

Pistis Sophia

Pistis Sophia is an important Gnostic text discovered in 1773,^[1] possibly written between the 3rd^[2] and 4th centuries AD.^[3] The remaining manuscript, which scholars place in the late 4th century,^[4] relates the Gnostic teachings of the transfigured Jesus to the assembled disciples (including his mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Martha), when the risen Christ had accomplished eleven years speaking with his disciples. In it, the complex structures and hierarchies of heaven familiar in Gnostic teachings are revealed.

The text proclaims that Jesus remained on earth after the resurrection for 11 years, and was able in this time to teach his disciples up to the first (i. e. beginner) level of the mystery. It starts with an allegory paralleling the death and resurrection of Jesus, and describing the descent and ascent of the soul. It then proceeds to describe important figures within the Gnostic cosmology, and then finally lists 32 carnal desires to overcome before salvation is possible.

The female divinity of Gnosticism is Sophia, a being with many aspects and names. She is sometimes identified with the Holy Spirit itself but, according to her various capacities, is also the Universal Mother, the Mother of the Living or Resplendent Mother, the Power on High, She-of-the-left-hand (as opposed to Christ, understood as her husband and he of the Right Hand), as the Luxurious One, the Womb, the Virgin, the Wife of the Male, the Revealer of Perfect Mysteries, the Holy Dove of the Spirit, the Heavenly Mother, the Wandering One, or Elena (that is, Selene, the Moon). She was envisaged as the Psyche of the world and the female aspect of Logos.^[5]

1 Title

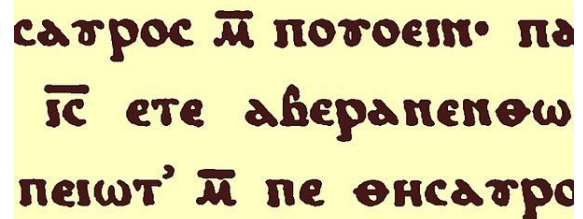
The title *Pistis Sophia* (Πίστις Σοφία) is nowhere given as the title of the whole work. The work got its name by mistake by Karl Gottfried Woide who was one of the first to have a closer look at the codex. Although this title is wrong, it has been kept ever since. Carl Schmidt suggests Τεύχη τοῦ Σωτῆρος (books of the saviour) instead.^[6] The term *Pistis Sophia* is obscure, and is sometimes translated *Faith Wisdom* or *Wisdom in Faith* or *Faith in Wisdom*. A more accurate translation, taking into account its Gnostic context, is *The Faith of Sophia*, as Sophia to the Gnostics was a divine *syzygy* of Christ, rather than simply a word meaning *wisdom*. In an earlier, simpler version of a *Sophia*, in the Berlin Codex and also found in a papyrus codex at Nag Hammadi, the transfigured Christ explains

Pistis in a rather obscure manner:

Again, his disciples said: *Tell us clearly how they came down from the invisibilities, from the immortal to the world that dies?*

The perfect Saviour said: *Son of Man consented with Sophia, his consort, and revealed a great androgynous light. Its male name is designated 'Saviour, begetter of all things'. Its female name is designated 'All-begettress Sophia'. Some call her 'Pistis'.*

2 Askew Codex



The phrase "Jesus, who is called Aberamentho" in the original Coptic

Pistis Sophia has been preserved in a single Coptic MS., a quarto of 346 pages, written in the Thebaic dialect. This "Askew Codex" was purchased by the British Museum (now British Library) in 1795 from Anthony Askew. It has no general title, and begins without any inscription, but is divided into four sections or books, of which the second, third, and fourth, bear separate titles. The second is inscribed *secundus tomos pisteos sofias* (p. 126, ed. Schwartze), the third and fourth *Meros teuchon soteris* (pp. 252 and 357). The two first of these sections or books treat, for the most part, of the *Pistis Sophia* (pp. 43-181). The fourth book, which is defective, presents a simpler and older form of Gnostic doctrine, and was the work perhaps of a different author. It describes Jesus as, immediately after his resurrection, making himself known as the Redeemer to his disciples, and instructing them in the mysteries. The three first books relate, on the other hand, how Jesus gives the disciples a course of instruction for eleven years subsequent to his resurrection, and then ascends to heaven, whence, after completing his redeeming work, he returns to them once more and gives them the last and highest teachings concerning the super-sensuous world, the middle kingdom, the under-world,

and about the fates of the Pistis Sophia, and of individual human souls.

In the fourth book, Jesus is described as standing, after his resurrection, at an altar on the shore of the ocean, surrounded by disciples, men and women, clothed in white linen raiment. At his command, retire to his left hand, towards the west, the Aeons, the *sphaira*, the Archontes, with their *dynameis*, and the whole world. Jesus and his disciples then take their place *in medio topo aerino*, on the way of the midst (*via medii*) underneath the *sphaira*. He proceeds to instruct them concerning the significance and operation of the Archontes of the way of the midst, their binding by Jeu, and the tortures to which sinful souls are exposed from the five evil Archontes in the regions of the air, and also concerning the deliverance of the souls out of their power by the planetary spirits. At the prayer of the disciples that he would save them from those torments, Jesus takes them to a mountain in Galilee, while the Archontes return to their former place. Jesus bids them bring fire and branches of trees, and then, amid mystic prayers, offers the Eucharist (the *mysterion aletheias baptismatos*) for their atonement. Here follows in the text a lacuna of several pages. But it is evident that meanwhile Jesus has betaken himself with his disciples into the lower world, and there depicts to them the various fates of souls after death, their torments in Orcus, their *palin-genesiai*, and also the conditions under which souls which have found the mysteries and done their penance, will be raised into the *thesauros luminis*.

Until the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library in 1945, the Askew Codex was one of three codices that contained almost all of the Gnostic writings that had survived the suppression of such literature both in East and West, the other two codices being the Bruce Codex and the Berlin Codex. Aside from these primary sources, everything written about Gnosticism before the Nag Hammadi library became available is based on quotes, characterizations, and caricatures in the writings of the enemies of Gnosticism. The purpose of these heresiological writings was polemical, presenting Gnostic teachings as absurd, bizarre, and self-serving, and as an aberrant *heresy* from a proto-orthodox and orthodox Christian standpoint.

3 Text

The first three books make frequent reference to what is related in the fourth, and complete its descriptions. For eleven years after his resurrection Jesus has instructed his disciples concerning the lower mysteries only up to the 24th mystery. Then, on the 15th of Tobe (Tybi), the day of the full moon, a sudden glorious light invests him, by which he is withdrawn from the view of his disciples and carried up into heaven. The next day he returns to them again, in order now finally to initiate them into all mysteries, from the highest to the lowest, and so impart to them the perfect Gnosis. This initiation, namely, could not be



Jesus appears to his disciples after the resurrection

vouchsafed till the whole work of Jesus had been accomplished, the shining vesture left behind in the 24th mystery been restored to him, and his return accomplished to the heavenly locality from whence he had come forth. This introduction is followed by a detailed description of the mysteries, in four clearly distinguishable sections, which do not coincide with the four books as denoted by their titles or inscriptions.

The form of relation is that of dialogue. The disciples, male and female, put questions to Jesus, which he answers one by one, or exhibit the degree which each has attained in Gnosis by allegorical interpretations of scriptural texts and narration. Mary Magdalene is the readiest of all with questions and interpretations. She and John “the Virgin” (*Parthenos*) are noted (231) as the chief disciples of Christ, that is, as those furnished with the greatest measure of Gnosis. But while Mary Magdalene is distinguished by her special thirst for knowledge, she is also admonished in the fourth book (p. 383) to let other disciples speak as well as herself. So, also, Peter, Andrew, James, Philip, Thomas, Matthew (in the fourth book also Bartholomew and Simon the Canaanite), come forward, and of the women, Salome and the mother of Jesus (*kata kosmon*). Philip, Thomas, and Matthew commit to writing the instructions which the disciples receive from Jesus (pp. 32, 69 sqq.).

3.1 First section

The first section (pp. 4-43) describes the ascent of Christ through the different regions of the spirit-world, from the earth through the way of the midst, and through the various provinces of the *Kerasmos*, up to the 13th Aeon, in order to accomplish the *diakonia* entrusted to him by the first mystery, and subject all the Archontes to his dominion.



Jesus with Mary Magdalene

3.2 Second section

The second section (pp. 43-181) depicts the fates of the *Pistis Sophia*, that is, the penitent and believing Sophia whom Jesus meets, during his ascent, and beneath the 13th Aeon. Seized with longing for the *Thesaurus lucis*, which lies beyond the 13th Aeon, Pistis Sophia has separated herself from her consort (*syzygos*), in the 13th Aeon, and thereby incurred the hatred of *Authades*, one of the Archontes of the 13th Aeon, and of the twelve Archontes under him. Deceived by a false light, generated by *Authades*, Sophia is enticed and drawn into the depths of chaos, where she is deprived of her own robe of light by a number of *probolai*. In seven penitential prayers (*metanoiai*) she makes her humble and believing supplication to the upper light, and prays for deliverance.

After the seventh penitential prayer, Jesus comes, of his own good will, to her help, and leads her out of the midst of her oppressors. But inasmuch as the command to deliver her from chaos has not yet issued from the first mystery, she is again tormented by her tormentors. After her ninth penitential prayer, Jesus raises her by means of a power of light sent to her, which surrounds her head with a crown of beams, up into a higher region of chaos, where she is purified from the material (hylic) elements which still adhere to her. After the twelfth prayer she is requick-

ened by a fresh power of light, sent to her from the first mystery. But, yet again, once more she is overcome in conflict with her enemies, and is hurled down into the depths of chaos. After this, she is brought out of chaos by the angels Gabriel and Michael, is again invested with the powers of light, of which she has been deprived, and brought by Christ to a place underneath the 13th Aeon, whence she sends up thankful hymns to the upper regions. In this place she remains till the ascension of Jesus. Then, finally, after she has withstood the last assaults of her enemies, Jesus leads her to her former dwelling-place in the 13th Aeon, and brings her back to her *syzygos*, while she, in new triumphant hymns proclaims the mercy which has been vouchsafed her.

3.3 Third section

The third section (pp. 181-246) contains a lengthened description of the orders and degrees of spirits in the upper world, from the lowest to the highest *chorema*; each degree appearing in its turn as mere darkness in comparison with that above it.

3.4 Fourth section

The fourth section (pp. 247-356) finally gives detailed instruction to the disciples concerning the necessity and conditions of *metanoia* for individual human souls, concerning the sin-destroying power of the various mysteries, and the different fates to which penitent and impenitent souls will be respectively subjected.

4 Kingdom of Light

At the head of the Kingdom of Light stands the *Pater paternitatis omnis* (called also *Pater thesaurou luminis*; *aperanton lumen*, *Sanctus Sanctorum omnium*); under him is the mystery of the Seven Voices (*mysterion Septem phonon*), *i. e.* probably a Heptad of the highest Aeons, from whom proceed in their turn forty-nine *dynameis*, with their *psephoi*. The dwelling-place of the *Pater paternitatis* is the *topos luminis luminum* (*thesaurus luminis*, *topos aletheias*). In this place appear also to exist the fifteen great *dynameis* of the *Pater thesaurou*. These are also called *Remissores peccatorum* (or *mysteria*), because they are the mediators of the powers of redemption.

Much more completely organised is the kingdom of light, according to the description of the first three books. At its head stands the *Ineffabilis*, called also the *Internus interni* and *Deus aletheias*, the fulness of whose Being is unfolded in his immanent *mele Ineffabilis* (or *verba Ineffabilis*) on the one hand, and on the other, in the *mysteria*, which have issued from him. At the head of these Mysteries, as highest principle of revelation and organ of creation, stands the *mysterion Ineffabilis* or *mysterium primum*,

called also *Verbum unicum Ineffabilis*, from whence all other emanations proceed. This is, at the same time, the supreme intelligence which, issuing from the Ineffabilis, is like the Ineffabilis himself, both *introspicens* and *prospiciens* that is endowed with absolute knowledge, both of its own essence and of all other existence. This first mysterium is further the supreme principle of all forgiveness of sin. From it again proceeds the *primum (unicum) mysterium primi mysterii*, and from these two proceed further three, five, and twelve other mysteries. The upper world, the kingdom of light, finds its completion in the twenty-fourth or last mystery, which again itself produces twelve subordinate mysteries and emanations; beneath this is the *magnum lumen charagmes luminis*, which again divides itself into five *karagmai luminis*, the *primum praeceptum (statutum)*, which is divided into seven mysteries, the *magnum lumen luminum*, the five great Helpers (*parastatai, proegoumenoi*), which serve to conduct the energies of light into the lower regions, and finally the *topos kleronomion luminis*, the destined habitation of redeemed souls. The whole Light-Region is divided into three *choremata mysterion*, which follow one upon the other. The uppermost *chorema* that of the Ineffabilis, the second that of the primum mysterium, the third (the *chorema partis externae*, called also *secundum chorema primi mysterii*) comprises all the other mysteries down to the twenty-fourth. All three *choremata* are again inhabited by an infinite multitude of spirits, *topoi* (or *taxeis*), *apatores, tripneumatoi*. These *tripneumatoi* again are of three grades, *hypertripneumatoi, protripneumatoi, and tripneumatoi*, with their *choremata, taxeis, and mysteria*. Again, each of these *tripneumatoi* has his *tripneumatoi*, and further five trees of light and twenty-four mysteries. Besides these are named 124,000 *hymneutai, amenytoi, asemantoi, anennoetoi, asaleutoi, akinetoi*, with *taxeis* corresponding.

5 The light-treasury

With regard to the region which comes next beneath the realm of light, we learn but little from the fourth book. It is divided into three provinces, the right, the left, and that of the middle between them. What we are told of the rulers of these three dominions agrees so closely with the statements of the three earlier books that we may here conveniently combine both descriptions. There is, however, one essential difference between the latter and the former of these descriptions. According to that, the *thesauros luminis* is no longer identical, as in this, with the upper realm of light, but is placed below the three *choremata* the upper world, and stands at the head of the *kerasmos* or region of mixed light. The *thesauros luminis*, or *terra lucis (topos probolon)* is then, according to this representation, the place from whence the light, which has its source in the upper world, is brought down into the lower world, and whereby it is again transmitted upwards from the one world to the other. In this *thesauros*

luminis are found twelve gathering-points of lights (*taxeis taxeon*), the seven *phonai* or *amen* (which, according to the fourth book, are the seven highest spirits of the world of light after the *Pater paternitatis*), and five trees of light. Beside the seven *phonai* and the five trees of light are found, moreover, in this region three *amen*, the gemini *soteres*, and nine *phylakes*, who are charged with the office of guarding the light. From the above-named gathering-points of light proceed further twelve *soteres*, each of whom again is set over twelve *taxeis*. The mixture of *hyle* with the *thesauros*, or treasury of light, or the already existing combination of purer and impurer elements therein, has produced the material out of which the lower regions of the *kerasmos* were formed.

6 Region of the right

Beneath the light-treasury begins now also, according to the first three books, the division between the regions of right and left. The right, with its rulers, takes the first place next the treasury; but, whereas the fourth book names here, in addition to the two great lights, Jeu and Zorokothora *Melchizedek*, only one other, the Good One, the great *Sabaoth*, the three first books enumerate six great rulers of this region, Jeu the *episkopos luminis*, called also *primus homo* and *presbeutes primi statuti*, the *phylax katametasmatos*, then the two *proegoumenoi*, and, as fifth and sixth, *Melchizedek* and the great *Sabaoth*, Father of the soul of Jesus. The office of these rulers is that of forming and developing all lower spheres of existence by bringing down the light out of its treasury, and then conducting it back thither again, and so accomplishing the salvation of such souls as are capable of reception into the higher world.

7 Middle region

Next, after the region of the right, comes that of the middle (the *topos meson*), the spirits of which are specially entrusted with the guardianship of human souls. Among them the fourth book names (besides the *Zarazaz* or *Maskelli*, which probably belongs here,) the great Iao the Good, and the little *Sabaoth the Good*, to which the first book adds the little Iao. In this place of the midst the light-maiden (*parthenos lucis*) has her seat, and is the judge of souls, who either discloses for them the gates of the light-realm, or sends them back into earthly existence.

Under her are placed (according to the text of the later description) seven other light-maidens with their fifteen helpers (*parastatai*). In the *topos Parthenou* sun and moon also have their seats (the *diskos solis* and the *diskos lunae*), and thence transmit their light, obscured indeed by many veils (*katapetasmata*), into the lower realms of creation. The *diskos solis* is described in the fourth book as a great dragon carrying his tail in his mouth, and drawn by four

great powers in the form of four white horses. The *basis* of the moon has the form of a ship drawn by two white cattle and steered from the stern by a boy; a male and a female dragon forming the rudder.

8 Region of the left

Beneath the place of the mid-region is that of the left, the place of righteousness, the lowest portion of the *keramos*, towards which the penitent souls are tending. It is here that the conflict between the light and the material principle takes its beginning. Here dwell likewise, according to the fourth book, the *aoratos deus* and his *magna dynamis* the *Barbelo*, from whence is derived the blood or corporeity of Jesus, and also the three *dii tridynamoï*, of which the two uppermost are called *Ipsantachounchainchouchooch* and *Chainchooch* (*Bainchouchooch*) these spirits belong to the 13th Aeon reckoned from below. Underneath this Aeon are the twelve Aeons, of which six are ruled by Sabaoth Adamas, and six by Jabraoth. These produce, by the exercise of the *mysterion synousias*, ever fresh ministering spirits, in order to extend the circuit of their power. These efforts are, however, opposed by *Jeu*, the Father of the Father of Jesus. Jabraoth, with his *archontes*, undergoes conversion, and becomes a believer in the mysteries of light, in reward for which he is brought to a higher place, into an *aera purum*, and before the sunlight, *ad meson* and *intra topous aoratos Dei*. Sabaoth Adamas, on the other hand, because he will not abstain from the *mysterion synousias*, is confined along with his *Archontes* in the *sphaira*, or the *eirmarmene sphairas*, the visible star-heaven in which the twelve spirits of the zodiac have their seat. Over the *sphaira* *Jeu* sets five great *Archontes*, formed out of the light-powers of the right. These are the five planetary spirits—*Kronos*, *Ares*, *Hermes*, *Aphrodite*, *Zeus*. Under it he sets 360 other Aeons. The present fixed order of the star-courses is, therefore, originally a punishment inflicted on the *Archontes* for the misuse of their liberty. Three hundred and sixty *Archontes* then of the *Adamas*, having refused to believe in the mystery of light, are assigned a dwelling-place in a still lower region, that of the air (*topos aerinos*), beneath the *sphaira*, or on the way of the mid-region, *in via medii*. Over these are likewise set five *Archontes*—*Paraplex*, *Ariouth* (Aethiopia), *Ecate*, *Paredron Typhon*, and *Iachthanabas*. Their occupation is to snatch away souls, to entice them to sin, and after death to torment them.

Here, again, the description in the three first books is somewhat different, and carried out into further details. In these also the 13th Aeon stands uppermost in the place of the left region, or that of righteousness. This Aeon is an image of the upper world, and like it contains innumerable spirits. The uppermost one is the *magnus aoratos*, or *magnus propator*, with his great *dynamis* the *Barbelo*; then follow the three *tridynamoï*, the third of which in-

dicates by his very name *Authades*, the intrusion at this stage of finite narrowmindedness, the desire to exist for itself alone, which is characteristic of finite existence. From the great *propator* and the two upper *tridynamoï* proceed twenty-four other *probolai aoratos*, which appear to be thought of as syzygies, or Pairs of Aeons. The last and lowest of these is the female Aeon (only occasionally mentioned in the fourth book), *Pistis Sophia*, whose audacious longing after the *thesauros lucis* has brought about her separation from her masculine *Syzygos*, and her Fall out of the World of Light. Below the thirteenth stand the twelve other Aeons (which again are inhabited by innumerable spirits), with their ambitious rule-loving *Archontes*, among whom is specially named the *Adamas magnus tyrannus*, known to us from the fourth book, and again below them the *Archontes* of the *eimarmene* (the second *sphaira*) and the *sphaira* (the *prima sphaira*, i. e. the first, reckoning from below); further and finally beneath these are the *Archontes* of the way of the midst, with whom the *moira* has her seat, and through whom (according to the fourth book) punishments are executed on such souls as are condemned to a second earthly life.

8.1 Formation of souls

In order to bring back the rebellious *Archontes* to a lasting obedience, *Melchizedek* comes down to them from the place of the right, deprives them of light-power, and all finer elements, the breath of their mouth, the tears of their eyes, and the exhalations of their bodies, and restores to the *thesauros luminis* all the purer elements, of light contained in these. Out of the coarser remnant these *Archontes* next proceed to form the souls of men and animals, and, urged on by their innate love of rule, find themselves compelled to continue in this occupation till they are completely emptied of even the less pure elements of light. In this creative work concur also the *paraleptores solis et lunae*, who, collecting the scattered elements of pure light on the one hand, and, on the other, the still relatively finer sediments of these, form out of them on their own account, also the souls of men and animals.

9 World

Underneath the Way of the Midst is the World or *kosmos*, which consists of

1. the *stereoma*, or firmament, with the innumerable spirits;
2. the earth, or *kosmos hominum*; and
3. the under world.

This last is divided into three places of punishment,

- *Orcus*,

- Chaos, or *Orcus Chai*, and
- the Outer Darkness (*caligo externa*), into which are cast the souls incapable of redemption.

Over Orcus rules the *archon erinaios*, Ariel; over Chaos, the lion-headed Ialdabaoth, along with whom are mentioned (in the fourth book) *Persephone*, and (as it seems) also *Adonis*. *Caligo externa*, the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, is (in the third book) described as a great dragon which encircles the earth and carries its tail in its mouth, while the sunlight is obscured by the smoke and mist which issue from its darkness. In this dragon are twelve chambers of punishment (*tamieia kolaseos*), in which are housed all sorts of brute-shaped Archontes. The upper approaches to these receptacles are under the guardianship of the good angels, whereas, souls thrust down into the outer darkness are made to enter them by means of the opening and closing dragon's tail. In Orcus, souls are tormented with flames of fire; in Chaos, with added darkness and smoke; in *Caligo externa*, with further additions, of ice, hail, snow, and cruel cold.

10 Origination of human souls

The origination of human souls is particularly described in the third book. They are of different kind, according to the matter, more or less pure, out of which they are formed. In this formation each of the five rulers or planetary spirits contributes his part; after which a *Lethopotion* is offered them, *e spermati kakias*, and full of stimulant to evil lusts. This forms itself into their evil enemy, a spiritual substance surrounding the soul (*antimimon pneumatos*). By the provident care of the sun and moon spirit, every soul has a spark of light intermingled with it (thence *migma*). The soul is then brought down from above by the Archontes of the Way of the Midst, and by them associated with its *moira*, or Genius of Death (i. e., Fate), whereupon follows its investiture with the *soma hylikon archonton*. As soon as the various psychical elements of the future human being, which exist apart in man and wife, have been united in conception, the 365 ministers of the Archontes proceed to fashion in the *metra*, the future body consisting of 365 parts, impressing on it the *sphragides* of the days which will prove most significant in the formation of the man and the length of life assigned to him. These *sphragides* they then make known to the *archontes erinaioi*, and a child is born, which, apart from the indwelling spark of light, is a mere creature and formation of the Archontes, and stands wholly under their power. All future life-fortunes befall the man thus formed with absolute necessity, and in consequence of the *moira* by which he is accompanied. Even the sin into which the soul falls under the influence of the *antimimon pneuma* is an inevitable fate, a consequence *per ananken eimarmenes*; but every single act of sin is put on record in order to be punished. After the man's death his indwelli-

spark of light goes back to the Light-Maiden, while his soul is laid hold of by the *paraleptores* of the *archontes erinaioi*, and after being led about for three days in all the *topoi kosmou*, is finally brought into the Orcus Chai. If not then condemned to eternal torment, the soul is, on the expiration of her term of penance, brought up out of chaos and placed before the *archontes viae medii*. She is there questioned concerning the mysteries of the *moira*, and if ignorant of them, is again condemned to yet more terrible punishments. When these have been endured, the soul is brought before the light-maiden, and again by her, on account of past sins, brought back into the *sphaira archonton*, and from thence into a second earthly life. Endued once more with her old light-power, she is again born in the same way as before; and these *metabolai* or *metangismoi* repeat themselves till the soul has completed the number of *kykloi* assigned her in accordance with the extent of her guilt. Should she now have passed through all this cycle of trials without having found the mysteries of light, or if, having received the highest mysteries, she has made no repentance, she will then be cast for ever into the outer darkness. Yet can many souls be delivered out of this outer darkness if they know the mystery of one of the twelve chambers of punishment in the dragon. In such cases they will be led upwards by the watch-keeping angels of Jeu, and being no longer capable of returning in new bodies to this world, will receive baptism from the seven light maidens, be set free from all punishments, and be translated into the lowermost *taxis* of the treasury of light.

The necessity of sinning is not, however, universal. The apostles, for instance, were exempt from it, their souls having been formed out of pure elements of light. The possibility, moreover, of a soul keeping herself free from sin is elsewhere occasionally assumed. A soul initiated into the higher mysteries, and yet sinning, will be more severely punished than one which has only received the lower mysteries. These lower mysteries, on the other hand, lose through persistence in sin their power of atonement, till at length only the highest mystery of all is able to absolve from sin. In this way the work before us seeks to combine a strictly ethical position with that Gnostic esteem for pure knowledge without which no one can attain to the upper world of light. It represents the mysteries whose knowledge is required for any entrance into the treasury of light, as, on the one hand, a free gift vouchsafed to man, and, on the other, an object of striving and spiritual warfare. The absolving power attributed to them may be compared with the similar operation attributed to the sacraments of the church.

11 Fates of souls after death

The fourth book describes, with special fulness, the fates of souls after death, the punishments which await them for their sins, as well as the circumstances of their regen-

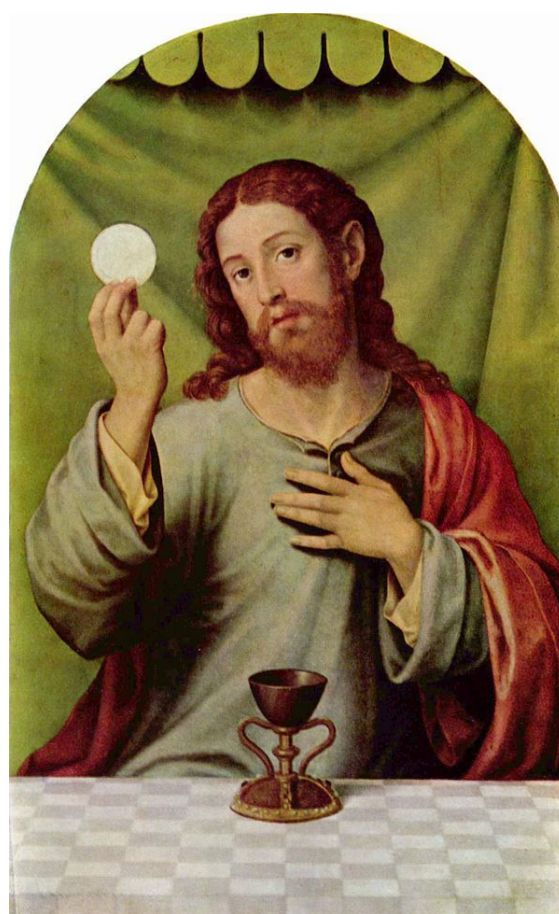
eration and the condition under which they may obtain forgiveness. The five Archontes of the *via medii*, and their subordinate *archidaimonia*, are first the tempters of the souls to sin, and afterwards the most terrible tormentors. The demons of the *Paraplex*, an Archon, with woman's hair flowing down to her feet, lead souls astray to wrath, evil-speaking, and slandering; the demons of *Ariouth Aethiopica*, who is also a female Archon, lead on, in like manner, to murder and bloodshed; and those of the three-headed *Hecate* to false-swearing, lying, and deceit; those of Paredron Typhon to uncleanness and adultery; and, finally, those of Iachthanabas, to unrighteous judgment and oppression of the upright and the poor. Souls that have been carried off by these demons are tormented by them, according to the nature of their transgressions, for one hundred years, or longer, and only after a corresponding favourable conjunction of the planets can they be rescued from their tormentors by the five Archontes of the Aeons (*i. e.* the planetary dynasts themselves), assisted by the higher spirits of the right and of the midst. Such souls, as on account of sin have to undergo regeneration, are, after death, first tormented in orcus by Ariel, then in chaos by Ialdabaoth, then again by the Archontes of the way of the midst, and so, finally, are led before the light-maiden, who pronounces her judgment upon them. They are then brought back into the *sphaira*, and after being purified by the *leitourgoi sphairas* through the instrumentality of fire, smoke, and water, they receive from Jaluham the *paralempetes* of Sabaoth-Adamas, the drink of forgetfulness, and are then invested with a new body, the nature of which will be such as to put hindrance in the way of repetition of former sins.

Those, on the other hand, who have been guilty of greater sins, such as murder, blasphemy, sins against nature, or have performed the impure mysteries of the Borborites (a Gnostic sect), are not again invested with new bodies, but cast into the outer darkness where, along with the dragon, they will be destroyed at the last judgment. Good souls, on the other hand, who, without having committed grievous sins, have failed to find the mysteries of light, will (according to the consentient representations of the third and fourth books), so soon as the favourable conjunction of the planets has taken place, be, after death, led about during three days in all *topoi* of the universe, and likewise in chaos, and made acquainted with all the forms of punishment there; the punitive spirits of those regions will have but little power over them, and being rescued from these and safely conducted past the Archontes of the way of the midst, they will then be led before the light-maiden, and by her be signed with a *sphragis praestans*. They will then remain with the little Sabaoth till the favourable time has come for their renewed descent to earth. Each soul being then supplied with a wisdom and watchfulness inspiring potion, and a *soma dikaiou*, will set herself to seek the mysteries of the upper world, the Gnosis of which will render her worthy of a share in the kingdom of light. But, not these only, sinning souls also, who after they have found the mysteries of light, leave

off sinning, may yet attain to the treasury of light. Such souls, when the favourable conjunction of the planets has come, will be once more sent back as righteous souls into the world. From all this it would seem that the fates of men after death will indeed depend on their moral conduct on the one hand, but also, on the other hand, on the conjunctions of the stars and the influence they exercise on the mysteries of light. Souls born under unfavourable constellations become bad, and will be unable to find the mysteries.

12 Redemption

12.1 Eucharist



Christ with the Eucharist, *Vicente Juan Masip, 16th century.*

The redemption of human souls is, according to this, accomplished chiefly by initiation into the sin absolving mysteries. Into this Jesus first initiates his own disciples, and then commissions them to impart the knowledge of the same to others. In this impartation of absolving mysteries consist, according to the fourth book, the work of Jesus upon earth. For which end he brings down water and fire from the *topos luminis luminum*, wine and blood from the *topos* of the Barbelo. His Father sends him the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove; fire, water, and wine,

serve for the cleansing of all the sins of the whole world; while the blood serves him as a token *propter soma generis humani*, i. e. (probably) of his own corporeity. The word of Jesus, I have come to send fire upon the earth, points to the purification of the sins of the whole world by fire; in like manner, the saying to the woman of Samaria about the water of life (John 4:10-14), the issuing of water and blood from the pierced side of Jesus, and the consecration of the eucharistic cup as the blood of the covenant; all three refer to the forgiveness of sins accomplished by these mysteries of light. Of special energy and power for this end is the mystery of the eucharist, consisting of oblations and special prayers. Jesus himself celebrates it, in the first instance, for the cleansing of his disciples, and bids them henceforth repeat it for the like cleansing of all future believers. The particular description here given of this celebration, the offering of water, wine, and bread, with solemn mystic forms of prayer, is of special importance as characteristic of the ritual and worship of the Gnostic party, among whom this work originated.

Beside the mystery of the eucharist, which is also designated as that of the true baptism, we find mentioned a *baptisma fumi*, a *baptisma pneumatos sancti luminis*, an *unctio pneumatike*, and as the highest mystery, that of the seven *phonai*, and their forty-nine *dynameis* and *psephoi*. These mysteries disclose to the souls of men the entrance to the kingdom of light, and the thus initiated have only to leave the *soma hyles*, and then restrained no longer by any hostile or subordinate power, they mount up freely through all those regions to the treasury of light.

12.2 Christology

The Christology and Soteriology of the three first books is also much more developed and detailed than that of the fourth book. Jesus is in them represented as the universal Redeemer, whose historical manifestation and redeeming work on earth accomplishes at the same time a cosmical redemption. The prophets, patriarchs, and other righteous ones of the Old Testament, must wait in patience till Jesus has brought his disciples into the kingdom of light. Three only, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are at once, at the time of our Lord's ascension, received with him into that kingdom; the rest have to return once more into earthly existence, and there receive the mysteries of light.

Jesus, who proceeds from the first mystery, i. e. from his Father, bears himself the name of *primum mysterium*. The end of his mission to the earth is the revelation of the upper (higher) mysteries. As, on the one hand, even before his earthly manifestation, he had begun to work through the instruction of Enoch, as given in paradise; so, on the other hand, he makes the perfect communication of Gnosis and the accomplishment of his redeeming work coincident with the ascension.

12.3 Deliverance of Pistis Sophia

The deliverance of the Pistis Sophia is a prelude and fore-type of the redemption of humanity. In her, indeed, is typically represented the original descent and implanting in the lower world of the spark of divine light. But Pistis Sophia herself obtains her full deliverance only at the ascension.

12.3.1 Incarnation

The process of the work of redemption is as follows:— The *Soter* rises from his seat in the 24th mystery, leaves there his *endyma lucis* behind, and descends unrecognised by the Archons (who take him for the angel Gabriel) into the lower regions. From the *thesauros lucis* he carries with him twelve powers of light, out of which the souls of the apostles are formed in the *sphaira*; from the little Jao, in the place of the midst, he takes another power of light, with which he combines the soul of Elias, and out of this the soul of John, the forerunner, is formed. Thereupon he announces, and once more in the form of Gabriel, to Mary, that she is to become the mother of the *Soter*, and brings down to her a *psyche* and a *soma*. The former is a *vis luminis*, from the great Sabaoth, in the place of the right; the latter is a robe of light from the Barbelo in the 13th Aeon, which, though a *hyle* needing some measure of purification, is yet no earthly or material corporeity. From these two constituents Jesus is formed. With him in his very childhood a *pneuma* is associated, called the *simile Jesu* or *frater Jesu*, which keeps him free from all hylic influences, and impels him to receive the baptism of John. The *Soter* himself descends at the baptism, in the form of a dove, upon Jesus.

12.3.2 Ministry

The work of redemption upon earth, or the imparting of the mysteries of the upper world, is now proceeded with, partly in the way of instruction given concerning the *topoi aletheias* in general, partly in that of revelations concerning the remission of sins as mediated by various sacred actions and formulae. During his life on earth Jesus imparts the mysteries to his disciples, in the first instance, in parabolic and symbolical language, i. e. in the numerous parables and discourses of our canonical gospels, the deeper significance of which is not disclosed to them until after his ascension. His death is described as an actual crucifixion. After the resurrection he remains yet eleven years longer with his disciples, and then being re clothed with his heavenly *endyma lucis*, on which are inscribed the secret names of all celestial and supercelestial beings. He mounts upwards through all the middle regions to the higher world of light. On his way he overcomes the opposing world-rulers of the 12th Aeon, and the *Authades*, the ruler of the 13th Aeon, depriving them of their power of light, and compelling them to yield up again the souls

which they have devoured, so that the *arithmos psychon teleion* may be completed. After this he brings the *Pistis Sophia* with him into the upper realm of light. From thence, adorned with a triple crown of beams, he descends again to earth in the glory of world-redeemer, and initiates his disciples into all mysteries, *ab internis usque ad externa et ab externis usque ad interna*.

12.4 Mysteries

The personal apprehension of the work of redemption by individual souls is then proceeded with, through the mediation of the mysteries of light. After these, men must seek day and night, and render themselves worthy to receive them, by renouncing the world and the *hyle*, and all their cares, and sins, and occupations. These mysteries are again, in their turn, numerous and manifold. The “mystery of baptism” imparts, by water and fire, the cleansing from sin and the soul’s deliverance from the *antimimon pneuma*, the *moira* and the *soma*. But in order fully to accomplish this deliverance, further mysteries are also required from the *primum chorema a parte externa* (the lowest region of the realm of light upwards to the highest mystery, that of the *Ineffabilis*). These mysteries are imparted to penitent souls in a regular series, one after the other, because (as has been already observed) the lower mysteries lose their power after fresh relapses into sin, till at last the *Mysterium Ineffabilis* alone is of any help. The higher the mysteries that have been received, the severer is the punishment for relapses into sin. He who, after receiving the *mysterium Ineffabilis*, falls again into sin and departs impenitent out of this life, will be cast into the outer darkness. But even out of the *Caligo externa* deliverance is possible, through the mediation of others, who pronounce the *mysterium Ineffabilis*. A soul thus delivered is brought before the light-maiden, and she sends it back once more to earth, clothed in a righteous body (*soma dikaion*). And even when it is no longer possible for a soul to return to earth in a new body, yet the possibility of deliverance (as was shown above) is not fully excluded.

The same series of mysteries, rising step by step up to the highest, serves also for the initiation of the *dikaioi* and *agathoi*. Those who have died penitent need not, after receiving the mysteries, to submit again to a fresh metempsychosis. Souls perfectly pure, who have been partakers of the highest mysteries, ascend upwards robed in glorious light, and without encountering any hindrance, through all the intermediate realms up to the place of the inheritance. Others who have received only the lower mysteries, and have not lived perfectly free from sin, are required to produce at every stage their *apologia* (*apophasis, symbola*), are taken up, step by step, by *paraleptores* from the realms of light, examined by the Light-Maiden, and finally transmitted by Melchizedek into the *ultima taxis luminis*. Of human souls, however, in comparison with all other spiritual existence, the saying is especially

true—“the last shall be first”—for though once the mere dregs and last deposit of the light of the middle regions, they will, after passing through conflicts and sufferings, be raised above all the world-rulers (*Archontes*) and introduced into the realm of light.

13 End of the world

After the reception into that realm of the pre-determined number of perfect souls (*arithmos aionos teleion*), the end of the world (*synteleia aionos*) will come. No sooner has that number been fulfilled than the gates of light will be finally closed, and no one more suffered to enter therein. Then will follow the *solutio mundi*, the dissolution by fire of the material universe, the *kerasmos* likewise will be dissolved, and all the powers of evil, yea, the outer darkness itself, and all its inhabitants, will be annihilated. The last act of all is the *evectio universi*. Jesus takes his station in the place of the inheritance, surrounded by fully purified souls. He then conducts the souls, which still abide in the lowest regions of the treasury of light, to the fitting place appointed for them, the curtains are then up-drawn which have hitherto separated the *thesauros lucis*, the place of the right and the place of the midst from the realm of light, and all souls inhabiting those regions, mount up into the place of the inheritance. The same salvation will be vouchsafed to the penitent *Archontes* of the 13th Aeon, and those of the other twelve Aeons. But even after the whole has been perfected different ranks and orders will still be found in the realm of light. Above all stand the souls of the apostles, and of the just made perfect, who have received the first mystery of the *Ineffabilis*. To these belongs the saying—“they shall be one with Jesus”—*homines illi sunt ego et ego sum illi* (p. 230). Beneath these are placed the other souls of men in various ranks, according to the mysteries of which they have been made partakers. Among the Aeons, also, finally admitted into the realm of light, a corresponding order of ranks will be found, according to the places occupied by them in the times before their perfecting. Each one finally reaches the place pre-ordained for him (*topos taxeos*) from the beginning, and enjoys henceforth that measure of knowledge which has been procured for him by the corresponding mysteries.

14 Analysis

The four books of the work before us afford a clear insight into the changes and reconstructions to which the Gnostic systems were subjected. The fourth book, as we have already observed in our introductory statement, presents a yet simpler form of Gnostic doctrine, and variously connected with the older systems, such as those of Saturninus, the Ophites, Basilides, etc. The subsequent developments consist, like those of the Valentinian School, in

the introduction of ever fresh series of spiritual beings, and of names of Aeons, as well as in the endeavour to push back to even greater and greater distances from this earthly world, the highest ranks and powers of the world of light. The system of the Pistis Sophia resembles, moreover, that of Valentinus in its (not so much dualistic as rather) monistic-pantheistic character. The *hyle*, or material substance, stands, not as in the older Syrian Gnosis, over against the world of light as a primeval realm of darkness, but is, in fact, a symbol of that finite narrowness and imperfection which increases in the same measure as the spirits which have emanated from the world of light, depart further and further from their original source, and its pure and perfect lustre. In this system, moreover, the antithesis of pneumatic, psychic and hylic souls, which the Valentinian system still retained, is given up; as, in all souls alike, the germ of spiritual life is found, so are they all likewise (those of the apostles alone excepted) burdened with a *hyle*, abandoned to an evil impulse by the *antimimon pneumatos* and the *moira*, and subjected by the *kakia tryphon* to the *eimarmene* and the dominion of the Archontes. But as they all lie under a necessity of sinning, so there exists for all the possibility of deliverance by repentance and purity of life. The impartation of the mysteries of light, like that of the sacraments of the church, has for its first object the deliverance of souls from evil spirits, and the empowering them to exercise true repentance and a genuine morality of conduct. Even for souls abandoned to the outer darkness there still exists a possibility of salvation. Those only who have denied themselves with specially grievous sins (the so-called mortal sins of the church's system) are finally shut up in the outer darkness, and so become obnoxious to ultimate annihilation. The degrees and differences which will continue to exist in the realm of light and the state of perfection are not independent of the differences in men's moral conduct. But especially the doctrine of the *transmigration of souls* shows how earnestly this Gnostic system endeavoured to disclose for all sinners fresh possibilities of repentance and an entrance into the kingdom of light.

This notwithstanding the Pistis Sophia is also cognisant of numerous degrees and differences of spiritual perfection which are not based on the free ethical position of individual souls, but on original differences of nature. The very elements out of which souls are originally formed are of very different (now finer, now coarser,) kinds. More especially the conjunctions of the planets, under which souls are born on earth, exercise a decisive influence on their subsequent ethical character. Under certain conjunctions good and righteous, under others, again, sinful souls are born; and so it is expressly said that at the final redemption every soul will reach the place which, from the beginning, was assigned her.

It is a peculiar and profoundly significant idea in the work before us that human souls although originally inferior to and immeasurably weaker than the Aeons and Archontes to whom they owe their existence, are yet destined in the

end, when the universe reaches the goal of its perfection, to take their final place above them. Thereby also expression is given to the ethical principle which lies at the basis of the whole system, namely, that spiritual purification and gradual deliverance from hylic elements is essentially dependent on a moral process, and this forms a distinguishing peculiarity of human souls in comparison with all other spiritual beings. And so it is that the very creation of human souls ultimately subserves the purpose of depriving the apostate world-rulers of that power of light which they have abused. For even as their selfish endeavour to extend their power and dominion by the continual procreation of fresh series of ministrant spirits has a limit assigned to it by a higher will, so on the other hand must these Archontes, by an involuntary concurrence in the creation of human souls, themselves contribute to the undermining of their own sovereignty. No sooner has this purpose been accomplished by the completion of the number of predestined souls and their entrance into the kingdom of light, than the *Consummatio* and the *Solutio Universi* follow.

With the endeavour moreover to derive from different beings and regions of the spiritual world the distinctions and differences observable in this and its manifold kinds and ranks of creatures is closely connected the vast multiplicity of spiritual essences and mysteries, which this system provides for in excess even of that of Valentinus. As every degree in the spiritual world has its own approximate mysteries, so does the place assigned to individual souls at the end of the world depend on the degree of initiation attained to here. But although such an influence on the ultimate fate of human beings is assigned in this system to ethical conduct, the endeavour is no less obvious to refer the manifold differences in the good and the evil to an ultimate metaphysical basis, and the influence exercised by a multiplicity of higher powers on the origination and subsequent fate of human souls. While therefore the ethical features of this system and its denial of qualitative differences between pneumatici, psychici and hylici, constitutes on the one hand an approximation to the ethical standpoint of Catholic theology, so on the other hand is the reference of all spiritual differences to original differences of natural elements a genuine characteristic feature of Gnosticism. At the same time one must not overlook the close approximation of the doctrine of the mysteries contained in this work to that of the sacraments in the church. Both are media of supernatural help and grace; and so great as is the importance attached to the possession of Gnosis and initiation into its mysteries, the absolving and cleansing power of these is made to rest not on the Gnosis with which they are connected, but on the sacred mystic actions themselves. It is in accordance with these conceptions that a greater significance is attributed to the work of redemption as an historical phenomenon, and more especially to the death of Jesus and his bloodshedding, as that of the covenant (*aima diathekes*) than is the case with other Gnostic systems.

In all these points the system of the book Pistis-Sophia exhibits an approach to the conceptions current in the Catholic church. And great as in other respects may seem the gulf which separates these endless genealogies of Aeons and spirits, divine essences and mythological figures, from the simple faith of Catholic Christendom, it must yet be remembered that in the Christian circles also of that time angelological speculations and astrological dreamings found especial favour. In this respect also the difference between Catholic and Gnostic opinions must be regarded as rather a quantitative than a qualitative one. But the clearest indication of the Gnostic character of this work is found in its Mythus of the fall and penitence of Pistis-Sophia. Attempts have been made to draw from this Mythus a proof that the work itself was a product of the Valentinian school; nay, some (as Woide and Dulaurier) have even thought that Tertullian expressly refers to it when he mentions (*Adv. Valent.* c. 2) the “Sophia” of Valentinus. This last assumption is perfectly arbitrary. But as to the Mythus itself we find it as much at home in the Ophite and Bardesanian systems as in that of Valentinus. We meet indeed, in the most various forms, this mythic history of the Sophia as symbol of the human soul which, having forgotten her heavenly origin, sinks ever deeper into the corrupting pleasures and pains of this earthly existence till reminded by help sent from above of her celestial home, and after enduring all manner of pains and distresses she is at length brought back to the place from whence she has fallen.

K.R. Köstlin believed that points of connection between the system of the Pistis-Sophia and the Ophitic system are much more numerous than those between it and the Valentinian:^[7]

First, many single instances may be alleged; such as the significance possessed by the serpent (in this system also) as both a good and evil genius, the fall of the Sophia into the ὕλη, her penitence and her redemption by Christ, the names Ialdabaoth, Iao, Sabaoth, Adonis (the Adonaius of the Ophites), the animal forms assumed by evil spirits, the view that *not* a single world-ruler (the Demiurg) but several Archontes spake to the prophets, the notion that Christ by assuming another form in his descent through their realms remained unknown to these Archontes (cf. *Iren.* I. 30, 12), the importance attached in both systems (*ibidem*) to the perfect purity of the body of Jesus, as organ for the σωτήρ, the long abiding of Jesus upon earth after the resurrection, the high significance of sacramental acts (e.g. of the σφραγίς in baptism, *Orig.* c. *Cels.* vi. 27), and yet more of the ἀπολογία which the soul has to make before the Archontes on her upward passage through their respective realms (*ibid.*, and c. 31), the doctrine of the immediate elevation of redeemed souls after

death to the heavenly world, and also the essentially anthropomorphic conceptions of the supreme being (his σῶμα and μέλη) notwithstanding the assertion of his infinitude and “Unspeakableness”—(cf. *Iren.* I., 30, i. *primum lumen—beatum et incorruptibile et indeterminatum, esse autem hoc Patrem omnium et vocari primum hominem*). Again, and this is specially to be observed, the fundamental conception of the whole system that the development of the universe is nothing else but the return of the light-power from the realm of the ἄρχοντες to the heavenly world, their evacuation against their will and knowledge accomplished by the deprivation of the *humectatio luminis* or of its *virtus* (*ibid.* 6 sqq. 12 sqq.) is essentially Ophitic. In both systems the light-power is arbitrarily misused by the world-rulers for the production of *angeli, potestates, and dominationes*. In both the creation of man is the means of depriving them of this power. In both Christ draws by degrees to himself the light-power confined in the earthly sphere, and the complete restoration of these elements of light to the upper world is the final close of the whole development. One other main point of doctrine in our system, that namely of the distinction made between souls which issue from the *primum lumen* and those whose origin is merely from the ὕλη (as for instance from the *habitus* of the Archontes) is found again in that doctrine of the Ophites which distinguishes between *animae sanctae* ('*ex substantia luminis*') and '*animae ex substantia Ialdabaothi*' or '*ex insufflatione*' (*ibid.* 14).

14.1 Parallels

To the same group also belong the Gnostic sects mentioned by Irenaeus (I. 29) and Epiphanius (Haer. 26) who among other names bore also that of Barbelites (Epiph. 26, 3), Among these we meet again the mythological figure of the Barbelo so often mentioned in the book Pistis-Sophia. The light-maiden of the Pistis-Sophia recurs in one frequently mentioned among these Gnostics (Epiph. 26, 1; cf. *Iren.* I. 30, 9) (though in a different mythological connection) as the Virgin (Norea, i. e. *puella* or *Barthenos*, i. e. *parthenos*) who, against the will of the Archontes, reveals to men the higher powers and the Barbelo in particular, and announces the necessity of gathering and bringing back the sparks of light which the Archon and the *theoi, angeloi* and *daimones* in alliance with him have made their prey. Epiphanius mentions (26, 8) as books made use of by these Gnostics the small and great *eroteseis Marias*, and (26, 13) an *Evangelium Philippi*.

14.2 Questions of Mary

What Epiphanius tells us of the contents of those questions of Mary^[8] has nothing in common with our work, but rather agrees with the licentious practices (which are here so severely condemned)^[9] of another Gnostic sect, the so-called Borborites. If it seems impossible to identify those *eroteseis Marias* with our Pistis Sophia, nevertheless Mary Magdalene does actually play a distinguished part in the Pistis Sophia among the female disciples of Jesus, and is remarkable among all, both male and female, for her thirst for knowledge and her unweary activity in asking questions.

14.3 *Evangelium Philippi*

It agrees further with the notice in Epiphanius of the use made by his Gnostics of an *Evangelium Philippi*, that our Pistis Sophia (p. 39-62 sqq.) also mentions Philip along with Thomas and Matthew as having been entrusted with the office of committing to writing the instructions given to his disciples by the risen Jesus. That moreover which Epiphanius tells us of the contents of his *Evangelium Philippi* agrees right well with the whole tone and range of thought in the Pistis Sophia. The following fragment of the *Evangelium Philippi* has had, quite improperly, an impure sense interpreted into it by Epiphanius:

The Lord has revealed to me what the soul must say when she mounts to heaven, and what she will have to answer to each of the higher powers. I have, he says, known myself and have gathered up myself from all quarters, and have sown to the Archon no children, but have torn up his roots, and gathered together the scattered members, and I know thee who thou art. For I, saith he, derive my origin from those above.

14.4 Barbeliotes

The book Pistis Sophia exhibits moreover, along with great and striking differences, some remarkable points of contact with the views of the Barbeliotes of whom Irenaeus speaks. Köstlin^[10] has already compared the description given of the fall of the Sophia in *Iren. I. 29, 4*, with that in our book. More especially does what is there related of the sufferings of the Sophia from *Ignorantia* (i. e. the Demiurge) and *Authadeia*, remind us of the persecutions which, according to the Pistis-Sophia, she has to endure from the *Authades*. The continual progress and changes of use in regard to names, figures, and symbols among the Gnostic sects need not puzzle us any more than the circumstance, that these names are continually occurring in different connections and significations.

14.5 Origins

The system it contains is not identical with any one of the other Ophite systems known to us. From most of these it clearly differs in not having like them a dualistic but, like the systems of the Naassenes and Peratae known to us from the so-called *Philosophumena*, a pantheistic and monistic character. Its home moreover is not in Syria, like the systems described by Irenaeus and Epiphanius, but in Egypt. While of the many non-Greek names which occur in the fourth book a large part certainly are of Aramaic or Syriac origin, others are as clearly from Egyptian sources. Egyptian also is the mode of computing time (*mensis Tobe*, p. 4, i. e. Tybi), and so also the symbols of the sun-dragon and the moon-ship. The book, notwithstanding its Egyptian character, must have been originally written in Greek. The Coptic (Thebaic) text is a translation. This is proved by the numerous Greek words which it contains.

In comparison with the other Ophite systems known to us, that of our book is later and more developed. This remark applies not to the first three books only, but also to the fourth book. Köstlin pronounced it incredible that the far more richly developed world of Aeons and spirits described in this work should have subsequently shrunk up to the few mythological forms with which the earlier Ophites contented themselves, and that it was only by more recent speculations that the infernal potentate Ialdabaoth was exalted to the position of Demiurge and God of the Jews.

14.6 Manichaeism

As indications of a comparatively later origin of the system may be further mentioned the numerous points of contact between it and Manichaeism;^[11] to these belong the conceptions of a light-maiden, a world of light, trees of light, and light saviours (*soteres thesaurou luminis*), of sun and moon as good spirits which take part in the enlargement of the sphere of light, and the liberation of the light-spark from the *hyle*, and more especially the conception of the moon as a ship of light, and further the formation of the *soma Christi* after a prototypical light-form, the doctrine of the members (*mele*), of the *Ineffabilis* and the like.

No actual dependence of the Pistis Sophia on Manichaean views and teaching can be assumed. The one is a dualistic, the other a pantheistic system; if one is in any way dependent on the other, it is Manichaeism to which we must assign that position. The grand figure of the light-maiden finds its meaning and motive only in the connection in which we find it in the Pistis Sophia. Her activity is here very striking and significant, whereas in the Manichaean system she holds only a very subordinate and obscure position. It is indeed possible that a literary connection may exist between the book Pistis Sophia and the four books *peri mysterion* of Terebinthos mentioned in the

Acts of the Disputation between Archelaos and Manes. This Terebinthos is said to have been initiated in Egyptian wisdom, and his writing to have been one of the sources of the Manichaean doctrine; and though we may not at present be able to find other support for the conjecture, it may be assumed as probable that the book *Pistis Sophia* was written before the rise of the Manichaean system, and therefore before A.D. 270. Moreover, as the system contained in it is evidently more recent than the other systems known to us, Köstlin assigned its composition to the first half of the third century.

14.7 Catholicism

But if on the one hand the book points to Manichaeism, it exhibits on the other a remarkable approximation in a Gnostic work to the views and conceptions of the Catholic church. It has been remarked already that the Gnostic antitheses of psychici and pneumatici are here sensibly modified. The tone of moral earnestness which pervades the system is common to it with that of some other Gnostic parties, such as the Basilidians and the Marcionites; but a yet further approach to Catholic sentiment is found in its assumption that salvation is obtained in the twofold way of right moral conduct and the use of cleansing and atoning mysteries. The condemnation of the immoralities practised in some Ophitic sects is as severe in the book of *Pistis Sophia* (p. 386 sq.) as it could possibly be among Catholics.

14.8 Old Testament

It also takes a more friendly position in regard to the Old Testament and its religion than did the olden Ophites. If on the one hand it is said that the *archontes aionon* imparted the *mysteria aionon* to the prophets of the Old Testament (p. 354), so again on the other hand it was through David, Solomon, Isaiah, and other prophets, as unconscious agents, that the *vis luminis* is said to have prophesied of the future redemption. Accordingly we find Davidic and pseudo-Solomonic psalms cited in the penitential prayers of the *Sophia*, and allegorically interpreted by the disciples male and female. The reception of the Old Testament prophets, patriarchs, and other righteous persons into the kingdom of light is expressly foretold; and to Israel's forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, special distinctions are vouchsafed in the redemption wrought by Christ.

14.9 New Testament

Besides the passages quoted from the Psalms and prophets of the Old Testament, we find in this writing numerous citations from all four canonical gospels, without reckoning the not less frequent allusions to evangelical utterances, and one citation from the Epistle to the Romans

(p. 294). The interpretation of citations made from the Gospels, like that of those from the Psalms, is allegorical after the manner otherwise known to us of the Gnostic schools. To the teaching of Jesus in the four Gospels the instructions vouchsafed to his disciples in our book are supposed to stand in the relation of a higher grade, developing and completing, but by no means superseding what has gone before. It is also worthy of remark that this higher teaching is not given to otherwise unknown disciples of Jesus, but to the Apostles themselves. Along with the older Apostles St. Paul is once mentioned and designated by Mary Magdalene as "our brother" (p. 294). Beside male disciples certain females also appear, as Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of Jesus *secundum somnialia*, Martha and Salome. The instructions which Jesus imparted to them are for the most part elicited by questions which they put to him, Mary Magdalene distinguishing herself as the chief questioner. The first three books are those which put special honour on the Apostles by relating that they alone in place of the *psyche archontum* carry in themselves the treasure of light, being thus from the first sinless and righteous (p. 149), and that therefore in the perfecting of all things they will take the highest place among the blessed (p. 231, 244).

14.10 Apocryphal writings

Beside the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments various apocryphal writings are made use of, all probably being of Gnostic origin. To these must be added the book *Jeu*, which Jesus is supposed to have dictated to Enoch in paradise (p. 245 sq. 354). It is cited as an authority for the knowledge of the mysteries of the three *kleroi luminis*, and appears to have been the main source of the fully developed Gnostic doctrine of the three first books. We find also some allusions to an apocryphal gospel of the childhood (p. 120), and, perhaps to the gospel of Philip (p. 230).

14.10.1 Odes of Solomon

Pistis Sophia includes quotes from five of the *Odes of Solomon*, found in chapters between 58 and 71. *Pistis Sophia* was the only known source for the actual wording of any of the *Odes* until the discovery of a nearly-complete Syriac text of the *Odes* in 1909. Because the first part of this text is missing, *Pistis Sophia* is still the only source for Ode 1.

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- [1] Jones, p. 45.
- [2] Mead 1921, pp. xxix-xxxviii.
- [3] Pearson, p. 74.

- [4] Horton, p. 136
- [5] Mead 1892, p. 67. Cf. Mead 1900, pp. 419-24.
- [6] Carl Schmidt, *Koptisch-gnostische Schriften* S. XIV
- [7] Köstlin, p. 185 sqq.
- [8] *Panarion* 26, 8: "(2) For in the so-called 'Greater Questions of Mary'—there are also 'Lesser' ones forged by them—they claim that he reveals it to her after taking her aside on the mountain, praying, producing a woman from his side, beginning to have sex with her, and then partaking of his emission, if you please, to show that 'Thus we must do, that we may live.' (3) And when Mary was alarmed and fell to the ground, he raised her up and said to her, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?'" Williams, p. 96.
- [9] "We have heard that there are some on the earth who take the male seed and the female monthly blood, and make it into a lentil porridge and eat it, saying: 'We have faith in Esau and Jacob.' Is this then seemly or not?" Mead 1921, p. 321.
- [10] Köstlin, p. 187.
- [11] As already observed by Köstlin, p. 190 sqq.

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Sophia (Gnosticism)

Sophia (Greek Σοφία, meaning “wisdom,” Coptic σοφία *tsophia*^[1]) is a major theme, along with Knowledge (Greek γνώσις *gnosis*, Coptic *sooun*), among many of the early Christian knowledge-theologies grouped by the heresiologist Irenaeus as *gnostikos*, “learned.” Gnosticism is a 17th-century term expanding the definition of Irenaeus’ groups to include other syncretic and mystery religions.^[2]

In Gnostic tradition, Sophia is a feminine figure, analogous to the human soul but also simultaneously one of the feminine aspects of God. Gnostics held that she was the syzygy of Jesus Christ (i.e. the Bride of Christ), and Holy Spirit of the Trinity. She is occasionally referred to by the Hebrew equivalent of *Achamōth* (Αχαμώθ, Hebrew חכמה *chokmah*) and as *Prunikos* (Προύνικος). In the Nag Hammadi texts, Sophia is the lowest Aeon, or anthropic expression of the emanation of the light of God. She is considered to have fallen from grace in some way, in so doing creating or helping to create the material world.

1 Gnostic mythos

Almost all Gnostic systems of the Syrian or Egyptian type taught that the universe began with an original, unknowable God, referred to as the Parent or Bythos, or as the Monad by Monoimus. From this initial unitary beginning, the One spontaneously emanated further Aeons, being pairs of progressively 'lesser' beings in sequence. Together with the source from which they emanate they form the *Pleroma*, or fullness, of God, and thus should not be seen as distinct from the divine, but symbolic abstractions of the divine nature. The transition from the immaterial to the material, from the noumenal to the sensible, is brought about by a flaw, or a passion, or a sin, in one of the Aeons.

In most versions of the Gnostic mythos, it is Sophia who brings about this instability in the Pleroma, in turn bringing about the creation of materiality. According to some Gnostic texts, the crisis occurs as a result of Sophia trying to emanate without her syzygy or, in another tradition, because she tries to breach the barrier between herself and the unknowable Bythos. After cataclysmically falling from the Pleroma, Sophia’s fear and anguish of losing her life (just as she lost the light of the One) causes confusion and longing to return to it. Because of these longings, matter (Greek: *hylē*, ὕλη) and soul (Greek: *psychē*, ψυχή) accidentally come into existence. The cre-

ation of the Demiurge (also known as Yaldabaoth, “Son of Chaos”) is also a mistake made during this exile. The Demiurge proceeds to create the physical world in which we live, ignorant of Sophia, who nevertheless manages to infuse some spiritual spark or *pneuma* into his creation.

In the *Pistis Sophia*, Christ is sent from the Godhead in order to bring Sophia back into the fullness (Pleroma). Christ enables her to again see the light, bringing her knowledge of the spirit (Greek: *pneuma*, πνεύμα). Christ is then sent to earth in the form of the man Jesus to give men the Gnosis needed to rescue themselves from the physical world and return to the spiritual world. In Gnosticism, the Gospel story of Jesus is itself allegorical: it is the Outer Mystery, used as an introduction to Gnosis, rather than being literally true in a historical context. For the Gnostics, the drama of the redemption of the Sophia through Christ or the Logos is the central drama of the universe. The Sophia resides in all of us as the Divine Spark.

2 Book of Proverbs

Jewish Alexandrine religious philosophy was much occupied with the concept of the Divine *Sophia*, as the revelation of God’s inward thought, and assigned to her not only the formation and ordering of the natural universe (comp. Clem. *Hom.* xvi. 12) but also the communication of all insight and knowledge to mankind. In Proverbs 8 Wisdom (the noun is feminine) is described as God’s Counsellor and Workmistress (Master-workman, R.V.), who dwelt beside Him before the Creation of the world and sported continually before Him.

In accordance with the description given in the Book of Proverbs, a dwelling-place was assigned by the Gnostics to the Sophia, and her relation to the upper world defined as well as to the seven planetary powers which were placed under her. The seven planetary spheres or heavens were for the ancients the highest regions of the created universe. They were thought of as seven circles rising one above another, and dominated by the seven Archons. These constituted the (Gnostic) Hebdomad. Above the highest of them, and over-vaulting it, was the Ogdoad, the sphere of immutability, which was nigh to the spiritual world (Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata*, iv. 25, 161; comp. vi. 16, 138 sqq.). Now we read in Proverbs 9:1:

Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars:

These seven pillars being interpreted of the planetary heavens, the habitation of the Sophia herself was placed above the Hebdomad in the Ogdoad (*Excerpt. ex Theodot.* 8, 47). It is said further of the same divine wisdom (*Proverbs* 8:2):

She standeth in the top of high places, by
the way in the places of the paths.

This meant, according to the Gnostic interpretation, that the Sophia has her dwelling-place “on the heights” above the created universe, in the place of the midst, between the upper and lower world, between the Pleroma and the *ektismena*. She sits at “the gates of the mighty,” i.e. at the approaches to the realms of the seven Archons, and at the “entrances” to the upper realm of light her praise is sung. The Sophia is therefore the highest ruler over the visible universe, and at the same time the mediatrix between the upper and the lower realms. She shapes this mundane universe after the heavenly prototypes, and forms the seven star-circles with their Archons under whose dominion are placed, according to the astrological conceptions of antiquity, the fates of all earthly things, and more especially of man. She is “the mother” or “the mother of the living.” (*Epiph. Haer.* 26, 10). As coming from above, she is herself of pneumatic essence, the *mētēr phōteinē* (*Epiph.* 40, 2) or the *anō dynamis* (*Epiph.* 39, 2) from which all pneumatic souls draw their origin.

3 Descent

In reconciling the doctrine of the pneumatic nature of the Sophia with the dwelling-place assigned her, according to the *Proverbs*, in the kingdom of the midst, and so outside the upper realm of light, there was envisioned a descent of Sophia from her heavenly home, the Pleroma, into the void (*kenōma*) beneath it. The concept was that of a seizure or robbery of light, or of an outburst and diffusion of light-dew into the *kenōma*, occasioned by a vivifying movement in the upper world. But inasmuch as the light brought down into the darkness of this lower world was thought of and described as involved in suffering, this suffering must be regarded as a punishment. This inference was further aided by the Platonic notion of a spiritual fall.

4 Mythos of the soul

Alienated through their own fault from their heavenly home, souls have sunk down into this lower world without utterly losing the remembrance of their former state, and filled with longing for their lost inheritance, these fallen souls are still striving upwards. In this way the mythos of the fall of Sophia can be regarded as having a typical significance. The fate of the “mother” was regarded as

the prototype of what is repeated in the history of all individual souls, which, being of a heavenly pneumatic origin, have fallen from the upper world of light their home, and come under the sway of evil powers, from whom they must endure a long series of sufferings until a return into the upper world be once more vouchsafed them.

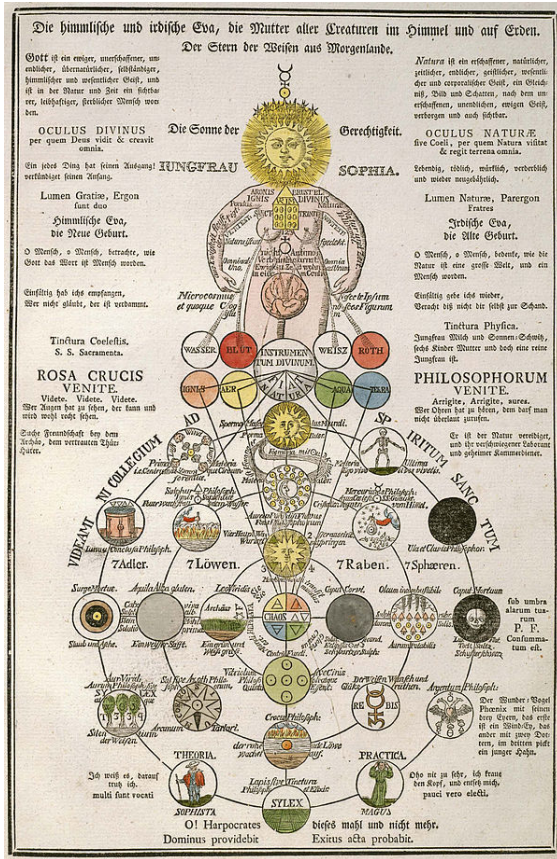
But whereas, according to the Platonic philosophy, fallen souls still retain a remembrance of their lost home, this notion was preserved in another form in Gnostic circles. It was taught that the souls of the Pneumatici, having lost the remembrance of their heavenly derivation, required to become once more partakers of Gnosis, or knowledge of their own pneumatic essence, in order to make a return to the realm of light. In the impartation of this Gnosis consists the redemption brought and vouchsafed by Christ to pneumatic souls. But the various fortunes of such souls were wont to be contemplated in those of Sophia, and so it was taught that the Sophia also needed the redemption wrought by Christ, by whom she is delivered from her *agnoia* and her *pathe*, and will, at the end of the world’s development, be again brought back to her long lost home, the Upper Pleroma, into which this mother will find an entrance along with all pneumatic souls her children, and there, in the heavenly bridal chamber, celebrate the marriage feast of eternity.

5 Syrian Gnosis

The Sophia mythos has in the various Gnostic systems undergone great variety of treatment. The oldest, the Syrian Gnosis, referred to the *Sophia* the formation of the lower world and the production of its rulers the Archons; and along with this they also ascribed to her the preservation and propagation of the spiritual seed.

5.1 Formation of the lower world

As described by *Irenaeus*, the great Mother-principle of the universe appears as the first woman, the Holy Spirit (*rūha d’qudshā*) moving over the waters, and is also called the mother of all living. Under her are the four material elements—water, darkness, abyss, and chaos. With her, combine themselves the two supreme masculine lights, the first and the second man, the Father and the Son, the latter being also designated as the Father’s *ennoia*. From their union proceeds the third imperishable light, the third man, Christ. But unable to support the abounding fulness of this light, the mother in giving birth to Christ, suffers a portion of this light to overflow on the left side. While, then, Christ as *dexios* (He of the right hand) mounts upward with his mother into the imperishable Aeon, that other light which has overflowed on the left hand, sinks down into the lower world, and there produces matter. And this is the Sophia, called also *Aristera* (she of the left hand), *Prouneikos* and the male-female.



A mystical depiction of Sophia from *Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer, Altona, 1785*.

There is here, as yet, no thought of a fall, properly so called, as in the Valentinian system. The power which has thus overflowed leftwards, makes a voluntary descent into the lower waters, confiding in its possession of the spark of true light. It is, moreover, evident that though mythologically distinguished from the *humectatio luminis* (Greek: *ikmas phōtos*, ἰκμάς φωτός), the Sophia is yet, really nothing else but the light-spark coming from above, entering this lower material world, and becoming here the source of all formation, and of both the higher and the lower life. She swims over the waters, and sets their hitherto immovable mass in motion, driving them into the abyss, and taking to herself a bodily form from the *hylē*. She compasses about, and is laden with material every kind of weight and substance, so that, but for the essential spark of light, she would be sunk and lost in the material. Bound to the body which she has assumed and weighed down thereby, she seeks in vain to make her escape from the lower waters, and hasten upwards to re-join her heavenly mother. Not succeeding in this endeavour, she seeks to preserve, at least, her light-spark from being injured by the lower elements, raises herself by its power to the realm of the upper region, and these spreading out herself she forms out of her own bodily part, the dividing wall of the visible firmament, but still retains the *aquatilis corporis typus*. Finally seized with a longing for the higher light, she finds, at length, in herself, the power

to raise herself even above the heaven of her own forming, and to fully lay aside her corporeity. The body thus abandoned is called “Woman from Woman.”

5.2 Creation and redemption

The narrative proceeds to tell of the formation of the seven Archons by Sophia herself, of the creation of man, which “the mother” (i.e. not the first woman, but the Sophia) uses as a mean to deprive the Archons of their share of light, of the perpetual conflict on his mother’s part with the self-exalting efforts of the Archons, and of her continuous striving to recover again and again the light-spark hidden in human nature, till, at length, Christ comes to her assistance and in answer to her prayers, proceeds to draw all the sparks of light to Himself, unites Himself with the Sophia as the bridegroom with the bride, descends on Jesus who has been prepared, as a pure vessel for His reception, by Sophia, and leaves him again before the crucifixion, ascending with Sophia into the world or Aeon which will never pass away (Irenaeus, i. 30; Epiph. 37, 3, sqq.; Theodoret, h. f. i. 14).

5.3 As world-soul

In this system the original cosmogonic significance of the Sophia still stands in the foreground. The antithesis of Christus and Sophia, as He of the right (*ho dexios*) and She of the Left (*hē aristera*), as male and female, is but a repetition of the first Cosmogonic Antithesis in another form. The Sophia herself is but a reflex of the “Mother of all living” and is therefore also called “Mother.” She is the formatrix of heaven and earth, for as much as mere matter can only receive form through the light which, coming down from above has interpenetrated the dark waters of the *hylē*; but she is also at the same time the spiritual principle of life in creation, or, as the world-soul the representative of all that is truly pneumatic in this lower world: her fates and experiences represent typically those of the pneumatic soul which has sunk down into chaos.

6 Prunikos

For I am the first and the last.
I am the honored one and the scorned one.
I am the whore and the holy one.

—*The Thunder, Perfect Mind*^[3]

In the Gnostic system described by Irenaeus (I. xxi.; see Ophites) the name Prunikos several times takes the place of Sophia in the relation of her story. The name Prunikos is also given to Sophia in the account of the kindred Barbeliot system, given in the preceding chapter of Irenaeus. Celsus, who shows that he had met with

some Ophite work, exhibits acquaintance with the name Prunikos (Orig. *Adv. Cels.* vi. 34) a name which Origen recognizes as Valentinian. That this Ophite name had really been adopted by the Valentinians is evidenced by its occurrence in a Valentinian fragment preserved by Epiphanius (Epiph. *Haer.* xxxi. 5). Epiphanius also introduces Prunikos as a technical word in the system of the Simonians (Epiph. *Haer.* xxi. 2) of those whom he describes under the head of Nicolaitans (Epiph. *Haer.* xxv. 3, 4) and of the Ophites (Epiph. *Haer.* xxxvii. 4, 6).

6.1 Etymology

Neither Irenaeus nor Origen indicates that he knew anything as to the meaning of this word; and we have no better information on this subject than a conjecture of Epiphanius (Epiph. *Haer.* xxv. 48). He says that the word means “wanton” or “lascivious,” for that the Greeks had a phrase concerning a man who had debauched a girl, *Eprounikeuse tautēn*. One feels some hesitation in accepting this explanation. Epiphanius was deeply persuaded of the filthiness of Gnostic morals, and habitually put the worst interpretation on their language. If the phrase reported by Epiphanius had been common, it is strange that instances of its use should not have been quoted from the Greek comic writers. It need not be denied that Epiphanius had heard the phrase employed, but innocent words come to be used in an obscene sense, as well by those who think *double entendre* witty, as by those who modestly avoid the use of plainer language. The primary meaning of the word *prouneikos* seems to be a porter, or bearer of burdens, the derivation being from *enenkein*, the only derivation indeed that the word seems to admit of. Then, modifying its meaning like the word *agoraios*, it came to be used in the sense of a turbulent violent person. The only distinct confirmation of the explanation of Epiphanius is that Hesychius (*s. v. Skitaloi*) has the words *aphrodisiōn kai tēs prounikias tēs nykterinēs*. This would be decisive, if we could be sure that these words were earlier in date than Epiphanius.

In favour of the explanation of Epiphanius is the fact, that in the Gnostic cosmogonical myths, the imagery of sexual passion is constantly introduced. It seems on the whole probable that *prouneikos* is to be understood in the sense of *propherēs* which has for one of its meanings^[4] “precocious in respect of sexual intercourse.” According to Ernst Wilhelm Möller (1860) the name is possibly meant to indicate her attempts to entice away again from the lower Cosmic Powers the seed of Divine light.^[5] In the account given by Epiphanius (*Haer.* 37:6) the allusion to enticements to sexual intercourse which is involved in this name, becomes more prominent.

However, in the *Exegesis on the Soul* text found at Nag Hammadi, the soul is likened to a woman which fell from perfection into prostitution, and that the Father will elevate her again to her original perfect state.^[6] In this context, the female personification of the soul resembles the

passion of Sophia as Prunikos.

7 The womb, *mētra*

Nigh related to this is the notion widely diffused among Gnostic sects of the impure *mētra* (womb) from whence the whole world is supposed to have issued. As according to the Italian Valentinians the Soter opens the *mētra* of the lower Sophia, (the *Enthymēsis*), and so occasions the formation of the universe (*Iren.* I. 3, 4) so on the other hand the *mētra* itself is personified. So Epiphanius reports the following cosmogony as that of a branch of the Nicolaitans:

In the beginning were Darkness, Chaos, and Water (*skotos, kai bythos, kai hydōr*), but the Spirit indwelling in the midst of them, divided them one from another. From the intermingling of Darkness with Spirit proceeds the *mētra* which again is kindled with fresh desire after the Spirit; she gives birth first to four, and then to other four aeons, and so produces a right and a left, light and darkness. Last of all comes forth an *aischros aiōn*, who has intercourse with the *mētra*, the offspring whereof are Gods, Angels, Daemons, and Spirits.

—Epiphanius, *Haer.* 25, 5

The Sethians (Hippolytus. *Philosophum.* v. 7) teach in like manner that from the first concurrence (*syndromē*) of the three primeval principles arose heaven and earth as a *megalē tis idea sphragidos*. These have the form of a *mētra* with the *omphalos* in the midst. The pregnant *mētra* therefore contains within itself all kinds of animal forms in the reflex of heaven and earth and all substances found in the middle region. This *mētra* also encounters us in the great *Apophysis* ascribed to Simon where it is also called Paradise and Edem as being the locality of man’s formation.

These cosmogonic theories have their precedent in the Thalath or Tiamat of Syrian mythology, the life-mother of whom Berossus has so much to relate, or in the world-egg out of which when cloven asunder heaven and earth and all things proceed.^[7] The name of this Berossian Thalath meets us again among the Peratae of the *Philosophumena* (Hippolytus, *Philosophum.* v. 9) and is sometimes mistakenly identified with that of the sea—*thalassa*.

8 Baruch-Gnosis

A similar part to that of the *mētra* is played by Edem, consort of Elohim in the Gnostic book *Baruch* (Hippolytus,

Philosoph. v. 18 sqq.) who there appears as a two-shaped being formed above as a woman and from the middle downwards as a serpent (21).

Among the four and twenty Angels which she bears to Elohim, and which form the world out of her members, the second female angelic form is called *Achamōs* [*Achamōth*]. Like to this legend of the *Philosophumena* concerning the Baruch-Gnosis is that which is related by Epiphanius of an Ophite Party that they fabled that a Serpent from the Upper World had had sexual intercourse with the Earth as with a woman (Epiphanius, *Haer.* 45: 1 cf. 2).

9 Barbeliotae

Very nigh related to the doctrines of the Gnostics in Irenaeus are the views of the so-called Barbeliotae (*Iren.* I. 29). The name Barbelo, which according to one interpretation is a designation of the upper Tetrad, has originally nothing to do with the Sophia. This latter Being called also *Spiritus Sanctus* and *Prunikos* is the offspring of the first angel who stands at the side of the Monogenes. Sophia seeing that all the rest have each its *syzygos* within the Pleroma, desires also to find such a consort for herself; and not finding one in the upper world she looks down into the lower regions and being still unsatisfied there she descends at length against the will of the Father into the deep. Here she forms the Demiurge (the *Proarchōn*), a composite of ignorance and self-exaltation. This Being, by virtue of pneumatic powers stolen from his mother, proceeds to form the lower world. The mother, on the other hand, flees away into the upper regions and makes her dwelling there in the Ogdoad.

10 The Ophites

We meet this Sophia also among the Ophiana whose "Diagram" is described by Celsus and Origen, as well as among various Gnostic (Ophite) parties mentioned by Epiphanius. She is there called Sophia or Prunikos, the upper mother and upper power, and sits enthroned above the Hebdomad (the seven Planetary Heavens) in the Ogdoad (Origen, *Against Celsus.* vi. 31, 34, 35, 38; Epiphanius, *Haer.* 25, 3 sqq. 26, 1, 10. 39, 2; 40, 2). She is also occasionally called *Parthenos* (Orig. *c. Cels.* vi. 31) and again is elsewhere identified with the Barbelo or Barbero (Epiphanius, *Haer.* 25, 3; 26, 1, 10).



Helen on the Ramparts of Troy by Frederick Leighton; an incarnation of the Ennoia in the Simonian system.

11 Simon Magus

11.1 The Ennoia

This mythos of the soul and her descent into this lower world, with her various sufferings and changing fortunes until her final deliverance, recurs in the Simonian system under the form of the All-Mother who issues as its first thought from the *Hestōs* or highest power of God. She generally bears the name *Ennoia*, but is also called Wisdom (Sophia), Ruler, Holy Spirit, Prunikos, Barbelo. Having sunk down from the highest heavens into the lowest regions, she creates angels and archangels, and these again create and rule the material universe. Restrained and held down by the power of this lower world, she is hindered from returning to the kingdom of the Father. According to one representation she suffers all manner of insult from the angels and archangels bound and forced again and again into fresh earthly bodies, and compelled for centuries to wander in ever new corporeal forms. According to another account she is in herself incapable of suffering, but is sent into this lower world and undergoes perpetual transformation in order to excite by her beauty the angels and powers, to impel them to engage in perpetual strife, and so gradually to deprive them of their store of heavenly light. The *Hestōs* himself at length comes down from the highest heaven in a phantasmal body in order to deliver the suffering *Ennoia*, and redeem the souls

held in captivity by imparting gnosis to them.

11.2 The lost sheep

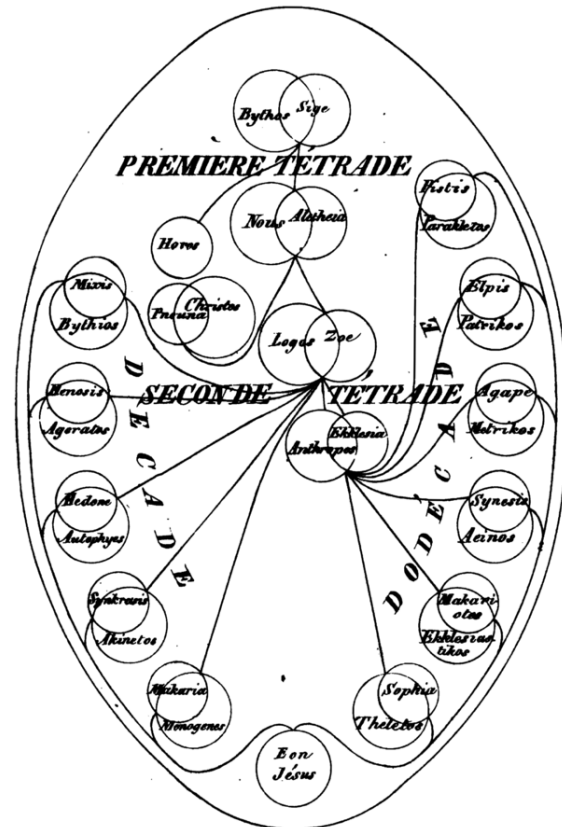
The most frequent designation of the Simonian *Ennoia* is “the lost” or “the wandering sheep.” The Greek divinities Zeus and Athena were interpreted to signify *Hestōs* and his *Ennoia*, and in like manner the Tyrian sun-god Herakles-Melkart and the moon-goddess Selene-Astarte. So also the Homeric Helena, as the cause of quarrel between Greeks and Trojans, was regarded as a type of the *Ennoia*. The story which the fathers of the church handed down of the intercourse of Simon Magus with his consort Helena (Iren. i. 23; Tertullian *de Anima*, 34; Epiphanius *Haer.* 21; Pseudo-Tertullian *Haer.* 1; Philaster, *Haer.* 29; *Philos.* vi. 14, 15; *Recogn. Clem.* ii. 12; *Hom.* ii. 25), had probably its origin in this allegorical interpretation, according to Richard Adelbert Lipsius (1867).^[8]

11.3 Hestōs

In the Simonian *Apophysis* the great *dynamis* (also called *Nous*) and the great *epinoia* which gives birth to all things form a syzygy, from which proceeds the male-female Being, who is called *Hestōs* (*Philos.* vi. 13). Elsewhere *nous* and *epinoia* are called the upper-most of the three Simonian Syzygies, to which the *Hestōs* forms the Hebdomad: but on the other hand, *nous* and *epinoia* are identified with heaven and earth (*Philos.* vi. 9sqq.).

12 Valentinus

The most significant development of this Sophia mythos is found in the Valentinian system. The descent of the Sophia from the Pleroma is ascribed after Plato's manner to a fall, and as the final cause of this fall a state of suffering is indicated which has penetrated into the Pleroma itself. Sophia or *Mētēr* is in the doctrine of Valentinus the last, i.e. the thirtieth Aeon in the Pleroma, from which having fallen out, she now in remembrance of the better world which she has thus forsaken, gives birth to the Christos “with a shadow” (*meta skias tinos*). While Christos returns to the Pleroma, Sophia forms the Demiurge and this whole lower world out of the *skia*, a right and a left principle (Iren. *Haer.* i. 11, 1). For her redemption comes down to Sophia either Christos himself (Iren. i. 15, 3) or the *Soter* (Iren. i. 11, 1, cf. *exc. ex Theod.* 23; 41), as the common product of the Aeons, in order to bring her back to the Pleroma and unite her again with her syzygos.



“Plérome de Valentin,” from *Histoire critique du Gnosticisme*; Jacques Matter, 1826, Vol. II, Plate II.

12.1 Motive

The motive for the Sophia's fall was defined according to the Anatolian school to have lain therein, that by her desire to know what lay beyond the limits of the knowable she had brought herself into a state of ignorance and formlessness. Her suffering extends to the whole Pleroma. But whereas this is confirmed thereby in fresh strength, the Sophia is separated from it and gives birth outside it (by means of her *ennoia*, her recollections of the higher world), to the Christos who at once ascends into the Pleroma, and after this she produces an *ousia amorphos*, the image of her suffering, out of which the Demiurge and the lower world come into existence; last of all looking upwards in her helpless condition, and imploring light, she finally gives birth to the *spermata tēs ekklēsiās*, the pneumatic souls. In the work of redemption the Soter comes down accompanied by the masculine angels who are to be the future *syzygoi* of the (feminine) souls of the Pneumatici, and introduces the Sophia along with these Pneumatici into the heavenly bridal chamber (*Exc. ex Theod.* 29-42; Iren. i. 2, 3). The same view, essentially meets us in the accounts of Marcus, (Iren. i. 18, 4; cf. 15, 3; 16, 1, 2; 17, 1) and in the Epitomators of the Syntagma of Hippolytus (Pseudo-Tertullian *Haer.* 12; Philaster, *Haer.* 38).

13 Achamōth

The Italic school distinguished on the other hand a two-fold Sophia, the *ano Sophia* and the *katō Sophia* or Achamoth.

13.1 Ptolemaeus

13.1.1 Fall

According to the doctrine of Ptolemaeus and that of his disciples, the former of these separates herself from her *syzygos*, the *thelētos* through her audacious longing after immediate Communion with the Father of all, falls into a condition of suffering, and would completely melt away in this inordinate desire, unless the *Horos* had purified her from her suffering and established her again in the Pleroma. Her *enthymēsis*, on the other hand, the desire which has obtained the mastery over her and the consequent suffering becomes an *amorphos kai aneideos ousia*, which is also called an *ektrōma*, is separated from her and is assigned a place beyond the limits of the Pleroma.

13.1.2 The place of the Midst

From her dwelling-place above the Hebdomad, in the place of the Midst, she is also called Ogdoad (Ὀγδοάδς), and further entitled *Mētēr*, *Sophia* also, and *he Hierousalēm*, *Pneuma hagian*, and (*arsenikōs*) *Kyrios*. In these names some partial reminiscences of the old Ophitic Gnosis are retained.

13.1.3 Repentance

The Achamoth first receives (by means of Christus and *Pneuma hagian* the Pair of Aeons within the Pleroma whose emanation is most recent), the *morphōsis kat' ou-sian*. Left alone in her suffering she has become endued with penitent mind (*epistrophē*). Now descends the son as the common fruit of the Pleroma, gives her the *morphōsis kata gnōsin*, and forms out of her various affections the Demiurge and the various constituents of this lower world. By his appointment the Achamoth produces the pneumatic seed (the *ekklēsia*).

13.1.4 Redemption

The end of the world's history is here also (as above) the introduction of the lower Sophia with all her pneumatic offspring into the Pleroma, and this intimately connected with the second descent of the Soter and his transient union with the psychical Christus; then follows the marriage-union of the Achamoth with the Soter and of the pneumatic souls with the angels (Iren. i. 1-7; *exc. ex Theod.* 43-65).

13.2 Two-fold Sophia

The same form of doctrine meets us also in Secundus, who is said to have been the first to have made the distinction of an upper and a lower Sophia (Iren. i. 11, 2), and in the account which the *Philosophumena* give us of a system which most probably referred to the school of Heracleon, and which also speaks of a double Sophia (*Philos.* vi.). The name Jerusalem also for the *exō Sophia* meets us here (*Philos.* vi. 29). It finds its interpretation in the fragments of Heracleon (ap. Origen. *in Joann.* tom. x. 19). The name Achamoth, on the other hand, is wanting both in Hippolytus and in Heracleon. One school among the Marcosians seems also to have taught a two-fold Sophia (Iren. i. 16, 3; cf. 21, 5).

13.3 Etymology

August Hahn (1819) debated whether the name *Achamōth* (Ἀχαμιώθ) is originally derived from the Hebrew *Chokhmah* (חֻכְמָה), in Aramaic *Ḥachmūth* or whether it signifies 'She that brings forth'—'Mother.'^[9] The Syriac form *Ḥachmūth* is testified for us as used by Bardesanes (Ephraim, *Hymn* 55), the Greek form *Hachamōth* is found only among the Valentinians: the name however probably belongs to the oldest Syrian Gnosis.

14 Bardesanes

Cosmogonic myths play their part also in the doctrine of Bardesanes. The *locus foedus* whereon the gods (or Aeons) measured and founded Paradise (Ephraim, *Hymn* 55) is the same as the impure *mētra*, which Ephraim is ashamed even to name (cf. also Ephraim, *Hymn* 14). The creation of the world is brought to pass through the son of the living one and the Rūha d' Qudshā, the Holy Spirit, with whom Ḥachmūth is identical, but in combination with "creatures," i.e. subordinate beings which cooperate with them (Ephraim, *Hymn* 3). It is not expressly so said, and yet at the same time is the most probable assumption, that as was the case with the father and mother so also their offspring the son of the Living One, and the Rūha d' Qudshā or Ḥachmūth, are to be regarded as a Syzygy. This last (the Ḥachmūth) brings forth the two daughters, the "Shame of the Dry Land" i.e. the *mētra*, and the "Image of the Waters" i.e. the *Aquatilis Corporis typus*, which is mentioned in connection with the Ophitic Sophia (Ephraim, *Hymn* 55). Beside which, in a passage evidently referring to Bardesanes, air, fire, water, and darkness are mentioned as aeons (Īthyē: *Hymn* 41) These are probably the "Creatures" to which in association with the Son and the Rūha d' Qudshā, Bardesanes is said to have assigned the creation of the world.

Though much still remains dark as to the doctrine of Bardesanes we cannot nevertheless have any right to set

simply aside the statements of Ephraim, who remains the oldest Syrian source for our knowledge of the doctrine of this Syrian Gnostic, and deserves therefore our chief attentions. Bardesanes, according to Ephraim, is able also to tell of the wife or maiden who having sunk down from the Upper Paradise offers up prayers in her dereliction for help from above, and on being heard returns to the joys of the Upper Paradise (Ephraim, *Hymn 55*).

15 Acts of Thomas

These statements of Ephraim are further supplemented by the *Acts of Thomas* in which various hymns have been preserved which are either compositions of Bardesanes himself, or at any rate are productions of his school.^[10]

15.1 Hymn of the Pearl

In the Syriac text of the Acts,^[11] we find the *Hymn of the Pearl*, where the soul which has been sent down from her heavenly home to fetch the pearl guarded by the serpent, but has forgotten here below her heavenly mission until she is reminded of it by a letter from “the father, the mother, and the brother,” performs her task, receives back again her glorious dress, and returns to her old home.

15.2 Ode to the Sophia

Of the other hymns which are preserved in the Greek version more faithfully than in the Syriac text which has undergone Catholic revision, the first deserving of notice is the *Ode to the Sophia*^{[12][13]} which describes the marriage of the “maiden” with her heavenly bridegroom and her introduction into the Upper Realm of Light. This “maiden,” called “daughter of light,” is not as the Catholic reviser supposes the Church, but Ḥachmūth (Sophia) over whose head the “king,” i.e. the father of the living ones, sits enthroned; her bridegroom is, according to the most probable interpretation, the son of the living one, i.e. Christ. With her the living Ones i.e. pneumatic souls enter into the Pleroma and receive the glorious light of the living Father and praise along with “the living spirit” the “father of truth” and the “mother of wisdom.”

15.3 First prayer of consecration

The Sophia is also invoked in the first prayer of consecration.^[14] She is there called the “merciful mother,” the “consort of the masculine one,” “revealant of the perfect mysteries,” “Mother of the Seven Houses,” “who finds rest in the eighth house,” i.e. in the Ogdoad. In the second Prayer of Consecration^[15] she is also designated, the “perfect Mercy” and “Consort of the Masculine

line One,” but is also called “Holy Spirit” (Syriac *Rūha d' Qudshā*) “Revealant of the Mysteries of the whole Magnitude,” “hidden Mother,” “She who knows the Mysteries of the Elect,” and “she who partakes in the conflicts of the noble Agonistes” (i.e. of Christ, cf. *exc. ex Theod. 58 ho megas agōnistēs lēsous*).

There is further a direct reminiscence of the doctrine of Bardesanes when she is invoked as the Holy Dove which has given birth to the two twins, i.e. the two daughters of the *Rūha d' Qudshā* (ap. Ephraim, *Hymn 55*).

16 Pistis Sophia

A special and richly coloured development is given to the mythical form of the Sophia of the Gnostic Book *Pistis Sophia*.^[16] The two first books of this writing to which the name *Pistis Sophia* properly belongs, treat for the greater part (pp. 42–181) of the fall, the Repentance, and the Redemption of the Sophia.

16.1 Fall

She has by the ordinance of higher powers obtained an insight into the dwelling-place appropriated to her in the spiritual world, namely, the *thēsauros lucis* which lies beyond the XIIIth Aeon. By her endeavours to direct thither her upward flight, she draws upon herself the enmity of the *Authadēs*, Archon of the XIIIth Aeon, and of the Archons of the XII. Aeons under him; by these she is enticed down into the depths of chaos, and is there tormented in the greatest possible variety of ways, in order that so she may incur the loss of her light-nature.

16.2 Repentance

In her utmost need she addresses thirteen penitent prayers (*metanoiai*) to the Upper Light. Step by step she is led upwards by Christus into the higher regions, though she still remains obnoxious to the assaults of the Archons, and is, after offering her XIIIth *Metanoia*, more vehemently attacked than ever, until at length Christus leads her down into an intermediate place below the XIIIth Aeon, where she remains until the consummation of the world, and sends up grateful hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

16.3 Redemption

The earthly work of redemption having been at length accomplished, the Sophia returns to her original celestial home. The peculiar feature in this representation consists in the further development of the philosophical ideas which find general expression in the Sophia mythos. According to Karl Reinhold von Köstlin (1854), Sophia is here not merely, as with Valentinus, the representative of

the longing which the finite spirit feels for the knowledge of the infinite, but at the same time a type or pattern of faith, of repentance, and of hope.^[17] After her restoration she announces to her companions the twofold truth that, while every attempt to overstep the divinely ordained limits, has for its consequence suffering and punishment, so, on the other hand, the divine compassion is ever ready to vouchsafe pardon to the penitent.

16.4 Light-Maiden

We have a further reminiscence of the Sophia of the older Gnostic systems in what is said in the book *Pistis Sophia* of the Light-Maiden (*parthenos lucis*), who is there clearly distinguished from the Sophia herself, and appears as the archetype of *Astraea*, the *Constellation Virgo*.^[18] The station which she holds is in the place of the midst, above the habitation assigned to the Sophia in the XIIIth Aeon. She is the judge of (departed) souls, either opening for them or closing against them the portals of the light-realm (pp. 194–295). Under her stand yet seven other light-maidens with similar functions, who impart to pious souls their final consecrations (p. 291 sq. 327 sq. 334). From the place of the *parthenos lucis* comes the sun-dragon, which is daily borne along by four light-powers in the shape of white horses, and so makes his circuit round the earth (p. 183, cf. p. 18, 309).

17 Manichaeism

This light-maiden (*parthenos tou phōtos*) encounters us also among the Manichaeans as exciting the impure desires of the Daemons, and thereby setting free the light which has hitherto been held down by the power of darkness (*Dispuat. Archelai et Manetis*, c. 8, n. 11; Theodoret., h. f. I. 26).^{[19][20][21]} On the other hand, the place of the Gnostic Sophia is among Manichaeans taken by the “Mother of Life” (*mētēr tēs zōēs*), and by the *World-Soul* (*psychē hapantōn*), which on occasions is distinguished from the Life-Mother, and is regarded as diffused through all living creatures, whose deliverance from the realm of darkness constitutes the whole of the world’s history (Titus of Bostra, *adv. Manich.* I., 29, 36, ed. Lagarde, p. 17 sqq. 23; Alexander Lycopolitus c. 3; Epiphanius. *Haer.* 66, 24; *Acta dispatat. Archelai et Manetis*, c. 7 sq. et passim).^{[22][23]} Their return to the world of light is described in the famous *Canticum Amatorium* (ap. Augustin. c. Faust, iv. 5 sqq).

18 Nag Hammadi texts

In *On the Origin of the World*, Sophia is depicted as the ultimate destroyer of this material universe, Yaldabaoth and all his Heavens:

She [Sophia] will cast them down into the abyss. They [the Archons] will be obliterated because of their wickedness. For they will come to be like volcanoes and consume one another until they perish at the hand of the prime parent. When he has destroyed them, he will turn against himself and destroy himself until he ceases to exist. And their heavens will fall one upon the next and their forces will be consumed by fire. Their eternal realms, too, will be overturned. And his heaven will fall and break in two. His [...] will fall down upon the [...] support them; they will fall into the abyss, and the abyss will be overturned. The light will [...] the darkness and obliterate it: it will be like something that never was.

19 Mythology

Carl Jung linked the figure of Sophia to the highest archetype of the anima in depth psychology.^[24] The archetypal fall and recovery of Sophia is additionally linked (to a varying degree) to many different myths and stories (see *damsel in distress*). Among these are:

- Isis, who while still in the cosmic womb, brings forth the flawed Elder Horus without a consort^[25]
- The abduction and rescue of Helen of Troy
- Persephone and her descent into Hades, from which she returns to life [but is bound to return to Hades for 6 months every year]
- The fall of Eve and the birth of Christ through the Virgin Mary
- The descent of Orpheus into the underworld to rescue his wife, Eurydice
- The return of Odysseus to his kingdom, Ithaca, to reclaim his wife, Penelope
- The rescue of Andromeda by Perseus
- Ishtar's descent to the Underworld, in the Epic of Gilgamesh
- Pandora
- Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty
- The slaying of the Dragon by St. George to rescue the Princess
- The rescue of the kidnapped Sita by her husband, the god-king Rama, with the help of Hanuman in the Ramayana

Note that many of these myths have alternative psychological interpretations. For example Jungian psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz interpreted fairy tales like Sleeping Beauty as symbolizing the 'rescue' or reintegration of the *anima*, the more 'feminine' part of a man's unconscious, but not wisdom or *sophia* per se.

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