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Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices

Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixty

Edited by

Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied
and John D. Turner



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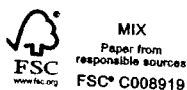
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FROM THE BOWELS OF HELL TO DRACO:
THE MYSTERIES OF THE PERATICS

APRIL D. DECONICK
Rice University

We alone have known that genesis is necessary, and we alone have known the roads by which humans have entered into the cosmos. We have been instructed precisely so we alone can pass through and traverse mortality.¹

Μόνοι δέ ἡμεῖς οἱ τῆς ἀνάγκης τῆς γενέσεως ἐγνωκότες, καὶ τὰς ὁδοὺς δι' ὧν εἰσελήλυθεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἀκριβῶς δεδιδαγμένοι, διελθεῖν καὶ περᾶσαι τὴν φθορὰν μόνοι δυνάμεθα.

So says the second-century Gnostic writer whom Hippolytus quotes and identifies as a member of the Peratics, literally the “Traversers.” Hippolytus tells us that he is resolved to publish “their forbidden mysteries (τὰ ἀπόρρητα μυστήρια).”² This description is not a casual remark on the part of Hippolytus, nor can we easily dismiss it as a heresiological misrepresentation of the Peratics or a secondary “alien” interpretation superimposed on the Gnostic tradition by outsiders.³ The Peratic author himself makes the claim that his group has received instruction in exclusive knowledge about the precise paths that the soul journeys when incarnating, and then uses to exit when traversing mortality. He also states that when the Son draws the purified soul up into the Father’s world during “the mystery of Eden (<τὸ> μυστήριον Ἐδέμ),” the initiates exit the cosmos through the river that flowed out of Eden as “the exactly copied perfect race (τὸ ἐξεικονισμένον τέλειον γένος).”⁴

¹ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.1 (Miroslav Marcovich, ed., *Hippolytus. Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* [PTS; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986], 182); Eng. trans. mine.

² Hipp. *Haer.* 5.12.1 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 173).

³ A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology against Its Graeco-Roman Background* (WUNT 44; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1987), 125, 139. Cf. Hans-Martin Schenke, *Der Gott Mensch' in der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 59; Walter Burkert, *Homo necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 278.

⁴ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.9; 5.17.10 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 183, 187); Eng. trans. mine. Thus I disagree with the contemporary opinion that, apart from the Naassenes who were an exception, the Greek mysteries did not impact Gnostic formation because Gnostic groups were too aware of their Judaeo-Christian roots to have acknowledged inspiration from

I find it very significant that Hippolytus' own description of the Peratics as a mystery cult appears to be sympathetic with the Peratic author he quotes. Both authors use language that belongs to mystery initiation, secret traditions and soul journeys when describing the Peratic movement. For instance, the Greek adjective ἀπόρρητα is commonly used to describe the secrecy of the initiation, which was "not-to-be-spoken" or shared outside the group, while τελειόω and its cognates are descriptors for the "accomplishment" of the mysteries and the "perfecting" of the initiate.⁵ From the evidence that we have about a variety of ancient initiations or "mysteries (μυστήρια)," it is suggestive (although controversial) that one of the functions of cult initiations was as a "trial run" for the afterlife journey that began in the underworld at the moment of death. A big appeal of initiations was their promise to alleviate the horrors of hell when the person finally died, an opinion already expressed in Plato: "And it seems that also those who established the *teletai* for us are not incompetent but in fact have all along been speaking in riddles (in saying) that whoever arrives in Hades as uninitiate and non-participant in the *teletē* will lie in mud, but he who has been both purified and has participated in the *teletē*, upon arrival there, will dwell with gods."⁶

Plutarch even compares death with initiation, suggesting that the death experience itself is like initiation into the great mysteries.⁷ At the death moment, "the soul suffers an experience like those who are undergoing initiation into the great mysteries *teletai*," he says.

And so the verbs *teletân* (die) and *teleisthai* (be initiated), and the actions they denote, have a similarity. In the beginning there are wanderings astray, tiresome running in circles, and frightening paths through darkness that

their main competitors, the mystery cults (cf. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection*, 125, 139). In fact, the opposite is more likely the case. Developing their competitors' strengths would have been a much more successful strategy than ignoring them, since it would have offered a religiosity already familiar and attractive to new converts.

⁵ Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 9–11.

⁶ Plato, *Phaedo* 69c (E. A. Duke et al., eds., *Platonis Opera* [OCT; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], 107). On this passage, see Kevin Clinton, "Stages of Initiation," in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos; New York: Routledge, 2003), 55–56.

⁷ Cf. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection*, 152–53, who points out that "death is compared to an initiation and not *vice versa*" as if this means that, while death might have been viewed as an initiation, one cannot appeal to *this* text to support the opinion that initiation was viewed as death. This is nonsense. Metaphorical language, such as used in this text, equivocates the two. Death is similar to the experience of initiation *only because* when initiation is undergone, the initiate 'dies' and journeys to the underworld.

lead nowhere. Then immediately before the end, all the terrible things, shivering and trembling and sweat and amazement. But afterwards, a wonderful light meets the wanderer, open country and meadows are there to welcome the wanderer. In that place there are voices and dances and solemn, sacred sounds and holy visions. Amidst these, the initiate, now perfect, set free and loose from all bondage, walks about, crowned with a wreath, celebrating the festival together with the other sacred and pure people. He looks down on the uninitiated, unpurified mob, the mob of living people who, herded together in mud and deep mire, trample one another down and in their fear of death cling to their ills, since they believe in the blessings of the other world.⁸

As my research into a variety of Gnostic movements has progressed over the years, I have come to the conclusion that these types of initiation secrets lie at the heart of antique Gnostic movements. I offer this brief examination of the Peratics as the first in a long-term series on the subject of Gnostic initiation as I attempt to chart the precise katabatic and astrological roads into and out of the cosmos that the Gnostics claim to have discovered and traveled during their initiations. Part of the reason that these journeys have not been previously mapped by scholars is the direct result of the general modern perception that astrology is a "pseudoscience" at best. At worst it has been understood as a sign of a decline into irrationality and ignorance, a "disease" that infected the "folk" forms of religion. Scholars have been resolute that mainstream religions did not participate in astrology because they actively refuted it. Astrology has been so trivialized in the Academy that *even* the "heretics," the "philosophically-inclined" Gnostics merely "borrowed" astrological language. As a thin secondary patina, it was hardly relevant to the development of their ideas and practices, which could be better understood by investigating philosophy.⁹

⁸ Plut. fr. 178 (Francis H. Sandbach, ed., *Plutarch's Moralia: XV, Fragments* [LCL 429; London: William Heinemann, 1969], 317–19, with some alteration) from Stob. *Ecl.* 4.52.49.

⁹ Only recently have scholars become aware of this bias. Charlesworth points out that the view that astrology in the Roman period is a 'pseudo-Science' is misleading and anachronistic (James H. Charlesworth, "Jewish Astrology in the Talmud, Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Early Palestinian Synagogues," *HTR* 70 [1977]: 183–200 at 199n57). Barton discusses astrology as a "science" in the ancient world (Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* [London: Routledge, 1994]). For other recent academic treatments of astrology and the integral role they play in Judaism and Christianity, see Kocku von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie: Jüdische und christliche Beiträge zum antiken Zeitverständnis* (RVV 49; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000); idem, "Jewish and Christian Astrology in Late Antiquity—A New Approach," *Numen* 47 (2000): 1–40; Tim Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology* (PS 6; New York: Peter Lang, 2007); Mladen Popović, *Reading the Human*

So marginalized is this astrological material that Werner Foerster, in his famous collection of patristic testimonies first published in English translation in 1972, neglects to translate an entire chapter of a Gnostic astrological book written by a Peratic. In the middle of Hippolytus' testimony on the Peratics, when Hippolytus is quoting one of their texts, Foerster writes in the blank space marking his omission: "The rest of c. 14 is not translated; it presents further astrological statements which introduce divine names and legendary characters without contributing material essentially relevant to gnosticism."¹⁰ The projection of our modern perception of astrology onto the past may explain why the Peratics as a group are so neglected that, according to the standard Nag Hammadi bibliography, the whole of scholarship on the Peratics includes three articles and a few encyclopedia entries written between 1949 and 2009—in sixty years, by my count, 55 pages total.¹¹

From the information I have been able to cull from Hippolytus and the Peratic book he excerpts, I have come to see that the Peratics' initiation journey was structured around two, perhaps even three, mysteries or stages of initiation. The first mystery or stage was the sublunar journey

Body: *Physiognomics and Astrology in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Hellenistic-Early Roman Period Judaism* (STDJ 67; Leiden: Brill, 2007).

¹⁰ Werner Foerster, ed., *Patristic Evidence* (vol 1 of *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*; trans. Robert McL. Wilson; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 286. MacMahon provides an English translation of chapter 14 in A. Cleveland Coxe, ed., *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyrian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix* (ANF 5; 1868; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). Although MacMahon interacts with Duncker and Schneidewin (*S. Hippolyti episcopi et martyris Refutationis omnium haeresium librorum decem quae supersunt* [Göttingen: Dieterichianis, 1859]), and Cruice (*Philosophumena, e, Kata pason aireseon elenchus* [Paris: Typographeo imperiali, 1860]), his translation is inferior, based mainly on the *editio princeps* of the *Elenchos* IV–X printed in 1851 under the editorship of Miller as a tract from Origen. In 1921, Legge made a second English translation based on Cruice's edition. The most recent edition by Marcovich, who views the Parisinus ms. as more corrupt than previous editors, was published in 1986. My work interacts with Marcovich's edition.

¹¹ Alfonso M. di Nola, "Perati," in *Enciclopedia delle Religioni* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1972), 41580–82. Pierre-Thomas Camelot, "Pérates," in *Catholicisme: Hier, Aujourd'hui, Demain* (ed. Gerard Mathon et al.; Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1985), 103219; Josep Montserrat-Torrents, "Les pérates," in *Pléroma: Salus cornis; homenaje a Antonio Orbe, S.J.* (ed. Eugenio Romero-Pose; Compostellanum 34; Santiago de Compostela, 1990), 229–42; Michel Tardieu, "The Perates and Their Gnostic Interpretation of Paganism," in *Mythologies* (ed. Yves Bonnefoy and Wendy Doniger; trans. Gerald Honigsblum; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2:680–82; A. Magris, "L'esegesi della setta ofitica dei Perati: Analisi di Ippolito, Haer. V,16," *Apocrypha* 14 (2003): 193–223; Winrich Alfred Löhr, "Perates," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 2:934–940. Cf. David M. Scholer, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1948–1969* (NHS 1; Leiden: Brill, 1971), 70; idem, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1970–1994* (NHMS 32; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 168–69; idem, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1995–2006* (NHMS 65; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 92.

through Hades. The second involved the celestial journey through the planetary spheres and the Zodiac. This second mystery or stage of initiation culminated in a transcendent journey through the divine realm above and beyond the universe. This initiation was a trial run for the soul, anticipatory of the death journey. It was meant to introduce the soul to the proper path it would take at death, and to teach the soul the proper charms and invocations to secure safe passage through the threatening realms of the dead and the demons who ruled the skies.

The Book of The Suburbs up to the Aither

The Peratic book that Hippolytus excerpts is *The Suburbs up to the Aither*. The title suggests that the book describes the regions of space between earth and the moon, *aither* delineating here the "air" that originally rose up on the winds and formed the heavenly atmosphere.¹² In cosmological terms, the suburban region depicted is the sublunar sphere, consisting of the earth and Tartarus at the center of the earth, the skies and air above it, the clouds and fire in the atmosphere, all the way up to the firmament.

Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.14.1–10¹³

5.14.1 Δοκεῖ οὖν παρατάξει μίαν τινὰ τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς δοξαζομένων βίβλων, ἐν ἧ λέγει:
"Ἐγὼ φωνῆ ἐξυπνισμοῦ ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τῆς νυκτός.

λοιπὸν ἀρχομαι γυμνοῦν τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ Χάους δύναμιν.
ἡ δύναμις τοῦ ἀβυσσικοῦ θολοῦ,
ἡ τὸν πηλὸν ἀναβαστάζουσα τοῦ ἀφθάρτου ἀχανοῦς διύργου,
ἡ τοῦ σπασματος ὅλη δύναμις ὑδατόχρους ἀεικίνητος,
φέρουσα¹⁴ τὰ μένοντα,
κατέχουσα τὰ τρέμοντα,

Therefore it seems good to quote one of the books which is praised among them, in which it says:

"I am the voice of the one who has awakened from sleep in the realm of night.

Now I begin to struggle with the Power that has sprung from chaos, the Power of the abyss of mud, the (Power) that supports the clay of the boundless expanse swollen with water, the utter Power of the earthquake, watery-green, continually moving, holding up what is firm, holding down what quakes,

¹² For a discussion of *aither* as 'air', see Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 15–35.

¹³ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.14.1–10 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 177–80), although I do not accept all of the emendations in his edition; Eng. trans. mine.

¹⁴ Before φέρουσα Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 177: *addidi* <ή>.

ἀπολύουσα τὰ ἐρχόμενα,
 κουρφίζουσα τὰ γέμοντα,
 καθαιρούσα τὰ αὔξοντα,
 πιστῆ¹⁵ οἰκονόμος τοῦ ἴχνους τῶν ἀέρων,
 ἢ τὰ ἀνερευγόμενα ἀπὸ τῶν δώδεκα
 ὀφθαλμῶν¹⁶ <τῆς> ἐντολῆς ἀπολαύουσα,
 σφραγίδα¹⁷ δηλοῦσα πρὸς τὴν μετ' αὐτῆς
 οἰκονομοῦσαν
 τῶν ἐπιφερομένων ἀοράτων ὑδάτων
 δύναμιν, ἐκλήθη Θάλασσα.

5.14.2 ταύτην τὴν δύναμιν ἢ ἀγνωσία
 ἐκάλεσε Κρόνον, δεσμοῖς φρουρούμενον,
 ἐπεὶ ἔσφιγγε τὸ σύμπλεγμα τοῦ πυκνοῦ
 καὶ ὀμιχλώδους,
 ἀδήλου¹⁸ σκοτεινοῦ Ταρτάρου.
 ταύτης ἐγένοντο κατ' εἰκόνα Κηφεύς,
 Προμηθεύς, Ἰαπετός.

5.14.3 δύναμις πεπιστευμένη τὴν
 Θάλασσαν, ἀρσενόθηλυς·
 ἢ τὸν ἀνατρέχοντα συριγμὸν ἀπὸ τῶν
 δώδεκα στομάτων τοῖς δώδεκα αὐλλοσκοῖς
 ἀρμόζουσα·
 δ<ι>αχνεῖ λεπτύ<ν>ουσα καὶ καθαιρεῖ
 τὴν κατέχουσαν λάβρον¹⁹ ἀναφορὰν·

καὶ σφραγίζει ἀτραπῶν²⁰ ὁδοὺς αὐτῆς,
 πρὸς τὸ μὴ πολεμήσαι ἢ ἐναλλάξαι τὸ²¹ μὴ
 δι²² αὐτῆς·

releasing what is to come,
 reducing what is full,
 purging what grows large,
 a fluid overseer of the trail of mists,
 losing what is spewing up from the twelve
 eyes of the law,
 putting a seal on the power with him,
 regulating
 the unseen waters hovering above, called
 Thalassa.

The ignorant call this Power “Kronos,”
 guarded with chains,
 since he bound together tightly what is
 interwoven of the dense and steamy,
 the dim dark Tartarus.
 In the image of this Power were born
 Cēpheus, Prometheus, (and) Iapetus.

The Power committed to Thalassa is
 male-female.
 The whistling rising upward from the
 twelve mouths in the twelve small pipes
 is harmoniously tuned.
 (The Power of Thalassa) disperses and
 purges the violent return by weakening
 and restraining [it].
 And it seals its paths from a straight route,
 lest hostility form against (the straight
 route) or not divert (the route) through
 Thalassa.

¹⁵ Before πιστῆ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178: *addidi* <ἢ>.

¹⁶ Cruice ὀφθαλμῶν = πηγῶν based on the reference to Exod 15:27 and Num 33:9 where twelve fountains פְּיָ of Elim appear. The Hebrew פְּיָ can mean both “eye” and “fountain.” There may have been a translation error from Hebrew to Greek when ὀφθαλμῶν was chosen instead of πηγῶν. See: Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178.

¹⁷ Before σφραγίδα Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178: *addidi* <ἢ>.

¹⁸ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178: *addidi* <καί>.

¹⁹ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178: *supplevi* <ἄμβρον>.

²⁰ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178 reads: <σ>ατραπῶν. But this correction does not fit the context which is describing the power that Thalassa has to dispense the water streaming up from the underworld.

²¹ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178 reads: τό<πους>. P: τό.

²² Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178 *supplevi* <ασημαινούσης>.

θυγάτηρ Τυφωνική, πιστὴ φύλαξ ὑδάτων
 παντοίων·
 ὄνομα αὐτῆ Χορζάρ.
 ταύτην ἢ ἀγνωσία ἐκάλεσε Ποσειδῶνα·
 οὐ κατ' εἰ(κ)όνα ἐγένοντο Γλαυκος,
 Μελικέρτης, Ἴη,²⁴ Νεβρών.

5.14.4 Περιεσφαιρωκῶς τὴν
 δωδεκαγώνιον πυραμίδα, πύλην εἰς <τὴν>
 πυραμίδα σκοτίζων ποικιλίας χροαῖς καὶ
 ἀπαρτίζων πάσαν [τὴν] νυκτόχρουν.
 Τοῦτον ἢ ἀγνωσία ἐκάλεσε Κόρην.
 οὐ λειτουργοὶ πέντε· πρῶτος Οὐ, δεύτερος
 Ἄοαι, τρίτος Οὐά, τέταρτος Οὐάβ,
 πέμπτος·
 ἄλλοι²⁵ πιστοὶ οἰκονόμοι αὐτοῦ τῆς
 τοπαρχίας, ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς οἱ
 ἀναπαύομενοι ἐν τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ αὐτῶν.
 τούτους ἢ ἀγνωσία ἐκάλεσε τοὺς
 πλάνητας ἀστέρας,
 ἐφ' ὧν ἢ φθαρτὴ γένεσις ἠώρηται.

5.14.5 Ἄερος ἀνατολῆς²⁶ οἰκονόμοι
 Καρφάκασημοχειρ <καί> Ἐκκαββάκαρα·
 τούτους ἐκάλεσεν ἢ ἀγνωσία Κουρήτας.
 ἄρχων ἀνέμων τρίτος Ἀριήλ·

οὐ κατ' εἰκόνα ἐγένοντο Αἴολος,
 Β<ρ>ιάρη<ο>ς.
 καὶ ἄρχων δωδεκαώρου νυκτερινῆς
 Σοκλάν.

5.14.6 ὃν ἐκάλεσεν ἢ ἀγνωσία Ὅσιριν.
 τούτου κατ' εἰκόνα ἐγένοντο Ἄδμητος,
 Μήδεια, Ἐλλην, Αἴθουσα.
 ἄρχων ἡμερινῆς δωδεκαώρου Εὐνώ·

The Typhonic daughter is faithful guard
 of all sorts of waters.
 Her name is Chorzar.
 The ignorant call²³ Chorzar “Poseidōn,”
 in whose image were born Glaucus,
 Melicertes, Iē, and Nebrō.

Surrounded spherically with the twelve-
 angled pyramid, darkening the gate in
 the pyramid with many different colors,
 fitting all in the color of night.
 This one the ignorant call “Korē,”
 whose officers are five. The first is OU,
 the second is AOAI, the third is OUŌ, the
 fourth is OUŌAB, the fifth is [?].
 Other faithful ministers of his domain—
 of day and night—are resting in his
 authority.
 The ignorant call these “the wandering
 stars,”
 upon which the perishable created order
 is suspended.

The ministers of the rising air are
 Carphacaseocheir and Eccabbacara.
 The ignorant call these “Curetēs.”
 Of the archons of the winds, the third is
 Ariēl,
 in whose image were born Aeolus (and)
 Briarēs.
 And ruling the twelve night hours is
 Soklas,

whom the ignorant call “Osiris.”
 In the image of Soklas were born Adme-
 tus, Medea, Helen, (and) Aethusa.
 Ruling the twelve daytime hours is Eunō.

²³ Literally: “Ignorance calls”; and so throughout passage.

²⁴ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178: coniec Ἴν<ώ>. P: Ἰη. Because Inō is mentioned again in 5.14.9 as created in the image of the Fates, something odd is going on. Should we emend the text? We may be dealing with two references to the same entity, one as the deity and the other as the mortal woman. In this case, Iē would be the secret name of Inō the sea deity, while the Inō mentioned in 5.14.9 may be her mortal fate as the wife of Athamus.

²⁵ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 179 considers ἄλλοι a corruption, so adds in its place: <οί>.

²⁶ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 179: *supplevi* <καὶ ἄερος δῦσεως>.

Οὗτος οἰκονόμος τῆς πρωτοκαμάρου
ἀνατολ<ικ>ῆς καὶ αἰθερίου·
δ<ν> ἐκάλεσεν ἢ ἀγνωσία Ἴσιν.
τούτου σημεῖον τὸ Κυνὸς ἄστρον·

5.14.7 οὗ κατ' εἰκόνα ἐγένοντο
Πτολεμαῖς ὁ Ἄρσινός, Διδύμη,
Κλεοπάτρα, Ὀλυμπιάς.
δύναμις θεοῦ δεξιά· ἦν ἐκάλεσεν ἢ
ἀγνωσία Ῥέαν·
οὗ κατ' εἰκόνα ἐγένοντο Ἄττις, Μυγδῶν,
Οἰνώνη.
δύναμις²⁸ ἀριστερά· τροφῆς ἐξουσιάζει.

ἦν ἐκάλεσεν ἢ ἀγνωσία Δήμητραν,
ἔνομα²⁹ αὐτῇ Βένα.
τούτου κατ' εἰκόνα ἐγένοντο Κελεὸς,
Τριπτόλεμος, Μίσυρ, Πραξι<θέ>α.

5.14.8 δύναμις³⁰ δεξι(ά)· ἐξουσιάζει
καρπῶν.
τούτου ἢ ἀγνωσία ἐκάλεσε Μῆνα·

οὗ κατ' εἰκόνα ἐγένοντο Βουμέγας,
Ὀστάνης, Ἑρμῆς Τρισμέγιστος,
Κουρίτη(ς), Πετόσιρις, Ζωδάριον,
Βηρωσός, Ἀστράμψουχος, Ζωρόαστρις·
δύναμις πυρὸς εὐάνυμος·
τούτου ἢ ἀγνωσία ἐκάλεσεν Ἡφαίστον·

οὗ κατ' εἰκόνα ἐγένοντο Ἐριχθόνιος,
Ἀχιλλεύς, Καπανεύς, Φλεγύας,
Μελέαγρος, Παδ<ο>υήλ, Ἐγκέλαδος,
Ῥαφαήλ, Σουριήλ, Ὀμφάλη.

5.14.9 δυνάντις τρεῖς μέσαι,³¹ τοῦ
ἀέρος κρεμάμεναι·
αἰτίαι γενέσεως.
ταύτας ἢ ἀγνωσία ἐκάλεσε Μοίρας·

Eunō is the minister of the rising of the
primal and aitherial vault.²⁷
The ignorant call Eunō "Isis."
The sign of Eunō is the Dog Star,

in whose image were born Ptolemy son
of Arsinoe, Didymā, Cleopatra, (and)
Olympias.

A Power of God on the right, the ignorant
call Rhea,

in whose image were born Attis, Mygdōn,
(and) Oenōne.

A Power on the left has authority over
sustenance.

The ignorant call the Power "Demeter," a
name for her is Bena.

In the image of Bena were born Celeus,
Triptolemus, Misyra, and Praxitheia.

A Power on the right has authority over
the fruits.

The ignorant call the Power on the right
"Mēna,"

in whose image were born Boumegas,
Ostanēs, Hermēs Trismegistos, Kourit-
tes, Petosiris, Zodarium, Bērosus, As-
trampsuchus, (and) Zoroaster.

A Power on the left is over fire.

The ignorant call the Power "He-
phaistos."

in whose image were born Erichthonius,
Achilles, Capaneus, Phlegyas, Meleager,
Padouēl, Egceladus, Raphaēl, Suriēl, (and)
Omphalē.

There are three Powers in the middle,
suspended by air,

responsible for generating (people).

The ignorant call these Powers "Fates,"

ὧν κατ' εἰκόνα ἐγένοντο οἶκος Πριάμου,
οἶκος Λαίου, Ἰνώ, Αὐτονόη, Ἀγαυή,
Ἀθάμας, Πρόκνη, Δαναΐδες, Πελιάδες.

in whose image were born the house of
Priam, the house of Laïus, Ino, Auto-noē,
Agayē, Athamas, Procnē, Danaïdes, (and)
Peliades.

5.14.10 δύναμις ἀρσενόθηλος αἰε
νηπιάζουσα, ἀγήτατος·
αἰτία κάλλους, ἡδονῆς, ἀκμῆς, ὀρέξεως,
ἐπιθυμίας.

ὧν ἐκάλεσεν ἢ ἀγνωσία Ἑρωτα·
οὗ κατ' εἰκόνα ἐγένοντο Πάρις, Νάρκισσος,
Γανυμήδης, Ἐνδυμίον, Τιθωνός, Ἰκάριος,
Λῆδα, Ἀμυμώνη, Θέτις, Ἑσπερίδες,
Ἰασων,³² Λέανδρος, Ἡρώ.
οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ προάστειοι ἕως αἰθέρος.
οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ἐπιγράφει τὸ βιβλίον.

There is a male-female power always
young, never growing old,
responsible for beauty, pleasure, matura-
tion, appetite, (and) desire,
whom the ignorant call "Eros,"

in whose image were born Paris, Nar-
cissus, Ganymēdē, Endymion, Tithomus,
Icarius, Lēda, Amymonē, Thetis, (the)
Hesperides, Jasōn, Leander, (and) Hērō.

These are the suburbs up to the aither.³³
For thus it is that he inscribes the book.

Out of the Bowels of Hell

Hippolytus' excerpt is from the Peratic book, *The Suburbs up to the Aither*, which describes the suburbs and names its confederation of rebel rulers. The Peratics were of the opinion that there was a primordial insurrection of Aeons who became apostates. Their revolt turned good powers into evil ones, creating a confederation of rulers over the *Toparchai* or "places" (= celestial realms) and the *Proasteioi* or "suburbs" (= sublunar realms).³⁴ Here is an example of the archaic myth about God struggling with his angels and throwing the rebels into hell.³⁵ But this myth has penetrated the Gnostic cosmology in a striking way: the rulers of the cosmos in the suburban *and* the celestial realms are identified with fallen angels or demons. Why? Likely this is the result of their cosmology. Since the Supreme God resides outside the traditional cosmos, the rebellious aeons fall down into the cosmic sphere from the transcendent realm. But significantly, penetration of the heavens with demons may also be the

²⁷ For a discussion of this use of *aither*, see Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, 15–35.

²⁸ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 180: *supplevi* <θεοῦ>.

²⁹ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 180: *addidi* <δ'>.

³⁰ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 180: *addidi* <πυρὸς>. But this Power over the fruits is not the same Power mentioned in line 45, which is the Power over fire.

³¹ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 180: *addidi* <ἐκ>.

³² Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 180: emends Ἰασ<τ>ων. P: Ἰασων.

³³ For a discussion of this use of *aither*, see Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*.

³⁴ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.13.12 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 177).

³⁵ Cf. Ezek 28:11–19; Isa 14:4–17; 1 Tim 3:6; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6; Rev 12:7–9; 1 En. 6:6; 2 En. 29:4, 31:4; L.A.E. 12. For a discussion of the myth, see Christoph Auffarth and Loren Stuckenberg, *The Fall of the Angels* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *The Myth of the Fallen Angels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

consequence of a connection that was made by the ancients between the myth of the fallen angels and the myth of the succession of the violent Titans.³⁶ Thus it is not surprising that the Titans are prominent among the Peratics' chief archons: Kronos, Iapetos, Rhea.

The naming process appears to have been a central feature of the book, since the excerpt provides, in most cases, the ruler's domain and both the common name for the ruler and the ruler's "real" or secret name. In the cases where the "secret" name is not recorded in this excerpt, I imagine it would have been recited and transmitted as oral hierophantic teaching so that the entire mystery was not revealed in a manner that the uninitiated (like Hippolytus!) might discover intact. Likewise, Clement of Alexandria says that the Christian mysteries are delivered through speech and, even though he is committing much of his knowledge to writing in his book, he purposely omits the "unspeakable (τὰ ἀπόρητα)" forbidden mysteries, fearing that they might fall into the wrong hands.³⁷ It appears that some mystery cult leaders even used books written in arcane letters so that they could only be read and interpreted by the priests on behalf of the initiates. This practice also safeguarded the cult secrets from the eyes of the uninitiated.³⁸

The Peratic book also records examples of those who were created in the image of specific rulers: hero(in)es, gods and/or demons, and famous people associated with the fields of magic and astrology. This is an uncommon feature since Gnostic cosmogonies usually involve creation of lower beings according to the model of the upper luminous aeons, rather than according to the image of the fallen archontic figures.³⁹ Human beings generally are created in the image of Anthropos revealed to the archons from the other world.⁴⁰ Basilides' system, according to Irenaeus, has some similarity with the Peratic since each successive heaven is created and populated by angels according to the image of the previous heaven and its

³⁶ Jan N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSRC 8; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 73–99.

³⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.1.14.2 (Otto Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus. Stromata Buch I–IV* [Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1960], 10).

³⁸ Cf. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.22 (William Adlington and Stephen Gaselee, eds., *Apuleius: The Golden Ass*. [New York: Putnam's Sons, 1915], 576–79).

³⁹ Cf. *Apoc. Jn.* NHC II 12,34–13,1 (Michael Waldstein and Fredrick Wisse, eds., *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2* [NHMS 33; Leiden: Brill, 1995], 76–77).

⁴⁰ Cf. *Apoc. Jn.* NHC II 14,14–15,14 (ibid., 84–87); Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.30.6 (Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, eds., *Irénée de Lyon : Contre les Hérésies. Livre 1* [Vol. 2; SC 264; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1979], 370–73).

inhabitants.⁴¹ Many of the Peratic examples on the image lists represent characters whose myths have definitive connections with the underworld and initiatory contexts, including those with psychopompic duties like Hermes. Many of the hero(in)es had transcended the distinctions between mortal and immortal and were considered "the powerful dead" who might be persuaded to intervene on the petitioner's behalf.⁴² There seems to be some affinity between the named god and those created in his/her image, since those associated with Eros include the beautiful Paris and the self-obsessed Narcissus. At this time, I have not been able to further penetrate the significance of these image lists, although it appears to me that the myth of Jason and the Argonauts was significant to the Peratics since leading characters in this epic are predominant.

Many ancient people of the Mediterranean believed that the recitation of divine names was powerful "magic," serving to persuade, appease, or overcome the named deity. The inscription on an ancient protective amulet published in 1950 by Bonner sums up the concept succinctly, stating that knowledge of the names and images of the deity gave the owner access to the deity's power: "Holy names and symbols and terrifying characters protect from dangers the man or woman who carries your dreadful divine powers."⁴³

Often these secret names are "barbarian" names from priestly traditions in contrast to the commonly known name or translation of the name as we see, for instance, in the Greek magical papyri, the gem collections, lamellae and magical bowls. The famous theurgist in late antiquity, Iamblichus says that the theurgical recitation of "names without meaning" does not mean that they are without signification. They might be unknowable to us, "yet to the Gods all of them are significant, but not in a manner that is effable, nor in a manner that is significant or indicative to men through their imaginations."⁴⁴ The names were considered "sacred," mystical words whose sound was "not concerned with ordinary, created things,

⁴¹ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.24.3 (ibid., 324–27).

⁴² The phrase, "the powerful dead," is coined by Jennifer Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults: A Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 196–207.

⁴³ Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1950), 215.

⁴⁴ Iamblichus *Myst.* 254.15–16; 254.18–255.3 (Thomas Taylor, *Iamblichus: On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians and Life of Pythagoras* [TTS 17; repr., Somerset: Prometheus Trust, 1999], 133; with minor alteration in translation). For a more thorough discussion, see Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 179–88.

but with a certain mysterious divine science that is related to the Creator of the universe," states Origen.⁴⁵ Sallustius calls them "the letters of the unspeakable powers on high (οἱ χαρακτῆρες τὰς ἀρρήτους ἄνω δυνάμεις)."⁴⁶ Most simply put is the command found in the *Chaldean Oracles*: "Do not change the *nomina barbara* (ὀνόματα βάρβαρα μήποτ' ἀλλάξης); that is, the names handed down by the gods to each race have ineffable power in the initiation rites."⁴⁷

Thus *Asclepius* warns that the Egyptian mysteries should not be translated into Greek:

The very quality of the speech and the <sound> of Egyptians words have in themselves the energy of the objects they speak of... Keep the discourse uninterpreted, lest mysteries of such greatness come to the Greeks, lest the extravagant, flaccid and (as it were) dandified Greek idiom extinguish something stately and concise, the energetic idiom of <Egyptian> usage. For the Greeks have empty speeches... that are energetic only in what they demonstrate, and this is the philosophy of the Greeks, an inane foolosophy of speeches. *We, by contrast, use not speeches, but sounds that are full of action.*⁴⁸

Although this passage is clearly pro-Egyptian, it typifies the type of discourse the ancients were having about "sacred" language and the need for its preservation. It was believed by some that translation could empty the name of its "magical" power. The book of *The Suburbs up to the Aither* appears to be in sympathy with this world view, written to provide its audience with the Peratic versions of the "magical" names of the deities who rule over certain regions of the sublunar realm.

Kronos

In the hymn, the initiate learns that Kronos the Titan King bound with chains in Tartarus is the destructive power of chaos. Although restrained in chains, he remains the terrifying power that quakes the earth, the

⁴⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.24 (Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* [repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 24).

⁴⁶ Arthur Darby Nock, *Sallustius: Concerning the Gods and the Universe* (1926; repr., Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1966), 28; H. S. Vernsel, "The Poetics of the Magical Charm: An Essay in the Power of Words," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (ed. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 105–58.

⁴⁷ *Chaldean Oracles* 150 (Ruth Majercik, ed., *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary* [SRR 5; Leiden: Brill, 1989], 107).

⁴⁸ *Corp. Herm.* XVI, 2 (Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation with Notes and Introduction* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 58). Italic mine.

churning power of the waters of deep Tartarus that swell and feed the ocean above. This is the mighty power that the soul must face and overcome upon its journey through the underworld. Thus the newly awakened initiate says in the liturgy, "Now I begin to struggle with the Power that has sprung from chaos..."⁴⁹ The secret name of Kronos is not provided in writing, although it is stated that the famous Prometheus, Cēpheus, and Iapetus were produced in Kronos' image.

What is being described in this portion of the hymn is the ancient geography of the underworld made famous by Plato in his *Phaedo*, where he describes a vast boundless chasm filled with water that was located at the deepest depths of the dark and misty Tartarus. All rivers flow out of and into this bottomless chasm and all vapors and mists arise from its caverns.⁵⁰ The water is turbulent and muddy, flowing off in a circle into the greatest and outermost river, Oceanus, which surrounds the earth.⁵¹ The Peratics connect this vast ocean surrounding the suburbs with the Red Sea in scripture and Kronos with the power of its violent destructive waters.⁵²

Later in Hippolytus' description of the Peratics, we additionally discover that Kronos is the demiurge, the cause of mortal generation. Thus, he is identified by the Peratics as the god who interferes in the fate of the person as that person is brought into being.⁵³ As lord, the planets are under his dominion (ἐν τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ), faithful managers (πιστοὶ οἰκονόμοι) within his toparchy or celestial domain (αὐτοῦ τῆς τοπαρχίας).⁵⁴ We also discover that the "lord over all generation" is positioned at the center (τὸ κέντρον) of the universe.⁵⁵ This is a specific astrological reference to one of the cardinal points that mark the coordinates on the path of the rotating ecliptic. The horoscope is the center that marks the rising of the Zodiac on the eastern horizon. This is called the ascendant. The mid-heaven point is the center where the signs reach their zenith or highest elevation. The descendant or the "setting" of the Zodiac is where it crosses the western horizon. The anti-meridian is where the signs reach their lowest point underneath the earth.

⁴⁹ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.14.1 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 177–78). Eng. trans. mine.

⁵⁰ Plato, *Phaedo* 111e–112b (Duke et al., *Platonis Opera*, 176–77); Plutarch, *De sera* 566a–b. For a discussion of this geography, see Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, 112–48.

⁵¹ Plato, *Phaedo* 113a–c (Duke et al., *Platonis Opera*, 178–79).

⁵² Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.2–6 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 182–83).

⁵³ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.3 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 182).

⁵⁴ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.14.5 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 179).

⁵⁵ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.15.4 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 181).

Kronos occupies one of these points, but which one? Hippolytus writes:

Since the astrologers know the ascendant and the midheaven and the descendant and the anti-meridian, and they know that these stars have different motions at different times through the perpetual revolution of the entire universe, but there are different declensions from the cardinal point and different ascensions (from the cardinal point), they allegorize the system of the astrologers presenting the cardinal point with "god" and "monad" and "lord over all generation," and the declination is left, and the ascension is right. Therefore, when anyone reading their writings finds mention of a power which they call "right" or "left," refer to the cardinal point and (then) the declination and the ascension, and he will clearly observe that their entire system is an astrological doctrine.⁵⁶

I understand Hippolytus to mean that the Peratic allegory identified Kronos with the midheaven cardinal point, putting the declination on his left and the ascendant on his right (Figure 1). This positioning of the "lord over all generation" makes perfect sense when it is realized that the philosophers Numenius and Cronius identified the gate for the descent and incarnation of the soul with Cancer, the summer tropic, the point on the ecliptic where the sun reaches midheaven.⁵⁷ Furthermore the tropics were believed to be so influential that, according to astrologers, they turned the wheel of fate, just as we see Kronos doing in the Peratic system.⁵⁸

Thalassa

Thalassa is identified as a male-female power who disperses and weakens the violent flow of water surging up from the underworld. "Poseidon" is Thalassa's common name.⁵⁹ The initiate is taught the secret magical name: Chorzar. The sea deities Glaucus, Melicertes, and Ië, are produced in Poseidon's image, along with Nebrō, a demonic archon found in other Gnostic sources.⁶⁰ In these Gnostic sources, Nebrō is known to be the

⁵⁶ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.15.4-5 (ibid.). Eng. trans. mine.

⁵⁷ Porphyry, *Cave of the Nymphs* 23 (Robert Lambertson, ed., *Porphyry: On the Cave of the Nymphs* [Barrytown: Station Hill, 1983], 33). Cf. Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.12.1-3 (William Harris Stahl, *Macrobius: Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1952], 133-34).

⁵⁸ Manilius, *Astron.* 3.676-79. Cf. Katharina Volk, *Manilius and his Intellectual Background* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 94.

⁵⁹ For a recent treatment of Poseidon, see Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults*, 57-68.

⁶⁰ On Ië, see note 23.

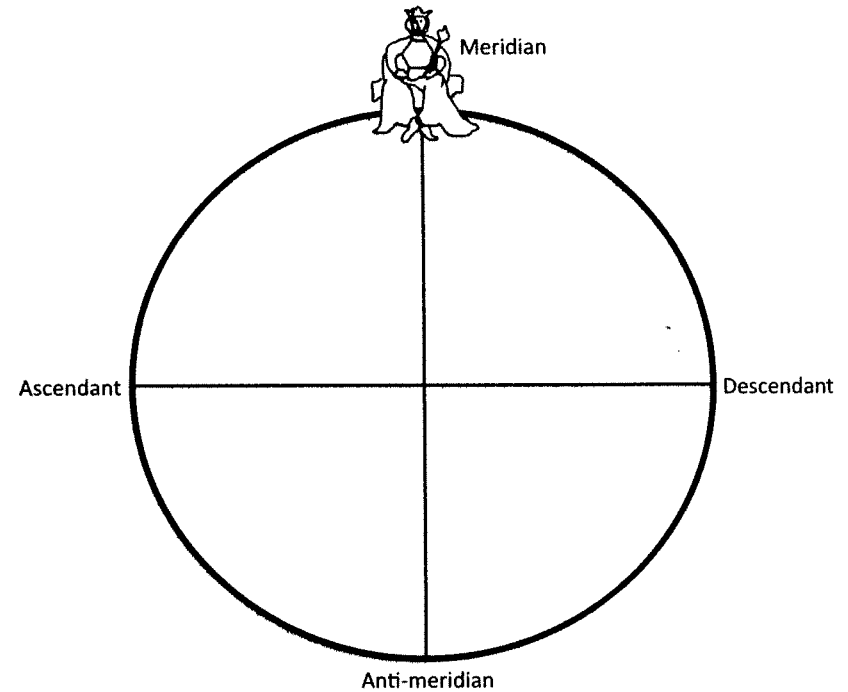


Figure 1 Graffitto from the catacomb of San Sebastiano, Rome. Redrawn After Dölger, *Ichthys*, 4:220.2.

demiurge's assistant, as he is here.⁶¹ There also is a tradition that his other name is Ialdabaoth.⁶²

The Peratics understood the archon Nebrō to be a corrupt imitation of the biblical Nimrod, whose name in the Septuagint is Νεβρωδ.⁶³ According to Hippolytus' references to the Peratics, they were exegeting at least some scriptures transgressively.⁶⁴ For instance, they suggest that Cain was marked with a "sign (σημείον)" that represented Eve's word of wisdom so

⁶¹ Gos. Eg. NHC III 57.16-20; IV 69.1-4 (Alexander Böhlig and Frederik Wisse, eds., *Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2 The Gospel of the Egyptians* [NHS 4; Leiden: Brill, 1975], 120-23).

⁶² Gos. Jud. 51.13-15 (Rodolphe Kasser et al., *The Gospel of Judas Together with the Letter of Peter to Philip, James, and a Book of Allogenes from Codex Tchacos: Critical Edition* [Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2007], 221).

⁶³ LXX: Gen 10:8-9; 1 Chr 1:10; Mic 5:5. On Nimrod, see Karel van der Toorn and Pieter Willem van der Horst, "Nimrod Before and After the Bible," *HTR* 83 (1990): 1-29.

⁶⁴ On Peratic exegesis, see Magris, "L'esegesi della setta ofitica dei Perati."

he would not be killed by the ruler of this world, Kronos.⁶⁵ Because the lord of this world delights in blood, Abel's sacrifice was accepted by him while Cain's was not.⁶⁶ Accordingly the Peratics understood that Abel was in league with Kronos, while Cain rebelled against him and needed a magical sign to be placed on his body as protection against Kronos. It appears that this sign was conceived by the Peratics to be a diagram of Draco drawn on Cain.⁶⁷ Were the initiates similarly marked in order to be protected from Kronos as they journeyed over the Red Sea? We do know that branding was performed on initiates in other mystery cults, so this mention of marking Cain's body may allude to a Peratic initiation practice.⁶⁸

Likewise, Nimrod, a figure traditionally portrayed as an evil tyrant and associated with the building and ownership of the Tower of Babel, was interpreted transgressively as a scriptural reference to Jesus who was "like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord (ὡς Νεβρώδ γίγας κυνηγὸς ἔναντι κυρίου)."⁶⁹ Based on this passage, the Peratics concluded that Jesus was like Nimrod, *opposing* the Lord of this world. The Peratics believed that there were many archons who tried to imitate Jesus, and Nebrō represented one of them. Nebrō was perceived by the Peratics to be the fake Nimrod who was *part of* Kronos' army. The Peratics were able to develop this multivalent reading of Genesis 10:9, applying it one way to Jesus and another to Nebrō, because the preposition ἔναντιόν can mean both "over against" in a hostile sense, and, more neutrally, "in the presence of" or "before." Centuries after the Peratics, this exegetical ambiguity is still in play according to Augustine who complains about it:

Some interpreters have misunderstood this phrase, being deceived by an ambiguity in the Greek and consequently translating it as "before the Lord" instead of "against the Lord." It is true that the Greek ἔναντιόν means "before" as well as "against" . . . It is in the latter sense that we must take it in the description of Nimrod; that giant was "a hunter against the Lord." For the word "hunter" can only suggest a deceiver, oppressor and destroyer

⁶⁵ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.9 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 183). Cf. Gen 4:1–16.

⁶⁶ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.8–9 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 183).

⁶⁷ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.9 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 183).

⁶⁸ Fritz Graf, "Mysteries," in *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopedia of the Ancient World* (ed. Herbert Cancik et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 9:433–44 at 440.

⁶⁹ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.11 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 184). Cf. Gen 10:9; C. Uehlinger, "Nimrod," *DDD* 627–30.

of earth-born creatures. Thus he, with his subject peoples, began to erect a tower against the Lord, which symbolizes his impious pride.⁷⁰

Korē

Korē, Queen of the Underworld, is said to be seated at a gate (πύλη) in the Zodiacal "pyramid."⁷¹ The *Book of the Suburbs* notes that Korē and her five assistants darken and guard the Zodiacal gate.⁷² They are positioned within the cosmic structure in such a way that they alone control access between the sublunar and supralunar realms, certainly the upward movement of the soul, but perhaps also the downward. Her five assistants appear to be the five rulers of the abyss mentioned in other Gnostic sources.⁷³ The first four of their magical names are preserved by Hippolytus: OU, AOAI, OUŌ, OUŌAB. The fifth magical name does not survive in the manuscript tradition. In *Pistis Sophia*, the five abyss demons are named Paraplex, Ariuth, Hekate, Parhedron, and Jachthnabas.⁷⁴ The name "Korē" itself is interesting, since it is preferred by the ancients who dreaded to vocalize the name Persephone, so terrifying was she.⁷⁵ So we are not supplied with Korē's secret name in the Peratic excerpt. Like Kronos' name, I imagine that it was believed to be part of the tradition that was so secret it could only be disclosed to the initiates orally.

Curetēs

In the *Book of the Suburbs*, we learn that the planets are Kronos' servants and they provide the foundation for the suspension of the created order. The book does not list out the common magical names of the planets,

⁷⁰ Augustine, *Civ. D.* 16.4, as translated by van der Toorn and van der Horst, "Nimrod Before and After the Bible," 19.

⁷¹ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.14.4 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178–79); Eng. trans. mine. For a recent treatment of Korē, see Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults*, 69–85.

⁷² Hipp. *Haer.* 5.14.4 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178–79); Eng. trans. mine.

⁷³ *Apoc. John* NHC II 1,9 (Waldstein and Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John*, 68–69); *Pist. Soph.* 4.139–140 (Carl Schmidt and Violet MacDermot, eds., *Pistis Sophia* [NHS 9; Leiden: Brill, 1978], 718–33).

⁷⁴ *Pist. Soph.* 4.139–140 (ibid.).

⁷⁵ Susan G. Cole, "Landscapes of Dionysus and Elysian Fields," in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos; New York: Routledge, 2003), 193–217 at 195–96. This appears to be a soft taboo: Albert Henrichs, "Namenlosigkeit und Euphemismus: Zur Ambivalenz der chthonischen Mächte im attischen Drama," in *Fragmenta dramatica* (ed. Heinz Hofmann and Annette Harder; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 161–201.

however, probably because *The Book of the Suburbs* was focused on information about the sublunar realm, not the celestial spheres. But it did elaborate the secret magical names of the ministers of the rising air, the winds—Carphacaseocheir, Eccabbacara and Ariel—whom the uninitiated identify with the Curetēs, the dancers who attend Rhea. Eccabbacara may derive from 1 Chr 9:15 where the name “Bakbakkar” is found.⁷⁶ In other Gnostic traditions, Ariel is the name that the initiated (τελειος) use for the Ialdabaoth archon, a name derived from his leonine shape, since “Ariel” literally means “lion of God” in Hebrew.⁷⁷ We possess the cast of an antique (in my opinion, initiatory) gem with this very information inscribed.⁷⁸

Osiris

According to the Peratics, Soklas is the secret name of the one the ignorant call “Osiris,” the god who controls the twelve hours of the night. This secret name is likely a variant of Saklas, an archon found in other Gnostic narratives. In these other sources, Saklas is known as one of the demiurge’s assistants as well as another name for the demiurge himself.⁷⁹ Here, however, Saklas (from Aramaic: “Fool”) appears to be welded with Sokaris/Seker, the god of the Memphite funeral cult who was the manifestation of Osiris resurrected.⁸⁰ Seker is the form of the night sun or the dead sun god. He represents the power of darkness, the night. In the period of the Old Kingdom, he personified the act of the separation of the soul from the body at death. By the beginning of the New Kingdom, Sokaris-Osiris then was welded with Ptah, who was not only the god of craftspeople

⁷⁶ Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 179.

⁷⁷ *Orig. World NHC II 100,25–26* (Bentley Layton, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 together with XIII.2**, BRIT. LIB. OR. 4926(1), and P. OXY. 1, 654, 655 [Vol. 2; NHS 21; Leiden: Brill, 1989], 34).

⁷⁸ Campbell Bonner, “An Amulet of the Ophite Gnostics” in *Commemorative Studies in Honor of Theodore Leslie Shear* (Hesperia Supplements 8; Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1949), 43–46 and 444.

⁷⁹ NHC III 57,16 and 58,24; V 74,3. Identified with Ialdabaoth: NHC II 11,17; II 95,7; XIII 39,27; Epiph., *Pan.* 26.10.1. See also *Gospel of Judas* where Saklas is a creature separate from the demiurge, but is confused with the demiurge later in the narrative (April D. DeConick, “Apostles as Archons: The Fight for Authority and the Emergence of Gnosticism in the Tchacos Codex and Other Early Christian Literature,” in *The Codex Judas Papers: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Tchacos Codex held at Rice University, Houston Texas, March 13–16, 2008* [ed. April D. DeConick; NHMS 71; Leiden: Brill, 2009], 265–67).

⁸⁰ Jean Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (repr., Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1986), 51, 274.

but also a god who fashioned afterlife bodies. The underworld area that Sokaris/Seker controlled deep within the earth is a district known as the Sixth Aat. It was depicted as a frightful place, pitch black, filled with huge snakes and the souls of those who have been consumed by the fire that came from the mouth of the goddess Ammit.⁸¹ The Peratic book records the names of those who were born in Soklas’ image: Admetus, Medea, Helen and Aethusa.

Isis

As the book continues in formulaic fashion, we learn the secret name of the ruler of the hours of the day, Euno, who is Isis, Osiris’ wife. The book lists the names of those heroes and heroines born in her image: Ptolemaeus son of Arsinoe, Didyma, Cleopatra, and Olympias. Her secret name appears to be a variant of Juno, the daughter of Saturn and the sister wife of Jupiter. It is one of the many names that Isis was known by in antiquity.⁸² The *Book of the Suburbs*, as Egyptian lore in general, identifies her with the Dog Star, Sirius (*Sopdet/Sothis*), whose heliacal rising after a seventy-day absence signaled the start of the annual calendar for the Egyptians.⁸³ This occurred immediately prior to the rising of the Nile floodwaters.⁸⁴

In the Peratic book, she is associated with the primal vaulting of the *aither*, when the air rose to form the heavens and separated from the earth. This association is mentioned in another ancient source where she claims to be the one who “divided the earth from the heaven.”⁸⁵ Past editors of this passage did not recognize this role and so MacMahon favored translating the passage as a reference to the rising of a star named Protocamarus, a star whose existence I have not been able to verify.⁸⁶ Legge emended the Greek to read πρωτοκαμάρος, so that the translation would read (incorrectly): “He is steward of the rising of the first-blessed and aetherial (goddess) whom ignorance calls Isis.”⁸⁷

⁸¹ E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians* (2 vols.; London: Methuen, 1904), 1:216–24, 500–08, 2:138.

⁸² Cf. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5 (Adlington and Gaselee, *Apuleius*, 546–47).

⁸³ Cf. Cyme Isis aretalogy, as translated in Frederick C. Grant, *Hellenistic Religions: The Age of Syncretism* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1953), 132.

⁸⁴ Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 1:436.

⁸⁵ Cyme Isis aretalogy, as translated in Grant, *Hellenistic Religions*, 132.

⁸⁶ MacMahon in *ANF* 5:61.

⁸⁷ Francis Legge, ed., *Philosophumena or the Refutation of All Heresies* (2 vols.; London: SPCK, 1921), 1:152.

Right, Left and Middle Powers

The book outlines several powers whose domains are “on the right” or “on the left” of Kronos, including his wife Rhea. The right hand powers are identified by their common names as Rhea and Mēna, although their secret names are not revealed. While Rhea is Kronos’ wife and mother of Zeus, Mēna is a god who has authority over “the fruits.” This may be a reference to Min, the Egyptian god of fertility. Those created in Rhea’s image include Attis, Mygdōn, and Oenōnē. In Mēna’s image were born Boumegas, Ostanēs, Hermēs Trismegistos, Kourites, Petosiris, Zodarium, Bērosus, Astrampsuchus and Zoroaster.

On Kronos’ left are Bena, the authority over “sustenance” whom the uninitiated know as “Demeter,” and Hephaistos the god of fire. Like the secret names for Rhea and Mēna, Hephaistos’ secret name remains undisclosed. However the names of those created in Bena’s image are recorded: Celeus, Triptolemus, Misyra, and Praxithea. Those fashioned after Hephaistos include Erichthonius, Achilles, Capaneus, Phlegyas, Meleager, Padouēl, Egceladus, Raphaēl, Suriēl, and Omphalē.

The *Book of the Suburbs* also includes a reference to three powers “in the middle” that are supported by air. These are known to the uninitiated as the “Fates” and the house of Priam, the house of Laius, Inō, Autonōē, Agaue, Athamas, Procnē, Danaides, and Peliades were born in their image. Finally we learn about “Erōs” who is a male-female power of virility and maturation, responsible for beauty, pleasure, and desire, in whose image were generated Paris, Narcissus, Ganymēdē, Endymion, Tithomus, Icarus, Lēda, Anymonē, Thetis, the Hesperides, Jasōn, Leander, and Hērō.

The Peratic book was laid out in a formulaic manner, presenting information about the names and locations of the rulers of the hours of day and night, as well as the names of the lords over fertility, sustenance and fire, and the three Fates, the daughters of the primeval night deities, and the three rising winds. Why was all this information needed? Why were the Peratics concerned to write down the common and at least some of the secret magical names of the rulers in the sublunar realm? Because these were the powers encountered by the soul when it left the body at death and the initiate needed to learn this information in order to successfully journey after death through Tartarus and the airy region below the moon. The particular powers charted by the Gnostic author in the *Book of the Suburbs* are those rulers that the soul would meet in the course of its afterlife journey, when it traveled through Hades, entered the course of its purification before rebirth when it was cleansed by the buffeting

winds in the zones of clouds and fire of the sublunar realm. These were the rulers who controlled the fate of the soul, whether it would be taken for punishment into the abyss, or purified and taken to a region in the underworld to live, or released into the celestial realms where it would ascend to a more blessed afterlife until it was returned to another womb for a birth appropriate to its piety, a process of “becoming” ruled over by Kronos.

The excerpt from the Peratic book opens with a haunting hymn featuring Kronos. Like Apuleius’ Lucius who claimed, “I approached the frontier of death, I set foot on the threshold of Persephone, I journeyed through all the elements and came back, I saw at midnight the sun, sparkling in white light, I came close to the gods of the upper and the nether world and adored them from near at hand,” the Peratic initiate appears to have sung this hymn when he “awakened from sleep in the realm of night” and found himself in the bowels of hell.⁸⁸ Thus he cries, “I am the voice of the one who has awakened from sleep in the realm of night. Now I begin to struggle with the Power that has sprung from chaos . . .”⁸⁹

What might have been the practical setting for the Peratic hymn? Hippolytus does not tell us about the details of the Peratic performance of the hymn. However, he is more generous with information about a comparable group, the Naassenes whose initiatory journey into muddy Hades and over Oceanus, led by “Hermes” is described in more detail. Hippolytus reveals that part of the initiation was enacted in a theatre to the song of the leader strumming a lyre and leading the group in the performance of a hymn imbued with secret meaning.⁹⁰ The Peratic hymn may have functioned similarly. If so, it appears to have been part of what I call the “first mystery,” the initiatory journey through the underworld. As such, it would have been a practical “roadmap” meant to guide the soul through Hades, providing in lyric and formulaic format poetic instructions that could be easily memorized and recalled by Peratic initiates. Its song would have assisted the initiates in greeting the demons that they encountered as they were led along the path that passed through the perishable world and traversed over the realm of mortality.

⁸⁸ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.23.6–8 (Adlington and Gaselee, *Apuleius*, 580–81).

⁸⁹ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.14.1 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 177–78); Eng. trans. mine.

⁹⁰ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.9.7 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 166).

Through the Gate of the Zodiacal Pyramid

Spherically surrounding Korē is “the twelve-angled pyramid.”⁹¹ This reference to the Zodiac as angles of a pyramid is peculiar in our sources. I think that the Peratic Zodiac as a dodecagonal shape, was a subtle development of two ideas placed in tandem, the first attributed to the Pythagorean Philolaus. It was the teaching that the angles of triangles and squares were sacred to specific gods and related to the four divisions of the Zodiac.⁹² The second is a Greek astrological teaching found, for example, in Manilius, that four triangles can be inscribed upon the circle of the Zodiac so that the vertex of each triangle touches a different Zodiac sign.⁹³ The Peratics appear to have envisioned the Zodiac as a dodecagonal shape, whose twelve angles aligned with various signs and rulers.

Further, the “pyramid” configuration may have to do with the alignment of specific sets of angles or “aspects” in astrology, since Hippolytus tells us that the Peratics were particularly concerned about the square and triangular aspects of the signs. They understood the Zodiac signs to appear in the shape of a triangle whenever three signs intervened, and in the shape of a square whenever two signs intervened.⁹⁴ So it may be that the Zodiacal pyramid has to do with the ancient application of astrology where certain alignments of the planets within the twelve signs form trine and quartile aspects. These aspects work to modify the influence of the planets in particular ways.⁹⁵

I find it fascinating that in book four of the *Pistis Sophia*, the five abysses of Hades, each ruled by its own demon, open and release their prisoners only when certain planets are aligned in specific Zodiacal signs. From the information given, Alexandra von Lieven was able to map the correspondences, revealing a trine relationship between Jupiter and Venus (in diagonal aspect, 120 degrees apart) with respect to certain houses.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Hipp. Haer. 5.14.4 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 178–79); Eng. trans. mine.

⁹² Proclus, *In Euc.* 166.25 (Carl A. Huffman, *Philolaus of Croton: Pythagorean and Presocratic* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 381–82). For a discussion, see Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (trans. Edwin J. Minar, Jr.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 349–50.

⁹³ Manilius, *Astron.* 2.270–72.

⁹⁴ Hipp. Haer. 5.13.10–11 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 176–77).

⁹⁵ Cf. Roger Beck, *A Brief History of Ancient Astrology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 20–28; Volk, *Manilius and his Intellectual Background*, 82–87.

⁹⁶ Alexandra von Lieven, “Gnosis and Astrology. ‘Book IV’ of the *Pistis Sophia*,” in *Under One Sky: Astronomy and Mathematics in the Ancient Near East* (ed. John M. Steele and Annette Imhausen; AOAT 297; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), 223–36 at 234.

Once released from these prisons, the souls then enter the Zodiac before becoming embodied again. Could we be dealing with a similar system in the Peratic literature, where we find an ascension gate into the Zodiacal pyramid, a gate between Hades and the heavens guarded by Korē and her five assistants? Could the reference to a pyramid of twelve angles suggest a certain trine alignment of the planets in houses that opens the gate to release souls? It is a seductive possibility, but not conclusive.

There was quite a bit of speculation in ancient literature about the exact location of the star gates that the soul journeys through when it incarnates (or descends) and when it exits (or ascends). The neo-Pythagorean philosophers Numenius and Cronius identified the ascension gate as Capricorn, while the gate to descend was through Cancer. These were the winter and summer tropics, the “gates of the sun” or the “mouths” or portals for the ascent and descent of the soul.⁹⁷ Macrobius also knows the opinion that the gates are located at the intersection of the Milky Way with the Zodiac, a teaching he suggests is supported by Pythagoras’ teaching. He tries to reconcile this teaching with Numenius’ and says that these points of intersection are at Capricorn and Cancer, when in fact they are at Gemini and Sagittarius.⁹⁸ Macrobius knows yet another teaching. He seems to be aware of a teaching that the portal of incarnation between the heavens and the sublunar realm is the Crater constellation. He states that the place where the incarnation of the soul begins in the Zodiac is where the soul moves from Cancer to Leo and passes through the Bowl or Crater of Bacchus.⁹⁹ According to the wisdom of *Pistis Sophia*, the soul journeying skyward is escorted by a spirit to the “Middle,” the ecliptic in the center of the Zodiac. Each of the twelve signs is a dungeon of punishment with gates that open out on top to the world of light above. If the soul is successful in meeting the defenses of each gate, it is escorted to the Virgin of Light who appears to be on the Sun. From there the soul is transported to the Gate of Life where the Great Sabaoth sits. Once through this gate, the spirit returns to the Treasury of Light.¹⁰⁰

Other opinions focused more on planetary gates than Zodiacal. Porphyry says that some theologians identify the “gates” of souls with the sun and the moon. Ascent takes place through the sun, while descent through

⁹⁷ Porphyry, *Cave of the Nymphs* 23 (Lamberton, *Porphyry*, 33). Cf. Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.12.1–3 (Stahl, *Macrobius*, 133–34).

⁹⁸ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.12.1–5 (ibid.).

⁹⁹ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.12.8 (Stahl, *Macrobius*, 135).

¹⁰⁰ *Pist. Soph.* 3.112 (Schmidt and MacDermot, *Pistis Sophia*, 286–91).

the moon.¹⁰¹ The moon appears to have been connected to genesis by the officials of the Eleusinian mysteries. They called the moon who presides over genesis "the bee" and also "the bull" since Taurus is its exaltation.¹⁰² Macrobius appears to know of a descent pattern through the seven planetary spheres as the soul passes through the successive spheres lying beneath the Zodiac: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon. At the moon, the soul is drawn into the material body, its psychical body having been formed through its planetary descent.¹⁰³ Porphyry also mentions this transfer pattern: from the heavens above Saturn (this must be the Zodiacal sphere) to Saturn to Jupiter to Mars, and so forth.¹⁰⁴ Macrobius tells us about the opinion of some philosophers who think that the moon is the demarcation of life and death and that souls falling from there towards earth are incarnated, while those rising from the moon to the heavens are returning to their former celestial life.¹⁰⁵ Macrobius describes another group of philosophers who taught that the Elysian Fields were in the Zodiacal sphere. The descent was planetary, through the four elements in triplicate: Zodiac (= earth) to Saturn (= water) to Jupiter (= air) to Mars (= fire) to the Sun (= fire) to Venus (= air) to Mercury (= water) to Moon (= earth). In this way the soul incarnates by descending from the Fields, passing through the three ranks of elements to the body by a three-fold death, suggesting that the gate to the sublunar realm is the Moon.¹⁰⁶

Firmicus Maternus, however, says that the moon is the planet of escape for the ascending soul. He writes, "Who doubts that by the same law divine Mind is transfused into earthly bodies, that descent is allotted through the Sun, ascent prepared through the Moon?"¹⁰⁷ This appears to be similar to the opinion of the Manichaeans, who identified the Moon and the Sun as stations on the path of descent and ascent for the soul. The path down was the same as the path up, and it involved the moon and the sun. They are called both "ships" and "palaces." The way up to the Moon was to journey up the Pillar of Glory, the Milky Way, in a ship of light. From there, the soul was conveyed to the Sun which in turn conveyed them to the world of light above. But this is not the entire picture. The Zodiac also appears

¹⁰¹ Porphyry, *Cave of the Nymphs* 29 (Lamberton, *Porphyry*, 37).

¹⁰² Porphyry, *Cave of the Nymphs* 18 (Lamberton, *Porphyry*, 31–32).

¹⁰³ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.12.13–16 (Stahl, *Macrobius*, 136–37).

¹⁰⁴ Porphyry, *Cave of the Nymphs* 16 (Lamberton, *Porphyry*, 30–31).

¹⁰⁵ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.11.6 (Stahl, *Macrobius*, 131).

¹⁰⁶ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.11.8–9 (Stahl, *Macrobius*, 132); 1.21.33 (180–81).

¹⁰⁷ Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis* 1.5.9.

to have been involved since it is related in the *Acts of Archelaus* that Jesus came for the salvation of souls by producing "an instrument with twelve vessels; this is turned by the sphere and draws up the souls of the dying. Then the great light takes them up with its rays, purifies them and passes them on to the moon." Once the moon has ferried the souls to the east and unloads them, ready to take on more souls that have been brought up to it "by the vessels."¹⁰⁸

The concept of a gate that opened from the sublunar realm into the celestial spheres is at least as old as Plato. It is clear from his writings that he had begun to accommodate the old underworld myth to the skies and the concept of reincarnation. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato reflects that the pious souls after judgment are carried up into the heavens where they live among the stars. At some point, they are born again in a body worthy of their piety (as are those purged souls whose punishments have been completed in the underworld prisons).¹⁰⁹ This teaching also appears in the *Republic* when Plato describes the underworld seat of judgment as a locale between two chasms in the earth and two in the sky. The pious soul is examined by the Judges and then led "up through the sky" with its judgment in hand. The pious soul is taken to the right, through one of the sky chasms. The wicked one takes the left road and is led downwards through the earth chasm, also carrying the evidence of its judgment with it. If wicked souls or those who had not yet paid the full penalty for their sins try to thwart the system and sneak through the sky chasm, a horrific voice screams from the chasm. These souls are arrested by fierce and fiery beings standing next to the chasm. They are bound, flayed, impaled on thorns and flung into Tartarus.¹¹⁰

Plato goes on to relate that souls who have finished their punishments return to this place of judgment via the second earth chasm. The souls that have been living among the stars descend back to this place of judgment via the second sky chasm when it is time for them to be born again.¹¹¹ All these souls camp there in a meadow for seven days before journeying for four days to the place where they observe a shaft of rainbow light stretched above them straight up through the earth and then through the

¹⁰⁸ Epiph., *Pan.* 66.26.6–8 (Frank Williams, ed., *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Books II and III (Sects 47–80, De Fide)* [NHMS 34; Leiden: Brill, 1994], 247–48).

¹⁰⁹ Plato, *Phaedrus* 249 (Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, 253–54).

¹¹⁰ Plato, *Republic* 10.614c–616a (Simon R. Slings, ed., *Platonis Rempublicam* [OCT; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 398–401).

¹¹¹ Plato, *Republic* 10.614d–e (Slings, *Platonis Rempublicam*, 398–99).

heavens. They journey another day, up the pillar of light, until they reach a place that Plato calls the "middle." At the "middle," the souls see the light stretching all the way around the heavens, forming its circumference. Inside are the whorls or spherical paths of the seven planets that revolve around the earth. The outermost sphere, the band of light encompassing the other spheres, is identified as the eighth sphere where the Zodiac is located. The movement of each sphere emits a constant pitch and together they make up a single scale of eight perfect harmonious notes.¹¹²

What Plato is describing is a journey from the underworld up the *axis mundi*. This was the spindle or pole that ancient astronomers argued ran through the earth up into the heavens. It was the pole that allowed the heavens and the planets to rotate around the earth. The "middle" is a term used by the Greek astronomers to designate a particular path within the Zodiac. It was the center of the Zodiac band, the ecliptic, the path that the sun took as it moved through the signs of the Zodiac. So Plato is describing a journey where the souls are ferried up the pole shaft from the center of the earth and then transported to a location on the circumference of the Zodiac.

At four equal distances around the outer rim of the Zodiac are placed the thrones of the three Fates, Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos, and their "mother" Anagkē who control birth and death and the lot of life. The journeying souls come into the Zodiac at the point where Anagkē's throne is set up. Upon arrival they journey next to Lachesis' throne. She tells them that it is time for them to be born again as a mortal. Lots are thrown at their feet and each one picks up what it might, usually selecting a lot that reflects the habits of its former life. Lachesis then gives each soul a guardian spirit which will guide it through life so that the soul's lot would be fulfilled. Then they go around the Zodiac, first to Clotho who ratifies their chosen lot, then to Atropos who makes the threads of destiny irreversible, and then back to Anagkē.

Here we have the descending soul's progress through each sign of the Zodiac, and the creation of its nature and fortune through the process. The person's horoscope is being woven—the person's birth and death circumstances—as well as the psychical, emotional, social, and physical attributes of the person. These circumstances and attributes are determined by the placement of the planets in relationship to the signs of the Zodiac and each other as the soul moves through them. Each sign is ruled

¹¹² Plato, *Republic* 10.616b–617b (Slings, *Platonis Rempublicam*, 401–03).

by one of the planets, and each is associated with a house that influences particular aspects of the person's life.

After this ride around the Zodiacal circle, the souls descend from the skies to the plain of Lēthē through stifling heat which assists in purifying them. They camp beside the Forgetful River. Because they are thirsty, they drink, and they forget everything. At midnight while they are sleeping, the earth quakes and thunder rumbles, and "like shooting stars" the souls are swept up and away, this way and that, to their births.¹¹³

Plato expands on this teaching in the *Timaeus* where we learn that the original artificer first sowed souls among the stars and gave each his own chariot. The souls were shown the nature of the universe and the laws of destiny. Then he gave them all equitable first births so that none should suffer a disadvantage at his hands. If life went well, and the soul conquered passion, anger and fear, it would return to dwell in its native star and live a blessed existence. If wickedness abounded, the soul would be reborn in a body that reflected the soul's nature.¹¹⁴

According to Plato, Ultimate Reality exists above and beyond the cosmic whirl of the planets and the band of the Zodiac. It lives there without shape or color, intangible and only visible to reason, the pilot of the soul.¹¹⁵ Each revolution of the chariot around the sphere brings with it opportunity for the soul to peer around and take in the realities above and below it. As long as the soul stays focused on the Ultimate Reality above, it will continue to whirl around the highest spheres as the gods do. But as soon as its focus shifts to the realities below, the soul cannot stay aloft in orbit. It falls to earth and is born into a lot that reflects its piety. This primal fall of the soul begins the soul's struggle to return to its lofty place in stellar orbit. Plato states that it takes at least 10,000 years for this return to be achieved. After the first life, the soul receives its judgment and lives for 1,000 years in Hades or heaven. At this time, the soul chooses its second lot and undergoes a second birth commensurate with its piety.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Plato, *Republic* 10.617c–621b (Slings, *Platonis Rempublicam*, 403–08). Vergil (*Aeneid* 6.724–51; Gian Biagio Conte, ed., *P. Vergilius Maro: Aeneis* [BSGRT; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009], 188–90) makes a similar claim: after the cycle of time and scourges of punishment have purged the soul, it makes its way to the river Lethe where, forgetting all that has happened to it, it can "revisit the vault (of heaven) above, and begin with a desire to return to the flesh."

¹¹⁴ Plato, *Timaeus* 41d–e.

¹¹⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus* 247 (Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, 250–51).

¹¹⁶ Plato, *Phaedrus* 248–49 (Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, 251–54).

Plato himself did not originate these ideas, but was likely influenced by Pythagoras' legacy and the Orphics who believed that the soul lives in the *aither* after death, while the body stays on earth.¹¹⁷ Pythagoras was reported to have taught that the sun and the moon were the "Isles of the Blessed" and the sea the "tears of Kronos."¹¹⁸ He is said to have stated that souls are the "people of dreams" assembled in the Milky Way (γαλαξία). Their celestial habitation in the Milky Way is demonstrated because this belt of stars derives its name from "milk" (γάλα), the first nourishment that souls receive as newborns when they have fallen into genesis.¹¹⁹ Consequently, Pythagoras thought that the infernal regions of Hades began just below the Milky Way. Souls that fall away from the Milky Way are falling out of heaven, beginning the process of incarnation.¹²⁰

Wherever the actual gate of ascension was positioned according to the Peratics, we may never know. But we do know that it was an underworld chasm guarded by Korē and opening into the Zodiac. We also know that the Peratics identified Kronos with the power of the destructive waters surging up from the underworld and feeding into Oceanus. Thus they identified Kronos with the Red Sea from scripture. He is the power of the water that encircles the suburbs, a power that cannot be escaped by anyone who belongs to the generative world. He is the water that the soul must cross in order to reach the wilderness where dwell the gods of destruction and the God of salvation. In this scripture-based allegory, the non-Gnostics are identified with the Egyptians who drown in the waters because of their ignorance. But the Gnostics, who have the precise knowledge of the sublunar sphere and the prayers and names will be permitted to cross the Red Sea. They will be permitted to pass through the Zodiacal pyramid gate guarded by Korē and her assistants and enter the celestial spheres beyond the place of birth and death.¹²¹

From the material that Hippolytus preserves, it appears that the first part of the Peratic initiatory journey, the first mystery or stage, involved journeying through the underworld and getting past Korē, and the guards

¹¹⁷ Euripides, *Suppliants* 533–34.

¹¹⁸ For discussion and references, see Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, 355.

¹¹⁹ Porphyry, *The Cave of the Nymphs* 28 (Lamberton, *Porphyry*, 36); Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.12.3 (Stahl, *Macrobius*, 134). Cf. Proclus (Wilhelm Kroll, ed., *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Rem publicam commentarii* [2 vols.; repr., Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1965], 2:129; Heraclides Ponticus, cited in Stob. 1.906.

¹²⁰ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.12.3 (Stahl, *Macrobius*, 134).

¹²¹ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.2–5 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 182).

of the five abysses, and over the dangerous waters of Kronos. It appears that invocations of powerful names were used to persuade the demons that the soul should be allowed out of Hades and over the Red Sea by way of the Zodiacal pyramid gate. Success meant the beginning of the journey of the second mystery or stage, the ascent through the celestial spheres.

Over the Desert and through the Serpent's Mouth

The Peratics call the celestial spheres the "desert." It is the frightening place that the children of Israel found themselves in once they had crossed over the Red Sea. In this desert, the Gnostics meet fiery serpents who try to bite and kill them just as they did the children of Israel.¹²² Who are the fiery serpents? Hippolytus tells us that the Peratics thought these serpents were the stars that would combat them in order to return their souls to the cycle of birth and death.¹²³ They are "the gods of generation (τῶν θεῶν τῆς γενέσεως)."¹²⁴ So here we have the confrontation between the soul and the planetary and Zodiacal rulers (who often were depicted by the Egyptians as serpentine) as it tries to make its way out of the celestial revolutions that are forcing it back into a body.

What saves the soul from this cycle according to the Peratics? Like initiations in some of the ancient mystery cults that culminated in a revelatory vision, the Peratic initiates are told to gaze further above them to the very top of the celestial sphere where they lay their eyes on Draco, the image of the perfect serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness for the redemption of the Israelites. Who is this serpent? It is none other than Christ, the Son of Man who was lifted up according to John 3:14 and who left his likeness shining perpetually in the heavens as Draco.¹²⁵

According to the Peratics, this constellation is the image of the great serpent who started the rotation of the universe and the process of descent or coming-into-being, as well as the process of ascent and return. His face turns about the pole, sometimes oriented upwards toward the

¹²² Num 21:6.

¹²³ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.6 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 183).

¹²⁴ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.8 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 183).

¹²⁵ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.6–12 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 183–184). For a discussion of the Peratic serpent, see Tuomas Rasimus, "The Serpent in Gnostic and Related Texts," in *Colloque International: "L'Évangile selon Thomas et les Textes de Nag Hammadi" Québec, 29–31 mai 2003* (ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier; BCNH.E 8; Québec: Les Presses de L'Université Laval, 2007), 417–71 at 439–42.

Father when he, as Christ, receives the descending powers. Then he turns and transfers these transcendent powers downward to matter, where they will function like the striped feed that Jacob fed his sheep in order to breed different colors.¹²⁶ This is how both the "corruptible" and the "incorruptible generations" came into being according to the Peratics.¹²⁷ Kronos, the demiurge, uses what he sees of these powers that Christ is revealing from the top of the universe and gives them material form. So we learn that the Peratics distinguish in the Gospel of John between Jesus' "Father in heaven," who is above Draco and who is the source of the powers that the Son transfers into the material realm, and "Your father is a murderer from the beginning" who is Kronos, the artificer of matter who reproduces the transferred powers in this world.¹²⁸ Kronos is a "murderer" because his work ends in corruption and death, the Peratic exegete concludes, although I imagine that Kronos' reputation as a baby-devouring Titan probably influenced this identification.¹²⁹ In this way, the Peratics remain careful interpreters of the Gospel of John which they understand to refer to Jesus as the creator and resident of the highest heavens, while the God of the Jews as "the father of the devil" is Kronos, the one responsible for evil and the formation of the corruptible generation.¹³⁰

The Gnostic, a member of the incorruptible generation, is the one who knows these cosmic secrets. He knows the "mystery of Eden," that the serpent in the sky is the river that flows out of Eden into the divine realm outside this universe and thus, it is the river that will carry him or her back to the divine realms beyond this cosmos.¹³¹ There is a suggestion in Hippolytus' discussion that the soul, while journeying in the celestial realms, is purified and then literally drawn up into the constellation Draco. The Peratic teacher quoted by Hippolytus says that if someone knows the secret of Draco, then that person is reconceived as if from Jacob's striped feed and becomes "white." This language is suggestive of investiture, when the initiate may have donned a white robe as was a typical practice in

¹²⁶ Gen 30:37; cf. John 1:1-4.

¹²⁷ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.17.1-4 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 185-186).

¹²⁸ Cf. Matt 7:11; John 8:44.

¹²⁹ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.17.7 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 186).

¹³⁰ Cf. John 8:44a. For a thorough discussion of this passage, see my forthcoming work on the Gospel of John and Gnostic thought.

¹³¹ Gen 2:10-14.

other mystery cults.¹³² If the person does not become "white," the person was like an "abortion born of night" that perishes in the night.¹³³

Thus the "mystery of Eden," the second of the initiation stages or journeys, appears to have included the spirit's escape from the terrifying "desert" through Draco, the serpent Christ who is "the door" at the top of the celestial dome leading into the transcendent realm where the Father lives.¹³⁴ For just as he brought down the Father's powers, so he brings up the awakened and purified powers, "the exactly copied perfect race (τὸ ἐξεικονισμένον τέλειον γένος)," from this world to the Father again, transferring them from unreality to reality. According to the Peratics, this happens like a magnet that draws only iron and nothing else.¹³⁵

They give proof for this Christ-centered descent-ascent system with reference to an analogy: the anatomy of the brain. The Father is the brain, while the Son is the serpentine-shaped cerebellum. The cerebellum draws up through the pineal gland the spiritual and life-giving substance that flows out from the arch of the brain. The cerebellum receives this and presents it to the Father. Likewise the Son imparts the powers to matter, like the seeds that flow down the marrow of the back so that children are born.

What we are seeing in the Peratic material is a very specific route for the ascent of the Gnostic's spirit after death. This route begins in the sub-lunar sphere, where the demons of Hades and Tartarus must be met and overcome. Kronos, the turbulent power of the sea that encompasses the terrestrial sphere must be crossed and the soul must pass through the gate that opens into the Zodiac, the pyramid gate guarded by Korē and her five demon assistants who govern the suburbs of Hades. This is the core of the first mystery or stage. Once in the Zodiac, the stars and planets must be met and overcome. This is the heart of the second mystery or stage. The spirit must journey up the draconian river of stars from the tail to the mouth where it is then spit out into the perfect divine realms outside the universe, the dwelling place of the transcendent Father. If there was a third mystery or stage, it probably began with the journey outside the universe, back to Jesus' "heavenly" Father who lives far above the heavens in a place all his own.

¹³² Cf. Graf, "Mysteries," 440.

¹³³ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.17.6 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 186).

¹³⁴ John 10:7.

¹³⁵ Hipp. *Haer.* 5.16.8-9 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 183). Hipp. *Haer.* 5.17.6-10 (Marcovich, *Hippolytus*, 186-87).

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