

***"Within limitless realms dwells incorruptibility." An Exploration of the
Figure of Sophia in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*.***

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation looks at the Sophia narrative in the Gnostic text *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. The figure of Sophia has long been considered an integral figure in Gnostic cosmology but one who is consistently identified as a fallen entity. I shall argue that the figure of Sophia is not a fallen figure in this tractate but rather conforms to the dual tradition of the entity found in the Valentinian tradition, whereby Wisdom is split into higher and lower forms. This allows for a higher, unblemished manifestation of the figure and a lower incarnation of the aeon that retains the fallen characteristics of the narrative. In this case Eve functions as the lower manifestation of Wisdom and Sophia can be viewed as the higher manifestation of the aeon. My approach to the subject of Sophia in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* incorporates social scientific criticism and textual analysis. The main body of my argument utilizes the work of Ingvild Gilhus:1985, Elaine Pagels:1988, and Deirdre Good:1987, who concur that the figure of Sophia in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* represents a unique portrayal of the traditional entity and one which can be viewed as an ‘unfallen’ figure. The social scientific segment of this dissertation employs theory developed from cultural anthropology, specifically the work of Bruce Malina:2001 and Mary Douglas:1966. This line of reasoning posits that if the Pleroma is analyzed as a community of beings that Sophia adheres to the purity laws of the Pleroma and is thus, in this context not a fallen or ostracized figure. In conducting this study of *The Hypostasis of the Archons* I hope to highlight to unique nature of the figure of Wisdom in the tractate and suggest that the text shows elements of the dual tradition of Sophia found in Valentinian theology

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INDRODUCTION

*"Within limitless realms dwells incorruptibility. Sophia, who is called Pistis, wanted to create something, alone without her consort; and her product was a celestial thing."*¹

This dissertation seeks to address the scholarship on Gnosticism, specifically the gnostic figure of Sophia as she is represented in the Nag Hammadi Codex, *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. I shall focus on the representation of the figure of Sophia in the 'myth of Sophia', or the 'pre-creation myth'², which details the creation of the material world.

I propose to argue for a reading of the narrative as representing a secondary tradition of the Sophia account. I believe that the narrative contained in the tractate could be of Valentinian provenance and thus, the figure of Sophia can be interpreted as conforming to the divided tradition. According to this perspective, Sophia maintains a consistent distance from the material world and narrative elements associated with her fallen manifestation. In contrast Eve embodies these attributes identifying her as the lower manifestation of Sophia.³ Scholarship on *The Hypostasis of the Archons* has been reluctant to engage in a discussion of the tractate and the Valentinian tradition, though scholars such as Gilhus:1985 and Pagels:1988 contend that the figure in the codex does not conform to the traditional ideal of a fallen figure.

The pre-creation account of Sophia contained in this text, presents a different depiction of the narrative to that which is found in related literature.⁴ Sophia is explicitly distanced from aspects of the narrative which would identify her as a fallen figure and creator

¹ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 94.1-10.

² I refer to the narrative as myth here as the account is referred to as thus, in the scholarship and in both Irenaeus and Hippolytus. However, I shall use the term account or narrative and not myth to refer to the pre-creation story of Sophia throughout this thesis.

³ The fallen attributes I shall discuss are the creation of and interaction with the material world. Both narrative elements are under-played in this text. In contrast to Sophia, the author devotes much of the narrative to the depiction of Eve as a fallen figure seeking redemption.

⁴ The related texts to be discussed in this thesis are *The Apocryphon of John*, and *On the Origin of the World*.

of the material world. Previous studies on the Sophia narrative emphasize the fallen nature of the aeon, one which embodies the thought process of Gnosticism, fall and redemption.⁵ I intend to draw upon recent studies which advocate for a revision of the accepted view of a universal tradition of the fallen Sophia, to a text oriented approach to the pre-creation account. This method of analysis will emphasize the unique portrayal of Sophia in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* and suggest that the document displays elements of Valentinian doctrine, specifically the divided nature of Sophia.⁶ In addressing the figure of Sophia in this tractate I shall engage with the works of Ingvald Sælid Gilhus:1985 in her seminal work, *The Nature of the Archons*, and Elaine Pagels:1988, "Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip*". These scholars maintain that the image of Sophia in the tractate demonstrates a divergence from the tradition of the pre-creation account in related literature.

An associated aspect of my approach to the examination of Sophia will utilize the works of Deirdre Good:1987, Sergio La Porta:1997 and George C. Stead:1969 and their contribution to the reconstruction of the tradition of the Sophia narrative. In using these works, my focus will be to demonstrate there is no one unified tradition of Sophia in gnostic literature and the narrative necessitates an individual reading of each text.

In chapter one, I shall survey the development of the pre-creation narrative from the original Valentinian account detailed in book one of Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* and Hippolytus' *Haereses* through the *Apocryphon of John*, *On the Origin of the World* and finally *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. This will enable me to trace and highlight the

⁵ While recent scholarship on the figure of Sophia in gnostic texts is moving toward a text orientated approach to the representation of the pre-creation account the traditional reading of the narrative is one of transgression and fall. Cf. Schenke:1962; Perkins:1971; Wilckins: 1971 and Goehring:1981.

⁶ The Valentinian school of Gnosticism produced a particular form of the narrative in which the figure of Sophia is divided into higher and lower manifestations.

divergence in tradition found in the tractate and to suggest that the document displays elements of Valentinian doctrine in the pre-creation account. Furthermore, I shall discuss scholarly views related to the fallen tradition of Sophia found in the texts above as well as addressing the role of Sophia in gnostic theology.

Chapter two will form the main body of my argument. The narrative contained in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* and its connection with the Valentinian tradition of the duality of Sophia in which the entity is divided into a higher and lower manifestation will be explored. Primarily, I shall argue that the account functions on two levels. The more conceptual level of the narrative centers on Sophia's role as the higher manifestation of Wisdom in the pre-creation account. The lower manifestation of this aeon is more visceral and is embodied by the spiritual Eve in the *Genesis* exegesis. Specifically, I intend to discuss the link between Sophia and Ennoia, the highest female entity in the Pleroma. Although this figure is not mentioned in connection with Sophia in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, the two figures have been linked in related literature.⁷ In *The Hypostasis of the Archons* Sophia is depicted as having a number of important characteristics namely that of Wisdom, Genetress/ Mother, Redeemer and Plurality. These traits are important, as the portrayal of wisdom in the tractate is unique and identifies her as a higher manifestation of wisdom rather than the traditional Sophia.

In the final chapter I propose to employ cultural anthropological theories of purity to analyze this concept in the tractate. In particular, the work of Mary Douglas:1966⁸ and Bruce

⁷ Buckley:1986 notes that the figures of Ennoia and Sophia become interchangeable at points in the *Apocryphon of John*.

⁸ In her book, *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas contends that the body symbolizes society. The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system and its boundaries can represent any which are threatened or precarious within a certain society. These boundaries represented in the body are contingent upon the rules governing purity/impurity and clean/unclean within that society. Cultures often use purity and pollution schemes to organize everything into its proper place and to define and demarcate what is complete or incomplete, damaged or whole, what is allowed or forbidden, who belongs to the society and who does not and what preserves the

Malina:2001⁹ will be reviewed. For the purpose of this analysis, the Pleroma will be conceptualized as a community. The rules and ideas contained in this community therefore, dictate the concept and rules of purity to which the entities are held to account.¹⁰ Thus, I shall prove that in the society of the Pleroma, Sophia conforms to the purity laws that govern the entities and can be considered an untarnished figure.

The discussion of the nature of Sophia in gnostic ideology has been significantly influenced by the heresiological accounts of the Irenaeus and Hippolytus and I aim in this textual examination to demonstrate that there are variations in tradition that need to be addressed. I will endeavour to establish that *The Hypostasis of the Archons* contains many of the features congruent with the divided tradition of Sophia which necessitate an alternate reading of the text.

society and what endangers it. Consequently, when a person is called unclean or impure is to evaluate them as out of order or incomplete thus, rendering them as outside society.

⁹ Malina's work on purity concepts in the first century C.E. in Israel builds upon Douglas' theories. He contends that purity within this society was defined in terms of the sacred and the profane. He contends that what was sacred to God was what was exclusive to God, while the profane or nonexclusive to God consisted of all things categorized in terms of a system that would allow everything and everyone a certain meaning-endowed, order inducing situation or place. This classification can also be applied to people. Those who observe societal rules and are as exclusive to God as their God is exclusive then a parallel is established between ritually exclusive and socially in place. This parallel and classification is further developed in the hierarchy of the temple and society, with those at the highest level of the temple the Priests signifying the purest and most exclusive in society and the marginalized signifying the non-exclusive and impure within society. The classification is further subdivided and reinforced by geographical restrictions within the temple and purity laws governing marriage.

¹⁰ The idea of promiscuity and impurity is associated with Sophia in related literature, specifically the *Apocryphon of John* and in Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*. The emphasis placed upon this aspect of her character in these tractates and other gnostic texts of varying provenance suggests that the motif was a prevalent one. The title *prounikos* (lewd), found in the tractates mentioned above, is never applied to Sophia in the text of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* which marks a divergence from the traditional depiction of the aeon.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NARRATIVE

The main premise of this chapter is to give a detailed review of the sources which will be utilized in this thesis and to give an account of the scholarship related to the tradition of the pre-creation account. To this end I shall concentrate the review of scholarship primarily on scholars who address the tradition of Sophia. I intend to survey the following texts, Irenaeus' and Hippolytus' heresiological texts, the *Apocryphon of John*, *On the Origin of the World* and *The Hypostasis of the Archons*.

I shall begin with Irenaeus' and Hippolytus' heresiological accounts of the narrative. These sources provide much of the information which is used to support the assertions of the traditional scholarly views of the fallen Sophia. Next I shall discuss the pre-creation account found in the *Apocryphon of John*. Many scholars believe that this form of the narrative is a later more developed version of that found in the heresiological texts. Finally the primary scholarly views on the narrative of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* will be discussed. I shall supplement the discussion of this text with reference to *On the Origin of the World* as this text is of related literary tradition and often provides an expanded form of the narrative found in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*.

Before beginning a discussion of the sources it is necessary to provide information on the pre-creation account of Sophia. This narrative, commonly referred to as the 'myth of Sophia', or the 'pre-creation myth'¹¹, details the creation of the material world. The representation of Sophia presented in gnostic literature does not appear in a consistent form. The details of the fall and the process of redemption vary in the tractates. However, recurrent narrative features can be identified in much of the literature namely, a) Sophia's fall and departure from the Pleroma, b) the creation of the corrupt material world as a direct result of

¹¹ I refer to the narrative as myth here as the account is referred to as thus in the texts. See footnote 2.

her actions, c) her repentance and eventual restoration to the Pleroma. Regardless of provenance these main features form the basic narrative of the Sophia accounts.

2.1 Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* and Hippolytus' *Haereses*

The account of the narrative contained in the works of Irenaeus' and Hippolytus' has had a pronounced affect on the scholarship related to the tradition of Sophia. Both of these heresiological works describe a complex pre-creation story centered on the figure of Sophia.¹² In his work the *Adversus Haereses* Book one, Irenaeus describes what many scholars argue is the original form of the Sophia narrative.¹³ Irenaeus is believed to have directed his polemic against a group of Gnostics who are believed to have been members of his own congregation called the Valentinians.¹⁴ In his work, he gives two accounts of the pre-creation narrative. The myth paraphrased in the *Adversus Haereses* 1.29 begins with a theogony featuring the Father and Ennoia (Thought).¹⁵ Ennoia is the first emanation of the Father, after whom further entities are produced, known as aeons.¹⁶ These include Christ, four luminaries, and the Adams. The creation of the material world is attributed to a lower aeon. Sophia-specifically referred to as Sophia *prunicus*.¹⁷ In her arrogance and ignorance she creates the imperfect being, Ialdabaoth, who in turn creates the material world. The second

¹² Stead, 1969:75-77. In this article Stead contends that the myth of Sophia that is preserved in the Nag Hammadi texts is heavily influenced by Valentinian ideology. He argues that the accounts of the myth detailed in Irenaeus' *Ad. Haer.* xxix and Hippolytus' *Haer.* 22.2; 29.3; 30.4; 31.3 are pivotal to the reconstruction of the original myth. cf. Fallon: 1978; Pagels; 1988; Gilhus: 1985; Wisse:1988.

¹³ Ibid, 1969: 75-79.

¹⁴ These Gnostics followed the teachings of one particular teacher, Valentinus. He appears to have joined the church in Rome some forty years before Irenaeus became bishop c. 140-160 C.E. having established himself a spiritual teacher in Alexandria. (Pagels, 1988: 60-61). For a detailed discussion of Valentinian doctrine see Thomassen:2006.

¹⁵ Ennoia is also called Barbelo in this account. Ennoia is the consort of the Father and the highest female entity in the Pleroma.

¹⁶ According to the writings of Ptolemy and Irenaeus the original Valentinian myth began with the creation of eight aeons by the Father. These were including Thought (*Ennoia*), Mind (*Nous*), Truth (*Aletheia*), Word (*Logos*), Life (*Zoe*), Man (*Anthropos*) and Church (*Ekklesia*). These aeons bring forth further aeons of which Sophia is the last. (Pearson, 2007: 154-155).

¹⁷ Lewd Sophia. *Adversus Haereses*, 1.29.4.

account that follows features a variant theogony in which Irenaeus elaborates upon the being created by Sophia, named Ialdabaoth.¹⁸ Irenaeus also gives an account of the genesis exegesis found in many of the gnostic texts and illustrates how the authors reinterpreted the myth to form a continuous narrative which included the pre-creation account. Logan:1996 contends that Irenaeus' polemic contains a record of the original doctrine of the pre-creation story and posits that the account may be more original than that contained in the *Apocryphon of John*.¹⁹ While this indeed may be true, there appears to have been an additional tradition of the account rendered by Hippolytus. Both Irenaeus' and Hippolytus' descriptions of the narrative of Sophia differ mainly in the detail surrounding the creation of the material realm. Stead:1969 has identified two main versions of the Sophia myth which he titles A and B. In the Hippolitian account the differences between the two are found in the presentation of the supreme aeon.

In version A, this aeon named variously as Bythos, the Father, and Propator is linked with a consort known as Ennoia, Sige or Enthymesis, while in version B the principal aeon exists outside the system without a consort. The second divergence between the two concerns the circumstances surrounding the fall of Sophia and the creation of the material world. While in both accounts Sophia transgresses by acting without her consort, her desire to penetrate the mystery which surrounds the Father is given as the principal reason for her fall in version A by Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*. The Hippolitian version B, attributes her fall to her attempt to imitate the creative power of the Propator which results in a defective being. Stead:1969 contends that within the heresiological accounts of Gnosticism which he ascribes to Valentinian teaching, at least five conceptualizations of Sophia are depicted.

¹⁸ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.30.

¹⁹ Logan, 1996:xiii-1.

She is identified variously as God's perfect consort; the source of matter, evil and death; a fallen entity who leaves the Pleroma but is pardoned and restored; an aeon who sins, is forgiven, does not leave the Pleroma, and finally as a lower Sophia who remains outside the Pleroma, and awaits her eventual restoration.²⁰ He maintains that later Valentinian doctrine attempted to consolidate the Sophia narrative by amalgamating the concept of Sophia as the highest aeon with that of the Father's agent in dealing with the imperfect world.²¹ This resulted in the divided tradition of Sophia in which she is depicted as having both a higher and lower manifestation.²²

Filoramo:1990 contends that the main purpose of the Pleromatic Sophia is to be the source of spiritual knowledge to the material world. She is destined to be cast into this world so that she may return to the Pleroma after purification from her contact with matter. However, this destiny is described in terms of her disobedience; a disobedience that is expressed through sexual promiscuity. The title *prunicus*, which generally indicates lewdness or prostitution, reveals much about the nature of Sophia. She cannot control her sexuality and because of the overpowering nature of her femininity is compelled to sin.²³ Pearson's discussion of the Church Fathers' rendition of the pre-creation narrative, argues that this designation of Sophia as a fallen entity can be accounted for by viewing her as a heavenly projection of Eve, whose fall is narrated in the Genesis narrative. Pearson maintains that much of the narrative of Sophia is a heavenly counterpoint to the Genesis narrative and that Eve and Sophia are dual and contrasting images of each other.²⁴ Though there are several

²⁰ Stead, 1969:93.

²¹ Ibid, 1969:103.

²² Ibid, 1969:88-103 Stead argues that in the divided tradition of the Sophia myth the lower element is compelled to wander the earth until her ultimate salvation by Christ while the higher concept of Sophia, Pistis Sophia, never leaves the Pleroma. Cf. Pearson, 2007:110.

²³ Filoramo, 1990:68-69.

²⁴ Pearson, 2007:110-112.

versions of the narrative, the themes of fall and restoration are prominent in the heresiological accounts of Sophia.

2.2 *The Apocryphon of John*

The *Apocryphon of John* provides a detailed description of the creation of the material world and is believed by scholars to be a later more developed form of the account given in Irenaeus.²⁵ The pre-creation account of the *Apocryphon of John* contains elements of both versions A and B as previously discussed. In the document, Ennoia, is described as the consort of the Supreme aeon and the creation of the material world occurs as a direct result of Sophia's desire to produce something without the consent of the Father or her consort.

The figure of Sophia in the *Apocryphon of John* is a complex one as she is described with more than one name and multiple identities throughout the text.²⁶ In an effort to unravel the complexity and understand its chronology the work of Buckley:1986 is useful. She contends that the figure of Sophia appears first in the tractate as a female entity in the Pleroma known as Ennoia. She is created from the Father when he is reflected in water.²⁷

For it is he who looks at himself in his light which surrounds him, namely the spring of the water of life. And it is he who gives to all the aeons and in every way, (and) who gazes upon his image which he sees in the spring of the Spirit. It is he who puts his desire in his water-light which is in the spring of the pure light-water which surrounds him. "And his thought performed a deed and she came forth, namely she who had appeared before him in the shine of his light. This is the first power which was before all of them (and) which came forth from his mind, She is the forethought of the

²⁵ Pearson, 2007:10-11; 110-112. Cf. Wisse:1988. Wisse maintains that the reports of the church fathers indicate that they were familiar with the contents of the tractate and the teachings of some Gnostics. He also states that the cosmological teachings in the *Apocryphon of John* are very similar to those attributed to Valentinus by Irenaeus though the teachings may have existed prior to the account found in *Adversus Haereses*. (Wisse,1988:104).

²⁶ There are three versions of the *Apocryphon of John* known as III, 1 and BG, 2 which represent independent Coptic translations of a short Greek recension of the work. Additional copies, II, 1 and IV, 1, of the same Coptic translation of a longer Greek recension of the document. (Wisse, 1988:104).

²⁷ Buckley, 1986: 39.

All - her light shines like his light - the perfect power which is the image of the invisible, virginal Spirit who is perfect.²⁸

She is identified by the names Pronoia and Barbelo in this account which marks her as the highest ranking female entity in the Pleroma as both names are associated with the consort of the Father. The figure of Sophia, or the named figure of Sophia, appears later in the text.

An explicit connection between Sophia and the higher entity is established by the name 'Sophia of the Epinoia'. The account of Ialdaboath's creation in the *Apocryphon of John* is very detailed and emphasizes the link between Sophia and transgression. The text repeatedly reinforces the notion that Sophia is acting on her own authority in producing Ialdaboath. The creation of the material world begins with the birth of Ialdaboath's as follows:

And the Sophia of the Epinoia, being an aeon, conceived a thought from herself and the conception of the invisible Spirit and foreknowledge. She wanted to bring forth a likeness out of herself without the consent of the Spirit, - he had not approved - and without her consort, and without his consideration. And though the person of her maleness had not approved, and she had not found her agreement, and she had thought without the consent of the Spirit and the knowledge of her agreement, (yet) she brought forth. And because of the invincible power which is in her, her thought did not remain idle, and something came out of her which was imperfect and different from her appearance, because she had created it without her consort. And it was dissimilar to the likeness of its mother, for it has another form.²⁹

Following his creation, the *Apocryphon of John* details how he was cast away to a place where no immortal might see what she had created from ignorance. The tractate elaborates upon this realm, describing it as a luminous cloud with a throne in the middle. His form was that of a lion faced serpent with eyes that flashed like lightening. His name

²⁸ *Apocryphon of John*, 4.20-5.1.

²⁹ *Apocryphon of John*, 9.25-10.8.

Ialdaboath was given to him by Sophia.³⁰ At this point in the text the creation of Ialdaboath by Sophia is predominantly the same as that found in *The Hypostasis of Archons*. The principal divergence emerges in the assertion that Sophia created the realm and named him Ialdaboath. According to this account, Sophia is aware of her creation and gives him form and place in the world.

The idea of repentance can be seen to arise and is attributed to the figure of Sophia in the *Apocryphon of John*. Understanding the extent of her mistake, "She became aware of the deficiency when the brightness of her light diminished. And she became dark because her consort had not agreed with her."³¹ She realizes that she cannot return to the Pleroma and begins to lament. This is heard by the entire Pleroma, and the Holy Spirit, another aeon, descends with the consent of the Father in order that she might correct her deficiency.³² Ialdaboath's imperfection cannot be healed at this juncture in the account, but Sophia's own deficiency is corrected by the intervention of the Pleroma.

Buckley:1986 maintains that the consent of the Spirit, the Father, is crucial in this intervention as it is his consent that has been absent from her actions to this point. She also contends that the Spirit is Sophia's higher female self and in the syzygial sense, her consort.³³ Thus, Sophia restores her connection to her higher self through her repentance. However, she is not immediately restored to the Pleroma but is temporarily forgiven for her sin and placed in a realm above Ialdaboath. There, she is able to contemplate correcting her mistake and consequently restore order within the cosmos.

This will entail the destruction of the false hierarchy created by Ialdaboath in the material realm. Buckley notes that Sophia's transgression is twofold, in addition to acting without the

³⁰ *Apocryphon of John*, 9.25- 0.20.

³¹ *Apocryphon of John*, 13.10-20.

³² *Apocryphon of John*, 14.1-10.

³³ Buckley, 1986: 47.

consent of her mate, her second action the creation of Ialdaboath results in an objectified transgression, her son.³⁴

Much of the scholarly work on the figure of Sophia in this text has focused her role as a fallen figure in the theology. Buckley:1986 and Doniger-O'Flaherty:1999 maintain the image presented in the *Apocryphon of John* is one which expresses how her generative power and sexuality were a threat to male powers.³⁵ Doniger-O'Flaherty contends that the product of her solitary creation, Ialdaboath, displays his mother's illegitimate creative capacity specifically in the form attributed to him, the serpent. She creates a male power that by his very form manifests her lack. Doniger contends that androgyny allows for autonomy but if the androgyny is outspokenly female, negativity adheres to it.³⁶ Buckley contends that the spiritual power that Ialdaboath steals from his mother is indistinguishable from her sexual power and she needs to regain both before she can be reinstated to the Pleroma. The androgynous nature of the entities in the text is contrasted with the need for complimentary couples, while Sophia is androgynous and therefore, capable of creating on her own, the text reinforces the notion that creation should not occur in this manner and only with her ordained consort.³⁷ Buckley maintains that the threat of a female acting in a male manner makes androgynous sexuality the main point of contention in the depiction of Wisdom in the *Apocryphon of John*. This idea of her sexuality as the root of the classification as a tarnished aeon is found in the work of many scholars such as Stroumsa:1984 and La Porta:1997.

³⁴ Buckley, 1986: 47.

³⁵ Doniger's work on female figures in myth is not specifically directed toward Gnosticism. However, her observations are very useful in deconstructing the figure of Sophia in the *Apocryphon of John*.

³⁶ For further discussion see Doniger (O' Flaherty): 1999. This observation does not withstand examination as Barbelo and Epinoia are not portrayed in a negative fashion though both are of androgynous nature also. I think perhaps the issue is the out of union creation of Ialdaboath-an action that appears to be reserved only for the father.

³⁷ Buckley, 1986:128-132.

La Porta maintains that the author of the *Apocryphon of John* expressly portrayed Sophia in terms of a fallen figure by emphasizing her flaws. He argues that this is accomplished in three ways: labeling her as *prunicus* and furnishing her with the power to procreate, describing her in terms representing instability, and in her placement as the last aeon, furthest away from the father.³⁸ Stroumsa contends that the figure of Sophia and her representation as a fallen figure are contingent on the tradition of the fallen woman, Eve, in Genesis. He argues that both figures are inextricably linked in the Gnostic texts and the Sophia narrative is best understood through consideration of the fall of Eve, as Sophia can be seen as representing a Pleromatic version of Eve.³⁹ This connection between Eve and Sophia will be explored in chapter two.

The portrayal of Sophia in the *Apocryphon of John* differs from those found in the heresiological accounts, yet depiction of the aeon as a disruptive and promiscuous force remains. The connection to Ennoia is often undermined by the adherence to the traditional description of Sophia as a fallen figure.

2.3 On the Origin of the World and The Hypostasis of the Archons

The Hypostasis of the Archons is the first of the seven texts from Codex II of the Nag Hammadi scrolls.⁴⁰ There is no exact date prescribed to the text. Scholars contend that it was written approximately the third century C.E. before the fourth century date assigned to the

³⁸ La Porta, 1997:194.

³⁹ Stroumsa, 1984:171. Cf. MacRae:1970. MacRae also sees the fall of Eve as the main source for the fallen narrative of Sophia. He contends that there are three principal textual allusions which allow for this; 1) both are women, 2) the motivation for the falls are the same, and 3) there is a close association between Sophia and Zoe.(MacRae, 1970: 100).

⁴⁰ This is an anonymous tractate from the Nag Hammadi Library. (Bullard, 1988: 161) According to Bullard the text contains clear Christian features and thus can be considered a Christian text. It contains wide ranging Hellenistic and Jewish syncretism.

Codex.⁴¹ It is thought that the tractate was originally written in Greek and later translated into Coptic as it retains Greek inflection in some of the Greek loan words in the Coptic text.⁴² The narrative in the text is based primarily around the exegesis of the creation myth in *Genesis* 1-4 but told in the gnostic fashion. It also contains the pre-creation account of Sophia told to Norea by the angel Eleleth. Though provenance of the tractate has not been agreed upon, reference to the pre-creation story may suggest that it is written in the Valentinian tradition.⁴³ Scholars have posited that the text is composed of two individual sources which have been united by a redactor.⁴⁴ Bullard:1988 elaborates on this concept by posing the question as to whether non-Christian sources may have been Christianized by the redactor since there are references to Ephesians 6:21 at 86(134).23-24 and allusion to another Christian text at 96(144).33-97.⁴⁵ The general consensus is that the tractate contains at least two main sources, the *Genesis* narrative and the apocalyptic source. It is in this context that the narrative of Sophia can be understood.

The pre-creation account of Sophia is placed at the end of the tractate. The account maintains the basic features of the Sophia narrative, the creation of Ialdabaoth and the

⁴¹ Fallon, 1978: 4.

⁴² Ibid, 1978: 3.

⁴³ Pagels, 1988:74. Pagels contends that the Valentinian branch of Gnosticism made use of a pre-creation myth in their exegesis of the *Genesis* myth to explain the original sin. This pre-creation myth is described in Ireneaus' *Adversus Haereses* in connection with his polemic against the Valentinian Gnostics. However, the affiliations of the text are debatable as Bullard suggests that this text may be of the Sethian tradition. (Bullard, 1988: 161)

⁴⁴ Fallon, 1978: 4 cf. Schenke:1958. Scholars contend that a number of different sources are present in the text. Logan: 1996 maintains that by the use of concepts such as the *figures of the Invisible Spirit, the four Illuminators, Sophia, Norea* and *the kingless race* suggests that the text originates in the Barbelognostic tradition which developed from earlier elements of Jewish material. (Logan, 1996: 121.). Bullard and Krause: 1972 completed an examination of the sources of the tractate and assert that there are two main sources the first is the exegesis of *Genesis* and the second is the apocalyptic source. The *Genesis* narrative begins at 87:11 to 92:18 though there is no direct model in *Genesis* for passages 92: 18-32. This section of the tractate appears to be sourced from an apocalyptic text. (Bullard, 1970: 115 & Krause, 1972: 16). Gilhus:1985 argues that apart from the *Genesis* and apocalyptic sources, there are also two additional sources that should be taken into account. These are an introductory citation from Paul, Ephesians 6:12 and another fragment of a source that seems to inspire the passages 94: 2-96 which depict the attempted seduction of Norea and the revelation of the angel Eleleth. (Gilhus, 1985: 11-13).

⁴⁵ Bullard, 1988: 113-114.

material realm, his destruction and the restoration of order by Sophia. While these features remain consistent with the tradition, the concepts of fall, repentance and redemption are not emphasized in the text.

The Sophia narrative detailed in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* contains similar literary material to that contained in the tractate *On the Origin of the World*.⁴⁶ Arthur:1984 contends that this indicates that both texts appear to exist in a dependant literary relationship. She suggests that *The Hypostasis of Archons* was actually the name given to the tractate known now as *On the Origin of the World* as the title of the manuscript reads, *The Hypostasis of the Archons* followed by the text of *On the Origin of the World*. This idea can be further supported by the appearance of both texts in contiguous order in Codex two. This suggests that the same version of the myth forms the basis for both texts. While this may be the case there are some differences within the accounts contained in both tractates. Fallon:1978 maintains that the common tradition behind both works may be part of a book entitled *Norea*, which Epiphanius refers to in his work *Panarion*.⁴⁷

The pericope detailing the narrative of Sophia is found at the beginning of this tractate. Though many of the details are similar to *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, it provides a more detailed rendition of the pre-creation story. The narrative structure of the myth is similar as the events in both occur in the same consecutive order. However, many of the critical aspects, as outlined by Gilhus:1985, are not emphasized in the pericope. The separation between Sophia and Ialdaboath that is preserved in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* is not emphasized in this tractate. When Sophia sees her creation moving about in the waters below she calls to him to move through them and join her above.⁴⁸ "...she said to him,

⁴⁶ Arthur, 1984: 93

⁴⁷ Fallon, 1978: 15. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 26.1.3-9.

⁴⁸ *On the Origin of the World*, II.5.100.10-15.

“Child, pass through to here.”⁴⁹ Sophia is represented as creating Ialdaboath in order to rule over matter and her forces.⁵⁰ She gives him form and shape which resulted in his leonine appearance. The boundaries between them are those of ignorance. He, Ialdaboath, does not know of his origins or even about Sophia. The account of his creation differs primarily in that Sophia does not distance herself from him in the same way as outlined in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. His appearance as a lion is not described as monstrous or beastly in contrast to the *Apocryphon of John*, rather the opposite, as it is a form given to him by Sophia herself. The capture of Ialdaboath which occurs in both accounts also differ. In *On the Origin of the World*, Sophia captures Ialdaboath and sends him to Tartaros,⁵¹ thus she leaves the Pleroma in order to administer justice to Ialdaboath.⁵²

This is an aspect of the narrative which does not receive the same treatment in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. Rather, the text emphasizes the separation of Sophia and Ialdaboath.

"Within limitless realms dwells incorruptibility. Sophia, who is called Pistis, wanted to create something, alone without her consort; and her product was a celestial thing. A veil exists between the world above and the realms that are below; and shadow came into being beneath the veil; and that shadow became matter; and that shadow was projected apart. And what she had created became a product in the matter, like an aborted fetus. And it assumed a plastic form moulded out of shadow, and became an arrogant beast resembling a lion. It was androgynous,..., because it was from matter that it derived."⁵³

Sophia is theoretically the creator of Ialdaboath and therefore responsible for the creation of the corrupt realm of existence that he instituted. However, she is not directly credited with his parentage in the text. Here the Abyss, *pnoun*, is presented as the mother of

⁴⁹ *On the Origin of the World*, II.5.100.10-15.

⁵⁰ *On the Origin of the World*, II.5.100.1-10.

⁵¹ Tartaros is a term from Greek mythology. It was a realm in the Underworld where souls were sent after death to suffer eternal punishment. (Powell, 2004:76-77).

⁵² *On the Origin of the World*, II.5. 102. 30-35.

⁵³ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 94.5-20.

Ialdaboath. Thus, Sophia is never directly named in this role. “....and what she had created became a product in the matter,”⁵⁴ Sophia relinquishes her claim on Ialdaboath and he is reborn to the Abyss. Eleleth describes his initial birth as analogous that of an aborted fetus. She does not complete the act of creating him and thus cannot be named as his mother, since it is the Abyss who actually gives birth to him and assigns a form to him.

Ialdaboath’s separation from Sophia is further emphasized in that he does not resemble her or the other divine being except in his androgynous nature. He is described as resembling an arrogant beast, a lion.⁵⁵ The idea of duality so prevalent in gnostic ideology is once again seen in the dual nature of his birth and form. Gilhus:1985 maintains that the two explanations for the origin of Ialdaboath are related, as the Abyss was regarded as the great womb in which both Ialdaboath and matter were created.⁵⁶ Thus, from the beginning of this narrative Sophia is irrevocably distanced from Ialdaboath and the fallen aspect of her character witnessed in other retellings of the myth. Pagels:1988 makes reference to the link between sexuality and spirituality; thus, if the Sophia figure in this myth represents the higher manifestation of Wisdom, then she must remain untarnished in her dealings with Ialdaboath. Similar narrative features are replicated in the *Apocryphon of John* but with one main exception, the Abyss is not named as the mother of Ialdaboath in the birth narrative.

The account of how Sophia introduces light into the darkness receives more attention in *On the Origin of the World*. Light in this case functions as a metaphor for knowledge and spiritual authority. This meta-narrative further demonstrates that Sophia embodies the role of the higher manifestation of wisdom. The text states that Sophia acted like a veil dividing mankind from the things above.⁵⁷ Thus, she controlled humanity’s access to knowledge. The

⁵⁴ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, II.4. 94. 10-20.

⁵⁵ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, II.4. 94. 15.

⁵⁶ Gilhus, 1985: 97.

⁵⁷ *On the Origin of the World*, II.5.98.20-25.

illumination of the darkness, chaos, by Sophia had a twofold effect. The first is the creation of matter from the darkness and the second is the creation of Ialdaboath. This explanation also provides a context in which to read the rather cryptic line in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, “and immediately Sophia stretched forth her finger and introduced light into matter and pursued it down to the region of chaos.”⁵⁸ This account of the light is found in all three texts, the *Apocryphon of John*, *On the Origin of the World* and, *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. However, in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, the account is not directly connected to the birth of Ialdaboath unlike the other two texts. This suggests that the author did not wish to connect Sophia with the creation of matter and as such the account, found in lengthier form in related literature is condensed to retain her separation from pollution. Filoramo:1992 contends that the interaction between Sophia and chaos can be seen in terms of an interaction between male and female elements.⁵⁹

There are two Sophia's named in *On the Origin of the World*. The first is Sophia, the mother of Ialdaboath and the second is Sophia (Astaphaios), the daughter of Ialdaboath.⁶⁰ It is the second Sophia, who is credited with maintaining order amid the chaos of heaven and earth following the destruction of Ialdaboath.⁶¹ The account surrounding the redemption and enthronement of Sabaoth is similar, following the same narrative sequence but with some

⁵⁸ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, II.4. 94. 30-35.

⁵⁹ Filoramo, 1992: 75-76. He argues that the encounter between the two entities also conforms to Aristotle's concept of relations between a male and female element. The male element is the bringer of movement and the giver of form while the female element provides substance. Sophia represents the male aspect of her nature while chaos, the Abyss, represents the female element. Thus, as the male element Sophia is limited to acting as the fertilizing power which does not lead to a loss or diminution of her own nature. She does not have to leave the Pleroma to provide this force for the union but can maintain her residence with the other entities in the eighth heaven. The creation of the demiurge serves to support the idea that the Sophia represented in these two accounts conforms to the higher manifestation of her character.

⁶⁰ The two are distinguished from each other at this point by the fact that the older Sophia is referred to as Pistis Sophia.

⁶¹ *On the Origin of the World*, II.5.103. 1-5.

variation.⁶² Though Zoe instructs Saboath on the teachings of the eighth heaven, later in the account, Pistis Sophia, places Saboath on her right in the seventh level and the prime parent, Ialdaboath on her left.⁶³

Fischer-Mueller: 1990 contends that the figure of Wisdom, Sophia, enlightens Saboath as he represents the female that has lost its place. In this encounter Sophia acts as the male principle. This echoes her own earlier mistake, the begetting of Ialdaboath by acting without the male principle and consequently the world and chaos. In reversing her role, she then becomes a savior figure who restores the fallen female principle to the heavenly abode in which it belongs.⁶⁴ Fallon maintains that certain elements in the account had to be changed to reflect the particular theology of the tractate. Pistis Sophia is required to take a more active role in the events surrounding Ialdaboath and Saboath as dictated by Valentinian ideology. He maintains that the account shows distinct influences from Valentinianism in the instruction of Saboath by Pistis Sophia and her separation of Saboath from darkness.⁶⁵

In the accounts discussed above, Sophia's disobedience results in a cosmogonic fall which is followed by her conversion or repentance.⁶⁶ All of her activity is limited to the higher levels of the cosmos. Stead:1969 contends that Valentinus envisaged an 'unfallen' female figure in the cosmogony of the Pleroma.⁶⁷ Gilhus:1985 argues that while this thesis has merit it does not apply to the representation of Sophia in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. She argues that more likely the text draws from the original tradition of the Sophia myth in

⁶² In *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, Saboath, the son of Ialdaboath, condemns his father and offers praise to Sophia and the Father. His prayers are heard and Sophia sends her daughter Zoe down to material world to raise Saboath to the seventh heaven. Here he receives instruction concerning the nature and teachings of the Pleroma from Zoe. For a detailed discussion of this account see Fallon:1978.

⁶³ *On the Origin of the World*, II.5.106. 10-15.

⁶⁴ Fischer-Mueller, 1990: 90.

⁶⁵ Fallon, 1979: 112-113.

⁶⁶ Gilhus, 1985: 97. cf *the Apocryphon of John*; *Pistis Sophia*; Irenaeus *Ad. Haer.* 1, 4, 2; Hippolytus *Ref.* VI. 32. 5-7.

⁶⁷ Stead, 1969: 88.

the mythologemes assigned to Sophia.⁶⁸ However, her main function in this text is that of *gnosis*, where she represents the eternal wisdom upon which all things are ordered. I agree with Gilhus in her observations concerning the nature of the higher Pistis Sophia and her role as the eternal wisdom. But I do not think that the Valentinian context of the text can be ignored. The complementary themes in the accounts of the Sophia narrative and the *Genesis* exegesis suggest that the duality of Sophia underscores the entire text and appears throughout the tractate. The polarity between carnal and spiritual knowledge, ignorance and awareness permeate the text. Therefore the duality and polarity of the nature of Sophia can be argued within this context.

Gilhus:1985 contends that *The Hypostasis of the Archons* expresses the view that Sophia is not a fallen entity rather she is symbolic of a higher form in the Pleroma and does not engage with matter or the material world. This perspective deviates from that evident in the *Apocryphon of John*, and even the testaments of the Church Fathers, in which one of the principal aspects of her character is that of a fallen figure.⁶⁹ Though the narrative of Sophia is reworked in the context of the Valentinian ideology, the basic sequence and structure remain intact, namely that she conceived Ialdaboath without her consort.

Gilhus:1985 argues that the principal deviance in the account of Sophia is that she does not fall beneath the cosmological veil which she created by conceiving Ialdaboath. She further contends that *The Hypostasis of the Archons* maintains and sustains the view that Sophia's fall and repentance is transferred to lower entities that do not originate in the Pleroma. Thus, Ialdaboath fulfills the role of the deity who falls, Sabaoth becomes the deity of the repentance while Sophia remains free of any guilt or sin.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Gilhus, 1985: 103.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 1985: 95.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 1985: 97.

This concept is essential for the sanctioned reorganization of the cosmos by Sophia after the banishment of Ialdaboath. She needs to be a pure deity with an unblemished history in order to successfully reorganize the realms of Chaos and recreate the order which Ialdaboath and the Archons perverted.⁷¹ She projects a higher form of authority throughout the text.⁷² She does not mete out punishment to Ialdaboath or reorganize the lower realms of the cosmos. These duties are carried out by the angel created by Zoe and Death respectively.⁷³ Sophia remains consistently separated from any contact with Ialdaboath and the corrupt entities of the lower regions and thus remains uncontaminated. While I agree with this line of reasoning I also believe that Sophia leaves the Pleroma and interacts with Ialdaboath and the material world in her lower manifestation as Eve.

Pagels' approach to the text centers on the figure of the spiritual Eve in the Genesis exegesis. She contends that there is a direct connection between Eve and the aeon Sophia. Pagels treats the text primarily as a Christian document and as such does not examine the pre-creation in detail narrative. However, she contends that the principal contrast in the text is between the psychic and the pneumatic forms of perception. This is shown in the comparison between the Incorruptibility and the Archons, and the contrast between carnal and spiritual knowledge. As such the figure of Sophia can be contrasted with the Eve. Sophia remains pure and untarnished while Eve is violated by the Archons. She maintains that *The Hypostasis of*

⁷¹ Chaos is the term given to describe all the planes and realms. It is without form until given one by Sophia in this text. Chaos existed prior to the creation of the entities by the Father. The seven planets here refer to the seven realms below the Pleroma which Sophia establishes by designating each with a ruler. This concept of the seven planets may refer to the Platonic myth of creation in the *Timaeus* whereby the Father creates the world according to a particular model; this includes the creation of seven planets. For further discussion see J. Dillon:1981.

⁷² She is able to offer redemption to Ialdaboath by establishing him as ruler of the seventh heaven and creates the higher parts of Chaos with the seven rulers of the planets.

⁷³ Gilhus, 1985: 101. The angel binds Ialdaboath and Death regulates the lower realms unconsciously carrying out the will of the Father.

the Archons sustains the view that sexuality has a direct but antithetical relationship to spirituality.⁷⁴

While scholarship on the tradition of Sophia has been extensive, recent work on the tradition posits that the traditional view of the aeon as a fallen figure needs to be revised. Good maintains that the concept of the fallen Sophia can be retained only by selective application of available material. In support of this argument, she cites the existence of texts known prior to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library, as well as texts within the Library wherein Sophia is described as Genetress, Mother and Consort to a number of divine beings. She believes these necessitate a revision of this standard scholarly view of Sophia. Work on *The Hypostasis of the Archons* often does not focus on the figure of Sophia and as such the view of her as a fallen figure is still in effect. Arthur:1984 contends that the narrative contained in the narrative of Sophia in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* is simply a condensed account of the fallen narrative found in *On the Origin of the World*. However, there are sufficient differences in both accounts to view the text of *The Hypostasis of the Archons* as a unique version of the narrative.

2.4 Summary

The tradition of Sophia as represented in the *Apocryphon of John* and the accounts of the Church Fathers has received much attention. The dominant view of the narrative is one of a fallen figure. The text of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* does not maintain this same view of Sophia, rather it emphasizes the unblemished nature of the figure. Though, the divergence from the tradition has been acknowledged by scholars, there has been no analysis of the tradition to determine the reasons for this alternative depiction of the aeon. In the next chapter

⁷⁴ Pagels, 1988:205-206.

I shall address this issue; specifically I intend to link the text of *The Hypostasis of the Archons* with the Valentinian tradition of a dual figure and to examine the connection between Eve and Sophia.

CHAPTER TWO: *THE HYPOSTASIS OF THE ARCHONS* AND THE VALENTINIAN TRADITION

In support of my argument, there are two central points in the discussion of the narrative of Sophia that require review in this chapter. Firstly, I shall argue that the narrative contained in the primary tractate, *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, conforms to the Valentinian tradition of dividing Sophia into a higher and lower manifestation. This division renders Sophia as a pure entity; thus, transferring the status of a fallen figure to Eve as the lower manifestation of Sophia. The second concerns the unique portrayal of the figure of Sophia found in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. This particular depiction will be discussed with a view to highlighting the divergence in tradition found in the tractate. I shall suggest that there is a connection between Sophia and the entity Ennoia in the document. In doing this, I shall illuminate the characteristics ascribed to Sophia which warrant the connection to Ennoia.

Sophia is known by many titles in the Nag Hammadi codices ranging from Barbelo to Epinoia depending on the tractate. Similarly, in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, Sophia is depicted as having a number of important characteristics namely those of Genetress/ Mother, Redeemer and Plurality. It is precisely these characteristics that establish her as the highest manifestation of wisdom within the tractate. I propose to examine these three character traits and discuss their relevance for its interpretation. I also intend to briefly address the concept of the link between Ennoia and Sophia in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. In undertaking this review, I shall primarily address the work of La Porta:1997 and Good:1987, whose work addresses the assignation of certain character traits to the higher and lower manifestations of wisdom in the Nag Hammadi texts.

3.1 Sophia- The Higher Manifestation of Wisdom

3.1.1 Characteristics

Recent scholarship on the tradition of the higher manifestation of Sophia has focused on the characteristics of the aeon. This dichotomy in the nature of Sophia, offers the opportunity to examine the characteristics that differentiate between higher and lower forms of the Wisdom. These can be used to support the argument in favor of such a separation and to elucidate a possible older tradition of the myth which identifies the higher manifestation of Sophia with Ennoia, the consort of the father. This view has been raised by scholars such as La Porta:1997, Good:1987 and Buckley:1986.

La Porta proposes a model of the dichotomy of the myth of Sophia. He divides the figure of Sophia into positive and negative characteristics and uses these to illustrate the complex and conflicting representation of this aeon. In his article, “Sophia-Meter: Reconstructing a Gnostic Myth”, La Porta schematizes the dichotomy of the higher and lower forms of Wisdom as follows:

- I. Glorifying and Stabilizing Emanation/Disobedient and Destabilizing Emanation**
- II. Mother of the Living/Mother of Ialdaboath**
- III. Descent with Revelatory Effects/ Descent with Disruptive Effects⁷⁵**

La Porta's observations are focused primarily on the tractate the *Apocryphon of John* and presented in that version of the narrative. He maintains that the dichotomy occurred in c. 2nd to 1st century B.C.E. and was a result of contemporary intellectual or historical factors, namely the Neopythagorean concepts of the creation of the Universe. The attributes associated with the lower manifestation of Wisdom are ascribed to a purely female figure, Sophia, who engaged with the world as a revealer/redeemer. The higher form of Wisdom was

⁷⁵ La Porta, 1997: 203-204.

retained by Barbelo, who maintained the androgynous nature of the first created being and was the Ennoia of the Invisible spirit. He further contends that the final separation of the Barbelo and Sophia figures occurred as a result of the conflict inherent in recognizing a redeemer figure who was also the creator of evil beings. This outcome confirmed the schism and Sophia was relegated to the position of the lowest aeon.⁷⁶

Pearson: 2007 agrees with this view and argues for this split to be formalized into higher and lower manifestations. In the Sethian system, reflected in the *Apocryphon of John*, Barbelo is the higher form while Sophia functions as the lower fallen manifestation. Pearson contends that the fallen aspect of the figure is centered around her role in the creation of the material realm namely by the birth of the Demiurge.⁷⁷ However, as a repentant fallen figure she can play a role as mediator between the two worlds. In addition, she is also provider of salvific *gnosis* to the elect.⁷⁸ While there is some agreement concerning these forms, their exact nature and typology is largely dependant on the provenance to which the text conforms.

Good's (1987) work on the tradition of Sophia argues for an individual text based approach to the study of the Sophia narrative. She maintains that the Sophia narrative as represented in the gnostic texts is part of a greater milieu of wisdom literature. The most notable example of this is Proverbs. Here, the figure of Wisdom is not a personified attribute of God but rather an independent entity present at the creation of the world. Wisdom can be read as the consort of the father and therefore, not as a fallen figure.⁷⁹ Good maintains that

⁷⁶ Barbelo in the *Apocryphon of John* is described as first creation of the Father. She is formed from his thought and is described as the first human being, the virgin spirit and androgynous in nature. Barbelo is often referred to as Ennoia/Epinoia in other gnostic texts. (Roukema, 1998:39).

⁷⁷ Pearson: 2007: 110. Pearson maintains that the *Apocryphon of John* is of Sethian provenance while other scholars such as Stead:1969 and Wisse:1988 argue that it is more closely linked with the teachings of Valentinus. I propose to address the text in light of the views of Stead and Wisse though still discussing the characteristics outlined in Pearson.

⁷⁸ Ibid , 2007: 110.

⁷⁹ Good, 1987:xiv-xv. A group of scholars comprising Ringgren:1947; Mack:1973; Lang:1976; Crenshaw: 1976; Nickelsberg and Stone:1983 have concluded that in *Proverbs* 8.22-31 Sophia is not a personified attribute of God but rather an independent entity present at the creation of the world.

the concept of the fallen Sophia can be retained only by selective application of available material. In support she cites the existence of texts known prior to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library as well as texts within it, wherein Sophia is described a Genetress, Mother and Consort to a number of divine beings. She believes these necessitate a revision of the standard scholarly view of Sophia.⁸⁰ La Porta maintains that Sophia's faults which contribute and result in her classification as a fallen entity can be summarized using the concept of *prouneikos*⁸¹. This refers to her power to procreate, and its capacity to represent instability as an anti-wisdom figure; and finally to her placing as the last aeon. Though there is a difference in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* and *The Apocryphon of John* in this regard, the format and basic structure of the myth derive from a common source as discussed above.

The term *prounikos* does not appear in the text of *The Hypostasis of the Archons* and therefore, the taint of lewdness cannot be applied to the character of Sophia. Great emphasis is placed upon this aspect of her character in other gnostic texts of varying provenance, indicating that the motif was a prevalent one.⁸² Sophia is also referred to as *prounikos* in

"I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." (Prv. 8.22-31)

⁸⁰ Good, 1987:xiv-xxi. The manuscripts, *Sophia of Jesus Christ* and *Apocryphon of John* describe Sophia as Genetress, Mother and Consort.

⁸¹ La Porta takes *prounikos* (*prunicus*) in this context to mean lewd or lascivious. However, in her article on this topic Anne Pasquier:1988 suggests an alternative reading for *prounikos*. She uses ancient etymologies of the term *prounikos* to argue that the term meant an impulsive person (πρό + νεῖκος) or a porter (πρό + νεῖκω, a form of φέρω). She analyses the use of the latter in comic plays in which it conveyed a sense of haste and audacity and conversely an impulsive person. She contends that *prounikos* then represents a character who is untamed or untamable, rushes audaciously and impetuously to the outside provoking dissent or discord. She also examines a range of Nag Hammadi texts and applies this definition to Sophia. She concludes that 'Sophia Prounikos' does not bring about the creation of the material world but merely prepares the separation while Ialdabaoth holds the position of dissent (νεῖκος). (Pasquier, 1988: 47-66).

⁸² The title *prounikos* is applied to Sophia in the *Second Treatise of Great Seth*, Epiphanius *Haer.* in reference to the Nicolaitians and Simonians and in the *Apocryphon of John*.

Irenaeus *Ad Haer.*⁸³ However, a more recent definition offered by Pasquier: 1988 suggests an alternative interpretation.⁸⁴

3.1.2 Genetress

La Porta assigns both the title ‘Mother of the Living’ and ‘Mother of Ialdaboath’ to the higher manifestation of wisdom in his analysis. However, I would suggest that only one should be applied to the higher element- ‘Mother of the Living’. The distance between the Sophia and Ialdaboath is emphasized consistently throughout the pericope and throughout the text as a whole. Consequently, she is not depicted as embodying the particular character trait, ‘Mother of Ialdaboath’, which is explicitly associated with the fallen Sophia. Gilhus:1985 contends that the original connection between Sophia and Ialdaboath is maintained in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, as it forms an essential part of the framework for the account. However, in contrast to related gnostic literature, she is not named as his mother nor he as her son.⁸⁵

Sophia’s connection to this title ‘Mother of the Living’ can be established by examining the hymn in the Genesis exegesis and also her role in introducing light into matter. Both passages in the document serve to connect her to Ennoia and the higher attributes of Wisdom. In the *Apocryphon of John* the creation of Ennoia/Barbelo is followed by a hymn of praise, “This is the first thought, his image; she became the womb of everything for it is she who is prior to them all.”⁸⁶ The sentiments expressed in this hymn can also be found in a praising hymn in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. This praise is given to Eve by Adam in tribute to her higher form, Sophia. “It is you who have given me life, you will be called

⁸³ Irenaeus, *Ad. Haer.* 1.29;30.3.

⁸⁴ Pasquier, 1988: 47-66. cf footnote 7 above.

⁸⁵ Gilhus, 1985: 95-97.

⁸⁶ *Apocryphon of John*, 5.5-8.

‘Mother of the Living’.- For it is she who is my mother. It is she who is the physician, and the woman, and she who has given birth.”⁸⁷ Both passages emphasize the creative processes of the female entities. In *The Hypostasis of the Archons* Adam is created in two distinct stages. The first occurs when the Archons construct his physical form from the soil of the earth. The first stage does not result in any further development as the Archons are unable to awaken Adam to consciousness. The second stage in his creation takes place when the spirit descends from the Pleroma to dwell in him and he becomes a ‘living soul’.⁸⁸ Though Sophia is not directly credited with the creation of Adam, her manifestation Eve completes the process and through her Sophia is recognized as the ultimate creator of Adam.

Though, the text maintains a clear separation between Sophia and the material realm. Without the intervention of the spirit acting on behalf of Sophia, Adam would have remained in an unconscious state. Upon seeing the spiritual woman Adam offers a salutary hymn in praise of his awakening. Gilhus maintains that through the form and content of the hymn Eve is identified as a mother goddess and as a result of subsequent events, specifically in being both mother and daughter and giving birth to Seth and Norea, is this too much information becomes a universal goddess.⁸⁹

Arthur: 1984 agrees with this assessment and contends that the hymn of praise, spoken by Eve, which also appears in longer form in *On the Origin of the World*, is a traditional piece of poetry.⁹⁰ This hymn is attributed to Adam in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. Arthur maintains that its inclusion in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* in the third person form indicates that the author has moved the attention from the genesis narrative to

⁸⁷ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 89.14-19.

⁸⁸ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 88.15.

⁸⁹ Gillhus, 1985:56.

⁹⁰ Arthur, 1984: 132-133.

another narrative. She agrees that the hymn is a form of traditional poetry and asserts that the change from the second to third person narration, confirms that it is also a citation.⁹¹

Gilhus: 1985 maintains that the salutary hymn contains several word-plays on the name Eve which in the Coptic text and the hymnological type has its predecessors in aretalogies of Isis.⁹² She argues that the spirit in this context alludes to the feminine nature of God and that while the hymn is explicitly directed to Eve there is an implicit allusion to God the Mother. This establishes yet another connection between the figures of Eve, Sophia and Ennoia. Ennoia is the female consort of the father and thus can fulfill the role of God the Mother and Eve's link to Isis also serves to connect to her to Sophia. However, it may be more probable to suggest that since the feminine aspect of the Father is not emphasized in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* the hymn refers to either Sophia or Ennoia who are credited with the birth of humanity in *On the Origin of the World* and *The Apocryphon of John*. Secondly, there is an established connection between Isis and Sophia.⁹³

In the text *On the Origin of the World*, Sophia creates the first human from a drop of light. In gnostic cosmogonies, Sophia's loss of light power is usually a crucial point in the narrative. It highlights the enormity of her mistake. However, this point has been reduced in the tractate so that no taint of the material plane or matter can be attributed to her.⁹⁴ The placement of the light pericope is significant as it occurs after the birth of Ialdabaoth. This connection between Sophia and light further underscores her role indirectly as the creator of

⁹¹ Ibid, 1984: 132. cf. Böhlig, 1962: 74-75; Tardieu, 1974: 107:117.

⁹² For the connection between Isis and Sophia see W.L. Knox:1937; Conzelman:1971; Kloppenborg:1982.

⁹³ *On the Origin of the World*, 113.20-30. In this narrative the creation of the first human occurs when Sophia let fall a droplet of light into water and it formed the first androgynous human. The connection between Sophia and light is maintained in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* but there is no explicit allusion to the creation of Adam, the first human in this text. Arthur: 1984 argues for the preference of *On the Origin of the World* over the text of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and maintains that the latter is a condensed version of the myths contained in *On the Origin of the World*. There she maintains that many of the motifs and narratives contained in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* are elaborated upon in the related text. (Arthur, 1984: 143-146). For the Isis connection see footnote 27.

⁹⁴ Gilhus, 1985:103.

humanity. “And immediately Sophia stretched forth her finger and introduced light into matter; and she pursued it down to the region of chaos.”⁹⁵ The description of the first human in *On the Origin of the World* contains a complimentary description of Sophia’s role in providing light to the world. “When Sophia let fall a droplet of light, it flowed onto the water, and immediately a human appeared, being androgynous.”⁹⁶

The role of light in the creation of the first human is a motif that also occurs in *The Apocryphon of John*, when Ialdaboath speaks of creating Adam. “Come let us create a man according to the image of God and according to our likeness that his image might become a light for us.”⁹⁷

Schenke:1958 argues that the Archons believed that their divine name and form guaranteed that their image would shine.⁹⁸ Giverson however, argues that their decision to create Adam is based upon his connection to the light and not to the earth.⁹⁹ The role of Sophia in both accounts is attested to in the narratives. Therefore, I would suggest that the otherwise obscure reference to Sophia’s release of light into matter is an allusion to her role in the creation of Adam. In *On the Origin of the World* it is through the power of light that Ialdaboath and the Archons are able to create Adam.¹⁰⁰ Though the connection is not explicit within the text of *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, nonetheless the explicit descriptions of the creation of the first androgynous being by Sophia and her use of light in the creation process cannot be ignored. The title ‘Mother of the Living can therefore be applied to Sophia in this context.

⁹⁵ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 94. 29-33.

⁹⁶ *On the Origin of the World*, 113.22-25.

⁹⁷ *The Apocryphon of John*, 15.1-5.

⁹⁸ Schenke, 1958: 665.

⁹⁹ Giverson, 1963:178.

¹⁰⁰ The separation of the description from the genesis narrative is due to the binary nature of the Sophia tradition. The relationship between light and the Pleroma is a prevalent one and also occurs in the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*. The beings which come into the world do so through light, a light which has direct connections to Sophia. (Good, 1987:37-38).

3.1.3 Redeemer

Gilhus: 1985 maintains that *The Hypostasis of the Archons* adopts a special view of Sophia as it transfers her fall and repentance to lower entities that do not have their origin in the World Above.¹⁰¹ Thus, she contends that Ialdaboath becomes the deity of the fall and Sabaoth the deity of the repentance. Ialdaboath therefore, fulfills the role of the anti-wisdom figure and represents instability. Conversely, Sophia is established as a stabilizing emanation. The threat of instability is most evident from statement “It is I who am God, and there is none apart from me”.¹⁰² This declaration confirms his role as the anti-wisdom figure in the text. His ignorance and false claim to be the ultimate God lends the element of instability to the cosmos. Prior to his creation of the material world, the Pleroma existed pure and stable, populated by entities created by the Incorrptibility. Ialdaboath created the material world in a comparable manner but it is imperfect as he himself is inherently flawed.¹⁰³ In reviewing his declaration of supremacy, Gilhus:1985 maintains that two important aspects need to be considered. Firstly, following his claim to be the only ruler of the Universe he is corrected by a voice from the Pleroma. This is significant as he asks to see the thing that existed before him. He is then given a vision of Sophia and her light. Thus he becomes aware of the existence of divine beings in the Pleroma. By reiterating his claim that he is the only God to his followers and emanations he is seeking to usurp the Father.¹⁰⁴ The narrative following his

¹⁰¹ Gilhus, 1985:97.

¹⁰² *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 94, 21-22.

¹⁰³ Ialdaboath is imperfect in both form and gender. In the previous section the appearance and significance of that appearance were discussed, namely that he does not resemble the divine beings originating in the Pleroma. Fischer-Mueller: 1990 argues that Ialdaboath is lacking in the male element of his androgynous nature due to his singular birth. She maintains that Ialdaboath is weak as he is lacking in maleness except for the power which he is able to take from his mother. She draws upon the Hellenistic medical beliefs outlined in Hippocrates and Aristotle that the female is a deformity and if the female nature prevails during the pregnancy the product will be imperfect and deformed. Fischer-Mueller, 1990:79-87. I am inclined to agree with her assessment of the deficiency in the form of Ialdaboath however, many of the gnostic aeons though described as aeons seem to favor one gender over the other and are referred to predominantly as being one primary sex throughout the texts. Sophia is described as androgynous in nature but is most often referred to in the feminine.

¹⁰⁴ Gilhus, 1985:98-99.

claim supports this view. Ialdabaoth's fate is to be cast down to Tartaros. He is punished for introducing an unstable element in to the gnostic cosmos.

His role as a destabilizing force is countered-balanced by Sophia's role as a stabilizing entity. Sophia brings order to the cosmos by introducing light into the material realm. This acts as a driving force in the battle between ignorance and wisdom on the material plane. Sophia is responsible for bringing Ialdabaoth to account. She does not do this directly thus avoiding any descent to matter and retaining her status as a higher aeon. Following the dethronement of Ialdabaoth, Sophia reorganizes the seven planets/realms which may be taken as a corrective influence following the corruption of gnosis by the Demiurge.

This glorifying element of the Sophia character can also be seen in her ability to enthrone other divine beings most notably in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* where it is applied to Sabaoth. Upon his repentance, Sophia raises him up to the seventh realm establishing him as ruler.¹⁰⁵ Fallon:1978 maintains that heavenly enthronement can be interpreted as a metaphor for the heavenly realm and accession to power. It does not have to refer specifically to placement on a throne.¹⁰⁶ If this is the case then Sophia is ultimately responsible for the enthronement not only of Sabaoth but of all who ascend to the Pleroma. She has created the means by which humanity can achieve gnosis and attain this goal. Her role as a wisdom figure and a glorifying emanation is explicit.

The position of Sophia and her placement as the twelfth aeon is more problematic and less easily resolvable particularly with reference to *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. It may not be possible to resolve this question of placement conclusively, as there is no mention of the order of the aeons in the tractate itself. However, in light of the Valentinian tradition quoted

¹⁰⁵ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 95.13-96.3.

¹⁰⁶ Fallon, 1978:42.

in Stead:1969, I believe that a case can be made for the classification of the spiritual woman as a lower aeon than Pistis Sophia within the tractate. Giverson:1963 maintains that she was placed in this position so that her subsequent failure was understandable. She is placed furthest away from the father and his influence.¹⁰⁷ This emphasis on understanding and accounting for the fall of Sophia is not a prevalent topic in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*.¹⁰⁸ Sophia is not always found in the position of twelfth aeon. However, in *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* she is specifically identified as the first aeon. Therefore, there is precedence for considering her as a higher form even without the nomenclature of Barbelo or Ennoia. In *The Hypostasis of the Archons* Sophia conforms to the model of the higher manifestation of wisdom and portrays the relevant characteristics for such manifestations.

3.2 Eve- The Lower Manifestation of Wisdom

3.2.1 Plurality

Thus far the discussion of the text has centered on the figure of Sophia in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* and her role as the higher manifestation of wisdom. To establish the concept of a dual Sophia in accordance with the Valentinian tradition, the lower manifestation of Sophia must also be addressed.

One of the main arguments in support of the fallen representation of Sophia is her role as the mother of Ialdaboath. This role identifies her as not only a transgressor but also the creator of the material world and the source of all its woes. Her role is integral to Gnostic

¹⁰⁷ Giverson, 1963:182.

¹⁰⁸ La Porta: 1997 maintains that the placement of Sophia as the final aeon may be a mistake and that she may have been found as the fourth aeon in the same tradition. Irenaeus notes that Sophia was brought forth from the first angel and is identified with the Holy Spirit. It is not within the scope of this paper to look at the placement of Sophia in the order of the aeons and the history of this topic. I do believe that the author of the *Hypostasis* did not have the traditional character of Sophia in mind when writing the text as there are very noticeable differences in the formation of the material world and the character of Sophia. Therefore, the order of her emanation though while not unimportant in this case is not of primary importance in the discussion of her status.

ideology otherwise it would not be possible to explain the existence of this perfect realm. It could not be ascribed to the agency of the Father whose creations are all of a higher form and authority than those present in the material world.

Sophia begins the process of her redemption through her repentance. The creation of Adam, located in the *Genesis* exegesis, symbolizes the correction of the mistake. Sophia manipulates Ialdaboath into giving Adam the power that he took from her.¹⁰⁹ She petitions the Father to send messengers from the Pleroma to Ialdaboath instructing him to blow into Adam's face in order to awaken him. This marks the beginning of Ialdaboath's demise. However, he is not banished entirely, as is seen in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*; rather Sophia gives humanity the tools to defeat his corruption. Following the birth of Seth, she sends a manifestation of herself to the material world to prepare this world for the aeons that will descend from the Pleroma. Thus, through the agency of Seth, the manifestation of Sophia and the future aeon, most likely, Jesus Christ, the deficiency of Ialdaboath will be corrected and the Pleroma will once again become whole and faultless.¹¹⁰ This aspect of Sophia is not emphasized in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* and she is explicitly distanced from any interaction with Ialdaboath. She does not repent nor is she relegated to a lower realm or forced to correct the mistake of Ialdaboath, as his birth is linked to the Abyss rather than Sophia. Thus, the account in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* needs further examination to determine the purpose behind this retelling of the traditional myth.¹¹¹

The *Genesis* exegesis comprises a large part of the text of *The Hypostasis of the Archons* and begins with the creation of the first human, Adam, through the agency of the

¹⁰⁹ *The Apocryphon of John*, 19.15-30.

¹¹⁰ *The Apocryphon of John*, 25.1-15.

¹¹¹ The *Apocryphon of John* is often connected with the Sethian branch of Gnosticism. Pearson:2007; Buckley: 1986; Wisse:1988 and not explicitly with the Valentinian tradition. This is also the case with the *Hypostasis of the Archons* however scholars do agree that both tractates contain aspects of Valentinian doctrine. Pearson:2007; Gilhus:1985; Petrement:1984.

Archons. Adam is created by the Archons to entice Eve, the female spirit, from the Pleroma to their plane. Once she descends to join him he is rendered complete, possessing both a soul and spirit.¹¹²

In this mode, the figure of Eve is an interesting one. She is introduced as a manifestation of Sophia, though not Sophia herself. There is a duality to the figure of Eve like that of Sophia. Eve appears alternately in pneumatic and sarcic form throughout the *Genesis* exegesis. The Genesis account in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* begins at 87.10 when the Archons see the reflection of the female figure in the waters and decide to create Adam in order to entice her from the Pleroma. Though the figure of Eve is not named as that of Sophia, I believe that building on the knowledge of the myth from *The Apocryphon of John*, in which Eve and Sophia are one and the same, this concept can be applied to the text. In *On the Origin of the World* Sophia begets the androgynous figure, the living Eva to save man from the evil Archons.¹¹³ In *The Hypostasis of the Archons* Adam refers to the spiritual Eve as: you who have given me life; you will be called 'Mother of the Living.'¹¹⁴ Pagels:1988 asserts that in referring to Eve as the mother of all, the author is signifying that the spiritual woman is not only his pneumatic co-image but also a manifestation of Wisdom, his spiritual mother.¹¹⁵

The figure of Eve functions as the lower manifestation of Sophia and as Gilhus: 1985 contends, Sophia's fall and repentance are transferred to a lower entity that did not originate in the Pleroma.¹¹⁶ This idea can be supported by the fact that the physical Eve is created in the material realm by Archons. Prior to this she is merely a thought manifestation, a form of consciousness or knowledge that exists within Adam. Her purpose in descending is to bring

¹¹² *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, II. 88.

¹¹³ *On the Origin of the World*, 113.30-33.

¹¹⁴ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, II. 89.10-15.

¹¹⁵ Pagels, 1988: 195.

¹¹⁶ Gilhus, 1985: 97.

knowledge to Adam. She accomplishes this aim and her presence in his consciousness is verified by the Archons who bring the animals to him so that he may name them.¹¹⁷

However, unlike Sophia, the spiritual Eve does not remain pure throughout her ordeal in the material world nor does she retain a higher form of authority. The fall begins with her separation from Adam by the Archons. She is separated from her consort and her purpose which is to join with him to achieve *gnosis*. This leads to the events that render her impure. The rape of Eve suggests a context for a fallen figure; though she flees from her physical body she does not escape untainted.

“And she laughed at them for their witlessness and their blindness; and in their clutches, she became a tree, and left before them her shadowy reflection resembling herself; and they defiled it foully. And they defiled the stamp of her voice...”¹¹⁸

The Hypostasis of the Archons expresses the opinion that sexuality bears a direct but antithetical link to spirituality. Thus, Eve’s association with this sexual act impacts negatively on her as a higher element.¹¹⁹ The carnal female is violated by the Archons, and though she is not the spiritual Eve, she is nonetheless a version of her. The Archons have succeeded in creating for their purposes, a carnal Eve, one who is the binary opposite of the spiritual Eve. The violation of the spiritual Eve and the creation of the carnal woman also represents a moment of horror in the narrative, horror for the bodily Eve; her victory comes at a cost that is the division of her self and the denial of her material self, the carnal woman.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 88.15-25. Gilhus, 1985: 52. Gilhus: 1985 maintains that the naming is a test to ensure that the pneumatic Eve is within Adam, knowing that the Archons can then proceed to capture her for themselves.

¹¹⁸ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 89.20-30.

¹¹⁹ Pagels:1988.

¹²⁰ King: 1993 as cited in McGuire, 1999:271 The separation of the spirit from her bodily form in the wake of the assault by the Archons is cited by McGuire 1999, as being reminiscent of the disassociation of mind and body that occurs as a survival mechanism among rape victims.

The significance of the attack is reinforced later in the text when Norea is born to Eve. She refers to her as "...the virgin whom the forces did not defile"¹²¹ This refers to Norea's pursuit by the Archons and the intercession of the Angel Eleleth, as a result of which she remains undefiled. McGuire: 1999 contends that Norea is a powerful female model of redemptive subversion. She is represented as the subversion of all Powers that falsely claim to rule the cosmos, social order and body. She participates in a system of power in which true identity and value reside only in the spiritual.¹²² By implication Eve does not reside in this place. Thus, the rape of the Archons had a lasting effect on more than just her bodily self.

Following her ascent to the Pleroma Eve next appears as the serpent in order to educate Adam and the sarcic woman about the tree of knowledge. She takes the form of a snake or inhabits the body of a snake in order to escape the notice of the Demiurge and the Archons. Pagels makes an interesting point regarding the relationship between Eve and the serpent, Adam and the carnal woman. This is the concept that first sin is adultery. According to the *Gospel of Philip*, Eve is committing a form of spiritual adultery with the serpent for which Adam retaliates by knowing the carnal woman.¹²³ She contends that as they are alienated from one another, each becoming involved in inferior relationships. Pagels defines adultery through the terms of the *Gospel of Philip*; that is every act of sexual intercourse which has occurred between those unlike one another is adultery.¹²⁴ The act of Eve joining with the serpent signifies how the pneumatic being, Eve, separated from the *psychē*, Adam, joins instead with matter or *hylē*, the snake. Likewise Adam undergoes an analogous experience with the sarcic woman.

¹²¹ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, II. 92.1-5.

¹²² McGuire, 1999: 272

¹²³ Pagels, 1988: 199. Cf. Gero:1987.

¹²⁴ Pagels, 1988:199 and *Gospel of Philip*, 61.10-11.

Furthermore, the carnal woman gives birth to Cain and Abel, both products of an impure marriage. The violation of the woman prior to her marriage to Adam renders her impure and her offspring are by implication also impure. This taint on the children of their union can be seen in their behavior, since Cain is referred to as the “carnal Cain”.¹²⁵ Since the carnal woman is a manifestation of Eve these children are further evidence of her fall and her repentance. Cain kills Abel, which is a deed that would not occur had the spiritual Eve not abandoned her consort Adam and opened the way for the birth of an impure being such as Cain.

The idea of redemption and repentance is introduced subtly throughout the *Genesis* narrative. Gilhus: 1985 contends that the sarcic woman provides positive soteriological functions in the text. She provokes Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge.¹²⁶ This begins the process of reconciliation between Adam and the spiritual Eve which results in the creation of Seth and Norea. The tractate states that following the birth of Seth and Norea humanity began to multiply and improve.¹²⁷ Thus, Eve redeems herself and provides humanity with the means to subvert the corruption of Ialdaboath.

3.3 Parallel Narratives: The Descent of Sophia and Eve

The descent or the non descent of Sophia is a topic of some contention within Gnostic texts. Stead:1969 states that the Valentinian teachings maintained a tradition where the lower manifestation of Sophia wandered the earth until her salvation by Christ. The higher element, Pistis Sophia, never left the Pleroma and therefore, avoided any association or taint with the

¹²⁵ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, II. 91. 10-25, pp.165-166.

¹²⁶ Gilhus, 1985: 65.

¹²⁷ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 92.1-5.

material realm and the birth of Ialdabaoth.¹²⁸ Her descent is not depicted within *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. The text explicitly designates that role to Eve, the spiritual woman. This contrasts with Sophia's role in related gnostic text such as *The Apocryphon of John*. However, I believe that the descent can be explained in the context of the divided tradition of Sophia. Eve maintains the role of revelatory figure in the material realm while the role of Sophia is confined to the higher levels. Sophia functions as a revelatory figure for Sabaoth and is responsible for enthroning and teaching him about the eighth heaven. Thus, I propose that there is a parallel narrative construction in play within the text. Eve descends to the material world with revelatory effects while Sophia descends from the eighth heaven to reveal the truth to Sabaoth. Therefore, both maintain their respective roles in the tradition, Sophia as the higher form of Wisdom and Eve as its lower manifestation.

3.3.1 Sophia's Descent

The descent of Sophia forms the basis for the pericope detailing the enthronement of Sabaoth who, upon seeing the fiery angel created by Zoe, condemns his father and mother and praises Sophia and Zoe.

And Sophia and Zoe caught him up and gave him charge of the seventh heaven, below the veil between above and below. And he is called the 'God of the forces, Sabaoth', since he is up above the forces of chaos, for Sophia established him.¹²⁹

Fallon: 1978 maintains that this account of Sabaoth's enthronement is influenced by two distinctly Jewish traditions. The first is that of the apocalyptic visionary and the second, the heavenly enthronement. Both are conflated in this account. Fallon suggests that there are two specifically new interpretations to these traditions in this account.¹³⁰ Firstly, Sabaoth is raised to the seventh heaven by Sophia and Zoe rather than by an angel or angels. This is contrary to

¹²⁸ Stead, 1969:88.

¹²⁹ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 95.15-30.

¹³⁰ Fallon, 1978:38-41.

the versions found in apocalyptic literature.¹³¹ Secondly, he is immortal rather than mortal as has been recounted in the apocalyptic accounts of this tradition. Thus, the reading of the pericope differs to related accounts. Arthur:1984 classifies the pericope as a revelation through cosmogonic narrative.¹³² The significance of Saboath should not be overlooked. Why did the author break the tradition of a mortal ascending to heaven and choose to consign this role to Saboath

The tractate maintains a consistent separation between Sophia and the material realm. Thus, it can be suggested that the use of Saboath supports a narrative device which allows the maintenance of detachment while conferring the characteristics associated with the higher form of wisdom, namely revelation. Sophia functions solely as an aeon of the Pleroma. It is only as the manifestation Eve that she has any dealings with the lower realms of existence. This view is further supported when she does not instruct Saboath about the mysteries of the eighth heaven but assigns her daughter Zoe to the task. "And Sophia took her daughter Zoe and had her sit upon his right to teach him about the things that exist in the eighth heaven;"¹³³

Gilhus: 1985 contends that Saboath's primary role is as a soteriological paradigm on the cosmological level which corresponds to Adam's role as a similar paradigm on the anthropological level.¹³⁴ Sophia and Zoe raise him to the seventh heaven and the gnosis of the eighth heaven is revealed to him. Though Zoe is responsible for initiating him into the teachings of the Pleroma the ultimate acknowledgement is given to Sophia. "...since he is up above the forces of chaos, for Sophia established him".¹³⁵

¹³¹ Ibid, 1978: 41. In 2 Enoch, Enoch is taken up by angels of the Lord and views the different heavens. 2Enoch (3:2-19:6). Similarly, Levi ascends through the three heavens at the bidding of an angel and the contents of heaven are revealed to him by the same angel (*The Testament of Levi*, 2:7, 2:8-3:10).

¹³² Arthur, 1984: 106.

¹³³ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 95.30-35.

¹³⁴ Gilhus, 1985: 105-106.

¹³⁵ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 95.25.

Gilhus argues that there are structural similarities between Sophia and Zoe; the Impenetrability and the spiritual woman, as each engage in actions of revelation and descent in both episodes. The Imperishability remains hidden in the Pleroma, while only her image is projected to the world below while the spirit operates in that world.¹³⁶ Similarly Sophia is restricted to the World above and projects only an image below, while her daughter Zoe acts beneath the veil.

There is some overlap between the figures in that the identity of the Imperishability and Sophia are intertwined in the text.¹³⁷ Both the spiritual Eve and Zoe are agents of Sophia and maintain her ordinances in the lower realms. Though revelation is not propagated by Sophia directly the ultimate acknowledgement of the revelations are awarded to her. There is no disruptive effect associated with the revelation and enthronement of Sabaoth rather the opposite holds true. After establishing Sabaoth as ruler of the seventh heaven, Sophia reorganizes the cosmos and creates order over not only the Pleroma, but also through the agency of Zoe and Eve, removes the corrupting influence of Ialdabaoth. However, the descent of the spiritual woman, Eve and the events surrounding her descent to the material world are not without disruptive consequences.

¹³⁶ Gilhus, 1985:106.

¹³⁷ Bullard, 1970: 56-57 maintains that the Imperishability and Sophia are one and the same. However Gilhus:1985 argues against this identification and maintains that Sophia is the last of the aeons while the Imperishability is the highest of the female saviors. She contends that the Imperishability initiates the process of salvation while Sophia initiates the process of the fall. I find that I am inclined to agree with Bullard's assessment of the two entities in that there are unmistakable links between the Imperishability and Sophia. The Imperishability is not identified with the father but with Ennoia or Barbelo. In the text Sophia is not described as the twelfth aeon nor as I have argued in this dissertation is she associated with the 'fallen' Sophia found in *The Apocryphon of John* and *On the Origin of the World*. Thus, Sophia is identified with the higher forms of Wisdom namely Barbelo and Ennoia.

3.3.2 Eve's descent

The narrative surrounding the descent of the spiritual woman forms an essential contrast to the descent of Sophia. Though the spiritual woman is acting in the interests of the Pleroma the account of her operations in the material world are not detailed in terms of an uneventful descent with only revelatory effects. That Eve represents a disruptive force in the material realm must be acknowledged as that is her purpose in descending. Her role is to counteract Ialdaboath's and the Archons' ignorant influence over Adam and to reveal the path of gnosis to humanity. In this role she is compelled to act as a disrupting force against the tyranny of Ialdaboath. Her revelation to Adam begins the process of salvation (Gilhus: 1985). However, in contrast to the descent of Sophia, Eve is forced to return to the Pleroma following the Archon attack. She returns to the material realm to give birth to Seth and Norea. Her revelations are accompanied by actions that are violent and sexual in nature. Though Eve is responsible for awakening Adam he praises wisdom.

And when he saw her, he said, It is you who have given me life; you will be called Mother of the living. - For it is she who is my mother. It is she who is the physician, and the woman, and she who has given birth.¹³⁸

The wording of the hymn alludes to the connection to Wisdom/Sophia and Jewish Proverbs and establishes the link between Eve and Sophia. The title 'mother of the living' attributed to Eve is used to connect her to Sophia, who is the real mother of the living; Eve is merely an earthly manifestation of Sophia. The spiritual woman's/Eve's revelations occur in a sequential order. The first is her command for Adam to wake. This action results in her eventual separation and flight to the Pleroma. Scholars agree that the genesis narrative and the joining of Adam and Eve is an allegory for the process of spiritual enlightenment that occurs within the individual seeking gnosis.¹³⁹ I propose to treat the pericope as a narrative

¹³⁸ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 89.10-20.

¹³⁹ Pagels:1988 cf. Logan:1996; Pearson:1988; Buckley:1986.

for the purpose of examining the events following Eve's revelations. Upon separation from her consort Adam, Eve is pursued and her image is defiled by the Archons. Eve does not maintain a pure image and is contrasted in the remainder of the tractate with Norea, "the virgin whom the forces did not defile".¹⁴⁰ Pagels:1988 maintains that the central theme in the tractate is the contrast between carnal and spiritual knowledge. Thus, the connection between carnal knowledge and Eve is unmistakable. The sexual and violent reaction that her revelation provokes is contrary to that of the revelation of Sophia. Eve's first revelation has a threefold result namely, her defilement, separation and flight.

The second revelation occurs while in the form of the serpent. The connection to wisdom is again explicit as the snake was an essential figure in wisdom iconography in the classical world. The serpent advises Adam and the carnal woman to eat from the tree of good and evil. This brings about their expulsion from the garden. The violence and disruption occurs later after their expulsion when Cain kills Abel and mankind is thrown into great turmoil. This could be explained as the process of relearning *gnosis* after losing the path of enlightenment. The death of Abel could also be seen as relinquishing the trappings of the old way of living in preparation for a life dedicated to gnosis. However, this it is not the central point of contention. Eve's final revelation occurs when she knows Adam again and gives birth to Norea and Seth both of whom contribute to the good fortune of humanity.

In contrast to the actions of Sophia, Eve's actions are not seamless. Though she is a heavenly aeon she does not maintain the same purity or authority as Sophia and therefore, her revelations are not as highly developed or sophisticated. Sophia's descent is described solely in terms of stabilizing revelation, whereas, Eve's action as a revelatory figure results in

¹⁴⁰ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 92.1-5

disruptive effects. This is accomplished without intent on her part. Similar to Stroumsa,¹⁴¹ I agree that the pericope detailing the fall of Eve/the Spiritual woman is in part a result of the inclusion of the Genesis narrative and also influenced by the divided tradition of Wisdom. Authors seeking to rework the narrative would doubtless have been influenced by early Christian accounts of Eve's fall and thus have included this significant theology into the narrative. Regardless of the reason, the contrast between the two figures remains.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the dual nature of Sophia with references to selected sources and in particular to *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. The specific characteristics examined are ones associated most commonly with the higher manifestation of Wisdom. These can be clearly identified in the figure named as Sophia in the tractate. She is not ascribed the role of mother of the demiurge nor does she repent her actions. She is distanced from all interactions with matter and the corrupt material world. The role of the 'fallen' figure is ascribed to Eve who is tarnished by the Archons and must redeem herself and humanity through the birth of Seth and Norea. The next chapter applies social-scientific theory to the findings reached in this section, namely that Sophia is a pure and untarnished figure.

¹⁴¹ Stroumsa, 1984:171. Cf. McRae:1970.

CHAPTER THREE: DEGREES OF PURITY

In this chapter I propose to introduce theories of purity and pollution derived from cultural anthropology in order to examine whether Sophia conforms to socially constructed purity models. The concepts of purity and pollution and their relationship to the figure of Sophia are of seminal importance in this dissertation. I propose to analyze the concept of purity on a macrocosmic level, namely the wider conventional purity norms found in the Pleroma, and secondly at the microcosmic level, to demonstrate its application to the person of Sophia. For the purpose of this examination I shall treat the Pleroma as a community of people and Sophia as an elite member of this group.

In undertaking this analysis I intend to utilize two main theories, those outlined in Douglas: 1966 and Malina: 2001, which combined, form the basis of a Purity Model of analysis. I shall utilize these to examine the community represented in the text, in particular, the hierarchy of the Pleroma and Sofia's place within this grouping. Using Malina's model, I intend to discuss the ramifications of the findings in terms of her classification within the text as a pure/impure aeon. The primary objective in using this approach is to clarify aspects regarding the nature and role of Sophia in the Pleroma. In applying the model to the character of Sophia I intend to expand the discussion of her place within the hierarchy and to determine whether she conforms to the ideal of purity in the classification of persons in the Pleroma.¹⁴²

The use of purity and pollution schemes to create order and structure in society is well attested to in anthropology. Douglas:1966 maintains that cultures use purity and pollution schemes variously as a means of organizing and maintaining social structures and defining

¹⁴² The model outlined in Malina is based upon the purity laws in effect in Israel in the first century C.E. Though the model is based upon Judaic scripture and cultural practices it establishes a precedent for classifying these concepts in a contemporary or at least related time period. There are both Jewish and Christian elements within the text which while not supporting the use of this model as a method of exclusively determining the nature of Sophia do not preclude it. The author of the text may indeed have been aware of the hierarchy of the Jewish Temple which in turn influenced the structure of the Orthodox Church.

the status quo; of identifying the criteria by which individuals are included or excluded; and illustrating those essential elements which preserve or endanger society. An object, person or thing which is classified as impure/unclean is thus marked as out of place damaged or incomplete.¹⁴³ The Malina model is based on a similar premise. Such schemes are generally accepted as classification systems which are used to delineate concepts of order and reinforce codes of belonging and behavior.¹⁴⁴

4.1 Methodology

To begin it is necessary to give a brief account of the Douglas and Malina models which will provide the basis for the purity model analysis.

4.1.1 The Malina Model

Malina's model is primarily focused on and applied to Israelite society in the period of second temple Judaism. Though the text in question is not of this exact origin many of the classifications present in this model are found within it. Thus, it provides a useful basis to establish general trends within the community of the Pleroma. In approaching the concept of purity laws and the rules that uphold them, Malina identifies the two major categories or sets of protocols governing the organization of Israelite society; these are *according to nature* and *contrary to nature*. This dichotomy is found within the structure of *The Hypostasis of the Archons* where the Pleroma can be said to represent the *according to nature* category and the material realm relegated to the category of *contrary to nature* due to the manner of its creation.

¹⁴³ Douglas, 1966:54.

¹⁴⁴ Elliot, 1993:73-74.

These two categories can be divided into further subsets, of *exclusive*, meaning holy, sacred, in place, clean and pure and *non exclusive* meaning profane, out of place or impure. These designations can be applied to all five major classifications commonly found in societies: namely self and others, animate and inanimate objects, time and space. Temple arrangements especially illustrate the application of these categories both in the composition of the space and to the groups permitted to use it.¹⁴⁵

4.1.2 Classification of People: Exclusive/Non-Exclusive

The classification of persons and the construction of hierarchy in first century Israelite society was dependant upon the categories above. The social construction of Israelite society was contingent upon the purity system discussed previously. The hierarchy of the society was determined by a continuum ranging from most pure to most impure. The rating of pure/impure was accomplished by a further subdivision of exclusive (sacred) and non-exclusive (profane).¹⁴⁶

The exclusive and non-exclusive subsets were dependant upon a number of factors. Primary among these were inclusion in the house of Israel and the ability to procreate, both interconnected as marriage laws dictated that marriage partners had to come from the house of Israel. Status was based on birth and dependant on wholeness of the family unit.¹⁴⁷ Those without a father or born with physical or mental deformities were relegated to the lowest

¹⁴⁵ Malina, 2001: 171.

¹⁴⁶ Malina: 2001 defines sacred as that which is set apart to or from some person. It includes persons, places, things and times that are symbolized or understood to be set apart from everyday activity and use. The opposite to the sacred is the profane which can be identified as that which is not set apart in any exclusive way and which can be viewed as belonging to everyone and no-one in varying degrees. Malina contends that the sacred and profane are subsets of purity rules dealing with differences in exclusivity (sacred) and non-exclusivity (profane). These concepts are dependant on the cultural and social context in which they are based. (Malina, 2001:163-165).

¹⁴⁷ The Priests, Levites and full blooded Israelites formed the higher levels of society as they conformed to both the pure and exclusive subsets of the scheme, being able to trace their lineage and originate from complete and established families.

level. They were non exclusive and out of place as they either did not possess covenant membership at birth, since this was traced through the paternal line, or were incapable of transmitting the status of Israelite. Therefore, they were not considered whole and were out of place within the society.¹⁴⁸ These further defining factors will be instrumental in assigning a provisional status to Sophia and later Eve within the context of their communities.¹⁴⁹

4.1.3 Geographical Measures of Purity

The spatial arrangement of the Temple replicated the social construction of first century Israel. Much of the interaction within this space mimicked the established hierarchy in that the elite/pure in society interacted to the highest degree in the temple while those in the non-elite/non-exclusive bracket had only limited access to this space. The temple was divided into zones, which were accessible to different groups based on their purity status in the society. There were three main zones of interaction within the Temple. The temple was surrounded by an area which was considered profane and thus, could be utilized by all regardless of their place or ethnicity in society. This place known as Zone A, (Malina:2001) was a place of assembly for those who are members of the house of Israel regardless of their standing in society. Zone B was the zone of interaction, in which all other activities took place. This zone was more restrictive and required the facilitation of a priest to effect entry. Zone C formed the most sacred part of the temple, as it was dedicated solely to God. These zones, while not so rigid in their classification, are also found in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. There are three main spatial definitions within the text, the Pleroma, the material world and the zone of

¹⁴⁸ Malina, 2001:173-176.

¹⁴⁹ I have chosen to focus primarily on the according to nature category as this is the grouping in which Sophia is placed. For discussion of anomalous/abominations, the final category of people who were those of all other ethnic groups, including Gentiles see Malina:2001. This grouping is not considered to be outside the Israelite society and therefore, does not conform to the social norms in any way and cannot be included even in the impure subset; rather their fate is left to God or to be destroyed. Malina, 2001:175-177.

interaction between the Pleroma and the material world .This area was restricted to Priests and Levites alone. Thus, much like the structure of the Pleroma and the material plane, the closer the space and aeon to the Father, the more sacred/pure they become.¹⁵⁰

4.1.4 The Douglas Model

Douglas' work on the concept of purity within society provides insight into the rationale behind the ostracism or separation of the individual in certain societies. Cultures often use purity and pollution schemes to organize everything into its proper place and to define and demarcate what is complete or incomplete, damaged or whole, what is allowed or forbidden, who belongs to the society and who does not and what preserves the society and what endangers it. Consequently, when a person is considered unclean or impure they are evaluated as out of order or incomplete thus, rendering them as outside society.¹⁵¹ She argues that purity and pollution should be viewed in symbolic terms.¹⁵² She argues that the body symbolizes society. The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system, and its boundaries can represent any system which is threatened or precarious within a certain society.¹⁵³

Douglas maintains that the wider social norms and concerns of society can be seen to be reflected in the rules imposed upon the physical body.¹⁵⁴ These boundaries represented in the body are contingent upon the rules governing purity/impurity and clean/unclean within

¹⁵⁰ Malina, 2001:182-184. Though this overview of the temple may be further subdivided for a comprehensive rendering of Temple space, for the purpose of this paper I intend to give a survey of the main points of the purity structure.

¹⁵¹ Douglas, 1966:54.

¹⁵² Douglas, 1966:6. Douglas' observations on these concepts are centered on how dirt is perceived. She contends that "dirt" can be viewed as a code word for polluted/unclean or taboo, as reflections on dirt often involve reflection on the relations of order to disorder, being to non-being and life to death among other things

¹⁵³ An example of a threatened boundary in Douglas is the concept of purity in Israelite society. Douglas, Cf. Malina:2001, maintains that the purity laws and their application to the body indicate an underlying societal concern with pollution and how this affects the order of society.

¹⁵⁴ Douglas contends that the physical body represents a microcosm of social order and is very important for understanding and interpreting the main causes of concern within a society.

that society.¹⁵⁵ Consequently this theory is of central importance when analyzing the figure of Sophia in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* as it offers a basis with which to discuss her depiction and actions within a community, specifically the Pleroma.¹⁵⁶

Hence, it can be determined whether her actions in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* result in a separation from the community as is the case in *The Apocryphon of John* and *On the Origin of the World*. While it may be argued that the model deals only with the physical community and holds no relevance for a constructed spiritual grouping such as the Pleroma, beliefs which attribute spiritual power to individuals are rarely neutral or devoid of the dominant social patterns. In essence the text reflects the dominant social structure and belief of the community that produced it. Though this community cannot be conclusively identified, Douglas' seminal work has been utilized in the analysis of both Jewish and Christian texts previously and has proved invaluable.¹⁵⁷

4.2 The Pleroma

I shall begin by discussing the Pleroma and establishing its general structure and format in order to provide a concrete basis by which Sophia's status and lineage within this community can be determined. The Pleroma represented in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* appears to conform to the model of the Israelite society outlined in Malina. This model of pure/impure is not restricted to the Israelite community but rather serves to provide one means of analyzing a community. Early societies cannot be considered to be secular in any way but rather religion formed an integral part of the governmental force and therefore, served to reinforced these concepts of pure and impure among the inhabitants. The

¹⁵⁵ Douglas, 1966:115

¹⁵⁶ Both the figure of Sophia and Eve will be analyzed with particular attention to the physical imagery and actions ascribed to each in order to show the dichotomy which is upheld using this theory.

¹⁵⁷ Neyrey, 1996:87.

prevalence of this system in ordering societies can be found in much of the early Christian literature.¹⁵⁸ Elliot:1993 observes that purity concepts and regulations formed comprehensive and internally consistent patterns for ordering personal and social life in consonance with structures at the cosmological level. He maintains that these concepts were integral to the construction of not only Jewish but also early Christian conceptualizations of wholeness, social identity, and communal morality.¹⁵⁹

4.3 The Geography of the Pleroma

The text clearly divides the realms in the narrative. The Pleroma was created first, followed later by the material plane. The Pleroma was created by the Father, the highest form of authority within the text. Consequently, the concepts of purity and sacred are measured against his creation thus, it conforms to the category of *according to nature*. Furthermore, it is an exclusive space geographically, being inhabited by only those created by the Father and of the highest lineage.¹⁶⁰ It is a place reserved for the elite of the community represented in the text. Sophia automatically conforms to this elite category of *according to nature* merely by her inhabitation of the realm.

The geographical layout of the Pleroma reflects a similarity to the spatial plan of the Temple. It represents the most sacred of space and is accessible to only the most pure and exclusive in the community. Sophia's residence in the Pleroma immediately identifies her as a member of this elite, specifically a member of the spiritual elite as Malina contends this

¹⁵⁸ Elliot:1991;1993 uses this model of purity to analyze *Luke-Acts* and *The Epistle of James*. For further discussion on the history of scholarship see Neyrey:1996.

¹⁵⁹ Elliot, 1993:74. The text in question cannot be conclusively dated except to an approximate date no later than the fourth century C.E. Nonetheless, in utilizing the observations of Malina as a basic outline, the text can be seen to employ these purity systems found in the early Christian and Jewish communities.

¹⁶⁰ *The Hypostasis of the Archons* makes no reference to any individuals not born of the Father residing in the Pleroma. When Sabaoth is raised from the material realm he is placed in the seventh heaven not the eighth realm with the Father. (*The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 95.14-96).

space is reserved for the priests and the most pure of the community. The eighth heaven, the realm of the Father is comparable to zone C as it is the least accessible of the realms and restricted to those members directly related to the Father and their offspring. This is most apparent in the text when Saboath is raised from the material realm to the Pleroma. He is not permitted access to the seventh heaven but rather a lower realm, perhaps comparable to zone B where interactions between the Father and those not of the priestly class could take place.

And Sophia and Zoe caught him up and gave him charge of the seventh heaven , below the veil between above and below...And Sophia took her daughter Zoe and had her it upon his right to teach him the about the things that exist in the eighth [heaven].¹⁶¹

4.5 The Hierarchy in the Pleroma

As Malina's model outlines, the status of member of the house of Israel was conferred upon the child through the paternal line, the same can be applied to membership of the Pleroma. Whether Sophia is termed as the daughter of the Father, or the consort of the Father, either designation legitimates her place as a respectable member of the Pleroma. Furthermore, her parents are placed at the highest stratum of the social order and she can be categorized as much like the priestly class. In the description of her birth found in the *Apocryphon of John* this is corroborated. Sophia, Wisdom, is the twelfth aeon created by the Father and Barbelo.¹⁶²

Her residence in the Pleroma is an important factor. She resides in the Pleroma with the other members of the group and is neither ostracized nor cast down to a lower realm. Thus, those that reside in the Pleroma can be thought of as equal to the highest level of society. In accordance with marriage and procreation practices, Sophia herself has a consort

¹⁶¹ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 95.14-96.

¹⁶² *The Apocryphon of John*, 8.5-25. The placement and birth of Sophia are not included in the account of the pre-creation narrative in *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. However, the figure of Sophia has a standard lineage in many of the accounts and therefore, I believe that it can be extrapolated from the long standing tradition.

who is also a member of the Pleroma and she is able to give birth to children, such as Zoe, who retain the right of residence there. This is further evidence of her status in the society of the text. She complies with the necessary rules which maintain her classification, marrying within her class and providing the Pleroma with children of equal standing.

Further evidence of her spiritual status within the hierarchy of the Pleroma can be found in her role as a mediator between the lower entities such as Sabaoth. Sophia fulfills the role of priest in her actions in the eighth heaven. Here it can be suggested that Sophia replicates the role of the priest or spiritual aid in facilitating access. However, Sophia is no mere priest. Rather, her actions portray her as one of the principal mediators in the Pleroma but one who does not ordinarily interact with those of the lower levels. Thus, I would argue that she functions like the high priest of the temple. She has access to the highest form of knowledge and acts as the spokesperson for the Father. This can be corroborated by her delegation of certain tasks to Zoe and Eve as it demonstrates the authority she wields, namely her ability to organize the cosmos following the ostracism of Ialdabaoth.¹⁶³

These actions alone would render her above taint and in accordance with the classification, the purest of the pure/ exclusive grouping. While these factors mark Sophia as a member of the pure/elite, her continued membership of the class is dependant upon the adherence to the norms that govern the society. Thus, as is seen in the *Apocryphon of John*, Sophia loses her status and place within the society of the Pleroma following the creation of Ialdabaoth. She is excluded and cast down to the realm just above the material world until her mistake can be corrected. She is no longer considered a member of the society of the Pleroma as she has transgressed the rules which define and demarcate what is acceptable and

¹⁶³ The text of *On the Origin of the World* assigns the task of banishing Ialdabaoth to Sophia (102.30-35) but *The Hypostasis of the Archons* names Zoe as the banisher (95.5-15). I believe that the explicit separation of Ialdabaoth and Sophia in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* necessitated the change in the text. However, as Sophia is depicted as the ultimate authority in the reorganization of the cosmos I believe that it can be argued that the action takes place at her behest.

what is forbidden within the society. Malina's model is valuable for examining the structure of a society where status is determined by these factors. In order to maintain their status within the society the individual must adhere to the laws of the purity system that governs it.

4.5 The Social construction of the Pleroma

4.5.1 Sophia

The microcosmic analysis of Sophia can be undertaken using Douglas' work which is invaluable in this regard. Douglas contends that labeling persons or things as pure or polluted serves to establish identity and maintain group identity. With these labels, the group now has the power to include or exclude individuals. The use of such terms is designed to aid with maintaining order within the community as the labels support clarification, maintain social/group boundaries, and reduce dissonance.¹⁶⁴ Pollution is not always an intentional action. However, whether deliberate or accidental the result is the same. A polluting person will always be in the wrong and will be subject to repercussions.¹⁶⁵

The principal action in question which has defined Sophia' status in many texts as an impure aeon is her role in the creation of Ialdaboath and the material world. In the accounts of this pericope in both the *Apocryphon of John* and *On the Origin of the World* the outcome of this action is temporary banishment until such time as the mistake has been corrected and order has been restored. The birth of Ialdaboath is a prime of example of how the body can symbolize society. His creation results in both cosmic and hierarchical disorder. Prior to his creation there was only one plane of existence, the Pleroma, and it functioned with an

¹⁶⁴ Douglas, 1966:133.

¹⁶⁵ Douglas, 1966:106.

established and ordered hierarchy maintained through proper 'marriage'¹⁶⁶ and social functions. When Sophia transgresses and produces her own offspring it is tantamount to adultery, the child creates an alternate social hierarchy and refuses to acknowledge the Father. Rather Ialdaboath challenges his authority. "...I have no need of anyone," he said, "It is I who am God and there is no other that exists apart from me."¹⁶⁷

Thus, the creation of the child outside the union of her consort symbolizes all of the concerns present in the community: illegitimacy/adultery, the complete breakdown of social and familial order. Ialdaboath is vilified, though his identification as an impure aeon is initially through no fault of his own. His characteristics are described in the worst possible terms, 'arrogant' and 'ignorant'. The description of his appearance is also described in terms designed to shock and also to place him irrevocably outside the community of the Pleroma. "...something came out of her which was imperfect and different from her appearance...it changed into a form of a lion-faced serpent."¹⁶⁸ Sophia is described in terms of her uncontrollable sexuality. She is defined by her inability to control her bodily urges which symbolize her inability to conform to the social norms. By allowing the sanctity of her body to be breached she has transgressed the very rules which it upholds.

Israelite and Greek beliefs on impurity dictate that many bodily functions were polluting, in particular semen and blood. Thus, childbirth was considered to be so contaminating that it required a period of ritual cleansing before a woman could interact in society after childbirth.¹⁶⁹ In addition to this taint, Sophia also must contend with the birth of a child outside of her union with her consort which compounds her impurity.

¹⁶⁶ I use the term marriage here in place of the consort arrangement of the Pleroma to establish a more institutional convention and one which reflects the rigidity of the arrangement which exists within the hierarchy of the Pleroma.

¹⁶⁷ *On the Origin of the World*, 103.10-15

¹⁶⁸ *The Apocryphon of John*, 10.4-10.

¹⁶⁹ For further discussion see Burkert: 1985.

In the society under review, the women of the household and in particular the wife, personified the very heart of the family. Any misdeed or mistake on her part impacted not only her consort but also the entire family line. The worst fears of ancient society are enacted in the Sophia narrative; an illegitimate child who brings shame and pollution to an otherwise exemplary figure and challenges the ultimate male authority of the community resulting in chaos. These fears and repercussions are narrated on an individual level and developed in depictions of Sophia and Ialdaboath.

The account of the narrative found in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* contains no such account of Sophia. Rather, the author zealously protects the purity of the aeon throughout the rendition. Sophia's actions are above reproach and never lead to the consequences seen in related literature. She is never referred to as *prounikos* nor connected to Ialdaboath or the material world. Sophia is never ostracized from the community of the Pleroma. Since contamination with pollution can occur with contact, Sophia is explicitly distanced from all possible contagion and resides safely in the Pleroma. Thus, since the birth of Ialdaboath is not attributed to Sophia and the action does not result in any lessening of her status, it can be determined that she maintains her pure status within this text. Her authority within the text remains unchallenged or lessened within the community. She controls the ordering of the Pleroma, an action which would not be entrusted to her if the taint of pollution were attached to her character. The avoidance of any and all bodily images in the depiction of Sophia prevents any hint of contamination with pollution. Her observation of the conventions of the Pleroma and her classification as a member of the elite render her a pure aeon.

4.5.2 Eve

The purity and maintenance of this status by Sophia is further evident in the dichotomy between her character and that of Eve. As the higher manifestation Sophia is only described in terms of her spirituality and authority while Eve is depicted in terms of her physical weakness. The differences between the two figures serve to emphasize the virtues of Sophia and the weaknesses of Eve. Though the violation of her physical body is not an action which she can avoid or control, it nonetheless reduces her standing and authority. She is forced to flee from the material realm in horror. When her daughter Norea is born, Eve describes her as “the virgin whom the forces did not defile”.¹⁷⁰ Like Sophia in the *Apocryphon of John*, Eve must rectify the problems caused by the violation of her physical body, namely her separation from Adam and the birth of Cain and Abel before she can regain a semblance of her former stature.

And Adam [knew] his female counterpart Eve, and she became pregnant, and bore [Seth] to Adam,...Again Eve became pregnant, and bore [Norea]. And she said, ‘He has begotten on [me a] virgin whom the forces did not defile. Then mankind began to multiply and improve.’¹⁷¹

The chaos caused by the violation is reflected in the Cain and Abel pericope. Both are the children of the carnal woman, the lesser image of Eve. The fratricide that occurs in this pericope signifies the disorder of the family and the transgression of the social morals that is a direct result of the violation of the heart of the family. The message is clear, the state of mankind is reflected in microcosm, thus with the breaking of social boundaries comes chaos. Eve was violated and left the family. Her return and the reunification signified a return to the norm and the family/mankind began to thrive. However, Eve does not ever attain the status that she once had as a pure entity and the attack results in a lasting impurity.

¹⁷⁰ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 92.2-4.

¹⁷¹ *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, 91.30-92.5.

In contrast to the figure of Eve, Sophia and even Norea are portrayed as idealized figures. Since the tractate embodies the idea that carnal knowledge is antithetical to spiritual knowledge it is not surprising that the author maintains an explicit distance between the principal spiritual figures and this impure knowledge. Nonetheless, the text still depicts the concerns and cultural beliefs of the community in which it was produced.

In analyzing the community of the Pleroma and establishing the rules and hierarchy in which Sophia must function it is clear that she deserves the label of a pure entity within this group. She adheres to the rules governing the purity system of the Pleroma and maintains a clear distance from any and all activities which may compromise her status. Unlike the *Apocryphon of John* or *On the Origin of the World* Sophia never leaves the Pleroma, never acknowledges Ialdaboath or engages in discussion with him. All activity of that nature is passed to lower aeons. Her role as spiritual authority is paramount. As the heart of her own family and spiritual community she remains untouched and in charge.

4.6 Summary

The models used above are but one way in which the society of the text can be analyzed. In using these models it is apparent that the figure of Sophia in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* can be seen as one who conforms to the model of a high ranking member of the elite within this Pleromatic society. While in other accounts of the pre-creation narrative Sophia is portrayed as a figure who transgresses and is ostracized the opposite is true of this document. Authority and purity are the central focus of this analysis as one cannot be conferred on the individual without the other existing also. Therefore, in retaining her authority throughout the account, it can be suggested that she likewise retains her purity. I have briefly discussed the figure of Eve as she experiences quite the opposite treatment in the

tractate. Eve's violation results in her temporary flight from the material realm and loss of her authority. Mankind does not thrive nor is she able to fulfill her role. The contrast between the two figures serves to reinforce both the fallen image of Eve and the pure image of Sophia.

CONCLUSION

The figure of Sophia in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* is a complex one and one which is in some ways congruent with the image of the figure represented in the *Apocryphon of John* and *On the Origin of the World*. However, there are sufficient differences to warrant an alternate reading of the specific account detailed in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. In the course of this thesis I have strived to highlight the unique nature of the Sophia narrative in this tractate. The text presents an alternate view of the figure of Wisdom than that found in other related gnostic texts and one that has received little attention in scholarship. My main objective in undertaking this research was to explore whether an argument could be made to support an alternate reading of the text to include an 'unfallen' figure of Sophia. I believe that this can be done. By comparing the account of the pre-creation myth in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* to that found in Irenaeus, Hippolytus, the *Apocryphon of John* and *On the Origin of the World* it is clear that there are significant divergences in the narrative. While there are many versions of the pre-creation account there is a unifying factor and that is the fall of Sophia, her repentance and eventual restoration. Since this is not the case in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* further research needed to be completed.

The Valentinian tradition, in which higher and lower manifestations of the figure of Sophia are recognized, is a valuable tool for the analysis of the text. While it cannot be asserted that the text is of Valentinian provenance I believe that the tradition itself is much older.¹⁷² Thus, the version of the narrative in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* may indeed be drawing upon this alternate tradition of Sophia. Gilhus:1985 in her seminal work on the text maintained that the fall of Sophia was indeed absent from the tractate and the flaws and repentance so prevalent in the figure were transferred to lower entities. It is my assertion that

¹⁷² La Porta, 1997:203-205. La Porta maintains that this dichotomy between the higher and lower forms of Wisdom was first evident in the Jewish Proverbs tradition. This later influenced Hellenistic philosophy and Gnostic theology.

Eve represents the lower manifestation of the aeon and is the bearer of the flaws of wisdom. I have examined the features of both figures to demonstrate how they form parallel dichotomous narratives in the text.

While much of my analysis remained literary I thought that it would be interesting to examine the social context of the text in as much as this can be done with a text like the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. By using the models of Malina:2001 and Douglas:1966 I was able to analyze the concepts of purity and pollution in the text. The society of the Pleroma was representative of the kind of community found in other ancient texts, family unity, honor and fear of disorder. Furthermore by examining Sophia's role in this community of the Pleroma it could be stated that she fulfilled the role of a pure, 'unfallen' figure within the document. There are essentially two narratives in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, one which deals with a higher more conceptual way of thinking and the material realm which represents the human way of life. Though it was not the purpose of this thesis to analyze the possible ramifications of this division in terms of the audience of the text it would certainly be interesting to investigate this area. Pheme Perkins:1988 maintains that the fallen narrative would have appealed to many ordinary women in the gnostic communities and they would be able to identify with the message of hope and restoration. Who then was the target of the more esoteric narrative in the Pleroma? Were the narratives combined in order to maximize the audience? These are questions which warrant further research.

In completing this preliminary analysis of the text I hope to demonstrate that the tractate does not conform to the fallen Sophia tradition. There intriguing similarities to the Valentinian tradition of the higher and lower forms of Wisdom. Indeed Sophia appears to possess more of the characteristics found in Ennoia more so than the Pistis Sophia found in related literature. The social context of the text is of particular interest and an area I believe

could benefit from further research. The application of social scientific methodology to a text of this kind could result in perhaps more information about the community in which it was produced. Therefore, I would like to conclude this thesis with a call for scholarship as I believe that the tractate has a wealth of wisdom yet to bear.

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