Did “The Gnostic Heresy” Influence Valentinus?
An Investigation of Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1.11.1 and 1.29

M. David Litwa | ORCID: 0000-0002-4778-045X
New Testament Abstracts, Boston College, Boston, MA, USA
litwa@bc.edu

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Abstract

This article argues (1) that there is insufficient evidence to conclude that a or the “gnostic heresy” (Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1.11.1) referred to a specific social group whose theology is witnessed in Against Heresies 1.29 and (2) that the aeonology in this passage influenced Valentinus. There is no evidence that the aeonology in Against Heresies 1.29 existed prior to 160 CE, the approximate date of Valentinus’s demise; thus this material could not have shaped Valentinus’s theology. Instead of thinking with Irenaeus in terms of unidirectional influence (Irenaeus’s constructed “gnostic heresy” inspiring Valentinus/Valentinians), future theories ought to account for multiple directions of influence and entanglement between various early Christian theologians in the late second century CE.

Keywords

1 Introduction

The publication of the second edition of *The Gnostic Scriptures* provides a good opportunity to investigate a particular theory of Bentley Layton and his student David Brakke that provides the basic structure of the textbook.\(^1\) According to this theory, the “Gnostics” whose thought is described in *Against Heresies* (hereafter *AH*) 1.29\(^2\) is a proper name that refers to a particular “school” – here indicating a specific social group. The theory, in other words, proposes a sociological entity (a school of actual persons with a relatively coherent mythological system), not just a “school of thought.”\(^3\) This professional school of “Gnostics” then influenced Valentinus and his heirs. Valentinus made the “gnostic” material “more overtly Christian.”\(^4\) Accordingly, Valentinians became a “reformed branch of gnostics.”\(^5\) To some extent, the Layton-Brakke theory depends on the arguments of another of Layton’s students, Anne McGuire.\(^6\) I will have opportunity to refer to the work of McGuire and Layton in this essay, but I will focus on Brakke’s most recent formulation of the argument.\(^7\)

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1 Bentley Layton and David Brakke, ed. *The Gnostic Scriptures Translated with Annotations and Introductions*. 2d ed. Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021). I would like to thank David Brakke for his input on this essay, along with Lance Jenott for his comments.

2 Although some of the findings of this paper apply equally well to the figures represented in Irenaeus, *AH* 1.30–31.2, the focus will be on entirely *AH* 1.29. Methodologically, it is incorrect to conflate the theologies (or mythologies) represented in 1.29, 1.30, and 1.31, since they all seem to represent significantly different sources and thinkers.

3 The Layton-Brakke theory thus goes beyond the point made by Richard Adelbert Lipsius (*Die Quellen der ältesten Ketzergeschichte neu untersucht* [Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1875], 54, 191–225) that Irenaeus sometimes referred to “gnostics” in a restricted sense (to denote the thinkers represented in *AH* 1.29–31.2). One can agree with Lipsius on this score while still being skeptical about whether we can discover a coherent self-designating group of “Gnostics” represented by the material in *AH* 1.29. For the distinction between αἵρεσις as “school” versus a “school of thought,” see David T. Runia, “Philo of Alexandria and the Greek *Hairesis*-Model,” *VC* 53:2 (1999): 117–47.


7 David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1–51. Brakke acknowledges that his approach to “the Gnostics” “has not received the support of most working scholars” (*ibid.* 46, cf. 59). He also admits that “Irenaeus does not say that his ‘Gnostics’ called themselves that” (*ibid.* 48).
Brakke’s interpretation leans heavily on a passage in Irenaeus’s (*AH*) 1.11.1. I supply the Greek text, which survives in Epiphanius, *Panarion* 31.32.2.⁸

For Valentinus first, having adapted the principles from the so-called gnostic heresy to the peculiar character of his school, brought out (what follows).

The Latin translation is somewhat different.¹⁰

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I will focus on the Greek text, which I take to be more original. One could understand it to mean that Valentinus was “the first from the so-called gnostic heresy” to adapt principles.¹² In this reading, Valentinus was not borrowing from the/a “gnostic heresy”; he was already part of the/a gnostic group. This theory is supported by the fact that Irenaeus called Valentinians “false gnostics” (*falsarii gnostici*).¹³ The title of Irenaeus’s book can also be used to support the

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⁹ MSS of the *Panarion* here read ἐξηροφόρησεν or ἐξηφόρησεν. See the apparatus in Holl, Bergermann, and Collatz, *Epiphanius I*, 434.

¹⁰ Here and throughout this essay, the Latin text of Irenaeus is taken from Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, *Irénée de Lyon. Contre les Hérésies Livre 1*, SC 264 (Paris: Cerf, 1979), 166 (here). I do not accept all of their emendations.


¹³ Irenaeus, *AH* 3.10.4.
identification of Valentinians and "gnostics." Irenaeus wrote primarily against the Valentinians, but he called his book the Refutation and Overthrow of Gnosis Falsely So-Called.

It is probably better, however, to take τῆς λεγομένης γνωστικῆς αἱρέσεως with τὰς ἀρχὰς. In this case, Valentinus was the first of the Valentinians to adapt the principles of "the so-called gnostic heresy."14 According to McGuire, λεγομένης indicates that Irenaeus was "not referring to the self-designation of certain persons ('Gnostikoi')."15 He was, rather, alluding to a biblical text, 1 Timothy 6:20, which refers to "falsely-named gnostics" (τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως).16 Although it could be middle, the participle λεγομένη is most likely passive. Accordingly, the adjective "gnostic" is probably an outsider term, not a self-designation of a particular group. Here we can contrast the active verb in reference to Marcellinians in AH 1.25.6: "they call themselves gnostics" (gnosticos se autem vocant).17

The phrase "gnostic heresy" (γωνστική αἵρεσις) seems to have been Irenaeus’s own coinage. No Christian group after Justin Martyr would likely refer to themselves as a αἵρεσις.18 Accordingly, αἵρεσις should not be translated as "school" or "school of thought," as if Irenaeus employed it as a neutral term.19 In the immediate context, Irenaeus used a different word to refer to a school, namely διδασκαλεῖον.20 Reportedly, Valentinus had a "school," but he borrowed from the gnostic "heresy."

Irenaeus’s use of τὰς ἀρχὰς is important, since it shows that the dependence of Valentinus on "the gnostic heresy" was an appeal to principles, not the plagiarism of words or phrases.21 The aorist participle μεθαρμόσας confirms this point. One should not expect, Irenaeus implied, that the dependence of

15 McGuire, “Valentinus,” 38. McGuire is not entirely consistent, since she thinks the name of a group called γνωστικός could be based on a self-designation of its members (38). She recognizes at least eight different uses of the term γνωστικός, only half of which credibly qualify as self-designations (ibid., 35–36).
16 According to Thomassen, “the implicit subject of λεγομένης is probably not the heretics themselves, but other Christians” (Coherence 8, n.14).
17 I owe this point to Lance Jenott (personal communication).
19 Pace Brakke, Gnostics 31 and Layton, Gnostic Scriptures 283. Brakke of course recognizes that “during the second century it [the term hairesis] acquired a negative meaning for Christians (‘heresy’)” (Gnostics, 32).
21 Antiquas in the Latin seems to translate ἀρχαῖς apparently read by the Latin translator. See further Rousseau/Doutrelleau, Contre les Hérésies, sc 263,229.
Valentinus on “the gnostic heresy” is easily detected. Adaptation occurred. Valentinus had a διδασκαλεῖον with a “peculiar character” (ἴδιον χαρακτῆρα). Irenaeus was prepared to recognize the distinctiveness of the Valentinian movement, but he was not prepared to call it a Christian assembly (ἐκκλήσια). He wanted to make it seem like a non-Christian institution.22

3 An Inclusio

A remark in AH 1.30.15 seems to pick up Irenaeus’s statement in AH 1.11.1 (that the Valentinian “school” derives from “the gnostic heresy”). It should be kept in mind, however, that AH 1.30.15 does not refer to “a/the gnostic heresy”; it only has in mind the “crowd of gnostics” (multitudo gnosticorum) mentioned in AH 1.29.1.

This is what Irenaeus says: “such are their doctrines. From these (people), like the Lernaean hydra, the many-headed beast was born from the school of Valentinus” (tales quidem secundum eos sententiae sunt: a quibus, velut Lernaea hydra, multiplex capitibus fera de23 Valenti scola generata est).24 In context, Irenaeus wound up his description of the “others” mentioned in AH 1.30.1, who were part of the “crowd of gnostics” mentioned in AH 1.29.1. The “many-headed beast” is not Valentinus’s immediate circle, but the Valentinian movement(s) that emerged from it (led by Marcus, Ptolemy, Secundus, and others). Strictly speaking, then, the remark reports something different than AH 1.11.1, where Valentinus himself is the subject.25

The inconsistency continues in AH 1.31.3, where Irenaeus only referred to Valentinians: “from such mothers, fathers, and ancestors the Valentinians came, just as their very doctrines and canons show” (a talibus matribus et patribus et proavis eos qui a Valentino sint, sicut ipsae sententiae et regulae ostendunt eos). If the statements in AH 1.30.15 and 1.31.3 revise the remark made in 1.11.1, then it was not Valentinus (the founder) who depended on “the gnostic heresy,” but his followers (the multi-headed beast). It is better, I think, to let the ambiguity


23 I agree with Christoph Markschies (“Nochmals: Valentinus und die Gnostikoi: Beobachtungen zu Irenaeus, Haer. 1 30,15 und Tertullian, Val 4.2,” VC 512 [1997]: 179–87 at 180–82) that there is no need to excise the de (Rousseau/Doutreleau, Contre les Hérésies, sc 263.311).

24 Irenaeus, AH 1.30.15.

25 For further discussion of AH 1.30.15, see Schmid, Christen und Sethianer 223–38.
between founder and followers stand. It seems that Irenaeus wanted his readers to believe that the material in *AH* 1.29.2–31.2 chronologically preceded Valentinus himself, and that Valentinus and his heirs genetically depended on these doctrines for the formation of their teaching. The immediate “mothers” and “fathers” in *AH* 1.31.3 may refer to the material in *AH* 1.29.1–1.31.2 (the *multitudo gnosticorum*), while the “ancestors” may recall the succession from Simon to Tatian in 1.23.1–1.28.1.26 But Tatian, who was active in Rome in the 170s, can hardly be called an “ancestor,” and the only “mothers” that Irenaeus mentioned were Helen and Marcellina.27 This same Marcellina may have come to Rome as late as the mid-160s and was perhaps still alive at Irenaeus’s time of writing.

An important point here is that the material in *AH* 1.29.1–1.31.2 seems not to refer to a single group, but to three or four groups, who were later called by three different names. Irenaeus called them “some of them” (*quidam... eorum*), “others” (*alia*), “some people” (*quidam*) and still “others” (*alia*).28 For Irenaeus, all four parties are part of “the crowd of gnostics” (*multitudo gnosticorum*).29 One cannot, however, affirm that this “crowd” refers to a distinctive school for the simple reason that it was a “crowd” (or “mob”). At any rate, the cacophony of this “crowd” was a point Irenaeus wanted to emphasize.30 The extensive aeonologies delineated in *AH* 1.29.1–4 and 1.30.1–5 are not variations on a single myth. Rather, they are distinct aeonologies from what appear to be at least two distinct schools of thought, which can be called – for lack of better terms – “Barbeloite” and “Ophite.” This is an interpretation advanced in the reception history of Irenaeus (Theodoret, *Fab*. 1.12–14) and confirmed in modern scholarship – though in a more sophisticated and nuanced way.31

26 This is the hypothesis of Rousseau/Doutreleau, *Contre les Hérésies*, SC 263:313–14.
27 Irenaeus, *AH* 1.23.2; 1.25.6. Rousseau/Doutreleau unnecessarily delete *matribus* (*Contre les Hérésies*, SC 263:314) despite the fact that it is attested in the MSS and makes good grammatical sense.
28 Irenaeus, *AH* 1.29.1; 1.30.1; 1.30.15; 1.31.1.
29 Irenaeus, *AH* 1.29.1.
30 Pace Brakke, *Gnostics* 36.
4 Review and Critique

One can now turn more directly to Brakke’s arguments. In his book, The Gnostics, Brakke argues that at least the people represented by AH 1.29 refer to a sociologically distinct group, “the Gnostics.” He admits that “Irenaeus does not say that these Christians called themselves Gnostics, but it seems almost certain that they did.” It is “almost certain,” Brakke urges, because γνωστικός was a positive term in the second century CE and because Irenaeus used no other label to refer to this group.32

This kind of inferential logic, however, does not allow the interpreter to claim near certainty. It is not clear that those represented by the material in AH 1.29–31 represent a single group.33 It is true, moreover, that in the second century CE, γνωστικός was considered a positive term. Yet it was a term self-applied by several persons and groups, not by just one. Furthermore, Irenaeus classed the separate groups in AH 1.29–31 (the “some,” “others,” and “others”) among the multitudo gnosticorum.34 In this text, he never actually gives them what can be called a proper name – probably because a name did not appear in his sources. One should, however, mention that the phrase multitudo gnosticorum Barbelo may, if Barbelo is read as genitive, be some sort of group designation, if one does not excise Barbelo as a gloss.35

Irenaeus referred to his opponents in AH 1.29 as “a/the crowd of gnostics.”36 If Irenaeus had simply called them “gnostics” he would have confused them with the followers of Marcellina, who “called themselves gnostics” (se vocant gnosticos).37 Instead, Irenaeus mentioned an amorphous “crowd.” They apparently had no other chosen name or named leaders. Referring to an ambiguous “crowd of gnostics,” enabled Irenaeus to trace the material in AH 1.29 back to the Simonians, as he noted: “from these aforementioned Simonians (ex his qui praedicti sunt Simoniani), a crowd of gnostics [Barbelo] rose up and have

32 Brakke, Gnostics 32.
34 Irenaeus, AH 1.29.1.
35 Irenaeus, AH 1.29.1. I think it is probably a gloss. See Rousseau/Doutreleau, Contre les Hérésies sc 263-269–300; Schmid, Sethianer 227.
37 Irenaeus, AH 1.25.6.
appeared like mushrooms from the ground.” In fact, Irenaeus here seems to say that the “crowd of gnostics” in \textit{AH} 1.29–31 rose directly from the Simonians (cf. \textit{AH} 3.4.3), not via mediation (through Saturninus or Basilides, for instance).\textsuperscript{38} They are thus “gnostic,” not because “the crowd of gnostics” used “gnostic” as a self-designation, but because Irenaeus thought they derived from Simon, whom he viewed as father of a conglomerate category of “gnostics.”\textsuperscript{39} The persons or groups in \textit{AH} 1.29–31 were never part of a specific and sociologically distinct group. They were, according to Irenaeus, part of a “heresy”\textsuperscript{40} and a “crowd”\textsuperscript{41} – a “heresy” and a “crowd” that did not denote a single and coherently defined group of people who used “gnostic” as a proper name.

Brakke claims that Irenaeus’s “diction also suggests that ‘Gnostics’ and ‘Gnostic school of thought’ functioned as proper names for the group.” But it is hard to see what in the diction of \textit{multitudo gnosticorum}\textsuperscript{42} or of \textit{λεγομένη γνώστική αἵρεσις}\textsuperscript{43} suggests a proper name. If \textit{multitudo gnosticorum} were a proper name, it would have to be a proper name for the whole \textit{multitudo}, a \textit{multitudo} which does not suggest a coherent group. Irenaeus himself never distinguished a proper name from a non-specific epithet for a “crowd” of persons and groups – likened to wild mushrooms popping up from the ground. The mushrooms simile suggests, moreover, clusters of various persons and groups popping up everywhere. The distinction between a proper name and a non-specific epithet must be read into the text of Irenaeus.

It was Layton who argued for this distinction in his essay, “Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism.” Here Layton averred that \textit{γνώστικος} referred to “persons” (note the plural) “as social entities.”\textsuperscript{44} He mentioned examples of self-identifying \textit{γνώστικοι}: the aforementioned Marcellinians,\textsuperscript{45} the unnamed \textit{γνώστικος} mentioned by Clement,\textsuperscript{46} and the \textit{γνώστικοι} referred to in Origen’s

\textsuperscript{38} Similar is Irenaeus, \textit{AH} 2, pref. 1: “In the first book ... we exposed the doctrine of their ancestor Simon the magus of Samaria, and of all those who succeeded him, and we spoke of their crowd of gnostics who are from him’ (\textit{diximis quoque multitidinem eorum qui sunt ab eo gnostici}).

\textsuperscript{39} Irenaeus, \textit{AH} 1.11.1.

\textsuperscript{40} Irenaeus, \textit{AH} 1.11.1.

\textsuperscript{41} Irenaeus, \textit{AH} 1.29.1.

\textsuperscript{42} Irenaeus, \textit{AH} 1.29.1.

\textsuperscript{43} Irenaeus, \textit{AH} 1.11.1.


\textsuperscript{45} Irenaeus, \textit{AH} 1.25.6.

Contra Celsum 5.61. One can add to this list the Prodicans,\footnote{In Clement, Strom. 3.4.30.1.} the Naassenes,\footnote{[Anonymous,] Ref. 5.6.4. M. David Litwa, ed., Refutation of All Heresies Translated with an Introduction and Notes, WGRW 40 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016).} and Clement himself.\footnote{E.g., Clement, Strom. 4.3.9.2. See further Brox, *Γνωστικοί* 106–113. The study of Morton Smith, “The History of the Term Gnostikos” in The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, ed. Bentley Layton, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 2.796–807 has effectively been replaced by Holzhause, “Gnostizismus,” 58–74. See also Brakke, *Gnostics* 33–34. 48.} If one can believe the author of the Refutation of All Heresies, the Peratics, Sethians, and Justin (author of the book Baruch) also self-identified as “gnostics.”\footnote{[Anonymous,] Ref. 5.23.3.} In light of the many persons or groups who claimed the name “gnostic,” it is surprising that Layton could conclude: “Gnostikos was a self-designating proper name referring to a haeresis.”\footnote{Layton, “Prolegomena,” 338.} Without any explanation, the plural groups Layton mentioned become “a” singular haeresis with a particular if varied mythology.

Layton continued: “This is the only proper-name usage of the word γνωστικός in classical or late classical antiquity.”\footnote{Layton, “Prolegomena,” 338.} But the logic does not to follow. Layton cited multiple examples for self-designating γνωστικοί, not a singular one. It is therefore precipitous to conclude that “it [the term γνωστικός] was the Gnostics’ own professional school name for themselves.”\footnote{Layton, “Prolegomena,” 338.} Layton intuited a singular group when his evidence pointed to multiple groups claiming a non-specifying name. The self-designating “gnostic” Marcellinians were primarily known as Marcellinians, as Celsus reported;\footnote{Origen, Cels. 5.62.} likewise the self-designating “gnostic” Naassenes were apparently better known as “Naassenes.”\footnote{[Anonymous,] Ref. 5.6.4.} Since at least half a dozen named figures and groups (including Clement) claimed the title “gnostic,” none could plausibly claim it as an their own “professional school” name, because – even in the second century – the name was not specific enough.\footnote{Schmid, Sethianer 237. Brakke himself puts the problem well: “if multiple and diverse ancient people and groups were calling themselves Gnostics, how can we separate one such group out as the only people to whom we should give this name?” (Gnostics 48).} Clement, if he knew a heresy with the proper name “Gnostic,” would not have used “gnostic” in a positive sense for his true (intellectually mature) Christian around 200 CE. Still, Layton thought of the figures in AH 1.29 as a single and distinctive “Gnostic” group.
In one place, however, Layton did not accurately report the data. He claimed that, “These persons are collectively called by the plural of \( \text{gnōstikos} \) (οἱ \text{Γνωστικοί} scil. \( \text{ἀνθρώποι} \), Adv. Haer. 1.29.1).”\(^{57}\) It is unclear why Layton cited Greek here, since the Greek of \( \text{AH} \) 1.29.1 does not exist. When we turn to the Latin we see that Irenaeus did not refer to οἱ Γνωστικοί (ἄνθρωποι), but (as we have seen) to a \textit{multitudo gnosticorum} – a “crowd of gnostics” – with “Barbelo” tacked on. The fact is, no specific, singular group of “gnostics” is referred to in \( \text{AH} \) 1.29.1. There is instead a “crowd” of figures popping up like mushrooms, none of whom are attested as using the name \( \text{γνωστικός} \) as a proper name. Given the ambiguity of the language, the Layton-Brakke theory of a single, self-designating and specifically “Gnostic” professional school represented first and foremost by the material in \( \text{AH} \) 1.29 must be called shaky and inferential at best.\(^{58}\)

5

Aeonology

I turn now to try to answer the basic historical question: could Valentinus – here focusing particularly on the claim in \( \text{AH} \) 1.11.1 – have adapted the principles of the material represented in \( \text{AH} \) 1.29? Was this data even available to Valentinus during his lifetime? It is agreed that Irenaeus wanted to make a linear and uni-directional genetic connection (from “gnostic heresy” to Valentinus’s “school”) based on his own perceived conceptual similarities between the material in \( \text{AH} \) 1.11 (the supposed doctrine of Valentinus) and \( \text{AH} \) 1.29. There are indeed...

\(^{57}\) Layton, “Prolegomena,” 338.

\(^{58}\) Michael Williams offers further criticism of Layton in “Was There a Gnostic Religion? Strategies for a Clearer Analysis,” in Was there a Gnostic Religion? ed. Antti Marjanen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 55–79 at 75–76: (1) “this particular self-designation \( \text{gnōstikos} \) is never used in Nag Hammadi or other original sources”; as a result, “with the very first step ... into original sources Layton must abandon this landmark in favor of grouping according to continuity in mythological tradition”; (2) “the self-designation \( \text{gnōstikos} \) as the foundational criterion is ... applied somewhat inconsistently. Not only is it never found in any of the sources that Layton wishes to identify as core to the ‘gnostic’ religion, the self-designation is attested in other traditions with significantly different mythologies ... It is not clear that Layton has shown why \( \text{gnōstikos} \) should be considered to have been more of a proper name for adherents in Schenke’s ‘Sethian’ group than it was for followers of Marcellina or Justin or the Naassenes. For that matter, I confess that I am not yet so convinced that the usage of \( \text{gnōstikos} \) by any such persons would have been different \textit{in type} from the way in which Clement of Alexandria speaks of \( \text{gnōstikos} \) as an ideal ... that in the case of a certain group it must be understood strictly as a proper name employed ‘not to say what they were, but only who they were’ [Layton, “Prolegomena,” 344] seems to me to be more of an assertion than something that has been (or can be) demonstrated from the evidence” (italics original).
certain conceptual similarities. But was Irenaeus right about the genetic connection and its unidirectional movement?

Let’s return to the context of AH 1.11. Part of Irenaeus’s posited conceptual similarity between AH 1.11 and 1.29 had to do with theories of aeonic proliferation (or aeonology). As is well known, Irenaeus made the Valentinians famous for their aeonology. It was an aspect of their thought that he considered foreign and un biblical. One suspects that when he was collecting the literature of his opponents, he was looking in particular for discordant aeonologies to emphasize Valentinian διαφώνια.59

Yet Irenaeus had a problem. He wanted to connect Valentinus with Simon, the claimed founder of the gnostic heresy.60 When Irenaeus dealt with the material that he inherited from Justin’s Syntagma,61 however, he did not find a robust aeonology. Irenaeus claimed that Tatian developed an aeonology like the Valentinians,62 but Irenaeus knew that Tatian came after Valentinus. All that Irenaeus could find in the Syntagma was Simon of Samaria as “Father” and Helen of Tyre as “Thought,” along with the proliferation of “powers and angels.”63 The powers and angels, however, were not the paired and named aeons characteristic of Valentinian lore.64 The only named aeons appear in the Basilides report – a string of six beings (Father, Nous, Logos, Phronesis, Sophia, and Dynamis) who are not paired and seem to produce the next aeon “asexually.”65 This story is not very much like to the numerically-defined 8-10-12 pattern of paired aeons who give birth by coupling in Valentinian lore.66

Thus by the time Irenaeus had finished copying (and updating) Justin’s Syntagma (AH 1.23–28), he still did not have a strong parallel showing the dependence of Valentinus’s “school” on “the gnostic heresy” fathered by Simon. This is why the material in AH 1.29 proved important to Irenaeus. For AH 1.29 presented a robust theory of aeonology. Here Irenaeus found aeons with similar names as the Valentinian aeons – names like Nous, Ennoia, Logos, Zoe, and Aletheia. These aeons were grouped, moreover, in syzygies. Not all the pairs and names were identical, of course (there is no Valentinian Barbelo or Autogenes, for instance), but the structural similarities were enough for

59 Cf. Irenaeus, AH 1.11.4.
60 Irenaeus, AH 1.23–4.
61 Irenaeus, AH 1.23–27.
62 Irenaeus, AH 1.28.1.
63 Irenaeus, AH 1.23.2.
64 Irenaeus, AH 1.1–8.5.
65 Irenaeus, AH 1.24–3.
66 Irenaeus, AH 1.1–8, 11. Irenaeus himself drew attention to the specificity of the 8-10-12 pattern in AH 2.15.2.
Irenaeus to draw a genetic connection between the material in *AH* 1.29 and Valentinian aeonology. In short, the aeonology in *AH* 1.29 became the proposed source for the Valentinian aeonology in *AH* 1.11.67

How exactly was the material in *AH* 1.29 connected to the “gnostic” succession fathered by Simon (*AH* 1.23–27)? The writer(s) represented in *AH* 1.29 never refer to Simon or to particularly Simonian theologoumena. All that Irenaeus could do was say that “the crowd of gnostics” (*multitudo gnosticorum*) which produced the document behind *AH* 1.29 rose from the Simonians.68 The connection seems forced. One can agree with McGuire that Irenaeus wanted his readers to conceive of the figures represented by *AH* 1.29–31 “as the descendants of Simon, and the immediate ancestors of Valentinus and the Valentinian school.”69 In the mind of Irenaeus, the material in *AH* 1.29 became the key evidence for connecting Simon’s “crowd of gnostics” to Valentinus and the Valentinians. The conceptual bridge, for Irenaeus, was the similar aeonology (aeons in syzygies forming specific numerical patterns).

In drawing this genetic connection, however, Irenaeus did not know – perhaps could not have known – the date of the material in *AH* 1.29. He assumed that it was earlier than Valentinians and Valentinus himself, whose Roman debut Irenaeus synced with the time of Hyginus (about 136–140 CE).70 But it not likely that the material in *AH* 1.29 predates 136 CE. Eusebius claimed that Basilides lived in Alexandria in the 130s CE, and that “from him derive the Gnostics.”71 If there is any truth to this report, it would indicate that “Gnostics” came after the 130s CE, when Valentinus was already a mature man. Saturninus, who may have influenced what is called Sethian thought, had no aeonology, at least as far as Irenaeus knew.72 The material in *AH* 1.29 was presumably unknown to Justin Martyr, who never mentioned it. Yet if Justin

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67 Cf. Logan, *Gnostic Truth* 9. Significantly, the author of Ref. ignored the material in Irenaeus, *AH* 1.29–31. This material was apparently not important for his own heresiological reconstruction. For him, there was no restricted group of “Gnostics”; rather there were four groups (in Ref. 5: the Naassenes, Peratics, Sethians and followers of Justin) who claimed the gnostic title, four groups that had little else in common. Valentinus was said to have depended on Platonic and Pythagorean philosophy (Ref. 6.21.1; 6.29.1), not on “the gnostic heresy.” The writer of *Adversus Omnes Haereses*, which survives in a Latin epitome, summarized portions of “Ophite” and “Cainite” material in 1.30–31 (2.1–6), but skipped over *AH* 1.29, as if it were insignificant (A. Kroymann, ed., *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Opera Pars II: Opera Montanistica*, *CCSL* 11/11 [Turnholt: Brepols, 1954], 1403–4).

68 Irenaeus, *AH* 1.29.1; cf. 2 pref. §1.

69 McGuire, “Valentinus,” 42.

70 Irenaeus, *AH* 3.3.3.


72 Irenaeus, *AH* 1.24.1–2.
wrote a *Syntagma Against All Existing Heresies* (σύνταγμα κατά πασῶν τῶν γεγενμένων αἱρέσεων, 1 Apol. 26.8), then he would have included the material in *AH* 1.29 if he knew it.\(^7^3\) Justin died around 165 CE. Importantly, Hegesippus also failed to mention the *AH* 1.29 material. Hegesippus wrote in the time of Eleutherus (174–189 CE) – thus simultaneously or even after Irenaeus wrote *AH* 1.\(^7^4\) Irenaeus probably became acquainted with the material in *AH* 1.29 after he adapted Justin’s *Syntagma* (*AH* 1.23–27). And it is likely that the copy of the *Syntagma* that Irenaeus possessed was itself a version that was updated by an anonymous editor (or editors) in the early 170s CE.\(^7^5\)

This means that Irenaeus likely found the material in *AH* 1.29 fairly late – probably between 175–180 CE.\(^7^6\) To be sure, this does not mean that the material of *AH* 1.29 was only composed in the 170s CE. It could have been composed earlier. Yet it is not likely to be much earlier, since if Justin, Hegesippus, or the updater of Justin’s *Syntagma* knew about this material, they would have mentioned it. I hypothesize, then, that the material in *AH* 1.29 was probably composed between 165–180 CE.\(^7^7\)

If my hypothesis is correct, then Valentinus was probably already dead before the material in *AH* 1.29 was written, thus he could not have adapted

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\(^7^3\) I agree with most scholars that Justin Martyr was the original author of the *Syntagma*. For a different view, see Smith, *Guilt* 49–86 with the response of Matthijs den Dulk, “Justin Martyr and the Authorship of the Earliest Anti-Heretical Treatise,” *VC* 72 (2018): 471–83.


\(^7^5\) Smith, *Guilt* 121–45.


\(^7^7\) Cf. McGuire: “For while Irenaeus wanted to claim that Valentinus adapted the principles of the *Gnostike Hairesis* as described in *Haer.* 1.29–31, he may have included in those accounts some material that was composed after the height of Valentinus’s career (135–160). Though Irenaeus may have gathered his descriptions of the Gnostikos teaching directly from sources provided by Valentinians, even they cannot be dated before 180” (“Valentinus,” 67).
its principles.\textsuperscript{78} Aeonic speculation is something that probably emerged with Valentinus's disciple Ptolemy, whose thought seems to be the main target of Irenaeus's attack in \textit{AH} 1.1–8.\textsuperscript{79} Ptolemy and his disciples – and we can add Marcus, Secundus, among others – were the real innovators in Valentinian aeonology, since they combined it with Neopythagorean number speculation resulting in a distinctive numerical proliferation of aeons (the 8-10-12 pattern).\textsuperscript{80}

Tertullian confirms this reconstruction. He said it was Ptolemy who distinguished the aeons with names and numbers as personal substances outside of God (\textit{Ptolemaeus intravit, nominibus et numeris aenorn distinctis in personas substantias, sed extra deum determinatas}). Valentinus, by contrast, conceived of aeons as thoughts, sentiments, and emotions within the height of divinity (\textit{quas Valentinus in ipsa summa divinitatis ut sensus et affectus, motus includerat}).\textsuperscript{81} If this report is true, it is more evidence that Valentinus did not adapt the material in \textit{AH} 1.29. If he did, he would have conceived of independent, named and paired aeons outside of the Father; but – even according to the hostile witness, Tertullian – he did not.\textsuperscript{82}

6  
**Distinctive Terminology**

Another hint of a later date for the material in \textit{AH} 1.29 regards terminology. The earliest attestation of Προύνικος, which appears in \textit{AH} 1.29.4, is attested by Celsus, who was probably writing in the late 170s.\textsuperscript{83} The material in the Peratic

\textsuperscript{78} Irenaeus, \textit{AH} 1.11.1.

\textsuperscript{79} Much depends on the words in \textit{AH} 1.8.5: \textit{et Ptolemaeus quidem ita}, which some scholars understand as a gloss. For recent discussion, see Marksches, “Grande Notice,” 53–55.

\textsuperscript{80} Einar Thomassen, \textit{The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the ‘Valentinians’} (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 269–314. Thomassen opined that Valentinus “taught a protology with aeons” but that he “seems not to have written a system. ... Instead, the importance of the founder more probably lay in the continual use of his psalms in worship and in the inspiration derived from his homilies and letters” (\textit{ibid.} 492).

\textsuperscript{81} Tertullian, \textit{Against Valentinians} 4.2 in Jean-Claude Fredouille, \textit{Contre les Valentiens}, sc 280:86. See further Christoph Marksches, \textit{Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins}, WUNT 65 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 310–11.


\textsuperscript{83} Origen, \textit{Cels.} 6.34. See further Anne Pasquier, “Prouneikos: A Colorful Expression to Designate Wisdom in Gnostic Texts,” in \textit{Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism}, ed. Karen L.
report probably came after Irenaeus, since he evidently knew nothing about it. Likewise, the distinctive figure of Adamas appears elsewhere only in the Naassene report, which also probably came after Irenaeus in the late second or early third century CE. Distinctive mythological figures of \(AH\) 1.29, in short, appear late in the second century, roughly between 175–200 CE. If Irenaeus was writing as late as 188 CE, then there is room to fit the original document represented by \(AH\) 1.29 between 165–180 CE.

7 Dating the “Barbeloites”

I am aware that there are theories positing the very early appearance of the “Barbeloite” movement, the tentative name for movement that produced the material in \(AH\) 1.29. John D. Turner, for instance, saw the earliest Barbeloites as a heterodox Jewish group who were Christianized in the course of the second century. Their aeonology was already Christianized by the time it reached Irenaeus. But when one looks at the evidence for pre-Christian Barbeloites, it is virtually non-existent. Largely, Turner identified Barbeloite material (in \(Ap. John\) and elsewhere) he considered to be Jewish and projected backward into history a purely Jewish Barbeloite group. Strictly speaking, Turner’s only hard evidence for dating the group appears in the third century: Porphyry’s attestation of \(Zostrianos\) and \(Allogenes\) circulating among members of Plotinus’s seminar (240–265 CE). Turner considered \(Trimorphic Protennoia\) to be Barbeloite and early (between 115–140 CE). Yet his only evidence for an early date was that \(Trimorphic Protennoia\) reflected the debate over the interpretation of John that occurred around the writing of 1 John. This is not a secure means of dating a
document, since such Johannine debates could have occurred any time after the Johannine literature was written. Paul-Hubert Poirier has more recently established that Trimorphic Protennoia depends on the longer version of the Apocryphon of John. Although Poirier dated the longer version as early as the late second century, it is more likely to have been composed in the early third. A likely date for the Trimorphic Protennoia is thus 225–250 CE.

One can ask another chronological question. Assuming that the “Barbeloites” with their negative view of the creator were active in the early second century CE, why didn’t their theories of an evil creator convince any of the major early Egyptian theologians – Basilides, Carpocrates, and Valentinus? None of these theologians, as they are reported, depicted an evil creator who claimed to be the only deity (a view I have called negative demiurgy)? Did they all independently reject negative demiurgy although they all knew about it in the Egypt of the 130s and 140s CE? Such a view seems unlikely. It is more probable that the negative demiurgy as found in the Gospel of Judas and in AH 1.29–30 was influenced by Marcionite thought, which had its heyday in the 150s and 160s CE.


I now turn to the Apocryphon of John. As is well known, the material in AH 1.29.1–4 overlaps with a section in the Apocryphon, and some would date the (short recension of the) Apocryphon as early as 150 CE. This dating, however, is too early to allow for the combination of the Barbeloite aeonology (as in AH 1.29) with the paradise narrative in AH 1.30, both of which were later “Sethianized” by the inclusion of a heavenly Seth. This interweaving of distinct mythologies, as we see in surviving versions of Ap. John, probably occurred in the early third century CE. This observation undercuts the assertion of Brakke that Irenaeus had Ap. John in his possession around 180 CE.

90 Poirier, La pensée Première à la Triple Forme (NH XIII, 1), BCNH 32 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 68–122.
Following Irenaeus, Brakke concludes that “some version” of *Ap. John* “must” have appeared “no later than the middle of the second century, most likely earlier if, as Irenaeus claims, Valentinus and his students knew its teachings.”

I agree with the more careful conclusion of Frederick Wisse and Michael Waldstein that Irenaeus likely did not have what we call *Ap. John* in his possession, but a document “which was the apparent source of the first part of the main revelation discourse” in *Ap. John*. *Ap. John* as we have it possesses a dialogic frame narrative introducing the risen Jesus to the apostle John. Irenaeus showed no knowledge of this frame narrative or the salvation history section of *Ap. John*. Even his presentation of the nameless Father in *AH* 1.29 lacks the negative theology and Neopythagorean terminology (e.g., “monad”) we find in *Ap. John*. If Irenaeus had a version of the extant *Ap. John*, he would likely have mentioned it, since attribution of such material to the apostle John stood in tension with his depiction of John (e.g., *AH* 3.11.9). When Irenaeus had an apostolic book title, such as the *Gospel of Judas*, he mentioned it. One can deduce, then, that Irenaeus did not have what we call *Ap. John*, only an early version of an aeonology that was redacted into *Ap. John*. If the negative
theological source common to Allogenes\textsuperscript{103} and \textit{Ap. John}\textsuperscript{104} was redacted into the \textit{Apocryphon} in the early third century, this was probably the time when the \textit{Apocryphon} as a whole took its present form.

The \textit{Gospel of Judas} (\textit{Gos. Judas}), however, did likely predate Irenaeus, even if not in the form it exists today.\textsuperscript{105} There is an aeonology in \textit{Gos. Judas}.\textsuperscript{106} Most of the aeonic beings (like Autogenes and El[eleth]) are called angelic or divine. The aeonology in the \textit{Gospel of Judas} contains no syzygies. The aeonology section mentions no female aeons although Barbelo is referred to earlier in the text.\textsuperscript{107} The luminaries, moreover, are not named. There is no rupture effected by Sophia to produce the cosmos, and no single demiurge.\textsuperscript{108} Instead, we have two angelic beings named Nebro (aka Yaldabaoth) and Saklas.\textsuperscript{109}

If Irenaeus did have access to this text – as opposed to a summary of it – he would have struggled to find conceptual parallels with Ptolemean aeonology (syzygies in the 8-10-12 pattern). This is the same pattern of aeonology attributed to Valentinus in \textit{AH} 1.11.1. Most scholars concur (as I do) that \textit{AH} 1.11.1 is not actually from Valentinus.\textsuperscript{110} Thus the aeonology in \textit{Gos. Judas} is not an objection to dating the material in \textit{AH} 1.29 to 165–180 CE.

In fact, \textit{AH} 1.29 gives every indication of being a more thoroughly Christian reworking of the aeonology in \textit{Gos. Judas}. \textit{Gos. Judas} presents Autogenes as the god of light immediately below the primal aeon (the Invisible Spirit).\textsuperscript{111} \textit{AH} 1.29, however, has Christ the anointed Light effectively take over the position

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{103} Allog. NHC XI,3 62.28–63.25.
\bibitem{104} \textit{Ap. John} BG 24.6–25.7; NHC II,1 3.18–33.
\bibitem{106} \textit{Gos. Judas}, Codex Tchacos [CT] 47.1–52.14.
\bibitem{107} \textit{Gos. Judas}, CT 35.18.
\bibitem{109} See further Brakke, \textit{Gnostics} 39; Brakke, \textit{Commentary} 32–46. Brakke also argues that \textit{Gos. Judas} is “less dualistic” than Ap. John (\textit{ibid.}, 39) and has no “abstract philosophical vocabulary” (\textit{ibid.}, 167). For Brakke, the aeonology of \textit{Ap. John} and \textit{Gos. Judas} are contemporaneous, even though the “teachings of \textit{Judas} ... fit comfortably in the 130s or 140s” (\textit{ibid.}, 45).
\bibitem{111} For “Christ” or “the Kind” as a name for one of the lower angels in \textit{Gos. Judas}, see Brakke, \textit{Commentary} 192–94.
\end{thebibliography}
of Autogenes, who is demoted to become the offspring of the pair Logos and Ennoia.\textsuperscript{112} \textit{AH} 1.29.3 also introduces a trinity of Father-Mother-Son.\textsuperscript{113} No explicitly trinitarian structure exists in \textit{Gos. Judas}.\textsuperscript{114} Finally, the four angels/luminaries mentioned in \textit{Gos. Judas} all receive names and named partners in \textit{AH} 1.29. (In fact, the insistence on an Ogdoad of named pairs in \textit{AH} 1.29 might indicate influence from the better-known Ogdoad of Ptolemaean aeonology as revealed in \textit{AH} 1.1.1). Accordingly, if we date the aeonology of \textit{Gos. Judas} between 150–165 CE, one would plausibly date the aeonology in \textit{AH} 1.29 somewhat later, between 165–180 CE.\textsuperscript{115}

One final indication of later date for the material in \textit{AH} 1.29 concerns the figure of Monogenes. Monogenes appears suddenly in 1.29.4 without being mentioned beforehand. To find the identity of Monogenes, one must turn to later instantiations of the myth,\textsuperscript{116} where Monogenes is identified with the Christ-Light figure. Although the Christ-light figure is identified with the “Son” (\textit{filius}) in \textit{AH} 1.29.3, Irenaeus did not previously reveal that he was also the “Only-begotten” Son. The name “Monogenes” recalls John 1:18 where Christ is called the “Only-begotten.” We thus have more evidence of the later Christian updating of the material in \textit{AH} 1.29, an updating that likely took place after the writing of \textit{Gos. Judas}.

9 Directions of Influence

It is worth pointing out, finally, that there were heresiologists who disagreed with Irenaeus on the direction of dependence from the constructed “gnostic heresy” to Valentinus’s “school.” Brakke himself translated Tertullian’s remark in his \textit{Against the Valentinians} 39.1: “And so the sprouting doctrines of the Valentinians have now grown up into the woods of the Gnostics” (\textit{atque ita inolescentes doctrinae Valentinianorum in silvas iam exoleverunt gnosticorum}).\textsuperscript{117} Brakke concluded: “he [Tertullian] seems to imply that the Valentinians

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Ap. John} solves the tension by identifying Christ with Autogenes (\textit{Ap. John} \textit{BG} 30.6).
\textsuperscript{113} The same triad appears in \textit{Ap. John}, e.g., \textit{BG} 21.19–21; \textit{NHC} II,1 2.13–15.
\textsuperscript{114} See further \textit{van den Broek}, “Autogenes and Adamas,” 18–25.
\textsuperscript{115} By contrast, Brakke sees the aeonology of \textit{Gos. Judas} and \textit{Ap. John} more or less contemporaneous in the mid-second century (\textit{Commentary} 171). Yet Brakke also supplies reasons for why \textit{Gos. Judas} might be considered chronologically prior: (1) \textit{Gos. Judas} probably does not know the fall of wisdom story which is present in \textit{Ap. John} and other texts (\textit{Commentary} 183, 186), and (2) \textit{Gos. Judas} presents the angel El[eleth] in an independent role prior to his “incorporation into the set of four luminaries” (\textit{ibid.}, 187).
\textsuperscript{116} E.g., \textit{Ap. John} \textit{BG} 30.5.
\textsuperscript{117} Fredouille, \textit{Contre les Valentiens} SC 28:2154.
preceded the Gnostics intellectually, rather than the other way around, as Irenaeus would have it.” Theodoret thought that the “Barbeloites” (from Irenaeus, AH 1.29) came “from the seeds of Valentinus” (ἐκ τῶν Βαλεντίνου σπερμάτων). We can also add Epiphanius, who wrote that “the heresy of falsely-named Gnosis grew up from the pretext (or: proclamation) of Valentinus” (ἔτι δὲ ἐκ προφάσεως Οὐαλεντίνου ἢ τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως ἐφύη αἵρεσις). This “heresy,” Epiphanius clarified, “called its own members ‘Gnostics,’ from whom are the Gnostics” (ἡτίς γνωστικούς τοὺς αὐτῆς ὤνόμασεν, ἀφ’ ἦς οἱ γνωστικοὶ). The fact that three of Irenaeus’s heirs all interpreted him as saying the opposite as the Layton-Brakke model should at least give one pause. In the 1980s, Simone Pétrement also proposed this direction of influence (from Valentinus to Gnostics) in her work A Separate God. Although her arguments generally failed to convince, her well-researched discussion joins with more recent research showing how the evidence can be read in different ways.

10 Conclusion

Some final clarifications are in order. It would be a misreading of my thesis that AH 1.11.1 and 1.29–31 represent (mere) heresiological constructs. I believe that Irenaeus, in writing these sections, summarized actual documents from real authors. I am not in principle against the idea that these authors belonged to groups (though I wouldn’t call them “gnostics”). My thesis is only that we cannot define a specific sociological group (the “gnostic school”) from these reports. My view, then, is that we can explore historical links between documents which belonged to authors who may in turn have belonged to groups.

This paper is not about the overall reliability of Irenaeus. It is only about the reliability of his specific claim that Valentinus was influenced by “a/the gnostic heresy” (AH 1.11.1) as represented by AH 1.29. Even if Irenaeus was wrong in this specific claim, he was not a liar. We have no reason to doubt that Irenaeus believed that the material in AH 1.29 preceded and influenced Valentinus, based on what Irenaeus thought was shared theologoumena.


119 Theodoret, Haer. Fab. 13.

120 Epiphanius, Pan. 27.1.2; Holl, Bergermann, and Collatt, Epiphanius 1, GCS NF 10/1231.


123 In fact, since Irenaeus considered Nicolaitans to be an “offshoot of the falsely-called gno- sis” (AH 3.11.1), he would evidently date the material in AH 1.29 to the first century CE.

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To evaluate Irenaeus’s claim about unidirectional genetic connection, however, one must depend not on conceptual similarities, but on careful historical reconstruction. The fatal flaw of Irenaeus’s claim is that we cannot date the material in *AH* 1.29 earlier than about 165 CE. Accordingly, Valentinus could not have “adapted the principles” of a constructed “gnostic heresy,” as supposedly witnessed by *AH* 1.29. To agree with Irenaeus in *AH* 1.11.1, or to think that it reflects the actual course of intellectual history, would thus be a mistake.

In the early 1980s, McGuire rightly recognized that “there is good reason to be suspicious of Irenaeus’s claim [in *AH* 1.11.1]. Irenaeus’s conception of the varieties of religious thought which were known to Valentinus was limited by the evidence at his disposal, and by his polemically motivated goals of showing the inferiority of ‘Gnosis’ to the Church. Even more important, guided more by his concern to overthrow the Valentinians of his own day, Irenaeus may have misrepresented the historical position of the founder in order better to sharpen his argument against the source and root of the school.”

Nevertheless, McGuire still wanted to derive “at least partial truth in Irenaeus’s claim. Clearly,” she wrote, “there were varieties of Gnosticism that developed and flourished before Valentinus, and Valentinus and members of his school may well have been familiar with, or even indebted to, some of those varieties.”

McGuire’s latter point is sensible (if one accepts “Gnosticism” as a big-tent term), but it deflects from the key issue. The question is: did a specific group (or the person responsible for *AH* 1.29) influence Valentinus? There were indeed many varieties of Christianity that could be classed under the modern category of “Gnosis/Gnosticism.” Some of these varieties did predate Valentinus (e.g., Simonians, Basilideans, and Saturninians). The problem is: none of these figures, as far as we know, claimed the name “Gnostics” as a proper name, and none of them presented an aeonology with paired aeons in the 8-10-12 pattern. Most importantly, the figures that did come before Valentinus (Basilides, Saturninus, and probably Carpocrates) were not part of “the crowd of gnostics” known from *AH* 1.29. The material in *AH* 1.29 probably did not exist between 120 and 160 CE – the time when Valentinus was alive. By about 160, Valentinus was probably dead. Justin Martyr, writing about that time, referred only to his disciples.

An improved reconstruction of the historical events can be advanced here. The *Gospel of Judas* became known in Rome between 155–165 CE. Building
on the “Barbeloite” aeonology of *Gos. Judas*, an unknown theologian began more thoroughly to Christianize its aeonology between 165–180 CE. He demoted Autogenes and replaced him with Christ. He introduced a concept of the Trinity, brought in named pairs of aeons, and identified Christ with the Only-begotten (Son). These Christianizing modifications were quite possibly in response to the Christian aeonologies put forward by the Ptolemeans after Valentinus’s death about 160 CE.

Then about 180 CE – but as late as 188 – Irenaeus obtained the treatise of the unnamed Christianizer, a treatise which Irenaeus summarized in *AH* 1.29. Irenaeus considered the author of this document to be part of his flexible conception of “the gnostic heresy” ultimately stemming from Simon. Perhaps he received the document via a Valentinian. At any rate, Irenaeus concluded that he now had the missing link proving that Valentinus and his students had borrowed from an unidentified “crowd of gnostics” to derive their own aeonologies. Irenaeus concluded that his Valentinian opponents – including Valentinus himself – had adapted the material represented in *AH* 1.29, stating (dogmatically) that Valentinianism was the *recapitulatio omnium haeresium*.127

But Irenaeus’s attempt to blacklist the Valentinians involved him in anachronism. What he concluded did not represent the actual course of intellectual history. Perhaps this is no surprise, since Irenaeus also claimed that the Valentinians adopted (*adsumentes*) the *fabulum* of Aristophanes, changing only the names (*solummodo demutantes eorum nomina*) of primeval entities like Chaos, Night, Silence, Love, and Light.128 Irenaeus’s ability to go from perceived conceptual similarities to genetic connections is well-known. We need not exclude that Valentinians were familiar with Aristophanes, of course. Still, most scholars would not accept Irenaeus’s argument that Valentinians genetically depended on Aristophanes to derive their aeonology. Irenaeus was pulling every punch, so to speak, and was not entirely precise or careful when he argued for genetic connections.

To sum up: one cannot posit, based on the data of Irenaeus, that Valentinus encountered the material in *AH* 1.29 prior to 160 CE (the approximate date of Valentinus’s death). The material in *AH* 1.29 was probably composed after Valentinus’s death, and may even have been influenced by later Valentinian (specifically, Ptolemean) speculation on the aeons. One can more plausibly posit some theory of mutual influence between Ptolemeans and “Barbeloites” in the 160s and 170s CE. Along with mutual influence, one can point to third

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127 Irenaeus, *AH* 4., pref. §2.
factors influencing both Ptolemeans and “Barbeloites,” such as Marcion’s negative demiurgy\textsuperscript{129} and Neopythagorean number speculation.\textsuperscript{130}

Whatever theory we construct, it must reflect the entangled nature of intellectual influence, be duly critical of heresiological claims, and be able to explain all known data. Second-century CE Christian theology was, in the end, more like a jungle than a laboratory, a metaphor which suggests controlled experiments.\textsuperscript{131} One can agree with Irenaeus that Christian ideas and ideologies sprung up quite uncontrolled like mushrooms. What scholars need is a new theory that rejects simplistic models of uni-directional influence and better represents the entangled interactions of second-century Christian theology.

\textsuperscript{129} Litwa, \textit{Evil Creator} 67–156.
