

## PISTIS SOPHIA AGAIN.

## I.

ANOTHER translation of Pistis Sophia! This dreary Egyptian book, first edited in the original Coptic with a Latin translation by Schwartz and Petermann in 1851, was translated into French by Amélineau in 1895 and into German by Carl Schmidt in 1905. G. R. S. Mead published an English translation in 1896 and another better one in 1921. Now we have an Essay on the date and origin of *Pistis Sophia* by Mr Legge, together with the excessively literal translation made by Mr Horner for Mr Legge's use.<sup>1</sup>

Mr Horner's translation is indeed very literal, following the Coptic word for word. 'These therefore saying them the Saviour, knew Andreas clearly not only he, but knew all the disciples in directness that they will inherit the Kingdom of the Light' (p. 126): this extract will give an idea of the style, and of the difficulties that the English reader who knows no Coptic will find in it. It may be taken for granted that it is generally accurate, but I notice on p. 129, line 10 from bottom, Mr Horner has 'mysteries of the Light' in agreement with Schwartz-Petermann (trans. p. 162, l. 20 *μυστηρίους luminis*), where the Coptic (S.-P. 257, l. 24) has 'mysteries of the Kingdom of the Light'.<sup>2</sup>

Neither Mr Legge nor Mr Horner has taken any notice of Mr Mead's second edition (1921): apparently Mr Legge had died before it appeared. Mr Horner would, as I venture to think, have gained something by considering my review of Mead in this JOURNAL (*J. T. S.* xxiii 271 ff). For instance, he would have translated *Ghemmout* (p. 178) instead of leaving it as a Nomen Barbaricum, seeing that it is the native name for the star or constellation mentioned in Job ix 9, xxxviii 31. Further, at the beginning of his Fourth Document (p. 180) we have the explanation of the Name IAO. Mr Horner has 'iōta, The Universe came out alpha, They will turn them. ō, Will become the completion of all the completions'. I confess to having a low opinion of the style and thought of *Pistis Sophia* in general, but it really is a little more sensible than this.<sup>3</sup> What the Coptic text says here is: 'I—Everything has come forth. A—They will return within. O—There will be the End of all ends.'

<sup>1</sup> *Pistis Sophia*, literally translated from the Coptic by George Horner, with an Introduction by F. Legge, F.S.A. (London, S.P.C.K., 1924.)

<sup>2</sup> Mead (p. 216) has 'Light-kingdom', correctly.

<sup>3</sup> In any case the text (in Schwartz) actually does have a full stop before 'alpha'.

It is the thought of Eccl i 7 and of Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence put into the simplest words; but the English reader is not conducted to any sense from Mr Horner's rendering.

Again, I cannot believe that 'Aphrodite' was ever called a *Ram* or, if we use astronomical language, that Venus was ever identified with Aries (p. 185). Here indeed I believe that Schwartz's text has an error, but it is a very small one, viz. that we should supply a point after κριος (just before fol. 326<sup>a</sup>), for the following ἴτε is not the sign of the genitive but a verbal particle meaning 'if' or 'when'. Bearing this in mind we get at once a reasonable sense, so far as any Astrology is reasonable: when Jupiter is in Aries and Venus is in Libra, then Paraplex is discouraged and the souls that Paraplex is tormenting are liberated. All this was pointed out in *J.T.S.* xxiii 275, note<sup>1</sup>, but as I said above Mr Horner does not seem to have read it.

When we turn from the translation to the Introduction I doubt if we are on any firmer ground. Mr Legge was chiefly interested in ancient Egyptian lore, and was also the author of a brilliant paper which went far to prove that the Lion-headed figure often found in Mithraic sanctuaries was not intended for Zrvān the Supreme Deity, but for an unfriendly Demon, perhaps Arimanes himself.<sup>1</sup> His object in this work is to set forth the view that the *Pistis Sophia* is a collection of works of the Valentinian School, the two first documents which treat at length of *Pistis Sophia* herself being actually works by Valentinus, 'and that in any case the Greek original from which the Coptic translation was made, must be earlier than 170 A.D.' (p. xlv).

The chief objection to this simple solution is the immense difference between the mental atmosphere of our Coptic *Pistis Sophia* and the theology of Valentinus as set forth by our earliest and best authority Irenaeus. May I venture to refer to another contribution of mine to this JOURNAL, the Note on Valentinian Terms in Irenaeus at the end of an article on the Oxford edition of Irenaeus's N.T. quotations (*J.T.S.* xxv 64 ff)? The object of that Note was mainly philological and concerned with the meaning of technical terms, but for this purpose I had to shew some of the connexions of thought, and I think it appeared pretty clearly that Valentinus as set forth by St Irenaeus was no mere mythologizer, but that his Aeons corresponded to mental processes. This is the case also with Schmidt's *Apocryphon Iohannis* (*Philotesia*, pp. 317-36), the Greek work that Irenaeus contends against in *adv. Haer.* i 29. To quote once more from my former article on *Pistis Sophia*, 'in the Greek work God is described psychologically, in the Coptic magically and mythologically' (*J.T.S.* xxiii 276 f). In *Pistis Sophia* we are in regions not of thought but of mythology, and

<sup>1</sup> P.S.B.A. xxxiv 140 f (1912).

not a mythology that really expresses anything but a blindly accepted lore. Why is the Receiver of the Light called Melchisedec (*fol.* 34<sup>a</sup>, 35<sup>a</sup> &c.)? What are 'the seven Voices and the five Trees and the three Amens and the Twin-Saviours and the nine Guards and the twelve Saviours' (see *fol.* 3<sup>ab</sup>, 182<sup>a</sup>)? There is nothing of this sort in the genuine Valentinus. No doubt *Sophia* was a key-word in Valentinus's system. But, whereas in Irenaeus's account the psychological basis is obvious, the story in *Pistis Sophia* (*fol.* 40<sup>b</sup> ff.) is wholly mythological, a romance—dull enough, to be sure, but essentially a *tale*—of the Heavenly Powers. I do not think Valentinus would have owned it. In any case it is not the work of a creative mind, of the founder of a school. What we read in the first two 'documents' is not so much the tale of Sophia and her Repentance as a commentary upon that tale, which is illustrated at length from the Psalms. The gnosis of Valentinus was a real philosophy, however 'heretical' or inconsistent with Christian theology it may have been. But the gnosis of the books of *Pistis Sophia* is little more than what Isaiah of old called 'a thing taught'.

## II.

Since the above paragraphs were written Prof. Carl Schmidt's new revised translation of *Pistis Sophia* has appeared.<sup>1</sup> This is a revision of his former translation in the well-known series published by the Berlin Academy (1905), but in every respect improved. I cannot help being pleased to note that Dr Schmidt (unlike Mr Horner) no longer makes Aphrodite to be called a Ram (p. 268, l. 4: contrast ed. of 1905, p. 238, l. 7). And further, he has accepted the psychological interpretation of *κρυλλί μαιος* which was explained at length in my article in this JOURNAL (*J. T. S.* xxiii 272), so that instead of *sich gezerrt* (*σκύλλειν*) he now has *sich abgemüht* (*σκύλλεσθαι*).<sup>2</sup>

Dr Schmidt's Introduction contains a great deal of valuable matter, ranging from palaeographical details in the Askew MS to the place of this Egyptian Gnosticism in Christian thought. He divides the contents of the MS somewhat differently from previous editors. There are in any case four principal divisions<sup>3</sup>: Schmidt shews very good reason for treating I–III as a unity, the proper name of which seems to be 'The Rolls of the Saviour', while IV is an entirely separate work, the title of which has not been preserved. In Schmidt's opinion, which appears to

<sup>1</sup> *Pistis Sophia*, ein gnostisches Originalwerk des dritten Jahrhunderts . . . übersetzt . . . von Dr Carl Schmidt (Leipzig, 1925).

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 160, ll. 17, 21; 181, l. 23; 259, l. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Called by Horner 'Documents' and by Mead 'Books', but Mead has a further division of no. 3, so that Horner's 'Fourth Document' is Mead's 'Fifth Book'.

me to be very well grounded, 'The Rolls of the Saviour' are later than IV, while IV is later than the 'Books of Jeū' contained in the Bruce Papyrus at Oxford.<sup>1</sup>

I have not been able to persuade Dr Schmidt that the 'Rolls of the Saviour' and Book IV, together with these two Books of Jeū, are Coptic originals, not translations from the Greek. But the question is really part of a larger issue connected with the general history of Coptic Christianity as a whole before the Mohammedan conquest: I venture to think that the final verdict will go according to the views held about this general history, rather than upon arguments based on linguistic details (unless, of course, something is noticed which is more decisive than what has been brought forward hitherto).

From one point of view the decision on this interesting question does not greatly matter. It is recognized by Schmidt that in any case the author of *Pistis Sophia* was 'no Hellene in the proper sense of the word, but only a so-called Levantine' (p. xxi), and he goes on to connect him with those syncretistic circles from which are derived the Greek magical papyri. Further, in giving his reasons for rejecting altogether Mr Legge's theory that in *Pistis Sophia* we have to do with a work of Valentinus, he observes: 'If our *Pistis Sophia* or parts of it are really to be ascribed to Valentinus or his School, one must be frankly astonished that the champions of the Church felt there could be serious danger to Christendom from such a quarter, for the disordered fancies in the system of *Pistis Sophia* reveal no spirit informed by philosophical and theological ideas. Of the deeply thoughtful speculations of Valentinus and his followers which come before us in the extracts from them made by the Church Fathers there is no trace' (p. lxxxiv).

This is very well said, and it is very much in place. I cannot help feeling that the investigation of *Pistis Sophia* and allied documents has too often been undertaken by persons who have had a pathetic faith that when properly understood and rendered these writings would be found to contain something of permanent value, the work of a superior mind or the transmission of a splendid tradition. Accompanying this belief are often found disparaging remarks about the narrowness or dogmatism of the Church Fathers, who are supposed to have been unable or unwilling to appreciate the profound ideas of 'the Gnosis'. It is therefore only just to bear in mind that all the evidence for this profundity comes from extracts in the Fathers, notably St Irenaeus and those who directly borrowed from him, and that when we do come across actual documents of 'Gnostic' origin they either demonstrate

<sup>1</sup> The proper title of the Two Books of Jeū appears to be 'The Book of the great λόγος κατὰ μυστήριον'.

the good faith of Irenaeus (as does Schmidt's *Apocryphon Iohannis*) or else, and more often, are on a distinctly lower plane of thought and speculation than the works quoted by the orthodox Church-writers.

Among these inferior works must be classed *Pistis Sophia*. To quote once again from Prof. Schmidt: 'Christianity in Pistis Sophia has been altogether transformed into a Mystery-cult. Questions about penance and forgiveness dominate the whole book, and the Sacraments of the Forgiveness of Sins and of Expiation play a great rôle. . . . The great aim and desire is to attain the highest place in the realm of Light by the help of the Mysteries. The older simple Mysteries were no longer enough, and so new Mysteries had later been contrived. This is indeed a clear sign of the time of decadence' (p. liii). No doubt the writer of *Pistis Sophia* was conscientious, according to his lights. I suppose he deliberately invented very little, but he copied or adapted a great deal that he did not understand, some of which indeed could not be understood for it had no meaning. This, I think, applies to the 'incorruptible' language, judging from the specimens of it which we find. Does Prof. Schmidt think that *Chōsi* (ΧΩΣΙ) and *Chōnbal* (ΧΩΝΒΑΛ) were ever really the names of Venus and Jupiter, whether we think of the Planets or of the Gods? If not, the fact that they were 'known in the whole world' as Aphrodite and Zeus does not prove that our text of *Pistis Sophia* is a translation from the Greek. Is it not likely that the Planets were called by their Greek names among the Copts also?<sup>1</sup> We in England speak of Aries and Taurus: it is only in the useful lines of Isaac Watts that the Ram and the Bull occur, and I should think it likely that the Copts called these Zodiacal Constellations *κρίος* and *ταύρος* respectively.<sup>2</sup> In *PS* 366 and 367 Aphrodite (i.e. the planet Venus) is also called 'the Bubasti'. I wish I could get more information about the meaning of this equation: the only confirmation I can find is that the Ship of the Moon in *Pistis Sophia* itself (359) has the face of a cat in its prow. This is said not to be asserted elsewhere, but it may be guessed that the cat's face is the face of Bubastis and that what goes before the Moon is Phosphorus-Hesperus, i.e. Venus. But however this may be, there seems to me nothing to suggest that the Copts continued to use vernacular Coptic names for the Planets or the Signs of the Zodiac, and therefore Prof. Schmidt's argument (p. xxii) that the writer of *Pistis Sophia*, part IV, could not have been a Copt, because he knew the Planets and the Signs of the Zodiac by their Greek names, falls to the ground.

That the colophon to two sections of *Pistis Sophia* is 'Part (μέρος) of the Rolls (τεύχος) of the Saviour (σωτήρ)' does not seem to me to

<sup>1</sup> The old native Egyptian name for Jupiter was 'Star of Horus', spelt *Hr-sht*.

<sup>2</sup> *κρίος* at least is sometimes misspelt *τερεως*, according to Tattam, p. 826.

prove so clearly as it does to Prof. Schmidt (p. xxii) that the work could not have been so named by a native Copt. The method of translating Coptic works into modern languages in this manner is indeed convenient, but it gives the language the appearance of being more of a jargon than it seemed to those who used it. My impression is that Coptic *literati* deliberately employed foreign expressions as a sign of culture and an educated style, in preference to vernacular phrases: they did not want to put down their thoughts in the homelier words of their mother-tongue, although it was rich and full enough to set forth what they had to say.<sup>1</sup> If I were to publish an English translation of the Four Books of the Askew MS together with the Two Books of Jeū and call the whole 'A Gnostic Hexateuch' I do not think that my fellow-countrymen would consider I had excogitated an outlandish title! But is not such a title exactly parallel to the Coptic *ⲟⲩⲁⲙⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲡⲓⲡⲉⲧⲉⲭⲟⲥ ⲁⲓⲡⲥⲟⲩⲏⲣ*? If we may regard the tale of Horsiesius, published by Mr Crum, as a Coptic original (see *J. T. S.* xxiii 314-318), it is difficult to see why *Pistis Sophia* must be a translation.

As regards the name Pistis Sophia, which I had called a barbarous formation and so a sign of a Coptic rather than of a Greek original, Prof. Schmidt brings forward a phrase out of his unedited Apocryphon Iohannis, which says 'what is called *Sophia παργενεΐρα*, which some name the *Pistis*' (p. xxi). The same Æon therefore had both the name Pistis and the name Sophia. No doubt: but that does not prove that a double name like 'the Faith-Wisdom' ever existed in Greek. The case would be different if either of these terms was properly an adjective like *ὁ χριστός* or *ἡ προύγκοσ*; but they are both abstract nouns. On the other hand this double style of nomenclature is curiously characteristic of parts of the Pistis Sophia literature, e.g. 'Zorokothora-Meljisedek' (*sic*)<sup>2</sup> mentioned in *PS* 369 and elsewhere. Somewhat similar is '(the) Parhedrōn the Typhōn' *PS* 369, 370, a name that recalls Typhōn-Sēth in the invocation from the magical text mentioned below.<sup>3</sup>

In one passage of Document IV we are able to see the author at work, as Schmidt himself points out. The explanation of IAO, referred to in the former part of this article, seems to be directly taken from the

<sup>1</sup> May I be allowed to 'set forth' the first part of the above sentence as it would be printed if it were part of the translation of a Coptic text? 'My impression (*impression*) is that Coptic *literati* deliberately (*délibérer*) employed (*emploi*) foreign (*forain*) expressions (*exprimer*)' &c. The latter part, after the colon, contains no word derived from non-Teutonic sources, but I venture to claim that no one would notice this if I did not expressly point it out.

<sup>2</sup> Note that Melchisedek is always so misspelt in IV, and often in I-III.

<sup>3</sup> Griffith and Thompson *Magical Papyrus* p. 147.

Second Book of Jeū (2 *Jeu* 75; Schmidt's ed., p. 124 and 213). In this passage Jesus invokes his Father and after various meaningless syllables says 'Īapttha, ĩapttha, which means the Father of all Fatherhood, for when All has gone out from α it will be returned into ω,<sup>1</sup> for there will be the End of all ends: we invoke now these incorruptible Names' &c. If this be compared with the sentence quoted above (p. 391) it will be seen that one is taken from the other, and I am sure Prof. Schmidt is right in claiming the priority for the passage in the Book of Jeū. In other words the writer of Document IV had in this case no real authority for his 'gnosis' beyond a blundering decipherment of a high-sounding but rather obscure Coptic sentence.

Before leaving *Pistis Sophia* I should like to make a couple of remarks on two particular points. A peculiarity of Document IV is the name *Aberamenthō* as an epithet or title for Jesus, or rather it would be more accurate to say that Jesus is identified with this personage. 'Again cried out Jesus, i. e. Aberamenthō, pronouncing the Name of the Father of the treasury of Light' (*PS* 358); 'Said Jesus, i. e. Aberamenthō: "Since the Father of my Father, i. e. Jeū, is the Pronoētōs of all the Archons"' (*PS* 365); and again 'Said Jesus, i. e. Aberamenthō, to his disciples: "Amen I say to you, I brought nothing into the world when I came but this Fire and this Water and this Wine and this Blood"' (*PS* 373). The peculiar thing about these passages is that they seem to assume that Aberamenthō is a known figure with whom Jesus is equated. No satisfactory derivation of the name, so far as I know, has been suggested, but I wish to point out that it is one of the names by which the old Egyptian God Set (ⲥⲏⲜ) is invoked in the magical Papyrus published by Ll. Griffith and H. Thompson.<sup>2</sup> The Papyrus is thought to be of the 3rd century A. D. and is mostly written in Egyptian Demotic, but this particular Invocation (the object of which is to call up Typhon to strike so-and-so with frost and fire) is in Greek. Among the fourteen words which the invoker believes that Typhon-Sēth cannot refuse to hear are *Aberamenthōu Lerthexanax*.<sup>3</sup>

I fear this parallel from late Egyptian Magic proves very little except the Egyptian affinities of the documents associated with *Pistis Sophia*, but so far as it goes it is another link connecting this literature with native Egyptian religion rather than with the philosophical mythology

<sup>1</sup> I suggest that we should read ⲉω ϳⲉ for MS ⲉϣϣⲉ (rather than ⲉω ⲉϣϣⲉ, as Schmidt does).

<sup>2</sup> Col. xxiii 17, p. 147: quoted in P. D. Scott-Moncrieff's *Paganism and Christianity in Egypt* p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Another is Ereskigal (ⲉⲣⲉⲥⲕⲓⲒⲁⲗ), which appears to be 'the old Sumerian goddess of the underworld': see also Griffith and Thompson, p. 61, last line.

of Valentinus and Basilides. I will conclude with a suggestion about the meaning of *Barbelo*, which I think better than the desperate derivation which I put forward in *J. T. S.* xxiii 280.

Aberamenthō comes into heretical and 'gnostic' Christian terminology from Egyptian Magic. So obviously does Typhon, and so (according to Origen) does Astaphaeus. Is it not possible that Barbelo came from the same sort of source? Schmidt points out that the Barbelo is found among the Simonians, the Nicolaitans, and the so-called 'Gnostics' in Epiphanius, and among the 'Barbelo-Gnostics', mentioned by Irenaeus (*adv. Haer.* i 29).<sup>1</sup> These last are known as an Egyptian sect: is not their book extant in Coptic in Prof. Schmidt's possession? Of the sects mentioned by Epiphanius, no doubt the most important account is that of the 'Gnostics' (*Haer.* 26), for in it Epiphanius is giving us his personal reminiscences. When he talks of 'Simonians', i.e. the heresies of Simon Magus, it is hearsay and tradition: Simon Magus is supposed to be the founder of all heresy.<sup>2</sup> But the 'Gnostics' described in *Haer.* 26 were a sect in Egypt among whom Epiphanius had lived, and it is here that Epiphanius (92) calls the Mother of the Living ἡ Βαρβηρῶ ἡτοι Βαρβηλῶ. The liquids, therefore, were not quite certain, and a confusion between *l* and *r* suggests the ambiguity of Egyptian writing and an Egyptian derivation. Is it not possible that Barbelo, the original Mother of all living things, is the Seed or Grain, in Sahidic Coptic *Belbīle* (ⲠⲉⲖⲓⲖⲓⲗⲉ)? It seems to have been a toss-up whether the 'Gnostics' whom Epiphanius knew pronounced the second syllable with *l* or with *r*, so that a derivation from a word the proper transliteration of which is with an *l* in both syllables does not seem impossible. At least this gives a definite and not inappropriate meaning.

I would also suggest that a spelling of 'Barbelo' with *l* for *r* underlies the obviously corrupt passage in *PS* 359, where we read ⲠⲉⲠⲠⲏⲗⲱ ⲠⲉⲠⲁⲗⲗⲁ. The second word here has usually been taken for βδέλλα 'a leech', but why should Barbelo be connected with a leech? She is always represented as kindly and beneficent. It seems to me more likely that the ς in ⲉⲁⲗⲗⲁ is a corruption of an λ, and that what lay in the original document was Ⲡⲉⲗⲗⲉⲓⲗⲁ, or some form like it: the compiler saw that 'Barbelo' was what was meant, so he inserted the name in the form familiar to him.

<sup>1</sup> Schmidt (p. lxxxv) adds the Ophites, but this is not the case: Epiphanius in *Haer.* xxxvii 3 explains the Ophite lore about *Prunicus*, but does not mention the name *Barbelo* at all.

<sup>2</sup> It is to be noted that when Epiphanius mentions 'Barbēro, or rather Barbēlo', in writing of the Simonians he does not assert that this name was current among them, but only that the Power from above of which Simon talked is the same as was called *Barbelo* in other heresies (*Haer.* xxi 2).

The *Apocryphon Iohannis*, though now only extant in Coptic, was certainly a Greek work. The 'Gnostics' among whom Epiphanius lived, from whom he heard the name 'Barbēro or Barbēlo', lived in Egypt but must have been a Greek-speaking community. These are exactly the syncretic circles from which come the Greek and semi-Greek magical papyri, to which Prof. Schmidt appeals, and it does not seem to me unreasonable to look for an ultimate Egyptian derivation for this name. It comes into the Coptic text of *Pistis Sophia* as a proper name, just as *Aberamenthō* does, and all sense of its etymology must have been lost.

Should this derivation of 'the Barbelo' be accepted the difference between Alexandrian and native Egyptian thought comes out more strikingly than ever. To Valentinus the first thing produced by the primordial undifferentiated Deep was an *ἐννοια*, a Notion; to the Egyptians it was a Seed.

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### NATALE PETRI DE CATHEDRA.

La plus ancienne mention que l'on ait de la fête de la chaire de saint Pierre est celle qui se lit dans la *Depositio martyrum* du chronographe romain de 354, établi par Furius Dionysius Filocalus :

*VIII Kal. Mart. natale Petri de cathedra.*

Cette *Depositio martyrum* est elle-même antérieure à 354, elle a dû être dressée en 336.<sup>1</sup> Nous aurions ainsi une attestation de la fête de la chaire de saint Pierre, l'année qui suit la mort du pape Silvestre. Cette fête, celle de Noël exceptée, est la seule qui, dans ce calendrier de l'Église romaine, ne soit point un anniversaire de martyr.

L'origine de cette fête de la chaire de saint Pierre du 22 février est inconnue. De ce que cette date était celle de l'anniversaire des défunts de chaque famille,<sup>2</sup> *Caristia*, *Cara cognatio*, on a conjecturé que l'Église romaine avait voulu substituer une fête chrétienne à la fête païenne. Mais à ce compte l'Église romaine aurait eu bien d'autres fêtes païennes à démarquer. La conjecture ne s'impose donc pas. Le 22 février était-il l'anniversaire d'une déposition ayant quelque rapport avec l'apôtre

<sup>1</sup> L. Duchesne *Liber pontif.* t. I pp. vi-vii. Le texte de la *Depositio*, *ibid.* pp. 11-12, et dans H. Lietzmann *Die drei ältesten Martyrologien* (1903) pp. 3-9.

<sup>2</sup> Le chronographe de 354 le mentionne au 22 février sous le nom de *Caristia*. Le calendrier de Polemius Silvius, en 448-449, porte au 22 février : 'Depositio sancti Pauli et Petri. Cara cognatio ideo dicta, quia tunc etsi fuerint vivorum parentum odia, tempore obitus deponantur.' *C. I. L.* t. I p. 336 et 337. La *Cara cognatio* est signalée par Tertullien, *De idololat.* 10 (éd. Reifferscheid-Wissowa, p. 40).