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Texts and Studies of Early Christian Life and Language

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Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity

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Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity

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Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity: An Introduction

Outi Lehtipuu and Ismo Dunderberg

This book is offered to our esteemed colleague Antti Marjanen, Professor of Gnosticism and Early Christian Literature at the University of Helsinki, on the occasion of his retirement from the Faculty of Theology. In honor of Antti's lifetime of scholarship, we have invited the contributors of this volume to write on women and knowledge in early Christianity, topics that have been central in Antti's research.

The topic of the knowledge possessed by and related to women in the context of early Christianity can be approached from many different perspectives, ranging from questions related to women's education in the ancient world and women's roles as recipients and mediators of (secret or public) knowledge, whether through mythical female characters who claim to impart knowledge about the primordial past of humankind or through portrayals of knowledgeable women in other kinds of stories. Women's knowledge could be practical (pertaining to skills necessary in everyday life), mystical (manifesting in prophecy and ritual), or divine (being essential to the salvation of humankind). Ancient writers talked about real women they knew; they narrated about idealized women, usually those who had lived in the distant past; they used women as rhetorical tools "to think with"; they linked feminine imagery with the divine. Attitudes toward women and their knowledge thus range from eulogies of wise women, as carriers of true wisdom, to complaints about women's lack of understanding. Sometimes, the authority of women in regard to their knowledge is taken for granted, while at other times such authority is questioned, belittled, or outright rejected.

Idealized Women in Myth and Narrative

Jewish and Christian traditions, which claimed to be monotheistic, depicted the one true God for the most part in masculine terms and images.[1] In con-

1 In biblical texts, God is sometimes depicted using attributes and verbs associated with mothers and motherhood; cf. Isa 49:15; 66:13; Matt 23:37 // Luke 13:34.

trast, the feminine belonged self-evidently to polytheistic mythology, in particular to the Greco-Roman pantheon, starting with Gaia (Tellus or Terra in Roman mythology), the Mother Earth who nurtured and sustained all life. Powerful goddesses included Demeter in Greece and Ceres in Rome, venerated for having introduced agricultural skills to humankind, Athena and Minerva, goddesses of wisdom, and Isis and Magna Mater, worshipped in some of the most popular cults.[2] Some of their features were even adopted into the emerging Christian cult of Mary, Mother of God, and other female saints.[3]

Nevertheless, the heavenly realm of Jewish and Christian thinking was not altogether devoid of feminine aspects. In Jewish wisdom literature, the term for God's wisdom was feminine in gender, both in Hebrew (חָכְמָה) and Greek (σοφία). In this body of texts, divine wisdom is personified and portrayed as the mediator between God and humans (Prov 8; Sir 24). In early Christianity, this mediating role and other traits of Wisdom are given to God's son. In early gospel traditions, for instance, Jesus presents himself as the envoy of Wisdom (Sayings source Q: Matt 11:19 // Luke 7:35; cf. Luke 11:49), Paul identifies the crucified Christ with the Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24), and the Gospel of John begins with a prologue describing Jesus in terms derived from Jewish wisdom literature.[4] While wisdom Christology was to be overshadowed by the developing Trinitarian dogma, wherein the divine was defined by using masculine (Father, Son) or gender-neutral (Spirit, τὸ πνεῦμα) terms, in some strands of early Christianity, myths about the divine Wisdom and other mythical female figures remained central.[5]

Alongside Wisdom, other personifications of grammatically feminine nouns abound in ancient literature. Virtue (Arete) was chief among Greek thinking (Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.1.21–34; Philo, *Sacr.* 20–34; Methodius, *Symp.*). In Roman literature, individual virtues such as Dignitas, Pietas, Justitia, and Prudentia,

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2 A classic treatment of the feminine in the ancient world, including goddesses, is Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Dorset, 1975), and, more recently, e.g., Attilio Mastrocinque and Concetta Giuffré Scibona, ed., *Demeter, Isis, Vesta, and Cybele: Studies in Greek and Roman Religion in Honour of Giulia Sfameni Gasparro*. Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 36 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2012).

3 See Philippe Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods: From Cybele to the Virgin Mary* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

4 Cf. Gail Corrington Streete, "Women as Sources of Redemption and Knowledge in Early Christian Traditions" in *Women and Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepherd Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 330–354, on pp. 339–340.

5 Karen L. King, ed. *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (Phildelphia: Fortress, 1988).

as well as such basic concepts as Philosophia and Natura, often appear personified as women.[6] One Christian representation of Wisdom is Repentance (Metanoia), who is presented as God's daughter and the heavenly overseer (ἐπίσκοπος) of all virgins in Joseph and Aseneth (15.7–8).[7] Several Nag Hammadi texts also feature a wisdom figure called Barbelo, the female counterpart of the supreme God.[8]

In addition to virtues, however, vices were also often personified as women: Arete was contrasted with Kakia or Hedone (Pleasure), Wisdom with Folly (γυνὴ ἄφρων; Prov 9). Both Greek and Jewish mythology told of how evil came to the world through a primordial woman (Pandora / Eve)—either through her malevolence or her ignorance—which gave cause for several commentators to lament the deceitfulness of the female sex and underline its inferiority (Hesiod, *Op*. 60–105; 1 Tim 2:12–14; Tertullian, *Cult. fem*. 1.1). Early Christian mythmakers even developed complex etiological myths where one of the critical points leading to the creation of the inferior, visible world was a wrong thought, inclination, or action of a female divine character called Wisdom (Sophia). Some versions of this myth describe Wisdom as entangled in harmful emotions (πάθη) and the heavenly Christ as the healer of such emotions.[9] The exemplary human soul (ψυχή) is portrayed as a woman in late Antique Christian thought: the soul's fate can resemble that of heavenly wisdom's fate.[10]

Idealized feminine figures also appear in portrayals of wise women of the distant past. Early Christian rhetoric adopted both Jewish and pagan examples of virtuous women, presented as models to be imitated, such as Judith and

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6 Alex Dressler, *Personification and the Feminine in Roman Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

7 Ross Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 61–62; 130–132.

8 According to Irenaeus, the adherents of the "falsely so-called Gnosis" taught that along with the invisible and incomprehensible perfect Aeon there existed a female Ennoia (Thought), also called Charis (Grace) and Sige (Silence). On different female wisdom figures in the Nag Hammadi texts, see Uwe-Karsten Plisch, "Sophia und ihre Schwestern: Norea, Protennoia, Brontē" in *Antike christliche Apokryphen und Marginalisierte Texte des frühen Christentums*. Bibel und Frauen: Eine exegetisch-kulturgeschichtliche Enzyklopädie 3.2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, forthcoming).

9 Cf. Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 95–118.

10 Ulla Tervahauta, *A Story of the Soul's Journey in the Nag Hammadi Library: A Study of Authentikos Logos* (*NHC VI,3*). NTOA 107 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis of the Soul*. NHMS 73 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

Esther, Lucretia and Dido.[11] Judith and Esther, who both act as saviors of their people, are depicted as clever, even cunning, but also beautiful. Judith's enemies marvel at her wisdom, declaring, "No other woman from one end of the earth to the other looks so beautiful or speaks so wisely!" (Jdt 11:20–21). Indeed, in these portrayals, wisdom goes hand in hand with conventional feminine ideals: beauty, purity and piety. In subsequent early Christian tradition, Judith is not primarily remembered and praised for her cunning wisdom in her acts as seductress and liar, but rather for her chastity and godliness (cf. Jerome, *Preface to Judith*).

Such idealized females also include prophetic women, transmitters of divine messages. Although there were no direct counterparts to the powerful interpreters of Greek oracles, Pythia and the Sibyls, some female prophets, such as Deborah and Huldah, do appear in the Hebrew Bible (Judg 4–5; 2 Kgs 22).[12] Luke-Acts portrays Anna (Luke 2:36–38) and the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9) as having the gift of prophecy. It is striking that these women never utter a word in the narrative—it is rather their way of life, i.e. their chastity, that exemplifies their wisdom and that is as important as their prophetic knowledge.[13] Many subsequent writers offer eulogies for female prophets—but only for those who belonged to the past, as their existence did not mean that contemporary female prophets were always accepted.[14] While some nascent branches of Christianity, most notably the "New Prophecy" or Montanism, accepted and even revered female prophetic activity, others opposed it (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 49; Dialogue between a Montanist and an Orthodox).[15] Moreover, the reverence of female prophets past and present did not necessarily mean that women's knowledge was otherwise appreciated or that women were allowed to hold positions of authority. While Tertullian, for instance, admires a female prophet as a "sister"

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11 Outi Lehtipuu, "'Receive the Widow Judith, Example of Chastity': The Figure of Judith as a Model Christian in Patristic Interpretations" in *Biblical Women in Patristic Reception / Biblische Frauen in patristischer Rezeption*. Agnethe Siquans, ed. JAJ Supplements (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming).

12 See the special issue of the *Journal of Ancient Judaism*, devoted to female prophecy in Greek and Jewish literature, Hanna Tervanotko, ed. The Image of Female Prophets in Ancient Greek and Jewish Literature. Special Issue of *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 6/3 (2016).

13 Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 1994), 164–184.

14 Similarly, John Chrysostom praises Junia as a female apostle but remains reserved on the topic of women's authority in his own time; see *Hom. Rom.* 30.7.

15 Joy A. Schroeder, *Deborah's Daughters: Gender Politics and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14–17.

with a revelatory gift, able to "converse with angels" (*An.* 9.4), he rejects outright that women might teach, baptize, offer the Eucharist, or perform other such "male functions" (*ullius virilis muneris*; *Virg.* 9.2).

While all best-known ancient philosophers were male, available sources mention several women philosophers. These references have different functions. Some female philosophers are clearly idealized figures of the past (such as Theano, the wife of Pythagoras, or Pericles's companion Aspasia), sometimes serving as indicators of inclusivity; if a woman can philosophize, all men certainly can. All in all, sources provide little information about what women philosophers taught and where such information is available, they are customarily portrayed as teaching other women conventional wisdom of how to be a good wife.[16]

Not all women, however, were married. Ascetic ideals were part of the Christian proclamation from its onset and came into flower by the fourth century. Monastic literature evidences, besides desert fathers, also some desert mothers, such as Amma Syncletica. These desert mothers, like their male counterparts, personified monastic wisdom both in their teaching and in their way of life.[17] Other ascetic women were praised as Christian philosophers and teachers. Most notable among them was Macrina, the sister of Gregory of Nyssa, whom he repeatedly calls "my teacher." However, the narratives of Macrina and other prominent women, such as Olympias or Melania the Younger, tell frustratingly little about real women—they are instead carefully crafted rhetorical representations that reveal more about their authors than about the women they describe.[18] Ironically, the wisdom of these idealized women is only reported by men, and the few glimpses of real women offered in the sources betray a tendency toward grounding ascetic women firmly under the banner of male authority.[19]

On the whole, the relationship between idealized feminine figures and real women is far from straightforward. It is mostly men who paradoxically are knowledgeable about feminine wisdom and other personified virtues, while

16 For some examples, see Joan E. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo's "Therapeutae" Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 178–182 (Theano), 182–186 (Aspasia); for conventional models of ideal behavior set to women by Stoics, see ibid. 206–211.

17 Susanna Elm, *"Virgins of God:" The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 253–282.

18 Elizabeth A. Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the 'Linguistic Turn.'" *JECS* 6 (1998): 413–430.

19 David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 17–79.

women's knowledge is expected to profit men, in the manner of the virtuous wife of Proverbs 31. In addition, the paradigmatic wise women of the past not only exemplify knowledge but also more conventional feminine values, such as beauty and fidelity, as Gail Streete aptly summarizes:

> The way of Wisdom leads to life and companionship with God, but she is a companion of males, not the embodiment of females, except as pure virgin daughters, industrious wives, and careful mothers who build up their houses and keep their husbands and sons from straying after sexually independent women. Nor do they stray themselves. The wisdom and knowledge of such women is of the practical and nurturant variety, confined to domestic fidelity.[20]

Controlling Women and Their Knowledge

Apart from these idealized figures of myths and other narratives, the dominant perspective of early Christian sources is reserved when it comes to women's knowledge and the authority of women associated with this knowledge. Several texts reflect controversies that centered on women and their proper roles. Polemics against groups deemed heretical took full advantage of dismissive attitudes on women. The author of the Book of Revelation, for example, attacks a female teacher in the congregation of Thyatira, denouncing her as a self-designated prophet: "the woman, Jezebel, who designates herself as a prophet, teaches and leads astray my servants to fornicate and eat meat offered to idols" (Rev 2:20). The Pastoral Epistles, attributed to the apostle Paul, betray similar concerns, seeking to limit women's knowledge. The author of 1 Timothy instructs that women should not teach but instead learn "in silence" (1 Tim 2:10–11), dismisses wrong sorts of teaching as "old wives' tales" (4:7), and is concerned about rambling young widows who talk about "inappropriate things" and are prone to becoming followers of Satan (5:13).[21] Later, Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 180) singles women out as being especially susceptible to the words of those he considered false teachers (*Haer*. 1.13.3–7), a stereotype valorized by Epiphanius of Salamis (late 4th century) in his own time, claiming he had met women who tried to seduce him to heresy and immoral behavior (*Panarion* 26.17.1–9).

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20 Streete, "Women as Sources of Redemption," 338.

21 On the "improper" talk of women, see Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles*, BZNW 164 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).

In a similar vein, women were already urged to remain silent "in the meetings of the holy" in the notorious passage of 1 Corinthians 14:33–35, according to which it would be "inappropriate" and "shameful" for them to talk in these occasions; should they be eager to learn more, such women should ask their husbands to instruct them in privacy ("at home"). It is nevertheless worth noting that this passage may be a secondary interpolation to 1 Corinthians since the policy it advocates contradicts the instruction Paul offers elsewhere in the same letter on women "praying and prophesying" in public meetings of the Corinthian congregation (1 Cor 11:2–16).[22] In addition, the passage also seems to clash with the high esteem Paul exhibits in his letters toward women whom he calls benefactors (Phoebe; Rom 16:1–2), fellow workers (Prisca and many other women who "work hard" for the Lord; Rom 16:3–5,12), and even apostles (Junia; Rom 16:7).[23] On the other hand, Paul does not reveal any knowledge of women as transmitters of the resurrection proclamation so central in all New Testament gospels (cf. 1 Cor 15:3–8).

The prohibitions for women to teach are often interpreted as indicative of the likelihood that in the congregation addressed in 1 Timothy, there were women who played active roles as teachers and whom the author wanted to silence. Moreover, the strict order not to let young widows go from house to house and the denigration of such widows as gossipers and busybodies (1 Tim 5:13) have been taken to suggest that there were wandering female teachers whose teaching the author opposes. While this may be true, there is no certainty whether ancient texts like 1 Timothy directly reflect certain social realities or whether their statements on women and the knowledge of women should be seen as rhetorical tools "to think with." On the other hand, early Christian congregations were not exclusively male; women played active roles in the congregations, for example, by hosting their gatherings at their homes (cf. Acts 12:12–17; 16:14–15, 40; Rom 16:3; Col 4:15).[24] It is also likely that women of diverse social statuses also held different positions in their communities and were also privy to various levels of knowledge.

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22 See, e.g., Lee A. Johnson, "In Search of the Voice of Women in the Churches: Revisiting the Command to Silence Women in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35" in *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth A. McCabe (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), 135–154.

23 On the gender of Junia, see Eldon J. Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

24 Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 157–159; Kaisa-Maria Pihlava, *The Authority of Women Hosts of Early Christian Gatherings in the First and Second Centuries C.E.* (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, forthcoming).

Women and Knowledge in the Gospel Tradition

Similar tensions in the portrayal of female characters exist in the four early Christian gospels that became part of the New Testament. In the Gospel of Mark, women appear both as the only reliable followers of Jesus—who, unlike the male disciples, are present at his crucifixion (Mark 15:40)—and as unreliable messengers, incapable of delivering the news about the empty tomb to the male disciples (Mark 16:8). On the other hand, Jesus's women followers are described as having taken care (διηκόνουν) of him (15:41), the same word used earlier in the gospel to describe how Jesus serves (διακονῆσαι) others as the Son of Man, an act Jesus urges his followers to emulate (Mark 10:41–45). This common terminology in turn places special emphasis to this description of women's activity. In other words, in addition to remaining loyal to Jesus at his final hour, the women at the cross illustrate the ideal discipleship envisaged in Mark. Against this background, the women's failure at the empty tomb seems rather puzzling. In comparison, elsewhere in the Gospel of Mark, people are quick to circulate news about the healings Jesus performed even when he forbids them to do so (Mark 2:40–45; 7:36–41) and especially when he urges them to do so (Mark 5:18–20). Thus, the women's failure to spread news about the empty tomb is quite unique in Mark, and the fact that the whole gospel ends with this scene makes their failure even more dramatic. The irony, whether deliberate or accidental, of such a thematic dissonance embedded in this, the original ending of the gospel, is that by remaining silent, the first witnesses to the empty tomb adhere to the ideal of silence women are exhorted to in the Pastoral Epistles.

Other mixed messages on the knowledge of women also emerge from the Gospels of Luke and John. Luke, for instance, expands on Mark's reference to women caring for Jesus by mentioning and even naming "some" women followers of Jesus already in an earlier part of the story (Luke 8:1–3). In fact, Luke affirms that in addition to the three women mentioned by name, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, there were "many other" women, who provided for Jesus with the possessions they had. While the role ascribed to women here is that of rendering service to Jesus, the story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42) adds a new twist to this picture. Martha is described in terms that make her similar to the women followers of Jesus mentioned in Luke 8:1–3: she is preoccupied with mundane tasks and laments that her sister Mary has left her "alone" in doing this work. Yet Jesus praises Mary, who has "listened to his words" at his feet and reprimands Martha for "being worried and troubled about many things." The story no doubt illustrates the importance of heeding the words of Jesus (Luke 7:46–49) and lays the foundation for his later advice not to yield

to worry (Luke 12:22–31). This much said, it is striking that Luke, on the one hand, features women providing economic support to Jesus, and, on the other, "deconstructs" the idealized picture of such women in the story of Martha and Mary. While Luke never returns to Mary's privileged knowledge later in the gospel, the claim is made that being the recipient of such knowledge is allowed to women and that receiving knowledge is in fact even more praiseworthy than seeing to the needs of one's guests. At the same time, Mary also embodies the conventional ideals for women: she remains silent and obedient.[25]

In the Gospel of John, women are portrayed in dialogue with Jesus in very much the same manner as men. The strange narrative world of this gospel prevents any quick conclusions about these interlocutors. Martha, for instance, seems to profess unremitting faith in Jesus in John 11:27: "I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God who is coming to the world." Yet, only a few lines later, she expresses doubt. When Jesus asks for the removal of the stone at the tomb of Lazarus, she protests that "there is a stench," since Lazarus has been dead four days. Jesus's response to Martha underlines her lack of faith: "If you believed, you would see the glory of God" (John 11:39–40). The contrary-to-fact condition here indicates that Martha's faith seems less ideal than one might have deduced from John 11:27. This is not a unique feature in the Gospel of John. Jesus responds with a similar warrant to Thomas's confession to "my Lord and my God": "Is it now that you have seen me that you believe? Fortunate are those who believe without having seen" (20:28–29). Jesus's only response to Peter's confession (John 6:68–69), in turn, is the revelatory non sequitur that one of his chosen disciples is a traitor (6:70–71). The Johannine Jesus thus very rarely shows satisfaction with anything other characters in the gospel think or do.[26]

Nevertheless, women feature prominently in the gospel's dialogues, and the issues addressed in the dialogues with female characters are just as "doctrinal" as those with male characters. Just as the Samaritan woman leads Jesus into a discussion about the right place of worship (4:19–24), Martha is used as a foil to express traditional Jewish beliefs of resurrection, against which Jesus offers a new interpretation of himself being "the resurrection and life" (11:24–25). While women fare no better than men in their discussions with Jesus, there seem to be no reservations as regards the right of women to address such issues. It is also notable that while in the Gospel of Mark the women followers do not bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus, it is Mary of Magdala who performs this

25 Seim, *Double Message*, 112–118.

26 One exception is the washing of the feet, where Jesus compliments his disciples for calling him properly their Teacher and Lord (John 13:13).

task in John. She is both the first to meet the resurrected Jesus and the one who informs the male disciples about the resurrection (John 20:11–18). While women are portrayed as being afraid of the empty tomb in Mark, in John this role is reversed: it is the male disciples who, even after having heard Mary's testimony, are afraid and gather behind closed doors (John 20:19–29).

The Gospel of Mary (possibly from the middle of the second century) builds upon this scene in the Gospel of John. Mary of Magdala comforts and encourages the disciples, who are otherwise struck with fear and unable to proclaim the message about Jesus. Surprisingly, Mary's teaching becomes a subject of debate among the male disciples in this text: Peter is doubtful of whether or not the Savior had really divulged to Mary the privileged information she now imparts to them. It stands to reason, then, that this scene in the Gospel of Mary reflects and assumes a position in early Christian debates about women as teachers and leaders.[27] Yet it remains unclear how active a role this gospel attributes to women after all. In one of the two extant versions of this text, only one of the disciples, Levi, goes to spread the good news; in another one, it is said that "they" went to preach—but it remains unclear whom "they" refers to: the possibilities are Levi and Mary, Levi and other disciples, or all of them.

Contents of This Book

This brief survey of the topic of women and knowledge has already indicated that knowledge in the context of women and late antiquity can be understood in several different ways and that this knowledge was often subject to debate. Organized in four parts, this book provides a study of the relationship between women and knowledge in early Christian and other ancient sources from a number of perspectives. The first section deals with real women in their social contexts and explores how women's literacy and their role in some emerging Christian cults can be deduced from the available sources. The second part analyzes the *Nachleben* of certain female characters of biblical texts. Stories about paradigmatic figures—both good and evil—were developed over time and employed in inventive ways to create new stories about knowledgeable and crafty, even dangerous women. The third part focuses on ancient intellectual discourses and the role women play in the rhetoric of such discourses. While the attitude towards women and their capabilities is often pejorative, women

27 Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents*. NHMS 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 119–121.

nevertheless appear at times as visionaries. In addition, femaleness is often used figuratively to denote the human soul. The fourth and final section takes to task the topic of feminine wisdom and reflects on female figures in myths related to the Nag Hammadi texts.

In the opening essay, "Women and Independent Religious Specialists in Second-Century Rome," Nicola Denzey Lewis investigates the role of women in groups attacked by heresiologists, such as Irenaeus of Lyons. Denzey Lewis argues that women associated with gnostic teachers, whether fictional or not, are constructed as passive figures, with little power or agency. Even Marcellina who, according to Irenaeus, was a teacher, is depicted mostly through her practices, such as veneration of images, while activities related to her teaching are not described in any detail. Denzey Lewis concludes that in Irenaeus's account, women appear mainly as the objects of male deception. What he tells of such male teachers as Simon Magus and Marcus suggests that they too withheld any real power or prospects for advancement from the women who accompanied them.

Irenaeus's testimonies about Marcellina, a follower of Carpocrates and a second-century Christian teacher (*Haer*. 1.25.6), is also the focus of H. Gregory Snyder in "'She Destroyed Multitudes': Marcellina's Group in Rome." A detailed textual analysis leads Snyder to suggest that the entire comment about Marcellina and her veneration of images of Greek philosophers is a later addition to the text. This conclusion indicates to Snyder that the information in the passage chiefly pertains to Marcellina, not to Carpocrates. It was in fact Marcellina, not Carpocrates, who used images of philosophers for group rituals; Marcellina thus deserves a more prominent place in the history of Christian iconography than she has generally been granted.

In "Some Remarks on Literate Women from Roman Egypt," Erja Salmenkivi addresses the issue of female literacy. Our knowledge about women in antiquity rests heavily on literary sources written by upper-class men. Greek papyri, however, evidence women capable of writing letters by themselves. Such evidence sheds light on women and literacy, one of the cornerstones of education. Even in small villages of Roman Egypt, we find literate women who conducted their own businesses and were active in various economic and socio-cultural circles. Salmenkivi discusses several letters written to and by women in the early Christian context of Roman Egypt.

The second part, on the afterlives of female characters of biblical texts, opens with Christian H. Bull's investigation, "Women, Angels, and Dangerous Knowledge: The Myth of the Watchers in the Apocryphon of John and its Monastic Manuscript-Context," of different renderings of the myth of the watchers, based on the Genesis account of angels. These watchers are the sons of God

who take women as their wives, beget offspring with them, and teach them illicit arts. Bull discusses the myth in the four known versions of the Apocryphon of John as well as in monastic interpretations in the fourth century Egypt. He suggests that there are considerable differences among the versions in the way they portray women, whether they are seen as innocent victims, seduced by trickery, or as wicked temptresses. Consequently, a monastic reader of the Apocryphon of John might have interpreted the angels as seductive and deceitful demons, dangerous to both ascetic men and women, whereas, in the readings of such monastic writers as Cassian and Annianus, the sons of God are better understood as paradigmatic male monks and human women a threat that might open the door for demonic desire.

In "Jezebel in Jewish and Christian Tradition," Tuomas Rasimus addresses early Christian and Jewish reception of the notorious ninth-century BCE queen of Israel. He suggests that the literary portrayals of several women of bad repute in early Christian literature have been modeled after the image of Queen Jezebel. In Revelation, John of Patmos calls his prophetic rival in Thyatira by the name of Jezebel, portraying her as a demonic manifestation of the Jezebel of old, sponsoring idolatry and a licentious sexual code. While other early Christian authors did not go as far as to style the women they portrayed as Jezebel, some of them clearly drew upon traditions surrounding this northern queen. Since John the Baptist was considered by some to be Elijah, Jezebel's nemesis, Rasimus argues, Mark reshaped the story of John's death in the hands of Herod to fit Herod and Herodias to the Ahab-Jezebel paradigm. Finally, Irenaeus's report of Simon and Helena (*Haer*. 1.23) depicts Helena as an ex-prostitute from Tyre and stresses Simon's activity in Samaria instead of Rome. This suggests that Irenaeus, or perhaps already his source, could have modeled Simon's and Helena's biographical sketch partially upon the Ahab-Jezebel paradigm.

Petri Luomanen's essay "Mary and Other Female Characters in the Protevangelium of James" presents a study on the roles assigned to women in the Protevangelium of James. While the focus of the narrative is on Mary, the future mother of Jesus, she, in Luomanen's judgment, ends up being a relatively flat character, assumed without question or further development to be the (future) Mother of God. The (male) author's theological agenda has thus reduced Mary to a rather passive role. In contrast, the many minor female figures of the narrative—Anna, Juthine, Elizabeth, the midwives, and the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews—actively contribute to the plot of the narrative. Despite the fact that many of their traits corresponded to what was generally expected of women in antiquity, these minor female figures evidence the rounder and deeper approaches to female characterization than those employed to depict the future Mother of God.

In "What Happened to Mary? Women Named Mary in the *Meadow* of John Moschus," Ulla Tervahauta moves beyond apocryphal literature in her analysis of different female characters in John Moschus's *Meadow*, a collection of monastic stories from the late sixth to the early seventh century. These Marys—a mother who murders her children, a prostitute who repents and becomes a nun, and an anchorite who was in a later version of her story to became one of the most famous Marys of Eastern Christianity, Mary of Egypt—show how biblical and other traditions were innovatively rendered as popular stories about women who shared many traits with biblical characters. Tervahauta suggests that since women were outsiders from the male monastic perspective, their portrayals enable not just discussion on how biblical literature is used to tell new stories, but exploration of questions of identity and gender. The women in the stories of the *Meadow* betray their knowledge in their sharp answers and pious wisdom, and even the sinners among them speak for themselves.

The third part of the volume explores how women and the feminine appear in ancient intellectual discourse. In "'For Women Are Not Worthy of Life' Protology and Misogyny in Gospel of Thomas Saying 114," Ivan Miroshnikov discusses the puzzling saying that ends the Gospel of Thomas, according to which women are not worthy of life and must instead become "living spirits," i.e. male, to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Miroshnikov argues that the Thomasine notion of a "living spirit" was inspired by the creation narrative of Genesis 2:7 and that saying 114 describes this living spirit as male because the first human of Genesis 2:7 was male. Approaching saying 114 against this background in the second creation account allows a new insight into the harsh words of Simon Peter: women are not worthy of life because the first living being was male. Fortunately, according to Jesus, a woman can still attain the condition of the primordial man, i.e. transform into a "living spirit," and, by doing so, attain salvation.

Silke Petersen's point of departure in "'Women' and 'Heresy' in Patristic Discourses and Modern Studies" is the observation that one popular litmus test for the contemporary value of a religion is the attitude that religion exhibits toward women. The "woman question" is used as a tool of praising one's own religion and of denigrating others—both in the present and in the past. While early Christian heresiologists frequently linked women and their active role in heresy, Petersen demonstrates that the stereotype of the heretical woman only appears in the fourth century. In earlier sources, the stereotype connected with women is that of the seduced victim. In historical terms, she claims, the number of women in so-called heretical movements was not large, especially as there is no basis for assuming that female office-holders who appear in inscriptions were automatically members of a heretical movement. Petersen concludes

that both "woman" and "heresy" are constructed Others whose very existence reinforces the Own, characterized by the terms "man" and "orthodoxy."

Women also play a prominent role in the *Symposium* of Methodius of Olympus (later third century CE), which depicts a banquet of ten virgins who give encomia in turn in praise of chastity and other virtues. The work is generally regarded as having little to do with Plato's dialogue of the same name, which is a decidedly all-male, bawdy affair. The climax of Methodius's treatise is the speech of Thecla, an invective against astrological determinism, extolling the virtues of free will in Christian life. Commentators suppose Methodius here to be attacking gnostic doctrines regarding the relationship between humans, the stars, and Providence. In "Astrological Determinism, Free Will, and Desire According to Thecla (St. Methodius, *Symposium* 8.15–16)," Dylan M. Burns shows that Methodius almost certainly does not have Gnosticism in mind, for the sort of astrological determinism Thecla argues against has no parallel in extant gnostic sources. Rather, "her" polemic is directed against the second-century Syrian Christian philosopher Bardaisan. Thecla's description of the relationship between free will, desire, and the soul's experience of emptiness, on the other hand, demonstrates that Methodius was reading Plato more closely than his modern editors have supposed, for the language she uses closely echoes that of Plato, making Thecla a mouthpiece of philosophical knowledge.

Hugo Lundhaug rejects Gnosticism as a meaningful category when studying Nag Hammadi texts in relation to early Egyptian monasticism. In "Monastic Exegesis and the Female Soul in the Exegesis on the Soul," Lundhaug claims that instead of postulating that the Nag Hammadi codices represent Gnosticism and seeking to identify so-called gnostic traits in Pachomian literature, possible connections should be sought out by focusing on other common aspects. A test case for such an investigation is the Exegesis on the Soul, a Nag Hammadi treatise whose eponymous main character, the soul, is described throughout the text as a woman. Lundhaug suggests that the closest parallels to the way this text speaks about the soul and prostitution are found in other monastic texts. By carefully considering the main interests of the Exegesis on the Soul—repentance, prayer, and the soul's ideal attachment to Christ—numerous points of contact can be found between the way the scriptures are used in the Exegesis on the Soul and in literature associated with the Pachomian and Shenoutean monastic federations.

In the fourth and final part of this volume, the focus is turned to the feminine principle in myth and philosophy. In "Life, Knowledge and Language in Classic Gnostic Literature: Reconsidering the Role of the Female Spiritual Principle and Epinoia," Tilde Bak Halvgaard examines the female spiritual principle in

the Hypostasis of the Archons (NHC II 4) and related texts where she is styled with such names as Sophia, Epinoia (Thought), Pronoia (Forethought), and Zoe (Life). Bak Halvgaard notes that the pattern of female figures, whether divine or human, who represent, possess, or provide knowledge, is widely known in ancient literature. In Nag Hammadi texts in particular, the female spiritual principle mostly appears in retellings of the Genesis story and is closely related to the figure of Eve. The different female figures in these stories and the topos of eating from the tree of knowledge are both presented in a positive light. However, the creative and life-giving acts of these figures are not framed as profound acts of creation but simply biological processes. Moreover, such motifs as the pursuit of Eve/the female spiritual principle in the Hypostasis of the Archons and the recurring motif of searching and finding in Thunder: Perfect Mind not only illustrate wisdom as something desired by men but also rehearse a stereotypical image of what women are to men. Nevertheless, it is still the female spiritual principle that functions as a mediator between the human world and the divine sphere, providing a path for human beings to approach the Father.

In the next essay, "'Wisdom, Our Innocent Sister': Reflections on a Mytheme," Michael A. Williams reflects upon the motif of Wisdom's innocence as it is attested in the origin stories found among Nag Hammadi and related writings. Scholars have often called Wisdom's action in the myth narrated by Irenaeus (*Haer*. 1.29) and in related passages of the Apocryphon of John a "mistake," "tragedy," "fall," etc. Yet, as Williams notes, what is often overlooked is that in Irenaeus, Wisdom's motivations are free of any suggestion of evil. In fact, evil does not appear until *after* the creation of the material cosmos. Similarly, the myth narrated in the Apocryphon of John can be read as a distinctive affirmation of the tradition of creation by God's Wisdom. Wisdom in the Apocryphon of John is impetuous but innocent: the blame falls rather on the activities of her son, not so much in his original creation of the cosmos as in his arrogant and ignorant efforts to tyrannize humanity. Williams proceeds then to discuss the Trimorphic Protennoia and the Second Treatise of the Great Seth and notes that in these texts Wisdom has no connection with evil at all. It is only in the Pistis Sophia that the innocence motif has been turned to the service of fundamentally demoting Wisdom ontologically, which could have been part of a polemical program to trump "Sethian" mythology.

The concluding essay is John D. Turner's "The Virgin That Became Male: Feminine Principles in Platonic and Gnostic Texts." Turner explores feminine principles in the metaphysics of select Platonic and gnostic literature, arguing that the Sethian Father-Mother-Son triad was derived from the Father-Mother-Child triad of Plato's *Timaeus*, either directly or in the form of summaries and

references to it in first- and early second-century Platonic sources. However, beginning with the Sethian Platonizing treatises, such as Allogenes and Zostrianos, the Father-Mother-Son nomenclature begins to fade, and the ontological position of the Mother begins to decline. According to Turner, this development can be explained by the increasing Sethian preoccupation with the metaphysics of contemporary Platonism.

Antti Marjanen on Knowledge (Gnosis) and Women

These essays demonstrate how much the work of Antti Marjanen has inspired each of the contributors of this book. Antti's comprehensive study on early Christian traditions about Mary of Magdala deals with texts spanning from the second to the fourth century, from the Gospel of Thomas to the Manichean Psalm-Book.[28] One of the most important points he makes is the tension that often exists in these texts between idealized women (such as Mary of Magdala) and low opinions about women or femininity in general. For one, Marjanen points out that potential women readers of the Dialogue of the Savior would have been

> exposed to a mixed message. On the one hand, they heard about Mary Magdalene, a prominent woman, who together with her two male colleagues played the most important part in a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples while he was imparting his most valuable teachings. On the other hand, while describing such behavior a Christian may not take part in, the text used metaphorical language which clearly and in an unqualified way devalued women.[29]

This observation very much characterizes Antti's scholarly style. He has sought to avoid one-sided, sometimes idealized portraits of alternative early Christianities in which women's rights might have been better acknowledged than in the "winning side" of the Christian church. What he has offered, instead, is a more versatile picture of how women were treated in documents stemming from forgotten forms of Christianity. What makes the views expounded in these texts exciting is the very tension between the way they extol women characters and

28 Antti Marjanen, *Woman Jesus Loved*; cf. Antti Marjanen, "Mary Magdalene, a Beloved Disciple" in *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother*, ed. Deirdre J. Good (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

29 Marjanen, *Woman Jesus Loved*, 92.

the way they dismiss "ordinary" women. Antti's study first and foremost warns against any simple correlation between the positive role of some women in the story world of these texts and the role of real women in communities behind these texts.

Antti's career as a researcher and teacher at the University of Helsinki has spanned almost 35 years. He has educated entire generations of biblical scholars, including the four editors of this volume. Antti has been the pioneer who broached the study of Coptic and Nag Hammadi texts in Finland. His numerous courses on Coptic in Helsinki and the scholarly networks he has built with his Nordic colleagues have produced a constant stream of younger scholars specialized in this field. In addition to his studies on Mary of Magdala, Antti is especially known for his articles on other early Christian women and movements,[30] most prominently Gnosticism,[31] but also Monta-

30 Antti Marjanen, "Women Disciples in the *Gospel of Thomas*" in *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas*, ed. Risto Uro (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 89–106; Antti Marjanen, "Phoebe, a Letter Courier" in *Lux humana, Lux aeterna* (Helsinki & Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); Antti Marjanen, "Male Women Martyrs: The Function of Gender-transformation Language in Early Christian Martyrdom Accounts" in *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body, and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity*, ed. T.K. Seim and J. Økland (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009); Antti Marjanen, "Rewritten Eve Traditions in the Apocryphon of John" in *Bodies, Borders, Believers: Ancient Texts and Present Conversations: Essays in Honor of Turid Karlsen Seim on Her 70th Birthday*, ed. A. Hege Grung, M. Bjelland Kartzow and A.R. Solevåg (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 57–67.

31 An important contribution in the field is Antti Marjanen, ed. *Was There a Gnostic Religion?* PFES 87 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2005). Cf. his numerous publications on Nag Hammadi and related texts, e.g., "The Figure of Authades in the Nag Hammadi and Related Documents" in *Coptica—Gnostica—Manichaica*, ed. L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier (Quebec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 2006), 567–581; "The Figure of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas" in *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity*, ed. J.M. Asgeirsson, A.D. DeConick and R. Uro. NHMS 59 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 209–219; "Does the Gospel of Judas Rehabilitate Judas Iscariot?" in *Gelitten—Gestorben—Auferstanden: Passions- und Ostertraditionen im antiken Christentum*, ed. T. Nicklas, A. Merkt. and J. Verheyden, WUNT 2/273 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010), 209–224; "Sethian Books of the Nag Hammadi Library as Secret Books" in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices: Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixty*, ed. C.H. Bull, L.I. Lied and J.D. Turner. NHMS 76 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 87–106; "A Salvific Act of Transformation or a Symbol of Defilement? Baptism in Valentinian Liturgical Readings (NHC XI,2) and the Testimony of Truth (NHC IX,3)" in *Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honour of John D. Turner*, ed. K. Corrigan and T. Rasimus. NHMS 82 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 245–259.

nism.[32] In Finland, he has always been the foremost specialist on the Nag Hammadi Library and apocryphal gospels.

Those familiar with Antti personally have also learned to appreciate his amiable character and the time and devotion he takes to read and comment on the texts of students and colleagues. In addition to being a great and highly knowledgeable colleague, he has also been a good friend to us all. This book has its origin in the aura of friendship which Antti has created among those near him and should first and foremost be understood as our token celebrating that friendship, for which we are immensely grateful to him.

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32 Marjanen "Montanism and the Formation of the New Testament Canon" in *The Formation of the Early Church*, ed. Jostein Ådna. WUNT 2/183. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 239–263; Antti Marjanen, "Montanism: Egalitarian Ecstatic 'New Prophecy'" in *A Companion to Second-century Christian "Heretics"*, ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 185–212; Antti Marjanen, "Female Prophets among Montanists" in *Prophets Male and Female: Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Eastern Near East*, ed. Jonathan Stökl and Corrine L. Carvalho (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 127–143.

PART 1

Women and Knowledge in Social-Historical Contexts

CHAPTER 1

Women and Independent Religious Specialists in Second-Century Rome

Nicola Denzey Lewis

Much of the work on women and Gnosticism in the past quarter-century has focused on ethereal or abstract expressions of "the female" or "the feminine" or, finally, "gender" more broadly as a category.[1] These studies have taken up and actively engaged the many fascinating elements of Nag Hammadi writings that bear upon questions of gender, from the startling discourses of the female speaker who identifies as the Thunder in Thunder, Perfect Mind, to the complexly layered portraits of Sophia, or of Eve in Hypostasis of the Archons. These remarkable textual meditations on "the feminine," broadly construed, have nevertheless been unhelpful for determining the value of women in Gnosticism as a whole. There are, first of all, the definitional problems of "Gnosticism" as a religious movement. How can we emplace women or "the feminine" within a phenomenon, the contours and very existence of which is still so hotly debated? The enormity of this problem is only enhanced when we consider all that we do not know about Nag Hammadi: who wrote these texts, where, and when. It is hardly a surprise, then, that studies of "the feminine" in Gnosticism have foundered in recent decades.

Somewhat differently, the issue of women in gnostic circles—by which I mean real women as opposed to "the feminine"—has received less scholarly

1 The bibliography here is large; for now, I will bring to readers' attention only the collected volume of essays, *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000); the work of outstanding women scholars in the field: Anne McGuire, Deirdre Good, Elaine Pagels; Anne Pasquier, and Maddalena Scopello; on gender more broadly, see Ben Dunning, "What Sort of Thing is This Luminous Woman? Thinking Sexual Difference in *On the Origin of the World*," *JECS* 17 (2009), 55–84; Anne McGuire, "Women, Gender, and Gnosis in Gnostic Texts and Traditions" in *Women and Christian Origins*, ed. R.S. Kraemer and M.R. D'Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 257–299; Karen L. King "Prophetic Power and Women's Authority: The Case of the Gospel of Mary (Magdalene)" in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. by B.M. Kienzle and P.J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 21–41; Bernadette Brooten, "Heretics Who Promote Equality: Hippolytus on the Naassenes," in *Love Between*

attention in studies of Gnosticism. In part, this is because reconstructing the lives of real historical women has often remained of only peripheral interest to scholars of theology and biblical or patristic studies, and in part because the discovery and dissemination of the Nag Hammadi writings have, perhaps unfortunately, led us to turn our attentions away from heresiological writings (where we might at least find evidence for "real women") to the writings of "gnostics" themselves. The works of Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius are now primarily pressed into service as *comparanda* for the ideas, philosophies, and perspectives we find expressed in the Nag Hammadi documents.

The Nag Hammadi writings themselves are frustratingly circumspect in terms of their usefulness for reconstructing any sort of social or cultural history for early and late antique Christianity. Still unclear—and indeed, hotly debated—is the issue of their original dating and context. When and where were they written, and for what purpose? While I find these questions breathtakingly exciting to consider, they provide only shifting grounds for any sort of inquiry into social history. Not a single tractate mentions a "real" woman—no names of historically-grounded teachers or prophetesses or leaders or even learners emerge. This holds true not only of Nag Hammadi, but all our other so-called gnostic codices as well. Here, we come to the work of Antti Marjanen; a rare example of a man who has crossed gender lines to consider women and "the feminine" in Gnosticism, he cannot be accused of pushing an apologetic agenda. His book *The Woman Jesus Loved. Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (1996) delivers its information with refreshing neutrality and plain, Finnish, good sense. Marjanen did not explore the ultimately unanswerable question of whether "gnostics" organized themselves into communities that saw largely symbolic figures such as Mary Magdalene as their founder; if these existed, then we still do not know if they had women leaders or a preponderance of women members; such reconstructions remain, as Marjanen was fully aware, mere conjecture.

Into this arid landscape of ancient women's social history came the spectacular launch in 1979 of Elaine Pagels's *The Gnostic Gospels*. Pagels was ahead of her time when she constructed arguably the first social history of Gnosticism, moving away from examinations (whether critical or complimentary) of gnostic theology. Pagels's argument that women enjoyed higher status in gnostic circles, largely because of a broader trend of appreciating or reflecting upon the divine feminine as we find in so-called gnostic treatises such as Thunder, Per-

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Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 338–343.

fect Mind, remains speculative.[2] Counter-arguments posed by scholars such as Daniel Hoffman—that Irenaeus and Tertullian actually cared for and respected women more highly than, say, Marcus and Valentinus—reveals not a corrective to Pagels's thesis, but the ease by which we read our own apologetic agendas into source materials.[3]

For this essay in Marjanen's honor, I will return to the issue of women—real women—in Gnosticism. My focus is different than his, in that I remain, like my Doktormutter Pagels, a social historian. I turn again to the work of Irenaeus of Lyon to mine it for evidence of "real women" gnostics in, primarily, second-century Rome.[4] In this, I attempt here on a greatly diminished scale what Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen accomplished in their visionary and much-needed compilation of portraits of individual "gnostics."[5] There are no women profiled in that volume; here, I will profile, and comment, on those precious few about whom we know. My analytical frame, however, is rather different than Pagels's. I do not see the landscape of second-century Christianity as a battleground for proto-orthodox and gnostic Christians; rather, I see a much more inchoate, fluid growth of diverse Christian groups with no central oversight or dominant theology emerging in a dynamic multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious Roman Empire. I will keep my focus in this paper, as much as possible, on the city of Rome, which already gives us a thriving, complicated city of one million inhabitants in the second century. I do not see "capital C Christianity" in second-century Rome, any more than I see "capital G Gnosticism" or even "capital V Valentinianism." Rather, I see what I would call "small group religion"—a point on which I will elaborate below—in complex interaction with people I would call "independent religious specialists" or even "religious entrepreneurs."

For all the remarkable positive or sympathetic evaluations of things feminine in the Nag Hammadi writings, one thing quickly becomes abundantly clear: any reading of heresiological literature immediately reveals a second-century landscape virtually devoid of visible Christian women. We have no

2 Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), 71–88.

3 Daniel H. Hoffman, *The Status of Women and Gnosticism in Irenaeus and Tertullian*. Studies in Women and Religion 36 (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995).

4 For the critical edition of Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses*, I use here *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les hérésies*, ed. Adelin Rousseau, Louis Doutreleau and Charles Mercier, SC 100 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1965). English translations are modified from Roberts and Rambaut, *Irenaeus of Lyon: Against Heresies*, A Library of Ante-Nicene Fathers (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889).

5 Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, eds., *A Companion to Second-Century Christian 'Heretics'* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

writings ascribed to gnostic women. Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* remains the only extant Valentinian writing addressed to a woman. Celsus, probably writing from second-century Rome, offers a list of female leaders (*Cels*. 5.62), of which he names four—Marcellina, Mariamme, Martha, and Salome—only one of whom (Marcellina) is also mentioned in an unrelated source; in his contribution to this volume, Gregory Snyder writes eloquently that these groups "did not leave enough of a social or cultural footprint" for Origen to have heard of them a century later in Alexandria.[6] Other Christian leaders in Rome such as Clement and Justin virtually never mention their Christian women contemporaries.[7] Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses* is a textual woman-free zone; although he does spend a brief amount of time on a few women involved with the heretics he despises, in the other three books that comprise that work he does not use the words "woman," "women," "wife," "wives," or even "consort" a single time.

To give shape to my investigation, I will consider three brief case studies emerging from the pages of Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses*: Simon Magus and Helena; Marcus and his women, and finally, our sole female "independent religious specialist," Marcellina. I will argue here that in this urban environment, Christian groups of all stripes, inclinations, or affiliations were not "safe spaces" for women, nor areas for women's emancipation.

Gnosticism and Small Group Religion: Remapping Territory

It is yet too early to speak of "Christianity" in the second century of the Roman Empire. What we see instead is a diverse, fissiparous religious landscape of Christians—surprisingly difficult to identify as cohesive groups or communities, but easier to see as independent, itinerant individuals with followings, patrons, and sometimes confrontational or unsuccessful relationships with more settled "communities" of Christian believers, perhaps organized into relatively loose study circles or "schools" rather than churches or assemblies.[8] Most

6 See Gregory Snyder's article in this volume.

7 Justin's sole mention of a woman is the unnamed wife of a dissolute pagan man, whom she seeks after her conversion to Christianity to divorce, leading to the eventual persecution of Christians in her community because of her aggrieved and estranged husband; see Justin, *Second Apology* 2.

8 I mean "communities" here in the loosest possible sense—Christians involved in expressing their beliefs and maintaining their practices within the context of a house church, private commercial space, "school" or household, balancing their Christian identity with a multi-

of these circles, schools, or groups were not tightly bounded; they welcomed outsiders. Religious specialists travelled from place to place (both between cities and more locally within the city) and were privately hired to work either one-on-one with a client, or more broadly within the group.[9] This model—rather than the elusive "house church" assembly—seems to have characterized many Christian intellectual exchanges, particularly those whose adherents were primarily upwardly-aspiring freedmen, as many so-called "gnostics" appear to have been.

These itinerant Christian individuals constituted "cultural producers," to borrow a useful Bourdeusian term, who engaged in a series of practices, including textual production and circulation, ritual innovation, prophecy and oracular utterances, teaching, and social innovation, providing areas and opportunities for social change or growth for disadvantaged groups or classes (women, slaves).[10] I suggest that thinking of those "heretics" outlined in Irenaeus's *Adver-*

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plicity of other social roles, of which Christian adherence might be the least stable or dominant. The term "school" is Irenaeus's own, but we may interpret this more literally than he. It may be, too, that he deliberately favored "school" over "ecclesia." On whether it is proper to think of the Valentinians as a "school," see the seminal essay of Christoph Markschies, "Valentinian Gnosticism: Toward the Anatomy of a School" in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, ed. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 401–438, and its dismissal by Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), as well as Giacinta Spinosa, "Ἐκκλησία-*ecclesia*, *secta*, *ordo* nel cristianesimo dei primi secoli. Una riflessione sul lessico." *Cristianesimo nella storia* (2003): 453–487.

9 Although Irenaeus provides few biographical details, many second-century "gnostic" religious entrepreneurs apparently traveled. Valentinus hailed from Alexandria but taught in Rome; Marcion, in Rome, came from Pontus. Cerdo, a student of Simon in Samaria, travels to Rome to teach (*Haer*. 1.27.1). Marcus originated in the Rhone Valley (*Haer*. 1.13.7) but presumably worked in Rome. Marcellina also travels to Rome to lead a community, although Irenaeus only mentions that Rome is not her native city (*Haer*. 1.25.6).

10 On Bourdieusian approaches, see Stanley Stowers, "The Religion of Plant and Animal Offerings Versus the Religion of Meanings, Essences, and Textual Mysteries" in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice*, ed. J.W. Knust and Z. Várhelyi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 35–56; less Bourdieusian but relevant to second-century textual production is David Brakke, "Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity: Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon," in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights Over Religious Traditions in Antiquity*, ed. Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobsen and David Brakke (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2012), 263–280. For a more extensive investigation of so-called gnostic cultural producers, see Nicola Denzey Lewis, "Lived Religion Among Second-Century Gnostic Hieratic Specialists" in *Beyond Duty: Religious Professionals in the Roman Empire*, ed. Georgia Petridou, Jörg Rüpke, and Richard Gordon (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2018), 79–102.

sus Haereses—Marcion, Valentinus, Marcus, Basilides, and so on—as cultural producers each working to build an audience by engaging these practices can be useful for moving away from the traditional questions often asked of them, that is, have they gotten Christianity "right," or more specifically, "do they pervert Christian doctrine?"

When we re-organize our investigations of individual Christians in the second century to focus on issues of cultural production, we can also find interesting things about the way in which Irenaeus and other Christian writers fit women into the landscape of nascent Christianity. For example, the "gnostic" cultural producers Valentinus and Marcus appeared to have valued, even empowered, women in a way that other, more conservative Christian men like Irenaeus and Tertullian did not. On the other hand, much energy in this century went into textual production—an activity which appears to have been completely closed to women. Although it is theoretically possible for women to have written books, we do not hear of any doing so. Women as textual critics and scholars in Christian Rome are unknown until Jerome's famous Aventine circle in the fourth century. Although Hippolytus reports that Montanists possessed a large number of approved books (*Haer*. 8.19), Montanists (women or otherwise) are never posed as actively participating in textual production. By all appearances, therefore, textual production was a male-only domain. Since the circulation of writings was a significant way for Christian teachings to spread, the exclusion of women from this domain was to have a profound impact on, increasing the influence and visibility of male teachers and textual experts.

But what of teaching, another activity of Christian freelancers? Marcellina is the only female teacher to emerge from the pages of *Adversus Haereses*, and Irenaeus condemns her for it categorically: through her act of teaching, she "destroyed many": *multos exterminavit* (*Haer*. 1.25.6). A clear social conservative, Irenaeus followed the dictates of the Pastoral epistles: women must not teach, but learn in silence (1Tim 2:12).

If women teachers do not appear on Irenaeus's horizons, however, neither do women learners—at least, not learners following the teacher-disciple model so common in antiquity.[11] In fact, the woman Christian learner of this period is a rare bird indeed; our sole example from sources other than *Adversus Haere-*

11 Henri Irénée Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956) on the exclusion of women from the Greek (and subsequent Roman) model; on p. 247 for the private education of upper-class women in Rome.

ses is Ptolemy's student Flora.[12] Ptolemy, a Valentinian Christian, indicates in his letter that he has previously met with Flora and will meet with her again; in the meantime, his letter to her addresses theological questions which she has posed. There is no indication that Flora is part of a school; I surmise that the relationship was likely one of a private instructor to a private student within a household. It may well be that this sort of private instruction—associated with the upper classes, whose households employed tutors and *paedagogues* to educate their children—brought significant social capital to members of a socially aspiring freedman class, much in the same way that employing a nanny or private tutor today carries with it a sort of bourgeois prestige. Indeed, this "private education" model, by which a teacher promises powerful, secret information to be disclosed may have been particularly attractive to women, who are consistently identified as the main audience for "gnostic" entrepreneurs. Whether or not Irenaeus knew of Flora or other such private female students remains an unanswered question, although it is easy to imagine that there were probably very many Floras in second-century Rome; they simply were invisible to more public methods of accounting unless they, like their teachers, moved from student to textual producer, or unless (as in the case of Flora) they were specifically addressed by name in an epistolary or pastoral context.

The other principal cultural productions of our male "gnostic" specialists—in the areas of ritual and social innovation—left room (indeed, *made* room) for female participants; it is through these activities that figures like Simon Magus and Marcus "the Magos" garnered Irenaeus's ire. At this point, it is best to look to these figures more precisely, as Irenaeus paints them.

Simon Magus (*and Helena*)

For Irenaeus, the appearance of Simon of Samaria in the Book of Acts 8:9–24 makes Simon the earliest of the heretics he so despises. Nothing is known of the historical Simon, but Irenaeus insists that his followers, the Simonians, still existed in his day, along with those who venerated Simon's partner, Helena: "They also have an image of Simon fashioned after the likeness of Jupiter, and another of Helena in the shape of Minerva; and these they worship" (*Haer*. 1.23.1–4). Celsus also refers to Simonians and Helenians (*Cels*. 5.63).

Irenaeus's account of Helena (*Haer*. 1.23.2) makes for a fascinating read. According to him, Simon purchased and emancipated a slave woman from

12 Ptolemy, *Letter to Flora*. For the critical edition, see Ptolémée, *Lettre à Flora*, ed. Gilles Quispel (Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966).

Tyre. He named her Helena after Helen of Troy, claiming to redeem her soul from an endless cycle of increasingly fallen and demeaning reincarnations which she—really, the divine Ennoia—was powerless to stop or control. The first of Simon's salvific acts, Helena's redemption rings only hollowly. We do not know where Irenaeus comes by his information, but it supplements information that Justin Martyr provides in his *First Apology*: that Helena was a prostitute who "went about with him, whom they say is the First Idea generated by him" (*1 Apol* 26, trans. Roberts, ANF 1:171). If Irenaeus's and Justin's accounts are to be believed, then Simon considered Helena not his equal partner, but fully subordinate to him—the Mother of All, yet only an emanation from Mind, which with he identified himself. Further, that soul eventually reincarnated into the unnamed prostitute's body had been detained and foully abused, because it had neither the ability nor the power to rise above material contamination.

We recognize in this ancient account of Simon's relationship with Helena distinct resonances with Nag Hammadi tractates such as the Exegesis on the Soul that explore the drama of the soul's fall and enslavement into the "prostitution" of incarnation into mere human bodies. Consider this parable of the soul:

> And in her body she [i.e, the soul] prostituted herself and gave herself to one and all, considering each one she was about to embrace to be her husband. When she had given herself to wanton, unfaithful adulterers, so that they might make use of her, then she sighed deeply and repented. But even when she turns her face from those adulterers, she runs to others and they compel her to live with them and render service to them upon their bed, as if they were her masters. Out of shame she no longer dares to leave them, whereas they deceive her for a long time, pretending to be faithful, true husbands, as if they greatly respected her. And after all this they abandon her and go.[13]
>
> Exeg. Soul 128.1–17, trans. WILLIAM ROBINSON, JR, 1988

Still, when this myth is imposed upon another human being—a woman described as a "slave" and a "prostitute"—her "redemption" at the hands of a man who buys her is hardly an example of Simon's high esteem for women in general. Nothing in Irenaeus's account (or, for that matter, in Justin Martyr's) accords Helena any social power; she does not speak or self-represent;

13 See further Hugo Lundhaug's article in this volume.

she is nowhere described as Simon's equal or syzygy. She becomes, in tradition, merely Simon's "woman"—a status which Simon himself, in this narrative, does not seek to disrupt or valorize.

I do not argue here that either Simon or Helena were anything other than fictive constructions by Christian polemicists. My point here is to highlight that even from the beginning of heresiologists' constructed narratives of gnostic figures, women appear as passive, associated with spiritual and physical slavery and degradation. Their elevation is not power or freedom, but simply movement higher up the ladder of male domination—into the hands of a richer, more powerful slave master. Irenaeus willingly colludes with this narrative; he himself does not seek to redeem or elevate Helena, but instead ridicules Simon for his ego and presumption. Indeed, the narrative is classic Irenaean satire in the vein of Lucian of Samosata: a pompous trickster plucks a whore off the streets and presents her ridiculously as "Helen of Troy" and "Mother of the All." I imagine that Irenaeus and his (male) readers found the very idea completely hilarious: an ancient Eliza Doolittle, testimony to male ego and female gullibility.

The themes we see emerge here in Irenaeus's brief portrait of Simon and Helena develop even further in our next case study, the Valentinian Marcus and his community.

Marcus "the Magos" and His Women

The second-century religious entrepreneur Marcus, whom Irenaeus disparagingly nicknames "the *Magos*," or "Magician," offered a robust skill set, according to *Adversus Haereses* 1.13.1–7. His specializations included the ability to prophesy through his own spirit and the power to make prophets of others as well. Irenaeus recounts a story of how Marcus convinced wealthy women to follow him by giving them the power or authority to prophesy. Flattering these women at a feast, he would offer verbal encouragement: "Behold Charis has descended upon thee; open thy mouth and prophesy." Irenaeus reports that the woman singled out at the dinner table would then blushingly protest: "I have never at any time prophesied, nor do I know how to prophesy!" Irenaeus continues,

> … then engaging, for the second time, in certain invocations, so as to astound his deluded victim, he says to her, "Open thy mouth, speak whatsoever occurs to thee, and thou shalt prophesy." She then, vainly puffed up and elated by these words, and greatly excited in soul by the expectation that it is herself who is to prophesy, her heart beating violently [from emotion], reaches the requisite pitch of audacity, and idly as well as impu-

> dently utters some nonsense as it happens to occur to her, such as might be expected from one heated by an empty spirit … Henceforth she reckons herself a prophetess, and expresses her thanks to Marcus.
>
> *Haer.* 1.13.3, trans. A. ROBERTS and W. RAMBAUT; ANF 1

It is worth noting here the connection between women and prophecy, clearly a hot-button topic in the first centuries of Christianity as early as Paul's Corinthian correspondence. We also see controversy concerning the right of women to prophesy quite clearly in the case of Montanism. Evidently, then, prophecy formed part of the skill set of religious entrepreneurs including women entrepreneurs like Prisca and Maximilla; if Irenaeus's account of Marcus is accurate, then permitting or even encouraging prophecy became part of the allure of specific (male) religious entrepreneurs. Irenaeus clearly links Marcus's legitimizing acts—in effect, giving religious agency to women—with his attractiveness and popularity. In return for this gift of spiritual charisma, the women support Marcus financially or—what Irenaeus finds more appalling—provide for him sexually. How much this represents an actual historical situation is something to which I shall return presently.

Marcus also apparently practiced ritual innovation, celebrating a form of Eucharist involving color-changing liquid and magically overflowing chalices (*Haer.* 1.13.2). This sleight-of-hand rite, thoroughly debunked by Hippolytus (*Haer.* 6.35), is not my main focus here, except to point out that ritual innovation is another stock feature of the religious entrepreneur. More interesting to me is the participation of women in this sacrament:

> Pretending to consecrate cups mixed with wine, and protracting to great length the word of invocation, [Marcus] contrives to give them a purple and reddish colour, so that Charis, who is one of those that are superior to all things, should be thought to drop her own blood into that cup through means of his invocation, and that thus those who are present should be led to rejoice to taste of that cup, in order that, by so doing, the Charis, who is set forth by this magician, may also flow into them … he himself produces another cup of much larger size than that which the deluded woman has consecrated, and pouring from the smaller one consecrated by the woman into that which has been brought forward by himself … he then appears a worker of wonders when the large cup is seen to have been filled out of the small one, so as even to overflow by what has been obtained from it.
>
> *Haer.* 1.13.2, trans. A. ROBERTS and W. RAMBAUT; ANF 1

Here, Marcus actively solicits the participation of a woman in his Eucharist. On the face of it, this seems to be a rare and generous act of women's equal participation in Marcosian communities. Women are drawn to Marcus, Irenaeus asserts, because he lets them do things which ordinarily they are not allowed to do as Christian women: prophesy, and participate actively in performing a sacrament. According to Tertullian, the Valentinians were known for allowing women to participate in things which it was not their place to do, particularly by serving as bishops (*Prescr*. 41.5).

But this fantasy (or nightmare, from Irenaeus's perspective) of female emancipation and inclusivity is still troubling. The blushing and breathless woman prophetess, enabled by Marcus, does not truly prophesy; she is only told that she does, and she believes it. The woman co-serving the consecrated wine is not an equal partner to Marcus, because she does not know that he has dropped dye into the wine; he lies to her, telling her that it is infused with Charis's blood. She does not know, either, that the large chalice that Marcus holds into which she pours her small "consecrated" cup only to have it overflow is but a dissembling stage performance designed not just to deceive an audience, but to deceive her, the one supposedly empowered to perform an important and impressive ritual. If this is the Marcosian "elevation" of women, it is a sham, designed to hit women at their weak spot: their gullibility, and their desperate desire to be seen, heard, and included.

One more Marcosian vignette before I move on: Irenaeus tells at *Adversus Haereses* 1.13.5 the saga of an unnamed couple. The husband, a deacon from Asia Minor, invited Marcus into his house. His beautiful wife promptly falls in love with Marcus, abandoning her husband to travel with him, which she apparently did for some time. Irenaeus is of the opinion that Marcus had employed erotic magic to enchant the woman, a trick which Irenaeus claims was typical of Marcus's *modus operandi*. Irenaeus reports that it took some work to bring back the wife over to the true Church of God (his expression), after which she devoted the rest of her sorry life "weeping and lamenting over the defilement which she received from this magician" (*Haer*. 1.13.5).

There is much to say about this vignette. Let us start with the story at face value. It is easy to see how Marcus's techniques actively drew women adherents; he appears to have imparted to them a rare agency and voice, which must have been a tremendously powerful incentive to join him and build a movement. As for the charge that it was through erotic magic that Marcus actually wielded his influence, I am reminded of the relatively recent work in the sociology of magic. Here, the idea that women were "charmed" or compelled into adulterous relationships acted as a sort of cover for their sexual promiscuity (or even just falling in love with someone who was not

their husband).[14] The claim "I was enchanted" acts to protect the honor of the adulterous woman, particularly in a case like this where the woman returns and is compelled to do public (?) penance for her actions. Magic acts here to reduce or displace the active agency of the woman, as in the famous "the devil made me do it" defense.[15]

But there is reason to be suspicious of Irenaeus's account, which (without mention of specific names and places) has the feel of a cautionary tale with little basis in truth. One thinks immediately of the Acts of Paul and Thecla, where the betrothed heroine is lured away from her home and her impending marriage to follow Paul. Paul, for his part, is thrown out of Iconium by a host of angry men, who accuse the apostle of bewitching their women. There is, to me at least, too much of a convenient fit between "Paul the itinerant teacher who lures away women by magic" (even though the women insist that they are drawn to his teachings by their own agency) and Marcus, the itinerant teacher who lures away women by magic, even though the women themselves protest that their reasons for joining them have to do with the agency and voice that Marcus himself gives them. Ultimately, the two narratives lead us to different places: Thecla emerges the autonomous, virginal heroine, while the unnamed wife returns to be shamed by her community; nevertheless, the trope of the bewitching male Christian teacher perhaps reveals deep masculine anxieties about the dangerous power that male outsiders can wield, especially over the insiders' women.

Before we leave Marcus, then, we might quickly summarize his relationship with women as it emerges from the pages of *Adversus Haereses*. As a religious entrepreneur, Marcus was a social innovator, involving women in prophecy and in ritual practices—two areas of Christian activity which were quickly and progressively becoming closed to women. Irenaeus asserts that women adored him

14 The argument, in a slightly different form (i.e., that erotic magic was directed by young men to young women guarded within their households) was first proposed by John Winkler: women in love were "considerably more watched and guarded and disciplined than their brothers, and presumably had less access to male experts with their books and the money for hiring them." John Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 90. The theory was accepted by Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), and properly nuanced Matthew Dickie, "Who Practised Love-Magic in Classical Antiquity and in the Late Roman World?," *The Classical Quarterly* 50 (2000): 563–583.

15 The phrase appears in the English vernacular, at least in print, first in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1952)—an excellent example of women's agency being reduced by resorting to excuses of a foreign compulsion.

and flocked to him in droves, a situation he can only explain by charging Marcus with dabbling in sorcery. He resents Marcus's sexual attraction, and like the unknown author of the Acts of Paul and Thecla, insinuates that women cannot distinguish between spiritual charisma and plain old sexiness. Like Thecla to Paul, women confuse their erotic attraction to Marcus with what they believe is his spiritual power. This is classic slander, and only possibly true, although many cases of male spiritual leaders sexually dominating their female members exist, even to this day. My point is that in either case—whether this is Irenaeus's view of women as stupid and vain or Marcus's—women of the second century apparently could not escape what men perceived as their true nature. Only if Irenaeus gets some of the basic details right (Marcosian women participated in the Eucharist and served as prophetesses) while mischaracterizing Marcus as duplicitous can we reconstruct a scenario where women exercised a modicum of power and authority. Were this the case, then the "cultural footprint" of such a group was too faint, once again, to leave much of an impression in the landscape of formative Christianity.

Marcellina

Finally, we come to Marcellina. She emerges from *Adversus Haereses* as the sole female independent religious entrepreneur apparently known to Irenaeus.[16] He tells us that she was a Carpocratic, a group concerning whom we know only what patristic sources tell us. Followers of one Carpocrates of Alexandria, they believed they had power over demons. They used erotic magic, espoused a doctrine of reincarnation, practiced dream interpretation through a system of familiars and dream-sending demons; and, considering themselves to be unbound by Mosaic law, led a "licentious life" (*Haer*. 1.25.3), unspecified by Irenaeus as "all those things of which we dare not either speak or hear," but explained as promiscuous intercourse and polygamy in Hippolytus's *Refutation of All Heresies* (*Haer*. 7). Clement of Alexandria quotes in *Stromateis* Book 3 from a treatise *On Righteousness* attributed to Carpocrates's son Epiphanes, which notes, among other things, that Carpocratics considered property in common; Clement also includes the detail about sexual licentiousness, claiming that Carpocratians had sexual intercourse wherever or with whomever they desired (*Strom*. 3).

16 She is not mentioned in Hippolytus's *Refutatio*, but appears in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.62, Epiphanius, *Panarion* 27.6.1, and Augustine, *De haeresibus* 7. For more, see Maddalena Scopello, *Femme, gnose et manichéisme* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 218–221.

Marcellina set up shop in Rome, when, Irenaeus tells us, Anicetus was bishop, thus around 150 CE. Irenaeus mentions only three things about her, all of which are interesting and curious. First, she brands or tattoos herself inside the lobe of her right ear, as did other Carpocratians (*Haer*. 1.25).[17] Second, she keeps in her *lararium* images of Jesus—including one said to have been made by Pilate—with other images of philosophers, honoring them as images of the gods, crowning them and presumably offering small sacrifices to them (*Haer*. 1.25.6–7). Third, she appears to have been a teacher, in that Irenaeus claims that through her teachings (*doctrinae*), she "destroyed many."

Marcellina is a fine example of a religious entrepreneur, but Irenaeus's account is almost vestigial in its brevity. What does she teach, where, and to whom? Why were her teachings so destructive? Presumably Irenaeus was not familiar with them; had he come across any written material, as he had for Valentinians, he would certainly have transmitted it, if only to refute it; that was his stock in trade. Rather than detailing her doctrines, Irenaeus focuses, uncharacteristically, on her practices. Marcellina's activities that Irenaeus found monstrous—the tattooing and the veneration of images in a *lararium*—were neither distinctive nor aberrant in the broader second-century context. Susanna Elm has written on the practice of tattooing in the Roman Empire into late antiquity; it meant, only, to be a devotee of a particular god.[18] As for the images of Jesus in the *lararium*, it could not have been particularly strange.[19] The Historia Augusta reports that in Severus Alexander's *lararium* were images of his ancestors, statues of Alexander the Great and various deified emperors, as well as other "more holy" souls including Apollonius of Tyana, Christ, Abraham, and Orpheus (SHA 2.29).[20] Irenaeus has already made a similar claim concerning the followers of Simon and Helena: they kept images of them, in the guise of Jupiter and Minerva (*Haer*. 1.23.4).[21]

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17 See the comments of Alain Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque IIe–IIIe siècles*, t. *I: De Justin à Irénée* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1985), 1.130.

18 Bert Lott, "A Prophet of the Dea Syria" (unpublished paper); Susanna Elm, "Pierced by Bronze Needles: Anti-Montanist Charges of Ritual Stigmatization in their Fourth-Century Context," *JECS* 4 (1996): 409–439.

19 For other examples of eclectic *lararia*, see John Bodel, "Cicero's Minerva, Penates, and the Mother of the Lares: An Outline of Roman Domestic Religion" in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, ed. John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 248–275.

20 Bodel, "Cicero's Minerva, Penates, and the Mother of the Lares," 263.

21 Although, famously, Justin Martyr gets this spectacularly wrong, when he misidentifies a

How much of Irenaeus's account is likely to be true? The person of Marcellina—powerful and independent—seems to speak against the patristic writers' insistence that Carpocratics were sexually loose—a charge that Irenaeus never makes of her. It seems unlikely he would have missed the opportunity, though. Her independence and power also seems to speak against the Carpocratic treatise On Righteousness, which considers women property rather than agents (*Strom*. 3.5). It is possible, therefore, that Irenaeus confused things; Celsus, intriguingly, refers in *Contra Celsum* 5.62 to Marcellina's followers in the same sentence that he discusses a group called the Harpocratics, who took their name from Harpocrates, the Greek form of Horus, and followed a woman named Salome. It is unclear whether this Salome was the one named as a follower of Jesus in the gospels (Mark 15:40, 16:1; Matt 20:20), and a disciple in a variety of so-called gnostic writings including the Gospel of Thomas logion 61, the First Apocalypse of James, Pistis Sophia, and the Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit.[22] It is certainly possible, too, that a second-century female religious entrepreneur adopted this name for herself, leading a Harpocratic community, as Celsus claims.

As Gregory Snyder notes in this volume, it is curious indeed that Hippolytus, when he copies and expands *Adversus Haereses*, omits any reference to Marcellina; if he is truly a native Roman, he might have been better poised to have heard of her. Hippolytus's silence is vexing, but matches Origen's arguments against Celsus, when he notes that despite Celsus's claim that Marcellina had many followers, he himself has found no evidence for any in Alexandria of his day. If, indeed, the sole female religious entrepreneur of any note in the second century had failed to grow a legacy, then our general verdict for the role of women in so-called gnostic Christian circles in the third century is that they were as rare and limited as in non-gnostic Christian circles.

Second-Century Christianity: A Woman-Free Zone?

It becomes abundantly clear, while scanning *Adversus Haereses* to help construct a social history of "gnostic" groups or individuals that includes women, that Irenaeus himself saw few appropriate roles for Christian females. His general disinterest in women comports well with his overall positioning as a reli-

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statue with an inscription in Rome to SEMO SANCTO as an image to the divinized Simon Magus (*1 Apol.* 26) rather than to the Italic deity Semo Sancus.

22 Salome is also mentioned in the Secret Gospel of Mark, which, curiously enough, is also tied to the Carpocratics.

gious conservative resistant to the many-headed hydra of Christian belief and practice in second-century Rome, a staunch traditionalist who eschewed any hint of innovation or adaptation within Christian groups. I have argued elsewhere that Irenaeus participates actively in a distinctive Second Sophistic discourse of mocking and amplifying religious difference, painting that difference as deviance.[23] There is, I think, a striking parallel between Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses* and his contemporary Lucian of Samosata's *Philopseudes*, with its stock of dubious religious specialists: Lucian regales the reader with hilarious accounts of a Babylonian *magos* who heals with philtres and conjurations (11–15); a Syrian exorcist (16); a Pythagorean expeller of ghosts (*daimōnes*) (30–31); and an Egyptian adept of Isis who animates brooms and pestles (33–36). With that, it is crucial to note that any "real women" who might appear to emerge within the pages of *Adversus Haereses* must remain securely within quotation marks. The few portraits we find of women in this tractate are brief constructions that are not historical but polemically-charged, tilting into satire as stock characters puffed up by their own vanity and the men who enable them. Irenaeus himself consistently devalues the women about whom he writes—perhaps not more than he devalues men, but certainly differently.

How cynically and deliberately manipulative of tradition and the active roles of women as religious entrepreneurs Irenaeus actually was is beyond our ability to judge. It is interesting and significant, however, that Irenaeus quickly and consistently paints women as dupes. As early as the thirteenth chapter of Book One of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus labels the female followers of his heretics "silly women" (*Haer*. 1.13.6). Except for the isolated case of Marcellina, Irenaeus never sees women as active Christian agents; rather, their labile nature marks them as easy targets for men to exercise their own ambitions. The first time we find a reference to women in *Adversus Haereses*, they are the sexual victims of those men who call themselves "The Perfect," Valentinian *pneumatikoi*:

> Some of them, moreover, are in the habit of defiling those women to whom they have taught the above doctrine, as has frequently been confessed by those women who have been led astray by certain of them, on their returning to the Church of God, and acknowledging this along with the rest of their errors. Others of them, too, openly and without a blush, having become passionately attached to certain women, seduce them away from their husbands, and contract marriages of their own with them. Others of them, again, who pretend at first to live in all modesty

23 Denzey Lewis, "Lived Religion among Second-Century Gnostic Hieratic Specialists".

> with them as with sisters, have in course of time been revealed in their true colours, when the sister has been found with child by her [pretended] brother.
>
> *Haer*. 1.6.3

Interestingly, Irenaeus then cites a passage from an otherwise lost Valentinian source:

> Whosoever being in this world does not so love a woman as to obtain possession of her, is not of the truth, nor shall attain to the truth. But whosoever being of this world has intercourse with woman, shall not attain to the truth, because he has so acted under the power of concupiscence.

On the face of it, this lost source appears to support the very opposite of what Irenaeus argues that Valentinians do; it asserts that women should be married (and for love!) but that sexual intercourse should not form part of conjugal relations. Yet Irenaeus justifies the inclusion of the excerpt on the grounds that the Valentinian "Perfect," acting hypocritically, do not follow their own rules. Valentinian men thus mis-educate and simultaneously embolden and victimize their women. Irenaeus learns of these women, he claims, only through their abject penitence when they return to the "true church" (*Haer*. 1.6.3). If this was true, then the punishment and humiliation of women at the hands of male Christian leaders—after they have already been sexually victimized (or perceived to have been) by other male Christian leaders—leaves so-called "proto-orthodox" Christian communities at least as hostile to women as any so-called gnostic leader, and perhaps even more so. If Irenaeus represents a "true Church of God," then this church devalues and shames women, finding the only "good" woman one who follows her husband faithfully and remains invisible within the drama of an unfolding religious movement.

It is also difficult, frankly, to find positions of authority that Irenaeus believed women might legitimately and appropriately occupy. Despite Celsus's claim that women were disproportionally represented in Christian groups (*Cels*. 3.44; 3.55), actual hard evidence for women's leadership in the second century is virtually impossible to come by.[24] If it is the case that women's attraction to Christianity was a trope that masked masculine anxieties concerning the loss of their power and authority—and I believe it is—then Irenaeus continued a traditional form of Christian teaching most strongly evinced by the Pastoral epis-

24 Similarly Silke Petersen in her contribution to this volume.

tles in which women were theoretically welcome, but should neither be seen nor heard. If this is the case, then it is hardly surprising to find women actively drawn to Christian groups where their participation was valued and encouraged rather than marginalized. Certainly Marcus's willingness to perform a Eucharist with women partners, as well as his enabling of women prophetesses, appears to have commanded not just women's loyalty but their amorous attachment.

I think, however, that it is time to interrogate anew any argument that so-called gnostic entrepreneurs or teachers valued women more highly than any "proto-orthodox" Christians. Put bluntly, neither group sought to free women from entrenched cultural ideals concerning their fundamental flawed and subordinate nature. If Irenaeus is even slightly accurate in his reporting of stories that circulated about Simon and Marcus, then these men only used women for their own sexual ambitions, withholding any real power or prospects for advancement. The vignettes Irenaeus transmits are rife with accounts of sexual victimization, leaving women literally enslaved to so-called gnostic male leaders or else, ultimately broken and publicly humiliated for their prior acts of sexual autonomy. Associated both with the fallen flesh and the debased, sexually degraded soul requiring a man's power to liberate them, the only good Christian woman to be found in the second century, unfortunately, was one who could learn, in silence, with all submissiveness.

CHAPTER 2

"She Destroyed Multitudes": Marcellina's Group in Rome

H. Gregory Snyder

In his discussion of the Alexandrian philosopher Carpocrates, Irenaeus briefly mentions a female student of Carpocrates named Marcellina. This intrepid lady left her teacher in Egypt and immigrated to Rome in the mid-second century, where she founded a group dedicated to the Platonist-inspired teachings of her mentor. The circle of devotees she attracted supposedly used images of Jesus, Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle as part of their religious practice, a fact that should earn her a place in the first chapter of any study on Christian iconography.[1] A woman who leaves her home, travels from one end of the Mediterranean to the other, founds her own group in the largest and most intimidating city in the known world, a group that, in the words of Irenaeus, "destroyed multitudes," will naturally excite both admiration and curiosity. It makes a fitting topic for the present volume, given Antti Marjanen's attention to the study of women in early Christianity.

Heresiological Accounts of the Carpocratians

After a somewhat lengthy section on Carpocrates, Irenaeus comments as follows,[2]

1 Neither Marcellina nor the Carpocratians are mentioned in Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *DOP* 8 (1954): 83–150; missing also from Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). In *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Eerdmans, 2005), 8–9, Robin Jensen mentions the Carpocratians generally, without drawing attention to Marcellina in particular. One of the most sustained treatments of Marcellina is by Madeleine Scopello, *Femme, gnose, et manichéisme; de l'espace mythique au territoire du réel* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 218–221.

2 *Haer*. 1.25.6. The translation given here is chiefly that of Dominic Unger, in Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies, Book 1*, ACW 55 (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 89–90, with a few minor changes. With regard to "teaching," Unger discusses why *doctrina* surely represents

> Some of them put a mark on their disciples, branding them behind the lobe of the right ear. Among these [followers of Carpocrates] was Marcellina, who came to Rome under Anicetus and, with this teaching (*doctrina*), she destroyed many. They call themselves gnostics. They also possess images, some of which are paintings (*imagines*), some made of other materials, saying that Christ's image was copied by Pilate at the time Jesus lived among men. They put garlands on these images and exhibit them along with the images of the philosophers of the world, images of Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and the rest. Toward these [images] they practice other rites like those of the nations.[3]

This short notice conceals a puzzle often elided in the brief treatments this passage receives. First, there is some question as to whether the "they" that serves as the subject of *vocant* in the third sentence and *habent* in the following sentence, ("they call themselves gnostics," "they possess images") refers primarily to Marcellina or to the Carpocratians generally, the main subject of this section. If the latter—if the remarks about the use of images apply principally to Carpocrates and his followers in Alexandria—then the specificity of this remark and whether it should apply to Marcellina in Rome is diminished. Even if she does proceed from the orbit of Carpocrates, there is no guarantee that her group automatically replicates all Carpocratian practices: not all students follow in the exact footsteps of their teachers.

The question becomes more acute on reading Hippolytus's account of the Carpocratians, as he makes no mention of Marcellina. After recounting Carpocratian teachings on metempsychosis—straightforwardly copying much of

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διδασκαλεῖον in the Greek original (pp. 242–243), and so he translates, "because she belonged to this school." But as he notes in his commentary to 11.1 (pp. 194–195), where a similar situation arises, it must mean something more like "system of doctrine," for which "teaching" seems adequate.

3 Alii vero ex ipsis signant, cauteriantes suos discipulos in posterioribus partibus exstantiae dexterae auris. Unde et Marcellina, quae Romam sub Aniceto venit, cum esset huius doctrinae, multos exterminavit. Gnosticos se autem vocant. Et imagines quasdam quidem depictas, quasdam autem et de reliqua materia fabricatas habent, dicentes formam Christi factam a Pilato illo in tempore in quo fuit Iesus cum hominibus. Et has coronant, et proponunt eas cum imaginibus mundi philosophorum, videlicet cum imagine Pythagorae et Platonis et Aristotelis et reliquorum, et reliquam observationem circa eas similiter ut gentes faciunt. The Latin text is from Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, eds., *Irénée de Lyon: Contre Les Hérésies, Livre 1*, 2 vols., SC 263–264 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1979), 2:342–344. The Latin translation, probably executed shortly after Irenaeus, in the early third century, is "slavishly" literal, according to Unger (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, 14).

Irenaeus's discussion of the same subject—Hippolytus asserts that the followers of Carpocrates tattoo their acolytes and employ images, using very similar language to that found in Irenaeus:

> Some among them also brand their own disciples in the back parts of the lobe of the right ear. And they fashion images of Christ, claiming they were made by Pilate at that time.[4]

As he does often throughout his work, Hippolytus takes this material straight from Irenaeus. But he never mentions Marcellina here or elsewhere; a puzzling omission, had she appeared in the version of Irenaeus he had before him. And Hippolytus (or perhaps proto-Hippolytus as per Allen Brent), given his location in Roman environs, might have been better-placed than Irenaeus to know of Marcellina's group or the vestigial remains of the "multitudes" she allegedly destroyed.[5] Even if he had no actual knowledge of Marcellina's tenure in Rome or her followers, why miss the chance to draw attention to the prismatic variety of the heretics and their thralldom to pagan philosophy? In his account of Simon Magus and his consort Helena, another section where he follows Irenaeus, no details unfavorable to Simon escape the author's notice.[6] And given that Hippolytus seeks above all to tarnish deviant Christian groups by tying them to Greek philosophy, how could he overlook a group that venerates images of Greek philosophers?

Nor does Tertullian mention Marcellina, though he too is known to have used Irenaeus's work. Indeed, his discussion of Carpocrates makes reference to the same gospel story used by Irenaeus, namely, that of the defendant who must make friends with his accuser on the way to court, lest he be thrown

4 Τούτων ⟨δέ⟩ τινες καὶ καυτηριάζουσι τοὺς ἰδίους μαθητὰς ἐν τοῖς ὀπίσω μέρεσι τοῦ λοβοῦ τοῦ δεξιοῦ ὠτός. καὶ εἰκόνας δὲ κατασκευάζουσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, λέγοντες ὑπὸ Πιλάτου τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ ⟨γε⟩γενῆσθαι. Hippolytus, *Ref*. 7.32.8. The Greek text is from Miroslav Marcovich, ed., *Hippolytus: Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 316. On the subject of tatooing, see Alain LeBoullec, *La notion d'hérésie dans la litérature grecque IIe–IIIe siècles* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985), 1:130.

5 Peter Lampe observes that Hippolytus fails to mention Praexes, who lived in Rome during the 190s, and that his account of Callistus's origins seems acquired at second-hand. Lampe infers that Hippolytus was not present in Rome before the beginning of the third century. See Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, trans. Michael Steinhauser (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 350.

6 Hippolytus's account is in *Ref*. 6.19, Irenaeus's in *Haer*. 1.23. Hippolytus (*Ref*. 6.40) also expands Irenaeus's discussion of Marcus's practices with his female followers (*Haer*. 1.13).

in jail and not released until he has paid "the last penny" (Mt. 5:26 // Lk. 12:29).[7] Surely, the man who disparaged the heretics for allowing women to teach, preach and—God forbid—to baptize, would have drawn attention to Marcellina, had she been mentioned in his sources. We must conclude that neither Tertullian nor Hippolytus had a version of Irenaeus's writing containing this particular remark about Marcellina coming to Rome, about Marcellina's group (or the Carpocratians) "calling themselves gnostic," or about Marcellina's (or the Carpocratian's) manner of venerating images of the philosophers.[8] All Hippolytus has in his text and seems to know is that the Carpocratians tattoo their devotees and that they possess images of Christ.

Epiphanius gives a breathless report on Carpocrates in the same general sequence found in Irenaeus and Hippolytus, moving from Carpocrates to Cerinthus, and then to the Ebionites. Of Carpocrates, he observes:

> And this school of Carpocrates marks the right ear-lobes of the persons they deceive with a burning iron, or by using a razor or needle. I heard at some time of a Marcellina who was deceived by them, who corrupted many people in the time of Anicetus, Bishop of Rome, the successor of Pius and the bishops before him.

The added flourish, "I heard at some time," seems designed to create the impression that he had picked up the tidbit by personal research, as opposed to simply copying it from Irenaeus. After digressing for a full page to discuss the first bishops in Rome (Peter and Paul), then Linus, then Cletus, Clement, and so forth, Epiphanius returns to the topic at hand:

> In Anicetus' time then, as I said, the Marcellina I have spoken of appeared at Rome spewing forth the corruption of Carpocrates' teaching, and corrupted and destroyed many there. And that made a beginning of the so-called Gnostics. They have images painted with colors—some, moreover, have images made of gold, silver and other material—which they say are portraits of Jesus, and made by Pontius Pilate! That is, the portraits of the actual Jesus while he was dwelling among men! They possess images like

7 *De Anima* 1.35. In *Haer*. 1.3, "Tertullian" also treats Carpocrates, Cerinthus and Ebion in the same order as Irenaeus. But this is a pseudonymous treatise.

8 B.G. Wright, in "Cerinthus *apud* Hippolytus: An Inquiry into the Traditions about Cerinthus's Provenance," *Second Century* 4 (1988): 103–115, discusses the reasons why Hippolytus might have altered Irenaeus at points.

> these in secret, and of certain philosophers besides—Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and the rest—and they also place other portraits of Jesus with these philosophers. And after setting them up they worship them and celebrate heathen mysteries. For once they have erected these images, they go on to follow the customs of the heathen. But what are the customs of the heathen but sacrifices and the rest? They say that salvation is of the soul only, and not of bodies.[9]

Epiphanius clearly has the text of Irenaeus at hand. He adds a remark about images made of "gold and silver," no doubt an extrapolation based on the phrase in Irenaeus, "different kinds of material."[10] Separated as it is from the discussion of Carpocrates by the remarks about episcopal succession, "gnostics" seems to apply specifically to Marcellina's group.[11] But even here, in the fourth century, the evidence about images remains ambiguous: the heading of this section (the *anacephalaeosis*) attributes the use of images to Carpocrates, not Marcellina:

> (3) Like the sects from Simon on, Carpocrates repudiated the law, together with the resurrection from of dead. (4) Marcellina at Rome was a follower of his. He secretly made images of Jesus, Paul, Homer, and Pythagoras, burned incense to them and worshiped them.[12]

Given the divergences between these *anacephalaeoses* and the content they ostensibly summarize (Epiphanius does not mention images of Paul or Homer), they are later additions. But even so, they suggest that at least one ancient reader (prior to Augustine) believed that Epiphanius assigned the use of images principally to Carpocrates, not to Marcellina.[13]

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9 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 27.6.1 and 27.6.8–11, trans. Frank Williams in Epiphanius of Salamis, *The Panarion, Book I* (*Sects 1–46*), 2nd ed., NHMS 63 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 113–114.

10 According to the *Historia Augusta* (Vita Marci Antonini 3), Marcus Aurelius kept golden *imagines* of revered teachers in his *lararium* (*imagines eorum aureas in larario haberet*).

11 This is a well-known digression; Lightfoot argued that it represents a fragment of Hegesippus. See Aline Pourkier, *L'hérésiologie chez Épiphane de Salamine* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1992), 275–277.

12 Epiphanius, *Anacephalaeosis*, 27.4 (Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, 60).

13 Williams: "They are an epitome of the work which originally circulated independently but at an early date was edited into it" (Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, xxii). A Latin translation was known to Augustine.

Marcellina's Group in Modern Scholarship

If ancient readers seem divided on this subject, modern scholars too, show a difference of opinion. Gathering the sources on Marcellina, Patricia Cox Miller cites only this much of Irenaeus:

> Among these [the Carpocratians] was Marcellina, who came to Rome during the bishopric of Anicetus [155–166 CE], and since she held these teachings, she caused the downfall of many.[14]

Nothing in her ensuing remarks suggest a belief on her part that Marcellina's group employs images in their practice. Anne McGuire, referring to the same section, senses the difficulty and leaves the question open:

> Marcellina, a Carpocratian teacher, who, according to Irenaeus, "came to Rome in the time of Anicetus" (154–166) and "led multitudes astray." According to Irenaeus, "they" (the followers of Marcellina or Carpocrates?) "call themselves gnostics and possess images."[15]

Michael Williams, on the other hand, shows no qualms about the assigning the use of images to Marcellina:

> Otherwise, we know very little about her, except for the intriguing fact that she and her circle were known to use images, including images of Christ.[16]

Peter Lampe similarly treats Marcellina's group in Rome under the general heading, "Carpocratians," and asserts that the "Roman Carpocratians" honor images of philosophers.[17] Finally, Allen Brent goes one step further when he

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14 Patricia Cox Miller, *Women in Early Christianity: Translations from Greek Texts* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 17.

15 Anne McGuire, "Women, Gender, and Gnosis in Gnostic Texts and Traditions," in *Women and Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepherd Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 261.

16 Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 127.

17 Lampe, *Paul to Valentinus*, 321–322. So also Winrich Löhr, "Christian Gnostics and Greek Philosophy in the Second Century," *Early Christianity* 3 (2012): 353.

claims that Marcellina and her group—described as "licentious rather than aesthetic gnostics"—venerated images, and that, remarkably, one of these images still survives:

> One of these images of the Carpocratian Gnostics, reflecting the feminine qualities of σοφία, appears to have been produced by taking over a statue of Serapis and making it an icon of Christ as Σοφία. Though Σοφία is not mentioned particularly regarding their beliefs, Irenaeus does say that they believed the world to have been made through angelic creators and that the man Jesus was adopted by a power in order to rescue him with the rest of mankind from the dominion of the angelic creators. We may infer that such a power could be conceived as the aeon Σοφία. What appears to be one of their statues stands today in the Museo Nazionale di Roma, still beardless with feminine breasts, but reconstructed with a scroll in one hand to represent the Gospel, and the other raised in the gesture of a teacher.[18]

This is an intriguing series of conjectures. Nevertheless, the basic uncertainty about Marcellina's use of images weakens the foundation of these claims.

Celsus's Testimony

Into this mix comes an important bit of evidence from Celsus, via Origen. In *Contra Celsum*, we find,

> Celsus *knows also of Marcellians who follow Marcellina, and Harpocratians who follow Salome, and others who follow Mariamme, and others who follow Martha*. But although by giving all our strength to study we have examined not only the doctrines in Christianity and the different views held within it, but also to the best of our ability have honestly looked well into the teachings of the philosophers, yet we have never met with these.[19]

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18 Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 74.

19 *Cels*. 5.62; in the translation of Chadwick, in Origen, *Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 312. The text in italics represents Chadwick's judgment about the actual language of Celsus being quoted by Origen. Scopello, *Femme*, 220, attributes the last sentence to Celsus.

Two observations seem to follow. First, this list of female teachers goes back to Celsus (or his source), not Origen.[20] Just prior to his remark about Marcellina, Origen writes (quoting Celsus), "Then he pours on us a heap of names, saying that he *knows of some also who are Simonians who reverence as teacher Helena or Helenus and are called Helenians*." So Origen is following the structure of Celsus's work, which mentions other female teachers. Celsus is apparently casting aspersions on these Christian groups for their multiplicity and diverse leadership, and their violent disagreements ("they utterly detest each other", *Cels*. 5.63).[21]

Second, the close proximity between Marcellina and Carpocrates occurs in both Celsus's work and in Irenaeus, though the genealogical relationship in Irenaeus is disrupted in Celsus: Marcellina comes first, then the "Harpocratians, who follow Salome." Celsus—or the source on which he relies—seems to be organizing groups, not according to intellectual traits or to ethnic origin but according to female leadership.[22] One wonders if this source could have been some version of the *Syntagma* of which Justin speaks: even though the first edition of this work would have emerged before Marcellina came to Rome, it continued to evolve, incorporating later figures such as Ptolemy.[23]

If indeed Marcellina was in Rome (this far, we may trust Irenaeus), it seems likely that Celsus was also located in Roman environs, given his knowledge of her group. Chadwick discusses the arguments advanced for situating Celsus in Rome or in Alexandria.[24] The best argument for Alexandrian provenance is the

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20 It is evident at many points that Origen is simply following the order of Celsus's book, e.g., "Let us see what Celsus has to say next" (*Cels*. 5.41).

21 Elsewhere, he disparages Christians for making special appeals to women (*Cels*. 3.44, 3.55).

22 Celsus could 1) have come to this knowledge himself; 2) could have been relying on a pamphlet or treatise of some sort that he reorganizes; or 3) be simply quoting such a source; if it is the *Syntagma*, it seems more likely to have had the genealogical structure. And would he have assigned leadership of the "Harpocratians" to Salome if he had been using this source?

23 The *Syntagma*, which Justin mentions at *1 Apol.* 26, seems to have been written before 145 CE, according to Frederik Wisse, "The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists," *VC* 25 (1971): 214.

24 Chadwick, *Contra Celsum*, xxviii–xxix. Chadwick leaves the question open, but the arguments adduced for locating Celsus in Alexandria are not compelling. In favor of Alexandria: 1) Celsus is interested in Egyptian lore; 2) he is somewhat aware of the *logos*-theology of Hellenistic Judaism; 3) Origen is bothered that Celsus draws no lines between heresy and orthodoxy, a state of affairs more typical (says Chadwick) of Alexandria, rather than Rome, where the lines were more clearly drawn; 4) at 6.22 Celsus alludes to the "Mithraic mystery of the ladder with seven gates, corresponding to the seven planets, and explains

fact that Celsus's work comes to Origen's attention in Alexandria. But Origen seems to have no information about Celsus.[25] Had Celsus lived in Alexandria, he would have been more likely to have left traces. In either case, it raises the possibility that Celsus knows of Marcellina's group because he is residing or has resided in Rome. It is much more likely that he would have heard reports of such a group from social interactions in Rome, or have encountered Christian groups and/or written sources there.

And if Celsus is writing in or around Rome, it would also explain why he decouples Marcellina from Carpocrates.[26] In Rome, Marcellina and her group are distanced from any connection with their group of origin. Barring insider knowledge of the group, which seems quite unlikely, he might not have known of any intellectual connection with the Egyptian teacher. And his knowledge of the latter seems to capture a different stream of information—perhaps reliable, perhaps unreliable—given that he detaches Marcellina and Carpocrates, and that he associates the "Harpocratians" with an otherwise unknown Salome. Had he been using the Syntagma or some version thereof, he would have found "Carpocrates."[27]

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it by means of 'musical theories.'" Addressing these in order: 1) the fact that Celsus was interested in "Egyptian lore" need not be taken as evidence for Alexandrian provenance, given the plentiful evidence for Egyptianizing motifs in art and culture in Italy at this time; 2) knowledge of Hellenistic *logos*-theology is not restricted to Alexandria, given the net diffusion of people and ideas from East to West, with Rome as the destination point; 3) the bright lines between "heresy" and "orthodoxy" seem less bright now than in 1953, when Chadwick wrote; 4) a trip to the Mithraeum of the Seven Spheres in Ostia or to any of the dozens of mithraea in Rome demonstrates the diffusion of these ideas.

25 Only that he had been dead a long time (Praef. 4) and that he was either a contemporary of Nero (impossible) or lived in the time of Hadrian (1.8).

26 Unless, of course, Andresen is right and Celsus is just working with Justin's writings. But the Andresen thesis has fallen on hard times: see Gary T. Burke, "Celsus and Justin: Carl Andresen Revisited," *ZNW* 76 (1985): 107–116; also Geoff Smith, *Guilt by Association: Heresy Catalogues in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 81–83.

27 Perhaps Celsus slews towards the use of "Harpocratians" because of prior knowledge of Harpocrates, the Hellenistic scion of Horus. On Carpocrates/Harpocrates, see Silke Petersen, *"Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!": Maria Magdalena, Salome und andere Jüngerinnen Jesu in christlich-gnostischen Schriften* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 220. Petersen cites Nock's notice (*CP* 46 [1950], 50) of a third-century text in which Karpocrates is substituted for Harpocrates.

In any event, Celsus's notice of the group serves as independent confirmation of its existence from an early source, dating from around 177–180, apart from the writings of Irenaeus and Justin.[28] In the absence of such testimony, the lack of any mention by Hippolytus and Tertullian would be more telling, requiring an even more cautious stance regarding the existence of Marcellina's group. It would, in effect, depend on just the single mention in Irenaeus. Celsus's notice does not, however, provide any assistance with the question of Marcellina's group and its use of images.

Adversus Haereses 1.25.6 Revisited

To solve that question, we revisit the site of Hippolytus's "non-mention" of Marcellina. It is illuminating to juxtapose the sections on Carpocrates, Cerinthus, and Ebion as found in Irenaeus and in Hippolytus. *Adversus Haereses* 1.25 is the section on Carpocrates, which begins as follows:

Irenaeus	**Hippolytus**
25.1 Carpocrates, again, and his followers maintain that the world and the things which are therein were created by angels greatly inferior to the unbegotten Father.	Carpocrates affirms that the world and the things in it were made by angels, far inferior to the unbegotten Father.

In the edition of Rousseau and Doutreleau, subsections 25.1, 25.2, and most of 25.3 sufficiently resemble the highly literal Latin translation to warrant being represented as Greek fragments of Irenaeus, preserved in their entirety by Hippolytus.[29] Variations are observed starting at the end of 25.3:

28 Chadwick, *Contra Celsum*, xxiv–xxix. R. Joseph Hoffmann, Celsus, *On the True Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 30–33.

29 For this table, the Ante-Nicene Fathers translation—with a few alterations—is adequate.

Irenaeus	Hippolytus
25.3 But they lead a licentious life, and, to conceal their impious doctrines, they abuse the name [of Christ], as a means of hiding their wickedness; so that "their condemnation is just," when they receive from God a recompense suited to their works.	
4. So unbridled is their madness, that they declare they have in their power all things which are irreligious and impious, and are at liberty to practice them; for they maintain that things are evil or good, simply in virtue of human opinion. They deem it necessary, therefore, that by means of transmigration from body to body, souls should have experience of every kind of life as well as every kind of action (unless, indeed, by a single incarnation, one may be able to prevent any need for others, by once for all, and with equal completeness, doing all those things which we dare not either speak or hear of, nay, which we must not even conceive in our thoughts, nor think credible, if any such thing is mooted among those persons who are our fellow-citizens), in order that, *as their writings express it*, their souls, having made trial of every kind of life, may, at their departure, not be wanting in any particular. It is necessary to insist upon this, lest, on account of some one thing being still wanting to their deliverance, they should be compelled once more to become incarnate. They affirm that for this reason Jesus spoke the following parable: "While you are with your adversary in the	

(cont.)

Irenaeus	Hippolytus
way, give all diligence, that you may be delivered from him, lest he give you up to the judge, and the judge surrender you to the officer, and he cast you into prison. Truly, I say to you, you shall not go out until you pay the very last penny." They also declare the "adversary" is one of those angels who are in the world, whom they call the Devil, maintaining that he was formed for this purpose, that he might lead those souls which have perished from the world to the Supreme Ruler. They describe him also as being chief among the makers of the world, and maintain that he delivers such souls [as have been mentioned] to another angel, who ministers to him, that he may shut them up in other bodies; for they declare that the body is "the prison." Again, they interpret these expressions, "You shall not go out until you pay the very last penny," as meaning that no one can escape from the power of those angels who made the world, but that he must pass from body to body, until he has experience of every kind of action which can be practiced in this world, and when nothing is longer wanting to him, then his liberated soul should soar upwards to that God who is above the angels, the makers of the world. In this way also all souls are saved, whether their own, which, guarding against all delay, participate in all sorts of actions during one incarnation, or those, again, who, by passing from body to body, are set free, on fulfilling and accomplishing what is requisite in every form of life into which	(The followers of Carpocrates) allege that the souls are transferred from body to body, so far as that they may fill up (the measure of) all their sins. When, however, not one (of these sins) is left, (the Carpocratians affirm that the soul) is then emancipated, and departs unto that God above of the world-making angels, and that in this way all souls will be saved. If, however, some (souls), during the presence of the soul in the body for one life, may by anticipation become involved in the full measure of transgressions, they, (according to these heretics,) no longer undergo metempsychosis.

Irenaeus	**Hippolytus**
they are sent, so that at length they shall no longer be shut in the body.	(Souls of this sort,) however, on paying off at once all trespasses, will, (the Carpocratians say,) be emancipated from dwelling any more in a body.
5. And thus, if ungodly, unlawful, and forbidden actions are committed among them, I can no longer find ground for believing them to be such. And *in their writings* we read as follows, the interpretation which they give [of their views], declaring that Jesus spoke in a mystery to His disciples and apostles privately, and that they requested and obtained permission to hand down the things thus taught them, to others who should be worthy and believing. We are saved, indeed, by means of faith and love; but all other things, while in their nature indifferent, are reckoned by the opinion of men-some good and some evil, there being nothing really evil by nature.	
6. Others of them employ outward marks, branding their disciples inside the lobe of the right ear.	Certain, likewise, of these (heretics) brand their own disciples in the back parts of the lobe of the right ear.
From among these also arose Marcellina who came to Rome under [the episcopate of] Anicetus, and, holding these doctrines, she led multitudes astray. They style themselves gnostics.	
They also possess images, some of them painted, and others formed from different kinds of material; saying that a likeness of Christ was made by Pilate at that time when Jesus lived among them.	And they fabricate images of Christ, saying that these were in existence at the time (during which our Lord was on earth, and that they were fashioned) by Pilate.

(cont.)

Irenaeus	Hippolytus
They crown these images, and set them up along with the images of the philosophers of the world that is to say, with the images of Pythagoras, and Plato, and Aristotle, and the rest. They have also other modes of honoring these images, after the same manner of the Gentiles.	
26.1. Cerinthus, again, a man who was educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians, taught that the world was not made by the primary God.	But a certain Cerinthus, himself being disciplined in the teaching of the Egyptians, asserted that the world was not made by the primal Deity.

Sections 26.1 (on Cerinthus) and 26.2 (on Ebion) return to exact overlap, and Rousseau and Doutrelou accept it as the Greek text of Irenaeus.

The material in 25.4, 25.5, and 25.6 is preserved in spottier fashion. Some points of exact overlap are observed, e.g., at the end of 25.4, beginning with "in this way, all souls will be saved," but a good deal of material in the Latin translation of Irenaeus is not found in Hippolytus. Curiously, the two sections missing from Hippolytus coincide with those sections in which writings are referenced and quoted: two writings from the Carpocratians ("as their writings express it" and "in their writings"). The same is true for the section on the Ebionites: verbatim quotation, but then a short section in Irenaeus, not found in Hippolytus, that mentions writings, in this case, the Gospel of Matthew:

Irenaeus	Hippolytus
2. Those who are called Ebionites agree that the world was made by God; but their opinions with respect to the Lord are similar to those of Cerinthus and Carpocrates.	The Ebionaeans, however, acknowledge that the world was made by Him who is in reality God, but they propound legends concerning the Christ similarly with Cerinthus and Carpocrates.
They use the Gospel according to Matthew only, and repudiate the Apostle Paul, maintaining that he was an apostate from	

Irenaeus	Hippolytus
the law. As to the prophetical writings, they endeavor to expound them in a somewhat singular manner: they practice circumcision, persevere in the observance of those customs which are enjoined by the law, and are so Judaic in their style of life, that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God.	

There is no obvious reason why Hippolytus should have omitted these sections.

And looking closely again at the Latin version of Irenaeus and the "non-mention" of Marcellina in Hippolytus (material in italics is found in Irenaeus, not in Hippolytus):

> Some of them put a mark on their disciples, branding them behind the lobe of the right ear. *Among these was Marcellina, who came to Rome under Anicetus and, with this teaching, she destroyed many. They call themselves gnostics*. They also possess images, *some of which are paintings* (*imagines*)*, some made of other materials*, saying that Christ's image was copied by Pilate at the time Jesus lived among men. *They put garlands on these images and exhibit them along with the images of the philosophers of the world, namely, with those of Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and the rest. Toward these* [*images*] *they practice other rites like those of the nations*.

The first sentence of the fragment ("Some of them … right ear") represents a fairly exact rendering of the exemplar for the Latin translation, and Rousseau and Doutreleau treat the first sentence as reliable testimony to the Greek version of Irenaeus.[30] After the phrase, "they also possess images" one encounters an expansion, "some of which are paintings, some made of other materials (*quasdam … quasdam …*)" after which, Hippolytus's quotation falls back in line with what is found in (Latin) Irenaeus. Then, (Latin) Irenaeus continues with the worship practices, "they put garlands on these images … they practice other rites like those of the nations," an expansion missing in Hippolytus.

30 Terming it Fr. Gr. 18 (Rousseau and Doutreleau, *Irénée*, 2:343).

It is possible to imagine several different scenarios for how such a thing might have happened.

1. An early version of Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses*, without the comment about Marcellina, but with the statement about tattooing and the image of Christ, made its way to Rome, where it was then copied and disseminated. Perhaps one of these copies received, in the course of transmission, the added remarks about Marcellina, gnostics, and images of the philosophers.

1a. (a more developed version of 1.) It is generally agreed that Irenaeus based his own work on Justin's *Syntagma*.[31] In its earliest recensions, the *Syntagma* would not have included a remark on Marcellina, given that it was in circulation around 145, before Marcellina is reputed to have come to Rome. But given its nature as a catalogue, it could have easily picked up, at some point in its career, the statements about Marcellina, gnostics, and images of philosophers, in a version later than the one Irenaeus used. When this document was compared with and copied alongside Irenaeus's work—which was based on an earlier version of the *Syntagma*—the statement about Marcellina might have crossed over into Irenaeus, or at least, into some copies thereof. But the version of Irenaeus that Hippolytus inherited lacked this comment.[32] Rome is a big city: it is easy to imagine multiple copies and versions of this *Syntagma*-like literature in circulation, exerting mutual influence on each other and on documents based upon it.[33]

2. Or, back in Lyon, it is possible that Irenaeus kept adding to his own writing over time; perhaps he learned of Marcellina and made the addition himself. There is nothing manifestly non-Irenaean about the style of the longer additions that employ writings of the groups being criticized. At his death (or before), the updated version of *Adversus Haereses*, with edits and additions would have circulated and been copied, but its dissemination lagged behind the first edition, which came into the hands of Hippolytus and Tertullian. The later version served as the basis of the Latin translation we now possess.

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31 Geoff Smith, in *Guilt by Association*, argues that the *Syntagma* was not so much authored by Justin as advertised and augmented by him and thus, of uncertain authorship and date.

32 Adolf Harnack believed that the mention of Marcellina was a later addition to *The Syntagma*. See his *Zur Quellenkritik der Geschichte des Gnosticismus* (Leipzig: E. Bidder, 1873), 75.

33 "The *Syntagma* known to Justin was but one of many competing lists in circulation at the time." Smith, *Guilt by Association*, 84.

3. It might also be the case that the remark about Marcellina, gnostics, and images of philosophers is added to Irenaeus's writing later, by an unknown Greek tradent of Irenaeus's work, post-dating Hippolytus and Tertullian, but pre-dating the Latin translation, made some time in the third century.[34]

4. It may be that the person responsible for the Latin translation of the *Adversus Haereses* added the comment. This, however, is less likely, as Epiphanius knows of it.

On balance, I would favor the second scenario, for the following reasons. We know that *Adversus Haereses* was composed and distributed in stages. The first two books were sent before the third (*Haer*. 3. Praef.), and the fourth after the third (*Haer*. 4. Praef.). Individual parts of the text were therefore in circulation and subject to additions of one kind or another. Subsequent alterations by authors themselves to their existing texts are also common. The birth of Tertullian's *Ad Marcionem* was a vexed and multi-staged affair:

> The first edition, too hastily produced, I later withdrew, substituting a fuller treatment. This too, before enough copies had been produced, was stolen by one who was at that time a brother but later became an apostate, and who copied excerpts very incorrectly and made them available to very many people. Thus emendation was required. This occasion persuaded me to make some additions. Thus this composition, a third following a second, and instead of a third from now on the first, needs to begin by reporting the demise of the work it replaces in order that no one may be confused if in one place or another he comes across varying forms of it.[35]

It is plausible to imagine that Irenaeus, after writing and promulgating a first draft of his work (Irenaeus[1]), might have come across writings associated with the Carpocratians, and decided to further develop his case against them with reference to their actual texts, just as Tertullian made corrections and additions in second and third editions of his work. In any event, one of these scenarios, a variation thereof, or a combination thereof, would account for the appearance of Marcellina in Irenaeus and her absence in Hippolytus and Tertullian. While

34 Unger: "The Latin version seems to have been made not long after Irenaeus's time, that is, in the earlier decades of the third century." Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, 14–15 along with notes 74 and 75, on pp. 121–123.

35 Quoted in Harry Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 118–119.

the stratigraphy of these writings is surely more complicated, it may have clarifying value to refer to Irenaeus[1] and Irenaeus[2], with Irenaeus[2] containing the remark about Marcellina, gnostics, and the images of philosophers in addition to those of Christ.

It is possible that the additional material in Irenaeus[2] is added at this point in the text because of the mention of images of Christ in Irenaeus[1] has invited the insertion of a remark about Marcellina's use of images. In any event, the statement concerning Marcellina's group, their self-ascription as "gnostic" and their veneration of images of philosophers was an independent piece of information, added after the original section on Carpocrates had been written and disseminated.

If these claims are granted, then several results follow:

1. The remark about Marcellina's group and their practices is in fact, *relatively reliable*. It arose in the Roman milieu and made its way into some version of the Syntagma-literature then in circulation, or in a second edition of Irenaeus's work. Of course, any information that arises anonymously and unsourced from an opposing group should be treated with great caution. But she is not simply lumped in with an already tenuous statement by a writer in Gaul commenting on a faraway, long-ago group in Alexandria. Specific mention of her enters the stream of tradition separately and later. We need not worry that we are illicitly attributing characteristics to Marcellina in light of her connection with Carpocrates. Celsus's notice serves as independent confirmation of the group's existence, and he does not classify her as a derivative character following in the wake of her teacher.
2. It is Marcellina's group that calls itself "gnostic." Of course, she may do this after the pattern of her group of origin, but that is not a given.
3. It is Marcellina's group that venerates images of philosophers. This may represent an innovation on her part. The earliest statement about the Carpocratians mentions only images of Christ. Whether Carpocrates employs images of philosophers in a similar fashion cannot be known.
4. If the remark about Marcellina is added later, it is also possible that the statement about the tattooing of ears pertains to Carpocrates's group in Alexandria and not Marcellina. This practice might have been continued by Marcellina or she might have discontinued it. Again, not all students replicate the practice of their teachers.

Marcellina and Περὶ δικαιοσύνης

These results open the door to thinking about augmentations of Irenaeus's works, either by himself or others, and so one further conjecture about Marcellina's group and their textual practices can be advanced. We have seen that there are two sections of Irenaeus in sections 25.4 and 25.5 that do not appear in Hippolytus. Both sections make reference to Carpocratian writings. If we allow that these sections were added later, we might inquire how such writings have come to the attention of Irenaeus or have been integrated into his writings. One prime candidate for this is Marcellina herself. It is entirely likely that she would have brought along texts from her group of origin when she came west to Rome. Peter Lampe has said exactly this:

> The Carpocratians brought with them an explosive writing, entitled περὶ δικαιοσύνης (partly quoted in Clement, *Strom*. 3.5 ff.) which deduced from arguments of natural law and the Platonic concept of δικαιοσύνη the equality of all humans.[36]

Lampe has simply assumed that Marcellina brought this text along with her—not an unwarranted assumption—but the claim can perhaps be justified to a greater degree.

On a first pass, there are significant differences between Περὶ δικαιοσύνης as quoted by Clement and the Carpocratian writings cited by Irenaeus. According to Clement, Περὶ δικαιοσύνης is the work of Epiphanes, the son of Carpocrates.[37]

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36 Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 319.

37 The Greek text of the Epiphanes quotation is in Otto Stählin and Ludwig Früchtel, eds., *Stromata, Buch I–VI*, vol. 2 of *Clemens Alexandrinus* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 197–199. Chadwick (*Alexandrian Christianity*, 25) disparages Epiphanes as "an intelligent but nasty-minded adolescent of somewhat pornographic tendencies," a sentiment that may strike some as donnish and dated. Norden ranks the writing higher, with its clear debt to Plato, and its "beautiful and strongly rhythmic" character; see Eduard Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa vom VI. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis in die Zeit der Renaissance* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995), 2:547 n. 2. For a recent re-evaluation, see Winrich Löhr, "Epiphanes' Schrift Περὶ δικαιοσύνης (= Clemens Alexandrinus, *Str*. III,6.1–9.3)," in *Logos: Festschrift für Luise Abramowski zum 8. Juli 1993*, ed. Hanns Christof Brennecke, Ernst Ludwig Grasmück, and Christoph Markschies, BZNW 67 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 12–29; also Judith Kovacs, "Was Paul an Antinomian, a Radical Ascetic, or a Sober Married Man? Exegetical Debates in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* 3," in *Asceticism and Exegesis in Early Christianity: The Reception of New Testament Texts in Ancient Ascetic Discourse*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, NTOA 101 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 189–190.

In it, Epiphanes discusses the beneficence of God, evident in creation: "God pours out the light of the sun … equally for all those with the power of sight," and "the night is equitable in displaying all the stars."[38] All beings, all crops, all nature, receive God's favor in equal measure; none takes more than its share. "Food is available in common to all animals that pasture on the land, and to all equally. It is not regulated by any law, but is there for all." As with matters of consumption, so with the affairs of generation: "all beings sow their seeds and produce their offspring on equal terms, possessing by Divine gift an innate common inclination." No regulation, no prescription, no "written law" (νόμος γεγραμμένος) governs such processes. Regulations (νόμοι), in fact, "conduce to transgression, not being able to check the ignorance of humankind." And so, human conventions and regulations that draw boundaries, establish possession, or govern natural, God-given dispositions are antithetical to the principle of Divine equity. These sentiments apply to human conventions like property ownership and marriage, leading to radical antinomianism where sexual ethics are concerned. Clement does not approve: "how can this fellow still be ranked among us, when he does away with the law and the Gospel with such talk?"[39] According to Clement, these ideas may have sprung from a reading of Paul: "he (Epiphanes) misunderstands Paul's dictum, when he says, 'through law I knew sin'" (Rom. 7:7).

These doctrines as expressed in Περὶ δικαιοσύνης are both similar and different to what we find in Irenaeus[2]. They are similar in that both accounts contain doctrines that would justify the charge of antinomian ethical behaviors, and both Irenaeus and Clement accuse the Carpocratians of such behaviors. But they also feature significant differences. In Irenaeus's account, the transmigration of souls is the central idea: to attain its liberation, the soul must have sampled from every sort of action both moral and immoral, and so, "having had every experience in life, may at [its] departure not be wanting in anything"; at which point, it "escapes to the God who is above the Angels, the makers of the world."[40] As support for this idea, the Carpocratians, "in their writings," quote the parable of Jesus (Matt 5:25–26), "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court … you will never get out until you have paid the last penny." Conversely, there is nothing about metempsychosis in the section of Περὶ δικαιοσύνης quoted by Clement. The fundamental concept here

38 The translations presented here are mine, but with reference to those of John Ferguson, in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis: Books One to Three* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 258–262.

39 *Str*. 3.8.4 (Stählin, *Stromata*, 199.13–15).

40 *Haer*. 1.25.4, trans. Unger in Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, 88–89.

seems to be the idea of human vs. divine legislation, and the texts employed are more closely tied to the letters of Paul, rather than the gospels. The "righteousness of God" is, after all, one of the central concepts in Pauline theology. And so "the writings" cited in Irenaeus[2] seem to differ significantly from the one cited by Clement, on the other side of the Mediterranean.

And yet, behind these superficial differences, there are clear affinities between Irenaeus's report of Carpocratian writings and Clement's quotation of Περὶ δικαιοσύνης. The parable of the accuser (Matt 5:25–26) stands in close proximity with another saying attributed to Jesus: "he makes his sun rise (ἀνατέλλω) on the evil and the good." This statement seems to inform Περὶ δικαιοσύνη, where it is said that "the sun rises (ἀνατέλλω) on all living beings equally." Similarly, at the end of *Adversus Haereses* 1.25.5, the phrase, "we are saved, indeed, by means of faith and love," sounds reminiscent of Paul in First Corinthians 13:13, where he speaks of faith, hope and love. The claim that "nothing is really evil by nature" (*Haer*. 1.25.6) would be quite at home in Περὶ δικαιοσύνης, where good and evil are merely human conventions. And while the metempsychosis in Irenaeus[2] is not found in Clement's quotation of Περὶ δικαιοσύνης, nor the "communism" of Περὶ δικαιοσύνης in Irenaeus[2], both ideas have a common root in Platonic metaphysics. It does not seem that Irenaeus[2] is quoting from Περὶ δικαιοσύνης, or at least, from the part that Clement cites, but under the surface the two texts show common characteristics. It is not unlikely that they have come from the same shop, and I would suggest that Marcellina's group is the connection.

It may be that Marcellina and her followers have brought books along with them, as Lampe states. Alternatively, Marcellina's group might have generated "the writings" mentioned by Irenaeus as a continuation of the textual activity of the group in Alexandria. We need not subscribe to an either/or: a group that reflects on written texts is likely to generate written texts. In either case, we should certainly add "reflection on texts" and possibly "creation of texts" to the veneration of images as one of the group's activities. If indeed they are venerating images of the philosophers, it seems quite likely that they are also reading books written by the figures whose images they venerate. When Lucian visits the Platonist philosopher Nigrinus, living in Rome, he finds him "with a book in his hands and many busts of ancient philosophers (εἰκόνες παλαιῶν φιλοσόφων) standing round about."[41] In this instance, at least, texts and images keep company with one another.

41 *Nigrinus* 3; trans. A.M. Harmon in *Lucian*, LCL (London: William Heinemann, 1913), 1:101–102.

If indeed these conjectures about Irenaeus^2 and "the writings" of the Carpocratians are correct—that texts were brought west to Rome by Marcellina, where they eventually came to be integrated into Irenaeus^2—then Marcellina's group is actively involved with the interpretation and probably the production of philosophical and exegetical writings, and this fact should be taken into account when considering whether her group qualifies as a "school." But it must be admitted that this conjectural: it is but one possible scenario that would account for the added material in *Adversus Haereses* 1.25.4 and 1.25.5, which mention "the writings" of the Carpocrations.

Conclusion

This article began with concerns about whether statements made concerning the Carpocratians generally apply equally well to Marcellina's offshoot group. The precision of Irenaeus' knowledge of such far-flung groups feels tenuous at best, and the statement about Marcellina seems all the more dubious in light of its anecdotal character.

But if, as seems clear, the comment about Marcellina is inserted later, then the information contained there does indeed pertain chiefly to Marcellina, and not to Carpocrates, or at least, not necessarily. Furthermore, whether or not Carpocrates used images of philosophers for group rituals is unknown, but we have seen that Marcellina, at least, seems to have done so. As a result, she deserves a more prominent place in the history of Christian iconography than she generally receives credit for.

It appears that Marcellina's group did not last for long. Unlike the school of Theodotus the cobbler, who attracted followers enough to perpetuate his school for at least three generations, Marcellina's group seems more like a cultic salon. The group achieved a certain notoriety, enough that it came to the notice of Celsus (or his source), but it did not leave enough of a social or cultural footprint that Origen, writing from Alexandria in the middle of the third century, could find any traces of it. Indeed, Origen emphasizes the degree to which he has strained every sinew to learn of these female-led groups, "yet we have never met with these"; not so surprising, perhaps, if Marcellina was in Rome and Origen on the other side of the Mediterranean, writing seventy-five years later. But Hippolytus and Tertullian also seem ignorant of Marcellina's group even though they would have been better placed to learn of it from direct experience or through other information sources.

As a next step we might inquire further about Marcellina's use of images: in what kind of venue can we imagine such worship happening: an urban *domus*?

A suburban villa? What kind of comparisons can be made with practices at work in the wider culture? What exactly does it mean for purposes of classifying Marcellina's group as a type of philosophical or religious school? What kind of comparative evidence exists for people like Marcellina, who immigrated to Rome and founded a group, evidence that would shed light on her social location? These questions will be the focus of future work. In the meantime, I hope to have demonstrated that such work can proceed on a relatively firm foundation.

CHAPTER 3

Some Remarks on Literate Women from Roman Egypt*

Erja Salmenkivi

It is not easy to evaluate what level of literacy, one of the cornerstones of education, was attained by ancient societies. The notion that every male citizen should know how to read and write first becomes apparent during the Classical period in Athens. William Harris has nevertheless argued that, accounting for the whole population of Attica during the Classical period, it can be determined that an estimated 5–10% were literate.[1] At least since the publication of Harris's influential monograph, it is now a scholarly commonplace that the literate people of antiquity comprised the uppermost stratum of the population. Generally, attempts to determine exact percentages of people able to read and write have been unproductive, and, thus, the focus of studies in literacy (or literacies) has moved on to the function of literacy in particular sociocultural contexts.[2] One such approach, *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, a monograph edited by Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf, discusses literacy and power in a number of ancient societies ranging from the Persian to the late Byzantine Empire.[3] As the editors point out in their introductory chapter, our knowledge of ancient societies relies heavily on textual evidence.[4] Often, such evidence becomes entangled with and consequently is difficult to be extricated from modern western assumptions of literacy as a self-evident skill possessed by the majority and exploited in almost all situations of life. My aim, then, is to discuss some of the evidence on women who were literate in either Greek or Coptic in the multicultural environment of Roman Egypt.

* I wish to thank the editors of this volume, especially Ivan Miroshnikov, as well as Juha Himanka, Kenneth W. Lai, and the anonymous reviewer for their invaluable suggestions on improving this article.

1 William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 114.

2 See William A. Johnson and Holt N. Parker, ed., *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3–4 and 14.

3 Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf, eds., *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

4 Bowman and Woolf, *Literacy and Power*, 1.

Learning Greek in Roman Egypt

General background on the educational system of the Greek-speaking population of Roman Egypt can be found in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, for example, writes,

> There are perhaps four customary subjects of education, reading and writing, gymnastics, music, and fourth, with some people, drawing; reading and writing and drawing being taught as being useful for the purposes of life and very serviceable, and gymnastics as contributing to manly courage.[5]

It is interesting to note that already Aristotle considered reading, writing, and drawing to be the kinds of abilities that would prove useful for and serviceable to various aspects of life as a whole. He further notes, again in his *Politics*, that leaving the responsibility of education to individual parents posed certain problems:

> And inasmuch as the end for the whole state is one, it is manifest that education also must necessarily be one and the same for all and that the superintendence of this must be public, and not on private lines, in the way in which at present each man superintends the education of his own children, teaching them privately, and whatever special branch of knowledge he thinks fit.[6]

In reality, though, the level of education varied through the Greek-speaking populace, and it was not uncommon for parents to have their children taught privately. The latter point at least is illustrated in a letter written in the second century CE by a young man called Apion, who was recruited into the Roman army. He wrote the following to his father, who lived in Philadelphia, located in the north-eastern corner of the Faiyum in Egypt, after he had arrived safely at his station in Italy:

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5 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1337b23–27 (trans. by H. Rackham, LCL).

6 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1337a21–26 (trans. by H. Rackham, LCL). On the history and practices of and philosophical reflections on education in antiquity, see Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1948), and Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: Die Formung des griechischen Menschen*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1954–1955).

> Now I ask you, my lord and father, write me a letter, telling me first of your welfare, secondly of my brother's and sister's, and enabling me thirdly to make obeisance before your handwriting, because you educated me well and I hope thereby to have quick advancement, if the gods so will.[7]

This passage clearly evidences that Apion's father had taught him to read and write. Furthermore, we learn that Apion was hoping, based on his literacy, to be promoted soon after he had settled into his station. He was probably not mistaken in his hopes, as writing was an indispensable skill for the management of supplies and goods as well as for the coordination of the activities of different units of the army. Consequently, the army was in constant demand for literate soldiers.[8] Besides the wish to do well in his life with the help of literacy, Apion's reverence for his father's handwriting betrays his homesickness and his desire for the familiar in a faraway country and in a new phase of his life.

Letters such as that of Apion, above, and various kinds of writing exercises labelled as school texts illustrate the ways people learned to read and write in antiquity. The school texts that have survived from Greco-Roman Egypt have been studied and discussed thoroughly by Raffaella Cribiore.[9] A student that had acquired basic literacy skills would have mastered the alphabet and would have been able to copy a relatively short text and compose a list.[10] At more advanced levels of education, students studied *loci communes* from Homer and other Greek classics, such as the playwright Euripides or maxims originally from the plays written by Menander.[11]

Surviving school exercises attest to a great uniformity in the contents and curricula of education throughout the Greek and Roman world. This realization does not come as a surprise, considering education focalized on the acquisition of Greek, the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean area, from the time of

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7 *BGU* 2.423, ll. 11–18, trans. by Arthur S. Hunt in *Private Documents*, vol. 1 of *Select Papyri* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 305.

8 Greg Woolf, "Literacy," in *The High Empire, AD 70–192*, ed. Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey, and Dominic Rathbone, vol. 11 of *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 892.

9 Raffaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, ASP 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

10 Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students*, 31.

11 Cf. Raffaella Cribiore, "Literary School Exercises," *ZPE* 116 (1997): 53–60; 117 (1997): 162. Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 91, notes that Homer was the formative mold of early Greek *paideia*, and in the end, the word *paideia* meant Greek literature as a whole.

the conquests of Alexander the Great up to those of the early Muslims in the seventh century CE. By learning Greek, the student was thus also introduced to the most important texts that disseminated the Greek worldview. The advantages of learning Greek were particularly apparent in Egypt, where the language of the government remained Greek during the Roman period. Knowledge of Greek was consequently a prerequisite for a career in administration, where employment was offered for people from the lowest levels of villages, e.g., the office of *komogrammateus*, to central offices, in the nome *metropoleis* and in the capital, Alexandria.

Though our evidence for education concerns mostly young men, Cribiore has devoted a whole chapter to women's education in her monograph *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*.[12] Yet she admits that, even in the papyri of the Roman period, the best-attested period of papyri in general and of school texts in particular, direct allusions to the education of girls are rare. Sometimes, however, legal documents supply information on literate women, evidencing cases wherein the legal system enabled women to manage family property while their husbands were travelling or were for some other reason absent from home. These women can be described as "knowing letters" (εἰδυῖα γράμματα) in contracts. Jennifer A. Sheridan has studied one such "knower of letters," Aurelia Charite, in detail.[13] Sheridan points out that, even though there was no social stigma of illiteracy among women, there were always economic consequences. Those who were illiterate were compelled to depend upon others to conduct their own affairs, and, thus, one possible reason women learned to read and write was to protect themselves from being defrauded of their property.[14] Sheridan furthermore notes that the designation "knowing letters" was clearly gender-specific, seeming to occur mostly in documents from Hermopolis ca. 250–350 CE.[15]

Aurelia Charite, active during the first half of the fourth century CE, belonged to the wealthy bouleutic class of the city of Hermopolis. Berenice, another

12 Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 74–101.

13 Jennifer A. Sheridan, "Not at a Loss of Words: The Economic Power of Literate Women in Late Antique Egypt," *TAPhA* 128 (1998): 189–203.

14 Sheridan, "Not at a Loss of Words," 199–200.

15 Sheridan, "Not at a Loss of Words," 201. Based on the data collected in the Papyrological Navigator, http://papyri.info, there seems to be only one other surviving document not discussed in Sheridan, "Not at a Loss of Words," viz. *SB* 20.15188, which mentions a lady as εἰδυῖα γράμματα. This document is dated 212 CE and comes from Antinoupolis. See Peter van Minnen, "Gesuch um Bestellung eines Kyrios (P.Flor. III 318 + P.Lond. III 1164a)," *ZPE* 93 (1992): 191–204.

wealthy literate woman, lived around 100 CE in the city of Oxyrhynchus. Berenice and her husband drew up a joint will stating that, if she survived her husband, she would inherit their entire estate. This is quite an exceptional arrangement considering that the couple had four sons, two of whom were most probably adults at the time the will was written. The estate in question was substantial, including property with arable land and possibly vineyards, as well as residential property and slaves. Berenice did, in fact, outlive her husband and manage the estate by herself, as illustrated by a petition by a former business partner of her late husband. This individual complains that Berenice has yet to sell some wine of his after the death of her husband, and that she, under the council of her ill-behaved sons, is unwilling to pay him his due. The most interesting papyrus in this context, however, is the third papyrus of the dossier of Berenice, an account she has herself written. This document proves without question that Berenice was not only a very wealthy woman who could have conducted her business with the help of professional scribes but that she was herself able to read and write.[16]

Since the first modern excavations conducted by Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, Oxyrhynchus has yielded thousands of papyri dating mostly to the Roman and late antique periods, covering all possible aspects of life from laundry lists to fragments of otherwise lost literature. The Oxyrhynchus papyri have also revealed a population of students, instructors, and anxious parents concerned with the education of their children and are quite unique in one respect in particular: even female pedagogues are attested among the texts from Oxyrhynchus.[17]

Correspondences between Women in Greek

A short but very interesting letter survives from Oxyrhynchus, a letter perhaps written by a woman and certainly addressed to a woman.[18] It is written on the

16 For the dossier of Berenice, see Peter van Minnen, "Berenice, a Business Woman from Oxyrhynchus: Appearance and Reality," in *The Two Faces of Graeco-Roman Egypt: Greek and Demotic and Greek-Demotic Texts and Studies Presented to P.W. Pestman*, ed. Arthur M.F.W. Verhoogt and Sven P. Vleeming, Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 59–70.

17 Raffaella Cribiore, "The Schools," in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts*, ed. Alan K. Bowman et al., Graeco-Roman Memoirs 93 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007), 290.

18 P.Oxy. 63.4365, *editio princeps*: J.R. Rea, "Letter about Christian Books," in *Oxyrhynchus*

back of a petition (P.Oxy. 63.4364) that was signed by a woman by the name of Aurelia Soteira, alias Hesychium. AnneMarie Luijendijk has argued that the hand that wrote the letter is not the same as the one that signed the petition.[19] Thus, we do not know who wrote this letter of only six short lines, even though we know that the woman who signed the petition on the other side of the letter was literate. We further know that the hand of the letter resembles that of Aurelia Soteira's signature and that the unnamed woman to whom the letter was addressed had books in her possession. While the latter fact does not necessarily mean that the unnamed woman was literate, it is a likely surmise. The letter is generally dated to the early fourth century CE and, while rather short, has nevertheless garnered much attention in scholarly circles of early Christianity. The entire letter reads as follows: "To my dearest lady sister, greetings in the Lord. Lend the Ezra, since I lent you the little Genesis. Farewell in God from us."[20]

Since the first edition of the papyrus, much ink has been spilled in discussion over the two books mentioned in the letter. "Ezra" perhaps refers to the text known as Fourth Ezra, but, according to Luijendijk, the textual history of Ezra literature is so complex that we cannot be certain about this.[21] The "little Genesis" (λεπτὴ γένεσις), on the other hand, is now generally agreed upon to refer to the Jubilees.[22] Luijendijk points out that the fact that both manuscripts

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Papyri, vol. 63, Graeco-Roman Memoirs 83 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1996), 44–45.

19 AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, HTS 60 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 71 n. 47. Jane Rowlandson, however, thinks that the letter P.Oxy. 63.4365 may also have been written by Aurelia Soteira; see Jane Rowlandson, ed., *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 78.

20 Translation from Lincoln H. Blumell and Thomas A. Wayment, eds., *Christian Oxyrhynchus: Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 511. The letter is assigned the number 141 in this updated collection of Christian material from Oxyrhynchus, which includes a useful bibliography, introduction, and commentary on the text.

21 Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 72 n. 51. On the reception of 4 Ezra in Coptic and Copto-Arabic literature, see Alin Suciu, "On a Bilingual Copto-Arabic of 4 Ezra and the Reception of this Pseudepigraphon in Coptic Literature," *JSP* 25 (2015): 3–22.

22 Suggested first by Dieter Hagedorn, "Die 'Kleine Genesis' in P. Oxy. LXIII 4365," *ZPE* 116 (1997): 147–148, soon after the publication of the text and supported, for example, by Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 72. Lincoln H. Blumell, *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus*, NTTSD 39 (Leiden: Brill 2012), 170–171, leaves open the question of whether the "little Genesis" refers to the Jubilees or rather to a miniature codex of Genesis, a possibility that has also been suggested in scholarship.

mentioned in the letter might well be copies of Jewish apocryphal works does not necessarily mean that the correspondents were likewise Jews; the *nomina sacra* used at the beginning and end of the letter rather point towards Christian readers.[23] In fact, the use of *nomina sacra* establishes the writer as Christian according to Erica Mathieson.[24]

Because Oxyrhynchus was a nome capital, it is not very surprising to find religious manuscripts written in Greek and literary Greek texts circulating there. Fragments of Greek literature, however, have been found from much smaller villages, too. One example comes from the village of Philadelphia in the Faiyum, from which Apion's letter, cited at the beginning of this chapter, was discovered. Philadelphia is perhaps best known from the third century BCE, as the site has yielded hundreds of papyri comprising the so-called archive of Zenon.[25] In the second century CE, the population of Philadelphia has been estimated at 3000–4000 inhabitants, and, even though this figure suggests a relatively modest village in size, a proportionally large number of papyri survive from Philadelphia from the second and third centuries CE.[26] The number of literary Greek texts from Philadelphia from the first to the sixth centuries CE number only twelve in total,[27] four of which Paul Schubert has dated to the second and third centuries CE.[28]

Two letters from the village of Philadelphia concerning women are of particular interest. The first was originally labelled "An Illiterate Letter of the Second Century" (*SB* 5.7572). Written by a woman named Thermouthas to her mother Valerias, the letter betrays an orthography and clumsiness of syntax that give the impression that the writer was not well acquainted with writing in standard Greek. I fully agree with Jane Rowlandson, however, that it would be unfair to regard Thermouthas as an illiterate woman, since it is rather likely that she

23 Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 72.

24 Erica A. Mathieson, *Christian Women in the Greek Papyri of Egypt to 400 CE* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 220.

25 See, for example, Claude Orrieux, *Les papyrus de Zénon* (Paris: Macula, 1983); Willy Clarysse and Katelijn Vandorpe, *Zénon, un homme d'affaires grec à l'ombre des Pyramides* (Leuven: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 1995).

26 Paul Schubert, *Philadelphie: Un village égyptien en mutation entre le II^e^ et le III^e^ siècle ap. J.-C.*, Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft 34 (Basel: Schwabe, 2007), 23–24.

27 According to the Leuven Database of Ancient Books, http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab; cf. Peter van Minnen, "Boorish or Bookish? Literature in Egyptian Villages in the Fayum in the Graeco-Roman Period," *JJP* 28 (1998): 143–144, where there are ten Greek literary texts listed from Philadelphia from the Roman period.

28 Schubert, *Philadelphie*, 135–143.

wrote the letter herself.[29] This letter illustrates well the topics people covered in their general correspondence:

> Thermouthas to Valerias her mother, very many greetings and always good health. I received from Valerius the basket in which there were twenty pairs of wheat cakes and ten pairs of other cakes. Send me the blankets at the price (we agreed upon) and fine-quality wool, four fleeces. Give these items to Valerius. Also, I am at the moment seven months pregnant. And I greet Artemis and little Nikarous and Valerius, my lord (I long for him in my mind), and both Dionysia and Demetrous, many times, and little Taesis, many times, and all those in your house. And how is my father doing? Please send me news, because he was ill when he left me. I greet grandma.[30] Rodine sends you greetings. I have set her to handiwork; again, I have need of her, but I'm pleased (with her). Phaophi 8.
>
> (Address on the back) Deliver to Philadelphia, to Valerias, my mother.

The above greetings and wishes for good health are all *topoi* attested in letters surviving from Egypt. Even though Thermouthas is not using the normative grammar and spelling of Greek, she was obviously confident that her mother would understand her message. After some business-like information on cakes and wool, Thermouthas tells her mother that she is pregnant, and, at the end of the letter, reassures her that she is doing well—partly, perhaps, because she has a girl named Rodine assisting her.

The other letter of note that survives from Philadelphia concerns a relatively large religious feast that took place in the house of a woman called Artemisia in 206 CE. This letter was written (or dictated) by Artemisia to Isidora, a *krotala*-dancer, contracting Isidora and two other ladies to perform at her house for six days (P.Corn. 9).[31] The engagement was a generous one, the wages including payment in both money and kind, with Artemisia offering to insure the valuable dresses and golden jewellery that the dancers were to bring with them. Finally, she offered to provide Isidora and her company donkeys for transporta-

29 Rowlandson, *Women and Society*, 284–286, text number 220.

30 I follow the translation of μάμα chosen by Rowlandson, *Women and Society*, 286. The other possibility is to translate μάμα as "wet nurse," "nanny."

31 *Krotala*-dancers (κροταλίστρια or κροταλιστρίς), i.e. dancers with clappers, are quite rarely mentioned in the papyri. The name of the instrument is sometimes misleadingly translated as castanet, even though the clappers in question resemble small cymbals; see further Marjaana Vesterinen, "Dancing and Professional Dancers in Roman Egypt" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2007), 37–38, 159–160.

tion both to and from Philadelphia. In all, Artemisia asked Isidora and her company to perform "for six days, from the twenty-fourth of the month Pauni according to the old reckoning" (P.Corn. 9, ll. 6–8). "Old reckoning" refers here to the traditional Egyptian religious calendar, which was still in use in horoscopes and in connection with religious festivals during the Roman period. That the dancers were asked to perform for six days suggests that the feast was a significant one. It may have been arranged to celebrate the traditional eponymous festival of the month Pauni, i.e. "the Beautiful Feast of the Valley."[32]

Women's letters, i.e. letters either written or dictated by women, have been collected and analysed by Roger S. Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore.[33] One of the discoveries of their study is that women's letters written in Greek are unevenly distributed, with the bulk of women's letters dating to the second and third centuries CE.[34] There is a drastic decline in women's letters in the fifth century and they amount to just one-tenth of one percent of all documents from the sixth to the eighth centuries. It seems that women simply disappear as writers of letters in Greek after the fourth century CE.[35]

Women Literate in Coptic

Roger Bagnall has discussed the possibility that women were more likely to use the native Egyptian language than men, as men were trained to take part in the public sphere of life, which operated mostly in Greek.[36] Bagnall and Cribiore have developed this thought further, discussing the considerable rise in women's letters written in Coptic following their drastic decline in Greek.[37]

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32 Cf. Heidi Jauhiainen, *"Do Not Celebrate Your Feast without Your Neighbours": A Study of References to Feasts and Festivals in Non-literary Documents from Ramesside Period Deir el-Medina* (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2009), 147–152. During the Ramesside period in Deir el-Medina, this festival took place in the month Pauni starting with the new moon of the month. It was celebrated for between two and six days. It is also known from sources dating to the Greco-Roman period in the Theban region, and its connection to Hathor makes it tempting to suggest that Artemisia may have been organizing a feast in honor of either the eponymous festival or the goddess connected with it.

33 Roger S. Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt, 300 BC–AD 800* (Ann Arbor & New York: The University of Michigan Press & ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2008).

34 See the table in Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, § 89.

35 Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, § 96.

36 Roger Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 235.

37 Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, §§ 101–107.

Among the earliest Coptic correspondence not deriving from a monastic milieu, i.e. among the Coptic letters from Kellis, five out of thirty-five letters are from women to their sons, husbands, or other male relatives.[38] With the publication of the second volume of the Coptic documentary texts from Kellis, the gender distribution of Coptic letters from Kellis has become even more drastic, with ca. 40 % of them being written to or from women.[39]

One other group of evidence for women's literacy comes from the Coptic ostraca from the Theban tomb TT29 that attest to the correspondence of a certain Frange written in the early eighth century CE. Even though these texts fall outside the time frame of "Roman," they reveal at least one lady, named Tsie, who certainly wrote her letters by herself, and she even acted as the scribe on behalf of other people.[40] While the editors describe Tsie's hand as clumsy,[41] as in the case of Thermouthas, above, this may also be considered as *evidence* of her literacy.[42]

Bagnall and Cribiore argue that, soon after the advent of Coptic, wealthier Egyptian women took pride in learning the script of their native tongue, employing it toward both financial and intellectual ends.[43] One lady who certainly took pride in her Coptic literacy was a certain Tatre, who wrote a letter requesting a certain Moses to send her and another lady named Katharon a portion of (presumably ecclesiastical) canon in the sixth century. Within the body of the text, she states that "I, Tatre, write with my own hand" (O.Mon.Epiph. 386, ll. 7–8).[44] Even though her statement brings to mind, for example, the Greek sig-

38 See Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, § 103 and § 445.

39 Jennifer Cromwell, review of *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis II*, ed. Iain Gardner, Anthony Alcock, and Wolf-Peter Funk, *JEA* 101 (2015): 389.

40 Chantal Heurtel, "Une correspondence copte entre Djémé et Pétémout", in *La lettre d'archive: Communication administrative et personnelle dans l'Antiquité proche-orientale et égyptienne*, ed. Laure Pantalacci (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2008): 97–98.

41 Anne Boud'hors and Chantal Heurtel, *Les ostraca coptes de la TT 29: Autour du moine Frangé*, 2 vols. (Brussels: CReA-Patrimoine, 2010), 1:15.

42 The other lady considered to be literate in this dossier, Susanne, is the sender of letters 353–358. The editors take her letters to be written by herself, but they seem to betray two different hands. Because the hand of 353–355 and 358 is a refined one, I think it is possible that Susanne may have dictated her letters and not written them herself. Cf., however, Jennifer Cromwell, review of *Les ostraca coptes de la TT29: Autour du moine Frangé*, ed. Anne Boud'hors and Chantal Heurtel, *JEA* 99 (2013): 314 and n. 6.

43 Cf. Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, § 336.

44 O.Mon.Epiph. 386 = Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, letter 131. Terry Wilfong, *Women of Jeme: Lives in a Coptic Town in Late Antique Egypt* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michi-

natures of male witnesses in sixth century documents from Petra and scribal practice attested in Coptic legal texts,[45] Tatre's phrasing is unique among Coptic women's letters. The interesting question of how much of the cultural and intellectual inheritance of ancient Egypt was transmitted by Egyptian women all the way up to early Christian thought is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to give an outline of the ways people learned to read and write Greek in Roman Egypt. Private letters and so-called school exercises attest to the real situation in which students underwent the Greek curriculum in order to advance their careers or to communicate with their loved ones. Even though there was no social stigma to being illiterate, some women nevertheless learned to read and write, most likely for the same purposes as men did: to be able to communicate with others and to be able to manage their property independently.

One proof of a woman's literacy is the appellation "knowing letters" in various legal documents, but the hand of a letter, too, can often reveal the fact that a woman was literate. Letters written (or sometimes dictated) by women during the Roman period offer glimpses into both everyday life and ancient Egyptian traditions still in practice at the beginning of the third century CE. Not much later, however, women's letters also betray interests in Biblical books written in Greek. Furthermore, the advent of Coptic and the considerable rise in number of Coptic letters written to or sent by women raises the question of the role of women in transmitting and exchanging ideas in the early centuries of Christian Egypt.

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gan Press, 2002), 76, has suggested that the intention of this statement was to assert to Moses that Tatre was able to read whatever he would send her.

45 For example, P.Petra 1.1, 3.18, 3.29, 3.31, and 4.39, as well as P.KRU 18, 35, and 38.

PART 2

Afterlives of Women in Biblical Narratives

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CHAPTER 4

Women, Angels, and Dangerous Knowledge: The Myth of the Watchers in the Apocryphon of John and Its Monastic Manuscript-Context*

Christian H. Bull

An ancient Greek proverb, found in the sentences of Menander, asserts that "sea and fire and woman are thrice evil."[1] The proverb exemplifies a tendency in the ancient world to see women as the root cause of mankind's miseries, a tendency also witnessed in for example the Greek myth of Pandora or the Hebrew myth of Eve. Proverbs and myths are genres that naturalize categories and pass value-judgment on them, but especially myths can also be used to challenge

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1 Menander, *Γνῶμαι μονόστιχοι* 231: θάλασσα καὶ πῦρ καὶ γυνὴ τρίτον κακόν (see also 233: Θησαυρός ἐστι τῶν κακῶν κακὴ γυνή). My trans.; text in August Meineke, *Fragmenta comicorum Graecorum I* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1847), 1049. My title is inspired by George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), esp. 98–104. Lakoff's title is based on a Dyirbal language-category, and its no doubt coincidental similarity to the ancient proverb cited was pointed out by Elisabeth Piirainen, "Metaphors of an Endangered Low Saxon Basis Dialect—Exemplified by Idioms of Stupidity and Death," in *Endangered Metaphors*, ed. Anna Idström and Elisabeth Piirainen, Cognitive Linguistic Studies in Cultural Contexts 2 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012), 339–357 at 354–355. However, Piirainen only gives a version found in Erasmus, *Adagia*, 2.2.47, which I have not been able to find in any ancient sources: πῦρ, καὶ θάλασσα, καὶ γυνὴ, κακὰ τρία. Erasmus also quotes from Euripides, via Planudes's life of Aesop: "Constant the fury of the ocean wave, | Of raging rivers and hot streams of fire | Frightful is poverty and much else besides, | But naught so frightful as a wicked woman." William W. Barker, numbers the adage 2.2.48 instead of 47; Barker, *The Adages of Erasmus* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2001), 166. Aesop seems to have had a quite different version of the saying in his *Sententia*, quoted by Maximus the Confessor: Πῦρ γυνὴ καὶ θάλασσα, δυνατὰ τρία; see Ben E. Perry, *Aesopica I* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952), 248.

entrenched values.[2] A myth is successful only if it is continually retold and reengaged with, and yet every retelling opens the way to subtly alter the fabric of the myth, and thus also the categories being negotiated. Written myths are furthermore susceptible to changes from one manuscript to the next, as textual critics have learned to their chagrin in the search for Urtexts. Scholars engaged with textual fluidity, on the other hand, see divergent manuscripts as an opportunity to compare the different readings elicited in each manuscript.[3] A text that attains the status of canon is however less vulnerable to textual fluidity (but by no means immune),[4] and the main tool to modify the categories negotiated in the text becomes the commentary, or the apocryphal elaboration.[5]

The book of Genesis is one such text that has spawned innumerable commentaries and apocrypha, a number of which is contained in the Nag Hammadi Codices. In the present contribution—offered here in homage to Professor Antti Marjanen[6]—I will consider a myth dealing with somewhat similar categories as those in the Greek saying, namely women, angels (incidentally often described as igneous), and the dangerous knowledge they reveal, in the reception of a biblical myth in late antique Egypt. On the subject of women, angelic or demonic beings, and knowledge, it is the myth of Eve, the snake, and the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that has received the most attention, both in the apocrypha of the Nag Hammadi Codices and the scholarly literature. However, another myth deals with a later stage of antediluvian history,

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2 I am particularly influenced here by Bruce Lincoln, e.g., *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

3 Hugo Lundhaug, "The Nag Hammadi Codices: Textual Fluidity in Coptic," in *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Alessandro Bausi et al. (Hamburg: COMSt, Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies, 2015), 419–423. Cf. also Hugo Lundhaug and Liv I. Lied, eds., *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, TUGAL 175 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

4 Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 149 ff.; Edmon L. Gallagher, *Hebrew Scripture in Patristic Biblical Theory: Canon, Language, Text*, VCSup 114 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 143 ff. Cf. Einar Thomassen, "Some Notes on the Development of Christian Ideas about a Canon," in *Canon and Canonicity: The Formation and Use of Scripture*, ed. Einar Thomassen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009), 9–28.

5 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C.H. Beck, 1992, 6th ed., 2007), 93–129.

6 I am particularly grateful for Antti's efforts in the steering-committee of the Nordic Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism Network, funded by Nordforsk 2004–2009, which has been of enormous importance for me and many other young scholars, Scandinavian as well as international.

when the sons of God took the daughters of men as wives, and the descendants of Cain invented arts musical and metallurgical.

According to the book of Genesis, before the flood, when men began to multiply, the sons of God (*Bene Elohim*) saw the beauty of the daughters of men and took as wives whoever they wanted (Gen 6:1–2). Some versions of the Septuagint, such as Codex Alexandrinus, write angels (ἄγγελοι) instead of sons (υἱοί) of God,[7] and according to Julius Africanus (2nd c.) the majority of copies says "angels of heaven," whereas "in some copies, I found: 'the sons of God.'"[8] In response to their actions, God goes on to say that his spirit will not remain with humans forever, since they are flesh, but their days will be 120 years (either limiting the human lifespan or predicting the flood; Gen 6:3). The sons of God begot offspring with their human wives who became giants and famous heroes (Gen 6:4).[9] Straight after this, God saw that human evil had proliferated and decided to wipe them out with the flood (Gen 6:5 ff.). The cryptic passage spawned several attempts at explanation, for example Philo asserted that the myth is an allegory of souls falling into material desires,[10] while Tertullian identified the sons of God with angels, and claims that this is the reason that Paul commands women to wear a veil on their head during divine service, "because of the angels" (1 Cor 11:10), in order not to tempt them.[11] Tertullian's interpretation is based on the more elaborate version of the myth found in the Book of Watchers, which comprises the first 36 chapters of 1 Enoch.[12]

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7 Susan Brayford, *Genesis*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 46, 260.

8 Apud Synk., *Chron*. 19.24–26: Πλήθους ἀνθρώπων γενομένου ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἄγγελοι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ θυγατράσιν ἀνθρώπων συνῆλθον. ἐν ἐνίοις ἀντιγράφοις εὗρον· οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ; cf. below. Also Philo, *Deus* 1 quotes "angels of God."

9 Cf. Walter Bührer, "Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter: Gen 6,1–4 als innerbiblische Schriftauslegung," *ZAW* 123 (2011): 495–515. Cf. also Ellen J. van Wolde, "The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men in Genesis 6:1–4," in *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11*, BibInt 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 63–74, who sees this episode in the Masoretic text as a positive event, and David J.A. Clines, "The Significance of the 'Sons of God' Episode (Genesis 6:1–4) in the Context of the 'Primeval History' (Genesis 1–11)," *JSOT* 13 (1979): 33–46, for a negative view.

10 Philo, *Gig*. 6–18; *Deus* 1–3. Cf. Bührer, "Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter," 495–515.

11 Tertullian, *Virg*. 7.2.4; see also *Cult. fem*. 1.2–3, 2.10; *Or*. 22.5; *Apol*. 35.12; *An*. 2.3; *Idol*. 4, 9.1; Jean Daniélou, *Histoire des doctrines chrétiennes avant Nicée III: Les origines du christianisme latin* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978), 140–149. Few modern scholars agree with Tertullian that this is the meaning of Paul in 1 Cor, cf. for example Dennis R. Macdonald, "Corinthian Veils and Gnostic Androgynes," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King, SAC (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1988), 276–292 at 290.

12 Ethiopic text in Michael A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in the Light of*

This influential version of the myth is considered by most scholars to be an elaboration on the biblical verses, although some hold that the myth contained in the Book of Watchers is actually presupposed by Genesis, thus predating it.[13] The version of the Book of Watchers identifies the sons of God as 200 angels, called watchers (ἐγρήγοροι), many of whom are named individually, who swore a mutual oath to take human women as wives after they had seen their beauty (1 En. 6). They descended to Mount Hermon, took wives with whom they defiled themselves, taught them illicit arts, and begot gigantic offspring (1 En. 6–8). One of our Greek text witnesses here adds a remark that the daughters of humans in fact seduced the angels with the arts of beautification they learned from the angel Asael.[14] A cry then went up to heaven because of the iniquities of the watchers, and in response God commissioned his angels to warn Noah about the flood, bind the watchers in the darkness, and wipe out their offspring.[15] The

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the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978). Aramaic text in Jósef T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976); Michael Langlois, *The First Manuscript of the Book of Enoch: An Epigraphical and Philological Study of the Aramaic Fragments of 4Q201 from Qumran* (Paris: Cerf, 2008). Greek text in Matthew Black, *Apocalypsis Henochi Graece*, PVTG 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1970) and translation in his *The Book of Enoch or 1Enoch: A New English Edition with Commentary and Textual Notes*, Studia in veteris testamenti pseudepigrapha 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1985). On the reception of the myth, cf. Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and James C. VanderKam, "1Enoch, Enochic Motifs, and Enoch in Early Christian Literature," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler, CRINT 3: Jewish Traditions in Early Christian Literature 4 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), 33–127 at 70–72 for the Apocryphon of John.

13 Philip R. Davies, "Women, Men, Gods, Sex and Power: The Birth of a Biblical Myth," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 194–201.

14 George W.E. Nickelsburg, "Apocalyptic and Myth in 1Enoch 6–11," *JBL* 96 (1977): 383–405 at 397–398. Nickelsburg sees this line as authentic, although the other Greek witness and the Ethiopic omit it. The line is considered a later interpolation by Siam Bhayro, "The Use of Jubilees in Medieval Chronicles to Supplement Enoch: The Case for the 'Shorter' Reading," *Henoch* 31 (2009): 10–17.

15 1 En. 8–11; cf. 1Pet 3:19–20; Jude 6. For some studies of the Book of Wathers 6–11 cf. Paul Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1Enoch 6–11," *JBL* 96 (1977): 195–233; David Suter, "Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest: The Problem of Family Purity in 1Enoch 6–16," *HUCA* 50 (1979): 115–135; Hans Dieter Betz, "On the Problem of the Religio-Historical Understanding of Apocalypticism," *JTC* 6 (1969): 134–156; Siam Bhayro, "Noah's Library: Sources for *1Enoch* 6–11," *JSP* 15 (2006): 163–177; Helge S. Kvanvig, "Gen 6:3 and the Watcher Story," *Henoch* 25 (2003): 277–300; id., "Cosmic Laws and Cosmic

Book of Watchers thus combines the myth of illicit marital unions with the introduction of secret and illicit knowledge and technology, such as sorcery, rootcutting, metallurgy, and astrology.[16] In Genesis, it is a seventh generation descendant of Cain, Tubal-Cain, who introduces the working of bronze and iron.[17] Tubal-Cain is placed two generations closer to Adam than Noah is, but since he and his siblings are the last Cainites to be mentioned they were probably thought to be contemporaries of Noah, before they were wiped out by the flood. However, there is no indication that Tubal-Cain is considered to be a giant, nor that his mother was taught arts by sons of God. It is striking though that the only women mentioned in the genealogy of Cain is the sister of Tubal-Cain, his mother, and the mother of his half-brothers: Naamah, Zilla, and Ada respectively. The significance of these women is however unclear in Genesis, though they will reappear in later Jewish myths.[18] Indeed, a reader

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Imbalance: Wisdom, Myth and Apocalyptic in Early Enochic Writings," in *The Early Enoch Literature*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini and John J. Collins, JSJSup 121 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 139–158 at 152–158; Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Heavenly Ascent, Angelic Descent, and the Transmission of Knowledge in 1Enoch 6–16," in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, ed. Ra'anan S. Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47–66; Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6.1–4 in Early Jewish Literature*, WUNT 198 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Rebecca Lesses, "'The Most Worthy of Women is a Mistress of Magic': Women as Witches and Ritual Practitioners in 1Enoch and Rabbinic Sources," in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*, ed. Kimberly B. Stratton and Dayna S. Kalleres (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 71–107 at 74–78.

16 Nickelsburg, "Apocalyptic and Myth," argues that the Book of Watchers combines one tradition concerning the fallen angel Shemihazah, who marries women and beget giants, whereas the other tradition, of Asael, deals with illicit instruction. On these two watchers cf. also the Book of Giants, the Manichaen Book of Giants, the medieval Midrash of Šemiḥazah and ʿAśa'el (the latter in Milik, *Enoch*, 322–328), and Ken M. Penner, "Did the *Midrash of Šemiḥazah and ʿAśa'el* use the *Book of Giants*?" in *Sacra Scriptura: How "Non-Canonical" Texts Functioned in Early Judaism and Early Christanity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Lee M. McDonald with Blake A. Jurgens (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 15–45.

17 Cf. Philip R. Davies, "Sons of Cain," in *A Word in Season: Essays in Honour of William McKane*, ed. James D. Martin and Philip R. Davies, JSOTSup 42 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 35–56. Davies holds that the Sethites and Cainites are two variant geneaologies of Noah, of respectively P and J, combined into one, with the Cainite family of Lamech added redactionally to replace Noah. The Septuagint calls Tubal-Cain simply Θόβελ.

18 Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1909–1938, repr. 2003), 1:112–114. Cf. Birger Pearson, "The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature," in *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, Stockholm, August 20–*

of the Greek version of the Book of Watchers might have understood the statement that the daughters of men were not only καλαί, as in Genesis, but also ὡραῖαι, "beautiful"[19] as a reference to Naamah, whose name in Hebrew means "pleasant." Now, Naamah is sometimes the name given to the sister and wife of Seth or the wife of Noah, who are in Greek texts sometimes called Ὡραῖα or Νωραῖα, for example in Sethian myths.[20]

Although not spelled out in Genesis, the author of the Book of Watchers thus combined the motif of sons of God who take the daughters of men as wives with the motif of metallurgical knowledge developed by a Cainite. The myth is a kind of culture-hero myth,[21] and in fact Jan N. Bremmer has shown that there are reminiscences of the Greek myth of the titans in the Book of Watchers, especially in view of the fallen angels being bound in fetters in the underworld, just like the titans, whereas Prometheus—the culture hero *par excellence*—was bound in the Caucasus, similar to how the angel Asael is bound in the wilderness.[22] In the Book of Watchers, the daughters of men are taught technology and arts like metallurgy, herb-lore, astrology, and magic by their angelic husbands, and these arts are explicitly linked to a decay in the purity

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25, 1973, ed. Geo Widengren (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell international, 1977), 143–152; repr. in *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 84–94; id., "Jewish Sources in Gnostic Literature," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, ed. Michael E. Stone (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), 443–482; id. "Revisiting Norea," in *Images of the Feminine*, 265–275. Pearson claims that it was Naamah who seduced the sons of god, but cites only *Pirke de R. Eliezer* 22, which does not mention Naamah, and the *Zohar* which is a medieval text ("Norea," 90; "Sources," 467). Cf. Guy G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology*, NHS 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 56–58. Clines, "Significance," 38–39, claims that the sons of God are intelligible as royal successors of Lamech, the Cainite who took both Zilla and Ada as wives and thus introduced polygamy.

19 1 En. 6.1. Cf. Black, *Apocalypsis*, 21: Codex Panopolitanus: ἐγεννήθησαν θυγατέρες ὡραῖαι καὶ καλαί; Syncellus: ἐγεννήθησαν αὐτοῖς θυγατέρες ὡραῖαι.

20 Pearson, "Revisiting," 266, also citing other scholars who favor a derivation from *na'ara*, "maiden"; Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 58. Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.30.5; Origen, *Cels*. 6.31; Epiphanius, *Pan*. 39.5.

21 Cf. William F. McCants, *Founding Gods, Inventing Nations: Conquest and Culture Myths from Antiquity to Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 30–34, 54–55.

22 Jan N. Bremmer, "Remember the Titans!" in *The Fall of the Angels*, ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; TBN 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 36–61; id. "Greek Fallen Angels: Kronos and the Titans," in *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 73–99. Cf. also Nickelsburg, "Apocalyptic and Myth," 395–401. Actually the watchers were bound "in the valleys of the earth" (1 En. 10.12: εἰς τὰς νάπας τῆς γῆς), and are only taken to "the chaos of fire" after the judgement of the "eon of eons."

of the human way of life. Likewise, in Jubilees, the union of angels and human women is considered to have increased injustice on earth, and led to the first instance of meat eating.[23] The union between angels and women is an illicit form of category-mixture, a mythological miscegenation, which also provides an etiology for the art of metallurgy, on the common ancient supposition that such knowledge cannot have been discovered by humans on their own.[24] The knowledge of working base and precious metals was thought of necessity to have been revealed, and since the products of metallurgy are often suspect items like weapons, coins, graven images, ornamentation, and alchemical mixtures, it was an effective rhetorical move to discredit the art by associating it with the unnatural sexual union between women and fallen angels.[25] A similar rhetorical move, discrediting certain practices with reference to myths of impure sexual relationships, is found in Epiphanius's listing of eighty heresies that are identified with the eighty foreign concubines of Solomon, who lured him from the pure religion to idolatry.[26] Both the watchers and Solomon fall from their pure status because of their sexual desire for women whom it is unlawful for them to bed, and the result is idolatry in Solomon's case, and illegitimate arts related to war, ornamentation, idolatry, alchemy, and magic in the

23 Jub. 5. On sexuality in 1 Enoch and Jubilees, cf. William Loader, *Enoch, Levi, and Jubilees on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in the Early Enoch Literature, the Aramaic Levi Document, and the Book of Jubilees* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

24 Suter, "Fallen Angel," 116–117, claims the myth is an etiology of evil, yet in my view the myth rather suggests that certain gifts of civilization have a corrosive effect on the purity of human life. The human potential for evil must be presupposed to already exist after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise and Cain's murder of Abel. On the supernatural origin of arts, cf. McCants, *Founding Gods*.

25 Cf. however Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Gendering Heavenly Secrets? Women, Angels, and the Problem of Misogyny and 'Magic,'" in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*, ed. Kimberly B. Stratton and Dayna S. Kalleres (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 108–151 at 128, who proposes that the instruction of the angels in some manuscript variants of 1 Enoch is "true knowledge wrongly revealed," which serves as a power strategy for the knowledge in question.

26 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 35.3.5, 80.10.2–4. Ingvild S. Gilhus, "Flirty Fishing and Poisonous Serpents: Epiphanius of Salamis Inside his Medical Chest against Heresies," in *History and Religion: Narrating a Religious Past*, ed. Bernd-Christian Otto, Susanne Rau, and Jörg Rüpke, RVV 68 (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2015), 93–108, shows how Epiphanius links the possession of heretical texts with promiscuous women. Cf. also the marriage between Jewish men and Midianite and Moabite women that leads to idolatry (Num. 25); Jennifer W. Knust, *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity*, GTR (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 121–124.

case of the Book of Watchers. Such a myth could have several usages. In Second Temple Judaism it could be used to protect the family purity of priests, as David Suter has argued,[27] whereas Egyptian monks would read the myth as a warning against sexual temptation, as we shall see.

The Book of Watchers in Late Antique Egypt

It is the later reception of the myth combining angels, sexual desire, women, and illicit knowledge that will concern us here, specifically its reception in late antique Egypt. Most of the Greek text from the Book of Watchers we possess come from Egyptian papyri or literary sources. The parchment Codex Panopolitanus (P. Cairo 10759) from Akhmim contains 1 Enoch 1.1–32.6a, together with the Apocalypse and Gospel of Peter. It was likely found by fellahin in a tomb in 1886–1887, and it is often claimed that this tomb belonged to a monk, yet there is no actual proof of this: the first editor of the fragment, Urbain Bouriant, assumed that it was owned by a monk *living* in the tomb, that is, the book would have been read by a monk or monks reclusing themselves in the tomb.[28] This assertion was not supported by any evidence in the edition of Bouriant, and was later misconstrued to mean that a monk was buried in the tomb. It has furthermore been suggested that the codex might have been placed in the grave as a Christian "Book of the Dead."[29] However, Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nick-

27 Suter, "Fallen Angel," 116–131.

28 Urbaine Bouriant, "Fragments grecs du livre d'Enoch et de quelques écrits attribués à Saint Pierre," in *Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission archéologique française au Caire* 9 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1892), 91–147 at 94: "Les fragments reproduits dans le volume pourraient cependant être d'une epoque plus ancienne que celle où *vivait* le moine dans le tombeau duquel ils ont été déposés" (my emphasis).

29 George W.E. Nickelsburg, "Two Enochic Manuscripts: Unstudied Evidence for Egyptian Christianity," in *Of Scribes and Scrolls*, ed. John J. Collins, Harold W. Attridge, and Thomas H. Tobin (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 251–260 at 254; Nicola Denzey Lewis, "Death on the Nile: Egyptian Codices, Gnosticism and Early Christian Books of the Dead," in *Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature. Essays in Honor of Birger A. Pearson*, ed. April D. DeConick, Gregory Shaw, and John D. Turner, NHMS 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 161–180. Denzey Lewis opens her article by stating unequivocally that the French archaeologists of Cemetery A near Akhmim discovered the codex "within the long-sealed grave of a Christian monk." There are no grounds to state that the archaeologists rather than local excavators found the codex, nor that the grave belonged to a Christian monk. Cf. Peter Van

las, in evaluating the find-story on the background of archaeological reports from Akhmim, conclude that there is no evidence that the codex was buried with a monk, and Paula Tutty has shown that there is no evidence for Christian "Books of the Dead" at all.[30] The codex was initially dated by Bouriant between the eighth and twelfth centuries, but has more recently been dated to the sixth century.[31] There are also manuscripts surviving of other Enochic texts, many of which are connected to monastic manuscript culture with varying degrees of certitude.[32] Parts of the Epistle of Enoch (1 En. 91–107) are found on a fourth-century papyrus in the Chester Beatty collection.[33] Fragments from the Astrological Book (chap. 72–82) and the Book of Dream Visions (chap. 83–90) have been identified on three early fourth-century papyrus scraps from Oxyrhynchus.[34] Furthermore, there survives in Coptic a portion of the Enochic Apocalypse of Weeks[35] and two otherwise unknown fragmentary Enoch apocrypha.[36] The so-called 2 (Slavonic) Enoch, which presupposes the watchers

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Minnen, "The Greek Apocalypse of Peter," in *The Apocalypse of Peter*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and István Czachesz (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 15–39 at 17–19.

30 Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas, *Das Petrusevangelium und die Petrusapokalypse: Die griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung*, GCS nf 11 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 25–27; Paula Tutty, "Books of the Dead or Books with the Dead? Interpreting Book Depositions in Late Antique Egypt," in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, STAC (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).

31 Frederic G. Kenyon, *Palaeography of Greek Papyri* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 119; Van Minnen, "Greek Apocalypse," 16–17.

32 David Frankfurter, "The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler, CRINT 3.4 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), 129–200 at 187–190.

33 P. Chester Beatty 12 + P. Michigan 5552; Campbell Bonner, *The Last Chapters of Enoch in Greek* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968); Michael A. Knibb, "The Book of Enoch or Books of Enoch," in *Early Enoch*, 21–40 at 35.

34 P.Oxy. 2069. Cf. Milik, *Enoch*, 19, 42, 75–77, 214, 245; id., "Problèmes de la littérature hénochique à la lumière des fragments araméens de Qumrân," *HTR* 64 (1971): 333–378; Arthur S. Hunt, "2069. Apocalyptic Fragment," in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri. Part 17* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1927), 68. Milik postulated that the scraps dated to the late fourth century and derived from two different codices, whereas more recently Randall D. Chesnutt, "Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 2069 and the Compositional History of 1 Enoch," *JBL* 129 (2010): 485–505, has argued that they are from the same, early fourth century codex.

35 1 En. 93.1–10; 91.11–17; cf. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91–108*, CEJL (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007): 49–152, and 8 ff. on the collection of Enochic writings.

36 Pierpoint Morgan Copt Theol 7. fol. 1–9, cf. Birger Pearson, "The Pierpoint Morgan Fragments: A Coptic Enoch Apocryphon," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham*, ed. George

myth, was possibly composed in Alexandria between the first and the fourth century, and parts of it may now be attested in Coptic from Nubia.[37]

The Egyptian provenance of surviving papyri is hardly surprising. However, we also possess an excerpt from the Book of Watchers in Greek from the early ninth-century *Chronography* of George Syncellus, whose sources were the fourth- to fifth-century Egyptian monks Panodorus and Annianus, to whom we shall return.[38] Since also earlier Egyptians and Alexandrians, Clement, Origen, and Zosimus of Panopolis, seem to have known the Book of Watchers, we can be certain that the text was fairly widespread in late antique Egypt.[39] In his famous Easter letter of 367, Athanasius of Alexandria complains about heretics who have convinced the simple folk about books written by Enoch, even though no scripture existed before Moses.[40] The popularity of the myth is also indicated by the attestation of John Cassian, who reports an Egyptian monk saying that the myth of angels having handed over maleficent and diverse arts to humans had become a common notion.[41] By the fourth century, Enochic motifs such as the watchers as teachers of illicit arts had probably entered oral tradition, alongside the circulation of the Book of Watchers itself.[42]

W.E. Nickelsburg, Jr., Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies 6 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 227–283; Cairo 48085, cf. Frankfurter, "Legacy," 188.

37 Joost L. Hagen, "No Longer 'Slavonic' Only: 2 Enoch Attested in Coptic from Nubia," in *New Perspectives on 2 Enoch: No Longer Slavonic Only*, ed. Andrei A. Orlov and Gabriele Boccaccini, Studia Judaeoslavica 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 7–36. Several other contributions in this volume address the question of dating and provenance.

38 Heinrich Gelzer, *Sextus Julius Africanus und die byzantinische Chronographie*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1885–1898), 2:431–434; William Adler, *Time Immemorial: Archaic History and Its Sources in Christian Chronography from Julius Africanus to George Syncellus* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1989), 160ff.

39 Cf. H.J. Lawlor, "Early Citations from the Book of Enoch," *Journal of Philology* 25 (1897): 164–225 at 201–207.

40 Athan. *Ep. fest.* 39.21: ⲛⲓⲙ ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁϥⲧⲣⲉϥϩⲁⲡⲗⲟⲩⲥ ⲡⲓⲥⲧⲉⲩⲉ ϫⲉ ⲛⲁⲉⲛⲱϫ ⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ϫⲱⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲧⲏ̄ⲙⲁⲩ, ⲉⲙⲡ̄ⲅⲣⲁⲫⲏ ⲙⲫⲟⲟⲡ ϩⲁⲟⲏ ⲛ̄ⲙⲱⲩⲥⲏⲥ. Louis-Théophile Lefort, *S. Athanase: Lettres festales et patorales en Copte*. CSCO 150, Scriptores Coptici 19 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1955), 20. Cf. Frankfurter, "Legacy," 171.

41 Cassian, *Conf*. 8.21: *illa opinio vulgi qua credunt angelos vel maleficia vel diversas artes hominibus tradidisse*. Cf. H.J. Lawlor, "The Book of Enoch in the Egyptian Church," *Hermathena* 30 (1904): 178–183.

42 Frankfurter, "Legacy," 166–168.

The Watchers Myth in the Apocryphon of John

A version of the myth of the watchers is used near the end of the Apocryphon of John.[43] Although the hypothetical Greek original of this work has been conjectured to have been written in Alexandria in the second century, and Irenaeus of Lyons paraphrases part of it (*Haer.* 1.29), we shall presently be concerned with the four manuscript witnesses of the work, which are all in Coptic and have their provenance in Egypt. Three of them are from the fourth-century Nag Hammadi Codices (NHC II 1, III 1, and IV 1) and the fourth from the Berlin Codex (BG 2), a fifth-century manuscript unearthed in Akhmim in the late nineteenth century, which consequently makes it geographically and chronologically close to Codex Panopolitanus.[44] The Berlin Codex (hereafter BG) was owned by the arch-presbyter and abbot Zacharias, and the monastic provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices has also recently been argued at length by Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott.[45] There is a long and a short recension of the text, and the two

43 Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; II,1 and IV,1 with BG 8502,2*, NHMS 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Bernard Barc and Wolf-Peter Funk, *Le Livre des secrets de Jean. Recension Brève* (NH *III, 1 et* BG, *2*), BCNHT 35 (Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 2012). Other uses of Enochic literature in Nag Hammadi texts: Punishment of Ialdabaoth in Hyp. Arc., Orig. World (II 123.4–15), Pist. Soph. 15, Zost. (2 En). Cf. Claudia Losekam, *Die Sünde der Engel: Die Engelfalltradition in frühjüdischen und gnostischen Texten*, TANZ 41 (Tübingen: Franke, 2010), 151 ff.

44 Berlin Papyrus Codex 8502. Cf. Carl Schmidt, "Ein vorirenäisches gnostisches Originalwerk in koptischer Sprache," *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (1896): 839–847. Schmidt made an edition that was prevented from publication by various mishaps (pipe burst in the printing shop, WW I, death of the author, WW II, discovery of NHC), and finally revised in Walter C. Till, *Die gnostischen Schriften des koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502*, TUGAL 60 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1955), see 1–8. For codicology cf. Hans-Martin Schenke, "Bemerkungen zum koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502," in *Festschrift zum 150jährigen Bestehen des Berliner Ägyptischen Museums*, Mitteilungen aus der Ägyptischen Sammlung 8 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974), 315–322 repr. *Der Same Seths: Hans-Martin Schenkes kleine Schriften zu Gnosis, Koptologie und Neuem Testament*, ed. Gesine Schenke Robinson, Gesa Schenke, and Uwe-Karsten Plisch, NHMS 78 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 293–304. The fifth century dating of the codex has been put into question by Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, STAC 97 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 163 n. 82.

45 Lundhaug and Jenott, *Monastic Origins*, 164, for Zacharias, whose name is on the letter cover, which might not have belonged to BG originally. Cf. Myriam Krutzsch and Günter Poethke, "Der Einband des koptisch-gnostischen Kodex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502," *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin: Forschungen und Berichte* 24 (1984): 37–40 + T5–T6. Karen

versions of the short recension are different translations into Coptic (NHC III 1 and BG 2), whereas the two versions of the long recension are from the same translation (NHC II 1 and IV 1). This means that two different recensions of the Apocryphon of John were translated into Coptic by three different translators. All four versions include the myth of the watchers, which occurs near the end, right before the so-called Pronoia-hymn in the Long Recension.[46] The passage in fact concludes the mythical narrative presented by the descended Jesus in the text, and consequently is of great importance for how the work conceives of the present-day situation of humankind, a fact to which the scholarship on the text has not been sufficiently attentive. Birger Pearson, Guy G. Stroumsa, Madeleine Scopello, and recently Claudia Losekam have all written specifically on the use of the watchers myth in the Apocryphon of John, but their focus has largely been on the composition stage, not the manuscript context in fourth century Egypt.[47] Ingvild S. Gilhus and Karen L. King have both done extensive work on women in the Apocryphon of John, and yet none of them have lavished much attention on the watchers myth.[48]

Since all four manuscripts contain the myth, we can be fairly sure that it was also contained in the Greek archetype, no matter whether the short or

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L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 20–21, takes the Pachomian monastic provenance of NHC II, III, and IV as fact.

46 Hereafter the three Nag Hammadi versions will be referred to as II, III, and IV, the Berlin Codex as BG, the long and short recensions as LR and SR, whereas Syn. refers to the synoptic edition of Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon*. Since IV is highly lacunose and mostly adheres closely to II, it will not be mentioned unless it deviates in some way. The conventional abbreviation BG stands for Berlinus Gnosticus.

47 Birger Pearson, "1Enoch in the *Apocryphon of John*," in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Studies in the Textual and Situational Contexts: Essays in Honour of Lars Hartman*, ed. David Hellholm and T. Fornberg (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), 355–367; Madeleine Scopello, "Le mythe de la chute des anges dans l'Apocryphon de Jean (II.1) de Nag Hammadi," *RevScRel* 54 (1980): 220–230; revised edition: "'Ils leur enseignèrent les charmes et les incantations …'" in Scopello, *Femme, Gnose et Manichéisme: De l'espace mythique au territoire du réel*, NHMS 53 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 29–47; Losekam, *Sünde*, 151–183; Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 34–70, 127 f.

48 Ingvild S. Gilhus, "Male and Female Symbolism in the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John*," *Temenos* 19 (1983): 33–43 at 37; id. "Sacred Marriage and Spiritual Knowledge: Relations between Carnality and Salvation in the *Apocryphon of John*," in *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity*, ed. Martti Nissinen and Risto Uro (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 487–510 at 499–500; King, *Secret*, 109, 327–328 nn. 30–34; id. "Sophia and Christ in the *Apocryphon of John*," in *Images of the Feminine*, 158–176. Cf. also in the same volume John D. Turner, "A Response to Sophia and Christ," 177–186.

long recension is given priority, but here we shall be concerned with the Coptic manuscripts. Although the four versions present the myth in very similar wording—there are no major disagreements between the manuscripts—we shall see that there are some differences in how the myth would likely be understood between the short and long recensions, modifying the respective preceding mythical narratives. The narrative of the myth unfolds as follows, in the long recension of Codex II, noting only the meaning-bearing discrepancies in the short recension in parentheses:[49]

> And he made a plan with his powers (SR: angels). He sent his angels to the daughters of men that they might take some of them for themselves and raise offspring for their enjoyment. And at first they did not succeed. When they did not succeed they gathered together again and made a plan together. They created a despicable (SR: counterfeit) spirit who resembles (III: in imitation of) the Spirit who had descended so as to pollute the souls through it. And the angels changed themselves in their likeness into the likeness of their mates filling them with the dark spirit[50] which they had mixed for them and with evil (BG: And the angels changed the appearance to their likeness while their husbands satiated them with spirit, which labored with them in the darkness that stems from evil[51]).

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49 See the synopsis in Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon*, 164–169; Losekam, *Sünde*, 181–182.

50 All translations I have seen here translate "spirit of darkness," but there is no article before ⲕⲁⲕⲉ, meaning that it should be taken as an attributative.

51 The sentence is corrupt, and my translation demands an emandation of ⲙⲛⲁⲩ > ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲟⲩ, and taking ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲉⲩⲙⲁ in an instrumental sense. Waldstein and Wisse emends more extensively, and translates tendentiously: ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱⲓⲃⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉ⟨ⲩ⟩ⲥⲙⲟⲧ ⲉⲡⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⟨ⲛⲛⲉⲩⲣⲁⲓ ⲉ⟩ⲣⲉ ⲛⲉⲩⲣⲁⲓ ⲧⲥⲉⲓⲟ ⲙⲛⲁⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲁ ⲛⲧⲁϥⲙⲟⲩⲕϩ ⲛⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ϩⲙ ⲡⲕⲁⲕⲉ, "And the angels changed ⟨their⟩ appearance, to the likeness ⟨of their husbands⟩ since as their husbands they filled them with spirit which mixed with them in the darkness." Yet ⲧⲥⲉⲓⲟ does not mean "fill" but "sate," and ⲙⲟⲩⲕϩ is not an attested form of ⲙⲟⲩⲭⲥ (“fill") but is a verb meaning "afflict, oppress," and the BG passage is listed by Crum as an example of this verb with the rare meaning "labour, find difficult." See Walter E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939), 163a; cf. Rodolphe Kasser, *Compléments au dictionnaire copte de Crum*, Bibliothèque d'études coptes 7 (Cairo: IFAO, 1964), 27a. ⲙⲛⲁⲩ is attested as a form of ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲟⲩ in BG 78.8. I consequently read ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱⲓⲃⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉϥⲥⲙⲟⲧ ⲉⲡⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⟨ⲉ⟩ⲣⲉ ⲛⲉⲩⲣⲁⲓ ⲧⲥⲉⲓⲟ ⲙⲛⲁⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲁ ⲛⲧⲁϥⲙⲟⲩⲕϩ ⲛⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ϩⲙ ⲡⲕⲁⲕⲉ, which with a minimum of emendation would have made sense to a Coptic reader, no matter what the Vorlage might have said. Till, *Gnostischen*, 188–189, does not emend his text but the translation and critical apparatus clearly shows that he has been influenced by the Nag Hammadi parallels.

> They brought gold and silver and a gift and copper and iron and metal and all kinds of things. And they steered the people who had followed them into great troubles by leading them astray with many deceptions (SR adds: so that they would not remember their immovable providence). They became old without having enjoyment. They died, not having found truth and without knowing the God of truth. And thus the whole creation became enslaved forever, from the foundation of the world until now (missing from SR). And they took women and begot children out of the darkness according to the likeness of their spirit.

The passage is immediately followed by the so-called Pronoia-hymn in the long recension. This is the ultimate plan the rulers concoct against humans; it follows their institution of astral fatality, and the planned extirpation of humans in the Flood, where Pronoia—or her reflection (Epinoia) in the short recensions—warns Noah, who hides in a luminous cloud with those who heed his message. The institution of fate, the flood, and the seduction of women by the angels are all events related by Jesus in response to John's question of where the counterfeit (BG 71.3–5; III 36.16–17) or despicable (II 27.32) spirit is from.[52]

The Demiurge takes counsel with his powers or angels, like the angel Shemihazah does in the Book of Watchers, and in both texts the angels bear metallic gifts and lead humans astray. Unlike both the Book of Watchers and Genesis there is no mention of the angels' sexual desire for the daughters of men,[53] and the events take place after the flood instead of before it. This solves the problem as to why the narrative should be considered important for post-diluvian humans, for in Genesis it appears that the giant offspring of the sons of God and daughters of men were all wiped out in the flood, despite some unexplained appearances of giants or their descendants, the Rephaim, later.[54] The Book of Watchers solves this problem by explaining that the giants became malevolent spirits, who in their disembodied form could remain on earth through the flood, and thus plague later generations of humans (1 En. 15.8–16.2; cf. Jub. 10). Still, this means that the evil spirits are exterior to humans, whereas the counterfeit or dark spirit in the Apocryphon of John is insinuated into mankind, as an intrinsic part of their post-diluvian and pre-salvific being. In the biblical nar-

52 Cf. Alexander Böhlig, "Zum Antimimon Pneuma in den koptisch-gnostischen Schriften," in *Mysterion und Wahrheit: Gesammelte Beiträge zur spätantiken Religionsgeschichte*, AGSU 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 162–172.

53 Scopello, "Mythe," 221.

54 Cf. Brian B. Schmidt *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 267 ff.

rative, evil seems to be an inherent potential in the humans who survived the flood. This will not do for the Apocryphon of John, since Noah and those hiding with him in the luminous cloud are all members of the immovable race of Seth, and cannot become impure of their own volition.[55] Rather, a diabolic stratagem must be supposed, such as the one Ialdabaoth and his angels concoct.

The initial immovability of the post-diluvian human race, including the women, are seen in their initial refusal of the wicked angels' first attempt at seduction. Rebuffed, and apparently unable to simply take the women as in Genesis and the Book of Watchers, the angels must resort to trickery. Their plan is to assume the shape of the women's husbands, incidentally meaning that the members of the immovable race were assumed to marry each other. Indeed, the commandment that a man should leave his parents to live with his wife is given after Adam was awakened from his unnatural sleep by Epinoia, and gained self-knowledge (II 23.4–16). One might wonder about the status of sexual intercourse, the desire for which Ialdabaoth planted into women in the long recension (II 24.26–29), whereas men are given the desire for offspring in the short recension (III 31.21–24/BG 63.1–6). Immediately after sexual desire has been introduced, Adam knows his own lawlessness (III 32.6–7), essence (BG 63.12–13), or likeness of foreknowledge (II 24.35–36), and this self-knowledge makes him beget Seth, which the long recension calls the likeness of the Son of Man (II 24.36–25.1). All versions liken this event to the race (γενεά) in the aeons, meaning that the earthly Adam and Seth replicate the aeonic (Pigera-)Adamas and Seth who are placed in the first and second pleromatic luminaries, Harmozel and Oroiael (Syn. 21.17–22.1, 22.15–17).

The implication is that there exists a pure form of procreation also for embodied humans, which seems to depend on self-knowledge of the spiritual nature of oneself and one's partner, and the absence of desire.[56] After all, how

55 Losekam, *Sünde*, 172. Cf. Michael A. Williams, *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity*, NHS 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 103–140 for the theme of immovability in the Apocryphon of John; also Birger Pearson, "The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature," in id., *Gnosticism*, 68–71.

56 King, *Secret*, 5, 107. A similar passionless intercourse in Valentinian teachings is suggested by April D. DeConick, "Conceiving Spirits: The Mystery of Valentinian Sex," in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal, Aries Book Series 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 23–48. Cf. also for the Hermetic mystery of intercourse Christian H. Bull, "The Notion of Mysteries in the Formation of Hermetic Tradition," in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices*, ed. Christian H. Bull, Liv I. Lied, and John D. Turner, NHMS 76 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 399–425.

could Noah and the rest of the immovable race have come into being otherwise? Procreation with desire is inspired by the counterfeit spirit (Syn. 65.13) and gives birth to copies of bodies. The prototype of this process is Ialdabaoth's defilement of Eve, which produces the righteous, cat-faced Eloim, and the unrighteous, bear-faced Yave, monstrous offspring that are also called Abel and Cain (Syn. 64.4–65.2)—possibly emblematic of the psychic and hylic humans, as in the Valentinian system paraphrased by Irenaeus (*Haer*. 1.7.5). Their monstrous appearance is no doubt due to the unnatural union of a human woman with the Demiurge, who has the appearance of a lion-headed snake, and they are thus somewhat similar to the giants in the Book of Watchers.

A parallel to the motif of a first failed attempt at seduction by the angels can be found in the Sethian Hypostasis of the Archons, where Norea—a figure combining the sister of Seth and the wife of Noah in other Jewish myths—rebuffs the archons when they attempt to seduce her, again *after* the flood like the seduction of angels in the Apocryphon of John.[57] In that text we learn of no second, successful attempt by the archons. However, the offspring of Norea, whom the authorities cannot approach, are said to come into being only after three generations have passed, when the true human appears and releases humanity from the bondage of the authorities by anointing them with the oil of eternal life, given him from the kingless generation.[58] This implies that the authorities will dominate Norea's offspring until the time of the savior, and opens the possibility that a second attempt at seduction will succeed with Norea or her immediate offspring. There is also a likely allusion to the Book of Watchers in the Hypostasis of Archons, when it describes how Ialdabaoth is bound by a fiery angel and cast down into Tartaros, like the leader of the fallen angels in the Book of Watchers.[59]

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57 NHC II 92.13–93.8. Cf. Anne McGuire, "Virginity and Subversion: Norea against the Powers in the Hypostasis of the Archons," in *Images*, 239–258. Losekam, *Sünde*, 173 ff. likens the first failed attempt with Philo, *Imm*. 2–3, yet there it is the angels, representing pure souls, who rebuff the daughters of men, representing the passions, and only bear children with them when their reason fades, not after a second attempt. Also, there are no ψευδάγγελοι, *pace* Losekam, but "bearers of false news" (ψευδαγγελούντοι), a slight but significant distinction.

58 NHC II 96.27–97.9.

59 NHC II 95.8–13. Also the destruction of the angels of the authorities in 97.10–13 might echo the Book of Watchers. Bernard Barc, *L'Hypostase des archontes: Traité gnostique sur l'origine de l'homme, du monde et des archontes* (*NH II, 4*), BCNHT 5 (Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 1980), 32, also thinks the creation of the demiurge might be an exegesis of the Book of Watchers; cf. Losekam, *Sünde*, 187 ff.

Scholars have pointed out the similarity between the angels' stratagem of imitating the husbands of the women in the Apocryphon of John, which is not attested in the Book of Watchers, and the Testament of Reuben.[60] However, in the latter text the angels don't actually have intercourse with the women, as is the implication of the Apocryphon of John, but they take the shape of humans and appear to the women as they are copulating with their husbands, thus causing them to conceive gigantic children similar to the angels. This is in line with the ancient obstetric theory that thinking about others during intercourse will make the offspring resemble the object of desire, an idea also found elsewhere in NHC II, in the Gospel of Philip.[61] It appears that BG is actually closer to the Testament of Reuben, according to my translation: "the angels changed the appearance to the likeness while their husbands satiated them with spirit which labored with them in the darkness that stems from evil."[62] Here it does not actually say that the angels took the form of the husbands, but that the angels changed their appearance while the husbands satiated "them" (probably their wives), and a possible interpretation is that the angels appeared to the women while their husbands had sex with them, thus somehow insinuating the spirit of darkness into them. It is possible that the later BG has changed the text to avoid having the spiritual angels have intercourse with material humans, which is a theological impossibility according to John Cassian.[63]

Another innovation of the Apocryphon of John to the watchers myth is the spirit mixed by the demiurge and his angels, which is characterized as counterfeit in the short recensions, and as a despicable spirit of darkness in the long recension.[64] The spirit seems to be an imitation of the helpful spirit sent by the mother (Sophia or Barbelo) to perfect the seed of Seth and thus eventually restore the pleroma (Syn. 66.2–67.8). The counterfeit or despicable spirit has

60 Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 37–38; Pearson, "Jewish Sources," 454; Scopello, "Chute," 222; Losekam, *Sünde*, 173; Ishay Rosen-Zvi, "Bilhah the Temptress: The Testament of Reuben and the Making of Rabbinic Anthropology," *JQR* 96 (2006): 65–94 at 74–76.

61 Gos. Phil. 112 (NHC II 78.12–20); cf. Gilhus, "Sacred Marriage," 499; Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul*, NHMS 73 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 273–275.

62 BG 74.11–16. Cf. above.

63 Cassian, *Conf*. 8.21.1. Cf. below.

64 Böhlig, "Antimimon," 160–167, 171–172; Gilhus, "Sacred Marriage," 496–498. Scholars usually cite the Qumran (1QS 3.13–4.26), but cf. also the Syriac Apocalypse of Paul which has a "spirit of error" opposed to the soul's guardian angel. Cf. Richard Bauckham et al., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 55.

appeared earlier in the Apocryphon of John: it enters into the creation of the Adam's material body (Syn. 56.1);[65] it represents the archons' tree of life (Syn. 57.11); and it is the source of offspring for intercourse filled with desire (Syn. 65.13). It is implied that the angels introduce this spirit into the women through intercourse, which is partly confirmed by the later statement that the angels "begot children out of the darkness according to the likeness of their spirit,"[66] or even more clearly in the short recension: "by means of their counterfeit spirit."[67] There are thus two modes of intercourse: offspring begotten through desire will be influenced by the counterfeit spirit, whereas those who recognize the spiritual spark from above that resides in oneself and one's partner will beget spiritual children.[68]

After the angels filled the women with their spirit, but before the begetting of children, we find them introducing metallic gifts. This is clearly a reminiscence of the watchers motif where the angels teach humans the art of metallurgy, among other things, but the Apocryphon of John emphasizes the gift of metals rather than the art of forging them. The long recension makes it clear that the gifts of metal made people (ⲣⲱⲙⲉ) follow the angels (ⲛⲁⲓ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲟⲩⲁϩⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲟⲩ), which indicates either that they were bribed by the gifts, or perhaps that they became the pupils of the angels, learning their crafts. A reader familiar with the Book of Watchers would likely interpret this passage to mean that the angels instructed humans in metallurgy, whereas other readers might interpret the metals as bribes.[69] Unlike the long recension, the short one has the angels bring gifts to the women they seduce, and not to people at large. This gives women the blame for falling for the stratagem of the wicked angels, and puts into question the thesis of Karen King, that the short recension is less patriarchical and misogynistic, since the subordination of women to men is due to a curse of Ialdabaoth in this version, and sexual desire is implanted into the man, not the woman as in the long recension.[70]

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65 BG here has "adversative" (ἀντικείμενον) spirit. It is unclear if this spirit is identical to the spirit that represents air as one of the four elements (Syn. 17), or if they are distinct.

66 II 30.8–9: ⲁⲩϫⲡⲟ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓ̄ ⲡⲕⲁⲕⲉ ⲛ̄ϩⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲡⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲡⲛ̄ⲁ. II also has "likeness" (ⲡⲓⲛⲉ) instead of "counterfeit" in Syn. 57.11.

67 BG 75.4–6 (= III 39.6–8): ⲁⲩϫⲡⲟ ⲛ̄ϩⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲏⲣⲉ ϩⲙ ⲡⲕⲁⲕⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓ̄ ⲡⲉⲩⲁⲛⲧⲓⲙⲓⲙⲟⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛ̄ⲁ.

68 Cf. Gilhus, "Sacred Marriage," 499.

69 Cf. Tertullian, *Cult. fem.* 2.10.3: "angels who revealed both substances and temptations of this sort, I mean gold and precious stones, and taught how to produce them." Cf. also *Cult. fem.* 1.2, and Marcellin Berthelot, *Les origines de l'alchimie* (Paris: G. Steinheil, 1885), 12, who erroneously refers to *Idol.* 9.

70 King, "Sophia"; id., *Secret*, 106. Cf. Gilhus, "Male and Female," 36, claims to the contrary that

In a passage exclusive to the long recension, the people led astray by the angels became old without any leisure (II 30.2–3: ⲁⲩⲣ̄ⲣⲉϫⲗⲟ ⲉⲩⲟ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲥⲣ̄ϥⲉ), which might allude to the curse of God in Genesis (3:17–19), and they die without knowing truth and God. Thus the deceptive knowledge of the angels leads people astray, and hinders them from true knowledge of God. The idea is reminiscent of First Corinthians (1:20; 3:19), in which Paul distinguishes the knowledge of the world and the rulers of the world from the knowledge of God. Origen would later interpret the knowledge of the rulers of the world to correspond to the secret wisdom of the Egyptians, the astrology of the Chaldeans and Indians, and the diverse theologies of the Greeks, though the rulers presiding over this knowledge are said to be not men, but powers.[71] Origen further speaks of two spirits, either good or bad, that might control those who admit them.[72] An epistemology similar to that of Origen is also found elsewhere in the Nag Hammadi Codices, in the Tripartite Tractate: "Those who have become wise among the Greeks and the barbarians have reached as far as the powers that came into being from illusion and a vain thought … and those powers have worked in them."[73] These ostensibly wise people have an "imitation-wisdom," and are actually led astray by the powers they reach out towards. Both Origen and the author of Tripartite Tractate thus follow Paul in speaking of a lower cosmic wisdom, which is under the domain of adversarial powers, but neither mention the watchers myth.

Origen elsewhere demonstrates knowledge of "the Book of Enoch," which he says is not universally recognized as divine, and he himself instead follows Philo in reading Genesis 6 as an allegory of the souls yearning for life in the body.[74] Origen could not have accepted the literalist view of the Book of Watchers that the angels, as psychic beings, could have carnal intercourse with the daughters of men, and this Origenistic reservation was indeed still prevalent among fourth-century Egyptian monks, as testified by John Cassian.

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it is the short version which makes women unspiritual, pointing out that in BG 58.4–7 the snake teaches only Eve and not also Adam about desire, that Epinoia does not enter into Eve (compare Syn. 60.1), and that only Adam eats from the Tree of Knowledge in BG 61.2–5 unlike II 23.30–31 (III is unfortunately lacunose just where the pronouns were).

71 Origen, *Princ*. 3.3.2; cf. Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History & Eschatology*, VCSup 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 199.

72 Origen, *Princ*. 3.3.4.

73 Tri. Trac. 108.13–114.30; cf. Geoffrey Smith, *Guilt by Association: Heresy Catalogues in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 109–111.

74 Origen, *Cels*. 5.53–54. Cf. also *Com. Lam*. where Origen identifies the watchers (ἐγρήγοροι) of Lam 4.14 LXX with angels.

However, the prince of this world and his powers of the air are concrete spiritual menaces according to Origen, who try their best to hinder the souls, and they grasp those who have "anything of their works and deeds in it" when they are released from the body after death.[75] The Apocryphon of John is thus similar to Origen and the Tripartite Tractate in considering certain types of knowledge to belong to adverse spiritual powers and therefore corruptive to the human soul. The result of the deception of the angels is that the human hearts were hardened,[76] an expression that is often used for the refusal of either Jews or pagans to accept divine messages.[77] The hardness of heart in the Apocryphon of John could thus be connected either to Judaism or Paganism, which have persisted to the narrative present day, when Christ has descended to present the mystery of the immovable race (Syn. 82.8–9).

In the Pronoia hymn, which is only found in the long recension, we find that the dominion of the angels is finally dissolved in the third and final descent of Pronoia as Christ, who proclaimed to the one imprisoned in the body: "Guard yourself against the angels of poverty and the demons of chaos and all those who ensnare you, and beware of the deep sleep and the enclosure of the inside of Hell."[78] Death, which we recall is the result of the angels leading people astray in the long recension, can now be overcome by means of the baptism of five seals, well known in Sethian literature.[79]

The short recension does not offer an equally satisfying conclusion. Here we are told that the Mother-Father took form in or with her first seed,[80] and that Christ went up to the perfect aeon, unlike the long recension where Christ says he *will* go up to the perfect aeon. Christ gives no clear instructions for how to

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75 Origen, *Hom. Ps.* 5.7.

76 Because of the unclear antecedents of the pronouns in this passage, there is a possibility that it is the angels who harden their hearts, since their hardness of heart is what prompted them to reveal unspeakable secrets to women in 1 En. 16.3–4, and the stubbornness of their hearts cause them to fall in the Damascus Document (CD-A II.17–19). Cf. Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 99, 182; Losekam, *Sünde*, 178.

77 E.g., Exod 4:21; 7:3; 14:4, 17 (Pharaoh), and 33:3, 5; 34:9 (Israelites); Eph 4:18 (pagans); Heb 3:8 (Jews). Cf. Daniel M. Gurtner, *Exodus: A Commentary on the Greek Text of Codex Vaticanus* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 252. The Jews' hardness of heart is again taken up by Justin, in his interpretation of the watchers myth. Justin, *Dial.* 18.2; cf. Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 167.

78 NHC II 31.17–22: ⲛ̄ⲕ̄ⲣ̄ⲁⲥⲫⲁⲗⲓⲍⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧⲣⲙⲕⲉ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲇⲁⲓⲙⲱⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡϩⲁⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧⲥⲟⲗϫ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲕ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲕⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲕⲣⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲡⲣⲓⲛⲏⲃ ⲉⲧⲣⲟⲣⲱ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲛ̄ ⲧⲥⲁⲗⲉⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲥⲁⲙⲣⲟⲩⲛ ⲛ̄ⲁⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉ.

79 Jean-Marie Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal séthien: études sur la sacramentaire gnostique*, BCNHE 2 (Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 1986), 31–37.

80 "First" can modify either the preceeding "her seed" or the following "I came."

escape the snare of the angels, like the baptism of five seals. Instead he says that "the Mother had come another time before me," and "had rectified her seed,"[81] likely a reference to the appearance of the mother of all before the seduction of the women by angels. Otherwise the rectification of the mother would have made the coming of Christ basically redundant. Furthermore, Christ says that he will teach John about what will happen, a promise that is not kept in the short recension. This text ends after Christ encourages John to write down the account in secret, for his fellow spirits only, and curses anyone who exchanges these things for a gift—food, drink, clothing or something similar in all versions, and Codex III adds silver or gold, possibly alluding to the gifts of the angels (Syn. 82.14–83.1).

Consequently, the short recension does not offer a real resolution to the watchers myth and a reader would be left to infer that Christ's coming somehow put an end to the angels' reign. The long recension, on the other hand, explains how it was that the immovable race was corrupted after the flood by the angels of Ialdabaoth, and presents the salvific mission of Christ, the third descent of Pronoia, as the final countermove to this corruption, where he crucially offers the baptism of five seals which restores the pure status of the immovable race.[82]

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81 BG 76.1–5: ⲧⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲇⲉ ⲁⲥⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲕⲉⲥⲟⲡ ⲉⲁⲧⲁⲉⲏ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲟⲛ ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲥⲁⲁⲩ ⲉⲙ ⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲁⲥⲧⲁⲉⲉ ⲡⲉⲥⲡⲉⲣⲙⲁ ⲉⲣⲁⲧⲟ̄. The Codex III version (39.18–21) is more lacunose. It largely corresponds to BG but markedly has ⲡⲉⲩⲥⲧⲉⲣⲙⲁ ("deficiency") instead of ⲡⲉⲥⲡⲉⲣⲙⲁ ("seed").

82 Conversely, Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions*, NHMS 58 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 101–103, claims that after the flood and the plan of the angels humankind was divided into three: those living in the darkness of the flood; those who were saved from the flood but corrupted by the angels of Ialdabaoth; and those who were saved and did not mix with the angels. However, the text nowhere states that there were people who survived the flood except for those in the luminous cloud with Noah, nor does it say that some of the immovable race escaped the mixture of the counterfeit spirit. Luttikhuizen's thesis would account for the common division of people into hylics, psychics and pneumatics, but would detract from the centrality of Pronoia's third descent as Christ in the economy of salvation, since there would then still be pneumatics around with no need for salvation. Cf. also Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, "The Demiurge in Gnostic Mythology," in *Fall of the Angels*, 148–160 at 159, who without supporting evidence asserts that: "The context and purport of the story require that the mythical ancestresses of the Gnostics did not fall victim to these temptations—they must have kept their spiritual nature free from the darkness of the demonic angels." Likewise in Gerard P. Luttkihuizen, "The Critical Rewriting of Genesis in the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John*," in *Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome: Studies in Ancient Cultural Interaction in Honour of A. Hilhorst*, ed. Florentino García Martínez and Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, JSJSup 82 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 187–200 at 195. Bernard Barc also supposes, in what he admits is a provisional

Ingvild S. Gilhus has pointed out how procreation is used as a metaphor for knowledge in the Apocryphon of John, and how spiritual knowledge and carnal knowledge are associated with spiritual and physical begetting respectively.[83] The women of the immovable race of Seth were the locus where Ialdabaoth's angels introduced the counterfeit spirit, but these women could only be seduced through trickery and apparently not through any fault of their own. The result of this mixture was that desire and a preoccupation with gold, silver, and other metals stood in the way for spiritual knowledge of God, making the immovable race less steady. The teaching of Christ in the Apocryphon of John points the way for a reader to be aware that the presence of the counterfeit spirit in humans after the flood is what prevents them from knowledge of God, and in the long recension the advertised solution is the baptism of five seals.[84]

The Watchers in Egyptian Monasticism

The Apocryphon of John does not originate in monastic circles, but the four versions preserved in Coptic were likely read and possessed by Upper Egyptian monks, three of these versions at some point being gathered together at Nag Hammadi, and the fourth ending up in Akhmim. If the monks read the text sympathetically, agreeing at least with parts of it, then they could easily identify with the immovable race, tormented on earth by wicked angels.[85] The myth of the angels in the Apocryphon of John would be valued for its demonology, revealing the plan of the fallen angels to seduce the monk with the impure

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paraphrase, that the descentdants of Cain and Abel survived the flood and became the progenitors of the Jews and pagans respectively. Barc also claims that pagans cannot be identified as material humans, since they also are provided with a soul, but it may be that they were considered material because they worshipped material statues, not because they were lacking a soul; Barc and Funk, *Livre des secrets*, 28–29.

83 Gilhus, "Sacred Marriage," 500–502, 509–510.

84 Cf. Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 74–75: "Christian baptism was a ceremony of simplification: it was not so much a ceremony of rejection and renunciation as of cutting down anomalous and conflicting strands in the life and personality of the baptized. The demonic that was driven out in exorcism was not necessarily conceived of as a persecutory force, standing in enduring hostility to the human race.... They were incomplete ... [The] story of the mating of the angels with the daughters of men and of its dire consequences for the peace of society, was not a distant myth: it was a map on which they plotted the disruptions and tensions around them."

85 Williams, *Immovable Race*, 131, 158 ff.

desire of their counterfeit spirit.[86] Just as the angels were first rebuffed but later overcame the immovable race through trickery, so demons were known to tempt monks first with coarse vices such as sexual desire and greed, and then return with more subtle vices such as pride if they were first turned away.[87] The *Life of Antony* states that demons first attack monks with filthy thoughts, and if rebuffed "they do not stop but advance once more with deceit and cunning … changing their shapes and taking on the appearance of women, wild beasts, reptiles, and huge bodies and legions of soldiers."[88] Demons can also assume the shape of monks and give destructive advice to other monks.[89] Just as the Apocryphon of John has two spirits, one divine spirit from the pleroma and a second counterfeit and malevolent spirit, so also the monks would train themselves to discern if spirits were good or bad.[90]

Fallen angels were often identified with demons in monastic literature. In a fragment of Pachomius, the darkness into which the angels have been cast, echoing the Book of Watchers via Jude 6, is equated to the quotidian world from which the monk can rise: "Look in what a place and what a smoky prison were confined the prevaricating angels, in a great darkness. If you can rise from this great darkness where they are confined, you are responsible!"[91] Here the prison of the angels is not the underworld, as in the Book of Watchers, but the world in which the monks live.

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86 Lance Jenott, "Recovering Adam's Lost Glory: Nag Hammadi Codex II in its Egyptian Monastic Environment," in *Jewish and Christian Cosmogony in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lance Jenott and Sarit Kattan Gribetz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 222–238 at 226–227.

87 David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

88 Athanasius, *Vit. Ant*. 23.2–3: Ἀλλὰ καὶ πεσόντες οὐ παύονται, αὖθις δὲ πάλιν προσέρχονται πανούργως καὶ δολίως. Ἐπειδὰν γὰρ ἐκ φανεροῦ καὶ ῥυπαρῶς δι' ἡδονῆς μὴ δυνηθῶσιν ἀπατῆσαι τὴν καρδίαν, ἄλλως πάλιν ἐπιβαίνουσιν. Καὶ λοιπὸν φαντασίας ἀναπλάττοντες ἐκφοβεῖν προσποιοῦνται, μετασχηματιζόμενοι καὶ μιμούμενοι γυναῖκας, θηρία, ἑρπετὰ καὶ μεγέθη σωμάτων καὶ πλῆθος στρατιωτῶν. Trans. Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *The Life of Antony by Athanasius of Alexandria* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2003), 111–113.

89 Athanasius, *Vit. Ant*. 25.1–4; cf. Brakke, *Demons*, 42.

90 E.g., Pachomius, *Instr*. 1.10.

91 Pachomius, *Fr*. 4.1: ⲉⲣⲉⲡⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩⲡⲁⲣⲁⲃⲁ ⲛ̄ⲁⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁ ⲏ̄ ⲣ̄ⲛ̄ⲁⲩ ⲛⲉⲩⲧⲉⲕⲟ ⲉⲩⲟⲧⲡ̄ ⲉⲣⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲩⲛⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲕⲁⲕⲉ ⲉⲩⲣⲧⲏ̄ⲧⲱⲛ: ⲉⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁⲩⲧⲱⲟⲩⲛ ⲣⲁⲡⲛⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲕⲁⲕⲉ ⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲟⲧⲡ̄ ⲉⲣⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲓⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲱⲧⲛ̄ ⲉⲧⲣⲱⲱⲉ. See Louis-Théophile Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme et de ses disciples*, CSCO 159, Scriptores Coptici 23 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1956), 30. Trans. Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia, vol. 3: Instructions, Letters, and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and his Disciples*, Cistercian Studies 47 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1982), 87.

Like the fallen angels of the *Life of Antony* (e.g., 21; 32–33) it is also quite likely that the monk would interpret the angels of Ialdabaoth as pagan gods, especially since they use the same stratagem as Zeus in disguising themselves in order to seduce women. The metallic gifts of the angels might also be connected to graven images, and for example Pseudo-Philo's Biblical Antiquities states that graven images and their worship were introduced by the first smith Tubal-Cain, and later that Aod, a Midianite magician, derived his power from sacrificing to the angels of sorcery, who were the gods of the Midianites.[92] Justin Martyr identified the fallen angels with the evil angels who rule the Egyptian city Tanis according to Isaiah (30:4), and with the gods of the pagans in general.[93] More examples could be adduced, but I will in the following focus on three monastic interpretations of the watchers: those of Panodorus, Annianus, and John Cassian, all of whom were monks in Egypt at the end of the fourth and early fifth centuries.

The monk Panodorus, who wrote in Alexandria during the episcopate of Theophilus and the reign of Arcadius,[94] identified the watchers with the gods who ruled Egypt in primeval times. This author is only preserved in the *Chronography* of the Byzantine monk George Syncellus, who used Panodorus and his somewhat later contemporary Annianus—also an Alexandrian monk—as his main sources.[95] It is likely through Panodorus that Syncellus has the excerpt from the Book of Watchers that he quotes, and also an excerpt from the Egyptian alchemist Zosimus of Panopolis, who assimilated the watchers myth with Hermetic myths of fallen angels.[96] Panodorus identified the fallen angels of the Book of Watchers with the dynasties of gods who were said to rule Egypt in primordial times according to the Egyptian priest and historian Manetho, who wrote in the first half of the third century BCE. Panodorus recalculated the extensive reigns of these gods given by Manetho to make the

92 Ps.-Philo, *Bib. ant.* 1.9, and 34.2. On the latter passage, cf. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John*, WUNT 2/70 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 170–173. However, Pseudo-Philo does not refer to antediluvian watchers, only some obscure watchers that are to receive an offering during the feast of trumpets (13.6).

93 Justin, *Dial.* 79. Cf. Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 165.

94 Synk., 396 Mosshammer. Cf. Gelzer, *Sextus*, 2:189.

95 Cf. Synk. 35–37 Mosshammer.

96 Gelzer, *Sextus*, 2:184–186. A treatment of the use of the watchers myth in Zosimus and the Hermetic writings lies outside the scope of the present paper, cf. Kyle A. Fraser, "Zosimos of Panopolis and the Book of Enoch: Alchemy as Forbidden Knowledge," *Aries* 4 (2004): 125–147, and Christian H. Bull, "Wicked Angels, and the Good Demon: The Origins of Alchemy according to the Physika of Hermes." Forthcoming in *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies*.

dynasties of gods and demigods correspond to the timeframe between the year 1058 after creation (Anno Mundi) until the flood, in year 2242.[97] Although not explicitly stated, the demigods were likely identified with the giant offspring of the watchers. Manetho had a third group of dead spirits who ruled before the first human ruler, and it is likely that Panodorus would have identified these with the malevolent spirits of the giants who remained on earth after the flood, according to the Book of Watchers. This likely corresponds to the period from the flood until the son of Ham, Misraim, became ruler of Egypt. The example of Panodorus shows that Egyptian monks could still in the fourth century use apocryphal and even pagan sources to supplement their understanding of sacred history, and indeed Panodorus was criticized by Syncellus for being too esoteric-minded in his use of pagan sources: "this is what Panodorus writes, in his struggle to prove that the Egyptian writings against God and divinely inspired scriptures are in harmony with them."[98] Syncellus also informs us that Panodorus made similar recalculations on the reign of Mesopotamian god-kings, but the quotes he gives us are more preoccupied with Egypt.[99]

Unlike his predecessors Julius Africanus and Eusebius, Panodorus thus accepted the claim of Manetho that gods and demigods ruled over Egypt before the flood, and these gods he identified with the watchers who descended and slept with humans, and taught them about the 360-degree course of the sun through the zodiac, and the 30-day lunar cycle.[100] It appears that Panodorus had a fairly positive view on the Egyptian gods, and possibly he had the patriotic motivation of making Egypt the cradle of antediluvian wisdom. Certainly, from Syncellus one gets the impression that Panodorus was an apologist for Egyptian paganism. The impression is strengthened from the letter of Manetho, which Syncellus likely had from Panodorus.[101] In the preface to the letter it is stated

97 Synk. 42 Mosshammer.

98 Synk. 42.20–21 Mosshammer: Καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ὁ Πανόδωρος τὰς κατὰ θεοῦ καὶ τῶν θεοπνεύστων γραφῶν Αἰγυπτιακὰς συγγραφὰς συμφωνεῖν αὐταῖς ἀγωνίζεται δεικνύναι. Cf. also Synk. 378, where Panodorus is again criticized for "pursuit of agreement with the pagan scholars." Trans. William Adler and Paul Tuffin, *The Chronography of George Synkellos: A Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 57.

99 Gelzer, *Sextus*, 2:191 ff.; William Adler, "Berossus, Manetho, and '1Enoch' in the World Chronicle of Panodorus," *HTR* 76 (1983): 419–442 at 434 ff.

100 Synk. 42.4–7 Mosshammer.

101 Since Panodorus is the source of the list of Egyptian gods in Synk. 19, it is also likely that this list was preceded by the letter of Manetho in Synk. 41 Mosshammer, since Syncellus after the letter states that "Now after this, he also narrates about the five Egyptian classes [of kings] in thirty dynasties, called by them gods, demigods, spirits of the dead, and mortal men." Trans. Adler and Tuffin, *Chronography*, 55.

that the first Hermes, Thoth, wrote down certain works pertaining to the future of the universe on stelae before the flood, which were subsequently found and translated by the second Hermes after the flood. This second Hermes is the son of Agathodaimon and father of Tat, who consequently corresponds to Hermes Trismegistus, and he placed the books in the temples of Egypt, where they were found and presented by Manetho to Ptolemy II Philadelphos.[102] The letter is commonly considered to be pseudepigraphic,[103] but however that may be, it is likely that Panodorus wished to link Hermes Trismegistus and the gods of Egypt to antediluvian biblical history. Heinrich Gelzer conjectured that Panodorus might have been a former Neoplatonist who became a monk and sought to save what he loved in paganism after the anti-pagan laws of Theodosius.[104] A similar motivation may have impelled monks to keep reading Hermes Trismegistus and including Hermetica in Nag Hammadi Codex VI,[105] and treatises such as Allogenes and Zostrianos would appeal to monks with Neoplatonic leanings.[106] Unfortunately we learn little of how Panodorus viewed the women who married the angels, though one might notice that the goddess Isis is included with Osiris in the list of gods.[107]

A little after the death of Theophilus, another Alexandrian monk and chronographer, Annianus, revised the chronography of Panodorus, criticizing him.[108] Annianus too equated the watchers with pagan gods ruling as kings before the flood, but he followed Julius Africanus in interpreting the sons of God in Genesis 6 with the offspring of Seth, not angels, who intermingled with

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102 Agathodaimon and Tat are commonly associated with Hermes Trismegistus in the Hermetica. The motif of Hermetic literature written on stelae and confined in temples are also found in Hermetic and magical texts; cf. Christian H. Bull, "Hemmelig tekst: fra nedgravde steintavler til bestselger i pocketformat," in *Religion i skrift: mellom mystikk og materialitet*, ed. Ingvild S. Gilhus and Lisbeth Mikaelsson (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2013), 171–183.

103 I have argued for its authenticity in Christian H. Bull, "The Tradition of Hermes: The Egyptian Priestly Figure as a Teacher of Hellenized Wisdom", PhD diss. (The University of Bergen, 2014), 48–87 (to be published in Brill's series Religions in the Greco-Roman World).

104 Gelzer, *Sextus*, 2:192.

105 Christian H. Bull, "Hermes between Pagans and Christians: The Nag Hammadi Hermetica in Context," in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, STAC (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).

106 Cf. John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*, BCNHE 6 (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001).

107 There is also a Hermetic alchemical text of uncertain date in which Isis learns alchemy from the angel Amnael, cf. Fraser, "Zosimos," 132 ff.

108 But cf. Adler and Tuffin, *Chronography*, lxvi.

the offspring of Cain.[109] Syncellus accepts Annianus as a more orthodox writer than Panodorus, and his paraphrase of the myth is likely based on Annianus's version:

> Seth was devout and exceedingly well formed, and all his descendants were devout and beautiful. At the behest of Adam, they inhabited the more elevated region of Eden, opposite Paradise, living as angels do, up to AM [Anno Mundi] 1000. The author of evil, unable to tolerate the sight of their virtuous conduct, did harm to them by using the beauty of the daughters of men of that time. Concerning them, the divine Moses also says that "the sons of God seeing the daughters of men that they were beautiful, took for themselves wives from among them."[110]

This became the dominant interpretation of the sons of God among later Byzantine writers, for whom Annianus was an important source. Syriac writers also had access to Annianus,[111] and Ephrem Syrus is quoted by Syncellus elaborating on this myth, stating that "the daughters of Cain, coming to them with wind and stringed musical instruments, led them down from their own land, and [the Sethites] took them."[112] According to Annianus, the descendants of Cain were small, because of his curse, but the offspring they had with Sethians became like giants and ruled as kings. In this version of the myth, the offspring

109 Synk. 19 = Africanus fr. 23 in Martin Wallraff (ed.), *Julius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 48–49. Cf. Adler and Tuffin, *Chronography*, 47 n. 5; Albertus F.J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature*, NovTSup 46 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 61–67; Adler, *Time Immemorial*, 117–122; Gelzer, *Sextus*, 2:198–200, 440–441; Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 120 ff.; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 224–226. Cf. also Philip S. Alexander, "The Targumim and Early Exegesis of the 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6," *JJS* 23 (1972): 60–71 and Lionel R. Wickham, "The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men: Genesis vi 2 in Early Christian Exegesis," *Oudtestamentische Studieen* 19 (1974): 135–147. Cf. also 4Q417 (4QInstruction^{c}) 2.1.15 which mentions a judgement over the sons of Seth.

110 Synk. 9.26–10.2 Mosshammer: ὁ Σὴθ εὐσεβὴς ἦν καὶ εὐδιάπλαστος σφόδρα καὶ οἱ ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες εὐσεβεῖς καὶ ὡραῖοι ἦσαν. οὗτοι κατὰ πρόσταγμα τοῦ Ἀδὰμ τὴν ὑψηλοτέραν γῆν ᾤκουν τῆς Ἐδέμ, κατέναντι τοῦ παραδείσου, ἀγγελικῶς βιοῦντες, ἕως τοῦ χιλιοστοῦ κοσμικοῦ ἔτους. τούτων τὴν ἐνάρετον πολιτείαν μὴ φέρων ὁ ἀρχέκακος βλέπειν, εἰς τὴν ὡραιότητα τῶν τότε θυγατέρων τῶν ἀνθρώπων αὐτοὺς ἔτρωσε, περὶ ὧν φησι καὶ ὁ θεῖος Μωϋσῆς ὅτι ἰδόντες οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὅτι καλαί εἰσιν, ἔλαβον ἑαυτοῖς γυναῖκας ἐξ αὐτῶν. Trans. Adler and Tuffin, *Chronography*, 13.

111 Cf. Sebastian P. Brock, "A Fragment of Enoch in Syriac," *JTS* 19 (1968): 626–631. Adler and Tuffin, *Chronography*, lxviii–lxix.

112 Synk. 15.20–22 Mosshammer: ἐλθοῦσαι δὲ αἱ θυγατέρες τοῦ Κάιν διὰ μουσικῶν αὐλῶν καὶ κινυρῶν κατήγαγον αὐτοὺς ἐκ τῆς χώρας αὐτῶν, καὶ ἔσχον αὐτάς.

of the unblemished Seth were not only a pure race, but their way of life was virtuous and divine and consequently they lived close to Paradise. The Cainite daughters, on the other hand, are portrayed as seductive and sinful, and they tempted the Sethians away from their pure life with their beauty at the instigation of Satan. Clearly this demythologized account would have appeal among Annianus's monastic brethren who strived to keep themselves free from carnal desires, symbolized by the daughters of Cain, and it is consistent with the first part of the monastic slogan: "A monk must always flee from women and bishops."[113]

Annianus[114] states that his goal in computing the years since creation is to refute both pagans and heresiarchs who claim to be wise: "For the pagans, wise in their self-conceit, believed that the universe was many thousands of years old, whereas the heresiarchs, by contrast, confess that Christ the creator of time was subject to time, saying, 'there was a time when he was not.'"[115] The latter is clearly aimed at the Arians, and thus no doubt a stab at Eusebius.[116] However, the subordination of Christ is also found elsewhere, as in the Apocryphon of John (Syn. 15.10–12), and it seems that the reduction of antediluvian regnal years of Egyptian and Chaldaean god-kings was meant to counteract heretical speculations on overly extensive eons in general. Syncellus criticizes Panodorus and Annianus for crediting such "demonic history" instead of discounting it like Eusebius did: "from this history, as if from some filthy spring, and from material akin to it, every mythical doctrine of Greek and Manichaean heresy has sprung up. And not a few of the heresies in our midst have taken their beginnings from deceptive writings of this kind as their point of departure."[117] Whereas the monks Panodorus and Annianus wanted to appropriate the pagan primeval histories for establishing a secure dating of sacred history,

113 Cassian, *Inst*. 11.18. Cf. Evagrius, *Prac*. 96; *Hist. monach*. 1.4 ff.; 1.36 etc.

114 The source of Syncellus is anonymous, but since it places the birth of Christ in AM 5500 (not 5493 as Panodorus; Synk. 396.12 Mosshammer), and runs to the death of Theophilus in 412 CE, we can be quite sure it is Annianus. Cf. Gelzer, *Sextus*, 2:190; Unger, *Manetho*, 38 ff.

115 Synk., 33 Mosshammer: ὅτι οἱ μὲν ἐθνικοὶ οἰήσει σοφοὶ ἐνόμισαν πολλῶν μυριάδων ἐτῶν εἶναι τὸν κόσμον, οἱ δὲ αἱρεσιάρχαι τὸ ἀνάπαλιν τὸν Χριστὸν τοῦ χρόνου δημιουργὸν ὑπὸ χρόνον ὁμολογοῦσι λέγοντες· ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν. Trans. Adler and Tuffin, *Chronography*, 44.

116 Cf. Epiphanius, *Pan*. 69.4.3 ff.

117 Synk. 34.32–35.4 Mosshammer: οὔτε ταῖς περὶ κατακλυσμοῦ μαρτυρίαις αὐτῶν πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἡμετέρων πίστωσιν προσέχειν χρὴ οὔτε ἄλλῃ τινὶ δαιμονιώδει αὐτῶν ἱστορίᾳ. σχεδὸν γὰρ ἀπὸ ταύτης τῆς συγγραφῆς καθάπερ ἔκ τινος πηγῆς βορβορώδους καὶ τῶν παραπλησίων αὐτῇ πᾶσα μυθώδης Ἑλληνικὴ καὶ Μανιχαϊκὴ κακοδοξία ἀνέβλυσε, καὶ τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς δὲ αἱρέσεων οὐκ ὀλίγαι τὰς ἀρχὰς ἐκ τοιούτων ἀπατηλῶν γραφῶν ἐσχήκασι τὰς ἀφορμάς. Trans. Adler and Tuffin, *Chronography*, 35.

Syncellus supported Eusebius and Africanus in jettisoning them as a dangerous breeding-ground for heresies.

It is likewise for this reason that Epiphanius of Salamis, another writer with a background in Egyptian monasticism, spends considerable space on reaffirming the orthodox interpretation of primeval history in his refutation of the Sethians, whom he believes he has encountered himself in Egypt.[118] According to Epiphanius, the Sethians said it was the benevolent Mother, not Ialdabaoth, who brought on the flood in order to wipe out the offspring of angels and humans, so that only the offspring of Seth should remain—clearly not the same myth as in the Apocryphon of John.[119] Epiphanius's own view is only briefly stated, "two stocks were commingled—Cain's with Seth's and Seth's with the other."[120] This indicates that he agrees with Africanus that the sons of God and daughters of men in Genesis 6:1–4 were Sethians and Cainites respectively, since he considers it impossible that an invisible spirit can have sexual intercourse with a material body.[121] Epiphanius also claims that "in the lifetime of Jared and afterward, came sorcery, witchcraft, licentiousness, adultery and injustice,"[122] no doubt due to the illegitimate commingling of Sethians and Cainites. It is striking that Africanus's version of the myth, followed by Annianus and Epiphanius, identifies the sons of God with Sethians and the daughters of men with Cainites, whereas the Apocryphon of John quite to the contrary identifies the daughters of men with Sethians and the sons of God as fallen angels, following the interpretation of the Book of Watchers.

Another monastic source that follows Africanus's interpretation must finally be taken into consideration. John Cassian spent several years at the end of the fourth century in Lower Egypt, predominantly in Scetis.[123] In his later work, the *Conferences*, written for the nascent monastic movement in Gaul, there are two conferences attributed to Serenus, a monk of Scetis, on the topic of

118 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 39.1.2: "I think I may have met with this sect in Egypt too—I do not precisely recall the country in which I met them." Trans. Frank Williams, *Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I* (*Sects 1–46*), NHMS 63 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 276.

119 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 39.3.1–2. The angels circumvent the flood by planting their offspring Ham on the ark.

120 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 39.7.1: καὶ οὕτως πλατυνομένων ἄρτι τῶν ἀνθρώπων συνεμίγη τὰ δύο γένη, τοῦ τε Κάϊν πρὸς τὸ γένος τοῦ Σὴθ καὶ τοῦ Σὴθ πρὸς θάτερον, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ Ἀδὰμ γένη. Trans. Williams, *Panarion*, 280.

121 Cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 26.13.6.

122 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 1.1.3: νῦν δὲ ἐν χρόνοις τοῦ Ἰάρεδ καὶ ἐπέκεινα φαρμακεία καὶ μαγεία, ἀσέλγεια, μοιχεία τε καὶ ἀδικία. Trans., Williams, *Panarion*, 15.

123 Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, OSHT (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7–12.

demonic adversaries (*Conf*. 7–8). Serenus asserts that God created angels in the innumerable ages before the creation of the universe, and that some of these fell (*Conf*. 8.7–8). Having explained how they are now demons who do constant battle against monks and the faithful, Cassian's companion Germanus asks concerning "a reading from Genesis … about those apostate angels that are said to have had intercourse with the daughters of men."[124] Serenus answers that it is not possible for spiritual natures to have carnal relations with women, and explains that the seed of Seth "were called angels of God or (as some texts have it) sons of God on account of their holiness."[125] When they saw the beauty of the daughters of the Cainites they became gripped by desire and took them, and were thus infected by Cainite wickedness. The result is that the wisdom inherited from the pure patriarchs was perverted by the commingling with Cainite women, in a passage worth quoting in full:

> These are the ones who abandoned that true discipline of natural philosophy which was handed down to them by their forebears and which that first man, who was at once immersed in the study of all natural things, was able to grasp clearly and to pass on in unambiguous fashion to his descendants. For he had gazed upon the infancy of this world while it was as it were still tender and trembling and unformed, and by a divine inbreathing he was filled not only with a plenitude of wisdom but also with the grace of prophecy … The seed of Seth, then, enjoyed this universal knowledge from generation to generation, thanks to its ancestral tradition, as long as it remained separate from the sacrilegious breed, and what it had received in holy fashion it also exercised thus for the worship of God and for the general good. But when it intermingled with the wicked generation it fell into profane and harmful deeds that it had dutifully learned at the instigation of demons, and thereupon it boldly instituted the strange arts of wizards, sleights and magic tricks, teaching its descendants that they should abandon the sacred cult of the Divinity and worship and adore the elements and fire and the demons of the air.[126]

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124 Cassian, *Conf*. 8.20: *Quia Geneseos lectio … de illis apostatis angelis sentiendum sit, optamus agnoscere, qui se cum filiabus hominum miscuisse dicuntur, utrum hoc possit spiritali naturae secundum litteram convenire*. Trans. Boniface Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Conferences*, ACW 57 (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 304.

125 Cassian, *Conf*. 8.21.3: *Semen illud Seth, utpote de optima radice procedens, pro merito sanctitatis, angeli Dei, sive, ut diversa exemplaria continent, filii Dei vocati sunt*. Trans. Ramsey, *John Cassian*, 305.

126 8.21.4: *Quique ab illa vera physicae philosophiae disciplina tradita sibi a majoribus excide-*

Cassian preserves the motif of angelic wisdom from the Book of Watchers, but here this wisdom was originally pure and only became perverted when the Sethians mingled with the Cainites. Instead of the Sethians teaching the Cainite women their pure wisdom, the lapse into carnal desire permits the demons to teach the Sethians harmful deeds and wizardry, thus preserving this element of illicit knowledge from the Book of Watchers. The background is likely Origen's distinction between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the rulers of the world, mentioned above. Cassian's version of the myth emphasizes that a lapse in the monastic discipline of abstinence can give the demons a window of opportunity, and we are told that demons are highly rewarded by Satan if they can seduce a monk with carnal desire (*Conf*. 8.16). A concomitant of the fornication and the profanation of wisdom is the abandonment of true religion and the introduction of paganism, represented as the worship of elements, fire, and demons. The survival of the illicit arts is blamed on Ham, who wrote them down on metal and stone plates and hid them before the flood, and then reintroduced them to his descendants after the flood (*Conf*. 8.21.7). This is a variation of a theme, similar to the stelae containing the teachings of the watchers discovered by Kainan after the flood in Jubilees (8.3), the stelae of Seth in Josephus (*Ant*. 1.70–71), and the stelae of Hermes Trismegistus in the letter of Manetho, mentioned above.[127] Serenus concludes: "Hence the popular opinion, according to which it is believed that angels handed on wizardry and other arts to men, has an element of truth."[128]

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runt, quam primus homo ille, qui universarum naturarum institutionem evestigio subsecutus est, potuit evidenter attingere, suisque posteris certa ratione transmittere. Quippe qui mundi ipsius infantiam adhuc teneram, et quodammodo palpitantem rudemque conspexerat, et in quem tanta fuit non solum sapientiae plenitudo, sed etiam gratia prophetiae, divina illa insufflatione transfusa … Hanc ergo scientiam omnium naturarum per successiones generationum semen Seth paterna traditione suscipiens, donec divisum a sacrilega propagine perduravit, quemadmodum sancte perceperat, ita etiam vel ad Dei cultum, vel ad utilitatem vitae communis exercuit. Cum vero fuisset impiae generationi permixtum, ad res profanas ac noxias quae pie didicerat, instinctu quoque daemonum derivavit, curiosasque ex ea maleficiorum artes atque praestigias ac magicas superstitiones audacter instituit, docens posteros suos, ut sacro illo cultu divini nominis derelicto, vel elementa haec, vel ignem, vel aereos daemones venerarentur et colerent. Trans. Ramsey, *John Cassian*, 306.

127 Cf. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 107–108, 137–138.

128 Cassian, *Conf*. 8.21.7: *illa opinio vulgi qua credunt angelos vel maleficia vel diversas artes hominibus tradidisse*. Trans. Ramsey, *John Cassian*, 307.

Conclusion

The myth of the angels or sons of God in Genesis 6 lent itself to many interpretations, of which that of the Book of Watchers was very influential. Here, wicked angels take innocent women, marry them and beget giant offspring with them, and teach them illicit arts. Guy G. Stroumsa has shown that the Book of Watchers likely inspired the many myths concerning archons raping Eve or other female spiritual principles,[129] and it is more directly adapted in the final stages of the narrative of the Apocryphon of John. In the latter text, the angels have not defected from the creator god but act on his orders, and they succeed in seducing the women of the immovable seed of Seth only on their second attempt, by imitating their husbands. Here also they lead the women astray with gifts of metal and they beget offspring with them, introducing the counterfeit spirit into humankind. In the long recension Christ counteracts the angels by introducing the baptism of five seals, which will readmit humans into the immovable race of Seth.

However, another version that became prevalent in Egyptian monastic circles in the fourth century interpreted Genesis 6 in a completely opposite way: it was the offspring of Seth that were named angels or sons of God because of the purity of their life, and not any supernatural beings. They fell from grace when they saw and desired the daughters of the Cainites, who in some versions are accused of tempting the Sethians at the behest of the devil. The different value judgments given to the creator, the angels or sons of God, and women can be shown schematically (Table 4.1), naming the version identifying the sons of God with Sethians "Africanus," after its first proponent.

Africanus and his followers agree with the Book of Watchers that the creator is beneficent, but denies that the sons of God can be literally angels, since they are spiritual beings incapable of carnal intercourse. Rather they were human descendants of Seth, and their wisdom was divine before their fall, at which point they and their offspring were taught profane wisdom and magic by demons, corresponding to the knowledge of the angels in the Book of Watchers. Whereas the women who are taken by angels seem to be hapless victims in the Book of Watchers,[130] they are portrayed as wicked temptresses in "Africanus." The Apocryphon of John, on the other hand, disagrees that the creator is

129 Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 35–70.

130 Though cf. above, for the statement in the Greek version of Syncellus which would make women responsible for tempting the watchers. I incline towards agreeing with Bhayro, "Use of Jubilees," that this is likely a later interpolation.

TABLE 4.1 *Value judgements in different sources*

	Book of Watchers	**Apocryphon of John**	**"Africanus"**
Creator	+	–	+
	God	Ialdabaoth	God
Angels or sons of God	–	–	+
	Renegade angels	Coconspirator angels	Sethians
Knowledge of the sons of God	–	–	+
	Illicit	Illicit	Pure
Daughters of humans	±	+	–
	Victims	Sethians	Seductresses

good, and makes the angels his subordinates instead of renegades, thus sharing the negative view of them and their knowledge with the Book of Watchers. Unlike all the other versions, the Apocryphon of John actually sees the women as steadfast like the rest of the immovable race of Seth, and they are only seduced by means of trickery. A monastic reader of the Apocryphon of John would consequently interpret the angels as seductive and deceitful demons, dangerous to both ascetic men and women, whereas in Cassian and Annianus the sons of God are the paradigmatic male monks, while human women are the threat that might open the door for demonic desire.

CHAPTER 5

Jezebel in Jewish and Christian Tradition

Tuomas Rasimus

Of all the women in the Bible, Jezebel may just have the worst reputation. As Janet Gaines ironically notes, Jezebel's "immorality is infamous; she is … the Queen of Tarts, the Slut of Samaria … the Sultana of Slut … Our Lady of the Golden Bull."[1] Not only this, her later avatars were associated with forbidden knowledge concerning the deep things of Satan and the false god Simon. A promiscuous sorceress, queen Jezebel has become the very embodiment of a dangerous woman. This ninth-century BCE queen of Israel from Phoenicia was said to have promoted the worship of Baal and Asherah, persecuted Elijah and other prophets of YHWH, urged king Ahab and all Israel to sin, and arranged the murder of Naboth to obtain his ancestral vineyard for the crown. Thrown out of her window wearing slutty makeup and devoured by dogs with few pieces left to bury, her fate was seen as an act of divine justice by the Deuteronomistic historians who have transmitted her story to us.[2] And yet, while her sponsorship of idolatry was only symbolically called prostitution (זְנוּנֵי אִיזֶבֶל, 2 Kgs 9:22) by these historians, the label stuck and mutated into a literal fact in later tradition, sometimes combined with the harlots mentioned in her husband's burial scene in 1 Kings 22:37–38.[3] But it may have been specifically her reputation as the nemesis of Elijah that fascinated and disgusted early Christians. After all, the canonical gospels apply traditions about Elijah to both John the Baptist and Jesus.[4] And so in early Christian literature we meet several women of bad

1 Janet Howe Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones: Jezebel Through the Ages* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 27, 29, 46.

2 On the Deuteronomistic character of 1–2 Kings, see Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien: Die sammelnden und bearbaitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967); Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, WBC 12 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), xlii–xlix; and Martin J. Mulder, *1 Kings 1–11*, vol. 1 of *1 Kings*, trans. John Vriend, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 11–18.

3 Her husband king Ahab's blood was washed off his war-chariot at the pool of Samaria where harlots bathe (cf. also 1 Kgs 21:17, 23, where Ahab's death is predicted). The connection between Jezebel and these harlots is made, for example, in b. Sanh. 39b. See below for discussion.

4 John the Baptist was considered Elijah come back: Mark 9:13; Matt 11:13–14; 17:10–12; Luke

repute whose literary portrayals seem influenced by the image of Jezebel. The purpose of my essay is to study these early Christian portrayals. However, in order to do so, we must first get acquainted with Jezebel of old before moving to an analysis of her symbolic counterparts: Jezebel of Thyatira in Revelation, Herodias in the Gospel of Mark, and Helen of Tyre in Irenaeus's version of the Simonian myth.

Jezebel the Queen of Israel

Jezebel, whose story is told in 1 and 2 Kings, was a queen of the northern kingdom of Israel. She was the wife of king Ahab who ruled in the kingdom's new capital Samaria (1 Kgs 16:23–24, 29), and the daughter of a Phoenician king Ethbaal who ruled over Tyre and Sidon. While 1 Kings 16:31 says that Ethbaal was merely the king of the Sidonians, Tyre and Sidon were often considered a pair,[5] and Ethbaal and Jezebel's connection to Tyre becomes stressed in the first century CE. According to Josephus, Ethbaal was the king of the Tyrians and the Sidonians, and the Baal that he and Jezebel worshiped was the god of the Tyrians (*Ant.* 8.317–318; 9.138). Josephus is also of the opinion that of all the Phoenicians it was the Tyrians who were the worst enemies of the Jews (*J.W.* 4.105; *Ag. Ap.* 1.70).

The Deuteronomistic historians paint a very negative picture of Jezebel and her husband.[6] Jezebel sponsored the worship of her native deity, Baal, in

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1:17. Some saw Jesus as Elijah, too (cf. Matt 16:14; Luke 9:7, 19), but more importantly, some accounts of Jesus's miracles (raising a dead child: Mark 5:35–43; Luke 8:49–56; cf. 1 Kgs 17:8–24; miraculous provision of food or drink: e.g., Mark 6:35–44; John 2:1–11; cf. 1 Kgs 17:7–16) and his assumption (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9; cf. 2 Kgs 2:11–12) seem influenced by Elijah-traditions. Cf. John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, SP 2 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 236; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 262–263; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 319–320.

5 See, e.g., 1 Chr 22:4; Joel 3:4; Jer 29:4; 32:22; Mark 3:8; Matt 11:21; 15:21; Luke 6:17; 10:13; Acts 12:20.

6 They may have even distorted the very name of the queen they so hated. The original spelling was probably something like אִי־זְבֶל "where is the prince?" but at least the vocalized MT text can be taken to be a wordplay on "manure." While such a meaning for the root זבל is not attested in the Hebrew Bible, it is found in other Semitic languages such as Arabic. This suggestion receives further support from 2 Kgs 9:37, where "Jezebel's corpse will be like manure (*ḏomęn*) on the surface of the ground," even if the word for "manure" is based on a different root. See Pamela Thimmes, "'Teaching and Beguiling My Servants': The Letter

Israel,[7] and Ahab was said to have been the most sinful king of Israel, surpassing in evil even Jeroboam I, who had reinstated the cult of the golden calf in the northern kingdom (1 Kgs 16:30–31; 12:28). Yet Ahab's marriage to Jezebel was considered even worse than his walking in the sins of Jeroboam (16:31), as it was Jezebel who caused Ahab to sin (21:25). He built a temple and an altar to Baal in his capital, Samaria, and set up an asherah pole (16:31–33).[8] Jezebel herself was an ardent supporter of Baal and Asherah (18:19), and she was said to have persecuted and killed prophets of YHWH (1 Kgs 18:4, 13; 2 Kgs 9:7).

She threatened to kill Elijah, too (1 Kgs 19:1–2), because Elijah had butchered the prophets of Baal after the famous showdown on Mount Carmel. According to this story, all Israel gathered on the mountain to witness a competition between Elijah and the priests of Baal. Two bulls were brought up, then slaughtered and cut into pieces, and set upon their respective piles of wood. The 450 prophets of Baal would call upon their god and Elijah alone would call upon YHWH. The god who would respond with fire, thus igniting the wood, was the real god. All day long the prophets of Baal ecstatically invoked their god but to no avail. Evening come, Elijah repaired a broken altar of YHWH, placed the wood and the sacrifice on it, and had the wood soaked three times with water. He then prayed to YHWH who right away responded with fire, igniting the wet wood, and the people accepted YHWH as the true god. Elijah ordered them to seize the prophets of Baal and had them slaughtered in the Kishon valley (18:16–40).

We are also told how Ahab coveted the ancestral vineyard of one Naboth because it lied next to his palace. Naboth having refused Ahab's generous offer,

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to Thyatira (Rev. 2.18–29)," in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine, FCNTECW 13 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 79; Mary Ann Beavis, "Jezebel Speaks: Naming the Goddesses in the Book of Revelation," in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine, FCNTECW 13 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 141; and Lissa M. Wray Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, ApOTC 9 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2014), 225, 337–338.

7 There were many Baals. The Baal of Jezebel was probably Baal Shamem. See Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 41–49, esp. 44.

8 An asherah pole was a wooden object symbolizing a tree with possible healing properties (Smith, *Early History of God*, 81, 85). It seems to have been a somewhat regular part of Yahwistic worship both in the northern and southern kingdoms (pp. 80, 84). The relationship between the asherah pole and the cult of Baal that Ahab instituted, is not clear, however (p. 41). The ancient Canaanite/Israelite goddess Asherah was apparently conflated with the Phoenician goddess Astarte in the first millennium BCE (pp. 80–97). See also Saul Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel*, SBLMS 34 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

the king began to sulk and stopped eating. Witnessing Ahab's weakness, Jezebel took matters into her own hands. In a mock trial featuring false witnesses, she arranged a death sentence to Naboth so Ahab was able to claim the vineyard for the crown (21:1–27). This caused Elijah to prophecy Jezebel's death—dogs would devour her body (21:23). The prophecy came true later when Jehu performed a coup, exterminated the house of Ahab (2 Kgs 10:11–17), and had Jezebel herself thrown out of window. In a vivid description sparing no details, Jezebel's blood splatters on impact and Jehu finishes the job with his chariot. Dogs are allowed to eat her body with the result that there is not much left to bury (2 Kgs 9:30–36).

While 1–2 Kings does not accuse Jezebel herself of prostitution, her story contains three passages that contributed to such reputation. First, Jehu had rebuked Jezebel's son Jehoram by exclaiming that there can be no peace as long as his mother promotes adultery (זְנוּנִים, πορνεῖαι) and sorcery (כְּשָׁף, φάρμακον) (2 Kgs 9:22). Second, getting ready to meet the bloodthirsty Jehu, Jezebel put on makeup and fixed her hair (9:30). Third, after her husband Ahab had died in his war chariot, the blood on it was washed off at the pool of Samaria, "where prostitutes (זֹנוֹת, πόρναι) bathe" (1 Kgs 22:38). It seems obvious that the first passage—Jezebel promoting adultery and sorcery—is merely symbolic and refers to the well-known idea that Israel is YHWH's bride and her worship of other gods is infidelity and prostitution (Hos 1:2–3; 2:4–9 LXX; Jer 3:1–4; Ezek 16:23–26).[9] There is no story about Jezebel's loose sexuality in the Scriptures.[10] The make-up scene, however, has often been interpreted in light of such an assumption; Jezebel is seen offering herself to Jehu, although it is just as plausible that she simply wanted to "die like a queen."[11] As for the place where prostitutes bathe, there is no obvious connection to Jezebel herself. There is, however, a later rabbinic story that offers a curious explanation to this biblical remark: Ahab was frigid so Jezebel drew images of two prostitutes on his chariot to arouse his desires (b. Sanh. 39b).

Later tradition is unanimous that Jezebel was wicked. Josephus says she fell into great licentiousness and madness (ἀσέλγειαν καὶ μανίαν) and led Ahab to serve other gods (*Ant*. 8.317–318). Rabbinic tradition affirms her responsibility in corrupting Ahab (b. Bava Metzi'a 59a), and talks about her misguided love for money (b. Sanh. 102) and connection with prostitution (b. Sanh. 39b). The Pesiqta Rabbati compares Jezebel's persecution of Elijah to Pharaoh's pursuing

9 Cf. also Gaines, *Music*, xv.

10 Gaines, *Music*, 67.

11 See, e.g., Ephrem Syrus, *On the Second Book of Kings* 9.30. See also Gaines, *Music*, 86–93.

of Moses (4.2). Second Baruch 62:3–5 evokes the "curse of Jezebel"[12] and refers to cannibalism that occurred during a famine while her son ruled and she still obviously pulled the strings behind the scenes. One could also mention that according to the Mishnah, Jezebel's husband Ahab was one of only three kings who have no portion in the world to come (m. Sanh. 10.2).[13]

In light of the unanimously negative reception history of Jezebel, it is interesting to consider the often-raised possibility that Psalm 45 might speak of her wedding to Ahab.[14] This unique, royal wedding psalm calls the king's bride a "daughter or Tyre" (בַּת־צֹר, v. 13), and speaks of the king's ivory palaces (v. 8), which Ahab is known to have built (1Kgs 22:39; cf. Amos 3:15); it has also been suggested that the word אָהַבְתָּ ("you have loved") in v. 8 is an allusion to the name Ahab (אַחְאָב).[15] While by no means certain, Psalm 45 might be a psalm from the northern kingdom where the reign of Ahab and Jezebel was remembered in very different terms than in the south where it was transmitted by the Deuteronomistic historians. Perhaps purposefully left anonymous, the psalm could be reapplied to further royal weddings and be connected with other kings, even one from the past like Solomon.[16]

Jezebel may thus be found in disguise of anonymity in a royal wedding psalm. Under other disguises her more notorious self seems to have contributed to literary portrayals of women of bad repute in early Christian literature, such as Herodias and Helen. Yet the most famous symbolic Jezebel is found in the book of Revelation, where the queen has inspired the portrayal of an influential female prophet from Thyatira. Not only is she harshly rebuked in the letter to the church of Thyatira (Rev 2:18–29), she also makes further appearances in John's visions as the whore of Babylon and the second beast. Let us take a closer look.

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12 This possibly refers to her killing of the prophets of YHWH (1Kgs 18:4). See James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985), 1:642.

13 The other two are Jeroboam for setting up the golden calves (1Kgs 16:30–31; 12:28) and Manasseh for sponsoring idols and causing the Babylonian exile (2Kgs 21:1–18).

14 See, e.g., Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 453–454; Gaines, *Music*, 25; Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 222–225; John Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, vol. 2 of *Psalms*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 54, 60–63. For a differing opinion, see James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 42–106*, vol. 2 of *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 381.

15 See Kraus, *Psalms*, 453.

16 Cf. Kraus, *Psalms*, 453; Boice, *Psalms*, 381; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 54.

Symbolic Jezebels in Early Christian Literature

Jezebel of Thyatira in Revelation

In his letter to the church in Thyatira, John of Patmos,[17] the author of Revelation, vehemently attacks a local female prophet whom he calls Jezebel (Rev 2:20–24). He accuses her of deceiving believers to commit sexual immorality and to eat idol meat. John's attack on Jezebel is, in fact, the longest and the most elaborate of all the attacks on opponents contained in the seven opening letters of the book:[18]

> 20 But I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and by her teaching deceives my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent, but she is not willing to repent of her sexual immorality. 22 Look! I am throwing her onto a bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.

17 The author of Revelation identifies himself as John (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8) and places himself on the island of Patmos at the time of his visions (1:9). I use the title, "John of Patmos," simply for the sake of convenience in order to distinguish him from the Elder of the Johannine Epistles and from John son of Zebedee to whom the Fourth Gospel is traditionally attributed. For the different Johns, see Alan R. Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend*, Studies on Personalities of the New Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 56–106.

18 Not only Jezebel, but also the Nicolaitans (2:6, 15) and those who follow the teaching of Balaam (2:14) are accused of sexual immorality and eating idol meat. Consequently, many scholars believe all three "groups" are manifestations of the same teaching that has spread to several places in Asia Minor; see, e.g., Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, SP 16 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 61; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 71; David Frankfurter, "Jews or Not? Reconstructing the 'Other' in Rev 2:9 and 3:9," *HTR* 94 (2001): 403–425. As sexual immorality and eating idol meat are traditional markers of apostasy in the Jewish tradition, e.g., in Exod 34:15–16 and Num 25:1–3 (cf. also the Apostolic decree in Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984], 88, 107, n. 5), so the accusations here, especially that of sexual immorality, are often taken to be symbolic. Yet, as David Frankfurter ("Jews") has shown, Paul was accused of promoting both, even if this was not always Paul's actual intention. Since John of Patmos also attacks two further "groups" in his opening letters, the false apostles (Rev 2:2) and the false Jews (2:9; 3:9), and Paul had to defend both his apostolic and Jewish identity, it seems that all five "groups" refer to Pauline teaching in Asia Minor. See below.

> 23 Furthermore, I will kill her children with death, and then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts. I will repay each one of you what your deeds deserve. 24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, all who do not hold to this teaching (who have not learned the so-called "deep things of Satan"), to you I say: I do not put any additional burden on you.[19]
>
> Rev 2:20–24, NET, slightly modified

The woman in Thyatira calls herself a prophetess (ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφῆτιν), and while John does not continue with the words "but who is not and is lying," as he does in the case of false Jews and false apostles,[20] such a message reads loud and clear between the lines. John is a real prophet,[21] whereas Jezebel is a false one. In fact, there are reasons to believe that the false prophet (ψευδοπροφήτης) mentioned later in the text is no one else than Jezebel (see below).[22] Here, in the letter to Thyatira, she is accused of deceptive teaching (διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ),[23] and the deception consists of her exhortation to sexual immorality and eating meat sacrificed to idols (πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα). These are the same accusations John levels against the Balaamites (Rev 2:14) and the Nicolaitans (2:6, 15). They are also the only things that the apostolic decree had asked gentile converts to avoid (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25),[24] but

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19 I have slightly modified the NET translation towards a more literal one in order to bring out probable references to the Jezebel story.

20 See Rev 3:9: τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ *οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται*; cf. Rev 2:2: καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ *οὐκ εἰσὶν καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς*.

21 Rev 22:9 comes closest to actually calling John a prophet: "you and your brothers the prophets" (τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν προφητῶν). At 10:11, John is asked to prophesy (προφητεῦσαι) again. Revelation itself, or its contents, is called a prophecy (προφητεία) at 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19. For discussion, see David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), esp. 274–290.

22 Thus also Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

23 The verb "to deceive" (πλανάω) is elsewhere in Revelation used only of the devil, the beast, and the false prophet (who is the second beast: Rev 19:20). Devil: 12:9; 20:3, 8, 10; the second beast/false prophet: 13:14; 19:20; and Babylon-Rome (who is here probably a mixture of the first and second beasts): 18:23.

24 While the Decree in the majority of manuscripts lists four items to be avoided (1. idol meat, 2. blood, 3. what has been strangled, and 4. sexual immorality), items 2 and 3 appear to be clarifications of the first item: meat sacrificed to idols was obtained by strangling the animal, instead of cutting its throat, and thus the meat still contained blood (whose

which Paul had allowed in no uncertain terms. Paul accepted marriage for pleasure (it is better to marry than to burn, 1 Cor 7:9)[25] but, more importantly, he accepted intermarriages with gentiles[26] and eating of idol meat because idols do not really exist (1 Cor 8:4–13; 10:23–27; Rom 14). As Paul had to defend both his apostolic and Jewish identity,[27] and some even accused him of advocating non-circumcision within Jewish families (Acts 21:21), it seems likely that John of Patmos is actually targeting Pauline teaching and practice in Asia Minor under the labels of false apostles, false Jews, Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel.[28]

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consummation was prohibited by the Mosaic Law, Gen 9:4 and Lev 17:10–15; cf. 1 Sam 14:33). The order of the items is not stable, however (Acts 15:20 places sexual immorality in the second place), and the Western text lists only three items, omitting the strangling, and twice (15:20, 29) replacing it with the golden rule. The Western text also appears to moralize the original ritual meaning. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, SP 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 266–267. *Pace* Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 461–467, who thinks that "each item in the decree should be taken separately and all be seen as referring to four different activities that were known or believed to transpire in pagan temples," the decree is much more likely based on the requirements for proselytes and sojourners found in Lev 17–18. As Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987), 119, notes, "As a whole, these stipulations had to do with those ritual prohibitions which enabled the Jew to live together with the Gentile Christian."

25 Thus Frankfurter, "Jews," 401.

26 Gal 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female—for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (cf. 1 Cor 12:13; Rom 10:12). In Acts 16:1–3, Paul eagerly accepts Timothy, who was the son of a Jewish woman and a Greek father, as his fellow-worker. In 1 Cor 7:12–16, Paul affirms that a believing spouse sanctifies the children s/he has with an unbeliever. Finally, although an argument from silence, Paul never opposes to mixed marriages.

27 See 1 Cor 9:1–2; 2 Cor 11; Gal 1–2; cf. Ascents of James (*apud* Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.16) where Paul is even presented as a gentile convert.

28 This is not surprising as Paul's law-free gospel to the gentiles encountered strong criticism in the first centuries. The reason John does not mention Paul by name may be his desire to win over Christ-believers in an area which has traditionally been seen as Pauline territory; see Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 5, 114–126. With Frankfurter ("Jews"), I do not believe that the false Jews (a.k.a. the synagogue of Satan, Rev 2:9; 3:9) mean the local Jewish community; a much better candidate is a group of gentile-born believers who have assumed a Jewish identity without undergoing circumcision or being halakhically observant.

It is often thought that sexual immorality (πορνεία, πορνεύω) is here only symbolic and refers to giving in to the Greco-Roman culture.[29] This is certainly possible, but several reasons suggest that John has actual sexual activity in mind. At Revelation 2:14, he attacks those who follow the teaching of Balaam. This refers to the famous apostasy of Baal-Peor (Num 25:1–18) where Israelites at Balaam's counsel (31:16) began to marry Moabite women, worship their gods, and eat idol meat. God brought about a plague that killed 24,000 Israelites until Phineas put an end to the plague by killing one Zimri and his Moabite wife who had unlawfully come to the holy camp. The root of all evil at Baal-Peor was thus intermarriage with gentiles. Similarly, it was Ahab's own intermarriage with the gentile-born Jezebel that caused an exponential growth in Israel's Baal worship. While Jezebel was (symbolically) accused of sexual immorality in 2 Kings 9:22, and her later reputation as a harlot seems to be reflected in the vision of the beast-rider in Revelation 17, the real meaning behind the sexual immorality here at 2:20 is probably related to marriage practices considered illegal by John. While these could include marrying for wrong reasons (burning passions), remarrying after divorce, or simply marrying at all,[30] the references to Balaam and Jezebel strongly favor taking *porneia* as intermarriage

29 See A. Collins, *Crisis*, 88; Harrington, *Revelation*, 61; G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 250; Cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 116; Heikki Räisänen, "The Nicolaitans: Apoc. 2; Acta 6," in *Vorkonstantinisches Christentum: Neues Testament* (*Sachthemen*), vol. 2.26.2 of *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 1616–1617; Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 259–263.

30 Paul recommended staying single, some in Corinth did, too, and John himself praises those who have not "defiled themselves with women" (οἳ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, 14:4). John may well be alluding to the concept of holy war which demanded sexual purity in the military camp; cf. Deut 23:9–15; Josh 3:5; 7:13; 1 Sam 21:5–6; 2 Sam 11:11. See further Gerhard von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel*, ATANT 20 (Zürich: Zwingli, 1951); Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.*, trans. David Smith (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989); Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 210–237. This is also attested at Qumran (1QM 7.3–7); see also Philip R. Davies, *1QM, the War Scroll from Qumran: Its Structure and History*, BibOr 32 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), 29–32, 63; John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 1997), 96–98; cf. Frankfurter, "Jews," 410. John might prefer celibacy for the same reason: preparation for the end-time holy war (Paul's reasoning was more practical and eirenic: the world is about to end so there is no point of marrying and having children; 1 Cor 7:25–31).

with gentiles who remain gentiles and continue to worship idols (even if only symbolically/unwittingly by eating idol meat).[31] While Paul accepted such marriages, others following Ezra's example vehemently banned them.[32]

Eating food sacrificed to idols, however, should be taken literally. Meat sacrificed to idols was readily available for purchase on the market in Thyatira.[33] One could always buy safe meat for private occasions, but if one belonged to one of the many trade guilds and participated in their common banquets, one could not avoid eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols.[34] Avoiding trade guilds and their banquets would be a professional suicide for anyone running a business, even for tentmakers like Paul, Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:3).[35] Paul's practicality best explains his lenient attitude towards eating idol-meat (1 Cor 8:4–13; 10:23–27; Rom 14), but John takes a firm stance against it. It is no accident he criticizes commerce and wealth.[36] To what degree does actual idol worship—almost certainly a form of emperor worship—lie in the background, is a matter of debate. The vision of the two beasts in Revelation 13 is often taken as an indication that emperor worship was an issue for John.[37] We will return presently to the visions found in chapters 13, 17 and 18 of Revelation. First, however, we must complete our analysis of passages that contain echoes of queen Jezebel in the letter to Thyatira.

Verses 2:21–23 seem to contain references both to the actual woman in Thyatira and to the story of Jezebel in 1–2 Kings. That the woman has not repented despite the time she was given to do so (Rev 2:21), can be read on both levels. It seems obvious enough that John or someone else had confronted

31 Cf. Duff, *Prophetic Rivalry*, 59 and Frankfurter, "Jews," 415–416.

32 Ezra 9:1–2; 10:11; cf. Neh 9:2; 10:31; 13:1–3. One could even go so far as to consider a priest marrying a non-priestly woman an instance of sexual immorality. See Martha Himmelfarb, "Sexual Relations and Purity in the Temple Scroll and the Book of Jubilees," *DSD* 6 (1999): 11–36.

33 See, e.g., Räisänen, "The Nicolaitans," 1610; Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 75.

34 Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 115–120. For trade guilds and associations, see especially Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*.

35 Leonard. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 123; Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 261. For Paul as a tentmaker, see Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

36 A. Collins, *Crisis*, 88–97, 132–134; Beale, *Revelation*, 847–886, 895–924.

37 See A. Collins, *Crisis*, 54–83; Thompson, *Revelation*, 158–167; Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

the woman in Thyatira. But this could well be an allusion to the Jezebel of old, too. After Naboth's vineyard incident, God sent Elijah to rebuke Ahab. Elijah predicted the deaths of Ahab, Jezebel and their children. Perhaps unexpectedly, Ahab repented, tore his clothes, wore sackcloth and fasted, so God spared Ahab from seeing his dynasty drown in blood (1 Kgs 21:17–29). Jezebel, however, not only outlived her husband by some 15 years, but also never repented.

Verses 22 and 23, then, predict the demise of the woman in Thyatira, of her co-adulterers, and of her children:

> I am throwing her onto a bed (κλίνη),
> and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation,
> unless they repent of her deeds.
> I will kill her children with death (ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ).

It is noteworthy, first of all, that only Jezebel's co-adulterers have a chance to avoid their fate if they repent, whereas Jezebel and her children (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς) are not given this opportunity. This seems to echo the respective fates of Ahab, Jezebel, and their children in 1–2 Kings. Ahab, who had committed adultery with Jezebel,[38] repented, and was spared the worst, whereas Jezebel and the children were all massacred by Jehu and his men. And so the contemporary Ahabs in Thyatira, i.e., those who follow her Pauline teachings and thus commit adultery (whether symbolically or actually, for example, by intermarrying gentiles), still have a chance to save themselves if they recant.[39]

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38 Both actually (by intermarriage) and symbolically (by sponsoring Baal worship).

39 The great tribulation (θλῖψις μεγάλη) with which they are threatened, is mentioned only once elsewhere in Revelation, at 7:14, where the enormous, multiethnic crowd dressed in long white robes has come out of the great tribulation (οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης). In Matt 24:21, θλῖψις μεγάλη refers to the apocalyptic end-time suffering (probably elaborating upon Dan 12:1). This is probably the meaning here at Rev 2:22 as well, summarizing the plagues and other disasters elaborated in course of the visions. John creates a contrast between people who in the face of disaster react by cursing God (9:20–21; 16:9, 11) and people who react by praising God (11:13). The former ones do not repent and continue in idolatry, sexual immorality, and other sins (9:13–21). They are thus children of Jezebel. The only ones who are spared the great tribulation are the 144,000 sealed ones (7:3–8), but these do not include the enormous, victorious multitude (7:9–17). That these had to go through the tribulation suggests they had repented at one point, although this is not explicitly stated. They may correspond to those who praised God in face of a disaster (11:13), and they may thus be the "Ahabs" who for a while followed a Pauline teaching but later recanted.

The word "bed" (κλίνη) in verse 22 has several possible meanings. It seems likely that John does not have a place to sleep in mind, given the violent context of the verse. It is more likely that the "bed" refers to at least one of the following: (i) a place of sexual activity, (ii) a couch for reclining while eating, (iii) a sickbed, or (iv) a deathbed.[40] The first two options obviously relate to the two things of which Jezebel of Thyatira was accused, namely, sexual immorality and eating idol meat. One could even combine the two activities in a wild symposium.[41] The latter two options, however, echo the story of Jezebel and her son, king Ahaziah. The expression "kill/die with death" (ἀποκτενῶ/ἀποθνήσκω ἐν θανάτῳ)[42] occurs in connection with κλίνη in LXX only in 2 Kings (1:4, 6, 16), where Elijah predicts that Ahaziah will die of his injuries in the bed upon which he lies. Jezebel and her son both fell out of a window to their deaths, although Ahaziah did not die immediately but only later on his bed. Perhaps John also considers the ground Jezebel hit to be her "deathbed."[43] Given the highly referential and intertextual nature of Revelation, it is not impossible that John, when he spoke of Christ throwing Jezebel on a bed, had multiple references in mind.

The "deep things of Satan" (τὰ βαθέα τοῦ σατανᾶ), mentioned at Revelation 2:24, and which the followers of Jezebel have come to know is probably a mock-image of the "deep things of God" (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ) of which Paul speaks.[44] Just like those in Smyrna who falsely claim they are Jews but really are the "synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9), the followers of Jezebel claim to know the deep things of God, but really are probing the depths of Satan. John uses similar, reversed mock-imagery throughout Revelation.[45] Finally, that Christ

40 See Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 38a (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 299.

41 Mounce, *Revelation*, 87; D. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 34–38.

42 Cf. the θανάτῳ ἀποθανεῖσθε, "you will surely die," in Gen 2:17; 3:4.

43 Jezebel was actually thrown out of the window, although the verb at LXX 2 Kgs 9:33 is different (κυλίω; MT has שמט) than the one at Rev 2:22 (βάλλω), where John says he will throw Jezebel onto a bed.

44 1 Cor 2:10; cf. also Rom 11:33 (ὦ βάθος πλούτου καὶ σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως θεοῦ). See Koester, *Revelation*, 263. The other, often suggested option is that the expression really means deep things of/about Satan that the opponents teach, either in order to know how to defeat him, or because they are some sort of libertine "gnostics." See Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 117, 124; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 162–163.

45 Cf. for example the lamb-like horns of the second beast (13:11) vs. the horns of the true lamb (5:6); the beast who was, and is not, but is about to come up from the abyss (17:8) vs. God who was, who is, and who is still to come (4:8); the beast who was had a deadly

will not throw any additional "burden" (βάρος) upon his faithful ones (Rev 2:24) probably refers back to the two things of which Jezebel was accused and from which the faithful have to abstain, namely sexual immorality and eating idol meat; for these constituted the only "burden" (βάρος) the apostolic decree demanded of gentile-born believers (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25), as Räisänen has shown.[46]

What John says of Jezebel in the letter to Thyatira bleeds into the visions, too. Paul Duff has convincingly demonstrated that John equates Jezebel of Thyatira with the second beast (13:11–18), the false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), the rider of the beast (17:1–18), and the city Babylon (17:1–18:24), who are all manifestations of the same entity.[47] Perhaps the clearest echoes of Jezebel of old in the visions are found in chapter 17, where we meet the rider of the beast, called "Babylon the Great and the mother of prostitutes."[48] The rider is described in royal terms which suggests a connection with queen Jezebel.[49] She is specifically connected with *porneia* (17:2, 4–5, 15–16) like Jezebel of old (2 Kgs 9:22) and Jezebel of Thyatira (Rev 2:20–22). She is drunk with the blood of the saints (17:6), which recalls Jezebel's killing the prophets of YHWH (1 Kgs 18:4, 13; 2 Kgs 9:7). This may additionally refer to eating idol-meat whose blood has not been drained. Finally, dogs devoured Jezebel's flesh, whereas the beast with its ten horns will devour the beast-rider's flesh.[50] The woman riding the beast is explicitly identified as the great city Babylon (17:5, 18), whose destruction is described in the following chapter. Apart from connecting the city with *porneia*, royalty, magic spells (φαρμακεία) and the blood of the prophets (Rev 18:3, 9, 23–24; cf. 2 Kgs 9:7, 22), there are further echoes of queen Jezebel in the description of the city. Babylon the great proclaims, "I rule as queen and am no widow; I will never experience grief!" (18:7). This can be taken as an ironic

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wound (ὡς ἐσφαγμένην, 13:3) vs. the lamb who was slain (ὡς ἐσφαγμένον, 5:6); the seal of the 144,000 (7:3–4; 14:1) vs. the mark of the beast (13:16); the woman clothed with the sun in the wilderness (12:6) vs. the whore of Babylon in the wilderness (17:3). Cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 164–177; Thompson, *Revelation*, 37–52.

46 Räisänen, "Nicolaitans," 1610–1612.

47 Duff, *Prophetic Rivalry*, 16, 81–95, 113, 122–125. In the same vein, Jezebel is negatively contrasted with the positive female characters, namely, the woman clothed with the sun (12:1–17), heavenly Jerusalem (21–22), and the bride of the lamb (21:2, 9). Cf. also Schüssler-Fiorenza, 171.

48 The parallels are pointed out and discussed by Duff (*Prophetic Rivalry*, 90).

49 She is said to have dominion (βασιλεία) over the kings (17:18); she is dressed in purple and scarlet clothing, and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls (17:4).

50 καταφάγονται οἱ κύνες τὰς σάρκας Ἰεζάβελ (2 Kgs 9:36); τὰ δέκα κέρατα … καὶ τὸ θηρίον … τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς φάγονται (Rev 17:16).

allusion to Jezebel who remained in power after Ahab's death, but was—in later tradition—thought to have attempted to seduce Jehu with slutty makeup, thus showing no grief over Ahab. Further, the merchants' lamentation over Babylon's destruction (Rev 18:9–19) is modeled not only upon Isaiah's prophecy against Babylon (Isa 23:1–12) but especially upon Ezekiel's prophecy against Tyre (Ezek 26–28),[51] Jezebel's homeland. Specifically, the list of cargo items (Rev 18:12–13) is largely modeled upon a similar list in Ezekiel 27:12–24, which describes various items in which Tyre traded.[52]

Moreover, there are several reasons to think with Paul Duff that the second beast from the land (Rev 13:11–18) is also meant to evoke the figure of Jezebel. This beast is explicitly identified as the false prophet (ψευδοπροφήτης) at Revelation 19:20, and at 2:20, Jezebel of Thyatira is said to have called herself a prophetess (προφῆτις) and to have been deceptive (πλανάω) like the second beast later (13:14; 19:20). Moreover, the first beast from the sea, the one with seven heads and ten horns, is usually accompanied by the second beast (13:11–18; 16:13; 19:20; 20:10); no figure other than the beast-rider accompanies the seven-headed beast in chapter 17, which further suggests the rider is the second beast, the false prophet.

At 13:13–14, the second beast is said to perform great signs in order to deceive, and causes fire to descend from heaven. Four men were credited with such a deed: Moses, David, Solomon, and Elijah.[53] The one most readily associated with the deed, however, was Elijah[54] who caused fire to descend three times and on two different occasions: once on an altar in a competition against the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:38), and twice to destroy the king's men who came to arrest him (2 Kgs 1:9–14). The sign that the second beast in Revelation performs must reflect the altar fire on Mount Carmel, as destruction of enemies is not in view in Revelation 13:13–14.[55] What further strengthens the Elijah-connection of the second beast in Revelation 13 is the fact that the fire from heaven is closely connected with idol worship, as it is in 1 Kings 18. Elijah

51 Duff, *Prophetic Rivalry*, 62.

52 See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 350–371; cf. Iain Provan, "Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 from an Old Testament Perspective," *JSNT* 64 (1996): 88.

53 Moses: Exod 9:23; 2 Macc 2:10; David: 1 Chr 21:26; Solomon: 2 Chr 7:1; 2 Macc 2:10; Elijah: 1 Kgs 18:38; 2 Kgs 1:10–14; Sir 48:3.

54 The sons of Zebedee wished to reproduce Elijah's miracle (Luke 9:54). Rev 20:9, where fire from heaven destroys the troops of Gog and Magog, probably also reflects Elijah's miracle (2 Kgs 1:10–14). Cf. also Sir 48:3.

55 This aspect is reserved for God at Rev 20:9 where fire from heaven destroys the troops of Gog and Magog.

defeats the prophets of Baal with his fire sign, and the second beast deceives people with his fire sign causing them to make an image of the first beast and worship it (Rev 13:11–15).[56] The second beast succeeds where the prophets of Baal failed and is effectively credited with Elijah's miracle. This, together with his lamb-like horns (13:11), shows the second beast to be a deceptive anti-Christ figure,[57] since Christ the true lamb with horns (Rev 5:6) was himself credited with some of Elijah's miracles.[58]

Finally, those who will be banned from the New Jerusalem include obviously the second beast who is thrown in the lake of fire (Rev 19:20; 20:10), but also "the dogs and the sorcerers and the sexually immoral, and the murderers, and the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (οἱ κύνες καὶ οἱ φάρμακοι καὶ οἱ πόρνοι καὶ οἱ φονεῖς καὶ οἱ εἰδωλολάτραι καὶ πᾶς φιλῶν καὶ ποιῶν ψεῦδος, Rev 22:15). Every item in this list can be associated with queen Jezebel. She was devoured by dogs,[59] she was said to have promoted sorcery and sexual immorality,[60] she had prophets of YHWH slaughtered and Naboth murdered,[61] she sponsored idolatry, i.e., worship of Baal,[62] and she orchestrated the murder of Naboth with false witnesses.[63]

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56 The image worship comes partially also from Daniel 3, where the three young men are thrown into the fire after they refuse to bow down to the image Nebuchadnezzar erected in Babylon. Notice the connection of fire and idol worship here, too.

57 The term anti-Christ (ἀντίχριστος) is used in Johannine letters (1John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2John 7) to describe apostates, and Mark and Matthew speak of false Christs (ψευδόχριστος) who will appear during the great tribulation and perform great signs and wonders to deceive even the elect (Mark 13:22; Matt 24:24). John of Patmos stands in this apocalyptic tradition and presents the second beast as a threat internal to the churches, not as an outsider persecuting Christians.

58 See note 4 above.

59 1Kgs 21:23: Οἱ κύνες καταφάγονται αὐτὴν; 2Kgs 9:36: καταφάγονται οἱ κύνες τὰς σάρκας Ἰεζάβελ.

60 2Kgs 9:22: αἱ πορνεῖαι Ἰεζάβελ τῆς μητρός σου καὶ τὰ φάρμακα αὐτῆς.

61 In 1Kgs 21:19 LXX, Elijah reprimands Ahab for having murdered (σὺ ἐφόνευσας) Naboth at the instigation of Jezebel. Cf. also the 1Kgs 18:4, 13; and 2Kgs 9:7 according to which Jezebel had prophets of YHWH killed: 1Kgs 18:4: καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ τύπτειν τὴν Ἰεζάβελ τοὺς προφήτας κυρίου; 1Kgs 18:13: ἐν τῷ ἀποκτείνειν Ἰεζάβελ τοὺς προφήτας κυρίου; 2Kgs 9:7: τὰ αἵματα τῶν δούλων μου τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τὰ αἵματα πάντων τῶν δούλων κυρίου ἐκ χειρὸς Ἰεζάβελ.

62 Cf. especially 1Kgs 18:19 which speaks of prophets of Baal (LXX: prophets of shame, προφήτας τῆς αἰσχύνης) and of Asherah (LXX: prophets of the grove, προφήτας τῶν ἀλσῶν) who *eat at Jezebel's table*: ἐσθίοντας τράπεζαν Ἰεζάβελ.

63 Cf. 1Kgs 20:10, 13, where Jezebel has two false witnesses ("sons of transgressors," υἱοὶ παρανόμων) testify against Naboth to the effect that Naboth is stoned to death.

John sees the woman in Thyatira as a satanically inspired false prophet, comparable to Jezebel of old, who deceives the elect to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. She is not only the opponent attacked most vehemently in the opening letters, she also appears to have made a considerable contribution to John's visions. Multiple allusions to queen Jezebel highlight the woman's alliance with Rome, sponsorship of idol worship, positive attitude towards commerce, consummation of blood, and harlotry. All this attention suggests she was an influential figure among the believers in Thyatira (perhaps in other areas as well) who promoted lenient Pauline attitude towards the surrounding gentile world and whose teachings John strongly disapproved. While harlotry here probably refers to marriage practices deemed illegal by John, the other features can be, and usually are, explained as stemming from an acceptance to eat idol meat.[64] Meat sacrificed to idols was naturally connected with false gods and their images, it contained blood, and it was readily available on markets and served on trade guild banquets. Paul gave his acceptance to eating such meat, and the woman in Thyatira very likely did, too.

While Pliny in the early second century had Christians executed if they did not sacrifice to the image of the emperor (*Ep*. 10.96),[65] there is no compelling reason to think something comparable lies behind Revelation. There may have been sporadic persecutions of believers in Asia Minor, as the killing of Antipas (2:13) and the presence of souls of the martyrs under the altar (6:9–11) suggest, but hard evidence of any kind of systematic or wide-scale Christian persecution in Asia Minor in the first century, especially during Domitian's reign, is lacking.[66] One can explain most of the imagery by scriptural allusions, exaggerations, and John's own end-time expectations.[67] Expectation of the great end-time holy war was very much alive in the first century, and probably only

64 Cf. A. Collins, *Crisis*, 46, 87–88; Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 116–117; Harrington, *Revelation*, 61; Räisänen, "Nicolaitans," 1616–1617.

65 See A.N. Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966); Robert E. van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 23–29; Jakob Engberg, *Impulsore Chresto: Opposition to Christianity in the Roman Empire, c. 50–250 AD*, trans. Gregory Carter, Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 2 (Frankfurt-am-Main: Lang, 2007), 174–193.

66 See A. Collins, *Crisis*, 69–73; Thompson, *Revelation*, 16–26. See, however, Beale, *Revelation*, 12–16.

67 A. Collins (*Crisis*, esp. 84–110) has stressed John's expectations and the perceived nature of the crisis.

increased as a result of the Jewish War of 66–74 CE and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.[68] Rome's brutal presence in the land of Israel inspired updated reinterpretations of Daniel's visions, as one can see from 4 Ezra and Revelation itself.[69] Daniel had seen four beasts that symbolized four empires (ch. 7). John combined these into one final beast that symbolized Rome (Rev 13:1–10). Daniel had told of Nebuchadnezzar's dream where the king's statue likewise symbolized the four empires (ch. 2) and of the king's order to worship his statue or die (ch. 3). John turned Nebuchadnezzar's statue into an image of the beast (Rome), probably thinking of a statue of a Roman emperor, and explained how everyone was forced to worship it or be killed (Rev 13:15). It is not impossible that the second beast in John's vision (i.e., Jezebel of Thyatira) who promotes worship of the first beast's image, was involved in the provincial government responsible for the imperial cult.[70] On the other hand, the second beast's nature as an anti-Christ figure suggests she was a Christian teacher. While it is not impossible for a Christ-believer to occupy an important position in the local government, it is perhaps more likely that her role is merely exaggerated by John, and that Jezebel of Thyatira simply promoted a lenient attitude towards idol meat, trade guilds, and the Greco-Roman society at large. John saw all such compromise as satanic.

Jezebel is obviously a codename for the woman in Thyatira. There have been attempts to identify this powerful and influential prophetess with a known individual, such as Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira who was converted by Paul at Philippi (Acts 16:14–15), the Sibyl Sambathe, or the wife of the leader (bishop) of the church at Thyatira.[71] Needless to say, these are hypothetical suggestions, albeit interesting ones, and we will probably never know the true identity of "Jezebel" of Thyatira. If, however, one were to guess, the best candidate in my opinion would be Lydia. Not only was she from Thyatira, but she also traded in purple cloth (πορφυρόπωλις, Acts 16:14) that

68 Hengel, *Zealots*, 282–290.

69 See Michael E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 9–10, 361; Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Influence of Daniel on the New Testament," in John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 90–112, 102–112; John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 58–61, 82–84.

70 For the imperial cult in Asia Minor, see especially Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family*, RGRW 116 (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*.

71 See Mounce, *Revelation*, 86–87.

was associated with royalty and luxury.[72] Both are themes opposed by John but associated with Jezebel of old. The rider of the beast, of course, wore purple (πορφυροῦν, Rev 17:4).

While John of Patmos explicitly calls the woman in Thyatira by the code-name Jezebel, there are portrayals of other powerful women in early Christian literature which, while not using the name Jezebel, nonetheless seem to be influenced by traditions about the northern queen.

Herodias in the Gospel of Mark

Given Jezebel's connection with Elijah, one immediately thinks of Mark's story of Herodias and her daughter (often identified as Salome)[73] who requested John the Baptist's head on a platter (Mark 6:14–29). John had openly criticized Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, for having married his brother's wife,[74] Herodias, in a clear violation of the Mosaic law.[75] For this reason, Herodias herself held a grudge against John and wanted to kill him (Mark 6:19; Matthew says Herod himself wanted to kill John). Herod had John imprisoned but would not kill him because, despite the taunting criticism which baffled him, Herod still revered John and considered him a holy man (so Mark 6:20). And so Herodias had to recourse to deception. At a birthday banquet, Herodias's daughter[76]

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72 A. Collins, *Crisis*, 133; William Barclay, *Letters to the Seven Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 44.

73 The gospels do not mention her name, but according to Josephus (*Ant*. 18.136–137), Herodias had a daughter called Salome from her previous marriage. On the colorful reception history of the figure of Salome, see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 308–309.

74 In the gospels, the brother's name is given as Herod Philip (Mark 6:17; Matt 14:3), but this may be incorrect (Luke omits the name, 3:19). According to Josephus (*Ant*. 18.136–137), Philip was married to Salome, and Herodias had first been married to a "Herod" simply (18.109–110). For discussion, see Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, AB 28 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), 476–477.

75 Lev 18:16; 20:21. Levirate marriage (Deut 25:5) was not allowed when the brother was still alive. See William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 219; Luz, *Matthew*, 306; and R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 554–555.

76 There is a textual problem at v. 22 where the best reading (and the *lectio difficilior*) is τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ἡρῳδιάδος, "his daughter, Herodias." Several manuscripts have τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτῆς τῆς Ἡρῳδιάδος, "the daughter of Herodias herself," but only a few the expected τῆς θυγατρὸς τῆς Ἡρῳδιάδος, "the daughter of Herodias." While it is possible that both the daughter and mother were called Herodias, we are probably dealing with an old scribal

danced for Herod which pleased him so much that he promised her anything she wanted, up to the half of his kingdom. She consulted her mother who told her to request the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod could not refuse in front of his guests and had John beheaded (6:26–28).

Besides certain similarities with the story of Esther,[77] the parallels to Naboth's vineyard incident are obvious. Both feature a weak king unable or unwilling to kill a prophet who has caused him harm and sorrow, and whose death is brought about by a cunning queen.[78] Mark indeed calls Herod a "king" (βασιλεύς, 6:14) although he was in reality only a tetrarch.[79] Mark also identifies John the Baptist with Elijah (9:13; cf. Matt 17:12) whose death Jezebel had

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error. The larger context, in any case, makes it clear that the daughter is the daughter of Herodias who herself wanted John dead (v. 19) and who, on her day of opportunity (v. 21), now got to ask for John's head from her dancing daughter (v. 24).

77 According to the book of Esther, queen Vashti refused to come to king Ahasuares when he summoned her. This so angered the king that he deposed of the queen and replaced her with Esther (2:17). While not told in the biblical book of Esther, Esther Rabbah 1.28 on 1:19 relates how queen Vashti's severed head was brought to the king. At Esther 5:3, 6, and 7:2, the king asks Esther—in a different context—what she wants and promises her "even up to half the kingdom." Esther also pleases the king like Salome (cf. Esther 2:4, 9, 14, 15, and 17). For these and more, see Roger Aus, *Water Into Wine and the Beheading of John the Baptist: Early Jewish-Christian Interpretation of Esther 1 in John 2:1–11 and Mark 6:17–29*, BJS 150 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 39–74.

78 *Pace* James A. Brooks, *Mark*, NAC 23 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 105, and others, such as Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 313, 317 who play down the parallels. The similarity is considered meaningful by Henry Barclay Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices*, 2nd ed (London: MacMillan, 1905), 194; Harold Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, SNTSMS 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 162; Lane, *Mark*, 217; John P. Meier, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, vol. 2 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 173; Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of* Mark, 198, 202; and A. Collins, *Mark*, 307. Gundry's (*Mark*, 317) comment that Mark's gentile audience could not be expected to understand the reference is, in my view, meaningless; authors may make intertextual references and allusions while knowing that these may go unnoticed. Cf. Anthony Burgess's ("A Conspiracy to Rule the World," *The New York Times*, October 15, 1989) remarks on Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*: "These pages are crammed not with action but with information.... The book clearly needs an index.... No man should know so much."

79 Josephus, *Ant.* 18.148; Matt 14:1; Luke 3:1, 19; 9:7; Acts 13:1. The title is also attested in two inscriptions on Cos and Delos (A. Collins, *Mark*, 303). According to Josephus (*Ant.* 18.240–246), Herodias demanded Herod go to Rome to request a royal title that his father, Herod the Great, once had held. See France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 555–556.

sought (1 Kgs 19:1–2), and models several of Jesus's miracles upon stories about Elijah[80] and his successor Elisha[81] (who also was active during Jezebel's lifetime) in 1–2 Kings. Beheading is not common in the Scriptures, but Jehu asked for the heads of Ahab and Jezebel's sons to be sent to him in baskets (2 Kgs 10:1–7).[82]

Compared to the other versions of John's death (in Matthew, Luke and Josephus),[83] Mark clearly elaborates on Herod's weakness and Herodias's proactivity in the matter. According to Matthew (who considerably abbreviated Mark's story)[84] Herod himself—not Herodias—wanted to kill John but was restrained from doing so because he feared the crowds, not because he revered him or protected him from Herodias (Matt 14:1–12). Luke simply says Herod had John imprisoned because John had criticized him for marrying Herodias (Luke 3:19–20), and that Herod had John beheaded (9:7–9). There is nothing in Luke about the dance, Herodias's grudge, or her advice to request John's head.

Josephus (*Ant.* 18.116–119) knows of John the Baptist's death in the hands of Herod, too, although he presents a different reason for it: Herod was afraid that John's popularity among the people might cause him to raise a rebellion. So, Herod had John imprisoned and sent to the castle at Macherus where he was killed. The method of execution is not specified. Josephus does know of Herod's unlawful marriage to Herodias (18.109–115) and of Herodias's cunning nature and ability to manipulate her second husband (18.240–246), but he does not connect these themes directly with John's death. Josephus does, however, report the opinion of some Jews that the destruction of Herod's army in a disastrous war against his first wife's father, king Aretas IV of Nabatea, was a divine punishment for killing John the Baptist (18.116, 119).

Mark's is the earliest known story of John's death in the hands of Herod. Because Josephus also knows Herod killed John, and Josephus is clearly not dependent on Mark, the story itself very likely contains a historical nucleus.[85]

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80 See note 4 above.

81 The feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:32–44 par.) and four thousand (Mark 8:1–10; Matt 15:32–39) find their prototype in 2 Kgs 4:42–44 where Elisha feeds 100 men with 20 loaves. Jesus, like Elisha, heals a leper (Mark 1:40–42; Matt 8:2–3; cf. 2 Kgs 5:1–14) and raises a dead child (Mark 5:35–43; Luke 8:49–56; cf. 2 Kgs 4:18–37). Cf. Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of Mark*, 236; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 262–263; A. Collins, *Mark*, 319–320.

82 A. Collins, *Mark*, 312.

83 The Fourth Gospel merely alludes to John's imprisonment (John 3:24).

84 As France (2007, 552) points out, Mark's story has 249 words whereas Matthew's version only 136.

85 Cf. Lane, *Mark*, 217; Gundry, *Mark*, 312–318; Meier, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, 171–176;

Some of Jesus's followers had belonged to Herod's household (Luke 8:3; Acts 13:1) and may have reported of the events.[86] Rather than assuming with Bultmann and some other scholars that Mark simply invented the story because it differs from Josephus's version and contains details known from biblical stories of Esther and Jezebel,[87] it seems likelier that Mark received a basic story from an earlier tradition, but reshaped it in order to fit Herod and Herodias into the Ahab-Jezebel-pattern, quite possibly because some people had considered John to be Elijah, Jezebel's nemesis. After all, if Elijah was to return at the end-time,[88] then perhaps a Jezebel would too. And while such an expectation may not have existed until Mark's veiled identification of Herodias as a Jezebel figure who killed her Elijah in John, this possible new twist to the legend of Elijah's return may have then inspired John of Patmos to use the codename Jezebel for the woman whom he, another *John*, saw as his own end-time nemesis.

Helen in the Simonian Myth

Another notorious couple from early Christian literature may also have been partially modeled after the Ahab-Jezebel-pattern, namely Simon Magus and Helen.[89] The earliest story about Simon comes from Acts 8. Simon had been practicing magic (μαγεύων) in "the city of Samaria" (τὴν πόλιν τῆς Σαμαρείας) and the whole city was said to have been under Simon's spell (8:5, 9–10) until Philip converted everyone. The identity of the city has puzzled interpreters. There are three popular suggestions: (i) the capital, which was once indeed called Samaria, but which was later destroyed, rebuilt, and renamed as Sebaste;[90] (ii) the Samaritan holy city Shechem at the root of Mount Gerizim,

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Luz, *Matthew*, 305; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 397–399.

86 France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 555.

87 See Rudolph Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), 301–302; Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 28, remarks: "the account bears all the marks of bazaar-gossip."

88 Mal 3:23–24 (4:5–6 English), "Look, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord arrives. He will encourage fathers and their children to return to me, so that I will not come and strike the earth with judgment." Cf. Sir 48:1–10; Mark 6:15; 8:28; 9:11–13; 15:35–36; Matt 11:14; 17:10–12; 27:49; Luke 1:17; 9:8, 19; John 1:21, 25. See also Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 326–327.

89 On Simon and Helen, see further Nicola Denzey Lewis's article in this volume.

90 Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernhard Noble and Gerald Shinn (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 301–302; cf. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2015), 2:1494.

where the Samaritan temple once stood and where the expected Prophet Like Moses (later called the *Taheb*) would restore worship;[91] and (iii) Gitto, which Justin Martyr (*1 Apol.* 26) gives as Simon's hometown.[92] It is possible that Luke did not know the name of the town, or that he purposefully left it unnamed. But the most natural interpretation of the text, as it stands,[93] seems to be the first option: Luke refers to the capital by its old name, Samaria, but does so for symbolic reasons. Ahab's father, king Omri, had founded the city of Samaria ca. 880 BCE and made it the new capital of the northern kingdom (1 Kgs 16:23–24). Most kings of the northern kingdom sponsored cults of deities other than YHWH. These included Ahab, the most wicked of the northern kings, who built a temple and an altar for Baal in Samaria (1 Kgs 16:32), and whose wife Jezebel was said to have been involved with sorcery (2 Kgs 9:22: כְּשָׁף, φάρμακον). Luke does not mean to demonize his contemporary Samaritans; on the contrary, he depicts them in a favorable light both in his Gospel (e.g., the parable of the Good Samaritan) and Acts (they all convert, Acts 8:5–6, 10, 12). But as long as they were under the spell of Simon and his magic, their city could be symbolically called Samaria, thus evoking the idolatrous days of old.

Luke does not know anything about Simon's companion, Helen.[94] She is first mentioned by Justin Martyr in the mid-second century, according to whom Simon, worshiped by almost all the Samaritans as the supreme god,

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91 Julius Wellhausen, *Kritische Analyse der Apostelgeschichte*, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen Philologisch Historische Klasse 15.2 (Berlin: Weidemann, 1914), 14; cf. Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism*, WUNT 36 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 164, who points out that Shechem had been destroyed in 129/8 BCE, and thus suggests the town to be Sychar which "became the center of the Samaritans after the destruction of Shechem."

92 Cf. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 164–165; C.K. Barrett, *Preliminary Introduction and Commentary on Acts I–XIV*, vol. 1 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1994), 402–403.

93 The reading with the definite article (τὴν πόλιν τῆς Σαμαρείας) is better attested than the anarthrous reading. See Ben Witherington, *Acts*, 282; Keener, *Acts*, 2:1494.

94 Gerd Lüdemann, *Early Christianity according to the Traditions in Acts: A Commentary*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 100–102, however, thinks she lurks behind the word *epinoia* in Peter's rebuke of Simon (ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου, Acts 8:22); in patristic reports about Simon, Helen becomes the first thought (*ennoia*) of Simon the supreme God; see, e.g., Justin, *1 Apol.* 26; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.23.2, 38–52; Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, eds., *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les hérésies, Livre 1*, SC 263–264 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1979).

went about with an ex-prostitute called Helen who was hailed as his first, primordial idea (*1 Apol.* 26).[95] Justin may not have known Acts,[96] and in any case his information about Simon and Helen appears to derive from other sources.[97] Justin places Simon in Rome and even contradicts Acts when he says that almost all the Samaritans presently worship him (Luke says they had all converted). However, the classic account of Simon and Helen is found in Irenaeus's work *Adversus Haereses* (1.23) around 180 CE.[98] Irenaeus, like Justin, says the Simonians held Helen to be the first thought of their supreme God Simon. But Irenaeus continues and relates how this first thought had been captured by the world-creating angels who had imprisoned her in a human body and thrown her into the cycle of reincarnation. For ages she had wondered the earth in various manifestations, including Helen of Troy, until she had finally become a common prostitute in Tyre. Simon had descended on earth to redeem Helen from slavery and went about with her to proclaim the good news of liberation.

While the Simon of Acts 8 may have been a historical person,[99] there are reasons to doubt the existence of a historical Helen or at least details of her

95 *1 Apol.* 1.26: Καὶ σχεδὸν πάντες μὲν Σαμαρεῖς, ὀλίγοι δὲ καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις ἔθνεσιν, ὡς τὸν πρῶτον θεὸν ἐκεῖνον ὁμολογοῦντες, προσκυνοῦσι· καὶ Ἑλένην τινά, τὴν περινοστήσασαν αὐτῷ κατ' ἐκεῖνο τοῦ καιροῦ, πρότερον ἐπὶ τέγους σταθεῖσαν, τὴν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἔννοιαν πρώτην γενομένην λέγουσι. "And almost all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations, worship him [Simon], and acknowledge him as the first god; and a woman, Helen, who went about with him at that time, and had formerly been a prostitute, they say is the first idea generated by him" (ANF).

96 See Andrew Gregory, *The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period before Irenaeus: Looking for Luke in the Second Century*, WUNT 2.169 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 317–321.

97 These include the famous statue, dedicated "to the faithful god Semo Sanco" (*Semoni Sanco Deo Fidio*). Semo Sanco was an old Sabine god of oaths, often conflated with Zeus/Jupiter. The statue mentioned by Justin was actually rediscovered on the Tiber Island in 1574, and depicted a god who possibly held a thunderbolt in his hand and was accompanied by the said inscription (*CIL* 6.567). Cf. Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.23.4, 86–87) who says the followers of Simon have a statue of him fashioned after the likeness of Jupiter (*Imaginem quoque Simonis habent factam ad figuram Jovis*). See Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. Robert McL. Wilson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), 294–298; Roger D. Woodard, *Indo-European Sacred Space: Vedic and Roman Cult* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 184 ff.

98 Irenaeus's story may very well be based on Justin's lost *Syntagma*, which would push the myth of Helen back at least to ca. 150 CE. See the classic study by Adolf Hilgenfeld, *Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristenthums* (Leipzig: Fues, 1884), 21–30, 46–58.

99 Ferdinand Christian Baur famously thought Simon was nothing but a caricature of Paul; see F.C. Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, trans. Allan Menzies, 3rd ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1878), 1:93.

biography as presented by Irenaeus. Behind the Simonian Helen seems to lie a myth of the fallen soul whose presence in a body is compared to prostitution.[100] Irenaeus's source says as much, and an elaborate version is found in a Nag Hammadi text Exegesis on the Soul (NHC II 6) where the soul's demise is compared both to Israel's unfaithfulness to YHWH and to Helen of Troy's running away with Paris.[101] The Simonian myth may in fact be a partial heresiological invention where the symbolic Helen (of Troy) of the soul-allegory was historicized and married to the father of all heresy from Samaria. Irenaeus is aware of both Justin's report which places Simon in Rome and Luke's account in Acts which places him in Samaria.[102] Irenaeus clearly downplays Simon's connection with Rome and emphasizes his activities in Samaria and the nearby regions. That he also presents the female companion of the successful sorcerer from Samaria as a prostitute from Tyre[103] may be just general slander, as both Samaria and Tyre had a bad reputation. But this may also be another instance of imposing features of the Ahab-Jezebel pattern on a notorious, if partially fictitious, couple, Simon of Samaria and Helen of Tyre.

Conclusion

We have seen how the literary portrayals of three notorious women in three early Christian texts seem modeled after the image of queen Jezebel. This is clearest in the case of Revelation where John of Patmos calls his prophetic rival in Thyatira Jezebel and presents her as a demonic manifestation of Jezebel of old sponsoring idolatry and an illegitimate sexual code. Mark's account of John the Baptist's death seems influenced by Naboth's vineyard incident and consequently presents Herodias as a cunning Jezebel figure with Herod as a weak Ahab. Finally, Irenaeus's report of Simon and Helen depicts Helen as an ex-prostitute from Tyre and stresses Simon's activity in Samaria instead of Rome.

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100 Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 297–298; cf. Christoph Markschies, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, trans. John Bowden (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 76.

101 Exeg. Soul 128.1–2; 129.5–130.28; 136.35–137.6. For details, see Hugo Lundhaug's article in this volume. By the second century CE, Helen had accumulated a questionable reputation. See Stephen Haar, *Simon Magus: The First Gnostic?*, BZNW 119 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 263.

102 Irenaeus says Claudius honored Simon with a statue (*Haer*. 1.23.1, 25–26). This is related in more detail in Justin, *1 Apol*. 26. Irenaeus also quotes Acts 8:9–11 and 20–23 at *Haer*. 1.23.1, 2–8, 16–20.

103 That Helen came from Tyre is not yet mentioned in Justin's *First Apology*.

This suggests that Irenaeus (or perhaps already his source) modeled Simon and Helen's biographical sketch partially upon the Ahab-Jezebel pattern. Such negative portrayals are in accordance with the Deuteronomistic picture of Jezebel in 1–2 Kings as well as with her later fame, visible in Josephus, 2 Baruch and rabbinic literature. And while it does seem possible that the northern queen got a fairer hearing in Psalm 45, one must admit that time has not treated the daughter of Tyre kindly.

CHAPTER 6

Mary and the Other Female Characters in the Protevangelium of James

Petri Luomanen

The goal of the present article is to study Jewish female characters in the Protevangelium of James (Prot. Jas.). Despite its name, it is a story about Jesus's mother Mary, starting with her parents Joachim and Anna and closing with events related to Jesus's birth and early childhood. Consequently, throughout the centuries ordinary readers and hearers of the Protevangelium have been mostly interested in the story of Mary. Scholars, for their part, have taken this apocryphal work as a witness of early Mariology.[1]

Because Mary is born to Jewish parents she is by definition the number one Jewish character in the Protevangelium. There are also other Jewish female characters in the story that have not received as much attention as Mary. Furthermore, in the case of Mary, the focus has been on her developing role as the Virgin Mary and the Mother of the God; other traits in her character have been largely ignored.[2] Thus, the perspective chosen for this article turns

1 Because the close colleague whom the present Festschrift honors has devoted a significant part of his scholarly career to studying Mary in non-canonical texts, it seemed appropriate to write an essay on an apocryphal gospel where Mary is the protagonist. For this project, it is unfortunate that one of the honoree's articles has clipped the wings of a theory that tries to show how the two Marys, the Magdalene and the Mother of Jesus, were fused together in gnostisizing sources. See Antti Marjanen, "The Mother of Jesus or the Magdalene? The Identity of Mary in the So-Called Gnostic Christian Texts," in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition*, ed. F. Stanley Jones (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 31–41; cf. Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Rethinking the 'Gnostic Mary': Mary of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala in Early Christian Tradition," *JECS* 9 (2001): 555–595; Stephen J. Shoemaker, "A Case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary," in *Which Mary?*, 5–30. In the case of the Protevangelium of James it is clear that the protagonist is Mary the Mother of Jesus. However, a closer look at the characterization in Protevangelium reveals features that may, after all, show some resemblance between the two Marys.

2 Other perspectives have entered the study of Protevangelium slowly. Lily Vuong's monograph is an example of literary analysis of Mary's character in the light of Jewish purity laws and practices. Lily C. Vuong, *Gender and Purity in the Protevangelium of James*, WUNT 2/358 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013). Earlier studies applying a literary or narrative approach

attention to features that have traditionally been considered marginal in the narrative. From the viewpoint of narrative analysis, minor characters, and even characters that exist only to provide a setting for the story, are also important for conveying the message,[3] although their effect on readers is generally more subliminal than that of the protagonist or the plot of the narrative. Before the actual analysis an introduction to the story and the historical background of the Protevangelium is in order. Because I approach the texts from the viewpoint of narrative analysis I also include a short methodological discussion with definitions of some key concepts to be used.

The Story, Dating, and the Historical Context of the Protevangelium of James

The Protevangelium of James was most likely composed in the second half of the second century. It was written in Greek, either in Syria or Egypt.[4] The obvious reason for its writing is to praise Mary but it is also generally assumed, for good reason, that the text was prepared in order to refute Jewish accusations about Mary's character as exemplified, for instance, in Origen's *Contra Celsum*.[5] The main character in the text is Mary and Greek manuscripts have titled it accordingly, for instance, as The Birth of Mary: Apocalypse of James (in the Papyrus Bodmer v from the late third or early fourth century) or An Account of

to the Protevangelium, along with other sources, include Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, Studies on Personalities of the New Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), and Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). In all these literary/narrative approaches the focus is on the characterization of Mary. Other female characters receive little attention.

3 Cf. Gaventa, *Mary*, 23; James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 123–124.

4 Silvia Pellegrini, "Das Protevangelium des Jakobus," in *Evangelien und Vervandtes*, vol. 1/2 of *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, ed. Christoph Markschies and Jens Schröter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 903–929, esp. 907–909.

5 Thus P. Van Stempvoort, "The Protevangelium Jacobi: The Sources of its Theme and Style and Their Bearing on its Date," in *SE III*, ed. F.L. Cross, TUGAL 88 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 410–426, esp. 413–415; Roland F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas: With Introduction, Notes, and Original Text Featuring the New Scholars Version Translation*. The Scholars Bible 2 (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 1995), 11–12, 15–20. Cf. Origen, *Cels*. 1.28, 32, 69.

the Birth of Theotokos (Georgian translation).[6] The present article is based on Roland F. Hock's critical edition of the Greek text.[7]

The text received its present title, the Protevangelium of James, in the mid-sixteenth century when it was re-introduced in the West by Guillaume Postel. The title is based on the concluding note of the "author" who obviously identifies himself as James the brother of Jesus (Prot. Jas. 25.1–2). In the narrative world of Protevangelium, James is Joseph's son from his previous marriage (Prot. Jas. 9.2). He follows Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem where they go to be enrolled for the census (Prot. Jas. 17.1). He also keeps guard, together with his brother(s), outside the cave where Jesus was to be born, when Joseph goes out to look for a midwife around Bethlehem (Prot. Jas. 18.1).

Chapters 1–7. Joachim and Anna have not received offspring. They feel ashamed and are even rebuked by their fellow Israelites. They mourn and lament their lot and pray to be blessed like Abraham and Sarah who were given Isaac in their late days. Their prayers are heard and Anna becomes pregnant. The manuscripts differ over whether Joachim hears from the angel that Anna has become pregnant or will become pregnant.[8] If the perfect tense (εἴληφεν) is original, then even Mary's conception might have been miraculous, although clearly not "virginal" because the narrative presupposes that Joachim and Anna have tried to get offspring.[9] After Mary is born, Anna devotes herself to protecting Mary's purity in her bedroom that is turned into a sanctuary, assisted by "the Hebrews' undefiled daughters." When Mary turns three she is eventually handed over to the Lord in the Temple in order to fulfill the promise Anna made when an angel announced that her prayers had been heard (Prot. Jas. 4.1). When

6 Émile De Strycker and Hans Quecke, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques: Recherches sur le papyrus Bodmer 5 avec une édition critique du texte grec et une traduction annotée par Emile de Strycker, s.j., En appendice les Versions arméniennes traduites en latin par Hans Quecke, s.j.* Subsidia hagiographica 33 (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 211–212.

7 Hock's reconstruction of the Greek (Hock, *The Infancy Gospels*) differs slightly from de Strycker's edition (de Strycker, *La forme*). Hock also applies his own division of the text into verses, which I have not followed.

8 For the discussion concerning this textual problem, see Hock, *The Infancy Gospels*, 38–39.

9 Hock argues for a miraculous conception. Consequently, he also chooses to read "nine months" as the duration of Anna's pregnancy in Protevangelium 5.2 where manuscripts provide several options: six, seven, eight, and nine months are all attested. See Hock, *The Infancy Gospels*, 39 n. 4:4, and 41. Pellegrini ("Das Protevangelium," 913 n. 54) chooses a shorter time and argues that the logic of the narrative allows Joachim to have given his seed before he left for the wilderness.

Mary is escorted to the temple she dances "and the whole house of Israel loved her." After this, Joachim and Anna do not appear in the narrative again.

Chapters 8–16. As Mary is approaching womanhood she cannot stay in the Temple any longer because the text suggests that her menstruation would pollute it.[10] Zacharias, the high priest, is instructed by an angel to call together the widowers of the people in order to find her a husband. Joseph is among the widowers and is selected by a miraculous sign: a dove coming from his staff. Joseph objects by referring to his old age and the fact that he already has sons. Scared by some examples of what has happened to people who have not feared God, Joseph consents to give Mary "care and protection." Joseph's old age and reluctance are stated in order to make it clear that he has no sexual desires towards Mary. That no sexual relations take place between them is also emphasized by relating that immediately after receiving Mary from the Temple Joseph goes out to build houses, leaving Mary home.

While Joseph is building houses Mary is kept busy at home: she is elected as one of the pure maidens who are to spin threads for the new veil of the Temple. She is also visited by a heavenly messenger at a well and she learns that she will become pregnant by the word of the Lord and give birth, but not the way women usually do. At this point, the narrative starts to pick up elements from the synoptic infancy stories: Mary is told that she shall name the child Jesus (cf. Matt 1:21), and she visits her relative Elizabeth (cf. Luke 1:39–45, 56).

Mary is six months pregnant when Joseph returns home from his building projects. He becomes terrified, compares his situation to that of Adam when Eve was deceived by the snake, and starts questioning Mary who claims to be innocent. Joseph is convinced when an angel appears to him in a dream. However, Joseph and Mary still have to convince the high priest. This happens through a drink test which both Joseph and Mary pass unharmed. The test is apparently something similar to what is described in Numbers 5:11–31, although there it is applied only to women suspected of adultery.

Chapters 17–20. In these chapters the Protevangelium links up more closely with the canonical gospels. Augustus's census motivates Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem. In contrast to Matthew's and Luke's narratives, they are followed by Joseph's sons from his previous marriage. When Joseph goes to look for a "Hebrew midwife" he leaves them to keep guard outside the cave where Mary is waiting. The midwife arrives in time to testify to a miraculous birth with a dark cloud first overshadowing the cave and then giving way to a bright light

10 Although menstruation is not explicitly mentioned, the discourse clearly presupposes it, as aptly argued by Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 120–125.

that reveals the newborn. She is convinced. That is not the case with Salome who hears about the birth from the midwife. Salome wants to examine Mary but when she inserts her finger into Mary, her hand becomes consumed by flames. She is healed, however, when she picks up Jesus and acknowledges him as the one who has been born to be the king of Israel.

Chapters 21–25 tell about the astrologers' visit and Herod's murder of infants (not just boys in this narrative) of two years old and younger. Mary manages to save Jesus by hiding him in a manger (Prot. Jas. 22.2). This short note is also the last reference to Jesus in the narrative that, in contrast to synoptic infancy narratives, gives more space to the history of John the Baptist's parents. Elizabeth and John are saved when a mountain splits and lets them in. Zechariah, the father, however, is killed by Herod's servants because he refuses to disclose the whereabouts of his son (chapter 23). Chapter 24 describes in detail how other priests learn about Zechariah's murder. When "tribes of the people" hear about the murder they mourn for three days and nights.[11] The Protevangelium even appears to refer to Zechariah as the high priest (Prot. Jas. 8.3, 10.2, 23.1–3). The Protevangelium closes with the author's self-description as described above.

The Narrative Approach and the Key Concepts

Although the focus of the present article is on characterization, it goes without saying that attention must also be paid to other elements of the narrative. Characterization and *plot* are tied closely together since characters of narrative, if not providing mere background (see below), are also active *agents* that contribute to causality and sequence in the narrative.[12] The way that characters *act* reveals some *traits* of their *personality*.[13] Narrator's and other characters'

11 Because Zechariah is murdered when he is serving at the altar, the story may have been inspired by Matt 23:35 (thus, Hock, *The Infancy Gospels*, 75). However, in Matthew it is the Pharisees and Scribes who are blamed for the murder of Zechariah the son of Barachiah. In the Protevangelium it is Herod and his servants who are responsible for the murder while the priests and people are described in a good light.

12 For the relationship between characters and plot, see Seymor Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 108–116.

13 I follow here, slightly modifying, Chatman (*Story and Discourse*, 120–123) by understanding traits as a) more general than simple *habits*, b) empirically verifiable, c) partly overlapping, not totally independent of all other traits so that an understandable identity of a personality appears, and d) possibly contradictory with some other traits.

comments and descriptions also add to the traits of a character's personality, and so does also the character's own speech. The environment and the social context where a character appears also makes it possible for the audience to make inferences about the personal traits of the character.[14] In addition to traits the personality of a character also requires some degree of uniqueness and stability that makes it possible to distinguish the person from others.[15]

E.M. Forster's distinction between *round* and *flat* characters is widely used in narrative analysis. Flat characters lack complexity and may exhibit only one trait. "In their purest form they are constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round." Round characters exhibit several traits that can even be contradictory. They are "capable of surprising in a convincing way."[16] Characters without any, even flat, personal identity can also be called *walk-ons*. They are nameless and can be taken as the setting or background of the narrative.[17] Crowds and Roman soldiers can be regarded as collective walk-ons in the gospel narratives.[18] This does not, however, mean that they are necessarily insignificant for the development of the narrative. For instance, walk-ons can function as a *foil* that adds depth to other characters' personality by providing *contrast* to their traits. The definition of foil is functional; foil characters can be round or flat. What makes them foils is their contrastive relation to other characters. *Stock characters* are characters typical of certain literary genres. An example is cruel stepmothers in fairy tales.

Collectives and groups often exhibit stability and traits which makes it possible to distinguish them from other groups. This raises the question about their relation to individual characters. Because the human mind is able to perceive and process groups mainly though abstract conceptualizations, by stereotyping and focusing on some distinctive features,[19] it is clear that as far

14 Cf. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 121–122.

15 Chatman's starting point in his discussion of character is the definition in the Dictionary of Philosophy, edited by Dagobert Runes, 1975 (Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 120 n. 28). Chatman summarizes his considerations as follows: "I argue—unoriginally but firmly—for a conception of character as a paradigm of traits; 'trait' in the sense of 'relatively stable or abiding personal quality.'" Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 126.

16 E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edvard Arnold Publishers, 1927; repr. 1958), 65–75, esp. 65, 75; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 123–124.

17 Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 139–141.

18 Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 125.

19 Social psychology, especially the social identity approach that was developed by Henry Tajfel and his colleagues, has developed ample concepts, like stereotypes, exemplars and

as groups function like characters they appear at the flat end of the round–flat continuum.[20]

The relative importance of the characters for the overall narrative and its development also needs to be noted. *Protagonist* is the term used for the main character of the story. Originally the term was used for the leading, first actor in Greek plays, πρωταγωνιστής, which implies that the protagonist was the character whose actions were essential for the development of events in the play. Especially when applied in literary studies, the possibility emerges that the character who is most closely followed in the narrative does not have much effect on the causal chain of events. This seems to be the case in the Protevangelium of James where Mary's actions are not essential for the plot, as previous narrative analyses have revealed (more on this below).[21] Narratives can also have several protagonists, who may dominate different parts of the narrative. Relative importance can also be generally described by referring to *major* and *minor characters*. Characters can also develop in the course of the narrative. If such is the case the character can be termed as *dynamic*. On the other hand, *static characters* remain essentially the same throughout the narrative.[22]

The following narrative analysis presumes the standard distinction between story (content) and discourse (expression).[23] I am also using the terminology from the so-called Booth and Chatman communication model, which makes distinctions, for instance, between real and implied authors as well as real

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prototypes, for analyzing group categorizations. These concepts make it possible to combine literary and narrative analyses with social-scientific perspectives. For the use of the social identity approach in biblical studies, see J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). For the cognitive background of the approach and further discussion of its concepts, see Petri Luomanen, "The Sociology of Knowledge, the Social Identity Approach and the Cognitive Study of Religion," in *Explaining Christian Origins and Early Judaism: Contributions from Cognitive and Social Science*, ed. Petri Luomanen, Ilkka Pyysiäinen, and Risto Uro, BibInt 89 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 199–229, and Petri Luomanen, "Matthew's Corpus Mixtum in the Perspective of the Social Identity Approach," in *Voces Clamantium in Deserto*, ed. Sven-Olav Back and Matti Kankaanniemi, Studier i exegetik och judaistik utgivna av Teologiska fakulteten vid Åbo Akademi 11 (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 2012), 199–215.

20 Cf. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 123, 125.

21 Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived*, 160–161; Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 242; Gaventa (*Mary*, 120) also regards Mary's character as flat.

22 Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 123–126.

23 I am applying here the standard distinction in narrative analysis between story (content) and discourse (expression) as defined by Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 22–26.

and implied audiences.[24] Although I am analyzing characterization, I am also setting the discussion in the original historical context of the Protevangelium.[25] Therefore when I refer, for instance, to the author, I usually have the real author in mind unless stated otherwise.

Jewish Female Characters in the Protevangelium of James

Mary

Virginity is obviously one of the most central traits in Mary's character and it has been important in subsequent Christian reception of the Protevangelium.[26] Nevertheless, as Vuong convincingly shows, the purity of Mary is the overarching theme of the narrative, and virginity is only one aspect of her purity.[27] Her mother Anna "did not permit anything profane or unclean to pass the child's lips" (Prot. Jas. 6.1).[28] This is in line with the promise Anna gave when she was informed that her prayers had been heard and she would conceive and give birth. Whether the baby would be a boy or a girl Anna "will offer it as a gift to the Lord" (Prot. Jas. 4.1). Naturally, the gifts offered to the Lord have to be kept pure.

The safeguarding of Mary's purity dominates the narrative and explains some of its features that are usually regarded problematic from the historical point of view. For instance, several scholars have taken the fact that at the age of three Mary is moved to the temple as one indication of the author's ignorance of Jewish temple service.[29] From the viewpoint of the narrative the moving is

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24 See, for instance, Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 151.

25 In this regard, I agree with Petri Merenlahti and Raimo Hakola who advocate the useful interaction of narrative analysis and historical inquiry. See Petri Merenlahti and Raimo Hakola, "Reconceiving Narrative Criticism," in *Characterization in the Gospel: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*, ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni. JSNTSup 184 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 13–48.

26 J.K. Elliott, "Christian Apocrypha and the Developing Role of Mary," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha*, ed. Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 269–288, esp. 270–272; Charlotte Touati and Claire Clivaz, "Apocryphal Texts About Other Characters in the Canonical Gospels," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha*, 48–51.

27 For a summary, see Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 240–244.

28 Translations of Protevangelium of James in this article follow Hock's edition (Hock, *The Infancy Gospels*), with slight modifications. However, I have not adopted Hock's verse numbering.

29 Oscar Cullmann, "Kindheitsevangelien," in *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher*

a most natural expression of Mary's purity: she is kept pure from the day of her birth and given as a pure gift to the Lord as promised. She dwells undefiled in the temple just as her womb will later provide a pure dwelling for the Son of God. In this way Mary's purity is made comparable to the purity of the temple.[30]

As noted above, earlier narrative analyses of Mary have paid attention to some peculiar features in her characterization. Although she is the main character in the narrative she is more often an object than the subject of action. Consequently, her character appears as relatively flat.[31] Sparse description of mental and physical traits is typical of biblical as well as ancient Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian literature. Therefore, Robert Alter thinks that biblical authors developed other literary means—such as plot development, contrast and comparison—through which they were able to add depth and complexity to their characters. In Vuong's view, Mary's own voice in the Protevangelium of James serves this purpose.

Mary speaks only in five instances in the entire narrative. Voung finds this a deliberate contrastive structure that the author uses in order to heighten the significance of Mary's message when she speaks. The speeches also add roundness to Mary's character. In Vuong's view, she becomes an example of

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Übersetzung: 1, Evangelien, ed. Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 330–372, esp. 337; J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Hock, *The Infancy Gospels*, 10. Although Mary's living in the temple does not cohere with Second Temple practices, the story also includes elements that may indicate the author's knowledge of some later Jewish traditions. Mary is transferred to the temple at the age when her virginity is becoming more vulnerable. According to Mishnaic tradition, before the age of three the hymen of girls would regenerate spontaneously. See Timothy J. Horner, "Jewish Aspects of the Protevangelium of James," *JECS* 12 (2004): 313–335, esp. 321–324; cf. m. Nid. 5:4; m. Ketub. 1:2–3. There is also a tradition about temple virgins who were responsible for weaving the temple curtains. See Megan Nutzman, "Mary in the Protevangelium of James: A Jewish Woman in the Temple?" *GRBS* 53 (2013): 551–578, esp. 563–570; cf. m. Šeqal. 8:5; t. Šeqal. 2:6; 2 Bar 10:18–19. All this indicates that the author of Protevangelium did not just consult the Septuagint for Jewish practices but was also aware of some contemporary Jewish traditions and used them creatively for literary purposes. For a more detailed discussion of the relation of Protevangelium of James to Judaism, see Petri Luomanen, "Judaism and Anti-Judaism in Early Christian Apocrypha," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha*, 319–342, esp. 319–328.

30 Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 88–103.

31 See above, n. 21. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: Georg Allen & Unwin, 1981), 114–115; Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 242 n. 6.

women "who maintain their innocence and purity even when questioned by the highest male authorities."[32] Surely Mary's speeches add something to her character, but it is questionable how much depth there actually is. The first scene where Mary speaks is when she is addressed by a heavenly messenger, later identified as Gabriel:

> But as she listened, Mary was doubtful and said, "If I actually conceive by the Lord, the living God, will I also give birth the way women usually do?" … And Mary said, "Here I am, the Lord's slave before him. I pray that all you have told me comes true."
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> Prot. Jas 11.2–3, trans. HOCK 1995, slightly modified

The second scene where Mary voices her thoughts is her visit to her relative Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother. After Elizabeth has hailed Mary the discourse continues:

> But Mary forgot the mysteries which the heavenly messenger Gabriel had spoken, and she looked up to the sky and said, "Who am I, Lord, that every generation on earth will congratulate me?"
>
> Prot. Jas. 12:2

In the third scene, Joseph questions Mary, who replies:

> But she began to cry bitter tears: "I am innocent. I have not had sex with any man."
>
> And Joseph said to her, "Then where did the child you are carrying in your womb come from?" And she replied, "As the Lord my God lives, I do not know where it came from."
>
> Prot. Jas. 13.2–3

Later on, Mary also replies to the high priest who is questioning her (Prot. Jas. 15.3):

> But she began to cry bitter tears: "As the Lord God lives, I stand innocent before him. Believe me, I have not had sex with any man."
>
> Prot. Jas. 15.3

32 Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 242. To be exact, Mary speaks eight times but this happens in five (or six, if one counts the last one as two) different scenes. Vuong refers to Mary speaking only five times.

Finally, Mary speaks when Joseph wants to know the reason for her rapidly changing moods.

> And she replied, "Joseph, it is because I imagine two peoples in front of me, one weeping and mourning and the other celebrating and jumping for joy." Halfway through the trip Mary said to him, "Joseph, help me down from the donkey—the child inside me is about to be born."
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> Prot. Jas. 17.2–3

After this Mary does not say anything further in the narrative of the Protevangelium. The scenes are related to three themes. The first and the second deal with the annunciation in dialogues with Gabriel and Elizabeth. In the third and the fourth Mary is questioned about her pregnancy. The fifth presents prophetic words about the reception of the child that is about to be born.

Do these speeches add depth to Mary's characterization? It is true that in the third and the fourth scene Mary defends herself in the face of Joseph's and the high priest's accusations. The content of her speech hardly surprises the audience; she simply states the plain fact that the audience has known throughout the narrative. If one of the characteristics of a round character is an ability to surprise, that does not happen here, at least as far as the content of Mary's speech is concerned. Still it is remarkable that in the two cases where Mary defends her virginity she leaves her otherwise submissive role and stands up for her case. Does this make Mary a role model for women who wish to maintain their integrity in front of male authorities—in this case her husband and the high priest? Perhaps so, if a woman should happen to be wrongly accused of adultery. Otherwise I am doubtful because Mary mostly has a submissive role in the narrative.

Despite her quick development—she walks at the age of six months and at the age of three years she walks up the temple stairs and dances (Prot. Jas. 6.1, 7.2–3)—she does not say a word when the priests are making plans about her future at the age of twelve (Prot. Jas. 8.2–3). She remains silent even when Joseph directly addresses her telling her that he has received her from the temple—and will immediately leave her alone at home in order to go away to build houses (Prot. Jas. 9.3). At this point, even the narrator remains silent about Mary's reaction. When the virgins are commissioned to weave the temple curtains, Mary silently receives the threads that befell her (Prot. Jas. 10). When Joseph and Mary are subjected to the adultery test, Mary remains silent, and after the test only Joseph's reaction is described (Prot. Jas. 16). When Joseph ponders how to enroll Mary for Augustus's census and leaves for Bethlehem setting her on his donkey she remains silent (Prot. Jas. 17.1–2). She does not reply

when Joseph directly asks her where to take her in order to secure the privacy of her delivery (Prot. Jas. 17.3). Perhaps the most striking and most telling about the submissive traits in Mary's character is the scene where the second midwife Salome comes to the cave and orders Mary to position herself for examination. Mary submits without complaints and Salome inserts her finger into Mary (Prot. Jas. 20.1).

It is perhaps not surprising that the overall narrative coheres with patriarchal structures and male dominance. What is striking is that Mary does not engage in ordinary discussions with her spouse/guardian as, for instance, her mother Anna does. In this regard Mary's character clearly differs from other more active female characters in the Protevangelium, as becomes clear below. Against this background it is hard to take Mary's character as a role model of an individual who speaks out with her own voice displaying courage and strength.[33] On the contrary, it seems that when Mary is allowed to speak she voices the theological ideas of the author who most probably was male.[34]

Mary's first dialogue with Gabriel makes it clear for the audience that she will not just miraculously become pregnant but will also deliver the baby unlike any other woman. In contrast to Luke's version of the annunciation Mary does not wonder at all how she can become pregnant, but wonders if she will also give birth the usual way (cf. Luke 1:34). The dialogue clearly anticipates the scene with the midwives where the author does not hesitate to submit Mary's private parts that have remained thus far untouched and pure to Salome's intrusion. The theological point becomes clear: Mary was proven virgin even after the delivery. Because there was no bleeding, Mary is also able to give breast to the child immediately after giving birth (Prot. Jas. 19.2; cf. 5.2 where Anna first waits for the required time and cleanses herself).[35]

If the Protevangelium was originally composed in response to Jewish accusations concerning Mary's reputation it is no wonder that the author gives voice to Mary at the points where her virginity is questioned. Mary's prophetic words about the two nations continue the theme. Her birth pangs do not only anticipate the birth of the Lord, but metaphorically also the birth of a new group of believers who receive him and rejoice.[36]

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33 Cf. Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 242.

34 At least the implied author of the Protevangelium, James, is male.

35 Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 89–90.

36 It has been suggested that the twofold reception could refer to the positive response among Christians and negative among Jews, as the same scene does explicitly in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (13.1), but this kind of distinction does not hold with the overall positive characterization of the "people of Israel" in the narrative of Protevangelium. The dividing line is not drawn between "Christians" and the "people of Israel" but believers

To be sure, Mary's character receives some roundness through the narrator, who occasionally attributes emotions to her. In Mary's childhood, dancing may imply her being happy (Prot. Jas. 7.3). After that we do not learn about her emotions until the annunciation where the narrator describes her as being "terrified" (ἔντρομος, Prot. Jas. 11.1). Other descriptions of Mary's emotional and cognitive reactions include being doubtful when Gabriel addresses her (διεκρίθη, Prot. Jas. 11.2), rejoicing as she hears the high priest's prophetic words (χαρὰν δὲ λαβοῦσα, Prot. Jas. 12.2), forgetting Gabriel's message (ἐπελάθετο, Prot. Jas. 12.2), being afraid when her womb keeps swelling (φοβηθεῖσα, Prot. Jas. 12.3), weeping (ἔκλαυσε(ν), Prot. Jas. 13.3, 15.3) when defending her virginity, both mourning and laughing (see στυγνός/στυγνάζω, γελάω in Prot. Jas. 17.2) on the way to Bethlehem, and finally being afraid (φοβηθεῖσα, Prot. Jas. 22.2) that Herod's troops may harm the child.

These descriptions do add some depth to Mary's character but it is interesting that her emotions become mainly observable either in the context of divine revelation or when she defends her virginity. Ordinary or even stressful human encounters do not evoke any emotional reactions in Mary. The narrator is silent about Mary's emotions when she is given into Joseph's custody. We do not learn anything about her emotions when she is about to face the bitter water test, or about her relief after the positive outcome: only Joseph rejoices. Likewise, Salome's rude examination does not result in any emotional response on Mary's part. Mary's emotions are also hidden in the context of the actual delivery. That she does not feel any pain is in line with the author's theological ideal but it is notable that even any expression of joy is lacking in stark contrast to Joachim's and Anna's reactions when Mary was born (Prot. Jas. 4–7).

Mary expresses emotions in response to human action only in two cases. She becomes afraid of people seeing her womb swelling. Notably, this reaction, too, is related to her virginity being challenged, like when she is interrogated by Joseph and the high priest. The second time is in the last scene in which Mary appears in the Protevangelium of James, when she is afraid of Herod's troops and hides Jesus in a manger. Even in this case she is not mainly concerned for her own safety but for the child's.

Mary's character in the narrative is not totally flat. There is "a curve towards roundness," to use Forster's phrase (see above) but this curve seems to be instigated almost exclusively in the contexts where the role prepared for Mary

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and non-believers. Thus, B. Dehandschutter, "Anti-Judaism in the Apocrypha," in *Papers Presented to the Tenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1987: Historica, Theologica, Gnostica, Biblica et Apocrypha*, ed. Elisabeth A. Livingstone. StPatr XIX (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 346.

in the divine plan is challenged in a way that also finds a resemblance in the author's contemporary context. To put it simply, when Mary speaks out, she speaks out for the author's case. On the other hand, she can also remain silent and submissive if that best serves the author's goals.

The narrative seems to be objectifying Mary for two reasons. First, the emphasis placed on Mary's purity and virginity is indicative of a development that is setting up the Virgin Mary as an object of veneration on its own. Second, the author of the Protevangelium of James contributes to this development by manipulating the traits of Mary's character that are related to emotional expression and human interaction in order to promote his own theological goals. The result is that in the Protevangelium Mary's character mostly lacks the kind of humane emotional and cognitive traits that would make it easy for devotees to identify with her. In this regard some other female characters are different.

Anna

The above discussion about Mary's character has already suggested that Anna's character is more round, especially in the contexts that involve human interaction. When Joachim banishes himself, because of his shameful childlessness, into the wilderness to pray and fast, we learn that Anna is lamenting and mourning (Prot. Jas. 2.1)[37] for two reasons: because of her widowhood[38] and because of her childlessness. The following scene, where Anna converses with her slave Juthine (Prot. Jas. 2.2–4),[39] is also loaded with emotional tension. Anna replies angrily to her slave, who has urged her to stop mourning because the great day of the Lord[40] is approaching. Juthine's reply is no less unsympa-

37 Anna's lamenting and mourning is expressed forcefully: Ἄννα δύο θρήνους ἐθρήνει καὶ δύο κοπετοὺς ἐκόπτετο. "Anna sang a double funeral song and a double lamentation."

38 At this point the narrative does not clarify whether Anna actually believes she has lost her husband (thus, Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 73–74) or simply feels like a widow because her husband has abandoned her in his great grief. The logic of the subsequent scenes supports the latter option, since Anna still prays for becoming pregnant, which would not make sense if she believed her husband had passed away. In Vuong's view (above) Anna's widowhood offers the author an opportunity to emphasize Anna's righteousness: she acts the way widows are supposed to act.

39 The name of the slave varies in the manuscripts and in the critical editions. De Strycker, followed by Hock, has Ἰουθίνη. Some manuscripts have Εὐθίνη. For discussion, see de Strycker, *La forme*, 313–315.

40 The narrative does not explicate what "the great day of the Lord" is. The author, who views Judaism from an outsider's perspective, probably had in mind the combination of Yom Kippur and the Feast of Tabernacles, two great festivals that were close chronologically

thetic: there is no need for her to curse Anna because God has already made her barren. This makes Anna sad. Anna's discussion with Juthine is followed by the most notable expressions of Anna's feelings in the Protevangelium, her long song of lamentation (Prot. Jas. 3), which has its counterpart in her thanksgiving after the birth of Mary (Prot. Jas. 6.3).

Anna's relationship with Joachim also includes more interaction and expressions of feelings than Mary's relationship with Joseph. When Joachim returns from his self-imposed exile in the wilderness, Anna rushes out and throws her arms around his neck declaring: "Now I know that the Lord God has blessed me greatly. This widow is no longer a widow, and I, once childless, am now pregnant!" After Mary is born, Anna feels "greatly honored" (ἐμεγαλύνθη, Prot. Jas. 5.2). She also shows herself to be more sensitive towards the child's possible emotions (of which the narrative is silent!) when she suggests that she should not be taken to the temple at the age of two but a year later. This way she would not miss her father and mother so much (Prot. Jas. 7:1). When Mary is left in the temple Anna "marvels," "praises," and "glorifies" God (Prot. Jas. 8:1) together with Joachim.

In contrast to Mary, Anna's character actively contributes to the plot of the narrative. It is Anna who originally promises to give the child as a gift to the Lord (Prot. Jas. 4.1; in 7.1 Joachim agrees with this) while Joachim expresses his gratitude by offering generous sacrifices (Prot. Jas. 4.3–4). It is Anna who swears that the child is to be kept pure by not letting her touch the ground after her first seven steps. It is Anna who turns Mary's bedroom into a sanctuary and calls in the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews to amuse her (Prot. Jas. 6.1). She even dares to question Joachim's exhortation to take Mary to the temple at the age of two, and Joachim agrees with her (Prot. Jas. 7.1).

In part, the traits of Anna's character correspond to what was generally expected of women in antiquity. She is emotional and impulsive (running to Joachim and hugging him). She is also occupied with the domestic arrangements related to Mary's upbringing, while Joachim is responsible for the public sphere of life by socializing with the priests and other members of the Israelite elite.[41] This pattern of behavior is obviously related to the aim of the Prote-

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and which outside observers seem to have taken as one festival. See Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity*, WUNT 163 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 68–69, 250, 254. Juthine's exhortation not to worry would suit the joyous character of the Feast of Tabernacles well. For discussion, see also Luomanen, "Judaism and Anti-Judaism," 324–325.

41 Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches*. The Family, Religion and Culture (Louisville: Westminster John Knox,

vangelium to picture Joachim and Anna as a pious couple, prefigured in the stories of Abraham and Sarah as well as of Hannah and Elkannah. They also fulfill the general cultural expectations by leading reputable family life. Nevertheless, I find it remarkable that all the important decisions about Mary's future are made on Anna's initiative. In particular, it should (also) have been the father's task to decide about the future of his children, and when Anna questions Joachim's initiative to take Mary to the temple at the age of two,[42] she makes herself equal to Joachim in this regard.[43] When events are pushed in motion Joachim does fulfill his responsibilities in the public sphere, but Anna is the character who steers the plot. Therefore, if there is character that provides an example for active women, it is Anna, not Mary.

Juthine

Despite her brief appearance, Juthine's character shows interesting features and contrasts, all the signs of a round character (Prot. Jas. 2.2–3). Juthine has two lines in her conversation with Anna. Before the first line the narrator introduces her briefly as Anna's slave. All other information about Juthine's character is to be inferred from the content of her speech.

On the one hand, Juthine acknowledges her status as a slave by saying that in her position it would not be acceptable for her to use a headband with royal insignia. On the other hand, she dares to reprimand Anna for mourning when the great day of the Lord is approaching. Although Anna first replies in anger, later on she seems to agree with her since she takes off her mourning clothes and puts on her wedding dress. Anna's reply suggests that Juthine is socializing with disreputable persons: a trickster may have given the headband to Juthine. This suggestion presents a double challenge to Juthine's integrity. First, Anna

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1997), 54–56; Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 364–377; Carolyn Osiek and Jennifer Poya, "Constructions of Gender in the Roman Imperial World," in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, ed. Dietmar Neufeld and Richard DeMaris (London: Routledge, 2010), 44–56, esp. 45–48. Joachim is clearly presented as a wealthy man, which is often interpreted as one sign of the author's apologetic interests.

42 For the importance of the age three, see above n. 29.

43 The way decisions about Mary's future are made in the Protevangelium would better suit a Hellenistic than a Roman cultural context where the paterfamilias has more power over his children. See for instance, James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 238–240. Nevertheless, even if we were to assume a Hellenistic cultural context for the Protevangelium, it is still remarkable that Anna takes the initiative throughout the part where Joachim and Anna appear in the narrative.

does not trust Juthine's own account of where she received the headband, from a mistress of a workshop. Second, Anna hints that there is something sinful in the way Juthine has received the headband; one can infer that perhaps it is stolen or Juthine has received it from a disreputable lover. By receiving the headband Anna would become associated with Juthine's sin.

The way Anna addresses her slave is not surprising as such. That slaves were associating with suspicious persons and could well be involved with thefts belonged to stock traits of slave characterization in antiquity.[44] However, Juthine's reply is unexpected. She strikes back right at the sorest point in Anna's character, her childlessness. There is no need for Juthine to try to curse Anna. She could not possibly do that more severely than God, who had already made her womb barren. In the end, Anna is disparaged even by her own slave.

Anna's and Juthine's dialogue is one of the most entertaining parts of the narrative. But why is it there? How does it serve the plot? It is generally acknowledged that Juthine is playing the same part as Peninnah, Elkannah's wife, who had children and who used to provoke Hannah because of her childlessness (1Samuel 1). In 1Samuel, Peninnah drives Hannah to despair and prayer. This also happens in the Protevangelium: Juthine's words make Anna sad and lead to her lamentation in the Protevangelium 3. On the other hand, the discourse also highlights Anna's steadfastness and piety: Although it should be time for the great festival and joy, Anna does not accept empty, outward decorations from a suspicious source. It is God who has shamed her. Therefore, she prays to God and accepts only the relief that comes from the Lord.[45]

Elizabeth

The scene that introduces Elizabeth's character exemplifies the same traits that are also observable in Anna's character: When Elizabeth hears Mary knocking at the door she "tossed aside the scarlet thread, ran to the door, and opened it for her." Her impulsive reaction conforms to what was expected of female characters.[46] The scarlet thread, the spinning of which is also Mary's task, signals that Elizabeth, too, was among the true virgins "from the tribe of David" selected for the weaving of the temple veil (Prot. Jas. 10.1; 12.1). These traits were

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44 Cf. Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 133–134.

45 In this regard, I agree with Vuong (*Gender and Purity*, 74–75), but I do not think that Juthine offers "continued misinterpretations" of Anna's situation. Juthine's character is more complex. She partly functions as a foil (as Vuong suggests) but she also offers correct advice when she reminds Anna about the upcoming joyous festival.

46 Osiek and Poya, "Constructions of Gender," 46.

obviously quite important for the author to communicate because they are in contradiction with the fact that Elizabeth was already married.

Elizabeth also shows traits of a typical female character in the next scene where she appears. When Elizabeth hears that Herod was looking for her son John, she also, like Mary, starts to look for a place to hide him (Prot. Jas. 22.3). She goes up to the hill country where she "groans" (στενάξασα … φωνῇ μεγάλῃ). The narrator's explanation for this groaning is telling: Elizabeth was unable to climb because of fright (διὰ τὴν δειλίαν).[47] However, the mountain splits hiding Elizabeth and John.

The author considered it unnecessary to provide any introductory information about Elizabeth. He must have assumed that the audience knew who Elizabeth was. The author uses Luke's discourse word for word at several points, but he is not at pains to harmonize his own discourse with Luke. The points where his characterization differs from that of Luke seem to be either theologically motivated or based on typical female stock traits.

The Midwives and the Undefiled Daughters of the Hebrews

The first midwife in the narrative is Anna's midwife. Her character is a typical *walk on*, she appears only once in the story and does only what a midwife is expected to do. The narrator does not name her or disclose anything about her personal traits. First-time readers or hearers of the discourse hardly remember her part. Such is not the case with the midwives in the context of Mary's delivery.

After having placed Mary safely in the cave Joseph goes out to look for a "Hebrew midwife." When he meets a woman coming down from the hill country, their exchange of words focuses on ascertaining that they both are Hebrews/Israelites (Prot. Jas. 19.1). The first midwife's testimony links up with Israel: "I have really been privileged, because today my eyes have seen a miracle in that salvation has come to Israel" (Prot. Jas. 19.2). The second midwife, Salome, wants to examine Mary. Although Mary is submissive, Salome receives her punishment when her hand is consumed by flames. When Salome starts praying her Israelite background also becomes clear. She refers to her Israelite ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and reminds the Lord that she has been healing people in his name. The "Lord of all" hears her prayer and instructs her to pick up the child in order to be saved. Salome does as told, saying: "I'll worship him because he's been born to be king of Israel." She is healed.[48]

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47 Hock (*The Infancy Gospels*, 73) translates "because her nerve failed her." For courage (ἀρετή) as the number one male attribute, see Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 55–56.

48 Cf. Catherine Trautmann, "Salomé l'incrédule: Récits d'une conversion," in *Écritures et*

The two midwives function as each other's foils, exemplifying the twofold reception Mary predicted when she was riding Joseph's donkey. Besides being examples of belief and unbelief the most important trait that the midwives share is their Hebrew ancestry. Both are also eventually vindicated.

If the Protevangelium was written in response to Jewish attacks on Mary's character and background, it was naturally important for the author to point out that the midwives who testified to—and tested—Mary's virginal delivery of the child were Hebrews themselves. The "undefiled daughters of the Hebrews" who entertained Mary in her home sanctuary and escorted her to the temple at the age of three serve the same purpose: Mary's purity was secured by the reliable daughters of the Hebrews. Although the scenes where the midwives appear are quite colorful, the characterization of their personalities remains relatively flat, serving mainly the theological goals of the author. Even more so is in the case of the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews. They function as collective walks-ons whose characterization is exhausted in the way they are termed: they are undefiled daughters of the Hebrews and as such they fulfill their background role in the narrative by giving credence to the author's claim about Mary's purity.

Conclusion

Narrative analyses of the Protevangelium of James have paid much attention to Mary and her characterization. Although Mary has been pictured as the protagonist of the narrative, her character has appeared as relatively passive and flat. On the one hand this has been taken as a standard feature of biblical characterization that uses flat characters but creates depth through contrasts and comparisons in the plot. Furthermore, the cases where Mary is active and speaks out are assigned special significance as instances where Mary's character provides a role model for active women who defend their integrity in front of the highest male authorities.

My analysis of Mary's character concurs with the earlier analyses by acknowledging the central role of purity in the narrative and the character's relatively flat and submissive traits. However, when other female characters in the Protevangelium are taken into account it becomes clear that there are

traditions dans la littérature copte, ed. Jaques É. Ménard. Cahiers de la bibliothèque copte 1 (Louvain: Peeters, 1983), 62, 68. As pointed out by Trautmann, Salome also appears as a witness of Jesus' divine origin in the Gospel of Thomas, logion 61.

also more round and deeper female characterizations. Mary's characterization therefore cannot be taken simply as one instance of characterization that is typical of biblical characterization in general.

Especially the characters of Anna and Elizabeth include more emotional expressions and other traits that were considered to be typical of female behavior. Anna, in particular, engages in emotional interaction and dialogue both with her slave Juthine and her husband Joachim. Anna's initiatives and actions are also crucial for the plot development. If there is a role model for active women in the Protevangelium, it is Anna, not Mary. Since Anna is Mary's mother, the contrast in the traits of their characters is all the more striking.

The undefiled daughters of the Hebrews and the Hebrew midwives are also relatively flat characters. In that regard they resemble Mary's character. Their main function in the narrative is to give credence to the author's central claims about Mary's purity and virginity.

Instead of taking the flat and submissive traits of Mary's character as the author's technique to highlight the points where Mary takes a more active role, I suggest that the sterile and passive outlook of Mary is indicative of a development where Mary is being made an object of veneration and simultaneously defended against Jewish accusations. The Protevangelium of James contributes to this process by emphasizing Mary's extraordinary purity. Mary does not engage in ordinary human interaction and dialogue that would cause emotional arousal. Her emotional and cognitive state of mind is referred to almost exclusively at the points where she encounters divine messengers or defends her virginity.

Mary's character is subjugated to the promotion of the male author's theological agenda. In the process, Mary also becomes less feminine—or more masculine, depending on one's point of view. The masculinization of Mary's character brings to mind logion 114 in the Gospel of Thomas where becoming male is a prerequisite for female disciples to be saved. Logion 114 requires Mary Magdalene to become a male, living spirit like Jesus's male disciples, since "every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven." Although the overall ideologies are quite different, it is possible that the same cultural and philosophical convictions that are behind the Gospel of Thomas's views about women's way to salvation are also operative in the Protevangelium.[49]

49 The connection seems likely especially if one adopts Marvin Meyer's interpretation of logion 114 which emphasizes the cultural values attached to masculinity and femininity in antiquity. See Marvin Meyer, "Making Mary Male: The Categories 'Male' and 'Female' in the Gospel of Thomas," *NTS* 31 (1985): 554–570, esp. 561–567. For a balanced assessment

When the high ideals of purity are attached to Mary's character her personality also becomes stripped of other weak female traits. In the Protevangelium of James Mary is not to become fully male—but she is made clearly less female.

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of different ways to interpret logion 114, see Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents*. Nag Hammadi and Manichean Studies 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 43–52. See also Ivan Miroshnikov's essay in this volume.

CHAPTER 7

What Happened to Mary? Women Named Mary in the *Meadow* of John Moschus

Ulla Tervahauta

Introduction

The various Marys of the New Testament lived on in early and medieval Christian traditions. Apocryphal texts portray Mary of Magdala as a teacher of the disciples or investigate the early years of Mary, Mother of God. New Marys also emerge, such as Mary of Egypt, to this day a popular saint in eastern orthodox Christianity. There are other stories that portray Marys and provide entertainment with a moral teaching. In this article, I discuss several Marys who appear in John Moschus's *Meadow*, a collection of monastic stories originating from the late sixth to the early seventh century. These figures show how biblical and other literature was applied and turned into popular forms in the sixth century and onwards by Moschus and others. As outsiders from the male monastic perspective, the portrayal of these women enable us to explore questions of identity, gender, and inclusivity/exclusivity.

I will approach the reception of biblical traditions and views towards women through three stories featuring a woman who is at some point named Mary. There is a Mary who murders her own children: this Christian Medea does not avenge a treacherous husband, but resorts to extreme violence because the man she would marry refuses to have a woman with another man's children. She is punished by divine judgement. Second, a story of a prostitute, in some manuscripts named Mary, repents and becomes a nun. Her story builds on gospel narratives of Jesus's encounters with various women, including the woman who anoints him. Third, there is an unnamed woman anchorite who was later to become one of the most famous Marys of eastern Christianity, Mary of Egypt. She is yet unnamed in Moschus's work, and neither is she the harlot of the later version of her story. All three Marys in the *Meadow* reveal creative use of literary sources and suggest that attitudes towards women are not straightforward to categorize. The way biblical sources are used in the first two Mary stories sheds light on the way the Bible is used to shape them: this suggests thorough knowledge of biblical lore and shows that the Bible was not only a source of exegetical interpretation or spiritual guidance,

but a foundation on which new stories and characters were created.[1] Just as analysis of the use of sources in these stories enables one to explore how biblical and other literary traditions are employed, it reveals attitudes towards women and their roles as part of the society and the Christian community. Monastic authors are sometimes harsh on women who are seen as a source of temptation, but to what extent this is the case with Moschus?

John Moschus and His *Meadow*

Before we turn to the Marys in the *Meadow*, some words about the work and its first context are in order. The brief stories of the *Meadow* were for the most part written in the early 600s, at the height of the monastic culture in Palestine. They are attributed to John Moschus, also known as Eucratas, who began his monastic career at the monastery of Theodosius (Deir Dosi) in the Judean desert, but stayed also in the small laura of Pharan (Ein Fara), the monastery of Chariton, and the laura of Sabbas (Mar Saba). The *Meadow* purports to stem from Moschus's and his disciple Sophronius's travels around the Levant and Egypt.[2] In *Meadow* 67 Moschus suggests that he spent some ten years in the laura of Eliotes in the Sinai.[3] Moschus and Sophronius travelled to Antioch and

1 Cf. Lorenzo Perrone, "Scripture for a Life of Perfection. The Bible in Late Antique Monasticism: The Case of Palestine" in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11–13 October 2006*, ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turcescu (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 393–417.

2 Henry Chadwick, "John Moschus and his Friend Sophronius the Sophist," *JTS* 25 (1974): 41–74; Siméon Vailhé, "Jean Mosch," *Échos d'Orient* 5 (1905): 107–116, esp. 108; Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, *John Moschos' Spiritual Meadow*: *Authority and Autonomy at the End of the Antique World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 1–4; and most recently, Fergus Millar, "John Moschus' Reminiscences of the Christian Near East: Monks, Heretics and Others" in Millar, *Empire, Church and Society in the Late Roman Near East: Greeks, Jews, Syrians and Saracens* (*Collected Studies, 2004–2014*), Late Antique History and Religion 10 (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 285–310. For the monasteries, see Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), xviii (map), 21–23 (Pharan), 23–24 (Chariton), 24–26 (Mar Saba), 78 (Theodosius).

3 Henry Chadwick suggested that this period would have been about 580/581–590/591, others differ from Chadwick by a few years. Chadwick, "Moschus and Sophronius," 57; Vailhé, "Jean Mosch," 108; John Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow* (*Pratum Spirituale*) *by John Moschos* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992), xviii; Llewellyn Ihssen, *John Moschos' Meadow*, 3. Daniel Sahas dates John and Sophronius's travels to 578/79–619 and John's death in agreement with Chadwick to 619. Daniel J. Sahas, "Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem" in *Christian*

Alexandria, where they were when Palestine was conquered by the Persians in 614, and finally went to Rome (or, according to some scholars, "New Rome," i.e., Constantinople), where John died. The year of this is debated, the options given are either 619 or 634, just before the dawn of the Islamic era in Palestine.[4]

It is usually suggested that the *Meadow* was first compiled around 600. It is a collection of short, episodic stories that John dedicated to Sophronius in the hope that he would find virtues, amusement, and benefit in them (*Mead.* Proem.). The stories and anecdotes in the *Meadow* often bear resemblances in style or content to earlier monastic stories and anecdotes, such as Cyril of Scythopolis's (b. c. 525) *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, written around the mid-sixth century.[5] Despite Moschus's claim that his collection is manifold and true, it is not historically accurate and perhaps does not aim at accuracy, but is very much a literary work, and reading it, one notes how details and storylines are linked with earlier literary works. Yet these brief stories appear to provide glimpses into the society and culture of the late sixth and early seventh century Levant.[6] They have been described as "spiritually beneficial tales," anecdotal stories with oral roots that find their place somewhere between apophthegmata and hagiography, and belong to Byzantine monastic literature.[7] They feature people from different strands of society whom Moschus and Sophronius met or claimed to have met during their travels—monastics and lay people, men, women and children, rich merchants, slaves, soldiers, and peasants. The stories are usually set in realistic situations, but miraculous or incredible things tend to occur. It is easy to observe that the *Meadow* defends Chalcedonian Christian truth and lauds conversion of Jews and pagans, as well as denounces heretics and other opponents. This defence of orthodox identity is pronounced. Thus, the glimpses of everyday life in the stories simultaneously reveal their authors' views and attitudes and their understanding of what it is to be a Christian and how the boundaries between Christians and "others", whether heretics, Jews, pagans, or Saracens, should be drawn.[8]

Muslim Relations 1 (600–900): A Biographical History, ed. Juan Pedro Sala Monferrer, Barbara Roggema and David Thomas (Leiden: Brill 2009), 120–122.

4 Wortley, *Spiritual Meadow*, xix–xx; Chadwick, "Moschus and Sophronius," 50–52.

5 John Binns, "Introduction" in Cyril of Scythopolis, *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, trans. R.M. Price (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991), ix–lii, esp. xi, li; Chadwick, "Moschus and Sophronius," 47–48; Wortley, *Spiritual Meadow*, ix–x.

6 Philip Pattenden, "The Text of the Pratum Spirituale," *JTS* 26 (1975): 38–54, esp. 38.

7 Llewellyn Ihssen, *John Moschos' Meadow*, 10–13. John Wortley, *A Répertoire of Byzantine Beneficial Tales*, https://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~wortley/index.html (accessed 10 August 2016).

8 Llewellyn Ihssen, *John Moschos' Meadow*, 13–14.

The *Meadow* continued to change and grow after John's death. The richness and fluidity of the manuscript tradition indicates that the work was popular, but it also makes it challenging to determine when one is reading Moschus's or when someone else's text. John of Damascus (c. 660–c. 750) and Arabic translations even attribute the collection to Sophronius who later became the Patriarch of Jerusalem and was perhaps more famous than Moschus.[9] For the sake of simplicity, in this article I refer to Moschus and other people involved with writing these tales as "Moschus", without claiming that they all necessarily stem from the historical John Moschus. Philip Pattenden, Henry Chadwick and John Wortley provide overviews of the text history.[10] For the moment, there is no satisfactory edition of the work, and in anticipation of a new edition,[11] I use Migne's texts (PG 87/3:2851–3116), a compilation of two seventeenth-century editions (Ducaeus and Cotelier).[12]

Marys in the *Meadow*

Women often make appearances in the *Meadow* as minor characters, but occasionally at the centre of various episodes. They often remain unnamed, but some are named. Compared with over one hundred male names in the collection, less than ten female names are mentioned, Mary being the most common. In addition to Mary, female names include Damiana (*Meadow* 127, 128), Jannia or Ioanna (*Meadow* 128), Cometa (*Meadow* 32), Cosmiana (*Meadow* 48), Nicosa (*Meadow* 32), and Thecla (*Meadow* 20, 180). This scarcity of female names probably has a twofold explanation: it is to do with a monastic author's disinterest in female characters and the custom of not naming women.[13] That Mary is

9 Daniel J. Sahas, "Saracens and Arabs in the *Leimon* of John Moschos," *Byzantiaka* 17 (1997): 123–138, p. 124 n. 3; Chadwick, "Moschus and Sophronius," 49. Patriarch Photius mentions in *Bibliotheca* 198 a book called *Leimonarion* that contains 304 stories.

10 Chadwick, "Moschus and Sophronius," 41–49; Wortley, *Spiritual Meadow*, x–xiii; Philip Pattenden, "Text of the *Pratum Spirituale*," 38–54.

11 John Wortley, "Foreword" in Llewellyn Ihssen, *John Moschos' Meadow*, viii.

12 Chadwick, "Moschus and Sophronius," 41–42. Additional Greek tales have been edited by Theodor Nissen, "Unbekannte Erzählungen aus dem Pratum Spirituale," *BZ* 38 (1938): 351–376; and Elpidio Mioni, "Il Pratum Spirituale di Giovanni Mosco; gli episodi inediti del cod. Marciano Greco 11.21," *OCP* (1951): 61–94. The Latin translation from Venice 1558, accompanying the Greek text in Migne, is from a longer Greek version. Wortley, *Spiritual Meadow*, xi.

13 Cf. Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity, Part I: Palestine 330 BCE–200 CE* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 3.

the most common name in the collection is not surprising. The name was the most popular Jewish female name in Roman Palestine and became a favourite among Christians as well.[14] In addition to the three Marys discussed below, the *Meadow* mentions two more Marys, but very little is revealed about them. *Meadow* 185 tells a fantastic tale that a woman named Mary is said to have told John and Sophronius on Samos about a Christian woman and the conversion of her pagan husband through a miracle. Her name, it seems, simply provides the tale with a provenance.[15] The Mary who is most often mentioned is the Theotokos, the Ever-virgin and Mother of God,[16] but the *Meadow* does not contain stories of the life, deeds, or death of Mary the mother of Jesus. Rather, the Mother of God emerges as a distant figure, particularly in comparison with texts such as the Protevangelium of James and the dormition narratives.[17] The Mother of God is already a venerated figure, and the focus in the *Meadow* is on earthly women of the sixth- and seventh-century Levant.

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14 Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names I*, 56–57, 242–248. Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity, Part II: Palestine 200–650* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 7. In Asia Minor, the name Μαρία begins to appear from the third century and becomes more prominent in the Byzantine era: P.M. Fraser et al., eds., *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names. Vol. 5A: Coastal Asia Minor: Pontos to Ionia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010), 280; P.M. Fraser et al., eds., *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names VB: Coastal Asia Minor, Caria to Cilicia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), 272.

15 It is said that she was loved by God and a friend of the poor, and she was the mother of Paul, a military official. See the discussion in Llewellyn Ihssen, *John Moschos' Meadow*, 50–52.

16 Surprisingly often, she is involved in condemning heresy. Her name is mentioned in *Meadow* 26 (Θεοτόκον τὴν ἁγίαν Παρθένον Μαρίαν); "our lady holy mother of God and ever-virgin Mary" is mentioned in a prayer addressed to Jesus (*Meadow* 36, 106) or herself (*Meadow* 180); in connection with Nestorios, labelled as a heretic and her enemy (*Meadow* 46 and Nissen fragment 1.4, 1.10, 1.32); in the prayer of a woman whom Emperor Zenon wronged who went into the church of our all-holy lady, Mary Mother of God and prayed to her (*Meadow* 175); the mother of God appears in a vision, condemning heresy (*Meadow* 46, 47); she denies Cosmiana's entry into the church of the Holy Sepulchre because she is a heretic (*Meadow* 48); she provides for a charitable monk and the poor he feeds (*Meadow* 61); and protects a mother and her child from a murderous slave (*Meadow* 75). Several times the New Church dedicated to Mary the mother of God is mentioned, and occasionally icons portraying her are mentioned as well: the new monastery of holy Mary mother of God, Jerusalem (*Meadow* 6, 61, 68, 131, 187); icon bearing the likeness of our lady holy mother of God Mary (*Meadow* 45, 180); the church of the Theotokos (*Meadow* 77).

17 See, e.g., Petri Luomanen's article in this volume. For the dormition narratives, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

In Christian literature Mary was a popular figure, with several Marys named in the gospels and elsewhere in the New Testament, such as Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Magdala and Mary of Bethany, and Mary, mother of James and Joseph.[18] The only figure to consistently appear in all four resurrection accounts is Mary of Magdala,[19] which makes her a key character of the Christian narrative along with Mary the mother of Jesus. Indeed Mary traditions continued their growth in the apocryphal literature, with noted ambiguity about the identity of Mary(s) in some texts.[20] Eventually the gospel Marys developed in different directions: Mary of Nazareth became the *Theotokos*, but Mary of Magdala was made the penitent prostitute. I suggest that the popularity of the name in antiquity, the many literary characters thus named, as well as the manifold directions to which Marys developed in early Christian literature explain why several women in the *Meadow* are named Mary. Their portrayals likewise take different directions as will be shown in the following.

The Drowning of Mary

The most dramatic and tragic Mary makes her appearance in *Meadow* 76. The story is told by Abba Palladius, who claims to have heard it from the captain of a ship. This captain narrates how he was sailing a ship that, unlike other ships passing, could not make way in the sea. The crew gets anxious about the situation, and the captain, responsible for the ship, begins to pray to God for help. He then hears an invisible voice saying: "Throw down Mary and you will

18 Mother of Jesus: Mark 6:3; Matt 1:16, 18, 20; 2:11; 13:55, several times in Luke 1–2, and Acts 1:14; Mary of Magdala: Mark 15:40, 47; 16:1; Matt 27:56, 61; 28:1; Luke 8:2; 24:10; John 19:25; and several times in John 20. Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha) appears in Luke 10:39, 42 and John 11 (several times); 12:3. There is also Mary, mother of James and Joseph ("the other Mary", see Mark 15:40, 47; 16:1; Luke 24:10; Matt 27:56, 61; 28:1); Mary of Clopas (John 19:25); Mary, mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); and Mary whom Paul greets in Rom 16:6.

19 Mark 16:1, Matt 28:1, Luke 24:10, John 20:1.

20 Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2001), 28–31; Stephen Shoemaker, "A Case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary" in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition*, ed. F. Stanley Jones (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 5–30; Antti Marjanen, "The Mother of Jesus or the Magdalene? The Identity of Mary in the So-Called Gnostic Christian Texts" in *Which Mary*, 31–41; Ann Graham Brock, "Setting the Record Straight—The Politics of Identification: Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother in Pistis Sophia" in *Which Mary*, 43–52.

sail well."[21] As the captain is wondering at the meaning of this, the voice returns: "I tell you, throw down Mary and you will be saved." When the captain, not knowing who is meant, calls for Mary, a woman presents herself. This Mary claims that there is no sin that she has not committed, and tells her story to the captain:

> O Captain, I am wretched. I had a husband and two children from him, one who was nine years old, the other five years. After this my husband died and I remained a widow. There was a soldier living near me, and I hoped that he would take me as his wife. I sent some people to him, but the soldier replied: "I do not take a woman who has children by another man." When I heard that he does not want to take me because of the children, but also because I loved him, I, the wretch, killed my two children and I revealed it to him, saying, "Look, now I have none." When the soldier heard about the children and what I did, he said, "As the Lord lives and dwells in heaven, I will not take her." Fearing that it will become known and I will be killed, I fled.[22]

The captain, hearing this, does not want to simply throw her into the sea, but decides to deal with her in a less direct way. He suggests first that he himself get into a dinghy, but as he does so, nothing happens: neither the ship nor the dinghy moves. The captain returns on board and now asks Mary in turn to get into the dinghy. As she does that, the dinghy turns round five times and sinks into the depths of the sea. The ship now completes its journey in three and a half days instead of the fifteen days it normally would have taken.

The story shares several key elements with the story of Jonah and the whale in the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint, yet Moschus's story has a female protagonist and a very different ending. Jonah refuses to go to Nineveh and flees God's word (Jonah 1–3), while Mary flees her murderous deed and its consequences. The ship in the Jonah story faces a mighty storm (Jonah 1:4–5), but Mary's ship is stuck, as the divine justice will not allow her flight. Both are asleep and are woken to face the situation their presence has caused (Jonah 1:5–6). The sailors cast lots to find out the cause for the storm, and as the lot falls on Jonah, he is

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21 The name is spelled Μαρία. Variant spellings do not appear as in the gospels and early Christian texts. For those, see Émile de Strycker S.J. and and Hans Quecke, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques: Recherches sur le Papyrus Bodmer 5 avec une édition critique du texte grec et une traduction annotée* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 315–316.

22 My translation.

compelled to confess his flight (1:7–9). Like Jonah, Mary confesses her deeds to the captain. It is Jonah who tells the sailors that he is to be thrown into the sea (Jonah 1:11–12), while it is the divine voice that twice repeats the command to throw down Mary. The sailors of Jonah's ship are reluctant to throw their passenger into the sea, but eventually do so (Jonah 1:13–16). The captain in charge of the ship in which Mary travels deals with her in a subtle way, asking her to step into the dinghy only after trying it himself. Jonah is swallowed and saved by a huge fish (Jonah 1:17, 2:10), but there is no miracle to save Mary.

The story does not provide explicit answers to the question of why Mary the widow is driven to destroy her family. The reasons Mary herself gives are her rejection and her love towards the soldier. But why is she unable to control her emotions: is it humiliation caused by her unrequited love, or something else? The murder brings to mind the Medea story, but there is no attention in Mary's account to conflicting emotions and her inability to control them. The story suggests love as the guiding motive, but also her position as a widow with children: she says that she slew her children because they were the reason he did not want her, and adds, "but also because I loved him." Even if love or passion explain Mary's deeds, they do not emerge as the key issue of the narrative.

Looking for other explanations (along love) for a widow's wish to marry again, one may ask if practical concerns, worry about income or desperation for survival, should be considered. Yet there is no indication of any mundane reasons behind Mary's plans to marry: it is not suggested that Mary contemplated marriage on economic grounds, to avoid destitution or poverty. Moschus often addresses economic issues, but there are no such suggestions in this case. However, the age of her children—five and nine—could be taken to insinuate that her situation was not as desperate as could be, for Mary did not have infants to provide for. Children of five and nine would have survived the most dangerous phases of their childhood and they would be capable of participating in the work of a household.[23] Whether these considerations are correct or not, we

23 In the *Meadow* children are portrayed as valued and their deaths are feared and mourned: see *Meadow* 101, 131, 165, 174. Child mortality rates were considerably high in the ancient world, but a child that had reached the age of five had already survived the most dangerous phases of his or her childhood. Tim Parkin, "The Demography of Infancy and Early Childhood in the Ancient World" in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education*, ed. Judith Evans Grubbs and Tim Parkin with Roslynne Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 40–61. Children played an important role in generating the household income. See, e.g., Cornelia B. Horn and John W. Martens, *"Let the Little Children Come to Me": Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press,

note that economic concerns do not here merit Moschus's attention, although elsewhere he acknowledges how poverty can drive people to extreme actions.[24]

This lack of attention to Mary's motives reveals that they are not the issue of the tale; it is not primarily directed at lay women and their concerns. Moschus does not exhort women to control their emotions or abstain from remarriage even for economic reasons. Many details in the story rather emphasize the male characters, especially the captain. He begins to ask God the reasons behind their slow pace and receives the command to throw down Mary. As the captain remains uncertain (ἠπόρουν), the voice repeats its command. Only at this point does he call Mary, still somewhat doubtful. As Mary appears, he addresses her in a courteous manner, calling her sister (ἀδελφὴ Μαρία) and claiming to be a sinner himself. Even after hearing Mary's confession the captain is unwilling to simply throw her into the sea (οὐδὲ οὕτως ἠθέλησα βαλεῖν εἰς τὸ πέλαγος). One can read this as a wish to test the divine command, but also as a method of luring the possibly dangerous murderess off the ship without alarming her. In any case the following verb (ἐσοφισάμην) suggests that the captain's activities may not simply be due to hesitation and lack of response to the divine voice: perhaps he decided to use cunning rather than force to get Mary off the ship.

The woman who murdered her children and was thrown into the sea shares her name Mary with the most illustrious women in the Christian tradition. Yet we should not be surprised by this. In his interpretations of Hebrew names, Jerome in the late fourth century suggested that the name Mary may derive from *mar-yam* and mean "drop of the sea" (*smyrna maris*) or "bitter sea" (*amarum mare*).[25] It may well be that Moschus, or whoever created the story, knew of this interpretation and accordingly fashioned this story of the bitter fate of Mary who becomes a drop in the sea.

2009), 166–167. There is considerable discussion on the roles and value of children in the ancient world; see, e.g., Mary Harlow, Ray Laurence and Ville Vuolanto, "Past, Present and Future in the Study of Roman Childhood" in *Children, Childhood and Society*, ed. Sally Crawford and Gillian Shepherd (Oxford: Archeopress, 2007), 5–14.

24 See discussion of a Saracen woman's attempted prostitution below.

25 "Most people think that Mary is to be interpreted as 'they illuminate me' or 'illuminator' or 'myrrh of the sea,' but it does not seem at all likely to me. It is better that we say … a 'drop of the sea' or 'bitter sea'." Jerome, *Liber interpr.* (Matt.), 137 trans. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 20.

The Prostitute Named Mary

If the story of the Mary who was drowned may stem from the name's etymology in Hebrew, there is another character, named Mary in some manuscripts, whose name indicates the reception and interpretation of certain gospel stories. This Mary makes her appearance in *Meadow* 31, a story of two elders' encounter with a prostitute (πόρνη), set in Cilicia. The two travelling elders arrive at an inn where they see three youths with a prostitute in their company. The elders sit apart from the group and one of them takes out his gospel book and begins to read aloud. As the girl hears the reading, she moves and sits close to the elders to listen. The other elder tries to chase her away, calling her wretched and suggesting that she should be ashamed of coming closer and sitting near them, but the girl replies in a respectful tone and reminds him that the Lord did not refuse the prostitute who approached him.[26] At this the elder replies that the prostitute in question did not remain prostitute, and she declares that from now on she will not live in sin. She leaves the young men and follows the elders who place her in the Nakkiba monastery close to the Aegean. Moschus claims to have met her there as an old woman, full of insight; it is she who told him the story.

The Greek text in the PG (Migné) does not mention the name of this nun, but the Latin version and some manuscripts add that her name was Mary.[27] The reason for this is to be found in her reply to the elder and her reference to Jesus's encounter with a prostitute. The gospels do not make explicit claims that Jesus met a prostitute, but gospel narratives of Jesus's encounter with various women were read as and elaborated into encounters with sinners or prostitutes in later Christian memories. The most obvious one is the anointing narrative in Luke 7:36–50 that takes place in the house of Simon the Pharisee.[28] This narrative builds on Mark 14:3–9 but with modifications, the most important of which for the purposes of this investigation is the change of the presumably wealthy woman with an alabastron of expensive nard oil into the "sinful woman in the town" (γυνὴ ἥτις ἦν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἁμαρτωλός). This probably means that she was a local prostitute.[29]

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26 Μὴ, Πάτερ, μὴ βδελύξῃ με. Εἰ γὰρ καὶ πεπληρωμένη ὑπάρχω πάσης ἁμαρτίας, ἀλλ' οὖν οὐκ ἀπώσατο τὴν προσελθοῦσαν αὐτῷ πόρνην ὁ Δεσπότης τῶν ἁπάντων ὁ Κύριος καὶ Θεὸς ἡμῶν. PG 87/3:2880.

27 PG 87/3:2879–2880.

28 Other famous encounters of Jesus with women of dubious reputation (but not openly claimed to be prostitutes) are with the Samaritan woman in John 4:4–30 and the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1–11.

29 Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007),

The woman's answer in the *Meadow* suggests a deliberate analogy with the gospel incident, read as an encounter with a prostitute. Luke's narrative of Jesus's anointment and Moschus's narrative of the prostitute in the Cilician inn suggest several points of connection: Jesus is visiting Simon the Pharisee, the monks arrive at an inn. As Jesus, Simon, and the others present have settled for dinner, the woman approaches with an alabastron and anoints Jesus's feet, weeping, wiping his feet with her hair and kissing his feet, no doubt causing embarrassment. The elders in the inn sit down and refresh themselves with the gospel, keeping their distance from the young men and their companion, but the prostitute disturbs their peace by approaching and participating in the reading. In Luke's narrative the Pharisee points out the woman's character, in the *Meadow* the elder attempts to chase her away. Luke's Jesus defends the sinful woman, but in Moschus's narrative she defends herself, not unlike the Syro-Phoenician woman in another narrative (Mark 7:24–30 // Matt 15:21–28). The woman will not be shamed, nor will she quietly go back to the young men, but reminds the elders of the Lord's mercy to the prostitute. In Luke's narrative Jesus turns to Simon to tell him the parable of two debtors with a sharp question on love and forgiveness, with a comparison between Simon's and the woman's behaviour to the benefit of the latter,[30] while the woman herself says nothing and is kindly dismissed and told to go in peace. François Bovon has noted that this is a "rather colorless" ending, and it is disappointing indeed: the prostitute remains an embarrassment and must go.[31] In the same vein, in the monastic tale the prostitute cannot continue as a prostitute, which the elder points out. The woman agrees, changes her way of life and follows the monks who place her in the Nakkiba monastery, and the readers of the *Meadow* are assured that she lived a long life in the monastery where Moschus met her.

Two levels emerge from the story. It claims to be a "true story," based on what the old nun told Moschus. Yet it builds on the memory of Jesus's encounter with a sinful woman, synonymous with a prostitute, adding to the story the

641; François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 293.

30 Raimo Hakola has suggested that the portrayal of the Pharisees in Luke-Acts can be explained by their role as the other against Jesus and his followers. Raimo Hakola, "Pharisees as Others in the New Testament" in *Others and the Construction of Early Christian Identities*, ed. Raimo Hakola, Nina Nikki and Ulla Tervahauta (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2013), 33–73, esp. 53–59.

31 Bovon, *Luke 1*, 291.

woman's perceptive responses. This connection is strengthened by the addition of the name Mary to the female protagonist. The synoptic versions obviously do not name the woman, while John identifies her with the sister of Martha and Lazarus in Bethany (John 11:2 and 12:3). This woman who anointed Jesus and who was made the sinful woman was identified as Mary of Magdala by Gregory the Great, and then by other western Christians.[32] Whoever inserted the name Mary into the tale must have been familiar with this mingling of the sinful woman in Luke's narrative with Mary of Magdala.

François Bovon takes the four anointment stories in the canonical gospels (Mark 14:3–9, Matt 26:6–13, John 12:1–8, Luke 7:36–50) as "written fixations of a single gospel memory." He points to the unsettling character of the woman's behaviour, which served to render the episode unforgettable for the gospel writers.[33] The memorable nature of the episode carved it into the social memory of the first Christians and of later generations, and the story developed further and took many forms, merging the unidentified woman who anointed Jesus with Mary of Magdala and in that way not only changing Mark's rich lady into a sinner, but turning Mary of Magdala, Jesus's follower and witness of resurrection, into a penitent prostitute. The *Meadow* story uses the motif of Jesus's encounter with the sinful woman—as it was remembered and interpreted—to fashion the story of the nun near the Aegean.

In the *Meadow* the woman is said to be a prostitute (πόρνη), while in Luke's story she is more ambiguously "a sinner" (ἁμαρτωλός, Luke 7:37). Although clearly a derogatory label, being a prostitute is not an unpardonable sin in the *Meadow*, contrary to the sin of the murderess Mary discussed above. Stories involving prostitution in the *Meadow* suggest that financial or other difficulties may drive people to prostitution, in which case it can be pardoned. Although *Meadow* 31 does not refer to economic reasons behind Mary the prostitute's way of life, they are not unknown to the *Meadow* as story 136 illustrates. This story is told by Abba John who claims to have heard it from Abba Sisinnios the anchorite. One day a Saracen woman enters Sisinnios's cave when he is praying. She places herself in front of the anchorite and strips herself naked. Rather than being thrown into confusion, Sisinnios promptly finishes his prayers and only afterwards asks her to get up. He addresses her in Hebrew (ἑβραϊστί) and asks her, if she is pagan or Christian—she is Christian—and does she not know

32 Jansen, *Making of the Magdalen*, 32–35; Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 168–169.

33 Bovon, *Luke 1*, 291.

that prostitutes bring themselves under judgement.[34] The woman admits to knowing this, and Sisinnios asks her why, then, does she want to prostitute herself. Her answer is simple: "Because I am hungry." Sisinnios tells her not to prostitute herself but to come to his cave daily; he shares his provisions with her as long as he remains in the place.

The story of the nameless Saracen is interesting for several reasons. Its aim no doubt is to show Sisinnios's charity and inner strength, perhaps recalling the temptations of Antony in Athanasius's *Life of Antony*.[35] It admits that poverty and hunger are the forces driving the woman to prostitution.[36] Similarly to the stories of the drowning of Mary and the prostitute's conversion, it allows her to explain her reasons. The story furthermore provides its readers with an account of encounter on several levels: between anchorite and woman, between persons of different ethnic backgrounds, for Sisinnios is Christian and Greek-speaking,[37] the woman a Saracen who speaks a Semitic language, yet Christian (Χριστιανή) rather than pagan (Ἕλλην). This tale not only opens perspectives on monastic views of women, but also on the relations of Christians with non-Christians at the time when Islam was born. Although out of

34 Is the woman's language Hebrew or another Semitic language, namely, Aramean or Arabic? Perhaps Sisinnios changes to the only Semitic language he knows, but Saracens would probably have spoken Arabic. Sahas's suggestion that the woman was a (converted) Jew is unnecessary. Sahas, "Saracens and Arabs", 135. In *the Life of Hilarion* 25, Jerome takes Saracens in Elusa, Negev, to speak Syrian, but John Matthews follows Irfan Shahîd in assuming they more likely spoke Arabic. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London: Duckworth, 1989), 348; Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), 288–292. Saracens had been converting to Christianity since mid-fourth century; Walter D. Ward, *Mirage of the Saracen: Christians and Nomads in the Sinai Peninsula in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 32.

35 Demons tempt Antony, first in the guise of a woman, then as a black boy. Athanasius, *Vit. Ant.* 5–6.

36 Cf. *Meadow* 186.

37 Sisinnios's background is not elaborated, but there are other tales where he is mentioned. In *Meadow* 9 it is claimed that he had left his office as bishop for the sake of God. *Meadow* 93 tells the story of how Sisinnios died and was accompanied by his disciple in death. *Meadow* 136 indicates that he is Greek-speaking, but knows the local language, since he changes language to address the woman. The name Σισίννιος or Σισίνιος appears in several ancient sources, for example, Athanasius, *Historia Arianorum* 71.4; Sozomen, *Church History* 4.3, 7.12, 14, 8.1, 24; Socrates's *Ecclesiastical History* 5.10, 21, 6.1, 21–23, 7.5, 6, 12, 26–29, 41, Palladius, *Lausiac History* (recension G) 49.1; *Testament of Forty Martyrs* 3.4; Capita VII *Contra Manichaeos* of Zacharias of Mytilene.

the scope of the current article, it is easy to agree with Daniel Sahas that the *Meadow* in all its incompleteness, "is fundamental for the understanding of the background of the Byzantine-Muslim relations."[38]

Saracens are mentioned in numerous Roman and Byzantine works.[39] In the *Meadow*, Saracens and Arabs are generally portrayed in a negative way as nomads, caravan drivers or merchants. They attack monks, are murderous and violent, steal and attempt to entice monks sexually.[40] Moschus's work primarily portrays them as a threat to Christians, but the episode between Sisinnios and the woman gives a different perspective: rather than a sexually dangerous seductress, the woman fails in tempting Sisinnios and is wretched in her poverty. In his study of the relationships between nomads and monastics in the late ancient Sinai, Walter Ward reminds us of a variety of reasons behind descriptions of Saracens that can also be applied to the *Meadow*. In ancient sources, Saracens are portrayed as the often violent other, but these portrayals reveal mainly their authors' views on Saracens.[41]

Anthropological studies suggest complex relationships between sedentary and nomadic populations and emphasize their economic interdependence, and in several cases, poverty emerges as a plausible explanation for the Saracens' marauding mentioned in the sources Ward studied.[42] This means that it is unnecessary here to view the Saracen woman's attempt as naïve and revealing ignorance of monastic ethics as has been suggested.[43] There is no reason to doubt the poverty, or that sexual abstinence was an arduous task and some

38 Sahas, "Saracens and Arabs," 137.

39 Among them Strabo, *Geography* 1.16; Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 9.24; Eusebius *Prep. ev*. 6.10; *Church History* 6.42; *Onomasticon* 60.13, 118.22, 124.10, 166.13. An overview of Saracens in Ammianus's fourth-century view is provided by Matthews who suggests that Saracens are portrayed as brigands and barbarians, different from civilized people also in their sexual customs. Matthews, *Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 344–348. Helpful Saracens are mentioned in Athanasius, *Vit. Ant*. 49–50. Lawrence I. Conrad "The Arabs" in *The Cambridge Ancient History. Volume 14: Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A.D. 425–600*, ed. Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins and Michael Whitby, Cambridge Ancient History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 678–700, esp. 680.

40 Murderous or threatening Saracens appear in *Meadow* 21, 99, 133, and 155. Other than the Saracen woman, the only Saracen not portrayed as a violent threat is the boy in *Meadow* 160 who carries a bread basket and tries to seduce Abba Paul. The basket may indicate that he is not motivated by hunger. Sahas, "Saracens and Arabs," 125–127, 137.

41 Ward, *Mirage of the Saracen*, 24–31.

42 Ward, *Mirage of the Saracen*, 19–21.

43 *Contra* Sahas, "Saracens and Arabs", 135.

monastics occasionally failed or came close to failing it, as is also suggested by other *Meadow* tales.[44] In this sense Sisinnios's story is realistic: poverty is the reason for the Saracen woman's offer of sexual favours, and a monastic could have taken advantage of the situation. Again, the woman and her sexuality are not focal to the story, but rather her humanity in her abject poverty and Sisinnios's exemplary conduct in not exploiting her but sharing his provisions with her.

Saint Mary of Egypt in the Making

Mary of Magdala is not the only woman whose portrayal changes at the hands of later Christian authors and becomes coloured with morally questionable characteristics. *Meadow* 179 tells the story of an unnamed female anchorite, known as Mary in two other early sources; the three accounts show considerable and intriguing changes in her portrayal. The earliest version of this story is found in Cyril of Scythopolis's *Life of Cyriacus* where she is presented as a cantor named Mary. After Cyril, the *Meadow* recounts the story but omits her name and changes her profession to that of a nun, while afterwards Sophronius develops the story further by making her into Mary of Egypt, one of the most notorious and best-loved harlots of Christian lore—Mary of Egypt was a popular saint in eastern and medieval western Christianity; the orthodox church commemorates her on the fifth Sunday of the great lent.[45] The question is, what happened to Cyril's Mary the cantor and what was Moschus's role in it?

Cyril of Scythopolis mentions the tomb of the blessed Mary in *Life of Cyriacus*. According to the narrator, Abba John, a hermit named Mary who lived in the Judean desert was buried inside the tomb. John tells how he and his disciple Parammon met her and heard her story. Mary had been a cantor (ψάλτρια) in the Holy Church of the Resurrection of Christ, but the devil tempted many through her (presumably sexually). Not wanting to be responsible for causing anyone to sin, Mary took water from Siloah and a bag of pulses, and withdrew into the desert where she sustained herself on those pulses for eighteen years.

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44 *Meadow* 39, 204 and 205. A monk heals a woman of breast cancer by a method that borders on suspicious: he places his hand on her breast (*Meadow* 56). In *Meadow* 114, a monk is accused of making a childless woman pregnant.

45 Maria Kouli, "Life of St. Mary of Egypt" in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), 65–68.

John and Parammon were the only people whom Mary claimed to have seen in the desert during all those years; she told her story after a failed attempt to hide from them. John and Parammon leave and tell the story to Cyriacus who praises God for such hidden saints. On their return from Cyriacus, John and Parammon find Mary dead and arrange for her burial by looking after her body and burying her in her cave, which they close with stones. This, according to Cyril, took place somewhere near the laura of Souka.[46]

Meadow 179 gives an altered version of the same story. The story is attributed to a John, or two Johns: John the anchorite whom he claims told him the story, and John the Moabite, who told the story to John the anchorite. There are several differences between the two versions. First, Moschus omits the name Mary. Second, the female anchorite is no longer a cantor, but a nun (μονάστρια) who was very devout and progressed according to God. Yet the Devil envied the pious virgin (παρθένος) and her progress, and set a satanic love towards her in the heart of a young man. She perceived this and the looming destruction of the youth, and withdrew into the desert with a bag of soaked pulses. Her action brought peace from desire to the young man while she gained security through withdrawal. Only so that her great virtue would not remain unknown did some anchorite meet her in the desert of the Jordan. In the narrative he addresses her as amma (ἀμμᾶ), mother, a title for monastic women, and inquires after her reasons for being in the desert. She is compelled to tell her story, and this, according to Moschus, is due to the economy of God (κατ' οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ), the same economy that miraculously makes her bag of soaked pulses last through her seventeen years in the desert. The woman says that no one has seen her, although she has seen many during those years. When the anchorite speaking with her learns all this, he praises God.

The differences between Moschus's and Cyril's versions, particularly the change of Mary the cantor into an unnamed nun, merit our attention. One suspects that a woman's position as cantor, even in a literary setting, was problematic for male authors. Cyril made a woman in a public role a cause of temptation for many, a situation that was only solved through her withdrawal. Moschus would not mention a woman acting as a cantor, and in his version she is made a nun instead. This is certainly one way of explaining the description of the female protagonist's earlier activities. Be that as it may, it was not usual for women to perform music in churches; Eamonn Kelly has suggested that opportunities for women to perform music in public were strictly limited in

46 Souka is another name for the monastery of Chariton. Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries*, xix, 11.

the Byzantine world. Only nuns were exempt from the ban, as they would need to sing the liturgies in convents where they lived, but not outside.[47] However, the possibility that Moschus changed the ψάλτρια into μονάστρια because any woman who was a cantor would also be a nun does not seem likely. One rather suspects that this woman's public role is perceived as unusual, even problematic.

If Mary the cantor was desired by many, the *Meadow* intensifies the love motif by focusing on one young man's burning desire for the nun. The romance is tied to the Devil's envy of the nun and her spiritual progress that together result in her need to withdraw into the desert and seclusion where she sees people but they do not see her. Cyril's concern for Mary's burial is replaced by a focus on the young man's sexual temptation, the nun's action to resolve the issue and release herself and the young man. It seems somewhat unclear what the cause of praise at the end of the *Meadow* version is, compared with the praise in Cyril's version, where Cyriacus praises God for hidden saints. When the *Meadow* elaborates the desire of the young man that brings the nun's good spiritual progress in Jerusalem to its end, does that only intensify the story, or does it advocate seclusion for pious women? The latter interpretation is tempting, but should be balanced by noting that the *Meadow* may not simply emphasize women's subordination. The pious virgin is not just secluded in the desert: she becomes perfect there, a desert mother, even if unknown to most.[48]

The story of this female cantor/nun turned anchorite changed remarkably in the third version we have, *The Life of St. Mary of Egypt*, attributed to Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (634–638), probably the same person as John Moschus's disciple.[49] The cantor/nun who wanted to cause no temptation transformed at Sophronius's hands into Mary from Alexandria who since age of twelve prostituted herself not out of poverty but insatiable lust. Only after having, out of a whim, travelled to Jerusalem and been denied entry into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre by an invisible force, does she repent and withdraw into the desert.[50] Although this story came to be one of the best-loved stories of

47 Eamonn H.R. Kelly, "From 'Fallen Woman' to Theotokos: Music, Women's Voices and Byzantine Narratives of Gender Identity" in *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott*, ed. John Burke et al. (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006), 164–181, esp. 169–170.

48 Llewellyn Ihssen, *John Moschos' Spiritual Meadow*, 28–32, emphasizes the autonomy and the spiritual proficiency of the nun in the story.

49 Chadwick, "Moschus and Sophronius," 49–53; Kouli "Life of St. Mary of Egypt," 66.

50 This motif has similarities with the story in *Meadow* 48 where a Cosmiana is denied entry into the Holy Sepulchre, on account of her heresy.

repentant harlots, the two earliest versions suggest no sexual lust on Mary's part, only virtue and unwillingness to be the source of temptation to anyone.[51]

Conclusions

Not three but four stories, two of Marys and two of unnamed women in the *Meadow* were discussed above: Mary who was destroyed because of her unforgivable sins; the prostitute at some point named Mary who moved over from the young men to the elders and from folly to wisdom gained through hearing the Scriptures; the unnamed Saracen woman who attempted to prostitute herself because of poverty, but was saved when Sisinnios the anchorite showed self-control and decided to share his meals with her; and the nameless anchorite who became perfect in the desert.

These women can be considered outsiders from the male monastic perspective that the *Meadow* represents, and two of its most prominent Marys are indeed outcasts and sinners, one a fugitive child-murderer, the other a prostitute. Yet the portrayal of Marys and other women in the *Meadow* is multifaceted in a number of ways. These women are allowed to speak for themselves. Mary the murderess gets to tell her chilling story, and the prostitute chooses wisdom as she moves closer to the reading elders and defends her right to do so. The portrayal is in her favour: she yearns for knowledge and something beyond her circumstances. The unnamed Saracen who attempts prostitution is asked to explain herself, and a solution is found to her situation. These women are generally addressed in respectful tones. Mary the murderess is addressed as "sister" and the captain will not accept her guilt immediately. The nameless anchorite is addressed as "nun," "virgin," and "mother." Yet this story of the nun is a case that complicates this evaluation. Her name, Mary, mentioned by Cyril, is omitted in the *Meadow*, and her possibly problematic public position as a cantor is changed into that of a nun. These slight modifications do appear suspicious, even if in the *Meadow* Mary of Egypt is still in the making, and even when the desert is the place of monastic perfection.

The characters studied here, as I suggested, enable us to reflect on their portrayal and underlying assumptions concerning relations between men/women, monastics/lay people, Greeks/others, sin/sainthood. Furthermore, the two first stories provide evidence for the creative use of biblical narratives. The Jonah

51 For Mary of Egypt, see, e.g., Efthalia Makris Walsh, "The Ascetic Mother Mary of Egypt," *GOTR* 34 (1999): 59–69, esp. 59.

story is given an alternative ending as Jonah's repentance is replaced by the destruction of the fugitive sinner who is drowned in the depths of the sea. Mary the prostitute resembles Luke's sinful woman approaching Jesus and Mark's and Matthew's Syro-Phoenician mother who answers with no hesitation when challenged. This way of employing motifs and themes of the biblical narrative shows how deeply the Bible is immersed in Byzantine monastic culture. It is not only a source of spiritual or dogmatic inspiration, but equally employed to create entertaining stories in imaginative ways.

PART 3

Women in Ancient Intellectual Discourse

CHAPTER 8

"For Women are Not Worthy of Life": Protology and Misogyny in Gospel of Thomas Saying 114*

Ivan Miroshnikov

In his article on the role of women disciples in the Gospel of Thomas, Professor Antti Marjanen refers to saying 114 as "one of the most studied and debated logia in the entire gospel."[1] Marjanen's article has undoubtedly proven to be a prominent voice in the discussion of this saying. This volume, celebrating Professor Marjanen's contribution to the scholarship of early Christianity, offers an appropriate opportunity to revisit and build on his interpretation of the debated logion. Below is the Coptic text of the saying along with its English translation:

114:1 ⲡⲉϫⲉ ⲥⲓⲙⲱⲛ ⲡⲉⲧⲣⲟⲥ ⲛⲁⲩ ϫⲉ ⲙⲁⲣⲉ ⲙⲁⲣⲓϩⲁⲙ ⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧⲛ̄ ϫⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥϩⲓⲟⲙⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲱϣ ⲁⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲱⲛϩ

114:2 ⲡⲉϫⲉ ⲓ̅ⲥ̅ ϫⲉ ⲉⲓⲥϩⲏⲏⲧⲉ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ϯⲛⲁⲥⲱⲕ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲥ ϫⲉⲕⲁⲁⲥ ⲉⲉⲓⲛⲁⲁⲥ ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ ⲱⲓⲛⲁ ⲉⲥⲛⲁⲱⲱⲛⲉ ϩⲱⲱⲥ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲧⲡ̅ⲛ̅ⲁ̅ ⲉϥⲟⲛϩ ⲉϥⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲧⲛ ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ

114:3 ϫⲉ ϩⲓⲙⲉ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉⲥⲛⲁⲁⲥ ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ ⲥⲛⲁⲃⲱⲕ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̄ⲉⲣⲟ ⲛ̄ⲙ̄ⲡⲏⲩⲉ[2]

114:1 Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life."

114:2 Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you, men.

114:3 For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."[3]

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* I wish to thank Dmitry Bratkin, Ismo Dunderberg, Kenneth W. Lai, and Alexey Somov for commenting on previous versions of this text.

1 Antti Marjanen, "Women Disciples in the *Gospel of Thomas*," in *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas*, ed. Risto Uro, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 95, with bibliography. For studies on this saying published after 1998, see Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, TENTS 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 607.

2 The Coptic text is reproduced from Bentley Layton, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 together with XIII, 2*, Brit. Lib. Or. 4926 (1), and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655*, NHS 20–21 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 1:92.

3 I have modified Thomas O. Lambdin's translation from Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7*, 1:93.

In what follows, I offer a reflection on the Coptic text of the saying, its possible mythological background, and its place in the composition of the Gospel of Thomas.

The Text of Gospel of Thomas 114:2

The Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften translates ⲟⲩⲡⲛ̅ⲁ̅ ⲉⲩⲟⲛϩ ⲉⲩⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̅ⲙⲱⲧⲛ ⲛ̅ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ in Gospel of Thomas 114:2 as "ein lebendiger, euch gleichender, männlicher Geist."[4] As Uwe-Karsten Plisch explains, "Here ⲛ̅ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ 'male' is understood as syntactically equal to the two previous attributive circumstantial clauses ⲉⲩⲟⲛϩ and ⲉⲩⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̅ⲙⲱⲧⲛ. All three parts are attributes of ⲟⲩⲡⲛ̅ⲁ̅ 'spirit.'"[5] Despite Peter Nagel's objections to this translation,[6] it seems to be perfectly grammatical, as illustrated by the following example from the Authoritative Discourse, where an attributive noun is preceded by an attributive circumstantial clause:[7]

ⲛ̅ⲥⲉⲣ̅ⲕⲁⲧⲁⲫⲣⲟⲛⲓ ⲙ̅ⲙⲟⲟⲩ ϩⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲉϥⲭⲟⲥⲉ ⲛ̅ⲁⲧⲧⲉϩⲟϥ[8]

(God wished) that they despise them with *exalted, incomprehensible* knowledge.[9]

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4 Kurt Aland, ed., *Synopsis quattuor evangeliorum: Locis parallelis evangeliorum apocryphorum et patrum adhibitis*, 15th ed., 4th printing (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2005), 545.

5 Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, trans. Gesine Schenke Robinson (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008), 247 n. 4. See also Hans-Gebhard Bethge, "'Werdet vorübergehende': Zur Neubearbeitung des Thomasevangeliums für die Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum," in *Bericht der Hermann Kunst-Stiftung zur Förderung der neutestamentlichen Textforschung für die Jahre 1995 bis 1998* (Münster: Hermann Kunst-Stiftung zur Förderung der neutestamentlichen Textforschung, 1998), 50; Uwe-Karsten Plisch, "Probleme und Lösungen: Bemerkungen zu einer Neuübersetzung des Thomasevangeliums (NHC II, 2)," in *Schrifttum, Sprache und Gedankenwelt*, vol. 2 of *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit: Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster, 20.–26. Juli 1996*, ed. Stephen Emmel et al., SKCO 6:2 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1999), 528.

6 See Peter Nagel, "Die Neuübersetzung des Thomasevangeliums in der *Synopsis quattuor evangeliorum* und in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch* Bd. 1," *ZNW* 95 (2004): 255–256.

7 The linguistic terminology used in this chapter follows Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar, with Chrestomathy and Glossary: Sahidic Dialect*, 3rd ed., PLO NS 20 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011).

8 Auth. Disc., NHC VI 26.16–18; see Douglas M. Parrott, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2–5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4*, NHS 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 268.

9 I have modified Marvin Meyer's translation from Marvin Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 385.

Two more passages attest to the phenomenon, though in these examples the circumstantial clause functions adverbially:

> ⲁⲩⲱ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲉⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲱⲉⲭⲉ ⲁⲣⲁⲩ *ⲉⲩϩⲏⲡ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲛⲉⲩ* ⲁⲣⲁⲩ ⲉⲩⲣ̄ ⲑⲁⲩⲙⲁ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ϩⲛ̄ⲛ ⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩⲥ[10]
>
> And *being hidden and invisible* in his ineffability, he is admired in the mind (trans. Einar Thomassen).[11]
>
> ⲁⲥⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲇⲉ ⲙⲛⲛⲥⲁ ⲡⲙⲟⲩ ⲛⲛⲉⲩⲉⲓⲟⲧⲉ ⲁⲩⲱⲱⲭⲡ ⲙⲁⲩⲁⲁⲩ ⲉⲁⲩⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲡⲟⲩⲡⲗⲓⲟⲥ ⲉⲩϩⲁⲣⲉϩ ⲉⲛⲉⲛⲧⲟⲗⲏ ⲙⲛ ⲛⲇⲓⲕⲁⲓⲱⲙⲁ ⲙⲡⲭⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ *ⲉⲩⲟ ⲛⲥⲧⲙⲏⲧ ⲛⲣⲙⲣⲁⲱ ⲉⲩⲑⲃⲃⲓⲏⲩ ⲛⲁⲅⲁⲑⲟⲥ* ⲉⲩⲙⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲩ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲙⲛ ⲛⲣⲱⲙⲉ[12]
>
> And it came to pass, after the death of his parents, he remained alone and stayed with the blessed Publius, keeping the commandments and the ordinances of the Lord God, *being obedient, gentle, humble, and good*, beloved by God and the people (translation mine).

However, the suggestion of the Berliner Arbeitskreis is still problematic. As Simon Gathercole notes, "there is a certain tautology in a translation along the lines of '… so that I might make her male, so that she also might be a living male spirit …'."[13] It seems reasonable, therefore, to interpret ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ as a direct address and to translate ⲟⲩⲡⲛ̄ⲁ ⲉⲩⲟⲛϩ ⲉⲩⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲱⲧⲛ ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ as "a living spirit resembling you, men." This understanding of ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ receives support from the Sahidic New Testament, where ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ often corresponds to the vocative οἱ ἄνδρες of the Greek text.[14]

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10 Tri. Trac., NHC I 63.21–22; see Louis Painchaud and Einar Thomassen, eds., *Le Traité tripartite* (*NH I, 5*), BCNHT 19 (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1989), 80 and 82.

11 Marvin Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 67.

12 Martyrdom of Leontius of Tripoli 3.5; see Gérard Garitte, "Textes hagiographiques orientaux relatifs à saint Léonce de Tripoli. I. La passion copte sahidique," *Mus* 78 (1965): 321. This example is from Alla I. Elanskaya, *A Coptic Grammar: Sahidic Dialect* [in Russian] (St. Petersburg: Nestor-Historia, 2010), 318 (§1045).

13 Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, 615–616.

14 See Eph 5:25; Col 3:19; 1Pet 3:7. In all these instances, the nominative usurps upon the domain of the vocative; see Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk,

The Text of Gospel of Thomas 114:3

Another suggestion of the Berliner Arbeitskreis concerns the meaning of ⲭⲉ in Gospel of Thomas 114:3. According to Hans-Gebhard Bethge,

> In 114:3 bedarf das einleitende ⲭⲉ einer genaueren Bestimmung. Bisher wurde es ganz überwiegend kausal verstanden, wodurch freilich ganz deutlich sachliche Spannungen zur Aussage Jesu in 114:2 unvermeidlich sind. U.E. ist nun das ⲭⲉ als eine einem ὅτι recitativum entsprechende Konjunktion aufzufassen, die antecedenslos in elliptischer Ausdrucksweise eine erneute direkte Rede einleiten soll. Vorauszusetzen ist dabei ein imaginäres ϯⲭⲱ ⲁⲓ ⲛ̄ⲙⲟⲥ (ⲛⲏⲧⲛ̄) = "Ich aber sage (euch)."[15]

According to Plisch, a similar case of a "mere" ⲭⲉ introducing direct speech is attested in the Gospel of Judas (CT 45.14).[16] However, while the proposal of the Berliner Arbeitskreis is quite ingenious, it is hardly appealing. As Nagel notes, there are various instances of ⲭⲉ used in a causal/explicative sense at the end of a Thomasine saying.[17] What is perhaps even more important is that the saying follows a parallel structure: in Gospel of Thomas 114:1, Simon Peter first pronounces a statement about Mary and then offers justification for this statement by making a claim about women in general. In Gospel of Thomas 114:2, Jesus also makes a claim about Mary and then, in Gospel of Thomas 114:3, justifies this claim by means of a general statement about women. In both cases, the general claim is introduced with ⲭⲉ. The parallelism of the saying is clear: Mary—women / Mary—women (A—B / A—B). Indeed, parallelism is one of the most critically important structural devices in the Gospel of Thomas.[18] To interpret ⲭⲉ in Gospel of Thomas 114:3 as a conjunction introducing direct speech would thus mean to disregard the poetics of both this particular saying and the saying collection as a whole.

A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 81–82 (§147).

15 Bethge, "Zur Neubearbeitung des Thomasevangeliums," 50. See also Plisch, "Probleme und Lösungen," 528; Aland, *Synopsis quattuor evangeliorum*, 546 n. 165.

16 Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas*, 247 n. 9.

17 Nagel, "Neuübersetzung des Thomasevangeliums," 256–257.

18 See, e.g., Ivan Miroshnikov, "The Gospel of Thomas and Plato: A Study of the Impact of Platonism on the 'Fifth Gospel'" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2016), 189–190.

Marjanen on Saying 114

Having discussed the text of saying 114, I turn now to its contents. While men are considered "living spirits," women neither are nor have any part in salvation. The only way, rather, for a woman to gain salvation is to become male. By virtue of becoming male, she will then become a "living spirit," which in turn will grant her salvation.

Marjanen has especially focused on the representation of women disciples in the Gospel of Thomas. With respect to Simon Peter's harsh words in Gospel of Thomas 114:1, Marjanen notes, "Nowhere else in early Christian literature does one find an equally negative view of women."[19] Moreover, while elsewhere the words of the disciples merely reveal their ignorance (sayings 51, 52, 99, 104, etc.), in Gospel of Thomas 114:2–3 Jesus implicitly agrees with Simon Peter's statement.[20] Although the notion of "making female male" has parallels in second-century Valentinian sources,[21] in these texts, both men and women are innately "female" and must both become "male." In saying 114, on the other hand, only women are in need of change.[22]

These observations incline Marjanen toward Stephen J. Patterson's reading of the saying.[23] As Marjanen points out, the Thomasine notion of "making female male" "could have been understood very concretely," and it is thus possible that saying 114 might be a witness to an early Christian practice of female cross-dressing.[24] Marjanen also hypothesizes that saying 114 could have

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19 Marjanen, "Women Disciples," 104.

20 Marjanen, "Women Disciples," 102.

21 Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 21.3 (cf. *Exc.* 79); Heracleon, fr. 5 (= Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 6.111).

22 Marjanen, "Women Disciples," 102–103.

23 Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus: Thomas Christianity, Social Radicalism, and the Quest of the Historical Jesus*, FF: Reference Series (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993), 153–155. Patterson draws upon the work of Elizabeth Castelli; see Elizabeth Castelli, "Virginity and Its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity," *JFSR* 2 (1986): 75–76; Castelli, "'I Will Make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (London: Routledge, 1991), 43–44.

24 Marjanen, "Women Disciples," 99–100. Most of the early examples of Christian women cutting their hair and wearing male dress come from the apocryphal acts: Acts Paul 3:25; 4:15; Acts Thom. 114 (Greek version); Acts Phil. 4:6; 8:4; cf. Acts Andr. 19. The version of Acts Phil. 8 attested in the manuscript Atheniensis 346 (mentioned in Marjanen, "Women Disciples," 100) has since been published: see François Bovon, Bertrand Bouvier, and Frédéric Amsler, eds., *Acta Philippi: Textus*, CCSA 11 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 237–275 (text and French translation); François Bovon and Christopher R. Matthews, *The Acts*

been a later addition to the text of the Gospel of Thomas, "added to the collection in a situation in which the role of women in the religious life of the community had for some reason become a matter of debate."[25]

Whatever the case, it is clear that the author of saying 114 is confident that women can attain salvation, even though the words he puts into Jesus's mouth are pronouncedly misogynistic.[26] In what follows, I build on Marjanen's interpretation of saying 114 by discussing a possible mythological background to the saying's misogyny.

Living Spirits

In Gospel of Thomas 114:1, Simon Peter says that women do not deserve to live. What underlies this statement is the very ubiquity of misogyny in the ancient world. Indeed, examples are plentiful: Plato, for instance, famously wrote that all wicked men are reborn as women,[27] while Aristotle insists that we "must look upon the female character as being a sort of natural deficiency (δεῖ ὑπολαμβάνειν ὥσπερ ἀναπηρίαν εἶναι τὴν θηλύτητα φυσικήν)."[28] Similar views were maintained by various writers throughout the period of antiquity; for instance, Aristotle's thoughts are echoed in Philo: "It is said by the natural philosophers that the female is nothing else than an imperfect male (λέγεται ὑπὸ φυσικῶν ἀνδρῶν οὐδὲν ἕτερον εἶναι θῆλυ ἢ ἀτελὲς ἄρρεν)."[29]

However, Jesus's response to Simon Peter in Gospel of Thomas 114:2 seems to imply that the reasons for the author's misogyny are more specific: women do not deserve to live, because they are not "living spirits." Where, then, does the notion that men are "living spirits" come from?

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of Philip: A New Translation (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 74–80 (English translation). Other early sources that seem to attest to this practice are Herm. Vis. 3.8.4 (16.4) and Lucian, *Fug.* 27. The latter example, noted in Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 154, is especially revealing, since it seems to attest to female cross-dressers among non-Christians.

25 Marjanen, "Women Disciples," 103.

26 Marjanen, "Women Disciples," 100.

27 *Tim.* 42a–d; 90e.

28 *Gen. an.* 775a15–16 (trans. A. Platt). Cf. 737a27–28: "For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male (τὸ γὰρ θῆλυ ὥσπερ ἄρρεν ἐστὶ πεπηρωμένον)" (trans. A. Platt). The translations are from Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Bollingen Series 71:2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1:1199 and 1:1144.

29 *QE* 1.7; cf. *QG* 1.25.

I am inclined to agree with scholars who understand this expression as an allusion to the second account of creation according to Genesis.[30]

Two details of this account are relevant for the present discussion. First, God breathes into the first human πνοὴ ζωῆς, "a breath of life," thus making the human ψυχὴ ζῶσα, "a living soul" (Gen 2:7).[31] Second, while according to the first account of creation, the created human (ὁ ἄνθρωπος) was both male and female (Gen 1:27), the second account claims that God first (Gen 2:7) created the human (ὁ ἄνθρωπος), called "Adam" (ὁ Ἀδάμ), and only later (Gen 2:22) fashioned a woman (γυνή) from the rib that he had taken from Adam. Although the second account of creation does not explicitly state that the first human was male, it is clear that it was interpreted this way by at least some of its ancient readers.[32]

I suggest that the Thomasine notion of a "living spirit" was inspired by the creation narrative of Genesis 2:7 and that Gospel of Thomas 114:2 says that only men are "living spirits" because the first human of Genesis 2:7 was male. An objection might be leveled against this point, since the word "spirit" (πνεῦμα) does not occur in Genesis 2:7. However, the biblical text does employ a cognate to πνεῦμα, viz. πνοή, and at least some ancient readers of Genesis 2:7 certainly thought that the text spoke about πνεῦμα. Our best evidence on this point comes from Philo, who writes that what God breathed into the human was nothing other than a "divine spirit," πνεῦμα θεῖον.[33] Philo also makes the case that, in Genesis 2:7, Moses calls the human soul πνεῦμα.[34] Occasionally, when quoting Genesis 2:7, Philo even substitutes πνεῦμα ζωῆς for πνοὴ ζωῆς.[35] Thus, even though a modern reader would perhaps prefer the Thomasine Jesus to be faithful to the text of Genesis and speak of "a living soul" rather than of "a living spirit," it is likely that the author of the saying was simply not concerned with philological precision.

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30 See Pheme Perkins, "The Gospel of Thomas," in *A Feminist Commentary*, vol. 2 of *Searching the Scriptures*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (London: SCM Press, 1995), 558–560; April D. DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas*, VCSup 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 19–20; Hans Kvalbein, "The Kingdom of the Father in the Gospel of Thomas," in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune*, ed. John Fotopoulos, NovTSup 122 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 214.

31 Here and elsewhere, the text of Genesis is from the Septuagint. It seems very unlikely that saying 114 would presuppose the Hebrew version rather than the Greek one.

32 See, for instance, 1 Tim 2:13.

33 *Opif.* 135.

34 *Det.* 84.

35 *Leg.* 3.161; *Det.* 80.

Thus, Simon Peter's claim that women do not deserve to live is likely based on a particular reading of the second account of creation. Adam, the first man, was the one whom God made a living being (Gen 2:7). To live, i.e. to attain salvation, means to return to the prelapsarian condition of the first living being; since the first living being was male, maleness is a prerequisite of salvation. Femaleness, on the other hand, has nothing to do with life.

Mary on Trial?

If indeed the symbolic world of saying 114 revolves around a specific reading of the Genesis narrative, it is plausible that the author of the saying was also reading the whole of Genesis either critically or selectively, i.e. endorsing some verses and disagreeing with/ignoring others.[36] Indeed, while the scriptural passage that deals with the creation of woman (Gen 2:22) does not say anything about life, in Genesis 3:20, we read that Adam "called the name of his wife Life (ζωή),[37] because she is the mother of all the living" (NETS). Why would women not deserve to live, then, if "Life" was the name of the first woman?

At the risk of going beyond the evidence provided by the text, I would like to make the following tentative suggestion. In the biblical text, Genesis 3:20 is immediately preceded by the story of the Fall. It seems likely that the author of saying 114 held Eve responsible for this catastrophic event and thus considered Genesis 3:20 to be in direct contradiction with the preceding narrative. The notion that the Fall resulted from the malicious actions of the first woman is attested in 1 Timothy 2:14 ("and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor," NRSV) and other ancient sources.[38] It is thus possible that, from the viewpoint of saying 114, women are unworthy of life due to the troubles the first woman inflicted upon the humankind. By no means would the author of the saying deem the first woman worthy of the name "Life."

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36 I have borrowed the term "selective reading" from Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, STAC 97 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 267.

37 The Greek text attempts to preserve the word play of the original Hebrew text, wherein the name חַוָּה, "Eve," is etymologically linked to חָיָי, "living."

38 See, for instance, Life of Adam and Eve 9:2; 10:2; 11:1–2; 14:2; 32:2. My references follow the versification of the Greek version. For parallels in the Latin, Armenian, Georgian, and Slavonic versions, see Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, eds., *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve*, 2nd ed., EJL 17 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).

Interestingly, the assumption that in saying 114 women are pronounced unworthy of life because all human misfortunes were caused by Eve's transgression may, in turn, shed some light on the very expression ⲙ̄ⲡⲱⲛϧ ⲁⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲥⲁϣ in Gospel of Thomas 114:1. The only parallel to the Thomasine expression "not worthy of life" seems to be Acts 13:46, where Paul and Barnabas say to the Jews, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life (οὐκ ἀξίους κρίνετε ἑαυτοὺς τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς), we are now turning to the Gentiles" (NRSV). This expression is clearly a reformulation of another expression, "to be worthy of death (ἄξιος θανάτου)," which often occurs in legal contexts.[39] In Romans 1:32—"They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die" (NRSV)—Paul appears to employ the expression ἄξιος θανάτου in a metaphorical sense: as Joseph A. Fitzmyer notes, "death" here seems to refer not to physical death, but to exclusion from the kingdom of God (cf. Rom 6:23).[40] Similarly, both Acts 13:46 and Gospel of Thomas 114:1 repurpose what was initially a legal expression to refer to those who do not deserve salvation, i.e. Jews and women. However, in Acts 13:46, the author still bears in mind the legal nature of this expression: the Jews "judge" themselves unworthy of eternal life. In Gospel of Thomas 114:1, on the other hand, the connection between this expression and the realm of law is no longer evident.

Yet it is not improbable that the author of saying 114 used the expression "not worthy of life" intentionally, in order to indicate that the dialogue between Simon Peter and Jesus takes place during a trial of sorts, wherein Simon Peter indicts Mary, and Jesus pronounces her sentence. At this "trial," women were "found guilty" of the Fall and "sentenced" to (spiritual) death; hence, Simon Peter's request to expel Mary from the collegium of Jesus's disciples. Jesus, however, is offering "release on probation": should Mary—or any other woman—free herself from her own femaleness, she will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Saying 114 and the Composition of the Gospel of Thomas

As noted above, Marjanen suggested that saying 114 could have been a later addition to the text of the Gospel of Thomas. Building upon the work of Stevan

39 See, for instance, Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.1.1, where the prosecutors persuaded the Athenians that Socrates deserves to die.

40 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 289–290.

L. Davies,[41] Marjanen offered several arguments in favor of the secondary character of the saying: the tension between the notion of "making female male" and the annulment of gender promoted in saying 22,[42] the fact that saying 113 seems to form a thematic unit with saying 3 and "could thus be a natural ending for the collection," and the multiple parallels to the motif of "making female male" in second- and third-century Christian writings.[43]

These arguments merit serious scholarly consideration, though, admittedly, with regard to the theory of saying 114 as a later addition and the compositional history of the Gospel of Thomas in general, there seems to be no methodologically sound procedure that would lead us to definitive conclusions. Whatever the case, it is worth noting that the person who decided to place saying 114 at the end of the collection was well-acquainted with the rest of the text. As I have already noted, the parallel structure of saying 114 is in tune with the poetics of the Gospel of Thomas. Moreover, although some of the features of the saying are admittedly unique,[44] its language has remarkable parallels in other sayings. Most importantly, while the expression "not worthy of life" occurs only in saying 114, the language of "being worthy" (expressed with either Coptic ⲙ̄ⲡⲱϣ or Greco-Coptic ⲁⲝⲓⲟⲥ) appears also in sayings 55, 56, 80, 85, 111, and possibly also 62.[45] Of those, saying 85 is of special interest, as it deals with the unworthiness of the protoplast:[46]

85:1 ⲡⲉϫⲉ ⲓⲥ ϫⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁ ⲁⲇⲁⲙ ⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲛⲟϭ ⲛ̄ⲇⲩⲛⲁⲙⲓⲥ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲛⲟϭ
ⲙ̄ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲣⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲟ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉϥⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲉ̣[ϥⲙ̄]ⲡ̣ⲱϣ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲧⲛ̄

85:2 ⲛⲉⲩⲁⲝⲓⲟⲥ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲡⲉ [ⲛⲉϥⲛⲁϫⲓ] ϯⲡ[ⲉ] ⲁⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲟⲩ[47]

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41 Stevan L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), 152–153.

42 On the idea of becoming asexual in saying 22 as a subcase of the Thomasine motif of becoming one, a motif largely shaped by Platonist thought, see Miroshnikov, "Thomas and Plato," 86–113.

43 Marjanen, "Women Disciples," 103; see also n. 24, above.

44 As Marjanen notes, for instance, no other Thomasine saying begins with a disciple addressing other disciples; see Marjanen, "Women Disciples," 103.

45 In saying 62, the word ⲙ̄ⲡⲱϣ likely occurs in the lacuna, as there appears to be no other meaningful way to restore the Coptic text. Moreover, the restoration is supported by a possible allusion to saying 62 in Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 14.14; see Matteo Grosso, "A New Link between Origen and the *Gospel of Thomas*: *Commentary on Matthew* 14,14," *VC* 65 (2011): 249–256.

46 This saying presents us with a number of challenges, most importantly the interpretation of the "great power" and "great wealth," but it is not my intent to address them here.

47 Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7*, 1:70.

85:1 Jesus said, "Adam came into being from a great power and a great wealth, but he did not become worthy of you.
85:2 For had he been worthy, [he would] not [have experienced] death".[48]

The notion of experiencing (literally, "tasting") death in Gospel of Thomas 85:2 immediately reminds the reader of saying 1, according to which, "whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death" (trans. Thomas O. Lambdin). Thus, the true disciples of Jesus are worthier than Adam, because, unlike him, they will never die. For the purposes of the present discussion, it is worth noting that saying 85 contrasts Adam's divine origins with his human death, the latter of which proved that Adam was unworthy. It seems very likely that the saying presupposes the notion of Adam's transgression, which resulted in the advent of death (cf. Rom 5:12).[49]

Thus, saying 85 appears to stand in contrast to saying 114. According to saying 85, Adam's transgression made him mortal and therefore unworthy; according to saying 114, on the other hand, Eve was the transgressor and therefore unworthy of life. This contrast provides us with yet another example of the tension between saying 114 and the rest of the collection, and thus can be compounded with Marjanen's evidence for the saying's secondary nature, yet it can hardly serve as the conclusive argument. On the other hand, the tension between sayings 85 and 114 may provide us with an opportunity to gain better insight into the reasoning behind the position of saying 114 at the end of the collection. Perhaps the purpose of saying 114 was in anticipation of certain misreadings of the Gospel of Thomas. The reader of the collection might come to the conclusion that both genders are equally abominable (saying 22), or even that our male protoplast was solely responsible for our expulsion from the paradise (saying 85). The author of saying 114 might have exposed the deficiency of femininity to avoid precisely such interpretations; hence, the unparalleled misogyny of the saying.

Conclusion

Professor Antti Marjanen's article "Women Disciples in the Gospel of Thomas" contains valuable insights into the meaning and background of saying 114. The purpose of this chapter was to revisit and build upon Marjanen's observations.

48 Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7*, 1:71.

49 Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas*, 195.

First, I have argued that ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ in saying 114:2 should be understood as a direct address. Thus, according to this saying, men, unlike women, are "living spirits." Second, I have suggested that this notion draws upon Genesis 2:7, where God makes Adam, our *male* protoplast, a "living soul." Thus, women are not worthy of life, because, in the beginning, life was given to *men*. Third, it is also possible that, from the perspective of the author of saying 114, the creation of woman had tragic consequences for the history of salvation. Thus, yet another reason for women not to deserve to live is the maliciousness of the first woman and the catastrophic consequences of her actions. Fortunately, according to Jesus, a woman can free herself from her own femaleness, attain the condition of the primordial man (i.e. transform into a "living spirit"), and, by doing so, attain salvation. Finally, I have argued that saying 114 could have been designed to prevent the reader from misinterpreting the rest of the collection, which, according to the author of the saying, would have failed to emphasize the worthlessness of womanhood.

CHAPTER 9

"Women" and "Heresy" in Patristic Discourses and Modern Studies*

Silke Petersen

The attitude a religion shows toward "the woman question" is a popular indicator of the value granted to that religion. This is shown, for example, in debates over Islam that have permeated German media in various forms in the last several years. Those aspects of Islam that are oppressive to women are attacked; the headscarf is seen as a symbol of oppression; honor murders are described as typical of the Islamic social context; and, quite generally, the unwillingness of Islamic "parallel societies" to integrate themselves into Western societies is lamented.

The argumentative structure behind such statements can be described in the following way: First, the premise of the argumentation is the conviction that women should have equal rights. Second, this premise is followed by the observation that this is apparently not the case in Islamic contexts; whereupon, third, the consequence is reached that Islam is to be rejected as oppressive to women; it needs to be fought against, or at least civilized.

Instead of analyzing this debate in any detail, what interests me is this argumentative structure and how it makes a connection between "the woman question" and the value of a religion. What strikes me as a New Testament scholar in this structure is its analogy to the anti-Jewish stereotype of "oppressed Jewish women", to whom Jesus the Liberator brought freedom from patriarchal Judaism. In this way of thinking, the standard is also the equal status of women and the supposed non-compliance with this (modern) standard results in a devaluation of the corresponding religion, in this case Judaism. A cliché about Jewish women is construed to serve an apologetic goal; the worse it was for Jewish women and the darker the picture, the more brilliantly shines the light of the saving Jesus, while at the same time the Jewish identity of this Jesus is

* A longer German version of this article is published as "'Jede Häresie ist eine wertlose Frau' (Epiphanius von Salamis): Zur Konstruktion der Geschlechterdifferenz im Religionsstreit" in *Doing Gender—Doing Religion: Fallstudien zur Intersektionalität im Religionsstreit*, ed. Ute E. Eisen, Christine Gerber, and Angela Standhartinger, WUNT 302 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 99–126.

ignored.[1] The primary intent of such an anti-Jewish way of thought is to upgrade one's own religion at the expense of another.[2] At the same time, this means making the shortcomings in one's own religious tradition invisible by making them visible in the other religion.

A similar argument can also be used against Christianity. For example, Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father* emphasizes the patriarchal character of Christianity.[3] Daly's premise is again the demand for equal rights, or at least a renunciation of mechanisms that are fundamentally hostile to women. The goal in her case is not only a change, but rather abandoning the destructive Christian order altogether.

In Table 9.1 (on the following page) these lines of argumentation are listed in a simplified form.

This structure does not only exist in connection with two different religious traditions, but "heresy" can also take the place of the other religion. In other words, that what is denounced is the deviant within one's "own" religion and not in the "alien" one. The boundaries between what belongs to one's own and what falls outside are often difficult to perceive.[4]

I will now turn to the question of "women and heresy" in the first Christian centuries. I will pay special attention to the structures of argumentation, not historical facts. The latter become all the more suspect, the more closely the texts are examined. It is important to note that when in the following I refer to "heresy," "orthodoxy," "Gnosticism,"[5] or "women," I use these concepts in the

1 An example of this can be found, e.g., in the popular book of Franz Alt, *Jesus—der erste neue Mann* (München: Piper 1989) where Alt paints a picture of the "patriarchal Judaism" of Jesus's time against which Jesus is a bright, women-liberating figure, for instance, in his prohibition of divorce. It may be asked, however, whether prohibiting divorce meant liberation for women and whether Alt's assumptions concerning the Jewish legal system are correct. Cf. Bernadette J. Brooten, "Konnten Frauen im alten Judentum die Scheidung betreiben?" *EvT* 42 (1982): 65–80; Bernadette Brooten, "Zur Debatte über das Scheidungsrecht der jüdischen Frau," *EvT* 43 (1983): 466–478; David Instone Brewer, "Jewish Women Divorcing Their Husbands in Early Judaism," *HTR* 92 (1999): 349–357; Hannah Cotton, "Recht und Wirtschaft: Zur Stellung der jüdischen Frau nach den Papyri aus der judäischen Wüste," *ZNT* 6 (2000): 23–30.

2 For a critique of this stereotype, see also Judith M. Lieu, "The 'Attraction of Women' in/to Early Judaism and Christianity: Gender and the Politics of Conversion," *JSNT* 72 (1998): 5–22.

3 Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973, second edition 1993).

4 Scholars have discussed whether "Gnosticism" was a Christian heresy or an autonomous religion, and Islam was sometimes considered a Christian heresy, similar to Arianism.

5 For the problems connected with the category "Gnosticism," see Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking*

TABLE 9.1 *Three-step argumentations in the modern period*

	German popular opinion	**Research stereotype in NT studies**	**Mary Daly**
Premise	Women should have equal rights	Women should not be oppressed	Hostility to women is to be rejected
Observation	Islam oppresses women	(ancient) Judaism oppresses women	Christianity is irrecoverably patriarchal
Goal / Consequences	Islam is to be rejected	Christianity is better than Judaism	Abandoning Christianity

sense they are used in the ancient texts which I analyze. Thus, when I speak of "heresy," I mean what the respective texts understand as "heresy," acknowledging that this is not an inherent quality but rather designed for the purposes of argumentation. The situation is the same for the concept of "women"; here, too, a satisfactory definition is difficult to give, as is well known.[6] Thus, in the following, "women" are understood in a provisional sense to be those human beings who are called "women" in the sources.

The Prominence of Women in "Heretical" Groups?

Many modern depictions of "heresy" assume a particular affinity between "women" and "heresy"; such a claim can almost be said to belong to present-day general knowledge. For example, in modern depictions of "Gnosticism," it is frequently claimed that women played a particularly significant role in this

"Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

6 Groundbreaking also for the German discussion has been Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1991). For gender constructions in antiquity, see also Page DuBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representation of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, *Contextualising Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking Beyond Thecla* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), esp. 44–62.

group. While patristic sources use this claim in a polemical sense in order to downgrade "heresy" for the important role it gives to women, in many present-day discussions the same claim means an upgrading of "heresy" because of its (supposed) woman-friendliness. The exclusion of women from ecclesiastical offices is then explained as a reaction to the strong feminine presence in heretical groups.

The first to my knowledge to present this idea was Adolf von Harnack who opens his discussion about the spread of Christianity among women with the following observation: "No one who reads the New Testament attentively, as well as those writings which immediately succeed it, can fail to notice that … women played an important role in the propaganda of Christianity and throughout the Christian communities."[7] After numerous examples that prove this, Harnack comes to the topic of "Gnosticism": "Among the gnostics especially women played a great role, for the gnostics looked not to sex but to the Spirit."[8] According to Harnack, this prominence enjoyed by the women had negative consequences: "It was by her very opposition offered to Gnosticism and Montanism that the church was led to interdict women from any activity within the church—apart, of course, from such services as they rendered to those of their own sex."[9]

Harnack's ideas are repeated, for example, by Kurt Rudolph[10] and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, who states: "Women often enjoyed more respect in Gnostic circles than in the mainstream church which was gradually coming into being. The mainstream church, adapted to the patriarchal social structures of society,

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7 Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, Vol. 2, trans. James Moffatt. Second Edition. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1908), 64. An expanded German edition was published in 1924, see *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 4th ed. (Wiesbaden: VMA-Verlag—Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924). It is noteworthy that Harnack treats women in a separate chapter, following other chapters on more general, i.e. "male," topics.

8 Harnack, *Mission*, 75, followed by several examples.

9 Harnack, *Mission*, 76. Similar statements can be found, e.g., in Leopold Zscharnack, *Der Dienst der Frau in den ersten Jahrhunderten der christlichen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902), 156–157; Wolfgang A. Bienert, "Das Apostelbild in der altchristlichen Überlieferung," in *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen 2: Apostolisches, Apokalypsen und Verwandtes*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, 6th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 6–28; Hans-Josef Klauck, *Die religiöse Umwelt des Urchristentums 2: Herrscher- und Kaiserkult, Philosophie, Gnosis* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996), 188.

10 Kurt Rudolph, "Zur Soziologie, sozialen 'Verortung' und Rolle der Gnosis in der Spätantike", in *Gnosis und spätantike Religionsgeschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, NHMS 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 83 and 85.

did not offer women the same opportunities as Gnostic groups."[11] Elaine Pagels points to the widespread metaphorical feminine language, as well as to the feminine images of God in gnostic texts.[12] She believes that the image of God has an effect upon social structures and that for this reason women were especially attracted to gnostic movements.[13] In my opinion, such inference from symbolic and theological statements to social structures of groups that hand down such statements is rather doubtful. It is mainly based on patristic comments about women's prominent role in heretical movements.

Thus, many modern views in search of women in early Christian groups seem to say the following: There is a frequent connection between "women" and "heresy" in patristic texts. Their authors, of course, meant this to be derogatory because they considered women to be inferior, but "we" are glad about all women we can find. For this reason, the valuation is now reversed: The female presence in "heretical" movements serves no longer the purpose of depreciation of "heresy," but rather its upgrading. What used to be a reason for a disqualification of a religious movement, has now become a mark of quality. Table 9.2 shows the argument in a simplified form.

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11 Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women around Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads, 1982), 5. The latest German edition is *Ein eigener Mensch werden: Frauen um Jesus* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009). More nuanced statements about women in "heretical" movements can be found in Susanna Elm, *"Virgins of God": The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 16, 59. See also Anne Jensen, *God's Self-confident Daughters: Early Christianity and the Liberation of Women*, trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox; German original *Gottes selbstbewußte Töchter: Frauenemanzipation im frühen Christentum?* Freiburg, Basel and Vienna: Herder, 1992). In her view (p. 191), egalitarian praxis survived in some gnostic communities.

12 See Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), esp. Chapter 3. "God the Father/God the Mother," 48–69.

13 See the above-mentioned chapter in Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*. Cf. Susanne Heine, *Frauen der frühen Christenheit: Zur historischen Kritik einer feministischen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 154–160. Heine criticizes Pagels in many other respects but supports her interpretation of the role of women in "gnostic" circles. Similarly, Madeleine Scopello, "Jewish and Greek Heroines in the Nag Hammadi Library," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 90; Raoul Mortley, *Womanhood: The Feminine in Ancient Hellenism, Gnosticism, Christianity, and Islam* (Sidney: Delacroix, 1981), 62–63. Ross Shepard Kraemer is more skeptical; see *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religion among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 20–21 and *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

TABLE 9.2 *Three-step argumentations in regard to ancient heresies*

	Modern research in search of women	**Patristic depiction in modern views**
Premise	Women ought to be present / important	Women are inferior
Observation	Connection of women and "heresy" occurs frequently in patristic sources (is historicized)	Connection of women and "heresy" occurs frequently
Goal / Consequences	Upgrading of "heresy"	Patristic authors reject "heresy" for this reason

Next, I will take a look at those patristic texts that serve as key witnesses for the argumentation in the right column of the table. In the scholarly literature, the same passages from the anti-heretical texts of Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Epiphanius are repeatedly quoted. My aim is to show that some of them are overused in support of the prominence of women in "heretical" groups.

Tertullian: How Wanton are the Women of the Heretics

One of the frequently cited textual passages comes from Tertullian's *De praescriptione haereticorum* where Tertullian describes the lifestyle of "heretics" in the following way:

(1) Non omittam ipsius etiam conversationis haereticae descriptionem quam futilis, quam terrena, quam humana sit, sine gravitate, sine auctoritate, sine disciplina ut fidei suae congruens. (2) Inprimis quis catechumenus, quis fidelis incertum est, pariter adeunt, pariter audiunt, pariter orant …	(1) I must not omit an account of the conduct also of the heretics—how frivolous it is, how worldly, how merely human, without seriousness, without authority, without discipline, as suits their creed. (2) To begin with, it is doubtful who is a catechumen, and who a believer; they have all access alike, they hear alike, they pray alike …

(4) Nihil enim interest illis, licet diversa tractantibus, dum ad unius veritatis expugnationem conspirent. Omnes tument, omnes scientiam pollicentur. Ante sunt perfecti catechumeni quam edocti.
(5) Ipsae mulieres haereticae, quam procaces! quae audeant docere, contendere, exorcismos agere, curationes repromittere, fortasse an et tingere. (6) Ordinationes eorum temerariae, leves, inconstantes. Nunc neophytos conlocant, nunc saeculo obstrictos, nunc apostatas nostros ut gloria eos obligent quia veritate non possunt.
(7) Nusquam facilius proficitur quam in castris rebellium, ubi ipsum esse illic promereri est.
(8) Itaque alius hodie episcopus, cras alius; hodie diaconus qui cras lector; hodie presbyter qui cras laicus. Nam et laicis sacerdotalia munera injungunt.

(4) [F]or it matters not to them, however different be their treatment of subjects, provided only they can conspire together to storm the citadel of the one only Truth. All are puffed up, all offer you knowledge. Their catechumens are perfect before they are full-taught.
(5) The very women of these heretics, how wanton they are! For they are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures—it may be even to baptize.
(6) Their ordinations, are carelessly administered, capricious, changeable. At one time they put novices in office; at another time, men who are bound to some secular employment; at another, persons who have apostatized from us, to bind them by vainglory, since they cannot by the truth.
(7) Nowhere is promotion easier than in the camp of rebels, where the mere fact of being there is a foremost service.
(8) And so it comes to pass that to-day one man is their bishop, to-morrow another; to-day he is a deacon who to-morrow is a reader; to-day he is a presbyter who to-morrow is a layman. For even on laymen do they impose the functions of priesthood.[14]

Tertullian writes in highly polemical terms. He accuses "heresy" of breaking every boundary, but his description leaves several questions unanswered. It is not clear which of the groups he mentions are exclusively male and which of them are mixed ones. For example, are the "perfect" *catechumeni* at the end of (4) only males or also females? What about the recently baptized, those who are entangled with the world (*obstrictos*: the word "men" in the translation does

14 Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41, trans. Peter Holmes in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 3. Latin text is fom Dietrich Schleyer's Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum/Vom prinzipiellen Einspruch gegen die Häretiker*, FC 42, 316–319.

not appear in the Latin text), and the apostates, whose ordination is criticized in (6): do they include people of both sex? Does the list of office holders and lay persons in (8) speak of both male and female office holders? While I personally have nothing against interpreting the grammatically masculine plural forms of the Latin text as referring to both sexes, it is important to notice that Tertullian does not explicitly state this. It may also be asked whether he would have let the opportunity pass to target a "heretical" female bishop after his obvious disparagement of "heretical" women in (5). In addition, Tertullian does not appear to be quite certain whether "heretical" women actually baptized, or whether they "only" taught (5). And finally, it is unclear what heretical groups Tertullian is in fact attacking with his sweeping accusation.

In the light of so many unanswered questions in relation to this text—which has been one of the key witnesses to the theory of women's prominence in "heretical" groups—it is necessary to have a closer look at the entire text of *De praescriptione haereticorum*: Which women (and men) are mentioned in which contexts? The result of such an examination is rather disappointing. The only "female heretic" Tertullian mentions by name is Philomena, of whom he says that she had seduced a Marcionite disciple called Apelles.[15] Remarkable in this passage is the defamation of Philomena on sexual grounds: though shortly before still a virgin, she is called a "dreadful prostitute." This kind of defamation occurs frequently in patristic texts, just as the motif of seduction, too.

As far as statistics are concerned, over against the one explicitly named "female heretic," there are clearly more male "heretics" mentioned.[16] Along with Marcion and Apelles, Tertullian names Ebion, Valentinus, Simon Magus, and Hermogenes, as well as a whole series of Greek philosophers that he also attacks in a manner similar to the "heretics."[17] Thus, the percentage of women does not meet expectations. The one who on the basis of Tertullian's polemic in chapter 41 (see above) anticipates encountering numerous "female heretics" in *De praescriptione hereticorum*, will be disappointed.

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15 See *Praescr.* 30.6 (Schleyer, FC 42, 290); on Philomena, see also *Praescr.* 6.6 (Schleyer, FC 42, 240–243), where the motif of seduction also appears. More on Philomena, see Jensen, *Daughters*, 194–225 and Madeleine Scopello, *Femme, gnose et manichéisme* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 229–234.

16 Philomena is the only woman listed in the indices of names apart from the biblical figures of Eve and Mary, all other names are male names.

17 See *Praescr.* 7 (Schleyer, FC 42, 242–245), where Tertullian, among others, opposes Epicurus, Zeno, and Aristotle.

Irenaeus: More Male Than Female "Heretics"

A comparable situation regarding women in "heretical" movements is also encountered in Irenaeus, another chief witness to modern views. When "women passages" are read in context, the following results emerge: practically all "heads of schools" whom Irenaeus names are men; for example, in the first book of *Adversus Haereses* these are Valentinus, Secundus, Marcus, Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, Carpocrates, Kerinthos, Kerdon, Marcion, and Tatian. In contrast to these numerous male "heretics," there are only three relevant passages dealing with women: a passage about Helena in relation to Simon Magus,[18] a short note about Marcellina,[19] and a reference to women who were "seduced" by the "heretic" and magician Marcus.[20] In the last mentioned case, Irenaeus claims that Marcus gave women a role in the celebrations of the Eucharist but only under his leadership. According to the description, Marcus remained in charge of these events and Irenaeus repeats that women are objects of Marcus's "seduction."[21]

With the exception of Marcellina, none of the women Irenaeus mentions appear to be acting on her own.[22] What Ireaneus finds problematic is the "corruptibility" of women, and the main target of his accusations are those men who seduce women. Women appear as victims of male propaganda, not as independent teachers (with the exception of Marcellina). Whether this depiction corresponds to the reality of the early Christian movement can be questioned. Be that as it may, it does not appear plausible to argue for the prominence of "heretical" women on the basis of Irenaeus. This would require an explanation of why the prominent "heretics" he introduces are almost exclusively male.

With due caution toward statistics, one can say the following: Tertullian mentions six male heretics over against one female teacher Philomena; in Irenaeus, the ratio is twelve to one. On the other hand, in comparison, in the

18 *Haer*. 1.23.1–4; see Norbert Brox, *Irenäus von Lyon: Epideixis/Darlegung der Apostolischen Verkündigung, Adversos Haereses/Gegen die Häresien* 1, FC 8.1, 288–295.

19 *Haer*. 1.25.6 (Brox, FC 8.1, 312–315).

20 *Haer*. 1.13.1–7 (Brox, FC 8.1, 216–227).

21 This passage is often quoted as a proof of the assumed equal role of women in "gnostic" communities. However, a closer reading makes it obvious that Marcus has the leading role in the community. Moreover, prophesying women are mentioned in many different early Christian texts; there is nothing specifically "gnostic" in them; cf., e.g., 1 Cor 11:5; Acts 2:17; 21:9 or the Phrygian prophetesses.

22 Cf. Nicola Denzey Lewis's contribution to this volume.

list of names in Romans 16, approximately one third of the names mentioned by Paul are female, in contrast to the two thirds of male names. The active participation of women appears clearly to have been more pronounced in the Pauline congregations than in the "heretical" groups of the second century.

One could object that the two situations are not comparable, because Paul is communicating with members of his own community, not attacking an alien group from the outside. A look into texts that derive from "heretical" groups shows, however, that the difference does not likely depend on inside/outside perspective only. Among Nag Hammadi and related texts, there is a series of dialogue gospels in which the resurrected Jesus converses with his disciples.[23] Some of these texts, such as the Gospel of Mary and the Dialogue of the Savior, are eagerly referred to when the focus is on the prominent role of Mary Magdalene in "gnostic" texts and the participation of women in "Gnosticism." However, when the entire group of these texts is taken into account, a different picture emerges. In the following dialogue gospels, women make no contribution: the Apocryphon of John (NHC II 1 / III 1 / IV 1 / BG 2); the Apocalypse of Peter (NHC VII 3); the Letter of James (NHC I 2); the Letter of Peter to Philip (NHC VIII 2 / Tchacos 1); the Book of Thomas the Contender (NHC II 7); the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles (NHC VI 1); the Books of Jeû (Codex Brucianus); the Gospel of Judas (Tchacos 3); and the (first) Apocalypse of James (NHC V 3 / Tchacos 2). On the other hand, women have a role to play only in the following four texts: the Sophia of Jesus Christ (NHC III 4 / BG 3); the Gospel of Mary (BG 1); the Dialogue of the Savior (NHC III 5); and the Pistis Sophia (Codex Askewianus).

Even using a relatively broad definition of dialogue gospels and including the Dialogue of the Savior and the Pistis Sophia among them, which improves the statistics in favor of women, in only about one third of these texts women are mentioned as recipients of revelation. Moreover, in texts where women appear, they generally play a minor role and the reports of their dialogues are considerably shorter than those of the male disciples.[24] This is all the more

23 On this group of texts, see Judith Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre: Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen als Rahmenerzählungen frühchristlicher Dialoge*, TU 146 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000).

24 The only significant exception is the Pistis Sophia with a relation of male to female disciples of 8:4—similar to the relation in Romans 16—and many speeches of Mary Magdalene against which Peter protests. On the role of Mary Magdalene and other female disciples in these texts, see Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents*, NHMS 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Silke Petersen,

remarkable for the simple reason that the dialogues are set in the context of resurrection appearances which, according to the New Testament gospels, actually suggests the presence of women. In every one of the gospels that became canonized in the New Testament, women appear in the Easter events.

Thus, in regard to the so-called "gnostic" texts, it is only with difficulty that one can speak of a particular affinity between women and "heretical" thought. This impression can only be produced if individual passages from selected texts are read, without taking the broader picture into consideration. This general finding speaks against any unifying theory concerning "women and heresy." On the contrary, it seems that the role of women in the groups that produced the Nag Hammadi and related texts varied in each case.

Women Seduced by "Heresies"

After considering texts up to this point, the question arises where the widespread notion of many "heretical" women actually comes from. The difficulty is not only whether the patristic sources can be taken as historically accurate but it also concerns a deeper level: "heretical" female leaders are all but absent in the patristic sources—at least in the texts of the second and third centuries. The texts clearly know more "heretical" men than women; and women, according to the majority of patristic authors, are not prominent figures in heretical movements. On the contrary, women are seducible and they are seduced (and in a few cases, they also seduce).

The seduction stereotype is frequent in ancient texts, not only among patristic texts.[25] I will give two examples before I come back to the question of the "heretical" women. The first example is a text-critical variant of Luke 23:2, which includes a Marcionite addition.[26] The whole assembly (consisting of leading Jewish figures) accuses Jesus and says:

"Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!" Maria Magdalena, Salome und andere Jüngerinnen Jesu in christlich-gnostischen Schriften, NHMS 48 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 94–194.

25 On the pagan polemics against the special connection between women and religion, see David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter*, SBL Monograph Series 26 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981); Shelly Matthews, *First Converts: Rich Pagan Women and the Rhetoric of Mission in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). Elite women are nevertheless accepted as sponsors and benefactors; according to Matthews, this is the reason for their positive evaluation in Luke and Josephus.

26 See Harnack, *Mission*, 65; the addition is also listed in NA[27]. See also a similar argument in 2 Tim 3:6.

τοῦτον εὕραμεν διαστρέφοντα τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν καὶ κωλύοντα φόρους Καίσαρι διδόναι ⟨καὶ ἀποστρέφοντα τὰς γυναῖκας καὶ τὰ τέκνα⟩ καὶ λέγοντα ἑαυτὸν χριστὸν βασιλέα εἶναι.	We have found this man to be one who stirs up our people and forbids it to pay taxes to Caesar, ⟨and makes the women and children to turn away⟩ and says he is Christ, a king.[27]

The accusation speaks of seduction of women, not of the prominence of women in a religious movement. This becomes already clear by the combination of "women and children." The textual addition illustrates that the stereotype of "seduced women" existed in the fourth, and probably also in the second century.

A further example is found in the writings of Celsus.[28] He reproaches Christians whose mission seeks uneducated persons as their objectives: "they … want to persuade only the dumb, low, and tedious people, and only male and female slaves, and women and children, and they are able to do this."[29] Even in the private homes and workshops, he continues, they are interested in stirring up children and "ignorant women," and say that they should not obey "the father and the teachers" (τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τοῖς διδασκάλοις).[30]

Women are found, together with children, on the side of those seduced by the new religion, not on the side of the seducers. Their existence provides evidence for the inferiority of Christianity.

In sum, the seduction motif appears again and again in religious polemics, and there is no difference whether its object is another religion or a deviating

27 This is a Marcionite addition according to Epiphanius, *Pan.* 42.11.6 and 42.11.17; see Karl Holl and Jürgen Dummer, eds., *Epiphanius 2: Panarion haer. 34–64*, GCS 31, 116 and 152; Frank Williams, trans., *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, Book I, NHS 35, 286 and 312. In his commentary on the latter passage, Epiphanius states that Jesus did not really behave in this way but wanted parents to be honored and marriages not to be broken.

28 See also similar accusations in Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 8.4; Bernhard Kytzler, *Minucius Felix, Octavius*, 66–69. Similarly also Julian and Porphyry; see Jensen, *Daughters*, 11 n. 44.

29 Origen, *Cels.* 3.44; see Miroslav Marcovich, *Origenes: Contra Celsum*, SVigChr 54, 186. See also *Cels.* 3.10 (Marcovich, SVigChr 54, 159–60); *Cels.* 3.49 (Marcovich, SVigChr 54, 192); *Cels.* 7.41 (Marcovich, SVigChr 54, 494).

30 Origen, *Cels.* 3.55 (Marcovich, SVigChr 54, 196).

TABLE 9.3 *Ancient three-step argumentations on "seduction"*

	Patristic authors	**Celsus 3.44, 49, 55**
Premise	Women are seducible	Women (and children) are seducible and uneducated
Observation	Heretics seduce (gullible) women	Christians seduce women (and children)
Goal / Consequences	For this reason (among others), heresy is to be rejected	Christianity, as a religion of the uneducated, is to be rejected

group in one's own religious tradition. Thus, while the seduction motif is frequent (and is not only applied to Christian "heretics"), it does not reveal any independently acting "heretical" females.

Epiphanius: "Every Heresy is a Worthless Woman"

Thus far I have only considered texts from the second and third centuries. A significant change takes place in the sources in the fourth century—only then the stereotype of "heretical female" actually begins to win more space in ancient texts,[31] primarily in regard to certain groups. The perception of these later sources has also influenced the assessment of earlier sources; the reading of the latter alone would have hardly led to the same assumptions.

An important fourth century text is the *Panarion*, a polemical treatise against heresies by Epiphanius of Salamis. It contains several examples of the seduction motif, especially in reference to groups that are usually classified as "gnostic" groups. Epiphanius also provides a theory concerning these seductions, which he develops along the lines of the story of the serpent seducing Eve. The "serpent" and the "devil" are blended with each other, and the Paradise story is generalized:

31 Similarly Virginia Burrus, "The Heretical Woman as Symbol in Alexander, Athanasius, Epiphanius, and Jerome" *HTR* 84 (1991): 229–248; see esp. 231 n. 6.

(4) μηκέτι γὰρ δυνάμενος ὁ διάβολος τὴν ἀνδρείαν διάνοιαν τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου λαβοῦσαν τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἀληθείας ἀπατᾶν τρέπεται ἐπὶ τὸ θῆλυ τουτέστιν τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἄγνοιαν καὶ πείθει τοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀγνοίᾳ, ἐπειδὴ οὐ δύναται τὸν στερεὸν λογισμὸν ἀπατῆσαι.
(5) θηλυκοῖς γὰρ ἀεὶ διανοήμασι προσπελάζει, ἡδονῇ τε καὶ ἐπιθυμίᾳ τουτέστι τῇ ἀγνοίᾳ τῇ ἐν ἀνθρώποις θηλυνομένῃ καὶ οὐχὶ τῷ στερεῷ λογισμῷ τῷ εὐλόγως τὰ πάντα νοοῦντι καὶ θεὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν νόμου ἐπιγινώσκοντι.

(4) No longer able to deceive the masculine reason, which has received the power of the truth from the Lord, the devil turns to the feminine—that is, to men's ignorance—and convinces the ignorant, since he cannot fool sound reason.
(5) He always makes his approach to feminine whims, pleasures and lusts—in other words, to the effeminate ignorance in men, not to the firm reason which understands everything logically and by the law of nature recognizes God.[32]

Epiphanius qualifies reason as masculine and ignorance as feminine, and for this reason the devil always turns to feminine weaknesses, not to masculine reason. This means that in individual cases, men can likewise be victims of seductions; in this case, they are more or less feminine.[33] Most of the victims of the devil's seduction, however, are women and most seducers are men.

Particularly interesting are those passages in which Epiphanius writes about female teachers and leaders. He develops a far-reaching theory and finally ends up allegorizing all heresies which he describes as feminine. Epiphanius's views appear to become increasingly more radical in the course of his work. At first, he takes the Marcellina story over from Irenaeus without attacking her specifically as a woman.[34] About twenty chapters later, he comes to speak about the Phrygian prophecy and names Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla as the leading prophetic figures of the movement. He emphasizes their dogmatic agreement with the true church, but nevertheless finds their oracles to be completely implausible.[35] Here his objection is not directed specifically

32 *Pan.* 37.2.4–5 (Holl and Dummer, GCS 31, 52–53; Williams, NHS 35, 242).

33 A similar strategy also occurs in Athanasius, *Orationes tres adversos Arianos* 1 (fourth century) where Arius is "feminized." See Burrus, "Heretical Woman", 235–239.

34 See *Pan.* 27.6.1 and 6.8 (Williams, NHS 35, 104–105). In the latter passage, Epiphanius writes: "During Anicetus' episcopate then, as I said, Marcellina appeared at Rome spewing forth the corruptions of Carpocrates' teaching, and destroyed many there by her corruption of them. And that made a beginning of the so-called Gnostics."

35 See *Pan.* 48 (Williams, NHMS 36, 6–21).

against *female* prophets but in the next section, he explicitly attacks female office holders, in this case female bishops and presbyters in the circle of a (later)[36] Phrygian prophetess named Quintilla.[37] Epiphanius's critique begins precisely at the point where official functions are at stake. He targets exclusively women and accuses them of seduction: "And who but women are the teachers of this? Women are unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited. As in our earlier chapters on Quintilla, Maximilla and Priscilla so here the devil has seen fit to disgorge ridiculous teachings from the mouths of women."[38] Epiphanius clearly views women as teachers of certain religious orientations, no longer only as victims of seduction, even though the devil stands in the background.

This accusation appears in the description of the seventy-ninth "heresy" out of a total of eighty, and the context in which Epiphanius formulates it is his portrayal of the so-called Collyridians who, according to Epiphanius, practice an exaggerated form of the veneration of Mary, since they worship her as divine and believe in her miraculous birth and the heavenly origin of her body.[39] His polemic against this group has, again, mostly to do with official status and actions, such as a kind of Eucharist performed by women. He uses the practice of the Collyridians as a pretext for a more general treatment of women's authority to exercise the office, and attempts to limit this as far as possible. In this context, Epiphanius also strikes his final, fundamental tone on women and heresy:

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(3) Πᾶσα γὰρ αἵρεσις φαύλη γυνή, πλέον δὲ ἡ τῶν γυναικῶν αἵρεσις αὐτὴ καὶ ἡ τοῦ ἀπατήσαντος τὴν πρώτην γυναῖκα.

(3) Every sect [or "heresy" S.P.] is a worthless woman, but this sect more so, which is composed of women and belongs to him who was the deceiver of the first woman.

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36 For the question of dating see Jensen, *Daughters*, 164–166.

37 *Pan.* 49.2.5 (Williams, NHMS 36, 22). Invectives against female officeholders are also found in the context of antimarcionite polemics, see *Pan. Anacephaleosis* 42.3 (Williams, NHS 35, 210) and *Pan.* 42.4.5 (Williams, NHS 35, 275). On Epiphanius's polemics against female officeholders, see Ute E. Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies*, trans. Linda Maloney (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 118–121.

38 *Pan.* 79.1.6–7; trans. Williams (NHMS 36, 621). Cf. Karl Holl and Jürgen Dummer (ed.), *Epiphanius 3: Panarion haer. 65–80. De fide*, GCS 37, 476.

39 See *Pan.* 79 (Williams, NHMS 36, 620–629).

(4) τιμάσθω ἡ μήτηρ ἡμῶν Εὔα ὡς ἐκ θεοῦ πεπλασμένη, μὴ ἀκουέσθω δέ, ἵνα μὴ πείσῃ τὰ τέκνα φαγεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου καὶ ἐντολὴν παραβῆναι. μετανοείτω δὲ καὶ αὐτὴ ἀπὸ κενοφωνίας, ἐπιστρεφέτω αἰσχυνομένη καὶ φύλλα συκῆς ἐνδυομένη. κατανοείτω δὲ ἑαυτὸν καὶ ὁ Ἀδάμ, καὶ μηκέτι αὐτῇ πειθέσθω.
(5) ἡ γὰρ τῆς πλάνης πειθὼ καὶ γυναικὸς εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον συμβουλία θάνατον τῷ ἰδίῳ συζύγῳ ἐργάζεται, οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις. κατέστρεψε τὸ πλάσμα Εὔα διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως, ἐρεθισθεῖσα διὰ τῆς τοῦ ὄφεως φωνῆς καὶ ἐπαγγελίας, πλανηθεῖσα ἀπὸ τοῦ κηρύγματος καὶ ἐφ' ἑτέραν βαδίσασα διάνοιαν.

(4) Our mother Eve should be honored because formed by God, but not be obeyed, or she may convince her children to eat of the tree and transgress the commandment. She herself must repent of her folly, must turn in shame clad with fig leaves. And Adam should look to himself, and no longer obey her.
(5) Error's persuasion, and the contrary counsels of a woman, are the cause of her spouse's death—and not only his, but her children's. By her transgression, Eve has overturned creation, for she was incited by the voice and promise of the snake, strayed from God's injunction, and went on to another notion.[40]

In the concluding section of the *Panarion*, entitled *De fide*, Epiphanius once again summarizes his observations and compares the true Church with heresies. The Church is the only legitimate daughter, born with the help of the Holy Spirit; all other "women" are concubines without a share in the inheritance, the title, and the legitimate status of the free married woman. These concubines are the eighty "heresies" which Epiphanius lists and now clearly classifies as female.[41]

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40 *Pan.* 79.8.3–5 (Holl and Dummer, GCS 37, 483; Williams, NHMS 36, 628).

41 *De fide* 6.1–4. Williams, NHMS 36, 643, translates: "For the church is engendered by one faith and born with the help of the Holy Spirit, and is the only daughter of the only mother, and the one daughter of her that bore her. And all the women who came after and before her have been called concubines. They have not been entire strangers to the covenant and inheritance, but have no stated dowry and are not receptacles of the Holy Spirit, but have only an illicit union with the Word.... And similarly even though concubines—who are not acknowledged or full wives, and are not married with a dowry by their husbands—have carnal relations with the husbands, they cannot have the honor, title, security, marriage portion, wedding gifts, dowered status and legitimacy of the free wife. And so, as I have said, the sects I have listed in succession are eighty concubines." The idea of eighty concubines in contrast to the one, perfect woman is derived from Cant 6:8.

In sum, the seduction stereotype also takes up considerable space in Epiphanius's work, but no longer are heretical women presented merely as seduced victims but as prophetesses, teachers, and female office-holders.[42] At the same time, Epiphanius establishes a special affinity between "heresy" and women on yet another level, as he allegorizes heresies as female. Similar observations can be made in other patristic texts of the fourth century, for example, of Athanasius of Alexandria (298–373) and Jerome (347–420).[43] Only from this period on are the stereotypes of "heretical women" and "female heresy" actually found in the sources; this is not a typical feature of earlier texts which almost exclusively speak of women as victims of heretical seduction.

It does not appear accidental that the change in the sources occurred precisely in the fourth century. Earlier, Christianity was to a large extent a religion on the margins and was (from time to time) persecuted. In the fourth century, however, with increasing alliance with the Roman state, power positions and official influence had to be guaranteed by men and for men. What had before been marginal, was now increasingly becoming intertwined with the state and, as a result, both the content and the tone of writings also change.[44]

Concluding Remarks

The above analysis can be summarized in a few concluding remarks. First, in regard to the historical question, our sources do not point to a large number

42 Even though it is easy to criticize Epiphanius, it is also worth noting that in some cases, he seems more progressive than the Roman Catholic administration today, for he knows of female deacons and supports the female diaconate (see *De fide* 21,10; Williams, NHMS 36, 662). Moreover, while he does not consider remarriage after a divorce ideal, he does not condemn it, either (see *Pan.* 59.4.9; Williams, NHMS 36, 105).

43 See esp. Jerome, *Ep.* 133.4 (Isidor Hilberg, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi opera 1, Epistulae CXXI–CLIV* [CSEL 56,1], 247 f). Cf. Burrus, "Heretical Woman", who describes how many patristic writers of the fourth century (Alexander, Athanasius, Epiphanius and Jerome) create the "heretical woman" as a symbolic figure. According to her, the heretical woman is "a specter of the fears of men who long for a clear articulation of group boundaries and of individual relationships in a social world where everything seems muddled" (p. 248).

44 Similarly, Burrus, "Heretical Women", 246 f. This kind of an evaluation is not new, it appears as early as in Gottfried Arnold's depiction of early Christian history, *Die Erste Liebe der Gemeinen Jesu Christi / Das Ist / Wahre Abbildung Der Ersten Christen / Nach Ihren Lebendigen Glauben und Heiligen Leben*, first published in 1696. Arnold's eighth book bears the title "Von dem Abfall der Christen vornemlich unter und nach Constantino M[agno], von der erstem Lauterkeit," *Die Erste Liebe*, part 2, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1712), 190.

of women in all "heretical" movements. This kind of an assumption is especially dubious in regard to the so-called "gnostic" groups. While the presence of women may be different as far as Collyridians and the Phrygian prophecy[45] are concerned, it is worth noting that it is quite unclear whether these were distinctive movements at all and, especially in regard to the latter, whether this actually was a "heretical" movement.[46] The number of "heretical" women is reduced further when every female office-holder who appears in an inscription is not generally assumed—as was customary in earlier research—to be a "female heretic," simply because there could have been female office-holders *only* in "heretical" movements.[47] It is finally time to put an end to the circular reasoning that is involved in connecting women and "heresy."

Second, as regards patristic texts, it is clear that the stereotype of the heretical woman and the female heresy is a product of the fourth century and should not be read into earlier texts. What can be found in texts of the second and third centuries, is the seduction stereotype with women as victims. In general, the patristic strategy of defaming "heresy" is based on the assumption that everything in which women are interested is inferior. The issue is not only the defamation of "heresy", but also the preservation of male power by means of a derogatory depiction of women. "Women" as well as "heresy" are thus construed as the Other, in contrast to the Own, and that which is one's Own is indicated by the terms "man" or "orthodoxy." We should not continue to uphold such a construct, not even under reversed circumstances.

Third, in regard to argumentative structures, I have drawn a final table where the three main lines of argumentation are compared (see the following page).

The table shows, first, that the target against which the argument is directed, is interchangeable; it can be a religion or a "heresy." The modern variant has

45 See further, Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); William Tabernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism*, Patristic Monograph Series 16 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), esp. 560, 568; Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 157–173.

46 One can ask if Epiphanius was any more "orthodox" than the Phrygian female prophets. If the criterion of orthodoxy is continuity with early Christianity, rather the opposite seems to be the case. Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 166, speculates that the Collyridians might have been "simply a group of Montanists."

47 On this problem, see Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 10–12. A similar stereotype can found in relation to women leaders in the ancient synagogue, see Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*, Brown Judaic Studies 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1982).

TABLE 9.4 *Lines of argumentation in comparison*

	Modern period	**Sources of the 2nd and 3rd centuries**	**Sources of the 4th century**
Premise	Demands equal rights for women	Consider women to be especially seducible	Consider women to be inferior (partly because of Eve)
Observation	Discovers oppressive structures in certain (mostly alien) religious traditions	Find leading religious figures ("heretics"), through whom especially women are seduced	Find many women ("female heretics") in certain religious groups
Goal / Consequences	Rejects the respective religion/religious groups	Reject respective religion/ religious groups	Reject respective religion/religious groups

been used against Islam, Judaism, or even Christianity; among patristic writers the target is "heresy". Second, the goal is the defamation of a religion or a religious group which is taken to be alien or inferior. In the process, the "women question" is employed repeatedly as an argument, although with different initial convictions in each case. One can easily see that the issue is not really about women, but that they are instrumentalized in a religious *Kulturkampf*. The gender argument is used as one argument among others useful for praising one's own religion and for denigrating others. In interreligious discourse such argumentation should be abandoned altogether. If the argumentation serves merely as an apology for one's own religion, "women" are instrumentalized which furthers their marginalization. Instead, one should deal with the blind spots in one's own religion or religious tradition[48]—without projecting deficits into other religious orientations and denouncing them—in order to make them invisible in one's own tradition.

48 Mary Daly (see note 4) is an exception here—my critique does not apply to her.

CHAPTER 10

Astrological Determinism, Free Will, and Desire According to Thecla (St. Methodius, *Symposium* 8.15–16)

Dylan M. Burns

Introduction

The eighth discourse of Methodius of Olympus's *Symposium* is delivered by perhaps the most famous figure we meet in the treatise, Thecla.[1] In a work which is chiefly occupied with the life of chastity and virtuous action, Thecla opts for the big picture, plunging into celestial matters. She begins with an etymology typical of the *Cratylus* and its predecessors (παρθενία = παρθεῖα) (8.1), describes the ascent of the soul (8.2–3), performs allegorical exegesis of Revelation 12 (8.4–12), and finishes with a polemic against astrological determinism (8.13–16). While Thecla is neither the first nor last to speak in the *Symposium*, her speech occupies perhaps the most privileged place in it.[2] Following her discourse, it is Thecla who finally wins the ἄθλον, receives the "thickest" wreath, and is permitted to sing the great hymn to Christ that serves as the climax of the treatise ("chastely I live for thee"—12). It is Thecla who is assigned, in a discourse whose title cannot refer to anything but Plato's most beautiful

1 On Thecla's legend, see Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity*, OECS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6–8. For overviews of Methodius's thought, see Lloyd William Patterson, *Methodius of Olympus: Divine Sovereignty, Human Freedom, and Life in Christ* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997); Katharina Bracht, *Volkommenheit und Vollendung: Zur Anthropologie des Methodius von Olympus*, STAC 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999); eadem, "Methodius von Olympus," *RAC* 24:768–784; Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, "Methodius," in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, trans. Seth Cherney, VCSup 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 494–496. It is to my regret that several works relevant to the present study had not yet appeared at the time of writing: Katharina Bracht, ed., *Methodius of Olympus: State of the Art and New Perspectives*, TUGAL 178 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), and Ilaria Ramelli, ed., *Bardaisan on Free Will, Fate, and Human Nature: The Book of the Laws of Countries* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

2 Patterson, *Methodius of Olympus*, 95; Davis, *Cult of St. Thecla*, 4–5.

dialogue, the last word on the philosophical questions of agency, desire, and will. Many scholars have touched upon Thecla's polemic, attempting to diagnose its sources and proper contextualization in the history of early Christian ideas about astrology, determinism, and free will, and, as we will see, "gnostic" sources have played a significant role in such attempts.[3] However, thorough doxographical studies of Thecla's attack on astrological determinism are rare.[4] It is thus with great pleasure that I present these brief meditations on Thecla's refutation of astrological determinism to Antti Marjanen, who has contributed so much to our understanding of ancient Christian women, particularly with respect to our extant gnostic sources and the Nag Hammadi Codices.

Thecla's Polemic against Astrological Determinism

Immediately following her exegesis of the Great Red Dragon of Revelation 12, Thecla jumps into her polemic against astrology. She begins:

> For the greatest of all the evils that have been implanted amongst the common people is to attribute of the causes of sin to the movements of the stars (τὰς αἰτίας τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων εἰς τὰς τῶν ἀστέρων κινήσεις), and to say that our lives are controlled by the necessities of Fate, as is taught by the astronomers with great arrogance.[5]
>
> *Symp.* 8.13.37–41

3 As far as the present argument is concerned, it does not matter whether "Gnosticism" is a useful historical category or not. Therefore it will be used with "scare quotes," on occasions where other scholars discussing the issues at hand have invoked it.

4 Cristóbal Macías and Marta González, "El Banquete de Metodio de Olimpo y sus argumentos contra la astrología," *Μήνη: Revista Internacional de Investigación sobre Magia y Astrología Antiguas* 5 (2005): 319–341, is largely occupied by introduction and Spanish translation with commentary. Bracht, *Vollkommenheit und Vollendung*, 243–247, observes that here Thecla speaks as one baptized to the baptized, and that the conception of free will that she mentions in 8.17 must be considered in light of Methodius's ideas about virginity and human psychology. While this is so, it tells us nothing about the philosophical valence of the arguments Thecla makes in 8.15–16.

5 For the text of the *Symposium*, I have consulted V.-H. Debidour and Herbert A. Musurillo, eds., *Méthode d'Olympe: Le banquet*, SC 95 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1963). All translations given in this article are my own.

Rather, she states, human beings are "free of all necessity" and "are not slaves to fate and fortune" (8.13.32–33). The claim that human beings are not subject to the enslavement of malevolent cosmic forces is central to early Christian discourse, but the focus on the proposition that the stars are responsible for sin is somewhat more distinctive.[6] Following an exposition of the basics of astrology (8.14), she offers a series of arguments, which may be broken down by topic into four groups:

The first set of arguments have to do with the order of creation. If it were better for people to be born under horoscopes, Thecla asks, why then were there no horoscopes at the beginning of time? And if there were horoscopes, why then did the system of constellations come into existence later (8.15.1–15)? In fact, the heavens are not "made of" the constellations at all (8.15.16–25). The second set of arguments, meanwhile, is concerned with the character of "the sun and the moon and the other celestial bodies." If they govern the passage of the seasons through their beautiful and regular motion, they are happy indeed; but if they "contrive and effect (τεκταίνεται καὶ ἐνεργεῖ)" human crimes, then they "are even more wretched than human beings (ἄρα ἀθλιώτερα τῶν ἀνθρώπων)," since they are also involved in human evil (8.15.31–38). She continues:

> If no act can occur without desire, and no desire without need, and the divine has no needs, then it (i.e., the divine) is also without conception of wickedness (οὐδὲ μὴν ἐπιθυμία χωρὶς ἐνδείας, ἀνενδεὲς δὲ τὸ θεῖον, ἀνεννόητον ἄρα πονηρίας). Further, if the nature of the stars has been created closer to God and exceeds the virtue of even exceptional human beings, then the stars exist without conception of evil and without needs (ἀνεννόητα κακίας … καὶ ἀνενδεῆ).
>
> *Symp*. 8.16.1–5

Indeed, the astral bodies "are not admitting of the experiences of pleasure and pain, for such loathsome appetites do not befit heavenly beings" (8.16.8–10).

Thecla here proceeds to the third set of arguments, regarding the character of virtue. She begins with a short proof that intemperance is bad; therefore, "the divine is insulated from passion; therefore there is no horoscope" (8.16.37–38). Moreover, temperance is identified with manliness, and intemperance with

6 For recent survey of the rhetoric of cosmic enslavement in early Christian discourse, see Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate in Gnosticism and Greco-Roman Antiquity: Under Pitiless Skies*, NHMS 81 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

femininity (8.16.49–55). In any case, God cannot be the cause of wickedness; "rather, if some people are wicked, they are wicked because of the emptiness of their hearts, not because of their horoscope (κατὰ ἔνδειαν φρενῶν … καὶ οὐ κατὰ γένεσιν)" (8.16.61–62).

Thecla turns to three arguments—introducing our fourth set—concerning the relationship between laws, fate, and human nature. The existence of human laws and that of the fate determined by a horoscope are, she claims, mutually exclusive (8.16.64–88). Rather, the law assumes that one can learn to be virtuous (and should be punished if one fails to learn virtue); "therefore, there is no horoscope" (8.16.88–93). In fact, if destiny is responsible for behavior, then why do we have laws at all?—It would have been better for God to simply not create wicked people, rather than to create them and then give them laws, if they were not meant to be capable of wickedness (8.16.93–98).

These three arguments are followed by the statement that "the causes of sinful acts derive from either nurture and custom, or the soul's passions and the body's desires. And whichever of these is at fault, God is not at fault" (8.16.99–101). After asking again why God did not simply create human beings incapable of injustice in the first place, Thecla introduces the factor of human nature: if wicked people are simply living according to their wicked natures—immutably determined "by the decrees of providence, according to the horoscope (κατὰ γένεσιν προνοίας ταγαῖς)"—would they not be *un*deserving of punishment for their acts of wickedness (8.16.106–112)? The deterministic view, then, goes something like this: "someone living in accordance with his own nature (κατὰ τὴν προσοῦσαν αὐτῷ φύσιν) does not sin, for it is not he that has made himself such a person; rather, it is fate (εἱμαρμένη), and he lives according to the motion of that guiding entity, led on by the inexorable workings of necessity." Yet God hates wickedness, and the law exists to punish; "therefore, there is no fate" (οὐκ ἄρα εἱμαρμένη—8.16.116–119).

Methodius on Gnosticism, Bardaisan, or Origen?

Notably, the causal relationship between desire or passion—coached in the language of privation, of need—and sin is the hinge by which all the arguments beyond the first set move.[7] We should expect no less from a treatise on chastity, and so Musurillo is correct to surmise that the arguments were inserted by

7 Yet Harper restricts his remarks to the first set of the arguments, regarding the priority of the creation of terrestrial to celestial life in Gen 1; Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian*

Methodius into Thecla's speech to express how "in his (Methodius's) view men have the ability, with God's assistance, to transcend the limitations of the flesh."[8] Perhaps due to its obviousness, this point disappears in modern doxography of the speech, which tends to take two perspectives regarding its background and targets.[9]

The first is concerned with "Gnosticism." Musurillo detects here a vaguely "anti-Gnostic" stance in the polemic.[10] Patterson, meanwhile, regards the refutation as a "digest" of arguments that would later see fruition in his *De autexousio*, directed against cosmic dualism and gnostic determinism.[11] Despite the appearance of Valentinus in a brief catalogue of heretics furnished in Thecla's exegesis of the stars swept to earth by the tail of the Great Red Dragon (8.10.22–32, re: Rev 12:4),[12] such allusions to Gnosticism seem misleading, since Thecla's oration does not mention any doctrines distinctively associated with Gnosticism (in any of its various construals).[13] Rather, one senses here the oper-

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Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 129.

8 Methodius, *The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, trans. Herbert A. Musurillo, ACW 27 (Westminster: Newman Press, 1958), 231 n. 89.

9 Patterson, meanwhile, states that the polemic is reminiscent of "philosophical rejections of fate (see, e.g., Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De fato*)." Patterson, *Methodius of Olympus*, 62 n. 38; similarly, ibid., 104, adding that the arguments are so compact that one cannot draw any specific parallels.

10 Methodius, *Symposium*, 16.

11 Thus Patterson, *Methodius of Olympus*, 103; further, "it was in the circumstances of the writing of the *Symposium* that Methodius came to associate his opposition to a cosmological dualism, the dominant theme of the *De libero arbitrio*, explicitly with the issue of gnostic teaching as it is assumed to be related to such a dualism in the writings of his predecessors"; ibid., 62.

12 In any case there is, as Musurillo notes, some evidence to suggest that the catalogue is a textual interpolation; Methodius, *Symposium*, 223–224 n. 49.

13 As Patterson himself notes, the distinction given between the psychics and spirituals in *Symp*. 8.6.187 need not necessarily be taken as an allusion to Valentinianism; *Methodius of Olympus*, 98; Musurillo refers rather to 1 Cor 2:14 ff. (Methodius, *Symposium*, 222 n. 33). Patterson also recalls *Symp*. 8.9.1–12, where Thecla takes Matt 3:17 (quoting Ps 2:7; cf. Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22)—God telling Jesus at his baptism, "you are my Son," and not "you have become my Son"—to mean that Christ existed "before the ages" and was at this moment "begotten for the world." Musurillo thinks this passage to have been a later, orthodox interpolation (Methodius, *Symposium*, 223 n. 46), but Patterson believes Methodius to recall Clement of Alexandria, *Paed*. 1.6.25, an invocation of the same passage ostensibly directed against Marcion; thus, according to Patterson, Thecla criticizes "the opponents

ative assumption, widespread in 20th-century scholarship, that "gnostics" were prone to a cosmic pessimism predicated in part upon astral fatalism.[14]

Ilaria Ramelli goes further, focusing on the fourth set of arguments—concerned with the consequences that the existence of human laws holds for astrological determinism—and pointing to Bardaisan and Origen, for good reason. The *Book of the Laws of the Countries* (*Liber legum regionum*), penned by Bardaisan's disciple Philip, is the programmatic early Christian exposition of the so-called νόμιμα βαρβαρικά, the refutation of the efficient power of the stars read in a horoscope by reference to the plurality of human laws and customs discovered by Hellenistic ethnography: "in all countries, every day and every hour, people are born with different horoscopes, yet the laws of human beings are stronger than fate, and they lead their lives according to their own customs."[15] Thus Ramelli states that

> Methodius employs the same arguments as Bardaisan in the *Liber legum regionum*: the laws instituted by human beings contradict Fate; in 8,16, Methodius asks the very same question as Bardaisan is asked in the *Liber*: why God did not make the human being incapable of sinning from the beginning. The answer is the same: because God created it free. It was precisely to defend human free will against Gnostic predestinationism, at the same time safeguarding theodicy, that Origen had constructed his history of salvation from the ἀρχή to the τέλος, the latter characterized as apokatastasis.[16]

Origen also invoked the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά in his Genesis commentary, in passages known from Eusebius and extant portions of the *Philocalia*.[17] It is worth adding that Methodius's thoughts on free will in his *De autexousio* strongly

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whom Clement designates, certainly Marcion but here especially Valentinus" (*Methodius of Olympus*, 102).

14 For survey, see Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate*, 13–28.

15 *Lib. leg. reg*. 52.8–11. Text in H.J.W. Drijvers, ed., *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaiṣan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965).

16 Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of "Apokatastasis": A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*, VCSup 120 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 273.

17 Ibid., 272 re: Origen, *Comm. Gen. apud* Eusebius, *Praep. ev*. 6.11.69–70 = Origen, *Philoc*. 23.16. Origen acknowledges elsewhere that people are born into diverse circumstances, but deigns to blame astrological forces for the situation: *Cels*. 5.27 and *Princ*. 2.9.4, per Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 136.

resemble those of Origen.[18] The argument that assigning responsibility for action to fate robs humans of responsibility is also extant in Origen.[19]

A closer look at Thecla's arguments with respect to the thought of Bardaisan and Origen show that the relationship is close indeed, but more fraught than a simple matter of influence. David Amand noted long ago that the initial three arguments that Thecla levies regarding human law likely go back to Carneades, but it is very unlikely that Methodius here relies directly on the New Academy.[20] Rather, he must have known the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά via contemporaries, in turn likely reliant on Bardaisan, as were near-contemporaries such as Eusebius of Caeserea or the author of the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*.[21] Yet while Methodius appears to agree with Bardaisan and Origen in broadly rejecting astral determinism, the nuances of his argument and vocabulary show that he

18 Amply discussed by Patterson, *Methodius of Olympus*, 61; Michael Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*, Sather Classical Lectures 68 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 106; Harper, *From Shame to Sin*, 129; *pace* André Vaillant, "Le De Autexousio de Méthode d'Olympe, version slave et texte grec édités et traduits en français," *Patrologia Orientalis* 22 (1930): 649–652. On Methodius's philosophical valence in this treatise, see Jean Pépin, "Platonisme et Stoicisme chez Méthode d'Olympe," in *Forma futuri: Studi in onore del Cardinale Michele Pellegrino* (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmo, 1975), 126–144.

19 *Philoc*. 23.1–2; Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 145.

20 Dom David Amand, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l'Antiquité grecque: Recherches sur la survivance de l'argumentation morale antifataliste de Carnéade chez les philosophes grecs et les théologiens chrétiens des quatre premiers siècles*, Recueil de Travaux d'Histoire et de Philologie 3.19 (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1945), 338–340, followed by Musurillo in Methodius, *Symposium*, 230; cf. Macías and González. "El Banquete," 328–329. For Carneades's arguments and their reception in Hellenistic and early Imperial philosophy, see Cicero, *Div*. 2.96–97, and the discussion of Heinrich Boll, *Studien über Ptolemäus: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie und Astrologie* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1894), 181–188, followed by Amand, *Fatalisme et liberté*, 55–60; H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaiṣan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1966), 76; Tim Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, Patristic Studies 6 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 94; Nicole Kelley, *Knowledge and Religious Authority in the Pseudo-Clementines*, WUNT 213 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 116; eadem, "Astrology in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*," *JEH* 59 (2008): 607–629 n. 34, 619.

21 See, e.g., Eusebius, *Praep. Ev*. 6.10.48; Pseudo-Clement, *Rec*. 9.19–29. For discussion, see Kelley, *Knowledge and Religious Authority*, 114–130; eadem, "Astrology in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*," 612–613; H.J.W. Drijvers, "Bardaisan's Doctrine of Free Will, the Pseudo-Clementines, and Marcionism in Syria," in *Liberté chrétienne et libre arbitre*, ed. G. Bedouelle (Freibourg: O. Fatio, 1994), 25–26; Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 94.

also takes pains to reject deeply characteristic aspects of their views, likely in the interest of correcting what he envisioned as unnecessary concessions to the "astrologers."

The *Liber legum regionum* and the Sinful Stars in the Third Century CE

Ramelli notes that, like Thecla, Bardaisan poses the question of why God did not create human beings as incapable of sin.[22] The context of the question in the *Liber* pertains to the problem of monotheism vs. dualism—beginning with the protasis, "if God is one …?"—and serves to introduce the issue of free will to a greater anti-Marcionite polemic.[23] Ramelli is correct to see in Methodius a similar logical procession from the problem of cosmic dualism to soteriological determinism. Nonetheless, we also have other reasons to suppose that Methodius knew Bardaisan's thought and had him in mind when composing Thecla's speech.

As noted above, immediately following her brief reference to the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά, Thecla states that "the causes of sinful acts derive from either nurture and custom, or the soul's passions and the body's desires. And whichever of these is at fault, God is not at fault" (8.16.99–101). Musurillo takes the argument to mean that "whether sin is due to education and habit (as the present adversaries hold) or to man's passions (governed by his free will, as Methodius holds), in either case God is not to blame. On any interpretation, the logic is very confused."[24] On the contrary, the sense is lent by the following passages, which introduces the factor of human nature (φύσις) as the source of human passion and desire. According to Thecla, either human culture (a product of human free will) or natural constitution is to blame for sinful behavior, but neither of these can be laid at the feet of destiny, unlike those who think that "someone living in accordance with his own nature (κατὰ τὴν προσοῦσαν αὐτῷ φύσιν) does not sin, for it is not he that has made himself such a person; rather, it is fate (εἱμαρμένη)."

Methodius here likely recalls Bardaisan's description in the *Liber legum regionum* of the three cosmic forces at work in human destiny: nature, fate, and

22 *Lib. leg. reg*. 4.9–13.

23 Drijvers, "Bardaisan's Doctrine," 16; Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment of the Evidence and a New Interpretation* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009), 62.

24 Methodius, *Symposium*, 231.

will:[25] "as for us, we are led, equally but distinctly, by nature, by fate, and by our free will, each according to their wont."[26] Fate is conceived of in astral terms:

> That principle which is called fate is that order of the course of stars which has been granted by God to the rulers and the elements. According to this course and order do intellects undergo change while entering the soul, and do souls undergo change while descending to bodies. And that agent of change is called "fate" and "natal horoscope," belonging to that grouping (of qualities) which was mixed and is being purified for the benefit of what, by the grace and goodness of God, was and will be cared for until the consummation of the universe.[27]

Fate is also powerful, its dominion extending to all external circumstances of both life and death, without necessarily overwhelming the human capacity for choice.[28] Similarly, while some aspects of human nature are immutable and thus not subject to astral rule, others are:

> But when the periods and kinds of nature's influence are complete, then does fate manifest in such matters, and work various sorts of effects. Sometimes, it helps and strengthens the natural constitution, and sometimes it harms and mars it. Growing up and reaching physical maturity comes from nature, but, nature set aside, illnesses and deformities result from fate. From nature comes the union of men and women, and the satisfaction of both parties, but from fate come strife and the dissolution of marriage, and all defilement and licentiousness that people commit out of desire under the pretext of marital union.[29]

According to the *Liber legum regionum*, the stars do exercise some (albeit incomplete) power over human nature, although they are not, in Bardaisan's estimation, entirely responsible for sin either.[30]

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25 On this distinctive tripartition, see Drijvers, *Bardaiṣan*, 71, 85–89; Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 261–263; Ramelli, *Bardaiṣan*, 79; Harper, *From Shame to Sin*, 127.

26 *Lib. leg. reg*. 32.8–10.

27 *Lib. leg. reg*. 32.11–19. See also Drijvers, "Bardaisan's Doctrine," 20.

28 Drijvers, "Bardaisan's Doctrine," 20–21; Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 264; Ute Possekel, "Bardaisan and Origen on Fate and the Power of Stars," *JECS* 20 (2012): 530; Harper, *From Shame to Sin*, 128.

29 *Lib. leg. reg*. 34.10–19.

30 *Lib. leg. reg*., 38.16–22; see also Drijvers, "Bardaisan's Doctrine," 21–22.

Given that third and fourth-century Christian sources invoking the in arguments about free will likely did so with reference to Bardaisan, we can suppose that Methodius would have been familiar with not only the ethnographic portions of the *Liber legum regionum*, but also the cosmological schema in which Bardaisan frames them. Thecla's rejection of the notion that astral destiny, as divined in a horoscope, exerts power over a human being's natural constitution ought to be read, in this context, as a rejection of Bardaisan's formulation of just this notion in the *Liber legum regionum*. In fact, Thecla rejects the possibility that the stars exert any causal force within human affairs at all. Bardaisan, meanwhile, concedes significant causal power to "Fate"—much more than Origen—or, we now may say, Methodius—would readily grant.[31]

While Thecla appears to be in full agreement with Origen regarding the (absence of a) relationship between human law and nature and astral destiny, her description of the character of celestial bodies—as given in the second set of arguments in her refutation—deviates in significant ways from Origen's ideas about heavenly bodies. To be sure, both Origen and Methodius stand in a long line of thinkers who consider the stars to be sentient beings who enjoy a more blessed life than humans.[32] Thecla's insistence that the stars are not involved in human misdemeanor and therefore bear no responsibility for worldly evil seems, on first sight, very much in line with Origen's description of the basic goodness of the stars,[33] and his vehement rejection of the idea (which he assigns to Basilideans and Valentinians) that some celestial bodies are malign, others benign.[34]

Yet Origen also regarded the stars as—by virtue of their possession of sentience and free will—having *some* experience of sin and evil. They have fallen away from God, albeit less than have human beings.[35] We learn as much from Job 25:5, he says: "For Job appears to disclose that the stars are not only capable of subjection to sin, but even that they are not free from the contagion of it. For so is it written: 'The stars are not clean in Your sight.' "[36] Thecla, meanwhile,

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31 On the difference between Bardaisan's and Origen's conceptions of the reach of the stars' power, see Possekel, "Bardaisan and Origen," 540.

32 For catalogue, see Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 132.

33 See, e.g., Origen, *Princ*. 1.7, discussed in Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 130–131, and *Cels*. 5.10, discussed in Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 329.

34 *Comm. Matt*. 13.6, per Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 143–144.

35 On the free will of the stars, see *Or*. 4 and 7; *Cels*. 8.67; Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 131.

36 *Princ*. 1.7.2. Text in Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, eds., *Origène: Traité des principes, Tome I* (*Livres I et II*), SC 252 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978). Origen says much the same,

firmly states that "no act can occur without desire, and no desire without need, and what is divine has no needs, so it is without conception of wickedness. Further, if the nature of the stars has been created closer to God and exceeds the virtue of even exceptional human beings, then the stars exist without conception of evil and without needs (ἀνεννόητα κακίας … καὶ ἀνενδεῆ)" (8.16.1–5). Thecla here excludes even the the possibility of sinful action amongst the stars.

Yet her language, which anchors sinful acts first to desire (ἐπιθυμία) and then to "need" or "emptiness" (ἐνδεία), does not reflect that used by Origen for celestial beings. To be sure, a variety of ancient magical, astrological, and philosophical sources did ascribe human desires—and so human vices—to astral, demonic influences.[37] Christian sources did not always disagree. Athenagoras believed that the watchers who fell from heaven and became evil spirits (Gen 6:1–4), together with the demonic souls of the Nephilim, govern an inferior, lower πρόνοια, by which they produce "the irrational and uncanny movements of the soul around opinions" (αἱ τῆς ψυχῆς ἄλογοι καὶ ἰνδαλματώδεις περὶ τὰς δόξας κινήσεις)—faulty sense-perceptions that lead humans to idolatry and thence to sin.[38] One comes across this view now and again at Nag Hammadi. Perhaps most famously, the long recension of the Apocryphon of John features a Book of Zoroaster, giving the names of the various demons who exert their influence over the "psychic" parts corresponding to our material body parts.[39] A fragmentary homily deeply and aggressively implicated in the Alexandrine theology of Origen's day, the Testimony of Truth, even states that stars, together with angels and demons, possess desire:

> For many have sought the truth, and they were unable to find it, because [the] old leaven of the Pharisees and the Scribes of the Law has held them back. But the leaven [is the] desire for error, belonging to the angels [and] the demons and the stars (ⲡⲑⲁⲃ ⲇⲉ ⲡ[ⲉ ⲧⲉ]ⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲗⲁⲛⲏ ⲛ̄ⲧ[ⲉ]

albeit with hesitation, at *Comm. Jo.* 1.35.257. On these passages, see Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 137–138; Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 334 n. 4.

37 See, e.g., Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate*, 113–117, 158, 167, focusing on patristic and Hermetic sources; for the theme in the Pseudo-Clementines, see Kelley, *Knowledge and Religious Authority*, 109–114.

38 *Leg.* 24–27; see Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate*, 35, and esp. Dragoş-Andrei Giulea, "The Watchers' Whispers: Athenagoras's *Legatio* 25,1–3 and the *Book of the Watchers*," *VC* 61 (2007): 266–273.

39 Ap. John NHC II 15.13–19.12. On the Book of Zoroaster, see, e.g., Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 114–119; Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate*, 107–108, 128.

> ⲛ̀ⲁⲣ`ⲣⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲙ̄[ⲛ] ⲛ̀ⲁⲁⲓⲙⲱ[ⲛ] ⲙ̄ⲙⲛ ⲛ̄ⲥⲓⲟⲩ). But, as for the Pharisees and the Scribes, [they] belong to the archons, since they possess authority [over them].[40]

It is against such perspectives that Thecla speaks. Yet Methodius also knew Origen well, particularly on matters related to fate and free will, as we know from his *De autexousio*. Surely he was familiar with Origen's ideas about astrology and the stars—including theory of the sin of the stars. Authors like the homilist of the Testimony of Truth took the character of the stars to be lustful, demonic, and oppressive, something from which to be freed. Methodius, evidently opposed to this view, must have regarded Origen's notion of the sinful character of the stars—like Bardaisan's ideas regarding the potency of fate as regards human nature—as yielding ground to proponents of astrology. Instead, he emphasized that the stars are not sinful, for they exist "without conception of evil and without needs." Meanwhile, Thecla's characterization of the impulse to sin as stemming from a sense of privation—of absence, or emptiness—remains to be explained.

Conclusion: Lack, Desire, and Evil in the *Symposia*

I would suggest that here, Methodius reaches back to Plato's *Symposium* so as to address another controversial aspect of ancient ideas about the stars: the question of their identity with demons. In Plato's dialogue, Socrates interrogates the tragic playwright Agathon following his speech (the fourth speech in praise of Eros). Agathon has insisted on Eros's youth and beauty. Socrates responds by taking the "erotic" element of Eros seriously: if anything is worthy of love, it is noble beauty (i.e., anything κάλος), so Eros must love beauty. This love is a desiring (ἐπιθυμεῖν, or, more directly, ἐρᾶν), and desire must be of something one does not have—hence of something one lacks, or is in need of (ἐνδεῖν). Thus, Socrates asks,

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40 Test. Truth NHC IX 29.9–21. Text in Jean-Pierre Mahé, ed., *Le Témoignage Véritable* (*NH IX,3*): *Gnose et Martyre*, BCNHT 23 (Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 1996). On this passage, see Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 102; Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate*, 72–73, 167. These stars deceive the martyrs, amongst others: "But these people are not correct, in the way (that they think): rather, it is by the deceiving stars (that they proceed)" (34.6–10).

> "But tell me this—as regards love of that thing of which there is love, does love desire it or not?"
> "Indeed it does," Agathon replied.
> "And as for that thing that it desires and yearns for—at the moment that it desires and years for it (αὐτὸ οὗ ἐπιθυμεῖ τε καὶ ἐρᾷ, εἶτα ἐπιθυμεῖ τε καὶ ἐρᾷ), does it possess it, or not?"
> "That's not so, it seems likely," he said.
> "Instead of what's likely," said Socrates, "ask yourself whether it be necessary that it be so: whatever desires something, desires that of which it is in need (τὸ ἐπιθυμοῦν ἐπιθυμεῖν οὗ ἐνδεές ἐστιν); it would not desire it, if it were not in need of it."[41]

Socrates continues:

> "And does such a person—and any person, for that matter—desire something which is not at hand and which is not present, and that which one has not, is not, and lacks; and are such objects the objects of desire and love?"
> "Definitely," Agathon said.[42]

Thus, Agathon is horrified to learn, Eros must be ugly, for it could only love beauty if it lacked beauty.[43]

Although Methodius also speaks of desire as privative in his *De resurrectione*,[44] it is worth considering the possibility that he was, in composing his own *Symposium*, inspired by Plato's remarks regarding love and desire as predicated upon absence. Indeed, scholarship has long recognized that Methodius actively engages Plato's conception of terrestrial ἔρος as privative. Bracht, for instance, proposes that the literary artifice of the *Symposium* is meant to evoke the specter of Plato's conceptions of earthly ἔρος, emphasizing their privative nature, so as better to replace them by the principle of virginity (παρθενεία), which connotes desire without privation.[45] Such a thesis assists the greater,

41 Plat. *Symp*. 200a1–b1. For the text, see Kenneth Dover, ed., *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

42 Plat. *Symp*. 200e2–6.

43 Plat. *Symp*. 201.

44 *Apud* Epiphanius, *Pan*. 64.55.5–7; Bracht, *Vollkommenheit und Vollendung*, 89–90.

45 Bracht, *Vollkommenheit und Vollendung*, 195–206; cf. Amy Hughes, "'Chastely I Live for Thee': Virginity as Bondage and Freedom in Origen of Alexandria, Methodius of Olympus, and Gregory of Nyssa" (Ph.D. Diss., Wheaton College, 2013), 211–213. For Methodius's

modern-day theological project of reclaiming both *Symposia* as works teaching us that Christian desire need not be predicated upon absence, but presence.[46] As we have observed, Thecla's polemic against astrology regards the privative sense of desire axiomatic and crucial to its conception of sin. Yet given the speech's objective—the demonstration of the logical incoherence of astral determinism—παρθενία does not enter the picture at all.[47] As far as determinism is concerned, privation appears superfluous to Thecla's arguments. Elsewhere, Methodius conceptualizes desire and its relationship with sin in Stoic terms, as resulting from the false poor reactions to sense-perceptions.[48] With ἐπιθυμία so characterized, the validity of Thecla's proofs would remain unchanged. Yet Methodius takes pains here to emphasize precisely such a privative quality.

In adopting the privative sense of ἔρος from Plato's *Symposium* to characterize states of desire, and in turn emphasizing that astral bodies are incapable of evil—due to their incapability to experience privation ("lack," ἐνδεία) and so desire—Methodius must have intended to exonerate the stars not only from sin, but from their identification with demons. As noted above, many ancient thinkers regarded celestial bodies as demons of some kind, whether benevolent or malevolent. In the Greek philosophical tradition, the notion of δαίμονες as intermediaries between gods and human beings goes back to nowhere other than Plato's *Symposium*, in the discourse of Diotima, immediately following Socrates's interrogation of Agathon:

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appropriation of the literary conceit of the symposion, see esp. Alexander Bril, "Plato and the Sympotic Form in the *Symposium* of St Methodius of Olympus," *ZAC* 9 (2006): 279–302, as well as Macías and González, "El Banquete," 312–313; Bracht, "Methodius von Olympus," col. 771; M. Benedetta Zorzi, "The Use of the Terms ἁγνεία, παρθενία, σωφροσύνη, and ἐγκράτεια in the *Symposium* of Methodius of Olympus," *VC* 63 (2009): 138–168; Hughes, "'Chastely I Live,'" 64–72.

46 See, e.g., Hughes, "'Chastely I Live,'" 190–193, following Mario Costa, "For the Love of God: The Death of Desire and the Gift of Life," in *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 38–62. For a theological reading of the language of male orgasm and ecstasy in the *Symposium*, see Ralph Norman, "Methodius and Methodologies: Ways of Reading Third-Century Christian Sexual Symbolism," *Theology & Sexuality* 13 (2006): 79–100.

47 This remains the case despite the fact that Thecla thereafter swings the discussion back to chastity and free will, in 8.17; see above n. 4.

48 Per Bracht, *Vollkommenheit und Vollendung*, 77–94; eadem, "Methodius von Olympus," cols. 777–778.

> "Do you see?" she [Diotima] said, "You think that love is not a god!"
> "Then what," I [Socrates] exclaimed, "would Love be? A mortal?"
> "Certainly not!"
> "But what, then?"
> "Just as was said before," she said, "something between mortal and immortal."
> "What do you mean, Diotima?"
> "A great demon (δαίμων μέγας), dear Socrates. For everything daemonic exists between god and mortal."[49]

In Thecla's refutation of astrology, then, Methodius does not invert Plato's notion of privative ἔρος, but appropriates it. In full agreement that ἔρος ultimately stems from lack—the desire *for* something—Thecla rejects the notion that the stars are ever in a state of need. If the stars were to lack anything, they would be demons—like Diotima's ἔρος himself, insinuated with desire, and thus sin. Meanwhile, the mediating function of the "demon" of love is taken over by the Incarnation, who furnishes a bridge between God and human beings.[50]

Thecla's polemic against astrological determinism is thus not an appendix that may be read independently of the rest of her discourse, or the entire *Symposium*, for that matter. Nor, from a doxographical perspective, should it be regarded as a brisk and compact digest of arguments from *De autexousio*.[51] Rather, Methodius here carefully tweaks common arguments regarding determinism and free will, rendering them in precise terms so as to exclude what he must have regarded as dangerous concessions to the astrologers: Bardaisan's notion that fate does possess causal efficacy in human lives, Origen's view of the stars as capable of sin in a manner comparable with humans, and the widespread identification of certain celestial bodies with demons. On the contrary, says Thecla, fate does not exist, and the stars have no conception of evil or even needs—unlike Eros, the demon of Diotima. Thecla psychologizes desire, the chief cause of sin, in the terms of Plato's privative erotics not only to redeem a notion of desire for chaste Christian women, but to articulate what Methodius believed to be the proper conception of human responsibility in a world where the heavens are inhabited by stars and demons alike.

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49 Plat. *Symp*. 202d7–e1.

50 *Symp*. 1.4, per Bracht, *Vollkommenheit und Vollendung*, 238–240; eadem, "Methodius von Olympus," cols. 779–780.

51 *Pace* Patterson, on both points (see above n. 9 and 11).

CHAPTER 11

Monastic Exegesis and the Female Soul in the Exegesis on the Soul*

Hugo Lundhaug

> … speaking also the words of Jeremiah: "At the end of my captivity I repented, then I groaned over the day of my shame."[1] For we know, and Isaiah tells us, that "If we turn around and groan we shall be saved and we shall know where we are in the days when we trust in vain things"[2] and in wicked thoughts that are not those of God.
>
> THEODORE, *Instr*. 3.37[3]

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> Again in another place, "The Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: 'When you turn around and groan, then you will be saved and you will know where you were on the day when you trusted the vain things.'"[4]
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> Exeg. Soul 136.4–8[5]

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1 Jer 31:19.

2 Isa 30:15.

3 Coptic text in Louis Théophile Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme et ses Disciples*, CSCO 150, Scriptores Coptici 23 (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1956), 57. Translations from Coptic in this article are my own.

4 Isa 30:15.

5 Coptic text in Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul*, NHMS 73 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 464.

Worlds Apart

It has been claimed by the great scholar of Pachomian monasticism, Armand Veilleux, that "there is nothing in the gnostic documents that is comparable to the extremely frequent and altogether orthodox use of all the documents of the Scripture in the Pachomian sources."[6] Indeed, both in studies of the Nag Hammadi texts and in studies of early Egyptian monasticism one is often left with the impression that there is a considerable gulf separating the former from the latter, and the impression conveyed by Veilleux's statement is indeed representative of much modern scholarship on the matter. The perceived lack of overlap between monasticism and the Nag Hammadi texts gave Veilleux "the impression of being in the presence of two universes of thought that have evolved on parallel courses. There are certainly points of contact, and probably mutual influences, but they did not leave traces in the known literary sources."[7] Veilleux thus concluded that the monastic texts on the one hand and the Nag Hammadi Codices on the other belonged to different worlds. Trying to articulate the differences between the two, he claimed that "One of the major differences between these two worlds is certainly the manner in which the Scripture is used in each of them."[8] This is a conclusion that has recently been echoed by another major authority on Pachomian monasticism, Christoph Joest, who argues that since there are no traces of "Gnosticism" in Pachomian literature, the Nag Hammadi Codices have little to do with Pachomian monasticism.[9]

These conclusions, however, highlight the impact of certain interpretive assumptions. Trying to test the relationship between the Nag Hammadi Codices and Pachomian monasticism by looking for Gnosticism in the Pachomian literature is a procedure that not only takes for granted that the Nag Hammadi Codices are gnostic, but also that it is necessary to identify so-called gnostic traits in Pachomian literature to establish such a connection. A better way to investigate a possible connection involves leaving "Gnosticism" out

6 Armand Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring, SAC (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 292.

7 Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis," 291.

8 Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis," 291.

9 Joest claims "dass sich in den uns erhaltenen Katechesen und Briefen Pachoms keinerlei Hinweise auf gnostische Gendankengänge erhalten haben, wie sie in den Codices von Nag Hammadi repräsentiert sind. Sollten die Pachomianer in einem frühen Stadium, ihrer Geschichte solche Spekulationen angehangen haben, wäre es m. E. undenkbar, dass deren Spuren im Nachhinein vollständig hätten gelöscht werden können." Christoph Joest, *Die Pachom-Briefe: Übersetzung und Deutung*, CSCO 655, Subsidia 133 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 53.

of the equation and instead focusing on aspects of both corpora that have little to do with clichés associated with this category.[10] Rather than going on a wild goose chase for Gnosticism in the Pachomian texts, we might learn more about early monasticism and its relationship with the Nag Hammadi Codices by looking at aspects of the texts that do not necessarily have anything to do with stereotypical "gnostic" traits.

Let us now look closer at the biblical interpretation on display in one of the Nag Hammadi texts, and see whether it is true, as Veilleux claims, that Scripture is used very differently in the Nag Hammadi texts than in Pachomian and other early monastic literature. The text in question is the Exegesis on the Soul from Nag Hammadi Codex II, which, like a majority of Nag Hammadi texts, has usually been classified as "gnostic"—one scholar has even gone so far as to characterize it as "perhaps the closest to what one might have expected a Gnostic text to look like from the reports of the Church Fathers."[11]

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10 For thorough critiques of the usefulness of "Gnosticism" as a scholarly category, see esp. Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Michael A. Williams, "Was There a Gnostic Religion? Strategies for a Clearer Analysis," in *Was There a Gnostic Religion?*, ed. Antti Marjanen, PFES 87 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2005), 55–79; Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2003). For a sense of the debate, see the articles in Antti Marjanen, ed., *Was There a Gnostic Religion?* PFES 87 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2005).

11 Christopher M. Tuckett, *Nag Hammadi and the Gospel Tradition: Synoptic Tradition in the Nag Hammadi Library*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 51–52. See also, e.g., William C. Robinson, Jr., "The Exegesis on the Soul," *NovT* 12:2 (1970): 102–117; William C. Robinson, Jr., "The Expository Treatise on the Soul: Introduction," in *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2–7 Together with XIII,2*, Brit. Lib. Or.4926(1), and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655*, 2 vols., ed. Bentley Layton, NHS 20–21 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 2:136–143; Maddalena Scopello, *L'Exégèse de l'âme: Nag Hammadi Codex II,6: Introduction, traduction et commentaire*, NHS 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1985); Maddalena Scopello, "The Exegesis on the Soul (II,6): Introduction," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. James M. Robinson, 3rd rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 190–192; Maddalena Scopello, "Jewish and Greek Heroines in the Nag Hammadi Library," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King, SAC (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 71–90; Douglas M. Parrott, "Response to 'Jewish and Greek Heroines in the Nag Hammadi Library' by Madeleine Scopello," in *Images of the Feminine*, 91–95; Martin Krause, "Die Sakramente in der 'Exegese über die Seele,'" in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi: Colloque du Centre d'Histoire des Religions (Strasbourg, 23–25 octobre 1974)*, ed. Jacques-É. Ménard, NHS 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 47–55; Rodolphe Kasser, "Citations des grands prophètes bibliques dans les textes gnostiques coptes," in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts: In Honour of Pahor Labib*, ed. Martin Krause, NHS 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 56–64; Rodolphe Kasser, "L'*EKSÊGÊSIS ETBE TPSUKHÊ* (NH II, 6): Histoire de l'âme puis

The Prostitution of the Soul

The main character in the Exegesis on the Soul is the soul, described throughout the text as a woman. It is in dire straits and is described as a prostitute, which enables the text to call upon a significant corpus of Scripture to undergird its metaphorical discourse on the importance of repentance and renunciation of worldly concerns.

What is described in terms of sexual licentiousness and prostitution is the soul's attachment to the body and the material world. The soul "prostituted herself in her body, and she gave herself to everyone, and whomever she would embrace she considered to be her husband."[12] Old Testament imagery of Jerusalem as a prostitute is called upon and applied specifically to the soul, while buttressing the argument with New Testament references. Before reminding the reader that Paul was not only speaking about bodily transgression when he warned the Corinthians against mixing with prostitutes,[13] the text cites Ezekiel:

> Again he says in Ezekiel: "It happened after many evils, said the Lord, that you built yourself a brothel and you made yourself a beautiful place in the squares and you built yourself brothels on every street and you destroyed your beauty and you spread your legs on every street and you multiplied your prostitution. You prostituted yourself to the sons of Egypt, those who are your neighbours, those great of flesh."[14] But who are "the sons of Egypt, those great of flesh" except the fleshly and the perceptible and the things of the earth, in which the soul has defiled herself in these places, by receiving bread from them and receiving wine and receiving oil and receiving clothes and the other nonsense on the outside surrounding the body, these which she thinks are useful for her? But concerning this prostitution the apostles of the Savior commanded: "Guard yourselves

exégèse parénétique de ce mythe gnostique," *Apocrypha* 8 (1997): 71–80; Peter Nagel, "Die Septuaginta-Zitate in der koptisch-gnostischen 'Exegese über die Seele' (Nag Hammadi Codex II)," *APF* 22 (1973): 249–269. Notable exceptions include Frederik Wisse, "On Exegeting 'The Exegesis on the Soul'," in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi*, ed. Jacques-É. Ménard, 68–81; Cornelia Kulawik, *Die Erzählung über die Seele* (*Nag-Hammadi-Codex II,6*)*: Neu herausgegeben, übersetzt und erklärt*, TUGAL 155 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006); Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*.

12 Exeg. Soul 128.1–4 (Coptic text in Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 448).

13 Exeg. Soul 131.2–13; cf. 1 Cor 5:9–10.

14 Ezek 16:23–26.

> against it! Cleanse yourselves of it!"[15] speaking not only of the prostitution of the body, but especially that of the soul.
>
> Exeg. Soul 130.11–32[16]

It is not primarily bodily prostitution that is to be avoided, but *especially* the prostitution of the soul. "The great [struggle]," continues the text, "concerns the prostitution of the soul. From it comes the prostitution of the body too."[17]

The closest parallels to this way of speaking about the soul and prostitution are found in other monastic texts. In his *Instruction Concerning a Spiteful Monk*,[18] Pachomius makes several observations on the monastic life that express a similar exegetical perspective to that of the Exegesis on the Soul. Pachomius warns his monks concerning the various kinds of prostitution threatening their purity of heart:

> Behold, you know, my beloved, that we have put on Christ, the good one and lover of humanity. Do not make us take him off because of our evil deeds, having promised God purity. Having promised to live a monastic life, let us perform its works, namely fasting, unceasing prayer, purity of body, and purity of heart. If we have promised God purity, let us not be

15 Cf. Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Thess 4:3; 1 Cor 6:18; 2 Cor 7:1.

16 Coptic text in Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 452.

17 Exeg. Soul 130.35–131.2; Coptic text in Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 452, 454.

18 This text is preserved in a single manuscript discovered at Edfu. The Coptic text was first published by E.A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, vol. 3 of *Coptic Texts: Edited with Introductions and English Translations* (London: British Museum, 1913), 146–176; and later by Lefort, *Œuvres*, 1–24. The authenticity of Pachomius' authorship of the text, as stated in the manuscript, has been supported by Louis Théophile Lefort, "S. Athanase écrivain copte," *Mus* 46 (1933): 1–33. Veilleux expresses some doubt, stating that "it could be a literary composition of a Pachomian monk rather than an instruction actually given in that form by Pachomius himself" (Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia: The Lives, Rules, and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples*, 3 vols.; CS 45–47 [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980–1982]: 2) Christoph Joest has argued that the text as we have it, while originally authored by Pachomius, has been redacted by Horsiesios. (Christoph Joest, "Horsiese als Redaktor von Pachoms Katechese 1 'An einen grollenden Mönch': Eine stilkritische Untersuchung," *JCopS* 9 [2007]: 61–94). Interestingly, the text includes a long section of Athanasius' *On Charity and Continence* quoted without attribution (this was first noted by Lefort, "S. Athanase écrivain copte"). For the latter text, see Arnold van Lantschoot, "Lettre de Saint Athanase au sujet de l'amour et de la temperance," *Mus* 40 (1927): 265–292. David Brakke accepts this text as genuinely Athanasian "with hesitation" (David Brakke, "The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana," *Or* 63 [1994]: 36).

> caught in fornications, *which exist in multiple forms*, for he says, "they have prostituted themselves in many ways."[19] Brothers, do not let us be found in works of this sort or fallen beneath every man.
>
> PACHOMIUS, *Instr.* 1.39[20]

Like the Exegesis on the Soul, this Pachomian text utilizes scriptural accounts of prostitution, extending the meaning of prostitution beyond the literal level. While it does not go quite as far as to describe the soul directly as a prostitute, like the Exegesis on the Soul, another prominent monastic author does do that. Shenoute of Atripe, leader of the White Monastery federation, applies scriptural imagery of Jerusalem's infidelity directly to the individual soul in a manner that is highly similar to what we find in the Exegesis on the Soul. In surviving fragments of a letter addressed to his monks, known as *So Listen*, Shenoute explains how the Old Testament's allegorical description of Jerusalem's infidelity applies to the soul:

> Again, if you do not want to say to yourself in this place, brother, "prostitute soul," according to the word of the prophet—for how did the city of faith, which is your soul, prostitute herself, or, "you prostituted yourself to the sons of Egypt,"[21] which is your soul who prostitutes herself in her thoughts, according to the words of [the prophets]…
>
> SHENOUTE, *So Listen*, XO 48[22]

Clearly the use of Scripture on display here is very close to that of the Exegesis on the Soul. This is also well illustrated in the following passages of *So Listen*, where Shenoute explains how the stories in the Old Testament are directly related to the life of the individual monk in his federation:

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19 Ezek 16:26.

20 Coptic text in Lefort, *Œuvres*, 1:16.

21 Ezek 16:26; cf. Exeg. Soul 130.19.

22 I refer to Shenoute's writings using titles based on their incipits as listed in Stephen Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, 2 vols., CSCO 599–600, Subsidia 111–112 (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), xviii–xxii. Following the title I indicate from which manuscript the Coptic text is taken, using the sigla established by Tito Orlandi for his CMCL database, omitting the abbreviation MONB which designates their White Monastery provenance, followed by the page number of the codex. *So Listen* is part of Shenoute's *Canon* 8. Coptic text in Anne Boud'hors, *Le Canon 8 de Chénouté d'après le manuscrit Ifao Copte 2 et les fragments complémentaires*, 2 vols., BEC 21.1–2 (Cairo: Institut Français d'archéologie orientale, 2013), 1:98.

> It pertains to the Old (Testament) to strike those who have become weak in the true teaching, which is you and those who resemble you, always, smiting them with these words, which are these: "Because of this, prostitute," which is your soul, "listen to the word of the Lord, because you have poured out your copper,"[23] and all the other words which the Old (Testament) says like this in its anger against the souls that play the harlot against God[24] and his true teaching, always, "because you have spread your legs for everyone who passes by,"[25] which is the soul of people like you, and those who are defiled in every way, spreading its thoughts or its considerations beneath the demons for them to defile it with their badness and their pollution and their disobedience. And they fornicate with it with their deceitful councils, which are like the flesh of the donkeys and the dogs, according to the words of the prophets.[26]
>
> SHENOUTE, *So Listen*, XO 49–50[27]

While neither Shenoute nor the Exegesis on the Soul quotes or shows direct knowledge of the other, they both use the same biblical texts, with the same exegetical methodology, expanding upon the same metaphor, applying it to the same topic. In the Exegesis on the Soul, however, the soul finally repents, changes her way of life, and is able to make herself worthy of being (re)united with Christ:

> She abandoned her former prostitution and cleansed herself of the defilements of the adulterers, and became renewed to be suitable as a bride. She cleansed herself in the bridal chamber, filled it with perfume, and sat within it waiting for the true bridegroom.
>
> Exeg. Soul 132.10–15[28]

The soul leaves behind her life of prostitution with multiple worldly lovers in favor of a monogamous relationship with Christ, her true husband. The way the Exegesis on the Soul describes the soul's preparations for the marriage with Christ is paralleled by what we find in the *Fourth Instruction* of the Pachomian archimandrite Horsiesios. According to Horsiesios the Holy Spirit teaches us

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23 Ezek 16:35–36.

24 Cf. Hos 9:1.

25 Ezek 16:25.

26 Cf. Ezek 23:20.

27 Coptic text in Boud'hors, *Le Canon 8*, 1:99–100.

28 Coptic text in Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 456.

"to do all the good that is possible to our soul, so as to adorn it with every virtue belonging to heaven, so as to clothe it with brilliant garments … We must adorn it with ornaments as a bride …"[29]

An important aspect of the soul's renewal in the Exegesis on the Soul is the renewal of her virginity. Virginity is a fundamental aspect of the monastic life, and the Exegesis on the Soul is not alone in understanding virginity to refer not only to bodily virginity. Pachomius provides us with an example in his *Instruction Concerning a Spiteful Monk*:

> If we have gladly promised God to live a monastic life, virginity is not only of the body, but virginity is your removal from every sin. For the virgins in the Gospel were turned away because of their tarrying. Those who keep diligent watch enter into the bridal chamber. May everyone therefore enter into that place forever.
>
> PACHOMIUS, *Instr*. 1.51[30]

In fact, Pachomius's *Instruction Concerning a Spiteful Monk* can almost be said to sum up the main points of the Exegesis on the Soul, in the way it admonishes the monks not to obey the demons:

> Do not obey the demons. "Do not make the members of Christ the members of a prostitute."[31] Remember the anguish of the punishments; set the judgement of God before you. Flee every lust; "put off the old human being and its works, dress yourself in the new human being";[32] remember the anguish of the moment when you will leave the body.
>
> PACHOMIUS, *Instr*. 1.30[33]

Although demons are not directly mentioned in the Exegesis on the Soul, the way it describes the adulterers and the soul's relationship to them, as well as its subsequent repentance and renewal, is strikingly close to the quoted passage from Pachomius's *Instruction Concerning a Spiteful Monk*.

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29 Horsiesios, *Instr*. 4.1 (Coptic text in Lefort, *Œuvres*, 72).

30 Coptic text in Lefort, *Œuvres*, 1:20.

31 1Cor 6:15.

32 Col 3:9.

33 Coptic text in Lefort, *Œuvres*, 1:12.

Repentance and Prayer

From beginning to end, the Exegesis on the Soul emphasizes repentance and prayer, and the means of repentance advocated is similar to what we find described in other monastic texts. In a sense the protagonist of the Exegesis on the Soul is described as an ideal monastic. Indeed, the soul goes around weeping, repenting, and praying to the Father in a manner that closely resembles the practices of the foundational heroes of Pachomian monasticism, as described in the *Life of Pachomius* and other Pachomian writings. In the *Life of Pachomius*, for instance, Theodore describes the practices Pachomius "performed night and day, with fasts, prayers and abundant tears," and we are told how Theodore himself "remained standing the whole night in prayer to God," and how another brother watched him, "listening to him utter all these words with bitter weeping and groaning."[34]

Moreover, like the Pachomian texts, the Exegesis on the Soul makes its case for repentance in a prose replete with scriptural quotations and allusions, like when the value of repentance is explained by means of quotations from Luke and Acts:

> "If one does not hate his own soul he will not be able to follow me."[35] For the beginning of salvation is repentance. Therefore, "before the arrival of Christ, John came, preach[ing] the baptism of repentance."[36] And repentance comes about in pain and grief. But the Father is a good lover

34 SBo 198. Coptic text in Louis Théophile Lefort, *S. Pachomii Vita Bohairice Scripta*, CSCO 89, Scriptores Coptici 7 (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1953), 193–194. SBo is Veilleux's designation for the recension of the *Life of Pachomius* represented by Bo supplemented by Av and a selection of S-fragments. For a thorough discussion of the sources and redactional theories of the *Life of Pachomius*, see Veilleux, *La liturgie*, 16–158; Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 1:1–21. The *Bohairic Life* (Bo) itself is known from a single codex (Cod. Vat. Copt. LXIX), probably copied in the thirteenth century (Lefort, *Vita Bohairice Scripta*, i–ii), but a number of fragmentary Sahidic manuscripts, the so-called "Sahidic Lives," designated S^{1}–S^{18} by Lefort, are also extant. The earliest, on papyrus (S^{10}, S^{12}, S^{13}), date no earlier than the seventh to eighth centuries, while the rest, on parchment, date from the ninth to twelfth centuries. Lefort, *S. Pachomii Vitae Sahidice Scriptae*, CSCO 99–100, Scriptores Coptici 9–10 (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1952), i–xi. The earliest extant manuscript of the Greek *Vita Prima* (G^{1}) was copied in 1021 (MS XI,9 in the Bibliothèque Laurentienne, Florence); see François Halkin, *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae*, SHG 19 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1932), 10. The Arabic *Life* (Av) is preserved in Vatican Ms. 172.

35 Luke 14:26.

36 Acts 13:24.

> of humanity and he hears the soul who calls up to him and he sends her the saving light.
>
> Exeg. Soul 135.19–29[37]

Repentance and self-deprecation is emphasized throughout, as it is in many monastic writings, and the necessity of constant prayer is emphasized. Both the Exegesis on the Soul and Pachomian literature liken such prayer to that of people in peril at sea. The Exegesis on the Soul states that "it is appropriate to pray to God night and day, stretching our hands up to him like those who are sailing in the midst of the sea. They pray to God with all their heart without hypocrisy, for those who pray hypocritically deceive only themselves."[38] In the *Life of Pachomius* we likewise find Theodore praying to God, saying: "may your mercy and your goodness reach us concerning the whole sorry state in which we find ourselves.... Indeed, we are like those at sea at the time of a storm ..."[39] The connection between the perilous and sinful state of the soul in the world and the nautical metaphor of seafarers praying to God in times of trouble is similar in both cases.

The necessity of sincere repentance and prayer is also highlighted elsewhere in the Pachomian sources. Horsiesios, for instance, repeatedly urges his monks to "return to the Lord with our whole heart."[40] As Veilleux points out, this is "a kind of leitmotiv" for this entire work.[41] "Therefore," Horsiesios states, "let us return to the Lord our God, and whenever we pray, He, who daily urges us to pause and get to know him, will hear us."[42] The Exegesis on the Soul agrees, and promises that "If we truly repent, God, the patient and abundantly merciful, will hear us."[43]

Closely connected to the emphasis on the sincerity of repentance and prayer, the Exegesis on the Soul seems also to promote especially an inward prayer of the soul, which it assigns higher value than external audible prayer:

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37 Coptic text in Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 462. On God sending the saving light to the soul, cf. also Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.44: "We have been given holy prayer and perseverance, which fill the soul with light" (Coptic text in Lefort, *Œuvres*, 18).

38 Exeg. Soul 136.16–22. Coptic text in Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 464.

39 SBo 198. Coptic text in Lefort, *Vita Bohairice Scripta*, 193.

40 Horsiesios, *Testament* 33 (twice), 35; cf. Deut 30:2.

41 Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 3:221 n. 33:7.

42 Horsiesios, *Testament* 33 (Boon, *Pachomiana Latina*, 131; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 3:196); cf. Hos 6:1, Ps 20:9, 46:10 (LXX).

43 Exeg. Soul 137.22–25; Coptic text in Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 466.

> It is therefore appropriate to pray to the Father and for us to call up to him with all our soul, *not with the external lips, but with the spirit within*, the one which came from the deep,[44] sighing,[45] and repenting for the life we have led, confessing the sins, perceiving the empty error we were in and the empty haste, weeping like we were in the darkness and the wave, mourning ourselves so that he may have pity on us, hating ourselves as we are now.
>
> Exeg. Soul 135.4–15[46]

While it is not entirely clear whether this should be understood as advocating silent prayer *to the exclusion of* audible prayer, or simply that it is absolutely necessary that the prayer is sincere, it is worth noting that the statement is not unlike the advocacy of silent prayer found in John Cassian's *Conferences*, where it is argued that "prayer should be made in complete silence."[47] In short, the way the Exegesis on the Soul emphasizes repentance and prayer is highly similar to contemporary monastic sources.

The Exegesis on the Soul and Monastic Literature

By looking at its rhetoric of repentance and prayer we have seen how the Exegesis on the Soul comes close to early Pachomian and Shenoutean monastic texts, not least with regard to its exegesis of Old Testament Scripture. Reading and interpretation of Scripture were supremely important activities among the early cenobitic monks,[48] and it is not difficult to see how the Exegesis on

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44 Cf. 1 Cor 2:10–13.

45 Cf. Rom 8:26.

46 Coptic text in Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 462.

47 Cassian, *Conf*. 9.35.3.

48 See, e.g., William A. Graham, "God's Word in the Desert: Pachomian Scriptural Practice," in *Islamic and Comparative Religious Studies: Selected Writings*, ACTR (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 263–284; P. Corbinian Gindele, "Die Schriftlesung im Pachomiuskloster," *Erbe und Auftrag* 41 (1965): 114–122; Bentley Layton, "Rules, Patterns, and the Exercise of Power in Shenoute's Monastery: The Problem of World Replacement and Identity Maintenance," *JECS* 15:1 (2007): 45–73; Hugo Lundhaug, "Memory and Early Monastic Literary Practices: A Cognitive Perspective," *JCH* 1:1 (2014): 98–120; Janet A. Timbie, "The Interpretation of the Solomonic Books in Coptic Monastic Texts: 'Reading' Community," in *Christianity in Egypt: Literary Production and Intellectual Trends: Studies in Honor of Tito Orlandi*, ed. Paola Buzi and Alberto Camplani, SEAug 125 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2011), 501–512; Janet A. Timbie, "Writing Rules and Quoting Scripture in Early Coptic Monastic

the Soul would have been of interest to the fourth- or fifth-century monastic readers of Nag Hammadi Codex II.[49] Here they would get vivid descriptions of repentance and prayer, and a stern warning against attachment to worldly concerns, and probably against demons as well, argued by means of potent examples from canonical Scripture, interpreted metaphorically so as to apply directly to their own immediate concerns.

By looking at the main interests of the Exegesis on the Soul with regard to repentance, prayer, and the soul's ideal attachment to Christ, we have seen that there are numerous points of contact between the way Scripture is used in the Exegesis on the Soul and in literature associated with the Pachomian and Shenoutean monastic federations. While Veilleux investigated the possible connection between the Nag Hammadi Codices and early monasticism by searching for traces "of a heterodox or Gnosticizing use of the Scripture"[50] in the Pachomian literature, of which he could find none, we have seen above how the Exegesis on the Soul is highly reminiscent of Pachomian and other early monastic texts both in terms of style and exegesis. It is evident that Veilleux's claim that "there is nothing in the [Nag Hammadi Codices] that is comparable to the extremely frequent and altogether orthodox use of all the documents of the Scripture in the Pachomian sources,"[51] is very difficult to uphold when we take the Exegesis on the Soul into consideration.

In this text, monks would have been able to read about topics that were common in monastic texts, and the goals and requirements described, and the exegetical strategies employed would be familiar from such texts. As we have seen, the way in which the Exegesis on the Soul employs Old Testament citations and allusions is not dissimilar to how it is employed by monastic authors like Pachomius and his successors, or Shenoute. Indeed, in its application of the metaphor of Jerusalem as a prostitute specifically to the soul, the Exegesis on the Soul comes particularly close to the exegesis of Shenoute, as seen in the letter to his monks entitled *So Listen*.

Martin Krause noted already in 1972 that far from the stereotypically "gnostic" opposition to the Old Testament, the Exegesis on the Soul shows an un-

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Texts," in *Ascetic Culture: Essays in Honor of Philip Rousseau*, ed. Blake Leyerle and Robin Darling Young (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 29–49.

49 On the monastic provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices, see Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, STAC 97 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

50 Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis," 292.

51 Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis," 292.

equivocally positive use of Old Testament Scripture.[52] Indeed, as we have seen above, the Old Testament is treated very similarly to how it is used in early monastic writings of undisputed orthodoxy. The Exegesis on the Soul thus constitutes an obvious counter-argument to Veilleux's claim that there is a world of difference between the Nag Hammadi texts and monastic literature. It is a text that can be read as a commentary on the monastic life, illustrated by Scriptural citations and allusions, emphasizing the appropriate focus of its protagonist, the righteous soul, which in many ways itself represents the ideal monastic by leaving worldly concerns behind in favor of a life totally devoted to Christ.[53]

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52 Martin Krause, "Aussagen über das Alte Testament in z.T. bisher unveröffentlichten gnostischen Texten aus Nag Hammadi," in *Ex orbe religionum: Studia Geo Widengren, XXVI mense Aprili MCMLXXII quo die lustra tredecim feliciter explevit oblata ab collegis, discipulis, amicis, college magistro amico congratulantibus*, ed. C.J. Bleeker, S.G.F. Brandon, and M. Simon, SHR 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 452; cf. also Kulawik, *Die Erzählung*, 8.

53 For an extended analysis of the *Exegesis on the Soul* and its use of Scripture and metaphors, see Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 65–152.

PART 4

The Feminine Principle in Myth and Philosophy

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CHAPTER 12

Life, Knowledge and Language in Classic Gnostic Literature: Reconsidering the Role of the Female Spiritual Principle and Epinoia*

Tilde Bak Halvgaard

Once you begin to look for them, the number of female characters in the Nag Hammadi texts turns out to be great. They appear across a broad spectrum of texts and occupy every cosmological level: from Mary, Norea, and Zoe to Sophia, Epinoia, and Barbelo. Even though these texts operate from within a male-dominated worldview, the female figures often seem to hold important roles within the narratives. These roles have been explored a number of times and by different scholars, among whom our jubilarian is one of the most prominent, due to his piercing work on Mary Magdalene.[1]

In this article, I shall explore one of these female characters who remains relatively poorly-understood: the female spiritual principle, who appears in the Hypostasis of the Archons (NHC II 4). In related texts, this principle is called Epinoia (ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲓⲁ), not by coincidence, as I will argue, but due to highly elaborate theorizing of the provenance of the human ability for reflection and for the construction of language. The female spiritual principle and Epinoia appear for the most part in Genesis-narratives, and thus they are closely related to the figure of Eve. However, as we shall see, the various authors differ in their depictions of these figures, which invites us to understand them not only as "spiritual Eves," but as multi-faceted heavenly entities, shaped according to the authors' specific intentions.

* It is a great honor to take part in celebrating Prof. Antti Marjanen. I was fortunate to have him as a co-supervisor on my PhD project, during which he guided me with much patience and insight through difficult topics and passages. I have deep admiration for him and his careful and detailed exegetical style.

1 Besides the work of Antti Marjanen, I would like to highlight the volume edited by Karen L. King, *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, SAC (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

Women and Knowledge

As the title of the present volume indicates, women and knowledge are closely related not only in many Nag Hammadi texts, but also in a variety of myths from across the world. Within the ancient Mediterranean literary environment (in its broadest conception) in which the Nag Hammadi texts are usually placed, we encounter many literary female figures who are associated with knowledge in one way or another: Athena, Isis, Minerva, Sophia, and Eve. From the human world, figures such as Diotima, Mary, and Thecla could be mentioned. Thus, it goes without saying that the association of women with knowledge in the female characters of the Nag Hammadi texts is not a unique phenomenon, but seems to form part of a widely-spread notion of goddesses and other female divine (or human) figures representing, possessing, or providing knowledge. From the Nag Hammadi collection, one of the most famous is Sophia (ⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ), who has her very own myth according to modern scholarship. I refer to the "myth of Sophia" in which Sophia, with an anarchistic approach to "divine reproduction," gives birth to her monstrous offspring and ultimately to the creation of the material world. This myth varies greatly from text to text in line with each author's aims and approaches. Nevertheless, certain features allow us to see repeated cross-textual patterns, and further permit us to compare the "myth of Sophia" with parallel mythological material outside the Nag Hammadi corpus. According to George W. MacRae's seminal article, the gnostic Sophia myth has its background in the Jewish wisdom tradition.[2]

On the other hand, James E. Goehring reminds us that the Sophia myth likewise has many traits in common with Classical Greek traditions about the birth of the snake-headed Typhaon, who was cast into Tartaros.[3] Goehring does not seek to exclude the Jewish personified Wisdom as a possible source of influence on the Nag Hammadi writers. Instead, he understands the "Gnostic author and exegete [as being] capable of multiple exegetical manoeuvers" and thus he concludes: "the relationship of the Gnostic Sophia myth to the classical traditions concerning Hephaistos and Typhaon … reveals the extent of the syncretistic cooking pot from which the Gnostic drew."[4]

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2 George W. MacRae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," *NovT* 12 (1970): 86–101. MacRae lists fifteen parallels between the gnostic Sophia and her Jewish counterpart. I shall not repeat them here, since they are generally known, but a few of them will be considered below.

3 James E. Goehring, "A Classical Influence on the Gnostic Sophia Myth," *VC* 35 (1981): 16–23.

4 Goehring, "A Classical Influence on the Gnostic Sophia Myth," 21.

Today scholars are more reluctant to characterize either the gnostics or the Hellenistic world as "syncretistic."[5] Nevertheless, I think Goehring is right in pointing out that the Nag Hammadi authors were informed and well-read exegetes. This is also clear from the descriptions of the female spiritual principle and Epinoia in the classic gnostic material[6] as well as in the Thunder: Perfect Mind.[7] They, too, seem to bear resemblance to the Jewish personified Wisdom, but also with Isis and Christ. At the same time, they personify complex philosophical principles that indicate a high degree of innovation.[8] The literary characters then function on several levels, and it invites us to continue our exegetical investigations and discussions. In what follows, I shall explore the role of the female spiritual principle as she appears in the Hypostasis of the Archons.

The Female Spiritual Principle in the Hypostasis of the Archons

The first appearance of the Spirit (ⲡⲛⲉⲩⲙⲁ) in the Hypostasis of the Archons' retelling of Genesis is when the soul-endowed (ⲯⲩⲭⲓⲕⲟⲥ) man lies motionless upon the ground. The Spirit comes forth, dwells within him, and thus makes him alive and rise. He becomes a living soul and is called Adam (Hyp. Arch. 88.11–17).[9] The account continues with Adam naming the beasts and the birds

5 It is the general assumption that the term is not very informative, because it is very broad and presupposes "original" religious phenomena, which are not syncretistic but rather appear as "pure," "un-influenced" objects. No religious, philosophical, or literary traditions or movements, ancient or modern, are "un-affected" by other traditions. For a study that seeks to recast the term "syncretism," see, e.g., Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw, *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London: Routledge, 1994).

6 Following the definition of Tuomas Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Evidence*, NHMS 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 54–62.

7 Rasimus does not count the Thunder: Perfect Mind among the classic gnostic texts, but as I suggest elsewhere, this text has close literary connections to classic gnostic material, especially with regard to the figure of Epinoia. See Tilde Bak Halvgaard, *Linguistic Manifestations in the Trimorphic Protennoia and the Thunder: Perfect Mind Analysed against the Background of Platonic and Stoic Dialectics*, NHMS 91 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), esp. 117–124.

8 As Michael A. Williams describes the gnostics' way of interpreting Scripture in *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 80–95.

9 All references to Hypostasis of Archons follow the critical edition of Bentley Layton in J.M. Robinson (ed.), *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices, Vol. 2* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 234–259.

(with assistance from the highest female entity called Incorruptibility). He is placed in Paradise by the archons and is forbidden to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (88.18–32). Then follows the remarkable passage in which the archons cause Adam to sleep and "open his side like a living woman." In this process the Spirit leaves Adam, and again he is endowed only with soul. Next, the author of the Hypostasis of the Archons emphasizes the transfer of the Spirit from Adam to the woman by referring to her as the pneumatic woman (ⲧⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ ⲛ̄ⲡⲛⲉⲩⲙⲁⲧⲓⲕⲏ). Hence, it is the Spirit from within the woman who raises Adam (again), an act which causes Adam to praise the woman and, perhaps more importantly, praise the Spirit within her as the "mother of the living," the "physician," the "woman" etc. (89.4–16). I agree with Elaine Pagels that this emphasizes that Adam awakens to spiritual and not carnal knowledge, since it is the Spirit that is called "the mother of the living."[10] The eulogy of Adam has parallels in both the Treatise without Title (NHC II 114.7–15) and the Thunder: Perfect Mind (NHC VI 13.19–14.9), as it has been noted and treated by several scholars.[11] I shall not go further into these parallels, but only briefly mention Bentley Layton's suggestion that the revealer in the Thunder: Perfect Mind is likely to be Eve in her heavenly and earthly form, owing to parallel passages in the three Nag Hammadi texts together with a Gospel of Eve mentioned by Epiphanius in *Panarion* 26.3.1.[12]

The author of the Hypostasis of the Archons continues the narrative with the ridicule of the archons, who pursue Eve and the Spirit within her in order to rape her, but fail in the attempt since she metamorphoses into a tree and leaves them only a shadow of herself (89.17–31). The Spirit has thus left the carnal woman, who consequently, like Adam, must be considered soul-endowed. The

10 Elaine Pagels, "Exegesis and Exposition of the Genesis Creation Accounts in Selected Texts from Nag Hammadi," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, ed. Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 270.

11 See, for instance, Ingvild S. Gilhus, *The Nature of the Archons: A Study in the Soteriology of a Gnostic Treatise from Nag Hammadi* (*CG II, 4*), StOR (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1985), 56–59; Bentley Layton, "The Riddle of the Thunder (NHC VI,2): The Function of Paradox in a Gnostic Text from Nag Hammadi," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, ed. Charels W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 37–54; Elaine Pagels, "Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip*," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, SAC, ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988), 187–206; Paul-Hubert Poirier, *Le Tonnerre, intellect parfait* (*NH VI, 2*), Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, Section «Textes» 22 (Québec: Les Presses de L'Université Laval/ Louvain: Éditions Peeters, 1995), 120–132; Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*, 52.

12 Layton, "The Riddle of the Thunder (NHC VI 2)," esp. 48–51.

transformation of the spiritual woman into a tree is a good example of a literary motive shaped by a highly innovative author. The author has been quite resourceful, and the treatment of earlier sources demonstrates an ability to navigate through complex materials. In this "woman-into-tree-motive," at least three literary features are combined. Firstly, it reflects the classical myth of Daphne turning into a tree as Apollo pursues her.[13] However, the similarities are limited, since according to Ovid, what is left of Daphne is her beauty and not her shadow (as it is in the Hypostasis of the Archons).[14] Secondly, the tree may also allude to the tree of life as Ingvild S. Gilhus and Bentley Layton argue. They both suggest that the tree into which the woman is transformed is the tree of life.[15] While Layton lists only one argument for this understanding—the pun on the name of Eve (Aramaic: *ḥayyayā* "Life")—Gilhus elaborates on this topic. She enumerates three reasons for understanding the tree as the tree of life: 1) the two trees of knowledge and of life are mentioned together in Genesis but not in the Hypostasis of the Archons, since the tree of life does not come into existence before 2) the woman metamorphoses into that tree. 3) In the Hypostasis of the Archons, the tree of life is interpreted as the Holy Spirit as part of the specific retelling of Genesis in which Adam and Eve are cast out of

13 Cf. the above-mentioned classical influence on the Sophia myth pointed out by Goehring. The metamorphoses into trees and animals are common motifs in classical literature. Peter Nagel also comments on this in *Das Wesen der Archonten* (Halle-Wittenberg: Martin-Luther-Universität, 1970), 40, where he refers to Lucian, *A True Story* 1.8. Moreover, the fact that Bentley Layton did not comment on the classical parallel in his edition of the Hypostasis of the Archons (Conclusion) from 1976 (for reference, see below), caused Birger Pearson to publish a note on this particular matter: Birger A. Pearson, "'She Became a Tree': A Note to CG II, 4: 89, 25–26," *HTR* 69 (1976): 410–415. Pearson draws attention to a parallel from a mosaic (ca. 2nd–1st century BC) from Pompeii picturing the god Pan "reaching out with obvious lust toward a beautiful nude woman. The attempted rape is all in vain, for the woman, virtually in his clutches, is turning into a tree!" (p. 414). In addition, he mentions the parallel in Ovid in note 8. In 1978, yet another note on the topic was published by Stephen Gero, "The Seduction of Eve and the Trees of Paradise: A Note on a Gnostic Myth," *HTR* 71 (1978): 299–301. Gero draws attention to a medieval text (15th century catalogue by Cardinal Johannes Torquemada) which lists "Manichaean errors." Among these, he notes, figures a reference to a belief that "the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a woman and that Adam knew her and on account of this was expelled from Paradise" (pp. 299–300).

14 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.452.

15 Ingvild S. Gilhus, *The Nature of the Archons*, 58, 69–72; Bentley Layton, "The Hypostasis of the Archons (Conclusion)," *HTR* 69 (1976): 31–101, esp. 57. See also, Ingvild S. Gilhus, "The Tree of Life and the Tree of Death: A Study of Gnostic Symbols," *Religion* 17 (1987): 337–353.

the garden, lest they be devoted to the Holy Spirit (91.7–11). In Genesis, however, they are expelled so that they may not eat from the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). In this way, Gilhus interprets the pneumatic Eve as the tree of life, which again is the Holy Spirit.[16]

Thirdly, Elaine Pagels draws attention to yet another parallel, which somehow completes the blended image crafted by the author of the Hypostasis of the Archons. Pagels agrees with Layton that the woman metamorphoses into the tree of life, hence the pun on the name of Eve. This, she argues, should be understood in relation to the Jewish personified Wisdom, who is identified as "a tree of life" in Proverbs (3:18). This is emphasized by the fact that Eve is identified with Wisdom in the Hypostasis of the Archons (95.17–18).[17]

Thus, we have the pursuit of a virgin who turns into a tree in combination with the Genesis account of the two trees and the female Wisdom from Proverbs as the tree of life. This combination is according to Birger Pearson a "gnostic synthesis."[18] In the next paragraph in the Hypostasis of the Archons, the reader is led elegantly from one tree to another, following the author's line of association from the tree of life to the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The informed reader—ancient as well as modern—is aware of the decisive role of the woman in the Genesis account, and a topic elaborated by the Hypostasis of the Archons. In both accounts, a woman provides knowledge. However, whereas knowledge obtained in Genesis leads to destruction, knowledge in the Hypostasis of the Archons leads to salvation. Of special interest for our purpose is not only the positive reinterpretation of the "myth of the fall," but also the novel feature that the human beings are made to eat by the female spiritual principle (ϯπνεγματικη). After having left the carnal woman ("the shadow"), the spiritual principle "borrows" the body of the snake and speaks from inside it (89.31–90.18). The author of the Hypostasis of the Archons thus maintains that women and knowledge are strongly connected, yet positively valued. It is important to hold on to the fact that it is the same spiritual prin-

16 Gilhus, *Nature of the Archons*, 70. She emphasizes that "both trees symbolize female pneumatic values."

17 Elaine Pagels, "Exegesis and Exposition," 271. See also Pagels, "Pursuing the Spiritual Eve," 187–206 (esp. 196). It should be noted, however, that it is not the earthly Eve, who is associated with Wisdom in 95.17–18, but Sophia's daughter Zoe, who is linked to her mother. Nevertheless, there is a strong relationship between Sophia—Zoe—Eve (of which the last two means 'Life').

18 Pearson, "She Became a Tree", 415. We could add that this conclusion is not unlike the one made by J. Goehring about the "syncretistic cooking pot" (see above). Pearson, however, does not consider the relation to Proverbs.

ciple that first makes Adam alive and next makes the human beings eat from the tree. Hence, it is perhaps not so strange that this female spiritual principle is often designated the "Spiritual Eve" or the "Heavenly Eve." It makes good sense indeed, since it is the *woman* (Eve) to whom Adam speaks when he is awakened, and it is a female principle that makes them eat.

On the other hand, when we consult the parallel passages in related classic gnostic literature, we find that this principle is designated more specifically as "Epinoia." That is seen in the Apocryphon of John, in which the authors have been more specific when naming the female characters that take part in the narrative. We shall now turn to the Apocryphon of John and consider the role of Epinoia in particular.

The Spirit, Eve, Epinoia, and Life

Between the two recensions of the Apocryphon of John, there is an interesting dissimilarity with regard to the relationship between the Spirit (ⲡⲛⲉⲩⲙⲁ), who is also called the Power (ⲇⲩⲛⲁⲙⲓⲥ) of the Mother (Sophia), and the "helper of Adam" (ⲃⲟⲏⲑⲟⲥ). The latter is in all four manuscripts further identified as the Epinoia of light (ⲧⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ [III 25.10]) and Adam calls her "Life" (ⲍⲱⲏ).[19] In the short recension, the Spirit is sent from the Father as the helper of Adam. Thus, in the Codex III version of the Apocryphon of John and in BG the Spirit is identical with the Epinoia of light and thereby also with the one whom Adam called 'Life'.[20] The long recension in Codex II[21] tells differently that the Mother-Father (ⲡⲓⲙⲏⲧⲣⲟⲡⲁⲧⲱⲣ) sends a helper to Adam through (ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄) his Spirit and his mercy. Therefore, it seems that the author of Codex II differentiates between the Spirit and the helper (which is the Epinoia). Perhaps this does not make a decisive difference in the theologies of the two recensions but, on the other hand, the function of the Spirit is an important issue due to its central position in both the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint and the New Testament.

Due to the authors' reception of the Genesis narrative it seems reasonable to understand the Spirit against that background; especially Genesis 1:2,[22] where the Spirit of God hovers over the waters, and Genesis 2:7, in which God blows

19 III 25.11; BG 53.9–10; II 20.18–19. All references to *Ap. John* follow the critical edition of Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse in *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices. Volume 2*, ed. J.M. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 12–177.

20 III 24.25–25.11 and BG 52.17–53.10.

21 Codex IV is fragmented through this particular passage.

22 The references to Genesis follows LXX unless otherwise noted.

a spirit of life into the human being's face and he becomes a living soul.[23] Particularly the latter passage must have meant a great deal both to the author of the Hypostasis of the Archons and to the authors of the Apocryphon of John, since they all rewrite the scene carefully. Thus, it appears that it is the Spirit, especially as the divine, life-giving element, that has concerned them. In addition, this focus on the Spirit, which persists throughout the Apocryphon of John, should be understood against the background of the New Testament, as so many other motifs in the Nag Hammadi texts. The Gospel of John and the letters of the apostle Paul reflect a similar focus on the Spirit, and especially its life-giving function: e.g., John 6:63 ("it is the Spirit that gives life")[24] and First Corinthians 15:45 ("the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.")[25]

Codex III and BG thus emphasize the active role of the Spirit in the "material" world as the life-giver and the "helper" of Adam. We see a similar portrayal of the female spiritual principle in the Hypostasis of the Archons, because it alone makes Adam "a living soul" since the Spirit resides within the woman and awakens him from his sleep. As a consequence, Adam calls her "the mother of the living." Moreover, in the Hypostasis of the Archons it is also the Spirit who makes the human beings eat from the tree.

In the long recension of the Apocryphon of John, it is Epinoia who is sent through the Spirit and who performs all the actions in primordial times. I would not go as far as to argue that the long recension keeps the Spirit away from the lower world; rather, the author has nuanced the picture considerably for a good reason. Before engaging in that question, let us pause for a moment to consider the role of the female spiritual principle and Epinoia in relation to the role of Eve.

In both recensions of the Apocryphon of John, at first glance it appears puzzling that Adam calls his helper (Epinoia) "Life."[26] As it is a clear reference to Genesis 3:20, in which Adam names the woman Ζωή, it seems strange that

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23 ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοὴν ζωῆς, καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν. Thus, to be exact, God blows a "*breath of life*" into his face.

24 For a thorough study on the role of the Spirit in John, see Gitte Buch-Hansen, *"It is the Spirit that Gives Life": A Stoic Understanding of Pneuma in John's Gospel*, BZNW 173 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010). See also John 20:22 where Jesus gives the Spirit to his disciples by blowing on them.

25 1Cor 15:45 is in itself a well-known citation and interpretation of Gen 2:7 in which Paul differentiates between soul and spirit explaining that the Adam of Genesis was a mere "living soul" whereas the last Adam (Christ) became a "life-giving spirit." See also Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*, 163–171.

26 III 25.11; BG 53.9–10; II 20.18–19.

in the Apocryphon of John, the woman is not even created at this point. The creation of the woman does not happen until pages later, when the evil chief ruler wants to bring Epinoia out of Adam.[27] Accordingly, the life-giving function, possessed by Eve in Genesis, which is reflected in her name, seems to be taken over by Epinoia in the Apocryphon of John. In the short recension, this makes perfect sense in so far as the Spirit is identical with Epinoia who thereby has the Spirit's life-giving function.

As we saw above in relation to the Hypostasis of the Archons, the Spirit has the same life-giving function when it raises Adam while residing within Eve. However, in that text we do not see a similar anticipation in the retelling of Genesis with regard to the Spirit's taking over of Eve's epithets. Rather, the author manages to retain Eve's maternal, life-giving role by letting the Spirit work from inside her. From this follows that the short recension of the Apocryphon of John stands in a position between the Hypostasis of the Archons, where it is the Spirit who fills the central roles (and Incorruptibility as the "helper"), and the long recension of the Apocryphon of John, where Epinoia is the active part in the Genesis-narrative.[28]

Nonetheless, it remains clear that the authors of the Hypostasis of the Archons and the Apocryphon of John agree on blending three events/motifs from the Genesis account, which makes the reader either compare or identify the female spiritual principle/Epinoia with Eve: first, the "breath of life" is blown into the face of the human being (Gen. 2:7); second, the decision of making a helper for Adam (Gen. 2:18–23); third, Adam calling the woman Eve/Zoe/"Life," since she is the "mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). The first of these points does not relate to Eve in Genesis, but the Spirit only. By bringing these episodes together, the authors of the Hypostasis of the Archons and the Apocryphon of John bring their readers to reflect upon the correlation between the Spirit as life-giver and Eve as "Life."[29] The Spirit, however, is the principal agent for these authors, in all three episodes.

In her commentary on the Apocryphon of John, Karen King explains this feature as a specific strategy of identification. In her view, it produces

> correspondences between diverse episodes and resource materials by identifying their main characters with each other. It also connects differ-

27 III 29.19–20; BG 59.12–15; II 22.33–36.

28 This may suggest that the short recension is earlier than the long one, an issue which I have set aside.

29 According to Gilhus, *The Nature of the Archons*, 58, Eve's life-giving role is further emphasized as she metamorphoses into the Tree of Life. See discussion above.

> ent levels of reality; for example, the heavenly figures of Adam and Seth are linked to the figures of the same names in the lower world.[30]

This is, in my view, a precise explanation of how these features work in the texts. For, as King indicates, those identifications and connections do not only work on a metaphorical level, providing numerous allusions for the well-read reader; they also work on a cosmological and philosophical level, presenting correspondences between figures in the heavenly world and the lower world. This seems to reflect a Platonic cosmology, especially when we recall the description given in the Hypostasis of the Archons of the pursuit of Eve. In order to escape the archons, the female spiritual principle departs from the carnal woman and what she leaves behind is only a shadowy reflection. This resembles the classic Platonic notion of the lower world's entities being mere shadows of the eternal ideas.[31] More specifically, the female spiritual principle provides the heavenly form of life, i.e., eternal life, whereas the earthly woman is only capable of providing a carnal, hence temporary, life on earth.

This is in line with earlier research, especially that of Ingvild Gilhus, which shows how Eve's functions have been divided between the earthly Eve and the pneumatic Eve.[32] However, in both the Hypostasis of the Archons and in the Apocryphon of John, this heavenly being is not designated the "pneumatic Eve," but rather "the Spirit" and "the Epinoia of light." This does not mean that the ancient authors and readers may not have considered the figure as the "heavenly/spiritual Eve." The authors, however, insist that it is the Spirit who is the life-giving element.

It seems clear that the female Spirit provides in eternity what the earthly woman provides in time: they both provide life, a heavenly spiritual life or an earthly psychic life. From this also follows the obvious necessity of the femaleness of the Spirit, which stands out very strongly in these Nag Hammadi texts. Thus, the fundamental role of women is accentuated, namely, the cycle of life, regeneration and childbirth. The picture becomes somewhat blurred, however, when we enquire into the nature of the Spirit when depicted as Epinoia in the Apocryphon of John.

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30 Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 187.

31 Gilhus, *Nature of the Archons*, 60; Layton, "The Hypostasis of the Archons (Conclusion)," 57.

32 Gilhus, *Nature of the Archons*, 52.

The Spirit, Eve, Epinoia, and Knowledge

As described above, the short recension of the Apocryphon of John identifies the Spirit with Epinoia, whereas in the long recension, Epinoia is sent through the Spirit as a helper for Adam. The reader is reminded that Epinoia was the one whom Adam called "Life." Accordingly, this distinct use of Epinoia does not indicate a decisive difference in the theologies (or pneumatologies) of the different recensions of the Apocryphon of John, but rather a nuancing of the various divine roles in the long recension. In the end, I agree with John Turner who describes the diverse divine, female characters on the earthly plane in the Sethian corpus as being "avatars" of Pronoia/Barbelo.[33]

Why, then, does the author of the long recension use Epinoia persistently? When we consider the meaning of Epinoia, etymologically as well as contextually, the answer to this question may not be that complicated. Firstly, while the basic meaning of ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲓⲁ (ἐπίνοια) is "afterthought," it may as well be rendered as "reflection" and "thought."[34] Secondly, in the context of the Apocryphon of John, we see that Epinoia first enters into the lower world as the "helper" of Adam. She "takes suffering" (ϣⲉⲃ ϩⲓⲥⲉ) with him, restores him to his fullness (ⲡⲗⲏⲣⲱⲙⲁ), and teaches him about his descent and ascent.[35] It is remarkably different from the way in which the author of the Hypostasis of the Archons understands the function of the "helper." In this text, the helper is "a voice from Incorruptibility" who helps Adam name the animals.[36] The Hypostasis of the Archons thus follows the Genesis account more closely than the Apocryphon of John by retaining the scene, where Adam names the animals. On the other hand, the Hypostasis of the Archons differs from Genesis, precisely where the Apocryphon of John seems to follow Genesis, namely, that the function of the helper has nothing to do with the naming of the animals. Rather it "assists the creature" and Adam in particular, which is the role of Eve in Genesis, too. Thus, again, we have the identification of Epinoia/the Spirit as Eve and vice versa. Moreover, like the female spiritual principle in the Hypostasis

33 John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*, Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, Section «Études» 6 (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval/ Louvain: Éditions Peeters, 2001), 227–228. See also Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*, 153.

34 The diversity of possibilities is reflected in the various translations of the Apocryphon of John and other texts where ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲓⲁ occurs; e.g., the Trimorphic Protennoia (NHC XIII 1) and the Thunder: Perfect Mind (NHC VI 2). Cf. also the variety of meanings listed in LSJ (thought, notion, conception, idea, power of thought, inventiveness, intelligence etc.).

35 III 25.12–17; BG 53.11–17; II 20.19–24.

36 Hyp. Arch. 88.17–24.

of the Archons, Epinoia is hidden in Adam in the Apocryphon of John; furthermore, she remains unknown to the archons and corrects the deficiency of the "Mother."[37]

It is especially noteworthy that Epinoia teaches (ⲧⲁⲙⲟ/ⲧⲥⲁⲃⲟ) Adam, because the same role is assigned to the snake in the Hypostasis of the Archons when its body is "borrowed" by the female spiritual principle in the scene about the tree of knowledge.[38] The parallel between the female spiritual principle and Epinoia is apparent, and it becomes even stronger when we consider that in the Apocryphon of John, it is Epinoia in particular who fills the leading role in the scene. In both the short and the long recension of the Apocryphon of John, Epinoia is associated with the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but not in exactly the same manner. The differences between them most likely tell us something about the main concerns of the authors, as becomes clear in the following.

To begin with, the readers learn from the dialogue between Christ and John that Christ—and not the snake—is the one who made the human beings eat from the tree. Both recensions assert this.[39] Nevertheless, a few pages later, when the reader gets to the pivotal scene about the tree of knowledge, the short recension appears somewhat inconsistent. Here Christ does not appear, but it is Epinoia alone who teaches the human being about knowledge and tells him "to eat of knowledge so that he might remember his perfection."[40] The author of the long recension maintains the activity of Christ and makes him the teacher who appears on the tree of knowledge.[41] Yet, both recensions insist on the relation of Epinoia to the tree of knowledge, whether she appears on the tree and teaches them about knowledge (NHC III and BG), or is identified with both the tree and the knowledge they obtain when they eat (NHC II). What

37 III 25.17–23; BG 53.18–54.4; II 20.25–28. The "Mother" is Sophia. This fact is accentuated in the short recension.

38 Cf. Hyp. Arch. 90.6 where the snake is named the "instructor" (ⲡⲣⲉϥⲧⲁⲙⲟ).

39 III 28.16–18; BG 57.20–58.3; II 22.9–11.

40 Translation follows BG 61.3–5. Instead of "perfection" (ϫⲱⲕ), Codex III reads "fullness" (ⲡⲗⲏⲣⲱⲙⲁ), which might indicate a type of restoration of Adam which involves the entire cosmos. See, for instance, Tilde Bak Halvgaard, "The Concept of Fullness in Paul and the Pauline Tradition," in *Pauline Studies* 9, ed. Stanley E. Porter and David Yoon (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 161–187.

41 II 23.26–31. Both recensions present the image of the revealer (Epinoia or Christ) appearing on the tree of knowledge in the form of an eagle (ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲧⲟⲥ). Karen L. King proposes to "see this as a pun (or mistranslation) based on the phonetic similarities between 'snake' (*hiera*) and 'eagle' (*hierax*) in the Greek translation (LXX)"; *The Secret Revelation of John*, 106 n. 24.

the human beings obtain when they eat is knowledge, and that knowledge is qualified by Epinoia in these texts. Recalling that ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲓⲁ means "afterthought" or "reflection," I find it plausible to assume that what they obtain is the ability for *reflection*. At an earlier stage, this ability is called "Life" since it functions as a help for Adam to be restored to his "fullness." In other words, it is the life-giving knowledge, which is the ability to reflect.

In conclusion, I suggest that the author of the Apocryphon of John uses the figure of Epinoia instead of, for instance, the Spirit, Pronoia, or the female spiritual principle, due to the focus on the ability which the human beings receive as they eat from the tree of knowledge: the ability to reflect about good and evil. The Apocryphon of John does not elaborate on the contents of this ability. The reader is only informed that the ability is for recognition, restoration and remembrance of perfection or fullness.[42] However, if we consider yet another Nag Hammadi text, namely the Thunder: Perfect Mind, we may obtain a fuller picture of how the ancient readers of the Nag Hammadi codices were presented to the concept of "reflection", that is, "Epinoia."

Epinoia in the Thunder: Perfect Mind

The Thunder: Perfect Mind (NHC VI 2) is not usually associated with the classic gnostic texts.[43] However, as I have argued elsewhere, Thunder has many traits in common with Barbeloite mythology, especially the Trimorphic Protennoia, due to the numerous "I am" proclamations and linguistic manifestations in sound, voice, and word.[44]

For our purpose, the most important parallel is the occurrence of the term ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲓⲁ in 14.10–11, where the revealer proclaims to be "the Thought/Reflection (ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲓⲁ), whose remembrance is great."[45] This corresponds to the representation of Epinoia in the Apocryphon of John, in which part of her purpose is to make human beings *remember*. However, whereas in the Apocryphon of John this remembrance is not specified further, we acquire, in my opinion, an elaboration of that remembrance in Thunder.

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42 III 30.19–20; BG 61.4–5; II 23.30–31. Cf. also BG 53.13 and II 20.20–21.

43 Cf. Rasimus's depiction of the interdependence of the classic gnostic literature, among which *Thunder* is not counted; *Paradise Reconsidered*, 62.

44 Bak Halvgaard, *Linguistic Manifestations*.

45 All references to Thunder follow the critical edition by Paul-Hubert Poirier, *Le Tonnerre intellect parfait* (*NH VI,2*).

The knowledge, which the first humans obtain from the tree of knowledge, is, as we saw, a life-giving knowledge, which is the ability for reflection, which again leads to remembrance. But what is it exactly which the human beings gain the ability to reflect upon? The answer lies in the tree itself: namely, good and evil. This pair of concepts is perhaps the most fundamental of the kind and represents the way in which human beings conceptualize the world in opposite terms, that is, how they grasp their world in dichotomies and speak about it in such "black and white" terms. In short, what they gain is the ability to reflect and conceptualize their world in concepts: they obtain language.

The revealer in Thunder presents herself as Epinoia, and the major part of her revelation is formed as opposite concepts. Nowhere does she state that she is good and evil, but indeed a wide range of other opposites: war and peace, knowledge and ignorance etc. In this way, her manifestation gives the recipients a system of concepts that makes them capable of organizing, understanding and communicating about the world. Via Epinoia, the author of Thunder thus associates the text with the probably better known "rewritten" biblical mythology in the Apocryphon of John, and makes it the key concern of the text to show what and who Epinoia is. That it is about language is clear from the linguistic passages in the text, in which the revealer describes herself as silence (ϫⲁⲣⲱϥ), sound (ϩⲣⲟⲟⲩ), voice (ⲥⲙⲏ) and word (ⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ) (esp. 14.9–15), and it becomes even clearer as we approach the end of the text, where she is "the manifestation of the division (ⲇⲓϩⲉⲣⲉⲥⲓⲥ)."[46]

In Platonic dialectics, a *diairesis* was a method of definition by division, by which the dialectician could obtain a definition of the concept in question through divisions. That is, a concept is divided into two opposite concepts, which are divided repeatedly until the undividable concept is reached, and the dialectician has arrived at a reasonable definition.[47] Moreover, as Stephen Minardi has shown, the process of a *diairesis* is a process of remembrance, namely, of the Platonic forms.[48]

When the revealer in Thunder proclaims that she is the manifestation of the *diairesis*, and at the same time presents herself in nothing but opposite concepts, I believe it makes good sense to understand it as a *diairetic*, linguistic

46 20.34–35. The linguistic passages are 14.9–15; 19.20–25, and 20.28–35.

47 This method is described in the *Phaedrus* 265d–266c and the *Sophist* 235b–c (among others). For a thorough discussion of the nature of the Platonic *diairesis*, see, for instance J.M.E. Moravcsik, "The Anatomy of Plato's Divisions," in *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, Phronesis: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy, Supplementary I, ed. E.N. Lee et. al (Assen: van Gorcum, 1973), 324–348.

48 Stefano Minardi, "On Some Aspects of Platonic Division," *Mind* 92:367 (1983): 418.

manifestation. This provides the readers (the human beings) with the knowledge they need in order to comprehend the world they live in, but also with the knowledge of how to transcend it. This aspect is indicated in the Apocryphon of John when Epinoia is depicted as the helper of Adam, who tells him about his descent and the way of ascent. Moreover, Epinoia also appears in Thunder as the revealer who constantly encourages the reader to find her. Thus, I suggest that the linguistic manifestation is to be understood as a manifestation of language, but at the same time, it demonstrates the shortcomings of language showing that language only consists of names, i.e. words. In line with the Platonic skepticism towards language, the author of Thunder seems to encourage the readers of the text to reflect upon language in order to abandon and perhaps even transcend language. In this way, they are invited to find the revealer in the place whence she came: in the silence, a place beyond language.[49]

Final Remarks

The above discussion shows that the classic gnostic rewritings of Genesis offer not only a positive perspective on the eating from the tree of knowledge but also a positive representation of the female figures within that story. As has been argued many times before, the roles and functions of the Eve of Genesis have been divided between the earthly woman and heavenly figures as the female spiritual principle, Epinoia, Pronoia, Zoe, Sophia etc. according to the specific functions they have in the texts.

Now, perhaps we should ask the obvious but difficult question of why these important characters are female.[50] Part of the answer is probably found in the traditional depictions of goddesses from other, contemporary (late) antique cultures. By and large, goddesses like Ashera, Isis, Gaia, Demeter, Aphrodite, Magna Mater etc. all represent the cycle of life, regeneration, and procreation, i.e. functions that are associated with female biology. We could also mention the designation of Meirothea as the "womb" in the Trimorphic Protennoia (38*.15). On the other hand, the female goddesses found in the Nag Hammadi texts are not only related to procreation and the cycle of life but also to knowledge and wisdom. This is probably due to the close relation to and dependence on earlier wisdom traditions, especially of Jewish origin, but also Egyptian.

49 For the full version of this argument and reading of Thunder, see Bak Halvgaard, *Linguistic Manifestations*, 98–165.

50 I thank Ingvild S. Gilhus for posing this important question at the 2015 NEWCONT conference in Oslo.

The Jewish Dame Wisdom has often been highlighted as the background material for the gnostic Sophia myth.[51] I shall not go into the many parallels between these figures, but only emphasize a few which are of special importance to our discussion. Following George MacRae, it is easy to see that the gnostic Sophia is "instrumental in the creation of the world" (cf. Prov. 3:19 and 8:27–30.)[52] She is "identified with life" (cf. Prov. 8:35)[53] and she "protected, delivered and strengthened Adam" (cf. Wisd. 10:1–2). Even though MacRae hesitates in identifying Sophia with Epinoia, he does not doubt that they "are inspired by the same source."[54]

It is clear that the creative and life-giving aspects possessed by so many other goddesses, are also present in the Wisdom-like figures in the Nag Hammadi collection, whether they are called Sophia, Epinoia, Pronoia, Zoe or something else. However, these aspects are still shaped against the background of the biological functions of women. To this list belong the pursuit of Eve/the female spiritual principle in the Hypostasis of the Archons, and the repetitive motif of searching and finding in Thunder, which recalls the portrayal of the Jewish Wisdom and her counterpart, the "woman of folly" (Prov. 8:17 and 9:13). Both Wisdom and Folly tempt and invite men with their beauty and men want to pursue and possess them. These motifs are clear illustrations of wisdom as something men desire to possess, and we are left with a stereotype image of what women are to men.

On the other hand, another important motive is the mediating function of the Jewish Wisdom, which indeed is also found in the Nag Hammadi characterizations of Pronoia, Epinoia, Sophia, and the female spiritual principle. As the Jewish Wisdom figure, they function as the mediating principles between the two worlds, providing a path for human beings to transcend the lower world and approach the Father. This aspect may be understood as the specific *female* connection to earth, due to the maternal function, which in its most basic form is life-giving. She is grounded in earth at the same time as she provides the way to heaven, in fact, she resembles a tree which has its roots buried in the soil but which at the same time stretches its branches and leaves up high. Perhaps in this image we have part of the answer to the question why the tree of knowledge is associated with the female figures in these texts.

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51 See esp. MacRae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth."

52 MacRae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," 90.

53 MacRae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," 93.

54 MacRae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," 92.

CHAPTER 13

"Wisdom, Our Innocent Sister": Reflections on a Mytheme*

Michael A. Williams

Introduction

Wisdom (or "Sophia") myths are among the more famous features in origin stories found among Nag Hammadi and related writings. This essay does not attempt a comprehensive analysis of all Wisdom myths in the relevant sources, but it does explore one particular mytheme: Wisdom's "innocence." This mytheme does not appear in every Wisdom myth, but it does occur in some interesting sources: the Apocryphon of John (NHC II 1, III 1, IV 1, BG 2),[1] and a related tradition summarized in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.29;[2] the Trimorphic Protennoia (NHC XIII 1);[3] and the Second Treatise of the Great Seth (NHC VII 1).[4] Though the mytheme has been mentioned in studies and com-

* It is a true honor to have the opportunity to participate in this volume dedicated to a dear friend and respected colleague. So far as I know, Prof. Antti Marjanen has not yet published on the specific theme addressed here, but I can only hope that the following discussion to some degree is worthy of the standard of careful analysis that his work has always exemplified.

1 For a synoptic edition of all four versions, see Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse, eds., *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2*, NHS 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1995); for BG and III, see Bernard Barc and Wolf-Peter Funk, eds., *Le livre des secrets de Jean: Recension brève* (*NH III, 1 et BG, 2*), BCNHT 35 (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2012).

2 Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, eds., *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les hérésies, Livre I*, SC 263–264 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1979).

3 Gesine Schenke, ed., *Die dreigestaltige Protennoia* (*Nag-Hammadi-Codex XIII*), TUGAL 132 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1984); John D. Turner, "Trimorphic Protennoia," in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, ed. Charles W. Hedrick, NHS 27 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 371–454; Paul-Hubert Poirier, ed., *La Pensée première à la triple forme* (*NH XIII, 1*), BCNHT 32 (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006).

4 Joseph Anthony Gibbons, "A Commentary on the Second Logos of the Great Seth" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1972); Hans-Gebhard Bethge, "Zweiter Logos des großen Seth," *TLZ* 100 (1975): 97–109; Louis Painchaud, ed., *Le deuxième traité du grand Seth* (*NH VII,2*), BCNHT 6 (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1982); Gregory Riley, "Second Treatise

mentaries, so far as I am aware there has been no systematic analysis devoted to the roles the mytheme plays across several texts. The nuances of this mytheme are somewhat more varied than has been noticed. Moreover, a close examination adds something of substance to our understanding about how myths that assigned a prominent but negative role to lower, "ignorant" cosmic creators could at the same time insist that somehow Jewish tradition had been right: God's Wisdom was crucial in the creation of the cosmos.

Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.29

As is well known, the myth recounted in *Adversus Haereses* 1.29 is closely related to the first part of the Apocryphon of John,[5] from the unfolding of the divine realm, to the appearance of Holy Spirit or Wisdom (Sophia); to her production of the first Ruler (archon) as offspring; to his creation of the material cosmos; and ending with this Ruler's ignorant claim to be the only God.[6] In *Adversus Haereses* 1.30 Irenaeus turns to a longer summary of a myth presented by "others," in which the account of the emergence of the divine

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of the Great Seth," in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, ed. Birger Pearson, NHMS 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 129–199.

5 From past research on the relation between *Haer*. 1.29 and the Apocryphon of John, see, e.g., Hans-Martin Schenke, "Nag Hammadi Studien I: Das literarische Problem des Apocryphon Johannis," *ZRGG* 14 (1962): 57–63; Werner Foerster, ed., *Gnosis: A Selection of Texts*, trans. R.McL. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972–1974), 1:101–103; Michael Waldstein, "On the Relation Betweeen the Two Parts of the *Apocryphon of John*," in *Der Gottesspruch in der kopt. Literatur: Hans-Martin Schenke zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Walter Beltz, Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientwissenschaft 15 (Halle: Institut für Orientalistik der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1994), 99–112; Barc and Funk, *Recension brève*, 2.

6 Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.29.4 concludes with that boast, whose wording combines elements from passages such as Exod 20:5 LXX and Isa 45:5–6 LXX. We will see similar examples of this boast in the other sources, and for convenience I will refer to this motif as the "vain claim," recalling the seminal article by Nils A. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia," in *Sethian Gnosticism*, vol. 2 of *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978*, ed. Bentley Layton, SHR 41 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 689–712. For a recent analysis of the different forms of the "vain claim" and suggestions as their significance, see Steve Johnston, "Le mythe gnostique du blaspheme de l'Archonte," in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi: Histoire des religions et approches contemporaines: Actes du colloque international réuni à Paris, le 11 décembre 2008, à la fondation Simone et Cino del Duca, le 12 décembre 2008, au palais de l'Institut de France* (ed. Jean-Pierre Mahé, et al.; Paris: AIBL-Diffusion De Boccard, 2010), 177–201.

realm differs from that in 1.29.[7] And then 1.30.6–14 continues with a lengthy section with no parallel in 1.29, recounting the creation of humans and of their peril and salvation. 1.30 contains elements similar to the last part of the Apocryphon of John, while also differing in many respects. As Tuomas Rasimus has remarked, Irenaeus's source for 1.30 "has a clear but problematic relationship to *Ap. John*."[8] For all of their differences, the myths in both 1.29 and 1.30 divert blame from actions of Wisdom in curious ways that are of direct relevance for the current topic. But because the subject here is the specific mytheme of Wisdom's "innocence," I focus primarily on the content in 1.29.

The myth in 1.29 first maps out an elaborate transcendent realm including an unnamable Father; a virginal Spirit, Barbelo; and their luminous offspring, Christ. There are also four sets of paired entities, with the initially appearing set: Thought, Incorruptibility, Eternal Life, and Foreknowledge, paired, respectively, with: Word/Reason, Christ, Will and Mind. From Thought and Mind is emitted the Self-generated (Autogenes), and then from other entities above are generated four Lights attending the Self-generated: (H)armogenes, Raguel, David and Eleleth, and attendants for each of these. Finally, the Self-generated emits the True Human, Adamas, who is paired with Knowledge (*Gnosis*) and set with (H)armogenes. Then we have this:

> Then they say that from the first angel, who attends the Only-begotten, the Holy Spirit was emitted, who is called both "Wisdom" (*Sophia*) and "Impetuous" (*Prunicus*). Then seeing that all of the others had consorts while she[9] was without consort, she sought with whom she might unite. And when she did not find this she exerted herself and stretched and looked into the lower regions, thinking to find a consort there. And when she did not find one, she leaped forth (*exsiliit*)—though saddened, since she had rushed forth (*impetum fecerat*) without the consent of the Father. *After that, acting in innocence and goodness* (*simplicitate et benignitate acta*)*, she engendered a work* in which there was ignorance and arrogance, whom they say is the First Ruler (*Protarchon*), the Maker of this creation. They recount that he took away (*abstulisse*) great power from the Mother

7 For an extensive analysis on the significance of *Haer*. 1.30 and its relation to other sources, see Tuomas Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Evidence*, NHMS 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

8 Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*, 10.

9 I.e., the Holy Spirit = Wisdom = the "Impetuous One." The Latin text uses the masculine here because of the antecedent *Spiritus sanctus*. But I have used the feminine for the sake of clarity, since this figure is also clearly Sophia/"mother" in the context as a whole.

> and withdrew from her into the lower regions. He created a firmament of heaven in which they say he also resides. And since he was in ignorance he created those who are under him: powers, angels, firmaments and all earthly things. Then, they say that he *united with arrogance, and generated evil, jealousy, envy, dissension and desire*. Now when these had been generated, Mother Wisdom grieved and withdrew higher; counting from below, it was the Eighth.
>
> *Haer.* 1.29.4

Prunicus, i.e., Greek προύνεικος, is an appellation also applied to Wisdom in other sources to be discussed below. The term has often been translated as a rather salacious reference to sexual profligacy—e.g., Wisdom "the whore," "lewd," or "wantonly sexual." However, several years ago Anne Pasquier pointed out examples in new comedy and other ancient literature illustrating that, though the word can sometimes be used in a sexual context, προύνεικος more fundamentally connotes such characteristics as hastiness, impetuosity, temerity, boldness, excessive competitiveness, etc.[10] Rather than an accusation of the lewd promiscuity of a "whore," characterizing Wisdom as προύνεικος may more plausibly reflect the sapiential traditions that include "ready mobility" among Wisdom's aspects (e.g., Wis 7:22–24).[11] This seems justified by the descriptions of her actions in 1.29.4 ("leaping forth") and elsewhere among the sources under examination in the present essay.

This connotation of προύνεικος also helps us understand why in the passage quoted above Wisdom's engendering the First Ruler is said to have been done "in innocence and kindness." Wisdom's action here and in related passages in the Apocryphon of John has been very commonly referred to as a "mistake," "tragedy," "fall," etc.[12] From the standpoint of characters in the story the notion of a misstep appears justified, because the text says that Wisdom did not have the consent of the Father. However, the resulting production of the First Ruler is something done not only "in innocence" (*simplicitate* = ἁπλότητι or

10 Anne Pasquier, "Prouneikos: A Colorful Expression to Designate Wisdom in Gnostic Texts," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King, SAC (Philadephia: Fortress Press, 1988), 47–66, esp. 48–54.

11 Pasquier, "Prouneikos," 66.

12 Here I plead guilty (no pun intended) to having myself used "mistake" for Wisdom's action in Michael Allen Williams, *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity*, NHS 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), e.g., 111–122. Today I would be more circumspect in how Wisdom's role is characterized, and this current essay offers some of the reasons.

ἀκακίᾳ?)[13] but also out of "goodness, kindness" (*benignitate* = ἀγαθότης or χρηστότης?)[14] One should not too quickly dismiss the "innocence" in this instance as merely a kind of childlike inexperience that led to unfortunate results, since "goodness, kindness" is the companion motive. There seems to be something more here than some childish mistake. In her action Wisdom is kind—and without culpability.

Wisdom's motivations are free of any suggestion of evil. In Irenaeus's summary above, evil actually does not appear until a point *after* the creation of the material cosmos, a detail that is virtually never discussed. I will return to its importance later, but for now I call attention to the fact that it is only after the First Ruler generates *vices*: "evil (κακία), jealousy (ζήλος), envy (φθόνος), ⟨dissension (ἔρις)⟩,[15] and desire (ἐπιθυμία)," that Wisdom is grieved and withdraws above to the Eighth (1.29.4).

13 We cannot be certain of the Greek term Irenaeus used in 1.29.4, but precision on that point is not so crucial in this analysis, because in the first place he may have been paraphrasing and secondly, in any event the true issue is the fundamental import of the mytheme in his source at this point. Beneath the Coptic sources to be examined below the evidence points overwhelmingly to forms of ἀκακία there. That may not be the exact terminology Irenaeus chose in 1.29.4, and perhaps it was not even the Greek in his source. But what is important is that Latin phrasing strongly suggests that the connotation was "innocence, simplicity, guilelessness"—i.e., with pure motive, and not merely childish ignorance. E.g., cf. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 4.13.1: *quod in omni simplicitate et innocentia Dominus volens nos offerre praedicavit dicens* (on Matt 5:23–24 and the disposition one should have in offering one's gift at the altar); 4.18.3: Abel gave his offering *cum simplicitate et justitia*; 4.18.4: the Church should offer its gift *cum simplicitate*; 4.31.2: it was *secundum simplicitatem and innocentiam* that the daughters of Lot got their father drunk in order to have offspring from him, because they were the only hope to preserve the human race; so they were *excusabiles*; 5.19.1: the *prudentia* of the serpent was conquered by the innocence of the dove (*columbae simplicitate*; cf. Matt 10:16; therefore = ἀκεραιότητι?); 5.30.1: *Sed his quidem qui simpliciter et sine militia hoc fecerunt* (where we do have a surviving Greek fragment with the reading: Ἀλλὰ τοῖς μὲν ἁπλῶς καὶ ἀκακῶς τοῦτο ποιήσασιν); the reference is to some persons who accept the reading of 616 for the number of the Beast in Rev 13:18, "out of simplicity/inexperience and without evil motives."

14 In other places in the Latin text the term *benignitas* most often refers to the "goodness, benevolence" of God (e.g., 2.31.3; 3.20.1;3.24.1; 3.25.4; 4.20.5; 4.36.5–8; 4.38.3–4; 4.39.2; 5.4.2). Cf. also Wisdom as "beneficent" (εὐεργετικόν) in Wis 7:23.

15 On reading *Erin*, "discord," rather than *Erinnyn*, see Rousseau and Doutreleau, *Irénée*, 1:303.

Apocryphon of John

More than one previous study has noted that several Wisdom myths in Nag Hammadi writings and in related sources do not actually portray any "fall" of Wisdom. For example, in her 1983 Harvard dissertation Deirdre Good discussed how Wisdom figures in some of these texts are not depicted negatively and in fact often play very positive roles in generation and salvation.[16] However, the Apocryphon of John has not typically been assigned to this category of writings, but rather continues to be commonly regarded as a text in which fault is assigned to Wisdom.[17] This notion needs significant nuancing: From the perspective of characters *within the story* Wisdom does engage in a misstep, but storyteller and imagined readers are in a position to see the fundamentally important "big picture." The following explores some pieces of that larger story that may explain why, surprisingly, the Apocryphon of John insists on Wisdom's "innocence."

Wisdom's "innocence" is actually asserted at two rather different points among the recensions of the Apocryphon of John. In the short recension (BG/III) Wisdom's "innocence" is proclaimed in association with the "power" that she had given to her offspring, the Chief Archon Ialdabaoth, and that

16 Deirdre J. Good, *Reconstructing the Tradition of Sophia in Gnostic Literature*, SBLMS 32 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987); cf. Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*.

17 E.g., Alastair H.B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 117: in the Apocryphon of John, Wisdom's "error" is responsible for the "origin of this present world of deficiency." Yet Logan also correctly mentions of the portrait of Wisdom in the Apocryphon of John that complicates the picture. He notes that "Sophia's *wanton if innocent* act of giving birth to the Demiurge without a consort or the agreement of the supreme deity … is a characteristic negative reflection of Barbelo's conception of the Son" (117, emphasis added). Logan's treatment in this chapter does include significant discussion of the term προύνικος, which he renders as "wanton" above, and he is aware of Pasquier's study (150 n. 42). Though ambivalent, he appears more convinced by "wantonness" than "impetuosity" (123), and comments that "the paradox of the wanton virgin is a well-attested Gnostic theme" (124); the BG version "presents Sophia as acting without her consort because of the wanton creative passion (*prounikon*) within her" (125). What Logan's analysis passes over too quickly, in my view, is why the Apocryphon of John would insist that a "wanton" being, committing "error," was nevertheless "innocent" or "guileless" (119, 121). Part of the answer is in the more appropriate rendering of προύνικος with "impetuosity," on which Logan retains doubts. But the other part, to be explored below, concerns Wisdom's role in creation, the valuation of material creation as an image (even if imperfect) of transcendent aeons, contrasted with the moral evil to which Wisdom's offspring Ialdabaoth turns—i.e., the evil of which Wisdom is truly innocent.

she now wished to retrieve. In the longer recension (II/IV) her innocence is heralded at a later moment in connection with when she "descends" as the ἐπινοία ("Intellective Faculty" or "Reflection") embodied in Eve. If the longer recension is essentially a revision of the shorter version, then how significant is this shift? Did redactors responsible for the longer recension find more reason to consider the descent in Eve "innocent" than they did Wisdom's earlier actions with Ialdabaoth? I contend that in all of the manuscripts of the Apocryphon of John the "blamelessness" of Wisdom, wherever mentioned, is integral to understanding her role *throughout* the narrative.

Wisdom's Innocence in the Short Recensions

In the short recensions of the Apocryphon of John, the "innocence" of Wisdom is mentioned only after the body of the first molded Adam has been completed by the seven archontic authorities (Ap. John III 22.8–23.19//BG 48.16–51.1). The body lies motionless and the authorities cannot bring it to life. It is at this moment that we hear of Wisdom's wish to retrieve the power that earlier in the narrative (III 15.2–9//BG 37.10–18) she had given to her offspring, the Chief Archon Ialdabaoth, shortly after his birth.

The texts of III and BG here contain some problems. In III 23.22, ⲃⲁⲗ-ϩⲛⲧ probably translates ἀκακία, "innocence,"[18] as the ϩⲛ ⲟⲩⲙⲛⲧⲁⲧⲕⲁⲕⲓⲁ in BG suggests. However, the lacuna creates uncertainty about the precise form of ⲃⲁⲗϩⲛⲧ here (ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧⲃⲁⲗϩⲛⲧ?). The lacuna in III here ("[...] *innocence*; she petitioned the Father") leaves uncertain whether "innocence" connects with something that precedes or with what follows?[19] It is conceivable that [....]. ⲃⲁⲗϩⲛⲧ concludes the previous phrase (i.e., "the power [that she had] given to the Archon impetuously [*and in*] *innocence*").[20] That is important for our

18 Cf. Walter Ewing Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 715a.

19 E.g., Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 112, tentatively reconstruct [ⲛⲧⲙⲛ]ⲧⲃⲁⲗ-ϩⲛⲧ ⲁⲥⲧⲱⲃϩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲱⲧ and in their translation connect the phrase with what follows: "[In?] innocence she petitioned the Father," etc. Martin Krause and Pahor Labib, eds., *Die drei Versionen des Apokryphon des Johannes im koptischen Museum zu Alt-Kairo*, Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo, Koptische Reihe 1 (Glückstadt: J.J. Augustin, 1962), 79, reconstructed the beginning of III 23.22 as [ⲉⲥⲟ ⲛ̄]ⲃⲁⲗⲛⲧ, and also connect this with the following clause: "Arglos bat sie den Vater," etc. On other hand, Barc and Funk, *Recension brève*, 125, more conservatively leaves the reconstruction uncertain and in the translation leaves open the possibility that "innocence" connects with what precedes: "[...] innocence. Elle adressa une supplique au Pere," etc.

20 That is the interpretation apparently behind Barc's translation in Jean-Pierre Mahé and Paul-Hubert Poirier, eds., *Écrits gnostiques: La bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi*, Collection

III 23.19–22	BG 51.1–6	II 19.15–18[21]
ⲁⲥⲣ̄ ϩⲛⲁⲥ ⲟⲉ ⲛ̄ⲑⲓ [ⲧⲙⲁ]ⲁⲩ	ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁ̣[ⲥⲣ ϩⲛⲁⲥ	ⲧⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲁⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲣⲉⲥⲟⲩⲱⲱⲉ
ⲉⲧⲱⲕⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩⲛⲁⲙⲓⲥ	ⲉⲭⲓ] ⲛ̣ⲧⲟⲟⲙ	ⲁⲭⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲟⲙ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲥ[ⲧⲁⲁⲥ ⲙ]ⲡⲁⲣⲭⲱⲛ	ⲛⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲁⲥ ⲙ̣ⲡⲁⲣⲭⲱⲛ	ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲁⲥ
ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲡⲣⲟⲩⲛⲓⲕⲟⲛ	ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲡⲣⲟⲩⲛⲓⲕⲟⲥ	ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲱⲟⲣⲡ ⲛ̄ⲁⲣⲭⲱⲛ
	ⲁⲥⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ	
[....]. ⲃⲁⲗϩⲏⲧ	ϩⲛ ⲟⲩⲙⲛⲧⲁⲧⲕⲁⲕⲓⲁ	ⲁⲥⲥⲟⲛⲥ̄ ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲏⲧⲣⲟⲡⲁⲧⲱⲣ
ⲁⲥⲧⲱⲃϩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲱⲧ	ⲁⲥⲥⲟⲛⲥ ⲙⲡⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲛⲛⲓⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ	ⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ
Thus [the mot]her wished	And [she wished	When the mother wished
to take the power	to take] the power	to take the power
[that she had] given	that she had given	that she had given
to the Archon	to the Archon	to the first archon,
impetuously	of Impetuosity.	
	She came (had come?)	
[...] *innocence;*	forth *in innocence;*	
she petitioned the Father.	she entreated the Father	she entreated the
	of the All.	Mother-Father of the All.

purposes here, since it would be a clear affirmation that Wisdom's transmission of power to Ialdabaoth was both intentional and innocent. It is possible also to divide the two clauses in the parallel text in BG with a full stop, so that they could refer to different moments in the story: "She came (or had come) forth *in innocence*. She entreated the Father of the All." In other words, the "coming forth" might refer back to her original action.[22] Otherwise, it would refer to an "approach" of some sort at this later narrative moment as she petitions the Father.[23] On this issue we could be dealing with two different deci-

Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 538 (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2007), 241, which combines elements of the BG/III versions of this passage: "Alors la Mère voulut reprendre la puissance qu'elle avait donnée à l'Archonte par impétuosité *et sans méchanceté*. Elle adressa une supplique au Père," etc.

21 The text of the longer recension in II is included for comparison. The parallel text in IV 29.24–26 is very fragmentary, but appears to be essentially the same here as in II.

22 I.e., in BG 37.10–11: "setting forth/producing (ⲉⲥⲧⲱⲕⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ) ... her product came forth (ⲁⲡⲉⲥϩⲱⲃ ⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ)" (see longer quotation below).

23 Both Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, and Barc and Funk, *Recension brève*, follow

sions by Coptic translators/editors responsible for the BG and III versions, or even by tradents of the underlying Greek texts. It is probably impossible to resolve all aspects without further evidence. However, this is the moment in both manuscripts at which Wisdom's innocence is *mentioned*, and that is an interesting difference from the longer recension (see below).

A second rather ambiguous element in this passage is the Greek term προύνικος. In BG it refers to the giving of power to the Archon, and earlier in BG προύνικος had described Wisdom as she brought forth Ialdabaoth:

III 14.24–15.8	BG 37.8–15	II 9.34–10.5
She gave the nod without the approval of the Spirit and the knowledge of her proper harmonious partner. She was perfect (ⲛⲉⲥⲭⲏⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ) because of the secured feature (ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲉⲫⲣⲟⲩⲣⲓⲕⲟⲛ)[24] within her. And her thinking was not inactive and her work came forth imperfect, not having form from her form, since she did it without her consort.	She was about to give the nod without the approval of the Spirit and the knowledge of her harmonious partner. Producing (ⲉⲥⲧⲱⲕⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ) *because of the impetuosity* (ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲉⲡⲣⲟⲩⲛⲓⲕⲟⲛ) within her, her thinking could not be inactive, and her work came forth imperfect, with hateful appearance—since she did it without her consort.	And she had considered without the will of the Spirit and the knowledge her partner. And she brought forth; because of the invincible power within her, her thinking was not inactive. And there appeared from her a thing that was imperfect and different from her in form, since she had created him without her consort.

this latter option for their translations of BG. However, in his commentary Barc opines that the text of III is to be preferred (presumably meaning more original), in spite of the lacuna, because it would not make sense for Wisdom to be "coming forth" from her location in the ninth heaven to appeal to the Father who is in the tenth heaven: "En effet, à ce moment du mythe, Sophia ne peut 'sortir' du neuvième ciel où elle a été reléguée, pour se rendre auprès du 'Père de Tous' qui se trouve dans le dixième ciel" (Barc and Funk, *Recension brève*, 276 n. 165). But this problem completely disappears if we take the clause about coming forth in innocence to refer to a past action.

24 The ⲡⲉⲫⲣⲟⲩⲣⲓⲕⲟⲛ in III 15.3 is often considered a scribal error and corrected to ⲡⲉⲡⲣⲟⲩⲛⲓⲕⲟⲛ, and that might be correct; e.g., Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 60; Barc and Funk, *Recension brève*, 101. On the other hand, in an extensive footnote Zlatko Pleše, *Poet-*

So at least the BG version uses προύνικος twice, while the term is completely absent in the longer recension—an interesting fact, to which I will return. Earlier I mentioned Anne Pasquier's compelling study of προύνικος and her argument has informed my translations. Alternative translations of the term have appeared in some important editions of the Apocryphon of John as well as Second Logos of the Great Seth,[25] but do not fit any better or as well as "impetuosity."[26]

Nor is there reason to reject the connotation of "impetuosity" or "impetuous element" for ⲡⲉⲡⲣⲟⲩⲛⲓⲕⲟⲛ in the earlier pericope in BG 37.11, where Wisdom produces "*because of the impetuosity* within her." Nothing necessitates read-

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ics of the Gnostic Universe: Narrative and Cosmology in the Apocryphon of John, NHMS 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 144 n. 4, has suggested that the reading in III may be an intentional variant, designating Wisdom's "imprisoning" nature. It is true that the body is referred to as "cave" (σπήλαιον; e.g., III 26.21 // II 21.10) and the language of imprisonment is found in all of the versions of the Apocryphon of John. But I do not find Pleše's particular explanation on this point so convincing. For one thing, it does not seem to me that Wisdom herself is depicted as the one who imprisons. But also, it is hard to see how "imprisoning" would fit so well with the rest of the clause ("she was perfect/complete"). Nevertheless, Pleše could be correct that the text in III 15.3 is intentional, since it is possible that a redactor or Coptic translator simply felt that προύνικος did not fit the context. One notes that it is completely absent here in II, and in the later passage in II 19.15–18.

25 In the case of the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, see e.g., Riley, "Second Treatise," 135, 151, who renders the term as "the whore." Riley evidently did not yet know of Pasquier's study. This interpretation of the term, rather conventional at the time, resulted in problems of which Riley himself was obviously aware. He comments that though Wisdom in the Second Treatise of the Great Seth is "termed 'the whore,' the epithet is softened by the fact that she plays a wholly positive role" (ibid., 135). See below.

26 Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 112, elected the "sexual desire" in the BG 51.3–6 // III 23.19–23 pericope. Yet at least in III 23.19–23 it is hard to see how that is as appropriate for προύνικος as is "impetuously"; the reference is not to the engendering of Ialdabaoth but to Wisdom's transfer of a "power" to him, hardly something so readily associated with sexual desire. Cf. Krause and Labib, *Die drei Versionen*, 79: "die Kraft … die sie dem Archôn [gegeben] in einer *triebhaften Lust*"; Foerster, *Gnosis*, 1:114, for the BG text: "the power which she had given to the archon *in compulsive desire*." By contrast, Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 58: "And (the Mother) wanted to retrieve the power which she had given to the ruler *from* (*her*) *audacity*. She went in innocence and entreated the Father of the All," etc.; Barc and Funk, *Recension brève*, 124–125, translates προύνικος as "impétuosité" in both the III and BG texts. For "Archon of Impetuosity" in BG 51.3–6, cf. Pleše, *Poetics*, 144 n. 3, who suggests similarly that the phrase here in BG "denotes Ialdabaoth's appurtenance to Sophia: ⲡⲁⲣⲭⲱⲛ ⲛ̀ⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲡⲣⲟⲩⲛⲓⲕⲟⲥ, 'the ruler belonging to, or born from, the impetuous one.'"

ing "sexual knowledge"[27] into this passage, while "impetuosity" suits the context well. We may compare the myth in Irenaeus in *Adversus Haereses* 1.29.4 discussed above, where Holy Spirit/Wisdom/*Prunicus* did not find a consort and "leaped forward" (*exsiliit*), "rushed" (*impetum fecerat*), producing a "work" (*opus*) that was the Chief Archon (1.29.4). Because both *Adversus Haereses* 1.29.4 and the Apocryphon of John refer to Wisdom's lack of a consort, interpreters have often inferred sexual desire. But both sources actually portray only a "rushing" impatience in Wisdom—as well as in *Adversus Haereses* 1.29.4, her "innocence and benevolence."[28]

To summarize to this point: Wisdom's innocence is mentioned at different points in what appear to be versions of the same basic myth: In *Adversus Haereses* 1.29 the very production of Ialdabaoth is something done in innocence. In the shorter recensions of the Apocryphon of John, either (1) Wisdom's giving of a "power" to Ialdabaoth[29] was in innocence; or (2) it was in innocence that she later petitioned for help in retrieving that power; or (3), possibly, in BG the reference to Wisdom's "coming forth in innocence" is also (like *Haer*. 1.29) referring to her first action resulting in the production of Ialdabaoth.[30] In any case, in BG and III a significant amount of narrative has ensued from Ialdabaoth's birth to any explicit mention of Wisdom's innocence. By this point the narrative has covered Ialdabaoth's production of his own realm with subordinate archons to help rule it; his "vain claim"[31] to being the only "God"; and the creation of the human who lies inanimate and in need of life. Only in this last scene do we encounter the passage quoted above (BG 51.3–5 par.) regarding Wisdom's innocence and her plea for help in retrieving the power she had given Ialdabaoth, an appeal answered with the ploy through which Ialdabaoth is tricked into blowing that power into the inanimate Adam.

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27 Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 60.

28 Cf. the extensive and insightful comments by Barc and Funk, eds., *Recension brève*, 241: "L'impétuosité de Sophia la conduit donc à prolonger dans le monde sensible la dynamique d'expansion des eons initiée par Barbélo et à provoquer ainsi l'apparition d'un 'au dehors' du monde intelligible." Barc also makes the crucial point that Wisdom's actions must be considered as within the will of the Spirit, given the role of Providence here (241). On the motif of procession ("going/leaping forth") here and its background at least in part in Platonism, cf. Williams, *The Immovable Race*, 118–121.

29 I.e., this would be possible if the lacunose text in III 23.22 could be resolved with some construction that would allow the connection of [....]. ⲃⲁⲗϩⲏⲧ with what precedes. For example, Barc and Funk suggest as one reconstruction: ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲡⲣⲟⲩⲛⲓⲕⲟⲛ [ⲛⲧⲉ ⲟ]ⲩⲃⲁⲗϩⲏⲧ, which might be rendered something like: "in an innocent impetuosity."

30 BG 51.4–5.

31 See Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon."

Wisdom's Innocence in the Longer Recension

By contrast, in the longer recension of the Apocryphon of John Wisdom's innocence is not mentioned until even later in the story, in connection with the creation of Eve. Here Ialdabaoth has decided to extract a part of the power out of Adam, over whom he has brought a trance (II 22.19–21), and to deposit that power into a molded female figure beside the man (II 22.29–23.4).[32] This eventuates in a moment of revelation for Adam, when he is awakened from the trance by the vision of the female figure. Adam then speaks a version of the words of Genesis 2:23–24: "This is bone of my bones," etc. (II 23.4–16). Essential elements of this are paralleled in the shorter recensions (BG 58.10–60.11 // III 28.25–30.10). However, wording that follows this in II is distinctive:

III 30.10–14	BG 60.12–16	II 23.20–24[33]
Since the consort of the [Mother] was sent	Since the consort of the Mother will be sent	For his consort will be sent to him, and "he will leave his father and his mother."[34] Now our sister Wisdom, *who came down in innocence* (ⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲛⲉ ⲁⲉ ⲧⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲧⲁⲓ ⲉⲧⲁϩⲉⲓ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲕⲁⲕⲟⲥ)
to set right her deficiencies.	and she will be set right.	in order to set right her deficiency,
Therefore, [Adam named her "the Mother of the living."]	Therefore, Adam named her "the Mother of all the living."	was therefore called "Life" (ζωή), that is, "the Mother of the living."

32 The text of II 22.33 says that Ialdabaoth extracted only *a portion* (μέρος) of the power for deposit in the woman, while in BG 59.13 // III 29.18 it is apparently *all* of the power.

33 The text in IV 36.14–17 is fragmentary and the portion of papyrus that would have contained the reference to Wisdom's innocence is missing.

34 In II 23.17–18 there is a dittography this point, omitted above; cf. Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 133.

The parallels in BG and III are somewhat puzzling within their context:[35] The appearance of Adam's female counterpart in the immediately preceding narrative (interpreting Gen 2:23) might have led us to expect a reference to the "sending" of *Adam's* counterpart, as in II, not *Wisdom's* ("the Mother's") male consort. Barc concludes that this reference to the Mother's consort in BG/III may be a gloss alluding to the eventual sending of Christ.[36] One wonders whether the text in II might be an effort to make better sense of an obscure passage like that now preserved in the shorter texts? In any case, this important scene in II constitutes a significant difference: Not only is the consort here female, she is "our sister, Wisdom, who came down in innocence."

But why is this now the first reference to Wisdom's innocence in II/IV? Were the redactor(s) shifting "innocence" only to this later episode and intentionally removing it from the earlier moments with which innocence is associated in BG and III (or the very moment in the myth found in *Haer*. 1.29)? Might they have felt that "innocence" was less appropriate for Wisdom in the earlier contexts? That might be an appealing theory were it not for how in II/IV, as well as in *all* of these versions, Wisdom's actions throughout seem to be a part of an overall divine economy. I turn next to this topic, a dimension in the Apocryphon of John narratives that has received far too little notice.

Ialdabaoth's Divine Power: Given or Stolen?

An important element related to the language about Wisdom's innocence in the Apocryphon of John is the transfer of power to Ialdabaoth. In the "Ophite" myth in *Adversus Haereses* 1.30 this power, the "breath of incorruptibility" through which Wisdom's offspring would operate, was something "left" to him by his Mother (see 1.30.3–4). In 1.29.4 the First Ruler "*took away* (*abstulisse*) great power from the Mother."[37] Elsewhere in the Latin of Irenaeus's work *abstulisse* (perfect of *auferre*) at least once connotes something like theft or snatching,[38] but its most common meaning is simply to "remove," or "take

35 Barc and Funk, *Recension brève*, 294: "Le texte est obscur."

36 Barc and Funk, *Recension brève*, 294.

37 The Greek for this sentence is not found in Theodoret, *Haer. Fab*. 13, which is our only access to the Greek of this portion of *Haer*.

38 E.g., in *Haer*. 4.21.2, the Latin term appears with something of this sense: the people of Christ have "snatched away" (*surripuit*) from the "first people" (Jews) the blessings from the Father, just like Jacob "took away" (*abstulit*) the blessing from Esau. Of course, Irenaeus does not view either of these appropriations as illicit; both were a part of the divine plan. The present tense also can be used this way, e.g., of "taking away" someone's property (2.32.1); cf. Marcion's "removing" passages of scripture (1.27.2).

away."[39] So whether the implications are positive or negative, whether the "taking" is illicit or something approved, depends on the context rather than the verb itself.

What do we find in the Apocryphon of John? There are several places in the Apocryphon of John narrative where this transfer of power is mentioned, but one of the more remarkable is the pericope discussed above in connection with Wisdom's innocence in BG and III:

Zlatko Pleše has correctly called attention to the fact that in this passage the power transferred to Ialdabaoth is Wisdom's "gift," not something "stolen" by her son.[40] I would add that at least in the Codex III version this interpretation seems undeniably warranted, since how could the Archon have "stolen" the power if the Mother had "given it impetuously"?

On the other hand, Pleše agrees with the conventional view that elsewhere in the Apocryphon of John this transfer of power is a "theft."[41] Pleše has in mind such passages as those in the following table:

III 15.16–16.3	BG 38.6–19	II 10.14–23
(Wisdom) joined a luminous cloud with (Ialdabaoth) and placed a throne in the midst of the cloud so that no one might see him except the Holy Spirit who is called the Mother of all the living.	(Wisdom) joined a luminous cloud with (Ialdabaoth) and placed a throne in the midst of the cloud so that no one might see him except the Holy Spirit who is called "Life," the Mother of everyone.	And (Wisdom) surrounded him with a luminous cloud and she placed a throne in the midst of the cloud so that no one might see him except the Holy Spirit who is called the Mother of the living.

39 E.g., *Haer.* 3.6.3: through statements about pagan gods in scripture, God "removes (the notion) that they are gods" (*abstulit quod sint dii*); 3.11.2: by his words in John 1:10–11, the apostle "removes all controversy from among us" (*abstulit autem a nobis dissensions omnes*) about who created the world; 3.18.7: the Law of Moses "removed" (*abstulit*) the reign of sin that had lasted since Adam (Rom 5:14); 4.28.3: that the Jews killed the Lord "took away" (abstulit) eternal life from them. The present tense is used similarly: taking away ignorance (2.17.10); taking away sin (3.10.2; translating αἴρω in John 1:29); the paralytic "taking up" his pallet (2.22.3); "receiving/taking away" monetary reward (2.32.4).

40 Pleše, *Poetics*, 174.

41 Pleše, *Poetics*, 172.

III 15.16–16.3	BG 38.6–19	II 10.14–23
And she named him "Ialdabaoth." This is the first Ruler, *who had attained* (ⲁϥⲧⲱⲕⲉ) great power from the Mother and withdrew from her and moved from place to place away from the place in which he had been born.	And she named him "Ialdabaoth." This is the first Ruler. *He attained* (ⲁϥⲧⲱⲟⲉ) great power from the Mother and removed himself from her and moved away from the place in which he had been born.	And she called him "Ialtabaoth."[42] This is the first Ruler, *who received* (ϫⲓ) great power through[43] his Mother; and he withdrew from her and moved away from the places in which he had been born.
III 18.9–15	**BG 42.10–18**	**II 11.7–10**
Then Ialdabaōth, who is Sakla, the one who belongs to that (whole) multitude of forms, so that he appears in every aspect according to his design, apportioned to them from his fire.	Now Ialdabaoth Saklas, the one who belongs to that multitude of forms, so that he reveals himself in every aspect according to his wish, apportioned to them from his own fire and power.	And he distributed some of his fire upon them.
But he did not give them any of the pure light, which is the power that *he drawn* (ⲁⲡⲟⲥ⟨ⲡ⟩ⲁ) *from the Mother*.	But he did not give them any of the pure light of the power, which *he had drawn* (ⲧⲁⲕⲙⲉ-) *from the Mother*.	He did not send any of the power of the light *that he had received* (ϫⲓ) *from* (ⲛ̄ⲧⲛ̄) *his Mother*. For he is an ignorant darkness.

42 Ialtabaoth is the alternate spelling used here, and most often, in the Codex II manuscript, and once in III (30.22). To avoid confusion I use "Ialdabaoth" consistently in the discussion, except where directly quoting a passage with the alternate spelling.

43 I have chosen to translate ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲛ here and in other instances as "through," since this instrumental connotation ("by the hand of") is very common for this compound preposition (Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 429b). However, "from" is also certainly a possible meaning, like the ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ found in the parallels in BG/III. How would the readers/hearers of II have heard the expression? We obviously cannot know for certain, but with this rendering and my translation of ϫⲓ as "receive" (though it can mean "take") I simply wish to challenge the facile assumption that the text must be asserting a "grabbing/snatching" rather than "taking" something "given" by Wisdom (as in II 19.16 par.; see discussion above).

	BG 44.5–9	II 13.2–5
(*missing leaf*)	These (authorities) have a firmament corresponding to each heaven, and an aeon according to the aeonic model (ⲡⲉⲓⲛⲉ) that existed from the beginning, after the pattern (ⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲩⲡⲟⲥ) of the incorruptibles.	(Ialdabaoth) organized/adorned (ⲁⲩⲧⲥⲉⲛⲟⲩ) everything after the model (ⲡⲓⲛⲉ) of the first aeons who had come into being, so that he might create them in the pattern (ⲙ̄ⲡⲥⲛⲁⲧ) of the incorruptibles. Not because he had seen the incorruptibles; rather, *the power within him that he had received* (ⲧⲁⲓ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩϫⲓⲧⲥ̄) *through his Mother* had produced within him the model (ⲡⲓⲛⲉ) for the cosmos.
	BG 45.11–46.3	**II 13.21–30**
(*missing leaf*)	But (the Mother) beheld the wickedness (ⲕⲁⲕⲓⲁ) and the rebellion (ⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ) that would come from her son, and she repented and, going to and fro in the darkness of ignorance, she began to be ashamed, and she did not dare to return, but rather was going to and fro.	When (the Mother) had seen the wickedness (ⲕⲁⲕⲓⲁ) that had taken place and *what her son had received/taken* (ⲡϫⲓ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩϫⲓⲧⲩ) she repented. And a forgetfulness overcame her, and she began to be ashamed, ⟨and she did not dare return,

	BG 45.11–46.3	II 13.21–30
	Now her movement to and fro is the "rushing upon."[44] Now when the Self-willed One *received* (ⲁⲥ) *power* from the Mother he was ignorant of a multitude of things that transcend his Mother. For he was saying with regard to his Mother that she alone existed.	but moved)[45] with an agitated movement. Now the agitated movement is the "going back and forth." Now the Self-willed One *received* (ⲁⲥ) *power* through his Mother. For he was ignorant,[46] thinking that no other power exists except his Mother.

Pleše reads these as references to "theft" and he therefore finds this theme to be in sharp conflict with BG 51.1–3 par—so much so that, he argues, we must have here two "episodes" that are remnants of two originally separate and divergent mythemes: "Episode One" had Wisdom taking the initiative in giving power to Ialdabaoth, while "Episode Two" had Ialdabaoth in the role of larcenous agent.[47] Pleše suggests that Wisdom's "giving" of power to Ialdabaoth took place as she joins her son to a light-cloud with a throne in its midst (BG 38.6–12), an interpretation that I view as both ingenious and plausible.

There is not space to do justice to Pleše's entire analysis. I will only remark that I am much less confident than is Pleše (and most scholars) that we must find "theft" in all these other pericopes. Past scholarship has been too hasty in reading larceny into what could be simply descriptions of Ialdabaoth "receiving" or "taking away/carrying off" the power *that he had been given*. Admittedly we are heavily dependent on Coptic translations. But as will be seen below

44 In the dialogue, Christ is explaining to John the true reference in the "rushing/moving (ἐπιφέρεσθαι) over the water" by the spirit of God in Gen 1:2 LXX.

45 An accidental omission in II, restored on basis of the texts in IV and BG.

46 This passage appears to be stressing that although the realm created by Ialdabaoth was patterned after the imperishable aeonic realm (see the quotation of II 13.2–5 above; and BG 39.9–10; III 16.11), he was quite ignorant of this because he was ignorant of that transcendent realm. The power to do what he has done has come solely through his Mother (the power she gave to him), not from his own ability.

47 Pleše, *Poetics*, 173–174.

in the discussion of Trimorphic Protennoia 39.13–32, it was quite possible in Coptic to express Ialdabaoth's "taking" of the power as a "grab" or "snatching" (ⲧⲱⲣⲡ). That never occurs in any of the manuscripts of the Apocryphon of John and this fact ought not without further ado to be considered insignificant.

In the first pericope above, BG and III speak of Ialdabaoth "attaining" or "joining" this power,[48] while II has ⲉⲧⲁϩϫⲓ, which can mean: "who *took*"[49] but can just as well mean: "who *received*." In all versions, and especially in II, the language could be read to imply Wisdom's cooperation in this attainment or acquisition of power, that she was even the initiator of this transfer (as Pleše argues for BG 51.3–5 par.). Some passages in fact sound more like the latter. For example, in II 13.2–5 we find a related statement, absent from the short recension, in which Ialdabaoth creates his realm in the pattern of the transcendent "indestructibles"; but he is able to do so not because he had actually seen them, but because of "the power within him *that he had received* through his Mother, since she/it[50] had produced in him the image of the (true) order" (ⲧⲥⲟⲙ ⲉⲧⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧⲟ ⲧⲁⲓ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩϫⲓⲧⲥ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲙ̄ ⲧⲉⲩⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲉⲁⲥϫⲡⲟ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧⲟ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲥⲉⲛⲟ).

III 18.9–15 above evidently reveals ἀποσπάω in the underlying Greek, and the Coptic ⲧⲁⲕⲙⲉ- in the parallel in BG is probably a translation of this verb. The term ἀποσπάω certainly can mean: "tear away, draw away," with negative connotations. But everything depends on context, since the verb can be used in a range of associations.[51] It is possible that this is merely another synonym for Ialdabaoth's "drawing" or "carrying away" of power that had been "given" by Wisdom.

What Ialdabaoth *did* with that power is another matter! In the passage in II 13.21–30, I have translated: "when (the Mother) had seen the wickedness (ⲕⲁⲕⲓⲁ) that had taken place and what her son *had received/taken* (ⲡϫⲓ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩ-

48 Coptic ⲉⲁⲩⲧⲱⲕⲉ (III); ⲁⲩⲧⲱⲥⲉ (BG); the term ⲧⲱ(ⲱ)ⲥⲉ (or: ⲧⲱⲕⲉ) normally has the sense "join, attain" (Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 464b). Cf. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 42, who translates BG here: "who *attained* a great power from the Mother." She also favors "received" or "got/gotten" for ϫⲓ in the above pericopes (ibid., 47, 49, and 51), except in the case of II 13.21–30 (see above): "the theft which her offspring had committed" (51).

49 So, e.g., Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 63.

50 I.e., the noun for "power" is also feminine. Either way, it was Wisdom's power that was responsible, without Ialdabaoth's awareness of the true divine model.

51 E.g., drawing out nails (Gos. Pet. 6:21), drawing a sword (Matt 26:51), luring people from a city (Josh 8:6 LXX; cf. Josephus, *Life* 321), drawing people from a land (Jer 12:14 LXX), to separate (Job 41:9 LXX), wean from milk (Isa 28:9 LXX), to depart, become distanced from (2 Macc 12:10, 17), to carry (a prisoner) away (4 Macc 13:18), and so forth.

ⲭⲓⲧϥ)". The passage has most often been translated to convey the theme of "robbery."[52] However, ⲡⲭⲓ does not typically mean "theft"; Crum's dictionary suggests instead a wide array of connotations, none of which is "theft."[53] A less negatively freighted translation might be just as warranted here: "that with which her son had been *provided*" or "had *received*." The parallel in BG 45.10–46.3 does not really help on this particular matter, since the wording is quite different: "she beheld the wickedness (ⲕⲁⲕⲓⲁ) and the rebellion (ⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ) that would come from her son."

This last pericope in all of the manuscripts is important for a reason seldom if ever noted: It is only now in any version of the narrative that Wisdom realizes the implications of her offspring's activities and repents. The narrators have not portrayed her in any distress throughout the story of his begetting of authorities and powers, or his creation of firmaments, heavens and aeons after the pattern of the intelligible aeons (II 10.24–13.5 par.). It is only now, when she sees the "wickedness" (ⲕⲁⲕⲓⲁ) of her son, that she is distressed. And this wickedness is evidently not plain to her until the "vain claim" expressing the arrogance and "jealousy" of Ialdabaoth (II 13.5–13 par.): "I am a jealous God and there is no other God beside me."[54] Earlier, in all versions, it is said that Ialdabaoth had within himself "the power of the glory of his Mother's light," i.e., the power by which he had been creating. Now in the story, arrogant about this power, he allows himself to be called "God." It is now in *this* presumptuous act—not

52 This convention began early, e.g., Søren Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis: The Coptic Text of the Apocryphon Johannis in the Nag Hammadi Codex II with Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, ATDan 5 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), 71, translated II 13.21–23 as: "No, but when she had seen the wickedness which had arisen and *the robbery which her son had committed*, she repented." In his commentary (p. 233) Giversen observed that the Coptic here "literally means 'the taking away which her son had taken,' i.e., 'that which her son had taken.'" This is correct though a preposition such as ⲉⲃⲟⲗ is lacking here, so that it is not so obvious that ⲡⲭⲓ by itself connotes "taking *away*." Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 81, similarly have: "when she had seen the wickedness which had happened and *the theft* which her son had committed." And Barc in Mahé and Poirier, *Écrits gnostiques*, 275: "larcin que lui avait dérobé son fils."

53 Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 751b. The basic meanings suggested for the noun are "taking, bringing" or "provision" of fodder, etc. The fundamental connotations suggested (748a–b) for the verb: "to take, bring, accept, have, be provided with, learn, buy," etc.

54 On the "vain claim" in general, cf. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon." The "vain claim" does appear once earlier in the II text (11.19–21), but there it has the appearance of a parenthetical comment, an aside that seems to be alluding only by anticipation to the actual moment of the claim in II 13.8–9. Only then is it depicted as something noticed by Ialdabaoth's angels (13.10–11) and as something that now prompts Wisdom's distress.

creative activity up to that point—that he is said to be "disobeying the place from which he had come."[55]

Creation as Divine Image

The conventional understanding of all this is that the material creation is a malicious fake which Ialdabaoth was able to fabricate only surreptitiously, by means of a power he had "stolen" against his Mother's will and even without her knowledge. Yet that hardly fits the text as we have it. Zlatko Pleše is quite correct in his important point that in BG 51.1–3 par., the Mother is wishing to retrieve a power "that she had *given*" to Ialdabaoth. For why is it put that way in this text? If the emphasis were on some illicit, surreptitious snatching, why not at least say: "the power that the Chief Archon had *taken*," using ϫι or one of the other verbs found in the passages above; or the power that had been "snatched" (ϯωρπ), as is stated in the the Trimorphic Protennoia (see below)? Instead, the power is something the Mother "had *given*."

Although it has commonly been acknowledged that in the Apocryphon of John Wisdom is implicated in the creation of the visible cosmos, this has usually been understood in negative terms, as completely unintentional on her part because it was the result of an error embodied in Ialdabaoth. However, if Ialdabaoth creates by a divine power *bestowed* by Wisdom herself, might that not imply that her son's created realm had her imprimatur, at least initially? Everything Ialdabaoth creates is by means of that distinctly *divine* power which he has from his Mother. As Karen King has remarked, "it is striking that the *Secret Revelation of John* insists that Yaldabaoth follows the model of the Divine Realm in all his acts of creation."[56] This is underscored most elaborately and explicitly in the longer recension: in fashioning the cosmos Ialdabaoth has followed the divine model not by direct observation but by "the power within him that he had received through his Mother" (II 13.1–5). But the shorter version also contains the clear assertion that the indestructible primordial aeons provide the model for our world.[57] It may be that II's consistent use of the Coptic ϫι (rendering also a consistent underlying λαμβάνειν?) for Ialdabaoth's acquisition of the power was part of an overall redactional tendency to accentuate the role of Wisdom's "gift."

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55 Ap. John II 12.6–8; cf. BG 43.1–2; III 18.17–18: "being disobedient to the ὑπόστασις from which he had come." The precise sense of the term ὑπόστασις is often difficult to ascertain ("essential reality, being, nature," etc.), but here it surely refers to Ialdabaoth's disobedience to his origins in divine Wisdom.

56 King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 94.

57 See BG 39.9–18 = III 16.11–15; BG 44.7–9; see above. Cf. Barc and Funk, *Recension brève*, 15.

In any event, there are decidedly *positive* connotations in the fact that Ialdabaoth's material creation is an image of the divine realm.[58] The cosmos is not without imperfection, to be sure; but that was a commonplace in Platonic thought. The truly remarkable fact is that the Apocryphon of John devotes virtually no attention to imperfections in the material cosmos *per se*. For example, we find no ranting about earthquakes or biting insects or poisonous snakes,[59] and so forth. Such "natural evils," even if not mentioned in the text, might generally have been regarded negatively; it is unlikely that contemporaries would have loved biting insects. But the absence of complaints in the Apocryphon of John suggests that such things were not the central concern. Instead, the target is the human predicament in the face of *moral* evil, *moral* danger. It is the potential for this evil that Wisdom first seems to notice only after her son's arrogant claim.[60]

And if one considers the several moments in the myth in which Wisdom's power is on the move, so to speak, it is interesting that in each instance a fundamentally important feature of the created order is the result. (1) There is the initial "gift" of power to Ialdabaoth, already discussed, eventuating in the cosmos patterned after the aeons. (2) Like the cosmos, the human created by the archons is patterned after a divine model, the transcendent Human (II 14.19–15.4 par.).[61] Yet it is only by the power of (innocent) Wisdom, after her plea and the subsequent divine ploy tricking Ialdabaoth into transferring (breathing) Wisdom's power into that inactive human, that the human comes to life, is able to stand upright and is immediately recognized by the archons as not only intellectually superior to them but also "naked of wickedness" (κακία II 20.7 par.). So this is an extraordinarily positive moment in the creation of humanity. (3) The next point at which Wisdom's divine power is transferred is the creation of Eve:

58 Cf. Michael A. Williams, "A Life Full of Meaning and Purpose: Demiurgical Myths and Social Implications," in *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels*, ed. Eduard Iricinschi et al., Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 82 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 21–27.

59 E.g., the only mention of something "poisonous" refers to the deceptive "fruit" (influence, teaching, etc.) offered by the archons (II 21.22–23 par.).

60 Cf. the account in Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.29.4 that I discussed above, where "Mother Wisdom" grieves only *after* the generation of wickedness, jealousy, envy, ⟨discord⟩ and desire. Nothing is mentioned there about Wisdom's horror at the material cosmos itself.

61 Admittedly, in the longer version the archons propose to create their human not only after the image of God but also after their own likeness (II 15.2–3); the shorter texts, more closely following Gen 1:26–27, have the human created only after the image and likeness of God (III 22.4–6; BG 48.11–14). On the other hand, the longer recension presents the most elaborate and explicit account of the revelation and role of the divine model.

Ialdabaoth brings Wisdom's power (or, in II, a part of it) out of Adam to fashion Eve (II 22.32–23.2 par.), whose appearance is revelatory for Adam (II 23.4–16). Wisdom's action here was "in innocence," says the longer recension (II, 23.20–21). (4) Finally, Wisdom completes the true offspring of Adam and Eve, Seth, by sending Spirit into him so that the race of Seth (the human race) would be modeled after the race in the aeons (BG 63.14–64.1 par.).[62]

With justification scholars have always treated moments (2) through (4) as soteriological acts, counter-punches to Ialdabaoth's actions. But each moment is also a part of Wisdom's creative project. Though creation in the Apocryphon of John's myth has so often been branded an "accident" or "mistake,"[63] that does not grasp the big picture here. The authors and redactors of the Apocryphon

62 Barc, in Mahé and Poirier, *Écrits gnostiques*, 288, rightly notes that the passage is somewhat obscure in all versions, and suggests that in II 25.3 the expression ⲧ-ⲕⲉ-ⲛⲁⲁⲩ may mean "the other Mother"—i.e., the highest female figure, Providence (Pronoia): "Likewise, *the other Mother* sent down her spirit," etc. That would mean a redactional divergence from BG 63.16–17, where the sender is simply "the Mother." This understanding of ⲧ-ⲕⲉ-ⲛⲁⲁⲩ is completely possible grammatically, and this adjectival sense is the only way that -ⲕⲉ- is employed elsewhere in the NHC II version of the Apocryphon of John. On the other hand, it would also be the only place where the expression "the *other* Mother" is found in any version of the Apocryphon of John. Barc's suggestion cannot be ruled out. However, the other very possible grammatical sense of -ⲕⲉ- (see, e.g., Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 91b) would be: "the Mother *also* sent down" (so, e.g., Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 143), which would retain the possibility that in both BG and the longer recension "Mother" refers to Wisdom. The text in III 32.9–10, on the other hand, increases the complexity: "Likewise, they sent (or: "there was sent") *to the Mother* her own spirit," etc. Barc and Funk, *Recension brève*, 303, is inclined to prefer this reading in III and dismisses too quickly the role of "the Mother" as sender as found in BG 63.14–18: "And corresponding to the race (ⲧⲧⲉⲛⲉⲁ; i.e., of Seth) above in the aeons, similarly the Mother sent that which is hers. The Spirit came down to her/it (ⲛⲁⲥ) to awaken the essence which is like him (probably: Seth)." Barc (ibid.) considers this scenario in BG illogical because he understands "to her" to mean Epinoia (Intellective Faculty), and yet, he says, "Épinoia est elle-même l'Esprit"—i.e., how could Spirit be descending on Spirit? However, Barc does not seem to consider that the feminine antecedent in the preposition ⲛⲁⲥ could just as easily (more easily, I think) be ⲧⲧⲉⲛⲉⲁ "the race (of Seth)," but with an eye to the race of Seth now being generated in the cosmos, in the image of the one in the aeons.

63 E.g., Tage Petersen, "Hermetic Dualism? CH. VI. against the Background of Nag Hammadi Dualistic Gnosticism," in *The Nag Hammadi Texts in the History of Religions: Proceedings of the International Conference at the Royal Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen, September 19–24, 1995: On the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Nag Hammadi Discovery*, ed. Søren Giversen et al., Historisk-filosofiske skrifter 26 (Copenhagen: Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2002), 95, speaking of the Apocryphon of John, among

of John were accounting for life in the world as they knew it. Yes, moral evil is due to the immoral influence of archons. And the scriptural narrative has been rewritten—but not completely. Adam, Eve and Seth were not created without the crucial involvement of divine power. The archons may have created the material shell, the "prison,"[64] but that very creation was facilitated by divine power. And the completed humanity that really counts is very much the product of Wisdom's divine power. In spite of his evil intentions, Ialdabaoth did not know what he was really doing.

We have in the Apocryphon of John a more positive Wisdom cosmology than is usually recognized. The myth can be read as a distinctive affirmation of the tradition of creation by God's Wisdom. If the intent were merely to cast calumny on Jewish Wisdom tradition or to deny that God's Wisdom is at work in creation, then why preserve any role for her at all? Yes, Wisdom was impetuous. But Pasquier rightly pointed out that this depiction itself echoes sapiential tradition in which Wisdom is lively, crafty, "more moving than any motion" (Wis 7:24). But though impetuous, Wisdom was "innocent," without blame. As in Wisdom of Solomon 7:30, "Evil (κακία) does not prevail over Wisdom." The wickedness and blame fall on the later activities of her son; but not so much on his original creation of the cosmos as on his arrogant and ignorant efforts to tyrannize humanity.[65]

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others: "At the centre of this type of gnostic cosmology is the distinction between the misery of *a world which was not meant to be, but was created because of a mistake* (by an incompetent demiurge), and the transcendent world" (emphasis added).

64 The term ⲱⲧⲉⲕⲟ, "prison" is actually used only in the longer recension and primarily in the Providence hymn (II 27.8; 30.19; 31.3, 4, and 10). But the language of bondage associated with the body is in all the versions (e.g., BG 55.9–13 par.; 72.9–10 par.). As it well known, this image of the body as "prison" was common in several traditions, especially under the influence of Plato; e.g., Plato, *Phaedo* 62b; *Cratylus* 400c; Philo, *Conf*. 177; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom*. 7.62; Melito of Sardis, *Homily on the Pascha* 48.

65 One could compare what is said of the actions of the Logos in the Tripartite Tractate in Nag Hammadi Codex I. That writing's myth is significantly different from the Apocryphon of John, yet the role given to the Logos in the Tripartite Tractate is analogous in some respects to that of Wisdom in the surviving texts of the Apocryphon of John. The Logos's "movement" leads eventually to the creation of realms outside Perfection (Pleroma). However, the Tripartite Tractate explicitly forbids any criticism of the Logos's movement (77.6–7), for its intent (προαίρεσις) was good (76.2–4), and its action was not apart from the Father's will (76.24). Similarly, readers of the Apocryphon of John (in all the versions) are assured that divine Providence (Pronoia) stands in control behind the entire story (e.g., BG 27.10; 47.6; 72.16; 75.2; and parallels).

Trimorphic Protennoia

The Trimorphic Protennoia has received its most extensive analysis to date in the superb commentary by Paul-Hubert Poirier.[66] The possible relationships between the Trimorphic Protennoia and the Apocryphon of John, especially the long recension and its "Providence (Pronoia) hymn" (II 30.11–31.27), have been debated for decades.[67] The prevailing hypothesis is that the Trimorphic Protennoia is an appropriation of the Providence hymn found in the long recension of the Apocryphon of John rather than the other way around.[68] Other mythic details in the Trimorphic Protennoia find no direct parallel in the Providence hymn, but they seem to assume a larger mythic narrative that could have been very similar to the Apocryphon of John.[69]

Wisdom Overcome, Power Stolen

The Trimorphic Protennoia repeats the claim of Wisdom's innocence as many as three times, more than any of the other sources discussed here. The first instance occurs in connection with a transfer of power to Ialdabaoth. But this transfer in the Trimorphic Protennoia is remarkably different from what we saw in the Apocryphon of John: (1) There is no reference in the Trimorphic Protennoia to Wisdom "giving" that power to Ialdabaoth; to the contrary, the power is definitely "snatched away" from Wisdom; (2) and Wisdom is not only robbed, she is also first "overpowered":

> Then a word came forth from the great Light Eleleth, and he said, "I am the king! Who belongs to Chaos and who belongs to the underworld?" And immediately his Light appeared, radiant, possessing the Intellective Faculty (Epinoia). The powers of the powers did not entreat him. And

66 Poirier, *La Pensée première*; see also Turner, "Trimorphic Protoennoia"; and Schenke, *Die dreigestaltige Protennoia*.

67 See Poirier, *La Pensée première*, 68–81, and his all-but-exhaustive annotated bibliography of past research (32–67); and more recently: Paul-Hubert Poirier, "The *Three Forms of First Thought* (NHC XIII,1), and the *Secret Book of John* (NHC II,1 and par.)," in *Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honour of John D. Turner*, ed. Kevin Corrigan et al., NHMS 82 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 23–42.

68 E.g., John D. Turner, "Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, ed. Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 62–63; Poirier, *La Pensée première*, 81, and see his extensive history of research (33–67).

69 Poirier, *La Pensée première*, 81.

> in the same instant there appeared the great Demon who rules over the lowest part of the underworld and Chaos, not possessing form, and not being perfect; but, on the contrary, he possesses the form of the glory of those who had been begotten in the darkness. Now he is called "Saklas," that is, "Samael," "Ialtabaoth," who had *received* (ϫⲓ) *power* that he had *snatched away* [ⲧⲱⲣⲡ] from the *innocent one* [ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲟⲧⲥ̄ ⲛ̄ϯⲁⲧⲡⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ] *whom he had first overpowered* [ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩϫⲣⲟ ⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲥⲟⲩⲟⲣⲡ], that is, the Light's Intellective Faculty (Epinoia) *who had descended*, she from whom he had come forth originally (ⲧ̣ⲁ̣ⲓ̈ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲥ ϫⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲥⲟ[ⲣ]ⲡ). Now [when] the Intellective Faculty of the Light realized that [he] begged for another [order even though he was] different from her, (the Intellective Faculty) said [...].
>
> Trim. Prot. 39.13–34

We know that the "innocent one" here is Wisdom, because of a subsequent passage where the Revealer announces:

> Behold, I am coming down to the world of mortals for the sake of my portion that has been in that place from the time when *the innocent Sophia was overpowered* [ϫⲛ̄ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲟⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩϫⲣⲟ ⲁϯⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲡⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ], *she who descended*, so that I might overcome their goal commanded by him who is revealed by her.
>
> Trim. Prot. 40.11–19

A third passage might mention "innocent Wisdom," though there is a lacuna:

> I am the Light that illumines the universe. I am the Light that rejoices in [my] siblings. For I came into the world [of the] mortals for the sake of the spirit left behind in [it], which [came down], *which came out of* [*innocent*] *Wisdom* (ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ [ⲣⲛ̄]ⲧ̣ⲥ̣ⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲛ̄[ⲁⲧⲡⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ]).
>
> Trim. Prot. 47.28–34

The overpowering of Wisdom is reminiscent in some ways of the theme of Ialdabaoth's rape of Eve in the Apocryphon of John (II 24.8–17). But in the Trimorphic Protennoia it is innocent Wisdom who is overpowered, not Eve,[70]

70 To be sure, Eve is closely associated with Intellective Faculty (Epinoia) in the Apocryphon of John (e.g., II 22.28–36 par.), and the quotations from the Trimorphic Protennoia quoted above reveal that Wisdom is essentially identified with Intellective Faculty there. However,

and nowhere in the Apocryphon of John does Ialdabaoth "overpower" Wisdom.

Thus, the initial acquisition of power by Ialdabaoth has now been quite dramatically and vividly painted as unambiguous villainy. It is no longer merely that Ialdabaoth's "vain claim" eventually reveals his wickedness after earlier having been "given" a power from his mother;[71] in the Trimorphic Protennoia he has brutishly mugged Wisdom to steal that power. In the first passage quoted above one notices what might be a redundancy: Ialdabaoth "had *received/taken* (ϫⲓ) *power* that he had *snatched away* [ϯⲱⲣⲡ]." It is possible that the first verbal phrase, "had *received/taken* (ϫⲓ) *power*," is reprising the language from some version of the Apocryphon of John and that a redundancy has been created from the addition of wording to make it unmistakable that this was thievery, not something "given."

Missing is any reference to Wisdom's "repentance."[72] Also completely absent is any allusion to the "impetuosity" of Wisdom, or any evidence that the author(s) even knew the term.[73] No mention is made in the Trimorphic Protennoia of any initiative or motivation on Wisdom's part for the emergence of Ialdabaoth; there is only the brief comment that it was "she from whom he had come forth originally" (39.31–32; see above). This might allude to a narrative episode similar to Ialdabaoth's production in the Apocryphon of John, but the focus in the Trimorphic Protennoia is entirely on this archon's overpowering of Wisdom and his theft of power. Wisdom is without blame.

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in the Apocryphon of John this Intellective Faculty is never overpowered, and no power is ever "snatched from" her.

71 The vain claim does appear in the Trimorphic Protennoia, but only in a question from disillusioned and terrified powers of the Demon (= Ialdabaoth), facing bewildering threats to their realm (43.31–44.2). It is not portrayed as the moment when Wisdom recognizes the wickedness afoot and "repents."

72 E.g., Turner, "Trimorphic Protennoia," 442: "The failure of *Trimorphic Protennoia* explicitly to credit Sophia with the creation of Yaltabaoth by her *hybris* and without her partner is reflected by Sophia's epithet 'innocent' (ⲁⲧⲡⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ). Sophia has done no bad thing; she was merely overpowered by the great demon produced from Eleleth's Epinoia. She needs no repentance because it was Eleleth's fault." Cf. Poirier, *La Pensée première*, 260: "Le fait de qualifier la Sagesse de sans malice a pour effet de lui denier toute responsibilité dans ce qui est arrivé suite au larcin du demiurge." Here Poirier is actually referring not only to the "innocence" theme in the Trimorphic Protennoia, but also in the Apocryphon of John, the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, as well as the myth recounted in Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.29. Though there is legitimacy in comparing the theme in all these sources, an argument of this essay is that there are also substantive contrasts.

73 After all, the term προύνικος is absent from the version (long recension) of the Apocryphon of John usually deemed to have the closest relation to the Trimorphic Protennoia.

However, there is more going on here than merely a shifting of "blame" for creation onto Ialdabaoth. In fact, in this writing the responsibility for creation is not something that, strictly speaking, is "blamed" even on archons. The orchestrator of creation, as well as of every movement within it (!), is Divine First Thought.

Absolute Divine Control

The Trimorphic Protennoia proclaims that it is the Revealer who works through Ialdabaoth and the lower powers! One might have thought that Wisdom's victimization here, her being strong-armed and explicitly robbed of power, would present a very pessimistic message. But the larger context suggests quite the opposite. As seen above, Wisdom is identified with Intellective Faculty (Epinoia), and this entity is the descended spiritual element of First Thought (Protennoia), the Revealer who speaks throughout most of the text.[74] One of the most striking assertions in the Trimorphic Protennoia is the absolute control of all things by First Thought. In one place, Ialdabaoth, the "Great Demon," is said to have created aeons in the image of the true aeons "by his own power" (40.4–7). This is reminiscent of the theme of the cosmos as divine image in the Apocryphon of John, discussed above. However, in the Trimorphic Protennoia providential initiative and control of the cosmogony is even more explicit than in the Apocryphon of John. The text makes very clear that it was not really "by his own power" that the Demon did this; it was actually the First Thought who was hidden "in all the principalities and powers and in the angels and in every movement and in all matter; I hid myself within them until I revealed myself to my siblings" (47.19–23). The demiurgical forces did not know that it was she who gave them power (47.18–19); even though it was First Thought "operating (ἐνεργεῖν) through them, they thought that they themselves created everything, since they are ignorant, not realizing their root" (47.24–26).[75] There is certainly a moral dualism dividing good and evil, and demonic powers are on the side of oppressive socio-political powers, "the evil activity (ἐνεργεία), those who beat and constrain you (pl.), the tyrant, the adversary, the king (Emperor?), the current enemy" (41.11–15). However, the text also resolutely asserts a kind of monism, something close to a pantheistic gospel. First Thought is not only in light, but present even "in

74 E.g., see the discussion in Poirier, *La Pensée première*, 26–27.

75 Cf. John Turner in Marvin Meyer and James M. Robinson, eds., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 732 n. 97: "Blind to the divine realm beyond them, they cannot know that Protennoia is the true source of the universe."

the rulers (archons) and the angels and the demons and every soul that exists in T[art]aros[76] and in every material soul" (35.16–18). First Thought is everpresent in this way, but because she is in disguise she is not seen: "I am the Invisible One within the universe."[77] The Jesus being crucified on "the cursed wood" was none other than an identity worn by First Thought, who brought this Jesus from the cross to be established in "the houses of his father" (50.12–15).

In the Trimorphic Protennoia we again essentially have a Wisdom cosmogony, in the positive sense. There is an unwillingness to abandon the crucial involvement of Wisdom/Intellective Faculty (an aspect of First Thought) in creation. The project instead is to insist that Wisdom/Intellective Faculty has no connection at all with any evil; she is entirely "innocent" (ⲁⲧⲧⲓⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ). "The evil activity" (ⲧⲉⲛⲉⲣⲅⲓⲁ ⲉⲧϩⲟⲟⲩ) is present in every instance of immoral tyranny and violence inflicted by Ialdabaoth and his archontic henchmen (41.11–15). It seems paradoxical that the Divine is exempt from moral responsibility for this evil, in spite of the somewhat startling proposition that First Thought is in every principality, power, archon, angel, demon, and movement! But this notion is perhaps no more paradoxical in the end than the insistence in many Abrahamic traditions on God's absolute omnipotence in spite of moral evil in the world. Like many of these, the Trimorphic Protennoia anticipates a final conquest of evil powers (42.27–45.2) and the "consummation (συντέλεια) of the age, [that is], this life of injustice has [drawn near, and approaching is the] beginning of the [age to come]" (44.33–45.1).

Second Logos of the Great Seth

There can be no attempt here to untangle all of the ambiguities in the famously opaque *Second Logos of the Great Seth*. But with respect to the topic of "innocence" and its relation to Wisdom it is possible to trace some reasonably well-defined themes. Although Wisdom's own innocence is mentioned only once in this text, "innocence" is a more frequent theme here than in any of the other sources discussed in this essay. In the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, Wis-

76 Apparently a reference to the terrestrial world. As Poirier, *La Pensée première*, 188, notes, this image of earth as Tartaros or Hades also appears in sources other than demiurgical myths such as this: e.g., Clement of Alexandria (*Strom*. 1.67.4, paraphrasing Plato, *Tim*. 47 a–b).

77 E.g., in addition to this passage and Trim. Prot. 47.19–23 above, see also 45.21; 49.1–22.

dom's innocence is one part of an all-encompassing assertion about innocence in the divine realm and of the devotees who belong to it and understand its true nature.

"Innocence" as the Father's Presence

The first appearance of this theme is near the beginning of the work, in Second Treatise of the Great Seth 49.29–50.1, where the Revealer (later identified with Jesus Christ) states: "The scripture of the ineffable water which is from us is this word: 'I am in you and you are in me, just as the Father is in you (ⲛ̅ϩⲏⲧ-ⲧⲏⲛⲉ)[78] in innocence (ϩⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲙ̅ⲛ̅ⲧⲁⲧⲕⲁⲕⲓⲁ).'" The "scripture" mentioned here is probably John 14:20 or 17:21–23; given the associated reference to "ineffable water," this passage may refer to words pronounced at a baptismal rite.[79] In any event, the text claims that the Father is present within the devotees "in innocence." I will return below to some implications of this arresting declaration.

78 Bethge, "Zweiter Logos," col. 109 n. 4, argued that ⲛ̅ϩⲏⲧ-ⲧⲏⲛⲉ is not a form that is possible in Coptic and emended the text to: ⲛ̅ϩⲏⲧ ⟨ⲁⲩⲱ ϩⲛ̅⟩ ⲧⲏⲛⲉ, "in me ⟨and in⟩ you, in innocence." Painchaud, *Le deuxième traité*, 24, initially followed suit; but he follows the reading of the manuscript in his more recent translation of the Second Treatise of the Great Seth for Mahé and Poirier, *Écrits gnostiques*, 1120: "C'est moi qui suis en vous et vous qui êtes en moi *comme le Père est en vous* en toute innocence" (emphasis added). So also Gibbons, "Second Logos," 98–99; Riley, "Second Treatise," 148. But Bethge's emendation still influences other translations; e.g., Meyer and Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 477. Given the importance of this pericope to the topic under discussion here, it is worth noting that Bethge's grammatical argument was incorrect; e.g., cf. Apocryphon of James 13.17–19 in Nag Hammadi Codex I: ⲙ̅ⲡⲱⲣ ⲁⲧⲣⲉⲧⲙ̅ⲛ̅ⲧⲣⲣⲟ ⲛⲙ̅ⲡⲏⲩⲉ ⲣ̅ⲭⲁⲉⲓⲉ ⲛ̅ϩⲏⲧ-ⲧⲏⲛⲉ, "Do not have the Kingdom of heaven become desert *within you*"; though the alternate form ϩⲛ̅ ⲧⲏⲛⲉ also appears in Codex I (3.36–37; 32.33), and in the Second Treatise of the Great Seth (VII 49.33; 65.20; cf. earlier in the Paraphrase of Shem 24.15). The Subachmimic form -ⲧⲏⲛⲉ corresponds to the Sahidic -ⲧⲏⲩⲧⲛ̅, and in Codex VII it is more common than the latter (in addition to the instances above: 20.14; 24.2; 25.6–7; 49.35; 65.21; but -ⲧⲏⲩⲧⲛ in 65.22 and -ⲧⲏⲟⲩⲧⲛ in 127.23). In Sahidic the forms ⲛ̅ϩⲏⲧ-ⲧⲏⲩⲧⲛ̅ and ϩⲛ̅-ⲧⲏⲩⲧⲛ̅ are legitimate variations: Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar, with Chrestomathy and Glossary: Sahidic Dialect*, 3rd ed., PLO NS 20 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 69 n. 7. This appears also to be true of ϩⲛ̅-ⲧⲏⲛⲉ and ⲛ̅ϩⲏⲧ-ⲧⲏⲛⲉ. Bethge's emendation would not entirely alter the import of the passage, since it would still be a transcendent divine figure present in devotees (the Revealer). But the assertion that it is the Father himself is arguably a more dramatic claim.

79 Painchaud, *Le deuxième traité*, 77–78; and in Mahé and Poirier, *Écrits gnostiques*, 1120; Riley, "Second Treatise," 148.

Wisdom's "Innocence" in Preparing Bodies (and Creation in General?)

The second instance of the noun "innocence" in this writing characterizes a certain creative activity by Wisdom. The Revealer recounts having willingly come forth,

> to reveal the glory of my kindred and my fellow spirits. For the things that existed (ⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲩⲱⲟⲛ) in the cosmos had been prepared by will of Wisdom our sister—who was impetuous (ⲡⲣⲟ⟨ϒ⟩ⲛⲓⲕⲟⲥ)—out of innocence (ϯⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲕⲁⲅⲓⲁ). She had not been sent, nor had she requested anything from the All and the Greatness of the Assembly and the Perfection, when she first came forth to prepare dwellings (μονάς) and places (τόποι)[80] for the Child of the light and the fellow workers.
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> Treat. Seth. 50.22–51.3

So this writing, too, mentions Wisdom's "impetuosity," and appears to be associating it with her creative work. However, we have no scene corresponding to Wisdom's penitent distress in the Apocryphon of John when she beholds the wickedness embodied in Ialdabaoth's "vain claim." The conceited vain claim does appear in Second Treatise of the Great Seth 53.30–33, but it evokes, not distress, but only laughter from the Revealer!

In this writing Wisdom's "innocence" is directly ascribed to her creative activity in the cosmos. The phrase ⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲩⲱⲟⲛ is ambiguous, since there is no neuter in Coptic, and the phrase could refer to persons: "those who existed in the cosmos," etc. A few lines later, what Wisdom prepared are identified as bodily "houses" or dwellings (51.7) to receive the spiritual entities from above.[81] But because of the earlier phrase it is not clear whether these dwellings are the *only* things that she prepared, or whether she had prepared *all* things in the cosmos. In any event, Wisdom receives no blame; indeed, that seems to be the point of the insistence on her "innocence" in this activity.

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80 The allusion to language in John 14:2–3 has been recognized for some time; and the argument that ϩⲉⲛⲙⲟⲛⲁⲥ ("monads") in 51.1 was a Coptic translator's incorrect rendering of μοναί, "dwelling-places, houses" (as in John 14:2) was suggested by Gibbons, "Second Logos," 160; and Bethge, "Zweiter Logos," col. 109 n. 10.

81 On Wisdom making dwellings, cf. Wis 7:21–27; 1 En. 42:1–3; and of course, Prov 9:1 LXX. Gibbons, "Second Logos," 18 states that in this writing Wisdom "is not said to create anything, rather she *prepares* (ⲥⲟⲃⲧⲉ) bodies from the elements below (50.34–51.7)." He seems to mean that anything qualifying as "creating" would have to be *ex nihilo*. But

Among the abundant ambiguities in this writing are the details that are assumed regarding cosmic origins.[82] More specifically, what role in creation is imagined for Wisdom vis-à-vis Ialdabaoth? Unlike myths discussed above, the origin of the archons is never spelled out in the Second Treatise of the Great Seth nor is Wisdom called Ialdabaoth's mother.[83] The realm into which the Revealer is to descend is called "that creation of his" (50.3–4), presumably referring to the cosmos created by Ialdabaoth, although there is no narration of this action. A partial exception is anthropogony, since the archons are said to have fashioned the material Adam (53.17) after the model of a (true) Human (62.27–30). Adam's body is perhaps the "burning and vessel (σκεῦος) that they created for the destruction of Adam whom they made" (53.7–10).

However, precisely with regard to anthropogony we are confronted also with the obscure references to Wisdom's preparation of bodily (σωματικόν) houses (52.1–20) by using "στοιχεῖα below" (51.4–7). Language that is partially similar is found in the Apocryphon of John, especially in the longer recension (II 25.3–7): "the Mother also sent her Spirit in the image of the one (f.) who is in her likeness and a copy of the one (f.) who is in Perfection (Pleroma), since she will *prepare a dwelling place* (ⲥⲛⲁⲥⲟⲃⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲛⲁ ⲛ̄ϥⲱⲡⲉ) for the aeons who will come down." I commented earlier that this passage and a different version in BG 63.14–18 both should be understood to refer to Wisdom's role in the production of the race of Seth.[84] However, the Second Treatise of the Great Seth is remarkably

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fashioning from elements (στοιχεῖα), even if this matter were pre-existent, would certainly be demiurgical action.

82 The Second Treatise of the Great Seth certainly alludes to more myth than it narrates, as earlier researchers have noted, and it is quite understandable that scholars have tended to draw on other works, from Nag Hammadi and elsewhere, to "fill in the blanks." Yet as we have already seen with just this one mytheme of "innocent" Wisdom, mythological elements can vary significantly across writings with general similarities, and even across redactions of what one often treats as a "single" work such as the Apocryphon of John. Cf. Karen King, "Approaching the Variants of the *Apocryphon of John*," in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, ed. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire, NHMS 44 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 105–137.

83 Cf. Gibbons, "Second Logos," 18.

84 See above, n. 62; Gibbons, "Second Logos," 161–162, already cited the parallel with Ap. John II 25.2–7, and the reference to preparation of dwellings, though that passage is less obviously an allusion to the language of John 14:2–3. The "Child of the Light and fellow-workers" in Treat. Seth 51.2–3 are presumably Christ and his followers/devotees, while in Ap. John II 25.2–7 the occupants of the prepared dwelling are Seth and his race. Nevertheless, what should be underscored is that in both cases we have the "preparation"

more graphic in portraying Wisdom's demiurgical (what else can one call it?) use of matter, the "στοιχεῖα below," in her preparation of "somatic dwellings." So did the archons create the bodies or did Wisdom? Both, it would seem.

We can only speculate about how the relation between these two demiurgical tracks was imagined. Perhaps Wisdom is understood to have accomplished her own "preparation" of bodies using archontic agents as unwitting puppets—i.e., something analogous to First Thought's operation through archons in the Trimorphic Protennoia (see above). And, as noted above, it is possible that the text asserts that "the things that existed (ⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲩⲱⲟⲟⲡ) in the cosmos had been prepared by will of Wisdom"—i.e., that Wisdom was also behind the creation of the cosmos in general.

The "Innocence" of the Devotees

Though the noun form ϯⲙ̅ⲛ̅ⲧⲁⲧⲕⲁⲥⲓⲁ, "innocence," appears only twice, in the two passages above, the attributive or adjectival construction ⲛ̅ⲁⲧⲕⲁⲥⲓⲁ, "innocent," is found several times. The community of devotees is persecuted by immoral opponents characterized by vanity, ignorance, hate, conflict and schismatic jealousy (59.19–60.7). By contrast, the community of readers will be strong and victorious in every combat and struggle, because they lack jealousy and anger, "in the uprightness of our love, being innocent (ⲛ̅ⲁⲧⲕⲁⲥⲓⲁ), pure, good, having a thought (or "mind") of the Father in an ineffable mystery" (60.7–12).

The remaining instances of the adjective are also ascriptions of innocence to the members of the community, and are found in the refrain: ⲁⲛⲟⲛ ⲉⲛⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲛ̅ⲁⲧⲕⲁⲕⲓⲁ ϫⲁⲣⲟϥ ⲉⲛⲧⲙ̅ⲡⲣ ⲛⲟⲃⲉ, "We are innocent in that regard, since we have not sinned/erred."[85] This refrain appears in one of the more well-known sections of the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, the litany of "ludicrous" (ⲥⲱⲃⲉ) imitations put forward by the archontic powers (62.27–65.2). Each stanza lists a "laughable" fake of a true entity:[86] Adam was only the archons' imitation

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by Wisdom ("the Mother," in the Apocryphon of John) of bodily homes for devotees in the cosmos. Only her contribution completes the anthropogony.

85 Treat. Seth 62.33; 63.3, 10, 16, and 25; 64.16 and 28; the Coptic for the refrain varies slightly.

86 Dankwart Kirchner, "Der Zweite Logos des großen Seth aus NHC VII—ein gruppendynamischer Zugang zur Gnosis," in *Der Gottesspruch in der kopt. Literatur: Hans-Martin Schenke zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Walter Beltz, Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientwissenschaft 15 (Halle: Institut für Orientalistik der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1994), 125, finds the commonality among these fakes to be that they "stets auch Gerechtigkeit, Knechtschaft, Satzungen oder Gesetze thematisieren." That misses something important about the list. Kirchner's assertion is explicitly valid in the case of Moses; but less so in the

patterned after the true "Human"; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were called "the Fathers" after the real divine parents; David's son was passed off as "Son of Man";[87] Solomon thought he was Christ ("anointed"); the twelve prophets were imitations (ἀντίμιμον) of the true prophets; Moses was ridiculously called "faithful slave" and "friend,"[88] though he never even knew the Revealer; finally, "the Archon" falsely called himself the only "God" and "the only Father, the Lord."[89] This theme of the "ludicrous" imitation actually begins a couple of pages prior to this litany. In 60.13 the clause: "For it is something ludicrous …" refers to the "imitation (ἀντίμιμον)" created by the archons (60.20–21) that is a fake version of the "freedom and purity of the Perfect Assembly (ἐκκλησία)" (60.23–25).[90] This contrast between the true assembly (transcendent, but embodied on earth in the devotees) and the false church that persecutes the true "friends" of God, is a dominant message of the writing.

The devotees maintain themselves "innocent" of all the errors, the "sins," that mistake these fakes for truth. Instead, the devotees acknowledge "the *Father* of Truth, the *Human* of the Majesty" (53.3–5; 54.7–8); "Jesus the *Christ*, the *Son of Man*" (69.21–22), who is "alone the *Friend* of Wisdom" (70.3–5). The reference to

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other cases (e.g., Adam). Far more consistent is the theme of false *identities*. The community has understanding of the *true* Human, Father, Son of Man, Christ, prophets, friend, God, Lord (see below).

87 It is conceivable that this is an allusion to Ps 8:4. However, most commentators have felt that it might be connected to the use of the title "Son of David" and "Son of Man" of Jesus in the gospels; e.g., Gibbons, "Second Logos," 259; Riley, "Second Treatise," 182; Painchaud, in Mahé and Poirier, *Écrits gnostiques*, 1132. But Gibbon, followed by Painchaud, then suggests that the use of the verb ἐνεργεῖν in reference to this "Son of Man" ("his son was named 'Son of Man,' *having been put into action* by the Hebdomad"; Treat. Seth 63.5–7) could allude to Solomon's reputation as a magician. However this opaque reference is resolved, what is clear is that the Second Treatise of the Great Seth deems the only true "Son of Man" to be Jesus (69.21–22).

88 This reference to Moses being falsely named "friend" (ⲡϣⲃⲛⲣ) could be an allusion to Exod 33:11 LXX: καὶ ἐλάλησε Κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν ἐνώπιος ἐνωπίῳ, ὡς εἴ τις λαλήσει *πρὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ φίλον*, "And the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as one would speak *to his friend*." Therefore Gibbons, "Second Logos," 262 was technically correct in asserting that "nowhere in the Bible is [Moses] called '*the* Friend'"; followed by Painchaud, *Le deuxième traité*, 132. But neither mentioned Exod 33:11 at all, where "friend" (of the Lord) is certainly applied to Moses.

89 Treat. Seth 64.19–23; cf. 53.30–31. This is of course a reference to passages such as Isaiah 45:5–6, etc.; cf. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon."

90 Cf. Klaus Koschorke, *Die Polemik der Gnostiker gegen das kirchliche Christentum: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Nag-Hammadi-Traktate "Apokalypse des Petrus"* (*NHC VII,3*) *und "Testimonium Veritatis"* (*NHC IX,3*), NHS 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 47–48.

the "true prophets" is at first less transparent. But in the context of the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, this is arguably an allusion to a passage such as Wisdom of Solomon 7:27: "in every generation [Wisdom] passes into holy souls and makes them *friends of God, and prophets*." Those in possession of the truth are the "true prophets," the "friends of God." They are innocent of the sin, the error of confusing the imitations with truth, because, as mentioned earlier, the innocence the Father is "in them."

Moreover, it needs to be underscored that for the Second Treatise of the Great Seth this innocence is not merely an intellectual condition. The devotees do possess knowledge, gnosis (61.1; 68.1), but the sign of this is their morality and social behavior.[91] They are a community of "friends." Characterized not by jealousy, hatred, conflict, etc., but by the harmony and friendship of natural sibling love that is not forced by decree (62.20–22), "universal (καθολικόν), perfect love" (62.25–26).[92] In the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, it is this behavior that displays their innocence, the Father "in them." This is how they prevail against the archontic powers and those under the influence of this evil.[93] Though still "in the cosmos," such a devotee is now "a free person and acts with (χρᾶσθαι) nobility (-εὐγενής)" (57.32–34).

More than in any of the other sources discussed in this essay, the Second Treatise of the Great Seth provides a glimpse of the *social* significance for its author(s) and readers of Wisdom's "innocence."[94] The devotees were being opposed and persecuted by hostile leaders of a church who proclaimed "a dead person" (60.22)—i.e., leaders who insisted that Jesus the Son of God had actually died, and not merely appeared to do so (55.18), in the crucifixion. These opponents were perceived to lack interest in the core values mentioned above: love, harmony, friendship, etc. "Wisdom, our sister," was innocent even in her

91 Cf. Gibbons, "Second Logos," 27–29 on the "high ethical expectations" articulated in the work; Riley, "Second Treatise," 139 notes the concern in the Second Treatise of the Great Seth for the question of "how the speaker's audience (the spiritual brethren of Christ, called the Perfect) are to live in this world ruled by archons."

92 Cf. Treat. Seth 66.23–67.18; 67.32–68.12.

93 Treat. Seth 65.24–31: "And do not become female lest you give birth to evil (ογκαϭια) and its relatives: jealousy, divisiveness, anger and wrath, fear and duplicity, and vain, unfulfilled desire." This is another passage illustrating the writing's typical emphasis on moral rectitude and proper behavior, and its prominent condemnation of vices that destroy community (cf. 62.14–18; 67.15–16). See also Williams, "A Life Full of Meaning and Purpose," 54.

94 Here I am speaking to an inferred earliest social context, rather than the context of compilers and users of Nag Hammadi Codex VII.

descent, even her gathering of material elements and fashioning of things in the cosmos, because unlike these opponents Wisdom is aligned with "truth," not ludicrous fakes. She is the Wisdom of whom Jesus Christ alone is "friend." United with her truth on every point, the devotees also have "the innocence of the Father in them"; they "have not sinned."

The Pistis Sophia

Finally, I include a brief comment on the occurrence of Wisdom's "innocence" in the Pistis Sophia, the name conventionally given to a complex writing in the Askew Codex.[95] This writing is actually a compilation manifesting layers of diverse origin and its complexities cannot be adequately summarized here. For present purposes it is necessary only to note that the innocent Wisdom mytheme occurs in chapters 30–82, a portion that may be the latest layer added to this compilation, and that presents a myth about Pistis Sophia ("Faith-Wisdom"). This Wisdom character manifests certain echoes from sources discussed above, but her position and role are radically different. The far more negative treatment of Faith-Wisdom (called simply "Wisdom" in a few places) may function partly as polemic against the very types of Wisdom tradition exemplified in the Apocryphon of John and the Trimorphic Protennoia. Faith-Wisdom in chapters 30–82 is not from the transcendent realm, but rather from the start she belongs to the lower, material realm. She does not produce/create, but instead is a "completely passive figure, who is tricked, bullied, and ultimately made whole again all through outside forces."[96] The "Great Triple-Powered Arrogant One" (Authades; e.g., ch. 30) appears only in this section of the Pistis Sophia, and is an evil character modeled on the Ialdabaoth of earlier traditions like the Apocryphon of John. But here this Arrogant One is superior to Faith-Wisdom and is not her offspring. He hates Faith-Wisdom and persecutes her, and devises a lion-faced light-power that he places below

95 Carl Schmidt, ed., *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*, trans. Violet MacDermot, NHS 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1978); for recent analysis and extensive bibliography, see Erin Evans, *The Books of Jeu and the Pistis Sophia as Handbooks to Eternity: Exploring the Gnostic Mysteries of the Ineffable*, NHMS 89 (Leiden: Brill, 2015). It is a true pleasure also to recall the learned analysis of material in *Pistis Sophia* by our honoree, although part of a study with a quite different focus from the topic here: Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents*, NHMS 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 170–188.

96 Evans, *The Books of Jeu and the Pistis Sophia*, 241.

Faith-Wisdom to lure her into a trap. She mistakes this light for something transcendent, tries to swallow it, but instead much of her own light is swallowed by the lion-faced power (ch. 31). This disaster evokes the "thirteen repentances" of Faith-Wisdom, in which she repeatedly pleads for rescue and bewails the continued oppression by archontic powers while she is in Chaos (chs. 32–57). In the first of these repentances, Faith-Wisdom cries out for help to "the True Light," insisting that "it is in my innocence (ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲁⲙⲛⲧ ⲃⲁⲗϩⲏⲧ) that I have done these things, since I thought that the lion-faced light belonged to you, and the sin (ⲡⲛⲟⲃⲉ) that I have committed is manifest before you" (ch. 32.5). Thus, "innocence" here certainly does not mean absence of sin. In fact, Faith-Wisdom rues her sin or "transgression" (παράβασις) frequently throughout the thirteen repentances.[97]

The straits in which Faith-Wisdom finds herself are vaguely reminiscent of the assertion in the Trimorphic Protennoia that innocent Wisdom had been assaulted and robbed. However, in the Pistis Sophia there is no Providential control over this chain of events; there is no First Thought operating through archons. Faith-Wisdom's "repentance" might initially remind one of the repentance of Wisdom in the Apocryphon of John, but in the Pistis Sophia this remorse is far more melodramatic and Faith-Wisdom's "plight is presented as a circle within the lower material realms,"[98] not as the story of an aeon who had belonged to a transcendent realm. And in the other sources discussed here Wisdom is not said to have "sinned," as she is in this Faith-Wisdom myth. Erin Evans has argued plausibly that later layers of the Pistis Sophia, including chs. 30–82 and its myth of Faith-Wisdom, have profoundly revised elements from "Sethian" traditions about Wisdom such as in the Apocryphon of John and shifted Wisdom's "entire experience a level downward" as a strategy to "devalue the Sethian system" and subordinate it fully to "Jeuian" convictions in the Books of Jeu and Pistis Sophia as a corpus.[99]

Conclusion

The implications of Wisdom's "innocence" require more adequate attention than they have received in previous research. It is an attribute of hers too often simply overlooked or mentioned only briefly in passing in accounts of the

97 E.g., Pistis Sophia 44.8; 46 *passim*; 110 *passim*; etc.

98 Evans, *The Books of Jeu and the Pistis Sophia*, 245.

99 E.g., Evans, *The Books of Jeu and the Pistis Sophia*, 245.

texts in question. The mytheme goes back at least as far as the myth Irenaeus describes in *Adversus Haereses* 1.29: Wisdom, "out of innocence and kindness," engenders the world creator, the Chief Ruler. The other sources examined in this study provide anecdotal evidence from the history of the deployment of this mytheme. That history turns out to be surprisingly multiform, revealing ongoing speculation about nuances or ramifications in the assertion of Wisdom's innocence.

In the Pistis Sophia material the "innocence" motif has been turned, along with other elements, to the service of fundamentally demoting Faith-Wisdom ontologically, which could have been part of a polemical program trumping "Sethian" mythology, as Erin Evans argues. And Wisdom's insistence, at the beginning of the thirteen repentances, on having acted in innocence is essentially drained to insignificance by her copious confessions of "transgression/sin," instanced only here among the sources examined in this essay.

By contrast, in each of the other sources examined above Wisdom's innocence is consistent with a larger profile and program. This is true not only of the Trimorphic Protennoia, where there is an absence of any reference to Wisdom's "impetuosity" or depiction of her "repenting." Nor is it true only in the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, where Wisdom is not penitent, and her impetuousness is mentioned precisely in connection with a positive reference to her preparing everything in the cosmos from innocence. It is also true where scholars have perhaps paid least attention to it: in the Apocryphon of John, where Wisdom's repentance is a featured scene and we find mention of her impetuosity (though only in the shorter recensions). But in the Apocryphon of John it is not material creation *per se* over which Wisdom repents, but rather the arrogance of her son-turned-tyrant and the wickedness he would foment as a consequence. This is the deficiency that the Mother proceeds to correct, with her focus not on the material cosmos in general but rather on, essentially, perfecting the creation of humanity in Adam, Eve, and Seth and his progeny.

Despite their differences, all of the recensions of the Apocryphon of John, as well as the Trimorphic Protennoia and the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, affirm divine involvement, and indeed initiative, in the creation of the cosmos. Moreover, Wisdom's role in this is more than merely the engendering of a creator, Ialdabaoth, upon whom then falls all responsibility for the material cosmos. The Second Treatise of the Great Seth portrays Wisdom in a vividly "hands-on" role gathering στοιχεία from which to prepare bodies. In the Apocryphon of John, the image, albeit imperfect, of the divine realm is built into the structure of the material cosmos only because Ialdabaoth operates through divine power bestowed by Wisdom, and the life of the first humans comes from the same power. The Trimorphic Protennoia includes no explicit account

of Wisdom creating, but the divine power stolen from her is evidently that by which the Ialdabaoth of that text creates. And although all of the sources here presuppose Providential control over the universe, nowhere is this more thoroughly stressed than in the Trimorphic Protennoia, where Wisdom's divine prototype, First Thought, controls every action, including Ialdabaoth's demiurgical work. Within such contexts, "innocence" not only is conveying something positive about divine Wisdom, but it also belongs to something positive about the cosmogonic story as a whole.

CHAPTER 14

The Virgin That Became Male: Feminine Principles in Platonic and Gnostic Texts

John D. Turner

It is indeed an honor to contribute to this anthology of studies on the subject of *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity* in recognition of our esteemed colleague Antti Marjanen—to my knowledge the only Professor of Gnostic Studies in the modern academic world—who has taught us so much on the subject of gender and the role of women in antiquity and the early Christian world. Although he has dealt extensively with real women as intellectual leaders in these contexts, I would like to explore a more abstract topic, namely the ways in which wisdom (σοφία) and (spiritual) knowledge (γνῶσις) are frequently personified as female entities. Of course one must bear in mind that there is a distinction between *functional* femininity and merely *grammatical* femininity in ancient Greek, Latin, and Coptic sources, in which various significant nouns and pronouns in the philosophical and mythological schemes can appear in the feminine gender, sometimes for good and substantial reasons, and sometimes for reasons that are purely grammatical and lexicographic.[1]

In this chapter, I survey the phenomenon of feminine principles in the metaphysics of selected Platonic and gnostic literature. The Platonic sources will include Plato's later dialogues and oral teaching, and continue with some subsequent Platonist sources, including Speusippus, Philo of Alexandria, Moderatus, Plutarch, Numenius, the Chaldaean Oracles and Plotinus. I will limit the treatment of gnostic sources to texts commonly referred to as "classic gnostic" or "Sethian." These will include the theogony that Irenaeus in his *Adversus Haereses* 1.29–30 attributes to certain "gnostics" later identified as Ophites, Sethians and Barbeloites, and the related Nag Hammadi treatises Eugnostos the Blessed, Apocryphon of John, Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit (Gospel of the Egyptians), Trimorphic Protennoia, Allogenes, Zostrianos, and Marsanes. I begin with Plato and Platonic sources.

1 On this point, see John Dillon, "Female Principles in Platonism," *Ítaca: quaderns catalans de cultura clàssica* 1 (1985): 107–123.

Plato and the Old Academy

In his *Timaeus*, Plato first accounts for the created order as the best possible copy of a perfect transcendent model carefully reproduced by a completely intelligent male demiurge. But at the end of section 48, he makes a fresh start, stating that his account is incomplete without a consideration of a second, maternal cause of the universe in addition to Intelligence.[2] Plato then goes on to characterize all earthly existents as offspring of two transcendent "parents." All phenomena are images (εἴδωλα), the offspring or Child (ἔκγονος) of their Father the Forms, emerging and existing within the volume of their "Mother," the "all-receiving nature" of "space," called the "Receptacle and Nurse of becoming."

Indeed, the Mother is not so much a parent, as she is a Nurse, since there is no direct sexual interaction between her and the paternal Forms.[3] The Forms, which alone have real being, never undergo alteration nor actually enter into anything else at any point. The receptacle is itself entirely homogeneous, without any inherent quality, and never undergoes alteration. It is a space that contains an endless flux of indistinguishable sensible qualities. Like a mirror, the Receptacle receives and reflects the images of the Forms, enabling this qualitative flux to become defined as distinguishable things within her.[4] In order to survive as offspring or Child, they must continue to exist "in" the Mother. The implication is that only the Forms and the formless Receptacle have any independent reality of their own. The images, the things that we see in the world, are only reflections or impressions of the Forms in the eternally subsisting nature of the Receptacle, apart from whom they would simply cease to be.

Although the *Timaeus* is the only place where Plato employs the terms Father, Mother, and Child to designate ultimate metaphysical principles, the tradition of his later oral teaching seems to be much occupied with developing the ontological implications of this metaphysical triad. According to the var-

2 *Timaeus* 48e: "For this world came into being from a mixture and combination of necessity and intelligence … and it was by the subordination of necessity to reasonable persuasion that the universe was originally constituted as it now is."

3 Cf. Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 660 etc.; the mother is not a parent but only the nurse of what the father begets in her. On *Timaeus* 48e–52d, see Edward N. Lee, "On the Metaphysics of the Image in Plato's *Timaeus*," *The Monist* (1966), 341–368.

4 The images constitute the contents of the sensible world. While the Forms are the object of intellection and the images are objects of perception, the Receptacle is neither an intelligible nor a sensible object. It only partakes of the intelligible in a most puzzling way, and can be apprehended only by a kind of spurious reasoning.

ious reports of Plato's oral teaching, Plato's ultimate principles were the One, and an opposing feminine principle, the Indefinite Dyad, characterized as the Many and Few, the Great and Small, the More and Less, and the Unequal. Above or below these there seems to be envisioned also an intelligent cause or Demiurge. In the transcendental realm, the Dyad, which plays the role of the maternal Receptacle of the *Timaeus*, is responsible for multiplicity, difference and change, while the One causes unity, identity and permanence; their offspring are generally conceived as the ideal numbers whose proportions constitute the forms according to which sensible objects are caused to be what they are. Apparently, these numbers and proportions come to exist in the World Soul, where they regulate the cosmic motion and change that first appear there.[5]

This oral teaching is basically a development of the scheme found in Plato's *Philebus*, as well as in hypotheses I, II, III and VII of his *Parmenides*.[6] According to the *Philebus*, the principle of the Unlimited interacts with the principle of Unity (τὸ ἕν) or Limit (adumbrated in hypothesis I of the *Parmenides*) at two levels. At the highest level, this interaction produces the Forms, which in turn interact with the Unlimited principle at the next level to produce the contents of the sensible realm. The cause of this interaction is said to be the divine Intelligence, playing much the same role as does the demiurge in the first part of the *Timaeus*.[7]

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5 Plato's doctrine of the production of ideal numbers—as well as the other forms and their sensible images—from the two primal principles of the One and the Indefinite Dyad is reported not only by Aristotle, but also by the various digests of Plato's notorious lecture "On the Good," and traces of this doctrine can also be found in Plato's later published dialogues, especially the *Philebus* and the *Parmenides*. See the important monograph of K.M. Sayre, *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

6 The *Parmenides* makes a distinction between two "Ones," a One-which-is in Hypothesis II, and in Hypothesis I (137c–142b), another absolutely pure, unique and unqualified "One," which cannot properly be said to "be" at all (see n. 35 below). Any name or attribute such as "being" entails predication, which necessarily implies a measure of plurality or relationality, which if applied to the One, would destroy its unity. While the One-which-is and the Unlimited Multitude lead directly to the Old Academic principles of the One and the Dyad, one can see how, at a much later time, various gnostics and Neoplatonists might well adopt the absolutely unqualified One of hypothesis I, which has no real existence and is related to nothing else, as a sort of super-principle at the summit of their hierarchy of first principles, as that which is "beyond being" and utterly transcendent to any other imaginable entity.

7 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 988a7–14: Plato employed as the two fundamental causes "that of the essence and the material cause. The forms are the cause of the essence of other things, and the One is the cause of the essence of the forms, and he says that what is the underlying matter of which the forms are predicated in the case of sensible things and the One in the case of the forms is the Dyad or the Great and the Small."

The Old Academy seems to have adopted Plato's doctrine in a form in which the presiding Intelligence was identified with the One or Limit, thus restricting the ultimate principles to a supreme pair, the One and the Unlimited or Indefinite Dyad, whose function was identical with that of the Limit and the Unlimited or Great and Small of the *Philebus*. These complementary principles of Limit and the Unlimited are necessary to the existence of any ordered system. In the transcendent world, the Dyad submits perfectly to the principle of order and form and thus is merely the cause of the multiplicity necessary to any world. But in the phenomenal, perceptible world, especially at levels below the moon, this ordering becomes less complete. At the lowest ontological levels, the unordered residue of the indefinite principle constitutes an excess of unmastered disorder which becomes viewed as the source of evil. Aristotle for his part sought to replace Plato's duality of two ultimate principles, the One and the Indefinite Dyad (the Unlimited, the Great and Small) with the pair Act and Potency (δύναμις/ἐνέργεια) on the grounds that opposites cannot act on opposites in the way that Plato claimed the One to act upon and limit the Indefinite Dyad.

But Plato's nephew and successor, Speusippus, developed Plato's concept of a transcendent principle of indefiniteness operating at successive ontological levels even further. He seems to have posited such a principle, which he called Multiplicity and identified with Plato's Receptacle, to be present throughout the entire series of ontological levels.[8] At the highest level, that of the supreme One beyond being, the principle of Multiplicity is that from which the ideal numbers are generated. Then at the level of the mathematicals, it appears again as the principle of position, discreteness, place and solidity within which the geometrical entities of point, line, surface and solid are generated. And so on down the scale of reality. It appears finally in the two lowest realms below the World Soul, that of the sensible realm and that of pure residual matter. At this lowest point, the persuasive influence of the limiting principle in the upper levels becomes increasingly unable to master the material principle at the lower levels; the result is the emergence of evil.[9] This multiplication of

8 By definition, the Receptacle was conceived as entirely homogeneous, having no distinguishing characteristics of her own to contribute to the offspring. Were it present only at the highest level, the limiting formal principle, the One, could generate within her only a single class of things, the mathematical forms. Thus it is necessary to posit more than one Receptacle for the appearance of multiplicity in each successively lower realm.

9 This conception anticipates Plotinus's notion of the gradual privation of the power of the good at each successively lower level. At the very lowest level, evil is said to arise, not as a proactive force, but merely by the eventual attenuation of the influence of the limiting

feminine generative principles, the ontologically lowest of which is associated with disorder uncontrolled by a masculine counterpart, will reappear in the Platonic and gnostic systems of the first three centuries of our era, notably in the figure of the gnostic Sophia.

Neopythagorean Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism

Skipping ahead some three hundred years over the metaphysically barren years of the Skeptical, New, and Eclectic periods of the Academy to the first century BCE, one discovers a return to metaphysical interests among Platonists both within and without the Athenian Academy. During these times, there also flourished a Neopythagorean preoccupation with the derivation of the world from a restricted set of foundational number-principles such as the Monad, Dyad, and Triad.

Philo of Alexandria

In the early first century of our era, Philo of Alexandria considered the highest ontological level to be occupied by a supreme principle, the personal creator God of Judaism, whom he called the One and true being. On at least one occasion, Philo depicts God as Father, closely associated with a feminine consort, his own knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), who bore the sensible world as her Son (*Ebr.* 30–31). He goes on to characterize this feminine being as Sophia, God's eldest daughter, Mother and Nurse of the All, that is, as Plato's receptacle of becoming (*Det.* 115–116). But Philo can also consider Sophia as the Mother (*Fug.* 109) of God's eldest Son, the Logos, the image and shadow of God, the place of the Ideas (κόσμος νόητος).[10] Philo comes extremely close here to Plato's conception

principle. P. Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism*, 3rd ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 96–140 has isolated a passage from Iamblichus's *De communi mathematica scientia* (15.5–18.12) which perhaps represents Speusippus's view of the matter; cf. ⟨Speusippus⟩ *apud* Iamblichus, *De comm. math. sci.* 15.5–18.12 Festa. Leonardo Tarán, *Speusippus of Athens: A Critical Study with a Collection of the Related Texts and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 86–107, has seriously questioned Merlan's attribution of this passage to Speusippus; it stems rather from an anonymous pre-Iamblichean author who culled Aristotle's *Metaphysics* for doctrines about principles, mathematicals, being, goodness, beauty, and evil to support his own philosophical beliefs. Nevertheless, as Aristotle makes clear elsewhere, Speusippus certainly held the One and Multiplicity as the principles of mathematicals and that there were a plurality of material principles.

10 Such notions are present in other Jewish wisdom materials, most notably Wis 7:22–8:1,

of a Father, Mother, Child triad of supreme principles, although he does not actually name such a triad.

As Sophia's Son, the Logos is the principal articulator and place of the ideas (conceived principally as numbers and measures), subsuming the role not only of the Old Academic Limit and Unlimited, but also of the Forms themselves as well as that of a demiurgical Intelligence. As a result, Philo can conflate the figures of Mother and Son as well as distinguish them; indeed he may be disturbed by the gender of Sophia's name, and on the grounds of her more masculine function of educating humans, would prefer to consider her as a masculine father (*Fug*. 50), but he cannot completely escape the influence of the Jewish tradition of the femininity of Wisdom nor the Pythagorean tradition of the femininity of the Dyad (which he usually identifies with Matter).

Moderatus of Gades

Moderatus of Gades (fl. 80–90 CE), is a key figure in the development of Neopythagoreanism, in that he all but sketches out the metaphysical scheme of Plotinus a century in advance. Drawing upon Plato's image of the receptacle, Moderatus's system elaborates that of Eudorus of Alexandria, and also closely resembles that of Speusippus. His teaching can be reconstructed on the basis of teaching attributed to him by Porphyry and Stobaeus.[11] According to Porphyry *apud* Simplicius, Moderatus posited a four-level metaphysics based on the Old Academy ("Plato") and the Pythagoreans:[12]

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a late first-century text that applies to Sophia a number of attributes, many of them of Stoic and Platonic provenance, that figure prominently in later gnostic and Neoplatonic characterizations of the feminine principle. Sophia is an all-pervading motion, a breath and effluence of the divine power and glory, a reflection of eternal light, a mirror of the divine activity, an image of the divine goodness, and so on; she renews all things while abiding (μένειν, cf. the Neoplatonic idea of permanence, μονή) in herself as one, yet she extends (διατείνει) from limit to limit (περάς) and governs (διοίκει) all things.

11 Porphyry, *Vita Pyth*. 48–53 and "On Matter" (*apud* Simplicius, *In Phys*. 230.34–231.27 Diels); and Stobaeus, *Anth*. 1.21 Wachsmuth. See John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*: *80 B.C. to A.D. 200* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 344–351.

12 Moderatus *apud* Simplicius, *In Phys*. 230.34–231.26 Diels, translated by P. Merlan in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 91–92. See however the doubts raised by J. Noel Hubler, who argues that Simplicius's Neoplatonist summary and Porphyry's own apparent version of Moderatus cited by Simplicius recount two different theories, Porphyry's version being consistent with what we know from other sources about the Neopythagoreanism of Moderatus's time; see his "Moderatus, E.R. Dodds, and the Development of Neoplatonist Emanation," in *History and Interpretation from the Old Academy to Later Pla-*

The supreme principle is the first One, beyond being and all essence. This is followed by a second One, who is true determinate being, intelligible (νοητόν) and is the forms (εἴδη). This One is to be understood as the Monad or unitary (i.e. transcendent) Logos containing the ratios (λόγοι) of beings and the paradigms of bodies. Ontogenesis begins, not with the First One, but with the solely existing Monad or second One. By an act of self-retraction, the Monad deprives itself of its own unity, giving rise to the "first One," who then transcends it as the paradigm, source of unity, limitation, and proportion. In this act the Monad makes room for the "primal Quantity," the primal non-being that was already seminally present within it, in effect becoming formless and shapeless, an "all-receiver" like Plato's Receptacle of becoming. This Quantity (ποσότης) does not seem to be a preexisting principle separate from the Monad, but must somehow arise from the Monad's self-deprivation of all the proportions and forms (i.e., unitary forms like the ideal numbers) of which it is the source. Moderatus's feminine principle of primal Quantity seems to be his equivalent of Plato's indefinite Dyad; it is the archetype or paradigm of the derived quantity (ποσόν) which is the pure extension in corporeal things that is bounded and limited by the forms now resident in the first One. The Monad is what remains (μονή) and is stable after depriving itself of all aspects of unity and form (the principle of discrete numbers) so as to yield pure Multiplicity, which seems to be the same thing as Speusippus's principle of Multiplicity, and is in turn an adaptation of Plato's Receptacle or indefinite Dyad.

In this scheme, a material principle exists at every level except the highest (which is derived from the principle subjacent to it!): 1) at the level of the second One as primal Non-being and the Quantity or Multiplicity left over from the self-privation of the second One, 2) probably at the level of the third One (the psychic level, which Moderatus characterized as Number) where Matter as extension is proportioned with ideal magnitude to form geometrical shapes, and disarray or dispersion is rendered as eidetic (ideal) number by numerical distinction. Apparently, 3) still lower matter is impressed with those shapes and numerical proportions to produce objects of the subjacent sensible realm of Nature, and finally 4) in the form of its remainder at the lowest level, as a shadow of non-being devoid of all shape, declining toward non-being.

By positing a sole transcendent first principle, this system elaborates that of Eudorus of Alexandria and anticipates that of Plotinus. Though explicitly present at the second and lowest ontological levels, there seems to be a fem-

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tonism and Gnosticism, vol. 1 of *Plato's Parmenides and its Heritage*, ed. John D. Turner and Kevin Corrigan, WAWSup 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 115–128.

inine material principle implicitly present at every level except the highest. Since Moderatus does not directly discuss the place and function of the (feminine) dyadic principle in his system, much less locate it within an explicit family triad, its exact place in the structure of his system must be inferred.

Plutarch of Cheironeia

Moderatus's contemporary, Plutarch of Cheironeia, generally refers to the supreme deity as the One or Monad; unlike the One of Moderatus, which is elevated above involvement with anything below it and is beyond Mind itself, Plutarch's One is a transcendent Mind or Logos which contains the Ideas as its thoughts, and is symbolized by the soul of Osiris. What is new in Plutarch's scheme is the addition at the highest ontological level of a proactive evil psychic force responsible for irrational perturbations of the celestial realm, a Seth-Typhon figure antagonistic toward the orderly Osiris, but not sufficiently effective to destroy the prevailing celestial order.

Curiously, the introduction of an evil soul as a principle of evil opposing the supreme deity seems to entail the demotion of the feminine principle (the Receptacle), traditionally conceived to be coeval with the One, to the status of a third principle at a subordinate ontological level. Plutarch names this third principle Isis, who is both wisdom (φρόνησις) and Matter. She is identified as Plato's Nurse of becoming and the "all-receiving" one, the passive, material principle, eagerly receiving all procreation, who lovingly submits to Osiris, the masculine principle of order and form, although continually having to resist attack from the evil power.[13] From Isis and the soul of Osiris is produced the lower Logos (symbolized by the body of Osiris), containing the Ideas in their immanent aspect; as such, it forms the rational aspect of the World Soul. Note that the demotion of the maternal principle completely unseats Plato's notion of a supreme Father, Mother, and Child triad. In fact, given Plutarch's identification of the sensible world with Horus as the offspring of Isis and Osiris, any implied family triad is displaced even further to the level of the World Soul.

Finally, while Plutarch adheres for the most part to a three-level ontology headed by two opposed principles, he also toyed with a four-level metaphysical hierarchy in which the summit of reality is occupied by a sole Monad who links primal stability to the realm of coming-to-be and passing away immedi-

13 By the agency of the Logos, Isis is turned to herself as a space and material for the receipt of all shapes and forms, offering herself to it for reproduction, and for the sowing in herself of emanations and likenesses (*Is. Os.* 53, 372e–f).

ately below, which is presided over by a demiurgic Intellect.[14] It seems that this supreme Monad is closely associated with a principle called "Life" which stands at the head of a descending series of feminine principles (Ζωή, Κίνησις, Γένεσις, Φθορά) of change and becoming, a possible anticipation of Plotinus, and another example of a feminine principle occupying levels of reality from the highest on down. Clearly, Plutarch's metaphysics is highly original and occasionally contradictory; perhaps his overwhelming desire to insist that Plato believed that the world had a beginning in time was responsible for its somewhat fluid character.

Numenius

In the mid-second century, Numenius developed an ontology that posited a triad of male gods. The first God is the Monad, an inert Mind, characterized by stability and motionless motion. The second God is a Mind in motion who is self-generated in the act of contemplating the first God. But this self-generation is also the generation of the world. Indeed, the second God is said to be dyadic, alternating between contemplation and demiurgic activity, so that he can be considered as split into two Gods by his occupation with Matter: a second God who contemplates the First, and a third God who is the actual Demiurge.[15] The conjunction of this third God with Matter constitutes the rational part of the World Soul,[16] while the unmastered material component of the World Soul is actually conceived as a lower, evil soul. The final level is the sensible world.

Although the evidence is fragmentary, it seems that Numenius has suppressed explicit mention of a feminine dyadic principle near the ontological summit, perhaps in the interests of a philosophical monism, and because he views it as the source of evil (as was the case with Plutarch's Seth-Typhon figure). But he obviously presupposes its prior presence in the role of the Matter which splits the second God. If so, as in Speusippus, it seems that a material or indefinite dyadic principle is associated with all levels below that of the first

14 In *Gen. Socr*. 591b; cf. H.-J. Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin* (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 1967), 98.

15 Though not explicit in the extant fragments of his treatise *De bono*, it seems that his system requires that either the First God, or, more likely, the Second, be opposed by a material principle, itself unbegotten. This resembles the scheme of Moderatus.

16 *Anima beneficientissima*, frg. 52 des Places. The third God is the demiurge insofar as he is occupied with Matter, constituting a sort of conjunction between the second God and matter, and is the mind which intends or plans the world. In this sense, the third God would correspond to something like the immanent Logos or the rational part of the World Soul in the previously described systems.

God. At the highest level, that of the second God, it would be *sui generis*, underivable from the first principle of his system, and is to be regarded as the source of evil.[17] The resultant scheme of three Gods is heavily masculine, and certainly holds no room for the maternal member of a Father, Mother and Child triad: evidently he dubbed his first, second and third gods Grandfather, Child and Grandchild (frg. 21 des Places)! In view of the close relationship between the theology of Numenius and of the Chaldaean Oracles (which abound in triads and feature a central feminine figure), one may wonder whether part of this relationship may be a critical and revisionist one on the part of Numenius, with a tendency to demote feminine principles and associate them with the rise of evil; such a tendency seems to show itself in Plutarch and in gnostic myths of Sophia.

The Chaldaean Oracles

Roughly contemporary with Numenius are the Chaldaean Oracles, which exhibit a hierarchical system with many Neopythagorean features. The supreme God is called the Father, Bythos, a Monad who seems to transcend being itself, having nothing to do with anything below him. He can be apprehended only by a cognitively vacant form of intellection.[18]

Although the Oracles themselves do not describe a process of ontogenetic generation, they seem to posit the original existence of a preexistent "triadic monad" comprised of Father, power and intellect (Orac. chald. 26).[19] Together with the fourth fragment of the anonymous Turin Parmenides Commentary (9.1–8) and fragments 3, 4 and 5 of the Chaldaean Oracles, one can infer that, by extracting or "snatching himself" (ἥρπασσεν/ἁρπάσαι ἑαυτόν)—perhaps as the "first transcendent fire" of Oracula Chaldaica 5 that represents his own singular hypostatic reality—away from this initial "triadic monad," the Father leaves behind a dyad of power (perhaps the δύναμις νοερά of Orac. chald. 3) which stays "with him" and his intellect, which is said to proceed "from" him. This

17 A champion of the Old Academic two-opposed principles doctrine, Numenius has only scorn for those Pythagoreans who, like Moderatus, attempt to derive an indefinite Dyad from the Monad by some process of receding from its singular nature and taking on duality.

18 Orac. chald. 1 (Majercik): "For there exists a certain Intelligible which you must perceive by the flower of the mind.... You must not perceive it intently, but keeping the pure eye of your soul turned away, you should extend an empty mind toward the Intelligible in order to comprehend it, since it exists outside of (your) mind."

19 "For the world, seeing you as a triadic Monad, has honored you." The term "triadic monad" is probably not Chaldaean but Proclan.

dyad would be a potential multiplicity which, when co-unified with the Father's now extracted simplicity (Orac. chald. 8: "beside this one sits a Dyad"), is somehow delimited to produce a separately existing second (demiurgical) intellect distinct from ("from him") the Father's power, while his power, though now distinguishable from the Father, nevertheless stays "with him" (Orac. chald. 4) and comes to act as a sort of membrane (ὑμήν, Orac. chald. 6) that separates what has now become two "fires," namely the self-extracted supreme Father and the derivative second, demiurgic intellect (Orac. chald. 6).

The proceeding Intellect is a separately existing demiurgical entity, "a triad that connects the All while measuring all things" (Orac. chald. 23, 31). By contemplating the intelligible universal Ideas contained in the supreme Paternal Intellect, it "measures" them into the forms of individual entities and then sows them throughout the cosmos (Orac. chald. 8, 37). Like the second God of Numenius, it is oriented towards both what is below it and what is above it.

So far, everything seems rather masculine, until one considers the figure of Hekate, in whose womb all things are sown (Orac. chald. 28).[20] She seems to be conceived as a sort of diaphragm or girdling membrane (Orac. chald. 6, ὑπεζωκώς τις ὑμὴν), the "center between the two Fathers," which separates, yet girds together (ὑπεζωκώς τις ὑμὴν) the "first and second fires" (Orac. chald. 6). As such, she serves as the "center between the two Fathers" (Orac. chald. 50), i.e., the Paternal Intellect or Monad (πατρικὴ μονάς, Orac. chald. 11; cf. Orac. chald. 12 and 27) and the second, demiurgical Intellect (the measuring triad of Orac. chald. 23). As a membrane, Hecate not only separates the first and second Fathers or intellects, but also, as the "bond of love" (δεσμὸς ἔρωτος, Orac. chald. 39 and 42) between them, she associates them together a kind of cosmic "glue."[21] By serving as the bond between the first and second

20 Τῆσδε γὰρ ἐκ τριάδος κόλποις ἔσπαρται ἅπαντα. Hecate thus serves as Plato's receptacle of Forms and nurse of becoming in Timaeus 49a5f., posited as a necessary intermediate principle between model (the Ideas) and copy (the world).

21 Psellus (*Opuscula psychologica, theologica, daemonologica* 146.16–18 O'Meara) says that she is in the middle of the "source-fathers" (πηγαῖοι πατέρες), sandwiched between the "once beyond" (ἅπαξ ἐπέκεινα; cf. Orac. chald. 169; Psellus, *Opuscula* 149.13–15 O'Meara) above her, and the "twice beyond" (δὶς ἐπέκεινα) below her. Lydus (*De mensibus* 4.53) says Porphyry's commentary on the Oracles identified the twice beyond with the universal demiurge and the once beyond with the Good. Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 392–396, suggests that Hecate may have been identified with the median term of the triad existence, power and intellect which characterized the supreme Father. However, in his "Female Principles in Platonism," 122, he follows Psellus (*Opuscula* 146.16–18 O'Meara), in seeing Hecate as distinct from and subordinate to the Father's power, which has no "role in generating

intellects, Hecate may thereby represent the supreme Father's "power" acting within the demiurgic intellect, as suggested by Oracula Chaldaica 5: "For the first Fire beyond (πῦρ ἐπέκεινα τὸ πρῶτον) does not enclose its own power in matter by means of its works, but by Intellect." Moreover, Hecate also serves as the Father's generative and life-giving womb (Orac. chald. 32, τὸν ζῳογόνον Ἑκάτης κόλπον) or the cosmic crater (Orac. chald. 29, 42, and 44, cf. the mixing bowl of *Timaeus* 35a) in which the prenoetic ingredients of the ideas sown from the Paternal Intellect are bound and mixed together (Orac. chald. 32 and 56). As such, Hecate is not the World Soul, but its source (Orac. chald. 51).

This seems to be another example of a female principle of indefiniteness and multiplicity being located at nearly every ontological level, as was the case with Speusippus, Philo (Sophia), Moderatus, Plutarch (Isis) and Numenius.[22] This suggests that Hecate was understood by the Chaldaeans to function minimally at two levels, as the transcendent principle of ideal multiplicity and source of the world soul, from which in turn is derived the world of Nature.[23] If so, we shall see that the dual role of Hekate as the transcendent source of ideal multiplicity and as immanent World soul strikingly resembles the relationship between the Sethian Barbelo and her lower double, Sophia.

Although the oracles do not invoke Plato's Father, Mother, and Child triad by name, it seems to be functionally present at the highest level in the figures of the Father, Hekate as his power, and the demiurgic paternal Intellect.

Intellect; it merely 'remains with' the Father, while the Intellect 'proceeds from' him." However, the phrase "the shining ray of Hecate, who is generated from the Father" seems to portray Hecate as a dynamic, circumradiating principle of some kind in Orac. chald. 35, "For implacable Thunders leap from him and the lightening-receiving womb of the shining ray of Hecate begotten of the Father. From him leap the girdling flower of fire and the powerful breath (situated) beyond the fiery poles (τοῦδε γὰρ ἐκθρώσκουσιν ἀμείλικτοί τε κεραυνοί, καὶ πρηστηροδόχοι κόλποι παμφεγγέος αὐγῆς πατρογενοῦς Ἑκάτης, καὶ ὑπεζωκὸς πυρὸς ἄνθος ἠδὲ κραταιὸν πνεῦμα πόλων πυρίων ἐπέκεινα)."

22 As noted by Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 394.

23 A view with which Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 394–395, also agrees. See my "The Figure of Hecate and Dynamic Emanationism in the Chaldaean Oracles, Sethian Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," *SecCen* 7 (1991): 221–232, and Sarah I. Johnson, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate's Roles in the Chaldaean Oracles and Related Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), ch. 5.

Plotinus

According to Plotinus's doctrine of ontogenesis, the realm of true being and intellect, followed by that of Soul and Nature itself, continuously unfold from their source in the One, a transcendent, only negatively conceivable ultimate unitary principle which is itself beyond being. Every reality subsequent to the One is eternally generated in three continuous phases: first, an initial identity of the product with its source, a sort of potential or prefigurative existence; second, an indefinite procession or spontaneous emission of the product from its source; and third, a contemplative visionary reversion of the product upon its own prefiguration within its source, in which the product becomes aware of its separate existence and thereby takes on its own distinctive form and definition.

I shall comment only on that point of Plotinus's metaphysics at which he hints at a feminine principle that emanates from the One, albeit very cautiously, since above all, he is unwilling to compromise the unity of his supreme principle, the One. This interhypostatic entity, identified variously as an Indefinite Dyad or Intelligible Matter, is characterized as power, an undefined primary movement and otherness, a trace of Life emitted by the supreme One.[24] Emanating from the One, it takes on limit and definition as the second hypostasis, Intellect, at the point where it contemplatively turns back toward the source from which it was emitted.

Every reality subsequent to the One is eternally generated in three continuous phases: first, an initial identity of the product with its source, a sort of potential or prefigurative existence; second, an indefinite procession or spontaneous emission of the potential product from its source; and third, a contemplative reversion of the product upon its own prefiguration still resident in its

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24 The principal passages containing Plotinus's doctrine of the dyad are *Enn*. 2.4.5.15–23, 2.4.5.28–35, 2.4.10.4–11, 2.4.11.33–43, 2.4.15.14–28, 5.1.5.6–19; and especially 6.7.17.6–43. In the earlier treatises, Plotinus employs concepts reminiscent of the Old Academicians and the Neopythagorean arithmologists, such as the "Dyad" or the "Unlimited" or "Matter," though never "Mother." In *Enn*. 2.4, "On Matter," Plotinus discusses a feminine generative principle called "Intelligible Matter" or the "Indefinite" or the "Dyad" or the "Unlimited" or the "Great and Small" (as in Plato's oral teaching preserved by Aristotle), which he explicitly associates with Plato's Receptacle. It is a primal otherness in the neighborhood of the One, an indefiniteness, not yet good, immediately prior to its turning to the one and receiving definition and illumination. This intelligible matter is to be distinguished from lower, sensible matter, which is "evil" in the sense of its privation of all form and definition. Like Plato's Receptacle, lower matter is always potentially receptive of form and never actual, and therefore cannot be an irreconcilably independent, proactive principle of evil as suggested by some gnostic sources.

source, in which the product becomes aware of its separate existence as distinct from its source and thereby takes on its own distinctive form and definition.

> It is because there is nothing in it (the One) that all things come from it: in order that Being may exist, the One is not being, but the generator of being. This, we may say, is the first act of generation: the One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it. Its halt and turning towards the One constitutes Being; its gaze upon the One, Intellect. Since it halts and turns towards the One that it may see, it becomes at once Intellect and Being.
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> *Enn.* 5.2[11].1.8–13

Soon after the production of his tetralogy against the gnostics, Plotinus seems to abandon traditional arithmological terminology for the principle of multiplicity such as the "indefinite Dyad" and even the notion of "intelligible Matter" in favor of an indefinite entity he calls "Life." In *Ennead* 6.7[38] "On the Multiplicity of Ideas," this entity, which is not hypostatized in his system, is characterized an indefinite primary movement and otherness, a certain limitless and multiple trace of Life which, once emitted from the One, looks back upon its source and thereby becomes defined and limited in the form of Intellect, the second hypostasis:[25]

> Life, not the life of the One, but a trace of it, looking toward the One was boundless, but once having looked was bounded (without bounding its source). Life looks toward the One and, determined by it, takes on boundary, limit and form … it must then have been determined as (the life of) a Unity including multiplicity. Each element of multiplicity is determined multiplicity because of Life, but is also a Unity because of limit … so Intellect is bounded Life.
>
> *Enn.* 6.7.17.13–26

25 In *Enn.* 2.9[33].3.7–12, Plotinus refers to both a primary and secondary life or vitality as virtual synonyms for his well-known doctrine of two "activities" (ἐνεργείαι), an "internal" primary activity by which an entity is what it is, and an incidental "external" or secondary activity that it emits as an image or trace of its primary internal activity, e.g., *Enn.* 4.8[6].6.1–2, 5.4[7].2.21–37, 5.1[10].6.28–53, 4.5[29].7.13–23, 2.9[33].8.11–19, 6.2[43].22.26–29, 5.3[49].7.13–3, 6.8[39].16, 5.9[5].8.

Eventually, the unreverted portion of this indefiniteness ends up as ordinary Matter at the bottom of the cosmic scale, as the principle of evil conceived as a mere image of intelligible Matter, utterly deprived of goodness, life and intelligence, a "decorated corpse" (νεκρὸν κεκοσμένον, *Enn.* 2.4.5.18).

Owing to this dual nature of matter, Plotinus's system has no room for a supreme Father, Mother, Child triad. As a transcendent feminine principle, Intelligible Matter or the Life-trace emanating from the One is never hypostatized at any point, and in the transcendent realm is generally redefined as Life, a member of a triad of attributes (Being, Life, Intelligence) within his second hypostasis, Intellect, which "boils with Life."[26]

The Anonymous (*Porphyrian?*) Parmenides *Commentary*

Finally, one must also consider the doctrine of an anonymous and fragmentary commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*—very plausibly attributed by P. Hadot to Porphyry[27]—since its ontology constitutes a direct link with later Sethian treatises. The commentator conceives the unfolding of the Intellect from the One somewhat as does Plotinus, but in a much more detailed manner, in the process introducing a new triad of principles between the One and Intellect.

The first four fragments deal with the One of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* and the last two with the One-Being of the second hypothesis.[28]

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26 Indeed, the dominant role of Life in Plotinus's metaphysics tends to be limited to membership in the triad Being, Life, and Mind as aspects of Intellect proper, rather than to serve as a sort of link between the first two hypostases. In this respect, Plotinus serves as instance of an established tendency to demote or suppress ultimate female principles in the interests of a philosophical monism. Most scholars suspect Plotinus derived—or at least justified—this triad from his exegesis of Plato, *Sophist* 248c–e, to the effect that true being must also have life and intelligence; for Plotinus, true being is first found in his second hypostasis, Intellect. Plotinus seems intentionally vague about the ontological status of this principle at each phase of the emanative process, perhaps in reaction to certain derivational schemes, such those of the Oracles and certain gnostic treatises, which may have seemed to him to be too detailed, populating the transcendent world with an excessive number of intermediate entities whose burgeoning multiplicity were in danger of compromising the uniqueness of the supreme One. In his view, all such multiplicity has its start in the Intellect, whose unity keeps it in check, prior to its spilling forth into the lower realms of Soul and Nature.

27 Cf. P. Hadot, "La métaphysique de Porphyre," in *Porphyre*, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 12 (Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), 127–157, and P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, 2 vols. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1968).

28 Fragment 1 deals with the concept of the One in terms of negative theology. The One can only be conceived by a "non-comprehending comprehension and an intellection that

In the final fragments, the commentator identifies the One-Being of the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* with the Plotinian Intellect, and attempts to show how it is simultaneously identical and not identical with the absolute One. The absolute One is clearly beyond being itself, and can only be apprehended by means of a cognitively vacant "preconception," a "learned ignorance."[29] The commentator also correlates each distinguishable phase in the unfolding of the Intellect from the One with the members of the triad of "activities" Existence (ὕπαρξις), Life or Power, and Intellection (ὕπαρξιν καὶ ζωὴν ⟨καὶ⟩ τὴν νόησιν, *Anon. in Parm*. 14.15–16) emitted as an "otherness" from the pure infinitival being (τὸ εἶναι) in the absolute One, a triad of powers or activities also found in the Sethian Platonizing treatises Allogenes and Zostrianos and detected in the Chaldaean Oracles by its later Neoplatonist exegetes. In the Commentary, the activity of Existence represents the outgoing state of Intellect as "activity remaining at rest", in which thinking coincides with thought, whereupon Intellect constitutes itself by the movement of Life as an indeterminate thinking away from Existence, ending in the backward movement of determinate Intellection in which "thinking returns to the object of thought."[30] Although this triad is explicitly present in the Sethian gnostic treatises, it should be noted that there is no trace here of a Father, Mother, Child triad, nor any sign of multiple female principles.

Proto-Sethian Gnostic Sources

Having alluded to the place of the feminine principle in the metaphysical scheme of Plotinus, I turn to a survey gnostic metaphysics. I shall limit myself to the gnostic theologies known as "Sethian" or "classic gnostic" and their close relatives, which acutely raise the issue of the ontological place of feminine principles.

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intuits nothing," wherein one arrives at "an ineffable preconception representing the One in silence, without awareness of that silence, or consciousness that it is the One's image, or indeed any kind of knowledge." In a sense, the One has no relation to anything else. Negative theology generally speaks of the non-existence of the One; actually, the One is the only real Existent, while it is all else that is nothing in relation to it. In fragment 4, the One is said to be superior even to the positive statements about God in the Chaldaean Oracles. See the summary in R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1972), 110–118.

29 In Parmenidem 2.4–27.

30 In Parmenidem 14.10–26.

The Gnostics in Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses *1.29–30*

For the sake of comparison, one may begin the treatment of gnostic ontologies with the schemes of two anonymous groups of Christian gnostics discussed by Irenaeus of Lyons toward the end of book I of his *Adversus Haereses*, that of the "multitude of gnostics" (*multitudo gnosticorum*) he describes in chapter 29 and contrasts with that of yet "other" group (*alii autem rursus*) in chapter 30, who by mid-fifth century became distinguished by Theodoret (*Haereticarum fabularum compendium* 1.13–14) as Barbeloites and Sethian-Ophites respectively.[31]

Here one finds a pentad of highest beings: The First Male is Bythos, the supreme Father of All. His Thought (ἔννοια) which proceeds from him emits the Second Male, the Son of Man. Below these is the Holy Spirit, the first Female, the Mother of the Living, from whom the First Man and the Son of Man beget Christ, the "Third Male" (*tertius masculus*) as well as his sister, the androgynous Sophia Prunicos, who bursts forth from the Holy Spirit and descends below the pleroma to give rise to her son Yaldabaoth.[32] Once Sophia reascends to the eighth heaven, she implores her mother Holy Spirit to send aid in the form of her brother Christ, who descends below to unite with Sophia and thence entered into the human Jesus, upon whose crucifixion he and his sister Sophia reascend to the imperishable aeon.

Now the nomenclature of this "Ophite" theogony resembles that found in the Nag Hammadi treatise Eugnostos the Blessed (NHC III 3 and V 1) and its strikingly obvious expansion into the Christian revelation dialogue The Wisdom of Jesus Christ (NHC III 4 and BG 3) that concludes with a cosmogony very typical of what has become known as Sethian Gnosticism. According to Eugnostos, the ultimate principle, the unbegotten Propator, is said to conceive a second, self-generated (αὐτοφυής) principle, Autopator, by a process of self-reflection as in a mirror. Thereupon Autopator, by "intelligizing its ἀρχή" (presumably the supreme Propator), is said to produce a third principle, "first-begetter Nous," also called the androgynous Immortal Man, together with his

31 To judge from the later heresiologies of Origen (*Contra Celsum* 6.24–38), Pseudo-Tertullian (*Adversus omnes haereses* 2), Epiphanius (*Panarion* 25–26, 37–40), Philastrius (*Diversarum Hereseon Liber* 3) and Theodoret, the process of branding these groups with distinct names probably began at the turn to the third century in Hippolytus's lost *Syntagma kata Haireseōn*.

32 Her excess power descends further in the form of the androgynous Sophia Prunicos; from the chaotic waters below her, she takes on a material body which bears the ignorant demiurge Yaldabaoth, while she herself ascends to the eighth heaven. Thence she implores her mother Holy Spirit to send aid in the form of her brother Christ who descends upon Jesus, leaving him to die while he reascends with his sister Sophia to the imperishable aeon.

female aspect, "all-wise begettress Sophia," who is also identified as "Truth" and perhaps "Ennoia." In this scheme, the two highest levels each contain a sole male principle, while, beginning at the third ontological level, the successive male principles are joined with feminine principles each of which bears the name Sophia; only at the fourth level is the figure of the Mother introduced as consort of the Son of Man.

Much like the old Academic system of Speusippus, one finds the presence of a female principle at every level of being except the highest two, and there is some warrant to suspect that the author of Eugnostos was aware of an arrangement in which even these two also had a feminine aspect associated with them, but has suppressed this in favor of a philosophical monism. In addition, The Wisdom of Jesus Christ identifies Adamas's consort, the Mother of the All, as the mother of the demiurge Yaldabaoth, an instance of the tendency to associate a female principle with the source of evil. Among the Platonic systems previously surveyed, such a devaluation of the feminine seems to occur in the thought of Plutarch, Numenius and Plotinus.

As shown in detail by Tuomas Rasimus,[33] this "Ophite" theogony is clearly different from the theogony of the *multitudo gnosticorum* which Irenaeus presented in the immediately preceding chapter of his *Adversus Haereses* (1.29.1–4), which Theodoret identified as "Barbeloite" (also as Borborian, or Naassene, or Stratiotic, or Phemionite). It features a four-level hierarchy: the Father/Invisible Spirit, the Mother/Barbelo, and their Child Autogenes, who form a supreme trinity supplemented by the Child's four Luminaries or aeons (Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe, and Eleleth), who contain a total of twelve ideal beings, the last and lowest of whom is Sophia. The ensuing cosmology then takes its start with the appearance of Saklas, the creator and governor of the lower world, either at the behest of Eleleth or from the independently creative act of the lowest of Eleleth's inhabitants, Sophia.

Sethian Gnosticism

Sethian Gnosticism had its roots in a form of Jewish speculation on the figure and function of Sophia, figure of the divine Wisdom featured in the Hebrew Bible. In the hands of Sethian gnostics, the biblical functions of Sophia as creator, nourisher, and enlightener of the physical cosmos were distributed

33 Tuomas Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Evidence*, NHMS 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 29–62.

among a hierarchy of feminine principles: 1) an exalted divine Mother or even Mother-Father called Barbelo, the First Thought or Forethought ("Protennoia," "Pronoia," "Ennoia") of the supreme deity (the "Invisible Spirit"), who is ultimate savior and enlightener; 2) a lower wisdom figure, called Sophia or even mother, responsible for both the creation of the physical world by the instrumentality of her direct offspring, the world-creating Archon (Yaldabaoth, Saklas, Samael), as well as his incarnation of portions of the supreme Mother's divine essence into human bodies; and 3) the figure of Epinoia, Barbelo's reflection on the earthly plane who appears as the spiritual Eve (or Zoe, "mother of the living"), who appears as to alert humankind ("Adam") to its true filiation with the divine First Thought. Salvation was achieved by the Mother's reintegration of her own dissipated essence into its original unity.

The Apocryphon of John (*NHC II 1, III 1, IV 1, BG 2*)

In the interests of brevity, I shall assume without argument that the Apocryphon of John is a mid-second century Sethian gnostic apocalypse. Its introductory theogonical section is substantially identical with the theogony presented in Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses* 1.29 in the third quarter of the second century.[34] In this work, one can perhaps for the first time discern the combination of two essential building blocks of gnostic Sethianism: 1) a preoccupation with the primordial history of Adam, Seth and his seed derived from the early chapters of Genesis, and 2) a mythical theogony centered on a triad of primal principles called Father, Mother and Son, which Irenaeus attributed to certain gnostics, whom Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*Haeret. fab. compend.* 1.14) later identified as "Barbeloites."

The theogony proper begins with a description of the supreme deity, the Monad or Invisible Spirit, the first member of the Father, Mother and Son triad. The major feature of this description, which has an extensive parallel in the Sethian Platonizing treatise Allogenes (NHC XI 62.28–63.25 // Apocryphon of John BG 24.6–25.7 // NHC II 3.17–33), is an extended negative theology employing terms nearly identical to those of the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*. This initial instance of Platonic metaphysics alerts the reader to expect further Platonic influence.[35] The author emphasizes here the Monad's

34 *Haer.* 1.29, ca. 175–180 CE.

35 The primal deity is described as unlimited, without quantity, neither corporeal nor incorporeal, neither great nor small, immeasurable, neither eternal nor in time, ineffable, unnamable, invisible, unsearchable, undergoing nothing, and not anything among those things that exist, just as Plato's One. Among its positive attributes are: it is the ultimate Monad and Father of the All, the Invisible Spirit higher than God; it is total perfection,

superiority to any of its attributes, including a rather traditional sounding triad of attributes, blessedness, perfection and divinity, suggesting that he opposed an antecedent doctrine which posited a triadic structure inherent in the Monad itself, somewhat analogous to the father (or existence), power, intellect triad latent within the supreme Father of the Chaldaean Oracles.

Next, the author moves to an account of the origin of the median member of the triad, the Mother Barbelo, the first Thought of the Invisible Spirit. She originates as an act of the Father's self-reflection in the radiant Living Water that surrounds him.[36] Called the Father's Pronoia, the merciful Mother of the All, she is an androgynous Mother-Father, the Womb of the All. Her first act is to request three hypostatic powers from her progenitor (Foreknowledge, Imperishability and Eternal Life). Thereupon the Mother conceives the third member of the triad, the only-begotten Son, or self-begotten Christ, by means of a spark of light from the Father, and he too is given a triad of hypostatic powers (Mind, Will and Word). The pairwise cooperation of these hypostatic beings

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pure Mind, life-giving life, blessedness-giving blessedness, knowledge-giving knowledge, goodness-giving goodness, mercy-giving mercy, and grace-giving grace, yet transcends all these attributes. The *Parmenides* makes a distinction between two "Ones," a One-which-is in Hypothesis II and in Hypothesis I, another, absolutely pure, unique and unqualified "One," which cannot properly be said to "be" at all. The non-existence of the "One" of the first Hypothesis follows (137d–141e) because 1) it is neither a whole nor has parts, 2) it is unlimited, 3) it has no extension or shape, 4) it has no place, neither in itself nor in another, 5) is neither at rest nor in motion, 6) is neither the same nor different nor like nor unlike nor equal to nor unequal to itself or another, 7) is immeasurable, 8) is neither younger nor older or of the same age as itself or another, and 9) has nothing to do with time or any length of time. Therefore, the One in no sense "is." According to the material common to the Apocryphon of John and Allogenes (BG 23.3–26.13 // NHC II 3.18–25 // NHC XI 62.28–63.23), the Unknown One is neither divinity nor blessedness nor goodness, but is superior to these; neither boundless nor bounded, but superior; neither corporeal nor incorporeal, neither great nor small, neither a quantity nor a product, nor a knowable existent, but superior; it shares in neither time nor eternity (αἰών); it does not receive from another; neither is it diminished nor does it diminish nor is it undiminished. Striking instances of such negative theology are found in Alcinous, *Didask.* 10.164.28–165.14 and Basilides *apud* Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7.20.2–21.1. H.A. Wolfson has pointed out that this is not so much a negative theology, in which an affirmative predicate is negated, but a privative theology which denies the possibility of predication at all; see his "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides," *HTR* 50 (1957): 145–156; cf. also J. Whittaker, "Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology," *SO* 44 (1960): 109–125; "Neopythagoreanism and the Transcendent Absolute," *SO* 48 (1973): 77–86; "Επέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας," *VC* 23 (1969): 91–104; M. Jufresa, "Basilides, A Path to Plotinus," *VC* 35 (1981): 1–15.

36 NHC II 4.19–26.

then results in the production of the four Lights (Harmozel, Oroiael, Davithai and Eleleth). Each of these is equipped with three hypostatic attributes, the twelfth and last of which is named Sophia.

Thus, the Apocryphon of John offers a family triad of supreme beings, Father, Mother and Son, with many of the same attributes as Plato granted to his triad of principles: the paternal Invisible Spirit as source of the forms (here conceived as light or sparks), Barbelo, the maternal receptacle in which the image of the forms come to be, and the resultant Child or Autogenes Son as offspring, not of a procreative act, but as a "self-begotten" spark of light conceived by the Mother.[37]

In addition to the presence of a female principle immediately subjacent to the summit of the scale of being, the Apocryphon of John introduces also the lower figure of Sophia, who, like Barbelo, is also conceived as a mother.[38] Unlike the higher figure of the Mother who conceives—or is impregnated by—a spark of light from the Father, Sophia tries to imitate the highest deity by attempting to produce an offspring alone without the cooperation of a male consort (the formal element), which results in the production of the misshapen evil world creator. As the source of the author of disorder and evil, Sophia is an unstable lower feminine principle insufficiently mastered by the masculine principle of order.[39]

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37 The Berlin Codex version portrays this event in a strictly Platonic manner by having Barbelo conceive the Son through her act of turning toward the Invisible Spirit and contemplating him, while the longer version of Nag Hammadi Codex II portrays a more procreative process in which the Invisible Spirit looks at Barbelo and begets in her a spark of light.

38 The same seems to be true of the Ophite system and the concluding section of The Wisdom of Jesus Christ.

39 Interestingly, in the Berlin Codex version (BG 54.1–19), just as Barbelo is generally called "Mother" or "Mother-Father" and bears the epithet "Womb of the All," so also Sophia is called "Mother," and similarly takes on a characteristic of Plato's Receptacle and Nurse of becoming, when it is said that she became "agitated" when Yaldabaoth extracted some of her power from her, moving to and fro, not "above the waters" as in Gen 1:2, but in the darkness of ignorance. Not only are there the double maternal figures of Barbelo and Sophia, but there is also a double Eve: a spiritual one, who is none other than the Epinoia of Light, a manifestation of the Mother on high and the source of Adam's enlightenment, and the other, her earthly image, Adam's wife. Perhaps this is yet another instance of the tendency to multiply feminine maternal principles at various levels in the hierarchy of being, although Eve figures can scarcely be said to be "principles." Significantly, neither the introduction of Sophia as lower Mother figure nor that of the double Eve entails any demotion in the ontological stature of the Mother on high, Barbelo.

The Trimorphic Protennoia (*NHC XIII 1*)

Trimorphic Protennoia likewise presents a Father, Mother and Son triad of highest principles, identified as the Invisible Spirit, his First Thought (Protennoia/Barbelo), and the Self-begotten Son. As the incomprehensible Womb, it is through Protennoia that the All takes shape (NHC XIII 38.15). Significantly, Trimorphic Protennoia interprets the notion of Barbelo's androgyny, found also in the Apocryphon of John, in terms of a triadic interpretation of Barbelo herself. Instead of merely being granted a subordinate triad of attributes, here she is said to manifest herself in the world in three successive forms or modalities of increasing substantiality and articulateness: Sound, Speech and Word.[40] This functional and modalistic tripartition of Barbelo/Protennoia is a harbinger of things to come as the Sethian tradition develops.

The Gospel of the Egyptians (*NHC III 2, IV 2*)

As in the case of the Apocryphon of John, the first part of the Gospel of the Egyptians consists of an elaborate theogony narrating the generation of the five principle transcendent beings who comprise the highest aeon of the divine world, called the Doxomedon aeon: namely, the great Invisible Spirit and the male virgin Barbelo; the thrice-male Child; the male virgin Youel, who seems to be a lower double of Barbelo; and Esephech the Child of the Child, who seems to be a lower double of the thrice-male Child.[41] The treatise goes on to develop

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40 She appears first in masculine form as the Voice of the first Thought of the Invisible Spirit, the androgynous Mother and Womb of the All, then in feminine form as the audible Speech of this Thought, and finally in masculine form as the fully articulate Word of the Thought. As Logos, she is manifested decisively in the masculine form of the Christ who puts on Jesus and rescues him from the cross along with all gnostics who realize the true identity of the Word. See the extensive analysis of Tilde Bak Halvgaard, *Linguistic Manifestations in the Trimorphic Protennoia and the Thunder: Perfect Mind Analysed against the Background of Platonic and Stoic Dialectics*, NHMS 91 (Leiden: Brill, 2016). While this rather ingenious scheme shows little interest in Platonizing speculation on the origins and nature of the primal triad, it does share with the Apocryphon of John an insistence upon the fundamental soteriological role of the Mother figure of the primal tetrad, referring to her role in the creation, continued survival and ultimate completion and salvation of the All, and to her status as image of the Invisible Spirit and Womb of the All. The same is true of Barbelo in the Apocryphon of John, particularly in a hymnic section near the conclusion, which depicts the three saving descents of Pronoia, the first two preliminary, and the third successful, resulting in the elevation of her members to the light by means of the celestial baptismal rite of the Five Seals. Indeed, Trimorphic Protennoia may have originated as a creative expansion of this hymnic passage.

41 The basic outline of this theogony seems be an elaboration upon a traditional list of

an extended theogony featuring a bewildering series of at least six interlocking Father, Mother, Son triads accounting for the generation of the pentad as well as of the self-begotten Son, Adamas, Seth and his seed. The multiplicity of such triads entails an amazing replication of feminine principles all the way down the scale of being.[42]

Rather than narrating the emergence of Barbelo from the self-reflection of the Invisible Spirit, it seems that the Gospel of the Egyptians envisages a doctrine of emanation according to which the Father, Mother, Son triad is conceived as a structure latent within and directly emitted from the Invisible Spirit.

The Sethian Platonizing Treatises

Elements of the traditional Sethian theogony and ritual are sufficiently present in the Sethian treatises Allogenes (NHC XI 3), Zostrianos (NHC VIII 1), the Three Steles of Seth (NHC VII 5) and Marsanes (NHC X 1) to recognize them as Sethian. But their major focus has become metaphysical, specifically Platonically inspired speculation on techniques of contemplative ascent and ontological and ontogenetic schemes centered on triadic divine principles. For this reason, these treatises have become designated as the "Sethian Platonizing treatises."

In Allogenes, the supreme Unknowable One is regarded as beyond being and describable only in negative terms reminiscent of Plato's *Parmenides*. Significantly, one section of this negative theology contains a nearly word-for-word parallel with a similar negative theology found in the Apocryphon of John (Allogenes NHC XI 62.27–63.25 ≈ Ap. John BG 24.6–25.7 ≈ NHC II 3.17–

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five principal transcendent beings who are the object of five repeated doxologies or presentations of praise which punctuate the major episodes of the theogony (IV 59.13–29, III 49.22–50.17, 53.12–54.11, 55.16–56.3, 61.23–62.13). Apparently, the Gospel of the Egyptians understands the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo and the three beings thrice-male Child, Youel and Esephech contained in the Doxomedon aeon to constitute a divine pentad, which it identifies with the Five Seals of the Sethian gnostic baptismal rite.

42 These triads are: 1) the Invisible Spirit, the Living Silence and a certain "Father;" 2) the traditional triad of Father, Mother Barbelo, and an unspecified Son; 3) the Thrice-male Child, the virgin Youel and the Child of the Child Esephech; 4) the Self-begotten Word, Mirothoe and Adamas; 5) Adamas, Prophania (the spiritual Eve?) and Seth; finally comes 6) Seth, Plesithea (the same as Norea elsewhere?) and their seed, the incorruptible race. Here the Father, Mother and Son triad, which in most Sethian treatises consists of the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo or First Thought, and the Self-begotten Son or Christ, is no longer located at the summit of divine principles. Instead, while the Invisible Spirit is still ranked as the ultimate principle, he is now given, as the second highest principle of this theogony, a partner called Silence or the Silence of the Silence.

33). The novel feature in the metaphysics of Allogenes is its doctrine of the Triple Powered One. This being is mentioned sometimes separately from[43] and sometimes in conjunction with[44] the Invisible Spirit.

Originating as a purely infinitival Existence (ὕπαρξις) latent within and identical with the supreme One, this power proceeds forth from the One as an indeterminate Vitality (ζωότης) or "primary activity" which—in its final phase as a "secondary activity" or Mentality (νοήτης)—contemplatively reverts upon its prefiguration (Existence) in the One and takes on the character of determinate being (τὸ ὄν) as the intellectual Aeon of Barbelo, the self-knowledge of the Invisible Spirit.[45] Contrast this with the simpler theogony of the Apocryphon of John, where Barbelo emerges directly from the self-reflection of the Invisible Spirit. The portrayal of the emergence of the Triple Powered One in Allogenes clearly anticipates the Neoplatonic doctrine of the three phases of emanation (μονή, πρόοδος and ἐπιστροφή) in which a product proceeds from its source and becomes hypostatized in the act of contemplative reversion upon its source.[46]

This novel introduction of the Triple Powered One as an interhypostatic entity between the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo has an immediate effect. The traditional Sethian Father, Mother, Son triad is split apart, and the ontological

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43 See XI 45.13–30, 52.30–33, 53.30, 55.21, 61.1–22, regularly in Marsanes.

44 See XI 47.8–9, 51.8–9, 58.25, 66.33–34; cf. Zostrianos 20.15–18, 24.12–13, 97.2–3, 128.20–21, usually as "the Triple-powered Invisible Spirit" or "the invisible spiritual Triple Powered One."

45 By a static self-extension in which it comes to know both itself and the Invisible Spirit, the Triple Power of the Invisible Spirit becomes "complete" in the form of the Aeon of Barbelo. XI 45.21–28: "the Triple Powered One who authentically exists, for when it was stilled, it extended itself, and when it extended itself, it became complete and was empowered from them all, knowing itself." Cf. Zostrianos 76.7–19, 78.10–81.20; the Three Steles of Seth 121.20–122.18; Marsanes 8.18–9.28. This notion of an indefinite principle achieving defined existence through the limitation of mere extension (ἔκτασις) also occurs in Iamblichus's summary (*Th. Arith.* 3 and 16) of the early second century arithmology of Nicomachus of Gerasa and in Porphyry's summary (*apud* Simplicius, *In Phys.* 1.1.231) of the late first century metaphysics of Moderatus of Gades. The Allogenes passage also clearly parallels—and perhaps prefigures—the Neoplatonic doctrine of μονή, πρόοδος and ἐπιστροφή in the sequence of stillness, extension and becoming complete, in the notion of being empowered from these stages, and in the notion of a contemplative reversion upon its source through an act of self-knowledge.

46 Compare Allogenes 49.7–18: "when (the Triple Powered One) is intelligized as the traverser of the Unlimitedness which subsists in the Invisible Spirit, (the Unlimitedness) turns (the Triple Powered One) toward (the Invisible Spirit), in order that he know what is within him and how he exists, and that he become a preservation for everyone by being a cause of the authentic existents."

status of Barbelo is lowered by one level. It also creates the occasion for another level of triadic speculation. This new triad, the Triple Powered One, is identified with the triad Existence, Vitality and Mentality.[47] A similar triadic nomenclature is found in the Chaldaean Oracles (father, power, intelligence), the *Parmenides* commentary (existence, life, intellection), and in Plotinus (being, life, intelligence).

Passing on to the Aeon of Barbelo, the First Thought of the Invisible Spirit, one notices also here a predilection for triadic speculation. Just as in the Trimorphic Protennoia, Barbelo is herself tripartitioned, but into three aeonic sublevels rather than into three successive modes of self-manifestation.[48] In the scheme of Allogenes, Barbelo assumes the more traditionally masculine role of a divine Intellect in its contemplating, contemplated and demiurgic modalities (designated by the names Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes respectively), rather as the three gods of Numenius. These names suggest that they originally designated, not just the ontological levels of the Barbelo Aeon, but rather the dynamic stages by which the Barbelo Aeon gradually unfolds from its source in the Invisible Spirit: at first "hidden" (καλυπτός) within the Spirit as its prefigurative intellect, then "first appearing" (πρωτοφανής) as the initial moment of the Spirit's separately-existing thought or intelligence, and finally "self-generated" (αὐτογνής) as a fully-formed demiurgical intellect. Indeed, the Sethian Platonizing treatises tend to blunt the (traditional and still discernible) feminine and maternal character of Barbelo by referring to her frequently under the masculine name "the Aeon (masc. αἰών) of Barbelo," although her feminine designation as the "First Thought" (Coptic ϯⲛ̀ⲟⲩⲟⲩⲉⲓⲛ ⲛⲉⲛⲛⲟⲓⲁ = Greek προτέννοια) continues to appear in these texts.

The interposition of the new triad of the Triple Powered One necessitates that the Aeon of Barbelo has now become only a preliminary contemplative

47 Specifically, Existence (ὕπαρξις) or Being (οὐσία or τὸ ὄν), Life (ζωή) or Vitality (ζωήτης) and Mentality (νοήτης, a neologism). Given the sophistication of speculation on the manner in which Barbelo emerges by self-reflection from the Invisible Spirit in the Apocryphon of John and Barbelo's association there with the triad of attributes Aphtharsia, Aionia Zoe and Prognosis, one has only to proceed a little way to the triad existence (incorruptible, unchanging, stable), vitality or life, and mentality or mind (cf. γνῶσις, or Barbelo's cognomen Ennoia) used in Allogenes.

48 Namely, the Hidden one (Kalyptos), the First-appearing One (Protophanes), and the Self-begotten God (Autogenes). In Trimorphic Protennoia, she appears in three forms or modes, Sound, Speech and Word. Matters are further complicated by the presence of a fourth entity familiar from the Gospel of the Egyptians by the name of the Triple Male, although there is a tendency to identify this figure sometimes with the First-appearing One, and sometimes with the Self-begotten One.

level or stage in the course of a self-performable contemplative ascent whose real target is the ascent to the highest level of the suprajacent Triple Power. In Allogenes, One achieves this by the same technique of cognitively vacant contemplation as is urged by both fragment 1 of the Chaldaean Oracles and fragment 2 of the *Parmenides* commentary.

While Allogenes and Marsanes tend to portray the Triple Powered One as a being distinct from the Invisible Spirit, Zostrianos regularly coalesces the two into a single being called "the Triple-powered Invisible Spirit" or "the invisible spiritual Triple Powered One."[49] The passage describing the emergence of Barbelo in Zostrianos (NHC VIII 66–84) is very fragmentary, but seems to reflect a similar emanative process, conceiving Barbelo as the knowledge emanated from the Invisible Spirit whose further descent and potential dispersion is halted by a contemplative reversion upon her source. She comes to stand outside him, examining him and herself, becoming separate and stable as an all-perfect (παντέλιος, 77.13) being, the unborn Kalyptos. She was an "insubstantial existence" (79.5–8), eternally moving from undividedness into active or actual existence. Seeing the privation of her prior triple-powered principle, she comes forth from her source until, in an act of knowing both herself and her source, she becomes extended and stable, knowing herself and the one who preexists. She then appears as Kalyptos, a "second Mentality," the duplication of the Invisible Spirit's knowledge or as the triple-male, virginal Barbelo, the intellection of the pre-existent one. As such, she serves as an eternal space or receptacle (χώρημα, 82.8) in order that those who indwell her, perhaps the Forms, might have a stable and limited place and that those who come forth from her, perhaps souls, might become purely simple individuals at the level of Autogenes (88.16–22, 127.7–15). Within her, the ideal entities are alive and in agreement, separate and yet "all together" (115.2–13, 117.1–4).[50]

Marsanes seems to top Allogenes, Zostrianos and the Three Steles of Seth by placing yet another being, "the Unknown Silent One," beyond the Invisible Spirit and his Triple Powered One, much the same as Iamblichus posited an ineffable principle beyond even the Plotinian One that heads the noetic triad.[51] Marsanes explains that the highest level or first power of the insubstantial Triple Powered One is the act (ἐνέργεια) or Silence or insubstantial spirit (i.e., the Invisible Spirit) of the preexisting unknown Silent One.[52] Apparently

49 See notes 43 and 44.

50 The similarity to Plotinus's description of the condition of the Ideas as "all together" within the Intellect (e.g., *Enn.* 5.3[49].3.43–46, 15.18–24) is obvious.

51 See NHC X 4.13–23 and compare Iamblichus *apud* Damascius, *De Principiis* 1.86.3.

52 NHC X 7.1–9.29.

in an act of reversion upon its source, the third power (Mentality in Allogenes) of the Triple Powered One moves from a state of "abiding" by itself to one in which it leads itself forth[53] into the Aeon of Barbelo, the male Virgin. This causes the (duality of) the female Virgin to become male (probably a triad), and to stand outside of the Invisible Spirit as his Knowledge (γνῶσις).[54] Although the further deployment of the Barbelo Aeon is not described, it was subdivided into three levels consisting of Kalyptos ("[the head] of the power [that first] appeared"), Protophanes ("the *male Mind that first appeared*, even the incorporeal essence and the noetic cosmos") and Autogenes ("the *self-begotten* power of the third perfect [...] the great [...] fourth concerning salvation [and] Sophia").

Platonism and Sethian Gnosticism

The importance of the doctrine of the Triple Powered One becomes obvious when it is realized that in Allogenes, the Three Steles of Seth, and Zostrianos, the Triple Powered One is the emanative by means of which the Invisible Spirit generates the Aeon of Barbelo in three phases. As Existence it is latent within the Invisible Spirit; as Vitality it proceeds forth from him; and as Mentality (or Blessedness in Zostrianos) it takes on the form of the intellectual Aeon of Barbelo.[55] It will of course be noticed that this is merely a Sethian version of the same doctrine as is found in the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary and in Plotinus's account of the emergence of Intellect as a trace of Life from the One. But it may be pre-Plotinian.

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53 The phrases "abiding by itself" = ⲙⲏⲛ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ [ⲁⲣⲁⲓ] and "leading itself forth" = ϫⲓ ⲙⲁⲉⲓⲧ ⲉⲣⲏⲧ ⲁⲣⲟⲩⲛ ⲁ- in X 8.26–27 seem equivalent to the Neoplatonic technical terms μονήν and πρόοδος respectively.

54 In this act she withdraws (ἀναχωρεῖν) from the "two powers," who are probably the Silent One and the Invisible Spirit, or perhaps the first and second powers of the Triple Powered One (Existence and Vitality in Allogenes, but not named in Marsanes).

55 See NHC VII 125.28–32, VIII 66.11–67.4, 73.6–11 and XI 49.26–38. In its Existence phase, the Triple Powered One is latent within and indistinguishable from the Invisible Spirit. In its Vitality phase, the Triple Powered One is the boundlessness of the Invisible Spirit proceeding forth in an act of emanation, paradoxically both continuous and discontinuous with the Invisible Spirit and its end-product, Barbelo. In its Mentality phase, the Triple Powered One has become bounded as Barbelo, the self-knowledge and First Thought of the Invisible Spirit. It has taken on form and definition as a perceiving subject, whose object of perception is the Invisible Spirit.

Especially in Allogenes and to a lesser extent in Zostrianos, one can also see the rudiments of the Neoplatonic triad of emanative phases undergone by a product emerging from its source, namely, initial permanence in its source, procession away from its source, and an intellective reversion upon its source. Both treatises use the analogous concepts of self-extension, self-stilling, and becoming stable and complete, terms rather closer to those employed in second-century Neopythagorean arithmological treatises than to the rigidified terminology of the later Neoplatonists (μονή, πρόοδος and ἐπιστροφή), although these terms as well are incipiently present. Clearly Neopythagorean concepts of the generation of numbers underlie Marsanes's account of the emergence of Barbelo as the virgin who became male by separating or withdrawing from the male in an act of vision. It thus seems that these Sethian texts are at least in part a product of, and thus an important witness to pre-Plotinian Neopythagorean speculations on the derivation of multiplicity from unity.

The issue of the relationship between Platonism and the Sethian treatises implicit in these parallels is raised acutely by Porphyry's notice in his *Life of Plotinus* 16 that revelations under the name of Allogenes and Zostrianos as well as others were studied and refuted at great length in Plotinus's seminars in mid-third century Rome.[56] The record of Plotinus's own debates with the proponents of these treatises, although visible throughout much of his entire corpus,[57] is concentrated in his so-called antignostic tetralogy (*Enn.* 3.8[30], 5.8[31], 5.5[32], 2.9[33]), whose last section contains Plotinus's extensive antignostic critique, several of whose details are clearly directed at Zostrianos. Indeed, in *Ennead* 2.9.10 Plotinus actually cites about eleven lines from Zostrianos (*Enn.* 2.9.10.19–33 ≈ NHC VIII 9.17–10.20).[58]

I think a case can be made for placing both Zostrianos and Allogenes at a time before both Plotinus and the *Parmenides* commentary, especially if it was the work of Porphyry.[59] With a bit of thought, the doctrine of first

56 Ca. 265–268 CE.

57 As argued *in extenso* by Jean-Marc Narbonne, Narbonne, *Plotinus in Dialogue with the Gnostics*, Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

58 See Michel Tardieu, "Plotin citateur du Zostrien" (paper presented at the colloquium "Thèmes et problèmes du traité 33 de Plotin contre les Gnostiques," Paris, 7–8 June 2005). A similar case of Plotinus's dependence on Allogenes's description of the self-withdrawal of the contemplative intellect into its prefiguration in the supreme One seems to be reflected in the very close parallel between *Enn.* 3.8[30].9.29–39 and Allogenes 60.14–61.22.

59 In her "The Existence-Life-Mind Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," *ClQ* 42 (1992):

principles found in the Sethian Platonizing treatises could be easily derived from a combination of notions from the Apocryphon of John and Plato,[60] as well as other pre-Plotinian second century Platonic sources such as the Chaldaean Oracles.[61]

The interrelation between Sethians and Platonists was by no means a one-way street. Plotinus's circle certainly took Sethian doctrine seriously enough to produce lengthy refutations, in the course of which gnostic doctrine must have made positive contributions to Platonic doctrine. For example, the Existence, Life, Mind triad of the *Parmenides* commentary may have been an original Sethian development which was adopted and modified by professional Platonists, perhaps in the early third century.[62]

475–488, Ruth Majercik, who accepts Pierre Hadot's attribution of the commentary to Porphyry, has argued that these treatises neither predate nor are contemporaneous with Plotinus, on the grounds that the triadic groupings used in them have an explicit and fixed form uncharacteristic of Plotinus; their technical use of the term ὕπαρχις for the first member of the Existence-Vitality-Mentality triad has no specific significance for Plotinus (who employs the nomenclature Being-Life-Mind); and that the nomenclature of these triads on various levels reflects a method of paronymy and of predominance and implication (see note 55) likewise uncharacteristic of Plotinus. Instead, all of these features are found in Plotinus's disciple Porphyry, whose lost commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles (and perhaps the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary attributed to him by Hadot) must have been the Greek source that mediated them not only to the Sethian treatises, but to the Christian Neoplatonists Victorinus and Synesius. The ultimate source of these concepts probably cannot be identified as a particular individual, but is more than likely the philosophical exchange within Plotinus's circle in Rome 265–268 CE, which included not only Plotinus, Porphyry, and Amelius, but also quite likely the authors and users of these Platonizing Sethian treatises. Recently a strong case against Hadot's attribution of the commentary to Porphyry has been made by Tuomas Rasimus, "Porphyry and the Gnostics: Reassessing Pierre Hadot's Thesis in Light of the Second and Third Century Sethian Material," in *Its Reception in Neoplatonic, Jewish, and Christian Texts*, vol. 2 of *Plato's Parmenides and its Heritage*, ed. John D. Turner and Kevin Corrigan, WAWSup 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 81–110. Rasimus also argues for a Sethian gnostic authorship of the commentary.

60 As has been recently argued by Tuomas Rasimus, "Johannine Background of the Being-Life-Mind Triad," in *Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honour of John D. Turner*, ed. Kevin Corrigan and Tuomas Rasimus, NHMS 82 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 369–409.

61 As recently argued by me in "The Chaldaean Oracles: A Pretext for the Sethian Apocalypse Allogenes?" in *Theologische Orakel in der Spätantike*, ed. H. Seng and G. Sfameni Gasparro (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016), 89–111.

62 Ca. 265–268 CE.

Obviously there was influence in the reverse direction, of Platonism upon Sethianism, even at the formative stages of the earliest Sethian treatises. Indeed, I think it likely that the Sethian Father, Mother, Son triad was derived from the Father, Mother, Child triad of Plato's *Timaeus*, either directly or in the form of summaries and references to it in first and early second century Platonic sources. Clear Platonic influence seems to appear first in the Apocryphon of John, datable at least to the middle of the second century by virtue of Irenaeus's "Barbeloite" report.[63]

Within the camp of non-gnostic Platonic authors of the first three centuries, Plato's Father, Mother, Child triad is occasionally mentioned, but not used as a foundational element of their ontologies. The only exception to this seems to be Philo of Alexandria in the early first century, who uses the terms Father, Mother, and Son for his supreme triad of God, Sophia and the Logos, although not in a systematic way.[64] In general, the Father, Mother, Son triadic nomenclature occupies a prominent place in the Apocryphon of John, Trimorphic Protennoia, and the Gospel of the Egyptians, which are also treatises that fea-

63 Its initial apophatic description of the monadic Invisible Spirit (with its word-for-word parallel in Allogenes) is ultimately derived from Plato's *Parmenides*. Irenaeus's Barbeloite report and Trimorphic Protennoia show little interest in the elaborate Sethian anthropogony based on the first six chapters of Genesis, but concentrate on theogonical and soteriological matters. They relate only those events that transpire in the transcendental world, and only as much of cosmogonical matters as was necessary to indicate Sophia's role in the birth of the world-creating demiurge. This component of Sethian doctrine, certainly indebted to Jewish wisdom speculation, was principally concerned with the immediate experience of salvation as mediated by revelatory vision, probably conveyed in the course of a baptismal initiation rite. Only in the fuller versions of the Apocryphon of John does one begin to find concern with the primordial antecedents of this salvation, as detailed in the Sethian sacred history of Adam, Seth and his seed. But the Father, Mother, Son triad is primarily of Platonic inspiration.

64 Although Philo did not produce a systematic Platonic ontology, he did entertain the identification of the biblical Sophia with Plato's Receptacle, and conceived her as the Mother of the Logos, the eldest Son of God. This is about as close as non-gnostic Platonists ever get to the Sethian Father, Mother, Son nomenclature for the primal triad. Other pre-Plotinian Platonists make no use of the Father, Mother and Child nomenclature. The system of Moderatus, for instance, might have easily accommodated such a triad, providing for a maternal figure in the person of primal Matter as the sheer quantity left by the self-contraction of the paternal Monad, in which arise the mathematical Forms as the Monad imposes limit and form upon Matter. The Chaldaean Oracles offer a clear maternal principle in the figure of Hecate, though without explicit use of the Father, Mother, Child terminology. On the other hand, the systems of Numenius and Plutarch feature the doctrine of an evil World Soul that allows only a minimal place for a positive female

ture Sophia as another Mother figure located at the periphery of the divine world. Although they are aware of her connection with the birth of the ignorant demiurge, they still tend to portray Sophia in a rather positive light by stressing either her repentance or her outright blamelessness. The latter two treatises even go to the point of crediting the Fourth Light Eleleth, rather than Sophia, with the appearance of the demiurge.

Barbelo, the Female Becomes Male

The earlier Sethian treatises present the Mother Barbelo as chief actor, the principal initiator and agent of enlightenment and salvation. She is ranked immediately after the supreme deity and is the source of the aeonic world. Most importantly, she is ultimately the Mother of those gnostics to whom she descends, enlightens and receives back into the divine world. In this sense, she is the receptive principle *par excellence*, and no more fitting designation could be given her than to be identified as the Mother member of Plato's supreme triad of first principles. Like Plato's Receptacle, her seed could only hope to live by being reintegrated within her, the Womb of the All.[65]

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principle of any sort. The place of the feminine principle Isis in Plutarch's metaphysics is complicated by his introduction of an evil principle that competes with the feminine principle Isis for her maternal services.

65 The stages by which this identification took place are scarcely recoverable, but if one were to hazard a guess, it might have included the following factors: 1) Barbelo, perhaps a *nomen barbarum* representing the Tetragrammaton or name of Yahweh, is consistently conceived as the first thought (*protennoia*, *pronoia*) of God, which would associate her with the transcendent forms insofar as these were considered to be God's thoughts, a conception typical of Middle Platonism. 2) Barbelo is more than once conceived as the Womb of the All, a notion rather close to Plato's concept of the Receptacle of becoming. 3) Barbelo is frequently called the merciful "Mother" or "Mother-Father." 4) Barbelo is said to have originated from the self-reflection of the father, much as Eugnostos conceives the origin of its second principle, the Autopator. While Plato and Old Academic thought conceived the Mother and Father as two coeval principles, neither derivable from the other, the advent of Neopythagorean schemes of the derivation of the number series in the first century BCE provokes Platonists under its influence to work out schemes in which the dyadic feminine principle is derived from the Monad, using the images of self-replication, self-retraction, self-extension, the sprouting of a seed, and so on. 5) Barbelo (explicitly in Zostrianos) serves as a receptacle or Womb for her spiritual progeny, and gives rise to the Self-begotten Son by conceiving him as a spark of the Father's light, quite as Plato represents the images of the Father's forms taking on substantial

But beginning with the Sethian Platonizing group of treatises, the Father, Mother, Son nomenclature begins to fade, and the ontological position of the Mother begins to decline. I think that this development can be explained by increasing Sethian preoccupation with the metaphysics of contemporary Platonism.

First, the earlier Sethian treatises such as the Apocryphon of John portray the advent of salvation as conveyed by a series of temporally successive descents into this world by the Mother Barbelo in the form of various modalities. On the other hand, the treatises Allogenes, Zostrianos and Three Steles of Seth exhibit a more vertical, non-temporal, supra-historical scheme in which salvation is achieved, not through visitations of the Mother, but through a graded series of visionary ascents initiated by the gnostic himself.[66]

In Zostrianos, the visionary ascends through the celestial realm to the intellectual level of the Barbelo Aeon. In Allogenes and Three Steles of Seth, the ascent does not terminate in the Barbelo Aeon, but continues through the levels of the Triple Power, culminating in a non-knowing, mentally vacant revelatory encounter with the Unknowable One at the summit of all. The Aeon of Barbelo is now only a stage on the path of ascent. This shift may be the product of a deeper degree of involvement with a contemplative Platonism that takes its start in Plato's *Symposium* and leads directly to Plotinus. The inevitable

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reality within the Receptacle; indeed, this son, identified with Christ and perhaps with Seth, is certainly an image of the Father. 6) In the Sethian Neoplatonizing group of treatises, Barbelo begins to be conceived hypostatically as the divine Intellect, and is accordingly tripartitioned into a contemplated, contemplating and demiurgic mind, the lowest of which is identified with the self-begotten Son, a scheme rather close to that of Numenius. A corollary of this development is the introduction of a new triad, the Triple-Powered One, as the liaison between Barbelo and the Father. The result is her relative demotion in the scale of being, which seems to result from an increasing tendency towards a philosophical monism involving the elevation of the Father as far as possible from subordinate beings, but still leaving him contemplatively accessible. Such a tendency is typical of the Neopythagoreanizing Platonists from Plutarch and Numenius onwards, and it should not be surprising that it have its gnostic equivalent.

66 Here an exemplary visionary employs a self-performable technique of successive stages of mental detachment from the world of multiplicity, and a corresponding assimilation of the self to the ever more-refined levels of being to which one contemplatively ascends. Ultimately, the visionary achieves a state of mental abstraction evacuated of all cognitive content. All sense of contrast now gone, one has achieved an absolute self-unification and utter solitariness characteristic of deification; only at this point can one receive the "primary revelation" of the Unknowable One.

result is increased reliance upon self-performable techniques of enlightenment and decreased reliance upon the salvific initiatives of the Mother Barbelo.

Second, after the time of Philo, contemporary Platonism had a strong tendency, especially in the cases of the second-century Platonists Plutarch and Moderatus, to demote the feminine principle to lower ontological levels: in positive form, to that of the rational aspect of the World Soul, and in negative form, to its irrational aspect which is regarded as the source of cosmic evil. This trend towards demotion has worked its influence upon the Sethian Neoplatonizing group, whose authors seem to have been closely allied with such Platonists, but not to the point of making the maternal principle the source of evil.

Both Philo and the Chaldaean Oracles, like the early Sethians, locate a positive maternal principle at the second highest level of reality. Philo even employs the terms Father, Mother and Son, but not in a systematic way. Neither author explicitly invokes any family triad or group of first principles by this name, despite its implicit presence in their systems. But shortly after the time of Philo, in the cases of the second century Platonists Plutarch and Numenius, one begins to see metaphysical systems in which the feminine principle is regarded as the source of evil and irrationality in the universe, not only in the sublunar realm, but in the celestial realm as well.[67] The nearly sole exceptions to this negative valorization of the feminine principle are the Chaldaean portrayal of Hecate and the early Sethian portrayal of Barbelo.[68]

Conclusion

To conclude, it seems that those behind the first traces of the so-called Barbeloite speculation display the highest estimation of the feminine principle.

67 Plotinus's treatment of the feminine principle is even more complicated: as Life, a vital trace of the One, she is the source of Intellect. Yet as intelligible Matter and true unlimitedness, she is dangerous: had that aspect of her which has escaped the persuasion of being and truth not sunk down into the realm of images, her continued presence above would have threatened the destruction of the limiting principle itself.

68 The Sethians continue to present Barbelo as unequivocally good, and her lower double Sophia as tainted yet basically innocent; even though she mistakenly bore the ignorant demiurge, she continues to be "our sister Sophia." But despite this positive estimation of the Mother Barbelo, the Sethians also tend to demote her from her early status as the next highest principle after the Invisible Spirit, to a level subordinate to that of the interposed masculine triad of the Triple Powered One. The family triad has been split apart.

They appropriated Platonic metaphysics in the form of Plato's Father, Mother, Child triad with its positive estimation of the feminine principle, much as Philo seems to have done on at least one occasion. Then, as they became more heavily involved with the Platonic metaphysics of the second century, where the feminine principle becomes increasingly associated with irrationality and evil, that positive estimation wanes. Indeed, in the Sethian Platonizing treatises, the Father, Mother, Son nomenclature becomes obsolete. It is not Barbelo's maternal characteristics that are stressed; it is rather her status as the Knowledge or Intellect of the Invisible Spirit that is emphasized, an entity which Platonists traditionally treated in masculine terms as Intellect (νοῦς). She is no longer so much Mother Barbelo as she is the masculine Aeon of Barbelo.[69] The erstwhile Virgin has become male.

Thus one must end this survey with an irony: It was the early Sethians that seemed to have the greatest share in the first and second century rehabilitation of Plato's Father, Mother and Child triad. But their increasing alliance with the very philosophers who likewise traced their doctrine back to Plato resulted in the demotion of that triad to the status of a mere preparatory level of visionary ascent on their way to a revelatory encounter with the Father on high.

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69 Another possible Platonic influence on the gnostic systems is the multiplication of feminine beings located at various levels of reality, noticeable from Speusippus onward. The case of Eugnostos, which displays no interest in family triads, preferring instead the masculine triad of Man, Son of Man and Son of the Son of Man, is most instructive here. All the female principles bear the name Sophia, but what distinguishes each of these figures is for the most part the epithet of the male consort with whom they are paired. That is, it is the number of male principles needing a consort that determines the number of female principles. However, Speusippus, the first Platonist to introduce multiple feminine principles, justified it on the grounds that, if there were only one Receptacle, only one kind of product would result, which is impossible, since the world contains many different kinds of things. That is, it is the number of different offspring that determines the number of female principles. In certain of the Sethian treatises, especially the Gospel of the Egyptians, the feminine beings frequently seem to have been invented out of thin air, not established Sethian tradition, in order to explain the origin of important male figures, such as the Child of the Child, Adam, Seth and Seth's seed. The same may be true for Christianized Sethian treatises in general, where the center of interest is in the origin and work of the Self-begotten Son Christ, or of the divine Logos. Even though his mother Barbelo arranges his conception and sends him on his saving mission, or is herself conceived to be the actual savior appearing in the masculine guise of her son, it is still the son who is perceived to have the decisive soteriological contact with the gnostic devotee. And in the cases where Barbelo's soteriological efforts are presented as a threefold descent, it is only her third appearance in masculine form that is finally effective.

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