PISTIS SOPHIA.

MR MEAD is to be congratulated upon having twice edited *Pistis Sophia*, the strange book of Gnostic lore preserved in a very ancient codex in the British Museum.[1] It is now a quarter of a century since he first translated it, mainly from Amélineau: in the interval has appeared Carl Schmidt's admirable rendering into German in the Berlin Corpus (1905), and Mr Mead has very wisely corrected his earlier translation by this. It thus can be recommended to the English reader as an introduction to Gnostic literature; at the same time neither Schmidt's edition nor Mr Mead's translation of it dispenses the investigator from the study of the Sahidic original, so admirably edited in 1851 by Schwartze and Petermann, or from consulting their Latin translation, which, bald as it is, sometimes gives a better sense than Schmidt does.[2] To the translation Mr Mead has prefixed a readable Introduction, followed by an Annotated Bibliography of 60 items (pp. lii–lxix), which is a most useful guide to the investigator and, indeed, a positive contribution to learning.[3]

I.

There are two main ways of studying such a book as *Pistis Sophia*. We may start backwards from the actual MS and try to trace the various stages of the growth of the text before us, or we may start from the general ideas of the 'Gnostics' and see how they are reflected in *Pistis Sophia*, whatever its date may be. Now that a good deal is known about what it is the fashion to call 'the Gnosis',[4] we can begin by the latter and easier way. At first sight *Pistis Sophia* seems a very confused medley, but there can be little doubt that to its compiler it

[1] *Pistis Sophia* by G. R. S. Mead. New Edition. (London, Watkins, 1921.)

[2] A curious instance may be found *PS* 358 (beginning of the 5th book), where ιαω is explained to mean '*Iota*, all things have gone forth; *Alpha*, they will return within; *O*, there will be the end of all ends'. When Mr Mead (p. 295) translates this '*iōta*, because the universe hath gone forth', &c., he is following Schmidt (p. 232), who has '*weil* das All' &c. But here the particle *dje* only corresponds to inverted commas (ὅτι), as often, e.g. Dan v 26–28.

[3] I take this opportunity of pointing out that 'Skemmūt' (*PS* 354 = Mead p. 292) is not a *Nomen barbaricum*, but a native Egyptian name for a star or constellation, almost certainly the Pleiades, as in Job ix 9, xxxviii 31. The Pleiades are connected with the Flood in Jewish lore also.

[4] After all, *Gnosis* in Greek is nothing more than 'knowledge'; it is only when transliterated into English or Coptic that it acquires a special mysterious meaning. It is a pity that Mr Mead does not distinguish between *gnosis* transliterated in *PS* (16 init.; 75 med.; 254, l. 12, but not l. 13), and the use of the ordinary Coptic word for 'knowledge' (*sooun*), which occurs e.g. *PS* 182, l. 12, and nine times in *PS* 232 f. Mr Mead uses 'gnosis' for both words.

was a simple and practical guide to the most important branch of knowledge, viz. how to attain after death to a blessed immortality. The Gnostics imagined this Earth as the centre of the Universe, encircled with starry spheres on the whole unfriendly to man but controlling his destiny. At death a man's spirit flies upwards to the free regions of Light beyond the spheres, but the rulers of the Fate seize it, and it is punished for its sins and then born again (*PS* 344): the only escape is to know the names of these rulers and what 'apology' should be given to each. To reveal these passwords, or rather a master-password superior to them all, was why Jesus, the Saviour, came down from the heights of otherwise inaccessible Light in which He dwells. 'For the sake of sinners it was that I have this once troubled Myself to bring them the Mysteries, that I might free them from the aeons of the Archons and bind them into the heritages of Light—and not only the sinners, but also the righteous, that I may give them the Mysteries to be taken into the Light, for without a Mystery they cannot be taken into the Light' (*PS* 351 = Mead, p. 290).[1]

The word which I have translated 'troubled myself' is ⲥⲕⲩⲗⲗⲓ ⲙⲙⲟⲓ, an adaptation of σκύλλεσθαι, familiar to us from its use in the Gospels (μὴ σκύλλου, Luke vii 6). The word once meant 'to flay', and is translated '*mich zerren*' by Schmidt and 'tear myself asunder' by Mead. But there is nothing in any of the contexts to suggest this concrete meaning, and the metaphorical sense of 'trouble myself', found in the Gospels and Patristic writers, is actually attested in Greek papyri from Egypt.[2] The matter is important, because the word gives us a glimpse into what the compiler of the *Pistis Sophia* thought about the mind of God. With the corrected meaning of ⲥⲕⲩⲗⲗⲓ ⲙⲙⲟⲓ the striking passage in *PS* 248, 249, becomes far clearer: the Saviour tells the disciples that men and angels and archons are all made of the same sort of stuff, a Mixture of Light and Matter; the great heavenly Powers have been purified, yet not by their own will or effort, but only by the compulsion of the Supreme God, the Ineffable. These great Powers have been purified, but they had not concerned themselves about it (248, l. 16). Men, meanwhile, are formed of the refuse of the Powers, but they have struggled of themselves and not left off seeking for the Light; and so Jesus for the sake of mankind concerned Himself to bring them the purifying Mysteries of the Light, without which no soul could have been saved (249, l. 15).[3]

[1] I quote *Pistis Sophia* by the Coptic pages of Schwartze, given in the margin of all editions of *PS*.

[2] Milligan *Greek Papyri* 44: also *Oxyr. Pap.* 1669, where Grenfell and Hunt translate σκύλῃθι . . . ἐνθάδε by 'be at the pains of coming here'. See also Eus. *H. E.* i 13, and Athan. *Vit. Antonii* 50 and 72.

[3] Contrast this view of 'the mind of Christ' with the Stoic doctrine: 'the Wise

And when we go on to ask what these Mysteries are, we find that we should renounce the world and its care (250, also 218), and beyond that there is only One Mystery, properly so called: in orthodox terminology it would be called the mystery of the Incarnation. No doubt the Gnostics regarded Jesus as human only in appearance, but they thought of Him as having *really come*[1] to visit this world of men, and they believed that this Visit and the reason of it was the key to all mysteries in heaven and earth. 'Hearken', says Jesus to the Disciples, 'concerning the knowledge (not "gnosis", 219, l. 5) of that mystery. That mystery knows why the highest of all high Powers of the Unbegotten (enumerated one by one, *PS* 219–224) have concerned themselves to come forth, for It knows why It has concerned Itself to come forth from the Ineffable, the ultimate Ruler of them all (224). The soul that receives this mystery will soar into the height as a great light-stream and no power will be able to hold it down at all (227), for it will go straight up to the Ineffable and become incorporated with the Ineffable "in the time a man shoots an arrow"' (228). Such an enlightened soul is a man in the world, but he towers above all supernal principalities and powers (229). 'He is a man in the world, but he will rule with Me in My Kingdom. He is a man in the world, but he is King in the Light. He is a man in the world, but he is not one of the world. Amen, I say unto you: That man is I, and I am that man' (230). And further, Jesus says: 'That mystery is I, and I am that mystery' (231).

It should be noted that the mystery of the Ineffable which is Jesus includes, according to the *Pistis Sophia*, a great deal besides purely 'moral' and 'religious' insight. That mystery knows the reason of darkness and light, of the impious and the good, of adultery and purity, of tears and laughter, of poverty and wealth, of freedom and slavery, of death and life (206–209); besides these things it knows the reason of reptiles and wild beasts, of cattle and birds, of the precious metals and even of glass and wax, why the matter of the world has arisen and why it will be utterly destroyed (210 f). It knows also all about the atmosphere and the heavenly bodies, and why the Archons of the Sphere have arisen, in a word it knows all the lore of astrology (211–

Man was not to *concern* himself with his brethren' (E. R. Bevan *Stoics and Sceptics* p. 66).

[1] I cannot help feeling that modern writers sometimes confuse the ancient Christian theory or heresy known as 'Docetism' with modern subjectivity. Modern disbelief in the Incarnation is essentially a disbelief that Jesus the Nazarene had been really sent from Outside, from the Power behind phenomena; the Docetic Christians believed that Jesus was really the Messenger from Outside, but they differed from the orthodox as to the stuff of which His visible body was made.

216). The same thought is familiar to English churchgoers from Bp Christopher Wordsworth's hymn, which tells of the Saints who

'all truth and knowledge see
In the Beatific Vision of the Blessed Trinity.'

I venture to quote this modern Hymn, that we may remind ourselves that the substance of thought in *Pistis Sophia* is not after all so very far removed from the aspirations of Western traditional religion.

II.

When and where was *Pistis Sophia* compiled? It is a difficult question. As I said above, we may either start from the book itself, or from leading ideas found in it. These leading ideas can very often be paralleled from documents or schools of thought which were certainly ancient, and so a very high antiquity has sometimes been claimed for *Pistis Sophia* as we have it. Let us now try the other method and work backwards.

The MS in the British Museum (Add. 5114) is itself old, perhaps of the fifth century (Schmidt, p. xiii), or the sixth (Hyvernat). It is written in Sahidic, the dialect of Upper Egypt, so that the first question that comes before us is whether it is a Coptic 'original', or a translation from the Greek. I venture with some diffidence to urge that the matter is still far from clear, notwithstanding Prof. Schmidt's assertion that 'no one who knows Coptic has ever thrown doubt upon the fact of translation' (Schmidt, p. xiii).[1]

There is no doubt, of course, that a great deal of the fundamental doctrine in *Pistis Sophia* comes from Gnostic schools of thought already known to, and therefore earlier than, Irenaeus. The figure of Barbelo, Virginal Spirit and Mother of the Only-Begotten, was part of the celestial hierarchy of the Gnostics whom Irenaeus confutes, and therefore her appearance in *Pistis Sophia* was something inherited from elsewhere. But is it not likely that our book is a compilation from sources of different age and character? And I think it not out of place to put down here one or two facts which tend to shew that our book, as it stands, has an Egyptian, non-Greek origin.

The direct question of style appears to me not easy to answer. The author was a man of curious learning, writing for a circle of disciples. No doubt he did not write in the unadulterated (was it unadulterated?) idiom of the unlettered peasantry of Upper Egypt. But do we know how much Greek syntax, as well as Greek vocabulary, was thought suitable for a learned work compiled by a Christian Egyptian of the Ṣa'īd? I imagine the whole language was something of a jargon, and very likely the most idiomatic native style was the least literary.

[1] In reply to F. Granger, *J. T. S.* v 401.

The first thing that struck me was that out of 37 sins that men are warned against in *PS* 255 ff, only ten are expressed wholly or partly by Greek words, the remaining 27 being altogether Coptic.[1] This seems to me to shew that the writer, whether he was compiling in his own language or translating from another, had a large and flexible native vocabulary: if he does not always use it, it is because he preferred a more exotic style. It may be noted in passing that the ultimate Supreme Power, called by Irenaeus *Pater innominabilis*, has a vernacular name. I spoke of Him just now as the Ineffable, following Mr Mead, but what *Pistis Sophia* has is 'the-No-word-for-it'.[2]

The quotations from the Bible follow the Sahidic Version closely, not only in the formal citation of whole Psalms, but also in isolated verses, such as Lk. xiv 34, 35, quoted *PS* 308, ll. 13–15. It has been stated by Rahlfs (see Mead, lxii) that the quotations of the Psalms in *PS* 86–110 'are so totally different that they must be an independent translation from the Greek', but this is an over-statement. Even in this section the renderings of the Psalms are at least strongly influenced by the choice of words in the Sahidic version: the differences do not seem to me to be greater than those which might be produced by quoting from memory.[3]

Another point which deserves notice in this connexion is that the Greek names of the Five Planets, Zeus, Hermes, &c., seem to be quite devoid of any associations with idolatry. 'Aphrodite' is identified as Bubastis (*PS* 367)[4] and 'Zeus' is even called a good regent (*PS* 361): is this possible in a *Greek* text dating from ante-Nicene days?

Finally, the very name of the personage from which the work is commonly called, Pistis Sophia,—is not this a 'barbarous' formation, whether it be written 'the Pistis Sophia' (*PS* 42 and generally), or 'the Pistis, the Sophia' (*PS* 361, l. 19)? Is there any real analogy for it in any of the names of the Aeons excogitated by Greek-speaking thinkers?

I am very far from suggesting that the coherent and consistent

[1] A Coptic equivalent is found even for a word which corresponds to *ἀπαιδευσία* (cf. Hos. vii 16). For 'sloth' (Mead p. 216, l. 4) read 'folly', *ἀπόνοια*.

[2] See the Bohairic, but not the Sahidic, of 2 Cor. ix 15 (*ἀνεκδιήγητος*).

[3] A few quotations, e.g. that of Lk. xvi 9 (*PS* 334), are not taken from the Sahidic version, but this quotation also diverges very widely from the Greek also. Note that here the Biblical quotation precedes the Gnostic explanation, while in the case of the Psalms and Odes the Gnostic paraphrase comes first.

[4] Something has gone wrong in the text of *PS* 366, l. 23: a semi-colon should come after 'the Ram' (Mead p. 303, l. 4), and the translation should go on: 'when Boubastis, that is Aphrodite, cometh . . . to the Balance'. The particle before 'Boubastis' is not here the sign of the genitive, but of the subjunctive, as may be seen from the parallel *PS* 370, l. 4.

element in the 'gnosis' taught in the Askew Codex is not derived from Greek thinkers, even if they were semi-barbarian, or at least Levantine, by race. But as we have it, *Pistis Sophia* seems to me non-Greek. I cannot help thinking that it is a *réchauffé*, a hash-up, of older Greek materials. The long repetitions of exactly the same formula (e.g. 'that mystery knoweth why . . .' repeated 86 times in *P S* 206–216, and 'he is a man in the world but he towereth above . . .' repeated 17 times in *P S* 229 f)—these can hardly have been conceived in Greek. Somewhat similar is the case of the 'repentances' of Pistis Sophia. These are all quite obvious paraphrases of Psalms of David or Odes of Solomon; after each one a Disciple comes forward and announces with extreme naïveté that this 'repentance' had been prophesied aforetime by David or Solomon in such-and-such a Psalm, which is then quoted in full. It is difficult to suppose that the paraphrase and the literal quotation were both made by the same person from the same original, but if the 'repentances' were paraphrases of the Greek Psalter, a text imperfectly understood by the compiler while at the same time it was believed by him to be full of all sorts of hidden meanings, then there is some point in indicating that the paraphrastic repentance is the real meaning of the more or less familiar Coptic Psalm.

I venture therefore to claim that the question of the language in which our *Pistis Sophia* was composed is still open. And what I have said about *Pistis Sophia* may, I think, be said also of the two Books of Jeu (or Yew, as Mr Mead spells it), preserved in the Bruce Papyrus at Oxford and edited by Prof. Schmidt in *T. u. U.*, vol. viii 1, 2 (Berlin, 1892). On the other hand the 'nameless' Gnostic treatise, also preserved in the Bruce Papyrus, has more the character of a Greek work: as it stands it is more coherent, and passages like Schmidt 235 (= Woide 72) do read like a translation from a Greek text which the Coptic translator did not understand, as Professor Schmidt observes on p. 285, note.

Exactly; behind the Coptic gibberish lies a real doctrine, but what we have is not the real doctrine, but an imperfect representation of it, imperfect not so much (at least in *Pistis Sophia*) because of linguistic difficulties, but chiefly because the ideas themselves have only been imperfectly apprehended by the compiler of the book.

If we pass on to Prof. Schmidt's *Apocryphon Iohannis*, of which he gives a full account in the book called *Philotesia*, pp. 317–336,[1] we find ourselves in a different atmosphere. Here obviously we are dealing with a translation from the Greek, the same Greek work that Irenaeus contends against in *adv. Haer.* i 29. The difference is quite perceptible and may be expressed in a single formula: in the Greek work God is

[1] *Philotesia* (Essays in honour of Paul Kleinert's 70th birthday), Berlin, 1907. Schmidt's Essay is called *Irenäus u. seine Quelle in adv. haer.* i 29.

described psychologically, in the Coptic magically and mythologically. When we read in *Pistis Sophia* 289–292 of the upward passage of the enlightened soul through the Archons of the Midst with their Destiny, the Aeons of Fate with their 'imitation Spirit', the Regions of the Tyrants of King Adamas, the Archons of the Left, the Virgin of Light with her Virgins, Sabaoth the great and good who is at the gate of life in the Region of the Right, to Melchisedec the great Receiver of the Light who leads the soul into the Treasury of the Light from whence it goes into the region of the Inheritance—when we read of all this we are not in regions of thought but of mythology, and not a mythology that really expresses anything but a mere external lore. Why is Melchisedec above Sabaoth? Why, indeed! And what meaning can we suppose the compiler of *Pistis Sophia* attached to 'the seven Voices and the five Trees and the three Amens and the Twin-Saviours and the nine guards and the twelve saviours' (*PS* 195)? Very likely, if we knew all, the mention of the Twin-Saviours may be a survival of the cult of the Great Twin Brethren, about which Dr Rendel Harris has written so ingeniously. Yes, but there is no sign that there is any knowledge of any part of this cult in *Pistis Sophia*; as mentioned by our Coptic writer it is so much meaningless foreign tradition.

When on the contrary we read in the *Apocryphon Iohannis* that the ineffable, invisible Existence, the ultimate Source of all things, Who had dwelt from eternity contemplating Himself in the pure Light-water with which He is surrounded, once had a notion (ἔννοια), and that somehow this notion is the cause of everything incorporated and visible, then we are not in the regions of mere tradition but of rational reflexion. It is now the regular commonplace to say that Magic comes before Metaphysics, and that such rational reflexion is therefore later than the merely traditional lore of the greater part of *Pistis Sophia*, and particularly later than the Gnostic sacramental ritual set forth in *PS*, bk. v, and in the Second Book of Jeu. But this theory does not always hold; especially is it not true of the age in which the philosophy of Plotinus begot the theurgy of Jamblichus. After all, in the case of the 'Gnostics'—I include all the schools—the thing given, and calling for theoretical explanation, was not Christian rites, but the Christian Revelation in general. Gnosticism is an attempt to give, in terms of the philosophy and the cosmology of the second and third centuries A. D., a sufficiently dignified and scientific account of the entry of a new hope for mankind into this visible world. The science is not our science, and so to us the explanation is far less credible than the alleged fact which it attempts to illuminate. But at least the whole movement began in thought rather than in ritual, and the oldest monuments of Gnosticism shew the most thought.

III.

This seems a not inappropriate opportunity to say a few words on the *Nomina barbarica*, the monstrous names for heavenly and hellish beings which some of the Gnostics excogitated. There can, I should think, be little doubt that some of the names found in *Pistis Sophia* and the *Books of Jeu* are the free inventions of irresponsible editors, however faithful the immediate scribes of our MSS may have been. Thus in the sacramental rite described in *PS* 376 and in 2 Jeu 107 Jesus invokes His Father, the Father of all Fatherhood, to send the magic Power. But whereas in *PS* 376 the prayer is that 'the forgivers of sins may come, whose names are Ṣiphirepsnichieu, Zenei, Berimou, Sochabrichēr, . . .', in 2 Jeu 107 it is that 'the fifteen Helpers may come which serve the seven Virgins of the Light who are set over the baptism of Light, whose unspeakable names are Astrapa, Tesphoiode, Ontonios, Sinētos, Lachon, . . .' Who can doubt that here we have nothing more than the independent fancy of two Egyptian Gnostics, one of whom wished to give his 'angels' Greek-sounding names, while the other preferred something definitely non-Greek? In either case we have to do with something essentially arbitrary. The names mean nothing, and never did mean anything. I venture to guess that the name of the 'true God', viz. 'Ioeiaōthōuichōlmiō' is as arbitrary as are the three horizontal straight lines in his 'Type', which we are told are the three cries, *ie ie ie*, which he emitted when he was moved by the Unapproachable Father of All to utter praise (1 Jeu 48–51, 146–148).

But the matter is different when we come to the documents which were certainly written in Greek and find in them certain *nomina barbarica* that occur in all this literature, names which are mentioned by Irenaeus himself and therefore belong to the creative period of Christian Gnosticism. What are we in particular to make of *Barbelo* and of *Ialdabaoth*?

In the later works, such as *Pistis Sophia*, Barbelo is obviously an inherited name. She is the mother of Pistis Sophia among other things (*PS* 361), but from the book no clear idea can be gathered of her original function. As we go back, Barbelo becomes more prominent and her nature clearer: it is a name for the Holy Spirit, i. e. that which came forth in the beginning from God and was somehow the parent, both for Creation and for Jesus. Ialdabaoth also in some way traces his being back to Barbelo, but he is more directly connected with evil and evil matter. In most systems where he occurs he is hostile to man and a rebel against the Highest God, while Barbelo on the other hand is never represented as unkindly or rebellious.[1]

Besides Barbelo and Ialdabaoth we find other names, such as Sabaoth and Iabraoth. Most of this series have a vaguely Semitic flavour, and

[1] In particular Isai. xlv 5, 21, is supposed to be the utterance of Ialdabaoth.

it was formerly the custom to seek derivations for them from 'the Aramaic' and to think of them as originally significant terms invented by the 'Syrian' Gnostics, such as Simon Magus was supposed to have been, or the mysterious Saturninus. It was easy to do this formerly, for little was known of the history of opinion in Aramaic-speaking Christian communities. The matter is somewhat different now that we have, from the Prose Refutations of St Ephraim, a very fair knowledge of the opinions of Bardaisan and of the Syriac-speaking Marcionites. Had names such as Barbelo and Ialdabaoth been current among early Aramaic-speaking Gnostics—where, it may be asked in passing, were such persons ever to be found?—some echo of them might have been expected to survive in the cosmogony of Bardaisan.[1] But we find nothing of the kind. We find a knowledge of the heathen doctrine of Fate and speculations about the ultimate physical constitution of Matter, but none of the characteristic Gnostic mythology with its apparatus of curiously named Archons and Demonic Powers.

This apparatus appears to me to be essentially Egyptian; Alexandrine and Graeco-Egyptian in the first instance, and later on persisting among the native Copts of Upper Egypt. And further, the nomenclature does not suggest any real acquaintance with Semitic languages or Semitic alphabets, but only a superstitious veneration for Hebrew names found in the Greek versions of the Old Testament, eked out by scraps of ill-digested bits of Hebrew supplied (no doubt) by Jews.

Consider first the name Sabaoth. It does not matter at the moment what powers or functions were assigned to 'Sabaoth' by this or that Gnostic school; the point is, that they all treat it as a Divine Name. Obviously they did not get this from Jews, or from any Aramaic-speaking school, but from the Book of Isaiah in Greek, where a reader ignorant of Hebrew might easily suppose that the Κύριος Σαβαώθ, so often mentioned there, was a lord Sabaoth, perhaps not the Supreme God. Hebrew and Syriac speculation never took 'Sabaoth' for a proper name: in the 'Book of Protection' edited by H. Gollancz (a collection of native Syriac charms) we find all sorts of Names of God, but Sabaoth is not among them.[2] It seems to me clear that the use of Sabaoth as a proper name stamps any school that uses it as non-Semitic.

Again, the use of Iao, Adonai, and Eloi—or Iao, Adonaios, and Eloaios—as the names of different inferior Deities, co-ordinate with but different from Sabaoth, is hardly possible among persons who knew any Hebrew.

[1] I venture to refer here to my Introductory Essay in C. W. Mitchell's *Ephraim* vol. ii pp. cxi–cxliv.

[2] On the other hand 'Āhiāh Āshārāhiāh' plays a great part in the 'Book of Protection', because the Peshitta so transliterates the Name in Exod. iii 14. The Gnostics, who read in their Bibles only Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν, took no magic Name from this verse!

These considerations do not give us direct help in obtaining a derivation for Barbelo and Ialdabaoth, but they warn us from attempting to find a rational meaning for these names in Hebrew or Aramaic. If they are Hebrew they will probably be, like 'Sabaoth', a misunderstanding of some word or phrase from the Hebrew Bible transliterated into Greek. I find it difficult to dissociate Ialdabaoth from יהוה צבאות. Origen (*c. Celsum* vi 31) says it came to the Gnostics from *μαγεία*, by which he surely means 'Magic' rather than 'the theology of the Magians': if it then has had an extra long pedigree as a *Nomen barbaricum* we may be prepared for more than ordinary deformation. I can imagine various ways of corruption: ⲗⲁ might be Ⲍ on its side, or ⲗⲁ might be for ⲙ an attempt to write the letter ⲯ, or ⲓⲁⲗⲁ may have arisen from a confusion between the initial syllables of ⲓⲁ(ω) and of ⲁⲃⲁ(ωⲛⲁⲓ). Bad as these suggestions are from a strictly palaeographical point of view, I feel that derivations which altogether neglect the word *Sabaoth* are even more far-fetched.

For Barbelo I cannot help thinking that the general character of the presentation of her in the *Apocryphon Iohannis* and in Irenaeus *adv. Haer.* i 29 drives us to look for a derivation in Genesis i 1. How little second-century Christians really knew about the Hebrew text, and how much they thought was contained in it, is clear from Irenaeus's quotation (*Demonstr.* 43, J. A. Robinson's trans., p. 108), where he gives Gen. i 1 in an almost unrecognizably corrupted transliteration, and persuades himself that it means 'The Son in the beginning: God established then the heaven and the earth'. If this was possible for Irenaeus, it seems to me quite likely that some Gnostic in Alexandria got a Jew to transcribe for him the first verse of the Bible, and that in transmission *bara elohim* became corrupted into *barbelo*. 'In the beginning Barbelo, with the heaven and with the earth.'

If the name Barbelo did not come in this, or some such way, it is difficult to imagine what its source could have been. It is like nothing in any language I have ever heard of. There is no trace of it in any Semitic literature, although the Holy Spirit was generally treated as feminine by Syriac-speaking Christians before the fifth century. It is perhaps worth noticing that Barbelo has the same vowels as *παμμήτωρ*, a word used in the 'unnamed apocalypse' edited by Schmidt from the Bruce Papyrus.

Perhaps no really satisfactory explanation of these names can be offered till a derivation has been found for *Ἀσταφαιόσ*, a Gnostic name for one of the inferior Gods, coordinate with Ialdabaoth and Sabaoth. Origen tells us that it also comes from Magic, but no one seems to know what it means. 'And God knows best', as the Arabs say when *they* don't know!

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