

The Secret Book according to John

(Apocryphon of John)

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Classic gnostic scripture

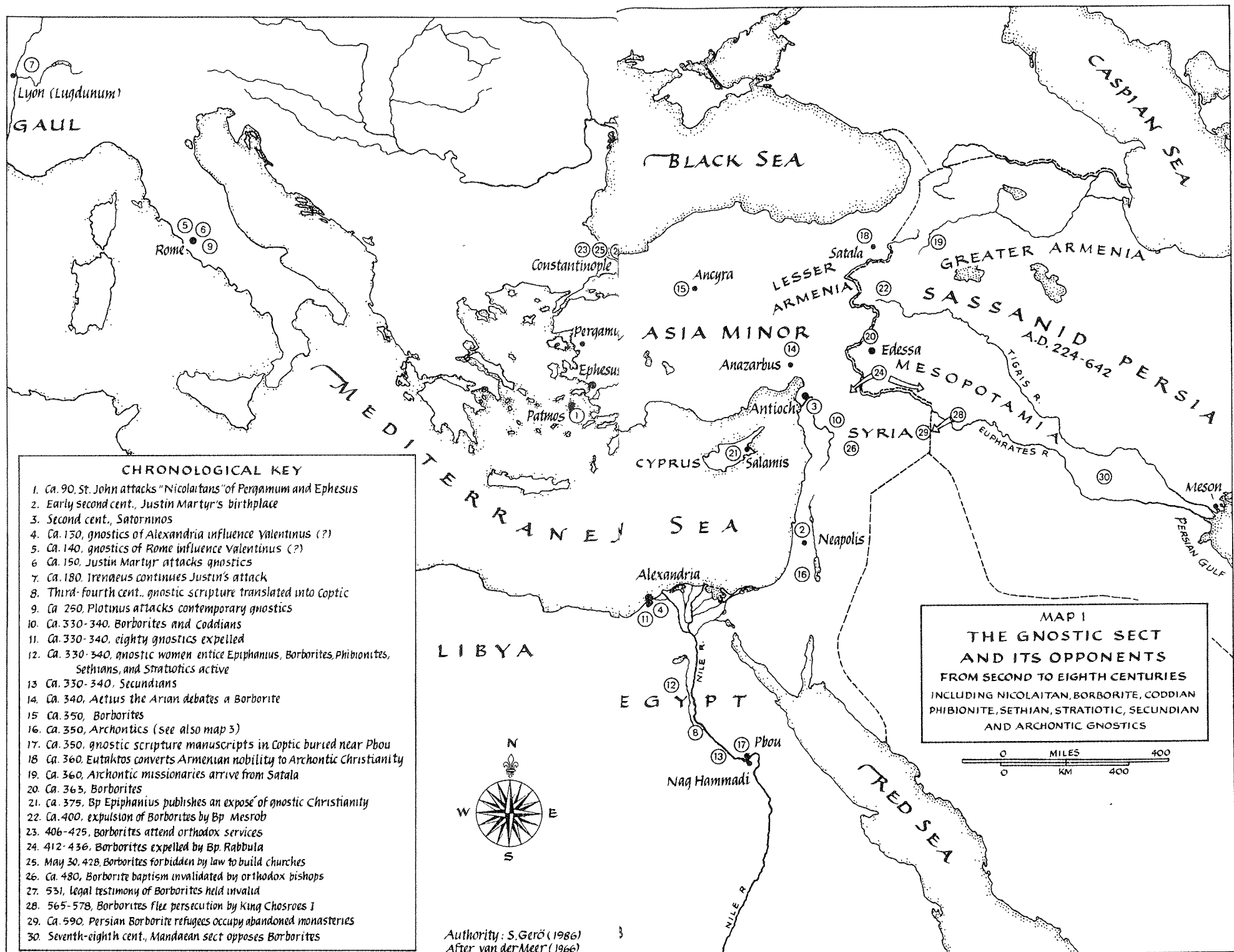
The word “gnostic” has two meanings. One is a broad meaning, denoting all the religious movements represented in this book, and many more besides. The elusive category (“*gnosticism*”) that corresponds to this broad meaning has always been hard to define.

The other meaning of “gnostic” is narrow and more strictly historical: it is the self-given name of an ancient Christian sect, the *gnōstikoi*, or “gnostics.” Because the ancient sect of the gnostics is relatively early, indisputably gnostic—even lending its name to the broader category—and a historical source of other important movements, it deserves a primary place in any general study of gnostic religion. In this book the word “gnostic” is mainly restricted to the narrow, historical meaning, and Part One is devoted to gnostic works in this classic sense of the word.

The date of the gnostic sect

The gnostics were active in the mid-second century A.D. (see Map 1) and beyond. Greek was the basic language of the sect, as it was of non-gnostic Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism of that period. The earliest surviving reference to the sect is by St. Irenaeus, writing in Lugdunum (modern Lyon, France) about A.D. 180; cf. IrG 1.29.1. According to Irenaeus the gnostics were a major influence on the Christian theologian Valentinus. This may have been before Valentinus arrived in Rome to begin his career of teaching, between A.D. 136 and 140 (cf. “Historical Introduction” to Part Two), or not long thereafter.

How much older might the sect actually be? There seems to be no direct answer to this question. However, an indirect answer might be obtained by considering the philosophical character of classic gnostic scripture within the context of Greek philosophy. In such a context, the characteristic gnostic myth of creation turns out to resemble philosophical mythic speculation already current in the time of Jesus. The formulation of the gnostic myth ultimately drew on Platonist interpretations of the myth of creation in



Plato's *Timaeus*, as combined with the book of Genesis. Speculation of this kind—from the period of “Middle Platonism”—was popular with learned Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria at the time of Philo Judaeus (ca. 30 B.C.—ca. A.D. 45). Such speculation was also fashionable in pagan philosophical circles of the first and second centuries A.D., and beyond. Since the gnostic myth seems to presuppose this speculative tradition, it *might* be as old as Philo Judaeus. Yet nothing proves that it *must* be so old. Scholars are therefore unable to say exactly how much older than Irenaeus (A.D. ca. 180) the gnostic sect actually must be.

Gnostics continued to flourish in the third and fourth centuries A.D. (cf. Porph., EpS, EpA, EpG). But in A.D. 381, legislation of the emperor Theodosius I officially recognized a single branch of Christianity as catholic orthodoxy in the Roman empire and opened the way for sanctions and violence against the “heretics,” who then included gnostics. Thereafter, gnostics are mainly heard of in Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Persia, with references to them continuing to crop up in medieval sources (see Map 2). Whether all such medieval sources are based on actual encounters with living members of the sect is not entirely clear. To a great extent, gnostic Christianity may have already been absorbed by the Valentinian church (see Parts Two and Three), and after A.D. 250 by the Manichaean world religion, which showed certain resemblances to the Gnostics (cf. EpG).

By the middle of the fourth century, gnostic Christianity (apart from its Valentinian branch) was known by several different names, perhaps indicating that it had split into denominations: “Archontics” (from *arkhōn*, “heavenly ruler”), “Sethians,” “Barbēlites,” etc.; see EpG 25.2.1, 26.3.7. In recent scholarship gnostic Christianity is often called “Sethian Gnosticism” because of its particular interest in Seth, son of Adam, as ancestor and prototype of the individual gnostic. Indeed, there is no point in arguing too much over which name should be used today.

The name “gnostic”

The original self-designation of the sect—*gnōstikos*, “gnostic”—was a very striking name; it must have sounded new and slightly odd to Greek speakers of the second century A.D. As a mere word, the Greek term *gnōstikos* goes back as far as the time of Plato. It was a rare technical word with philosophical overtones; it meant something like “leading to knowledge” or “capable of attaining knowledge.” In normal usage the term was never applied to human beings; that is to say, normally a *person* would not be called “gnostic.” Rather, the word “gnostic” regularly referred to disciplines of study, human faculties, capacities, and the like. Thus, for example, the Platonist philosopher Plutarch could write, “Human souls have a faculty that is *gnōstikos* (leads to knowledge) of visible things.”

So when a social group in the early second century A.D. began to call itself *gnōstikoi*, or “gnostics,” this usage would have sounded like odd sectarian jargon—as though a modern club began to call itself the Perceptives or the Epistemologicals.

The meaning of “gnōsis”

Gnostic scripture describes the salvation of the individual by the Greek word *gnōsis*, and the self-given name of the “gnostic” sect refers to their ability to attain *gnōsis*. The meaning of *gnōsis* is easy to grasp. Unlike its odd derivative *gnōstikos*, the word *gnōsis* was an ordinary part of Greek, both in daily life and in religion (including Judaism and Christianity). The basic translation of *gnōsis* is “knowledge” or “(act of) knowing.” But the ancient Greek language could easily differentiate between two kinds of knowledge (a distinction that French, for example, also makes with ease).

One kind is propositional knowing—the knowledge *that* something is the case (“I know that Athens is in Greece”). Greek has several words for this kind of knowing—for example, *eidenai* (French *savoir*).

The other kind of knowing is personal acquaintance with an object, often a person (“I know Athens well”; “I have known Susan for many years”). In Greek the word for this is *gignōskein* (French *connaître*),¹ and in English one can call this kind of knowledge “acquaintance.” The corresponding Greek noun is *gnōsis*. If, for example, two people have been introduced to one another, each one can claim to have *gnōsis* or acquaintance of the other. If one is introduced to god, one has *gnōsis* of god. The ancient gnostics described salvation as a kind of *gnōsis* or acquaintance, and the ultimate object of that acquaintance was nothing less than god.

Readers should note that in this book the English word “acquaintance” always translates *gnōsis* or its equivalent in Coptic or Latin.

Sectarian features in gnostic literature

Social information about the gnostics is very hard to come by. Most of the ancient gnostic literature consists of “pseudepigrapha”—that is, works attributed to the authority of a respected figure of the past such as Adam, Seth, or John the apostle; this literary convention does not leave much room for direct description of sectarian activities. The other records are brief and biased descriptions of gnostic teaching and practice left by Christian opponents; these give much less data than a historian and sociologist needs.

Nevertheless, an observer can find in gnostic scripture certain features that are typically sectarian, thus helping to confirm the cohesiveness of the gnostics as a group. First, a *complex and distinctive myth of origins* runs throughout the surviving records. It is the distinguishing mark of gnostic literature; without it, classic gnostic scripture could not be recognized. Second, this myth expresses a *strong sense of group identity*, which is backed up both by genealogies and by psychological analysis of humanity, with the conclusion that there are two essential types of human being, gnostic and non-gnostic. Along with this goes overt hostility to the non-gnostic population, and the prediction of their ultimate damnation and destruction. Third, the records often use a *special jargon or in-group*

¹ Ordinary language is not a rigid system, of course, and thus in natural usage the distinction between the two kinds of knowledge is sometimes blurred.



THE REALM OF LIGHT

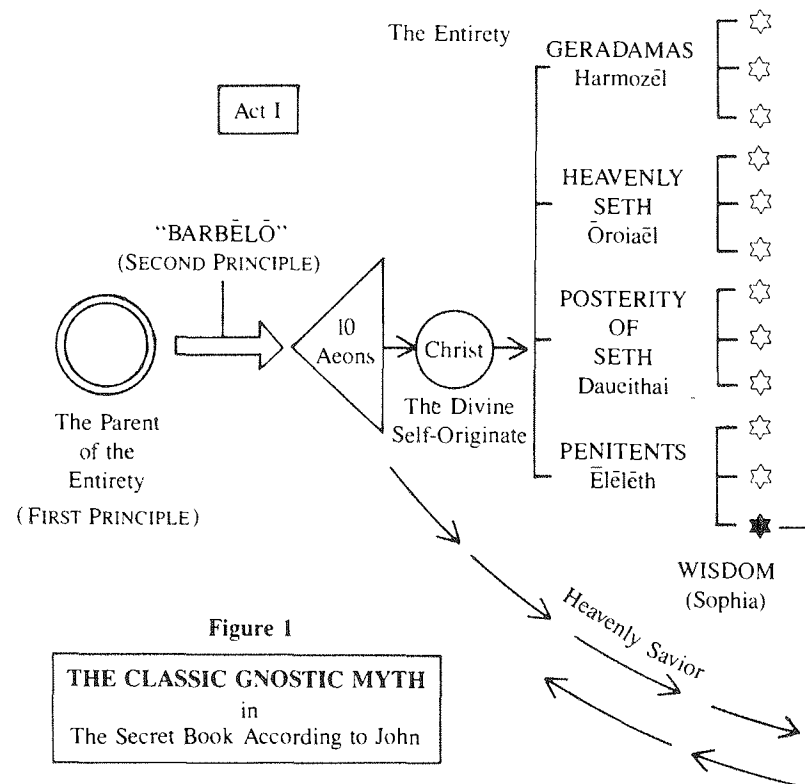
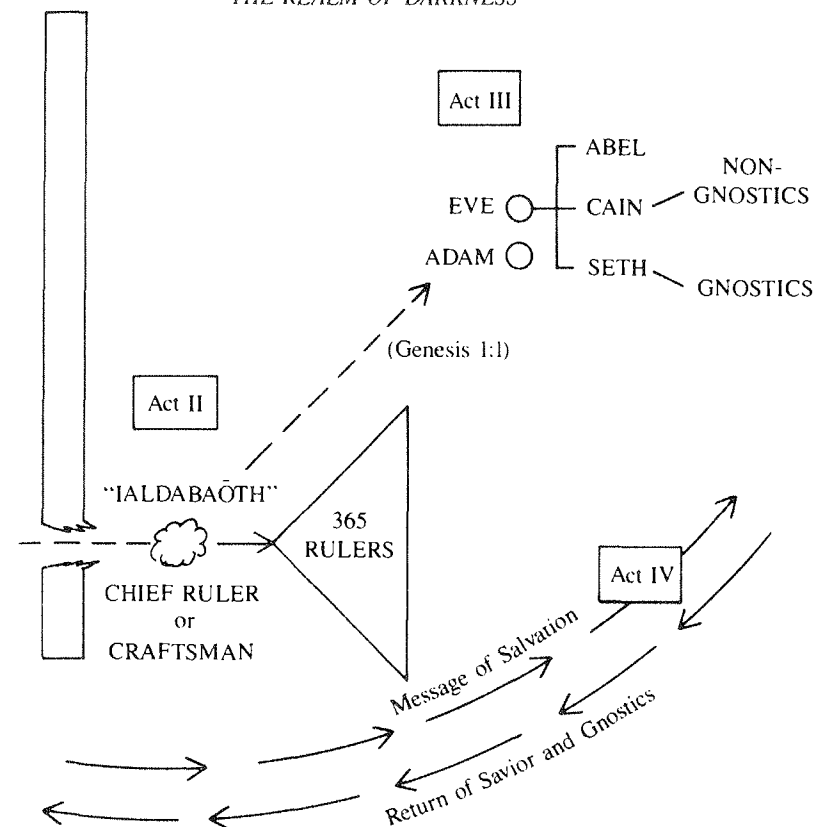


Figure 1

THE CLASSIC Gnostic MYTH
in
The Secret Book According to John

THE REALM OF DARKNESS



The mythic drama unfolds in four acts (see Fig. 1):

- Act I. The expansion of a solitary first principle (god) into a full nonphysical (spiritual) universe
- Act II. Creation of the material universe, including stars, planets, earth, and hell
- Act III. Creation of Adam, Eve, and their children
- Act IV. Subsequent history of the human race

Running throughout this drama (sometimes just below the surface) is a subplot of theft, loss, and ultimate recovery of a part of the divine. The subplot also expresses itself in the four acts, as follows:

- Act I. Expansion of divine power ("the parent of the entirety") to fill the spiritual universe
- Act II. Theft and loss of some of that power into the hands of a nonspiritual being ("Ialdabaōth")
- Act III. Deception of the thief, leading to transfer of the power to a part of humanity (the "gnostics")
- Act IV. Gradual recovery by the divine of the missing power as gnostic souls are summoned by a savior and return to god

From the divine perspective, therefore, the evolution of this subplot entails

language, much of it not found in other branches of ancient Christianity. Fourth, there are references to a *ritual* of baptism. For non-gnostic Christians, baptism marked induction into the religion; the gnostic meaning of baptism may have been the same. Somehow associated are the sacramental "five seals" and their heavenly prototype (EgG); their use is never described.

What is normally excluded by the pseudepigraphic convention of gnostic scripture is information about the organization or daily life of the sect.

It must also be stressed that, despite the distinctive sectarian features mentioned above, gnostics had a great deal in common with non-gnostic Christians, including some of the same scripture, use of broadly Christian in-group language, certain shared theological traditions, and an ascetic life style (though here EpG presents evidence to the contrary). Both the gnostic sect and other branches of early Christianity created new scriptures and attributed them to respected religious figures of the past.

The gnostic myth

Gnostic myth is the literary creation of theological poets—an elaborate theological symbolic poem, and not the spontaneous product of a tribe or culture. "Philosophical myth" of this kind was generally fashionable in the second century A.D., following a revival of interest in Plato's mythic tale of creation, the *Timaeus*, in the previous two centuries.

(i) fullness or “entirety,” (ii) lack (of the stolen power), and (iii) eventual fulfillment of the lack.

No single complete telling of the gnostic myth seems to have survived, though one may be reflected in *The Secret Book According to John* (BJn) and *The Egyptian Gospel*, and by St. Irenaeus’s account of Saturninos (IrSat). But the surviving forms of the myth all show great variation in detail and structure.

Act I: The emanation of the spiritual universe

At the beginning of the myth is the perfect, ultimate, and omnipotent divine source, or “first principle,” of all further existence; it is ineffable and beyond description. The characterization of this divine source in gnostic myth corresponds to philosophical talk about god found in Platonism of the second century A.D. (and before).²

For unfathomable reasons, according to the myth, this perfect omnipotent divine source emits a hypostasis, or second being, and through successive phases of emission produces a carefully structured series of other beings. These emanations are called in Greek *aiones* (“aeons”), meaning “realms,” “eternities,” “ages,” or “eternal realms”; the aeons are at once places, extents of time, and abstractions (with names such as “forethought,” “incorruptibility,” “eternal life,” etc.). The last of the aeons is “wisdom” (Sophia).

In such a story of creation the classic problem is why, from a perfect original source (a “first principle”), there should ever need to emanate a second, less perfect being (a “second principle”) and thence a plenitude of forms. No gnostic text attempts a solution of this problem, although *The Secret Book According to John* provides three symbolic models showing how (though not why) such an evolution came about; these, too, are typical of second-century Platonism.

First, it is claimed, the first principle is a solitary *intellect*, whose only

² One need only compare the discourse about the “parent of the entirety” in BJn 2:26–4:24f with an excerpt from a second-century textbook of Platonist philosophy by a certain Albinus, also known as Alcinous:

“Since the ultimate intellect [that is, the divine source] is supremely beautiful, it must necessarily have a supremely beautiful object of intellection. But there is nothing more beautiful than the ultimate intellect itself. Therefore it will eternally think about itself and its own thoughts, and this activity constitutes its ideal form.

“Now, the first god is everlasting, ineffable, self-perfect, i.e. without need, eterno-perfect, i.e. ever perfect, complete, i.e. in every way perfect; deity, essentiality, truth, proportion, goodness. I do not speak as though distinguishing these things (as aspects of it), but rather as of one being conceived of in all kinds of ways. And it is “good,” because it acts beneficently toward all things to the full extent, acting as cause of all goodness; “beautiful,” because by its very nature it is perfect and proportional; “truth,” because it is the source of all truth, just as the sun is the source of all light; “parent,” in being the cause of all things and because it orients the celestial intellect and the soul of the universe in an orderly relationship to itself and to its own intellections. . . .

“It is ineffable and comprehensible by intellect alone, as stated, since it is neither a genus nor a species nor a variety. Indeed, it does not have any attributes: it is neither evil (it is impious to say so), nor good (for this would be by participation in something, namely, goodness), nor indifferent (for this does not accord with our thought of it); neither something with a quality . . . nor something without any quality . . . ; neither a part of something, nor a whole having various parts . . . ; it neither moves nor is moved. . . . Just as the sun stands in relation to seeing and to the things seen—not itself being vision, but rather providing the seeing for the former and the being-seen for the latter—just so, the ultimate intellect stands in relation to intellection within the soul and to the things thought about. . . .”

function is to think and whose only possible object of thought is itself, since it alone exists. But its act of thinking is objectified, and this thinking is the second principle.

Again, the first principle is a solitary *eye*, floating in a luminous reflective medium. Its only function is to look, and all it has to see is itself. The reflection that it sees, however, is the second principle.

Finally, the first principle is a *spring of water* that flows perpetually. Its only function is to overflow, and that overflow is the second principle.

The second principle is called by the non-Greek name Barbēlō or occasionally (EpG 26.10.10) Barbērō. In antiquity, obscure mythic names like Barbēlō were sometimes invented ad hoc by theological writers rather than being produced by natural language; in some cases, therefore, ancient theological readers were expected to guess their meaning. Such a process is of course difficult to trace without precise identification of the linguistic milieu in which the text was first published. But if that milieu was Egyptian, the name “Barbērō” or “Barbēlō” might have called to mind the native words for “emission, projectile” and “great,”³ yielding a pseudo-word meaning “the great emission”—an apt description of the Barbēlō’s relation to the first principle.

Barbēlō is a stock character who occurs in various versions of the gnostic myth. There are other stock characters as well: especially important among these are *the anointed* (“Christ”), a metaphysical being that in some versions descends to unite with Jesus of Nazareth; and *the four luminaries* Harmozēl, Ōroiaēl, Daueithai, and Ēlēlēth. Since they are aeons, the luminaries are both eternal realms and actors. As realms, they are the dwelling places of four archetypes: *Geradamas* (or *Adamas*), the heavenly Adam; *Seth*, heavenly prototype of Adam’s son; the heavenly *posterity of Seth*, prototypes of the gnostic church on earth; and a *fourth group*, whose identity varies from tale to tale. Some scholars also hold that the gnostic myth divides human history into four great epochs, corresponding to the four luminaries and their resident archetypes. According to one formulation of this theory, the first three epochs are antediluvian (the first, the second, and the third to ninth generations of humankind), while the fourth (the epoch of Ēlēlēth) begins with the time of Noah (cf. RR 92:3f) and extends to the end of the material universe. A parallel conception of history has been proposed in the Zoroastrian religion of Persia.

Act II: The creation of the material universe

After the emission of the spiritual universe has been completed, in order for creation to continue beyond the limit of spiritual existence the activity of a “craftsman”⁴ or “maker” of the world is introduced; his name is

³ Cf. Coptic *berbir*, “projectile, lance” (a grammatically feminine noun, surviving only in the northern, or Bohairic, dialect), presumably from Egyptian *brbr* or *b3b3*; and -ō, “great.” The name might also have recalled Coptic *berber*, “boiling over, overflow” (a masculine noun).

⁴ “Craftsman,” “demiurge” (Greek *dēmiourgos*), is Plato’s metaphorical term for the maker of the universe in his mythic account of the world’s creation entitled *Timaeus*. Educated readers of gnostic scripture in the second and third centuries A.D. would surely have compared Ialdabaoth with the craftsman of the *Timaeus*.

Ialdabaoth. This part of the myth is clearly modeled on Plato's myth of creation, found in the *Timaeus*. Ialdabaoth the craftsman makes a universe out of matter, copying patterns provided by the spiritual universe. It is an elaborate structure of material aeons (realms), i.e. planets, stars, and heavenly spheres, populated by the craftsman's offspring, which are called "rulers," "authorities," "powers," "demons," "angels," etc.

Plato's *Timaeus* had already exerted an influence on Hellenistic Jewish philosophy when Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (ca. 30 B.C.–ca. A.D. 45) and his colleagues tried to show that the *Timaeus* said substantially the same thing as the opening chapters of Genesis; this can be seen in Philo's treatise *On the Creation of the World*. Such accomplishments may have paved the way for gnostic Christian theologians, since early Christianity took many of its cues from Hellenistic Judaism. The concept of an intermediate "craftsman" can also be seen, at some remove from Plato, in the Christian theology of the Logos, or Word: "The Word . . . was in the beginning with god; all things were made through it" (Jn 1:1–3).

In Plato's *Timaeus*, each of the cosmic craftsman's creations is a copy of some perfect pattern that exists in the spiritual realm. All the copies are as good as they possibly can be, given the resistance of the working material, for the craftsman works to the very best of his ability. But in contrast, Ialdabaoth, the gnostic craftsman of the world—though not exactly a principle of pure evil—is morally ambivalent, for though he loves the good he is fatally flawed by ignorance and self-centeredness. Thus, for example, he recognizes the goodness of the patterns in the spiritual realm and feels a natural attraction toward them; but this attraction is also experienced as an ignorant, selfish, erotic lust to possess the divine, even to rape it (cf. RR 89:18f). Ialdabaoth and his fellow heavenly "rulers" are possessive and arrogant and try to dominate all human affairs; their desire for domination leads them to create human sexual lust and the bond of destiny (control by the stars), by which they intend to enslave humanity.

Why should Ialdabaoth, the creator of our world, be so fatally imperfect? The cause of his imperfection in the myth was a point of continuing speculation and difficulty, and the gnostics explained it in various ways. In most accounts this imperfection is paralleled by a previous lustful act or emotion on the part of the creator's mother, wisdom, the lowest aeon in the spiritual universe. At the very least, then, Ialdabaoth's lustful selfishness is a family trait, inherited from his mother.

The gnostics' craftsman or cosmic creator is thus distinct from god the ultimate first principle, just as Plato's craftsman is an intermediate being between the highest principle and our world. Such a distinction had already been made both by Philo Judaeus and in the Gospel of John, where "god the father" (the first principle), the god of Israel, is distinguished from his offspring the "only begotten son," or Logos, or Word, on the one hand, and from ourselves on the other. But, unlike the author of the Gospel of John, the gnostics did not identify the god of Israel with the first principle. Rather, the god of Israel was equated either with Ialdabaoth the imperfect craftsman, or with Ialdabaoth's first-born offspring Sabaöth.

Act III: The creation of Adam, Eve, and their children

The rest of the myth concerns the efforts of wisdom, aided by higher aeons of the spiritual universe, to regain the stolen power. Although Ialdabaoth is lured into surrendering it, in the process Adam and then a human race are created; and the stolen power becomes dispersed in successive generations, whom Ialdabaoth's offspring enslave by creating destiny and a malevolent spirit of deception. The plot of this act of the drama closely follows Genesis 1–4, but with the extensive reinterpretations necessary to make the acts of the creator into actions of an imperfect craftsman. From Seth springs a race of people in whom the dispersed power resides to this day: these are the gnostics, and to the extent that the myth concerns these people it is a myth of their origins.

Act IV: The subsequent history of the human race

In gnostic eyes the final act of the drama is still in progress. A heavenly savior has been sent to "awaken" gnostic humanity, to give them acquaintance (*gnōsis*) with themselves and god, to free their souls from destiny and from bondage to the material body, and to teach them how to escape the influence of the malevolent rulers. To counteract the evil spirit of these rulers, a good spirit has been bestowed upon the gnostics. According as each soul responds and gains acquaintance, it either escapes and returns to god or becomes reincarnate in another body; a special "eternal punishment" is reserved for apostates from the sect.

Some versions of this final act of the myth are restricted to general theological issues and speak of the final advent of a savior without historical details. Others dwell on a futuristic description of the final destruction of the evil rulers and of death, thus emphasizing the result of the savior's advent. Still other versions refer to events in biblical history that non-gnostic Christianity saw as parts of the background of the incarnation (Noah and the flood, genealogies of humankind, the prophets of Israel, John the Baptist) and go on to speak of Jesus of Nazareth, his crucifixion, his resurrection, and his post-resurrection teachings, or his ascension. Jesus' special role in these versions results from his being the incarnation of a preexistent Christ, a preexistent Word, a preexistent Seth, or Barbēlō.

Gnostic in-group language (religious jargon)

Any modern reader, no matter how well informed, will be struck by the obscurity of many names and phrases that occur in the gnostic myth. For the most part, this obscurity is not a mark of our distance from classical antiquity but rather a function of the esoteric character of gnostic life in a closed, and sometimes persecuted, religious sect that was defiantly sure of its superiority to the rest of humanity.

In their mythic tales the gnostics do not refer to themselves, their ancestors, or their spiritual prototypes as "gnostics." Instead they are "the offspring (seed, posterity, race) of Seth" or "the offspring of the light";

“the perfect race,” “the undominated race,” or “the immovable race”; or, even more obscurely, “Those People.”

Their true home, *the spiritual universe*, is “the light,” “the fullness,” their “root.” It is populated by “aeons,” also known as “eternals,” “great eternals,” “great eternal aeons,” “incorruptible beings,” or “immortals” (all of which are equivalent terms). The entire system of the aeons that are lower than the second principle is “the entirety,” or, more obscurely, “all these,” i.e. “all these spiritual beings.” This system is a graded hierarchy of beings, each step of which is a “shadow” or image of the one above it.

Entities in the spiritual universe are identified by the epithets “eternal,” “great,” “living,” “luminous,” “male,” “masculine,” or, more obscurely, by the words “That” (plural “Those”) and “other.” The epithet “other” (“foreign,” “alien”) is based on Gn 4:25 (in Greek) describing the birth of Seth, “God has raised up to me some *other* seed,” while the mystifying “That” had already been used by esoteric circles (Pythagoreans) in Greek philosophy.

There is no fixed terminology for describing *non-gnostic humanity*, but the *demonic heavenly enemies* of the gnostics are called by traditional names—“rulers,” “powers,” “authorities,” “brigands”—most of which, incidentally, are also known from the letters in the New Testament written by Paul or attributed to Paul. The *material universe* is “the darkness,” just as the spiritual universe is “the light.” In the language of one gnostic text (RR 94:8), the two domains are divided from one another by a “veil.”

Gnostic description of the components of the human being is simple and depends on common Platonizing clichés. The body is a “bond,” “bondage,” “fetter,” or “prison” of the soul. The true person is the soul, and the body is merely a “garment” that we must “put on” and “wear”; compared to the vitality of the soul, the body is a “corpse.” The realm of matter, to which the body belongs and to which it will return, is “shadow,” a “cave,” a realm of “sleep.” It is “female” and “femininity”—for, according to a philosophical cliché, shape-giving form is called in Greek “male,” while passive constituent matter is “female.” What distinguishes the saved human being from the non-saved is the presence and activity of the good spirit (“holy spirit,” “spirit of life”) and the saved person’s renunciation of deceptions held out by the rulers’ “counterfeit spirit.” The mark of this renunciation is a life of asceticism and contemplation. The capacity for *gnōsis* and salvation within a gnostic is a function of the inherited “power” or “glory” transmitted by the gnostic “race”—nothing less than a fragment of the “power” that the craftsman Ialdabaōth stole from his mother, wisdom, at the moment of his birth. It is not by accident that “power” and “glory” are also descriptions of Barbēlō, the second principle, for they are epithets that characterize the entire spiritual universe so far as it can be known or described.

Names of characters in the gnostic myth

Apart from this web of sectarian language, gnostic scripture is shot through with the obscure names of stock mythic characters—Barbēlō, Geradamas

or Adamas, “luminaries,” Ialdabaōth, etc. In the introduction to each individual work, such of these names as occur are catalogued; they are also commented on in the annotations.

The spelling of these mythic names in ancient manuscripts shows considerable variation—not only from work to work, but even from place to place within one work. This variation has been retained in the English translation. However, it has no obvious significance.

Thus: “Adamas,” “Adama,” “Geradamas”; “Daueithai,” “Daueithe”; “Elōaios,” “Elōaiō”; “Ialdabaōth,” “Ialtabaōth,” “Aldabaōth”; “Iōēl,” “Iouēl”; “Norea,” “Noria”; “Oroiaēl,” “Ōroiaēl”; etc. Instances of such variation will be obvious to the reader who knows to expect them.

Gnostic baptism

Like other Christians, the gnostics laid great stress on the importance of baptism and made strong use of baptismal rhetoric when speaking of salvation. To judge from the texts, gnostic baptism marked a decisive step in the spiritual life of the gnostic, involving renunciation, instruction, learning, and initiation into a new “kinship” and a new state of life. Reception of gnostic baptism was closely associated with reception of *gnōsis* and was believed to enable the gnostic to overcome death.

Various stages of a gnostic baptismal ceremony are enumerated in FTh: the candidate strips off “darkness,” puts on a robe of light, is washed in the waters of life, receives a throne of glory and is glorified with glory of “the kinship,” and finally is raised to “the luminous place of . . . kinship.” The baptized is also said in EgG to put on the name of Jesus, and according to BJn *gnōsis* is received when the savior seals the candidate with “the light of the water of the five seals.” These five seals are mentioned in many passages of gnostic scripture as having a very intimate connection with *gnōsis*, but what they consist of is never clearly explained. EgG concludes with a lengthy, ecstatic baptismal invocation presumably spoken by a recipient of gnostic baptism.

Yet despite the insistence on baptism in gnostic scripture, the references to it are phrased in exaggerated poetic language, always giving the impression that the ceremony takes place not on earth, but only in the spiritual realm. For example, various aeons known from gnostic myth take a leading role in the ceremony; the spiritual baptismal water is even mythically personified, as are “the five seals.” It may seriously be asked, then, whether such references to baptism are not mere metaphor, a mystical description of salvation by acquaintance (such an equation is explicitly made at the end of RAd). Was there also a physical gnostic rite of baptism, and if so was it a once-for-all initiation into the new kinship of the gnostic church or a repeatable act of mystical enlightenment? What was its relation, if any, to that baptism already received by members of the non-gnostic church who then converted to gnostic Christianity? No answer to these questions is given by the scriptures themselves, apart from silence. But St. Epiphanius, a hostile—and not fully reliable—fourth-century observer (EpA), reports that the Archontics, a subdivision of the gnostics, “curse and reject [non-

gnostic] baptism, even though there are some among them who have already been baptized [as orthodox Christians]" because baptism is "alien and has been established in the name of Sabaōth," i.e. the god of Israel, who according to the Archontics is the son of Satan. Furthermore, according to St. Epiphanius, the Archontics believe that when the soul is saved it "gets *gnōsis* and flees baptism of the [non-gnostic] church."

The chronology of gnostic scripture

In the absence of any historical information about the authors of the various works of gnostic scripture and of any mention of historical facts in the texts themselves, nothing very precise can be said about the date of their composition.

The *latest possible dates* are as follows. A version of *The Secret Book According to John* seems to be already known and summarized by St. Irenaeus (IrG), writing about A.D. 180. *Zōstrianos* and *The Foreigner* are mentioned by Porphyry (Porph) as being among the works brought to Plotinus's attention about A.D. 250. It is worth noting that four other works show a striking similarity to these two in philosophical and mythic content: EgG, RAd, 3Tb, and FTh. The remaining works cannot in any case be later than the date of the Coptic manuscripts in which they are copied, roughly A.D. 350, and time must also be subtracted to allow for their prior translation from the original Greek into Coptic.

The *earliest possible dates* of any of the gnostic works, at least in their present form, are limited only by two factors. First, none of them (except possibly RAd and Th) can be earlier than the first serious efforts of Christian theologians to come to grips with Platonic philosophical myth, assuming that the gnostic myth emerged from Christianity. Second, none of them (except RAd and Th, which are not philosophical in character) seems to presuppose philosophical speculation more advanced than Plotinus or less advanced than Philo Judaeus, so they probably fall not too far outside the chronological framework of those two Platonists' careers, ca. 10 B.C. to A.D. 270. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the chronological sequence of these texts must correspond to their degree of philosophical elaboration in a spectrum from Philo to Plotinus.

In fact, it is reasonable to guess that the dates of composition of the gnostic works in Part One extend over a long period of time. Some of them probably date from before the evolution of Valentinianism (A.D. ca. 140), described in Parts Two and Three of *The Gnostic Scriptures*, and others from after that time. Later gnostic works might even be influenced by Valentinian ideas.

Gnostic scripture without distinctive Christian features

Distinctively Christian features appear both in classic gnostic scripture and in the ancient summaries about the gnostics, making it undeniable that the gnostics were a sect or movement of Christianity; and in the discussion above they have been considered only in this aspect.

In a fair number of gnostic works, however, distinctive Christian features are completely absent (see Table 3). Their absence has caused many scholars to raise the question whether the gnostics might have first, or also, existed as a non-Christian movement or sect.

Table 3
Distinctive Christian and Platonist Features in the
Gnostic Scriptures

	Distinctly Christian	Distinctly Platonist		Distinctly Christian	Distinctly Platonist
BJn	×	×	3Tb		×
RAd	×	(?)	IrSat	×	×
RR	×	×	IrG	×	×
Th			IrUnid	×	
FTh	×	×	Porph	×	(×)
EgG	×	×	EpS	×	
Zs		×	EpA	×	
Fr		×	EpG	×	

How significant is the absence of Christian features in these works? In answering this question, it is important to remember that a sect or religion is a social group, and that its members are people, not texts or ideas. In this primary sense, it is not a written work that is "Christian" or "gnostic," but rather the people who produce and use it. Ancient Christians certainly made use of writings that contained no explicit reference to Jesus Christ or to other distinctive marks of their own religion; such writings even formed a central part of Christian scripture—for example, the book of Genesis and other Old Testament books. Throughout their history, Christians have not thought it strange to create and use literature that lacked such features. The question is whether early Christians would have written such literary works with the intention of adding them to Christian scripture. If the answer is yes for certain gnostic works, these would be very unusual cases in the history of ancient Christian literature. Yet the possibility seems hard to exclude, especially since one item on the gnostic agenda was the deliberate balancing of Genesis by a rival body of myth (cf. BJn 13:18f, 22:23f, etc.). Scholarship has therefore been hesitant to regard these works as conclusive evidence of an extra-Christian, or even pre-Christian, branch of the gnostic movement.

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THE SECRET BOOK ACCORDING TO JOHN

IN THE LONG VERSION
(BJn)

Contents

The Secret Book According to John ("Apocryphon of John") contains one of the most classic narrations of the gnostic myth.¹ After starting out with a philosophical description of god as the source of all being (2:26f), the gnostic author proceeds to describe the structure of the divine world in its glorious complexity (4:26–9:24f) telling, as it were, "what happened *before* Genesis 1:1." After this weighty prelude, the events of the Genesis story are retold from a gnostic perspective (starting at BJn 12:33f). The story finally ends with the gnostic savior's exhortation of the human race to "awaken" and be saved (30:11f).

Any reader who came upon BJn unprepared would surely have been puzzled by many of its obscurities. The web of highly structured emanations, for instance, that enfold the godhead (Fig. 1 and "Mythic Characters" below) forms a thick and almost inscrutable barrier between the human world and god, shutting off god from humanity by alienating human beings from the knowledge of the divine. The creator of the material world, though clearly identified with the figure called "god" in Gn 1:1, turns out to be not true god but Satan (here called "Ialdabaoth" and "Saklas," 10:19f, 11:15f). Furthermore, the creation of Adam is made out to be more complicated than Genesis says, for following Alexandrian Jewish teaching the gnostic author tells of a twofold creation of Adam—first an "animate" Adam made only of soul, though having all the anatomical parts (15:1f–20:27f); and second, a material shell to encase him (20:28f).

The detailed retelling of Genesis stops with the birth of Seth (cf. Gn 4:25); after this, the subsequent history of the human race is discussed only in general terms, within the context of a theological discourse on the activity of the holy spirit. Nothing is said about the history of Israel, nor about Jesus as an incarnation of the preexistent Christ (except in the last sentence of the work and by implication in the opening). Nevertheless, Christ ("the anointed") is an important character of the myth, making BJn an example of a Christian work that discusses the preexistent Christ but not the incarnation.

The narration of the gnostic myth in BJn is encapsulated within a frame story

¹ For a more detailed discussion of the gnostic myth, see the "Historical Introduction" to Part One and cf. Fig. 1.

which seems to imply that the content of the work is a post-resurrection teaching of Jesus. This would agree with the gnostic belief that after his resurrection Jesus remained on earth for eighteen months and taught "the plain truth" (IrUnid 1.30.14). Yet in terms of the gnostic myth the identity of the revealer is not Jesus but Barbēlō, the second principle, perhaps here manifested as the afterthought of the light.

Literary background

The author and place of composition of BJn are unknown. The date of its composition is probably sometime before A.D. ca. 180, the date of St. Irenaeus's summary of the work (cf. IrG, but the resemblance is not perfect, suggesting that Irenaeus knew a different version of the text); and in any case before A.D. 350, the approximate date of the MSS. The work is attributed to John the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus' twelve original disciples (Mt 4:21, Mk 1:19, Lk 5:10), recording words spoken by the savior; it is thus an example of pseudepigraphy. The language of composition was Greek.

BJn has a complex mixture of genres in which various traditional materials are subordinated to others:

- I. Romance (apocryphal acts of apostles)
 - A. Angelic revelation and revelation dialogue
 1. Treatise
 2. Cosmogony and uranography
 3. "True history" of humankind
 4. Wisdom monologue

The narrative frame story is a typical episode from the literature called "apocryphal acts of the apostles," a Christianized version of the Greek *romance* or novel. Within the narrative of the romance, an *angelic revelation monologue* occurs, but after some pages it develops into an *angelic revelation dialogue*. In this genre a human interlocutor woodenly intervenes to provide excuses for the continuation of the angel's revelation; the genre has been traced back to the Greek school catechism (the so-called "erotapokriseis"), in which dry facts are presented in question-and-answer form.

The revelatory monologue comprises two kinds of material: a typical philosophical *treatise on theology*, and a *cosmogony* accompanied by "*uranographic details*" (details describing the structure of the universe). The revelation dialogue comprises a revisionistic "*true history*"—that is, an alternative, "corrected" version—of the events of Gn 1:2f. The dialogue eventually lapses back into monologue and ends by assuming the form of poetry (parallel strophes). The concluding poem is a *wisdom monologue* (for this genre, see the introduction to Th) and closely resembles FTh.

Mythic characters

I. The Immortals

The PARENT OF THE ENTIRETY. The perfect invisible virgin spirit.

An ANDROGYNOUS QUINTET OF AEONS, constituents of the parent:

1. The PERFECT FORETHOUGHT OF THE ENTIRETY. The Barbēlō, a product of the parent's thinking, the image of the parent. Also known as:
 - mother-father;
 - first human being;
 - holy spirit;
 - thrice-male;
 - the three powers;
 - the triple androgynous name;
 - eternal aeon.
2. PRIOR ACQUAINTANCE

3. INCORRUPTIBILITY
4. ETERNAL LIFE
5. TRUTH

The DIVINE SELF-ORIGINATE. The anointed (Christ), a luminous spark, the only-begotten, maker of the entirety.

Its coactors: INTELLECT, WILL, WORD (or verbal expression)

FOUR LUMINARIES that stand before the divine self-originate, and TWELVE AEONS that are with them:

HARMOZĒL

LOVELINESS, TRUTH, FORM

ÖROIAËL

AFTERTHOUGHT, PERCEPTION, MEMORY

DAUEITHAI

INTELLIGENCE, LOVE, IDEAL FORM

ËLĒLĒTH

PERFECTION, PEACE, and

WISDOM (Sophia) belonging to afterthought. Mother of Ialdabaōth, mother of the living, a holy spirit, sibling of the posterity of Seth. Also called life (Zōē), and referred to as "an afterthought."

FOUR BEINGS that dwell with the four luminaries:

The GERADAMAS, also called ADAMAS. The perfect human being. With Harmozēl. SETH, his son. The "child of the human being" (son of man). With Öroiaël.

POSTERITY OF SETH. Souls of the holy persons, the immovable race or perfect race. With Daeithai.

SOULS who were not acquainted with the fullness and repented tardily. With Ëlēlēth.

II. The Rulers

IALDABAÖTH or IALTABAÖTH or ALTABAÖTH. The first and chief ruler, first begetter of the other rulers, an offspring of wisdom. Called SAKLAS and SAMAËL.

Ialdabaōth's AUTHORITIES, KINGS, RULERS, POWERS, ANGELS, SERAPHIM, DEMONS, etc., amounting to 365 in number and having various names

DESTINY, child of wisdom and Ialdabaōth

III. Humankind

ADAM. The first material human being, created (as an animate body) in the image of the Geradamas, then fitted with a material body.

EVE. The first female human being, created in the image of the luminous afterthought.

ABEL. A just son of Ialdabaōth and Eve.

CAIN. An unjust son of Ialdabaōth and Eve.

SETH. A son of Adam and Eve/afterthought, created as a likeness of the heavenly Seth.

POSTERITY OF SETH on earth. The immovable or perfect race, including Noah, John the brother of James (a son of Zebedee), and John's fellow disciples.

OTHERS, including Arimanios, a Pharisee

IV. Spirits Active in Humankind

The SPIRIT OF LIFE. The mother's (wisdom's) spirit.

The COUNTERFEIT SPIRIT. A creature of the rulers, originating in matter.

Text

The original Greek apparently does not survive. The text is known mainly in Coptic translation, attested by four manuscripts: MSS NHC II (pp. 1–32), NHC III

(pp. 1–40), NHC IV (pp. 1–49), which were copied just before A.D. 350 and are now in the Cairo Coptic Museum; and MS BG (Berolinensis gnosticus), that is, p. Berol. 8502 (pp. 19–77), which was copied ca. fifth century A.D. and is now in the papyrus collection of the East Berlin Museum. In addition, a summary of what appears to be the first part of the work, by St. Irenaeus, survives; it is translated elsewhere in this volume (see IrG).

The manuscripts and summary attest the circulation of no less than four distinct editions of the Greek text in antiquity. Such a series of editions must have resulted from continual study and revision of BJn by gnostic teachers; it is a measure of the importance and timeliness of the work for ancient gnostic Christianity. These four ancient editions, usually called “versions,” comprise the following.

1. The *long version*, which is represented by two virtually identical Coptic manuscripts, MSS NHC II and NHC IV, is the text translated here. When one of its two manuscripts is defective, its original reading can often be restored from the other. The most obvious difference between the long version and the short version is that the former contains a lengthy excerpt from a certain *Book of Zoroaster* (cf. 15:29–19:8f).

2. A *short version*, which is represented by Coptic MS NHC III, differs from the others in certain details of phraseology and systematic theology; as a Coptic translation it differs in style and vocabulary from all the other Coptic versions.

3. Another *short version*, which is represented by Coptic MS p. Berol. 8502, also differs in certain details of phraseology and systematic theology; as a Coptic translation it differs in style and vocabulary from all the other Coptic versions.

4. The *summary* of BJn in St. Irenaeus (IrG) is too brief and compressed to classify as long or short, but in any case it shows certain minor differences that distinguish it from each of the three other versions.

The long version has been chosen for translation here because of its apparent coherence; however, scholars have not determined which version is the original.

In passages where the three texts of the Coptic versions run in parallel, they differ considerably in vocabulary and style. As in the case of EgG, careful comparison of such parallels has made it possible to gain a systematic understanding of the different ways in which the three ancient Coptic translators did their work; thus, in many places where both manuscripts of the long version are defective or erroneous, the original reading of the long version can be conjecturally restored by comparison and stylistic adjustment of a reading found in the other manuscripts. Such restorations, which are supported by the parallel versions, are *printed in italics*. Comparison of the versions has also clarified the meaning of certain Coptic expressions in the long version and has thus been an aid in translation. In a few instances all pertinent manuscripts are defective in a given passage, but the original text can nevertheless be conjectured with certainty: these totally conjectural restorations are enclosed within square brackets [].

No adequate critical edition of BJn has been published. The translation below is based on my own unpublished synopsis of the manuscripts, constructed from collation of photographic facsimiles and from Till's critical edition of the Berlin manuscript (see “Select Bibliography”).

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THE SECRET BOOK^a ACCORDING TO JOHN^b

Contents

1 **1** The teaching [of the] savior and [the revelation] of the mysteries,
[which] are hidden in silence [and which] it (the savior) taught to John
[its] disciple.

I. FRAME STORY (INTRODUCTION)

Dialogue of John and a Pharisee

5 *Once*^c upon a time when John *the brother* of James, one of the *sons*
8 of Zebedee, was going up to the temple^d • a Pharisee named Arimanios
encountered him and said to him, *Where* is your teacher, the man *that*
you *used* to follow?

11 And *he* (John) said to him, He has *returned* to the *place* from which
he came.

12,13 The Pharisee *said* to him, •That Nazarene^c has *greatly* misled you,
16 *filled* your ears with lies, closed [your hearts], •and *turned* you away
[from] the traditions of your [ancestors].

II. JOHN'S NARRATION

John's distress

17 When I^f heard these words, I *turned* away from the temple *towards*
20,21 *the barren mountain*,^g •and I was *very* distressed, *saying*, •How *indeed*
22 *was* the savior *chosen*? •And *why* was he *sent* into the world by his
23,24 *parent* who *sent* him? •And *who* is his *parent* who [sent him]? •And
26 *what* is *that* realm *like*, to which we shall go? •For what [. . .] he *told*
us that this realm [. . .] *has been stamped* in the mold of that *incorruptible*
realm, and did not tell us *what* that other one is like.

Appearance of the savior

30 At the moment *that* I was *thinking* these thoughts, lo, the heavens
31 *opened*, •and all creation *shone* with light that [. . .] below heaven.

Title 1 a. Greek *apokryphon*, lit. "concealed (thing)."

b. In the manuscripts, the title is found after the text (at 32:7f).

c. For the meaning of *italics*, see the introduction to BJn, "Text."

d. The Jewish temple of god in Jerusalem. Ancient Christian tradition (cf. Acts 2:46f) held that the earliest Christians in Jerusalem continued to take part in the Jewish religious cult of the temple.

e. "Nazarene": Gk. *nasōraios*, "person

from Nazareth." Traditionally the term was also held to mean "one who is observant," and sometimes referred to members of a Jewish-Christian sect of that name or to Christians in general.

f. From here until 31:31f the narrator is John. But starting at 2:9f, John's narration quotes a long speech of the savior.

g. Or "toward the desert." The Judean Desert begins at the back of the Mount of Olives, which on the other side overlooks the site of the temple.

33,1 And the [. . .] world moved. 2 •For my part, I was afraid, [. . .] saw
3 within the light a *child* standing before me. •When I saw [. . .] like an
4 elderly person. •And it changed (?) [its] manner of appearance to be like
5,6 a young person. •[. . .] in my presence. •And within the light there was
7 a multiform image (?). •And the [manners of appearance] were appearing
8 through one another. •[And] the [manner of appearance] had three forms.
9 [It]^a said to me, John, John, why do you have doubts, and why [are
11,12 you] afraid? •Are you alien to this kind of thing? •This is to say, do *not*
12,13 *be* timid. •It is I who *am* with [you (*plur.*)] always. •*It is* I who *am* [the 9:9+
15 father]; *it is* I who *am* the mother; it is I who am the son.^b •It is I who
16 am *the* undefiled and the unpolluted. •[Now I have come] to *teach* you
(sing.) what exists, and *what* [has come to be], and what must *come* to
18 *be*, •so that you might [know about] *the invisible realm* [and the] *visible*
19 *realm*; •and to [teach you] *about the perfect* [human being].
20 Now, *then*, *lift up* your [face] to *hear* and [learn about] what I *shall* say
22 to you today, •so that you too might convey it [to those who are] *like*
23 [you] in spirit, •and who are [from] *the immovable* race of the perfect
human being [. . .], so that [they] might understand [. . .].

III. THE SAVIOR'S TEACHING

The parent of the entirety

26,26 It said to me: •The unit (monad), *since it is a unitary principle of rule*,
28 has nothing that presides over it. •[. . .] *god* and parent of the entirety
30 [. . .] presides over [. . .] incorruptibility,^c •existing [in] uncontaminated
32 light, toward which no vision can gaze. •*This* [is] *the invisible spirit*.
33 It is not fitting^d to *think* of it as divine or as something of the sort,
35,36 for it is superior to deity; •*nothing* presides over it, for nothing 3 has
1 mastery *over* it; •[it does] not [exist (?)] in any state of inferiority, [. . .]
4 exists in it alone.^a •[. . .] because it lacks *nothing*. •For *it* is utter fullness,
without having *become defective* in anything so that it might be completed
6,7 by [it]: •*rather*, it is always utterly perfect in [. . .]. •It is *unlimited*
because nothing [exists] *prior* to it so as to bestow limit upon it;
9 unfathomable, *because* nothing exists prior to it so as to *fathom* (?) it;
10,12 *immeasurable*, because nothing *else* has *measured* it; •*invisible*, *because*
13 nothing *else* has seen it; •*eternal*, since it [exists] unto eternity;
14 *ineffable*, since nothing has been able to reach it so as to *speak* of it;
15 *unnameable*, since *there is nothing that exists prior* to it so as to give a
17 name to it. •*It is immeasurable light*, which is uncontaminated, holy,
18,20 and *pure*; •it is ineffable and perfect in incorruptibility: •not in *perfection*,
22 nor in blessedness nor in divinity; •rather as being *far* superior to these.^b
22,24 It is not corporeal, it is not *incorporeal*, •it is not large, it is not small. Fr 63:5
24,26 it is *not* quantifiable, nor *is it* a creature. •Indeed, no one can *think* of 3Tb 121:30
26 *it*. •It is not something among the *existents*; *rather it is something* far
28 *superior* to these: •(yet) *it is not as though it were "superior"*; rather,
its proper characteristic is not to *share* in eternal realms (aeons), or in

2 a. As is explicitly stated in 30:11f, the speaker of the teaching is forethought, or the Barbēlō. Forethought is genderless because it is simultaneously male and female (cf. 5:6f).

b. "[father] . . . mother . . . son": one of the basic structures of the Barbēlō aeon (cf. FTh, EgG, IrG). A similar triadic structure, but without this terminology, is present in Zs, Fr, 3Tb.

c. MS BG instead has "the [. . .] god, parent of the entirety, the holy [spirit (?)],

the invisible, [which] presides over the entirety, which [exists in] its incorruptibility."

d. The description of god that follows resembles some accounts in second-century Platonist philosophy; see "Historical Introduction" to Part One.

3 a. MS BG instead has "For, it is eternal."

b. MSS BG and NHC III next have "It is neither infinite, nor has it been limited; rather, it is something superior to these."

30 spans of time. •For whatever shares in *an eternal realm* has been
 31 prepared *beforehand*.^c •And it [has not been] *divided* by time [. . .] any
 33,34 other, *for* it does not receive anything. •For [. . .]^d •For [. . .] it, so that
 36 it might receive from [. . .]. •For it gazes upon itself [alone (?)] within
 1 4 its *perfect* light. •For it is majestic;^e it is an immeasurable [. . .].^b
 3,3 [It is] eternity, [as] bestowing^c eternity.^d •It is life, as bestowing *life*.
 4,5 It is blessed, as bestowing blessedness. •It is acquaintance, as bestowing
 6,7 acquaintance. •[It is] good, as bestowing goodness.^c •[It is] *mercy*, [as
 7,8 bestowing] mercy and ransom. •It is grace,^f *as bestowing* grace. •(It is
 all these things) [not] as possessing (attributes); rather, as bestowing
 (them).
 9 [It is] immeasurable, incorruptible *light*,^g [in so far as I can speak]
 10 with you (sing.) about it. •Its [eternal realm] is incorruptible, at peace
 13 and dwelling in *silence, at repose, utterly* (?) preceding. •[It] is the head
 of *all* the aeons, *since* it is this which in its goodness bestows strength
 upon them.
 15,16 Indeed, we [are] not *acquainted* with [. . .]; •we do not (?) know [. . .]
 except [for] *what* has been shown forth out of it,^h that is, [the] parent:
 19 for it is the parent that *spoke* to us. •For it is this that gazes at its own
 21,22 self in its light *around it*, •that is, the wellspring of living water;ⁱ •gives
 22 unto *all* the aeons; •and in every way [thinks of (?)] its image, beholding
 24 it in the wellspring of the [spirit]^j and •exercising will^k in its [watery]
light, [that is,] the wellspring of the *pure, luminous* water around it.

Zs 128:27 ?
Fr 67:24

Fr 64:30

FTh 46:16 +
EgG 62:9
Zs 17:11

FTh 35:1 +
EgG 51:22
IrG 1:29.1
EpG 25:2.2
v.29
10:20

Production of forethought

26 And *its thinking produced* something, and the thinking was disclosed,
 29 *standing* [plainly] in its presence in *the brilliance* of its light. •This is
 the first *power, which exists* prior to all (others), and *which was shown*
forth (?) out of its thinking, that is, *the perfect forethought* of the
 32 *entirety*. •The light of this (thought) [. . .] light, the power of the [. . .],

c. MS NHC III instead has “prepared by others.”

d. MS BG instead has “And it is not in need. (for) nothing at all exists prior to it.”

4 a. Or “magnitude.”

b. Instead of these two sentences, MSS BG and NHC III have simply “(It is) the immeasurable majesty.”

c. Because it “bestows eternity,” it might itself be termed “eternity.” The savior qualifies these epithets at 4:8f.

d. MS BG next has “It is light, which bestows light.”

e. MS BG next has “and doing goodness—not as though possessing (something); rather, as bestowing.”

f. Or “loveliness”: Greek *kharis*.

g. MSS BG and NHC III next have “What shall I say to you concerning it? The incomprehensible is the image of the light, in terms of what I can think about. Indeed, who can ever think about it?”

h. “Indeed . . . of it” (4:15f); MSS BG and NHC III instead have “For none of us has become acquainted with the properties of the immeasurable except for what has been shown forth by it.”

i. MS BG next has “the light full of sanctification. The wellspring of the spirit streamed down from the living water of the light.”

j. Three metaphors in this passage (4:19–36f) gloss over the difficult traditional problem of why a second principle (here called forethought, Barbēlō) would come to be “produced” from a perfect first principle (the parent). (1) The parent is a detached eye whose function is simply to look. It is surrounded by reflective “luminous water” so that it must “gaze at its own self”; its own “image” that it sees becomes objectified as a second principle, “the image of the perfect invisible virgin spirit.” (2) The parent is an abstract intellect whose function is simply to think. It initially has no other object of thought than its own self; the act of “thinking” or thought becomes objectified as a second principle, “the perfect forethought.” (3) The parent is a “spring of living (running) water” whose function is simply to overflow endlessly. The overflow becomes objectified as a second principle, the Barbēlō (“great overflow”: see “Historical Introduction” in Part One). Note that the first metaphor implies that in the beginning there might have been something together with the parent (“its light”). Metaphors like these are used in a similar context by Platonist philosophers roughly contemporary with the author of BJn.

k. Or “desire.”

34,36 that is, *the* image of the perfect invisible virgin spirit.¹ •*This is the* power, the glory of *the* Barbēlō,^m the (most) perfect glory 5 among the aeons, the glory of the manifestation, which glorifies the virgin spirit and praises
 3,4 it, •for because of the latter it was shown forth.^a •It is the first thinking of the spirit’s image.^b
 5,6 It (the Barbēlō) became a womb for the entirety,^c •for it was prior to all (others), (being) the mother-father, the first human being, the holy spirit, the thrice-male,^d the three powers; the thrice-androgynous name; and (was) the (most) eternal aeon among the invisible.

14.18
FTh 38.11
v.36
Th 13.2
RAAd 64.6
EgG 52.2
IrG 1.29.1
EpG 26.10.4 +
FTh 38.14 +

Its request for more eternal realms: prior acquaintance

10 And the emanation, that is, *the* Barbēlō, made a request of the invisible virgin spirit, that it be given prior acquaintance (*prognōsis*).
 14,14 And the spirit consented.^e •And *when* it had *consented*, prior acquaintance became disclosed. •And prior acquaintance stood at rest^f along with forethought, which derived from the thinking of the invisible virgin spirit; and it glorified the spirit *and the* Barbēlō, the spirit’s perfect power, for prior acquaintance had come to exist *because of the Barbēlō*.

EgG 51.22
IrG 1.29.1

Incorruptibility

20 And *furthermore*, the Barbēlō made a request that it be given
 21,22 *incorruptibility*. •And the spirit consented. •While *it was consenting*, *incorruptibility became disclosed*. •And [they]^g *stood at rest* along with 23 thinking^h and *prior acquaintance*; •and they glorified the invisibleⁱ and the Barbēlō because of which they had come to exist.

RR 86.32
EgG 51.22
IrG 1.29.1

Eternal life

26,27 And the Barbēlō made a request that it be given *eternal life*. •And the
 28 invisible spirit consented. •And while it was consenting, eternal life
 30,30 became disclosed. •And *they stood at rest*, •and they glorified the invisible spirit and the Barbēlō because of which they had come to exist.

EgG 51.22
IrG 1.29.1

Truth

32,33 And furthermore it made a request that it be given truth. •And the
 34 invisible spirit consented. •And truth became disclosed.
 35,35 And they stood at rest, •and they glorified the 6 acceptable (?), invisible spirit and its Barbēlō, because of which they had come to exist.
 2 This is the quintet of aeons belonging to the parent, which is the first human being,^a the image of the invisible spirit, namely:

IrG 1.29.2

3Tb 120:19

l. “the perfect invisible virgin spirit”: the parent.

m. For the meaning of this name, see “Historical Introduction” in Part One and note 4j.

5 a. MS BG next has “and thinks about it.”

b. MS BG instead has “the first thinking, the spirit’s image.”

c. “entirety”: the sum total of spiritual reality deriving from the Barbēlō.

d. “thrice-male”: cf. EgG, note 51f.

e. “consented”: here and throughout this passage, the Coptic word can be translated also “gazed out.”

f. To “stand at rest” is philosophical jargon for the state of permanence, non-change,

and real being, as opposed to what exists in instability, change, and becoming.

g. I.e. prior acquaintance and incorruptibility.

h. I.e. forethought, the Barbēlō.

i. The “perfect invisible virgin spirit,” the parent.

6 a. Forethought (cf. 5:6f). The quintet is made up of “forethought” and its four emanations. The four emanations are here considered to be mere aspects of their source, so that also the quintet as a whole can be spoken of as “the image of the invisible spirit,” i.e. as being forethought, the Barbēlō.

5 forethought, which is *the* Barbēlō and thinking;
prior acquaintance;
incorruptibility;
eternal life;
truth.^b

8 This is the androgynous quintet of aeons, that is, the group of *ten* aeons,^c
which constitutes the parent.^d

Begetting of the self-originate

10 And it^e gazed at the Barbēlō, (who was) in the uncontaminated light^f IrG 1.29.1
12 around the invisible spirit and (in) its radiation. •And the Barbēlō
13 conceived by it, •and it begot a luminous spark consisting of light in an
image that was blessed, though *not* equal to its parent's magnitude.
15 This was the only-begotten offspring of the mother-father^g which ap-
16 peared, •and the mother-father's only begetting; (it was) the only-
begotten of the parent, the uncontaminated light.

Its anointment

18 And the invisible virgin spirit rejoiced at the light that had come to
exist and that had been shown forth out of the first power of the spirit's
23 forethought, *who* is the Barbēlō. •And the spirit anointed it (the spark) FTTh 37:31
24 with its own kindness^h until it became perfect, •needing no further EgG 55.11
kindness since it had been anointed with the *kindness* of the invisible IrG 1.29.1
26 spirit. •And it stood at rest in the presence of the spirit, which was IrUnid 1.30.1
28 pouring upon it. •And the moment that it received from the spirit it EpS 39.3.5
glorified the holy spiritⁱ and perfect forethought, because of which it had Zs 131:14
become disclosed.

Its request for coactors

33 And it made a request that it be given a coactor, namely intellect. IrG 1.29.1
34.34 And the spirit consented [. . .]. •And while the invisible spirit was
1 consenting, 7 intellect was disclosed. •And it stood at rest along with
3 the anointed (Christ),^k glorifying the spirit and the Barbēlō. •And all
these beings came into existence within silence.^b EgG 51:22

4 And thinking^c wished to make something by the Word (or verbal

b. MSS BG and NHC III omit "truth" from this list, counting "the Barbēlō" and "thought" as the first two members.

c. "forethought, . . . prior acquaintance, incorruptibility, . . . life, truth" are all grammatically feminine words in Greek (*pronoia*, *prognōsis*, *aphtharsia*, *zōē*, *alētheia*), and are here perhaps said to have grammatically masculine consorts, thus adding up to ten. Such an arrangement is hinted at in 7:11f and is explicit in IrG.

d. Lit. "which is the parent" (MS NHC III, "which belongs to the parent"). The parent "is" its emanations even while being distinguishable from them, just as forethought "is" its emanations but is also distinguishable from them (cf. note 6a).

e. The parent, the invisible spirit.

f. MS BG instead has "The Barbēlō, the uncontaminated light, gazed intently at it"; NHC III, "the Barbēlō gazed intently at the uncontaminated light."

g. "the mother-father": forethought (the Barbēlō); cf. 5:6f. Forethought's four emanations in the quintet (6:5f) merely "appeared"; they were not "begotten offspring" of forethought and the parent.

h. "kindness": Greek *chrēstotēs*. Once "anointed," the only-begotten will be both *chrēstos*, "kind," and *christos* "the anointed." The two Greek words were pronounced identically at the time that Bln was written.

i. "spirit . . . holy spirit . . .": the parent.

7 a. "anointed" (cf. note 6h) and "Christ" are the same word in Greek.

b. In some gnostic systems (e.g. IrV) "silence" is distinguished as an entity that coexisted with the ineffable parent in the beginning

c. MSS BG and NHC III instead have "and thinking. The invisible spirit wished to make something."

6.7 expression)^d of the invisible spirit. •And its will became deed, •and was EgG 51.22
disclosed along with intellect and the light, and glorified it.^e
9.10 And Word (or verbal expression) followed after will. •For by the FTTh 37:3 +
Word, the anointed (Christ) divine self-originate made the entirety (or EgG 51.22
all things).
11.12 Now, eternal life is with its will. •And intellect is with prior acquaint-
ance.^f

Its establishment as god of the entirety

13 They stood at rest and glorified the invisible spirit and the Barbēlō,
15 for because of the Barbēlō they had come to exist. •And the holy spirit^g
perfected the divine self-originate,^h the offspring of itself and the Barbēlō,
18 so as to make the offspring stand at rest before the great invisible virgin
19 spirit.ⁱ •The divine self-originate, the anointed (Christ), who glorified the
22 spirit with a great voice, was shown forth by forethought. •And the in-
visible virgin spirit established the self-originate as true god over the en-
25 tirety, •and subordinated to it (the self-originate) all authority and the
27 truth that was in it (the spirit), •so that it might know about the entirety:
27.29 which is called by a name that is superior to every name, •for that name
will be uttered to those who are worthy of it.

Appearance of four luminaries and twelve eternal realms

30 For by the gift of the spirit, out of the light that is the anointed (Christ) FTTh 38.33 +
and out of incorruptibility,^j the four luminaries from the divine self- EgG 62:11
originate gazed out^k so as to stand 8 before it. Zs 29.1
IrG 1.29.2

1 And the three: will, thinking, and life.

2 And the four powers:

intelligence;
loveliness;
perception;
prudence."

IrG 1.29.2

Harmozēl

4 Now, loveliness dwells at the eternal realm (aeon) of the luminary
6 Harmozēl, and is the first angel. •And with this eternal realm (aeon) are
three additional aeons:

7 loveliness;
truth;
form.^b

d. "Word (or verbal expression)": the divine *Logos*.

e. The parent (?).

f. See note 6c.

g. MS NHC III instead has "the great invisible spirit."

h. "self-originate" (Greek *autogenēs*): the anointed (Christ).

i. MSS NHC II and IV here erroneously insert "of."

j. MS NHC II here erroneously inserts "of."

k. MSS BG and NHC III instead have "appeared."

8 a. "And the three . . . prudence": the Coptic text of MS NHC II may be slightly garbled here. MSS BG and NHC III here list "loveliness; intelligence; perception; prudence." The parallel in IrG has "loveliness; perception; intelligence; prudence."

b. Greek *morphē*.

Ōroiaēl

8 Now, it is the second luminary Ōroiaēl that has been established in
10 charge of the second eternal realm, •and with it are three additional
aeons:

11 afterthought;^c
perception;
memory.

Daucithai

12 Now, the third luminary is Daucithai, which has been established in
14 charge of the third eternal realm, •and with it are three additional aeons:

15 intelligence;
love;
ideal form.^d

Ēlēlēth

16 Now, the fourth luminary Ēlēlēth was established in charge of the
18 fourth eternal realm, •and with it are three additional aeons:

19 perfection;
peace;
wisdom (Sophia).

20 Those are the four luminaries that stand before the divine self-originate,
22 and those are the twelve aeons that stand before the offspring of the
great self-originate anointed (Christ),^e through the desire and the gift of
25 the invisible spirit. •The twelve aeons belong to the offspring of the self-
26 originate. •And it was by the will of the holy spirit that the entirety
became strong through the self-originate.

Appearance of four archetypes

28 Then—(deriving) from *prior acquaintance* and perfect intellect through
[disclosure] of the desire of the invisible spirit and the desire of the self-
originate—the perfect human being, the first manifestation and true
34 (person), was named •“the Geradamas (Ger-Adamas)”^f by the virgin
35 spirit. •And that being was established upon the first 9 eternal realm
(aeon) with the great self-originate and anointed (Christ), at the first
3.4 luminary Harmozēl, •and its powers^g dwell with it. •And the invisible
gave to it an invincible intellectual faculty.
5 And it (the Geradamas) spoke, glorifying and praising the invisible
spirit, and said,

7 “Because of you the entirety has come to exist;
8 And it is unto you that the entirety will return.
9 And for my part I shall praise and glorify you and the self-
originate along with the *triple* aeon^h—the father, mother, son,
the perfect power.”

c. Greek *epinoia*.

d. Greek *idea*.

e. “offspring of the . . . anointed”: the Geradamas (8:34f).

f. “Geradamas (Ger-Adamas),” known in some works as “Adamas”: the name recalls both “Adam,” the first human being, and Greek *adamas*, “steel, hard, unyielding.”

The prefix “Ger-” has been explained as Gk. *hier-* from *hieros*, “holy”; in any case the name is a neologism in gnostic myth. MS BG instead has “Adam,” NHC III “Adamas.”

9 a. Cf 8:2f.

b. Forethought, the Barbēlō; cf. 2:13f.

RR 93:8
FTh 39:13

3Tb 123.16
EgG 68.9
IrG 1.29.4

15.9
RR 88:13
EgG 61.5
Zs 6:21 +
3Tb 118:25
IrG 1.29.3

2:13
EgG 50.23 +

11 And it established Geradamas’s son Seth upon the second eternal
realm, before the second luminary Ōroiaēl.

14 And in the third *eternal realm*, upon the third luminary Daucithai, the
17 posterity of Seth was established, •and also the souls of the holy persons.

18 And in the fourth eternal realm were established the souls of those
who were not acquainted with the fullness and did not repent at once,
22 but rather held out for a while and then repented. •They came to exist
23.24 at the fourth luminary Ēlēlēth. •These were engendered beings,ⁱ •and
they glorified the invisible spirit.

24:34
RAAd 65:5
EgG 62:30
Zs 6:21 +
3Tb 118:10
v.14
EgG III 56.3
Zs 7:6 +
3Tb 120:9
v.18
Zs 27.27?

Production of wisdom’s offspring: Ialtabaōth

25 Now, the wisdom belonging to afterthought,^j which is an aeon, thought
a thought derived from herself, (from) the thinking of the invisible spirit,
and (from) prior acquaintance.

28 She wanted to show forth within herself^k an image, without the spirit’s
30.31 [will]; •and her consort did not consent. •And (she wished to do so)
31 without his pondering: •for the person of her maleness^l did not join in
33 the consent; •for she had not discovered that being which was in harmony
34 with her.^m •Rather, she ponderedⁿ without the will of the spirit and
without acquaintance with^o that being which was in harmony with her.

35 And she brought forth. 10

1 And because of the invincible power within her,^a her thinking did not
2 remain unrealized. •And out of her was shown forth an imperfect
3 product, that was different from her manner of appearance, •for she had
6 made it without her consort. •And compared to the image of its mother
it was misshapen, having a different form.

RR 94.2
FTh 39.20
EgG III 57.5
Zs 9:16
IrG 1.29.4
EpG 25.2.2

Its concealment by wisdom

7 Now, when she saw that her desired artifact was stamped differently—
serpentine, with a lion’s face,^b and with its eyes gleaming like flashes of
11.12 lightning—•she cast it outside of her, outside that place, •so that none
13 of the immortals might see it: •for she had made it without acquaintance.

14.15 And she surrounded it with^c a luminous cloud. •And she put a throne
16 in the midst of the cloud, •so that no being might see it except for the
19 holy spirit called “mother of the living.”^d •And she called its name
Ialtabaōth.^e

23.20

5:6f, and note 2b. “the triple aeon” is found in MS NHC III; the other MSS here have lit. “the aeons, the three.”

c. MS NHC III instead has “They will remain at the luminary Ēlēlēth, assembling there.”

d. Lit. “of afterthought,” perhaps looking forward to the events described in 14:9f. MSS BG and NHC III do not have this phrase, instead having “Now, wisdom our sibling.”

e. “within herself”: or “by her own means.”

f. “the person of her maleness”: MSS BG and NHC III instead have “her consort, the male virgin spirit.”

g. MS NHC III instead has “not discovered her consort.”

h. MSS BG and NHC III instead have “consented.”

i. Or “knowledge of” in the sense of sexual intercourse.

10 a. MS BG instead has “growing strong because of the vulgar (*prounikos*) element within her.”

b. “serpentine . . . face”: MS BG instead has “with a snake’s face and a lion’s face.”

c. MSS BG and NHC III instead have “she harnessed it in.”

d. Wisdom. MS BG instead has “life (Zōē), mother of all.”

e. The spelling of this name fluctuates among “Ialdabaōth,” “Ialtabaōth,” and “Altabaōth.” For its meaning, see RR note 95b.

Its theft of power from wisdom

- 19:20 This is the first ruler, *•and it took great power^l from its mother,*
 retreated from her, and moved out of the place where it had been born.
 23 Taking possession (of another place), it made for itself other eternal
 26 realms (aeons) inside a luminous, fiery blaze, which still exists.⁸ *•And*
it became stupefied in^h its madness, which still is with it.

Its creation of other rulers

- 27 And it engendered for itself authorities:^l
- 28 the first is named Athōth,^l who is called "[. . .]s" by the races;
 30 the second, Harmas,^k *the eye of fire*;
 31 the third, Kalila-Oimbri^l (or Kalila-Kimbri);
 32 the fourth, Iabēl;^m
 33 the fifth, Adōnaios, who is called "Sabaōth";
 34 the sixth, Cain, whom the races of humankind call "the sun";
 36 the seventh, Abel;ⁿ
 36 the eighth, Abrisene;^o
 37 the ninth, Iōbēl; 11
 1 the tenth, Armoupiēl;^a
 1 the eleventh, Melkheir-Adōnein;^b
 2 the twelfth, Belias, who presides over the depth of Hades.^c

- 4 And it (the first ruler) established seven kings in charge of the seven
 heavens, one per firmament of heaven; and five in charge of the depth
 7.8 of the abyss, to reign. *•And it shared some of its fire with them, •but it*
did not bring forth any of the power of the light that it had gotten from
 10.10 *its mother. •For, the first ruler is dark and is without acquaintance. •For*
 12 *when light mixed with darkness it made the darkness bright. •But when*
 13 *darkness mixed with light it darkened the light, •so it was neither*
 luminous nor dark, but rather was dim.
 15 Now, this dim ruler has three names:

- 16 the first name is Ialtabaōth;
 the second, Saklas;^d
 the third, Samaēl.^e

f. Cf. 10:1f. In 13:21f this act is described as theft.

g. MS BG instead has "an eternal realm (aeon), flaming with fire and luminous, where it now is."

h. MSS BG and NHC III instead have "harnessed to."

i. MSS BG and NHC III next have "(i.e.) the twelve angels—each of them unto its own eternal realm (aeon), after the prototype of the incorruptible eternal realms. And it made seven angels for each one of them, and three powers per angel [BG next has "all told 360 (sic), consisting of angelic beings and trios of powers"] after the image of the original prototype that was before them. Now, the authorities were shown forth in the first begetter and the first ruler of the darkness, out of lack of acquaintance of the one that begot them; and these are their names."

j. MS BG instead has "Iaōth"; NHC III, "Haōth."

k. MS BG, "Hermas."

l. MSS BG and NHC III, simply "Galila."

m. MSS BG and NHC III, "Iōbēl."

n. MSS BG and NHC III count "Sabaōth"

as the sixth; count "Cain" (called either "Kainan-Kasin" or "Kainan and Kaē, called Cain") as seventh; and do not mention "Abel."

o. MS BG, "Abiressine"; NHC III, "Abiressia."

11 a. MS BG instead has "Harmoupiāēl"; NHC III, "Armoupiāēl."

b. MSS BG and NHC III, simply "Adōnin."

c. MSS BG and NHC III next have "Now, they all have other names deriving from desire and anger. In short, they all have pairs of names: one set given them after the superior glory, the other corresponding to the truth that shows forth their nature. And Saklas called them by their names with reference to external appearance and with reference to their powers. Now, over intervals of time they withdraw and grow faint; thereafter they grow strong and increase."

d. "Saklas" (Aramaic "fool"); a conventional name of Satan in Judaism.

e. "Samaēl"; Aramaic "blind god."

- 18.19 And the ruler is impious, in its madness that is with it. *•For it said,*
 21 *"It is I who am god, and no other god exists apart from me," •for it*
 22 *did not recognize whence its strength had come. •And the rulers made*
 23 *seven powers for themselves; •and the powers made six angels for each*
 25 *of themselves, •so that they amounted to 365 angels.^f*
 26 And these are the bodies belonging to the names (?):^g
- 26 first, Athōth,^h with the face of a sheep;
 27 second, Elōaios, with a Typhonian face (i.e. the face of a donkey);
 28 third, Astaphaios, with the *face of a hyena*;
 29 fourth, Iaō,^j with the *face of a serpent* and having seven heads;
 31 fifth, Sabaōth,^k with the face of a dragon (or snake);
 32 sixth, Adōnin, with the face of an ape;
 33 seventh, Sabbede,^l with a glowing face of fire.

34 This is the septet of the week.^m

35 Now, Ialtabaōth had many 12 outward appearances, and relied upon
 2.3 all of them, •so as to show any one of them according to wish; *•and*
 dwelled in the midst of seraphim.

4.5 It (the ruler Ialtabaōth) shared its fire with them.^a *•The reason it*
 dominated them was because of the mother's luminous power of glory
 8.9 that belonged to it. *•For this reason it called itself god. •And it did not*
 believe in the source from which it had come.

10.12 And it mixed with the authorities residing with it. *•While it was*
 thinking and while it was speaking, the seven powers came to exist;
 13.14 and it assigned a name to one power after another.^b *•It began from*
 above:

- 15 first is kindness,^c with the first (power), Athōth;^d
 17 second, forethought: with the second, Elōaiō;^e
 18 third, divinity: with the third, Astaphaios;
 19 fourth, lordship: with the fourth, Iaō;
 20 fifth, kingship: with the fifth, Sanbaōth;^f
 22 sixth, zeal: with the sixth, Adonein;
 23 seventh, intelligence: with the seventh, Sabbateōn.^g

25.26 And each of these has a firmament in its own eternal heaven.^h *•And*
they were named after the glory of the heavenly realm, for the [. . .]
 28 *power. •And they exercised power through the names that they had*
 30 *been given by their first begetter; •but the names allotted to them*
 according to the glory of the heavenly realm led to their overthrow and
 33 powerlessness: *•and so they have pairs of names.*

f. "And it shared . . . 365 angels" (11:7–25f) is not present in MSS BG and NHC III. See, however, note 10i.

g. Translation uncertain. MSS BG and NHC III instead have "And the names of glory belonging to those in charge of the seven heavens are as follows."

h. MS BG instead has "Iaōth"; NHC III, "Athō."

i. MSS BG and NHC III, "of a lion."

j. MS NHC III, "Iazō."

k. MSS BG and NHC III, "Adōnaios."

l. MS BG, "Sabbataios"; NHC III, "Sabbadaios."

m. MSS BG and NHC III next have "It is these beings that preside over the world."

12 a. MSS BG and NHC III next have "but it did not bestow on them any of the uncontaminated light, i.e. the power, that it had detached from its mother."

b. MS BG next has "and appointed authorities" (NHC III is imperfect here).

c. In MS BG the list is somewhat different: (1) forethought; (2) divinity; (3) kindness; (4) fire (cf. "zeal"); (5) kingship; (6) [intelligence]; (7) wisdom (Sophia).

d. MS BG instead has "Iaōth."

e. MS BG, "Elōaios."

f. MS BG, "Sabaōth."

g. MS BG, "Sabbataios."

h. MS BG, "has a firmament and an eternal realm (aeon) in its own heaven."

Creation of the universe

33 And it (the first ruler) put all things in order,ⁱ according to the image of the original aeons that had come to exist, so as to 13 make all things in the incorruptible manner: •not that the ruler itself had seen the incorruptible, •but rather, the power within it, which it had gotten from its mother, and which had begotten within it the image of the ordered world.^a

Gn 1.1
RR 94.34 +
FTh 40.4
Zs 10.1
IrSat 1.24.1
EpS 39.1.4

Ialtabaōth's arrogance

5 And seeing the creation surrounding it and the multitude of angels around it that had come to exist out of it, it said to them, •“For my part, I am a jealous god. •And there is no other god apart from me.” In uttering this it signified to the angels staying with it that another god did exist. •For if no other one existed, of whom would it be jealous?

11-18
RR 94:21
FTh 44:1
EgG III 58:23
IrG 1.29.4
IrUmd 1.30.6
EpG 25.2.3
v.8
Ex 20.5
Dt 49:9
v.9
Is 45.5

The mother's “movement”

13,14 Then the mother began to move. •She knew about the lack when the radiation of her light diminished. •And she grew darker, for her consort had not come into harmony with her.

Gn 1.2

IV. DIALOGUE OF JOHN AND THE SAVIOR

A. INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 1-4

The meaning of “move”

17 And I said, Sir, what is meant by “move”?
18 But it laughed and said, Do not suppose that it means “over the waters” as Moses said. •No, rather when she saw the imperfection that had come to exist and the theft^b that her offspring had committed,^c she repented.
24 And in the darkness of unacquaintance, forgetfulness came over her. And she began to be ashamed, moving back and forth. •*And she did not rashly try to return, but rather she went back and forth.* •And the going back and forth is the meaning of “move.”
27,28 Now, the arrogant (ruler) had gotten power from its mother. •For it was without acquaintance, •since it thought that no other existed but its mother alone. •And seeing the multitude of angels that it had created, accordingly it exalted itself over them.

22:22

Repentance and elevation of wisdom

32 But when the mother learned that the garment^d of darkness had not come to exist perfectly, she knew accordingly that her consort had not been in harmony with her, •and she repented 14 with much weeping.
36 And the entreaty of her repentance was heard, •and all the fullness lifted up praise on her behalf unto the invisible virgin spirit, *and it* consented.^a •And while the *holy spirit* was consenting, the holy spirit

Gn 1.2
FTh 40:3
EgG III 59:6
Zs 10.7
IrG 1.29.4
EpG 25.2.4

i. Or “fashioned all things.” At this point the story begins to parallel Genesis (Gn 1:1f).

13 a. “And they were named . . . ordered world” (12:26–13:2f): this passage is not present in MS BG (NHC III is imperfect here).

b. Of wisdom's power (cf. 10:20f).

c. “the imperfection . . . committed”: MS

BG instead has “the imperfection and the coming rebellion of her offspring.”

d. MS BG, “the aborted foetus,” perhaps correctly (NHC III is imperfect here). Ialtabaōth is meant.

14 a. “consented”: here and throughout this passage, the Coptic verb can be translated also “gaze out.”

7 poured over her something of the fullness of all. •For her consort did not come to her (in person); •rather, it came to her through the fullness, in order to rectify her lack.^b •And she was conveyed not to her own eternal realm but to a place higher than her offspring, •so as to dwell in the ninth^c (heaven) until she rectified her lack.^d

23.20, 25:9
EgG 61.14 +
Zs 45.17

Projection of an image of a human being

13,14 And a voice emanated from above the exalted aeons: •“The human being exists, and the child of the human being.”^e •But Ialtabaōth the first ruler listened and thought that this voice came from its mother, and it did not know where it had come from.

18 And the holy mother-father^f and complete, perfect forethought, the image of the invisible, i.e. of the parent of the entirety in whom the entirety had come to exist, the first human being, showed them^g that it had revealed its image in a representation like a portrait statue. •And all the eternal realm of the first ruler trembled, •and the foundations of the abyss moved. •And through the waters that are over the material realm, the bottom [shone] because of the [appearance] of its image that had appeared.

EgG III 59.4
IrSat 1.24.1

30 And when all the authorities and the first ruler were dumbfounded,^h they saw that the whole lower part shone; •and by the light, they saw in the water the representation of the image. 15

30-19^g

Gn 1.2b
Gn 1.3

Gn 1.4a

Creation of the animate Adam

1.2 And it (the first ruler) said to the authorities dwelling with it, •“Come, let us make a human being after the image of god^a and after our images, so that the human being's image might serve as a light for us.” •And they performed the act of creation by means of one another's power, according to the characteristics given to them. •And each of the authorities^b put into that being's soul^c a characteristic corresponding to the representation of the image that they had seen. •And they made a subsistent entity, after the image of the perfect first human being. •And they said, “Let us call him Adam, so that we might have his^d name as a luminous power.”

Gn 1:26
RR 87:23 +
FTh 40:24
IrUmd 1.30.6
EpS 39.2.1

8:28

13 And the powers began:

14 the first, kindness,^e made an animate element^f of bone.
15 The second, forethought, made an animate element of connective tissue.
16 The third, divinity, made an animate element of flesh.

12-15

b. “For her consort . . . her lack”: MSS BG and NHC III instead have “Her consort came down to her to rectify her lacks (plural). It was pleased to rectify her lacks by the agency of forethought.”

c. In the list of twelve aeons given in 8:7f, the ninth from the bottom is afterthought.

d. By returning to regain the stolen power (“lack”) in the person of life (Zōē), a luminous afterthought sent from afterthought proper.

e. “human being . . . child of the human being”: or “man . . . son of man”; i.e. the Geradamas and the great Seth.

f. MS BG instead has “the holy perfect parent.”

g. All the rulers.

h. MSS BG and NHC III instead have “bent down.”

15 a. Forethought, the “first human being.”
b. MSS BG and NHC III instead have “powers.”

c. Or “animate (subsistence).” The original reading of the text is uncertain here.

d. For convenience of identification, the name Adam is hereafter picked up by “he” in the English translation.

e. In MS BG the list is somewhat different: (1) divinity; (2) kindness; (3) fire (cf. “zeal”); (4) forethought; (5) kingship; (6) intelligence; (7) wisdom (Sophia).

f. “animate element”: lit. “soul,” Greek *psykhē*.

- 18 The fourth, lordship, made an animate element of marrow.^g
 19 The fifth, kingship, made an animate element of blood.
 20 The sixth, zeal, made an animate element of skin.
 22 The seventh, intelligence, made an animate element of hair.^h
- 23,24 And the multitude of angels stood before him. *And the seven
 substances of the animate subsistenceⁱ were taken by the authorities,
 26 so that the regularizing of limbs and parts and the joining, i.e. ordering,
 of each of the constituents might be brought about.
- 29 The first,^j Raphaō, began by making the crown of the head;
 Abrōn (?) made the skull;
 Mēniggesstrōēth made the brain;
 32 Asterekhmē, the right eye;
 Thaspomakha, the left eye;
 33 Ierōnumos, the right ear;
 Bissoum, the left ear;
 35 Akiōreim, the nose; **16**
 1 Banēnephroum, the lips;
 Amēn, the front teeth;
 Ibikan, the back teeth;
 2 Basiliadēmē, the tonsils;
 Akhkha, the uvula;
 3 Adaban, the back of the neck;
 Khaaman, the neck bone;
 Dearkhō, the throat;
 5 Tēbar, the right shoulder;
 [. . .], [the] left shoulder;
 6 Mniarkhōn, the [right] elbow;
 [. . .], the left elbow;
 7 Abitriōn, the palm of the right hand;
 Euanthēn, the palm of the left hand;
 Krus, the back of the right hand;
 Bēluai, the back of the left hand;
 9 Trēneu, the fingers of the right hand;
 Balbēl, the fingers of the left hand;
 Krima, the fingernails;
 12 Astrōps, the right nipple;
 Barrōph, the left nipple;
 13 Baoum, the right armpit;
 Ararim, the left armpit;
 14 Arekh,^a the bodily cavity;
 Phthauē, the navel;
 Sēnaphim, the abdomen;
 16 Arakhethōpi, the right side;
 Zabedō, the left side;
 18 Barias, the lower back on the right;
 Phnouth, the lower back on the left;
 18 Abēnlenarkhei, the marrow;
 Khnoumeninorin, the skeleton;
 20 Gēsole, the stomach;
 Agromauma, the heart;

g. MS BG next has "and all the system of the body."

h. MS BG next has "and they set all the body in order"; NHC III, "and they set all [the] human being in order."

i. Or "soul."

j. The following passage, 15:29-19:8f ("... *Book of Zoroaster*"), is not found in MSS BG and NHC III.

16 a. Or "Arekhē."

- Banō, the lungs;
 Sōstrapal, the liver;
 Anēsimalar, the spleen;
 Thōpithrō, the intestines;
 Biblō, the kidneys;
 24 Roerōr, the connective tissue;^b
 24 Taphreō, the vertebrae;
 25 Ipouspobōba, the veins;
 Bineborin, the arteries;
 Latoimenpsēphei, the pneumatic^c system within all the limbs;
 28 Ēnthollei[.], all the flesh;
 28 Bedouk, the right buttock (?);
 Arabēei, the left (buttock (?));
 29 (. . .),^d the penis;
 Eilō, the testicles;
 Sōrma, the private parts;
 30 Gormakaiokhlabar, the right thigh;
 Nebrith, the left thigh;
 Psērēm, the muscles of the right thigh;
 Asaklas, the muscle of the left thigh;
 34 Ormaōth, the right knee;
 Ēmēnun, the left knee;
 Knuks, the right leg; **17**
 1 Tupēlon, the left leg;
 2 Akhiēl, the right ankle;
 Phnēmē, the left ankle;
 Phiouthrom, the right foot;
 Boabel, the toes of the right foot;
 Trakhoun, the left foot;
 Phikna, the toes of the left foot;
 Miamai, the toenails;
 6 Labērnium, (the . . .).^e
- 7 Now, those which are ordained in charge of the preceding are seven in number:
- 8 Athōth;
 Armas;
 Kalila;
 Iabēl;
 Sabaōth;
 Cain;
 Abel.
- 8 And those which provide activation in the limbs are, according to parts:
- 10 first the head, Diolimodraza;
 10 the back of the neck, Iammeaks;
 11 the right shoulder, Iakouib;
 the left shoulder, Ouertōn;
 12 the right hand, Oudidi;
 the left hand, Arbao;
 the fingers of the right hand, Lampnō;
 the fingers of the left hand, Lēekaphar;

b. Or "nervous system."

c. Or "respiratory."

d. The word "(buttock) (?)" and the angel's name are missing. Through an inadvertence, MSS NHC II and IV omit a few

words, having "Arabēei, the left penis."

17 a. One or more words are inadvertently omitted here.

- 15 the right nipple, Barbar;
the left nipple, Imaē;
the chest, Pisandiptēs;
17 the right armpit, Koadē;
the left armpit, Odeōr;
18 the right side, Asphiksiks;
the left side, Sunogkhouta;^b
19 the bodily cavity, Arouph;
the abdomen, Sabalō;
20 the right thigh, Kharkharb;
the left thigh, Khthaōn;
22 all the private parts, Bathinōth;^c
22 the right knee, Khouks;
the left knee, Kharkha;
the right leg, Aroēr;
the left leg, Tōekkhtha;
the right ankle, Aōl;
the left ankle, Kharanēr;
26 the right foot, Bastan;
the toes of the right foot, Arkhenteekhtha;
the left foot, Marephnouth;
the toes of the left foot, Abrana.
- 29 [And (?)] seven, i.e. 7, were [ordained (?)] in charge of the preceding: 17-8
- 30 Mikhaēl;
Ouriēl;
Asmenedas;
Saphasatoēl;
Aarmouriam;
Rikhram;
Amiōrps.
- 32,33 And those which are in charge of perception are Arkhendekta: •and the
34 one that is in charge of reception,^d Deitharbathas; •of imaging,^e Oummaa;
35,1 of [harmony (with imaged information)], 18 Aakhiamam; •of all impulse
to action,^a Riaramnakhō.
- 2 And the wellspring of the demons that are in all the body is divided
5 in four: heat, cold, wetness, dryness. •And the mother of them all is
matter.
- 6 Ruling over heat (is) Phloksopha;
cold, Oroorrothos;
dryness, Erimakhō;
wetness, Athurō.
- 10 And Onorthokhrasaei the mother of all these stands in their midst, of
13 unlimited extent; and she is mixed with all of them. •And truly she is
matter, for they are nourished by her.
- 14 The four leading demons:
- 15 Ephememphi belongs with pleasure;
16 Iōkō, with desire;
17 Nenentōphni, with grief;
18 Blaomēn, with fear.

b. Or "Sounogkhouta."
c. Or "Thabin"
d. Or "perceived information."
e. Or "received information."

18 a. "reception . . . imaging . . . [harmony] . . . impulse to action"; jargon from the ethical division of Stoic philosophy.

- 18,19 And the mother of them all (is) Esthēnsis-Oukh-Epi-Ptoē.^b •And out of
the four demons came passions.
- 20 From grief:
envy;
fanaticism;
pain;
distress;
contention for victory;
lack of repentance;
anxiety;
mourning;
and so forth.
- 24 From pleasure come many imperfections and vain boasting, and the
like.
- 26 From desire:
anger;
wrath;
[bitterness];
bitter lust;
insatiableness;
and the like.
- 30 From fear:
terror;
entreaty;
anguish;
shame.
- 31,32 Now, all these are as it were virtues^c and vices. •And the thought of
1 their truth is Anaiō (?), which is the head of the material soul: 19 •for it
dwells with Esthēsis-Zoukh-Epi-Ptoē.^a
- 2,3 Here is the number of the angels: all told, they amount to 365; •and 11:25
they all labored at him (the human being), until limb by limb the animate
and material body^b was completed.
- 6 Now, others, whom I have not mentioned to you (sing.), preside over
8 the rest of the passions; •and if you want to know about them, the
matter is written in the *Book of Zoroaster*.

Porph 16.3 +

His immobility

- 10 And all the angels and demons labored, until they put the animate
13 body in order. •And for a long time their product existed inactive and
immovable.^c

RR 88.4
IrSat 1.24.1
IrUmd 1.30.6

Passage of wisdom's power into Adam

- 15 So when the mother wished to recover the power that she had
surrendered to the first ruler, she entreated the greatly merciful mother-

10:19
RR 87.4
FTh 40:25
IrSat 1.24.1
IrUmd 1.30.6

b. I.e. Greek *aisthēsis oukh epi ptoā*,
"perception not in a state of excitement";
more Stoic ethical jargon, a description of
the psychic state of the virtuous person.
c. Or "valued categories."

19 a. Greek for either "perception not in a
state of excitement" or "the seven percep-
tive faculties not in a state of excitement";
cf. note 18b.

b. "and material": with these words the
narrator anticipates slightly, since the ma-
terial body's creation is described at 20:28f.
The present passage tells only how the "ani-
mate . . . body was completed."

c. MSS BG and NHC III next have "For,
the seven authorities could not raise it; nei-
ther could the 360 angels that had constructed
the chains."

18 father^d of the entirety; •and by divine counsel the mother-father sent
21 five luminaries^e in place of^f the angels of the first ruler. •[And] they
counseled it (the ruler), and in consequence, the mother's power was
extracted from it.

EgG III 65:23⁹

22 Indeed, they said to Ialtabaōth, "Blow some of your spirit into his
25 face and his body will arise." •And Ialtabaōth blew some of its spirit,
that is, the power of its mother, upon him.

Gn 2:7
RAAd 64:22 +
RR 88.3
FTh 45:28
IrUnid 1.30.6

27,28 It did not understand, since it existed without acquaintance. •And the
mother's power left Altabaōth (i.e. Ialtabaōth) and entered the animate
body, which they had labored at after the image of the aboriginal existent.

Relegation of Adam to the realm of matter

32,34 The body moved, became strong, and shone. •And in that moment
1 the rest of the powers became envious; 20 •for by the efforts of all of
2 them he had come to exist, •and they had given their power to the
3 human being.^a •And his intelligence became stronger than those which
had made him, and stronger than the first ruler.

IrUnid 1.30.8

20:19 +

5 Now, when they knew that he shone, thought more than they did,
and was naked of imperfection, they took him and cast him down into
the lower part of all matter.

Sending of a helper (life) to Adam

9 But the blessed, beneficent, compassionate mother-father had pity on
13 the mother's power, which had been extracted from the first ruler; •and
furthermore (had pity) because they were about to gain control over the
14 animate and perceptible body. •And by its beneficent spirit whose mercy
is great it sent unto Adam a helper, a luminous afterthought,^b which
19 derived from it and which was called life (Zōē). •And afterthought
rendered assistance to the whole creature, suffering along with him;
20,21 leading him into his fulfillment;^c •teaching him about his descent as the
23 posterity—•about the way of ascent, by which he had descended.

RR 88.13
Th 14.10 +
FTh 35:12
IrSat 1.24.1
Gn 3:20
Th 16:11
FTh 35:12
v.19
20.3, 20:30
21 14, 22:15
22 28, 28:2
Gn 2:18
RAAd 64:12
RR 88.17
IrUnid 1.30.12
v.21
3St 127:20

24 And the afterthought of the light hid within Adam so that the rulers
27 might not understand, •and that rather the afterthought^c might be a
rectification of the mother's lack.^f

Creation of Adam's material body

28 And the human being became visible because of the light's shadow
30 that existed within him, •and his thinking surpassed all those who had
32 made him. •When they looked up, they beheld that his thinking was
33 higher. •And along with all the host of rulers and the host of angels,
35 they made a plan. •Taking fire, earth, 21 and water, they mixed them
2 together with the four fiery winds. •And they became forged to one
4 another, and a great disturbance was made. •And they brought him into

IrUnid 1.30 9

20:19 +

RR 87:23 +

Gn 2:7

d. Forethought.

e. MS BG instead has "sent the self-originate and its four luminaries."

f. MSS BG and NHC III, "after the manner of."

20 a. MS NHC III next has "And he bore (within him) the souls of the seven authorities and their powers."

b. Forethought (the "mother-father") sends wisdom back down into the material world from her temporary residence in the ninth

heaven, the realm of the aeon afterthought (14:11f). Wisdom as an envoy of forethought is called forethought's afterthought, an "afterthought, which derived from it."

c. Or "to all creation, suffering along with them."

d. Or "fullness."

e. "the afterthought": MSS BG and NHC III instead have "wisdom (Sophia) our sibling that resembles us."

f. I.e. might bring about the reclamation of the missing power.

the shadow of death, in order to perform again the act of modeling, out
7 of earth, water, fire, and the spirit that derives from matter—•that is,
out of the ignorance of darkness, and desire, and their counterfeit spirit.^a
9 That is the cave^b of the remodeling of the body in which the brigands
12 clothed^c the human being, the bond^d of forgetfulness. •And he became
13 a mortal human being. •It is he who was the first to descend, and the
first to separate.

22:32 +

Gn 2:21

20 19 +

14 But it was the afterthought of the light within him that was raising his
thinking.

His introduction into paradise

16 And the rulers brought him and put him in the garden (paradise).
18,19 And they said to him, "Eat"—namely, at leisure. •For in fact their food^e
21 is bitter, and their beauty is lawless; •while their enjoyment is deception,
their trees are impiety, their fruit is incurable poison, and their promise
24 is death. •And it was in the midst of the garden that they put the tree
of their life.

Gn 2 15

RR 88.24

Trees of paradise

26 Now, I shall teach you (plur.) what is the mystery of their life, the
29 plan they made with one another, the image of their spirit:^f •its root is
31 bitter; its branches are deadly; •its shade is hateful; deception resides
33 in its leaves; •its blossom is the anointing of wickedness; its fruit is
34,36 death; •its seed is desire; and it is in the dark that it blossoms. •The
2 dwelling place of those who eat 22 of it is Hades, •and the darkness is
their realm of repose.

FTh 44.19

3 But as for that tree which is called by them the tree of acquaintance
with good and evil, and which is the afterthought of the light, they^a
remained in its presence^b lest he^c gaze upon his fulfillment^d and recognize
9 the nakedness of his shame. •But I rectified them so that they ate.

Gn 2:9
RR 89.34
IrG 1.29.3
IrUnid 1.30.9
EpG 26.2.6

The snake

9 And I said to the savior, Sir, was it not the snake that taught Adam
to eat?
11,12 The savior laughed and said, •The snake taught them to consume
imperfection consisting of the sowing of desire for corruption, so that
15 he (Adam) might become useful to it. •And it knew that he was disobedient
to it^e because of the light of the afterthought dwelling within him and
18 making him more upright in his thinking than the first ruler. •And it

Gn 3:4

20:19 +

21 a. "counterfeit": or "mimicking, imitative." Cf. 29:14f. MS BG instead has "adversarial spirit."

b. "shadow . . . cave (Greek *spēlaion*)" (21:4–9f): Platonist clichés for the material world, based ultimately on Plato's *Republic*, book 7. "Cave" is also traditionally associated with "brigands" (21:9f).

c. The "brigands" (a cliché for demons) are the rulers; the material body is here likened to the soul's garment in which it is "clothed," another cliché.

d. "bond": a Platonist cliché for the material body.

e. Or "enjoyment."

f. The counterfeit spirit. Instead of "the

image of their spirit" MSS BG and NHC III have "namely their counterfeit spirit that derives from them so as to turn him back, so that he might not know his fulfillment (or fullness). That tree is of the following sort."

22 a. The rulers.

b. "remained in its presence": MSS BG and NHC III instead have "gave the command not to taste of it, i.e. not to hearken to it; for the commandment was directed against him."

c. Adam.

d. Or "fullness."

e. The snake is identified with one of the rulers, as in IrUnid.

wanted to extract from Adam the power that it had imparted to him.

20 And it caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam.

Gn 2:21

Creation of Eve

21 And I said to the savior, What does "deep sleep" mean?

RR 89:3

22,23 And it said, It is not as you have heard that Moses wrote; *for in his First Book (i.e. Genesis) he said that he made him lie down: no, rather 25 (it means) in his perceptions.^f *For also he said through the prophet, "I shall make their hearts^g heavy, that they might not understand, and might not be able to see."

13:18
IrSat 1.24.2

28,29 Next the afterthought of the light hid within him. *And the first ruler 31 wanted to extract it from his side. *But the afterthought of the light is 32 incomprehensible: *although the darkness was pursuing it, it could not comprehend^h it.

20:19 +

32 And it (the ruler) extracted a portion of his power from himⁱ and performed another act of modeling, in the form of a female, after the 36 image of the afterthought that had been shown forth to it. *And into the modeled form of femaleness it brought 23 the portion it had taken from the power^a of the human being—not "his rib," as Moses said.

21:13
Gn 2:21
RR 89:7 +
IrUnid 1.30.7
EpS 39.2.1

4,5 And he saw the woman beside him. *And at that moment the luminous afterthought was shown forth, for it had removed the veil from around 8 his heart; *and he became sober out of the drunkenness^b of the darkness. 9 And he recognized his partner in essence, and said, "This now is bone 11 of my bones and flesh of my flesh. *Therefore man will leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall both become one flesh. For his consort will be sent to him."

Gn 2:23
RR 89:13

20 Now, wisdom (Sophia) our sibling, who innocently descended^c in order to rectify her lack, was therefore called life (Zōē)—i.e. mother of 25 the living—by the forethought of the absolute power of heaven. *And 25 [. . .] him [. . .]. *And thanks to it (life) they tasted perfect acquaintance. 26 I myself was shown forth in the manner of an eagle upon the tree of acquaintance—which is the afterthought deriving from the uncontami- 30 nated, luminous forethought—*so that I might teach them and raise them 31 out of the depth of sleep. *For they both dwelled in a corpse,^d and knew 33 that they were naked. *The shining afterthought was shown forth to them, raising their thinking.

14:8 +
10.16
Gn 3:20

The expulsion from paradise

35 But when Aldabaōth (i.e. Ialtabaōth) knew that they had withdrawn 37 from it, it cursed its earth. *It found the female preparing 24 herself for 1,2 her male—he was master over her,^a *for he was not acquainted with the mystery that had come to pass from the holy plan.

RR 90:19
IrUnid 1.30.8
Gn 3:17
v.1
Gn 3:16

4,4 And they were afraid to rebuke it (Ialtabaōth). *And he (Adam) 6 showed^b its lack of acquaintance that is within it to its angels. *And it^c 7 expelled them from the garden, *and clothed them in obscure darkness.

Gn 3:24

f. MSS BG and NHC III instead have "rather, it covered his perceptions with a veil and weighed him down with unconsciousness."

g. MSS BG and NHC III, "the ears of their hearts."

h. Or "seize."

23 a. Wisdom's "power" is now divided between Adam and Eve; by them it will be transmitted into succeeding generations in the form of soul, cf. 26:26f.

b. Another common cliché for unperceptiveness, especially typical of gnostic texts.

c. As the luminous afterthought.

d. "corpse," or "fallen thing": the body.

24 a. "It found . . . over her" (23:37–24:1f); MSS BG and NHC III instead have "And what is more, it gave over the female so that the male might be master over her."

b. Or possibly "it (Ialtabaōth) displayed."

c. MS BG instead has "its angels."

Cain and Abel

8 And the first ruler saw the female virgin^d standing with Adam, and saw that the living, luminous afterthought had been shown forth within 12,13 her. *And Aldabaōth became filled with lack of acquaintance. *Now, the forethought of the entirety learned of this, and sent certain beings, 15 who caught life (Zōē) up out of Eve. *And the first ruler defiled her,^e and begot on her two sons—the first and the second, Elōim and laue.^f 18,19 Elōim has the face of a bear; laue, the face of a cat. *One is just, the 20 other is unjust: laue is just, Elōim is unjust. *It established laue in charge of fire and wind, and established Elōim in charge of water and 24 earth. *And it called them by the names Cain and Abel, with trickery in mind.

Gn 4:1
RAD 66:25
RR 91:11
EgG 71:6
IrUnid 1.30.9
EpS 39.2.1
EpA 40.5.3
v.13
RAD 64:28
RR 89:25

26 And to the present day sexual intercourse, which originated from the 28 first ruler, has remained. *And in the female who belonged to Adam it 29 sowed a seed of desire; *and by sexual intercourse it raised up birth in 31 the image of the bodies. *And it supplied them some of its counterfeit 32 spirit. *And it established the two rulers in charge of realms, so that they ruled over the cave.^g

RAD 67:2
Th 18:28

Seth

34 Now, after Adam had known the image of his own prior acquaintance,^h he begot the image 25 of the child of the human being,ⁱ and called him Seth, after the race^b in the eternal realms.

Gn 4:25
RR 91:30
EgG 71:10
IrUnid 1.30.9
EpS 39.2.4
EpA 40.7.1
RAD 65:5
9:11
v.2
EpG 26.1.7 +^j

2 Likewise, also the mother sent down her spirit^c in the image of the female being that resembled her, as a counterpart of what is in the 5 fullness; *for she^d was going to prepare a dwelling place for aeons that were going to descend.

Oblivion of Adam and Eve

7 And they were given water of forgetfulness^e by the first ruler, so that they might not know themselves and realize where they had come from. 9 And so the posterity temporarily remained, rendering service, so that whenever the spirit^f would descend from the holy aeons it might rectify 14 the posterity and heal it of the lack: *so that the entire fullness might become holy and without lack.

RAD 65:9

RAD 73:10
RR 92:30
14:8 +

B. THE SALVATION OF SOULS

The spirit of life

16 And I for my part said to the savior, Sir, will all souls then be saved and go into the uncontaminated light?

d. Eve.

e. Carnal Eve, from whom wisdom has now escaped.

f. "Elōim . . . laue": in Genesis and other Old Testament books Elohim and Yahweh (Jehovah) are names of the creator of this world, the god of Israel.

g. I.e. the material world (cf. note 21b).

h. Had had intercourse with Eve.

25 a. Or "the son of man."

b. Or "after the manner of birth."

c. To compensate for the departure of the spiritual element from Adam, Eve, and their

first two offspring (cf. 24:13f), wisdom now sends the "spirit" of life to humankind. It will remain in Seth's posterity as the element capable of being awakened and saved by true religion.

d. "the female being . . . she": possibly Seth's sister and wife, Nōrea, known from other Sethian texts where considerable emphasis is placed upon her role in establishing the posterity of Seth; cf. RR 91:34f; EpS 39.5.2–3; EpG 26.1.1f.

e. Or "deep sleep."

f. Forethought (the "holy spirit") as savior.

18 It answered and said to me, The matters that have arisen in your mind
20 are important ones: •indeed, it is difficult to disclose them to any but
those who belong to the immovable race,^g upon whom the spirit of life
25 will descend and dwell with power.^h •They will attain salvation and
26,26 become perfect. •And they will become worthy of greatnesses. •And
there they will become purified of every imperfection and of the anxieties
29 of wickedness: •being anxious for nothing except incorruptibility alone;
30 meditating on it thenceforth without anger, envy, grudging, desire, or
33 insatiableness as regards the entirety; •restrained by nothing but the
35 subsistent entity of the flesh, which they wear, •awaiting the time when
1 they will be visited 26 by those beings who take away. •Such souls are
3 worthy of eternal, incorruptible life and calling: •abiding all things and
enduring all things so that they might complete the contest and inherit
eternal life.

RAAd 66.1 +
RR 96:22 +
FTh 41.21
EgG 74:30
IrSut 1.24.2
EpS 39.2.4
EpG 26.6.2

RAAd 76.21

7 I said to him, Sir, can the souls upon whom the spirit of life has
descended, but who did not perform these deeds [attain salvation]?
10 It answered and said to me, If the spirit descends upon them, it is
12 quite sure that they will attain salvation; •and they will migrate. •Indeed,
14 the power will descend unto everyone^a—•for without it no one can stand
5 up. •And after they are begotten, if the spirit of life increases—for the
power comes (to them)—it strengthens that soul,^b and nothing can
20 mislead it into the works of wickedness. •But those upon whom the
counterfeit spirit descends will be beguiled by it and go astray.
22,23 But for my part I said, •Sir, so when the souls of these people have
come forth from their flesh, where will they go?
25,26 And it laughed and said to me, •The soul—which means the power—
will increase within it (the flesh) more greatly than the counterfeit spirit;
28,28 for it (the soul) is strong and will flee from wickedness. •And by visitation
of the incorruptible it will attain salvation and be taken into the repose
of the aeons.

The counterfeit spirit

32 But for my part I said, Sir, then where will the souls of these others,
who have not known to whom they belong, reside?
35 And it said to me, In the case of those others, the counterfeit spirit
1 has increased 27 within them while they were going astray. •And it
2 weighs down the soul, •and beguiles it into the works of wickedness,
3,4 and casts it into forgetfulness^a (or deep sleep). •And after it has come
forth it is given into the charge of the authorities, who exist because of
6 the ruler. •And they bind it with bonds and cast it into the prison.^b
8 And they go around with it^c until it awakens out of forgetfulness and
10 takes acquaintance unto itself. •And in this way, when it becomes perfect
it attains salvation.
11,12 But for my part I said, Sir, how is it that •the soul becomes thinner
and thinner, returning then to the nature of its mother or to the human
being?
14,16 Then it was happy when I asked it this, and said to me, •You are

g. The posterity of Seth.
h. Or “with the power.”

26 a. Wisdom’s “power” (19:28f) is transmitted, “descends,” to all the posterity of Adam in the form of soul, the animating element.

b. The Coptic text of MS NHC II is slightly corrupt here. MS NHC III instead has “After a person is begotten, the counterfeit spirit of

life of [. . .] is introduced. Now, if the strong (i.e. true) spirit of life [comes], the power or [soul] becomes strong [and is not] misled into wickedness.”

27 a. Cf. 22:23f, 25:7f.

b. Cause it to become incarnate in another material body (“prison”).

c. In cycles of reincarnation.

17 truly blessed, for you have understood! •That soul will be made to follow
19 the guidance of another in which the spirit of life resides, •and by that
20 other it attains salvation, •and so is not cast into flesh again.

EpG 26.10.7+

Apostates

21 And I said, Sir, where will the souls go of those who have gained
acquaintance and then turned away?
24 Then it said to me, They will be taken to the place where the angels
26 of poverty go—•it is the place where no act of repentance is performed—
27 and they will be kept until the day when those who have uttered
blasphemy against the spirit will be tortured and punished with eternal
punishment.

C. THE ENSLAVEMENT OF HUMANKIND

Destiny

31 But for my part I said, Sir, where did the counterfeit spirit come
from?
33 Then it said to me, It is the mother-father who is greatly merciful, the
holy spirit who in every way is compassionate and 28 suffers with you
2 (plur.), that is, the afterthought of the luminous forethought.^a •And it
raised up the posterity of the perfect race, raised their thinking, and
raised up the eternal light of the human being.
6 When the first ruler knew that they were greatly superior to it and
that they thought more than it did, it then wanted to arrest their
pondering; and it did not realize that they were superior to it in thought
11 and that it could not lay hold of them. •In the company of its authorities,
12 that is, its powers, it made a plan. •And in turns they fornicated with
13,15 wisdom; •and by them, destiny was begotten as bitterness (?): •this is
the last and varied bond, which is of diverse sorts, for they (the
17 authorities) differ from one another. •And it is difficult and overpowers
that being with whom the deities, angels, demons, and all the races have
21 mingled down to the present day. •For out of that destiny were shown
forth all impieties; violent action; blasphemy and the bond of forgetful-
24 ness; lack of acquaintance; •and all burdensome precepts, burdensome
26 sins, and great fears. •And thus they made all creation blind so that the
29 deity above them all might not be recognized. •And because of the bond
of forgetfulness, their sins became hidden (to them); for they had been
bound with measures, times, and ages, since it exerted mastery over
all.

20:19+

RR 87.17

FTh 43:13

The flood and Noah

32 And it (the ruler) repented of all things that had come to exist because
34 of it. •Again it made a plan: to bring down a flood 29 upon the human
creation.
1 But the greatness of the light of forethought taught *Noah*, and he
4 preached to all the posterity, that is, the children of humankind. •And
6 those who were alien to him did not pay heed to him. •They did not—
7 as Moses said—hide in an ark; •rather, it was in a certain place that
8 they hid. •Not only Noah, but many other people from the immovable

RAAd 69:2
RR 92:3
EgG 72:10
IrUnid 1.30.10
EpS 39.3.1
EpG 26.1.7
v.1
Gn 6:5f
IrUnid 1.30.10
EpG 26.1.7+?
RAAd 69:19
RR 92.8

28 a. The text may be corrupt here. Possibly some words have been left out, as follows: “The mother-father that is greatly merciful, the holy spirit that in every way is compas-

sionate and suffers with you (plur.), (. . .), that is, the afterthought of the luminous forethought.” Instead of “mother-father,” MS BG has simply “mother.”

12 race, went into a certain place and hid within a luminous cloud. •And
13 they recognized his absolute power. •And with him was that being which
belonged to the light, who had illuminated them. RAAd 70:16

The counterfeit spirit

14,16 For it (the ruler) had brought darkness down over all the earth. •And
17 in the company of its powers, it made a plan. •It sent its angels to the
daughters of humankind to take some of them unto themselves and so
20 to raise up a posterity as a comfort for themselves. •And at first they
21 did not succeed. •Then after they had not succeeded, they assembled
23 again, and all together made a plan. •They made a counterfeit spirit in
the image of the spirit that had descended, by which they would beful
26 the souls. •And the angels changed in image, after the images of their
spouses,^a filling them with the spirit of darkness, which they mixed with
30 them, and with wickedness. •They brought gold, silver, gifts, copper,
33 iron, metal, and all kinds of raw materials. •And they beguiled the people
who followed them into great anxieties, 30 leading them astray in many
2 errors. •Humankind grew old without having any leisure, and died
without discovering any truth or becoming acquainted with the god of
4 truth. •And thus was the whole creation perpetually enslaved, from the
foundation of the world down to the present time.
7 And they married women and begot children out of the darkness, Gn 6:5
8,9 after the image of their spirit. •And their hearts became closed and
hardened with the hardness of the counterfeit spirit, down to the present
time.

V. POEM OF DELIVERANCE

11 Then^a I, the perfect forethought of the entirety, transformed myself RR 97:1
into my posterity.
13 For, I existed in the beginning, traveling in every path of FTh 36:4 +
travel.
15 For it is I who am the riches of the light;
15 It is I who am the memory of the fullness.
17 And I traveled in the greatness of the darkness,
17 And I continued until I entered the midst of the prison.
19 And the foundations of chaos moved. 14:26⁹
20 And for my part, I hid from them because of their evil;
21 And they did not recognize me.
21 Again I returned, for a second time.
23 And I traveled, coming into the beings of the light— FTh 47:11
24 I, who am the memory of the forethought. EpS 39.3.1
25 I entered the midst of the darkness and the interior of Hades,
striving for my governance.
27 And the foundations of chaos moved, as though to fall down
upon those who dwelt in chaos and destroy them.
30 And once again I hastened back to my luminous root,^b
31 Lest they be destroyed before their time.
32 Yet a third time I traveled— RR 96:28 +
33 I who am the light that exists within the light,

29 a. Or “doubles.”

30 a. The following passage, 30:11f (“Then I . . .”) to 31:27f (“in your ears”) is not present in MSS BG and NHC III, which

instead have simply “then in the beginning the blessed mother-father, who is greatly merciful, takes form in its posterity. I have come to the perfect realm (aeon).”

b. Or “source.”

34 I the memory of the forethought—
35 So that I might enter the midst of the darkness and the
interior 31 of Hades:
1 I filled my face with the light of the end of their realm. IrSat 1.24 2 +
3 And I entered the midst of their prison,
4 Which is the prison of the body.
4 And I said, “O listener, arise from heavy sleep.” RAAd 66:1
6 And that person wept and shed tears, heavy tears; FTh 35:21
7 And wiped them away and said, “Who is calling my name?
9 “And from where has my hope come, as I dwell in the bonds
of the prison?”
10 And I said, “It is I who am the forethought of the
uncontaminated light;
12 “It is I who am the thinking of the virgin spirit, 4:26 +
13 “And I who am leading you to the place of honor.
14 “Arise! Keep in mind that you are the person who has
listened;
15 “Follow your root, which is myself, the compassionate;
16 “Be on your guard against the angels of poverty and the
demons of chaos and all those who are entwined with you;
20 “And be wakeful, (now that you have come) out of heavy
sleep and out of the garment in the interior of Hades.”
22 And I raised and sealed that person, with the light of the FTh 49:27 +
water of five seals,^a EgG 56:25
24 So that from thenceforth death might not have power over
that person.
25 And lo, now I shall enter the perfect eternal realm:
27 I have completed all things for you (sing.) in your ears.
28 For my part, I^b have told you (sing.) all things, so that you might RAAd 85 3
write them down and transmit them secretly to those who are like you Fr 68.16
31 in spirit. •For this is the mystery of the immovable race.^c

VI. FRAME STORY (CONCLUSION)

32 And the savior transmitted these things to him (John) so that he might
34 write them down and keep them safe. •And it said to him, “Cursed be
anyone who sells these in exchange for a bribe, for foodstuffs, for drink,
1 for clothing, or for anything else 32 of the sort.” •And these things were
transmitted to him mystically; and immediately, it vanished from before
4 him. •And he came to his fellow disciples and informed them of what
6 the savior had told him. •JESUS (IS) THE ANOINTED (CHRIST)!^a AMEN!^b

31 a. The “five seals” are associated with the reception of *gnōsis* in gnostic baptism (for which, see “Historical Introduction” in Part One).

b. The savior, forethought.

c. MS BG here adds: “Now, the mother came before me once again. Moreover, these are the things she did in the world. She caused the posterity to stand at rest. I shall tell you (plur.) about what is going to come to pass.”

nate (cf. 6:23f). This is the only reference in BJn to the Incarnation. Because it does not occur within the central body of the work, some scholars have suspected that it is not part of the original but rather is a pious exclamation added by an ancient Christian gnostic copyist or editor. On the other hand, for gnostic elaborations of the Incarnation, see FTh, EgG, IrUnid, EpS, EpA, EpG; and probably RAAd.

b. In the manuscripts the title of this work is written after the text (at 32:7f).

32 a. “the anointed”: the divine self-origi-

angelic beings—about whom none of the races of humankind knows
 9 anything—who will deliver them. •For, they will be situated atop a high EgG 80:16 +
 mountain upon a rocky outcrop^b of truth.
 12 They will be called oracles^c of incorruptibility [and] truth (given) unto
 those who, by wisdom of acquaintance and by teaching of angelic beings,
 18 are eternally acquainted with the eternal god: •because he is acquainted
 with all things.

III. TRANSMISSION AND CONTENTS OF THE TREATISE

19,21 These are the revelations that Adam disclosed to his son Seth. •And 64:2
 22 his son taught them to his seed. •This is the secret acquaintance of
 24 Adam that he delivered unto Seth •and which, for those who are
 26 acquainted with eternal acquaintance •through the agency of the reason-
 born beings and the incorruptible luminaries who emanated from the
 30 holy seed, is holy baptism,^d •Iesseus-Mazareus-Iessedekus, [the living] EgG 75 25 +
 water.^e

b. Or “rock.”
 c. Or “utterances.”
 d. True (“holy”) baptism is “acquain-
 tance” (gnōsis).

e. Uncertain remnants of one more line of
 text survive; apparently it was the title “Rev-
 elation of Adam” copied as a subscript,
 duplicating 64:1f.

THE REALITY OF THE RULERS

(RR)

Contents

The Reality of the Rulers (“Hypostasis of the Archons”) recounts the gnostic myth from the creation of Ialdabaōth down to Noah and the flood and concludes with a prediction of the final advent of the savior, the destruction of demonic powers, and the victory of the gnostics. In the first half of the work the story line intertwines with the wording of Genesis in the Septuagint Greek version, tacitly calling attention to discrepancies between the myth and canonical scripture. Of special importance is an unusual account of the rebellion of Sabaōth against his satanic father Ialdabaōth and his eventual installment as lord of the seventh heaven, i.e. as the god of Israel (?). Learned etymologies and puns on Semitic names suggest close contact with a Jewish or Jewish-Christian milieu, despite the anti-Jewish intention of the myth. Apart from the opening paragraph, no elements clearly characteristic of non-gnostic Christianity occur in the work. The author’s theological perspective stresses the activity of divine providence (“the will of the parent”) even in the deeds of the demonic rulers, probably thus altering to some degree the original intent of gnostic myth.

Literary background

The author and place of composition of RR are unknown. The date of its composition must be sometime before A.D. 350, the approximate date of the MS. The language of composition was Greek.

RR has a complex mixture of genres in which various traditional materials are subordinated to others:

- I. Learned treatise
 - A. Cosmogony
 - B. “True history” of humankind
 - 1. Angelic revelation dialogue
 - a. Cosmogony
 - b. Historical predictions

The whole work is presented as a *learned treatise* in which a teacher addresses a topic ostensibly suggested by the dedicatee of the work. The treatise begins with a fragment of *cosmogony*, which leads naturally into a revisionistic “true history” of the events in Gn 2:7f. Within the narration of the true history occurs an *angelic revelation dialogue* (for this genre, cf. BJn, “Literary background”). In it, the revealing angel repeats and elaborates the author’s fragment of *cosmogonic myth* in much broader scope, concluding with *historical predictions* of the coming of the savior and the end of days. At the end the narration assumes the form of poetry (parallel strophes).

THE GNOSTIC SCRIPTURES

A NEW TRANSLATION
WITH ANNOTATIONS
AND INTRODUCTIONS BY
BENTLEY LAYTON

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