

# WAS ZOSIMUS OF PANOPOLIS CHRISTIAN? ¿ZÓSIMO DE PANÓPOLIS FUE CRISTIANO?

OLIVIER DUFAULT  
odufault@gmail.com

---

## ABSTRACT

Zosimus of Panopolis, the first identifiable author of Greek alchemy, wrote in late-3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>-century CE Egypt. For over a century, scholars have pictured him in turn as Christian or as pagan. A reconsideration of Zosimus' *On the Letter Omega* and the treatise known as the *Final Count* or *Final Abstinence* (*teleutaia apochē*) and the *First Lesson on Excellence* demonstrates that he saw Jesus as a savior, that his citations of the *Hermetica* are not in contradiction with basic Christian notions and that he believed that the gods of Egypt were evil divine beings. His Christology and anthropology shares characteristics with "Classic Gnostic" theology and other

## RESUMEN

Zósimo de Panópolis, el primer autor identificable de alquimia griega, escribió en Egipto a finales del siglo III o IV E.C. Durante más de un siglo, los eruditos lo han considerado alternativamente como cristiano o como pagano. Una reconsideración de su tratado *Sobre la letra Omega* y el tratado conocido como *La cuenta final* o *La abstinencia final* (*teleutaia apochē*) y la *Primera lección sobre la excelencia* demuestra que percibió a Jesús como un salvador, que sus citas de las *Hermetica* no están en contradicción con nociones cristianas básicas y que creía que los dioses de Egipto eran seres divinos malvados. Su cristología y antropología comparten características con la teología "gnóstica clásica" y otras nociones cristianas

early Christian notions. Also characteristic of the soteriologies presented in some heresiological reports, Zosimus described Jesus as teaching humans to “cut off” their body. This last observation, which is dependent on recognizing Zosimus as a Christian, shed light on the symbolism of the *First Lesson on Excellence*.

primitivas. También es característico de las soteriologías presentadas en algunos informes heresiológicos, en los que Zósimo describió a Jesús enseñando a los humanos a “cortar” su cuerpo. Esta última observación, que depende de que se reconozca a Zósimo como cristiano, arroja luz sobre el simbolismo de la *Primera lección sobre la excelencia*.

---

#### KEYWORDS

Alchemy; Apologetics; Classic Gnosticism; Corpus Hermeticum; Early Christianity; Zosimus of Panopolis.

#### PALABRAS CLAVE

Alquimia; Apologética; Corpus Hermeticum; Gnosticismo Clásico; Cristianismo primitivo; Zósimo de Panópolis.

---

Fecha de recepción: 18/02/2022

Fecha de aceptación: 13/06/2022

---

ZOSIMUS OF PANOPOLIS (LATE 3<sup>RD</sup> OR 4<sup>TH</sup> CENT. CE) is the first identifiable author of a Greek alchemical text.<sup>1</sup> The two treatises discussed here take the form of letters to a certain Theosebeia, who also taught alchemy. Zosimus wrote to her as to a pupil and spent considerable energy trying to discredit other alchemy specialists who interacted with her. I argue in the following that two of his polemical treatises provide enough evidence to conclude that he was Christian and that he espoused anthropological and soteriological views similar to those found in “Classic Gnostic” anthropogonies.

The passage from *On the Letter Omega* describing how Jesus saves humanity is the most obvious allusion to Christian theology found in Zosimus’ work.<sup>2</sup> It goes at the core of the beliefs that united all early Christians even though Zosimus’ anthropology and soteriology would have certainly conflicted with the views of influential Christian theologians of his time. My purpose is to systematize and add to analyses that have characterized Zosimus as a Christian and Gnostic. I also propose a framework explaining the logic behind Zosimus’ use of mythological or theological material of various provenances. This framework enabled Zosimus to reinterpret and assimilate older traditions to suit his own. I show in part one that there are no compelling reasons to follow Richard Reitzenstein in rejecting the passage from *On the Letter Omega* as a Christian gloss. In part two, I present a systematic survey of references to the *Hermetica* in the work of Zosimus and show that his citations of Hermetic literature could not clash with the Christian theological and soteriological

---

1. Note that I use the expression “Greek alchemical texts” as a short form for “alchemical texts written in ancient Greek”. The following abbreviations will be used throughout: BG = Berolensis 8502, cited in the edition of Barc & Funk, 2012; CAAG 2 = Berthelot & Ruelle, 1888; CH = Corpus Hermeticum in Festugière & Nock, 1945a and 1946; M = Marcianus Graecus 299; MA = Zosimus, *Mémoires authentiques* in Mertens, 1995; NHC = Nag Hammadi Codices. All translations are mine except otherwise indicated. I would like to thank all participants of the workshop that led to the publication of this issue and the organizers for asking us to send papers in advance.

2. MA I 13, 121-125.

beliefs he expressed. Part three demonstrates that Zosimus' description of the gods of the Egyptian temples as evil divine beings as well as his refusal of sacrificial practice further supports the assumption that he was Christian. Part four summarizes and builds on several recent studies to show that his anthropogony and soteriology include some of the characteristic elements of "Classic Gnostic" treatises and of a theology described by the *Refutation of All Heresies*.

The claim of this paper is not that Zosimus was a member of a gnostic religious community or that he saw alchemy as a strictly religious activity. Both interpretations have been associated with the views of Carl G. Jung, who believed European alchemy took its root in ancient Gnosticism.<sup>3</sup> Since Jung's time, text discoveries and critical appraisals of methodologies have led many specialists to abandon the notion of Gnosticism inasmuch as it implies the existence a coherent group of Christians who would be the source of texts recognized as gnostic. All parties would probably agree that the term was not well chosen since the adjective *gnōstikos* was used to describe various early Christian doctrines, even those that were explicitly opposed to those now described as gnostic. It was also applied pejoratively to specific groups or used as a catch-all term for "heretical" groups. For these and other reasons, scholars have argued that "Gnosticism" is a loaded term that oversimplifies the study of early Christianity. Yet, research concentrating on "gnostic texts" continues unabated. Even in the absence of heresiological treatises, the presence of theological notions only found in a limited number of early Christian texts will continue justifying the construction of theological typologies. However, these alone are not sufficient to prove the existence of distinct social groups. Indeed, claims that those who produced and read texts labelled as "Valentinian", "Sethian" or "Classic" Gnosticism were "Gnostics" – *i.e.* members of single organized group – are now mostly abandoned.<sup>4</sup>

The same is true for the study of early Mediterranean alchemy (*ca.* 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE). Former introductions presented ancient Mediterranean alchemy as an ancient school of philosophy with its own specialists and a coherent (or at times conflicting) body of theories. Recent research makes it increasingly difficult to assume that Greek alchemical texts are the products of organized groups.<sup>5</sup> Starting from these premises,

---

3. For a concise summary of Jung's approach, see Segal, 2019.

4. For reflections on the historical concept of Gnosticism, see King, 2003 and 2011; Poirier, 2004; Burns, 2019; Williams, 2019; Thomassen, 2020.

5. See Koutalis, Martelli & Merianos, 2018.

the larger purpose of this paper is to contribute to a satisfactory socio-historical contextualization of early Mediterranean alchemy.

The following deals principally with three texts. The first is the treatise *On the Letter Omega* in the edition of Michèle Mertens. It takes the form of a letter from Zosimus to a certain Theosebeia introducing a lost work on alchemical apparatus. Theosebeia is his usual dedicatee and was also probably his patroness at some point in time.<sup>6</sup> *On the Letter Omega* is a polemical tract on the proper alchemical method that associates a particular type of alchemy with the worship of evil divine beings. Zosimus' polemics are also an occasion to state some of his views concerning the origin and future of humanity. This is the text and context for the reference to Jesus emended by Reitzenstein.

The second principal piece of evidence is called τὸ πρῶτον βιβλίον τῆς τελευταίας ἀποχῆς, that is, *The First Book of the Final Count*, or, *of the Final Account*, or *of the Final Abstinence*.<sup>7</sup> Like the treatise *On the Letter Omega*, it is a letter introducing a lost work to an anonymous “purple-clad” (πορφυρόστολος) woman.<sup>8</sup> The first seven pages of text in the edition of Berthelot and Ruelle reads as a short history of the tinctorial arts (βαφαί, *i.e.* ancient alchemy) in Egypt up to Zosimus' days. This narrative is not simply a history of the origins of alchemy in Egypt. It also serves as evidence showing that one should refrain from the practice of sacrifices, and more particularly in the practice of alchemy. After this introduction, Zosimus introduces readers to the interpretation of alchemical texts in the last two pages of the extant treatise (he rehashes there the theme of the apparent disunity of the alchemical arts, discusses the roasting of substances and stresses that he did not hide the real name of substances under code-names). The treatise is usually translated as the *Final Count* even though the extant text does not deal with counting or receipts. Moreover, there is nothing “final” about the text. As many other texts attributed to Zosimus, it is an introductory letter to a lost treatise. In this context, translating ἀποχή by “count” seems unjustified. As I argue below, the aim of the τελευταία ἀποχή is to advocate for the avoidance of sacrifices. I suggested elsewhere that the translation of the treatise's title should be revised in light

---

6. See the arguments developed in Dufault, 2019. See also Grimes, 2018, who argues that Zosimus was a priest of an Egyptian temple cult, and Escolano-Poveda, 2020, who argues that he was probably working for a temple but not in the capacity of a priest.

7. See CAAG II, pp. 239-247 for a complete edition and 231-237 for the French translation of Berthelot. For a more accurate but incomplete edition, see Festugière, 2006, pp. 362-368 and 275-281 for a French translation.

8. CAAG II 246, 22-23: ἐνθεν ἀπάρξομαι, πορφυρόστολε γύναι.

of its content. For this reason, I propose to translate the full title as the *First Book of the Final Abstinence*.<sup>9</sup>

The last text is the *First Lesson on Excellence* in the edition of Michèle Mertens (1995). It is unique among the treatises attributed to Zosimus in that it describes an allegorical narrative and is addressed to an unknown man.<sup>10</sup> It begins with a preamble on nature and then describes two dreams followed by short interpretations and a longer interpretation that is itself expressed as an allegory. It seems clear enough that Zosimus wanted to compare alchemical and natural processes. Pushing the analysis further is complicated by the allegorical nature of Zosimus' own longer interpretation. Unsurprisingly, several diverging readings of this text have been proposed.<sup>11</sup> It is dealt with here because of the similarity of its sword-bearer motif and the figure of Jesus as seen in the treatise *On the Letter Omega*. This similarity also provides more reasons to read the treatise as an alchemical allegory on a particular understanding of Christian salvation.

I should also add a few words concerning texts that have not been brought to bear on the argument. These are the two series of *Summaries* of works of Zosimus (traditionally called the *Chapters to Theodorus* and *Chapters to Eusebeia*), the Syriac translations of Zosimus and the two versions of the *Book of Sophē*, one of which is attributed to Zosimus. The two versions of the *Book of Sophē* and the *Summaries* were edited and translated by Berthelot and Ruelle, but it is generally admitted that their edition should be revised. There are also evidence suggesting that the *Summaries to Eusebeia* were either interpolated or that they were written several centuries after Zosimus by someone who combined materials from different sources.<sup>12</sup> This

---

9. Advocating for the abstinence from sacrifices does not appear to have been a common topic of philosophical or technical discussion but there is a parallel to Zosimus' work in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE, *On the Abstinence from Ensouled Beings* (περὶ ἀποχῆς ἐμψύχων) by the philosopher Porphyry of Tyre. One reason to avoid killing and eating animals, Porphyry argues, is that only evil demonic beings passing for gods would request blood sacrifice (see *De abst.* II 36-54 with the introduction in Clark, 2000). The similarity between the anti-sacrificial argument of the τελευταία ἀποχή and one of the arguments from Porphyry's περὶ ἀποχῆς ἐμψύχων suggests that the ἀποχή in Zosimus' title should also be translated by *Abstinence*. See Dufault, 2019, pp. 127-133.

10. See MA X 5, 100, where Zosimus addresses himself to the reader using a masculine vocative (φιλτατε).

11. See Fowden, 1986, pp. 120-126; Edwards, 1992; Mertens, 1995, pp. 207-211; Fraser, 2007; Knipe, 2011; Grimes, 2018, pp. 127-153; Martelli, 2019, pp. 85-86; Dufault, 2022.

12. The edition of the *Summaries to Eusebeia* cites Stephanus, who wrote two or three centuries after Zosimus (see CAAG II 162, 19 and 173, 1). These are indeed "summaries" of treatises by Zosimus, as the titles in the manuscripts imply (... πρὸς Εὐσέβειαν ... κεφάλαια in the table of contents of M and κατ' ἐπιτομήν κεφαλαϊώδη in the three other main manuscripts; see Mertens, 1995, pp. lv-lxi).

could also be the case with the *Summaries to Theodorus*. The attribution of the *Book of Sophē* to Zosimus is debatable since only one of its versions attributes the work to Zosimus while both are attributed to Sophē (*i.e.* Cheops). It is not entirely clear how we should understand this double authorship.<sup>13</sup> We have reliable but incomplete editions and translations of the Syriac manuscript of Zosimus. The complete translation and edition of the manuscript are now more than a century old and need revision. It is also difficult to judge whether the Syriac translations did not include extraneous materials. While Matteo Martelli showed that we can accept several passages or treatises as genuine, evidence suggests that the text was interpolated in different places (see Appendix). I will consequently leave these translations aside. In any case, the Syriac translations suggest that Zosimus was Christian.<sup>14</sup>

---

13. One solution could be that some type of works, especially when they had the status of revealed knowledge, were assigned two names, one for the “author” (*i.e.* the person who originally received the knowledge) and one for the person who transmitted it (I am borrowing here from the work of Crégheur, 2019). This might be the explanation for a passage from the Syriac translation of Zosimus where Zosimus mentioned that recipes were “found” (rather than “created” or “written”; I am dependent here on the French translation in Berthelot & Duval, 1893, p. 226). This is the case of Messos, mentioned by Porphyry as the author of a revelation. His name occurs in the colophon of the *Marsanes* as the person who transmitted this text. The seer Nicotheos mentioned by Zosimus (MA I 1, 10) and Porphyry (*Vita Plot.* 16) might have been the same kind of “transmitters” (Crégheur, 2019). This could also explain why Zosimus appears in the title of the alchemical *Book of Sophē* (See CAAG II, pp. 211-213. For other hypotheses, see Mertens, 1995, pp. lxvii–lxix.

14. See Camplani, 2000, pp. 94-96. A note should be made of a passage from the Syriac translation of Zosimus that has received contradictory interpretations from Martelli, 2017 and Grimes, 2019, pp. 72-73. The passage is as follows (in Martelli’s translation): “These are the images, statues, or idols of snakes and female serpents, of the good Daimon, of the good Fortune, and also other (statues) of Aphrodite, of (the daimons?) of the earth, of Capricorn, or of Nilos – that is Gihon (+, a river flowing from the Eden) – or of fruits, ears of wheat, and of those things that lead upset people to mistakes and illusions. I condemn Neilos’ disciples, who are astonished and admire things that do not deserve admiration. Indeed, they are not expert (?); and he (Neilos) addressed them with the precept that says: ‘know thyself’ (γνώθι σεαυτόν)”. Shannon Grimes argues that Zosimus reacted to the veneration of what he believed to be mere images rather than divine statues: “Zosimos’s complaint is that certain priests admired things about these statues that were not worthy of reverence; they did not ‘know themselves’”. Zosimus, in Grimes’ interpretation, is a pagan priest who disagrees with Neilos on the proper worship of the Egyptian gods. “Knowing oneself” here would refer to the knowledge of one’s divine nature obtained after ethical purification.

## 1. ZOSIMUS' MENTION OF JESUS AS SAVIOR

The obvious place to start an analysis of Zosimus' religious orientation is with the main portion of the treatise *On the Letter Omega* emended by Reitzenstein and others after him.<sup>15</sup> Here is Mertens' edition with the translation of Howard M. Jackson. Reitzenstein's emendations have been placed inside brackets.

φησὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς ἡμῶν· ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ πάντα δυνάμενος καὶ πάντα γινόμενος, ὅτε θέλει, ὡς θέλει, φαίνει ἐκάστω.

13. [Ἀδὰμ προσῆν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς <ὄς> ἀνήνεγκεν ὅπου καὶ τὸ πρότερον διῆγον φῶτες καλούμενοι. Ἐφάνη δὲ καὶ τοῖς πάνυ ἀδυνάτοις ἀνθρώποις ἀνθρωπος γεγονῶς παθητὸς καὶ ραπιζόμενος, καὶ λάθρα τοὺς ἰδίους φῶτας συλήσας ἅτε μηδὲν παθῶν, τὸν δὲ θάνατον δείξας καταπατεῖσθαι καὶ ἐῶσθαι.] Καὶ ἕως ἄρτι καὶ τοῦ τέλους τοῦ κόσμου, ἔπεισι λάθρα καὶ φανερᾶ συλῶν τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ συμβουλευῶν αὐτοῖς λάθρα καὶ διὰ τοῦ νοῦς αὐτῶν καταλλαγὴν ἔχειν τοῦ [παρ'] αὐτῶν Ἀδὰμ [κοπτομένου καὶ φονευομένου παρ' αὐτῶν] τυφληγοροῦντος καὶ διαζηλουμένου τῷ πνευματικῷ καὶ φωτεινῷ ἀνθρώπῳ· [τὸν ἑαυτῶν Ἀδὰμ ἀποκτείνουσι].

“For our Mind says: ‘The Son of God, being capable of everything and becoming everything, when he wills, as he wills, appears to each’.

13. [Jesus Christ drew nigh to Adam and bore him up to the place where those named ‘photes’ dwelt before. And he also appeared to very powerless humans by becoming a human being who suffered and was subjected to blows]. And he secretly carried off as his spoil the ‘photes’, who belong to him, because he suffered nothing but instead showed death trampled under foot and thrust aside. And both now and until the end of the world he comes both secretly and openly to seize those who belong to him and communes with them by counseling them secretly and through their minds to get rid of their Adam. [By cutting off and slaying their Adam] whose guidance is blind and who is jealous of the Man of spirit and light [they kill their own Adam]”.<sup>16</sup>

Removing all references to Jesus in this text, Reitzenstein argued that the treatise *On the Letter Omega* contained the last “pagan formulation of the Poimandres doctrine”<sup>17</sup> and that Zosimus was a follower of the first “Gnostic system” (*i.e.* the

15. Ruska, 1926, p. 27; Tonelli, 1988, pp. 96-98; Festugière, 2006, pp. 270-271.

16. Zosimus, MA I 12, 118 – I 13, 132. For the emendations, see Reitzenstein, 1904, p. 105.

17. Reitzenstein, 1904, p. 102.



“Poimandres doctrine”).<sup>18</sup> Its founder, he argued, was a priest of Ptah from Memphis living around the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE, who combined a Hellenized Egyptian cosmogony with a doctrine of Near Eastern origin concerning the liberation of humanity from the influence of the stars.<sup>19</sup> This was the so-called “Anthropos doctrine”, which Wilhelm Bousset and Reitzenstein believed to be of Iranian origin and the source of the “redeemed redeemer” figure of early Christianity (*i.e.* Jesus). Their theory had a lasting influence and was abandoned by most scholars in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> cent.<sup>20</sup> Reitzenstein saw the purest manifestation of this doctrine in Manichaeism, in which the creation of the world and of humans is the result of the “fall” of Anthropos (“Human”) into matter. Arguing that the Anthropos doctrine as found in the *Poimandres* was developed independently from its Christian version, Reitzenstein had to find early, non-Christian parallels. The emendation of Zosimus’ treatise *On the Letter Omega* served this purpose.<sup>21</sup>

To justify his emendations, Reitzenstein argued that a book summary from Photius’ *Bibliotheca* showed that Zosimus was already “interpreted in a Christian sense”

---

18. Reitzenstein, 1904, pp. 8 and 114.

19. Reitzenstein, 1904, pp. 114, 248-250.

20. Reitzenstein, 1904, p. 109. See Schenke, 1962, pp. 16-31; Gordon, 1999; King, 2003, pp. 137-147.

21. Two other “Hermetic” sources were adduced to support the argument (Reitzenstein, 1904, pp. 102-106). One is an heresiological report on the so-called Naassenes (*Ref. V 7, 3 – V 8, 10*). The other concerns the “steles” of Βίτος and the translations of Hermetic texts made by Βίτυς, mentioned by Iamblichus (it is very likely that Βίτος is the Hellenized form of Βίτυς; so Tonelli, 1988, p. 81). The passage from Zosimus’ treatise *On the Letter Omega* (MA I 8, 75-78) quoted by Reitzenstein states that Bitos, Plato and Hermes indicate “that, in the first hieratic language, ‘Thoth’ signifies the first human” (καὶ βλέψαι τὸν πίνακα ὃν καὶ Βίτος γράψας, καὶ ὁ τρίσεμγας Πλάτων καὶ ὁ μυριόσεμγας Ἑρμῆς, ὅτι Θῶυθος ἐρμηνεύεται τῇ ἱερατικῇ πρώτῃ φωνῇ ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος). This does not demonstrate Reitzenstein’s hypothesis that Zosimus found the full myth of the Anthropos in the text of Bitos. Reitzenstein also interpreted a quote from Βίτυς found in Iamblichus’ *Response to Porphyry* (*De Myst.*) 8, 4-5 and 10, 7 as a testimony of the same Anthropos doctrine. Yet, passages of the *Response to Porphyry* attributed to Βίτυς do not mention the fall of an Anthropos god, which is characteristic of Reitzenstein’s theory. Iamblichus simply mentions that the “prophet Bitus” showed a “way” (ὁδός) leading to the unification with the divine (cf. 8, 5 and 10, 7) and describes this way as an Egyptian technique: “[the Egyptians] enjoin to use hieratic theurgy to elevate oneself to the highest and most universal [of beings], who are above destiny, up to the Demiurge god, without considering matter nor paying head to anything beside the observation of the [propitious] moment” (8, 4: διὰ τῆς ἱερατικῆς θεουργίας ἀναβαίνειν ἐπὶ τὰ ὑψηλότερα καὶ καθολικότερα καὶ τῆς εἰμαρμένης ὑπερκειμένα παραγγέλλουσι πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ δημιουργόν, μῆτε ὕλην προσποιουμένους μῆτε ἄλλο τι προσπαραλαμβάνοντας προσποιουμένους μῆτε ἄλλο τι προσπαραλαμβάνοντας ἢ μόνον καιροῦ παρατήρησιν). The expression καιροῦ παρατήρησιν here refers to the observation of the moment indicated by a certain astral configuration (see Saffrey & Segonds, 2013, p. 198, n. 1).

in the 9<sup>th</sup> cent. CE.<sup>22</sup> A closer look at Photius' text shows that Reitzenstein's argument is difficult to follow. The lost text summarized by Photius defended Christian theology by harmonizing it with the oracular saying of different cultures. The author of the book in question, Photius writes, "not only gathered and composed testimonies from the aforementioned people, but also went as far as making the same conclusions by drawing on the alchemical treatises of Zosimus, a Theban from Panopolis".<sup>23</sup> While the apologetic work summarized by Photius made use of non-Christian oracular traditions, it does not follow that Photius believed that Zosimus belonged to them. The syntax rather makes a special case of Zosimus by separating him from the oracular traditions of non-Christian peoples. Photius also appears to have considered Zosimus as a surprising choice. As can be surmised by the passage emended by Reitzenstein, Zosimus' views on the role and nature of Jesus must have made him somewhat suspect to a bishop from a prominent family in 9<sup>th</sup>-century Constantinople. The simple fact that Zosimus was an author of alchemical works could have also worked to the same effect.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the extant text of Zosimus' treatise *On the Letter Omega* is well suited for the kind of book Photius summarized. Assuming that there are no Christian interpolations, Zosimus did follow the same apologetic technique. Indeed, several passages from the text of Zosimus' *On the Letter Omega* cite diverse non-Christian authorities in support of a theology that is coherent with Christian ideas.<sup>25</sup> He associated the body with Adam, Thoth and Epimetheus (MA I 9-12); Hesiod and "the Hebrews" are said to have spoken about the same person, Eva/Pandora, who was sent by "Zeus" to bind the outer human (MA I 12); Hermes and the Hebrews would have spoken of two pairs of Anthropos-like beings and their guides: the "Anthropos of light" and the "son of God" on one side and the "Adam made of earth" and the "counterfeit *daimōn*" on the other (MA I 15). In sum, the author of the book Photius summarized could have simply cited Zosimus for his arguments. It is also clear that Photius' summary does not claim that the author in question cited interpolated versions of Zosimus' work.

Reitzenstein and André-Jean Festugière's suggestion that the treatise *On the Letter Omega* presented a non-Christian, mostly Hermetic, form of Gnosticism cast

---

22. Reitzenstein, 1904, pp. 8 and 105, n. 4: "Wieder paßt die Erwähnung Christi nicht in den Zusammenhang. Daß Werke des Zosimos christlich gedeutet wurden sagt Photios *Bibl. cod. 170*".

23. Photius, *Bibl.* 170 (117a, 26-30): Οὐ μόνον δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰρημένων ἀγείρει καὶ συντίθησι τὰς μαρτυρίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν χεμεντικῶν Ζωσίμου λόγων (Θηβαῖος δ' ἦν οὗτος Πανοπολίτης) οὐκ ἐφείσατο τὰ αὐτὰ κατασκευάζειν.

24. See Koutalis, Martelli & Merianos, 2018, pp. 31-38.

25. For a list of quotations found in Zosimus' work, see Letrouit, 1995, pp. 38-45.

a long shadow on the study of Zosimus.<sup>26</sup> Reitzenstein's emendations also appear to have gained acceptance from the fact that they both supported and were supported by the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* theory on the origins of the Christianity. As interest for this theory waned, so did the implicit justification for Reitzenstein's emendations. Recent editors of the treatise *On the Letter Omega* reject the emendations but a systematic confrontation with the original text has not yet fully materialized.<sup>27</sup>

## 2. THE HERMETICA

Zosimus' ethnic self-identification can first help circumscribe his religious orientation. The "first human", Zosimus claimed, *i.e.* the first embodied human, "is called 'Thouth' (Θώθ) by us and Adam by them, who call him using the language of the angels".<sup>28</sup> The spellings of the name of Thoth (θώθ and, in its Hellenized form, θώυθος) in the chief manuscript attesting this passage (M) corresponds to the form used by Egyptians according to Philo of Byblos.<sup>29</sup> Zosimus also states that the name of "Adam" is used by the Chaldeans, the Parthians, the Medes and the Hebrews and later mentions that "the Greeks call the terrestrial Adam 'Epimetheus'". This further suggests that he did not consider himself Greek.<sup>30</sup> If Zosimus did not self-identify as Egyptian, he at least appears to us as one.

26. Ruska, 1926, p. 27; Schenke, 1962, pp. 52-56; Lindsay, 1970, p. 333; Stroumsa, 1984, p. 142; Tonelli, 1988, p. 97, n. 37; Festugière, 2006, p. 270, n. 10.

27. See the editions of Jackson, 1978; Letrouit, 1995, p. 43; Mertens, 1995, p. 6, n. 80. Letrouit, 2002, p. 88 keeps the passage mentioning Jesus in his edition of *On the Letter Omega*. On analyses of religious symbolism in Zosimus' work, see Fowden, 1986, pp. 120-126, 204; Edwards, 1992; Camplani, 2000; de Jong, 2005, p. 1185; Fraser, 2007 and 2018, p. 739; Knipe, 2011. Bull (2018b, pp. 402-403; 2020, p. 142) tends to see Zosimus as a Christian, and so do Jourdan & Edwards, 2021, pp. 274-276. Roelof van den Broek, 2013, pp. 223-224 argues that Zosimus was not a "Christian gnostic" and that it is uncertain if he saw himself as a Christian. Shannon Grimes, 2018, p. 33 argues that Zosimus was an Egyptian artisan-priest. See also the paper by Marina Escolano-Poveda in this issue of ARYS.

28. MA I 9, 87-89: οὕτως οὖν καλεῖται ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος [ὁ] παρ' ἡμῖν Θώθ καὶ παρ' ἐκείνους Ἀδάμ, τῇ τῶν ἀγγέλων φωνῇ αὐτὸν καλέσαντες.

29. Cf. MA I 8, 76; 9, 88, 98 with the fragment of the *Phoenician History* in Eusebius, *Praep. evan.* I 9, 24: Τάαυτος ... ὃν Αἰγύπτιοι μὲν ἐκάλεσαν Θώθ, Ἀλεξανδρεῖς δὲ Θώθ, Ἑρμῆν δὲ Ἑλληνας μετέφρασαν. It should be noted that the text of the treatise *On the Letter Omega* does not appear in other textual traditions than that of M (see Mertens, 1995, pp. 51-53).

30. One could object that the *Summaries to Eusebeia* mention that "the Egyptians observed that all base metals are created from lead only" and that this could imply that Zosimus distinguished himself from the Egyptians (CAAG II, p. 168, 2-5: πᾶσαι αἱ οὐσίαι κατεγνώσθησαν παρ' Αἰγυπτίους ἀπὸ μόνου

None of Zosimus' citations of Hermes/Thoth clashes with an early Christian perspective. The *Hermetica* he quoted or paraphrased never present the positive attitude toward traditional cults that can be found in the *Perfect Discourse* (= *Asclepius*).<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, Zosimus quotes or paraphrases the otherwise unknown treatise *On the Inner Life*<sup>32</sup> to develop a soteriological doctrine about a "son of God" that bears similarities with Christian doctrines. I quote here the translation of Howard M. Jackson.

Ὁ μέντοι Ἑρμῆς ἐν τῷ περὶ ἐναυλίας διαβάλλει καὶ τὴν μαγεῖαν λέγων ὅτι οὐ δεῖ τὸν πνευματικὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν ἐπιγνόντα ἑαυτὸν οὔτε διὰ μαγείας κατορθοῦν τι, ἐὰν καὶ καλὸν νομίζεται, μηδὲ βιάζεσθαι τὴν ἀνάγκην, ἀλλ' ἔαν ὡς ἔχει φύσεως καὶ κρίσεως, πορεύεσθαι δὲ διὰ μόνου τοῦ ζητεῖν ἑαυτόν, καὶ θεὸν ἐπιγνόντα κρατεῖν τὴν ἀκατονόμαστον τριάδα καὶ ἐὰν τὴν εἰμαρμένην ὃ θέλει ποιεῖν τῷ ἑαυτῆς πηλῶ, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῷ σώματι. Καὶ οὕτως, φησί, νοήσας καὶ πολιτευσάμενος θεάσῃ τὸν θεοῦ υἱὸν πάντα γινόμενον τῶν ὁσίων ψυχῶν ἔνεκεν, ἵνα αὐτὴν ἐκπάσῃ ἐκ τοῦ χώρου τῆς εἰμαρμένης ἐπὶ τὸν ἀσώματον. Ὅρα αὐτὸν γινόμενον πάντα, θεόν, ἄγγελον, ἄνθρωπον παθητόν· πάντα γὰρ δυνάμενος πάντα ὅσα θέλει γίνεται. Καὶ πατρὶ ὑπακούει· διὰ παντὸς σώματος διήκων, φωτίζων τὸν ἐκάστης νοῦν, εἰς τὸν εὐδαίμονα χώρον ἀνώρμησεν ὅπου περ ἦν καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τὸ σωματικὸν γενέσθαι, αὐτῷ ἀκολουθοῦντα καὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ὀρεγόμενον καὶ ὀδηγούμενον εἰς ἐκεῖνο τὸ φῶς.

"Hermes, however, in his book *On the Inner Life*, also condemns *mageia*, saying that the spiritual man, one who has come to know himself, need to rectify anything through the use of *mageia*,<sup>33</sup> not even if it is considered a good thing, nor must he use force upon Necessity, but rather allow Necessity to work in accordance with her own nature and decree. He must proceed through that one search to understand himself,

---

τοῦ μολύβδου πεπονημένοι; ὡς οὐσίαι = the four base metals, see CAAG II, pp. 167, 20 – 168, 1). But, as noted above, this treatise includes later interpolations. This passage could be one of them.

31. *On the Letter Omega*: MA I 4, I 5, I 7; *The Final Abstinence*: see Festugière, 2006, p. 368 for the text and Festugière, 2006, p. 281 for the translation; George Syncellus, *Chron.* 14 and the Cambridge Syriac manuscript Mm. 6.29 (see Martelli, 2014b). See also Festugière, 2006, pp. 243-247 for references to shorter citations from the *Summaries to Eusebeia*. For translations of some of the Greek citations, see Litwa, 2018, pp. 196-201.

32. The title of the work in M is περὶ ἀναυλίας, which modern editions correct to περὶ ἐναυλίας. See Mertens, 1995, p. 3, n. 34; Litwa, 2018, p. 199, n. 11.

33. Zosimus refers here to the ritual discipline attributed to the Persian μάγοι, not to "magic" or "witchcraft", i.e. what is perceived as an alternative or problematic form of religious activity found in many if not all societies. I have modified Jackson's translation by transliterating μαγεῖα to avoid interpreting the term "magic" in this second sense. Considering that Zosimus always cites Hermes approvingly, I also follow Michèle Mertens in reading the καὶ in διαβάλλει καὶ τὴν μαγεῖαν by "also" rather than "even" (as Howard M. Jackson does).

and, when he has come to know God, he must hold fast to the ineffable Triad and leave Fate to work what she will upon the clay that belongs to her, that is, the body. And with this way of thinking and regulating one's life, he says, you will see the Son of God become everything for the sake of holy souls, to draw her up out of the realm of Fate into the realm of the incorporeal. See him becoming everything he so wills and obeys the Father by pervading every body. He enlightens the mind of each soul and spurs it on up to the realm of bliss, where it was even before it was born into corporeality, following after him, and filled with yearning by him, and guided by him into that light".<sup>34</sup>

That a work attributed to Hermes would mention that the "spiritual man" must "hold fast to the ineffable Triad" or that the "son of God ... obeys the Father by pervading every body" led some to argue that the Hermetic text quoted by Zosimus contains Christian interpolations. Not all evidence leads us to this conclusion.<sup>35</sup> If many of the authors and readers of these texts believed like Zosimus that the *Hermetica* were the revelations of the first human, we should assume that they could be produced to suit different theological perspectives.

Other quotations of Hermes do not suggest specific religious orientations.<sup>36</sup> The most characteristically Hermetic reference is in the *Final Abstinence* where Zosimus exhorts Theosebeia to "run down to Poimenandres, be immersed in the mixing-bowl and run up to [her] kind".<sup>37</sup> The reference here is to the protagonist and receiver of the revelation of the *Poimandres* (CH I), and to Hermetic wisdom by extension. Since baptism can appear in the *Hermetica* as a metaphor for embodiment, Zosimus'

---

34. MA I 7, 57-74.

35. It is well attested that the notion of a divine triad is not particular to Christianity. The notion of a "son of God" is also found in the *Hermetica* in three instances. They refer either to the "logos of the luminous intellect" (CH I 6) or to the cosmos (CH IX 8, 10, 14). In the three cases, the "son of God" appears to be indirectly connected to salvation but it does not appear as an active savior. See Bull, 2018b, pp. 402-403; Mertens, 1995, p. 4, n. 37. Festugière, 2006, p. 267 and Jackson, 1978 understand the "son of God" referred to in this section (MA I 7) as the Hermetic *logos*. Festugière, however, believed that the mention of the son's obedience to the father is a Christian gloss. See MA I 7, 64-66: θεάση τὸν θεοῦ υἱὸν πάντα γινόμενον τῶν ὁσίων ψυχῶν ἔνεκεν, ἵνα αὐτὴν ἐκσπάσῃ ἐκ τοῦ χώρου τῆς εἰμαρμένης ἐπὶ τὸν ἀσώματον. It is not clear if the following lines (66-74) continue the citation/paraphrase of the *περὶ ἐναυλίας* or if these are Zosimus' commentary.

36. MA I 4-5; George Syncellus, *Chron.* 14 and the Cambridge Syriac manuscript Mm. VI 29 (see Martelli, 2014b) and Festugière, 2006, pp. 243-247.

37. Festugière, 2006, p. 368, 3-4: καταδραμοῦσα ἐπὶ τὸν Ποιμένανδρα καὶ βαπτισθεῖσα τῷ κρατῆρι ἀνάδραμε ἐπὶ τὸ γένος τὸ σόν.

mixing-bowl could represent the body or the physical world.<sup>38</sup> Running down to Poinmenandres, then, would be what the soul goes through when it undergoes embodiment. By going up to its kind – *i.e.* by reverting to its original place – it would leave matter and returns to its immaterial source. As can be seen here, Zosimus and some Hermetic treatises appear to share the notion that salvation is not obtained by avoiding the material world but by experiencing it and, more precisely, by acquiring the knowledge necessary to achieve an ethical disposition in the body.<sup>39</sup> A broad understanding of early Christian theology can accommodate such an interpretation of the *Hermetica*. We can conclude that Zosimus’ affinity with the *Hermetica* does not preclude the possibility that he was Christian.

### 3. ZOSIMUS AND EGYPTIAN TEMPLE CULTS

As shown by Marina Escolano-Poveda’s contribution to this issue, Zosimus certainly alluded to Egyptian notions regarding Osiris and his cult in his *First Lesson on Excellence*. To name the clearest examples, his mention of fifteen “staircases” of light and darkness in the first vision of the *First Lesson on Excellence* recalls lunar staircases depicted in Egyptian temples.<sup>40</sup> His description of the dismemberment and renewal of Ion and a snake in the same treatise suggests Egyptian mythology concerning the death and regeneration of Osiris.

Yet, that Zosimus implicitly referred to Egyptian theology and religious symbolism does not necessarily imply that he cared for the traditional cults of Egypt. In fact, the short history of alchemy found in the *Final Abstinence* shows that he was opposed to them. The art of tinctures (*i.e.* alchemy), Zosimus explains, had been the monopoly of the pharaohs and priests until it was seized by “the overseers” (οἱ ἔφοροι), also called “the overseers of the places” (οἱ κατὰ τόπον ἔφοροι).<sup>41</sup> These

38. CH XII 2: σώματος γὰρ συνθέτου ὥσπερ χυμοὶ ζέουσιν ἢ τε λύπη καὶ ἡ ἡδονή, εἰς ἃς ἐμβᾶσα ἡ ψυχὴ βαπτίζεται. See also SH XXV 8 in Festugière & Nock, 1945b.

39. See Dufault, 2022.

40. MA X 2: τὰς δεκαπέντε σκοτοφεγγεῖς κλίμακας ... τὰς φωτολαμπεῖς κλίμακας. The similarity of the image with the lunar staircases, which are made of fifteen *steps*, suggests that Zosimus would have used κλίμακες here and later (MA XI 1, 2) to mean steps rather than “staircases” (Mertens, 1995, p. 35, n. 7; Escolano-Poveda, 2020, p. 142). However, this meaning is not recorded in the dictionaries I consulted. If Zosimus wanted to make an obvious reference to steps, he could have used the term βᾶσις, which he used in the same treatise (MA X 5, 112). He might have used κλίμαξ to refer to a “way of ascent to heaven” (see Lampe, 1961, *s.v.* “κλίμαξ”) as well as to a lunar staircase.

41. Throughout the narrative, the “overseers” are also designated by two koppas (κοπ), which can be used as a symbol for copper and Aphrodite. These appear in different forms: “κοπ of the flesh”, the

beings replaced the ancient “natural” tinctures with “unnatural” ones and provided success in alchemy only to those who would offer them sacrifice. As Festugière noted, a passage of the *Final Abstinence* makes clear that Zosimus meant that the traditional cult of the temples supported the practice of alchemy.<sup>42</sup> The cult of the overseers continued until a “complete astronomical revolution of the regions” occurred.<sup>43</sup> As a result, Egypt was torn by a war and emptied of its population. This led in turn to the desertion of the temples and the neglect of their cults. Despite the destruction of temple cults, the overseers remained in Egypt and started to visit people in their dreams, promising them success with tinctures in exchange for sacrifices. They should be avoided, Zosimus warns Theosebeia, since their flattery hides a darker motive. These demonic beings do not simply crave sacrifices but also hunger for human souls.<sup>44</sup> Zosimus positioned himself so radically against the ancient gods of Egypt that he did not even name them as such. He might even have refrained from calling them δαίμονες. In most places where one would expect δαίμονες or δαιμόνια, the manuscript shows double koppas. This particularity of the manuscript tradition might go back to Zosimus since he also appears to have refrained from naming the divine beings responsible for the Fall of the original human in his treatise *On the Letter Omega* (see below).

It is striking that Zosimus, who wrote either in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> or in the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE, implies that Egyptian cults were no longer practiced. Dating the end of Egyptian temple cults to the late 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE, we should assume that Zosimus’ activity should be dated at that time rather than in the late 3<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>45</sup> It seems likely, as Christian H. Bull argued, that Zosimus’ history of alchemy was an attempt to subvert the prophecy attributed to Hermes Trismegistus in the *Perfect Discourse*. The prophecy glorifies traditional cults and tells that their abandonment will precipitate Egypt into war and moral perdition until God destroys and re-establishes the universe.<sup>46</sup> As Bull noted,

---

“seeming ρρ”, the “terrestrial ρρ” or the “ρρ of the places”. The last construction confirms that the koppas stand for the “overseers”.

42. Zosimus, *On the Final Abstinence* (Festugière, 2006, p. 366, 25-26): εἴ τε δημόται ἡμέλων τῶν θυσίων, ἐκόλυον καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀφύσικον φιλοτιμίαν: “and if the peasants neglected the sacrifices, they [*i.e.* the overseers] prevented success even in the unnatural (tinctures)”.

43. Festugière, 2006, p. 366, 29-30: ἐγένετο ἄρα ἀποκατάστασις τῶν κλιμάτων. See Bull, 2018a, p. 220.

44. Festugière, 2006, p. 367, 7-8: κολακεύουσίν σε τὰ κατὰ τόπον <δαιμόνια>, πεινῶντα οὐ μόνον θυσίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν σὴν ψυχὴν.

45. Others would argue that a late third-century date is also possible. See the summary of the debate and a defense of the late-fourth century dating in Medini, 2015.

46. *Asclepius*, 23-26. See NHC VI 68, 20 – VI 74, 11 for the corresponding section in the Coptic *Perfect Discourse*.

all aspects of Hermes' prediction – that foreigners would invade Egypt, that Egyptians would disappear and that temples would be deserted – have already happened in Zosimus' account. The fact that the overseers remained in Egypt also find its pendant in the “evil angels” of the *Perfect Discourse*, who are said to stay after the gods will have departed.<sup>47</sup> The *Perfect Discourse* also explains that these evil divine beings would mingle with humans and teach them “what is contrary to nature”.<sup>48</sup> This could again be seen as a parallel to Zosimus' interpretation of the *Book of the Watchers*, which ascribe the origin of certain techniques to the teachings of angels.<sup>49</sup>

It is highly unlikely that the *Final Abstinence* was written by someone who was a priest of the traditional cults of Egypt. This is coherent with Zosimus' citations and references to the *Hermetica*, which in no way imply that he supported the cults of the Egyptian gods. On the contrary, that Zosimus was a staunch critic of these cults and of sacrifices in general rather suggests that he changed the prophecy found in the *Perfect Discourse* so as to entirely reverse its message. This would also be coherent with the description of Jesus in the treatise *On the Letter Omega* and the fact that he leveled criticism at some alchemy specialists for their use of sacrifices.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4. CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS IN *ON THE LETTER OMEGA* AND THE *FIRST LESSON ON EXCELLENCE*

Zosimus described Christian beliefs on the origin and nature of humanity partly through references to theological traditions that are not Christian. This “assimilative” form of textual exegesis is common to 2<sup>nd</sup>- and 3<sup>rd</sup>-cent. CE apologists but it can also

---

47. There is no extant Greek text of this passage. The Latin version has *angeli nocentes* (*Asclepius* 25). Jean-Pierre Mahé (1982, p. 183) reads the corresponding line in the Coptic manuscript of the *Perfect Discourse* ⲛⲁ[ⲓⲣⲉ]ⲗⲟ[ϥ ⲁⲉ Ⲡ]ⲡⲞⲨⲞⲢⲠⲟⲥ (NCH VI 8, 73, 5-6).

48. Translating NHC VI 73: εϣⲓ ⲥⲃⲱ ⲛⲁϥ εἰⲃⲓⲡⲁ[ⲣ]ⲁϥϣⲓⲥ. The *Asclepius* 25 translates the corresponding passage by *compellent ... in omnia quae sunt animarum naturae contraria*.

49. There is a chronological problem, however, since alchemy is said by Zosimus (in the Syriac manuscript and the quotation by Syncellus) to have been originally transmitted by demonic beings in the past, not that demonic beings took hold of it. This foundational act of alchemy should logically take place before the history of alchemy presented in the *Final Abstinence*. See Bull, 2018a, p. 222. On Zosimus' description of this myth, see Syncellus, *Chron.* 14 and the corresponding passage of the Cambridge manuscript Mm. 6, 29 edited and translated in Martelli, 2014b.

50. In his polemics, Zosimus also attacked a certain Taphnoutiē, described as a παρθένος and Neilos, described as Theosebeia's ἱερέυς (ὁ σὸς ἱερέυς). They could have been part of the same group of specialists against whom he directed the treatise *On the Letter Omega* (Martelli, 2017, pp. 210-217; Bull, 2018a, pp. 218-225). Considering the polysemy of the term ἱερέυς, it is not entirely clear what Zosimus meant by referring to Neilos as Theosebeia's “priest”. See Dufault, 2019, pp. 126-137.



be found in non-Christian works as well. George Boys-Stones traced its origin among Christians to their confrontation with Platonism. Many philosophers starting with Aristotle assumed that humanity used to be in possession of a better form of wisdom. What defines Platonists in Boys-Stones formulation is precisely the belief that Plato's writings contain all that is necessary to grasp the "primitive wisdom" enjoyed in humanity's infancy. Apologists similarly argued for the superior authority of Hebrew scriptures by asserting their high antiquity. Doing so, they also reversed the critiques of their opponents: in reaching theological truth, Greek poets and philosophers had ultimately depended upon Moses and the Hebrew prophets.<sup>51</sup> Rather than ignoring or refuting non-Christian theological systems, some apologists chose to assimilate them to their own beliefs.<sup>52</sup> Clement of Alexandria, for example, assumed that the myth of Plato's *Republic* did not picture the vision of Er but of Zoroaster. The same Zoroaster, Clement believed, had learned about a judgement in Hell from the Hebrew prophets.<sup>53</sup> A non-Christian type of assimilative interpretation can be found in the *Phoenician History* of Philo of Byblos. His euhemeristic history presents divinities from Greek and Egyptian myths as ancient Phoenician mortals. He credits the invention of writing to the Phoenician Taautos, whom, he claims, was called Thoth by the Egyptians and Hermes by the Greeks.<sup>54</sup>

The same type of assimilative interpretation explains Zosimus' use of revelations attributed to Hermes/Thoth, understood euhemeristically as the first living man. It is the narrative of the first embodiment of the "inner human", called Phōs, which shows characteristics common to the Classic Gnostic creation narrative.

#### 4.1. ANTHROPOGONY

More specifically, the myth of the fall as found in treatises such as the *Secret Revelation of John* can be found in a condensed form in a passage of Zosimus' *On the Letter Omega*:

Ὅτε ἦν Φως ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ διαπνεόμενος ὑπὸ τῆς εἰμαρμένης, ἔπεισαν αὐτὸν ὡς ἄκακον καὶ ἀνενέργητον ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν παρ' αὐτοῦ Ἄδამ, τὸν ἐκ τῆς εἰμαρμένης, τὸν

---

51. See Boys-Stones, 2001, esp. ch. 8-9.

52. This is what Mark Edwards (2018) calls the "constructive" form of apologetics.

53. See Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* V 14, 90 – V 14, 91, 1, citing Plato, *Resp.* 615e-616a.

54. See the fragment in Eusebius, *Praep. evan.* I 10, 14. For other examples, see, e.g. Justin, *Apol.* I 44, 12; Lactantius, *Inst. div.* VII 18; Augustine, *De civ. D.* X 27.

ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων στοιχείων. Ὁ δὲ διὰ τὸ ἄκακον οὐκ ἀπεστράφη· οἱ δὲ ἐκαυχῶντο ὡς δεδουλαγωγημένου αὐτοῦ.

“When Phōs was in paradise and was blown through by fate, they convinced him, as he was without malice or (material) powers,<sup>55</sup> to put on his Adam, he who comes from fate, he who comes from the four elements. He did not turn back, as he was without malice, and they boasted that he had been made a slave.”<sup>56</sup>

The name of Phōs (Φως) can be read either as “light” (φῶς) or as “man/mortal” (φώς), depending on the accentuation. Phōs, Zosimus writes, is the archetypal human and represents the “inner human”. He is identified with the soul, the intellect (νοῦς) and Prometheus. This “inner human” is opposed to the “body” (σῶμα), also called “the external human”, “Adam” or the “fleshly/earthly Adam” (σάρκικος/γήϊνος Ἀδάμ), “Thoth” and “Epimetheus.”<sup>57</sup> In this sense, Phōs is comparable to the figure of the “first” or “perfect” or “luminous human” of some Classic Gnostic theologies.<sup>58</sup>

For instance, a similar play on the words φῶς and φώς is found in the anthropogony of the *Secret Revelation of John*, often perceived as the most typical example of

---

55. Translating ἀνεέργητος by “ineffective” or “unactivated” does not automatically convey the theological concept that the term implies. In *Enn.* V 6, 6, Plotinus uses this term to describe the absence of activity of God. This use relates to that made in CH I 25-26 to describe the vices that the soul leaves behind as it ascends to heaven (see Jackson, 1978, p. 31, n. 54), *i.e.* the soul becomes ἀνεέργητος, “without activity”, as it loses its potential for evil deeds. Zosimus could have said that Phōs in Paradise was “unactivated” in the sense that it was not possible for him to fulfill any potentialities, as he was not yet incarnated.

56. MA I 11, 104-109. I follow Mertens in writing Φως unaccentuated to distinguish the name of the archetypal human from φῶς, “light”, and φῶς, “man/mortal”. I chose not to follow Reitzenstein and most editors in correcting παρ’ αὐτοῦ Ἀδάμ in M for παρ’ αὐτῶν Ἀδάμ even though Adam is qualified a few lines further as παρ’ αὐτῶν (MA I 13, 129). The alternation between the third person singular and the third person plural is also found in texts from Nag Hammadi describing the creation of the first human. The *Secret Revelation of John* describes the participation of the authorities in the creation of the body of the first human but uses a third person masculine singular form when summarizing the anthropogony. Cf. NHC II 1, 15, 1-14 with lines 10-11: ἀγαμιῶ νοῦργηποστασις κατα πινε ἴπρωρη ἴπρωμε ἴτελειος, “he created a being according to the likeness of the first and perfect human”. See also the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, NHC II 4, 87-88 and *On the Origin of the World*, NHC II 5, 114-115. Zosimus could have been following this pattern.

57. See Mertens, 1995, p. 8, n. 96.

58. *Secret Revelation of John*, BG XXXIV 19-35, 20 and NHC II 1, 8, 29 – 9, 11, *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 24, *On the Origin of the World*, NHC II 5, 103, 19 and 107, 25 – 108, 20, *Eugnostos*, NHC III 3, 81, 10-14, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, NHC II 4, 88.

the Classic (or Sethian) Gnostic theological system.<sup>59</sup> The creation of the first human is described in this text as the result of actions and responses between the higher divine world and Yaldabaoth (or Saklas), the chief “archon” (ἄρχων, *i.e.* “ruler”), and creation of Sophia, an entity part of the higher divine world. Boasting that there is no other god beside him, Yaldabaoth attracted the attention of the upmost god (the μόνας, “Monad” and μοναρχία, “supreme ruler”). The “Monad”, described as filled with light, responded by showing an image of itself in the form of a self-directed and luminous “Thought” manifesting itself in a human form as seen reflected in a watery surface. The reflection was accompanied with a voice from above that said: “the human and the human’s child exist”.<sup>60</sup> This image served as template for the first human, created by Yaldabaoth and the other lesser divine beings. The statement “the human and the human’s child exist” appears as an implicit allegorical reading of *Genesis* 1.3: “And God said: ‘Let there be light (φῶς)’. And there was light (φῶς)”, which, in Greek, could be read as “And God said: ‘Let there be a human. And there was a human’”.<sup>61</sup> That Zosimus calls the “inner human” Φῶς implies the same play on the words φῶς (light) and φῶς (man, mortal). In both cases, *On the Letter Omega* and the *Secret Revelation of John* to reinforce the semantic association between the first human and the divine light associated with God.<sup>62</sup>

The anthropogony of the *Secret Revelation of John* involves the creation of two bodies, one made of soul (ψυχή) and one made of matter. Both were created by Yaldabaoth with the help of other divine entities called “authorities” (ἐξουσίαι) and “angels” (ἄγγελοι). The creation took place in three steps. After seeing the image of the first human, the text in BG says that the angels “created a substantial soul out of the things which had first been prepared by the authorities, the harmony of the joined parts”<sup>63</sup> (as shown below, the description of this blueprint of the body as a “harmony of the joined parts” also mirrors Zosimus’ description of the body). However, this first creative act was not enough to give life to Adam. Since Sophia was searching for a way to take back the pneuma she gave to Yaldabaoth when she created him, she managed to have him blow this pneuma into Adam to bring him

---

59. On Classic Gnosticism in modern scholarship, see Turner, 2019, pp. 142-145. There are two version of this treatise, one short (represented here by BG) and one long (represented by NHC II).

60. *Secret Revelation of John*, BG 44, 9 – 48, 10 and NHC II 1, 8, 13, 5 – 14, 34.

61. See King, 2006, pp. 98-99.

62. The embodiment motif of the *Secret Revelation of John* also shares similarities with that of the Hermetic *Poimandres* (CH I 14), where the god Anthropos is incorporated into the world after looking down to nature and falling in love with his own image, imperfectly reflected in the waters down below.

63. BG 50, 8-11. Translation from King, 2006, p. 53.

to life, thus transferring the pneuma to his creation. Realizing that his new creation now had powers and intelligence superior to his, Yaldabaoth and the authorities decided to trap Adam in a second body:

“They took some fire, earth, and water. They mixed them together with each other and the four fiery winds. And they brought them together and made a great disturbance. And they enclosed him in the shadow of death in order that they might yet again form from earth, water, fire, and spirit a thing from matter, which is the ignorance of the darkness, desire, and their counterfeit spirit.<sup>64</sup> This is the tomb of the molding of the body with which the robbers clothed the human, the chain of forgetfulness. And he came to be a mortal human.”<sup>65</sup>

The authorities then put Adam in Paradise so that he would delight in its pleasure and be further entrapped into matter.<sup>66</sup> In its broad lines, this anthropogony has a family resemblance with that of Zosimus. In both cases, the archetypal human is described as an incorporeal being compared with “light”. Like the *Secret Revelation of John*, Zosimus also implicitly comments on the first chapters of *Genesis* by describing the creation of the body of the first human as a trap: Zosimus writes that Prometheus/Phōs, *i.e.* the intellect, was bound to Epimetheus/Thoth/Adam, “the external human”, by “Zeus” (MA I 12). As in the Classic Gnostic anthropogony, the incarnation of the first human occurs at the instigation of certain divine beings. In contrast with both versions of the *Secret Revelation of John*, where the names of the “authorities” are listed, Zosimus never names those who convinced Phōs to take a material form.<sup>67</sup>

A further connection between early Christianity and Zosimus’ anthropogony is supported by the fact that Zosimus mentions a certain Nicotheos as the only one knowing the real name of Phōs. This Nicotheos was probably the one known as the author of a revelation (ἀποκαλύψις) read by Christians who attended Plotinus’ lectures in Rome.<sup>68</sup>

64. πεπ̄ν̄ᾱ ν̄αν̄τικειμενον = ἀντικείμενον πνεῦμα.

65. NHC II 1, 8, 20, 35 – 21, 13. Translation from King, 2006, p. 61.

66. For the complete anthropogonic narrative, see BG XXXIV 19 – LXII 3 and NHC II 1, 8, 29 – 24, 8.

67. Compare MA I 11, 104-109 quoted above with NHC II 1, 20-21, 6 and BG LII 12 – LV 18. See Mertens, 1995, p. 6, n. 68.

68. See Porphyry, *Vita Plot.* 16. On Nicotheos, see Crégheur, 2019; Jackson, 1990.

#### 4.2 THE SWORD-BEARER MOTIF

Similarities between Zosimus' interpretation of the salvific activity of Jesus and that found in a theology attributed to "Sethians" in the *Refutation of All Heresies* suggests a closer connection between Zosimus and some early Christian theologians.<sup>69</sup> Bringing Zosimus in conversation with the "Sethian" document is also justified by the fact that they are two of four extant texts from antiquity justifying belief in the transformation of the self after death by making explicit reference to alchemical processes.<sup>70</sup> As seen in the passage emended by Reitzenstein, Zosimus writes that Jesus came to counsel his people "openly and through their mind to get rid of their Adam". This activity proceeds among humans in an odd way: "By cutting off and slaying their Adam ... they kill their Adam".<sup>71</sup> Most modern interpreters have doubted that this passage goes back to Zosimus.<sup>72</sup> Yet, Zosimus' violent imagery echoes a motif repeated in his *First Lesson on Excellence*. It can also be read as an implicit allegorical reading of a saying attributed to Jesus found in the gospels of Thomas and Matthew: "I came not to bring peace but a sword (*machaira*)".<sup>73</sup> Some early Christians did read this *logion* as a reference to salvation. The most explicit reading is found in a "Sethian" document mentioned in the *Refutation of All Heresies*:

καὶ δὴ ἀπὸ τῶν ζῶων, φησί, <τοῦτο> καταμάνθανε· τελευτήσαντος γὰρ τοῦ ζῶου ἕκαστα διακρίνεται καὶ λυθὲν οὕτω τὸ ζῶον ἀφανίζεται. τοῦτό ἐστί, φησί, τὸ εἰρημένον· «οὐκ ἦλθον εἰρήνην βαλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν», τουτέστι [τὸ] διχάσαι καὶ χωρίσαι τὰ συγκεκραμένα.

"Learn this also, he (*i.e.* the 'Sethian' author) says, from animals: for when the animal dies, each of its parts is separated and dissolved. Thus the animal decays. This, he claims, is what the scriptural verse means: 'I came not to set peace on earth but a *machaira*'. That is, Jesus comes to separate and distinguish the blended elements".<sup>74</sup>

69. These Sethians are not the same as those conjectured by modern scholarship around the Classic or "Sethian" typology. For the authorship and the dating of the *Refutation of all Heresies* (*ca.* 220 CE), see Litwa, 2016, pp. xxxii-xl.

70. See also Aeneas of Gaza, *Theophrastus*, LXII 26-29 with Dufault, 2019, pp. 102-103 and the *Gospel of Philip*, NHC II 3, 61 with Charron & Painchaud, 2001. On the similarities between the "Sethian" source, the *Paraphrase of Shem* and alchemy, see Burns, 2015.

71. For the text, see note 7 above.

72. See Tonelli, 1988, p. 99, n. 38; Mertens, 1995, p. 7, n. 88; Festugière, 2006, p. 271. The passage is kept by Jackson, 1978.

73. *Matt.* 10.34: οὐκ ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν. See also the *Gospel of Thomas*, 16.

74. *Ref.* V 21, 4 (text and translation from Litwa, 2016).

For the author of the document, there are three elements, light, pneuma and darkness. Jesus thus appears primarily as the separator of the blended elements and implicitly as the savior (that is, as the one who saves pneuma from matter). That Zosimus intended something similar is first suggested by the use of cutting imagery. It can also be read further in the use of the term *machaira* (a sacrificial knife or a small bladed weapon) and its association in Hebrew with the power of words. Some early Christian texts associated the words of Jesus/God to a sword, probably as a reference to passages from Hebrew scripture where the “sharpness” of words is compared to that of swords.<sup>75</sup> *Ephesians* interprets the expression “*machaira* of the pneuma” derived from a version of *Wisdom* (5.17-20) as referring to the word of God.<sup>76</sup> According to Irenaeus, Valentinians understood the sword and the cross as symbols of the “Limiter” (Ὀρος), that which “consumes all material things, as fire consume hay, but that purifies those who are saved as the winnow purifies wheat”.<sup>77</sup> Zosimus’ soteriology implies a similar interpretation of the Matthean *logion*. Jesus, he writes, comes to humans to “cut off” their body through the “illumination of the intellect” (MA I 7, 70-71).

This reading can find support in the role played by some knife- or sword-bearing figures in the *First Lesson on Excellence*. In the first dream, Zosimus explains how a priest called Ion described a process in which he claimed to have “learned to become pneuma”.

Ἦλθε γάρ τις περὶ τὸν ὄρθρον δρομαίως καὶ ἐχειρώσατό με μαχαίρα διελών με, διασπάσας κατὰ σύστασιν ἀρμονίας καὶ ἀποδερματώσας πᾶσαν τὴν κεφαλὴν μου τῷ ξίφει τῷ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ κρατουμένῳ. Τὰ ὁστέα ταῖς σαρχὶν συνέπλεξεν, καὶ τῷ πυρὶ τῷ διὰ χειρὸς κατέκαιεν ἕως ἂν ἔμαθον μετασωματούμενος πνεῦμα γενέσθαι.

“At sunrise, someone came running and mastered me, dividing me with a *machaira*, pulling me apart according to the structure of the assemblage and skinning my head with the sword he possessed. He intertwined the bones with the flesh and burned them with the fire from his hand until I learned to become pneuma by changing my body. This is the intolerable violence I endure.”<sup>78</sup>

75. See Sim, 2000, p. 94.

76. *Eph.* 6.17: καὶ τὴν περικεφαλαίαν τοῦ σωτηρίου δέξασθε, καὶ τὴν μάχαιραν τοῦ πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστὶν ῥῆμα θεοῦ. See also *Rev.* 1.16.

77. Irenaeus, *Haer.* I 3, 5: *et per hoc operationem Hori significasse: ventilabrum enim illud Crucem interpretantur esse, quae scilicet consumit materialia omnia, quaeamodum paleas ignis, emundat autem eos qui salvantur, sicut ventilabrum triticum.*

78. MA X 2, 29-36.

This first vision ends with the disappearance of Ion, the protagonist. As he finished to describe his suffering, blood raised to his eyes, he regurgitated “all his flesh” and ate himself back before “falling onto himself” (συμπιπτοντα). The dissection and reconstruction of Ion described in the passage above suggests the dismemberment and reassembling of the body of Osiris.<sup>79</sup> This suggests that some form of regeneration is alluded to here. Why the added precision that the body needs to be separated κατὰ σύστασιν ἄρμονίας? Perhaps to recall the way the soul-body is believed to have been originally assembled, as can be read in the anthropogonies of all versions of the *Secret Revelation of John*.<sup>80</sup> However, Ion’s gruesome disappearing act is more difficult to interpret. The first ordeal at the hands of the unnamed *machaira*-wielder was a lesson since Ion explicitly claims that it taught him to become pneuma. His self-disappearance must then be the proof that he had effectively learned how to transform himself into immaterial pneuma. And indeed, Zosimus’ second dream explicitly mentions the transformation of human bodies into pneuma.<sup>81</sup>

In the second dream, Zosimus comes across a large “bowl-altar” with a “a small, grey-haired human wielding a razor” (πεπολιωμένον ξυρουργὸν ἀνθρωπάριον) and a multitude of people inside. Interrogated by the dreamer as to what the scene might be, the small human responds that it is the “entrance, the exit and the transformation (μεταβολή)”. This transformation is further defined as “the place of the exercise called ‘embalming’” where those who wish to reach excellence “leave the body and become spirits”.<sup>82</sup> The connection between Egyptian funerary traditions and Zosimus’ dream is clear. This process is also described as reaching excellence (ἀρετή), which suggests that transforming humans into spirits (or, more generally, matter into pneuma) is the entire purpose of the *Lessons on Excellence* (ἀρετή). It is not entirely clear what the “razor-wielding” spirit might refer to as he is not directly involved in the transformation. Shannon Grimes suggests a possible allusion to knife-wielding

79. See Mertens, 1995, p. 36, n. 16 and the paper by Marina Escolano-Poveda in this issue.

80. The version in BG glosses the soul-body as “the harmony of the joined parts” (BG L 10-11: μπρωρβ ν̄μ̄μελος ν̄αρμος). In NHC II, the angels create “the harmony of the parts and the harmony of the limbs and the proper combination of each of the parts” (NHC II 1, 8, 15, 27-29: π̄ π̄χωνη̄ ν̄μ̄μελος μ̄ν̄ π̄χωνη̄ ν̄ν̄ψαγ̄ μ̄ν̄ τ̄γ̄νη̄ε̄σις μ̄π̄τ̄σανο μ̄πογα πογα ν̄μ̄μελος; trans. King, 2006, p. 53).

81. MA X 3, 54-57.

82. MA X 3, 54-57: τόπος ἀσκέσεως τῆς λεγομένης ταριχείας· οἱ γὰρ θέλοντες ἀνθρωποι ἀρετῆς τυχεῖν ὧδε εἰσέρχονται καὶ γίνονται πνεύματα φυγόντες τὸ σῶμα. I leave aside the following ten lines (MA X 3, 59-69) as their purpose in the narrative is unclear to me. Shannon Grimes (2018, p. 138) suggests a connection between the grapes mentioned by Zosimus and those mentioned in a description of the ceremony of the Opening of the Mouth.

demons seen in Egyptian depictions of the underworld and a reference to embalmers or barbers.<sup>83</sup> It is, in Zosimus own words, “a spirit and a guardian of spirits.”<sup>84</sup>

The third appearance of a character with a cutting tool occurs in Zosimus’ final analysis of the dreams (MA X 5). This time, this character is the reader, whom Zosimus enjoins to build a shrine and to search for its entrance, sword (ξίφος) in hand. There, he says, a snake must be mastered, sacrificed and cut into parts. Its flesh and bones must be put back together and shaped as a step leading inside the shrine.<sup>85</sup> The image and vocabulary is strikingly similar to the dissection and reassembling of Ion. In this case, the act of dismembering and reassembling leads not to the disappearance of the victim. The reassembled snake is rather used as a step leading into the shrine. There Zosimus says that one will find “the thing sought for”. Zosimus addresses readers directly saying that the “human being of copper” seen inside the shrine will transform itself into silver and finally into gold. The link with Ion is clear since another character from the dream told Zosimus earlier that Ion is the human being of copper.<sup>86</sup>

It is not clear whether the three scenes rehash the same idea in different ways or if they point to different processes. However, it seems clear enough that dismembering and reassembling is a motif Zosimus used to indicate a process leading to “excellence” (ἀρετή), either mineral, human or both. Like Jesus in the treatise *On the Letter Omega*, the first *machaira*-wielder of the *Lesson* shows Ion how to “cut” the body away. Read through the symbolism of the treatise *On the Letter Omega*, Ion’s teacher would stand for Jesus/God, and his carving knife for “our Intellect” (which, Zosimus claims, enjoins us to perceive the son of God in all things).<sup>87</sup> In the second vision, the dismembering and reassembling is not mentioned, although the “pneuma” guarding individuals transforming themselves into pneuma is described as holding a small blade. Zosimus’ final interpretation, which is itself allegorical, involves a process of human self-perfection (the transformation of a copper-human into a gold-human) enacted thanks to the dissection and restructuration of the bones and flesh of a snake.

83. Grimes, 2018, pp. 134-140.

84. MA I 10, 3, 57-59: πνεῦμα καὶ φύλαξ πνευμάτων.

85. A Christian parallel to this image can be found in the ascent narrative of the ca. 3<sup>rd</sup>-cent. CE *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (4, 7), where Perpetua tamed a dragon guarding the *scala*/κλίμαξ leading to heaven and used its head to climb “as if it were the first step” (*et quasi primum gradum*/ὡς εἰς τὸν πρῶτον βαθμόν; text from Heffernan, 2012).

86. MA X 3, 69-73.

87. MA I 12, 118-119: φησὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς ἡμῶν· ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ πάντα δυνάμενος καὶ πάντα γινόμενος, ὅτε θέλει, ὡς θέλει, φαίνει ἐκάστω. The notion that the “son of God” is the cosmos is also found in the *Hermetica* (CH IX 8, 10, 14).



Since a character in the dream mentions that Ion and the copper-human are the same, we are led to the conclusion that the snake stands for the body, or perhaps, for matter more generally.<sup>88</sup> Read as tools used to bring about the transformation of the body into pneuma, the first and last use of the sword/knife in Zosimus' dreams is similar to the reading of the *logion* of Jesus found in the "Sethian" document of the *Refutation of All Heresies*. Brought back to bear on the interpretation of the image of Jesus teaching how to "cut off" the body, Zosimus' dreams suggest an interpretation of the Matthean *logion* similar to that found in the "Sethian" document of the *Refutation of All Heresies*. Conversely, the salvific action of Jesus can help interpret the role played by blade-wielding characters in Zosimus' dreams. References to Osirian mythology and cult can be read as attempts to assimilate those elements of Egyptian religion that coincided with Christian ideas. Following the explicit goals of "assimilative theology" and the belief in a "primitive wisdom", Zosimus' visionary narrative would have hinted at the notion that Osirian cult and mythology included part of the original truth, albeit in a perverted form.

### 4.3 CHRISTOLOGY

Jesus, according to Zosimus, "suffered nothing but instead showed death trampled under foot and thrust aside" (see MA I 13 above). Similar "docetic" views are described by heresiological reports and can be found in early Christian treatises as well.<sup>89</sup> Zosimus' Christology is also characterized by the assumption that Jesus can take any shape. In his interpretation or paraphrase of the treatise *On the Inner Life*, Zosimus writes: "See [the son of God] become everything: god, angel, a person subject to suffering. Being all-powerful, he becomes what he wants. And yet he obeys the

---

88. This, at least, is what can be assumed from two diagrams found in M (f. 188<sup>v</sup>; for a reproduction, see Mertens, 1995, p. 241). One of these is a circle shaped in the form of a serpent that implicitly equates the snake with the universe. It is attributed to Zosimus by Michèle Mertens (see MA VI). Olympiodorus also stated that Egyptian sacred scribes used the ouroboros to represent the cosmos (CAAG II 80, 9-11).

89. Irenaeus, *Haer.* I 6, 1 and I 24, 2; Epiphanius, *Pan.* XXVI 10, 5 and XL 8, 2. See also the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, NHC VII 2, 55, 9 – 56, 20 and the *Revelation of Peter*, NHC VII 3, 81, 3 – 83, 8.

father”.<sup>90</sup> This notion appears in the *Gospel of Philip* (which also uses an alchemical metaphor to describe salvation) and in Valentinian theology.<sup>91</sup>

The “son of God”, Zosimus also writes, strives to bring “each intellect” back “where it was before corporeality came to be”.<sup>92</sup> It is the Intellect that provides counsel about everything “to those who have intelligent ears” (MA I 16: ἀκοὰς νοεράς). This expression is also characteristic of early Christian writings.<sup>93</sup>

## CONCLUSION

There are no good reasons why we should accept the emendations proposed by Reitzenstein and no evidence showing that Zosimus’ use of Hermetic treatises entailed beliefs and practices that would have excluded those of Christians in general. The fact that Zosimus opposed sacrifices to the traditional gods of Egypt implies that his references to Greek and Egyptian mythology cannot be read as to suggest that he participated in Greek and Egyptian cults. They rather take part in what I referred above as the “assimilative” type of theological interpretation. This was a widespread theological approach that consisted in assimilating rather than refuting or ignoring other traditions. We can also observe that Zosimus’ anthropogony shares similarities with Classic Gnostic treatises as well as with notions found in some heresiological reports – although no text from these two groups corresponds perfectly with Zosimus’ views.

---

90. MA I 7, 67-70: ὄρα αὐτὸν γινόμενον πάντα, θεόν, ἄγγελον, ἄνθρωπον παθητόν· πάντα γὰρ δυνάμενος πάντα ὅσα θέλει γίνεται. Καὶ πατρὶ ὑπακούει (on translating καὶ as “yet”, see LSJ, s.v. “καί”, A.II.3). Zosimus attributes the same notion to “his/our Intellect” in MA I 12, 118-120, just before the section describing how Jesus provides salvation: Φησὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς ἡμῶν· ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ πάντα δυνάμενος καὶ πάντα γινόμενος, ὅτε θέλει, ὡς θέλει, φαίνει ἑκάστῳ: “For our Intellect says: ‘the son of God is all-powerful and, becoming everything, he manifests himself to each and everybody when and how he wishes to’”.

91. See *Gospel of Philip*, NHC II 3, 57, 29 – 58, 10; Irenaeus, *Haer.* I 3, 4: *Quod autem Salvatorem ex omnibus existentem Omne esse per hoc responsum: “Omne masculinum aperiens vulvam” ... Et a Paulo autem manifeste propter hoc dictum dicunt: “Et ipse est omnia”, “That the Savior, who proceed from all things, is everything is indicated by this: ‘every male opening the womb [i.e. who is born]’ ... And they say that it was clear to Paul that the following was said for this reason: ‘And he is everything’”; The *Refutation of All Heresies* (V 7, 25) mentions that the “Naassenes” justify the notion that the “substance of the seed” is the cause of all generated things with “I become what I want, and I am who I am” (γίνομαι ὁ θέλω καὶ εἰμι ὁ εἰμί).*

92. MA I 7, 70-72: διὰ παντὸς σώματος διήκων (i.e., ὁ υἱὸς θεοῦ), φωτίζων τὸν ἐκάστης νοῦν, εἰς τὸν εὐδαίμονα χώρον ἀνώρμησεν ὅπουπερ ἦν καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τὸ σωματικὸν γενέσθαι.

93. See Mertens, 1995, p. 8, n. 97 and Puech, 1978, pp. 183-187 who cite relevant passages from the gospels, NHC treatises and other documents, arguing that the expression is typically gnostic.

That Zosimus also claimed that Jesus teaches humans to “cut off” their bodies shows striking similarity with the “Sethian” interpretation of the Matthean *logion* presenting Jesus as *machaira*-bearer. The actions of the first blade-wielding character from the *First Lesson on Excellence* also probably refers to the teaching activity of Jesus as conceived by Zosimus. Zosimus’ final interpretation of his dreams appears to put this lesson in practice: take the sword, dissect and reassemble the snake (matter?) and find “what is sought for”, *i.e.* the transformation of matter into pneuma.

That Zosimus and the author of the “Sethian” theology found inspiration in the same source appears likely considering that they count among only four extant texts referring to alchemy or metallurgical parting to justify Christian beliefs in the transformation of the self after death. That his Christian beliefs were marginalized in his days could also explain why he chose to write the allegories of the *Lessons on Excellence* even if he said elsewhere that he did not think much about keeping alchemical writings secret.<sup>94</sup> It would indeed be strange that he described technical processes in coded words when he tried to clear older alchemical texts from their confused language. The fact that Zosimus’ Christology and soteriology would have been peculiar (if not problematic) in post-Nicene times might explain the need he felt to express his ideas through allegorical writing. That is not to suggest that Christian theology is the “key” to all of his allegories. His visionary narratives refer to several domains of experience. We should expect that, like actual dreams, they can combine several ideas in a single image.

---

94. See CAAG II 246, 14-16: ἐὰν γὰρ ἀκούσης ὄχραν ξανθὴν, μὴ ἀπλῶς ὑπολάβῃς, καὶ μεταπαρασκευάσαντα μυστικῶς πρὸς μόνον τοὺς κωλύτας ἔχειν (“if you hear ‘yellow ocre’, do not simply assume that this is an initiatory contrivance (directed only) against those who impede”); MA I 13, 1, which starts by δῆλα ὑμῖν ποιοῦμαι, “I will make (things) clear to you”, followed by an explanation of the meaning of the expression ὁ λίθος ἐγκέφαλος; Martelli’s translation of the Syriac Cambridge Manuscript Mm. 6, 29, fols. 49<sup>r</sup>-50<sup>r</sup>: “But you (my lady [*i.e.*, Theosebeia]) moved away from the various topics (of this book); you presented them in a shorter form and you taught them openly. But you claim that this book cannot be possessed unless in secret. Now, even though secrets are necessary, it is quite fair that anyone has a book of alchemy, since it is not kept secret for them” (translation from Martelli, 2014a).

## APPENDIX

(Three notes on the treatises attributed to Zosimus in the Cambridge Manuscript Mm. 6, 29 in M. Berthelot and R. Duval's *La chimie au Moyen Âge*, Vol. 2).

In his study of the sections of the Cambridge Syriac manuscript Mm. 6, 29, Matteo Martelli adduced the following arguments in favor of the attribution of parts of Mm. 6, 29 to Zosimus:

- 1) The headings name books according to letters.
- 2) The addressee is a woman.
- 3) Alchemy is described as the practice of Egyptian priests.
- 4) Part of the manuscript was also transmitted by George Syncellus in a passage of his *Chronicle* explicitly attributed to Zosimus.
- 5) Tinctures are separated in three types, as found in the commentary of Olympiodorus on Zosimus' treatise *On Action*.
- 6) The Syriac word PYNW ("superficial tincture") transliterate the Greek πίνωξ ("patina, coating"), a term found in the commentary of Olympiodorus and which could derive from Zosimus.

Against this evidence, Martelli also showed that passages attributed to Zosimus by Berthelot and Duval belonged in fact to Galen's *On the Properties of Simple Drugs*. Syriac alchemical compilations, Martelli concludes, have a composite character. I add here three elements in support of this conclusion:

- 1) The use of italics by Berthelot and Duval is meant to convey rubricated passages.<sup>95</sup> However, italics also appear to have been used to indicate glosses.<sup>96</sup> They appear in a confusing passage that could be key in determining Zosimus' cultural and religious orientation:

*"Chez les Égyptiens, il y a un livre appelé les Sept cieux, attribué à Salomon, contre les démons; mais il n'est pas exact qu'il soit de Salomon, parce que ces talismans ont été apportés autrefois à nos prêtres; [f. 88r] c'est ce que la langue employée pour les désigner fait déjà supposer; car le mot talismans de Salomon est une expression hébraïque. En tout temps, les grands prêtres de Jérusalem les tiraient, suivant le sens simple, du gouffre inférieur de Jérusalem.*

---

95. Berthelot & Duval, 1893, p. xlv.

96. See f. 39<sup>r</sup> in Berthelot & Duval, 1893, p. 228.

*Après que ces écrits eurent été répandus partout, étant encore inachevés, ils furent corrompus.*

*C'est lui qui les avait inventés, comme je l'ai dit plus haut. Mais Salomon n'écrivit qu'un seul ouvrage sur les sept talismans, tandis qu'on imagina des commentaires, à différentes époques, pour expliquer les choses que cet ouvrage renfermait; or dans ces commentaires il y avait de la fraude. Tous, ou à peu près, sont d'accord sur le travail des talismans dirigés contre les démons. Ces talismans agissent comme la prière et les neuf lettres écrites par Salomon; les démons ne peuvent y résister.*

*Mais revenons plus en détail au sujet que nous avons en vue. Les sept bouteilles (talismans), dans lesquelles Salomon renferma les démons, étaient en électrum. Il convient d'ajouter foi à cet égard aux écrits juifs sur les démons. Le livre altéré, que nous possédons et qui est intitulé les Sept cieux, renferme, en résumé, ce qui suit. L'ange ordonna à Salomon de faire ces talismans (bouteilles)".<sup>97</sup>*

Christian M. Bull argues that “*nos prêtres*” in this passage refer to the Egyptian priests.<sup>98</sup> This would explain why the author claim that the *Sept cieux* was misattributed to Salomon. This would be coherent with the evidence adduced above. But why would the fact that “*talismans de Salomon*” is a Hebrew expression be a proof that the *Sept cieux* should be attributed to Egyptian priests? The italics at the beginning of the citation might indicate a gloss. If that is the case, Zosimus would have called the priests of Jerusalem “*nos prêtres*”.

2) Only one of the alchemical books attributed to Zosimus by Berthelot and Duval is attributed to Zosimus in the manuscript. Martelli translates the heading as follows: “Eighth Treatise on the Working of Tin; letter Ḥēt<sup>h</sup>. The Book tells us about tin and Zosimus gives his best greetings to the queen Theosebeia”.<sup>99</sup> The fact that a passage from this book corresponds to a citation attributed to Zosimus by George Syncellus supports the authenticity of the text (*Chronography*, 14). The passage discusses how divine beings recorded alchemy and the “arts of nature” into a book called the Χημεῦ. The citation of Syncellus stops shortly after these words but the corresponding passage in the Syriac manuscript goes on to explain how the Χημεῦ is separated in twenty-four sections called after the letters of the alphabet. The description of these books is as follows (in the translation of Martelli):

97. See f. f. 87<sup>v</sup>–88<sup>r</sup> in Berthelot & Duval, 1893, pp. 264-265.

98. Bull, 2018a, p. 225.

99. Martelli, 2014b.

“They [*i.e.* the books] are explained by the words of priests. One of these is entitled ‘Imus’, another ‘Imuth’, another ‘Face’ – so it was interpreted (or translated). One of these is entitled ‘Key’, another ‘Seal’ or ‘Signet’, another ‘Handbook’ (see gr. ἐγχειρίδιον), another ‘Position’ (of the stars? see gr. ἐποχή).”<sup>100</sup>

The names of the alleged books from the Χημεῦ are problematic. Syncellus writes that the text he cited comes from the “ninth book of the *Imouth*” (ἐν τῷ ἐνάτῳ τῆς Ἰμουθ βιβλῳ), not from the “eighth Treatise *On the Working of Tin*”. The Syriac translation gives the name of Imouth to a part of the Χημεῦ, not to a book attributed to Zosimus. Similarly, the names of ‘Seal’ or ‘Signet’ are given to a section of the Χημεῦ but are also found as names of a section of the Syriac manuscript attributed to Zosimus by Duval and Berthelot.<sup>101</sup>

It might seem strange that Zosimus named his books after older alchemical treatises. One possible solution, as noted above, is that ancient books of revealed wisdom were sometimes attributed to their source as well as the person associated with their transmission. This is the case of Messos, who was known by Porphyry as the author of a revelation and whose name occurs in the colophon of the *Marsanes* as the person who transmitted this text. The seer Nicotheos mentioned by Zosimus and Porphyry could also have been the same kind of “transmitter”.<sup>102</sup> Was Zosimus’ name perhaps associated with the Χημεῦ in the same way? This could also explain why his name appears in the title of the alchemical *Book of Sophē*.<sup>103</sup>

3) The *Ninth Book on the Letter Tet* tells a story concerning the “capture” of mercury. “In a far-away place in the West” where tin is found, locals attract mercury from sources by bringing a beautiful virgin to a place lower than the source. As if enamored by the virgin, the mercury rushes out and is hacked by young people with axes (f. 58<sup>r-v</sup>).<sup>104</sup> A similar story is found in a Chinese text of the 14<sup>th</sup> cent. CE where it is told to the narrator by two men, one of which appears to have a Hebrew name. As in the Syriac manuscript, the “hunt” for mercury also takes place “in the West”. The story also appears in several Indian texts, all of which are dated no earlier than the 10<sup>th</sup> cent. CE.<sup>105</sup> Berthelot and Duval date the Syriac text of the Cambridge ms. Mm.

100. Martelli, 2014b, p. 12.

101. See Berthelot & Duval, 1893, p. 232. The book is also called “Houphestion”.

102. Crégheur, 2019.

103. See CAAG II 211–213. For other hypotheses, see Mertens, 1995, pp. lxvii–lxix.

104. Trans. Berthelot & Duval, 1893, pp. 244–245.

105. Needham *et al.*, 1980, p. 337; White, 1996, pp. 203–204.

6, 29 to the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> cent. CE and the codex itself to the 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>106</sup> It is not clear where the story of the capture of mercury originated but it could have come to Syria from China or India in the 10<sup>th</sup> cent. CE at the earliest. This suggests that other sections attributed to Zosimus could include documents much removed in time and space from 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>-cent. Egypt.

---

106. Berthelot & Duval, 1893, pp. xlv, xlviii.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barc, Bernard, & Funk, Wolf-Peter (eds.) (2012). *Le livre des secrets de Jean : recension brève : NH III, 1 et BG, 2*. Québec, Leuven & Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval, Peeters.
- Berthelot, Marcellin & Duval, Rubens (1893). *La chimie au Moyen Âge, II*. Paris: Imprimerie nationale. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54521558>.
- Berthelot, Marcellin & Ruelle, Charles-Émile (1888). *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs, II*. Paris: Georges Steinheil. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9680734p>.
- Boys-Stones, George (2001). *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy. A Study of its Development from the Stoics to Origen*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bull, Christian H. (2018a). Hermes between Pagans and Christians. The Nag Hammadi Hermetic in Context. In Lundhaug & Jennott, 2018, pp. 207-260.
- Bull, Christian H. (2018b). *The Tradition of Hermes Trismegistus. The Egyptian Priestly Figure as a Teacher of Hellenized Wisdom*. Leiden: Brill.
- Bull, Christian H. (2020). The Panopolis Connection. The Pachomian Federation as Context for the Nag Hammadi Codices. In Buzi, 2020, pp. 133-147.
- Burns, D. M. (2015). μίξεώς τινη τέχνη κρείττονι. Alchemical Metaphor in the Paraphrase of Shem (NHC VII 1). *Aries*, 15, pp. 79-106. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700593-01501007>.
- Burns, Dylan M. (2019). Gnosticism, Gnostics, and Gnosis. In Trompf, Mikkelsen & Johnston, 2019, pp. 9-25. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315561608>.
- Buzi, Paola (ed.) (2020). *Coptic Literature in Context (4<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> cent.). Cultural Landscape, Literary Production, and Manuscript Archaeology*. Rome: Quasar. [https://orbi.uliege.be/bitstream/2268/242112/5/BuziP%28%c3%a9d.%29\\_CopticLiteratureInContext\\_Rome\\_2020.pdf](https://orbi.uliege.be/bitstream/2268/242112/5/BuziP%28%c3%a9d.%29_CopticLiteratureInContext_Rome_2020.pdf).
- Camplani, Alberto (2000). Procedimenti magico-alchemici e discorso filosofico ermetico. In Lanata, 2000, pp. 73-98.
- Charron, Régine & Painchaud, Louis (2001). "God is a Dyer". The Background and Significance of a Puzzling Motif in the Coptic Gospel According to Philip (CG II 3). *Le Muséon*, 114, pp. 41-50.
- Clark, Gillian (ed.) (2000). *Porphyry, On Abstinence from Killing Animals*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Crégheur, Eric (2019). Marsanès et Nicothée dans la littérature gnostique, philosophique, alchimique et manichéenne. In Rasimus, Crégheur & Painchaud, 2019, pp. 297-320.
- de Jong, Albert (2005). Zosimus of Panopolis. In Hanegraaff, 2005, pp. 1183-1186.
- Dufault, Olivier (2019). *Early Greek Alchemy. Patronage and Innovation in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: California Classical Studies. <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/2ks0g83x>.
- Dufault, Olivier (2021). Review of Martelli, 2019. *Studies in Late Antiquity*, 5.1, pp. 161-164. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sla.2021.5.1.161>.



- Dufault, Olivier (2022). Lessons from the Body. Alchemy and Spiritual Exercises in the First Lesson on Excellence of Zosimos of Panopolis. In Slaveva-Griffin & Ramelli, 2022, pp. 193-214.
- Dupré, Sven (ed.) (2014). *Laboratories of Art*. Cham: Springer.
- Edwards, Mark (1992). The Vessel of Zosimos the Alchemist. *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 90, pp. 55-64.
- Edwards, Mark (2018). Apologetics. In Hunter, van Geest & Lietaert Peerbolte, 2018. [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com:443/entries/brill-encyclopedia-of-early-christianity-online/apologetics-SIM\\_00000235](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com:443/entries/brill-encyclopedia-of-early-christianity-online/apologetics-SIM_00000235).
- Edwards, Mark (ed.) (2021). *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- Escolano-Poveda, Marina (2020). *The Egyptian Priests of the Graeco-Roman Period. An Analysis on the Basis of the Egyptian and Graeco-Roman Literary and Paraliterary Sources*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv15vwk37>.
- Festugière, André-Jean (2006). *La révélation d' Hermès Trismégiste, I*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).
- Festugière, André-Jean & Nock, Arthur D. (eds.) (1945a). *Corpus hermeticum. Tome II : Traités XIII-XVIII - Asclépius - Hermès Trismégiste* (Vol. 1-5). Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Festugière, André-Jean & Nock, Arthur D. (eds.) (1945b). *Corpus hermeticum. Tome IV : Fragments extraits de Stobée (XXIII-XXIX) - Fragments divers - Hermès Trismégiste* (Vol. 1-5). Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Festugière, André-Jean & Nock, Arthur D. (eds.) (1946). *Corpus hermeticum. Tome I : Poimandrès - Traités II-XII - Hermès Trismégiste* (Vol. 1-5). Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Fowden, Garth (1986). *The Egyptian Hermes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fraser, Kyle (2007). Baptised in Gnosis. The Spiritual Alchemy of Zosimos of Panopolis. *Dionysius*, 25, pp. 33-54.
- Fraser, Kyle (2018). Distilling Nature's Secrets. The Sacred Art of Alchemy. In Scarborough & Keyser, 2018, pp. 721-742. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199734146.013.76>.
- Gilly, Carlos & van Heertum, Cis (eds.) (2002). *Magia, alchimia, scienza dal '400 al '700. L'influsso di Ermete Trismegisto / Magic, Alchemy and Science. The influence of Hermes Trismegistus*. Florence: Centro Di.
- Gordon, Richard L. (1999). Anthropos. In van der Toorn, van der Hoorst, & Becking, 1999, pp. 59-62. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-7802\\_DDDO\\_DDDO\\_Anthropos](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-7802_DDDO_DDDO_Anthropos).
- Grimes, Shannon (2018). *Becoming Gold. Zosimos of Panopolis and the Alchemical Arts in Roman Egypt*. Auckland: Rubedo Press.
- Grimes, Shannon (2019). Divine Images. Zosimos of Panopolis's Spiritual Approach to Alchemy. *La Rosa di Paracelso*, 2, pp. 69-81.
- Hanegraaff, Wouter J. (ed.) (2005). *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*. Leiden: Brill.
- Heffernan, Thomas J. (2012). *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Hunter, David G., van Geest, Paul J. J. & Lietaert Peerbolte, Bert J. (eds.) (2018). *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity Online*. Leiden: Brill.
- Jackson, Howard M. (1978). *Zosimus of Panopolis, On the Letter Omega*. Missoula: Scholars Press.
- Jackson, Howard M. (1990). The Seer Nicotheos and His Lost Apocalypse in the Light of Sethian Apocalypses from Nag Hammadi and the Apocalypse of Elchasai. *Novum Testamentum*, 32, pp. 250-277.
- Jourdan, Fabienne & Edwards, Mark (2021). Orpheus, Mithras, Hermes. In Edwards, 2021, pp. 267-279.
- Kahn, Didier & Matton, Sylvain (eds.) (1995). *Alchimie: art, histoire et mythes. Actes du 1<sup>er</sup> colloque international de la Société d'étude de l'histoire de l'alchimie (Paris, Collège de France, 14-15-16 mars 1991)*. Milan & Paris: Archè.
- Kelly, Christopher (ed.) (2011). *Unclassical Traditions, II*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- King, Karen L. (2003). *What is Gnosticism?* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- King, Karen L. (2006). *The Secret Revelation to John*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- King, Karen L. (2011). Factions, Variety, Diversity, Multiplicity. Representing Early Christian Differences for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 23.3-4, pp. 216-237. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006811X608368>.
- Knipe, Sergio (2011). Sacrifice and Self-Transformation in the Alchemical Writings of Zosimus of Panopolis. In Kelly, 2011, pp. 59-69.
- Koutalis, Vangelis, Martelli, Matteo, & Merianos, Gerasimos (2018). Graeco-Egyptian, Byzantine and post-Byzantine Alchemy. Introductory Remarks. In Nicolaidis, 2018, pp. 11-43. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.DDA-EB.5.116310>.
- Lampe, Geoffrey W.H. (1961). *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lanata, Giuliana (ed.) (2000). *Il tardoantico alle soglie del duemila: diritto, religione, società: atti del quinto convegno nazionale dell'Associazione di studi tardoantichi*. Pisa: ETS.
- Letrouit, Jean (1995). Chronologie des alchimistes grecs. In Kahn & Matton, pp. 11-93.
- Letrouit, Jean (2002). Hermétisme et alchimie: Contribution à l'étude du Marcianus Graecus 299 (= M). In Gilly & van Heertum, 2002, pp. 85-104.
- Lindsay, Jack (1970). *The Origins of Alchemy and Graeco-Roman Egypt*. London: Frederick Muller.
- Litwa, M. David (2016). *Refutation of All Heresies*. Atlanta: SBL Press.
- Litwa, M. David (ed.) (2018). *Hermetica II. The Excerpts of Stobaeus, Papyrus Fragments, and Ancient Testimonies in an English Translation with Notes and Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316856567>.
- Lundhaug, Hugo & Jennott, Lance (eds.) (2018). *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

- Mahé, Jean-Pierre (ed.) (1982). *Hermès en Haute-Égypte. Le fragment du “Discours parfait” et les “Définitions” hermétiques arméniennes (NH VI 8.8a), II*. Quebec City: Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Martelli, Matteo (2014a). L'alchimie en syriaque et l'oeuvre de Zosime. In Villey, 2014, pp. 191-214.
- Martelli, Matteo (2014b). The Alchemical Art of Dyeing. The Fourfold Division of Alchemy and the Enochic Tradition. In Dupré, 2014, pp. 1-22.
- Martelli, Matteo (2017). Alchemy, Medicine and Religion. Zosimus of Panopolis and the Egyptian Priests. *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 3.2, pp. 202-220.
- Martelli, Matteo (2019). *L'alchimista antico dall'Egitto greco-romano a Bisanzio*. Milan: Editrice Bibliografica.
- Medini, Lorenzo (2015). “Chronique d'une mort annoncée?” Le crépuscule des temples et des païens d'Égypte. *Topoi Orient - Occident*, 20.1, pp. 239-280.
- Mertens, Michèle (ed.) (1995). *Zosime de Panopolis, Mémoires authentiques*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Needham, Joseph, Ho, Ping-Yu, Lu, Gwei-Djen & Sivin, Nathan (1980). *Science and Civilization in China, V. Chemistry and Chemical Technology. Part 4. Spagyric Discovery and Invention: Apparatus, Theories and Gifts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nicolaidis, Efthymios (ed.) (2018). *Greek Alchemy from Late Antiquity to Early Modernity*. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Poirier, Paul-Hubert (2004). Comment les gnostiques se sont-ils appelés? Comment doit-on les appeler aujourd'hui? *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses*, 33.2, pp. 209-216.
- Puech, Henri-Charles (1978). *En quête de la gnose, II*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Rasmus, Tuomas J., Crégheur, Eric & Painchaud, Louis (eds.) (2019). *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans. Qu'avons-nous appris? / Nag Hammadi at 70: What Have we Learned? Colloque international, Québec, Université Laval, 29-31 mai 2015*. Leuven: Peeters.
- Reitzenstein, Richard (1904). *Poimandres. Studien zur griechisch-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur*. Leipzig: Teubner.
- Ruska, Julius (1926). *Tabula Smaragdina*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
- Saffrey, Henri D. & Segonds, Alain-Philippe (eds.) (2013). *Jamblique, Réponse à Porphyre (De Mysteriis)*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Scarborough, John & Keyser, Paul T. (eds.) (2018). *Oxford Handbook of Science and Medicine in the Classical World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schenke, Hans-Martin (1962). *Der Gott “Mensch” in der Gnosis. Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur Diskussion über die paulinische Anschauung von der Kirche als dem Leibe Christi*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Segal, Robert A. (2019). Carl Jung on Gnosticism. In Trompf, Mikkelsen & Johnston, 2019, pp. 549-552. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315561608>.
- Sim, David C. (2000). The Sword Motif in Matthew 10:34. *HTS Theologese Studies / Theological Studies*, 56.1, pp. 84-104. <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/1698>.

- Slaveva-Griffin, Svetla & Ramelli, Ilaria L. E. (eds.) (2022). *Lovers of the Soul, Lovers of the Body. Philosophical and Religious Perspectives in Late Antiquity*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies.
- Stroumsa, Guy A. (1984). *Another Seed. Studies in Gnostic Mythology*. Leiden: Brill.
- Thomassen, Einar (2020). *The Coherence of "Gnosticism"*. Berlin: De Gruyter. <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110705829/html>.
- Tonelli, Angelo (1988). *Zosimo di Panopoli: Visioni e Risvegli*. Milan: Coliseum.
- Trompf, Gary W., Mikkelsen, Gunner B. & Johnston, Jay (eds.) (2019). *The Gnostic World*. London: Routledge.
- Turner, John D. (2019). Genres of Gnostic Literature and the "Classical Gnostic" School of Thought. In Trompf, Mikkelsen, & Johnston, 2019, pp. 133-146. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315561608>.
- van den Broek, Roelof (2013). *Gnostic Religion in Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139381659>.
- van der Toorn, Karel, van der Hoorst, Pieter W. & Becking, Bob (eds.) (1999). *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible Online*. Leiden: Brill.
- Villey, Émilie (ed.) (2014). *Les sciences en syriaque*. Paris: Geuthner.
- White, David G. (1996). *The Alchemical Body. Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Williams, Michael A. (2019). On Ancient "Gnosticism" as a Problematic Category. In Trompf, Mikkelsen, & Johnston, 2019, pp. 100-117. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315561608>.