1 Introduction

Among the more abstruse of the ancient Gnostic texts is the Untitled work that is preserved in the Bruce Codex, one of the few Coptic Gnostic manuscripts known to scholarship prior to the Nag Hammadi discovery. Untitled relates a theogony and cosmogony, before the narrative is cut short by the loss of the rest of the manuscript following its account of the creation of the material world. Its lengthy descriptions of a densely-populated celestial realm cascading from the transcendent, divine abyss, eventually producing earth and human beings, appear to draw upon and synthesize a variety of ancient intellectual traditions, such as Numenian Platonism and Valentinian Gnosticism. Perhaps most
well-known, however, is a scene immediately preceding the abrupt end of the manuscript, which describes the creation of an “aerial earth” (ⲕⲡⲣ ⲛⲡⲣⲓ) and aeons called the “Sojourn” (ⲧⲣⲟⲓⲥⲓⲥ), “Repentance” (ⲉⲡⲧⲓⲧⲟⲇ), and the “Self-Begotten Copies” (ⲟⲧⲓⲧⲟⲅⲟⲩⲧⲓⲥ), occupied by celestial baptizers. The third-century Platonist philosopher Plotinus was familiar with these terms, excoriating them in his polemic against his Christian Gnostic “friends” (ⲡⲁⲣⲟⲓⲥⲓⲥ 2.9 [33], titled by Porphyry Against the Gnostics) as useless intermediaries introduced to the noetic world, having something to do with reincarnation. The Gnostics simply are, in his eyes, plagiarizing Plato, “inventing a new jargon to recommend their own school” even though “the judgments too, and the rivers in Hades, and the reincarnations come from Plato.”

Meanwhile, among the Coptic Gnostic works unearthed in 1945 nearby Nag Hammadi is Zostrianos (NHC VIII.1), a lengthy ascent apocalypse describing the heavenly journey of the eponymous seer, where he receives baptisms, recites doxologies alongside angels, and is party to lengthy discourses on Neoplatonic metaphysics. Porphyry wrote in his Vita Plotini that one of the apocalypses introduced by the Christian Gnostics to Plotinus’ seminar was titled Zostrianos, and it is safe to say that some version of the Greek Vorlage of the Divine,” 321–323; on the likely Valentinian background of the language of “right” and “left” used to distinguish between the two earth and two groups of humanity, see D. Brakke, “The Body as/at the Boundary of Gnosis,” JECS 17 (2009): 195–214 at 198 and 209–212. It is worth mentioning that the text preceding Untitled in the Bruce Codex, usually called the Books of Jeu, also shares material with the Pistis Sophia of the Askew Codex; see S. Johnston, “Proximité littéraire entre les Codices Askew et Bruce,” Journal of Coptic Studies 17 (2015): 85–107.

4 Untitled 61, 263.16–264.6.
