material nature and transcendence.98 In our texts only the feminine figures are presented as both immanent in the world and capable of ascent from it. As such, feminine figures provide linkage between the worlds above and below. The True Man may ultimately be the savior, but he is distant and abstract; the female savior, Norea, is strong and present. She is the source of life and teaching.99 Because the female figures of The Hypostasis of the Archons are immanent and active in the world below, but are also representatives of the divine world above, they not only transcend the conflict between the two, but in this role they provide a “crucial link between the human in this world and that divinity which constitutes his/her true identity.”100 Since she stands between thepleromatic home of the Gnostic and his/her current residence in the world below, the Female Spiritual Principle can help the Gnostic traverse the distance between political exploitation and empowerment, between the experience of degradation and the knowledge of infinite self-worth, between despair and peace.

98 Sherry Ortner has expressed this point by describing the symbolic ambiguity that arises from the association of woman with nature. Though identified with nature, women are not simply bodies, but fully human and capable, like men, of culture and the transcendence culture seeks to achieve. See “Female to Male?”

99 Gilchrist concludes her book with the statement that in The Hypostasis of the Archons, “the male aspect of God is transcendent, his female aspect is immanent and the source of life, love and instruction” (“Nature of the Archons,” 241–42).


Genealogy and Sociology
in the Apocalypse of Adam

Luther H. Martin

At either end of the earth and at both extremes of time, the Sumerian myth of the golden age and the Andaman myth of the future life correspond, the former placing the end of primitive happiness at a time when the confusion of languages made words into common property, the latter describing the bliss of the hearth as a heaven where women will no longer be exchanged, i.e., removing to an equally unattainable past or future the joys, eternally denied to social man, of a world in which one might keep to oneself.

—Lévi-Strauss, The Elementary Structures of Kinship

Although Gnosticism has provided a rich trove for psychological analyses,2 it offers meagre data for sociological inquiry, unless a parallel between mythological metaphysics and social situation is assumed. Such social analyses of gnostic traditions most often employ a general sociology of individualism (for example, that of Marx or Weber) or a sociology of context (Green)3 that simply reformulates the orthodox judgements of early heresiological literature in terms of social scientific categories of alienation or marginality. Yet the prominence in gnostic myth of kinship categories of relationship, especially that of father to son,4 and of those based upon claims to a common ancestry suggests an unexplored possibility of social insight. Accounts of descent from a common ancestor represent a conventional strategy of collective identity among peoples of antiquity. The discourse of such inclusion is that of kin relationship, which anthropologists consider “the most central of social processes.”5

1 Lévi-Strauss, Elementary Structures of Kinship, 497.
2 See especially the insightful inquiries of Gilles Quispel informed by the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung after whom Codex I from Nag Hammadi was named; but see Darnton, The Great Cat Massacre, 9–72, and Martin, “Aretimous,” who question the historical adequacy of interpreting pre-psychological era texts psychologically, a hermeneutic which assumes the universal as opposed to the contingent validity of psychological theory.
3 Green provides a helpful overview of sociological interpretations of Gnosticism in Economic and Social Origins, chap. 1.
4 The father-son relationship in gnostic myth is usually treated as “an expression of spiritual or didactic filiation,” see e.g., Peel, “Treatise on the Resurrection,” 137.
5 Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 3, 13; an excellent introduction and overview of this difficult and often confused subject.
Kinship systems tell us how people themselves see their world of kin; from whom they distinguish themselves and on what basis. Kinship nomenclature systems are social inventions. The criteria for assigning persons to the role of kin vary from culture to culture in ways having little or nothing to do with biology. Rather, systems of kinship represent implicit classifications of an ideal kinship universe. This distinction between idealized kinship systems and actual kin relationship corresponds to the distinction between "culture" and "society," whereby "culture" designates shared patterns of expectations, evaluations, and symbolic meanings, and "society" designates a group of people who share these cultural attributes with some measure of regularity.

As summarized by J. A. Barnes,

It is obvious that many people can think alike without having anything to do with one another, and that many people who come into contact with each other everyday [may] hold radically different views.

While ideal kin classification systems may or may not correspond to real groups or categories, they do give an accurate picture of significant categories of social relationship in a kinship universe. Bruce J. Malina has shown the value of anthropological theory for addressing the meaning of social realities in the world of early Christianity, and Robert A. Oden has demonstrated the usefulness of theoretical kinship analyses for understanding the conventionalized biblical genealogies of Genesis.

In the spirit of Hans Jonas' "experimental vein" of gnostic studies, it might be asked what an analysis of gnostic claims to kin inclusion determined by eponymous descent might disclose about gnostic society, if indeed there be one, and/or about the culture that has produced such a kin system. "Sethian gnosticism," the fixed point of which has been described as "the idea that Gnostics constitute a special 'race' descended from Seth," provides the ideal case study for an anthropological "demystification" of a gnostic kinship universe. Because of the relatively early date of the Apocalypse of Adam, NHC V.5, hypothesized on the basis of an absence of distinctively Christian imagery, and because that document belongs to a general class of "charter myths," in which privilege is established through a genealogy that the descendent comes "to know in contrast to others who are excluded," it will be the focus of the following analysis.

1. Kinship in the Apocalypse of Adam

Any cultural system defines two patterns of kin relationship: descent and alliance. Descent groups are defined by a real, putative, or fictive descent from a common ancestor through either the male line (patrilineally) or the female line (matrilineally), or through both sexes (cognatically). Such groups may share common property, ritual, some activity, or, as in the Apocalypse of Adam, a name.

According to the Apocalypse of Adam, Seth is the descendent of Adam and Eve (64,26; 65,2-3, 12-13; 66,7-8), while Cain (though the name is absent from the corrupt text) is the offspring of Eve and Sakla, the demiurgic deity of this world (66,25-27). The descendants of this primordial menage à trois constitute two patrilineally defined descent groups (yeveul) (65,8; 71,19, 23; 82,19; 83,1), in which the typical father-son-brother constellation dominates; the Sethites and the Caineites. Descent is traced from Adam to Seth and his seed, on the one hand (64,1-3; 67,14-21; 69,9-17; 85,19-24), and from Sakla through Seth's half-brother, Cain, to Noah and to his sons Japheth, Ham, and Shem, on the other (70,10-11). The name of Shem does not recur in the text, but Shem is most certainly the coanenator with Sakla (72,31-73,12). Shem's descendents are the Israelites (73,1-12) who have "done all [Sakla's] will" (74,17-18). By contrast, the descendents of Japheth and Ham

6 Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 243.
7 White, An Anatomy of Kinship, 6; Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 34.
8 Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 245.
9 J. A. Barnes, Three Styles, 25.
10 Barnes, Three Styles, 25.
11 Malina, New Testament World, Oden, "Jacob As Father." See also Leach, Genesis as Myth; and Donaldson, "Kinship Theory."
13 Wisse ("Stalking Those Elusive Sethians," 575) concludes that the Sethian treatises "must not be seen as the teaching of a sect or sects, but as the inspired creations of individuals who did not feel bound by the opinions of a religious community."
14 Epiphanius, Against Heresies, 39,3.2-3. trans. Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, 188; MacRae, "Seth in Gnostic Texts and Traditions," 21; Pearson, "Figure of Seth," 489; Stroumsa, Another Seed, 125.
15 As with Gnosticism generally, there is no information about the social makeup or practices of any Sethian group; see Wisse, "Stalking Those Elusive Sethians," 564.
16 Kuhl, Seth, 90, n. 42; Rudolph, Gnosis, 135; Turner, "Sethian Gnostic:" but compare Stroumsa, Another Seed, 103.
17 Burkert, Ancient Mystery Cults, 76, on "charter myths," see Kilk, Myth, 256-57.
18 See translations by MacRae and Parrott in J. M. Robinson, The Hag Hammadi Library in English, 2d ed., 256-64; by MacRae in Parrott, Hag Hammadi Codices V, 2-5 and VI, 151-95 (includes Coptic text) and in Charlesworth, Pseudepigrapha, 707-19; and by Layton in The Gnostic Scriptures, 52-64.
19 Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 34.
20 Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 49.
21 Abel, who according to Epiphanius was replaced by Seth after Cain killed him (39.2.4), is not mentioned in the Apocalypse of Adam.
22 Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 121.
23 The text has it that Sakla gives "power to his [Sakla's] sons and their wives by means of the ark," thus making Noah a Cainite by descent in contradiction to the account in Genesis, where Noah is a Sethite. MacRae and Stroumsa suggest that the text suffers from a haplography and restore it to read: "and he will give power to Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives." (Stroumsa, Another Seed, 83 and n. 11). By betraying the requirements of descent through his covenant with Sakla and the Caineites, however, Noah becomes a "sinful Sethite" (Stroumsa, Another Seed, 86), allied thereby with the Caineites. From the perspective represented by the Apocalypse of Adam, the question seems to be not whether Noah is a Cainite, but whether he is considered to be a Cainite by birth or by alliance.
24 Kuhl, Seth, 94; Stroumsa, Another Seed, 85.
form twelve kingdoms of Gentiles (73,25–27). Four hundred thousand (Gentile) men, who have departed from the descendants of Japheth and Ham, “enter into another land and sojourn with those men who came forth from the great eternal knowledge” (73,13–24; 74,8–16), that is, with the descendants of Seth (73,13–20; 65,5–9).

The Apocalypse of Adam employs two kin terms in dealing with descent, “son” and “seed.” The Coptic ṣeρεμ, or “son” (equivalent to the Greek ὁ γιος) is used to refer both to Seth (67,15; 85,21) and to the (Cainite) sons of Noah (70,10, 21; 71,2, 4; 72,16, 18; 73,1; 74,18), including their sons (76,13). As a man gains complete rights over the possession of his own children in patrilineal systems,25 so Seth dominates his line as their forefather, even as Cain dominates his.

The kin category “son” is further qualified in the Apocalypse of Adam by the use of “seed,” for which three words are employed: the Greek loan words σπόρα and σπέρμα and the Coptic word ὀρο. L. Schottroff has pointed out that σπόρα is always used positively in the Apocalypse of Adam and refers to the line of Adam/Seth whereas σπέρμα refers to the descendants of Sakla/Cain.26

Σπόρα characterizes authentic descent from Seth, the sole legitimate offspring of Adam and Eve. His legitimacy is based upon his parents' union in knowledge (γνώσις), which has been taught Adam by Eve (64,12–13) and which is inherited by Seth (65,3–5; 69,11–17). It is into the seed (σπόρα) of the great aces that knowledge (γνώσις) entered (65,4) to become the seed (σπόρα) of the great generation who is Seth (65,8). Σπόρα is the equivalent, therefore, of γνώσις, and three revealers tell Adam that this seed (σπόρα) of knowledge has passed to Seth (66,3–8). Like angels, those men who work in the imperishable seed (σπόρα, 76,7) will receive the gnosia that passed from Adam through Seth to that seed (σπόρα, 85,22).

Cain's illegitimacy, on the other hand, is based on his father's position's being lower than that of Eve (64,16–19). This low "rank" is characterized by his lack of gnosia and by his acting on the basis of an antithetical "desire" (ἐπιθυμία) that he introduced into the world through his union with Eve (67,1–4). This primordial opposition between knowledge and desire defines the separate races of Seth and Cain.

Σπέρμα is used to describe the seed of Noah and his sons (72,24; 73,14, 25, 28; 74,17; 76,12) and that of the four hundred thousand men who are from the seed of Japheth and Ham (74,11). Although the Coptic ὀρο can translate both σπόρα and σπέρμα,27 it is used in the Apocalypse of Adam to refer to the descendants of Noah (73,2, 6) and thus in the sense of σπέρμα.

There are no further genealogical connections established in the Apocalypse of Adam between any of the ancestors and the gnostic Ego. This "telescoping"

tendency, whereby "those ancestors whose presence in the genealogy is inessential for the reckoning of contemporary relationships" have disappeared,28 establishes an ancestral ordering for classes of human identity.29 The genealogical taxonomy defined by the Apocalypse of Adam establishes three such classes: (1) the descendants of Seth, (2) the descendants of Cain, including Noah and his descendents (Jews through Shem and twelve kingdoms of gentiles through Ham and Japheth), and (3) the four hundred thousand apostate Gentiles.30 The kinship universe articulated by the Apocalypse of Adam provides authority for this proper order of nature because its genealogy from mythical time can be stated.31

The paradigm of identity established by the Apocalypse of Adam for the contemporary gnostic Ego is, of course, Sethian descent. Comparative sociologists generally distinguish descent (the transmission of kinship membership rights) from inheritance (the transmission of property) and from succession (the transmission of office), neither of which necessarily requires a kin relationship.32 Whereas succession, which validates right to an exclusive office,33 is not an issue in the Apocalypse of Adam, the tractate does link inheritance to descent. Descent systems establish the procedure for transmitting inheritance not only of property and position, but also of values and knowledge.34 The inheritance of gnosia belongs to the race of Seth (65,4–9) and to no other race (71,16–26). It legitimates as heirs of gnosia those "sons" who claim Seth as their ascendant.

Although the Sethites and Cainites are differentiated by separate patrilineal ascendants, they share a common matrilineal ancestor. This shared relation in the Sethian kinship universe gives rise to an overlapping grouping of descendant kin with membership rights dependent upon additional criteria of eligibility involving choice among such alternatives as marriage or adoption.35 Since intercourse is renounced by the Sethites (72,12–13; 73,23–24; 75,1–4) and by the four hundred thousand (73,20–24), the joining of the four hundred thousand with the Sethites may be understood in terms of the kin category of adoption.

2. Kinship in Roman Society

Adoption is a legal fiction that permits a family tie to be artificially created.36 The frequency of this practice in Roman society shows that biology was of

25 Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 121.
26 Schottroff, "Animae naturaet salvae," 79 cited by Stroumas, Another Seed, 125, n. 2.
27 Crum, A Coptic Dictionary, 831b.
little concern in the Roman conception of the family. As adoption involved also the assent of the adoptee, it may be considered a practice of kinship recruitment upon which the religious notion of conversion was modeled in genealogically articulated systems. The Greek technical term for legal adoption, παιδεία (“sonship”), is used in this metaphorical sense of conversion most notably by Paul (see Gal 4:5).

Adoption in Roman society was not by legal document but by will or testament, the instrument by which the devolution of an inheritance was prescribed in antiquity. Following the lead of G. MacRae, Stroumsa notes that the Apocalypse of Adam “is actually a ‘testament’ of Adam, for the revelation took place at the time of his death.”

Sir Henry Maine, founder of the comparative study of jurisprudence and one of the founders of modern kinship analysis, understood ancient law to be based upon the problem of legitimate inheritance. Because such discursive formations as the canon of law have their own histories—viz., when they emerged, the conditions of their emergence, from which discourse they diverged or merged, etc.—and because “insistence on abiding by shared values and norms was an expression of commitment to the existing social structure,” it is useful to review some of Maine’s conclusions concerning inheritance and law as exemplars of the historical boundaries of kinship discourse within which the Apocalypse of Adam might have been articulated.

“The original Will or Testament,” Maine writes, “was . . . an instrument . . . by which the devolution of the Family was regulated.” “In the old Roman Law of Inheritance the notion of a will or testament is inextricably mixed up . . . with the theory of a man’s posthumous existence in the person of his heir.” The Roman notion of inheritance is that “though the physical person of the deceased had perished, his legal personality survived and descended unimpaired on his Heir or Co-Heirs, in whom his identity (so far as the law was concerned) was continued,”—the elimination, Maine concludes, “of the fact of death.”

“The prolongation of a man’s legal existence in his heir, or in a group of co-heirs, is neither more nor less than a characteristic of the family transferred by fiction to the individual.” Ancient society “has for its units, not individuals, but groups of men united by the reality or the fiction of blood-relationships.” “All ancient societies regarded themselves as having proceeded from one original stock, and even laboured under an incapacity for comprehending any reason except this for their holding together in political union.” All ancient witnesses to testaments in Rome “indicate that what passed from the Testator to the Heir was the Family, that is, the aggregate of rights and duties contained in the Patria Potestas and growing out of it.” Under Roman law, patria potestas was the basis of family life. “The life of each citizen is not regarded as limited by birth and death; it is but a continuation of the existence of his forefathers, and it will be prolonged in the existence of his descendants,” whether through agnatic descent or through adoption.

Under Roman law, the line of inheritance was:

1. The sui, or direct descendants, equivalent in the Apocalypse of Adam to Seth.
2. The nearest agnate. Agnatic descent refers to cognates who trace their connection exclusively through males, as does the Apocalypse of Adam. Whereas “Parental Powers proper are extinguished by the death of the Parent . . . Agnation is as it were a mould which retains its imprint after they have ceased to exist.” Agnation is not based upon the marriage of Father and Mother, but only upon the “authority of the Father” (patria potestas), including those brought under this authority through adoption.
3. The gentiles, i.e., the collective members of the dead man’s gens or house, who, on the ground of bearing the same name, were supposed to be descended from a common ancestor. The four hundred thousand descendants of Japheth and Ham adopted by the house or race of Seth establish the primordial model for those who will inherit gnosis. Under Roman law, “the only purpose of adoptio is to bring patria potestas into existence.”

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37 Maine, Ancient Law, 107; Veyne, “Roman Empire,” 17.
39 Contra Stroumsa, Another Seed, 86.
40 Betz, Galatians, 208–9, also 185–86.
41 Veyne, “Roman Empire,” 17.
42 Maine, Ancient Law, 147.
43 “Seth in Gnostic Texts and Traditions,” 18; and in Parrott, Nag Hammadi Codices, 152.
44 Stroumsa, Another Seed, 82.
45 Maine, Ancient Law, 1. Maine’s work not only remains a classic of comparative jurisprudence but is one of the foundations of modern kinship studies. See, for example, Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 18, and Fortes, Kinship and the Social Order, 11–12. Morgan’s Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity is the undisputed foundation for kin term systems.
46 Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, 22.
48 Maine, Ancient Law, 158.
50 Maine, Ancient Law, 151, 156.
51 Maine, Ancient Law, 157–58.
52 Maine, Ancient Law, 154.
53 Maine, Ancient Law, 152, see also 104, 213–14.
54 Maine, Ancient Law, 106.
55 Maine, Ancient Law, 158.
56 Curzon, Roman Law, 32.
57 Maine, Ancient Law, 214.
58 Curzon, Roman Law, 32.
59 Maine, Ancient Law, 124.
60 Maine, Ancient Law, 123.
62 Schultz, Classical Roman Law, 144.
those who will do “the will of my Father in heaven” to reject their natural family (Matt 12:6:46–50; Mark 3:31–35; Luke 8:21), adoption into the patria potestas of Seth requires the rejection of the adoptee’s Cainite origin.

3. Kinship Rationales in the Apocalypse of Adam

“Whatever else kinship systems do,” Robin Fox has summarized, “they divide people into categories of kin and then define marriageability in terms of these categories.”63 Marriage was equivalent in status to adoption under Roman Law,64 and, like adoption, has been treated by kinship analysts largely in the context of recruitment to kinship groups.65 Lévi-Strauss, however, has emphasized the importance of marriage alliance over descent as the basis for the social state. For Lévi-Strauss, kinship groups are “units in a system of ‘alliance’ made or ‘expressed’ by marriage.”66 In the Apocalypse of Adam alliance, based upon desire, is the identifying mark of the Cainites.

Adam/Eve, an androgynous pair who are divided by Sakla (64,20–23), are as much brother/sister as husband/wife. Sakla, the God who created them, created for himself a son (Cain) with Eve (65,25–28), thus establishing exogamous marriage. Exogamy is regarded as equivalent to the prohibition of incest, which, according to Lévi-Strauss, is not so much the prohibition of marriage with mother, sister, or daughter as it is an obligation to give mother, sister, or daughter to others.67 It “provides the only means of maintaining the group as a group, of avoiding infinite fission and segmentation which the practice of consanguineous marriages would bring about.”68 This exogamous bond of alliance with another family represents a tendency to social cohesion69 and “ensures the dominance of the social over the biological.”70

Because of the gnostics that the Sethian seed contains, Sakla enjoins Noah against mixing his σπέρμα with the alien σπορά (“no seed will come from you [Noah] of the man who will not stand in my presence in another glory [Seth]” [71,4–8]).71 In exchange for Noah’s pledge not to mingle with the race of gnostics, Sakla offers “power to Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives” (70,10–11).72 Authority over his newly established exogamous alliance is granted by Sakla to Noah and his sons as a kingly rule over the earth. The

gnostic sons of Seth, by contrast, are described as a “race without a king over it” (92,19–20).73 Thus a Sethite kinship system based upon an agamous kin model of adoption is contrasted with a Cainite kinship system based upon exogamous marriage alliances.

Anthropologists regularly distinguish between “kinship” and “kingship” systems as types of social organization.74 Whereas kinship systems are characterized by a genealogically defined communal authority and a “self-consciousness about their superior place in the world,”75 kinship systems represent the tendency towards centralized leadership and power.76

Whereas sexual license is universally reputed of kings,77 it is related to the breakdown of kinship systems.78 In the Apocalypse of Adam marriage alliances, mandated by the rule of exogamy, are viewed negatively. They are based upon lust (ἐπιθυμία, 67,3) which results in pregnancy (80,3; 81,8, 9, 17) and the transmission of σπέρμα. And in the hymnic section of the Apocalypse of Adam (77,27–83,3), spokesmen of the twelve kingdoms enumerate various views of the incarnation of the savior “in their own language of lustful beginnings and carnal births,”79 which had been “impacted to them by their god Sakla (73,3–4).”80

The Gnostics, on the other hand, having no such desire (83,16), are undivided (ἀγαμία, 75,3–4; 75,6; 82,23), and are protected, therefore, from such ἐπιθυμία (73,24; 75,4). By avoiding ἐπιθυμία, ἀγαμία, and the transmission of σπέρμα, which are characteristic of marriage alliances, the Sethites avoid the social state itself.

The Sethites’ inverse reading of Genesis emphasizes the asocial implications of its Sumerian prototype. According to the citation from Lévi-Strauss, which concludes his study of kinship and which opened this essay, the Sumerian myth places a golden age of primitive happiness prior to the time when a confusion of languages made words into common property and established the possibility of alliances between peoples. This possibility is represented in the Apocalypse of Adam by the dispersion of Noah’s sons and their descendants, who constitute the twelve kingdoms. Before this confusion of tongues, words were the property of each particular group, a privilege of gnostis still claimed by

63 Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 2.
64 Veyne, “Roman Empire,” 17.
65 Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 22.
66 Fox, Kinship and Marriage, 22.
67 Lévi-Strauss, Elementary Structures of Kinship, 481.
68 Lévi-Strauss, Elementary Structures of Kinship, 479.
69 Lévi-Strauss, Elementary Structures of Kinship, 480.
70 Lévi-Strauss, Elementary Structures of Kinship, 479. Similarly, in Roman society, marriage was understood primarily as a civic duty rather than as a matter of establishing a family (Veyne, “Roman Empire,” 37–38).
71 Stroumsa, Another Seed, 83.
72 See n. 23 above.
73 See Fallon, “The Gnostics.”
74 Sagan, At the Dawn of Tyranny, 225–42.
75 Sagan, At the Dawn of Tyranny, 236, 240.
76 Sagan, At the Dawn of Tyranny, 236.
77 Sagan, At the Dawn of Tyranny, 320–21.
78 Sagan, At the Dawn of Tyranny, 72.
79 Sagan, Another Seed, 91.
80 Stroumsa, Another Seed, 90. It is tempting to explore the relation of this section of the Apocalypse of Adam to the Matthew genealogy of Jesus, in which all the women named “conceived Jesus” forebear in illicit sexual encounters,” culminating in the virgin birth (Rothkrug, “German Holiness and Western Sanction,” 218–19). Matthew borrows the phrase, ἀδελφός ραπτόμενος, “book of origin,” with which he begins his gospel, from Gen 2:4a (LXX), which introduces the “J” narrative covering the genealogy of mankind from Adam to Seth (Gen 2:4a–4:26/Allen, Matthew, 1). But this is another story...
the Sethites (as by “orthodox” Christians following the miracle of tongues reported in Acts 2).

Lévi-Strauss compares the Sumerian denial of happiness to social man with the Andaman myth of the future life, which

will be but a repetition of the present, but all will then remain in the prime of life, sickness and death will be unknown, and there will be no more marrying or giving in marriage.81

Again, an ideal age, set this time in the future, is characterized by the absence of alliance. These two motifs correspond, according to Lévi-Strauss, since both remove to an equally unattainable time an ideal, epitomized also in the Apocalypse of Adam, of a world eternally denied social man “in which one might keep to oneself.”

4. Kinship and Society in the Apocalypse of Adam

Contrary to those who would find within gnostic myth a cultural paradigm for the positive evaluation of women in ancient society, the idealized kinship universe articulated in the Apocalypse of Adam is a staunchly patriarchal cultural system.82 It defines gnostics as those who claim patrilineal descent from Seth.

In the “racial theology” of the Apocalypse of Adam,83 membership in the Sethian descent system is defined as a potential of the descendents of Japheth and Ham, the gentiles; Jews, the descendent of Shem, are considered unregenerate Cainites. Such “antisemitic” gentiles,84 who nevertheless read the book of Genesis as their “charter myth,” could only be a “class” of Christians,85 the thirteenth kingdom referred to in the Apocalypse of Adam (82,10–19).86

Membership in this Sethite-Christian descent group is not understood biologically, but rather is based upon the paradigm of the four hundred thousand descendents of Japheth and Ham who join with the Sethites and with whom the primordial genealogical drama of the Apocalypse of Adam concludes. Sethites are Sethites not through some literal claim to consanguinity, but by choice: “adoption” in the discourse of kinship, “conversion” in that of religion.

The four hundred thousand converts are a heterogenous people who renounce all alliances, whether based upon desire, which has characterized the Cainites ever since the union of Sakla with Eve, or upon power, which has

characterized the Cainites ever since the covenant of Sakla with Noah and his sons. From the anthropological perspective of this study, their rejection of marriage should be taken less as evidence for an ascetic life style than as a rejection of alliances, that is, as a rejection of any social definition of identity. Such “keeping to oneself” should not be understood as recommending individuality, a modern notion, but as the embodiment of sacrality. Since birth and death are part of a single process of corruption (70,3–5; 76,15–17), this embodiment of sacrality is not in the corporeal body produced through sexual relations, but in an angelic or resurrected body (76,6, 23–24; 83,14) which “will not perish” (76,21–23). “For,” as “orthodox” Christians well knew, “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matt 22:30//Mark 12:25 and Luke 20:35–36).

The rejection of kingship, or political alliances, by the Sethites in favor of a kinship model suggests a form of social relations characteristic primarily of peoples defined by place. “The first century world,” writes Malina, “was marked by geographical and social immobility which resulted in the heightened support and constraint of a closed social network.”87 With the newly bureaucratic urbanization characteristic of Hellenistic civilization,88 new inhabitants came to cities from the countryside where their ancestors had lived for centuries. Such a move provides the conditions for the creation of alternative social systems. The question then arises of the basis for nonkinship forms of social cohesion or identity inclusion. One option is adherence to the centralized leadership or authority characteristic of kinship systems; another is the formation of quasi-family associations to replace the kinship networks left behind.89 The Sethite emphasis on kinship suggests a conservative (and “orthodox” [Matt 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25]) evaluation of Hellenistic urban life, favoring a previous status quo,90 rather than the radical posture conventionally attributed to an urbane gnosticism from the interpretative orientation of normative Christianity.91 Such kin associations do not represent powerlessness, but the absence or rejection of a centralized locus of power in favor of a diffused embodiment of power.

When the four hundred thousand renounced their Cainite alliances, they joined the “kingless race” (82,19–20) and settled in “another place” with the Sethites (73,13–25) who had already rejected such alliances. This “other place” is no geographical place but “heaven,” the placeless place of angels (72,10–11; 73,16–20). Here they may “reflect upon the knowledge of the eternal God” embodied in their hearts and attributed to their redeemer, the

81 Man, Aboriginal Inhabitants, 94–95, cited by Lévi-Strauss, Elementary Structures of Kinship, 457.
82 Malina makes this same point with respect to theological studies of the Bible (“‘Religion’ in the World of Paul,” 94).
83 Stroumsa, Another Seed, 86.
84 Stroumsa, Another Seed, 85; on “anti-semitism” in the Nag Hammadi documents, see Gager, The Origins of Anti-Semitism, 167–73.
86 Stroumsa, Another Seed, 94–100.
88 See de Ste. Croix, Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World, 10–11; Martin, Hellenistic Religions, 26.
89 Sagan, At the Dawn of Tyranny, 72. See also Little, West African Urbanization, and Mitchell, Mishpokhe.
90 Malina, “‘Religion’ in the World of Paul,” 96.
91 On gnosticism as a “city religion,” see Rudolph, Gnostis, 291. See also Kippenberg, Verländlichung.
heavenly Seth (76,24–30), with whom they are now identified by name. A placeless people who no longer bury because they have lost contact with their natural kin,92 the Sethites are linked through their fictive kinship relations and are “already resurrected” into their legitimate inheritance of gnosis, a cultural system that defines an asocial reality.


The Trimorphic Prot ennoia and the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel

Gesine Robinson

Hardly any other book of the New Testament has posed such extensive and difficult riddles for exegetes as has the Fourth Gospel. It puts New Testament scholarship really “on the spot.” The mass of literature, in commentaries, essays, and monographs is so great that it is hard to get an overview. A glance at the surveys of research presented from time to time gives eloquent expression to this situation.

In the case of the eighteen verses that stand at the beginning, the so-called Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, or, more specifically, the hymn generally agreed to lie behind the Prologue, these difficulties are only aggravated, and the quantity of secondary literature swells accordingly! Most of this literature, at least in the post-Bultmannian period, has dealt with the question of the relation of the Prologue to Gnosticism, where opinions vary widely, from gnostic or gnosticizing to anti-gnostic or even completely non-gnostic. This question as to its history-of-religions background has always been important. But since the Nag Hammadi texts have become available, it has again been put into the center of interest.

The East Berlin Nag Hammadi team, the Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften, of which I was a member, published in 1973 the thesis that Trimorphic Prot ennoia from Nag Hammadi Codex XIII, especially the description of Prot ennoia’s third appearance as Logos, might be a genuine parallel to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel.2 Since then, the discussion has never ended about the relation between the two texts, or about the possibility of a history-of-religions background being shared by both texts.

The discussion was accelerated by a first translation, which I published on behalf of the Berlin team in 1974, where our earlier thesis was enlarged by our ongoing research on the text. There I argued that one has the impression that the relevant statements of Prot ennoia stand in their natural context, whereas

1 This is a slightly revised version of a paper read at the SBL convention in Boston in December 1987. For the English translation I am indebted to my husband, for whom the present volume has been prepared.

2 Arbeitskreis für die koptisch-gnostische Schriften, “Bedeutung der Texte,” 76.
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