

# Stalking Those Elusive Ophites: The Ophite Diagrams Reconsidered

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Frederik Wisse's seminal article "Stalking those Elusive Sethians" (1981) provided a much-needed corrective for a growing tendency among scholars of Gnosticism to see Sethianism not only as a descriptor covering a set of documents with shared characteristics, but much more as a coherent school that, presumably, we could locate in a particular place and time.<sup>1</sup> Famously, Wisse likened the search for the Sethians to the historical quest for the mythical unicorn, that hybrid beast visible only from textual, mythological traditions but otherwise unsubstantiated through material and zoological record.<sup>2</sup> The Sethians, he suggested, were in danger of being hypostasized, conjured into existence from a limited set of heresiological fictions.

Following Wisse's lead, in this essay I will investigate two related documents that scholars have too quickly classified. The documents—actually two descriptions of diagrams—were long ago attributed to a group known as the Ophians or Ophites, since they revered the snake (*ophis*) of Genesis 3. My suspicion is that the Ophites have similarly been "conjured" out of heresiological fictions.

My aim in this paper is to re-place the "Ophite" diagrams into different contexts, intellectual, historical, and ritual. The diagrams share their imagery, language, and function with a variety of other source documents from the second century, many of them classified by modern scholars—problematically, I would say—as "Sethian." But neither label—"Sethian" or "Ophite"—helps us to unlock the mystery of these documents. More broadly, the diagrams have often been heralded as syncretistic exercises in Christian magic or "mystery religions," with Orphic, Mithraic, and Egyptian elements. I argue here, by contrast, that the diagrams reveal a system of cosmic salvation at once coherent and consistent, with its roots in distinctive ways of interpreting Jewish ascent traditions. Nevertheless, this cultural "borrowing" of Jewish elements is superficial rather than profound, operating subversively to create a *bricolage* of prior traditions, drawn out of context to yield an entirely new product.

## The “Ophite” Diagrams

The great father of the Church, Origen, composed in the 240s his *Contra Celsum*, an elaborate and extensive refutation of a lengthy diatribe written some sixty years earlier by the Platonic philosopher Celsus.<sup>3</sup> Celsus’s work, *The True Doctrine* (ΑΛΗΘΗΣ ΛΟΓΟΣ) (ca. 178 C.E.) has not survived, but Origen excerpts it extensively enough and apparently without too much distortion for us to have a fairly clear sense of what it contained.<sup>4</sup> In *The True Doctrine*, Celsus had denounced certain Christian presbyters in whose hands he had seen “books, containing barbarian names of daemons and magical formulae” (*Cels.* 6.40; Chadwick 355). He even describes one of these books that he had in front of him (6.25–40). Origen, too, procures one of these diagrams, then proceeds to refute it point by point (6.25–40).

The diagram or more properly, diagrams—for Celsus and Origen did not hold identical documents in their hands—attest to complex cosmological and soteriological systems in place within early Roman Christian communities. While Celsus assumes that his document represented Christian theology and cosmology as a whole, Origen claims that both diagrams derive from an obscure—and by his time, defunct—sectarian Christian group known as “Ophians”—literally, “snake people” (6.24).

The “Ophite diagrams” provide a tantalizing glimpse into second-century cosmology. Yet it is difficult to discern from *Contra Celsum* precisely how the “Ophians” had used them, or to extract from the diagrams any coherent theological system. Since their aim was not to describe them so that the diagrams might be reproduced, but rather to discredit them while still disclosing enough information to convey disdainful expertise, Celsus and Origen never fully describe the documents in their possession. Still, their partial disclosure has proved irresistible to modern scholars. Proponents of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, in particular, were fascinated by what they saw as a clear example of Christian syncretism.<sup>5</sup> The diagrams were important because they likely were Christian, yet they contained elements of Judaism and of Graeco-Roman magic; they thus captured an experimental moment in Christianity’s development. But no modern scholar has yet fully teased out the different strands in these documents, nor speculated much on their use.<sup>6</sup>

## Stalking those Elusive Ophites

Despite efforts of scholars to construct from various sources and texts some sort of community, we have no clear indication that the “Ophians” or “Ophites” ever existed as anything other than a heresiological construct.<sup>7</sup> The first to use the term “Ophite” was Pseudo-Tertullian (ca. 220 C.E.) (*Adversus omnes haereses* 2.1–4). He describes a system of cosmological speculation very similar to a description of an unnamed “Gnostic” group that Irenaeus discusses in *Adversus Haereses* 1.30. Irenaeus refers to the group only as “alii”; the cosmology is termed “Ophite” only in later manuscript editions of *Adversus Haereses*.<sup>8</sup> Irenaeus and Pseudo-Tertullian likely drew upon the same source.<sup>9</sup> There are also affinities between the cosmology of our diagrams and the cosmology of this same unnamed group in *Haer.* 1.30, affinities shared with other so-called Sethian texts, particularly the *Apocryphon of John*.<sup>10</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus (*Haereticarum fabularum compendium* 1.14) identifies Irenaeus’s anonymous Gnostics of *Haer.* 1.30 as οἱ δὲ Σεθιανοὶ οὓς Ὀφίανους Ὀφίτας τινες ὀνομάζουσιν “Sethians whom some call Ophians or Ophites.” The resulting term “Sethian-Ophite” subsequently appears in some studies of Gnosticism.<sup>11</sup> “Ophitism,” in turn, became a sort of blanket term in early studies for the earliest forms of Gnosticism grounded in Jewish speculative philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

Origen’s identification of his diagram as “Ophite” does not appear to be entirely off base, inasmuch as the diagrams have affinities with a system that came to be, in the third century, retroactively labelled “Ophite.” But here, “Ophite” does not mean a group of “snake worshippers”; it means a particular soteriological system evinced in a series of sources all dating from the second and third centuries. In fact, Origen says of the Ophians and Epiphanius of the Sethians that these groups no longer existed.<sup>13</sup> We might be inclined to disbelieve them, but it makes more sense to note that at the time when Origen and later, Epiphanius, composed their works, their only true knowledge of “Sethian-Ophitism” was drawn from other heresiologists, specifically Irenaeus and Hippolytus. Points of contact between Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.30 and the “Ophite” diagrams include: 1) references to an original pentad of beings—although the characters that comprise this pentad appear to be different (*Haer.* 1.30.3; *Cels.*

6:31, in the speech to Sabaoth); 2) the names and order of the seven archons, also called the higher septet or “holy hebdomad” (*Cels.* 6.31; *Haer.* 1.30.5); and 3) the names and order of the seven ruling or mundane demons or the lower septet or hebdomad (*Cels.* 6.30; *Haer.* 1.30.8); 4) In *Haer.* 1.30.8, Ialdabaoth casts the snake of Genesis 3 into the lower cosmos, which may correspond to the Leviathan marked on Origen’s diagram’s innermost circle (*Cels.* 6.25); 5) Prounikos appears as a character in *Haer.* and in at least Origen’s copy of the document, although nothing appears to be said in the diagram or its accompanying text of her role (*Cels.* 6.34; *Haer.* 1.30.3, 7, 9, 11, 12).

Far less attention has been paid to the differences than to the similarities between *Haer.* 1.30 and our diagrams. These differences—too extensive to be elaborated here—include the lack of correspondence between the principal beings in the primary documents. *Haer.* 1.30.1 features Bythus, the First Man, the Third Male, the Holy Spirit, and Christ, all apparently absent from the diagrams. Even given that Irenaeus reproduces a protological, soteriological myth and not a conceptual “map” of the world, this myth gives only the barest outlines of the structure and geography of the cosmos. It focuses primarily on the role of the celestial Aeons to the process of salvation and on the hidden significance of stories from the Old Testament, particularly Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood. Its abundant references to a Church, Jesus, Christ and his disciples, Elizabeth and the Virgin Mary, and finally the crucifixion and resurrection appearances (*Haer.* 1.30.13), makes it evident that Irenaeus held a Christian document in his hands. By contrast, there seem to have been fewer indications that the “Ophite” diagrams were unequivocally Christian. Or could Celsus or Origen have overlooked or repressed the Christian details of either diagram? At any rate, would the Ophite diagrams have mapped out, visually, the central salvation myth of Irenaeus’s document, without including its central actors? The answer to both these questions, I think, is “no, not likely.” If the diagrams corresponded to—or illustrated—the soteriological myth of *Haer.* 1.30, the points of contact would surely have been more profound than two sets of shared names for celestial archons and the presence of a serpent in the lower cosmos. It is also far from clear why the myth of *Haer.* 1.30 would have warranted a cosmological map in the first place, since salvation seems here connected to the proper, esoteric interpretation of the stories of Genesis rather than to any sort

of cosmic ascent through the heavenly spheres. The diagrams, then, do not match the theology of the “others” of *Haer.* 1.30, either in detail or in their general picture of salvation.

The evidence for a direct relationship between Irenaeus’s unnamed Gnostics and the “Ophians” ostensibly behind our diagrams, it would seem, is not especially impressive. In any case, even “points of contact” between a treatise in Irenaeus’s possession and a diagram in Celsus’s possession—even if they are roughly contemporaneous—do not a community make. We must not forget that Irenaeus is not, in *Haer.* 1.30, describing a community; he is summarizing the contents of a particular book, the title of which he either does not know or refuses to divulge.<sup>14</sup> It is only possible to state securely that *general* elements in the cosmology of the diagrams appear in a *number* of second-century sources, including *Haer.* 1.30, and from the Nag Hammadi library, the *Apocryphon of John*, *On the Origin of the World*, and *Hypostasis of the Archons*. Furthermore, all these sources have been considered “Sethian,” not because Seth appears in them, nor because they belie any particular community, but because their cosmologies are relatively consistent with one another.<sup>15</sup> The consistencies and commonalities between them are general enough—the evidence of the seven archons’ names and their order is a fine example of this—to prevent us from deducing them to be characteristic of one sect alone.

A second area of scholarly investigation has been the search for the origins of Ophite theology or cosmology. An earlier generation of scholars addressed the question of whether or not Ophitism was Christian or “pre-Christian”—that is to say, Jewish. The ostensibly Jewish elements of Sethianism have been well investigated, but John Turner’s recent extensive investigations have emphasized later Sethianism’s clear affinities with Platonism, moving us away from the idea that these texts represent any thoroughgoing Jewish worldview.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, it is difficult to sustain the argument that Ophitism predates Christianity as a form of Jewish sectarianism. The argument probably derived, in part, from the lack of explicitly Christian elements in many “Ophite” texts (including our diagrams), particularly the absence of Jesus Christ as a Redeemer or Saviour figure. The eponymous redeemer of Sethianism is of course Seth, who happens to be absent from both Celsus’s and Origen’s descriptions of the diagram.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Seth’s intervention was assumed; but then, one could as easily argue on those grounds that perhaps Christ was assumed.<sup>18</sup> What is clear is

that no redeemer figure is present in our documents, nor was one apparently needed in the soteriological system they accompany.<sup>19</sup> The absence of a redeemer led modern scholars to surmise that whoever employed the diagram, then, would become his own Saviour; this interpretation effectively shifted the diagrams from the category of “pre-Christian Jewish” to “magico-Gnostic.”<sup>20</sup>

The attribution of the diagrams to Sethianism or even Ophitism does not get us very far, except to help us to acknowledge that there are correspondences between our diagrams and other roughly contemporaneous documents. Here, Wisse’s caveat is well taken: in “Stalking those Elusive Sethians” he argues that recurrent themes which Hans-Martin Schenke identified as “Sethian” were not “part of a particular Gnostic system but ‘free-floating’ theologoumena and mythologoumena which one could use as one saw fit.”<sup>21</sup> Rather than positing the existence of any continuing, established Jewish or Christian heresy we might term “Ophite”—including Sethianism—I suggest that we follow Wisse’s lead. We would be better off seeing our diagrams as drawing upon certain “free-floating” sources and traditions common to second-century religious movements that, in turn, contributed to the cosmology of later Christian groups. We would also be on the wrong track were we to understand these diagrams as “pre-Christian,” or magical, or Jewish, although whoever drew up the diagrams culled elements of all these traditions to appeal to their particular target audience. In fact, the two diagrams drew on these traditions to different degrees; whoever authored the diagram in Celsus’s possession sometime before 178 C.E. drew more on esoteric, sectarian Jewish traditions than did the author of the diagram in Origen’s possession, which was later and drew more explicitly on language from the Graeco-Roman mysteries and magic.

### Modern Reconstructions of the “Ophite” Diagram

An open question has been the degree to which Origen gives us sufficient information to reconstruct either diagram. The great scholar of early Christianity, Günther Bornkamm, was pessimistic in his entry on the Ophites for Pauly-Wissowa;<sup>22</sup> others have tried with varied success. To date, three modern scholars have published reconstructions of the Ophite “diagram”—each working under the assumption that Origen’s and Celsus’s documents were virtually identical.<sup>23</sup> The

first attempt, produced by Theodore Hopfner in 1930, Henry Chadwick included with his English translation of *Contra Celsum* in 1950;<sup>24</sup> a second, produced by Hans Leisegang after his consultation of Hopfner's drawing, is reproduced in Kurt Rudolph's *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*.<sup>25</sup> Andrew Welburn published a third, brilliant attempt in 1981.<sup>26</sup> Each reconstructed diagram is very much a product of the intellectual environment of the scholar who produced it. Hopfner and Leisegang, two proponents of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, could not resist filling out the opacities of Origen's and Celsus's descriptions by adding details drawn from other, similar sources. Hopfner adds details taken from Justin's *Book of Baruch* (Hippolytus *Haer.* 5.21), while Leisegang includes the zodiacal sphere in his diagram—nowhere mentioned in the text. Leisegang also adds a particular presupposition concerning cosmic architecture to which I will return presently; for now, it is enough to note that culling the details from both Origen's and Celsus's descriptions to produce a single reconstructed diagram is misleading and inaccurate. Nor can we take the liberty of filling in the opacity of *Contra Celsum* as we have it today with other details from other, unrelated sources. In this respect, Welburn's reconstruction is likely the most true to the text, but it still reduces two different accounts into one diagram.

It is my conviction that the two diagrams differed at the very least in their accompanying text, instructions, and details. I stand, therefore, with scholars such as Robert Grant, Robert Haardt, and Werner Foerster, who all separated Celsus's description from Origen's.<sup>27</sup> I do not, however, necessarily agree with the manner in which modern scholars have parsed out descriptive elements from *The True Doctrine* and from Origen's description of his own document. In their attempt to separate the two accounts, Grant, Haardt, and Foerster all left out many of the details that Origen furnishes—perhaps because they were not clear to which diagram to assign them. Consequently, both diagrams appear from the modern textual versions to be simpler than they must have been. For instance, Grant omits the eight "soul speeches" apparently included with Origen's diagram (*Cels.* 6.31), along with any reference to circles other than those assigned to "Father" and "Son," perhaps because they were fragments of text rather than diagram *per se*.<sup>28</sup> Yet the relationship between that text and the diagrams themselves warrants some thought. Were the speeches written on the diagram, within the circles, or alongside them? Paul

Wendland was the first to conclude that Origen's reverse order of the speeches as recorded in *Cels.* 6.31 suggested that Origen was reading the speeches written on the diagram from the diagram's outer edges to its inner.<sup>29</sup> If Wendland was correct, then our reconstructions of Origen's diagram must include the speeches. Yet if one were to imagine such a document, it must have been very large indeed, since the speeches are not brief. It seems more likely that the speeches were written alongside the circles, perhaps in a tabular format, which Origen still might have read starting from the top rather than from the bottom. In this case, it is easier to imagine why Origen includes the speeches along with the archon names and why Celsus does not: they may well have been added at some point to a "base" diagram which Origen and Celsus both acquired. If the speeches were added later, it is worth considering, as I will do presently, whether the editor who added them or the community that used them included them for the same purpose as that for which the earlier diagram of circles had originally been intended.

My reading of the documents assumes an excursive stance; that is to say, I assume that the many details to which both authors allude are taken from the document in front of them. Grant, Haardt, and Foerster, by contrast, have tended to approach the descriptions discursively; that is, they assume that Origen and Celsus have augmented their descriptions with extraneous details from outside sources to demonstrate their general familiarity with the thought-worlds from which the diagrams derived. To give an example, when Celsus comments at *Cels.* 6.27 concerning the diagram that the ruler of those named "archontic angels" is "said to be an accursed God," modern readers have tended to see his use of the passive construction "is said to be" (λέγεσθαι) as Celsus's own generalization. But I see no reason not to assume that the diagram itself—or more precisely, the teachings that accompanied it—included the title or phrase "accursed God." Indeed, as I will demonstrate, the title fits well with other elements of the liturgical drama which the diagram details. Contra Grant, Haardt, and Foerster, then, I read many of Celsus's comments on the theology of the "Christians" as deriving from the diagram in front of him rather than from a different source altogether. Celsus's details—which are clearly repeated, then either refuted or augmented



by Origen—cannot be left unassigned to either diagram. It is crucial to decide to which document they belonged, and then to consider the diagrams that emerge after this assignation.

### 1. *Celsus's Diagram*

Celsus's document appears to have been more elaborate than Origen's, comprising a number of different illustrations and pages, perhaps like the elaborately illustrated *Books of Jeu*. The diagram showed ten circles, with smaller circles enclosed within a greater one labelled "Leviathan" (6.25). The entire diagram (not merely a portion of it, as in Hopfner's reconstruction) was bisected by a thick black line (6.25). I follow Welburn's suggestion that the label "Gehenna" did not designate the line itself, but the area to one side of the diagram, meant to correspond to the lower cosmos.<sup>30</sup> There was also a "rectangular figure" (τετράγωνος σχῆμα) (6.33), perhaps connected to the "Gates of Paradise" (τῶν τοῦ παραδείσου πυλῶν) (6.33). It is not clear whether the "flaming sword. . . guarding the trees of knowledge and of life" drawn as "the diameter of a circle of fire" (6.33) was in both diagrams, only on Celsus's, or only on Origen's. Above the central cluster of circles were additional "upper circles above the heavens" all labelled, perhaps accompanied by additional commentary or text. Two of these circles—a smaller and a larger—were understood to represent Son and Father (6.38).

Other elements clearly present in Celsus's document but absent from currently published excerpts or reconstructions include: 1) the names of the books of the Old Testament prophets written on the document, with, it seems, excerpts of prophetic writings (6.33; cf. *Haer.* 1.30.11); 2) additional "circles upon circles" (κύκλους ἐπὶ κύκλοις) (6.34) beyond the central figures described; 3) either teachings or passages on the Tree of Life including, perhaps, an image of the Tree of Life superimposed upon the entire diagram (6.34, 36); 4) multitudes of the dying appearing, it seems, in some cosmic region (6.34) along with additional "gates which open by themselves" (αὐτομάτως) (6.36).

On Celsus's diagram, remarkably, was also written a fragment of a liturgy (6.25) not present on Origen's document; I will return to this liturgy presently. There was accompanying this liturgy—perhaps as

part of it, or perhaps as part of teachings accompanying the diagram, the mention of an “accursed” (κατηραμένος) God (6.27, 28) who made a “mistake” (ἐσφάλη) (6.29). The diagram also lists seven archontic daemons and their animal forms, but possibly not their names, except for the name of the last, Thaphabaoth or Onoel (6.30). These animal forms appear to be connected to a doctrine of metempsychosis (6.33). The presence of the liturgy, as well as Celsus’s references to death (6.27, 34, 35, 36) and resurrection (6.34, 36) locates the ritual context for this diagram in a mortuary setting.

## 2. Origen’s Diagram

Origen’s diagram was indeed similar to Celsus’s, but differed in details and accompanying text. Like Celsus’s document, it also apparently depicted a number of small circles enclosed by a larger circle. Of the name “Leviathan” attested by Celsus’s document, Origen says that his diagram bore the name twice, once on the circumference of the outermost circle and once at its center. He notes also on his copy that the name “Behemoth” (Βεμίων) was fixed below the lowest circle (6.25). Origen notes a “rectangular shape” (6.33) which stood next to a “flaming sword,” the diameter of which was a circle of fire, and the larger and smaller circles of Father and Son. He indicates that his document was in colour, with circles of blue and yellow; he also comments on the presence of a “rhomboid figure” labelled “providence of *pronoia*,” other circles marked “Agape” and “Zoe,” and a figure like a “double axe.”<sup>31</sup> Origen’s document apparently provided additional material absent from Celsus’s copy, including the names of its seven theriomorphic archons (Celsus gives only their animal forms at 6.30) and the list of ascent formulae or speeches that the soul is to recite on its ascent (6.31). These speeches are used, Origen says, after passing through the “barrier of evil” (φραγμός κακίας) (6.31).

Although Origen claims that no one whom he had asked knew of anyone still using the diagrams (6.24), the diagrams themselves could not have been impossibly arcane. What remains remarkable—and mitigates against their obscurity—is that he was able to procure the same type of document as Celsus, a full sixty years later, in a different part of the Empire. But are they “Ophite,” as Origen claims? And what was their purpose?

## Rethinking Ophite Heavenly Ascent

Central to the contemporary interpretation of *Contra Celsum* 6.24–38, from Bousset up until now, has been the idea that the documents in Celsus’s and Origen’s possession were celestial maps, diagramming the planetary spheres with their gatekeepers and the passwords needed to escape them.<sup>32</sup> Both Hopfner and Leisegang compress the two diagrams into one, thus “reproducing” a sole map that they then based conceptually on a Ptolemaic planetary system. Beyond the sublunary realm Hopfner and Leisegang thus place the seven planets confined to their spheres, progressing in a conventional planetary order, from the Moon to Saturn.<sup>33</sup> Following this order, the seven archons mentioned by name in the text at 6.31 (Horaeus, Aeloeus, Astaphaeus, Adonai, Sabaoth, Iao, and Ialdabaoth) represent the planets, beginning with Horaeus (Moon), and moving upward through the cosmos:<sup>34</sup>

↑	Ialdabaoth	Saturn
	Iao	Jupiter
	Sabaoth	Mars
	Adonai	Sun
	Astaphaeus	Venus
	Aeloeus	Mercury
	Horaeus	Moon

It seems to me, however, that this interpretation stands on shaky ground. There is nothing in either Celsus’s or Origen’s descriptions to suggest that their documents depicted a conventional planetary progression based on supposed relative distances of each planet from the earth, nor are there any grounds for reading the circles associated with the planets as concentric or geocentric.<sup>35</sup> Origen reports what he sees: smaller circles enclosed by a larger one (Ἐν ᾧ ἦν διαγραφὴ κύκλων, ἀπολελυμένων μὲν ἀπὸ ἀλλήλων δέκα) (6.25). The relationship between these circles is unclear; even if the circles were meant to represent the planets, we should not surmise that the planetary circles were concentric rather than in some other spatial relationship. We know only that they did not touch one another and that a larger circle contained them.

What if the circles were not meant to represent the planets? The only “planetary” association Origen explicitly links to the list of archon names is that of the first archon, Ialdabaoth the lion-faced, whom he reports is in “sympathy” with the star Phainon: *φασὶ δὲ τῷ λεοντοειδεῖ ἄρχοντι συμπαθεῖν ἄστρον τὸν Φαίνοντα* (6.31). Since Phainon and Saturn were sometimes equated, generations of scholars have concluded that since Ialdabaoth is addressed as “first and seventh” in the speeches, he must have corresponded to Saturn-Phainon, the seventh planet in the Ptolemaic order. It is far more likely, however, that Saturn and Ialdabaoth were linked because the planet was associated with the seventh day, Saturday. Irenaeus reports that the “Ophites” associated Ialdabaoth with the Jewish God, and thus with the Sabbath (*Haer.* 1.30.10). Tacitus, too, associated the God of Judaism with Saturn (*Hist.* 5.4). If Origen reports that Ialdabaoth represents Saturday, then Iao’s description in the formulae as “the second” would correspond to Sunday, the second day of the week, and to the Sun, not to Jupiter.<sup>36</sup> This new hebdomadic order would then be:

Horaeus	Venus	Friday
Aeloeus	Jupiter	Thursday
Astaphaeus	Mercury	Wednesday
Adonai	Mars	Tuesday
Sabaoth	Moon	Monday
Iao	Sun	Sunday
Ialdabaoth	Saturn	Saturday

Although the evidence for this reading appears at first farfetched, it is actually far better substantiated than the argument that the archons represent the seven planets of the Ptolemaic cosmos. Celsus himself, commenting on the diagram, observes that while those who use it claim that the God of the Jews “erred,” they nevertheless accepted Genesis’s cosmogony (6.29). More persuasive still is the association of the archons with the seven days of the week in other second-century Sethian texts. In *Haer.* 1.30.8–9, Ialdabaoth produces six offspring: Iao, Sabaoth, Adonaeus, Eloeus, Oreus, and Astaphaeus. Together these form the “holy hebdomad” (*sanctae hebdomadae*) or, in other words, the planetary week. In the cosmogony of the *Apocryphon of John*, Ialdabaoth creates seven archons to rule the

cosmos, giving each one its own firmament (*Ap. John* BG 41.16; II, 59.29; III, 17,22; NHC IV, 18,18).<sup>37</sup> The names of these rulers follow Origen's list, with some minor differences; the positions of Iao and Adonai (Sun and Jupiter) are switched, perhaps as a consequence of the custom of reading aloud "Adonai" in place of the ineffable name YHWH, of which Iao was a conventional Greek rendering. The *Ap. John* lists are even more clearly based on the sevenness of the week than is the Ophite archon list. The name of *Ap. John*'s first archon is not Ialdabaoth but Sabbataios/Sabbede, the name of which unmistakably refers to the Sabbath; the Hebrew name for Saturn is Shabbathai.<sup>38</sup> *Ap. John*'s list then concludes, "and these [seven] formed the Hebdomad of the Week" (*Ap. John* BG 41.16).<sup>39</sup> *On the Origin of the World* contains an almost identical archon list, which is also associated with the days of the week rather than the planets: Pronoia Sambathas, "which is the hebdomad [i.e. week]" replaces Ialdabaoth here as his "feminine name," followed by Iao, Sabaoth, Adonaios, Elaios, Oraios, and Astaphaios; these archons are "the seven powers of the seven heavens of chaos" (*Orig. World* 101.25–102.2). Among recent scholars, both Robert Grant and Simone Pétrement have noted the correspondence between the seven archons and the seven days of the week rather than the seven Ptolemaic planets.<sup>40</sup> Despite this wealth of evidence, however, the idea that the Ophite diagrams reflect a conventional planetary ascent through the Ptolemaic spheres remains a widely held assumption.

If the first set of archon names revealed by the diagrams directly correspond to the days of the week, what about the second set of names which Celsus provides, the so-called "seven theriomorphic angels" or "seven archontic demons": Michael, Suriel, Raphael, Gabriel, Thauthabaoth, Erathaoth and Onoel/Thartharaoth (6.30)? Modern commentators have naturally tended to equate these seven *daimones* with the seven "planetary" archons;<sup>41</sup> thus many scholars maintain that these beings (which Irenaeus in *Haer.* 1.30 calls the "lower hebdomad") are similarly meant to correspond to the planets, or perhaps even to the constellations of Roman antiquity. Michael in lion-form represents Leo, Suriel in bull-form, Taurus; Raphael in snake-form, Hydrus, Draco or Serpens; Gabriel in eagle-form represents Aquila; Thauthabaoth in bear-form corresponds to Ursa maior or Ursa minor; Erathaoth in dog-form represents Canus maior or Canicula. Only Onoel/Thartharaoth in ass-form is difficult to place.

A. J. Welburn makes the interesting suggestion that the first four of the seven ruling demons—albeit in slightly modified form—make up the “fixed cross” or the four fixed zodiacal signs:<sup>42</sup>

Lion (Leo)  
Michael

Bull (Taurus)  
Souriel

Eagle (Scorpio)  
Gabriel

Man (Aquarius)  
Raphael

It is difficult to say whether or not this correlation is significant for “unlocking” Celsus’s diagram. Perhaps the soul was thought to exit the cosmos through the “gate” formed by the four constellations. Mithraic teachings, for instance, preserved the idea that souls entered the lower cosmos to be incarnated into bodies through the Tropic of Cancer on the summer solstice and exited through the Tropic of Capricorn on the winter solstice (Porphyry, *Antr. nymph*, 24). This does not help us much with our diagrams, or with the theory that the first four “Ophite” demons were meant to represent the fixed quaternary. However, Roman astrology also taught of other astrological entry points for the soul. Varro tells us that the legendary Empedotimus of Syracuse had seen in a mystical vision “three gates and three routes, one in the sign of Scorpio, where Hercules is said to have passed to the gods, another at the boundary (*limitem*) between Leo and Cancer, and a third between Aquarius and Pisces.”<sup>43</sup> If those who created our diagrams knew of these cosmic “entry points,” there is the possibility that the four ruling archons attending the soul were intended to represent three of the four “gates” out of the cosmos. However, this seems manifestly unlikely.

The diagrams do, however, seem to attest to some sort of symbolic itinerary for the soul that involved its passing across a *phragmos kakias* that separated the lower world from the higher realm (6.31). If the diagrams’ list of archons point to the days of the week rather than to a planetary progression, then the documents may attest to a belief in a diachronic, rather than a spatial, movement of the soul after death. Similarly, rather than seeing the symbolism of the seven ruling

demons as astrological, that is to say, primarily connected to a cosmic journey through fixed space, we may see them as connected to fixed time, following the seven higher archons' representation of the planetary week. The significance of the Michael/Souriel/Gabriel/Raphael quaternary may have been simply that their corresponding constellations represent the four seasons—it is spring when the sun is in Taurus, summer when it is in Leo, fall when it is in Scorpio, and winter when it is in Aquarius. The archons of the “higher hebdomad,” then, would represent the week, while four of the lower hebdomad might stand for the seasons.

To return to the prevailing History of Religions theory that the “Ophite” diagrams were maps for celestial ascent, the evidence suggests that perhaps there was no “ascent of the soul” presupposed in the diagrams' *via salutis* at all. This rather radical reading is supported by Origen's description of the diagrams: he never notes that the circles are concentric, three-dimensional, planetary, or geocentric—a model only assumed by Leisegang in his reconstruction.<sup>44</sup> By throwing out the model of the soul's ascent through a Ptolemaic cosmos and positing in its place a notion of diachronic progression, we are led away from established modes of thinking about the ancient “soul-journey.” What may be being hinted at here was a soul-initiation, which might more plausibly be connected with a ritual cycle or ritual calendar than to a cosmic scheme. Perhaps the day of the week in which a death occurred might have been significant and commemorated accordingly by a community. Interestingly, Irenaeus notes that the “holy hebdomad” of his “Ophites” corresponds to the days and that among the Jews each person chose a “herald” from the seven days to be honoured as a god (*Haer.* 1.30.11).<sup>45</sup> This report may have been slander, or it might represent Irenaeus's misunderstanding of a particular initiatory process that linked individuals with specific planets or archons—a process reflected in Origen's diagram as well. Second, the point of the “Ophite” association between individuals, archons, the week, and even the seasons may have been to ritually reverse, and thus master, the tyranny of time.<sup>46</sup> Third, perhaps the point was rather that all of space and time was under archontic control, which the soul could be expected to transgress or abrogate after its dissolution from the body. However, there is no reason to consider the process as an “ascent” in a spatial or diexodic sense.

## Establishing a Ritual Context for the “Ophite” Diagrams

It remains for us to try to place each diagram in some sort of historical, social, or ritual context. It becomes clear, after we have considered the details of each separately, that these diagrams differed in their intended audience, in their intellectual milieu, and, I suspect, in their function.

### 1. *The ritual context of Celsus's diagram*

I have already noted that Celsus transcribed from his document what appears to be a fragment of a liturgy (6.27). The first part of the dialogue runs, “He who administers the seal (σφραγίς) is called Father (Πατήρ), and he who is sealed is called Youth (νέος) and Son (υἱός).” The one anointed then responds: “I have been anointed (κέχρισμαι) with white oil from the tree of life.”<sup>47</sup> Celsus immediately continues to say that seven angels—some of whom represent angels of light and some, “archontic angels”—stand on either side of the soul when the body is dying (ἐκατέρωθεν τῇ ψυχῇ τοῦ ἀπαλλαστομένου σώματος ἐφισταμένων), presumably to accompany the soul on its ascent (6.27; Bourret, 246). The text here is confusing, but the angels appear to have some sort of relationship to the act of sealing, although apparently not a direct one.<sup>48</sup> This “sealing” was an act of sacramental intervention in the form of ritual chrismation that transformed individuals into the spiritual sons of the Father.

Let us return to the seven angels involved in the rite of sealing. Celsus notes that all these angelic beings are theriomorphic; he lists their animal forms but not their names, which do not seem to have been included on his diagram (6.30). It is Origen who supplies their names: Michael the lion-formed, Suriel the bull-formed, Raphael the serpent-formed, Gabriel the eagle-formed, Thauthabaoth the bear-formed, Erathaoth the dog-formed, and Onoel or Thartharaoth the ass-formed (6.30).<sup>49</sup> We have already seen that they may correspond to constellations, or (in the case of the first four), to a fixed astrological quaternary known in antiquity. These seven angels stand on either side of the body; those to the left are malevolent, those on the right, benevolent (6.27). Of these seven, the first four, I suggest, were the benevolent “angels of light,” and the second three, “archontic” or “ruling” angels.<sup>50</sup> My clustering or grouping here is supported by their



names: the first four bear the theophoric suffix “-el,” the second three, the Hebrew feminine plural suffix “-oth.”

Andrew Welburn was the first to observe that these first four of the seven theriomorphic beings bear a striking similarity to the four living creatures or *hayyoth ha-kodesh* of Ezek 1:5–28 who accompany God’s throne-chariot.<sup>51</sup> These creatures of Ezekiel’s throne vision each have a human “likeness” (ὁμοίωμα) and three animal “faces” (πρόσωπα): an eagle-face, a lion-face, and a bull-face. These living, composite creatures, in Jewish apocalyptic and *merkabah* texts, become transformed over time into four creatures each bearing a single form; these are the four Angels of the Presence who surround God’s throne: Michael, Suriel, Raphael, and Gabriel.<sup>52</sup> In Jewish tradition as here, Michael the lion-faced is the angel who stands not to the right of the body of the dying, but to the right of the divine throne itself.<sup>53</sup>

The *locus classicus* of the four *hayyoth* in the New Testament is the Book of Revelation, where the living creatures that surround the throne each has its own form—the first like that of a lion, the second, an ox, the third, a human face, and the fourth, an eagle. It must be noted that there are some interesting points of contact between Celsus’s diagram and the Book of Revelation.<sup>54</sup> Just as I have argued here that the diagram’s seven ruling archons are not meant to correspond to the planets of the Ptolemaic cosmos, we find in John’s Apocalypse no ascent through the seven Ptolemaic heavens. But seven spirits do stand (apparently as a group) before God’s throne (Rev 1:4, 4:5; 8:2). Furthermore, the four throne creatures (Rev 4:7) appear in the same order as in the “Ophite” material, and also have some association with seals and sealing (see Rev 6:1–9). It is perhaps significant that the “Ophite” diagram includes in its lowest circle (likely representing the lower cosmos associated with the second set of archontic beings) the name Behemoth, which scholars tend to see paired with Leviathan also on the diagram because the two are associated in Job 40–41. However, *behemoth*, literally “animals,” may refer to the animal forms of the archontic beings, connecting them again with the throne animals or *hayyoth* of Ezekiel and Revelation.<sup>55</sup>

If the four archontic angels in the “Ophite” diagram represent chariot animals, whose chariot are they guarding? This, I believe, is the key to understanding the entire system represented here: Celsus notes that seven spirits surround the soul of the dying. Some of these spirits are angels of light who stand on the right; others are the

archontic angels who stand on the left. The imagery invoked is thus of the soul borne aloft on the throne-chariot. Perhaps there were intended to be here some resonances with Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which the soul of the philosopher is born aloft on a chariot pulled by two horses (*Phaedr.* 246–257). One horse is noble and disciplined, while the other is intractable and unruly. The soul, when perfected, travels aloft to govern the cosmos, managing the diametrical forces of the two horses. Similarly, the soul is borne aloft in Celsus's description of the "Ophite" liturgy by a balance of "bad" and "good" angels. But if Plato provided one source of imagery, a much more potent source must have been the Book of Ezekiel. If Celsus records this tradition correctly, the soul of the "Ophite" initiate was ritually sealed then symbolically enthroned, carried to the heavens in God's chariot. But does anything else in the diagram itself support this ritual context and imagery?

I have argued so far that the context for Celsus's diagram seems to be a rite in which a dying individual would be "sealed" through chrism before his or her soul made its return to the realm of the Father.<sup>56</sup> We can discern a few things about this rite. First, it was performed shortly before death; the one anointed participated in the dialogue, yet shortly afterward the seven ruling archons surround the soul as it ascends. Second, there was a specific ritual action—in this case, a sealing or anointing of the individual with "white chrism from the tree of life" (κέχρισμαι χρίσματι λευκῷ ἐκ ξύλου ζωῆς) (6.27).<sup>57</sup> Third, the enactors of the ritual held through the rite specific titles ("Father," "Youth," and "Son"). Fourth, certain words on the diagram functioned as performative utterances—a liturgical dialogue. Fifth, the ritual existed in fixed form, with basic, written guidelines for performance. Sixth, the rite was accompanied by a diagram, which did work as a sort of "map," but there is no textual support to imagine that this map followed the structure of a Ptolemaic cosmos; rather, it was specific to the cosmology of the group that used it, outlining the way back to their own source. Seventh, the source of this imagery comes not from Graeco-Roman ascent traditions or magic, but from Jewish mystical traditions regarding the apotheosis of a human seer. These traditions appear to have been known in some form by the individual or community that created Celsus's diagram.

Beyond the appearance of the Angels of the Presence surrounding the body of the dying, other elements of the "Ophite" ritual as Celsus records it bear significant connections to early Jewish *merkabah*

literature. The unusual epithet “Youth” given to the newly-anointed initiate, for instance, has explicit connections to Jewish ascent traditions. In the pseudepigraphon *3 Enoch*, the angel Metatron, the Prince of the Presence (and in this text associated with the heavenly seer Enoch) gives his name to Rabbi Ishmael: “I have Seventy Names, corresponding to the seventy tongues of the world, and all of them are based upon the Name of my King, the Holy One; but my King calls me “Youth” (*3 En.* 3:2).<sup>58</sup> When Rabbi Ishmael inquires further into the title, Enoch-Metatron replies,

“. . . the Holy One, blessed be He, replied ‘I have made and will sustain him; I will carry and deliver him.’ When they saw me they said before him, ‘Lord of the Universe, what right has this one to ascend to the heights of heights? Is he not descended from those who perished in the waters of the Flood? What right does he have to be in heaven?’ Again the Holy One, blessed be He, replied and said to them, ‘What right have you to interrupt me? I have chosen this one in preference to all of you, to be a prince and a ruler over you in the heavenly heights.’

“. . . Because I am young in their company and a mere youth among them in days and months and years—therefore they call me “Youth.” (*3 En.* 4:6–10; Alexander, 259).

*3 Enoch* is a late work, but appears to preserve earlier traditions concerning the ascent of a seer. We can note here that the title “Youth” is given by the Father to Metatron, the angel who accompanies the divine throne; noteworthy, too, is the connection between Metatron, a divine being, and Enoch, the human seer who becomes Metatron through his ascent and transformation. “Youth” was also a ritual epithet for other divine beings in sectarian Judaism. Gershom Scholem notes that the Hebrew word for “Youth” also means “servant,” and may have been a title of the archangel Michael, God’s principal angel.<sup>59</sup>

Remarkably, the title “Youth” enters into only a few other Christian sources, all of them Sethian. The Untitled Bruce tractate refers to an Overseer “who is called ‘Youth’ (ΠΑΛΟΥ)” (ch. 3); the *Three Steles of Seth* calls the androgynous aeon seated next to the Father “divine ΠΑΛΟΥ” (123.7). We find the term, finally, attributed to Ialdabaoth in *Orig. World*; the author explains the name Ialdabaoth as etymologically derived from Sophia’s words to her son, “Youth (*neaniskos*),

move over (*diaperan*) to this place” (*Orig. World* 100.13). All these sources, we note, share the use of the title Youth as a divine epithet for a being installed in the cosmos, often alongside the divine throne.

The second title bestowed on the initiate in the “Ophite” liturgical fragment is “Son.” Here, the epithet draws upon the sacramental dimensions of Ps 2:7, a royal psalm perhaps used in investiture ceremonies. God speaks from his heavenly throne to recognize and legitimate his anointed: “You are my son; today I have begotten you.” In the synoptic accounts of Jesus’s baptism, Jesus becomes the Son of the Father through the agency of the Holy Spirit at baptism (Luke 3:22; Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11). But in these New Testament passages, the ancient connection between investiture, anointment, adoption, and ascent are obscured. The connection returns, however, in a variety of second-century Christian sources, including the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Philip*. In the *Gospel of Thomas*, souls answer the question “who are you?” of their unnamed celestial interlocutors: “we are his sons (ΝΕΥΩΗΡΕ), and we are the chosen of the living father (ΠΕΙΩΤ ΕΤΟΝ2)” (*Gos. Thom.* 50). In the *Gos. Phil.*, to “become a son” at baptism is to “gain imperishability,” that is, to become impervious to hostile celestial powers (*Gos. Phil.* 61.31; cf. 52.5–15), and to be given all that the Father possesses (*Gos. Phil.* 60:1–6). A soul-speech attributed to the Valentinian Marcosians begins “I am a Son (υιός) from the Father—the pre-existing Father (Πατὴρ πρόντος) and a Son in him who is pre-existent” (*Haer.* 1.21.5) This same speech is repeated in Nag Hammadi’s *First Apocalypse of James*:

You are to say to him, “I am a Son (ΝΕΥΩΗΡΕ), and I am from the Father” (ΔΝΟΚ ΟΥΕΒΟΛ ΜΜΠΙΩΤ). He will say to you, “What sort of son are you, and to what father do you belong?” You are to say to him, “I am from the Pre-[existent] Father (ΠΙΩΤ ΕΤΩΟΡΗ) and a Son in the Pre-existent One”<sup>60</sup> (*I Apoc. Jas* 33.16–25; Schoedel, 246).

In summary, the ritual alluded to in Celsus’s diagram utilizes Jewish language of ascent and installation in the heavens. This is not to say that Celsus’s diagram derived from sectarian Judaism, but that its author located himself in one particular Christian trajectory from Judaism which still found the language and imagery of early *merkabah* and apocalyptic literature both accessible and compelling. At some point in the second century, this language from Jewish literary sources

was given ritual expression, although we cannot know where this ritual developed or how widespread such a ritualization of ascent language might have been in the second century. The diagram in Celsus's possession represents—and illustrates—an agglomeration of Jewish ascent traditions from, I suspect, literary sources (as opposed to, let us say, encounters with Jewish mystics) along with the new, ritual expression of those sources. Nevertheless, the diagram and its liturgy were not unique; they draw upon sacramental language and imagery present in other "Gnostic" sources of the second century and appear to share with these sources a similar myth of origins and path to salvation. More generally, there is nothing about Celsus's diagram that points to any "syncretism" of Christian and Graeco-Roman traditions or even Graeco-Roman cosmology, as has been widely assumed.

## *2. The ritual context of Origen's diagram*

Origen's copy of the diagram does not appear to have retained the same liturgical fragment as Celsus's copy; if it did, he fails to mention it. In its place, Origen transcribes seven speeches or passwords addressed to seven archons: Ialdabaoth, Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai, Astaphaeus, Ailoeus, and Horaeus. As he records them, these passwords do not properly correlate with the archon list; the first speech which precedes the address to the first archon, Ialdabaoth, is addressed to a "Solitary King." We do not know to whom the speech was originally addressed. The second address is then to Ialdabaoth, the "first and seventh," the third address to Iao, "second and first," and the fourth to Sabaoth (addressed as the "fifth" in order, since Origen is reading the passwords in reverse order). Origen then entirely omits the password for Adonai, perhaps confused because he read the list in reverse format, or perhaps because his eye missed something as it ranged from the diagram to the list or table of addresses that accompanied it as he copied. Chadwick's "corrected" order of speeches and archons, as it stands in his translation, passes over in silence the problem of eight speeches for seven named archons—a point which no contemporary scholar has so far noted. In fact, it is impossible to reconstruct the archontic order from the text as it now stands. But the order of the archons may not have been of utmost importance in the first place, given the relative fluidity in the names and orders of

parallel archon lists. More interesting is the presence of these speeches on Origen's diagram and the language upon which they draw to articulate a relationship to the sacred.

Each formula Origen records at 6.31 is several lines long and ends with a prayer, "May grace be with me, Father, let it be with me" (ἡ χάρις συνέστω μοι, πάτερ, συνέστω). But it is helpful to reproduce at least one of these speeches here in its entirety:

Βασιλέα μονότροπον, δεσμὸν ἀβλεψίας, λήθην ἀπερίσκεπτον ἀσπάζομαι,  
πρώτην δύναμιν, πνεύματι προνοίας καὶ σοφία τηρουμένην· ἔνθεν  
εἰλικρινῆς πέμπομαι, φωτὸς ἤδη μέρος υἱοῦ καὶ πατρός· ἡ χάρις  
συνέστω μοι, ναὶ πάτερ, συνέστω.

O one-formed King, bond of blindness, unconscious oblivion, I  
greet you, First Power, preserved by the spirit of *Pronoia* and *Sophia*;  
from thee I am sent in purity, being already a portion of the light  
of Son and Father. May grace be with me, Father, let it be with me.

If we read carefully, we note that this speech—the first in the series—hardly fits the conventionally and consistently applied label "magical password." Indeed, all the speeches differ substantially from the rhetoric and speech traditions of Graeco-Roman and Graeco-Egyptian magic. To begin with, they never seek to control, repel, replace, or usurp the celestial powers. The soul addresses each of the named archons with respect and in consistently positive terms—Ialdabaoth, for instance, is addressed as "the ruling logos of a pure mind" (ἄρχων λόγος ὑπάρχων νοὸς εἰλικρινοῦς) and a "perfect work of Son and Father" (ἔργον τέλειον υἱῷ καὶ πατρί). Most remarkably—and most at odds with formulae from magic—the point of each speech is to note to the archons how the ascending being has been ritually prepared to continue farther along its voyage.

Why do I say "ritually prepared" to continue? In place of more conventional magical ciphers or passwords, we find in the speeches sacramental language condensed into ritual imagery; thus the "symbols" presented to each archon are not actual ciphers or images, but abstract qualities with sacramental overtones. To pass Ialdabaoth, for instance, the initiate must present a "symbol" (σύμβολον) of a character (χαρακτήρ) of a type (τύπος) of life (ζωή). It is difficult to imagine what this symbol might have looked like, but the important keyword here is clearly Life. Similarly, other "symbols" in the formulae

are “image” (εἰκών), “likeness” (ὁμοίωσις), innocence (ἀνεπίληπτος), purity (εἰλικρινής), light (φῶς), tree of life (ζωή ζυλοῦ), mother (μήτηρ), the virgin spirit (παρθένον πνεῦμα), and grace (χάρις). This language is not drawn from Graeco-Roman magic, but apparently from an otherwise uncoverable Christian sacramental system with connections to sectarian Judaism. Protologically, these “symbols” link the initiate back to the events and setting of Genesis, particularly 1:26, in which Adam is made in the “image and likeness” of God. This key event also stands behind the similar account of “Ophite” theology in Irenaeus’s *Adversus Haereseas*, where the archons say “Let us make a man in our image (*imaginem nostram*)” (1.30.6) as well as in the *Apocryphon of John* BG 48.10 : “Let us make man after the image of God and his likeness.” The keywords “image” and “likeness,” furthermore, play an important role in *merkabah* mysticism. The *kavod* on the heavenly throne in Ezek 1:26 takes the likeness and form of man, with garments more radiant than the sun on a throne surrounded with fire (1:20 LXX). The “man” whose likeness and form mirrors the divine Glory is not a generalized and generic “human being” but the first, primordial man, the ‘*adam*.<sup>61</sup>

The point of each of these formulae is clear: the ascending being has *already* been transformed into a pure image (*eikon*) of light, the spiritual offspring of the Father, Mother, and Virgin Spirit. It may be, then, that the ascending being in Origen’s formulae has been transformed sacramentally into God’s first son, Adam. There was a tradition in some Jewish circles that Adam would be eschatologically reinstated in Paradise after his expulsion. These traditions were still known within certain later Christian communities. In the fragmentary Greek *Apocalypse of Moses*, when Adam is buried, God declares,

I will install you again in your power upon the throne of your seducer; but he shall be cast down, so that he can see you be enthroned above himself. Then he and they who obeyed him shall be condemned, and they shall grieve and cry, when they see you sit on his precious throne (*Apoc. Mos.* 39.3ff).

The Latin *Life of Adam and Eve* bears some textual relation to the *Apocalypse of Moses*, but both appear to draw slightly differently upon the same Jewish sources. In the *Life*, the God delivers Adam to the archangel Michael:

He shall be in your custody until the day of avengement in punishment until the last years, when I will turn his sorrow to delight. Then, he shall be placed upon the throne of him who seduced him. (L.A.E. 47).

### 3. *Ascent Mysticism and Enthronement Rituals in the "Ophite" Diagrams*

The *Apocalypse of Moses* and the *Life of Adam and Eve*'s Adamic themes correspond to details in both "Ophite" diagrams, in fact. In the *Life of Adam and Eve* 36, the four archangels led by Michael anoint Adam on his deathbed with oil from the Tree of Life—a scene remarkably similar to Celsus's testimony that the one receiving the seal claims to be anointed with white oil from the Tree of Life, and that upon receiving this seal, his body is surrounded by angels (led by Michael) who bear him aloft. While Adam is not mentioned as named on the diagrams either by Celsus or by Origen, Irenaeus in his account of "Ophite" theology notes that Ialdabaoth cast Adam and Eve down to the lower cosmos together with the serpent (*Haer.* 1.30.8). There in the lower cosmos, Ialdabaoth generates the unnamed seven theriomorphic archons of the lower hebdomad, who rule over humankind. It is possible, of course, that Adam was not named on the diagrams because they were maps of his own path to salvation; present are all the other elements of the story: the serpent as "seducer" or "deceiver" cast into the lower cosmos, the salvific Tree of Life with its redemptive oil, the archangel Michael standing next to the redeemed, and, indeed, the location of Paradise itself, which Celsus notes was marked on the map. The diagrams could have had two different functions, then. First, they illustrated a myth of redemption linked to Adamic traditions. This myth taught of a fall through the actions of the "condemned" or "accursed" serpent and the symbolic rectification of the cosmos through the redemptive, ritual inheritance of an individual, and his (or her) installation in the heavens. Second, if the diagrams were used sacramentally, an initiate would be likened to or associated with Adam, anointed, and thus symbolically restored to his or her place on (or alongside) the heavenly throne in Paradise.

But there was likely more to the diagrams than this. In Adamic literature, Adam is not elevated to God's throne but sits alongside it; he replaces Satan, the prince of the angels and ruler of this cosmos. Satan is not explicitly named in Ophite theology, of course, and



appears to be absent from our diagrams. But in a sense he is present in the form of Ialdabaoth, the ruler of the archons. Of course, in the beauty and exegetical complexity of many so-called “Gnostic” writings, Ialdabaoth is not just Satan but simultaneously the demiurgical God of the Hebrew Bible. According to Celsus, Ialdabaoth is “said to be an accursed God,” the God of the Jews who sends rain and thunder (6.27). The conflation of Satan and the Demiurge (and the inverse valuation of the snake who is cast down into Tartaros only to become a Redeemer) are hallmarks of so called “Gnostic” writings; they seem to rule out an exclusive interpretation of the ascending Son of Celsus’s diagram as a restored Adam to replace a deposed Satan.

As Jarl Fossum has observed, Adamic traditions around the turning of the Common Era were “more or less perfectly equivalent” to a separate set of traditions regarding the elevation and enthronement of another figure: Sabaoth.<sup>62</sup> In “Sethian” cosmologies that closely mirror our “Ophite” materials, Ialdabaoth casts his son Sabaoth down into the lower cosmos—that is to say, to earth. But in an act of celestial investiture, Sabaoth is elevated by his mother Sophia (the Virgin Spirit) and placed on a throne-chariot, surrounded by the *hayyoth*.<sup>63</sup> In *Orig. World* 103.5ff, Sabaoth is caught up by “seven angels,” like the seven spirits that stand beside God in Rev 1:4; Pistis Sophia also sends three archangels and a fourth archon, Zoe, to accompany the throne, which is surrounded by “Cherubin” with the forms of a lion, a bull, an eagle, and a man. On Sabaoth’s right, Jesus is seated; to his left, “the Virgin of the Holy Spirit.” As Jarl Fossum has noted, this scene corresponds with the *Ascension of Isaiah* 11.32ff, in which the “Great Glory” sits with Jesus on his right and the “angel of the Holy Spirit” to his left.<sup>64</sup>

The *Hypostasis of the Archons* recounts a similar myth. Here, it is Ialdabaoth, not Sabaoth or the snake, whom an angel binds and casts into Tartaros. Sabaoth repents and reviles his begetter, whereupon Sophia places him in charge of the seventh heaven and gives him the title “god of the forces, Sabaoth.” In *Hyp. Arch.* 95.27ff, Sabaoth at his enthronement sings songs of praise to Sophia and Zoe, her daughter, and creates a heavenly host:

Now when these (events) had come to pass, he made himself a huge four-faced chariot of cherubim, and infinitely many angels to act as ministers, and also harps and lyres. And Sophia took her daughter Zoe and had her sit upon his right to teach him about the

things that exist in the eighth (heaven); and the angel of wrath she placed upon his left. Since that day, his right has been called “life”; and the left has come to represent the unrighteousness of the realm of absolute power above (Layton, 158–59).<sup>65</sup>

The enthronement of Sabaoth here reflects Revelation 4:8, where in the LXX the four throne animals sing the *trisagion* of Isa 6:2–3: “Holy Holy Holy is the Lord Sabaoth.”

Both *On the Origin of the World* and *Hypostasis of the Archons* share elements and features with our documents. In Celsus’s diagram, if the seven angels stand to the right and left of the dying body and four are chariot-beings, then perhaps in the system behind Celsus’s diagram the soul of an individual was likened to Sabaoth at his celestial investiture, anointed to “seal” the relationship of spiritual inheritance or sonship, transformed into a light-being, and borne out of the lower cosmos toward the first Father. Although the mortuary ritual context may not have been present for those who used Origen’s document, the passwords he records reflect a consistent belief in the sacramental transformation of an initiate.

But why would the soul, for those who used these diagrams, stand for Sabaoth at this celestial enthronement? In both *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World*, Sabaoth recognizes the blasphemy of his father, Ialdabaoth, and repents, whereupon Sophia draws him up on his chariot and returns him to his source. That this *mythologoumenon* stood behind our diagrams is at least suggested by Celsus’s words that the chief archon of the “Ophite” system was reviled as an “accursed God.” Furthermore, a part of an apparent initiation into the “Ophite” group would be to revile Jesus—surely a garbled tradition. Since the declaration of Ialdabaoth as “accursed” initiates Sabaoth’s redemption and enthronement in Sethian cosmogonies, it is plausible that a similar declaration on the part of an initiate sealed his or her spiritual or mystical identification with Sabaoth. Sabaoth, then, becomes in certain texts—and perhaps in certain communities—a potent symbol for the descent, repentance, and salvation of the soul. These diagrams and their accompanying rites allude to this myth and help, sacramentally and practically, to replace souls in the place of their origin.

## Conclusion

Generations of scholars have assumed the “Ophite” diagrams’ similarity to magical ascent texts, as well as to Graeco-Roman models of ascent through the cosmos such as Plato’s *Myth of Er*. Werner Foerster, for instance, comments on the diagrams: “After death the pneumatics strode past seven aeons and their corresponding rulers. . . [the] planetary spheres.”<sup>66</sup> This way of understanding the diagrams, I have suggested here, needs to be considered anew. Paradigms for heavenly ascent in Graeco-Roman texts are relatively rare, and the magical papyri present us only with the Mithras Liturgy as a very imperfect example of a “magical” text that leads an initiate on a heavenly journey through the cosmos.<sup>67</sup> But I would venture to say that these diagrams have as little to do with magic as they do with mystical ascent through a Ptolemaic cosmos. I also suggest that the two diagrams may have differed from one another in their soteriology, on both practical and theoretical levels, although they share a background in Jewish mystical ascent, particularly early *merkabah* traditions. The ritual context behind the two documents may also have differed. It may be that while Celsus’s diagram was used for a mortuary ritual, for instance, Origen’s diagram was used for a sort of ecstatic, shamanic ascent. Noteworthy is the language drawn from the mysteries that marks the ascent speeches; the ascending being is called a *mystes* or “initiate” just as the sacraments are likewise “mysteries.” At the same time, no reference is made to the soul or to the body of the dying, as on Celsus’s diagram.

Celsus’s diagram—the older of the two—invokes elements from Judaism, including a cosmology based on Genesis rather than on Ptolemy, the names of the chief Jewish archangels in a traditional order, archon names based on variations of the name of the Hebrew God, references to the books of the prophets, and vocabulary drawn from ascent or early *merkabah* traditions. The diagram was certainly not Jewish, but drew freely upon Jewish traditions, names, and imagery. The function of the diagram in Celsus’s possession was to illustrate the post-mortem journey of the soul, which it did rather unusually, by drawing on key terms employed in Jewish apocalyptic literature and giving this vocabulary an apparently unique ritual elaboration. When

Origen comes upon his copy of the diagram—some sixty years later than Celsus and presumably in Alexandria—the mortuary ritual context for the diagram Celsus possessed may have been lost or altered. Together, the two diagrams served different communities in the conceptual space formed between the competing interests of Jews, Christians and pagans in a vibrant spiritual marketplace.

## Notes

1. F. Wisse, "Stalking Those Elusive Sethians," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* vol 2: *Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. Bentley Layton (SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 563–76. See, in the same volume, Kurt Rudolph, "Die 'Sethianische' Gnosis—eine häresiologische Fiktion?" and the subsequent discussion in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 577–87.
2. Wisse, "Stalking," 565.
3. The definitive English translation of *Contra Celsum* remains Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). English excerpts of *Cels.* are taken from Chadwick's edition unless otherwise marked as my own translations. I use the Greek text from M. Borret, *Origène. Contre Celse. Tome III* (SC 147; Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1969).
4. Celsus's text has been excerpted and published separately by R. Joseph Hoffman, *Celsus: On the true doctrine: a discourse against the Christians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).
5. See Wilhelm Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973 [1907]), 10.
6. Note the brief summary in Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984) 67–69, who rightfully describes the diagram as "difficult to interpret" but who nevertheless sees it as representative of the Gnostic "whole world system" (69). He gives no hint as to the diagrams' practical or liturgical use.
7. Beyond the testimony of Origen and Irenaeus, the so-called Syntagma group, all likely dependent on Hippolytus's lost heresiological treatise *Syntagma*, also attest to the existence of Ophites or Ophians; see Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 2.3–4; Epiphanius, *Pan.*, 37; Filastrius, *Haer.* 1; Theodore, *Haer. fab.*, 1.14. These texts, however, are drawn almost exclusively from Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.20–30.
8. For the critical edition of Irenaeus's text, see A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, *Irénée de Lyon. Contre les Hérésies Livre I, Tome 1* (SC 263; Paris: Les

Éditions du Cerf, 1979), 157–164; 296–300. Translations from the Greek and Latin are my own unless otherwise indicated.

9. On the construction of Ophitism, see the summary of Tuomas Rasimus, “Ophite Gnosticism, Sethianism and the Nag Hammadi Library,” in *Varia Gnostica*, ed., Søren Giversen et al. (forthcoming). Many thanks to Tuomas for providing me with a copy of his unpublished manuscript.

10. The list of extant Sethian texts includes between twelve and fourteen works, eleven from the Nag Hammadi Library: *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1; BG, 2); *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II,2); *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC III,2; IV,2); *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V,5); *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5); *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1); *Melchizedek* (NHC IX,1); *Thought of Norea* (NHC IX,2); *Marsanes* (NHC X); *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3); *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII); the *Untitled Treatise* from the Bruce Codex, and the accounts of the Barbeloites (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.29), and finally the Gnostics, Sethians, and Archontics from Epiphanius, *Panarion* 26, 39, 40). This list derives from Hans-Martin Schenke, “Das Sethianische(s) System,” *TLZ* 100 (1975): 165–66 and Hans-Martin Schenke, “The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism,” in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 588–616. On Sethian Gnosticism more recently, see John Turner, “Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History,” in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, ed. Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1986), 55–86.

11. See, for instance, Robert Haardt, *Gnosis: Character and Testimony*, trans. J.F. Hendry (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 72–88; PHEME Perkins, “On the Origin of the World (CG II, 5): A Gnostic Physics,” *VC* 34 (1980): 45.

12. R. Lipsius, “Gnostizismus” (reprint, 1860) in *Gnosis und Gnostizismus*, ed. K. Rudolph (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), 92ff.; A. Hönig, *Die Ophiten. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des jüdischen Gnosticismus* (Berlin: Maner & Müller, 1889); M. Friedländer, *Der Vorchristliche jüdische Gnosticismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973 [1907]), 319; F. Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis* (Tübingen: Osiander, 1835), 194–97.

13. Origen, *Cels.* 6.24; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 39.

14. Wisse, “Stalking,” 568–69.

15. See F. Wisse, “The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists,” *VC* 25 (1971): 205–23, who notes that certain shared characteristics may give rise to a heresiological label; thus, the mention in a group of texts of Seth leads to “Sethianism,” and so on.

16. John Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001).

17. Seth is also absent from the “Ophite” system described in *Haer.* 1.30. For Seth in Gnostic literature, see A. F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic*

*Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1977); George W. MacRae, "Seth in Gnostic Texts and Traditions," *SBL Seminar Papers*, 1977 (SBLSP 11; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1977), 17–24; Birger Pearson, "Egyptian Seth and Gnostic Seth," *SBL Seminar Papers*, 1977 (SBLSP 11; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1977), 25–43; Birger Pearson, "The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature," in *Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger Pearson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 52–83.

18. For a similar problem in the *Paraphrase of Shem* (NHC VII, 1) see Frederik Wisse, "The Redeemer Figure in the Paraphrase of Shem," *NovT* 12 (1970): 138.

19. Missing from the diagrams, in fact, are all the features of Sethianism outlined by Hans-Martin Schenke: 1) the self-understanding of the Gnostics as the seed of Seth; 2) Seth as Savior; 3) the four luminaries of Autogenes (Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai, and Eleleth) in the dwelling places of Adam, Seth, and Seth's seed; 4) the heavenly Trinity of Father, Mother/Barbelo, and Son (Autogenes/Anthropos); 5) Ialdabaoth tries to destroy Seth's offspring; 6) the division of history into three ages, each with its own redeemer. For this typology, see Hans-Martin Schenke, "Das Sethianische System nach Nag-Hammadi-Handschriften," in *Studia Coptica*, ed. Peter Nagel (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1974), 165–73; reiterated in Wisse, "Stalking," 573–75.

20. The exception, perhaps, was Wilhelm Anz, who long ago interpreted the diagrams as mapping the Savior's descent through the cosmos rather than the initiate's ascent, but his theory never met with much favour. See Wilhelm Anz, *Zur Frage nach dem Ursprung des Gnostizismus* (TU 15/4; Leipzig: August Pries, 1897), 12 ff.

21. Wisse, "Stalking," 575.

22. G. Bornkamm, "Ophiten" in *RE* 18.1.654–57.

23. Chadwick comments in his notes for this section that "it is not certain that the identical documents lay before them" (337, n. 3). Haardt, *Gnosis* (78–81) presents the descriptions separately, as do Werner Foerster, *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*, trans. R. McL. Wilson (2 vols.; Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974), 1:84–99, and Robert Grant, *Gnosticism: A Source Book* (New York: Harper, 1961), 89–92.

24. Theodore Hopfner, "Das Diagramm der Ophiten," in *Charisteria Alois Rzach zum achtzigsten Geburtstag dargebracht* (Reichenberg: Stiepel, 1930), 86–98; Chadwick, 338–39.

25. H. Leisegang, *Die Gnosis* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1955), 32; see his comments at 168–73; Rudolph, 68.

26. A.J. Welburn, "Reconstructing the Ophite Diagram," *NovT* 23 (1981): 261–87.

27. Grant 89–92, Haardt 78–81, Foerster 84–99.
28. Grant, 89–92.
29. Paul Wendland, *Die hellenistisch-römische Kultur* (HNT 2; 4th ed.; ed., H. Dörrie; Tübingen: Mohr, 1972), 174, n. 4.
30. Welburn, “Reconstructing,” 279.
31. Andrew Welburn (“Reconstructing,” 279) has done us a great service by mapping out the spatial relationship between these upper circles in such a way that their overlapping area resembles the mysterious “double axe,” thus greatly clarifying the details of Origen’s diagram.
32. Wilhelm Bousset, “Die Himmelsreise der Seele,” *AR* 4 (1901): 272; Hopfner 87; Jacques Flamant, “Soteriologie et systèmes planétaires,” ed., Ugo Bianchi and M.-J. Vermaseren, *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell’impero romano* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 231.
33. Bousset, “Himmelsreise,” 272. Hopfner’s and Leisegang’s order is Moon (Horaeus), Sun (Adonai), Venus (Astaphaeus), Mercury (Aeloaeus), Mars (Sabaoth), Jupiter (Iao), and Saturn (Ialdabaoth) (Hopfner, 88). Their reconstruction switches the order of Mercury and Venus, following a known but fairly rare planetary order (see Macrobius, *In Somn.* 1.19). I have used Bousset’s more well-known order, which places Mercury closer to earth than Venus (see Plato, *Tim.* 38D). On these orders, see Roger Beck, *Planetary Grades and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras* (EPRO 109; Leiden: Brill, 1988), 5. That the Ophite diagram(s) reflect a conventional planetary order is the conclusion of Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Seven Heavens in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses,” in *Death, Ecstasy and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed., John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 83–84.
34. Adonai had at some point been inadvertently dropped from the formulae; however, it can readily be restored from Origen’s archon-list at *Cels.* 6.32.
35. This observation is also made by Welburn, “Reconstructing,” 263.
36. For Iao identified with the sun, see Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.18.19.
37. Two of the manuscripts of the *Apocryphon of John* (BG and NHC II) give virtually identical archon lists: Iaoth, Eloaiu, Astaphaios, Iao, Adonaios, Adoni, and Sabbataios (BG 41.16) and Athoth, Eloaios, Astaphaios, Iao, Sabaoth, Adonin and Sabbede (II, 59.29). Very close are the additional two manuscripts of *Ap. John*: NHC III, 17,22 and NHC IV, 18,18.
38. See, too, Tacitus *Hist.* 5.4, who associates the God of Judaism with Saturn.
39. *Ap. John* BG 41,16.

40. Robert Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 51; Simone Pétrement, *A Separate God: The Origins and Teachings of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1984), 51–74, esp. 65. On the formation of the planetary week—which was just becoming established in Rome in the second century, see Franz Boll, “Hebdomad,” *RE* 7.2.2547–78.

41. Welburn, “Reconstructing,” 263; Hopfner, “Diagramm,” 88. Lipsius, “Ophitischen Systeme,” 448 and Rasimus, “Ophite,” 8, do not equate the two.

42. Welburn, 226, argues that in an “Ophite” system, we might expect to find a “serpent-faced” archon in place of an anthropo-morphic one, thus justifying how Raphael comes to represent the constellation Aquarius.

43. Varro, *apud* Servius, *ad. Georg* 1.34; quoted in Beck, *Planetary Orders*, 42.

44. The closest parallel for this “Ophite” diachronic progression is the “Mithraic” progression through the planetary grades that Celsus quotes earlier in *The True Doctrine* (*Cels.* 6.22). This unique order—not corroborated by any other Mithraic evidence—is similarly diachronic, beginning with Kronos/Saturn and moving backward through the week from Aphrodite/Venus/Friday to Sunday, thus moving in the opposite direction through the week as the order of the Ophite list. Celsus explains that this order does not represent the planets, but derives from Pythagorean musical theory, based on the principle of the tetrachord (6.22). For comments on this passage, see Beck, *Planetary Orders*, 73–85.

45. There may also be in these theriomorphic demons connections to a doctrine of reincarnation. Celsus notes that “some return into the archontic forms so that some becomes lions, some bulls, and others serpents or eagles or bears or dogs” (6.33; Chadwick, 349). Origen refuses to engage Celsus on this point; Chadwick suggests that the Ophite “initiates work masks shaped according to the animal forms of the Archons” (349, n. 4), revealing that he thinks of the diagram as having an initiatory rather than a mortuary context.

46. This is the suggestion that Roger Beck makes for the significance of the Mithraic diachronic progression in *Cels.* 6.22; see Beck, *Planetary Orders*, 10: “in advancing from Monday to Sunday to Saturday the initiate defies time’s one-way rule and so annuls its tyranny over him.”

47. *Cels.* 6.27 (Borret, 244): τοῦ μὲν τὴν σφραγίδα περιτιθέντος καλουμένου πατρός, τοῦ δὲ σφραγιζομένου νέου καὶ υἱοῦ. In what I have described in this essay as a “discursive” reading, Chadwick suggests that Celsus suddenly and mysteriously imports this liturgy from an entirely different source, perhaps the so-called “heavenly dialogue” he mentions in 8.15. There is no reason to suppose that in the middle of describing one diagram, Celsus might suddenly



turn to another without noting this before returning a few sentences later to his first source. Indeed, the words in the liturgy work very well to tie together the imagery expressed in the formulae and the formulae's function.

48. The best work on the rite of "sealing" or anointing with oil is still G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit* (London: S. P. C. K., 1967 [1951]).

49. These seven beings are distinct from the seven archons of *Cels.* 6:31. In Irenaeus *Haer.* 1:30 we find a similar list identified as the "lower hebdomad" which imitated the higher hebdomad headed by Ialdabaoth. As here, this lower hebdomad is led by Michael, and acts to "continually oppress humankind."

50. The first four "angels of light" may be related to the four luminaries from many "Gnostic" cosmologies; see Welburn, 268–69. On angels of the left and right more generally, see Hippolytus *Haer.* 5.14.7–8 (on the Peratae) who includes Raphael and Suriel as angels of the left; *Exc. Theod.* 23.3; 28; 37; 47.2; *Pistis Sophia* 139–40; Epiphanius *Pan.* 40 on the Archontics.

51. Welburn, "Reconstructing," 266; R. van den Broek, "The Shape of Edem according to Justin the Gnostic," *VC* 27 (1973): 35–45.

52. Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985), 324.

53. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 323.

54. The similarities are perhaps even more interesting when one considers the persuasive argument offered by my colleague John Marshall of the University of Toronto that the Book of Revelation was a first-century Jewish apocalyptic text, only secondarily Christianized. See John W. Marshall, *Parables of War: Reading John's Jewish Apocalypse* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001).

55. Rasimus, "Ophite," 8.

56. For evidence of deathbed sealing in early Christianity and Second Temple Period Judaism, see *Life of Adam and Eve* 36; *Acts of Xanthippe* 13; and Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.21.5, on the Valentinian Marcosians. Still useful is Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*.

57. These eschatological sealing rites were certainly not uncommon in the second century. See, for instance, the testimony of Irenaeus on the Marcosians (*Haer.* 1.21.4); Hippolytus *Haer.* 5.9.22; Clement of Alexandria *Exc.* 82. There are also sealing rites alluded to in the NHC *Gospel of Philip*. Finally, other Sethian texts allude to a rite of the "Five Seals," e.g. *Trim. Prot.* 48.31; 49.27; *Ap. John* NHC II, 31.24; *Ap. John* NHC IV, 49.4; *Gos. Eg.* NHC IV, 56.25; 58.6, although it is not clear of what this rite might have consisted.

58. The English translation here is P. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:257.

59. Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960) 44, 48. See also Fossum, *The Name of God*, 312.

60. The translation here is from William Schoedel, "The First Apocalypse of James" in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. James Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 242–48.

61. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 278.

62. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 304.

63. On Sabaoth in Sethian texts, see W. Fauth, "Seth-Typhon, Onoel, und der eselsköpfige Sabaoth," *OrChr* 57 (1973): 79–120. On the enthronement scene, see Francis T. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myths* (NHS 10; Leiden: Brill, 1978).

64. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 304.

65. English translation from Bentley Layton, "The Hypostasis of the Archons," in Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 152–60.

66. Foerster, *Gnosis*, 94.

67. For this important observation, see Martha Himmelfarb, "The Practice of Ascent in the Ancient World," in Collins and Fishbane, *Death, Ecstasy and Other Worldly Journeys*, 121–33. It is interesting, and perhaps significant, that the Mithras Liturgy has likewise been interpreted as being based on a seven-fold planetary ascent. This interpretation has recently been challenged by Radcliffe G. Edmonds II, "At the Seizure of the Moon," in *Prayer, Magic and the Stars*, ed., Scott Noegel, Joel Walker, and Brannon Wheeler (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 226.