



uOttawa

L'Université canadienne
Canada's university

FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES SUPÉRIEURES
ET POSTDOCTORALES



FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

Elizabeth A. Parton

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE / AUTHOR OF THESIS

Ph.D. (Religious Studies)

GRADE / DEGREE

Department of Religious Studies

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT / FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

Apocalyptic and Sethian Trajectories and Melchizedek Speculations in Late Antique Egypt
The Melchizedek Apocalypse from Nag Hammadi (NHC 1X, 1) as a Test Case

TITRE DE LA THÈSE / TITLE OF THESIS

Pierluigi Piovanelli

DIRECTEUR (DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS SUPERVISOR

CO-DIRECTEUR (CO-DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

EXAMINATEURS (EXAMINATRICES) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS EXAMINERS

Michel Desjardins

Jitse Dijkstra

Theodore De Bruyn

Kimberly Stratton

Gary W. Slater

Le Doyen de la Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales / Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

ELIZABETH A. PARTON

**APOCALYPTIC AND SETHIAN TRAJECTORIES AND
MELCHIZEDEK SPECULATIONS IN LATE ANTIQUE EGYPT**

**THE *MELCHIZEDEK APOCALYPSE* FROM NAG HAMMADI
(NHC IX, 1) AS A TEST CASE**

Dissertation submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate and Post-doctoral Studies, University of Ottawa,
in partial fulfillment for the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA
OTTAWA, CANADA

2008

© Elizabeth A. Parton, Ottawa, Canada, 2008



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-50749-0
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-50749-0

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the great number of people that have contributed to this dissertation. I extend my thanks to the members of my committee, Dr. Theodore de Bruyn, Dr. Jitse Dijkstra, Dr. Kimberly Stratton and Dr. Michel Desjardins, for their extensive participation and considered readings of my thesis. Dr. Reinhard Pummer, Dr. Georges Tissot and Dr. Carl Kazmierski provided my earliest guidance on this road, and still offer inspiration and support when the going gets tough.

My thesis supervisor, Dr. Pierluigi Piovanelli, has been a constant source of guidance, practical advice and personal encouragement throughout this process. Through my work with him as a student and research assistant, and his support of teaching opportunities, he has been invaluable in helping me to develop my academic and lecturing skills. Dr. Piovanelli has been an invaluable mentor, and I cannot thank him enough for all his hard work in bringing this project to fruition.

Additionally, I am extremely fortunate to be surrounded by a great deal of love and support from family and friends. They have provided an incredible amount of comfort, commiseration and clarity through this often-trying process, and the paper could not have been finished without them. I would especially like to express my gratitude to Paulette, for her endless optimism and "above-and-beyond-the-call" editorial help, and to Wendy, who has been through it herself and so knows the ups and downs and was able to talk me through mine. I have a wonderful extended network of friends and family in both Ottawa and Toronto, and all of them have contributed in one way or another, whether through a well-timed phone call or a much needed night out.

My family has been unbelievably supportive, in this, as in all aspects of my life. My sisters Doris and Patti provided opportunities for fun and relaxation, not to mention a great place to stay when I needed a break. My parents, Richard and Betty Parton, have always offered full support to all of my endeavors and aspirations, and I would not have accomplished this without their guidance and love. They promoted a love of learning and instilled a strong sense of responsibility and determination that has served me well in this process, as it has in life. Likewise, my "other parents," Peter and Peggy Martin, have been unfailing in their generosity and encouragement.

Finally, I thank Garth Martin, without whom none of this would have been remotely possible. He has kept me grounded and provided constant emotional support, particularly in this last, extremely difficult year. His love and sense of humour have sustained and nurtured me, and this has been as much his project as mine.

**The Melchizedek Apocalypse from Nag Hammadi (NHC IX.1):
Apocalyptic Trajectories and Melchizedek Speculations in Late Antique Egypt**

Summary

The *Melchizedek Apocalypse* is a Coptic text, written in the late second or early third century CE, by a Sethian gnostic author, and discovered near Nag Hammadi in Egypt. Only one extant copy of the document has survived, preserved in the translation of the original Greek, in Codex IX of the Nag Hammadi collection. *Melchizedek* has significant codicological issues, with only 19 of the approximately 745 lines of the original document completely extant, and even with a great deal of effort and scholarly conjecture, only about 47% of the text is at all recoverable. Perhaps because of the state of the manuscript itself, the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* has been examined by only a few scholars, those tasked with the production of the critical editions, translations and commentaries on the text, Birger A. Pearson (English), Hans-Martin Schenke (German), Wolf-Peter Funk, Jean-Pierre Mahé (French), and Claudio Gianotto (French and Italian), in particular.

The text presents Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of God Most High first seen in Genesis (14.18-20), as an apocalyptic and gnostic hero, assuming the authority of the character in order to present an understanding of the cosmos, reflective of both literary styles and their visions of this world and the next. The text is demonstrative of apocalyptic and gnostic conventions, as well as of the literary traditions surrounding Melchizedek speculation, and socio-historical elements having to do with its Egyptian milieu. In the present work I examine each of these designations on the way to establishing the literary and historical contexts of the text.

Following the trajectory theory suggested by James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, through the examination of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* and its literary and historical contexts I will place it within the various trajectories of Judaism, early Christianity and Sethian gnosticism, seeking to demonstrate the over-lapping nature of the literary and religious distinctions of the early centuries of the Common Era. In order to do so, I address the difficult issue of “gnosticism” as a viable categorization, beginning with the arguments of Michael A. Williams, Karen L. King and Carl B. Smith. As *Melchizedek* can be seen as a clear example of the diversity of forms within the religious traditions of Egypt in late antiquity, it acts as an ideal test case.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	i
Table of Contents	ii
0. Introduction	1
Part 1	
1.1. Gnosticism: An Issue of Definition and Category	10
1.1.1. Introduction	10
1.1.2. Michael A. Williams' <i>Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category</i>	12
1.1.3. Karen L. King's <i>What is Gnosticism?</i>	23
1.1.4. Carl B. Smith's <i>No Longer Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins</i>	35
1.1.4. Conclusion	50
1.2. Sethians and Gnostics	55
1.2.1. Introduction	55
1.2.2. The Great Seth	55
1.2.3. The Epithets of Seth and Seth as Revealer and Saviour	59
1.2.4. Defining Sethian Gnosticism: Jewish? Christian?	60
1.2.5. Sethian Soteriology	67
1.2.6. The Sethian Literature: Direct and Indirect Sethian Texts	70
1.2.6.1. Direct Texts	71
<i>The Apocalypse of Adam</i>	71
<i>The Apocryphon of John</i>	72
<i>The Gospel of the Egyptians</i>	73
<i>The Hypostasis of the Archons</i>	74
<i>The Three Steles of Seth</i>	75
<i>Zostrianos</i>	76
1.2.6.2. Indirect Texts	77
<i>Marsanes</i>	77
<i>The Melchizedek Apocalypse</i>	78
<i>The Thought of Norea</i>	78
<i>Allogenes</i>	79
<i>The Trimorphic Protennoia</i>	80
<i>Untitled Apocalypse</i>	80
<i>The Gospel of Judas</i>	81
1.2.7. Conclusion	82
1.3. The Egyptian Context	84
1.3.1. Introduction	84
1.3.2. Finds in the Desert: Nag Hammadi	84
1.3.3. The Egyptian Diaspora	89
1.3.4. Alexandria	95
1.3.5. Egyptian Christianity	97
1.3.5.1. Clement of Alexandria	105
1.3.5.2. Origen	107
1.3.6. Early Monasticism and Monastic Eschatology	110
1.3.7. The Traditional Egyptian Priesthood	119

1.3.8. Conclusion	125
Part 2	
2.1. The Apocalyptic Trajectory	127
2.1.1. Introduction.....	127
2.1.2. Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition	127
Daniel	131
<i>1 Enoch</i>	133
<i>Jubilees</i>	138
<i>2 Baruch</i>	140
4 Ezra	141
<i>2 Enoch</i>	142
<i>3 Baruch</i>	144
<i>The Testament of Abraham</i>	145
Other Diaspora Literature	147
2.1.3. The Dead Sea Scrolls	148
2.1.4. Apocalypticism in Early Christianity.....	153
Revelation	155
<i>The Apocalypse of Peter</i>	156
<i>The Shepherd of Hermas</i>	157
<i>The Apocalypse of Paul</i>	157
2.1.5. Apocalypses from Nag Hammadi	158
Category I.....	160
Category II	164
Category III.....	166
2.1.6. Conclusion	167
2.2. Melchizedek and The Melchizedekians.....	170
2.2.1. Introduction.....	170
2.2.2. The Melchizedek Tradition: Origins and Early Literature.....	173
2.2.3. Anti-Gnostic Polemics and Hypothetical Sects:	
Communities of Followers?.....	183
2.2.3.1. The Evidence from the Apologists and Heresiologists.....	183
2.2.3.2. Melchizedekians.....	187
Theodotus of Byzantium and Theodotus the Banker:	
Dynamic Monarchians (Circa 190-217 CE)	187
Hieracas of Leontopolis (Circa 300 CE)	188
2.2.4. The Priesthood in Jewish and Christian Tradition.....	191
2.2.5. “The Priest of God Most High”: From Genesis to Qumran,	
Hebrews and Nag Hammadi	194
2.2.6. Conclusion	202
2.3. The <i>Melchizedek Apocalypse</i>	204
2.3.1. Introduction.....	204
2.3.2. Synopsis of the Text.....	204
2.3.3. Historical Context	206
2.3.4. Textual Issues.....	207
2.3.5. Significant Research to Date.....	208
2.3.6. Date and Provenance.....	210

2.3.7. Key Questions.....	210
2.3.8. Theoretical Base and Importance of Research.....	210
2.3.9. Exegesis of the Text.....	211
2.3.9.1. The Revelation of Gamaliel (1.2-14.16).....	212
The Lower Church.....	212
The Higher Church and the True Priesthood	217
The History and Destiny of the Elect Descended from Adam.....	222
2.3.9.2. The Liturgy of Melchizedek (14.15-18.20).....	227
Preface.....	227
Trishagion.....	229
Final Exhortation.....	230
2.3.9.3. The Revelation of the Sons of the Generation of Light (19.127.6)	230
2.3.9.4. Epilogue (27.2-10).....	235
2.3.10. The Phenomenology of Melchizedek the Priest.....	235
2.3.11. Conclusion.....	237
3. General Conclusions	243
3.1. What the <i>Melchizedek Apocalypse</i> Can Tell Us	243
3.2. The Sethian Trajectory.....	244
3.3. The Apocalyptic Trajectory.....	247
3.4. The Melchizedek Tradition.....	250
3.5. Egyptian Origins.....	251
3.6. The Question of Gnosticism Revisited	253
3.7. Conclusion.....	256
Appendices	259
Appendix 1: The Text of the <i>Melchizedek Apocalypse</i>	259
Appendix 2: Names and Titles in the <i>Melchizedek Apocalypse</i>	287
Bibliography	288

0. INTRODUCTION

Melchizedek

Without father, without mother, without descent; having neither
Beginning of days, nor end of life

Thrice bless'd are they, who feel their loneliness;
To whom nor voice of friends nor pleasant scene
Brings that on which the sadden'd heart can learn;
Yea, the rich earth, garb'd in her daintiest dress
Of light and joy, doth but the more oppress,
Claiming responsive smiles and rapture high;
Till, sick at heart, beyond the veil they fly,
Seeking His Presence, who alone can bless.
Such, in strange days, the weapons of Heaven's grace;
When, passing o'er the high-born Hebrew line,
He forms the vessel of His vast design;
Fatherless, homeless, reft of age and place,
Sever'd from earth, and careless of its wreck,
Born through long woe His rare Melchizedek.

John Henry, Cardinal Newman (1801-1890)¹

In their important 1971 work, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, James Robinson and Helmut Koester noted a “crisis of categorization” in New Testament scholarship, and suggested similar ways in which the study of early Christianity should move, in order to alleviate the crisis and maintain the relevance of the discipline.

The interaction between the modern understanding of reality from which scholarly categories are derived, and the results of scholarly study which in turn modify the understanding of reality, is both inescapable and legitimate. Progress takes place when the modern categories employed are sufficiently illuminating that they lead to a more adequate understanding of the data, and thus are relatively validated by the successful research itself. But, conversely, the new insights resulting from the application of the facilitating categories tend to put in question these very categories and their presuppositions. This leads ultimately to a basic

¹ D.H. S. Nicholson and A. H. E. Lee (eds.), *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse* (Oxford, 1917). The biblical passages throughout are from the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, NRSV (Oxford and New York, 1989).

questioning of the adequacy of former categories in the present stage of research. The outcome is a crisis of categories.²

They suggest the dismantling and reassembling of traditionally employed categorizations, noting the importance of context and that the creation of texts and development of worldviews are dynamic processes. Many of the issues besetting traditional categories lie in approach favouring the unmediated examination of the original texts, rather than in an analytical process to uncover the compositional layers that demonstrated the active development of the ideas the texts came to convey. As a response to ecclesiastical subjectivity in the study of Jewish and Christian writings, canonical and non-canonical, critical scholarship attempted an objectivity that was based in the latest versions of the texts, even as it sought to remove these later, biased and slanted surfaces, or “patinas,” from the examination.

The discipline moved further away from attempting to provide documentation for “revealed truth,” and into a history of early Christianity that demonstrates its evolutionary stages, from Jesus to Paul, to the authors of the gospels, to the early church fathers etc., or, as Robinson suggests:

from an “unworldly” antiinstitutionalism rooted in the apocalyptic ideology of imminent expectation, toward a bifurcation into a relatively “worldly” Christian establishment whose eschatological hope has lost its imminence or at least its existential urgency, and an “otherworldly” disestablished Christianity, whose ideology has become gnostic rather than apocalyptic.³

Added to this is the reality that the apparent unity of early Christianity had a great deal to do with a dearth of “alternative” texts due to the propensity of the church authorities for burning heretical books, and the presence in some areas of a tradition of oral transmission that makes tracing changes difficult. As a result, Christianity has been presented as a product of an immobile world, in which the different religious groups were presented as representing a single position, whether Christian, Jewish or gnostic. Rather than seeing

² J. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971), 3.

³ Robinson, “Introduction: The Dismantling and Reassembling of the Categories of New Testament Scholarship,” in *Trajectories*, 10.

the religions as singularities, Robinson suggests looking at them as composite entities of layerings of traditions, with the static categories of background or environment reconceptualized with regards to the movements or trajectories in the Hellenistic world.⁴

Not only are specific trajectories to be understood and evaluated with reference to their interplay with overarching trajectories; also specific events, individuals, documents and positions become intelligible only in terms of the trajectories in which they are caught up. At one stage of movement a document may function in a specific way, have a certain meaning or influence on the movement; at a subsequent stage on the trajectory that document, unaltered, may function or cut in a different way, may mean in effect something different, may influence the movement differently.⁵

In this way of understanding the study of early Christianity and analyzing the texts of the period, Koester suggests that such distinctions as canonical and non-canonical, and orthodox and heretical, are obsolete.⁶ Further, the apocalyptic or revelatory genre as it originated in Jewish literary tradition cannot be seen as developing into the same tradition in early Christianity by means of a straight continuation. A strictly linear progression, Jewish to Christian to gnostic examples of the genre, is not acceptable. Some Jewish apocalyptic literature in fact is of the same compositional time period as examples of Christian apocalyptic texts, and likewise some of the early gnostic texts were written at the same general time as Christian examples.⁷ Writings from the same genre can occur simultaneously, out of similarities of literary conventions, cultural

⁴ Or, in the case of this study, specifically those trajectories that were found in the Egyptian milieu.

⁵ Robinson, "Introduction," in *Trajectories*, 16.

⁶ Koester, "Conclusion: The Intention and Scope of Trajectories," in *Trajectories*, 270. I use the terms throughout with their accepted intentions toward definition, "canonical" meaning those texts found in either the Old or New Testament, "non-canonical" referring to Jewish and Christian literature that exists outside of the books of the bible. "Orthodox" and "heretical" are trickier terms. While "normative" and "non-normative" are used sometimes, those distinctions are not completely accurate in their assessment or categorization of the texts and worldviews discussed below, either. When I refer to the orthodox as placed in comparison or contrast with a gnostic/heretical worldview, the term is reflective of the developing theology and practices in the relevant historical and social contexts from which it originated. "Gnostic" and "gnosticism" as effective categorical terms provide their own specific issues, some of which are addressed below (1.1.). Until such "crises" of categorization are resolved and new paradigms formed and terminology agreed upon and consistently employed, scholars remain tied to the use of traditional genres in the study of religion in antiquity, Second Temple Judaism, Christianity and gnosticism in particular, regardless of their overall ineffectiveness.

⁷ For example, 4 Ezra and 2 *Baruch* being roughly contemporaneous with Revelation and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which date roughly to the same time as the earliest gnostic apocalypses like the *Apocryphon of John*. Cf. Koester "Conclusion," 271.

conditions and contemporary realities. The differences in the texts and their particular messages lie in the expression of specific religious experiences, beliefs and practices.⁸

These issues of categorization in the historical and literary scholarship of early Christianity, as outlined by Robinson and Koester, reverberate in the issue of the designation “gnostic.” As the term has come to encompass everything from the dualistic worldviews of the early centuries of the Common Era, to diverse and, often, little more than spurious twenty-first century applications. As a result, “gnosticism” as a categorization has ceased to convey clearly the blurring of the lines between different forms of Judaism, early Christianity and “gnostic” systems in late antiquity.

As Robinson notes, categories, while they are artificial constructs, are necessary tools for analysis and understanding. By evaluating and disassembling those designative labels that we have taken for granted, the “new synthetic efforts,”⁹ formed out of new readings of the documents of Late Antiquity will offer better, less limited insights into the worldviews of the time period.

Following in the footsteps of Robinson and Koester, I will examine the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* from Nag Hammadi in light of a variety of literary, historical and religious trajectories. The text is an example of the overlap of categorizations, demonstrative of apocalyptic, Sethian, and therefore gnostic, literary traditions, falling as it does within various traditions and speculations surrounding the High Priest, Melchizedek, and illustrative of socio-political, cultural and theological concerns drawn from an Egyptian milieu. Despite its issues having to do with the condition of the text – and there are many – *Melchizedek* is demonstrative of the manner in which such trajectories run parallel, converge and diverge, adopting earlier traditions and presenting innovations of literary form and ideological imaginings.

⁸ Koester, “Conclusion,” 272.

⁹ Robinson, “Kerygma and History in the New Testament,” in *Trajectories*, 20.

I have divided the thesis into two parts, representative of the temporally parallel and frequently over-lapping traditions, categorizations and contexts. Part 1 contains the elements of my discussion having to do with geographical context and the Sethian literary trajectory.

In 1.1 the issues or crises of categorization discussed by Robinson and Koester are examined as they apply specifically to the designation “gnostic.” Through my discussion of three theoretical approaches to the myriad concerns raised by the appellation – those of Michael Allen Williams, Karen L. King and Carl B. Smith – I will navigate the most significant problems and contribute to the discussion, clarifying my position along the way, and introducing the term “Sethian” as the descriptor I will use for the body of literature to which the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* belongs, while attempting to avoid the use of the terms “gnostic” and “gnosticism” altogether. The text will ultimately be employed as a test case for the strengths and weaknesses of the positions regarding the use of the term gnosticism, and the suggested sub-categorizations such as Sethian and Valentinian, as well as Smith’s theories regarding gnostic origins.

Having discussed the larger literary categorization and trajectory of traditions and writings considered gnostic, I look at the characteristics and texts specific to the subcategory Sethianism in 1.2, as it is the designation in the reevaluated categorizations that best fits the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*. I present the literary trajectory, as I perceive it, based in similarities of motif and underlying belief systems, while noting the diversity of the categorization.

In keeping with Smith’s insistence upon the importance of determining historical and geographical origins, and due to such things as the incorporation of Hellenistic philosophical elements in keeping with similar examples found in the writings of Philo, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria, in 1.3. I examine the Egyptian context of the early centuries of the Common Era, investigating the dynamic historical, literary and religious milieu from which the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* originated. The monastic movements of the third to fifth centuries CE are examples of the variety of belief and practice within

Christianity, and demonstrative of the complexities surrounding the study of the religions of Egypt in Late Antiquity.

Part 2 is composed of a discussion of the apocalyptic literary trajectory, and the trajectory of the traditions of Melchizedek speculations, leading into my close examination of the text itself. 2.1. looks at apocalyptic literature, establishing defining characteristics and forms and providing a survey of some of the key texts in the trajectory. These include documents and traditions drawn from Jewish, Christian and Sethian literature, and illustrate innovations pertaining to time and environment, as well as tension with the larger culture or religion.

2.2. traces the trajectory of literature pertaining to the traditions of Melchizedek speculation in Judaism, Christianity and Sethian gnosticism, and the suggestion of a group (or groups) of Melchizedekians, as described in some anti-gnostic polemics, as a possible source for *Melchizedek*. The traditions discussed are demonstrative of the development and variations of the character over time, leading to his starring role in the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*.

2.3. is my analysis and exegesis of the text of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, including the key elements associated with its apocalyptic, and Sethian natures, along with its use of the character Melchizedek, and any clues regarding the possible influence of a specific compositional environment, concluding with a discursive evaluation of the influences of the presented categories, traditions, trajectories and contexts.

Part 3 presents my conclusions, illustrating the manner in which *Melchizedek* answers questions raised in the previous chapters, and places the text into its context of trajectories, and again returning to the issues of categorization. I hope to demonstrate the links between Jewish apocalyptic literature, Christianity and gnosticism, presenting thematic continuities despite such things as the negativity of the demiurge as it is presented in some Sethian systems.

Finally, included in the Appendix is an English version of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, based on the Coptic facsimile edition and transcriptions, the reconstructions and translations of Birger Pearson, in English, and Jean-Pierre Mahé, in French. It is included for the ease of the reader in referencing the test case and to clearly demonstrate the extent of the damage to the text.

My examination will be cross-cultural, taking into account Ancient Near Eastern, including Hebrew and Egyptian, antecedents and Hellenistic philosophical elements that speak to possible influence. While my method is primary historical-critical, I will employ elements of literary and socio-rhetorical analysis, along with aspects of textual criticism and codicology. My assessment of the text will be comprised of an analysis of relevant foundational material alongside a new socio-religious look at the Coptic *Melchizedek*.

Although often challenged, I believe that the historical-critical method remains a viable one, particularly when combined with other analytical tools such as literary criticism and models derived from the social sciences. In his essay on historical-critical approaches to biblical interpretation, John Barton discusses some of the problematic elements of the methodology. He specifically mentions the issues surrounding genetic questions and the focus on the origin of a document over its nature along with the supposed “neutrality” of the historian. Barton addresses such problems in the context of post-modern criticisms of the historical-critical method as a legacy of the Enlightenment with all its Western-centred prejudices and perspectives. Like Wendy Doniger, I would argue that we need not “throw the baby out with the bathwater.”¹⁰ Similarly, Barton’s response to critiques of the method lies in a call for both “diachronic and synchronic issues [being] handled in a spirit of criticism [and] asking questions that present themselves to intelligent and inquiring minds.”¹¹ As such, the methodology remains viable as long as the “canonization” of particular approaches is avoided. He also

¹⁰ W. Doniger in K. Patton and B. Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000), 63-74.

¹¹ J. Barton “Historical-Critical Approaches,” in J. Barton ed., *The Cambridge Guide to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1998), 9-20, esp. 19.

emphasizes that until recently much of what is called literary criticism was in fact diachronic in nature, indicative of the potential for overlap between the two methods. David Jasper concurs that “reading the Bible (and other ancient literature) will never be an easy task, and its peculiar relationship with our complex cultural and religious histories will always claim the necessary attention of scholars whose investigations demand the skills of the historian, the philologist and the theologian”.¹² It is then possible to transcend some of the boundaries of critical methodologies and attempt a more comprehensive reading of biblical, and by extension, other non-canonical writings of late Antiquity.

For me, this transcendence of traditional boundaries also includes the implicit use of social-scientific models, specifically Bruce Malina’s “grid/group” model. Following the anthropological methodology of Mary Douglas, Malina developed the model in order to illustrate the degree of social adherence of symbols and pressure exerted to conform. Under these specifications, the Jews and Christians of the early centuries CE fall under the strong group/low grid designation, indicative of a high pressure to conform to societal standards and low degree of correspondence between experience and expectation.¹³ Since much apocalyptic and gnostic literature can be interpreted as being reflective of dissatisfaction with the temporal social order, such models can aid in determination of the social and historical context.

Additionally, I will look to the other evidence of so-called Sethian and other texts, described as gnostic, Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions, and the Egyptian context of the Nag Hammadi Library, in particular the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*. This will include a look at the monastic tradition in the early Christian centuries in Egypt, the role of the High Priest in Jewish, Christian and Egyptian contexts and the possible influence of the known syncretism found in the city of Alexandria.¹⁴ As Robinson points

¹² D. Jasper “Literary Readings of the Bible,” in Barton ed., *The Cambridge Guide to Biblical Interpretation*, 21-34, esp. 31.

¹³ See B. Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta, 1986), 13-15.

¹⁴ On the categorizations of early Christianities see Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago and London, 1990).

out, new discoveries, like the one at Nag Hammadi, act as “missing links” and necessitate the reevaluation of existing categories and the development of new conceptualizations that demonstrate the inadequacies of the old.¹⁵ As one of the rediscovered links in the chain, *Melchizedek* can aid in the understanding of the varieties of ideologies and religious communities of Late Antiquity.

¹⁵ Robinson, “Kerygma and History in the New Testament,” in *Trajectories*, 67.

PART 1

1.1. “GNOSTICISM”: AN ISSUE OF DEFINITION AND CATEGORY

1.1.1. INTRODUCTION

As mentioned above, the study of texts and religious movements in Late Antiquity has become problematic, due in part to the inadequacy of commonly employed categories as heuristic tools. Since the traditional categorizations often presented differing types of texts as being from static “backgrounds” or as belonging to a movement that was defined as the opposite of something else, they have ceased to provide meaningful frameworks from which to study and evaluate the documents associated with the Judaism and Christianity of the time period. In *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* Robinson and Koester suggest the reevaluation and reconstruction of categories to better reflect the dynamism of the early centuries of the Common Era, and the convergence and divergence of different tradition and literary trajectories. One important example of these issues of categorization can be seen in the use of gnosticism as the descriptor of a “religious movement” or ideology, characterized by a specific body of texts and as identified by early Christian polemicists.

Since the late nineteenth century, the problem of how to define what it means to be gnostic has created contention within the study of early Christianity. Here at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the issue remains unsolved and continually debated. At the heart of the on-going discussion lies the question of the applicability of a narrow or broad definition, the first that sees no conclusive evidence of a pre-Christian gnosticism and the second that attempts to include the New Testament and other traditional literature within the designation. Adherence to the broader definition tends to be centered within German scholarship and is reflected in the works of Rudolf Bultmann, Kurt Rudolph and Hans Jonas, while American scholars such as Michael Williams and Bentley Layton embrace the narrow view. Within the broad categorization are two sub-

designations that further cloud the issue. The literature in question can be viewed as either “pre-gnostic,” containing disparate elements that existed in pre-Christian times and were later incorporated into “classical” gnosticism, or “proto-gnostic,” fully formed early examples that preceded and influenced the fully developed second century gnosticism like that attributed to Valentinus and his school.

From such issues of definition, issues of genre logically follow. There appear to be as many paradigms as there are scholars, a problem also found in discussions of apocalyptic literature, as can be seen in examples from Edwin Yamauchi’s *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (1973). At one end of the spectrum lies Theo P. van Baaren’s assumption of sixteen characteristics necessary in the designation gnostic.¹ The first of these, that “gnosis considered knowledge is not primarily intellectual, but is based upon revelation and is necessary for the attainment of full salvation,”² can be seen in examples of gnostic texts that offer revealed wisdom and the knowledge necessary for redemption, according to a gnostic conceptualization of salvation.³

At the other end of the academic divide lie Jonas and his insistence that the presence of a radical, ontological dualism and a divine tragedy is *the* essential characteristic.⁴ Additionally, gnostic writings cross boundaries of style and form, found as poetry, treatises, revelations, instructional guides and “gospels.” Such examples are generally taken on a case-by-case basis, examining the genre of a particular document with thought given to its audience and intention. My work will include such a case study as I place the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* into the Jewish and Christian apocalyptic, and Sethian trajectories, along with Melchizedek traditions while determining its *Sitz im*

¹ T. P. van Baaren, “Towards a Definition of Gnosticism,” in U. Bianchi ed., *The Origins of Gnosticism : The Colloquium of Messina 13-18 April 1966* (Studies in the History of Religion Supplements to Numen 12; Leiden, 1967), 178-180.

² E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1973), 14.

³ Cf. the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Apocryphon of John* and *Melchizedek* for example.

⁴ H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, second edition (Boston, 1991).

Leben in the historical and social environment of Egypt, its assumed place of composition.

Three works in particular speak to these issues, and contribute to the overall discussion of gnostic definitions and origins, and the importance of the issues in the larger study of Judaism, Christianity and the literary trajectories of the early centuries CE. Michael A. Williams presents a strong argument for a complete reevaluation and overhaul of the categorization, providing a comprehensive overall examination of the problems and proposing a solution.⁵ In her own words, Karen L. King “aims to contribute to the larger enterprise of rewriting the history of Christianity by examining how modern historiography came to invent a new religion, Gnosticism, largely out of early Christian polemics intersecting with post-Enlightenment historicism, colonialism, and existential phenomenology.”⁶ Carl B. Smith presents his own take on the questions, responding to Williams and King and others, and submits his theory as to the necessity of establishing the temporal, geographical and historical contexts of gnostic origins.⁷ These studies have provided, in large part, the starting point for my own discussion in which I will test the viability of some of the theories presented, while using Robinson and Koester’s trajectories theory for my use of *Melchizedek* as a case study.

1.1.2. MICHAEL A. WILLIAMS’ *RETHINKING “GNOSTICISM”*: AN ARGUMENT FOR DISMANTLING A DUBIOUS CATEGORY

William’s 1996 book is reflective of a particular analytic trend in the study of gnosticism and its place in early Christianity and religion in Late Antiquity. Included within the group that subscribes to this perspective are PHEME PERKINS, JOHN D. TURNER, ELAINE PAGELS, BIRGER PEARSON and KAREN KING, members of the American school that suggests a narrower definition of gnosticism. Like these other scholars, Williams

⁵ M. A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, N.J., 1996).

⁶ K. L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2003), viii.

⁷ C. B. Smith, *No Longer Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins* (Peabody, Mass., 2004).

believes that gnosticism as a modern category is too inclusive for analytic clarity and viability. Over the course of *Rethinking "Gnosticism"* he suggests alternate categorizations that may serve to aid in the analysis of gnostic texts and the polemical writings of the early church fathers, and in determining the existence of the often-hypothetical communities that produced the bodies of literature. His work provides a valuable introduction to the major issues of definition as Williams sees them, with his discussion of the difficulties associated with the categorization and typology placing him firmly within a specific continuity of theory as a representative of the extreme end of the spectrum that would define gnosticism narrowly. In a nutshell, and self-evident from his sub-title, Williams is suggesting the abolition of the category entirely, claiming that by encompassing everything, the description has ceased to define anything.⁸ He maintains that gnosticism as a modern category is far too inclusive and not generally representative of either the self-definition of the compositional communities or of a cohesive typology.

In general, I tend to agree with the larger points regarding the over-inclusive nature of the modern categorization. Williams' methodology is similar to my own, being historical and text-critical, as well as socio-political and comparative. His theories are illustrative of the complexities of the discussions surrounding the issue of categorization, demonstrating that even such designations as "narrow" or "broad" are not that useful. The differences between such groups as the Sethians, the works of Valentinus, the two Valentinian schools, and the Hermetica, for example, preclude such a generalized modern category as has come to be widely applied. As such, Williams' question, regarding the viability of the categorization of so-called gnostic texts and communities into alternate groupings,⁹ has direct relevance in my work.

His outlining of two basic strategies is helpful in setting the scene as it pertains to issues of definition, and establishes the main focus of the book. One strategy is based in self-definition, or an internal group's identification of themselves; and the other is a typological or phenomenological approach, an external and intentional construction of

⁸ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 3.

⁹ For example, Williams suggests "biblical demiurgical traditions" as an alternate category. See Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 266.

groupings. He stresses the importance of both, noting that while self-definition is a necessary component, “insiders may be ignorant of, or may intentionally ignore or underestimate, either genuine continuities or significant differences between themselves and others.”¹⁰

Williams suggests that both strategies have been applied to the study of gnosticism but that neither goes far enough. What began as a designation for specific early Christian heresies, the Valentinians and Basilideans for example, has been stretched to accommodate all groups and literature with specific doctrinal similarities regardless of the self-designation of the originating groups. This leaves unexplored the potential of “gnosis” outside of pre-Christianity, the “gnostic religion” suggested by Jonas, or the evidences of specifically Jewish origins for many of the Sethian texts (see below 1.2.).

The use of the two strategies in modern scholarly treatment has become problematic in and of itself. In answer to this, Williams suggests that gnosticism is no longer a viable organizing category. While the strategic methods remain valid, Williams suggests “neither approach should have led us to the category ‘gnosticism.’”¹¹ By examining the two strategies and suggesting an alternative, Williams offers support for his position regarding the “dismantling” of the category.

In the beginning of his approach to this method of categorization, Williams explains the difference between self-definition and self-designation. Self-definition involves more than just labeling; it is in fact a symbolic self-understanding as opposed to the imposed labeling inherent in designation. To illustrate this, Williams uses the example of Paul. His self-definition would not have been “Christian” as a seventh-century Christian would define the term. In this same vein, no gnostic writers used the label γνωστικός, less of an issue before the discovery of the Nag Hammadi documents in 1945.

¹⁰ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 30.

¹¹ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 31.

With more, clearer, evidence to hand, the problems associated with the lack of gnostic self-labeling have become more pronounced. Additionally, other self-designations are present in the literature, with writers self-referencing as Christians, pneumatics, and the progeny of Seth, etc. This lack of the self-designation gnostic rightly leads to questions as to the widespread use of the term and its importance in the social context of the time.¹²

Rather, the designation was applied by the Christian heresiologists who made claims as to such incidences of self-definition by the heretics they spoke against. Irenaeus (c. 180 CE) was the forefather of this (seemingly) erroneously applied self-designation. In his *Exposure and Refutation of Knowledge Falsely So-Called*, Irenaeus was the originator of the implied self-designation of οἱ γνωστικοί, those “falsely called gnostics.”¹³ In his work he describes a gnostic sect that influenced the relatively Christian character of Valentinus’ school, but his designation is ambiguous due to its overuse. Irenaeus labeled most of the groups he spoke against as “gnostic” in a way of generalizing all heretics.

Williams notes Norbert Brox’s suggestion that there was a sect of “true” gnostics, but that all “heretics” came to be described under that designation due to the influence of Irenaeus.¹⁴ It can be asserted that the heresiologist was not in a position to definitively “know” anything regarding any group’s self-definition. There is no evidence that his examples were derived from anything other than his own observances and from hearsay. If Brox is correct in his assertions that γνωστικός as a term is equated with “heretic,” then there is no support available for the application of the term as a self-designated descriptive term.

¹² See the survey of P.-H. Poirier, “Comment les gnostiques se sont-ils appelés? Comment doit-on les appeler aujourd’hui?,” *Studies in Religion* 33 (2004), 209-216.

¹³ *Adversus Haereses* 1.11 reads “the first of them, Valentinus, who adapted the principles of the heresy called Gnostic to the peculiar character of his own school...” (translation taken from *Early Church Fathers: Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, at <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/TOC.html>). The Greek term *hairesis* that Williams translates as “sect” is more accurate and less “loaded” or negative in its implication.

¹⁴ N. Brox, “Γνωστικοί als häresiologischer Terminus,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 57 (1966), 105-114, esp. 108, 111-112.

Similarly, Hippolytus' early third century *Refutation of all the Sects* suggests two groups that are self-defined as gnostic, following Irenaeus' use of the term. The first, the "Naassenes" or "Serpentists," are connected with the Sethians through their posited literature and alleged self-designation.¹⁵ They considered themselves to have been Christian and "the designation *gnostikoi* refers to a quality that they as Christians valued (openness to knowledge) rather than to a religious identity different from being Christian."¹⁶ The followers of the "Gnostic Justin" (as distinguished from Justin Martyr) are likewise ambiguously labeled and have ties to the previously mentioned Naassenes.¹⁷ Even supposing that the above-mentioned groups can be differentiated and accurately designated gnostic, Williams suggests that they still represent a very small selection of the groups that fall under the modern categorization.

In his examination of the polemical attacks produced by the early church Fathers as a tool for the eradication of perceived heresy, Williams repeatedly uses such adjectives as "vague," "alleged" and "ambiguous."¹⁸ This is, of course, strongly indicative of his position. Through his further examination of Epiphanius, Tertullian, Clement and Origen he concludes that the employment of gnostic as a term of self-designation is not supported by the evidence, either primary, the texts themselves, or secondary, the writings of the heresiologists. His main point consists of the question as to whether we can know anything definitively regarding the issue of self-designation from the polemical sources. Using the example of Layton's organizational structure in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (1995), Williams argues that "the criterion is *not* in actuality the self-designation 'gnostic' but rather the social-historical continuity based primarily on supposed theological similarity."¹⁹ As such, Williams is stating that he believes in

¹⁵ Cf. the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Apocryphon of John* for example, in which the figure of Naas, the serpent, plays a pivotal role in the foundational mythologies of this Sethian gnostic group.

¹⁶ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 38.

¹⁷ Naas is assumed to have been a featured and important character in Justin's *Baruch*, which is presently lost.

¹⁸ Cf. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 36, 38-40.

¹⁹ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 43. Cf. B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Garden City, N.Y., 1995), especially the general introduction, xv to xxxiii.

categorization according to connections and continuities, but not those based in an ill-defined supposition of self-designation.

Williams states unequivocally that gnosticism as a typological construct is modern. Although it can be traced back to Irenaeus' catalogue of heresies, this categorization "was not itself really constructed for the purpose of grouping together examples of religious thought and practice on the basis of phenomenological similarity. Rather what all the items on Irenaeus' list share in common is deficiency (in his judgement) with respect to Truth."²⁰ Since Irenaeus' first intent was the search for "heresy" rather than "gnosticism," Williams believes that any modern definition should not depend on the heresiologist's categorization.²¹ This, as much as anything, has led to the lack of clarity in the classification of gnosticism. Williams sees this, the inviability of traditional categorization, as the fundamental flaw that has created a lack of scholarly consensus and the unreliability of the designation in contributing to the study of religion in late antiquity.

He also adds that the modern term gnosticism dates from the eighteenth century, and that "gnosis" and "gnostic" have ancient equivalents, though neither term was used specifically as a categorization in antiquity. Likewise, Greek words like *christianos* (Christian), *christianaios* (Christian- adjective), and *christianismos* (Christianity), appeared in ancient literature within a few generations of the time of Jesus.²²

With regards to gnostic hermeneutics, Williams stresses the fact that a large majority of specialists still follow H. E. W. Turner's old assertion that gnostic scriptural interpretation is largely one of eisegesis, that is "the importation of meanings derived from other sources into the Biblical record rather than the patient elucidation of the content of particular passages in the light of their immediate context within the

²⁰ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 44.

²¹ See below 1.4 for Smith's argument regarding the importance of the heresiologies in determining origins and categorizations.

²² Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 7.

framework of the teachings of the Bible as a whole.”²³ Put another way, the interpretation of biblical texts and themes can be described as “protest exegesis,” as suggested by Rudolph and Jonas, representative of “social protest on the part of certain disaffected or socially marginalized groups.”²⁴ This “inverse exegesis” can be seen as the systematic reversal of accepted interpretations of the bible.²⁵

The key problem with this envisioning lies in the reality that there are no patterns of consistent reversals of scriptural interpretation. Williams cites examples of the diversity of hermeneutical approaches taken by gnostic authors as categorized by Peter Nagel, Giovanni Filoramo and Claudio Gianotto, and Birger Pearson.²⁶ Pearson, for example, divides the gnostic use and interpretation of Jewish scripture into three categories, those texts with either a negative, positive or intermediate stance, with the last being the most common.

Williams also comments upon theories suggesting that gnosticism represents a secularization or Hellenization of early Christianity, along with the perceived parasitical nature of gnosis, with its borrowing and reinterpretation of Jewish scriptures and traditions. For Gedaliahu Stroumsa, gnosticism can be likened to a “virus,” one that produces mutations and is more than simply a Christian sect, but less than a distinct religion itself.²⁷ Williams suggests that such metaphors are unsuitable as they suggest an external attack on an established entity. Rather, the innovations of the gnostic authors came from *within* the religions in question (whether it be Judaism or Christianity), at least according to the author’s self-understanding. He suggests the example of the Valentinian

²³ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 54. Cf. H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study of the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: Moberly, 1954), 186.

²⁴ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 55. Cf. K. Rudolph, *Gnosis* (San Francisco, 1987), 216-223, and Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 91-92, 95.

²⁵ Of course, the “accepted” interpretations are only “reversed” to modern readers. To the authors and their audiences such interpretations were most likely seen as “restored,” that is the *true* interpretation. It is, after all, a matter of perspective.

²⁶ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 57-59. Cf. P. Nagel, “Die Auslegung der Paradieserzählung in der Gnosis,” in K.-W. Tröger (ed.), *Altes Testament, Frühjudentum, Gnosis: Neue Studien zu “Gnosis und Bibel”* (Gütersloh, 1980), 49-70, esp. 52-70; G. Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* (Oxford, 1990), 94; G. Filoramo and C. Gianotto, “L’interpretazione gnostica,” *Augustinianum* 22 (1982), 60-62; B. A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis, 1990), 37.

²⁷ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 81-82. Cf. Stroumsa *Savoir et salut* (Paris, 1992), 11.

Ptolemy as an illustration of this, pointing out that the theology found in Ptolemy's writings represents a synthesis of the heritage of Judaism, the early Jesus movement and the central tenets of Hellenistic-Roman cultural tradition.²⁸

Williams offers further examples of this suggestion of syncretism in his discussion of the anticosmic world-rejection found in some gnostic systems. Here he cautions about the danger in drawing conclusions about social reality based on mythological symbol. For example, Hans Kippenberg posited a direct reflection of the realities of political power as presented in the structure of the pleroma or assemblage of archons, and therefore representative of a critique of the Roman Empire.²⁹ The problems that Williams sees with this conclusion lie in the lack of common dualistic doctrine, creator or cosmology. He further cites evidence suggesting that those who produced or were influenced by and attracted to anticosmic or demiurgical mythologies may have in fact felt "*less* tension with their sociopolitical environment than was the case with some of their more 'orthodox' critics." "The evidence can be grouped into three broad categories: (a) general level of social interaction and involvement; (b) degree of sociopolitical deviance; and (c) attempts to reduce cultural distance."³⁰

Further cautions are required within this discussion. Thus, for example, the interpretation of the phenomena described by the polemicists as clues pointing to social deviance is legitimate "only if we think of Judaism and Christianity as the norm."³¹ Additionally, Williams points out that there is evidence that the alleged gnostics described as "world-rejecting" actually had a relatively high level of involvement with Greco-Roman society, and were in fact "attempting to reduce tension with the social, cultural and even political environment, an attempt for which they are frequently criticized by ancient heresiologists who then turn out to be the real world-rejecters,

²⁸ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 85.

²⁹ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 98. Cf. Hans Kippenberg, "Versuch einer soziologischen Verortung des antiken Gnostizismus," *Numen* 17 (1970), 211-231, esp. 219.

³⁰ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 101. See below chapter 2, for comparable arguments regarding the authorship of apocalyptic literature.

³¹ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 103.

insisting upon a much sharper self-definition over against late antique culture, society, and political pressure.”³²

Another characteristic usually associated with gnosticism in attempting to define the term involves the perceived anticosmic hatred of the body that leads to either the asceticism or libertinism that the various gnostics were charged with. Williams sees this ascribed characteristic as “a rather empty and useless cliché... [that] reveals very little and... conceals very much that might otherwise be understood about perceptions of body and soul among the men and women under study here.”³³

In fact, the libertine gnostics are difficult to locate in antiquity outside of the polemics that condemn them as such, alleged evidence that is decidedly suspect. Ethical exhortations in the polemics critique the deterministic nature of gnosticism, like that seen in the examples of advocacy of fixed identity and destiny as described by the Valentinians.³⁴ But in this, as in other criticisms, the heresiological portrayal is not accurate when viewed in light of the original sources (see below for Smith’s arguments *against* the usefulness of the original sources).³⁵ Pagels pointed out that the difference between the “castes” was a temporary state. The psychicals were ultimately expected to join the pneumatics in the perfection of the pleroma once achieving the gnosis of the ineffable Father. Rudolph further stressed that most gnostic systems did not contain a theology of salvation by nature, but rather there would be no redemption without ethical achievement.³⁶

³² Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 108. See below 4.6 for monastic examples of orthodox worldviews that are perceived as world rejecting.

³³ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 138.

³⁴ Under attack is the Valentinian motif of the three elemental natures of humanity: the pneumatic (mind) psychical (soul) and material (flesh/body); as well as the Sethian proclivity toward separatism in the self-descriptors “immovable race,” “undominate race,” and “the race of Seth.”

³⁵ In *Sin in Valentinianism* (Atlanta, 1990), Michel Desjardins illustrates the problems with the traditional view that the Valentinians thought of themselves as belonging to the highest rank in a threefold caste system, when, in fact, sin was treated very similarly as it was in the Pauline Epistles of the New Testament.

³⁶ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 192. Cf. E. Pagels, “Conflicting Versions of Valentinian Eschatology: Irenaeus’ Treatise vs. The Excerpts of Theodotus,” *Harvard Theological Review* 67 (1974), 35-53; Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 117-118.

Ultimately, Williams sees the debates surrounding the origins of gnosticism as being at an impasse because the categorization is flawed. While the origins of specific traditions may be identifiable (Valentinianism, Sethianism), scholars are not going to find a single identifiable source as the many mythoi of gnosticism emerged from multiple innovations.³⁷ That these multiple innovations are known from documents about which there is little scholarly consensus further heightens the problem. There remains no consensus as to the *Sitz im Leben* of the Nag Hammadi documents, and they are seen variably as the secret library of an Egyptian gnostic sect, the possessions of a gnostic group of early Christian monastics, a library of unorthodox writings used as ammunition by heresiologists, and a collection of irrelevant writings, among other disparate conclusions.³⁸

Williams also dismisses two other scholarly constructs. He sees Save-Soderbergh's thesis as unlikely, and suggests that the Nag Hammadi corpus was "produced for more definitive purposes than Scholten allows, with individual tractates serving specific functions within the books, rather than simply being randomly collected as reading material."³⁹ While Wisse's thesis is consistent with his own perspective, Williams still sees it as too vague. For Williams "everything... points to fourth-century Egyptian Christian monks," with each work interpreted in terms of its own function in relation to others in the codex.⁴⁰ Further, the producers of the majority of the texts "seem to have been persons (1) who accepted the biblical demiurgical proposition that the cosmos was not created as a result of the initiative of the highest God, (2) who were intensely interested in speculation about the true nature of divinity and the supracosmic realms, (3) who were focused on the soul's eventual transcendence of the created order

³⁷ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 231.

³⁸ These include the contentions that the texts may have been owned (1) by a gnostic sect or individual, but not one easily identifiable as Valentinian or Sethian (Martin Krause); (2) by Christian monks with unorthodox views before the enforced orthodoxy in monastic communities and the suppressing of heretical literature (Frederik Wisse); (3) by orthodox Christian monks to combat their heretical teachings (Torgny Save-Soderbergh); and (4) by orthodox monks who owned a diverse collection of reading matter that they stored, but didn't necessarily read (Clemens Scholten).

³⁹ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 260.

⁴⁰ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 261.

and on patterns of spirituality that would contribute to this goal, and (4) who saw nothing un-Christian in these views.”⁴¹

Additionally, the texts are great examples of an evolving trajectory of writing, redacting and recycling religious innovations in which religious and sociological “failures” created “fresh opportunity and inviting leftover material for the next round of innovators.”⁴²

With all this said and examined, Williams insists that the solution to the problem lies in the creation of more categories. He sees this as necessary in maintaining the relationships and connections while establishing the differences to be found within the designation gnostic. For example, he suggests “Valentinianism” as one possibility, grouping all those texts that can be traced to the school and person of Valentinus. Another example he offers is that of the category of “biblical demiurgical tradition,” a designation that would include all those traditions that feature a distinct lower creator and biblical figures as characters in the mythological dramas.

This would lead to a narrowing of categories that would resolve the paradigmatic problem of caricatures and clichés.⁴³ Contrary to Jonas’ belief in a gnostic religion, Williams sees the gnostic texts as originating from a variety of religious movements. He believes that they should be read as such and not forced into an imposed and inaccurate categorization. Using the wide-reaching examples of Manichaeism and the Hermetica, Williams demonstrated the lack of usefulness of the current description gnostic. Moreover, the picture of gnostics as revolutionary, world-rejecting, parasitic body-haters is an inappropriate one. This view fails to capture anything essential or characteristic in those texts and traditions that the terms purport to describe or include. On this point especially I agree with Williams’ analysis. Ultimately, a new model is necessary, and Williams suggests that the biblical demiurgical myth as a categorization would “cut free

⁴¹ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 261-262.

⁴² Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 262.

⁴³ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 52.

from baggage surrounding the old one,” and would “be a simple typology for organizing several religious innovations and new religious movements. As a typology, it would of course not be the only way of organizing many of these sources... [but as b]iblical demiurgical myths entail distinctions in symbolic discourse that were evidently taken very seriously in ancient debates over cosmogony... it would apparently be a typological organization worth making.”⁴⁴

For the most part, I agree with Williams’ conclusions and suggestions for alternative categorizations, in particular the designations applied to similar texts. The larger over-arching category of the demiurgical tradition found in many of the documents, should then be further divided into groups determined by specific theological assertions, typified by such connections as a claim of elite status based on familial descent from Seth, or an affiliation with the ideas first expressed by Valentinus. The former, the ideology described as Sethian, provides an excellent alternative to gnosticism as a descriptive category and literary trajectory, one that I will use in my interpretation of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*. But does this restructuring go far enough? In *What is Gnosticism?*, Karen King suggests that it does not, and offers alternatives of her own.

1.1.3. KAREN L. KING’S *WHAT IS GNOSTICISM?*

King begins her discussion of the issues of definition and origin by acknowledging that there is presently no consensus as to the background, sources, origin and development of gnosticism, making it a problematic term in need of reevaluation. These problems have been compounded by the discovery of the texts at Nag Hammadi, as the previous definitions of the term have proven themselves inadequate to meaningfully explain the diverse worldviews found in the documents. She sees gnosticism as a “rhetorical term [that] has been confused with an historical entity.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 266.

⁴⁵ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 1.

This confusion has led to the current state of the discussions as to the definition of gnosticism, and its place in the history of the development of early Christianity and on the trajectories of Jewish and Christian literary traditions. She argues:

Some have responded to this challenge by turning away from definitional tasks altogether, at least for the time being. Gershom Scholem has summarized this general sentiment by pointing out that “research into the problems of gnosticism, which has entered a new phase in our generation, is still far removed from a state where valid generalizations can be established with any amount of confidence. This is largely due to the prevalence of hypotheses which rest on tenuous foundations. What is needed most, it seems to me, is the analysis of details on which such general conclusions could be built.” Indeed, generalizations must be based on detailed and disciplined studies of the primary materials in order to guard against superficiality, arbitrariness, and partiality. Until these studies have progressed further, it might be prudent to suspend the use of the term, along with the definitions and categories associated with it, since at this point, generalizations about Gnosticism seem counterproductive.⁴⁶

But I would contend that it is necessary to maintain categories as heuristic tools in examinations of the primary texts that King suggests are vital to maintaining the integrity of the dialogue. In order to preserve discursive potential, I see the continuing use of, at the very least, the smaller sub-categories, like those suggested by Williams, as important in the overall process of discovery. This belief can be seen in my continuing use of the term Sethian as a descriptor of a specific worldview, one that is crucial in my analysis and contextual location of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*.

One of the keys to the issue of definition is that gnosticism is generally defined in comparison with normative Christianity, the heretical “other” to the “orthodoxy.” It is, in a sense, a negative definition, those things that Christianity is not, as defined by the early Christian polemicists. This use of dualisms as a means of definition is common (Jew/Gentile, Christian/Pagan), as the “self” achieves identity through identifying the other, the heretical side of the coin. The negative self-definition is inadequate, but gnosticism is usually discussed in the context of the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy. Regardless of the problems associated with the term, King does not put gnosticism in

⁴⁶ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 2. Cf. Gershom Scholem, “Jaldabaoth Reconsidered,” in *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech* (Paris, 1974), 405-421, esp. 405.

quotes. Although it is an artificial construct, she argues that Judaism and Christianity are as much synthetic creations as gnosticism as a categorization, and still viable and useful terms in discourse.

While King is correct in her assertion that Christianity and Judaism are as much “created” or “artificial” terms as is “gnosticism,” the key difference, as I see it, lies in the lack of cohesion among many of the groups and worldviews collected under the latter, blanket term.

Although there are now, and were in late Antiquity, variations and innovations among specific, often geographically-based, examples of both Christianity and Judaism, they yet retained significant enough commonalities and few enough dramatic differences, that to compare them as categorizations with the far more nebulous label gnosticism, an artificial collective of often very disparate beliefs and one that is in no way representative of anything resembling a religion, is akin to comparing apples and oranges.

King suggests a three-fold definition of gnosticism, used historically as a pivotal element in discussions of normative Christian self-identification:

- 1) all varieties of early Christianity that have too little or a negative appropriation of Judaism;
- 2) the outside contamination of “pure” Christianity from either an independent religion or a deviation of Christianity;
- 3) those traditions closely related to this contaminated Christianity, such as Hermeticism, Sethianism etc.⁴⁷

The ubiquity of the term is one of its problems. Gnosticism has come to be connected with all kinds of seemingly unrelated things: Buddhism, Nihilism, Marxism, Jungian theory etc. Adding to the already clouded waters of definition and historical relevance, it has been adopted by contemporary movements, such as the Gnostic Church in Los Angeles, California.

⁴⁷ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 4.

So why is a definition so difficult to pin down? Like Williams, King discusses the fact that until the Nag Hammadi discoveries in 1945, information on the groups labeled with the term and its associated worldview came almost exclusively from the polemics of the early Church Fathers, the “enemies” of the gnostic perspective. Layton claims that the term was first used in 1669 by Henry More, and likely taken from Irenaeus’ *Adversus Haereses*, and his description of those with “false knowledge,” possessing “false prophecy,” or promoting “heresy.”⁴⁸ In the years of earliest Christianity, there were three larger categorizations of adherents: Jewish-Christians, Gnostics, and those followers of the orthodoxy. For the heresiologists, heresy had a single source in Satan, and their definition of the term was the one that has persisted through the centuries.

The Nag Hammadi texts presented new information, mostly in the form of myths, using ritual language and providing cosmological and theological speculations, but containing little sociological information regarding the groups or writers responsible for the documents. King sees this as a significant problem, especially since in her view,

determining how to write social history from myth is surely one of the thorniest issues in modern historiography. Although there is no direct relation between myth and social practice (that is, myths do not provide rules for behavior, let alone descriptions of actual behaviors), a cosmological myth, such as *The Apocryphon of John*, a work found in both the Berlin Codex and at Nag Hammadi, does provide a framework within which practices and choices can be oriented and made meaningful.⁴⁹

She does concede that “while there are decided limitations to using myth to describe social practices or construct group histories, it can be a fascinating indicator of how people were oriented toward certain behaviors, how those behaviors were conceptualized, and how patterns of meaning and belonging were constructed.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ B. Layton, “Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism,” in M. White and O. L. Yarbrough (eds.), *The Social World of the Early Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks* (Minneapolis, 1995), 334-350.

⁴⁹ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 10.

⁵⁰ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 11.

In contrast to King's perspective on the issue of whether or not there is any relation between myth and social practice as King has defined it, Ninian Smart discusses rituals based in myth, like Passover in Judaism, that re-enact important historical/mythological events, in *The Religious Experience*, and William E. Paden comments on the subject in *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion*. Paden suggests that mythologies are versions of history, telling the stories of origins, genealogies, lineages and culture-specific institutions, describing, among other things, "great events that founded *our* society," and that gods and rituals are directly related to myth, as "in traditional religion gods received their imagery from social categories," and "deities take on the value orientation of the society."⁵¹ I am inclined to subscribe to the latter two perspectives, and their belief in the interdependence of myth, ritual and descriptions of social practices. That such elemental aspects of the human condition could be created in separate vacuums seems unlikely.

Throughout the book, King examines existing theories of gnostic origins, describing essentialist and nominalist approaches to defining gnosticism, in particular the work of such scholars as Bentley Layton and Adolf von Harnack, including Harnack's list of the defining characteristics as they were presented by the heresiologists.⁵² She traces the history of the study of early Christianity as it moved out of the demesne of theology with the advent of the *Religionswissenschaft* and its scientific approach to the history of late antiquity.

Where Harnack posited that gnosticism was the "acute Hellenization of Christianity,"⁵³ the history of religions school saw the Orient, Iran, Babylonia and India, in particular, as the sources of pre-Christian gnosticism, a distinct religion unto itself. Using motif history, the origin and evolution of a specific symbol like the Son of Man, and the newly-discovered texts available to them, the members of the school classified

⁵¹ N. Smart, *The Religious Experience* (Upper Saddle River, N.J., 1996), 4-5, and W. E. Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion* (Boston, 2003), 33-34. There is evidence of this over-lap of myth and practice in *Melchizedek*, as will be seen below.

⁵² King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 62.

⁵³ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 62. Cf. A. von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. I (New York, 1961), 253.

the intellectual context of the “gnostic religion,” in accordance with contemporaneous discourses on cultural progress, ethnology, philology and colonialism.

Illustrating the diversity of theories that came out of the German school of thought as regards the nature and history of gnosticism, King outlines the arguments of Richard Reitzenstein, Rudolph Bultmann, Walter Bauer, Wilhelm Bousset and Hans Jonas. Bousset, for example, hypothesized that gnosticism predated Christianity and existed alongside it in its earliest formative years. He saw gnosticism as an oriental product, anti-Jewish and un-Hellenic, and offered a description of the basic nature and content of gnostic thought, including such elements as sharp dualism, radical pessimism, alienation and a theology of the alien god.⁵⁴

Bauer noted, in 1934, that Christianity was different in different places and times, an acknowledged truth, and went further by refusing the New Testament as the starting point for the history of early Christianity. Rather, Bauer saw the New Testament writings as having been written in support of Church doctrine, collected after the fact to further legitimize the establishing orthodoxy of belief and practice. Furthermore, he viewed the silence of the New Testament and the apostolic Fathers on particular geographical areas, especially Egypt and Edessa, very significant.⁵⁵ As such, and despite criticisms that his theories relied too much on silence as opposed to available information, King sees Bauer’s resulting alternative model of historiography as “one of the most important works in the history of Christianity in the twentieth century, and [one that] may well point the direction for early Christian historiography in the twenty-first.”⁵⁶ His theories of the variety with which he characterizes Christianity is widely taken as a theoretical “given” by historical-critical scholars.

⁵⁴ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 90-100. Cf. W. Bousset, “Gnosis, Gnostiker,” in A. F. Pauly and G. Wissowa (eds.), *Realencyclopädie der classischen Alterthumswissenschaft* VII.2 (1912), 1503-1546, reprinted in *Religionsgeschichtliche Studien: Aufsätze zur Religionsgeschichte des hellenistischen Zeitalters* (ed. A. F. Verheule; Leiden, 1979), 44-96.

⁵⁵ W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971), 16-17.

⁵⁶ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 114.

Jonas shifted the methodological study of gnosticism and early Christianity toward a typological or phenomenological approach, delimitating the characteristics of gnosticism as a means of explanation. Noting its dynamic character, he put forth his theory of seven primary and vital characteristics, with history remaining “important to his thinking, but ... viewed less diachronically than synchronically. Historical analysis in Jonas’ view primarily involved interpreting a phenomenon in its social and political context, not charting its linear evolution through time.”⁵⁷ His characteristics summarize the dynamism of gnosticism (see below, 1.2. for the comparable characteristics ascribed to Sethianism): gnosis, pathomorphic crisis, mythological character, dualism, impiety, artificiality and unique historical locus. Although he acknowledged the variety of traditions that served as sources for gnosticism as defined through his seven characteristics, Jonas saw the origins of gnosticism in a specific experience of the self and the world.⁵⁸

While he acknowledged that gnosis and Christianity were contemporaneous and responded to the same *Sitz im Leben*, Jonas did not focus on the relationship between the two. His evaluation of the “religion” maintained a negative perspective, in keeping with the writings of the polemicists. Gnosticism was the “other” to proper religious thought. And although the conceptualization of gnosticism as a distinct religion is no longer viable, through his work “scholars could perceive that its deepest religious impulses and feeling were rooted in existential alienation and revolt.”⁵⁹

King recognizes that regardless of the untenable nature of the theory, the tendency of the history of religions school was to accept the “pre-Christian gnostic redeemer myth as a given.”⁶⁰ With further examination, the dating of source material does not support a

⁵⁷ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 115. Despite his insistence on the unity of the “gnostic religion,” Jonas’ move away from the “motif-historical” approach of his historical-critical predecessors and his incorporation of methods drawn from philosophy, psychology and social history were indicative of the evolution of the study of gnosticism.

⁵⁸ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 115-141. Cf. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*; idem, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, 2 vols. (Göttingen, 1934-1954).

⁵⁹ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 135.

⁶⁰ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 137.

pre-Christian origin for gnosticism, the philological arguments for a motif-history were unsubstantial and the conclusion that the artificially constructed invention of modern scholarship, the myth of the gnostic redeemer, never existed in antiquity.⁶¹

Colpe, for example, identified philological errors in the construction of the myth, in particular the use of a Parthian hymn cycle by Reitzenstein, in which the subject was incorrectly identified as the soul, rather than humanity. He challenged the “redeemed redeemer” myth, acknowledging that the concept may have existed, but the term itself never appears in the source material. Rather, Colpe concluded that “the Jewish Son of Man and the Oriental soteriological myths belong to a common circle of thought — but they may not be resolved into a teleological or linear genealogy.”⁶² Colpe further attacked the validity of the motif-historical model, concluding that the sources we have say little to nothing about the beginnings and development of gnosticism.

Although he finds some areas in which to agree with Jonas, for the most part for Colpe there is no value in “determining whether Gnostic myths originated through reinterpretation of older myth... or by transforming older tradition through allegory, or even whether they had borrowed older materials or discovered new ones themselves... [w]e are dealing here not with influence... but with confluence: Gnosis is the product of a West-Oriental Zeitgeist.”⁶³ Colpe distinguished “Gnosis,” a human phenomenon, from “Gnosticism,” the historical localization of the phenomenon, pointing out that a “Gnostic attitude” can be present with or without a complex cosmology or salvation myth.

King uses Colpe as a clear example of how, in contributing to the critique of the modern categorization “Gnosticism,” scholars have created new problems with regard to assumed normative Christian origins. Through her discussion of the discourse surrounding the issues of the categorization, King demonstrates how the scholarship and

⁶¹ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 137-138.

⁶² King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 145. Cf. C. Colpe *Die Religionsgeschichtliche Schule: Darstellung und Kritik ihres Bildes vom gnostischen Erlösermythus* (Göttingen, 1961), 150.

⁶³ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 146-147. In my opinion, the transformation of older traditions is a key ingredient in the analysis and placement of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* (see below).

counter-scholarship further muddy the waters, and clearly presents the diversity of early Christian ideologies and interpretation along with the reality that Judaism and Christianity are inseparable from their historical and cultural environments.

Since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi corpus, King argues that as scholars we can no longer blame a lack of evidence for the problems in pinning down gnosticism, but rather that the texts and the varieties of cosmologies and theologies that they contain in fact highlight the issues. Among the texts are examples that demonstrate a clear link to the New Testament writings – the *Gospel of Thomas* for example – and knowledge of the early stages of the Jesus tradition, offering previously unknown possibly authentic sayings of Jesus. Furthermore, certain texts seem closely related to heresies as described by the early Christian polemicists, but with significant enough differences that they point to the specific agendas of the heresiologists. Such texts illustrate the need for a reevaluation of the polemicists as “historians” or accurate witnesses to the movements that subscribed to the worldviews, a reality that I see as an especially key argument for the overhaul of the category. Smith has a different perspective (see below).

Additionally, King points out that rather than more clearly drawing the line between heresy and orthodoxy, the Nag Hammadi documents have instead supported Bauer’s thesis that distinct varieties of Christianity developed according to geography. Orthodoxy and heresy were not fixed, and early Christian literature, and especially the Nag Hammadi corpus, offers many examples of the fluidity between the two in the similarities and overlaps to be found in both sides of the coin. As James M. Robinson points out in *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, there was not a clear central body of doctrine to distinguish the orthodox and the heretical, and “the terms *heresy* and *orthodoxy* are anachronistic.”⁶⁴ In the same work Helmut Koester suggests that the problem of defining gnosticism is inextricably linked with establishing the identity of Christianity.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Robinson, “Kerygma and History in the New Testament,” in *Trajectories*, 62, 69.

⁶⁵ Koester, “*Gnomai Diaphoroi*,” in *Trajectories*, 115-116.

In order to clarify an approach to the diversity of materials, King discusses the subcategories applied to the Nag Hammadi documents, Valentinian and Sethian being the most common examples. While there are similarities between the two systems, it is unclear as to their exact relationship. Both can be divided into a sociological grouping with a cohesive set of intellectual materials.⁶⁶ Valentinianism seems to be nominally more “Christian,” with a primary saviour-Christ and a partially positive creator. Sethianism contains many possible saviours: Seth, Melchizedek, Christ, but the creator is portrayed as arrogant, ignorant or evil.

Further subcategories include the Hermetica and the texts associated with Thomas Christianity. But what are they subcategories of? Gnosticism? Christianity? Are they distinct entities like Manichaeism or Mandaeism? How are they related to each other? And what of those texts that do not fit into any of the subcategories? Are they “generically gnostic”? Another mode of classification: Christian gnostic, Jewish gnostic and philosophical-pagan gnostic, does as little to clarify the issue as the other subcategories. And how effective can they be when, as King notes, “most summary definitions of Gnosticism continue to describe it as a Christian heresy?”⁶⁷

This is, of course, the core of the problem. Regardless of its ineffectuality, realistically the definitional problems of gnosticism are most associated with fitting new materials into old paradigms and “the impossibility of finding a single list of essential characteristics that adequately represent the enormous variety of the materials grouped under the terminological canopy of ‘Gnosticism.’”⁶⁸ The term remains stubbornly embedded in a specific association, an implicitly negative one at that. Again, while Kings’ points regarding the suggested sub-categories is well-taken, I suggest that as

⁶⁶ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 158. Cf. H.-M. Schenke, “Das Sethianische System nach Nag-Hammadi-Handschriften,” in P. Nagel (ed.), *Studia Coptica* (Berlin, 1974), 165-172, esp. 166-167, A. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Peabody, Mass., 1996); B. Layton (ed.), *Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978*, vol. II (Leiden, 1981).

⁶⁷ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 191. See also *ibid.*, 327, n. 1, for papers she presented on similar topics at SBL meetings.

⁶⁸ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 191.

specificity of language is necessary for comprehensive discussion, they represent the viable alternatives to the (mis)use of gnosticism as a category.

King continues her examination with an analysis of the common associated characteristics of gnosticism, namely, dualism, ethics, or asceticism and libertinism, and docetic Christology, as seen earlier in Williams' discussion. She then critiques Williams, allowing for the excellence of the study but suggesting that he does not propose adequate alternatives for the dismantled categorization. King sees him as "falling back into the old mold" as his use of "biblical demiurgical myth" as a category "privileges one mythic element over all others as the determinant characteristic."⁶⁹ She contends that he takes his lead from the polemicists regarding the importance of elements deserving of focus and emphasis. King disagrees, stating

that it is precisely by reinscribing the polemicists themes and discourses and privileging their perspectives that we distort the interpretation of the texts- and indeed are kept from a fuller and richer understanding of what the controversies were really about. The polemicists offer only one range of views; if we want to understand the views of their opponents, we have to take a different starting point.⁷⁰

Ultimately, King feels that while Williams exposes the shortcomings of existing typologies, he doesn't really offer a viable alternative framework.

Once again, while I see her point, in many cases, the "privileging" of specific elements or motifs she perceives, based in the polemicists' reviews of the systems and worldviews of the texts, is often an indicator of the most valuable starting point for analysis of the documents, based on their own merits or shortcomings. Even if Irenaeus emphasized Valentinus' use of an apparently dualistic anti-material system as an example of the *heretical*, and therefore *negative*, aspects of the worldview, Valentinus' anti-material discourse as a significant component of his writings is nonetheless a logical and

⁶⁹ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 215.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

legitimate place with which to begin an attempt at understanding the beliefs categorized as Valentinian.

So what is to happen? King thinks that eventually “Gnosticism” will be abandoned as a term. Since its framework is caught up in anti-Catholic Protestant polemics, anti-Judaism and colonial ideology, new paradigms are necessary. She suggests an alternative shift away from a search for origins to an analysis of practice, in addition to the reconception of religious identity and tradition through “continuity in difference,” which assumes no true beginning, as religions are not fixed entities, but rather ones that overlap, cross-fertilize and become syncretic hybrids.⁷¹ Instead, as historians we should analyze the processes by which such evolutions occur, rather than trying to

identify the “true” provenance of particular ideas, stories and practices, nor designat[ing] who “authentically” owns them. Historians have to ask who makes such claims, upon what are they based, and what purposes they serve... The pertinent historical question is not whether a tradition is pure or not, or who really owns it, but what are the resources being used to think with— whether literary or nonliterary “texts,” cultural codes, or discursive structures. What hermeneutical strategies are at work? What are the generative, rhetorically constructed problems being addressed and to what ends are they employed? Orienting analysis toward practice rather than origins significantly shifts the functions of historical-critical and literary methods.”⁷²

I have to agree with King’s suggestions as to the modification of the discipline of historical-critical analysis, and I will seek to answer her suggested questions in my examination of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, while attempting my own “abandonment” of the term. Still, I maintain that the examination of origins and context *can* and *does* inform our evaluations of the texts and worldviews being studied, regardless of theories suggesting “ownership” of ideas. Carl Smith would agree, at least insofar as questions of origins are concerned.

⁷¹ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 229.

⁷² King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 231.

1.1.4. CARL B. SMITH'S *NO LONGER JEWS*

In *No Longer Jews* Carl B. Smith takes a very different approach to the issue of defining gnosticism. In contrast to both Williams and King, Smith sees the search for origins as being *paramount* in the study and understanding of gnosticism. Right from the start he considers the etymology and primary meaning of gnosticism, and boils it down to the presence of salvation through special knowledge and an anticosmic dualism. He makes further generalizations, suggesting that “though Gnosticism includes a concept of ethical dualism (i.e., light versus darkness), as was common in the ancient world in Iranian, Jewish and Christian religions, the dualism unique to the gnostics identifies the spiritual realm of nature and the universe as morally good and the physical domain as evil, not merely less good as in various Platonic systems. The physical universe originated through a crisis in the realm of the divine and is the creative work of an evil demiurge.”⁷³

Smith sees three crucial issues in the search for gnostic origins: the religious and historical context, the geographical setting, and chronological development. With these in mind, he sees none of the traditionally posited starting places as the clear source for gnosticism.⁷⁴ He identifies gnosticism as a radical rejection of Judaism and the God of the Jews, equating Him with the evil demiurge found in some systems that began in the Jewish intellectual centers of North Africa, with its roots in the crisis of the Jewish revolt under Trajan (115-117 CE).⁷⁵

In stating this hypothesis, Smith briefly discusses some of the theories about these particular elements of the study of gnosticism, including those of Birger A. Pearson and Edwin Yamauchi, his advisor and mentor. He takes issue with Pearson and Friedlander and their acceptance of a pre-Christian gnosticism noting that “there is no clear evidence

⁷³ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 2.

⁷⁴ Among these traditional positions he includes Judaism and its scriptural traditions, early Christianity with its redeemer myth and the language and mythical elements of Platonism. See Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 2.

⁷⁵ Cf. B. Pearson, “Friedlander Revisited: Alexandrian Judaism and Gnostic Origins,” *Studia Philonica* 2 (1973), 23-39, reprinted in *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity* (1973), 10-28, R. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York, 1966), E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*. Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 3

presented as of yet that establishes the existence of a pre-Christian or even a first-century Gnosticism... Though certain elements in Jewish and Christian literature written before the second century CE bear some resemblance to gnostic themes, they do not present a Gnosticism characterized by anti-cosmic dualism.” This point is predicated on Smith’s belief that to be truly gnostic, as system must present a clear anti-cosmic dualism. While I agree that it is unlikely that those worldviews categorized as gnostic existed in any clear or developed way before the time period of the growth of Christianity, I don’t place as much emphasis on the primacy of anti-cosmic dualism as a characteristic of the systems being discussed.

As Egypt was the home of such “named” gnostics as Basilides, Carpocrates, Epiphanes and Valentinus, Smith agrees that Egypt was certainly the origin point of many strands/strains of gnosticism, but notes that the evidence we have from the Nag Hammadi corpus does not appear to predate the early second century. He cites both Robert Grant, who suggested the rise of gnosticism grew from the disappointed apocalypticism of the First Jewish revolt (66-74 CE), and Edwin Yamauchi, who followed Grant’s thinking but further hypothesized that the crisis within Judaism responsible for the collapse of apocalyptic expectations was the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135 CE). Grant later abandoned his hypothesis as the textual evidence has demonstrated that apocalypticism as a worldview persisted after the fall of the Second Temple, adapting and adjusting its conceptualization of messianism and the End of Days. Yamauchi, in placing gnostic origins at the end of Jewish apocalyptic hopes following the Bar Kokhba revolt, does allow for the possibility that there were earlier gnostic teachers in Egypt and Syria, suggesting that the ideas and cosmologies that would grow into gnosticism existed in nascent form before the defining crisis.

In positing the revolt under Trajan as an alternative, Smith suggests that gnosticism evolved out of the crisis in Cyrenaica and Egypt, so from the milieu of Jewish North Africa. Summing up his thesis, Smith writes:

The historical and literary evidence that we possess allows for the possibility, if not the probability, of the rise of Gnosticism in this temporal and geographical

environment. The Jewish population of Egypt was one of the largest and most intellectually active and religiously diverse of the Diaspora. Many of the currents present in Jewish circles may have influenced Gnosticism, including asceticism, allegorical interpretation, and apocalypticism. The language, though not necessarily the system, of Middle Platonic cosmogony is foundational to gnostic thought, and it is well known that Jewish intellectuals in Alexandria such as Philo were using Middle Platonic concepts in their theological and hermeneutical systems. Further, the history of Middle Platonism in the first century centers upon Alexandria as a geographical focal point. That a significant Christian population emerged from within the Jewish community of North Africa is certain, as hinted at in the NT and evidenced in writings such as *The Epistle of Barnabas*. What remains to be shown is how Gnosticism could have emerged in this context. Such is the argument of this study.⁷⁶

Smith first discusses the issues of definition of “gnosis” and “gnostic,” disagreeing with Williams and claiming that the terms were used as categories in antiquity,⁷⁷ and then goes on to outline the discourse regarding broad and narrow definitions and the theorists behind the perspectives.⁷⁸ As was seen in both Williams and King, Smith also separates and describes different types of dualism, from the ethical dualism concerned primarily with good and evil as found in particular at Qumran, to the eschatological or supernatural dualism that focused on the questions of this age versus the age to come, and the psychological or cosmic dualism that negatively juxtaposes the material/spiritual or body/soul. Smith sees gnostic dualism as originating with a preoccupation with the problem of evil in the world.⁷⁹ Generally though, he doesn’t see the problems associated with the use of the category as significant. Rather, he continues his usage of both gnostic and gnosticism without acknowledging the inherent ambiguities associated with the category.

⁷⁶ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 4-5.

⁷⁷ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 8. Cf. Morton Smith, “The History of the Term ‘Gnostikos’,” in Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 2:796-807, reprinted in *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh* (Leiden, 1996), 2:183-193; Layton, “Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism.”

⁷⁸ For example, he reiterates Birger A. Pearson’s summary of the features of gnosticism listing them as: (1) Gnosis; (2) Theology; (3) Cosmology; (4) Anthropology; (5) Eschatology; (6) Social; (7) Ritual; (8) Ethical; (9) Experimental; (10) Myth; and (11) Parasitical. See Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 11-12.

⁷⁹ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 15. Cf. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”*; G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden, 1984); J. E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen, 1985).

Smith's ultimate conclusions regarding the definition(s) of gnosticism suggest that such elements as anticosmic dualism and biblical demiurgy, while legitimate innovations of second-century gnosticism, break down as categorizations when faced with the problem of determining gnostic origins. Having said that, he further remarks that the multiplicity of proposals and paradigms should not render the quest for gnostic origins hopeless. "Rather, it testifies first to the syncretistic nature of Gnosticism, and second to the uniqueness of the innovation of its underlying myth... What may be determined is *a* ripe intellectual and historical (and perhaps geographical) context in which the innovation of Gnosticism could have occurred, resulting in the creative gnostic religion of the second century CE."⁸⁰

He then proceeds to outline the various theories regarding gnostic origins, beginning with the traditional assumption of gnosticism as a Christian heresy, an "aberration of apostolic Christianity," as first described by the heresiologists.⁸¹ Among the small group of scholars that holds to this view of gnosticism, Smith lists Alastair H. B. Logan, Simone Pétrement and Arthur Darby Nock, a group that can be (and has been) accused of "flying in the face of the primary evidence now available to scholarship."⁸² While Smith notes that the traditional arguments do not prove a Christian origin of gnosticism, he points out that they do raise further issues with regards to sources and chronology. "The caution raised is that historians of religion must not close their eyes to alternative reconstructions of gnostic origins, simply because those reconstructions coincide with traditional views that currently are out of vogue."⁸³

⁸⁰ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 18. This, of course, is in direct opposition to Robinson and Koester's insistence that contexts were not static not singular." See Robinson, "Dismantling and reassembling the Categories," in *Trajectories*, 13.

⁸¹ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 20.

⁸² B. A. Pearson, *The Emergence of the Christian Religion* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1997), 150. Logan, for example, does not believe that even the Sethian texts, those that seemingly evolved from a Jewish milieu (see below, 1.2.), can be understood apart from Christianity, and that the closest description we have of the original form of Christian gnostic mythology lies in Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereres* 1.29. See Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, xviii, xix, xx.

⁸³ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 24. He lends additional support to this point by noting that such "outdated" arguments can be used to dispute the potentiality of pre-Christian gnosticism noting that "If... Gnosticism was a significant threat to Christianity in its inception, why is there no polemic against it in its earliest writings?" and "Further, if as others claim, Gnosticism arose in a Jewish context in the pre-Christian era, why was there no first-century Jewish polemic against this radical position regarding the creator?" See

Secondly, Smith examines the theories associated with Iranian dualism as a starting point for the evolution of gnosticism, an assertion popularized by the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* of the 1920's. Two characteristics are usually traced to Iranian thought: dualism and the redeemer myth. In support of this syncretistic approach to gnostic origins and following Jonas, Rudolph identified two distinctions between dualisms; the ethical dualism of Iranian-Zoroastrian origin that speaks to the dichotomy of light and darkness: and the anticosmic dualism of Syrian-Egyptian origin that traces the decline from the ultimate deity and sees that decline as the cause of all evil. Rudolph further describes ethical dualism as the starting point for anticosmic dualism, insisting on an Iranian source for the beginning of gnostic thought.⁸⁴ Smith concludes that gnosticism was more likely to have been influenced by Judaism than by Iranian thought, at least in any kind of direct line or evolution.

Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 24. These are legitimate questions that speak against the likelihood of a first-century gnosticism, although his argument is unpersuasive since the existence of a pre-Christian gnosticism was not *necessarily* a threat to the nascent religion.

As can be deduced from the early diversity of the movements and writings, there was no established "orthodoxy" against which other worldviews could legitimately be described as heretical. The canonization of Christian, and even Jewish, scriptures took place at relatively later dates (second century for Christianity and possibly after the meeting at Jamnia in the 70's in the case of Judaism). So why, when there was a diversity of thought, would a pre-Christian gnosticism have been viewed with any more (or less) animosity than the other differing opinions that we can see evidenced in scriptural and apocryphal texts, as well as gnostic texts? Marcion was, after all, ostensibly Christian, viewing the Pauline writings and Luke/Acts as the only true scriptural tradition, while presenting a very negative view of the Old Testament God.

As I see it, the lack of Jewish anti-gnostic polemics offers a better argument against the existence of pre-Christian gnosticism, but even in Judaism there were those communities on the fringes of Second Temple mainstream practice – the group at Qumran, for example – that apparently were tolerated, if not completely accepted, by the normative group. In fact, after the fall of the Temple, there was a blurring of the lines between the two, as the Temple as the centre of praxis no longer existed. Furthermore, if the development of gnosticism was an evolutionary process, a radical anti-traditional Jewish perspective on the creator was not necessarily a motif from the earliest incarnation, in fact that convention could well have grown out of a crisis of the sort that Smith is suggesting – the revolt under Trajan for example. There could have been a more moderate early version, drawn from an Iranian/Zoroastrian influence, or the context of Hellenistic Judaism in Alexandria. The radicalism often associated with gnosticism is not necessarily truly representative of early formative strata in the evolution of the worldview(s). Cf. A.F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden, 1977).

⁸⁴ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 26. As to Rudolph's insistence on the Eastern origin of gnosticism, he does not initially address the fact of the presence of a clearly ethical dualism in the very Jewish environment of Qumran and in other first century CE examples of apocalyptic literature. As Smith notes "this is not to say that Iranian influences are entirely absent, only that it is highly likely that those elements, if present, were mediated through Jewish lines." See Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 26. However, Rudolph does concede the point later in his work. See Rudolph *Gnosis*, 283.

Moving on to the question of Platonic philosophical influence in the development of gnosticism, Smith cites the theories of Nock (gnosticism as “Platonism run wild”),⁸⁵ Grant and Everett Ferguson. Grant noted similarities to Neopythagoreanism and Middle Platonism, in particular the higher and lower “gods,” the concept of the material world as an inferior copy of the higher world, and the necessity of the recovery of self-understanding that had been lost or forgotten.⁸⁶ Ferguson saw the Platonic elements in gnosticism as including the remote spiritual being, the immortal soul imprisoned in the body, and the discouragement of the material world, “extended to an extreme beyond what philosophers advocated.”⁸⁷ The gnostic anticosmic dualism was indeed an extreme reinterpretation of the Platonic, essentially procosmic imagining of a deficient, but still generally good creator (Logos).

In contrast, Ioan Culianu de-emphasizes the influence of Hellenism on Judaism, finding in Philo an exception to the rule, and while not identifying Christianity as the origin point for gnosticism, claims that Philo, and his method of scriptural interpretation, had a greater effect on early Christianity and gnosticism than his approach to the scriptures had in Judaism.⁸⁸

The suggestion that gnosticism came out of Hermeticism is unlikely due to the dating of the texts of the Hermetica. As a possible product of pagan religious speculation, gnosticism can claim similarities with a number of diverse sources. The early centuries of the Common Era saw a period of religious creativity and syncretism, but gnosis is not an amalgamation of Eastern Mystery religions, or as Robert McL. Wilson would have it, “not *merely* syncretism.”⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 29. Cf. A. D. Nock, “Gnosticism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 57 (1964), 255-279, esp. 267.

⁸⁶ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 29.

⁸⁷ E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1987), 245.

⁸⁸ I. Couliano, *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism* (San Francisco, 1992), 126-127.

⁸⁹ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 37. Cf. R. McL. Wilson, “‘Jewish Gnosis’ and Gnostic Origins: A Survey,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 45 (1974), 179-189, esp. 183.

Perhaps the most compelling of the arguments for gnostic origins lies in its growth out of Jewish speculation, and it is on this point that Smith expands his hypothesis. While Jonas, Roelof van den Broek and others cite the anti-Semitic character of alienated gnosticism as reason against a Jewish starting point, Smith sees many arguments *for* Judaism as the root of gnostic imaginings, with the strongest point being the seeming “preoccupation with themes and terms derived from the OT and Jewish speculation.”⁹⁰ These include Hebrew puns and plays on words indicative of knowledge of Hebrew, such themes as the personification of wisdom and the development of angelologies listing intermediaries between God and the physical world, and the “adoption and adaptation of biblical names for God.”⁹¹

Smith sums up Williams’ approach to understanding the origins of gnosticism as lying “in its hermeneutics and the problems it was attempting to solve... theodicy, the embarrassing anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms of the OT, and issues related to asceticism.”⁹² This perspective is further supported by Stroumsa’s conclusions in his monograph *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (1984), in particular his

⁹⁰ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 39. Supporters of Jewish influence and origin include Pearson, Stroumsa, Yamauchi, R. McL. Wilson and Gilles Quispel, among others. In Philip Alexander’s opinion, “it [is] very likely that some of the similarities between Gnosticism and Merkavah Mysticism are due to the fact that both systems draw on the tradition of Palestinian Jewish apocalyptic, apocalyptic elements having been transmitted to them by Christianity and Rabbinism respectively. [... T]here are good grounds for supposing that common, syncretistic magic mediated between the two systems.” See Ph. S. Alexander, “Comparing Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism: An Essay in Method,” *Clouds Magazine* 16 (2003), at <http://www.cloudsmagazine.com>. One of the other similarities cited is “cooperative dualism,” or at least the presence of a strain within Judaism that suggests a subordinate but complementary actor who works in concert with God. This dualism may be the product of eschatological pessimism, but it is *not* the anticosmic dualism of gnosticism; the cosmos is neither evil nor the creation of evil. Cf. Peter Hayman, “Monotheism – A Misused Word in Jewish Studies,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 22 (1990), 1-15.

⁹¹ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 39. Cf. Joseph Dan, “Yaldabaoth and the Language of the Gnostics,” in H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger and P. Schäfer (eds.), *Geschichte-Tradition-Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, 3 vols. (Tübingen, 1996), 1:557-564. I would assert that the arguments are not particularly convincing when there are significant examples of non-Jewish writings that demonstrate a clear knowledge and understanding of Hebrew and Jewish traditions. Cf. Smith’s own arguments regarding the *Epistle of Barnabas* and its author’s extensive knowledge of Jewish scriptures and practices, used, in this case, as an anti-Jewish polemic (see below).

⁹² Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 41. Cf. M. A. Williams, “The Demonizing of the Demiurge: The Innovation of Gnostic Myth,” in M. A. Williams, C. Cox and M. S. Jaffee (eds.), *Innovations in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change* (New York, 1992), 73-107.

suggestion that gnostic speculation arose out of “an obsessive preoccupation with the problem of evil.”⁹³

Whereas Rudolph sees Qumran as the link between Jewish apocalyptic and wisdom traditions and gnosticism PHEME PERKINS suggests the Jewish baptismal groups of Syro-Palestine. For Stephen G. Wilson, the largest problem in conclusively calling Judaism the root of gnosticism, lies in the latter’s inversion of Jewish values, for which there is no precedent. The material is often radically anti-Jewish.⁹⁴ So why and where would such a reversal have taken place? Smith outlines the sociological and crisis theories that could locate Judaism as a more definitive source for gnosticism.

The time period of roughly 200 BCE until 150 CE was marked by pivotal events in Jewish history. As seen, Williams is skeptical of crisis theories that suggest a specific originating point, citing too many possibilities. Although he argues *for* a Jewish origin, he is *against* the likelihood of a sociological crisis as cause.⁹⁵ Rather, Williams argues that a crisis of faith significant enough to lead to the development of a gnostic worldview could have happened without an external catalyst of any kind, and that the radical innovations of gnosticism came out of exegetical and hermeneutical concerns. Williams also believes that while elements of the accepted influences – Christianity, Judaism and Platonism – can be seen as having been translated into gnostic innovations, they can be traced to no specific social crisis in Jewish history as there are none mentioned or even indirectly referenced in the gnostic texts. While Smith sees the validity of this position, he believes that there was more to the story.⁹⁶

⁹³ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 41. Cf. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 17.

⁹⁴ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 42-43. Cf. Rudolph *Gnosis*, 279-281; Ph. Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis, 1993), 18-19; S. G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70-170 C.E.*, (Minneapolis, 1995), 205; Williams *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 218.

⁹⁵ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 45. Cf. Williams, “The Demonizing of the Demiurge,” 85. Some of the suggested sociological crisis points may include the Maccabean Revolt and the growth of the community at Qumran.

⁹⁶ Williams, “The Demonizing of the Demiurge,” 75. Cf. King’s challenge to Williams in *What is Gnosticism?*, 32.

As mentioned above, Smith thinks that there is a high likelihood that gnosticism grew out of a specific crisis, the Jewish Revolt of 115-117 CE. He states

Theories addressing gnostic origins from within Judaism due to socioeconomic conditions or sociopolitical crises follow several lines of reasoning described generally as follows: First, Gnosticism may have developed as a response of Jewish individuals to socioeconomic conditions that left them isolated and powerless. The new religious innovations were created to aid these individuals in transcending their circumstances and finding release in a new theological system. Second, Gnosticism may have developed in response to apocalyptic and messianic hopes that were either disappointed or devastated through a crisis or a series of crises in history. The innovations were created as theological adjustments inspired by the life experience of an individual and/or community.⁹⁷

There must have been compelling circumstances that would make the sometimes drastic and shocking innovations acceptable, as minor innovations were acceptable within the tenets of the existing systems, but the big one, the anticosmic dualism, could no longer be included in normative Judaism. As Pearson points out, “in my opinion the sources we now have tend to show that this revolt did indeed arise from *within* Judaism, though it is axiomatic that once Gnosticism is present Judaism has been abandoned.”⁹⁸

Having established the point to his satisfaction, Smith then goes on to expand upon the already mentioned theories as to which of the many crises from within Judaism could have produced a nascent gnosticism. He details the arguments of Rudolph, Grant and Yamauchi, and examines them against his own thesis that the precipitating crisis was the Revolt under Trajan.⁹⁹ Referencing Pearson and David Frankfurter, among others, Smith sets the historical context and presents his view on the chronological and geographical evidence of gnostic origins.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 47. Cf. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 225-229, and R. Stark and W. Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley, 1985), 177-188, as summarized in Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 219-220 and 232-234.

⁹⁸ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 51.

⁹⁹ To review, Rudolph saw gnostic origins as stemming from the syncretism of first century CE Palestine and Syria, Grant placed the originating point in the first Jewish Revolt, and Yamauchi, along with S. G. Wilson and Alan Segal, posit the Bar Kokhba Revolt as the catalyst. Cf. Rudolph, *Gnosis*; Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*; Wilson, *Related Strangers*; Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*.

¹⁰⁰ Cf., for example, B. A. Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* (New York and London, 2004); idem, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*; D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, N.J., 1998); idem, “Lest Egypt’s City Be Deserted:

With the supposition that the most definitive features of gnosticism can be traced to the second century and that Egypt provides the most suitable environment for the evolution of these characteristics, Smith sets gnostic origins, and especially its anticosmic dualism, firmly in the disappointed messianism of the revolts in Judea and the Diaspora, especially after 115-117 CE.¹⁰¹ The totality of his argument can be illustrated by five specific considerations:

1. The Nag Hammadi codices are less significant for the historical reconstruction of gnosticism than are the works of the Christian heresiologists.
2. [The nature of the evidence is circumstantial, but] all known chronological factors indicate a second-century development for Gnosticism, subsequent to the rise of Christianity and subsequent to the devastation caused by the Jewish revolt under Trajan.
3. A narrow definition of gnosticism is necessary, especially characterized by its most unique innovation, extreme anticosmic dualism, which finds no parallel in the ancient world prior to the second century CE.
4. The connection between gnosticism and Judaism, and the likelihood of Jewish intellectual centers being the “seedbeds” of gnostic thought.
5. The nature of the historical development in the first two centuries of the Common Era.¹⁰²

On the latter point, Smith points to Helmut Koester and James Robinson and their theory of trajectories as a metaphor for the “process of conceptual development from the beginning point to the end of a concept’s formulation through history.”¹⁰³ Smith identifies four kinds of trajectories found in the first two centuries CE: (1) teachers identified by early heresiologists; (2) the issues of polemics and the anti-Judaism in early

Religion and Ideology in the Egyptian Response to the Jewish Revolt (115-117 C.E.),” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43 (1992), 203-220, esp. 208-212.

¹⁰¹ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 113.

¹⁰² Quoted from Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 115-119.

¹⁰³ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 118. Cf. Koester and Robinson, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*. In contrast, for Yamauchi there is instead a “confluence of streams,” various identifiable strands of influence, such as apocalypticism or wisdom tradition, that come together and form something new, in “The Descent of Ishtar, the Fall of Sophia, and the Jewish Roots of Gnosticism,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978), 143-175, esp. 169-174. King uses the metaphor of ingredients, cook and kitchen in an unpublished paper, “Rethinking the (Jewish) Origins of (Christian) Gnosticism,” as cited by Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 118, n. 16.

Christianity and gnosticism; (3) Sethianism as the earliest branch of gnosticism; and (4) the implications of some lesser trajectories.¹⁰⁴

To do so, Smith outlines the chronology of gnostic teachers as described by the heresiologists, along with the polemical works associated with gnosticism, and notes the problems with the descriptions offered in the polemicists' accounts.¹⁰⁵ He places special emphasis on the *Epistle of Barnabas*, calling it "highly significant in terms of the development of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism and in terms of gnostic origins... This epistle was quite concerned about Jewish-Christian relations, at least on a religious ideological plane, and is highly polemical."¹⁰⁶ Its likely Alexandrian origin, if dated, as Smith suggests, to before the revolt under Trajan, makes it one of the very few witnesses to early Egyptian Christianity.¹⁰⁷ As such, the *Epistle of Barnabas* should demonstrate an awareness of gnostic teachers if they were, in fact, at the time of its writing. Instead, "the *Epistle of Barnabas* is a Christian work that is highly aware of Jewish themes and Scriptures. It reflects numerous currents and trends that were prevalent in the diverse environment of Egyptian Judaism, including apocalypticism, allegorical interpretation, and messianism. It is very closely connected with Judaism, dependent upon it, but also

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 117-119.

¹⁰⁵ Among them: their usage of the terms "gnostic" and "gnosticism" as an ill-defined umbrella term for the departure from the true faith of the apostles, and the heavy dependence on each other, with later polemics relying on earlier, with minor additions and changes. Smith does not restrict his discussion to Christian anti-gnostic polemics, but makes mention of Rabbinic polemics that further demonstrate the gradual separation of Judaism and Christianity, and Middle Platonic writings that criticize the adoption of Platonic thought by gnostic authors, as evidenced in Plotinus' *Enneades* 2.9 (*Against the Gnostics*). He also discusses polemics from within the gnostic writings themselves that speak against Christianity, Judaism, other gnostics (the *Testimony of Truth*), the Great Church (the *Apocalypse of Peter*), and Jerusalem and the Temple (the *First Apocalypse of James*), which Smith thinks are examples of the gnostic authors' search for self-definition.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 172-173.

¹⁰⁷ Smith advocates for an Alexandrian provenance for the *Epistle of Barnabas*, following, among others, J. Quasten, *The Beginnings of Patristic Literature* (vol. 1 of *Patrology*; Westminster, Md., 1992); L. Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* (New York, 1967), 41-55, esp. 47; B. A. Pearson, "Earliest Christianity in Egypt: Some Observations," in B. A. Pearson and J. E. Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1986), 132-159, esp. 151; idem, "Christians and Jews in First-Century Alexandria," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986), 206-216. S. G. Wilson disagrees, suggesting a Syro-Palestinian origin for the text. See Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 127. A. F. J. Klijn is more non-committal in "Jewish Christianity in Egypt," in Pearson and Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, 161-175, esp. 166.

separated from it,"¹⁰⁸ and demonstrative of the strained nature of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the face of external threat.

Smith suggests that the author of *Barnabas* and his readers were likely either Gentiles or Jewish-Christian converts, and that the epistle demonstrates a negative valuation of Judaism, but no real gnostic characteristics.¹⁰⁹ This negative portrayal addresses proper doctrines and practices and warns its audience against a "return" to the Law, an action that would indicate the presence and work of the Evil One (2.10). The emphatic polemic suggests the distinct possibility of a threatened resurgence of Judaism, including the rebuilding of the Temple (16.1-5). Eschatologically, the *Epistle of Barnabas* is illustrative of the belief in the messiah who has already come and who will come again (4.12, 5.7, 7.2, 15.5). The Jewish covenant is compared unfavorably to the covenant under Jesus, with the author stating that the Jews were never the chosen of God (14), and the practice of circumcision is rejected (9.6).

The text offers teachings on the key elements of Christianity, especially those pertaining to the incarnation, suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. As a polemic, the *Epistle of Barnabas* suggests that its author perceived a real threat to his Christian community from Jews or Jewish-Christians. This fear resulted in the demonizing of Judaism and its historical and theological traditions, as the demiurge was demonized in the gnostic systems presented in texts including the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World*.

Smith sums up his discussion of polemics and their importance in the study of gnostic origins, saying that if they "tell us anything, it is that Gnosticism arose in a second-century environment in which several religions were seeking self-definition and self-understanding as they negotiated difficult issues of theology and a turbulent period of history. From this environment the gnostic belief system emerged as a religion in its own right, highly dependent on Judaism, Christianity, and Platonism as its points of departure,

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 179.

¹⁰⁹ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 174.

but highly innovative in defining itself as a unique and separate tradition.”¹¹⁰ I view his use of “religion” as a descriptor of gnosticism as problematic. As mentioned above, it was not a cohesive religious system but rather a complex and diverse group of often similar, but sometimes drastically disparate worldviews, expressed in terms specific to geographical, sociological and religious context.¹¹¹ To describe gnosticism as a religion clearly demonstrates the issues of the categorization, and in this respect, Smith’s position is not representative of the current general theories regarding the designation.

To complete his examination of the issue of definition and origin, Smith moves into a discussion of Sethian gnosticism, and Egypt as the geographical location of its rise, before offering his ultimate scenario as to the question of gnostic origins. In addition to his sketch of the various theories that seek to define Sethianism, he briefly outlines the connection between Jewish, gnostic and Egyptian traditions dealing with Seth, suggesting that he does “not mean to imply that gnostic Sethian conceptions had a direct dependence upon Egyptian traditions. What is argued is that the Egyptian environment of the early second century was a context in which Egyptian and Jewish traditions could have been combined to form a new tradition.”¹¹² In combining the traditions, the Sethians, with their use of “race” and “immovability,” were creating a self-identity separate from the repeatedly displaced (and so, “movable”) Jews and the Christians that were still so closely tied to Judaism. Smith argues, “it seems reasonable that following the Jewish Revolt, Basilides formulated the concept of a new people (*genos*) upon whom the tumult of this world no longer had power.”¹¹³

Smith’s discussion of the possible geographical locations for the rise of gnosticism ends with Egypt as the most promising region. Though he dismisses the

¹¹⁰ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 214.

¹¹¹ That is, proximity and adherence to the more established tenets of Judaism, Jewish-Christianity or Christianity.

¹¹² Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 225. I see much the same argument in favour of the Jewish, Christian and Egyptian conceptualizations of the High Priest as personified in the figure of Melchizedek (see below 1.3.). For specific examples of the use of the Egyptian Seth/Typhon and his possible influence in Jewish and Christian writings see B. A. Pearson, “Egyptian Seth and Gnostic Seth,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1977), 25-43.

¹¹³ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 227.

importance of the Nag Hammadi corpus, declaring that “the discovery... does not really speak to the issue of origins, since it was most likely that they were collected and discarded [*sic*] in the fourth century C.E., the provenance of nearly one-third of the collection is traced to this region,”¹¹⁴ he sees Egypt as a place of great significance in the development of gnosticism, if not the origin point itself.

From here, Smith presents his proposal for how the rise of gnosticism might have come about. He is certain that gnosticism came from within one of the Jewish groups in Egypt, likely alienated Jewish intellectuals, Jewish Christians or Platonic converts to Judaism or Jewish Christianity, following the Revolt under Trajan. Because of the obvious use of hermeneutics and knowledge of the Jewish language and traditions found in many of the gnostic writings, the Jewish intellectual community looks to be a good candidate. Smith suggests:

Possibly, these Jews were part of communities that were producing apocalyptic works in this same time period. They may have sensed alienation from an oppressive government (temple tax, taxation without citizenship) and a hostile and jealous native population. Their failed attempt at a revolution may have created an even deeper sense of alienation, even from their God and their traditions. It is also possible that the first gnostics were Jews responding to other Jewish groups that produced apocalyptic texts and inspired the revolt... Primary motivations could have been desires (1) to distance themselves from revolutionary factions, (2) to identify with more normative (Platonic) theological conceptions, and (3) for transcendence, and perhaps assimilation. How better to distance oneself from the tumultuous religion of the Jews than to reverse its images and despise its God? Though they could have merely apostatized, their investment in the Jewish religion and traditions may have been too great to abandon entirely. They still conceptualized life and reality through Jewish constructs. Basilides’ expression “no longer Jews” takes on special meaning in this context.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 231. Cf. Henry A. Green, *The Economic and Social Origins of Gnosticism* (SBLDS 77; Atlanta, 1985). Green cites seven tracts seen as identifiably Egyptian in provenance in the Nag Hammadi Library; *The Apocryphon of James*, *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, *On the Origin of the World*, *The Concept of Our Great Power*, *Melchizedek*, *The Thought of Norea*, and *The Testimony of Truth*. To these he adds *The Apocryphon of John*, *The Dialogue of the Saviour*, *the Thunder: Perfect Mind*, *The Discourse on the Eight and the Ninth*, *Asclepius*, *The Three Steles of Seth*, and *The Gospel of the Egyptians* to the list. Smith would add *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* and *Zostrianos*, as suggested by Jacques Ménard and Michael Allen Williams, respectively. I will have more to say on Smith’s reductive designation of the Nag Hammadi Library.

¹¹⁵ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 246. Cf. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 96-115. Also, see above for Williams’ discussion of the alienation/degree of social engagement of the gnostics.

The only problem with such a group being the initiators of a gnostic worldview lies in the fact that there is no certain proof or knowledge of gnostics who were definitely former Jews, unlike the obvious examples of self-identified Christians, or polemically-described *apostate* Christians among the gnostic company. And although there were intellectuals within the Jewish-Christian population that were closely tied and therefore as likely to have been affected by the events of 115-117 CE, and ready to distance themselves from their Jewish origins, this does not account for the presence of the non-Christian gnostic texts.

Similarly problematic is the suggestion of Platonic/Hellenistic converts to Judaism or Jewish-Christianity. While gnosticism could be seen as a Platonic response to the unanswered questions of the Old Testament, left unresolved by Judaism and Christianity, Smith suggests that there is little possibility that Hellenistic (Gentile) converts would have had enough familiarity with the language to have produced the puns and word-plays from Hebrew found in the gnostic writings.

So although its beginnings can certainly be found in Judaism, and elements of Christianity and Platonism made up necessary components, Smith sees the ultimate origin of gnosticism as a convergence of the three streams or trajectories. The crisis following the revolt under Trajan was the catalyst for what evolved into the anti-Judaism that can be seen in the anticosmic dualism of gnosticism.¹¹⁶ While it is not necessary for Egypt to be proven as the geographical origin for the thesis to stand, as Jews throughout Palestine and the Diaspora would have heard of the results of the 115-117 revolt, and speculations could have begun anywhere, Smith sees Egypt as the most likely original home of gnosis. He states that all the required characteristics integral to the gnostic systems were present only in Egypt:

(1) familiarity with Jewish traditions (e.g., Seth) and Scriptures;

¹¹⁶ Smith states here that Yamauchi's theory of the Bar Kokhba Revolt is too late to allow for the presence of Carpocrates, Saturninus, and most especially the earliest and "most significant" of the gnostics, Basilides. See Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 250.

- (2) familiarity with allegorical hermeneutics and their employment on sacred texts;
- (3) awareness of Jewish and/or Platonic theories regarding “two powers” or “second God” (e.g., Philo);
- (4) familiarity with Platonic concepts of emanations and myth;
- (5) a sense of alienation from (other) Jewish groups that were nationalistic or apocalyptic in thrust;
- (6) a sense of alienation from the world due to social unrest or conflict;
- (7) participation in an intellectual environment in which the issues of anthropomorphisms, ethics and theodicy were discussed; and
- (8) an experience of social and political unrest, even revolt, and the consequences thereof.¹¹⁷

Smith sees these elements, added to the necessary knowledge of Christianity, especially the motifs of redemption and incarnation, as could certainly have been seen in second-century Alexandria, as indicators that Egypt remains the most probable geographical locale for the beginnings of the growth of gnosticism. In these arguments for Egypt as an origin point, I see some value, particularly if they are examined using the framework of Sethianism, with its distinctly Jewish-Christian elements, instead of maintaining an adherence to the more problematic descriptor, gnosticism. I am less enamoured with his dismissal of the importance of the Nag Hammadi texts and remain unconvinced by many of his arguments.

1.1.4. CONCLUSION

The term gnosticism has come to encompass more than is justifiable from the historical and literary evidence. It has become so non-specific as to include not only the disparate examples from antiquity that are at issue here, but also the Renaissance “Hermetic” writings of Pico della Mirandola, the psychological theories of Carl Gustav Jung, and a late twentieth-century Gnostic church in California. Since currently the term is used collectively to describe phenomena that are neither monolithic nor cohesive, change is necessary to reflect this incongruity. Although sometimes extreme in his vehemence that the term be disposed of altogether, Williams’ suggestions as found in *Rethinking “Gnosticism”* are provocative and timely. Using comparison as a method of interpretation, Williams seeks to redefine gnosticism by redefining and recreating

¹¹⁷ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 251-252.

categories. In *What is Gnosticism?* King agrees, suggesting that the abandonment of the term is inevitable, and calling for a reexamination of the way in which we study gnosticism. Smith instead advocates for the importance of origins in the discourse surrounding the issues of gnosticism, while de-emphasizing the problematic nature of the term in *No Longer Jews*. Each of them has contributed both to the manner in which I have approached the discussion of categorization and my text, the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, itself.

Among other purposes, Williams, King and Smith all present overviews of the issues besetting the designation gnosticism. There is a great deal of overlap as they attempt to provide comprehensive surveys of the manner in which gnosticism and its origins have been studied until this point. But each has elements that specifically inform their individual studies of the problems.

For Williams, the main issue is that the term has become too inclusive, and that using self-definition or a typological construct involving the external imposition of category is no longer a viable way in which to organize the grouping. He sees using the heresiologists as sources as problematic, as in addition to offering negative definitions of the term gnosticism the polemic descriptions are often vague and ambiguous. Williams suggests the “dismantling” of the category and its rebuilding under newly defined categories, that speak to the origins and worldviews of specific traditions that fall under the traditional categorization as it stands (or does not, as the case may be).

King agrees that a lack of scholarly consensus is one of the major problems when dealing with questions of gnosis and gnosticism, as is the fact that it has traditionally been defined in comparison to normative Christianity. Additionally she speaks to the lack of agreement as to the existence of a pre-Christian gnosticism, and to the potential inadequacy of the subcategorization of the term as suggested by Williams. What of those texts that fit into no subcategory? Is there such a thing as “generic gnosticism”? King sees and advocates for the abandonment of the term, with its overtones of anti-Catholic Protestant polemics and colonial ideology, altogether, and suggests that the resolution of

the issues lie in an analysis of practices rather than a search for origins. As Marvin Meyer points out in his review of *What is Gnosticism?*, “while its postmodern perspective and ambitious agenda may not appeal to all... Karen King offers preliminary thoughts about new ways of describing and defining what has been dubbed “Gnosticism.”¹¹⁸

Smith suggests a completely different approach to the issue, seeing the search for origins as paramount in the study of gnosticism. Defining the category, rather simply and generally, a “caricature” as Williams would term it, as a system that features the concept of salvation through special knowledge and the presence of an anticosmic dualism, and then dismissing the discussion of the problems associated with the category, he argues that the really important questions are those that pertain to religious and historical context and geographical setting. Additionally, he sees the multiplicity of proposals and paradigms posited as solutions to the study of gnosticism as particularly problematic, and warns against the “over-use” of the Nag Hammadi library in attempting to determine gnostic origins or the parameters of a categorization.

Unfortunately, Smith seems to accept much as definitive that is not necessarily clear. Philip Tite points out the most significant weaknesses in his review of the book. He believes that Smith’s thesis “is founded upon the assumption of a social-conflict model for religious innovation or change... [while] the evidence he marshals is completely circumstantial... [and] presumes a homogeneous and normative view of Gnosticism, Christianity and Judaism.”¹¹⁹ These points are representative of the weakness of Smith’s overall approach to the question of origins and the application of gnosticism as a categorical descriptor. Still, I believe that his arguments regarding the placement of the geographical and temporal origins of some gnostic systems, Sethianism in particular, have something to offer as aids to understanding the products of many of the groups that have been called gnostic. As such, I will employ such contexts as part of my examination of *Melchizedek*.

¹¹⁸ M. Meyer, Review of *What is Gnosticism?* From the SBL’s RBL site May 2004.

¹¹⁹ P. L. Tite, Review of *No Longer Jews* from the SBL’s RBL site July, 2005.

Ultimately, my approach takes elements of all three of these arguments, agreeing in places and (strongly!) disagreeing in others. In the pages that follow I will employ aspects of historical- and text-critical methods, with elements taken from socio-rhetorical analysis, while looking to social and geographical context. I agree with Williams that in having come to mean everything, gnosticism as viable term has, in fact, ceased to mean anything. As he and King agree upon the necessity of removing the term from its common usage in the discourse surrounding the texts of this era, I have attempted to remove it from my discussion for the remainder of this dissertation. From his suggested subcategories, I will focus on the group known as “Sethians” to lend clarity to my presentation of a particular ideological category, while employing others, such as demiurgical and Valentinian when applicable.

Unlike King, I regard the Nag Hammadi Library, with its presentations of ritual language, cosmologies, theologies and practices, as informing as to the possible social context from which the texts may have originated. As mentioned, I think that the total abandonment of gnosticism as a widely-used term, even in scholarly circles, is a difficult proposition, but I have tried to do so, hopefully determining whether or not it is possible to produce discourse on these texts and ideologies without resorting to the catch-all and meaningless categorization.¹²⁰ As to her suggestion that the analysis of practices rather than the search for origins is the way to proceed, I think that the awareness of origins, and therefore evolutions, of the various worldviews cannot be left out of the equation. That said, I have chosen, for the remainder of this dissertation, to employ the term Sethian, as defined in 1.2., as my descriptor of the ideologies present in the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*. Wherever possible I have avoided the use of gnostic as a designation of any kind, except in those cases in which I describe or discuss the views of others who choose to use the term, or the scholarship that has done so historically.

Further, in my analysis of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, I will try to answer King’s suggested questions: (1) what hermeneutic strategies are employed? (2) What are the

¹²⁰ In cases where I have used gnosticism, my discussions in this chapter for example, I have chosen not to capitalize the word, as to me the capitalization suggests a cohesive religion, or at the very least, an organized and agreed upon categorization of something, which, as we have seen, it is most definitely not.

problems being addressed in the rhetoric of the document? And (3) for what desired ends are the rhetorical devices being used?

As mentioned, I understand the necessity of the quest for gnostic origins as laid out by Smith, using the framework of Sethianism as I will describe it below, rather than the generic categorization, gnosticism, and will incorporate this element through an examination of the historical, cultural, religious and geographical contexts, as found specifically in Egypt. Unlike Smith, I see the Nag Hammadi library in general, and the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* in particular, as an extremely informative tool in the search for the origins of literary trajectories like those of the apocalyptic, Sethian and Melchizedek traditions, as well as one that speaks to the continuity and evolution of Jewish and Christian ideas and beliefs. Using the language of Koester and Robinson, I will place *Melchizedek* on the trajectories described below, taking into account the social and historical contexts, while illustrating its own particular virtues.

1.2. SETH AND SETHIANS

1.2.1. INTRODUCTION

With the problems associated with term gnostic as a means of categorization, one of the recurring, and most viable, alternative suggestions for the reconstruction of the designation into subcategories, is “Sethianism.” The term is used to describe those texts associated with the figure of Seth, referring to an elect race descended from him, and sharing commonalities of form and content, produced by hypothetical Sethians as expressions of particular worldviews and hopes for salvation. The category features apparent connections with Jewish and/or Jewish-Christian traditions, and is likely representative of the earliest developments in the larger literary genre in the second century.

Although it shares only a few of the defining characteristics of the designation, as will be seen, according to the organizational strategies associated with Sethianism, *Melchizedek* fits within the grouping and therefore has a place on the Sethian trajectory. In order to eventually examine the text within the particular literary and ideological construct, I will examine the conventions associated with the category, establishing those defining motifs that will provide the framework for my analysis and interpretation of the text.

1.2.2. THE GREAT SETH

For the post-exilic Jews of Palestine and the Diaspora, the figure of Seth represented the continuity of a tradition that had its literary origins in the Book of Genesis. As the son of Adam and Eve, born following the death of Abel at the hand of his brother, and Cain’s punishment and exile at the hand of God, Seth appears in both the Priestly (P) and Yahwist (J) accounts of the origins of the world.¹ These chronicles offer

¹ J. D. Turner, “The Gnostic Seth,” in Stone and Bergren (eds.), *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible*, 33-58, esp. 34. Turner suggests that the P account included Genesis 1.1-2.4a, 5.1-32 and 6.9-22, with the J passages falling between 2.4b and 4.26 and continuing in 6.1-8.

the genealogies of both Cain (Genesis 4.17-24) and the “other seed” (σπέρμα ἕτερον, Genesis 4.25) that is the lineage of Seth.² This genealogy as adopted by Sethian groups followed a tradition in which Seth is portrayed as the only true son of Adam and the “progenitor of righteous humanity.”³ In addition to the more obvious Sethian sources, this tradition suggests that the race of Cain is one of wickedness while the seed of Seth is one of virtue and can be found in the allegorical writings of Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (ca. 20 BCE-40 CE).⁴ John Turner notes that “higher spiritual status [is granted] to those human beings who belong to the progeny or ‘seed’ of Seth.” As such, in mainstream Jewish and some Sethian accounts, Seth is presented as the figure that represents ideal humanity.

With that said, in the diverse Sethian versions, Seth himself is often perceived as a duality, manifest in both the spiritual and material realms. These two aspects can be described as a heavenly ideal and transcendent prototype and an earthly materialization who is the father of the elite “race,” the recipient and transmitter of divine revelation, and the saviour of the elite of humankind.⁵ This indication of two planes of existence demonstrates the influence of Hellenism, in particular the Platonic concept of the imperfect reflection of the universe in the material world. The syncretism that was commonplace in the Mediterranean world found its way into much Sethian literature that demonstrates a development of this dualistic concept, creating extensive systems that attempt to explain the order of the universe and the origin of evil.

The documents produced by the hypothetical “Sethians” are illustrative of this ordering of the cosmos. Most examples contain an ultimate source deity, an unknowable god from whom all order emanates, often named as “the ineffable,” Bythos, or the Abyss. The resulting pleroma is made up of pairs of higher beings, variably called archons, aeons or powers, among whom reside such characters as the Mother Wisdom (Sophia), heavenly Adamas (Anthropos), Eve (Zoe/Epinoia) and Seth, along with the negatively

² Cf. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*.

³ Turner, “The Gnostic Seth,” 36.

⁴ Cf. Philo, *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile* 383.1551.

⁵ Turner, “The Gnostic Seth,” 44.

viewed Ialdabaoth, the foolish or evil principle responsible for the material creation. That the creation of the world was unintended by the ultimate power and therefore ultimately negative (to varying degrees, dependent upon the specific system) is central to Sethian ideology.⁶ This negativity or evil requires the intercession of the divine to aid in the plight of humanity. For many Sethians, remembrance of or acquaintance with the transcendent originating principle was equated with salvation. As such, a connection was required, be it through the salvific influence of a divine figure or a perceived elite and historical tie to a revealer-figure. For the authors of the Sethian documents, Seth fulfilled both roles. He was earthly progenitor and divine intercessor. In this way, the Sethian perspective remained tied to the biblical tradition of Genesis, enhancing legitimacy, and linked to emergent belief systems in which a soteriological figure was required for ultimate salvation.⁷

As seen above, Carl B. Smith suggests Egypt as the proposed place of gnostic origins, with the rise of the worldview taking place in the early second century. Within this evolution, Smith describes Sethianism as the “earliest gnostic tradition,” and a trajectory with its origins in Judaism.⁸ While Birger Pearson argues against any real connection to the Egyptian Seth in the development of Sethianism, seeing its origins as stemming exclusively from within Judaism, there are suggestions of some small over-laps in the traditions. Admittedly, while linked, there is no clear identification of the Jewish/gnostic Seth with the Egyptian god of the same name, but there are some hints that the native syncretism of the environment grants a limited legitimacy to some similarities and instances of seeming connection.⁹

⁶ See F. Fallon’s discussion of the Jewish elements in the creation stories found in the *Hypothesis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World* in *The Enthronment of Sabaoth* (Leiden, 1978).

⁷ Hence the connections to both Jewish apocalyptic literature and that of the early Christian movement.

⁸ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 215, 217.

⁹ The Egyptian god (Seth or Set) was the god of chaos who was associated with everything that caused disharmony in Egypt. He was brother to Osiris and Isis and husband/brother of Nephthys. Seth killed his brother and then battled Osiris’ son, Horus, for rulership of the living world. His usual appearance was that of a man with an animal head of no zoological equivalent. He was also associated with the ass, and with foreigners such as the Hyksos and Semites.

Two sources outside of the Nag Hammadi collection, the *Untitled Apocalypse* of the Bruce Codex and the fourth-century document *Pistis Sophia*, make mention of the Egyptian Seth's Greek name, Typhon. Smith notes that Egyptian Jews "were characterized by the Egyptian priests prior to the Jewish Revolt (115-177 CE) as 'Typhonic,' associated with the god Seth, and the object of curses. The destruction of Seth and his followers came to represent the decimation of chaotic foreign elements in the cosmos."¹⁰ The Egyptian context could well have allowed the endemic and Jewish traditions to combine to form new traditions.

Smith further suggests that the growth of Sethianism can be explained in part by a self-identity based in Platonism, Judaism and Christianity, with a new self-understanding growing out of the Jewish crises of the early second century, crises that had repercussions in Christian communities as well. He posits that the Sethians represented a newly understood race, one not in tumult and revolt, but rather one that transcended the earthly cares that come along with the realities of nationality and race.¹¹

In contrast, Pearson concludes that Seth-Typhon and Seth were two completely different entities, and points to the existence of Seth in Manichaean literature. In a variety of Manichaean sources, Seth appears as Sethel, Shatil and Sytyl as the saved saviour of Mani's ideology. As Mani was born in southern Mesopotamia (ca. 216 CE) and raised in a Jewish-Christian Baptist community (the Elkasaites, followers of Elkasai, an early second century Syrian leader), similarities to the Sethian mythology are understandable.¹²

¹⁰ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 225. Cf. Frankfurter, "Lest Egypt's City be Deserted," 207; Pearson "Egyptian Seth and Gnostic Seth." The primary texts can be found in B. Porten, *Jews of Elephantine and Arameans of Syrene* (Jerusalem, 1976), and the Great Magical Papyrus of Paris (PGM IV).

¹¹ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 227.

¹² Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt*, 268-282.

1.2.3. THE EPITHETS OF SETH AND HIS ROLE AS REVEALER AND SAVIOUR

The figure of Seth is variably named in the literature that claims to stem from his genealogical line. In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* he is called both “the Great (incorruptible) Seth” (63.21) and “the thrice-male child” (51.42).¹³ In *The Three Steles of Seth* he is referred to as “Emmacha (Emmakha) Seth,” the eternal son of Geradamas (Anthropos). Additionally, he is often found closely associated with the heavenly figure of the Son of Man. In the *Apocalypse of Adam*, Seth is the son of the heavenly Adam, making him the Son of the Son of Man. Likewise, in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* he is called “the son of the incorruptible man,” with incorruptibility representing one of the characteristics that Bentley Layton sees as being ascribed to the Father.¹⁴ Regardless of how he is named in the specific examples, Seth is a pivotal figure in the cosmogonies and salvation theories of the Sethian groups.¹⁵

As mentioned, in the systems that bear his name, Seth acts as the fixed originating point of departure from mainstream Jewish tradition, as he is featured as the progenitor of a race chosen for the enlightenment and ultimate salvation that comes with gnosis. In the *Apocalypse of Adam* a salvation history is presented, detailing the account of the race of Seth including its origin, survival of Flood and conflagration (the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah) and salvation through the intercession of the “Illuminator.” Pearson notes, “this kind of ‘salvation history’ is a regular feature in presumably ‘Sethian’ materials. In the *Apocalypse of Adam* we have what seems to be an early stage of this

¹³ The “thrice-maleness” of Seth in this instance is evocative of the “thrice-greatness” of Hermes Trismegestes of the Hermetic document *Poimandres*, a polytheistic example.

¹⁴ Layton described the Father, one of the Three Powers among the Incorruptible Beings, as consisting of “Thought, Verbal Expression (Word/Logos), Incorruptibility, Eternal Life, Will Intellect, Prior Acquaintance (with the unknowable first principle) and the Androgynous Father.” Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 101.

¹⁵ For a more extensive examination of the names of Seth, cf. B. A. Pearson, “The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature,” in B. Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1980-1981), 2:472-504.

tradition, modeled on Jewish apocalyptic texts and especially on the Jewish apocryphal Adam literature.”¹⁶ The *Gospel of the Egyptians* demonstrates a similar, if more developed, tradition in which there are three parousias, flood, fire and judgement, visited upon the “immovable race” of Seth. In the *Three Steles of Seth*, Seth is described as “the father of the living and unshakable race” who is the revealer of gnosis, which is redemptive knowledge.

The stone steles, thought to be the source of the document *Three Steles of Seth* in and of themselves, speak to the necessity of a salvific figure to see the race through the various times of trial in history. Tradition has their construction as being a result of the foreknowledge of the flood and conflagration to come. The message was carved onto steles in order to preserve the divine knowledge during the tribulations to come. Pearson notes that Josephus was the earliest witness to the tradition of Jewish sources of antediluvian revelations recorded on brick and stone steles.¹⁷ The steles represent a revelatory message as is found in Jewish tradition. In this case, the message is discovered and transmitted by Dositheos. Likewise, according to the text that bears his name, Zostrianos, possibly an incarnation of Seth, recorded his revelations on three tablets of wood to “remain as a source of gnosis (acquaintance)” for the elect (130.1-4). In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* the heavenly Seth himself composed the message and left it in the high mountains “perhaps engraved on tablets.”¹⁸ Throughout the examples runs a common thread of divine revelation mediated by Seth, either heavenly or earthly, and the necessity of preserving the gnosis awarded to his race.

1.2.4. DEFINING SETHIANISM: JEWISH? CHRISTIAN?

In her chapter on reconstructing gnostic history in *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (1993), PHEME PERKINS follows John D. Turner’s model of tradition history in which he “analyzes the variations in the use of divine triads as well as the use of

¹⁶ Pearson, “The Figure of Seth,” 489.

¹⁷ Pearson, “The Figure of Seth,” 503. Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.2.3 (69-71).

¹⁸ Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 102.

mythemes from Sethian gnosticism into the fourth century.”¹⁹ Since the concern at this point includes possible evidence of a pre-Christian Sethianism, the first-century developments are of paramount importance. Perkins notes the likely existence of baptizing sects among which she included “early Sethian gnostics, Essenes, followers of John the Baptist and Christians.”²⁰ At this stage, she believes that the Sethian mythology included a preexistent redeemer (usually Seth), heavenly wisdom, evil as originating through the act of a foolish or evil creator and offspring, and cultic practices, such as baptism. This myth, she claims, was eventually Christianized, featuring Jesus as one of the incarnations of Seth.²¹ Perkins would therefore assume a pre- or at least extra-Christian existence for the evolving Sethian mythic system.

Sethianism had its roots in Jewish literary tradition. As noted above, Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, was considered the father of the “chosen” racial line and “the transmitter of the divine power of wisdom.”²² Most important to Sethian soteriology is his relationship to the metaphysical universe and with the unknowable originating principle. The mythology of Seth as saviour and redeemer has an extensive history, known even by Josephus, who commented on a folkloric Sethian tradition ca. 90 CE.²³ The lineage of Seth seems to represent an alternative strand to that of Enoch, another seed that followed through the various literary trajectories in order to fulfill expectations not being met by the social system.

In the later first century CE a Christianized version of the Sethian myth developed, leading to groups headed by individual teachers in the second century. As the putative heresy spread further, there was a responding increase in anti-gnostic and anti-Sethian polemics that would continue to follow the adherents to the various messages and

¹⁹ Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament*, 46. Cf. also J. D. Turner “Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History,” in C. W. Hendrick and R. Hodgson Jr. (eds.), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass., 1986), 55-86; F. Wisse, “Stalking Those Elusive Sethians,” in Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 2:563-576.

²⁰ Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament*, 46.

²¹ *Ibid.* Cf. especially the *Gospel of the Egyptians* 74.9-75.9.

²² Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 185.

²³ See above, n. 16.

means of worship, further marginalizing the communities. These attacks, those from Irenaeus and Hippolytus, for example, may have led to a shift toward the incorporation of more philosophical elements in the third century, as Sethianism became more Neo-Platonic in its focus and expression, eventually becoming reduced to a collection of disparate groups, some of which survived in varying forms until the Middle Ages.²⁴

Pearson is a little more definite in his assertions. In *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, he discusses the connections, or lack thereof, between gnosticism and Christianity. He believes that gnosticism should no longer be seen as “an aberrant form of Christianity” rather; he is “prepared to posit that gnosticism, as a religious form of late antiquity, originated in sectarian Jewish circles, independent of, and perhaps prior to, Christianity.”²⁵ For Pearson, the origins of Sethianism lie firmly within Jewish tradition but reflect a new self-understanding or self-definition. As such they contain some essential elements:

- (1) Seth- the son of Adamas, a heavenly being and redeemer whose descendents form the gnostic elect,
- (2) A primordial divine triad including:
The Father- Anthropos/Man
The Mother- Barbelo
The Son- Autogenes/Adamas,
- (3) Four luminaries of the divine son (Adam); Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe, Eleleth,
- (4) An apocalyptic description of history reflecting the judgement of the creator and the archons in flood, conflagration and in eschaton.²⁶

He also notes the usual presence of the characters of Sophia and the demiurge, but stresses that these elements are not specifically Sethian but rather common to most of the systems. Pearson also agrees that Christian elements (where present) are secondary additions and that “the Sethian gnostic system is essentially non-Christian, and probably

²⁴ Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament*, 46. On Neo-Platonism and Sethianism cf. J. D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and Platonic Tradition* (Laval, Qc., and Leuven, 2001).

²⁵ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, 124-125.

²⁶ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, 127. Cf. the Enoch literature discussed in the previous chapter.

even pre-Christian in its origins.”²⁷ With that said, it should be emphasized that the “Jewishness” of the texts associated with Seth is an inescapable and essential quality for understanding the self-definition of the Sethian groups. But, as Pearson and Smith both note, the Sethians are “no longer Jews.” The evil or negativity of the creator god as described marks an irredeemable split from traditional Jewish tradition, in which the positive relationship between humanity and its creator is essential to the belief system. Yet, the self-definition of the Sethians remains based in Jewish traditions and origins.

This self-designation of the Sethians appears to be founded in the trajectory of the “seed of Seth” derived from Genesis. They were an elite or elect group for whom gnosis included self-knowledge and the figure of Seth as both progenitor and saviour. Pearson asserts that Sethianism was a movement of intellectuals that incorporated ideas from all areas of the syncretic environment from which it stemmed.²⁸ Such Jewish intellectuals redefined their religious self-understanding through an acknowledgement regarding the failure of history as manifested in the negative conceptualization of the creator. This essential element was at once revolutionary and in direct opposition to the traditional Jewish conceptualization of their god.

For later Christian gnostic groups, too, the incorporation of Christian symbols and theology into the more dualistic cosmology is demonstrative of the same type of syncretic back and forth movement that makes assumptions as to community origins and existence difficult, to say the least. Pearson notes, “in the case of Sethian gnosticism, in fact, we are confronted with serious problems in attempting to identify the particular communities from which our sources derive, and it has been suggested [by Frederick Wisse] that the quest for a Sethian sect is as fruitless as the quest for the mythical unicorn.”²⁹ But he remains willing to make the attempt. Pearson suggests that despite the group self-awareness implied by the pivotal belief in the Sethian position as an elect race, the texts

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, 133. Cf. the arguments of M. Schenke, “The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism” in Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 2:588-616; Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*; King *What is Gnosticism*, 158.

²⁹ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, 134. Cf. Wisse, “Stalking Those Elusive Sethians.”

were for the most part used for individual meditation rather than in community. Although there are many indications of enactment of rituals such as prayer, baptism and sacred meals, there does not appear to be any normative group activity or actualization.³⁰ However, the lack of evidence of community does not diminish the significance of a Sethian movement. As Pearson notes, movements like Sethianism acted as “important negative factor[s] in the institutionalization of the catholic church and in the development of a normative Christian self-definition.”³¹

As we can see, Sethian mythology is not uniform but rather representative of a diversity of thought and ideology. The literature contains a number of saviours, including many that are female, reinforcing gender symbolism that places feminine imagery and actors in more positive and active roles. Karen King suggests that Sethianism is more dualistic and presents the creator as more negative than in other demiurgical imaginings (especially those of the Valentinians). There is evidence of “the active malevolence of evil,” seen in the tyranny of the archons in the rape of Eve (*Hypostasis of the Archons* 89.17-29.)³² As a result, ascetic self-rule was encouraged as protection against demonic forces, and whereas the Valentinian system was generally tripartite, King describes the Sethians as having only two categories: those who will be saved and those who will not.³³

Turner describes Sethianism as a “religious competitor to early Christianity that had its own roots in Second Temple Judaism.”³⁴ As regards self-identity, he notes that the literature does not use the term Sethian as a descriptive, but that references are made to the great generation, strangers (*Apocalypse of Adam*), immovable, incorruptible race (*Gospel of the Egyptians*), seed of Seth (*Apocryphon of John*), living and unshakable race

³⁰ In a Sethian context at least. Pearson does cite the examples of the Manicheans and the Mandeans as exceptions (*Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, 134). Cf. also K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco, 1987), 218-252.

³¹ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, 135.

³² King, *What is Gnosticism*, 159. All the archons are not uniformly depicted as evil. Cf. for example, the *Thought of Norea* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.

³³ King, *What is Gnosticism*, 162.

³⁴ Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and Platonic Tradition*, 57.

(*Three Steles of Seth*), children of Seth (*Melchizedek*) and the holy seed of Seth (*Zostrianos*). He sees the *Apocryphon of John* as the “central text” of Sethian mythology.³⁵ Expanding upon Pearson’s description and following Schenke, Turner lists the Sethian doctrines and mythic elements as:

- (1) The self-understanding of the gnostics as the pneumatic seed of Seth
- (2) Seth as the heavenly/earthly saviour of his seed
- (3) The heavenly trinity of the Father (Invisible Spirit), Mother (Barbelo) and Son (Autogenes)
- (4) A division of the aeon/archon Barbelo into the triad of Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes
- (5) The Four Luminaries of the Son Autogenes – Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai and Eleleth
- (6) The evil demiurge Y/Ialdabaoth who tried to destroy the seed of Seth
- (7) The division of history into three ages and the appearance of the saviour in each age
- (8) A special prayer
- (9) A specific deployment of negative theology
- (10) A specific philosophical terminology
- (11) Obvious (secondary) Christianization
- (12) The presupposition of a triad or tetrad of “ministers” of the Four Luminaries – Gamaliel, Gabriel, Samblo, Abrasax
- (13) The designation “Pigeradamas” (ΠΙΓΕΡΑΔΑΜΑΣ) for Adamas

To which Turner would add:

- (14) The baptismal rite of the Five Seals.³⁶

He further delineates the variety of literary genres present in the documents as “apocalypse, testament, didactic treatise, revelation discourse and dialogue, self-predicatory aretalogy, liturgical manual, (and) ritual etiology,”³⁷ and the ways in which salvation through enlightenment comes about. He points out two groups within the Sethian treatises, one in which the “means of salvation [is a] horizontal, temporally

³⁵ Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and Platonic Tradition*, 69.

³⁶ Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and Platonic Tradition*, 63-64.

³⁷ Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and Platonic Tradition*, 88.

successive sequence of descents into this world by a heavenly saviour,”³⁸ and the second in which the “means of salvation [is a] vertical succession of mental states and assimilation to even higher levels of being on the part of the gnostic himself.”³⁹

Additionally, Turner suggests a hypothetical history of the Sethian movement in six phases.

- (1) The Sethians originated as a second century fusion of 2 groups – the Barbeloites, a baptismal sect associated with Barbelo/Wisdom and the Sethites, those of the “seed of Seth.”
- (2) Amalgamation by the mid-second century with Christian baptizing groups in which the pre-existent Christ is associated with the self-generated Autogenes
- (3) In the later second century, amalgamation of the Sethites and the Christianized Barbeloites – the birth of gnostic Sethianism.
- (4) At the end of the second century, a gradual estrangement from Christianity which was coming to reject the “docetic” Sethian envisioning of Christ.
- (5) By the third century, Sethianism rejected by heresiologists of the apostolic (orthodox, normative) Church, but became attracted to second and third century Platonism.
- (6) The late-third century, Sethianism estranged from Platonism due to attacks by Platonists like Plotinus. Thereafter in the early- to mid-fourth century, Sethianism fragmented into derivative groups.⁴⁰

Whether or not this particular paradigm is completely accurate, the evidence seems to consistently point to the Jewish origins of Sethianism, with close connections to the

³⁸ Including the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Trimorphic Prottennoia*, and possibly the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and Platonic Tradition*, 91).

³⁹ Including *Zostrianos*, the *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Marsanes* (ibid.).

⁴⁰ Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and Platonic Tradition*, 257-259. Cf. also Turner “Sethian Gnosticism.” Williams includes a summary of Turner’s reconstruction of the possible history of Sethianism drawn from “Sethian Gnosticism,” 56, in *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 91:

“(1) Sethianism as a non-Christian baptismal sect of the first centuries BCE and CE which considered itself primordially enlightened by the divine wisdom revealed to Adam and Seth, yet expected a final visitation of Seth marked by his conferral of saving baptism;

(2) Sethianism as gradually Christianized in the later first century onward through an identification of the pre-existent Christ with Seth, or Adam, that emerged through contact with Christian baptismal groups;

(3) Sethianism as increasingly estranged from a Christianity becoming more orthodox toward the end of the second century and beyond;

(4) Sethianism as rejected by the Great Church but meanwhile increasingly attracted to the individualistic contemplative practices of third-century Platonism; and

(5) Sethianism as estranged from the orthodox Platonists of the late third century and increasingly fragmented into various derivative and other sectarian gnostic groups, some surviving into the Middle Ages.”

apocalyptic tradition, especially the expected redemption of the chosen people through the intervention of a characteristic redeemer.

1.2.5. SETHIAN SOTERIOLOGY

In its most basic form, the dualistic soteriology was represented by a belief in salvation through “gnosis,” knowledge of or acquaintanceship with the unknowable foremost divine principle. Gnosis offered freedom from “ignorance and imprisonment in an alien body and a hostile world governed by fate.”⁴¹ Some systems, Sethian included, also required baptism for initiation, an echo of the Christian practice. As in Christian belief, Sethians perceived the ritual of baptism as necessary for salvation and revelation, with the revelation always received from an outside source. Coupled with this is the consideration that the knowledge of one’s true self, of “one’s kinship with the unknown transcendent god and of the true nature of the visible world,”⁴² was a requirement for eventual salvation.

This is a paradoxical element of the soteriology, as it implies divine grace, an unresolved tension pointed out and preserved in the polemical attacks of Irenaeus, “alongside the Valentinian concept of substance or nature [and the] ideas that education is necessary even for pneumatics.”⁴³ This saving revelation acts as a call to “awake” and implies the presence of a saviour, one who is a revealer, redeemer, liberator and rescuer, needed for the intervention of a superior power. For adherents of this ideology, “redemption and a redeemer existed from the beginning of human history and the redeemer has therefore a twofold task: original revelation and continuous revelation

⁴¹ Logan *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, 211.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, 213. Many ideologies perceived humanity as divided into three groups: the spiritual or pneumatic, the psychical or soul-like, and the material or hylic. The pneumatics were of the race of Seth, the ones chosen to receive gnosis. Regardless of this designation they still required education and revelation for acquaintanceship and ultimate salvation.

through history.”⁴⁴ Logan holds that this evolution was independent of Christianity, but that it influenced the development of early Christology.

The Christian heresiologists portrayed their opponents as believing in a concept of fixed identity and destiny rather than in the concept of free will. The three designations that they applied were fixed before birth as the pneumatic children of Seth, the psychical race of Abel (among whom mainstream Christians were numbered) and hylic race of Cain and were rewarded or condemned to ignorance according to pre-destination. Thus the children of Seth had a lock on deliverance through their redeemer. But despite this proclivity of belief, following Kurt Rudolph, Michael Williams insists that:

gnosis is not a theology of salvation by *nature*, as the heresiologists caricature it; it is rather thoroughly conscious of the provisional situation of the redeemed up to the realization of redemption after death. Otherwise the extant literature which relates to existential and ethical behavior is inexplicable... The gnostic thus acts in conformity with his nature and destiny: he is enabled to do so by the freedom from the constraint and tyranny of the cosmos which he has recovered. There is for him no redemption given by *nature* which he had not achieved for himself.⁴⁵

Rather, the nature (φύσις) of each individual is manifested through behavior, knowledge and revelation received from a salvific figure.

This redeemer or saviour figure is as diverse in its personification as the varieties of gnosis themselves. Some Valentinian literature identifies the revealer with Jesus, but a Jesus of the archons of the pleroma, wholly supernatural and incorruptible by the material world.⁴⁶ Other traditions feature the personification of Sophia, the embodiment of Wisdom in Old Testament literary traditions, as the divine intercessor acting in the interests of humanity. Sethianism focuses on a preexistent and eternal saviour that manifests through various incarnations, providing guidance and hope for salvation. The

⁴⁴ Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, 214. This has interesting echoes in/of Christianity from the perspective that Jesus, the redeemer, was associated with the Word, and “the Word was with God” in the beginning (as in John 1.1).

⁴⁵ Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 192.

⁴⁶ Cf. the *Gospel of Truth*, for example.

manifested saviour is variously represented as Seth himself, Jesus as incarnation of Seth, or in the apocalyptic text under examination, perhaps as Melchizedek.

Perkins notes that “the son of man tradition in the New Testament is developed along the lines suggested by Daniel 7 [whereas] gnostic use of the term owes more to the esoteric traditions found in 1 Enoch.”⁴⁷ As such, it follows the trajectory of the Enochic vision as a literary form, while the canonical Christian writings adhere more closely to traditional Hebrew apocalyptic imagery and style. They therefore represent the preservation of independent lines of tradition while remaining faithful to the larger literary heritage.

The “redeemed redeemer” in Sethian considerations is not trapped in the material world, and is accordingly more powerful than one imprisoned, however briefly, in the negative flesh associated with the material realm.⁴⁸ This saviour is sent to awaken, or reawaken, the awareness that humanity carries implicitly regarding their connection with the divine first principle (Abyss or Βύθος) to which all will ultimately return. Invariably this motif is represented as a heavenly figure with a close connection to the origin of the divine spark that exists deep within the imprisoning flesh of human incarnation and the forgetting of the originator inherent in the human condition.

Regardless of specific form, the myth of the saviour continued to adapt to suit the worldview and expectations of its originating community. It continued to function according to the societal concerns of often-marginalized assemblies, attracting criticism and condemnation from the larger, more powerful majority. In this case the censure was exhibited in the polemics of the Christian heresiologists.⁴⁹ Ironically fuelled by such

⁴⁷ Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament*, 30.

⁴⁸ This point illustrates the predominance of docetic christologies in many systems, although *Melchizedek* demonstrates a clearly anti-docetic perspective (5.2-11).

⁴⁹ This phenomenon of criticism was not exclusively the domain of the polemicists. The early Christians experienced much the same in the way of derision at the hands of detractors. Cf. for example Celsus' contemptuous dismissal of the nascent religion and its resurrected saviour as the imaginings of an hysterical woman quoted in Origen's *Contra Celsus* 2.55 and 3.55.

negative commentary, the hope for salvation and its accompanying redemptive manifestation persisted and diversified.

In many systems, the figure of the pre-existent Christ, an immortal being and one of the pleroma of archons (aeons) that made up the mythological universe, descended into Jesus of Nazareth, a human descendent in the line of Seth, generally at the time of his baptism. In Sethian gnosis, the preexistent Christ *is* Seth, and Jesus merely a vessel needed for the assumption of a heavenly saviour. This exaltation of Seth and his line served to set the Sethian communities apart from the rest of humanity. This concept is predicated in the belief system surrounding the creation of the world. Seth, as both preexistent archon and “human” child of Adam and Eve, was engendered through the intercession of the Mother, often Sophia or Barbelo, a female principle of the pleroma. Through her, Seth received power and the divine spark that resides in all humanity and acts as the connection to the first principle. In part, the purity and ascendancy given to the descendents of Seth lie in this affiliation with the Mother.

In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* Seth is numbered among the company of heaven as the preexistent saviour who intervenes three times in human history. The third intercession occurs through the heavenly Seth’s “incarnation or adoption” of Jesus of Nazareth, a human descendent of Seth’s first manifestation.⁵⁰

1.2.6. SETHIAN TEXTS: DIRECT AND INDIRECT SETHIAN LITERATURE

Turner’s paradigm of the Sethian documents provides a clear organizational framework. The most important Sethian works that deal directly with the figure of Seth are categorized as “Direct.” The “Indirect” documents include Seth in a tangential or less obvious fashion (the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* among them).⁵¹

⁵⁰ Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 101. Cf. Luke’s genealogy (3.38).

⁵¹ Cf. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and Platonic Tradition*, 42. Layton would add the *Thunder, Perfect Mind* (NHC VI, 2) to the list and the case can be made for the inclusion of *Hypsiphron* (NHC XI, 4) along with the anti-gnostic polemics that “quote” lost documents as well. Cf. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and Platonic Tradition*, 61-62.

1.2.6.1. DIRECT TEXTS

THE APOCALYPSE OF ADAM (NHC V, 5)

The Sethian *Apocalypse of Adam* takes the form of a revelation received by Adam through the intercession of three heavenly visitors. This revelation was narrated to Seth, the son of Adam, and contains the traditional forms associated with Jewish revelatory literature. It contains a dream vision, is passed from father to son, is hidden on a mountain and is related and recorded just before the death of the recipient. While it contains an account of the creation, the *Apocalypse of Adam* does not follow the Genesis text as closely as the *Hypostasis of the Archons* or the *Apocryphon of John*. The account traces the myth from the creation of Eve to the final soteriological episode and the advent of the final redeemer at the eschaton at which time all but the elect will be damned. Sakla is the name given to the evil creator, and humanity is divided into three groups or races: the descendents of Seth, those of Noah (through his sons Shem, Ham and Japheth) and the apostates from the second group that join the Sethians through attained gnosis.⁵² Additionally, the text includes a fifteen-stanza poem on the incarnation of the saviour that is unique among the mythological systems (77.27-83.2). The document is of unknown provenance, but must be dated before 350 CE, the approximate date of the burial of the Nag Hammadi documents, and is known only in its Coptic version. The original language of composition was likely Greek.⁵³

George MacRae and Douglas M. Parrott suggest that there are no clear borrowings from Christian tradition found in the document, which in turn suggests a “transitional stage in an evolution from Jewish to gnostic apocalyptic.”⁵⁴ Rudolph noted that “this document works together very skillfully several traditions and is certainly a

⁵² Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 52. This description of the races contradicts Genesis 5.1-6.1, which lists Noah as *belonging* to the line of Seth.

⁵³ Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 64.

⁵⁴ G. W. MacRae and D. M. Parrott, “The Apocalypse of Adam,” in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 277. Cf. the critical editions in the Nag Hammadi Library series by H. W. Attridge, *Nag Hammadi Codex I (Jung Codex)* (Leiden, 1985); S. Emmel, H. Koester and E. Pagels, *Nag Hammadi Codex III, The Dialogue of the Saviour* (Leiden, 1984).

witness of early gnosis, since it still stands very near to the Jewish apocalyptic literature and has no Christian tenor.”⁵⁵ It is considered a Sethian text due to the prominence of the character of Seth and the position of his progeny as the inheritors of salvific knowledge.

THE APOCRYPHON OF JOHN (NHC II, 1, III, 1, and BG 8502, 2)

The *Apocryphon of John* had to have been written previous to c. 180 CE, the date of Irenaeus’ summary.⁵⁶ The original language of composition was Greek and it is attested in four different manuscript versions. Manuscripts NHC II and IV contain long versions of the text, and manuscripts NHC III and the Berlin Codex contain short versions of the document. Karen King’s book *The Secret Revelation of John* provides her comprehensive reading of the variants, along with an interpretation of the text.⁵⁷

Like the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Apocryphon of John* offers a retelling of Genesis, in this instance with the addition of the before-times, those previous to Genesis 1.1, as a revelation delivered by Christ, post-resurrection (as in the *Gospel of Thomas*), to John, the son of Zebedee, one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus. It describes the twofold creation of Adam, both the soul and material shell (15.1-18.11). The detailed recounting ends with the birth of Seth and transforms into a theological discourse on the preexistent Christ, but not on the incarnation, that is, the earthly manifestation.⁵⁸ The *Apocryphon of John* also deals with the origin of evil and how to escape its grasp, as well as the emanations born of the perfection of the unknowable god. In this example the fall occurred through Sophia’s seeking to create, without approval, resulting in the “birth” of

⁵⁵ Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 135.

⁵⁶ Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.29, specifically his summary of the doctrines of the “Barbelognostics,” named due to the importance of the character of the Mother or Barbelo, believed to be derived from his reading of the *Apocryphon of John*. Cf. also G. Quispel, “The Demiurge in *The Apocryphon of John*,” in R. McL. Wilson (ed.), *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis: Papers Read at the First International Congress of Coptology (Cairo, December 1976)* (Leiden, 1978), 1-33.

⁵⁷ K. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, 2006). Cf. F. Wisse, “After the *Synopsis*: Prospects and Problems in Establishing a Critical Text of *The Apocryphon of John* and Defining Its Historical Location,” in J. D. Turner and A. McGuire (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (Leiden, 1997), 138-153.

⁵⁸ Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 23.

Ialdabaoth, Saklas or Satan, who creates angels of his own to rule the material world and aid in the creation of man. In this cosmic struggle of light and darkness to gain ascendancy over the divine spark in humanity, Christ is sent as a reminder of its heavenly origin and possibility of return to the presence of the ineffable first principle. Asceticism is necessary for the return to the ultimate source, with reincarnation being the fate of those who fail to achieve acquaintance.⁵⁹

THE GOSPEL OF THE EGYPTIANS (NHC III, NHC IV, 2)

The *Gospel of the Egyptians* or *The Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* is not a gospel of the genre generally associated with the canonical New Testament. It is essentially a prelude to a baptismal ritual and presents the entire myth. The emphasis is on the story of creation and the “expansion of the invisible spirit or first principle into a full spiritual universe and the establishment of the gnostic church.”⁶⁰ Its setting is mythic, featuring metaphysical beings seen in the throne room of the spiritual universe and arranged according to its hierarchy. Seth is numbered among this company as the preexistent saviour who intervenes three times in human history. The third intercession occurs through the heavenly Seth’s “incarnation or adoption” of Jesus of Nazareth, a human descendent of Seth’s first manifestation.⁶¹ The creation is seen in a more positive light, something of an anomaly in Sethian tradition, and more in keeping with the positivism of Jewish and Christian “mainstream” belief.

There is no real tie to the Egyptians, and the author and date of composition are unknown. Its position among the other documents discovered at Nag Hammadi ensures a compositional date prior to 350 CE, and, like most of the other documents, its original language of composition was likely Greek. It contains a mixture of literary styles, including a heavenly message, learned treatise, cosmogony and hymn. “The Great Seth” is the putative author, following the tradition of ascription of authority and reinforcing the

⁵⁹ F. Wisse, “The Apocryphon of John,” in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 104.

⁶⁰ Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 101.

⁶¹ Ibid.

position held by Seth in the minds of his “race.” Two Coptic witnesses were preserved that differ in vocabulary style. This has led to the theory that they offer independent translation and interpretation of the Greek originals. Manuscript NHC IV is thought to be the superior copy. As an example of Sethian salvation history, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* presents the life of Seth as the canonical gospels present the life of Jesus, both offering salvation through baptism and divine intervention.

THE HYPOSTASIS OF THE ARCHONS (NHC II, 4)

Like the other Sethian documents covered thus far, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* or *Reality of the Rulers* is an example of an extended cosmogony based in Genesis 1-6. It contains a myth of creation by Ialdabaoth, the story of Noah and the Flood, a prediction of the final coming of the saviour, the destruction of demonic powers and the ultimate victory of the Sethians. It is a complicated document, filled with lacunae and with what appear to be later Christian interpolations.⁶² It likely had its origin within a Jewish or Jewish-Christian milieu despite the anti-Jewish, negative portrayal of the god of creation. The document’s authorship and place of origin are unknown, and it can be dated no more exactly than before 350 CE. There are examples of Hellenistic syncretism, and “questions of date and provenance are complicated by the possibility that the work as it stands is a result of a Christian editor’s having combined a narrative source (interpreting parts of Genesis) with a revelation discourse concerned with soteriology and eschatology, and placing them both within a Christian framework.”⁶³ The “true history” account is paraphrastic and similar in style to Jewish Aramaic *targums*.⁶⁴ R. A. Bullard suggests that the document was used for instruction in the context of a Christian-gnostic community that accepted the authority of Paul (the “great apostle” mentioned in the introduction of the *Hypostasis of the Archons*) regarding the grim reality of the existence of the negative or demonic archons.

⁶² Cf. E. H. Arthur, *The Wisdom Goddess: Feminine Motifs in Eight Nag Hammadi Documents* (Lanham, Md., 1984), 93-151.

⁶³ R. A. Bullard and B. Layton, “The Hypostasis of the Archons,” in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 161. Cf. B. Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7 together with XIII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1), and P. OXY. I, 654, 655* (Leiden, 1989).

⁶⁴ Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 66. Cf. especially the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* for similarity of style.

Interestingly, in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* the figure chosen to receive revelation is not Seth, but rather his sister, Norea. The document as a whole contains many examples of positive feminine imagery, and it is to a spirit-endowed pneumatic woman that the great angel Eleleth grants insight and a glimpse into the future. This demonstrates a definite break with the other Sethian documents examined to this point. Regardless, it is placed within the corpus of direct documents due to the similarities of style and content, in spite of potentially Christian affiliations.

THE THREE STELES OF SETH (NHC VII, 5)

As mentioned above, Josephus acted as a witness to the tradition of the preservation of revelation on stone, brick or wooden tablets, or steles, meant to survive the various catastrophes found in biblical literature. The *Three Steles of Seth*, discovered at Nag Hammadi, provides a clear example of this convention. The document contains a frame story, the discovery made by Dositheos, a (Samaritan?) sectarian leader, regarding the recovery of Sethian gnosis.⁶⁵ The message received by Adam and passed through his son (cf. the *Apocalypse of Adam*) details worship practices and hymns of thanksgiving, praise and petition, open to those of the living race that is descended from Seth. In this example of direct Sethian literature, there is no specific setting of scene. Rather, prior acquaintance with the mythic system is presupposed.⁶⁶

Although the place and date of composition are unknown, there is clearly no evidence of Christian influence. The document instead seems drawn from Jewish and Neo-Platonic tradition. The numbering of the three steles is representative of the symbolic divine triad of Neo-Platonism and represents the three-fold nature of god: "the Selfbegotten Son, the male virgin Barbelo (mother) and the Unbegotten Father."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Dositheos was portrayed as the teacher of Simon Magus. Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* XXX.18-125; Th. Caldwell, "Dositheos Samaritanus," *Kairos* 4 (1962), 105-117.

⁶⁶ Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 148.

⁶⁷ J. E. Goehring and J. M. Robinson, "The Three Steles of Seth," in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 396. Cf. B. A. Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codex VII* (Leiden, 1996).

Additionally, Seth is represented here as both an archetype (Emmakha Seth) and as a replacement of Abel, a new beginning and hope for his progeny. As is the case with the other documents, the original Greek version did not survive and the *Three Steles of Seth* is attested in a single Coptic manuscript.

ZOSTRIANOS (NHC VIII, 1)

Zostrianos, the final direct Sethian document, is an example of a heavenly journey apocalypse. In it, baptism is equated with the ascent of the soul to the acquaintance of the ineffable first principle from whom all things emanated. This journey features a ladder of ascent peopled with the aeons, archons or abstractions present in varying forms throughout most Sethian systems. As in Plato's *Symposium* (210a-212a), the soul is met after death by higher and higher abstractions and then expected to return. As such, the voyage of Zostrianos is a representation of the "intellectual voyage of the mystic," accompanied by angels offering revelation as is found in apocalyptic tradition.⁶⁸

The author and place of composition are unknown, but Layton suggests the possibility of pre-Christian Persia as a locale owing to the lack of reference to the history of Israel or Christian foundations in the frame story.⁶⁹ It was completed prior to 268 CE as it is mentioned by Plotinus in his treatise against heretics.⁷⁰ The original language of transmission was Greek, but the document remains only in the very damaged Coptic translation from Nag Hammadi. *Zostrianos* is the autobiography of a religious seer following an attempted suicide. It contains revealed gnosis "for the benefit of the elect, the holy seed of Seth."⁷¹ It ends with a sermon or homily on the ideal that regards the oppressiveness of this (material) world and the possibility of salvation only through

⁶⁸ Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 121. There is also a potential association with Zoroaster that might suggest a Persian milieu.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead* II.9.

⁷¹ J. H. Sieber, "Zostrianos," in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 402. Cf. J. H. Sieber, *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII* (Leiden, 1991).

gnosis. Sieber suggests the possibility that *Zostrianos* was used “by a group of gnostics in worship or contemplative exercises.”⁷²

1.2.6.2. INDIRECT TEXTS

MARSANES (NHC X)

As it is found in one of the most corrupt of the Nag Hammadi Codices, *Marsanes* is the only document preserved on its own. The remainder of the codex, likely more than half, has been lost to time and damage. As such, the text is very fragmentary and so much of the reconstructed document is hypothetical. In this example of Sethian apocalypse, Marsanes is named as the prophet, known from two other sources, the *Untitled Apocalypse* from the Bruce Codex, and mentioned in the anti-heretical writings of Epiphanius as “Marsianos” as one among the so-called Archonites. Over the course of the document, Marsanes experiences revelations and visionary experiences, including the ascent as described by Turner.⁷³

The character Marsanes is assumed to be the avatar of Seth, the saviour, specially chosen to receive and transmit the message of salvation. This salvific message, that matter is capable of salvation, was influenced by Platonist philosophy. There appears to be no sign of Christian influence or Christianizing interpolations, but the text does contain discussions of theurgy, the works of the gods, while demonstrating a preoccupation with ritual.

Marsanes is thought to date from the third century, by an author of Syrian background who may have been exposed to the environments of Egypt and Rome. The original language of composition was Greek.⁷⁴

⁷² Sieber, “Zostrianos,” 402.

⁷³ See Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*, Chapter 5.

⁷⁴ B. A. Pearson, “Marsanes,” in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 460-462. Cf. B. A. Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X* (Leiden, 1981).

THE MELCHIZEDEK APOCALYPSE (NHC IX, 1)

As the document central to this thesis, I provide elsewhere a comprehensive look at *Melchizedek* (see 2.3.). Briefly, to keep it in the context of its fellow Sethian literature, the document is an apocalypse, a revelation given to Melchizedek by heavenly intermediaries, for transmission to the elite. *Melchizedek* demonstrates a mix of Jewish, Christian and Sethian influences. The document was written in Greek, likely in Egypt in the early third century.

It is made up of three parts. The first contains a vocative address, likely from Melchizedek to Jesus, and then a revelation received from the heavenly Gamaliel. This includes a prophecy regarding the ministry, death and resurrection of the saviour Jesus Christ. Additionally a future high-priestly office is prophesied for Melchizedek. These prophecies herald the final triumph over death.

The second section sees Melchizedek joyously participating in ritual actions: prayers of thanksgiving, baptism, the reception of a priestly name and spiritual offerings. There are invocations to the divine beings, names held in common with the archons/angels of the *Apocryphon of John* and other examples of Sethian literature.

The third part is a second set of revelations with Melchizedek transported into the future. He witnesses the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but in a twist, Melchizedek himself will perform the spiritual triumph over the enemies.⁷⁵

THE THOUGHT OF NOREA (NHC IX, 2)

Norea is one of the shortest of the Nag Hammadi documents and has a four-fold structure. The first part is an invocation to the divine Triad of Father (Incomprehensible, Adamas), the Mother (Thought, Ennoia), and the Son (Mind, Nous, Logos, Autogenes).

⁷⁵ S. Giversen and B. A. Pearson, "The Melchizedek Apocalypse," in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 438-439.

The second invocation has Norea crying out to the divine pleroma, and results in her return to their presence. The third section focuses on Norea's saving role, her propagation of the "words of life" that will allow for salvation. Fourth, Norea's salvation is assured through the intercession of four holy helpers, the luminaries seen elsewhere in Sethian tradition: Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe and Eleleth. Her thought, which is gnosis, allows her progeny to reenter the presence of the ineffable first principle.

Norea shows no indications of Christian influence but is rather a presentation of prehistory in keeping with Jewish tradition. The female saviour, Norea and other variations on the name (Orea, for example), appears as the daughter of Adam and Eve, the sister/wife of Seth or as the wife of Noah or Shem. There are likely connections with the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and Norea as the intended victim of the rape perpetrated by the evil archons. Norea could also be a derivative of a figure from Jewish *haggadah*, a Cainite woman named Naamah who had unlawful congress with the fallen angels (the Watchers of *1 Enoch*), appearing instead as an undefiled virgin in Sethian traditions.

In this document, Seth himself has disappeared; Norea is the saved saviour and the symbolic equivalent of Sophia/Wisdom. *Norea* is likely of Egyptian or Syrian provenance and usually dated to the late second or early third century.⁷⁶

***ALLOGENES* (NHC XI, 3)**

Allogenes is a revelation discourse, received by Allogenes and recorded for his son, Messos. The name of the recipient of the apocalypse is generally seen as meaning "stranger" and often represented a member of the Sethian race or Seth himself. The document is made up of two parts. The first details the five revelations of the female deity Youel as transmitted to Allogenes. These include descriptions of the divine powers, Barbelo among them. The second section features the ascent of Allogenes and the ultimate revelation of the transcendent god.

⁷⁶ S. Giversen and B. A. Pearson, "The Thought of Norea," in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 460-462.

Allogenes is thought to be of Alexandrian origin, with Greek as the language of composition and dated to the very early fourth century. The later dating of the text is reflective of its associations with Neoplatonism. Porphyry mentions Plotinus' attacks on certain writers who produced revelations, including one by Allogenes.⁷⁷

THE TRIMORPHIC PROTENNOIA (NHC XIII, 1)

The *Trimorphic Protennoia* or "Three-Formed (Divine) First Thought" is a Barbeloite treatise with Sethian and Christian revisions. It likely dates from the mid-second century, approximately contemporaneous with the *Apocryphon of John* and is essentially another aretalogy, the relation of the wonderful deeds of a god or hero, in this case the accomplishments of a divine female figure, the First Thought (Ennoia). First the "Voice of First Thought" descends as light into darkness to shape her fallen members (humanity). Secondly, the "Speech of the Thought" descends to empower the fallen members with spirit. Finally, the "Word/Logos of Thought" descend while in the likeness of the powers, takes human form, introduces the baptismal rite (five seals) and restores her members to the light (acquaintance with the Ineffable).

There is an apparent similarity of language to the prologue of the Gospel of John in *Trimorphic Protennoia*. There are also seemingly connections to Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom schools and traditions. These speculated as to the personification and hypostasis of the figure of Wisdom (Sophia), and her role in creation and the enlightenment of humanity as found in *1 Enoch* 42, *Sirach* 24 and *Wisdom* 7-8, for example.⁷⁸

UNTITLED APOCALYPSE (BC)

The last two Sethian documents are not found in the Nag Hammadi Codices. The *Untitled Apocalypse* is found in the Bruce Codex and is variably dated to the end of the

⁷⁷ Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16. Cf. A. C. Wire, J. D. Turner and O. S. Wintermute, "Allogenes," in J. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 490-491.

⁷⁸ J. D. Turner, "The Trimorphic Protennoia," in J. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 511-512.

second century⁷⁹ or, in Turner's estimation, to 325-350 CE, because of its likely connections to Alexandrian Platonism. It may be the product of an Egyptian community and was likely later Christianized.

The *Untitled Apocalypse* tells of the preparation of candidates for the "baptism of light." It offers descriptions of the Unknowable God, the Abyss of All Being and the extended pleroma, including the Ennead or Nine-fold Being and the further emanations. It is a pre-historical mythology in keeping with the cosmologies of other Sethian literature, based in Jewish traditions and writings. Beyond all is the "Deep" Setheus, in whom the Word is hidden. Salvation is expected through the practice of baptismal rite and the logos is the demiurge. Despite the extreme complexity of the pleroma, the elaborate cosmology with its "Fathers" and "Deeps," there is no Barbelo or Invisible Spirit. There seems to be an affinity between the *Untitled Apocalypse*, *Zostrianos* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and the author likely knew of *Marsanes*.⁸⁰

THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS (AL MINYA CODEX)

As a recent literary media darling, the *Gospel of Judas* has received a great deal of press, owing to the strange history of the codex itself and the perceived content that paints Judas in a different light than the traditional characterization of the betrayer of Jesus. The 26-page papyrus document likely dates from the third or fourth century CE, and presents an anti-docetic worldview in which Jesus reveals the mysteries of the cosmos, in particular the creation of the pleroma and the origin of the world. There is a great deal of speculation that the *Gospel of Judas* may be the text mentioned, and maligned, by Irenaeus.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Cf. C. Schmidt, *Gnostische Schriften in koptischer Sprache aus dem Codex Brucianus* (Leipzig, 1892), 664.

⁸⁰ Cf. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and Platonic Tradition*, 195-198. See below, chapter 5, for a more comprehensive look at the motif of Melchizedek as saviour and the importance of symbolic baptism in *Pistis Sophia*, *The Book of Ieu* and the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* itself.

⁸¹ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.31.1.

It features many of the characters common to the Sethian systems, including Adamas (47.22), Saklas (51.17,19), Yaldabaoth (51.15), and Barbelo (35.18). The cosmos originated with the Great Invisible Spirit and divine Self-Generated angel (47). In his naming of the angels, “Seth, who is called Christ (52.5-6),” the author of the *Gospel of Judas* suggests an equation of Jesus’ heavenly persona and Seth, the originator of the seed (49.6) of the “incorruptible generation” (49.13). Judas is the only one of the disciples to see that Jesus has come to earth from the supernatural realm of Barbelo (35.17-18) and ultimately is the one who will sacrifice the “man that clothes” Jesus (56), setting his spirit free to return to the pleroma.⁸²

1.2.7. CONCLUSION

As discussed above, the crisis of categorization besetting gnosticism as a genre has led to a necessary reevaluation of the way in which we examine its literature. With the figure of Seth as the main point of commonality, the Sethian texts are representative of continuity and innovation developed from Jewish literary tradition. This continuity is characterized by elements taken from earlier apocalyptic writings and the use of the biblical tradition of Seth as the third son of Adam as a soteriological figure. The subcategory Sethianism aids in the classification of the Nag Hammadi library and other texts from Late Antiquity, and is a viable way of describing a commonality of key themes and images.

Although the texts are demonstrative of great variety in form, theology and rhetorical language and processes, they share enough characteristics to make Sethianism a viable framework for analysis. As a literary trajectory the category Sethian, as I have described it, provides a vocabulary and presentation of themes that is necessary for the effective evaluation of texts and therefore the discourse surrounding the religions of the early centuries of the Common Era. Sethian discourse may itself be somewhat elusive,

⁸² R. Kasser, M. Meyer and G. Wurst, *The Gospel of Judas from Codex Tchacos* (Washington, D. C., 2006). Cf. *National Geographic* 209 (May 2006), 78-95; B. D. Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed* (Oxford, 2006). There are some very interesting commonalities between the *Gospel of Judas* and *Melchizedek*, as the polemic against the Temple and the priestly practice of sacrifice (39-43 in *Judas* and 6.24-28 in *Melchizedek*, see below 2.3.9.1.).

but in the case of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* the designation remains useful as the most applicable of the alternatives to simple gnosticism as a descriptor of the ideology behind the text, an ideology that is reflective of the Egyptian milieu from which it originated.

1.3. THE EGYPTIAN CONTEXT

1.3.1. INTRODUCTION

As Carl Smith suggests in *No Longer Jews*, Egypt is the most likely geographical locale for the origins of many forms of religious speculation, including Sethianism. In addition to being the site of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library, the source of much of our direct evidence of the dualistic and biblical demiurgical worldviews and cosmological systems, Egypt was the pivotal origin of Christian desert monasticism and its traditions of asceticism and removal from society. Alexandria was an important centre in the development of mainstream Christian belief during the volatile early centuries CE, wracked as they were with disputes about docetism and Trinity, and “proper” Christian theology and praxis, along with political in-fighting and power struggles among the elite of the Church and its developing, Alexandria-based patriarchal authority.

For these reasons, and to test the veracity of the emphasis Smith places on origins as the paramount factor in the dialogue about such religious movements, I will examine some of the complexities of the Egyptian environment. The establishment of the temporal and geographical context of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* may lend insight into its positions on the Sethian, apocalyptic and Melchizedek literary trajectories, therefore contributing to its analysis and interpretation, and overall importance in aiding understanding of the varieties of religious experiences and their expression in Late Antiquity.

1.3.2. FINDS IN THE DESERT: NAG HAMMADI

On the side of the Nile Valley cliffs rise abruptly to the desert above. The section of the cliff on the right bank marking the limit of the Nile Valley and the arable land between Chenoboskion and Pabau is called the Jabal al-Tarif. A protruding boulder shaped somewhat like a stalagmite had broken off in prehistoric times from the face of the cliff and fallen down onto the talus (the inclined plane of fallen rock that over the ages naturally collects like a buttress at the foot of a cliff). Under the northern flank of one of the huge barrel-shaped

pieces of this shattered boulder the jar containing the Nag Hammadi library was secreted.

In the face of the cliff, just at the top of the talus, which can be climbed without difficulty, sixth-dynasty tombs from the reigns of Pepi I and II (2350-2200 BCE) had in antiquity long since been robbed. Thus they had become cool solitary caves where a monk might well hold his spiritual retreats as is reported of Pachomius himself, or where a hermit might have his cell. Greek prayers to Zeus Sarapis, opening lines of biblical Psalms in Coptic, and Christian crosses, all painted in red onto the walls of the caves, show that they were indeed so used. Perhaps those who cherished the Nag Hammadi library made such use of the caves, which would account for the choice of this site to bury them. The jar rested there a millennium and a half...¹

In his introduction to *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, James Robinson lyrically describes the site of one of the largest discoveries of literary texts from late antiquity. The story has become well known and is a classic example of truth being stranger than fiction. In 1945 an Egyptian peasant discovered a jar in the desert sand of Nag Hammadi Upper Egypt. The jar contained the forty-six works that would come to be called the Nag Hammadi library. He brought them to his home in a hamlet called al-Qasr that was the ancient site of Chenoboskion, the home of Pachomius, a pivotal figure in the development of Christian desert monasticism. Due to a variety of factors, including a bloody family feud, material greed, and concerns about curses and bad luck, the codices ended up separated and worse for wear.² Today, the Nag Hammadi library has been restored and is conserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo.

A number of factors caused the examination and presentation of the codices to progress slowly: the dissemination of the texts throughout the world via the antiquities market, the overshadowing effects of the aftermath of World War II, the volume of material, and the physical and literary nature of the texts.³ Issues of codicology and language, exegetical problems, questions regarding composition and use of sources, as

¹ Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 22.

² Parts of the codices were burned in the oven by the mother of the discoverer, Muhammad Ali, as she thought them, at best, worthless, at worst, a source of bad luck. Many others were sold on the antiquities market, including the one named the "Jung" Codex, which was purchased by the Jung Institute of Zurich in 1952.

³ Such reasons likely account for the relative obscurity, initially, of the Nag Hammadi texts, at least as compared with the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Jewish texts found at Qumran between 1947 and 1956.

well as the clear need to re-evaluate categories, meant that the publication of the complete Nag Hammadi library was slow in coming. Work progressed through the efforts of an international team led by James M. Robinson, and includes the French language project at the University of Laval in Quebec, under the direction of Paul-Hubert Poirier and Louis Painchaud, and the seventeen-volume English edition, *The Coptic Gnostic Library*.

The texts themselves vary as to where, when and by whom they were originally written, offering differing points of view and usage of themes and motifs, so it is not surprising that the discovery of the library has caused a great deal of discussion regarding the issues of genre and categorization, and the need for a clear the reevaluation of the label gnostic. The diversity of the texts points to the reality that they did not originate within a single, cohesive group or movement, but they do share enough commonalities to have been collected and preserved together. Robinson sees the connective point as being “the focus that brought the collection together [which] is an estrangement from the mass of humanity, an affinity to an ideal order that completely transcends life as we know it, and a life-style radically other than common practice. This life-style involved giving up all the goods that people usually desire and longing for an ultimate liberation. It is not an aggressive revolution that is intended, but rather a withdrawal from involvement in the contamination that destroys clarity of vision.”⁴

This approach to life was too radical for the “mainstream” religious traditions of antiquity, and it was ultimately deemed heretical by the authorities of the time.⁵ Being forced “underground” as it were, Robinson suggests that the diverse manifestations of this perspective reinterpreted and translated the initial texts, from Greek to Coptic, often poorly and without an understanding of the nuances of the original language.⁶ In addition to intentional redactions made over time, scribal errors created unintentional changes to

⁴ Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 1. The lifestyle Robinson is referencing is the monastic movement that originated in the fourth century in Egypt.

⁵ Robinson includes Neoplatonism in his definition of the religions of the time that had issues with gnosticism.

⁶ Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 2.

the original documents. As, in the majority of cases, the versions from Nag Hammadi are the only extant copies of the texts available, there is nothing, no “control” document, that can be used for comparison and to document the changes through time as the texts evolved into their presents forms.⁷

Because of the physical deterioration of the document, an unsurprising result of being buried for 1600 years and the lack of initial conservation upon discovery, with the final conservation done 30 years later, the laconic nature of the remnants means that the larger holes remain blank of anything other than educated guess-work. Still, the texts are representative of differing expressions of a worldview, or worldviews, that seek to answer problematic questions that arise as a result of, and in response to, among other things, a perceived inequity between expectations and reality. That the collectors are Christian, and the original essays composed, for the most part, by Christians, seems the most likely scenario. This is not surprising when viewed in light of the fact that Christianity itself grew out of a radical movement, with its leader, Jesus, calling for a reversal of social norms and religious practices. The Nag Hammadi library seems to offer evidence of the pluralism of beliefs that were present in the development of early Christianity, as the Dead Sea Scrolls evinced the pluralism of Jewish theological positions.

The texts that make up the Nag Hammadi collection are important witnesses that preserve, in Coptic, lost Greek works that serve to illuminate both the practice of the production of books, and the lives of those who copied, read and buried them. There are twelve codices, with eight leaves from a thirteenth codex that were tucked into the cover of the sixth. These papyrus codices contain fifty-two tractates, six of which are found in a second duplicate version in the library itself, and six others that were known in extant copies at the time of the discovery.⁸ So, ultimately, the library contains forty new texts,

⁷ Other than references from the heresiologists, not often the most accurate portrayal of the texts or the worldviews expressed in them.

⁸ The six extant texts are VI, 5 and 7, and XII, 1, preserved in the original Greek; VI, 8 in Latin translation; and II, 1, and III, 4, composed and preserved in the original Coptic. There are also examples of previously known fragmentary texts, particularly those that are found in the *Papyrus Berolinensis* 8502 (BG 8502) that were not readily identifiable until the Nag Hammadi discovery.

of which some, including *Melchizedek*, are very fragmentary, that can and do offer a more complete view of the literary imaginings of the early centuries of the Common Era.

Since Greek was the language of origin of the majority of Nag Hammadi texts, the original authors did not necessarily come from within an Egyptian milieu, although an Egyptian provenance for most of the texts is likely.⁹ The Nag Hammadi translations appear in two dialects of Coptic, and feature the distinguishable handwriting of different scribes. From the cartonnage of the codices, the papyrus previously used for correspondence or business dealings and employed to thicken the leather covers of the codices, the texts can be attached to their earliest possible dates, in the fourth-century, while we are offered a window into the daily life of the monastery/monasteries from which they originated.

The headquarters of the Pachomian monastery at Pabau and the Pachomian monastery at Chenoboskion are within close proximity of the burial site of the Nag Hammadi Library (8.7 and 5.3 kilometers, respectively), and as a result the texts are frequently identified with the Pachomian monastic order. This attribution is in keeping with the “large-scale literary program at the appropriate time and place of the production of the Nag Hammadi codices,”¹⁰ that is known to have occurred in the Pachomian communities. While not a completely assured conclusion, it is perhaps, Robinson suggests, the best among many.

In response to the charge of the contradiction apparent in the orthodox Pachomian monks, as described in Eusebius’ *Life of St. Pachomius*, holding an extensive library of heretical documents, it has been suggested that the texts were used to *refute* heresy.¹¹ But

⁹ Exceptions may include VI, 5 which is a Coptic version of a portion of Plato’s *Republic*; and II, 2, in which the authorship of the *Gospel of Thomas* is attributed to Didymos Judas Thomas, who has close associations with the Syrian church. Cf. H. Koester in Robinson (ed.) *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 124.

¹⁰ Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 17. A second discovery in 1952, of documents dating roughly two centuries after those that make up the Nag Hammadi library, are most certainly the remains of a Pachomian library. Although they contain no gnostic texts, these manuscripts, the Bodmer Papyri, contain biblical and apocryphal material associable with the Pachomian monastic order.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

why would such an extensive collection be necessary, and why undertake the time- and resource-consuming task of translation from the original Greek into Coptic if they were not going to be used? Additionally, some of the texts in the library were not particularly “heretical” and therefore would not have been in need of refutation. Robinson suggests:

the very fact that the library seems to have been made up by combining several smaller collections tends to point toward individual Christian Gnostics or monasteries producing individual books or small collections for their own spiritual enlightenment, rather than to a heresy-hunting scribal campaign. Since the familiar heresy-hunting literature is in Greek, one should hesitate to postulate such a widespread heresy-hunting activity in Coptic.¹²

Furthermore, the apparent care taken in the manufacturing of the documents could be seen as reflective more of religious devotion, the texts appearing to be products not of disinterest and revilement, but of veneration and respect. Robinson answers this dilemma by stating that “perhaps the common presentation of the monastic movement of the fourth century CE as solidly orthodox is an anachronism, and more nearly reflects the situation of the later monasticism that recorded the legends about the earlier period.”¹³ Coupled with the fact that the documents being hidden in a jar is suggestive of a desire for *preservation* rather than *elimination*, Robinson’s assessment seems highly possible.¹⁴

1.3.3. THE EGYPTIAN DIASPORA

As the Nag Hammadi texts were discovered in Egypt, some historical, religious and cultural background is necessary to understand the context from which they emerged. The Alexandrian Jewish community is arguably the best documented of the Diaspora, especially through the writings of Philo Judaeus. From him and other

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 18.

¹⁴ If disposal was the goal of the burying of the texts, it would be out of keeping with the common means of being rid of problematic texts of the time. The burning of the Serapeum of the Library of Alexandria in the late fourth century suggests that fire was a typical way of destroying “heretical” views, and would have been a less involved means of disposing of the Nag Hammadi library were the texts in fact seen as heretical rather than holy.

historical and literary sources, we know of a number of key events in Egyptian Jewish history:

- (1) the 24/23 BCE poll tax (*laographia*) instituted by Caesar Augustus;
- (2) the 38 CE pogrom under Flaccus;¹⁵
- (3) the massacre of Jews under Tiberius Julius Alexander, Philo's nephew, in 66 CE;
- (4) the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE; and
- (5) the 115-117 revolt under Trajan, in which the Egyptian Jewish community was virtually wiped out.¹⁶

Philo came from a noble, educated and prosperous Jewish family. Of his approximately forty-nine extant works, about three quarters of the work attributed to him is composed of commentaries on the Pentateuch, employing the perspectives of Jewish exegesis and elements of Hellenistic philosophy, specifically Platonic thought, and textual interpretation. His writings demonstrate the degree of the acculturation of educated Jews to the influence of Greek literature, philosophy and social practices.

While his work is a clear example of the assimilation of Greek literature, Philo maintained the integrity of traditional Judaism. His goal was not "to promote a change in his religion, or to harmonize the Mosaic Law with Greek philosophy, as if he were the architect and builder of a higher synthesis; it was rather the comprehension of his spiritual heritage in the light of his new intellectual horizons, and the preservation, if not the very recovery, of those spiritual and human values that the Jewish community seemed destined to lose in an ever more rapid process of assimilation."¹⁷

Alexandria was the main cultural space in which "the Jewish Diaspora developed an extraordinarily lively spiritual life. At least the upper classes acquired an often

¹⁵ Following this, the first pogrom against the Jews which had no clear or specific cause, Philo was the leader of an embassy to Rome to protest the state-sanctioned atrocities perpetrated against the Jews. Cf. Philo Judaeus' *On Flaccus* and *The Embassy to Gaius*.

¹⁶ Cf. Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt*, 83.

¹⁷ M. Alexandre, Jr., *Rhetorical Argumentation in Philo of Alexandria* (Atlanta, GA., 1999), 91. Cf. S. Sandmel, *The First Christian Century in Judaism and Christianity: Certainties and Uncertainties* (New York, 1969), 123.

astonishing rhetorical and philosophical education.”¹⁸ While the city was a significant site of learning and culture, there was also political violence and ethnic tension. Philo was involved in both the cultural and political spheres, as a representative of the Alexandrian Jewish community.

In her article, “Philo on the Greeks: A Jewish Perspective on Culture and Society in First Century Alexandria,” Ellen Birnbaum suggests “two scholarly commonplaces: (1) that Philo was a great admirer of Greek thought and learning, and (2) that the political opponents of the Jews in first-century Alexandria were composed of Greeks and Egyptians.”¹⁹

Prior to 117 CE, the community was large and diverse, including the educated and cultured strata that produced a synthesis of Hellenism and Judaism, as well as groups that featured more of a Palestinian influence, with its focus on messianism, allegorical interpretations of Scripture, and literalisms, as suggested by Victor A. Tcherikover.²⁰

Although it is impossible to verify their number and while it is likely an exaggeration, Philo claims that “no less than a million Jews” lived in Egypt, and a large percentage of them would have chosen Alexandria as their city.²¹ It seems as though the Jews of Egypt enjoyed relative tolerance or ambivalence in times of peace, but the Greek and Egyptian natives of Alexandria may have been more hostile to their presence.²² While they maintained wealth and property, they held no social or legal recognition as

¹⁸ Alexandre, *Rhetorical Argumentation in Philo of Alexandria*, 85. Cf. S. Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (New York and Oxford, 1979), 29-81; M. Hengel, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians: Aspects of the Hellenization of Judaism in the Pre-Christian Period* (Philadelphia, 1980), 170-171.

¹⁹ E. Birnbaum, “Philo on the Greeks: A Jewish Perspective on Culture and Society in First Century Alexandria,” in D. T. Runia and G. E. Sterling (eds.), *The Spirit of Faith: Studies in Philo and Early Christianity in Honor of David Hay* (Providence, 2001), 37.

²⁰ V. A. Tcherikover, “The Decline of the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt in the Roman Period,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 14 (1963), 1-32.

²¹ Philo, *Against Flaccus* 43. Cf. Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt*, 83.

²² In periods of revolt, the entire population would have been adversely affected, so some hostility, in light of the Jewish uprisings, seems likely. The Roman tolerance was restricted to periods of calm, but they were quick to act in times of upheaval, closing the Temple at Leontopolis after the first Judean revolt that ended in the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem (70 CE). Cf. P. Borgen, *Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism* (Edinburgh, 1996), 71-102.

Jews, and had little political power or recourse in times of persecution. For these reasons, it seems that the social anomie and dislocation of expectations from reality produced a movement toward change, which first took form in the revolt under Trajan, and then, according to Smith, in the development of the Sethian mythologies.

Historically, the Jews of Egypt fell into and out of favor with the ruling authorities. They were well treated under the Ptolemies, and for their initial support of the Romans Jews were exempted from the draft, and afforded some favour under Julius Caesar and Augustus. But there were many periods of difficulty and conflict, and pogroms instituted at various times, including the one in Alexandria in 38 CE. Following the failure of the Judean Revolt, the surviving Sicarii, Jewish rebels in Jerusalem and its area, fled to Alexandria where they were not welcomed by the propertied Jews, creating tension within the community itself.²³ A rebellion in Cyrene, stirred by the Sicarii, brought the anger of Catullus, the governor of the Libyan Pentapolis, down on wealthy Jews, killing 3000.

The unrest and growing anti-Roman sentiment brought about the closing of Temples and meeting-places, and a Jewish tax was instituted. With the destruction of Jerusalem, Jewish taxes were then put toward the rebuilding of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome. Not only were they forced to support a pagan temple, their taxes were further increased to do so. In this period a great deal of pseudepigraphal and apocalyptic literature was produced that reflected the growing animosity between the Jews and the Romans.²⁴

There were religious causes of unrest to go along with the apparent temporal issues. The concept of the Judgement of God, and the restoration of Jerusalem, themes of the Jewish apocalyptic messianic expectations, seemed poised for fulfillment. The Jews experienced hostility from Egyptian religious sources, with the Jews seen as “Typhonic”

²³ Josephus, *Jewish War* VII.10.

²⁴ 4 Ezra allegorizes Rome (late 1st century CE), 2 *Baruch* advocates the killing of the last Roman ruler (early 2nd century CE), and Revelation and the *Sibylline Oracles* demonstrate the growing animosity between Jews, Romans and Egyptians (late 1st - early 2nd century CE).

or associated with the god Seth and therefore cursed, as well as religious hostility in Alexandria itself, in the form of conflict with the cult of Serapis.²⁵ As Smith notes, this increased “dissonance of ideologies”²⁶ added fuel to the fire of Jewish dissatisfaction.

The revolt had its beginning in Cyrene in 115 CE. From there it moved through Egypt, Cyprus and further east to Judea. It ended in September or October of 117 CE, and the effects were extreme and far-reaching. The native dead of Cyrene and Cyprus amounted to 220 000 and 240 000, with similar numbers in Egypt. The revolt left terrible destruction in its wake: roads, temples and villages were destroyed, including the synagogue of Alexandria, and the signs of Jewish habitation in Egypt practically ended, aside from the “rudimentary survival of the Alexandrian Jewish population.”²⁷ If there was little sign of the Christian community in Egypt prior to the revolt, perhaps because of their close ties with the Jews and self-identification with them, after 117 they quickly separated themselves. The revolt under Trajan acted as a catalyst for the separation of Egyptian Christianity and its Jewish parent. Following the revolt, with its great number of Jewish casualties, there is much more evidence of the Christian presence in Egypt.

In 1898, Moritz Friedländer posited the origins of gnosticism as arising out of pre-Christian, antinomian Judaism in Alexandria,²⁸ and in doing so became the first to suggest that it originated from within Judaism. Hellenistic Alexandria, with its culture of philosophy and the allegorical interpretation of scriptural texts, was an environment that created an awareness of the “revelation” of “divine philosophy.”²⁹ The ideological separation of conservative Jews and their Hellenistic counterparts was, to Friedländer, representative of just one sectarian division in Alexandria and in Judaism. Among the sects, some described in antiquity by various writers, including Philo himself, are the

²⁵ See above, 1.2.

²⁶ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 95.

²⁷ Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 110.

²⁸ M. Friedländer, *Der vorchristliche jüdische Gnosticismus: Patristische und Talmudische Studien* (Göttingen, 1898; reprinted, Franborough, 1972). Cf. idem, “La secte de Melchisédec et l’Épître aux Hébreux,” *Revue des Études Juives* 5 (1882), 1-26, 188-198; *Revue des Études Juives* 6 (1883), 187-199; Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 10-28.

²⁹ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 12.

“Sibyl lists” (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.6); the “Hellenians” (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Tryphon* 80); the antinomians that Philo had criticized (Philo, *On the Migration of Abraham* 86-93); as well as the better-known Therapeutae, the philosophical group described by Philo in his *De vita contemplativa*.

Friedländer suggests that the Ophites, Cainites, Sethians and Melchizedekians are the heretical “progeny” of the antinomian Jews of Alexandria.³⁰ He saw the groups as evolving out of the Jewish Diaspora, “recruited from the Jewish radicals known to us from Philo, and from philosophically oriented proselytes who had attached themselves to the synagogues... It is obvious that these sects could not have originated from within Christianity, from the very fact that their chief doctrines are derived from the Old Testament rather than from the New.”³¹

Pearson points out that the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library, years after Friedländer’s time, has served to call into question the heresiologists’ designations of the heretical groups. He further contends that mounting evidence points to Sethianism in particular as originally a Jewish heresy, that must have arisen from a syncretistic, Hellenized milieu. The rise of changing ideologies “should also be seen as a response not only to a syncretistic conflict-mixture of ‘traditions’ and ‘ideas’ but also to the concrete circumstances of history, to social and political conditions.”³² There is therefore a case that can be made for these movements as having arisen out of disappointed or transmuted messianism. Pearson concludes his discussion of Friedländer’s argument, stating that the

³⁰ Friedländer describes the Melchizedekians as viewing Melchizedek as a “great Power” (cf. Epiphanius, *Haereses* 55; Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haereses* 8.3; Augustine, *Haereses* 34), a being higher than the messiah, and a “son of God” who lived among the angels. He was symbolic of Law-free religion, as he was not of the levitical line. When the Melchizedekians came into contact with Christianity, Friedländer suggests that they then incorporated Jesus into their cosmology, but as a being *below* Melchizedek. Additionally, he saw the Melchizedekians as less aggressive in their antinomian tendencies than the other group he mentions, and describes “*le melchisédecisme [comme étant] la forme primitive de la gnose chrétienne [...] le pont sur lequel l’alexandrinisme a passé rapidement au christianisme*” (“La secte de Melchisédec et l’Épître aux Hébreux,” 8, author’s emphasis), “Melchizedekianism [as] the primitive form of Christian Gnosticism [...] the bridge that Alexandrine religiosity took to quickly become Christianity”) qualifies best as the point of departure for *Christian Gnosticism*” (my translation). Cf. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 13-15.

³¹ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 14.

³² Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 27.

latter “has been vindicated in his basic contention, that gnosticism is a pre-Christian phenomenon that developed on Jewish soil,”³³ specifically, it would seem, from within the Egyptian Diaspora community.

As mentioned above (1.1.), I disagree with this assertion. I am not convinced that the worldviews at issue existed in any developed form before the rise of Christianity. Rather, I see them as having grown out of a second-century environment in response to second-century problems. Yet there may still be connections between the disappointment of messianic expectations and the rise of Sethianism. The failure of apocalyptic expectations in the second-century could have marked the beginning of the development of the Sethian worldview.

1.3.4. ALEXANDRIA

Before the revolt under Trajan (115-117 CE), second-century Alexandria was a culturally diverse center that embraced and represented both the western and eastern worlds. Along with Rome, it was one of the two cities of antiquity that approached the size of a modern city, and was perhaps home to as many as 750 000 people. Since the time of Alexander the Great and through the long period of his Ptolemaic Dynasty, the city was more Greek than Egyptian and considered to be apart from the traditions and practices of ancient Egypt. It contained a significant immigrant population, featuring a Jewish quarter that housed the Hellenized Jews responsible for the Greek Septuagint version of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Alexandria was built on a Greek grid pattern with city walls nine and a half miles in diameter. The main streets were thirty meters wide and were illuminated by streetlights, an unusual innovation in antiquity. Water cisterns in basements and on roofs demonstrated a rare degree of both foresight and fireproofing.

³³ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 28.

Additionally, Alexandria was home to many distinguished public buildings, including theatres, baths, gymnasia, athletic stadiums, the Museum and University, with its zoo and botanical garden, and, most famously, the library with its 700 000 volumes. Such amenities made the city a great center of scholarship with a thriving literary culture, as well as being a desirable home to poets, mathematicians and astronomers. Its character also lent itself to great religious diversity, with temples to the gods of Egypt, Greece and Persia, along with Rome's cult of the Emperor, sharing space with the gathering places of the Jews. Alexandria was a crossroads city, a Greek "island" within Egypt.³⁴

There was no "orthodoxy" of beliefs or practices, but rather a syncretism among representatives of gods of differing origins, which would come to incorporate the relative newcomer Christianity into cultic practices. It therefore seems likely that Alexandrian Christianity would likewise be influenced and shaped by the wide-ranging worldviews that were the norm in the great city.

Into this bubbling melting pot arrived the Christian message and its developing praxis and theology. As mentioned, the strong Greek-speaking Jewish community had already experienced the syncretism endemic to Alexandria, in the particular form of Philo and his attempts at the reconciliation of Judaism with Hellenistic philosophy. Among other things, Philo combined the Jewish concept of wisdom and the Platonic *nous* into a uniquely Jewish conceptualization of the *logos* as intermediate rather than immanent, and presented an allegorical interpretation of Scripture that harmonized with Greek philosophy. The early history of Christianity in Alexandria is not, however, as clear as later traditions about the arrival of Mark the Evangelist from Rome would have us believe.³⁵

³⁴ The city was referred to as *Alexandria ad Aegyptum*, *Alexandria next to Egypt*, indicating its separation from the rest of the country, a reality that would come back to haunt the Alexandrian patriarchs as they attempted to unify Christianity.

³⁵ Cf. C. W. Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity: From Its Origins to 451 C.E.* (Leiden, 1991), P. Derchain, "L'Égypte ptolémaïque et romaine," in F. Dunand and C. Zivie-Coche (eds.), *Dieux et hommes en Égypte, 3000 av. J.-C. - 395 apr. J.-C. : Anthropologie religieuse* (Paris, 1991), 199-329.

1.3.5. EGYPTIAN CHRISTIANITY

For the largest part, literary and historical sources regarding Christianity in Egypt are silent until the early second century. Ascribed apostolic succession suggests that Egyptian Christianity originated with Mark (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.16), his cousin Barnabas (*Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* 1.8.3-15.9), or Apollos (Acts 18.25, secondary variant reading), with Mark seen as the traditional founder of the Alexandrian Church. Birger Pearson, following the papyrologist Colin Roberts, places earliest Egyptian Christianity in Alexandria, with the first Christians being Jewish-Christians, that is, part of the Alexandrian Jewish community descended from the Jerusalem Church.

This close connection with the Jewish community goes a long way toward explaining the silence of the sources, since the rebellion against Trajan destroyed all evidence of the Alexandrian Jewish-Christian community, embedded as it was in Judaism. Furthermore, Pearson sees continuity between Alexandrian Judaism pre-115 and Alexandrian Christianity post-117. Philip Rousseau suggests that it was “perhaps not until the Jewish war under Trajan [that] Christians in Egypt [were] able to disassociate themselves from their Jewish colleagues.”³⁶

The bulk of Egyptian Christian writings are pseudonymous or anonymous, making it difficult to define an audience or social context, along with determining with any certainty the varieties of Christianity as they existed from early in its history into the second century and beyond. The New Testament is not very illuminating regarding Christians in Egypt. With the exception of Acts 2.10, the Jews from Egypt present at Peter’s Pentecostal speech; Acts 6.9, with its mention of Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria; and Acts 18.24-25, the description of Apollos, a learned Jew from Alexandria, Egypt features very little in the canonical scriptural material of Christianity.

³⁶ Ph. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* 2nd ed. (Berkeley, Calif., 1999), 15.

As seen above, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, written c. 117 CE, is an important witness to the themes of eschatology and living in the last evil days of the present age, as well as being a window into the conflict between the Christians and the Jews, as the separation became more defined in the years following the revolt under Trajan. Other than the fragmentary *Gospel of the Hebrews* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Barnabas* offers the earliest picture of Egyptian Christianity, incomplete though it is.³⁷

Beyond these brief glimpses, the references we have to Christian life and traditions in Egypt in the early centuries CE is limited to historical inference, based in the suggestions offered by later texts. The *Teachings of Silvanus*, likely dating to the end of the second century and found among the texts at Nag Hammadi (NHC VII, 4), shows no evidence of conflict between the Christians and Jews and there is no eschatology, demonstrating that the second century saw many changes to the Christianity of Egypt.

An even later document, the fourth-century *Acts of Mark* proposes a topography of Alexandria, specifically the northeastern and northwestern parts of the city, the predominantly Jewish areas in the first century. It makes mention of such landmarks as the Pharos (lighthouse); the Mendion/Bennidion (Temple); the Church in Boukolou (the site of the martyrdom of St. Mark); and the Angeloi (where the mob tried to burn Mark's body).³⁸

³⁷ The *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, cited by Clement and other church Fathers, and extant in fragmentary form, may be products of first-century Egyptian, specifically Alexandrian, Christianity. Cf. R. Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-canonical Gospel Texts* (Philadelphia, 1982), 49-52, 83-86; B. A. Pearson, "Christianity in Egypt," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 1 (1992), 956; idem, "Pre-Valentinian Gnosticism in Alexandria," in idem (in collaboration with A. Th. Kraabel, G. W. E. Nickelsburg and N. R. Peterson) (eds.), *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (Minneapolis, 1991), 455-466; Ch. Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore, 1997); A. Jakab, *Ecclesia Alexandrina: Évolution sociale et institutionnelle du christianisme alexandrin (I^{er}-III^{es} siècles)* (Bern, 2001); idem, "Le gnosticisme alexandrin aux premiers temps du christianisme," in Hilhorst and van Kooten (eds.), *The Wisdom of Egypt*, 365-379.

³⁸ Cf. B. A. Pearson, "Ancient Alexandria in the *Acts of Mark*," *SBL Seminar Papers* 36 (1997), 273-284; A. D. Callahan, "The Acts of Saint Mark: An Introduction and Translation," *Coptic Church Review* 14 (1993), 3-10; idem, "The *Acts of Mark*: Tradition, Transmission, and Translation of the Arabic Version," in F. Bovon, A. G. Brock and Ch. R. Matthews (eds.), *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (Boston, 1999), 63-85; F. Bovon and A. D. Callahan, "Martyre de Marc l'évangéliste," in P. Geoltrain and J.-D. Kaestli (eds.), *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, vol. 2 (Paris, 2005), 567-586.

A work attributed to St. Peter (possibly pseudonymously), seventeenth bishop of Alexandria (300-311 CE), the Coptic homily *On Riches*, or the *Encomium of the Archangel Michael*,³⁹ tells us something of the state of affairs in Alexandria in the early fourth century. It addresses, in particular, apocalyptic issues, determining Michael's role in judgement, resurrection and the Day of the Lord. It confirms that Michael is the angel who will blow the trumpet, heralding the end of days, and is a polemic against the doctrine that Michael replaced Satanael as the chief archangel following the Fall. Additionally it describes the teaching of Abba Theonas on the subject of Michael's three postdiluvian manifestations recorded in Scripture: to Abraham, to Joshua, and to Daniel.⁴⁰

Returning to the earlier centuries and the subsequent issues of dating Christian origins in Egypt, while he recites the names of the church leadership sequentially, Eusebius (c. 264-340 CE) fails to provide any biographical information on the bishops in the Alexandrian succession until the time of Pantaenus, a learned teacher who was influenced by Stoicism and was responsible for the ecclesiastical education of his time.⁴¹ If, as is suggested in the tradition of Acts, "Christianity was taken to Egypt by the middle of the first century, an inexplicable silence in Christian sources concerning the leaders of the Christian movement and the development of the church over the next 125-150 years is probably unique in the history of Christianity."⁴²

There are other texts that speak to an early Christian presence in Egypt. The *Papyrus Rylands Greek 457*, or P52, recovered from Oxyrhynchus, is the oldest known fragment of the New Testament. It contains John 18.31-33 on the *recto* and John 18.37-

³⁹ Cf. B. A. Pearson and T. Vivian, *St. Peter of Alexandria: Bishop and Martyr Studies in Antiquity and Christianity 3* (Philadelphia, 1988).

⁴⁰ Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt*, 122.

⁴¹ The ambiguity of the catalogue of names suggests that the list may have been a third or early fourth century fabrication, either by Eusebius himself, or by another writer assuming his authority. Eusebius also attempted to associate the early Christians of Alexandria with Philo's Therapeutae. Cf. Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 39, n. 52, and 29.

⁴² Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 22.

38 on the *verso*, and has letter forms corresponding to texts that may be dated to 94 CE and 127 CE, placing the transcription of the document in the late first or early second century. If the Gospel of John was composed in Ephesus in the late first century, the existence of this text in Egypt suggests a rapid production of texts in the late first century, and a rapid dissemination of those texts, arguing for a relatively early community in Egypt, one interested in John and other canonical and non-canonical Christian texts.

There is also a large body of texts dating from the second century onward that further suggest “an early proliferation of Christian writings throughout Egypt,”⁴³ again implying the existence of a Christian audience for such documents. The diffusion of the texts further suggests that the Christian readers were both in and outside of Alexandria.

So, why the relative silence, the anomalous quiet regarding the presence of Christianity in Egypt early on? Griggs maintains that there were two likely reasons: (1) the Roman Church (which would later shape the orthodoxy of the early Church) defined Christianity narrowly, and established and imposed this view throughout the Mediterranean, a case of the victor writing history; and, similarly, (2) the successors of Demetrius, considered the late-second-century “second founder” of the Alexandrian Church, did not regard the previously imagined and practiced Christianity, with its “eclectic tendencies,” as Christianity at all, so its leaders were not worth mentioning.⁴⁴

The Christianity of Alexandria in the late first and early second centuries could, in fact, have been “an undifferentiated Christianity based on a literary tradition encompassing both canonical and non-canonical works (both categories being named as such here in light of their *later* status as defined by the Catholic tradition)... [Walter] Bauer may be correct in asserting that what later heresiologists attacked as “gnosticism” in Egypt at first may have been simply “Christianity” to Egyptian Christians.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 25.

⁴⁴ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 26-29.

⁴⁵ Griggs goes on to critique Bauer’s argument claiming “he does not pay sufficient heed to the evidence of so-called ‘orthodox Christianity’ existing alongside it. Egyptian Christians did accept the Apocalyptic literary tradition so notably rejected by the Western Church [?], especially as reflected in the Resurrection

Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria from 189-232, instituted a cleansing of the “idiosyncrasies” of Egyptian Christianity in response to the appearance of Irenaeus’ *Adversus Haereses* in Alexandria, c. 200 CE. This cleansing may have curbed some of the varieties of Egyptian Christianity, and may also have been the cause of the polarization that led to more and more extreme forms of Sethianism. That said, while

[a] Gnostic type of Christianity was apparently more prevalent in Egypt than in the West... as attested by extant evidence, [o]ne must emphasize that this is not to argue that Gnosticism was predominant in Egypt, as some have done, or that Catholicism was absent. Rather, Egyptian Christianity was founded on a more broadly-based literary tradition and a less defined ecclesiastical tradition than was the same religion in the region from Syria to Rome, and it was only when that more stringently defined Christianity made its appearance near the end of the second century along with the *Adversus Haereses* of Irenaeus, that “orthodoxy” and “heresy” began to be defined along lines now familiar to Christian historians.⁴⁶

With the advent of the writings of the church Fathers, by the second century the writings of Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Tertullian were the best source of information as to the state of Christianity and heresy in Egypt.⁴⁷ From the heresiologists we learn of named leaders: Simon; Cerinthus; Carpocrates; Epiphanes; Basilides; and Valentinus, among others, and their transgressions against the proper truth of Christianity. Irenaeus accused Carpocrates and his followers of licentious and immoral behavior, and noted that they called themselves gnostics. Clement associated the movement with what he called “Monadic Gnosis,” but had little else to say about them.⁴⁸

Ministry texts, but not at the expense of the gospel or epistolary tradition of the emerging Catholic Church” (*Early Egyptian Christianity*, 32-33). Cf. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, 52.

⁴⁶ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 34.

⁴⁷ This is said with the caveat that the heresiological writings carried inherent issues due to the reality that the views expressed within them were polemics against specific theological elements, motifs, practices, language, and therefore no truly representative of the theological and literary realities that the gnostic writers were trying to express. As Griggs would have it, “most of the information presently available on the heretics comes from Western sources who are removed both in geography and sympathy from their subjects, rendering them at least suspect as to their accuracy in understanding and explaining the authors and movements they oppose” (*Early Egyptian Christianity*, 46).

⁴⁸ Although Irenaeus says that the Carpocratians self-identified as gnostics, it is not at all clear exactly what they might have meant by the term. As a designation, to be gnostic often meant little else than having an awareness of the “knowledge,” esoteric and heretical, or orthodox and accepted, that begat the term to begin with.

As described in Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Clement, Basilides offered perhaps the first clear alternative cosmology. He envisioned a first Heaven and the emanation of 365 others from it, along with six first begotten Powers that emanated from the Unbegotten Father. The last heaven held the creators of this world, including the God of the Jews, who were aided by the Unbegotten, as he sent the first emanation from himself as Christ. The Basilideans held to a docetic theology. Christ experienced no suffering as he is incorporeal in his true form, so Simon of Cyrene suffered in his place. Irenaeus goes on to accuse the followers of Basilides of secret knowledge of all the magical arts, and the practice of “every kind of immorality.”⁴⁹

While Hippolytus saw no more virtue in the teachings of Basilides than did Irenaeus, he explained the Basilidean cosmology differently. He saw it as based in a gnostic understanding of Aristotle, a system in which the ineffable god sends out a seed from which all things are created.⁵⁰ While there were some obvious dualistic elements to be found, there was no evidence of the radical anticosmic dualism of the later systems.

Valentinus, a transplanted Egyptian in Rome, and his school were representative of a strain of “moderate gnostics.” While the Valentinians envisioned a similar cosmos with a pleroma made up of an Ogdoad of archons and further emanations from an ineffable First Principle, and featured a demiurge in the form of Sophia, whose longing for reconnection to the Father accidentally caused the creation of the material world, with its “natural” and “spiritual” humans, Valentinianism sought merely to supplement existing Christian scriptures. Their appeal seemed to have been widespread rather than local, as they apparently “permeated Christianity” in both the Egyptian world and the milieu of the West as based in Rome.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.25.6. Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 49. The polemicist certainly cannot be accused of understating his case against them.

⁵⁰ Hippolytus, *Refutatio* VII.1-15; X.10.

⁵¹ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 55.

The later centuries before the burial of the Nag Hammadi library saw a great deal of change and shifts in the ideology of the church in Egypt. Religion in Egypt was traditionally locally based (see below, 4.7), and this trend continued and can be seen in the localized differences in the Christianity of the early centuries. Additional issues arose surrounding the various periods of persecution at the hands of the Roman political authorities. Situations like the ones under Severus in 202 CE, aimed at limiting, but not exterminating, Christianity, and the persecution under Decius in 250-251 CE, which sought a return to the participation in sacrifice to the Roman gods and had as a side-effect the incidental persecution of Christians, affected the worldview of the Christians who felt the repercussions of the political actions.

The arrival of Manichaeism in the mid-third century in Egypt also altered the worldviews of the Christians of that country. Bringing with it associations with a cosmology centered in a dualistic perception of the world, Manichaeism got a toe-hold in Egypt relatively early on in the development of the religious movement.⁵² Griggs suggests that this was able to happen because Egypt did not yet have a “strong and centralized ecclesiastical organization... with power to resist this foreign heresy... [Furthermore] like many Christian groups scattered throughout Egypt, Manichaeism emphasized an on-going Apocalyptic tradition, gnosis required for salvation, and a broad-based literary tradition. The spiritual climate of Egypt, even Christian Egypt, in the third century was conducive to the spread of Manichaeism, and remnants of the movement lingered on for some centuries, as is indicated by [the] manuscripts discovered in recent years.”⁵³ The receptiveness of the religious climate suggests and evinces openness to many different worldviews and theological speculations, including some regarding the figure of Melchizedek that might account for the preservation of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*.

⁵² Mani was born c. 216 CE in Persia, and martyred in 276. Although it is difficult to say exactly when Manichaeism arrived in Egypt, Michael Grant suggests that missionaries arrived before 262 CE. Cf. R. M. Grant, “Manichees and Christians in the Third and Fourth Centuries,” in *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studia Geo Widengren, XXIV mense apr. MCMLXXII quo die lustra tredecim feliciter explevit oblata ab collegis, discipulis, amicis, collegae magistro amico congratulantibus*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1972), 1:430-439, esp. 431.

⁵³ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 95-97.

Another event that helped to shape the developing orthodoxy in opposition to the “heresies” of the early centuries was the Melitian schism of c. 305 CE. The schism concerned the readmission of “lapsed” Christians to the fellowship of the Church. At the time of the Diocletian persecutions, both Peter, bishop of Alexandria, and Melitius, bishop of Lycopolis, were imprisoned in Alexandria. The two discussed the issue of the readmission of those who had recanted their Christian views, which grew into a power struggle once they were released to assume their ecclesiastical authority. While Peter took a more lenient stance, Melitius advocated for harsher requirements for those who sought to return after committing the crime, albeit under duress, of sacrificing to the Roman gods. The significant difference of opinion had to do with the amount of time required between the transgression and allowance back into the Christian communion. Because of the ongoing persecution, Peter remained in hiding after his release from prison, allowing Melitius the freedom to excommunicate and ordain clergy as he saw appropriate to his stricter view of the *relapsi*.

This discord led to the separation of the two groups, with the Melitians going as far as changing their name. While the Alexandrians under Alexander, following the martyrdom of Peter in renewed persecutions under Maximin, remained the Catholic Church, the followers of Melitius called themselves the Church of the Martyrs.⁵⁴ This power-struggle and the other incidences of shifting loyalties and politicizing are indicative of the divisive nature of the ecclesiastical system. This weakness and lack of cohesion led to new disputes and schisms, and provided even more fertile ground for the development of the varieties of cosmologies and ideologies.

As the diversity of the interpretations of the Christian message continued to be in evidence in Egypt, two figures from Alexandria in particular shaped many views on the practice and theology of early Christianity, but not without causing some controversy along the way. Clement and Origen, both from Alexandria, offered approaches that veered of the track of the developing orthodoxy and threatened to enter into heretical

⁵⁴ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 118. Cf. Epiphanius *Panarion* 2.68.3.

country, but developed followings that made their interpretations acceptable, even among the ruling elite of the Alexandrian church.

1.3.5.1. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Titus Flavius Clemens of Alexandria likely lived c. 150-215 CE. Although his early years are not well documented, he was likely a Christian convert raised within the Hellenistic milieu, possibly in Athens or in Alexandria itself, who came to Christianity slowly and with a strong awareness of the pagan beliefs of his youth and the philosophy of the Greeks. He traveled widely, seeking teachers from differing backgrounds and belief systems and developed his own unique approach to Christianity.⁵⁵

Clement claimed the authority of Abraham and Moses as the originators of the biblical and philosophical understandings that had gotten mixed up with pagan philosophies. The philosophies were retrieved from their pagan versions by his own and given validation by his teacher, Pantaenus of Palestine. Clement saw philosophy as originating from Syria, Egypt and Mesopotamia, with Abraham being the first and Moses the greatest of the philosophers, a motif common to the Jewish apologies. Later Hellenistic philosophies had their origins in the same source, becoming systems of thought based in misunderstood gleanings of the Truth given to the Semitic peoples.

For Clement, salvation was directly equated with education, and toward that end he employed a fourfold system of educational attributes comprised of:

- (1) the experiences, responses and development of students;
- (2) the role of the teacher in the construction of a curriculum, outlines and goals to be met;
- (3) the strategies and stages of both teacher and student, and
- (4) the content of the education, specifically doctrinal and ethical instruction.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Clement's travels included a journey to the East and exposure to Buddhism (*Stromateis* 1.15). Cf. J. Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York, 1974), 15; J. C. Paget, "Clement of Alexandria and the Jews," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998), 86-97.

⁵⁶ W. H. Wagner, *After the Apostles: Christianity in the Second Century* (Minneapolis, 1994), 173.

He believed that education would lead each person to knowledge of God consistent with his or her individual level of ability. This pedagogically-based approach to the practice of Christianity and its ultimate soteriology was primarily expressed in three treatises used in his school and after his death.

The first stage of learning was covered in the *Exhortation to the Heathens* or *Protreptikos*, in which Clement detailed the move from paganism to Christianity, informing potential and actual converts about such issues as God, society, the Logos, and themselves as individuals and as Christians. The second and third treatises, *The Instructor* or *Paidagogos*, and the *The Miscellanies* or *Stromateis*, described specific ethical duties and general principles that could lead to the mastering of habits, actions and passions. Such mastery allowed for eventual initiation into a “cosmology-theology...[that was the] esoteric gnosis that Jesus supposedly taught his inner circle.”⁵⁷ These “true gnostics” would be the interpreters of scripture and soteriological teachers in schools like Clement’s. His “seeds of gnosis” were often covered with elaborate rhetoric to be hidden from those unable to discern the meaning of Truth. This use of rhetoric as an obscuring tool explains much of the lack of continuity and apparently obscure and far-reaching subjects covered in Clement’s writings.

Stromateis was not actually meant as the third installment of his pedagogical series, which was never written, but is rather a collection miscellaneous musings on issues of theology and practice, in which Clement acts as a spiritual guide reemphasizing his understanding of the Logos as a salvific force. Near the end of *Stromateis* is a section in which Clement offers *Excerpts from the works of Theodotus and the so-called oriental teachings, contemporary with Valentinus*. These *Excerpta ex Theodoto* continue Clement’s teachings, placing special emphasis on comparison and contrast with the writings and theology of Theodotus, a follower of Valentinus, which Clement cites throughout.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Clement, *Stromateis* III.78.2.

Although it is assumed that the Theodotus in question is one of the founders of the eastern school of Valentinianism, there is no actual proof. Additionally, “only some of the extracts are explicitly attributed to Theodotus; others are clearly linked with these; but there are some (6-7 and 42-65) which differ from the rest and therefore cannot come from Theodotus, though we cannot be certain whether they involve one or two additional sources.”⁵⁹

From this part of *Stromateis* we learn a number of things, primary among them that Clement was aware of and in some respects cautiously appreciative of the teachings of Valentinus and his followers. From the polemical treatises of Irenaeus of Lyon, we know that such even tentative approval of Valentinianism and its adherents was far from the norm in the circles of the authorities of the developing orthodoxy. Can this seeming discrepancy and Clement’s mild treatment of the “heretical” writings ascribed to Theodotus and the Valentinians perhaps be explained according to a similarity of thought, the prevailing themes and issues that were “in the air” of second century Alexandria?

1.3.5.2. ORIGEN

Unlike Clement, who was suspicious of the extremes of asceticism and libertinism, Origen lived an ascetic life of disciplined appetites. Eusebius regarded Origen with great admiration, and the bulk of Book 6 of his *Ecclesiastical History* is devoted to him. Origen was likely born in Alexandria c.185 CE. His father, Leonides, was a devout Christian who was martyred under the persecutions of Severus, and tradition suggests that Origen longed to follow his father in his martyrdom and was only prevented from doing so by his mother.

When Clement left Alexandria as a result of the persecutions, Origen succeeded him as head of the catechetical school when he was only seventeen. While a lay teacher and the head of the Alexandrian school, Origen made five significant journeys: to Rome,

⁵⁹ Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria*, 157.

Arabia, Palestine, Antioch and Greece, by way of Caesarea. While in Caesarea, Origen was ordained by the bishop of that city, Theoctistus, with the assistance of Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem. Upon his return to his duties at the catechetical school, it became clear to Origen that Demetrius, the bishop of Alexandria, was less than pleased with his ordination, despite the letters of support he had written to aid him in his journeys. This rift caused Origen to leave Alexandria permanently in 231 CE.

Origen journeyed again to Caesarea and opened a new school with Theoctistus, his friend and ally in Palestine. While in exile, Origen continued his writings, producing commentaries, polemics, interpretations of Scripture, and developed a particular theology that would continue to influence the Christian world after his death. During the persecutions of Decius (250 CE), Origen was imprisoned and tortured, and died not long after his release (253 or 254 CE) at the age of sixty-nine, as a result of his treatment at the hands of his enemies.

His influence was widespread after his death, especially among such writers and ecclesiastical leaders as Hippolytus, Dionysius, the Patriarch of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, and Athanasius. A movement called Origenism rose out of doctrines, rightly or wrongly, attributed to him, including: (1) the allegorical interpretation of Scripture; (2) the subordination of the Divine Persons; and (3) the theory of successive trials and the eventual restoration of all of humanity.⁶⁰ The allegorical interpretation Origen suggested was to be done according to two rules: that Scripture must be interpreted in a manner worthy of God, the author of Scripture, and that the corporeal sense or letter of Scripture must not be adopted when it would entail anything impossible, absurd or unworthy of God. The conceptualization of the Trinity was to be understood in their absolute immateriality, omniscience and substantial sanctity, with the Father seen as the creator, the Son as the redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as the sanctifier.

⁶⁰ Origen acknowledged the disparity in the two creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2, and interpreted them as being illustrative of two separate creations: the first the creation of souls, and the second the creation of the physical universe. Cf. Origen, *De Principiis* 1.1 (on the nature of God, the light and the Trinity), for example.

The third aspect of theological speculation attributed to Origen and adopted by the Origenists seems, on the surface at least, to have a great deal in common with some of the alternative theologies, with some key differences. While the concepts of origin and destiny appear to be an amalgam of philosophy and theology, as can be seen in some systems, the notion of the eternity of creation was sacrosanct, and *all* that is outside of God was created by Him. Origen saw an initial equality of all created spirits, with the differences occurring due to the use of the gift of free will. Carelessness led to falls of differing degrees, causing the hierarchy of angels, and the four categories of created intellects: angels, stars, humans and demons. Origen also dealt with essence and positivity of matter, the universality of the redemption and the Final Restoration to the company of the Father.⁶¹

The controversies that grew out of interpretations of Origen's work led to two so-called Origenist crises, the first of which falls into the relevant timeframe.⁶² In the second half of the fourth century, the monks of Nitria demonstrated a clear enthusiasm for Origen, while the monks of Scetis fell into the trap of anthropomorphism. The crisis drew critics from all over Christendom. Epiphanius of Salamis wrote and acted against Origen and John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople (392-404 CE) and a follower of Origen and his theology. Until 400 CE, Theophilus, the bishop of Alexandria, apparently was an Origenist. He was a friend to the Tall Brothers, the leaders of the Origenist "party," until he changed his views after his Easter Letter of 400 CE and turned against the Origenists, condemning John Chrysostom and leading to his eventual removal from power. The second Origenist crisis began in 514 CE and saw a return to many of the same issues. Both crises were illustrative of the precariousness of the balance of power in Christian Egypt in the early centuries.

⁶¹ Origen, *De Principiis* 1.4 (regarding the *apokatastasis*, or restoration).

⁶² Cf. E. A. Clark, "New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy's Human Embodiment and Ascetic Strategies," *Church History* 59 (1990), 145-162; eadem, "Elite Networks and Heresy Accusations: Towards a Social Description of the Origenist Controversy," *Semeia* 56 (1991), 79-117; eadem, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, N.J., 1992).

The writings of both Clement and Origen are illustrative of the often-blurry line between heresy and the development of normative Christianity in Egypt. They both present worldviews that have much in common with the later Sethian and Valentinian writers, and influenced a diverse cross-section of the Alexandrian church, seen in Origen's importance to the early desert Fathers, the Tall Brothers, for example. Still, they also had the acceptance of the church authority, Athanasius included, for a time.

1.3.6. EARLY MONASTICISM AND MONASTIC ESCHATOLOGY

While there are non-Christian precedents for monasticism as a religious expression, any connection is uncertain. Partly because of the localized nature of early Egyptian Christianity, with the authority of the Church lying in the context of Alexandria, and therefore removed from the rest of the Egyptian community, the monastic way of life, alongside or outside of the ecclesiastical organization, found a strong foothold in the deserts of Egypt. Some Christians fled to the desert to avoid persecution in the third century, but the earliest monks were primarily escaping what they saw as a corrupt society. These first monks saw the way of life, with its solitude and withdrawal from the world, as a path to achieving sanctity, not possible within the Church.

By the third century, the bishop of Alexandria had become the arbiter of doctrine, responsible for church education and the appointment of bishops outside of the city. Some found the new organization and its strictures confining, or in contradiction with what had become the norm in these communities outside of Alexandria. Both in a traditional sense and with the growth of Christianity, the localized movements were used to a certain amount of religious autonomy that was no longer available.

Among the earliest Egyptian monastics was Anthony, known to us primarily through the work of Athanasius. Written in 357 or 358 CE, the *Vita Antonii* describes his life. Anthony was a native Egyptian, born c. 251 CE near the Thebaid to wealthy Christian parents, though he was orphaned at an early age. He was deeply influenced by the gospel message of perfection attained by giving up earthly goods in favor of treasure

in heaven (Matthew 19.21). Anthony retired to the desert, beset by spiritual struggles and the temptations of the devil, where he established himself in an abandoned mountain fortress, south of Memphis, on the east bank of the Nile, and stayed for twenty years. Resisting calls to leadership, he retreated further, into Upper Egypt near the Red Sea (the Inner Mountain or *Deir Anba Antonios*). The place became a center for those wishing to follow Anthony, and a place of pilgrimage for those seeking a life of individual and independent piety.⁶³

During the persecutions of Maximin, Anthony attempted martyrdom, but was denied, as he was too unkempt.⁶⁴ He was credited with the gifts of exorcism, healing and prophecy, but never ordained to office. His wisdom was widely regarded, and he was consulted in order to combat the Arians. Anthony died in 356 CE, leaving a legacy that would help to shape Egyptian, and Western, Christianity.

Peter Brown suggests the “rapid growth of monasticism during the third and fourth centuries can be linked to tensions and crises in human relations, which cause men to seek autarchy through detachment from society.”⁶⁵ The tensions were myriad. In addition to the frequent state-mandated persecutions, early Christians suffered increased taxation and the inherent social power of pagan civic religion. Monasticism can be described as symptomatic of “the perceived inadequacies of the ecclesiastical organization spreading from Alexandria into the rest of the country.”⁶⁶

As monasteries and communities of monks grew, the tension between them and the ruling Church authorities in Alexandria seemed to grow accordingly. The Melitian Schism, which began with a dispute as to christology between Melitius and Arius, went on until the Council at Nicea. Over its course, the Melitian schism challenged the leadership of the Alexandrian bishops, becoming a nationalistic movement with

⁶³ Cf. R. T. Meyer trans., *The Life of St. Anthony* Ancient Christian Writers 10 (London and Westminster, MD., 1950).

⁶⁴ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 105.

⁶⁵ P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 81-84.

⁶⁶ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 106.

Alexandria representing foreign influence. The initial stages of the schism grew out of the monasteries, primarily from those in the Thebaid (Middle and Upper Egypt).⁶⁷

In Alexandria itself, the institutionalization of Christianity created its own problems. There were disputes about episcopal succession, especially the “secret” ordination of Athanasius as successor to Alexander, which served to once again aggravate the followers of Melitius. As bishop, Athanasius attempted the reconciliation and unification of the various forms of Egyptian Christianity under his own authority.⁶⁸ He managed to integrate the native Egyptians with their foreign rulers, which led to Coptic becoming the language of composition as well as translation, by the mid-fourth century. On his last return from exile, in his 39th *Festal letter*, Athanasius listed the canonical books to be used in the Egyptian Church, and warned Egyptian Christians, the monks in particular, against “popular” apocryphal works.⁶⁹ But the apocryphal books remained. From the details offered in the *Festal Letter*, Griggs notes:

- (1) there is an abundance of writings still circulating in Egypt which, in name and apparent similarity of form to the canonized works, claim to be of equal authority and antiquity with the accepted writings;
- (2) the so-called apocryphal works contain doctrines or rituals which Athanasias recognizes will be appealing to many Christians, potentially providing as great a threat to his control over Egyptian Christians as did his competitors.⁷⁰

Under Athanasius’ authority, books were ordered burned, and threats were made against heretical teachings and their teachers. Griggs suggests that this period in particular “account(s) for the nearly complete loss of such works over the centuries, but

⁶⁷ Cf. A.H.M. Jones, “Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?” *Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (1959), 280-298.

⁶⁸ A task made all the more difficult due to the fact that of the thirty-eight years (328-366 CE) that Athanasius spent as bishop of Alexandria, half of them were spent in exile, either with the monks or outside of Egypt altogether.

⁶⁹ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 173. Athanasius’ is one of the earliest extant lists of canonical books.

⁷⁰ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 174.

some works and collections of non-canonical writings were either discarded or buried in the Egyptian desert.”⁷¹

Although Anthony was the first to distance himself from societal concerns by moving into the Egyptian desert, Pachomius was the founder of the community life of Christian asceticism. The structure of the Egyptian Christian community was changing, especially as it related to provincial administration, the relationship between town, village and countryside, and the growing power of the Alexandrian patriarchy. At this time, “the evidence of letters and literary or biblical texts preserved among the papyri of the third and earlier centuries now suggests very strongly that there had been for some time extensive contact between Alexandria and the towns of Upper Egypt, a contact not restricted to the wealthy, the traveled, or the erudite. The Christian material in particular points to an often surprising level of education.”⁷²

Eusebius of Caesarea, in his readings of Philo, identified the Therapeutai of Alexandria with the Christian community of the time. Eusebius was wrong, as Philo’s writings predated any clearly Christian community in Alexandria, but by portraying them as such, *his* readers saw the early Alexandrian Church as ascetic, philosophical, given to virtuous poverty and partial withdrawal from city life, inspired, in Eusebius’ view, by the description of the first Christians of Jerusalem in Acts. The Therapeutai, as described by Philo, rejected marriage and family, held general weekly meetings and believed in equality, seeing slavery as the source of evil. In the two centuries between Philo and the growth of the monastic communities, the attitudes and approaches to religious life that Philo had recorded would develop into a new expression of faith. Philo’s *De vita*

⁷¹ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 176. The dating of the 39th *Festal Letter* (367 CE) and the burial of the Nag Hammadi library correspond quite nicely. Regardless of whether or not a specific monastery or monastic tradition can be definitively attached to the library, as Griggs notes, “there is no question that some Christian body held the writings of the library in high esteem” (*Early Egyptian Christianity*, 179). Cf. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 17; D. Brakke, “Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria’s Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994), 395-419.

⁷² Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 7.

contemplativa would serve as a great influence to the fathers of the earliest monastic asceticism.⁷³

While in the army during the 312-313 CE war between Licinius and Maximin Daia, Pachomius was exposed to and impressed by the Christians of Thebes. After his release from the army, he became a Christian and was baptized in the village of Chenoboskion (Seneset in Coptic). Pachomius spent his first years in service to the Christian community, engaging in acts of charity and discussions on the nature of the religious teachings, while becoming increasingly ascetic, down to his association with an older hermit named Palamon.

While praying, Pachomius had a vision of a monastery at Tabennesi, which, when built, would attract many followers to the ascetic way of life that he was embracing. The monastery soon became the site of the eventual growth of an anchorite community under Pachomius' leadership.

The monks of his community were granted the privacy of their own cells for individual reflection. There was also an emphasis placed on communal prayer, and "all monks were expected to be lettered, and to learn at least some of the Psalter and the New Testament. Pachomius warned them against the 'splendor and the beauty' of books, which could be 'outwardly pleasing to the eye,' but this was not so much an attack on ideas as an emphasis on a book's true worth, the contents rather than the appearance. Books, like much other monastic property, were guarded very carefully by the *praepositus*, or superior, of each house, but they could be borrowed with permission for a week at a time."⁷⁴

The monks were assigned daily, moderate, work: the preparation of meals, service at table, conducting the liturgy, and such industrial tasks as the weaving of baskets, a variety of handicrafts and some specialization in agriculture, that provided for the day to

⁷³ Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 15.

⁷⁴ Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 81. Cf. Pachomius' *Rules*, especially the *Praecepta* 36-37; 138; 122; 28; 59; 139-140; 25; and his *Vita Prima* 125; 61; 88; 63; 59.

day economic needs of the community. There was also a strong emphasis on instruction, especially as to the importance of scripture as a source of ideas and, through recitation, for tranquility and self-control. Pachomius encouraged a preoccupation with inner life, as a means to closeness with God, God's presence being the "context and focus of work and prayer."⁷⁵ While individual freedom was highly valued, there was an expectation of mutual support and responsibility within the community. Ultimately, Pachomius advocated for the attainment of "purity of heart" through watchfulness, as the key value in his approach to ascetic Christianity.

Evagrius Ponticus (d. 399 CE) was another monk whose writings, cosmology and mystical theology would help shape the evolution of Egyptian Christianity. His conceptualization of the mystical journey to God and interpretation of the teachings of Origen contributed to the Origenist controversies and to the development of orthodoxy. According to Palladius, a disciple, Evagrius was born in Iborra, near the Black Sea in northern Turkey.⁷⁶ His travels took him from Constantinople to Jerusalem, where he encountered Melania the Elder. He pledged to her that he would adopt the monastic life that she advocated, and she sent him on into Egypt.

Circa 383 CE, Evagrius arrived at Nitria, meeting with Ammonius the Earless and the Tall Brothers, the future leaders of the Origenist movement. Moving on to Scetis and Kellia he became a disciple of Macarius the Egyptian and Macarius the Alexandrian, respectively, and learned Coptic writing and a "balanced" asceticism. He was a trained calligrapher in the Oxyrhynchus style, and unlike an increasing number of monks, was very well educated. His writings encompassed many issues and reflections on theological questions. His *Gnostikos* (the "Gnostic") offered advice for advanced monks with disciples, contained spiritual pedagogy and biblical exegesis, and featured citations from other Christian writers, including Basil of Caesarea, Athanasius, and Origen's disciple, Didymus the Blind.

⁷⁵ Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 119.

⁷⁶ Palladius, *Lausiac History* LXXXVI.

The *Kephalaia gnostica* (“Gnostic chapters”) contained his cosmology, an adaptation of Origen’s theories, which caused Evagrius to be named anathema by the Council of Constantinople in 553 CE. It spoke of the preexistence of minds, the cosmic restoration and the reintegration of all things into God, or *apokatastasis*.⁷⁷ In his *Antirrhētikos* (Counter-arguments), he wrote of the scriptural battle against evil thoughts, listing 487 counter-temptations modeled on Jesus’ temptations in the desert. The evil thoughts were a catalogue of the human propensity toward evil that would become, with modification, the Seven Deadly Sins, and provide the geography of Dante’s vision of Hell. Evagrius’ list included: gluttony; fornication; love of money; sadness; anger; listlessness; vainglory; and pride.

Evagrius dealt with the practicalities involved in combat with demons, a theme which figures prominently in all desert literature, including a psychology of temptation along with “cosmological origins, [and the] nature and destiny of demons.”⁷⁸ In this discussion Evagrius was not using metaphorical language; the conflict was deemed real and constant, although the demons often took the form of individual inappropriate thoughts. The tools of combat included a first stage, the *Praktike* (Practice) involving cleansing and purification to ensure freedom from the domination of passions. It demonstrated the transition to a state of *apatheia*, the passionless and quiet state of the rational soul, and of *agape*, freedom to love without agenda and to learn to love others, flaws and all. The second stage involved *Gnostike*, a mystical knowledge of the visible world as created by Christ, the Logos of God. “Theology” was simply the knowledge of God through prayer, and the experiential encountering of the Trinity, the awareness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, was equal to the kingdom of God.

⁷⁷ W. Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford, 2004), 318. Cf. A. Guillaumont, *Les ‘Kephalaia gnostica’ d’Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens* (Paris, 1962); M. A. Jourdan-Gueyer, M. O. Goudet and M.-H. Congodeau, *Évagre le Pontique. De la prière à la perfection: Au moine Euloge* (Paris, 1992); M. O’Laughlin, “Elements of Fourth Century Origenism: The Anthropology of Evagrius Ponticus and Its Sources,” in Ch. Kannengiesser and W. L. Petersen (eds.), *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1988), 357-373.

⁷⁸ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 327.

In the *Kephalaia gnostika*, Evagrius' radicalism surfaces further. In this difficult writing, he reveals the origin and destiny of the universe, including the Creation, Fall, and Second Creation. Drawing from Origen's cosmology, the First Creation was one of disembodied spirits, rational beings (*logikoi*) and minds (*noes, nous*), living in equal assembly and unity (*henad*). The lapse from the primordial communion came about through the first sin, negligence, and led to the pre-cosmic Fall. This "Movement" (*kenesis*) saw the "minds" become "souls," until God mercifully rescued these beings in the Second Creation. The Fallen souls were given bodies as containment so as to not drift into nothingness. The souls received bodies appropriate to the degree of sin in the pre-cosmic Fall, leading to three differing designations for those souls with different "chemistry." Those with the chemistry of mind and fire (*nous*), became angels; those of desire and earth (*epithymia*), humans; and those of anger and air (*thymos*) were the demons.

In his cosmological system, Evagrius emphasized the goodness of the body, as the gift from God preventing ultimate nothingness, and attacked those who would dispute this material positivity. Since God had created the body in mercy, those who hated the body also hated the Creator.⁷⁹ But the truest "self," the mind or *nous*, was the first identity. While the secondary body was important as an anchor, it would ultimately be discarded upon reuniting with the Father. Evagrius' christology was expressed through this cosmology, portraying Christ as the one *nous* that did not neglect the Creator, and so never fell. He was charged with presiding over the Second Creation, which would then be imbued with the wisdom of Christ and his teachings as the way to return to God. In time, Christ became human, as were his charges, leading to a complication of the christology as Evagrius failed to adequately explain how divinity and humanity came to be the one person of Christ.

The eschatology of Evagrius' system followed Origen's idea of *apokatastasis*. At the end time God will restore all things to Him. All rational beings will regain their spiritual nature, including the demons. On the seventh day, Christ reigns over the

⁷⁹ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 355.

rational beings, and on the eight, the reign ends with the ultimate restoration. This marks the return of the cosmos to the primordial state. For Evagrius, salvation was equated with deification through the return to God.

As mentioned, the Origenist controversies were times of great crisis for Egyptian monasticism, as they resulted in the purge of leading intellectuals and writers. In 399 CE, the controversy gained steam when Theophilus' annual *Festal letter*, telling the date of Easter, attacked the "heresy" of anthropomorphism. Many monks were outraged by the charges leveled against the interpretations of Origen's theories, and there were violent demonstrations, including threats against Theophilus, in Alexandria. The works of Origen were anathematized as Theophilus attacked the monasteries that followed his teachings, and turned against his former Origenist friends, including Isidore the Hosteller, the official guestmaster of the Alexandrian Church, who was excommunicated on spurious charges of an affair with a sailor. He fled to Nitria, the sanctuary of the Tall Brothers, Dioscorus, Ammonius the Earless, Euthymius and Eusebius, who were eventually excommunicated in their turn.

The monks fled Egypt with approximately three hundreds followers, and traveled to Constantinople where they appealed to John Chrysostom, who took them in. This action led to Theophilus turning against Chrysostom, who was deposed, exiled in 404 and died while in custody in 407 CE. In the Holy Land, Epiphanius of Salamis denounced Origen in his *Panarion* ("Medicine Chest"), spreading the anti-Origenist message. Although Evagrius died in 399 CE, just prior to the eruption of the controversy, William Harmless sees *his* theology as the one under attack, as he had reworked and sharpened Origen's original thesis. Desert Origenism, as led by Evagrius and his friends, Rufinus and Melania the Elder in Jerusalem, the Tall Brothers, and his disciple Palladius, was the real target of the persecutions and heresy hunters.

1.3.7. THE TRADITIONAL EGYPTIAN PRIESTHOOD

For thousands of years the priesthood and religion were inseparable in traditional Egyptian religion. As Melchizedek is a priestly figure, a brief examination of the traditional Egyptian priesthood may provide some insight as to his later importance among Christian monks. As the localized practices of the early Christian communities were influenced by ideas specific to the area in which they arose, those Christians who retained memories of the traditional practices may have seen a reflection of the important role in the person of Melchizedek.

In the beginning, the pharaoh acted as the only “real” priest, the intermediary who spoke with the gods and acted on their behalf, but the practicalities of the intricacies of worship soon made this untenable. By the time of the Old Kingdom (c. 2686-c. 2181 BCE) the development of a priestly class had begun. These priestly families would become the ruling class by the Middle and Late Kingdoms (between 2181 and 1090 BCE). The 21st Dynasty was a family of priest-kings, and it was the opposition of the priests that prevented Amenhotep IV (d. 1374 BCE) from completing his reform.⁸⁰

Since traditionally, art, science, government and law were all associated with and founded in religion, with the concept of justice personified as a goddess, Ma’at, secular office-holders as well as religious practitioners were priests. Viziers from the 5th Dynasty onward were given the title “Priest of Ma’at.” As the intermediary to the gods, the king was simultaneously god and man, entitled to communicate with the gods and to carry out their prescribed rituals. As mentioned, for purposes of practicality as the Kingdom grew and the pharaoh’s role changed, these actions were actually performed by priests. In the art of the New Kingdom there are images of the inherent paradox of the king as priest and god, in which he is portrayed, in priestly capacity, confronting his own divine image.⁸¹ Revelation occurred through incarnation.

⁸⁰ In the Amarna Revolution, Amenhotep IV, or Akhenaten, attempted to reform the entire Egyptian religious system by banishing all gods except the sun-god, Aten, and instituting sun-worship as the state religion. Cf. R. David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London, 2002), 215.

⁸¹ S. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1973), 40.

In the delegation of the king's duties, priests were initiated into the "secret mystery" of the services performed for the gods.⁸² The development of the priesthood was affected by and impacted the social and economic structure of Egypt, but the highest priestly function involved the care of the image of the deity, a process that made it a living presence. In all aspects of traditional Egyptian religion, the burial of the dead being the most obvious example, ritual was of central importance. Localized deities, and the cultic practices surrounding them, were the norm, with syncretism and shifting worldviews changing and combining the natures of the deities and their worship as the situation dictated.⁸³

Although the king was the sole priest in every temple in theory, functionaries fulfilled the everyday necessities of the temple, which amounted to ministering to the god's needs. Rather than being a "shepherd" to a congregation, guiding their practices and beliefs or preaching, as would become the model in Christianity, the priests of ancient Egypt acted only as intercessors, working on behalf of the god of the temple. They prepared offerings and performed rituals, understood the liturgy and taught from within specific areas of specialization, but did not receive divine revelation. The temples were not places of worship, but the houses of the gods. The inseparable combination of church/temple and state ensured that the temples would never gain ascendancy over the righteous rule of the pharaoh.

The priesthood of Amun wielded unprecedented power, with the High Priest given the title First Prophet of Amun. Beneath him were three lower designations of priestly functionaries; the senior priests who were responsible for the copying of texts

⁸² Rosalie David suggests that the inherent secrecy of the duties and the initiations into the duties means that we really know relatively little about the specific tasks of the Egyptian priesthood, a problem also seen in the study of the Mystery religions. At the time of a priest's first term of duty there was likely a ritual purification rite, in which the secret knowledge of the god's cult would be passed on, and vows of integrity and ritual purity would be taken. From Herodotus' *Histories*, we know that priests were required to take cold-water baths twice daily and twice nightly, refrain from sexual relations while they acted in the temple, adhere to food restrictions and wear clothing made from non-animal sources. Cf. Herodotus, *The Histories* II; David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 198-203.

⁸³ David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 137-138.

(*hierogrammatists*), and specialists in medicine, history, geography, astronomy, astrology and botany; the minor priests did not enter the sanctuary, but fulfilled such duties as carrying the sacred barque, and supervised the day to day activities of the lay personnel, and the lay workers, the architects, stewards, clerks, bakers, cooks, craftsmen and florists who performed their specific tasks in service of the deity.

There were additionally special categories of priests assigned to specific duties, often outside of the temple environs. The lector-priests (*hry-hb*) were responsible for the ritual books; the mortuary priests looked after the tomb rituals, the preparation of the corpse, and the burial rites of the dead; while other servants ensured the upkeep of tombs into perpetuity.

In the Third Intermediate and Late Periods, the time of the 21st to the 25th Dynasties (1085-332 BCE), the High Priest at Thebes achieved essentially royal status and ruled in his own right.⁸⁴ While the king ruled from his seat of power in northern Egypt, the High Priest had control of the Thebaid and the south.

When Alexander entered Egypt in 332 BCE, he allowed the Egyptians to continue their traditional religious practices, and was invested as the pharaoh. After his death, under Ptolemy I there was a reorganization of government and restoration of Egyptian temples, as well as the establishment of a divine cult of Alexander. As pharaohs, the Ptolomies, for the most part, allowed for the upholding of tradition. But this period also saw political abuses of the system, including heavy taxation, and marked the beginning of Hellenism, with its alien culture and religion.⁸⁵

Increasingly in the Roman period Egyptian kingship became a function of the priesthoods, as the role grew in political authority. To curtail this growing power, under the Augustan reforms, a Roman official was given the title of "High Priest of Alexandria and All Egypt." Despite this intervention, the first two and a half centuries of Roman

⁸⁴ An example being Herihor, an army general in the time of Ramesses XI, who was granted the rulership of Thebes. Cf. David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 202.

⁸⁵ David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 137.

rule in Egypt saw little to no decline in cultic and priestly activity, as Egyptian religion and its priesthoods continued to grow.⁸⁶ The economic reforms under Septimius Severus at the beginning of the third century CE, brought localized governments and temples under a new administrative body. The priesthood maintained its social significance with particular ranks and functions, and its status in the communities by preserving and continuing to perform traditional ritual acts.

Some adaptation was necessary for the priesthood to maintain its place and nominal power in Egyptian society with the alien influences of Hellenization acting to undermine the traditions of Ancient Egypt. This reality was reflected in the somewhat diminished scope of performed rituals, scaled to address everyday concerns rather than the larger political interventions that had become associated with the priesthood. Additionally, some priests became charismatic, prophetic leaders, often encouraging defense or revolt. In the early centuries of the Common Era, some priests were associated with the mobilization of “holy wars.” One example can be seen in the native Egyptian response to the Jewish revolt of 115-117 CE, in which the Egyptian army effectively “annihilated most of Egyptian Jewry.”⁸⁷ The extreme reaction against the uprising grew out of priestly oracles encouraging attacks on the Jews as the opponents of order, and was historically linked to a priestly tradition dating to the time of the Ptolemies, in which the Seth-Typhon connection presented the Jews as “dangerous foreigners.”⁸⁸ In a similar case, native Egyptians were roused to a regional uprising in the Nile Delta (172-173 CE). The *boukoloi*, rebel brigands or warriors depending on perspective, were a threat to the Roman military for a time. According to the Roman historian Dio Cassius (ca. 150-235 CE), the insurrection was led by a priest called Isidorus (*History of Rome* 72.4). Frankfurter notes:

Isidorus’ leadership of the Delta *boukoloi* simply contributes to a general picture of priests’ charismatic leadership in the Roman period despite the progressive

⁸⁶ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt* (Princeton, N. J., 1998), 198-199. Cf. Plutarch, *De Iside*; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.4.35, 37.

⁸⁷ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 206.

⁸⁸ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 207.

erosion of their *economic* status. The example of the *boukoloï* also alerts us to the local or regional boundaries of such charisma. Priestly authority, especially in its capacity to mobilize people beyond the context of festivals, was growing increasingly circumscribed, localized, as with the rest of Egyptian religion.⁸⁹

With these increasing economic and social issues, the added problem of the Christianization of Egypt in the third century CE necessitated further change within the traditional priesthood. Priests became healers, diviners, manufacturers of amulets and dispensers of spells, including those for safety, love, success, snakebites and curses, some based in long traditional practice.⁹⁰ There were examples of prophetic figures in the fourth century such as Paul of Thebes, Apollo, and John of Lycopolis, but more and more the remaining Egyptian priests were facing competition from the early Christians. The established book culture of traditional practices gradually moved from the hands of the lector-priest into the desert monasteries and the developing Christian theologies.

But the Egyptian priesthood had not yet seen its end. Travelogues and fiction from the Roman served to kindle a fascination with the figure of the Egyptian priest, as he became the Oriental “wise man.” This love of the perceived exoticism of Egypt and its religion, this “Egyptomania,”

carried both romanticizing and negatively distorting sides. And the literary construction of the Egyptian priest was prone to both. He was, above all, a skilled *magos*: a master of supernatural forces for the most mundane as well as the most weighty purposes. *Magos* (akin to English “magician”) and its corollary *mageia* (akin to “magic”) had by the Roman period assumed the sense of ritual power such as an “Oriental” priest might control and dispense for any reason, but especially for subversive purposes in matters of competition: love, justice, politics, commerce, hatred. It was clearly an outsider’s term, casting an aura of otherness to practical or quotidian ritual.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 208.

⁹⁰ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 210. Cf. M. W. Meyer and R. Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton, N. J., 1999), for comparable Christian examples of spells and amulets.

⁹¹ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 219-220.

From the outsider perspective, the Egyptian priest became the philosopher, astronomer and diviner, living an ascetic, or at least moderate, life in study of ancient texts and control of the supernatural.

In addition to the general, localized priest, there was still some semblance of the “upper class” priesthood of the past, especially seen in the writings from the Roman period. They demonstrate the degree to which Egyptian priestly tradition had become Hellenized,

and yet the evolution of this priestly class and its interests in the late Roman period was authentically Egyptian. Emphasizing their own supra-local activity, private illumination rituals, their status as priests, and their concerted endeavor to translate Egyptian temple traditions into Hellenistic idiom, they sought to distinguish themselves from the ranks of those local priest whose scopes of authority were merely the shrine, the community, and its perennial ritual needs.⁹²

In order to survive and maintain what power they could, the Egyptian priesthood appropriated the stereotypes and assumed the perceived power of the *magos*.⁹³ This led to a certain amount of international appeal and self-promotion outside of Egypt, often in service to Rome. In one case, the priest Harnouphis engaged in the casting of spells for Marcus Aurelius during his German campaign.⁹⁴

The role of the priest was also idealized in the native Egyptian literature composed in Greek and Egyptian in the early Roman period. It often included the motif of the lector-priest in the service of the court. The “Magical Papyri” of the second to fourth centuries CE, documents in Greek, Demotic Egyptian, and “Old Coptic,” reflected the ritual conventions of the tradition, including “the lector-priest’s threats to return the world to chaos or to control through knowledge of secret names, his ritual claims of identity with series of Egyptian gods, [and] his invocations of Re (Helios), and Seth

⁹² Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 224.

⁹³ Frankfurter defines “stereotype appropriation” as the “manifold ways indigenous cultures embrace and act out the stereotypes woven by colonizing or otherwise dominant alien culture” (*Religion in Roman Egypt*, 225).

⁹⁴ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 226. Cf. Dio Cassius, *History of Rome* 72.8.4.

(Typhon) and of Isis, Osiris and Horus as efficacious paradigms.”⁹⁵ Also within the repertoire of the priest were elaborate and pretentious revelation spells, detailing personal-divine encounters that were “evocative of early Christian and Jewish liturgies.”⁹⁶

Effectively, in order to survive the dramatic shifts in political power, worldviews and religious ascendancy in Egypt in the early centuries of the Common Era, of necessity “from Oxyrhynchus to Alexandria and then to Rome the Egyptian priest, the image of an Egyptian priest, becomes ever more weird, an Oriental wise man constructed almost entirely according to the exoticist perspective of Roman culture.”⁹⁷ In this propensity toward adaptation in the interest of survival, the traditional Egyptian priesthood is representative of the syncretistic nature of the country as a whole, with its Hellenistic and eastern influences mixing with the Judaism of the Diaspora and nascent Christianity. Still, it maintained some level of adherence to the historical beliefs and practices of pre-Graeco- and Roman Egypt, and those influences would help to shape both Egyptian Christian theology and praxis, as well as those of Sethianism and other second-century systems.

1.3.8. CONCLUSION

Following Smith’s insistence upon the importance of geographical origins in the examination of the religious movements of the early centuries CE, I have looked to Egypt as the originating point for those particular ideologies whose diverse worldviews were recorded among the texts found at Nag Hammadi. Sethianism, in particular, seems to have deep roots in Egyptian soil, developing out of concerns specific to the Jewish and Christian populations. Many of the characteristic themes and motifs of the literary trajectories associated with the Nag Hammadi texts and therefore the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* can be traced to cultural and societal concerns, realities and practices in

⁹⁵ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 229.

⁹⁶ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 236.

⁹⁷ Ibid. Cf. W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 31, 33-35.

Egypt in Late Antiquity. Perhaps, then, as Smith suggests, the Egyptian environment itself played a key role in the continuity and evolution of these categories of texts and worldviews.

For example, the indigenous awareness of the traditional Egyptian priesthood and its duties, as well as the role that priests played in society, might have been a cause of some of the frictions between the localized Egyptian Christianity, including a lack of theological agreement in some cases, and that of the monasteries and the ecclesiastical (ordained) authority of Alexandria. Since the role of the priest in traditional Egyptian religion and the development of the priesthood of Christianity were very different in practice and authority, it is not surprising that disputes arose as to the power-base of the early Christian church. This discord, and the importance of the priest in the social and religious life of the Egyptians, may have contributed to the popularity of a specific High Priest whose origins lie within Jewish tradition, and speculations as to his role in the worldviews of the early Egyptian Christians and Sethians, as we shall see in *Melchizedek*.

PART 2

2.1. THE APOCALYPTIC TRAJECTORY

2.1.1. INTRODUCTION

Apocalypticism is one of the major literary trends in Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity, often representative of the uncertainty of the socio-political environment that fostered this body of literature. As is the case with gnosticism and other hermeneutical categories found in the historical and literary study of Judaism and Christianity, the designation “apocalyptic” is often too-freely or non-specifically applied.

Since *Melchizedek* contains apocalyptic attributes, it is, in fact, an apocalypse, an examination of the genre and its key characteristics and motifs, along with a brief survey of some of the important antecedent and contemporary texts, is useful in establishing the nature of the literary trajectory, and relevant to the analysis of the text and its placement within the tradition. In describing the literary trends associated with the apocalyptic worldview, and by way of comparison and contrast, I will demonstrate that the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* is a product of a culture of uncertainty and dislocation of expectation and reality, representative of a worldview anticipating redemption and the destruction of the enemies of the chosen community through the intervention of a divine saviour.

2.1.2. JEWISH APOCALYPTIC TRADITION

Over the course of its long history, Israelite literature reflected the issues and beliefs of the times specific to each composition. The apocalyptic tradition eventually developed as a response to the perceived disparity between expectations and the reality of the societal situation faced by the Jews of antiquity. Apocalypticism can be defined as “a type of religious thinking characterized by the notion that through an act of divine intervention, the present evil world is about to be destroyed and replaced with a new and better world in which God’s justice prevails. Apocalyptic schemes usually involve a

moment of judgement, in which persons are called upon to answer for the evil of the world and are either acquitted to salvation in the new world or convicted to suffer divine punishment or destruction.”¹ Dealing with such cultural realities as exile and Diaspora, apocalypticism as a literary expression and theological speculation developed according to societal and religious necessity. It was used variably as legitimation for political and religious propaganda, and to fulfill a socially received need for justice, transforming from a vision of messianic prosperity to one focusing on expectations not being met.

Apocalypses take the form of revelations, visions imparted from a divine source through a human mediator. In his seminal introduction to volume 14 of the journal *Semeia* (1979), “Toward the Morphology of a Genre,” John J. Collins developed a comprehensive paradigm in which the characteristics of apocalyptic literature can be illustrated and evaluated. The first element deals with the manner of revelations, whether through a visual medium, as visions or epiphanies, or an auditory one with discourse and dialogue. Many visions combine the two, with the auditory message elaborating on the initial vision. Some revelations take the form of otherworldly journeys where the recipient is taken up to heaven or down to hell, granting visual perspective as to the state of the cosmos. Occasionally revelations take the appearance of writings, messages contained in a heavenly book or other written document. All such revelations are communicated through an otherworldly or suprahuman mediator, often an angel, usually (in Christian literature) Christ. The human recipient of the message is often pseudonymous, identified with a venerated figure of the past (in the present case, Melchizedek), and is described as feeling awe and perplexity when he is presented with the revelation.

The messages almost universally contain two axes, a temporal and a spatial plane. The temporal axis contains examples of protology, dealing with the beginnings of history, theogony and/or cosmogony and primordial events, such as the Flood, that have repercussions for the current generation and situation. In such revelations, history may be presented as explicit recollections of the past or as *ex eventu* prophecy where the past

¹ J. S. Kloppenborg, *Q-Thomas Reader* (Sonoma, Calif., 1990), 160.

is disguised as the future and associated with eschatological prophecies.² There is often a notion of salvation through knowledge, especially within the dualistic systems, and an eschatological crisis of some sort, resulting either from persecution or other upheavals that disturb the order of the universe. Eschatological judgement and destruction are common characteristics. The eschaton is brought about through supernatural intervention and directed against sinners (oppressors), the world (natural, material elements) and negative otherworldly beings (Satan, the fallen angels, the archons). The positive counter to the eschatological judgement is salvation, again through the intercession of a supernatural actor. Salvation involves cosmic transformation, the renewal and restructuring of the world, and personal salvation as bodily resurrection or other forms of afterlife.

The spatial axis notes the predominance of otherworldly aspects, good and bad, personal and impersonal. The regions visited may also be positive or negative as the beings described are either angelic or demonic. Such dichotomies and dualities were relatively new additions to the theological conceptualizations of Hebrew traditions, as was the concept of an afterlife, incorporated, perhaps, due to the widespread influence of Hellenism and the proximity to Zoroastrian sources.³ Paraenesis by the mediator, though rare, is sometimes present. The revelations often conclude with instructions to the recipient, directions to reveal or conceal the message. The narrative conclusion ends the vision with a return to the world of creation or lists the consequences associated with revealing the vision.⁴

² The Animal Apocalypse with its historical overview, in *1 Enoch* (Chs. 85-90), is one example. Cf. G. W. E. Nickelsburg, "The Apocalyptic Construction of Reality in *1 Enoch*," in J. J. Collins and J. H. Charlesworth (eds.), *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium* (Sheffield, 1991), 51-64, reprinted in A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner (eds.), *George W. E. Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning*, 2 vols. (Leiden and Boston, 2003), 1:29-43, and below, 2.2.2.

³ Cf. J. M. Bremmer, Th. P. J. van den Hunt and R. Peters (eds.), *Hidden Futures: Death and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, the Classical, Biblical and Arabic-Islamic World* (Amsterdam, 1994); J. M. Bremmer, "The Resurrection between Zarathustra and Jonathan Z. Smith," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 50 (1996), 89-107; idem, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Read-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol* (London and New York, 2002).

⁴ J. J. Collins, "Introduction: Toward the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979), 1-19, esp. 6-8.

The Italian scholar Paolo Sacchi describes the genre as a “current of thought within the Jewish world characterized by its autonomy in relation to the rest of the tradition.”⁵ Apocalyptic literature can be seen as a development in the trajectory of wisdom tradition.⁶ Like Collins, Sacchi has attempted to specify the themes and characteristics of the genre in order to ease interpretation and assignation of form. Following Klaus Koch,⁷ Sacchi lists them as follows:

- (1) Waiting: the organized anticipation of the rapid change of order and human existence;
- (2) a catastrophic end that is perceived as liberating rather than pessimistic;
- (3) an eschatology with connections to the history of the cosmos and humanity and linked to the concept of determinism;
- (4) angelic beings, good or evil, and an “in-between” world in which events that transpire there have repercussions in our world;
- (5) salvation of the just through resurrection, the eternity of paradise and the belief in the immortality of the soul;
- (6) dualism of this bad world and the good world to come following the catastrophe (the kingdom or reign of God);
- (7) a soteriological figure (a human or angelic intermediary);
- (8) the “glory” of the coming time, used to emphasize the rejoining of heavenly and earthly sphere and the failure of all social structures.⁸

Noting that the term is so rooted in tradition that its meaning can be difficult to determine, Sacchi suggests that the designation “apocalyptic” should be applied to documents with two fundamental elements, i.e., that evil has its origin in the heavenly sphere, and a belief in immortality, either by resurrection or through the continuance of the soul.⁹ With these characteristics and suggestions of definition in mind, some key documents should be examined.

⁵ P. Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History* (Sheffield, 1990), 40.

⁶ Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*, 41.

⁷ K. Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic: A Polemical Work on a Neglected Area of Biblical Studies and Its Damaging Effects on Theology and Philosophy* (London, 1972).

⁸ Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*, 43-46.

⁹ Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*, 71.

DANIEL

An early example from Jewish tradition, the apocalyptic vision of the Book of Daniel, was likely composed at the time of the Antiochus crisis.¹⁰ Antiochus IV Epiphanes was the tenth Greek king of the Selucid line that had occupied Judea since the conquest of Alexander the Great. His insistence on the maintenance of Hellenistic thought and practices resulted in the abolition of the Judaic practices of Torah. This policy of political expedience served to divide an already fragmented Hebrew community, smarting from generations of exile in Babylon. Some Jews, especially those from urban areas and the wealthy found elements of Hellenism appealing and looked to Selucid rule for economic prosperity.¹¹ This prohibition of Torah and its outward manifestation led to the rise of the Hasidim, those faithful to the Law and to their God. From this divisiveness, rebellion and active resistance formed, and the apocalyptic visions developed. A guerilla action led by Mattathias and his son Judas “the Maccabee” became a successful war for the freedom of the Jews from their Hellenistic overlords. Three years after the desecration of the Temple, it was rededicated and the Hasmonean dynasty began its rule according to its interpretation of the Law. Such successful acts of rebellion and victory would provide actors and events to support the apocalyptic vision in the subsequent writings.

The first six chapters of Daniel contain stories about him while he was in exile at the court of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. These court tales, possibly originating from an earlier tradition, provide a fictional base for the visions of chapters 7-12. The continuity of the two evolutionary strands is maintained through the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel’s interpretation of the vision of the future of Babylon.

¹⁰ One should note that Daniel 7 was probably written prior to the desecration of the Temple in December 167 BCE. Cf. J. J. Collins, *Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1984). 30.

¹¹ This perspective, the civil war theory, is discussed in A. Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, Conn., 1987); E. J. Bickerman, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*, 3 vols. (Leiden, 1976); V. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (New York, 1970).

The visions of Daniel are interpreted by an angelic figure, and contain obvious apocalyptic themes. The four beasts, representations of the four dominating kingdoms that persecuted the Jews, and the enigmatic figure of the “one like a son of man” (8.15) who would come to be associated with the redeemer, are examples of apocalyptic motifs employed within the message. Additionally, the symbolism of the chaos monsters and the Ancient of Days harken back to the earlier traditions of Leviathan and Behemoth, and the Canaanite God El, respectively.¹²

Daniel makes no mention of evil originating with angelic beings and their contamination of nature. Rather, evil is temporal in nature, brought on by outside sources, specifically the domination of Israel by Babylon and the Selucids. There is no internal personification of evil in the theology of Daniel. Although it is contemporaneous with the Dream Visions of *1 Enoch*, specifically the Animal Apocalypse (chapters 85-90), the underlying sense of evil appears to come solely from political and social factors acting in the world of the authors. These outside forces are humans and non-believers, removed from the accepted governance of God.

Sacchi notes that Daniel was likely influenced by the Book of the Watchers (*1 Enoch* 1-36) as it contains visions, “in-between” worlds, and a super-human mediator, but the primary problem of evil had shifted to the temporal realities associated with persecution from human rather than angelic sources. The one like a son of man is granted governance on earth, and the good angels, Michael and Gabriel, are assigned as protectors of Israel. As such, in Sacchi’s view, “Daniel is an apocalyptic work more on the formal and stylistic level than on that of ideology, even if some of its conceptual elements can be considered apocalyptic.”¹³ Still it is demonstrative of a notable difference in focus regarding the source of evil, Daniel’s originating in a politically

¹² Cf. F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1997), 11-75; N. Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven and London, 1999), 121-123, 124, 132, and 135-136.

¹³ Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*, 111. Cf. G. Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1998), 81-86; idem, *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual history, from Ezekiel to Daniel* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002), 169-201; J. J. Collins and P. W. Flint (with the assistance of C. VanEpps) (eds.), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 2001).

driven contextual reality, as opposed to the spiritual and supernatural realm of Enochic tradition.

1 ENOCH

1 Enoch consists of a collection of writings composed between the fourth century BCE and the turn of the Common Era. In the second and first centuries BCE, at least eleven manuscripts were produced for the separatist Essene community of Qumran and later found in fragmentary form among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Although the assortment of writings was probably vetoed at the end of the first century CE by the Sages beginning to set the Hebrew canon, *1 Enoch* remained part of the corpus of early Christian writings until the fourth century, as witnessed by Clement, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and the need felt by Christian missionaries to translate it into Ethiopic. The only extant integral manuscripts (with the exception of the Book of the Giants) to survive are those written in ancient Ethiopic (Ge'ez) that date from the 15th century.¹⁴

The authorship of the document is attributed to Enoch, an antediluvian patriarch mentioned briefly in Genesis 5.21. This assignment of composition allows for the document's placement among the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and is in keeping with the authority established through the perception of a chain of legitimacy. As the seventh patriarch following Adam, this father of the long-lived Methuselah was "taken up" by God in his 365th year. He was shown the wonders and order of the cosmos and given revelatory visions of the coming eschaton. As a messenger, he was to deliver transmissions of hope and the expectation of judgement to the righteous and faithful that would live in the end days. The emphasis on order and chaos suggest the influence of Hellenistic and Ancient Near Eastern conceptualizations of justice and evil.¹⁵

The first part of *1 Enoch*, the Book of the Watchers, contains an initial cosmology and detailing of the judgement to come. It was certainly written prior to 200 BCE and

¹⁴ Cf. G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch* (Minneapolis, 2001).

¹⁵ Cf. Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, 14-15, 34-35, 120.

tells the story of the fall of the angels and the damage that they caused to the earth and its inhabitants. Smitten with the “daughters of man,” the corrupt angels reproduce, creating a race of giants on the earth. In response to their transgressions, God sends the Flood as punishment and to eliminate the source of evil on earth. The postdiluvian reparation “is rewritten as a scenario of eschatological recreation... a prototype of eschatological violence, judgement and restoration in which evil that originated in demonic rebellion would find its cure in divine intervention.”¹⁶ In a second tradition, likely from the hand of another author, God again had to intervene as the angels, under the tutelage of their leader Azazel, provided humanity with the knowledge of warfare, metallurgy and the production of cosmetics. God and his host descended to earth causing it to convulse, and imprisoned the fallen angels, cursing them to remain there for eternity. Nickelsburg notes that collectively the accounts “criticize aspects of contemporary civilization, construing them as the result of heavenly judgement and reparation. The pervading sense of humanity’s victimization by demonic forces and the necessity for direct divine intervention will continue to be a constitutive part of much later apocalypticism.”¹⁷

Sacchi suggests that the implication to be found in this discussion of the roots of evil is that “the time of the antediluvian patriarchs was free of evil. Evil and sin entered the world after the angelic transgression.”¹⁸ The corruption associated with evil comes from the teaching of inappropriate and sinful skills, as well as through the unholy congress of angels and humans. Following this line of thought Sacchi states that

from a development of Genesis 6.1-4 there is born in Israel an absolutely new idea: evil was not invented by humans; it is a disorder of nature, one that comes

¹⁶ G. W. E. Nickelsburg, “First Book of Enoch,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* 2 (1992), 510. Cf. G. W. E. Nickelsburg, “The Nature and Function of Revelation in *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees* and Some Qumranic Documents,” in E. G. Chazon, M. E. Stone and A. Pinnick (eds.), *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 12-14 January, 1997* (Leiden, 1999), 91-119; idem, “Enoch as Scientist, Sage and Prophet: Content, Function and Authorship in *1 Enoch*,” *Society of Biblical Literature, Seminar Papers* 38 (1999), 203-230; P. Piovanelli, “‘Sitting by the Waters of Dan,’ or The ‘Tricky Business’ of Tracing the Social Profile of the Communities That Produced the Earliest Enochic Texts,” in G. Boccaccini and F. Garcia Martínez (eds.), *The Early Enoch Tradition* (Leiden, 2007, forthcoming).

¹⁷ Nickelsburg, “First Book of Enoch,” 510.

¹⁸ Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*, 50.

from outside it. God has already healed it and has not yet healed it. He has bound the watchers to await their destruction; and he has destroyed the giants, but not their souls. We are in the atmosphere of the “already and not yet.” Evil will be destroyed, because in reality it has already been destroyed; but the earth remains situated in a sort of slime of evil that has survived in some way God’s work of restoration. The mystery of evil stands in this gap between the accomplishment of a fact in one sphere and its universal accomplishment. This is a fact which, though not willed, is in any case permitted by God.¹⁹

There is already another world not tainted by evil that exists in another place. Since evil comes from a sphere beyond the human, salvation must also come from outside the human realm.

An examination of the compositional layers of the Book of the Watchers in particular is especially illuminating as regards the problem of evil and the authors’ varying ways of dealing with the issues. As mentioned, at this time humanity was seen more as the victim of supernatural forces than as a source of evil itself. Evil as a metaphysical conception seemed to be seen as either beyond or before the Law, and salvation is not achievable through covenant alone. Enoch plays the role of intercessor on behalf of humanity. He is human, but in the angelic realm. He displays no characteristics of royalty and is not the saviour of humanity. Salvation comes through God alone.

The first layer of the Book of the Watchers, which Sacchi calls BW1-base, demonstrates no knowledge of the Priestly author (P), but displays a familiarity with the angelology of the Iranian worldview. This suggests its likely place of composition as either Babylon or Palestine, sometime in the fifth century BCE. BW1 presents a belief in immortality but no concept of salvation through the intercession of a mediator suggesting a dating in the early fourth century BCE. Sacchi then dates BW2, the final formative redaction of the Book of the Watchers, as originating earlier than the likely compositional dating of Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) and shortly after that of Job, sometime in the late fourth century BCE.²⁰

¹⁹ Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*, 54.

²⁰ Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*, 62.

Book Four of *1 Enoch* contains the Dream Visions (chapters 83-90) that the patriarch experienced before his marriage and later journey around the cosmos. The first vision is a recounting of the Flood to come and contains Enoch's concerns for the posterity of his familial line of descent. In this vision, the leader of the fallen angels is presented as having fallen before the other watchers, so indicating a primacy in their hierarchy. Additionally, here the myth of human origins differs from the story as found in Genesis. Represented by cows, Adam and Eve emerge from the earth followed by Cain and Abel. There is no mention of Eden and therefore no serpent to be identified with the devil; rather, the fall is that of the "stars" from heaven who come to be pastured among the cows that represent humanity.

This second vision is an "extensive allegorical apocalypse that traces human history from Adam to the eschaton," called the Animal Apocalypse. Written between 167 and 160 BCE, before the death of Judas Maccabee, it features an historical perspective comparable to that seen in Daniel. As in the rest of *1 Enoch*, the patriarch is presented as the authoritative author, fulfilling his eschatological role as the "scribe of righteousness." Humans are depicted as animals and angels represented as stars or human beings. In *1 Enoch* 85 and 86, the leader of the fallen stars mixes with Adam's children. Cain is depicted as a black calf while Adam is a white ox. With this juxtaposition of characters, the text seems to imply that the fallen angels played a role in the sin of Cain.

The first fallen star and his followers are seized and thrown into the prison of the abyss, a device later echoed in Revelation, rendering them inactive and unable to play a role in human history. This banishment required another angelic transgression to explain the continuing presence of evil in the world after the devil is made ineffectual, which the author answered with the story of the sin of the seventy angels. These were shepherding angels, charged by God with the guidance of the Israelites after the Exile. They disobeyed God's commands and left their herds to the devouring beasts, as God knew they would. The Dream Visions contain a narrative tracing the unfolding of human history, noting that the progression of time brings increasingly unsatisfactory

circumstances. The realities associated with the Babylonian exile and the desecration of the Temple led to apocalyptic imaginings and, eventually, messianic hopes. Through this portion of the text, which Sacchi places in his description of the second phase of apocalyptic development, the world of the spirit had disappeared in favor of the idea that the continuity of history would lead to the eschaton.

In the Epistle and Parables of *1 Enoch* we see the diversity of the developments of the apocalyptic worldview. In the Epistle of Enoch (chapters 91-107), evil is not considered a form of angelic contamination, but as an invention of humans. At 98.4 Enoch exclaims, “neither has sin been exported into the world. It is the people themselves who have invented it.” Although it is part of the same collection, this view differs greatly from the theology of the Book of the Watchers and the Dream Visions.

The Parables or Similitudes of Enoch (chapters 37-71) depict events relating to the eventual ultimate judgement.²¹ They are cosmic in scope rather than historical, with no narrative of Israel’s past. Evil is here also seen as stemming from the sins of the fallen angels, but the problem lies in their revelation of heavenly secrets rather than by contamination through intercourse with humans. The skills achieved with the help of the forbidden knowledge caused the illicit power that is the seed of the earth’s evils. As in the Book of Dreams, a first angel is distinguished from the ranks of the fallen, a motif that would lead to the eventual characterization of the devil in later literature.

Despite disparities in theme and obvious signs of redactional evolution, the books that together form *1 Enoch* were considered as a single work by the first century BCE, with the Book of the Watchers, the Dream Visions, the Epistle of Enoch, and/or the Book of the Giants copied together in the scrolls of Qumran Cave 4.²² The soul was no longer seen as headed for Sheol unjudged, but held after death in a valley in the extreme west and separated according to moral merit until the time of the Great Judgement. Once adjudicated, the soul would be granted salvation or condemnation for eternity.

²¹ Cf. now G. Boccaccini (ed.), *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2007).

²² Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*, 110.

JUBILEES

The *Book of Jubilees* is the recounting of a revelation given to Moses during his forty days on Mount Sinai. It contains an introduction (1), creation and Adam stories (2-4), Noah stories (5-10), Abraham stories (11-23.8), a digression on the death of Abraham (23.9-32), stories of Jacob and his family (24-45) and stories of Moses himself (46-50).²³ The creation and foundational mythic stories follow Genesis and Exodus with a modified version of the fall in chapters 15-26. O. S. Wintermute notes that *Jubilees* is not specifically an apocalypse. By his description it lacks "bizarre imagery, limited esoteric appeal and preoccupation with the type of eschatology characteristic of apocalyptic writings."²⁴ *Jubilees*' primary concern is with the time in which it was written, as opposed to looking to ultimate judgement and the eschaton. Obedience to the Law is deemed critical, especially in the difficult times contemporaneous to the document. Through the message of *Jubilees*, the chosen people are reassured of the restoration of the proper order of the relationship between God and Israel. God will come to earth and protect Israel (15.31-32) from the evil that inhabits the earth and creates problems for humanity.

Following James VanderKam, Wintermute suggests Hebrew as the original language of composition. The *Book of Jubilees* was then translated into Greek and Syriac, and from Greek into Latin and Ethiopic. The Greek and Syriac texts have survived only in fragmentary form, as has the Latin version of which only one quarter is extant. Like *1 Enoch*, the Ethiopic version is almost complete and provides our best witness to the tradition of *Jubilees*. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Hebrew versions of the text were found, providing the earliest known copies of *Jubilees*. These

²³ The Ethiopic version and the fragments of the Hebrew original and the other versions have been republished and translated by J. C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees: A Critical Text*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 1989). Cf. J. C. VanderKam, "The Origins and Purposes of the Book of Jubilees," in M. Albani, J. Frey and A. Lange (eds.), *Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (Tübingen, 1997), 3-24.

²⁴ O. S. Wintermute, "Jubilees," in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y., and London, 1983-1985), 2:35-142, esp. 37. In Wintermute's discussion we can see an example of the trickiness that comes with attempting to define documents or worldviews as apocalyptic or not. This issue of categorization is a common problem and source of contention, just as we have seen in the case of gnosticism.

can be dated between 75 and 50 BCE. The date of original composition is commonly given as prior to 100 BCE, likely between 161 and 140, and it may be, in part, dependent on *1 Enoch*. *Jubilees* can be described as proto-Essene in nature, or as an Essene reworking of a more Torah-centered theology, accounting for its position among the writings of the Qumran community and its negative stance regarding the reign of Antiochus IV.²⁵ As such, *Jubilees* offers an insight into the sectarian writings of the time-period from which it originated.

The God of the author of *Jubilees* is the God of the Old Testament tradition. All things are fixed and predetermined by this God. “Even the evil forces of the world are fixed by God. Mastema, who has been allotted exactly one tenth of the demons born in the days of Noah (10.9), may be bound by God at will (48.15).”²⁶ *Jubilees* contains examples of angels and demons, the Watchers (4.15) and their offspring, the evil demons. As in *1 Enoch*, the question of the source of evil arises and is dealt with by the text. The tradition of *Jubilees* suggests that evil is superhuman, not caused by God, but rather finds its source in the angelic realm, where proper order has been lost. Thus, neither humanity nor God is responsible for the origination of evil. Although the fall of Adam is mentioned, the fall of angels and their corruption of the human realm is the source of all that is distasteful to God and negative to humans. Mastema is given the responsibility for Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac (7.15-18.13) in contrast to the version of the story found in Genesis 22.1-9. Likewise, he is the one who attempts to kill Moses (48.2-3) as he returns to Egypt, rather than the incongruous and unexplained attack described in Exodus 4.24 in which “on the way, at a place where they spent the night, the Lord met him and tried to kill him.” The God of *Jubilees* will restore a new, good creation in which there will be a return to the Law and tradition.

Although evil spirits and sin still exist, right acts such as circumcision prevents their malignant influence (15.32). VanderKam notes, “the way in which he [i.e., the author of *Jubilees*] presents the account gives evidence that the author was aware of all the details

²⁵ Wintermute, “Jubilees,” 46.

²⁶ Wintermute, “Jubilees,” 47.

in the story about the angels who became impure.”²⁷ While the Book of the Watchers focuses on sin and ultimate punishment and the supernatural origin of evil, in *Jubilees*, while present, the story is less dominant. It is not seen as the paramount source of human evil. Rather, the errand of the angels to earth is stressed in its initial positivity and serves to “protect the reputation of heaven by distancing it from evil. That is, evil did not come from heaven to earth, as it does in *1 Enoch*, but originates on the earth.”²⁸ Humanity deviated from its prescribed course, violating the laws appropriate to its position in creation. Noah alone pleased God, and the Watchers were removed from their appointed stations because of their transgression. As such, the *Book of Jubilees* represents a step on the path to attempting to confront the problem of evil in the world and its theological ramifications.

2 BARUCH

As a later example, the *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* or *2 Baruch* is illustrative of the theology of the difficult times following the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. Although this apocalypse claims authorship after the first destruction of 587, it is clearly representative of a later evolution of the apocalyptic trajectory. It is closely connected with 4 Ezra either in its textual dependence or their use of a common source. Albertus F. J. Klijn suspects that the latter is more likely, and places the time of composition in the first or second decade of the second century CE. The surviving Syriac manuscript notes that it is a translation from the Greek, of which only fragments remain.

2 Baruch is made up of lamentations, prayers, apocalypses and a letter to the Jews remaining in Diaspora. The apocalypse (1-77) seems to be a composite, as it offers often-conflicting traditions surrounding the Temple.²⁹ Like Daniel, *2 Baruch* seems primarily concerned with issues of a temporal nature that are logical in light of the

²⁷ J. C. VanderKam, “The Angel Story in the Book of Jubilees,” in Chazon, Stone and Avital (eds.), *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives*, 151-170, esp. 152.

²⁸ VanderKam, “The Angel Story in the Book of Jubilees,” 155.

²⁹ A. F. J. Klijn, “*2 Baruch*,” in Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:615-652, esp. 617. Cf. R. Nir, *The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Idea of Redemption in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* (Atlanta, Ga., 2003).

significant issues surrounding the war and its consequences. The visions foretell of the coming of the Anointed One, a saviour or messiah present at the beginning and the end, but with no *role* in creation or judgement. Instead, he will rule in the time of abundance following the end-time disasters (31.5). The dead will be judged according to merit, reflecting an element of personal culpability as regards sin and evildoing. Israel as a nation will be protected and held separate, but will know some measure of punishment for a time, the destruction of the Temple and the Diaspora, due to its collective sins and transgressions against the Law.

The God of *2 Baruch* is the creator who rules his creation, and who remains inscrutable. In this way evil remains something of a mystery, but God is merciful to the righteous and vengeful upon the enemies of Israel.³⁰ Darkness occurred as a result of the sin of Adam (18.2), returning the responsibility for evil to the sphere of humanity. There is always a choice between light and dark, as free will is essential to the theology. Until the final judgement, the righteous will sleep in the earth. They will become like angels, only more exalted and sinners are condemned to the fire for eternity (51.10). There are some parallels to *1 Enoch*, such as the knowledge of the sons of the fallen angels, but the correspondences only occur in isolated passages.

4 EZRA

As mentioned, 4 Ezra is closely connected with *2 Baruch*, either as its source or drawn from another document common to both works. Like *2 Baruch*, 4 Ezra purports to originate in the time following the destruction of the Temple in 567 BCE, but can in fact be dated to the years following 70 CE. The first lines of the apocalypse (3-14) suggest that composition took place 30 years following the original destruction of the Temple.

³⁰ These enemies are the nations aligned against them, similar to the four beasts of Daniel's vision. In spite of the suggestion made by R. Nir, *The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Idea of Redemption in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* (Atlanta, Ga., 2003), to attribute *2 Baruch* to a Christian author, the perspectives and goals of this late apocalypse are almost certainly Jewish. See J. R. Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other?* (Leiden, 2005), 126-131.

The original Jewish writing (3-14)³¹ is preserved in various Oriental texts in languages such as Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic and Coptic. Its original language of composition was likely Hebrew, from which Greek translations were made that exist in fragmentary form.

Among other theological issues, the author of 4 Ezra questions the origins of sin and suffering. As in *2 Baruch*, God is the only creator and he provided his creation, humanity, with free will. Within this system of belief, sin was seen as originating with humanity. The view was basically pessimistic, and humans were charged with the responsibility for the evil present in the world. "Sin is conceived as consisting essentially in unfaithfulness to the Law (9.36) resulting in alienation and estrangement from God... Since all of Adam's descendents have followed his example in clothing themselves with an evil heart (3.26), each is morally responsible."³²

The remaining visions contained within the apocalyptic section of 4 Ezra are consistent with the messages of *2 Baruch*. 4 Ezra contains a view of creation, primordial history, eschaton, judgement and transformation, all examples of recurring apocalyptic motifs. That such a continuity exists, from the Apocalypse of Ezra to the more sophisticated theology of the *Apocalypse of Baruch*, suggests that the issue of evil, while still significant to the beliefs of the Jews of the early years of the Common Era, of necessity underwent representative transformations in order to explain the total upheaval brought about with the destruction of the Second Temple.³³

2 ENOCH

The *Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch* is the most elaborate of the Diaspora apocalypses. It remains in two Slavonic versions, translations from the Greek original. 2

³¹ As opposed to later Christian interpolations, found in the Latin version, that are included among the Christian Apocrypha as *5* and *6 Ezra*. These contain an introduction in which Ezra (Salathiel) is ignored by the Jews and turns to the Gentiles with his message of redemption through repentance.

³² B. M. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra," in Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:517-559, esp. 521. Cf. B. W. Longenecker, "Locating *4 Ezra*: A Consideration of Its Social Setting and Functions," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 28 (1997), 271-293.

³³ These transformations could have taken the form of the early gnostic writings.

Enoch was likely composed in Egypt due to the inclusion of allusions to Egyptian mythology and its affinities with the worldview of Philo and other Diaspora writings, no later than the first century CE.³⁴ Stylistically and thematically it has much in common with the earlier text, *1 Enoch*. As in the earlier Enochic history, *2 Enoch* features an ascent to heaven, a creation story, instructions to be delivered and recorded for posterity, and the story of the birth of a great hero or patriarch.³⁵

Enoch is taken on an otherworldly journey by two angels (described as two very tall men) who guide him through the seven cosmological and eschatological heavens. The first, fourth and sixth heavens are the places in which cosmological order is maintained, with angels set to govern the stars and elements, the movements of the sun and the moon and the regulation of time, and the overall order of the world, respectively. The remaining four represent the eschatological heavens, the places of reward and punishment. The angels take Enoch through the second heaven, the place of punishment for the rebellious angels; the third heaven, which contains paradise including the original Garden of Eden and the place prepared for the reward of the just, as well as a place to the north that is the place of punishment for sinners; the fifth heaven, the realm of the Watchers who mourn the fall of their fellows, and, finally, the seventh heaven which holds the heavenly court and where Enoch is anointed, given new garments and transformed to an angel-like being.

Additionally, the angel Vreveil (Uriel?) dictates 360 books that are recorded for later transmission to Enoch's family. God himself tells of the creation of the earth in a very different account from that found in Genesis. All creation began in a stone in the belly of "the very great Adoil" with the foundation for life brought forward by Aronchaz,

³⁴ Contrary to Jozeph T. Milik's theory that it is a much later Christian work that he dates to the ninth or tenth century CE. Cf. A. A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen, 2005), 320-333, who assumes "a date of the Melchizedek story and the entire apocalypse [i.e. *2 Enoch*] before 70 C.E." (333).

³⁵ Noah, in the case of *1 Enoch* and, significantly, Melchizedek in *2 Enoch* (71.17), although the latter passage belongs to a distinct unit and it is likely of different origin to the rest of the text (see below, chapter 6).

another mythical monster.³⁶ Enoch is given thirty days to transmit the information to his children, and the writings are recorded to survive the impending flood in order to assure the ultimate salvation of humanity.

Unlike the earlier Jewish apocalypses, *2 Enoch* does not seem to have been written in response to a particular historical crisis. Instead, while set in the heavens, the text provides an extensive listing of sins and virtues, as found in each of the eschatological levels, and the text seems to be a “reflection on the human situation in general (and) as such it constitutes a kind of wisdom book.”³⁷ But the wisdom remains both apocalyptic as we have defined it and broadly humanistic. The aim of the text, while primarily hortatory, is more than ethical matters. It offers a total view of the universe and informs that the transcendent world, with its places of judgement, reward and punishment, are already in existence and prepared for humanity. *2 Enoch* reinforces the apocalyptic reality of the spatial and temporal distinction between this and the transcendent worlds.

3 BARUCH

Another example of Diaspora literature, *3 Baruch* shares a likely Egyptian provenance and demonstrates Jewish apocalyptic themes and later Christian redactions.³⁸ It begins with Baruch weeping over the destruction of Jerusalem and the appearance of an angel who escorts him through the five heavens. The first and second are occupied by “those who built the tower of strife against God and those who gave counsel to build the

³⁶ This creation account, with the inclusion and important role of mythical (chaos) monsters, especially echoes Mesopotamian creation stories (the *Enuma Elish*) and elements of Egyptian mythology that tells of monsters encompassing the whole of creation. Cf. J. A. Wilson, “Egyptian Myths, Tales, and Mortuary Texts,” in J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, N. J., 1950), 3-11; L. H. Lesko, “Ancient Egyptian Cosmogonies and Cosmology,” in B. E. Shafer (ed.), *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1991), 89-122.

³⁷ J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1998), 246.

³⁸ Cf. D. C. Harlow, *The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (3 Baruch) in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden, 1996); idem, “The Christianization of Early Jewish Pseudepigrapha: The Case of *3 Baruch*,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 32 (2001), 416-444.

tower,” and contains hybrid animal forms, suggestive of its Egyptian origin.³⁹ The third heaven further evokes Egyptian tradition, featuring a dragon that devours the bodies of the wicked, Hades, who as a monster, drinks from the sea, the animated vine that was responsible for leading Adam astray, a phoenix that shields the world from the rays of the sun, the movements of the moon, and the sun, that is defiled by witnessing the sins of humanity and must be purified daily.⁴⁰

The fourth heaven is filled with birds singing the praises of the Lord, representing the souls of the righteous. At the entrance to the fifth heaven, the gate remains closed until opened by Michael to receive the prayers of men. He then takes the merits of humanity in baskets to god in a higher (unknown) heaven and returns with rewards for the righteous.⁴¹ Those without merits have no one to blame but themselves, as the vices are provided in a revealed list, and to succumb to evil is deemed an act of free will. By means of the journey and its revelations, Baruch’s sadness about the destruction of Jerusalem is placed in a larger perspective. He is offered the vision of the life to come, stressing the transitory nature of everything in this temporal reality. He is provided with what Collins calls “the apocalyptic cure,”⁴² and his distress is moderated by the reality of the heavenly world as presented in the vision.

THE TESTAMENT OF ABRAHAM

The *Testament of Abraham* is a peculiar example of Diaspora apocalyptic literature. Although it contains a heavenly journey, it is the only episode in the story of Abraham’s death, narrated in the third person. The text, likely composed in Greek, is also of Egyptian origin owing to its use of traditional mythological symbols, the weighing of the

³⁹ The occupants of the first and second heavens represent the Babylonians and Romans. Cf. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 249.

⁴⁰ In some Egyptian mythological texts, those hearts judged as wicked in the presence of Anubis are thrown to the devouring crocodiles.

⁴¹ That God is in a higher, unknown heaven is almost a foreshadowing of the later traditions regarding the ineffability of God and the lack of knowledge of and familiarity with his realm.

⁴² Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 250.

soul at judgement and the sky-chariot for example, and can be dated to the first century CE.

The archangel Michael is sent to Abraham to announce his impending demise, but the patriarch refuses death and instead asks for revelations. He is taken in a chariot and shown the world from above and the gate of heaven before being returned to earth, where he still refuses to die. Death appears in disguise and is still declined, so Abraham is granted further revelations. Even after learning his true nature, Abraham has to be tricked into kissing Death's hand before the angels are able to finally escort his soul to heaven.

The theme of Abraham's reluctance to die is the key innovation of the *Testament*. Although Abraham is special in his righteousness and position as a patriarch, he still succumbs to fear when faced with the anticipation of death. Through this fear he becomes accessible and identifiable to the rest of humanity in the shared uncertainty of the reality of the human condition.

As he is taken through heaven and presented with sinners and punishment, Abraham displays no mercy for the wicked, until he witnesses a soul whose virtues and sins are evenly balanced. Abraham and the angel save the soul, tipping the balance through their prayers. Because of this experience, Abraham prays for forgiveness for his earlier (sinful) zeal in the punishment of others. God forgives him, and the earlier victims of Abraham's fervor are restored.

In the *Testament of Abraham* the judgement of the dead is presented in a new perspective. Fewer souls are saved than damned, but the severity of the judgement is modified and intercession is allowed. God, as the creator, has mercy on sinners and is less severe in his judgement than a righteous human like Abraham is severe in his judgement. Death is the "destroyer of the world," but God has mercy on all who die early, so Death's victory is hollow and not as terrible. Although the fear of death persists, the (eventually) peaceful removal of Abraham's soul is offered as a paradigm

and comfort for others. This consolation is indicative of the text's illocutionary function. Fear of death is natural and human, but the fear of judgement can be alleviated. The hortatory message is that mercy, not severity, is pleasing to God and in keeping with His example.⁴³

OTHER DIASPORA LITERATURE

In addition to the above three major surviving Diaspora apocalypses, two sub-categories may be included in the discussion. The *Sibylline Oracles* and the testamentary literature (among which the *Testament of Abraham* can be included) can offer further insight into the evolution of the apocalyptic worldview and its literary trajectory.

Oracles represent a genre within the literature of antiquity found in Hellenistic, Roman, Egyptian, Jewish and Christian traditions. The *Sibylline Oracles* were primarily tools used as political propaganda, the ostensible prophecies of various ecstatic women. The twelve books that can be considered Jewish and/or Christian Oracles seem to have their origins in Egypt, and the compositions span a number of centuries, from the mid-second century BCE to the early Christian period. They are varied in content and purpose, containing ethical teachings, themes of exile and restoration and future expectations. As a group, the Oracles do not feature the apocalyptic conceptualization of the vertical axis; there are no angels or demons, and no cosmologies of heavens or mystical dimensions. They are commentaries reflective of earthly, political realities. But some contain an historical apocalyptic eschatology (*Oracles* 1, 2 and 4) and they include apocalyptic characteristics such as pseudonymity, historical reviews and expectations of a definitive future kingdom. As such, they can be included in the trajectory.⁴⁴

⁴³ Cf. G. W. E. Nickelsburg (ed.), *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (Missoula, Mont., 1976); J. W. Ludlow, *Abraham Meets Death: Narrative Humor in the Testament of Abraham* (London and New York, 2002); D. C. Allison Jr., *Testament of Abraham* (Berlin and New York, 2003).

⁴⁴ Cf. J. J. Collins, "The Sibylline Oracles," in M. E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period. Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (Assen and Philadelphia, 1984), 357-381.

The testamentary literature is made up of discourses delivered before the imminent death of many of the Old Testament patriarchs. The *Testament of Moses* written in the early years of the first century CE, attempts to assure the Jews that the world *was* created for them, even if contemporaneous events did not seem to support this. It features a distinctive apocalyptic revelation of the heavenly kingdom, an angel in a key role, the schematic review of the divine design of history, and carries the weight of authority as a prophecy *by* Moses, not a revealed truth that was later recounted or recorded.

Likewise, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* presents an historical retrospective through a narrative about the lives of the patriarchs, an ethical exhortation and a prediction regarding the future. Again, the revelation takes the form of an address from father to son, rather than the typical apocalyptic device of supernatural disclosure of heavenly secrets. The *Testament of Levi* includes a “full-blown” apocalypse in chapters 2-5. The journey and the presentation of the seven heavens in this case serve to legitimize the priesthood of Levi, and the *Testament* includes heavenly tablets and armies in the third heaven who wait to exact vengeance on Beliar. As a group, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* act as “witnesses to apocalypticism in the broader sense, although they are not in the form of apocalypses,”⁴⁵ and, as a group, are clearly Christian.⁴⁶

2.1.3. THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

The literature produced and preserved by the Community of the renewed covenant, those documents found at Qumran between 1947 and 1956, suggests the community was an apocalyptic group.⁴⁷ Those texts that are not apocalypses themselves, still demonstrate an apocalyptic worldview that was influenced by the traditions of *Enoch* and *Daniel*. One of the most significant recurring themes is the existence of warring forces, a battle of good versus evil or light versus dark. There is an emphasis on predestination

⁴⁵ Collins *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 143.

⁴⁶ Cf. M. de Jonge, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament as Part of Christian Literature: The Case of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Greek Life of Adam and Eve* (Leiden and Boston, 2003).

⁴⁷ See the ongoing debate in G. Boccaccini (in collaboration with J. H. Ellens and J. A. Waddell) (eds.), *Enoch and Qumran Origins: New Light on a Forgotten Connection* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2005).

and the aid of angelic forces in the battles to come, specifically the pairings of Michael/Melchizedek against Belial/Melchiresha.

Along with this predominant theme of conflict the community seemed to subscribe to the belief that history was organized according to predetermined periods. The authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls saw themselves as living in the end of days, the period before divine intervention would end the era of Belial, the era of wickedness. These last days were broken into two phases: the time of testing, in which they were living, and the messianic age that was still to come. With the advent of the messianic age would come the final war against the Gentile powers (the *Kittim*, likely identified with the Romans) and the opposing Jewish groups, the Sons of Darkness. In this war, the messiah of Israel would play a key role, but ultimately God would decide the conflict through his agent, Michael or Melchizedek, assuming that the messianic ideas of the different Dead Sea Scroll texts were actually held by the members of the Qumran community.⁴⁸

The writings present an incomplete picture of the form that the world would take following the last days. There is the suggestion of the existence of a New Jerusalem, and mention made of a final conflagration that implies an end to this temporal existence. While it is unclear whether or not a general resurrection was anticipated, the Scrolls do reflect an expectation of eternal life, with the righteous enjoying unending bliss and the damned experiencing ceaseless torment. The members of the community would enjoy continued life with the angels, as in the present they already live in communion with God's representatives through the medium of the "heavenly liturgy."⁴⁹ But danger remained, as Belial's influence would continue to be felt until the final battle.

⁴⁸ Cf. M. G. Abegg, Jr., "The Messiah at Qumran: Are We Still Seeing Double?," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 2 (1995), 125-144; F. García Martínez, "Messianic Hopes in the Qumran Writings," in F. García Martínez and J. Trebolle Barrera, *The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden, 1995), 159-189; J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York, 1995); C. A. Evans and P. W. Flint (eds.), *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1997); M. A. Knibb, "Eschatology and Messianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1998-1999), 2:379-402; P. Piovaneli, "Les figures des leaders 'qui doivent venir': Genèse et théorisation du messianisme juif à l'époque du second Temple," in J.-C. Attias, P. Gisel and L. Kaennel (eds.), *Messianismes: Variations sur une figure juive* (Geneva, 2000), 31-58.

⁴⁹ J. J. Collins *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London and New York, 1997), 151.

The apocalyptic imaginings found in the Dead Sea Scrolls are clearly representative of both continuity and innovation from the traditions of Enoch and Daniel. Evil exists on earth because of the influence of supernatural forces such as those found in the Book of the Watchers or the figure of Mastema in *Jubilees*. Additionally, there are examples of cosmologies that illustrate the systematic division of creation that were likely influenced by both Zoroastrian myth and Jewish wisdom speculations regarding the origins of evil. The end of days were calculated as in Daniel in that the last days had already begun, but the appearance of the messiah and the eschatological war were still anticipated. The Jewish apocalypses provide the first examples of extensive speculations as to the reality of angels and the heavenly world, and the Dead Sea Scrolls offer further illustrations of the angelic hosts in detail, while remaining mute on descriptions of divine geography. In earlier apocalypses the righteous will become companions to the angels, whereas the members of the Dead Sea Scrolls community already walk in their company. Because of this close connection to the divine, little attention is paid to the concepts of death and resurrection.

In Daniel and *1 Enoch*, ancient heroes and revealing angels bridge “the gulf between the recipients of the revelation and the heavenly world,”⁵⁰ but in the Dead Sea Scrolls the response is more experiential, with instructions for participation rather than detailed descriptions. Traditional apocalyptic revelation is unnecessary since they already live in the presence and example of the angels, and because of the structure of authority in the community. The typical apocalyptic conventions of authority through experience and the visions of prestigious (pseudonymous) authors are also needless as authority is based in the person of the Teacher of Righteousness and his successors. This line of authority probably superseded the influence of the old prophets.

In Collins’ opinion, the nature of apocalypticism in ancient Judaism was not generally or inherently tied to any one movement or tradition, but rather “is primarily concerned with a metaphysical framework, within which various theologies and

⁵⁰ Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 152.

ideologies can find meaning.”⁵¹ At Qumran, the ideology was reflective of common interests with some of the wisdom schools (like that of Ben Sira), and the centrality of Torah, and the priestly character of the worldview were distinctive. Of central importance was the community’s way of life as being in accord with the guidance of the angels, their assurance of final vindication at final judgement and the everlasting life of its members. As is typical of the apocalyptic worldview, there was a generally assumed desire for salvation from alienation and dissatisfaction with earthly realities, the disconnect between social actuality and expectations. The Dead Sea sect was in disagreement with the interpretation of the Law and the regulation of the Temple cult by the Jerusalem authorities. This alienation from the Temple directly resulted in the priestly character of the Qumran community. Angelic company was granted as “compensation” for the loss of access to the Temple, as the community acted as a substitute for the Temple, making the earthly location for the practices of the heavenly cult the Qumran settlement.

It is unclear how widespread the worldview associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls actually was. Primary reference to the group is largely dependent on Josephus. Most scholarly consensus allows that the Qumran sect is the group that Josephus identified as “Essenes,” with the caveat that his account (and Philo’s) made no mention of the apocalyptic tendencies of the group.⁵² There are possible correspondences with the Dead Sea sect and its literature to be found in the New Testament texts, in particular, the motifs of the “suffering messiah,” resurrection, and the naming of the “Son of God, Son of the Most High.”⁵³ Early Christian convention portrayed Jesus as a prophet (Elijah) rather than a militant and military Davidic messiah,⁵⁴ although he was eventually identified as such. And while he was not presented as a priestly (Aaronic) messiah, the risen Jesus is

⁵¹ Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 154.

⁵² There is a good possibility that Josephus left out any mention of the apocalyptic worldview of the Essenes in his attempts to edit any material that might be “offensive” to his Hellenised and Roman readers, the overthrow of the fourth “beast” as described in Daniel 7, for example. Cf. Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.119-161.

⁵³ Cf. the *Aramaic Apocalypse* (4Q246) and Luke 1.31-35; the *Messianic Apocalypse* (4Q521) and Matt. 11.2-5 and Luke 7.22.

⁵⁴ Cf. Mark 6.14-15 and 8.27.

given the characteristics of both: the Davidic messiah in Revelation 19 and the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek in Hebrews 5.6.⁵⁵

The realized eschatological expectations of the two groups also differed. The canonical early Christian writings presented varying degrees of realization, generally seeing themselves as living in the period between the resurrection and the second coming which would inaugurate the end of days. In the Gospel of John, the expectations are the most thoroughly realized in the Evangelist's themes of judgement, light and darkness, the coming of the hour and the ruler of this world. But its dualism is not as developed as in other examples of the apocalyptic worldview, there is no eschatological war, and its conceptualization of eternal life and sapiential teachings more closely tied to those found in wisdom traditions.⁵⁶ The realized eschatology of the Scrolls was grounded in Temple piety and purity, which were not obvious concerns of John.

But the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament writings came out of the same general cultural milieu. Similarities are to be expected. As an example, The Book of Revelation could be called the "Christian War Scroll" as it outlines the coming eschatological battle and contains examples of parallel language and imagery. Both worldviews were informed by the apocalyptic tradition, sharing a common belief in the angelic/demonic forces working on human destiny (much more than in the Hebrew Bible), that history is in its final stage, and that God's intervention/judgement were at hand, at which time the evil of this world would be swept away.

As the Dead Sea Scrolls were contemporaneous with only the earliest stages of Christianity, the bodies of literature produced by the two groups were ultimately very different. The Scrolls were the product of a group concerned with ritual and purity laws and the exact fulfillment of Torah, while emphasizing the existence of a heavenly group of angels and their regular participation in earthly matters. Christianity developed around the life and teachings of an eschatological prophet and developed its own rituals, in

⁵⁵ Cf. the *War Scroll*^a (4Q491) 11 (the eschatological High Priest on his throne in heaven).

⁵⁶ Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 161.

which the belief in angels was of minor importance. That the two groups had two very different ethical commitments yet share a common language of symbolism and imagery demonstrates the great flexibility and diversity of the apocalyptic tradition. As Collins notes,

the Scrolls offer the possibility of a fresh insight into a crucial period of Western history, especially into the nature of Judaism and Christianity... both were competing approaches to Judaism, claiming a monopoly on divine revelation. The fate of the Scrolls is a sobering reminder that such claims are never self-validating, and that the certainties of apocalyptic revelation are invariably vulnerable to the ongoing revelations of history.⁵⁷

2.1.4. APOCALYPTICISM IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

As previously noted, Christianity as a nascent religious movement arose during a time of upheaval caused by the foreign domination of Palestine. The issue of Roman dominance was relevant to the people of the Jesus movement and the authors of the writings that would eventually form the New Testament, as the crisis associated with Antiochus IV was to the authors of *Jubilees* and the Animal Apocalypse. As a result, it is not surprising that problems associated with justice and order plagued the early Christian inheritors of the apocalyptic tradition, as it had inspired their authorial predecessors.

The canonical New Testament evinces encounters with apocalyptic images and, in particular, depictions of evil in the forms of temptation and demon possession in the gospels and the theologies of the authors of the epistles. A strong emphasis on the actions of the negative supernatural figures associated with apocalypticism is found throughout the writings. Thus, James 4.7, 1 Peter 5.8, Ephesians 4.27 and 6.11 and 2 Timothy 2.26 note that the devil, the tempter and source of evil, must be resisted. Human nature is seen as inseparable from sin and death, both which must be fought as Satan, the supernatural personification of evil, is fought.⁵⁸ Paul perceived sin as being pre-existent

⁵⁷ Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 164-165.

⁵⁸ Here we have the notion that links death with evil, demonstrative of how far the belief system had evolved from earlier Jewish conceptions of death as a part of nature, to be neither feared nor reviled. This is in direct opposition to the gnostic systems that viewed the material human world as evil and therefore the release of death to be a freedom from the corruption of the flesh.

in humanity through the sin of Adam, rather than resulting from the actions of fallen angels. In the New Testament, sin and evil are interchangeable with and undifferentiated from impurity, as can be seen in the reciprocal use of “evil” and “unclean” to describe the spirits and oppressors plaguing humanity in general, and the early Christians in particular.⁵⁹

Like the Jewish apocalypses, the Christian texts can be categorized according to two types: the otherworldly journeys and the visionary or auditory revelations. The vision texts use *ex eventu* prophecy as a literary device, but are less focused on a complete review of history than can be seen in many Jewish examples.⁶⁰ The eschatology of such texts as *Jacob’s Ladder* foresee the ultimate destruction of the world, but remain silent as to any positive transformation of the cosmos. The otherworldly journeys are demonstrative of political and cosmic eschatologies, and present the destruction and transformation of the world, with either a communal or personal conceptualization of salvation.

The Christian apocalypses demonstrate great variety at times, but all of them “share the significant, basic characteristics expressed in the definition of apocalypse [as defined by J. J. Collins in the Introduction to *Semeia* 14].”⁶¹ They contain the motifs of a specific manner of revelation, with the intercession of a heavenly mediator; temporal elements that may demonstrate some interest in the past, without the systematic review of history common to Jewish apocalypses, but that certainly show interest in the future; and the spatial element of great concern with heavenly realities, the governance and structure of the higher realm, for example.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ephesians 5.5 and 1 Thessalonians 4.7.

⁶⁰ Like the Christian apocalypses, *Melchizedek* shows little interest in most of the history of the world, although it does contain *ex eventu* prophecy.

⁶¹ A. Y. Collins, “The Early Christian Apocalypses,” *Semeia* 14 (1979), 61-121, 66.

REVELATION

The clearest example of the continuity of the apocalyptic trajectory can perhaps be found in the canonical New Testament Book of Revelation. Written around 95-96 CE by a Christian of Palestinian-Jewish origin, the Revelation was originally attributed to the apostle John, explaining, in part, its eventual inclusion in the canon. In reality, its author was likely an itinerant, charismatic prophet. Although the language of composition was most certainly Greek, the awkwardness of the language suggests that the author was more comfortable with Aramaic or Hebrew. While considered a wholly Christian document, the Revelation presents examples of traditionally Jewish symbolism, such as reference to the Twelve Tribes, and many significant allusions to and quotations from the Hebrew corpus.⁶²

The Revelation was given to a certain John on the island of Patmos, in the form of a vision from the transcendent Jesus. The message was then sent in the form of letters to the seven churches surrounding Ephesus. In an extended version of the combat myth, a template found in many cultures of the Ancient Near East, the battle between good and evil is described as a war in heaven. The archangel Michael, the patron of Israel found in Daniel, is the champion of the Christian Church. In the vision he is victorious over Satan and his host, and the devil is thrown down from heaven in a symbolic reference to the first fall of the angels, nicely encapsulating the myth of beginning and the myth of the eschaton. Satan has allied himself with two beasts, one from the sea, the Great Beast, to whom he grants power and rule, and one from the earth, the false messenger, who strengthens the power of the first. These two beasts are an amalgamation of the four beasts of Daniel and representative of the external temporal evils, rather than the remnants of angel-born evil. The Revelation emphasizes the cosmic order in contrast to the earthly realities of the Christians in conflict with the larger society. Satan is to be ultimately destroyed through the destruction of his creation, the oppressor of the

⁶² Cf. A. Y. Collins, "The Book of Revelations," in J. J. Collins (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Volume 1. The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (New York, 1998), 384-414; eadem, "Source Criticism of the Book of Revelation," *Biblical Research* 43 (1998), 50-52; J. W. Marshall, *Parables of War: Reading John's Jewish Apocalypse* (Waterloo, Ont., 2001).

Christian community, the Roman Empire. Jesus is seen as a warrior leading his host of angels to battle on earth at Armageddon. The demonic powers and their human allies are defeated, with the beast and false messenger destroyed in a lake of fire, also the ultimate fate of the damned. Satan is chained in the abyss for a thousand years when the Christian martyrs will be resurrected to reign alongside Christ on earth. After the thousand years the devil is to be released and will attack with legions of demonic beings. This host is destroyed by fire from heaven, the direct intervention of God, which leads into the Last Judgement and resurrection of all dead.

THE APOCALYPSE OF PETER

Outside of the Christian canon, examples of apocalyptic literature are more plentiful. The *Apocalypse of Peter* dates from circa 135 CE, possibly originating in Syria.⁶³ It is set after the resurrection of Jesus during a period in which he was thought to have communicated with his followers. The authorship is pseudepigraphal, claiming the authority of Peter the apostle. It is made up of two parts: the visions on the Mount of Olives (1-14) and “on the holy mountain” (15-17) in which Peter is given visions of Moses and Elijah and paradise, through an auditory discourse with Christ. The false messiah or prophet, like the false messenger of Revelation, is a figure of evil that “will kill those who refuse to recognize him as the Christ.”⁶⁴

The document is demonstrative of a tradition that is no longer focused on the redeemer and the last days, but on the conditions to be found at the resurrection and in the afterlife. The *Apocalypse of Peter* lists the classifications of sinner and sins, detailing the punishment of evil and the salvation of the righteous. Despite the evolutionary differences between this writing and its literary predecessors, “the ideas of the last

⁶³ Richard Bauckham dates the text shortly after 135 and suggests a Syrian provenance. Cf. “Jews and Jewish Christians” in his *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (New York, 1998), 228-238.

⁶⁴ A. Y. Collins, “Christian Apocalypses,” in *Semeia* 14 (1979), esp. 73. Cf. D. D. Buchholz, *Your Eyes Will Be Opened: A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter* (Atlanta, Ga., 1988); R. J. Bauckham, “The Apocalypse of Peter: A Jewish Christian Apocalypse from the Time of Bar Kokhba,” *Apocrypha* 5 (1994), 7-111, reprinted in idem, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden, 1998), 160-258; J. N. Bremmer and I. Czachesz (eds.), *The Apocalypse of Peter* (Leuven, 2003).

judgement, the resurrection of the dead, of the destruction of the world by fire, etc., are to be traced back through the medium of Jewish Apocalyptic (the Book of Enoch etc.) to oriental origins.”⁶⁵

THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS

This document, known as the *Pastor* or *Shepherd of Hermas*, was composed in three stages circa 120-140 CE, and offers the visions of an average man shown the record of sins and sinners as entered into a heavenly book by supernatural mediators. These intermediaries take the forms of an ancient lady, the personified Church, a young man (likely an angel) and an angel that assumes the guise of a shepherd. It is filled with eschatological concerns regarding persecution and the coming crisis.

The lady provides accounts of the faithful as a “defender of the righteous in the heavenly court where sinners can be accused now.”⁶⁶ As in the later Jewish apocalyptic writings (4 Ezra, 2 Baruch), evil is the result of earthly transgressions and the “affairs of the world (first vision 3.6).” The angels of punishment act against sinners that refuse to repent in the face of the coming tribulations. Again present is the motif of a beast, the devourer of cities, who has four colors on his head, demonstrating a repetition of the symbolic number four as it appeared in Daniel.⁶⁷

THE APOCALYPSE OF PAUL

Like the *Apocalypse of Peter*, upon which it is at least partially based, the *Apocalypse of Paul* details an otherworldly journey to the realms of punishment and salvation. Originally composed in Greek, it follows the tradition of 2 Corinthians 12 in which Paul is taken up into paradise. Since the document is most accurately dated to the

⁶⁵ Ch. Mauer, “Apocalypse of Peter,” in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher (eds.), *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1965), 2:667.

⁶⁶ A. Y. Collins, “The Early Christian Apocalypses,” 75.

⁶⁷ Cf. C. Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, 1999).

end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth centuries CE, the account is obviously pseudepigraphal in nature. The Latin translations offer the most complete picture of the visions, but Greek (abridged), Coptic, Syriac, Armenian and Slavonic witnesses also remain.⁶⁸

In the course of the journey it is demonstrated that angels protect humans and report their doings to God each day and night (7), as in the *Shepherd of Hermas* and earlier traditions. Also, two groups of angels, good and evil, meet the soul at death and take charge of each soul according to its deeds (11-12). Once judged, punishment is the responsibility of the angels (16, 34), with Michael acting as the angel of the covenant (14, 43-44).⁶⁹ Although there is mention of “doing the work of Satan” (3.2), sin is again seen as being the result of human decisions, highlighting the culpability of human beings in the matter of their ultimate fate and destination, be it heaven or hell. In part, the *Apocalypse of Paul* is used to explain the delay of the eschaton, offering divine forbearance as the excuse. Its concern is primarily with the divisions of the righteous and evil after death, and the colorful, sometime shocking, descriptions of heaven and hell would influence later theology and literature.⁷⁰

2.1.5. APOCALYPSES FROM NAG HAMMADI

The key elemental difference between the apocalypses found in the collection from Nag Hammadi and those composed in Jewish or Christian circles, is the presence of the revelation dialogue, that Rudolph suggested was an “original gnostic creation,” rooted in

⁶⁸ Cf, P. Piovanelli, “Les origines de l’*Apocalypse de Paul* reconsidérées,” *Apocrypha* 4 (1993), 25-64; idem, “The Miraculous Discovery of the Hidden Manuscript, or The Para-Textual Function of the Prologue to the *Apocalypse of Paul*,” in G. J. Brooke and J.-D. Kaestli (eds.), *Narrativity in Biblical and Related Texts – La narrativité dans la Bible et les textes apparentés* (Leuven, 2000), 265-282; A. Hilhorst and Th. Silverstein (eds.), *The Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition* (Geneva, 1997).

⁶⁹ A. Y. Collins, “The Early Christian Apocalypses,” 86.

⁷⁰ For example, the *Apocalypse of Paul* may have been used as a source by Dante, upon which he modeled his visions of Hell and Paradise in his *Divine Comedy*. Cf, Pierluigi Piovanelli, “The Miraculous Discovery” in George J. Brooke and Jean-Daniel Kaestli eds., *Nativity in Biblical and Related Texts* (Leuven, 2000), 265-282, and A. Hilhorst and Theodore Silverstein eds., *The Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition* (Geneva, 1997).

Platonism, while Parrott posited an origin in Jewish Wisdom tradition.⁷¹ Alternatively, Fallon, following PHEME PERKINS, sees the origins of the gnostic revelation as sourced firmly in Jewish apocalyptic literature.⁷²

As seen in the texts from the earlier parts of the trajectory, these apocalypses are of two types: those with a heavenly journey, and those without a heavenly journey. They variably contain historical reviews, cosmic eschatologies and personal eschatologies, with salvation arising through some form of gnosis, hidden and ultimately revealed knowledge. They feature the characteristic visits from heavenly mediators, with the temporal axis demonstrated through stories of the Fall and remembrances/warnings of the Flood (the *Three Steles of Seth*, for example). The ascent of the soul is equated with personal salvation discovered through gnosis, and the eschaton features the dissolution of the world, with no cosmic transformation present, in keeping with the Sethian conceptualizations of the perceived negativity of creation. The spatial division between the heavenly realm of the ineffable God, the pleroma as the dwelling place of the evil archons, and the earth, are key features of the writings.

With this in mind, following the characteristics suggested by Koch and Sacchi and with the consideration of the apocalyptic traditions of Judaism and Christianity, most of the texts found at Nag Hammadi can be viewed as having at least some apocalyptic tendencies. As such, I have divided the texts into three categories: (I) those that are apocalyptic, (II) those that employ some of the motifs usually found in apocalyptic literature, and (III) those in which such themes are referenced but not the focus of the document. There is a great deal of overlap between the examples I offered here and my more extensive discussions of the Sethian documents in a previous chapter (1.2.). As a result, some descriptions are shorter than others.

⁷¹ F. T. Fallon, "The Gnostic Apocalypses," in *Semeia* 14 (1979), 123-158, 124. Cf. Douglas M. Parrott's Ph.D. dissertation, "A Missionary Wisdom *Gattung*: Identification, *Sitz im Leben*, History and Connections with the New Testament" (San Francisco: Graduate Theological Union, 1970).

⁷² Ibid. Cf. P. Perkins' Ph. D. dissertation, "The Genre Gnostic Revelation Dialogue" (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 1972).

2.1.5.1. CATEGORY I

The *Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I, 5) is a cosmic history that is likely Valentinian in origin. It features the emanation of supernatural entities from their original source, the transcendent Father and his original emanations, Son and Church, forming an initial trinity.⁷³ The rest of the cosmic history is in keeping with the tradition of demiurgical systems, describing the fall of Logos (a male figure in this case), the creation, which includes an interpretation of the two creation stories of Genesis 1-3, and breaks humanity into the three expected categorizations, i.e., the psychic, hylic and pneumatic. The three classes are directly connected to the soteriology of the text in that the pneumatic humans (Valentinians) are those who immediately recognize the saviour, the psychics are ordinary Christians, and the hylic humans are non-Christians who reject the saviour completely. How the ordinary Christians can be brought into knowledge and salvation is the focus of the text's eschatological speculation.

The Sethian document, the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II, 1, III, 1, IV, 1) features the primary concerns of the origin of evil and the process by which a soul may escape this evil world and return to its heavenly home in the presence of the unknowable Father (see below, 3.4.1.2.), while another direct Sethian text, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II, 4) is an example of a cosmic history, including an interpretation of Genesis 1-6. It is a means of instruction that includes angelic revelations and details of the actions of the archons, the inhabitants of the supernatural realm.

We find a cosmogony, anthropogony and eschatology in *On Origin of the World* (NHC II, 5, XIII, 2), through an interpretation of Genesis 1-2, along with elements from *Jubilees* and Enochic tradition. It is a "mixture of various kinds of Jewish views, Manichaean elements, Christian ideas, Greek philosophical conceptions, and figures of Greek or Hellenistic mythology, magic, and astrology, as well as a clear emphasis on

⁷³ Note that most examples of Valentinian cosmologies are based around a pleroma that begins with an Ogdoad.

Egyptian thought,”⁷⁴ along with a comprehensive angelology and demonology. Redemption is possible through the intervention of Pistis Sophia and Sophia Zoë, and Jesus Christ has no central function. *On the Origin of the World* presents a universal eschatology, with allusions to the end and description of final events with “a massive appropriation of thoughts, terms and motifs from apocalypticism.”⁷⁵ Likewise, in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC III, 2, IV, 2), the revelation, received by Seth, the author and the father of the elect race, provides another cosmic history that includes the origin of the race of Seth and the necessary process to salvation (see below, 3.4.1.3.).

The *Apocalypse of Paul* (NHC V, 2) is a version of Paul’s ascension and tour of the heavenly realms. It has no direct connection with the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Paul*, although both deal with Paul’s visions of judgement in the heavens. With a child (guardian angel) as his guide, Paul is taken to heaven to meet his fellow apostles, who accompany him through the rest of his journey. Among the heavens he traverses, Paul sees the judgement of souls (in the fourth heaven), angels driving souls to judgement (in the fifth), an illumination of light from above (in the sixth) and an old man on a shining throne who threatens to stop his ascent (in the seventh).⁷⁶ Paul continues into the Ogdoad and as he reaches the tenth heaven experiences the transformation to spirit. The themes of the heavenly visitor, judgement, punishment and the heavenly journey are all evocative of Jewish apocalyptic literature, especially the *Testament of Abraham*, thought to be one of its possible sources.

The *(First) Apocalypse of James* (NHC V, 3) is a revelation dialogue between Jesus and James, his brother (see below 3.4.19.). It is an attempt to make sense of recent (first century) history, in particular the fall of Jerusalem. The text explains the temporal reality by making Jerusalem the dwelling place on earth of the negative archons (25, 15-19), while detailing James’ defeat of the archons, his martyrdom and Jesus’ crucifixion, all

⁷⁴ H-G. Bethge and B. Layton, “*On the Origin of the World*,” in J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library* (San Francisco, 1990), 170-189, esp. 170.

⁷⁵ Bethge and Layton, “*On the Origin of the World*,” 171.

⁷⁶ A likely negative referencing of the Elder of Days of Daniel 7.13 and *1 Enoch* 46-47, demonstrating the anti-Jewish bias, especially as regards the creator God of the Old Testament, typical of some gnostic literature.

necessary for victory over the powers. The *(Second) Apocalypse of James* purports to be a revelation discourse and report delivered by Mareim, a priest and friend of the family, to Theuda, the father of James after the martyrdom of the latter. Through the aretalogies found in the text, the author offers predictions about the resurrected Jesus and about James as a redeemer. James also acts as the escort of the returned souls through the door into heaven (55.6-14, 59.15-56.13).

The *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V, 5) is revelation received by Adam from three heavenly visitors and narrated to his son Seth, making it another of the Sethian texts (see below, 3.4.1.1.). In a dream vision, Adam is granted a view of the future. In his introduction to the text, and contrary to his earlier position (see above), Douglas Parrott proposes that “its close dependence on Jewish apocalyptic tradition suggests that it may represent a transitional stage in an evolution from Jewish to gnostic apocalyptic.”⁷⁷

The *Concept of Our Great Power* (NHC VI, 4) is essentially a dualistic Christian salvation history. It tells the story of creation and God’s justice and mercy in the conflict between good and evil. Employing an extremely limited definition of apocalyptic, Francis E. Williams suggests that “unusually for a gnostic work the tractate is ‘apocalyptic,’ that is, its climax is a dramatic description of the end of the world.”⁷⁸ The supreme God, “Our Great Power,” is the transcendent god above all, while the God of the Old Testament is the father of the material world. The Power intervenes in human history, building the Ark and rescuing Noah, and salvation comes through “knowing” this God.

Additionally, history is divided into three aeons: the first ended with the Flood, in the second, the psychic aeon, the revealer appears (as Christ, though he is not named), and the third is the aeon of the end times, with war among the archons (the evil angelic “rulers,” cf. the *Hypostasis of the Archons*), the appearance of the antichrist and ultimate destruction of the world by fire.

⁷⁷ D. M. Parrott, “The Apocalypse of Adam,” in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 277.

⁷⁸ F. E. Williams, “The Concept of Our Great Power,” in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 311.

The *Paraphrase of Shem* (NHC VII,1) “for its major part... is an apocalypse, with the narrative frame describing the initial ascent of the seer, Shem, to the top of the creation and his final return to the earth.”⁷⁹ It demonstrates a cosmogonic myth centered in the belief in the universe as being made up of three principals: Thought, Spirit and Mind. The exalted Light Infinite (Thought) reveals himself through his son, Derdekeas, as a means of salvation, sent to remove Mind from the lower darkness in which it dwells.

It is an interesting document, in that it uses overtly sexual language to describe the workings of the pleroma, and in that it presents the baptismal ritual as negative due to its use of primordially impure water. John the Baptist is therefore presented as a demonic figure, and his appearance brings about the final revelation of the Saviour, whose descent upon the water allows for its purification.

The *Apocalypse of Peter* (NHC VII, 3), different from its apocryphal homonymous text, is an account of the revelation sent to Peter and interpreted by Jesus Christ, in keeping with the apocalyptic convention of the angelic interpreter. James Brashler believes that it “belongs to the literary genre of the apocalypse.”⁸⁰ In three visions Peter is offered prophecies reflecting actual past events, as in Daniel and the Animal Apocalypse, and an image of the heavenly Son of man, the eschatological judge set to condemn the oppressors and reward those chosen for salvation through gnosis. The apocalyptic literary form is used to present an understanding of the Christian tradition, especially the nature of Jesus.

The Sethian literature demonstrates a definite affinity with apocalyptic themes, arising as it likely did out of an Egyptian and Jewish milieu. As a result, many of the texts fit into this category. In the Sethian document the *Three Steles of Seth* (VII, 5), a revelation is given to Dositheos, detailing the history of the world and forewarning of the impending judgements that will come in the forms of water and fire, while another Sethian text, *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII, 1) is the account of the heavenly journey of

⁷⁹ M. Roberge, “The Paraphrase of Shem,” in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 339.

⁸⁰ J. Brashler, “Apocalypse of Peter,” in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 372.

Zostrianos and the visions he receives. A third text is the focus of my overall investigation, and as such *Melchizedek* obviously falls into both the apocalyptic and Sethian categorizations as I have defined them, and will be dealt with in detail in 2.3. *Marsanes* (NHC X, 1) is a prophet, and the text describes his ascent experience and the various levels, or seals, of reality, and records his visionary experiences, and *Allogenes* (NHC XI, 3) recounts the divine visions of the seer, in the form of a revelation discourse.

Although it is found outside the corpus, the *Gospel of Mary* (BG 8502, 1) shares commonalities of form and content with the Sethian and apocalyptic texts already mentioned, and as such I have included it among the Nag Hammadi texts. It is the account of special revelations given to Mary by the risen saviour, “classified as an apocalypse due to several characteristics it shares with other texts of that genre: revelation dialogue, vision, an abbreviated cosmogony, a description of otherworldly regions and the rise of the soul (though there is no heavenly journey as such), final instructions, and a short narrative conclusion.”⁸¹

2.1.5.2. CATEGORY II

Among the texts that employ some of the motifs associated with apocalyptic literature, the pseudepigraphal *Apocryphon of James* (NHC I, 2) is presented as the secret writings of James, the brother of Jesus, and offers the keys to salvation, meant for a select few readers. Jesus appears to his disciples 550 days after the Resurrection, and Peter and James are singled out to receive his teaching. The appearance of the post-resurrection Jesus is a common legitimation motif (cf. the *Gospel of Mary*, for example). As he ascends to the Father’s right hand, Peter and James attempt to follow, but are turned back. The revelation is meant as instruction for later generations, rather than for the disciples themselves.

⁸¹ K. L. King “The Gospel of Mary,” in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 525.

Jesus' speeches are partly innovations, but also incorporate older material from the oral and written transmissions of traditional sayings. In the *Apocryphon of James*, salvation is possible and likely, but not assured. The document can be dated as early as before 150 CE, if claims to "personal remembrance/witness" of the sayings of Jesus are to be believed. In any case, due to a likely interpolated two-page exhortation to martyrdom, the *Apocryphon of James* can be dated no later than 314 CE, as the persecution of the Church ended under Constantine, likewise ending the emphasis on martyrdom for this period.

The *Gospel of Thomas* (NHC II, 2) lists sayings ascribed to Jesus, dictated to and recorded by Didymous Judas Thomas and offering, "whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death" (Saying 1). Many types of sayings are included in the collection; wisdom sayings/proverbs, parables, eschatological sayings/prophecies and rules for the community. In its original Greek form the *Gospel of Thomas* may date to the same period as the hypothetical Q (Sayings Source) document, the mid-first century CE. There are parallels with the synoptic gospels, and to sayings found in non-canonical writings such as the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. It is, however, possible that the *Gospel of Thomas* contains sayings that are representative of older traditions. Its understanding of salvation is closest in form to that of the Gospel of John, in that salvation is achieved through the removal of everything that is of this world. A connected text, the *Book of Thomas the Contender* (NHC II, 7), along with the *Acts of Thomas*, shares commonalities with Jewish wisdom traditions. Through a revelation dialogue between the resurrected Jesus and his twin, Judas Thomas, recorded by Mathias before the ascension, *Thomas the Contender* offers a particularly ascetic teaching against the dangers of sin.

In the final text that employs apocalyptic motifs within its larger framework, the revelation dialogue in the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (NHC VII, 2) is delivered by Jesus Christ and Seth appears only in the title. It is essentially a polemic in support of the docetic Passion of Christ, but features a heavenly assembly, descent to earth, encounter with the earthly authorities, crucifixion and then a return to the pleroma.

2.1.5.3. CATEGORY III

Among the Nag Hammadi texts that reference or suggest apocalyptic themes without demonstrating a clearly apocalyptic focus, the *Treatise on the Resurrection* (NHC I, 4) discusses some of the common themes of apocalypticism: death, life after death, resurrection, and the Parousia. *Eugnostos the Blessed* (NHC III, 3, V, 1) and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (NHC II, 4, BG 8502, 3) are closely connected to each other, as the author of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* clearly used *Eugnostos* as he wrote.⁸² They include revelation dialogues and a conceptualization of salvation through the Christ of the pleroma as saviour. The bonds of the ruler of this world will be broken, and those who know the Father purely will be delivered to him, while those whose knowledge is imperfect will be sent to the Eighth. Likewise, the *Dialogue of the Saviour* (NHC III, 5) is a revelation dialogue with a specific eschatological timetable that can be seen in the discussion of the events “when the dissolution arrives” (saying 3.2-3).

In the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* (NHC VI, 1), which contains visions and revelatory dialogue, Peter and the mysterious Lithargoel (Jesus Christ in the actual text)⁸³ discuss the mission of the disciples as they are charged with ministering to and teaching the faithful. It is likely a composite text of three sections that began as parables, perhaps similar in form to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, with Lithargoel originally a non-Christian deity. I include it due to its comments on the human condition and because it is a “miscellaneous collection of spiritual writings on the ultimate fate of the soul,”⁸⁴ and as it is not demiurgical, very different from any of the other texts found at Nag Hammadi. Similarly, the *Thunder: Perfect Mind* (NHC VI, 2) is another text from the collection that

⁸² D. M. Parrott, “Eugnostos the Blessed and The Sophia of Jesus Christ,” in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 220.

⁸³ According to I. Czachesz, “The Identity of Lithargoel in the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*,” in A. Hilhorst and G. H. van Kooten (eds.), *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen* (Leiden, 2005), 485-502, . Lithargoel was someone “who forgot about God” in the original source used by the Pachomian (?) author of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*.

⁸⁴ D. M. Parrott, “The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles,” in Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 289.

evinces no anti-cosmic dualism. It contains a revelation discourse with an unidentified female figure that speaks in antithetical or paradoxical self-proclamations.

The *Authoritative Teaching* (NHC VI, 3), again dealing with the origin, condition and destination of the human soul displays no typical Sethian or Valentinian cosmology, but presupposes an anticosmic dualistic worldview, and warns against the “adversary” and “false attraction to the material,” while another text, the *Teaching of Silvanus* (NHC VII, 4) is representative of Jewish and Hellenistic wisdom traditions and shows the influence of Cynic-Stoic philosophy. As a representative of Alexandrian Christianity, it does discuss the state of the soul, and the salvation of the soul as made possible by the revealer/redeemer, Christ.

Finally, and very briefly, the *Letter of Peter to Philip* (NHC VIII, 2) contains a revelatory discourse that discusses the nature of salvation, *Hypsiphron* (NHC XI, 4) demonstrating a possible affinity with the Sethian texts, also features revelations and the story of a descent from the pleroma, and another Sethian text, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII, 1) features a descent to the material world from the heavens and a christology that includes discussions about Christ’s salvific characteristics.

2.1.6. CONCLUSION

The apocalyptic writings presented new conceptualizations of eschatology, messianism and evil in a frequently challenging and inexplicable world. The desire for justice and God in an unjust world necessitated a dramatic change and the forecasted end or transformation of the world. This need was often associated with the belief in a supernatural being who would restore justice and God in the world, specifically reestablishing Israel to its position as the legitimized chosen nation of God. These messianic expectations were interwoven with problems of legitimacy in the Hasmonean dynasty. As the eventual victors over Seleucid rule, the Hasmoneans were neither kings nor legitimate high priests (from the line of Aaron), and as such were considered usurpers of the righteous rule. The messiah (Greek *Christos*) or anointed, came to be seen as an

apocalyptic saviour, a being that would intercede on behalf of Israel and bring judgement to its oppressors. So as the conceptualization evolved from the traditional king, priest or prophet as the anointed ruler appointed by God, the messiah began to take on the characteristics of a redeemer or saviour figure and becoming increasingly apocalyptic in nature. This thread would continue to evolve in the theology and eschatology of early Christianity.

To use an example that can be found in both Jewish and Christian literary tradition, the figure of the Son of Man as it first appears in Daniel 7 is presented as a patron of the suffering people of Israel, taking the appearance of a human being while in fact a supernatural or heavenly figure. As such it fits within the paradigmatic descriptions cited above as a supernatural figure that will intercede and redeem the people of Israel, granting salvation to those devoted to God, and sitting in judgement of their persecutors. This mythic imagery, with antecedents that can be found in Canaanite and Mesopotamian traditions, would later be extended in other examples of apocalyptic literature. Within this trajectory, simple adherence to the Law, with its guidelines for living and dietary practices, was no longer enough to ensure salvation in that specific Jewish worldview. The parameters of evil had changed, and with them, the concept of redemption. With this shift, the concepts of judgement and the afterlife were also altered accordingly. Divine intercession became a necessary part of the religious experiences of Israel, freeing people from earthly slavery and providing salvation through the justice of God.

Since it began as an offshoot sect of Judaism, such concepts and motifs naturally found their way into the belief systems of the many of the formative Christian writings. It seems likely that the writers of the early literature were influenced by the eschatological and apocalyptic visions of their authorial predecessors. The era in which Christianity arose as a burgeoning religious movement was also one of great crisis. The sovereignty of the Roman Empire had replaced Hellenistic domination and a brief period of self-rule. Problems that arose concerning questions of legitimacy led to the break-off of the Essene sect in the second century BCE and the self-imposed exile of an extremist group, to Qumran, near the Dead Sea, from the environs of Jerusalem and its Temple.

Despite the relatively syncretic nature and acceptance of the Roman government in matters of religion, some Jews found the realities of once again living under the rule of a foreign power intolerable. As a result, other splinter groups formed, including the Zealots, the last resistance movement before the First Jewish War.⁸⁵ Such a time reflected a disturbance in the dominion of order over chaos, an integral element in the cosmologies of the societies of the Ancient Near East. Into such an environment, the apocalyptic visions, with their restoration of order and justice and triumph of good over evil, remained pivotal and relevant in their eschatological optimism.

Following Smith's hypothesis regarding origins, Egypt, and likely connections to the revolt under Trajan, the failure of Jewish apocalyptic expectations in a time of great crisis, may have transformed into the musings of the first Sethians. As such, the continuity of apocalyptic language, themes and motifs, and their evident incorporation into the earliest writings, seems to demonstrate a natural and necessary evolution and adaptation of worldview, including innovations that would become increasingly distanced from normative Jewish and Christian theologies.

One such innovative text, featuring a priestly messiah figure, is very much in keeping with earlier apocalyptic messianic tradition, but further elements, taken from other literary developments and the context of the tradition of Melchizedek speculation, clearly demonstrates the over-lapping nature of all these trends.

⁸⁵ Cf. M. Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.* (Edinburgh, 1989); R. A. Horsley, "The Politics of Cultural Production in Second Temple Judea: Historical Context and Political-Religious Relations of the Scribes Who Produced *1 Enoch*, *Sirach*, and *Daniel*," in B. J. Wright and L. M. Wills (eds.), *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism* (Atlanta, Ga., 2005), 123-145.

2.2. MELCHIZEDEK AND THE MELCHIZEDEKIANS

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
maker of heaven and earth;
and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies
into your hand!”

And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything.

Genesis 14.17-20

The Lord has sworn and will not
change his mind,
“You are a priest forever according
to the order of Melchizedek.”

Psalm 110.4

... And concerning that which He said, *In [this] year of Jubilee [each of you shall return to his property (Leviticus 25.13); and likewise, And this is the manner of release:] every creditor shall release that which he has lent [to his neighbour. He shall not exact it of his neighbour and his brother], for God's release [has been proclaimed] (Deuteronomy 15.2). [And it will be proclaimed at] the end of days concerning the captives as [He said, To proclaim liberty to the captives (Isaiah 61.2). Its interpretation is that He] will assign them to the Sons of Heaven and to the inheritance of Melchizedek; f[or He will cast] their (5) [lot] amid the po[r]tions of Melchize]dek, who will return them there and will proclaim to them liberty, forgiving them [the wrong-doings] of all their iniquities.*

And this thing will [occur] in the first week of the Jubilee that follows the nine Jubilees. And the Day of Atonement is the e[nd of the] tenth [Ju]bilee, when all the Sons of [Light] and the men of the lot of Mel[chi]Zedek will be atoned for. [And] a statue concerns them[to pro]vide them with their rewards. For this is the moment of the Year of Grace for Melchizedek. [And h]e will, by his strength, judge the holy ones of God, executing judgement as it is written concerning him in the (10) Songs of David, who said ELOHIM *has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgement (Psalms 82.1).* And it was concerning him that he said, (Let the assembly of the peoples) *return to the height above them; EL (god) will judge the peoples (Psalms 7.7-8).* As for that which he s[aid, *How long will you] judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah (Psalms 82.2), its interpretation concerns Belial and the spirits of his lot [who] rebelled by turning away from the precepts of God to... And Melchizedek will avenge the vengeance of the judgements of God... and he will drag [them form the hand of] Belial and from the hands of all the sp[irits of] his lot. And all the 'gods' [of Justice] will come to his aid [to] attend to the de[struction] of Belial. And the height is... all the sons of God... this... This is the say of [Peace/Salvation] (15) concerning which [God] spoke [through Isa]iah the prophet, who said, [How] beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who proclaims peace, who brings good news,*

who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion: Your ELOHIM [reigns] (Isaiah 52.7). Its interpretation; the mountains are the prophets... and the messenger is the Anointed one of the spirit, concerning who Dan[iel] said, [Until an anointed one, a prince (Daniel 9.25)... [And he who brings] good [news], who proclaims [salvation]: it is concerning him that it is written... [To comfort all who mourn, to grant to those who mourn in Zion] (Isaiah 61.2-3). To comfort [those who mourn: its interpretation] (20), to make them understand all the ages of t[ime]... In truth... will turn away from Belial... by the judgement[s] of God, as it is written concerning him, [who says to Zion]; your ELOHIM reigns. Zion is..., those who (25) uphold the Covenant, who turn from walking [in] the way of the people. And your ELOHIM is [Melchizedek, who will save them from] the hand of Belial.

As for that which He said, *Then you shall send abroad the trump[et in] all the land (Leviticus 25.9)...*

The Heavenly Prince Melchizedek (11Q13)¹

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;
as he says also in another place,
“You are a priest forever,
according to the order of
Melchizedek.”

Hebrews 5. 5-6

This “King Melchizedek of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham as he was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him”; and to him Abraham apportioned “one-tenth of everything.” His name, in the first place, means “king of righteousness”; next he is also king of Salem, that is, “king of peace.” Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

See how great he is! Even Abraham the patriarch gave him a tenth of the spoils. And those descendents of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to collect tithes from the people, that is, from their kindred, though these are descended from Abraham. But this man, who does not belong to their ancestry, collected tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had received the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In the one case, tithes are received by those who are mortal; in the other, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

Now if perfection had been attainable through the levitical priesthood- for the people received the law under this priesthood- what further need would there have been to speak of another priest arising according to the order of Melchizedek, rather than one according to the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. Now the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

¹ Taken from G. Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London, 1998), 500-502. Following his translation, lacunae are indicated by dots, hypothetical reconstructions are placed between [], glosses for fluency between (), and biblical quotations appear in italics.

It is even more obvious when another priest arises, resembling Melchizedek, one who has become a priest, not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of him,

“You are a priest forever,
according to the order of
Melchizedek.”

There is, on the one hand, the abrogation of an earlier commandment because it was weak and ineffectual (for the law made nothing perfect); there is, on the other hand, the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God.

This was confirmed with an oath; for others who became priests took their office without an oath, but this one became a priest with an oath, because of the one who said to him’

“The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
‘You are a priest forever’”

accordingly Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant.

Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Hebrews 7

2.2.1. INTRODUCTION

The trajectory of Melchizedek speculation, beginning in Jewish literary tradition with the Priest of God Most High mentioned in Genesis 14.17-20, clearly shows the development of a particular character, from one briefly encountered, to an soteriological hero responsible for the redemption of humanity. This evolution progressed along mainly apocalyptic lines in both the canonical and extra-canonical literature of Judaism and early Christianity.

As the third trajectory of literary tradition in my discussion, following Melchizedek through his various incarnations, as priestly figure, supernatural actor, apocalyptic warrior, helps set the stage for his appearance in NHC IX, I. The

Melchizedek Apocalypse clearly demonstrates how the three literary traditions converge, diverge and run parallel according to specific historical, geographical and religious circumstances, building upon the existent appearances of the character and continuing his increasing importance as a means to specific rhetorical ends.

2.2.2. THE MELCHIZEDEK TRADITION: ORIGINS AND EARLY LITERATURE

As a literary figure, Melchizedek has enjoyed something of a storied past. In addition to the three brief mentions we have of him in the canonical Jewish and Christian scriptures, the traditions surrounding the often-enigmatic priest-king are demonstrative of a diversity of literary trajectories and worldviews. Birger Pearson suggests “the interpretive imagination devoted to Melchizedek in extrabiblical sources stands in inverse proportion to the sparsity of data found in the Bible about him.”² In the Genesis account, we are presented with a passing introduction to the King of Salem and priest of God Most High as he blesses Abram after battle. In Psalms the king in Jerusalem is seen to also be a priest in the order of Melchizedek. This theme is again taken up in reference and differentiation in Hebrews, as Jesus is described not as a priest according to the Levitical line, but of the inherent line of Melchizedek. He is mentioned in the pseudepigraphal apocalyptic literature along with that found in the libraries of the community at Qumran, and in fact his popularity recurs at various points in history up to, and even after, the Middle Ages, with new imaginings drawn about him from Jewish and Christian literary traditions.³

There is evidence that he was adopted as an eschatological figure, and acted as, according to the heresiologists’ accounts, the inspiration to a sect of heretics in the early centuries of the Common Era.⁴ Most importantly for my purposes, he is the main

² Pearson, “Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism,” 176.

³ It is also Melchizedek the king of Salem who sets Santiago on his quest in Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*.

⁴ G. Bardy, “Melchisédech dans la tradition patristique,” *Revue Biblique* 35 (1926), 496-509; *Revue Biblique* 36 (1927), 25-45, suggests that the Melchizedekians were nothing but an invention of Epiphanius, but they are also mentioned in the writings of Hippolytus and Pseudo-Tertullian, among others (505). Cf. F. L. Horton, Jr., *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Cambridge, 1976), 98.

character in the Sethian *Melchizedek Apocalypse* found among the Nag Hammadi codices, and as such, is representative of the continuation and evolution of different but related literary trajectories. Despite the brevity of his introduction in the canonical sources, Melchizedek, the King of Salem, developed into more than a two-dimensional character encountered in passing by one of the important scriptural players. In some circles he is an apocalyptic hero who will fulfill a great role in the eschaton, acting as a receiver of revelation, intercessor, heavenly being, and, ultimately, saviour.

There are many theories as to whether or not Melchizedek is representative of an historical figure, or a prototype for the kingship-priesthood. In his survey of the traditional literature associated with Melchizedek, Fred L. Horton, Jr., discusses some of the possibilities behind Melchizedek's origins. If Salem is equated with Jerusalem, then Melchizedek could have been a pre-Israelite king of ancient Jebus in the Patriarchal period. El Elyon, the divine name that Melchizedek uses in his blessing of Abram in Genesis is a Phoenician deity, associated with the Jebusites.⁵ In pre-Israelite times, Palestine was a bridge between the cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and the religious and cultural practices of both found their way into what would become the religion of Israel.

The Ancient Near Eastern tradition of the sacral kingship, including the enthronement rite in which the king becomes the son of the deity and as much a part of the realm of the gods as of the realm of humanity, has elements in common with the traditional Egyptian notions of religion and kingship, and is reflected in biblical tradition.

⁵ Horton raises the possibility of the "Davidic kingship in Jerusalem as an out-growth of an earlier Jebusite priest-kingship," dating the addition of Genesis 14.17-20 to a redaction after the Priestly author's time (*The Melchizedek Tradition*, 34-35). The four sources generally posited for the division of the Pentateuchal composition are: the Yahwist (J) and Elohist (E), generally dated to the ninth and eighth centuries BCE; the Deuteronomistic History (D), largely from the seventh century BCE; and the Priestly source (P) of the Exilic or post-Exilic period (587 BCE and after). Cf. F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of Israel* (Cambridge, 1973), 193. The question of the historicity of the Genesis narratives remains unsubstantiated, but the general time period suggested for the time in which the events might have taken place is likely the Middle to Late Bronze Ages (ca. 2000-1200 BCE). Cf. B. L. Bandstra, *Reading the Old Testament: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Belmont, Calif., 1999), 18-29, for a suggested timeline of the pre-Israelite and ancestral periods as represented in the biblical texts. El Elyon as a divine name in canonical biblical traditions is found only in Genesis 14 and Psalm 78.35. *El* is a common Semitic term for "God," while *Elyon* is an epithet associated with Baal, "the exalted one," in Ugaritic. Cf. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 15-20.

The significant difference between the Mesopotamian and Egyptian kingships lies in the actuality of the divinity of the king. In Mesopotamian tradition the king is not a god, except in a cultic-mystical way, while in Egypt the king is seen as having been begotten by god and therefore fully divine. The Israelites, by way of the Jebusites and other Canaanite peoples, formed something of a composite of the two, with the addition of the conceptualization of the king as a nomadic chieftain.

The El-Amarna tablets offer extra-biblical evidence of the pre-Israelite kinship in Jerusalem, as they are the letters of Abdi-Hibam the ruler of Urusalim to the 18th Dynasty pharaohs in the first half of the 14th century BCE. The king of Urusalim paid tribute to Thutmose III (1490-1436 BCE), and described the loss of Egyptian control in Palestine in the years following the Amarna Revolution. From these letters it is clear that the leadership of Urusalim was designated by the pharaoh rather than gained through genealogical succession.

Jerusalem itself is not mentioned in the Pentateuch. Jebus, or Jerusalem, is first mentioned in Joshua, with its Canaanite inhabitants or Jebusites. Joshua 10.1, 3 lists the ruler as one named Adonizedek, structurally the same as Melchizedek, being made of the same linguistic elements. As first elements, *malchi* meaning “(my) king,” and *adoni* meaning “(my) prince,” are representative of an office or position. *Tzedeq* is representative of a divine name from Phoenicia or South Arabia. Additionally, the names *melech* (“king”), *shalem* (“covenant”), and *tzedeq* (“justice”) are personifications of the god El Elyon.⁶

⁶ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 43-44. Paul J. Kobelski notes that the prefix “*mlky*” had the meaning “my king” and “*tzdq*” was representative of the theophoric element, giving the name Melchizedek the meaning “Tzedeq is my king.” Tzedeq was associated with the Assyro-Babylonian solar deity, Kittu, who may have been connected with the cult in the Jerusalem area at one time. He further suggests that it was a later tradition that the meaning of Melchizedek became the “popular” understanding of “upright king,” or “king of righteousness.” Cf. P. J. Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchiresha* (Washington D.C., 1981), 55-56; Cf. S. Mowinckel, “General Oriental and Specific Israelite Elements in the Israelite Conception of the Sacred Kingdom,” in *The Sacral Kingship: Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions (Rome, April 1955)* (Leiden, 1959), 283-293. A third interpretation adopted, for example, by Martin Noth is “(the god) Melech is justice.” On these different possibilities cf. C. Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia: Tradizioni giudaiche, cristiane e gnostiche (sec. II a.C. – sec. III d.C.)* (Brescia, 1984), 12-15.

The exact nature of Melchizedek's priesthood remains elusive. Other than Genesis 14.17- 20 and Psalm 110.4, nowhere in the Old Testament is the king described as "priest." The term itself is problematic, as it is used to describe other than the Zadokite or Aaronic priesthood.⁷ In some cases of biblical tradition, those given the designation "priest" seem to be little more than secular officials who may or may not have had cultic duties.⁸ Horton suggests an analogy to illustrate the difficulty in firmly establishing what was meant by the term, using the example of the position of minister. In the United States the term always has a cultic meaning, while in Canada a minister can be a cultic or a secular official. The ambiguity of the application of the title leads Horton to the conclusion that "the priesthood of Melchizedek assumed by the Davidic kings cannot be the cultic office of priest in the temple and that some other, extended meaning of the word must apply here."⁹

Melchizedek could have been a local chieftain or a warrior-prince associated with a particular geographical location. The conceptualization of the warrior-hero would cast David into a similar role, and any connection to Melchizedek could have been drawn from "passing references to a relatively unimportant traditional Canaanite hero."¹⁰ While it is possible that Melchizedek was an historical person, as traditional heroes were often based on real figures, he was not necessarily the king of Jerusalem in the period before the Philistine domination of central Palestine. The Amarna tablets suggest that he may have lived before the 14th century BCE. The combination of evidence and lack thereof concerning his historical existence led Horton to conclude

⁷ The Zadokite succession features the priests Adonizedek and Zadok, as examples, continuing to David's kingship. In Exodus 2, Moses' father-in-law is described as a "priest of Midian," likely referencing his position as a local chieftain and the cultic duties for which he may have been responsible. Likewise, in Genesis 46.20; 41.45, 50 Joseph's father-in-law, Potipherah, is called a priest of On, with his duties being for the city rather than for a specific god (Re), the role seemed to be, as most traditional priestly roles were, both cultic and administrative.

⁸ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 47 (again in keeping with the Egyptian priestly system).

⁹ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 48.

¹⁰ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 52. David was, after all, a warrior-king, and his kingship and the stories that grew up around him may well have been influenced by the rugged warring landscape of Palestine, suiting the geographical reality better than the antecedent examples of Egypt and Mesopotamia, with their emphasis on the divinity or semi-divinity of the king.

if Melchizedek was a king of Jerusalem in the patriarchal period, he would still probably be a warrior-hero such as we have suggested. We have no evidence apart from the single name 'Adonizedek,' to suggest that there was a dynastic kingship founded by Melchizedek, and much evidence against such a view.

The figure of Melchizedek as a divine redeemer which emerges in the 11Q *Melchizedek*, the doctrine of the Melchizedekians, the doctrine of Hierakas, and the *Pistis Sophia* has no grounding that we can find in the Old Testament sources themselves, and we must turn to other sources to find the origins of that figure.¹¹

Philo wrote of the "great priest" (μέγας ἱερεύς) of the "greatest God" (μεγίστου θεού), El Elyon, and how, impressed by Abram's success in battle, he offers victory sacrifices and "lifts his hands to heaven."¹² Through his haggadic midrash, Philo elaborated biblical narrative without any real halachic intent. In the *Legum Allegoriae* III.79-82, he references the "king of peace" (βασιλεὺς τῆς εἰρήνης) presenting him in discussion and opposition of the despotic "prince of war." This righteous king of Salem is an allegorical representation of the Logos, "the mind of God in which the pattern of all the visible world is conceived,"¹³ but still viewed as an historical character of a self-taught priesthood. To Philo, Melchizedek is without antecedent, the "eldest" (πρεσβύτατος), the "first-born" (πρωτόγονος) and the "pattern of the image" (παράδειγμα τῆς εἰκόνος). It is evident that Philo equated Melchizedek with the divine Logos, formed in the image of God, an archangel, and the first-begotten Son of the Father.¹⁴ This seems indicative of Philo's possible knowledge of Jewish tradition that saw Melchizedek as divine or semi-divine, although his use of allegory makes it difficult to say definitively.¹⁵

¹¹ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 52-53.

¹² Philo, *De Abrahamo* 235. In *De Congressu* 99, he discusses the practice of tithing, along with the concept of the self-taught (αὐτομαθής) or instinctive (αὐτοδίδακτον) priesthood. Cf. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 54-60; Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*, 87-99.

¹³ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 59.

¹⁴ Pearson, "Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism," 181. Cf. Philo, *De confusione linguarum* 146; *Quis rerum diuinarum heres sit* 205; *De Somnis* I.215.

¹⁵ The *Testament of Amran* (4QAmran 3.1-2) has a lacuna causing the three names of the chief angel of light to be lost, but it is likely that Melchizedek is one of them since one of the extant three names of the chief angel of darkness is Melchiresha, his negative counterpart. Melchizedek is mentioned in the *Genesis Apocryphon* (1QapGen 22.13-17) and, of course, in the 11QMelchizedek. Cf. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 60-82; Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchiresha*, 3-74; Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*, 61-86; F. Manzi, *Melchisedek e l'angelologia nell'Epistola agli Ebrei e a Qumran* (Rome, 1997). Pearson sees both Philo and the author of Hebrews as having been aware of this type of interpretation that describes an important, exalted Melchizedek ("Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism," 182).

The first century CE apocalyptic text *2 Enoch* includes an odd story about Noah's brother Nir, a priest, whose barren, aged wife, eventually conceives a child, dies, and posthumously gives birth to Melchizedek (chapters 71-72). As such, he comes into the world marked with the badge of priesthood. The story further recounts how Nir receives a vision of the coming Flood, and Melchizedek is taken to heaven for protection. After the Flood, he will return as the first of twelve priests. Forty days following the reception of the vision, Michael, following God's instructions, takes Melchizedek to heaven. In one recension of the text (J), Michael tells Nir about two other Melchizedeks, one who will be priest and king in Salem, and one who will function as a messiah at the eschaton. This version of Melchizedek's birth story, in an attempt to explain his origins, reinforces the growing tradition surrounding the otherworldly nature of his existence.¹⁶

The Rabbinic sources contributed two types of speculation to the traditions surrounding the figure of Melchizedek. The first focuses on him as the precursor of the levitical priesthood, and the second on Melchizedek as an eschatological character. Relatively early in the rabbinic period, Melchizedek came to be identified with Shem, the son of Noah.¹⁷ Other rabbinic writings examined Melchizedek's presentation of the bread and wine, interpreting the episode as an allegorical symbol for either the passing of the priesthood to Abram, or a presentation of Torah. He is sometimes seen as an impious figure, losing the line of the priesthood for blessing Abram before God.¹⁸ Ultimately, there is agreement that Melchizedek "for one reason or another passed on to Abraham something of central importance to Israel's life, either the priesthood or the Torah, and that Melchizedek always has secondary importance to Abraham... [He] has importance

¹⁶ Cf. Ch. A. Gieschen, "The Different Functions of a Similar Melchizedek Tradition in *2 Enoch* and the Epistle to the Hebrews," in C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders (eds.), *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (Sheffield, 1997), 364-379; A. A. Orlov, "Melchizedek Legend of 2 (Slavonic) Enoch," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 31 (2000), 23-38; Ch. Böttrich, "The Melchizedek Story of 2 (Slavonic) Enoch: A Reaction to A. Orlov," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 32 (2001), 445-470.

¹⁷ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 122. Cf. Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*, 108-112, 171-185; C. T. R. Hayward, "Shem, Melchizedek, and Concern with Christianity in the Pentateuchal Targumim," in K. J. Cathcart and M. Maher (eds.), *Targumic and Cognate Studies: Essays in Honour of Martin McNamara* (Sheffield, 1996), 67-80.

¹⁸ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 123

in these sources only insofar as he is the agent through whom Abraham receives the priesthood or Torah.”¹⁹

As an eschatological figure, the rabbinic writings differ from those found at Qumran, in that Melchizedek is uniformly seen as an historical human being. He is referenced in connection with the eschaton only in one passage, which likely is representative of a redaction of an earlier tradition that did not mention Melchizedek.²⁰ This is illustrative of the fact that Melchizedek is referred to nowhere definitively in rabbinic literature as either divine or angelic. Where he is in any way associated with an eschatological system, his role is subordinate to that of the royal messiah, and he appears as a human “righteous priest.”

Before the publication of the codices of the Nag Hammadi Library and the scrolls from Qumran, there were four other primary sources that contributed to an awareness of the Melchizedek tradition. These documents are: Kahle’s Fragment 52; the *Pistis Sophia* Books 1-3; the *Pistis Sophia* Book 4; and the *Second Book of Ieu/Jeu*.²¹ The first is preserved in the Bodleian Library. It was discovered in 1907 at Deir El-Bala’izah, and is a fourth-century CE Coptic text, a translation from the original Greek. It is a revelation to John, akin to the *Apocryphon of John* from Nag Hammadi and the Bruce Codex, with some significant differences in form.

The Bala’izah fragment is an allegorical interpretation of early biblical characters, and does not contain a cosmological construction. It is in the form of a dialogue between John and the risen Christ, or possibly, but less likely, an angel, but the text breaks off without finishing the questions about Melchizedek and therefore offering no knowledge of Jesus’ response. The fragment references Hebrews 7.3, demonstrating its Christian character, and if it was written in imitation of the *Apocryphon of John*, its time of original composition should be after the end of the second century. As such, its earliest

¹⁹ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 124.

²⁰ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 126.

²¹ On these texts cf. Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*, 187-193, 216-233.

incarnation may have been as the product of the Barbelo-Gnostic movement, as described by Irenaeus, that was the forerunner of Valentinianism, therefore making it representative of some of the earliest Christian gnosis.²²

The *Pistis Sophia* Books 1-4 date to the later third century CE, with Book 4 originating earlier. The original language of composition was Greek, but references to Egyptian deities in Book 4 suggest an Egyptian milieu. It is part of the Codex Askewianus, and compositionally is an unsystematic collection of speculations. Books 1-3 present Melchizedek as the great Receiver of Light, who descends and takes power from the archons, purifying the light and leaving matter, while the archons become inert and lifeless. Some of the archons of the Sphere and the servants of Heimarmene use the matter to create humans and other material creatures. A later version of the text introduces the Receivers of the sun and moon, and Melchizedek in turn delegates the role of descending into the archons to his subordinate Receivers. He is also associated with Ieu, the Guard “of the place of those of the right hand,” and tasked with the supervision of the “removal of souls from the judgement of the archons or from the serpent.”²³

Books 1-3 of the *Pistis Sophia* place Melchizedek in a crucial salvific and highly developed role, as the sealer and saviour of souls. While it references no specific biblical texts, there are several layers of Christian traditions, though it was obviously the product of an author or group outside of the mainstream of Christian belief and praxis. It appears reflective of a non-canonical line of traditions about Melchizedek, perhaps that also found in 11QMelchizedek, as both look toward the restoration of the sons of light to their rightful heavenly abodes. Pearson suggests,

Pistis Sophia's treatment of Melchizedek can easily be seen as a Gnostic reinterpretation of that found in 11QMelch. Indeed, when one thinks about such a possibility, one can see that Jewish lore concerning Melchizedek could just as easily have reached the Egyptian Gnostic author(s) of *Pistis Sophia* as Jewish lore concerning the antediluvian patriarch Enoch, such as is found in books 2 and 3 of that Gnostic work.

²² Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 135.

²³ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 141.

If that is true, we must also conclude that the Christian interpretive tradition concerning Melchizedek, begun by the author of Hebrews, is simply a caesura in the case of the Gnostic evidence. The constant trajectory of interpretation runs from pre-Christian Judaism (11QMelch) to the “decadent” Gnosticism of third- or fourth-century Egypt represented by the books of *Pistis Sophia*, a Gnosticism whose Christian character is but a thin veneer, and, in the case of the Melchizedek lore, totally lacking.²⁴

Book 4 of the *Pistis Sophia* and the *Book of Ieu* feature similar themes and portrayals of Melchizedek. In Book 4, he is called “Zorokothora Melchizedek,” a magical name, in keeping with magical function of prayer as a means of direct access to the deity, and as in Books 1-3, he descends into the archons acting as the ambassador of the Lights. A second figure of the light is introduced, Ieu, the administrator of the archons. This earlier account differs from that of Book 1 in the manner of the emission of the Light from the archons. Although he collaborates with Ieu in the collection of the light, Melchizedek alone is responsible for transporting the Light into the Treasury. Book 4 also sees Jesus offering an explanation for the existence of falsehood, laying it at the door of Hecate, who captures the souls and holds them for a period of 105 years and six months. The disturbance of the archons, performed by Melchizedek and Ieu, allows for the freeing and ultimate reconstitution of the souls. Unlike Books 1-3, in Book 4 Melchizedek is not accompanied by Receivers or helpers of any kind, with the exception of Ieu, who seems to be superior even to Melchizedek.

The *Second Book of Ieu* mentions Melchizedek only twice, but is similar in form to Book 4 of the *Pistis Sophia*. The two poems that refer to Melchizedek are strikingly similar to the poem that begins Book 4, evoking the Father and naming heavenly assistants, while expanding upon the motif of baptism. Zorokothora is responsible for bringing out the baptismal water of life in a single wine jar, echoing the original Genesis account of his presentation of wine to Abram. But the connection between Melchizedek as offering a blessing to Abram and as purveyor of the water of life makes a large leap, from the traditional Genesis account’s portrayal of him as a human priest-king of God Most High, to the divine figure responsible for restoration of the heavens and of trapped

²⁴ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 123.

human souls. Horton suggests that the answer to the issue of Melchizedek's transformation from his status as a relatively unimportant Old Testament figure to a heavenly being lies outside of the gnostic sources, and can, in fact, be found within the tradition associated with Hebrews.²⁵

In order to search out the linking factor between the two extremes of the presentations of Melchizedek, Horton outlines the parallels found between the Melchizedek of 11QMelchizedech and the Christ of Hebrews 7. Christ and Melchizedek are both portrayed as eschatological and redemptive heroes, they are both exalted in the heavens, they both make atonement for sin (on the Day of Atonement), they overcome the forces opposed to God, and they bring the promise of a new age.²⁶ The author of Hebrews uses Melchizedek and his priesthood as a foil or antitype for Christ's priesthood, especially through the eternal nature of that role, and his (mistakenly?) assumed immortality. Links such as these likely led to later interpretations of the figure of Melchizedek. Horton concludes

by the second or third century AD the ultimate reason for regarding Melchizedek as important had all but been forgotten and that Melchizedek's importance was simply an accepted fact. This, in my view, is what set the stage for the Melchizedek legends of a later time. The reasons for assigning an important role to Melchizedek were no longer as important as that role itself. Melchizedek... was coming to have an independent importance, not only for the heretics, but also for those who opposed the heretics... [Still] we are no closer than when we began to knowing anything of real substance about an historical figure named Melchizedek. The only solid connections between this figure and the priesthood are preserved for us only in the later tradition, and we have no reason to try to push this tradition back beyond the first century BC.²⁷

Seemingly then, the real traceable evolution of the Melchizedek tradition begins in the first century BCE, with such literary evidence as that in 11QMelchizedech and the

²⁵ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 151. The association of Melchizedek with baptism is also a motif employed in the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*.

²⁶ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 167.

²⁷ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 171-172.

speculations at Qumran, and in the apocalyptic imaginings of the Jews.²⁸ There are two different trends associated with the presentations of the figure of Melchizedek: one that views him as a human being, expanding upon the biblical sources; and one that depicts him as a heavenly semi-divinity, emerging in pre-Christian Jewish traditions, like those found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the writings of Philo. Both trends demonstrate variants that portray him as an eschatological figure. Regardless, it appears that Melchizedek had enough authority ascribed to him that the legendary traditions must have been known and used as influences in the later Sethian imaginings surrounding the character that began as the Priest of God Most High.

2.2.3. ANTI-GNOSTIC POLEMICS AND HYPOTHETICAL SECTS: COMMUNITIES OF FOLLOWERS?

While Josephus mentions Melchizedek in both his major works,²⁹ and there is evidence of some rabbinic interest in the early second century CE, Christian interest in Melchizedek, beyond Hebrews, does not seem at all prevalent until the end of the second or beginning of the third century CE. Other than the monastic speculations about Melchizedek, most of the interest paid to him within the early Church took the form of polemics against those who would exalt him as a saviour, sometimes over and above Jesus.

2.2.3.1. THE EVIDENCE FROM THE APOLOGISTS AND THE HERESIOLOGISTS

Writing in the last quarter of the fourth century, Epiphanius of Salamis suggested that there seemed to be “wide latitude allowed for speculation about Melchizedek as a

²⁸ Gianotto, however, provides additional evidence for a second century BCE Jewish debate about the figure of Melchizedek (*Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*, 45-61). Cf. his synthesis, “La figura di Melchisedek nelle tradizioni giudaica, cristiana e gnostica (sec. IIa.C.-IIIId.C.),” *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi* 1 (1984), 137-152.

²⁹ In *Antiquities* 1.179-181 Josephus recounts the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek, the king of Solyma (later Hierosolyma), and in the *Jewish War* 6.438 he goes on to reference Melchizedek as the Canaanite chief, the Righteous King, who was the founder of Solyma, the first priest and the first to build a temple, renaming the town Jerusalem. Cf. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 82-83; Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*, 99-102.

divine or angelic being in the early church.”³⁰ These speculations, as presented by the “heretical” movements of the early centuries needed to be addressed and countered by the early Church Fathers, in light of the issues surrounding the development of the “orthodox” church.

At the beginning of the fifth century CE, Jerome noted, “Origen considered Melchizedek to be an angel or supernatural power of some kind, an opinion also held by his secretary, Didymus.”³¹ Jerome further asserted that other than Origen, the early church Fathers believed that Melchizedek was a man, a Canaanite, and king of Jerusalem, who functioned as a “priest of the uncircumcision, a priesthood carried on through Christ.”³² Clement of Alexandria connects the bread and wine Melchizedek offered to Abram to the Eucharist, seeing it as a prototype or foreshadowing of the Christian ritual meal. In a fragment of a lost commentary on Genesis, Hippolytus introduces a typology equating Melchizedek with John the Baptist, seeing Melchizedek as the one who circumcised Abraham, as John was the one to baptize Jesus.³³ Finally, Justin Martyr cites Melchizedek in the *Dialogue with Trypho* as an example of one the many ancients quoted in the Old Testament who were not circumcised.³⁴

But Melchizedek appears far more frequently in the writings against the heretics, who saw him as a divine being.³⁵ In the *Panarion*, Epiphanius introduces the term “Melchizedekians,” suggesting that they branched off of the Theodotians, and held a belief in a “heavenly priest who intervenes for man eternally.”³⁶ He includes the mention of “spurious books” fabricated by the Melchizedekians, and basing his divinity in the

³⁰ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 87. Cf. the old but still invaluable overviews of Bardy, “Melchisédech dans la tradition patristique”; M. Simon, “Melchisédech dans la polémique entre juifs et chrétiens et dans la légende,” *Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 17 (1937), 58-93.

³¹ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 88. Cf. Jerome, *Epistula ad Evangelum* 73.1.

³² Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 87-89. Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 33.

³³ Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*, 160-162.

³⁴ Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho* 19. Cf. Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*, 145-150; Pearson, “Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism,” 186.

³⁵ Cf. G. Vallée, *A Study in Anti-Gnostic Polemics: Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Epiphanius* (Waterloo, Ont., 1981).

³⁶ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 60.1.1-5. Epiphanius further describes the heavenly priest as an “archon of righteousness.” Cf. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 95.

attestation from Hebrews that renders him without parents or genealogy. Epiphanius refutes them by emphasizing Melchizedek's humanity, going as far as to give him human parents, Heracles and Astarth/Astoriane.³⁷

Hippolytus' *Refutation of All Heresies* 7.35-36 and 10.23-34 both refute the worldview held by the Melchizedekians, and suggest a starting point of the heresy, linking them with Theodotus of Byzantium and Theodotus the Banker, but at the same time seeing the group as representative of one point of view from within the larger "dynamic monarchism," a movement he suggests did not last long.³⁸

Pseudo-Tertullian describes the Melchizedekian heresy as centered in the belief in Melchizedek as a heavenly advocate (for the angels) as Christ is the advocate of humanity.³⁹ This work is among

the information that Epiphanius seems to have had at his disposal in his invention of a "Melchizedekian" sect. Even the detail about the sects' offerings in Melchizedek's name (55.8.1) can be construed as a misunderstanding of what is said in Pseudo-Tertullian about the intercessory role of Melchizedek, unless, perchance, Epiphanius reflects here some vague information about Gnostic cultic activity in Egypt involving Melchizedek. There is, of course, nothing specifically "Gnostic" about the Melchizedekian heresy described by Epiphanius.⁴⁰

³⁷ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 55.21. Cf. Pearson, "Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism," 188. Also see Pseudo-Athanasius' *Historia de Melchisedek*, for another tradition about Melchizedek's parents. This intriguing text has been recently re-edited by J. Dochhorn, "Die Historia de Melchisedech (Hist Melch). Einführung, editorischer Vorbericht und Editiones praeliminares," *Le Muséon* 117 (2004), 7-48, and translated by S. E. Robinson, "The Apocryphal Story of Melchizedek," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18 (1987), 26-39.

³⁸ Hippolytus suggested Theodotus of Byzantium as the originator of the heresy, having to do specifically with the nature of Christ, and saw Theodotus the Banker as the one who incorporated Melchizedek into the discussion. Specifically Hippolytus speaks of; "different questions having arisen among them, a certain one, himself called Theodotus, a banker by trade, attempted to say that a certain Melchizedek is the great power, and this one is greater than Christ, in whose likeness, they say, the Christ happens to be. And they, like the aforementioned Theodotians, say that Jesus is a man and just like them that the Christ came down into him (at baptism)" (*Refutation of All Heresies* 7.36, Horton's translation).

³⁹ Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against all Heresies* 8.

⁴⁰ Pearson, "Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism," 190. Cf. Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*, 250.

In the last quarter of the fourth century CE, Pseudo-Augustine, now named Ambrosiaster, produced the Latin *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti*. Question 109 addresses the equation of Melchizedek with the Holy Spirit and notes that an exegesis of Psalm 110.4 may have been the originating point of the heretical interpretation. It raises the issue of Christ being a priest after the example of Melchizedek and implies that while the two are of the same nature, they are not the same person. Christ is in the primary position. This placement of Melchizedek as secondary, but of the same nature as Christ, led to the connection of Melchizedek with the Holy Spirit, possibly as a revival of the doctrine introduced by Hieracas.⁴¹

The refutations of the speculations about Melchizedek have one main element in common. As Horton notes, the theologies contain “the conviction that Melchizedek was something other than a man, a conviction that he was a divine being who could be described as θεός... [and] that it is the role of Christ in all these systems which determines the role of Melchizedek.”⁴² That said, the heresiologists’ accounts demonstrate the fact that “where we encounter a clear picture of a group that believes Melchizedek to be a heavenly power, we invariably find that belief not to be central to the system of thought involved.”⁴³

Further evidence is found in the writings of Mark the Hermit (d. after 430 CE) who was a student of St. John Chrysostom and the abbot of a monastery in Galatia. He wrote a treatise on Melchizedek, challenging the heretical belief that Melchizedek was the Logos and the Son of God, before entering the womb of the Virgin.⁴⁴ There are similarities with Epiphanius’ critique of the sect. Like Epiphanius, Mark saw the heresy

⁴¹ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 108-109. Other than in this one aspect, the doctrine spoken against in the *Quaestiones* does not share the same theology as found in the beliefs of Hieracas. Bardy suggests that Question 109 was the starting point for Jerome’s *Epistle* 63, which deals with Melchizedek and is similar “in tone and argument” (“Melchisédech dans la tradition patristique,” 28, n. 1).

⁴² Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 110.

⁴³ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 111.

⁴⁴ Mark the Hermit, *On Melchizedek 2* (in Migne’s *Patrologia Graeca* 65, 1117-1140). Cf. O. Hesse, “Markus Eremita und seine Schrift ‘De Melchisedech’,” *Oriens Christianus* 51 (1967), 72-77; Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 107-108; Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*, 259-262.

as originating with a single movement, though neither of the polemicists seems to have really understood the movement or the belief(s) behind it.

2.2.3.2. THE MELCHIZEDEKIANS

Citing the evidence of 11QMelchizedek and the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, when placed alongside the prior information from heresiological and other ancient sources, Pearson notes:

- (1) Insofar as one can speak of a Gnostic sect of “Melchizedekians,” one is dealing with a Christian group in whose speculations the figure of Jesus plays an important role;
- (2) Their views of Melchizedek develop out of Jewish speculations and traditions surrounding this Old Testament figure;
- (3) Such speculations existed both in the Alexandrian Diaspora (Philo and, perhaps, Hebrews) and in Palestine, among the Essenes particularly;
- (4) There is no concrete evidence for the existence of a pre-Christian Jewish Gnostic sect of “Melchizedekians,” though the existence of such a sect cannot be ruled out categorically.⁴⁵

But can these putative Melchizedekians be definitively linked to a specific person or group? From the heresiological evidence there are a few possible candidates.

THEODOTUS OF BYZANTIUM AND THEODOTUS THE BANKER: DYNAMIC MONARCHIANS (C. 190-217 CE)

Theodotus the Banker expanded upon Theodotus of Byzantium’s earlier christology, including Melchizedek as a higher being and introducing the concept of the descent of the archon into Christ at the time of baptism.

The Melchizedekians are described as a splinter group of the Theodotians who believed (1) Melchizedek was the highest heavenly power; (2) the Christ (*archon*) was formed in the likeness of this higher power; and (3) the Christ descended into Jesus at baptism. The earliest followers of Theodotus of Byzantium were relatively orthodox in their cosmology, except as regarded the incarnation of Christ. Nevertheless, in Rome

⁴⁵ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 26.

circa 190 CE, Pope Victor excommunicated the founder of the movement for teaching that Jesus was a man.

With succeeding generations the worldview grew in its radicalism. According to Pseudo-Tertullian, while Theodotus of Byzantium introduced a new doctrine, Theodotus the Banker organized a new sect. In addition to the motif of the descent of the Christ at baptism, Theodotus the Banker, with Asclepiodotus and Natalus, suggested that Melchizedek, as a high heavenly being, acted as the intercessor and advocate of the heavenly beings, while Jesus Christ was the intercessor and advocate of humanity. With his lack of human genealogy, Melchizedek was without beginning or end, and not comprehensible by humans.⁴⁶

HIERACAS OF LEONTOPOLIS (C. 300 CE)

Hieracas of Leontopolis lived in the late third to early fourth centuries CE. He was a calligrapher by trade, learned in Greek and Egyptian literature, medicine, magic and astronomy. According to tradition, Hieracas knew the Old and New Testaments by heart and authored biblical commentaries in both Greek and Coptic. He lived an unmarried, strict, ascetic life, while believing in the concept of spiritual resurrection and the equation of the Holy Spirit with Melchizedek. He grew to a position of influence among the ascetically inclined Christians of Leontopolis and eventually withdrew from the city to lead the life of a desert ascetic.⁴⁷ J. E. Goehring quotes Adolf von Harnack, who described Hieracas as a follower of Origen's thought and his major contribution to the history of early Christianity was his creation of an ascetic academic association made up of virgins, monks, continent persons and widows.⁴⁸

Karl Heussi incorporated the later assertion, as found in Athanasius' writings, and places Hieracas in an anchorite's cell outside of town. In this, Hieracas fits the pattern as

⁴⁶ Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against All Heresies* 28.

⁴⁷ According to the 5th- or 6th-century legendary writings included in the *Life of Epiphanius*. In the *Panarion* Epiphanius himself places Hieracas in Leontopolis.

⁴⁸ J. E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1999), 111. Cf. C. Gianotto, "Melchisedek e lo Spirito santo: Acuni aspetti della pneumatologia eterodossa tra il III e il IV secolo," *Augustinianum* 20 (1980), 587-593; idem, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*, 254-258.

outlined in the *Life of Antony*, presumably modeled after Antony, and having no community around his cell, as most of his community remained in Leontopolis and other nearby towns. Heussi further notes Hieracas' encouragement of male and female ascetic cohabitation, and the gathering of the community for common worship. As such, Hieracas was demonstrative of the link between urban practices and desert monasticism and in conflict with Athanasius' institutional form of Christian authority.⁴⁹ But despite legendary traditions surrounding Epiphanius, "there is no indication that Hieracas ever altered his teaching in the face of opposition from the emerging episcopally centered Christianity presented by Athanasius and Epiphanius."⁵⁰

James Goehring suggests that the largest controversy surrounding Hieracas was his challenge to developing Church authority: "Hieracas not only created an academic school devoted to intellectual speculation and debate, but he fashioned the school as a separate worship community with its own psalms and its own requirement for admission."⁵¹ As Marcion's heresy led the authorities to closely define canonical scripture, so too did the Alexandrian authorities have to more clearly establish the episcopal model's understanding of asceticism. The model of Antony, with his withdrawal to the desert outside of the scope of episcopal authority, allowed for the maintenance of the ascetic impulse while moving the impulse out of the city, rendering it less immediately challenging to the authority of the church.⁵²

Hieracas identified the Holy Spirit as Melchizedek, using two proofs from Scripture to support his assertion. Seeing the Holy Spirit as an intercessor, as described in Romans 8.26-27, Hieracas follows Hebrews 7, with its references to the lack of genealogy and immortality that Melchizedek is credited with in legendary tradition

⁴⁹ Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert*, 115. Cf. D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford, 1995), 48.

⁵⁰ Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert*, 118.

⁵¹ Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert*, 132.

⁵² Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert*, 133.

(Hebrews 7.3).⁵³ Like Jesus, who has become a “priest forever” according to his order, Hieracas saw Melchizedek as holding his priesthood permanently and always living to intercede for all those who approach God (Hebrews 7.25). Putting the Holy Spirit of Romans together with the eternal priestly intercessor of Hebrews, Hieracas concluded that Melchizedek and the Holy Spirit were the same divine being. He further points to the pseudepigraphal *Ascension of Isaiah* 9.33-36 and the angel of the Holy Spirit seated at the left hand of God who spoke through the righteous prophets. This angel is described as “like” the Lord, and Hieracas therefore associated him with Melchizedek who resembled the Son of God (Hebrews 7.3). In equating him with the Holy Spirit and making him the equal, within the Trinity, of the Father and the Son, Hieracas raised Melchizedek to an exalted position that would prove problematic in many ways.

The *Apophthegmata Patrum* recount an assembly held in Scetis to discuss the problem of Melchizedek and his role in Christian theology.⁵⁴ But Hieracas’ teachings about Melchizedek are representative of only a part of the entirety of the interpretation of the Christian message and practice that he wished to convey. Epiphanius did not equate the Hieracites with the Melchizedekians, saying, “others in their turn imagine and say [other things] about this Melchizedek.”⁵⁵ It is clear from the evidence of the heresiologists that Hieracas and his followers were not the only ones speculating about the role of the High Priest. Jerome noted the influence that Origen and his follower Didymus held over the desert monks, leading Goehring to conclude, “it seems safer to set the debate over Melchizedek within an Origenist context than to posit a specific Hieracite influence in Scetis.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Like Horton, Pearson sees Hieracas’ interpretation of Hebrews and the larger Melchizedek tradition as being independent of the “Melchizedekian heresy” as described by Epiphanius (“Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism,” 191).

⁵⁴ *Copres* 3, in Migne ed., *Patrologia Graeca* 65, col. 252.

⁵⁵ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 55.51.

⁵⁶ Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert*, 126.

2.2.4. THE PRIESTHOOD IN JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The envisioning of the character of Melchizedek and his role as priest changed, in part, according to the evolution of the position itself. In the time of the Patriarchs, the offering of sacrifices fell to the father or male head of the family. After Sinai, Aaron, the brother of Moses, was made High Priest, a position that would pass to the firstborn son upon his death. The Levites, those of the tribe of Levi not in direct succession from Aaron, would act as assistants and servants to the priests of each generation. The nature of the succession was normally hereditary, especially after the Babylonian Exile when genealogical proof of birth became very important.⁵⁷ The priests were expected to maintain a level of purity, there were age limitations for service, and there were marriage restrictions.

Priestly functions were connected with public worship, and included the offering of incense twice daily (Exodus 30.7) and other tasks performed in the sanctuary, as well as those in the outer court of the temple, such as the maintenance of the sacred fire on the altar for burnt sacrifices. Additionally, priests acted as teachers and judges, explaining and clarifying the law (Leviticus 10.11, Deuteronomy 33.10) and settling lawsuits (Deuteronomy 17.8, 19.17, 21.5). As the complexity of the liturgy grew, according to biblical tradition, David divided the priesthood into twenty-four classes or courses, each responsible for specific tasks (2 Kings 11.9). The priests derived their income from tithes, and they were not necessarily of the wealthy classes. But their exalted office and superior education led to high social position and prestige among the community. With

⁵⁷ The development of the Israelite priesthoods (Zadokite, Levite, etc.) is extremely complex. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 195-215, for example; C. Werman, "The Sons of Zadok," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years after Their Discovery. Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20-25, 1997* (Jerusalem, 2000), 623-630; A. Aschim, "Melchizedek and Levi," *ibid.*, 773-788; D. W. Rooke, *Zadok's Heirs: The Role and Development of the High Priesthood in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 2000); W. R. Millar, *Priesthood in Ancient Israel* (St. Louis, Miss., 2001); L. L. Grabbe and A. O. Bellis (eds.), *The Priests and the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists* (New York, 2004).

the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the time of sacrificial service came to an end and therefore the Jewish priesthood became unnecessary.⁵⁸

The true Israelite priesthood was hereditary only from within the house of Aaron. The other descendants of Levi assumed the subordinate positions of the Levites, coming from one of three groups: the Gersonites, the Caathites or the Meraites, named for the three sons of Levi. The Levites were the servants of the priestly class, assisting them during the sacred services and maintaining the sacred vessels, but were not allowed to enter the sanctuary or to perform real sacrificial acts. Once the tabernacle that housed the Ark of the Covenant found its home in the Temple of Jerusalem, the Levites were charged with its guardianship. The Levites were divided into categories fulfilling specific roles: those who were the servants to the priests; officials and judges; porters; and musicians and singers. Once initiated into the office by rites of consecration including purification by water, the shaving of hair, washing of garments and offering of sacrifices, the Levites acted as the guardians of the Temple of Solomon and its environs.

As mentioned, Aaron was the first High Priest, consecrated by Moses at the command of God. The acts of consecration were repeated for seven days, and included purifying washings of body and vestments, anointing with holy oil and the offering of sacrifices (Leviticus 8.12)⁵⁹. On the eighth day Aaron was presented into the tabernacle of the covenant (Exodus 29) and assumed the ultimate responsibility for its care. The High Priest was the highest embodiment of the theocracy, acting as the mediator between God and the people of the covenant. The “Great Priest” (ἀρχιερεύς) was responsible for the supervision of the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple, the divine service and all personnel connected with public worship. In the time of the Second Temple, he presided at the Sanhedrin, and was the only one to enter the Holy of Holies to offer sacrifices for his sins and the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement.

⁵⁸ The rabbis who assumed the leadership of the Jews following 70 CE were not priests, although they did assume the teaching role and became responsible for instruction in all matters of Law.

⁵⁹ The “simple” priests had only their hands anointed with oil (Exodus 29.7, 29).

The hereditary office passed from Aaron to his firstborn son, Eleazar, and to his son after him. Under the Seleucids (175 BCE onward) the succession became corrupted and the office sold to the highest bidder, returning to its hereditary origins in the time of the Hasmonean Dynasty. As was the case with the larger priesthood and the Levites, the office of High Priest was rendered obsolete with the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE.⁶⁰

In the New Testament mention is made of few types of religious functionaries. However, bishops, priests and deacons, the attendants of priests, are referenced in the writings of the early Church. The first organizations seem to have been democratic in nature, with the local churches being responsible for choosing their leaders. There are even examples of women as heads of these early congregations.⁶¹ Christ is the sole High Priest of the New Testament writings, responsible for the only blood sacrifice necessary in Christian tradition.⁶²

In the decades and then centuries following the death of Jesus and the rise of the religious movement that developed in his name, a hierarchy within the gradually institutionalizing body began to form in some communities. The bishops, with their powers of ordination, were pre-eminent over the priests, with their power of consecration and absolution, who were in turn above the deacons in the power structure of the early Church. But the differentiation of the levels remained unclear until the mid-second century, when the terms *episkopos* (bishop) and *presbyteros* (priest) ceased to be used interchangeably. At this time, the hierarchical distinction began its gradual growth. Priests continued to be appointed and left in charge in areas that were too small to

⁶⁰ Cf. J. C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* (Minneapolis, 2004).

⁶¹ Mary, the mother of John Mark in Jerusalem (Acts 12.12-17); Apphia in Colossae (Philemon 2); Nympha in Laodicea (Colossians 4.15); Lydia in Thyatira (Acts 16.15); and Phoebe at Cenchreae (Romans 16.1), for example. All of these women were said to be responsible for the congregations that met in their homes, some of the earliest House Churches. Cf. K. J. Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco, 1995), 33.

⁶² And it is Christ, of course, who is connected with the High Priest Melchizedek in Hebrews.

warrant a bishop, but increasingly the local priests and deacons began to answer to the authority of a bishop in a centralized city, like the bishop or patriarch of Alexandria.⁶³

As seen above, there were dissenting views on the importance of the hierarchy and the power wielded in the upper echelons of the Church authority. Some monks, for example, did not see the need to be consecrated as priests in order to fulfill their spiritual purpose, and there is clear evidence of politicking in the selection and appointment of priests and bishops throughout the early years. Schisms and conflicts arose over differing theologies and theories as to proper practice, especially under the duress imposed by the various periods of persecution.

2.2.5. “THE PRIEST OF GOD MOST HIGH”: FROM GENESIS TO QUMRAN, HEBREWS AND NAG HAMMADI

For most of the postexilic period, the position of High Priest was extremely significant. The motif of the priestly messiah, which originated in the example of the anointed priest as described in Leviticus, gradually developed in the time following the Babylonian Exile and was connected with the importance of the office of High Priest. John J. Collins notes, “the expectation of a priestly messiah in the eschatological sense, however, involves more than the exaltation of the office of High Priesthood. It implies a dissatisfaction with the current exercise of the office.”⁶⁴ Melchizedek was the “prototypical priest-king,” and the enduring model for the High Priesthood outside of the levitical line. But he was also a soteriological figure, appearing in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* as a divine redeemer and administrator of heavenly judgement.

⁶³ While they were not the same, especially as the practice of sacrifice was no longer needed (other than in the symbolic ritual of the Communion, which priests could perform), bishops come closest to the function and authority of the High Priest of Israelite tradition.

⁶⁴ Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 83-84. Cf. G. G. Xeravits, *King, Priest, Prophet: Positive Eschatological Protagonists of the Qumran Library* (Leiden, 2003); idem, “Wisdom Traits in the Qumranic Presentation of the Eschatological Prophet,” in F. G. Martinez (ed.), *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition* (Leuven, 2003), 183-192.

Melchizedek appears as a character in two of the texts found at Qumran. In the *Genesis Apocryphon* (1Q202) 2.15, which is a literal translation of the Genesis account into Aramaic, Melchizedek brings food and drink to Abram as a priest of El Most High or El Elyon.⁶⁵ But his most significant appearance is in the scroll 11QMelchisedek, where he is presented as an eschatological hero. Dating to the first half of the first century BCE, 11QMelchisedek is a fragmentary eschatological midrash that looks to the liberation of captives at the end of days, as part of the restoration of the Jubilee year.⁶⁶ Melchizedek is the heavenly deliverer, sent to judge the holy ones of El and condemn his evil counterpart, Belial. Geza Vermes suggests “this manuscript sheds valuable light not only on the Melchizedek figure in the Epistle to the Hebrews, but also on the development of the messianic concept in the New Testament and early Christianity.”⁶⁷ Another figure, the anointed eschatological prophet who proclaims the message of Isaiah 52.7, announces the coming reign of Melchizedek, at which time Belial and his “lot” would fight against the “holy ones of El” or the “sons of light” on earth. “The day of salvation in the Melchizedek Scroll is the occasion of the arrival of the herald, the ‘anointed of the spirit’ or eschatological prophet. We might expect that he would be followed by the messiahs of Aaron and Israel and then by the eschatological war, which takes forty years according to the War Scroll.”⁶⁸

The author of 11QMelchisedek considered Melchizedek to be a superior being who will appear at the end of days to bring atonement, expressing judgements and imposing penalties. Like Michael, the Prince of Light in the *War Scroll*, Melchizedek is

⁶⁵ At Qumran the designation for God is almost universally given as “El” or a variation of the term (Elohim etc.), rather than the tetragrammaton YHWH. The *Genesis Apocryphon* is typologically similar in its script to the *War Scroll* (1QM, 1Q33, 4Q491-497, 4Q471) suggesting a compositional dating somewhere between the late first century BCE and the early first century CE.

⁶⁶ J. T. Milik believes 11QMelchisedek to be part of a larger work, the *Pesher on the Periods of History*, further portions of which can be found in 4Q180 and 4Q181. Cf. J. T. Milik, “Milkî-sedeq et Milkî-resha’ dans les anciens écrits juifs et chrétiens,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23 (1972), 95-144, esp. 100. Cf. A. Aschim, “The Genre of 11QMelchizedek,” in F. H. and Th. L. Thompson (eds.), *Qumran between the Old and New Testaments* (Sheffield, 1998), 17-31. The definitive edition of 11QMelchisedek has been published by F. Garcia Martinez, E. J. C. Tigchelaar, A. S. van der Woude, J. P. M. van der Ploeg and E. D. Herbert, *Qumran Cave 11: II. 11Q2-18, 11Q20-31* (Oxford, 1998).

⁶⁷ Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 500.

⁶⁸ Collins suggests that although Melchizedek is pivotal as a judge and intercessor, he is not representative of a messianic figure (*Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 68).

the opponent of Belial, but in 11QMelchizedek he will reign in the last days. This presentation of the eschatological mythology is not the same as that found in the usual apocalyptic literature. Melchizedek is not an angel in the Enochic tradition of the Qumran or Ethiopic versions of the texts, but is more in keeping with the description offered in *2 Enoch*.

Although there is no proof in the text itself that the Melchizedek of Genesis was a heavenly emissary, the author of 11QMelchizedek may have interpreted him that way. Generally, Melchizedek's role in 11QMelchizedek evokes the description of the priesthood found in the *Testament of Levi* 18.2-14. In the *Testament*, the priest will

- (1) Execute judgement on earth (18.2);
- (2) Experience a period of service associated with a king (18.3);
- (3) Hold the position of eternal priest (18.8);
- (4) Act as the light illuminating the world, dispelling the darkness (18.3-4);
- (5) Inaugurate the time of peace (18.4-5);
- (6) Preside over a world in which sin and evil have ended (18.10-12); and
- (7) Bind Belial (Beliar), open the gates of paradise and remove the "threatening sword against Adam (humanity)" (18.10-12).⁶⁹

The text of 11QMelchizedek uses complementary eschatological themes and language. Melchizedek is presented as the *heavenly* judge who reigns as king in the time of peace and joy, and is responsible for the destruction of Belial's power, the end of sin and evil and sees through the restoration of the sons of light to their places among the sons of heaven. That said, Melchizedek's priesthood is not explicit in 11QMelchizedek. Despite this, "the identification of him as a priest of El Elyon in Genesis 14, the mention of the everlasting priesthood of Melchizedek in Psalm 110, and the use of Genesis 14.18b-19 in 1QapGen 22.15, make it impossible to separate the mention of him from the thought of his priesthood."⁷⁰

There are also apparent connections between the figure of Melchizedek in his soteriological role, and Michael, the archangel as he is presented as the opponent of

⁶⁹ Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchiresha*, 68.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Satan. In earlier biblical tradition (Job 1.6; Zechariah 3. 2), Satan is presented as a representative of God, one of the Elohim, who acts on God's behalf as the tempter or accuser of humanity. He is associated with, but not necessarily in conflict with, his opposite, the angelic advocate or Angel of the Lord. A debated line of thought suggests that the mid-second century BCE the influence of the dualism of Zoroastrianism, with its double godhead of Ahriman and Ahura Mazda, altered the conceptualization of Satan and his angelic adversary into a clear polarization of evil versus good. Kobelski suggests that the Iranian influence can be seen at Qumran in the literature regarding Satan/Belial, the ruler of the world of darkness and the evil sons of darkness, and the advocate angel Michael/Melchizedek, the ruler of this world of light and goodness and the sons of light.⁷¹ Human life on earth was presented in the Scrolls as being influenced by the constant warfare of the two sides.

Melkiresha, mentioned in 4Q280 or 4QBenedictons, is given as Satan's specific name, following a tradition found in the *Ascension of Isaiah* (1.8, 5.9), which presents Sammael Malchira as the false prophet. In the Coptic apocryphal *Apocalypse of Bartholomew*, Melchir is a minister of Beliar.⁷² He is presented in opposition to Melchizedek, the king of justice and chief of the Army of Light. In the Qumran literary tradition, in addition to his eternal priesthood, Melchizedek is a key player in the development of the themes of dualism, angelology and demonology, astrological predestination, and an eschatology featuring judgement by fire.⁷³

There are also similarities between the salvific intercessor of Qumran and the Paraclete of Johannine tradition. In the New Testament writings of John (John 14.16, 14.26, 15.26, 16.7 and 1 John 2.1) the eternal Paraclete is expected to bear witness as an advocate on behalf of Jesus Christ. This Spirit of Truth or Holy Spirit, acting in

⁷¹ Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melkiresha*, 76.

⁷² Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melkiresha*, 82. The Coptic *Apocalypse of Bartholomew* is preserved in a ninth century manuscript found at the White Monastery at Sohag, Egypt, and now kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. It was likely composed in Greek in the fourth century, and translated into Sahidic Coptic in the fifth or sixth century. Cf. E. A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (Oxford, 1913), 6, 184.

⁷³ All very important themes in the speculations of the Egyptian desert monastics.

opposition to the Spirit of Perversity, has clear parallels with Melchizedek/Michael as found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. He too is seen as immortal and without known beginning. In Hebrews, the eternal nature of Melchizedek is emphasized both explicitly and implicitly. Kobelski notes, "if Jesus arose as a priest in the likeness of Melchizedek because of the power of his indestructible life, then a similar indestructible eternal life must be attributed to Melchizedek. Hebrews 7.3 and 7.8 provide the corroboration of this argument: each ascribes to Melchizedek eternal life."⁷⁴

In biblical tradition, the notion of Melchizedek's eternal nature is a conceit generated "from silence." In other words, the lack of a *known* genealogy, led to the supposition of no *actual* genealogy. However, the extra-canonical sources emphasize Melchizedek's presence in the heavenly court, his leadership role and the transcendence of his character. His immortality is assumed as it is with Michael and the other angels of God. The "historicity" gleaned from his presence in Genesis lends further credence to the superiority of his priesthood over the levitical priestly line. This conveniently provides an explanation for Jesus not coming from the levitical line, and emphasizes that the eternal nature of his priesthood, and the eternal nature of Jesus' priesthood, are "based in the power of an indestructible life, not on the legal requirement of family descent."⁷⁵

The Epistle to the Hebrews is a clear source of early Christian speculation about Melchizedek, due, primarily, to the juxtaposition of Jesus and Melchizedek and the connection of the two in the role of High Priest. Hebrews is a pseudepigraphic sermon of encouragement to steadfastness of faith. Initially attributed to Paul, differences in style and theology between Hebrews and the known Pauline writings were noted by Origen, Clement and Tertullian, placing Hebrews among the anonymous deutero-Pauline letters.

⁷⁴ Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchiresha*, 119.

⁷⁵ Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchiresha*, 125. Cf. Ch. A. Gieschen, "The Different Functions of a Similar Melchizedek Tradition in 2 Enoch and the Epistle to the Hebrews," in C. Evans and J. A. Sanders (eds.), *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (Sheffield, 1997), 364-379; J. H. Neyrey, "'Without Beginning of Days or End of Life' (Hebrews 7.3): Topos for a True Deity," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53 (1991), 439-455; and J. R. Davila, "Melchizedek, The 'Youth,' and Jesus," in idem (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden, 2003), 248-274.

It is unique in the New Testament, as the author employs the letter to develop the image of Christ as a High Priest, fulfilling and completing the Jewish sacrificial system.

Rhetorically, the author uses argument and exhortation to make his or her case. Structurally speaking, unlike some of the other New Testament epistles, there is no opening greeting, but the letter concludes with the usual greetings. It is similar in form to the synagogue sermon delivered by Paul and described in Acts 13.15. The precise date of composition is unknown, but generally accepted to fall sometime between 60 and 100 CE. Despite the title, the intended audience was likely made up of both Jews and Gentiles familiar with Jewish writings and traditions. The author grounded his argument in canonical scripture but used it to emphasize his perception of Jesus' superiority to Jewish traditions. The section of Hebrews made up of 4.14-10.31 is most important for the examination of Christian Melchizedek tradition, as the author stresses the eternal High Priesthood of Jesus, based in the example of Melchizedek, over and against that of the Israelite priestly line.

Jesus and Melchizedek are presented as type/antitype in Hebrews, as in the example found in Hebrews 9 of the heavenly and earthly sanctuaries. Jesus is not necessarily above Melchizedek, in fact, "there are no statements in Hebrews that the priesthood of Jesus is superior to the priesthood of Melchizedek as there are statements that the earthly sanctuary is but a copy of the true one in heaven (8.5, 9.23-24), that the new covenant supersedes the old (9.6-10)... The attribution of 'eternity' to Melchizedek and his priesthood (7.3, 8, 15-16) sets him apart from the earthly realities and places him in the heavenly sphere."⁷⁶ Still, Melchizedek is both an historical and a heavenly figure, superior to angels, but inferior to the Son of God, *like* the Son of God, but *not* the Son of God. As Kobelski notes,

These similarities suggest at the very least that the descriptions of the redemptive activity of Jesus in Hebrews and Melchizedek in 11QMelch were part of a complex of ideas associated with the common understanding of salvation and the heavenly redeemer figure. In terms of a salvation that was yet to come,

⁷⁶ Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchiresha*, 126.

11QMelch presents Melchizedek as a figure who “embodied” the people’s hope for a definitive release from the bondage of evil; in terms of a salvation that has been accomplished, Hebrews presents Jesus as the one who actually brought about this release. The description of Melchizedek and his activity in 11QMelch could be viewed as a prefiguration of Jesus and his saving activity in Hebrews, if some relation between the texts could be established. 11QMelch exposes and clarifies the background form which NT concepts such as the description of Jesus’ activity are drawn. It seems impossible to determine whether or not the author of Hebrews was familiar with or even knew of 11QMelch; on any case, he was certainly familiar with a tradition about a heavenly redeemer and made use of its elements in the description of Jesus.”⁷⁷

Pearson concurs, suggesting that the characteristics assigned to Melchizedek in Hebrews “reflect[s] the existence of nonbiblical Jewish interpretative traditions on which its author draws, if only to subordinate Melchizedek to Christ[...].”⁷⁸

The role and personage of the Son of Man can be seen in a similar light. While the term is not the title of an expected apocalyptic figure in Jewish apocalyptic tradition, it is widely used as a title in the New Testament. Still, the visual associations of the figure of the Son of Man and the image of the enthroned figure speak to the influence of Jewish ideas and motifs. In the Similitudes of Enoch (*1 Enoch* 37-71) the Son of Man vision is presented as a background or foreshadowing for the coming of Jesus as an eschatological judge and the Son of Man. Similarly, in Daniel 7.9-14, the enthroned Ancient of Days, the one like a Son of Man, has been interpreted as a collective symbol of Israel, or as an individual angel, likely Michael, who is so often equated with Melchizedek in the literature of Qumran. In fact, Collins suggests,

Michael, Melchizedek and the Prince of Light were three names for the same figure, and that the dualism of the princes of light and darkness was already laid out in the Testament of Amran in the middle of the second century BCE. This dualism involved a significant development beyond what is found in the book of Daniel, but shared with the older apocalypse the expectation of deliverance by the

⁷⁷ Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchiresha*, 128-129. The similarities between Jesus and Melchizedek and their role(s) as redeemer is a theme that recurs in the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, perhaps demonstrating that this confluence of depictions of the apocalyptic soteriological remained unresolved centuries after Hebrews was written.

⁷⁸ Pearson, “Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism,” 179. The nonbiblical Jewish tradition that Pearson refers to includes the writings of Philo, the Jewish apocalyptic literature such as the Enochic texts, and the tradition found at Qumran.

hand of an angel. Quite apart from Qumran dualism, we also find an angelic deliverer in the *Testament (Assumption) of Moses*, around the turn of the era... These angelic saviours are not properly called messiahs, as they are not anointed and in any case are not human figures. They are, however, immediately relevant to the development of traditions relating to the Son of Man.⁷⁹

The *Melchizedek Apocalypse* from Nag Hammadi is illustrative of apparent formative connections to Hebrews, as can be seen in the author's juxtaposition of Melchizedek and Jesus. But there are other influences that clearly "derive directly from Jewish apocalyptic speculation, unmediated by Christianity. They can be seen in the depiction of Melchizedek in an eschatological role as a heavenly 'holy warrior,' a heavenly 'high-priest' who does battle with demonic forces."⁸⁰ The visionary revelation in the third part of the text, a key passage is damaged, but tells of Melchizedek as the heavenly High Priest, victorious over the evil archons, as he is greeted by heavenly figures. The "prince of the host" or "commander-in-chief" (ἀρχιστρατηγός) is called Jesus, ultimately identifying Melchizedek with the Christian saviour.⁸¹

Melchizedek presents additional secondary features, especially cultic practices in keeping with Melchizedek's traditional priestly role. Prayers introduce and invoke divine beings, serve as offerings to God, hymns and aid in the rite of baptism.⁸² Melchizedek is presented as the "paradigm for the Gnostic initiate in his reception of the sacrament of baptism. We have here a convergence of (originally non-Christian) Sethian ritual with Christian sacramental theology and practice. The tractate as a whole is generically an apocalypse infused with Christian traditions and strong influence from the epistle to the Hebrews, together with pre-Christian Jewish speculations on the figure of Melchizedek".⁸³

⁷⁹ Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 176. Cf. G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 28-31.

⁸⁰ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 111.

⁸¹ *Melchizedek* 18.5. Cf. Daniel 8.11 and the Septuagint description of Michael as ἀρχιστρατηγός.

⁸² *Melchizedek* 5.24-6.14, 14.15 and 16.6.

⁸³ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 114. C. Gianotto, "Quelques remarques à propos de Melchisédek (NHC IX, 1)," in M. Immerzeel and J. van der Vliet (eds.), *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies, Leiden, 27 August - 2 September 2000*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 2004), 1:739-748; J.-P. Mahé, "La figure de

2.2.6. CONCLUSION

As the Melchizedek tradition developed, so to did variant portrayals of his precise role. In 1Q202, as in the original story in Genesis, he is the vague, undeveloped figure: the king, and High Priest of El Elyon who offers Abram food and drink. 11QMelchizedek, in contrast, presents a much more elaborate and specific characterization. At this point in the trajectory, Melchizedek was an apocalyptic hero, a superior being who offered judgement and punishment at the end of time. While not described as a priest, of God Most High or anyone else, in this example from Qumran, since the author of 11QMelchizedek would almost definitely been aware of the tradition of Melchizedek in earlier texts, the biblical references at the very least. Therefore it seems likely that his position as the priest described in Genesis and Psalms would have been assumed.

The Qumran texts can aid in the analysis of Melchizedek's appearance in the Epistle to the Hebrews, regardless of whether or not the Epistle's author was familiar with them. At Qumran, he was seen as the supernatural saviour who would intercede and battle Satan. In Hebrews, he is the archetypal priest, both historical and heavenly, and an understanding of his priesthood was meant to provide insight into the priesthood of Jesus. In 11QMelchizedek he is the saviour who is yet to come at the end of days, whereas in Hebrews, Jesus is the saviour who *has* come and redeemed humanity.

While they are both supernatural, soteriological figures, in Hebrews, Jesus is, unsurprisingly, the higher of the two. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* offers evidence of the continuity of this tension between the two figures. Initially, as the receiver of the message of salvation from a heavenly intercessor, Melchizedek is in the relatively inferior role, in keeping with his position in Hebrews. But the end of the text it is less clear, owing to the many lacunae in the single preserved

Melchisédek dans le codex IX de Nag Hammadi," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* (2000), 259-294.

version, but there is the possibility that he then assumes a role more in keeping with 11QMelchizedek, as he is heralded as the one who has overcome Death.

Whether he is an historical figure or rhetorical device, Melchizedek has remained a character of some importance in the Jewish and Christian literary and legendary trajectories. From a relatively insignificant beginning, as a briefly encountered minor character in Genesis, the traditions surrounding the role and position of Melchizedek developed, primarily, along apocalyptic lines. He became an eschatological figure: a judge, an immortal and indispensable aid to salvation, a priestly prototype and a warrior in the heavenly battles to come, developments that would impact later portrayals, in particular, his appearance in NHC IX, I. That he is “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, [and] resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever,” sets the stage for the Sethian imaginings that emphasize and continue the exploration of Melchizedek’s divine soteriology.

2.3. THE *MELCHIZEDEK APOCALYPSE* AS A CASE STUDY

2.3.1. INTRODUCTION

Having examined the arguments of Williams, King and Smith, along with establishing the Sethian, apocalyptic and Melchizedek trajectories and the geographical and historical background location, Egypt, I will employ the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* as a way of testing the applicability of these positions. The relatively orthodox anti-docetic theology found in the document leads to the conclusion that *Melchizedek* is clearly a Christian text, albeit one filled with obvious Jewish apocalyptic elements. Pearson suggests that it can be called “a Jewish-Christian product containing an originally pre-Christian Melchizedek speculation overlaid with Christian christological re-interpretation.”¹ This re-interpretation is sourced in Hebrews, particularly in Hebrews 7.3, the likely starting point for all Christian theological speculation about Melchizedek. The *Melchizedek Apocalypse* represents Melchizedek’s only appearance at Nag Hammadi, but it is one of some significance.

2.3.2. SYNOPSIS OF THE TEXT

Employing characteristic motifs of the literary genre, *Melchizedek* (NHC IX.1, lines 1.1-27.10) is an apocalypse, with the plural form of the Greek term $\Delta\text{Π}\text{Ο}\text{Κ}\text{Α}\text{Λ}\text{Υ}\text{Ψ}\text{Ι}\text{Σ}$ ($\acute{\alpha}\text{π}\text{ο}\text{κ}\acute{\alpha}\lambda\upsilon\psi\text{ο}\text{ι}\varsigma$) appearing at 27.3. It is pseudonymous, attributed to a past biblical hero, in this case Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High and king of Salem, whom Abram meets in Genesis 14.17-20. Additionally, it contains prophecies regarding future events delivered by an angelic intermediary and visions of the heavenly world and access to its secrets. It is presented in three sections: (1) a revelation to Melchizedek by the angel Gamaliel (1.1-14.15); (2) ritual actions performed by Melchizedek (14.15-18.11?); (3) additional revelations delivered to Melchizedek by other angelic messengers (18.11?-27.10).

¹ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 34.

Due to the damage to the first page of the codex, the beginning of the text is somewhat unclear, but it seems to contain a vocative address to Jesus Christ from Melchizedek. It then moves on to a description, likely from the angel Gamaliel, of the future ministry, death and resurrection of the saviour. The activities and teachings of the saviour will anger Death, personified as in the *Testament of Abraham*, and his fellow evil archons, the world-rulers. The saviour will be punished based on false charges, but will rise from the dead on the third day.² As part of the overall prophecy, Melchizedek is shown the appropriate high-priestly activities, and his own actions after the death and resurrection, as well as a very fragmentary section that seems to deal with the activities of the elect community, the congregation of Seth (5.19-20).

Following invocations to other inhabitants of the heavenly realm, there is a theogonic passage (9.2-10) that discusses the origins of the gods/archons/angels of the lower world, and contains a listing of biblical figures.³ The section ends with a typically apocalyptic instruction not to reveal the information, except to the initiated, presumably those in the congregation of Seth.

The second section contains Melchizedek's first person reaction to the heavenly revelation. He rejoices and gives thanks to the heavenly world, then performs an act of self-sacrifice through baptism and through the act of confession professes his faith (18.10-11). Moreover, the rite of baptism serves as the official reception and consecration of the name "Melchizedek." These ritual actions are followed by further invocations to the divine world, repeating the names of those already invoked and possibly adding others, the text being too fragmentary to know for sure.

Again, much of the text is lost, so the actual end of the second section and the beginning of the third is unclear, but 19.1 likely marks the beginning of the second

² This description of the suffering of the saviour goes against what is supposed to be the "typically gnostic" device of docetic denial, stressing the *reality* of the incarnation, suffering and death of Jesus.

³ In his introduction to the text, Pearson suggests the possibility that the invocation may be a secondary addition to the text. See B. E. Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X* (Leiden, 1981), 23.

revelation. It includes a further discourse with the heavenly intermediaries (19.2-26.7) and a speaker addressing an unknown group (25), delivering accusations of violence against the unknown audience. The speaker is identified as Jesus in the following lines, as he discusses his crucifixion and resurrection, while charging his listeners with the responsibility for his death. The audience of executioners is likely the archons, the instigators of evil in the world.

Pages 25 and 26 of the text are missing a great deal of material, a particularly unfortunate lacuna since Melchizedek is greeted by the heavenly beings and lauded for *his* victories over his enemies. The text seems at this point to be emphasizing Melchizedek's redemptive role. So although there is acknowledgement of Jesus' life, suffering, death, resurrection and overall victory, and the struggles of the community against the archons, *Melchizedek* seems to infer that the victory of Jesus Christ is, in fact, Melchizedek's victory.⁴ This duality associated with Melchizedek is also present in 2 *Enoch*; he fulfills a double role as both the recipient of eschatological revelations and the eschatological saviour-priest.

2.3.3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

According to Carl B. Smith and some other specialists, Egypt, in the years following the Jewish revolt under Trajan (115-117 CE), was likely the historical milieu that served as the source for *Melchizedek* and many other Nag Hammadi texts.⁵ With this assumption as a starting point, the second century was a period of great change, as well as the temporal period in which Christianity set its canon of scriptures (at the end of the second century), and really began the task of normalizing and creating an accepted "orthodoxy" of practice. The first and second centuries witnessed three failed Jewish revolts and dealt a deathblow to Jewish apocalyptic imaginings and messianic

⁴ Cf. 2 *Enoch* 71.29-36.

⁵ Smith, *No Longer Jews*; Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*; Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, for example. In the case of *Melchizedek* in particular, see Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 39-40, W.-P. Funk, J.-P. Mahé and C. Gianotto, *Melchisédek (NH IX,1): Oblation, baptême et vision dans la gnose séthienne* (Laval, Qc., Leuven and Paris, 2001), 55; Pearson, "Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism," 200.

expectations. The representative literature of the period was used to express theological speculation, developed according to societal and religious necessity. Jewish and Christian texts were used variably as legitimation for political and religious propaganda, and to fulfill a socially perceived need for justice, transforming for example, from a vision of messianic prosperity to one focusing on and responding to expectations not being met.⁶

Melchizedek may have originated within a particular community of “Melchizedekians” as described by Epiphanius (*Haereses* 55), possibly a branch of a sect founded by the Egyptian monk, Theodotus the Banker (see above 5.2.2.1.). The specific criticisms leveled against the group in the heresiologist’s writings are for the most part found in one form or another in *Melchizedek*. Pearson notes “there is... enough evidence to suggest that our tractate emerged from a ‘Melchizedekian’ sect very much like the group described by Epiphanius,” with further influence coming from a Sethian source.⁷ A determination of a more exact historical context is part of the goal of this work.

2.3.4. TEXTUAL ISSUES

As already noted, unfortunately, but not uncommonly, the text of *Melchizedek* is very fragmentary. Of the approximate 745 lines that originally made up this portion of Nag Hammadi Codex IX, only 19 are completely extant, with another 467 lines left partially preserved and 199 completely restored through scholarly conjecture, marking only 47 percent of the text as truly recoverable.⁸ Because of this, we have access to only an incomplete picture of the contents and meaning of the text; so many interpretations are possible. Due to its laconic nature, interpretations of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* of necessity take the form of suggestions rather than certainties. Furthermore, the number of lines on each page varies, making reconstruction all the more difficult. The pages of the

⁶ 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch are apocalyptic literary responses to the destruction of the Second Temple (see above, 2.2.4. and 2.2.5).

⁷ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi IX and X*, 39.

⁸ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi IX and X*, 19.

document were numbered in antiquity, and it seems to have been written in its entirety by one scribe.

Codex IX itself is made up of three tractates, all from the hand of a single scribe, of which *Melchizedek* is the first.⁹ The second text, the *Thought of Norea*, is a hymn or psalm, featuring such elements as the presence of a heavenly pleroma, hostile archons and the ineffable Father of the All. It is a salvation document, with a story similar to that found in the *Hypothesis of the Archons*, featuring Norea, the daughter of Adam and Eve and the wife/sister of Seth. Due to this connection, *Norea* is placed amongst the indirect Sethian texts (see above 1.2.7.1. and 1.2.7.3.). It likely dates to the early third century CE, and is indicative of diverse influences and presents a syncretism of a number of systems.¹⁰

The third text in the codex is the *Testimony of Truth*, a homily analogous in form to the Epistle to the Hebrews and featuring a “radical encratism” that takes the form of the total rejection of Jewish Law.¹¹ Although there is no complex mythological system included, the presence of the pleroma and other elements demonstrates similarity of motif between some Sethian texts and the *Testimony of Truth*. It likely originated in Alexandria in the late second or early third century.¹²

2.3.5. SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH TO DATE

In the discussion of categorization and the term gnosticism, my focus was centered on the three texts discussed above (1.1.): Williams’ *Rethinking Gnosticism*, King’s *What is Gnosticism?*, and Smith’s *No Longer Jews*. All three raise and examine

⁹ Pearson notes that other than some inconsistencies in the use of superlinear strokes, self-corrected errors and some ambiguity in the use of articulation marks, the work of the “scribe is remarkably accurate and obviously practiced.” *Nag Hammadi IX and X*, 12-13. He describes the language of the codex as “Sahidic, but an “impure” variety of the Sahidic dialect which shows considerable contamination or influence from other dialects.” *Nag Hammadi IX and X*, 15.

¹⁰ Cf. Pearson, *Nag Hammadi IX and X*, 87-93. Note that the titles of both *Norea* and the *Testimony of Truth* are editorial constructs drawn from the texts themselves, rather than ones applied in Antiquity.

¹¹ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi IX and X*, 102.

¹² Cf. Pearson, *Nag Hammadi IX and X*, 101-120.

the problems associated with the designation gnostic and suggest alternatives to better explicate the texts and worldviews lumped under that label. They are also important sources for discussions of origin and issues of dating and provenance. In concert with the trajectory theory posited by Robinson and Koester (see above, Introduction 0.), they provide the framework for my examination of *Melchizedek* and its context.

The most comprehensive examinations of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* have been done by the authors of the official versions of the text: Birger A. Pearson in English, Hans-Martin Schenke in German, and Wolf-Peter Funk, Jean-Pierre Mahé and Claudio Gianotto in French. The three versions offer translations from the original Coptic and commentaries on the text, along with conjectural restorations of many of the corrupted lines. Pearson's work in the general field of Egyptian Christianity offers great insight into the innovations of the early Church in Egypt.¹³ John D. Turner provides examples and characteristics of Sethianism and issues of Platonic influence. Additionally, Fred L. Horton Jr.'s *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews*,¹⁴ while not mentioning *Melchizedek*, and Claudio Gianotto's *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia: Tradizioni giudaiche, cristiane e gnostiche (sec. II a.C. – sec. III d.C.)*,¹⁵ more exhaustively, give a comprehensive overview of much of the work done on the figure of Melchizedek until the end of the 1970's.

Thus far, the research surrounding Melchizedek has focused on the evolution of the character and its theological meaning in the context of Jewish and Christian messianic doctrines. I will expand this body of work to include the Sethian and Egyptian contexts of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*.

¹³ Cf. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity* and *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt*, and Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*.

¹⁴ Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*.

¹⁵ Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia*.

2.3.6. DATE AND PROVENANCE

Melchizedek likely originated in an Egyptian milieu, possibly in Alexandria or its environs. As speculations about the figure of Melchizedek were rife in Egypt in the early centuries of the Common Era, it was likely the location of at least the final redaction, in Greek, of the text. It is generally dated in the late second or early third century, with its burial with the other Nag Hammadi texts taking place in the second half of the fourth century. Other than the above-mentioned suggestions of a community of Melchizedekians, there is no speculation as to specific authorship, unlike many of the Nag Hammadi texts that were often ascribed to a particular teacher or school.

2.3.7. KEY QUESTIONS

Like other documents discovered in the last century the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* has remained a fairly enigmatic and understudied piece of literature, in large part due to its fragmentary nature. Nevertheless, the text remains a fruitful one, offering insight into different literary and theological trajectories that date at least as far back as the presumed date of burial, the second half of the fourth century CE. Using this difficult example as a case study, I will evaluate and join the discussion of the Melchizedek tradition and the arguments besetting the designation gnostic, including the contemporary debate on gnosticism as a Christian trajectory, attempting to place Sethian texts and Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions within the suggested reconstruction. Additionally, I will respond to King's key questions as to the hermeneutic strategies, the problems addressed through the document's use of rhetoric, and the desired ends of these rhetorical devices (see above, 1.1.).

2.3.8. THEORETICAL BASE AND IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

Using the above-described methodology and reference works as a starting point, I will present the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* and its associated revelatory, soteriological and Sethian elements as an important and unique example of the literature of the period. The document crosses many categorical lines, and can be seen as an example of both

apocalyptic and Sethian worldviews. Despite its fragmentary nature, the text offers some great insight into the over-lapping literary distinctions and complexities of ideology that characterized the first centuries of the Common Era.

As a soteriological figure, Melchizedek himself is a character of great importance, especially among the apocalyptic traditions of the monastic orders of Egypt, an actuality that needs emphasizing in the study of the apocalyptic trajectories of Jewish and Christian traditions. I intend to support these assertions through my examination of the text, its historical and social milieux, and the religious and literary traditions from whence it stemmed, while contributing to the ongoing discussion about issues of categorization and the search for origins.

2.3.9. EXEGESIS OF THE TEXT

The *Melchizedek Apocalypse* is a Coptic text, written in the late second or early third century CE, by a Sethian author. It presents Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of God Most High first seen in Genesis (14.18-20), as an apocalyptic and Sethian hero, assuming the authority of the character in order to present an understanding of the cosmos, reflective of both literary styles and their visions of this world and the next. Through the examination of this text I will place it within the various trajectories of Judaism, early Christianity and Sethianism, seeking to discover where the trajectories converge, diverge and run parallel. As *Melchizedek* can be seen as an example of the diversity of forms within the religious traditions of Egypt in Late Antiquity, it acts as an ideal test case.

In his commentary on the text of *Melchizedek*, Gianotto divides the text into its three logical sections, further dividing those sections into their composite parts. I have followed his breakdown of the text and used his headings and sub-headings as a guide for my exegesis.¹⁶

¹⁶ Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek* (translation from the French is mine). For a new English version of the Coptic text, see Appendix I.

2.3.9.1. THE REVELATION OF GAMALIEL (1.2-14.16)

The Lower Church

Announcement of the Coming of Jesus Christ, including the Teaching and Activities of Jesus and the Consequences Thereof (1.2-3.11)

Melchizedek, Jesus Christ, the Son of God...

1.1. The name Melchizedek appears on the first line of the text¹⁷ and provides both the title and the subject of the text. He is, of course, known from the biblical traditions presented in Genesis, Psalms and Hebrews, along with various pseudepigraphal, rabbinic and polemical writings. He is known in both his kingly and priestly capacities, although from the text to follow, it is the latter that will claim the totality of attention.

1.2. Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is invoked in the second line, possibly as a vocative address to introduce the prayer to follow, as seen also in *Pistis Sophia* 61.

1.5-11. The speaker, likely the angelic intermediary Gamaliel¹⁸, offers to tell of the nature of the aeons, the world-rulers or archons seen in many cosmologies, while presenting himself as a friend and brother to the recipient, Melchizedek. The notion of “putting on” these things as a garment (9) evokes both the process of priestly investiture and more docetic ideas found in other systems which suggest that Christ wore his human body like a garment to be discarded when no longer needed.¹⁹ As can be seen further along in the text (5.6-7) *Melchizedek* is presenting an anti-docetic perspective on the person of Jesus, so the former suggestion, that the imagery of the donning of a garment is related to a priestly milieu, is the likelier interpretation. This harbinger of a cultic scenario and priestly investiture will be resumed later, and play the central role in the second part of the text.

¹⁷ Cf. also 5.15, 12.10, 14.16, 15.9, 19.3, and 26.3.

¹⁸ See below 5.18 for the introduction of Gamaliel as the speaker.

¹⁹ Cf. for example the Valentinian *Gospel of Truth* 20.28-29 that describes Jesus as “having put off the corrupt rags, he put on incorruptibility.”

The address “O brother” (11) suggests an equality, or at least an affinity, between the speaker and the recipient. If Gamaliel is the speaker this suggests an equation of the heavenly mediator with the earthly priest, and speaks to Melchizedek’s importance in the events to come. The address, and the prayer which contains it, could also originate with Jesus himself, addressing Melchizedek as coeval to coeval, as the Spirit, or heavenly double to Jesus’ earthly role and presence, as seen in *Pistis Sophia* 66 where the Spirit calls to Jesus on earth as “my brother.” Though both arguments have validity, especially in light of the ultimate revelations and Melchizedek’s “relationship” with Jesus, I think that in this part of the text, Gamaliel is the more likely speaker.

1.18-2.2. This assertion of Gamaliel as the speaker is, I think, supported by the lines that follow, as he tells of one to come in the future, who will reveal truth and speak in proverbs, parables and riddles. This person to come is clearly Jesus.²⁰

Death will tremble and be angry...

2.4-10. The coming one will also cause personified Death himself to tremble in fear and anger, a feeling shared by his fellow negative spirits, as described as world-rulers, archons, principalities, authorities, male and female gods, and (presumably evil) archangels. These principalities and authorities suggest political designations and so earthly foes, but the list overall tends toward the supernatural in its language. The authorities of Ephesians 6.12 are not of flesh and blood, but “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”²¹ The female and male gods evoke a Hellenistic, Roman or traditional Egyptian pantheon, or the pairings of the archons in other developed Sethian systems, rather than a typical Jewish or Christian imagining of the cosmos. In addition to being personified as in 1 Corinthians 15.26, Death can be seen as the functional equivalent to the Jewish “angel of Death,” Samael, who is a separate entity from Satan.²²

²⁰ Cf. Matthew 13.34-35, Mark 4.33-34 and John 16.25, for examples of Jesus speaking in proverbs, parables and riddles.

²¹ Cf. also Ephesians 1.21, 3.10; Colossians 1.16, 2.15, 2.10; 1 Corinthians 15.24, and Romans 8.38, that suggest both natural and supernatural enemies to be conquered.

²² Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 44, n. 2.5; Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek*, 118.

2.16-26. The lies told against the saviour by the evil archons or world leaders evoke the false prophets of Mark 13.22, who “will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect” at the end of time.²³ The “hidden” religious mysteries again suggest the Sethian nature of the text.

They will bury him quickly...

3.3-11. The coming experiences of the saviour are further outlined here, specifically pertaining to his death and resurrection, along with the lies told by the “lawyers” (if we accept Person and Giversen’s reading and restitution ΝΑΙΚΟ[ΛΟΓΟΣ])²⁴ who will bury him and slander him after death. Charges of impurity and impiety speak to a Jewish reference here, as does the practice of burying the body quickly.²⁵ When added to the title “lawyers,” if it is taken in the sense of those who follow the law or word,²⁶ there may be the suggestion here of an anti-Jewish bias, as appears in the canonical tradition as well as the writings of some of the early Church Fathers, as regards the arrest, trial and execution of Jesus. If so, this anti-Jewish – or at least anti-Demiurge – theme can be seen as representative of a typically demiurgical convention that diminishes the importance of the earlier traditions, or does away with them altogether.²⁷

Lines 7-11 can find parallels in New Testament tradition, with the practice of vilifying those who come with messages from the higher realms. John the Baptist is called a “demon” for neither eating nor drinking (Mathew 11.18) while the Son of Man is accused of being a “glutton and a drunkard,” when he is seen to eat and drink (Matthew 11.19; Luke 7.34). Of great importance in establishing Jesus as the one to come, is the

²³ Cf. Matthew 7.15; Revelation 16.13 and 20.10.

²⁴ Schenke too adopts this interpretation. Funk reads ΝΑΙΚΔΙ[OC] and Mahé translates it as “les just[es]” (*Melchisédek*, 68).

²⁵ Cf. John 19.38-42, for example, and Deuteronomy 21.22-23 regarding the necessity of immediate burial and the rituals involved.

²⁶ Alternatively, “the righteous” could be Jesus’ disciples. Cf. Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek*, 118-119.

²⁷ Such a rejection of Jewish antecedents is common in the gnostic writings, as well as in some of those found in the “normative” tradition of early Christianity, produced as a means of distancing the newer groups from their Jewish origins in the face of persecutions. Cf. Mark 10.33-34, 8.3; Matthew 20.28-29; Luke 18.32-33, 9.22.

reference to the resurrection after three days, a key motif in the Christian mythos, repeated in this context.²⁸

The Diffusion and Distortion of the Doctrine (4.2-5.17)

4.2-6. This section of the text likely refers to expected post-resurrection revelations and instructions offered to the disciples, as can be found in other examples of dialogue literature, the *Gospel of Mary* being an obvious example, as well as the New Testament traditions of Jesus' appearances after death, like those found in John 20.19-21.23.

Those in the heavens spoke...

4.7-10. These lines, and presumably at least part of the remainder of the page which is lost, make further reference to the hostile powers of the heavens and the earth and those below the earth that will speak against the saviour and offer false information to the elect.²⁹

5.1. The opening line of page 5 offers a continuation of the missing 16 lines of the previous page, indicating that the spreading of Jesus' teachings and the distortion of his message and the reality of his time on earth continued for the missing parts of page 4.

They will say of him that he unbegotten...

5.2-11. In this section we have a specific listing of some of the lies that will be told against the saviour, including some concerns that are particularly anti-docetic, and so out of keeping with many "typically gnostic" theologies.³⁰ This rejection of docetism may be indicative of a desire to distance this text from other speculations about Melchizedek, such as those of Hieracas and the two Theodotus', writings that had been denounced as heretical.³¹ Gianotto suggests

²⁸ Cf. for example Matthew 17.22-23; Mark 9.31; Luke 24.7.

²⁹ Cf. Philippians 2.10; Revelation 5.3; Exodus 20.4.

³⁰ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 21.

³¹ Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.26.1; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 27.2.2, and above 6.2.1.

“cette polémique antidocète pose quelques problèmes à l’intérieur d’un texte qui manifeste, par ailleurs, des traits manifestement gnostiques... les principales solutions possibles se réduisent à deux modèles : le premier nie toute réalité objective à l’élément humain en Jésus Christ, si bien que son corps se présente comme pure apparence; le second accentue à tel point l’opposition entre les éléments divin et humain en Jésus Christ, qu’il nie l’existence d’une véritable unité personnelle entre les deux; ce qui est apparent, dans cette perspective, c’est moins le corps de Jésus Christ que l’unité divino-humaine du Sauveur.”³²

He then goes on to note that the author of *Melchizedek* chooses neither of the “gnostic” options when solving the christological issue, instead taking the anti-docetic stance of the “Larger Church,” as a solution to the question.³³

The accusations levelled at the saviour, and their contradictions are familiar from canonical biblical tradition, appearing in many places and in similar, if not identical, forms.³⁴

That he did not rise from the dead...

5.11-13. Those of the tribes and peoples who hear the truth as Melchizedek will deliver it to them will then speak the truth in their turn. The people referred to here are the elite children of Seth (see below 5.20).

You yourself, O Melchizedek, Holy One, High-Priest...

5.14-17. Melchizedek is invoked as the Holy One, the high priest and “perfect hope,” charged with his first real task, the transmission of the heavenly message to the elect.³⁵ The “gifts of life” likely are meant to be both the ultimate triumph over Death and the awareness of the truth and the coming redemption of the chosen people to whom Melchizedek will reveal the message as it has been revealed to him.

³² Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek*, 121, 122. The first solution is similar to the views of Marcion and the Valentinians (122) while the second option is Platonic in origin (123).

³³ Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek*, 125.

³⁴ Cf. Matthew 11.19; Luke 24.39-43, 2.21, 24.46, 22.63-24.12; John 1.14, 19.1-10; Romans 8.3; Philippians 2.7; 1 Timothy 3.16; Hebrews 2.14; 2 John 7, and so on.

³⁵ Cf. 12.10-11, 15.9-10, 15.12-13, 19.13-14, 26.2-4; Hebrews 5.10, 6.20, along with Genesis 14.18 and Psalm 110.4.

The Higher Church and the True Priesthood

Invocation of the Upper World (5.17-6.22)

Gamaliel who was sent...

5.18. Gamaliel describes himself as the messenger sent to communicate the revelation to Melchizedek. Although it is a reconstruction, the presence in the extant text of the letters $\text{I}\text{H}\Lambda$ makes Pearson's supposition likely.³⁶ Gamaliel appears in other Sethian literature in much the same role. In the *Apocalypse of Adam* (75.23) he will "descend and remove those people from the fire and wrath" along with Abraxas and Sablo.³⁷ He is listed among the emanated attendants in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (64.15), and again with Samblo and Abraxas, with the addition of Gabriel to the company of the four luminaries (76.17).³⁸ Further on in the text he will mention that he is not alone (12.1) and the presence of Gamaliel and his fellow angels in other literary examples may be seen here as well. His "brethren" – likely those "who belong to the generations of life" (27.7-10) – are not named, but it is possible that the author of *Melchizedek* may have been thinking of the accompanying heavenly emissaries named in other tractates.

To the congregation of the children of Seth...

5.19-23. This section identifies the congregation of the elect, those to whom Gamaliel has been sent and with whom Melchizedek will share the divine revelation, as the

³⁶ While the appellation "Gabriel" is also possible, Pearson notes that there are not enough letter spaces in the lacuna for the name of the biblical angel to be the best choice (*Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 22).

³⁷ I use Bentley Layton's translation from *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 59, here.

³⁸ In the version of the text found in Codex III, in his appearance at 64.26 his name is spelled "Kamaliel." Cf. also *Trimorphic Protennoia* 48.27; *Marsanes* 64.19; *Zostrianos* 47.2, and *Untitled*, chapter 8 in the Bruce Codex. Gamaliel, a Greek form of a Hebrew name meaning "reward of God," was also the name of a famous first century CE Palestinian rabbi (died c. 50 CE), a Pharisee, who taught the law to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22.3). Acts presents him as having been tolerant and peaceful, rejecting the cries of others in the Sanhedrin for the execution of Peter (Acts 5.34-36). The 'Rabban,' a leading sage of his time, at the least saw Christianity as a legitimate Jewish sect, but according to some early ecclesiastical tradition, was himself a convert who remained a part of the Sanhedrin to offer aid to his fellow Christians (cf. *Recognitions of Clement* 1.65-67). The use of the name may serve as an emphasis of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, despite the seeming critique of important elements of the law, the practice of sacrifice for example, or is, perhaps, indicative of an early Jewish-Christian origin for foundational elements of the text.

“children of Seth.”³⁹ In addition to being the reference that allows the text to be included among those called “Sethian” (see above 1.2.), 5.20 sets the stage for the description of the cultic expectations of the congregation, offering a glimpse into the nature, life and activities of the elect community, the likely intended audience of the tractate. The “thousands” and “myriads” of aeons find correspondences in other literature, including Revelation 5.11; Daniel 7.10, and *1 Enoch* 14.22, 40.1, 60.1, 71.8, where they variably act as a heavenly choir (Revelation) and the guards of the throne of glory (*1 Enoch* 71.8).

5.24. The invocation of the specific heavenly beings begins with a palindrome that is likely representative of an ineffable name of the supreme god, a mystical name like one used in magical texts. The Greek letters $\alpha\beta\alpha\beta\alpha$ are evocative of the Hebrew word for “father” (*abba*), an appellation commonly used for the highest, first principle of the Sethian pleroma ($\epsilon\iota\omega\tau/\iota\omega\tau$) or “Father.”⁴⁰ Gamaliel’s listing of the celestial company is a foreshadowing of the same invocation that will be performed by Melchizedek in his future priestly role (16.16-18.7).

O Mother of the aeons Barbelo...

5.27. The first of the aeons to be specifically mentioned is Barbelo, the Mother and first-born among them. Although the name itself is missing from the manuscript at line 27, Pearson notes that early photos show the letters $\overline{\Delta\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{B}}}$, with the overstrike indicating a *nomen sacrum*, which subsequently flaked off in the mishandling of the text.⁴¹ Barbelo is listed as the mother of all the aeons in the *Untitled* text from the Bruce Codex (chapter 2) and as the first born of the aeons in the *Apocryphon of John* II 5.5, while Irenaeus quotes Valentinus as placing her, as the mother, in the first Ogdoad (*Adversus Haereses* 1.8.5). In the *Gospel of Judas*, Judas recognizes Jesus as being from the “realm of Barbelo” $\text{ΠΑΙΩΝ } \overline{\text{ΝΤΒΔΡΒΗΧΩ}}$ (35.18).

³⁹ Cf. *Three Steles of Seth* 118.12-13; *Gospel of the Egyptians* 65.19-20, and *On the Origin of the World* 105.20-29.

⁴⁰ Cf. for example *Melchizedek* 7.5 ($\text{ΠΙΩΤ } \overline{\text{ΜΠΤΗΡΥ}}$) and the *Gospel of Judas* 50.14 (ΠΙΩΤ).

⁴¹ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 51, n. 5.27.

Splendid Doxomedon...

6.1. Splendid Doxomedon,⁴² “lord of glory,” appears in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III) as Domedon Doxomedron (41.14; IV 51.1), where Doxomedon is called the “eternal realm of the aeons (IV 53.1; III 43.9).”⁴³

O Glorious One, Jesus Christ...

6.2. Jesus Christ is included in the list as one of the heavenly host.

O Chief commanders of the luminaries...

6.3. The leaders of the “luminaries” invoked in the following lines are called “chief commanders” (ἀρχιστρατηγός), a title commonly associated with Michael the archangel.

Armozel, Oroiael, Daveithe, Eleleth...

6.4-5. Armozel/Harmozel appears in the *Apocryphon of John* (III) at 11.24; Oroiael at 13.19; Daveithe at 14.1, and Eleleth at 14.7, within listings of heavenly beings.⁴⁴

Immortal Aeon Pigeradamasas...

6.5-6. Pigeradamas is described as the man-of-light and immortal Aeon.⁴⁵

The good god of the beneficent worlds, Mirocheirothetou...

6.7-8. The “good god of beneficent worlds,” Mirocheirothetou, is found in the *Three Steles of Seth* 119.12 and 120.15 as Mirotheos.

Through Jesus Christ, the Son of God...

6.9-10. Gamaliel finishes this initial list with a proclamation of Jesus Christ.⁴⁶

⁴² In the manuscript both words have a superlinear stroke that designates them as a *nomen sacrum*, and perhaps a title.

⁴³ Layton’s translation (*The Gnostic Scriptures*, 106). Cf. Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 36.

⁴⁴ Variations on these names can be found in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.29.2.

⁴⁵ Cf. also *Apocryphon of John* II 8.34-35; *Zostrianos* 6.23, and the *Three Steles of Seth* 118.26, as the third of the names in the Sethian triad.

There has visited the One who truly exists...

6.11-14. He continues the invocation with a formulaic description of the supreme god, “similar to the following passage in Bruce Codex *Untitled*, ch.7, attributed to the prophet Phosilampes: ‘Those things which verily and truly exist and those which do not truly exist are for his sake. This is he for whose sake are those that truly exist which are secret, and those that do not truly exist which are manifest.’”⁴⁷ The suggestion in line 11 is that the “One” has visited the people already.

6.14. Abel Baruch is most likely not a reference to the familiar biblical figures of Genesis 4.2 and Jeremiah 32.12, for example, but rather an epithet of the supreme god.⁴⁸

6.15. The visit of the highest power (or his emissary) has the purpose of enlightening Melchizedek (the “you” of this line is in the singular form, so cannot represent the people as a whole) and offering the knowledge of the truth.

That he is from the race of the High-priest...

6.16-17. The truth includes the fact that Jesus is “from the race of the High-priest,” the race of Seth. This is evocative of Hebrews and the tradition that Jesus originated not from the Aaronic priestly line, but from the superior example of Melchizedek.

6.19-22. Gamaliel now suggests that the bad spirits are ignorant of the coming of Jesus and their ultimate destruction at his hands.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Pearson thinks that this invocation passage (5.24-6.10) is likely a secondary insertion. This is in keeping with his assertion that the text contains pre-Christian speculations about Melchizedek and a later Christian christological reinterpretation based in Hebrews.

⁴⁷ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 53, n. 6.12-14.

⁴⁸ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 53 n. 6.14.

⁴⁹ Cf. Luke 23.34; Acts 3.15, 17 and 13.27-28; 1 Corinthians 2.8-11; Hebrews 2.11-12, 5.17-20 and 27.7, for further evidence of both human and archontic ignorance regarding Jesus.

Living Oblation and Sacrifice (6.22-7.9)

6.22-24. Once again Gamaliel explains his purpose in revealing these things to Melchizedek, this time mentioning the truth in concert with the “brethren,” likely those already alluded to at 5.18, those of the “generations of life” (27.7-10).

He included himself in the living offering...

6.24-28. Jesus is revealed to be included in the living sacrifice that will also include the children of the race of Seth, Melchizedek’s people. This living sacrifice will replace the traditional burnt sacrifices of the Jews, no longer seen as effective in redeeming sins. Such rituals belong to the realm of the lord of Death (cf. 16.2), and with the new revelation new rituals will come into practice. As can be seen in Hebrews 9.1-10.18, 7.27, and 12-13, some early Christian writings attempted to institute this same distancing from the rituals of the Jews, most often as a response to persecutions. While the author of *Melchizedek* was obviously influenced by and beholden to Jewish traditions, especially those conventions stemming from apocalyptic literature, he seems to be suggesting a similar movement away from certain Jewish practices.

In the case of burnt offerings, by the time the document was written, of course, the Second Temple had been destroyed and the period of rabbinic Judaism well begun. Without the Temple, the traditional priesthood and its functions, especially those having to do with sacrificial offerings, were no longer required. The text is set in the time period of Melchizedek’s original life, the era recorded in Genesis, and looks far into the future for the advent of the saviour, through the use of *ex eventu* prophecy. In critiquing Jewish sacrificial practices, the author is attempting to retroactively demonstrate their ineffectiveness, while emphasizing the paramount nature of Melchizedek’s priestly example. This will help to bring about the events foretold in the revelation, and provide the (putative) basis for the Melchizedek/Jesus connection of Hebrews.

7.1-3. The true sacrificial offering will attempt to redeem the sins of unbelief, wickedness and past ignorance of the elect.⁵⁰

They do not reach the Father of the All...

7.4-5. These lines mark the beginning of a large lost section of the manuscript, and so therefore are unclear. It seems logical that “they” refers back to the sacrifices of cattle, reinforcing the suggestion that the old manner of making offering was ineffectual, never reaching the Father of the All, the ineffable highest god.

Melchizedek and Baptism (7.25-8.10)

7.27-28. The remaining lines of page 7 are mainly conjectural, and Pearson and Schenke have reconstructed them looking ahead to the theme of baptism that follows on page 8.

8.1-10. Although the word ΒΑΠΤΙΣΜΑ appears complete, for the most part, on line 2, the further references to baptism are reconstructions. It seems likely that this is the beginning of the charge to Melchizedek to perform the baptismal rituals that would prepare himself and his people for the coming events.⁵¹

The History and Destiny of the Elect Descended from Adam (8.28-14.9)

The Creation and Fall (8.28-10.9)

They were engendered out of the seed...

8.28-9.10. Prayers are offered to the offspring, the people of the world, to “humanity in general, viewed as the product of both heavenly and archontic powers.”⁵² Melchizedek’s

⁵⁰ In his introduction to the text, Pearson notes, “the paradigm for Melchizedek’s priestly work is the high-priestly work of Jesus Christ, and the influence of the epistle to the Hebrews is very much in evidence” (*Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 23).

⁵¹ The allusion to the “waters from above” is reminiscent of the baptismal tradition and Melchizedek’s role in the process as seen in the *Second Book of Ieu*.

⁵² Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 56, n. 8.28-9.3. Pearson views 9.2-10 as another secondary insertion, used to explain the existence and origin of the gods and angels of the lower world. “Such an

role as priest will include such intercessory prayers. The offspring of the archons and angels calls to mind the tradition of the Watchers of *1 Enoch* 7 and Genesis 6, the fallen angels/sons of God who take human wives and produce children, the “giants/Nephilim on the earth.” The seed from the Father of the All can be equated with the divine spark trapped in matter that is a foundational belief of many systems, as well as strengthening the connection of the line of the seed of Seth to the ineffable god.

9.25-27. This heavily damaged section of the text alludes to the “nature” of females, perhaps those women who mated with the heavenly beings and became mothers of the Nephilim, and the “bound” Adam. This is not the *true* Adam (cf. 15.24).

They trampled the Cherubim and the Seraphim with the flaming sword...

10.1-5. Nor is the true Eve spoken of here, those who ate of the tree of knowledge and trampled the Cherubim and Seraphim are not the Adam and Eve of the pleroma, those seen in *On the Origin of the World* 117.2 and 117.11, nor the “true man” of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* 96.33. The trampling of evil spirits falls as a task to the elect at the time of the eschaton as seen in the apocalyptic traditions of the *Testament of Simon* 6.6 and the *Testament of Levi* 18.12.⁵³ The removal of the flaming sword against Adam, as representative of all of humanity, is another apocalyptic convention, indicative of an eschatological hope of release from the bondage of sin and oppression.⁵⁴ In the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* 54.34, the glory of the Cherubim and Seraphim will fade with the Saviour’s encounter with the powers.

10.6-9. These lines continue the reference to Adam and Eve. The lacunae make interpretation difficult, but this passage is evocative of a violation of Eve by the world-rulers seen in *On the Origin of the World* 117.2-28. This rape produces offspring of the archons, including Abel (*On the Origin of the World* 117.16), which is in keeping with

account of origin is remarkably reminiscent of the ancient Egyptian myth of the procreation of the gods by the masturbation of the primal god Atum” (*Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 24).

⁵³ Cf. Psalm 91.13; Luke 10.19-20; Romans 16.20, for canonical examples of the trampling of personifications of evil. Death and the authorities, the evil archons, also face trampling in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* 97.6-7.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Testament of Levi* 18.10, for example.

the Sethian tradition that sees Seth, the third son, as the only true son of Adam and Eve and the origin of the elect or righteous of humanity.⁵⁵

The Elect Seed through the Ages (10.9-12.15)

10.17-28. This very damaged section of the text begins a description of the race of Seth, the people of Melchizedek (cf. 9.25 and 5.12). Those that exist with the hidden divine seed or spark (27-28) will renounce the archons and their associated evil, and by implication, be ready to accept the truth and redemption offered through the revelation.

For they are worthy...

11.1-12. What little extant text remains of page 11 emphasizes the worthiness of the humans of the line of Melchizedek, the sons of men, the great heroes and the disciples of the light.

But I will be silent...

12.1. Gamaliel passes the speaking duties to another emissary, saying “I will be silent.”

12.2-5. This new speaker is also from among the heavenly brethren who came down from the living God.

Of Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah...

12.7-8. The biblical figures Adam, Abel, Enoch and Noah appear as part of list, perhaps of the “great” ones of the line of Melchizedek or as “heroes of the past who functioned as priests.”⁵⁶ All the proper names have a superlinear stroke indicating *nomina sacra*, but unlike lines 6.14 and 16.19 the presence of Abel in this group is likely representative of the son of Adam, rather than an epithet of the high god. Line 9 is missing all but the letters X€I with superlinear stroke, which Pearson suggests may have made up part of the

⁵⁵ Cf. Turner, “The Gnostic Seth,” 36, and above 3.1.

⁵⁶ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 25.

name “Melchi,” traditionally given to Melchizedek’s father.⁵⁷ That Aaron is missing from the list could be a further example of the author’s movement away from the Jewish traditional priestly line.

Melchizedek, the Priest of God Most High...

12.10-13. Melchizedek, the Priest of God Most High, is once again referenced in company with his people, those women, and likely men, who are worthy of the message being revealed.

The End of Time (13.1-14.9)

These two who have been chosen...

13.1-3. Who the “two chosen” referred to here are actually meant to represent is unclear. Pearson suggests the two witnesses of Revelation 11.3-11, who are granted the ability to prophesy and the authority to “shut the sky” (11.6). They will never be convicted, regardless of time or place. In Gianotto’s opinion, this is “a literary *topos*... borrowed from Jewish and Christian apocalyptic tradition.”⁵⁸

13.4-8. This section uses the literary device of repetition of opposite states to emphasize the inviolability of the chosen two.

13.9-10. The negative spirits are described as existing above and below the earth, as manifest and invisible. The use of the word [ΝΑΝ]Τ[Ι]ΚΕΙΜΕΝΗ (10) evokes the Antichrist and the “lawless one” of 2 Thessalonians 2.3-4.

⁵⁷ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 63, n. 12.9. Cf. also Pseudo-Athanasius, *Historia de Melchisedech* (*Patrologia Graeca* 28, 525-526).

⁵⁸ “[O]n peut constater que l’auteur de *Melchisédek* utilise un *topos* littéraire (deux personnages, qui interviennent dans le combat final contre les forces du mal et, en particulier, contre leur représentant, l’Adversaire par excellence) tire de la tradition apocalyptique juive et chrétienne” (Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek*, 145).

They will make war...

13.11-16. These lines, further describing the evil archons, again use formulaic repetition of opposites, and reveal that they will wage war (15), bringing about the beginning of the eschaton.⁵⁹

13.16-28. The few fragments of these lines suggest that the war instituted against the many, the all, the elect race and every blow and evil action will be directed against the people of Melchizedek.

These will be confined in other forms...

14.1-3. Some of the people, those with weaknesses, will be trapped in other forms and punished. This is reminiscent of the traditions found in *Pistis Sophia* and the *Second Book of Ieu*, in which the souls of the Light are confined and held as punishment, either in the flesh or in the realm of Hecate.

These the Saviour will take away...

14.4-8. The Saviour will rescue the confined souls, and they will overcome everything, eventually witnessing the destruction of Death himself, as first mentioned at 2.5. This follows the tradition as seen in 1 Corinthians 15.26, which has Death as the last enemy to be destroyed; Hebrews 2.14, and 2 Timothy 1.10.⁶⁰

He will destroy Death...

14.8-15. These lines that mark the end of the first angelic revelation, follow a common apocalyptic and Sethian format as an injunction against revealing the message to anyone except those who are chosen to receive it. The speaker ends his revelation by reiterating that he was commanded to deliver the message and emphasizes its secret nature.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Cf. Revelation 11.7, 13, 5.3; Daniel 7.21; Philippians 2.10; Exodus 20.4 for correspondences with the use of "above and on the earth and below the earth," as well as references to the one who will begin the war.

⁶⁰ Cf. the tradition of Jesus' descent to the underworld, R. Gounelle, *La descente du Christ aux enfers: Institutionnalisation d'une croyance* (Paris, 2000).

⁶¹ Cf. the *Apocryphon of James*, where the admonition appears at the beginning of the text (1.20-25).

2.3.9.2. THE LITURGY OF MELCHIZEDEK (14.15-18.20)

Preface (14.23-16.16)

Thanksgiving for Sending Gamaliel as Envoy (14.23-15.7)

That which is hidden, do not reveal to anyone...

14.15-28. Having received the revelation in its entirety, Melchizedek arises and praises God, offering thanksgiving to the Father of the All for sending his envoy. He acknowledges the greatness of the gift, and the mercy shown in sending it to him, promising unceasing constancy.

You have sent the angel of light...

15.1-7. Melchizedek continues his thanks for the revelation offered by the angel of Light, from among the holy aeons/archons.⁶² He acknowledges his ignorance and now his deliverance from that ignorance through the revelation of the truth. He has been moved from a state of death to a state of life.

Affirmation of the Vocation of the High Priest (15.7-16.16)

I have a name...

15.8-14. He now self-identifies as the “true High-Priest of God Most High” in keeping with the traditions of Genesis, Psalms and Hebrews, but saying that he is the “image” of the High Priest, likely a reference to the type-antitype model of Melchizedek/Jesus in Hebrews. This ambiguity of exact role, whether or not he is *the* High Priest, will continue throughout the remainder of the text.

15.14-19. Melchizedek emphasizes the significance of the revelation, and what a great gift God has given by sending his messenger. “The angels that dwell on earth” (18-19)

⁶² Pearson suggests that the missing eight characters at the beginning of line 2 may have been the name “Gamaliel,” a further invocation of the angel of Light (*Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 67 n. 15.2).

may be a reference to the Watchers of Enochic tradition or among those that “dwell upon the earth” that were mentioned earlier (2.11, 4.9, 9.9 and 13.14).

15.22-23. These lines speak of the sacrifice of one “whom Death deceived.” As to the identity of the sacrifice, Pearson suggests Adam, citing Romans 7.11 and its allusion to Genesis 3.13. I tend to agree with Gianotto, that the lines represent a return to the polemic against the sacrificial cult of the Old Testament, as the theme is continued a few lines later.⁶³

When he died he bound them...

15.24-25. The binding of those whose natures “led them astray” is likely a reference to Satan and his followers, in keeping with traditions that see the evil beings imprisoned at the death of Jesus.⁶⁴

Yet he offered up sacrifices...

15.26-16.6. This section returns to the commentary on sacrifice and sacrificial practice (see above 6.24-28), suggesting that the sacrifices of cattle belong to Death and his demons. The author is again likely speaking against the traditional burnt offerings of the priesthood, here suggesting that while Melchizedek once preformed such offerings as right practice, with the reception of the revelation he can now see that those sacrifices meant nothing except a stronger tie with Death and his devices.

Oblation and Baptism (16.7-16.16)

I have offered up myself to you as a sacrifice...

16.7-11. Melchizedek now rights his previous wrongs, those done in ignorance, by offering himself and his people as living sacrifices to the Father of the All and his divine helpers. This seems to be following the commentary in Hebrews 9.1-10 and 7.27, in

⁶³ Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek*, 151.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Testament of Simon* 6.6; *Testament of Levi* 18.12; Isaiah 24.21-22; *1 Enoch* 31. This passage also calls the *Pistis Sophia* and *2 Book of Ieu* to mind, with the inference of being bound in natures or bodies that are the cause of misunderstanding and therefore wrong behaviour and practice.

which the high priest (Jesus) “has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of his people; this he did once for all when he offered himself.” Again, the author is reinforcing the connection between Jesus and Melchizedek, as well as making the distinction between more ambiguous.

I shall pronounce my name as I receive baptism...

16.12-16. These lines are in keeping with a ritual context, in particular the rite of consecration and the suggestion of baptism to come. The “perfect laws” reflect Psalm 19.7-9 and James 1.25. Pearson notes, “these ritual actions fit into a pattern that harks back to ancient Mesopotamian priestly-royal ritual, and which can also be seen to be operative in Jewish texts, most notably *T. Levi* 8, as well as Mandaean ritual.”⁶⁵

The Trishagion (16.16-18.17)

Holy are you, Holy are you, Holy are you...

16.16-23. These lines are the first in the section “adapted from the Trishagion in Isaiah 6.3, ascribed to the companies of angels in later Jewish literature and liturgy.”⁶⁶ The invocation “holy are you,” repeated three times, is offered to various inhabitants of the heavenly world, most of whom appeared earlier in the text (5.18-6.10). “The Father of the All” as a title is addressed first (17-18), and then named as Abel Baruch (19), as seen earlier in the text (6.14). Each invocation ends with “for ever and ever, Amen.” The “job description” and name of the one invoked is missing from line 22, but the letters $\bar{\alpha}\bar{\zeta}$ (23) are suggestive of mystical names such as those found in the *Pistis Sophia* 140 and the *Books of Ieu*.⁶⁷

16.24-27. Barbelo, the Mother of the aeons is invoked (5.27).

16.30-18.7. The first-born, Doxomedon, is the next on the list (cf. 6.1); followed by an unknown archon that Pearson suggests may be a variation on Pigeradamas (cf. 6.5-6) due

⁶⁵ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 26.

⁶⁶ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 70-71, n. 16.16-18.7. Cf. *1 Enoch* 39.12; *2 Enoch* 21.1.

⁶⁷ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 71, n. 16.23.

to the presence of the letters $\overline{\text{M}\overline{\text{A}}\overline{\text{N}}}$ at the end of line 17.4; Harmozel (17.8-9, cf. 6.4-5); the commander luminary, Oriael (17.11-12, cf. 6.4-5); the commander of the aeons, man-of-light, Daveithe (17.15-16, cf. 6.4-5); the commander-in-chief, Eleleth (17.18-19, cf. 6.4-5); another missing archon, possibly Akramas, as in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* 65.7 and *Zostrianos* 47.3 (17.24); the good god of the beneficent worlds, Mirocheirothetou (17.27-18.2, cf. 6.7-80);⁶⁸ and ending with the commander-in-chief of the All, Jesus Christ (18.5-6, cf. 6.9-10).

Final Exhortation (18.7-18.22)

18.7-11. There is the suggestion of the process of confession at lines 10 and 11, likely referring to Jesus as the “apostle and High Priest of our confession” as in Hebrews 3.1, or the confession of Jesus as Lord as in Romans 10.9. It is a profession of faith in Jesus, supporting the assertion that those who acknowledge his existence and accept his message will be blessed.

18.12-23. Much of the remainder of the page is damaged, but there is the suggestion of the ritual action of confession as a means to overcome the fear of the “great darkness” (18-19). The corruption of this page makes it difficult to determine where the second section ends and the third, the final revelation, begins.

2.3.9.3. THE REVELATION OF THE SONS OF THE GENERATION OF LIGHT (19.1-27.6)

The Confrontation of the Two Priesthoods (19.16-21.6)

19.1-9. 19.1 likely marks the transition to the second revelation. The reference to being “clothed” again suggests the wearing of a garment as at 1.11, and could be part of the act

⁶⁸ The superlinear stroke is missing from Mirocheirothetou, likely a scribal error.

of investiture within the priesthood. Alternatively, “they” could be Melchizedek’s religious opponents, those clothed in the flesh against whom he is later warned (27.4-5).

19.10-25. With Melchizedek invoked again, there is a return to the discussion of right practice. The notion of “disturbances” (10) again calls to mind *Pistis Sophia* Book 4 and the 2 *Book of Ieu* and the purposeful disturbance of the archons performed by Melchizedek and Ieu as a means of freeing the trapped souls and allowing for their ultimate restoration to the Father (see above 6.1). The implication of the differentiation of the levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Melchizedek is that the former have been “lead astray” (24) by Death and his minions.⁶⁹

20.1-7. The traditional functions of the Jewish priesthood – worship, prayers, offerings – are again dismissed as unnecessary in the true faith of the Father of the All.

20.10-26. The priesthood performed is the priesthood of the counsels of Satan, his doctrines, including sacrifice, are responsible for leading the people astray. This possible linking of the levitical priesthood to Satan would represent one of few truly dualistic elements to the text. The equation of traditional Jewish practice with evil is evocative of the negative demiurgical tradition of some systems. It is also in keeping with 1 Corinthians 2.6-8 and the rejection of the “wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to perish,” and 2 Corinthians 4.4, which says that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.”

The real corruption of the text begins here, with page 21 only having 6 partial lines remaining; page 22 much the same; page 23 is missing entirely, and page 24 has fragments of 2 lines. It seems likely that the missing text continued single discourse about the members of the heavenly realm, both the evil followers of Satan and the good beings who oppose them. The significant damage ends with an abrupt jump in speaking voice, to a first person account as told by Jesus Christ.

⁶⁹ Cf. Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek*, 158.

The Passion of Christ (25.1-14)

And you struck me...

25.1-7. Jesus accuses his demonic-archontic executioners, recounting what it was that they did to him, ending with the crucifixion from “the third hour of the Sabbath-eve until the ninth hour.” These lines demonstrate a strong connection with the canonical accounts of the crucifixion, having direct parallels in all four of the gospels and other New Testament literature.⁷⁰

And after these things I arose from the dead...

25.8-10. After the crucifixion Jesus arose from the dead. Pearson suggests the remainder of the lines can be reconstructed as “my body came out of the tomb into me” (ΔΠΔΩ)ΜΔ ΕΙ ΕΒ[ΟΛ 2]Μ [ΠΜΖΔΔΥ Ε2Ο]ΥΝ ΕΡΟΙ).⁷¹ This would indicate a reunion of Jesus’ body and soul after the resurrection, meaning that he appeared in the flesh.

25.11-14. This section seems to recount Jesus’ witnessing of the women at the tomb as they came to anoint the body and found it empty as in Luke 24.3.

Exhortation to Melchizedek (26.1-27.10)

They said to me “Be strong, O Melchizedek, great High-priest of God Most High...

26.1-4. The first lines of page 26 shift the perspective back to that of Melchizedek as he is addressed by the emissaries once again, greeted with his title and the apocalyptic holy war cry to “be strong.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Cf. Matthew 26.67, 27.30, 27.45; Mark 14.65, 15.19, 12.8, 15.25, 15.33, 33.42; Luke 22.63, 20.15, 23.44, 54; John 18.22, 19.3; Hebrews 6.6; 1 Corinthians 2.8. Note that the executioners are of the heavenly variety, rather than the earthly authorities, the Romans or the Jewish priests.

⁷¹ Differently Funk, who reads [λ...]ΜΔ ΕΙ ΕΒ[ΟΛ 2]Μ [ΠΧΙΣΕ Ε2Ο]ΥΝ ΕΡΟΙ, translated by Mahé as “[Mon...]-me revint d[es] [hauteurs ve]rs moi” (Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek*, 108-109). According to Funk, “l’espace semble manquer pour restituer ΔΠΔΩ)ΜΔ (Sch), à moins qu’on suppose une forme dialectale ΜΔΥΤ au lieu de ΜΟΟΥΤ” (ibid.).

⁷² Cf. Deuteronomy 31.6-7; Joshua 1.6-7, along with the *War Scroll* (1QM) 17.9 (“and you, the sons of His Covenant, be strong in the ordeal of God!”).

For the archons, who are your enemies made war; you have prevailed over them...

26.5-9. The enemy archons made war, the past tense indicating that the war is over and won by Melchizedek, the enemies destroyed in the eschatological battle.⁷³ The opponents are those previously named (2.5-11, 4.7-10, 10.5-11, 13.9-5, 15.18-25, 16.3-5 and 25.1-5), but since the good endured as in Hebrews 12, evil has been destroyed as in 1 Corinthians 24-25.

26.10-14. With the enemies, “those that exalted themselves against him,” destroyed, those things that are living and holy are redeemed. Here again we have the confusion of redeemers. While earlier on the page the emissaries are addressing Melchizedek directly and crediting him with the eschatological victory, the use of “him” at line 13 suggests a return to Jesus as the victor. This “twinning” of Melchizedek and Jesus is not completely unique to the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, and he is equated with the Holy Spirit in other early Christian writings.⁷⁴ Pearson suggests, “we are drawn to the conclusion that, in the revelation which the priest Melchizedek has received, he has seen that he himself will have a redemptive role to play as the suffering, dying, resurrected and triumphant Saviour, Jesus Christ!”⁷⁵ The suggestion of this future redemptive role again raises anachronistic issues, as Melchizedek is receiving these revelations in his time, the period of Genesis, but seems to be alive to witness the end of days, following the time of Jesus. This is evocative of the Enochic tradition that sees Melchizedek taken to heaven as protection from the Flood and returned to earth to fulfill his priestly vocation as messiah.⁷⁶

If this equation of Melchizedek with Jesus is tenable, the two revelations can be seen as progressive. The first foretells the life, suffering, death, resurrection and ultimate victory of Jesus, in addition to the struggles of the elect community against the evil

⁷³ Cf. Revelation 19.19.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Pistis Sophia* and above 5.2.2.2, regarding Hieracas, as well as such examples as the *Gospel of Thomas* for the “twinning” of Jesus.

⁷⁵ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 28.

⁷⁶ Cf. 2 *Enoch* 71-72.

archons. While it is a prophecy about distant future events, Melchizedek's projected role is as the high priest. The second revelation also describes the suffering, death, resurrection and victory of Jesus, but the victory has somehow become Melchizedek's victory. He is transported through his visionary experience to the future to witness that the dual role of Saviour/High Priest is his role to play. Whether this is indicative of an assertion that Melchizedek is incarnated in the future as Jesus, as is the case with Seth in some Sethian systems, or demonstrative of the elevation of Melchizedek that lead to the accusations of the heresiologists, or a device used to some other arcane purpose, is unclear. Regardless, there seem to be two Melchizedeks: the historical, biblical figure who is the recipient of the revelations, and the eschatological redeemer who is assimilated with Jesus Christ.⁷⁷

Pearson notes that the identification of Melchizedek with the Son of God and therefore with Jesus Christ took place among some early Christians, in particular those in Egypt. The *Apophthegmata Patrum* tells of an old visionary who calls Melchizedek the Son of God, and is corrected by Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria. The conflict at Scetis mentioned above, is another example.⁷⁸

27.1-3. These last lines before the final exhortation return the text to its ritual context, commending positive, proper offerings, baptism, prayer and fasting.⁷⁹

These revelations do not reveal to anyone in the flesh...

27.3-6. This final exhortation is a reiteration of the admonition found at the end of the first revelation (14.8-15) to not reveal the message to "anyone in the flesh," unless specifically charged with doing so. These fleshly beings are likely the worldly opponents

⁷⁷ This duality of role is paralleled in other apocalyptic literature, notably in the *Similitudes of Enoch* (1 *Enoch* 37-71) in which Enoch receives revelations about the Son of Man (46-49) and it is later revealed that he is the Son of Man (71.14). The long recension of 2 *Enoch* features three manifestations of Melchizedek, first in his miraculous birth before the Flood, then as the great priest after the Flood, and then as the messianic priest at the end of time. Cf. Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 30.

⁷⁸ See above 1.3.5.2.

⁷⁹ Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 55.8.1-2; 2 *Book of Ieu* 45-46.

(“those on the earth”) that have been referred to before (19.1-2), unworthy of the message and the redemption that it will bring.

2.3.9.4. EPILOGUE (27.2-10)

When the brethren who belong to the generations of life had said these things...

27.7-10. With this completion of their tasks, the “brethren of the generations of life” are recalled “to the regions above all the heavens,” leaving Melchizedek to deliver the message to his people and prepare for the coming of Jesus and, ultimately, the eschaton.⁸⁰

2.3.10. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF MELCHIZEDEK THE PRIEST

The character of Melchizedek as he appears in this text is multi-faceted and sometimes ambiguously presented. His roles can be broken down as follows:

(A) Melchizedek as the ancient priest of God Most High. In this role he addressed at least twice (12.10-11 and 19.14), offers animal sacrifices to the evil archons but is not referred to as the king of Salem. Characterized in this way, the Genesis account is the primary source, and there is no evidence of the influence of Psalm 110.4.

(B) Melchizedek as the eschatological High Priest. This role reflects his future activities, including such cultic activities as baptism and consecration, and the larger symbolic sacrifice that takes the place of the traditional burnt offerings. He acts as an intercessor, the mediator between this world and the higher realm, chosen to deliver the message to the community of the elect.

⁸⁰ Cf. Hebrews 7.26; Ephesians 4.10.

(C) Melchizedek as an eschatological holy warrior. Admonished to “be strong” (26.2), he is charged with leadership in the holy war. Victorious, he is congratulated for his endurance and victory over his enemies, including the hostile archons and angels, and is presented as a priestly warrior.⁸¹

(D) Melchizedek as saviour. Although ambiguous due to the damage to the text, the character Melchizedek seems to be equated with the character Jesus at the end of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*. This over-lap is an extrapolation of the tradition found in Hebrews, which presents a type/antitype paradigm of the two and their respective priesthoods, likely combined with the equation of Melchizedek and other heavenly beings, such as the Holy Spirit or the heavenly Christ archon, as found in extra-biblical literature i.e. the Nag Hammadi writings.

The commonality within these different characterizations of Melchizedek remains his role as priest and his functioning in that capacity. In his commentary on the text, Gianotto includes a table illustrating the parallels, or lack thereof, between the priesthoods of Jesus and Melchizedek.

The Priesthood of Jesus Christ	The Priesthood of Melchizedek
Jesus is descended from the race of the heavenly High Priest (6.16-19)	Melchizedek is the image of the true High-Priest (15.12-13); His priesthood descends from ? (20.12)
He offers a living sacrifice (6.25-26)	He offers a living sacrifice (16.6)
Jesus includes himself in the living sacrifice (6.26)	Melchizedek offers himself as a sacrifice (16.7)
To the All (6.27-28)	To the Father of the All (16.9)
With the offspring of Melchizedek (6.26)	Those of Melchizedek (“those who are my own”) are included in his sacrifice (16.8)
	Those who the Father of the All loves, those who emanated from him are included in his sacrifice (16.10-11)
	The sacrifice is offered for unbelief, ignorance and

⁸¹ Cf. Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 31-35.

	sins of wickedness (7.1-3)
The Passion and resurrection of Jesus are interpreted as the victory over the evil archons (15.24-26, 25.1-9)	Conflict with the evil archons and their destruction (26.2-9)
	Ascetic dimension (fasting: 27.2-3) ⁸²

The close similarities between the two priesthoods can be seen as supportive of the supposition that the author of *Melchizedek* meant to ultimately equate the two characters by the end of the tractate. While this is not completely clear from the extant text itself, Melchizedek seems to fulfill the main eschatological and salvific role in the war against the archons at the end of time.

Still, the dilemma can also be answered with the suggestion that the text is referencing two separate events: a victory in the heavenly realm and a victory on earth, as was seen in 11QMelchizedek. Accordingly, Melchizedek would be the victor in the war of the heavens, as Jesus would be on earth. In this case, while the two characters do not become one, there is a connection between the two, not unlike the type/antitype presentation of Jesus and Melchizedek in Hebrews. As it has been established that Hebrews was the most likely source for this christological reinterpretation of older Melchizedek speculations, this latter possibility is more viable than the former. A “twinning” of the characters Jesus and Melchizedek is more in keeping with the lack of radical dualistic elements evinced by the rest of the extant text.

2.3.11. CONCLUSION

Despite its readily apparent and significant conditional, the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* is an important example of the literature of the early centuries of the Common Era. The text crosses many categories, presenting both apocalyptic and Sethian perspectives, while demonstrating an awareness of the larger corpus of literature from the Old and New Testaments, the pseudepigrapha and the apocrypha. Even with its fragmentary nature, *Melchizedek* offers insight into the overlapping literary distinctions

⁸² Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek*, 162 (my translation).

of the first four centuries CE, and is illustrative of the points of convergence and divergence, and those that run parallel within the literary trajectories of late antiquity discussed above.

The Sethian Trajectory

There are some specific examples that place the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* within the tradition of Sethian literature, although they are few enough to place it in the sub-category of the Indirect Texts as described in the designation. The angelic intermediary, Gamaliel, offers a revelation to Melchizedek and charges him with repeating it to the congregation of the elect (5.20), the children of Seth, to allow for their ultimate redemption at the end of days.

Gamaliel, and revealer characters like him, also appears in other examples of Sethian literature like the *Apocryphon of Adam* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, in much the same role. In *Melchizedek* he offers knowledge of the divine pleroma, the world-rulers, archons or aeons, both the evil ones and those who are righteous. As seen above (1.2.5.), the existence of this higher plane is a defining component of the Sethian worldview. *Melchizedek* presents specific examples of the supernatural servants of the ineffable Father of the All, including Barbelo, Doxomedron and Pigeradamas, who can be found in other Sethian texts (the *Gospel of Judas*, *Zostrianos* and the *Three Steles of Seth*, for example).

The text emphasizes the primacy of the race of Seth (6.16-17) who, along with Jesus and Melchizedek specifically, will be offered as living sacrifices to the Father, taking the place of the offerings of traditional Jewish practice (pre-70 CE). The unknowable First Principle, the Invisible Father of Sethian tradition is invoked, as the burnt sacrifices are described as useless as a way into his favour, a clear movement away from former Jewish practices. Those who offer the burnt sacrifices, the Jews, are linked with Satan (20.10), connecting the god to whom they sacrifice with evil, as is the case in negative demiurgical examples.

Lines 8.28- 9.10 suggest that humanity is both heavenly, belonging first to the Invisible Father, and material, owing to the interference of evil archontic creative forces, in keeping with the demiurgical tradition. Despite this, *Melchizedek* does not necessarily present the material realm as corrupt, but instead describes the resurrection of Jesus as a resurrection of the flesh, an anti-docetic belief that is in contrast to the typical Sethian perspective. 14.1-3 is more suggestive of the negative duality usually encountered in the Sethian literature. Reminiscent of *Pistis Sophia* and the *2 Book of Ieu*, “weak” humans are trapped in material forms and punished, to be rescued by the saviour and act as witnesses to the destruction of Death.

The form is comparable to other Sethian apocalypses as the revealer warns against the repetition of the secret message to anyone other than the elite, the chosen children of Seth, but it is ambiguous as to the ultimate personification of the redeemer. Still, if both Jesus and Melchizedek are assumed to be either in the hereditary line of Seth, or as incarnations of him, *Melchizedek* retains its Sethian character and position among the Indirect texts on the Sethian trajectory.

The Apocalyptic Trajectory

There are many aspects of *Melchizedek* that can be considered apocalyptic, as I have defined it above (2.1.1.), beginning with the format that it follows. It is a classic example of a revelation dialogue between a heavenly messenger (Gamaliel and Jesus) and an earthly recipient of the revelation (Melchizedek). Gamaliel warns against interference from Death and the negative spirits, those of the pleroma, and those “principalities” and “authorities” (2.9) that may imply an earthly foe, perhaps political or religious opposition of some variety. The underlying implication of the text is that the false prophets and evil archons are acting directly against the chosen ones, the race of Seth, and may be indicative of dissatisfaction with the social realities of the time.

Melchizedek is charged, in his role as High Priest and as the leader of the children of Seth, with the transmission of the message to the elect, including the prophecy regarding the destruction of evil at the hands of the saviour (6.19-22). The revelation further takes the form of an *ex eventu* prophecy, with the messenger appearing in the time-period associated with the biblical figure, Melchizedek, that is, the time of Abram in Genesis. The forecasted events leading to the eschatological war are set far in the future, at the time (or thereabouts) of the composition of the text, well after the time of Jesus' ministry and execution.

The text contains other apocalyptic conventions: the "trampling" of the evil spirits (10.1-5) as also found in the *Testament of Simon* (6.6) and the *Testament of Levi* (18.10). By making Melchizedek the recipient of the revelation, the author is assuming the authority of the character as a legitimating tool, an action reinforced by the invocation of past heroes from biblical tradition, Adam, Abel, Enoch and Noah for example. Through his apocalyptic visionary experience Melchizedek is transported to the future to witness the events so that he can prepare for his coming role as the High Priest and saviour of the community of the elect.

Other examples of the apocalyptic nature of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* include the injunctions at the end of each of the revelations against revealing the message to anyone but the chosen audience, and the use of the commonly employed apocalyptic war cry, "be strong" (26.1-4) as seen in the War Scroll from Qumran (1QM 17.9). The war, instigated by the evil archons, ends in the victory of the savior and the redemption of all living things and the destruction of the enemies. The fragmentary nature of the text makes the identification of the saviour problematic, but the seeming identification of Melchizedek as the redeemer follows the apocalyptic convention of the recipient of the redemptive message becoming the soteriological hero, as in the example of 1 Enoch.

The Trajectory of Melchizedek Speculations

The *Melchizedek Apocalypse* perhaps adds most to the development of the Melchizedek tradition, and in doing so is unique among the Nag Hammadi documents. Beginning with the first line, the identification of the main character, if not actually the title, of the text. The invocation of the name of Jesus on the following line sets up the potential for tension between the two that was seen in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In contrast to Pearson's assertion that *Melchizedek* is a pre-Christian text with secondary redactions that add Christian motifs and characters,⁸³ Wolf-Peter Funk suggests "Il est hautement probable que l'auteur a lu l'*Épître aux Hébreux*, à laquelle il emprunte l'analogie fondamentale du Grand Prêtre céleste, Jésus Christ, et de sa figure terrestre, Melchisédek."⁸⁴

The implied affinity between the heavenly revealer (Gamaliel) and the receiver of the revelation (Melchizedek) is in keeping with the tradition of Melchizedek as an apocalyptic hero, as in 2 Enoch and 11QMelchizedek. Nor is the ambiguity of Melchizedek's exact role and nature (human priest or supernatural saviour?) surprising, given the diversity of positions, discussed above (2.2.4.), that he fills in earlier literary examples.

It is clear that he is charged with a priestly role in the coming events; as High Priest he performs baptism and offers prayers of thanksgiving and intercession, along with the transmission of the message of truth and the ultimate redemption. In the extant text's list of heroes of the past who acted as priests, Aaron's name is conspicuously absent, either as a result of damage to the codex, or as an intentional rhetorical device that served to distinguish the priesthood of Melchizedek (and Jesus) from that of the traditional Jewish priesthood.

⁸³ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 34.

⁸⁴ Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek*, 16-17.

While he described as having offered burnt sacrifices in ignorance, the new information is imparted through the divine revelation: that the Father of All does not demand the offerings, rather they are a device of Satan used to lead people away from true gnosis and ultimate return to the presence of the First Principle (19.24).

The possible “twinning” of Melchizedek and Jesus is in keeping with the type/anti-type model employed by the author of Hebrews, and employed for many of the same reasons. By making Jesus a priest in the line of Melchizedek rather than the levitical line, he is distanced from Jewish practice and belief. Whereas the ascendancy of Jesus is assumed in Hebrews, it is not as clear in *Melchizedek* who ranks higher in the supernatural hierarchy, and just whether or not they are different incarnations of the same divine being. If Melchizedek’s priority is assumed, there are parallels to the legendary traditions attributed to some early Egyptian monks (see above 5.2.2. and 5.4.).

Overall, Melchizedek’s role seems to be dual. As priest/messiah and historical figure/eschatological redeemer, he acts as an instrument of deliverance, as a messenger and as an active participant. Whether human or divine, the author of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* emphasized and developed his importance in keeping with the earlier texts of the tradition of Melchizedek speculation.

With the ways in which the literary trajectories overlap and diverge, and even allowing for the removal of gnosticism as a descriptive label, fixed categorizations like Sethian and apocalyptic are problematic. Discussing a text like *Melchizedek* as only one thing or another: Sethian, apocalyptic, Melchizedekian, Egyptian, is reductive and not at all indicative of the complexities exhibited by many of the texts written in Late Antiquity. Using Robinson and Koester’s trajectory theory, the suggestions of Williams and King pertaining to issues of categorization, and even Smith’s insistence upon the importance of origins, we can see that the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, extensively damaged though it may be, demonstrates the extent of the information about worldviews, theologies, origins and literary traditions still accessible in such texts.

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1. INTRODUCTION- WHAT THE *MELCHIZEDEK APOCALYPSE* CAN TELL US

Although *Melchizedek* offers a particular challenge for interpretation and analysis, enough of the text remains extant that it can clearly be seen as demonstrative of the paralleling, convergence and divergence of different trajectories of literature and history. While the physical deterioration of the text, a result of the centuries spent buried beneath the Egyptian sand, and the lack of initial conservation upon its discovery, means that any analysis of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* is of necessity a composite of educated guesswork, it, and other comparably problematic texts, remains valuable as a representation of a particular strand of Sethianism. According to Robinson, as scholars,

[we] should not be misled by such impediments to understanding into thinking that the stance inherent in these essays is unworthy of serious consideration. Rather, we have to do here with an understanding of existence, an answer to the human dilemma, an attitude toward society, that is worthy of being taken quite seriously by anyone able and willing to grapple with such ultimate issues. This basic stance has until now been known almost exclusively through the myopic view of heresy-hunters, who often quote only to refute or ridicule. Thus the coming to light of the Nag Hammadi library gives unexpected access to the gnostic stance as Gnostics themselves presented it.¹

The text can further inform our discussions of apocalyptic literature and the trajectory of Melchizedek speculations as found in Jewish, Christian and Sethian traditions. *Melchizedek* demonstrates the relevant commonalities and significant differences found in the earlier literature, changes that were reflective of alterations in belief and practice according to societal realities. Placing its composition within an Egyptian environment can provide clues to the conflicts and continuities of the religious traditions from which its author drew influence.

My interpretation and situation of the text is based in the use of these trajectories as paradigms for discussion, following the work of Robinson and Koester, and their

¹ Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 3.

emphasis on the need for the re-evaluation and restructuring of traditional categories. This issue is recognized, specifically, as it pertains to the category gnosticism by Williams and King, who offer possible solutions toward shift away from the use of the term altogether. Smith places less emphasis on the continuing discourse, focusing his study instead on the question of gnostic origins.

I have used these ideas in concert with Robinson and Koester's trajectory theory, taking up the challenge of the removal of the term gnosticism from scholarly dialogue, employing Sethian, one of Williams' sub-categorizations, as I define it above (1.2.) as an alternative. I have interpreted the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* within this framework, and by looking to the specific topics, language, motifs and themes found in each of the traditions I have described. In doing so, I have contributed to the discussion regarding issues of categorization and the quest for origins, while situating the text on each of the literary trajectories. This background contributes not only to an understanding of *Melchizedek*, but illustrates the value of the text as a witness to and example of the evolutions of each of the categories through the early centuries of the Common Era. This reciprocity of purpose demonstrates the importance of these texts in understanding the changing nature of the religious traditions of the time period.

3.2. THE SETHIAN TRAJECTORY

The connections to the Sethian literary trajectory are, at first glance, not very comprehensive. While there are commonalities in the implied mythology of *Melchizedek* with such Sethian texts as the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (10.1-5) and *On the Origin of the World* (10.6-9), the only explicit connection to the Sethian body of literature is the reference to the children of Seth at 5.20. But the implicit clues are enough to allow the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* its position on the trajectory, albeit as an indirect example of the category.

The order of the universe, with its ineffable godhead and the pleroma that emanated from him, is present in the listings of the higher beings and their roles in the ordering of the cosmos. The heavenly realm is described as distinct from the earthly

realm, but cohabitating together in the larger cosmological system. This is evidenced in the repetition of references to those above, on and below the earth (4.8-10 and 12.13-15 for example), as well as in the stated distinction between those in the flesh and those of the spirit (27.5 for example). The Sethian ideology regarding ultimate return to the Father of the All through special knowledge is offered through the revelations mediated by the heavenly intercessors.

Seth himself, either as the human son of Adam or as the incarnated heavenly being, does not appear in *Melchizedek* as an acting personage. Unlike much of the Sethian material, he is not the revealer, or even the one sending the revelation, unless, as is the case in *Zostrianos*, the receiver of the revelation is meant to be an incarnation of the heavenly Seth. Although Melchizedek is presented variably as an historical human priest, a supernatural holy warrior and Jesus, the ultimate saviour, he is not described as an incarnation of the Great Seth.²

Still, according to the definitions examined above (see Chapter 1.2), *Melchizedek* does include some of the significant characteristics ascribed to Sethianism. Like other Sethian texts, it was influenced by Jewish literary tradition, particularly apocalypticism, and it follows much of Pearson's list of Sethian doctrines and mythic elements.

- (1) The elect receivers of the soteriological revelation are the children of Seth, and so self-understood as originating with his seed. (Cf. 1)³
- (2) From among the Sethian heavenly trinity of the Father (Invisible Spirit), Mother (Barbelo) and Son (Autogenes), only Barbelo appears in the extant text. (Cf. 3)

² In some of the Sethian texts, especially those considered "Christianized" redactions of older traditions, Jesus is added to the story as an incarnation of Seth (cf. *Gospel of the Egyptians* 74.9). Again, there is not an extant suggestion of even this application of direct Sethian involvement in the revelation process in *Melchizedek*. Following some Rabbinic traditions (e.g., Midrash *Genesis Rabbah* 44.7; Targum *Onkelos on Genesis*), Melchizedek is equated with Shem, the son of Noah, and therefore a direct descendent of Seth, the son of Adam (Genesis 5.6-32). Cf. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 114-116.

³ The corresponding numbering from the list as it appears in 1.2. appears in brackets.

- (3) The four luminaries appear as Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe and Eleleth (6.4 for example). (Cf. 5)
- (4) The second, liturgical, section of the text uses mythical language and the Trishagion formula of the *Kedushah* prayer (Cf. Isaiah 6.3). (Cf. 8)
- (5) Gamaliel plays a pivotal role in the text. The other members of the ministerial triad/tetrad do not appear in the extant text, although the missing sacred name on line 17.24 could be reconstructed as “Akramas.” (Cf. 12)
- (6) Pigeradamasas is invoked at 6.3 and possibly again at 17.4. (Cf. 13).

The remaining characteristics are not clearly included in *Melchizedek*, although Pearson suggests that a case can be made for the “obvious” (secondary) Christianization of the text (13)⁴, and although the baptismal rite of the Five Seals is not mentioned, there are references to baptism and its importance as part of Melchizedek’s priestly investiture and future duties.

Turner’s delineation of the variety of literary genres found within the designated Sethian documents is also applicable in this case. It is an “apocalypse, testament, didactic treatise, revelation discourse and dialogue, self-predicatory aretology, liturgical manual, [and] ritual etiology,” and “the means of salvation [is a] horizontal, temporally successive sequence of descents into this world by a heavenly saviour.”⁵ Furthermore, the text shares specific commonalities with other, clearly Sethian texts, such as the newly published *Gospel of Judas*.⁶ So while it does not display the same range of characteristics as other examples, the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* fits within the Sethian literary trajectory. As such, it is clearly demonstrative of the continuity between the traditions of literary forms, such as apocalyptic, and the maintenance of Jewish elements

⁴ As mentioned above (2.3.11.) I find his argument on this point unpersuasive.

⁵ Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*, 63-64, 88.

⁶ For example, the *Gospel of Judas* contains what can be construed as a similar polemic against the practice of sacrifice (40.19-26), and the presence of Adamas and the luminaries (47.22) and Barbelo (35.18). See Marvin Meyer’s translation and introduction in Meyers (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (New York, 2007). For a dissenting opinion, see April D. deConick’s *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* (2007).

despite the presence of primarily Christian language and themes and anti-Jewish polemics.

3.3. THE APOCALYPTIC TRAJECTORY

Like many of the Nag Hammadi texts, the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* shares many of the elements common to both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literary traditions. It is clearly made up of two separate revelations with a liturgical interlude regarding Melchizedek's priestly activities. The revealer sent to Melchizedek is angelic in nature, a visitor from the higher realm, and the messages are delivered in the form of auditory revelations and contain discourse and dialogue.

With the presence of Gamaliel and his fellow brethren of the Generations of Life, *Melchizedek* shares the dual axes of early and contemporaneous apocalyptic literature. Both the temporal and spatial planes are represented, if not as clearly as in some other examples (see above 2.1). The temporal axis contains some limited and implied protology, gathering its history from the tradition represented in Genesis, through the use of the character Melchizedek as the Priest of God Most High (Genesis 14.18-20), and references to the activities of the levitical priesthood, also mentioned in Hebrews.

Additionally, the author of *Melchizedek* makes use of *ex eventu* prophecy, presenting the ministry, Passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a future event, and the eschatological battle to come as a culmination of his earthly activities and ultimate victory over Death and the evil archons. The apocalyptic notion of judgement is implied through the suggestion that some will be chosen for salvation, while others, those not receptive to the truth as offered through the heavenly mediators, will remain confused in the "place of great darkness" (18.18-19).

The ultimate judgement in this case is enacted against primarily supernatural enemies, with no extant references to specific political or social oppressors of the time period of composition. There is a distinction made between the positivity of the spirit

and the negativity of the fleshly world (27.4 for example), but the company of Satan and the other evil spirits are a significant focus of the document. The counter to the eschatological judgement, salvation, is provided to those of the line of Melchizedek, the children of Seth, through the intercession of the heavenly messengers, and Melchizedek's relaying of the truth as presented to him.

The spatial axis is represented by the otherworldly aspects present in the text. While there is no heavenly journey in *Melchizedek*, the reality of the higher realms is implicitly obvious, due to the heavenly visitors and the invocation of and references to those that inhabit the realms above and below the earth. Both angelic and demonic characters and regions are represented, and accepted as existing alongside the human realm. The apocalyptic convention of instructions to the recipient, in this case to conceal the message from all those who are not of the elect race, is present twice, at the end of each of the two revelations.

Most of the themes and characteristics of apocalyptic literature as presented by Paolo Sacchi and John Collins appear in the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, although the emphasis on the evils of the social structures of the time are less of an influence than in other examples of the genre.⁷ The two fundamental elements he sees as being necessary for the designation "apocalyptic," that evil has its origin in the heavenly sphere and the belief in immortality through resurrection or the continuance of the soul, are both found in the text, albeit subtly presented.⁸

There are direct commonalities with specific examples of Jewish, Christian and gnostic apocalyptic literature throughout the text, the Enochic texts, Revelation and *On the Origin of the World*, for example. Melchizedek's role as a priestly warrior in particular has clear parallels in the larger body of literature. 11QMelchizedek features him as a heavenly figure coming to earth to exact vengeance on Belial. The *Testament of*

⁷ For example, the author of Revelation characterized the Roman Empire as the "beast from the sea" that makes war and conquers the saints (13.1-10).

⁸ Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and its History*, 71. Also see above 2.1.

the Twelve Patriarchs, the *Testament of Levi* 18.12 in particular, present a messianic priest battling Beliar's demonic forces.

Melchizedek's association with Michael, as seen in the literature from Qumran, is hinted at here as well. Jesus Christ, the heavenly figure, is called "commander-in-chief" (18.5), a title usually applied to Michael, reinforcing his role as a warrior in the eschatological battle, and as we have seen, the line between the characterizations of Melchizedek and Jesus is blurred at the end of the text, perhaps as a deliberate rhetorical device. The author of *Melchizedek* seems to be suggesting the commonality of Jesus/Melchizedek as a warrior, and the archangel Michael, the leader of the heavenly host and defender of Israel, as seen in Daniel 8.11 and 2 *Enoch* 22.6 and 33.10 for example. Pearson notes:

the eschatological struggle of Melchizedek includes the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. In this we have a theme that is common in early Christian theological interpretation of the death and resurrection of Jesus, i.e. as an eschatological victory over the forces of wickedness (cf. e.g. Col. 2.15). Thus the depiction of Melchizedek as a "holy warrior" figure, derived from Jewish apocalyptic speculations, is overlaid with an equation of the eschatological struggle with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and an identification of Melchizedek with "Jesus Christ, the Son of God."⁹

My research has confirmed that the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* is representative of the continuity of the apocalyptic trajectory, in keeping with the themes, motifs, characterizations and language employed by earlier texts from both Jewish and Christian sources. The Jewish apocalyptic elements are clearly presented and are "prominent, even basic"¹⁰ facets of the text. But the inclusion and significant emphasis on the character of Jesus, and an apparent authorial knowledge of Hebrews speaks to a Jewish-Christian milieu as the point of origin of the text. Setting aside the issue of specific origin for now, it is clear that *Melchizedek* can be safely and firmly placed on the trajectory of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature.

⁹ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 34.

¹⁰ Ibid. He further suggests that the text is "a Jewish-Christian product containing an originally pre-Christian Melchizedek speculation overlaid with Christian Christological re-interpretation," and that the re-interpretation is based in the epistle to the Hebrews.

3.4. THE MELCHIZEDEK TRADITION

The use of the Priest of God Most High as the central character of the text offers the initial suggestion that *Melchizedek* belongs on the literary trajectory of the Melchizedek tradition. He is presented as the recipient of the revelation to the elect, charged with imparting its message to his people, and further employed as the prototypical example of the legitimate priesthood. By the end of the document he is revealed to be the holy warrior, the saviour of the chosen of the ineffable god, through his defeat of the powers of Satan and Death.

In all of these roles he fits firmly on the larger trajectory that bears his name. He is in keeping with the oldest literary tradition of Genesis, which introduces him as the Priest of God Most High, responsible for cultic activities, as well as the rule of his people. Although *Melchizedek* does not refer to him as the king of Salem, Melchizedek is still a temporal leader of his people, the elite race of Seth, chosen to receive the gnosis required for salvation.

The tradition of the character as presented in Psalm 110 provides much of the basis for his appearance in the epistle to the Hebrews. As Hebrews provides the framework for the theology behind *Melchizedek*, this second Old Testament reference and point on the trajectory of the tradition is also represented in the text. Extra-biblical examples such as those found in the Enochic writings, provide the apocalyptic characteristics associated with Melchizedek. The story in 2 *Enoch* about his miraculous birth is echoed, albeit inexactly, in Hebrews 7.3 and sets the stage for his supernatural role in the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*.

His appearance in 11QMelchizedek from Qumran sees him as an eschatological hero, the heavenly warrior who will help to bring about the judgement of the End of Days. His role is similar to that usually seen in the character of Michael the archangel, the protector of Israel and leader of the heavenly host. The traditions of the early monks, such as Hieracas, equating Melchizedek with the Holy Spirit or Son of God, also find

reflection in *Melchizedek* in his eventual amalgamation with the crucified and resurrected Jesus. Furthermore, the traditions of the *Pistis Sophia* and the *2 Book of Ieu* are suggested in *Melchizedek* through the ritual practices of baptism and the cleansing of the Fallen souls (for example, 7.27-8.9).

My research of such evidence makes clear that the author of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* was familiar with the body of speculations about the High Priest of the Father of the All. Such familiarity led to the re-imagining of the character as the apocalyptic hero and prototypical priest drawn from the line of Seth to fulfill the role of a soteriological warrior in the eschatological war. *Melchizedek* is therefore representative of the continuity of the literary trajectory of Melchizedek speculation, employing previously seen devices and conventions, and emphasizing the importance of the character.

3.5. EGYPTIAN ORIGINS

Following Carl Smith's theory, as found in *No Longer Jews*, that the search for the geographical and historical origins of literary innovations like Sethianism is paramount to understanding the texts and the worldviews behind them, I have placed the authorship of *Melchizedek* in an Egyptian environment. Since Christianity in Egypt in the second, third and fourth centuries was varied, I am referencing the larger body of Christian, monastic and gnostic texts as discussed above. This diversity was illustrative of differences in perspective and worldview, as caused by social and cultural factors, the localized nature of many of the first Egyptian Christian communities, and the influences of the multi-cultural milieu that was present in Alexandria in the formative years of the Christian community. *Melchizedek*, or at least its final redaction, most likely originated in an Egyptian milieu, as indicated by the commonalities it shares with other Melchizedek speculations from Egypt, and as Pearson suggests, "the Egyptian colouration of the brief theogony beginning at 9.2"¹¹

¹¹ Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 39.

The incorporation of indigenous and outside religious beliefs and practices and often the distance from any true Church authority, led to a certain amount of at least perceived autonomy, that in turn resulted in a number of periods of controversy and reform. From these theological and doctrinal disagreements posterity has preserved the critiques of the controversial beliefs and practices in the form of the anti-heretical writings of theologians and heresy hunters like Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Epiphanius. Through these polemical accounts we are presented with examples of some of the problematic worldviews, skewed as they may be by the negative commentaries of the heresiologists.

Additionally, thanks to the discoveries of texts like the Nag Hammadi corpus, we have a significant number of the primary sources produced by the critiqued groups. As one of these, *Melchizedek* is representative of a so-called heretical worldview as recorded in the fourth century that likely evolved from earlier versions of similar beliefs. As such it is demonstrative of the diversity of perspectives that clearly indicates the lack of a cohesive and centralized system of beliefs and praxis in the era of the early Christian church in Egypt. Instead, there are a number of perspectives that run alongside one another, converging in agreement in some places and diverging sharply in others.

With its influences from the traditions of Diaspora Judaism, indigenous Egyptian religion, monastic speculations regarding the figure of the Priest of God Most High, and canonical New Testament writings, the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* demonstrates that the lack of centralized or normative theology was in fact the norm in Egypt of the early centuries of the Common Era, and that different perspectives were both widespread and relatively tolerated at various times and by various church authorities.¹² As such, in suggesting that *Melchizedek* was produced in an Egyptian environment it would seem that the text is representative of the syncretism and variety that was the reality of early Egyptian Christianity.

¹² Origen and the Origenists being the clearest example, as they moved in and out of favour with some church authorities such as Theophilus (see above 1.3.5.2.).

3.6. THE QUESTION OF GNOSTICISM REVISITED

In *Rethinking Gnosticism* and *What is Gnosticism?* Michael Williams and Karen King, respectively, ask the question: can anything truly be accurately described and defined as gnostic? As seen above (1.1.), defining gnosticism and therefore determining a trajectory of gnostic literature, is problematic at best. With the flaws of the traditional categorization, can we really speak of a single, unified or unifying gnosticism? Following Williams' suggestion that the creation of more, specifically characterized categories is required as we "dismantle" the category gnosticism, I saw placing *Melchizedek* on the Sethian literary trajectory as a viable alternative.

In my opinion, Williams is correct in his assertion that the disparate body of texts designated as gnostic can trace their origins to a variety of religious movements rather than one overarching gnostic movement. This point offers additional support to the argument that the literature of Egypt, for example, in the early Christian era is representative of a number of different interpretations of the theology and practice of Christianity, rather than a series of heretical movements stemming from misunderstandings about a single mode of Christian belief and practice. With these key suggestions in particular, it seems that referring to a generally gnostic literary trajectory is as problematic and unhelpful as the categorization itself.

King would agree that the distinct varieties of Christianity developed according to specific geographic and social realities. As distinctions, or themselves as categories, orthodoxy and heresy were not fixed, and the literature of the early Christian centuries, the Nag Hammadi texts in particular, offers a diversity of examples of the often-fine line between the two. Without a clearly established central body of doctrine to distinguish between the orthodox and the heretical, the terms are anachronistic. Since much of the traditionally ascribed definition of gnosticism reflected a belief in its position as an obvious Christian heresy, a negative or naively mistaken representation of the "correct" message and its practice, the term is no longer useful as a descriptor. *Melchizedek* is

quite clearly representative of this ambiguity, as the author of the text and its audience would likely consider themselves Christian, despite anti-polemic claims to the contrary. King's call to abandon the use of the term, caught up as it is in anti-Catholic Protestant polemics, anti-Judaism and colonial ideology (see above 1.1.), would further suggest the ineffectiveness of referring to a gnostic literary trajectory.

Although their perspectives are very different, as Smith's focus is primarily on the question of origins, rather than specifically a discussion of the viability of the categorization, like Williams and King, however unwittingly, his argument does not really support the paradigm of a generic gnostic trajectory. In searching for religious and historical contexts, geographical settings and chronological development, he limits his definition of gnosticism to the presence of salvation through special knowledge and an anticosmic dualism.

He identifies four separate trajectories in the first two centuries CE, those movements following specific teachers identified by early heresiologists, such as Valentinianism; polemics and anti-Judaism in early Christianity; Sethianism as the earliest branch of gnosticism; and examples from less-represented groupings, such as the Hermetica. By his understanding, *Melchizedek* could be placed on two of his trajectories, i.e., Sethianism and the anti-Jewish polemical texts of early Christianity. So although his repeated use of the term gnosticism might lead to the conclusion that Smith is not advocating the adaptation of the categorization to increase its effectiveness, in using the term in his argument advocating Egypt origins he is almost always referring to what he sees as the earliest form of the genre, Sethianism.

With all this in mind, the reality is that gnosticism is still used as a general catchall categorization. Although I agree that it needs to be "dismantled," as suggested by Williams, or abandoned altogether, as suggested by King, the scholarly reality is that gnosticism as a descriptor of a religious and literary tradition remains in use, and it does

not look likely to disappear completely from common usage anytime soon.¹³ That said, I attempted throughout the body of this dissertation to restrict my own use of gnostic and gnosticism in my discussions as much as possible, instead employing the various sub-categories suggested by Williams as alternate descriptive terms.¹⁴

It has certainly been an interesting exercise. I had not realized how embedded the term had become in my vocabulary, and how many times I used the word unconsciously, even after making the decision to curtail its use. This experience would seem to prove Williams' point regarding the ubiquity and therefore unreliability of the category. Although it is most often the first term that comes to mind, that very fact is an indication that it has become too easy and throwaway for meaningful understanding.

Yet, even if gnosticism in coming to mean so many things has ceased to mean anything, at times the proposed alternatives seemed inadequate. Some texts and ideas were not easily or immediately identifiable as demiurgical, Sethian or Valentinian, or any of the other heuristic terms mentioned by Williams. And in such instances, I admit to reverting to bad habits and using the *verboten* designations. Still, the dialogue continues, and with it will likely come further consensus on how to approach the issue of definition and designation of the category. It is possible, though difficult, to engage in discussions about literary trajectories, ideologies and practices in Late Antique Egypt without using the words indiscriminately.

But while it still is considered a literary trajectory, containing a body of literature with some commonality of form, function and worldview, however inexact or arbitrary, the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* can and must be considered part of it. In the elements that make it Sethian, as discussed above, *Melchizedek* is an example of gnostic literature.

¹³ In his recent work, Pearson takes a pragmatic approach to the problem. While acknowledging that the term "has been used in so many different ways that it has led to a good deal of confusion as to what the term is supposed to mean... nevertheless, [he] think[s] there is some utility in retaining the term," as indicated by the title of the book. See Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis, 2007), 8.

¹⁴ As mentioned above (0 and 1.1), I retained the terms when specifically discussing or citing the theories of other scholars who do use the terms, as well as in historical applications of the category, when discussing the heresiologists accounts, for example.

While it is constructed out of a framework based in “canonical” literature (Hebrews), it diverges from normative Christianity in its presentation of the relationship between Jesus and Melchizedek. The text does not present the radical anticosmic dualism or well-defined demiurgical traditions usually associated with the genre, but it does contain the important conventions of a “redeemed redeemer,” the general and typically gnostic conceits of a realized heavenly realm (the pleroma), and ultimate redemption through hidden knowledge.

3.7. CONCLUSION

Melchizedek can both be placed upon the different literary trajectories, and be seen as an example of a point of convergence and divergence of these trajectories. By using literary devices from the apocalyptic, Sethian, and Melchizedek traditions, the author of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* synthesized elements of them all to present his message to his intended audience. Who might that audience have been?

Though difficult to determine definitively,¹⁵ due to the damage to the text as well as the limited information available as to a possible “Melchizedekian” community, according to my findings, the audience would have been aware of biblical conventions, especially those regarding the character Melchizedek and the tradition of the priesthoods of Jesus and of Melchizedek as found in the epistle to the Hebrews. The frequent biblical allusions, and commonalities with pseudepigraphal and apocryphal documents, suggests a familiarity with both canonical and extra-canonical texts, and the author’s use of mythological elements similar to those found in other Sethian writings and systems, suggest some knowledge of these as well.

That said, overall, the text is Christian in its language and message of the redemptive mission and victory of Jesus. Hebrews seems to be the most solidly determinable source of the theology behind the document. The author’s enforcement of

¹⁵ Pearson suggests that even trying is an exercise in futility (*Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, 40).

the legitimacy of the priesthoods of Melchizedek and Jesus is demonstrative of a conscious distancing of the group from its Jewish antecedents.

And what of King's questions? The hermeneutic strategy of the text lies in its redemptive message. Unlike other, more esoteric texts, the eschatology of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse* is relatively straightforward. The text suggests ritual and spiritual actions to be taken, such as the practice of baptism, the rejection of ritual sacrifice, and a quest for understanding the message regarding the Father of the All. The eschatological battle will be fought, ending with the ultimate conquest of evil and salvation of the chosen.

Rhetorically, the author employed literary and historical allusions to address the issues raised in the text. It is a polemic, both anti-docetic and anti-Jewish; its proclamation of the suffering and death of the saviour and the priestly activities, like the rituals of prayer and baptism, to be undertaken by Melchizedek is also a critique of docetic views and Jewish practices. In this regard *Melchizedek* is not very far from contemporaneous "mainstream" Christian texts. The use of the figure of the high priest and the liturgical language employed command an authority linked to traditional practice. The assumption of an historical character, Melchizedek, further lends legitimacy to the message.

The author's purpose may have included a continuation of distancing from Jewish origins, that of a particular Jewish-Christian group, for example, in the face of persecutions, as was seen in the *Epistle of Barnabas*. The ascendancy of the role and figure of Melchizedek may suggest a particular connection to speculations about the High Priest, and may, possibly, speak to the existence of a group of followers (Melchizedekians?). Ultimately, the author was attempting to impart a specific idealization of gnosis as the key to salvation.

Despite the readily apparent and significant difficulties with the manuscript, my research shows *Melchizedek* to be an important and unique example of the literature of

the early centuries of the Common Era. The text crosses many categorical lines, presenting apocalyptic and Sethian perspectives, while demonstrating an awareness of the larger corpus of literature, from the Old and New Testament, the pseudepigrapha and the apocrypha. Even with its fragmentary nature, the text offers great insight into the overlapping literary distinctions and complexities of the first four centuries CE, and is illustrative of the points of convergence and divergence as well as those that run parallel to the many literary trajectories of the time period.

Regardless of the condition of the text itself, and theoretical opinions to the contrary, the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, along with its fellow survivors from Nag Hammadi and elsewhere, are valuable witnesses to the literary, historical and socio-political realities of the early centuries. As more texts, like the *Gospel of Judas*, come to light, the opportunities to explore the traditions and worldviews increase. Such witnesses to various attempts at solving the human dilemma, commentaries on society and strivings to understand existence, offer, as Robinson suggests, the opportunity for valuable contributions to the discourse regarding religion in Late Antiquity.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

A NEW ENGLISH VERSION OF THE *MELCHIZEDEK APOCALYPSE*

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

As Wolf-Peter Funk notes in the Introduction to the French edition of the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*, Birger Pearson identified and replaced the fragments of the text for the facsimile edition of Codex IX, and then produced, with Giversen, the *editio princeps*. Funk further remarks, “[l]a qualité de ce travail est si éprouvée que tous les autres traducteurs ou éditeurs en dépendent.”¹ This version of the text, based as it is on the Coptic facsimile and transcriptions, and the reconstructions and translations of Pearson in English, and Jean-Pierre Mahé in French is offered here for the convenience of the reader, not as a new translation. The version is very close to Pearson’s original English translation, but I have presented the text more in keeping with the French edition, including the lacunae and missing pages to illustrate the true state of the text. The pages are numbered as they were in antiquity.

[] Square brackets indicate lacunae and likely reconstructions where possible.

() Greek words in the Coptic text are placed in parentheses.

¹ Funk, Mahé and Gianotto, *Melchisédek*, 2.

1

1 Melchizedek /ΜΕΛΧΙΖΕΔΕΚ
2 Jesus Christ, the Son [of God]
3 [] from [
4
5 [] the aeons that I [might tell]
6 all of the aeons and in (the case of)
7 each one of the aeons [that I might tell]
8 [the] nature of the aeon, what
9 it is, and that I might put on
10 friendship and goodness
11 as a garment, O brother [
12 [
13
14
15 [
16 [
17 [] and [
18 [
19 [] their end [
20 [] And he will [reveal]
21 [to them] the truth [
22 [
23
24 [] in [
25 [proverb(s)
26 [
27
28

1 [at first] in parables
 2 [and riddles [
 3
 4 [] proclaim
 5 them, Death will [tremble]
 6 and be angry, not only
 7 he himself, but also his [fellow]
 8 world-rulers and archons [and]
 9 the principalities and the authorities, the
 10 female gods and the male gods
 11 together with the [arch-] angels. And
 12
 13
 14
 15 [
 16 [] all of them [
 17 [the] world-rulers [
 18 [] all of them, and all the
 19 [], and all the [
 20 They will say [concerning]
 21 him, and concerning [
 22 [] and [
 23
 24
 25 [] they will [
 26 hidden [mystery(s)
 27 [
 28
 29

1 [
2 and [
3 [
4 [holy disciples. And]
5 the Saviour [will reveal] to them [the word]
6 that gives life to the [All.]
7 [But] those in the heavens spoke [many]
8 words, together with
9 those on the earth [and those]
10 under the earth. [
11 [
12 [
13 [] to them [
14 [
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30

1 [which] will happen in his name
 2 [Furthermore], they will say of him that he is
 3 unbegotten though he has been begotten, (that) he does
 4 not eat even though he eats, (that) he does not drink
 5 even though he drinks, (that) he is uncircumcised
 6 though he has been circumcised, (that) he is unfleshly
 7 though he has come in flesh, (that) he did not
 8 come to suffering, <though> he came to suffering
 9 (that) he did not rise from the dead
 10 <though> he arose from [the]
 11 dead. [But] all the [tribes and]
 12 all [the peoples] will speak [the truth],
 13 who are receiving from [you]
 14 yourself, O [Melchizedek],
 15 Holy One, [High-priest],
 16 the perfect hope [and]
 17 the [gifts of] life. [I am]
 18 [Gamaliel] who was [sent]
 19 to [] the congregation of [the]
 20 [children] of Seth, who are above
 21 [thousands of] thousands and [myriads]
 22 of myriads [of the] aeons [
 23 [] essence of the [aeons]
 24 [a]ba [] aiai ababa. O
 25 divine [] of the [
 26 [] nature
 27 [O Mother] of the aeons, [Barbelo,]
 28 [O first-] born of the aeons],

1 splendid Doxomedon, Dom[
 2 O glorious one, Jesus Christ,
 3 O chief commanders of the luminaries, you [powers]
 4 Armozel, Oroiael, Daveithe,
 5 Eleleth, and you man-of-light,
 6 Immortal Aeon, Pigeradamasas,
 7 and you good god of the
 8 beneficent worlds, Mirocheirothetou,
 9 through Jesus Christ, the Son
 10 of God whom I proclaim.
 11 Inasmuch as there has [visited]
 12 [the One who] truly exists
 13 [among those who] exist [
 14 [do(es)] not [exist], Abel Baruch---
 15 [that] you *singular* [might be given] the knowledge [of the truth]
 16 [] that he is [from]
 17 [the] race of the High-priest
 18 [which is] above [thousands of thousands] and
 19 [myriads] of myriads of the aeons. The
 20 adverse [spirits are]
 21 ignorant of him and (of) their (own)
 22 destruction. Not only (that, but) I have come to
 23 [reveal] to you [the] truth
 24 [which is] within the [brethren.] He included
 25 himself [in the] living
 26 [offering] together with your [offspring.] He
 27 [offered] them up as a [sacrifice to]
 28 [the] All. [For it is not] cattle
 29 [that] you will offer up [for sin(s)]

1 of unbelief [and for]
2 the ignorance [and all the] wicked
3 [deeds] which they [will do].
4 And they do [not] reach
5 [the] Father of the All [
6 [] the faith [
7 [
8 [
9 [] thus [
10 [
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25 [
26 [
27 [] to receive [baptism
28 [] waters [

1 For [the waters] which are above
 2 [] that receive baptism
 3 [] But receive [that baptism]
 4 [which is] with the waters which [
 5 [] while he is coming [
 6 [] ... [
 7 [] great
 8 [
 9 [] baptism] as they [
 10 [] upon [
 11
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25 [
 26 [] by [
 27 [] of the [
 28 [] pray for the [offspring of the]

1 archons and [all] the angels, together with
 2 [the] seed <which> flowed [forth from]
 3 [the Father] of the All
 4 [the] entire [] from [
 5 [There were] engendered the [gods and the angels]
 6 and the men [
 7 out of the [seed,] all of [the]
 8 [natures], those in [the heavens and]
 9 those upon the earth and [those]
 10 under [the earth
 11
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16 ...[
 17 ...
 18 [
 19
 20 the [
 21 ...[
 22 [
 23
 24 [
 25 [] nature of the females [
 26 [] among those that are in the [
 27 [] they were bound with [
 28 [But this] is [not] (the) true Adam

1 [nor] (the) true Eve. [For}
 2 [when they ate] of the tree [of]
 3 [knowledge] they trampled [the]
 4 [Cherubim} and the Seraphim
 5 [with the flaming sword]. They [
 6 [] which was Adam's [
 7 [the] world-rulers and
 8 [] them out
 9 [] offspring of the archons and
 10 [their worldly things, these belonging to
 11
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17 [] but
 18 [] they are
 19 [
 20
 21 [
 22
 23
 24
 25 [light
 26 And the females and the [males,]
 27 those who exist with [
 28 [hidden] from every nature, [and they will]
 29 [renounce] the archons, [that is those]

1 [who] receive form him the [
 2 For [they] are worthy of [
 3 [immortal,] and [great
 4 [] and [great
 5 [and] great [
 6 [] sons of [men
 7 [] disciples
 8 [] image] and [
 9 [] from the [light]
 10 [] which is holy.
 11 For [] from the
 12 [beginning] a seed
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25
 26
 27
 28

1 [] But I will be silent
2 [] for we [are[
3 [the brethren who] came down from
4 [the] living []. They will...
5 [] upon the [
6 [
7 [] of Adam
8 [Abel], Enoch, [Noah
9 [
10 [] you, Melchizedek, [the Priest]
11 of God [Most High
12 those who [
13 women [
14 [
15 [
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29

1 these two who have been chosen will
 2 [at] no time nor
 3 [in] any place be convicted,
 4 whenever they have been begotten,
 5 [by] their enemies, by their friends,
 6 [nor by strangers nor their
 7 [own] kin, (nor) by the [impious]
 8 nor the pious.
 9 [All of] the adverse natures will
 10 [] them, whether
 11 [those that] are manifest, or those that
 12 [are] not [manifest], together with those
 13 [that dwell] in the heavens and those that are
 14 [upon] the earth and those that are under
 15 the earth. They will make [war
 16 [] every one
 17 For [] whether (εἴτε) in the [
 18 [] and [
 19 [
 20 [
 21 [] many
 22 [] in a [
 23 [] them [
 24 [] ... [
 25 [] And these in the [
 26 every [one] will [
 27 [] These will [
 28 [] with every blow

1 weaknesses. These will be
 2 confined in other forms [and]
 3 [will] be punished. [These]
 4 [] the Saviour will take [away]
 5 [and] they will overcome everything, [not with]
 6 their mouths and words []
 7 but by means of the [
 8 which will be done for [them. He will]
 9 destroy Death. [These things]
 10 which I was commanded
 11 to reveal, these things
 12 reveal [as I (have done)].
 13 But [that] which is hidden, do not reveal
 14 [to] anyone, unless [it is revealed]
 15 to you (to do so).” And [immediately]
 16 [I] arose, [I. Melchizedek],
 17 and I began to [
 18 [] God [
 19 [] that I should [rejoice
 20 [] will [
 21 [] while he [is acting
 22 [] living [
 23 [I said], “I [
 24 [] and I [
 25 [] the [
 26 [and I] will not cease, from [now on]
 27 [for ever,] O father of the [All],
 28 [because] you have had pity on me, and

1 [you have sent the] angel of light
 2 [] from your [aeons]
 3 [] to] reveal [
 4 [] when he came [he]
 5 [raised] me up from ignorance
 6 and (from) the fructification
 7 of death to life. For
 8 I have a name;
 9 I am Melchizedek, the Priest
 10 of [God] Most High; I
 11 [know] that it is I who am truly
 12 [the image of] the true High-priest
 13 [of] God Most High, and
 14 [] the world. For it
 15 is not [a] small [thing that]
 16 God [] with [
 17 [] while he [
 18 And [] the angels that]
 19 [dwell upon the] earth [
 20 [
 21 [
 22 is the [sacrifice] of [
 23 whom Death deceived.
 24 When he [died] he bound them
 25 with the natures which are [leading them astray].
 26 Yet he offered up

1 sacrifices [
 2 cattle [
 3 I gave them to [Death
 4 [and the angels] and the [
 5 [] demons [
 6 living sacrifices [
 7 I have offered up myself to you as a
 8 sacrifice, together with those that are mine, to
 9 you yourself, (O) Father of the All, and
 10 to those whom you love, who have come forth
 11 from you who are holy (and) [living]. And <according to>
 12 the [perfect] laws I shall pronounce
 13 my name as I receive baptism [now]
 14 (and) for ever, (as a name) among the living (and)
 15 holy [names], and (now) in the
 16 [waters], Amen. [Holy are you,]
 17 Holy are [you], Holy are you, O [Father]
 18 [of the All], who truly exist [
 19 [] do(es) not exist, [Abel Baruch]
 20 [] for ever and ever, [Amen].
 21 Holy are [you, Holy are you,} Holy are [you]
 22 [] before [
 23 [for ever and] ever,
 24 [Amen. Holy are [you,] Holy are [you,]
 25 [Holy are you, Mother of the] aeon(s),
 26 Barbelo,
 27 for ever and ever, [Amen].
 28 [Holy are you,] Holy are you, Holy are you,
 29 [First-] born of the aeons,
 30 Doxomedon. [

- 1 [for ever] and ever, Amen.
 2 [Holy are you, holy are you,] Holy are you.
 3 [
 4 [
 5 [for ever and ever], Amen.
 6 [Holy are you, Holy are you,] Holy are you.
 7 [
 8 [first] aeon,
 9 [Harmozel, for] ever and ever,
 10 [Amen. Holy are you], Holy are you.
 11 [Holy are you,] commander, luminary
 12 [of the aeons, Oriael, for
 13 [ever and ever], Amen. Holy are you,
 14 [Holy are you, Holy are you,] commander
 15 [of the aeons], man-of-light,
 16 [Daveithe], for ever
 17 [and ever, Amen]. Holy are you,
 18 [Holy are you, Holy are you, commander-in-chief
 19 [Eleleth,
 20 [the] aeons [
 21 [
 22
 23 [
 24 [for]
 25 [ever and ever,] Amen
 26 [Holy are you,] Holy are [you], Holy are you, good [god of]

1 the [beneficent] worlds, [
2 Mirocheirothetou, [for]
3 ever and ever, [Amen].
4 [Holy are] you, [Holy are you, Holy are you,]
5 Commander-in-chief [of the]
6 All, Jesus Christ, [for ever and ever,]
7 Amen. [
8 ... and [
9 Blessed [
10 confession [And
11 confess him [
12 now [
13 then it becomes [
14 fear [and
15 fear and [
16 disturb [
17 surrounding [them
18 in the place [which has a]
19 great darkness [in it]
20 [and] many [
21 appear [
22 there [
23 [appear
24
25 [
26 [
27 [
28 [
29 [

1 [] and
 2 [] they were clothed with
 3 [] all and
 4 [] there
 5 [] and
 6 [] just as
 7 [] them
 8 [
 9 [
 10 [] disturbances. They gave
 11 [] their words
 12 [] and they said to me,
 13 [Melchizedek,]
 14 [Priest] of God [Most high
 15 [they] spoke as though [
 16 [their] mouths [
 17 [] in the All [
 18 [] and [
 19 [] your [
 20 [
 21
 22
 23
 24 [] led astray
 25 [] he [
 26 [
 27
 28

1 with his [
 2 worship [and
 3 faith [and
 4 his prayers. And [
 5 ... And [
 6 those that [are his
 7 first [
 8 [
 9 [
 10 They did not care that [the]
 11 [priesthood] which you perform, [which]
 12 is from [
 13 [
 14 [in the] counsels of [
 15 [] Satan [
 16 []... the sacrifice
 17 [] his doctrines
 18 [] your [
 19 [
 20 of this aeon [
 21 [
 22
 23
 24
 25 [which] exist(s) [in
 26 [] lead (s) [astray
 27
 28

1 [] and some
2 [] and
3 []...
4 [] he gave them to [
5 [] and [
6 [and] thirteen [
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

1 throw [it
2 [in order that] you might [
3 [
4 [for] immediately [
5 [by means of
6 [on the ground]. The [
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28

[2]4

- 1 for [
- 2 [which is above
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28

1 [] me. And
 2 [] you (pl.) struck me,
 3 [] you threw me,
 4 [] corpse. And
 5 [you crucified me] from the third hour
 6 [of the Sabbath-eve] until
 7 [the ninth hour.] And after
 8 [these things I arose] from the
 9 [dead.] came out of
 10 [] into me. [
 11 [] my eyes [saw
 12 [they did not] find anyone
 13 [
 14 [] me [
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25
 26
 27
 28

1 greeted [me
2 They said to me, 'Be [strong, O Melchizedek,]
3 great [High-priest]
4 of God [Most High, for the archons],
5 who [are] your [enemies],
6 made war; you have [prevailed over them, and]
7 they did not prevail over you, [and you]
8 endured, and [you]
9 destroyed, and [you]
10 [] of their [
11 will rest, in any [
12 which is living (and) holy [
13 [those that] exalted themselves against him in [
14 flesh.
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27

1 [with] the offerings, working on that
2 which is good, fasting
3 with fasts. These revelations
4 do not reveal to anyone
5 in the flesh, since they are incorporeal,
6 unless it is revealed to you (to do so).”
7 When the brethren who belong to the
8 generations of life had said these things, they
9 were taken up to (the regions) above
10 all the heavens. Amen.

APPENDIX 2

NAMES AND TITLES IN THE *MELCHIZEDEK APOCALYPSE*

Abel 12.8.

Abel Baruch 6.14, 16.19.

Adam 9.28, 10.6, 12.7.

Barbelo 5.27, 16.26.

Cherubim/Seraphim 10.4

Daveithe 6.4, 17.16.

Death 2.5, 14.9, 15.23, 16.3.

Doxomedon 6.1, 16.30.

Eleleth 6.5, 17.19.

Enoch 12.8.

Eve 10.1.

Father of the All 7.5, 9.3, 14.27, 16.9, 16.17-18.

Gamaliel 5.18.

Harmozel/Armozel 6.4, 17.9.

High Priest/Priest of God Most High 5.15, 6.17, 12.10-11, 15.9-10, 19.14, 26.3-4.

Jesus Christ 1.2, 6.2, 6.9,

Melchizedek 1.1, 5.14, 12.10, 14.16, 15.9, 19.13, 26.3.

Mirocheirothetou 6.8, 18.2.

Mother of the aeons/First born of the aeons 5.27, 5.28, 16.29.

Noah 12.8.

Oroiael/Oriael 6.4, 17.12.

Pigeradamasas 6.6, 17.4.

Satan 20.15.

Seth 5.20.

The Saviour 4.5, 14.4,

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

(EDITIONS, TRANSLATIONS AND COMMENTARIES)

Attridge, Harold W., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989).

Buchholz, D. D., *Your Eyes Will be Opened: A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1988).

Budge, E. A. Wallis, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1913).

Charlesworth, James H. (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y., and London: Doubleday, 1983-1985).

Clement of Alexandria, J. Ferguson (trans.), *Stromateis: Books 1-3* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991).

Coogan, Michael D. (ed.), *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Epiphanius, F. Williams (trans.), *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, 3 vols. (Nag Hammadi Studies 35; Nag Hammadi and Manichaen Studies 36; Leiden: Brill, 1987-1994).

Eusebius Pamphili, Roy J. Deferrari (trans.), *Ecclesiastical History*, 2 vols. (Father of the Church 19, 29; Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953-1955).

Funk, Wolf-Peter, Jean-Pierre Mahé and Claudio Gianotto, *Melchisédek: Oblation, baptême et vision dans la Gnose Séthienne* (Laval, Louvain and Paris: Les Presses de l'Universitaire Laval and Peeters, 2001).

Garcia Martinez, Florentino, Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, Adam Simon van der Woude, J. P. M. van der Ploeg, and Edward D. Herbert, *Qumran Cave 11. II. 11Q2-18, 11Q20-31 (Discoveries in the Judean Desert 23)*; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

Grant, Robert M., *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary*, 6 vols. (New York: Nelson, 1964-1968.)

Hennecke, E., and W. Schneemelcher (eds.), *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965).

Herodotus, A. de. Selincourt (trans.), *The Histories: Book II* (London: Penguin Classics, 1961).

Hilhorst, Anthony, and Theodore Silverstein (eds.), *The Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition* (Geneva: Patrick Kramer, 1997).

Hultgren, Arland J., and Stephen A. Haggmark (eds.), *The Earliest Christian Heretics: Readings From Their Opponents* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

Irenaeus, *The Exposure and Refutation of Knowledge, Falsely So-Called (Adversus Haereses)*, (translation from *Early Church Fathers: Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, at <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/TOC.html>).

Josephus, H. St. J. Thackeray (trans.), *The Jewish War, Books 1-3* (Loeb Classical Library; London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1956).

Josephus, Ralph Marcus (trans.), *Jewish Antiquities* (Loeb Classical Library; London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1958).

Justin Martyr, Thomas B. Falls (trans.), Thomas P. Halton (intro.), and Michael Slusser (ed.), *Dialogue with Trypho* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2003).

King, Karen L., *The Gospel of Mary* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 2003).

Klijn, A. F. J., and G. J. Reinink (eds.), *Patristic Evidences for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 36; Leiden: Brill, 1973).

Layton, Bentley, *The Gnostic Scriptures: Ancient Wisdom for the New Age* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1995).

MacDermot, V. (trans.), and C. Schmidt (ed.), *Pistis Sophia* (Nag Hammadi Studies 9; Leiden: Brill, 1978).

Mark the Hermit, Georges-Mathieu de Durand (trans. and ed.), *Traité 1 et 2* (Paris: Cerf, 2000).

Nickelsburg, George W. E., *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

Nicholson, D. H. S. and A. H. E. Lee (eds.), *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917).

Origen, Henry Chadwick (trans.), *Contra Celsus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

Osiek, Carolyn, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1999).

Palladius, Robert T. Meyer (trans.), *The Lausiaca History* (Ancient Christian Writers 4; New York and Ramsay, N.J.: Newman Press, 1964).

Pearson, Birger A. and Soren Giversen (eds.), *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X* (Leiden: Brill, 1981).

Philo Judaeus, M. R. James (trans.), *Biblical Antiquities* (New York: KTAV, 1971).

Philo Judaeus, F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (trans.), *Philo of Alexandria*, 10 vols. (Loeb Classical Library; New York: Putnam, 1929-1962).

Plotinus, Arthur H. Armstrong (trans.), *Enneads*, 7 vols. (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966-1988).

Pseudo-Athanasius, in J. Docchorn (ed.), "Die Historia de Melchisedech (Hist. Melch.). Einführung, editrischer Vorbericht und Editions praeliminares," *Le Muséon* 117 (2004), 7-48.

Pseudo-Athanasius, in S. E. Robinson (trans.), "The Apocryphal Story of Melchizedek," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18 (1987), 26-39.

Quasten, Johannes, and Joseph C. Plumpe (eds.), James C. Kleist (trans.), *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, 6 vols. (New York: Paulist Press, 1948).

Robinson, J. et al (eds.), *Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices (IX and X)* (Published under the Auspices of the Department of Antiquities of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Conjunction with UNESCO; Leiden: Brill, 1977).

Robinson, James M., (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990).

Schenke, Hans-Martin, "Melchisedek (NHC IX,1)," in Hans-Martin Schenke, Hans-Gebhard Bethge, and Ursula Ulrike Kaiser (eds.), *Nag Hammadi Deutsch. 2. Band: NHC V, 2-XIII, 1, BG 1 und 4. Eingeleitet und übersetzt von Mitgliedern des Berliner Arbeitskreises für Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften* (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte, Neue Folge 12; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 677-689.

Schmidt, C., (ed.) V. MacDermot (trans.), *The Book of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex* (The Coptic Gnostic Library. Nag Hammadi Studies; Leiden: Brill, 1978).

Smith, Morton, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).

VanderKam, James, C., *The Book of Jubilees: A Critical Text*, 2. vols. (Leuven: Peeters, 1989).

Vermes, Geza, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (fifth edition; London: Penguin, 1998).

Wilson, John A. (trans.), "Egyptian Myths, Tales and Mortuary Texts," in J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950), 3-11.

SECONDARY SOURCES

(ARTICLES AND MONOGRAPHS)

Abegg, Martin G., Jr., "The Messiah at Qumran: Are We Still Seeing Double?," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 2 (1995), 125-144.

Aland, Kurt, and Barbara Aland, Erroll F. Rhodes (trans.), *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (2nd ed.; Leiden and Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brill and Eerdmans, 1989).

Alexander, Manuel Jr., *Rhetorical Argumentation in Philo of Alexandria* (Studia Philonica Monograph Series; Studies in Hellenistic Judaism; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).

Alexander, Philip S., "Comparing Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism: An Essay in Method," *Clouds Magazine* 16 (2003), at <http://www.cloudsmagazine.com>.

Allison, Dale C. Jr., *Testament of Abraham* (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 2003).

Altizer, Thomas J. J., *The Contemporary Jesus* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997).

Arthur, R. H., *The Wisdom Goddess* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984).

Aschim, Anders, "Melchizedek the Liberator: An Early Interpretation of Genesis 14?," *Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers* 35 (1996), 243-258.

Aschim, Anders, "The Genre of 11Qmelchizedek," in Frederick H. and Thomas L. Thompson (eds.), *Qumran Between the Old and New Testaments* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 290; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 17-31.

Aschim, Anders, "Melchizedek and Levi," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years After Their Discovery. Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20-25, 1997* (Jerusalem, 2000), 773-788.

Attridge, Harold, W., "Valentinian and Sethian Apocalyptic Traditions," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000), 173-211.

Bagnall, Roger S., *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Bandstra, Barry L., *Reading the Old Testament* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1999).

Barclay, J. M. G., *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan, 323 BCE- 117 CE* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

Bardy, Gustave, "Melchisedech dans la tradition patristique," *Revue biblique* 35 (1926), 496-509; 36 (1927), 25-45.

Barnard, Leslie, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* (New York: Schocken, 1967).

Barton, John, "Historical-Critical Approaches," in *The Cambridge Guide to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9-20.

Bauckham, Richard, "Jews and Jewish Christians," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 228-238.

Bauckham, Richard, "The Apocalypse of Peter: A Jewish Christian Apocalypse from the Time of Bar Kokhba," *Apocrypha* 5 (1994), 7-111, reprinted in *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 160-258.

Bauer, Walter, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (2nd edition; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

Benko, Stephen, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1984).

Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York and Toronto: Doubleday, 1969).

Bianchi, Ugo (ed.), *The Origins of Gnosticism: The Colloquium of Messina 13-18 April 1966* (Studies in the History of Religions, Supplements to Numen 12; Leiden: Brill, 1967).

Bickerman, Elias J., *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

Bickerman, Elias J., *The Jews in the Greek Age* (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

Birnbaum, Ellen, "Philo on the Greeks: A Jewish Perspective on Culture and Society in First Century Alexandria," in D. T. Runia and G. E. Sterling (eds.), *The Spirit of Faith: Studies in Philo and Early Christianity in Honor of David Hay* (The Studia Philonica Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism 13; Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 2001).

Boccaccini, Gabriele, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of Ways Between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002).

Boccaccini, Gabriele (ed.), *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007, forthcoming).

Borgen, Peder, *Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

Bottrich, Christian, "The Melchizedek Story of 2 (Slavonic) Enoch: A Reaction to A. Orlov," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 32 (2100), 445-470.

Bousset, Wilhelm, "Gnosis, Gnostiker," in A. F. Pauly and G. Wissowa (eds.), *Realencyclopädie der classischen Alterhumswissenschaft* VII.2 (1912), 1503-1546, reprinted in A. F. Verheule (ed.), *Religionsgeschichtliche Studien: Aufsätze zur Religionsgeschichte des hellenistischen Zeitalters* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 44-96.

Bovon, F. and A. D. Callahan, "Martyre de Marc l'évangéliste," In P. Geoltrain and J.-D. Kaestli (eds.), *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens* vol. 2 (Paris: Cerf, 2005), 567-586.

Brakke, David, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

Bremer, Jan M., Theo. P. J. van den Hunt and Rudolph. Peters (eds.), *Hidden Futures: Death and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, The Classical, Biblical and Arabi-Islamic World* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994).

Bremmer, Jan N., "The Resurrection Between Zarathustra and Jonathan Z. Smith," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 50 (1996), 89-107.

Bremmer, Jan N., *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Read-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

Bremmer, Jan N., and Istvan Czachesz (eds.), *The Apocalypse of Peter* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003).

Brown Peter, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978).

Brox, Norbert, "Γνοστικὸί als haresiologischer Terminus," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 57 (1966), 105-114.

Burkert, Walter, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1987).

Cameron, R., *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982).

Chadwick H., and J. Chadwick (eds.), *Alexandrian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954).

Chazon, E. G., M. E. Stone and A. Pinnick (eds.), *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of The Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 12-14 January, 1997* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 91-119.

Clark, Elizabeth A., *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Clark, Elizabeth A., "New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy's Human Embodiment and Ascetic Strategies," *Church History* 59 (1990), 145-162,

Clark, Elizabeth A., "Elite Networks and Heresy Accusations: Towards a Social Description of the Origenist Controversy," *Semeia* 56 (1991), 79-117.

Cohn, Norman, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (2nd ed.; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

Collins, Adela Yarbro, "The Book of Revelation," in John J. Collins (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticisms: Volume 1. The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 384-414.

Collins, Adela Yarbro, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

Collins, Adela Yarbro, "Source Criticism of the Book of Revelation," *Biblical Research* 43 (1998), 50-52.

Collins, Adela Yarbro, "The Early Christian Apocalypses," *Semeia* 14 (1979), 61-121.

Collins, Adela Yarbro, "Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism," in A. Y. Collins (ed.), *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting* (*Semeia* 36, 1988), 1-11.

Collins, Adela Yarbro, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 50; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

Collins, John J., "Introduction: Toward the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979), 1-19.

Collins, John J., *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).

Collins, John J., "The Sibylline Oracles," in Michael E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period. Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (Assen and Philadelphia: Van Gorcum, 1984), 351-381.

Collins, John J., *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995),

Collins, John J., *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

Collins, John J., "Apocalyptic Eschatology as the transcendence of Death," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 36 (1974), 21-43.

Collins, John J. and Peter W. Flint (with the assistance of C. VanEpps) (eds.), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* (2 vols.; Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2001).

Colpe, Carsten, *Die Religiosgeschichtliche Schule: Darstellung und Kritik ihres Bildes vom gnostischen Erlösermythus* (Göttingen: Vandehoek and Ruprecht, 1961).

Cross, Frank M., *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Culianu, Ian, *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992).

Czachesz, Istvan, "The Identity of Lithagoel in the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*," in A. Hillhorst and G. H. van Kooten (eds.), *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Essays in Honor of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 485-502.

Dan, Joseph, "Yaldabaoth and the Language of the Gnostics," in H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger and P. Schafer (eds.), *Geschichte-Tradition-Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, 3 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), 557-564.

David, Rosalie, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London: Penguin, 2002).

Davila, James, R., *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other?* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

Davila, James, R., "Melchizedek, Michael and War in Heaven," *Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers* 35 (1996), 259-272.

Davila, James, R., "Melchizedek, the 'Youth,' and Jesus," in idem (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers From and International Conference at St. Andrews in 2001* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 46; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 248-274.

Delcor, Mathias, "Melchizedek from Genesis to the Qumran Texts and the Epistle to the Hebrews" *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 2 (1971), 115-133.

Desjardins, Michel, *Sin in Valentinianism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

Desjardins, Michel, "Law in 2 *Baruch* and 4 *Ezra*," *Studies in Religion* 14 (1985), 25-37.

Desjardins, Michel, "Yamauchi and Pre-Christian Gnosticism," in Wendy E. Hellerman (ed.), *Hellenization Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response Within the Greco-Roman World* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1994), 63-67.

Desjardins, Michel, "Rethinking the Study of Gnosticism," *Religion and Theology* 12 (2005), 370-384.

Desjardins, Michel, "The Sources for Valentinian Gnosticism: A Question of Methodology," *Vigiliae Christianae* 49 (1986), 342-347.

Doniger, Wendy, "Post-Modern and –Colonial –Structural Comparisons," in K. Patton and B. Ray (eds.), *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University Of California Press, 2000), 63-74.

Doresse, Jean, P. Mairet (trans.), *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics: An Introduction to the Gnostic Coptic Manuscripts Discovered at Chenoboskion* (New York: Viking Press, 1960).

Ehrman, Bart D., *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scriptures and the Faiths we Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Ehrman, Bart D., *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

Evans, Craig A., and Peter W. Flint, *Eschatology, Messianism and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997).

Evans, Craig A., Robert L. Webb and Richard A. Wiebe, *Nag Hammadi Texts and the Bible: A Synopsis and Index* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

Fallon, Francis T., "Gnostic Apocalypses," *Semeia* 14 (1979), 123-158.

Fallon, Francis T., "The Gnostics: The Undominated Race," *Novum Testamentum* 21 (1979), 271-288.

Fallon, Francis T., *The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myths* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

Ferguson, Everett, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987).

Filorama, Giovanni, Anthony Alcock (trans.), *A History of Gnosticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1990).

Filorama, Giovanni and Claudio Gianotto, "L'interpretazione gnostica," *Augustinianum* 22 (1982), 53-74.

Fitzmeyer, J. A., "Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967), 25-41.

Fossum, Jarl E., *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Siebeck, 1985).

Frankfurter, David, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Frankfurter, David, "Lest Egypt's City Be Deserted: Religion and Ideology in the Egyptian Response to the Jewish Revolt (115-117 CE)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43 (1992), 203-220.

Fraser, Peter Marshall, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

Friedländer, Moritz, *Der vorchristliche jüdische Gnosticismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1898; reprinted Franborough: Gregg International, 1972).

Friedländer, Moritz, "La secte de Melchisédec et l'Épître aux Hébreux," *Revue des Études Juives* 5 (1882), 1-26; 188-198, and 6 (1883), 187-199.

Fowden, Garth, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Garcia Martinez, F., "Messianic Hopes in the Qumran Writings," in F. Garcia Martinez and J. Treballe Barrera, *The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 159-189.

Gianotto, Claudio, *Melchisedek e la sua tipologia. Tradizioni giudaiche, cristiane e gnostiche* (Supplementi alla Rivista Biblica 12; Brescia: Paideia, 1984).

Gianotto, Claudio, "Quelques remarques a propos de Melchisédec (NHC IX,1)," in Mat Immerzeel and Jacques van der Vliet (eds.), *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New*

Millenium: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies, Leiden, 27 August- 2 September 2000 Vol.1 (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 133; Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 739-748.

Gianotto, Claudio, "Qumran e la Lettera agli Ebrei," in Romano Penna (ed.), *Qumran e le origini cristiane. Atti del VI Convegno di studi neotestamentari (L'Aquila, 14-17 settembre 1995)* (Ricerche Storico Bibliche 9; Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1997), 211-230.

Gianotto, Claudio, "Il processo salvifico delle anime e il loro destino finale secondo la Pistis Sophia," in Julien Ries, Yvonne Janssens and Jean-Marie Sevrin (eds.), *Cnosticisme et monde hellénistique, Actes du Colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve (11-14 mars 1980)* (Louvain: Université catholique, Institut orientaliste, 1982), 377-383.

Gieschen, Charles A., "The Different Functions of a Similar Melchizedek Tradition in 2 Enoch and the Epistle to the Hebrews," in Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (eds.), *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 364-379.

Goehring, James E., *Ascetics, Society and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999).

Gounelle, Rémi, *La descente du Christ aux enfers: Institutionnalisation d'une croyance* (Paris : Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2000).

Grabbe, L. L. and O. Bellis (eds.), *The Priests and Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists* (New York, 2004).

Grant, Robert, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).

Grant, Robert, "Manichees and Christians in the Third and Fourth Centuries," *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studia Geo Widengren Oblata*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 1.431.

Green, Henry A. *The Economic and Social Origins of Gnosticism* (Society for Biblical Literature, Dissertation Series 77; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

Greunwald, Ithmar, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Gnosticism* (Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und die antiken Judentums 14; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988).

- Griggs, C. Wilfred, *Early Egyptian Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 1990).
- Haas, Ch., *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997).
- Harlow, Daniel C., *The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (3 Baruch) in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).
- Harlow, Daniel C., "The Christianization of Early Jewish Pseudepigrapha: The Case of 3 Baruch," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 32 (2001), 416-444.
- Harnack, Adolf von, *History of Dogma*, vol. I, (New York: Dover Publications, 1961).
- Harmless, William (SJ), *Desert Christians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Hayman, Peter, "Monotheism – A Misused Word in Jewish Studies," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 22 (1990), 1-15.
- Hedrick, C., and R. Hodgson, Jr. (eds.), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1986).
- Hengel, Martin, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989).
- Hengel, Martin, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).
- Horsley, Richard A., "The Politics of Cultural Production in Second Temple Judea: Historical Context and Political Religious Relations of the Scribes who Produced *I Enoch*, *Sirach* and *Daniel*," in B. J. Wright and L. M. Wills (eds.), *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalyptic* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2005), 123-145.
- Horton, Fred L. Jr., *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
- Jakab, A. *Ecclesia Alexandrina: évolution sociale et institutionnelle du christianismæ alexandrin (IIe-IIIe siècles)* (Bern, 2001).
- Jakab, A., "Le gnosticisme alexandrin aux premier temps du christianisme," in Hilhorst and van Kooten (eds.), *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen*, (Boston: Brill, 2005), 365-370.

Jasper, David, "Literary Readings of the Bible," in J. Barton (ed.) *The Cambridge Guide to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21-34.

Jonas, Hans, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, second edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

Jonas, Hans, *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist* 2 vols. 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1964)

Jonas, Hans, "The Gnostic Syndrome: Typology of its Thought, Imagination and Mood," in *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

Jonge, Marinus de, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament as Part of Christian Literature: The Case of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and Qumran Origins: New Light on a Forgotten Connection* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

Kahle, P., *Bala'izah: Coptic Texts from Deir El-Bala'izah in Upper Egypt* 2 vol. (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).

Kasser, R., M. Meyer and G. Wurst, *The Gospel of Judas from Codex Tchacos* (Washington D.C.: National Geographic, 2006).

King, Karen L., *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 2003).

King, Karen L., *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Kippenburg, Hans, "Versuch einer soziologischen Verortung des antiken Gnostizismus," *Numen* 17 (1970), 211-231.

Klijn, A. F. J., "Jewish Christianity in Egypt," in Pearson and Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 161-175.

Kloppenborg, John S., *Q-Thomas Reader* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1990).

Knibb, Michael A., "Eschatology and Messianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1998-1999), 2:379-402.

Kobelski, Paul J. *Melchizedek and Melchiresha'* (The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 10; Washington D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1981).

Koch, Klaus, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic: A Polemical Work on a Neglected Area of Biblical Studies and Its Damaging Effects on Theology and Philosophy* (London: SCM Press, 1972).

Krause, Martin (ed.), *Gnosis and Gnosticism: Papers Read at the Eighth Annual International Conference on Patristic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1981).

Labib, Pahor, "Egyptian Survivals in the Nag Hammadi Library," in R. McL. Wilson (ed.), *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 148-151.

Layton, Bentley, "Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism," in M. White and O. L. Yarbrough (eds.), *The Social World of the Early Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 334-350.

Layton, Bentley, (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1981).

Lesko, Leonard, H., "Ancient Egyptian Comogonies and Cosmology," in B. E. Shafer (ed.), *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths and Personal Practice* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 89-122.

Logan, Alastair H. B., *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996).

Longnecker, Bruce, W., "Locating 4 Ezra: A Consideration of Its Social Setting and Functions," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 28 (1997), 271-293.

Luckert, Karl W., *Egyptian Light and Hebrew Fire: Theological and Philosophical Roots of Christendom in Evolutionary Perspective* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991).

Ludlow, J. W., *Abraham Meets Death: Narrative Humor in the Testament of Abraham* (London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

Luttikuizen, Gerald., "The Thought Pattern of Gnostic Mythologizers and their Use of Biblical Tradition," in J. D. Turner and A. McGuire (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 89-101.

Mahé, Jean-Pierre, "La figure de Melchisédek dans le codex IX de Nag Hammadi," *Comptes rendus des seances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* (2000), 259-294.

Malina, Bruce, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986).

Manzi, Franco, *Melchisedek e l'angelologia nell'Epistola agli Ebrei e a Qumran* (Analecta Biblica 136; Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1997).

Marshall, John W., *Parable of War: Reading John's Jewish Apocalypse* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001).

Meade, David G., *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relation of Authorship and Authority in Earliest Christian Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986).

Meyer, Marvin W., and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Meyer, Marvin W., "Karen L. King *What is Gnosticism?*" (Review) *RBL* 05 (2004), at <http://www.bookreviews.org>.

Milik, J. T., "*Milkî-sedeq* et *Milkî-resha'* dans les anciens écrits juifs et chrétiens," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23 (1972), 95-144.

Momigliano, Arnaldo, *On Pagans, Jews and Christians* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

Nagel, P., "Die Auslegung der Paradieserzählung in der Gnosis," in K.-W. Troger (ed.), *Altes Testament, Frühjudentum, Gnosis: Neue Studien zu "Gnosis und Bibel"* Gutersloh: Gutersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1980), 49-70.

Neyrey, Jerome H., " 'Without Beginning of Days or End of Life' (Hebrews 7.3): Topos for a True Deity," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53 (1991), 439-455.

Nickelsburg, George W. E., "The Apocalyptic Construction of Reality in *1 Enoch*," in J. J. Collins and J. H. Charlesworth (eds.), *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Collection* (Sheffield, 1991), 51-64, reprinted in A. J. Avery and J. Neusner (eds.), *George W. Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning*, 2 vols. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 1:29-43.

Nickelsburg, George W. E., "The Nature and Function of Revelation in *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees* and Some Qumranic Documents," in E. G. Chazon, M. E. Stone, and A. Pinnick (eds.), *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 203-230.

Nickelsburg, George W. E., "Enoch as Scientist, Sage and Prophet: Content, Function and Authorship in *1 Enoch*," *Society of Biblical Literature, Seminar Papers* 38 (1999), 203-230.

Nickelsburg, George W. E., (ed.), *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976).

Nir, Rivka, *The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Idea of Redemption in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2003).

Nock, Arthur D., "Gnosticism," *Harvard Theological Review* 57 (1964), 255-279.

Orlov, Andrei A., "Melchizedek Legend of 2 (Slavonic) *Enoch*," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 31 (2000), 23-38.

Orlov, Andrei A., *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2005).

Paden, William E., *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion* (2nd ed.; Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

Pagels, Elaine, "Conflicting Versions of Valentinian Eschatology: Irenaeus' Treatise vs. The Excerpts of Theodotus," *Harvard Theological Review* 67 (1974), 35-53.

Paget, J. C., "Clement of Alexandria and the Jews," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998), 86-97.

Pearson, Birger A., *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

Pearson, Birger A., "Friedländer Revisited: Alexandrian Judaism and Gnostic Origins," *Studia Philonica* 2 (1963), 23-39, reprinted in *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity* (1990), 10-28.

Pearson, Birger A., *The Emergence of the Christian Religion* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997).

Pearson, Birger A., *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* (New York and London: T & T Clark International, 2004).

Pearson, Birger A., *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

Pearson, Birger A., "Christians and Jews in First-Century Alexandria," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986), 206-216.

Pearson, Birger A., "Egyptian Seth and Gnostic Seth," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1977), 25-43.

Pearson, Birger A., "Pre-Valentinian Gnosticism in Alexandria," in Pearson, A. Th. Kraabel, G. W. E. Nickelsburg and N. R. Peterson (eds.), *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Helmut Koester* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 455-466.

Pearson, Birger A., "Ancient Alexandria in the *Acts of Mark*," *SBL Seminar Papers* 36 (1997), 273-284.

Pearson, Birger A., "Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism," in M. E. Stone and T. A. Bergren (eds.), *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998), 176-202.

Pearson, Birger A., "The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature," in B. Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 472-504.

Pearson, Birger A., "Christianity in Egypt," in D. N. Freedman et al, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1.956.

Pearson, Birger A. and James E. Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

Perkins, Pheme, *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

Petrement, Simone, Carol Harrison (trans.), *A Separate God: The Christian Origins of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990).

Petuchowski, J. J., "The Controversial Figure of Melchizedek," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957), 127-36,

Piovanelli, Pierluigi, "'Sitting by the Waters of Dan,' or The 'Tricky Business' of Tracing the Social Profile of the Communities that Produced the Earliest Enochic Texts," in G. Boccaccini and F. Garcia Martinez (eds.), *The Early Enoch Tradition* (Leiden, Brill: 2007, forthcoming).

Piovanelli, Pierluigi, "Les figures des leaders 'qui doivent venir.' Genèse et théorisation du messianisme juif à l'époque du Second Temple," in J.-C. Attias, P. Gisel and L. Kaenel (eds.), *Messianismes: Variations sur une figure juive* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000), 31-58.

Piovanelli, Pierluigi, "Les origines de l'*Apocalypse de Paul* reconsidérées," *Apocrypha* 4 (1993), 25-64.

Piovanelli, Pierluigi, "The Miraculous Discovery of the Hidden manuscript, or the Para-Textual Function of the Prologue to the *Apocalypse of Paul*," in George J. Brooke and Jean-Daniel Kaestli (eds.), *Narrativity in Biblical and Related Texts – La narrativité dans la Bible et les textes apparentés* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 265-282.

Poirier, P.-H., "Comment les gnostiques se sont-ils appelés? Comment doit-on les appeler aujourd'hui," *Studies in Religion* 33 (2004), 209-216.

Porten, B., *Jews of Elephantine and Arameans of Syrene* (Jerusalem, 1976).

Puech, Emile, "Notes sur le manuscrit de 11QMelkisedeq," *Revue de Qumrân* 12 (1987), 483-513.

Quasten, Johannes, *The Beginnings of Patristic Literature*, vol. 1 of *Patrology* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1992).

Quispel, Gilles, "The Demiurge in the *Apocryphon of John*," in R. McL. Wilson (ed.), *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 1-33.

Robinson, James M., "The Coptic Gnostic Library Today," *New Testament Studies* 14 (1967-68), 356-401.

Robinson, James M., "The Future of Papyrus Codicology," in R. McL. Wilson (ed.), *The Future of Coptic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 23-70.

Robinson, James M., and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

Rooke, D. W., *Zadok's Heirs: the Role and Development of the High Priesthood in Ancient Israel* (St. Louis, Miss., 2001).

Rousseau, Philip, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (2nd ed.; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999).

Rudolph, Kurt, R. McL. Wilson (translation ed.), *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1987).

Rudolph, Kurt, "'Gnosis' and 'Gnosticism': The Problems of Their Definitions and Their Relation to the Writings of the New Testament," in A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn (eds.), *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McLachlan Wilson* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983), 21-37.

Sacchi, Paolo, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1990).

Sandmel, S., *The First Christian Century in Judaism and Christianity and Uncertainties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Sandmel, S., *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

Schenke, Hans-Martin, "Das Sethianische System nach Nag-Hammadi-Handschriften," in P. Nagel (ed.), *Studia Coptica* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1974).

Schenke, Hans-Martin, "The Problem of Gnosis," *The Second Century* 3 (1983), 73-87.

Schenke, Hans-Martin, "The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostics Sethianism," in Layton (ed.) *The Rediscovery Of Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 2:588-616.

Schmidt, Carl, *Gnostische Schriften in koptischer Sprache aus dem Codex Brucianus* (Text und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literature 8; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1892).

Scholem, Gershom, "Jaldabaoth Reconsidered," in *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts a Henri-Charles Puech* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), 405-421.

Schwartz, Daniel R., "On Quirinus, John the Baptist, the Benedictus, Melchizedek, Qumran and Ephesus," *Revue de Qumran* 13 (1988), 635-646.

Segal, Alan F., *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 25; Leiden: Brill, 1977).

Siegfried, Morenz, Ann. E. Keep (trans.), *Egyptian Religion* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973).

Simon, M., "Melchisédech dans la polémique entre juifs et chrétiens et dans la légende," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 17 (1937), 58-93.

Smith, Carl B. II, *No Longer Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004).

Smith, Jonathan Z., *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago and London: University of London Press, 1990).

Smith, Jonathan Z., "Wisdom and Apocalyptic," in B. Pearson (ed.), *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity* (Series on Formative Contemporary Thinkers 1: Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975).

Smith, Morton, "The History of The Term 'Gnostikos'," in Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (Leiden, Brill: 1981), 2:796-807, reprinted in *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 2:183-193.

Smart, Ninian, *The Religious Experience* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996).

Stark, Rodney, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Stark, Rodney, and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985).

Stone, Michael E., and Theodore A. Bergren (eds.), *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998).

Stroumsa, Gedaliahu, *Savior et Salut* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1992).

Stroumsa, Gedaliahu, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden, Brill, 1984).

Sturm, Richard E., "Defining the Word 'Apocalyptic': A Problem in Biblical Criticism," in J. Marcus and M. L. Soards (eds.), *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 24; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 17-48.

Tantlevskij, Igor R., "Melchizedek *Redivivus* in Qumran: Some Peculiarities of Messianic Ideas and Elements of Mysticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *The Qumran Chronicle* 12 (2004), 7-79.

Tcherikover, Victor, S. Applebaum trans., *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

Tcherikover, Victor, "The Decline of the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt in the Roman Period," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 14 (1963), 1-32.

Tite, Philip L., "Carl B. Smith, *No Longer Jews*" (Review), *RBL* 07 (2005), at <http://www.bookreviews.org>.

Torjesen, Karen Jo, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995).

Turner, H. E. W., *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study of the Relations Between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: Mowbray, 1954).

Turner, John D., *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (Laval, Louvain and Paris: Les Presses de l'Université Laval and Peeters, 2001).

Turner, John D., "The Gnostic Seth," in M. E. Stone and T. A. Bergren (eds.), *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998), 33-58.

Turner, John D., "Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History," in C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson, Jr. (eds.), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosis and Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1986), 55-86.

Turner, John D., "The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment," *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980), 324-351.

Turner, John D., and Anne McGuire (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

Vallée, Gérard, *A Study in Anti-Gnostic Polemics: Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Epiphanius* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1981).

Van Baaren, T. P., "Towards a Definition of Gnosticism," in Ugo Bianchi (ed.), *Le origini dello gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina, 13-18 aprile 1966* (Leiden: Brill), 178-180.

Van den Broek, Roelof, and Wouter J. Hanegraff, *Gnosis and Hermeticism: From Antiquity to Modern Times* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

Van De Water, Rick, "Michael or Yhwh? Yoward Identifying Melchizedek in 11Q13," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 16 (2006), 75-86.

Van Gronigen, G., *First Century Gnosticism: Its Origins and Motifs* (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

VanderKam, James C., "The Origins and Purposes of the Book of Jubilees," in M. Albani, J. Frey and A. Lange, (eds.), *Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), 3-24.

VanderKam, James C., "The Angel Story in the Book of Jubilees," in E. G. Chazon, M. E. Stone and A. Pinnick (eds.), *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 151-170,

VanderKam, James C., *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests After the Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004). Wagner, W. H., *After the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

Werman, C. "The Sons of Zadok," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years*, 623-630.

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

Williams, Michael A., "The Demonizing of the Demiurge: The Innovation of Gnostic Myth," in Michael A. Williams, Collett Cox, and Martin S. Jaffee (eds.), *Innovations in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change* (New York: de Gruyter, 1992), 73-107.

Williams, Michael A., *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity* (Nag Hammadi Studies 29; Leiden: Brill, 1985).

Wilson, R. McLachlan, "Philo of Alexandria and Gnosticism," *Kairos* 14 (1972), 213-219.

Wilson, R. McLachlan (ed.), *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis: Papers Read at the First International Congress of Coptology* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

Wilson, Stephen G., *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70-170 CE*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press).

Wisse, Frederik, "Stalking Those Elusive Sethians," in Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 2:563-576.

Wisse, Frederik, "After the *Synopsis*: Prospects and Problems in Establishing a Critical Text of the *Apocryphon of John* and Defining its Historical Location," in Turner and McGuire (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 138-153.

Wisse, Frederik, "Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt," in Barbara Aland (ed.) *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1978), 431-440.

Xeravits, Geza G., *King, Priest and Prophet: Positive Eschatological Protagonists of the Qumran Library* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 47; Leiden: Brill, 2003).

Xeravits, Geza G., "Wisdom Traits in the Qumranic Presentation of the Eschatological Prophet," In Florentino Garcia Martinez (ed.), *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 168; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 183-192.

Yamauchi, Edwin, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973).

Yamauchi, Edwin, "The Descent of Ishtar, the Fall of Sophia, and the Jewish Roots of Gnosticism," *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978), 143-175.

Yamauchi, Edwin, "The Issue of Pre-Christian Gnosticism Reviewed in Light of the Nag Hammadi Texts," in Turner and McGuire (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years* (Leiden: Brill), 72-88.