

## ASTROLOGICAL MEDICINE IN Gnostic TRADITIONS

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Much narrower than the general topics of both astrology and medicine, to say nothing of magic, the study of astrological medicine in western antiquity is prohibitive for a number of reasons besides the 'wretchedness' of all things astrological.<sup>1</sup> For one, several of the ancient texts have not survived or only survive in fragments. Moreover they were often written under the names of legendary figures such as the pharaoh and Hermetic sage Nechepso or even Hermes Trismegistus himself. Thus information as to any social reality behind this technical Hermetic tradition is scarce. So is information as to any social reality behind the affiliated pseudo-Zoroastrian and Solomonic traditions of the Hellenistic period and Roman Empire. The boundaries between these traditions are debatable, like the extent to which they represent belief and practice that are actually Egyptian, Persian, or Jewish.<sup>2</sup>

'Alien wisdom' or not, titles attributed to such legendary figures are cited in Gnostic texts. The *Apocryphon of John* refers to a Book of Zoroaster (πρωτομε ζωροαστρος) and may in fact contain an extract from it.<sup>3</sup> *On the Origin of the World* refers to a Book of Solomon (πρωτομε σολομων).<sup>4</sup> Although perhaps unidentifiable with any other known pseudepigrapha, the presence of these titles in Ophite-Sethian texts brings with it the possibility of astrological medicine in Gnostic traditions.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A concise encyclopedia entry aimed at some of the technical Hermetica is Touwaide 2005, 690–692; preceded by Kroll 1914, 802–804. See also recently Michel 2004a, 146–177 for the gems; Akasoy et al. 2008 for astrological medicine both eastern and western. On the wretchedness of astrology, refer to Sarton 1951, 374, writing of the Mandaean *Book of the Zodiac*; and the follow-up in Neugebauer 1951; Taub 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Hermetic tradition: e.g. Riess 1892; Festugière 1950/1989; Gundel-Gundel 1966, 9–40; Pingree 1974; Fowden 1986/1993; González 2005. Zoroastrian tradition: e.g. Bidez-Cumont 1938/1975; Beck 1991; de Jong 1997, 5–38; Quack 2006; Solomonic tradition: e.g. Torijano 2002.

<sup>3</sup> NHC II,1 19.10: Waldstein-Wisse 1995, III.

<sup>4</sup> NHC II,5 107.3: Layton 1989, 48–49.

<sup>5</sup> Prior discussion of iatromathematics, melothesia, and/or healing in 'Gnostic' traditions includes van den Broek 1981; Jackson 1985, 74–108; Quack 1995; King 1997; Brakke 2000,



Table 2. (cont.)

The Seventy-Two Astral Rulers		The Thirty Astral Rulers	
Name	Psychic Body Part	Name	Psychic Body Part
ΒΑΣΙΛΙΑΔΗΜΗ	tonsils	ΠΙΣΑΝΔΡΑΠΤΗC	chest
ΑΧΧΑ	uvula	ΚΟΔΔΗ	r. shoulder joint
ΑΔΑΒΑΝ	neck	ΟΔΘΩΡ	l. shoulder joint
ΧΑΔΜΑΝ	vertebrae	ΑΟΦΙΣΙΞ	r. ribs
ΔΕΑΡΧΩ	throat	ΣΥΝΟΓΧΟΥΤΑ	l. ribs
ΤΗΒΑΡ	r. shoulder	ΑΡΟΥΦ	belly
Ν[...]	l. shoulder	ΣΑΒΑΛΩ	womb
ΜΝΙΑΡΧΩΝ	r. elbow	ΧΑΡΧΑΡΒ	r. thigh
[...]Ε	l. elbow	ΧΘΑΩΝ	l. thigh
ΑΒΙΤΡΙΩΝ	r. underarm	ΒΛΘΙΝΩΘ	genitals
ΕΥΑΝΘΗΝ	l. underarm	ΧΟΥΞ	r. leg
ΚΡΥC	r. hand	ΧΑΡΧΑ	l. leg
ΒΗΛΥΑΙ	l. hand	ΑΡΟΗΡ	r. shin
ΤΡΗΝΕΥ	r. fingers	ΤΩΕΧΘΑ	l. shin
ΒΑΛΒΗΧ	l. fingers	ΑΩΛ	r. knee
ΚΡΙΜΑ	fingermails	ΧΑΡΑΝΗΡ	l. knee
ΑCΤΡΩΥ	r. breast	ΒΑCΤΑΝ	r. foot
ΒΑΡΡΩΦ	l. breast	ΑΡΧΕΝΤΕΧΘΑ	r. toes
ΒΑΟΥΗ	r. shoulder joint	ΜΑΡΕΦΗΟΥΓΗ	l. foot
ΑΡΑΡΙΗ	l. shoulder joint	ΑΒΡΑΝΑ	l. toes
et alii	et cetera		

### Celsus, Origen, and Plotinus on Gnostic Ritual Practice

According to Celsus, some of the Christians that he was familiar with, and that Origen preferred to call Ophian heretics, memorized the names of the seven planetary rulers for use in heavenly ascent. Origen even quotes the ascent formulas from a copy of one of their diagrams of the cosmos.<sup>9</sup> Memorization would go some way towards explaining the varied continuity to the many lists of the names of the seven astral rulers attested throughout Ophite-Sethian literature.<sup>10</sup> But memorization and spoken recitation for ascent need not have been the only use of the names of astral rulers in Gnostic myth. The widespread phenomenon of heavenly ascent in the ancient Mediterranean does not fully account for instances of the doctrine

<sup>9</sup> *Contra Celsum* 7.40; 6.31. On the diagrams and ascent formulas, see DeConick's contribution to this volume.

<sup>10</sup> See table 3 below; also Rasimus 2009, 104.

of melothesia in Ophite-Sethian texts, least of all such an elaborate double-decanal melothesia as in the *Apocryphon of John*. Stripping off the bodily passions while ascending through the cosmic spheres would not have required knowledge of the names of the astral rulers with which the ears, nose, lips, teeth, molars, tonsils, uvula, throat, and so on, are associated. Practical application of this knowledge must have been otherwise.<sup>11</sup>

Upon conclusion of his exposé of ascent ritual, Celsus says that the Ophian Christians “profess also some magical sorcery (καὶ ὑπισχνούνται ... μαγικήν τινα γοητείαν), and this is the summit of wisdom to them (καὶ τοῦτ' ἔστιν αὐτοῖς τὸ τῆς σοφίας κεφάλαιον).” It is not plain what else Celsus has to say about this or how his statements fit together, as his work is only preserved in limited quotation by Origen. He does go on to say, however, that they “use some sort of magic and sorcery (χρωμένους ... μαγείᾳ τινὶ καὶ γοητείᾳ) and invoke the barbarous names of certain daemons (καὶ καλοῦντας ὀνόματα βαρβαρικά δαιμόνων τινῶν).” He refrains from delineating “all those who taught rites of purification (ἄσοι καθαρμῶδες ἐδίδαξαν), or spells which bring deliverance (ἢ λυτηρίους ᾤδᾶς), or formulas that avert evil (ἢ ἀποπομπίμους φωνᾶς), or noisy crashes (ἢ κτύπους), or pretended miracles (ἢ δαιμονίους σχηματισμούς), or all the various prophylactics of clothes, or numbers, or stones, or plants, or roots, and other objects of every sort (ἐσθήτων ἢ ἀριθμῶν ἢ λίθων ἢ φυτῶν ἢ ῥιζῶν καὶ ὄλων παντοδαπῶν χρημάτων παντοῖα ἀλεξιφάρμακα).” But he testifies that he himself saw “books containing barbarian names of daemons and knowledge of portents (βιβλία βάρβαρα δαιμόνων ὀνόματα ἔχοντα καὶ τερατείας)” in the hands of Ophian Christians.<sup>12</sup>

Celsus disparages them for this. Nevertheless, his disparagement does not invalidate his basic testimony. With disparagement of his own, Origen also claims that the Ophian Christians were involved in sorcery and magic, unlike orthodox Christians, so he asserts.<sup>13</sup> From Origen's limited quotations of Celsus, it is reliable enough that Ophian Christians invoked daemons with unusual names and owned books with the names written in them. Why and how they invoked the daemons is not something that either Celsus or Origen specifies, at least not something that Celsus specifies as quoted in Origen. Prompted by his encounter with them, Celsus does have a few lines about amulets made from assorted media though. Could the Ophian Christians he encountered have used amulets alongside invocation?

<sup>11</sup> Heavenly ascent: e.g. Segal 1980; Culianu 1983; Couliano 1984.

<sup>12</sup> *Contra Celsum* 6.38–40; Borret 1969, 270–275; Chadwick 1953/1965, 354–355; translation modified.

<sup>13</sup> *Contra Celsum* 6.31–32, 38–41; 7.40.

Later, roughly a century after Celsus and within a few decades of Origen, Plotinus had similar things to say about some of his associates in Rome. They were Christians that his literary executor Porphyry referred to as Gnostics. Plotinus says that they “write chants, intending to address them to those beings (ἐπαοιδὰς γράφωσιν ὡς πρὸς ἐκεῖνα λέγοντες), not only to the Soul [i.e. World Soul, a.k.a. Wisdom, Sophia] but to the beings above it as well (οὐ μόνον πρὸς ψυχὴν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐπάνω);” while below “they claim to purify themselves of sicknesses (καθαίρεσθαι δὲ νόσων λέγοντες αὐτούς),” based on their assumption that “the sicknesses are daemons (τὰς νόσους δαιμόνια εἶναι), and they claim to be able to drive these out by their word (καὶ ταῦτα ἐξαιρεῖν λόγῳ φάσκοντες δύνασθαι).”<sup>14</sup> He does not mention amulets as such, but he does indicate that these Gnostic Christians wrote things as well as spoke them.

Plotinus is only slightly less disparaging than Celsus and Origen. He argues that the Gnostics were doing the same things prescribed in magical literature, even if they did not think so. Instead of what they were doing to heal themselves, Gnostics ought to live a philosophical life, according to Plotinus. Daemons do not cause sickness, anyway. This is in keeping with Plotinus’ stance on astrological determinism, namely that the stars indicate terrestrial conditions more than they actually influence them. Regardless, the highest order of things is what the philosopher is after. He should not worry so much about what goes on in the lower orders.<sup>15</sup>

Taken together with what Celsus and Origen say, there is evidence in contemporary reports, then, that Gnostics invoked daemons and owned books with daemon names in them. This was because they believed that daemons cause bodily ailment, which they endeavored to cleanse themselves of and remove by their word. When this contemporary evidence is added to the instances of melothesia in Ophite-Sethian texts, the possibility of astrological medicine in these Gnostic traditions becomes plausible, and a reading of their myths within the context of iatromathematical texts is justifiable.

### *Gnostic Myth in the Context Of Iatromathematical Texts*

Among the best preserved texts of astrological medicine are the *Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius* and the *Testament of Solomon*. Establishing a date of

<sup>14</sup> *Ennead* 2.9.14: Armstrong 1966, 276–279; translation modified.

<sup>15</sup> *Ennead* 2.9.13–14.

composition for either is difficult. All manuscripts of the *Sacred Book of Hermes* are medieval, although the text itself is likely ancient.<sup>16</sup> Galen, for example, cites a comparable prescription of astrological medicine from a technical Hermetic text attributed to Nechepso.<sup>17</sup> As for the *Testament of Solomon*, all complete manuscripts are also medieval. However, it was already being cited in late antiquity, and there are papyrus fragments of chapter eighteen that date to the fifth or sixth century.<sup>18</sup> A recent argument places the final Christian version of the testament as early as 175–250 CE, while reiterating that its important eighteenth chapter on the decans would be at home in late Ptolemaic or early Roman Egypt and may have been in circulation as an independent text before the Common Era.<sup>19</sup> Josephus attests the attribution of such texts to Solomon in the first century. He himself witnessed the therapeutic removal of a daemon by a Jewish practitioner. In accordance with Solomonic prescription, the practitioner used a gemstone amulet set in a ring with plant material.<sup>20</sup>

The *Sacred Book of Hermes* is a manual. Having learned about the doctrine of melothesia, its practitioner is taught the zodiacal signs, names, iconography, and associated body parts of all thirty-six decans. In order to heal and protect the associated body part, the practitioner is instructed to make an amulet from whatever gemstone is proper to that decan and then set it in a ring with that decan’s plant. On the gemstone are to be engraved the name and above all the iconography of that decan. This is how the text opens:

I appended for you the shapes and forms of the thirty-six decans in the zodia, both how you must engrave (γλύφειν) each one of them and wear it between the Ascendant and the Agathos Daimōn and the Place concerning health. So after you do this, wear it, and you will have a great amulet. For as many sufferings as are sent upon humans from the influence of the stars (ὅσα γὰρ ἐπιπέμπεται πάθη τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ τῆς τῶν ἀστέρων ἀπορροίας), they are healed by these decans (τούτοις ἰᾶται). Therefore when you have revered (τιμήσας)

<sup>16</sup> Editions and translations: Pitra 1888, 284–290; Ruelle 1908; Gundel 1936, 374–379; Festugière 1950/1989, 139–143; compare also Kroll 1903, 73–78. The manuscripts postdate the thirteenth century. For the late Byzantine scribal context, see Pingree 1971; Rigo 2002.

<sup>17</sup> *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus* 9.2.19; cited and discussed below.

<sup>18</sup> Manuscripts, editions, and translations are discussed in Klutz 2005, ix–x, 1–37; another translation with commentary has since appeared, Busch 2006. McCown’s standard edition of the text is known to be problematic but it is yet to be replaced. It may never be and arguably should not be replaced with an eclectic text that aims to represent the original, as the manuscripts are highly divergent.

<sup>19</sup> Klutz 2005, 34–35, 109–110.

<sup>20</sup> *Antiquitates Judaicae* 8.42–49.

each decan through its proper stone and its proper plant and especially its shape, you will have a great amulet. For without this decanal arrangement there is no generation of anything, since the universe is encompassed by it.

Now the zodiacal circle, shaped into parts and members and joints, stands out from the cosmos. And part by part it is thus. Aries is the head of the cosmos, Taurus the neck, Gemini the shoulders, Cancer the chest, Leo the back, heart, and sides, Virgo the abdomen, Libra the buttocks, Scorpio the genitals, Sagittarius the thighs, Capricorn the knees, Aquarius the lower legs, Pisces the feet.

So each of the zodia has power over its own member and brings about some suffering related to that member (ἕκαστον οὖν τῶν ζῳδίων ἐπέχει τὸ ἴδιον μέλος καὶ ἀποτελεῖ περὶ αὐτὸ πάθος τι). Accordingly, if you do not want to suffer what you must suffer under the zodia (εἴπερ βούλει μὴ παθεῖν ἀ δεῖ παθεῖν ὑπ' αὐτῶν), engrave the shapes and forms of their decans on stones. And after you put the plant of each decan underneath, and especially after you also produce its shape, wear the amulet as your body's great and blessed remedy. Let us start then from Aries.

First decan of Aries. This one is named Chenlachōri. As for its shape, given below, it has the face of a little child, hands raised up, holding a scepter as if carrying it overhead, the shins clad with greaves. This one dominates the sufferings that are related to the head (οὗτος κυριεύει τῶν περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν γινομένων παθῶν). Engrave it then just so on fine Babylonian stone, and after you put isophrus plant underneath, set it in an iron ring and wear it. Avoid eating boar's head. For thus you will flatter (κολακεύσεις) each one of the decans when you engrave it on its stone along with its proper name also.<sup>21</sup>

The text proceeds formulaically through the remaining thirty-five decans. If working alone, the practitioner assumed in the *Sacred Book of Hermes* would have knowledge of astrology, botany, gem cutting, and metallurgy. He is able to recognize and has access to specific materials. As an artisan he possesses the tools and expertise needed to craft the prescribed amulets.

Emphasis on gem cutting and on the iconography of the decans in the *Sacred Book of Hermes* could be a reaction to more skeptical physicians like Galen. In a famous passage from his voluminous work entitled *On the Composition and Specificity of Simple Remedies*, Galen comes to write about the use of stones.<sup>22</sup> Of green jasper he writes: "Some people bear witness that there is a special property to certain stones, such as in fact the green jasper does have. It benefits the stomach and the opening of the esophagus when it is worn. Some people," Galen goes on to explain, "even set the stone

<sup>21</sup> *Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius* 1–5; Ruelle 1908, 250–253; translation mine.

<sup>22</sup> *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus*, beginning at 9.2.1.

in a ring and engrave on it the radiate serpent (ἐντιθέασί τε καὶ δακτυλίῳ αὐτὸν ἔνιοι καὶ γλύφουσιν ἐν αὐτῷ τὸν τὰς ἀκτῖνας ἔχοντα δράκοντα), just as king Nechepso indeed prescribed in his fourteenth book (καθάπερ καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς Νεχεψῶς ἔγραψεν ἐν τῇ τεσσαρακαιδεκάτῃ βίβλῳ). Now I myself have made a sufficient trial of this stone," Galen adds. "After I made a little necklace of small stones of this type, I hung it from the neck just so as for the stones to reach the opening of the esophagus. They appeared no less beneficial when they did not have the engraving (τὴν γλυφὴν) that Nechepso prescribed."<sup>23</sup> In this passage Galen thinks that the stone itself is a natural curative, but his contemporaries, whether pagan, Jewish, or Christian, were less certain that prescriptions like that of the legendary Nechepso were unnecessary. For them, the names and iconography of the astral rulers were key to healing and protecting the body.

While the *Sacred Book of Hermes* is a manual of instructions for engraving gemstone amulets, chapter eighteen of the *Testament of Solomon* mixes instruction and narrative. The iconography of the decans is not featured in the text, but it hardly shares the skepticism of Galen. As Solomon tells the story, he summons each decanal daemon to find out who it is. They respond one by one, answering with their name, the associated body part that they afflict or their influence on human life more broadly, and what should be done to counteract them. These measures are often speech oriented but also include the making of amulets of various media to be inscribed with the names of thwarting gods and angels. After giving its name, the first decan tells Solomon, "I cause people's heads to suffer pain and I cause their temples to throb (κεφαλὰς ἀνθρώπων ποιῶ ἀλγεῖν καὶ κροτάφους σαλεύω)." Conveniently enough for anyone who might be suffering from such a headache, before concluding its response to the king the decan mentions that when it hears someone invoke the archangel Michael to thwart it, it immediately withdraws (εὐθὺς ἀναχωρῶ), that is, the headache will be gone.<sup>24</sup>

In terms of genre, this chapter of the *Testament of Solomon* is closer than the *Sacred Book of Hermes* is to the *Apocryphon of John*. The Gnostic myth is also told as a story, although the practical application of its doctrine of melothesia is less obvious. All three texts feature decanal names and associated body parts. But there are instructions for healing and protecting the

<sup>23</sup> *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus* 9.2.19; Kühn 1826/1965, 207; translation mine, with reference to Bonner 1950, 54; Jackson 1985, 77–78; see both, for issues of textual transmission and translation of the passage.

<sup>24</sup> *Testament of Solomon* 18.5; McCown 1922, 52; Duling 1983, 978; translation modified.

body only in the sacred book and the testament, not in the apocryphon. Chapter eighteen of the testament seems to have been composed through narrative adaptation of a manual something like the sacred book: a decanal melothesia and instructions for healing and protecting the body have been placed within a narrative framework dealing with the career and reputation of Solomon. Likewise in the apocryphon, an elaborate decanal melothesia and another melothesia of thirty astral rulers are placed within a narrative framework as the Savior retells the account of creation from Jewish scripture. The testament is also closer to the apocryphon in that its decans are negatively called daemons.

Perhaps the source of this material in the *Apocryphon of John* was the Book of Zoroaster referred to there. Whether a pagan or Christian text, it could have been a manual of astrological medicine, complete with instructions for making amulets. The *Sacred Book of Hermes* and the *Testament of Solomon* are limited to the thirty-six decans, but there is a second-century papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, P.Oxy. 465, that features the names and iconography of the seventy-two 'half' decans, their astrological influence on parts of the body, households, cities, kingdoms. As the same double-decanal structure of the Greco-Egyptian cosmos is found in early Sethian and proto-Sethian texts like the *Gospel of Judas* and *Eugnostos* respectively, the melothesia of seventy-two astral rulers in the long manuscripts of the *Apocryphon of John* does not necessarily represent a later development in Gnostic myth.

#### *Speech and Amulets in Gnostic Astrological Medicine*

More important than source criticism is the question of what use Gnostic myth had with its instances of the doctrine of melothesia. The evidence from Celsus, Origen, and Plotinus together points to the invocation of daemons for purposes of healing and protecting the body. Celsus has a few lines about amulets made from assorted media such as stones, plants, roots; and Plotinus indicates that Gnostics wrote things as well as spoke them. Despite the absence of any explicit instructions for making iatromathematical amulets in Ophite-Sethian literature, a reading of their myths in the context of the *Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius* and the *Testament of Solomon* shows how the iconography and names of the astral rulers could have been used to heal and protect the body.

Somewhat generously though not wildly reconstructed, astrological medicine in these Gnostic traditions as I understand it involved both speech and the making of amulets. The planetary melothesia in the *Apocryphon of John*

and *On the Origin of the World* would have allowed for making amulets that feature not only the names of any of the seven astral rulers but also their iconography; the decanal melothesia in the *Apocryphon of John* would have allowed for making amulets that feature the names of any of the seventy-two astral rulers; and the other melothesia following it would have allowed for making amulets that feature the names of any of the thirty astral rulers whose precise astrological function is unclear but are said to be "particularly active in the members (ἑρπᾶι ἐν ἄνθρωπος)." <sup>25</sup>

Hence, whatever the ailment in any given body part, from one of the major organs to the toenails, it could be healed or prevented. Speech was quicker and less costly to be sure, and the vocalized word was forceful. Still the making of amulets might have been valued precisely because of the extra involvement and the power of iconography. Inscribed amulets made from common media need not have required more than basic literacy, whereas amulets made from metal foil or gemstones could only be had with additional expertise and tools. Gnostics who wore gemstone amulets set in rings or as pendants around their necks must have had knowledge of gem cutting and metallurgy or else commissioned other, maybe non-Gnostic, artisans to make them. The use of plants and the knowledge of botany as assumed of the practitioner in the *Sacred Book of Hermes* are also possible. <sup>26</sup>

Identifying an amulet as Gnostic has been a problem in the history of scholarship. Objection to the excesses of previous generations of scholars, while necessary, has had the infelicitous result that the study of amulets is liable to be neglected in Nag Hammadi studies. If there is just a handful of amulets that are identifiably Gnostic, this does not mean that Gnostics were uninterested in wearing them. To find some amulets that are Gnostic would be rather fortunate given that Christians were a small percentage of the population of the ancient Mediterranean. A handful is all that might be expected to be found. <sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> NHC II,1 17.8–9; Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 103; translation modified.

<sup>26</sup> For amulets and amulet making in general, see Kotansky 2005; for gems and gem cutting in general, see Michel 2004b.

<sup>27</sup> Counting gemstone amulets, which survive in the greatest number and are the most durable, there is an estimated total of 5,000. See Michel 2005, 141. Among the major catalogues and studies are Bonner 1950; Delatte-Derchain 1964; Philipp 1986; Michel 2001a; 2001b; Mastrocinque 2003; Michel 2004a. Christianity constituted maybe half a percent of the population as Celsus was writing in the second century; it was maybe one or two percent of the population in the third century as Origen and Plotinus were writing. Refer to the projections in Stark 1996, which increase exponentially in the fourth century. Of course, many Christians were not Gnostics, so the Gnostic percentage of the population would be even lower. While

### The Ialdbaōth Gem

Such good fortune was the late Campbell Bonner's when he examined some amulets from the New York gallery of a major art and antiquities dealer. Recognizing one of them to be "of a rare and important kind," Bonner first published it separately in 1949 and then again the following year in his *Studies in Magical Amulets*. On the front it features a lion-headed human figure standing between the names Ααρηνλ and Ιαλδαβαωθ. On the back are the names of the seven planetary rulers, the first one abbreviated: Ια(λδαβαωθ), Ιαω, Σαβαωθ, Αδωναι, Ελωαι, Ωρρεος, Ασταφεος.<sup>28</sup>

Bonner bases his estimation of the rarity and importance of the amulet on its seeming "to be truly Gnostic. Contrary to an opinion which was once widely held," he explains, "few of the amulets commonly called Gnostic have anything to do with the various speculative religious systems to which that word is properly applied," making it "all the more important that a genuine relic of Gnostic belief should be faithfully recorded." Bonner correctly identifies the gem as an amulet of the Ophite Gnostics, with reference to the myth in Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.30, and to the descriptions of the cosmological diagrams by Celsus and Origen. He rightly sees the names on the amulet as those of the planetary rulers and notes that the first ruler is described as leonine in Celsus and Origen, from which Bonner concludes that "[t]he lion-headed demon [on the front of the amulet] may therefore be accepted as Ialdabaoth."<sup>29</sup>

it is challenging to quantify how many Gnostic amulets of astrological medicine might be expected to survive, then, out of an estimated 5,000 total gems, iatromathematical and otherwise, certainly no more than one hundred might be expected, and in all likelihood far less than that. Compare the number of Christian books, dating to the first three centuries, that might be expected to survive from Roman Egypt, as discussed in Bagnall 2009, 1–24. Additional challenge to a quantification of expected Gnostic gems is that the gems themselves are hard to date with much precision. A few easily come from before the Common Era; others were produced as late as the modern period. However, in the expert opinion of Michel 2005, 143, "the production of magical gems peaked in the second and third centuries CE."

<sup>28</sup> Bonner 1949; 1950, 135–138, 284 (D. 188).

<sup>29</sup> Bonner 1949, 43–45. If he had not faithfully recorded the gem when he did, it would have gone completely unappreciated by scholarship, as its whereabouts have been unknown since the dispersal of the Joseph Brummer collection. Information pertaining to the dispersal of the collection is to be had in the *New York Times*: 15 April 1947, 25; 16 September 1947, 26; 22 September 1947, 22; 20 January 1948, 25; 25 September 1948, 10; 17 April 1949, 80; 21 April 1949, 23; 22 April 1949, 21; 23 April 1949, 9; 8 May 1949, 80; 15 May 1949, 72; 22 May 1949, 91; 9 June 1949, 28; 10 June 1949, 25; 12 June 1949, 80; 23 March 1964, 85; in auction catalogues: Parke-Bernet 1949; Sotheby's 1964; Galerie Koller 1979; in a memoir by Brummer's contemporary: Martin 2002; and in a Duke University museum catalogue:

Even though he did not have at his disposal the Coptic manuscripts of Ophite-Sethian texts, the bulk of which had only recently been discovered and remained to be published in critical edition, Bonner's interpretation of the amulet is remarkably accurate. With the publication of the Berlin Gnostic Codex, the Nag Hammadi Codices, and now the Tchacos Codex, further correspondences have come to light.

Most striking is a passage from *On the Origin of the World*, where it is said that the chief astral ruler "called himself Ialdaoth (αμιογτε εροϋ χε ιαλλαωθ, scribal error for ιαλλαβαωθ). But Ariael is what the perfect call him (Ἰταλειος δε εγμογτε εροϋ χε αριαηλ), for he was like a lion (χε νεγεινε Ἰμογει πε)."<sup>30</sup> Correspondence between this passage and the lion-headed figure standing between the names Ααρηνλ and Ιαλδαβαωθ on the front of the amulet is extraordinary. It confirms Bonner's suggestion that Ariel is "only a secondary name or epithet of the lion-headed Ialdabaoth," though it may be more accurate to say that Ialdabaoth is a secondary name of Ariel. Bonner had also suggested that "the presence of the name Ariel in conjunction with Ialdabaoth can best be explained by its Hebrew meaning, which, according to some authorities, is 'Lion of God,' i.e. לִיֹּאֵל.<sup>31</sup> And just as he suggested, *On*

Bruzelius 1991. After Joseph Brummer's death in 1947, the collection was dispersed in several ways. A group of objects was purchased for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1947, and other private sales occurred before the auction by Parke-Bernet in New York in 1949. Some of the collection stayed with Joseph's brother Ernest. The Ernest Brummer collection was auctioned by Sotheby's in London in 1964, the year of his death, and by Galerie Koller in Zürich in 1979. Part of the family collection also went to Duke beginning in 1966, and another portion remained with Ella Baché, Ernest Brummer's widow, even in the 1990s. Her nephew, Dr. John Laszlo, graciously informed me that the amulet is not with him, when I inquired as to its whereabouts, January 2008. It could have been sold in one of the private purchases of 1947–1948, however insignificant it must have seemed among the other objects in a collection so vast; or it could have been grouped together with one of the 57 lots of "cameos, intaglios, and seals" offered in the 1949 Parke-Bernet catalogue, all of which lots were sold; or it could have been dispersed from the family collection sometime after that. I have inquired at the Metropolitan and at Duke, as well as at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, which has some gems purchased from Joseph Brummer in 1942, but the amulet in question was not located there. Parke-Bernet was acquired by Sotheby's along with its records of sales, including the lots of gems in the 1949 auction. Names of buyers are confidential, however. The only description and photos of the amulet from autopsy, then, are Campbell Bonner's. His black-and-white photos are from casts, whereas he describes the stone as "green jasper clouded with dark red." The casts are housed in the Kelsey Museum in Ann Arbor, Michigan: KEL Inv. BRU 5; see Michel 2004a, 546. With luck, one day the amulet may be located and photographed in color as well.

<sup>30</sup> NHC II, 5 100.23–26; Layton 1989, 34–35.

<sup>31</sup> Bonner 1949, 46. As for the rest of the names on the amulet, Ialdabaoth is ostensibly

the *Origin of the World* connects the name Ariaël with the chief astral ruler's leonine appearance. What is more, *On the Origin of the World* also supplies a list of the names of the seven astral rulers that is virtually identical to the one on the reverse of the gem (see table 3).<sup>32</sup>

Table 3. Lists of the names of the seven astral rulers

Gem:	NHC II,5:	Irenaeus:	Origen:	BC 20915:
Ια(λδαβαωθ)	ἰαλλαβαωθ	Ialdabaoth	Ἰαλδαβαώθ	[ἰαλλα]βαωθ
Ιαω	ἰαω	Iao	Ἰαώ	[c]αβαωθ
Σαβαωθ	σαβαωθ	Sabaoth	Σαβαώθ	αΔΩΝΑΙΟ[ε]
Αδωναι	αΔΩΝΑΙΟC	Adoneus	Ἀδωναίος	[ἰαωθ]
Ελωαι	ελωαιοC	Eloeus	Ἄσταφαιός	[ε]λωαιοC
Ωρεος	ωραιοC	Horeus	Ἀίλωαιός	ωραιοC
Ασταφειος	αCταφαιοC	Astaphaeus	Ἦραίος	α[ε]CταφαιοC

Semitic but of disputed etymology. Iaō (compare יהוה), Sabaōth (סַבְאוֹת), Adōnai (אֲדֹנָי), and Elōai (אֱלֹהִים) are divine names and epithets from Jewish scripture that have been transliterated into Greek. Iaō, Sabaōth, and Adōnai in particular occur everywhere on amulets and in the Greco-Egyptian ritual papyri. The last two names on the Ialdabaōth gem, Hōreos and Astapheos, are of uncertain derivation and occur only rarely, if at all in the case of Hōreos; the name HORIZON occurs after variations of Iaō and Sabaōth in a demotic love spell, *PDM* xiv.1035. There are occurrences of the name Ialdazaō and Aldabaim, but the name Ialdabaōth proper only occurs on one other amulet. A portion of this gem was already broken off when it was transcribed in the early 1800s, and since then the gem was lost. According to Bevilacqua, 1991, 26–28, who published the transcription but was unable to locate the gem, the transcription “is not very clear: the letters cannot be distinguished with safety.” At any rate, when the names of the seven planetary rulers of Gnostic myth do occur on amulets and in the Greco-Egyptian ritual papyri, they do not refer to multiple gods so much as one and same conglomerate deity. See e.g. *PGM* XII.284–307, where a single supreme god is invoked as ΙΑΘ ΣΑΒΑΩΘ ΑΔΩΝΑΙ ΕΙΛΩΕΙΝ ... ΑΣΤΑΦΑΙΟΣ, among many other names.

<sup>32</sup> NHC II,5 101.29–102.1: Layton 1989, 36, with Ialdabaōth supplied from 100.10–24. There are other more or less identical lists in: Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.30.5, 11; Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 369, 378; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.31; Borret 1969, 254–258, with Adōnaios supplied from 6.32; the “[teaching] of the Sethians” according to the so-called Coptic Book, *Berlin Codex* 20915; Schenke Robinson 2000, 247. And there are other lists without the name Hōraios in: *On the Origin of the World* NHC II,5 100.9–23; Layton 1989, 36; *Apocryphon of John* BG 8502,2 43.11–44.4; NHC II,1 11.26–34, 12.15–25; NHC IV,1 19.15–26; BG 8502,2 41.17–42.7; NHC III,1 17.22–18.6; Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 70–75. This is the order in which I have arranged the lists in table 3. Correspondence between the Ialdabaōth gem and *On the Origin of the World* is all the more striking given the general lack of such precise correspondence between the extant gems and Greco-Egyptian ritual papyri. See Michel 2005, 144.

Table 3. (cont.)

Without Hōraios, 2x Sabaōth				
NHC II,5:	BG 8502,2:	NHC II,1:	NHC II,1:	NHC IV,1:
ἰαω	ἰαωθ	αθωθ	αθωθ	α[θ]ω[θ]
ελωαι	ελωαιοC	ελωαιογ	ελωαιω	ελω[αιω]
αCταφαιοC	αCταφαιοC	αCταφαιοC	αCταφαιω	[αCτ]ρα[φαιω]
—	ἰαω	ἰαω	ἰαω	[ἰα]ω
—	σαβαωθ	σαβαωθ	σανβαωθ	σανβαωθ
—	αΔ[ΩΝΙ]	αΔΩΝΙΝ	αΔΩΝΕΙΝ	αΔω[νειν]
—	σαββατιοC	σαββελεC	σαββατεωΝ	[σαββατεωΝ]
Without Hōraios, 2x Adōnaios				
BG 8502,2:	NHC III,1:			
ἰαωθ	αωθ			
ελωαιοC	ελωαιοC			
αCταφαιοC	αCτοφαιοC			
ἰαω	ἰαζω			
αΔΩΝΑΙΟC	αΔΩΝΑΙΟC			
αΔΩΝΙ	αΔΩΝΙΝ			
σαββαταιοC	σαββαταιοC			

As for how the amulet was used, it is not pierced but would have been mounted in a setting and worn as a pendant or ring. This is clear from ancient literature on gem cutting, from the amulet's shape, and from the fact that other gems of similar shape survive in their settings. When worn, the lion-headed human figure standing between the names Aariël and Ialdabaōth would have faced outward, distinguishing the wearer as one of ‘the perfect’ according to the passage in *On the Origin of the World*, while the list of the planetary rulers would have been concealed against the wearer's chest or finger. Professor Pearson has written that the amulet “would serve as a reminder to the wearer of his/her initiation, which (as in the case of the Ophite Diagram) would have included the ‘passwords’ enabling the soul to escape the realm of Ialdabaoth.”<sup>33</sup> There is no reason to second-guess this. Since the wearer lived in a mortal body for some time before ascending past the planetary rulers once and for all, the amulet also would have been used for healing and protection on earth.

Unlike the thirty-six gems that the practitioner is directed to make in the *Sacred Book of Hermes* and unlike the various invocations and amulets for thwarting individual decanal daemons in chapter eighteen of the *Testament of Solomon*, this gem probably was not made to heal a single body part or

<sup>33</sup> Pearson 2004, 259, original parenthesis; refer also to Pearson 2007, 47.

prevent one specific ailment. Rather, with the iconography of the chief astral ruler and both his names on the front together with the names of all seven planetary rulers primarily responsible for incarnation on the back, it could have been used as a cure-all or protection against each and every ailment to which the body is susceptible. By invoking one of the planetary rulers and wearing his name engraved on the gem, the Gnostic could control any of his inferiors, whether zodiacal, decanal, etc. By invoking the chief astral ruler himself and wearing the names of the lion-headed Aariël/Ialdabaōth engraved on the gem, in turn the Gnostic could control any of the planetary rulers. The wearer of this amulet might not have been familiar with the elaborate double-decanal melothesia or the other melothesia following it in the long manuscripts of the *Apocryphon of John*. But it is safe to say at the least he or she would have known that Ialdabaōth formed the brain and marrow, Iaō the bones, Sabaōth the sinews, Adōnai the flesh, Elōai the blood, Hōreos the skin, Astapheos the hair, or something close to this, and that the seven planetary rulers were assisted by a number of angelic daemons.<sup>34</sup>

#### *A Silver Foil Amulet*

The Ialdabaōth gem is certainly Gnostic, as Roy Kotansky states in his entry on amulets in the *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*.<sup>35</sup> He considers very few others as potential candidates. A metal foil amulet or lamella deserves special consideration for its loose parallels with the melothesia of thirty astral rulers in the *Apocryphon of John*. In the estimation of its editor, Florent Heintz, this silver lamella was produced from a larger sheet on which the texts of other amulets could have been inscribed too. The metal sheet was then cut into strips, and this process caused the strips to curl. They were then rolled up completely and placed in tubular cases for wearing. A portion of this lamella's bronze case in fact survives. It was worn for protection by someone named Thomas, son of Maxima. After thirty-six carefully inscribed lines of unusual and exotic sounding names, the text reads: "sacred and mighty and powerful names of the great Necessity (ἅγια καὶ ἰσχυρὰ καὶ δυνατὰ ὀνόματα τὰ τῆς μεγάλης Ἀνάγκης), preserve and protect from all sorcery and potions (ἀπὸ πάσης γοετίας καὶ φαρμακίας), from

<sup>34</sup> See *On the Origin of the World* NHC II,5 114.33–35; *Apocryphon of John* NHC II,1 15.13–23; III,1 22.18–23.6; IV,1 24.2–14; BG,2 49.9–50.4; and Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 194 for a similar melothesia from an Apocalypse of John that Theodore bar Konai attributes to the Audians.

<sup>35</sup> Kotansky 2005, 70.

curse tablets, from those who died an untimely death, from those who died violently and from every evil thing, the body, the soul and every member of the body (καὶ πᾶν μέλος τοῦ σώματος) of Thomas, whom Maxima bore, from this day forth and for his entire future."<sup>36</sup>

Among the names invoked on this lamella are Pisandrapētēs, spelled exactly as in the melothesia of thirty astral rulers in the *Apocryphon of John* (see table 2). Some other names appear to be connected as well.<sup>37</sup> Overall, the thirty-six names on the lamella and the thirty names in the melothesia are admittedly quite different, yet they total approximately the same number. Moreover, the names on the lamella are invoked to protect every member of the wearer's body, and the astral rulers of the melothesia in the apocryphon are said to be "particularly active in the members (ἐραὶ ἐν ἰμέ-λος)."<sup>38</sup> Thomas, son of Maxima, was probably a Christian. I personally would not go so far as to state with confidence that he was a Gnostic. He could have been, and the lamella may be Gnostic. It also might not be.

Either way, this metal foil amulet is significant for reconstructing the utility of Gnostic myth. Gnostics could have worn similar protective lamellae. Protection from sickness is not specified on Thomas' amulet but might be lumped in with protection from "every evil thing." Foremost on his lamella is protection from "all sorcery and potions (ἀπὸ πάσης γοετίας καὶ φαρμακίας), from curse tablets," and from the dead.<sup>39</sup> If the astrological rulers of Necessity could be invoked to heal and protect the body, they could also be invoked to harm it. Perhaps Gnostics worried about ritual attack from other people and wore amulets for protection, as Thomas, son of Maxima, did.<sup>40</sup>

As is the case with the reference to sorcery and potions on this lamella, in Ophite-Sethian literature the only reference to magic per se that I am aware of is negative. After directing readers to the Book of Solomon as well as the Archangelic (Book) of the Prophet Moses, *On the Origin of the World* refers to "magic and potions (μαγεία ἐὶ φαρμακία)" along with idolatry and blood sacrifice as "many kinds of error (ἐλθὲ ἡπλᾶνῃ)" introduced by the daemoniac angels of the seven planetary rulers.<sup>41</sup> Regarding astrology, according to the *Apocryphon of John* it was also introduced by Ialdabaōth's angels, so too

<sup>36</sup> Heintz 1996, 295–297; translation modified.

<sup>37</sup> Such as Aremmouth (lamella) and Marephnouth (apocryphon).

<sup>38</sup> NHC II,1 17.8–9; Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 103; translation modified.

<sup>39</sup> Heintz 1996, 297; translation modified.

<sup>40</sup> Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 10, says that his teacher was the object of such an attack but warded it off by the strength of his soul.

<sup>41</sup> NHC II,5 123.4–124.15; Layton 1989, 82–83.

metals like gold, silver, copper, and iron.<sup>42</sup> None of this prevented Gnostics from reading books of magic and astrology, any more than the chief astral ruler's introduction of monotheism prevented them from reading and rewriting Jewish scripture.

#### *How Gnostic Astrological Medicine Worked*

The thirty-six gods of Necessity invoked on Thomas' lamella were as likely to harm as to protect him. He calls them 'sacred,' and he might even be said to pray to them. But it hardly follows from this that he viewed Pisandrap-tēs and the rest as benevolent.<sup>43</sup> With minor exceptions, the astral rulers in Ophite-Sethian literature, from Ialdabaōth to Pisandrap-tēs, are not benevolent either. Gnostics invoked them, wore amulets featuring their names and iconography, not because the astral rulers willed good for humans. On the contrary. Gnostics did so because the astral rulers were responsible for human suffering. They wanted to thwart Ialdabaōth and his inferiors. This can be seen by contrast and comparison, going back to the *Sacred Book of Hermes* and the *Testament of Solomon*.

In the *Sacred Book of Hermes*, the decans are to be revered and flattered. They are not called daemons. There is even a sense that the decans are positive and the zodiac is negative. The zodiac brings about suffering, which the decans heal. In order to avoid or stop a headache, for example, brought about by Aries, the prescribed gemstone amulet had to be worn when Chen-lachōri, the first decan of Aries, was most visible in the sky after crossing the eastern horizon and therefore most likely to look down and see its name and especially its iconography engraved on the gem.<sup>44</sup> In order to counteract zodiacal influence, the practitioner revered and flattered the decans by displaying the proper amulet.

<sup>42</sup> NHC II,1 28.5–30.2.

<sup>43</sup> Heintz 1996, 295–296 points out that this same amulet for protection against curse tablets "seems to be replicating deliberately their language." And not only do the thirty-six names that it invokes for protection loosely parallel the melothesia of thirty astral rulers in the *Apocryphon of John*, they closely match the names invoked in a rather violent love-spell in the Greco-Egyptian ritual papyri for employing the ghost of a corpse to torment a desired woman, PGM XIXa.

<sup>44</sup> As the opening of the text instructs, each gem must be worn when the decan is between the Ascendant and the Place concerning health. For the Places, see Bouché-Leclercq 1899, 280 figure 31. It would make little sense for the amulets to be worn when the decans are in this position on the actual birth chart. It must refer to the position of the decans in their daily crossing of the eastern and western horizons along with their zodiacal signs.

Astrological medicine in Ophite-Sethian traditions would have worked through similar display of such amulets as the Ialdabaōth gem, though I doubt that Gnostics were reverencing the astral rulers. In that regard, their iatromathematics had more in common with the eighteenth chapter of the *Testament of Solomon*, where together with amulets, speech is given a larger role among the measures to counteract the decans. These decans are called daemons. Not to be revered or flattered, they are to be thwarted, primarily by invocation of their superiors, such as one of the Judeo-Christian archangels. Astral rulers in Gnostic literature are daemons too, and their superiors are named. When the Savior tells his disciple in the *Apocryphon of John* the names of those that "were appointed (ΝΕΝΤΑΥΤΟΔΟΥ) over all" seventy-two astral rulers in the double-decanal melothesia, and the names of those that "have power (ΝΕΥΣΜΟΜ) over all" thirty astral rulers in the following melothesia, it is so that users of the apocryphon will be able to thwart them by invoking their superiors.<sup>45</sup> If a Gnostic was suffering from headache, he could invoke Michael to thwart Diolimodraza (see table 2), just as Solomon is told to invoke Michael to thwart the first decanal daemon in the testament. The distinction, however, is that in Ophite-Sethian literature even the archangel Michael is daemonic. So it is not a matter of counteracting evil with good; it is a matter of invoking a superior daemon against an inferior one.

What was astrological about Ophite-Sethian iatromathematics was the identity of the astral rulers as planetary, zodiacal, decanal, etc., the association of the astral rulers with parts of the human body through the doctrine of melothesia, and the use of their names and iconography for invocation as well as for making amulets to heal and protect the body. Other varieties of iatromathematics involved calculating the position of the stars on the birth chart and keeping time according to sidereal calendars.<sup>46</sup> Astrological medicine in these Gnostic traditions may have also been similarly technical.

Molded in the divine image, the psychic bodies of the Gnostics were created by the astral rulers along with their bodies of flesh. To heal and protect themselves, the Gnostics played the daemons' game, which they took seriously. They were not content to sit on the sidelines and live the

<sup>45</sup> NHC II,1 17.7–8; NHC IV,1 27.13–14; Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 101–105.

<sup>46</sup> See Ideler 1841/1963, 387–396, 430–440 for the position of the stars on the birth chart; P.Oxy. 465 for keeping time according to the Egyptian calendar, divided into seventy-two 'half weeks' of five days. An important manuscript of the eighteenth chapter of the *Testament of Solomon* also features the Egyptian calendar, divided more commonly into thirty-six periods of ten days. Refer to Duling 1983, 938; Klutz 2005, 27.

life of the philosopher indifferently resigned to Fate and Necessity, as was encouraged even in some of the philosophical Hermetica of their day.

The alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis records a dispute between 'Hermes' and 'Zoroaster' on this very issue. Against Zoroastrian claims to "avert all the evils of Fate (ἀποστρέφεισθαι πάντα τῆς εἰμαρμένης τὰ κακά)," Hermes has it that the pneumatic should not "overpower Necessity by force (μηδὲ βιάζεσθαι τὴν ἀνάγκην), but rather allow Necessity to work in accordance with her own nature and decree," and to "leave Fate to do what she wants to the clay that belongs to her (δὲ θέλει ποιεῖν τῷ ἑαυτῆς πηλῷ), that is, the body."<sup>47</sup> This Hermes is not the patron deity of the technical Hermetica; this is quite another from the Hermes of the *Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius* on engraving gemstone amulets so as to avoid suffering what must be suffered under astral influence. Here in the dispute between the two sages, the Gnostics who produced and used the *Apocryphon of John*, with its reference to a Book of Zoroaster, would not have sided with the Egyptian sage. They would have sided with the Persian, despite their double-decanal melothesia and the general Hermetic pedigree of iatromathematics.<sup>48</sup> With this Zoroaster, they claimed that the evils of fate can be averted, at least by the Gnostic holy generation and until their death.<sup>49</sup>

#### *Further Gnostic Traditions Broadly Defined*

Ophite-Sethian literature does not represent all traditions that might be grouped together as Gnostic. By way of conclusion, a small survey of other traditions and literature of ancient Gnosticism as Professor Pearson has outlined them suggests that the Gnostics whose astrological medicine I have been reconstructing were not alone in their practice of iatromathematics.

<sup>47</sup> *On the Letter Omega* 7: Jackson 1978, 24–25; translation modified.

<sup>48</sup> For the definite Egyptian context, regardless of attribution to Zoroaster, see Quack 2006, 272.

<sup>49</sup> Averting death poses a special problem. Gnostics are free from the rule of the stars, except as it concerns their bodies of flesh, in that they will still die under the circumstances determined by the stars. But in the meantime, their psychic bodies are not subject to the astral influences that cause the rest of the human generations to sin. Compare Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis* 1.8.1–3. Through the practice of iatromathematics, neither must they suffer ailment. The thrust of Gnostic astrological medicine would not have been to prolong life on earth under the astral rulers so much as to make it less painful. Death before the fated time, including suicide, was not an option. On that much, the Gnostics and Plotinus were in agreement.

According to Irenaeus, the Basilidians used "magic, spells, invocations, and all remaining jugglery (*magia et incantationibus et invocationibus et reliqua universa periergia*). And they also concoct certain names, as it were, of angels. They report that some reside in the first heaven, others in the second, and thus they strain to relate in full the names, archons, angels, and authorities of the 365 heavens that they have fabricated." Irenaeus goes on: "They locate the positions of the 365 heavens just as the astrologers do (*similiter ut mathematici*); for accepting the astrologers' speculations (*illorum enim theoremata accipientes*), they have adapted them to their own kind of teaching (*in suum characterem doctrinae transtulerunt*). And their ruler is named Abrasax, which is why he has the number 365 in himself."<sup>50</sup>

Heresiological rhetoric must be taken into account here, and I would not want to defend past identification of the several gemstone amulets featuring the name Abrasax (365: A=1 β=2 ρ=100 α=1 σ=200 α=1 ξ=60) as somehow Basilidian. A few could have been worn by followers of Basilides, yet I see no way to tell which ones. Basilidians may have studied the names of the angels and their astrological function for iatromathematical purposes, not only for achieving invisibility to pass through the realm of Abrasax. Epiphanius states that Basilides taught the doctrine of melothesia: "Then, he says, the human being has 365 members for this reason (εἶτα, ἐντεῦθεν, φησί, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τριακόσια ἑξήκοντα πέντε μέλη), so that he can assign one member to each of the powers (ὡς ἐκάστη τῶν δυνάμεων ἀπονέμεσθαι ἐν μέλος)."<sup>51</sup> If Basilides did teach such a doctrine of melothesia, it would have been even more elaborate than the double-decanal melothesia in the *Apocryphon of John*.

Epiphanius also states sarcastically of the Manichaeans that "they have astrology as a handy subject of boasting, and phylacteries—I mean amulets—and certain other incantations and spells (καὶ φυλακτήρια, φημί δὲ τὰ περίπτα, καὶ ἄλλαι τινὲς ἐπωδαὶ καὶ μαγανείαι)."<sup>52</sup> Some confirmation of this is to be had in Manichaean texts, such as the *Kephalaia*, where there are instances of the doctrine of melothesia. Manichaean astrology is notoriously opaque. The more transparent instances of melothesia are zodiacal, but the soul and body are also parsed in terms of five members or garments,

<sup>50</sup> *Adversus haereses* 1.24.5–7: Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979, 330–333; Layton 1987, 424–425; translation modified.

<sup>51</sup> *Panarion* 24.7.6: Holl 1915, 264; Williams 2009, 81; translation modified.

<sup>52</sup> *Panarion* 66.13.7: Holl 1985, 35–36; Williams 1994, 233.

as well as seven, nine, and eighteen garments. This human microcosm is further divided into four worlds of seven rulers, each with its associated body part. All told, there are thousands upon thousands of rulers inhabiting the body, causing it ailment.<sup>53</sup> In the largely Manichaean *Pistis Sophia*, the Savior explains to the disciples how the decans (ΔΕΚΑΝΟΣ) and their assistants (ΛΙΤΟΥΡΓΟΣ) enter the womb to construct the embryo, each one of them building a member (ΜΕΛΟΣ). The Savior promises to teach the disciples the names of these astral rulers responsible for the creation of the body of flesh, which would have been useful in the practice of astrological medicine.<sup>54</sup>

Never as widespread as the proselytizing Manichaeans, the Mandaeans have outlasted them to the present. Their main astrological text is the *Book of the Zodiac*, a handbook of astrology and ritual. Mandaeans have zodiacal names referring to their nativities. These names are used in ritual practice, such as on inscribed strips of paper, rolled up in metal capsules and worn around the neck for protection against sicknesses, etc. Priests also wear an iron ring during exorcisms, for instance. Its features are presumably astrological and confessedly of the powers of darkness, including the lion, scorpion, and serpent. To quote Lady Drower: "Most of the leading events in a Mandaean's life are decided by recourse to the priests, who tell him the astrologically auspicious day ... In cases of illness, cures and herbs fall under the influence of certain planets and certain signs of the Zodiac, and a man should take only the medicament or cure which belongs to the sign under which he fell ill, i.e. the hour he sickened."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See especially *Kephalaion* 70; and BeDuhn 2001, 13-14.

<sup>54</sup> *Pistis Sophia* 3.132; Schmidt-MacDermot 1978, 685-687.

<sup>55</sup> Drower 1937/2002, 25-27, 36-38, 81-83.

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THE PERSISTENCE OF RITUAL IN THE  
MAGICAL BOOK OF MARY AND THE ANGELS:  
P. HEID. INV. KOPT. 685

Marvin Meyer\*

In this essay, the focus of attention is upon a parchment codex that is part of the significant manuscript collection of the Institut für Papyrologie in Heidelberg, P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685.<sup>1</sup> This text, to which I have given an appropriate title in the light of its contents, “The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels,” is one of a number of magical manuscripts, or manuscripts of ritual power, in the collection. P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 consists of twenty parchment pages (ten leaves, or five sheets) assembled into a single-quire book. The five sheets were derived from the hide of an animal, and when prepared for the codex, the sheets were folded in half and bound together with parchment thongs tied on the outside at the “spine” of the book—the twenty-page book.

This Heidelberg book, “The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels,” may be compared, with its present contents, to other magical texts in the Heidelberg collection. According to the report of Richard Seider in “Aus der Arbeit der Universitätsinstitute: Die Universitäts-Papyrussammlung,” this text and others were acquired for the Heidelberg collection in 1930 by Carl Schmidt.<sup>2</sup> Heidelberg papyrologist Friedrich Bibabel, in *Griechische, koptische und arabishe Texte zur Religion und religiösen Literatur in Ägyptens Spätzeit*, classifies P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 with a number of these texts as all being part of the acquisition.<sup>3</sup> These texts are the following, here listed with new inventory numbers:

P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 678 (curse to harm a man and leave him impotent)

P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 679 (curse to harm a person through the use of wax dolls)

\* I dedicate this essay to Birger A. Pearson, a scholar and friend whose work on ancient texts has spanned many a year. [Professor Marvin Meyer died on August 16, 2012. Before his death, he gave the editors of this book permission to publish his contribution, in celebration of the career of his friend and colleague, Birger A. Pearson.]

<sup>1</sup> On P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685, see Quecke 1972; Meyer 1996, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Seider 1964, 163.

<sup>3</sup> Bibabel-Grohmann. 1934.