THE TEMPTATION OF ALLOGENES
(CODEX TCHACOS, TRACTATE IV)

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In this study in honour of our colleague and friend John D. Turner, we shall consider the fourth tractate from Codex Tchacos, Allogenes, and, to begin, we will give a preliminary overview of it. The ancient title of this tractate has not been preserved apart from two letters and its editors have entitled it Book of Allogenes after the name of its main character, Allogenes.1 First, we must note that this text is entirely independent of the tractate Allogenes found at Nag Hammadi (NHC XI,3),2 in which an initiate, who bears the name of Allogenes (the Stranger), receives revelations about the divine world. Speculation about the Gnostic pantheon was there given a philosophical structure with a Middle Platonic style (and sometimes a Neoplatonic one). This complex text that probably dates from the first half of the third century, was also influenced by themes common to Jewish mysticism.3 The matter is entirely different in the Allogenes from Codex Tchacos, a document whose style and contents are more easily understood and which was probably destined for a less knowledgeable public. Moreover, this takes on significant interest for the reception of Christian traditions in a Gnostic context.

1. A Character Dear to Gnosis

Allogenes T revolves around a symbolical figure dear to Gnosis: that of Allogenes, the Stranger. Let us briefly remind ourselves of the occurrences of this name in first and second-hand Gnostic literature. We have already mentioned the twenty-two-page tractate that is dedicated to him in Nag

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2 In this essay, we call the tractate of Codex Tchacos Allogenes T to distinguish it from the tractate Allogenes of Nag Hammadi Codex XI,3. For this document from Nag Hammadi, see Funk, Poirier, Scopello, and Turner 2004, with the French translation of the Coptic text by Scopello, pp. 189–239.
3 See Scopello 2007b; 2008. See also my introduction (2007a) in the same volume.
Hammadi Codex XI,3: Allogenes is presented as a half-human, half-divine being who receives a privileged knowledge during a celestial journey he takes during his life. This Gnosis is passed on to his spiritual son and disciple, Messos, and is destined for all those who will be worthy of it. These celestial revelations are explained in turn by angels, mainly by a female angel, Youel; they are recorded on a book written by Allogenes himself, a book that is kept under secure guard at the top of a mountain.

If we take a look at indirect sources, we will find that Epiphanius of Salamis mentions the Allogeneis, books that Sethians and Archontics are supposed to have forged and says that Archontics claim that some of these books were given to them by Seth himself.

Speculations on the Stranger-Allogenes—whose being “other” symbolizes his affiliation to a celestial dimension—grew around Seth who was born, according to Genesis 4:25, from “another seed” (σπέρμα ἕτερον). They have left a deep mark on some Nag Hammadi texts issued from Sethian tradition, where the name “Allogenes” is applied not only to Seth and his sons but also to the transcendent divinity, the Great Invisible Spirit.

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4 Allogenes, the hero of NHC XI,3, has a non-standard longevity: he meditates on the contents of the first part of the angel’s revelations for one hundred years: NHC XI, 3 56.21–22; 57.27–31.
5 NHC XI,3 68.16–69.16.
6 Youel recalls Yahoel, the angel bearing the Tetragrammaton according to mystical Jewish lore (cf., for example, the Apocalypse of Abraham). See Scopello 1981, published in an extensive version in Scopello 2005, 49–78.
7 NHC XI,3 68.20–23.
8 See Epiphanius of Salamis, Pan. 39,5,1: “They (the Sethians) compose certain books in the name of great men, and say that there are seven books in Seth’s name, and give the name ‘Strangers’ to other, different books.” Pan. 40,2,1–2: “These people (the Archontics) too have forged some apocrypha of their own … They heap up certain other books, moreover, (and add these) to any they may light on, to give the appearance of confirming their own error through many sources. And by now they also have the ones called the ‘Strangers’—there are books with this title.” (Trans. Williams 2009, 279 and 284.)
9 Pan. 40,7,4–5: “(And so) they (the Archontics) have also composed certain books in the name of Seth himself, saying that they were given by him, and others in the name of him and his seven sons. For they say he sired seven (sons) called ‘Strangers’ as I have said in other Sects, I mean The Gnostics and The Sethians.” (Trans. Williams 2009, 289–290.)
10 Gen 4:25: “Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, ‘God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.’” (NIV).
11 On the Sethian movements, see many important studies of John D. Turner. Here we cite four of them: Turner 1986; 1995; 2004; 2007a.
12 See the impressive hymn to Autogenes, in Steles Seth NHC VII,5 120.1–15, built on the theme of “another race.”
13 Holy Book NHC IV,2 50.18–20: “He who begets himself, and he who comes forth from