

# Gnosticism

Religion 222b, Haverford College, F 2016

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T Th 1-2:30 pm



The Nag Hammadi Codices



**This syllabus will be updated regularly. Students should check before every class and follow the links to any additional assigned or recommended materials.**

## Course Description

**Course Description:** This course offers a critical examination of "Gnosticism" through close reading of selected texts from the Nag Hammadi library and other ancient writings. The meaning and usefulness of the category "Gnosticism" are currently under debate among scholars. In this course we'll use the term "Gnosticism" to designate a particular type of religious movement and worldview that emerged within the culture of the ancient Mediterranean world, and is represented in the writings we will examine. Crucial to these sources is an emphasis on the saving power of "*gnosis*," secret or esoteric knowledge, grounded in spiritual experience and in revelations which often take the form of mythic narratives of creation and redemption. One classic text of Christian Gnosticism, for example, states: "It is not baptism alone that makes us free, but the knowledge (*gnosis*) of who we are, what we have become; where we were; where we have been cast out of; where we are bound for; from what we are delivered; what birth is; and what rebirth is." [*Excerpts from Theodotus* 78.2]. Those who possess such "*gnosis*" understand themselves to have been redeemed from ignorance and evil and to have achieved salvation through their acquisition of *gnosis* and their participation in rituals of rebirth and redemption.

**Learning Goals:** This course will help students develop a coherent set of academic skills in the study of religion, as well as an interdisciplinary approach to work in the Humanities and Social Sciences. A central mission of the Religion Department is to enable students to become critically-informed, independent, and creative interpreters of some of the religious movements, sacred texts, ideas, and practices that have decisively shaped human experience. This course, like others in the Religion Department, is designed to help students understand how a religious movement develops and changes and how religious texts, symbols, and rituals help constitute communities and cultures.

- More specifically, the goals of this course are to develop the skills of reading Gnostic texts critically and to become familiar with the varieties of Gnostic thought, especially those of the Valentinian school, the Thomas traditions, Sethianism, and contemporary forms of *Gnosis*. In this course, students will develop skills in the critical analysis of the sacred texts, images, beliefs, and performances of the religious movement known as Gnosticism.
- We will also consider efforts to relate the evidence for "Gnosticism" to other varieties of religious thought, including Platonism, Christianity, and Judaism. Throughout the course, we'll explore the literary form of the texts, their uses of gender imagery, and their varying conceptions of *gnosis*, salvation, and union with the divine.

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## Required Readings

These books are available for purchase in Haverford College Bookstore or are available online:

- Bentley Layton, ed. *The Gnostic Scriptures*
- Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism: Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds*
- David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity*
- D. Unger, ed. *St. Irenaeus of Lyons. Book I: Against the Heresies*
- Additional readings available on the course web site and in class handouts.
  - Some of the readings linked to this web syllabus require Adobe Acrobat, Acrobat Reader, or Apple Preview.
- [Research Guide for the Study of Gnosticism](#) (to be updated)

### Recommended Readings:

- *Holy Bible*: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha
- [The Gnostic Society Library](#) (Nag Hammadi Library in English translations online)

## Course Requirements

- Preparation of all reading assignments before class; regular attendance in class and active participation in class discussion (10%).
- A weekly post of 2-3 paragraphs in the course Discussion Forum on Moodle, beginning the second or third week of the semester (20%).
- 2 short papers of textual analysis and interpretation. First paper due by 4 p.m. on Thursday, 10/6. Second paper due by 4 p.m. on Tuesday, 11/22 (40%).
- 1 final research paper of 12-15 pages, to be submitted in stages (30%) :
  - proposal; annotated bibliography; 5-page draft; final paper.
- [Fuller description of Course Requirements](#)

## Syllabus

### I. Introduction to "Gnosticism" as System of Thought and A Modern Construct

#### T 8/30 Introduction to the Course: What is Gnosticism? Definitions, Origins, Approaches

- Handout: [GNOSIS: Excerpts from various sources](#)
- [Notes](#) for First Class
- [Selected Definitions of "Gnosticism"](#)

#### Th 9/1 "Gnosticism" as System of Thought, Religious Movement, Modern Construct; Major Varieties of "Gnosticism"

- Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism*, Preface Chapters 1-3, 1-41
- David Brakke, "[Introduction](#)," and Chapter 1: "[Imagining 'Gnosticism' and Early Christianities](#)," [Notes to Chapter 1](#), *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity*
- Begin to familiarize yourself with the contents of Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism* and Layton's *Gnostic Scriptures*. See also the Gnostic Society Library online: [Online Resource on The Nag Hammadi Library and Gnosis Archive](#) (from Gnostic Society Library [GSL])
  - Look over one example of each "type" of Gnostic literature we'll be studying:
    - Thomasine: *The Gospel of Thomas* [NHL II.2 (Codex II, tractate 2)]
    - Sethian: *The Hypostasis of the Archons* [NHL II.4]
    - Valentinian: *The Fragments of Valentinus; The Gospel of Truth* [NHL I.3]

**Recommended for further reading:** [C. Markschies, "Gnosis: An Introduction", 1-27](#); Anne McGuire, "[Gnosis and Nag Hammadi](#)," *Routledge Companion to Early Christian Thought*, 2010

### II. Knowledge of the Self and Salvation in the Thomas Traditions

#### T 9/6 Self and Salvation in the Thomas Traditions: The Gospel of Thomas and The Hymn of the Pearl

- Denzey Lewis, "The Thomas Literature, The Gospel of Thomas," *Introduction*, 100-117
- Layton, "Historical Introduction," in B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (GS), 359-365
- [The Hymn of the Pearl](#), in Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 359-375
  - [Allegory of the Hymn of the Pearl](#)
- *The Gospel according to Thomas* [NHC II,2], in Layton, GS, 380-399; see also The Nag Hammadi Library in English (GSL)
- [Some Themes of the Gospel of Thomas](#)
- [Recommended for further reading: The Gospel of Thomas HomePage](#), by Stevan Davies

**Suggested Topic:** Consider the allegorical narrative Layton outlines in his introduction to the Hymn of the Pearl. Analyze one or more of the key figures or images as a symbolic term within the allegory.

**Suggested Topic:** Who is Jesus according to the Gospel of Thomas? How is he related to God? How is he related to his disciples? How does his teaching on the Kingdom differ from that of the Gospel of Mark?

#### Th 9/8 Creation and Redemption in the Gospel of Thomas

- Reread *The Gospel according to Thomas* [NHC II,2]
- [Genesis 1-3](#), with particular attention to Genesis 1:1-3; 1:26-27; 2:7
  - [Human Creation in Genesis 1-3](#) with key Hebrew and Greek Terms
- Elaine Pagels, "[Exegesis of Genesis 1 in the Gospels of Thomas and John](#)," *JBL* 118 (1999) 477-496
- **Recommended for further reading:** Richard Valantasis, "Introduction," *The Gospel of Thomas*, 3 parts
- [Valantasis, Part I](#); [Valantasis, Part II](#); [Valantasis, Part III](#)
- Other translations of GThomas available online:
- [Gospel of Thomas trans. by Thomas Lambdin \(GSL\)](#); [Gospel of Thomas trans. by Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer](#)

**Suggested Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) Analyse and interpret 2-3 of GT's Parables. 2) Analyse the representation of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden in GT. 3) Consider the relation of opposites and other kinds of difference -- such as beginning and end; inside and out; two and one; male and female. 4) How is the notion of redemption (or salvation) connected to the theme of creation in GT?

#### T 9/13 Finding the Hermeneia, Entering the Kingdom, and Knowing the Self in *The Gospel of Thomas*

- *The Gospel of Thomas*, reread closely with attention to themes of creation, the true self, and entering the Kingdom
- Harold Bloom, "[Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings'...A Reading](#)," in M. Meyer, ed. *The Gospel of Thomas*, 111-121

- **Recommended for further reading:** P.-H. Poirier, "The Writings Ascribed to Thomas and the Thomas Tradition," *NHL After 50 Years*, ed. J. Turner and A. McGuire; Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 119-141

**Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) Analyse and interpret the images of the Kingdom and their relation to the themes of gnosis, making the two into one, and salvation in the Gospel of Thomas. 2) Compare and contrast the interpretive approaches of E. Pagels and H. Bloom.

### III. The Creation of the 'Gnostic' World: Genesis, Plato, and the Myth of Sophia in 'Sethian' Gnosis

#### Th 9/15 Stories of Creation: Genesis, Wisdom Literature, and Plato

- Plato, *Timaeus*; Selections from [Part I](#) [Sections 17, 29-39]; [Part II](#) [Sections 40-46; 69-73]; [Part III](#) [Sections 69-73, 87-92]
- [Genesis 1-6](#)
  - [Key Terms in Genesis 1-3](#) - Hebrew and Greek; [The Language of Human Creation in Genesis 1-3](#)
- [George W. MacRae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth"](#)
  - [Selections from Wisdom literature](#), cited in MacRae
    - Look up the rest of the cited passages in the Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha
- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.29-30 on the Barbelo-Gnostics, in Unger, 93-95
- **Suggested Topic:** Analyse one or two elements in the Timaeus myth of creation. For example, what is the difference between Being and Becoming? What is the role of the Demiurge/Creator in Plato's myth?
- **Suggested Topic:** What are the key features of the Wisdom of God, according to the biblical texts cited by MacRae? Compare with the role of Wisdom/Sophia in the myth recounted by Irenaeus, AH I.29 or I.30.

#### T 9/20 Stories of Creation Retold: Genesis, Wisdom Literature, and Plato in Gnostic Myth: The Reality of the Rulers (HypArch)

- The Hypostasis of the Archons, or "The Reality of the Rulers," in Layton, GS. 65-76
  - [The Hypostasis of the Archons](#) at the Gnostic Society Library website
  - Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, xv-xvi, note in particular what Layton says about "classic gnostic (Sethian) scripture" on p. xv
- Denzey Lewis, Introduction, 131-149
- Irenaeus, AH I.29-30 on the Barbelo-Gnostics, in Unger, 93-95
- [Brakke, The Gnostics, chapter two: "Identifying the Gnostics and Their Literature."Notes to Chapter 2](#)
- Study Guides for HypArch
  - [Glossary of Technical Terms](#) in the Hypostasis of the Archons
  - [Key terms and passages in Genesis to compare with HypArch](#)
- Recommended for further reading:
  - Plato, Selections from the *Timaeus*, [Part I](#) [Sections 17, 29-39]; [Part II](#) [Sections 40-46; 69-73]; [Part III](#) [Sections 69-73, 87-92]
  - Philo of Alexandria, [Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis](#) and [On the Creation](#), Selections
- **Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) Compare and contrast the accounts of creation in Genesis 1-3, Wisdom literature, and HypArch with particular attention to: the structure and nature of the cosmos and its creator; the creation of the first humans, male and female. What are the major points of similarity and dissimilarity? What is the significance of these differences for understanding human life in the world? 2) Compare Irenaeus' summary of the teachings of the Gnostics (AH I.29, also known as the Barbelo-Gnostics) with The Hypostasis of the Archons. 3) Compare the representation of the Creator/Demiurge in Genesis, Plato, and HypArch.

#### Th 9/22 The Mythic World of the Hypostasis of the Archons: Ialdabaoth and his Offspring in the HypArch; "Sethianism"

- [Outline and Introductory Notes on the Reality of the Rulers](#) (in-class projection)
- *Reread The Hypostasis of the Archons* (HypArch) aka *The Reality of the Rulers* [NHC II.4] in GSL and Layton, GS 65-76
  - [HypArch at Gnostic Society Library](#) (GSL), trans. by B. Layton, but text is presented without his editorial notes and headings
  - [Hypostasis of the Archons](#), translated by Anne McGuire
- [3 Mythic Accounts of Creation: Plato, Genesis, HypArch in Parallel Columns](#). This web page sets out in parallel columns the creation accounts of Plato, Genesis, and the Hypostasis of the Archons.
- A. McGuire, ["The Virgin Whom the Forces did not Defile: Norea and the Virginal Spirits"](#) (uncorrected proofs, Layton festschrift)
- Recommended for further reading, Anne McGuire, ["Virginity and Subversion: Norea against the Powers in the Hypostasis of the Archons"](#) [pdf];

**Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) Read the selections from Irenaeus and HypArch closely alongside Genesis 1-6, focusing on the accounts of human creation in Gen 1:26-28 (P) and 2:7 ff. (J) and their gnostic parallels. 2) Who is the Creator in the Hypostasis of the Archons? How does he fit into the structure of the cosmos? How does this figure relate to the God of Genesis 1-3? 3) Who are Adam and Eve, and what is their relation to one another, to the Creator, and to the two realms in the HypArch? What is the significance of these differences for the reader's perspectives on the nature of the world, its creator, and the human self?

#### T 9/27 Adam, Eve, and their Descendants in the HypArch and the Apocalypse of Adam; The Sethian Hypothesis

- The Apocalypse of Adam [NHC V.5] in Layton, GS 52-6; The Three Tablets of Seth. Layton, 149-158
- [Key Terms in the Apocalypse of Adam](#)
- [Hans-Martin Schenke, "The Sethian System according to the Nag Hammadi Manuscripts"](#)
- Denzey Lewis, 118-130; 230-243
- Genesis 1-6 (review) Genesis 5-11: [Genealogies from Noah to Abram](#)
- Luther M. Martin, ["Genealogy and Sociology in The Apocalypse of Adam"](#) (pdf)

**Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) 1) Compare and contrast the roles of Adam, Eve, and/or Seth & Norea in the HypArch and the ApocAdam. What significance should be attached to the differences in their depiction? 2) Evaluate the arguments of Martin on genealogy and sociology. How useful is his argument on genealogy and group identity in ApocAdam? 3) What is the relation between the categories of existence (matter, soul, spirit) and the categories of genealogy or group membership in either the ApocAdam or the HypArch.

**Th 9/29 Sophia and the Creator in the Apocryphon of John: The Origins of the Gnostic Sophia Myth**

- *The Apocryphon of John*, in GSL and Layton, 23-51
- The Construction of the Divine World in ApocJn: [ApocJn Charts](#)
- Denzey Lewis, 150-165
- Review Luther Martin essay and conceptions of the redeemed "Seed" with reference to both divine prototype and communal identity in Apocalypse of Adam and HypArch. Compare with ApocJohn's more explicitly "Christian" notions of redemption.
  - Recommended: Excerpts from Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*
    - [Part 1](#) from Chapters 1-2: "The Ideal: The Divine Realm" and "The Problem: Rupture"
  - Recommended: Nils A. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia," *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol. II.

**Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) Consider MacRae's argument about the Jewish background of the Sophia myth in light of your reading of the primary texts. What are its strengths? What is not accounted for? 2) Consider the relation between "Gnostic" representations of Sophia (and Christ) and the early Christian use of Wisdom/Sophia traditions in the conceptualization of Jesus as the pre-existent Word (Logos) of God; 3) What do you make of Pagels' argument about the relation between the Creator and attitudes toward such religious authorities as the bishops? Does this argument have relevance for your thinking about the social contexts of the primary texts (HypArch, ApocAdam, or ApocJohn)?

**T 10/4 The Relation of Sophia and Christ; Adam, Eve, and Seth in the Apocryphon of John**

- The Apocryphon of John, Layton, 23-51
- Gospel of John 1; Irenaeus, AH 1.29-30 in Layton, 163-181
- Excerpts from Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*
  - [Part 2](#) from Chapters 3-4: "The Solution: Salvation" and "Utopian Desire, Social Critique and Resistance"
- Recommended for further reading: Birger Pearson, "The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature," *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 52-83
  - [Pearson, "Figure of Seth," Part 1](#) (pages 52-59) [PDF](#)
  - [Pearson, "Figure of Seth," Part 2](#) (pages 60-69) [PDF](#)
  - [Pearson, "Figure of Seth," Part 3](#) (pages 70-83) [PDF](#)

**Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) Compare the account of Irenaeus, esp. in 1.29, with the ApocJohn. What do you make of the similarities and differences? 2) Analyse the depiction of the Christ figure/s in ApocJohn. Compare with the prologue of the Gospel of John and with Wisdom imagery discussed on Tuesday. What does this text say of Christ's role in creation? in redemption? What is his relation to Sophia?

**Th 10/6 Myth and Ritual in the Apocryphon of John and in the "Sethian" or "Gnostic" Movement**

- [Brakke, chap. 3, "The Myth and Rituals of the Gnostic School of Thought", Notes](#)
- Review [Hans-Martin Schenke, "The Sethian System according to the Nag Hammadi Manuscripts"](#)
- Bentley Layton, "Historical Introduction to Classic Gnostic Scripture," GS 5-22
- "Gnostics," "Sethians," and "Archontics," according to Porphyry, Epiphanius, and others, in Layton, 182-214; review passages on "Gnostics" and "Ophites" in Layton, 163-181
- Consider all the evidence for mythic system and ritual practice among the texts of the "Sethian" or "Gnostic" corpus

**First Interpretive Essay** of 5-6 pages due, Thursday, 3/6, 4 p.m. Please submit electronically in Word to [amcguire@haverford.edu](mailto:amcguire@haverford.edu).

**FALL BREAK****T 10/18 and Th 10/20 Language, Myth, Ritual, and Visionary Experience in Sethian Gnosticism**

- *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* in Layton, 101-120
- [An Outline of the Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit](#)
- Denzey Lewis, 166-174
- Patricia Cox Miller, "[In Praise of Nonsense](#)," *Ancient Mediterranean Spirituality*
- **Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) Examine the use of vowels and other formulae in the Holy Book and the 3 Tablets. What sort of theory of language, symbol, and ritual appears to underlie these texts? 2) How does the evidence for ritual practices and communal self-understanding in the 'Sethian' texts we've read affect your view of Schenke's argument about the Sethian corpus, the Sethian system, and a Sethian social group?

**T 10/25 The Female Voice of the Divine: Language, Spirit, and Wisdom in *Thunder, Perfect Mind***

- *Thunder, Perfect Mind* [NHC VI.2] GSL and Layton, 77-85 [I suggest that you look at at least one other translation]
  - [Thunder, Perfect Mind, trans. George MacRae \(GSL translation\)](#)
    - [MacRae's translation with a commentary by "Anonymous"](#); linked to a radical "Thought Crime" web site that includes references to Philip K. Dick, among others
  - [Thunder, Perfect Mind, trans. A. McGuire](#)
  - Review the hymn of Pronoia in *ApocJohn*, 30.11-31.31 (Layton, 50-51)
- Denzey Lewis, 191-206
- Bentley Layton, "[The Riddle of the Thunder](#): The Function of Paradox in a Gnostic Text from Nag Hammadi"
- Voices Divine: [Discourses of Isis, the Lord God, and Wisdom](#)
- Reread relevant portions of Patricia Cox Miller, "[In Praise of Nonsense](#)," *Ancient Mediterranean Spirituality*
- Anne McGuire, "[Women, Gender, and Gnosis in Gnostic Texts and Traditions](#)," *Women and Christian Origins*
- **Recommended for further reading:** Recommended: George W. MacRae, "The Ego Proclamation in Gnostic Sources," *Studies in the New Testament and Gnosticism*, 203-217



**Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) Can you discern a theory of language and symbol in the Gospel of the Egyptians, Thunder, and/or Trimorphic Protennoia? Look to Miller's article for some help on this question. 2) Who is the speaker in Thunder, Perfect Mind? Compare with the self-proclamations of Jesus in the Gospel of John, Wisdom in Proverbs, and Isis in the Cyme aretology. Compare and contrast Layton's argument about the identity of the speaker with Miller's discussion of Thunder at the beginning of her article. 3) What is the relation between the speaker in Trimorphic Protennoia and the speaker at the end of the ApocJohn? What relation does each have to the Invisible Spirit, to Barbelo, to the Anointed, Seth, Jesus, or any other divine figure?

#### IV. Creation and Redemption in the Thought of Valentinus and his School

##### T 10/25 Language, Creation, and Redemption in the Fragments of Valentinus

- Layton, Historical Introduction, GS 217-222
- Denzey Lewis, 63-74
- Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, I.Preface and I.1-3; I.11 in Unger, 21-30; see also Layton, 223-227
  - Unger, Introduction, 1-11
- Valentinus, The Fragments (Layton, GS,229-249 [Focus on Fragments C, D, F, G, H, and Summer Harvest]
  - [Themes of Creation and Redemption in Fragments C and D](#)
- **Recommended for further reading:** G.C. Stead, "In Search of Valentinus," *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol. I, ed. B. Layton, pp. 75-102. Harold Bloom, "Lying Against Time: Gnosis, Poetry, Criticism," *Rediscovery*, 57-72 ; Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 239-265 [Cosmos in Greek and Gnostic speculation]

**Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) What are the distinctive characteristics of Valentinus's expression and thought? Compare his account of the creation of Adam with those found in the Sethian and Thomas texts. 2) Who is Jesus according to the fragments of Valentinus?

##### Th 10/27 The Thought of Valentinus: Fragments and *The Gospel of Truth*

- Reread the Fragments of Valentinus, Layton, GS,229-249
- [Brakke, "Unity and Diversity in Second-Century Rome," Notes to Chapter 4](#)
- Harold Bloom, "[Lying Against Time: Gnosis, Poetry, Criticism,](#)" *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, ed. B. Layton
- *The Gospel of Truth* (NHL I,3 & XII,2) GS 250-264
- **Recommended for further reading:** David Dawson, "Valentinus: The Apocalypse of the Mind," *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*.
- **Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) What evidence do you find to support the argument that the author of the Fragments of Valentinus is the author of the Gospel of Truth? What similarities do you find in style and/or content? 2) Compare the significance of Jesus in the Fragments and the GTruth with the role he plays in the Sethian and Thomas texts. 3) How are New Testament images of Jesus reinterpreted in the Gospel of Truth? Consider in particular his role as a teacher and the significance attached to his death & resurrection. 4) What is the relation between individual experience and the Entirety in the Gospel of Truth? How does the retelling of the Sophia myth as a mythic narrative of Error suggest both a personal /psychological and a universal/cosmic interpretation of the myth?

##### T 11/1 The Mystical Theology of Valentinus: *The Gospel of Truth*

- *The Gospel of Truth* (NHL I,3 & XII,2) GS 250-264
- Denzey Lewis, 88-99
- Patricia Cox Miller, "[Words with an Alien Voice](#): Gnostics, Scripture, and Canon"
- **Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) What evidence do you find to support the argument that the author of the Fragments of Valentinus is the author of the Gospel of Truth? What similarities do you find in style and/or content? 2) Compare the significance of Jesus in the Fragments and the GTruth with the role he plays in the Sethian and Thomas texts. 3) How are New Testament images of Jesus reinterpreted in the Gospel of Truth? Consider in particular his role as a teacher and the significance attached to his death & resurrection. 4) What is the relation between individual experience and the Entirety in the Gospel of Truth? How does the retelling of the Sophia myth as a mythic narrative of Error suggest both a personal /psychological and a universal/cosmic interpretation of the myth?

##### Th 11/3 The Teachings of the Valentinian School: Ptolemy's Letter to Flora and Ptolemy's Version of the Sophia Myth

- Layton, "Historical Introduction," GS 267-75
- Ptolemy's Epistle to Flora, 306-315; compare with GMatthew 5-8
- Ismo Dunderburg, "[The School of Valentinus](#)" (pdf)
- **Topics for Study/Papers:** 1) Compare Ptolemy's version of the Sophia myth with those found in the Sethian texts and in Valentinus's writings. 2) How are the various parts of the Law distinguished in Ptolemy's Letter to Flora? On what basis and with what implications?
- [Suggested Topics for Final Research Paper](#); Proposal due Thursday, 11/17.
- **Look over the suggested topics, but also feel free to propose your own topic for your final research paper. Prepare to present your proposal in class on Thursday, 11/17.**
- [Research Guide for the Study of Gnosticism](#)

##### T 11/8 Ptolemy's Version of the Sophia Myth

- Irenaeus, AH I.1-11; focus on Irenaeus's presentation of Ptolemy's account of the Sophia myth
- [A Summary of Ptolemy's Version of the Sophia Myth](#);
- [A Short Outline of Ptolemy's Version of the Sophia Myth](#)
- [Brakke, ch/ 5, "Strategies of Self-Differentiation," Notes to Chapter 5](#)

##### Th 11/10 Irenaeus and Clement against the Valentinians; The Gospel of Philip

- Irenaeus, AH I.Preface, I.10, I.22 in Unger, 21-22, 48-51; 80-81

- Elaine Pagels, "[One God, One Bishop.](#)" *The Gnostic Gospels*
- [Clement of Alexandria, "On Marriage," \*Miscellanies \(Stromateis\)\*, Book III.1-2, 4, 7-9](#)
- Review Denzey Lewis on Gospel of Philip
- *The Gospel of Philip* [NHC II.3] GS 325-353
  - [Notes on the Gospel of Philip: The Bridal Chamber](#)
  - [Handout on GPhil](#) prepared by A. McGuire for talk on Mysteries of Union in GPhil
- **Suggested Topic:** What are the primary criticisms Irenaeus levels against the Valentinians? To what extent are they theological? social? ethical? political? sexual? Do you think Irenaeus' critique of the Marcosians' sacramental and sexual practices is likely to be true or a slanderous polemic?
- **Suggested Topic:** Scholars continue to debate the significance of the Valentinians' use of sexual and marital imagery. Is it purely spiritual and symbolic, or is it related to the practices of marriage and sexual union among the Valentinians, to which Clement of Alexandria attests.
- **Suggested Topic:** Examine closely the GPhil's use of New Testament images and themes, especially those concerning baptism, eucharist, marriage, and resurrection.
- **Suggested Topic:** Analyse the GPhil's reinterpretation of Genesis 1-3; compare with rereadings of Genesis in GThomas, HypArch, and/or ApocJohn.

#### T 11/15 Ritual, Language, and the Imagery of Salvation in The Gospel of Philip

- [Clement of Alexandria, "On Marriage," \*Miscellanies \(Stromateis\)\*, Book III.1-2, 4-5, 7-9](#) (the version I posted on Moodle)
- *The Gospel of Philip* [NHC II.3] GSL and GS 325-353
  - [Notes on the Gospel of Philip: The Bridal Chamber](#)
  - [Handout on GPhil](#) prepared by A. McGuire for talk on Mysteries of Union in GPhil
  - Recommended: Review the imagery of Bridegroom/Bride/Bridal Chamber in AH I.7.1 (Ptolemy's myth) and in Irenaeus' account of the teachings and practices of the Valentinian Marcus, Irenaeus, AH I.13.1-7 and I.21 (Unger, 55-59; 77-80)
- "[Introduction](#)," [PDF] *The Gospel of Philip Annotated and Explained*, by S. Davies and Andrew Philip Smith
- [Elaine Pagels, "Ritual in the Gospel of Philip," \*The Nag Hammadi Library After 50 Years\*](#), The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years, ed. J. Turner & A. McGuire, 280-291
- Recommended: Jorunn Buckley and Deirdre Good, "[Sacramental Language and Verbs of Generating, Creating, and Begetting in the Gospel of Philip](#)" in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (1997) 1-19; Anne McGuire, "[Mysteries of Union: Language, Ritual, and Gender in the Gospel of Philip](#)"
- **Suggested Topic:** Examine closely the GPhil's use of bridal imagery, esp. its sayings about the bridal chamber. How do the text's images of union relate to other kinds of union in GPhil?
- **Suggested Topic:** Scholars continue to debate the significance of the GPhil's use of sexual and marital imagery. Some argue the language of union in the bridal chamber is purely spiritual and symbolic, while others argue that it bears a direct relation to the practices of marriage and sexual union among Valentinian Christians, to which Clement of Alexandria, Strom. III.1 attests. What do you make of the evidence of the Gospel of Philip?
- **Suggested Topic:** Consider Patricia Cox Miller's analysis of theories of language in the Valentinian Gospel of Truth. To what extent does GPhilip provide evidence of similar theorizing about language and meaning?

#### Th 11/17 Mary Magdalene in the New Testament, The Gospel of Philip, and the Gospel of Mary

- Due in class: One-paragraph proposal for final research paper
- The Gospel of Philip, choose two passages you find particularly interesting or challenging for discussion
- [Mary Magdalene in the New Testament](#)
  - Gospel of Mark 15:40-16:9; Gospel of Matthew 27:56-28:1; Gospel of Luke 8:2, 24:10; Gospel of John 19:25, 20:1-18
- **Pope Gregory the Great, Homily 33, 591 CE** Authorizes the Composite Mary Magdalene
  - **Homily 33:** "We believe that this woman [Mary Magdalene] is Luke's female sinner, the woman John calls Mary, and that Mary from whom Mark says seven demons were cast out. And what did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices?...It is clear, brothers, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts."
- [Images of Mary Magdalene](#)
- [The Gospel of Mary](#), ed. and trans. by Karen L. King
  - Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, 3-34; Chapters 4-9 (pp. 37-90) *The Gospel of Mary* in Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, 3-34; Chapters 4-9 (pp. 37-90)
- Denzey Lewis, 258-272
- Recommended: Karen L. King, "[The Place of the Gospel of Philip in the Context of Early Christian Claims about Jesus' Marital Status](#)," *New Testament Studies* 59 (2013) 565-587
- The Controversy over the "New Coptic Papyrus Fragment"
  - [The Gospel of Jesus' Wife Website at Harvard Divinity School](#)
  - Karen L. King, "[Jesus said to them, "My Wife. . .": A New Coptic Papyrus Fragment](#)," *HTR* 107 (2014) 131-159.
  - The Retraction: to be added
- See also articles online: [Summary at GThomas web site](#), [New York Times](#), [Boston Globe](#), [Harvard Magazine](#)
- **Mary Magdalene in Nag Hammadi Texts:** Antti Marjanen, "[Introduction](#)," "[Conclusion](#)," [Mary Magdalene: A Beloved Disciple](#), in *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother*, ed. D. Good
- **Suggested Topic:** How do the teachings of the Gospel of Mary compare with those of other texts we've read this semester? What is the significance of Mary's vision and message?
- **Suggested Topic:** Consider the representation of the debate between Mary and Peter in the GMary in relation to debates about visionary experience and gender roles in second-century Christianity.

#### T 11/22 No Class: Attending Annual Meeting of American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature

**Due Tuesday, 11/22 by 4 p.m.:** [Interpretive Essay #2](#). Please submit by email attachment, saved as "yourname2.docx."

### Thanksgiving Break

### T 11/29 Representations of Mary Magdalene and Gnosticism in Ancient and Contemporary Culture

- Reread The Gospel of Mary
- Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, Chapters 10-14 (pp. 93-190)
- Review Mary Magdalene in Gospel of Philip sayings 14, 28, 48; Gospel of Thomas 114
- [Images of Mary Magdalene](#) and Excerpts from *Secrets of Mary Magdalene* video to be shown in class
- Recommended: Karen King, "[Letting Mary Magdalene Speak](#)," and "[Women in Early Christianity: The New Discoveries](#)," [PBS Frontline: From Jesus to Christ](#)
- **Suggested Topic:** Choose a representation of Mary Magdalene or Gnosticism for discussion.

### Th 12/1 and T 12/6 Gnosticism in Contemporary Culture

- Due in class on Th 12/1: preliminary bibliography for final research paper. This bibliography should consist of 6-10 recent studies (journal articles, books, book chapters) on the topic of your research paper
- Readings to be selected by student interest; possible topics include: Contemporary Gnostic churches; Gnosticism in popular fiction and film; Jungian approaches to Gnostic myth, etc.
- For this week: No posts required, but each student will make a brief presentation on a contemporary manifestation of Gnosis.
- **Gnosis in Contemporary Culture**
- Gnosis in the Movies: [Noah](#); The Matrix; The Truman Show; The DaVinci Code, etc.
- The Fiction and Films of Philip K. Dick:
  - [Wikipedia Entry on PKD](#); [VALIS Quotes](#); Haverford Thesis on [Human and Divine Redemption in VALIS](#) by Eric Hale
- [The God Above God web site](#); Aeon Byte Gnostic Radio, Miguel Conner
- David Tibet sites to be added
- [Overview of Gnosticism in Contemporary Times](#) from Wikipedia
- **Web Pages of Contemporary Gnostic Churches and Movements** - Select a few of the webpages below and explore. I encourage you also to do your own web searches and email the class with any particular links you discover.
  - [The Ecclesia Gnostica](#) Home Page
    - [Ecclesia Gnostic Liturgical Calendar](#) {choose a few other links as well from the home page}
  - [Apostolic Johannite Church](#), Home Page
    - [St. Eve's Apostolic Johannite Church](#)
    - [Noetic Apprehension](#): Blog of Mar Johannes of Calgary, Canada
  - [Sophia Fellowship Online Community](#) Home Page
  - [Gnostic Sanctuary: Ecclesia Gnostica Mysteriorum](#)
  - [Ordo Templi Orientis](#) website; [Wikipedia entry on OTO](#)
    - [Ecclesia Gnostica Catholic](#)
  - [New Aeon Socialist Movement](#)

### Th 12/8 Presentation and Discussion of Research Topics

- **Due in Class: Draft of a 5-6 page excerpt from your final research paper with annotated bibliography.**
- This final class session will be devoted to discussion of Research Papers in progress
- The final paper is due by Friday, 12/16.

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