

Paradise Reconsidered
in Gnostic Mythmaking

Nag Hammadi and Manichaeic Studies

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Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking

Rethinking Sethianism in Light
of the Ophite Evidence

By

Tuomas Rasimus



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PREFACE

This book is a revised version of my 2006 doctoral dissertation, completed jointly at the University of Helsinki, Finland, and Université Laval, Québec, Canada. I had the good fortune to be able to work under the guidance of two experts on Gnosticism, Profs. Ismo Dunderberg and Louis Painchaud, as well as in two research projects devoted to the study of Gnosticism and early Christianity. My original project in Helsinki, “Myth and Social Reality in Gnostic and Related Documents,” was a sub-project of a larger one (“Formation of Early Jewish and Christian Ideology,” led by Prof. Heikki Räisänen) that was funded by the Academy of Finland as a Centre of Excellence. Prof. Dunderberg, together with Profs. Antti Marjanen and Risto Uro, were members of that project, and their always valuable criticism and keen observations have often guided me through difficult phases in my research. The project at Université Laval, working on the French translations and new editions of the Nag Hammadi texts, *Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi* (BCNH), offered another great forum, where I was able to benefit from vivid scholarly discussions, especially in the project’s weekly translation seminars.

For my doctoral dissertation, I was originally supposed to investigate the relationship between two closely related Coptic texts from the Nag Hammadi library, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World*, a topic I had already dealt with in my Master’s thesis. However, Prof. Painchaud suggested to me that I should look more closely into what I had considered to be an insignificant detail: the mostly unexplored relationship between the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and another Nag Hammadi text, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*. I took his advice and found many interesting links between the two texts, especially concerning the Sophia myth, one of the most characteristic traits of Gnosticism. I proposed a paper on the Sophia myth to the 2001 *Society of Biblical Literature* (SBL) meeting, which was then accepted, and in anticipation, I presented a preliminary version of the paper in Laval project’s seminar. One thing I had noted already was that these two texts, as well as certain others, seemed to have something to do with Irenaeus’ description of the so-called Ophite myth (*Adversus haereses* 1.30). In the seminar, one of my fellow students, Michael Kaler, asked

me what did these Ophites have to do with Origen's report of the so-called Ophite diagram. I answered him that I did not really know but that I was going to find out. This book presents my findings.

My research has been funded by many institutions and I wish to express my thanks to them all. In 2000–2001, I enjoyed a research grant from the Academy of Finland; and a series of grants from the Finnish Cultural Foundation during 2003–2006. In some odd months between grants in 2001, 2003 and 2006, the Helsinki Centre of Excellence paid me a salary for my doctoral research. The BCNH project at Université Laval has also supported my studies with small grants and research assistant posts. As for various conference and seminar trips, I have received financial support from the University of Helsinki, the Academy of Finland, Université Laval, the Canadian Society of Patristic Studies and NordForsk.

In 2004–2008, NordForsk funded a network of Finnish, Norwegian and Danish research projects on Gnosticism, called the *Nordic Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism Network* (NNGN). This network has allowed me to work in collaboration with some 30 Nordic experts on Gnosticism, professors and students alike, as well as with invited foreign experts. I wish to express my thanks to the leaders of the network, Profs. Einar Thomassen, Nils Arne Pedersen, Antti Marjanen and Jørgen Podemann Sørensen, for organizing the seminars.

Some of the material in this book has already been published, although it is here modified, and is reproduced with permission from the respective publishers. Chapter 1 is based on my article: "Ophite Gnosticism, Sethianism and the Nag Hammadi Library," *Vigiliae Christianae* 59 (2005), 235–263. Chapter 2 is based on my article: "Serpent in Gnostic and Related Texts," *Colloque International "L'Évangile selon Thomas et les textes de Nag Hammadi: Traditions et convergences,"* L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier, eds., Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, Section: « Études » 8, Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval; Leuven: Peeters, 2007, 417–471. An earlier version of Chapter 5 was published as: "Ophite Myth of Adam and the Corinthian Situation," *Lux Humana, Lux Aeterna*, Festschrift for Lars Aejmelaeus, A. Mustakallio et al., eds., Publications of The Finnish Exegetical Society 89, Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005, 391–414. Chapter 8 is based on my article: "Anathema Iesus (1 Cor 12:3)? Origen of Alexandria on the Ophite Gnostics," *Coptica—Gnostica—Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*,

L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier, eds., *Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi*, Section: « Études » 7, Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval; Leuven: Peeters, 2006, 797–821. In addition, I read earlier versions of Chapters 6 and 7 at the SBL Annual Meetings in 2005 and 2004, with responses from John Turner and Michael Williams, respectively. I wish to thank them for their valuable feedback and comments that have helped me better formulate some of my ideas. I likewise want to express my deepest thanks to Mr. Ivo Romein, Ms. Mattie Kuiper and Ms. Gera van Bedaf at Brill as well as Asiatype, Inc. Philippines for their help in preparing the manuscript for publication. Many thanks are also due to Margot Stout Whiting and Tim Pettipiece for improving my English. Unless otherwise indicated, the citations of Coptic texts are from the editions published in Brill's *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies* and the 2007 National Geographic edition of *Codex Tchacos*.

In addition to the persons already mentioned, I wish to thank the following people for their feedback, comments and overall support: Harold Attridge, Risto Auvinen, Bernard Barc, Christian Bull, Dylan Burns, Serge Cazalais, Régine Charron, Julio César Dias Chaves, Adela Yarbrow Collins, Eric Crégheur, Paul Danove, Nicola Denzey, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Anne-Marit Enroth-Voitila, René Falkenberg, Wolf-Peter Funk, Jesper Hyldahl, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, Lance Jenott, Steve Johnston, Karen King, Minna Laine, Bentley Layton, Hugo Lundhaug, Dale Martin, Antti Mustakallio, Heidi Partio, Anne Pasquier, Birger Pearson, Paul-Hubert Poirier, Michel Roberge, Alin Suci, Ulla Tervahauta, Päivi Vähäkangas, Jennifer Wees, everyone in the NNGN, as well as all other individuals accidentally omitted in this list. Obviously, all shortcomings in this book are my own. I dedicate this work to my wife Céline and to my sons Luukas and Miika. To them I owe my inspiration.

Québec, April 7, 2009

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>1 Apoc. Jas.</i>	<i>The First Apocalypse of James</i>
<i>1 Jeu</i>	<i>The First Book of Jeu in the Bruce Codex</i>
<i>2 Jeu</i>	<i>The Second Book of Jeu in the Bruce Codex</i>
<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo</i>
<i>Adv. Ar.</i>	<i>Adversus Arium</i>
<i>Adv. haer.</i>	<i>Adversus haereses</i>
<i>Adv. Marc.</i>	<i>Adversus Marcionem</i>
<i>Adv. nat.</i>	<i>Adversus nationes</i>
<i>Adv. Prax.</i>	<i>Adversus Praxean</i>
<i>Agr.</i>	<i>De Agricultura</i>
<i>Alex.</i>	<i>Alexander the False Prophet</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquites</i>
<i>Ap. John</i>	<i>The Apocryphon of John</i>
<i>Apoc. Adam</i>	<i>The Apocalypse of Adam</i>
<i>Apoc. Mos.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Moses</i>
<i>Apoc. Pet.</i>	<i>The Apocalypse of Peter</i>
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologia</i>
<i>Ascen. Isa.</i>	<i>Ascension of Isaiah</i>
<i>Autol.</i>	<i>Ad Autolycum</i>
<i>Av.</i>	<i>Aves</i>
<i>Barn.</i>	<i>Barnabas</i>
<i>BG</i>	<i>Berolinensis Gnosticus, i.e., Berlin Codex 8502</i>
<i>b. Hag.</i>	<i>Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah</i>
<i>b. Sanh.</i>	<i>Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin</i>
<i>b. Shabb.</i>	<i>Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat</i>
<i>b. Yebam.</i>	<i>Babylonian Talmud, Yebamot</i>
<i>Cels.</i>	<i>Contra Celsum</i>
<i>Clem.</i>	<i>Clement</i>
<i>Cod. Bruc. Untitled</i>	<i>The Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>De confusione linguarum</i>
<i>Cor.</i>	<i>De corona</i>
<i>De antro</i>	<i>De antro nympharum</i>
<i>De gen. Socr.</i>	<i>De genio Socratis</i>
<i>De princ.</i>	<i>De principiis</i>
<i>Descr.</i>	<i>Description of Greece</i>

<i>De simpl.</i>	<i>De simplici medicina</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
<i>Dion.</i>	<i>Dionysiaca</i>
<i>Div. her. lib.</i>	<i>Diversarum hereseon liber</i>
<i>Enn.</i>	<i>Ennead</i>
<i>Ep. Apost.</i>	<i>Epistula Apostolorum</i>
<i>Exc. Theod.</i>	<i>Excerpta ex Theodoto</i>
<i>Ex. Rab.</i>	<i>Exodus Rabbah</i>
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga et inventione</i>
<i>Gen. Rab.</i>	<i>Genesis Rabbah</i>
<i>Gos. Judas</i>	<i>The Gospel of Judas</i>
<i>Gos. Phil.</i>	<i>The Gospel of Philip</i>
<i>Gos. Thom.</i>	<i>The Gospel of Thomas</i>
<i>Gos. Truth</i>	<i>The Gospel of Truth</i>
<i>Great Pow.</i>	<i>The Concept of Our Great Power</i>
<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus omnes haereses</i>
<i>Haer. fab. comp.</i>	<i>Haereticarum fabularum compendium</i>
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heresit</i>
<i>Herm. Sim.</i>	<i>Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude</i>
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>Histories</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Holy Book</i>	<i>The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit (Nag Hammadi III,2; IV,2), previously known as the Gospel of the Egyptians</i>
<i>Hom.</i>	<i>Pseudo-Clementine Homilies</i>
<i>Hyp. Arch.</i>	<i>The Hypostasis of the Archons</i>
<i>In phys.</i>	<i>In Aristotelis physicorum commentaria</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>L.A.E.</i>	<i>Life of Adam and Eve</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legatio pro Christianis</i>
<i>Leg. all.</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae</i>
<i>Lev. Rab.</i>	<i>Leviticus Rabbah</i>
<i>Lib.</i>	<i>Library</i>
<i>Lib. schol.</i>	<i>Liber scholiorum</i>
<i>LR</i>	<i>Long recension (of the Apocryphon of John)</i>
<i>Medit.</i>	<i>Meditations</i>
<i>Melch.</i>	<i>Melchizedek</i>
<i>Midr. Rab.</i>	<i>Midrash Rabbah</i>
<i>Midr. Teh.</i>	<i>Midrash Tehillim</i>

<i>Mos.</i>	<i>De Vita Mosis</i>
<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Natural History</i>
NH	Nag Hammadi
<i>Norea</i>	<i>The Thought of Norea</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OF	Orphic Fragment
<i>On Bap. A</i>	<i>On Baptism A</i>
<i>Opif.</i>	<i>De opificio mundi</i>
<i>Orig. World</i>	<i>On the Origin of the World</i>
<i>Oxyr.</i>	<i>Oxyrhynchus Papyrus</i>
<i>Pan.</i>	<i>Panarion</i>
<i>Paraph. Shem</i>	<i>The Paraphrase of Shem</i>
PGM	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>
<i>Phaen.</i>	<i>Phaenomena</i>
<i>Pirqe R. El.</i>	<i>Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer</i>
<i>Pist. Soph.</i>	<i>Pistis Sophia</i> , four books in the Askew Codex
<i>Plat. Phaedr.</i>	<i>Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus</i>
<i>Post.</i>	<i>De posteritate Cain</i>
<i>Praesc.</i>	<i>De praescriptione haereticorum</i>
QG	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesin</i>
<i>Quaest.</i>	<i>Quaestiones</i>
<i>Quis div.</i>	<i>Quis dives salvetur</i>
<i>Recog.</i>	<i>Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions</i>
<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Refutatio omnium haeresium (Elenchos)</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>De somniis</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus</i>
<i>Soph. Jes. Chr.</i>	<i>The Sophia of Jesus Christ</i>
SR	Short recension (of the <i>Apocryphon of John</i>)
<i>Steles Seth</i>	<i>The Three Steles of Seth</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromata</i>
<i>Teach. Silv.</i>	<i>The Teachings of Silvanus</i>
<i>Testim. Truth</i>	<i>The Testimony of Truth</i>
<i>Tg. Ps.-J.</i>	<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>
<i>Thund.</i>	<i>The Thunder: Perfect Mind</i>
<i>Treat. Seth</i>	<i>The Second Treatise of the Great Seth</i>
<i>Trim. Prot.</i>	<i>The Trimorphic Protennoia</i>
<i>Tri. Trac.</i>	<i>The Tripartate Tractate</i>
<i>Val.</i>	<i>Adversus Valentinianos</i>
<i>Val. Exp.</i>	<i>A Valentinian Exposition</i>

<i>Vir. ill.</i>	<i>De viris illustribus</i>
<i>Vita</i>	<i>Vita Adae et Evae</i>
<i>Vit. Apoll.</i>	<i>Vita Apollonii</i>
<i>Vit. Plot.</i>	<i>Vita Plotini</i>
<i>Zost.</i>	<i>Zostrianos</i>

PART I

INTRODUCTION

PROLOGUE

This book examines the mythology in and social reality behind a group of texts from the Nag Hammadi and related codices as well as from heresiological literature, to which certain leaders of the early church attached the label Ophite, i.e., snake people (from the Greek word for snake, ὄφις). In the mythology, which essentially draws upon and rewrites the Genesis paradise story, the snake's advice to eat from the tree of knowledge is considered positive, the creator and his angels are turned into demonic beasts with specific names and the true Godhead is presented as an androgynous heavenly projection of Adam and Eve. It will be argued that this unique mythology is attested in *On the Origin of the World* (NH II,5; NH XIII,2; British Library Or. 4926[1]), *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (NH II,4), *The Apocryphon of John* (NH II,1; III,1; IV,1; BG,2), *Eugnostos the Blessed* (NH III,3; V,1), *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* (NH III,4; BG,3; *Oxyr.* 1081), and in reports of Irenaeus (*Adversus haereses* 1.30), Origen (*Contra Celsum* 6.24–38) and Epiphanius (*Panarion* 26).¹ I will also propose that this so-called Ophite evidence is essential for a proper understanding of Sethianism, arguably one of the earliest forms of Gnosticism. According to Hans-Martin Schenke, sixteen texts from the Nag Hammadi and related codices as well as from heresiological literature,² are products of a pre-Christian Jewish group whose members practiced baptism and contemplative heavenly ascent, and saw themselves as the virtuous offspring of the Biblical Seth. Based on common features in the

¹ Epiphanius' description of the "Ophites" in *Pan.* 37 is ultimately based on Irenaeus, and does not add any new reliable information. See below.

² The sixteen texts in Schenke's Sethian corpus are *The Apocryphon of John* (NH II,1; III,1; IV,1; BG,2), *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (NH II,4), *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (NH III,2; IV,2), *The Apocalypse of Adam* (NH V,5), *The Three Steles of Seth* (NH VII,5), *Zostrianos* (NH VIII,1; fragments of another Coptic manuscript have now been published, see Kasser and Luisier 2007), *Melchizedek* (NH IX,1), *The Thought of Norea* (NH IX,2), *Marsanes* (NH X), *Allogenes* (NH XI,3), *The Trimorphic Protennoia* (NH XIII,1), *The Untitled Text* in the Bruce Codex, and the accounts of Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.29 (Barbeloites), and Epiphanius, *Pan.* 26, 39 and 40 ("libertine Gnostics," "Sethians," and "Archontics," respectively). See H.-M. Schenke 1981.

mythology of these texts (e.g., a triad of Father-Barbelo-Son, with the Son's four lights housing Adam, Seth and his "seed"), Schenke constructed a typological model of the "Sethian system."³ Despite criticism from some scholars,⁴ Schenke's theory has inspired a large quantity of scholarly work and has become generally accepted.⁵ While "Ophitism" in nineteenth-century scholarship was often considered an early and classic form of Gnosticism, today, due to the Nag Hammadi findings and Schenke's theory, Sethianism has come to be considered the classic and early, perhaps even the earliest, form of Gnosticism, rooted in Jewish soil and only secondarily Christianized.

This consensus, however, has resulted in an unfortunate bias in scholarship. Many texts not fitting Schenke's model have either been neglected or forced into it, even though they lack Sethian features. Although Schenke's model does reveal an important constellation of mythic themes and figures, it does not seem to reveal the whole picture of the "Sethian" text evidence. Some texts, among others the "most classic of Sethian texts," *Ap. John*,⁶ which exists in no less than four Coptic copies (in the following, I will simply speak of *Ap. John* or of authors [pl.] of *Ap. John* if the context does not demand a more subtle distinction among the Coptic versions), include narrative material about the events in paradise that does not fit Schenke's model. Very similar paradise material, which some heresiologists labeled "Ophite," is also attested in non-Sethian (e.g., *Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Orig. World*), or only slightly Sethian (e.g., *Hyp. Arch.*) contexts. Moreover, since the figure of Seth, arguably the hallmark of Sethian Gnosticism,⁷ does not appear in some "Sethian" texts at all (*Adv. haer.* 1.29, *Trim. Prot., Marsanes, Norea*), it seems that Schenke's model of the "Sethian system" is not after all the best way to account for the material that appears in the texts of his corpus. I propose we create an altogether new category that better explains this multiform textual evidence. The proposed new category, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1, is wider, and it not only adds texts that have features of the Ophite mythology along-

³ See H.-M. Schenke 1974; H.-M. Schenke 1981; H.-M. Schenke 1987.

⁴ Tardieu 1977; Wisse 1981; Van den Broek 1983, 54–56; Marksches 2003, 97–100.

⁵ See, e.g., Stroumsa 1984; M. Williams 1985; Sevrin 1986; Layton 1987; Pearson 1990, 52–83; Scott 1995; Turner 1995; Logan 1996; Turner 2001; M. Williams 2005; Pearson 2007.

⁶ Layton 1987, 23; Turner 2001, 69.

⁷ Cf. H.-M. Schenke 1974; H.-M. Schenke 1981; M. Williams 2005.

side Schenke's Sethian texts, but it also arranges the material in smaller typological units. It will be argued that Schenke's "Sethian system" only reveals part of a larger whole, to which the Ophite mythology belongs as an important and organic component. The proposed new category thus sets a framework and justification for the study of the so-called Ophite evidence. Because Seth is not the focal point in this new and wider category, I propose we rename this remodeled and expanded Sethian corpus. For reasons that will become apparent, I have chosen to call this category "Classic Gnostic."

I have divided this book into four parts: (I) Introduction; (II) Myth and Innovation; (III) Ritual;⁸ and (IV) Conclusion. I then execute four steps in examining the evidence, although the four parts and the four steps do not correspond exactly; steps two and three will be taken simultaneously in Part II: Myth and Innovation. Part I, the Introduction, consists of this Prologue and Chapter 1. In Chapter 1, the sources and previous research on Ophites and Sethians are examined, and the new category to replace Schenke's Sethian one is introduced to provide a framework for the study of the Ophite evidence. This is step one. Chapter 1 also includes discussion about the use of such terms as Gnostic, Sethian and Ophite. I wish to point out from the outset that these terms are artificial and are here used to denote typologically constructed categories. Chapters 2–6, then, constitute Part II: Myth and Innovation. Chapters in this part explore key themes in the mythology of the texts. Steps two and three are taken in these chapters. Step two consists of text comparison. It will be shown that (a) texts belonging to my Ophite corpus, including the ones with Sethian characteristics, usually agree fairly well with each other on a given theme, whereas (b) the remaining texts in Schenke's Sethian corpus present a clearly different version of the same theme—the specific features of the Ophite mythology as identified in this study are not included among Schenke's criteria for the "Sethian system" either; and finally, (c) *Ap. John*, where both Ophite and Sethian features are present, treats themes dealing with the true Godhead in accordance with the "Sethian system," but presents themes dealing with the lower worlds in line with the Ophite speculations.

⁸ For discussion of the use of the terms "Myth" and "Ritual," see Zuesse 1987; C. Bell 2005; Bolle 2005; Harrelson 2005; and Ricoeur 2005.

In Part II (Chapters 2–6), I also attempt to go beyond text and myth, to explore the *types* of social situation(s) that could have given rise to the innovation of certain key concepts expressed in the texts. This is step three. Obviously, this is a difficult task and any results must be regarded as somewhat hypothetical. One must also avoid the danger of confusing a typological construction with a historical entity, a mistake many heresiologists and modern scholars have made. However, such an attempt to leap beyond text and myth seems a worthwhile enterprise since it may give us important clues as to the origins and development of Sethian and Ophite Gnosticism, which still remain largely unsolved problems. Among other things, I search for sociological information that may be found in polemical statements and self-designations. Because certain important themes and figures in the Ophite mythology, especially material about Sophia and Adam, also have clear links to 1 Cor and Philo, these links may further tell us something important about the innovators of the Ophite mythology. The links between 1 Cor and Gnosticism (however defined) have long been debated,⁹ and my work attempts to shed additional light on the nature and meaning of these links. The question of a secondary “Sethianization” of earlier Gnostic materials, suggested by some scholars, will be examined in Chapter 6. Themes and figures to be examined in Part II are: the serpent (Chapter 2); the creator and the archons (Chapter 3); Sophia, Eve and *gnosis* (Chapter 4); Adam and Christ (Chapter 5); and Seth (Chapter 6). At the end of Chapter 6, there is a concluding summary of Part II.

Part III consists of Chapters 7–9 and is entitled “Ritual.” This part thus further explores the social reality behind the texts of the Ophite corpus, and constitutes the fourth step. In these chapters, I examine information and claims concerning Ophite rituals that appear in heresiological literature. The veracity of this information is assessed both by examining the sources and rhetorical agendas of the informants (Hippolytus, Celsus, Origen, Epiphanius), and by looking for corroborating evidence in the mythology of texts that contain Ophite characteristics. Whereas most of these claims are, in fact, based merely on malicious rumors and slander (snake worship, Chapter 7; initiatory

⁹ See, e.g., Jervell 1960, 243, 257–268; Schottroff 1970, 133–135, 166f., 170ff.; Schmithals 1971; Pearson 1973, 24–26, 51ff., 82f.; Conzelmann 1975, 283–288; Sandelin 1976, 40f.; Reitzenstein 1978, 443f.; Rudolph 1987, 300–302; Hultgren 2003.

cursing of Jesus, Chapter 8; promiscuous practices, Chapter 9), Cel-sus' information about an anointment ritual called the "seal," which is attached to a mythology of heavenly ascent, seems more or less reliable. Furthermore, this Ophite "sealing" has interesting links to the purported Sethian baptismal ritual known as the five "seals," which itself is also connected with a mythology of heavenly ascent.¹⁰ These sealing rituals will be discussed in Chapter 9. Interestingly, the mythological speculations that, in Classic Gnostic texts, are connected with such sealings, i.e., initiatory baptismal practices, have certain links to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel. These links will also be assessed in Chapter 9 as they are sometimes used to support the idea of a Gnostic background of the Fourth Gospel or of its Prologue.

The book concludes with Part IV, which consists of an epilogue. It summarizes the main results of the study and addresses introductory questions concerning the date and provenance of the Ophite evidence. To discuss introductory questions at the end may seem odd, but since this study is somewhat pioneering in character, I thought it best to address such issues only after the evidence has been examined in detail. In the Epilogue, I also briefly consider attempts to apply the sociological model of Stark and Bainbridge of the origin and organization of modern schismatic religious movements¹¹ to Schenke's Sethian evidence.¹² I then offer a few remarks concerning the application of the Stark and Bainbridge theory to the Ophite evidence. Finally, it should be noted that an examination of Valentinian, Mandaean and Manichaean parallels to Classic Gnostic material falls outside the scope of this study, and only occasional remarks will be made.

¹⁰ On the Sethian baptism, see especially H.-M. Schenke 1981; Sevrin 1986; and Turner 2006b.

¹¹ See especially Stark and Bainbridge 1985.

¹² Scott 1995; Logan 2006, 58–61.

CHAPTER ONE

RETHINKING SETHIANISM

As Hans-Martin Schenke's theory of Sethian Gnosticism seems to reveal only part of a larger whole to which the Ophite evidence belongs as an organic component, I argue that without this Ophite evidence, Sethianism and its origins cannot be properly understood. The purpose of this chapter is to construct a new and wider category to replace Schenke's Sethian one and thus to provide a framework and justification for the study of the Ophite evidence. In order to do this, and especially since the terms, Ophite and Sethian, have been used in several different and confusing ways in heresiological and scholarly literature, it is necessary to go through four specific steps in this chapter. First, I will discuss the heresiological reports on the Ophites, since the previous research on Ophitism to date has drawn almost solely upon these reports. The main features in those accounts that contain reliable information about Ophite teaching (most heresiological reports merely reproduce earlier ones or add slanderous claims) will be used to provide a preliminary typological model for Ophite mythology. This model will then be elaborated in the course of the study. Second, heresiological reports and previous research on Sethians, as well as those documents that have been included in various constructions of Sethian Gnosticism, will be examined. Schenke's theory and recent modifications to it will be discussed here, together with the shift in scholarly interest from Ophite to Sethian Gnosticism due to the Nag Hammadi findings. This brings us to the third step: I will argue that the Nag Hammadi codices contain texts that have features of the Ophite mythology, too, but that these texts are also intimately linked with Schenke's Sethianism. This, in turn, brings us to the fourth and final step of this chapter, namely, the construction of a new category to replace Schenke's Sethian one, by reorganizing and extending his corpus to also include the Ophite evidence.

1.1 OPHITES IN HERESIOLOGICAL LITERATURE AND PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

The term, Ophite, is artificial and was secondarily applied to Irenaeus' description of a "Gnostic" myth in *Adv. haer.* 1.30, by later heresiologists and copyists of Irenaeus' work.¹ Origen, for his part, applied the term, Ophian, to a "Christian" diagram described by Celsus in *True Doctrine* (which survives only in Origen's *Contra Celsum*). As will be seen, descriptions of this diagram—a drawing representing a map of the universe—shares many features with Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30, and Origen may well have identified the diagram as Ophian (i.e., Ophite) due to its similarity with *Adv. haer.* 1.30; the latter had already been identified as Ophite by Origen's time.² The other heresiological reports of the Ophites are mostly dependent on Irenaeus and do not seem to add any new reliable information. Thus, Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30 and Origen's *Cels.* 6.24–38 are our main heresiological sources concerning the mythology that became known as Ophite. I will next discuss the content and nature of the heresiological reports about the Ophites, as well as the sources behind them, starting with Irenaeus' account (*Adv. haer.* 1.30) as this is the most extensive report of the so-called Ophite teaching.

The reader gets the impression that, in *Adv. haer.* 1.30, Irenaeus is summarizing a written source, not unlike *Hyp. Arch.*, *Orig. World* or the second half of *Ap. John* (approximately II 10,1–30,11 parr.). This source has a clear but problematic relationship to *Ap. John*, which has led some scholars to suggest that *Adv. haer.* 1.30 should be included in the Sethian Gnostic corpus even though it lacks actual Sethian features.³ *Adv. haer.* 1.30 has also been included in attempts to account for the literary history of *Ap. John*.⁴ Irenaeus' catalog of heresies culminates in two extensive chapters describing Gnostics *par excellence*

¹ The text in *Adv. haer.* 1.30.1 simply has "others (*alii*)," but it refers to the beginning of the previous chapter, 1.29.1, which introduces the opinions of the "multitude of Gnostics (*multitudo Gnosticorum*)."² The title "Ophite" (or the like) in the manuscripts is a later addition to Irenaeus' text. See Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979, 30ff., 157–164, 296–300.

² It is not certain whether Origen knew Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.*, or Hippolytus' *Synagoga*, but he was, in any case, aware of heresiological traditions concerning the "Ophites." See Chapter 8.5.

³ Turner 2001, 61; Pearson 2007, 56–58.

⁴ Logan 1996; Turner 2001.

(*Adv. haer.* 1.29–30).⁵ These two chapters generally agree in content and order with the two main halves of *Ap. John*, although the parallels between the first chapter (*Adv. haer.* 1.29) and the first half of *Ap. John* (approximately II 4,29–10,28 parr.) are closer than those between the latter chapter (*Adv. haer.* 1.30) and the latter half of *Ap. John*. Given the close correspondence between 1.29 and *Ap. John*, scholars usually assume that Irenaeus was quoting from a version or a source of *Ap. John* when composing chapter 1.29.⁶ However, after Irenaeus has, in 1.29, summarized a description of a complex divine hierarchy that closely corresponds to the first half of *Ap. John*, he stops (“Such are their lies,” *Adv. haer.* 1.29.4) and moves on to relate the teachings of “others” (*alii*; 1.30.1) among these Gnostics. This following chapter, *Adv. haer.* 1.30, then starts with its own and completely different description of the divine hierarchy (see below). This gives the impression that Irenaeus has changed his source here. Thus, if Irenaeus was quoting from a version of *Ap. John* in composing chapter 1.29, he may have used another, closely related text in composing 1.30.⁷ Logan has suggested that Irenaeus omitted the continuation of his version of *Ap. John* and used instead another, yet related document in composing the following chapter (*Adv. haer.* 1.30) because it better suited his purposes of proving a “Gnostic” background for Valentinian mythology (cf. 1.11.1; 1.30.15; 1.31.3).⁸ This is a reasonable suggestion, although, since *Ap. John* exists in two recensions, short (SR) and long ones (LR), both attested by two Coptic copies,⁹ it obviously has had a complex literary history; it is thus possible that Irenaeus’ version was simply different from the Coptic versions known to us and covered both chapters (*Adv. haer.* 1.29–30). Be that as it may, *Adv. haer.* 1.30 is the most

⁵ Even though Irenaeus says certain Carpocratians called themselves Gnostics (*Adv. haer.* 1.25.6), and despite the fact that he labels his whole treatise, *Exposure and Refutation of Gnosis Falsely so-called*, he nevertheless seems to reserve the term, “Gnostics,” specifically for the groups described in *Adv. haer.* 1.29–31; the reference in 1.11.1, for example, appears to be to 1.29–31. For discussion of Irenaeus’ use of the term “Gnostic,” see Brox 1966; Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979, 299–300; and M. Williams 1996, 33–37.

⁶ Waldstein and Wisse 1995, 1; Turner 2001, 69; M. Williams 2005, 43; Luttikhuisen 2006, 2, 167.

⁷ Cf. Wisse 1971, 215, 218.

⁸ Logan 1996, 43.

⁹ The two copies of SR are found in NH III,1 and BG,2. The two copies of LR are found in NH II,1 and IV,1. While the two versions of LR are practically identical, there are some differences between the two versions of SR. See Waldstein and Wisse 1995.

extensive account of the so-called Ophite teaching. Let me therefore summarize its content at some length here.

The first principle, the supreme God, is called the First Man. From him came forth his thought (*ennoia*), apparently identified as the Son of Man, the Second Man.¹⁰ Below these was the First Woman—also called the Holy Spirit and the Mother of the living—and below her the elements: water, darkness, abyss and chaos. Both the First and Second Man united with the First Woman who begot the Third Man, Christ. These four beings form the heavenly *Ekklesia*. However, due to an overflow of light, the First Woman also gave birth to Sophia, who fell down to the waters below. Having struggled, she managed to ascend and free herself from the body she had assumed. The remains of her body fathered the creator Ialdabaoth, who, endowed with her power, produced six angelic offspring: Iao, Sabaoth, Adonaeus, Eloeus, Oreus and Astaphaeus. Together with their father they formed the “hebdomad.” These cosmic rulers represent both the seven planets and the seven days of the week; they are also the creators of Adam (see Chapter 3). The offspring then started a war against their father, battling for the supreme power. Ialdabaoth, for his part, produced a serpent-formed offspring, apparently to help him. This serpent is the devil and is called *Nous*, Michael, and Samael. It is said to be not only the source of the spirit, soul, and all worldly things, but also of oblivion, wickedness, emulation, envy, and death (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–5, 9).

Ialdabaoth then claimed to be the only God, with words reminiscent of YHWH’s monotheistic claim, “I am father, and God, and above me there is no one” (cf. Isa 46:9). Sophia, in turn, rebuked him by calling him a liar and informed him of the existence of the Man and Son of Man, i.e., the supreme God and his divine son. Apparently in response to this information, Ialdabaoth suggested to his offspring, “Let us make man after our image” (cf. Gen 1:26). Sophia caused the six offspring to think of Man, but their production (Adam) could only writhe on the ground until Sophia caused Ialdabaoth to breathe the divine power into him (cf. Gen 2:7). This act marks the beginning of the struggle for

¹⁰ *Alii autem rursus portentuosam loquuntur, esse quoddam primum Lumen in uirtute Bythi, beatum et incorruptibile et in terminatum: esse autem hoc Patrem omnium et uocari Primum Hominem. Ennoeam autem eius progredientem filium dicunt emitentis: et esse hunc Filium Hominis, Secundum Hominem* (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.1, Rousseau and Doutreleau, ed.). On the confusion concerning the identities of *Ennoia* and the Son of Man, see below, p. 45.

the possession of the light-power, characterizing the history of salvation, with Sophia and Ialdabaoth being the main forces in this struggle. By virtue of the breath, Adam gained *nous* and *enthymesis*, and thus could depart from his creators and praise the First Man. In order to regain the power, Ialdabaoth produced a woman (Eve). After Sophia had emptied her of power, the other rulers raped Eve and begat angels by her. Sophia, in turn, used the unwitting serpent (Ialdabaoth's son) to make Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge contrary to Ialdabaoth's commandment. Ialdabaoth, however, cursed them and threw them out of paradise (situated in the heavenly regions) along with the serpent, since it was through it that Adam and Eve were persuaded to eat (cf. Gen 3). The serpent subjugated the sub-lunar angels and begat six offspring to form with them a "lower hebdomad," in imitation of the hebdomad of Ialdabaoth. This evil, lower hebdomad consists of the seven mundane demons, who continuously oppress humankind. The double-evaluation of the serpent in Irenaeus' account is clear: even though its advice to eat from the forbidden tree is seen in a positive light, it remains an essentially evil being. Adam and Eve later begat Cain, whom the serpent ruined, then Abel, who was killed by Cain, and finally (by the providence of Sophia) Seth and Norea, from whom the rest of humankind derives (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.6–9). Seth seems to play no special role here, unlike in many Sethian texts where he is a savior and an originator of his own race (see Chapter 6).

Ialdabaoth later sent the Flood to destroy humanity, but Sophia opposed him again and saved Noah and his family. Ialdabaoth then chose Abraham, Moses, and certain prophets from Israel through whom the planetary rulers spoke. Sophia also announced things concerning the First Man and Christ through these prophets. However, finding neither rest nor general acceptance, Sophia prayed for help, and Christ was sent to her. Together they descended into the human Jesus at his baptism, thus producing Jesus Christ. But when Ialdabaoth brought about Jesus' crucifixion, Christ and Sophia departed. Jesus was then resurrected by Christ, and the former tarried on earth for eighteen months, instructing some of his disciples. This is reminiscent of the frame stories of *Soph. Jes. Chr.* and *Ap. John*, where the risen Jesus instructs his disciple(s). It seems therefore possible that Irenaeus disassembled the frame story of his source to present the material in a chronological order, although this remains speculative. Finally, according to Irenaeus' source, Jesus was taken to heaven, where he receives "holy souls" and leaves others to Ialdabaoth, who sends them

back into new bodies. When Jesus has gathered all of the holy souls, i.e., all the light-power, the end of the world takes place (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.10–14). For the most part, this tale is based on the first chapters of Genesis—complemented with speculations on Wisdom Christology—and, as pointed out above, paralleled by certain well-known Nag Hammadi texts, including *Ap. John*.

Irenaeus seems to stop here by asserting that “Such are their doctrines, by which was generated the Valentinian school, like the many-headed Lernaean hydra” (1.30.15). He then proceeds to report further opinions among these “Gnostics,” in *Adv. haer.* 1.30.15–1.31.2. Some scholars treat these as a short appendix drawn from miscellaneous sources.¹¹ In *Adv. haer.* 1.30.15, Irenaeus reports that “certain others” (*quidam*) held that Sophia herself became the snake, and that humanity has her imprint in the serpent-shaped intestines. These snake speculations thus resemble the actual Ophite narrative (1.30.1–14) where Sophia already had a close association with the snake in using it as her tool (1.30.7). Perhaps this opinion of “certain others” derives from such an ambivalent distinction between Sophia and the snake. However, whereas these snake speculations in 1.30.15 seem still related to the Ophite myth of chapter 1.30, the following opinions in 1.31.1 concerning Cain, Sodomites and Judas, as well as of the “womb” in 1.31.2, seem to represent different types of speculations. Later heresiologists treated 1.30.15 as part of the “Ophite” myth of 1.30.1–14, while labeling 1.31.1–2 as “Cainite.”¹² Irenaeus affirms that 1.31.1 is based, at least partially, on a *Gospel of Judas*, and the Codex Tchacos text by the same name does resemble Irenaeus’ information. In Irenaeus’ account, Judas is said to have alone known the truth and have performed the mystery of betrayal (*Adv. haer.* 1.31.1). In the Coptic text, Jesus often singles out Judas in order to disclose secrets to him. Whether Jesus also asked Judas to betray himself in the Coptic text (56,17–21) is disputed,¹³ but at least the heresiologists seem to have interpreted their version of the *Gospel of Judas* in this way (see Chapter 8). The Coptic *Gospel of*

¹¹ See Lipsius 1863, 424, 457; Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979, 162–163; Layton 1987, 181; Pearson 1990, 105.

¹² Cf. Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 2.1–6; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 37–38; Theodoret, *Haer. fab. comp.* 1.14.

¹³ The scholarly opinion about Judas’ role in the Coptic *Gospel of Judas* has begun to shift from the initial positive interpretation towards an understanding that Judas is no hero in the text. For the positive view, see Kasser, Meyer, Wurst and Gaudard 2007; Pagels and King 2007. For the negative view, see DeConick 2007; Painchaud 2008.

Judas also has features of Schenke's Sethian system, and shares certain interesting parallels with *Holy Book* and *Ap. John*.¹⁴ Thus, the Coptic *Gos. Judas* seems to confirm Irenaeus' claim that the speculations described in *Adv. haer.* 1.31 come from the same "Gnostic" group as the mythology behind 1.29 (and 1.30).¹⁵ In any case, if the additional opinions concerning Sophia and the snake in 1.30.15 are inspired by the Ophite mythology reported in 1.30.1–14, it seems nevertheless best to treat the following ("Cainite") teachings in 1.31.1–2, as a condensed mixture of related yet distinct pieces of Gnostic speculation, deriving partially from a "Sethian" *Gos. Judas*, partially from other, unidentified sources.

Around the same time as Irenaeus (ca. 180 CE), a pagan opponent of Christianity, Celsus, composed a treatise called *True Doctrine*, which, however, only survives through Origen's refutation of it in his *Contra Celsum*.¹⁶ Among other things, Celsus described and ridiculed a "Christian" diagram, a drawing representing a map of the universe in the form of circles; users of this diagram also supposedly had to memorize certain passwords to be delivered to theriomorphic heavenly gatekeepers on the soul's postmortem journey to the divine realm of the Father and Son. Origen wanted to make it absolutely clear to his readers that such teachings are not those of true Christians but of heretical "Ophites" (Ὀφειανοί, *Cels.* 3.13; 6.24,28,30; 7.40). A comparison between the diagram and Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30 shows that both draw upon essentially the same mythological speculation,¹⁷ which we may thus call, for the sake of convenience, "Ophite." Origen had apparently obtained such a diagram himself (*Cels.* 6.24) as well, and compares his exemplar to Celsus' literary description. Celsus and Origen may not have had access to exactly the same diagram since the two descriptions differ to some extent.¹⁸ Some of these differences, however, may be attributed to the differing rhetorical agendas of Celsus

¹⁴ *Gos. Judas* speaks of the the Invisible Spirit (47,9), Barbelo (35,18), Autogenes (e.g., 47,19–48,1), Adamas (48,22) and Seth (49,6), the corruptible Sophia (44,4), the 360 heavens (49–50), as well as of Sakla and Nebro creating twelve angels (51,8–14). *Gos. Judas* enumerates five of them (52,4–11) and at least the first four correspond to the first ones in the lists of the twelve archons in both *Holy Book* (III 58,8–22 par.) and *Ap. John* (II 10,28–11,4 parr.).

¹⁵ Cf. Pearson 2007, 48–50.

¹⁶ Chadwick 1980, xxiv–xxix; Hoffmann 1987, 30–33; Grant 1997, 1–10.

¹⁷ Cf. Lipsius 1864, 49; de Faye 1913, 333; Welburn 1981, 261.

¹⁸ See Chadwick 1980, 337n3; Witte 1993, 23ff.; and Denzey 2005.

and Origen (see especially Chapters 8–9 below). Be that as it may, Celsus' information is fairly easy to distil from Origen's text because Origen usually says explicitly when he is quoting his opponent.¹⁹ In the following, I will simply speak of the diagram (sg.) if the context does not demand a more subtle distinction between the descriptions of Celsus and Origen. The very nature of the diagram as a drawing, as well as some differences in detail, suggest that Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30 was not the source for Origen or Celsus or vice versa. Thus, Origen (together with Celsus) provides us with another important source for the so-called Ophite teaching alongside Irenaeus' report.

The diagram consisted of a map of celestial and supracelestial regions in the form of circles, which apparently were accompanied by descriptions of the animal shapes and names of the gatekeeper archons, as well as by the required passwords. There have been many attempts to reconstruct the diagram, but generally speaking, all reconstructions disagree with each other (for the pictorial reconstructions, see Plates 1–9).²⁰ Some scholars have even interpreted the diagram in light of other sources, and produced reconstructions that no longer agree with the descriptions.²¹ Nevertheless, the diagram, consisting of circles and accompanying inscriptions, could have been engraved on stone or wood, but could also have been drawn on papyrus, like the many ideographs in the books of Jeu of the Bruce Codex (see Plate 10).²²

Celsus wished to show that Christians, in speaking of the soul's journey through the seven heavens (*Cels.* 6.20–21), have plagiarized the mysteries of Mithras, which themselves reflect Plato's teaching (cf. 6.23).²³ Celsus affirmed that Christians use a diagram (as a heavenly

¹⁹ For the problem of reconstructing Celsus' text, see Borret 1969, 10; and Chadwick 1980, ix–xxxii. The editions of Borret (1969), Witte (1993) and Marcovich (2001), as well as the translations of Haardt (1971) and Chadwick (1980), distinguish Celsus' text from that of Origen. Cf. also Hoffman's (1987) English translation of Celsus' text.

²⁰ Matter 1843; Giraud 1884; Arendzen 1909; Hopfner 1930; Leisegang 1971; Welburn 1981; Witte 1993; Mastrocinque 2005, 94–121; Logan 2006, 36–46. In addition, some scholars have studied the diagram without producing a pictorial reconstruction, for example, Gruber (1864, 90ff.), Lipsius (1864), Hilgenfeld (1963, 277–283), and Denzey (2005).

²¹ Hopfner (1930) reconstructed the diagram in light of the teachings of Justin the "pseudognostic" (ψευδογνωστικός; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.23–28). See Plate 5 in this book.

²² Pearson 2004, 255–256; cf. Denzey 2005, 90, 97. Friedländer (1898, vii, 83) thinks the Ophite diagram(s) could have been *giljonim* mentioned in the Talmud.

²³ Cf. Pearson 2004, 253.

map) whose lower part consisted of seven or ten circles²⁴—probably the seven planetary spheres²⁵ and perhaps three more—enclosed by a circle called, “Leviathan, the soul of all things.” According to Origen, also the Biblical monster Behemoth was mentioned in the diagram, situated below all the circles, thus presumably in the atmosphere of the sub-lunar world (6.25).²⁶ It, too, may be imagined as a serpent-figure, another Leviathan (in LXX Isa 27:1, Leviathan is called ὄφις and δράκων), for Origen says that Leviathan’s name was written in two places in the diagram: on the circumference (the world-encompassing snake) and in the center (perhaps Behemoth).²⁷ That Leviathan and Behemoth are considered to be identical should not be totally surprising. First, they are brought into a close connection in Job 40–41; *1 Enoch* 60:7–8; *2 Baruch* 29:4; and *4 Ezra* 6:49–52. Second, in Irenaeus’ Ophite account, the serpent was a twofold character with two names (Michael and Samael). Originally that snake resided with Ialdabaoth in heaven and paradise, in which connection it was referred to as the source of spirit, soul, and all worldly things (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.5). This may be compared to the diagram’s Leviathan as the world soul encompassing the heavens.²⁸ Then, according to Irenaeus’ report, the serpent was cast down to the lower world (1.30.8,9), which may be compared to the diagram’s Behemoth situated below the heavenly spheres. On the other hand, however, Behemoth may simply be a collective name for the seven theriomorphic demons led by Michael (see below); for the Hebrew word, תַּיִם הַבְּהֵמָה, is plural for “animal, beast.”

Furthermore, the diagram was divided by a thick black line called Gehenna and Tartarus, according to Celsus (*Cels.* 6.25). This may suggest that the whole material cosmos was understood as the underworld. The upper portion of the diagram, for its part, consisted of circles that are “above the heavens” (6.38). Celsus only mentioned the circles of Father (πατήρ) and Son (υἱός), but, according to Origen, these were

²⁴ Some commentators correct the text here (6.25) and prefer the reading ἐπτά to harmonize this information with 6.35. See Lipsius 1864, 38n1; Hopfner 1930, 87.

²⁵ Denzey (2005, 99–103) thinks the circles represent the days of the week. For discussion, see Chapters 3 and 9 below.

²⁶ Thus Welburn 1981, 277.

²⁷ Witte (1993, 94) thinks the double appearance of Leviathan’s name stresses its role as the world soul, and that Behemoth is to be imagined as a hippopotamus (see also his pictorial representation of the diagram, reproduced here on Plate 7).

²⁸ The assertion in Irenaeus’ report that human intestines have a serpentine shape (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.15) also seems to be related to the world soul idea, since the snake’s imprint can be found in all human beings.

accompanied by blue and yellow ones, and the circles of Father and Son were separated from these by a double-axe-shaped barrier. Above this barrier was then found the circle of Love (ἀγάπη), and below it, the circle of Life (ζωή). Inside the second (δεύτερος) circle, presumably that of Life, were finally found circles of γῶσις and σύνεσις, accompanied by the inscriptions, “Sophia’s providence (σοφίας πρόνοια)” and “Sophia’s nature (σοφίας φύσις).” Unfortunately, the exact relationships among these figures are not elaborated by Origen and we are left with educated guesses concerning the arrangement of these supracelestial circles; the identities of the blue and yellow ones also remain obscure (cf. Plates 1–9). However, the circle of Life, likely containing in itself (the providence of) Sophia could be an equivalent of the Holy Spirit, the “Mother of the *living*,” giving birth to Sophia and her providence, of Irenaeus’ account (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.2–3,9); in LXX Gen 3:20, Eve is not only called “Life,” but also the “Mother of all living.” Thus, both Irenaeus’ account and the diagram suggest that Sophia was intimately connected with a heavenly Eve (see Chapter 4). Moreover, the upper worlds of Irenaeus’ Ophite source included five beings (Man, Son of Man, Christ, Holy Spirit, and Sophia who descended). Likewise in Origen’s account, a “mightier pentad” is evoked,²⁹ likely referring to the supracelestial beings (cf. Father, Son, Love, Life and Sophia who is linked with *gnosis* and *synesis* which probably are her providence and nature). Exactly how this pentad is related to the supracelestial circles, including the blue and yellow ones, is unclear. However, it seems at least possible that both the diagram and Irenaeus’ source posit five main figures in the upper worlds, although using slightly different designations for them.

Celsus also mentions seven theriomorphic ruling demons (ἐπτὰ ἀρχόντων δαιμόνων). Whereas he describes the shape of each, but names only the seventh one, Origen provides a name and shape for all seven: (1) Michael the lion-like,³⁰ (2) Suriel the bull-like, (3) Raphael the serpent-like, (4) Gabriel the eagle-like, (5) Thautabaoth the bear-like, (6) Erathaoth the dog-like, and (7) Thartharaoth (Celsus: Thapha-

²⁹ Εἶθ’ ἐξῆς τὸν Σαβαώθ, πρὸς ὃν οἴονται λέξειν· Πέμπτης ἐξουσίας ἄρχων, δυνάστα Σαβαώθ, προήγορε νόμου τῆς σῆς κτίσεως χάριτι λυομένης, πεντάδι δυνατωτέρα, πάρες με, σύμβολον ὄρων σῆς τέχνης ἀνεπίληπτον, εἰκόνι τύπου τετηρημένον, πεντάδι λυθὲν σῶμα· ἡ χάρις συνέστω μοι, πάτερ, συνέστω. (*Cels.* 6.31.25–30, Borret, ed.)

³⁰ Origen’s account differs from that of Irenaeus in that Raphael, and not Michael, is the serpent-shaped one. However, Michael is the leader of the demons in both accounts. Cf. Chapter 3 below.

baoth) or Onoel the donkey-like (6.30). After this, Origen goes on to describe the passwords that the ascending soul must say before the rulers (ἄρχων), heavenly gatekeepers, in order to pass by them on the way to the world of light (6.31). Again, whereas Celsus only hinted at such passwords (6.33; 7.40), Origen completes the information by actually quoting them (6.31). The names of these gatekeepers are the same as in Irenaeus' account: Ialdabaoth, Iao, Sabaoth, Adonaios, Astaphaios, Ailoaios, and Horaios.³¹ The connection between these seven archons and the seven theriomorphic demons is not clear. They seem to be identified here (6.33; 7.40) but this may be secondary (see Chapter 3). In Irenaeus' account, the seven led by Ialdabaoth (the "holy hebdomad," the seven planetary rulers) are clearly different from the seven led by Michael (the "lower hebdomad," the seven mundane demons).

Celsus further mentions that the ruler of the "archontic angels," the Jewish God (apparently Ialdabaoth), was considered an accursed god, since he cursed the serpent for bringing knowledge to humankind (6.27–28). Origen also hints at the role of the serpent as the bringer of knowledge (6.28). This agrees with Irenaeus' report according to which the serpent's advice was good (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.7). While in Irenaeus' source a subtle distinction between the evil serpent and Sophia using it as her tool was made (1.30.7–8), the serpent itself had apparently also come to be thought of as positive in the minds of certain "others" (1.30.15). However, due to the sketchiness of Celsus and Origen on this matter, we do not know if there was a similar subtle distinction made in their sources between the snake and the true revealer using it, as in the Ophite narrative Irenaeus reports at length in 1.30.1–14.

Although Origen provides us with more information about the diagram than Celsus, their diagrams need not have been so different. Whereas Celsus simply wanted to use the diagram as another example for ridiculing Christians, and thus did not necessarily need to go into details, Origen was at pains to show that such a diagram does not derive from real Christians. In order to do this, he may have wanted to give more information to make his point clear.

We may now assess the relationship between Irenaeus' and Origen's reports. They share many features: (1) the snake's advice in paradise

³¹ Origen gives the names in *Cels.* 6.31, where the order of the names is different in comparison with Irenaeus' list; and one of the archons, Adonaios, is missing, but mentioned later in 6.32. Cf. Table 3 and discussion in Chapter 3.

is given a positive interpretation; (2) the seven archons with similar names, led by Ialdabaoth, appear (cf. Table 3 below); (3) Sophia occupies a prominent place in the divine hierarchy and in the salvation history (her providence is mentioned in both documents); she is also intimately linked with a heavenly Eve; (4) the true divine hierarchy not only consists of Sophia/Eve-figures, but also of masculine divinities, three of whom are mentioned in Irenaeus' source (Man, Son of Man, Christ), two in the diagram (Father and Son). Other, less clear agreements include: snake as a world soul; the seven demons led by Michael, although their names and shapes are not elaborated in Irenaeus' report; and extensive use of Jewish materials.³² In any case, there is a close correspondence. Since the accounts of Irenaeus and Origen are also the only two surviving independent testimonies to the so-called Ophite mythology in the heresiological literature, their common material, especially the first four features, may serve as an initial criteria that can help us identify the use of the same mythological material in other (especially Coptic) sources. It is important to note that these common features are not included among Schenke's criteria for his "Sethian system" despite certain superficial resemblances (see below). These four features thus constitute a preliminary typological model for the Ophite mythology that will be elaborated in the course of this study.

There are also many other accounts of the "Ophites" in heresiological literature, but these are all based on Irenaeus, directly or indirectly. These reports do add information concerning Ophite snake worship and snake exegesis that is missing from Irenaeus' report, but this information is suspect, as will be seen later. It has, however, contributed to an unfortunate misrepresentation of the innovators and advocates of the Ophite mythology as serpent worshipers, based on the unfounded acceptance of heresiological embroidery. Scholars have also often identified all "snake-sects" described in heresiological literature with Ophites simply because their teachings include snake speculations. These heresiological reports will be analyzed in Chapters 2 and 7 below, but it should already be pointed out here that many of these accounts lack the special Ophite features identified above, including

³² Irenaeus' source is, for the most part, a reinterpretation of the early chapters of Genesis. The names of the seven rulers and the seven demons (for the most part), the names and figures of Sophia, Leviathan, Behemoth, and Gehenna, and the idea of the snake as the bringer of knowledge, are also derived from Jewish scriptures.

the positive interpretation given to the snake's advice in paradise. However, I briefly examine some of these reports already here, as they are related to the history of the label, Ophite.

This label first appears in heresiological literature in the beginning of the third century. Clement (*Strom.* 7.17.108.1–2), discussing names of “sects” briefly asserts that Ophites (Ὀφιοῖται) are named after their object of reverence (ὧν τετιμῆκασι), i.e., the snake.³³ This seems to presuppose the Pseudo-Tertullian account of the Ophites (*Ophitae; Haer.* 2.1–4), where such worship is actually described (the Ophites extol the serpent, prefer it to Christ, and let it bless the Eucharist). The Pseudo-Tertullian heresiology, for its part, corresponds almost exactly to what is known of Hippolytus' lost *Syntagma*, and may thus simply be an updated Latin translation of it.³⁴ Moreover, the heresiologies of Pseudo-Tertullian, Epiphanius (*Panarion*, from ca. 375 CE)³⁵ and Filastrius (*Div. her. lib.*, from ca. 385 CE)³⁶ share a great deal of material and it is often thought they all go back to Hippolytus' *Syntagma*.³⁷ If Pseudo-Tertullian does reproduce Hippolytus' *Syntagma*, as is usually assumed, then Hippolytus seems to have been the one who coined the term “Ophite.” The author of the Pseudo-Tertullian account of the Ophites summarizes Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30,³⁸ adds information about snake worship and a *positive* snake exegesis of Gen 3, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15, and finally attaches the label, Ophite, to

³³ Book 7 of *Stromata* was perhaps composed in 203 CE (Méhat 1966, 46–54; see also Ferguson 1974, 17). Text in Le Boulluec 1997.

³⁴ Hippolytus' *Syntagma* is mentioned by Photius (*Bibliotheca* 121), Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 6.22) and Jerome (*Vir. ill.* 61), and what is known of it, corresponds almost exactly to the Pseudo-Tertullian heresiology, *Adversus omnes haereses*. Photius says Hippolytus' *Syntagma* consisted of 32 heresies, running from the Dositheans to the Noetians. Pseudo-Tertullian consists of about 30 entries (depending on how one wishes to calculate them), and runs from Dositheus to Praxeas. Because the latter taught patripassianism (*Haer.* 8.4; Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.*) as did Noetus (Hippolytus, *Contra Noetum; Ref.* 9.7.1–3; 9.10.9–12; 10.27.1–2; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 57), the author of Pseudo-Tertullian may simply have changed the name of the last entry of the *Syntagma*. Hippolytus' *Syntagma* is earlier than his *Refutatio*, which draws upon the former. Since the *Refutatio* can be dated between 222–235 CE (Marcovich 1986, 16–17), one may date the *Syntagma* roughly around 200 CE.

³⁵ F. Williams 1987, xiii.

³⁶ See Koch 1938.

³⁷ See Lipsius 1865; Hilgenfeld 1963; Wisse 1981, 568.

³⁸ This account (*Haer.* 2.2–4) is highly condensed but one can still recognize that it is based on Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–7, 13–14. For the dependence of Pseudo-Tertullian (Hippolytus) on Irenaeus, see Hilgenfeld 1963, e.g., 58–63; and Wisse 1981, 568.

this combination. As will be seen in Chapter 7, the information about the snake worship is suspect, but a similar, positive snake exegesis—a combination of Gen 3, Exod 7:8–12, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15 (i.e., serpents of paradise and Moses)—is found in the Nag Hammadi text, *The Testimony of Truth* (NH IX,3), in its so-called snake midrash section (45,23–49,10).

With the exception of a reference to Exod, a combination of snake-friendly exegesis of Gen 3, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15, occurs only in *Testim. Truth*, Pseudo-Tertullian (which probably reproduces Hippolytus' *Syntagma*) and an anonymous heresiology known as *Refutatio omnium haeresium*,³⁹ which almost certainly was also written by Hippolytus.⁴⁰ These parallels suggest that Hippolytus may have known a version or a source of *Testim. Truth*, perhaps the “snake midrash” if it existed independently.⁴¹ One may further hypothesize that Hippolytus saw a connection between Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30 and the “snake midrash” simply because snake speculations appear in both, then coined the label “Ophite” to denote such speculations, and effectively created a new “sect” based on a typological similarity (the appearance of the serpent) between two literary documents. In fact, because the Pseudo-Tertullian Ophite entry is the only one in the catalog that discusses serpents, Hippolytus may well have used “Ophite” as a generic term for heretical snake speculations in his *Syntagma*.

The assumption of the artificial nature of the “Ophite sect” is strengthened by the appearance of the same specific exegesis in a different context in the *Refutatio*. While the *Syntagma* was a short catalog of heresies, based to a large extent on Irenaeus,⁴² the *Refutatio* was a massive undertaking based on at least eight previously unknown and extensive “original Gnostic” sources (the *Refutatio* also reproduces much of the *Syntagma*).⁴³ Having had access to this new

³⁹ Cf. Pearson 2007, 45–46.

⁴⁰ The author is usually today assumed to be Hippolytus, especially because he (1) refers to his earlier works, which can be identified as works of Hippolytus with the help of other sources; and (2) identifies himself as a bishop living in Rome attacking Pope Callistus. See Marcovich 1986, 8–17.

⁴¹ Pearson 1990, 41; cf. also Mahé 1996, 12–13. This midrash may well have existed independently, not only because it stands apart from the rest of the tractate in terms of its contents, but also because very similar material appears elsewhere in a different context (in Hippolytus' reports about the Ophites and Peratics, see below).

⁴² Cf. Hilgenfeld 1963, 58–63.

⁴³ Marcovich 1986, 8–51.

source material,⁴⁴ Hippolytus now distinguished Ophites (*Ref.* 8.20.3) from five other “sects” whose teachings involved serpent speculations: Naasseni (5.6–11), Peratics (5.12–18), Sethians (5.19–22), Justin the “pseudognostic” (5.23–27) and certain anonymous astrologers (4.46–51).⁴⁵ Interestingly, in the *Refutatio*, the specific combination of the snake exegesis of Gen 3, Exod 7:8–12, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15, is assigned to one of these other “snake sects,” the Peratics (*Ref.* 5.16.6–12). These did not call themselves Ophites, but used the self-designation, Peratics, according to Hippolytus (5.16.1). Apparently Hippolytus had to reassess his way of constructing sects and their names, in light of the new material. If Hippolytus coined the term “Ophite” as a generic term in composing his *Syntagma*, it no longer worked as such in the *Refutatio*, because some snake-exegetes apparently used different self-designations.

One may also note that all three documents where this specific snake exegesis occurs (*Testim. Truth*, “Ophites” of Pseudo-Tertullian, “Peratics” of the *Refutatio*) seem to treat the serpent of paradise itself as a completely positive figure, which is not in accordance with the subtle distinction made between the evil snake and the true revealer (Sophia) found in Irenaeus’ report (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.7). Admittedly, the opinion of certain “others,” according to Irenaeus (1.30.15), was that Sophia herself became the snake, thus allowing for a positive interpretation of the serpent. However, this was possibly a secondary interpretation, and, in any case, seemed to have stemmed from a source other than the narrative reported in 1.30.1–14. It may also be noted here that *Hyp. Arch.*, *Orig. World* and *Ap. John*, which greatly resemble this narrative, each make a distinction between the serpent and the true revealer (see Chapter 2). The information of Celsus and Origen concerning the serpent of paradise as the bringer of knowledge did not speak of such a distinction, but these were sketchy remarks made by hostile outsiders. *Testim. Truth*, however, is an “original Gnostic” text, where we might expect to find such elaboration, but this text says nothing of a distinction between the snake and a true revealer. It also lacks other

⁴⁴ Since the sections drawing upon the “original” texts share technical terminology and themes, some scholars suspect that Hippolytus did not have direct access to these sources, but instead made use of an earlier edited collection, the so-called base-text of the *Refutatio*. See Marcovich 1986, 45–51.

⁴⁵ In *Ref.* 8.20.3, Hippolytus says that he has not bothered to describe the Ophite teaching, while in the fourth and fifth books, he has already described the astrological teachings, as well as those of the Naasseni, Peratics, Sethians, and Justin.

Ophite features identified above, as does the Peratic teaching. Because Hippolytus may also have changed his mind about the provenance of the snake exegesis, and had possibly first connected it with Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30 simply because snake speculations were found in both, his additional information in the *Syntagma* about the Ophite exegesis and worship of snakes may not be "Ophite" after all. Ironically, this snake exegesis may have been the reason for creating the term "Ophite" in the first place. Thus, my use of the term "Ophite" is admittedly both artificial and different from its first use in heresiological literature. However, Hippolytus' usage appears to have been artificial and secondary as well, and I simply use the term as a convenient reference tool for the mythology reflected in Irenaeus' and Origen's accounts, as well as in other sources that contain similar material (i.e., *Orig. World, Hyp. Arch., Ap. John, Eugnostos, Soph. Jes. Chr., Pan.* 26). I also did not want to replace the term "Ophite" with another one because scholars generally associate the term with Irenaeus' (and Origen's) report.⁴⁶

In composing his entry devoted to the Ophites, Epiphanius (*Pan.* 37) seems to have simply expanded Hippolytus' account in the *Syntagma*, by changing and adding a few details; he has also apparently utilized Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30 directly.⁴⁷ Epiphanius elaborates on the Hippolytian Eucharist scene, and claims the Ophites identified their snake with Christ, but this information is suspect, as will be seen later (Chapter 7). It should be noted here, however, that several later writers, including Augustine and John Damascene,⁴⁸ based their heresiologies largely on a summary of Epiphanius' *Panarion*, the *Anacephalaeosis*. The Ophites appear in this summary as follows, "Ophites, who extol the serpent and think he is Christ, and have an actual snake, the

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Bullard 1970, e.g., 45; Barc 1980, 16; Gilhus 1985, 100n258, 103n264; Jonas 1988, 222; Pasquier 1988, 61; Pétrement 1990, 458; Logan 1996, e.g., 123, 135ff.; M. Williams 1996, 121; Turner 2001, e.g., 287–290; Luttikhuisen 2006, 2n5, 166n8; Thomassen 2006, 486n145.

⁴⁷ F. Williams 1987, xix–xxi. Cf., e.g., the serpentine shape of human bowels (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.15; *Pan.* 37.5.1), and the snake cast down from heaven (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.8; *Pan.* 37.5.4; cf. Rev 12:7–9 and related traditions, e.g., 1 *Enoch* 6–11, 86–88; 2 *Enoch* [J] 29:4–5; 31:1–6; *L.A.E. Vita* 12–16; Luke 10:18).

⁴⁸ The author of the anonymous heresiology, *Praedestinatus* (likely from the fifth century) may have had personal knowledge of the persecution of the "Ophites" in Bithynia, which allegedly included the slaying of their serpents (1.17). However, this latter statement may also be simply based on malicious rumors, or on Epiphanius' story. See also Legge 1950, 2:77.

familiar reptile, in a sort of basket” (F. Williams, transl.). Thus, Epiphanius’ suspect information became the main source of knowledge of the Ophites for later generations.

While Filastrius adds no new information about the Ophites,⁴⁹ Theodoret, in his *Haer. fab. comp.* 1.14 (from ca. 450 CE),⁵⁰ has identified Irenaeus’ *Adv. haer.* 1.30 as the teaching of “Sethians whom some call Ophians or Ophites.” However, Theodoret has not only summarized Irenaeus’ account, but has also added details known from other sources, producing, in effect, an encyclopaedic summary of everything that had been reported of Sethians and Ophites in previous heresiological literature. Thus, this account should be used with extreme caution in reconstructing Irenaeus’ original Greek text.⁵¹ According to Theodoret, these “Sethian-Ophites” deified Seth (like the Sethians of the *Syntagma*: Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 2.9; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 39.1.3; 39.3.5). Theodoret is the only heresiologist to suggest that the *Ophites* did this. He also adds a detail, known from the Sethians of Hippolytus’ *Refutatio*, that Jesus, taking the servant form of Phil 2:7, actually became a snake (*Ref.* 5.19.19–21). Finally, Theodoret refers to Epiphanius’ version of the Ophite Eucharist scene (*Haer. fab. comp.* 1.14.61–65; *Pan.* 37.5.6–8). An interesting question is why Theodoret combined “Ophite” and “Sethian” teachings. Since in *Ap. John*, where a rewriting of the paradise story very similar to what Irenaeus reports

⁴⁹ The Ophites, also called “Serpentini” (from the Latin *serpens*, snake), are said to venerate (*veneror*) and adore (*adoro*) the snake (*coluber*), who appears here, too, as the praised bringer of knowledge, a power of God (*aliquam dei virtutem*), and an enemy of the creator thrown down from heaven (cf. Rev 12:7–9 and related traditions). Filastrius’ text is from Marx 1898. In addition to this “Ophite” account based on Hippolytus and Irenaeus, Filastrius has used the Hebrew Bible as a sourcebook for ancient heresies. Among other things, he describes the worshipers of Moses’ brazen serpent (*Div. her. lib.* 21). This account, however, is not based on a Gnostic exegesis of Num 21:8–9 or John 3:14–15, but is merely an expansion of 2 Kings 18:4, according to which Hezekiah “removed the high places, broke down the pillars, and cut down the sacred pole. He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan.” (NRSV). Theodoret, for his part, connects the Ophites and the Naasseni (which he also incorrectly identifies with each other) with this story (*Quaest.* 49 [IV Reg. 18:4]), but even though the exegesis of Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15 is frequent in Gnostic texts, nowhere do we encounter an actual Gnostic exegesis of 2 Kings 18:4.

⁵⁰ See Opitz 1934.

⁵¹ Especially Harvey (1857, 226ff.) but also Rousseau and Doutreleau (1979, 82) have an overly optimistic view regarding Theodoret’s conservation of Irenaeus’ Greek text (Theodoret’s text in Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979, 328–335). Turner (1995, 213–214) seems to take Theodoret’s text as the original Greek of Irenaeus.

in *Adv. haer.* 1.30 (later identified as Ophite) is combined with speculations about Seth, Theodoret's "Sethian-Ophite" label may derive from his knowledge of *Ap. John* or a text similar to it.

Finally, it may be noted that the Naasseni, one of the "snake-sects" described by Hippolytus in his *Refutatio* (5.2; 5.6–11; 10.9), have often been identified with the Ophites in scholarship.⁵² Theodoret in the fifth century made this identification as well, even though Hippolytus, who is the only actual witness to the Naassene teaching, seems to have distinguished between the Ophites and the Naasseni.⁵³ The designation, Naasseni, is derived from the Hebrew word for snake, שָׂרָפִי, just like the designation, Ophite/Ophian, is derived from the Greek equivalent, ὄφις. Irenaeus calls the people behind *Adv. haer.* 1.30 "Gnostics" just as Hippolytus says of the Naasseni that they called themselves "Gnostics" (*Ref.* 5.2; 5.6.4; 5.11.1). That the snake also appears in both teachings, taken together with the designations just mentioned, seems to have been enough for many scholars to treat these two teachings as identical. This identification is, however, far from certain.⁵⁴ Most of the main features of the Ophite mythology identified above are either lacking from the Naassene teaching or appear in a different form: Sophia, Ialdabaoth and the seven archons are missing; the serpent appears only as a positively valued world soul (5.9.11ff.); and the Man and Son of Man are said to be one and the same figure yet divided into three parts (*Ref.* 5.6.4–6). The use of Jewish material is also less evident in the Naassene teaching than in the Ophite mythology. I will return to the relationship between the Ophite and Naassene teachings in Chapters 2 and 5 in discussing snake symbolism and the mythologoumenon of heavenly and earthly Adams.

⁵² See, e.g., Gruber 1864; Hönig 1889, 28–29; Leisegang 1971, 83; Mansel 1980, 7, 95ff. Casey (1965, 386), however, derives Ophites from the Naasseni.

⁵³ Theodoret, *Quaest.* 49 (IV Reg. 18:4), "I think the Ophites were called 'Naasseni.'" See also Theodoret, *Haer. fab. comp.* 1.13, where he gives "Naasseni" as an alternative name for the Barbeloites, and *Haer. fab. comp.* 1.14, where he in turn identifies the Sethians and the Ophites (= Naasseni on basis of *Quaest.*) with each other. But cf. Hippolytus, who, in *Ref.* 8.20.3, says that he has not chosen to describe the Cainite, *Ophite*, and Noachite teachings, while he has already described the *Naassene* teaching in *Ref.* 5.6–11. In addition, because the Ophites are frequently connected with the Cainites in the heresiological literature (see below), the Ophites who Hippolytus mentions in connection with the Cainites do seem to be the same Ophites who the other heresiologists describe.

⁵⁴ Thus also Kaestli 1982, 117–118.

Today the scholarship on Ophites is mostly limited to cursory attempts to reconstruct the Ophite diagram,⁵⁵ and to suggestions that the authors of *Ap. John* have drawn upon an “Ophite” source known to Irenaeus.⁵⁶ However, in older scholarship, “Ophitism” was used as an umbrella term not only to cover all so-called Gnostic teachings featuring a snake,⁵⁷ but also generally to denote early forms of Gnosticism. The term was even used as an equivalent to Gnosticism proper.⁵⁸ Ophitism thus defined was often thought to be the earliest form of Gnosticism,⁵⁹ rooted in Jewish soil,⁶⁰ and represented by up to 17 different “sects,” based on, for example, the Cainite, Barbeloite, Naassene, Peratic and the various Ophite and Sethian accounts in the heresiological literature.⁶¹ Scholars of earlier generations were eager to see links among these accounts. Because the teachings Irenaeus described in *Adv. haer.* 1.29–31 (secondarily identified as Barbeloites, Sethian-Ophites and Cainites, respectively) supposedly stemmed from the same “Gnostic” sect, and some of them (1.30) speculated on snakes, they could then all be linked with other “snake-sects” as well. The leading role given to the Ophites in these early constructions seems to go back to Hippolytus’ claim that the Naasseni (often identified as Ophites) were the first Gnostics (*Ref.* 5.6.3–4; 6.6.1). Some scholars made a useful distinction between Ophitism as a broad category, and the Ophites proper as a specific “sect” (represented especially by the accounts in Irenaeus’ *Adv. haer.* 1.30, Origen’s *Cels.* 6.24–38, and in works dependent on Hippolytus’ *Syntagma*) within it. Many scholars, nevertheless, included the Naasseni in the definition of the Ophites proper.⁶² However, the identification of the Ophite and Naassene teachings is dubious, as pointed out above. Furthermore, the mere appearance of a serpent does not yet make a text “Ophite.” As will be seen in Chapter 2, information about most of these other “snake-sects”

⁵⁵ E.g., Welburn 1981; Witte 1993; Denzey 2005; Mastrocinque 2005, 94–121; Logan 2006, 36–46.

⁵⁶ Logan 1996, e.g., 43–45, 55–56; Turner 2001, 257ff.

⁵⁷ Leisegang 1971, 83–129; cf. also Gruber 1864; Liechtenhan 1904; and Jonas 1988, 220, 343.

⁵⁸ Arendzen 1909, 598; Bousset 1973, 319ff.

⁵⁹ Friedländer 1898, 66–69; Bousset 1973, 319; Lipsius 1975, 92ff. Cf. Hönig 1889, 28–29, 77.

⁶⁰ Baur 1835, 194–197; Hönig 1889, 12, 17, 28–29, 77; Friedländer 1898, 66–69.

⁶¹ See, e.g., Gruber 1864, 155ff.; Liechtenhan 1904, 405–406; de Faye 1913, 327ff.; Hilgenfeld 1963, 230–283.

⁶² See R. Wilson 1958, 117ff.; see also Gruber 1864.

does not, in fact, fit the typological model of Ophite mythology that was sketched above and will be elaborated below. However, teachings that, according to heresiologists, stemmed from “Sethians” and “Barbeloites,” some of which belong to the modern category of Sethian Gnosticism, do sometimes occur together with actual Ophite material in the sources. These teachings will be examined next.

1.2 SETHIANISM: A PROBLEMATIC CATEGORY

The special interest in Sethianism is a modern phenomenon, and is largely due to the Nag Hammadi findings and Schenke’s theory. Earlier, scholars only knew Sethians from heresiological accounts and considered them to be merely a sub-group of a wider, “classic,” “proper” or “Ophite” Gnosticism.⁶³ Until the mid-nineteenth century, scholars were familiar with two heresiological accounts of Sethians. One was Theodoret’s fifth century hybrid Sethian-Ophite account, and, as we have already dealt with it above, we can move directly to the second account. This second one was a description of a myth revising Gen 4–9 and appears to have been first reported by Hippolytus in his *Syntagma*. I will here summarize the earliest surviving witness to it, Pseudo-Tertullian’s *Haer.* 2.7–9 (*Sethoitarum*).⁶⁴ Two human beings, Cain and Abel, were formed by the angels (Epiphanius: two humans, from whom Cain and Abel descended, *Pan.* 39.2.1). When Abel was slain, an unidentified heavenly Mother caused the birth of Seth, in order to raise a pure seed from him. Nevertheless, due to the copulation of angels with humans, there had resulted an impure race, and the Mother sent a deluge to destroy the impure ones and to save the pure race of Seth by the means of the ark. However, the angels managed to put Ham from the impure race into the ark without the Mother knowing it, and thus the impure seed survived. These Sethians also identified Christ with Seth.⁶⁵ This myth has certain parallelism with the rewritings of Gen 4–9 in *Apoc. Adam* and *Holy Book* (see Chapter 6), and it may well be based on a similar document. However, whereas

⁶³ See Gruber 1864, 155ff.; Liechtenhan 1904, 405–406; Bousset 1912; de Faye 1913, 327ff.; Hilgenfeld 1963, 230–283.

⁶⁴ Text in Gerlo, Evans and Harnack 1954.

⁶⁵ Epiphanius adds that Jesus belonged to Seth’s lineage, being, in fact, Seth himself, and that he was sent from above by the Mother (*Pan.* 39.3.5). Seth also had a wife called Horaia (*Pan.* 39.5.2–3).

these two Nag Hammadi texts include much other material as well, it should be asked whether Hippolytus has here quoted his source more or less completely, or has only picked up those sections that spoke of Seth. In any case, Hippolytus may have also here created a new “sect” based on a typological feature (prominence of Seth) in his source.

After the 1841 discovery and the 1851 publication of Hippolytus’ *Refutatio*,⁶⁶ scholars came to know of a third Sethian myth. Hippolytus counted it among the “snake-heresies” whose fountainhead were supposedly the Naasseni. According to this Sethian myth, there were three primordial principles: above was light, below darkness, and in between spirit, with all these principles being eternal. The light and spirit radiated in all directions, even towards the darkness. The darkness got hold of “fragrances” of light and spirit and imprisoned them because it realized that without them it would be invisible, obscure and feeble. The first coming together of the three principles produced heaven and earth in the form of a gigantic womb. The principle of all generation, the wind, also called the serpent, appeared from the waters (*Ref.* 5.19.13–19). It entered the womb and produced a human being; thus the womb recognizes no other form than the serpentine form. Because of this, the Logos needed to enter the womb in the form of a serpent, which is the servant form of Phil 2:7 (*Ref.* 5.19.19–22). It is noteworthy that Seth does not play any part in this teaching, although Hippolytus refers to *Paraphrase of Seth* for more details. Incidentally, this Hippolytian account was known to Theodoret in the fifth century, who used it, among other sources, to create his hybrid Sethian-Ophite account. It is also to be noted that the Sethian account in Hippolytus’ *Syntagma* is completely different from the one in his *Refutatio*, and probably reflects the same kind of reassessment of “sects” by Hippolytus as in the case of the Ophites and Peratics. This Sethian account does not fit the proposed typological model of Ophite mythology either, despite its snake symbolism. It does, however, resemble the Nag Hammadi treatise, *The Paraphrase of Shem* (NH VII,1).⁶⁷

Some scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth century thought that the differences among the three Sethian myths reflect different chronological stages in the development of the Sethian doctrine,⁶⁸ and

⁶⁶ See Marcovich 1986, xiv, 1–8.

⁶⁷ On the relationship between these *Paraphrases*, see Wisse 1970, 138; and Roberge 2000, 104–113.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Bousset 1912, 1539.

that Sethians themselves were merely a sub-group within the wider phenomenon of classic or Ophite Gnosticism. In fact, the scholarly linking of Sethians and Ophites had a basis in the heresiological literature itself. In addition to Theodoret's hybrid Sethian-Ophite account, the two "sects" were always grouped together with the Cainites in the works dependent on Hippolytus' *Syntagma*, even though the position of this group of three "sects" in comparison to other "sects" varied in different catalogs.⁶⁹ The Naasseni, whom Theodoret and many modern scholars have identified with the Ophites, were further connected with the Sethians in the *Refutatio* since Hippolytus asserts that the four "serpent-sects," including the Naasseni and the Sethians, which he is about to describe, are parts of the same "heresy" (*Ref.* 5.6.4). Epiphanius further tells us that the Ophites took their cue from the "libertine Gnostics" described in *Panarion* 26. Since the latter were said to use books in the name of Seth (*Pan.* 26.8.1), as did the *Sethians* (39.5.1), the related Ophites could be assumed to use these books as well.

Heresiological information allowed scholars of previous generations to also connect Sethians with Barbeloites, as related sub-groups of the same "Ophite heresy." This practice is still today reflected in the erroneous, synonymous use of the terms, "Sethian" and "Barbeloite."⁷⁰ Epiphanius had affirmed that the "libertine Gnostics," who supposedly used books of Seth, were also known as "Barbeloites" (26.3.7), and that they spoke of Barbelo (26.1.9; 26.10.1,4). A divine mother-figure known by the same name is also found in Irenaeus' so-called Barbeloite account (*Adv. haer.* 1.29). Irenaeus himself had also affirmed that the Gnostics of *Adv. haer.* 1.29–30, whom Theodoret later identified as Barbeloites and Sethian-Ophites, respectively, were part of the same "sect."

The scholarly linking of Sethians and Barbeloites gained strength as a result of the Nag Hammadi findings. Jean Doresse already proclaimed in the 1950s that the newly found, but yet unpublished, Nag Hammadi library was a product of Sethian Gnostics because the names Seth and

⁶⁹ Pseudo-Tertullian: (6) Ophites, (7) Cainites, (8) Sethians; Epiphanius: (37) Ophites, (38) Cainites, (39) Sethians; Filastrius: (1) Ophites, (2) Cainites, (3) Sethians. This Cainite teaching is the same as that found in Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.31, which sometimes incorrectly has been taken to be part of the Ophite teaching of *Adv. haer.* 1.30. While Cain is portrayed extremely positively in 1.31, he is condemned in 1.30.9. Cf. Scholten 2001.

⁷⁰ Cf. H.-M. Schenke 1981, 590; Layton 1987, xv.

Barbelo appeared there in several documents.⁷¹ After the publication of the library, however, it became apparent that this conclusion was premature: only eleven of the forty-six Nag Hammadi texts are considered Sethian today. On the other hand, it was soon discovered that the figures of Seth and Barbelo were both found in the divine hierarchy of *Ap. John*, which clearly parallels Irenaeus’ Barbeloite account in *Adv. haer.* 1.29. Even though Irenaeus’ note on these Barbeloites does not mention Seth, several Nag Hammadi texts add the figure of Seth into this kind of Barbeloite mythology (e.g., *Ap. John*, *Trim. Prot.*, *Holy Book*, *Zost.* and *Allogenes*).

The Barbeloite mythology consists essentially of descriptions of first principles and of a complex divine hierarchy, resembling Neopythagorean, Middle- and nascent Neoplatonic speculations. In the Barbeloite mythology, “Barbelo” is often the name given to the second (feminine) principle, the manifested first thought of the supreme God. A comparison among *Ap. John*, *Adv. haer.* 1.29 and other texts that parallel these descriptions in their depiction of the divine hierarchy reveals that the core of this Barbeloite speculation consists of a triad of Father-Mother Barbelo-Son, and of the four lights or luminaries of the Son called by mythological names of (H)armoziel, Oroiael, Daveithe and Eleleth. This common basic structure can also be seen to be based on a numerical pattern of 1–2–3–4 (the Pythagorean *tetraktys*), as the following figure (based on *Ap. John*, but also found in other texts) shows:

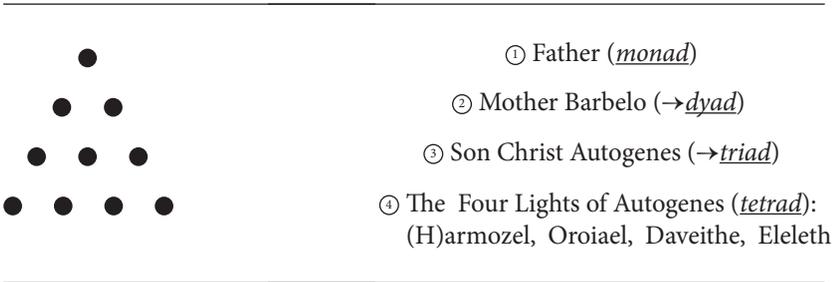


Figure 1: Core of the Barbeloite Scheme

⁷¹ Doresse 1958. Cf. also Doresse 1949, 411.

The basic Pythagorean-Platonic character of the Barbeloite speculation becomes clearer with the following observations. As Turner has suggested, the supreme triad of Father-Mother Barbelo-Son is more likely based on Plato's triad of Father-Mother-Child in *Timaeus* 48E–52D than on the Christian Trinity of Father-Son-Spirit.⁷² Some texts describe the first principle in terms of negative theology, reminiscent of Plato's *Parmenides* 137C–142A.⁷³ The derivation of plurality from the unitary first principle echoes Neopythagorean solutions.⁷⁴ And importantly, the “Platonizing Sethian treatises,”⁷⁵ two of which circulated in Plotinus' seminars in mid-third century Rome (*Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*),⁷⁶ contain a whole array of Neoplatonic concepts (e.g., derivation of plurality from unity with the help of the being-life-mind/blessedness triad; enneadic structuring of the triad with the principles of relative predominance, mutual implication and the method of paronyms; God's triple-power; ὑπαρξίς denoting undetermined existence above determined being) that are found to some

⁷² Turner 2001, 252; Turner 2006a, 14–15.

⁷³ *Ap. John* II 3,18–33 parr.; *Allogenes* 62,28–63,25; *Zost.* 64,11–68,25; 74,8–75,24; 84,18–22. See Turner 2001, 736–744; Turner 2006a, 35–36. The sections in *Zost.* are paralleled by Marius Victorinus, *Adv. Ar.* 1.49.9–50.21. Tardieu (1996) has convincingly argued that Victorinus and the author of *Zost.* drew on a common Middleplatonian source, which may have been a commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, as Turner suggests. Turner further thinks that another *Parmenides* commentary may lie behind the material shared by *Ap. John* and *Allogenes*. Cf. *Eugnostos* III 71,13–73,3 par., which contains very similar material.

⁷⁴ These include, for example, the Moderatean privation (*Zost.* 80,11–18; *Marsanes* 9,1–22); and the Nicomachaeian type of self-extension/self-doubling (*Zost.* 81,1–20; *Allogenes* 45,22–24). See Turner 2001, 354–355. Cf. also K. King 1995, 81; and Dillon 1996, 344–361, 397–399.

⁷⁵ I.e., *Zost.*, *Allogenes*, *Steles Seth* and *Marsanes*. The term was coined by Turner (see, e.g., 2001, 108ff., 499ff.).

⁷⁶ According to Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* 16, the Gnostic *hairetikoi* in the seminars appealed to “apocalypses” of Zoroaster, Zostrianos, Nikotheos, Allogenes, Messos and others. Plotinus in his *Ennead* 2.9 [33]—to which Porphyry had assigned the title, “Against the Gnostics,” and to which he refers in *Vit. Plot.* 16—disapprovingly refers to a set of unique expressions and ideas that are found concentrated in *Zostrianos* 8–10: ἀντίτυποι, παροίκησις, μετόνοια, “image of an image,” and Sophia's connection with “darkness” (*Enn.* 2.9.6.1–3; 2.9.10.19–33 Armstrong). It seems likely that Plotinus is here quoting from a Greek version of the NH *Zostrianos*. In addition, the names, Zostrianos and Zoroaster occur side by side in the colophon of NH *Zostrianos*, while Allogenes and Messos are both central characters in the NH *Allogenes*. Thus, Porphyry's list of five Gnostic apocalypses may not be a list of five texts (perhaps only of three), but five authoritative figures mentioned in these texts.

extent in the *Anonymous Parmenides Commentary*,⁷⁷ and especially in the works of the Christian Neoplatonist Marius Victorinus.⁷⁸ Pierre Hadot took these concepts to be inventions of Porphyry,⁷⁹ but as they are somewhat better attested in the Platonizing Sethian treatises than in the undisputed Porphyrian material, and especially because some of these concepts are already found in the pre-Plotinian *Ap. John* (some implicitly, others explicitly),⁸⁰ these innovative concepts—attached to the Barbeloite scheme—are likely of Classic Gnostic origin.⁸¹

⁷⁷ The six fragments of this Turin palimpsest *Commentary* were presumably discovered in a Northern Italian monastery in 1803. The first critical edition was published by Kroll in 1892, but the manuscript was subsequently destroyed in a fire in 1904. Other editions, based on the *editio princeps* and one surviving photograph of the manuscript, have been produced by Hadot (1968, 2:61–113) and Bechtle (1999, 17–65). Several scholars have accepted Hadot's (1961; 1968) assignment of the *Commentary* to Porphyry. See Abramowski 1983; M. Williams 1985, 50; Majercik 1992; and K. King 1995, 26.

⁷⁸ Especially *Adversus Arium* and *Letter to Candidus*. Hadot (1968) identified some 89 sections in Victorinus' theological works as borrowings from Porphyry's lost *Commentary on the Chaldean Oracles*. These specific sections, or "fragments," are collected in Hadot 1968, 2:13–55. Fragments 90–93 are treated separately (see Hadot 1968, 1:73). Some of the 89 fragments are further sub-divided into several units, e.g., §§36, 36a, 36b. For Hadot's methods of identifying the fragments from Victorinus' text, see Hadot 1968, 1:67.

⁷⁹ Hadot 1961; Hadot 1966; Hadot 1968.

⁸⁰ In *Ap. John*, the first principle is the Invisible Spirit (BG 22,21–23,3; 31,7) who is described as always existing (24,2), yet his being is superior to that of others (24,20–25,1); he is also said to be life who gives life, and blessedness who gives blessedness (25,15–16). Here we seem to have implicitly not only the being/existence-life-blessedness triad, but also the idea of the prefiguration of the triad in the One, because apparently higher forms of being, life and blessedness coincide with the One. What is more, the second principle Barbelo, who comes into existence out of the First One through the mediating "living" (HΕΗΘ) water (26,18), is called Triple-Powered (BG 27,21–28,1: ΤΡΩΦΗ|ΗΤΕ ΝΟΣΗ; III 8,2–3: [ΤΡΩΦΗ|ΗΤΕ ΠΛΥΗ|ΔΜΙΣ]), and her tripleness is stressed several times (BG 27,21–28,2 parr.). Finally, the third principle, the self-generated Son, who came from the Father, is also identified as blessed (ΜΑΚΑΡΙΩΗ; BG 30,2–3) like the Father; and whereas the Son receives *nous* (31,5–9 parr.), the Father is said to contemplate (HΘΙ) himself (26,15 parr.). Thus, the seeds of the being-life-*mind* triad—together with a variant of the Two Intellect theory—may be seen here as well. Moreover, the peculiar expressions from Victorinus' *Adv. Ar.* 1.50, i.e., God as Spirit, Blessed and Triple-Powered, are not only found here in *Ap. John*, but they also occur in connection with an implicit form of the being/existence-life-blessedness/mind triad. In the later Platonizing Sethian treatises, these speculations become explicit. In addition, the Neopythagorean Moderatus (*apud* Simplicius, *In phys.* 9.230.34–231.27 Diels) had already anticipated Plotinus' thinking in the second century. Despite the Porphyrian filter through which the Moderatean passage concerning the Three Ones has been transmitted, its description of the first principles appears essentially non-Porphyrian, and is probably authentic. See Dillon 1996, 347–349; Turner 2001, 363–372.

⁸¹ I have argued this in detail in Rasimus 2009.

In addition to the entities presented in Figure 1, many other beings, usually more than two dozen, appear in the divine realm according to this Barbeloite mythology. Among them are often found Adam, Seth and Sophia. These, however, are arranged within the structure of the four lights, in that Adam and Seth dwell in (or are above) the first two of them, while Seth's offspring, and those who repent later, are placed in the latter two lights. Often the members of the supreme triad have subordinate hypostases (e.g., *Ap. John* II 5,11ff. parr.) as well. Sophia is usually the last and lowest constituent of the fourth light, Eleleth. One of the four lights, Armogenes (=Harmozel) or Eleleth, is sometimes responsible for the appearance of Sophia, and of the material world, either directly as in *Holy Book* (III 68,5ff./IV 56,22ff.) and *Trim. Prot.* (39,13ff.) or indirectly through Sophia as, e.g., in *Ap. John* (II 8,16–20; 9,25ff. parr.) and *Adv. haer.* 1.29.4.⁸² Other prominent Barbeloite figures include a second tetrad alongside the four lights (Gamaliel, Gabriel, Samblo, Abrasax; in *Holy Book*, *Apoc. Adam*, *Zost.*, *Melch.*, *Trim. Prot.*, *Marsanes*).

It may also be noted that texts that utilize this Barbeloite material usually agree fairly well with each other on the description of supracelestial realms, but often differ considerably when they discuss events outside those realms. For example, *Ap. John* goes on to discuss the paradise story; *Holy Book* is interested in Seth, primordial disasters and baptismal speculations; *Trim. Prot.* relates the threefold descent of a female Savior; while *Zost.*, *Allogenes*, *Marsanes* and *Steles Seth* are mostly or completely silent about the lower worlds. In any case, the core material of the Barbeloite mythology seems to have enjoyed a wide circulation.

Since some of the texts utilizing Barbeloite material do not mention Seth or his seed at all (*Adv. haer.* 1.29, *Trim. Prot.*, *Marsanes*, *Norea*), some scholars have suggested that the Barbeloite teaching originally developed independently of speculations concerning Seth, and that Seth was secondarily introduced into the Barbeloite "system."⁸³ This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that some of Schenke's Sethian texts, which do deal with Seth and his seed, seem unaware of Barbeloite ideas (Sethians and Archontics of *Pan.* 39 and 40). Moreover,

⁸² Cf. the demiurgic role of the divine Setheus in the Sethian Cod. Bruc. *Untitled* 8. See also Pearson 1990, 66.

⁸³ Sevrin 1986, e.g., 275ff.; Logan 1996; Turner 2001. Klijn (1977, 115) also thinks that Seth was secondarily "introduced into an already existing system."

speculations about the Biblical Seth are also formally distinct from Barbeloite ones about first principles which resemble Neopythagorean, Middle- and Neoplatonic speculations.

Even though many scholars continued to evaluate links between the church fathers' Sethians and the Nag Hammadi texts,⁸⁴ it was a series of articles published by Hans-Martin Schenke in the 1970s and 1980s which guaranteed that Sethianism stayed in the spotlight and replaced Ophitism as the early and classic form of Gnosticism.⁸⁵ Despite some criticism,⁸⁶ Schenke's theory of Sethian Gnosticism has been generally accepted and it has inspired a large quantity of scholarly work.⁸⁷ Schenke famously argued that sixteen documents from the Nag Hammadi and related codices as well as from heresiological reports⁸⁸—including *Ap. John*, Irenaeus' Barbeloites (*Adv. haer.* 1.29), and Epiphanius' Sethians (*Pan.* 39) and "libertine Gnostics" (*Pan.* 26)—represented a unique mythology of a religious group whose members practiced baptism and cultic ascent, and identified themselves as the virtuous offspring of Seth. Based on a "network" of common features in the mythology of these texts, Schenke created a typological model of the mythological "Sethian system," as he called it. Schenke further thought that this movement had its roots in pre-Christian Judaism.⁸⁹ Thus, Schenke's corpus can be seen as a revision of earlier nineteenth-century constructions of Classic Gnosticism, only that now the Sethians, instead of the Ophites, play the decisive role. In fact, Schenke left out of his corpus the Ophites of Irenaeus, the Sethians of the *Refutatio*, and Theodoret's hybrid Sethian-Ophite account, since these do not fit his typological model of the "Sethian system." Moreover, because the self-designation, "seed of Seth," occurs in several texts that do fit

⁸⁴ Wisse 1972; Böhlig and Wisse 1975; Klijn 1977, especially 90–107; MacRae 1977; Pearson 1977; Tardieu 1977.

⁸⁵ H.-M. Schenke 1974; H.-M. Schenke 1981; H.-M. Schenke 1987.

⁸⁶ Tardieu 1977; Wisse 1981; van den Broek 1983, 54–56. Cf. also Marksches 2003, 97–100. For the most part, this criticism is directed at Schenke's 1974 article.

⁸⁷ For example, Stroumsa 1984; M. Williams 1985; Sevrin 1986; Layton 1987; Pearson 1990, 52–83; Scott 1995; Turner 1995; Logan 1996; Turner 2001; Logan 2006; Pearson 2007. Cf. Wisse's criticism (1981).

⁸⁸ The sixteen texts in Schenke's Sethian corpus are *Ap. John*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Holy Book*, *Apoc. Adam*, *Steles Seth*, *Zost.*, *Melch.*, *Norea*, *Marsanes*, *Allogenes*, *Trim. Prot.*, *Cod. Bruc. Untitled*, and the accounts of Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.29 (Barbeloites), and Epiphanius, *Pan.* 26, 39 and 40 ("libertine Gnostics," "Sethians," and "Archontics," respectively). See H.-M. Schenke 1981.

⁸⁹ H.-M. Schenke 1981.

his model, Schenke concluded that the authors and advocates of these texts were the real historical Sethians, and that the church fathers misrepresented Sethianism by labeling texts that have nothing to do with his model as Sethian.⁹⁰

Schenke presented a long list of features that constitute his typological model of the “mythological Sethian system.”⁹¹ The main features are (1) the self-understanding of the Gnostics that they are the pneumatic seed of Seth, (2) Seth as the heavenly-earthly savior of his seed, (3) the heavenly triad of Father, Mother Barbelo and Son Autogenes, (4) the four lights of the Son called Harmozel, Oroaiel, Daveithe and Eleleth, who are also dwelling-places of heavenly Adam, Seth, and his seed, (5) the evil creator god Ialdabaoth who tries to destroy the seed of Seth, and (6) the division of history into three ages and the appearance of the savior in each age, related to the four lights of Autogenes. In addition to these 1974 criteria, Schenke added more in his paper read at the 1978 Yale conference, published in 1981: (7) the division of Barbelo’s aeon into the triad of Kalyptos, Protophanes, Autogenes;⁹² (8) a second tetrad alongside the four lights: Gamaliel, Gabriel, Samblo, Abrasax; (9) the designation “Pigeradamas” for Adamas; (10) the concept of Eleleth as cause of the terrestrial world; (11) the name and figure of Mirothea/Mirotheos (or the like); (12) a special prayer in *Steles Seth, Allogenes* and *Zost.*; (13) a specific deployment of negative theology in *Ap. John* and *Allogenes*; (14) a specific philosophical terminology in *Steles Seth, Zost., Allogenes* and *Marsanes*; as well as (15) “obvious secondary Christianization.”⁹³

However, Schenke’s criteria for his “Sethian system” can be essentially reduced to two: the special focus on Seth and his offspring; and the utilization of the so-called Barbeloite mythology.⁹⁴ As pointed out above, these two types of speculation are formally distinct from each

⁹⁰ H.-M. Schenke 1981, 590–593.

⁹¹ See H.-M. Schenke 1974; and H.-M. Schenke 1981, 593–597; cf. Turner 2001, 63–64.

⁹² On this Sethian triad, which describes in functional terms the Platonic process of Procession and Return of originally hidden reality self-constituting itself via externalization, see especially Turner 2001, 531–547.

⁹³ H.-M. Schenke 1974, 165–173; H.-M. Schenke 1981, 588–616. Cf. Pearson 1990, 126ff.; Turner 2001, 63ff.

⁹⁴ Most of Schenke’s criteria (1974; 1981, 593–594) deal with details of the Barbeloite exposition of the upper worlds and the Godhead. The criteria 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 only apply to texts that utilize Barbeloite speculation; while the criteria 1, 2 (4) and 5 deal with Seth and his offspring.

other, and they are also attested individually in the sources. Thus, Schenke's "Sethian system" may not be a monolith but a combination of two types of mythological speculation. I will discuss this possibility in more detail below.

Schenke's theory has sometimes been criticized for its leap beyond typological modeling into real history. Frederik Wisse in particular has insisted that even though Schenke's texts do seem to reveal some sort of loose network of unique mythological features, these texts were not products of a historical group, but were simply written by like-minded individuals, based on free-floating mythologoumena. Wisse was also not convinced by the coherence of Schenke's "Sethian system," and suggested that the differences among Sethian texts are too great for them to be products of a real community.⁹⁵ Wisse's criticism, however, has, in general, not persuaded scholars to abandon Schenke's theory; many of them have rather been persuaded by Schenke's suggestion that there were real communities behind the Sethian texts, because many of the texts in question refer to baptism and contain apparent self-designations, such as the "seed of Seth." Alan Scott and Alastair Logan have even applied the sociological theory by Stark and Bainbridge concerning the origin and organization of modern schismatic religious movements to Schenke's Sethian evidence. They both concluded that Sethianism (Logan calls them "Gnostics") was a cult, although Scott identified it more specifically as an "audience cult," while Logan thought it best to classify his Gnostics as a "cult movement."⁹⁶ These suggestions will be assessed in the Epilogue after all the evidence has been examined.

To account for the noted differences among Schenke's Sethian texts, John Turner developed a hypothesis of a five-stage history of Sethianism,⁹⁷ which he has recently revised.⁹⁸ According to Turner, Sethianism underwent changes due to religious schisms and innovations, which led the movement from its Jewish origins to first Christian and then Platonic circles, and finally to alienation from all of these due to consecutive rejections. Turner suggested earlier (1986; 2001) that originally there had existed two independent pre-Christian movements, Barbeloites and Sethites. The former would have consisted of

⁹⁵ Wisse 1981.

⁹⁶ Scott 1995; Logan 2006, 58–61.

⁹⁷ See Turner 1986; and Turner 2001.

⁹⁸ Turner 2007.

Jewish priests engaged in baptismal practices and in speculations about the Godhead, whereas the latter would have been Genesis revisionists who saw themselves as the worthy seed of their savior Seth. The mythologies of these two groups would have been reflected in Irenaeus' two major chapters on the Gnostics (*Adv. haer.* 1.29–30), and their second-century fusion in the most famous of Sethian texts, *Ap. John*.⁹⁹ Since *Ap. John* exists in two recensions, SR and LR, and Irenaeus' chapters differ in certain ways from these, Turner suggested that an editor in the mid-second century combined versions of Barbeloite and Sethite myths, added a frame story in form of a dialogue between Jesus and John, and thus produced SR. Another editor would then have expanded SR into LR towards the end of the second century, by adding more material, including the supposedly early and originally independent "Johannine" Pronoia hymn, found at the end of LR (II 30,11–31,25 par.).¹⁰⁰

Turner's more recent view (2007), discussed presently, was foreshadowed by Alastair Logan's solution. Logan, too, suggested that the Gnostic sources known to Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.29–30) were combined by an author of an early version of *Ap. John* in the mid-second century, but that the ideas of Seth as a savior and the Gnostics as the seed of Seth were introduced into this version only by a later editor, around 200 CE. This "Sethianization" would then have resulted in a third century base-text behind both SR and LR, of which SR would be an abridgement.¹⁰¹ Usually today, however, LR is considered to be a later expansion of SR.¹⁰² According to Logan, the Sethianization would have been provoked by criticism of novelty by the "great church," and possibly under the influence of the Valentinian concept of Seth as the progenitor of the pneumatics.¹⁰³ As I will argue in Chapter 6, such a Sethianization seems to have indeed occurred, but rather as a result of *Jewish* accusations of forgery and novelty.

While Logan thus dates the Sethianization to the third century CE, many other scholars think the Gnostic interest in Seth was already a

⁹⁹ Turner 2001, 257ff.

¹⁰⁰ Turner 2001, e.g., 127–155, 214–220.

¹⁰¹ Logan 1996, xx, 26–69, 191, 283.

¹⁰² See, e.g., Barc 1980; Waldstein 1995, 388–393; Barc and Painchaud 1999; Turner 2001, 141.

¹⁰³ Logan 1996, e.g., xx, 45–46, 191, 283.

pre-Christian phenomenon.¹⁰⁴ But whereas Logan rightly saw that the Ophites of Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.30) had no interest in Seth, nor did they know of his special seed, Turner's earlier solution derived the "Sethite" speculations from a group "that crafted the anthropogonies common to the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, and Irenaeus' (*Adv. haer.* 1.30) 'Ophites'."¹⁰⁵ Turner further constructed the "Sethite" triad of highest beings on the basis of *Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*¹⁰⁶ Turner had noticed that the Ophites of Irenaeus did not conceive of Seth as a savior nor say anything about his special seed. He also conceived of the Ophites of *Adv. haer.* 1.30 (as well as of *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*) as non-Sethian, and, because Seth was not a savior for them, presumably as non-"Sethite" as well.¹⁰⁷ While Turner thus did not make a clear distinction between his "Sethites" and Irenaeus' Ophites in his earlier publications, he has recently assigned the interest in Seth to a later revision by the group that produced the so-called Ophite myth.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, both Turner and Logan distinguish among three types of mythological speculation behind *Ap. John* and Schenke's Sethianism: (1) Barbeloite speculation about first principles, as in *Adv. haer.* 1.29; (2) Ophite rewriting of Genesis, as in *Adv. haer.* 1.30; and (3) speculations about Seth and his special seed (Logan: those responsible for the "Sethianization"; Turner: later revisionists of the Ophite myth, whom he had earlier conceived of as a separate group, "Sethites").

Bentley Layton, whose category of Classic Gnosticism is essentially a revision of Schenke's Sethian one, but also yet another variant of the ever recurring attempt to define early and classic Gnosticism, suggests that we include (among other texts) *Ap. John* and both of Irenaeus' major Gnostic reports (*Adv. haer.* 1.29–30) in the corpus of Classic Gnostic Scripture.¹⁰⁹ Even though Layton says he has built his corpus

¹⁰⁴ H.-M. Schenke 1981, 607; Pearson 1990, 127–133; Turner 2001, 261, 271. Cf. Parrott 1991, 5–16. Turner has since changed his mind and now dates the Gnostic interest in Seth to the second century (2007, 905).

¹⁰⁵ Turner 2001, 258.

¹⁰⁶ Turner 2001, 287–290.

¹⁰⁷ Turner 2001, 203ff.

¹⁰⁸ Turner 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Layton 1987, 23–51, 163–181. To Schenke's corpus, Layton has added *Thund.*, the teachings of Saturninos, Ophites, and Cainites of Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.24, 30 and 31 respectively), the "Nicolaitan" account of Epiphanius (*Pan.* 25), and Porphyry's account of the "Gnostics" (*Vit. Plot.* 16). He does admit that "not enough is known

around the myths of those who used the self-designation, Gnostic, he specifically leaves such documents out, and, in fact, starts from those who were labeled Gnostic by the *heresiologists*, i.e., Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.29–31 and Epiphanius' *Pan.* 26.¹¹⁰ He then goes on to say that these Gnostics are the same as Schenke's Sethians, although Layton's corpus includes several documents that do not fit Schenke's typological model. Layton also adds that these Gnostics are sometimes, in scholarship, called Barbeloites, Sethians or Ophites.¹¹¹ He does not, however, include the Ophite diagram (*Cels.* 6.24–38), *Orig. World, Eugnostos* or *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, in his corpus. Nevertheless, Layton's starting point, the myths of Gnostics *par excellence* of heresiological literature, has forced him to see Sethianism from a wider perspective. It may be further pointed out that the publication of the "Sethian" *Gos. Judas* confirms Layton's suggestion that even *Adv. haer.* 1.31 should be included in the Classic Gnostic corpus. Recently, Birger Pearson has proposed a very similar expansion and renaming of Schenke's corpus, by adding Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30–31 to it, due to the publication of the Coptic *Gos. Judas*.¹¹²

Noteworthy here is that although Schenke did *not* accept the second one of Irenaeus' major chapters on Gnostics—the Ophites of *Adv. haer.* 1.30—into his Sethian category (the account lacks specific Sethian features), other scholars have felt compelled to do so. Logan and Turner see the myth of Irenaeus' Ophites as a main source of the Sethian *Ap. John* or even of Sethian Gnosticism in general. Turner thus suggests that Irenaeus' Ophites could be included in the Sethian Gnostic corpus.¹¹³ Layton finally does include them in his Classic Gnostic corpus, as does Pearson. This reflects a larger problem in Schenke's theory. Even though his typological model of the "Sethian system" does reveal

about the teachings of Satorninos to be sure it is a product of the gnostic sect"; and that the Cainite teachings "seem completely unrelated to the rest of the summary [of the Ophite teaching; *Adv. haer.* 1.30.15–1.31.2], and may have nothing to do with gnostic Christianity" (1987, 159, 170–181). However, the Coptic *Gos. Judas* is clearly a Sethian text in the sense Schenke defined the term, and only Irenaeus' sketchy report lacks Sethian features.

¹¹⁰ For example, certain Carpocratians, according to Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.25.6), and the Naasseni, according to Hippolytus (*Ref.* 5.2; 5.6.4; 5.11.1), called themselves Gnostics, but Layton (1987) excludes these from his corpus.

¹¹¹ Layton 1987, xv.

¹¹² Pearson 2007, 45–58. He also suggests the inclusion of the Codex Tchacos *Book of Allogenes*, based, however, merely on the name "Allogenes" (2007, 97). See below.

¹¹³ Turner 2001, 61.

an important constellation of ideas in certain documents, it seems to miss something important by excluding most texts that contain features of the Ophite mythology, since this mythology seems relevant for understanding *Ap. John*, “one of the most classic narrations of the gnostic myth,”¹¹⁴ or “Sethian revelation *par excellence*.”¹¹⁵ The Ophite mythology is also relevant for understanding a group of other documents that often have been linked with Sethianism, but which lack mostly or completely actual Sethian features. It is to these documents that we now turn.

1.3 OPHITE MYTHOLOGY IN THE NAG HAMMADI TEXTS AND RELATED LITERATURE

Six documents from the Nag Hammadi library and related literature have been suggested or shown to have links not only with both Schenke’s Sethians and heresiologists’ Ophites, but also with each other: *Eugnostos*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, *Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Ap. John* and *Pan. 26*. Some of these links are obvious. It is generally recognized that *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* have an intimate literary relationship, and probably depend on a common written source.¹¹⁶ *Soph. Jes. Chr.* is today generally considered to be a rewriting of *Eugnostos*.¹¹⁷ That *Ap. John*, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* share much common material is readily apparent.¹¹⁸ Other not so obvious links among several of these texts have also been detected, and they will be considered after the “sectarian links” of these documents have been discussed.

Of these texts, only *Ap. John*, *Pan. 26* and *Hyp. Arch.* are included in Schenke’s Sethian corpus, while the others (*Orig. World*, *Eugnostos*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.*) have remained more or less unclassified. Whereas *Ap. John* is considered a classic example of Sethianism, *Pan. 26* and *Hyp. Arch.* do not have significant Sethian characteristics. Even though the Gnostics of *Pan. 26* supposedly read books of Seth (26.8.1), and even though Seth, Barbelo and Davides (cf. Daveithe, one of Autogenes’ four lights) occur in *Pan. 26*, these figures do not seem to play the same roles

¹¹⁴ Layton 1987, 23.

¹¹⁵ Turner 2001, 69.

¹¹⁶ Bullard 1970, 100; Barc 1980, 1–48; H.-M. Schenke 1981, 596–597; Bethge 1989, 12–19.

¹¹⁷ See Parrott 1991, 3–5.

¹¹⁸ See, e.g., Barc 1980, 5–19; Logan 1996, 238; Turner 2001, 167.

as in other Sethian texts: Seth and Davides are evil archons (26.10.1), and Barbelo may here be an equivalent to the creator Sophia¹¹⁹ rather than being the first thought of the supreme God. Thus, it seems that the mythology behind these sections of *Pan.* 26 has only been slightly influenced by Barbeloite ideas. Furthermore, the main reason Schenke accepted *Hyp. Arch.* into his Sethian corpus was the appearance of the figure of Eleleth,¹²⁰ one of the four luminaries of the Barbeloite teaching (the only clear Barbeloite feature in *Hyp. Arch.*). However, because Seth is not considered a savior in this text and the special seed is said to be Norea's (96,19ff.), instead of his, *Hyp. Arch.* cannot be considered truly Sethian, but perhaps only influenced by Barbeloite ideas. *Orig. World* lacks all peculiarly Sethian features and is generally not considered Sethian, but its close connection with *Hyp. Arch.* has led to its inclusion in the discussion on Sethianism. Schenke and Turner have speculated that the possible common source behind *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* could have been Sethian in character.¹²¹ That does not seem likely, though, because their common material as well as *Orig. World* itself lack Sethian features. Perkins, nevertheless, thinks *Orig. World* represents Sethian Gnosticism.¹²² *Eugnostos* is sometimes conceived of as "proto-Sethian" because the third male in its divine hierarchy can be considered to be an archetype of Seth (see below), and since the text has been taken to be a possible source of *Ap. John*.¹²³ According to many scholars, the special material in *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, not based on *Eugnostos*, has Sethian features or at least clear links with Sethian writings such as *Ap. John*, *Hyp. Arch.*, and *Trim. Prot.*¹²⁴ The suggested Sethian features include the term "Invisible Spirit" for the supreme God (*passim* in *Ap. John*; *Trim. Prot.* 38,11), and the desire of Sophia to create without her consort. However, Seth himself does not explicitly appear in *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, and the suggested Sethian features are not included among Schenke's criteria.

¹¹⁹ *Pan.* 26.1.9; 26.10.9. Barbelo and the Mother from whom the power was stolen are not clearly distinguished. Cf. also *Pan.* 25.2.2–4; 25.3.4.

¹²⁰ H.-M. Schenke 1981, 596–597.

¹²¹ H.-M. Schenke 1981, 596–597; Turner 2001, 62.

¹²² Perkins 1993, 43. Jonas (1988, 393ff.) and Logan (1996, 179) consider *Orig. World* a "Barbeloite" text, although it lacks Barbeloite features.

¹²³ Parrott 1991, 12–16; Turner 2001, 203–216.

¹²⁴ See H.-M. Schenke 1962a; Tardieu 1984, 60–64; Barry 1995, 164–168; Turner 1995, 212ff.; Hartenstein 2000, 42–44.

On the other hand, all these texts have also been shown to have links with the Ophites. It is generally accepted that *Hyp. Arch.*, *Orig. World*, and the latter half of *Ap. John* have a close connection to Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30, and that these four documents represent a very similar kind of reinterpretation of the first chapters of Genesis.¹²⁵ The following themes are found in at least three of these four texts: Ialdabaoth, born of Sophia, creates offspring (the archons) and boasts that he is the only god; his claim is refuted; archons create Adam after a divine archetype but are unable to raise him from the ground; Adam receives two divine elements which awaken and assist him; Eve is created/brought to Adam; archons rape the earthly Eve while her heavenly counterpart escapes; Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge instructed by the true divine revealer (either directly or by the means of the evil or neutral serpent) and this is considered a positive act; Adam and Eve are cast out of paradise; evil beings from heaven instruct humankind in error and idolatry; the figure of Norea is mentioned; archon(s) send(s) the Flood; and the Jewish scriptures are considered to contain some truth due to Sophia, who also plays an important role in the salvation history. In addition, the names of the seven archons are found in almost identical form in Irenaeus' (and Origen's) Ophite account, *Orig. World*, and *Ap. John* (see Table 3). Finally, all four texts mention Samael; it is an alternate name either for the chief-demon Michael, or for Ialdabaoth. This material will be examined in more detail in the following chapters.

The material common to these four texts does not, however, cover the beginning of the Ophite account, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–3, which contains a description of the divine hierarchy. Whereas *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* are, for the most part, silent about such matters, the authors of *Ap. John* have adopted the so-called Barbeloite scheme, presented in the preceding chapter (*Adv. haer.* 1.29) of Irenaeus' catalog. Even though Layton suggests that 1.30.1–3 could be a summary of 1.29,¹²⁶ we are, in fact, dealing here with two completely different concepts of the Godhead. The basic structure of the Barbeloite one (1.29), consisting of the triad of Father-Mother-Son and the four illuminators of the Son, is clearly different from the Ophite one (1.30), consisting of

¹²⁵ Barc 1980, 6–19, especially 16n18; Perkins 1980, 44–45; Pétrement 1990, 437–441; Turner 2001, 167.

¹²⁶ Layton 1987, 170.

a series of heavenly men and their consorts (possibly conceived of as a pentad), with an underlying triad of Man-Son of Man-Savior/Christ (see below). The Barbeloite scheme further includes a great number of other characters, arranged within the fourfold structure (cf. Figure 1),¹²⁷ and is generally reminiscent of Neopythagorean, Middle- and Neoplatonic speculations. The Ophite scheme consists instead of a small number of individual figures derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition (Man, Son of Man, Holy Spirit, Christ, Sophia).

Turner and Logan have noted that the underlying structure of this Ophite (*Adv. haer.* 1.30) scheme—the triad of heavenly men—is found in *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*,¹²⁸ two texts mostly dealing with the genesis and structure of the upper worlds. Obviously, there is some variation in the way the rest of the scheme has been built around this core. In Irenaeus' Ophite source, an additional (and more “orthodox”) triad of the First Man-Son of Man-Holy Spirit seems superimposed on this scheme; and in *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, two consortless higher beings (Unbegotten and the Self-Begetter) are found above the triad of Immortal Man-Son of Man-Savior, all of whom also have consorts/female aspects called Sophia.¹²⁹ In addition, the author of *Eugnostos* is well aware of Greek philosophy. As Turner points out, the author employs the Neopythagorean tetraktys (III 78,15–24); utilizes negative theology reminiscent of Plato's *Parmenides* (III 71,13–73,3/V 2,8–3,4);¹³⁰ and distinguishes the tractate's teaching from that of other philosophical schools (III 70,1–71,1/V 1,1–24).¹³¹ Moreover, as van den Broek has suggested, the author may have derived the appellations “Mind” and “Truth” for the first pair of emanations, i.e., Immortal Man and his Sophia (V 6,6–11), from Plato's *Republic* (490B, 509B, 517B).¹³² It seems that the author of *Eugnostos* has systematized and philosophized the basic triadic structure, not only by clearly identifying all the female members/aspects of the triad as Sophias, but also by adding a monad and a dyad above the androgynous triad, and finally expressing the whole scheme in terms of “begetting” (see Figure 5). Nevertheless, the core structure of three heavenly men remains the

¹²⁷ See, e.g., *Ap. John* II 5,11–8,28 parr.; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.29.1–2.

¹²⁸ Logan 1996, 151n56, 180; Turner 2001, 209–210.

¹²⁹ See Turner 2001, 203–208.

¹³⁰ Cf. Trakatellis (1991) who finds several parallels in Middleplatonic negative theologies.

¹³¹ Turner 2001, 205–206. Cf. also Trakatellis 1991; and Pasquier 2000, 28–32.

¹³² Van den Broek 1996, 117–130.

same in all variants, i.e., *Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Eugnostos* III and V, and *Soph. Jes. Chr* III and BG.

Designations of the male and female aspects of the triad in *Eugnostos* (especially in the Codex V version) bear striking similarities to the figures in Irenaeus' Ophite account. The Immortal Man, the first member of the triad, in the Codex V version of *Eugnostos*, is called the "Man of the depth ($\omega\omega\kappa < \beta\upsilon\theta\acute{o}\varsigma$)"¹³³ (6,20), while the Ophite First Man is said to exist in the depth (*bythi*; *Adv. haer.* 1.30.1; cf. Theodoret, *Haer. fab. comp.* 1.14.4: $\beta\upsilon\theta\hat{\omega}$). The Ophite First Man puts his *ennoia* forward, and the Son of Man owes his existence to this act. *Ennoia*, as a grammatically feminine word seems a bit strange characterization for the masculine Son of Man,¹³⁴ and therefore *ennoia* and the Son of Man could originally have been two different figures. Perhaps the superimposing of the additional triad of First Man-Son of Man-Holy Spirit is responsible for the fading of *Ennoia* by identifying her with the Son of Man. Interestingly, in *Eugnostos* V, the female aspect of the Immortal Man is called "*Ennoia* of all Sophias" (6,8), and together they give birth to the Son of Man. The name of the Son of Man in *Eugnostos* is Adam (V 9,23 parr.), and his female aspect is called the "Mother of the all" (V 9,4–5; cf. *Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 104,17–18/BG 99,11–12), while the Holy Spirit in Irenaeus' source is called the "Mother of the living."¹³⁵ Both refer to LXX Gen 3:20 where Eve is called the "Mother of all living." This suggests that the background of these speculations is Gen 1–3. In addition, the characterization of the divine father of the Son of Man-Adam as the First or Immortal Man seems to derive from Gen 1:26–27, according to which Adam was created in the (apparently human-like) image and likeness of God. Moreover, the third Man is called Savior in *Eugnostos* (V 10,9–15 parr.) and Christ in Irenaeus' source. Finally, the Savior's femaleness in *Eugnostos* (V 10,12–13 par.) is called Pistis Sophia; and, in Irenaeus' account, Sophia Prunicus is the sister of Christ the savior. The comparison can be sketched in the following figure:

¹³³ Crum 1962, 555b.

¹³⁴ See Turner 2001, 210.

¹³⁵ Although the Holy Spirit is said to exist below the Son of Man, both exist hierarchically lower than the First Man, but higher than Christ and Sophia.

<i>Adv. haer. 1.30</i>		<i>Eugnostos V</i>	
<i>female</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>female</i>
		Unbegotten Forefather	
		Self-Begetter Self-Father	
(<i>Ennoia</i>)	First Man, exists in the Depth	Immortal Man, Man of the Depth	<i>Ennoia</i> of all Sophias
Holy Spirit, Mother of the living	Son of Man, Second Man	Son of Man Adam	Sophia, Mother of the all
Sophia Prunicus	Christ, Third Man	Savior	Pistis Sophia

Figure 2: Comparison between Irenaeus' *Adv. haer. 1.30* and *Eugnostos V*

It seems clear that the authors of both texts have based themselves on the same basic concept of the Godhead: a triadic structuring of heavenly men (*anthropoi*) and their female consorts or aspects. As will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5, this concept of the Godhead is essentially a heavenly projection of Adam and Eve, spiced up with Adam and Wisdom Christologies. The Codex III version of *Eugnostos* (76,14–82,6) as well as both versions of *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (III 100,20–106,24; BG 93,16–103,9) also include the same basic scheme, although these texts further identify the Son of Man with the Savior (and consequently the Mother Sophia with Pistis Sophia), due to a summary section condensing the divine hierarchy into three essential realms of (1) the supreme God, the first principle, (2) the Immortal Man, and (3) the Son of Man-Savior (*Eugnostos* III 85,9–22; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* BG 108,1–109,4 [Codex III version of *Soph. Jes. Chr.* is missing the relevant pages]).¹³⁶ These possibly secondary summaries¹³⁷ may, however, serve to strengthen a triadic concept of the Godhead, already expressed in a different form in the scheme identified in Figure 2. Moreover, this triad of heavenly men and their female aspects/consorts is, in fact, found nowhere else,

¹³⁶ In the Codex V version of *Eugnostos*, this summary (13,7–20) includes four realms, and only the Self-Begetter, the second principle, has been dropped.

¹³⁷ See Parrott 1991, 9–16. Tardieu (1984, 383ff.) thinks this section is a Valentinian addition.

except perhaps in *Pan.* 26.10.4 (*Orig. World* and the Ophite diagram may allude to it as well)—the Naassene teaching speaks of a similar triad, but the female aspects/consorts are missing (for discussion, see Chapter 5).¹³⁸

As the basic scheme draws upon the opening chapters of Genesis, Parrott's suggestion that the system of *Eugnostos* is based on ancient Egyptian mythology, of which the triadic pattern identified above would be only a secondary Biblical modification,¹³⁹ does not seem plausible to me. Some scholars,¹⁴⁰ including myself earlier,¹⁴¹ have suggested that the scheme in question is based on speculations about Adam and Seth. Such an interpretation would make understandable the "monstrous"¹⁴² concept of both the First Man and the Son of Man uniting with the Holy Spirit to beget the Third Man (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–2). If the First Man is taken to represent YHWH and if the Son of Man stands for Adam, and the Holy Spirit for Eve, then Gen 4:25 would offer the solution: after Adam had lain with Eve and she had given birth to Seth, she

¹³⁸ According to Epiphanius, these "libertine Gnostics" taught that in the Ogdoad, there are Barbelo, and, depending on one's interpretation, two, three or four male figures: Father of All; Lord the same Self-Father; another Christ the self-engendered; and this Christ who descended and revealed this knowledge to humanity, and who is Jesus (ἐν δὲ τῷ ὀγδόῳ οὐρανῷ τὴν Βαρβηλῶ καλουμένην καὶ τὸν πατέρα τῶν ὅλων καὶ κύριον τὸν αὐτὸν αὐτοπάτορα καὶ Χριστὸν ἄλλον αὐτολόχευτον καὶ Χριστὸν τοῦτον τὸν κατελθόντα καὶ δείξαντα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ταύτην τὴν γνῶσιν, ὃν καὶ Ἰησοῦν φασιν; *Pan.* 26.10.4, Holl, ed.). The "Father of All" may or may not be the same as the "Lord the same Self-Father," mentioned in the immediate context. F. Williams (1987, 90) and Layton (1987, 211) treat them identical. Layton also thinks the "another Christ" and "this Christ (who is Jesus)" are one and the same being whereas for Williams, they are two different Christ-figures. In *Eugnostos*, "(Fore-)Father" and "Self-Father" are the two highest entities (see Figures 2 and 5) above the Immortal Man and two Christ-figures, the Son of Man and the Savior (see Chapter 5). However, in the bridge-sections of *Eugnostos* (III 85,9–22; V 13,7–20) and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (BG 108,1–109,4) the more complex systems presented earlier in the treatises, are condensed into ones consisting of either three or four levels, bearing their male names only. In the "libertine Gnostic" teaching, the only female figure said to exist in the upper worlds with the male ones is Barbelo, the "Mother of all living" (*Pan.* 26.10.4,10), although earlier Epiphanius possibly speaks of Barbelo, and "mother on high" from whom the creator took power, as two different characters (see 26.1.9). These "mothers" further resemble the female figures in Irenaeus' Ophite source, i.e., the heavenly Eve ("Mother of the living"), and the descending Sophia whose power got into the hands of Ialdabaoth (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–4).

¹³⁹ Parrott 1991, 9–16.

¹⁴⁰ Parrott 1991, 12–16; Turner 2001, 203–216.

¹⁴¹ Rasimus 2005, 258.

¹⁴² Bousset 1973, 162; Pétrement 1990, 94.

proclaimed that *God* had granted her a child. The passage can be read in such a way that both Adam and God were involved in the begetting of Seth (the same applies for Cain, cf. Gen 4:1). This interpretation would thus imply that the Third Man, Savior or Christ, is intended to be Seth. However, nothing of a heavenly Seth is explicitly said in these texts. Likewise, there is no indication of Seth's special status in Irenaeus' account. If the scheme was based on speculations about Seth, why would he be absent? I will argue in Chapters 5 and 6 that Seth was only secondarily read into the scheme, which originally had to do with Adam Christology.

The Ophite speculation about the Godhead (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–3) is thus paralleled by *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, while the Ophite rewriting of the creation and paradise stories (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.3ff.) is paralleled by *Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.*, and the second half of *Ap. John*. Does anything else suggest that these Coptic texts belong together? Painchaud has proposed that *Eugnostos* and *Orig. World* were “intended as two complementary parts of a single design.” He argues that both documents share (1) a large amount of sometimes unique vocabulary and common *dramatis personae* (e.g., *Archigenetor*, “Immortal Man,” “Adam of Light,” the upper world as “unlimited”), (2) common literary patterns with similar functions,¹⁴³ and (3) the same rhetorical *dispositio*, with similar features in transition parts: (a) Exordium (*Eugnostos* III 70,1–71,13/*Orig. World* 97,24–98,11); (b) Narration (*Eugnostos* III 71,13–74,12/*Orig. World* 98,11–123,2); (c) Proof (*Eugnostos* III 74,12–89,15/*Orig. World* 123,2–31); and (d) Peroration (*Eugnostos* III 89,15–90,11/*Orig. World* 123,32–127,17) (the two texts also seem to form a symmetric unit based on certain links between the transition parts).¹⁴⁴

Even though Painchaud generally refers to the Codex III version of *Eugnostos*, it seems that the Codex V version has had an even closer relationship to *Orig. World*. As Parrott has suggested, the two extant versions of *Eugnostos* seem to represent two different trajectories of transmission of an underlying parent-text, which we may call “proto-*Eugnostos*.”¹⁴⁵ While the trajectory leading to the Codex III version

¹⁴³ I.e., lists of male and female names in *Eugnostos* III 76,24–77,2; 81,21–82,4; 82,7–83,2/*Orig. World* 101,24–102,2; 106,27–107,1; 107,4–14; and the descriptions of certain heavens in *Eugnostos* III 88,11–89,3/*Orig. World* 102,15–22.

¹⁴⁴ Painchaud 1995a. Pasquier (2000, 16ff.) as well as Falkenberg and Hyldahl (2003, 30) divide the *dispositio* of *Eugnostos* (III) in a slightly different manner.

¹⁴⁵ Parrott 1991, 3–18.

gave rise to *Soph. Jes. Chr.*,¹⁴⁶ the one leading to the Codex V version has not only stayed slightly closer to *Orig. World* and Irenaeus' Ophite source, as pointed out above, but seems to have also led to an anti-Valentinian redaction, visible both in *Orig. World* and *Eugnostos* V ("kinglessness" as the *fourth* class surpassing the spiritual one; see Chapter 4). In fact, Painchaud has suggested that at least *Orig. World* has undergone two redactions, a Valentinian, and an anti-Valentinian one,¹⁴⁷ and this may be the case with *Eugnostos* V as well. In the case of *Eugnostos*, such an anti-Valentinian redaction may well represent a counterreaction to an earlier Valentinian adaptation of the text. Both extant versions of *Eugnostos*, and thus presumably also the proto-*Eugnostos*, contain material that has parallels in Valentinian documents. While some scholars have seen here signs of a Valentinianizing redaction of *Eugnostos*,¹⁴⁸ it seems to me that it may well have been *Eugnostos* that influenced the Valentinians. Three kinds of Valentinian-like material can be detected in *Eugnostos*: (1) material that is parallel to the so-called Valentinian Letter cited by Epiphanius (*Pan.* 31.4.11–6.10);¹⁴⁹ (2) a list of mental attributes of God, cited by Irenaeus in refuting Valentinian views about the first principles (*Adv. haer.* 2.13.1–2); and (3) certain attributes of the Immortal Man and Sophia, such as "Mind," "Truth," "Silence" and "Depth,"¹⁵⁰ that are common in Valentinian texts as designations of the highest aeons.¹⁵¹

As for the Valentinian Letter, it is often considered an atypical example of Valentinianism, and many scholars assume its author, in fact, drew upon *Eugnostos*.¹⁵² The list of mental attributes known to Irenaeus is found nowhere else in a Valentinian context, but occurs in all versions of *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*¹⁵³ Because Irenaeus

¹⁴⁶ Parrott 1991, 3–5, 16–18.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Painchaud 1991; Painchaud and Janz 1997.

¹⁴⁸ Tardieu 1984, e.g., 383–390; Anne Pasquier, private communication.

¹⁴⁹ E.g., *Eugnostos* V 1,3/*Pan.* 31.5.1; *Eugnostos* V 2,8–13/*Pan.* 31.5.2; *Eugnostos* V 2,16/III 71,22/*Pan.* 31.5.5; *Eugnostos* V 5,23–6,11/*Pan.* 31.5.6. See Logan 1981.

¹⁵⁰ *Eugnostos* V 6,6 (νοῦς); 6,10 (με); 15,21 (σιγη); 6,20 (φεκ) parr.

¹⁵¹ See, e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.1.1; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.29; Tertullian, *Val.* 7.

¹⁵² Logan 1981; Painchaud and Janz 1997, 440. Tardieu (1984, 60, 389) thinks the version of *Eugnostos* known to the author of the letter had already been Valentinianized, but that the author of the letter was not a "good Valentinian." Cf. also Thomassen (2006, 218–230), who considers the redactor of the letter a "schismatic Valentinian" (227) who has made "odd" choices (221).

¹⁵³ The list occurs twice, first in relation to the supreme principle (*Eugnostos* V 3,10–15; III 73,9–13; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 96,3–10; BG 86,16–87,4), and then in relation

says that the Valentinians were reformers of earlier Gnostic (of *Adv. haer.* 1.29–31) ideology (*Adv. haer.* 1.11.1; 1.30.15; 1.31.3), the list in question may derive from *Eugnostos*. However, the actual Valentinian-like terminology in *Eugnostos*, as well as some features in *Orig. World*,¹⁵⁴ may derive from Valentinian influence, although a Valentinian adaptation of *Eugnostos* or a common Platonizing background would explain many of the parallels. It has already been noted above that the author of *Eugnostos* not only seems to have systematized and philosophized the Ophite concept of the Godhead, but also may have been influenced by Plato's *Republic* in calling the Immortal Man and his Sophia "Mind" and "Truth." As for "Silence" and "Depth," they occur in the *Chaldean Oracles* (frgs. 16 and 18 Majercik); and "Depth" is associated with the First Man in Irenaeus' Ophite source,¹⁵⁵ while "Silence" is associated with the supreme God's first manifestation in *Ap. John* (III 10,15). Thus, such appellations are by no means exclusively Valentinian property, and the presence of such terminology in *Eugnostos* does not automatically mean that *Eugnostos* was influenced by Valentinianism. In any case, *Eugnostos* and *Orig. World* have not only clear links to Irenaeus' Ophite source and each other, but may also have had a common history of interaction with Valentinianism.

Scholars have also pointed out connections between *Hyp. Arch.* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*¹⁵⁶ These two texts share common terminology and themes (mostly appearing in the same chronological order), such as the cosmic veil (*καταπέτασμα*) connected with Sophia's creation (*Hyp. Arch.* 94,5ff./*Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 114,14ff.), and the idea that the number of chaos has to be fulfilled (*Hyp. Arch.* 96,11–15/*Soph. Jes. Chr.* BG 121,5–13). In addition, the following themes that are explicit in *Hyp.*

to the Immortal Man (*Eugnostos* V 7,6–9; III 78,5–9; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 102,20–103,1; BG 96,12–19).

¹⁵⁴ E.g., the tripartitioning (spiritual, psychic, earthly) of Adam, humanity, the phoenix and baptism (117,28–118,2; 122,6–16); as well as certain features in the Sabaoth-episode (103,32–106,19), such as the presence of a Jesus Christ belonging to the archon Sabaoth. See Fallon 1978, 106–122; Painchaud 1995b, 110–115, 424–432, 462–472. While the tripartitioning is common in Valentinianism, it may here be simply a transposition of the Hellenistic Jewish tripartite anthropology to a cosmic plane, since the terminology also seems to be influenced by 1 Cor rather than by Valentinian texts; cf. especially "Adam" and the term, *χοϊκός* (1 Cor 15:47–49). See Chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁵⁵ Thomassen (2006, 485–486) thinks the term, *βυθός*, occurs in *Adv. haer.* 1.30 due to Valentinian influence.

¹⁵⁶ Barry 1995, 164–168; Turner 1995, 212ff.; Hartenstein 2000, 42–44. Falkenberg (2009) has discussed the many links between *Orig. World* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*

Arch. may be implicit in *Soph. Jes. Chr.*: Adam names the animals (*Hyp. Arch.* 88,19–24/*Soph. Jes. Chr.* BG 120,7–11); and falls into sleep and oblivion (*Hyp. Arch.* 89,3–7/*Soph. Jes. Chr.* BG 120,1–3). The two documents also present some or all of their material in the form of heavenly revelations. Both texts further describe the revealer in a similar manner: In *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, Jesus resembles a great angel of light (III 91,10–14 par.), while in *Hyp. Arch.* Eleleth is a great angel and luminary (93,18–20). In addition, the inability to properly describe the revealer is in both texts expressed in a similar way (*Hyp. Arch.* 93,13–18/*Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 91,14ff. par.). Finally, both Eleleth and Jesus are connected with wisdom (*Hyp. Arch.* 93,8–9/the title *Sophia of Jesus Christ*).¹⁵⁷

Since *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* form one obvious pair, *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* another, and the two pairs have contacts, it is only natural that all these four texts share many features, some of which are even rare elsewhere. The similarities include (1) the name Pistis Sophia;¹⁵⁸ (2) the term “kingless generation”;¹⁵⁹ (3) the idea that the one who has knowledge is immortal among mortals;¹⁶⁰ and (4) the idea that the lower world has its pattern in the upper ones.¹⁶¹ Scholars have also noticed links between *Ap. John* and both *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, especially the similarity between the frame stories of *Ap. John* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*¹⁶² It is also worth noting that the section dealing with negative theology in *Ap. John* (II 2,35–4,18 parr.) is missing from Irenaeus’ Barbeloite account but found in a somewhat similar form in *Eugnostos* (V 2,8–3,4 par.). In addition, these five texts have been grouped together to some extent in the Nag Hammadi and Berlin codices, which suggests they were seen as mutually related in

¹⁵⁷ For these links, see especially Hartenstein 2000, 42–44.

¹⁵⁸ *Eugnostos* V 10,11–15; III 82,3–6; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 106,21–24; BG 102,6–9; *Orig. World* 98,13–14; *Hyp. Arch.* 94,5–6.

¹⁵⁹ *Eugnostos* V 5,4–5; III 75,17–19; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 99,18–19; BG 92,6–7; *Hyp. Arch.* 97,4–5; *Orig. World* 125,2–7.

¹⁶⁰ *Eugnostos* V 2,2–8; III 71,5–13; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 93,16–24; BG 82,9–18; *Hyp. Arch.* 96,25–27; *Orig. World* 125,11–12.

¹⁶¹ *Eugnostos* V 3,31–4,8; III 74,14–20; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 98,13–20; BG 90,4–12; *Hyp. Arch.* 87,7–11; *Orig. World* 102,2–7; 103,15–32; 123,28–31; 125,17–20; *Ap. John* II 12,33–13,5 parr.

¹⁶² Tardieu (1984, 60–65) and Barry (1995, 164–168) are of the opinion that *Ap. John* has influenced *Soph. Jes. Chr.* here; Hartenstein (2000, 44–46, 313ff.) thinks *Soph. Jes. Chr.* is earlier than *Ap. John*. For possible contacts between *Ap. John* and *Eugnostos*, see Turner 2001, 216.

the fourth century and possibly linked in the transmission process: NH II has (1) *Ap. John*, (4) *Hyp. Arch.*, and (5) *Orig. World*; NH III has (1) *Ap. John*, (3) *Eugnostos*, and (4) *Soph. Jes. Chr.*; and BG has (2) *Ap. John*, and (3) *Soph. Jes. Chr.*

Whereas these Coptic texts are closely linked with each other and with Irenaeus' Ophites, Epiphanius, in composing *Pan.* 25–26,¹⁶³ has drawn upon several sources, some of which are clearly related to *Hyp. Arch.*, *Orig. World* and the Ophite diagram. In *Pan.* 26.1.3–9, he quotes from a *Book of Norea*, which, among other things, tells how Norea burned Noah's ark three times. This unique piece of mythology is elsewhere found only in *Hyp. Arch.* 92,14–18, although there, Norea burns the ark only once. In *Pan.* 26.2.6–3.1, Epiphanius proceeds to quote from a *Gospel of Eve*, which further parallels *Hyp. Arch.* but also *Orig. World*: the serpent is credited with having introduced knowledge (cf. *Hyp. Arch.* 89,31–91,3; *Orig. World* 118,24–120,6) and this is followed by what appears to be a quotation from a text resembling the Nag Hammadi treatise, *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* (NH VI,2). Remarkably, *Hyp. Arch.* (89,14–17) and *Orig. World* (114,6–15) also contain similar quotations. Although unidentified in *Thund.*, the mysterious speaker has been identified as Eve in the three documents that seem to draw upon it. Even though Layton includes *Thund.* in his Classic Gnostic corpus because it resembles sections of *Pan.* 26 and *Hyp. Arch.*,¹⁶⁴ this secondary usage does not make *Thund.* itself “Gnostic,” as Poirier has pointed out.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, *Thund.* lacks clear features of any kind of “Gnostic” mythology. Furthermore, it may be noted that Sabaoth is singled out as the highest of the archons in *Pan.* 26, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*.¹⁶⁶ Since one of the sources behind *Pan.* 26 is supposedly a *Book of Norea*, it may be identical with one of the two books of (N)orea mentioned in *Orig. World* (102,10–11.24–25).

Later in the same chapter (*Pan.* 26.10; 26.13.2–3), Epiphanius describes an ascension mythology of these “libertine Gnostics,” and this mythology resembles that expressed in the Ophite diagram. Both

¹⁶³ The two chapters form a unit, as Epiphanius connects the Nicolaitans (*Pan.* 25) and the Gnostics (26) intimately with each other (25.7.1–2; 26.1.3); some of the sources behind *Pan.* 25 also seem to stem from the same milieu as the sources behind *Pan.* 26. See Layton 1987, 199–214.

¹⁶⁴ Layton 1987, 77–85.

¹⁶⁵ Poirier 1995, especially 149–153.

¹⁶⁶ *Pan.* 26.10.3–11; *Hyp. Arch.* 95,13–96,3; *Orig. World* 103,32–106,29.

Pan. 26 and the diagram know of (1) a world-surrounding dragon (*Pan.* 26.10.8/*Cels.* 6.25); (2) the seven archons with somewhat similar names (*Pan.* 26.10.1–3/*Cels.* 6.31–32; see Table 3); (3) a postmortem ascent of souls with the need to have special knowledge and passwords (*Pan.* 26.10.7–8; 26.13.2–3/*Cels.* 6.27,31); and (4) the transmigration of souls with the possibility that some souls are reborn into animal bodies (*Pan.* 26.10.8/*Cels.* 6.33).¹⁶⁷ The serpent is further credited with bringing the knowledge in both *Cels.* 6.28 and *Pan.* 26.2.6. In addition, the divine hierarchy here (26.10.4,10) possibly consists of three male figures and two female ones, one of whom is a “Mother of the living” (see above). Thus, Ophite features, as well as specific links to *Hyp. Arch.*, *Orig. World* and the Ophite diagram, are found in the various sources behind *Pan.* 26.1–3,10,13.

It may be finally noted that unlike in *Ap. John*, the Sethian features in *Eugnostos*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, *Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Pan.* 26 are weak or suspect but that all these texts have clear links to Irenaeus’ and/or Origen’s descriptions of the Ophites. Obviously, these texts do not represent a pure form of any typologically constructed system or mythology. They may also have had quite complex literary histories of their own.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, one should not be surprised to find Sethian (Barbeloite) features in *Hyp. Arch.*, or even some Valentinian influence

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.14; and *Ap. John* II 26,36–27,11 parr. See p. 248 below.

¹⁶⁸ *Ap. John* exists in two recensions (SR and LR), both attested in two Coptic manuscripts; Irenaeus may have known a third version (*Adv. haer.* 1.29–30); cf. also theories concerning hypothetical redactions of *Ap. John* by Tardieu (1984, 38ff.), Logan (1996, 26–69) and Turner (2001, e.g., 127–155, 214–220). It is commonly agreed that *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* are based on common source material; Painchaud (1991) has suggested that a “primitive text” of *Orig. World*, based on this common material, would then have undergone two further redactions. According to Barc, *Hyp. Arch.* would likewise have been redacted twice (1980, 1–48). Parrott (1991, 3–5, 16–18) suggests that an “original version” of *Eugnostos* gave rise to *Eugnostos* V on the one hand, and to the two versions of *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, on the other; the Codex III version of *Eugnostos*, according to Parrott, would then have been edited in light of *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, even before the Codex V version of *Eugnostos* was produced. Be that as it may, all these Coptic texts are almost certainly translations from Greek. In the case of *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, we actually have Greek fragments (*Oxyr.* 1081). Furthermore, most of these texts also exist in several manuscript copies: *Ap. John* (4 copies: NH II,1; III,1; IV,1; BG,2); *Orig. World* (3 copies: NH II,5; NH XIII,2; British Library Or. 4926[1]); *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (3 copies: NH III,4; BG,3; *Oxyr.* 1081); *Eugnostos* (2 copies: NH III,3; V,1); *Hyp. Arch.* (1 copy: NH II,4).

in *Orig. World* and *Eugnostos*.¹⁶⁹ However, while (with the exception of *Ap. John*) these Sethian and Valentinian features either occur in material that has been suggested to be secondary and redactional, or is in any case modest, all these texts—even *Ap. John*—contain clear Ophite characteristics, i.e., they contain material that represents the same type of mythology that lies behind Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30 and the Ophite diagram. In what follows, I will occasionally refer to texts with Ophite characteristics simply as “Ophite,” and to the authors of such texts as “Ophite authors.” I do not wish to claim that these texts would be solely “Ophite”—*Ap. John*, for example, has features of Schenke's “Sethian system,” too, and the Ophite concept of the Godhead is not the only aspect of *Eugnostos*' teaching. I simply use such expressions for the sake of brevity and convenience, while acknowledging that these texts may contain features from other types of speculations as well.

1.4 TOWARDS A NEW SOLUTION

I have suggested above that Schenke's “Sethian system” only reveals part of a larger whole. Many scholars have already felt a need to include Irenaeus' Ophite myth (*Adv. haer.* 1.30) in the discussion and even in the corpus of Sethianism, in order to better understand *Ap. John* or even Sethianism itself. I have argued here that certain Coptic texts (*Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Ap. John*, *Eugnostos*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.*), as well as certain sections of *Pan.* 26, contain characteristics of the mythology Irenaeus describes in *Adv. haer.* 1.30, and which finds close parallels in the descriptions of the Ophite diagram (*Cels.* 6.24–38). In addition to their literary links, these eight documents share many unique features, of which the most important ones are (the following formulations are based on a detailed text analysis and comparison in Chapters 2–5, but I present the results to the reader already here):

¹⁶⁹ See Fallon 1978, 106–122; Tardieu 1984, 60–61, 382ff.; and Painchaud 1995b, 114. While Bethge (1989, 16) thinks certain sections in *Orig. World* are even influenced by Manichaeism, Tardieu (1984, 60ff.) thinks Mani himself was influenced by *Eugnostos*, in developing the concept of five members of the heavenly Man. Pentadic notions about the Godhead are indeed found in Ophite and Sethian texts (see Chapter 9), and Mani may well have been influenced here by Classic Gnostic texts. However, the possibility of secondary cross-fertilization between Manichaeism and Classic Gnostic material cannot be ruled out completely. For pentadic notions in Manichaeism, see Pettipiece 2009.

- (1) eating from the tree of knowledge is considered positive (although the snake is usually distinguished from the true revealer);
- (2) the seven archons with specific names appear: Ialdabaoth, Iao, Sabaoth, Adonaeus, Eloeus, Oreus, and Astaphaeus (or the like, see Table 3);
- (3) prominent and salvific Sophia/Eve-figures appear and make up the female aspect of the true Godhead;
- (4) important heavenly Man/Adam-figures appear and make up the male aspect of the true Godhead.

These features derive from a reversed paradise exegesis of Gen 1–3, where the true God is an androgynous heavenly projection of Adam and Eve, the creator and his minions are evil beasts with specific names, and the snake is used by or confused with the true revealer. These features can be further seen to center around the tree of knowledge: (1) eating of it was good, (2) forbidding it was evil, and (3–4) the eaters represent the divine. Moreover, the four features represent unique versions of otherwise common themes. For example, the Sophia myth is a commonplace in the so-called Gnostic literature, but its Ophite version (3) is clearly different from the versions found in most Valentinian and Sethian texts. My four Ophite features are also not found among Schenke's criteria for his "Sethian system"; whenever the same themes (such as Ialdabaoth or a heavenly Adam) occur in Schenke's list of Sethian characteristics, they are qualified differently (for discussion, see Chapters 2–5).

The four features can be used as criteria for a typological model of the Ophite mythology. Obviously, each typologically constructed category is artificial as it presents an ideal type, which usually, as such, does not even exist. A certain amount of differences among the texts are also expected since real-world objects are always more complex than the scholarly models constructed to help organize data. In typological modeling, there are always borderline cases as well. We may ask, for example, how many features does a given text need to have in order to be classified as Ophite. We cannot expect to find all of the typological features in each of our eight texts (*Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Cels.* 6.24–38, *Pan.* 26, *Eugnostos*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, *Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Ap. John*),¹⁷⁰ but as the following discussion will show, these

¹⁷⁰ *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (NH VII,2) (which was not considered Sethian by Schenke, despite its title) speaks about Sophia, *emnoia*, Ialdabaoth and his vain

eight texts do seem to form a close-knit group of documents where the four Ophite features occur prominently (elsewhere the same themes are either not found at all, or at least not in a similar form). We must also keep in mind that sometimes the lack of a specific feature does not mean that the text is not Ophite, but simply that its author did not discuss the theme due to the form and object of the text. For example, speculations about the serpent of paradise are not found in *Eugnostos*, likely for the simple reason that this text is concerned with supracellular realms. On the other hand, Hippolytus' account of the Ophites in the *Syntagma*, as well as *Testim. Truth* and the teachings attributed to Naasseni and Peratics, do contain material that resembles to some extent the Ophite mythology, although their Ophite character, according to the proposed typological model, is suspect. However, the relationship of these documents to the Ophite corpus will be discussed in the course of the study.

Some of the texts that do have clear Ophite features also contain features that Schenke considered Sethian. This can be expressed with an image of two overlapping circles where one circle represents Schenke's typologically constructed "Sethian system," and the other my likewise typologically constructed model of the Ophite mythology. Texts that have features of both types are placed in the section where the two circles overlap:

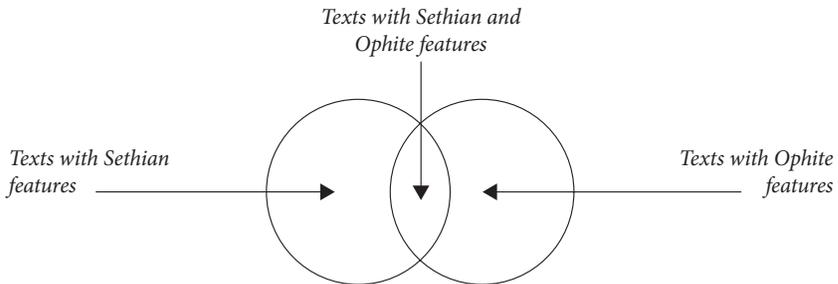


Figure 3: The Overlapping of the Sethian and Ophite Corpora

claim, the repentant archon Adonaios, the Hebdomad, Ogdoad, and God as "Man." Thus, many similarities to the Ophite mythology are present, but these similarities are, in the end, vague. Further research is needed in order to decide what is the actual relationship of *Treat. Seth* to my Ophite text corpus.

Yet Schenke's "Sethian system" itself seems to consist of two formally distinct types of mythological speculation (Barbeloite and Sethite) that are sometimes attested independently of each other, but sometimes occur together. Thus, a third circle can be introduced into the diagram (Figure 4 below). From a typological perspective, then, Schenke's Sethian corpus contains three different types of material that may be called by the artificial names of Ophite, Barbeloite and Sethite; Ophite material is also attested outside Schenke's Sethian corpus. Thus, I propose we replace Schenke's category of Sethianism with a wider one that includes texts that contain features of these Barbeloite, Sethite and Ophite materials. This kind of category would do better justice to the sources. Moreover, such a threefold distinction is not based on an arbitrary selection of typological features, but is guided by literary critical observations; all three types of mythology are attested both individually and in various combinations in the sources. This can be expressed by a diagram of three overlapping circles, as in Figure 4. In this figure, texts that have features of more than one type of mythology are placed in the overlapping sections, with *Ap. John* combining all three types placed in the middle where all three circles meet. The Ophite features are the four ones identified above; the Sethite features are the focus on Seth as a savior and transmitter of salvific knowledge, as well as the idea of Gnostics as the "seed of Seth" (the Valentinian speculations about Seth and the pneumatics are excluded here, because Seth is not a savior or a transmitter of knowledge in them);¹⁷¹ the Barbeloite features are essentially those of Schenke's "Sethian system," except for features dealing with Seth, and thus include the fourfold structure of Father-Mother Barbelo-Son Autogenes with the four lights of the Son (see Figure 1), as well as other prominent figures attached to this core, including the second tetrad alongside the four lights: Gamaliel, Gabriel, Samblo, Abrasax.¹⁷²

The document referred to as "*Sethians*" of *P 20915* is a fragment from a Coptic codex which was not known to Schenke.¹⁷³ This lacunar fragment (Nr. 128) gives a list of the names of the seven creator archons and is connected with the "Sethians" (ΣΕΤΗΙΑΝΟΙ).¹⁷⁴ The names

¹⁷¹ See, e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.7.5; Tertullian, *Val.* 29.

¹⁷² Cf. H.-M. Schenke 1974; H.-M. Schenke 1981, 593–594.

¹⁷³ See G. Robinson 2000; G. Robinson 2004a; G. Robinson 2004b.

¹⁷⁴ G. Robinson 2004a, 256–257; G. Robinson 2004b, 130. See also G. Robinson 2000, 247.

of the archons correspond almost exactly to the lists found in *Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Cels.* 6.30–32, *Orig. World* and *Ap. John* (see Chapter 3). The attribution of this list to “Sethians” seems to be made by an outsider, who possibly also refers to the book of Zoroaster,¹⁷⁵ as does *Ap. John* (LR II 19,9–10 par.). Thus, this attribution may result from the author’s knowledge of *Ap. John*, or a text similar to it, where such a list occurs together with speculations about Seth and his seed (cf. Theodoret’s hybrid “Sethian-Ophites”). I therefore tentatively place this fragment in the section where Ophite and Sethite circles meet. However, as in the case of the Brummer gem (Plate 16; for discussion, see Chapter 3), which likewise presents an Ophite list of the seven archons, this fragment lacks a proper narrative context as well as other Ophite features. These two sources are thus not included in the Ophite core group of eight documents.

The recently published *Gos. Judas* is likewise added to the diagram. The Codex Tchacos *Book of Allogenes* cannot be considered Sethian (or “Barbeloite-Sethite,” which can be used as an equivalent to Schenke’s “Sethian system”) solely on the basis of the occurrence of this name.¹⁷⁶ Even though Seth is called “Allogenes” in Schenke’s Sethian corpus (*Pan.* 40.7.1–2), it is not certain that Allogenes here is meant to be Seth (possessing Jesus), nor is the attribution of a text to Seth sufficient in itself to treat it as “Sethian” (cf. *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* [NH VII,2], which is not considered Sethian by Schenke or most other scholars).

Since speculations about Seth do not occupy a central place in this new and wider corpus, I suggest we rename it. I propose the label, “Classic Gnostic,” for the corpus, thus partially following Layton, but also participating in the long scholarly tradition of defining early classic Gnosticism.¹⁷⁷ Williams and King have recently shown the problematic and artificial nature of most historical and scholarly uses of the term “Gnosticism.” While Williams suggests we abandon the misused term and category completely and start afresh with a new (albeit another artificial) one, “Biblical demiurgy,” King is still basically ready to speak of “Gnosticism” as long as one clearly defines the

¹⁷⁵ See G. Robinson 2000, 247; G. Robinson 2004b, xiii.

¹⁷⁶ Cf., however, Pearson 2007, 97, who does include it in the Sethian corpus.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Pearson 2007, 51–100.

purpose, nature and discursive situation of the term.¹⁷⁸ I agree that to use “Gnosticism” as a wide umbrella-term for a large variety of—or to treat it as identical with—“heretical” forms of Christianity is inappropriate. However, we know from Clement’s own testimony and from other heresiological information that there were many Christians in Antiquity who claimed the title, Gnostic, for themselves.¹⁷⁹ I further believe that the kinds of myths that I have included in my category of Classic Gnosticism became generally known as products of Gnostics *par excellence* in Antiquity simply because their influential opponents, Irenaeus and Epiphanius, specifically reserved the title for the advocates of such myths.¹⁸⁰ Thus, in my view, we are entitled to use the term “Classic Gnostic” to denote this new corpus, admitting that the label is, in the end, an artificial but a convenient reference tool for a typologically constructed category. The same applies for the terms Ophite, Sethite and Barbeloite.¹⁸¹ Thus, in pragmatic terms, I use the term and category “Classic Gnostic” in an attempt to clarify and increase our understanding of the ancient religious-philosophical phenomenon that Hans-Martin Schenke defined and identified as Sethian Gnosticism.

I have decided to work with a typological construction precisely because this study modifies and aims at a better understanding of Sethian Gnosticism, itself a typological construction by Schenke. This is

¹⁷⁸ M. Williams 1996; K. King 2003, e.g., 1–19, 218; K. King 2005, 118. For a recent survey of scholarly opinions (including summaries of the positions of Williams and King) on the phenomenon and category of “Gnosticism,” see the collection of essays edited by Marjanen (2005). The only major view not represented in that book is the one advocated by Layton (1987; 1995), i.e., that “Gnostics” was a self-designation of one (and one only) specific ancient group of Christians whose surviving texts correspond closely to those in Schenke’s Sethian corpus. While I basically agree with Layton, I do think there were several (and not just one) different ancient groups of Christians who self-designated themselves Gnostic.

¹⁷⁹ For Clement, see especially Lilla 1971. For the alleged self-designations, see Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.25.6; and Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.2; 5.6.4; 5.11.1; cf. also Epiphanius, *Pan.* 31.1.1–5. Some teachers, e.g., a certain Justin (*Ref.* 5.28.1), were labeled “pseudo-Gnostics” by the heresiologists, which further suggests that these teachers called themselves Gnostics. In addition, the term, γνωστικὸς, is a “Platonic technical term” (Layton 1995, 348), and, as will be seen in this book, the authors of Classic Gnostic texts were heavily influenced by contemporary Platonism.

¹⁸⁰ For Irenaeus’ use of the term “Gnostic,” see note 5 on p. 11 above. Even though Epiphanius claimed that many “heretics” called themselves Gnostics (*Pan.* 31.1.1–5), he himself instead calls them by other names, such as Basilideans and Valentinians, and reserves the term “Gnostic” specifically for the entry *Pan.* 26.

¹⁸¹ The so-called Cainite mythology, on the other hand, is partially derived from *Gos. Judas*, which is a Sethite-Barbeloite text, according to the model proposed here.

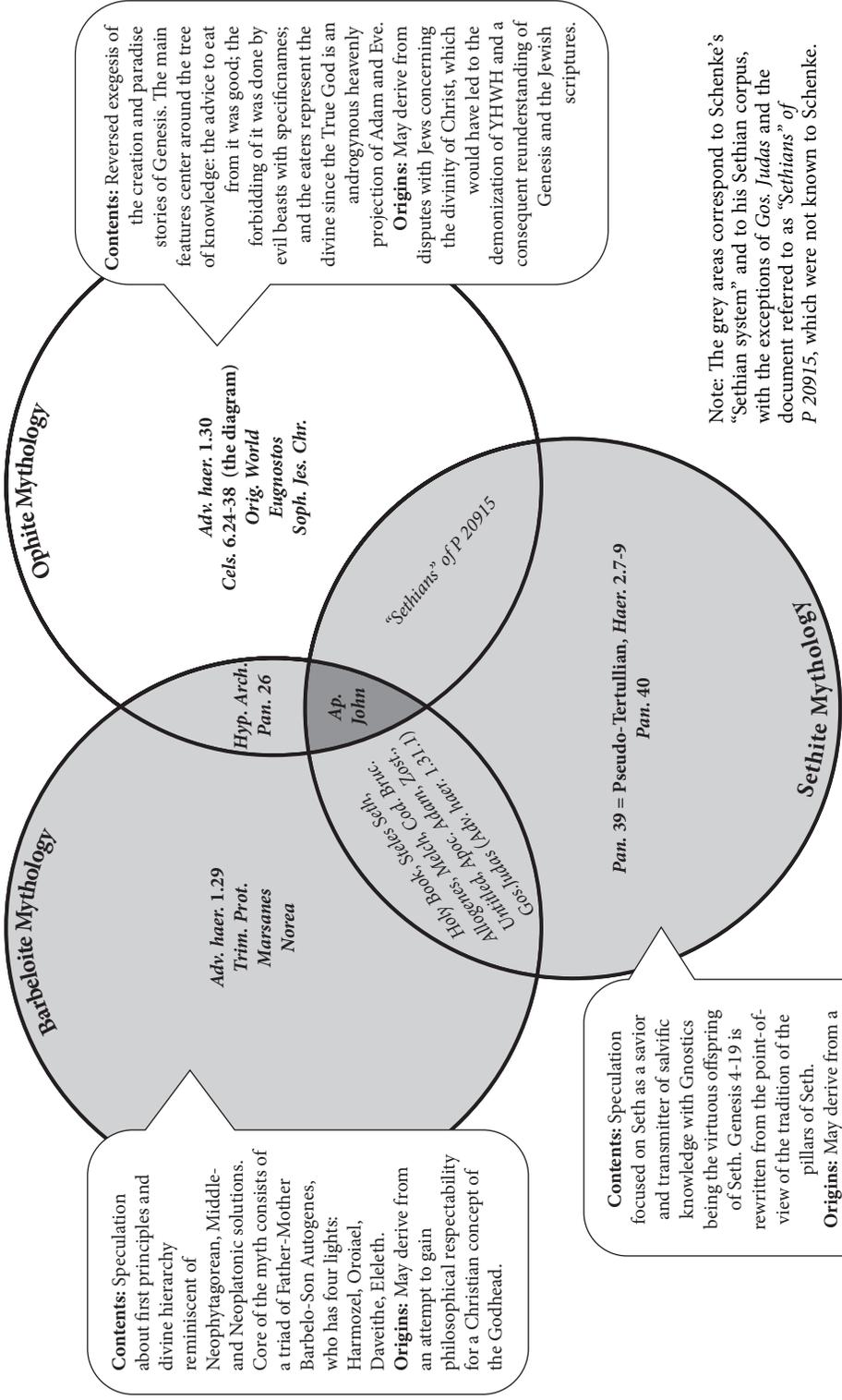
also why I grouped the texts in Figure 4 based on the main features of their mythology, instead of, for example, their literary genre or function.¹⁸² Such a basis for the grouping of the texts also seems useful because their respective mythologies are unique. The main impact of the new Classic Gnostic corpus is that it adds the Ophite evidence to account for the nature, origins and development of Sethianism, or better said, Classic Gnosticism. As I will argue, the three types of material—Ophite, Sethite and Barbeloite—may even derive from more or less the same historical group (we may call them “Classic Gnostics”), but each one addresses different kinds of concerns, for example, due to various disputes with certain Jews and Christians. These materials were sometimes readapted for new contexts, and such a framework would explain why the three types of material are different in principle, yet often occur in various combinations with each other.

In the following, I will also attempt to explain the origins of these three types of mythological speculation arising out of certain types of historical situations (disputes between Jews and Christians concerning Christ’s divinity would be one such type). As our sources and knowledge of ancient history are very fragmentary, we must often exercise “historical imagination.” Whether our imagined types of historical situations actually correspond to “what really happened,” is usually impossible to verify. However, if a plausible situation can be imagined and supported by textual evidence, a useful working hypothesis may have been found. Nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that such imagined historical situations are generalized hypothetical types, and cannot therefore give us accurate information about the date, geographical location, or concrete situations that may lie behind the myths under study.

In Chapters 2–5, I will examine the four main themes of the Ophite mythology. It will be shown that texts in my Ophite corpus, including the ones with Sethian features, agree fairly well with each other on these four themes, whereas the remaining texts in Schenke’s Sethian corpus treat the same themes differently, and generally pay less atten-

¹⁸² Such an exercise has, in fact, been carried out by John Turner in an article (1995) where he experiments with several kinds of typological groupings of Schenke’s Sethian texts: by manuscript position, content, function, literary genre, phenomenology, exegetical concerns and even hypothetical chronology and literary dependencies. Some of these groupings seem to produce useful results, such as the descent-ascent pattern in terms of enlightenment that seems to correspond to the use of primarily Jewish (descent) and Platonic (ascent) traditions.

tion to them. As noted above, my four Ophite features are also not found among Schenke's Sethian criteria. *Ap. John*, which combines Ophite and Sethian features, has replaced the Ophite concept of the Godhead with the Barbeloite one, and therefore treats Sophia and the heavenly men in accordance with Sethian, or better, Barbeloite speculations. However, in discussing the events and figures in the lower worlds, i.e., the serpent, the archons, and the earthly Adam's creation, *Ap. John* is well in line with the other texts of my Ophite corpus. Chapter 6 discusses the role of Seth and the question of "Sethianization" of Ophite and Barbeloite myths. Whether it is legitimate to split Schenke's "Sethian system" into Barbeloite and Sethite speculations will be considered in that chapter as well. Chapters 2–6 further discuss the socio-historical background of these myths as much as this is possible. Chapters 7–9, finally, assess heresiological information concerning Ophite rituals, including their relationship to purported Sethian ones.



Note: The grey areas correspond to Schenke's "Sethian system" and to his Sethian corpus, with the exceptions of *Gos. Judas* and the document referred to as "Sethians" of P 20915, which were not known to Schenke.

Figure 4: The Main Components of the Classic Gnostic Mythology

PART II

MYTH AND INNOVATION

CHAPTER TWO

THE SERPENT

In this chapter, which opens Part II (Myth and Innovation), the role of the serpent will be examined. The serpent is not only one of the main characters in the Ophite mythology, but also the main reason why many other texts have been classified as “Ophite” in scholarship, even though their serpent symbolism or the overall mythology may not have anything to do with the Ophites of Irenaeus and Origen or with the other texts included in my Ophite corpus. This chapter thus forms a bridge between Parts I and II, by both examining the snake symbolism of these texts and further discussing the definition of the Ophite mythology and corpus.

Overall, about twenty Gnostic and related documents speak of serpents in various ways and for different purposes.¹ A full investigation of this evidence has not been carried out before.² I will first examine the serpent symbolism of Classic Gnostic, i.e., my Ophite and Schenke’s Sethian texts. Second, the analysis will be extended to *Testim. Truth* and those heresiological accounts that seem related to it, thus also extending the discussion of the definition of the Ophite corpus. Finally, I will examine the snake symbolism of other so-called Gnostic texts, as many of them have been erroneously classified as Ophite in

¹ The exact number of the Gnostic sources that utilize snake symbolism depends on how one wishes to calculate them. For example, most of the late heresiological Ophite accounts are mainly based on earlier descriptions, and do not usually offer any new information. Furthermore, some of the Nag Hammadi texts exist in several copies or versions.

² Lancellotti’s book (2000) includes a chapter on the Gnostic serpent imagery (pp. 37–55), without, however, being a complete survey; Kaestli (1982) concentrates on a small selection of sources; P. Nagel’s study (1980) concentrates on the paradise story, thus leaving out of the discussion much of the Gnostic serpent imagery; and many others, e.g., Lipsius (1863–1864) and Leisegang (1971; first German edition 1924) wrote before the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices. Magne’s learned but fantastic study (1993) on the birth of Christianity out of Gnostic mythology also surveys several but not all of the Gnostic texts where snake symbolism is employed (cf. Mastrocinque 2005). His interpretations, however, are often unwarranted. The serpent of *paradise* is not usually depicted as a manifestation of Jesus in Gnostic texts. I also cannot see how Christianity could have arisen out of the mythologoumenon surrounding the Gnostic figure of Sabaoth as presented in *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*.

previous scholarship. In discussing the meaning and roots of the snake imagery, only the most obvious parallels in ancient literature can be pointed out here. It is to be noted that this chapter is devoted to serpent symbolism in textual evidence. The use of snake amulets as well as heresiological allegations of Ophite snake worship will be discussed in Chapter 7, i.e., in Part III (Ritual) of this book.

2.1 OPHITE AND SETHIAN SNAKE SPECULATIONS

A large section of Irenaeus' Ophite account (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–10,15) deals with the first chapters of Genesis, and it is precisely in this section that the serpent (*serpens, serpentiformis*) appears. It is the serpent of paradise (Gen 3) portrayed according to a common Judeo-Christian fashion as the devil.³ The creator Ialdabaoth begot him in response to a heavenly war, by fixing his desire on matter (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.5). This serpentine offspring is called, among other things, Samael, which was a common Jewish name for the devil.⁴ He is also said to have corrupted Cain, and, with his angels, to constantly oppress humankind (1.30.9). While the snake is depicted as ontologically evil,⁵ its advice to eat from the forbidden tree, however, is seen in a positive light; for it is explained that Sophia used the snake in paradise as her unwitting tool to teach Adam and Eve (1.30.7).

At the end of his account, Irenaeus gives a summary of the opinions of "certain others" (*quidam*) among these Gnostics (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.15). These opinions, however, seemed to derive from a source other than the extensive narrative reported in 1.30.1–14. In this summary, Irenaeus affirmed that, according to certain others, Sophia did not just use the snake as her tool, but herself became the serpent, thus opposing the creator; that is why the serpent was called wiser than all others (cf. Gen 3:1). Humanity would further have her imprint in the serpent-shaped intestines. As pointed out above, however, if Sophia was thought to have possessed the snake (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.7), the distinction between the snake and Sophia speaking through or from it

³ Rev 12:9; Wis 2:24; *Gos.Phil.* 61,5–10; 2 *Enoch* 31; 3 *Baruch* (Slavonic) 4:8; Justin, *Dial.* 103.

⁴ *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 4:1–2; *Midr. Rab. Ex.* 18:5; *Midr. Rab. Deut.* 11:10; *Ascen. Isa.* 2:1–2; 7:9; see Pearson 1990, 48, 100.

⁵ Kaestli 1982, 125; Lancellotti 2000, 38.

must have been a vague one, and this vagueness may then have contributed to the idea of Sophia herself as a snake.

Even though presented as the serpent of paradise, the portrayal of the snake here in Irenaeus' account is, in fact, an amalgam of several Biblical and pagan motifs, since the serpent also seems to be depicted as a world soul and a creator-figure. The snake is said to be the source of spirit, soul and all worldly things (1.30.5), which may imply the world soul idea. The opinion of "others" concerning the serpentine shape of digestive organs (1.30.15) may further point in the same direction if the snake's imprint is found in all humans. The idea of the serpent as a world soul is not only explicitly attested in Origen's Ophite account and in some other "Gnostic" texts (see below), but also in pagan sources. However, whereas in pagan symbolism the world soul serpent was usually a positive entity, it became mostly negatively evaluated in certain forms of Christianity, including the Ophite mythology.⁶ The theme of a serpentine creator, for its part, is attested in certain "Gnostic" texts as well as in Orphic cosmogonies (see below) and in Egyptian mythology.⁷ Here, such an idea appears to be attested in two forms: first, in the characterization of the serpent as the source of spirit, soul and worldly things, as well as of oblivion, wickedness, emulation, envy and death (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.5); and second, in the story of the snake cast down (cf. Rev 12:7–9 and related traditions) who produced six offspring, and formed with them an "inferior hebdomad" as opposed to Ialdabaoth's "holy hebdomad" (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.8,9).

Importantly, the serpent in Irenaeus' account is not connected with Christ.⁸ Here the serpent has an archontic origin, whereas in certain other texts (e.g., the Peratics of *Ref.* 5.12–18) it is a being belonging

⁶ As for the Hellenistic imagery, see, e.g., Horapollo, *Hieroglyphica* 1.64 (in van de Walle and Vergote 1943, 86); cf. also Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.9.12; Philo of Byblos, *frag.* 4 (in Attridge and Oden 1981, 66–67); and Epiphanius' report of the Epicureans (*Pan.* 8.1.2–5). For Christian imagery, see, e.g., *Acts of Thomas* 31–33; and the discussion of the Ophite imagery in this chapter.

⁷ See Clark 1959, 50ff., 239–240; Hornung 1982, 81. Moreover, the serpent is called *Nun* in *Adv. haer.* 1.30.5. Usually this is interpreted as $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ (Unger 1992, 97; Grant 1997, 100), but Layton (1987, 175) takes it as the Hebrew letter \aleph (*nun*), having the shape of a snake. However, it should be asked whether *Nun* could here be a reference to the Egyptian god Nun, the primeval waters, symbolized by the *ouroboros* serpent (see Hornung 1982, 161).

⁸ Perhaps a veiled allusion to this theme can be found. Eve is said to have listened to the serpent as if its advice came from the *son of God* (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.7). However, the serpent is only a son of the lowly creator Ialdabaoth.

to the lightworld. Even though the portrayal of the snake in Irenaeus' Ophite account consists of several motifs, the main source of the snake imagery is Gen 3 and those Judeo-Christian traditions that identified the serpent of paradise with the devil. The purpose of the positive evaluation of the serpent's advice is undoubtedly criticism of the creator's commandment not to eat from the tree of knowledge.

As for the Ophite diagram and its users, Celsus had claimed that these "Christians" curse the creator because he had cursed the serpent for introducing the knowledge of good and evil to the first humans. Origen clarified that such statements do not stem from true Christians but from certain heretical Ophites who proudly derived their name from the serpent (ὄφις) as the author of good (*Cels.* 6.28). This purported self-designation may be doubted, however, since Celsus had referred to them as Christians, and Origen, for his part, wants to depict them as un-Christian as possible (see Chapter 8 below). In the actual description of the diagram, two serpents appear: Leviathan and Raphael. Leviathan (remember that in LXX Isa 27:1 Leviathan is called both ὄφις and δράκων) is said to embrace the whole visible cosmos, encompassing the archontic spheres. It is said to be the "soul of all things" (ἡ τῶν ὅλων ψυχή) and "the soul which travels through all things" (τὴν διὰ τῶν ὅλων πεφοιτηκυῖαν ψυχήν), i.e., the world soul (*Cels.* 6.25). Leviathan is here the *ouroboros*, a snake swallowing its own tail (cf. Plates 4 and 7), a common image representing a limit between the cosmos and the beyond,⁹ the world soul,¹⁰ or time and eternity.¹¹ The *ouroboros* image is also employed in ancient magic.¹² This image further appears in *Pistis Sophia* 3 and 4 as well as in Epiphanius' account of the "libertine Gnostics" (*Pan.* 26), with mainly negative connotations (only *Pist. Soph.* 4 presents a positive *ouroboros*; see below). The diagram says nothing specifically positive of it.

As pointed out above, Behemoth may be a double of Leviathan, although not specifically described as serpentine. However, it may simply also be a collective name for the seven theriomorphic demons led by Michael (*Cels.* 6.30).¹³ One of them, Raphael, is said to be snake-like

⁹ See Hornung 1982, 164, 178–179.

¹⁰ Horapollo, *Hieroglyphica* 1.64; cf. Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.9.12.

¹¹ See Hornung 1982, 178–179; Lancellotti 2000, 46ff.

¹² See especially PGM 1.145–146; 12.274–275; and 36.184. See Betz 1992.

¹³ On the relationship of these demons to the seven archons in *Cels.* 6.31–32, see Chapter 3 below.

(δρακοντοειδής, 6.30). The names of the first four demons are those of the archangels of Judeo-Christian tradition: Michael, (S)uriel, Raphael and Gabriel.¹⁴ Moreover, they seem to be connected here with the four animal-faced beings around the throne of God (Ezek 1:10; Rev 4:7), as in *1 Enoch* 40:8–9.¹⁵ According to Rev 4:7, the first one of them has the face of a lion, the second one of a bull and the fourth one of an eagle, as in the diagram (this in itself does not prove that the diagram is dependent on Rev; in fact, Ezek 1:10 and/or common apocalyptic background can explain the parallelism). Only the human-faced third creature is here replaced by a serpent-faced one, but this could have its roots in Isa 6:1–7, according to which there were *Seraphim* (שרפים) around the throne of God. The Hebrew word, שרף, is used of snakes in Isa 14:29; 30:6 and Num 21:6,8. Even though the Seraphs are not specifically said to be snake-like in Isa 6, such an interpretation occurs in *Orig. World*: the “Saraphin” by the throne of Sabaoth are serpent-shaped (ΣΑΡΑΦΗ ΠΑΡΑΚΩΗ) angels (105,16–20).

The serpent imagery in the diagram accounts is almost completely derived from Judeo-Christian traditions. Only the common image of the *ouroboros* is not Biblical but it, too, has been given a Biblical name, Leviathan. Origen and Celsus mention only in passing the role of the snake as a bringer of knowledge (*Cels.* 6.27–28), so we do not know if there was an actual distinction made between the snake and the true revealer. However, since the rest of the snake symbolism associated with the diagram (Leviathan and Raphael) seems negative, perhaps the serpent of paradise itself was thought of as negative here although its advice was considered positive.

The snake speculations of the “libertine Gnostics” of Epiphanius’ *Pan.* 26, appear only in those sections that have connections to *Hyp. Arch.*, *Orig. World* and the Ophite diagram. These Gnostics spoke of a *Gospel of Eve*, and extolled her because “she got the food of knowledge by a

¹⁴ See, e.g., *L.A.E.*, *Apoc. Mos.* 40; *1 Enoch* 40; 54; 71:8–9.

¹⁵ *1 Enoch* 40: 8–9, “And after that, I asked the angel of peace, who was going with me and showed me everything that was hidden, ‘Who are these four faces which I have seen and whose voices I have heard and written down?’ And he said to me, ‘The first one is the merciful and forbearing Michael; the second one, who is set over all disease and every wound of the children of the people, is Raphael; the third, who is set over all exercise of strength, is Gabriel; and the fourth, who is set over all actions of repentance unto the hope of those who would inherit eternal life, is Phanuel by name.’” (Isaac, transl., in Charlesworth 1983). The fourth one is here called Phanuel, instead of (S)uriel.

revelation from the serpent (ὄφις) which spoke to her” (*Pan.* 26.2.6). This is an allusion to Gen 3, although Epiphanius, a hostile outsider, also does not elaborate whether there was a distinction between the serpent and the true revealer. At a later point, Epiphanius describes the structure of the cosmos and the postmortem ascent of the soul according to these Gnostics. The soul has to pass through the spheres of the seven archons, but if it does not have special knowledge, it is swallowed by a dragon-shaped (δρακοντοειδής) archon, who holds the world captive; it returns these souls into animal bodies through its phallus (*Pan.* 26.10.7–8; cf. *3 Baruch* [Gk] 4:4–5). This dragon holding the world captive may well be imagined as an *ouroboros* surrounding the cosmos, and thus as not unlike the Leviathan of Origen’s Ophites. In fact, the snake imagery of these Gnostics seems similar to what is found in the diagram: both have a positive evaluation of the serpent’s advice in paradise, and likely an evil *ouroboros* surrounding the cosmos. Epiphanius does describe the Ophites elsewhere (*Pan.* 37), but whereas his Ophite account is dependent on earlier heresiological reports (see below), he has utilized other sources,¹⁶ some of which fit my typological Ophite model, in composing the chapter *Pan.* 26.

As for the Nag Hammadi texts that have Ophite features, in *Hyp. Arch.*, the snake (ϩⲟϥ, ϩⲁϥ) is called the instructor (ⲡⲉϥⲧⲁⲙⲟ; 89,32; 90,6). However, in this text, the snake itself is just an earthly animal (ⲡⲛⲓⲕⲁϩ; 90,12),¹⁷ used by the instructive (ⲡⲉϥⲧⲁⲙⲟ; 90,11) spirit to teach Adam and Eve. The spirit descends from above, travels through Adam and Eve, and finally enters the snake: it renders Adam a living soul (88,15); it leaves him when the archons extract some material from his side (cf. Gen 2:21–22) to create Eve (*Hyp. Arch.* 89,7–11); the spirit-endowed Eve then awakens Adam from sleep (89,11–17); the archons rape Eve, but the spirit leaves her first and becomes a tree (89,17ff.); next, the spirit enters the serpent, in order to teach Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge (89,31ff.); finally, the instructive spirit is taken away from the serpent, and the latter is described now as just an earthly thing (90,11–12). The archons, however, curse the serpent, not understanding that it was the spirit and not the serpent itself, that really instructed Adam and Eve (90,30–34). According to *Hyp. Arch.*,

¹⁶ Cf. F. Williams 1987, xx.

¹⁷ Another Coptic word for serpent, ⲈⲓⲦ, derives from the Middle Egyptian, *s3-t3*, “son of (the) earth.” See Černý 1976, 164.

the “perfect man” (ΠΤΕΛΕΙΟΣ ΠΡΩΜΕ) later will lift the curse from the serpent (90,34–91,3). The prophecy concerning the perfect man may be a reversion of the protevangelium, a Christian interpretation of Gen 3:15, according to which Christ will crush the serpent’s head.¹⁸

The serpent is also intimately connected with Eve in this text. Not only is the spirit a counterpart of Eve (leaving Eve, she left *her shadowy likeness* behind; ΤΕΟΔΑΪΒΕΟ Ε[Σ]ΕΙΝΕ; 89,26), but it also teaches from within the serpent. In addition, the Aramaic word for “serpent” (ܫܝܦ) is brought into wordplay with the name “Eve” (ܗܘܘܐ) and with the Aramaic verb “to show, teach, tell” (ܫܘܦܐ).¹⁹ In the closely related *Orig. World*, the instructor is said to be an offspring of Sophia-Zoe (see below). In accordance with the Ophite source known to Irenaeus, the snake is depicted in *Hyp. Arch.* as a tool of the higher powers, but whereas in Irenaeus’ source the snake itself was evil, here it is treated as a neutral being. Both versions, however, are manifestations of the same kind of exegesis of Gen 3, criticizing the creator’s commandment.

The paradise stories of *Hyp. Arch.* (88,24–32; 89,31–91,11) and *Orig. World* (118,16–121,13), which both follow the text of Genesis fairly closely, are very similar. However, in *Hyp. Arch.* the true instructor was a spirit that possessed the snake, whereas in *Orig. World*, the instructor (ΡΕΥΤΑΜΟ) does not seem to use any earthly medium. No serpent is mentioned here at all, and it is the instructor who is called “the wisest of all beings who was called beast (θηρίον)” (118,24–26; cf. Gen 3:1). The instructor here is probably not to be thought of as serpentine because when Adam and Eve eat from the tree and their eyes open, they see that the archons are theriomorphic and hence loathe them (*Orig. World* 119,16–19). Furthermore, the instructor is called “beast” only by the wicked authorities, who cursed this revealer for introducing Adam and Eve to the knowledge (113,35–114,1; 120,3–6).²⁰ In fact, the instructor is described as an androgynous human being (113,21ff.), called “Lord” (ΧΟΕΙΟ; 113,35). This Lord is the offspring of Sophia Zoe, produced in order to instruct other humans to despise and to escape from their wicked creators (113,17–20; cf. Theodoret,

¹⁸ In my view, Barc (1980, 103) goes too far in interpreting this passage as Christ taking a serpentine form. Even though this theme is attested elsewhere, nothing in *Hyp. Arch.* suggests such an interpretation.

¹⁹ See Jastrow 1950. See also Böhlig and Labib 1962, 73–74; Layton 1976, 55–56; Barc 1980, 98; Pearson 1990, 44–46.

²⁰ Kaestli 1982, 122–123. Cf. *Testim. Truth* 47,6, where the snake was called “devil” by the malicious god.

Haer. fab. comp. 1.14). Thus, as Kaestli has noted, the exegesis here is meant to undermine the literary understanding of Gen 3: the instructor was not really a serpent, but was called so only by the creator and his angels.²¹

Since the instructor is depicted as a human being, can one find hints concerning his/her identity? Several different solutions have been proposed. As in *Hyp. Arch.*, the Aramaic wordplays connect the instructor to Eve.²² Thus, Kaestli thinks that the name of the instructor is Zoe-Eve,²³ who is also called an instructor (*Orig. World* 115,33). Kaestli sees that the instructor in paradise is further identified with the “second Adam” (ܩܡܐܘܨܚܝܘܬܐ ܩܘܠܘܘܬܐ) mentioned at 117,30–33, as well as depicted as an androgyne, thus making it possible to call the instructor both Adam and Eve.²⁴ Since the various heavenly Adam/Man and Eve/Sophia-figures are sometimes presented as the male and female aspects of same androgynous divine beings in the Ophite speculation (see especially Chapters 4 and 5), the instructor in *Orig. World* may be taken to be a divine androgynous Adam-Eve-figure, perhaps especially the Adam-aspect. Painchaud suggests that the instructor’s identification as a “second Adam” is a conscious revision of 1 Cor 15:45–47 and that this “second Adam” is Christ, although only a “psychic Christ” belonging to the realm of the archons. This Christological identification would, according to Painchaud, stem from the first revision of *Orig. World’s primitive text*.²⁵ In the related *Ap. John*, the true instructor is Christ (see below). As will be seen in Chapter 5, *Orig. World’s* material concerning Adam indeed seems to have been modified in light of an exegesis of 1 Cor 15:45–47. However, the heavenly Adam was probably understood as a Christ-figure from the beginning. Thus, there is no need to assign the instructor’s Christological identity *per se* to a redactional layer.

Yet an additional identification might be found at *Orig. World* 114,15, which Painchaud assigns to the second, anti-Valentinian, revision of the text.²⁶ In this case, the instructor’s additional identity may indeed derive from a secondary reworking of the material. Painchaud

²¹ Kaestli 1982, 122–123; cf. Painchaud 1995b, 393.

²² In *Orig. World*, one additional wordplay is found: the Aramaic word for “beast” (ܐܘܪܝܬܐ) also resembles the name of Eve. See Böhlig 1962, 74; Pearson 1990, 45.

²³ Kaestli 1982, 122.

²⁴ Kaestli 1982, 122.

²⁵ Painchaud 1995b, 393, 424–427.

²⁶ Painchaud 1995b, 393–397.

observes that the phrase concerning the birth of the instructor, “I have borne a lordly man (ΖΗΤΙΝΕ ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΝΙΧΘΕΙΟ)” resembles both Gen 4:1 (birth of Cain) and Gen 4:25 (birth of Seth). He favors the identification with Seth, however, with no basis in the text itself.²⁷ Pearson, for his part, proposes that the instructor is Cain. The Hebrew text of Gen 4:1, “I have produced a man with the help of the Lord” (NRSV), according to Pearson, could be read as, “I have gotten a man, namely, Yahweh.” He cites a Jewish *haggadah* where such an understanding seems to be rejected.²⁸ Abel is further said to be the first son of the earthly Eve in *Orig. World* (117,15–16). Since, according to Genesis, the first son was Cain, and because an offspring of an Eve-figure is already mentioned earlier in the text, the instructor could be the missing Cain. Moreover, according to a heresiological tradition, the so-called Cainites taught that Cain had his origin with the higher powers,²⁹ like the instructor in *Orig. World*. In heresiological literature, these Cainites were also traditionally connected with the Ophites.³⁰ Perhaps behind this heresiological tradition lies *Orig. World* or another text where the connection between the positively evaluated Cain and the serpent is even clearer (according to Peratic teaching, Cain was said to manifest the perfect serpent; see below). As will be argued in Chapter 6, such a “Cainite” interpretation may well stem from a later, “anti-Sethian,” redaction of *Orig. World*, which may or may not be identical with the anti-Valentinian one Painchaud presupposes.

Whatever the identity of the instructor, it is clear that in the background lies an exegesis of Gen 3 with its critique of the creator’s commandment. A distinction is made, however, between the true revealer and the snake, with whom the former was confused, according to

²⁷ Painchaud (1995b, 397) refers to *Ap. John* and other Sethian traditions that identify Christ with Seth.

²⁸ *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 4:1–2, “And Adam was aware that his wife had conceived from Sammael the angel, and she became pregnant and bore Cain, and he was like those on high, not like those below; and she said, ‘I have acquired a man, *the angel of the Lord*’ (Bowker, transl.; my italics).” See Pearson 1990, 99–100.

²⁹ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.31.1; Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 2.5; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 38.1.2. See also Pearson 1990, 95–107.

³⁰ The Ophites and Cainites are presented following each other, for example, in the heresiologies of Pseudo-Tertullian (*Haer.* 2.1–6), Epiphanius (*Pan.* 37–38), and Filastrius (*Div. her. lib.* 1–2). They are mentioned together by Origen (*Cels.* 3.13) and Hippolytus (*Ref.* 8.20.3). Irenaeus’ *Adv. haer.* 1.30–31 treats the opinions later known as those of the Ophites and Cainites as stemming from the same group. See also Chapter 8.5.

Orig. World. But actual serpent-figures appear in *Orig. World* as well.³¹ These are the “Saraphin,” serpent-shaped (ἸΜΟΡΦΗ ΠΛΑΡΑΚΩΝ) angels created by the repentant archon Sabaoth, who are said to praise their creator at all times by his throne (105,16–20). It may also be noted that Sabaoth himself is depicted as serpentine in LR of *Ap. John* (II 11,31–32 par.).

In *Ap. John*, we encounter yet another related exegesis of Gen 3. This time the serpent (ΖΑΔ, ΖΟΔ), however, is depicted as completely evil. The serpent is said to have taught Adam and Eve about sexuality (SR III 28,20–23 par.) or to eat from the wickedness of sexual desire (LR II 22,12–15 par.). Insisting that it was not as Moses said,³² the authors give a corrective interpretation of Genesis: it was not the serpent but the true revealer, Christ (Sophia and Epinoia of light are also suggested), who taught them to eat from the tree of knowledge, identified as Epinoia herself (see II 22,9; 23,26–31 parr.). The depiction of the revealer in the form of an eagle (II 23,26–28 parr.) in this context perhaps intentionally refers to ancient Greek notions of the hostility between eagles and snakes,³³ and thus underlines the negative evaluation of the serpent here. Since the evil creator Ialdabaoth is in both recensions also depicted as serpentine,³⁴ and both he and the serpent are connected in a negative way with sexuality and desire (II 22,12–15; 24,26–29 parr.), the serpent of paradise in *Ap. John* seems to be identified as Ialdabaoth himself.³⁵ In addition, not only Ialdabaoth but also his fourth and fifth descendants are described as serpentine: Ia(z)o has a serpent’s face with seven heads and/or a lion’s face,³⁶ and Sabaoth

³¹ The ΠΕΥΛΑΡΙΑ ΠΗΘΟΥΤ at 122,18 are likely not “water serpents,” as some scholars have suggested (see Böhlig and Labib 1962, 95; Layton 1989b, 81; Barnstone and Meyer 2003, 434), but “water jars” as Painchaud (1995b, 473–475) proposes.

³² II 13,19–20; 22,22–24; 23,3–4; 29,6–7 parr.

³³ Küster 1913, 52ff., 127–128. Cf., however, Lampe 1961, 40; and Kaestli 1982, 126n53. Barc (2009) thinks the eagle is an intentional allusion to the Fourth Gospel, the eagle being the evangelist John’s animal symbol. There was, however, considerable variance among early Christian authors in connecting the four living creatures of Rev with the four evangelists, and John was not always connected with the eagle. See Osborne 2002, 232–236.

³⁴ LR (II 10,8–9): ΔΑΨΩΠΕ ΠΟΥΤΥΠΟΣ ΕΨΩΒΒΙΔΕΙΤ ΠΛΑΡΑΚΩΝ ΠΕΟ ΠΗΜΟΥΕΙ; SR (III 15,10–11 par.): ΔΑΨΩΠΕ ΠΚΕΜΟΡΦΗ ΠΖΑ ΠΗΜΟΥΕΙ ΠΖΑ ΠΖΑΔ.

³⁵ Kaestli 1982, 123–124; Barc 2009.

³⁶ LR (II 11,30–31 par.): ΟΥΖ[Ο ΠΛΑΡΑΚ]ΩΝ ΠΕ ΕΥΠΤΕΔ ΣΑΨΩΕ ΠΑΠΕ; SR (BG 42,2–3): “Iao, the serpent-faced with seven heads” (Ἰἄω φο πῆροδ ησαωδε παπε); and (III 18,1–2): “Iazo, the serpent-faced, lion-faced” (Ἰἄζω πῆρα πῆρακων πῆρα πῆμουε).

(Adonaios in SR) is said to have the face of a dragon (ΟΥΓΟ ΠΑΡΑΚΩΗ; II 11,31–32 par.).

What is common to *Ap. John*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Orig. World* and the Ophite source known to Irenaeus, is that while the eating of the tree of knowledge is seen as a positive act, the true instructor in paradise is not the serpent but a transcendent being, as Kaestli has pointed out.³⁷ However, a comparison of the snake's role among these texts reveals an interesting difference in *Ap. John*: the snake is no longer connected in any way with the positively evaluated eating from the tree of knowledge (the true revealer assumes the form of an eagle, while the serpentine devil teaches only harmful things). As the serpent seems to be identified with Ialdabaoth here, the completely negative snake symbolism is likely due to *Ap. John*'s strong demonization of YHWH. I will return to this theme in the following chapters. Celsus, Origen (*Cels.* 6.27–28) and Epiphanius (*Pan.* 26.2.6) do not specify whether there was a subtle distinction made between the snake and the true revealer in their sources, although the fact that such information is missing from sketchy remarks made by hostile outsiders is not unexpected. *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* do not mention serpents but this is likely due to their concentration on the supracelestial realms.

Snake symbolism is not a feature of Schenke's "Sethian system," and apart from *Ap. John*, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Pan.* 26, Schenke's Sethian texts have no real interest in the snake. Of the remaining Sethian texts, only *Apoc. Adam* speaks of serpents and merely mentions them in passing (the serpent does not occur in *Gos. Judas*). *Apoc. Adam* includes a section where thirteen explanations about the "Illuminator" are refuted (77,27–83,4); according to the seventh one, he was a drop from heaven, who was brought down to caves by dragons (δράκων; 80,13) and then became a child (αλογ). Certain scholars have seen here echoes of the rock-born Mithras, worshiped in caves; some presentations of his birth-scene also include a snake.³⁸ The rock-birth is indeed mentioned in the eighth explanation (80,22–25), and therefore the Mithras connection seems possible. Be that as it may, there is a clear difference in terms of snake symbolism between the Ophite and Sethian (i.e., "Barbeloite-Sethite") types of mythological speculations.

³⁷ Kaestli 1982.

³⁸ Böhlig 1968, 155. For the mithraeum and the myth, see Vermaseren 1963, 37, 75–79; and Claus 2001, 42–43, 62–71.

2.2 HIPPOLYTUS AND THE *TESTIMONY OF TRUTH*

I have already suggested that Hippolytus may have known *Testim. Truth* or at least snake exegesis similar to what is found in it. While he assigned such exegesis first to the “Ophites” in the *Syntagma*, he then, having been better informed, presented it as part of the Peratic teaching in the *Refutatio*. Let us here take a closer look at the serpent speculations in these sources. In the case of the *Syntagma*, we will have to rely on the surviving witnesses, the earliest of which is Pseudo-Tertullian.

In the snake exegesis of *Testim. Truth* itself, the serpent appears only in a section that has been called a “snake midrash.” This section can be divided into three parts: The first part (45,23–47,14) basically just recounts Gen 2:16–17; 3. The second part (47,14–48,15), on the other hand, questions the activity of the creator, describing him as a malicious envier, devoid of foreknowledge, and showing just how unjustly and revengefully he acts. The third part (48,15–49,10) cites various passages speaking of serpents (ὄφις) from Jewish scriptures and the Fourth Gospel. Unfortunately, this third part is very lacunar, and not much can be made of it. Nevertheless, it seems clear, that YHWH and the serpent have been critically juxtaposed in order to show the merits of the serpent over the unpleasant nature of YHWH. In the first part of the midrash, the serpent is already called wiser than all the animals (φοῦς δὲ νεοῦσαβε πέ παραῖζων τήρου; 45,31–46,1), and it is said to have instructed (ἑδύδα; 47,4) Eve.³⁹ As a consequence, the malicious YHWH cursed it and called it the devil (διάβολος; 47,6). In the third part of the midrash, there are references to Exod 7:8–12, i.e., to the story of Moses’ (Aaron’s) staff which became a serpent and swallowed the serpents of the Egyptian magicians, and to Num 21:9, i.e., to Moses’ healing and salvific brazen serpent. In *Testim. Truth*, this brazen serpent is brought into connection with Christ (48,26–49,7), no doubt based on John 3:14–15. Whether this brazen serpent is actually identified with Christ is uncertain due to the state of the manuscript.⁴⁰

The author of the midrash has not only made use of Biblical passages which speak of the serpent in a positive manner, but has also

³⁹ Cf. Pearson 1990, 43–44.

⁴⁰ Pearson (1981, 168) and Mahé (1996, 196) think they are identified.

reformulated (or made use of a tradition which had already reformulated) the paradise story of Gen 3 by hinting at the positive nature of the serpent and its deed (*wisest* of all animals; *instructing* Eve) and by defaming the figure and behavior of YHWH.⁴¹ The references to positive serpents of Exod, Num and John are likely used as proof-texts for the goodness of the serpent of paradise and, consequently, used to criticize YHWH. Since *Testim. Truth* as a whole is a polemical tractate attacking other Christian groups and teachers,⁴² the midrash, as a part of *Testim. Truth*, may well criticize those *Christians* who accept YHWH as the true God.⁴³

Pseudo-Tertullian (*Haer.* 2.1–4), probably reproducing the Ophite account in the *Syntagma*, claims the Ophites extolled the serpent (*serpens; virtutem et similitudinem serpentis*) for two reasons: First, it was the bringer of knowledge (*Haer.* 2.1,4), and second, it has sacred powers, which were manifested in Moses' brazen and healing serpent (2.1; cf. Num 21:8–9). Furthermore, according to Pseudo-Tertullian, the Ophites said that Christ imitated the sacred power of Moses' serpent, referring to John 3:14, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (*Haer.* 2.1). The Ophites are then said to extol (*magnifico*) the serpent and even prefer it to Christ (2.1). Finally, they let the serpent bless (*benedico*) their Eucharist, Pseudo-Tertullian affirms (2.1). It seems that this alleged snake-worship, discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, is based on an exegesis of Gen 3, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15. As pointed out above, this combination of snake passages is elsewhere found only in *Testim. Truth* and the Peratic teaching (*Ref.* 5.12–18). Moreover, the snake in this exegesis is depicted in a completely positive light, and it has no ambivalence about it, as in *Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Orig. World, Hyp. Arch.* and *Ap. John*.

Since the rest of the Pseudo-Tertullian account is dependent on Irenaeus, one finds some information concerning the serpent that is parallel to *Adv. haer.* 1.30. The serpent of paradise is here, too, said to

⁴¹ Cf. the criticism of YHWH by Julian the Apostate, *Against the Galileans* 89A–B, 93D–E, 94A.

⁴² The author, for example, accuses other Christians of not knowing who Christ is (31,22–32,5). In another context, he seems to attack Valentinus, possibly also Basilides and the Simonians (56,1–58,4).

⁴³ Cf. Luttikhuisen 2006, 73ff.

be the son of Ialdabaoth.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Eve is said to have listened to the serpent as the Son of God (*Eua quasi filio deo crediredat*; *Haer.* 2.4). In light of the archontic origin of the serpent, the completely positive snake exegesis of Gen 3, Num 21:8–9 and John 3:14–15 seems a bit strange. Of course, the ambivalence concerning the snake's role as a medium of revelation may indeed have contributed to a more positive understanding of it, in the minds of some advocates of the Ophite teaching (cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.15). It is possible, however, to think that Hippolytus has summarized Irenaeus' report selectively, leaving out negative statements about the snake in order to harmonize Irenaeus' report with the positive snake exegesis that stemmed from another source. Be that as it may, we may note a slight contradiction in the evaluation of the serpent between the two sources of Pseudo-Tertullian's (Hippolytus') account: (1) in the actual Ophite narrative of Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–14, the snake itself is evil, while (2) only a positive evaluation of it is given in the specific snake exegesis of Gen 3, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15. We may also note that despite the use of John 3:14–15, Christ and the snake are not depicted as identical in the Pseudo-Tertullian account.

I will skip Epiphanius' account here and return to it in Chapter 7 in discussing allegations of Gnostic snake worship. I will likewise skip here the accounts of Filastrius and Theodoret that simply reproduce previous heresiological information about Ophites and Sethians,⁴⁵ and instead move on to Hippolytus' *Refutatio*. In this extensive heresiology, Hippolytus gives lengthy descriptions of several "snake-sects," and distinguishes these from the Ophites. One of these is called "Peratics" and it has been said that in the Peratic teaching (*Ref.* 4.2.1–3; 5.3; 5.12–18; 10.10),⁴⁶ the serpent symbolism has reached its peak.⁴⁷ Abundance of serpent imagery is indeed attested here, apparently deriving from various sources, but one theme dominates the imagery: a Christological interpretation of Moses' brazen serpent. According to the Peratic

⁴⁴ The motive for the snake's birth here, as in Epiphanius' version (*Pan.* 37.4.4), is Adam's newly gained understanding, not a heavenly war as in Irenaeus' account.

⁴⁵ For these accounts, see above, pp. 25–26.

⁴⁶ Curiously, Hippolytus does not mention the important serpent at all in his summary in *Ref.* 10.10. Theodoret's description (*Haer. fab. comp.* 1.17) is based on Hippolytus and he does not mention the serpent either. Clement merely mentions that the Peratics are named after a place (*Strom.* 7.17.108.2). This likely refers to the river Euphrates since the name of the river in Hebrew is פְּרָת. For the ophidian associations of the Euphrates, see, e.g., McEwan 1983. See also the Epilogue of this book.

⁴⁷ Leisegang 1971, 107.

teaching, there are three principles in the universe: Father, Son, and matter (*Ref.* 5.17.1). The Son is a serpent and the Logos (5.17.2), without whom no one can be saved (5.17.8). He is an intermediary principle who receives forms from the Father and imparts them to matter (5.17.2), then transmits them back to the Father after they have been awakened (5.17.8–10). The salvific activity of this serpent-Son can only be explained by an exegesis of John 3:14–15, as Kaestli has noted,⁴⁸ especially since the Peratic teaching has many allusions to the Fourth Gospel, including a citation of John 3:14.⁴⁹ The Son is the universal serpent (καθολικὸς ὄφις), who manifests himself in various Biblical characters and themes: in the “wise words of Eve” (ὁ σοφὸς τῆς Εὐᾶς λόγος) (Gen 3), the river of Eden, Cain and his mark, and, finally, Christ (*Ref.* 5.16.8–10). Whereas Cain was said to manifest the good universal serpent, the creator is criticized for refusing Cain’s sacrifice and for wanting bloody ones (*Ref.* 5.16.9). Moreover, Moses’ brazen serpent (Num 21:6–9) and the constellation of Draco are likewise manifestations of this “real and perfect serpent” (ἀληθινὸς ὄφις, τέλειος ὄφις; *Ref.* 5.16.7,16). According to a brief allusion to the paradise story, the universal snake manifested itself in the words of Eve, but the exegesis of Gen 3 is very marginal here.⁵⁰ In fact, Eve’s connection with the serpent is instead bolstered by an exegesis of John 1:1–4: Eve (life) was formed in the Word of God who is the serpent (*Ref.* 5.16.12–13).⁵¹ While this universal serpent is totally positive, there are also evil snakes: they include the serpents of the wilderness against whom Moses set up the perfect serpent (Num 21:6–9); and the serpents of the magicians in Pharaoh’s court whom Moses’ (Aaron’s) serpent swallowed (Exod 7:8–12). The stars, the “gods of destruction,” likewise symbolize evil snakes.

The combination of snake exegesis of Gen 3, Exod 7:8–12, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15, is thus found here, although it is now combined

⁴⁸ Kaestli 1982, 129–130. Odeberg (1968, 105), however, suggests there existed a pre-Johannine Gnostic interpretation of Num 21:8–9 which ultimately lies behind the Peratic notions.

⁴⁹ E.g., John 1:1–4/*Ref.* 5.16.12; John 3:14/*Ref.* 5.16.11; John 3:17/*Ref.* 5.12.7; John 8:44/*Ref.* 5.17.7; John 10:7,9/*Ref.* 5.17.8. For more, see the index in Marcovich 1986.

⁵⁰ Thus also Kaestli 1982, 129.

⁵¹ Valentinian exegesis of John 1:4, in Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.8.5 (cf. *Exc. Theod.* 6.4), aimed at proving the theory of syzygies with the help of this verse. John 1:3ab had declared that everything was created by (διὰ) the Logos, while John 1:3c–4a states that what was created in (ἐν) him was Life (ζωή). This means to the Valentinian commentator that Life has a much more intimate relationship to the Logos than the “everything.” Therefore Life in him is, in fact, his companion/syzygos.

with a large amount of other snake speculations. Given the amount of positive snake symbolism in the Peratic teaching, perhaps it is the original context of such snake-friendly exegesis. On the other hand, since this exegesis is found in three different contexts (*Testim. Truth* and Hippolytus' reports of the Ophites and Peratics), it may have existed as a piece of free-floating mythologoumenon or as an independent literary work, a "snake midrash," which various Gnostic authors found appealing and incorporated into their respective teachings.

In fact, the Peratic teaching (or the report of it) may derive from multiple sources since Hippolytus also claims that the Peratics derived much of their teaching from astrologers. He has earlier (*Ref.* 4.46–50) described a certain unidentified exegesis of Aratus' astrological treatise, *Phaenomena*,⁵² and now gives a Peratic adaptation of it. Let us here first examine the anonymous exegesis of Aratus, then its Peratic adaptation.

According to the anonymous exegesis, the protevangelium (Gen 3:15) is visible in the sky. Near the North Pole is found the (constellation of) Draco (δράκων) (*Phaen.* 24–62). The anonymous exegesis identifies it with the devil and calls it "serpent" (ὄφις) and "beast" (θηρίον). Situated at the celestial pole, it never sets like other stars, and thus this serpent is able to observe all creation at all times; nothing escapes its notice (*Ref.* 4.47.1–4). It seems to represent the evil ruler of this world. Near the head of this dragon is situated a certain man-like image (constellation of Hercules), called "the kneeling one" (ὁ Ἐν γόνασιν) (*Phaen.* 63–70). In the anonymous exegesis, it is identified with Adam (*Ref.* 4.47.4–5). Next to this kneeling one are found (the constellations of) Lyre and Crown (*Phaen.* 71–74, 268–274; *Ref.* 4.48.1–2), and, according to the exegesis in question, Adam will receive the crown if he guards the head of the dragon (*Ref.* 4.48.3). Additionally, near the kneeling one is found the (constellation of the) Serpent-Bearer, the *Ophiouchos*, holding firmly in his hands a (constellation of the) Serpent approaching the crown (*Phaen.* 74–90). According to the anonymous exegetes, this means that the crown is being pursued by a small dragon (δράκων), an offspring of the devil, and that the *Ophiouchos* is the Logos who prevents it from attaining the crown reserved for Adam (*Ref.* 4.48.4–7). In the sky there are also two bears (the constellations of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor), between which Draco reclines (*Phaen.* 24–62). For these exegetes, the bears

⁵² See also Lancellotti 2000, 53–54.

are images of two creations: the first creation represents Adam and a toilsome life; the second one, “the narrow way,” represents Christ and God (*Ref.* 4.48.7–10). The dragon’s reclining between the two creations prevents anything going from the first creation to the second one (4.48.13), thus apparently hindering humanity from attaining salvation.

According to Hippolytus, this exegesis was adapted by the Peratics (5.16.14–16), who, however, gave it a different twist. They saw the constellation of Draco situated at the celestial pole as a manifestation of the perfect serpent, the Logos, but treated the constellation of Serpent as a symbol of an evil serpent opposing the perfect one. Guided by their interpretation of Draco manifesting the Logos, they depicted it as the originating principle of every motion, without which nothing holds together, and which provides its guidance to all (5.16.14). Hippolytus also describes a certain medical theory of the human brain which included the notion that the brain has the shape of a serpent’s head (4.51). He explains how this inspired certain Gnostics, and, later gives a Peratic adaptation of these ideas: the brain is like the Father, and the serpent-shaped cerebellum is like the Son who transmits the spiritual and life-giving substance (5.17.11–12). By this, they wished to prove their notion of the serpent as the intermediary principle between Father and matter.

Obviously, the Peratic report is an extensive combination of various snake speculations. Whatever the provenance of the positive snake exegesis of Gen 3, Exod 7:8–12, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15, at least the extensive Christological snake speculations of the Peratics provided a natural context for this snake-friendly exegesis. Such exegesis is perhaps less natural in an Ophite context where the snake is said to have a demonic origin. In fact, the only known instances where this exegesis is combined with the Ophite mythology are those *heresiological* reports that are dependent on Hippolytus’ *Syntagma*. It may also be noted that apart from a completely positive (and not ambivalent) interpretation of the serpent of paradise, *Testim. Truth* and the Peratic teaching lack specific Ophite features. In fact, the Peratic snake symbolism, especially in its Logos speculations (which probably arise out of an exegesis of John 3:14–15), rather resembles that of the Naasseni, which will be examined next.⁵³

⁵³ Cf. Lancellotti 2000, 210–211.

2.3 OTHER EVIDENCE OF “GNOSTIC” SNAKE SPECULATION

Apart from the Ophites and Peratics, the heresiologists also claimed to know of other groups that had engaged in serpent speculations. In addition, there are several other texts in the Nag Hammadi codices and related literature that include snake symbolism. In the following, I will examine these as well, comparing their teachings to the Ophite mythology. As an excursus to this section, there will be a brief look at Eastern Christian and Islamic reports of snake worship and myths including snakes.

Hippolytus devotes the fifth book of his *Refutatio* to “snake heresies.” According to him, the first of these are called “Naasseni”⁵⁴ (from the Hebrew word for snake, נָח), and Hippolytus gives the impression that from them, all other heresies derive (*Ref.* 5.6.3–4; 6.6.1). The Naasseni are said to honor (τιμάω, 5.9.11) only *naas*, which is the serpent (νάας δέ ἐστιν ὁ ὄφις; 5.9.11–12). The Greek word for temple (ναός) is brought into wordplay with the Graecized Hebrew word for snake, *νάας*: all temples, as well as all the shrines, initiatory rites, and mysteries, are supposedly dedicated to the serpent. In fact, without a temple with the serpent in it, there could be no religious ceremonies (5.9.12). The serpent, for its part, is identified as “a moist substance without which nothing would hold together.” In this respect, the snake is compared to the river stemming from Eden. In addition, all things are said to be subjected to the serpent;⁵⁵ it is “good,” “having all things in itself,” and “it imparts beauty and bloom to all things... as if passing through all” (5.9.13–14).⁵⁶ Given the fact that the name of the group is derived from a word for a snake, it is curious that so little space in the very extensive report of the Naassene teaching is devoted to the

⁵⁴ Hippolytus is the only witness to this teaching (*Ref.* 5.2; 5.6–11; 10.9). Theodoret merely gives “Naasseni” as an alternative name both for the Barbeloites (*Haer. fab. comp.* 1.13) and the Ophites (*Quaest.* 49 [IV Reg. 18:4]). This also betrays Theodoret’s tendency to harmonize various teachings.

⁵⁵ Cf. 1 Cor 15:27–28; Eph 1:22; Hebr 2:8; Ps 8:7.

⁵⁶ Εἶναι δὲ τὸν ὄφιν λέγουσιν οὗτοι τὴν ὑγρὰν οὐσίαν... καὶ μηδὲν δύνασθαι τῶν ὄντων ὅλως, ἀθανάτων ἢ θνητῶν, [τῶν] ἐμψύχων ἢ ἀψύχων, συνεστηκέναι χωρὶς αὐτοῦ. ὑποκείσθαι δὲ αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, καὶ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἀγαθόν, καὶ ἔχειν πάντων ἐν αὐτῷ, ὡσπερ ἐν κέρατι ταύρου μονοκέρωτος, τὸ κάλλος [τῶν ἄλλων], καὶ τὴν ὀραιότητα ἐπιδιδόναι πᾶσι τοῖς οὖσι κατὰ φύσιν τὴν ἑαυτῶν καὶ οἰκειότητα. οἰονεὶ διὰ πάντων ὀδεύοντα, ὡσπερ <ποταμὸν> ἐκπορευόμενον ἐξ Ἑδέμ... (*Ref.* 5.9.13–14, Marcovich, ed.).

serpent.⁵⁷ For the most part, the teaching consists of various explanations concerning the heavenly man, the Logos,⁵⁸ who is Christ. Since this entity in its various manifestations is also given attributes similar to the serpent,⁵⁹ it is conceivable, as many scholars have suggested, that the serpent is but one manifestation or symbol of this *anthropos*-Logos.⁶⁰ But why is the Logos symbolized by a *snake*? Philo had already interpreted the brazen serpent of Moses (Num 21:6–9) as a symbol of Logos and virtue.⁶¹ However, since the Naassene teaching contains several quotations from and allusions to the Fourth Gospel,⁶² it rather seems that Johannine exegesis that equated Moses' serpent with the Christ-Logos (John 3:14–15) lies in the background. Even though the Johannine Logos is not really comparable to, for example, the Stoic Logos, the Naasseni could easily have read such a notion into the Fourth Gospel.⁶³ Other serpent themes in the Naassene teaching may then be dependent on this apparent Stoicizing world soul Logos motif. For example, the pagan theme of Oceanos surrounding the world is also related to the world soul idea, and it may have, in turn, contributed to the characterization of the Logos-serpent as the moist substance.⁶⁴ The serpent imagery in the Naassene teaching is completely positive, unlike the ambivalent Ophite imagery. Furthermore, the snake exegesis of Gen 3, which lies at the heart of the Ophite mythology, does not occur here (only the river of Eden is mentioned). Thus, the snake symbolism of the Naassene teaching is different from that of the Ophites.

⁵⁷ Thus also Kaestli 1982, 128.

⁵⁸ Leisegang 1971, 95–100; Lancellotti 2000, 7, 245ff. As Lancellotti (p. 273) puts it, even the two hymns to Attis are “only accepted to the extent in which he (Attis) is presented as functionally apt to represent the Celestial Anthropos.”

⁵⁹ E.g., all things are said to be subjected unto the Logos/naas (5.7.34/5.9.14); the Logos is the Ocean, and the Jordan/naas is the moist substance (5.7.37–41; 5.8.4; 5.8.20/5.9.13); the *anthropos*-Logos is present in all men/naas passes through all (5.8.4/5.9.14); the Logos shapes the cosmos/naas imparts beauty and bloom to all things (5.7.18,25; 5.8.4,13/5.9.15); the Logos (thus, Lancellotti 2000, 79)/naas is good (5.7.26/5.9.14).

⁶⁰ Casey 1965, 382; Leisegang 1971, 100; Kaestli 1982, 128; Lancellotti 2000, 51, 80.

⁶¹ *Leg. all.* 2.79. See also Odeberg 1968, 105.

⁶² E.g., John 1:3/*Ref.* 5.9.2; John 2:9,11/*Ref.* 5.8.7; John 10:9/*Ref.* 5.9.21; For more, see Lancellotti 2000, 285–287; and the index in Marcovich 1986.

⁶³ On the Stoicizing reading of the Johannine Logos, see p. 260.

⁶⁴ Legge (1950, 2:77–78), Casey (1965, 382, 387), Leisegang (1971, 82, 128), C. King (1973, 101, 225) and Kaestli (1982, 128–130) think the Naassene notions of the serpent derive ultimately from paganism, but in my opinion, they exaggerate the parallels to pagan cults and literature. See also Lancellotti 2000, 46ff.

After having dealt with the Naasseni and Peratics, Hippolytus moves on to Sethians. As noted above, according to this Sethian account (*Ref.* 5.4; 5.19–22; 10.11),⁶⁵ there are three eternal principles: light which is above, watery darkness that is below, and spirit situated in between. There are also two serpents: the demiurgic one belonging to the darkness; and the Word of God, the Perfect Man, who comes from the light. The demiurgic serpent (ὄφις, *Ref.* 5.19.18) appears out of the dark waters, and is characterized as the “cause of all generation” (πάσης γενέσεως αἴτιος; 5.19.13), the “Father who is below” (πατὴρ τοῦ κάτω; 5.19.16), the “first-begotten of the waters” (ὁ πρωτόγονος τῶν ὑδάτων; 5.19.19) and the “wind of the darkness” (ἄνεμος τοῦ σκότους; 5.19.19). It entered the cosmic womb (μήτρα), i.e., heaven and earth, in order to create a human being; thus the womb recognizes no other form. Therefore, in rescuing the light and spirit from the darkness, the Word of God needed to enter the womb in a serpentine (ὄφις) form, which is the servant’s form of Phil 2:7 (*Ref.* 5.19.19–22).

Hippolytus asserts that this Sethian teaching is based, among other things, on Orpheus’ teachings (*Ref.* 5.4; 5.20.4–5). Even though Hippolytus’ attempts to derive heresies from Greek philosophy and mythology are not always convincing,⁶⁶ in the case of certain details, his observations seem to be correct. The Sethian notions about the serpentine creator do have parallels in Orphic myths: out of water and some more solid matter was born a serpentine creator Chronos-Heracles;⁶⁷ he had wings which can be associated with the notion of wind;⁶⁸ the cosmic egg out of which the heaven and earth emerge, is laid by this serpent.⁶⁹ The idea that winds can generate life can be found in Orphic literature.⁷⁰ Additionally, in some stories associated

⁶⁵ Hippolytus’ summary at *Ref.* 10.11 is, in places, a slightly different telling of the myth (cf. Marcovich 1986, 33). A detail of this Sethian teaching is also found in Theodoret’s account of the “Sethian-Ophites” in *Haer. fab. comp.* 1.14 (see above).

⁶⁶ See Vallée 1981, 50ff.; Marcovich 1986, 35–36.

⁶⁷ Damascius, *De princ.* 123 (OF 54 [*Orphic fragment* in Kern 1972]); Athenagoras, *Leg.* 18 (OF 57); cf. *Ref.* 5.19.13,19. Snake symbolism was also attached to Chronos-Heracles’ son, Phanes; see Plate 12.

⁶⁸ Damascius, *De princ.* 123 (OF 54); Hermias, *Plat. Phaedr.* 246e (OF 78); cf. *Ref.* 5.19.19 (*wind* of the darkness). Associations between snakes and wind are also found elsewhere in Greek literature (Nonnos, *Dion.* 1.156–162; Pausanias, *Descr.* 5.19.1).

⁶⁹ Damascius, *De princ.* 123 (OF 54); Athenagoras, *Leg.* 18 (OF 57); cf. the cosmic womb, which represents the heaven and earth and which is impregnated by the serpentine creator, *Ref.* 5.19.11,19.

⁷⁰ *Orphic hymn* 38.3 (Athanasakis 1977, 52–53); see Leisegang 1955a, 41. Cf. also Aristophanes, *Av.* 695 (OF 1), where the cosmic egg is ὑπηνέμιος; see Guthrie 1966, 94; and van Amersfoort 1981, 27.

with the figure of Orpheus, Zeus, in the form of a snake, has intercourse with a woman.⁷¹ However, the Orphic myths are not the only source behind this Sethian myth. That the three main principles of this teaching are called light, spirit, and darkness, the last being depicted as primeval waters, finds its explanation in Gen 1:1–3, as Leisegang has pointed out: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and *darkness* was upon the face of the deep; and the *Spirit* (רוח) of God was moving over the face of the *waters*. And God said, ‘Let there be *light*.’”⁷² The characterization of the serpentine creator as the “*wind* (cf. רוח) of the *darkness*” and the “first-begotten of the *waters*” may also be based on Gen 1:1–3.

Thus, this Sethian creation myth appears to be based on an exegesis of Genesis that was influenced by Orphic ideas. If the creator is intended to be YHWH, then his natural serpentine character serves to disparage him, whereas Christ’s serpentine form was only seen as a necessary evil, a disguise. Although, in this Sethian context, the idea of Christ’s serpentine form is derived from Phil 2:7, only a very forced reading of this passage allows such an interpretation. Thus, this interpretation likely presupposes and reinforces an already existing exegesis of John 3:14–15, where Christ’s serpentine form can be easily deduced. Even though this account is attributed to Sethians and it includes serpent speculations, it has no features of Schenke’s Sethian system nor of the Ophite mythology as defined in this study.

Unlike the *Paraphrase of Seth*, the closely related Nag Hammadi text, *Paraph. Shem*, seems to have only veiled allusions to Christian texts and teachings.⁷³ The exegesis based on Phil 2:7 and John 3:14–15 is missing, but the serpentine creator, nevertheless, appears. According to *Paraph. Shem*, it is called “Moluchta(s)” (32,2; 34,9; 47,2), and it is said to be a wind (ΓΗΟΥ; 34,9) without which nothing can be brought forth upon the earth (34,9–11). Moluchtas does not only have the appearance of a serpent (ὄφις), but also of a (horn of a) unicorn (ἄπυλον; 34,11–13) (both may be phallic symbols due to their shape). His emanations are said to be manifold wings (πτερυγῶν ἐβόα ἑνενήκων ἢ ἑξήκων ἢ ἑπορφῆ μιν; 34,13–15). He is also associated

⁷¹ Athenagoras, *Leg.* 20 (OF 58); Clement, *Protrepticus* 2.16.1; Arnobius, *Adv. nat.* 5.21; cf. *Ref.* 5.19.19. See also Küster 1913, 152.

⁷² Leisegang 1971, 110; cf. also Roberge 2000, 53.

⁷³ Wisse (1996, 15, 21) and Pearson (1997, 52–53) consider *Paraph. Shem* as a basically non-Christian text. For a different opinion, see Yamauchi 1997, 82ff.; and Roberge 2000, especially 85–90.

with the “root of evil” and the “impurity of Nature” (32,2–5; 47,1–5).⁷⁴ In describing Moluchtas, the author refers to a womb (ΤΑΤΕ; 34,15), possibly the cosmic womb (ΤΑΤΕ, μήτρα) described elsewhere in the text (e.g., at 4,22ff.). Thus, the Orphic imagery is also present here, although perhaps in a more confused form than in Hippolytus’ account. As noted above, the Orphic creator Chronos-Heracles was a *winged serpent* who laid the cosmic egg (cf. the cosmic womb). As in the *Paraphrase of Seth*, the three primeval roots, light, spirit and darkness, as well as the characterization of the creator as the *wind*, seem to be based on Gen 1:1–3.⁷⁵

At the end of *Paraph. Shem*, there is a section whose serpent imagery may be based loosely on Rev 12–13, although the parallels are vague enough to allow their derivation from a common background.⁷⁶ A dragon (δράκων) is said to give birth to a demon (*Paraph. Shem* 44,31–32; cf. Rev 13:2,12, where the dragon gives its authority to the first beast who then renders it to the second one); this demon will perform miracles (cf. Rev 13:13), and reign over the world at the end of time (*Paraph. Shem* 44,31–45,31; cf. Rev 13:7,12). He had been hiding in a deserted (ἔρημος) place (cf. Rev 12:6), and when he appears, many are said to loathe him (*Paraph. Shem* 44,32–45,3). In addition, a wind (ΤΗΟΥ) with a female likeness, called Abalphe, will come forth from his mouth (45,3–6; cf. Rev 12:15, where the dragon pours water out of its mouth after the woman). The connection between this dragon and Moluchtas is not clear, although both are serpentine and somehow connected with the wind. Ascetic ideals might have given rise to the tractate’s abundance of negative sexual imagery (see, e.g., 4,27–32; 10,23–25; 13,13–14; 21,22–22,9) to which much of the likewise negative snake symbolism clearly belongs. *Paraph. Shem* has no Ophite features.

The teaching of Justin the “pseudognostic” (Ἰουστίνου τοῦ ψευδογνωστικοῦ; *Ref.* 5.28.1), which Hippolytus describes after the Sethians (5.5; 5.23–28; 10.15), supposedly derives from a *Book of Baruch*. This teaching also has three eternal principles: the Good, who is the true God; Elohim, who is the principal creator; and Edem-Israel, a kind of mother-earth-figure, half-woman, half-snake. Elohim and Edem unite

⁷⁴ The name, Moluchtas, possibly derives from the Greek μολύνω (“to defile; to seduce”) and γῆθών (“earth”). Michel Roberge, private communication.

⁷⁵ Cf. Roberge 2000, 53; and Barnstone and Meyer 2003, 439.

⁷⁶ Cf. Wisse 1996, 116–117.

and produce twenty-four angels, twelve for each. These are also called the trees of paradise. They create the bodies of Adam and Eve, with Edem giving the soul and Elohim the spirit. Finally, when all creation is complete, Elohim ascends to see whether anything is missing in it. Unexpectedly, he sees the light of the true God above, is allowed to enter his realm and thus abandons Edem. As a result, Edem wants to seek revenge on Elohim, but she can only do this by punishing Elohim's spirit bound in humankind. She allows one of her angels, Naas, identified as the tree of knowledge (*Ref.* 5.26.6), to chastise humanity in every possible way (5.26.21). In response, Elohim sends one of his angels, Baruch, identified as the tree of life (5.26.6), to help humankind. However, Naas manages to sabotage all interventions of Baruch until the coming of Jesus. Naas, for example, rapes both Adam and Eve, and confuses the words of Moses and the prophets. Finally, he tries to obscure Jesus' mission, but, failing to do this, he brings about the crucifixion.⁷⁷

Naas is thus a demonic figure. That he is the serpent of Gen 3 is quite clear from the facts that he is connected with the tree of knowledge, and that his name is derived from the Hebrew word for snake, שָׁפָן. There are also other serpentine figures in Justin's teaching. The body of Edem is said to resemble a virgin from the navel up, but the lower parts have a serpentine (ἔχιδνα) shape (*Ref.* 5.26.1), a detail paralleled by Herodotus (*Hist.* 4.8–10), as Hippolytus points out (*Ref.* 5.5; 5.25.1–26.1).⁷⁸ Like Naas, Edem is also evil because she issued the command to haunt humanity. Another one of her angels is called Leviathan, likely a serpent-figure (cf. LXX Isa 27:1 and the Ophite diagram). Although not as wicked as Naas (see *Ref.* 5.26.22–23), Leviathan—like the other angels of Edem—is connected with “the stream of evil,” producing evil times and diseases in the world (5.26.11–13). In Justin's teaching, then, there are only evil snake-figures. Even the eating from the tree of knowledge is not given a positive meaning (a rare instance in “Gnostic” paradise exegesis). The main source and inspiration for Justin certainly was not Herodotus, as Hippolytus asserts, but Genesis and other Judeo-Christian traditions identifying the serpent of paradise with the devil. In some ways Justin's *Book of Baruch* stays close to Genesis: Elohim is

⁷⁷ In Hippolytus' summary in *Ref.* 10.15.7, it is Edem, not Naas, who causes the crucifixion.

⁷⁸ Van den Broek (1996, 131–141) suggests that Justin might have here been influenced by the description of the serpentine goddess Isis-Thermouthis.

basically a good creator, the serpent (Naas) is evil and eating from the tree of knowledge is wrong.⁷⁹ This might be an indication of the antiquity of this myth, as many scholars have suggested.⁸⁰ The rich allegory and the many themes derived from other sources,⁸¹ however, might suggest otherwise. Moreover, the fairly literary following of Genesis, found in some Nag Hammadi texts, is missing at least in Hippolytus' summary. That the evil half-snake Edem was also called Israel, betrays an anti-Jewish bias, not unlike that of the Fourth Gospel. Despite certain similarities with Irenaeus' and Origen's Ophites (focus on the Genesis paradise story; an evil serpent; Leviathan), Justin's *Book of Baruch* cannot be considered Ophite; no clear Ophite features appear here.

In the mythology attributed to a certain Severus by Epiphanius (*Pan.* 45),⁸² the serpent (ὄφις) is the son of the leader of the archons and is identified as the devil; he was also cast down from the heavens (*Pan.* 45.1.4). Thus far, this is similar to what we find in Irenaeus' Ophite account. However, this serpent was then thought to have gone wild and copulated with the earth as with a woman; thus, the grapevine was produced (45.1.5). The vine is also associated with the serpent because of its shape, and the power of the wine is seen as the serpent's poison. Moreover, according to Epiphanius, Severus asserted that a vine producing green (literally "white," λευκός) grapes is like a snake (ὄφις), and the one producing dark ones is like a dragon (δράκων) (45.1.6–8). Severus is also said to have renounced marriage and sexual intercourse, and to have affirmed that woman is the devil's—i.e., the serpent's—handiwork (45.2). Somewhat similar ideas condemning wine and sexual procreation are found in *Orig. World*, according to which both Eros and the grapevine derive from the same root, the blood of the demonic Ialdabaoth's female half, Pronoia (108,14–109,29).⁸³ In addition, what Severus says of human beings resembles to some extent what Justin the pseudognostic had said concerning the female principle

⁷⁹ See Leisegang 1971, 112–113; and Barnstone and Meyer 2003, 119–120.

⁸⁰ Segal 1977, 248; Fossum 1985, 216; Rudolph 1987, 145; Barnstone and Meyer 2003, 108, 119.

⁸¹ E.g., Heracles (*Ref.* 5.26.27–28); Priapus (5.26.32); a female figure with a serpentine lower body (5.25.1–26.1).

⁸² Severus or the Severians are also mentioned by Jerome (*Vir. ill.* 29), Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.29.4–5), and Theodoret (*Haer. fab. comp.* 1.21), who, however, do not speak of any Severian snake imagery.

⁸³ The idea that the vine was planted by the devil is also found in *3 Baruch* (Gk) 4:8–15.

Edem. According to Severus, from the navel up, humans are made by God's power, but from the navel down, by the serpentine devil (*Pan.* 45.2.2–3); according to Justin, Edem was woman-like from the navel up, but serpentine from the navel down (*Ref.* 5.26.1). The Severian serpent imagery seems to derive from myths and speculations similar to what is found in Irenaeus' Ophite account and the *Book of Baruch*. Since the creation of humanity is mentioned in the same context (*Pan.* 45.2), the serpent is likely to be identified with the one of Gen 3. In accordance with a common Judeo-Christian fashion, this serpent is identified as the devil. Strong asceticism behind the Severian teaching probably explains the demonized serpentine associations of sexuality and wine. This Severian teaching does have a certain similarity with the Ophite mythology, but these similarities are vague at best; no clear Ophite features appear here.

This survey of snake symbolism will conclude with those "original Gnostic" writings which have not yet been discussed.⁸⁴ The treatises contained in *Pist. Soph.* (1–3, 4) of the Askew Codex have been suggested to be Ophite,⁸⁵ but their links to my typological model are vague at best. In the first treatise (books 1–3), which seems to have been originally independent from book 4,⁸⁶ the "Outer darkness" (ΠΙΚΡΕ ΕΤΩΒΟΛ; cf. Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) is said to be a great dragon (ΟΥΝΟΣ ΠΑΡΑΚΩΗ) swallowing its own tail, surrounding the whole world (3.126). Thus, it resembles the Leviathan of the Ophite diagram and the dragon of *Pan.* 26. It is called the "Mammon of unrighteousness" (ΠΙ<M>ΔΜΩΝΔC ΠΤΕ ΤΔΛΙΚΙΑ; 3.130; cf. Luke 16:9,11) and it can only enter the world in the form of smoke since the world is said to be unable to bear the dragon's true form (3.131). This dragon has twelve

⁸⁴ The Hermetic text *Asclepius*, of which a passage has survived in the Nag Hammadi library (NH VI,8 21–29), does not utilize snake imagery despite the attribution of the text to Asclepius whose traditional attributes included a snake. The occurrence of a "serpent" in *Poimandres* 4 is an unfortunate editorial addition to the manuscript; see Nock and Festugière 1945, 7; Büchli 1987, 31. In addition, the *Gospel of Truth* (NH I,3) 18,24–31 may have a veiled allusion to Gen 3, without, however, mentioning the serpent (Anne Pasquier, private communication). Cf. *Gos. Truth* 30,14ff. See also Attridge and MacRae 1985, 50–51.

⁸⁵ Gruber 1864, 3–5; Liechtenhan 1904. Legge (1950, 2:177), however, thinks Valentinus was the author. Another scholar who has linked Ophites (including Naasseni) with the Valentinians, is Hovhannessian (2000, 130–131). He thinks the apocryphal 3 *Corinthians*, due to its vague mentioning of the "faith of the serpent," was directed against the Ophites and Naasseni, whom he takes as obscure sub-sects of the Valentinians.

⁸⁶ Rudolph 1987, 27. Cf. also Legge 1924, xiv–xxviii; and Leisegang 1971, 248–249.

chambers of severe punishments, where various archons torture souls. Some of these archons have a reptilian appearance: Enchthonin, in the first chamber, is a crocodile-faced *ouroboros* (ΟΥΓΩ ΠΗΓΑΞ ΠΕ ΕΡΕ ΠΕΥΧΑΤ ΠΖΟΥΗ ΠΡΩΥ); Achrochar in the fourth chamber has the face of a serpent (ΟΥΓΩ ΠΖΟΥ); Archeoch in the ninth chamber has a basilisk-face (ΟΥΓΩ ΠΚΙΤ); and many archons in the tenth chamber, with Zarmaroch over them all, have seven dragon heads (ΣΑΩΥΕ ΠΑΠΕ ΠΛΡΑΚΩΗ) (3.126). Serpent-faced archons, together with a lion-faced one, who oppress Pistis Sophia, and whom she finally overpowers, are often singled out from the rest of the evil archons (see, e.g., in 2.66,67). Jackson is of the opinion that these “ophidian villains” are later introductions to the mythologoumenon surrounding the figure of Sophia.⁸⁷

The image of the *ouroboros* dragon as the “Mammon of unrighteousness” stems from Luke 16:1–13 with its parallels in Matt, and serves to depict this serpent as a force opposing God (Luke 16:13: “You cannot serve God and Mammon”). Its infernal character as the “Outer darkness,” a place of punishment, stresses this, too. Lukan influence may also be found at *Pist. Soph.* 2.67 where Psalm 91[90]:13 is paraphrased and then explained, probably in light of Luke 10:19.⁸⁸ Certain parallels in Egyptian mythology can also be pointed out: according to the *Book of Amduat*, the sun god travels through the underworld which is said to be divided into twelve regions; at the end, he enters an *ouroboros* snake to be reborn again.⁸⁹ This resembles the division of the *ouroboros* dragon into twelve chambers of punishment.

However, the Egyptian parallels are clearer in the fourth book of *Pist. Soph.*, where, on the other hand, the snake imagery is positive. The *ouroboros* image is also employed there. Now it is the disc of the sun, which is described as a great dragon (δράκων) swallowing its own tail, carrying seven powers of the left and drawn by four white horses (4.136). In addition, the base of the moon is said to resemble a boat, steered by a male and a female dragon (δράκων), drawn by two white bulls and guided by a “likeness of the child” (ΠΕΙΝΕ ΠΟΥΩΗΡΕ ΩΗΗ; 4.136). The dragons are said to steal the light from the wicked archons, which could be seen as a positive act, aimed at conquering the evil

⁸⁷ Jackson 1985, 33.

⁸⁸ Jackson 1985, 31.

⁸⁹ See Shorter 1937, 85; Hornung 1982, 160–161.

powers. The connection between sun and the serpent was common in ancient Egypt: the pharaoh, an image of the sun god, wore the uraeus on his forehead as a symbol of his sovereignty;⁹⁰ the sun god was often depicted as a man with a falcon's head surmounted by the solar disc and the uraeus;⁹¹ the image of the *ouroboros* can appear around the newborn sun god;⁹² and sun's boat, sometimes even having a serpentine shape, was occasionally presented as drawn by cobras in the underworld.⁹³ Perhaps *Pist. Soph.* 4 was intended for an Egyptian audience familiar with such imagery.⁹⁴ The books of *Pist. Soph.* 1–4 have only vague connections to Ophite mythology.⁹⁵ Sophia is depicted as a fallen and guilty figure, not as the mighty savior and female aspect of the Godhead as in most texts of the Ophite corpus (see Chapter 4). Ialdabaoth is not the leader of the seven archons here either. An *ouroboros* snake appears but the serpent of paradise and the idea of the male aspect of the true Godhead as a series of heavenly men are missing. Thus, the books of *Pist. Soph.* should not be seen as Ophite, but only slightly influenced by Ophite mythology.

The serpent appears or is mentioned in yet five other Nag Hammadi texts, however, only in passing or according to mainstream Christian interpretations. Even though none of them has Ophite features, we may, nevertheless, take a brief look at them. Logion 39 of the *Gospel of Thomas* (NH II,2; *Oxyr.* 1,654,655) resembles Matt 10:16–17 to a great extent. In instructing the disciples against the evilness of the Pharisees and the scribes, Jesus says, “Be as wise as serpents (2001) and as innocent as doves.” Not only the saying, but also its context is similar to Matt 10:16–17, where Jesus sends his disciples into the midst of wolves, and says how they “will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues.” *Gos. Thom.* 39 does not, then, seek to link Jesus with the serpent, but merely uses the snake as a symbol of wisdom, as was customary in the ancient world.⁹⁶ The author of the Naassene

⁹⁰ Shorter 1937, 12; Joines 1974, 45–49.

⁹¹ Shorter 1937, 5. See also Quirke 1992, 44.

⁹² Hornung 1982, 164; Quirke 1992, 116–120.

⁹³ Shorter 1937, 85; Clark 1959, 242.

⁹⁴ Cf. Legge 1950, 2:175.

⁹⁵ Cf. especially the employment of the figures of Sophia, Ialdabaoth and the *ouroboros*. Cf. also H.-M. Schenke 1981, 596.

⁹⁶ Apollodorus, *Lib.* 1.9.11; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 1.20; 3.9; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 10.70; the Egyptian story of the shipwrecked sailor (see, e.g., Simpson 1972, 50–56); Gen 3 originally. In addition, the meanings “serpent,” “divination” and “to practice

teaching claims to quote from a *Gospel of Thomas* (Ref. 5.7.20–21), but this does not correspond to our versions of *Gos. Thom.* Other links between *Gos. Thom.* and the Naassene teaching are tenuous at best, and they do not concern the snake imagery in any way.⁹⁷

The Teachings of Silvanus (NH VII,4) warns the reader against the evil schemes of the devil. These schemes are manifold, we are told, and they have already succeeded in robbing the “noetic man” (ΠΙΝΟΗΤΟΣ ΠΡΩΜΕ; 95,4–5) of the intelligence of the snake (ῥοϋ). However, against these schemes one should exercise the intelligence of the snake and the innocence of the dove (95,4–33). This is, of course, yet another reference to Matt 10:16. Despite the wisdom associated with snakes, the serpent itself is here an animal connected with evil, in accordance with Luke 10:19 and Ps 91[90]:13: snakes (ῥοϋ; δράκων), asps (ῥεω), basilisk-snakes (σιτ), lions and foxes are depicted as the powers of the devil (*Teach. Silv.* 105,28–106,1). The devil himself also seems to be identified as the serpent in paradise (95,12ff.), according to a common Judeo-Christian tradition.

Three texts attached to Valentinianism speak of serpents as well.⁹⁸ According to the *Tripartite Tractate* (NH I,5), there is an evil power called “serpent” (ῥαϋ). This is mentioned in a section, that is a midrash of Gen 2–3 (*Tri. Trac.* 104,4–108,12). The serpent is said to be more cunning (πανούργος, 107,11) than all the evil powers; it is said to have led man astray, and make him transgress the command so that he would die; as a consequence, man was expelled. Even though the expulsion is said to have happened according to providence and the spirit, the serpent is not positive in this text (107,10–28). Thus, the serpent of paradise with its advice is evaluated negatively, simply according to a mainstream Christian interpretation. *The Gospel of Philip* (NH II,3) utilizes Judeo-Christian traditions, according to which Cain was the son of the devil by Eve,⁹⁹ and the serpent in paradise was the devil: “First, adultery came into being, afterward murder. And he (i.e., Cain) was begotten in adultery, for he was the child of the serpent (ῥοϋ). So

divination” can be derived from the Hebrew root, שׁוּגַ. See Joines 1974, 21–26; and Hendel 1999, 744.

⁹⁷ See especially Lancellotti 2000, 317–348.

⁹⁸ On the Valentinian provenance of *Tri. Trac.*, *Gos. Phil.* and *On Bap. A*, see Thomassen 2006.

⁹⁹ See, e.g., *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 4:1–2; *b. Yebam.* 103b; *b. Shabb.* 146a; cf. also *Pirqe R. El.* 21.

he became a murderer, just like his father, and he killed his brother.” (61,5–10, Isenberg, transl.). This section also seems to elaborate on John 8:44. The author of the *Valentinian Exposition* [*On Bap. A*] (NH XI,2a), for his part, simply refers to Luke 10:19, “It is fitting for [you at this time] to send thy Son [Jesus] Christ and anoint us so we might be able to trample [upon] the [snakes] and [the heads] of the scorpions and [all] the power of the devil” (*On Bap. A* 40,11–17, Turner, transl.).

Excursus: Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources

In the famous *Hymn of the Pearl* (*Acts of Thomas* 108–113 [lines 1–105]),¹⁰⁰ the serpent appears as the guardian of a treasure, a common theme in ancient literature.¹⁰¹ The prince (the soul) descends to Egypt (the world) to get his pearl that is guarded by a terrible “swallowing serpent” (δράκοντα τὸν καταπότην; 13). Having been awakened from the ignorance into which he fell, the prince remembers his mission, subdues the serpent and gets his pearl (57–61). If the snatching of the pearl here symbolizes the discovery of one’s proper self-understanding, the salvific *gnosis*, as Layton suggests,¹⁰² partaking in the Father’s kingdom (Matt 13:45), as Klijn argues,¹⁰³ or Adam’s restoration to paradise, as Pearson has proposed,¹⁰⁴ the serpent in any case symbolizes the forces of the world hostile to God. However, no Ophite features are found here (despite Pearson’s reading).

In the pseudonymous *Testament of Ephraim* (died 373 CE), there is a list of heresies, among which are mentioned “those of the house of the serpent” (*d^ebeit hawya*; *Testament* 502).¹⁰⁵ Beck’s German translation has, “Ophiten,”¹⁰⁶ i.e., “Ophites,” but the identification of these with the Ophites described in Greek and Latin heresiologies is not really possible on the basis of this mere mention of the group devoted to the serpent. The entry of the *hêrêsis d^ehewyê* (“heresy of the serpents”) in Theodore bar Konai’s *Lib. schol.* 11.78 (ca. 792 CE) has sometimes

¹⁰⁰ See Klijn 1962, 273–281; Poirier 1981; Layton 1987, 366–375; Barnstone and Meyer 2003, 386–394.

¹⁰¹ Küster 1913, 68–71, 120–121; see also Klijn 1962, 279–280.

¹⁰² Layton 1987, 367–368.

¹⁰³ Klijn 1962, 277.

¹⁰⁴ Pearson 2007, 260.

¹⁰⁵ E. Beck 1973a, 58.

¹⁰⁶ E. Beck 1973b, 69.

been given the label “Ophites.”¹⁰⁷ However, bar Konai himself distinguishes this myth from that of the actual “Ophites, the devotees of the serpent” (*’pwt’y’ d’ytyhûn hwyy’*; 11.31), which description he has copied from Epiphanius’ *Anacephalaeosis*. Despite the name of the entry in *Lib. schol.* 11.78, there is no serpent-figure of any kind in the myth. The figures of Michael and Samiel (Samael), which were names of the serpent in Irenaeus’ Ophite account, do appear, but neither one is here serpentine. No clear Ophite features appear in this account.

According to the tenth century writer Agapius’ *Kitâb al-’Unwân*, Basilides affirmed that we have to honor and venerate the serpent since it told Eve to sleep with her husband; had it not existed, the world would not exist either.¹⁰⁸ Both Michael the Syrian (1126–1199 CE) in his *Chronicle* (105a,6),¹⁰⁹ and Bar Hebraeus (1226–1286 CE) in his heresiology¹¹⁰ also connect Basilides with serpent worship. These two writers mention that Basilides based his teaching on that of the venerated of the serpent who are called “Gnostics,” and that he taught there were 365 heavens. By these Gnostics, they probably mean those Epiphanius describes in *Pan.* 26 since they were reported to teach that the serpent brought a revelation to Eve and that there were 365 heavens (*Pan.* 26.2.6; 26.9.6–9). Because, according to Epiphanius, Basilides called himself a “Gnostic” (31.1.5), the information these two writers had on Basilides seems to derive from a secondary combination of Epiphanius’ information on the “libertine Gnostics” and Basilides.

Without carrying out a full investigation, I was able to find two accounts dealing with groups devoted to the serpent from Islamic literature. The *Fihrist* of al-Nadim (died ca. 995 CE) merely mentions the name of a group, *Hayyiyya* (“those of the serpent”),¹¹¹ and an-Nashi’ al-Akbar (died ca. 893 CE), in his work *al-Kitâb al-Awsat* (78,14), says that the *al-Hayyiyya* (“those of the serpent”) worship the serpent and the Messiah. This appears to be based on what is said of the Ophites in Epiphanius’ *Anacephalaeosis*. In addition, some Islamic myths with a Gnostic flavor employ serpent symbolism. For example, unbelievers and wicked ones were often thought to be reincarnated in the bodies

¹⁰⁷ Pognon 1898, 212. Cf. also the title of Gerö’s article (1987).

¹⁰⁸ Text and French translation in Graffin and Nau 1911, 506.

¹⁰⁹ French translation in Chabot 1963, 174.

¹¹⁰ Text and French translation in Graffin and Nau 1919, 252–253.

¹¹¹ See van Ess 1971, 73; Gerö 1987, 268.

of unpleasant animals, including those of snakes.¹¹² However, the most interesting story is found in Ibn Wahshiyya's work, *al-Filâha an-Nabatiyya* (tenth century).¹¹³ This work, which is an agricultural manual, and could partly derive from pre-Islamic Syria,¹¹⁴ contains a section (448–453) which seems to be a Gnostic-like paraphrase of the paradise story of Genesis.¹¹⁵ Let me summarize it here. Adam, who is not the first man, but a kind of sage, tells of a land in the East, near India, where the wheat and barley grow tall like trees. The people of that land, however, could not cultivate these wheat and barley trees because big and very poisonous winged snakes lived in them. Adam shot three of the snakes with arrows and crucified them on canes around the wheat trees. The other snakes fled because they had never seen any of their kind dead or crucified; these snakes never die a natural death. After rain had cleansed the trees from the poison of the snakes, Adam showed the people how to collect the grain and make bread out of it. Now that the people knew how to kill these snakes, and, after they started eating wheat, they became wiser and their thoughts became clearer (cf. Gen 3:7). Previously they had walked about naked (cf. Gen 3:7), but now they were ashamed of one another (cf. Gen 3:10). Adam taught them to manufacture and wear clothes (cf. Gen 3:21), and finally they wanted to make Adam their new king. The former king became jealous of Adam (cf. Gen 3:22–24) and asked the people why they wanted to have Adam as their leader given that he has harmed them: now that their intelligence has grown, they worry more, and are ashamed of one another. The people wished to kill this king, but Adam advised them rather to expel him (cf. Gen 3:23–24). Finally, Adam returns to his own land. Among the many Gnostic-like allusions to the paradise story of Genesis are: Adam himself appears as a heroic character; the eating of the tree is seen in a positive light; after the people eat from the tree, their intelligence grows; the king (cf. Ialdabaoth/YHWH) who rebuked the people for eating from the tree, is rejected. Furthermore, the fact that Adam *crucifies* the snakes, might be a distant echo of the connection between Christ and the serpent, attested

¹¹² This was taught by Ibn Harb, according to Pseudo-Nâsi, Naubahtî and Qummî. The theme is also found in the texts *Umm al-kitab* and *Kitab al-Azilla*, as well as in the doctrine of the present-day Nusairites (see Halm 1982, 69–75, 174–175, 180–181, 265, 303).

¹¹³ Here I rely on Hämeen-Anttila 2005.

¹¹⁴ Hämeen-Anttila 2005, 211.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Hämeen-Anttila 2005, 221n36.

in several heresiological sources. Despite the focus on the rewritten paradise story, this text does not fit the proposed definition of the Ophite mythology.

In sum, the reports of groups devoted to the serpent that appear in Eastern Christian heresiologies and Islamic sources either merely mention the existence of such a group, or, if any additional information is given, it is either based on Epiphanius, or it is not corroborated by earlier and more reliable witnesses. Curiously, Theodore bar Konai's account of the "heresy of the serpents" lacks snake imagery altogether. The *Hymn of the Pearl* cannot be connected with the Ophite myth despite Pearson's suggestion. Ibn Washiyya's story, for its part, simply testifies to the widespread popularity of Genesis exegesis. Finally, the idea of the transmigration of souls, encountered in some Islamic documents, was also widespread in Antiquity. None of the sources examined in this excursus gives us new reliable information about the "Ophites."

2.4 CONCLUSION

This examination of Gnostic and related sources that speak of snakes has revealed a rich and diversified serpent imagery. However, three themes appear to dominate in this material: (1) the serpent of paradise; (2) a connection between Christ and the snake; and (3) a cosmic snake. The examination has also shown that the Ophite texts largely focus on the paradise story in their snake speculations whereas many of the other texts examined here concentrate on Christ's connection with the snake instead. The cosmic snake appears in both Ophite and non-Ophite contexts. The Ophite texts, however, treat the three themes in a special way: first, the eating of the forbidden tree was a positive act, but the instructor was not actually the serpent; second, Christ is not a snake; and three, the cosmic snake is mostly a negative entity.

According to Irenaeus' Ophites, *Orig. World, Hyp. Arch.* and *Ap. John*, the true revealer in paradise was not the serpent itself, but a heavenly figure who either used the snake as a tool, or was confused with it. Eating of the tree of knowledge is, in any case, seen in positive light. Celsus' and Origen's (*Cels.* 6.27–28) as well as Epiphanius' (*Pan.* 26.2.6) information about the paradise exegesis is too sketchy to see whether there was a subtle distinction made between the snake and the true revealer in their sources; the snake's advice is praised, though, and

these reports do contain other Ophite features as well. That *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* do not speak of serpents is likely due to their concentration on the upper worlds.

We also saw that Schenke's Sethian texts generally lack snake speculations. Apart from the three texts that also belong to the Ophite corpus, only one Sethian text, *Apoc. Adam*, mentions serpents in passing, and without a connection to the paradise story. While the serpent is not a feature of Schenke's "Sethian system" either, it is an important character in the Ophite mythology. There is thus a marked difference between Ophite and Sethian (i.e., Barbeloite-Sethite) snake speculations.

The snake symbolism in *Testim. Truth*, Pseudo-Tertullian's Ophites (*Haer.* 2.1–4) and the Peratic teaching (*Ref.* 5.12–18) does include a positive interpretation of the serpent's advice in paradise, although no distinction between the snake and the true revealer in paradise is mentioned, not even in *Testim. Truth*. The Peratics further considered the true revealer himself a heavenly snake. In fact, these texts treat the snake itself as completely positive due to their Christological interpretation of Moses' brazen serpent (of Num 21:6–9) whereas texts of the Ophite corpus showed ambivalence towards the archontic snake, and never identified it with Christ (this identification is only found in Epiphanius' late and suspect Ophite report, see Chapter 7). Since *Testim. Truth*, Pseudo-Tertullian's Ophites, and the Peratics do not have any other features that resemble my Ophite criteria, it seems best not to classify them as Ophite according to the proposed typological model.

The paradise exegesis of Justin the pseudognostic and *Tri. Trac.* differ from the Ophite one in that the serpent's advice to eat of the tree of knowledge is treated as negative; these texts likewise lack clear Ophite features. The Severian snake symbolism is only vaguely attached to Gen 2–3. The other texts examined here do not speculate on the serpent of paradise at all, and cannot be considered Ophite either.

As pointed out, the actual identification of Christ as a snake does not appear in the Ophite exegesis, except in Epiphanius' late and suspect report. Texts that have Ophite characteristics, make a distinction between the snake and the true revealer, who, however, can even be a Christ-figure (*Ap. John*, perhaps *Orig. World*). In those cases where the distinction is vague, it may have contributed to a secondary identification of Christ as a snake, as people who later read these texts may not have been able or interested in making such a subtle distinction. I will return to this theme in Chapter 7, in discussing heresiological

allegations of Ophite serpent worship. In those cases where we do find an identification between Christ and the serpent, such as the teachings of the Naasseni, Peratics and Sethians of the *Refutatio*, the identification does not derive from an exegesis of Gen 3, but from a Christological interpretation of Moses' brazen serpent instead. Since similar, although less provocative, linking occurs in the Fourth Gospel, and some of these "Gnostic" texts contain several allusions to it, it seems clear that their identification of Christ as a snake stems specifically from John 3:14–15.

While an exegesis of Gen 3 was the focal point of Ophite snake speculations, a cosmic snake was also found in some Ophite texts: these are the heresiological reports of Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.5,15), Origen (*Cels.* 6.25) and Epiphanius (*Pan.* 26.10.7–8). The latter two speak of the *ouroboros* snake surrounding the cosmos, explicitly identified as a world soul in Origen's report. Moreover, according to Irenaeus, the snake is the origin of spirit, soul and all worldly things, on the one hand, and its imprint is found in human digestive organs, on the other. These notions may imply the world soul idea. Whereas, in pagan imagery, the cosmic snake, including the serpentine world soul, was often considered in positive terms, it became mostly a negative entity in the Ophite speculations. This is likely influenced by (a) those Judeo-Christian traditions that identified the serpent with the devil, and (b) certain Neopythagorean/Middleplatonian ideas of an evil world soul.¹¹⁶ Moreover, in the *Acts of Thomas* 31–33, the dragon surrounding the cosmos seems to be identified with the devil, who used a snake as his wicked tool in paradise. This text therefore further testifies to Christian reevaluation of the mainly positively understood cosmic snake of paganism. On the other hand, some "snake groups" (e.g., Naasseni, Peratics) spoke of a cosmic serpent in positive terms, in line with pagan snake imagery. Their evaluation, however, goes back to an exegesis of John 3:14–15 which actually identified Christ with the serpent, and thus contributed to a positive understanding of a world soul/Logos-serpent.

Finally, it may be noted that the three main themes of Gnostic and related serpent speculation (paradise story, Christ, cosmic snake) sometimes occur independently from each other in the sources since we have texts concentrating on Gen 3 without making an identification

¹¹⁶ Numenius (frg. 52 des Places) taught that there are two world souls, a rational one and an evil one. See Dillon 1996, 374ff.; Turner 2001, 387–388.

between Christ and the serpent (e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30; Justin's *Book of Baruch*) and documents interested in this identification without much or any attention paid to Gen 3 (Peratics and Sethians of the *Refutatio*). The various speculations on the cosmic snake derive from pagan sources. Thus, these three types of Gnostic snake speculation may have all arisen independently from each other. Ascetic notions, combined with traditions identifying the devil as a serpent, seem further responsible for some of the snake imagery encountered in this survey. Since the sources point to an exegesis of the paradise story and John 3:14–15 as the main sources for the Gnostic speculation on the serpent (the cosmic snake is a slightly less prominent theme), the scholarly theories according to which the Gnostic snake imagery ultimately stems from paganism, seem untenable. These theories will be assessed in Chapter 7, together with heresiological accusations of Ophite snake worship and the question of the possible Ophite provenance of snake amulets. The main themes of, and Biblical parallels to, Gnostic snake symbolism are presented in Tables 1 and 2 below.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CREATOR AND THE ARCHONS

We saw in the previous chapter that serpentine imagery was sometimes attached to the devil but also to the creator Ialdabaoth and some of the archons. In this chapter, the investigation of their theriomorphism will be carried further. In fact, theriomorphism and a specific set of names of the seven archons are important themes in most texts of the Ophite corpus. The marked use of these themes also clearly distinguishes these texts from the majority of Schenke's Sethian ones. In the following, I will first consider the general features and the suggested backgrounds of the names and the animal shapes of the archons. I will then examine the information about the creator and his archontic offspring in the Ophite texts, including the ones with Sethian features. After this, I will show that the main characteristics of the Ophite speculation about the archons are poorly attested in the remaining Sethian texts, and that these Sethian texts also make use of different traditions. Finally, the background of the Ophite mythologoumenon about Ialdabaoth and the archons in light of our findings and previously presented scholarly theories will be considered.

3.1 THE NAMES AND THERIOMORPHISM OF THE ARCHONS

The seven archons or creator angels are a commonplace in so-called Gnostic texts,¹ but when their names are mentioned, they often follow a particular pattern, as can be seen from the following Table:²

¹ In addition to the texts that specify their names (see Table 3), Saturninos (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.24.1), *Treat. Seth* (58,18–19; 62,30–63,22); Archontics (*Pan.* 40.2.3); and certain Valentinians (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.5.2; Tertullian, *Val.* 20; cf. the Marcosians, Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.14.7) also speak of seven archons/creator angels.

² Notes: the numbers in the left-hand column run in two directions because the enumeration of the archons runs sometimes upwards, sometimes downwards; the two lists of Origen refer to (1) archons, and (2) demons; in the list of *Orig. World*, Sabaoth occurs twice, because he is elevated above the other archons; and “Brunner” refers to the so-called Brummer gem (Plate 16; for discussion, see below).

Table 3: The Seven Archons

	Origen (1)	Irenaeus	<i>Orig. World</i> (Sabaoth)	Brummer	P 20915	<i>Ap. John III</i>	<i>Ap. John BG</i>	<i>Ap. John II</i>	<i>Pan. 26</i>	2 <i>Leu</i>	Origen (2)
8	Leviathan?	Irenaeus	(Sabaoth)	Ialdabaoth?	Ialdabaoth	Ialdabaoth	Ialdabaoth	Ialdabaoth	Dragon	Great Iao?	Leviathan?
1/7	Ialdabaoth	Ialdabaoth	Ialdabaoth	Ia<ldabaoth?>	[Iald]baoth	Aoth	Iaoth	Athoth	Ialdabaoth/ Sabaoth	Sabaoth	Michael
2/6	Iao	Iao	Iao	Iao	[S]abaoth	Eloaios	Eloaios	Eloaiou	Ialdabaoth/ Elilaeus	Taricheas	Suriel
3/5	Sabaoth	Sabaoth	Sabaoth	Sabaoth	Adonaiot[s]	Astophaiot	Astaphaiot	Astaphaiot	Eloaeus- Adonaeus	Ialthoo	Raphael
4/4	Adonaios	Adonaeus	Adonaios	Adonai	[Iaoth]	Iazo	Iao	Iao	Davides	Samaelo	Gabriel
5/3	Astaphaiot	Eloeus	Eloaios	Eloai	[E]loaios	Adonaios	Adonaios	Sabaoth	Seth	Ialdabaoth	Thauthabaoth
6/2	Ailoaios	Oreus	Oraios	Horeos	Oraios	Adonin	Adoni	Adonin	Sakias	?	Erataoth
7/1	Horaios	Astaphaeus	Astaphaiot	Astaphaiot	A[staphaiot]	Sabbadaiot	Sabbaiot	Sabbede	Iao	?	Thartharaoth

It may be noted already here that many of these lists occur in texts of the Ophite corpus. It may also be noted that in most lists there are four names in particular that seem to be based on various appellations of YHWH: Iao is an abbreviation of the tetragrammaton; Sabaoth is Lord *Sebaot*; Adonai(os) is “my Lord,” the usual circumvention of YHWH; and Ailoiuos/Eloeus (or the like) seems to go back to *Elohim*. Origen thinks that while these four names are based on names of God, the Ophites got the three others from magical sources (*Cels.* 6.32). Indeed, names similar to Ialdabaoth are found in the magical papyri;³ Astapahios occurs there as such;⁴ and the name, (H)oraios, might be based on the Egyptian god Horus, who is likewise mentioned in the magical papyri.⁵ However, the name “Ialdabaoth” is probably a condensation of the four appellations of God, as many scholars have suggested.⁶ It would thus be ironic if the Gnostic mythmakers had picked up an additional name from magical sources without knowing that it was a condensation of the four principal names they were already using. This does, nevertheless, remain a possibility because the etymology of Ialdabaoth is not obvious, and some Gnostic authors probably did understand it differently.⁷ Be that as it may, the four names of God are supplemented with three additional ones, in order to arrive at a list of seven names. A similar expansion also seems to have taken place in the case of the seven Ophite demons since four of them have the names of the Judeo-Christian archangels: Michael, (S)uriel, Raphael and

³ E.g., Ιαλδαζαω, PGM 1.203–205; 4.1195–1199; cf. 13.970–974; Ἀλδαβαεμ, PGM 13.84, 462, 596; cf. 13.153. See Jackson 1989.

⁴ PGM 12.288. See Jackson 1989.

⁵ See, e.g., PGM 4.930–1114.

⁶ Grant (1957, 148–149) has argued that the formula “Yahweh Elohe Zebaoth,” found in 2 Sam, Amos, 1 Kgs, Jer, and Ps 89:9, could have become epitomized as “Ia-el-zebaoth,” and that the Hebrew letter *tsade* (first letter in the name of Sabaoth) could be transliterated as “d.” Similarly, Pétrement (1990, 45) and Dan (1998) have suggested that the name, Ialdabaoth, is an epitomization of various appellations of YHWH, such as “Iao-El-Sabaoth,” or “Iao-El-Adonai-Sabaoth.” Dan (1998) has further shown that this kind of condensation is not only philologically possible, but also in certain Jewish settings, even probable.

⁷ Other kinds of etymologies have also been proposed: Scholem (1974) has suggested a derivation from *jald-abaath*, “begetter of (S)abaoth.” This, however, seems to give the figure of Sabaoth too much weight. The once popular derivation “son of chaos,” on the other hand, has been refuted with reason by Scholem. The question is, however, further complicated by the Gnostic authors’ own and possibly secondary understanding of the meaning and origin of the name, Ialdabaoth; for Ialdabaoth can be seen as a “son of chaos” in *Hyp. Arch.* (87,4–8; 94,9–19; 95,13–17) and *Orig. World* (98,23–100,33; 103,23–104,15).

Gabriel, as noted earlier. The reasons for these expansions and for the identification of the demons with the archons will be considered below. Ialdabaoth himself is also sometimes called by two additional names, Samael and Saklas. These names derive from certain specific traditions, and they were likely applied to Ialdabaoth only secondarily.

As for the animal shapes, Ialdabaoth himself is often depicted as a lion, and this is especially true in the case of the Ophite mythology; for such imagery occurs in the Ophite diagram, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*, as well as in *Ap. John*, which depicts Ialdabaoth as a hybrid of a lion and a serpent. It is noteworthy that these four documents further identify Ialdabaoth as the devil and the leader of the seven archons, who are likewise said to be theriomorphic. Irenaeus' Ophite source (*Adv. haer.* 1.30), for its part, does not seem to depict Ialdabaoth or the archons as theriomorphic, but it, too, attaches animal imagery to the devil, who is a son of Ialdabaoth, and the leader of the seven mundane demons.

Some scholars have suggested that especially Ialdabaoth's theriomorphism derives from pagan iconography. Behind many proposals is Bousset's old theory according to which the lion-like Ialdabaoth (*Cels.* 6.31) represents the planet Saturn, and thus the god Kronos.⁸ Because many gods in Antiquity were identified with Saturn-Kronos,⁹ and some of them were also depicted as leonine, as Bousset has shown, his theory gave rise to many solutions, which sought to derive Ialdabaoth's animal form from one of these gods, e.g., the Mithraic leontocephaline (Plate 11).¹⁰ Among these solutions is Quispel's theory, which tries to derive *Ap. John's* representation of Ialdabaoth from the creator Phanes of Orphic mythology (Plate 12).¹¹ Jackson, on the other hand, did not approve of Bousset's or Quispel's solutions, and suggested that the serpentine and leonine image of Ialdabaoth rather derives largely from

⁸ Bousset 1907, 351–355.

⁹ See, e.g., Bousset 1907, 352ff.; and Quispel 1965, 75.

¹⁰ Doresse (1986, original 1958) pointed out that Ialdabaoth's form reminds one of Chnoumis gems (93–94, 260), the Mithraic leontocephaline (93–94, 260, 281), Mios (274n41), and Ahriman (281). Grant (1959, 49–50) suggested that the Iranian Ahriman as Satan, rather than YHWH, would be the prototype of Ialdabaoth; and that the Mithraic leontocephaline originally stood for the Iranian Zurvan, which, in turn, had become identified with Ahriman by the time the Gnostics took the figure over. In addition, many scholars (Bousset 1907, 353; Frend 1953, 19; Quispel 1965, 75) have referred to the North African (in fact, Phoenician) lion-headed Baal-Kronos as a possible source for Ialdabaoth's form.

¹¹ Quispel 1978. See also Quispel 1965, 75ff.

Egyptian paganism and magic; from the lion-headed Mios worshiped in Leontopolis (Plate 13), and from the lion-headed serpent Chnoumis of magical amulets (Plate 14).¹² Finally, some scholars have suggested that Ialdabaoth's leonine shape derives from those Judeo-Christian texts that depict YHWH or the devil as lions.¹³

However, I argue here, following partially Barc and Fossum, that the Ophite mythologoumenon of Ialdabaoth and the archons as demonic beasts, rather derives from Judeo-Christian traditions of the serpentine devil Samael,¹⁴ and the lion-like archangel Michael as the leader of the four living creatures around the throne of God;¹⁵ and that the authors of *Ap. John* specifically combined such traditions in their depiction of Ialdabaoth as a demonic hybrid of a snake and a lion. While such mythological speculations are well attested in the texts of the Ophite corpus—including the three ones with Sethian features—they are practically non-existent in the remaining Sethian texts. Thus, the mythologoumenon of Ialdabaoth as the leader of seven, usually theriomorphic, archons with unique names (see Table 3) is not really a Sethian theme but rather an Ophite one.

3.2 OPHITE MYTHOLOGOUMENON ABOUT THE CREATOR AND HIS OFFSPRING

In Irenaeus' source, Ialdabaoth clearly represents the God of the Jews, the creator of the Hebrew Bible: he claims to be the only God in words reminiscent of YHWH's monotheistic claim (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.6), he suggests to his offspring the creation of man after the words of Gen 1:26–27 (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.6), breathes into him the spirit of life (1.30.6; cf. Gen 2:7), commands Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.7–8), as well as chooses Abraham and creates the Jewish nation out of his descendants with the collaboration of Moses (1.30.10), among other things. Ialdabaoth was born of the material watery body cast off by Sophia during her ascent. Ialdabaoth then himself gave birth to an angelic offspring from the chaotic waters,

¹² Jackson 1985.

¹³ Barc 1980, 31; Barc 2009; Painchaud 1995, 262–263. Jackson (1985, 13–21) also appealed to those Hebrew Bible passages that compare YHWH to a lion.

¹⁴ Barc 2009.

¹⁵ Fossum 1985, 323–324.

who, in his turn, gave birth to another offspring, and this one, in his turn, created another one, until there were seven powers or angels (1.30.5). Their names are: Ialdabaoth, Iao, Sabaoth, Adoneus, Eloeus, Oreus, and Astaphaeus. They are the creators of Adam (1.30.6) and this notion is apparently offered as an explanation to the problematic plural of Gen 1:26.¹⁶ While Ialdabaoth only blows the spirit into Adam, the six others form his body (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.6). This is reminiscent of the creation of man in Plato's *Timaeus*, where the "younger gods" create the body and the lower soul, while the demiurge himself creates the immortal part of man (41A–42B). Philo was also influenced by this idea (see, e.g., *Fug.* 68–70).¹⁷

The Ophite archons are further identified as the seven planets and they are called the "holy hebdomad" (*Ebdomas* < ἑβδομάς). This expression probably refers to the seven days of the week (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.9), and the seven planets were often associated with the seven days of the week in Antiquity.¹⁸ Certain prophets of the Hebrew Bible are also assigned to each of the archons (1.30.11).

As already noted, when the six offspring of Ialdabaoth started a war with each other for the supreme power, Ialdabaoth produced yet another offspring from his desire and the chaotic matter, a serpent-formed *Nous*, called by the names Michael and Samael. This was the serpent in paradise that was used by Sophia to instruct Adam and Eve to eat from the forbidden tree. Although the serpent itself was just an unwitting instrument of Sophia, Ialdabaoth failed to recognize the true state of affairs and cast the serpent down from the heavens. The serpent then subjugated the angels residing in the sub-lunar world, and produced six additional offspring, to form with them an "inferior hebdomad," in imitation of Ialdabaoth's hebdomad. The serpent's hebdomad

¹⁶ See Segal 1977, 128–130; M. Williams 1996, 68.

¹⁷ See Pearson 1984, 323–324; cf. Turner 2006a, 18ff.

¹⁸ Rordorf 1968, 38ff. However, the association could be done according to the pagan planetary week that started with Saturday, the day of Saturn; or, according to the Christian week that started with Sunday. The Christian planetary week preserved the order of the weekdays according to the Jewish calendar, but kept their pagan planetary names. Thus, the pagan and Christian planetary weeks connect the planets and weekdays in a different manner. The order of the planets themselves could be determined in different ways. A popular order was the Ptolemaian or Chaldean one, based on the distance from earth (Saturn-Jupiter-Mars-Sun-Venus-Mercury-Moon) with variations concerning the positions of Sun, Venus and Mercury. Another solution was the order used in horoscopes. Additional orders were presented in the mysteries of Mithras. See R. Beck 1988.

is characterized as the seven mundane demons who constantly oppress humankind and urge them on to wickedness, apostasy, idolatry and opposition to the holy hebdomad, i.e., to the God of the Jews and his angels (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.5–9). That the serpent is the devil of the Judeo-Christian tradition, is clear from the facts that he (a) is called by the devil's name, Samael,¹⁹ (b) is identified with the serpent of paradise,²⁰ (c) introduced murder by means of Cain (cf. *Gos. Phil.* 61,5–10), and (d) was cast down from heaven (cf. Rev 12:9 and related traditions). That this devil is also identified with Michael, the traditional enemy of the devil (Jude 9; Rev 12:7), seems a bit strange. However, the demonization of Michael is attested in the Ophite diagram, which will be considered presently.

In Irenaeus' account, the names and the possible animal-shapes of the six other demons led by Michael-Samael are not mentioned, although such information is found in the diagram (see below). Nothing here in Irenaeus' report is stated of the animal forms of the archons led by Ialdabaoth either, not even when Christ later is said to have descended through their heavens having assumed their likenesses (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.12). In addition, Adam is said to have been created in the image of the archons (1.30.6), and this, too, suggests that they may not be imagined as theriomorphic in this text.²¹ Irenaeus' source makes a distinction between the seven apparently non-theriomorphic archons led by Ialdabaoth and the seven demons led by Michael-Samael, who himself was a serpent. While Ialdabaoth here in Irenaeus' source clearly represents the creator God proper of the Jewish scriptures, the devil Michael-Samael also seems to have creative functions, as pointed out above: he produced not only his own hebdomad, but he

¹⁹ *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 4:1–2; *Midr. Rab. Ex.* 18.5; *Midr. Rab. Deut.* 11.10; *Ascen. Isa.* 2:1–2, 7:9.

²⁰ *Wis* 2:24; 2 *Enoch* 31; 3 *Baruch* (Slavonic) 4:8; See also Rev 12:9; *Gos. Phil.* 61,5–10; Justin, *Dial.* 103.

²¹ In SR of *Ap. John*, where the archons are, in fact, theriomorphic, Adam is created in the image and likeness of the First Man who revealed his image to the archons. However, LR of *Ap. John*, as well as *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*, which depict the archons as having animal shapes, specify that Adam was created partially according to the divine image/likeness, partially according to the appearance of the archons. Such a division may have been introduced to harmonize the myth with Gen 1:26–27, according to which Adam was created in the image and likeness of his creator(s). But Adam's "theriomorphism" would then have had to be given a new meaning, and one such meaning could be the sexuality that both the archons and humans share. Cf. Painchaud 1995b, 444–445.

was also said to be the origin of spirit, soul, all mundane things, and of oblivion, wickedness, emulation, envy and death (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.5,8). Moreover, it is important to note that this creator-devil is here called Samael and that he is born of matter. As will be seen, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* present Ialdabaoth both as the creator and the devil, call him Samael, and depict him as born of matter.²² In fact, the fusion of the creator and the devil is attested in several Classic Gnostic texts.

Let us now turn to the Ophite diagram. In chapters 6.30–32 of *Contra Celsum*, Origen gives two lists: (1) one of the seven archons led by Ialdabaoth (6.31–32), which corresponds almost exactly both with Irenaeus' list (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.5), and with most of the other known lists of the seven (cf. Table 3); and, (2) a list of the seven theriomorphic demons led by Michael (*Cels.* 6.30). In Irenaeus' version, Michael was one of the names of the devil, the leader of the seven demons. Even though Irenaeus or his source did not give the names or the animal shapes of the six other demons accompanying Michael, such a description is found in Origen's account. The seven demons with their animal shapes are: Michael (lion), Suriel (bull), Raphael (serpent), Gabriel (eagle), Thautabaoth (bear), Erataoth (dog), and Thartharaoth/Thaphabaoth or Onoel (donkey).

Michael is here depicted as a lion, and Raphael, the third one, is a serpent. Even though the devil is depicted as or compared to a lion in 1 Pet,²³ and in certain Psalms,²⁴ where the author of 1 Pet has probably derived the imagery,²⁵ the leonine imagery is elsewhere attested of the

²² The Ophite accounts dependent on Hippolytus' *Syntagma* tell mainly the same story as Irenaeus, and do not add much relevant information. Pseudo-Tertullian states that Ialdabaoth was born of the mixture of a "second Aeon" with inferior ones (cf. *Adv. haer.* 1.30.3–5), and that this Ialdabaoth, an aeon himself, opposed all the previous ones. He produced seven offspring (*Adv. haer.* 1.30: six offspring). The names of the seven are not mentioned, but they are depicted as the creators of man, who, as usual, are not able to make the newly created Adam fully alive. When Adam receives the divine spark from the "second Aeon," he becomes wise, understanding the things above, which Ialdabaoth wanted no one to know. Therefore, Ialdabaoth produced the serpent out of himself. Epiphanius adds that the aeon from whom Ialdabaoth was born was called Prunicus, and that she begot him because of weakness and ignorance. Epiphanius' remark about the "higher" Ialdabaoth (τοῦ ἀνωτέρου Ἰαλδαβαώθ; *Pan.* 37.6.6) is likely a textual corruption, or misunderstanding on Epiphanius' part, as a second and a higher Ialdabaoth is never found in Gnostic texts.

²³ 1 Pet 5:8: "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour" (NRSV).

²⁴ See, e.g., Ps 7:1–2 [2–3]; 10:9 [9:30]; 17 [16]:12; 35 [34]:17; 57:4 [56:5]; 58:6 [57:7].

²⁵ Cf. Achtemeier 1996, 341.

archangel Michael himself. We have seen that the first four names in the diagram's list of the seven demons are those of the archangels of Judeo-Christian tradition, and that they seem to be here connected with the four animal-faced creatures around the throne of God (Ezek 1:10; Rev 4:7) as in *1 Enoch* 40:8–9. Since according to some variants (Rev 4:7), the first one of the creatures has a face of a lion, and Michael is the traditional leader of the archangels, the fusion of these traditions apparently has rendered Michael as a lion. In fact, a leonine Michael seems to be depicted on certain gems (see Plate 15) (the serpentine shape of Raphael may derive from the *Seraphim* around the throne of God in Isa 6, as suggested above). Furthermore, according to some traditions, there were not only four, but seven archangels (e.g., Tob 12:15; Rev 1:4,20; *1 Enoch* 20:5). However, the names of the other three were not fixed,²⁶ and this may explain the (perhaps newly invented) strange-sounding names of the last three demons in the Ophite list. In any case, the list of the seven demons is apparently based on traditions of the archangels and the animal-faced creatures around the throne of God, with the traditional four names and shapes expanded into seven. The planetary associations of the demons and archons have likely contributed to this expansion as well. Even though YHWH, too, is compared to a lion in certain parts of the Hebrew Bible,²⁷ the leonine imagery here in the diagram seems to derive from traditions concerning Michael, and not of YHWH or the devil.

The seven archons led by Ialdabaoth are here in the diagram depicted as heavenly gatekeepers, to whom one has to deliver certain passwords in order to continue one's postmortem ascent to the world of light.²⁸ Since the archons are depicted specifically as guardians of the gates of paradise (*Cels.* 6.31,33), and because also the flaming sword is mentioned here, guarding the tree of *gnosis* and life, the most likely explanation is that these archons are imagined as the cherubs of Gen 3:24, guarding the way to the tree of life with the flaming sword. Furthermore, these gatekeepers likely represent the seven planets, since not only does Ialdabaoth seem to be associated with the planet Phaeton (Saturn), but Celsus also says that the users of the diagram believed in an ascent

²⁶ Cf. Van Henten 1999.

²⁷ See, e.g., Job 10:16–17; Hos 5:14; and Isa 38:13.

²⁸ On various interpretations of the soul's heavenly journey in the diagram accounts, see Chapter 9.

of the soul through planetary spheres (*Cels.* 6.20–21).²⁹ Origen gives the required passwords with descriptions of the archons in chapter 6.31, and, repeats the names in a slightly different manner in the following chapter. In quoting the passwords, Origen starts from the one to be delivered at the highest gate, and presents the passwords in a descending, thus, apparently reversed, order. This is probably because the passwords were inscribed on the diagram next to the circles representing the heavenly spheres. If the password to be delivered at the highest gate was placed on the top of the list, Origen may simply have copied the list in a descending order.³⁰ The first password Origen mentions is to be delivered to an anonymous being beyond Ialdabaoth, thus, apparently Leviathan. In addition, the fourth archon, Adonaios, is not mentioned in the section discussing the passwords (6.31), but does occur in 6.32, where Origen gives the names of the seven archons and claims these names derive partially from the scriptures, partially from magical sources. The names of the seven archons, according to Origen, are: Ialdabaoth, Iao, Sabaoth, Adonaios, Astaphaios, Ailoaios, and Horaios (with Leviathan above and around them all). With the exception of variations in spelling and the order of the names, the list corresponds to Irenaeus' list and most of the other lists of the seven (see Table 3).

However, it seems that the seven theriomorphic demons led by Michael and the seven archons led by Ialdabaoth, are actually identified with each other here. First, the gatekeepers are said to have animal-shapes, according to both Celsus and Origen (7.40). Second, after having cited the password one has to deliver to Ialdabaoth, Origen says that, according to the Ophites, the planet Phaedon (Saturn) is in sympathy with the lion-like archon, who is Michael according to *Cels.* 6.30. This seems to identify Ialdabaoth with Michael. Third, Celsus says that some souls have to be reborn in the animal shapes of the "archontics" (6.33). However, the identification between these two sets of characters seems secondary. There are four facts which speak for this. (1) If the two groups were identical from the outset, why not simply say so? Instead of presenting two separate lists, why not say clearly that Ialdabaoth is the lion-like Michael, Iao is the bull-like Suriel, and

²⁹ Denzey (2005, 99–103) thinks the seven here do not represent the planetary spheres but weekdays. For discussion, see Chapter 9.

³⁰ Wendland 1972, 174–175n4; Denzey 2005, 95–96.

so forth? In my view, it is easier to assume that the existence of these two separate lists is inherited from Ophite tradition, which did not always identify the demons with the archons, as we can see in Irenaeus' source. (2) Whereas the seven led by Michael are clearly said to be demons, and in this context the word, δαίμων, has negative associations, the seven led by Ialdabaoth, although not imagined as good powers either, are still presented in somewhat positive light, both here and in Irenaeus' source. For example, the seven planetary rulers are twice called the "holy hebdomad" in Irenaeus' account (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.9: *sancta Ebdomade*), and in Origen's account they are described as not completely evil beings: Ialdabaoth is called "the rational ruler of a pure mind," and "a perfect work of son and father"; Iao is described as the ruler "of the secret mysteries of son and father"; and Sabaoth is called "mighty."³¹ (3) In *Cels.* 6.27, where Celsus discusses an Ophite anointment ritual, the soul of the dying body (τῆ ψυχῆ τοῦ ἀπαλλαττομένου σώματος) is said to be surrounded by a group of seven angels on both sides. The meaning of the text is a bit unclear here, but the most natural reading in my view is that there are two groups of seven angels, one group on each side.³² I do not believe there are only seven angels in total, four on the one side and three on the other, as some scholars have suggested.³³ The angels on the one side are called the "angels of light," while the others are referred to as the "archontic angels." The ruler of the latter is further said to be an accursed God, the God of the Jews (*Cels.* 6.27); this ruler is probably Ialdabaoth. Although we do not find any indication of who the seven angels of light are, the existence of two groups of seven angels may, nevertheless, be an indication of an underlying tradition which made a distinction between the seven demons and the seven more positively evaluated archons.³⁴ (4) Origen

³¹ Ἰαλδαβαώθ, ἄρχων λόγος ὑπάρχων νοῦς εἰλικρινοῦς, ἔργον τέλειον υἱῷ καὶ πατρὶ (*Cels.* 6.31.13–14); Σὺ δὲ κρυπτομένων μυστηρίων υἱοῦ καὶ πατρὸς (6.31.20–21); δυνάστα Σαβαώθ (6.31.27, Borret, ed.).

³² Εἶτα καὶ ἀριθμὸν ὀρίζει λεγόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν παραδιδόντων τὴν σφραγιδα ἀγγέλων ἑπτὰ, ἑκατέρωθεν τῆ ψυχῆ τοῦ ἀπαλλαττομένου σώματος ἐφισταμένων, τῶν μὲν τοῦ φωτὸς ἐτέρων δὲ τῶν ὀνομαζομένων ἀρχοντικῶν (*Cels.* 6.27.8–11, Borret, ed.).

³³ Denzey 2005, 104–105. Witte (1993, 100–101) hesitates as to whether there are one or two groups of seven angels, and then suggests that the seven good forces of Zoe and the seven evil forces of Death, found in the related *Orig. World* (106,19–107,17), could correspond to the possible two groups of seven angels in *Cels.* 6.27.

³⁴ A similar distinction between the seven forces of good created by Sophia Zoe and the seven forces of evil created by Death, an offspring of Ialdabaoth, is found in the related *Orig. World* (106,19–107,17). Cf. Witte 1993, 98–104.

says that, in the diagram, the word Behemoth was inscribed under the lowest circle, likely that of the moon, if the circles represent heavenly spheres. Since the Hebrew word, *בְּהֵמוֹת*, is plural for “animal, beast,” it may refer to the theriomorphic demons existing in the sub-lunar world, and not in the heavenly regions as gatekeepers, and this would again be in accordance with Irenaeus’ source.

Indeed, when all these four facts are compared to what is found in Irenaeus’ Ophite source, the following assumption gains more strength: the diagram accounts reflect an Ophite tradition which treated the seven planetary archons led by Ialdabaoth as being different from the seven theriomorphic mundane demons led by Michael. These two sets of characters then became fused, either already in the diagram itself, or at least in the minds of its users who were known to Celsus. In any case, there existed two variants of the Ophite myth, which portrayed the devil as a serpent (Irenaeus’ source), and as a lion (diagram), respectively. These two portrayals were based on two different Judeo-Christian traditions, that of the devil Samael as the serpent of paradise, and that of the now demonized archangels around the throne of God, with Michael the lion-faced as their leader. Such traditions were then applied in different combinations to the creator Ialdabaoth and his angels in the diagram, *Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Ap. John*.

According to *Orig. World*, a lion-like ruler is born from the chaotic material waters due to the activity of Sophia (100,1–14). This ruler has three names: Ialdabaoth, Samael and Ariel. The latter is what the “perfect” call him (100,24–26), i.e., it is his true name, revealing his nature, which, as the name already tells us, is leonine (Ariel, the “Lion of god”). Ialdabaoth is his self-designation, based on Sophia’s utterance, “Child, pass through to here.”³⁵ Samael, as noted above, is a name of the devil, and it is Ialdabaoth who here plays that part (Ialdabaoth also has features of YHWH: he, for example, issues the monotheistic claim [103,10–13] and proposes the creation of man [112,33–113,1]). Together with his archons, Ialdabaoth rapes Eve (116,33–117,18), a devil’s deed in late Judaism.³⁶ After one of his offspring, Sabaoth, repents and is enthroned in the Seventh Heaven, Ialdabaoth-Samael becomes *envious*, and engenders *death* to replace Sabaoth. Death then

³⁵ The author of *Orig. World* thus derives the name, Ialdabaoth, from the Greek phrase, *νανίσκε διαπέρα* (100,10–14), which likely corresponds to *נְעֻטָא דְיָלְדָא* (see Böhlig and Labib 1962, 42).

³⁶ *Tg. Ps.-J. Gen* 4:1–2; *b. Yebam.* 103b; *b. Shabb.* 146a. See also *Gos. Phil.* 61,5–10.

produces additional demonic offspring (106,19–107,1). This is reminiscent of the devil Michael-Samael's giving birth to oblivion, wickedness, emulation, *envy* and *death* in Irenaeus' source (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.5). Finally, Sophia Zoe is said to have cast down the seven rulers, Ialdabaoth and his sons, from their heavens upon the earth where they assume the forms of evil demons (*Orig. World* 121,27–35); they then produced demonic angels to serve them, and these instructed mankind in idolatry, magic and warfare, having fate as their coworker (123,4–15). This theme is applied to the devil and his lower hebdomad in Irenaeus' Ophite source (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.8–9). The story itself is based on that of the fallen angels in *1 Enoch*, as is probably the story of archons raping Eve.³⁷

The seven archons led by Ialdabaoth are said to have both a masculine and a feminine name in *Orig. World* (101,24–102,2). The first names correspond to the usual lists of the seven (see Table 3), and the second ones (Pronoia Sambathas, Lordship, Deity, Kingship, Jealousy, Wealth, Wisdom) resemble the names of the seven powers Ialdabaoth attaches to his seven authorities in *Ap. John* (see below). In addition, the so-called Brummer gem gives the same list of the names for the seven archons, and, interestingly, depicts a lion-headed man on the obverse assigning two names to this creature: Ialdabaoth and A(a)riel (see Plate 16). Thus, this amulet corresponds exactly to the information about the archons as found in *Orig. World*. In *Orig. World*, these archons rule their respective heavens, and are created according to the “immortal pattern” (102,2–7).³⁸ Ruling the seven heavens, they undoubtedly represent the seven planets. Since Ialdabaoth's feminine name is Pronoia *Sambathas*, which is interpreted as “week” (101,26–28), they possibly all represent the days of the week as well. It is also clearly said in *Orig. World*, that all the archons are theriomorphic (119,16–19), and here, too, they are the creators of Adam (112,32–114,35).

With the exception of the repentant and elevated Sabaoth, Ialdabaoth and his archons play the part of the devil and the demons, i.e., of the theriomorphic hebdomad of the devil, in *Orig. World*. However, the author of the text has also retained the notion of the God of the Jews and his higher hebdomad, which notion is found in Irenaeus' source,

³⁷ Stroumsa 1984.

³⁸ Painchaud (1995a, 90) suggests that this is a reference to the six androgynous spiritual beings described in *Eugnostos* III 82,7–83,2 par. *Orig. World* here speaks of Ialdabaoth and his six androgynous offspring.

and possibly in the background of the diagram. Sabaoth, who is installed and enthroned in the Seventh Heaven by Pistis Sophia, is not only separated from the rest of the archons and darkness, but he is also the God of the Jews and of the “great church” in this text. His name is derived from Lord *Sebaot* (Isa 45:13 LXX); he creates a chariot with animal-faces (cf. Ezek 1:4–10; Rev 4:6–7); he has Seraphs accompanying him (cf. Isa 6:1–6); and he is the father of Israel and the “psychic” Jesus Christ. He is also being instructed by Sophia in the things of the Eighth Heaven, which probably serves to validate parts of the Hebrew Bible.³⁹ Just as Ialdabaoth was the God of the Jews and the head of the higher hebdomad in Irenaeus’ Ophite source, Sabaoth is the God of the Jews who has seven archangels around his throne in *Orig. World* (105,10–11).⁴⁰ Moreover, both in Irenaeus’ Ophite source and in *Orig. World*, a devil-figure (Michael-Samael, or Ialdabaoth-Samael) is the head of the lower evil hebdomad.⁴¹ It seems that, in a way, the God of the Jewish scriptures has been split in two here: both Ialdabaoth and Sabaoth have features of YHWH, but whereas Ialdabaoth is depicted as a devilish creator, Sabaoth appears as a more positive ruler of the world. Philo spoke of the creative and ruling powers of God as two separate entities (e.g., *Abr.* 120–122), but while these were positive forces for Philo, we find a distinction between the creator and the ruler as oppositional forces in Pauline and Johannine writings. In these writings, however, it is the true God who is the creator and the

³⁹ *Orig. World* 103,32–106,19. Fallon (1978, 67–68, 115–116) thinks the episode has this function in *Hyp. Arch.*, but not in *Orig. World* where the purpose of Sabaoth’s instruction is rather to enable him to create likenesses of things above. However, Fallon admits that the “original” Sabaoth-episode had the function of validating parts of the Hebrew Bible. This function may have been altered by later redactions of *Orig. World*. Cf. Painchaud 1991; Painchaud 1995b, 300–333.

⁴⁰ These may be the same ones Pistis Sophia sent to snatch Sabaoth into the Seventh Heaven (*Orig. World* 104,17–20). The theme of the seven archangels around Sabaoth’s throne has been suspected as being a redactional addition (Painchaud 1995b, 127, 317ff.), and this may be so, but in that case, it could have been added due to a desire to retain the idea of the higher hebdomad (if that is the case, then the mention of the seven archangels already earlier in the text, at 104,17–20, could be part of the same redaction, *pace* Painchaud).

⁴¹ The idea of hebdomads is further developed in *Orig. World*. The number seven occurs in the episode of Sabaoth’s enthronement (103,32–106,19) exactly seven times. In addition, when Sabaoth was installed in the Seventh Heaven, Ialdabaoth created death to replace him, and death then created seven offspring who again had seven offspring each to form 49 demons. In response, Life, who is Sophia Zoe, created seven good forces. Cf. also Painchaud 1995b, 306. On Painchaud’s suggestion that Sabaoth represents the devil, see pp. 233–234 below.

devil who rules this world (1 Cor 2:6–8; 2 Cor 4:4; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Nevertheless, since the Sabaoth-episode seems to be a variant of the theme of the opposition between the God of the Jews and the devil, Philo's distinction between the two positive powers of God does not appear to be as relevant in understanding the Sabaoth-episode as are traditions about the devil and his opposition to the creator God.

According to *Hyp. Arch.*, too, Ialdabaoth is born of matter due to the activity of Sophia, and became an arrogant, lion-like, beast (94,8–19) with three names: Ialdabaoth, Samael and Sakla (Aramaic for “fool”) (94,19–95,13). He is not only the creator of the Jewish scriptures, for he issues the monotheistic claim to his seven offspring he has created along with a vast realm (94,19–95,5), but he also clearly plays the role of the devil in *Hyp. Arch.* He has the devil's name Samael, and, together with his archons, rapes Eve (89,17–31; 91,11–12; 92,18–32). He also gives birth to envy, which in turn produces death, and death then engenders his own offspring (96,3–11), a theme reminiscent of the devil's activity in Irenaeus' Ophite source (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.5; cf. *Orig. World* 106,19–107,1). In addition, Ialdabaoth is bound and cast into Tartaros (*Hyp. Arch.* 95,8–13), like the leader of the fallen angels in *1 Enoch* 10:4–5. The archons, the seven sons of Ialdabaoth, probably all have animal shapes according to *Hyp. Arch.*, although lacunae in the manuscript prevent us from being certain.⁴² The archons are also the creators of Adam (87,23–88,10). The seven led by Ialdabaoth are again evil and demon-like, and thus correspond to the seven mundane demons of Irenaeus' source. In *Hyp. Arch.*, the seven are not named save for one, Sabaoth, whose repentance and installation above the Seventh Heaven is told here as well. Similarly to *Orig. World*, Sabaoth plays the parts of the ruler of this world and the God of the Jews in *Hyp. Arch.* His name, as stated above, derives from Lord *Sebaot*, and he is said to have made a four-faced chariot (95,26f.; cf. Ezek 1; Rev 4). However, nothing specifically is stated of a higher hebdomad, and only Sabaoth is mentioned as standing apart from the evil hebdomad of Ialdabaoth (Sabaoth is said to create countless angels, though). It

⁴² *Hyp. Arch.* 87,27–29: $\mu\alpha\rho\chi\omega\mu\iota \lambda[\epsilon \pi\sigma\omega] \mu\alpha \pi\epsilon\tau\epsilon\upsilon\pi\tau\alpha\gamma\omega \pi\sigma\tau\iota\mu\epsilon \omicron\upsilon\sigma[\omicron\upsilon\sigma\omega]$ $\pi\epsilon \pi\sigma\omicron \pi\theta\eta\rho\iota\omicron\mu$ (emendations by Barc [1980, 52]). Layton (1989a, 236) does not fill in the gaps in his edition, but otherwise offers the same text. Layton does, however, discuss the possible emendations elsewhere (1976, 33–36).

is to be noted that even though Ialdabaoth was originally the eighth,⁴³ Sabaoth's installation in the Seventh Heaven and/or Ialdabaoth's being cast into Tartaros results in a *hebdomad*. Perhaps we find here an echo of the solution found in *Ap. John* according to which there is only one hebdomad; for in *Ap. John*, to which we now turn, the evil Ialdabaoth alone plays the roles of the devil and of the God of the Jews proper, and thus there can be only one, evil, hebdomad.

In fact, the authors of *Ap. John* have preserved a large amount of traditions concerning the archons and demons. According to *Ap. John*, Ialdabaoth is, as usual, Sophia's son. He is described as "imperfect,"⁴⁴ changing into a form (τύπος, μορφή) different from that of his mother. According to SR, Ialdabaoth has the faces of a lion and a serpent with fiery eyes (III 15,11–12; BG 37,20–38,1), whereas in LR he is described as a lion-headed serpent, again, with fiery eyes (II 10,8–9). While Ialdabaoth's leonine appearance is a somewhat common theme in Ophite texts, *Ap. John* is the only document featuring him as a serpent.⁴⁵ In addition, if SR is older than LR, as is usually assumed today,⁴⁶ then it seems that the author of SR was the innovator of giving Ialdabaoth a *serpentine* form in addition to his more or less traditional leonine appearance. The author of LR then simply inherited this imagery from SR. The reason for Ialdabaoth's serpentine appearance seems to be to identify him with the serpent of paradise, as Barc has suggested,⁴⁷ and thus to strengthen the identification of the God of the Jews with the devil. Ialdabaoth-serpent forbade Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge (i.e., Epinoia), but did teach them about sexuality and desire (III 28,20–23; BG 58,4–7; cf. III 31,21–23; BG 63,1–5; II 24,26–29).⁴⁸

⁴³ In some sources, Ialdabaoth himself is included in the seven (e.g., *Orig. World, Adv. haer.* 1.30).

⁴⁴ III 15,6: ἀτέλειστον; BG 37,14: ἐῆριχικ λη; II 10,3–4: ἡδαιχωκ.

⁴⁵ *Paraph. Shem* and Hippolytus' report of the "Sethians" (*Ref.* 5.19–22) do speak of a serpentine creator, but he is not called Ialdabaoth (*Paraph. Shem* calls him "Moluchtas"; no name is mentioned in *Ref.*). These myths do not resemble the contents of *Ap. John* at all.

⁴⁶ Turner 2001, 141; Barc 2009.

⁴⁷ Barc 2009.

⁴⁸ The idea that the devilish Ialdabaoth-serpent taught Adam and Eve about sexuality is expressed in LR in terms of *eating* (II 22,12–15 par.: "The serpent taught them to eat from the wickedness of sexual desire"), thus bringing the story closer to its Biblical model. However, whereas Ialdabaoth taught them to eat from the wickedness of sexual desire, it was Christ who taught them to eat from the tree of knowledge, i.e., Epinoia. I owe this observation to Michael Williams, private communication.

In addition to his specific fiery leonine and serpentine appearance, Ialdabaoth is said to have many forms and the ability to appear with any face he desires (III 18,9–12; BG 42,10–13; II 11,35–12,3). His seven primary offspring also have animal faces (see below), and, interestingly, as Barc has noted, the first, middle (fourth), and last ones have the forms of a lion, lion-serpent, and fire (III), respectively;⁴⁹ these correspond to Ialdabaoth's specific appearances. According to Barc, this symmetrical arrangement means that the seven are Ialdabaoth's own manifestations.⁵⁰ It is likewise possible that Ialdabaoth is imagined as being able to assume his sons' animal forms at will, in addition to his own specific ones.

In any case, according to *Ap. John*, Sophia cast her theriomorphic product away and called it Ialdabaoth.⁵¹ He is characterized as the chief ruler (πρωτόρχων) and a prime parent (ἀρχιγενέτωρ). According to SR he has two names, Ialdabaoth and Sakla(s). LR adds that he has a third name, Samael, the devil's name. Ialdabaoth is also said to have raped Eve (III 31,6–32,6; BG 62,3–63,12; II 24,8–34), the devil's deed in late Judaism. In addition, Ialdabaoth made a plan with his angels (SR) or powers (LR) to corrupt humankind (III 38,10–39,11; BG 73,18–75,10; II 29,16–30,11). He sent angels to earthly women to seduce them and to raise offspring from them. After having created a counterfeit spirit and changed their appearances into human ones, the angels filled women with the counterfeit spirit, begot children with them and brought gifts and the knowledge of metallurgy (cf. *Orig. World* 123,4–15; *Adv. haer.* 1.30.8–9). In *1 Enoch*, these deeds are attributed to the fallen angels who act without the consent of their creator, whereas in *Ap. John*, Ialdabaoth deliberately sent them to do evil. However, Ialdabaoth does not only play the part of the devil in *Ap. John*. He is also the God of the Hebrew Bible. For example, he claims to be the only God (BG 44,14–15; II 13,8–9; cf., e.g., Isa 45:5–6; 46:9); he breathes into Adam who becomes alive (III 24,7–12; BG 51,15–20; II 19,23–32; cf. Gen 2:7); he puts Adam in paradise (III 27,4–6; BG 55,18–20; cf. Gen 2:15ff.) and casts him out with Eve (III 31,4–5; II 24,6–7; cf. Gen 3:23–24).

⁴⁹ Barc 2009. In the BG and II versions, the fourth one has the shape of a seven-headed serpent.

⁵⁰ Barc 2009.

⁵¹ The spellings vary in the manuscripts. See, e.g., Giversen 1963, 199ff.

Then, with ignorance (Τῆντατσοοῦν, III) or madness (ἀπόνοια, BG; cf. II), Ialdabaoth created twelve authorities, also called angels, with their respective aeons, after the pattern of the imperishable aeons (III 16,7–11; BG 39,4–10; II 10,26–28; cf. II 12,33–13,1). There are slight differences in their names among the various versions, but these lists of the twelve, together with the possibly dependent one in *Holy Book*,⁵² are remarkably different from the ones found in other texts.⁵³ According to the Codex III version of *Ap. John*, the twelve are: Haoth, Harmas, Galila, Iobel, Adonaios, Sabaoth, Kainan Kasin, Abiressia, Iobel, Armoupiael, Adonin, and Belias (16,20–17,5). In this context, Ialdabaoth himself is called Saklas. He divided the twelve, who seemingly represent the zodiac, into groups of seven and five, to rule over the heavens and the chaos of the underworld, respectively. In Antiquity, the signs of zodiac could be divided into groups of seven and five, corresponding to “day”-signs and “night”-signs.⁵⁴

Even though the five are practically forgotten as soon as they have been mentioned, the authors of *Ap. John* give detailed, even abundant, information about the seven. More or less following the common pattern (cf. Table 3), the authors give the seven another set of names, their proper names: Aoth, Eloaios, Astopahios, Iazo, Adonaios, Adonin and Sabbadaios (III).⁵⁵ They rule over the heavens and are identified as the

⁵² Logan 1996, 156n7; Turner 2001, 170, 220.

⁵³ *Pist. Soph.* 3: Enchthonin, Charachar, Archaroch, Archrochar, Marchur, Lamchamor, Luchar, Laraoch, Archeoch, Zarmaroch, Rochar, Chremaor; Bar Konai *Lib. schol.* 11.78: (Michael, Amen), Yah, Gabriel, Yahweh, ‘wt, ‘wt, Jerusalem, Elohim, Babel, El Saddai, Michael the lesser, Pharaoh, Samiel; Justin the pseudognostic’s evil angels (in Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.23–28): Babel, Achamoth, Naas, Bel, Belias, Satan, Sael, Adonaeus, Leviathan, Pharaoh, Carcamenos, Lathen; Justin’s good angels (only the first five names survive): Michael, Amen, Baruch, Gabriel, Esaddeus (cf. the lists of Justin and the one in Bar Konai). Other, but scattered and/or incomplete lists are found in *Pist. Soph.* 1–4; and the Peratic teaching (*Ref.* 5.12–18). A list of twelve is assumed in *Gos. Judas* (51,5–52,13), but only five are named (52,4–11). These, however, correspond closely to the lists in *Ap. John* and *Holy Book*.

⁵⁴ Welburn 1978, 253–254. Cf. *Gos. Judas* 52,5–14, where five archons are singled out as those who rule over the underworld and chaos.

⁵⁵ The lists of *Ap. John* do not differ very much from the other ones presented in Table 3. In fact, the differences can be explained quite easily. Because Ialdabaoth himself was not included in the list of the seven in *Ap. John*, a new name had to be added to fill the gap. In SR, there are two Adonaioses (Adonaios and Adonin), so the author seems to have simply doubled one of the existing names. But there are then some curiosities. First, Sabaoth is missing from SR. Second, Horaiois (commonly found in lists of seven) is not found either in SR or LR. Third, two of the names, Aoth and Sabbadaios (with their variants), do not occur in any of the other known lists of the seven. However, the seventh one, Sabbadaios/Sabbede, might have

sevenness, i.e., the seven days of the week (III 18,7–8; BG 42,7–8). Ruling over the seven heavens, they additionally represent the seven planets. The seven authorities in *Ap. John* are also said to have animal faces (lion, donkey, dog, serpent-lion, serpent, ape, fire; III). They are further attached to certain seven powers (Goodness, Pronoia, Divinity, Lordship, Kingdom, Envy, and Wisdom; II [Codex III is very lacunar here]), with whom they participate in the creation of man, each one being responsible for a specific part of the psychic body (bone, sinew, flesh, marrow, blood, tooth/skin, hair; III 22,18–23,6; BG 49,9–50,4; II 15,13–23). This list of body parts is generally reminiscent of Plato's description of the main constituents of the human body: marrow, bone, sinew, flesh, skin, hair, nails and blood (*Timaeus* 73B–76E; 80D–81E).⁵⁶ Furthermore, the seven powers are almost identical with the feminine names of the seven archons in *Orig. World* 101,24–102,2.

Thus, in *Ap. John*, the seven authorities can be identified in no less than seven different ways: with (1) the names according to the list of twelve; (2) the names according to the list of seven; (3) their animal faces; (4) the names of their powers; (5) the body parts for whose creation they are responsible; (6) the weekdays they represent; and (7) the planets they are associated with. This is fairly exhaustive, but the idea of multiple identifications for the seven is a well-attested theme in Ophite mythology, although the precise number and form of these identifications does not seem to have been fixed:⁵⁷ Irenaeus' Ophite

replaced Horaios, the seventh one in Origen's list, simply because both names can be taken as derivations of a word denoting time (ὥραῖος, "timely"; σάββατον, "seven days, week," "Sabbath"). (The name, Horaios may also be based on the name of the Egyptian god Horus; see above.) In addition, Aoth (III) may simply be an abbreviation of Ialdabaoth. A similar abbreviation of Ialdabaoth possibly occurs on the Brummer gem, where the first archon is called Ia (the name, Ialdabaoth, is found on the reverse; see Plate 16). These solutions would explain the names in LR, where Sabaoth occurs as the fifth, but it does not yet explain the lack of Sabaoth and the probable consequent doubling of Adonaios in SR. However, a possible solution to this problem is the tradition concerning the exaltation of Sabaoth as found in the related *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*. The author of SR may have been aware of this tradition, and, having concluded that Sabaoth is no longer part of the seven, doubled Adonaios to fill the vacancy left behind by Sabaoth. Or, the author of SR may have thought that Sabbadaios stood for Sabaoth, and therefore did not list him twice, but for some reason did not have a problem including Adonaios twice. According to the list of the twelve in LR, the fifth one, Adonaiou, was also called Sabaoth. This may have influenced the introduction of Sabaoth in the list of the seven in LR.

⁵⁶ Turner 2006a, 21–22.

⁵⁷ In *Ap. John*, the seven have two sets of names, one given them by the "glory of heaven," another by "wrath and desire." The latter are used by Ialdabaoth-Saklas (III

source gave names to the seven archons and attached them to planets, weekdays, and even to Hebrew prophets (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.5,9–11); Origen's account of the Ophite diagram seems to identify the seven planetary archons led by Ialdabaoth with the seven demons led by Michael, who also have specific animal shapes (*Cels.* 6.30–31); *Orig. World* gives masculine and feminine names for the seven and hints at their animal shapes. *Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Ap. John* all also identify the archons as creators of Adam, thus explaining the plural of Gen 1:26.

Finally, Ialdabaoth himself in many texts has several names. SR of *Ap. John* gives Ialdabaoth a second name, Saklas, while LR and *Hyp. Arch.* add a third one, Samael.⁵⁸ *Orig. World* mentions that the “perfect” call him “Ariel,” which is different from both his self-designation, Ialdabaoth, and from the name used in his rebuke, Samael. Since Ialdabaoth in *Orig. World* has also his feminine name, Pronoia Sambathas, he has no less than four names in that text.⁵⁹ The Brummer gem also identifies Ialdabaoth as A(a)riel. Ialdabaoth may further be identical with Michael in the diagram.

Despite their differences, these texts (*Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Cels.* 6.24–38, *Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Ap. John*) depict Ialdabaoth and his offspring in a similar manner. They all utilize the name Ialdabaoth, and most of them also give a list of the names of the seven archons (see Table 3), which agree well with each other. They all recognize the theriomorphism of the devil, and, with the exception of *Adv. haer.* 1.30, identify this devil with Ialdabaoth and depict the other archons as theriomorphic as well. Even though Irenaeus' Ophite source lacks the animal

17,5–17; BG 40,19–41,12; II 12,26–33). According to SR, the names given by the glory also reveal the true nature (φύσις) of the seven. However, there seem to be differences between SR and LR as to which ones of the many possible identities these two sets of names refer. In SR, the names of wrath that Ialdabaoth uses are those of the twelve, whereas the names given by the glory are the (proper) names according to the list of seven but also include their animal faces. Thus, the names of glory themselves are already of a double nature. In addition, it is likely the animal faces, not the proper names, that reveal the true theriomorphic nature of the seven (likewise in the related *Orig. World*, Adam and Eve found out the archons have animal shapes after they had eaten from the tree of knowledge; 119,15–19). However, in LR, the author mentions the existence of the two sets of names immediately after he has listed the seven powers attached to the seven authorities. It thus appears that while LR also identifies the proper names of the seven as the names of glory, it rather treats the seven powers, not the names of the twelve, as the names used by Ialdabaoth.

⁵⁸ *Ap. John* SR III 18,9–10; BG 42,10–11; LR II 11,15–18; *Hyp. Arch.* 94,25–95,8.

⁵⁹ See *Orig. World* 100,10–26; 101,26–28; 103,15–18.

shapes of the seven archons, and instead seems to reserve these for the seven demons, the speculations about the seven archons in Irenaeus' source are well in line with those of the other texts in the Ophite corpus.

Here we can take a brief look at the other texts that have Ophite features but which have not yet been examined. *Eugnostos*, probably due to its concentration on the upper worlds, does not speak of the archons, but *Soph. Jes. Chr.* briefly mentions Ialdabaoth (BG 119,16).⁶⁰ *Pan.* 26.10 presents a list of the seven archons, and, although there are differences compared to the other lists, there is also clear resemblance (see Table 3). This document, like *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*, singles out Sabaoth, although in *Pan.* 26 he is depicted as an evil figure, having either the shape of a pig or a donkey (26.10.6). Finally, it may be noted that *Pist. Soph.* depicts a demonic and lion-like Ialdabaoth who is one of the principal oppressors of Pistis Sophia (e.g., 1.31; 2.66). However, he is not the leader of the archons, although his double, Authades, occupies that position.⁶¹ In some other texts, Ialdabaoth himself is characterized as arrogant (αὐθάδης).⁶² *Pist. Soph.*, nevertheless, lacks clear Ophite features, and possibly betrays only later development of Ophite Ialdabaoth traditions.⁶³ Many other texts, including most of Schenke's Sethian ones, mention nothing of Ialdabaoth's theriomorphism or even of his name.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ialdabaoth is characterized as an Arch-Begetter (ἀρχιγενέτωρ) (BG 119,13–16). The Almighty (παντοκράτωρ; BG 103,15; 119,9 par.) might be a figure different from Ialdabaoth, and thus perhaps parallel to Sabaoth of *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* (René Falkenberg, private communication). The relationship of *Eugnostos*' Arch-Begetter (ἀρχιγενέτωρ; III 82,18; V has a lacuna here) to Ialdabaoth (not mentioned in the text) is unclear.

⁶¹ Ariel (e.g., 4.144) is here different from Ialdabaoth (cf. *Orig. World* 100,24–26, and the Brummer gem, where Ialdabaoth is Ariel). On Authades, see Marjanen 2006.

⁶² See, e.g., *Hyp. Arch.* 90,29; 92,27; 94,17; *Ap. John* BG 46,1; II 13,27.

⁶³ Cf. H.-M. Schenke 1981, 596.

⁶⁴ Other leonine archons, however, appear in Gnostic and related sources: the name, Ariel, "lion of god," is not only applied to the leonine Ialdabaoth (*Orig. World*, Brummer gem) but also to a power other than Ialdabaoth in *Pistis Sophia* (e.g., *Pist. Soph.* 4.144) (Sometimes Ariel does not even have a leonine form, as in the Peratic teaching, *Ref.* 5.14.5). In addition, Theodore bar Konai's account of certain serpent worshippers (*Lib. schol.* 11.78) includes a lion-shaped archon called Pharaoh. *2 Jeu* speaks of a son of Sabaoth, Taricheas, who has the shapes of a lion and pig, and who is different from both Ialdabaoth and Samaelo (*2 Jeu* 43, 52). Finally, the first (BG, II) and the fourth (III) of the seven archons in *Ap. John*, being specific manifestations of Ialdabaoth (together with the seventh one, the fire-faced), as Barc (2009) has noted, are depicted as sharing his leonine countenance. Moreover, other feline archons appear. In the teaching bar Konai describes, there is an archon called

3.3 COMPARISON BETWEEN OPHITE AND SETHIAN SPECULATIONS ABOUT THE ARCHONS

While the list of the seven names, the names Ialdabaoth and Samael, as well as the animal shapes of the archons, especially the leonine shape of Ialdabaoth, are commonplace in texts of the Ophite corpus, they are poorly attested in Schenke's Sethian texts. With the exception of the name Ialdabaoth, these features—including the list of the seven names—are also not included in Schenke's criteria for his "Sethian system." I will discuss Schenke's treatment of "Ialdabaoth" as a Sethian characteristic presently. Apart from the three texts that also belong to my Ophite corpus (*Ap. John*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Pan.* 26), the list of the seven names and Ialdabaoth's leonine shape do not appear at all in the Sethian corpus, while the names Ialdabaoth and Samael occur only in *Trim. Prot.* (Ialdabaoth occurs also in the newly published *Gos. Judas*). It has also been suggested that *Trim. Prot.* is dependent on LR of *Ap. John*,⁶⁵ and thus, the names, Ialdabaoth and Samael, might have arrived in *Trim. Prot.* from *Ap. John* (*Trim. Prot.* does not name the other archons). Be that as it may, the name Ialdabaoth is not a common one in Schenke's Sethian corpus. In fact, many Sethian texts do not give the creator a proper name at all.⁶⁶ It is important for our purposes, however, to note that, in the wider Classic Gnostic corpus, the name Sakla(s) only occurs in texts that have Barbeloite features. There are seven such texts: *Holy Book*, *Apoc. Adam*, *Trim. Prot.*, *Gos.*

Michael the lesser who has the shape of a leopard; and, in *Pist. Soph.* 3.126, some of the archons punishing souls in the Outer darkness have faces or heads of cats. See also Jackson 1985, 26–34.

⁶⁵ Poirier (2006, 68–81) points out that there are some two dozen phrases and expressions in *Trim. Prot.* that have a close parallel in LR of *Ap. John*. In his opinion, this shows a literary dependence on *Ap. John*. In one of these phrases, Saklas is also called "Ialdabaoth-Samael" (*Trim. Prot.* 39,26–28; cf. *Ap. John* II 11,15–18). Poirier does not postulate any redactional layers in *Trim. Prot.* See also Chapter 9.3 below.

⁶⁶ Apart from the seven Sethian texts that call the creator Sakla(s) (*Holy Book*, *Apoc. Adam*, *Trim. Prot.*, *Gos. Judas*, *Ap. John*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Pan.* 26), the other Sethian texts use the following appellations for the creator/God of the Jews: *Adv. haer.* 1.29: *Protarchon*; *Zostrianos*: "Divine Cosmocrator"; *Marsanes*: no name at all (Hebdomad, Zodiac, and the animal shapes of angels are mentioned); *Norea*, *Steles Seth* and *Allogenes*: no creator mentioned at all; *Melchizedek*: possibly "Death," but it is not certain that this refers to the creator; *Cod. Bruc. Untitled*: no proper name (ch. 8 mentions "those who have no form and no likeness" inhabiting the region of matter below); *Pan.* 40: Sabaoth; and *Pan.* 39: "Angels" as a group. The last two documents do not have any Barbeloite features.

Judas, Ap. John, Hyp. Arch. and *Pan.* 26. Although the three last ones also contain Ophite features, it may, however, be justified to conclude that the name Sakla(s) is properly speaking a feature of the Barbeloite mythology. It also seems that the specific list of the twelve authorities that identifies their leader as Sakla(s)—found in *Ap. John* and *Holy Book*, and assumed in *Gos. Judas*—is actually a Barbeloite feature, as it occurs only in texts with Barbeloite characteristics.

Furthermore, as we saw in Chapter 2, the serpent appears only in one Sethian text apart from *Ap. John, Hyp. Arch.* and *Pan.* 26, and this one, *Apoc. Adam*, does not associate serpent imagery with the creator or the devil at all. Irenaeus' Ophite source and *Ap. John*, on the other hand, identify Samael as a serpent. Samael, of course, was a common Jewish name for the devil, and it is exactly as the name of the devil that it appears in the Ophite mythology. Irenaeus' Ophite source was very clear about that, and *Hyp. Arch., Orig. World* and *Ap. John* call Ialdabaoth "Samael" while identifying him as the devil. Thus, the use of the name Samael is at home in the Ophite texts. Elsewhere, the name occurs in *Trim. Prot.*, as noted above, and in Theodore bar Konai's late (ca. 792 CE) account of certain "serpent-worshippers" (*Lib. schol.* 11.78) as the name of one of the archons. This account may thus show distant echoes of the Ophite mythology, but the name Samael may also simply derive from non-Gnostic Judeo-Christian traditions.

In this connection, one may also mention Barc's suggestion that the three names of the creator—Ialdabaoth, Samael and Sakla(s)—mentioned together in *Hyp. Arch.*, LR of *Ap. John*, and *Trim. Prot.*, would refer to three originally independent figures or traditions.⁶⁷ Barc isolates various episodes in certain Nag Hammadi texts where the use of each name seems to be confined to a specific tradition. The name Saklas occurs alone in an episode of *Holy Book*, according to which Eleleth requested the appearance of the ruler of chaos; as a consequence, Saklas was born with the great demon Nebrouel, and together they produced twelve authorities (their names are practically identical to those in *Ap. John*). Samael occurs alone in *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*, which describe the creator's birth and rebuke him for his monotheistic claim. Ialdabaoth, then, occurs as the sole name of the creator in an episode of *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* where Ialdabaoth envies Sabaoth. There is, actually, more evidence to support Barc's suggestion.

⁶⁷ Barc 1981.

In Irenaeus' Ophite source and the late text *2 Jeu*, Ialdabaoth and Samael are two different characters, as are Sakla and Ialdabaoth in *Gos. Judas* (51) and Epiphanius' account of the Gnostics (*Pan.* 26.10.1–3). In addition, the names Ialdabaoth and Samael are mostly attested in texts with Ophite features, whereas Sakla(s) appears only in texts with Barbeloite characteristics.

As noted above, one of Schenke's criteria for the "Sethian system" was the concept of an evil creator Ialdabaoth who tries to destroy the seed of Seth.⁶⁸ Of course, Schenke meant Ialdabaoth *or a comparable figure*, for the idea of the creator trying to destroy the seed of Seth occurs prominently in Schenke's Sethian corpus, e.g., in *Apoc. Adam* and *Holy Book*. These texts, however, do not utilize the name Ialdabaoth, but speak instead of Saklas. Schenke should have been more precise in that it is not Ialdabaoth but an evil caricature of YHWH (often called Saklas) who tries to destroy the seed of Seth. This kind of formulation fits the evidence better.

Regarding the mythologoumenon of the archons, there is thus a clear difference between the Ophite and Sethian, or better, Barbeloite, types of speculations. This mythologoumenon is predominantly Ophite, and the only Barbeloite contribution seems to be the theme of Sakla(s) and his twelve authorities. There are then some differences between *Ap. John* and the other texts that have Ophite features. Ialdabaoth is *both* leonine and serpentine in *Ap. John*, and *Ap. John* contains more traditions about the archons than any other text. Furthermore, whereas many texts in the Ophite corpus make a distinction between the God of the Jews and the devil, there does not seem to be such a distinction at all in *Ap. John*. This lack of distinction is probably not due to Barbeloite influence (unlike Saklas and the twelve), as *Holy Book* and *Gos. Judas* (which both utilize Barbeloite mythology) distinguish Sakla from Nebruel (*Holy Book* III 57,5–59,9 par.; *Gos. Judas* 51ff.). One simply finds a higher degree of demonization of YHWH in *Ap. John* than in other texts of the Ophite corpus. Generally speaking, however, the archon speculations of *Ap. John* are well in line with those found in the other Ophite texts. The list of the seven archons in P 20915 is attributed to "Sethians," but this may be based on the author's knowledge of *Ap. John* or a text similar to it, as suggested above. The

⁶⁸ H.-M. Schenke 1974, 167. See also H.-M. Schenke 1981.

information on the Brummer gem, for its part, including the list of the seven names, is identical with what is found in *Orig. World*, and therefore the gem may have actually had an Ophite provenance.

3.4 CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion leads to the following conclusions. First, the traditions about Ialdabaoth and the seven archons are prominent in the Ophite texts, but rather poorly attested in Schenke's Sethian corpus. It can be argued that the names of the seven archons, the creator's leonine and serpentine shapes, as well as his names, Ialdabaoth and Samael, are predominantly Ophite themes. Only Sakla(s) with his twelve authorities seems to be a specifically Sethian, or, to be more precise, a Barbeloite characteristic.

Second, the Ophite mythologoumenon about the creator and his archons derives mainly from Judeo-Christian traditions about the devil and the archangels, with some of their names further being based on appellations of YHWH and names from magical sources. Samael was a common name for the devil in late Judaism, and he appears exactly in this role in the Ophite mythology. Since the devil was often also identified with the serpent of paradise, *Ap. John's* Ialdabaoth seems to have inherited his serpentine form from the devil Samael. Furthermore, Ialdabaoth's leonine shape, at least in the diagram, is based on his identification with the now demonized archangel Michael, who is depicted as leonine in those apocalyptic traditions that combine the archangels with the living creatures around the throne of God. Thus, the suggestions that Ialdabaoth's leonine shape derives from those texts that compare YHWH or the devil to a lion, seem less likely candidates in explaining Ialdabaoth's leonine shape, than do Michael-traditions. Because Samael in Irenaeus' Ophite source is further called Michael, and because the leonine Ialdabaoth in *Hyp. Arch.*, *Orig. World* and *Ap. John* is called Samael, Judeo-Christian traditions about the serpentine Samael and leonine Michael are likely to lie in the background of Ialdabaoth's theriomorphism. The idea of the animal shapes of all seven archons in Ophite mythology seems to be based on the same tradition that combined the archangels with the living creatures around the throne of God. We also saw that the seven archons in the diagram, possibly secondarily identified with the seven theriomorphic demons, are depicted as heavenly gatekeepers and such a role seems to have been

derived from the depiction of the cherubs of Gen 3:24. Furthermore, the seven are usually the creators of Adam. It may further be noted that the animal shapes and the names of the seven archons, including the name Ialdabaoth are not found in the Naassene⁶⁹ and Peratic teachings⁷⁰ or in *Testim. Truth*.

Third, in this light, most of the previous theories that derived Ialdabaoth's theriomorphism from pagan iconography, seem a bit far-fetched. However, the lion-headed serpents of medicinal Chnoumis gems (see Plate 14) do resemble to some extent *Ap. John's* depiction of Ialdabaoth as a hybrid of a serpent and a lion. Thus, knowledge of such gems may have influenced the authors of *Ap. John* in combining various Ophite traditions about the theriomorphic devil (Samael and the demonized Michael) into one figure, Ialdabaoth. This may be the case specifically with LR, which depicts Ialdabaoth as a lion-headed serpent. I will return to these Chnoumis gems in Chapter 7.

Ialdabaoth is first and foremost a caricature of the creator of the Jewish scriptures. Theriomorphic imagery is applied to him only when he is also identified as the devil. The animal imagery therefore seems to be only a consequence of, not the reason for, the demonization of YHWH (of which the demonization of Michael and the archangels is a natural consequence). Where does this demonization itself come from? I will return to this question in Chapter 5 in discussing Adam's creation by the archons. This Ophite material about Adam also contains interesting parallels to Philo and 1 Cor, which may tell us something important about the background of the Ophite mythology. However, because such parallels are perhaps clearer in the case of speculations about Sophia and *gnosis*, I will examine them first, in the next chapter.

⁶⁹ MacMahon's old translation (in Roberts and Donaldson 1995) identifies the demiurge as Ialdabaoth, but the Greek text, in fact, reads, Ἡσαλδαίω (*Ref.* 5.7.30). See Marcovich 1986, 151.

⁷⁰ In the Peratic teaching (*Ref.* 5.12–18), the evil rulers are compared to snakes, and among the names of the various powers one finds Ariel, Soclan, Raphael and Suriel. However, no clear list of twelve or seven are presented, and most of the names of the many powers are rather derived from Greco-Roman mythology, e.g., Prometheus, Japetus, Rhea, Ceres, Vulcan, etc.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOPHIA, EVE AND GNOSIS

MacRae has argued that the Gnostic Sophia myth, especially what he called its “Sethian-Ophite” form,¹ is essentially based on Jewish Wisdom speculations; and that while the aspect of Sophia’s fall cannot be derived from these speculations, it could be explained as a heavenly projection of Eve’s Fall in Gen 3.² In this chapter, I attempt to show that MacRae’s suggestions, if slightly modified, fit well with most texts in my Ophite corpus, but that they do not fit very well with the majority of Schenke’s Sethian texts (MacRae wrote before Schenke’s theory was published). Whereas the Ophite texts (with the exception of *Ap. John* where the Ophite concept of the Godhead has been replaced with the Barbeloite one) present Sophia as a central figure, a heavenly Eve, and an important soteriological agent, the Sethian, or better, Barbeloite, Sophia is instead a somewhat marginal character, unconnected with Eve, and in need of salvation herself. The appearance of (such a marginal) Sophia is also not included in Schenke’s criteria for the “Sethian system.” Since the Ophite mythology intimately connects Sophia with salvific knowledge, *gnosis*, a question arises concerning this mythology’s relationship to Paul’s Corinthian opponents (in 1 Cor)³ and their

¹ I.e., *Orig. World, Hyp. Arch., Ap. John, Soph. Jes. Chr.*, and Irenaeus’ *Adv. haer.* 1.30. MacRae 1970, 87–94.

² MacRae 1970, 97–101.

³ The opposition in 2 Cor is related to different issues and probably to different people. The main issue in 2 Cor is apostolic authority (10–13). The opponents may well have been Jewish-Christians who claimed to have been (and perhaps were) sent by the Jerusalem community led by James (for various opinions, see Smithals 1971; Georgi 1986; Lambrecht 1999, 1–13; Harris 2005, 67–87; N. Taylor 2005). That Paul could call missionaries sent by James “false apostles” (2 Cor 11:13) is possible in light of Gal 1:8: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you *a gospel contrary to what we have proclaimed to you*, let that one be accursed!” (NRSV). The opponents in 2 Cor do preach “a different gospel” (11:4). Half a century later, the Corinthian church once again encountered problems in the form of boastful youths assuming leadership (*1 Clem.*). *2 Clem.* may or may not be addressed to Corinth (see Holmes 2007, 132–135). The apocryphal *3 Corinthians* almost certainly has no real Corinthian connection (see Klijn 1963; Hovhannessian 2000; Johnston 2007). It has often been suggested that both 1 Cor and 2 Cor are made up of several originally independent letters. See Conzelmann 1975, 4; Collins 1999, 1–29; Lambrecht 1999,

speculations on *sophia* and *gnosis*, likewise based on Jewish Wisdom traditions.⁴ Some scholars have argued that the Corinthians were Gnostics,⁵ although this remains doubtful. This chapter thus introduces a new theme into the discussion, namely, the nature of the parallels between 1 Cor and the Ophite mythology. In the following, I will first take a look at some of the main features of Jewish Wisdom speculations, as well as of their applications in 1 Cor. Second, I will analyze the Ophite mythologoumena of Sophia, Eve (ζωή, “life”) and *gnosis*. Third, the Ophite picture of Sophia will be compared to the Sethian one. With the exception of *Ap. John*, the texts in the Ophite corpus present a very different Sophia than do most of Schenke’s Sethian texts, especially those that have predominantly Barbeloite features. Fourth, as will be seen, *Ap. John*’s modifications to the Ophite myth of Sophia are sometimes striking, but in accordance with the general Sethian, or perhaps better, Barbeloite, picture of Sophia.

4.1 JEWISH WISDOM SPECULATIONS AND 1 CORINTHIANS

Certain Jewish texts, including *1 Enoch* 42, but especially Wis 6–10, Prov 1–8, and the writings of Philo, speak of the personified wisdom of God, Sophia. According to the apocalyptic *1 Enoch*, Wisdom descended to earth, but had to return to heaven after a general rejection by humanity (42). This imagery has probably influenced the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, and parallels to the Ophite mythology can be pointed out as well (see Chapter 9). However, there are perhaps more obvious parallels to the Ophite mythology in Jewish Wisdom literature, where Sophia is, for example, God’s first-born (Prov 8:22ff.), spirit (Wis 7:7; Prov 1:22f.), his tool in creation (Prov 3:19f.; 8:27–30), a world soul (Wis 7:24; 8:1), and both an agent and goal of salvation (Wis 6:17–19; 8:17; 9:18; 15:3; Philo, *Her.* 313–316).⁶ Some of these texts include a soteriological model according to which wisdom (σοφία) leads to knowledge (γνῶσις), which leads to immortality, i.e., salvation; or these

6–9; Thiselton 2000, 29–41; Harris 2005, 8ff., 64–87. Chapters 1–4, 8 and 15 of 1 Cor, nevertheless, seem to deal with same opponents, and they were likely to have been composed within a relatively short period of time.

⁴ Pearson 1973; Sandelin 1976; Horsley 1976; Horsley 1980–1981.

⁵ Schmithals 1971; Rudolph 1987, 300–302.

⁶ Cf. MacRae 1970, 88–94.

concepts can be identical, in that Sophia is *gnosis* (Prov 1:2ff.; 2:6–11) and/or the way to and goal of salvation. The tree of life could further be identified with Sophia (Prov 3:18) or as immortalizing knowledge of the supreme cause of the universe (Philo, QG 1.6). Philo also made twofold, even threefold, distinctions among degrees of religious status based on acquired knowledge or wisdom. In *Fug.* 97–98, he distinguishes among three levels of ascent to God: the wisest will be able to ascend all the way to God himself (and to everlasting life), whereas others will attain knowledge of his creative power only, and yet others merely of his ruling power. These three levels are further connected with supracelestial, celestial and sub-lunar realms, respectively (cf. QG 4.8). Regarding religious advancement, Philo could speak of the “babes” and the “perfect”; or, of beginning, progress and perfection.⁷ In addition, he was of the opinion that those who have not attained the religious status of the “perfect” are “babes” and have to be fed with milk (*Agr.* 8–9), almost exactly what Paul says to the Corinthians (1 Cor 2:6–3:4; cf. Heb 5:12–14).⁸

In fact, Paul seems to be opposing and modifying these kinds of Jewish Wisdom speculations in Corinth. His opponents claim wisdom (1 Cor 2:1,4; 3:18; 4:10), but Paul claims they have not known God in their wisdom (1:21). Paul associates their human wisdom with this world and its doomed rulers (ἄρχων) (2:6), but proclaims himself a hidden wisdom of God (2:7). For the opponents, the crucified Christ is foolishness (1:17–2:8), whereas for Paul, he *is* the wisdom of God and the way to salvation (1:18,24). For the opponents, *gnosis* is knowledge that there is only one God, and that the idols do not exist in reality (8:4). For Paul, *gnosis* is knowledge that there is one God (Father), one Lord (Christ), and that the idols do exist and are called gods, although they are not really divine (8:4–6). These idols may even be the doomed archons of this aeon Paul mentions earlier (2:6). According to Paul, even though “everyone has *gnosis*” (8:1), not everyone has the true and salvific *gnosis* of Father, Christ and the nature of the idols (8:7). In other words, Paul has broadened and explicitly Christianized the opponents’ Philo-like speculations on wisdom and *gnosis*.⁹ Whereas Philo apparently did not distinguish between the spiritual and psychic classes

⁷ *Leg. all.* 3.159; *Agr.* 8–9, 165. See Horsley 1976, 280ff.

⁸ Horsley 1976, 280ff.

⁹ See Horsley 1980–1981, 46.

of humanity,¹⁰ both Paul and the Corinthians seem to do this, in their respective ways, identifying higher religious status with spirit (πνεῦμα) and the spiritual (πνευματικός) (2:12–15; 3:1), as well as with wisdom and salvific *gnosis*. Paul also criticizes the opponents for calling themselves “wise” (σοφός, 3:18; φρόνιμος, 4:10) and “kings” (βασιλεύω, 4:8). As will be suggested, the self-designation, “kingless generation,” found in several Ophite texts, may derive from Paul’s criticism of his opponents as kings. It will also be seen that Wisdom soteriology similar to what is found in Philo, and what Paul seems to oppose in 1 Cor, is found in the Ophite texts, although it often occurs in an explicitly Christianized form. It is also expressed in an extremely mythological fashion, and projected onto the paradise story of Genesis.

4.2 THE OPHITE SPECULATIONS ABOUT SOPHIA

The main features of the Ophite speculations about Sophia—discussed in detail below—are the following: (a) Sophia is a world soul and the female aspect of the true Godhead; (b) Sophia is an important agent of salvation; and (c) she is intimately connected with the concepts of Life and *gnosis*, which can sometimes mean the trees of paradise, but, especially in the case of Life, the heavenly Eve (cf. LXX Gen 3:20).¹¹ Furthermore, there are various degrees of *gnosis*. Its content is the nature of God, or, to be more precise, the divine hierarchy: below the supreme God is the divine Christ, and the creator and his archons are not real divinities at all. To know all this, is to have perfect *gnosis*. Whereas Sophia can lead one to the rudimentary levels of knowledge, a higher degree of *gnosis*/salvation is given by a male savior, who is usually explicitly identified as Christ. Ophite mythology thus reflects Christianized Jewish Wisdom soteriology. While salvation is connected with spirit, there is sometimes an even higher, ultimate degree of salvation associated with “kinglessness.” Although spirituality and kinglessness may also sometimes be identical, a distinction between various levels, usually two, of salvation/*gnosis*, is, nevertheless, a commonplace in Ophite texts. It is further important to note that Eve’s eating of the tree of knowledge is seen as a positive and salvific act in the Ophite mythology. This reinterpretation of Eve’s deed may, in fact, explain why

¹⁰ Horsley 1976, 270–273.

¹¹ Cf. MacRae 1970, 93–94, 97–101.

her heavenly counterpart, Sophia, is also depicted as a powerful and mostly guiltless figure, fighting against the archons for the salvation of humanity on a cosmic plane.

I begin the examination with Irenaeus' Ophite source, after which the four closely related Coptic texts, *Eugnostos*, *Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* will be examined. I will then compare the Sophia myths of all these texts to the sketchy information about Sophia in the Ophite diagram. *Pan.* 26 as well as *Ap. John's* Barbeloite modifications will be dealt with only later, after the general features of the Sethian Sophia speculations have been considered.

According to Irenaeus' Ophite account (*Adv. haer.* 1.30), Sophia, also called Prunicus, was born when the "Mother of the living" could not contain all the excessive light in herself, and some of it overflowed. Sophia, a divine power, fell downwards with the light, but protected it from getting harmed in the chaotic waters; Sophia herself had to assume a body, from which she, however, managed to free herself, and made both the sky and Ialdabaoth out of it. The motive for Sophia's descent is not entirely clear. On the one hand, she seems to have fallen due to an overflow of light, but on the other, she is said to have willed it (1.30.3).¹² In any case, she managed to protect the light and free herself of materiality on her own. In addition, during her descent, she not only left some of the light behind, but also put the already existing but motionless waters in motion (1.30.3–4). Thus, she acted as a vitalizing world soul in the cosmos. That both Sophia and the serpent are presented as world souls in Ophite texts may be compared to Middleplatonian speculations about the two aspects of the world soul, especially Numenius' distinction between the rational and evil world souls.¹³

Sophia then engaged in a series of countermoves against the archontic machinations, to protect the light fallen from the "Mother of the living." For example, Sophia rebukes Ialdabaoth for his false monotheistic claim (1.30.6). She provides the archons with a heavenly model for Adam, and fools Ialdabaoth into blowing the lost divine power into Adam (1.30.6). She uses the snake as her tool to teach Adam and Eve

¹² *Virtutem autem quae superebulliit ex Femina, habentem humectationem luminis, a Patribus decidisse deorsum docent, sua autem uoluntate habentem humectationem luminis* (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.3, Rousseau and Doutreleau, ed.).

¹³ Numenius, frg. 52 des Places. See also pp. 179–180 below.

to eat of the tree of knowledge,¹⁴ which allows them instantly to know the true God and forsake the archons (1.30.7). Sophia further causes the births of Seth and Norea through her providence (1.30.9), and protects Noah from the Flood (1.30.10). Whereas pre-deluvian humanity did not accept Ialdabaoth as God, he later adopted the Jews as his own nation (1.30.10–11). While it is mostly Ialdabaoth and the archons that speak through the Jewish scriptures, Sophia herself announces the true Godhead through them, too (1.30.11). Finally, when she cannot find rest or general acceptance in the lower worlds, she prays for help (1.30.12). Christ, her brother, is sent to her, and she announces his coming through the prophets and prepares the birth of Jesus, the “pure vessel,” for Christ (1.30.12). Christ and Sophia unite, and descend into the human Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan. Finally, they depart for the upper worlds at the crucifixion, and Christ awakens Jesus from the dead (1.30.12–13). Crucifixion has no salvific meaning here; rather, proper knowledge concerning the true nature of Jesus Christ and the true God brings salvation from the hands of Ialdabaoth (1.30.13–14).

Sophia is here the only agent of salvation until Christ’s coming, and afterwards they act together. Jesus, after his resurrection, is said to have received knowledge, and taught some of his disciples correctly (*didicisse quod liquidam est*). He then ascended to heaven where he¹⁵ sits at the right side of Ialdabaoth and secretly receives and saves the “holy souls” who know him (1.30.14). Thus, knowledge that Ialdabaoth is not the true God, and that Christ shares in the true God’s divinity, appears to be the salvific knowledge. This can also be seen in the rebuke formula that Sophia addressed to Ialdabaoth when he falsely claimed to be the true God: “Do not lie Ialdabaoth... Man exists and Son of Man!” (1.30.6; these are God and Christ, see Chapter 5). The fact that not everyone has this knowledge, is expressed in mythological terms: the knowledge is dependent on the presence of the divine power, consisting of *nous* and *enthymesis*, which Adam received at his creation,

¹⁴ According to Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.15), some said Sophia herself was the snake in paradise, and this is essentially what is found in *Orig. World*, where the instructor in paradise was Sophia Zoe’s androgynous offspring. This instructor was possibly the male aspect of Zoe-Eve, who, likewise, was identified as Sophia Zoe’s offspring and an instructor. See p. 72 above.

¹⁵ There seems to be confusion in Irenaeus’ account in that both Christ and Jesus are said to sit on their father Ialdabaoth’s right side receiving holy souls. Since Christ is the son of higher beings (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–2), “Christ” here is probably a mistake for “Jesus.” See also Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979, 311.

and which gave him the *gnosis*. It is also these faculties that alone will be saved (1.30.6). One would expect that the souls who do not know Christ, do not have these faculties, and, in fact, of such souls it is said that they are merely of Ialdabaoth's own (psychic) essence, and have to be reincarnated (1.30.14). Sophia is responsible for giving humanity the divine power (she fooled Ialdabaoth to blow it, i.e., the spirit, into Adam; 1.30.6), but she can also remove and restore the power at will. This suggests that salvation is not predetermined. Because Sophia became united with Christ just prior to their joint descent into Jesus, the text presupposes a Christianized form of Wisdom soteriology, where proper knowledge of the Godhead brings salvation.

Furthermore, in Irenaeus' source, the connection between Sophia and Eve is, first of all, visible in the case of the "Mother of the living" (Eve's title in Gen 3:20) who is Sophia's mother. Second, the earthly Eve, created by Ialdabaoth (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.7), has a divine spark in her, which Sophia removes and restores at times to protect it (1.30.7,8,9). In fact, protection of light is one of Sophia's main tasks in this text. She protects it not only from the archons, but also from getting harmed in the chaotic waters during her original descent. Despite certain negative features, such as her appellation, Prunicus,¹⁶ and allusions to her "repentance" (*paenitentia*, 1.30.12), Sophia remains a powerful and lofty savior-figure in Irenaeus' source.¹⁷ The idea of Sophia's descent and rejection by many (for example, Jewish scriptures mostly contain archontic prophecies, even though Sophia has managed to speak through them as well; 1.30.11–12) resembles what is found in *1 Enoch* 42. However, since this rejection does not culminate in her withdrawal to heaven, but instead in her descent into Jesus at his baptism, the Ophite myth has an interesting link to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel. This link will be examined in Chapter 9.

Irenaeus' Ophite source draws heavily upon Jewish Wisdom speculations. In addition, it contains features that Paul opposes in 1 Cor, as well as features of Paul's own Christianizing modifications to these Wisdom speculations. On the one hand, the Ophite Sophia herself is depicted as a powerful savior-figure, and the crucifixion has no redemptive value. These features are not in agreement with Paul's exclusivist

¹⁶ On the various connotations of the title, including negative and sexual ones, see Meyer 1988; and Pasquier 1988.

¹⁷ Cf. Turner 2001, 203: "[T]he androgynous Sophia-Prunicos, who by gravity and without any trace of moral culpability descends."

Christology, and Paul associates such ideas with destructive foolishness (1 Cor 1:17–2:8). On the other hand, it seems that there cannot be proper salvation without Christ, who, however, unites with Sophia, according to this Ophite source (cf. 1 Cor 1:24,30). Furthermore, proper knowledge of Jesus Christ, and presumably also of the true God and Ialdabaoth (cf. 1 Cor 8:7), allows one to escape the latter’s power and attain the incorruptible world (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.7,14). Irenaeus’ Ophite source thus accepts *some* aspects of Paul’s Christian modifications to Jewish Wisdom soteriology. This kind of partial acceptance of Paul’s teachings, combined with a non-Pauline and direct use of Jewish Wisdom speculations is also found in other texts of the Ophite corpus.

As pointed out above, Irenaeus’ account presents essentially the same concept of the Godhead as do *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* with their multiple Sophia-figures. In the present form of Irenaeus’ account, the highest female figure, *Ennoia*, has faded away apparently due to her identification with the Son of Man; and the “Mother of the living” has also become identical with the Holy Spirit hovering over the primeval waters of Gen 1:2 (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–2; cf. *Ap. John* II 13,13–26 parr.; and Wis 7:7; Prov 1:22f.). However, these titles, *Ennoia* and the “Mother of all (the living),” are found as titles of the first and second Sophias in *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* This suggests that in the background of the *Ennoia* and the “Mother of the living” (Holy Spirit-Eve) from Irenaeus’ Ophite source, there are Sophia-figures (cf. Figure 2).

One striking feature of *Eugnostos* itself is that there are nine Sophia-figures. In fact, all female deities in the text are Sophias. The upper worlds, which *Eugnostos* discusses, can be divided into three main sections (see Figure 5): above all are (A) two consortless principles, the Unbegotten Forefather and the Self-Begetter Self-Father; then, below them begin the realms of androgyny, first represented by (B) a triad of Man-Son of Man-Savior (this section corresponds to Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–3; note that, in *Eugnostos*, the three androgynes themselves are identified as Man, Son of Man, and Savior, while their specific male and female aspects are identified as begetters and Sophias, respectively); and then by (C) six spiritual androgynous beings born from the Savior (below these are 360 firmaments). The female halves of all the androgynous beings are called Sophia. In addition, the female side of the androgynous Ogdoad is called Life (ζωή) (V 14,18–27 parr.). It is not certain, what the author means by “Ogdoad,” i.e., whether it denotes a specific section of the upper worlds (B and C are androgynous) or a separate middle world between the upper worlds and the

chaotic cosmos.¹⁸ The male side of the Ogdoad, Assembly (ἐκκλησία), is in any case said to have been named after the “Assembly that surpasses the heavens.” This suggests that its female portion, Life, was likewise named after a higher “Life.” Since the male name of the androgyne also suggests collectivity, its female name could refer to the apparent collectivity of Sophias in the higher realms. Be that as it may, with the exception of the two highest spheres (section A in Figure 5), all ontological levels of the upper worlds in *Eugnostos* include a Sophia, whose collectivity is possibly called Life. The latter, of course, is Eve’s name in Gen 3:20. In addition, the Sophia-aspect of the Son of Man-Adam is called the “Mother of all,” which likewise recalls Eve’s appellation, the “Mother of all the living,” in Gen 3:20.¹⁹ Thus, Sophia seems to be here presented both as a heavenly Eve (Life; cf. Prov 3:18) and a world soul (cf. Wis 7:24; 8:1), penetrating most ontological levels of reality. She is, in fact, the female aspect of the true Godhead.

The author presents the various Sophias creating in harmony with their consorts (V 8,27–9,3; 10,2–17 parr.), but speaks, nevertheless, of a “defect” (ὤστρα, V 13,7; ὑστέρημα, III 85,8f.) of the female, in connection with the 360 firmaments. Good has suggested that the defect in question would be based on numerical and calendrical reasons, the last day of the 30-day lunar calendar being understood as “feminine” and defective in Antiquity.²⁰ Couliano, for his part, suggests that the defect refers to the Biblical Fall of Eve.²¹ Tardieu suspects secondary Valentinian influence here,²² and Trakatellis allows for the possibility

¹⁸ In the related *Orig. World*, the term, Ogdoad/Eighth, seems to have originally meant the upper worlds, since the Immortal Man descends from the Eighth, but is then forced to stay in a middle realm between the Eighth and the chaos (108,2–25; 111,29–112,22). Only by adding into the text a fourth (“kingless”) class of humanity that surpasses even the spiritual ones, has the term, Eighth, been downgraded (cf. Painchaud 1995b, 499–501). In *Hyp. Arch.*, the Eighth seems to mean the upper worlds in general, since Sophia Zoe gives information about the Eighth to Sabaoth who has been installed in the Seventh Heaven below the veil that separates the upper and lower worlds (95,17–34). In *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, the chaotic cosmos is called the Seventh (BG 109,1–3; the parallels in *Eugnostos* call it “the Eighth that appeared in chaos”), and the Immortal Man is said to have created the Eighth (III 102,3–4 par.). In addition, *Soph. Jes. Chr.* presupposes a two-level salvation, in that those who know the Unbegotten Father (cf. section A of *Eugnostos*, Figure 5), gain access to his realms, but those who know him defectively, or know only the Son of Man (cf. section B of *Eugnostos*), have to enjoy their salvation in the Eighth (III 117,15–118,3 par.).

¹⁹ Cf. Parrott 1991, 9–16.

²⁰ Good 1987, 26–29.

²¹ Couliano 1992, 80.

²² Tardieu 1984, 382ff.

	<u>Male (Assembly):</u>	<u>Female (Life):</u>	
A	Unbegotten Forefather Self-Begetter Self-Father		
B	Begetter	IMMORTAL MAN	All-wise Begettress, Ennoia of all Sophias
	First-Beggetter	ADAM, SON OF MAN	First-Begotten Sophia, Mother of all, Love
	All-Beggetter	SAVIOR	All-Beggettress, Pistis Sophia
C	Unbegotten		All-wise Sophia
	Self-Begotten		All-Mother Sophia
	Begetter		All-Beggettress Sophia
	First-Beggetter		First-Begettress Sophia
	All-Beggetter		Love Sophia
	Archbegetter		Pistis Sophia
	360 firmaments		

Figure 5: The Scheme of *Eugnostos* V

that the author alludes to the fall of Sophia.²³ If one accepts Painchaud’s theory that *Eugnostos* and *Orig. World* are two complementary parts of a single design, then the author of *Eugnostos* probably does allude to *Orig. World*’s statements of Pistis Sophia’s defect (ⲱⲧⲁ, 99,30; 103,26; 124,6; 127,3), identified as the chaotic lower worlds deriving from Pistis. Nevertheless, it is important to note that none of the Sophia-figures in either text actually falls (see below). Quite possibly the existence of the chaotic cosmos is explained as resulting from an apparently necessary “defect” at one point in the unfolding of the reality from the divine heights down to the earthly level of decay and corruption (cf. the overflow due to the inability of the “Mother of the living” to contain all the light, in Irenaeus’ source). However, what makes the Ophite variants of this theme unique—as opposed to, for example, the Barbeloite and Valentinian ones—is the idea that there is very little, if any, guilt involved in Sophia’s “defect.”²⁴

Knowledge (*gnosis*) appears in *Eugnostos* as a soteriological concept. The actual contents of *Eugnostos*, i.e., the description of the supreme

²³ Trakatellis 1991, 114–115, 134–135.

²⁴ Einar Thomassen, private communication.

God and of the unfolding of the invisible realms may be identified with the beginning (ἀρχή) of knowledge (γνώσις, V 4,8; σοογιη, III 74,20). Thought (ἔννοια), which is the title of the highest Sophia-figure (see Figure 5), leads one to this knowledge (III 74,12–21 parr.). The author refutes three philosophical opinions concerning the universe, and explains that only by confessing the “God of truth” and by agreeing in everything concerning him, one will become immortal among mortals (III 70,12–71,13 parr.); those who do not know the difference between imperishable (true God) and perishable (creator) realities, die. At the end of the text, the author says that a word (V: ψαξε) or someone who need not be taught (III: παιτω), will interpret the teachings of *Eugnostos* in pure *gnosis* (III 90,4–11 par.). This suggests that *ennoia-Sophia* leads one to the immortalizing *gnosis*, which, however, is in need of completion. In a way, *Eugnostos*’ teaching is incomplete in that it does not discuss the nature of the creator god. The Codex III version may, in fact, point to *Soph. Jes. Chr.* and thus to the teaching of the resurrected Jesus (*Soph. Jes. Chr.* also mentions Ialdabaoth).²⁵ On the other hand, if Painchaud is right about the relationship between *Eugnostos* and *Orig. World*, then *Eugnostos*’ reference (especially in the Codex V version) to the complementary teaching might even refer to *Orig. World*, where the nature of the creator is discussed.

In fact, whereas *Eugnostos* concentrated on describing the upper worlds, *Orig. World* mostly concentrates on the lower ones and their creator, offering a rewriting of the early chapters of Genesis. According to *Orig. World*, several Sophia/Eve-figures are active in the lower worlds: (1) Pistis Sophia; (2) her daughter Sophia Zoe; (3) Zoe-Eve, the spiritual Eve, who is a daughter of Sophia Zoe; and (4) the earthly Eve, who is the likeness of Zoe-Eve. There is also (5) an archontic Sophia, who is the feminine aspect of the archon Astaphaios (101,34–102,1), and who may or may not be the same as the Sophia of Ialdabaoth (103,1–2).²⁶ Note also that the Sophias (in plural) of the archons are said to be put to shame (125,27). As in *Eugnostos*, all true female deities are Sophia-figures in *Orig. World*. In addition, their names overlap

²⁵ See Parrott 1991, 3–5, 16–19.

²⁶ Sophia of Ialdabaoth is said to be below them all (*Orig. World* 103,1–2), and Astaphaios-Sophia is described as the lowest of the archons (101,34–102,1).

to some extent: Pistis is also called Pistis Sophia; her daughter is called Sophia Zoe; her daughter, in turn, is called Zoe-Eve, whose likeness is the earthly Eve. In my view, this overlapping is not accidental, but stresses the intimate connection among these figures;²⁷ they form a chain of emanations:

Pistis Sophia
 Sophia Zoe
 Zoe Eve
 Eve

Thus, the world soul idea of Sophia-Eve, found in *Eugnostos*, seems to be reflected in *Orig. World*, too. The first three Sophias here are heavenly beings and they carry out most of the soteriological tasks, instructing the inhabitants of the lower worlds and fighting the archons.²⁸ Pistis Sophia causes Adam's creation through her providence (πρόνοια) (113,5–10) and finally destroys the archons (126,16–127,5). She also rebukes Ialdabaoth for his false monotheistic claim, informing the archons about the Immortal Man (who is not the supreme God, but a Christ-figure; see Chapter 5) (103,15–28). In so doing, she reveals her likeness in the waters (103,29–31), that thus become purified (108,28–31). She then reascends to the light on her own (103,29–32). As a result, the archon Sabaoth repented, accepted the information about the Immortal Man, and condemned his evil father Ialdabaoth (103,32–104,10). Pistis therefore installed Sabaoth above the Seventh Heaven and gave him her daughter Sophia Zoe as an instructor concerning the upper worlds (104,17–31). Even though the “defect” and “disturbance” of Pistis are mentioned in the text (e.g., 99,29–31), Pistis remains a lofty figure, unconquered by the archons and the material world. It is the Immortal Man, who is here unable to reascend to the light (112,10–22), and it is Sabaoth, who repents (104,27).

Sophia Zoe (Life), for her part, created in the beginning “likenesses of heaven having an unimaginable magnitude” (98,14–19);²⁹ then seven offspring as a countermeasure to the seven offspring of Death (106,27–

²⁷ Cf. Böhlig and Labib 1962, 72.

²⁸ According to Philo, wisdom exists in the world in three different manners (*Somn.* 1.169).

²⁹ These are said to have been created by Sophia, who emanated out of Pistis (*Orig. World* 98,11–23). Elsewhere we learn that Sophia Zoe is the daughter of Pistis Sophia (104,26–30; 113,12–13).

107,14); and finally, when the archons decided to create Adam, she produced the instructor in paradise (113,10–114,15). After the archons cursed Adam and Eve and expelled them from paradise, Sophia Zoe expelled the archons themselves from their heavens, down to earth (121,27–35). Earlier, she had also played a role in awakening the soulless Adam created by the archons, by sending him her breath (ἠμειε < πνοή)³⁰ (115,9–23). This is based on LXX Gen 2:7, according to which God breathed the *breath of life* (πνοὴν ζωῆς) in Adam's face. Sophia Zoe finally sent her own daughter, Zoe-Eve, to awaken and instruct Adam. Zoe-Eve awakens Adam to life with her word, and Adam calls her "Mother of the living" (*Orig. World* 115,30–116,8; cf. Gen 3:20). The archontic archangels see her and decide to rape her. Zoe-Eve, however, realizes what they are about to do and escapes by becoming the tree of *gnosis* (*Orig. World* 116,28–32). The archangels flee, frightened, but when they return, they mistake the earthly Eve for the spiritual one, and, in league with the archons, rape her (116,8–117,15). This earthly Eve, together with Adam, is later taught in paradise by the instructor to eat of the tree of *gnosis* (118,24–119,19), i.e., of Zoe-Eve. As suggested above, the instructor may be taken here as the male aspect of Zoe-Eve, i.e., a heavenly Adam-figure. Since Zoe-Eve is also identified as the tree of *gnosis* (116,28–32), it appears that Sophia, life and knowledge have here been practically identified with each other, as they are, for example, in Proverbs (2:1–11,19; 3:18,22).

According to *Orig. World*, eating of the tree of knowledge leads to awakening, and allows one to approach the tree of life (110,18–111,2). Eating of the latter finally makes one immortal and capable of condemning the archons (110,7–13.27–29). The author distinguishes among various degrees of *gnosis* and of salvation (some of these distinctions may derive from later modifications to the text, if one accepts Painchaud's analysis concerning the redactions of *Orig. World*).³¹ For example, even the archons can receive the *gnosis* necessary to create Adam, which, however, happens according to the providence of Pistis Sophia (113,5–12). The *gnosis* Adam and Eve receive from the tree makes them see the true, animal-like, nature of the archons, and allows Adam to name the animals (119,16–19; 120,17–25). This

³⁰ Crum 1962, 239a–b.

³¹ Painchaud 1991; Painchaud 1995b.

suggests that the archons may be thought of as the animals of Gen 2:19–20. Nevertheless, this *gnosis* does not seem to bestow upon Adam any knowledge of the upper worlds, and he is denied eating of the tree of life by the archons (*Orig. World* 120,25–121,5). This may be due to the fact that Adam and Eve are elsewhere in the text described as earthly (χοϊκός), presumably as opposed to being psychic or spiritual (117,28–118,2). Sabaoth, however, receives instruction about the upper worlds, as well as Life, i.e., Sophia Zoe (104,17–31). Perhaps Sophia Zoe thus symbolizes the tree of life, her daughter, Zoe-Eve, being explicitly identified with the tree of *gnosis*.

Finally, the author affirms that those who have not been perfected in the Unbegotten Father, i.e., the supreme God, do not attain the highest, kingless realm (ΤΜΗΤΑΤΡΟ), but have to enjoy their salvation on a lower level (127,5–17). This is reminiscent of Philo's idea of various levels of ascent to God, pointed out above. The “kingless generation” (ΓΕΝΟΣ ΟΥΑΤΡΟ) has here surpassed even the *gnosis*-endowed spiritual ones (124,5–32) as the “fourth race” (125,3–7).³² Painchaud has argued that the fourth, kingless generation, is an anti-Valentinian redactional addition to an earlier version of the text that had associated spirituality with the highest religious status.³³ However, kinglessness as the highest degree of religious status/salvation is a concept that is found also in *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Eugnostos*. Furthermore, the idea of kinglessness surpassing spirituality does not in itself necessarily derive from polemics against Valentinianism. Remember that Paul criticized his Corinthian opponents for being “kings,” and that these opponents had associated spirit with the highest religious status. One could thus conceivably think that Paul's criticism of these “spiritual kings” inspired the invention of a category of the “kingless ones,” surpassing the spiritual class whose members claimed to be kings, but in reality were fools.³⁴ In fact, in *Orig. World*, the other three races—

³² Painchaud 1995b, 501.

³³ Painchaud 1991; Painchaud 1995b, 110–115, 499–501.

³⁴ Fallon (1978, 118–119) suggests that the concept of “kinglessness” as a fourth race is a Valentinian one. Bergmeier (1982) thinks the concept presupposes Valentinianism. Painchaud and Janz (1997), for their part, suggest that the concept derives from an anti-Valentinian—and specifically Sethian—circle. However, the concept is better attested in Ophite rather than Sethian texts. It is also poorly attested in Valentinian sources (it is found only in *Tri. Trac.* 100,3–14; cf. Painchaud and Janz 1997, 444–446). Turner (2006b, 947) suggests that the “kingless generation” originated in the context of Sethian baptism that would have included enthronement. The expression is, however, never attested in the Sethian baptismal fragments identified by Sevrin (1986;

spirituals, psychics and earthly ones—are associated with the “kings” of the Eighth Heaven (125,3–7).³⁵ Nevertheless, since in the present version of *Orig. World* the kingless generation is specifically depicted as the *fourth* race, above the three others (122,6–9; cf. 117,28–118,2), the concept may well have been redirected against Valentinianism, where a tripartition of humanity is often attested with the Valentinians representing the spiritual class (or persons more spiritual than others).³⁶ Thus, while the idea of the kingless generation surpassing the spiritual class may derive from 1 Cor, it may have been placed in a new, specifically (anti-)Valentinian, context in *Orig. World*.

A distinction between the spirituals and the kingless ones may also be found in an implicit form in *Eugnostos*, where the “kingless generation” exists on the second highest ontological plane (V 4,16–5,9; III 75,4–23; section A in Figure 5), while spirit and spirituality are only mentioned in relation to lower ontological levels, namely, the realms of the six spiritual beings born of the union of the Savior and Pistis Sophia (V 10,13–16; III 82,7–10; section C in Figure 5). Moreover, the summary section of *Eugnostos* V connects kinglessness with the aeon that surpasses the three realms of the Immortal Man, the Son of Man and the Savior (13,7–19), while the Codex III version, together with *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (III 85,9–21; BG 108,1–109,4) has the kingless realm embracing only two others, thus lacking the idea of the *fourth* level. Therefore, together with *Orig. World*, the Codex V version of *Eugnostos* may criticize Valentinians by making kinglessness the fourth and highest category.

Yet another instance of the close association between *Orig. World* and *Eugnostos* V is found in their teaching concerning the Logos. The author of *Orig. World* affirms that the Logos is superior to everyone, and that he was sent to reveal the hidden things. This Logos is Christ, since Jesus’ words, “There is nothing hidden that is not apparent, and what has not been recognized will be recognized” (Mark 4:22 parr.), are put in his mouth (*Orig. World* 125,14–19). Likewise, in *Eugnostos* V, the Logos (ϠΑΧΘ) is said to dwell in the manifestation of the supreme

see pp. 257–259 below). *Apoc. Adam* mentions the “kingless generation” at 82,19–20, but its connection to the following polemics against baptism is not clear.

³⁵ Also in *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* “kingdom” comes into being due to the Immortal Man, who exists below the kingless realm of the Unbegotten One (V 6,14ff.; 13,7–19 parr.).

³⁶ See, e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.6.1–2; Tertullian, *Val.* 29; *Tri. Trac.* 104,4–106,25; 118,14–119,20.

principle, full of light (5,19–29), which is reminiscent of John 1:1–9.³⁷ The Logos is thus superior to *Ennoia*, who leads to the beginning of *gnosis*. In fact, both *Eugnostos V* and *Orig. World* seem to place the Logos on the same ontological level with kinglessness. Therefore, the highest and fourth degree of *gnosis*/religious status is associated with Christ-Logos both in *Orig. World* and *Eugnostos V*, although these features, at least in their present form, may derive from a later, anti-Valentinian redaction in both texts.³⁸ In any case, both *Eugnostos* and *Orig. World* make heavy use of Jewish Wisdom speculations, and seem to teach a Christianized form of Wisdom soteriology, where Christ delivers the highest form of salvific *gnosis*. Sophia herself is depicted as a world soul, a heavenly projection of Eve, and the female aspect of the true Godhead.

In *Hyp. Arch.*, there are six female figures acting in the lower worlds: (1) Incorruptibility, the image of God; (2) Pistis Sophia; (3) Sophia Zoe, the daughter of Pistis Sophia; (4) the instructor Spirit, who manifests herself, among other things, as the spiritual Eve, and becomes a tree; (5) the earthly Eve, who is the “shadow” of the spiritual one; and (6) Norea, the daughter of the spiritual Eve. It is easy to notice the close resemblance to the figures in *Orig. World*. However, two new figures, Incorruptibility and Norea, appear. Moreover, the Spirit’s identity and relation to the Sophias remain vague. Whereas in *Orig. World* it was Pistis who showed her likeness in the waters, following Ialdabaoth’s rebuke, here in *Hyp. Arch.* this act is performed by Incorruptibility. She may, however, be a Sophia-figure, since Philo, for example, identified Wisdom both with Incorruptibility and the image of God (*Fug.* 109; *Leg. all.* 1.43). Furthermore, the Spirit in *Hyp. Arch.* performs same tasks as the entities sent by Sophia Zoe in *Orig. World*: the Spirit/breath descends into Adam (*Hyp. Arch.* 88,11–16/*Orig. World* 115,11–14); the Spirit/Zoe-Eve manifests herself as the spiritual Eve, who turns into a tree (*Hyp. Arch.* 89,7–27/*Orig. World* 115,30–116,33); and the Spirit/Instructor teaches Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge (*Hyp. Arch.* 89,31–90,12/*Orig. World* 118,24–7). Whereas in *Orig. World*, the breath of Sophia Zoe was sent to Adam, it punishes

³⁷ Anne Pasquier, private communication.

³⁸ Painchaud (1995b, 504–506) suggests that the material concerning the Logos in *Orig. World* belongs to a later redaction. Likewise, the material speaking of the Logos in *Eugnostos V* is missing from the Codex III version, as well as from both versions of *Soph. Jes. Chr.*

Ialdabaoth in *Hyp. Arch.* (95,5–13). The importance of Sophia is clearly visible in *Hyp. Arch.* All female figures in the text, too, can be seen as Sophia/Eve-figures, and Pistis Sophia, together with her daughter Sophia Zoe, perform many important tasks in the salvation history: (Pistis) Sophia introduces light into the cosmos, and, even though she descends, she is able to reascend on her own (94,28–34); Sophia Zoe rebukes Ialdabaoth (95,4–13) and punishes him with her breath; Pistis and Sophia Zoe install Sabaoth above the Seventh Heaven and instruct him (95,13–96,3). The identification of Sophia and Eve is visible, for example, in the figure of Sophia Zoe herself.

When the psychic Adam and Eve eat of the tree of knowledge, instructed by the spirit using the snake, they realize they are naked of the spirit (90,13–19). The archons expel them from paradise so that they could not be devoted to the Holy Spirit (91,3–11). This is parallel to *Orig. World's* statement, based on Gen 3:22–24, according to which the archons wanted to prevent Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of life. Gilhus has suggested that the spirit, which entered an unidentified tree in paradise, would here in *Hyp. Arch.* symbolize the tree of life; for when the spirit entered the tree, the tree of *gnosis* had already been mentioned (88,29f.), unlike the tree of life.³⁹ This is a reasonable suggestion. In *Hyp. Arch.*, too, there appear to be various degrees of knowledge/instruction: the knowledge Adam and Eve received from the tree only made them realize they were themselves imperfect, non-spiritual; the instruction Norea receives from the angel Eleleth reveals that the creator is not the true God (93,2ff.) and that Norea's origin is in the upper worlds; the instruction received by Sabaoth deals with the upper worlds themselves; and, finally, the future teaching given by the true man is about "everything" and it is associated with the manifestation of the spirit of truth and salvation (96,32–97,23). The author also affirms, by the mouth of Eleleth, that the spirit of truth protects one against the archons, and everyone who knows this exists immortal among mortals (96,19–27).⁴⁰ The probable Johannine allusions concerning the spirit of truth that will protect, teach and reveal everything (John 14:16f.; 15:26; 16:7–16; cf. 1 John 2:27), suggest that *Hyp. Arch.*'s true man revealing the spirit of truth and bringing salvation is

³⁹ Gilhus 1985, 69–70.

⁴⁰ The idea that the one who has knowledge is immortal among mortals is found in *Eugnostos* (V 2,2–8; III 71,5–13), *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (III 93,16–24; BG 82,9–18), *Hyp. Arch.* (96,25–27) and *Orig. World* (125,11–12).

understood as a Christ-figure. However, *Hyp. Arch.* also seems to further distinguish the spirituals from the surpassing “kingless generation,” as the former will be anointed by the true man who himself receives the oil from the “kingless generation” (96,32–35). Possibly another Christ-figure, the “Son,” is then said to preside over the entirety (97,18–19), which suggests that at least the Son is not inferior in any way to the “kingless generation,” whereas the true man may be. In any case, *Hyp. Arch.* also appears to contain Christianized Jewish Wisdom speculations.

Let us return to the scheme of *Eugnostos*. The author of *Soph. Jes. Chr.* has essentially rewritten *Eugnostos*, and basically presents a simplified version of the same scheme, omitting section C with its six androgynous beings and their 360 firmaments (cf. Figure 5). In addition, there are some differences in the way the three remaining Sophias, the female aspects of the three androgynous humans, are presented: the highest one is called “Great Sophia,” who has a “tri-male Spirit” (III 101,16; 102,12–14 par.); and the third one has apparently been fused with the second, since the Sophia responsible for the lower worlds is called the “Mother of all” (III 114,14–18). This seems to be based on the summary section in the Codex III version of *Eugnostos*, where it is stated that the Son of Man and the Savior (apparently with their Sophia consorts) are identical (III 85,9–21 parr.).⁴¹ Dependence on this section of *Eugnostos* explains why the second Sophia is first said to have created in harmony with her consort (*Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 106,15–24 par.), but is then (as the third one) said to have wanted to create without her consort (only in Codex III 114,14–18).⁴² The activity of the (originally) third Sophia leads to the existence of the lower worlds (BG 108,19–109,3), and of the divine substance in them, sent down by Sophia-Savior (III 106,19–108,4), but redeemed by Jesus, the *Great Savior* (III 107,15–108,4 par.). Generally speaking, *Soph. Jes. Chr.* presents a very powerful Sophia: things are said to have happened according to her will (III 107,6f. par.; BG 120,14–16; 124,12–14 par.), and all female figures in the upper worlds are Sophias (suggesting the world soul idea). They are possibly also identified as Eves, since *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, like *Eugnostos*, names the female side of the Ogdoad “Life”

⁴¹ Good (1987, 50) has suggested that the lowest Sophia (Pistis) has here assumed the identity of other Sophias.

⁴² The first Sophia also creates in harmony (III 104,4–13 par.).

(ζωή). *Soph. Jes. Chr.* does not discuss the earthly Eve or the trees of paradise, probably due to its concentration on the upper worlds.

However, the text does speak of *gnosis* as a means of salvation: whoever knows (ΠΕΤΟΟΥΝ) the Father, the Immortal Spirit, in pure knowledge (III: [ΓΗ]ΩΣΙΣ), attains the highest degree of salvation, but whoever knows him defectively, or knows only the Son of Man-Christ, will have to stay in the Ogdoad (BG 123,2–124,9 par.). *Soph. Jes. Chr.* clearly presupposes two degrees of *gnosis* and of salvation, and this is again reminiscent of Philo's doctrine of various levels of salvation. Note, however, that in *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, the "kingless generation" (identified with the apostles, III 99,17–22 par.) probably does not surpass spirituality, as the supreme God himself is characterized as a Spirit (e.g., III 96,21; 118,11–12 par.). This may be due to Barbeloite influence, as the supreme principle in texts with Barbeloite features is often identified as the Invisible Spirit. Kinglessness, nevertheless, is associated here in *Soph. Jes. Chr.* with the highest level of salvation, too. Even though knowledge of the Son of Man alone can only lead to the lower level of salvation, the risen Jesus, apparently another Christ-figure (identified with the Self-Begetter of *Eugnostos*, and thus practically with the supreme God),⁴³ nevertheless, communicates all of the salvific knowledge, and awakens and perfects the drop sent by Sophia. Perhaps we find here criticism of the "great church," or even of Valentinians, associated with a defective understanding of Christ and with a lower level of salvation. *Soph. Jes. Chr.* utilizes Christianized Wisdom soteriology, and the intimate connection between Christ and Sophia is also clearly seen in the title of the work, *Sophia of Jesus Christ*.

The descriptions of the Ophite diagram are very sketchy about the role of Sophia. However, when they are read in light of the preceding analysis, Sophia's position in the diagram becomes clearer. The circles of γνῶσις and σύνεσις, with their Sophia-inscriptions (Sophia's providence; Sophia's nature), were located inside the circle of Life. Life itself is not only a name of a Sophia-figure in *Orig. World* and *Hyp. Arch.*, but the "Mother of the *living*," or "Mother of all" (titles of Eve, ζωή, in LXX Gen 3:20) is the mother of the third Sophia-figure, according to Irenaeus' Ophites, *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (cf. Figure 2). Furthermore, Life, as the designation of the female side of the Ogdoad,

⁴³ The risen Jesus says he comes from the "Self-Begotten and First Infinite Light" (III 106,5–7; BG 102,1–5), thus, apparently from the ontologically highest realms.

is possibly a name given to all Sophias in *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr. Gnosis* is here in the diagram associated with Sophia's providence, which is also mentioned in *Orig. World* and Irenaeus' Ophite account. Thus, the intimate connection among Sophia, Life (Eve) and *gnosis* is also found in the diagram. In addition, Love is an appellation of one of the Sophias in *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (see Figure 5).⁴⁴ Therefore, even if not explicitly called Sophias, Love and Life of the diagram could well be based on Ophite speculations about Sophia and Eve. Origen also mentions the trees of paradise in describing the diagram. There is a circle of fire,⁴⁵ whose diameter is the flaming sword (Gen 3:24), "as if guarding the tree of *gnosis* and life" (ὡς δορυφορούμενη τῷ τε τῆς γνώσεως ξύλῳ καὶ τῆς ζωῆς; *Cels.* 6.33). The context where Origen mentions the trees and the sword is the ascent of the soul through the gates of paradise guarded by the archons. As pointed out above, the archons as gatekeepers are probably based on the cherubs of Gen 3:24, guarding the way to the tree of life with the flaming sword. It is possible, then, that the circles of life and *gnosis* symbolize the salvific trees, which the archons try to keep out of reach of the ascending soul. The ultimate goal of the soul appears to be the "light of the Son and Father," mentioned in the password delivered to the highest archon (*Cels.* 6.31).

4.3 THE SETHIAN SPECULATIONS ABOUT SOPHIA

4.3.1 General Remarks

In those Sethian texts that have strong Barbeloite characteristics, Sophia is either not mentioned at all,⁴⁶ or is assigned a very negative and marginal role in comparison to most texts that belong to my Ophite corpus. In some cases, Sophia does not create,⁴⁷ and often her

⁴⁴ Cf. Paul's praise of Love in 1 Cor 13.

⁴⁵ Possibly identical with the "wall of fire" (φραγμὸν πυρός) mentioned at *Cels.* 6.31.40 Borret.

⁴⁶ This is the case in *Melch.*, *Allogenes*, *Norea*, *Marsanes* and *Steles Seth*, although the latter two appear to speak of "wisdom" as an abstract concept or a quality (*Marsanes* 3,25–4,2; *Steles Seth* 123,16–17).

⁴⁷ In *Holy Book* (III 56,22–58,22) and *Trim. Prot.* (39,13–40,16), Eleleth, and not Sophia, is responsible for the material cosmos, while Sophia produces the chief archon. The Cod. Bruc. *Untitled* 20 does not seem to connect Pistis Sophia with creation at all.

guilt, negativity and weakness are stressed.⁴⁸ Her soteriological role is replaced by actions of other divinities, or by a seer's self-actualized contemplative ascent, whose goal is to assimilate with the divine, as in Turner's "Platonizing Sethian treatises" (*Zost.*, *Marsanes*, *Allogenes*, *Steles Seth*).⁴⁹ Sophia is also distinguished from the highly valued figure of Barbelo, who is usually the first thought (ἔννοια) of the supreme God. Barbelo bears many features of the personified Wisdom of Jewish speculations,⁵⁰ but obviously the Jewish Wisdom texts never called Wisdom "Barbelo." Usually in Sethian texts with Barbeloite features, some 20–30 aeons separate Barbelo and Sophia proper from each other; and while Barbelo is normally the second principle, Sophia is often the last of the aeons, considered weak, guilty, and in need of repentance and salvation. In these texts, Life and *gnosis* are connected with Barbelo or the Father, not with Sophia.⁵¹ This demotion of Sophia proper may be due to a philosophical interest in protecting the supreme God from contact with the imperfect material cosmos, by distancing him as far from it as possible. It may finally be noted that some Sethian texts with Barbeloite features, including *Ap. John*, presuppose a two-level salvation in that the "seed of Seth" has its place in the third light, Daveithe, whereas those who repent later will be placed in the fourth light, Eleleth (see, e.g., *Ap. John* II 9,14–23 parr.). On the other hand, according to *Holy Book*, the fourth light is simply the resting place for

⁴⁸ *Trim. Prot.* (39,13–40,16) speaks of the "conquered" Sophia; according to *Holy Book*, Sophia is material (ΣΥΛΙΚΗ ΣΟΦΙΑ) and seems to exist completely outside the upper worlds (III 57,1); *Zost.* says Sophia created "darkness" (ΚΑΚΕ) and that her countenance was deceiving (ΣΑΛΖΟ) (9,16–10,17); *Gos. Judas* (44,4) calls Sophia "corruptible" (ΤΣΟΦΙΑ ΠΦΥΑΡΤΗ); Irenaeus' Barbeloite account states that Sophia produced the chief archon without the approval of the Supreme God, and that she ended up grieving and had to stay outside the upper worlds (*Adv. haer.* 1.29.4).

⁴⁹ See Turner 2001, 637–643, 747–749. See also pp. 256–257 below.

⁵⁰ For example, in *Ap. John*, Barbelo is described as the first thought and image of God (II 5,4–5 parr.; cf. *Wis* 7:25–26; *Prov* 8:22ff.) and the Holy Spirit (*Ap. John* II 5,7–8 parr.; cf. *Wis* 7:7; *Prov* 1:22–23). According to *Steles Seth* 123,16–17, Barbelo is or has "wisdom." See also Sieber 1981.

⁵¹ (Eternal) Life (*Vita aeterna*) and (*Pro-*)*gnosis* are features of Barbelo in *Adv. haer.* 1.29.1 (Barbeloites); *Trim. Prot.* 35,12–19; 36,10–13; and *Cod. Bruc. Untitled 9. Holy Book* IV 51,22–52,2 assigns Life and *gnosis* to the Father. In Turner's Platonizing Sethian treatises, the existence/being-life/vitality-mind/blessedness triad (*Allogenes* 49,26ff.; 59,10–20; 60,16–37; 61,36–37; 62,19–23; *Zost.* 14,13–14; 15,5–11; 15,13–17; 20,22–24; 66,16–17; 66,23–67,2; 68,1–7; 73,8–11; 75,7–10; 79,10–15; 86,15–22; *StelesSeth*: 122,19–25; 125,28–32; *Marsanes* 9,16–18 speaks of a *gnosis*-hypostasis-activity triad, possibly a variant of the being-life-mind triad; see Turner 2001, 708) is found, which is at times identified with the Triple-Powered One (e.g., *Zost.* 15,18–19), a quasi-entity between Father and Barbelo (See Turner 2001, 512–531).

the souls ($\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$) of the sons of Seth (III 65,20–22).⁵² This, in any case, may be an indication that the authors of *Ap. John* were influenced by an Ophite concept of two-level salvation.

Interestingly, in those Sethian texts where few, if any, Barbeloite features are present, one often finds an important Sophia or a mother-figure comparable to her. According to the “Sethian” accounts dependent on Hippolytus’ *Syntagma* (Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 2.7–9; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 39), a heavenly “Mother of all” causes the birth of Seth, implants her divine power in him (*Pan.* 39.2.4), and tries (unsuccessfully) to protect Seth’s seed from mingling with Cain’s (39.2.7–3.3). Finally, she sends Seth as Jesus (39.3.5) (cf. *Haer.* 2.7–9). The “Archontics” (*Pan.* 40) affirm that Seth is the son of Adam and Eve, and is protected by a higher power (40.7.1–3). A “shining mother” (40.2.3) exists in the Eighth Heaven, above the archons, and she may be identical with the power that protects Seth. *Apoc. Adam*, a text with a certain amount of Barbeloite features, also concentrates on the survival of Seth’s race in the Flood and destruction by fire, but Sophia, Norea and Barbelo do not appear in this text. The text does, however, engage in speculations about Eve who had seen the supracelestial glory before her union with Adam and who taught him the knowledge ($\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$) of the supreme God (64,1–13). Thus, speculations concerning Sophia and Eve (or comparable figures) appear to be more prominent in those texts of Schenke’s Sethian corpus that mostly or completely lack Barbeloite features. As noted above, the appearance of Sophia is not a feature of Schenke’s (heavily Barbeloite) “Sethian system,” while speculations about a powerful Sophia are an important feature of the Ophite mythology.

While the Ophite Sophia myth has already been examined in some detail, I will next consider those texts where Ophite and Barbeloite material occur together. Epiphanius’ account of the “libertine Gnostics” in *Pan.* 26 does not mention Sophia, but it does mention Barbelo, Norea and Eve. Barbelo appears as a heavenly mother-figure, called the “Mother of all living” (26.10.10), although her relationship to

⁵² *Zost.*, *Melch.* and *Steles Seth* also mention the heavenly seed of Seth, but do not clearly connect it with specific lights with repentant ones on a lower level. This lack of clarity may, however, be due to the lacunar state of the manuscripts. On the other hand, *Zost.* includes the aeon of Repentance in the divine hierarchy, below the four lights (5,26ff.).

the mother from whom the archons stole the divine power (26.1.9) is unclear (cf. 25.2.2–4; 25.3.4)—the two may be separate figures. In addition, Epiphanius' citation from the *Book of Norea* corresponds almost exactly to *Hyp. Arch.*'s story of Noah and Norea (*Pan.* 26.1.4–9; *Hyp. Arch.* 92,14–18), where the latter burns the ark, acting against the archontic forces. The *Gospel of Eve*, for its part, attributes the reception of knowledge from the snake to Eve, and, like *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*, it appears to contain a quotation from *Thund.* (13,19–14,9; 16,18–19; *Pan.* 26.3.1). Even though Sophia herself is not found in *Pan.* 26, the connections to *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* suggest that behind those sections of *Pan.* 26 that speculate about Eve, Norea and Barbelo, may be found Ophite Sophia traditions, influenced by Barbeloite language. Furthermore, as has been pointed out, *Hyp. Arch.* has only one Barbeloite feature, the figure of Eleleth. While Sophia remains an important character in *Hyp. Arch.*, her role is perhaps slightly less significant than in the other texts of the Ophite corpus examined thus far: Sophia's guilt is stressed in *Hyp. Arch.* due to the fact that she is said to have created alone without her consort (94,5–7). Eleleth also performs an important soteriological function in saving Norea and instructing her (92,32ff.), thus diminishing Sophia's role. A similar shift from the mighty Ophite Sophia to a diminished Barbeloite Sophia can be clearly seen in *Ap. John*, to which we finally turn.

4.3.2 *Rewriting of the Ophite Sophia Myth in the Apocryphon of John*

The authors of *Ap. John* employ the Barbeloite speculation concerning the Godhead and the upper worlds (approximately II 4,29–10,28 parr.), but they have combined it with a version of the Ophite rewriting of Genesis (approximately II 11,15–30,11 parr.). However, in both recensions of *Ap. John*, Sophia's role and importance have been dramatically reduced in comparison to, for example, Irenaeus' Ophite source and *Orig. World*. Other divinities, most notably Christ, Barbelo-Pronoia and Epinoia, now perform tasks that were Sophia's activities in most texts of the Ophite corpus. This is already visible in SR, and the author of LR has added a new twist by reassigning many tasks to Barbelo-Pronoia. Barbelo, in both recensions, is the first thought (ἔννοια) of the supreme God, and her attributes include πρόγνωσις and eternal life (ὠνιζ ὡς ἐνεζ < ζῶνι αἰώνιος); she is also the Providence (πρόνοια) (II 4,26–5,32 parr.).

Whereas Sophia remained essentially a guiltless and mighty figure in most texts of the Ophite corpus, her role in *Ap. John* is quite different. Sophia is the last of the divinities,⁵³ and she wishes to bring forth a likeness out of herself, without the approval of the supreme God and her consort (II 9,25–10,5 parr.). The result is a non-likeness, the imperfect and theriomorphic chief archon Ialdabaoth, whom she hides in a cloud lest others see him (II 10,6–19 parr.). Her creation is also characterized as “darkness” (II 11,10; 13,32–36 parr.). Remember that in *Orig. World*, Sophia’s creation was a “likeness of heaven having an unimaginable magnitude.” Ialdabaoth steals⁵⁴ a power from Sophia, whose recovery becomes a central theme in *Ap. John*. Sophia repents and is ashamed, but is allowed to enter only a middle world between the cosmos and the upper worlds. She has to stay there until her deficiency is corrected (II 14,7–13 parr.). In *Orig. World* and *Hyp. Arch.*, it was Sabaoth who repented and was installed above the cosmos; and in *Orig. World*, the Immortal Adam of Light was the one who had to stay in the middle realm instead of Sophia. In *Ap. John*, several figures are said to participate in the correction of Sophia’s deficiency, including Sophia’s consort,⁵⁵ Epinoia,⁵⁶ and Sophia herself.⁵⁷ This correction seems to mean the perfection of human beings by awakening them from ignorance and by teaching them the salvific knowledge of origin and return (II 20,14–28 parr.; II 23,26–35). When Sophia wished to retrieve the lost power, she asked the Father (Barbelo-Pronoia in LR) for help. This one sent five beings⁵⁸ who tricked Ialdabaoth into blowing the power into the newly created but motionless Adam. The latter immediately became luminous and wiser than his creators, and Ialdabaoth cast him down into the lowest regions of matter (II 19,15–20,9 parr.). Note that this tricking of Ialdabaoth was done by Sophia herself in Irenaeus’ source. The Father (Barbelo-Pronoia in LR) now had mercy towards the power of Sophia in Adam, and sent him a helper, identified as Epinoia and Zoe (II 20,9–19 parr.). Epinoia hides in Adam and teaches him the salvific knowledge (II 20,17–26 parr.). In

⁵³ Sophia is the last of the aeons of Eleleth, who, for his part, is the last of the four lights (see II 8,16–20 parr.).

⁵⁴ II 10,19–21 parr. The word, “theft” (ἵλασι), is used in II 13,22.

⁵⁵ II 14,7–9; BG 47,4–7; cf. BG 60,12–14. Cf. also the Spirit in II 25,9–16 parr.

⁵⁶ II 20,24–28; cf. BG 53,18–54,4.

⁵⁷ II 14,9–13 parr.; cf. II 23,18–25.

⁵⁸ SR: Autogenes-Christ and his four lights (BG 51,4–12 par.); LR: five lights (II 19,15–21). See also pp. 257–258 below.

fact, she is identified as the tree of knowledge from which the archons try to prevent Adam and Eve from eating (II 22,3–9 parr.). Later she appeared in Eve, after Ialdabaoth had created her out of a portion of Sophia's power that had been extracted from Adam (II 22,15–23,4 parr.). While in *Ap. John* it is Christ who instructs Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge (II 22,9 parr.), in Irenaeus' source it was Sophia, using the snake as her tool.

Whereas SR has often replaced Sophia with other divinities, LR further replaces them with Barbelo-Pronoia.⁵⁹ In some cases, LR has even substituted Barbelo-Pronoia in place of the Father, the supreme God (although Barbelo herself can be called "Father" as well; BG 27,1ff. parr.). In *Orig. World*, Pistis Sophia rebuked Ialdabaoth and showed her likeness in the waters, and in Irenaeus' Ophite source Sophia rebuked Ialdabaoth and provided the archons with the model for Adam. However, in SR it is Father, and in LR Barbelo-Pronoia, who perform these functions (II 14,13–34 parr.).⁶⁰ In Irenaeus' Ophite source, Sophia informed Noah of the Flood and thus saved him, but in SR this is done by Epinoia, and in LR by Pronoia (II 29,1–15 parr.).⁶¹ Sophia removed the divine spark from Eve before the latter was raped, cursed, and expelled in Irenaeus' Ophite source (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.7,8), whereas in LR, Pronoia had Zoe snatched out of Eve before the latter was raped by Ialdabaoth (II 24,13–15).⁶² Furthermore, LR concludes with a Pronoia hymn (II 30,11–31,25), which relates Pronoia's three-fold salvific descent in the first person singular form. Since Christ also intervenes at times in the first person singular (e.g., II 2,9–25; 21,9 parr.), LR ends up identifying Christ with Barbelo-Pronoia, who is the mother of Christ (II 6,10–7,32 parr.). LR does, however, explain that the primordial triad of Father-Mother-Son equals Christ (II 2,13–15 parr.), and thus all of its three members are aspects of one and the same Godhead. According to SR, it was the mother (Sophia), who had come before Christ to correct her deficiency, but this statement is missing from LR and is, in fact, replaced by the Pronoia hymn. Due

⁵⁹ Cf. Barc and Painchaud 1999.

⁶⁰ SR identifies this figure as the Father, the first man, but since the Supreme God is described in terms of negative theology (BG 23,3–26,14 parr.), and Barbelo is also called the "first man" (BG 27,1ff. parr.), it is likely Barbelo in SR who rebukes Ialdabaoth and shows herself in the waters (in a masculine form). See Chapter 5.

⁶¹ SR also speaks of Pronoia here, but identifies her one way or another with Epinoia.

⁶² SR does not mention the removal.

to the addition of the Pronoia hymn, LR now states that humankind has been under the dominion of death until the salvific descent of *Pronoia* (II 30,4ff.) who is Christ. However, since *Pronoia-Barbelo* is also a Wisdom-figure, the *Pronoia* hymn effectively contains Wisdom Christology. The hymn is further related to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, and their relationship will be examined in Chapter 9.

Moreover, the paradise symbolism has been altered in *Ap. John* since the tree of life and the snake have only negative meanings.⁶³ Whereas Christ instructed Adam and Eve to eat of *Epinoia*, i.e., the tree of *gnosis*, the tree of life is said to be a death-bringing counterfeit spirit of the archons (II 21,19–22,2 parr.). However, it has a divine counterpart, the spirit of life (II 25,23–26,19; 27,17–21 parr.). At birth, everyone receives a soul (*Sophia's* lost power) (II 26,12–15 parr.), and one of the two spirits; those who receive the spirit of life will be saved (II 25,23–26,19; 27,17–21 parr.), whereas those who receive the counterfeit spirit are lead astray. The latter also have a chance for salvation, but only by a divine intervention (II 26,26–32 parr.) or by following another soul who has the spirit of life (II 26,36–27,21 parr.). In other words, one can be saved by receiving the salvific *gnosis* from someone who already possesses it. Ultimately, the salvific knowledge of origin and return derives from Christ.

4.4 CONCLUSION

With the exception of *Ap. John* (and perhaps also *Pan.* 26), the texts of the Ophite corpus present an important and mighty figure of *Sophia*. She is the female aspect of the true Godhead (all female deities are *Sophia/Eve*-figures), and a world soul, penetrating most ontological levels of reality. Thus, she occupies an important position in the universe. She is also a major soteriological agent, and this role is expressed in a highly mythological way: she is intimately connected, and sometimes identified, with the trees of paradise, *Eve*, and even the snake. First, *Sophia* and *gnosis* can be intimately connected in the following ways: (1) a *Sophia*-figure uses the snake as a tool to teach Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of *gnosis*; (2) a *Sophia*-figure becomes herself the tree of *gnosis*; and (3) the circle of *gnosis*, in the Ophite diagram,

⁶³ The snake in paradise (II 22,9–15 parr.) and the serpentine *Ialdabaoth* (II 10,9) are both depicted in a very negative light. See Chapter 2 above.

is accompanied by inscriptions, “Sophia’s providence” and “Sophia’s nature.” Second, Sophia is depicted as a heavenly projection of Eve, whose name in LXX Gen 3:20 is Zoe, “Life.” This can also lead to an additional identification between Sophia and the tree of Life, as in Prov 3:18. Some of the Sophia-figures explicitly bear the Biblical titles of Eve, such as the “Mother of the living” or Zoe, and the collectivity of Sophias is possibly called Zoe in some texts. The earthly and spiritual Eves are likewise emanations or daughters of higher Sophias. In the Ophite mythology, Sophia and Eve are two sides of the same coin, so to speak. Furthermore, both Eve and Sophia oppose the archons in the Ophite mythology, and remain essentially guiltless and heroic figures. It seems that MacRae was perhaps too eager to see only the stereotypical, negative aspect of the “Gnostic” Sophia myth, the “Fall,” when he tried to derive it from the standard reading of Gen 3 with its blame on Eve. The preceding analysis has shown that the Ophite Sophia, while retaining her identity as the Wisdom of God of Jewish literature, is indeed also presented as a heavenly projection of Eve. However, since Eve’s deed in paradise is now considered a positive, salvific event, the actions of her heavenly counterpart are consequently depicted in positive and soteriological terms as well. Third, both Sophia and Eve are closely linked with the snake: the snake not only is explained as being Eve’s instructor in paradise, but it (1) is also used by a Sophia-figure as her tool (*Adv. haer.* 1.30; *Hyp. Arch.*); (2) was confused with an offspring of a Sophia-figure (*Orig. World*); or (3) is identical with Sophia herself, as was the opinion of some, according to Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.15).

Texts that belong to my Ophite corpus also utilize what appears to be Christianized Wisdom soteriology. Until the coming of Christ, Sophia fights the archons and protects her own, i.e., those with her light-spark in them. However, Christ (or an unidentified male figure), who is often depicted as the brother or the male aspect of Sophia, performs the final soteriological act. Salvation equals knowledge of the Godhead, but there are various degrees of this knowledge. Sophia can lead to rudimentary levels of *gnosis* and salvation, while the higher ones are communicated by or associated with a Christ-figure. Although according to *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, mere knowledge of the Son of Man leads one to a lower level of salvation, the risen Jesus, communicating the salvific *gnosis*, is nevertheless a being different from the Son of Man, and comes from the realm of the supreme God and the “kingless generation.” The kingless generation, when it is mentioned in Ophite

texts, is always associated with the highest degree of salvation/religious status. Because it sometimes surpasses spirituality (*Orig. World, Hyp. Arch.*, perhaps *Eugnostos*), the concept may derive from Paul's critique of the "spiritual kings" in 1 Cor, rather than from debates with the "spiritual" Valentinians. The possible anti-Valentinian usage of the concept in *Orig. World* and *Eugnostos V* may well be secondary.

Whereas Sophia is an important entity in the Ophite mythology she is quite marginal, guilty, and usually unconnected with Eve (Life) and *gnosis* in most of Schenke's Sethian texts, especially if they have Barbeloite features. In addition, those Sethian texts that are commonly dated late, like Turner's Platonizing Sethian treatises or the Cod. Bruc. *Untitled*, hardly speak of Sophia anymore. The authors of *Ap. John* have drawn upon mythological speculations that I have identified as Ophite, but they have rewritten these by greatly reducing the role and importance of Sophia. This is in accordance with their additional adoption of the Barbeloite concept of the Godhead, in which Sophia plays a marginal role. She is no longer the pervading female force in the universe, but the last of the divinities, whose guilt and weakness are emphasized. Other divinities now perform tasks that were Sophia's activities in the Ophite mythology. According to *Ap. John*, the salvific knowledge is given by Christ and it is associated with the presence or help of the spirit of life. The content of this knowledge is one's origin in, and return to, the upper worlds. It is interesting to note that Pronoia ("providence"), who in *Ap. John* carries out many of Sophia's previous roles, was an attribute of Sophia in *Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Cels.* 6.24–38 and *Orig. World*. It seems that Pronoia has assumed a life of her own at the expense of Sophia. Since Pronoia has also been identified with Christ in LR, this has led to a "Pronoia" Christology, where the fallen Sophia has been replaced with a lofty Wisdom-figure different from the Sophia proper of the Ophite myth. This move away from a *Sophia* Christology properly speaking, is common to most Sethian texts with Barbeloite features, where Sophia has faded away, and where sometimes another figure, Barbelo-Pronoia or Seth, has been identified with Christ. Such a move may derive from a reluctance to identify the Savior Christ with the fallen and thus troublesome figure of Sophia. Many Sethian texts with Barbeloite characteristics also place more emphasis on knowledge of the self, as well as on Platonic techniques of contemplation and mystical vision of the Godhead, than on the salvific activities of Sophia or Christ. There is thus a very clear difference between the Ophite and Barbeloite versions of the Sophia myth. It may further be noted here

that the Naassene and Peratic teachings, as well as *Testim. Truth*, do not speak of Sophia.⁶⁴

The Ophite Sophia speculations greatly resemble Jewish Wisdom traditions as found, for example, in *1 Enoch*, *Wisd*, *Prov*, and *Philo* (most Sethian texts, especially those with important Barbeloite characteristics, contain merely traces of these Jewish traditions, although both Sophia proper and the Barbelo-Pronoia still retain features of the Jewish Wisdom-figure). Clearly the Ophite authors were very familiar with such Wisdom speculations, as probably were Paul's Corinthian opponents. The Ophite authors also entertained notions that Paul strongly opposed in 1 Cor, such as the foolishness of the crucifixion and the high value of Wisdom in the search for God. On the other hand, some of Paul's modifications to Jewish Wisdom speculations were accepted with additional modifications in Ophite texts: the enlargement of the concept of *gnosis* and the very concept of Wisdom Christology. However, in the hands of the Ophite authors, these concepts were incorporated into a new, Gnostic worldview, where the idols became the seven archons and Christ became Sophia's consort. The adaptation of Wisdom Christology also led to a Christianized form of Wisdom soteriology. In addition, Paul's criticism of the spiritual kings may lie behind the Ophite concept of "kingless generation." It therefore seems clear that the Ophite authors had knowledge of both Jewish Wisdom speculations and of Paul's debates with and criticism of his Corinthian opponents.

Of course, neither Paul nor his Corinthian opponents were Gnostics since they both still identify the creator with the supreme God. The "archons of this age" (1 Cor 2:6–8), or the "god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4), for that matter, are not said to be separate creators. The separation of the creator from the true God is arguably the most decisive hallmark of Gnosticism,⁶⁵ and it occupies a prominent place in most Classic Gnostic texts.⁶⁶ Another great difference between 1 Cor and

⁶⁴ *Testim. Truth* 43,14 mentions wisdom (σοφία) as a feature of an archetypal man (thus, Pearson 1981, 103). Peratics affirm that the Son of God is the universal serpent who, among other things, manifested himself in the "wise words of Eve" (ὁ σοφὸς τῆς Εὕας λόγος); and, by referring to John 1:1–4, they explain that Life (ζωή) was formed in the Word of God (*Ref.* 5.16.8–13).

⁶⁵ See Pétremont 1990; Culiuanu 1992, 121; M. Williams 1996; Marksches 2003, 16–17.

⁶⁶ *Eugnostos'* silence concerning the lowly creator is understandable since the text concentrates on describing the upper realms.

the Ophite texts is the highly mythological way the latter express their ideas. The parallels nevertheless call for an explanation. Because the next chapter examines more parallels between 1 Cor and the Ophite mythology, I will consider the nature of these parallels only at the end of the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

ADAM AND CHRIST

The rewritten story of Adam's creation, based on Gen 1–3, forms a central piece of Ophite mythology. Not only does it receive much attention in texts that have Ophite features, but it also serves as the background for speculations about the nature of God, both the true "Man-God" and the demoted, even demonic, creator god (although technically the creator is not a god but an angelic being). In the Ophite versions of Gen 1–3, the creation of Adam is always preceded by Ialdabaoth's false monotheistic claim. Ialdabaoth is rebuked as a liar and is sometimes informed of the true Godhead, a heavenly man and his son. Ialdabaoth with his archons then create the earthly Adam according to a heavenly model, i.e., in the image and/or likeness of the Man-God of whom they have been made aware. This mythologoumenon is thus intimately related to the arguably most decisive feature of Gnosticism (however defined): the distinction between "two gods." Since the texts of the Ophite corpus contain polemical statements concerning the concept of divinity, and have interesting parallels to both 1 Cor and the writings of Philo, we have plenty of clues as to the background of the mythology these texts contain.

This chapter is divided into four parts. In the first part, I will take a brief look at 1 Cor 15 (where Christ is the second, heavenly Adam) and its Hellenistic Jewish background as a possible context of the Ophite speculations about Adam. In the second part, I will examine the Classic Gnostic mythologoumenon of Adam's creation and animation. As will be seen, in the case of the Ophite texts, there are clear parallels to Philo's exegesis of Gen 1–3 as well as to 1 Cor 15, while most of Schenke's Sethian texts are virtually silent about the earthly Adam's creation. In the third part, then, the speculations about heavenly men will be examined. Texts both in my Ophite corpus and Schenke's Sethian corpus contain speculations about the heavenly Adam and heavenly humanity, but these speculations are different and more pronounced in the Ophite texts (with the exception of *Ap. John* where the Barbeloite concept of the Godhead has replaced the Ophite one). Accordingly, while a heavenly Adam is a feature of both Schenke's

“Sethian system” and my Ophite myth, there is a clear difference in his role between these types of mythological speculations. Especially the Ophite speculations are further linked with the demonization of the Jewish creator God, and these links point to a religious dispute concerning monotheism and Christ’s divinity that seems to underlie the Ophite mythologoumenon about Adam. In the conclusion to this chapter, the background of this Ophite mythologoumenon (including its links to 1 Cor) will be discussed. I will also return to the questions of Ialdabaoth’s theriomorphism, as well as to the relationship between the Ophite mythology and the Naassene teaching, as both questions are related to the Ophite mythologoumenon about earthly and heavenly Adams.

5.1 THE HELLENISTIC JEWISH BACKGROUND OF 1 COR 15:45–47

In 1 Cor 15:45–47, Paul speaks of two Adams. He cites Gen 2:7 and says that a spiritual, life-giving Adam came from heaven only after a psychic one had been created out of the earth. The interpretation of these verses has been notoriously difficult, but many scholars agree that they are somehow related to Gnosticism, directly or indirectly: it has been suggested, for example, that the verses reflect the “Gnostic” mythology of Paul’s opponents,¹ or (more often today) that both Paul and certain Gnostic authors have independently drawn upon similar Hellenistic Jewish traditions.²

Basically, three solutions have been proposed as to what Paul opposes in 1 Cor 15:45–47: (1) nothing;³ (2) an Adam mythology in which the heavenly man is placed before the earthly one;⁴ or (3) a dualistic

¹ Jervell 1960, 243, 257–268; Schottroff 1970, 133–135, 166–167, 170ff.; Schmithals 1971, 169–170. Cf. Conzelmann 1975, 283–288. Reitzenstein (1978, 443–444) even thought Paul himself was a Gnostic.

² Pearson 1973, 24–26, 51ff., 82–83; Sandelin 1976, 40–41. Hultgren (2003), however, thinks Paul was influenced by Rabbinic Adam-traditions.

³ Pétrement 1990, 113; Hultgren 2003.

⁴ Jervell 1960, 243, 257–268; Pearson 1973, 24–26, 51ff., 82–83; Conzelmann 1975, 283–287. In addition, scholars of the History-of-Religions School, e.g., Bultmann (1951, 174, 204), Bousset (1970, 178) and Reitzenstein (1978, 443–444), suggested that a pre-Christian Gnostic Primal Man myth is reflected in 1 Cor 15:45–47. These theories were based, in fact, on sources later than the birth of Christianity, and are generally refuted today. See Colpe 1961; and K. King 2003, 71–109. Sandelin (1976, 149–153) suggests that Paul is mainly opposing Sophia speculations in 1 Cor 15:44–49.

anthropology overemphasizing the spiritual element.⁵ The insistence in verse 46, that “it is not the spiritual that is first, but the psychic, and then the spiritual,” does suggest a polemical background,⁶ as does the larger context, namely the dispute about the resurrection of the dead, denied by some in Corinth (v. 12). In fact, vv. 45–47 are part of Paul’s argument for the *bodily* resurrection. He appeals not only to the existence of heavenly, i.e., otherworldly bodies (v. 40),⁷ but also to the transformation of the psychic and mortal bodies into spiritual and otherworldly ones by the spirit. Whereas all humans have inherited mortal and psychic nature from the earthly Adam, they (or at least Christians) will be resurrected in a spiritual and heavenly body by virtue of the heavenly Adam’s transforming and life-giving spirit (vv. 44–57). Of course for Paul, the heavenly Adam is Christ, the image of God (2 Cor 4:4), who spiritually lives in Christians (Gal 2:20; Rom 8:9–11). However, one is then entitled to ask why Paul uses an exegesis of Gen 2:7 to prove his point, and why he speaks of Christ covertly as a heavenly Adam. Paul’s imagery here draws upon Hellenistic Judaism. Philo also distinguished between two Adams in his exegesis of Gen 2:7 in that a heavenly man, created according to the image of God (Gen 1:26f.), was breathed into the earthly Adam (Gen 2:7) as the spiritual element.⁸ Sometimes Philo even speaks of the heavenly man as the Logos (*Conf.* 146). Like Paul, Philo also uses the terms ψυχικός and πνευματικός in discussing Adam’s creation.⁹ Sandelin has further shown that Paul depicts Christ here in a way similar to how Sophia is depicted in Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom literature.¹⁰ If Paul’s opponents were familiar with these kinds of traditions, and perhaps also appealed to such traditions themselves, as it seems, Paul’s language becomes understandable.¹¹ Hultgren’s suggestion that Paul does not

⁵ Schottroff 1970, 166–167; Schmithals 1971, 155–159, 169–170. Martin (1995, 129) thinks that the opponents’ denial of bodily resurrection was influenced by popular philosophy, not by “spiritualism.”

⁶ The expressions τὸ ψυχικόν and τὸ πνευματικόν in v. 46 are neuter (cf. Schmithals 1971, 141), and thus cannot strictly speaking refer to the Adams or the ἄνθρωπος of v. 45. However, the neuters could be taken to mean, “that which is psychic, pneumatic,” and in v. 45, the first Adam is called a living ψυχή, and the second Adam a life-giving πνεῦμα.

⁷ Cf. Martin 1995, 117–120.

⁸ *Opif.* 134–135; *Her.* 55–56; *Leg. all.* 2.4–5; *QG* 2.56.

⁹ *Opif.* 66–67. Cf. Pearson 1973, 7–26.

¹⁰ Sandelin 1976, 44–48, 57–113, 135–153.

¹¹ Cf. Pearson 1973, 24.

here oppose Hellenistic Jewish ideology in any way, but simply wishes to explain the nature of the resurrection body from a Rabbinic point-of-view, does not seem convincing to me.¹²

It has also been suggested that Paul here is actually opposing Philo's exegesis, or at least speculations very similar to it.¹³ However, Philo's exegesis does not necessarily contradict that of Paul, at least not completely.¹⁴ Both Paul and Philo may have accepted that there is a heavenly man who *existed* or was *ontologically* prior to the earthly one, but who *manifested* himself in the cosmos only after the creation of the earthly Adam.¹⁵ They also agree that the heavenly man lives in humans as a spirit. But Paul seems to be saying that the earthly Adam did not receive this spirit at his creation (possibly only Christians have it), and here he contradicts Philo. For Paul, the life-giving spirit is the resurrected Christ, who as such is sharply contrasted with the "death-bringing" Adam who became merely a living soul (*ψυχή*) (1 Cor 15:20–23, 45–49; Rom 5:12–21). However, it will be shown in this chapter that the Ophite texts not only extensively utilize Hellenistic Jewish traditions, but also generally disagree with Paul on three counts: (1) the heavenly man *manifested* himself in the cosmos even before the creation of the earthly Adam; (2) the earthly Adam also received the spirit at his creation; and (3) this spirit is not identical with the heavenly man¹⁶. How this is related to Paul's opposition in 1 Cor 15, will be discussed in the course of this chapter.

¹² Hultgren 2003. The Rabbinic parallels (e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 8:1; 14:2–5; *Midr. Teh.* on Ps 139) are, of course, not only much later than Paul, but also not always very obvious (e.g., *Midr. Teh.* on Ps 139; see Hultgren 2003, 362–363). Furthermore, Hultgren (2003, 344–350) appeals to the sometimes apparent contradictions in Philo's thought, to dismiss him as a possible background, but these self-contradictions do not undermine the fact that Philo, for example, does sometimes speak of two Adams. Additionally, Hultgren's criticism and his own suggestion rely perhaps too heavily on the terminology of "first" or "heavenly" and "second" or "earthly" men, which is not of the uttermost importance here.

¹³ Pearson 1973, 18–26; Conzelmann 1975, 287; Sellin 1986, e.g., 175–181.

¹⁴ Cf. Wedderburn 1973, 302–306; Hultgren 2003, 344–357.

¹⁵ For Philo, the heavenly man was created first but was breathed into the earthly one only after the latter's creation (see above). Paul, in my view, certainly thought that Christ existed before Adam (see Phil 2:5–11; Rom 8:3; 9:5; Gal 4:4). Cf. Sandelin 1976, 97; Sellin 1986, 173; Hurtado 2003, 118ff.

¹⁶ Cf. Sandelin 1976, 41.

5.2 THE CREATION AND ANIMATION OF ADAM

Irenaeus' Ophite account (*Adv. haer.* 1.30), *Ap. John, Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* utilize common material and common exegesis in describing Adam's creation and animation. However, Irenaeus' Greek text has come down to us only in a Latin translation,¹⁷ and the Greek original was probably already a summarized and paraphrased version of the underlying source. Thus, the specific features of the common exegesis are not always as visible in this account as they are in the three Coptic texts. Nevertheless, all four texts clearly make use of common material. Furthermore, although this common material concerning Adam's creation and animation has parallels to both Philo's exegesis of Gen 1–3 and 1 Cor 15 (e.g., various distinctions between a spiritual and a psychic Adam based on an exegesis of Gen 2:7), it does not show any clear *dependence* on 1 Cor.¹⁸ However, the special materials unique to *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* then seem to react, in their respective ways, to Paul's teaching about two Adams in 1 Cor 15.

In Irenaeus' Ophite account, Adam's creation is set in motion by the refutation of Ialdabaoth's false monotheistic claim. The refutation includes the statement that Man and Son of Man exist above him (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.6). Having heard this, and in order to distract his offspring, Ialdabaoth proposes the creation of Adam in words derived from Gen 1:26, "Let us make man after our image" (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.6). Here the archons do not actually see any kind of divine image as in the Coptic texts but Sophia causes them to think of Man (*Matre dante illis excogitationem hominis, Adv. haer.* 1.30.6; the supreme God is called by the same term in 1.30.1). In other words, the heavenly man appears to the archons, only not visibly, but mentally. Adam is first described as gigantic, which reflects a Jewish tradition of his original huge size.¹⁹ Even though not stated clearly in Irenaeus' summary, this Adam created by the archons is said to have received a soul (*anima* < ψυχή) from Ialdabaoth (see 1.30.9). Ialdabaoth is then tricked into blowing the spirit (*spiritus* < πνεῦμα) he got from Sophia into Adam (Gen 2:7). As a consequence, Adam receives *nous* and *enthymesis*, which give

¹⁷ Theodoret's Greek account (*Haer. fab. comp.* 1.14), based on Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30, is silent about Adam's creation.

¹⁸ A quotation of 1 Cor 15:50 does occur in *Adv. haer.* 1.30, but in a separate context discussing Jesus' resurrection body (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.13).

¹⁹ See, e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 8.1; 12.6; 21.3; 24.2; *b. Hag.* 12a; *b. Sanh.* 38b.

him a proper life (previously he could only writhe on the ground) and the knowledge of the supreme God (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.6). These two divine elements are also said to partake in salvation. *Nous* is the Greek equivalent to the Jewish *pneuma* in tripartite anthropology,²⁰ and the author of this Ophite source seems to have combined these two notions in that Adam receives *nous* through the breathing of *pneuma*. Philo (*Opif.* 135; *Somn.* 1.34; *Her.* 55f.) uses both terms alternatively. It is to be noted, however, that neither element is here identified with the heavenly man. Later, when Adam eats from the forbidden tree, Ialdabaoth casts him and Eve down to earth where their bodies become corporeal and mortal, whereas previously they had spiritual bodies (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.8–9). This seems to correspond to *Ap. John*'s teaching that Adam and Eve were created anew from the earth and clothed in mortal bodies, a teaching based partly on an exegesis of Gen 3:21. In Irenaeus' Ophite source, the changing of the bodies into corporeal and mortal ones takes place after the Fall, which indeed suggests a derivation of this idea from Gen 3:21.

In *Ap. John*, the creation of Adam is likewise connected with the rebuke of Ialdabaoth's false monotheistic claim (II 13,5–15,5 parr.).²¹ Not only does a *luminous* (cf. Gen 1:3) image of a heavenly man appear in the *waters* (1:2),²² but Ialdabaoth is also informed of the existence of Man and Son of Man above him (*Ap. John* II 13,8–14,34 parr.). As a consequence, Ialdabaoth suggests to the archons, "Come, let us create a man according to the image of God and according to our likeness" (Gen 1:26; *Ap. John* II 15,2–4 parr.). The archons then create a psychic body (ΨΥΧΙΚΟΝ ΠΡΩΜΑ; II 19,12; cf. II 15,13ff. parr.) after the divine model they have seen. The concept of a *psychic* body is based on Gen 2:7 (Adam became a living ψυχή), and a similar idea is found in Philo and Paul as well. The terminology used in SR further strengthens the link to Gen 2:7.²³ This psychic Adam then receives two divine elements. The first one is a spirit (ΠΝΕΥΜΑ) that Ialdabaoth had stolen from Sophia, and which he is tricked into breathing (ΗΙΠΕ) into Adam (Gen

²⁰ See Pearson 1973, 7–26. Cf. 1 Thess 5:23; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.34; Plutarch, *De gen. Socr.* 591 D–F; Marcus Aurelius, *Medit.* 3.16.

²¹ The episode of Sophia's repentance (II 13,13–14,13 parr.) is here sandwiched between Ialdabaoth's false claim and the creation of Adam.

²² See Dahl 1981, 694–696. For the Greek wordplay on the words, φως, "light," and φώς, "man," see below.

²³ The archons are said to have created (ΔΥΤΙΑΔΩΣ) a form (πλάσμα) (III 22,8–9; BG 48,16–17). Cf. LXX Gen 2:7: ἔπλασεν.

2:7). This makes Adam move (κῑμ). The spirit is further not identified with the heavenly man who appeared in the waters. The second divine element is a helper (βοηθός), called Zoe, who assists and teaches Adam (Gen 2:18; *Ap. John* II 19,15–20,31 parr.). As in Irenaeus' source, in *Ap. John* the "earthly Adam" is also created last, *pace* Paul. Here in *Ap. John*, Adam was expelled from the heavenly regions where he was created (cf. *L.A.E., Vita* 12–17, *Apoc. Mos.* 29,37) down to earth; he was then created (πλασσε) anew from earth (Gen 2:7) and the other elements, and finally clothed (ἐνταγτασσι ρι πρωμε; Gen 3:21)²⁴ in the earthly tomb (*Ap. John* II 20,35–21,14 parr.). Here the material body proper, the earthly component, is derived from an exegesis combining Gen 2:7 and Gen 3:21. That the "garments of skins" of Gen 3:21 referred to the earthly body was also taught by Philo (QG 1.53) and certain Valentinians (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.5.5).²⁵

In *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* one finds closely related variants of this creation story where the order of events is, nevertheless, slightly different. According to *Hyp. Arch.*, the creator archons saw an image of God ("Incorruptibility") in the waters. The image appeared in the aftermath of the chief archon's false monotheistic claim, and it apparently happened in order to prove that Ialdabaoth is not the true God (86,27–87,23). The archons then proposed the creation of a man in words derived both from Gen 1:26 and Gen 2:7, "Let us create a man that will be soil from the earth" (*Hyp. Arch.* 87,23–26). The plural refers to Gen 1:26, the soil (χοῦς) to Gen 2:7. It is also said that they created the man according to their own bodies and according to the image of God they had seen (*Hyp. Arch.* 87,29–33).²⁶ Their creation is said to be completely earthly (ρηῑκαλ < χοῖκός).²⁷ The chief archon blows (πιε) into the man's face, which renders Adam psychic. In *Hyp. Arch.*, then, the creation of the earthly Adam precedes that of the psychic. But this psychic Adam is unable to arise from the ground (88,3–10). It is only by two interventions from the upper worlds that Adam is raised. Adam receives first a spirit (πῑα), which makes him move (κεῑμ) and renders him "a living soul" (Gen 2:7); and second,

²⁴ Boharic Gen 3:21 has a dialectical variant of the same verb, and the plural as in LXX: τῑττοῦ ριωτοῦ.

²⁵ Cf. Dunderberg 2005.

²⁶ As for the textual problems and the restorations of the lacunae, see Layton 1976, 33–36.

²⁷ See Crum 1962, 131b.

a voice as an assistant (βοήθεια; Gen 2:18), which enables him to name the animals (*Hyp. Arch.* 88,11–24). Later, when the spirit has passed on into the newly created Eve, it is said that Adam became *completely* psychic, and that the spiritual (πνευματική) woman came to Adam (89,10–12). This suggests that Adam, too, had been rendered spiritual while the spirit possessed him, although this is not explicitly stated. It is noteworthy that this spirit is not identified with the heavenly image that appeared to the archons. Finally, the spiritual Eve awakens Adam from sleep (89,4–17).

The author of *Hyp. Arch.* starts the whole treatise by quoting Eph 6:12, and, as Pagels has demonstrated, the creation account (*Hyp. Arch.* 87,26–88,19) is inspired by 1 Cor 15:42–49: the first man is earthly, and became a living soul (v. 45); he was sown in weakness (by the archons), but raised in glory (by the spirit) (vv. 42f.); the psychic man was before the spiritual, and the life-giving spirit came from heaven (vv. 45–47).²⁸ The term for the image of God, “Incorruptibility” (ἄφθαρσία),²⁹ serving as the model for Adam’s creation, is also found in v. 42. Whereas the other Ophite versions depict this divine model explicitly as a heavenly man, the variant here might reflect the author’s acceptance of Paul’s teaching according to which the heavenly man did not appear before the earthly one (Incorruptibility can also be seen as a Sophia-figure, see Chapter 4). Be that as it may, *Hyp. Arch.* contains exegesis of Gen 1–2 that seems to be further inspired by a pro-Pauline reading of 1 Cor 15. Such clear dependence on 1 Cor is missing from the creation accounts of *Ap. John* and Irenaeus’ Ophite source, and it seems that the author of *Hyp. Arch.* has modified the common material according to 1 Cor 15.

The related *Orig. World* includes a lengthy story about the creation and animation of Adam (107,17–109,1; 111,29–116,8), which is followed by an anthropogonic summary (117,28–118,2). While the actual creation story has many similarities to the one in *Hyp. Arch.*, the summary, which Painchaud suggests to be a redactional addition,³⁰ not only contradicts Paul’s teaching about the order in which the Adams appear, but also introduces a third Adam, possibly due to ambigui-

²⁸ Pagels 1986, especially 268–270, 276–285.

²⁹ See Crum 1962, 405b.

³⁰ Painchaud 1995b, 113, 424–432.

ties in Paul's language.³¹ The use of Paul's neologism *χοϊκός*³² in the summary further betrays a dependence on 1 Cor 15.³³ According to this summary, the first Adam was spiritual and appeared on the first day; the second one was psychic, and appeared on the sixth day; and the third Adam was earthly (*χοϊκός*), and appeared on the eighth day. Similarly, according to Philo, the ideal man of Gen 1:26f. was created on the sixth day, and the earthly one of Gen 2:7 after the seventh day (QG 2.56). The summary may betray Valentinian influence in its tripartitioning of Adam, but such a division may also simply derive from Hellenistic Jewish traditions and/or an exegesis of 1 Cor 15.

The actual creation story, for its part, starts, again, with Ialdabaoth's false monotheistic claim, which is first followed by a rebuke informing him of the Immortal Man of Light (*Orig. World* 103,2–32), and later, when Ialdabaoth demands proof of the existence of this higher being, by a descent of a heavenly Adam of *Light* (107,17–108,10).³⁴ This is the first, spiritual Adam who was said to have appeared on the first day. He is, in fact, the primordial light of Gen 1:3, an identification made possible through a Greek wordplay on the words, *φῶς*, "light," and *φῶς*, "man."³⁵ The archons then propose, "Let us create a man out of earth, according to the image of our body and according to the likeness of this being." Here, too, the proposal is a combination of Gen 1:26 and Gen 2:7. The plural refers to Gen 1:26, and the phrase, "out of earth," to Gen 2:7. After the author has briefly described Adam's creation by the archons, Adam is said to have become psychic. Curiously,

³¹ Paul speaks of first, second and last Adam in 1 Cor 15:45,47. P⁴⁶ attempts to clarify the issue by adding the word *πνευματικός* between the words *δεύτερος* and *ἄνθρωπος* in v. 47, thus identifying the second and last Adams (Louis Painchaud, private communication).

³² The term does not appear in Hellenistic literature prior to 1 Cor (Collins 1999, 571).

³³ In *Hyp. Arch.*, the term has been translated into Coptic (ϣⲓⲕⲟⲥ). Cf. Crum 1962, 131b.

³⁴ The rebuke results in the appearance of the likeness of Pistis Sophia in the waters (*Orig. World* 103,29–31; 108,28–31), which is parallel to the appearance of the image of Incorruptibility in the waters in *Hyp. Arch.* 87,11–33. In the present context of *Orig. World*, however, the likeness of Pistis Sophia does not serve as a model for Adam's creation.

³⁵ The wordplay seems to be reflected in Zosimos' *Omega* 10, where the spiritual man within Adam is called *φῶς*; and in Ezekiel the Tragedian's *Exagoge* 70 where the word, *φῶς*, is used of God's anthropomorphic manifestation at Sinai. Cf. also 2 *Enoch* 25 [J], where the angel Adoil seems to be identified with the primordial light. See Fossum 1985, 289–290. Furthermore, the light in *Orig. World* ironically appeared as the result of the creator's demand (107,34ff.; cf. Gen 1:3).

Ialdabaoth is immediately afterwards said to have left Adam *without a soul* for forty days (*Orig. World* 114,29–115,11). Painchaud proposes that the redactor responsible for the anthropogonic summary has intervened here, identifying the man created by the archons as the third Adam who is completely earthly (117,33–36),³⁶ and thus, spiritless (115,5f.) and soulless (115,12–15.33f.).

In fact, earlier in the text, there is a description of the creation of yet another, *androgynous* human (cf. Gen 1:27) by Sophia Zoe, which took place after the descent of the Adam of Light (first Adam), but before the archons created the earthly Adam (third Adam) (*Orig. World* 113,12–114,15). Even though the name of this androgynous figure is not revealed, he nevertheless appears to be identified with the summary's second and psychic Adam, created on the sixth day (he is also the instructor, later identified as the "lordly man"; see Chapter 2). According to Philo, the ideal man of Gen 1:26f. was created on the sixth day, as noted above. Whereas Philo tried to explain away the androgyny hinted at in Gen 1:27 (*Her.* 164), some rabbis accepted it (*Gen. Rab.* 8.1). Philo further identified what was transmitted in the divine breathing of Gen 2:7 as the ideal man (*Opif.* 134f., 139), sometimes called ψυχή (*Leg. all.* 3.161).³⁷ A divine breath is also mentioned in *Orig. World* and it may be identical with the androgynous human since it appears to render the earthly Adam psychic: after forty days had passed, Adam's soulless body received two visitors from the upper worlds. First, Sophia Zoe sent her breath (πνεῦ < πνοή of LXX Gen 2:7)³⁸ to Adam, which made him move (κινῆ), but did not enable him to arise from the ground. Adam is before (*Orig. World* 115,12–15) and after (115,33–34) the descent of the breath described as soulless, but he is also said to have become psychic at one point (114,36–115,1). This suggests that the breath rendered Adam psychic while it possessed him. Note that in the parallel material of *Hyp. Arch.*, the animating spirit also rendered Adam spiritual only while it possessed him. Note also that the breath here is not identified with the first, heavenly Adam, possibly only with the second and psychic one. Later, Sophia Zoe sent her daughter, Zoe-Eve, to Adam, to finally make him alive and arise

³⁶ Painchaud 1995b, 403, 405.

³⁷ Pearson 1973, 11–26; Sandelin 1976, 26. Philo, of course, made a distinction between the higher and lower ψυχή, e.g., in *Her.* 55–56. The higher one corresponds to the ideal man, *pneuma*, or *nous*.

³⁸ See Crum 1962, 239a–b.

with her word (*Orig. World* 115,30–116,9). If the breath is identical with the second Adam who is the androgynous child of Sophia Zoe, then it is to be taken as the male aspect of Zoe-Eve who raised Adam. Painchaud suggests that the anthropogonic summary with its addition of the third Adam to the myth, as well as the material concerning the androgynous human, unique to *Orig. World*, stem from a redactor.³⁹ In comparison to the other versions of the myth, it does seem that the common material has been modified in *Orig. World* to correspond to the summary's scheme of three Adams (with their specific order of appearance).

Finally, *Soph. Jes. Chr.* gives a condensed version of the creation story. Nevertheless, the same scheme found in the other texts can be detected there as well. The creation (πλάσμα) of the archons (BG 119,18), is described as psychic (ψυχικός, 121,6), and it is rendered a "living soul" through breath (πνεύ) (119,17–120,1; cf. Gen 2:7). Probably two distinct breaths are envisaged, one archontic, the other divine. The first breath seems to cause the spiritual element, the "drop from Spirit (πνεύ) and Light" (BG 119,6f.), to wither. The second breath, on the other hand, appears to activate it, by making the creature think and give names to all inhabitants of the lower world (120,1–11; cf. *Hyp. Arch.* 88,17–24). The spirit and the latter breath (cf. BG 122,5–9) thus seem to correspond to the two divine elements/visitors Adam receives in the other texts. Neither is here identified as a heavenly man. The vain claim of Ialdabaoth is also alluded to (BG 103,10–104,7; 125,15–19 par.).

Despite their differences, the texts examined above clearly present Adam's creation in a very similar manner. First, they share the same pattern that consists of: Ialdabaoth's vain claim and its rebuke; the appearance of a heavenly man/image; Adam's creation by the archons at least partially after the heavenly model; Adam's reception of two divine elements or visitors. Second, some of the key elements of this pattern, including the two divine elements/visitors Adam receives, are derived from an exegesis of three verses: Gen 1:26f. (the ideal, heavenly man), Gen 2:7 (the divine breath/spirit) and Gen 2:18 (helpmeet/instructor for Adam). Third, the texts share technical terminology (πνεύ, πνεύ, ψυχικός, βοηθός/βοήθεια) and use this common material to prove Adam's superiority over the creator. The only other instance

³⁹ Painchaud 1995b, 389ff., 424–432.

I know of, where exactly the same constellation of exegesis of Gen 1:26f., Gen 2:7, and Gen 2:18, is used to prove Adam's superiority over someone, is found in Philo (*Leg. all.* 2.4–5). However, for Philo, the one inferior to Adam was Eve, but for these Gnostic authors, it was the Jewish creator God.

The identity of the heavenly model for Adam's creation is expressed in slightly different ways in the Ophite texts: in Irenaeus' Ophite source, it was a mental image of the Man-God; in *Ap. John*, a luminous image of a Man; in *Hyp. Arch.*, an image of God, called Incorrptibility; and in *Orig. World*, a spiritual and heavenly Adam of Light. As noted earlier, this heavenly model, the image of God/heavenly Adam (Gen 1:26f.), is not identical with the spiritual element (or the divine breath, as in *Orig. World*) Adam receives, and here the texts of the Ophite corpus disagree with both Philo and Paul. Philo's Adam became spiritual by virtue of the breathing of the Image of God—or the heavenly man created according to the image of God—into him. Paul's spiritual Adam is the Image of God, namely Christ, although Paul's earthly Adam apparently never became spiritual. The Ophite variants could, in fact, result from a Christianization different from Paul's, of Hellenistic Jewish Adam speculations since the Ophite texts retain both the notions of Adam receiving the spirit, and, as will be seen, of Christ being a heavenly Adam. While 1 Cor 15:45–47 may or may not presuppose a mythology where the heavenly Adam was/ appeared before the psychic and earthly one(s), such ideas are, in any case, found in the Ophite texts.

It should also be noted that *Pan. 26*, *Eugnostos* and the Ophite diagram do not describe the creation of the earthly Adam, but this is almost certainly due to the nature, form and purpose of these documents: *Pan. 26* is a collection of fragments by Epiphanius, a hostile outsider, and thus does not reproduce a complete narrative; the diagram is essentially a map of the universe; and *Eugnostos* concentrates on descriptions of the supracelestial realms and heavenly men.

Most of Schenke's Sethian texts, however, do not seem to be very interested in Adam's creation at all—including Sethian texts that engage in extensive speculations about Seth. Apart from *Hyp. Arch.* and *Ap. John*, only three Sethian texts (as well as the newly published *Gos. Judas* and the "Sethian" fragment in P 20915) briefly mention that the archon(s) created a man after a divine model or simply after "image and likeness" (*Trim. Prot.* 40,22–25; *Holy Book III* 59,4–9; cf.

Gos. Judas 52,14–53,7; P 20915, Nr. 128).⁴⁰ *Apoc. Adam* (64,5–66,23), which does elaborate on the early chapters of Genesis, is much more interested in Adam’s offspring than Adam himself. However, *Apoc. Adam*’s story of the creation of Adam and Eve draws upon Gen 1–3 and thus includes some of the same terminology (ⲙⲓⲥⲉ, ⲡⲓⲛⲁ; Gen 2:7) than the material common to *Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Ap. John*, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*. The idea that an Eve-figure had a heavenly origin and taught Adam is found in *Apoc. Adam* (64,6–65,13) as well. Therefore, this text has certain parallelism with the Ophite material. These links will be considered in Chapter 6, in discussing the Sethianization of the Ophite mythology. For now it suffices to note that there is, nevertheless, a clear difference in the interest in Adam’s creation between the Ophite texts, including those with Sethian features, and the remaining texts of Schenke’s Sethian corpus.

With the exception of *Ap. John*, the Ophite texts also discuss the heavenly Adam in a clearly different manner than the remaining Sethian texts, most of which have adopted the Barbeloite concept of the Godhead. The Ophite triad of heavenly men, essentially constituting the male aspect of the true Godhead, has already been identified above. However, before we can engage in a comparison between the Ophite and Barbeloite speculations about the heavenly Adams specifically, it is important to understand the proper identities of these Ophite heavenly men as well as their relationship to the “Man and Son of Man” that are occasionally mentioned—even in some Sethian texts—in Ialdabaoth’s rebuke leading to the creation of the earthly Adam according to a heavenly model.

5.3 “MAN EXISTS AND SON OF MAN”—SPECULATIONS ABOUT HEAVENLY MEN

Arguably, the most decisive hallmark of Gnosticism is, as noted above, the idea of “two gods,” i.e., the idea that the creator of the Jewish scriptures is not the true God. This idea is vividly expressed in Classic

⁴⁰ The lacunar *Zost.* 9,16–10,18 may allude to the creation of Adam. The “Sethians” of *Syntagma* supposedly taught that Cain and Abel were the first humans (Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 2.7), although Epiphanius in *Pan.* 39.2.1–2 specifies that two men at odds with each other came into being at the beginning and sired Cain and Abel, respectively.

Gnostic texts in the famous “vain claim” of Ialdabaoth.⁴¹ He claims to be the true God in words reminiscent of the Jewish God’s monotheistic statement, such as Isa 46:9, “I am God, and there is no other.” Ialdabaoth is then rebuked as a liar in the mythological narrative. As we have seen, the vain claim with its rebuke is connected with, and itself in fact provoked, the creation of Adam in the Ophite mythology. Many solutions have been proposed as to the origins of this devaluation, even demonization, of the Jewish creator God. Grant proposed it originated in failed apocalyptic hopes following the Jewish revolts of 66–70 and 132–135 CE.⁴² Pearson, speaking of a “crisis of history,” essentially adopted Grant’s view.⁴³ Stroumsa thought a subordinate dualism was first developed to protect God from anthropomorphism, and that this was secondarily turned into a conflicting dualism, catalyzed by the problem of evil.⁴⁴ Fossum, along similar lines, suggested that a social conflict of some kind may have caused the shift from subordinate to conflicting dualism.⁴⁵ Williams has stressed attempts to save God from anthropomorphism, combined with ascetic concerns.⁴⁶ Pétrement, for her part, has suggested that Christian, especially Pauline and Johannine notions of the ruler(s) of this world/age causing the crucifixion of Christ, became radicalized and thus contributed to the Gnostic idea of the evil archons led by the Jewish God.⁴⁷

Alan Segal has then proposed that the devaluation of the Jewish God originated in a controversy between Jews and Christians over the question of monotheism.⁴⁸ The divinity of Christ was obviously regarded as heretical by the rabbis who cited passages like Deut 6:4f. (the *Shema*) and Isa 45:5 as monotheistic proof-texts to refute Christian bithetism. Applying Douglas’ remarks about “sectarian symbolism of evil” to the Fourth Gospel,⁴⁹ Segal suggests that a heated and

⁴¹ Cf. Dahl 1981.

⁴² Grant 1959, 27–38.

⁴³ Pearson 1990, 51. Cf., however, Green 1985.

⁴⁴ Stroumsa 1984, 172.

⁴⁵ Fossum 1985.

⁴⁶ M. Williams 1992; M. Williams 1996.

⁴⁷ Pétrement 1990.

⁴⁸ Segal 1980. Dahl (1981, especially 701) agrees that the myth of the demiurge’s “vain claim” originated in a controversy over monotheism, but that the controversy was an internal Jewish one. Gruenwald (1981, 719–723) admits that the Christian contribution to the creation of the “Gnostic heresy” out of Jewish materials may have been crucial.

⁴⁹ See Douglas 1996, especially 110–125.

prolonged controversy over monotheism resulted in the demonization of the Jews by the Johannine community (cf. John 8:44). While such a hostile conflict between the Johannine community and the synagogue is often postulated in the background of the Fourth Gospel (especially if the gospel is read as a “two-level drama” with J. Louis Martyn),⁵⁰ the hostile nature of the split between the Johannine and Jewish communities has been recently challenged;⁵¹ the Fourth Gospel may well reflect an exaggerated picture of the split, telling us more about the evangelist and the community’s self-definition and exclusivist soteriology than about the actual historical reality.⁵² However, I suspect the Fourth Gospel’s Christological quarrels as well as the passages describing harassment and expulsion from the synagogue (e.g., John 5:18; 8:58–59; 9:22; 10:30–33; 12:42), do tell us something about an earlier alienation of the Johannine community members from the synagogue, and that one of the principal reasons for it was the Johannine bithetism (cf. John 1:1–3; 5:18; 10:30).

Segal proposes that a controversy concerning monotheism, similar to what he postulates behind the Fourth Gospel, could have (elsewhere) led to the extreme Sethian Gnostic demonization of the Jewish *God*, the God of the opponents.⁵³ Since Segal does not discuss Sethian texts themselves, his suggestion lacks persuasiveness. However, there appears to be textual evidence for exactly this kind of controversy in Classic Gnostic texts, and I think this *type* of socio-historical situation best explains the Classic Gnostic demonization of the Jewish creator God (the situation need not have been as hostile as in many scholarly reconstructions of the history of the Johannine community). Four documents (Irenaeus’ Ophite account, *Ap. John*, *Holy Book*, *Orig. World*) include a formula, “Man exists and Son of Man” (or the like), as a part of Ialdabaoth’s rebuke. It is tempting to see this formula as a reference to God and Christ, not only because “Son of Man” is a Christological title, but also because the texts in question are Christian, at least in their present form. What is more, in Irenaeus’ Ophite source, Man and Son of Man are the two highest divinities. Thus, the rebuke

⁵⁰ Martyn (1979, 37ff.) suggests that the Fourth Gospel speaks simultaneously about the lives of Jesus and the Johannine community. See also Brown 1979, 40–43; Rensberger 1988, 25ff.; Keener 2003, 194ff.

⁵¹ Reinhartz 1998; Reinhartz 2001; Hakola 2005. For example, there is no firm evidence of the *birkat ha-minim* in the Fourth Gospel.

⁵² Cf. Reinhartz 1998; Reinhartz 2001; and Hakola 2005, 16–22.

⁵³ Segal 1980.

ontological level and gives birth to Adamas (49,8–16). If this is the case, then Adamas would be the Son of Man in *Holy Book* III, but he is, nevertheless, not the second highest being of the hierarchy. In *Ap. John*, the reference might also be to Barbelo and her son, Christ,⁵⁷ since the former, too, is characterized as the First Man (II 5,7 parr.). The supreme God himself is likely not considered a “man” in *Ap. John* since he is described in terms of negative theology, whose very functions include distancing God from anthropomorphism.⁵⁸ It is thus rather God’s first manifestation, Barbelo, who is the First Man appearing in the waters below and providing the model for Adam’s creation (II 14,13–34 parr.). *Ap. John*’s notion of Barbelo as a “man” is also a unique one in Sethian texts. In any case, the rebuke formula, “Man exists and Son of Man,” does not refer to the two highest divinities in *Ap. John* or *Holy Book*, as it does in Irenaeus’ Ophite source. Thus, it seems safe to assume that the rebuke originated in the context of the Ophite myth,⁵⁹ and that when it was transferred into a different, Barbeloite, context, it lost its original function.

The second problem is that the Son of Man is not explicitly identified as Christ in Irenaeus’ Ophite source, and there is, in fact, a separate figure (the Third Man) called “Christ” (cf. the Son of Man and Savior in *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*; see Figure 2). The figure of the Son of Man is, of course, known from a non-Christian context as well, but this apocalyptic Son of Man does not seem to have had any direct influence on the Ophite Son of Man. The latter is not an enthroned eschatological judge or ruler (cf. Dan 7:13–14; *1 Enoch* 46–49; 62–63). In fact, the Ophite Son of Man is paired up with a heavenly Eve-figure in Irenaeus’ source (he is explicitly identified as Adam in *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*), and the rebuke formula, “Man exists and Son of Man,” occurs in the context of Adam’s creation. This shows that the Ophite figure of the Son of Man as a heavenly Adam is based on the image and likeness speculations of Gen 1:26–27. Another Biblical text that speaks of the image and likeness is Gen 5:1–3 where one can find a triad of God-Adam-Seth (Adam transmitted the image and likeness

⁵⁷ Giversen 1963, 239–240.

⁵⁸ See II 2,35–4,18 parr. H.-M. Schenke (1962b, 6–7) and Pearson (1990, 52), however, think the supreme God is here a “man.”

⁵⁹ Similarly Logan (1996, 178, 181), who points out that some Valentinians, likely under Ophite influence, treated the supreme God and his son as “Man” and “Son of Man.”

of God to Seth). Some scholars have suggested that at least the scheme of *Eugnostos* is based on such a non-Christian “Sethian” sequence, *Eugnostos* thus being a “proto-Sethian” text.⁶⁰ However, *Eugnostos*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.* and Irenaeus’ Ophite source do not identify the Third Man as Seth. Whereas *Eugnostos* calls the Third Man “Savior,” Irenaeus’ Ophites explicitly identify him as Christ who descended into Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.12,14). Since the Son of Man and Adam are also Christological titles, and a comparable “splitting up” of Christ into two or more characters is attested elsewhere,⁶¹ it seems that Christological speculations lie in the background of both the Second and Third Man of the Ophite triad. While the Ophite mythology does not assign any importance to Seth, as will be seen in the next chapter, it does include many features of Adam Christology.

In addition to the fact that *Eugnostos* explicitly calls the Son of Man “Adam,” *Orig. World* appears to present Adam’s creation as an allegory of Christ’s passion, as Painchaud has suggested.⁶² *Hyp. Arch.* tells the story of Adam’s creation inspired by 1 Cor 15, where Paul identifies Christ, the life-giving spirit, as a heavenly Adam. Furthermore, Adam-Jesus parallelism is found in Irenaeus’ Ophite account, according to which both Adam and Jesus receive two divine elements, one to awaken them, the other to grant them special knowledge (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.6,13–14).⁶³ *Ap. John* teaches that Christ appeared in paradise and influenced Adam to eat (II 22,9 parr.; II 23,26–31). An Adam Christology different from Paul’s is attested in certain Jewish-Christian

⁶⁰ Parrott 1991, 12–16; Turner 2001, 203–216. Cf. Rasimus 2005, 258.

⁶¹ See, e.g., Irenaeus’ description of the Valentinian Ptolemaeans (*Adv. haer.* 1.1.1–2; 1.2.5–6), where Christ, Jesus, Logos and Monogenes are separate characters.

⁶² For example, the chief archon asks (the breath in) Adam his identity and origin (*Orig. World* 115,19–20) just as Pilate asks Jesus (John 18:33; 19:9); the archons take Adam and put him in paradise (*Orig. World* 115,28–29) like Jesus is taken from the cross and placed in a tomb in a garden (John 19:40–42); after the day of rest, i.e., the Sabbath, Zoe (Eve, Adam’s companion) comes to Adam (*Orig. World* 115,30–34) and after the Sabbath, Mary (Jesus’ “companion”) comes to look for Jesus (John 20:1 parr.); Adam is awakened after the day of rest (*Orig. World* 115,30–116,8) just like Jesus is awakened after the Sabbath (John 20:1–23; Luke 24:7). For these and more, see Painchaud 1995b, 403ff. Painchaud assigns this parallelism to the first redaction of the *primitive text* (1995b, 113).

⁶³ Adam receives *nous/pneuma* and *enthymesis*, which awaken him and give him knowledge of the supreme God (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.6). Jesus receives a power (*virtus*) and intelligence (*sensibilitas*) which awaken him from the dead and allow him then to teach some of his disciples correctly (*didicisse quod liquidam est*), after his resurrection (1.30.13–14).

sources, including the Pseudo-Clementines, which not only repudiate Paul,⁶⁴ but also teach that Christ manifested himself in both Adam and Jesus, thus already in paradise.⁶⁵ This kind of Adam Christology, rather than that of Paul, might better explain the background of the positive Ophite Adam-Jesus parallelism. For Paul, Adam was a negative opposite to Christ (Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:20ff.; 44ff.). The Adam-Christ parallelism itself could be pre-Pauline,⁶⁶ and in any case, took different forms in early Christianity.⁶⁷

That specifically Adam or Image Christology lies behind the Ophite concept of the Godhead is thus suggested by (1) the identification of the Second Man as a heavenly Adam and Son of Man in *Adv. haer.* 1.30 (implicitly), *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (explicitly); (2) the occurrence of features of Adam Christology in Ophite texts; and (3) the connection of the formula, “Man exists and Son of Man,” with Adam’s creation in general, and to the appearance of the divine model—identified either as a heavenly Adam (*Orig. World*) or as an image of God (*Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Ap. John*; cf. *Hyp. Arch.*, where the rebuke, however, does not include “Man and Son of Man”), both Pauline designations for Christ—in particular. Such speculations can also lead quite naturally to the idea that God the Father himself is a “man,” an ultimate heavenly projection of Adam, especially when, according to Gen 1:26–27, Adam was created in the image and likeness of God. This also suggests that the idea of God as a heavenly man was first and

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.26.2) and Epiphanius (*Pan.* 30.16.8) on the Ebionites; as well as the related Pseudo-Clementine *Hom.* 17.19; and *Recog.* 1.70–71. See also Klijn and Reinink 1973, especially 28–38; Bauckham 2003, 164ff. Paul is attacked in the Pseudo-Clementines as Simon Magus. See Luedemann 1989, 169–194; Ehrman 2003, 182–185.

⁶⁵ See Ps.-Clementine *Hom.* 3.19–22; *Recog.* 1.45–47; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.3.3–5; 53.1.8–9; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 9.14.1; 10.29.2; Syriac *Acts of Thomas* 10; Marius Victorinus, *Commentary on Galatians* 1.15; See also Fossum 1983.

⁶⁶ Sandelin 1976, 105–111.

⁶⁷ There were many kinds of Judeo-Christian speculations about Adam and/or a heavenly man, in the first centuries BCE and CE: (1) Merkavah mysticism, speculating on the human-like (in Hebrew: Adam-like) figure sitting on the divine throne (Ezek 1:26–27; see Gruenwald 1980; Fossum 1985, 266–291); (2) glorification of Adam, who according to some legends was created in heaven and worshiped by angels (*L.A.E. Vita* 12–17. *B. Sanh.* 38–39 is a compilation of various Adam legends, including rabbinic opposition to some of them. See Jervell 1960, 37–41, 96–107; Segal 1977, 109–120; Fossum 1985, 271–279.); (3) speculations about a heavenly man created in the image and likeness of God, based on Gen 1:26–27 (see Jervell 1960, 15–121; H.-M. Schenke 1962b); (4) Gnostic speculations about Adam as a divine hypostasis (e.g., *Eugnostos*, *Ap. John*); and, finally (5) various Adam Christologies.

foremost derived from Genesis speculations about Adam, as Schenke has proposed, and not from Jesus' title, Son of Man, as Pétrement has suggested.⁶⁸

This shows the Son of Man to be a Christ-figure (a heavenly Adam/Image of God), but it does not yet explain the splitting up of Christ into Son of Man-Adam and Christ. There are, however, at least two possible explanations. In Irenaeus' source, Christ seems to represent the Spirit that descended into Jesus at his baptism. Therefore, the distinction between the Son and the Spirit may belong to the larger problem of nascent trinitarian speculations in early Christianity. The trinitarian problem itself was well acknowledged in the second century: Theophilus of Antioch introduced the term, *τριάς* (*Autol.* 2.15; cf. Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 2–3); Irenaeus had a concept of Christ and Spirit as the “hands of God” (e.g., *Adv. haer.* 4.20.1–4); and Justin Martyr gave Christ the second, and the Spirit the third place after God the Creator (1 *Apol.* 13, 60f.). However, even prior to these ecclesiastical authors, the Classic Gnostic authors had developed trinitarian, or perhaps better, triadic concepts of the Godhead. The Barbeloite mythology included a triad of Father-Mother Barbelo-Son Christ Autogenes, which was likely modeled upon Plato's triad of Father-Mother-Child.⁶⁹ This triad was a central feature of the Barbeloite mythology, and perhaps its popularity (cf. *Ap. John*) in “heretical Gnostic” circles during the second century explains the relative lack of ecclesiastical interest in trinitarian speculations at such an early date.

Be that as it may, the core of the Ophite concept of the Godhead consists of three heavenly men, of whom the second one is called Son, and the third one Christ in Irenaeus' source. In the Gospel of Matthew, one finds a baptismal formula, “In the name of the *Father* and of the *Son* and of the Holy *Spirit*” (28:19). Furthermore, in Paul's letters, one finds the concept of Christ as Spirit. If one combines these Matthean and Pauline notions, one ends up with the idea that the Son and the Christ-Spirit are two different beings. This is, in fact, exactly

⁶⁸ H.-M. Schenke 1962b, 69; Pétrement 1990, 103–110. However, since Jesus' title, Son of Man, fits well with the idea that God himself is a “man,” perhaps it was picked up out of the various Christological titles as the most suitable one in a context of an *anthropos* theology.

⁶⁹ If Irenaeus is correct in stating that Valentinus (*floruit* 140–160 CE) was influenced by the Gnostics of *Adv. haer.* 1.29–31, then the Barbeloite mythology with its triadic concept of the Godhead seems to have already been in existence during the first half of the second century.

what one finds in the Ophite source known to Irenaeus. In this source, Christ is indeed the spirit (although not explicitly called such) who, together with his “sister” Sophia, descends into Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.12–14);⁷⁰ in the Synoptics and John, the descent into/on Jesus was performed by the Spirit.⁷¹ Despite the fact that there is a separate figure called the Holy Spirit in Irenaeus’ account, Christ, too, is there a spiritual being who descends into Jesus at his baptism.⁷²

On the other hand—and I find this more likely—one can also take the second and third men as representing two functional aspects of one Christ-figure. This would be comparable to Middleplatonist distinctions between the transcendent and immanent aspects of the Logos or the world soul.⁷³ Philo, too, explained that the “image of God,” after whom the ideal man of Gen 1:26–27 was modeled, was the Logos (*Leg. all.* 3.96). Philo’s Logos further had a transcendent and an immanent aspect,⁷⁴ the latter apparently being equivalent to the ideal human, whom Adam received in the divine breathing of Gen 2:7. In this regard, we may note that according to Paul, Christ is both the “image of God” (2 Cor 4:4), and a spirit continually living in humans (Gal 2:20; Rom 8:9–11; 1 Cor 15:45–47). The Ophite mythmakers were familiar with both Philo-like and Pauline thought. Indeed, the authors of the Ophite texts seem to know of such a distinction between the two aspects of the “image of God.” The Ophite Son of Man, who is a heavenly Adam (cf. the image of God), does not seem to deal with the

⁷⁰ Jesus’ baptism is singled out in *Adv. haer.* 1.30.14 as the event of Christ’s descent into Jesus.

⁷¹ See Mark 1:10–11; Matt 3:16–17; Luke 3:22; cf. John 1:32–33.

⁷² In fact, as noted above, the divine hierarchy seems to have been remodeled in Irenaeus’ source, towards a more “orthodox” Trinity of Father-Son-Holy Spirit. This remodeling has, however, distorted the underlying pattern of the triad of heavenly men, found also in *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*

⁷³ E.g., the Soul and Body of Osiris in Plutarch, *de Isis et Osiris* 373AB; Albinus’ Intellect and World Soul (*Didaskalikos* X 164,40–165,4); Moderatus’ Third One (Soul) and Nature (Simplicius, *In phys.* 9.230.34–231.27 Diels); Nicomachus’ Logos and World Soul (*Theology of Arithmetic* 45,6–50,8); Numenius’ Second and Third Gods (frgs. 16, 21–22 des Places; cf. the rational and evil world souls, frg. 52 des Places); and Hecate, and what springs from her thigh in the *Chaldean Oracles* (see frgs. 50–52 Majercik). See Dillon 1996, 200, 284, 348–349, 356–359, 374–375, 394–395; and Turner 2001, 363–396, 460–471.

⁷⁴ Philo’s Logos can be identical with both the intelligible world (*Opif.* 24–25) and an immanent creative force in the universe, sometimes even equivalent to the human mind (*Agr.* 51; *Her.* 230–232; *Mos.* 2.127). See Jervell 1960, 56ff.; Runia 1986, 446–451; Turner 2001, 359ff.

created world at all,⁷⁵ while the third man, the spiritual Christ/Savior engages in creation and/or a salvific descent.⁷⁶

Finally, the third and related problem is that whereas the Ophite concept of the Godhead according to Irenaeus' Ophite source and *Eugnostos* consisted of three heavenly men (with their female aspects or consorts), only two of them are mentioned in the rebuke formula, "Man exists and Son of Man." Why is the third heavenly man, Christ/Savior, not mentioned in it? In this connection, one might also refer to the reports of the Ophite diagram, where a third heavenly man alongside Father and Son is not, at least clearly, mentioned (*Cels.* 6.38); and where the Father and Son without a third man are evoked in the passwords in order to pass by the gatekeeper archons (6.31). In fact, these passwords including the mentioning of Father and Son, the two highest divinities, might be variants of the rebuke formula, "Man exists and Son of Man."⁷⁷ That the third man is sometimes missing, is, in my opinion, related to the fact that both the second and the third heavenly man are seen as Christ-figures. On the one hand, one may think that this reflects the developing trinitarian problem. The third member of the Christian trinity, the Spirit, has often been somewhat neglected in comparison to the importance given to the Father and Son,⁷⁸ and this might explain why the Spirit-Christ is sometimes missing in Ophite formulations. Or, one may think that a third man has been added to a simpler scheme of two *anthropoi*, as a result of growing interest in trinitarian speculations. On the other hand, the distinction between the transcendent/paradigmatic and immanent/salvific aspects or functions of Christ may have been thought unnecessary in the context of a controversy concerning Christ's divinity itself. Thus, the two aspects of Christ could have been condensed into one figure of "Son of Man" in the rebuke formula, and consequently, in some other instances as well.

The three potential problems with the proposal that the "Man and Son of Man" are God and Christ can then be solved and explained

⁷⁵ The Son of Man merely appears as one of the fathers of Christ (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–2), and is then mentioned in the rebuke formula (1.30.6).

⁷⁶ While in *Adv. haer.* 1.30, the Christ is identified as the dove descending into Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan, in *Eugnostos*, the Savior is responsible for creating the spiritual beings that give rise to the cosmos.

⁷⁷ Cf. also the Valentinian ones (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.21.5; and *The First Apocalypse of James* NH V 33,11–35,19; Tchacos 20,7–22,17) and *Gos. Thom.* 50.

⁷⁸ See Pelikan 1971, 172–225, especially 211ff.

satisfactorily. The rebuke originated in the context of the Ophite myth, where it refers to the two highest divinities. These are God the First Man and Christ the heavenly Adam. The latter is further split in two in that he appears to have a transcendent and an immanent aspect. The Ophite concept of the Godhead therefore not only includes Adam Christology, but is also generally expressed in terms of Adam speculations due to God himself being a Man in whose image and likeness the earthly Adam was created.

Before reaching the conclusions in this chapter, I will briefly compare the Ophite and Sethian, specifically Barbeloite, speculations about the heavenly Adam and the heavenly men. In Irenaeus' Ophite source, *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, the male side of the divine hierarchy essentially consists of a triad of heavenly men: Man-Son of Man-Savior/Christ. The rebuke formulae appear to condense the two Christ-figures into one; and this could be reflected in the diagram where the Father and Son appear at the summit of the hierarchy (remember that important Sophia/Eve-figures also appear in the diagram, and this is consistent with *Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*). *Orig. World* and *Hyp. Arch.* are sketchy about the upper worlds, but in *Orig. World*, three Adams are said to have appeared (117,28–118,2), one of which is the Immortal Adam of Light (108,2–112,25; 117,28–29), and therefore more or less equivalent to *Eugnostos'* Adam of Light (III 81,12 par.), the Son of Man. The Jesus Christ of Sabaoth (see Chapter 8) is said to resemble the Savior in the Eighth (*Orig. World* 105,26–29), which recalls the Savior (the third heavenly man) of *Eugnostos*. Finally, the supreme God as “Unbegotten” is mentioned in *Orig. World* 127,5ff., which corresponds to the first principle of *Eugnostos*. If Painchaud is right about the literary relationship between *Orig. World* and *Eugnostos*, then these figures in *Orig. World* could refer to the same beings as described in detail in *Eugnostos*, although subsequent redactions of these two texts may have distorted the original close correspondence between their respective divine hierarchies.

Hyp. Arch. is even more silent about the upper realms than *Orig. World*, but since these realms appear to be called the “Adamantine Land,”⁷⁹ one may hypothesize that this is based on the notion of the true Godhead consisting of heavenly Adam-figures, or at least housing

⁷⁹ See Layton 1976, 51–52. The same expression occurs in *Orig. World* where it, however, refers to the earth (108,19–25).

them as important characters (together with their Sophia consorts/aspects). Finally, the source behind *Pan.* 26.10 also indicates that in the upper worlds, there exist Father of All, Lord the Self-Father (cf. the Self-Father in *Eugnostos*), another Christ, and the Christ who is Jesus, although the mutual relationships and independent nature of these four are unclear (see note 138 on p. 47 above). In any case, such a hierarchy (if Epiphanius represents it correctly) resembles those of *Eugnostos*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, and *Adv. haer.* 1.30. Thus, it seems that, apart from *Ap. John*, even those texts of the Ophite corpus that are sketchy about the upper worlds, at least hint at figures and hierarchies similar to those described in more detail in *Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*

However, the Barbeloite doctrine of the upper worlds is completely different from the Ophite one, as has been noted many times. The heavenly man Adamas does appear in several Sethian texts that utilize Barbeloite material (e.g., *Ap. John* II 8,28–9,11 parr.; *Adv. haer.* 1.29.3; *Holy Book* III 49,1–51,14 par.; *Zost.* 6,23–26; 13,6; 30,4–5; *Melch.* 6,5–6; *Norea* 27,24–26; 28,27–29,5; *Steles Seth* 118,26; *Gos. Judas* 48,22), and the appearance of the heavenly Adam, who dwells in the lights of the Autogenes and is often called “Pigeradamas,” is indeed a feature of Schenke’s “Sethian system.” Such characterizations, nevertheless, clearly distinguish the Sethian Adamas from the Ophite heavenly Man/Adam-figures, who, in fact, make up the male aspect of the true Godhead itself. In addition, the Barbeloite Adamas usually occupies a less prominent place in the divine hierarchy than does his Ophite counterpart, Adam the Son of Man.⁸⁰ If the heavenly Adam, or even “Man and Son of Man,” are mentioned in texts that have Barbeloite features, they are often lost in the crowd of divine beings, and usually do not even appear near the summit of the hierarchy. Occasionally, the Barbeloite Adamas has Christological traits (e.g., *Holy Book* III 49,8–21 par.), but Adam Christology is not a prominent feature in the Barbeloite mythology (for Seth Christology, see Chapter 6). It may be

⁸⁰ The Barbeloite Adamas (or Pi-ger-Adamas) is sometimes connected with the first (*Ap. John*; *Zost.*), or third (*Melch.*) light of Autogenes. In *Steles Seth*, Adamas seems to be the third principle below Father and Barbelo (118,24–121,17), but this concept is different from the Ophite triad of heavenly men, where Adam occupies the second position. In *Norea*, Adamas appears to be identical with the supreme God, but this text may be dependent on *Hyp. Arch.*, as is often suggested. See H.-M. Schenke 1981, 595; Logan 1996, 45; Turner 2001, 168.

pointed out that *Ap. John*, and possibly also *Holy Book III*, contain echoes of the Ophite concept of the Godhead since they know of three heavenly men: The (First) Man, Adamas and Seth. These, however, are subjected to the Barbeloite hierarchy where they no longer make up the male aspect of the true Godhead (I will return to this theme in Chapter 6 in discussing the Sethianization of the Ophite and Barbeloite myths). Overall there seems to be a clear difference between Ophite and Sethian (especially Barbeloite) speculations about Adam.

5.4 CONCLUSION: THE BACKGROUND OF THE OPHITE MYTHOLOGOUMENON ABOUT ADAM

Ophite texts utilize common material in describing Adam's creation. This common material consists of (a) the false claim of the creator Ialdabaoth; (b) its rebuke; (c) the appearance of a heavenly man/image; (d) the creation of Adam by the archons at least partially after the heavenly model (Gen 1:2,3,26f.); (e) the descent of a divine breath (πνεῦμα < πνοή) or spirit (πνεῦμα) into Adam, derived from Gen 2:7; and (f) the descent of another divine being/element to teach or help Adam, derived clearly in most cases from Gen 2:18 (Eve/Zoe/βοήθεια). This common material to some extent resembles Philo's exegesis of Adam's creation, which likewise included the combination of Gen 1:26f., Gen 2:7 and Gen 2:18. In addition, this common material has no specific Pauline coloring, and it seems to even contradict Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 15 on three points: (1) the heavenly Adam appeared first; (2) the earthly Adam received the spirit (except in *Orig. World*); and (3) this spirit was not identical with the heavenly Adam. Whether or not Paul was contending against a myth of two Adams in 1 Cor 15:45–47, such speculations are found in this common material. The authors of *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* then, in any case, reacted to 1 Cor 15:45–47 in different ways and modified the common material accordingly. Whereas the author of *Hyp. Arch.* accepted Paul's authority and teaching, the author of *Orig. World* corrected Paul's teaching about the order and number of the Adams.

The Son of Man in the Ophite mythology is identified as Adam, and the rebuke mentioning "Man and Son of Man" is placed in the context of Adam's creation. This points to an Ophite Adam Christology, where Adam is projected on a heavenly plane with God the Father as the ultimate heavenly man and model for Adam's creation. In

Chapter 4, an Ophite heavenly projection of Eve was also encountered. Indeed, since Adam was created according to a divine model (Gen 1:26), and this model was androgynous (1:27), there must be a heavenly prototype for Eve as well. Moreover, because the heavenly Adam was seen as Christ, and the heavenly Eve as Sophia, it is only natural that the Ophite exegetes would entertain both Adam and Wisdom Christologies. Remember that Philo-like speculations about Adam and Sophia were Christianized by Paul in Corinth (1 Cor 1:24; 15:45–47). Whatever Philo, or Paul and his opponents in Corinth, for that matter, exactly thought of Sophia and the heavenly and earthly Adams, such speculations *are* essential to the Ophite mythology. Moreover, the Ophite concept of the Godhead as a series—often a triad—of heavenly humans, appears to be based not only on Christianization of Adam and Wisdom speculations, but perhaps also on nascent trinitarian speculations and/or on a distinction made between the transcendent and immanent aspects of Christ. This resulted in the presentation of the paradigmatic Son of Man-Adam and the salvific Christ-Spirit as two (functionally) different entities below God the First Man.⁸¹

While the authors of the Ophite texts were very interested in Adam's creation and utilized Hellenistic Jewish traditions, also drawing in some cases upon Paul, the majority of Schenke's Sethian texts, including those with an emphasis on Seth, show no great interest in such Adam speculations. Texts with Barbeloite characteristics often do speculate about the heavenly Adam, but in these speculations, Adam and the other heavenly men (if there are any) occupy much less prominent places in the divine hierarchy in comparison to texts that have Ophite features. Thus, in the case of Adam speculations, there is again a clear difference between the Ophite mythology and Schenke's "Sethian system," i.e., Barbeloite and Sethite myths.

The Ophite authors appear to have practiced a Platonic exegesis of Genesis à la Philo, and to have believed that Christ was a second divinity alongside God the Father. When early Christians tried to make sense of the significance of Jesus of Nazareth, many of them incor-

⁸¹ Moreover, because Sophia possibly represents the higher world soul as opposed to the serpentine lower world soul in the Ophite speculations, perhaps (although this is hypothetical) the Ophite mythology included a Middleplatonian scheme where (1) Christ represents the Logos, (2) Sophia represents the rational world soul—which may be somehow identical with the immanent aspect of the Logos, and (3) the serpent represents the lower and evil aspect of the world soul.

porated him into the divine hierarchy by identifying him—at least to some extent—with a more familiar figure from Jewish lore. We know that the Son of Man and Sophia were used in this way.⁸² So was Adam. One may therefore hypothesize that behind the Ophite mythologoumenon of Adam were educated Jewish converts to Christianity who read the scriptures through Platonic lenses, and identified Jesus Christ as the archetypal and ideal heavenly man, who was already known to them from speculations about the Genesis creation story. They were possibly also influenced by Paul's teaching that Christ is a heavenly Adam and the Image of God. This divination of Adam, by identifying him with the perhaps already troublesome figure of Jesus Christ, could then have sparked off a controversy about violation of monotheism, which not only led to the demonization of the Jewish God, as Segal has suggested, but also left traces in the Classic Gnostic creation myth in the form of the rebuke formula, "Man exists and Son of Man." In such a controversy, passages from the Jewish scriptures concerning YHWH's troublesome behavior were probably pointed out to reinforce the demonic character of this god of the opponents. This *type* of development may well explain the background of the Gnostic demonization of YHWH.

In light of the results of this and the previous chapter, the question of the relationship between the Classic Gnostic, especially Ophite, mythology and the Corinthian situation can be assessed. In other words, were the Jewish converts to Christianity sketched above Pauline Christians in Corinth, who later turned Gnostic? Clearly there are close parallels between 1 Cor and the Ophite texts. First, one finds parallels that indicate a probable common background in Hellenistic Judaism. These include speculations about Sophia, with traces of a Wisdom soteriology where Wisdom leads to a salvific *gnosis* of God; and speculations about a heavenly Adam, including a distinction between a spiritual and a psychic Adam based on an exegesis of Gen 2:7. Such Sophia and Adam speculations are also found in Philo. However, they have been Christianized both in 1 Cor and the Ophite texts, although the Wisdom and Adam Christologies are not exactly similar for Paul and the Ophite authors. Second, in Ophite texts, one finds dependence on Paul's formulations. These include the use of Paul's apparent

⁸² Cf. Mark 13:24–27; 14:62; Luke 12:8–10; Acts 7:55–56; 1 Cor 1:24. For discussion, see de Jonge 1999; Lang 1999; Nickelsburg 1999; and the cited bibliographies.

neologism, *χοϊκός*; possibly the concept of “kingless generation,” and probably also the enlarged concept of *gnosis*—in fact, the rebuke formula, “Do not lie, Ialdabaoth; above you exist Man and Son of Man” (or the like), contains the same basic idea as 1 Cor 8:4–6 in that apart from God and Christ there are only false gods. Third, one finds features in the Ophite texts that contradict or oppose Paul’s teachings. Such features include: the meaninglessness of the crucifixion; the high value of Wisdom and *gnosis*; the order in which the heavenly and earthly Adams appear; the earthly Adam’s reception of the spirit; the spirit’s separate identity from the heavenly Adam; the apparent modification of 1 Cor 15:45–47 in *Orig. World*; and features of a Jewish-Christian Adam Christology which is elsewhere attested in circles hostile to Paul.

One option to account for all these factors is to hypothesize that Paul and the Ophite authors testify to two more or less parallel Christianizations of Hellenistic Jewish traditions about Adam and Sophia, with some Pauline influence on the Ophite authors. However, another option is that the Ophite mythology belongs to the same trajectory as the theology of at least some of Paul’s opponents; for the parallels suggest not only a knowledge and a partial acceptance of Paul’s teachings, but also certain disagreements, even hostility towards his ideas.

Since the New Testament writings, including Paul’s letters, contain indications of disputes between Jews and Christians (e.g., 1 Cor 1:23; 15:9; Gal 1:13; Acts 7:54–8:3; 18:24–28; John 5:18; 8:58–59; 9:22; 12:42), similar to what may have launched a demonization of YHWH, then at least the ingredients and conditions for the invention of the Ophite mythology were already present at the time of the Corinthian controversy. More can be said about the date and origins of the Ophite mythology after the examination of all the evidence. For now, it suffices to note that the mythology seems to have been developed after the Corinthian controversy and the composition of 1 Cor in the 50s.⁸³

Finally, we may return to two questions that have already been addressed above. First, the question of the demonization and theriomorphism of Ialdabaoth, examined in Chapter 3. The theriomorphic imagery was attached to Ialdabaoth only when he was identified as the devil. In fact, the theriomorphism seems to presuppose the demoniza-

⁸³ On the date of 1–2 Cor, see Thiselton 2000, 29–32; and Harris 2005, 64–67.

tion, which, as suggested, derives from a controversy over monotheism. It is also reasonable to think that once YHWH had been demonized, his archangels would be as well. However, in Irenaeus' source, Ialdabaoth, although demoted to the rank of a lower rival demi-god, is nevertheless a character different from the theriomorphic devil proper. Since the rebuke formula, "Man exists and Son of Man," seems to have developed in an Ophite context, perhaps Irenaeus' source represents an early stage in the controversy leading to the demonization of YHWH. However, it may also simply be a less hostile variant of the same theme that finds its most hostile expression in *Ap. John's* full demonization of YHWH.

Second, let us return to the Naassene teaching and its relationship to the Ophite mythology, as the former also contains extensive speculations about heavenly and earthly Adams. The Naassene teaching has often been suggested to be a commentary to two hymns to Attis quoted towards the end of the teaching (*Ref.* 5.9.8–9).⁸⁴ The teaching also abounds with speculations about pagan myths and divinities. The author lists various *anthropos* speculations, including those concerning Attis, and explains them from the point-of-view of a specific Adam-myth, which greatly resembles the Ophite one. Lower powers create an inanimate Adam who starts to move after the reception of a soul (*ψυχή*). This Adam was created after the image of the heavenly Adamas (5.7.6–8), who is also called Man, Son of Man and Christ. Even though there appears to be three heavenly men, and the tripartition is stressed in the teaching (5.6.7; 5.8.1), the three are ultimately one: Man and Son of Man are said to be the same figure (5.6.5), and Christ is the portrayal of the Son of Man (5.7.33). This was evidently a confusing notion since the author of the Naassene teaching insists that tripartition, not unity, is the correct way of seeing things (5.8.1). (In the Ophite myth, Father and Son—or their equivalents—are distinguished from each other, while the Son and Savior/Christ may be fused into one Christ-figure.) This insistence might reflect the developing trinitarian problem. Since the Naassene teaching further utilizes Paul's neologism, *χοϊκός*, and abounds with allusions to the writings of the New Testament,⁸⁵ it seems best to consider it as a Christian attempt to explain pagan myths, and not as a piece of secondarily Christianized

⁸⁴ See Lancellotti 2000, 10–29, 245.

⁸⁵ See the indices in Marcovich 1986.

pagan Gnosis, as scholars of the History-of-Religions school suggested.⁸⁶ Even though the Adam speculations in the Naassene teaching occur in the same context as hymns to Attis (and speculations about other pagan divinities), surely such pagan material offers a less natural context for speculations concerning Adam than does the Genesis paradise story. Given the Naassene parallels to the Ophite myth, I propose that the Naassene author drew upon Classic Gnostic, especially Ophite, mythology in order to demonstrate the universal truth of the (rewritten) Biblical story of Adam's creation.

⁸⁶ On the theories concerning the secondary Christianization of an originally pagan teaching, see the discussion in Lancellotti 2000, 10–29.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PILLARS OF SETH: SETHIANIZATION OF OPHITE AND BARBELOITE MYTHS

This chapter, which concludes Part II (Myth and Innovation), shifts focus from Ophite to Sethian material. In the preceding chapters, four important themes of the Ophite mythology were examined, and in all four cases, a clear difference between the Ophite mythology and Schenke's "Sethian system" was detected. Texts in my Ophite corpus, including those with Sethian features (with the occasional exception of *Ap. John*) treated the four themes in a fairly coherent and specific manner, whereas the remaining texts in Schenke's Sethian corpus treated the same themes in a clearly different manner. In addition, we saw that texts with moderate or significant Barbeloite features often stood apart from the other documents. Here, I will examine the role of Seth, and address the questions raised in Chapter 1, that (a) Schenke's "Sethian system" may, in fact, consist of two originally independent forms of mythological speculation, Barbeloite and Sethite; and (b) there occurred a later Sethianization of earlier Gnostic myths. Speculations concerning Seth and his "seed" have been suggested by several scholars to be a later addition to Barbeloite material,¹ and even to Ophite, by some.² These suggestions mainly rest on the following facts: (a) there are texts in Schenke's Sethian corpus that do not speak of Seth; (b) whereas *Ap. John* speaks of a heavenly Seth and his seed, Irenaeus' two chapters (*Adv. haer.* 1.29–30) that generally parallel *Ap. John*, do not mention these concepts; and (c) even though Seth is mentioned in passing in *Adv. haer.* 1.30, he does not seem to play an important role there. Schenke himself, nevertheless, thought that Seth had always been part of the (heavily Barbeloite) "Sethian system." However, as pointed out above, speculations about the Biblical Seth (or the paradise story, for that matter) are formally distinct from Barbeloite ones concerning the first principles, and both forms of speculation are also attested independently of each

¹ Klijn 1977, 115; Sevrin 1986, e.g., 275ff.; Logan 1996, xx, 1–56, 283; Turner 2001, 257ff.

² See Logan 1996, 1–56; and now also Turner 2007.

other in Schenke's Sethian corpus. Furthermore, certain peculiarities can be detected in texts where Seth occurs within the Barbeloite divine hierarchy, and these may betray secondary reworking of the material.

In this chapter, I will first examine Sethian and Jewish traditions about Seth since the latter are often considered to lie in the background of the Sethian speculations. I will also examine the role(s) Seth plays in texts that have Ophite features. In accordance with the familiar pattern, a clear difference in the interest in Seth between the Ophite texts, including those with Sethian features, and the remaining texts of Schenke's Sethian corpus will be demonstrated. Second, I will attempt to explain the origins of the Classic Gnostic speculations about Seth. The clear parallels to certain Jewish Seth traditions, the apparent self-designations, such as "seed of Seth," and the polemical tone of many Sethian texts that appeal to Seth as guarantor of special knowledge, provide clues about the background of these speculations. I will also discuss Logan's suggestion concerning a secondary Sethianization of Barbeloite and Ophite materials under Valentinian influence and due to the "great church's" accusations of novelty. It will be argued that there did occur a Sethianization of Ophite and Barbeloite mythologies but that this happened as a result of Jewish accusations of forgery and novelty; this then led also to counterreactions by the heresiologists and even by some advocates of the Ophite mythology. This takes us to the third objective of this chapter, namely, the attempt to explain why the formally and typologically distinct Sethite, Ophite and Barbeloite mythologies were sometimes combined with each other in the sources.

6.1 SETHIAN, JEWISH AND OPHITE TRADITIONS ABOUT SETH

As Williams has pointed out, *Holy Book* is a text with perhaps the most "Sethian" emphasis, in that the amount of speculation about Seth is by far the largest within Schenke's Sethian text corpus.³ Let me briefly summarize what the author says of Seth and his seed. Close to the summit of the (Barbeloite) divine hierarchy, there is a figure called Christ, also apparently identified as the incorruptible child Telmael Telmael Eli Eli Machar Machar Seth (IV 59,13–21). Then, on a lower level come into

³ M. Williams 2005, 40.

being the heavenly Adamas and his son Seth (III 49,1–51,22 par.). This Seth praises the supreme God and asks for his “seed,” which is brought forth by Plesithea, bearing the fruit of Sodom and Gomorrah. Seth then places his seed in the third light of Autogenes, called Daveithe (III 55,16–56,22 par.). Adamas and Seth himself are placed with the first and second lights, Harmozel and Oroiael, respectively (III 65,13–20 par.). Later, when the creator has falsely claimed to be the true god, Metanoia (repentance) comes into being, and Seth sows his seed into aeons to correct the deficiency (III 56,22–61,1 par.). How this sowing happens is not explained in clear terms, but it is connected with Sodom and Gomorrah on the one hand, and with virginity on the other. Williams has suggested that one simply becomes a member of this Sethian race by leading a virtuous life.⁴ When the devil, possibly the creator god, oppresses the seed, Seth first asks for guardians for his seed, and is finally sent himself to the world three times: during the Flood, the conflagration, and the judgment of the archons connected with the crucifixion. In fact, Seth is said to have “put Jesus on” (III 61,1–64,9 par.). Finally, the document itself is said to have been written, and deposited on a mountain, by Seth. When it is manifested, it will reveal the incorruptible, holy race of Seth the savior (III 68,1–69,5 par.).

Many of Schenke’s Sethian texts (as well as *Gos. Judas*) include at least some of these traditions. The idea of a heavenly Seth, the son of Adamas, is found in *Ap. John* and *Zost.*, as well as in *Steles Seth*, possibly also in *Melch.*⁵ The former two connect Adamas and Seth with the lights of Autogenes. The *Cod. Bruc. Untitled* speculates on a divine being called Setheus (also found in *Zost.*, alongside Seth).⁶ Certain texts use the designation Emmacha Seth,⁷ which seems to be a modification of Eli Machar Seth, found in *Holy Book*. The identification between Jesus and Seth is found in those accounts of the Sethians that depend on Hippolytus’ *Syntagma*,⁸ possibly also in *Apoc. Adam.*⁹

⁴ M. Williams 1985, 158ff.; M. Williams 2005.

⁵ *Ap. John* II 8,32–9,12 par.; *Zost.* 7,8–9; 30,10; 51,14–16; 130,16–17; *Steles Seth* 118,26–31. Cf. *Melch.* 5,20.

⁶ *Cod. Bruc. Untitled* 3,6,7,8,11,21; cf. *Zost.* 126,12–16. See also Pearson 1990, 66–68.

⁷ *Zost.* 6,25; *Steles Seth* 118,28.

⁸ Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 2.9; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 39.1.3.

⁹ Cf. *Apoc. Adam* 76,8–27. See also Yamauchi 1997, 82ff. *Gos. Judas* likely does not identify Seth as Christ; a more probable restoration of the lacuna at 52,5 may be a variant spelling of Atoth.

The seed or a special race of Seth is mentioned in *Ap. John*, *Zost.*, *Steles Seth*, *Melch.*, *Apoc. Adam*, *Gos. Judas*, and in the heresiological reports about Sethians.¹⁰ With the exception of the heresiological reports, this seed or race is said to be heavenly. *Hyp. Arch.*, however, derives the special race from Seth's sister Norea (93,24–28; 96,19ff.). The survival of the seed of Seth in primordial disasters is found in the heresiological reports about Sethians, *Apoc. Adam*, *Ap. John*, and in a modified form also in *Hyp. Arch.*¹¹ The “Archontics” further taught that a heavenly mother protected Seth by taking him to heaven and returning him as a spiritual revealer (*Pan.* 40.7.1–3). Finally, the tradition about the book, tablets, or pillars of Seth, is found in one form or another in *Apoc. Adam* and *Steles Seth* as well.¹² According to Epiphanius, the “libertine Gnostics,” “Sethians” and “Archontics” also made use of books in the name of Seth.¹³

Parallels to some of these themes can be found in Jewish (and Christian) texts, and many scholars have tried to explain the origins of Sethian Gnosticism out of Judaism by appealing to Jewish Seth traditions.¹⁴ For Philo, Seth was a symbol of virtuous humanity, and of “another seed” (than Cain and Abel),¹⁵ and Josephus knew of a tradition according to which the virtuous offspring of Seth inscribed special knowledge about heavenly bodies on two pillars, one of brick, the other of stone, in order that at least one would survive the two primordial disasters by water and fire that Adam had predicted (*Ant.* 1.68–72). Certain pseudepigraphal and apocryphal texts, whose origin

¹⁰ *Ap. John* II 9,14–17; 25,1–2 parr.; *Zost.* 6,25; 7,8–9; 51,14–16; 130,16–17; *Steles Seth* 118,12–13; *Melch.* 5,20; *Apoc. Adam* 65,5–9; *Gos. Judas* 49,5–6; Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 2.7–9; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 39.2.6.

¹¹ Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 2.7–9, and Epiphanius, *Pan.* 39 (Flood); *Apoc. Adam* 70,4–76,7 (Flood and destruction by fire); *Ap. John* II 28,32–29,15 parr. (Flood); *Hyp. Arch.* 92,4ff. (Flood).

¹² *Apoc. Adam* 85,1–29; *Steles Seth*, e.g., 118,10–19. Cf. *Holy Book* III 68,1–14; IV 80,15–81,2. The tradition may also be alluded to in *Zost.* Towards the end of the tractate, Zostrianos writes three tablets of knowledge for the future elect, and then goes on to preach to the “seed of Seth” (130,1–17). Seth may have been here replaced by the ancient Chaldean figure of Zostrianos in an attempt to bypass Plato's authority in the Gnostic controversy in Plotinus' seminars. See Rasimus 2009 and the Epilogue in this book.

¹³ *Pan.* 26.8.1 (cf. the *Book of Norea*, 26.1.3–9); 39.5.1; 40.7.4. See also Tardieu 1977.

¹⁴ Stroumsa 1984, e.g., 49–61, 125–134; Pearson 1990, 52–83; Turner 2001, 266–270. Cf. H.-M. Schenke (1981, 592–593, 606–607) and Fossum (1985, 50ff., 122), who speculate on a Samaritan matrix.

¹⁵ See Philo, *Post.* 42. Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.68–72.

and date are uncertain, also speculate about Seth. *L.A.E.* presents itself as Adam's deathbed testament to Seth *via* Eve, with Seth writing down what happened in paradise on tablets to survive the Flood and conflagration (*Vita* 50.1–51.3). *1 Enoch* (85–90), for its part, derives the lineage of the Messiah back to Seth.¹⁶ In addition, the “sons of God” whose illegal copulation with the “daughters of men” (Gen 6:1–4) brought about the Flood (Gen 6–8), were sometimes interpreted as fallen angels, as in *1 Enoch*, but sometimes as the virtuous offspring of Seth who became corrupted after mixing with the wicked Cainite women.¹⁷ The first firm and datable identification of the sons of God with the offspring of Seth comes from Julius Africanus, a Christian writer of the third century, although Philo and Josephus may have already known of the tradition.¹⁸

While many Sethian authors utilize such Judeo-Christian traditions and generally give great importance to Seth, texts in the Ophite corpus—even the ones with Sethian features—evinced much less interest in Seth; often Seth is not even mentioned in these texts. *Orig. World*, *Eugnostos*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.* and the Ophite diagram do not mention Seth by name at all. Irenaeus' Ophite report merely says that after Abel had been killed and Cain ruined, humanity derived from Seth and Norea (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.9). *Hyp. Arch.* mentions Seth in passing,¹⁹ but treats his sister, Norea, as the transmitter of special knowledge and seed (91,34–96,28). Even *Ap. John* only mentions Seth and his seed in passing (II 9,11–17; 24,35–25,2 parr.) and Seth plays absolutely no role in the actual drama related in the text. Finally, in one of the sources behind Epiphanius' *Pan.* 26—a source which resembles the information about the Ophite diagram—Seth is considered an evil archon (26.10.1). This should not be totally surprising since Cain and Abel are considered to be archons in *Ap. John* (II 10,34–36; 24,15–26 parr.) and *Holy Book* (III 58,15–17 par.), and behind the archon (H)oraio^s²⁰ might lurk Seth's sister-wife Norea, whose name is sometimes spelled Horaia or Oraia (on the other hand, the name may be based on the Egyptian

¹⁶ Cf. Luke 3:23–38, where Jesus' genealogy culminates in Seth, Adam and God.

¹⁷ See Klijn 1977, 61ff.

¹⁸ Thus Stroumsa 1984, 129ff. See Philo, *QG* 1.92; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.72–74.

¹⁹ His name only appears in a restored lacuna, though (*Hyp. Arch.* 91,31). See Layton 1989a, 246–247.

²⁰ See Table 3.

god Horus; see Chapter 3).²¹ In this light, the apparent silence about Seth in *Orig. World* may become understandable. In *Orig. World*, all the sons of Eve starting with Abel are said to be fathered by demonic archons (117,15–18), so these sons probably include Seth, too.²² I will later return to the question of an anti-Sethian attitude present in some of the Ophite texts. It may, however, be noted already at this point that, concerning the role of Seth, there is a clear difference between the texts in my Ophite corpus and the remaining texts in Schenke's Sethian one. In the latter, Seth is often a heavenly savior, a transmitter of secret and salvific knowledge, and the progenitor of the special race (the "seed of Seth") whereas the Ophite texts either are not interested in Seth at all or depict him in a negative light. To put it differently, Ophite texts that are interested in the paradise story pay little attention to Seth, and, in fact, Sethian, or better, Sethite texts that are interested in Seth pay little attention to the paradise story. These two types of mythological speculations (Ophite and Sethite) are also usually attested independently of each other in the sources (cf. Figure 4).

6.2 APPEAL TO SETH AS A TRANSMITTER OF SECRET KNOWLEDGE

Stroumsa has attempted to derive (Sethian) Gnosticism from speculations about the fallen angels and the separate human stocks of Seth and Cain.²³ Certainly, Classic Gnostic rewritings of Genesis speculate about the rape of Eve by evil angelic archons, and this episode probably derives from traditions dealing with Gen 6:1–4.²⁴ However, this type of speculation already presupposes, instead of explains, the identification of YHWH as a lowly, even devilish, creator, which, according to many scholars, is the hallmark of Gnosticism. In addition, the idea of a special and separate race of Seth is not developed in some of these rewritings either (*Adv. haer.* 1.30; *Orig. World*). Pearson has insisted that all Sethian themes about Seth—apart from the identification of Seth as Jesus—are already present in Jewish sources, and that one does

²¹ E.g., *Orig. World* 102,10–11,25; *Pan.* 39.5.2–3. See Pearson 1990, 84–94. Epiphanius criticizes Sethians for saying that Horaia is Seth's wife when other "heretics" think Horaia is an archon (*Pan.* 39.5.2–3; 39.6.4).

²² That the previously mentioned (*Orig. World* 113,12–114,15) "lordly man" is Cain instead of Seth, see pp. 71–74 above; as well as Pearson 1990, 101–102.

²³ Stroumsa 1984.

²⁴ See Stroumsa 1984, 35–70.

not need Christianity to explain the origins of Sethianism out of the fringes of Judaism.²⁵ Turner also favors the Jewish origins of the Gnostic interest in Seth,²⁶ while Schenke suggested a Samaritan origin.²⁷ On the other hand, many scholars, such as Pétrement, Logan and Klijn, have proposed that the Gnostic interest in Seth is Christian in origin, mostly due to the facts that (a) special interest in Seth cannot be firmly documented before the third century,²⁸ and (b) the idea of Seth as a heavenly savior must presuppose the Christian concept of a heavenly savior.²⁹ Scott, finally, claims that the Sethian authors were comparable to astrologers, selling their products on the religious market by appealing to ancient figures (such as Seth) and odd secret doctrines.³⁰ None of these theories has become dominant, and the origins of the Gnostic interest in Seth, not to mention the origins of Sethianism, have remained basically unsolved.³¹

In my view, however, a plausible *type* of a social situation to account for the origins of a special interest in Seth can be postulated, and this can be backed up with textual proof. Important clues are found in the ideas of Seth as a transmitter of secret knowledge and the self-understanding of the Gnostics as virtuous and special offspring of Seth. As noted above, there was a Jewish tradition known to Josephus and the author of *L.A.E.*, which explained how Seth or his virtuous offspring had carved special knowledge on pillars, and these were designed to transmit the knowledge through primordial disasters by water and fire. This tradition thus already includes the notion of the virtuous offspring of Seth as transmitters of special knowledge. It also consists of a combination of the following themes: Seth; his virtuous offspring; secret knowledge; Flood; and destruction by fire, which in Biblical exegesis became sometimes identified with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.³² This tradition was then adopted in certain texts that belong to Schenke's Sethian corpus: *Apoc. Adam, Holy Book*

²⁵ Pearson 1990, 79–83.

²⁶ Turner (2001, 257–270) thinks this interest first arose within a group of Biblical exegetes leading virtuous lives as the “seed of Seth.”

²⁷ H.-M. Schenke 1981, 592–593. This is mostly due to (a) the occurrence of the name, Dositheus, in *Steles Seth*, and (b) the supposed Samaritan reverence for Seth.

²⁸ Klijn 1977, 81–117; Logan 1996, 45–46, 191, 283.

²⁹ Pétrement 1990, e.g., 140–143, 211–213.

³⁰ Scott 1995, 113–122. See the Epilogue below.

³¹ The controversy-theories proposed by Segal (1980) and Dahl (1981) basically apply to Sethianism, but do not explain the origins of an interest in Seth.

³² See, e.g., Philo, *Abr.* 1; *Mos.* 2.53–95, 263. See also Klijn 1977, 25, 121–124.

and *Steles Seth*. Whereas *Steles Seth* is only interested in the supracaelestial realms, the other two include rewritings of the early chapters of Genesis. These rewritings in *Apoc. Adam* and *Holy Book*, however, are selective, and concentrate on the same combination of themes as the pillar tradition: Seth, his offspring and their survival through primordial disasters by water and fire (*Apoc. Adam* 69,1–76,7; *Holy Book* III 60,9–64,9 par.). These Sethian rewritings also allude to the pillars or books of Seth (*Apoc. Adam* 85,1–29; *Holy Book* III 68,1–14 par.; *Steles Seth* 118,10–19). In other words, these Sethian texts rewrite early chapters of Genesis from the point-of-view of the pillar tradition. The authors of these texts therefore justify their rewritings not only by appealing to the tradition of Seth's pillars transmitting secret knowledge, but also by claiming to be themselves the very seed of Seth that has transmitted this knowledge. While such a claim naturally serves to strengthen the self-identity of the author and the intended audience as virtuous guardians of the truth, we may ask whether there was any other reason to appeal specifically to this pillar tradition, and therefore specifically to Seth.

It may be noted that these Sethian texts not only revise Gen 4–19, but are also quite polemical towards Judaism, demonizing YHWH,³³ and, in *Apoc. Adam*, possibly also Shem, the ancestor of the Jews.³⁴ Even though many rewritings of Genesis circulated in both Jewish and Christian circles (e.g., *Jub.*; *L.A.E.*; Josephus, *Ant.*), most of them were not considered heretical. However, a rewriting that demonizes YHWH and thus effectively bypasses the authority of the Mosaic version of Genesis, was another matter. From heresiological literature, we know that Classic Gnostic rewritings of the Genesis paradise story, such as Irenaeus' Ophite source (*Adv. haer.* 1.30), created controversy and were condemned as heresy. Heresiologists, including Irenaeus, but especially Tertullian, were also of the opinion that heresy is later than truth, i.e., that heresiarchs appeared only after Christ.³⁵ This reflects a

³³ The false monotheistic claim is attributed to Sakla, the "fool," in *Holy Book* III 58,23–59,4 par. In *Apoc. Adam*, the creator of the Hebrew Bible is called Sakla (74,3) and he tries to hinder the salvation of those who are higher than him (71,8–76,6).

³⁴ In *Apoc. Adam*, the post-deluvian humanity is divided into three, i.e., into the sons of Ham, Japheth and Shem (72,15–17). At least some of the sons of Ham and Japheth may attain salvation (74,8–16; 76,8–17), whereas true salvation is apparently not possible for the sons of Shem, the ancestor of the Jews (Gen 10–11).

³⁵ Tertullian, *Praesc.* 29–31. Irenaeus suggests that all heresies derive from Simon Magus of Acts 8 (*Adv. haer.* 1.22.2; 1.31.3; 2 *praef.*; 3 *praef.*).

wider notion in the ancient world, according to which antiquity was valued and novelty disliked. In the eyes of Jews and Romans, Jesus and Christians appeared as recent deceivers and impostors.³⁶ Jews themselves, however, could appeal to the ancient figure of Moses as a guarantor of their traditions, and this partially explains how they had acquired a somewhat secure and acknowledged position within the Roman Empire as a minority enjoying certain privileges.³⁷

It is against such a background that Logan tries to explain the Sethianization of Barbeloite and Ophite myths. He thinks the “great church” accused Gnostics of novelty. These Gnostics, then, would have appealed to the primordial figure of Seth as an originator of their truth, perhaps partially under the influence of a Valentinian concept of Seth as the progenitor of a spiritual and enlightened humanity. However, this concept evidently was not central to Valentinianism, and within a Christian context (as Logan imagines the ideological battle took place between the church and Christian Gnostics), an appeal to anyone other than Christ as a guarantor of the truth would be a strange move. In fact, a common Christian device for justifying one’s truth when facing opposition from other Christians, was a secret revelation from Christ.³⁸ Paul already used such a device (1 Cor 15:8–9; 2 Cor 12:1–4; cf. Gal 1:11–17; Acts 9:1–9; 23:11), and so did many Classic Gnostic authors by appealing to Christ’s secret post-resurrection appearances and dialogues (see, e.g., *Ap. John*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.*). On the other hand, in facing Jewish opposition, it does make perfect sense to appeal to a primordial figure from Jewish lore, like Seth. Thus, an appeal to Seth as a guarantor of truth would make better sense within a Judeo-Christian than within an internal Christian dispute. The anti-Judaic bias in many Sethian texts, including *Apoc. Adam*, also points to a conflict with Judaism. Although we do not have any clear instances of Jewish opposition to Classic Gnosticism, there are references in rabbinic literature that suggest the rabbis fought against advocates of Gnostic revisions of Genesis as well.³⁹

If certain Jews were accusing Classic Gnostic authors of producing lies and forgeries, and not knowing what happened in paradise,

³⁶ See Wilken 1984, 112–117; S. Wilson 1995, 1–28; van Voorst 2000, 75–134; cf. *Ap. John* II 1,8–17 parr.

³⁷ See Wilken 1984, 112–117; S. Wilson 1995, 20–25; cf. Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.

³⁸ Cf. Luttikhuisen 2006, 18–20.

³⁹ See especially Segal 1977.

these authors (or advocates of these texts) could reply that since Moses was not in paradise either and the god who told him what happened there is a liar, it is the accusers who do not know what happened in paradise and it is them who have transmitted lies and forgeries (cf. *Ap. John*'s insistence, "Not as Moses said..."; II 13,19–20; 22,22–24; 23,3–4; 29,6–7 parr.). In fact, these Gnostics then could, and did, appeal to a figure, who *was* in paradise, and has transmitted secret knowledge of what really happened there: they appealed to Adam, who told his son Seth about these events; Seth then transmitted this secret knowledge to his virtuous seed, the Gnostics. In so doing, the Gnostic authors appealed to the known tradition about the pillars of Seth. The variant known to the author of *L.A.E.* even included the notion that what was written on these pillars concerned the events in paradise. As pointed out above, three of Schenke's Sethian texts not only allude to the pillar tradition—either to the pillars themselves or to writings of Seth—in order to justify their teaching (*Apoc. Adam, Holy Book, Steles Seth*),⁴⁰ but two of them also rewrite Genesis in light of this pillar tradition. The source behind Hippolytus' report of the Sethians in the *Syntagma* (cf. Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 2.7–9), revising the story of the Flood, may likewise stem from such a background. Furthermore, such an attempt to justify one's rewritings of Genesis by appealing to the pillars of Seth transmitting secret pre-Mosaic knowledge, in my opinion better explains the origins of the Gnostic interest in Seth than does Scott's proposal of Gnostics appealing to an ancient figure like Seth, to better sell their product. (I will return to this question in the Epilogue.)

6.3 SETHIANIZATION OF OPHITE AND BARBELOITE MYTHS

The proposed type of socio-historical situation thus presupposes that the appeal to Seth and his pillars occurred as a secondary justification for the already existing rewritings of Genesis. Not only would new texts have been produced, which rewrote Genesis in light of the pillar tradition, such as *Apoc. Adam* and *Holy Book*, but Seth would then also have been read into the already existing, Ophite, rewritings. As discussed above, some scholars have suggested that the third heavenly man in *Eugnostos*

⁴⁰ *Apoc. Adam* 85,1–29; *Holy Book* III 68,1–14; IV 80,15–81,2; *Steles Seth*, e.g., 118,10–19.

is, in fact, Seth, although not explicitly so named. In my view, the Third Man had originally nothing to do with Seth, and that this figure was based on Christological speculations. However, once a special interest in Seth had been invented, the Third Man (Christ/Savior) would easily become identified as Seth (especially since the Second Man was explicitly identified as Adam). Such a secondary identification, I suggest, explains many central Sethian concepts: (a) the idea of the *heavenly* Seth; (b) the idea of Seth as a savior, even as Christ; and finally, (c) the idea of the *heavenly* seed of Seth. Even though one could speculate that the last concept simply derives from a heavenly projection of the Jewish concept of the virtuous Sethites,⁴¹ already part of the pillar tradition, I find it more likely that this Jewish concept was combined with an already existing Ophite concept of the “kingless generation,” which not only had a heavenly archetype or origin in the Ophite mythology,⁴² but may also have been a self-designation, like the appeal of belonging to Seth’s special race. Thus, a Sethianization of the concept of “kingless generation” may have played a role in developing the concept of the heavenly “seed of Seth.” It is to be noted, however, that not all Sethianizers of the Ophite material translated the “kingless generation” into the “seed of Seth”; for example, the author of *Apoc. Adam* still speaks of the “kingless generation” (82,19–20). The term occurs also in the non-Sethian Naassene teaching (*Ref.* 5.8.2,30), which appears to be another kind of modification of Ophite mythology (see Chapter 5).⁴³

Since writings in which Ophite paradise material is combined with speculations about Seth are rare, and the Ophite concept of the Godhead is clearly expressed only in *Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*—and these texts do *not* identify the Third Man as Seth—is there any actual evidence of a secondary identification of the Third Man as Seth? It seems that in *Ap. John* there is. We have already seen that the authors of *Ap. John* have rewritten Ophite material. Whereas most texts that utilize Barbeloite material do not describe God as a heavenly man,⁴⁴ *Ap. John* does (II 2,35–4,18 parr.; this may,

⁴¹ Philo, *Post.* 42; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.68–72.

⁴² See *Eugnostos* V 5,4–5/III 75,17–19; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 99,18–19/BG 92,6–7; *Hyp. Arch.* 97,4–5; *Orig. World* 125,2–7.

⁴³ The term, “kingless” is also found in the Valentinian *Tri. Trac.* (100,3–14), as well as in the Sethian Cod. Bruc. *Untitled* 12, but these texts do not speak of a “kingless generation.” See Painchaud and Janz 1997.

⁴⁴ Apart from *Ap. John*, such a concept is only found in *Norea* (which may be an expansion of *Hyp. Arch.*; cf. H.-M. Schenke 1981, 595; Logan 1996, 45; Turner 2001,

however, only apply to Barbelo, the first thought of the supreme God). *Ap. John* also mentions two other heavenly men, Adamas and his son, *who here is explicitly identified as Seth* (II 8,32–9,14 parr.). Since speculations about heavenly men are also not found in many variants of Barbeloite speculation,⁴⁵ they probably found their way into *Ap. John* from the context of the Ophite myth. This fits with the suggestion made in Chapter 5 that the rebuke formula, “Man exists and Son of Man,” found in *Ap. John* and *Holy Book*, originated within an Ophite context. However, while in the Ophite myth the three heavenly men (with their female aspects/consorts) essentially formed the Godhead itself, here in *Ap. John*, they have been scattered and they no longer occupy their former high positions. What seems to have happened is that while the authors of *Ap. John* retained some basic notions about the Ophite Godhead as heavenly humans, they nevertheless subjugated these mythological (and now Sethianized) Ophite concepts to the philosophically more acceptable Barbeloite scheme of the divine hierarchy. This, again, would be in accordance with the noted tendency on the part of the authors of *Ap. John* to modify Ophite material according to Barbeloite ideas. The Barbeloite concept of the Godhead is clearly influenced by Neopythagorean, Middle- and Neoplatonic speculations. One may thus argue that it is an attempt to express the Christian concept of divinity in philosophically acceptable terms. Of course, the Ophite mythology was in itself already influenced by contemporary Platonism as, for example, the parallels to Philo’s exegesis and *Timaeus* show. But even in the system of *Eugnostos*, where clear Platonic influence is found, the core triad of heavenly humans is still essentially Christian and essentially mythological.⁴⁶ As Turner has demonstrated, there occurred in Middleplatonism a general shift in interest from *Timaeus* and its creation account to *Parmenides* and its description of first principles, and this seems to be reflected in the Classic Gnostic mythmaking as well:⁴⁷ while even the first principles of the Ophite

168), Cod. Bruc. *Untitled*, and perhaps in the Codex III version of *Holy Book* (see above).

⁴⁵ God himself as “man” is a concept *not* found in *Adv. haer.* 1.29; *Trim. Prot.*, *Marsanes*, *Allogenes*, *Zost.*, *Steles Seth* or *Apoc. Adam* (possibly also not in *Holy Book*, see above). Heavenly Adam is *not* found in *Trim. Prot.* or *Marsanes*. A heavenly Seth or an anthropomorphic son of a heavenly Adam/Son of Man is *not* found in *Adv. haer.* 1.29, *Trim. Prot.*, *Marsanes* or *Norea*.

⁴⁶ Cf. Hyl Dahl 2006, 375–376.

⁴⁷ Turner 2006a.

mythology are derived from the creation account of Genesis that was read through Platonic lenses (likely in light of *Timaeus* specifically),⁴⁸ the later Platonizing Sethian treatises with their Barbeloite concept of the Godhead are mainly interested in the first principles and seem to express much of their speculation in terms of *Parmenides*.⁴⁹

In *Ap. John*, Christ is interestingly not identified with either Adam or Seth. This could be due to two reasons: (1) the Barbeloite speculation the authors used already had a place for Christ as the third member of the supreme triad, but no fixed place for Adam and Seth;⁵⁰ or (2) the authors did not approve of a Seth Christology, and simply placed the heavenly Seth on a lower level in the divine hierarchy. Even though a Seth Christology is found, for example, in *Holy Book* (III 64,1–3 par.), many Christians did not approve of such a concept. In fact, one finds a spectrum of attitudes towards Seth in early Christianity. Some Christians accepted that Seth is Christ (*Holy Book*; Sethians of *Pan.* 39.1.3). Others did not approve of this, but did not have a major problem with a special status for Seth either, as can be seen in *Ap. John*, where Christ and Seth both inhabit the divine world. However, some Christians, especially the heresiologists, condemned such a Christology as heresy. A similar rejection of a Seth Christology may explain the noted anti-Sethian attitude in some of the texts of the Ophite corpus, although such an attitude could also be taken simply as the authors' counterreaction to the Sethianization of their myths. One of the sources behind *Pan.* 26 depicts Seth as an evil archon, and *Orig. World* implicitly includes Seth in the list of the archontic sons of Eve (all her sons starting with Abel have an archontic origin). As noted earlier, Painchaud has suggested that the material in *Orig. World* which discusses the "lordly man," the offspring of a heavenly Eve who was born before Abel, stemmed from a redactor's hand. If this is true, and if this "lordly man" is Cain, instead of Seth (as suggested above), then this material, demonizing all the sons of Eve apart from Cain may derive from the hand of an anti-Sethian redactor. The anti-Valentinian material in *Orig. World* may or may not stem from the same redaction.

⁴⁸ Philo also read Genesis in light of *Timaeus*. Cf. Pearson 1984; Turner 2006a.

⁴⁹ Turner 2006a.

⁵⁰ Cf. Turner 2001, 286.

Many scholars have suggested that Seth was secondarily introduced into Barbeloite material as well. Apart from the facts that *Adv. haer.* 1.29, *Norea*, *Trim. Prot.* and *Marsanes* do not speak of Seth, it may also be pointed out that whereas the first and second lights (Harmozel, Oroiael) house one figure each (Adam and Seth), whole groups of people (seed of Seth, those who repent later) occupy the third and fourth lights (Daveithe, Eleleth). This curiosity may be a sign of a secondary addition of both Adam and Seth into the already established structure of the Barbeloite hierarchy. Such an assumption is strengthened by the facts that (a) *Marsanes* and *Trim. Prot.* do not mention Adam at all, and (b) *Adv. haer.* 1.29, which does speak of Adam, nevertheless does not connect him with any of the four lights. If Adam himself was part of the Barbeloite scheme from the beginning, one could then hypothesize that Seth was simply incorporated there next to his father. Textual evidence from *Ap. John*, however, suggests that Seth may have arrived in the Barbeloite hierarchy through a Sethianization of the Ophite mythology. In this light, the functions of the third and fourth lights of housing the saved, i.e., the seed of Seth and those who repent later, may also betray Ophite influence for they could be seen as importations of the Ophite idea of two-level salvation.

Furthermore, if certain features in the Barbeloite hierarchy can thus be explained as Ophite influences, what can be said about the relationship between the Ophite mythology and the actual core structure of the Barbeloite mythology, i.e., the triad of Father-Barbelo-Son and the four lights? As suggested above, this core material is generally reminiscent of Neopythagorean, Middle- and Neoplatonic speculations, and may have been developed to give the Christian Godhead philosophical respectability. In *Ap. John*, such material may have been adopted specifically to replace the mythologically unsuitable Ophite concept of the Godhead in order to convince people with Greek education. I will return to the relationship between the Ophite and Barbeloite types of mythological speculation in Chapter 9, in discussing the ritual dimensions attached to both types.

6.4 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF PART II

In accordance with the results of the previous chapters, there is a clear difference concerning the role of Seth between the Ophite texts, including the ones with Sethian features, and the remaining texts of

Schenke's Sethian corpus. The former either do not speak of Seth at all, or depict him as a marginal, even negative, character, whereas the latter depict Seth as an important savior-figure, as the transmitter of secret knowledge and as the progenitor of the special race, the "seed of Seth." However, such speculations about Seth and his seed do not occur in all Sethian texts, and they appear to be secondary additions to the Barbeloite mythology. Therefore, Schenke's "Sethian system" does not seem to be a monolith but a combination of two separate types of mythological speculation, Barbeloite and Sethite.

I have suggested that the Gnostic interest in Seth derives from Jewish accusations of novelty and forgery concerning Ophite rewritings of Genesis that had bypassed the authoritative Mosaic version and demonized the Jewish creator. The tradition of Seth transmitting secret knowledge carved on pillars was picked up and used to justify these rewritings. This seems to have led (a) to the production of new kinds of rewritings of Genesis that concentrated on Seth, the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah, such as one finds in *Apoc. Adam* and *Holy Book*; and (b) to the reading of Seth into the already existing Ophite rewritings (cf. *Ap. John*). As a result, Seth seems to have been identified as the Third Man of the Ophite Godhead, and this identification then led to the concepts of the heavenly Seth and his heavenly seed. The identification of Seth as the Third Man also suggested he is identical with Christ. This, however, divided opinions among early Christians. Some accepted a Seth Christology, some revered Seth for other reasons, but some Classic Gnostic authors seem to have reacted towards Seth in a hostile manner by depicting him as an archontic being. The idea of a heavenly Seth—whether he is identical with Christ or not—also seems to have been secondarily added to the Barbeloite mythology. Thus, there appears to have occurred a Sethianization of both Ophite and Barbeloite mythologies. When did it happen? We will return to this question after the links between Classic Gnostic baptismal speculations and the Fourth Gospel have been examined in Chapter 9.

* * * * *

This chapter concludes Part II: Myth and Innovation. Before moving to Part III (Ritual), let me summarize the main results of the preceding analysis concerning the main features of the Ophite mythology, as well as this mythology's relationship to Schenke's "Sethian system," i.e., Barbeloite and Sethite myths.

The Ophite mythology centers around the creation and paradise stories and is essentially a revision of Gen 1–3 complemented with speculations on both Wisdom and Adam Christologies. In fact, the main features of the Ophite mythology are all derived from or read into the paradise story, with a special interest on the eating from the tree of knowledge. The true Godhead is depicted as a heavenly projection of Adam and Eve, as a series of androgynous heavenly humans, whose male aspects are *anthropos*-figures, and whose female aspects are Sophias. Christ appears to have been identified with the heavenly Adam, the image of God (cf. Gen 1:26–27), and this also explains the depiction of God himself, the Father of Christ, as a heavenly human or the ultimate heavenly projection of Adam. Sophia, for her part, is not only the Wisdom of Jewish literature, but is also depicted as a heavenly projection of Eve, and is therefore derived from the paradise story as well. Furthermore, many Hellenistic Jewish traditions had already read Sophia into the early chapters of Genesis. The serpent's advice in paradise is given a positive interpretation, although the serpent itself seems to appear at best as a medium of revelation, either used by or confused with the true revealer. The creator, for his part, has been turned into a demonized Ialdabaoth who is the leader of the seven, usually theriomorphic, archons with peculiar names. These archons are partially derived from the cherubs guarding the gates of paradise in Gen 3:24. They are also the creators of the earthly Adam, and thus are derived from and/or read into the problematic plural of Gen 1:26. The sevenfold number of the archons, as well as their association with heavens and days of the week, may have been influenced by the seven days of creation (Gen 1:1–2:4), as some scholars have suggested.⁵¹ Their theriomorphism, although clearly influenced by traditions concerning the archangels around the throne of God, also derives partially from the figure of the serpent. These theriomorphic archons may even be connected with the animals Adam names in Gen 2:19–20. This, however, remains hypothetical.⁵²

Finally, even the “vain claim” of Ialdabaoth is, in a way, attested in the paradise story since the words are found in a nutshell in the words of the serpent, “you will be like gods” (Gen 3:4–5), as Dahl has

⁵¹ Gilhus 1985, 26–36; Pétrement 1990, 65ff.

⁵² An overtly literal reading of Genesis might suggest that God in Gen 1:26 is talking with the animals he has created since no other creatures are yet present; it may also be noted that at least the serpent had the ability to think and talk (Gen 3).

pointed out.⁵³ Adam's eating of the forbidden tree that indeed made him like god (Gen 3:24), was sometimes in Rabbinic literature connected with the blasphemies of the prince (LXX: ἄρχων) of Tyre, "I am a god" (Ezek 28:2–19); and the king of Babylon, "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa 14:3–20).⁵⁴ It is noteworthy that the former "archontic" blasphemy was already connected with the paradise story in Ezek 28 itself.⁵⁵ These "vain claims" could then easily shift to YHWH through his demonization, especially since the book of Isaiah already contained several versions of the monotheistic claim (e.g., Isa 44–46), as well as blasphemous variants of it by the king and daughter of Babylon (14:12–14; 47:7–10). The existence of such Rabbinic combinations of scriptural verses combining Adam's Fall with false claims to be like a god may further explain why Ialdabaoth's "vain claim" was incorporated into the paradise story.

As the Ophite texts predominantly rewrite the creation and paradise stories of Genesis, they also offer etiological explanations. For example, mortality derives from the jealousy of the creator, who either produces Death from his envy for Sabaoth (*Hyp. Arch.* 96,3–11; *Orig. World* 106,19–29), or envelopes Adam (together with Eve) in a mortal body due to his envy of Adam's newly gained higher intelligence (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.8–9; *Ap. John* II 20,32–21,13 parr.). Negatively viewed sexuality was likewise planted in humanity by the evil creator (e.g., *Ap. John* II 24,26–32 parr.), who then raped Eve in his own foolish lust. The existence of evil, in other words, is due to the creation and government of the cosmos by forces hostile to humanity. However, most significantly, humanity can rise above this misery by virtue of the divine spark within; people have inherited a divine spirit from Adam, who himself received it *via* Sophia from the True Human, the real God above the lowly creator. However, because some people are more accepting than others of this new Gnostic understanding of Genesis, mythological explanations were given to the real-world situation: those who deny this Gnostic message either lack the divine spirit, or have been led astray by the archontic counterfeit spirit; but even among those who accept it, there are people who know better, and they will

⁵³ Dahl 1981, 703.

⁵⁴ *Gen. Rab.* 9.5; *Ex. Rab.* 3.12; 8.2; *Lev. Rab.* 18.2; *Pirqe R. El.* 12–14. See also Dahl 1981, 701–712.

⁵⁵ It is possible that the allusion in Ezek 28 is not to the Genesis version, but to a variant tradition. See Zimmerli 1983, 90–91.

enjoy the highest level of salvation as the kingless generation, whose mythological origin, in fact, is to be found among the highest ontological planes.

From a typological point-of-view, texts of my Ophite corpus (*Adv. haer.* 1.30, *Cels.* 6.24–38, *Pan.* 26, *Eugnostos*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, *Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Ap. John*), stand clearly apart from the remaining texts of Schenke's Sethian corpus, although in the case of *Ap. John*, Ophite material seems to have been rewritten and remodeled in light of the Barbeloite concept of Godhead. Furthermore, while the Naassene teaching may be an adaptation of Ophite material, the Ophite character of *Testim. Truth* and Hippolytus' additional information about the snake-friendly exegesis remain problematic. However, since these sources depict the serpent of paradise completely positively due to the additional use of John 3:14–15, and lack material resembling the other Ophite criteria, it seems best not to include these documents in the Ophite corpus.

I have argued that the origins of the Ophite mythology could be located in a type of situation involving a Platonic reading of the paradise story of Genesis catalyzed by a controversy between Jews and Christians concerning Christ's divinity and the correct interpretation of monotheism. This would have led to the demonization of YHWH as an inferior rival god. Moreover, the Ophite mythologoumena concerning Adam and Eve have many interesting parallels to 1 Cor and the exegesis of Philo. The Ophite authors seem to have been familiar with both Philo-like speculations and Paul's Corinthian correspondence, although the actual connection between the Ophite mythology and Paul's opposition in Corinth is not entirely clear. It does seem possible, however, that the Ophite mythology belongs to the same trajectory as the theology of some of Paul's Corinthian opponents. The Ophite speculations also have certain links to Jewish-Christian ideas (Christ in paradise and positive Adam-Jesus parallelism) and apocalyptic literature (theriomorphism of the archons/demons; the lustful fallen angels teaching idolatry and forbidden knowledge to humankind; the descent and rejection of Wisdom; the *title* Son of Man), especially *1 Enoch*, but the most important links seem to be with Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom and Adam traditions, such as found in *Wisd*, *Prov*, *Philo* and 1 Cor, and surveyed in Chapters 4 and 5.

The secondary Sethianization of the Ophite mythology then shifts the focus from Adam and the paradise story to Seth and the ancient

disasters by water and fire, i.e., the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. This Sethianization seems to be connected with a type of a situation involving a dispute between Jews and Christians concerning the authority of Moses. This time, not only would new texts have been produced, but Seth would then also have been read into the Ophite mythology. Such a readaptation of Ophite material would explain the emergence of the "Sethian" concepts of a heavenly Seth, Seth as Christ, and the heavenly seed of Seth. Moreover, in *Ap. John*, the Ophite concept of the Godhead, expressed in mythological terms as androgynous heavenly humans, was modified and essentially replaced with a philosophically more acceptable Barbeloite one, resembling Neopythagorean, Middle- and Neoplatonic speculations about the first principles. In my view, such replacements and readaptations, arising out of various situations and concerns, best explain the simultaneous occurrence of Ophite, Barbeloite and Sethite materials in Classic Gnostic texts.

PART III

RITUAL

CHAPTER SEVEN

EVIDENCE FOR OPHITE SNAKE WORSHIP

This chapter opens Part III (Ritual) where the veracity of outsiders' (heresiologists and Celsus) information concerning Ophite rituals is discussed. First, I return to the serpent, already discussed in Chapter 2. This time, however, the focus will be on heresiological allegations of Ophite snake worship, and on the related question of Ophite provenance of certain snake amulets. Heresiological allegations of "heretical" Christian snake worship were not uncommon from the second century onwards, but for the most part, these allegations were directed against Ophites and Naasseni. This is not surprising since Ophites and Naasseni were often considered "snake-sects" *par excellence* because both names were derived from a word for snake. Some scholars, unfortunately, have taken these heresiological allegations of Gnostic (the label "Gnostic" was attached to both Ophites and Naasseni in heresiological literature) snake worship for granted, and speculated on the pagan roots of such snake worship.¹ Despite the apparent popularity of snake cults in the Greco-Roman world, these views seem untenable to me. As Chapter 2 shows, the evidence rather points to Biblical exegesis as the main source of Gnostic interest in snakes. The reliability of the heresiological allegations is likewise questionable.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the heresiological allegations of Ophite and Naassene snake worship, to see if there is any corroborating evidence that would support such claims, and, finally, to offer an explanation for these accusations. I will first consider the heresiological reports themselves. Second, I will take a brief look at pagan snake handling and imagery as a possible background for the purported Ophite and Naassene rituals. Third, I will examine the snake symbolism of the so-called original Gnostic evidence (Coptic texts from Nag Hammadi and related codices as well as various artifacts that have been considered Gnostic) in light of the allegations. Finally, before

¹ Bousset 1912, 1538–1539; Legge 1950, 2:77–78; Casey 1965, 382, 387; Leisegang 1971, 82, 107, 128; C. King 1973, 101; Mastrocinque 2005.

reaching the conclusions, I will also examine certain New Testament passages which may bear a relationship to these allegations.

7.1 THE HERESIOLOGICAL ACCOUNTS

As we have seen, the snake symbolism in Irenaeus' Ophite account is ambivalent. The devilish serpent's advice to eat from the forbidden tree is seen in a positive light, but another opinion actually equated the snake and Sophia (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.15), who spoke through it (1.30.7). The core myth (1.30.1–14), however, depicted the snake itself as evil. Whereas Irenaeus accordingly does not accuse these people of snake worship, later heresiologists who described the Ophites did make that claim. The earliest one seems to have been Hippolytus, in his now lost *Syntagma*, to which Pseudo-Tertullian is the earliest surviving witness. As I have already pointed out, Pseudo-Tertullian's account combines material from Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30 with information concerning snake exegesis of Gen 3, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15 (*Haer.* 2.1–4) that is paralleled by *Testim. Truth* and the Peratic teaching. While Hippolytus does not accuse the Peratics of snake worship despite their snake Christology, the "Ophites" are said to extol the serpent and even to prefer it to Christ (*serpentem magnificent in tantum, ut illum etiam ipsi Christo praeferant*; 2.1) because it was the snake who brought the knowledge; and while its sacred powers were manifested in Moses' brazen serpent, they were only imitated by Christ. Supposedly these Ophites then let a serpent bless (*benedico*) their Eucharist (*Haer.* 2.1). The basis for the purported snake veneration is clearly exegetical, as Gen 3, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15 are all here interpreted positively. However, Christ and the serpent are not here considered to be identical, although there is a positive link between them.

We will now finally turn to Epiphanius' famous report of the Ophite snake worship (*Pan.* 37), which, however, contains only suspect information. Epiphanius, who is dependent on Hippolytus and Irenaeus, affirms that in addition to citing Gen 3, Num 21:8–9 and John 3:14–15, the Ophites also refer to Matt 10:16, "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (*Pan.* 37.7.6). The snake is said to have acted against Ialdabaoth by convincing Adam and Eve to eat, thus bringing the knowledge (*γνώσιν ἤνεγκεν*) and "teaching them the whole of the knowledge of the mysteries on high" (37.5.3). Its imprint is found in the serpentine shape of human intestines (*Pan.* 37.5.1), a statement already found in

Irenaeus. Epiphanius then goes on to claim that the Ophite snake is, in fact, Christ (*Anacephalaeosis*; *Pan.* 37.2.6; 37.6.6; 37.8.1), a “king from heaven” (βασιλέα ἄπ’ οὐρανοῦ; *Pan.* 37.5.5) and a “god” (θεός, 37.2.4). This Christological claim, however, is not confirmed by any of the earlier heresiological reports of the Ophites upon which Epiphanius based his description. Even though the snake and Christ are identified with each other elsewhere, e.g., in the Peratic teaching (*Ref.* 5.12–18) where the snake is accordingly a light-world-figure, the identification did not occur in the earlier Ophite reports which assigned an archontic origin to the serpent.² As in John 3:14–15 and certain other contemporary interpretations of Num 21:6–9, the snake can symbolize or be a *typos* of the Logos or Christ without being identical with him.³ The identification here in Epiphanius’ account could, in fact, be based on Epiphanius’ perhaps tendentious misunderstanding of the Ophite use of John 3:14–15. He may also have read Peratic notions into the earlier Ophite reports. Be that as it may, Epiphanius did pick up an earlier heresiological claim (the *Syntagma*) according to which the Ophites used a snake to bless their Eucharist. Then, guided by his Christological understanding of the Ophite snake and by his favourite idea of the serpent symbolizing heresy,⁴ he let his imagination run wild. Admitting he is not an eyewitness (*Pan.* 37.5.7), Epiphanius nonetheless gives a detailed exposition of the Ophite Eucharist as a pagan-styled mystery cult (μυστήριον): he says the Ophites have an actual snake in a basket (κίστη),⁵ and that they let it crawl over the breads, which thus become the Eucharist; they also kiss the snake, and finally offer a hymn to the Father on high through the snake (37.5.6–8). Leisegang unfortunately took this description as accurate and explained how the Logos was thought to be present at the Eucharist in the serpent and how the purported kissing of the snake was the ritual kiss of peace.⁶

² Due to his dependence on Irenaeus, Epiphanius also knows of the archontic and evil nature of the Ophite serpent: the snake was cast down from heaven (*Pan.* 37.5.4), and in bringing the knowledge to Adam and Eve, it deceived (ἀπατάω, 37.4.5) Eve.

³ Philo, *Leg. all.* 2.76–81; *Wis* 16:5–12; *Barn.* 12:5–7; Cf. Odeberg 1968, 98–113.

⁴ Epiphanius compared almost all of the 80 heresies of his *Panarion* to venomous snakes. He also gave the title, Πανάριον, “Medicine chest,” to his work because it provides a cure for the snake bite of heresy (*Proem* 1.1.2). See Vallée 1981, 65–69.

⁵ Cf. the *cista mystica* with a snake; see, e.g., Harrison 1927, 264–266; van Voss 1979, 23–26.

⁶ Leisegang 1971 (first German edition 1924), 107. Leisegang (1955a, 40–41) changed his position slightly in another article. C. King (1973, 101) and Mastrocinque (2005, 32–41) also trust in Epiphanius’ report. Cf. Bousset 1912, 1539.

As noted above, this scene is summarized in the influential *Anacephalaeosis*. Thus, Epiphanius' apparent misinterpretations and invention of the Ophite Eucharist scene not only became the main source of knowledge of the Ophites for later authors, but they have also largely contributed to the still prevailing picture of the Ophites as worshipers of snakes. As for Filastrius (*Div. her. lib.* 1), he merely affirms that the Ophites venerate (*veneror*) and adore (*adoro*) the snake. Theodoret's description of the "Sethian-Ophite" snake worship (in *Haer. fab. comp.* 1.14.61–65) is based completely on Epiphanius, and Clement (*Strom.* 7.17.108.2) had earlier simply stated that Ophites are named after their object of reverence (ὦν τετυμήκασιν). Bousset has proposed that Leviathan in the Ophite diagram is identical to Sophia and that the Ophite interest in the snake derives from the cult of an ophiomorphic Isis of Pharos, this goddess being comparable to the serpentine Sophia.⁷ Bousset's proposal, however, is not really believable since the non-serpentine Sophia is distinguished from Leviathan in the diagram.⁸

In the *Refutatio*, Hippolytus claims that the Naasseni, who supposedly honored only *naas* (Graecized Hebrew word for serpent, *νάας*), i.e., the world soul Logos-serpent (*Ref.* 5.6.4; 5.9.11–14), attended certain pagan mystery cults.⁹ Since in many mystery cults snakes were handled (see below), and because the Naasseni, the first Gnostics, according to Hippolytus (5.6.3–4; 6.6.1), also explained how no religious ceremonies or mysteries can take place without the Logos-serpent somehow involved (5.9.12), many scholars, accepting Hippolytus' information, concluded that the Gnostic interest in the snake derives from pagan mystery cults.¹⁰ However, I feel that Lancellotti is right in arguing that the Naassene knowledge of these mysteries was not based on personal participation but rather on literary sources and publicly available information.¹¹ Since Hippolytus also does not describe any

⁷ Bousset 1912, 1538–1539.

⁸ Leviathan is said to be a circle that encompasses the seven or ten circles of the archons (*Cels.* 6.25,35); the "providence" and "nature" of Sophia are said to be written within a circle that encloses not only two intertwining circles and a rhomboid-shaped figure, but possibly also two additional circles (6.38). For the reconstructions, see Plates 1–9.

⁹ See *Ref.* 5.7.34; 5.8.9–10; 5.8.39–45; 5.9.10–12.

¹⁰ Legge 1950, 2:26, 2:56–59, 2:77–78; Casey 1965, 382–387; Leisegang 1971, 81–82, 95; C. King 1973, 82, 225; Mastrocinque 2005, 127–128.

¹¹ Lancellotti 2000, 245, 258–259, 265–266, 283–284.

actual Naassene snake handling and because the snake seems to be merely a symbolic representation of the Logos, the Naassene honouring of the serpent was probably only metaphorical in nature, based on a Johannine exegesis of Moses' brazen serpent (John 3:14–15) and not on snake handling in pagan mysteries.

Finally, it should be noted that Theodoret in the fifth century claimed that the Marcionites worshiped the snake (*Haer. fab. comp.* 1.24), but this is not confirmed by any ancient and more reliable testimony.¹² Similarly, the medieval reports of Basilidean snake worship are not corroborated by early witnesses.¹³ Interestingly, if Hippolytus was the author of the *Refutatio*, and if the Ophite accounts of Pseudo-Tertullian, Epiphanius and Filastrius go essentially back to Hippolytus' *Syntagma*, as is probable, then Hippolytus is the only actual early "witness" to Gnostic snake worship. Apart from connecting the Naasseni with honoring the snake as a symbol of the Logos in the *Refutatio*, he had apparently claimed in his *Syntagma* that the Ophites venerate the snake and use it to bless the Eucharist (at least this claim is made in accounts dependent on the *Syntagma*). All other accounts, including Epiphanius' influential one, are then ultimately dependent on Hippolytus. Since the Naassene snake worship seems to have been only metaphorical, the only remaining piece of information concerning a concrete Gnostic handling or worshiping of serpents is Hippolytus' claim that a group called Ophites venerate the snake and use it to bless their Eucharist; this would further be based on an exegesis of Gen 3, Num 21:6–9, and John 3:14–15. Is there any external proof for this claim?

¹² Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.*; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.27.2–4; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7.29.1; 7.30. Mastrocinque (2005) thinks the Marcionites of the fifth century had fused with Anatolian snake worshiping sects, both Gnostic and Asclepian (pp. 7ff., 135–136). Although in this instance Mastrocinque may be correct (this hypothesis is, however, speculative), his overall thesis of the roots of Gnosticism in Jewish magic seems untenable to me. He treats heresiological accusations of Gnostic snake cults uncritically, and takes most heresiological allegations of *idolatry*, as well as the serpent symbolism in Rev and *Acta*-literature, as evidence for widespread Eastern Gnostic snake cults (e.g., 32–41, 111, 122–159, 194).

¹³ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.24.3–7; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 24; and the very different account in Hippolytus' *Ref.* 7.20–27. As for the medieval reports, see Agapius, *Kitâb al-'Unwân* (in Graffin and Nau 1911, 506); Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 105a,6 (in Chabot 1963, 174); and Bar Hebraeus' heresiology (in Graffin and Nau 1919, 252–253). The last two seem to be based on Epiphanius. See the excursus in Chapter 2.

7.2 PAGAN AND SO-CALLED ORIGINAL Gnostic EVIDENCE

In light of many pagan cults of Antiquity where snakes were handled, the existence of a Gnostic snake cult of some kind cannot be ruled out completely. For example, snakes were kept in the temple of Asclepius, a Greek god of medicine whose attributes included a snake (still today the staff of Asclepius with the snake is used as a symbol of the medical profession; cf. the World Health Organization, www.who.int).¹⁴ Snakes often symbolized life and healing powers in Antiquity.¹⁵ A neo-Asclepian snake cult of Glycon, devised by a certain Alexander, became successful and included oracles purportedly given by a snake (Lucian, *Alex.*, e.g., 26, 43). In the mysteries of Sabazios, snakes were used in a procession in honor of the god, and, as a part of an initiation ritual, a snake was made to go into the chest of the initiates.¹⁶ Moreover, the ancient Greeks believed snakes to embody the souls of their ancestors and thus brought food to graves for the snakes.¹⁷ Finally, it should be pointed out that many pagan gods were depicted or thought of as having a serpentine shape. Zeus, according to some legends, assumed the form of a snake in order to have intercourse with a woman;¹⁸ Isis and Serapis eventually were presented as serpentine; and in Alexandria, a serpentine good spirit, the *Agathodaimon*, was venerated.¹⁹

However, when one takes a look at the texts from Nag Hammadi and related codices, one finds no descriptions of or references to snake handling or snake rituals of any kind. What one does find is a rich and varied serpent symbolism, as we saw in Chapter 2. Of the forty-six Nag Hammadi texts, eleven speak of the serpent, and serpents appear also in the books of *Pistis Sophia* of the Askew Codex. Even though

¹⁴ Küster 1913, 134–136; Edelstein 1945, 2:225–231; Kerényi 1960.

¹⁵ On the wide variety of serpent symbolism in pagan Antiquity, see, e.g., MacCulloch 1910; Küster 1913; Harrison 1927, 260–288, 307–316; Hinnells 1975; R. Bell 1982, 214–217; Hornung 1982; Lurker 1987; Kelhoffer 2000, 340–416; Gilhus 2006.

¹⁶ Demosthenes, *Cor.* 18.260; Clement, *Protr.* 2.16.2–3. The snakes used in the mysteries of Sabazios were not “fat-cheeked,” as the τὸς παρείας in Demosthenes (text in Butcher 1903) is sometimes translated (derived erroneously from ἡ παρεία, “cheek”), but “reddish-brown snakes” (< ὁ παρείας) used in the cult of Asclepius. See Liddle and Scott 1968, 1332–1333.

¹⁷ See Küster 1913, 41–42, 66; cf. Harrison 1927, 310–315.

¹⁸ Athenagoras, *Leg.* 20; Clement, *Protr.* 2.16.1; Arnobius, *Adv. nat.* 5.21. Cf. Küster 1913, 152.

¹⁹ See the bibliography cited in Jackson 1985, 79–80n50. See also C. King 1973, 358, 434.

some texts, e.g., *Ap. John*, only employ negative serpent imagery,²⁰ the snake is depicted in positive or at least in neutral terms in the following texts: *Hyp. Arch.*, *Orig. World*, *Testim. Truth*, *Apoc. Adam*, *Gos. Thom.*, *Teach. Silv.* and *Pist. Soph.* 4. The last four do not draw upon the paradise story (Gen 3) or on Moses' serpents (neither Num 21:6–9 nor John 3:14–15) in their snake speculations,²¹ and thus do not seem relevant in evaluating the Hippolytian account.

The authors of *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* rewrite the paradise story of Gen 3, and give a positive interpretation of the eating of the tree of knowledge. Both *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* agree with Irenaeus' Ophite source, that the true revealer was not the serpent, but a higher entity that either used the snake as a tool, or was mistaken for a snake. In *Orig. World*, this entity, the human instructor in paradise, can even be seen as a Christ-figure, if he is identical with the "second Adam" mentioned in the text.²² Likewise, according to the related *Ap. John*, the true revealer in paradise was Christ instead of the evil snake (II 22,9–15; 23,26–31 parr.). Therefore, the distinction between the snake and the true revealer—who can be Christ—is a vague one in the Ophite texts, and this vagueness could have contributed to a later understanding of the serpent itself as the instructor, or even as Christ. In fact, this kind of understanding seems to lie behind the opinion of certain "others" in Irenaeus' Ophite account, according to which Sophia herself became the snake (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.15). Nevertheless, *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* do not speculate on Moses' brazen serpent, and a reference to John 3:14–15 is missing as well.

However, the "snake midrash" in *Testim. Truth* (45,23–49,10) contains exactly the same kind of snake exegesis that Hippolytus connects with the Ophite snake worship. The creator is first criticized for his actions in paradise (Gen 3), and this is followed by a set of passages from the scriptures speaking positively of Moses' snakes (Exod 7:8–12; Num 21:9; John 3:14–15). Despite *Testim. Truth's* lack of references to the actual handling of snakes or their Eucharistic application, this text

²⁰ See *Ap. John* II 10,8–9; 11,30–31; 22,12–15; 24,26–29 parr.; *Paraph. Shem* 32,2–34,15; 44,31–45,31; *Tri. Trac.* 104,4–108,12; *Gos. Phil.* 61,5–10; *On Bap. A* 40,11–17; *Pist. Soph.* 3.126ff.

²¹ See *Apoc. Adam* 80,9–29; *Gos. Thom.* 39; *Teach. Silv.* 95,4–33; 105,28–106,1; *Pist. Soph.* 3.126ff.; 4.136; and Chapter 2 above.

²² The "second Adam" (117,30–33) is based to some extent on the Christ of 1 Cor 15:45–47. See Kaestli 1982, 122; Painchaud 1990. See also the discussion in Chapters 2 and 5.

at least confirms Hippolytus' statement that a snake-friendly exegesis combining Gen 3, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15 did exist.

In addition, there are artifacts with serpent imagery that have been connected with Gnosticism (however defined),²³ and even with the purported Ophite snake worship. An alabaster bowl (Plate 17) shows a winged snake surrounded by sixteen naked human figures that seem to be paying homage to it. An inscription on the outside connects the vase to Orphic mythology,²⁴ in which the creator is indeed depicted as serpentine.²⁵ Leisegang and Rudolph wish to connect the vase with the Ophites, based on Epiphanius' depiction of the Ophite Eucharistic scene according to which the snake was venerated.²⁶ However, since Epiphanius' story is anything but believable, and because there are no specifically Christian elements in the vase, it almost certainly was not used by advocates of the Ophite mythology or by any other Christians.²⁷

Furthermore, coins and amulets with serpentine gods survive in great number.²⁸ Certain amulets known as Anguipede gems, depict a serpent-legged figure that is called by some of the appellations of the Jewish God and/or is accompanied by an inscription "Abraxas" (Plate 18).²⁹ Some of these appellations of the Jewish God, such as Sabaoth or Iao, occur as names of individual archons in texts that belong to my Ophite corpus (e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.5; *Orig. World* 101,24ff.), and, according to the heresiologists, Basilides named either the supreme God (Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 1.5) or the chief archon (Irenaeus, *Adv.*

²³ Pearson (2004, 249–267) discusses many of the same artifacts as I do here, and his conclusions concerning their "Gnostic" provenance are very similar to mine.

²⁴ The reconstructed inscription runs as follows: κέκλυθι τηλεπόρου δίνης έλικαύγεα κύκλον / ούρανός τε γαία τε ήν μορφή μία θεοί / ούνεκα δινεΐται κατ' άπειρονα μακρόν Όλυμπον / άγλαέ Ζεΰ, κόσμου γεννήτορ. For parallels in Orphic literature, see especially Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.18.11–15 (OF 237); 1.23.22 (OF 236). For discussion on the Orphic provenance of the vase, see Delbrueck and Vollgraaf 1934; and Leisegang 1955a, 6–24.

²⁵ See Damascius, *De princ.* 123 (OF 54); Athenagoras, *Leg.* 18 (OF 57).

²⁶ Leisegang 1955a, 39–41; Rudolph 1987, 23, 247.

²⁷ In *Paraph. Shem* and in Hippolytus' report of the Sethians (*Ref.* 5.19–22), the serpentine creator is depicted in Orphic colors, but the evil character of the figure rules out the possibility of its worship as depicted in the bowl. Furthermore, the serpentine shape Jesus was said to have assumed in entering the virgin's womb according to the Sethian teaching (*Ref.* 5.19.19–22; based on Phil 2:7), was simply a necessary evil, a disguise, and not a proof of his serpentine nature worthy of veneration.

²⁸ See, e.g., Bonner 1950; C. King 1973; Jackson 1985, Plates 5–6; Philipp 1986.

²⁹ See Bonner 1950, 123–139, 280–284 + Plate VIII; C. King 1973, 435ff.; Philipp 1986, 101–110 + Tafeln 41–45.

haer. 1.24.7; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7.26.6) of his system, “Abrasax.” The Barbeloite mythology also includes Abrasax alongside the four lights of Autogenes. It is hard to say what these amulets were used for and whether or not they reflect Gnostic or related myths. It is possible that the name, Abrasax, was incorporated into Basilidean teaching solely because, in Greek, its letters have the numerical value of 365, the number of days of the solar year, and not because the name was associated with snakes on gems. It is likewise possible that the gems with various appellations of YHWH are simply syncretic products, fusing YHWH with other divinities, such as *Agathodaimon*. According to some scholars, Abrasax, at least, has been identified with *Agathodaimon* on certain gems, and with Iao on others.³⁰ Direct evidence linking these Anguipede gems with Ophite or any kind of Christian snake veneration is missing.

The Chnoumis gems, already briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, usually depict a lion-headed snake and were used to cure or protect one against stomach illnesses, and to help with digestion (Plate 14).³¹ Here we might have a link to the Ophite mythology. Not only do the Chnoumis gems parallel *Ap. John*’s depiction of Ialdabaoth (especially in LR), but according to Irenaeus, some Gnostics also held the opinion that the human intestines—through which nourishment flows—have a serpentine shape and are an imprint of the wisdom in paradise (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.15). This opinion connecting snakes with digestive organs, might therefore be influenced by these Chnoumis gems. It may be noted that this opinion was further connected with the *eating* of the tree of knowledge. One may speculate that the fruit of the tree of knowledge was symbolically identified with the bread of the Eucharist,³² thus rendering Hippolytus’ claim more believable, although this possibility has to remain hypothetical.

There is also a gem (perhaps third or fourth century CE), which Goodenough calls a “Jewish-Gnostic amulet” (Plate 19).³³ On the obverse, a large serpent is presented as coiled around an *omphalos* and surrounded by what appears to be the zodiac; other astrological symbols are present as well. On the reverse, there is a depiction of the paradise scene with Adam, Eve, the tree and the snake. The inscribed

³⁰ See C. King 1973, 435 + Plate A.

³¹ See Bonner 1950, 54–60 + Plates IV–V; Jackson 1985, 74–108; Philipp 1986, 87–92 + Tafeln 31–35. Galen approves the use of such stones (*De simpl.* 10.19). He also mentions Chnoumis rings (cf. Plate 14C).

³² M. Williams 2004.

³³ Goodenough 1958, 71–80.

Hebrew letters (whose meaning, however, remains incomprehensible)³⁴ connect the amulet to Judaism.³⁵ The serpent symbolism and the fact that Adam and Eve (or at least one of them) are not depicted as covering their genitals as though ashamed of one another might indicate a Gnostic provenance³⁶ for the amulet since many Gnostic retellings of Genesis depict the eating from the tree in a positive light.³⁷ As noted in Chapter 2, the paradise story and the cosmic serpent are commonly found themes in the snake symbolism of Gnostic and related texts, but these two themes occur together only in the heresiological reports of the Ophites and Peratics. Furthermore, the focus is almost solely on the cosmic snake in the Peratic teaching.³⁸ Thus, if one wishes to assign this amulet to a known text or teaching, it would have to be the Ophite teaching according to Irenaeus and Origen (cf. also the “Ophite” sections in Epiphanius, *Pan.* 26).³⁹ However, nothing specifically connects this amulet to concrete snake worship. The amulet also lacks references to Moses’ brazen serpent, Christ, and the Eucharist, which were important in the Hippolytian account.

7.3 THE NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCE

Apart from negative snake symbolism (e.g., in Rev 12–13), one finds verses in the New Testament where Jesus speaks highly of serpents, and also passages which might even point to a snake ritual or which in any case might have given rise to some kind of snake handling practice. In Matt 10:16, Jesus instructs his disciples to exercise the wisdom of serpents and the innocence of doves against the evilness of the Pharisees. The saying is paralleled by *Gos. Thom.* 39, quoted in *Teach. Silv.* 95,4–33, and according to Epiphanius, the Ophites cited it as well. But of course,

³⁴ See, however, Pearson 2004, 260–261.

³⁵ Goodenough 1958, 79.

³⁶ Goodenough 1958, 73.

³⁷ See, e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.7; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 26.2.6; *Hyp. Arch.* 89,31ff.; *Orig. World* 118,24–120,6; cf. *Testim. Truth* 45,23–48,15.

³⁸ Whereas the idea of the cosmic snake is vividly expressed in the depiction of the Son (the second principle) as a “universal serpent” (καθολικὸς ὄφις; *Ref.* 5.16.8–10; 5.17.2), as well as by astrological speculations (5.16.7,16), the only reference to the serpent of paradise is found in the statement that the universal serpent also manifested himself in the “wise words of Eve” (ὁ σοφὸς τῆς Εὕας λόγος; 5.16.8).

³⁹ The Naassene teaching, to which Goodenough (1958, 75ff.) seems to ascribe the amulet, does not, in fact, discuss the serpent of paradise.

this saying merely employs the common notion of serpents symbolizing wisdom. More important is John 3:14–15, where Jesus compares himself to the brazen and healing serpent of Moses (of Num 21:6–9). As noted above, this saying is sometimes (e.g., Peratics, *Ref.* 5.12–18) used to enforce the identification of Jesus as a serpent, and it may have thus given rise to snake worship, but there is no clear evidence for it. At least Epiphanius' information on such an identification and worship seems untrustworthy.

However, there is a possible reference to a snake ritual in the long, secondary ending of Mark. In Mark 16:17–18, Jesus says that one of the signs that accompanies the believers is that they will pick up snakes in their hands, and this will not harm them.⁴⁰ In modern commentaries on Mark, if anything is written on the long ending, it is usually suggested that the list of the signs in Mark 16:17–18 is compiled from scattered references elsewhere in the New Testament.⁴¹ The references to snake handling are then to be found in Luke 10:19, "I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you," and, in Acts 28:3–6, according to which Paul was bitten by a snake but was not harmed by it, and the people who saw it started to think Paul was a god. It is possible that these verses gave rise to a *literary* account of the snake handling found in Mark 16,⁴² but it is also possible that Mark 16:18 refers to an actual practice in second century Christianity, which aimed at proving or testing one's faith. We know that it at least gave rise to such a practice: one need only to think of the present-day snake handlers in Kentucky (see Plate 20).⁴³ However, it should be pointed out that the only actual, extant evidence for any kind of an *ancient* Christian snake handling practice comes from Mark 16 and Pseudo-Tertullian, the latter being the earliest surviving witness to Hippolytus' *Syntagma*.

Nevertheless, Hippolytus and the author of the long ending of Mark do not have the same kind of practice in mind. Mark 16 seems to presuppose a hostile image of snakes since these are potentially harmful and lethal. In the Hippolytian account, however, the venerated snake serves a beneficial purpose of sanctifying the Eucharist. If Hippolytus

⁴⁰ See Kelhoffer 2000, 340–416.

⁴¹ See, e.g., V. Taylor 1966, 612–613; Anderson 1976, 360–361. Kelhoffer (2000, 411) sees the closest parallel in Acts 28:3–6.

⁴² Cf. Kelhoffer 2000, 416.

⁴³ See especially Kimbrough 1995; and Covington 1996.

had utilized a known heresiological method of reading contemporary heresies back into the New Testament writings⁴⁴—in this case Ophite snake symbolism into Mark 16:17–18—he probably would have said so, and he probably would have also depicted the Ophite snake ritual as a test of faith (as in Mark 16:18). Can we then imagine that Mark 16 inspired certain Gnostics who were already interested in snakes? In such a case, their snake handling practice would have had to change from faith testing to worship, of which there is simply no evidence. Mark 16 can thus be left out of consideration as irrelevant in explaining Hippolytus' claim.

7.4 CONCLUSION

Essentially all the heresiological reports of Gnostic snake worship go back to Hippolytus' reports of the Ophites and Naasseni. The report of the Naasseni did not mention any actual snake handling and the purported snake worship seemed to have been only symbolic in nature. Thus, the only piece of evidence concerning actual Gnostic snake handling and worship turned out to be Hippolytus' claim that a group called Ophites extol the snake and let it bless their Eucharist. This would be based on an exegesis of Gen 3, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15. However, none of the texts from Nag Hammadi and related codices mentions any kind of snake handling practice, not to mention a Eucharistic use of snakes, nor does the description of snake handling in Mark 16 seem to be connected with Hippolytus' claim or the Ophite mythology. Of the artifacts discussed here, one amulet may be connected with the mythology the heresiologists labeled Ophite, the so-called Jewish-Gnostic amulet (Plate 19), but we know next to nothing of the use of this gem. Connections between the Ophite mythology and Chnoumis gems (Plate 14) are possible but uncertain. Furthermore, the scholarly theories that derived Gnostic interest in and worship of snakes from pagan symbolism and practice seemed untenable. Despite the use of certain pagan motifs, the evidence points to an exegesis of Gen 3, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15

⁴⁴ For example, Origen (*Catena fragment* 47 on 1 Cor 12:3; *Cels.* 6.28) suggested that Paul refers to the Ophites in 1 Cor 12:3 (see Chapter 8 below). Epiphanius, for his part, claims that the author of Jude rebuked the “libertine Gnostics” (*Pan.* 26.11.3), and that Cerinthus and his school were referred to in Acts (10:47–11:12; 15:24) and in 1 Corinthians 15.

as the main sources of Gnostic serpent speculations. The Naassene participation in pagan mysteries, often thought to have launched the Gnostic interest in the serpent, probably never took place. Epiphanius' depiction of the Ophite Eucharist as a true mystery cult and Bousset's suggestion that the Ophite interest in the snake derives from the cult of Isis are not believable either.

However, similar snake-friendly exegesis which Hippolytus attributes to the Ophites, is found in *Testim. Truth*. As argued above, Hippolytus may have known this document; in any case, he was aware of the snake-friendly exegesis of Gen 3, Num 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15. He then combined such exegesis with Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30, where the snake's advice in paradise was considered positive, although there were differences in opinion concerning the evaluation of the snake itself according to Irenaeus (cf. *Adv. haer.* 1.30.5–9; and 1.30.15). However, since Hippolytus' two sources (Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* 1.30; and the snake exegesis of Gen 3, Num 21:6–9, John 3:14–15) both contained exegesis that praised the snake's advice in paradise and even connected the serpent somehow with Christ (or Sophia, the sister of Christ, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.7,15), can we imagine that it was simply this kind of exegesis that gave rise to the actual worship of snakes, with possible Eucharistic dimensions? This is exactly what Hippolytus wants us to believe, but, as stressed above, there is no real supporting evidence. In fact, it could just as well have been Hippolytus himself who drew such conclusions. To a hostile outsider like Hippolytus, it might have seemed like a natural conclusion that such exegesis must manifest itself as snake worship, even in the form of Eucharist, if there was some sort of connection between Christ and the serpent. Hippolytus considered these exegetes heretical, and had a motive for depicting them in a suspicious light. This kind of heresiological tendentiousness and exaggeration, in my view, best explains Hippolytus' claim of the Ophite snake worship.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ANATHEMA IESOUS: ORIGEN ON THE OPHITE CURSING OF JESUS

The last two main chapters of this book deal with information concerning rituals connected with the Ophite diagram. Origen has preserved a fragment of Celsus where the latter had described an anointment ritual practiced by the users of the diagram. Origen understands this anointment as a perversion of Christian initiatory baptism, denies its existence even in “heretical” circles, and claims the Ophites instead curse Jesus as part of their initiation. I will first examine Origen’s alternative version of the Ophite initiation because a proper understanding of Origen’s motives and rhetorical agendas is important in examining the veracity of Celsus’ report, discussed in Chapter 9. This chapter on Origen’s claim further touches upon the relationship between 1 Cor and the Ophite mythology since Origen connects the Ophite cursing of Jesus with 1 Cor 12:3 (“I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ [Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς]).” Schmithals has taken this link for granted, suggesting the Corinthians were Gnostics—although not necessarily the same Ophites of whom Origen speaks—who cursed the fleshly human Jesus based on their strong separation or possessionist Christology (the divine Christ remained different from the human Jesus),¹ while Pearson has proposed that the purported Ophite cursing arises out of a heresiological misunderstanding of “Gnostic” snake exegesis linking Christ with the accursed (Gen 3:14) serpent.² There are problems with both of these suggestions, and the Ophite mythology itself does not seem to corroborate Origen’s claim either. Therefore, this chapter assesses the veracity of Origen’s claim by first exposing his rhetorical agenda, and then by searching for traces of negative images of Jesus both in Ophite and other “Gnostic” sources. Finally, a new proposal is put forth as to where Origen found the basis for his curious claim.

¹ Schmithals 1971, especially 124ff.

² Pearson 1967.

8.1 ORIGEN'S INFORMATION

Origen mentions the Ophites (Ὀφιοί) in three of his surviving works: in *Contra Celsum* (3.13; 6.24–38; 7.40), where he describes the diagram and answers Celsus' accusations; as well as in commentaries on 1 Corinthians (*Catena fragment* 47, 1 Cor 12:3)³ and Matthew (*Commentariorum in Matthaicum series*, 852).⁴ Of these, the material in *Contra Celsum* contains not only Origen's and Celsus' information about the diagram and its ritual use, but also polemical passages from both authors. The occasion for Origen's description of the diagram was given by Celsus' *True Doctrine*, where the latter had described and ridiculed the Ophite diagram and its ritual use, attributing it simply to "Christians." Origen, by describing the same teaching, wanted to make it clear that it instead derived from a heretical sect called "Ophites," whose adherents were not to be confused with real Christians. Thus, it is important to note that in *Contra Celsum* one finds polemical passages where Origen is devoted to making it clear that the Ophites known to Celsus are not true Christians (3.13; 6.24,28,30; 7.40). Apart from the section dealing with their teaching in detail (6.24–38), Origen's other references to the Ophites in *Contra Celsum* mostly just repeat what he has already said (7.40), or state that the Ophites are a heretical sect that is connected with certain other Gnostic branches and teachers.⁵

Origen connects the Ophites specifically with the cursing of Jesus in two out of his three works which mention them. *Contra Celsum* 6.28 has, "Ophites...do not admit anyone into their meetings unless he has first pronounced curses against Jesus (ἀρὰς θῆται κατὰ Ἰησοῦ)." This statement occurs within the section dealing with the Ophite diagram (6.24–38), and it is part of a polemical passage where Origen answers to Celsus' claim that Christians curse the creator because he had cursed the serpent.⁶ Origen goes on to say that those who call the creator accursed are not really Christians, but certain "Ophites," and that the accusations against these do not apply to the real Christians:

³ Text in Jenkins 1909, 30; translation in Chadwick 1980, 344n2.

⁴ Only a Latin translation of the relevant passage survives. Text in Migne 1857, p. 1643. See also Girod 1970, 19–20.

⁵ *Cels.* 3.13: Ophites and Cainites. Cf. also Origen's *Commentariorum in Matthaicum series* 852, where he offers a longer list of heretical teachers and groups: Marcion, Basilides, Valentinians, Apellians, Ophites.

⁶ See also Pearson 1967, 302.

He (Celsus) asserted that Christians say the Creator is an accursed God...because he cursed the serpent which imparted to the first men knowledge of good and evil. He ought to have known that those who have taken the story of the serpent to mean that he did right in conspiring with the first men...and on this account are called Ophites, are so far from being Christians that they object to (κατηγορεῖν) Jesus no less than Celsus...What, therefore, could be sillier or crazier...than Celsus when he thought that charges against the Ophites were charges against Christians? (*Cels.* 6.28; Chadwick, transl.)

In the same vein, Origen affirms that the Ophites Celsus had taken as Christians denied Jesus was a wise man or had a virtuous character (6.28), and that they did not conceive of him as Savior, God, teacher, or Son of God (6.30). Later Origen renews some of his accusations by stating that the Ophites deny Jesus completely (τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐξ ὅλων ἀρνούμενοι) and speak ill of him (κακῶς λέγουσι τὸν Ἰησοῦν; 7.40). All these claims occur in polemical passages where Origen wants to make it clear that the Ophites are not real Christians. Thus, the principal aim of these passages is to deny the Christian character of the Ophites by slander, not to give an objective view of their Christology. It should be noted that the passages do not distinguish between a heavenly Christ and a human Jesus, as Schmithals thinks.⁷

Origen's other work referring to the cursing of Jesus is his commentary on 1 Corinthians (*Catena fragment 47*). There Origen also uses a cognate of the word, ἀνάθεμα, which Paul uses, and thus clearly connects the Ophites with 1 Cor 12:3, "There is a certain sect which does not admit a convert unless he pronounces anathemas (ἀναθεματίση) on Jesus; and that... is the sect of the so-called Ophites."

In Origen's actual description of the Ophite teaching (*Cels.* 6.24–38), neither Jesus nor Christ, who are two distinct beings in Irenaeus' Ophite account, are mentioned by name. This silence is understandable since Origen wants to deny the Christian character of the Ophites. However, Celsus had referred to them as Christians,⁸ and, as we have seen, other Ophite sources include important Christological speculations. In fact, at least the Son (υἱός), located in the upper portion of the diagram, appears to be a Christ-figure, but nothing negative is stated of him, or of the other figures located in this upper portion of the diagram. Since it is possible that Origen's account of the Ophite

⁷ Schmithals 1971, 128.

⁸ See also Pearson 1967, 302; Schmithals 1971, 128.

teaching is incomplete or even distorted, I will next examine other heresiological reports of the Ophites (as well as *Pan.* 26 that contains Ophite material), to see if they present any negatively evaluated Jesus or Christ-figures. Heresiological reports of other “snake-sects” need to be discussed as well since Origen may not have made clear distinctions among various heretical groups engaged in snake speculations.

8.2 OTHER HERESIOLOGICAL REPORTS ABOUT OPHITES AND “SNAKE-SECTS”

According to Irenaeus’ Ophite account, there are three Christ-figures: the Son of Man, Christ the Savior and the human Jesus. While the transcendent Son of Man does not really appear in the narrative, except being one of the fathers of Christ (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–2) and mentioned in the rebuke formula (1.30.6), the other two figures play important roles. Christ, born of the union of the Father, the Son of Man and the Holy Spirit, forms together with his parents the heavenly *Ekklesia*, the incorruptible aeon. He is also the brother of Sophia, who, for her part, later causes the births of John the Baptist and Jesus through the world ruler Ialdabaoth. Therefore, Ialdabaoth can be called the father of the human Jesus,⁹ although he did not know what he was doing. Sophia also announces Christ and the Father through the prophets, but she herself finds no rest or general acceptance in the cosmos. Thus, Christ descends to her, and Sophia announces his coming via John. She also “adapts” (*adapto*) Jesus in advance so that Christ might find a “pure vessel” (*vas mundum*; *Adv. haer.* 1.30.12).¹⁰ Sophia and Christ unite and together descend into the human Jesus at his baptism, thus producing Jesus Christ. It is only after this that Jesus started to heal, perform miracles and to announce the unknown Father. However, even before Christ-Sophia’s descent into him, Jesus was “wiser, purer, and more righteous than all other men” (*sapientio rem, et mundiorem, et justio rem hominibus omnibus*, 1.30.12). The world rulers became angry because of Jesus and wanted to destroy him. At the crucifixion, Christ and Sophia departed

⁹ See *Adv. haer.* 1.30.12–14.

¹⁰ The meaning of *vas mundum* could also be “earthly vessel,” but the reading “pure” seems to be confirmed by the following characterization of Jesus as “wiser, purer, and more righteous than all other men” (*sapientio rem, et mundiorem, et justio rem hominibus omnibus*; *Adv. haer.* 1.30.12).

from Jesus, who died on the cross. Christ, however, sent a certain energy to Jesus to raise him up in a spiritual resurrection body. The disciples were said to have been mistaken when they thought that Jesus had risen in an earthly body, since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 15:50; *Adv. haer.* 1.30.13). After his resurrection, Jesus instructed some of his disciples for eighteen months, and was then taken to heaven (cf. the frame stories of *Soph. Jes. Chr.* and *Ap. John*). There he sits on the right side of Ialdabaoth, receiving “holy souls,” and leaving others to the creator to be sent back to the world.¹¹ After Jesus has gathered all the holy souls, the world will come to an end.

According to this account, the Ophites had a strong separation or possessionist Christology. However, the human Jesus, possessed by the divine Christ-Sophia, is not accursed in this account, far from it. He is said to have been “wiser, purer, and more righteous than all other men”; he is said to work for the salvation of the “holy souls”; and he is said to have performed miracles, healings and to have announced the unknown Father. This, in fact, completely contradicts Origen’s claims that the Ophites cursed Jesus and denied he was a wise man, Savior, or a teacher (*Cels.* 6.28,30). According to Irenaeus’ Ophite account, only the earthly parts of Jesus’ body were not thought precious or worthy of salvation, but this does not allow for the cursing of him.

The related “libertine Gnostics” of *Pan.* 26 say that there are two Christs in the Ogdoad: a self-engendered one; and the Christ who descended, revealed knowledge to humanity, and who is Jesus. He furthermore did not assume a bodily form, but was an apparition (26.10.4–5). However, nothing negative is stated here of these Christ-figures.¹²

Even though the Ophite reports dependent on Hippolytus’ *Syntagma* do not appear to contain any new reliable information about the

¹¹ On the confusion concerning Christ and Jesus in *Adv. haer.* 1.30.14, see Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979, 311. See also note 15 on p. 134 above.

¹² Epiphanius does describe promiscuous rituals these Gnostics supposedly practiced: they gathered semen and menstrual blood, and consummated these as the Eucharist (*Pan.* 26.4.5–8); they practiced ritual sex where 730 acts of intercourse makes one “Christ” (26.9.6–9); and, in order to support these practices, they related a story of Christ producing a woman out of his side (cf. Eve’s extraction from Adam’s side in Gen 2:21–22) and having intercourse with her in order to demonstrate the way of salvation (*Pan.* 26.8.1–3). Epiphanius’ reliability may be doubted here (see pp. 253–254 below), but in any case, the Gnostics in question were not said to curse Jesus in these rites, and Origen, writing some 130 years earlier than Epiphanius, was obviously not aware of the Epiphanian description.

Ophites, Origen may have known the *Syntagma* and used it in his evaluation of the Ophites. In fact, his knowledge of the title, Ophite (Ophian), seems to be at least indirectly dependent on Hippolytus since the latter probably coined the term.¹³ Pseudo-Tertullian (*Haer.* 2.1–4) says that, according to the Ophites, Christ did not exist in the flesh (*Christum autem non in substantia carnis fuisse*; 2.4); that they extolled the serpent and preferred it to Christ (2.1); and that Christ imitated (*imitor*) the sacred power of Moses' serpent (*Haer.* 2.1). In addition, Eve is said to have believed the serpent as if it had been the Son of God (*Eua quasi filio deo crediredat*; 2.4).¹⁴ The name, Jesus, is not mentioned in the account, and nothing actually negative is stated of Christ either. Epiphanius, for his part, claimed that the Ophites did not just prefer the snake to Christ, but thought them identical and worthy of veneration (*Pan.* 37.1.2; 2.6; 6.5–6; 8.1). This statement, however, is not found in earlier Ophite reports, and its veracity may be doubted, as pointed out above. Filastrius, finally, does not mention Christ or Jesus at all in his short Ophite account (*Div. her. lib.* 1).

Hippolytus' *Refutatio*, then, describes several pieces of teaching that include important serpent-figures, but these also do not present a negatively evaluated Jesus or Christ. The anonymous "heretical" astrologers explained that mythical events could be seen in constellations. According to them, the Serpent tries to attain the Corona, but Logos (the constellation of Serpent-Bearer) prevents this from happening since the Corona is reserved for Adam (the constellation of Hercules) (*Ref.* 4.47–48). The Naasseni, for their part, considered Jesus as "blessed," the "true gate" (5.9.21), and the bringer of *gnosis* (5.10.2).¹⁵ The Peratics taught that at the time of Herod, Christ came down, and that he was identical with the serpent (5.12.4–6; 5.16.9–10), and that no one can be saved without the Son who is the serpent (5.17.8). The Sethians taught that the serpentine creator had entered the cosmos, which they call the "womb," to create man. Since the womb recognizes no other form, the "perfect Logos," also called "the Logos of God," and

¹³ For a discussion of Origen's possible knowledge of the *Syntagma*, see pp. 239–242.

¹⁴ Irenaeus' source also indicates that Eve listened to the serpent as if it had been the Son of God (*Eua autem quasi a filio Dei hoc audiens*; *Adv. haer.* 1.30.7). However, there does not seem to be any connection between Christ and the serpent in Irenaeus' account. However, since the serpent in that account is the son of Ialdabaoth who represents the God of the Jewish scriptures, the serpent can indeed here be considered a son of God.

¹⁵ Cf. Pearson 1967.

“the perfect man” (5.19.19–21), needed to enter the womb in a serpentine form (5.19–22; cf. Phil 2:7). This, however, was merely a disguise and did not render the Logos evil. Justin the pseudognostic does not mention Christ, but taught that Jesus was a mere human being, who, at the instigation of the good angel Baruch, preached the truth. After his crucifixion, caused by the evil angel Naas (serpent), Jesus left his body behind, and ascended to the good God (*Ref.* 5.26.29–32). Even though the body is not worthy of salvation according to this document, the human Jesus is nevertheless evaluated positively.

Pearson has concluded mainly from these Hippolytian reports that since the Ophites and some other “Gnostics”¹⁶ identified Christ with the serpent, Origen may have misunderstood their Christology and concluded that since Christ is identical with the serpent who is cursed in Gen 3:14, Christ must be thought of as accursed, too, whereas in reality these Gnostic exegetes praised both Christ and the serpent.¹⁷ However, Origen does not mention a Christological interpretation of the serpent in discussing the Ophites.

8.3 OPHITE MYTHOLOGY IN THE NAG HAMMADI TEXTS AND RELATED LITERATURE

As those Coptic texts that have Ophite features have already been treated extensively, it will suffice here to examine whether any of their Christ-figures is depicted in a negative light, which could support Origen’s claim of the Ophite cursing of Jesus. The names Jesus and Christ are not mentioned in *Eugnostos*, but the figures of the Son of Man and the Savior appear to be Christ-figures. Importantly, none of the male divinities in *Eugnostos* is presented in a negative light. Only in discussing the perfect and good character of the angels and aeons created by the Savior, Pistis Sophia’s consort, does the text mention the “defect of femaleness” (III 85,7–9 par.), which could be an allusion to the idea that the chaotic cosmos ultimately derives from Pistis Sophia. However, her male consort, the Savior, is not to blame, even less is he

¹⁶ Pearson 1967. The “Gnostic” documents in question are the Ophite reports of Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.30), Pseudo-Tertullian (*Haer.* 2.1–4) and Epiphanius (*Pan.* 37), as well as Hippolytus’ descriptions of the Naassene (*Ref.* 5.6–11) and Peratic (*Ref.* 5.12–18) teachings.

¹⁷ Pearson 1967, 303–304.

cursed. Furthermore, even though strong negative attitudes towards transcendent beings are lacking in the related *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, some of the figures in this text are presented as having certain weaknesses: the Immortal Man, the father of the Son of Man-Christ, needs to be rescued by the risen Jesus (BG 121,13–17), the Great Savior (III 107,15–108,4 par.); and of the Son of Man-Christ it is said that knowledge of him without any knowledge of the Unbegotten Father, the supreme God, leads only to a partial salvation in the Eighth (BG 123,1–124,9 par.). However, none of these features, in my opinion, can be connected with any cursing of Jesus.

Hyp. Arch. mentions (a) the “perfect man” (ΠΤΕΛΕΙΟΣ ΠΡΩΜΕ, 91,2), who will lift the curse from the serpent; (b) the “true man in a modeled form (i.e., in a human body)” (ΠΡΩΜΕ ΠΑΛΗΘΙ[ΗΝΟΣ]... ΖΗΝΟΥΠΙΑΔΣΜΑ, 96,33–34), who will reveal the (spirit of) truth, and teach and anoint the children of light; and (c) the “Son” who presides over the entirety (ΠΩΗΡΕ ΖΙΧΠ ΠΤΗΡΕ, 97,18–19). It is possible that Jesus is meant by (a) and (b), since he, from the point-of-view of the narrative, has not yet appeared in the world. It is also possible that the Son presiding over the entirety is a figure distinct from the other two, not unlike the Son of Man of Irenaeus’ Ophite account or of *Eugnostos*. The connection between the perfect man and the accursed serpent might evoke negative associations concerning the former, as Pearson has suggested. However, the serpent is not condemned by the author of *Hyp. Arch.* (it is only cursed by the evil archons; 90,30ff.). It is presented as a mere animal, used by higher powers to teach Adam and Eve, and hence called the “instructor” (ΠΡΕΥΤΑΜΟ, 89,32; 90,6).¹⁸ Thus, for the author of *Hyp. Arch.*, neither the serpent nor the perfect man are negative figures, nor does Origen say the Ophites cursed Jesus because he was intimately linked with the serpent.

Orig. World mentions several possible Jesus-figures: Logos (λόγος, 125,14); the Savior (σωτήρ) in the Eighth (105,26; 124,33); the true man (ΠΡΩΜΕ ΠΑΛΗΘΕΙΗΝΟΣ, 107,11; 118,13; 122,20; 123,24);¹⁹ Adam of Light (ΑΛΑΗ (Ν)ΟΥΘΕΙΗ, 108,2–112,29; 117,28); and Jesus Christ of Sabaoth (105,26: ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ; 114,16–17: ΣΑΒΒΑΘΟ ΜΗ ΠΡΕΥΧΙΣ). Of these,

¹⁸ *Hyp. Arch.* 89,31–90,12, “Then the female spiritual principle (ΓΗΙΝΟΥΠΙΑΔΣΜΑ) came [in] the snake, the instructor (ΠΡΕΥΤΑΜΟ); and it taught [them]... And the female instructing principle (ΤΡΕΥΤΑΜΟ) was taken away from the snake, and she left it behind merely a thing of the earth (ΡΗΠΚΑΖ).” (Layton, transl.).

¹⁹ The true man is likely John the Baptist (see pp. 251–252 below).

the last two are presented as somewhat suspect. Adam of Light, the first and heavenly Adam (117,28), descends from the upper worlds as a consequence of Ialdabaoth's boast, but is unable to ascend back to the light because of the "poverty" (ΤΗΠΤΩΗΚΕ) that had become mixed with his light (112,12–13). Therefore, he creates himself a realm which, even though situated above the material cosmos, belongs to the world of "poverty" (112,10–22). Nevertheless, Adam of Light remains a lofty being.

According to *Orig. World*, Jesus Christ is a creation of one of the archons, Sabaoth, and thus belongs to the world of poverty. However, his father, Sabaoth, is an exemplary figure. He renounced his own wicked father, Ialdabaoth, and was consequently illuminated by Pistis Sophia and Zoe (104,4–5). Sabaoth was installed above the cosmos to rule it (104,17–31), and was instructed "about all things that exist in the Eighth Heaven" (104,26–31; 106,5–11). Sabaoth is also connected with justice (106,11–15). Thus, the character of the Jesus Christ of Sabaoth should not be thought of as condemned due to his archontic ancestry. Even more so since nothing negative about Jesus Christ is said in the text. In fact, he is portrayed as quite a sympathetic figure: he resembles the Savior in the Eighth Heaven (presumably the true Savior; 105,26–27); sits at Sabaoth's right upon a revered throne (105,27–29); and the souls about to enter human bodies are manifested to Sabaoth and his Christ, with the "holy voice" saying, "Multiply and improve! Be lord over all creatures" (114,16–20). Painchaud has suggested that a Valentinian redactor of the *primitive text* of *Orig. World* would have secondarily identified Sabaoth—the God of the Jews and of the catholic church—with the beast of the Book of Revelation and thus criticized the Trinity of catholic church (Jesus Christ and the "virgin of the Holy Spirit" are said to accompany Sabaoth, *Orig. World* 105,25–31).²⁰ This interpretation would effectively render Jesus Christ as a negatively evaluated being. However, it seems to me that Painchaud's suggestion rests perhaps on too weak a basis, since the numerical value of the number of the beast (he favors the variant 616), which seems essential to his theory, seems a bit artificially achieved.²¹ Instead, the Valentinian

²⁰ See Painchaud 1995b, especially 300–307.

²¹ In Painchaud's theory (1995b, especially 300–307), Sabaoth is to be identified with the God of the Book of Revelation, who is yet to be identified with the beast of the same book. The main reasons for the identifications are: (1) the four figures—lion, bull, man and eagle—both around the throne of Sabaoth (*Orig. World* 105,4–8) and

concept of the psychic Christ created by the rather *positively evaluated* demiurge would seem to offer a better point of comparison. As Fallon puts it, “within Valentinianism, Christ is considered as the creation of the Demiurge, sits at his right, is the image of the savior in the eighth heaven and represents the psychic.”²² It is possible, as Fallon has proposed, that the figure of Jesus Christ (which possibly belongs to a later redaction as Painchaud suggests) reflects Valentinian influence in *Orig. World*.²³ Importantly, in Valentinianism, the psychic Christ (as well as the demiurge) is not a condemned being, but represents the psychics capable of salvation.²⁴

All Coptic versions of *Ap. John* are presented as revelations from the risen Jesus to his disciple John the son of Zebedee. In this frame story, the “Nazarene” is, through the mouth of a hostile Pharisee, called a liar and a deceiver (II 1,8–17 parr.), but this attitude is not shared by the authors of *Ap. John*: they identify the risen Jesus of the frame story as the Lord (BG: Christ), Savior and a teacher (II 22,9–12 parr.), as well as an embodiment of the supreme triad of Father-Mother Barbelo-Son Autogenes Christ (II 2,13–14 parr.). The term, “Christ” (ⲬⲚ), is, however, twice used of the evil archontic powers in the BG version. First, it is said that because Ialdabaoth did not share the divine power he had stolen from Sophia with his offspring, he was *Christ* over them (ⲁⲕⲡ̅ ⲬⲚ ⲉⲣⲟⲟⲩ; BG 42,19). The other versions have “Lord” (ⲭⲟⲉⲓⲕ), instead of “Christ,” here, and thus the choice of the term, “Christ,” in the BG version seems to result from a scribal policy or a copying mistake (substitution of “Christ” for “Lord”). The scribe of BG has regularly written ⲬⲚ (“Christ”) where the Nag Hammadi versions of both *Soph. Jes. Chr.* and *Ap. John* have ⲬⲚ or ⲭⲟⲉⲓⲕ (“Lord”).²⁵ In addition,

the throne of God in Rev 4:7 are presented in similar order, whereas in, e.g., Ezek and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the order is different; (2) both Sabaoth (*Orig. World* 105,11–12) and the beast (Rev 17:11) are called the “eighth”; (3) if one sums up all of the several numbers mentioned in a certain part of the Sabaoth-episode (*Orig. World* 103,32–107,17, here: 104,19–107,1), adds to this number the number of the characters in this part of the episode, except for two (Pistis Sophia and Zoe), one ends up with 616 (Irenaeus, for example, knows of this variant, *Adv. haer.* 5.30.1–4). However, in order to achieve the total of 616, Painchaud has to limit his calculations to a certain section of the Sabaoth-episode, thus excluding certain numbers from the exercise.

²² Fallon 1978, 107–108.

²³ Fallon 1978, 108.

²⁴ See, e.g., *Exc. Theod.* 38.3; 59.2; 62.1; Tertullian, *Val.* 27; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.6.1; 1.7.2; See also Fallon 1978, 108.

²⁵ For *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, see, e.g., BG 83,1/III 94,1; BG 86,7/III 95,19; BG 87,9/III 96,15; BG 90,2/III 98,10; for *Ap. John*, see, e.g., BG 42,19/III 18,17/II 12,6/IV 19,4;

the meaning of the sentence is rather that Ialdabaoth exercised control over his offspring due to his divine power, not that he is to be seen as a Christ-figure. Second, Ialdabaoth is said to have created seven powers which he then joined with his seven offspring. In the BG version, one of these powers is called $\tau\mu\eta\tau\chi\bar{\rho}\bar{\varsigma}$, “Christhood” (43,16), although the Nag Hammadi versions have $\tau\mu\eta\tau\chi\rho\bar{\varsigma}$, “Goodness.” Again, the term, “Christhood,” in the BG version could result from a copying error or from the scribe’s partiality for the term, $\bar{\rho}\bar{\varsigma}$, “Christ.” Moreover, the power in question is rather an abstraction of a quality than any Christ-figure. Thus, there is, in my opinion, nothing in *Ap. John* that would support Origen’s claim.

I will, finally, also examine the related *Testim. Truth*, which contains exegesis that corresponds to Hippolytus’ information about the Ophites. *Testim. Truth* is a tendentious tractate which includes polemics against other Christian groups. The author of this text finds no fault in Jesus, and seems to identify Jesus, Christ, the Son of Man, and the Savior as the same person (see, e.g., 30,18–28 and 45,14–17). In the “snake midrash” (45,23–49,10), the author brings Christ into connection with Moses’ healing, brazen serpent (48,27–49,10). The author also teaches that the Son of Man did not baptize any of his disciples (69,15–17), and that the baptism of truth is gained by renunciation of the world (69,22–24). In addition, he accuses certain other Christians of not knowing who Christ is (31,22–32,5).²⁶ Thus, it could be asked whether the author was willing to curse, so to speak, the Jesus of his opponents. No traces of such an idea appear, however, nor were there any hints suggesting this idea in Origen’s claim. The Ophites were supposed, it seems, to have cursed and denied Jesus altogether, not just any false interpretation of him.

Since neither the heresiological reports of the Ophites nor those documents that are related to them (including *Testim. Truth* and Hippolytus’ reports of various “snake-sects”), support Origen’s claim of the Ophite cursing of Jesus, what could Origen have had in mind? Is such a claim attested anywhere else, where Origen or those who adhered to the Ophite teaching could have picked it up?

BG 64,14/III 32,23/II 25,17/IV 39,17; BG 66,13/III 33,24/II 26,7–8/IV 40,21. See also Waldstein and Wisse 1995, 72.

²⁶ In another context, the author mentions Valentinus, and possibly also Basilides and the Simonians (56,1–58,4).

8.4 NEGATIVE IMAGES OF JESUS

The scope of this work does not allow a full survey on the Christology of the so-called Gnostic literature. However, I would here like to concentrate on certain Nag Hammadi texts and heresiological descriptions, in which a negative attitude towards Jesus or Christ seems attested.²⁷ Three of these documents are found in the Nag Hammadi library, incidentally, following each other in Codex VII. Even though these texts do not contain clear Ophite features,²⁸ we may, nevertheless, take a brief look at them. The first tractate, *Paraph. Shem*, calls the true Savior “Derdekeas.” He says he will appear at the baptism of the demon who baptizes erringly with an imperfect baptism (31,14–19; 30,21–27), and that he will come to the water through the demon (32,5–7). The baptizing demon could be John the Baptist, as many scholars have suggested.²⁹ Since *Paraph. Shem* speaks of several demons,³⁰ the one who baptizes could be different from the one through whom Derdekeas comes to the water. Thus, this latter demon could be the earthly Jesus into whom Derdekeas, possibly the heavenly Christ, would have descended.³¹ The demon Soldas (30,31–33; 39,30–40,1) could be yet another figure, for his relationship to the demon(s) connected with baptism is not clear. As for Soldas, he will be “established,” or even “crucified” (39,30–40,1), as Roberge has interpreted the verb *πήσσω* used here.³² However, this meaning is a rare one,³³ and even though Roberge’s interpretation of Soldas as the crucified Jesus is interesting, it is also quite hypothetical. If the earthly Jesus, nevertheless, is meant to be one of the abovementioned

²⁷ Some Mandaean writings also contain a hostile attitude towards Jesus (see, e.g., *Right Ginza* 1.198–199; 2.1.146–156; *Book of John* 30,76; see also Lupieri 2002, especially 240–253), but the analysis of these texts would go beyond the limits of this book.

²⁸ On the possible Ophite features in *Treat. Seth*, see note 170 on pp. 55–56 above.

²⁹ See Wisse 1970, 136–137; Rudolph 1975, 210; Roberge 2000, 86–87.

³⁰ See, e.g., 25,7–35; 28,5–22; 29,7–19; 30,1–21; 30,21–33; 31,14–22; 32,5–18; 37,19–21; 40,23–29; 44,6–45,23. Roberge (2000, 85–86) thinks the various demons are different manifestations of YHWH. Roberge also distinguishes between the baptizing demon and the demon Soldas.

³¹ Fischer 1975, 266.

³² Roberge 2000, 87–90.

³³ Cf. Lampe 1961, 1080–1081.

demons,³⁴ *Paraph. Shem* would then have a very negative understanding of him.³⁵ But this remains speculative.

The idea of a substitute crucified instead of Jesus is attested in the other two Nag Hammadi documents, *Treat. Seth*, and *The Apocalypse of Peter* (NH VII,3). The latter distinguishes between the “living Jesus,” and the human Jesus. While the human Jesus is crucified, the “living Jesus” (ΠΕΤΟΝΩ ΤΣ), who is the Savior’s “incorporeal body” (ΣΩΜΑ ΠΑΤΣΩΜΑ), laughs above the cross (81,10–18; 83,6–8). The human, fleshly (σαρκικός, 81,20) Jesus is characterized as the “substitute” (ΠΩΘΕΡΙΩ, 81,21) and put to shame, “home of demons” (ΠΗΘΕΙ ΠΤΕ ΜΙΛΔΑΙΜΩΝ, 82,22–23), and the “dead man” (ΟΥΡΕΦΜΟΟΥΤ, 74,14). Clearly the author of this text despises the fleshly Jesus, as Schmithals thinks the Ophites did, but *Apoc. Pet.* has no Ophite features.

In *Treat. Seth*, “Jesus the Christ” (ΤΣ ΠΕΧΡΤΣ, 69,21) explains, “They nailed their man up to their death... It was another, their father, who drank the gall and the vinegar; it was not I. They struck me with the reed; it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder. It was another upon Whom they placed the crown of thorns... And I was laughing at their ignorance.” (55,34–56,20; Riley, transl.). In addition, the author criticizes others for proclaiming the “doctrine of the dead man” (ΟΥΣΚΩ ΠΤΕ ΟΥΡΕΦΜΟΟΥΤ, 60,21–22), and affirms that Christ himself did not suffer (55,15–18). However, the exact identity of the crucified is not clear. “Their man” (ΠΕΥΡΩΜΕ) nailed to the cross is likely the human body possessed by Christ (see 51,20–24), and “their father” (ΠΕΥΓΕΙΩΤ) drinking the gall and vinegar could be an ironical reference to the leader of the archons who in reality ended up defeated.³⁶ The crucified is probably not Simon, since he is only said to have borne the cross on his shoulders, like in the Synoptic accounts.³⁷ However, Irenaeus’ account of Basilides’ teaching contains a similar tradition, which clearly states that Simon was the one who was crucified: Jesus, being an incorporeal being and the *Nous* of the supreme God, transformed his shape into Simon’s, while the latter received Jesus’ shape and was crucified instead; Jesus stood by laughing.

³⁴ See, e.g., Fischer 1975, 266; Pétrement 1990, 442; Roberge 2000, 87–90.

³⁵ Fischer (1975, 258) has pointed out that the word δαίμων sometimes has a positive meaning in this text, which seems correct, e.g., in the case of *Paraph. Shem* 25,15–35. However, the word also has negative connotations, as in 27,19–21 and 29,7–12. Nothing specifically positive is said of the demons connected with baptism.

³⁶ Thus Riley 1996, 137.

³⁷ Mark 15:21; Matt 27:32; Luke 23:26. See also Riley 1996, 137.

Irenaeus adds that, according to Basilides, anyone who confesses the crucified is still a slave of the authorities, but he who denies the crucified has freed himself from their influence and knows the true God (*Adv. haer.* 1.24.4).³⁸ This actually comes quite close to Origen's claim concerning the Ophite cursing of Jesus. However, Basilides was said to deny the crucified *Simon*, not Jesus, whom he held in high esteem.

There is yet another piece of Gnostic teaching reported by the heresiologists, which should be considered here. It is the so-called Cainite teaching, which Irenaeus counted as stemming from the Gnostics *par excellence* (*Adv. haer.* 1.31.1–2). According to Irenaeus and other heresiologists, the Cainite Gnostics extolled Biblical villains, such as Cain and Judas. Irenaeus' account does not directly speak of Jesus, but has, "Judas, the traitor, they say, had exact knowledge of these things, and since he alone knew the truth better than the other apostles, he accomplished the mystery of the betrayal." (*Adv. haer.* 1.31.1; Unger and Dillon, transl.). According to Irenaeus, this is based on a *Gospel of Judas*. The Coptic *Gos. Judas* may confirm Irenaeus' information, if Christ really asks Judas to betray him in order to be released from the enveloping human body (56,17–21), presumably the human Jesus. This view, however, is disputed.³⁹ Nonetheless, the "Cainite" report in Hippolytus' *Syntagma*, or at least in the surviving accounts in Pseudo-Tertullian and Epiphanius, adds that the opinion of some Cainites was that Judas had to betray Christ because the latter "wanted to subvert the truth" (*Christus uellet ueritatem subuertere*; Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 2.6); or because Christ was "wicked" (πονηρός), and "wanted to pervert the provisions of the Law" (βουλόμενον διαστρέφειν τὰ κατὰ τὸν νόμον; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 38.3.3). It is not certain that Hippolytus had direct knowledge of any *Gospel of Judas*. He may have simply copied Irenaeus' report and added material from his own head. Be that as it may, Christ seems to be negatively evaluated in the Hippolytian account (as the human Jesus seems to be in the Coptic *Gos. Judas*). Even though these documents do not mention the actual cursing of Jesus, a very negative view of him has been recorded in them.

Schmithals treats Irenaeus' Cainite account as a "convenient parallel *in substance*" to the cursing of Jesus because he thinks the betrayal of

³⁸ Cf. also Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 1.5; and Epiphanius, *Pan.* 24.3.1–6. On Basilides, see Pearson 2005.

³⁹ See note 13 on p. 14 above.

Jesus as the *fleshly part* of the Savior is here glorified similarly to the cursing of him.⁴⁰ On the one hand, Schmithals seems to have read too much into his examples, since the heresiological Cainite reports do not distinguish between the heavenly and earthly constituents of the Savior, as he claims. On the other hand, the Coptic *Gos. Judas* does appear to do that. As Pearson has already pointed out, however, Origen's *Contra Celsum* does not spell out such a separation Christology, and, in fact, the Ophites, according to Irenaeus, were said to hold the human Jesus in esteem.⁴¹ Was Schmithals therefore on the wrong track in connecting the Cainite teaching with the Ophite cursing of Jesus? In my view, he was not.

8.5 CONCLUSION: CAINITE Gnostic TEACHING BEHIND ORIGEN'S CLAIM

The Ophite mythology does not despise the human Jesus or any other Christ-figure. In my view, there are four possibilities for explaining the contradiction between Origen's claim and the evidence of the Ophite sources. One possibility is that the people who adhered to the Ophite teaching also made use of texts like *Apoc. Pet.*, and saw no contradiction in so doing. Another option would be that Origen merely invented a false claim to disparage those he regarded as heretics. Given the polemical context of the *Contra Celsum* passage, this is a possible, although a hypothetical, suggestion. A third option would be that Origen distorted or misunderstood the Christology of the documents to which he had access. This appears to be what Pearson had in mind in suggesting that a "bold exegetical tradition," identifying Christ and the cursed serpent, lies behind Origen's claim. This is surely a possible explanation, but also a hypothetical one since Origen does not mention Christ's actual connection with the serpent. However, the fourth solution, which seems to be best supported by the evidence, is that Origen applied the negative view of Jesus found in the Cainite reports (especially in the Hippolytian version) to the related Ophites whom he wanted to present as un-Christian as possible, and interpreted this negative view of Jesus

⁴⁰ Schmithals 1971, 128–129.

⁴¹ See also Pearson 1967, 304–305. In the Ophite accounts of Pseudo-Tertullian and Epiphanius, it is said that *Christ* did not exist in the flesh. However, it does not follow from this that the human Jesus was cursed or found meaningless either.

in light of 1 Cor 12:3, “Jesus is accursed!” This kind of procedure is, in fact, not unknown in heresiological literature.⁴²

According to the heresiologists, the Cainites revered Judas, had a negative view of Christ, and, importantly, were connected with the Ophites. We do not know if Origen had direct access to a *Gospel of Judas*. Moreover, whether a separate “Cainite sect” ever really existed does not matter for our purposes.⁴³ What matters is how Origen might have interpreted and made use of the preceding heresiological tradition. In the heresiological works prior to Origen, the Cainites were often closely connected with the Ophites. Irenaeus treated the last three teachings in his catalog of heresies as three different branches of one and the same Gnostic sect (*Adv. haer.* 1.29–31). These included those teachings which later heresiologists came to label Ophite (1.30) and Cainite (1.31). Pseudo-Tertullian’s catalog, which probably depends

⁴² For example, Rev 2:6 mentions the “Nicolaitans” (“Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate,” NRSV), whom the heresiologists included in their catalogs of heresies; they also concluded that the Nicolas of Acts 6:5 was the founder of this sect (see, e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.26.3; Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 1.6; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7.36.3; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 25.1.1). Nicolas was then accused of being possessed by the devil (Justin Martyr had already demonized those he regarded as heretics; see 1 *Apol.* 26) and of licentious behavior (see, e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.26.3; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7.36.3; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 25.1.3–6; see also *Pan.* 26.4–9 on the “libertine Gnostics,” with whom Epiphanius intimately connects the Nicolaitans). Pseudo-Tertullian’s heresiology even ascribed a special doctrine to the Nicolaitans (*Haer.* 1.6), which can in no way be derived from Rev 2 or Acts 6.

Epiphanius then brought the Nicolaitans into such an intimate connection with the “libertine Gnostics,” described in the following chapter of his *Panarion*, that he affirmed the Nicolaitans were not only the founders of this “Gnostic” heresy, but that both groups basically constituted what was one and the same sect (*Pan.* 25.7.1–2; 26.1.3). Epiphanius also included in his Nicolaitan account what appear to be five different teachings. One of them (25.5) has clear affinities with the Nicolaitan account of Pseudo-Tertullian, but three others rather resemble the teachings of the “libertine Gnostics” of *Pan.* 26 and of Irenaeus’ *Adv. haer.* 1.29–30, especially since these teachings speak of Barbelo, Prunicus, Ialdabaoth, and Sabaoth, as well as of the boast of the chief archon. These figures and themes, to my knowledge, are not ascribed to Nicolaitans in earlier heresiologies. Concerning the fifth “Nicolaitan” teaching of which Epiphanius speaks, he claims that they glorified “Kaulakau” (*Pan.* 25.3.6). However, Irenaeus had not associated “Kaulakau” with Nicolaitans, but with Basilides (*Adv. haer.* 1.24.5–6), and Hippolytus in his *Refutatio*, with the Naasseni (5.8.4).

On the “heresiological methods,” see, e.g., Nautin 1968, 182–183; Perkins 1976; Vallée 1981; and Pourkier 1992. On Hippolytus’ futile efforts to prove that “heretics” borrowed their ideas from Greek philosophy and mythology, see Marcovich 1986, 35–36.

⁴³ Pearson (1990, 105–107) has suggested that the “Cainite system” was a pure heresiological invention; given the Sethian, i.e., “Barbeloite-Sethite,” or better, Classic Gnostic, character of *Gos. Judas* he appears to be right.

on Hippolytus' *Syntagma*, presents the Ophite and Cainite teachings following each other, that is, closely connected (similarly Epiphanius, *Pan.* 37–38; and Filastrius, *Div. her. lib.* 1–2). Even though Hippolytus in his other work, the *Refutatio*, does not actually describe the Ophite or the Cainite teaching, he nevertheless mentions them together (8.20.3). Clement also connects the Ophites and the Cainites in discussing the names of the sects (*Strom.* 7.17.108.1–2). Finally, Origen himself makes this connection in one of those polemical passages in *Contra Celsum* where he wants to draw a clear line between the “true Christians” and the heretics: “But I think that Celsus has come to know of certain heresies which do not share with us even the name of Jesus. Perhaps he got wind of the so-called Ophites and Cainites, or some other such doctrine which has entirely abandoned Jesus” (3.13; Chadwick, transl.). We cannot be certain if Origen had read Irenaeus or Hippolytus, but Irenaeus' catalog of heresies was at least known in Alexandria at the time of Origen,⁴⁴ and Jerome relates that Origen had met Hippolytus.⁴⁵ In addition, Clement, who was possibly Origen's teacher, did know Irenaeus' work.⁴⁶ There is thus a good possibility that Origen knew what the Cainites were said to teach. Furthermore, even if he had not been acquainted with the heresiological reports of the Cainites prior to him, he *was* at least aware of the Ophite mythology and its traditional connection with the Cainite teaching.

Why, then, had Origen attributed the cursing of Jesus to the Ophites instead of the Cainites, and why did he speak of an actual cursing which is not attested in the sources? My proposal is that he did it because of the polemical context at hand.⁴⁷ Origen defamed the Ophites because it was the Ophite ideas Celsus had criticized and presented simply as Christian teaching.⁴⁸ Origen, who regarded the Ophites as heretics, insisted that the accusations against them are not applicable to real Christians since the Ophites are not, in fact, Christians at all. What could be a better way to deny the Christian character of a group than to claim they curse and deny Jesus? In reality, the Ophite teaching did not have anything negative to say about Jesus, but Origen knew

⁴⁴ See Rousseau and Doutreleau 1974, 126–131; Trigg 1992; Trigg 1998, 4.

⁴⁵ See *Vir. ill.* 61.

⁴⁶ Chadwick 1966, 47.

⁴⁷ Pearson (1967, 302) also points out that Origen's claim of the Ophite cursing of Jesus is due to polemical intent.

⁴⁸ Celsus did not slander only those forms of Christianity Origen deemed heretical. Some of the critique was also applicable to “catholic” Christianity.

it was closely connected with that of the Cainites—perhaps he even thought they were teachings of one and the same sect, as Irenaeus' catalog suggested—and this Cainite teaching did have a negative view of Christ. Admittedly, the actual cursing of Jesus is not attested in the heresiological Cainite accounts. However, due to their very positive attitude towards Judas, and their very negative attitude towards Christ, it could easily be thought that the Cainites must also have actually cursed Jesus, as Paul suggested some did at Corinth. Hence Origen's claim of the Ophite cursing of Jesus.

CHAPTER NINE

THE OPHITE SEAL, SETHIAN BAPTISM AND THE JOHANNINE PROLOGUE

This final chapter examines what appears to be the only reliable piece of information in the heresiological literature concerning Ophite rituals. According to the fragment of Celsus preserved by Origen, the users of the Ophite diagram practiced an anointment ritual called the “seal” (a common name for Christian baptism),¹ and memorized passwords to ensure the soul’s safe postmortem ascent to the world of light, passing the archontic gatekeepers. Not only are there many known Christian parallels to this kind of ritual, but Celsus’ information is also confirmed to some extent by the mythology in the texts of the Ophite corpus. This information further resembles the purported Sethian rituals of the baptism of five seals and the cultic ascent. Because there also appear to be connections between Ophite baptismal speculations known to Irenaeus, and two Sethian baptismal documents, *Trim. Prot.* and the Pronoia hymn of LR of *Ap. John*, we may ask whether the Sethian authors were not only revisors of the Ophite mythology but also of rituals associated with these myths. Thus, the purpose here is to examine (1) the nature and veracity of Celsus’ information about the Ophite rituals; and (2) their relationship to the purported Sethian ones. This is especially important since the two Sethian texts just mentioned have been connected with the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel,² and some scholars have even hurried to claim that these texts prove Bultmann’s old theory³ of a “Gnostic” background of the Prologue.⁴

In this chapter, Epiphanius’ report of promiscuous rituals of the “libertine Gnostics” (*Pan.* 26) will be discussed as well because this report not only has connections to the Ophite diagram, but it is also

¹ Lampe 1967, e.g., 97–148; cf. Beasley-Murray 1972, 174–177; and Fiddes 2002, 298. Cf. also, e.g., 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 *Clem.* 6:9; 7:6; 8:6; *Herm. Sim.* 9.16.3–4; *Ep. Apost.* 41; Clement, *Quis div.* 39; 42.

² Colpe 1974; G. Schenke 1974; J. Robinson 1981; Tardieu 1984, 340–344; Turner 2001, 272–284. See also Poirier 2006, especially 32–67, 98–105.

³ Bultmann 1971, 7ff. See also Haenchen 1984, 122–124.

⁴ G. Schenke 1974, 733–734. See also J. Robinson 1981.

connected with the motif of cultic ascent. This report, however, does not seem to transmit very reliable information.

I will proceed as follows. First, the fragment of Celsus will be examined in order to determine what kind of ritual or rituals he is actually describing; scholarly opinion is divided here. Second, the veracity of this report will be assessed by examining Celsus' rhetorical agendas and the question of his sources, and by searching for possible parallels in related literature. Finally, the purported Sethian rituals of baptism and cultic ascent will be examined along with their relationships both to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, and to the Ophite rituals and baptismal theology.

9.1 CELSUS AND THE NATURE OF THE PURPORTED OPHITE RITUALS

Even though scholars generally recognize that Origen's *Contra Celsum* contains two descriptions of the diagram and its application (by Celsus and Origen), and that these descriptions do not completely agree, only Denzey has studied the two accounts separately,⁵ and I adopt this strategy. As noted already, Celsus' information is fairly easy to distil from Origen's text since Origen usually says explicitly when he is quoting his opponent. The diagram itself consisted of a map of celestial and supracelestial regions in the form of circles, and apparently was accompanied by descriptions of the animal shapes and names of the archons as well as by the passwords. Because all this information seems to have been inscribed on the diagram, Denzey has suggested that the description of the anointment ritual was also inscribed there, as a "liturgical fragment."⁶ This may be the case, but Celsus does not say so, and Origen's diagram apparently did not include such information at all. Since Celsus had other sources of information as well (the diagram is but one example of Christianity's ridiculousness for him),⁷ the information on an actual ritual may derive from other sources than the pictorial diagram.

⁵ Denzey 2005.

⁶ Denzey 2005, 97, 104–109.

⁷ Cf. Hill 2004, 309–311. Celsus knew at least the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John.

Celsus describes an anointment ritual which is called the “seal” (σφραγίς); the act is referred to as “sealing” (σφραγίζω) and “anointing” (χρίω); the substance used is identified as “oil” (χρῖσμα); and the anointment confers a “seal” (σφραγίς). Two persons are identified: the one who anoints and thus imparts the seal is called “Father” (πατήρ), and the recipient is called a “Youth” (νέος) and a “Son” (υἱός). Finally, the recipient is reported to say, “I have been anointed with white oil from the tree of life” (κέχρισμαι χρῖσματι λευκῷ ἐκ ξύλου ζωῆς; *Cels.* 6.27). Celsus then says that according to those who seal, there are seven angels of luminous and archontic nature standing around the soul when one dies, and that the leader of the archontic angels is the accursed Jewish creator (6.27). Celsus lists the animal shapes of the seven archontic angels (6.30), and seems to also have known the passwords to be delivered to these animal-shaped gatekeepers (7.40) at the gates of paradise (6.33). However, according to Origen, Celsus did not quote the passwords (6.33). Celsus then says that some return into archontic, i.e., animal shapes (6.33), which possibly refers to the idea of transmigration of souls (see below). Importantly, Celsus compares this ritual with its mythology to the mysteries of Mithras where the soul’s journey through the seven planetary gates was apparently assumed by the initiates (6.20–24).⁸ Celsus wished to show that Christians, in speaking of the soul’s journey through seven heavens (6.20–21), have plagiarized the mysteries of Mithras, which themselves reflect Plato’s teaching (cf. 6.23).⁹ In any case, Celsus had two agendas in describing the Ophite diagram and its use: he wanted to portray them in the light of the Mithras mysteries, and to ridicule and criticize Christians (see, e.g., 6.29,34).

Although Origen confirms Celsus’ information about the passwords for the soul’s heavenly journey by actually quoting them (6.31), he claims Celsus had invented the “sealing” ritual as a mockery of the church’s “seal,” i.e., baptism (6.27). However, the passwords Origen quotes seem to refer to an initiation ritual resembling the one Celsus described (see below). It also seems that Origen’s diagram included both the animal shapes and the names of the gatekeeper archons (6.30–31). Celsus, according to Origen, had only mentioned their shapes and the

⁸ Porphyry (*De antro* 6) refers to the Mithraic myth of the soul’s descent and ascent; and the seven-step ladders in Mithraea also contain planetary symbols. See R. Beck 1988, 73–85; R. Beck 2006, 16–17, 41–43, 83–85.

⁹ Cf. Pearson 2004, 253.

name of the seventh one, Thaphabaoth or Onoel (6.30), which some scholars have taken as a sign that Origen's diagram was different from the one in Celsus' possession.¹⁰

It is important to note that Origen, too, had his rhetorical agenda. As we saw in the previous chapter, in attempting to counter Celsus' attacks on Christianity, Origen presented the Ophites and their rituals as un-Christian as possible. He stresses that the diagram does not represent the teaching of "good" Christians but that of the "heretical" Ophites (6.30), who are not really Christians at all; thus Celsus' accusations against them do not apply to real Christians (3.13; 6.24,28,30; 7.40). However, Origen's information on the Ophite cursing of Jesus as part of their initiation process does not appear to be believable. Moreover, Origen's statements that he has not met anyone who believes in the teaching of the diagram and that the Ophites probably no longer exist (6.24,26), only prove that he did not really know what he was talking about when he denied the existence of their anointment ritual. It may well have been practiced in the second century when Celsus wrote. Thus, we may reject Origen's claims that the Ophites did not practice anointment (6.27),¹¹ and instead cursed Jesus as part of their initiation (6.28).

The sealing Celsus reports was evidently an anointment ritual, but what was its purpose? After Celsus has described it, he says that according to those who seal, the dying body (τοῦ ἀπαλλακτομένου σώματος) is surrounded by angels, and goes on to describe the mythology of the angelic gatekeepers. Some scholars, such as Hopfner and Denzey, have taken Celsus' words about the dying body as belonging to the sealing process, and interpreted the anointment as a deathbed ritual.¹² However, other scholars, such as Chadwick and Witte, have taken the anointment as part of an initiation rite.¹³ Must the words about the dying body indicate a mortuary setting for the anointment? The following facts speak for such an assumption: (a) Celsus speaks of death and resurrection elsewhere in the same context;¹⁴ and (b) certain related sources, most notably Valentinian and Mandaean, do know of a deathbed anointing

¹⁰ See, e.g., Denzey 2005, 98.

¹¹ Cf. Vigne 1992, 87.

¹² Hopfner 1930, 88–89; Denzey 2005, 104–109.

¹³ Chadwick 1980, 342–343nn1–3, 349n4; Witte 1993, 39, 90, 101–102.

¹⁴ *Cels.* 6.27,34,37. Denzey 2005, 98.

that aimed at securing the soul's successful heavenly journey.¹⁵ However, the following facts speak against a mortuary setting: (a) Celsus wishes to parallel the sealing to the mysteries of Mithras where the ascent was ritually enacted while in this life, probably in the initiation;¹⁶ (b) Celsus identifies the ritual as "sealing" which was the usual name for the Christian initiation; (c) both Christian baptism, and initiation into pagan mystery cults, were loaded with death imagery and sought to secure one's lot in the afterlife,¹⁷ without being deathbed rituals. Thus, the somewhat vague mentioning of the dying body in the teaching of those who seal, i.e., Christians, does not necessarily have an actual connection to the act of sealing itself. Furthermore, the notion of good and evil angels standing around the soul of the dying reflects a Judeo-Christian mythology—and not practice—according to which Michael and the devil fought for Moses' soul (Jude 9).

According to Celsus, one also needed to memorize passwords to ensure the soul's successful ascent through the archontic gates. While Celsus merely states the need to memorize such passwords, Origen actually quotes them. What was the nature of the journey? The scholarly opinion is divided here, too. First, even though most scholars think the journey was an ascent, the apparently reversed order in which Origen quotes the passwords has caused Witte to suspect that we are rather dealing with a meditative descent in imitation of the descending Savior.¹⁸ However, Witte's theory is based on a too literal reading of Origen's text. Origen may simply have presented the passwords in a descending order if he followed their inscribed order starting from the top of the list and worked his way down.

Second, Denzey has suggested that the journey proceeded in chronological rather than in vertical order, i.e., that the gatekeepers represent the days of the week instead of the planets of the Ptolemaic worldview. Denzey wishes to replace the "old History-of-Religions School theory

¹⁵ See Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.21.5; Rudolph 1987, 244, 362; Buckley 2002, 87–97; Lupieri 2002, 29–32.

¹⁶ The seven-step Mithraic ladder with its planetary associations was connected with initiation and the cult hierarchy. There is no indication of a mortuary setting. In addition, Porphyry's description in *De antro* 6 indicates that the myth of the soul's descent and ascent was ritually enacted in the Mithras mysteries, most probably in the initiation. See R. Beck 1988, 57n133, 77–79; Clauss 2001, 131–138; R. Beck 2006, 16–17, 41–43.

¹⁷ For Christian baptism, see, e.g., Rom 6:1–14; Col 2:12; the *Apostolic Constitutions* 3.17. For mystery cults, see Meyer 1987, 7–8; Burkert 1987, 97–101.

¹⁸ Witte 1993, 35–39, 101–102, 113, 125–128.

of a planetary ascent” with her chronological model, and (a) states that the presumably planetary circles inside the circle of Leviathan in the diagram are not explicitly said to be concentric (*Cels.* 6.25); and (b) points to certain related texts, such as *Orig. World*, *Ap. John* and Irenaeus’ *Adv. haer.* 1.30, where the seven archons are identified with the days of the week.¹⁹ She could also have pointed to the Mandaean deathbed ritual where the congregation aids the soul of the deceased in its 45 day-long journey.²⁰ However, what Denzey does not consider is that in the related texts she refers to, the archons are *also* identified as the seven planets,²¹ and that Celsus specifically says that the Christians in question, i.e., the users of the diagram, believed in an ascent of the soul through the planetary spheres (*Cels.* 6.20–21). Scholars sometimes miss the latter statement since it occurs a few chapters earlier than the actual descriptions of the diagrams in *Contra Celsum*. Furthermore, because Ialdabaoth is identified as the star Phainon, i.e., Saturn (6.31), the planetary ascent is, in my opinion, a more likely interpretation than Denzey’s chronological one.

Third, despite the apparent postmortem context of the journey in Celsus’ account, many scholars suspect that this journey was already practiced in this life, either as a meditative exercise or acted out in the initiation process. This is an attractive hypothesis, but the arguments to support it are mostly rather poor. Chadwick interprets the notion that some return into animal shapes (*Cels.* 6.33) in light of Mithraic mysteries, thus falling into the pit prepared by Celsus, and suggests that Ophite initiates wore animal masks, because such a practice may be presupposed in literary descriptions of the Mithraic mysteries.²² A more likely explanation is that the reference is to the transmigration of the souls²³ since such a doctrine is found not only in Irenaeus’ Ophite account (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.14) and *Ap. John* (II 26,36–27,11 parr.), but also in Epiphanius’ account of the “libertine Gnostics,” where the specific notion of a *theriomorphic* reincarnation is attested (*Pan.* 26.10.7–10).²⁴

¹⁹ Denzey 2005, 99–103.

²⁰ See Rudolph 1987, 244, 362; Buckley 2002, 87–97; Lupieri 2002, 29–32.

²¹ See Chapter 3.

²² Chadwick 1980, 349n4. See Porphyry, *de Abstinencia* 4.16; Ambrosiaster, *Adversus paganos* 114,11 Bussièrès.

²³ Thus Hopfner 1930, 89; and Denzey 2005, 98. Witte (1993, 125–126) thinks the descending initiate assumes the animal shapes of the archons in order to stay *incognito*.

²⁴ Cf. also 3 *Baruch* [Gk] 4:4–5.

Witte, for his part, is forced to suppose a meditative practice because he thinks the journey was a descent and not an ascent, and a descent would not be possible for a postmortem return to the world of light. Finally, Denzey accepts Origen's information that the Ophites do not anoint, and thinks that Origen's diagram therefore did not include the "liturgical fragment." Because Denzey assigns a mortuary setting to the "liturgical fragment" known to Celsus, and, since this supposedly was missing in Origen's diagram, she suggests that the diagram Origen knew was associated with a different type of ascent, a meditative one.²⁵ There are religio-historical parallels speaking of a heavenly journey while in this life, both in Judeo-Christian and pagan sources,²⁶ and the diagram may have served a similar purpose, too, but we cannot be sure. Celsus' information favors a postmortem ascent, and this may have been the only type of ascent envisaged.

We must still consider what was the actual connection between the sealing and the heavenly journey. Celsus links them by stating that those who seal say there are luminous and archontic angels around the soul of the dying, and that the latter are the theriomorphic gatekeepers to whom the memorized passwords are to be delivered. The passwords Origen quotes seem to allude to an initiation rite. Denzey has already pointed out the "sacramental" context of the passwords. In the password to be delivered at the third gate, guarded by the archon Astaphaeus, the ascending one refers to him/herself as an "initiate" (μύστης) and being cleansed by a virgin's spirit, probably as opposed to "water" associated with Astaphaeus (*Cels.* 6.31.32–34).²⁷ "Symbol of life" (6.31.14–15) and "tree of life" (6.31.42) are invoked in other passwords, and are reminiscent of the "tree of life" as the source of the ointment in Celsus' description of the ritual. If the "sealing" was an initiation, comparable to the church's baptism, perhaps it was likewise thought to convey the spirit (of the virgin), alluded to in one of the passwords.

²⁵ Denzey 2005, 115.

²⁶ See, e.g., "Scipio's Dream," in Cicero, *Republic* 6.9–26; the "myth of Er," in Plato, *Republic* 10.13–16; 2 Cor 12:1–5; Jewish Merkavah traditions (e.g., 3 *Enoch*); and the Sethian ascension practices as reflected in *Zost.*, *Allogenes*, *Marsanes* and *Steles Seth*. See also Rudolph 1987, 171ff.; Turner 2001, 81–84, 757–759; and Segal 2004, 204–247.

²⁷ "Archon of the third gate, Astaphaeus, overseer of the original source of water, look on one initiate, and let me pass who have been cleansed by a virgin's spirit, and see the world's essence. May grace be with me, father, let it be with me." (Chadwick, transl.).

The Ophite “seal” may thus have been thought of as giving the initiate powers over cosmic forces (cf. Col 2:6ff.; Eph 2; 6:10ff.), in this case, the heavenly gatekeepers. These powers would be fully actualized during one’s postmortem ascent.

Denzey has made an intriguing suggestion: the reference to the “image in the likeness of a guiltless man” (cf. Gen 1:26–27) in one of the passwords (*Cels.* 6.31.43) might mean that the initiate was ritually transformed into Adam and restored to the heavenly paradise. According to *L.A.E.*, the dying Adam was anointed with oil that presumably came from the tree of life, and was finally to be enthroned in the heavenly paradise (*Vita* 36, 47). This myth has a certain parallelism with Celsus’ and Origen’s information on the Ophite ritual, and Adam speculations—including Adam Christology—were of great importance in the Ophite mythology. It is also known that in some Christian circles, a ritual identification with or even a transformation into Christ was thought to take place at baptism.²⁸ However, since Adam is not actually named in the diagram accounts, Denzey’s suggestion has to remain hypothetical. In fact, Vigne’s proposal, according to which Christ’s baptism in the river Jordan is ritually reenacted here,²⁹ may be closer to the truth.

9.2 ANOINTING, BAPTISM AND ASCENSION IN THE OPHITE MYTHOLOGY

Is there any external evidence to support Celsus’ information (partially confirmed by Origen) that the users of the Ophite diagram practiced an anointment ritual and memorized passwords to pass by the heavenly gatekeepers in order to get to the world of light and avoid reincarnation? Similar practices seem to have been widespread in Antiquity,³⁰ and many Christian texts also hint at such a mythologoumenon. For example, Irenaeus, around the same time as Celsus (ca. 180 CE), describes a Valentinian ritual where oil and water were poured on the forehead of the dying in order to seal and secure the soul’s passage through the archontic heavens; passwords similar to what Origen reports were to be delivered at heavenly gates (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*

²⁸ *Gos. Phil.* 61,29–31; 67,9–27; 74,12–24.

²⁹ Vigne 1992, 87.

³⁰ See Rudolph 1987, 171ff.; and Segal 2004, 204–247.

1.21.5; cf. *1 Apoc. Jas.* NH V 33,11–35,19; Tchacos 20,7–22,17).³¹ The Mandaeans are known to have practiced a mass for the dead whose purpose was to aid the soul of the deceased in its heavenly ascent, and the ritual included anointing, washings and readings.³² But however interesting these parallels may be, one should rather look for traces of such rituals in texts that belong to the Ophite corpus. Since “sealing” was a common name for Christian baptism, or at least part of the baptismal process, one should also look for baptismal imagery in these texts, even though Celsus does not spell out the use of water (Origen mentions water in one of the passwords). In addition, it is known that some Christians considered anointment with oil more important than baptism in water,³³ and the former may have replaced the latter altogether in some cases.

Irenaeus’ Ophites do not mention anointing *per se*, but describe the baptism of Jesus by John: Sophia prepared the baptism of repentance (i.e., that of John the Baptist), then united with Christ, and descended into the human Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan. Hence, Jesus gained the ability to work miracles and proclaim the true God (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.12,14). At the crucifixion, Sophia and Christ departed from Jesus and ascended to the world of light. Jesus, for his part, arose in a special resurrection body, since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 15:50; *Adv. haer.* 1.30.14). The Christology here is possessionist, as already pointed out, and the implications of this material will be considered presently. According to *Orig. World*, there are three baptisms: spiritual, fiery, and aquatic, which correspond to the three classes of humanity, i.e., spiritual, psychic and earthly (122,6–16). The three baptisms are based on Luke 3:16 parr. where John the Baptist says that his baptism is by water, but that Christ will baptize by spirit and fire.³⁴ *Orig. World* also speaks of the “baptism of a true man,” which

³¹ See Thomassen 2006, 406–414. Thomassen thinks this ritual is a “derivative of baptism...referring back to and reinforcing the initiation undergone by the person now facing death” (412). In the immediate context (*Adv. haer.* 1.21.4), Irenaeus also describes a Valentinian initiation rite where oil and water were mixed and poured on the initiate’s head.

³² See Rudolph 1987, 244, 362; Buckley 2002, 87–97; and Lupieri 2002, 29–32.

³³ *Gos. Phil.* 74,12–24. Cf. *The Apostolic Constitutions* 3.16.2. See also Vigne 1992, 85ff., 248ff.

³⁴ According to Orbe (1973, 194), the Ophite source known to Irenaeus has made use especially of Lukan Jesus traditions.

appears to be associated with the lowest, aquatic baptism (122,16–20).³⁵ Given the context (the Lukan reference) in *Orig. World*, the true man is probably John the Baptist. Interestingly, in *Orig. World*, Ialdabaoth emerges out of waters, is called “youth” and is named “Ialdabaoth” by Pistis. This suggests a baptismal context, but certainly a polemical one, especially since the author (or redactor) had a doctrine of three baptisms, the lowest one of which is associated with water. Ialdabaoth appears to symbolize this lowest, aquatic baptism.³⁶ Furthermore, and as already pointed out above, one of the passwords Origen cites appears to associate water with the archon Astaphaeus, and possibly sets it against the cleansing by the spirit (*Cels.* 6.31.32–34). This all suggests that in the Ophite mythology, a spiritual interpretation of baptism prevailed while water itself was associated with the archons and with the lowest class of humanity. Perhaps the mythology was used to justify a replacement of water with oil.

Oil, anointment and a “seal” are then spoken of in *Orig. World* and *Hyp. Arch.* According to *Orig. World*, the olive tree originated in the light of the first heavenly Adam, for the sake of the oil (ΠΧΡΙCΜΑ) to be received; in the last days, it will purify the kings and high priests of righteousness (111,2–8). People belonging to the highest class of humanity, according to *Orig. World*, are “kings” among mortals (125,11–12); perhaps they are the ones to be purified with the oil. Moreover, the tree of eternal life in paradise is said to purify and be white (ΟΥΟΒΩ, 110,17), which recalls Celsus’ information on the words of the sealed youth, “I have been anointed with white oil from the tree of life.” The tree of life is associated with the olive tree in some Judeo-Christian texts.³⁷ Painchaud’s rhetorical analysis of *Orig. World* further suggests that the center and climax of the text is the section describing paradise and its trees.³⁸ This indicates that the trees of paradise, perhaps including the olive tree, had a high symbolic value. According to *Hyp. Arch.*, the “true man” (ΠΡΩΜΕ ΠΑΛΗΘΙ[ΗΟC]) will not only teach the chosen ones about everything, but he will also anoint (ΤΑΞCΟΥ < χρίειν)³⁹ them with the oil of eternal life (ΠΧΡΕΙCΜΑ ΠΠΩΗΩ ΨΑ ΕΗΕΩ), given him from the

³⁵ According to the text, ΠΩΥΑΡΙΑ ΠΗΟΟΥ (“water jars”; see Painchaud 1995b, 473–475; and note 31 on p. 74 above) are witnesses of the baptism of a true man.

³⁶ Painchaud 1995b, 262ff.

³⁷ Cf. *Gos. Phil.* 73,15–19; and *L.A.E. Vita* 36. See also Painchaud 1995b, 379–380.

³⁸ Painchaud 1995b, 81–85, 338–386.

³⁹ Crum 1962, 461b.

kingless generation (97,1–5). This likewise resembles the words of the youth in Celsus' account. Both *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World* also use the term, "seal" (σφραγίς), but its meaning is somewhat obscure: in both texts, the archons rape the earthly Eve instead of the spiritual one, and the former is referred to as the "seal of her voice" (*Hyp. Arch.* 89,28–29: ΤΟΦΡΑΓΙ[Σ] ΠΤΕΣΣΜΗ; *Orig. World* 117,7: ΤΟΦΡΑΓΙΣ ΜΠΕΣΣΡΟΥ). This takes place after the spiritual Eve, who is a Sophia-figure, had left the earthly Eve and had become a tree, either of life or *gnosis*.⁴⁰ This might mean that Sophia as a spirit was thought to confer the seal, if such a rite is to be found behind these texts. Remember that in Irenaeus' source the Spirit who descended into Jesus was Sophia-Christ.

As for the ascension motif, Irenaeus' Ophite account mentions that Ialdabaoth returns psychic souls back into the world whereas Christ gathers all the "holy souls" with *gnosis* unto himself and into the world of light (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.14). *Ap. John* (II 26,36–27,11 parr.) refers to the reincarnation of those who do not possess sufficient knowledge. Then, according to Epiphanius' account of the "libertine Gnostics," the souls who do not have special knowledge are returned by a world-surrounding dragon into animal bodies. However, those who do possess this knowledge, and have also gathered semen and blood, will pass by the archons (*Pan.* 26.10.7–8; 26.13.2–3). In fact, these "libertine Gnostics," according to Epiphanius, practiced ritual sex as a means to ascension,⁴¹ but this is probably slander on the part of Epiphanius.⁴² The Nag Hammadi texts generally—including those that have connections to the mythology behind *Pan.* 26—point to an ascetic lifestyle,⁴³ and similar charges had earlier been directed against Christians by pagans.⁴⁴ In fact, accusations of libertinism were a stock charge against one's

⁴⁰ See Chapter 4. *Orig. World* further says that by creating the sun and the moon, Sophia sealed (ΔΟΨΟΦΡΑΓΙΣΕ) her heaven (122,24–26).

⁴¹ According to this account, 730 acts of intercourse would make one "Christ" in imitation of his descent and ascent through the 365 heavens. Consummating semen and menstrual blood would also have been necessary for gathering the light-substance from the world. This supposedly was taught by Christ (*Pan.* 26.4.5–8; 26.8.1–3; 26.9.3–9).

⁴² Thus Koschorke 1978, 123–124; Layton 1987, 200; and Marksches 2003, 112. Cf. Knust 2006, 118. However, Benko (1967), Goehring (1988) and Marjanen (1996, 189–202) think Epiphanius may be reliable here.

⁴³ Cf. M. Williams 1996, 139–188; M. Williams 2005, 56.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Justin, 1 *Apol.* 26; Tertullian, *Apol.* 7–8; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9; Athanagoras, *Leg.* 3; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.1. See also Wilken 1984, 15–25; M. Williams 1996, 163–188; Knust 2006, 4, 104–107.

opponents in Antiquity.⁴⁵ Perhaps the prominent sexual imagery in Classic Gnostic texts (e.g., the rape of Eve; the “seed of Seth”) has also contributed to misunderstandings and consequently, to allegations of “libertinism.” Epiphanius does claim that he had personally talked with these “libertine Gnostics,” and that certain women belonging to their “sect” had tried to seduce him (26.17.4–9). However, given Epiphanius’ unreliability elsewhere, this information may be suspect as well.

Hyp. Arch. (97,5–9) and *Orig. World* (127,4–17) speak of the ascension of the chosen ones into the highest realms, but this can be considered commonplace. Both texts do, however, speak of the repentant archon Sabaoth’s conversion and ascension above the cosmic heavens.⁴⁶ This material contains clear allusions to conversion and initiation:⁴⁷ (a) Sabaoth accepts Faith (*Pistis*) and/or Life (*Zoe*);⁴⁸ (b) he repents and renounces Ialdabaoth and matter, probably symbolizing the world;⁴⁹ (c) he sings songs of praise;⁵⁰ (d) he ascends above the archontic powers;⁵¹ and (e) is given a new name and Life (*Zoe*).⁵² *Hyp. Arch.* may also allude to prebaptismal exorcism⁵³ in relating how Zoe blows into Ialdabaoth’s face and casts him into Tartaros (95,8–13).⁵⁴ *Orig. World* further adds that the proclamation of *Pistis* that convinced Sabaoth, culminated in her appearance in waters (103,15–32), and that Sabaoth was illuminated when *Pistis* poured light upon him (104,3–7). Thus, the Sabaoth-episodes may present a mythological narrative as a model for conversion and initiation; water is spoken of, but light (which may be equivalent to spirit)⁵⁵ effects salvation that allows for the ascension above the archontic heavens.

⁴⁵ See Grant 1981; and Knust 2006, e.g., 4–50. Cf. also Irenaeus’ accusations against the Carpocratians (*Adv. haer.* 1.25.4–6) and the Gnostic users of a *Gospel of Judas*, whom he connects with the Carpocratians (*Adv. haer.* 1.31.1–2).

⁴⁶ See especially Fallon 1978.

⁴⁷ Louis Painchaud, private communication.

⁴⁸ *Hyp. Arch.* 95,6–19; *Orig. World* 103,32–104,3.

⁴⁹ *Hyp. Arch.* 95,15–17; *Orig. World* 103,34–35; 104,10–13.

⁵⁰ *Hyp. Arch.* 95,17–18; *Orig. World* 103,34.

⁵¹ *Hyp. Arch.* 95,19–20; *Orig. World* 104,17–21.

⁵² *Hyp. Arch.* 95,22–26.31–34; *Orig. World* 104,3–10.26–31.

⁵³ See, e.g., Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 20.

⁵⁴ In *Orig. World*, this motif is moved to another context, where it precedes Ialdabaoth’s emergence out of waters (99,29–100,14). The motif may contain baptismal allusions in *Orig. World* as well.

⁵⁵ Light and spirit are associated with each other, for example, in *Orig. World* 117,28–29 (“the Adam of Light is spiritual,” ἀλλὰ ἢ τὸ πνεῦμα οὐρανογενέτης ἄνθρωπος ἐστίν).)

It appears from the preceding discussion that Celsus' information about the anointment and password-memorizing of the users of the Ophite diagram may well be accurate. Origen's denial of the Ophite anointing does not seem believable, and Celsus' information finds support in the mythology of related Coptic and heresiological sources. To put it in another way, the Ophite mythology was likely accompanied by an initiation ritual which included anointing with oil, perhaps also baptism, although the latter may have been understood spiritually and the use of water may have been avoided. The mythology was also likely to have been accompanied by a belief in a postmortem ascent of the soul, whose safe passage was thought to be guaranteed by a "seal" given in the anointing ritual, as well as by certain memorized passwords to be delivered to the heavenly gatekeeper archons. It remains a hypothetical possibility that this journey of the soul was also practiced in this life as a meditative or contemplative exercise. It is likewise possible that the ritual of "sealing" was a deathbed ritual similar to what certain Valentinians and Mandeans practiced. However, in my view, there are stronger arguments in favor of its understanding as an initiation; and the Ophite mythology, in any case, included spiritual and Sophiological speculations about Jesus' baptism. That being said, we may now move on to investigate the relationship of the Ophite rituals (sealing and memorizing of passwords for the soul's ascent) and baptismal theology to the Sethian rituals (baptism of the five seals and the cultic ascent). Of special interest will be the two Sethian texts, *Trim. Prot.* and LR of *Ap. John*, that have often been connected with the Johannine Prologue.

9.3 THE PURPORTED SETHIAN RITUALS AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

Schenke, and many scholars following him, think that Sethians practiced two rituals: baptism—sometimes associated with "five seals"—and a cultic ascent.⁵⁶ Even though seven texts in Schenke's Sethian corpus speak of baptism (*Ap. John*; *Trim. Prot.*; *Holy Book*; *Zost.*; *Melch.*; *Cod. Bruc. Untitled*; *Apoc. Adam*),⁵⁷ and four of the actual cultic

⁵⁶ H.-M. Schenke 1981, 599–607; Sevrin 1986; Turner 2001, 64, 80–84, 238–247.

⁵⁷ A few others (*Marsanes*; *Allogenes*) may allude to baptism, but this is not certain, due to the lacunar state of the manuscripts (see Sevrin 1986, 6). The "Archontics" (*Pan.* 40), possibly also the author of *Apoc. Adam*, polemicize against baptism. Clear baptismal polemics are further found in certain non-Sethian texts: *Testim. Truth*,

ascent (*Zost.*; *Allogenes*; *Steles Seth*; *Marsanes*), only one text, *Zostrianos*, combines the two. Turner nevertheless speaks of the “baptismal ascent ritual of the Five Seals,” although he thinks that the visionary ascent and baptism were originally performed separately.⁵⁸ Two things should be noted at the outset: (1) all the Sethian texts in question have Barbeloite features; and (2) the cultic ascent takes place in the supracelestial realms and lacks the mythology of the passwords to be delivered to the gatekeeper archons. The latter motif is found in Schenke’s Sethian corpus, but only in texts that have few, if any, Barbeloite features (*Pan.* 26, 40).⁵⁹ In certain texts that have clear Barbeloite characteristics, an ascent towards the world of light is described, but it happens when “clouds of light” descend to carry the seer or chosen ones out of reach of the archons.⁶⁰ No passwords are required or even mentioned. *Trim. Prot.* (48,15–35) appears to teach that there will be an immediate rapture into the light-world as a result of baptism.⁶¹ In addition, the cultic ascent described in the Platonizing Sethian treatises takes place in the supracelestial and intellectual (Barbeloite) realms, and requires contemplative techniques known from contemporary Platonism. The visionary is to launch the mind towards and assimilate into ever higher ontological levels. The methods consisted of using the classical paths to God: *via negationis*, *via analogiae* and/or *via eminentiae*. However, in order to experience the ultimate vision of the supreme One beyond being and intellect, one must engage in “learned ignorance” by absolutely vacating the mind and simply let the sudden ecstatic vision come.⁶² It seems that the purported Sethian rituals of baptism and cul-

Paraph. Shem and *The Concept of Our Great Power* (NH VI,4). See Sevrin 1986, 4, 165–172; and Turner 2000, 96–97.

⁵⁸ Turner 2001, 97, 108.

⁵⁹ The authors of the apparently late texts, *Pist. Soph.* 1–4 and 1–2 *Jeu*, know of the password mythology but these texts have only a few Barbeloite features. Schenke left these texts out of his Sethian corpus since he thought they were only superficially influenced by Sethianism (1981, 596).

⁶⁰ *Zost.* 4,20–5,13; *Apoc. Adam* 69,19–24; 75,17–76,6; cf. *Ap. John* II 29,6–15 parr.; and *Gos. Judas* 57,16ff.

⁶¹ Turner 2000, 95.

⁶² The basis for such an ascent is Diotima’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium* 210A–212A (cf. Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 23), which describes the path to the vision of absolute beauty by the redirection of Eros from lower to higher realms in successive steps. Later, especially Albinus (*Didaskalikos* X) and Plotinus (*Enn.* 6.7 [38]) developed contemplative techniques for attaining a vision of and an assimilation into the God/One. According to Albinus, the techniques are three: *via negationis*, *via analogiae* and *via eminentiae*. These were derived from the first hypothesis of *Parmenides* 137C–142A;

tic ascent (with no passwords) are anchored in the Barbeloite speculation, which itself was probably introduced to describe the Christian Godhead in philosophically acceptable terms.

Several Sethian texts include what appear to be baptismal liturgical fragments.⁶³ A few texts speak of an actual celestial baptism (*Zost.*;⁶⁴ *Cod. Bruc. Untitled* 20), and in *Holy Book*, the baptism is called supracelestial (III 65,25–26). All of the Sethian baptismal texts also appear to give a spiritual interpretation of the baptismal water: it is sometimes called “living water”⁶⁵ (cf. John 4:10–14) or equated with knowledge (*Apoc. Adam* 85,22–31). Since the fragments speak of immersions, Sevrin thinks actual water was used but its spiritual meaning was emphasized.⁶⁶ Because the liturgical fragments further lack clear allusions to anointing, Sevrin thinks the expression, “five seals,” that occurs in four texts (*LR of Ap. John, Trim. Prot., Holy Book, Cod. Bruc. Untitled*), rather points to a fivefold immersion in water. However, apart from the *Cod. Bruc. Untitled*, which appears to be a late text, possibly preserving baptismal traditions only as literary remnants,⁶⁷ the other texts that speak of the “five seals” also know of Christ’s primordial anointing.⁶⁸ In *Holy Book*, the “five seals” are identified as Christ (IV 56,23–27);⁶⁹ and in *Zost.*,

the sun simile in *Republic* VI 508–509; and Diotima’s speech in *Symposium* 210A–212A, respectively (Dillon 1996, 284–285; Turner 2001, 487–488). According to Plotinus, one needs to abandon knowledge and intellect (“learned ignorance”) in order to achieve the final sudden and unexplainable vision of the One (*Enn.* 6.7.36). Various preparations were also deemed necessary. *Allogenes* 57,27–60,37 describes Allogenes’ preparation (one hundred years), as well as instructions for and the performance of his ascent, especially through the intellectual realm of Barbelo. Finally (60,37ff.), Allogenes attains the vision of the Unknowable One. *Zost.* describes the visionary’s ascents and transformative heavenly baptisms, apparently all the way to the vision of the First One (see especially 128,19–129,16). The three steles in *Steles Seth* depict three distinct ontological levels in ascending order (cf. also 127,14–21), culminating in a statement, “We have seen! We have seen! We have seen the really preexistent one” (124,18–19). The author of *Marsanes* claims to have performed a visionary ascent (e.g., 4,24ff.; 6,18; 7,1; 14,15ff.), and may be the visionary Marsianos mentioned by Epiphanius (*Pan.* 40.7.6; cf. *Cod. Bruc. Untitled* 7). See especially Turner 2000, 87–97, 128–137; and Turner 2001, 81–84, 485–495, 637ff.

⁶³ E.g., *Holy Book* III 64,9–68,1 par.; *Trim. Prot.* 48,11–35; *Zost.* 6,7–7,21; 53,15–54,1; *Apoc. Adam* 83,4–85,31; *Melch.* 5,24–6,14; 16,7–18,7. See Sevrin 1986, 65–71, 94–144, 159–176, 186–190, 231–246, 258–269; Turner 2001, 238–247.

⁶⁴ See the index in Sevrin 1986, 295.

⁶⁵ E.g., *Trim. Prot.* 48,20–21; *Holy Book* III 66,10–11 par.

⁶⁶ Sevrin 1986, 256.

⁶⁷ Sevrin 1986, 218–220.

⁶⁸ *Ap. John* II 6,23–33 parr.; *Holy Book* III 44,22–24 par.; *Trim. Prot.* 37,31–32.

⁶⁹ Cf. the five ogdoads in *Holy Book* III 53,10–12 par.

the seer is spiritually baptized five times in the aeon of Autogenes (6,7-7,21; 53,15-54,1; Zostrianos is overall baptized at least 22 times in the course of his heavenly journey).⁷⁰ LR of *Ap. John* has identified the descending Autogenes Christ and his four lights of SR (BG 51,9-10 par.) as “five illuminators” (II 19,19 par.).⁷¹ *Ap. John* further speculates on the pentadic nature of the Father (II 6,2-9 parr.), and identifies him with Christ (“I am the Father, I am the Mother, I am the Son,” II 2,13-15 parr.). Thus, it seems possible that at least in some cases, the “five seals” refer to (baptismal) anointing and are performed in imitation of the primordial anointing of the pentadically understood Christ.⁷² Such a correspondence between the pentadic concept of divinity and the fivefold ritual act may have been inspired by the baptism of the “great church,” where a trinitarian baptismal formula (cf. Matt 28:19) corresponded to the developing trinitarian concept of the Godhead. It may likewise be noted here that one of the Ophite passwords Origen quotes refers to a “mightier pentad” that is “liberating Sabaoth’s creation and setting bodies free” (*Cels.* 6.31.27-30). The pentad may refer to the true Godhead, which, according to Irenaeus’ Ophite source, included five members (due to the fading of *Ennoia*).⁷³

Many of the Sethian baptismal texts utilize a special nomenclature that identifies various administrators of the baptismal rite. It is mythologically connected to the Barbeloite speculation, but also partially paralleled by magical sources. This nomenclature occurs in *Holy Book*, *Zost.*, *Trim. Prot.*, *Apoc. Adam* and *Cod. Bruc. Untitled*. It often includes the following names and functions: (a) Micheus, Michar and Mnesious,

⁷⁰ Turner 2000, 96; Turner 2006b, 950.

⁷¹ Cf. *Apoc. Adam* 85,22-31, where baptism is identified as knowledge received from those born of the Logos, and the illuminators (ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗΓΟΤΟΥ ΠΗΛΟΓΟΓΕΗΝΙΣ ΜΠ ΜΦΩΣΤΗΡ). The “living water” (probably that of baptism) is identified as “Iesseus Mazareus Iessedekus.”

⁷² Charron (2005) has pointed out interesting parallels between the Pronoia hymn of LR and certain alchemical texts where a transformation of metal into a gold-like substance was performed following a five-step process that culminated in “sealing” it in “divine” water. She thinks the Pronoia hymn circulated in Hermetic circles, and that alchemists and Gnostics borrowed ideas from each others’ writings (454-456).

⁷³ (1) First Man, (2) Second Man-Ennoia, (3) Holy Spirit, (4) Christ and (5) Sophia. Cf. Gruber 1864, 123. In addition, the present form of *Eugnostos*, despite its triadic core pattern, speaks of five male divinities due to the addition of two consortless principles above the triad of heavenly *anthropoi*. See Turner 2001, 205. Given the various pentadic concepts in *Ap. John* and *Holy Book*, it seems that there was a general interest in pentadic (and, of course, triadic) concepts of the Godhead in Classic Gnostic circles, even though the precise forms were not fixed.

the nature of the mutual relationships among these three documents has been a hotly debated question since some scholars think these Sethian hymns prove Bultmann's theory of a Gnostic background of the Prologue.⁸¹ Such claims have been made especially of *Trim. Prot.*, whose parallels with the Fourth Gospel (not only its Prologue) have been called "stupendous" and "striking."⁸² These include the ideas that the Logos "tabernacled" on earth (John 1:14: ἐσκήνωσεν; *Trim. Prot.* 47,15: σκηνή); that there are "divine dwellings" (John 14:2: μοναί; *Trim. Prot.* 37,22; 46,29: μονή); and that the descending Savior is light shining in darkness (John 1:5; *Trim. Prot.* 36,5; 46,30–32). The Savior in her third descent is explicitly identified as the Logos (46,14; 47,14–15; 47,28–29) and Jesus (50,12–14), although the Christology in *Trim. Prot.* is possessionist.⁸³ Many other parallels have been pointed out, and sometimes it is argued that the parallel material seems more "natural" in *Trim. Prot.* than in the Fourth Gospel.⁸⁴ For example, while the functions of λόγος (John 1:1,14) and φωνή (1:23) are distributed between two figures (Christ and John the Baptist, respectively) in the gospel,⁸⁵ in *Trim. Prot.*, the threefold descent of the Savior herself has been expressed by means of an "increasing articulateness of verbal communication," from voice (ῥοοῦγ) through articulate speech (σμη < φωνή)⁸⁶ to explicit word (λόγος).⁸⁷ This probably derives from the Stoic distinction between internal reason, and expressed reason with its various degrees of articulation.⁸⁸ Moreover, the pantheistic doctrine of the descending Savior (35,10–21) who is identified as the Logos (46,14) in her final descent may betray Stoic influence. The scholarly opinion concerning the relationship between this text and the Prologue is divided among three camps:⁸⁹ (1) those who see *Trim. Prot.* as a probable background for the Prologue;⁹⁰ (2) those who see *Trim. Prot.* as dependent on the

⁸¹ See G. Schenke 1974, 733–734; J. Robinson 1981, 650–662. Turner (2000, 91; 2005, 399) thinks all three documents derive from the same milieu, i.e., late first or early second century Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom speculations.

⁸² See Colpe 1974, 122; J. Robinson 1981, 651, 659.

⁸³ The Savior first puts Jesus on and then rescues him from the cross (*Trim. Prot.* 50,12–14).

⁸⁴ See J. Robinson 1981, 654–657.

⁸⁵ Turner 2005, 418.

⁸⁶ Crum 1962, 334b–335a.

⁸⁷ Turner 2001, 153; Turner 2005, 406. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.57, has a sequence: φωνή—λέξις—λόγος.

⁸⁸ Turner 2001, 153.

⁸⁹ For a full survey of the research history, see Poirier 2006, 32–67.

⁹⁰ G. Schenke 1974, 733–734; J. Robinson 1981, 650–662.

Prologue, at least to some extent;⁹¹ and (3) those who see both texts as simply drawing upon Jewish Wisdom speculations.⁹²

Parallels between *Ap. John's* Pronoia hymn and the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel have received less attention,⁹³ probably because there are no clear verbal agreements. However, *Ap. John's* Pronoia hymn—which comprises little more than one codex page (II 30,12–31,25 par.)—is much closer to the Prologue in its length than the quite long (sixteen codex pages) *Trim. Prot.*⁹⁴ The Pronoia hymn also appears in a text that claims the authority of John the son of Zebedee, to whom the Fourth Gospel (as well as the Johannine Epistles and Revelation) were attributed during the second century (see below). And despite the lack of clear verbal agreements between the Prologue and the Pronoia hymn, they—together with *Trim. Prot.*—do share formal and thematic parallelism.⁹⁵ All three documents:

- (1) describe the salvific activity of a preexistent divinity (Word, Providence, or the First Thought of God), who is identified as Christ;
- (2) arrange this activity in three parts;
- (3) describe this activity in terms of light shining in darkness;
- (4) draw upon Jewish Wisdom speculations;
- (5) culminate in baptism

The threefold structure is clearly stated in the two Gnostic hymns (*Ap. John* II 30,16–17.22.32–33 par.; *Trim. Prot.* 47,1–15). However, a threefold structure can be identified in the Prologue as well. On the one hand, the two blocks of material concerning John the Baptist (vv. 6–8 and v. 15), which are regarded by many as secondary additions in the Prologue's Christological material,⁹⁶ naturally divide the Prologue into three parts. On the other hand, the Christological material itself can be seen to correspond to three distinct activities of the Logos: (1) creation, (2) being in the world (before the incarnation),

⁹¹ Janssens 1978, 82; Perkins 1981.

⁹² Colpe 1974; Sevrin 1986, 50; Turner 2001, 152. See also Luttikhuisen 2006, 158.

⁹³ See, however, Waldstein 1995.

⁹⁴ Cf. Waldstein 1995, 402.

⁹⁵ Turner (2000, 91) considers all three documents—sharing common vocabulary and mythological structure—contemporaneous.

⁹⁶ See, e.g., Brown 1966, 21–22; Schnackenburg 1968, 230, 249–253; Bultmann 1971, 7–31; Haenchen 1984, 116–117; Keener 2003, 333–334.

and (3) incarnation.⁹⁷ Much of the Christological material has parallels in Jewish Wisdom speculations, as scholars have generally acknowledged (see below).

While the background of the Prologue can be located in Jewish Wisdom speculations, perhaps a more important observation in discussing the Prologue's background is that it links the incarnation to Jesus' baptism, not to his birth.⁹⁸ The Fourth Gospel lacks stories about Jesus' virgin birth and childhood.⁹⁹ The story of Jesus begins in the Fourth Gospel, as in Mark, with his baptism. While many scholars regard the Baptist material within the Prologue (vv. 6–8,15) as secondary, the Prologue's Christological speculations are nevertheless linked to John the Baptist both internally (vv. 6–8,15) and externally (the evangelist takes up John the Baptist immediately afterwards in v. 19). The unity of the Prologue (including vv. 6–8,15) has been defended on stylistic grounds,¹⁰⁰ and, in fact, we simply do not know of any other context for the Prologue than the one with John the Baptist. What is more, some of the schismatics of 1–2 John,¹⁰¹ who came from within the Johannine community¹⁰² (1 John 2:18–19) seem to have professed a possessionist Christology that was actualized at Jesus' baptism: for them, Christ

⁹⁷ See Becker 1979, 70; Smith 1999, 48; Keener 2003, 336–337; Turner 2005, 414.

⁹⁸ Turner (2000, 107) has suggested that the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel originated in a baptismal context.

⁹⁹ The episode of the wedding at Cana may even be originally a childhood miracle-story, which the evangelist moved into the sphere of Jesus' public ministry (Brown 1979, 192ff. Cf. Lindars 1972, 127; and Smith 1999, 83). Jesus is still in Galilee (instead of Capernaum) with his mother and brothers (John 2:1,12), and performs a kind of a naïve miracle. Brown considers v. 2:4, where Jesus informs his mother that his time has not yet come, a modification by the evangelist. This verse may, however, betray the original childhood context of the episode.

¹⁰⁰ See Keener 2003, 333–337; Köstenberger 2004, 19–23.

¹⁰¹ The "schismatics" who left the community were probably not a uniform group, and their presentation in the epistles is probably based on the author's rhetorical simplification (Raimo Hakola, private communication). It does remain likely, however, that some of them left the author's community due to, e.g., Christological quarrels (see below).

I accept the view that all three epistles were written by the same author (Schnackenburg 1992, 270; Akin 2001, 27; Painter 2002, 52; Trebilco 2004, 263–271), and that the schismatics in 1 and 2 John are the same (thus Brown 1982, 47ff.; Painter 2002, 54–55; Trebilco 2004, 273ff.). It seems possible that 2–3 John were written first (see Brown 1982, 30), and when the planned personal trips to these sister churches—during which the author wished to hold extensive conversations (2 John 12; 3 John 13–14)—were cancelled, the author wrote them the lengthier 1 John.

¹⁰² The Johannine epistles indicate that there were likely at least three separate house churches that made up the Johannine community. It is often thought that the main church represented by the author(s) of the Epistles was in Ephesus, and the "satellite" churches addressed in 2–3 John nearby the city. See Trebilco 2004, 241–271.

came only or specifically through water (1 John 5:6), but did not truly incarnate (1 John 2:22–23; 4:2–3; 2 John 7).¹⁰³

Since these schismatics came from the same community, and had utilized the same traditions (or the same gospel) as the author of 1 John, it seems possible that the Johannine community had until the schism professed—correcting Käsemann—a “naïve possessionist Christology.”¹⁰⁴ The author of 1 John in any case corrected such a view by affirming the reality of Jesus’ humanity (2:22–23; 4:2–3) and his salvific death (5:6).¹⁰⁵ Possibly the gospel was then redacted into its present form after the schism by the author of 1 John or someone close to him.¹⁰⁶ Such a redaction could have been aimed—among other things—at disarming the schismatics of their pure possessionist Christology, which might explain why an actual description of Jesus’ baptism by John is missing from the gospel (cf. John 1:29–34). It might also explain the “Word became flesh” in John 1:14,¹⁰⁷ although vague as the expression is, it could have been interpreted along possessionist lines to begin with, and thus could already have belonged to the gospel known to the schismatics.¹⁰⁸ If, however, the Prologue is treated as a stylistic unity, and if the verse 14 belongs to a post-schism redaction, then the whole Prologue could have been added to the gospel only at this stage. Many scholars have argued that the Prologue is a later addition to the main text of the gospel.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ See Painter 2002, 302–307; Trebilco 2004, 289–290.

¹⁰⁴ Käsemann (1968, 26, 70) held that the Fourth Gospel has a naïve *docetic* Christology. While in a possessionist Christology (or separation Christology) Jesus and Christ (or another divine being possessing Jesus) remain two separate beings, in docetic Christology, Jesus Christ only seemed to have a body, and only seemed to have suffered, while in reality his body and suffering were illusions.

¹⁰⁵ The “water and blood” in 1 John 5:6 may be an allusion to the “blood and water” flowing from Jesus’ side in John 19:34. But it could also simply refer to Jesus’ death.

¹⁰⁶ Richter (1975) thinks the author of 1 John also added anti-docetic verses (1:14–18; 19:34–35) to the Gospel. Cf. Lindars 1972, 62. Becker (1970) and Segovia (1981) suggest that the author of 1 John, or someone close to him (cf. Culpepper’s 1975 thesis of a Johannine school of authors), is responsible for the special emphasis on love in John 13–16.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Richter 1975.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Brown 1979, 152–153. Although Brown does not think that the schismatics (“secessionists”) had a possessionist Christology, he admits that John 1:14 could be read in favor of such a position.

¹⁰⁹ Brown 1966, xxxviii, cxxxviii, 20–28; Schnackenburg 1968, 226–231; Bultmann 1971, 7–31. Cf. Richter 1975; and Haenchen 1984, 125. Keener (2003, 334) thinks the evangelist himself composed and added the Prologue after having finished the first draft of the gospel.

Be that as it may, possessionist Christology and the related adoptionist Christology were common Christological models, known especially from Jewish-Christian sources.¹¹⁰ They both seek to maintain Jesus' humanity, either by divine possession, or by God's adoption of Jesus into divine sonship. In fact, the Synoptic Gospels already seem to know of and modify these kinds of speculations. The quotation of Psalm 2:7 ("You are my son; today I have begotten you") is modified in all three Synoptic accounts by replacing the "today's begetting" with "being pleased" from Isa 42:1. In addition, while according to Mark (the earliest gospel), the Spirit still goes into (εἰς) Jesus; Matthew, Luke and even John (in its present form) have the Spirit descend on (ἐπί) him. The full quotation of Psalm 2:7 at Jesus' baptism is found in one manuscript of Luke (D), in the Ebionite *Gospel of the Hebrews* (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.13.6–7), and in Justin Martyr's description of Jewish-Christians (*Dial.* 88.8).¹¹¹ The Ebionite model is clearly possessionist (the Spirit entered into Jesus), and possessionist models are known from other sources that can be considered Jewish-Christian. These include those under the name of Cerinthus (see, e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.26.1). Possessionism was a very early Christological model that seems to have been fully entertained by the Johannine schismatics, but which was corrected in 1 John and perhaps also in the Gospel's subsequent redaction.¹¹²

It is possible that the Johannine community simply had always had possessionist tendencies, but these may also have been imported into the community by Jewish-Christians from the Jerusalem church who had been scattered after the execution of their leader James (62 CE) and the destruction of the Temple in the Jewish War (66–70 CE).¹¹³ Such an importation would have taken place well before the writing of the Gospel and the Epistles (usually dated between 90–125 CE).¹¹⁴ In fact, the schismatics of 1 John have often been connected with Jewish-Christians with possible Gnostic tendencies.¹¹⁵ According to a tradition going back to Irenaeus (who says he received it from Polycarp, a hearer of John, *Adv. haer.* 3.3.4; 3.11.1; 5.33.4), John wrote his gospel against

¹¹⁰ See Myllykoski 2005; and Häkkinen 2005.

¹¹¹ Myllykoski 2005, 224–236.

¹¹² Such views are also found in *Treat. Seth* and *Apoc. Pet.* See p. 237 above.

¹¹³ Cf. Keener 2003, 144; Painter 2004, 230.

¹¹⁴ See, e.g., Brown 1982, 100–103; Moloney 1998, 1–6; Keener 2003, 140–142.

¹¹⁵ Dunderberg (2006, 180–198) has suggested that the final redaction of the Fourth Gospel was aimed at countering Jewish-Christian appeals to James' authority, with the introduction of the Beloved Disciple as a fictional anti-James.

Cerinthus. This notion has been entertained in critical scholarship, for example, in the form that the schismatics entered a road that led to Cerinthus and Gnosticism.¹¹⁶ Such assertions are usually based on the ill-founded assumption that the “heterodox” Christians loved the Fourth Gospel (they presumably received it from the Johannine schismatics), whereas the “orthodox” Christians abhorred it until Irenaeus rescued it for the church.¹¹⁷ There is evidence of a positive reception of the gospel already in Ignatius and Justin Martyr, for example.¹¹⁸ However, the possessionist Christology of the schismatics does link them with Jewish-Christian ideas. Jewish-Christian and Gnostic (or Gnostic-like) ideas also found their way into the same texts. *I Apoc. Jas.* combines James traditions (e.g., the title, James the ‘Just,’ NH V 32,1–3 par.; the stoning of James, Codex Tchacos 30,23–26) with “Gnostic” password formulae and apparent Valentinian Sophia mythology (NH V 33,2–36,13; Tchacos 19,24–23,12; cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.21.5). In addition, the Ophite story of Jesus’ baptism is very similar to the Cerinthian model: both assert that Jesus was a wise and a pure human who was divinely possessed from his baptism until his suffering (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.26.1; 1.30.12–14). It seems likely that the authors of this Ophite story had adopted a Jewish-Christian possessionist interpretation of Jesus’ baptism. Because the authors of *Ap. John* have drawn heavily on the Ophite mythology, and because they present Christ-Pronoia’s threefold descent culminating in baptism, we must now ask how the Ophite story of Jesus’ baptism fits into the bigger picture of the relationship between the Prologue and the Pronoia hymn.

As noted above, the Ophite source known to Irenaeus speaks of Sophia’s creation (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.3); her proclamation and general rejection (1.30.6,7,10–11);¹¹⁹ of the chosen few (e.g., Adam, Eve, Noah) who accept her, whom she helps and to whom she gives the divine spark (1.30.7–9,10); and of her final descent (together with her groom, Christ) into Jesus at his baptism (1.30.12,14). This Ophite narrative (and not a hymn) shows no clear dependence on the Fourth Gospel, although the mention of Sophia and Christ as the bride and groom in their joint descent into Jesus (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.12) may go back to John 3:29, given

¹¹⁶ See, e.g., Brown 1979, 24.

¹¹⁷ See Hill 2004.

¹¹⁸ See especially Hill 2004.

¹¹⁹ Sophia rebukes Ialdabaoth’s monotheistic claim as a lie (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.6,7), but the Jews nevertheless worship the latter and the archons as gods (1.30.10–11).

the Baptist connection in both instances. However, the Synoptics use the image of Jesus as a groom in connection with the Baptist as well (Matt 9:15 parr.). One may also think that the bridal theme arises simply out of the Ophite mythology itself, where Christ and Sophia are depicted as a primordial pair (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.1–3; *Eugnostos* V 10,2–15 parr.). In any case, both the Ophite myth and the Prologue seem to make very similar use of Jewish Wisdom traditions, and both connect the culmination of Wisdom’s activity with Jesus’ baptism (the following list of parallels is not exhaustive):

	<u>Prologue</u>	<u>Ophites</u>	<u>Wisdom Traditions</u>
creation	John 1:3,10	<i>Adv. haer.</i> 1.30.3–4	Prov 3:19–20; 8:27–30
activity in the world	1:5,9–13	1.30.6–11	Wis 10
general rejection	1:10–11	1.30.6–7,10–11	1 <i>Enoch</i> 42
children of God	1:12–13	1.30.7–9,10	Wis 2:12–18; 5:1–5
dwelling among men	1:14	1.30.12–14	Sir 24:8

However, no dependence of the Ophite myth on the Prologue or *vice versa* can be clearly demonstrated. Therefore, both may well go back to a common model: a possessionist interpretation of Jesus’ baptism where the Wisdom of God, after having participated in creation and salvation history, descends into Jesus. Remember that a Sophia Christology was already spoken of in the Corinthian controversy (1 Cor 1:24). Both the Ophites and the evangelist would then have adapted this basic model to their respective ideologies. The evangelist interpreted the Wisdom in question as God’s creative Logos (preceded in this by Philo),¹²⁰ but, due to his exclusive Christology, shunned the Logos-Wisdom’s previous activity in the salvation history by already introducing John the Baptist at vv. 6–8, thus suggesting that the Word

¹²⁰ In Philo, Sophia and the Logos receive identical descriptions and attributes: for example, both are God’s agents of creation (*Spec.* 1.81/*Fug.* 109), called the image of God (*Fug.* 101/*Leg. all.* 1.43) and the beginning (*Conf.* 146/*Her.* 62; *Leg. all.* 1.43). Denzey (2001) suggests that the author of the Prologue draws upon Logos speculations instead of Wisdom traditions. It seems undeniable to me that Wisdom traditions lie behind the Prologue, although it must remain an open question whether the Logos had already been substituted for Sophia prior to the Prologue’s composition.

came into the world only in Jesus' ministry (this would not exclude the original baptismal connection of the Prologue since the Prologue leads to John the Baptist in v. 19 in any case). The Ophites retained Sophia's previous activity and her feminine identity, but placed her in a Gnostic context where the true God was no longer the creator. However, the basic idea of a (possibly Jewish-Christian) Sophiological interpretation of Jesus' baptism is clearer in the Ophite myth than in the Prologue.

The authors of *Ap. John* then rewrote Ophite Sophia material and claimed Johannine authorship for their work. In fact, although *Ap. John* draws heavily on earlier Gnostic materials (Ophite, Barbeloite, Sethite), the material that is unique to *Ap. John* seems to have a specifically "Johannine air" to it. The authors of *Ap. John* appeal to the authority of John the son of Zebedee, and appear to present their text as a supplementary and clarifying revelation to the teaching of Jesus as found in the Fourth Gospel (II 1,21–29 parr.).¹²¹ Some of the clarifications John asks for in *Ap. John* find echoes in the Gospel of John: "Why was the Savior sent into the world by his Father...?" (*Ap. John* BG 20,9–11 parr.), for example, is parallel to John 10:36; 16:28; 17:18–26. In addition, there are many other instances—outside the Pronoia hymn—where one finds a close agreement in theme and/or vocabulary between *Ap. John* and Johannine literature (especially the Gospel and 1 John; some of the following items occur in Classic Gnostic texts other than *Ap. John*, too, e.g., God as Invisible Spirit; Living Water):

- (a) A Pharisee accuses Jesus of being a deceiver (*Ap. John* II 1,13–17 parr.; John 7:12,47)
- (b) Jesus teaches his interlocutor that rebirth does not happen by going back into (the womb of) one's mother (*Ap. John* II 27,11–21 parr.; John 3:4)
- (c) Jesus returns from whence he came (*Ap. John* II 1,11–12 parr.; John 13:3; 16:28)
- (d) Only the one who dwelt in the (bosom of the) Father knows his attributes and has taught about them/him (*Ap. John* BG 26,11–14 parr.; John 1:18)

¹²¹ Cf. T. Nagel 2000, 393–394; Perkins 2005, 274; Turner 2005, 428; K. King 2006, 235–238; Pleše 2006, 10.

- (e) God the Father is an Invisible Spirit/a Spirit whom no one has seen (*Ap. John* II 2,29.33; 5,12.28–35; 6,4.11.19.26.35; 7,5.14–22; 8,24–30; 9,4–6.24–27; 14,4.21 parr.; John 4:24; 1:18; 6:46)
- (f) Christ created everything through his Word (this statement may, in fact, contain polemics against the gospel where Christ *is* the Word) (*Ap. John* II 7,10–11 parr.; John 1:1–3)
- (g) Christ as the “Only-begotten” (ἰωῤῥῶγῶτ < μονογενής) (*Ap. John* II 6,15ff. parr.; John 1:14.18; 3:16.18)
- (h) Christ as “Light” (*Ap. John* II 6,15ff.; 7,30–31 parr.; John 1:4–9; 8:12)
- (i) Light shines in darkness (*Ap. John* II 29,12–15 parr.; II 30,15–31,2 par.; John 1:4–5,7–9)
- (j) Life (ζωή) as Light of Adam/humanity (*Ap. John* II 20,17–19 parr.; John 1:4)
- (k) “Living water” (*Ap. John* II 4,21 parr.; John 4:10–11)
- (l) Moses needs to be corrected (*Ap. John* II 13,19–20; 22,22–24; 23,3–4; 29,6–7 parr.; John 5:45f.; 6:32; 7:22)
- (m) Negative view of Judaism (for *Ap. John*, see Chapters 3 and 5 above; John 8:22–59)
- (n) A special concern because of apostates (II 27,22–31 parr.; 1 John 2:18–19; 4:1–6; cf. John 6:66; 8:31–59)
- (o) There is an evil spirit that resembles the true spirit that the chosen ones have received (*Ap. John* II 29,23–25 parr.; 1 John 4:1–6)

Even though no actual quotations of the gospel occur in either recension,¹²² it seems clear that the authors of *Ap. John* are aware of specifically Johannine language and thematics. While all of the listed items already occur in both recensions of *Ap. John*, LR also includes the Pronoia hymn. Although formally parallel to the Prologue, the Pronoia hymn, perhaps surprisingly, lacks, for the most part, Johannine language (except the light vs. darkness thematic), and instead seems to draw upon earlier Gnostic materials. It is thus possible that both the Pronoia hymn and the Prologue are independent of each other, and circulated first as individual hymns in their respective communities, Gnostic and Johannine. If this is the case, then *Ap. John* and the Fourth Gospel may have undergone similar expansions, as SR lacks

¹²² Cf. Hill 2004, 239–242.

the Pronoia hymn,¹²³ and the Prologue may have been added to an earlier version of the gospel.

The hymnic form of the Prologue may have been inspired by earlier Christological hymns, such as Col 1:15–20 or Phil 2:6–11, and its author need not have had any knowledge of the Pronoia hymn or of Gnostic mythology. Similarly, the Pronoia hymn itself need not be dependent on the Prologue, although its incorporation into LR of *Ap. John* may have been inspired by knowledge of the Fourth Gospel's final form. The threefold structuring of the Savior's descents culminating in the appearance in Jesus, may have taken place in Classic Gnostic circles independently from any Christological hymns now found in the New Testament. I have argued above that a Sethianization occurred when Moses was bypassed in favor of Seth, and an appeal was made to the tradition of the latter's two pillars transmitting secret knowledge.¹²⁴ The two pillars were connected with the idea of the destruction of the world by water and fire, which became identified with the Flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, respectively. Furthermore, in *Apoc. Adam* and *Holy Book*, these were also connected with the coming of Christ, which itself was identified as the judgment and destruction of the archons. *Holy Book* clearly identifies the descending savior as Seth and explains that he descended three times: during the Flood, the destruction by fire, and at the judgment of the archons (III 63,4–8 par.); the latter coincided with his appearance in Jesus, specifically at his baptism and crucifixion (III 63,9–64,6; 65,17f. par.). Hence, the descent of the Savior was in each case associated with the theme of destruction (similar emphasis is found in *Trim. Prot.*, 41,4–11; 43,4–26; and the Pronoia hymn, *Ap. John* II 30,19–20.27–33 par.; cf. 31,24–25 par.). *Apoc. Adam* also speaks of the third descent of the Illuminator (76,8–11), which may be identical with his appearance in Jesus;¹²⁵ earlier the text had spoken of the Flood (70,4ff.) and destruction by fire (75,9–76,7).¹²⁶

¹²³ Cf. Turner 2001, 127–155, 214–220; and Perkins 2005, 268. Some scholars have suggested that the Pronoia hymn was removed from SR (Logan 1996, xx, 26–69, 191, 283).

¹²⁴ See Chapter 6.

¹²⁵ The scholarly opinion concerning the Christian character of *Apoc. Adam* 76,8–77,27 is divided. For discussion, see Yamauchi 1983, 107–115.

¹²⁶ Note that *Apoc. Adam* also includes hymnic material in form of fourteen explanations about the Savior's origin, descent and "coming to water" (77,27–83,4). This hymnic material is then followed by a discussion of the true and false baptisms. In

It seems possible, then, that the Classic Gnostic notion of the Savior's threefold descent was based on a Christological application of the pillar tradition. Thus, while the idea of Christ's three descents in the Pronoia hymn may derive from the pillar tradition, his identity as a Wisdom-figure (Barbelo-Pronoia) whose activity culminates in baptism, may derive from the Ophite mythology, according to which Sophia and Christ together descended into Jesus at his baptism (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.12–14).

The background of both hymns (the Prologue and the Pronoia hymn) can therefore be explained without assuming a literary dependence between them. However, they are then both incorporated into texts that claim the authority of John the son of Zebedee. In the case of the gospel, the title (ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ) is likely a secondary addition to the manuscripts (see below). In the case of *Ap. John*, there is an interesting difference between the titles of the two recensions: the one in LR (ΚΑΤΑ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ ΠΑΠΟΚΡΥΦΟΝ), like the gospel title, is arranged with the preposition ΚΑΤΑ, while this is not the case in SR (ΠΑΠΟΚΡΥΦΟΝ ΝΙΩΔΑΝΗΝΟ). This, together with the inclusion of the Pronoia hymn, may indicate a conscious effort by the authors of LR at strengthening a link between the *Apocryphon* and the Gospel of John.

In light of the preceding discussion, the following scenario concerning the backgrounds of both the Prologue and the Pronoia hymn can be sketched. First, a Jewish-Christian possessionist and Sophiological interpretation of Jesus' baptism found its way into both the Classic Gnostic and Johannine communities. In the Gnostic case, the story was adopted without much modification (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.12–14), whereas in the Johannine community it eventually caused the schism, as evinced in the Epistles. Second, this baptism material was put into formally and thematically parallel tripartite hymnic forms in both the Gnostic (Pronoia hymn) and Johannine (Prologue) communities (with

Apoc. Adam 84,4–28, the author certainly criticizes certain baptismal practices (“defiling of the water of life,” 84,17–18), but scholarly opinion is divided on whether or not the polemic is directed against the figures of Micheu, Michar and Mnesious, the Sethian guardians of the baptismal water. Since the rebuke does appear to be directed against them, it also seems to be directed against Sethian baptism itself. The text, however, may be corrupted here. See Sevrin 1986, 165ff. Sevrin thinks that the hymnic material has no connection to Jesus' baptism (1986, 179). Moreover, in *Apoc. Adam*, the twelve first kingdoms are probably to be connected with the archontic zodiac, while the thirteenth may be seen as representing those Christians who can attain a lower level of salvation. The thirteenth explanation concerning the Savior is that he is a *logos* (82,13–15). This may be a critical allusion specifically to the Fourth Gospel.

doctrinal modifications in the Prologue). Third, the hymns were then incorporated in both communities into possibly already existing texts, i.e., into an early version of the gospel, and SR of *Ap. John*, respectively. Fourth, the title “according to John” with the preposition KATA was added to these expanded texts (i.e., the final gospel, and LR of *Ap. John*) in both communities (either during or after the textual expansion). This shows parallel development in the compositional histories of the Gospel and the *Apocryphon* of John.¹²⁷

It would be tempting to connect the authors of *Ap. John* (both recensions) with the schismatic teachers mentioned in 1–2 John, who left the Johannine community and began offering additional teaching (2 John 9; cf. 1 John 2:27), spoke the language of the world (perhaps an allusion to Greek philosophy) (1 John 4:5), and still apparently remained in contact with, and posed a threat to, the remaining community. Of course, the characterizations of the schismatics in 1–2 John are vague, and can also be taken to mean something completely different. If, however, one wants to find both a potential channel through which Johannine language and themes were transmitted to the authors of *Ap. John*, and a way to explain the parallel development of the Gospel and the *Apocryphon*, one may well think of the schismatics of 1–2 John.¹²⁸ This is, in fact, almost a necessity if the two parallel developments were simultaneous and connected.

Now it is certainly possible that *Ap. John* simply underwent similar expansions and developments (much) later than the Fourth Gospel, and that the authors of SR already knew the published gospel. The appeal to the authority of John the son of Zebedee in both recensions may, in fact, be taken as a sign of knowledge of the written gospel (and not just the oral teaching of the Johannine community available to the schismatics), especially if the attribution of the gospel to *John* is secondary. This is related to the question of when did the Fourth Gospel become

¹²⁷ Turner (2005, 422ff.) suggests parallel histories for the Johannine and Sethian communities: both would originally have been non-Christian baptismal groups that became secondarily Christianized and later engaged in polemics over the correct interpretation of the Fourth Gospel since the Johannine secessionists joined the Sethians in the mid-second century. Turner has arrived at such a scenario mainly by combining the theories of Bultmann and Brown with his own reconstruction of the history of Sethianism.

¹²⁸ Tardieu (1984, 10, 37–39) suggests that *Ap. John* was a product of the “left wing” of the Johannine community. Turner (2005, 422ff.) proposes that the Johannine secessionists joined the Sethians ca. 150 CE, after which SR of *Ap. John* was produced.

identified as the Gospel of *John*. The title “according to John” in the manuscripts has been suggested to be secondary,¹²⁹ although Hengel thinks it must have been part of the original gospel.¹³⁰ Certainly in the mid-second century, the Valentinians considered the Fourth Gospel to be by John.¹³¹ The somewhat problematic Papias evidence that derives from the 120s or 130s suggests that the attribution may have already been made by then,¹³² and in any case, the second century evidence of testimonies and manuscripts is unanimous: no other author than John the son of Zebedee was suggested for the Fourth Gospel.¹³³ The Fourth Gospel itself presents the anonymous Beloved Disciple as the author (John 21:24). At one point, someone identified this Beloved Disciple as John, and the identification became generally accepted. But where did this attribution come from and to what—if any—extent is it accurate?

A great many suggestions as to the identity of the Beloved Disciple have been made.¹³⁴ Basically, they can be divided into three categories: (1) he was a real follower of Jesus, (2) he is a fictional character, and (3) he is a mixture of both, e.g., an idealized representation of a real person.

¹²⁹ Thus, e.g., Theobald 1996, 250–251; Dunderberg 2006, 120n6.

¹³⁰ Hengel (1989, 26, 74) argues that the title (ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ) ΚΑΤΑ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ was already part of the original Gospel, mainly due to the lack of manuscripts with alternate titles or no title at all (cf. the variance in the case of Hebrews), and due to the unanimous attribution of the Gospel to John the son of Zebedee from early on.

¹³¹ Ptolemaeus, in his *Letter to Flora* (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 33.3–7), considered the Fourth Gospel to be apostolic (33.3.6), and the “Ptolemaeans,” according to Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.8.5), ascribed the gospel explicitly to John.

¹³² See Hill 2004, 383–396. Hill suggests that a new fragment of Papias may be found in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.24.5–17, which speaks of the origins of John’s Gospel, and closely parallels (1) *Hist. eccl.* 2.15.1–2; 3.39.15–16, that discuss the origins of Mark and Matthew, and which sections Eusebius does attribute to Papias; and (2) passages in later authors who are known or suspected to have used Papias’ account of the origins of the Gospels (e.g., Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, the *Muratorian Fragment*, Origen, and Victorinus of Pettau). Irenaeus’ parallel passage in *Adv. haer.* 3.1.1 relates the origins of all four Gospels. It has also been suggested that the Irenaeus passage derives from the archives of the Roman community (see Hengel 1989, 3, 137n5). Irenaeus further claims that his information about John derives from hearers of John, including Polycarp and Papias (e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 5.33.4). Eusebius seems to accuse Irenaeus of confusing the two Johns, the apostle and the elder, but this may be based on Eusebius’ distaste for Revelation, which he wants to assign to the elder and not to the apostle (Papias, frg. 3.1–13 Holmes = Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39).

¹³³ Gaius’ possible attribution of the Gospel to Cerinthus ca. 200 is a late and a unique variant. See Hengel 1989, 5–6; Hill 2004, 166, 174–204, 464.

¹³⁴ E.g., John the son of Zebedee, Lazarus, Thomas, John Mark, Matthias, the rich young ruler, Judas, Paul, Benjamin, the elder John, a fictional anti-James. For recent surveys of the various theories, see Culpepper 1994; and Dunderberg 2006.

Since the Beloved Disciple (John 13:23–25; 19:26ff.; 20:2–8; 21:7,20–24; cf. also the anonymous “other” disciple in 18:15f.)¹³⁵ appears to embody the anti-schismatic stance of 1–2 John,¹³⁶ he is probably a fictional addition to the final redaction of the gospel.¹³⁷ In such a capacity, he may be seen as an embodiment of the elder, who wrote 2–3 John, and probably also 1 John (this does not necessarily mean that the elder is the real Beloved Disciple or the author of the gospel).¹³⁸ However, there are indications that the Beloved Disciple is *also meant to be* John the son of Zebedee, although not a historically accurate presentation of him.¹³⁹ In my view, earlier—mostly Synoptic—traditions of John have been interpreted in light of the emphases of 1–2 John (love, incarnation, eyewitness) in the creation of the figure of the Beloved Disciple. In the Fourth Gospel, the Beloved Disciple is the one whom Jesus loves (13:23,25; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20), who witnesses Jesus’ crucifixion and death (19:26ff.) as well as his ministry (21:24), and who is paired (although somewhat critically) with Peter (20:2ff.; 21:7,20ff.; cf. 18:15f.). This picture accords well with Synoptic and Pauline traditions about John. According to the Synoptics, John belonged to a privileged inner circle of disciples together with his brother James and Peter.¹⁴⁰ Of this inner circle, only two, Peter and John, were among the “pillars” of the Jerusalem community, as Paul indicates (Gal 2:9);¹⁴¹ and these two, Peter and John, are presented as a pair in Luke-Acts (Luke 22:8; Acts 3:1–10; 4:1–22; 8:14–25).¹⁴² While John is “merely” a *privileged* disciple in the earlier tradition, he can easily become *beloved* in light of the Epistles’

¹³⁵ The “other” disciple in John 18:15–16 is probably the Beloved Disciple because he is paired with Peter, and, in 20:2ff. the Beloved Disciple is not only paired with Peter but also called the “other” disciple. See Culpepper 1994, 58–63.

¹³⁶ Among the emphases in the Letters are Jesus’ true incarnation (1 John 2:22–23; 4:2–3; 5:6; 2 John 7), love (1 John 1:5–2:17; 2:28–3:24; 4:7–21), and the importance of eyewitnesses (1:1–3). For the theme of love, see especially Segovia 1981.

¹³⁷ See de Jonge 1979, 105–108; Kügler 1988; Culpepper 1994, 72–84; and Dunderberg 2006, 117–118; 180–198. Cf. also Hengel 1989, 129ff.

¹³⁸ See Culpepper 1994, 83–84; Hengel 1989, 129ff. That all three epistles were written by the same author, see Schnackenburg 1992, 270; Akin 2001,27; Painter 2002, 52; and Trebilco 2004, 263–271.

¹³⁹ Hengel (1989, 129ff.) thinks the figure of the Beloved Disciple is a combination of two Johns: the evangelist and the elder.

¹⁴⁰ This is the case in the stories of (a) Jairus’ Daughter (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51), (b) the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2; Matt 17:1; Luke 9:28), and (c) Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3). Cf. also the addition of Andrew to the three in Mark 1:16–20; 3:16–17.

¹⁴¹ James of Gal 2:9 is the brother of Jesus, not of John. Cf. Culpepper 1994, 34.

¹⁴² See Culpepper 1994, 28–88.

emphasis on love. Furthermore, the Markan tradition (10:35–41), according to which the sons of Zebedee ask to be seated next to Jesus, could then also explain the Beloved Disciple's sitting next to Jesus in the Last Supper scene of the Fourth Gospel (John 13:23ff.).

Most counterarguments for identifying the Beloved Disciple as John fall short if one allows him to be a fictional character who can take liberties concerning historical accuracy.¹⁴³ For example, the real John the Galilean fisherman (Mark 1:19; Matt 4:21; Luke 5:10) may not have been acquainted with the high priest (John 18:15f.), but the fictional John the ideal disciple can be (of course, the real one *could* also have been). It is also claimed that since the sons of Zebedee are explicitly mentioned in John 21:2 together with two "other" (ἄλλοι) disciples, and because the Beloved Disciple is at times called the "other" (ἄλλος) disciple (e.g., 20:2–8; probably also 18:15f.), then it must be one of these two, instead of John, who is the Beloved Disciple.¹⁴⁴ This, however, is not a strong argument because the Fourth Gospel uses the term, "other disciple," of disciples other than the Beloved one as well: there are *two* "other disciples" in John 21:2, and both of them cannot be—in fact, neither one needs to be—the Beloved Disciple.

The Beloved Disciple's death seems to be alluded to in John 21:22–23. This has been taken as a sign for his being a real person, not a fictional or a symbolic figure.¹⁴⁵ However, John 21:22–23 could be an allusion to the real John's death (cf. Mark 10:38–39; Papias frg. 5.5 Holmes) and/or to the recent death of the elder. Since the Beloved Disciple has features of both the Synoptic-Pauline John the son of Zebedee *and* of the anti-schismatic elder of the Epistles, his figure may well be an idealized combination of both, as Hengel suggests.¹⁴⁶ (Church tradition, of course, has it that the two are one and the same.)

If the Beloved Disciple thus represents—at least to a degree—John the son of Zebedee, then the attribution of the Fourth Gospel to him seems to have originated in the Johannine community itself. If this is the case, then the appeal to John's authority in SR of *Ap. John* does not necessitate its dependence on the published gospel. In fact, a schismatic appeal

¹⁴³ For such solutions, see Culpepper 1994, 80–84; and Dunderberg 2006, 180–198.

¹⁴⁴ See Culpepper 1994, 73–76.

¹⁴⁵ See Culpepper 1994, 84.

¹⁴⁶ Hengel 1989, 129ff. Cf. Culpepper 1994, 83–84. Such an interpretation basically follows Martyn's (1979) "two-level" reading of the Gospel.

to John's authority could explain why the anonymity of the Beloved Disciple was stressed in the Fourth Gospel: the redactor(s) of the final version of the gospel may have wanted to sever ties to the possibly more popular "secret" book of John (while *Ap. John* was clearly a popular text in the second century, the gospel's early reception seems to have been somewhat shadowy).¹⁴⁷ Since the *Apocryphon's* claim for authenticity rested largely on its being an addition to the "open" teaching of *John*, i.e., the perhaps yet unfinished Fourth Gospel, the anonymity of the final gospel could seriously undermine the *Apocryphon's* claim.

SR of *Ap. John* may therefore be earlier than the final version of the Fourth Gospel, especially if the additions of the Prologue and the Pronoia hymns, as well as similar titles represent a later stage in the parallel developments of the Gospel and the *Apocryphon*. The explicit naming of the author in the gospel title is of course at odds with the stress on the anonymity of the Beloved Disciple, the purported author of the gospel. This indeed suggests that the gospel title must be secondary. However, in my opinion, it is not impossible to think that the Johannine community had cherished a tradition according to which their teachings somehow went back to John the son of Zebedee,¹⁴⁸ and that this tradition not only shaped the presentation of the Beloved Disciple, but that it also lies behind the later added title, "according to John."

In this light, it seems to me that the extensive *Trim. Prot.* (which also has no clear direct connection to the Ophite mythology) does not seem a likely candidate for being a source behind the Prologue. But since both *Trim. Prot.* and LR of *Ap. John* utilize Barbeloite mythology and engage in similar baptismal speculations of the "five seals," it is conceivable to think that they derive from the same Gnostic community. Therefore, *Trim. Prot.* may well be a later expansion of the Pronoia hymn.¹⁴⁹ In addition, because the authors of *Ap. John* attempted to anchor their text in Johannine teaching, the "striking" Johannine parallels in *Trim. Prot.* may simply be a further indication of such an attempt. Furthermore, the Stoicizing features in *Trim. Prot.* may be aimed at correcting the mythological and non-Stoic Logos doctrine of the Prologue. Turner

¹⁴⁷ Although Hengel (1989), T. Nagel (2000) and Hill (2004) have shown that the gospel was known from early on, its early reception is, nevertheless, largely surrounded by silence.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Painter 1975, 4; and Keener 2003, 83–115. Cf. also the earlier arguments of Brown (1966, c) and Schnackenburg (1968, 100–104), who, however, have since changed their minds (see Brown 1979, 33–34). See also Culpepper 1994, 73–76.

¹⁴⁹ See Turner 2001, 130–155; Poirier 2006, 68–81.

and Poirier indeed see *Trim. Prot.* as polemicizing against the Fourth Gospel.¹⁵⁰

Finally, *Trim. Prot.* is one of the texts that employ the specific Sethian baptismal nomenclature identified above and missing from *Ap. John*. What is the origin of this material? In a way, it may be “Johannine,” and may depend on both the Gospel and the *Apocryphon* of John. The name of the “living water” (ἰησοῦς ἐτρονῆ), “Iesseus Mazareus Iessedekus,” is surely a garbled form of Jesus of Nazareth,¹⁵¹ perhaps also of Jesus the Righteous (Ἰησοῦς δίκαιος). These expressions may derive from John 4:10–14, where Jesus says he will give “living water”;¹⁵² John 7:18 and 1 John 2:29, according to which Jesus was righteous;¹⁵³ and John 1:45f.; 18:5.7; 19:19, according to which Jesus came from Nazareth (Jesus is specifically called “Nazarene” in *Ap. John* BG 19,18f.,¹⁵⁴ too). The magical and glossolalic elements in the Sethian baptismal speculations may also have an indirect Johannine connection. The author of LR of *Ap. John* has included a long list of demons that preside over various parts of the human body (II 15,27–19,10 par.). The purpose of this list is probably to provide means to perform healing exorcisms.¹⁵⁵ If this is true, the magical component in Sethian baptismal tradition may well derive from such exorcistic practices, which were, after all, part of Christian baptism.¹⁵⁶ It may also be pointed out that according to an old tradition, the Fourth Gospel was written or published in Ephesus,¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ Turner 2001, 130–155; Poirier 2006, 102.

¹⁵¹ Thus also Turner 2006b, 964–965.

¹⁵² John 4:10: ὕδωρ ζῶν; 4:11: ὕδωρ τὸ ζῶν; 4:14: τὸ ὕδωρ ὃ δόσω αὐτῷ γενήσεται ἐν αὐτῷ πηγὴ ὕδατος ἀλλομένου εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

¹⁵³ 1 John 2:22 (Ἰησοῦς), 29 (δίκαιός ἐστιν); John 7:18 (Jesus speaks of himself in the third person: ἀδικία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν).

¹⁵⁴ The other versions are lacunar here.

¹⁵⁵ Thus K. King 2006, 152–153. Note especially the parallel in Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9.14.1–15, which criticizes the exorcism practiced by the advocates of *Zostrianos* and Classic Gnosticism.

¹⁵⁶ See, e.g., Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 20–21; Cyril, *Procatechesis* 9; cf. *Mystagogical Catechesis* 2–9. See also Lampe 1967; Whitaker 1970.

¹⁵⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3.1.1; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.18.6–8; 5.24.3; 6.14.7. Ephesus, or Asia Minor generally, remains the favored choice of scholars (Brown 1966, ciiix–civ; Moloney 1998, 1–6; Akin 2001, 27; Keener 2003, 140–149; Köstenberger 2004, 6–8; Trebilco 2004, 241ff.). Syria, Syria-Palestine and specifically Antioch, have also been proposed (Bultmann 1971, 12; Aune 1972, 25; Kümmel 1975, 247; Koester 1990, 245), and less frequently Alexandria (Sanders 1943, 39ff.; Brownlee 1972, 188ff.). On the other hand, the possibility of a transplantation of earlier traditions to the place of composition/publication (e.g., from Palestine to Egypt, Asia Minor or Syria) is considered by several scholars. See Brownlee 1972, 188; Brown 1979, 56–57, 166; Smith 1984, 22; and Beasley-Murray 1987, xlvi.

where magic and exorcisms supposedly flourished (Acts 19:11–19). If the authors of *Ap. John* were in contact with the Johannine community, and if the Fourth Gospel was published in Ephesus, then the supposedly flourishing Ephesian magical traditions may have further influenced Sethian authors to adopt magical elements (e.g., Sesseggen Barpharagges) in their baptismal speculations.

Sevrin, on the other hand, has suggested that the magical component derives from a heterodox Jewish baptismal sect which was interested in magic and called upon various angelic powers to protect the baptism.¹⁵⁸ Other scholars have also suggested that the background of the Sethian baptism, perhaps even of the Barbeloite speculation to which it is connected, derive from heterodox Jewish baptismal circles.¹⁵⁹ However, given the Ophite and Johannine parallels, I think a more plausible background for Sethian baptismal speculations is a Christian one. Thus, we may put an end to the quest for Jewish roots of Sethian baptism, inspired partially by Bultmann's thesis of a pre-Christian Gnostic (Mandaean) baptismal sect behind the Prologue. The origins of the Sethian baptism seem to be Christian.

9.4 CONCLUSION

According to Celsus, the users of the Ophite diagram practiced an anointment ritual called the "seal," and memorized passwords to ensure a successful postmortem ascent through the archontic gates. Origen's denial of the existence of such an anointment rite may be doubted, and related Coptic and heresiological sources speak of anointment and stress the spiritual meaning of Jesus' baptism (some of these sources also allude to the ascension mythology). Therefore, it appears likely that behind the Ophite mythology, there was an initiation rite where anointing with oil had surpassed water baptism in importance. An inscribed diagram may also have been used to aid for memorizing the required passwords for the ultimate postmortem heavenly journey. Perhaps Irenaeus' Ophite source, where Sophia-Christ descends into Jesus at his baptism, contains a paradigmatic story of an Ophite initiation by anointment and baptism.

¹⁵⁸ Sevrin 1986, 280–294.

¹⁵⁹ H.-M. Schenke 1981, 606–607; Turner 2001, 257–266, 238–247.

The “five seals” of the Sethian baptism, anchored in the Barbeloite speculation, seem to refer to an anointing in imitation of the “pentadic” Christ’s primordial anointing. Its association with the “living water,” whose name, “Iesseus Mazareus Iessedekus,” is further based on Jesus’ name, strengthens this assumption. The specifically pentadic Christology, and the apparently consequent fivefold “sealing,” may derive from the very structure of the Barbeloite scheme (Autogenes and his four lights as a pentad of Christ and his “members”), although it may also be influenced by an Ophite concept of a pentadic Godhead that is found in some sources. If the Sethian baptism is based to some extent on Ophite baptismal theology, which was probably acted out in the anointment ritual known to Celsus, can it be assumed that the Sethian practice of cultic ascent is likewise based on an Ophite model of the heavenly journey with the required passwords?

In the “Platonizing Sethian treatises,” a contemplative ascent through the various ontological levels of the supracelestial realms is championed. In *Zost.*, it is connected with a heavenly baptism although the other Platonizing Sethian texts do not clearly mention baptism. Descriptions of an ascent through archontic heavens are generally missing from Schenke’s Sethian texts, and those texts that employ Barbeloite speculations seem unaware of the password mythology altogether. However, since both Sethian rituals of baptism and cultic ascent seem anchored in Barbeloite speculation, whose purpose may have been to describe the Christian Godhead in philosophically acceptable terms (cf. *Trim. Prot.*’s Stoicizing modifications to the Logos doctrine set in a Barbeloite context), we may think that the mythological and even vulgar idea of the memorized passwords to be delivered to the theriomorphic gatekeepers was replaced by a philosophically more acceptable Platonic ascension model. Although this remains hypothetical, it is in line with our findings concerning *Ap. John*’s Barbeloite modifications to the Ophite mythological material.

Thus, the Sethian practices of the baptism of five seals and the cultic ascent may derive from earlier Ophite ones of anointing, and memorizing passwords for a heavenly ascent. These appear to have been adopted and modified by placing them in a new and philosophically more acceptable, Barbeloite, framework. This suggests that the Barbeloite type of mythology itself is later than the Ophite type, if the rituals connected with the former are to be seen as philosophizing modifications to those attached to the latter. Despite this philosophical “Barbeloite” approach, magical and glossolalic elements were attached to the Sethian

rites, probably for exorcistic purposes, as part of the baptismal process. Such a combination of philosophy and magic is, however, comparable to Neoplatonic theurgy.¹⁶⁰

The specifically Sethian baptismal nomenclature appears to have at least a partial Johannine basis. Some concepts, such as the “living water, Iesseus Mazareus Iessedekus,” may derive from expressions in the Gospel and 1 John. The magical and glossolalic elements, for their part, may have been partially inspired by the section in *Ap. John* where the various demons ruling over bodily parts are enlisted, probably for exorcistic purposes. Indeed, there may be an actual Johannine connection behind the Sethian baptismal speculations. The Pronoia hymn in LR of *Ap. John* is formally and thematically parallel to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, and both probably go back to a Jewish-Christian possessionist and Sophiological interpretation of Jesus’ baptism. The parallel developments of this interpretation in the Johannine and Classic Gnostic communities; the many Johannine elements in both recensions of *Ap. John* without clear quotations of the gospel; and the possibility that SR of *Ap. John* predates the final version of the gospel, suggest that the Johannine schismatics may have been involved in the composition of *Ap. John*. If the authors of *Ap. John* did have some sort of connection with the historical Johannine community, and if SR predates the final version of the gospel, then the Sethianization of the Ophite mythology (presupposed in *Ap. John*) could be dated to the time the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles were written, ca. 90–125 CE.

¹⁶⁰ For Neoplatonic theurgy, see, e.g., Dodds 1947; Majercik 1989, 21–46; and Shaw 1995.

PART IV

CONCLUSION

EPILOGUE

This study started out as a corrective for Schenke's theory of Sethian Gnosticism which has been dominant in the field of Gnostic studies during the past 30 years. This dominance, I suggested, had resulted in a bias in scholarship where important documents had been put aside. Many sources that have Ophite features according to the proposed typological model have been neglected, but as I have attempted to show here, they deserve to be studied. Sethianism and its origins cannot be properly understood apart from this Ophite evidence. It seems that Schenke's "Sethian system" only reveals part of a larger whole (Classic Gnosticism) to which the Ophite evidence belongs as an important and organic component. Furthermore, some hitherto unclassified texts, such as *Eugnostos*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.* and *Orig. World*, have characteristics of this Ophite mythology, and together with *Hyp. Arch.* (which likewise contains Ophite features), form a fairly close-knit group of texts. These four texts also have a close relationship to *Ap. John*, the most classic of "Sethian" texts which also utilizes, but sometimes modifies, Ophite material. We have also seen that some themes that have been considered to be specifically "Sethian" features belong more properly speaking to the Ophite type of Classic Gnostic mythology: these include the names and theriomorphism of the seven archons; the idea of God as "Man"; and the overall concentration on the reversed paradise exegesis.

I sketched a typological model of the Ophite mythology based on four central features, which were first derived from the material common to Irenaeus' source (*Adv. haer.* 1.30) and the Ophite diagram (*Cels.* 6.24–38), and then their precise form was elaborated during the course of the study by also examining the related Coptic texts (*Eugnostos*, *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, *Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Ap. John*) and *Pan.* 26. The main Ophite features, that are based on a reversed paradise exegesis of Gen 1–3, are: (1) eating from the tree of knowledge is considered positive, although the snake is usually distinguished from the true revealer; (2) the seven archons with specific names (Ialdabaoth, Iao, Sabaoth, Adonaeus, Eloeus, Oreus, and Astaphaeus; or the like, see Table 3) appear; (3) prominent and salvific Sophia/Eve-figures appear and make up the female aspect of the true Godhead; and (4) important

heavenly Man/Adam-figures appear and make up the male aspect of the true Godhead. These features are not included in Schenke's criteria for the "Sethian system," and his Sethian texts—apart from the three that also belong to my Ophite corpus—treat the same themes in a different way.

In light of my typological model of the Ophite mythology, some texts, especially *Testim. Truth* and Hippolytus' notes on the Ophites, Peratics and Naasseni, can be considered borderline cases. I decided to exclude them from the Ophite corpus since the typological features do not appear clearly in any of them. Ironically, Hippolytus' report of the Ophites, apparently the first description to use the label, does not meet my Ophite criteria, but Hippolytus' construction of the "Ophite sect" seems suspect in any case. I simply borrowed the title for the typologically constructed category, which in any case includes Irenaeus' and Origen's reports to which the label has been likewise attached.

The information Celsus provides (and Origen completes) concerning the Ophite anointment ritual and memorizing passwords most likely has a factual basis. In addition, the Sethian practices of the baptism of five seals and the cultic ascent may derive from earlier Ophite ones of anointing and memorizing passwords for a heavenly ascent. However, heresiological accusations of snake worship, initiatory cursing of Jesus, and promiscuous rituals do not seem reliable. Furthermore, those scholarly theories that attempted to derive the "Gnostic" interest in snakes, as well as the theriomorphism of the archons, from pagan iconography and cults did not seem plausible. The Classic Gnostic animal imagery rather derives from Judeo-Christian traditions about the devil, and the four living beings around the throne of God.

I also suggested that the Classic Gnostic mythology, of which the Ophite type seems to present a form earlier than Schenke's "Sethian system" (which in turn consists of two formally distinct types of mythological speculation, Barbeloite and Sethite), developed out of a series of religious innovations and disputes. These were presented as certain *types* of socio-historical situations. First, the Ophite mythology seems to have developed out of a Platonic reading of Genesis through Christian lenses. This would have led to an Adam Christology that caused a controversy over the correct interpretation of monotheism with certain non-Christian Jews. A heated controversy would then have led to the demonization of YHWH as an inferior rival god whose demonic character was in many cases sharpened by identifying him with the theriomorphic devil. Such a break with Judaism caused a reevalua-

tion of the Jewish God and his relationship to Christ and Adam. This reevaluation was expressed in writings, some of which have come down to us in the Nag Hammadi codices and heresiological quotations. Perhaps the earliest texts resembled the material concerning Adam's creation, common to *Orig. World, Hyp. Arch., Ap. John* and Irenaeus' Ophite source.

Second, such rewritings of Genesis were challenged by many Christians and Jews alike. This, I suggested, could have led to another religious dispute with Jews concerning the authority of Moses. Here, an appeal to Seth and his secretly transmitted truth would have been made although such a special interest in Seth divided opinions even among these Gnostics. Third, the Barbeloite mythology seems to derive from a non-hostile situation where an attempt was made to express the Christian concept of the Godhead in philosophically acceptable terms. It also seems that the Sethian baptism of five seals and the related Platonizing cultic ascent, as well as speculations about Sakla(s) and the twelve authorities, and the weakness of Sophia, originated in association with the Barbeloite mythology.

In my view, various readaptations and rewritings of the Ophite, Barbeloite and Sethite myths—which in themselves probably arise out of different types of situations and concerns—best account for the multiform textual Classic Gnostic evidence where these three types of myths often occur together in various combinations. Furthermore, it seems possible that some key ideas, like the creator's vain claim, and the positive snake exegesis, may have lived independently as free-floating mythologoumena (oral or written), and were picked up by various Gnostic authors for various purposes.

Now that the evidence has been examined, it is time to address certain introductory questions concerning the nature, date and provenance of Classic Gnostic, especially Ophite, evidence. First of all, the Ophite evidence includes both texts and amulets. There are five Coptic texts that have Ophite features, and most of these are attested in several copies; in one case (*Soph. Jes. Chr.*), we also have Greek fragments (*Oxyr.* 1081).¹ Three heresiologists appear to draw upon further Ophite sources: Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.30), Origen (*Cels.* 6.24–38; the diagram) and Epiphanius (*Pan.* 26.1–3,10,13). Amulets to which Ophite provenance may be assigned with any kind of confidence are the

¹ On the manuscripts, see note 168 on p. 53 above.

Brummer gem (Plate 16) and Goodenough's "Jewish-Gnostic Amulet" (Plate 19). Medicinal Chnoumis gems (Plate 14) may have been used by advocates of the Ophite mythology as well, even though this is not certain. The Ophite diagram may likewise have been inscribed on an amulet, although it may also have been drawn on papyrus, like the many ideographs in the Bruce Codex. Thus the Ophite sources are quite numerous and diverse. This suggests that the Ophite mythology was popular: texts were copied and translated, and amulets were produced, apparently inspired by the mythology.

These sources also appear to have been available in various parts of the Roman Empire. The Coptic codices, Oxyrhynchus fragments and perhaps also Origen's example of the diagram come from Egypt. Irenaeus' sources may have come from Asia Minor where he was from, Rome, or even Gaul where he wrote his *Adversus haereses*. Even though difficult to date with any kind of certainty, the Ophite sources also seem to derive from an extensive period of time. Irenaeus and Celsus wrote around 180, whereas the Nag Hammadi texts may have been buried around 350, possibly for safety reasons,² which would mean they were still valued. Epiphanius, in the fourth century, speaks of "libertine Gnostics," "Sethians" and "Archontics" being still active (*Pan.* 26.14.5; 26.17.4–18.2; 39.1.2; 40.1.1–8). "Ophitans" are further condemned in two Roman laws from the fifth and sixth centuries, although the name occurs in what appear to be traditional lists of heresies.³ If one believes Irenaeus who states that Valentinus (*floruit* ca. 136–166 CE) was influenced by the earlier myths of the Gnostics (*Adv. haer.* 1.11.1; 1.30.15; 1.31.3), then we can push the *terminus ad quem* of the Ophite myth to the mid-second century CE.⁴ However, if the authors of *Ap. John* were in contact with the Johannine schismatics, then even the secondary Sethianization of the Ophite mythology (presupposed in *Ap. John*) could already have taken place in the first century CE. On the other hand, the Corinthian controversy in the 50s appears to set the *terminus a quo* for the Ophite mythology. It seems possible, then, that the Ophite mythology originated during the latter half of the first century CE. Of course, the Johannine allusions in *Hyp.*

² See M. Williams 1996, 241ff.

³ See Coleman-Norton 1966, 2:713, 3:1100.

⁴ Valentinus was active in Rome ca. 136–166 CE (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3.4.3; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.10; Tertullian, *Praesc.* 30; Clement, *Strom.* 7.17.106–107), and had received a Greek education in Alexandria before that (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 31.2.3).

Arch. and *Ap. John*, as well as the Valentinian ones in *Orig. World* and *Eugnostos*, indicate that the Greek *Vorlagen* of the *present* versions of these texts must be no earlier than from the second century. However, this does not exclude the possibility that the myths these texts contain (or their sources, or earlier versions) go back to the first century.

A strong influence of Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom and Adam speculations on the Ophite mythology has been detected, together with a fair amount of influence of apocalyptic and even Jewish-Christian traditions. One attractive hypothesis would be to locate the birth of the Ophite mythology soon after the Jewish War of 66–70 CE, which ended up with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.⁵ Granted, no traces of the war appear in Classic Gnostic texts. However, the war not only fits the suggested timeframe in the latter half of the first century, but it would also explain the Ophite interest in apocalyptic traditions—which were generally increased by the war—as well as the possible dissemination of Jewish-Christian ideas by fleeing members of the Jerusalem community.

The Ophite mythology is in any case heavily embedded in Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom and Adam traditions, and it may even have belonged to the same trajectory as the theology of some of Paul's Corinthian opponents. In this regard, one may recall the figure of Apollos. According to Luke and Paul, he was an educated Alexandrian Jew who converted to Christianity (Acts 18:24–28), participated in the Corinthian controversy (1 Cor 3:4; 3:22; 4:6) and stayed in Ephesus (Acts 18:24–26), where the Fourth Gospel may have been published. I do not wish to go as far as Pétrement has gone in suggesting that Apollos created the Corinthian controversy, then wrote the Fourth Gospel, and was none other than the Cerinthus known from heresiological sources.⁶ The reason I mentioned Apollos here, however, is that he provides an example of a person who moved from Alexandria to Corinth and Ephesus; from Hellenistic Judaism to early Christianity. Thus, he embodies the kind of route the Classic Gnostic ideas may have taken. The examples of Paul and Apollos also show how people and ideas could travel fast. One does not need to postulate decades for new ideas to develop. Paul himself converted from Judaism to a fervent Christian missionary, and, in no time had founded congregations all over the Eastern

⁵ Cf. Grant 1959, 27–38; and Pearson 1990, 51.

⁶ Pétrement 1984, 247–314, 483.

Mediterranean. He traveled, composed letters and spread his ideas in synagogues and early Christian communities. We also know of various unidentified schismatic teachers and “opponents” that appeared in Pauline and Johannine communities during the first century, and whose ideas may or may not be related to the developing Classic Gnosticism. In any case, the noted popularity of the Ophite mythology suggests that it may have spread rapidly in the Roman Empire, similarly to Pauline Christianity.

If we leave Apollos aside, what do we actually know about people behind the Ophite sources? Surely Serapion of Thmuis is wrong in suggesting that the founder of the Ophites was Ophanus and the founder of the Sethians was Sitanus.⁷ On the other hand, Origen claims the Ophites deem a certain Euphrates as their teacher (*Cels.* 6.28). Hippolytus likewise affirms that the originators of the related snake speculations of the Peratics are Euphrates the Peratic and Celbes the Carystian (*Ref.* 5.13.9). Certain scholars have taken this information for granted.⁸ However, the following observations suggest that at least the name Euphrates may be fictitious. (1) The name, Euphrates the Peratic, is a tautological expression since the Hebrew name for the river Euphrates was פְּרַת, *Perat*.⁹ (2) Clement mentions that the Peratics are named after a place (*Strom.* 7.17.108.2), which thus must refer to the river, and not to a person, as Origen and Hippolytus say. (3) Euphrates was also the name of the fourth paradisiacal river (*Gen* 2:14), and speculation about these rivers was found in the related Naassene teaching (*Ref.* 5.9.18–22). (4) The river Euphrates was further associated with snake imagery in Antiquity.¹⁰ (5) According to Hippolytus, the Peratics themselves derived their name from the Greek *περάω*, “to cross over, to pass by”; the Peratics supposedly claimed to be the only ones who could safely pass through (*περάω*) the destruction, i.e., the world of generation and decay (*Ref.* 5.16.1). (6) Origen may also have known Hippolytus’ *Refutatio* and concluded from there that snake heresies generally derive from a man called Euphrates; as noted in Chapter 8, Origen extended the label Ophite to include other groups as well.

⁷ Serapion, *Against the Manichees* 3. See Scott 1995, 119.

⁸ Gruber 1864, 10–16; Arendzen 1909, 598; Mastrocinque 2005, 163. Cf. Pearson 2007, 195. Matter (1843, 1:252–257) wrote before the publication of the *Refutatio*, and thus was only concerned with Origen’s note on Euphrates.

⁹ Van der Toorn 1999.

¹⁰ See, e.g., McEwan 1983.

Therefore, we may at least doubt the information of Origen and Hippolytus. However, it must be admitted that certain people engaged in snake exegesis may have been well aware of the ophidian and paradisiacal associations of the river Euphrates, and for such reasons may have adopted such a name for themselves.

The tractate *Eugnostos* begins with “Eugnostos the Blessed” addressing his own.¹¹ Likewise, the Codex III version of *Holy Book* concludes with a colophon stating that the scribe had a spiritual name, Eugnostos, although his real name (“name in flesh”) was Goggesos. Is this Eugnostos-Goggesos the same person as the author of *Eugnostos*? It does not seem likely because the colophon seems to be a later addition to the text, and is probably inspired by two other tractates in the same codex (III), *Ap. John* and *Eugnostos*.¹² First, the colophon identifies *Holy Book* as “the Gospel of the Egyptians (ΠΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ <π>ΠΡΜΠΚΗΜΕ; III 69,6),” which suggests the colophon is of Coptic origin and therefore a later addition to the probable original Greek text of *Holy Book*. Second, the colophon alludes to the attributes of the four lights of Autogenes as found in *Ap. John* (*grace*-Armozel; *understanding*-Oroiael; *perception*-Daveithe; *prudence*-Eleleth; *Ap. John* III 11,22–12,12; cf. *Holy Book* III 69,8–9). In this light, it seems possible that the spiritual name Eugnostos was also inspired by a text in the same codex, *Eugnostos*. Thus, the occurrence of the same name in *Eugnostos* and *Holy Book* does not indicate that the two texts were written by the same person. The name Eugnostos (Εὐγνωστός) itself is probably a pseudonyme since it may be taken to mean “well-known,” or even “one who knows well.”¹³ In other words, we do not really know who wrote *Eugnostos*, but since the texts in Codex III were copied by the same scribe,¹⁴ we can say with some confidence that the Codex III version of *Eugnostos* was copied by a Coptic-speaking Egyptian scribe called Goggesos.

There is, however, some substantial information on later Gnostic personalities. Plotinus’ seminars in mid-third century Rome were attended by advocates of Classic Gnosticism (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16;

¹¹ *Eugnostos* III 70,1–3: “Eugnostos, the Blessed, to those who are his (ΕΥΓΝΩΣΤΟΣ ΠΑΔΚΑΡΙΟΣ ΠΙΝΕΤΕ ΠΟΥÇ ΠΕ).” The Codex V version (1,1–3) is lacunar here, but a probable restoration is offered by Parrott (1991, 40): “[Eugnostos, to] the [sons...] ([ΕΥΓΝΩΣΤΟΣ Π]ΠΩ[ΠΡΕ...]).”

¹² Cf. Pasquier 2000, 13–16.

¹³ See Pasquier 2000, 13.

¹⁴ See M. Williams 1996, 243.

Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9). According to Porphyry, these Gnostic *hairetikoi* had previously been students of Adelphos and Aquilinius. The latter may be the same as the one mentioned in Eunapius' *Vita Porphyrii*, and whose rhetorical skills Porphyry had praised. But while in Plotinus' seminars, these Gnostic *hairetikoi* had "abandoned the old philosophy," and claimed that Plato had not understood things perfectly. They then produced (προφέρω) "apocalypses" of Zoroaster, Zostrianos, Nikotheos, Allogenes, Messos, and others. Some of these have come down to us in Coptic translation. Whether the "many works" by Alexander the Libyan, Philokomos, Demonstratos and Lydos,¹⁵ are same as these apocalypses is not certain, but these named personalities may, in any case, be otherwise unknown Classic Gnostic teachers. Interestingly, Plotinus considers some of the Gnostics his personal friends (*Enn.* 2.9.10) even after his refutation of their ideas. It appears likely that the criticism of Plotinus, Porphyrius and Amelius mainly concerned the bypassing of Plato's authority by some hard-liners, and to a lesser extent certain Gnostic doctrines (cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9.6,10; Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16; of the Gnostic "apocalypses," only two are singled out for refutation). In fact, some advocates of Classic Gnosticism stayed in good relations with Plotinus.¹⁶ Moreover, as noted in Chapter 1, some of these Gnostics attending Plotinus' seminars may even have been the original innovators of several Neoplatonic concepts that Pierre Hadot attributed to Porphyry.

Epiphanius, for his part, names two advocates of the "Archontic" teaching: Peter the Hermit, and Eutaktos. After Eutaktos had been taught by Peter in Palestine, he returned to his native Armenia and converted many of his countrymen (*Pan.* 40.1). Epiphanius further says the Archontics revered two prophets: Martiades and Marsianos, who had taken heavenly journeys (40.7.6). The latter may be identical with the author of *Marsanes* (cf. *Cod. Bruc. Untitled 7*; and Porphyry's *Vit. Plot.* 16, which mention Marsanes and Nikotheos). Epiphanius' information about the "libertine Gnostics" (*Pan.* 26), on the other hand, is dubious.

Whatever the case with these named personalities, it seems that behind the Classic Gnostic sources are found educated and Platonically-oriented exegetes who drew upon Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom

¹⁵ Or: Demonstratos of Lydos. See Layton 1987, 184.

¹⁶ See Corrigan 2000, 24–25; and Rasimus 2009.

and Adam speculations, upon apocalyptic angel traditions, and upon Jewish-Christian Christological models; who engaged in philosophical speculations about the first principles; who practiced spiritualized baptism and prepared for the soul's heavenly journey (whether meditative or only postmortem); who sung hymns, and wrote and read texts (these were further translated and copied). They also produced amulets and diagrams. This, together with apparent self-designations such as "kingless generation," and "seed of Seth," seem to point to the existence of real communities.¹⁷ The types of religious controversies I have postulated above also point to the existence of religious groups who might have engaged in such conflicts. Thus, Wisse's suggestion that the Sethian authors were individual hermits,¹⁸ does not seem plausible. Alan Scott and Alastair Logan have applied the theory of Stark and Bainbridge concerning the origin and organization of (modern) religious groups to Schenke's Sethian texts.¹⁹ The basic idea in this theory of Stark and Bainbridge is to measure tension between a given religious group and its socio-cultural environment. "Churches" are defined as groups with low tension, "sects" with high tension; "sects" are thus deviant groups. "Sects" are further defined as schismatic, while non-schismatic deviant groups are "cults." "Cults" can then be divided into sub-groups: "audience cults" have loose organizational structure, whereas "cult movements" are more organized.²⁰ Scott considers the Sethian authors pseudographers who did not have a schismatic relationship with Judaism or Christianity, but were instead interested in selling their syncretistic products on the religious market by appealing to ancient figures and odd secret doctrines. This allows Scott to define Sethianism as an "audience cult."²¹ Logan, for his part, rightly draws attention to the ritual dimension as reflected in Sethian and related sources, and defines the "Gnostics" as a "cult movement."²² However, the very idea of appealing to the secret knowledge transmitted by the "seed of Seth" in order to justify the demonization of YHWH and the bypassing of Moses, rather suggests a schismatic relationship to Judaism. According to the model of Stark and Bainbridge, then, those

¹⁷ Cf. Layton 1987, 9–12.

¹⁸ Wisse 1981.

¹⁹ Scott 1995; Logan 2006.

²⁰ See especially Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1–37.

²¹ Scott 1995, 113–122.

²² Logan 2006, 58–61.

Classic Gnostics who appealed to Seth would be a schismatic “sect” in relation to Judaism. However, in relation to the wider Greco-Roman society, they would not necessarily be schismatic, and, due to the adaptation of philosophical Barbeloite speculations, not perhaps even very deviant.²³ Therefore, Scott’s and Logan’s classifications of Sethianism/Gnostics as a cult seems suspect. Furthermore, in light of the model of Stark and Bainbridge, the Ophite mythology, with its demonization of YHWH, seems to have a schismatic (“sectarian”) relationship to Judaism, but due to a Platonic reading of Genesis, it also does not seem so deviant (but perhaps rather “church”-like) in relation to the wider Greco-Roman world. The application of sociological theories to Classic Gnostic evidence seems promising, and should be given more attention in the future (cf., of course, Green 1985).

Finally, we may briefly consider the relationship between the Ophite material and Valentinianism. (1) According to Irenaeus, the Gnostics (of *Adv. haer.* 1.29–31) influenced Valentinus (e.g., 1.11.1; 1.30.15; 1.31.3). If this is true, as is usually assumed,²⁴ then many parallels could be explained due to Ophite influence on Valentinians. For example, *Eugnostos* may well have been adopted by certain Valentinians known to Irenaeus and Epiphanius. (2) On the other hand, *Eugnostos* and *Orig. World* also include some Valentinian-like material, mostly in sections that have been considered secondary or redactional. In this case, later cross-fertilization might explain the Valentinian influence on Ophite material. (3) However, *Orig. World* and *Eugnostos* may also have undergone a later anti-Valentinian redaction where the possibly earlier twofold distinction between the kingless ones and the spirituals was changed into a fourfold division with the kingless ones surpassing the spiritual, psychic and earthly ones. Such a change may have been inspired by an earlier Valentinian adaptation and “misuse” of *Eugnostos*. (4) Sometimes there are also parallels (e.g., speculation about the “garments of skins”; possibly also the use of terms such as “Depth,” “Mind,” “Truth” and “Silence”) that may simply derive from a common Platonizing Hellenistic Jewish background; according to heresiologists,

²³ Cf. M. Williams 1996, 109–115.

²⁴ See, e.g., Layton 1987, 217ff.; M. Williams 1996, 33–37; cf. also Dunderberg (2005, 510–518) who thinks Valentinus was influenced by *Ap. John*. Pétrement (1990, 351ff.), however, is of the opinion that Valentinians influenced Sethian authors. Logan (1996, e.g., xx, 45–46, 191, 283), for his part, thinks the secondary “Sethianization” of Barbeloite and Ophite materials took place under Valentinian influence.

Valentinus was educated in Alexandria (e.g., Epiphanius, *Pan.* 31.2.3), where Hellenistic Judaism flourished. (5) The anointment ritual of certain Valentinians (*Adv. haer.* 1.21.5) resembles to some extent the Ophite one Celsus describes, but similar rites may have been common in early Christianity, and thus the parallels could be explained from the point-of-view of a common Christian background. (6) Finally, the Sophia myth is important in both Ophite and Valentinian materials, but the Valentinians usually considered Sophia as the last and a fallen divinity,²⁵ like many Classic Gnostic authors drawing upon Barbeloite material. Therefore, the Valentinians were probably influenced more by the Barbeloite than the Ophite form of the Sophia myth. These remarks suggest that the Classic Gnostic authors, including those who produced texts that belong to my Ophite corpus, influenced Valentinians rather than *vice versa*, although some secondary cross-fertilization and critical debate between these forms of Christianity seem to have also taken place. However, to study these links in any detail would be another book.

²⁵ Cf., e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.1–8; 1.11.1; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.29–36.

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PLATES

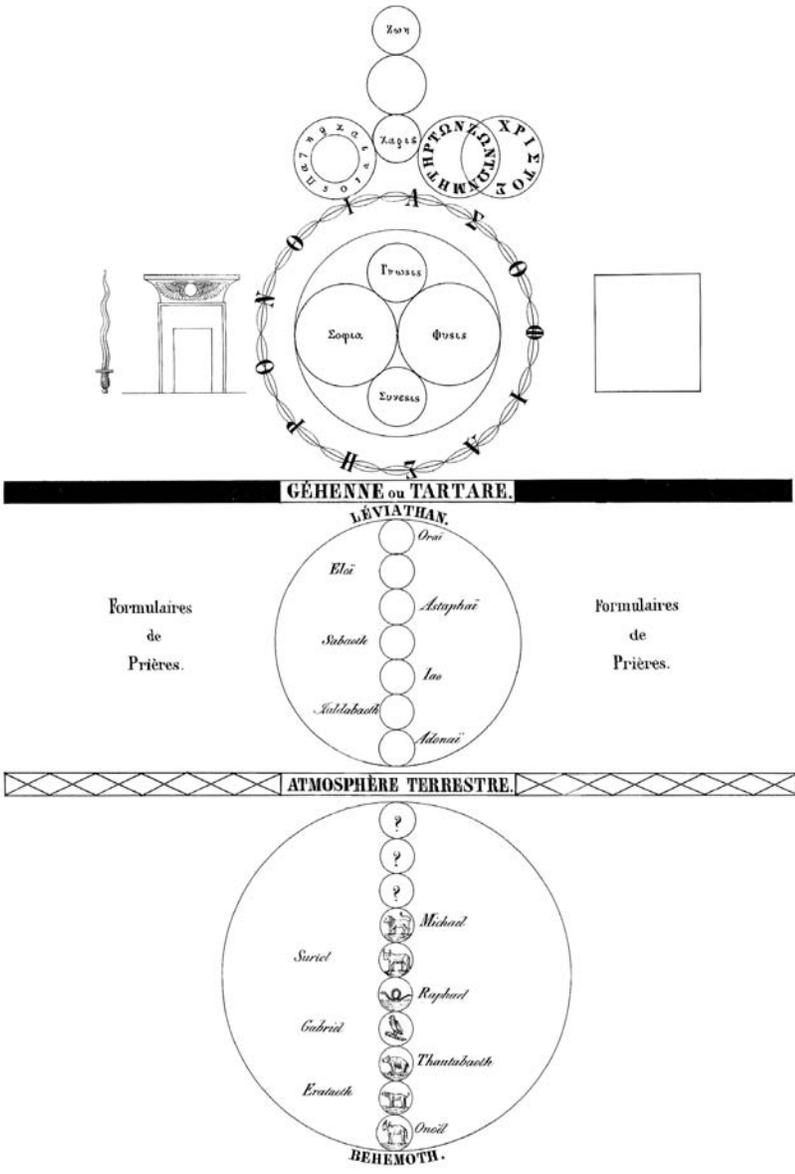
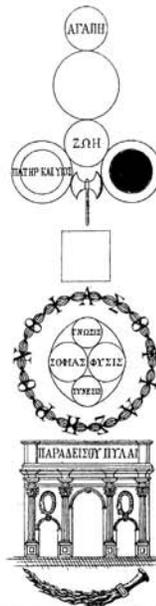


Plate 1: Matter's Reconstruction of the Ophite Diagram

ΔΙΑΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΟΦΗΤΑΡΙΩΝ
ex Origene,
 Contra Celsum, VI.



ΓΕΝΝΑ Η ΤΑΡΤΑΡΟΣ



ΦΡΑΓΜΟΣ ΚΑΚΙΑΣ



Plate 2: Giraud's Reconstruction of the Ophite Diagram

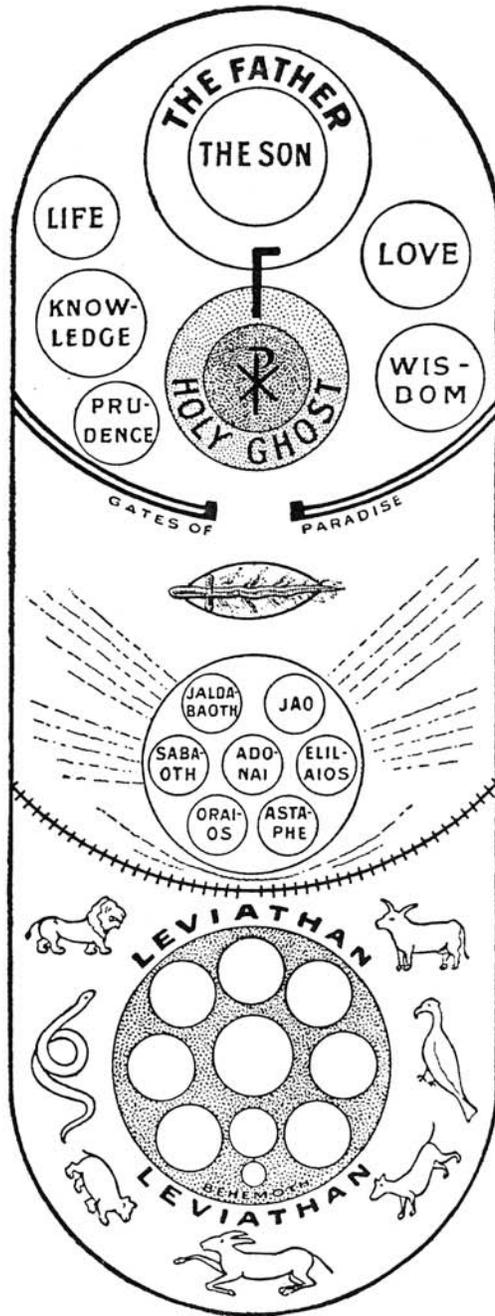


Plate 3: Arendzen's Reconstruction of the Ophite Diagram

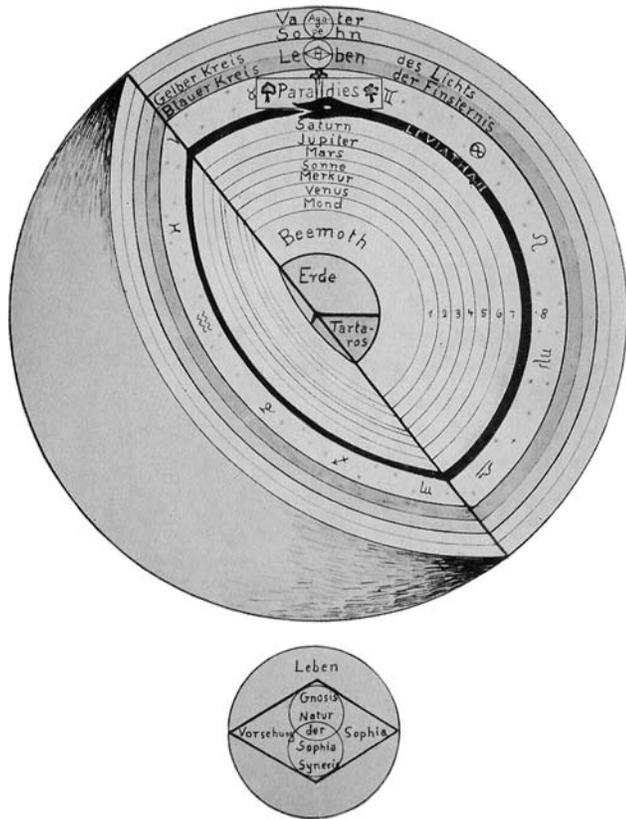


Plate 4: Leisegang's Reconstruction of the Ophite Diagram

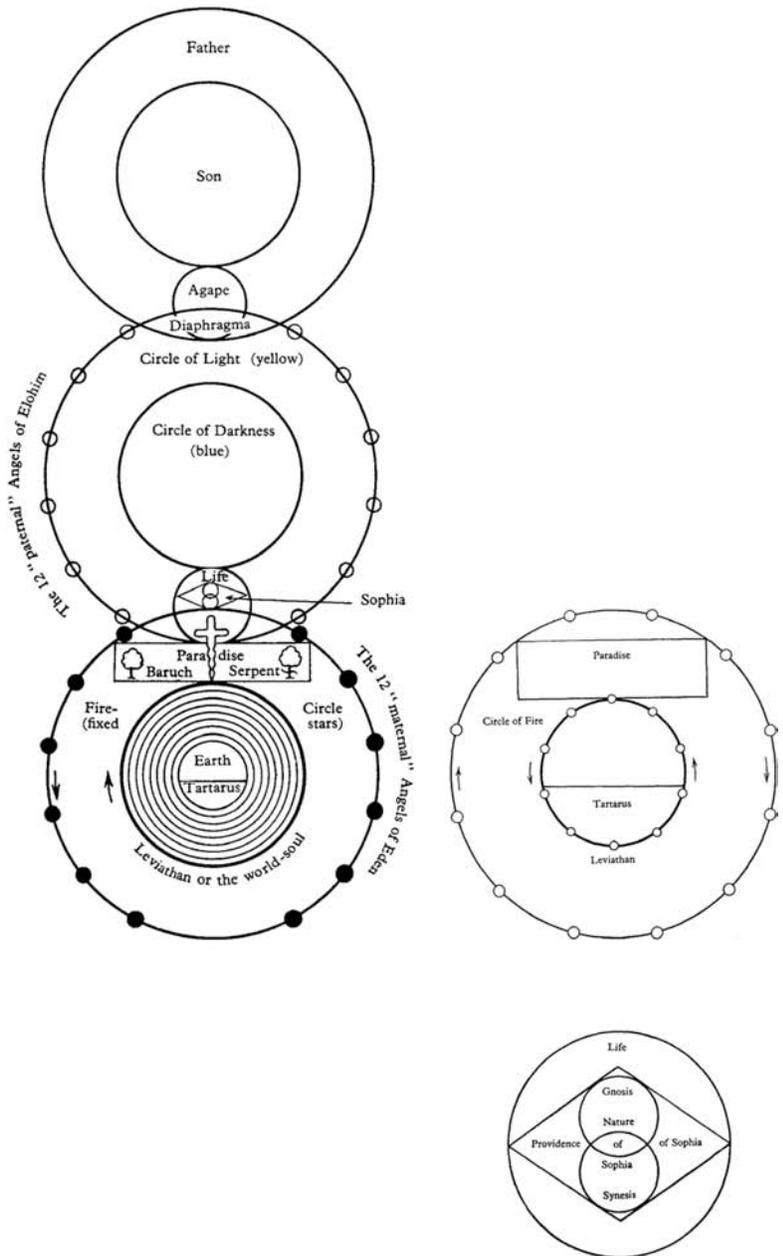


Plate 5: Hopfner's Reconstruction of the Ophite Diagram

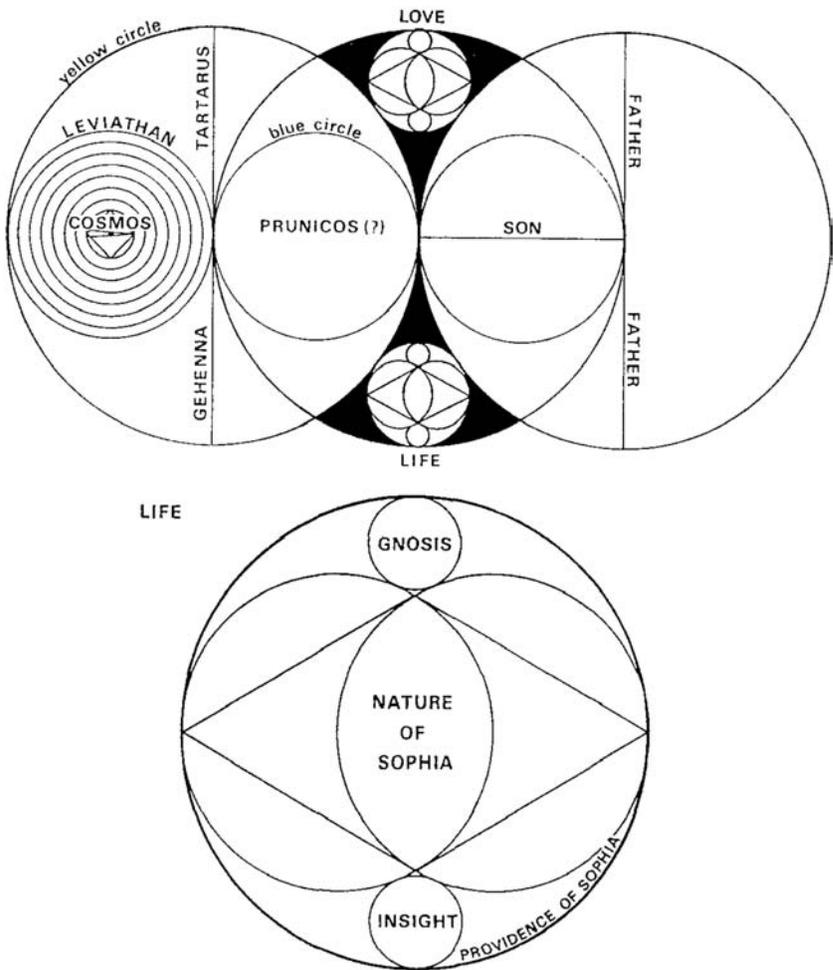


Plate 6: Welburn's Reconstruction of the Ophite Diagram

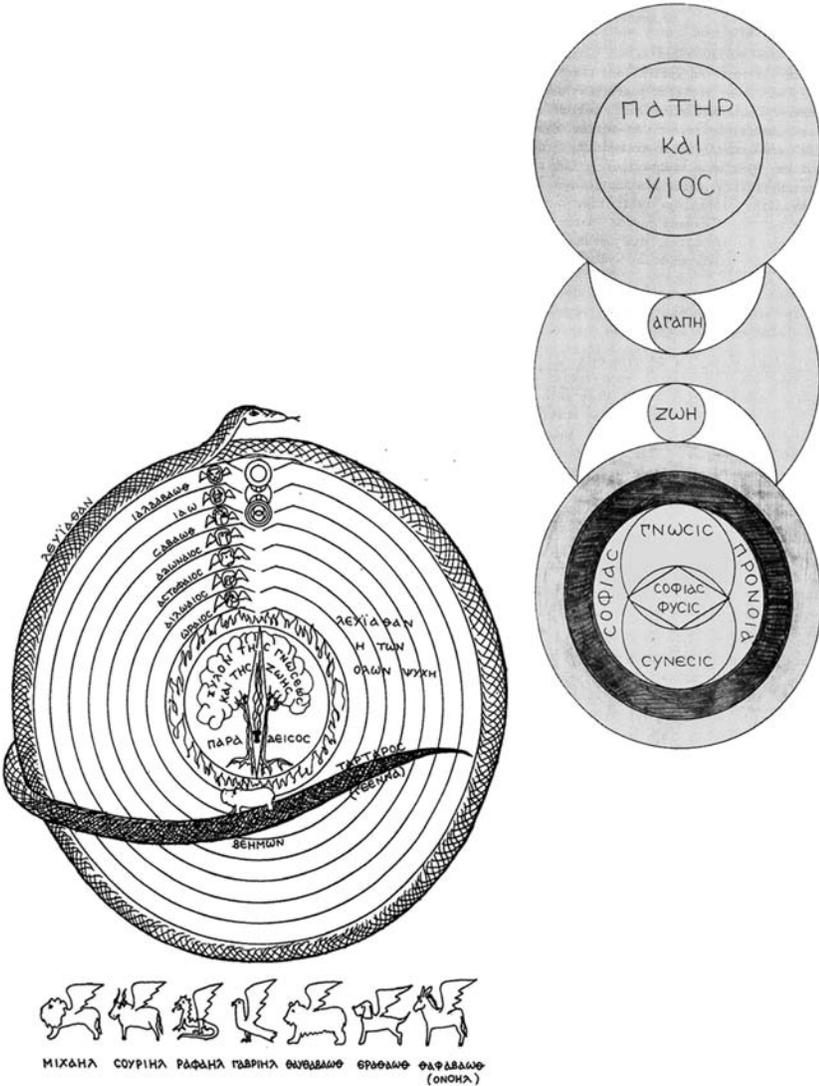


Plate 7: Witte's Reconstruction of the Ophite Diagram

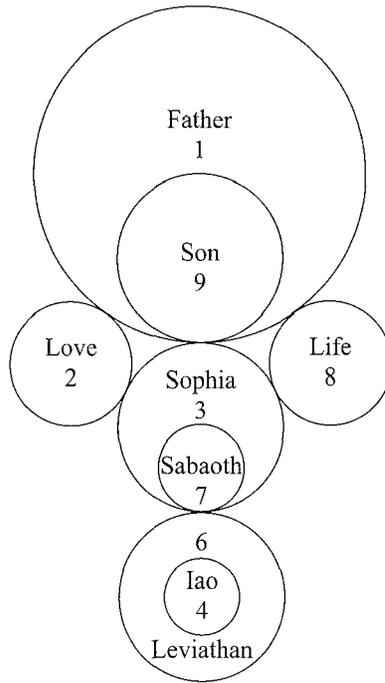


Plate 8: Mastrocinque's Reconstruction of the Ophite Diagram

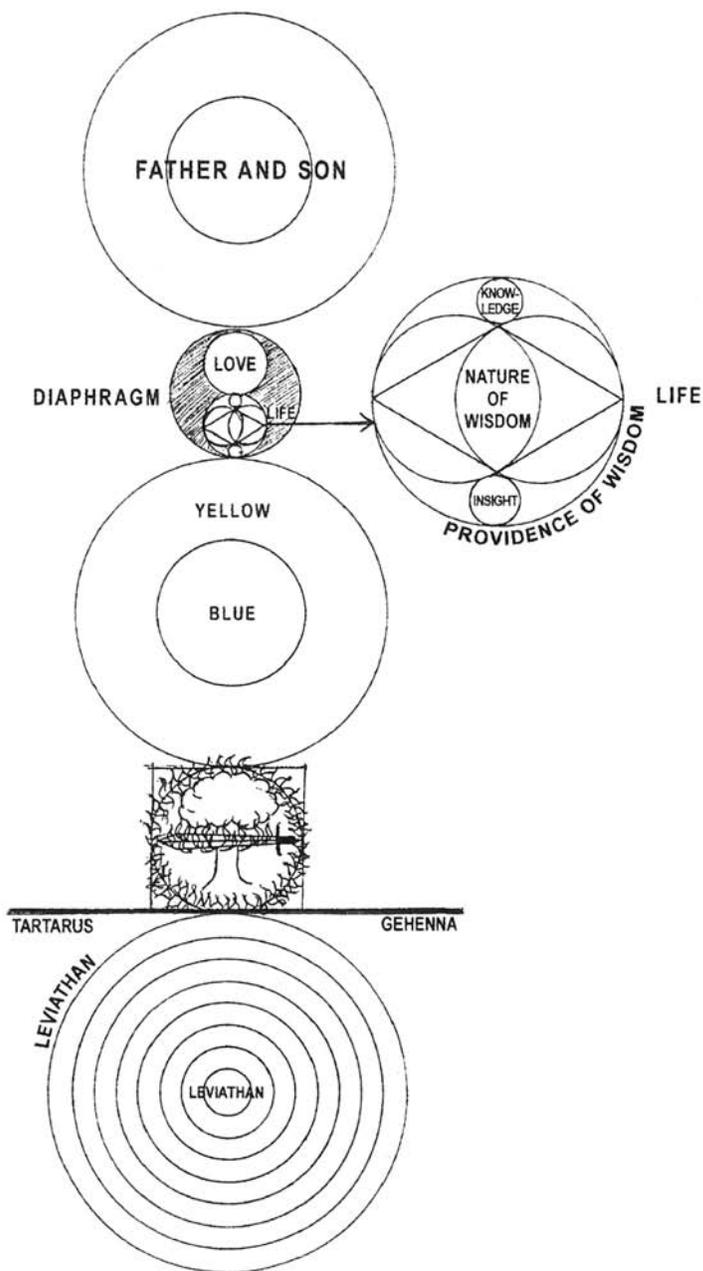


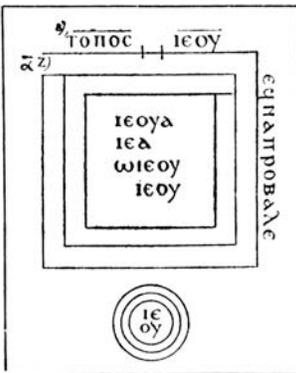
Plate 9: Logan's Reconstruction of the Ophite Diagram



A



B

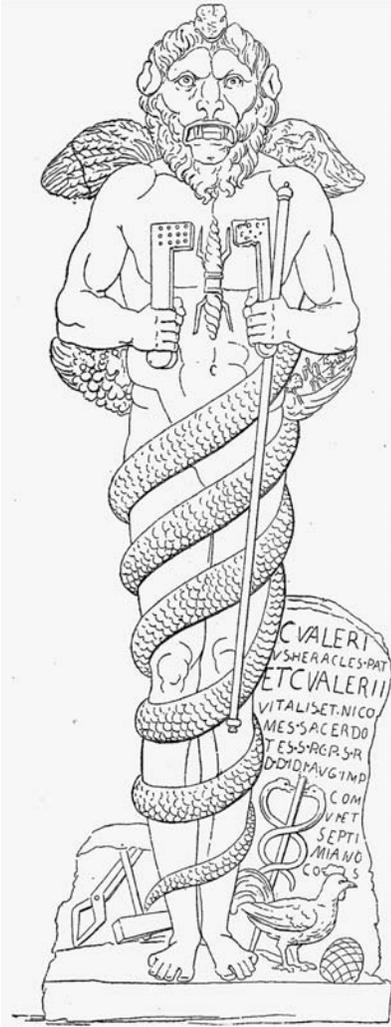


C



D

Plate 10: Figures from the Bruce Codex



A



B

Plate 11: Two Examples of the Mithraic Leontocephaline



Plate 12: The Modena Relief, probably depicting the Orphic Phanes



Plate 13: Mios



A



B



C

Plate 14: Chnoumis Gems



A



B

Plate 15: Gems possibly depicting a Leonine Michael



Plate 16: The Brummer Gem

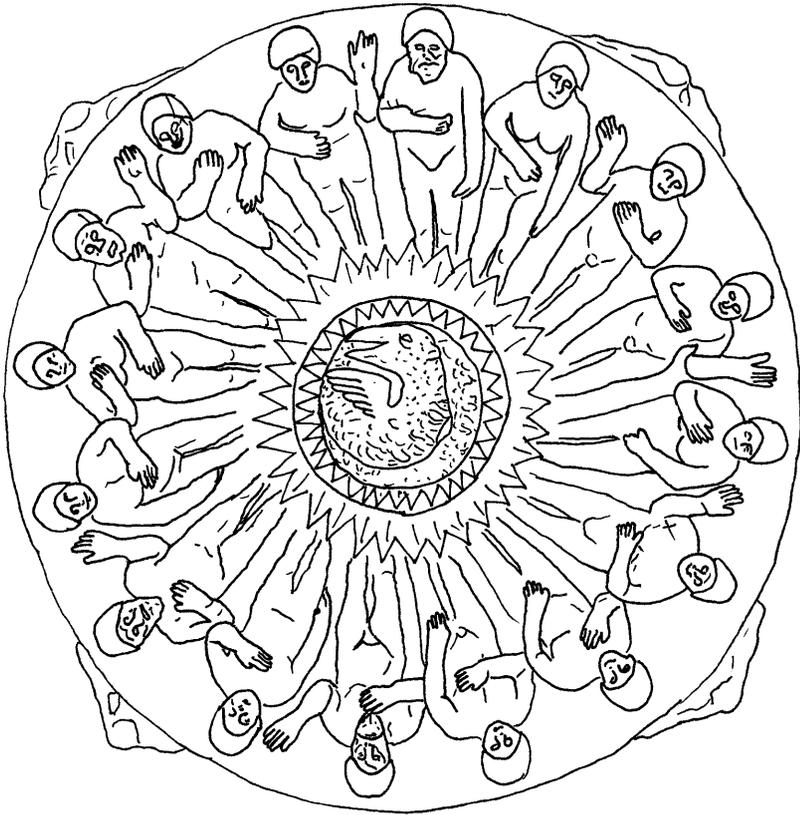


Plate 17: An Orphic Alabaster Bowl



A



B

Plate 18: Anguipede Gems

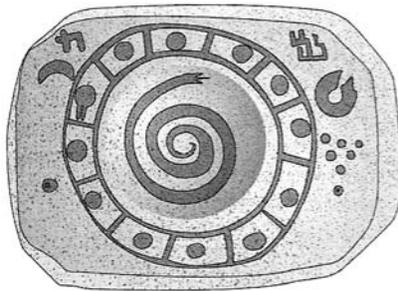


Plate 19: "Jewish-Gnostic Amulet"



Plate 20: Christian Snake Handlers in Kentucky

