

Magical, Coptic, Christian:
The Great Angel Eleleth and the ‘Four Luminaries’
in Egyptian Literature of the First Millennium CE

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Scholars often speak of different Gnostic literary traditions – Valentinian, Ophite, Sethian, etc. – as if they were breeds of a particular animal, “Gnosticism.” We like to debate which texts do and do not belong to this and that category, and what ought to define these categories. Even so, we generally have a good idea of what constitutes each tradition; the hard part is what we do with phenomena which exhibit just one or two characteristics of a tradition. Do such cases reflect an early stage of literary development within the tradition, or “tertiary” developments that come later? Do we bend the shape of the category we have built in order to make room for these cases, or do we simply set them aside and denote them as “fringe”? Plenty of examples come to mind: the *Gospel of Judas*, for instance, seems to exhibit a shared source and at times some shared mythologoumena with the Sethian text called the *Egyptian Gospel*, but scholars remain at odds over whether it is evidence of a primitive stage of Sethianism, a later, degenerated stage of it, or simply evidence of diversity within a literary tradition.¹

The present contribution examines one of the criteria used in such debates: a set of mythologoumena known as the “Four Luminaries,” spirits by name of Harmozel, Oriael, Daveithe (or Daveithai), and Eleleth. These

¹ For the first view, see Tuomas Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Myth-making: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Evidence* (NHMS 68; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 40 n. 109, and Marvin Meyer, “When the Sethians Were Young,” 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), 57–73; for the second view, Gesine Schenke Robinson, “The *Gospel of Judas*: Its Protagonist, Its Composition, and Its Community,” in DeConick ed., *The Codex Judas Papers*, 88–89; John D. Turner, “The Sethian Myth in the Gospel of Judas: Soteriology or Demonology,” in *The Codex Judas Papers*, esp. 97; for the third view, Lance Jenott, *The Gospel of Judas: Coptic Text, Translation, and Historical Interpretation of the ‘Betrayal’s Gospel’* (STAC 64; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 72–73, 131–32.

beings are best known as celestial helpers popping up in various treatises discovered at Nag Hammadi classified by Hans-Martin Schenke as “Sethian.”² I would like to offer a survey of what we know about these beings, and highlight examples where one of our “luminaries,” Eleleth, does not quite seem to fit the mold we have made for him based upon what we see in most of the “Sethian” texts, namely, where he appears to be responsible for producing unpleasant beings who create and rule the flawed cosmos, and when he appears as a revelatory angel, set apart from the rest of his Sethian gang.

It becomes easier to understand how Eleleth can play these other, independent roles in Gnostic texts when we turn to non-Gnostic Egyptian magical and homiletic literature of the first millennium CE, where Eleleth and Daveithe appear on occasion as angels of great power and benevolence. As we will see, some of this evidence reaches back to the second or third centuries CE, and so is contemporaneous with our evidence from Nag Hammadi. From this perspective, the mere mention of Eleleth in a text does not a “Sethian” text make. Conversely, the renown of the angelic beings Eleleth and Daveithe in the world of first-millennium Egyptian Christianity may explain the appeal of the Gnostic literature in which they prominently feature to the individuals responsible for the Nag Hammadi Codices.

Four Luminaries Inhabiting the Autogenes Aeon: A Barbeloite Mythologoumenon

In the Sethian texts, the Four Luminaries are usually associated with the Autogenes (or “self-begotten”) aeon, as for instance in the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II,1 and par.), where, together with their twelve own subaeons, they attend and praise the appearance of the aeon of the Christ.³ Thereafter, the “Perfect Human Being” – the model of divine humanity – appears, and, following his praise of the divine, various celestial counterparts of

² Hans-Martin Schenke, “Das sethianische System nach Nag-Hammadi-Handschriften,” in *Studia Coptica* (ed. Peter Nagel; BBA 45; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974), 165–73; Schenke (trans. Bentley Layton), “The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism* (ed. Bentley Layton; 2 vols.; SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 2:588–616. The classic monograph on Sethianism is John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (BCNH.É 6; Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2001).

³ *Ap. John* II 7.29–8.28. For convenience here I refer only to the long recension of the text. All translations given in this essay are my own except as noted; those from the Nag Hammadi texts are made with reference to both CGL and BCNH editions, noting differences ad loc.

primordial humans appear, together with the pre-existent souls of the saved. They inhabit the “Luminaries”:

Then, out of the [foreknowledge] of the perfect intellect, through the manifestation of the will of the Invisible Spirit, and (through the manifestation of) the will of the Autogenes, <the> perfect human being (came forth) – the first Manifestation, and the truth.⁴ It is he who the Virgin Spirit called “Geradamas.” And He (i.e., the Spirit) placed him over the first aeon, with the great one, the Autogenes, Christ, under the first Luminary, Harmozēl . . . And he (i.e., Geradamas) established his son, Seth, upon the second aeon, in the presence of the second Luminary, Ōrōiēl. And in the third aeon, the Seed of Seth was established, over the third Luminary, Daveithai; the souls of the saints were established there. And in the fourth aeon were established the souls of those who were without knowledge of the pleroma, and did not repent at once, but, rather, persisted for a time (in their disbelief), and repented only later. They came into being under the fourth Luminary, Ēlēlēth. These are begotten ones, who glorify the Invisible Spirit . . . (*Ap. John* II 8.28–9.24)⁵

Similarly, the *Egyptian Gospel* (NHC III,2; IV,2) depicts the production of the Four Luminaries in the Autogenes with their consorts, together comprising an “ogdoad of the divine Autogenes.”⁶ The Luminaries then acquire “ministers” and their own “consorts” (a second ogdoad contained within the Autogenes), and the whole bunch erupts in praise to the “[great, invisible and incorruptible, uncallable, virgin Spirit], and the male [virgin], and the great aeon of [Doxomedōn].”⁷ As in the *Apocryphon of John*, the second Luminary, Oroiael, serves as home to the celestial Seth, while the third Luminary, Davithe, serves as home to Seth’s celestial seed.⁸

In *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1) too, the Four Luminaries are associated with the Autogenes aeon. They appear occasionally throughout the text, particularly as beings who interact with different classes of post-mortem souls in heaven, those amongst the saved who escape reincarnation and thus enter the lowest sub-aeon of the Barbelo, the Autogenes:⁹

Therefore, there are four luminaries: [first, Harmozel] is established upon the first aeon – a love of the god of [truth]¹⁰ and a union of soul; second, Ōroiaēl is established over the

⁴ The text here is probably a little corrupt; see the clearer text in the short version.

⁵ Other “luminaries” appear later in the text, as celestial agents who trick the demiurge into giving up the creative power he has stolen from Sophia, but it is not clear that they are to be identified with Harmozel and his partners (*Ap. John* II 19.15–28).

⁶ NHC IV 63.8–64.10 = III 51.14–52.16.

⁷ NHC IV 64.10–65.14 = III 52.16–53.20.

⁸ NHC IV 67.27–68.5 = III 56.13–22; IV 77.12–18 = III 65.16–22; see further Dylan M. Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Divinations; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2014), 81, 214.

⁹ *Zost.* 18.14–19. For discussion, see John D. Turner, “Commentary: *Zostrianos*,” in *Zostrien* (ed. Catherine Barry et al.; BCNH.T 24; Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2000), 483–662, 529; Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God*, 95–106.

¹⁰ Here following the text of Barry et al., *Zostrien*.

second (aeon), a powerful seer of truth; third, Daveithē is established upon the third (aeon), a vision of knowledge; fourth, Ēlēth is established upon the fourth (aeon), an appetite and preparation for truth. And the four exist insofar as [they are] discourses of truth and [knowledge. They] exist, although they do not belong to the Protophanes; rather, they belong to the mother. . . (Zost. 29,1–17)

All four luminaries are blessed in heaven amongst celestial beings, such as Pleistheia and Emmakha Seth.¹¹ They have subaeons, with three heavenly inhabitants apiece.¹² Other “luminaries,” belonging to the aeons of the Protophanes and Kalyptos aeons, appear throughout the text, as well as luminaries who simply “belong to the Barbelo.”¹³ We set aside the evidence pertaining to these characters here.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the opaque *Untitled Treatise* in the Bruce Codex manages to mention three of the Four Luminaries in a passage that terminates in a lacuna. The passage seems to be part of a cosmogonic description, detailing the fashioning of the upper reaches of the material realm for the “products of matter” (νεαπο νογλη).¹⁵ The “aetherial earth” (or “airy earth” – κκαζ ἰαηρ) is created, followed by the “place of the Repentance” and the “stratospheric reflections (αντιτυπος ναεροδιος).”¹⁶ This jargon is known to *Zostrianos*, and likely refers to the realms about the moon where reincarna-

¹¹ Zost. 51.12–18.

¹² Zost. 127.15–128.8.

¹³ Those belonging to the Protophanes aeon are mentioned at Zost. 54.17–25; prayed to but not named at 63.13–17; listed and named on pp. 119–120. A nearly identical version of the latter pages is preserved in P. Bodmer XLIII, ed. Rodolphe Kasser and Philippe Luisier, “P. Bodmer XLIII: Un Feuillet de *Zostrien*,” *Mus* 120:3–4 (2007): 251–72. Those belonging to the Kalyptos aeon are listed and named at Zost. 126. Finally, those belonging “to Barbelo” are mentioned at 62.17–22: “Thus, invoke now Salamex and [Semen] and the absolutely perfect Armē – the luminaries of the [aeon] of Barbelo, and the immeasurable knowledge . . . See also 63.17–20. References to “luminaries” in passages too fragmentary to be clear or useful include NHC VIII 31.12–17 and 32.2–5.

¹⁴ These beings seem to be hypostasizations of heavenly helpers. They have their own sub-aeons, which seem to be servants who assist them with the celestial liturgy and baptism (see below, n. 21).

¹⁵ Text provided in *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Treatise in the Bruce Codex* (ed. Carl Schmidt, trans. and rev. Violet MacDermot; NHC 13; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 263.16–264.6, pp. 49–51 in the manuscript in the reckoning of Schmidt. Eric Crégheur has recently argued that numeration of the pages should rather follow that proposed by Baynes, with the present pages in question then coming at the end of the *Untitled Treatise*, numbered 60–61. Crégheur, “Édition critique, traduction et introduction des ‘deux Livres de Jésus’ (MS Bruce 96), avec des notes philologiques et textuelles” (PhD diss., Université Laval, 2013), 75–76, 482–83.

¹⁶ Or, more parsimoniously, “the antitypes of Aerodios,” per MacDermot. The Graeco-Coptic word ἀερόδιος is not found in major Greek lexica. Perhaps the term is an adjective describing a passage through the ἄηρ, i.e., the stratosphere; thus “celestial,” or “heavenly.”

tion takes place.¹⁷ Baptisms in the name of the Autogenes are administered there by celestial baptizers common to Sethian literature: Michar and Michael, with Barpharangēs, Zōgenethlos, “and the aeon Autogenes. Inside of it were left four luminaries: Ēlēth, Daveide, Ōroiaēl [. . .]”¹⁸ In fact, the content and wording of the passage is so similar to what we find on *Zostrianos* NHC VIII 6 that it is hardly possible that the *Untitled Treatise* did not know a version of *Zostrianos*, or share a source with it.¹⁹

Returning to Nag Hammadi, the names of the Four Luminaries appear in *Melchizedek* (NHC IX, 3) amongst a slew of other celestial beings (some of them, such as Geradamas, also known from other Sethian texts) praised by the speaker in a doxology.²⁰ They are called “commanders-in-chief” (ἀρχιστρατηγος), an epithet used elsewhere in Coptic literature for the archangel Michael, as we will see. They also appear in *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII, 1^a) as aeons produced by the Son, or Christ.²¹ They go on to give glory in heaven – and then, as we will see, things begin to go awry. First, however, let us summarize what we have observed thus far: the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Egyptian Gospel*, *Zostrianos*, the *Untitled Treatise* of the Bruce Codex, and *Trimorphic Protennoia* refer to the Four Luminaries as a distinct quartet of active beings – forming a quintet, together with the Autogenes aeon – who praise the First Principle in heaven (essentially performing a celestial liturgy for eternity), and, at the same time, passive locations, places in heaven themselves. (This tension between activity and passivity sounds strange, but is actually typical aeonic behavior).²² This “classic” account of the Four Luminaries is old: the opening theology of the *Apocryphon of John* in which the Luminaries appear is

¹⁷ Zost. 5.14–27, 12.2–17. See Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God*, 96–98; on the “aetherial earth” as a name for the moon, see Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (trans. William Harris Stahl; New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 1.11.7. Plotinus complains about the Gnostic notion of a “new earth,” which is mentioned elsewhere in the *Untitled Treatise* (Enn. 2.9 [33] 5.23–26, τὴν γῆν καινὴν; *Unt. Tr.* 249.21 [Schmidt/MacDermot], κκαζ ἰαηρ), but this is an eschatological notion, rather than a cognomen for the “a(eth)erial earth”; see Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God*, 107.

¹⁸ *Unt. Tr.* 264.5–7; cf. Zost. 6.7–17. Mikhar and Mikheus also appear in *Gos. Eg.* IV 76.4, 9–10 = III 64.14, 20; *Apoc. Adam* 84.4–8; Zost. 47.24; on Barpharanges, see below.

¹⁹ I hope to investigate this evidence further elsewhere.

²⁰ *Melch.* NHC IX 6.2–5, 17.6–19.

²¹ *Trim. Prot.* 38.33–39.7: “The first aeon, now, he established [on the first]: Harmēdōn, Nousa[nion, Harmozēl]; [the] second he established [upon the second aeon]: Phaionion Ainion Oroiaēl; the third (he established) upon the third aeon: Mellephanea, Lōion, Daveithai; the fourth (he established) upon the fourth: Mousanion, Amethēn, Ēlēth. Therefore, these are the aeons who were produced through the begotten God, the Christ.”

²² Dylan M. Burns, “Aion,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Ancient Mediterranean Religions* (ed. Eric Orlin, et al.; London/New York: Routledge, 2016), 26.

dependent upon or shares a source with a version of the myth ascribed by Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 180) to certain Gnostics, a myth termed by modern scholars “Barbeloite” due to its focus on the Barbelo as divine genetrix of the intelligible cosmos.²³ The “Four Luminaries,” here named Armogenes, Raguel, David, and Eleleth, are therefore a Barbeloite mythologoumenon that goes back at least to roughly the mid-second century CE. This formulation includes their association with the Autogenes-Christ aeon (also mentioned by Irenaeus), and thus the composition of the Luminaries with the Autogenes as a pentad.²⁴ We cannot trace their existence, to the best knowledge of this author, further back than Irenaeus.²⁵

Eleleth as Responsible for Creation

Yet there are several cases in the “Sethian” corpus delineated by Schenke and Turner where one of the Four Luminaries, Eleleth, does not at all walk or talk like the Eleleth of *Apocryphon of John* et al. One is a peculiar literary tradition which casts responsibility for the crack in the pleroma that eventually produces the demiurge at the feet of Eleleth, rather than a fault

²³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.29, where the luminares are named Armoges, Raguel, David, and Eleleth.

²⁴ The question of the relationship of this mythologoumenon to the mysterious rite known as the “Five Seals” I forego here. For an argument that the “Five Seals” refers to a fivefold chrismation (corresponding to these five aeonic beings), following a threefold baptism (corresponding to the Barbeloite triad of Father, Mother, and Son), see Alastair H. B. Logan, “The Mystery of the Five Seals: Gnostic Initiation Reconsidered,” *VC* 51 (1997): 188–206, esp. 190; Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*, 258.

²⁵ Proposed etymologies of their names run the gamut and tell us nothing certain, except that the names are likely of Hebrew or Aramaic origin; for survey, see Søren Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis: The Coptic Text of the Apocryphon Johannis in the Nag Hammadi Codex II, with Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (ATDan 5; Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), 183–85. Meanwhile, Paul-Hubert Poirier and Michel Tardieu have argued the names are of “Zurvanist inspiration,” Persian terms referring to a quadripartite division of time into four salvific-historical epochs (“Catégories du temps dans les écrits gnostiques non valentiniens,” *LTP* 37:1 [1981]: 3–13, 12–13, a suggestion admired but rejected by Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* [NHS 24; Leiden: Brill, 1984], 55 n. 7). Eugenia Smagina has instead proposed (without evidence) that the names are of Persian origin, referring to the four elements; Smagina, “Das manichäische Kreuz des Lichts und der *Jesus Patibilis*,” in *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West: Proceedings of the Fribourg-Utrecht Symposium of the International Association of Manichaeic Studies [IAMS]* (ed. Johannes van Oort, Otto Wermelinger, and Gregor Wurst; NHMS 49; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 248. Dr. Mushegh Asatryan and Dr. Khodadad Rezakhani relate to me that, *pace* Prof. Smagina, the names of the Luminaries do not appear to recall Old or Middle Persian terms for air, fire, earth, and water.

on the part of Sophia.²⁶ In *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the “Luminaries” praise the Invisible Spirit, as in other treatises noted already. But here, immediately following their praise, a “logos” appears from Eleleth, and poses a question presuming a rupture in the heavenly realm, apparently enacting such a rupture by doing so in what scholars might today call a “performative speech-act”:

Then, a Logos was issued from the great light, Ēlēlēth, and said, “I am king! Who belongs to Chaos, and who to Hades?” At that time, his light appeared radiant, possessing afterthought . . .²⁷

Next to this nasty *logos* appears a terrible demon who rules over chaos, Saklas, and it is he who adopts the familiar unpleasant characteristics of the Gnostic demiurge in the rest of our narrative.

Something similar happens in the *Egyptian Gospel*; here, after Seth places his seed in Davithe, “five thousand years” pass, and Eleleth pronounces, “let one reign over the chaos and Hades.”²⁸ The precise events that follow are unclear due to lacunae in the manuscripts, but the end products are “Sakla, the great angel,” and his partner in creation, “Nebruel, the great demon.”²⁹ We seem to find Eleleth in a comparable role in the *Gospel of Judas*, where he summons into existence angels to rule over the underworld, including “Nebro” and “Saklas.”³⁰ These episodes stick out in Gnostic literature, where some kind of error of Sophia or another being is usually responsible for the generation of the demiurge and the cosmos. So, why would Eleleth be singled out as culpable for the malevolent world-ruler(s) in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Egyptian Gospel*, and the *Gospel of Judas* (if the proposed restoration of the text is correct)?³¹ The philosophical reason is clear enough: by exculpating Sophia of error, these texts attempt to conceive of the Gnostic cosmogony as a providential event,

²⁶ Poirier and Tardieu, “Catégories du temps,” 10; see also John D. Turner, “Nag Hammadi Codex XIII, 1^{*}: Notes to Text and Translation,” in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, and XIII* (ed. Charles W. Hedrick; NHS 28; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 435–54, 441–43; Turner, *Platonic Tradition*, 228–30, and in the following discussion.

²⁷ *Trim. Prot.* 39.13–19.

²⁸ *Gos. Eg.* III 56.22–25.

²⁹ *Gos. Eg.* III 56.26–57.22. See also Alexander Böhlig and Frederik Wisse, “Commentary: The Gospel of the Egyptians,” in *Nag Hammadi Codices III, 2 and IV, 2: The Gospel of the Egyptians (The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit)* (ed. Alexander Böhlig and Frederik Wisse; NHS 4; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 183.

³⁰ *Gos. Jud.* 51.1–23, restoring the first word of the page as ἡλ^{vac} [ἡλλῆθ], per Turner, “Sethian Myth,” 100; for detailed discussion, see Jenott, *Gospel of Judas*, 94–97.

³¹ Indeed, Turner himself wonders what the benefit of this shift in Gnostic mythos obtains (*Platonic Tradition*, 229 n. 6).

willed by the divine.³² What remains is the question of why Eleleth *in particular* is assigned responsibility for creation.

Eleleth in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*

John D. Turner has argued that we can understand what is happening with Eleleth in *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Egyptian Gospel* if we turn to the evidence preserved in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II,4). Scholars generally recognize that the treatise is a revealer-discourse in two parts, of clearly distinct provenances.³³ It was designated “Sethian” by Schenke and Turner on the basis of the appearance of Eleleth as revealer.³⁴ However, the text has no other references to Sethian mythologoumena – in fact, Seth himself only “appears” in a mutilated passage, where his name has to be restored to the text. He is not the revealer, savior, or cosmic being who we find in the undisputedly “Sethian” material; in fact, he plays no role at all in the rest of the narrative, which proceeds to introduce and focus on his sister, the virgin Norea.³⁵ Indeed, Rasimus has argued convincingly that the text’s theology should be considered “Ophite,” in light of mythologoumena shared with several other Nag Hammadi texts, and especially its revisionary speculation on the famous story of Adam and Eve’s encounter with the Serpent in the Garden of Eden.³⁶

Significantly, the revealer in the second half of the text is our friend Eleleth. Poor Norea comes under assault from the archons,³⁷ and cries to heaven for help:

³² Thus Jenott, *Gospel of Judas*, 97–99.

³³ The basic insight of Rodolphe Kasser, “Formation de ‘L’Hypostase des Archontes,” *BSAC* 21 (1971–1973): 88, even if one is skeptical about his reconstruction of a redaction-history for the text, as is Roger A. Bullard, “The *Hypostasis of the Archons*: Introduction,” in *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2–7, together with XIII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. Or.4926(1), and P.Oxy. 1. 654, 655* (ed. Bentley Layton; NHS 20; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 1:220–33, 222, 225.

³⁴ For summary of scholarship, see Ursula Ulrike Kaiser, *Die Hypostase der Archonten (Nag-Hammadi-Codex II,4). Neu herausgegeben, übersetzt und erklärt* (TUGAL 156; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter), 33–35.

³⁵ *Hyp. Arch.* 91.30–92.3: “And Adam [had knowledge] of his partner, Eve, and she birthed [Seth] to Adam, and said, ‘I [have given birth to another] man, through God, in place [of Abel].’ Again Eve became pregnant, and gave birth [to Norea]. And she (Eve) said, ‘he (Adam) has begotten [me on a virgin], as aid [from] generation to generation of humanity. She is the virgin, who none of (the) powers have defiled.’”

³⁶ On “Ophite” Gnosticism, see Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*, 54–62.

³⁷ For a summary of ancient traditions about the figure of Norea, see Birger Pearson, “The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature,” in *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, Stockholm, August 20–25, 1973* (ed. Geo Widengren; Stockholm:

(Norea cried), “Deliver me from the rulers of unrighteousness! Save me from their clutches! – *Right now!*”

A <great> angel descended from the heavens, saying to her, “why do you shout up at God? Why do you dare to (act this way before) the Holy Spirit?”

Norea replied: “Who are you?” The rulers of unrighteousness had withdrawn from her.

He said, “It is I, Elelēth, Wisdom, the great angel who stands in the presence of the Holy Spirit. I have been sent to speak with you, and to save you from the clutches of the lawless ones. And I shall teach you about your root.”

Now, as for that angel, I could never speak of his power; his appearance is like fine gold, and his robe is like snow. Nay, my mouth should be unable to bear speaking of his power, and the look on his face!

The great angel Elelēth spoke to me. “It is I,” he said, “understanding. I come from the Four Luminaries, beings who stand in the presence of the Great Invisible Spirit . . .”³⁸

Eleleth then narrates the creation of the world, and the eventual redemption of the “kingless generation” by a “True Man” through salvific chrisim.³⁹

The revealer in this passage refers to himself once as one of the Four Luminaries, but everything else about the scene leads us to think otherwise. The revealer is dubbed three times a “great angel (τῆς ἄγγελος).”⁴⁰ He has a physical appearance recalling that of traditional Jewish theophanies, in stark contrast to the decidedly opaque aeons of the Auto-genes we know from other “Sethian” literature.⁴¹ Indeed, the other Luminaries appear nowhere throughout the rest of the text; nor do the Auto-genes aeon, nor the Invisible Spirit. In fact, the rest of the treatise prefers an entirely different appellation for the divine – “The Immortality” (often

Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977), 143–52; Pearson later argued that Norea is effectively a *salvatrix salvanda*: “Revisiting Norea,” in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (ed. Karen L. King; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 265–75; cf. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 54–60.

³⁸ *Hyp. Arch.* 93.1–22.

³⁹ *Hyp. Arch.* 96.27–97.16.

⁴⁰ *Hyp. Arch.* 93.8, 93.18, 94.3.

⁴¹ The “appearance like fine gold” (ἡμοιοῦσιν ἄργυρον) recalls 4QShirShabb^b 4Q405 23 ii 9–10: “the substance of the spirit of glory is like work from Ophir, that shines” (כְּמַצְשֵׁי אֹרֶן מֵאוֹפִיר), i.e. quality gold (trans. Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition* [2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 837; for Ophir, the Biblical “El Dorado,” as roughly synonymous with fine gold, see Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 20b). For the “robe like snow” on the Ancient of Days, see Dan 7:9 (“his clothing was white as snow”); similarly *1 En.* 14:20–21, and the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain (Mark 9:2–3, Luke 9:29). For beings with hair as white as snow, see: *Apoc. Abr.* 11:1–3, *Jos. Asen.* 22:7. For citation and discussion of these passages, I am indebted to Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (SNTSMS 95; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 37, 61, 82–84, 163–64; cf. Kaiser, *Hypostase der Archonten*, 291.

rendered by translators as “indestructibility” – Copt. $\tau\mu\eta\tau\alpha\tau\tau\alpha\kappa\omicron$ = Grk. $\alpha\phi\theta\alpha\rho\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$). This term is rare to the other Sethian treatises, although it is used once in *Apocryphon of John* to denote the Sethian first principle, the Great Invisible Spirit, a point we shall return to below.⁴² In short, even though Eleleth is a central character to the second half of the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the only other evidence of Barbeloite mythologumena in the text – the reference to the Four Luminaries and the Great Invisible Spirit – appears as an afterthought, distinct from the language used about divine beings (including Eleleth himself!) throughout the rest of the treatise.

Turner synthesizes the evidence on Eleleth – which he delimits to the Nag Hammadi corpus and Irenaeus – as follows: “Immortality” is also one of five characteristics assigned to Barbelo in the *Apocryphon of John*, and so he speculates that the “Immortality” in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* is nothing else than a cognomen for Barbelo.⁴³ He observes further that Norea calls for help, and Eleleth answers; now, in *Trimorphic Protennoia*, after Eleleth calls for the creation of the world, Epinoia-Sophia calls for help, and is forthwith restored to pleroma. Even though her cry is addressed to no one in particular, its proximity to Eleleth’s short speech leads Turner to suppose that Epinoia beseeches Eleleth.⁴⁴ He then also recalls a short, fragmentary treatise from NHC IX, in which the character Norea is aided by “four holy helpers ($\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\alpha\gamma\ \bar{\nu}\omega\nu\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma\ \epsilon\tau\omicron\gamma\alpha\lambda\bar{\nu}$).”⁴⁵ Turner concludes that that “the *Thought of Norea*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*” witness a stage in the Christianization of the Barbeloite-Sethian myth, taking place in the late second century, where Epinoia/Sophia is innocent, “such that her restoration to the Light no longer requires repentance for a willful act performed without her consort, as is the case in the *Apocryphon of John*.”⁴⁶ We are asked to read the “four helpers” of Norea in NHC IX as substitutes for the Barbeloite Four Luminaries; Sophia’s cry for help to no one in *Trimorphic Protennoia* as Norea’s cry for help answered by Eleleth in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*; the “Immortality” of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* as Barbelo in the *Apocryphon of John*.⁴⁷

Turner’s analysis is a remarkable presentation of what could have been. But *must* it have been? I find it *at least as likely* that the reference to the “Four Luminaries” and the “Invisible Spirit” in the *Hypostasis of the Ar-*

⁴² *Ap. John* II 2.30 = BG 22.22. I thank Kristine Toft Rosland for the reference.

⁴³ *Ap. John* II 5.21, 23 = BG 28.15–16; Turner, *Platonic Tradition*, 107.

⁴⁴ *Trim. Prot.* 39.32–40.4.

⁴⁵ *Norea* 28.24–30.

⁴⁶ Turner, *Platonic Tradition*, 99; similarly, 228–30, and 169–70 on this stage of Christianization of “the Sethian descent myth.”

⁴⁷ Turner, *Platonic Tradition*, 108.

chons (93.20–22) is a gloss on the text by a scribe who found these Barbeloite mythologumena to be attractive authorities. The “four holy helpers” of *Norea* could refer to any group of four angelic beings; indeed, angels like to travel in packs of four, as Turner himself recognizes.⁴⁸ The “Immortality” of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* plays none of the usual roles of the Barbelo (i.e., the divine mother, providence, etc.), and instead seems to refer to a first principle – indeed, as it once does in the *Apocryphon of John*. This would make sense in the context of Jewish sapiential literature, for the Wisdom of Solomon refers to God’s creative, “immortal spirit” (Copt. $\pi\epsilon\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha\ \bar{\nu}\alpha\tau\tau\alpha\kappa\omicron$), and the “immortality” ($\mu\eta\tau\alpha\tau\tau\alpha\kappa\omicron$) in which God created Adam, which can be recovered by following the Law and returning to God.⁴⁹ Rather than serving as a cognomen for Barbelo, then, the term “Immortality” as an appellation for God in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* draws from a greater wellspring of Jewish lore in which immortality is the binding agent between God and humanity, a wellspring from which the *Apocryphon of John* must have drunk as well. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* is thus a complex textual unit comprised of multiple sources and indebted to multiple literary traditions (Ophite and Barbeloite).

If it is probably the case that the reference to the Four Luminaries and the Invisible Spirit in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* is a scribal gloss, lending the “great angel” the weighty authority of Barbeloite tradition, was the name of the “great angel” Eleleth, or was this name added along with the reference to the Invisible Spirit and the Four Luminaries? We cannot say. Yet, should we turn to evidence about Eleleth and the “Four Luminaries” outside of the Nag Hammadi corpus, we are forced to entertain the possibility that the references to the “Four Luminaries” and the “Great Invisible Spirit” entered the text of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* as glosses to Norea’s dialogue with “the great angel, Eleleth” (and not simply “the great angel”): Eleleth possessed his own authority in later first-millennium Egypt, apart from the Barbeloite mythologoumenon of the “Four Luminaries,” as a benevolent superhuman being.

⁴⁸ For instance, in *1 En.* 9–10, the four archangels Raphael, Uriel, Michael, and Gabriel descend from heaven to battle the Watchers. Cf. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 55 n. 7, followed by Turner, *Platonic Tradition*, 229 n. 6; Kaiser, *Hypostase der Archonten*, 289; see also n. 59 below.

⁴⁹ Wis 12:1, 2:23, 6:19–20; Coptic text in Paul de Lagarde, *Aegyptiaca* (Göttingen: Arnoldi Hoyer, 1883). The term $\alpha\phi\theta\alpha\rho\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ refers to “immortality” in early Christian literature more widely: e.g., *Apoc. Pet.* 75.7.

Eleleth and Davithe in Egyptian Magical and Homiletic Literature

Indeed, Eleleth possesses his own life, not as a Barbeloite “Luminary” but a simply a powerful angel, throughout ancient and early medieval Egyptian Christian literature, particularly in magical texts. The name Eleleth – usually together with Davithe, himself also a distinct character – appears in many extant texts, six of which we shall review here. Five are preserved in Coptic, one in Greek; they range in date from the third or fourth century CE to the end of the first millennium of our era.⁵⁰

The first spell is a papyrus from the British Museum published by Kropp. The spell is used to acquire a good voice. Davithe and Eleleth (or: a single entity, Davithe-Eleleth) are amongst the beings invoked:

I invoke you (sg.) today, Daveithea, ye who lie upon the bed of the Tree of Life, ye in whose right hand lies the golden ring, in whose left hand lies the spiritual lyre; ye, gathering all the angels for the greeting of The Father.

I invoke you (sg.) today, Davithe, Eleleth (ⲧⲏⲧⲁⲣⲕⲟ ⲛⲓⲛⲟⲕ ⲛⲓⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲗⲟⲩⲟⲩⲁ ⲉⲗⲉⲗⲏⲏⲟ), in the names of the seven holy archangels: Michael, Gabriel, Souriel, Hraphael, Asouel, Sarafouel, Abael – those who are established at the right hand of the forearm of the Father, prepared to fulfill his will entire – so that you (pl.) might obey everything that will be uttered by my mouth and act under my control,⁵¹ descend upon this cup. . .⁵²

⁵⁰ I am indebted to members of the 2014 Koptische Lesegruppe Lipsiensis – Joost Hagen, Frederic Krueger, Franziska Naether, and Tonio Sebastian Richter – with whom I read the texts discussed in this section, for their commentary on this fascinating material, some of which is reflected in the present translations and notes. Any errors remain my own of course. By incorporating not only extra-Nag Hammadi but post-conquest materials into the present study, I am inspired in part by recent historiographical reflection on the virtues of mapping trajectories across the first millennium CE, rather than simply late antiquity; see chiefly Garth Fowden, *Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). In the interest of brevity, I set aside a questionable reference to Eleleth: P.Mich. inv. 593 18.4 mentions the name “Eielaeliath” in a long list of *voces magicae* and names of superhuman entities (Paul Mirecki, “The Coptic Wizard’s Hoard,” *HTR* 87:4 [1994]: 435–60, 451). Less questionable is the Ηληλυθ we meet alongside, Michaēl, Gabriēl, Raphaēl, and Ouriēl in P.Med. I 20, a Greek spell written on papyrus dated to the fifth–sixth century CE and used as an amulet. See Robert W. Daniel and Franko Maltonmini, *Supplementum Magicum Vol. II* (Abhandlungen der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Sonderreihe Papyrologica Coloniensia 16.2; Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1992), 204–8, for edition, translation, and commentary. However, Eleleth’s appearance on the gold amulet housed at the J. Paul Getty Museum (discussed below) suffices to demonstrate the angel’s circulation in Greek-language magical texts at an earlier date.

⁵¹ A somewhat free rendering of ⲛⲧⲉ[ⲧⲏ]ⲉⲣⲉ ⲥⲁ ⲛⲁⲧⲟⲟⲩ; on the idiom ⲉⲣⲉ ⲛⲁⲧⲟⲟⲩ, see Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 426a. Cf. Kropp (following note), “. . . auf daß ihr allen Aussprüchen meines Mundes gehorchet, gemäß den Winken meiner Hand handelt.”

Equally striking is another papyrus at the British Museum (P.Lond.Or. 5987), dated by Crum to the seventh or eighth century and republished by Kropp, where an exorcism and general call for power is laden with occasional “Gnostic” language (i.e., to “aeons” and Yao Sabaoth) and invocations of many angelic beings.⁵³ The magician calls upon “Arimiel Davithe Eleleth Ermukratos Adonai Ermusr, the invisible Bainchooch.”⁵⁴ Then, Davithe is described as a kind of supra-angelic figure:

Davithe, with the golden hair, whose eyes are lightning-bolts, it is you, in whose hand lies the keys to divinity; when you close something, one cannot open it again; when you open, one cannot close it again. It is you, who gives from the golden cup to the church of the first-born. Davithe, you are the Allfather, you are the one who blows the golden trumpet of the Father; you blow to gather all to you who exist throughout all creation – whether principality or angel or archangel.⁵⁵

Here, Davithe seems to enjoy supra-archangelic status, almost like what we would expect of a celestial vice-regent.

We also come across Davithe and Eleleth in a magical text copied onto a parchment codex, probably in the later tenth century CE,⁵⁶ at the climax

⁵² P.Lond.Or. 6794 1.6–17 (ed. Angelicus Kropp, *Ausgewählte koptische Zaubertexte*; 3 vols.; Brussels: Édition de la fondation égyptologique, 1930–31), 1:29–30 (text), 2:104–5 (trans.). Davithe remains a focal point of the spell throughout what follows. See also C. Detlef G. Müller, *Die Engellehre der koptischen Kirche: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der christlichen Frömmigkeit in Ägypten* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1959), 295–96.

⁵³ “Certain features of the language might indicate an archaic idiom, though some of these often characterize 7th and 9th cent. documents from Hermopolis (Ashmunain)” (Walter E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum* [London: British Museum, 1905], 418). The text is re-edited, with English translation, as an appendix in *A Coptic Handbook of Ritual Power (P.Macq. I 1)* (ed. Malcolm Choat and Iain Gardner; Macquarie Papyri 1; Turnhout: Brepols, 2014). One “Seth” is mentioned on line 98, whom Crum and Kropp (*Catalogue*, 420a n. 5; *Zaubertexte*, 2:159, respectively) surmise to be the Egyptian god Seth-Typhon, contrasted with Jesus Christ. This is all but impossible, for “neither Seth, the son of Adam, nor Christ is ever welded with the Egyptian god Seth-Typhon” in extant ancient literature (Jarl Fossum and Ben Glazer, “Seth in the Magical Texts,” *ZPE* 100 [1994]: 92).

⁵⁴ P.Lond.Or. 5987 1.13–14 (Kropp, *Zaubertexte*, 1:22, 2:149). Similarly, 1.45–46. For further commentary, see Müller, *Engellehre*, 295.

⁵⁵ P.Lond.Or. 5987 1.71–80 (Kropp, *Zaubertexte*, 1:24–25, 2:152–53).

⁵⁶ Thus Marvin Meyer, *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels (P.Heid.Inv.Kopt. 685). Text, Translation, Commentary* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1996), 5, following the analysis of Hans Quecke, “Palimpsestfragment eines koptischen Lektionars (P. Heid. Kopt. Nr. 685),” *Mus* 85 (1972): 5–24. See further Marvin Meyer, “The Persistence of Ritual in the Magical Book of Mary and the Angels: *P.Heid.Inv.Kopt. 685*,” in *Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature. Essays in Honor of Birger A. Pearson* (ed. April DeConick et al.; NHMS 85; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 360–61.

of a protracted apotropaic spell that also invokes the Father, the Son, countless angels, and particularly the Virgin Mary:

I adjure you today, by the chalice of blood from which the angels drank, until they received the Holy Spirit, that (you) send me your holy hand upon the water and the oil; set before me – me, NN – and let St. Mary, the Holy Virgin, come down upon them, and may she bless the water, that it becomes salvation and purification, so that at the moment that NN is washed in it, s/he becomes saved. Yea, yea, at once, at once! I adjure you today, (by) his four imperishable mysteries: Daveithea, Eleleth, Orem, Mosiēl, who are spread out upon the four sides of heaven . . .⁵⁷

Here Daviethe and Eleleth appear with two other beings (and so in a group of four), but are not dubbed “luminaries.” No other Sethian mythologoumena appear in the text. This “prayer of Mary” was popular, and is preserved (more or less) in at least eight other versions.⁵⁸ The Barbeloite “Luminaries” pop up in some of these parallels as well.⁵⁹

Fourthly, a newly-published parchment codex from the later first millennium CE (P.Macq. I 1) begins with an incantation which is beholden to a variety of Gnostic mythologoumena, many of them familiar to us from Sethian literature.⁶⁰ Much of the text of this incantation is shared with P.Lond.Or. 5987 and P.Berl. inv. 5527,⁶¹ suggesting a shared source which the editors identify as a “Sethian Gnostic” incantation, perhaps resembling the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5).⁶² Barbelo appears, identified as a “living wisdom, filled by the two loins of the Father. She has birthed for us a Perfect Man.”⁶³ The magician calls upon “Sabaoth, the Lord God Al-

⁵⁷ 7.22–8.10 (trans. Meyer, *Magical Book of Mary*, modified).

⁵⁸ Given in Meyer, *Magical Book of Mary*, 58.

⁵⁹ E.g., *P.Copt.Mus.* 4958: “Yea, yea, for I adjure you by these great luminaries (ΝΙΝΟΣ ΕΦΩΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ), ineffable in their glory, whose names are Taveithea, Oriēl . . . [E]leleth, who are spread out over the four corners of heaven” (tr. Meyer, *Magical Book of Mary*, 77 modified). Smagina is thus right to suspect that the Sethian Four Luminaries were associated by at least some with the famous Jewish tradition of four angels surrounding the throne of God (e.g., Rev 7:1), one over the domain of each of the four directions, north, south, east, and west (“Das manichäische Kreuz,” 248–49). Meyer notes that the “luminaries” are “stars” in ancient gnostic, astronomical, and astrological reflection,” and that they appear in P.Lond.Or. 5987 and *Ap. John* (*Magical Book of Mary*, 79).

⁶⁰ See Choat and Gardner, *Magical Handbook*. The text I cite by MS page and line number, the editors’ commentary by the edition’s page number. I thank Profs. Choat and Gardner for sharing their text and translation with me in advance of its publication.

⁶¹ On the former text, see above, n. 53; the latter is published in Walter Beltz, “Die koptischen Zauberpapyri der Papyrus-Sammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin,” *APF* 29 (1983): 61.

⁶² Although I generally concur with its broad strokes, the argument of Choat and Gardner is complex and calls for a point-by-point critical discussion. For reasons of space, I therefore will set it aside in the present contribution.

⁶³ *P.Macq. I*, 1.16–20.

mighty, king of all the aeons, forever alive in the holy aeons, with the keys of Tavithe in his hand; if he closes, no one is able [to] open; if he opens, no one is able to close . . .”⁶⁴ Sabaoth is again intoned, “in the name of Mosel, Piel, the great Hermosel, Hermopiel, Elethe, Davithe, Eleleth, Souriael – these who are within the four great luminaries, luminous, ineffable. Davithe, prepare for me your 240,000 angels . . .”⁶⁵ In part of the text sharing a source with P.Lond.Or. 5987, Davithe is a kind of heavenly gatekeeper, key and trumpet in hand, eyes blazing; it is he, not Eleleth, who is repeatedly invoked as a kind of celestial vice-regent:

IB Davithe, he who possesses the golden palm-branch. The Father, the Invisible one. It is you whose eyes shoot out fiery, invisible lightning. You are the new aeon; it is you who wears the golden girdle of the father. It is you who has the keys (to) the luminous heavens of God in your hand . . . It is you who has the golden trumpet in your hand. When you blow the trumpet, they all gather.⁶⁶

The incantation mentions Eleleth again, as well as “Makhar Seth, Seth, the living Christ . . . the one whom they call Bainchooch, Bainchonoth,” and, in a string of nomina barbara, “Sesengenbarpharankes.”⁶⁷

Fifthly, three of the Luminaries are encountered as august angels in a Coptic homily entitled the *Investiture of the Archangel Gabriel*. The text is preserved in J. Pierpont Morgan M593, copied 892/93 CE,⁶⁸ which only offers us a *terminus ante quem*.⁶⁹ Here, the apostles regale Jesus with questions about the “aeon of light” and the angels, and he responds by having angels come down from heaven and introduce themselves. An angel with 1000 eyes who rules over 240,000 angels introduces himself as follows: ἀνοκ πε λεληθ.⁷⁰ The initial epsilon in “Eleleth” was likely elided, following πε. “Harmosiel, trumpeter of the aeons of light” arrives not long afterwards, leading the souls of the righteous to “City of the Beloved One.”⁷¹

⁶⁴ *P.Macq. I*, 2.6–12.

⁶⁵ *P.Macq. I*, 2.21–27.

⁶⁶ *P.Macq. I*, 4.11–19.

⁶⁷ *P.Macq. I*, 5.13, 7.26–8.1, 10.18–19, respectively.

⁶⁸ Leo Depuydt, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (2 vols.; Corpus of Illuminated Manuscripts 4–5, Oriental Series 1–2; Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 1:214–15.

⁶⁹ C. Detlef G. Müller, ed., *Die Bücher der Einsetzung der Erzengel Michael und Gabriel* (CSCO 225, Scriptorio Coptici 31; Leuven: Secrétariat de CorpusSCO, 1962), vi. For a summary of the text’s contents, see Müller, *Engellehre*, 223–35.

⁷⁰ Müller, *Bücher der Einsetzung*, 66.30–31.

⁷¹ Müller, *Bücher der Einsetzung*, 67.8–12. The same Harmosiel appears, together with Daueithe and his lyre, in O.Cairo 49547, published by L. Saint-Paul Gérard, “Un fragment de liturgie magique copte sur ostrakon,” in *ASAE* 27 (1927): 62–68; see further Kropp, *Zaubertexte*, 2:102; Müller, *Engellehre*, 311.

“Daueithel” later appears as part of a different group of angels, and announces that he is “in the church of the first-born.”⁷²

Finally, we possess one Greek spell written on a thin sheet of gold-foil, likely for use as an amulet, where Eleleth appears amongst a plenitude of other deities and angels adjured to cure one “Aurelia” of epilepsy.⁷³ The pantheon includes the “God of Abraham,” “Lord Iao, Sabaoth,” “Raphael, Gabriel . . . Abrasax,” and “Sesengenbarpharanges Iao aieiuai Ieou Iao Sabaoth, Adonaie, Eleleth, [I]ako.” On paleographical grounds, it was assigned by Potansky to the third-century CE, but Kearsley argues that its reference to the “Gnostic deity” Eleleth, as well as use of the Chi-Rho sign, indicate a fourth-century provenance.⁷⁴ Although the document is relatively short and its description of these superhuman entities curt, it is crucial evidence for ascertaining the development of traditions about the Four Luminaries, for we see that at least one of the classic “Barbeloite” Luminaries also lived in the world of Egyptian Christian magic, at least as early as the fourth century CE – the earliest possible time the Nag Hammadi Codices could have been assembled.

One might be tempted to describe that the texts discussed here as “Sethian,” or at least “Gnostic,” since they mention Eleleth and, often, Davithe. Yet what they make clear is that mention of one or two of the Four Luminaries in a spell does not make it “Sethian,” given the absence of other characteristics associated with “Sethianism,” as is quite obvious in the case of the *Investiture*, where (E)leleth, Daueithel, and Harmosiel are simply angels. Given that our earliest attestation of any of the names of the Luminaries is in the account of “Barbeloite” myth given by Irenaeus in the second century, it is possible that the mythologumenon of the Four Luminaries is of Gnostic provenance. At the same time, as Howard Jackson has argued, a significant amount of Gnostic nomenclature seems to ultimately derive from the culture of magical practice preserved in the Egyptian papyri.⁷⁵ Recent studies support this perspective: Einar Thomassen, for instance, has demonstrated how the name “Meirotheos” – hitherto only known from the Sethian texts *Zostrianos*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, *Egyptian Gospel*, and the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5) – appears in a fa-

⁷² Müller, *Bücher der Einsetzung*, 70.26–27.

⁷³ Roy Kotansky, “Two Amulets in the Getty Museum: A Gold Amulet for Aurelia’s Epilepsy: An Inscribed Magical Stone for Fever, ‘Chills’, and Headache,” *J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 8 (1980): 181–84.

⁷⁴ Kotansky, “Two Amulets,” 181; R. A. Kearsley, in *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity, Volume 6: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri published in 1980–81* (ed. S. R. Llewelyn, with R. A. Kearsley; Macquarie University: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1992), 195.

⁷⁵ Howard Jackson, “The Origin in Ancient Incantatory *Voces Magicae* of Some Names in the Sethian Gnostic System,” *VC* 43 (1989): 69–79.

mous Aramaic inscription alongside the name Sesengen Barpharanges (another title we find both in magical and Gnostic sources).⁷⁶ Some of the “Four Luminaries” may have started out as denizens of magical literature, whence Irenaeus’ “Gnostics” – and, perhaps, the author(s) of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* – discovered them.

Conclusion

It is thus impossible to say whether Eleleth was originally a “magical” or “Gnostic” deity, and this should not surprise us. We face this quandary with many characters from Gnostic literature who are said to be “Gnostic” or “magical” (depending on who you ask): our earliest certain attestation to Abrasax, for instance, is in the thought of Basilides, at the beginning of the second century,⁷⁷ yet, given Abrasax’s ubiquity in magical papyri and gems, Jackson presumes that Basilides “borrowed the name from the magical tradition,” and thus we find Abrasaxes throughout Gnostic literature.⁷⁸ What we *can* say is that at least some traditions that were associated with Sethianism (e.g., nomenclature for benevolent superhuman beings, like Eleleth) also circulated amongst magicians in third or fourth-century Roman Egypt, and these traditions continued to circulate all the way through the end of the first millennium CE, both in spells, as we see in MSS like P.Macq. I 1 or P.Heid.Inv.Kopt. 685, as well as in angelological texts, like that of as J. Pierpont Morgan M593. There are other examples of nomenclature shared between treatises from Nag Hammadi and later angelological Coptic texts: *Melchizedek* calls each of the Four Luminaries “commander-in-chief” (ἀρχιστρατηγός), an epithet for the archangel Michael common to later Coptic manuscripts.⁷⁹ “Lithargoel,” a title used by Christ

⁷⁶ Einar Thomassen, “Sethian Names in Magical Texts: Protophanes and Meirotheos,” in *Gnosticism, Platonism, and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honor of John D. Turner* (ed. Kevin Corrigan et al.; NHMS 82; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 71–75. On Sesengen Barpharanges, Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), 84–100, remains useful.

⁷⁷ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.24.7.

⁷⁸ Jackson, “Origin of Some Names,” 75.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., the *Encomium on the Four Bodiless Living Creatures* attributed to John Chrysostom, in *Homiletica from the Pierpont Morgan Library* (ed. Leo Depuydt; CSCO 524; Louvain: Peeters, 1991), pp. 29.7–9, 35.34–37). The manuscript, M611, which may have belonged to the same codex as M612, contains a colophon dated to the ninth century CE (Depuydt, ad loc., vii–viii). See also an *Encomium on John the Baptist*, also attributed to John Chrysostom, in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), 139.11–15, and the *Discourse on Michael the Archangel* attributed to Timothy of Alexandria, in Budge, *Miscellaneous Cop-*

qua healer in the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* (NHC VI,1), is the name of an angel in the aforementioned *Investiture of the Archangel Gabriel*.⁸⁰ Thus we are in a position to ask: if Eleleth can appear as a distinct character, unmoored from other Sethian mythologumena, in many non-Gnostic Greek and Coptic texts, why could he not appear in a similar way in a Gnostic text, like the *Hypostasis of the Archons*?

Indeed, the Eleleth of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* behaves much more like the Davithe or Eleleth of Egyptian magical and homiletic literature than one of the Four Luminaries we know from the *Apocryphon of John* or *Zostrianos*. Eleleth in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* is a superhuman being directly invoked with respect to personal problems (in this case, unwanted attention from archons) who admits of (theophanic!) physical description and even speaks. The Eleleth of the *Apocryphon of John* and *Zostrianos* is a more traditional Gnostic “aeon,” empty of personality and anthropomorphisms; he is a projection of space and time. It is therefore altogether possible that the revelation-discourse in the second half of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* featured the “great angel, Eleleth,” a figure well-known to readers of Egyptian Christian ritual texts, even before the angel’s speech was glossed with the authority of the Four Luminaries and the Invisible Spirit. Eleleth’s same reputation as benevolent celestial entity amongst this readership could explain why the authors of texts like the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Egyptian Gospel*, and the *Gospel of Judas* would choose Eleleth (as opposed to Sophia, or any of the other manifold beings populating the Sethian aeons) to be the agent responsible for generating unpleasant, angelic world-rulers: what has one to fear from Saklas if it is Eleleth, a familiar angel, who produced him? In any case, it is all but certain that the fame of Eleleth and Davithe in Egyptian Christianity must have led those responsible for the Nag Hammadi texts to regard with great favor the Sethian literature they copied, bound, collected, and buried.

Regardless, what I hope to have demonstrated in this contribution is that each of the “Sethian Four Luminaries” is, on its own, not really “Sethian” at all. In one second-century account, the Four Luminaries are four aeons that, with the Autogenes, form a divine pentad; they are associated with “Gnostics” interested in the Barbelo-aeon. In some of the Nag Hammadi literature, the Four Luminaries of these “(Barbelo)-Gnostics” comprise one of many pockets of arcana utilized in a discrete literary tradition that we

tic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1915), 517.6–10, 522.20–23, 523.1–4.

⁸⁰ Robert McLachlan Wilson and Douglas Parrott, “Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles,” in *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2–5 and VI, with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, “1” and “4.”* (ed. Douglas M. Parrott; NHS 11; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 214–15, with comments on NHC VI 5.15–18.

scholars choose to dub “Sethianism.” In first-millennium Egyptian magical and homiletic literature, the Luminary Eleleth is a great angel indeed, and this is how he appears in NHC II,4 – not Sethian or magical, but Coptic, Christian.

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From the *Apocalypse of Paul* to Coptic Epic Passions: Greeting Paul and the Martyrs in Heaven

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The subject of the present article derives from a specific topic treated in my PhD dissertation, in which I analysed Nag Hammadi Codex V (NHC V) in light of the literature that circulated in Coptic at the time of its presumed compilation in the fourth century. Since nothing can convincingly establish a *terminus ante quem* for the compilation of the Nag Hammadi Codices, and since certain other sources, such as Shenoute’s *I am Amazed*,¹ also known as *Catechesis against Apocrypha*,² clearly demonstrate that apocryphal texts continued to circulate in fifth-century Egypt, my comparanda for the Nag Hammadi texts include Coptic literature that was probably composed or circulated in the fifth century.

My dissertation research employed two literary theoretical perspectives, namely reception theory and a literary-comparative approach. The goal of the first was to deal with NHC V from the perspective of its Coptic readers, as suggested by Stephen Emmel,³ analysing the Coptic text and its

¹ Hans-Joachim Cristea, *Schenute von Atripe: Contra Origenistas: Edition des koptischen Textes mit annotierter Übersetzung und Indizes einschließlich einer Übersetzung des 16. Osterfestbriefs des Theophilus in der Fassung des Hieronymus (ep. 96)* (STAC 60; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

² See Tito Orlandi, “A Catechesis against Apocryphal Texts by Shenoute and the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi,” *HTR* 75 (1982): 85–95.

³ Stephen Emmel, “Religious Tradition, Textual Transmission and the Nag Hammadi Codices,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (ed. John D. Turner and Anne Maguire; NHMS 44; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 42: “Regarding the Coptic phases of transmission, there is one obvious task that has not yet been carried out thoroughly and consistently, that is, to read the Nag Hammadi Codices as a part of Coptic literature . . . The task is to read the texts exactly as we have them in the Nag Hammadi Codices in an effort to reconstruct the reading experience of whoever owned each of the Codices. This reading would have to be undertaken in full cognizance of contemporary Coptic literature, and the culture of Upper Egypt during, say, the third to the seventh centuries. It would be a primarily Coptic enterprise, with nothing directly to do with Christian origins, nor necessarily even with ‘Gnosticism.’”