

# “Basilides” and “the Egyptian Wisdom”

## Some Remarks on a Peculiar Heresiological Notice (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.20–27)

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Now that some knowledge of the lost civilizations has been regained, it is important to pay special attention to them. Let us try to see what was there before and around Hellenism, and not only celebrate singular achievements but spell out the results of interaction and dialogue in a continuing eastern Mediterranean *koine*.

Walter Burkert

Ps.-Hippolytus’ report on Basilides of Alexandria stands alone in the whole heresiological literature on this early Christian teacher. With the following contribution, I aim to shed new light on this rather neglected text, tracing its possible sources and comparing it with other images we have of Basilides, his literary production, and teachings.<sup>1</sup>

My analysis will unfold through three subsequent stages: first of all, as it needs to be done for any quotation, whether it be long or short, I will make an attempt to understand Ps.-Hippolytus’ notice on Basilides within the redactional context in which it was embedded. Next I will re-locate the text in the overall setting of Basilides’ and his followers’ teachings as known them from Clement of Alexandria.

In a third step, I will take Ps.-Hippolytus at his word as he charges his “Basilides” with a full-blown *paideia* on Egyptian lore: I will extract two original fragments from Basilides’ work quoted *verbatim* out of Ps.-Hippolytus’ long and complex *résumé*, and search Egyptian and Graeco-Egyptian sources for literary parallels.

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<sup>1</sup> The groundbreaking monograph on Basilides is still Löhr 1996, who comments extensively on Ps.-Hippolytus’ report (284–323). For more recent treatments from different perspectives, see Biondi 2005; Bos 2005; Pearson 2005; Saudelli 2006; Quispel 2008; Métrope 2009. Unfortunately, I have not been able yet to read Hertz 2013, who devotes one chapter to Ps.-Hippolytus’ report and a whole section to Basilides’ non-Being God, under the title: “Trouve-t-on dans d’autres sources antiques une telle conception du principe?”

Finally, I will explore the possibility that the wide-ranging exegetical activity presupposed by the text and intended as an integral part of a “Christian” world-view within a multi-religious culture may in fact stem from the *Exegetika* on Parchor the Prophet attributed to Basilides’ son, Isidore, or from a literary enterprise of a similar nature. At any rate, whether my tentative proposal be accepted or not, the profile will emerge of an Alexandrian Christian intellectual milieu striving to combine theogony, cosmogony and *Heilsgeschichte*, Greek philosophical teachings and “barbarian wisdom,” Hebrew scriptures and older traditions of early groups of Jesus’ followers, with a degree of complexity wholly matched by the socio-cultural diversity of its urban environment.

## 1. Contesting authority: the meaning of a literary frame

Ps.-Hippolytus’ report is skillfully framed by two remarks, intended to direct the hearers’ – and readers’ – interpretation:

*Haer.* 7.20.1: Βασιλείδης τοίνυν καὶ Ἰσίδωρος, ὁ Βασιλείδου παῖς γνήσιος καὶ μαθητής, φασὶν εἰρηκέναι Ματθίαν αὐτοῖς λόγους ἀποκρύφους, οὓς ἤκουσε παρὰ τοῦ σωτήρος κατ’ ἰδίαν διδασθεῖς. ἴδωμεν οὖν πῶς καταφανῶς Βασιλείδης ὁμοῦ καὶ Ἰσίδωρος καὶ πᾶς ὁ τούτων χορὸς οὐχ ἄπλῶς καταψεύδεται μόνου Ματθίου, ἀλλὰ γὰρ καὶ τοῦ σωτήρος αὐτοῦ.

– 7.27.13: ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν ἃ καὶ Βασιλείδης μυθεύει, σχολάσας κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον καὶ παρ’ αὐτῶν τὴν τοιαύτην σοφίαν διδασθεῖς, ἐκαρποφόρησε τοιοῦτους καρπούς.

As can easily be seen, Ps.-Hippolytus opens by noting that Basilides and his son and disciple Isidore purport to have received secret teachings from Matthias, who in turn is supposed to have been taught by and have heard them from Jesus himself. Facing such claims, Ps.-Hippolytus feels the need to expose their lie – and that is what he aims to do, relating their doctrine. Unsurprisingly then his concluding remarks echo these opening lines (μαθητής ~ σχολάσας; παρὰ τοῦ σωτήρος [...] διδασθεῖς ~ παρ’ αὐτῶν [...] διδασθεῖς) in order to subvert the “tradition” as invented by the adversaries: all in all, as a result of his exposition, Ps.-Hippolytus can openly assert that Basilides was actually imbued with Egyptian wisdom, the Egyptians and no disciple of Jesus, nor Jesus himself, actually being involved in the teaching and schooling activity which formed the “heretic.”

One is now left to wonder: is such an assertion to be historically discarded as a heresiological stereotype depicting heretics as Barbarians, that is, as intrinsically alien to “Jewish” and “Christian” *paradosis*? Is it to be understood against the background of 2nd- and 3rd-cent. CE Egyptomania? Or, in other words, the alternative running as follows: does Ps.-Hippolytus know what he is talking about, when it comes to speaking of “Egyptian wisdom,” or does he somehow have access to and familiarity with actual Egyptian or Graeco-Egyptian traditions, enabling him to detect Egyptian materials as such, beyond any obvious polemical intent?

A brief excursus will give a few clues as to the answers to these questions: in *Haer.* 4.43.4–44.3, Ps.-Hippolytus reports a specimen of Egyptian “wisdom” centring on the self-development of an unbegotten and undivided Monad, duplicating itself into a Dyad and then a Tetrad, until turning finally into a Decad, “beginning and end of numbers, so that the Monad becomes first and tenth” (cf. also *Haer.* 6.21–24). (Neo-)Pythagorean influence is evident,<sup>2</sup> but as undisputable as this conclusion is, Egyptian texts do actually provide us with a cultural framework into which Greek philosophical language and ideas could have been and probably were fittingly integrated, thus justifying Ps.-Hippolytus’ attribution: on the coffin of a priest of Amun who lived under the 22nd Dynasty (10th to 8th cent. BCE) is written:

I am the One [= Atum] who turned into Two. I am the Two who turned into Four. I am the Four who turned into Eight. I am the One after him: I am Khepri.<sup>3</sup>

Comparing this passage with other theogonical progressions of numbers, attested for example in CT 76 and BD 7, the Egyptian side of the story slowly surfaces, which surely fuelled the process of cultural interplay of two worlds and languages.<sup>4</sup> Even later writings of Christian Egyptian origin, such as *Ap. John* 4.2; 6; 23–26 and *Untitled Text* 4 (the One who’s mother of the All is “the first unknowable one, mother of the Ennead, who, starting from the Monad of the Secret One, attains her full completion in the Decad”),<sup>5</sup> still show clear traces of the encounter and intermingling of Egyptian theogonical motifs with Greek philosophical lexicon of Pythagorean flavour, in terms reminiscent of Ps.-Hippolytus’ notice.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Thus Magris 2012: 124, n. 132, who goes so far as to speculate that Ps.-Hippolytus reproduces here a “gnostic” source comparable to Mark the Magician’s numerological theosophy. On the occurrence of Egyptian theogonical themes in the latter, see Förster 1999: 182–192.

<sup>3</sup> For an “Orphic” parallel to the “One after the many” concept, cf. the remarkable *μοῦνος ἐγένετο* referring to Zeus in the Derveni theogony, after every existing thing, gods included, has come out of him (col. 16[12].3–6). The theogony’s compatibility with Egyptian beliefs has been discussed and argued for by Burkert 2007: 93–95.

<sup>4</sup> These findings pair with Magris’ comments on Ps.-Hippolytus’ surprising reliability as historical source on Indian lore in *Haer.* 1.24.2–6 (2012: 87–88, n. 60). Conversely, Ducœr 2011: 173, discusses Ps.-Hippolytus’ report on Brahminical doctrines as a “construction savante provenant de milieux intellectuels et philosophiques neo-pythagoriciens et/ou neo-platoniciens.” On Ps.-Hippolytus’ acquaintance with authentic Graeco-Egyptian magic texts, see Kehlhofer 2007: 522–526.

<sup>5</sup> On the Egyptian background of the *Apocryphon of John*, see Tripaldi 2012. Denzey Lewis 2013: 170–177, has recently included the whole *Codex Brucianus*, transmitting the *Untitled Text* among other writings, in her list of the literary products of late Antique Egyptian “national” revivalism.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. also *Corp. herm.* 4.10–11 and 13.12. On the Egyptian roots of *Hermetica*, see recently Van den Kerchove 2012 and Bull 2014. The text on the coffin of the priest of Amun is edited and commented on by Maspero 1916: 165–166. For a thorough interpretation, see

Overall, then, if something is to be made of these correspondences on a more general level, Ps.-Hippolytus' reference to Egyptian wisdom should not be simply and hastily dismissed as a mere heresiological tool aiming to degrade the adversary's teaching into something neither Christian nor "biblical," nor even Greek.<sup>7</sup> Rather, if a critical appraisal is to be made as to the historical reliability of his information, the latter deserves a careful and deeply probing investigation by cross comparison. That is what I attempt to do, after assessing the relationship between Ps.-Hippolytus' report and some of the fragments of Basilides and his school preserved by Clement of Alexandria.

## 2. Basilides or not Basilides?

The ascription to the "historical" Basilides of the teachings recorded by Ps.-Hippolytus has always been heatedly debated. Méhat assumed it,<sup>8</sup> whereas Vigne more specifically proposed to identify the source of Ps.-Hippolytus' notice with the work of one of Basilides' followers, probably dating between the end of the 2nd cent. CE and the beginnings of the 3rd.<sup>9</sup> By comparing it with the "original" fragments transmitted by Clement, Löhr, on his part, seriously questioned Basilides' authorship and left four possibilities open:

- a) Ps.-Hippolytus' *Vorlage* depends on Clement's *Vorlage*;
- b) Ps.-Hippolytus' *Vorlage* draws directly on Clement's text;
- c) both Ps.-Hippolytus and Clement quote from a common source of Basilidean provenance;
- d) Ps.-Hippolytus' report builds on the *Stromata*.<sup>10</sup>

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Kees 1956: 155–171, who highlights the allusions to the Heliopolitan Ennead and the Heliopolitan Ogdoad. It is probably no coincidence that the theology ascribed to the Egyptians by Ps.-Hippolytus goes on linking the Monad with the numeric progression three, five, seven, nine; it further interprets the multiplication of the first Principle still persisting in its unity as separation of the natural elements; it introduces groups of nine as basic constituents of the Universe (*Haer.* 4.43.7–8; 11): are these features traces of a philosophical re-elaboration of the aforementioned Heliopolitan cosmogony? Cf. *Corp. herm.* 1.4–5; 3.1–2, *Stob. Flor.* 23.50–51, and some remarks by Assmann on the latter as "Elementenlehre" (2004: 17–18; 2005: 15–24).

<sup>7</sup> In *Haer.* 7.33.1, Ps.-Hippolytus ascribes Cerinthus's doctrine that the world was not created by the first God to his Egyptian *paideia*. One may reasonably doubt that Cerinthus had actually had such an education and that his assumption really rested thereon, but late Egyptian theology did distinguish between one primordial God beginning existence before anything else and another God performing the physical act of "creation" – and Greek writers were also well aware of that distinction: cf. Porph. *Amalg.* fr. 9 and Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, 8.2–3, with Mendel 2003: 25–26.37–43.64–74, and Klotz 2012: 121–126.133–139.403–404. See also Clark 2008: 178–189.

<sup>8</sup> Méhat 1974: 366, n. 4 and 368–369.

<sup>9</sup> Vigne 1992: 294.

<sup>10</sup> Löhr 1996: 318–323.

Conversely, Bos, Biondi, and Métroupe all presuppose the authenticity of the report without questioning the tradition.<sup>11</sup> Layton maintains that Ps.-Hippolytus has recorded the speculations of later disciples of Basilides’ which do not put us in direct contact with the master himself;<sup>12</sup> following Layton, Pearson rejects Ps.-Hippolytus as a reliable informant on the authentic Basilides.<sup>13</sup>

I cannot delve now into the entire question, complex and multifaceted as it is. I wish to focus instead on fr. 4 Löhner, and its lexical and thematic correspondences with some passages from Ps.-Hippolytus’ notice, and make a number of comments on them:

Clem. *Str.* 2.7.35.5–8.36.1: ὁθεν “ἀρχὴ σοφίας φόβος θεοῦ” θείως λέλεκται. Ἐνταῦθα οἱ ἀμφὶ τὸν Βασιλεῖδην τοῦτο ἐξηγούμενοι τὸ ῥητὸν αὐτὸν φασιν Ἄρχοντα ἐπακούσαντα τὴν φάσιν τοῦ διακονουμένου πνεύματος ἐκπλαγῆναι τῷ τε ἀκούσματι καὶ τῷ θεάματι παρ’ ἐλπίδας εὐηγγελισμένον, καὶ τὴν ἐκπληξιν αὐτοῦ φόβον κληθῆναι ἀρχὴν γενόμενον σοφίας φυλοκρινητικῆς τε καὶ διακριτικῆς καὶ τελειωτικῆς καὶ ἀποκαταστατικῆς· οὐ γὰρ μόνον τὸν κόσμον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἐκλογὴν διακρίνας ὁ ἐπὶ πᾶσι προπέμπει.

*Haer.* 7.26.1–2: Ἦλθεν οὖν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πρῶτον ἀπὸ τῆς υἰότητος, φησὶν, διὰ τοῦ παρακαθημένου τῷ ἄρχοντι υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸν ἄρχοντα, καὶ ἔμαθεν ὁ ἄρχων ὅτι οὐκ ἦν θεὸς τῶν ὄλων, ἀλλ’ ἦν γεννητὸς καὶ ἔχων αὐτοῦ ὑπεράνω τὸν τοῦ ἀρρήτου καὶ <ἀ>κατονομάστου οὐκ ὄντος καὶ τῆς υἰότητος κατακείμενον θησαυρόν καὶ ἐπέστρεψε καὶ ἐφοβήθη, συνιείς ἐν οἴᾳ ἦν ἀγνοία. τοῦτο ἐστὶ, φησὶν, τὸ εἰρημένον· “ἀρχὴ σοφίας φόβος κυρίου”· ἤρξατο γὰρ σοφίζεσθαι, κατηχούμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ παρακαθημένου Χριστοῦ διδασκόμενος τίς ἐστὶν ὁ οὐκ ὢν, τίς ἡ υἰότης, τί τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, τίς ἡ τῶν ὄλων κατασκευὴ, ποῦ ταῦτα ἀποκατασταθήσεται.

– 7.27.8: ἵνα ἀπαρχὴ τῆς φυλοκρινήσεως γένηται τῶν συγκεχυμένων ὁ Ἰησοῦς (cf. also 9.12); 7.26.9: ἡ δύναμις τῆς κρίσεως; 7.27.11 φυλοκρίνησις καὶ ἀποκατάστασις.

The introductory formula used by Clement (οἱ ἀμφὶ τὸν Βασιλεῖδην ... φασιν) leaves little doubt on the authorship of the fragment, and excludes that it stems directly from Basilides whom Clement quotes by name whenever he reports his opinions or excerpts passages from his works. Clement’s oscillation

<sup>11</sup> Bos 2005: 414–415 and n. 69, rests on Méhat 1974: 369. Later, in 2011: 104–105, he wrote: “But the author (*scil.* of the *Elenchos*) repeatedly gives the impression of being well documented. In his account of Basilides he often uses the words ‘(as) he says,’ which might suggest that he used (a summary of) a work attributed to Basilides. And he quotes a number of biblical passages which Basilides is said to have referred to in a way that is congruous within the framework of Basilides’ overall system. And the system which he ascribes to Basilides is itself well-constructed and seems remarkably original.” On Biondi’s attempt to harmonise Ps.-Hippolytus and Clement, see Saudelli 2006: 218 and 221. Métroupe 2009: *passim* variously mentions Basilides, or Basilides and his son Isidore, as author(s) of the text transmitted in Ps.-Hippolytus’ *Adversus haereses*, but does not address the problem any further.

<sup>12</sup> Layton 1995: 418–419, n. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Pearson 2005: 3.

between οἱ ἄμφι τὸν Βασιλείδην and οἱ ἀπὸ Βασιλείδου as introductions to other fragments (*Str.* 2.112.1–114.2 and 3.1–3 = fr. 5–6 Lühr) makes clear that Basilides does not belong to the group mentioned, as the use of ἄμφι might have implied.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, οἱ ἄμφι τὸν Βασιλείδην can be none other than the circle of his followers gathered around him, his “school.” Moreover, in fr. 5–6 Lühr, Clement moves from summarizing in *oratio obliqua* to reporting the very words in *oratio recta*, and from the reference to “Basilides’ followers” to the mention of Isidore, Basilides’ son and disciple, as his immediate source. This quotation praxis has led Lühr to assume that in both passages the more vague and indirect reference to Basilides’ followers is to be intended as later specified by means of, *and* as a direct quotation from Isidore’s works.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, that is not the case with fr. 4, which has only *oratio obliqua* with no mention of any more specific source. However, such a matter of fact has not prevented Pearson from speculating that fr. 1–4; 9; 16 Lühr might actually reflect Isidore’s teachings.<sup>16</sup>

That being said, what about the relationship between the fragment transmitted by Clement and the texts reported by Ps.-Hippolytus? I have tried to highlight the corresponding vocabulary by putting it in italics. As a result, it seems to me that the aforementioned passages share a common world-view expressed in a recurrent cluster of key-words and expressions (ἄρχων; εὐηγγελισμένον ~ εὐαγγέλιον; φόβον ~ ἐφοβήθη; σοφίας ~ σοφίζεσθαι; ἀποκαταστατικῆς ~ ἀποκατασταθήσεται / ἀποκατάστασις; φυλοκρινητικῆς ~ φυλοκρινήσεως / φυλοκρίνησις; διακριτικῆς / διακρίνας ~ κρίσεως) and centring on the exegesis of *Prov.* 1.7. The sapiential text is expounded in order to provide with biblical foundation, and therefore to sanction, basically the same cosmological and eschatological model, revolving around the conversion of the *Archon* as the first step in the restoration of all things through the gospel of Jesus. Lühr is firmly convinced that we are dealing with

die Rezeption eines basilidianischen Motivs in einem neuen theologischen Kontext [...]. Die Art der Rezeption erlaubt nicht den zwingenden Schluss, dass die Vorlage des Referates von einem (späteren) Basilidianer verfasst wurde.<sup>17</sup>

I do not share Lühr’s skepticism: there is no doubt that the divergence of the literary context of occurrence and some more differences in detail (the role of the Spirit in Clement played by the Christ in Ps.-Hippolytus; the simultaneity of audition and vision, as well as the relevance of the Archon’s amazement in the former; the doubling of the *Archon* and the intervention of the son, along

<sup>14</sup> Cf. LSJ: s.v. ἄμφι c.3 [89]; s.v. ἀπὸ iii.1.c. [192].

<sup>15</sup> Lühr 1996: 80–82.

<sup>16</sup> Pearson 2005: 28, n. 107.

<sup>17</sup> Lühr 1996: 322. See Bos 2011: 105–106, for a critical re-appraisal (with literature) of Lühr’s judgement on the “tensions” in Ps.-Hippolytus’ text.

with the list of the specific contents of the “Gospel” in the latter) exclude any hypothesis of direct dependence of Ps.-Hippolytus’ report on Clement’s text, or of the former’s source on the latter’s, whether *via* Clement’s text itself or not. Furthermore, assuming that Ps.-Hippolytus is dependent here on Clement, his freedom in dealing with the text of the Alexandrian radically contrasts with the greater accuracy he usually shows in drawing explicitly or implicitly from other authors and re-editing them: see, for example, the long, almost literal quotations from Irenaeus (cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 6.42 with Iren. *Haer.* 1.14.1) and Flavius Josephus (cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 9.18.2–28.2 with Jos. *B.J.* 2.8.2–13).

Ultimately, then, my educated guess is that the common tradition underlying both reports goes back to exegetical debates animating groups of Basilides’ followers in Alexandria in the second half of 2nd cent. CE – at the earliest.<sup>18</sup> The hypothesis that such ideas were actually circulating in 2nd- and/or 3rd-cent. Alexandria or at least Egypt is further strengthened in my view by the occurrence of an analogous and yet conflicting scheme of “evangelisation” in the material shared in common and variously reworked by the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II,4; end of the 2nd/beginnings of the 3rd cent. CE) and the *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II,5; Greek end redaction dating to the last quarter of 3rd cent. CE [?]), two writings of almost undisputed Egyptian, if not Alexandrian, provenance and background:<sup>19</sup> according to these versions of the “myth,” one of the sons of the *Archon* is illuminated by *Pistis Sophia* (!) or her daughter *Zoe*, and hears that his Father is not the one and only God, or alternatively that an immortal luminous Man pre-exists him, as a fiery powerful angel exhaled as a breath (!) out of *Zoe*’s mouth appears, or as the image of *Pistis Sophia*’s greatness flows on the primordial waters; he converts without informing the Father, and is taken up and established over the seventh heaven; he then creates his own court, completely neglecting his ignorant, raging parent and leaving him to his fate of doom (cf. *Hyp. Arch.* NHC II,4.95.1–96.17 and *Orig. World* NHC II,5.103.15–106.3). Compared to Ps.-Hippolytus’ report, both texts clearly lack the last passage in the chain of “evangelisation,” that is, the preaching of the son to the father, but equally as clearly do recurring motifs emerge and bring the story close to our Basilidian source (the illumination and “conversion” of a son who turns out to be greater than his Father and reigns over the heavens; the revelation of the God who is above all; a connection with

<sup>18</sup> Löhr 1996: 322–323, n. 135, following G. May, writes “dass die Vorlage des Hippolyt-referats als Ganze später als die Clemensfragmente zu datieren ist; wir können nicht ausschließen, dass auch hinter der Vorlage späte Basilidianer stecken.” See also 305–306 and 312. The familiarity of the original author(s) of our Basilides text with Philo’s vocabulary and thought stressed by Runia 1999: 135, and Saudelli 2006: 216–218, may be a further sign of its Alexandrian origin.

<sup>19</sup> See Barc 1980: 4–5; Painchaud 1995: 117–121; Kaiser 2001: 218; Bethge 2001: 237; Pearson 2007: 75–78 and 221–225; Denzey Lewis 2014: 214–216.

sapiential tradition as the revealer is represented by Wisdom-like figures): are we dealing with competing versions of the same basic account?<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Back to which Egypt?

Coming now to the core of my analysis, I first continue to adhere to what is most “certain, to the words on the page, and to the relationships” which can be reconstructed “among the words” and through them among texts.<sup>21</sup> Therefore once again I intend to conduct the main, initial comparisons on a strictly formal, structural and lexical basis.

In *Haer.* 7.21.5, an adjective that Ps.-Hippolytus employs probably signals that a literal quotation from “Basilides” is about to follow. The adjective in question is καταφανέστερον:

Ἴνα δὲ καταφανέστερον ποιήσω τοῦτο ὅπερ ἐκεῖνοι λέγουσι· καθάπερ ὦν ὄρνιθος εὐποικίλου τινὸς καὶ πολυχρωμάτου, οἰοεὶ τοῦ ταῦνος ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς ἐπι μᾶλλον πολυμόρφου καὶ πολυχρωμάτου, ἐν ὃν ὁμοῦς ἔχει ἐν ἑαυτῷ πολλάς οὐσιῶν πολυμόρφων καὶ πολυχρωμάτων καὶ πολυσυστάτων ἰδέας, οὕτως ἔχει τὸ καταβληθέν, φησὶν, ὑπὸ τοῦ οὐκ ὄντος θεοῦ οὐκ ὄν σπέρμα <πανσπερμίαν> τοῦ κόσμου, πολύμορφον ὁμοῦ καὶ πολυούσιον.

Corresponding to the use of καταφανῶς in 7.20.1, καταφανέστερον ποιέω here means “to show even more clearly, to bring more fully to light” (see Herodot. *Hist.* 2.120; Isocr. *Bus.* 11.4; Plat. *Gorg.* 453c), therefore lending itself *ipso facto* to introduce reports on and summaries of another’s words and thought (cf. Xenoph. *Cyr.* 1.6.14). Furthermore, the closing φησὶν echoes the opening λέγουσι and confirms that the preceding and immediately following words are part of a quotation. Hence, there seems to be no reasonable doubt that we are dealing with the reproduction of an original fragment from Ps.-Hippolytus’ written source. Following in the steps of J.-M. Roessli, A. Bernabé identified a close parallel with our fragment in *Ps.-Clem.* 6.5.2 (OF 120) and pushed the linguistic and thematic comparison further. He eventually – and convincingly – argued for an Orphic source being commented on in both texts:

Este paralelo tan estrecho me inclina a pensar más bien que los basilidianos y Apión derivan de una fuente órfica y que la comparación con el huevo de pavo real estaba en el texto poético (donde también cabrían palabras como πολυχρωμάτος). El texto basilidiano parece haber apro-

<sup>20</sup> Fallon 1978: 86, n. 194, refers to Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.26.1–7 as reporting a similar conception to the Valentinian doctrine on the Demiurge, which I actually do not regard as similar as he does. He maintains, however, that the son of the Archon’s account in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* fits most appropriately into the latter half of the 2nd cent. (1978: 88). On his part, Painchaud 1995: 102–103 and 117–118, assumes that *Orig. World* 103–106 goes back to the first redaction of the text and argues for a date in the second half of the 2nd cent. CE (around 175) as well.

<sup>21</sup> I am partly quoting, partly paraphrasing Brodie 2001: 104.



vechado la comparación (que es muy similar) y haber modificado la segunda parte. En todo caso parece claro que en el poema órfico que intentamos reconstruir se afirmaba que el huevo contenía en sí la capacidad de crear todo lo existente.<sup>22</sup>

His conclusions can be corroborated by noting that the explanation of the Orphic cosmogony put in Apion’s mouth in *Pseudo-Clementina* and Ps.-Hippolytus’ notice on Basilides, begin with almost identical words:<sup>23</sup>

<p><i>Ps.-Clem.</i> 6.3.1: Ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐδὲν ἦν πλὴν χάος καὶ στοιχείων ἀτάκτων ἔτι συνπεφορημένων μίξις ἀδιάκριτος, τοῦτο καὶ τῆς φύσεως ὁμολογούσης καὶ τῶν μεγάλων ἀνδρῶν οὕτως ἔχειν νενοηκότων.</p>	<p><i>Haer.</i> 7.20.2: Ἦν, φησὶν, ὅτε ἦν οὐδὲν· ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ τὸ οὐδὲν ἦν τι τῶν ὄντων, ἀλλὰ ψιλῶς καὶ ἀνυπονοήτως δίχα παντὸς σοφίσματος ἦν ὅλως οὐδὲν. ὅταν δὲ λέγω, φησί, τὸ ἦν, οὐχ ὅτι ἦν λέγω, ἀλλ’ ἵνα σημάνω τοῦτο ὅπερ βούλομαι δεῖξαι, λέγω, φησὶν, ὅτι ἦν ὅλως οὐδὲν.</p>
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In Ps.-Hippolytus’ text, once again, the simultaneous occurrences of φησί(ν) and of the verbal forms λέγω, σημάνω and βούλομαι assure that a work is being quoted, the original author, certainly not Ps.-Hippolytus, speaking now in the first person. It is probably no mere coincidence that such a proem distinguishes these two texts in the whole Greek literature: a search on the TLG online has sorted out only two comparable parallels in Alexander of Aphrodisia’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysica* (Alex. Aphr. *Comm. Metaph.* 689.30, 37 Hayduck). Here, however, the tenability of the hypothesis that “there was a time when nothing existed,” which according to Alexander would follow the assumption that all and every act is preceded by a power, is contested and explicitly denied together with its logical premise. Two lexical and structural clues now make much of a proof that “Apion” and “Basilides” are producing two philosophical interpretations of an Orphic theogony, probably close to that preserved in the *Rhapsodies*.<sup>24</sup>

Moving now to a wider, thematic comparison, as far as we can guess from Ps.-Hippolytus’ selective and unsystematic exposition, Basilides’ work seems to have assimilated, combined and expanded other Orphic motifs as well as sharing significant interpretive features with later (Neo-)Platonic exegesis of Orphic materials.

Among the former one may count:<sup>25</sup>

1. the emergence of a first God out of the cosmic egg / seed, who irradiates light

<sup>22</sup> Bernabé 2008: 91–92, here 92.

<sup>23</sup> On the relationship between *Ps.-Clem.* 6.3.1 and Orphic traditions, see Bernabé 2008: 82–89.

<sup>24</sup> Bernabé 2008: 97–98. See also Biondi 2005: 128–129 and 131, who however asserts, rather than demonstrates. On the exegetical value of 1st persons of *verba dicendi* as introducing personal comments on former allusions to or quotations from other texts, see, for example, Plot. *Enn.* 1.6.2.1–11: here Plotinus first alludes to *Symp.* 206c–d (ll. 2–6) and then expounds it in the light of *Phaedr.* 250a (ll. 7–11), the switch from statement and allusion to explanation being marked by φημὲν δὴ (l. 7), which actualises the initial λέγωμεν (l. 1). Cf. 2.1.7.19–33, and 2.3.16.4–5 (freely quoting *Phaedr.* 246c.1–2).

<sup>25</sup> See also Gabriele 2014: 142–145, commenting on the Orphic hymn in Porphy. *Agalm.* fr. 3.

- and ascends to the heights (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.3–8; cf. *Ps.-Clem.* 6.5.4; 6.2);
2. the separation of the substance inside the egg/seed corresponding to different density and weight (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.7; cf. *Ps.-Clem.* 6.3–8.1; Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5; Achilles Tatius, *Introductio ad Arati Phaenomena*, p. 32 Maass; Epiph. *Pan.* 8.4);<sup>26</sup>
  3. the role played by the *πνεῦμα* as cosmically active, raising and dividing force (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.10–13 and 23.1–3; cf. *Ps.-Clem.* 6.4.2–3; Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5; Epiph. *Pan.* 8.2–3);
  4. the formation of the heavens out of the seed / egg and the separation of the heavenly world from the space below through the action of the *πνεῦμα* (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.23.1–3; cf. *Ps.-Clem.* 6.5.4; 7.5–8.2; Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5; Ach. Tat. *Intr. Arat.* p. 32 Maass; Epiph. *Pan.* 8.2–3);

The latter include:

1. the re-elaboration of the primordial state of indistinctiveness as allusion to the incomprehensible, ineffable and unified nature of the First Principle (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.1–2; cf. Damascius, *De principiis*, 123);
2. the concept of the preexistent Totality hidden in the One as symbolised by the seed / egg (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.3–22.2; cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, 1.427.25–428.10 Diehl and 430.5–10 Diehl);<sup>27</sup>
3. connected to 2., the *πλήθος σπερμάτων* motif (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.3; 5; cf. Dam. *Princ.* 123<sup>2</sup>);
4. the triadic structuration of noetic Being as represented by embryological imagery (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.5 and 22.7; cf. Dam. *Princ.* 123; and 124<sup>2</sup>, here relating and interpreting the teachings of Pherekydes of Syros [A8 Schibli]);<sup>28</sup>
5. the identification of the first child emerging out of the seed / egg as Intellect (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.8; cf. Procl. *Comm. Tim.* 1.427.6–430.18 Diehl and Dam. *Princ.* 123).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> On the Orphic connection of Epiphanius' notice on the Epicurians, see Pini 2010: 163, n. 1. Some useful remarks on Basilides' ideas can be found in Simonetti 1993: 443, n. 40 and Biondi 2005: 141.

<sup>27</sup> See Hadot 1993: 269 and n. 443; Turner 2001: 540–541, n. 37; Thomassen 2008: 306–307.

<sup>28</sup> Triadic divisions of divine principles are not just late Neo-Platonic speculations: they go back at least to the *Chaldean oracles* (second half of the 2nd cent. CE). See Zambon 2002: 251–294. Brisson 1995: 2885–2887, regards divine triads as original and integral features of the Orphic *Rhapsodies* (end of 1st–beginning of 2nd cent. CE), ascribable to Middle-Platonic influence. According to Schibli 1990: 35–38, Pherekydes' work originated “in the same mythopoietic and speculative milieu” that informed some of the oldest Orphic cosmological accounts, or a similar one. Breglia 2000: 191–194, argues instead for Pherekydes' dependence on Orphic theogonies. Both concur, however, that a “genetic” link with Orphic traditions cannot be denied.

<sup>29</sup> On Basilides' first Sonship as *nous*, see Simonetti 1993: 443–444, n. 40; Biondi 2005: 137–138; Saudelli 2006: 217–218; Magris 2012: 255, n. 26.

Where is Egypt in all of this? I do not intend to delve into the *vexata quaestio* of the supposed Egyptian and Oriental “origin” of Orphic theogonies.<sup>30</sup> I limit myself here to just a few remarks.

By Roman times Egyptian priests had long been claiming Egyptian roots for Orphic *theologoumena* and rites, and had also long been engaged in spreading their versions of this story among others across the Mediterranean basin, especially among and through Greek writers (cf. Herodot. *Hist.* 2.81–82; 142; Diod. Sic. *Bibl. hist.* 1.23; 92.3; 96.2–5 and 4.25.3; Plut. fr. 212; Eus. *Praep. ev.* 1.6.4 and 3.9.12).<sup>31</sup> Did the native informants go completely astray in inventing and handing on the tradition? And were their hearers, who later became our informants, simply naïve to trust them blindly?

Two points need to be made in this regard: building on P. Hadot’s and J. Turner’s work, E. Thomassen has convincingly argued for a common source lying behind the apparently related protologies of the Valentinians, the *Chaldean oracles*, the later Platonists, the Platonising Sethians, and Victorinus and Synesius. Though not easy to pin down exactly, this common source must have encompassed a reinterpretation of older Orphic theogonies, and particularly of “the myth of Phanes emerging from the cosmic egg.”<sup>32</sup> In a more recent contribution, besides focusing on one of Phanes’ epithets, Πρωτόγονος as a lexical equivalent to the Sethian name Protophanes and further exploring the Orphic connection of the latter, the Norwegian scholar has detected and commented on two occurrences of the term πρωτοφανής in two different sections of PGM IV.<sup>33</sup> The first one appears in the second of two lines (PGM IV.943–944) which accumulate almost literal Greek renderings of ancient Egyptian epithets referring to Re.<sup>34</sup> Thomassen concludes:

[...] it is not without interest to observe that the Sethians adopted a vocabulary in their description of primal ontogenesis that would make good sense for an Egyptian familiar with traditional creation mythology and solar religion. It is not unlikely that the Sethians who introduced this vocabulary had an Egyptian background, and those Egyptians who translated and read the Sethian texts as well can easily be assumed to have seen a connection with traditional themes in their native religion.<sup>35</sup>

His conclusions may obviously apply to the corresponding Orphic vocabulary as well, which Sethians had appropriated, as Thomassen himself does not fail to remark.<sup>36</sup> My second point: before comparing the Greek – not only Orphic

<sup>30</sup> See Morenz 1950, West 1983: 187–190 and 199–204; West 1994: 303–307. More cautious Breglia 2000: 164–166.

<sup>31</sup> Frankfurter 1998: 224–237.

<sup>32</sup> Thomassen 2008: 291–307.

<sup>33</sup> Thomassen 2013: 64–71.

<sup>34</sup> Thomassen 2013: 66–67.

<sup>35</sup> Thomassen 2013: 67.

<sup>36</sup> Thomassen 2013: 64. On the historical and cultural continuity between “Orphism” and

– and Phoenician versions of egg cosmogonies, M. West quoted in a note, a passage from Porphyry which deserves further attention (*Agalm.* fr. 9):<sup>37</sup>

Τὸν δημιουργόν, ὃν Κνήφ οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι προσαγορεύουσιν, ἀνθρωποειδῆ, τὴν δὲ χροιάν ἐκ κυανοῦ μέλανος ἔχοντα, κρατοῦντα ζωὴν<sup>38</sup> καὶ σκῆπτρον, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς κεφαλῆς πτερὸν βασιλείον περικείμενον, ὅτι λόγος δυσεὔρετος καὶ ἐγκεκρυμμένος καὶ οὐ φανός, καὶ ὅτι ζωοποιός, καὶ ὅτι βασιλεύς, καὶ ὅτι νοερώς κινεῖται· διὸ ἡ τοῦ πτεροῦ φύσις ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ κεῖται. Τὸν δὲ θεὸν τοῦτον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος προῖεσθαι φασιν ὧν, ἐξ οὗ γεννᾶσθαι θεὸν ὃν αὐτοὶ προσαγορεύουσι Φθᾶ, οἱ δὲ Ἕλληνας Ἡφαιστον ἐρμηνεύουσιν δὲ τὸ ὧν τὸν κόσμον.

Taking into consideration that Κνήφ is definitely to be deciphered as Kematef, the primeval form of Amun by Roman times,<sup>39</sup> and therefore can manifest himself as wind and shining air deity,<sup>40</sup> four correspondences out of ten can be detected between Porphyry’s report and West’s subsequent reconstruction of a common archetype lying behind Greek and Phoenician cosmogonical accounts: motifs 3 (“The role played by the wind”), 7 (“Appearance of the bright Aither”), 8 (“The production of an egg”), and 10 (“In his role as demiurge, Phanes-Eros has a counterpart in Moch’s Khušor-Ptah, who presumably not only opens the egg, but fashions its two halves into heaven and earth, and perhaps performs other creative acts”).<sup>41</sup>

Correspondences increase as we move on to read Porphyry against original Egyptian sources. Daniela Mendel has persuasively proposed identifying the Egyptian specimen of Porphyry’s account with a cosmogonical text carved on the West Wall of the Bark Chapel of Khonsu Temple at Karnak around the middle of 1st cent. BCE: according to the inscription, Kematef before beginning creation, floated in the waters of the windy and dark primeval ocean, Nun, as indistinct as it was unlimited (motifs 1–2 and 4 in West’s model, Mendel 2003: pl. 3, ll. 11–14; pl. 4, l.16; pl. 6, ll. 34–38). At his will, sky appeared and spat out a falcon-egg from which Ptah came into existence. Upon being brought forth, Ptah fertilised and shaped the egg as space and solid ground for an ordered creation to take place.<sup>42</sup>

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Egyptian “theology” and ritual praxis under Greek and Roman rules, see more generally Herero de Jáuregui 2007: 63–72. The complex interplay of influences exerted on “Orphic” literature by Near Eastern traditions, pre-Socratic philosophy, Plato, and the Stoa, and influences exerted by “Orphic” literature on pre-Socratic philosophy, Plato, Stoic, Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic thought – and one may add at this point, Egyptian tradition – has been variously highlighted over the past twenty years by Brisson 1995: 2883–2885, and Bernabé 2005 and 2009.

<sup>37</sup> West 1994: 292, n. 12.

<sup>38</sup> I read ζωὴν with Drexler, Smith, Schwyzer and Gabriele for manuscripts ζῶνῃν (Gabriele 2014: 259, n. 150)

<sup>39</sup> Thissen 1996.

<sup>40</sup> Klotz 2012: 61–66 and 133–142.

<sup>41</sup> West 1994: 304.

<sup>42</sup> Mendel 2003: 183–189, suggesting the mediation of Chaeremon about a century later.

The case Mendel has focused on is not isolated: as a matter of fact, Egyptian texts of Graeco-Roman times feature even more characteristic motifs paralleled so far only in the Orphic theogony circulating under the name of Hieronymus (1st cent. CE?): I refer especially to the bisexual serpent *alias* the couple of entwined serpentine gods, male and female, emerging at the dawn of creation from water and mud (cf. Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5 and Dam. *Princ.* 123 with Urk. 8.18c; 79c.h and Esna 2.64.1; 3.216.3 [13])<sup>43</sup> and extending through or encircling the universe (cf. Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5 and Dam. *Princ.* 123 with Urk. 8.112.1, Edfou 6.16.5–6, and PGM VII.583).<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Egyptian texts persuasively account for the double equation of the two snakes with Time / Heracles and *Ananke* / *Adrasteia* respectively, as the *interpretatio graeca* of the Egyptian couple Khonsu-Shu and Hathor-Ma‘at, appearing together out of Nun as primeval life-sustaining and ordaining cosmic forces (cf. Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5 and Dam. *Princ.* 123 with Mendel 2003: pl. 6, ll. 37–39; pl. 8, ll. 48–49; pl. 15, ll. 31 [describing Khonsu-Thoth as the heart of *Dt*-time and tongue of *Nhh*-time]).<sup>45</sup>

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In his discussion of Iambl. *Myst.* 8.3, Clark 2008: 180–181, follows her conclusions, but correctly adds: “In any event, there is of course no evidence that Iamblichus knew directly or even indirectly the Khonsu cosmogony, but if Mendel is correct, she can at least offer not unreasonable evidence that valid knowledge of late Egyptian theology was passing to apparently interested parties like Porphyry via likely well informed intermediaries of Egyptian provenance, such as Chaeremon. How much, however, these sources distorted or by reinterpretation shaped the transmission is also with the present state of evidence not easy to determine” (180, n. 41). Improved readings of the hieroglyphic text, further commentary on the inscription, and more Egyptian parallels to single motifs can be found in Klotz 2012: 105–108 and 137–138.

<sup>43</sup> Klotz 2012: 123 and 170–174.

<sup>44</sup> Klotz 2012: 137–139.

<sup>45</sup> On the whole subject, see West 1983: 176–212, here especially, 188–198, who, however, limits himself to referring to much older – one would be tempted to say “classical” – Egyptian texts. I find his own attempt to explain the Time–Heracles connection (192–194) as “not completely satisfactory” (193) as the one which he himself discards. Cf. also Klotz 2012: 404, n. 9 on the authentic elements of the Theban cosmogony involving Khonsu-Shu as they appear in Damascius: “a crocodile (*sic!*) form of Heracles–Chronos (cf. Khonsu-Shu) creates the cosmic egg which produces aether, chaos and darkness (cf. the Ogdoad).” On the convergence of both Egyptian concepts of time, *Nhh* (cyclical time articulating itself in hours, days, months and years) and *Dt* (sameness, enduring permanence of what has taken place in time and has come to its end), on representations of Khonsu, see also Urk. 8.54f; 84c; 107(1) and the insightful comments in Assmann 1975: 36–41 and 61–65, and Klotz 2012: 84–88. Quaegebeur 1975–1976: 469–472 surveys the evidence on Heracles as Greek counterpart of Khonsu, as well as the latter’s representations as lion and falcon, and his acknowledged role as “Lord of life-time.” On *Ananke* / *Adrasteia* as Greek concepts basically overlapping with the Egyptian Ma‘at in her cosmic role, cf. Chaeremon quoted by Porphyry in Eus. *Praep. ev.* 3.4 (ἀνάγκη); *Corp. herm.* 3 and 11; 2; 4–6; Stob. *Flor.* 12–14 (ἀνάγκη) and 23 (Ἀδράστεια), and PGM IV.2306–2309 (ἀνάγκη; cf. BD 65!) and VII.646–649 (the solar deity is invoked as ὁ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀνάγκης

Summing up: we have been following some lexical and structural hints in Ps.-Hippolytus' notice which have brought us to assume that Basilides' text is offering a Platonising commentary on an "Orphic" cosmogony. That, in turn, has led us to search for a possible Egyptian connection for "Orphic" materials: leaving aside the question of the Oriental origins of what we call Orphism, we have come across a historical and cultural continuity between Orphic and Egyptian texts under Graeco-Roman rules, documented by distinctive recurring epithets, features and motifs in both traditions.<sup>46</sup> Long-time claims by Egyptian priests carried out the rest and spread the "official" version of the Egyptian cradle of Orphic mysteries. Its success was astonishing and reached Christian polemist too: Eusebius of Caesarea did not miss the chance to trace Greek theologies back to barbarian lore and, relying on Chaeremon's authority, he ascribed the Orphic verses admired, cited but – in his own view – misinterpreted by Porphyry, to an Egyptian *logos* (cf. Eus. *Praep. ev.* 3.9.1–2; 12–15 with 3.4). So probably did Ps.-Hippolytus as well (cf. *Haer.* 5.7.22–28; 20.4–5. and 7.33.1).<sup>47</sup>

However, this might not be the whole story.

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τεταγμένος [= Egyptian *nb m3'.t?*]), with the analysis of ancient Egyptian texts about Ma'at provided by Assmann 1990: 160–199. The German Egyptologist has devoted some pages also to highlighting and investigating the connection between Ma'at and Time on the cosmogonical level (169–171). The primeval twin, male-female couple, Shu and Tefnut, embodies cosmic principles, such as Life and Ma'at, *Nhh*-time and *Dt*-time, already in CT 78 and 80: see the commentary by Allen 1986: 24–27. On his part, Klotz 2012: 121–125.134–138.171–174.222, shows how deep Theban theology under Roman rule is indebted to Heliopolitan speculations on the primal triad, Atum-Shu-Tefnut.

<sup>46</sup> It is not without interest to note here that an Orphic fragment was actually interpolated into the Hermetic *Kore kosmou*, which also reports a "hellenised" version of the ancient Egyptian *Myth of the Heavenly Cow*: ὀφθαλμοὶ τὰς οὐκέτι τοῦ θεοῦ ψυχὰς χωρήσουσιν ἄλογοι, καὶ παντελῶς μικρὸν τῷ ἐν τούτοις ὑγρῷ καὶ κυκλίῳ τὸν ἑαυτῶν πρόγονον οὐρανὸν ὀρῶσαι στενάζομεν αἰεὶ, ἔστι δ' ὅτε καὶ οὐ βλέπομεν [ἔνθεν Ὀρφεὺς τῷ λαμπρῷ βλέπομεν, τοῖς δ' ὄμμασιν οὐδὲν ὀρῶμεν]· ἄθλια γὰρ κατεκρίθημεν καὶ τὸ βλέπειν ἡμῖν οὐκ ἀντικρὺς ἐχαρίσθη, ὅτι χωρὶς τοῦ φωτὸς ἡμῖν τὸ ὄρᾶν οὐκ ἐδόθη· τόποι τοίνυν καὶ οὐκέτι εἰσὶν ὀφθαλμοὶ (Stob. *Flor.* 23.36). Spells circulating under the name of Orpheus are also known to the authors of PGM (cf. PGM XIII.933ff.). More generally, on the osmosis between Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Roman dimensions of gods, religious worldviews and practices in Graeco-Roman Egypt, see Frankfurter 2012; Bommas 2012; Tallet, Zivie-Coche 2012; Stadler 2012. On late Egyptian temples as centres of intellectual innovations in traditional lore, cf. Betrò 2003. Camplani 2003 has in-depth discussion and proposals to offer on religious interaction in Roman Alexandria.

<sup>47</sup> On Ps.-Hippolytus' acquaintance with Orphic writings and ideas, see Arcari 2013.

#### 4. A “non existing” source?

Ten years ago, reflecting on the fact that “l’inesprimibilità di Dio non contempla per se stessa anche la sua inesistenza e che Dio non venne detto da Basilide “inesistente” perché inesprimibile,” Biondi assumed that “non existing” did not relate to a *ratio cognoscendi*, but rather to a *ratio essendi*. On that basis, he concluded that “l’idea di un Dio inesistente non ha altri riscontri prima di Basilide,” being unparalleled even in the most extreme, Platonic apophatic speculations on the first god before Porphyry.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, he turned to Egyptian writings as the possible source for the whole complex of themes revolving around the non existing God in “Basilides”, and found a thick correspondence in the Heliopolitan tradition: the god of pre-existence, Atum, whose name can be interpreted as “the Not-Being,” ejaculates semen (σπέρμα καταβάλλω in Greek: cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.1–2; 4 and 22.1.7, with Galen, *De semine*, 4.516.10 Kühn; Julius Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 2.6.1; Clem. *Ecl.* 50.1 and 3) as well as creating the egg as foundation of Being; immediately thereafter the Ogdoad springs out of the egg.<sup>49</sup> Does his comparison and the hypothesis relying thereon stand closer examination? Even more important: can his suggestion definitely explain “l’attribuzione delle dottrine basilidiane al patrimonio egizio,” as he appears to believe?<sup>50</sup>

As usual, I begin with some lexical observations on a passage which I believe we can assign with some confidence to Basilides (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.1):

Ἐπει <οὖν> οὐδέν <ἦν> οὐχ ὄλη, οὐκ οὐσία, οὐκ ἀνούσιον, οὐχ ἀπλοῦν, οὐ σύνθετον, οὐ νοητόν, <sup>51</sup> οὐκ αἰσθητόν, οὐκ ἀνθρωπος, οὐκ ἄγγελος, οὐ θεός, οὐδὲ ὄλωσ τι τῶν ὀνομαζομένων

<sup>48</sup> Biondi 2005: 110–116 (quotations: 112). In a recent communication (“Un Dieu ‘pas même indicible’, οὐδὲ ἄρρητος [Élenchos, VII, 20, 3]: examen de la théologie de ‘Basilide’ dans son rapport polémique aux théologies contemporaines,” Colloque “Dire Dieu,” Tours 17th–18th April 2015), G. Hertz maintained that Basilides is here deliberately contesting and challenging contemporary Middle-Platonic theologies on the basis of his own reading of Plato’s *Sophist*. Métrope 2009 insisted instead on the dependence of “Basilidian” ontology of the First Principle on the exegesis of Plato, *Parm.* 141e–142a. However, as Biondi 2005: 116, points out, “la concezione platonica non fu [...] una professione del nulla: nel *Sofista* il non-essere è ciò che è diverso dall’essere, ma non è un qualcosa per se stesso, se assunto senza relazioni ad altro, e tanto meno è Dio o il bene; nel *Parmenide* l’ipotesi ‘se l’uno non è’ (analoga nelle conclusioni apofatiche all’ipotesi ‘se l’uno è uno’) non conduce a definizioni soddisfacenti atte a definire cosa sia l’uno o il non-essere.” On Porphyry and the modes of Not-Beings, see Hadot 1993: 144–147. Turner 2011: 545–550, deals among other things with the jargon of the modes of Not-Being in Victorinus, *Zostrianos*, and other “Sethian” treatises, arguing that it originated with a Middle-Platonic theologico-metaphysical interpretation of Plato’s *Parmenides*.

<sup>49</sup> Biondi 2005: 103–108 and 116–132.

<sup>50</sup> Biondi 2005: 104.

<sup>51</sup> I accept Jacobi’s correction νοητόν for P’s corrupt reading ἄσύνθετον.

ἢ δι' αἰσθήσεως λαμβανομένων ἢ νοητῶν πραγμάτων, ἀλλ' οὕτω καὶ ἔτι λεπτομερ<εστέρ>ως πάντων ἀπλῶς περιγεγραμμένων, <ὁ> οὐκ ὄν θεός – ὄν Ἀριστοτέλης καλεῖ νόησιν νοήσεως, οὗτοι δὲ οὐκ ὄντα – ἀνοήτως, ἀναισθητῶς, ἀβούλως, ἀπροαιρέτως, ἀπαθῶς, ἀνεπιθυμητῶς κόσμον ἠθέλησε ποιῆσαι.

This passage clearly echoes the distinctive language of the first “Basilidian” fragment which can be isolated in Ps.-Hippolytus’ notice (*Haer.* 7.20.2–4), thereby building on and developing its linguistic and metaphysical reflections: οὐδὲν ἦν (cf. 21.1.1 and 20.2.1), οὐδὲ ὄλως (cf. 21.1.3 and 20.2.3), ὀνομάζομαι – δι’ αἰσθήσεως λαμβάνομαι // τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐκλαμβάνω – (νοητὰ) πράγματα (cf. 21.1.3–4 and 20.3–4), ἀπλῶς (cf. 21.1.5 and 20.3.1). Moreover, the following direct quotation from Basilides in *Haer.* 7.21.2 both provides 7.21.1 with further explanation on the employment of the terms “he wanted” and “world,” and presupposes the six adverb chain which occurred in the preceding lines, reducing it to a new series of three: τὸ δὲ “ἠθέλησε” λέγω, φησί, σημασίας χάριν, ἀθελήτως καὶ ἀνοήτως καὶ ἀναισθητῶς· “κόσμον” δὲ οὐ τὸν κατὰ διαίρεσιν γεγεννημένον καὶ ὕστερον κατὰ πλάτος διεστῶτα, ἀλλὰ γὰρ σπέρμα κόσμου. All in all, then, it is not far-fetched to assume that Ps.-Hippolytus is here too explicitly citing his source or at least paraphrasing it almost *verbatim*, the gloss on Aristotelian and Basilidian terminology compared obviously representing his main, if not his only one, redactional intervention.

In the attempt to describe in further detail the absolute nothingness before the very first creative “act” of the Not-Being God, “Basilides” appears to be acquainted (through literary or oral transmission) with a Hermetic text well known to later Christian Alexandrian authors as well (Didymus; Cyril) – or at least to have had access to traditions which influenced or were influenced by this writing. I quote from Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Iulianum Imperatorem*, 1.48.13–22:

Λέγει δὲ καὶ Ἐρμῆς ἐν λόγῳ τρίτῳ τῶν Ἰπρὸς Ἀσκληπιόν· “Οὐ γὰρ ἐφικτὸν ἔστιν εἰς ἀμύητους τοιαῦτα μυστήρια παρέχεσθαι· ἀλλὰ τῷ νοῦ ἀκούσατε. ἐν μόνον ἦν φῶς νοερὸν πρὸ φωτός νοεροῦ καὶ ἔστιν αἰεὶ, νοῦς νοὸς φωτεινός· καὶ οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἦν ἢ ἡ τούτου ἐνόησις· αἰεὶ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὢν, αἰεὶ τῷ ἑαυτοῦ νοῦ καὶ φωτὶ καὶ πνεύματι πάντα περιέχει.” Καὶ μεθ’ ἕτερά φησι· “Ἐκτὸς τούτου οὐ θεός, οὐκ ἄγγελος, οὐ δαίμων, οὐκ οὐσία τις ἄλλη· πάντων γὰρ ἔστι κύριος καὶ πατήρ καὶ θεός καὶ πηγὴ καὶ ζωὴ καὶ δύναμις καὶ φῶς καὶ νοῦς καὶ πνεῦμα· καὶ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ὑπ’ αὐτόν ἐστι” (fr. 23 Nock–Festugière).

The phrase οὐδὲν (ἕτερον) ἦν and the series of negated substantives οὐ θεός, οὐκ ἄγγελος, οὐκ οὐσία match perfectly in the two texts under focus. As a research on the TLG online shows, such a double match sets them apart from the whole *corpus* of ancient Greek literature.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, both the statement of not-ex-

<sup>52</sup> Cf. also Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 6.29.5; *Trip. Trac.* NHC I,5.53.21–37; Plot. *Enn.* 5.2.1 and 5.6; Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arium*, 1.49.9–17, as the closest parallels which I have been able to find. The passage from *Adversus Arium* does not seem to stem from the Middle-Platonic source Marius Victorinus shares in common with *Zostrianus* (see the synopsis in Turner 2011: 528).



istence and the negative triplet occur at the outset of a theogonical and cosmogonical account (cf. fr. 23–24; 27–28; 31–32b Nock–Festugière with *Chronicon Paschale*, 85.16–86.5), insisting on the sheer nothingness which surrounded the first God, just as in Basilides’ fragment. These cannot be mere coincidences. Such negative formulas are no radical innovation of Hermetic literature, but have a long history in ancient Egyptian writings alluding to the state of the pre-existence of Being, as Atum, sole God and Lord of Totality:<sup>53</sup>

PT 486: “(The deceased king) was brought forth in Nun,/ as the sky hadn’t come into existence yet,/ as the earth hadn’t come into existence yet,/ as the two columns (= the gods Shu and Tefnut, children of Atum) hadn’t come into existence yet,/ as even disorder hadn’t come into existence yet;” 571: “(the deceased king) was procreated by his father, Atum,/ as the sky hadn’t come into existence yet,/ as the earth hadn’t come into existence yet,/ as humans weren’t there yet,/ as gods hadn’t been generated yet,/ as even death didn’t exist yet.”<sup>54</sup>

CT 80.47–53: Atum was alone in the waters “not finding a place in which I could stand or sit,/ before Heliopolis had been founded, in which I could exist,/ before the Lotus had been tied together, on which I could sit,/ before I had made Nut so she could be over my head and Geb could marry her,/ before the first Corps was born,/ before the two original Enneads had developed and started existing with me;” 261,5–9: Magic speaks: “I am the one whom the Sole Lord made,/ before two things had developed in this world,/ when he sent his sole eye,/ when he was alone,/ when something came from his mouth.”<sup>55</sup>

P.Berol. 3048 (New Kingdom): Ptah is the one who “begot himself by himself, without any development having developed,/ who crafted the world in the design of his heart./ [...] Who built his body by himself,/ without the earth having developed,/ without the sky having developed,/ without the waters having risen yet.”<sup>56</sup>

P.Leid. 1.350 (Ramesside period), 80th Chapter, 12–14: “You (*scil.* Amun) began developing with nothing,/ without the world being empty of you on the first occasion./ All gods are developed after you;” 100th Chapter, 2–5.8.10–11: Amun is the One “who began development on the first occasion,/ Amun, who developed in the beginning,/ whose emanation is unknown,/ no god developing prior to him,/ no other god with him to tell of his appearance [...]. Who smelted his egg by himself. [...] Divine god, who developed by himself/ and every god developed since he began himself.”<sup>57</sup>

P.Berol. 3055 (Ramesside period; ÄHG 122.6–10): “Du bist der Gott, der zu Anbeginn entstand,/ da noch kein Gott entstanden, da noch der Name keines Dinges ersonnen war./ Du öffnest deine Augen, dass du sähest mit ihnen,/ und es entstand das Licht für jedermann/ durch den Glanz deiner Augen, als der Tag noch nicht entstanden war.”

P.Bremner-Rhind 5–19 (British Museum, EA 10188.1; beginnings of the Ptolemaic rule): the Lord to the Limit (Egyptian equivalent to Greek πάντων κύριος!) speaks: “All developments

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<sup>53</sup> These and other significant passages are listed and commented in Grapow 1931 and Hornung 1992: 156–158.

<sup>54</sup> Italian translation in Bresciani 2001: 11–12.

<sup>55</sup> English translation in Allen 1986: 22 and 37.

<sup>56</sup> English translation in Allen 1986: 39–40.

<sup>57</sup> English translation in Allen 1986: 50 and 52.

developed after I developed,/ developments becoming many in emerging from my mouth,/ without the sky having developed,/ without the earth having developed,/ without the ground or snakes having been created in that place./ It was out of the Waters, out of inertness, that I became tied together in them,/ without having found a place in which I could stand./ I became effective in my heart,/ I surveyed with my face./ I made every form alone,/ without having sneezed Shu,/ without having spat Tefnut,/ without another having developed and acted with me./ When I surveyed with my heart by myself,/ the developments of developments became many.”<sup>58</sup>

Urk. 8.3b (Ptolemaic era): just like Atum, Amun was not-existing, then he “began creation before anything had come into existence (or: without anything having come yet into existence),/ all creation came into existence after he came into existence;”<sup>59</sup> 188e: Ptah-Tatenen is “he who came about in the beginning,/ namely He-whose-name-is-hidden (*Imn-rn=f*), who made what exists,/who came about by himself, all alone,/without the sky having been lifted or the earth founded,/while Nun was stormy, mixed with utter darkness,/there was nothing before him.”<sup>60</sup>

Esna 5.253 (Roman era): Neith came into existence at the beginning, appearing out of the primordial waters by herself “as the earth was still in darkness,/ as no ground had yet emerged,/ as no plant was sprouting yet.”<sup>61</sup>

The hypothesis of “Basilides” acquaintance with Hermetic tradition might be further corroborated by observing that the two mention and share the innovating cosmological view of the Ogdoad as astral configuration (cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.23.5–7, and *Corp. herm.* 1.26.2–5 and 13.15.2–3).<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Hermetic writings provide us with assertions on God coming as close as possible to “Basilides” concept of Not-Being God.<sup>63</sup> Finally, the motifs of the supreme and solitary God

<sup>58</sup> English translation in Allen 1986: 28. Italian translation in Bresciani 2001: 16.

<sup>59</sup> English translation in Klotz 2012: 59. Amun then proceeds to plan creation in advance, or in Egyptian terms: “he began thinking in order to found the earth,” “he predicted what was to come. [...] He created the conditions of what would exist later on” (Klotz 2012: 59–60 and nn. 99–100). Cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.4–5 and 22.6.

<sup>60</sup> English translation in Klotz 2012: 203. Thereafter, according to Edfou 6.16.5–6, Ptah-Tatenen creates the primeval lotus “from the ejaculate of Nun, lifting it all up as the mysterious egg.”

<sup>61</sup> Italian translation in Bresciani 2001: 30.

<sup>62</sup> See already Biondi 2005: 105 and 108. In the *Hermetica*, however, as reshaped through the astrological filter as they are, some ideas revolving around the Ogdoad still show traces of their distinctively ancient Egyptian origin: cf. *Corp. herm.* 1.22–27 and 13.15–20 with Cairo CG 42225.42230–42232, Urk. 4/3.158–160, ÄHG 129–130, and the texts surveyed in Assmann 2010: 82–88. The use of the name *Abrasax* for the great archon of the Ebdomad and its 365 heavens (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.26.6) points to the influence of Graeco-Egyptian magical traditions (see PGM I.300–303; VII.510–521; VIII.41–49; XII.71–74; LXI.32–33), which have indeed much in common also with Hermetic writings and religious practice (cf., for example, *Corp. herm.* 5.11 and 13.13–15, and *Disc.* 8–9 [NHC VI,6] 26.61–67 Camplani with PGM VIII.1–51 and XIII.177; 795).

<sup>63</sup> *Corp. herm.* 5.9–11: ἔστιν οὗτος καὶ τὰ ὄντα αὐτὸς καὶ τὰ μὴ ὄντα. τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὄντα ἐφανερώσῃ, τὰ δὲ μὴ ὄντα ἔχει ἐν ἑαυτῷ. οὗτος ὁ θεὸς ὀνόματος κρείττων [...] σὺ γὰρ πάντα

ejaculating, and creating light by his word coalesce into allusions to the *Genesis* account both in Ps.-Hippolytus’ notice and in the aforementioned Hermetic fragments, all of them most probably stemming from one and the same work like the prologue which we focused on earlier (cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.1–6 and fr. 27–28; 31–32b Nock–Festugière).<sup>64</sup>

Appealing with some reason to Hermetic literature or, alternatively, to the complex processes of cultural and religious interaction leading to its production, transmission and diffusion helps our analysis bypass as historically unjustified Biondi’s basic dilemma (Greek philosophy or Egyptian wisdom?) that we started out with.

Indeed, as Alberto Camplani put it, writing on the *Hermetica*:

I materiali filosofici di matrice platonica, aristotelica e stoica, non sono immessi per redigere una disordinatissima dossografia filosofica, ma appaiono piuttosto utilizzati ai fini della costituzione di un discorso religioso, e anche cultuale, il cui senso potrebbe trascendere e distorcere quello delle singole unità concettuali che lo compongono. [...] La citazione dell’altrui scrittura [...] esprime ad un tempo *self-definition* e valorizzazione delle tradizioni parallele, quasi che le verità filosofiche e religiose sostenute o le pratiche religiose proposte possano essere corroborate dalla loro compresenza in altre tradizioni, come quella iranica e quella giudaica, viste come qualcosa di altro ma non per questo non omologabili almeno a livello lessicale e concettuale. Un’élite egiziana in evoluzione ha dunque esperito un continuo processo di traduzione, di interpretazione, di adattamento e di transcodifica culturale, di aggiornamento della cultura atavica.

He then wondered:

Quale legame possiamo stabilire tra tale sofisticata operazione di fusione culturale, di cui l’ermetismo è soltanto uno degli esempi (altri se ne potrebbero aggiungere sia nel campo della produzione testuale che in quello della produzione artistica o architettonica) e la dialettica culturale e organizzativa della comunità cristiana alessandrina?<sup>65</sup>

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εἶ και ἄλλο οὐδὲν ἔστιν· ὁ μὴ ἔστι, σὺ εἶ. σὺ πᾶν τὸ γενόμενον, σὺ τὸ μὴ γενόμενον; 10.2: τί γάρ ἐστι θεός και πατήρ και τὸ ἀγαθόν, ἢ τὸ τῶν πάντων εἶναι οὐκέτι ὄντων † ἀλλὰ ὑπαρξιν αὐτὴν τῶν ὄντων †; τοῦτο ὁ θεός, τοῦτο ὁ πατήρ, τοῦτο τὸ ἀγαθόν, ᾧ μηδὲν πρόσεστι τῶν ἄλλων (cf. also Plot. *Enn.* 5.2.1). Both texts seem to reflect and update the traditional notion of the Egyptian creator God as foretelling, thinking, determining, making or giving birth to “what is (*ntt*) and what is not (*iwtt*)” (P.Leid. 1.350, 400th Chapter, 3; cf. Text XIII.4–11 in Allen 1986: 39). On “existing” and “not-existing” as dialectical cosmological categories in Egyptian thought, Hornung 1992: 154–164, is still fundamental. The names used for the primordial God, *Ītm* and later *Km-3t=f*, play on the very same paradox of his being “all, whole, complete” and at the same time “not-existing (yet/anymore),” as he sets to and finishes developing into the whole of reality (see Allen 1986: 9 and 67, n. 56, and Klotz 2012: 133–134).

<sup>64</sup> On the Egyptian frame of reference for the shaping / invention of creation out of the semen-egg / (by) the word of (a) creator(s) god(s) standing on the solid ground which first emerged from Nun-waters, see P.Berol. 3048; P.Berol.Dem. 13603 1.8–12.14–17.24; PSI 7(a) inv.D, fr. 1 ll. 6; 13; 18–21; Esna 5.142–144; 253–255; Edfou 6.16.2–9; 180.10–181.11. Cf. also Mendel 2003: pl. 6, l. 33–pl. 7, l. 47, and pl. 13, l. 17–pl. 14, l. 23.

<sup>65</sup> Camplani 2003: 33 and 35.

Camplani's insightful considerations and his stimulating question bring me directly to my next point – and to a further, last step towards providing the answer to the second problem raised at the beginning of the section as originating with Biondi's conviction.

## 5. A teacher's legacy

“Le citazioni sono tratte da un'opera basilidiana non identificabile.”<sup>66</sup> In these terms Aldo Magris has recently expressed his radical pessimism on that matter. For my part, I am convinced that a suggestion on the identification of the written work from which Ps.-Hippolytus draws might be actually advanced or at least something more can be said on its genre and nature. In 1996 Löhr assumed

dass es geradezu ein Kennzeichen von antiker Schulliteratur ist, dass Widersprüche unausgeglichen nebeneinander stehen können. [...] Zur Vermutung, die Vorlage des Basilidesreferats könne eine (möglicherweise unausgefeilte) Niederschrift aus dem Lehrbetrieb gnostischer Zirkel sein, passt die Beobachtung, dass das Basilidesreferat zunächst durchaus ‚diatribenartig‘, mit fiktiven Zwischenfragen und Antworten anzufangen scheint.

He then went on to speculate that

die Vorlage möglicherweise noch unfertig war und im Schulbetrieb ihren Sitz im Leben hat. Die internen Widersprüche könnten auch auf ungelöste Probleme der Schuldebatten verweisen, vielleicht auch das unter Aufnahme heterogener, vor allem valentinianischer Motive durchgeführte Gedankenexperiment eines spekulativ begabten Theologen darstellen.<sup>67</sup>

The continuous interlacing of *exegesis* and *zetesis*, which structures the whole of Basilides' writing, represents probably the main evidence supporting Löhr's conclusions:<sup>68</sup> all throughout Ps.-Hippolytus' report, Homer and Heraclitus,<sup>69</sup> Hebrew scriptures,<sup>70</sup> and early Christian writings<sup>71</sup> are quoted or alluded to,

<sup>66</sup> Magris 2012: 254, n. 25.

<sup>67</sup> Löhr 1996: 305–306. Later on, he refers to the same writing as “eine Art spekulativer Schulübung eines gnostischen Zirkels” (312).

<sup>68</sup> On philosophical schools, the use and production of texts, and distinctive features of the latter, see more generally Snyder 2010: 33–44.110–116.139–146.

<sup>69</sup> *Haer.* 7.22.8 = *Hom. Od.* 7.36; *Haer.* 7.22.13 = Heraclitus, fr. 61 D.–K.

<sup>70</sup> *Haer.* 7.22.3: *Gen.* 1.3; *Haer.* 7.23.1 = *Gen.* 1.7; *Haer.* 7.25.4 = *Exod.* 6.2–3; *Haer.* 7.26.4 = *Ps.* 31.5–6; 50.5; 51.11; *Haer.* 7.22.15 = *Ps.* 132.2; *Haer.* 7.26.2 = *Prov.* 1.7, 9–10. The preceding list is obviously far from complete.

<sup>71</sup> I offer here only a small selection of passages: *Haer.* 7.27.4 = *Matt.* 2.1–2; *Haer.* 7.26.9 = *Luke* 1.35; *Haer.* 7.22.4 = *John* 1.9; *Haer.* 7.25.5 = *Rom.* 5.13–14; *Haer.* 7.25.2 and 27.1 = *Rom.* 8.19, 21–22; *Haer.* 7.26.3 = *1 Cor.* 2.7, 13; *Haer.* 7.26.7 = *2 Cor.* 12.4; *Haer.* 7.22.13 and 25.5 = *Eph.* 1.21; *Haer.* 7.25.3, and 26.7 = *Eph.* 3.4–5; *Haer.* 7.26.4 = *Eph.* 3.9; *Haer.* 7.25.2 = *Col.* 1.26–27.

discussed and commented on, whereas rival theo- and cosmogonical theories, namely, the προβολή—theory of “Valentinian” origin, are recalled, then debated, and eventually discarded (cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.2–6). Both exegetical practice and zetetical examination are openly intended to provide the “Christian” *haireisis* with a “story” framing, explaining and legitimating its very existence, its religious practices, and its world-view (see the “we-sections” in *Haer.* 7.25.2; 5).

In developing from such activity and aiming at such goals, our text would easily fall into the literary genre of *Exegetica* (or treatises), as James Kelhoffer aptly described it, analysing the remnants of the authentic literary production of Basilides.<sup>72</sup> We know indeed that both Basilides and his son Isidore wrote *Exegetica*, and devoted much attention to barbarian wisdom as a *corpus* of possibly ancient and revered traditions corroborating exegetical praxis, shedding light on origins and premises of Greek philosophical / “theological” thought, and supporting their own reflection in the field (cf. Clem. *Str.* 4.81.1 and 6.53.2–5, and Hegemonius, *Acta Archelai*, 67.5).<sup>73</sup>

It is therefore tempting to equate Ps.-Hippolytus’ Basilidian source with Isidore’s Τοῦ προφήτου Παρχῶρ Ἐξηγητικά (Clem. *Str.* 6.53.2), granted that Basilides’ Ἐξηγητικά seems a far less likely candidate:<sup>74</sup> on the one hand, Isidore shows acquaintance with Pherekydes of Syros and the allegorical interpretation of his work (Clem. *Str.* 6.53.5), which, as we have seen, either influenced or was influenced by “Orphic” tradition;<sup>75</sup> on the other hand, the name Παρχῶρ, if it is correct just as it stands, sounds Egyptian and might actually be of Egyptian origin, possibly the Greek transcription of *P(3)-n-k3-Hr*, “The one of the *K3* of Horus,” a specular formation to Coptic ΠΑΡΜΖΟΥΠ, “The one of Amenhotep,” deriving from Late Egyptian *P(3)-n-Imn-Htp*.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Kelhoffer 2005: 129–132, who concludes (132): “[...] the inference that Basilides’ writing offered “explanations” (Ἐξηγητικά) of, or “treatises” (*Acta Archelai* 67.5a: *tractatum eius*) on, his system accords with what the surviving fragments reveal about his work, as well as with the customary use of ἔξηγητικά until Origen in the mid-third century C.E.”

<sup>73</sup> It is worth noting that concluding his investigation of the fragment of Basilides’ *Exegetica* transmitted in Latin by the *Acts of Archelaus*, Bennett 2007: 165, concurs *de facto* with the overall results of my own analysis on Basilides’ unknown work (see *supra*). He writes: “the background against which the fragment is best understood is not the primal conflict narratives of Zoroastrianism or Manichaeism, but rather the Middle Platonic interpretation of Plato’s *Timaeus*, with the closest parallel being found in Plutarch’s *De Iside et Osiride*.” Cf. Löhr 1996: 219–249, and Biondi 2005: 88–90.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *supra*, 88–92.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *supra*, 96–97.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. also Greek Παρμόνθης (“The one of Mont”) and Παρτβῶς (“The one of *Dḅ3*,” or perhaps better “The man of *Dḅ3*”) in Preisigke 1967: 280–281. On *P3-n-k3* in name formations, see *P3-n-k3-hwt-ntr* (Pn 1.111, no. 11; cf. Greek Παχνοῦτις?). On *k3-Hr* as theophoric element in Egyptian personal names, see *P3-dj-k3-nfr-Hr-p3-hrd*, “The one whom the perfect *k3* of Horus the Child (= Harpocrates) has given” (Sandri 2006: 284, n. 73). An-

Were my hypothesis correct, the title which Παρχώρ bears, “prophet,” would have originally translated Egyptian *ḥm-ntr*, “servant of the god” (Wb 3.88), thereby characterising him and his role, whether he be a historical figure or not, as deputed mediator between ancestral Egyptian lore and the much younger and secondary Greek philosophy (cf. Chaeremon in Porph. *Abst.* 4.8.26–27, Abammon in Iambli. *Myst.* 1.1, and Pachrates in PGM IV.2446–2455).<sup>77</sup> As such, if we want to trust the (self-)presentation of Hermetic authors, προφήται were pivotal to the production and transmission of books circulating under the name of Thoth–Hermes (cf. Stob. *Flor.* 23.68, and the figure of the “prophet” Βίρυς / Βίτος [probably Egyptian *P3-(n)-t3*, “The one belonging to the land”] in Iambli. *Myst.* 8.5 and 10.7, and Zosimos of Panopolis, *Ω*, 7–8).<sup>78</sup> That being said, however, in the absence of any solid external evidence or sufficient textual support, the identification I propose remains mere speculation.

All in all, then, we are left only with the reality of a written document, which, as dismembered and distorted by Ps.-Hippolytus’ reading and interventions as it is, still embodies and continues the historical Basilides’ effort to integrate different sources of “truth,” traditions and scriptures into a unified discourse

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other plausible proposal would be to interpret Παρχώρ as *P3-i.ir-k3-Hr*, “the one whom the *k3* of Horus has made:” cf. Greek Παρά(μ)ων from Egyptian *P3-i.ir-Imn* (Preisigke 1967: 279). A derivation from *P3-nḥ-(n)-Hr*, “Life is in/belongs to Horus,” seems to me possible, but less probable, as the *n* in non initial “*nḥ*” is usually transliterated in Greek with *v* or *γ*: cf. Παχομπαβιήνγχις / Παχομβιήγγχις from *P3-ḥm-(n)-(p3)-B3-nḥ* (Preisigke 1967: 295). Alternative suggestions on the name and figure of Parchor, not taking into account an Egyptian origin, are quickly surveyed: Simonetti 1993: 438, n. 10, tentatively identifies Parchor with Parkos, a priest of Mithras mentioned in *Act. Archel.* 63 as forerunner of Mani. Along the same lines, Biondi 2005: 90, speaks of a presumably Persian prophet. The hypothesis of Παρχώρ being a textual corruption for Βαρκώρ, one of the two prophets that Basilides was supposed to have “invented,” according to his contemporary Agrippa Castor (*apud* Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 4.7.7), is cursorily referred to in Löhr 1996: 199, n. 5, with further bibliography. On his part, Löhr 1996: 199, given that we know next to nothing about Parchor, moves on to safer ground, assuming “dass mit dem Propheten Parchor eine vielleicht zeitlich weit zurückliegende, auf jeden Fall aber orientalisches-exotische Offenbarungsquelle als Autorität präsentiert wird.”

<sup>77</sup> Roughly similar Löhr 1996: 206: “Laut Isidor ist die (griechische) Philosophie nur eine sekundäre und abgeleitete Beschäftigung: Sie versucht zu entschlüsseln, was frühe Dichter wie Pherekydes in allegorischer Weise verlauten ließen. Doch auch Pherekydes ist keine Originalquelle: Er bezog seine Lehre von einem Propheten der Urzeit, wie Cham. Man darf vermuten, dass nach Isidor auch Parchor zu diesen urzeitlichen Propheten gehörte. Der Theologe Isidor verstand sich als der authentische Exeget dieser vorzeitlichen Weisheit. So konnte er beanspruchen, sich mit dem Ursprung der Weisheit aller Zeiten zu beschäftigen.”

<sup>78</sup> On scribal mastery of sacred texts as “prophecy, proclamation” (*sr/sl*) in the demotic *Book of Thoth*, see Butler 2013: 230–241. On the Egyptian priestly “upper class” translating temple traditions into Hellenistic idiom during the Roman period, see Frankfurter 1998: 221–224.

on reality, as coherent and organic as possible.<sup>79</sup> This effort is undertaken to propose and promote a specific socio-religious project of Jesus’ fellowship within the diversified cultural environment the author(s) of the text live(s) in. It thus further profiles itself as an intellectual enterprise aimed at opening and extending adherence to the multifaceted Alexandrian Jesus’ movement to the educated classes of both Greek *and* Egyptian origin.<sup>80</sup> As such, just like the cultural contacts and exchanges it presupposes over time, it does not consist of fragments but rather amalgams, difficult to analyze. And probably we should not even insist on separating neatly what testifies to interconnections.<sup>81</sup>

## 6. Towards a conclusion

We began by questioning without prejudice Ps.-Hippolytus’ pretension to derive Basilides’ system from his supposed Egyptian education. For Ps.-Hippolytus to recognise the materials contained in the text at his disposal as Egyptian in flavour, it probably sufficed to find a distinct primordial God existing as solitary Monad before any begotten being (cf. *Haer.* 1.2.2; 6–10; 18, and 4.43.4–5, with 6.21–23; 29–30) and not involved in the physical act of creation (cf. *Haer.* 7.33.1), as well as the magical name *Abrasax* (cf. *Haer.* 4.28.1–4).

Ps.-Hippolytus’ basic insight, however, proved far more fruitful and far-reaching than he himself was in the position to realise: it gave us the opportunity, relying in first place on strictly verbal and lexical comparisons, to track down the literary survivors of an experiment in religious hybridity carried out in late 2nd- and early 3rd-cent. Alexandria.<sup>82</sup> The picture has emerged of a Christian environment drawing on some elements of Egyptian theology most likely through the medium and filter of Orphic and Hermetic traditions, and combining them with, while repressing or rejecting others in favor of, Jewish and Greek themes and ideas.<sup>83</sup> Hence, Ps.-Hippolytus’ “Basilides” has no purely ancient Egyptian myths to offer ancient and modern hearers or readers, as paradigms or parallels for his “system;” rather, whoever it was that authored Ps.-Hippolytus’ source, her/his work testifies to the on-going cultural fusion of Egyptian indigenous tradition with Greek poetry and philosophy, and *hieroi logoi* of all sort and provenance, including Orphic literature and Hebrew scriptures – and at this point one should add, early Christian proclamation of Jesus too –, by Roman times at home both in and out of Egypt (cf. *Haer.* 5.6.16–7.41,

<sup>79</sup> Cf. the dense *résumé* on the authentic Basilides in Löhr 1996: 325–335.

<sup>80</sup> Camplani 2003: 35–36.

<sup>81</sup> Burkert 2007: 123.

<sup>82</sup> For another experiment of this sort, see Tripaldi 2012.

<sup>83</sup> So far I have been paraphrasing Denzey Lewis 2013: 170 and 173.

and Plut. *Is. Os.* 45–51 [*Mor.* 369d–372a]).<sup>84</sup> And that is certainly the main reason why a little later in Rome Ps.-Hippolytus did not fail to brand “Basilides” and his teachings as originating with “Egyptian wisdom.”

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<sup>84</sup> Kügler 1997: 15–81 and 234–244, argued for the influence of Egyptian “Königstheologie” on Philo. *Clem. Str.* 5.14.120–126, builds his “Christian” discourse on God, the world, and judgment on a chain of extracts from Menander, Diphilus and the Orphic poems, taken as “paraphrases” of the Hebrew scriptures. By alleging the Orphic divine attribute μητροπάτωρ as source and starting point for speculations on προβολαί and God’s σύζυγος, Clement gives us a small clue on the impact Orphic literature could have had, in his view, and probably really had on Alexandrian Christian milieus and their theologizing. On the ancient Egyptian and Gnostic connections of the epithet, see Tripaldi 2012: 98. On the Naassenes, Plutarch and Egyptian “mysteries,” see Lancellotti 2000: 212–220 and 250–252.



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