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Studies in the *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V,5): (1) Formation History

Koji Yamashiro

Summary: On the basis of a source-critical analysis, this paper aims to offer a new explanation concerning the process in which the *Apocalypse of Adam* was gradually formed. Moreover, its place and significance in Sethian Gnosticism will freshly be reevaluated.

1

The *Apocalypse of Adam*, one of the previously unknown writings discovered in the Nag Hammadi library in 1945, retells the biblical *Heilsgeschichte* from a typically Gnostic perspective.¹ At the outset of the present study, it would be advisable to

1 For the present study, I mainly consult the critical edition prepared by George W. MacRae in *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2-5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, I and 4*, ed. Douglas M. Parrott (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 151-195. Other important editions are Alexander Böhlig and Pahor Labib, *Koptische-gnostische Apokalypsen aus Codex V von Nag Hammadi im Koptischen Museum zu Alt-Kairo* (Halle-Wittenberg: Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität, 1963) and Françoise Morard, *L'Apocalypse d'Adam (NH V,5)* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1985). And see below n. 2. For other Coptic writings from the Nag Hammadi library, too, I consult the Brill edition.

For the basic bibliography for the study of the *Apocalypse of Adam*, see, among others, Walter Beltz, "NHC V, 5/p. 64,1-85,32: Die Apokalypse des Adams (ApocAd)," in *Gnosis und Neues Testament*, ed. Karl-Wolfgang Tröger (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1973), 46-47; Walter Beltz, "Bemerkungen zur Adamapokalypse aus Nag-Hammadi-Codex V," in *Studia Coptica*, ed. Peter Nagel (Berlin: Akademie, 1974), 159-163; Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (New York/London/Toronto/Sydney/Auckland: Doubleday, 1995), 52-64; George W. MacRae, "The Coptic

summarize briefly the story, as it is told in our book in its present form.

The *Apocalypse of Adam* begins with the scene of Adam's deathbed, when he gives Seth a retrospective account of his own life in the testamentary form. The evil demiurge created from the earth Adam and Eve as an androgyne, but they were still found in glory and gnosis, resembling "the great eternal angels." However, when the evil demiurge divided them into two in wrath, the glory and gnosis abandoned Adam and Eve amidst ignorance and darkness, and entered into the heavenly Seth, who is the seed of the great generation. Since that time, they were taught "dead things" and served the evil demiurge in fear and slavery. Cain was born from the intercourse of the evil demiurge and Eve, while, as it seems, the sexual desire of Adam towards Eve brought about the birth of Abel (nothing is said in detail about how Seth came into being in this world).

After these things, three angels appeared in front of Adam and taught him how the descendants of Seth are destined to be saved. Adam's transmission of the content of the angelic revelation to Seth covers the remainder of the book. From now on, the entire history will advance along the scheme of the continuing rivalry between the evil demiurge and the descendants of Seth. First, the evil demiurge will attempt to destroy in wrath all flesh on earth by flood, excluding Noah and his sons. Against his will, however, great angels will come down on the clouds of heaven in order to take the seed of Seth into the place where the spirit of life dwells. The sons of Noah, i.e. Shem, Ham and Japheth, in turn, will divide the earth between them, while serving the evil demiurge in fear and slavery. However, four hundred men from the sons of Ham and

Apocalypse of Adam," *Heythrop Journal* 6 (1965), 27-35; George W. MacRae, "Apocalypse of Adam," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Volume I: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1983), vol. I, 707-719; Francoise Morard, "L'Apocalypse d'Adam de Nag-Hammadi; un essai d'interprétation," in *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, ed. Martin Krause (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 35-42; Stephen E. Robinson, "The Apocalypse of Adam," *Brigham Young University Studies* 17 (1977), 131-153. Other studies will be quoted throughout the present study; see below nn. 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 45.

Japheth, but none from the sons of Shem, will join the descendants of Seth, the undefiled ones who sojourn in glory and gnosis. In response, the evil demiurge will cast fire, sulphur and asphalt on the intention of the annihilation of his enemies, who will, however, escape his wrath by the help of the clouds of heaven descending for their salvation. And “for the third time,” “the great illuminator of knowledge,” who is the Gnostic redeemer, will come upon “the dead creation” in glory, in order to redeem from the day of death the souls of those who know the eternal God, i.e. the progeny of Seth. Seeing his signs and wonders, the evil demiurge will punish in wrath the flesh of the illuminator of knowledge, but in vain, since his glory will withdraw from the dead earth and dwell “in holy houses.”

It is here that the Thirteen Kingdoms section is inserted. This section is composed of thirteen false explanations given by the thirteen kingdoms of this *Aiōn* on “the great illuminator of knowledge,” which are thereafter refuted by the true teaching held by “the kingless generation,” who belong to the *Aiōn* to come.

The book ends with the description of the damnation of those who belong to the evil powers, together with Micheu, Michar and Mnesinous, “those who are over the holy baptism and the living water,” which is concluded by the comment that “the words of imperishability and truth for those who know the Eternal God in wisdom of gnosis and teaching of angels forever” will be preserved “on a high mountain, upon a rock of the truth.”

Thus, the narrative of the *Apocalypse of Adam* is quite coherent, and at first glance, our tractate appears uniform from terminological as well as thematic points of view. Can we say, then, that this is a literary product of a single author? Aren’t there any trace of its being a composite work, a result of the combination of originally independent works which underwent an editorial process?

The monographic study of Charles W. Hedrick treats of this issue in a most comprehensive fashion.² In his view, the *Apocalypse of Adam* is composed of two

2 Charles W. Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam: A Literary and Source Analysis* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1980). In the present study, the critical edition of MacRae

sources, which were put together by the redactor, who in turn inserted his own words here and there. His arguments are three-fold: (1) the existence of two separate introductions (2) the doubling of the conclusions (3) the finding of contradictions and repetitions in the body of the text, together with the presence of narrative disconnections, editorial seams as well as changes of style, motifs, subject matters and terminology.³ On the basis of these observations, Hedrick supposes that source A was a Gnostic midrash on the Biblical stories of the creation of Adam and Eve and their descendants, Noah's Flood and the conflagration of Sodom and Gomorrah,⁴ while source B, which is only partially preserved, comprised a series of revelatory messages by the three angels on the three comings of the illuminator of knowledge.⁵ According to Hedrick, the main interest of the redactor was to assure the uninterrupted transmission of the gnosis from Adam to Seth, the founder of the true Sethian Gnostic community, which had an ascetic and anti-baptismal tendency close to that of the Archontics. Moreover, Hedrick maintains that both the *Apocalypse of Adam* and the Archontics reflect Sethian Gnosticism before its Christianization.⁶

In its broad lines, at least, Hedrick's proposal is not wholly unconvincing. No doubt, it is impossible to explain all sorts of irregularities found in our text as mere accidents; it is much more reasonable to think that they must reflect a complex developmental history, which eventually resulted in the redaction of the *Apocalypse of Adam* in its present form. In my view, however, his solution is only partial and needs thorough revision.⁷ Below I shall offer a new explanation concerning the

will be supplemented by the reading of Hedrick.

3 Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n. 2), 21-57

4 Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n. 2), 59-95

5 Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n. 2), 97-184.

6 Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n. 2), 185-215.

7 Apparently, the undeniable weakness of the arguments adduced by Hedrick has been the main reason for the general unpopularity of his theory in Gnostic studies. See, however, the remark of MacRae, "Apocalypse of Adam" (above, n. 1), 709: "The presence of repetitious and occasionally awkward transitions in the narrative suggest that the Apocalypse of Adam in its present form is a result of a process of growth in which several elements were combined or

process in which the *Apocalypse of Adam* was gradually formed.⁸

Before proceeding to the next section, two short notes would be in order. (1) Despite the contrary opinion held by some scholars, it is beyond doubt that there are found scattered references to Jesus in the *Apocalypse of Adam* and that our book shows an unmistakable acquaintance with Christian doctrines (both in Gnostic and non-Gnostic forms). Indeed, there is no strong reason for placing it in pre/non-Christian Gnostic trends.⁹ (2) Meanwhile, the problem of the spiritual understanding of baptism in the *Apocalypse of Adam* has drawn due attention in research. In so far as I can judge, past attempts of proving the favorite stance towards baptism by water are wholly unconvincing.¹⁰ More details for both issues will be given below.

in which the narrative was expanded in successive stages. Such stages may reflect a progressively explicit Gnosticizing of Jewish apocalyptic themes.” Cf. Gedaliahu A.G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984), 81, who calls Hedrick’s approach “legitimate,” yet emphasizes the importance of paying attention to “the total structure of the text.”

8 It should be added that from its peculiar style and content, some scholars supposed that the Thirteen Kingdoms section was originally an independent work. See, for example, Douglas M. Parrott, “The 13 Kingdoms of the Apocalypse of Adam: Origin, Meaning and Significance,” *Novum Testamentum* 31.1 (1989), 67-87.

9 See, in particular, the discussions of Glen M. Shellrude, “The Apocalypse of Adam: Evidence for a Christian Gnostic Provenance” in *Gnosis und Gnosticism*, ed. Martin Krause (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 82-91. Cf. Andrew J. Welburn, *From a Virgin Womb: The Apocalypse of Adam and the Virgin Birth* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 29, n. 1, where he gives bibliographical information on the *status quaestionis*: his own view is negative.

10 On this topic, see, in particular, Francoise Morard, “L’Apocalypse d’Adam du Codex V de Nag Hammadi et sa polémique anti-baptismale,” *Revue des sciences religieuses* 51 (1977), 214-33, though the comparison with the Archontics would be not necessary. Cf. Guy G. Stroumsa, “Purification and its Discontents: Mani’s Rejection on Baptism,” in *The Religious History of the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews and Christians*, ed. John A. North and Simon R. F. Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 460-478, who offers an excellent survey of Mani’s anti-baptismal attitude and its religico-historical background.

Our point of departure is the doubling of the conclusions of the book. Conclusion A runs:¹¹

These are the revelations (*ni-apokalypsis*) that Adam revealed Seth, his son. And his son informed his seed (*tef-spora*) about them.

This is immediately followed by Conclusion B:¹²

This is the secret knowledge (*ti-gnosis n-n-apokryphon*) of Adam, which he gave to Seth, which is the holy baptism (*pi-čōkm et-ouaab*) of those who know the eternal knowledge through those born of the word and the imperishable illuminators (*ni-phōstēr*), those who came from the holy seed (*ti-spora et-ouaab*):

Yesseus, Mazareus, Yessedেকেus, the Living Water (*pi-moou et-onh*).

Conclusion A is a simple statement, where how “the revelations” of Adam were preserved through Seth among his descendants is very briefly explained. In contrast, conclusion B shows a strong theological concern, which emphatically identifies “the secret knowledge of Adam” given to Seth and his progeny with “the holy baptism”; that is to say, nothing but gnosis is the true baptism, which never depends on the efficacy of water. Equally significant is the special mention of “those born of the word and the imperishable illuminators,” called “Yesseus, Mazareus, Yessedেকেus, the Living Water,” as the transmitters of “the eternal knowledge,” a statement which is far from common. The presence of the two consecutive endings in our book, which are similar in form but heterogeneous in content, surely suggests that Conclusion B was later added to Conclusion A by someone for specific aims. Let us tentatively call him X-redactor.¹³

11 *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 85, 19-22 (194).

12 *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 85, 22-31 (194).

13 This is correctly pointed out by Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n. 1), 27-28, though I disagree with Hedrick on the evaluation of the role of the redactor in the *Apocalypse of Adam*.

Indeed, the clarification of the degree of contribution by X-redactor to the present form of the *Apocalypse of Adam* is of crucial importance for the reconstruction of its developmental history. One of the most reliable criteria for such reconstruction would be the identification of sentences or passages which, in all probability, reflect theological view similar to those of Conclusion B, yet essentially different from that presupposed in Conclusion A.

Let us begin with the Thirteen Kingdoms section. One of the most striking characteristics of this section is the fixed formula repeated at the end of each of the thirteen accounts given about the previous life of “the great illuminator of knowledge” until his appearance to the human world, which reads:¹⁴

And in this way he came onto the water (*eċm pi-moou*).

Up to this critical moment, it is told, “the great illuminator of knowledge” grew up in an isolated place, often guarded by the hands of supernatural beings. Nothing but the bestowal of the glory and the power concludes this state of messianic hiddenness. Beyond doubt, the baptism of the Christ figure is implied here, as the reference to the coming of the great illuminator “to the water,” which marks the beginning of his career as the Redeemer, rather blatantly hints. The falsehood of these thirteen kingdoms, however, is countered by the authentic teaching of “the kingless generation”, whereby “God chose him from all the aeons (*ebol hn ni-eōn*). He caused a knowledge of the undefiled one of the truth to come to be in him.”¹⁵ That is to say, what makes the Gnostic redeemer distinguished is nothing but his possession of true knowledge. It is in this connection that “a foreign air,” which must be identical to what is generally called *aithēr*, is designated as the place of origin of “the great illuminator of knowledge”: “From a foreign air out of the great aeons (*ebol hn ou-aēr*

¹⁴ *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 78, 2-3 (178); 78, 16-17 (180); 78, 24-26 (180); 79, 14-19 (182); 79, 25-27 (182); 80, 6-9 (182); 80, 18-20 (184); 80, 27-29 (184); 81, 12-14 (184); 81, 21-23 (186); 82, 3-4 (186); 82, 8-10 (186); 82, 15-17 (186). Slight changes in wording are discernible in the repetitions, partly, as it seems, owing to translation and copying.

¹⁵ *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 82, 21-25 (188).

n-šmmo ebol hn ou-noky n-n-eōn) has the great illuminator come.”¹⁶ Owing to the gnosis brought by “the great illuminator of knowledge,” then, “the generation (*ti-genea*)” of the chosen ones themselves will shine “upon the whole aeon (*ečm pi-eōn tērf*),” possibly an implicit reference to Daniel 12:3: “And those who are wise will shine like the splendor of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”¹⁷ Incidentally, *aithēr* is etymologically related to the verb *aithō* (light up, kindle, burn, blaze) in classical Greek.¹⁸ Now, as the fifth element, *aithēr* was sometimes regarded as the counterpart of the four terrestrial elements (fire, air, earth and water) and/or darkness. At the same time, as the quintessence of the heaven, this element was often associated, in some way or another, with air and fire. However, its contraposition to water, as is expressed here, is rather unique and can hardly be accidental. No doubt, this is the corollary of the antagonism against baptism by water. Indeed, such a stance is quite explicitly expressed in the continuation of the text, which deals with the battle of the Sethians, here called “the seed,” against the archons and their baptismal followers:¹⁹

Then the seed (*ti-spora*) will fight against the power, those who will receive his name upon the water (*hičm pi-moou*).²⁰

All in all, the above observations seem to strongly indicate that the Thirteen Kingdoms section, too, derives from the hand of X-redactor.

The same applies to the following passage, which stands between the Thirteen

¹⁶ *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 82, 25-28 (188).

¹⁷ Curiously, this verse is one of the most important “code-verses” in the *Zohar*. On this topic, see, in particular, Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar*, trans. Nathan Wolski (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 75-80 (she also mentions the work of Yehuda Liebes and Elliot A. Wolfson there).

¹⁸ *Liddel and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v.

¹⁹ *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 83,4-7 (188). On the linguistic difficulty inherent in this sentence, see, in particular, Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n. 1), 293-294.

²⁰ This sentence is followed by some words, which are unfortunately almost illegible.

Kingdoms section and the double ending of the *Apocalypse of Adam*:²¹

Then a voice came to them, saying: “Micheu, Michar, Mnesinous, those who are over the holy baptism (*pi-čōkm et-ouaab*) and the Living Water (*pi-moou et-onh*), why were you crying out against the living God with lawless voices, and tongues without law over them, and souls full of blood and defiled deeds? You are full of works that are not of the truth, but your ways are full of joy and rejoicing. Having defiled the water of life (*pi-moou nte-p-ōnh*), you have drawn it within the desire of the powers, those to whom you have been given so that you would serve them. And your thought is not like that of those men whom you persecute, since they have not obeyed your desires.”²² Their fruit does not wither.

Here Micheu, Michar and Mnesinous, who are “those who are over the holy baptism and the living water,” are characterized as lawless, bloody, foul and pleasure-loving and are blamed for having defiled the water of life. The reason for the defilement is plainly the ignorance, as it comes to expression in their worship of the evil archons as well as their persecution of the descendants of Seth. Apparently, those who are involved in the practice of baptism by water without the accompaniment of gnosis are the object of criticism here.

Now, this condemnation by the heavenly voice is immediately followed by the promise of the eternal life for the seed of Seth and the assurance of the preservation of their gnosis. Below I shall quote in full the portion at issue:²³

But they will be known up to the great aeons (*ša ni-nok' n-n-eōn*), since the words they have kept, of the God of the aeons (*nte p-noute nte n-eōn*), were not committed to the book nor were they written. But angelic beings will bring them, whom all the generations of men (*n-genea tērou n-n-rōme*) will not know. For they will be upon a high mountain, upon a rock of the truth. Therefore they will

21 *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 84, 4 (190) - 85, 1 (192).

22 These words are supplemented by the restoration of Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n. 1), 286.

23 *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 85, 1 (192) – 85, 18 (194).

be named: “the words of imperishability and truth for those who know the Eternal God in wisdom of gnosis and teaching of angels forever,” for he²⁴ knows everything.

It should be noted that these words in turn directly precede Conclusion A and Conclusion B.

Is this portion a literary product of X-redactor, too? That this is not the case becomes clear enough, if we carefully read the passage which is found just before the condemnation of Micheu, Michar and Mnesinous: Its content is the damnation of “the peoples,” i.e. those who followed the way of the evil archons:²⁵

And a cloud of darkness (*ou-kloole n-kake*) is about to come upon them. Then the peoples will cry out with a great voice, saying: “Blessed is the soul of those men, because they have known God with a knowledge of the truth. They will live forever (*ša n-eōn nte n-eōn*) together with the angels, because they have not perished in their desire. And they have not completed the works of the powers. Rather, they have stood in his presence in a knowledge of God like light (*n-t-he n-ouoein*) which has come out of fire and blood (*ou-kōht mn ou-snof*). But we have foolishly done every work of the powers. We have prided ourselves in the deviation of all our works. We have cried against God. But now all his works have prevailed, for he is eternal.²⁶ These are against our spirits. For now we have known that our souls will surely die.”

Not only can these two citations smoothly be read as if the second were directly precedent to the first. What is sandwiched by the two, i.e. the rebuke of Micheu, Michar and Mnesinous by the heavenly voice, is obviously out of context, as is evident from the sudden, literally unexpected, change of topics and *dramatis personae*: The symmetrical contrast between the destinies of “the peoples” and those of the

24 Probably the eternal God is meant by this pronoun.

25 *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 83, 7 (188) – 84, 3 (190).

26 These words are supplemented by the restoration of Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n. 1), 240.

Sethians is broken by the intrusion of the completely foreign idea of the defilement of “the holy baptism and the living water” by Micheu, Michar and Mnesinous, who are never mentioned elsewhere in the *Apocalypse of Adam*. The most plausible explanation for this is that X-redactor inserted his own words in the middle of the original text in order to express his peculiar theological view.²⁷

At this juncture, let us recall that the damnation of “the peoples” together with the promise of the eternal life for the seed of Seth and the assurance of the preservation of their gnosis are nothing but the final part of the Gnostic *Heilsgeschichte* revealed to Adam by the angels, which begins with Adam’s words: “So now my son, Seth, I shall reveal to you these which those men, whom I saw before in front of me, revealed to me.”²⁸ In essence, the angelic messages consist of the predictions of the deluge, the conflagration and the third and final coming of “the great illuminator of knowledge” at the end of time. The entire narrative linearly evolves around the axis of the struggles between the Sethians and their enemies. Intriguingly enough, it is possible to excavate a special kind of structure here. In the evil demiurge’s repeated attempts of annihilation by water and fire, the redemption of the Sethians is always carried out by the angels, where the latter, with the clouds of light (designated as “high clouds (*hen-kloole e-u-čose*)”²⁹ “great clouds of light (*hen nok’ n-kloole n-ouoein*)”³⁰ and “other clouds of light from within the great aeons (*hen-ke kloole n-ouoein ebol hn ni-nok’ n-n-eōn*)”³¹), bring the former to the place of glory and eternal rest above this *Aiōn*. In the middle of the course, it is further said that the descendants of Seth stand against the evil demiurge and his human servants as “the cloud of the great light (*ti-kloole nte ni-nok’ n-ouoein*)”³² In the final judgment, by contrast, it is through the clouds of darkness (“a

27 Cf. the arguments of Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n. 1), 32-33.

28 *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 67, 14-21 (160).

29 *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 69, 21(162).

30 *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 75,17-18 (174).

31 *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 75,19-21 (174).

32 *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 71, 9-10 (166).

cloud of darkness (*ou-kloole n-kake*)”³³ coming down on the powers of the evil that they will be punished. In short, the Gnostic dichotomy is expressed, first and foremost, by the symbolism of the clouds, i.e. the pleromatic world which is found above the clouds of light and the created world which is under the clouds of darkness. In other words, the double image of the clouds is the very structural pivot.³⁴ From a stylistic point of view, too, the section at issue is, as a whole, homogenous. Thus, there is no strong reason to suppose that this section is a composite work.

Meanwhile, the first pages of our tractate exclusively concern itself with the Gnostic reinterpretation of the stories of the first generations of man, which is again put in the form of Adam’s recollective address to Seth (“Listen to my words, my son Seth”).³⁵ This section is, by and large, uniform, both in content and form. Its central theme is the possession of the gnosis and its loss. Even after Adam and Eve were created out of the earth by the evil demiurge, being androgynous, they still knew about the eternal God and his *plerōma*, to which they themselves belonged. When the evil demiurge divided Adam and Eve into two sexes, however, the gnosis left them and entered into the heavenly seed of Seth. From then on, Adam and Eve were put under death and darkness, i.e. the rulership of the evil demiurge, serving him “in fear and slavery.” In so far as I can judge, this part is fundamentally determined by the most basic structure, which is widely shared among different Gnostic systems (gnosis-ignorance, life-death, purity-filthiness, awakening-sleep, spirit-matter, light-darkness).³⁶ The worldview expressed in it is, on the whole, rather primitive, lacking in highly-developed theological speculations or mythological excess and squander.

33 *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 83, 7-8 (188).

34 Cf. the important remark of Stroumsa, *Another Seed* (above, n. 7), 122-123, on the ambivalent nature of water-symbolism in Gnosticism.

35 *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 64, 5-6 (154).

36 For the survey of the basic symbolism, terminology and structure, in Gnostic literature, see, in particular, Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religions: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 48-99, which is still useful despite his heavy reliance on Mandaism.

However, the new scene of the appearance of the three angels to Adam poses a serious problem. The text reads:³⁷

Now I was sleeping in the thought of my heart, for I saw three men in front of me, whose likeness I was unable to know, since they were not from the powers of the god who created me; they were superior to the powers in their glory. Those men spoke, saying to me:³⁸ “Adam, arise from the sleep of death, and hear concerning the *aiōn* (*pi-eōn*) and the seed of that man (*ti-spora m-pi-rōme et-mmau*)³⁹ to whom life attained, that one who came from you and Eve, your wife.” Then, after I had listened to these words from those great men who were standing before me, then we sighed, I and Eve, in our heart.

Why did both Adam and Eve sigh, although the angelic messages are said to have been conferred only to one of them (there is no explanatory comment that Adam transmitted what he saw and heard to Eve)? In other words, the second clause of the last sentence (“then we sighed, I and Eve, in our heart”) in the above citation does not fit in quite well with the first one (“then, after I had listened to these words from those great men who were standing before me”). Admittedly, this anomaly in itself is hardly conspicuous, yet this is not all of the story.

Now, the scene in question is followed by the evil demiurge’s question of the reason for Adam and Eve’s sighing, which in turn proceeds to the brief reference to the births of Cain and Abel. “Then,” the story continues, “the best of our eternal knowledge perished in us and weakness chased after us. Therefore, the days of our life became few.”⁴⁰ But then, how could on earth Adam transmit to Seth the content of the angelic messages, which was required to attain to salvation? No renewal of gnosis for Adam is told here or elsewhere. Thus, there is here obvious inconsistency from the point of view of narrative line. Rather, it seems that in its original form the clause

37 *ApocAdam* (NHC V,5) 65, 24 (156)–66, 14 (158).

38 These words are supplemented by the restoration of Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n.1), 260.

39 I.e. Seth.

40 *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 67, 4-12 (160).

“then we sighed, I and Eve, in our heart” directly succeeded the sentence which is found just before the scene of the appearance of the three angels to Adam: “And after these we became darkened in our heart.”⁴¹ And by the same token, it is perfectly conceivable that originally the clause “Then, after I had listened to these words from those great men who were standing before me” was immediately precedent to the very sentence which comes just before the beginning of Adam’s transmission to Seth of the angelic messages: “(For)⁴² I knew that I had come under the authority of death.”⁴³ In so far as I can see, there is no other way to read these sentences coherently.⁴⁴

All in all, we might hypothetically assume, with some degree of plausibility, the existence of two separate sources that served for the composition of the *Apocalypse of Adam*, excluding the portions derived from the hands of X-redactor. They might be called respectively [R] (the Revelation source) and [A] (the Autobiography source): As it seems, [R], in the main, treated the destiny of Seth and his progeny, whereas [A] was composed of various episodes related to the life of Adam and Eve.

Importantly, this supposition could resolve the mystery of the literary peculiarities of the *Apocalypse of Adam*. As its title clearly suggests, this book belongs to the genre of apocalypse. Our tractate typically takes the form of the secret unveiled about the future events in human history, including the End of Days. The *Apocalypse of Adam*, however, also bears undeniable resemblance to so-called testamentary literature, since its frame narrative is supposedly the last words of Adam to his son Seth.⁴⁵ No doubt, the double nature of the book is nothing but the self-evident consequence of the two

41 *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 65, 22-23 (156).

42 This word might have been added to at the time of the redaction.

43 *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 67, 12-14 (160).

44 Cf. Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n. 1), 21-27.

45 On the problem of genre in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, see, in particular, the discussions of Welburn, *From a Virgin Womb* (above, n. 9), 30-42. Cf. PHEME PERKINS, “Apocalypse of Adam: The Genre and Function of a Gnostic Apocalypse,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 39 (1977), 382-395 and GLEN M. SHELLRUDE, “Nag Hammadi Apocalypses: A Study of the Relationship of Selected Texts to the Traditional Apocalypse,” PhD diss. (The University of St. Andrews, 1986) 275-327.

different sources embedded in it, which were respectively an apocalyptic (= [R]) and a testament (= [A]).

3

We are now in position to envision a vague picture of the formation process of the *Apocalypse of Adam*. In short, [R] and [A] must have been put together at some point.

The question of who assembled [R] and [A] as a literary unity is not easy to answer. In so far as I can see, there is no decisive evidence for assuming that it is X-redactor who was responsible for this. No trace of his hand is recognizable in the way in which these sources were integrated; indeed, the emphasis on the possession of true gnosis as against baptism by water, so characteristic of X-redactor, takes no role here, though this fact in itself might be explained otherwise. In fact, it is not improbable that in front of X-redactor there had already been laid the prototype of the *Apocalypse of Adam*, to which he only added sentences and passages that could serve for his own theological aims.

Indeed, it is tempting to imagine that Conclusion A (“These are the revelations (*ni-apokalypsis*) that Adam revealed Seth, his son. And his son informed his seed (*tef-spora*) about them”) as well as the incipit of our book (“the revelation (*ti-apokalypsis*) that Adam told his son Seth in the seven hundredth year”)⁴⁶ were added when this *Vorlage* was made. Admittedly, however, it is not completely impossible that these sentences had been part of the original source(s).

It is difficult to decide whether the literary reworking of the *Vorlage* had as its aim the presentation of some peculiar theological ideas or not, mainly because we have no reliable criteria for attributing particular portions to this hypothetical phase. In so far as I can judge from the text as it stands now, its author’s main interest seems to have been in telling a new narrative, which harmonizes the two separate sources available

⁴⁶ *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 64, 2-4 (154).

to him.

Below is the proposal of the source-critical division of the *Apocalypse of Adam* according to the results of our analysis. It should be underscored that the list below is only approximate, and the possibility of sub-divisions is not excluded. In particular, it is not impossible that both [R] and [A] underwent some minor changes when they were integrated into the *Vorlage*, which might in turn have subsequently been modified by X-redactor (and perhaps, by others, including copyists and translators).⁴⁷

64	2	~	64	5a	<i>Vorlage</i> (?)
64	5b	~	65	23	[A]
65	24	~	66	12a	[R]
66	12b	~	67	12a	[A]
67	12b	~	77	18a	[R]
77	18b	~	83	7a	X-redactor
83	7b	~	84	3	[R]
84	4	~	85	1a	X-redactor
85	1b	~	85	18	[R]
85	19	~	85	22a	<i>Vorlage</i> (?)
85	22b	~	85	31	X-redactor

The title of the book is given twice in 64,1 and 85,32. Needless to say, the tentative conclusions presented here require further investigations based on the minute textual analysis.

4

It is significant to pay attention to the theologico-historical aspects of our reconstruction of the pre-history of the *Apocalypse of Adam*.

As is well known, according to the worldview of the Sethian Gnostics,⁴⁸ it is none

47 Two possible glosses might be found in *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5), 77, 23-27 (178) and *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 82, 18-19 (188).

48 On the question of Sethian Gnosticism, much ink was spilled in past research, and it is impossible to even summarize the main achievements here. The classical study is Hans-Martin Schenke, "Das System nach Nag-Hammadi-Handschriften," in *Studia Coptica*, ed.

other than the seed of Seth who possess the true gnosis. Moreover, the critical significance of Seth in their gnostic lore led to the development of the myth of Setheus, who is the heavenly prototype of the legitimate inheritor of Adam.

Now, in [R] and [A] the central place is conferred to the figure of Seth at the earthly as well as pleromatic levels: Seth's role as the receiver of Adam's teachings is deemed of critical significance for attaining to salvation here; moreover, both of them, more or less explicitly, refer to Setheus as a heavenly figure: According to [R], at the end of time, "the great illuminator of knowledge" will destroy the dead creation "through the sowing of Seth (*hm p-čo n-sēth*)",⁴⁹ whereas in [A] Adam explains to Seth that he called his son "according to the name of that person who is the seed of the great generation or comes from inside it (*m-p-ran m-p-rōme et-mmau ete ti-spora te n-ti-nok^y n-genea ē ebol nhētf*)."⁵⁰ Thus, no doubt, [R] and [A] originated from the so-called Sethian Gnostic milieu, in which the author of the *Vorlage* himself (if there was such) must have been active, as can be assumed from his access to the hypothetical sources in question.

Peter Nagel (Berlin: Akademie, 1974), which might be compared with Albertus F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature* (Leiden; E.J Brill, 1977), the papers included in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978, Volume Two: Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), Birger A. Gnosticism, *Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis, 1990), 52-83 and others. John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (Sainte-Foy, Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001) and Dylan M. Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) are two important monographic studies, which have comparatively recently been published. Of critical importance is the approach proposed by Tuomas Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Evidence* (Leiden/Boston: Brill 2009), though part of his conclusions might need revision. I shall discuss the relation of the *Apocalypse of Adam* to Ophite Gnosticism and Barbeloite Gnosticism in "Studies in the *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V, 5): (2) Topics in the Gnostic *Heilsgeschichte*."

49 *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 77, 1. Here I adopt the restoration of Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (above, n. 1), 260.

50 *ApocAdam* (NHC V, 5) 65,7-9 (156).

The position of X-redactor is unique. His central concern was the emphasis upon the crucial importance of true gnosis in contradistinction to baptism by water. Now, it is known that Micheu, Michar and Mnesinous (sometimes excluding the last one) were positively considered as baptismal angels by various Gnostics who were significantly influenced by Sethian Gnosticism, including the *Gospel of the Egyptians*,⁵¹ *Zostrianos*,⁵² the untitled text in the Bruce Codex⁵³ and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.⁵⁴ Intriguingly enough, it is exactly those spiritual entities who are exposed to criticism in the portion composed by X-redactor. It would be a safe assumption, then, that this fact reflects a controversy and competition between different Sethian Gnostic sects concerning the doctrinal authenticity, which was closely related to the problem of the practical efficacy of baptism by water. In other words, the rejection of the rival sects' teachings was indirectly expressed by downgrading particular angels.

Last but not least, it should be noted that the expression "seed" (*spora*) for denoting the Sethians is used throughout the *Apocalypse of Adam*. Needless to say, this usage is quite typical of Sethian Gnosticism.⁵⁵

5

Finally, I would like to offer additional comments on the provenance of [R] and [A].

The idea of the preservation of knowledge by Seth and his descendants following their parents' ante-mortem prediction concerning two cosmic disasters by water and fire, is attested in Jewish literature approximately dated to the first centuries CE.

(1) In his *Antiquities* Josephus reports on the descendants of Seth, all of whom were

51 *Gos.Eg* (NHC III,2) 64,12-20; (NHC IV,2) 76,2-10.

52 *Zost* (NHC VIII,1) 6, 8-17. Cf. *Zost* (NHC VIII,1) 47,4.

53 136^v, 15-21. I consult the edition of Charlotte Baynes, *A Coptic Gnostic Treatise contained in the Codex Brucianus* (Cambridge: University Press, 1933).

54 *Trim. Prot* (NHC XIII,2) 48, 18-21.

55 See above, n. 48. See also Stroumsa, *Another Seed* (above, n. 1), 71-134, though his main focus is not on Sethian Gnosticism in itself but the Gnostic image of Seth and his posterity.

virtuous men and invented “the wisdom concerning the heavenly bodies and their order”:⁵⁶

And for the purpose of their discoveries not escaping the notice of mankind and perishing before they became known - since Adam had said beforehand that the universe was to be destroyed at one time by the force of fire, and at another time by the power and magnitude of water - they made two pillars (*stēlas dyo*), the one of brick, the other of stone, and inscribed the discoveries on both, so that in case that of brick disappear by the flood, that of stone might remain and allow mankind to learn what had been engraved and make known that that of brick was set up by them. It remains until this day in the land of Seiris.

Obviously, it is presupposed here that Seth was the founder of the astronomical wisdom.

(2) Even more important for the purpose of our study is the *Life of Adam and Eve*. The structure of this apocryphal book is rather complex. It begins with Adam and Eve’s repentance after their expulsion from the paradise and Satan’s second temptation. After the murder of Abel by Cain, Adam tells Seth, his third son, about the vision which he had received once: He was caught up to the paradise of the just by Michael and saw God there. Moreover, Adam hands down to Seth the secrets about the future history of the chosen people (including the giving of the Torah, the building of the Temple, the Exile and the final judgment), which were revealed to him through eating from the tree of knowledge. When Adam was nine hundred and thirty years old, Adam assembles around his deathbed Seth and his other sons and relates the story of the fall, which was caused by the first temptation of Satan and, as a result, brought the great pains of death (this scene is followed by a curious interlude of the search of Eve and Seth for the oil of life). Six days after Adam’s death, Eve anticipates her impending death and says to Seth and his thirty brothers and thirty sisters as follows:⁵⁷

Hear me, my children, so that I might relate to you wherein I and your father

⁵⁶ *Ant.* I, 70-71.

⁵⁷ *Vita Adae et Evae*, 50, 1-2

transgressed the precept of God. And Michael the archangel said to us: “By reason of your collusions, our Lord will bring upon your race the wrath of his judgment, first by water, and second by fire. The Lord will judge the whole human race by means of these two.” But hear me, my children. Therefore, make tablets of stone (*tabulas lapideas*) and other tablets of clay (*alias tabulas luttea*), and write on them the whole life of mine and of your father, which you have heard from us and seen. If he judges our race by water, the tablets of earth will be dissolved, and the tablets of stone will persist. If, however, he judges our race by fire, the tablets of stone will be dissolved, and those of the clay of earth will be boiled.

Following the order of Eve, Seth makes tablets, which records the life of Adam and Eve (apparently, the final chapters of the book are later additions).

No doubt, a similar framework was known to and in an original fashion developed by Sethian Gnostics and other Gnostic authors with a Sethian Gnostic bent. The *Gospel of the Egyptians* is of particular interest in the present context. After an elaborate account of the heavenly *plerōma* and its evil counterpart, the author proceeds to the stories of Adam and his sons. In contrast with the archontic, therefore defiled, origin of Cain and Abel, the seed of Seth derives from a heavenly entity, i.e. the great Seth. From then on, the history of mankind advances according to the scheme of “the flood, the conflagration and the judgment of the archons and the powers and the authorities,”⁵⁸ to which correspond “the three advents” of the great Seth for the purpose of saving his seed. For the establishment of the holy baptism, the great Seth put on Jesus and then “nailed (*ōft/ti-eift*)” the Archontic powers through him (apparently, the former alludes to the baptism of Jesus, whereas the latter his crucifixion). After a series of passages on the mysteries of baptism, our Gospel ends with a comment that the great Seth composed this holy book and put it in high mountains. In addition, the correspondence between the three tablets and the triad of the flood, the great fire and the final judgment is possibly hinted at in the *Three Steles*

58 *GosEg* (NHC III,2) 63,6-8; (NHC IV,2) 74,19-22.

of Seth, as its beginning reads: “The revelation of Dositheos about the three steles (*ti-šomte n-stēlē*) of Seth, the father of the living and unmovable race (*ti-genea et-onh auō n-at-kim*). He remembered these which he saw, knew and read. And he gave them to the chosen who exist, as it was written in that place.”⁵⁹ Besides, there is one brief remark on the writing down of gnostic revelation by Seth in *Allogenes* (“And you shall place this book upon a mountain and you shall summon the watcher: ‘Come, Dreadful One’”)⁶⁰

These observations would enable us to make the following inferences:

- (1) Different traditions on the writing down of knowledge by Seth and his posterity were prevalent among the Jews, at the latest, in the first centuries CE, whereby the prediction on the future events of the deluge and the conflagration was the very reason for making the pillars/tablets.
- (2) Obviously, at some point, the third element, i.e. the final judgment, was added to the pair of the deluge and the conflagration in order to stretch the given historical frame into an eschatological direction. It is difficult to determine with certainty whether the shift in question took place for the first time in apocalyptic Jewish circles or not.
- (3) The new idea of the cosmic cycle of the deluge, the conflagration and the final judgment was developed, in particular, among the Sethian Gnostics. Here, the motif of the prevention of loss of knowledge against the cosmic disasters by water and fire lost its direct relevance; instead, the problem of the historical process of salvation came to the fore, the climax of which is the Eschaton.
- (4) That the periodizing scheme in question is almost lacking despite the presence of the motif of the writing down of knowledge by Seth and his posterity in some Gnostic writings that are significantly Sethian might be simply accidental; yet, it is equally possible that this reflects their predominant tendency to metaphysical and ahistorical speculations.

⁵⁹ *Steles Seth* (NHC VII,5) 118, 10-19.

⁶⁰ *Allog* (NHC XI,3) 72, 1-6.

Most probably, [R] was composed on the pattern of the three comings of the Gnostic redeemer through the cosmic cycle of the deluge, the conflagration and the final judgment, which was virtually the same as that known to the author of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. In this connection, it might be noted that as it seems, some traces of the dichotomy between the clouds of light and the clouds of darkness, the structure which is most characteristic of [R], are found in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, as well.⁶¹ Meanwhile, it is tempting to imagine that [A] in its original form had included, like the *Life of Adam and Eve*, some reference to the sequence of the flood, the great fire and the final judgment as the reason for the need of carefully recording Adam and Eve's life. If this were the case, the use of a similar narrative motif in [R] and [A] might have facilitated and even encouraged their merging. This is, however, a mere conjecture.

61 *Gos.Eg* (NHC III, 2) 48, 27-49, 7; (NGC IV, 2) 60, 30-61, 8 and *Gos.Eg* (NHC III, 2) 56, 22-58, 22; (NHC IV,2) 68, 5-70, 5.