

(CE:2276a-2277a)

TRIMORPHIC PROTENNOIA (Nag Hammadi Codex XIII.1).

This short Coptic text (sixteen pages of papyrus) forms a small booklet, clearly detached from a larger whole and slipped inside the leather cover of Codex II of the NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY. On its last page, the beginning of another Nag Hammadi treatise can be recognized, the anonymous treatise from Codex II of which Codex XIII no doubt contained a second version. The text of the *Protennoia* is probably complete, but the manuscript is badly damaged, containing considerable lacunae that hinder the interpretation of a work already very obscure.

The work is a kind of hymn of revelation, of the "I am" type, strongly marked by mythological gnosticism. The work appears to belong to the same Gnostic sect as the APOCRYPHON OF JOHN, with which it has several points in common, and also could well be almost contemporary. The revelation consists of three clearly separated parts, each having a subtitle in the manuscript. The speaker is always Protennoia, that is, the First Thought of the Invisible. The three parts begin, respectively: (1) "I am the Protennoia, the Thought . . ."; (2) "I am the Voice which was manifested . . ."; and (3) "I am the Word [Logos]. . . ." This tripartite division broadly corresponds to the three modes of the manifestation of Protennoia, although the latter are not so sharply distinguished (in fact, the first section already introduces the threefold aspect of Protennoia). Like the Revealer in the Apocryphon of John, Protennoia is at once the Father, the Mother, and the Son. She descends on three occasions from the world of light, each time in a form corresponding to the sphere that she comes to save: "Among the angels I manifested myself in their likeness, and among the powers as one among them, and among the sons of men as a son of man" (49.15-20). She is life, has produced the All, and lives in all. Her second coming had as its aim to put an end to fate (43.4-27). Accordingly, she put breath into those who were her own but ascended back to heaven without her "branch" (45.29-34). In the final segment, the Logos comes to enlighten those who are in darkness (46.30-33) and to teach the decrees of the Father to the

sons of light. Protennoia puts Jesus on the cross, then takes him down from the cross and establishes him in the dwelling places of his Father. Finally, she declares, she will establish her "seed" in the holy light, in an inaccessible silence.

The work is much more complex than this summary might lead one to believe, apparently having undergone several reworkings. Related not only to the Apocryphon of John but also to other Coptic Gnostic texts now rediscovered, it presents additionally literary contacts with the New Testament. Assuming that the work was purely Gnostic in origin, and only subsequently Christianized, it has been thought to represent—particularly in its third section, which concerns the Logos—a Gnostic source for the prologue of John's Gospel. This possibility has formed one of the principal foci of interest in this treatise. But on this subject exegetes remain far from unanimous.

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