THE ROLE OF CALENDARICAL DATA IN Gnostic LITERATURE*

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A significant number of passages not only in the gnostic literature itself but also in the writings of early Christian heresiologists refer to calendrical data in conjunction with gnostic cosmological systems. Since calendrical issues had the potential for being contentious – the Dead Sea Scrolls and pseudepigraphical writings such as Jubilees and 1 Enoch, for example, display strong calendrical polemics – it appears appropriate to raise the question of the overall role of calendrical matters in gnostic thought. Specifically, it is the purpose of this article to collect and analyse the primary calendrical passages found in gnostic literature and to draw attention to possible implications of calendrical matters for gnostic teaching in general.

Three distinct calendrical systems are reflected in the extant gnostic literature. Two of these systems have a 365-day year. A difference exists, however, in the subdivision of the year, that is, in the one system the total of 365 days is broken down into 360 ordinary and 5 epagomenal days while in the other system the 365 days are seen as a single unit. The third system has a year of 360 days.

The clearest reference to a 365-day year with a major subdivision of 360 and 5 days is found in the Pistis Sophia. That references to the number 365 indeed have calendrical implications is obvious from Pistis Sophia 99.1 Here Jesus is depicted as telling Mary that one day in the realm of light is a 1000 years in the world (kosmos) so that 365,000 years in the world are a single year in the realm of light. Consequently, according to the Pistis Sophia a year consists of 365 days.2 That this year is seen as consisting of 360 plus 5 days is evident from chapters 1363 and 1394. In both of these passages it is stated that 5 great archons are in charge of

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360 archons. This gives a total of 365. A further division of the year into 12 months is also evident in the *Pistis Sophia*. It is stated in chapter 15 that the Heimarmene exerts its influence to the right and left for six months respectively and the number 12 plays an important role in depicting various structures in the heavenly world.

It appears that the calendar outlined in the *Pistis Sophia* is of Egyptian provenance. There is wide scholarly agreement that prior to 239 B.C. the Egyptians used a civil calendar of 365 days. This year was divided into 12 months of 30 days and the remaining 5 epagomenal days at the end of the year were handed over to the priests for various rites and festivals.

It has been argued that in 239 B.C. a calendar of 365-1/4 days was introduced. While there undoubtedly is evidence that such a decree was passed, A. E. Samuel has argued convincingly that this decree had little actual effect on the Egyptian calendar. It should also be noted that since the intention of the decree was to add a 6th epagomenal day every fourth year, the structure of 360 plus 5 would still have held for 3 out of 4 years. Consequently, this structure would have continued to characterize the Egyptian calendar for the purposes of the Gnostics.

The Egyptian provenance of the calendar in the *Pistis Sophia* is not only evident from its general structure but also from specific calendrical references. It is stated that the ascension of Jesus took place on the 15th of Tybi, one of the months of the Egyptian calendar.

Let us now consider another type of 365-day year, that is, one in which the 365 days are not subdivided into blocks of 360 and 5 days but are seen as a complete unit. The clearest evidence for such a calendar is found in the version of *The Apocryphon of John* contained in Codex II of Nag Hammadi. In two different passages, i.e. 11,25 and 19,3, a total of 365 angels are mentioned.

Giversen states in his commentary that it is obvious that the number 365 refers to the sum of the days of the year. While it is true that this number is not explicitly given calendrical significance, there are no internal indications in this writing which prohibit such an identification. Indeed, it is clear that the author/redactor of *The Apocryphon of John* is conscious of calendrical considerations for 11,33-35 contains the following explanation, "the seventh is Sabbede, he has a shining fire-face. This is the sevenness of the week." It should be noted that this passage is found in the immediate context of 11,25 where the number 365 occurs.

Let us now turn our attention to the derivation of the number 365 in *The Apocryphon of John* Codex II. In 19,3 only the total occurs. In