

## **Gnostic Imagery from the Beginning of our Era to Today**

Katherine Schaefers, M.A.

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### **Abstract**

Originally presented at the conference “Hidden in Plain Sight: The Influence of Western Esoteric Movements on Modern Thought,” this essay is an adaption, with additional updates and insights, from my 2004 Master’s thesis “Gnosticism: Towards an Archaeological Definition.” It endeavors to provide suggestions for the possible identification of “Gnostic” material culture, while taking on the question of why there are very few legitimately recognized artifacts from an early Christian period religious movement termed “Gnosticism” by later scholars. This study works to aid scholars in the iconographic identification of ancient Gnosticism, so that we may trace and evaluate symbolic meaning as the movement has continued up to the present day, and its effects on modern trends of thought and belief. The ancient and modern definitions of “Gnosis,” “Gnostic,” and “Gnosticism” are discussed, along with images illustrating possible Gnostic iconography. The concluding section will take a look at the symbols of two modern Gnostic movements, the Ecclesia Gnostica of Los Angeles, California headed by Dr. Stefan Heller and Novus Spiritus, established by Sylvia Browne.

## **Imagerie gnostique du début de notre ère à aujourd’hui**

Katherine Schaefers, M.A.

### **Résumé**

À l’origine présenté à la conférence « Dissimulé en pleine lumière: l’influence des mouvements ésotériques occidentaux sur la pensée moderne », cet essai est une adaptation de ma thèse de maîtrise de 2004 intitulée « gnosticisme : vers une définition archéologique », avec des mises à jour et des notions supplémentaires. C’est une tentative pour proposer des suggestions d’identification potentielle de culture matérielle « gnostique », tout en considérant la question du pourquoi il y a peu d’artefacts légitimement reconnus provenant de la période religieuse du début du christianisme, appelée « gnosticisme » plus tard par les érudits. Cette étude a pour but d’aider les érudits dans l’identification iconographique de l’ancien gnosticisme, pour retracer et évaluer la signification symbolique du mouvement qui continue jusqu’à ce jour, et ses effets sur les tendances modernes de la pensée et des croyances. Les définitions anciennes et modernes des termes « gnose », « gnostique », et « gnosticisme » sont examinées, ainsi que les images illustrant une possible iconographie gnostique. La dernière section examinera les symboles de deux mouvements gnostiques modernes, le Gnostica Ecclesia de Los Angeles en Californie dirigé par Dr. Stefan Heller et Novus Spiritus, établi par Sylvia Browne.

## **Gnosticismo Imaginario, Desde el principio de nuestra Era hasta nuestros días.**

Katherine Schaefers, M.A.

### **Resumen**

Presentado Originalmente durante la Conferencia “Oculto a plena vista: La Influencia de los Movimientos Esotéricos del Oeste en el Pensamiento Moderno,” este ensayo es una adaptación, con actualizaciones adicionales y perspectivas, de my tesis del año 2004 “Gnosticismo: hacia una definición arqueológica.” Se hace el intento por proveer sugerencias sobre la posible identificación de cultura material “Gnóstica” mientras se toma la pregunta de que porque solo hay muy pocos artefactos legítimos reconocidos de los periodos de aquellos primeros movimientos Cristianos denominados “Gnosticismo” por los últimos eruditos. Este trabajo es para proveer a los eruditos en la identificación iconográfica de antiguo Gnosticismo, para que podamos rastrear y evaluar el significado simbólico del movimiento hasta nuestros días, y sus efectos en las modernas vías de pensamiento y creencias. La Antigua y moderna definición de “Gnosis,” “Gnostic,” y “Gnosticismo” son discutidas en conjunto con imágenes ilustrando posible iconografía Gnóstica. La sección concluyente versa sobre los símbolos de dos movimientos Gnósticos modernos, la Eclesial Gnóstica de los Angeles California comandada por Dr. Stefan Heller y el Espíritu Nuevo, establecida por Sylvia Browne.

## **Imagens Gnósticas desde o Início da nossa Era até Hoje em Dia**

Katherine Schaefers, M.A.

### **Resumo**

Originalmente apresentado na conferência "Hidden em Plain Sight: A Influência dos Movimentos Esotéricos Ocidentais no Pensamento Moderno", este relatório é uma adaptação da minha tese de mestrado de 2004, com atualizações adicionais, intitulado "Gnosticismo: Rumo a uma definição de Arqueologia." Empenha-se a fornecer sugestões para a possível identificação da cultura material gnóstica, tendo em questão o motivo por que há tão poucos artefatos legitimamente reconhecidos desde um período cristão primitivo, o movimento religioso que foi denominado mais tarde pelos eruditos como "gnosticismo". Este relatório funciona para ajudar os eruditos na identificação iconográfica do gnosticismo antigo, para que possamos localizar e avaliar o significado simbólico de como o movimento se manteve até aos dias de hoje, e seus efeitos sobre as tendências modernas de pensamento e de crença. As definições antigas e modernas de "Gnoses", "gnóstico", e "gnosticismo" são discutidas, junto com as imagens que ilustram a iconografia gnóstica. A seção final prestará atenção para os símbolos de dois movimentos gnósticos modernos, a Eclésia Gnóstica de Los Angeles, Califórnia, chefiada pelo Dr. Stefan Heller, e Novus Spiritus, criado por Sylvia Browne.

## **Gnostische Bildersymbolik vom Beginn unserer Ära bis zur heutigen Zeit**

Katherine Schaefer, M.A.

### **Zusammenfassung**

Ursprünglich präsentiert auf der Konferenz "Hidden in Plain Sight": The influence of Western Esoteric Movements on Modern Thought," dieses Essay ist eine Bearbeitung - mit gelegentlichen Ergänzungen - meiner 2004 Dissertation, "Gnostizismus: Auf dem Wege zu einer archäologischen Definition." Es ist ein Versuch "gnostische" Materialkultur zu identifizieren. Dabei wird die Frage erörtert, warum es sehr wenig legitim-anerkannte Artefakte von frühchristlichen religiösen Bewegungen gibt, die von späteren Gelehrten "Gnostizismus" genannt wurde. Diese Studie geht darauf hinaus Gelehrten bei der ikonographischen Identifikation des antiken Gnostizismus zu helfen, so dass wir die symbolische Bedeutung und seine Wirkung auf moderne Trends von Gedanken und Glauben verfolgen und beurteilen können, da die Bewegung bis zum heutigen Tage weiterbesteht. Es werden die antiken und modernen Definitionen von "Gnosis," Gnostik" und Gnostizismus diskutiert. Dabei werden Abbildungen gezeigt die mögliche gnostische Ikonographie illustrieren. Abschließend wird ein Blick auf zwei moderne gnostische Bewegungen geworfen, die Ecclesia Gnostica in Los Angeles, geleitet von Dr. Stefan Heller und Novus Spiritus, gegründet von Sylvia Browne.

## **Gnostic Imagery from the Beginning of our Era to Today**

Katherine Schaefer, M.A.

Once I believed that Gnosticism was a well-defined phenomenon belonging to the religious history of Late Antiquity. . . I was to learn soon, however, that I was a naïf indeed. Not only Gnosis was Gnostic, but the catholic authors were Gnostic; the neoplatonic too; Reformation was Gnostic; Communism was Gnostic; Nazism was Gnostic; liberalism, existentialism, and psychoanalysis were Gnostic too; modern biology was Gnostic; Blake, Yeats, Kafka, Rilke, Proust, Joyce, Musil, Hesse, and Thomas Mann were Gnostic. From very authoritative interpreters of Gnosis, I learned further that science is Gnostic and superstition is Gnostic; power, counter-power, and lack of power is Gnostic and right is Gnostic; Hegel is Gnostic and Marx is Gnostic; Freud is Gnostic and Jung is Gnostic; all things and their opposite are equally Gnostic.

—Ioan Culianu<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Did the ancient Gnostics leave symbolic remains? Can we trace their symbolism throughout Western history? Are their symbols perhaps here, under our noses today, hidden in plain sight?

Looking through the writings of the early church authors of the first few centuries CE, and the exasperated statements made by modern scholars, one may indeed come to the conclusion that the term mentioned above has no business in a symbolic study. How can Gnosticism<sup>2</sup> produce a distinct iconography when the word is merely the invention of a seventeenth/

century English theologian, meant to encompass all types of Christian heretics? How is a Gnostic recognized in the archaeological record if all the ancient literature points to someone belonging to a type of philosophic movement or Mystery Religion, both of which are extremely problematic to identify through their material remains?

Part of the problem is we don't really know what to look for. We cannot assemble Gnosticism into a nice little package of dogmatic affirmations, much less any rational kind of theology, as Gnosis by definition has to do with an individual's own personal quest for knowledge. Ancient Gnosis should be thought of as a philosophy that transcended religions, but yet was imbued to some extent within most of them. The expression it took depended on the current theological environment and was unique to each individual, and so was limitless in variability. However, the degree of variation amongst those who practiced Gnosis within a certain religious, philosophical, or independent system is much less if compared to those of another system. This degree of variation has allowed scholars to distinguish a certain Gnosis philosophy within a fledgling Christianity that existed during the first four centuries CE. All the information we have on this particular localization of Gnosis comes from a literary canon that shares many of the same events and people as other rudimentary Christian philosophies. As a consequence, a major assumption within modern interpretations of Christian Gnosis is that ritual and imagery, as in these other philosophies, were not thought to play a major role. Not only may this assumption be premature, but it has effectively excluded any serious attempts at looking for Gnostic material culture.

### **Gnosis and Plato**

Existing far before its Christian descendants, Gnosis in Classical Greek meant true knowledge or wisdom depending on which ancient philosopher one reads. According to Plato, reality as perceived by the five senses is merely the surface of a highly complex and structured system. The act of seeing and recognizing this system Plato calls "ideas." A key element in his philosophy, which would later transfer to Gnosticism and Gnostic, is the concept that every human had a previous and thorough understanding of the structures of reality. Unfortunately, this knowledge was somehow lost. The reclaiming of this knowledge through the comprehension of reality's underlying structures is Gnosis<sup>3</sup>.

After Plato and the Hellenistic period, the word Gnosis would venture out of the philosophic realm. Knowledge of the Divine came to be viewed as a gift of the Divine and not necessarily from the striving of the human mind. As in Platonic philosophy and the mystery religions, there was only a certain level of knowledge one could attain in public. Only if one was among the spiritual elite, as in the mysteries of Isis and Mithras, would secret knowledge be attained that lifted the burden of worrying over life and death. However, Gnosis in Christianity and especially in the canon of the New Testament was not so highly regarded by Church polemicists, and was usually meant to delineate a certain group of Christians who thought they could do away with the structure of the Church and instead know the Divine themselves. Yet despite these examples, Gnosis in early Christianity had no singular definition, with some even classifying the term in regards to perfecting one's knowledge of the Old Testament or as a supplement to ordinary faith.<sup>4</sup>

### **Gnostic and the Polemical Authors**

Based upon the multi-faceted Gnosis, the term Gnostic would eventually be created by polemicists to categorize certain Christians who designated themselves as “knowing.” Polemical authors have roots in Christian apology and religious philosophy. A few who held an Episcopal office were promoted by the Church to the status of “Church Fathers.” Writing mostly in the first and second centuries CE, at a time when a select few interpretations of Christianity were being coalesced into Orthodoxy, these authors sought out deviators from this new norm and expended much effort and paper refuting them.

Irenaeus of Lyons, an early Christian writer and one of the most famous of polemicists writing against the Gnostics, is the first to give us this category as, when he says of the followers of Carpocrates, “They call themselves Gnostics. (*Against All Heresies* 1. 25. 6).”<sup>5</sup>

### **Gnosticism and the Modern Day**

The term Gnosticism, invented by Henry Moore in the mid-1600s, would follow a similar course. Moore, whose philosophies mainly stemmed from Platonism and Neoplatonism, wished to encompass under Gnosticism those who, in the early years of the Church, were intellectually impudent and unable or unwilling to adapt to orthodox Christian teaching. From then on Gnosticism took on a wealth of different meanings, including a fundamental element to all religions, a higher form of knowledge existing above philosophy, and an adopted element of the New Age movement.

For clarity, the following essay will cover symbolism attached to a certain Gnosis persuasion within formative Christianity, referred to from here on out as Gnosticism, that was seen, due to the movement’s tendency to profess a secret, personal knowledge of the Divine, as well as to radically reinterpret the writings of the Apostles, as heretical by church polemicists. The possessors of this Gnosis philosophy I will refer to as Gnostics and include those whom ancient and modern scholars called the Valentinians, Ophites, Carpocratians, Thomasines, Basilidians, and Sethians.

### **Gnostic Ideology**

Before the great systems of ancient Gnosis of the second century, Gnosis in the first century was a chameleon-like movement, adapting to the situations and locations of the societies it encountered. From early Christian literature, there is an impression that Gnosis was a threat to subvert Christianity. Yet there seems to be no unified front of Gnosis during this time, just a variety of independent, small sects that on the whole seem very different from each other. However, these factions grappled with the same cosmologic, soteriologic, and ethical themes as their more mainstream Christian counterparts.<sup>6</sup>

By the second century though, Gnosticism would pose a real threat to Orthodox Christianity, at least in the view of some church polemicists. Now organized into schools with strong and enigmatic leaders, second century Gnosticism would be the profanation of choice for the polemical authors Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Epiphanius of Salamis, and Origen among others. Much of what we know of second century Gnostic Christian schools comes from these authors. Irenaeus in particular offers a wealth of information in his work *Against All Heresies*. Although quotations from such Gnostic leaders as Valentinus are ridiculed and picked for their shockingly deviant value, the quotations themselves are, by

comparisons with the Nag Hammadi Library and other Gnostic pieces, generally agreed upon to be correct.

### **The Gnosis According to Friend and Foe**

They call themselves Gnostics. They have images, some painted, others made of various materials, for, they say, a portrait of Christ was made by Pilate in the time when Jesus was with people. They put crowns on these and show them forth with images of the worldly philosophers, that is, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and others, and pay them the same honors as among pagans.

—Irenaeus, *Against All Heresies*. 1.25.6.<sup>7</sup>

### **Nag Hammadi**

Today, the most well known writings and mythology of ancient Gnosticism are certainly the manuscripts found at Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt. A veritable treasure trove of rare and lost Greek Coptic writing,<sup>8</sup> the Nag Hammadi codices tend to be seen as the most informative literary source for ancient Christian Gnosticism.

In December 1945 two brothers came upon a mysterious large clay jar buried near a cliff face in the proximity of Nag Hammadi, Upper Egypt. Hoping to have found a great treasure, one of the brothers smashed the jar open. Inside he discovered no hoard of gold, but instead books: more than a dozen old codices bound in golden brown leather.

In general, the find at Nag Hammadi consisted of twelve bound books, or codices,<sup>9</sup> including a few pages from an additional codex hidden inside the cover of the sixth. Within each of these codices were different essays written in Coptic. In all, fifty-two separate tractates were uncovered: an extensive collection of seemingly heretical “gnosis” texts, hidden over a millennium before.<sup>10</sup>

Besides the Nag Hammadi codices, there are a few other sources available to us in our understanding of the Gnosis movement within early Christianity. For instance, there are the Askew, Bruce, and Berlin Codices, and some early Orthodox Acts, specifically the Acts of Thomas and of John. Discovered in bits and pieces over the centuries, while these sources offered little information that hadn't already been gathered by early Christian writers, they were able to verify the existence of the Gnostic sources used in polemical writings, as well as give a contrasting viewpoint on the material.

### **Other Gnostic Codices**

Putting aside the Gnostic passages within the polemical writings, and the early Christian writers' own commentaries, there remain the works of unidentified authors that contain an unmistakably Gnostic character. These include the *Pistis Sophia* from the Askew Codex, the *Two Books of JEU* from the Bruce Codex, the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Acts of Peter*, and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* in the Berlin Codex. Many of these texts present a main component in Gnostic mythology, the figure of Sophia. Coming in various forms, the story of Sophia's fall is based on this fundamental formula: the creation of the cosmos by a Supreme Deity, who then creates Sophia, who falls from grace, thereby forming the

Demiurge (or “The Creator”), who in turn brings humankind into being. This myth is one of the richest sources for Gnostic imagery.

A big factor in the search for possible Gnostic Christian iconographic candidates is the highly adaptable nature of the movement. Gnostic statements found throughout the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles are good examples of this trend. From the *Acts of John* (97–102) we have a crucifixion scene of Jesus (“The Mystic Cross”) where John narrates:

And having thus spoken, he [Jesus] showed me a cross of light fixed, and about the cross a great multitude, not having one form: and in it (the cross) was one form and one likeness. And the Lord himself I beheld above the cross, not having any shape, but only a voice: and a voice not such as was familiar to us, but one sweet and kind and truly of God, saying unto me: John, it is needful that one should hear these things from me, for I have need of one that will hear.<sup>11</sup>

By constantly incorporating neighboring philosophy and mythology into its ever-changing structure, Gnostic symbolic representations would have reflected whatever movement was popular at the time. For early Christian Gnosticism, it was the symbolism of Judaism and Platonism, and to a lesser degree, of Hermetism and the Mystery religions. As Christianity began to standardize, grow more popular, and carve out its own mythology, Gnosticism would adapt its ideology accordingly.

### **Gnostic Iconography?**

Perhaps the problem with finding Gnostic remains has much to do with their indistinguishable integration into this overarching religious structure. Gnosis in Christianity belongs mainly to that portion of religion that is dubbed numinous or “the irreducible essence of holiness which can be discussed but not defined.”<sup>12</sup> This facet of religion deals more with imaginary worlds and private experiences rather than tangible objects. The remains likely to be found from practitioners of Gnosis are the same for any citizen of Rome who paid homage to its systems and deities. An exception would be if Gnostics had Christian articles, yet even here, these items would most likely be identified under the general category of “Early Christian.”

### **Attempted Applications**

In 1978 at Yale University, there was a conference entitled “The Rediscovery of Gnosticism.” With the full scope of the Nag Hammadi codices now available for scholarly study, this conference would be a pioneer in the heretofore uncharted waters of Gnosticism’s origins, its structure and place in society, independent of church sources. One paper to come out of this conference, by Paul C. Finney, would touch on previous scholars’ efforts to hunt down and label Gnostic Christian remains. Entitled “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?”<sup>13</sup> Finney’s article presents us with five artifact types that have acquired Gnostic associations: inscriptions, papyri, sculptures, paintings, and small finds such as gemstones. While most of these artifacts are either controversial in their identification as Gnostic (e.g. the Flavia Sophe inscription, Khirbet Qilqis collection, Alabaster phylae and gemstones) or have been completely discredited as belonging to the movement (e.g. the Tomb of Aurelii depictions), there is a group of pictorial manifestation that are seen as undoubtedly Gnostic.

**Table 1**

INSCRIPTIONS	PAPYRI	SCULPTURES	PAINTINGS	SMALL FINDS
Tomb of Flavia Sophe: Rome third century	Sixty-nine geometric schemata from the first and second books of JEU: Bruce Codex ca. third century	Limestone figures of mini stelae, statues and crosses: Khirbet Qilqis: Unknown origin, ca. third century	Tomb of Aurelii depictions: Rome, Viale Manzoni, second/third century	Gem depicting Demiurge?: Brummer collection, date unknown
		Alabaster phylae depicting cultic scene of possible serpent worship: third/fifth century Asia Minor/Syria?	Iconography in burial phase of Piazzuola: Rome, San Sebastiano, second/third century	Assorted “Abraxas” and cock-headed, snake-footed gems: dates unknown

**Inscriptions**

Starting with one of the more firm identifications of Gnostic Christian archaeology, we have the inscription upon the tomb of Flavia Sophe found in Rome. Finney, as his article is mainly concerned with Gnostic images, only gives this source a fleeting mention, stating that it was “surely inspired by Valentinian ideology and possibly executed for Roman Gnostics.”<sup>14</sup> A more illustrative comment on this inscription can be found in Kurt Rudolph’s *Gnosis; the Nature and History of Gnosticism*, where he postulates Sophia as a high-ranking female within the Gnostic order. The inscription does seem to indicate that she was accepted and took part in Gnostic rituals. The inscription reads:

You, who did yearn for the paternal light,  
Sister, spouse, my Sophē,  
Anointed in the baths of Christ with everlasting, holy oil,  
Hasten to gaze at the divine features of the aeons,  
The great Angel of the great council (i.e. the Redeemer),  
The true Son;  
You entered the bridal chamber and deathless ascended  
To the bosom of the Father.<sup>15</sup>

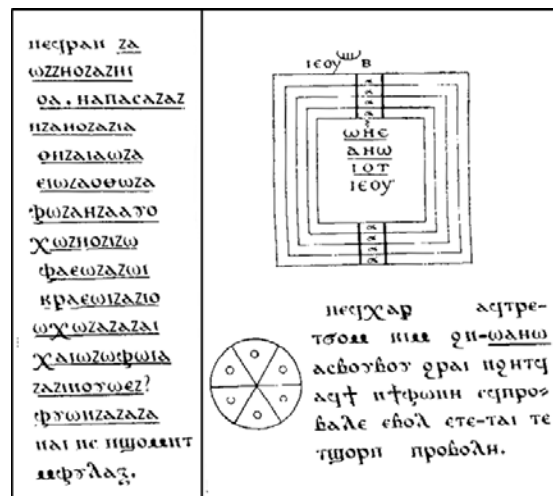


The mention of the bridal chamber at the end is an allusion to the Valentinian ritual. In Valentinian mythology, the fall of Sophia (or the world soul) represented the disunity of the male/female in the beginning. The sacrament of the bridal chamber on the other hand is supposed to represent the reunion of the separate halves, the male to the female.<sup>16</sup> The mythological Sophia yearns for a reunion with her consort and the Pleroma, “the home of the highest beings” just as Sophia wished to gain redemption through knowledge and joining of the Supreme Being.

## Papyri

Featuring more prominently in Finney’s article are the geometric designs from the margins of the books of JEU. Found in the first forty leaves of the Bruce Codex, these books contain sixty-nine schematic depictions of abstracted deities, heavenly bodies, seals, and celestial relationships. The First Book of JEU seems to be a creation story of the universe, where different aeons and powers emanate from and pay homage to the Supreme Deity, or JEU. Many of the words associated with the schemata are just a string of vowel sounds. Some have postulated that the books of JEU were meant to be only read—to be used in certain ritual ceremonies to induce a sort of trance or meditative state by chanting.<sup>17</sup> For example, we have the following image and description from Chapter 7:

Figure 1<sup>18</sup>



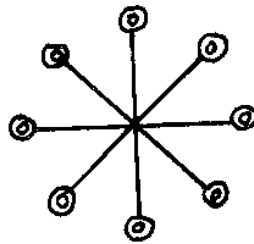
These are the ranks which he has caused to be emanated. And there are twelve ranks in each treasury, these being their type: six heads on this side and six on that, turned towards each other. There will be a multitude of ranks standing in them outside these, all of which I will say. There are twelve heads in each rank, and the name belongs to them all, according to rank; this name is that of the twelve, there being twelve heads in each rank.

The box on the left contains the phrase “His [JEU’s] name” and a gathering of vowel signs (underlined) followed by the phrase “These are the three watchers.” The box on the right contains a schematic representation of JEU at the top, followed by the description “His Character: he caused the power to move in. It welled up in him. He gave voice as he

emanated. This is the first emanation.” The pie-shaped diagram is a representation of the “twelve ranks in each treasury” which are “turned towards each other.”<sup>19</sup>

An example of a seal depiction commonly found in the second book of JEU comes from chapter 45, where we have the following diagram and narrative;

**Figure 2**<sup>20</sup>



Now thereafter it happened that Jesus spoke to his disciples: “Look, you have received the baptism of the holy spirit.” He laid out the censer of baptism in the holy spirit, and placed on it grape sprays, juniper berries, casdalanthos, remains of saffron, the resin of a mastich tree, cinnamon, myrrh, balsam, honey. And he laid out two vessels of wine, one to the right of the censer and the other to the left. And he laid out enough bread for the disciples. And Jesus sealed the disciples with this seal [Fig. 10]. This is the name of the seal: zkzoza. And this is its explanation: thozonoz.<sup>21</sup>

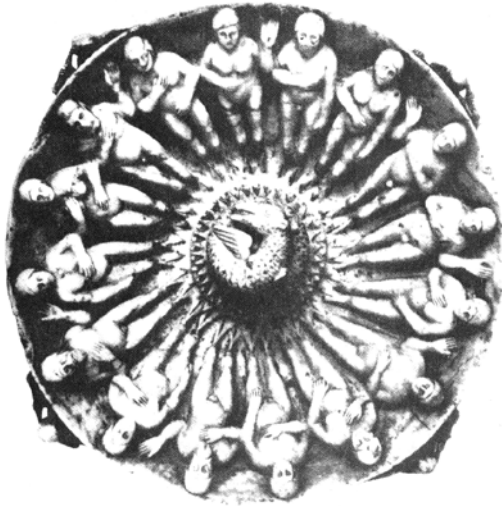
This selection is from the second book of JEU where Jesus is performing an initiation ceremony for his disciples. The disciples, upon death would place these seals upon themselves when facing up to the eleventh aeon. The twelfth and thirteenth aeons, comprise the Pleroma, or the dwelling of the deities, to which must be presented one’s seal, name, and number. After the fourteenth aeon, where the Godhead resides, no seal is required, only the “mystery of the forgiveness of sins.” Linear and geometrical representations would seem to suggest harmony and a divine order; concepts also used by Plato and Pythagoras in their celestial descriptions. As Christian Gnosticism was just a part of the highly syncretic Roman religious world, it is not surprising that they would borrow from or share ideas with other philosophies and religions.

## **Sculptures**

Coming from the more securely identified Gnostic artifacts to the more dubious, we have the Khirbet Qilqis collection of mini figurines and the alabaster bowl of a possible Gnostic cult scene. As related by Finney, the figurines were acquired by the Monastery of the Flagellation in Jerusalem, but were found in Palestine at Khirbet Qilqis. Some have linked these statues to a Gnostic sect named “Archontics” who are mentioned in Epiphanius (*Panarion* 40.1.1–40.8.2) as having ideology in line with these miniature figurines. At the time of Finney’s article in 1980, “the authenticity of the entire Khirbet Qilqis assemblage [was] seriously in question (Finney 441),” with the collection dating possibly from the third century. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find additional information or images of these

figurines since Finney's article was published, which probably means the artifacts were either falsified or too obscure to interpret and therefore interest in identifying these figures has since waned.

**Figure 3**<sup>22</sup>



Alternatively, the alabaster phylae, or bowl, has continued to draw attention. Dating anywhere from the third to the fifth centuries CE and originating possibly from either Asia Minor or Syria, the bowl depicts a possible Ophite Gnostic cultic scene of serpent worship. [Fig 3] On the inside, the bowl is surrounded by figures side to side with feet pointing towards the center where a coiled serpent lies. The outside of the bowl is decorated with four anthropomorphic images, each having an inscription at its feet. Three of these inscriptions are phrases from Orphic<sup>23</sup> poems to the Sun (Orphaeism was a Greek mystery school based on the poems of Orpheus and connected to the mysteries of Dionysus and Persephone). The fourth inscription is from Euripides' *Melanippus* from which we have an Orphic story of heavenly creation from a world egg.<sup>24</sup> While the inscription on the outside of the bowl is not contested as belonging to an Orphic persuasion, the inner cultic scene is. Kurt Rudolph believes this image to reflect a Nassene Gnostic (or Ophite) cult scene. His reasoning stems from an Ophite feast narrative preserved in the polemical author Epiphanius's *Panarion* or "Medicine Chest" against heresies:

They have a snake which they foster in a particular box; at the hour when they perform their mysteries they coax it out of the hole, and whilst they load the table with bread, they summon forth the snake. When the hole is opened, it comes out . . . crawling onto the table and wallowing in the bread: this, they claim is the "perfect offering." And that is also why, so I heard from them, they not only "break the bread" [an old Christian expression for the Lord's Supper] in which the snake has wallowed, and offer it to the recipients, but everyone also kisses the snake on the mouth, once the snake has indeed been charmed by sorcery . . . They prostrate themselves before it and call this the "thanksgiving" which originates from its wallowing, and furthermore

with its help they raise up a hymn to the Father on high. In such a manner they conclude their mystery feast.<sup>25</sup>

Even though this description is a tempting fit to the imagery of the bowl, the source, Epiphanius, may be later than the date of the bowl; 374–7 CE as opposed to a timeframe anywhere between the third to the fifth centuries CE.

## Paintings

Figure 4<sup>26</sup>



Figure 5<sup>27</sup>



Perhaps the “Gnostic artifact” to cause the most excitement was the wall paintings found in the Tomb of the Aurelii. The Tomb of the Aurelii has been estimated to date anywhere from the reign of Alexander Severus (122–35 CE) to that of Caracalla (211–17 CE).<sup>28</sup> The complex lies in Rome’s Viale Manzoni and contains one upper and two lower chambers intersected by stairways and platforms. The contested paintings are from the west wall of the upper chamber flanking a burial niche. The image on the left [Fig. 4] shows three figures: a male, an unidentified and fragmented second figure, and a snake. Many iconographies have been applied to this scene including Hercules, Jason and Medea, and a Gnostic Adam and Eve.

The picture to the right of the burial niche [Fig. 5] has also been identified as Gnostic. Finney attributed this theory to some who thought that the seated male figure and the head and shoulders of another in the picture represented an Ophite creation scene from Irenaeus, *Against All Heresies* 1.30.6. Here, the Demiurge or Ialdabaoth, along with six of his fellow powers and Sophia, create a “man of immense size, both in regard to breadth and length.”<sup>29</sup> Finney denies this connection, stating that the Demiurge would touch his creation and that there is no evidence of a giant in the painting.<sup>30</sup>

Finney’s statement may be too exclusive. Gnostics were in the Jewish and Christian tradition, and their depictions may not have been all that different from what we consider typical of these religions. Yet Christian Gnosis contained influences as diverse as any religion in the first few centuries CE, and it is these ‘other’ influences that make up the iconography of our next category.

## Gemstones

Figure 6<sup>31</sup>



Figure 7<sup>32</sup>



Mix in a little magic, and the nature of “Gnostic” small finds is revealed, or so it seems. The bulk of small finds labeled Gnostic are gemstones, talismans belonging to an “iconic dumping ground” of ancient religions that do not fit into neat archaeological classifications. The most common iconographies identified as Gnostic are lion-headed anthropomorphic figures, probably representing the lion-headed Demiurge [Fig. 6] and “Abraxas” gems that portray a figure with a cock’s head [Fig. 7] and snake feet.

Finney relates that a gem from the Brummer Collection is almost undoubtedly Gnostic. The gem is of green jasper, shaped and polished with a round top and flat back. Inscribed on the flat side are six of the seven beings of the Ophite cosmology. On the front, or rounded side, resides a lion-headed anthropoid [Fig. 8] with the inscribed words *Aariel* and *Ialdabaoth*.

Figure 8<sup>33</sup>



A Gnostic connection here does seem quite likely if the original sources are consulted: The first quotation from Irenaeus makes mention of the Ialdabaoth.

They have also given names to [the several persons] in their system of falsehood, such as the following: he who was the first descendant of the mother is called

*Ialdabaoth*; (1) he, again, descended from him, is named *Iao*; he, from this one, is called *Sabaoth*; the fourth is named *Adoneus*; the fifth, *Eloeus*; the sixth, *Oreus*; and the seventh and last of all, *Astanphaeus* (Irenaeus *Against All Heresies* 1.30.5. Italics mine)<sup>34</sup>

The second quotation is from the thirtieth chapter of the *Pistis Sophia* and gives a physical description of Ialdabaoth:

And she went forth also from the twelve æons, and came into the regions of the chaos and drew nigh to that lion-faced light-power to devour it. But all the material emanations of Self-willed surrounded her, and the great lion-faced light-power devoured all the light-powers in Sophia and cleaned out her light and devoured it, and her matter was thrust into the chaos; it became a lion-faced ruler in the chaos, of which one half is fire and the other darkness,—that is Yaldabaōth, of whom I have spoken unto you many times. When then this befell, Sophia became very greatly exhausted, and that lion-faced light-power set to work to take away from Sophia all her light-powers, and all the material powers of Self-willed surrounded Sophia at the same time and pressed her sore.

Less certain in a Gnostic identification are the Abrasax gems. These gems are very common among small finds and, before the Nag Hammadi discovery, were assumed have been invented by Gnostics. Yet now that more about Gnostic mythology is known, that notion has been put into question. Abrasax, according to Irenaeus (*Against All Heresies* 1.24.7)<sup>35</sup> and Hippolytus (*Refutation of all Heresies* 7.26.6)<sup>36</sup> was the most powerful, and ruler of the 365 archons in the Basilidian system and often equated with the number 365. Abrasax was also the Basilidian version of the Demiurge. Some of the Abrasax gems have only the name inscribed, while others contain only the cock-headed figure [Fig. 9]. Still others have both [Fig 23].

Figure 9<sup>37</sup>



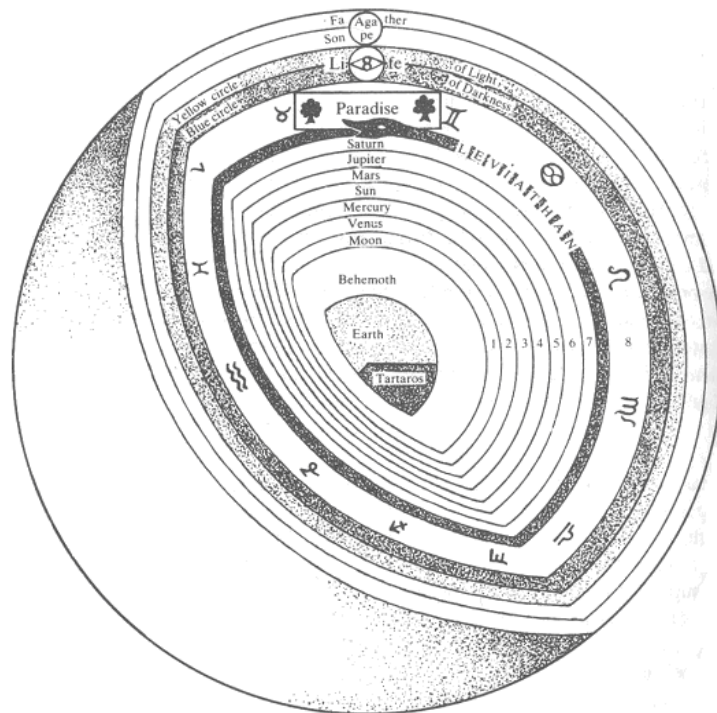
Figure 10<sup>38</sup>



Finney believes it is too early to tell either way as the Abraxoid gems have not been securely dated. If they date to the second century in Egypt, then a Basilidian origin would carry more clout. However, if they are pre-Constantine, some other group was the likely manufacturer.<sup>39</sup> The dilemma of conclusively dating and distinguishing these objects is twofold. First, we have no context for most of these gems and must rely on iconography, style and other such internal factors. Second, as Finney asserts; “The search for a Gnostic iconography could be illusory, based altogether on false premises. But we will not know until the magical images have been sorted out and ordered according to traditional critical categories.”<sup>40</sup> We have no inventory for ‘magical’ or Abraxoid gems, and therefore no guidelines as to what is and isn’t a Gnostic artifact.

These gems, as well as the other artifacts mentioned before, with a sometimes hesitant relationship to Gnosticism should not be grounds for dismissing the search for a Gnostic corpus of imagery. Since this field has been but poorly explored, there remains the need for a thorough exploration of the imagery-laden Gnostic Christian mythological landscape, the starting point for any serious endeavor to identify Gnostic material culture.

### Mental Constructs into Material Objects: Gnostic Iconographic Candidates



41

Gnosticism had no church, no dogma, and no rigidity of faith. Theological speculation and integration of other religious ideas were promoted, so long as they were contained within the Gnostic worldview.

The works of the early Christian writers were our first indication of Gnosticism’s variability. Bit by bit the movement’s multiplicity has only been shown to increase with the findings of the Berlin, Bruce, and Askew Codices; other assorted fragments; and the Nag Hammadi library. Toleration of divergent interpretations of myths like the “Fall of Sophia” and the

–Ignorant Demiurge” is especially evidenced in the Nag Hammadi collection where multiple versions of texts, like the –Apocryphon of John” and –On the Origin of the World” are preserved together.

The ancient Valentinians, Sethians, Ophites, and others had no canon of scripture; instead they used the writings of other religions or philosophies like the Bible and (Middle) Platonic ideas. The Gnostics had a system underlying their productions, a system that extracted thoughts from a myriad of influences in the ancient world and expressed them in original ways. Via this method, the Gnostics would produce their own material –under the cloak of the older literature.”<sup>42</sup> Christian Gnosticism, like many religions of the day, was a product of Hellenistic syncretism, or the mixing and reinterpretation of deities, rituals, and practices amongst the various factions, from the time of Alexander the Great’s conquest and integration of the Greek, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian worlds. Influences from Jewish, Greek, and Iranian cultures and religions can all be seen in the writings of Christian Gnosticism.

Yet there is one thread that can be followed through the tangled web of this system: mythology. Gnostic Christian mythology can be seen, as Kurt Rudolph suggests, as –parasitic” because it merely recycles mythologies from other traditions, prospering from their content.<sup>43</sup> However, for Gnostics, it appears this was a conscious act; for at the root of all religions there was the truth which had, over the course of time, been forgotten. By borrowing mythologies from their predecessors and contemporaries, Christian Gnosticism was allegedly putting the truth back into these tales. Fortunately, this –inserted truth” comes with much imagery, mainly in the form of creation stories and caricatures of deities.

## Dualism

In Christian Gnosis, dualism seems to be the mechanism behind all tales of the cosmos and creation. Dualism, as is generally used in theology, can be defined as two forces, normally –good” and –evil,” which are opposed to each other. In Gnosticism, the opposed forces are the world of matter ruled by the Demiurge or –Creator Deity” and the world of the unknowable, all-powerful Deity existing beyond senses and comprehension in the Pleroma, or –fullness,” consisting of angels, aeons, archons and personified ideas. The former is usually depicted as the –evil” which must be transcended and escaped, while the latter is likened to a sort of –heaven” or the ultimate, original home. The physical body as well as the psychic self dwell in the world of matter, while the spirit, or the –Divine Spark” is from the Pleroma and can be recognized and set free to return home only if one achieves –Gnosis” about this fundamentally divided existence.<sup>44</sup>

Finding descriptions of this dualism in the literature, for instance, the Pleroma or the Supreme, unknowable Deity is more than difficult, but maybe not impossible. According to the polemical author Origen, a representation of infinity, as well as the rest of the cosmos, named the –Ophite diagram,” was seen as an actual object by the Gnostic teacher Celsus upon his encounter with a particular Gnostic sect (whom Origen named the Ophites).



**Origen relates:**

In this diagram were described ten circles, distinct from each other, but united by one circle, which was said to be the soul of all things, and was called “Leviathan”... the being named “Behemoth,” placed as it were under the lowest circle. The inventor of this accursed diagram had inscribed this leviathan at its circumference and center, thus placing its name in two separate places. Moreover, Celsus says that the diagram was “divided by a thick black line, and this line he asserted was called Gehenna, which is Tartarus.” Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.25<sup>45</sup>

Following the mythological structure laid down by Ptolemy of the Valentinian Gnostic system, the disk-like creation showed Earth at the center of a cosmos which consisted of eight heavenly spheres, as well as the Pleroma of the Supreme Deity. The spheres, surrounding Earth in concentric rings were the Moon, Venus, Mercury, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, and a sphere belonging to the Demiurge known merely as the realm of the fixed stars. This latter realm is where the constellations are contained, as well as paradise, marked by the rectangle with two trees. Directly under this realm is the *ouroboros* or world snake representing infinity, which is described in Gnostic cosmologies and was common in alchemical texts, such as in this image from a Greek magical papyrus from the third century CE [Fig. 11] and in some proposed “Gnostic gems” [Fig. 12].

**Figure 11<sup>46</sup>**

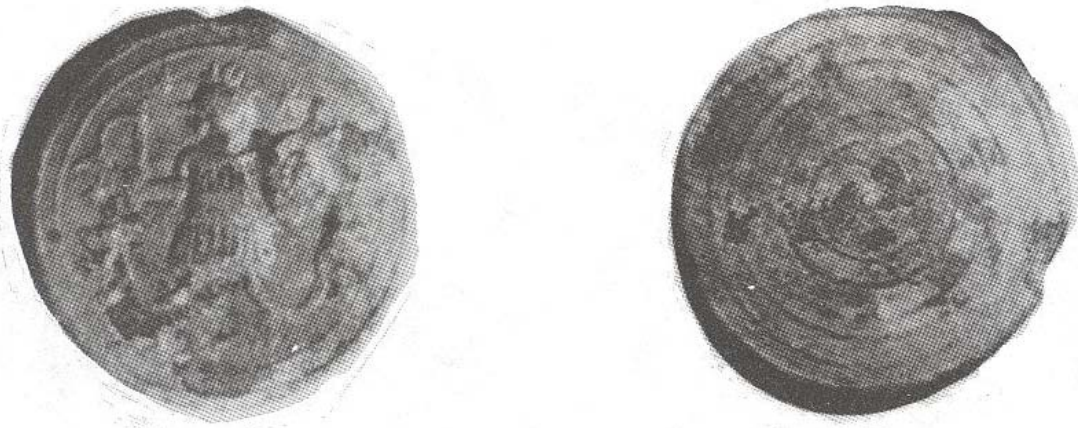


**Figure 12<sup>47</sup>**



The Pleroma, in the outermost layers of the disk, consists of two circles, that of the Father and that of the Son. Between the Pleroma and the earthly cosmos of the eight spheres is located the intermediate kingdom of light and darkness. Sophia has been allotted to this middle kingdom and it is here that she creates the “Divine Spark” which she gives to humanity. On the “Gnostic gems” we also have characters and representations from this celestial diagram as can be seen here [Figure 13]:

Figure 13<sup>48</sup>



As the Ophite diagram shows, descriptions too abstract to be considered good iconographic fodder may be some of the best candidates we have for Gnostic material culture.

### Cosmogony

Another deity that plays a major role in many Christian Gnostic writings is the Demiurge, also known as *Ialdabaoth*, *Saklas*, and *Samael*.<sup>49</sup> This creator of humanity and the world of matter is, according to Valentinian mythology, a jealous, vain and ignorant deity, formed from the faulty desires of his celestial mother, Sophia, who was cast out of the Pleroma. Standing in contrast to the indescribable Supreme Deity, the Demiurge is often given material characteristics that may be spotted on the controversial “magic” gems from antiquity. The “Fall of Sophia” anecdote, told by an array of Gnostic texts, provides for some of the best Demiurge imagery. The anonymous tractate from the second Nag Hammadi codex, *The Hypostasis of the Archons* we have the following account:

Sophia, who is called Pistis, wanted to create something, alone without her consort; and her product was a celestial thing. A veil exists between the world above and the realms that are below; and shadow came into being beneath the veil; and that shadow became matter; and that shadow was projected apart. And what she had created became a product in the matter, like an aborted fetus. And it assumed a plastic form molded out of shadow, and became an arrogant beast resembling a lion. It was androgynous, as I have already said, because it was from matter that it derived.<sup>50</sup>

The passage goes on to describe how the “arrogant beast” (the Demiurge) went on to create subordinate angels and archons, who would in turn govern and influence Earth and matter. Lion-headed and snake-footed figures can be found all over the proposed “Gnostic gems.” Some of these gems even have stars or planets in the background, which brings to mind descriptions, as in the above texts, of the Demiurge dwelling in the realm of fixed stars and ruling over the planetary spheres [Fig. 14].

Figure 14<sup>51</sup>



Figure 15<sup>52</sup>



From Origen's *Against Celsus* we have a continuation of the cosmology where the Demiurge then creates the archons who rule the seven spheres surrounding Earth. These rulers take on animal characteristics: Jaōth, the lion-faced; Elōaios, the ass-faced; Astaphaios, the hyena-faced; Jaō, the serpent-faced with seven heads; Adōnaios, the dragon-faced; Adōni, the ape-faced; and Sabbataios, with the face of flaming fire. Again, if we look to the "Gnostic gems" a promising suspect is found [Fig. 15], but as before, these gems have not been catalogued or studied and are without an archaeological context. As it stands, these descriptions in the texts remain only possibilities, references for any newly uncovered or re-investigated artifacts.

### Conclusion

In spite of the illustrative textual examples above, is an expectation of discovering Gnostic material culture ill-founded? Previous attempts at identifying Gnostic artifacts, with the exception of a few, have all but fallen flat. Why is this so when, as Rudolph states "Evidently many Gnostics also fostered a cult of images, even owning statues of gods such as those found among the archaeological remains of mystery cults . . . ?"<sup>53</sup> Perhaps it is because, as Finney imagines, "If Gnostics made pictures, they were probably esoteric and fantastic, laconic signs and symbols devoid of narrative context, and no doubt executed on an intimate scale,"<sup>54</sup> such as the geometric designs from the Bruce Codex. Christian Gnosticism was by and large a movement made unlimitedly variable because of each individual's own interpretation of life and the Divine. Seeking shared icons would then seem to pose problematic. Yet the advantage of limiting this study to Christian Gnosticism is that we are also limiting outside influences. Within this flux of Gnosis, influences from the encompassing religious society are coalesced to form a sect's mythology and ritual practices. In the case of Christian Gnosticism, that would include Christian mythology and variations on Christian icons.

Perhaps then, awaiting possible discoveries of strange lion-headed figures or straining to materialize abstract concepts is not the cumbersome direction slated for seekers of Gnostic Christian material remains. Considering the highly syncretic nature of Gnosticism, what's to say that their artifacts and symbols have not been under our noses the whole time? Early Christian art and religious depictions borrowed iconography from their pagan colleagues, as is evident in the adoption of the halo from sun-worshipping religions such as Mithraism, Egyptian religion (Ra), and the mythic figure of Apollo. Perhaps Gnostic Christian iconography was so fraught with outside symbolism and ideas combined with original Christian motifs that it has merely been dumped into the hodgepodge of material called "Early Christian," with no one bothering to sort it out.

Today, there exist many religions and spiritualities with the philosophy of Gnosis at their core, and a few who hark back to the ancient Gnostics of the early centuries CE. As ancient Gnosticism was a hodgepodge of influences and philosophies, so it is now. Two modern Gnostic groups, the Ecclesia Gnostica of Los Angeles, California, and Novus Spiritus in San Jose, California, have icons that are drawn from the Christian Gnostic tradition, and in the case of Novus Spiritus, also incorporate contemporary symbolism. The following descriptions are my own, based upon personal observation, conversations with Dr. Stefan Heller of Ecclesia Gnostica, and members of both Ecclesia Gnostica, and Novus Spiritus clergy. The Ecclesia Gnostica's Coat of Arms includes a serpent entwined about a cross, representing sadness over the crucifixion of wisdom, or of Moses in ancient times. Below, crossed gold and silver keys are symbolic openers to the upper and lower worlds. The main icon of Novus Spiritus is three intertwined rings symbolizing Loyalty, Gratitude, and Commitment. These words and rings are the key actions to Novus's philosophy: "Life is a long journey of discovery, wherein each person must meet—and love—themselves, overcome their own fears, and learn the truth about loving. It is a process of perfecting the innate, God-given beauty of the Soul."<sup>55</sup>

### **Ecclesia Gnostica**

The Ecclesia Gnostica is headed by Dr. Stefan Heller and is nestled securely in the Catholic tradition. Here are images of a baptismal font, cross, chair, and items for the Eucharist. The Eucharist I attended was a pleasure to the senses, with incense, bells, liturgy, and communion. Despite the occasional Gnostic overtones, as in the mention of Sophia, or the absence of references to Beezlebug, I was reminded of traditional Catholic ceremonies I've attended. Greeting the visitor of the Ecclesia Gnostica in the entryway is a chest-high statue of Sophia, a major icon here. The statue comes from India, where the Eastern Orthodox Church still recognizes her icon. When the congregation is seated, a not-quite traditional Catholic altar scene comes into view up front. To the left of the central altar is a picture of Mani, the founder of Manichaeism and an important figure in Gnosticism after the first few centuries CE. Mirroring Mani on the right is an image of Saint Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan order and connected to animals and nature. Upon leaving the Ecclesia Gnostica, one may notice a statue nestled amongst the greenery on the side of the building. It is the Madonna, a figure that Dr. Heller says calls attention to the sacred feminine.

## Novus Spiritus

The Gnostic Christian society of Novus Spiritus also has images of the Divine Feminine. In this tradition, she is referred to as Azna, Mother Deity, and is the active counterbalance to Om, Father Deity, the unmoved mover. A striking symbol in the ceremonial room of Novus Spiritus is a polished sword, representing the cutting piercing of darkness and negativity: a way back to light and wisdom. The collar and yellow, blue, and purple robes worn by the clergy of Novus denote various positions in the church. They recall the effects worn by officials of other Christian denominations and spiritual groups.

As Ian Culianu pointed out in the beginning of this paper, everything and everyone can be Gnostic. To be a Gnostic is to seek one's own path to the Divine, through direct experience. Symbols and icons are tools to achieve this and may be drawn from the surrounding religious iconography or created as needed. In the ancient world where politics and religion went hand in hand, iconography that was not orthodox would have been conspicuous and ripe for persecution. Today, mainstream religious icons carry esoteric meanings derived from a long ago Gnostic philosophy that needed to syncretize to survive. The philosophies and later mythology and imagery that grew up around the idea of Gnosis are still here today. They are the imagery of Christianity, Mary Magdalene, the saints, the snake. They are the imagery of three intertwined circles, the cross, and the adornments of a clergyperson.

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<sup>1</sup> I. P. Culianu, "The Gnostic Revenge: Gnosticism and Romantic Literature," in *Gnosis und Politik*, ed. Jacob Taubes (Munich: Wilhelm Fink/Ferdinand Schöningh, 1984), 290.

<sup>2</sup> The terms *Gnosis*, *Gnostic* and *Gnosticism* are rather ambiguous categories. While they should appear in their italicized forms, for reasons of simplicity they will be left, after initial mention of the words and the subsequent section on defining the terms, in normal script for the remainder of the discussion.

<sup>3</sup> Plato's treatise on the origins of Gnosis may be found in his work, the *Republic*.

<sup>4</sup> See *Epistle of Barnabas* 1.5. in B. D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: II Epistle of Barnabas. Papias and Quadratus. The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> R. M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* from *The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 1997), 94.

- <sup>6</sup> K. Rudolph, *Gnosis; the Nature and History of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Limited, 1984), 306.
- <sup>7</sup> Grant *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 94.
- <sup>8</sup> Coptic was an everyday language used and codified in Egypt during the early Christian era. The language was created by adapting Egyptian hieroglyphs to the Greek alphabet.
- <sup>9</sup> A *codex* (plural *codices*) is the Latin name for what we think of today as a book.
- <sup>10</sup> For more on the story of the Nag Hammadi discovery see J.M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 22–26.
- <sup>11</sup> J.N. Bremmer, ed., *The Apocryphal Acts of John* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 98.
- <sup>12</sup> T. Insoll, *Archaeology, Ritual and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2004), 19.
- <sup>13</sup> P. C. Finney, “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?” *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* 1, The School of Valentinius (1978), 435–454.
- <sup>14</sup> Finney, “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?” 439.
- <sup>15</sup> Rudolph *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 212.
- <sup>16</sup> Rudolph, *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 245.
- <sup>17</sup> See C. Schmidt, *The Books of JEU and The Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).
- <sup>18</sup> Image taken from “The Gnostic Society Library: Gnostic Scriptures and Fragments: The First Book of Ieou,” accessed October 1, 2010, <http://www.gnosis.org/library/1ieo.htm>.
- <sup>19</sup> Translation of Coptic writing by: Schmidt, *The Books of JEU and The Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*. Unfortunately, this is the only translation available for the Bruce Codex. While a few of the Coptic phrases are translated, the “string of vowel sounds” are not.
- <sup>20</sup> Seal from the Second book of JEU taken from Finney “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?” 437.
- <sup>21</sup> Excerpt from the Book of JEU taken from *Ibid.* 436–7.
- <sup>22</sup> Alabaster bowl depicting possible Ophite cultic scene of serpent worship. Estimated third/fifth century CE from Syria or Asia Minor. On the outside of the bowl reads an Orphic proverb. Taken from Rudolph *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 23.
- <sup>23</sup> The Orphites were a Greek theosophic school connected to the cult of Dionysus. For a brief introduction, see Rudolph *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism* 286.
- <sup>24</sup> For a more detailed description of the bowl and its symbolism, see Finney “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?” 441, Rudolph *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism* 23, 247, and J. Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (New York: International, 1986), 90.
- <sup>25</sup> Quotation from Epiphanius, *Panarion* (37.5.6–8) and bracketed comments taken from Rudolph *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 247.
- <sup>26</sup> Image to the left of the burial niche on the west wall of the upper chamber in the Tomb of the Aurelii depicting a proposed Gnostic creation scene. Image taken from Finney “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?” 444.
- <sup>27</sup> Image to the right of the burial niche on the west wall of the upper chamber in the Tomb of the Aurelii depicting a possible Gnostic creation scene. Image taken from *Ibid* 446.
- <sup>28</sup> Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*, 92.
- <sup>29</sup> Quotation from Irenaeus, *Against All Heresies* (1.30.6) taken from Finney, “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?” 445.
- <sup>30</sup> Finney, “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?” 445.
- <sup>31</sup> Image and caption taken from Doresse *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*, 166.
- <sup>32</sup> Gemstone depicting a snake-footed, cock-headed figure, with the words: ‘Jao’, ‘Abraxas’, ‘Sabaoth’ and ‘Adonis’. Taken from Rudolph *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> The lion-headed figure on a gemstone from the Brummer collection. Image taken from Finney “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?” 439.

<sup>34</sup> Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 100.

<sup>35</sup> Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 92.

<sup>36</sup> J. H. Macmahon, S. D. F. Salmond, *The Refutation of all Heresies by Hippolytus with Fragments from his Commentaries on Various Books of Scripture*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1911)

<sup>37</sup> Small stone of green jade containing the name ‘Abraxas’ as well as other names of the Gnostic archons. There are 14 leaves and names in total. Image taken from C. W. King *The Gnostics and Their Remains Ancient and mediaeval second edition*. (London: David Nutt), Preface.

<sup>38</sup> On the right: Cock-headed, snake-footed figure with whip and shield on red jasper. On the left: same figure but on green jasper. Both images taken from C. W. King *The Gnostics and their Remains Ancient and Mediaeval second edition*, 41, 194.

<sup>39</sup> Finney “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?” 453–4.

<sup>40</sup> Finney “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?” 451.

<sup>41</sup> The Ophite diagram showing, from top: the two rings (Father and Son) of the Pleroma (Upper cosmos), containing the smaller circle *Agape* representing love which connects the Son to the middle cosmos. The middle cosmos contains the two rings of light (yellow) and darkness (blue). The small circle connecting these two rings is the realm of Sophia where the ‘divine spark’ for humanity is manufactured. The lower cosmos begins, from the top, with the realm of the fixed stars where paradise and the signs of the zodiac are housed. Below this is the *ouroboros*, the sign of infinity here meant to represent the Demiurge ruling above the seven lower planetary spheres of the archons. The Earth is directly represented by the Behemoth, or the collective demonic influence exerted by the archons in the above spheres. Within the Earth is Tartaros, or the underworld. Image and description taken from Rudolph *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 68–69.

<sup>42</sup> Rudolph, *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Rudolph, *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 55.

<sup>44</sup> For a more detailed discussion, including Dualism in other non-Christian Gnostic systems, see Rudolph, *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 58–67.

<sup>45</sup> H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1953), 340.

<sup>46</sup> The *ouroboros* or world snake, representing infinity on a Greek magical papyrus of the third century CE. The text reads that this is an amulet “of the might of the great God” “against demons, against spirits, against all illness and all suffering,” as well as the mantra “Protect me, NN, body and soul from all injury.” Magical words and signs (like *Yaeo*) are also included. Image and description taken from Rudolph, *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 223.

<sup>47</sup> Green jasper gem showing the *ouroboros* encircling the names ‘IAO’ and ‘ABRASAX’. Taken from C. W. King, *The Gnostics and their Remains Ancient and Mediaeval second edition*, 102.

<sup>48</sup> Medal in lead with snake-footed, cock-headed figure with the name “IAO” on one side and with spheres of the seven heavens on the obverse. Taken from Doresse *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*, 110.

<sup>49</sup> “Ialdabaoth”, as used in Nag Hammadi Codex II.5 and by Celsus in Origen’s *Contra Celsum* VI.28 is of Aramaic origin and stands for “the begetter of Sabaoth (the heavenly



powers).” “Saklas”, as used in *The Secret Book of John* from the Berlin Codex means “fool.” “Samael” also appears in Nag Hammadi Codex II.5 (*On the Origin of the World*) and means “Blind God”. These names for the Demiurge can be found throughout the various Gnostic scriptures, and are usually interchangeable.

<sup>50</sup> *Nag Hammadi Codex II.4.94* in Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English; Third Completely Revised Edition*.

<sup>51</sup> Snake-footed cock-headed figure brandishing a whip and riding a chariot, recalling images of a Solar God. The sun (or a star) and the moon can be seen in the background. Green jasper. Taken from C. W. King *The Gnostics and their Remains Ancient and Mediaeval second edition*, 102.

<sup>52</sup> Red jasper gem depicting a crowned serpent ‘EVIA’ surrounded by animals. Taken from C. W. King, *The Gnostics and their Remains Ancient and Mediaeval second edition*, 41.

<sup>53</sup> Rudolph, *Gnosis, The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 225–226.

<sup>54</sup> Finney, “Did Gnostics Make Pictures?” 450.

<sup>55</sup> “About Novus,” Novus Spiritus, last modified 2006, accessed June 23, 2010, <http://www.novus.org>.