Many and varied are the ways in which the gnostics expressed their disaffection with the world in which they lived. One particularly striking way is their use of the motif of kinglessness. In order to see their use of this motif in its proper context, we shall first consider the relatively rare occurrences of the term in classical and Greco-Roman literature and then turn to the gnostic appropriation of the term 1).

HELIENIC AND GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

Xenophon is the first classical author to use the term "kingless" ἄβαστλευτος. In his Hellenica 5.2.11 ff Xenophon presents the meeting of the ambassadors of Acanthus and Apollonia with Lacedae-mon and its allies on the occasion of the threat of the Olynthians 2). In this context (5.2.17) the Olynthians are said to have as their neighbors the Thracians, who are "not ruled by a king" or who are "kingless" (ἄβαστλευτοι). The Macedonians, however, do have a king, Amyntas (5.2.12). On the other hand, the Olynthians, as Hellenes, are under the laws of their fathers and citizens of their own city (5.2.14). The term "kingless," then, is used in a political sense in a context in which the Hellenes are governed by a constitution and in which the non-Hellenes may or may not be ruled by a king.

Thucydides also uses the term in a political sense. In his History of the Peloponnesian War 2.80.5-7, Thucydides lists the forces fighting with Athens 3). First, he lists the troops of the Hellenes and then the troops of the barbarians. Among the barbarians are

1) For their helpful comments on this paper, I express my thanks to Dr. Harold ATTRIDGE and Prof. George MACRAE.
the Chaonians, who have no king (άβασιλεύτωι), and also some Thesprotians, who likewise have no king (άβασιλεύτωι). In addition from the barbarians there was a force from the Paraveans, whose king was Oroedus. In an earlier passage Thucydides had already discussed the usual sequence of rule, which had occurred in the Hellenic cities; the transition was from hereditary kingships to tyrants to a constitution 4). Thus the contrast here, just as in Xenophon, is between the Hellenes with their constitution and the barbarians who have no constitution but may or may not have a king.

In the later, Greco-Roman period the term is still used in a political sense but now in association with religious themes in two authors. Plutarch, first of all, at the beginning of the second century C.E. uses the term in his reply to Colotes, the Epicurean. According to Plutarch Colotes had praised the men who established the government of cities by kings and magistrates and laws. But, in the opinion of Colotes, if these were taken away, there would be chaos since men would follow their brutal instincts and devour one another. As a consequence of this desire to avoid contact with these brutal instincts and to maintain an untroubled spirit, Colotes then is said to exhort his followers not to become involved in public life. Plutarch states the matter as follows:

“But who are the men that nullify these things, overthrowing the state and utterly abolishing the laws? Is it not those who say that the crown of an untroubled spirit is a prize beyond all comparison with success in some great command? Is it not those who say that to be a king is a fault and a mistake? Who write in these words: ‘We must proceed to tell how a person will best uphold the purpose of his nature and how of his own free will he is not to present himself for public office at all’?” 5).

In response, Plutarch too praises the men who have established kings, magistrates, and laws, but he vigorously denies that the absence of these will lead to chaos in these words:

“For if someone takes away the laws but leaves us with the teachings of Parmenides, Socrates, Heracleitus, and Plato, we shall be very far from devouring one another and living the life of wild beasts; for we shall fear all that is shameful and shall honour justice for its intrinsic worth, holding that in the gods we have good governors (θεοις ἐγχοντας ἄγαθοις) and in the demons protectors of our lives (καὶ δαιμονας ἔχειν τοῦ βίου φύλακας)