Adam or Adams?

*Genesis and the Mythical Anthropology in the Writing without Title on the Origin of the World from Nag Hammadi (NHC II,5)*

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Introduction

The creation of man represents one of the central narratives in those ancient mythological texts that are labelled as Gnostic. The primary sources delineate several accounts, which are divided into two main types in the current literature. According to the researchers’ opinion, the common and principal sources of both types are the biblical accounts from Genesis (Gen 1:26f.; 2:7 and 3:21) and Pauline theology (1 Corinthians 15).

The question of the sources inevitably raises the ongoing issues of the origin of this ancient religious and philosophical phenomenon. The question of sources and of points of origin is related to the question of the use of Scripture in Gnostic texts. In addition to these debated issues, one should raise questions concerning the methodology of the authors. These questions might be dealt with in a more specific and more satisfactory way than previously.

This paper examines only the second group of questions, modeling a possible answer by the close examination of the primary source. The basis for this inquiry is a tractate from the Nag Hammadi Library (NHC II,5) and the much debated anthropological system presented by the text.

In this paper, I shall not attempt to present an elaborated and detailed examination of the whole development of anthropology. As a consequence, first I will sum up, as concisely as possible, the events of Adam’s mythological creation and restrict myself to seeking the reconstruction of the process. This part will take into close consideration not only the use of Scripture, but the analysis is intended to underline the author’s own way of reading of Scripture. Secondly, based on the results of the reconstruction, I shall demonstrate

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2 See e.g., Schenke 1962, Jervell 1960.
the manner in which the author constitutes the coherent and thoroughly considered theological system of the tractate. This part will illuminate the second aspect in question, and it will allow us to illustrate why and how the author used, revaluated, and interpreted the biblical passages and their terminology in order to create his own “Gnostic” narrative. From this point we shall turn to the question whether one could speak of a rewritten Bible or not in the case of the tractate.

The Tractate

The Coptic tractate Writing without Title on the Origin of the World (OrigWorld) is one of the most disputed texts among the tractates from Nag Hammadi. The dating of the original Greek is debated; most commentators accept that it was composed between the second and fourth centuries. The dating of its Coptic translation is also equivocal. The codex and the texts found in Nag Hammadi were probably composed at the end of the third or at the beginning of the fourth century.

The tractate has been much disputed in modern literature. The tractate’s mythological narrative has a lot in common with other contemporary narratives, which can be explained either by the heterogeneous traditions of religious and philosophical schools or by a common and inherited Gnostic source material found in a variety of primary Gnostic texts (the main parallels are in ApJohn, ApAdam, SJC, HypArch), or by other Gnostic materials (known from Church Fathers, e.g., Ophite, Sethian, Valentinian, and probably Manichean), or by other, non-Gnostic (Jewish, Christian, Greek, and Egyptian) sources. The author accommodated these heterogeneous materials to express his theology.

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7 As to my knowledge Pearson used this category for the first time concerning the tractate (Pearson 1988), and later this was followed by other scholars, e.g., Painchaud 1996.
8 Later I quote the Coptic text and Bethge’s English translation (occasionally with modifications) from Layton 1989a.
9 The tractate was well known. It has a fragmentary version from the XII Codex and an other, Subachmimic version from the British Library. For this, see e.g. Layton 1989a, 18.
10 See e.g. Bethge 1989, 12 and Perkins 1980, 37.