The Gnostic system of Monoimus the Arab, as preserved in Hippolytus (Refut. 8.12-15 and 10.17), is highly syncretistic, with apparent borrowings from the Naassenes, Peratics, Simonians, Basilides, and may be Ptolemy as well. However, at the closing of his—very fragmentary—account of the doctrine of Monoimus (8.15.1-2 and 10.17.5), Hippolytus verbatim quotes parts of a letter of Monoimus addressed to a Theophrastus. The text of the letter is both lacunose and corrupt, and scholars are puzzled by its content. The words of Werner Foerster may best illustrate this puzzlement: 1

Wenn ein Stück aus einem Brief des Monoimos zitiert wird, das dazu auffordert, in sich selbst hineinzuschauen, so scheint das auf eine mystische Frömmigkeit hinzudeuten; aber das Stück ist zu kurz, um feste Schlüsse daraus zu ziehen, zumal der Menschensohn "leidensfähig" sein soll; das lässt darauf schliessen, dass auch "Jesus" in diese Spekulationen einbezogen ist.

I shall try to heal the text of Hippolytus, and to offer an interpretation of Monoimus' letter within the frame of his teaching. But first let me describe briefly the main points of Monoimus’ system.

(1) One Principle of the All: Man and Son-of-Man. There is one single principle of the All (ἡ ἀρχή τῶν ὀλων), which may be thought of as twofold: Man and Son-of-Man. The only difference between them is that the former is unborn, while the latter is born. This reminds us at once of the Naassene primeval Archanthropos Adamas and his Son (Refut. 5.9.1). 2 But there are two differences of significance. First, in the Naassenerpredigt in Hippolytus, the stress is on the primordial Adamas: in Monoimus, however, the emphasis is on Son-of-Man. And second, Monoimus’ Son-of-Man is born independently of time, will or plan (8.12.3: ἀχρόνως γενόμενον, ἀμοιλήτως, ἀπροορίστως τοιαύτη γὰρ ἢστιν, ἡ δύναμις ἑκείνου τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου... γενέσθαι τὸν ὑδόν λογισμόν καὶ θεωρητέως τάχιον). This act of the primeval Man of Monoimus reminds us of a similar act of the primeval ‘‘non-existent’’ God of Basilides: ὁ οὐκ ὃν θεὸς... ἀνοήτως,
The existential relationship between Monoimus’ Man and Son-of-Man is best illustrated by the example of the simultaneity of fire and light. Like Man, fire “was,” and like Son-of-Man, light “came into being” (cf. Gen. 1:3, ηεβέλησε ποιήσα (Refut. 7.21.1).

The perfection of both Man and Son-of-Man is best illustrated, continued Monoimus, by the example of the letter Ιώτα, which he calls: τοῦ τελείου Ανθρώπου (8.12.6). For in Greek alphabet Iota (I) stands for Decad, which is the τελείος of Adamas (8.14.6) or the τελείος of Adamas (10.17.2) because it comprises every single number (8.13.1). Of course, the erudite Monoimus is well aware of the fact that the Decad is called the perfect number thanks to the Pythagorean holy Tetractys or Tetrad (since 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10). Because at 8.14.6 he mentions: ἡ γὰρ μονάς ἔως τῆς τετράδος ... ἐστὶ, φησί, τὸ τετράδον ... τοῦ τελείου ἀριθμοῦ· τὸ τε γὰρ ἔν, δύο, τρία, τέσσαρα γίνεται δέκα...

3 It is by no means certain that Monoimus had in mind Gen. 1:3. In Basilides, however, Gen. 1:3 is used as a proof of the “non-existent” God and “non-existent” seed of the world (7.22.3): Καὶ τοῦτο ἐστιν ... τὸ λεγέν δὸ τὸν Μωσέα: “Γεννηθήτω φῶς. Καὶ γενέτο φῶς.” Πόθεν, φησι, γέγονε τὸ φῶς: Ἐξ οὐδενὸς. Οὐ γὰρ γέγραπται, φησι, πῶς, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ μόνον (τὸ γεγονόμενον) ἐκ τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ λέγοντος. Ὁ δὲ λέγων, φησιν, οὐκ ἦν, οὐδὲ τὸ γεγονόμενον ἦν.