

Advaita and Gnosticism

1) Introduction

In this paper I examine the possible connection of the ancient Indian philosophical system Advaita, an aspect of Vedānta, and certain ideas that circulated in the first two centuries of the Christian Era in the Eastern Mediterranean and particularly Egypt. Ideas very similar to those of Advaita appear less clearly in Christianity than in Gnostic, Hermetic, Neo-Platonic and other related texts like the *Chaldean Oracles*. Not much original material survives from before the fourth century, but there is firm evidence that some Hermetica (“magical” rather than “philosophical”) and some Gnostic texts had appeared in the first century BC while many (again Hermetic and Gnostic) are mentioned by other writers c 100AD and certainly by 200 AD; the early Christian Gospels also would fall within this period. The Mandaean teaching (Manda = logos/knowledge), which continues to this day as a living religion in Iraq, is thought to be as early as, if not earlier than, Christianity, even though it is not attested before 700 AD (Jonas 1991; Sedlar 1980; Dodd 1985).

The bulk of these writings – and to a lesser extent the four Christian Canonical Gospels – have many elements in common: cosmogonic accounts, sometimes simple, often very complex, from a Godhead or a Creator-god; anthropogonic accounts; the Saviour; man’s salvation or return to his source through Self-knowledge; reincarnation, and so on. Since it has been impossible until now to establish exact dates for all these writings, it is not possible to determine which set of texts, or which movement (Gnostic, Hermetic, Christian etc), influences which. It may well be that there was a hitherto unknown or undetermined source that influenced them all at the very beginning of the Christian Era but there is no clear evidence for this. Consequently I treat them all as of equal standing and antiquity within this period. The Near East and particularly cosmopolitan Alexandria in Egypt was a seething cauldron of philosophical and religious ideas since it was the cultural centre of the Hellenistic period and the early Roman Empire.

One important idea appearing in most of these writings is that Man issues directly from the Godhead and can, through Self-knowledge, return to the original Unity in the Godhead. This idea is new. The aspect of Self-knowledge has, of course, a long history going back to the Delphic maxim “Know Thyself” (Betz, 1970). But the whole idea, as stated here and found in the texts, cannot be traced in any cultural tradition of the Eastern Mediterranean – Greek, Judaic, Egyptian, or Persian.

This very idea is, of course, fundamental to Vedānta, one of the six (orthodox) Systems of Philosophy in Ancient India. Vedānta itself is part of the Vedic Tradition which emerges first with the hymns of the *R̥gveda*, expressed in ancient Sanskrit.¹ There are several schools of Vedānta stressing various points. The best known is that of “monism”, established by Śrī (or Ādi) Śaṅkara, the first Śaṅkarācārya. Śaṅkara is assigned by modern scholars to the 8th cent AD. The orthodox Hindu tradition places him c500 BC. Be that as it may, he set up four (or more) Seats in South, East, North and West India to pass on his teaching Advaita of the identity of the individual and the universal Self (*ātman* and *brahman*). However, this idea is clearly present in the oldest Upanishads (see section III) while the term *advaita* is found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (XIV), which is even older: “The particular type of monism taught by Śaṅkara is very old” (Hiriyana 1994:339). Vedānta is the systematization of the teachings of the Upanishads and means the “end of the Vedas” in two senses: one, that the Upanishads come at the ‘end’ of the Vedic Compilations, much as Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* are the writings that come ‘after Physics’; two, that the aim (=end) of the Veda (= knowledge) is found in the Upanishads in their central teaching that the true Self (*ātman*) of every

¹ Scholars date the *R̥gveda* c 1500 - 1000 BC on certain linguistic conjectures. However, now much evidence from Archaeology and Comparative Mythology indicates that the *R̥gveda* hymns may have been composed at different periods (and locations in North-West India) and the compilation was complete before the emergence of the Indus Valley Civilization c 3000 – a date in accord with the Indian tradition that has the Vedic Compilations arranged on the eve of the Kali Yuga, ie just before 3102 BC. For a full discussion see Kazanas 1999.

man is the same as the Self of the universe (*Brahman*, the supreme mystic Spirit). Thus the real Self of man is of the selfsame substance as that of the Godhead and through the method of Self-knowledge (-recognition, -remembering or -realisation) that primordial Unity is reestablished in experience. *Advaita* means just this – ‘non-dual’, unified: in practical terms, this means that man does not view himself as separate from the Supreme Principle of the universe; such a view is not easily or commonly attainable.

In discussing the Gnostics, one scholar came very close to the Advaita concept. Hans Jonas found that the new spirit, underlying and providing a kind of unity to the disparate but related trends of the early Christian Era, is “the gnostic principle”, as he terms it (p 26). The ultimate “object” of this “gnōsis” (=knowledge) is God: “its event in the soul transforms the knower himself by making him a partaker in the divine existence (which means more than assimilating him to the divine essence). ... [T]he relation of knowing is mutual, ie a being known at the same time, and involving active self-divulgence on the part of the ‘known’ ... [it is] the union with a reality that in truth is itself the supreme subject in the situation and strictly speaking never an object at all” (p 35). In other words, knower, knowing and known, are One.

The gnostic *Gospel of Truth* describes this Oneness very succinctly: “It is within Unity that each one will attain himself from multiplicity into Unity” (25: 10-15, *NL* 44)²

In what follows I shall examine the appearance of this idea of Man’s unity with the Absolute in the texts expressing the religious and philosophical trends mentioned earlier – ie Gnostics, Christianity, Hermetism etc. First I shall describe analytically a work of the period, the *Poimandres* of the Hermetic writings and show the parallel ideas in some Upanishads, which form the basis, as was said, of Advaita. Then I shall examine these ideas in relation to Christianity, Gnostic and related doctrines. I shall then demonstrate that the identity of the individual and universal Self is not found in the cultures of the Near East prior to the Christian Era and finally present such (circumstantial) evidence as exists of the possible connection with Indian sources. (Although Mani undoubtedly was in India, Manichaeism will not be discussed since, like Plotinus’s Neoplatonism, it is of the 3rd cent CE and therefore too late for our purpose.)

II) The Hermetic *Poimandres*.³

The *Poimandres*, which is first in the Hermetic collection known as *Corpus Hermeticum* (hence denoted as *CH I*), and written in Greek, is in some ways typical of the writings circulating at that time in that area, but also has some special features of its own. Unlike many “magical” and similar other works like the *Greek Magical Papyri* (in PGM), for example, it contains no petition to God, no asking of favours – not even a prayer for salvation, but only a hymn of praise in the end.

The chief concern of most of Hermetica is man’s liberation from ignorance (*agnoia* or *agnōsia*) and vice (*kakia*) by means of piety (*eusebeia*) and knowledge of God (*theou gnōsis*) – within the wider frame of a moral behaviour, common to Egyptian, Greek and Judaic ethics. They express a firm belief in a supreme deity, God the Father, who is both transcendent (*CH IV*, 1; *CH VIII*, 2) and immanent in creation (*CH V*, 9, end, *CH XII*, 22-3) and from a philosophical viewpoint can be

² *NL* stands for IRobinson 1990.

³ I am aware the *Poimandres* may have been composed c 200 CE. The Greek text used is that of Nock & Festugière, Paris edition 1946-54 (=NF). References will be to the Corpus Hermeticum I, II, etc, hereafter *CH I*, *CH II* etc and the paragraph number; to the Stobaeus Fragments SF and the roman numeration in NF (eg SF V or SF XXIII); to the NHC VI, 6 (=The *Ogdoad and the Ennead*) by NL and page number in Robinson 1990; to other Gnostic texts in Robinson by the same method

As for the title itself, although Egyptian originals have been plausibly proposed (see Section VI, 3, below), the Greek *poimēn andrōn* ‘shepherd of men’ still seems the most fitting.

regarded as the Absolute. Apart from hymns that come under piety and instructions as to how God may be known (*CH V*, 3-6), they contain also some practices that can be termed “esoteric”: one is an exercise of expanding one’s awareness to include eventually the world and all creatures (*CH XI*, 19-20; *CH XIII*, 11); the other is sounding aloud certain vowel sequences and words as in *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* which, though not in the traditional Greek Corpus, is Hermetic (NL 324-6; see also similar exercises in *The Gospel of the Egyptians*, NL 210, and *Marsanes* NL readers; also, graded group-meetings and private tutorials (*CH XIII* is such) for more advanced or select students. All this constituted a kind of esoteric philosophical education.⁴

In *CHI* the progress towards liberation is presented as the “supreme good” (*periousion agathon*: 19), and it is fulfilled in an absolute sense in the return to the unity of the Godhead which is true immortality (19-21). This is achieved through Self-knowledge, or Self realization. Strictly the term is “self-knowledge”. In Vedānta too the usual term is *ātma-jñāna* (or *-vijñāna*), ie “self-knowledge”. However, usage is such that we speak of a “self-realized” but not of a “self-known” person. In this Discourse, since the essential Self of man (*ho ousiōdes anthrōpos* : 15) emanates from and is of the same substance as God (21), by knowing oneself or realizing one’s true being, man attains that primordial unity with God. In other Hermetica (eg *kore kosmou*, *SF XXIII*) and other writings (*Genesis*, Plato’s *Timaeus* etc) God Himself creates or fashions (*dēmiourgein, poiein*) the world and its creatures. In *CHI* God, “Nous being life and light” (9, 21), engenders (*apokuein*: 8, 9) a second Nous and this one now proceeds to create. This is a very significant difference – and it applies to man also. Here God the Father did not create Man out of generated secondary materials nor through intermediaries (as in *CH VIII*,5 and *SF XXIII* 25-30) but engendered him directly out of Himself and equal to Himself (12): thus Man, in his true Self, is of the same divine eternal substance “being life and light” (17). But then Man falls from that perfect state because of desire (*erōs*) by inhabiting a reason-less form (*alogos morphē*) and mingling with lowbound nature (*katōpherēs phusis*): he gets embodied of his own will, that is, in a gross material form, the human body, and is identified with this (14). As a consequence, he becomes mortal, a slave of cosmic forces (*heimarmenē*) and a prisoner of sleep, desire, multiplicity and other weaknesses (15). To escape from this situation of illusion and ignorance (28), “the mindful man should re-cognize himself⁵ as being immortal” (18), should break his attachment to his gross embodiment (19) and “know himself to be from life and light” (21). Thereupon, in an act of divine grace, the supreme Nous itself will intervene and assist by blocking off harmful or retarding influences (22).⁶ On death, all the weaknesses of his mortal form, connected somehow with cosmic levels, are cast off one by one as the soul ascends and finally, transcending all the Creation, the unencumbered *ousiōdes anthrōpos* ‘essential man’ returns to his initial perfection merging totally with the Godhead (*en theōi* 24-6).

In no other Hermeticum is this stated. For example, in *CH X* the worthy souls reach immortality by a process described as “becoming divine” (*apotheothēnai*), first by becoming

⁴ For more details of the “philosophical paideia”, see Fowden (1986:97ff). Also, points in Epictetus’s *Diatribai* (A XXIX 23, 34; B IX 29; etc), though here the stoic paideia is different. On the sounding exercises noted above, Fowden mentions (p 119 & n 12) similar Buddhist practices, but the practice in ancient India is much older than Buddhism, as can be seen in the *Chāndogya* Upanishad Bks I and II or the *Taittirīya* Up I, 1-6, at least.

⁵ *heauton* - all codd (*seauton* - Vat 914), though the NF text adopts Reitzenstein’s emendation *auton* which is unnecessary, introducing an ambiguity since *auton* could refer to God. Festugière translates *heauton* (tu apprends à te connaître). Betz, p 468, adopts *auton* but translates in the sense of “himself”. Copenhagen translates likewise; see his note on p 113.

⁶ Also notably *CH XIII*, 7 (end), 8,10 (*eleos*); and, of course, the automatic process whereby “with the advent of the decad [of virtues]... the mental birth was produced and expels the dozen [of vices]” (9). In §2 the turn towards spiritual development does not occur unless one is reminded by God. In Vedānta too it all starts with a Good Impulse (*śubhecchā*) given by one’s Self. Cf John’s Gospel: “No man can come to me except the Father ... draw him,” 6: 44.

daemons, then entering the troop of gods, one wandering (planets) the other fixed (stars): “this is the soul’s most perfect glory” (7-8). This is reiterated in *CH XII*, 12; *SF VI*, 18; *SF XIII*, 38-9. Here the highest attainment is to reach the starry zone and bask in God’s radiance (as in the paradise of every religion) but not unite fully with the Godhead. This difference too marks *Poimandres* out of all Hermetica and many similar writings.

To complete the picture, three more points need to be made, although there are, of course, many other themes like the cosmogony, spread intermittently over § 4-17, the narrator becoming a guide for the repentant worthy (27-9) and so on. These, only implicit in *CHI* but explicitly presented in other Hermetica, are the attainment of Self-knowledge before death, reincarnation/transmigration, and the role of cosmic spheres constituting Destiny or Necessity for man (*heimarmenē*).

In *CHI*, 24, man’s essence returns to its divine origin after death; but this happens only to a man who is suitably prepared and has reached Self-knowledge while still embodied. This esoteric process seems to involve four stages: acquiring information from various writings (*NHC VI*, 6 (*NL 323*) & *CH XIII*, 1); following various practices under guidance such as study, reverential and moral behaviour (*CHI*, 22-3; *IV*, 5; *XII*, 5-7;), contemplation of God and the good and beautiful (*CH V*; *VI*, 5; *XIV*, 9-10) and the exercise of expanding consciousness (*CH XI*, 20); obtaining the vision of the Unity of Self and God; the actual experience of Unity while embodied in the material world (*CH XIII*, 11-13, 18, and *CHI*, 6-7⁷). Implicit in this esoteric development is the phenomenon of reincarnation: man does not attain Self-realization in one embodiment. In 19-20 the man attached to his material embodiment “remains wandering (erring) in darkness and suffering through the senses the [pangs] of death” and the ignorant generally “miss the mark” and are deprived of immortality. Since this state of darkness and suffering is juxtaposed to Self-realization and its result of immortality (that is, no more birth and death), the passage can only mean that the non-Self-realized will wander in ignorance from one embodiment to another. Corroboration comes in *CH X*, 7-8, where some souls – of the good and just – are said to move from lower to higher forms reaching a godly state, while the bad and unjust sink to forms of animals. A different aspect of reincarnation is presented in *CH X*, 19-22, which excludes animal forms, and *SFXXIII*, 38-42 which does include them: we can ignore this contradiction.

The third point concerns the successive cosmic encumbrances. Mildly implicit here is the disinclination of the cosmic entities to allow the soul or spirit to ascend to higher levels. In other Hermetica the force of Fate or Necessity functions explicitly as a debarring agency for the ascent (*CH XII*, 14; *XVI*, 12). In some Gnostic writings the Archons of these spheres are definitely hostile – as in *The Apocryphon of John* (10: 20; 17: 30; 28: 11) or *On the Origin of the World* (123:2). In this respect, some Hermetica differ considerably from these Gnostic writings in that they communicate the (classical) idea of the cosmic order created by God wherein his goodness is manifest and may be appreciated (*CH XI*, 5-11). Indeed, on this point, the Gnostic texts depart considerably from, and in fact devaluate, the prevalent Greek view of the Cosmos as a coherent, orderly, harmonious and beautiful Whole in which man plays a fitting and significant role – as is described by Plato in the *Laws X*, 903 B and Cicero in *De Natura Deorum* BK II. This devaluation of the Cosmos – now a hostile structure – is also something new in some relevant writings of this period. Homer and Hesiod had displayed the gods’ hostility to men repeatedly (esp Hesiod’s *Catalogue...* B5-6 when Zeus thinks to annihilate mankind) but this attitude, even when no punishment for midemeanour was involved, was not directed against man’s spiritual ascent beyond the gods because such a concept did not exist then.

The view of Man’s identity with the Godhead is unique to *Poimandres* among the Hermetic

⁷ *NL 325*: “I myself see this same vision ...”. Perhaps stages 3 & 4 are not so different. But while in *NHC VI*, 6, the student sees a vision of angels and “him who has the power of them all” (in other words, being separate), in *CH XIII* he sees his own Self in the whole creation and in mind. Also *CH I*, 7: *theōrō en tōi noi mou to phōs...* I see in my [own] mind the light ...” (the light of God that first appears in 4). And in *CH XIII*, 22 (end) Hermes (or the Tutor) confirms that “You have known in mind yourself and our Father”.

Discourses. All other Hermetica contain different and even contradictory elements – except *CH XIII* which has many similarities with *CHI* and nothing contradictory. The most distinctive idea in *Poimandres* is the emanation of Man out of the Godhead and his liberation in returning to That. This view is found in other writings of the period like some gnostic or apocryphal proto-(?)Christian writings, as we shall see further down. Scholars say that this idea is present also in Plato, Middle Platonists, NeoPythagoreans, even the *Greek Magical Papyri* and the *Chaldean Oracles*; but I shall show that the idea does not appear in these writings: what is found there is something very similar yet very different, the final beatitude being in God’s heaven not God Himself. The idea, however, is also found in Vedānta – in the Upanishads.⁸

III. The Vedāntic View.

The essence of the Vedānta may for our purposes be summarized in three axiomatic statements, all in the Upanishads: *sarvaṃ khalvidam brahma*; *ayam ātmā brahma*; *ahaṃ brahmāsmi*.

a) *sarvaṃ khalvidam brahma*⁹: truly all this [universe] is Brahman. Brahman is the Absolute, transcendent and immanent, said to be ungenerated, undying, infinite and immutable and described positively only as Pure Consciousness or Intelligence (*prajñāna* as in note 9). The second axiom follows naturally from this.

b) *ayam ātmā brahma* (*Bṛh Up* II, 5, 19): this Self [of man] is the Absolute. Indeed, there is no time at all when the Self (*ātman*) in men is not the Absolute, even in the darkest oblivion in their minds, even in their lowest and most brutish embodiments. It is only a question of remembering and realization. From this follows the third maxim.

c) *ahaṃ brahmāsmi* (*Bṛh Up* I, 4, 10): I am the Absolute. When a man recognizes this fully, not just in thought or vague feeling, but with his whole being, then he is a Self-realized man and on the death of the body he merges with the Absolute no more to be subjected to the chain of repeated birth and death. The concluding sentence of the *Chāndogya* maxim, quoted in (a) above, states “With that Absolute shall I merge when departing from this world: he attains this really who doubts no more [his Absolute identity]”: *brahmaitam itaḥ pretyābhisambhavāmīti yasya syāt addhā na vicikitsāsti*, (*Ch Up* III,14,4). A later section affirms that while the Self-realized man is embodied no more, they who have not realized their Absolute identity will be reborn in the form of plants or animals or men in strict accordance with their previous mode of life (*Ch Up* V,10,3-8).

Let us now examine in detail the ideas we isolated in the *Poimandres* and their correspondences in Vedānta starting with the One Absolute. The *Chāndogya* provides just such a passage: “Truly all this [universe] is Brahman: [all] originates from It, dissolves in It and continues

⁸ The system of monist Vedānta (Advaita) is in the *Vedānta-* or *Brahma-sūtra* with Śaṅkara’s commentary. As scholars place Śaṅkara at a date later than our period, we shall not use this work. The same holds for the *Bhagavad-Gītā* with Śaṅkara’s commentary. We shall use only some Upanishads which are definitely earlier. Hereafter *Up* for upanishad(s).

⁹ *Chāndogya Up* III,14,1. This is not one of the 4 axioms (*mahāvākya*) in the tradition, but it is often referred to as a fifth one. Two of the 4 are discussed shortly. The other two are : *tat tvamasi* (=Thou art that, ie the true Self that is Absolute Being: *ChUp* VI,8,7); *prajñānam brahma* (=the Absolute is Pure Consciousness or Intelligence: *Aitareya Up* III,3, or in few edns V,5). Raju (1971: 176) omits this last one and regards *sarvaṃ khalvidam brahma* as one of the traditional four maxims. Hereafter *Ch* for *Chāndogya* and *Bṛh* for *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* Upanishads.

to exist by It¹⁰ ... This is my Self within the heart, [yet] greater than the earth, the atmosphere, the heaven and all these worlds ... He pervades all this ... my Self within the heart, he is Brahman, the Absolute.”(Ch Up, III, 14, 1-4)

There are several cosmogonies in the Upaniṣads: although they are usually simple, some of the images may seem odd at first. *The Absolute Itself does not create*. Within and from its substance, which is *prajñānam* (=intelligence or knowledge Absolute), arises the Power, or the God-creator, that sets in motion the creative process. So, really, cosmogonies begin at various stages after this first differentiation within that primordial, indescribable Unity, and the description emphasizes one or other point. Several hymns of the *Rgveda*, the oldest literary source of the Indo-Aryan Civilization, mention this Unity (I,164,46; III,55,11; VIII,58,2; X,114,5), and the *nāsadiya-sūkta* (the Creation hymn) X, 129 describes – with many questions – how from that One (*tad ekam*), which is before or beyond existence and non-existence, before death and immortality, there arose through power-of-transformation (*tapas*) the One-coming-into-being (*ābhu*) and with this One begins the creation.¹¹

In the Upaniṣads a simple formula is often used – the Creator desired, willed, perceived and the like. Here we examine four relevant passages. In the *Taittirīya Up* (II,4,1) it is said: “He (the Creator) desired ‘Let me be many, let me manifest forth’. He exercised his power of transformation (*tapas*, as above and n 11); in exercising his power of transformation he generated (*√srj* : *sr̥ṣṭi*= emanation, creation) all this, whatever is; in creating that, he indeed entered into that; in entering into that he became what is formed and unformed, what is manifest and unmanifest.” Thus the substance of the Creator enters into all creation as it arises by the Creator’s will and power. A passage in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* brings in the rise of Logos (I,2,1-5): “There was nothing whatever here in the beginning. By death, indeed, was this covered, or hunger; for hunger is death. He (death) created the Mind thinking (or willing)¹² ‘Let me have form ...’ His essential lustre sprang out as fire ... He differentiated himself in three ... He desired ‘Let there manifest a second form for me’. He, death [who is] hunger, manifested the union of Logos (*vāc*) with Mind ... Through that Logos and that Mind, he generated all this, whatever is...”(*vāc*= the divinity of the spoken word).

Let us close with a passage in the same Upaniṣad, giving the image of archetypal man (*Anthrōpos* in CH I): “In the beginning this [universe] was only the Self in the form of Man *puruṣa*” (which echoes the *Hymn of Man, puruṣa-sūkta, Rgveda* X,90: here all worlds and all creatures arise from the sacrificial division of this archetypal *puruṣa*). “Looking around he saw nothing other than himself. He said at first ‘I am’. Therefrom arose the name ‘I’ ...” then this archetypal figure, desiring the delight of a companion, became male and female and from their interplay arose all other creatures. Then it is explained that at first the world was the undifferentiated substance of the Self and all differentiations were produced through name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*): the Self remains unseen and all that is seen are his emanations, i e names and forms according to function (*karma*: *Bṛh Up* I,4,1-7).

¹⁰ This second sentence is the compound *taj-jalān* formed of *tat* (=that One, the Brahman) and *ja* (for *jā*=manifest, generate, produce)+*la*(for *lī*=dissolve)+*an* (=continue to be). Western Philology cannot explain this compound and has to rely on the analysis of Indian tradition. See MSD under *tat-*, *taj-jalān*; also, Hiriyana p 60.

¹¹ *tapas*= meditation, heat, austerity, deliberation, etc, in various translations. But the one traditional definition of the root *√tap* is *aiśvarya* = absolute power (bringing about changes not only in forms and materials but also in the laws that govern these changes); this would be intelligence or knowledge absolute.

The hymn ends significantly enough with the statement that even the Supervisor in the highest heaven perhaps does not know how it All begins!

¹² Death (*mṛtyu*) or hunger (*aśanāyā*) is , in fact, the first manifestation from the Power of the Absolute and in covering “this”, i e the unmanifest Absolute, he becomes the initiator of the creation. His first act is to create mind so as to have a “form” (here *ātman*) with which to identify.

Additional parallels in the Hermetica could be indicated but now we must turn to man's fall through desire and identification with his material embodiment and the transmigration from one form to another. The archetypal man *puruṣa*, we saw in the preceding paragraph, divided himself into male and female through *desire* for the delight of a companion. As in *CH I,18*, “the cause of death is desire (*erōs*)”, so here *desire* is the cause of differentiation, embodiment and change, which involves death. The desire of the Creator brings about the creation, so all desires stem from that primal mighty power. This was expressed early on in the Vedic tradition in the *Hymn of Creation*: “Desire (*kāma*) in the beginning evolved upon That One – which (desire) was the first seed of mind”, *kāmas tād āgre sāmavartatādhi mānaso rétaḥ prathamām yád āsīt* (*Rgveda X,129,4*). The *Maitrī Up* describes the human condition after the fall: “Now he, indeed, who is said to be in the body (*amṛtātmā*)... becomes the elemental Self (*bhūtātmā*) ... affected by the qualities (*guṇa*) of material nature (*prakṛti*) ... sinks into total delusion ... and no longer sees Himself, the bountiful Lord ... swept along by the current of the qualities, defiled, unstable, changeable, cut off, full of desires, scattered, he falls into arrogant identification (*abhimānitva*) ‘I am he, this is mine’: with such thinking he binds himself with himself like a bird in a snare. Affected by the fruits of his past action he enters a good or an evil womb and thus wanders on an upward or a downward course, suffering the pairs of opposites”(Maitrī Up III,2). This is due to ignorance of the true Self “the bountiful Lord” who is the One Absolute and not many separate selves, as seen by the man in delusion; “Whoever sees here multiplicity, as it were, goes from death to death”, says another Upaniṣad (*Kaṭha Up II,1,11*; also *Brh Up IV, 4, 19*).

Salvation from ignorance, delusion and suffering and from the chain of transmigrations, comes with Self-realization. This does not occur automatically at death, however morally good one's behaviour throughout life may have been. In Vedānta full liberation comes only when a man recognizes the identity of his true Self with the Absolute, the Self of All. “If one has known [the brahman] in this world, then there is truth, but if one has not known It here, there is great loss. The wise, realising It in all beings, become immortal on departing from this world.”¹³ The nature of this realization or re-cognition is expressed in terms very similar to Tat's description of seeing himself in all things (*CH XIII,11 & 13*): “I am in heaven, in earth, in water; in air; I am in animals and in plants; in the womb, before the womb, after the womb; everywhere.... I see the universe and I see myself in mind.” As the *Īsā Up* puts it, “[A man] sees all creatures in himself and himself in all creatures”(6). Instruction and various practices help along the way, but ultimately Selfrealization comes by the grace of the Ātman himself: “...this Self is to be attained only by one whom he (the Self) chooses: to such a one the Self reveals his own nature” (*Kaṭha Up I,2,23*. Cf *CH XIII,2*). The same Upaniṣad emphasizes the need for the restraint of the senses (as does *CH I,22; IV,5; VI,3; XIII,7&10*):“Beyond the unmanifest [Nature] is the Supreme Self, omnipresent and without characteristic ... When the five [senses of] knowledge rest in stillness together with the mind, and the higher intellect (*buddhi*) also does not stir, that is said to be the highest state ... It cannot be attained by talk, by mind, by sight ... When all desires clinging within one's heart are cast off, then the mortal becomes immortal and here (in this world) he attains the Absolute.” (*Kaṭha Up II,3, 9-14*). Self-realization comes, then, with the stilling of the senses and lower and higher mental functions and with the dissolution of personal desires that maintain one's separate existence. Then, at death, comes full liberation in the Absolute Unity¹⁴, outside or beyond all levels of the creation, manifest and unmanifest.

¹³ *Kena Up II,5*. Some (including Radhakrishnan) adopt the reading *vicintya* (=thinking, seeking) instead of *vicitya* (=realizing, being conscious of).

¹⁴ Discussed earlier in this section under c) *ahaṃ brahmāsmi*. Here, it is worth noting another affinity. In *CH I,24*, at death, the senses return to their sources and feeling (or anger) and desire enter reasonless nature. In the Ups (eg *BrhUp III,2,13*) this is described more fully.

Apart from the absolute liberation that is the Union with Brahman, Vedānta recognises a kind of limited fulfilment in a paradise called *Brahmaloka* ‘the world (or heaven) of Brahmā’;¹⁵ this is limited in that the good soul stays there for the period merited by its good deeds (sacrifices, alms-giving etc) and then has to start again in a new embodiment. Sometimes this stay may last for the duration of the *kalpa*, that is the period of the creation until it is withdrawn back into the Unmanifest and then emitted again in the next cycle of manifestation: so this is limited eternity or immortality. This idea resembles what we met earlier in the Hermetica (except *CH I*), the idea of heaven or the starry zone. It is this idea that we find also in Platonism and related systems.

As a final point here, it should be said that the Upanishads recognise that even the highest levels of the creation (=heaven of cosmos) are ruled by gods, corresponding to *heimarmenē*. These gods regard embodied men as their “cattle”, do not like to lose them and impede their efforts for liberation (*Brh Up I*, 4, 40). Only through proper preparation, through knowledge of the Absolute or Oneself, given in the tradition of Teacher-disciple (*guru-śiṣya: Ch Up IV*, 9, 3 & VI, 14, 2; *Tait Up I*, 9, 1 ff), can man attain absolute liberation. This idea too is important in our considerations, since it corresponds to (and may, in fact, be the source of) the cosmic Archons in Gnosticism.

Here we stop. The preceding paragraphs do not seek to give an exposition of the Vedānta system: this cannot be done without reference to the *Vedānta-sūtra* and several other texts. We have confined our discussion only to themes that correspond closely to the central ideas in *Poimandres*. Many of these themes are, of course, found in the writings of Platonists and others before the Christian Era, but not – I repeat not – the idea of Man issuing directly from the Absolute (or Godhead) and eventually returning and fusing with That, nor the Gnostic view of *heimarmenē*.

IV. Christianity

Some of the ideas mentioned above (in II and III) are found also in the New Testament and especially in John’s Gospel. But early Christianity presents problems – beyond textual purity. That the official doctrines of church (or institutionalised) Christianity do not represent the whole or the exact teaching of Christ has been suspected at different periods (Bauer 1971; Harmack 1961; William Hone 1875, etc). Now after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic texts in 1945 and their gradual publication starting in the late 50’s (*NL* ‘Preface’ and ‘Introduction’), there can be no doubt that Christ’s teaching contained ideas not found, or only hinted at, in the New Testament. In this section, the word ‘Gospel’, unless qualified, will refer only to the 4 canonical ones.

Apart from the New Testament, there are some few other early sources that mention Christ. Three of them are Roman and are dated about 100-120. One is the historian Tacitus who writes briefly of the Christians in his *Annals* adding that “Christus, the founder of [their] name, had undergone the death penalty in the region of Tiberius by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate” (XV, 44, 2). Then there is Pliny who wrote to emperor Trajan c 110 asking how to deal with Christians and mentioning Christ. The third is Suetonius who wrote c 120 the *Life of Claudius*, emperor 41-54; he says that Claudius expelled from Rome the Jews who made great trouble under the influence of “Chrestus”. A fourth one is Josephus (c 35-100?), the Jewish historian, who wrote in his *Jewish Antiquities* (c 90-95) that Pilate “condemned him [Christ] to be crucified” (XVIII, 63). Now, as Pilate was procurator of Judea before 40, we can safely accept that Christ taught and was crucified prior to that date. Even if we accepted that Christ was more than 50 at the time of the crucifixion, as Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, writes c 180 (*Against Heresies*, II, 22, 5-6), we would have no real problem.

¹⁵ *Muṇḍaka Up I*, 2, 5-7: *eṣa vaḥ sukṛto brahmalokaḥ* ‘this is your brahmaloka won through good works.’ Also *Brh Up VI*, 2, 15; *Ch Up V*, 10, 2; *Kauṣītaki I*, 3-5. In the monist Vedānta all these levels are *māyā* ‘unreality’ while reality is strictly speaking only the Absolute *brahman*.

Our knowledge of what Christ taught comes mainly from the 4 Gospels (at least until the Nag Hammadi finds). According to the church tradition, Jesus wrote nothing and the Gospels were composed by disciples after his death; but we do not know much about these evangelists themselves nor about the date of composition and the original contents of the Gospels. The earliest codices are the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus, both of the 4th cent. There are also some papyrus manuscripts of Gospel fragments, the earliest being only few verses of John's 18th chapter and dated early 2nd cent.

There are, at least, two obvious difficulties with the Gospels as we have them. First, there are textual differences between early and later manuscripts, or codices, indicating interferences with the writing, sometimes deliberate and sometimes accidental, in the concatenation of copying and transmission. Thus the earlier ms of John's 1st Epistle (5: 6-8) read simply "There are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, the water and the blood: and the three agree (literally 'are': *eisin*) in one". The text of the 4th cent has been changed into "and these three are one in Jesus Christ" (Johnson 1990: 26, notes further differences). Second, there are contradictory descriptions of some events in the different Gospels. Thus the accounts of Christ's first reappearance after his resurrection differ considerably. Mark says that Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene and afterwards to two and then to the eleven disciples (16: 9-14); we might note that the second appearance was "in another form" (12). Matthew writes that Christ appeared first to Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" as they were leaving the sepulchre and subsequently to the disciples in Galilee (28: 1-17); here nothing special is said about the form of Christ. Luke writes that Jesus appeared to two disciples, Cleopas (=Peter) and an unnamed one (24: 18) on their way to Emmaus but they did not recognise him (13-16) until they sat for supper, when he blessed and broke the bread, and as they recognised him he vanished (30-31): so here it is to Peter that Jesus first appeared and has a form solid enough to "break" the bread, yet fluid enough to disappear. John says that Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene who was alone outside the sepulchre (20: 14) and when she recognised him, he told her "Touch me not", because he had not yet ascended to his Father (15-17); later in the evening he appeared to the assembled disciples and showed them his hands and side (19-20) and at his third appearance invited Thomas to touch him (27). The inconsistencies are obvious: not only does Christ appear first to different persons but also his form is sometimes material and at others non-material. And in view of the Church later being built upon Peter and the traditional inferiority of women, it is not insignificant that only Luke has Christ show himself first to Simon-Peter (=Cleopas) whereas the other three give Mary Magdalene. It is also very significant that in the Gospels of Mark and John Christ appears in what seems to be an insubstantial form that *could change*.

Leaving aside such difficulties and inconsistencies let us now see if there are any ideas that can be identified as clear Advaita. There are of course the elements of ethics and piety or faith in God, but these are shared equally by the traditions of Egyptian, Greek and Judaic religion or philosophical thought. There is also an enormous, agonised effort to present Jesus not merely as a Master Teacher (as is the narrator of *Poimandres*) but also as the Messiah, the one Son of God, Redeemer and Saviour¹⁶: this too is a common theme or image in many non-Christian writings of the period and earlier – Hermetic, (Neo-)Pythagorean, Buddhist etc. Many phrases also can be interpreted as Vedāntic but these can be and have been interpreted otherwise as well: eg the references to the Kingdom of God (or of Heaven) can be regarded as metaphorical or symbolic of the union with the Godhead, but in fact they have been established as meaning Paradise, a location

¹⁶ "Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John, 1:29). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son ... that the world through him might be saved" (3: 16-8). This is a major dogma in church Christianity – as is the notion that Christ rose from death and ascended to heaven *in the flesh*.

in after-life Heaven where the soul is very much apart from the Godhead even if basking in Its radiance.

John's Gospel does furnish some explicit statements that come very close to Advaita. The significance and probable or certain influences on this Gospel and its affinities with other writings have been studied in great detail (Dodd 1985; a different approach in Pagels 1973). Here we shall deal with only a few passages that show affinity with the Vedāntic idea that Man issues from the Godhead, and is in his true essence no different from It.

Several passages in John state explicitly that Jesus comes into the world directly from God the Father: eg "I came out from God; I came out from the Father and am come into the world" (16: 27-8). This Son of God *is* in God, for Jesus said: "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father" (1: 18). And Christ's life is that of God: "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (5: 26). For this reason, doubtless, since he is in the Father's bosom, which is life eternal, he can assert "Before Abraham was (generated: *genesthai*), I am". Finally Christ states the idea of his identity with God in the words "I and the Father are One" (10:30).

It may be argued that this Unity with the Godhead pertains to Christ alone who is the one and only divine incarnation, come to the world to save it. But John's Gospel extends the idea of Unity beyond Jesus himself to the disciples and to all men. Jesus tells the disciples "Ye shall know that I [am] in my Father and ye in me and I in you" (14: 20); he will pray and the Father and he "shall give you another Comforter that he may abide with you for ever (=in eternity: *eis ton aiōna*), the Spirit of truth ... ye know him, for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you" (16-18; also 23, 26); but Jesus himself after the resurrection appears to the disciples saying "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (20: 21), then "breathed into" them (*enephusēse*) saying "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (20: 22)¹⁷. This very development, actualized by the disciples, is an open possibility for any man who wishes to follow Christ's teaching.

The Gospels contain no anthropogonic account – like the one found in *Poimandres* and similar writings. However, the Fourth Gospel opens with a brief cosmogonic description that develops into an anthropogonic account. The world and all it contains was made by God through Logos – the Word, as is usually translated. "In that was life and the life was the light of men" (1: 1-4). The two terms 'life' and 'light' are precisely the terms used in *CH I* (9,21) as we saw earlier, section II. "It was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (1: 9). The statement is absolutely clear, leaving no doubt that the Divine Light, the Life in the God-Logos, is in every man born into the world. The idea is repeated when some Jews want to stone Christ because "thou, being a man makest thyself God" and he answers "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, Ye are Gods'?" (10: 31-4). In their true essential nature, then, all men have the Divine Spirit and are God(s). But they do not believe this and cannot consequently recognise Christ and what he represents. The impediment is the evil, or sin, in which they are bound. For "men loved darkness ... since their deeds were evil" (3: 19-20). "Verily, verily I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (8: 34). And Jesus continues: "Why do ye not understand my speech?" he asks and gives the answer himself: "Because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of [your] father the *diabolos* (=slanderer) and ye will do the lusts (*epithumia*= desire) of your father ... a murderer ... a liar" (8: 37-44). In this condition, says Jesus, "No man can come to me except the Father who hath sent me draw him [towards me]" (6: 44); every man (= *pas*), and certainly men like the disciples, could approach and believe in him, but only if "they have heard and learnt of the Father" (45). In other words, men turn from evil, sin and lies towards truth only after an impulse from the Father, the light within their very being. Jesus repeats the idea a little later: no man can come to truth "except it were given unto him

¹⁷ This is clearly a re-enactment of man's creation in *Genesis II, 7* and not dissimilar to one of the Egyptian anthropogonic accounts where the Ram-god Khnum creates man out of mud on his potter's wheel and breathes into his nostrils (Silverman 1991: 43; Hart 1995: 25-7).

by my Father” (6: 65). Then, if the man follows Christ’s teaching, he will go through the “rebirth” of Spirit, as is explained at length to old Nicodemus (3: 1-15) and is illustrated by the transformation of the disciples themselves.

This is as far as we go in tracing the Vedāntic elements in John’s Gospel. The idea of creating through Logos is, of course, not exclusively Vedāntic. It may derive from the Judaic tradition where God creates by speaking (*Genesis* I, 3ff) or directly from Egyptian sources like the Shabaka text (Lichteim 1980, vol I 50ff; Rundle Clark 1993: 60 ff) with its Memphite Theology and its exposition of the Logos theme, or from Greek philosophy (Stoics and Neo-Pythagoreans). The fall of man is not described and there is only the mention of ‘lust’ or ‘desire’ (*epithumia* VIII: 44) originating in the ‘slanderer’ and holding man in bondage: this too is not specifically Vedāntic and can derive from other traditions of the area: for instance, from Judaism comes “Thou shalt not covet...” (Exodus 20, 17) and in Plato’s *Republic* 439D we find the *epithumētiko* part of the soul that is desire. But we do find the chief idea, ie the unity of man’s true self with the Godhead, which is pure Advaita.

Nonetheless, an important Vedāntic element is missing from John’s Gospel (and the other three): the return to the original unity through knowledge of Oneself. This idea of self-knowledge is not stated anywhere in the New Testament as we have it – although it is important in the Hermetica and the Greek tradition. Nor do we find the idea of reincarnation stated explicitly anywhere in the New Testament. Certain passages that can be connected with this last idea of reincarnation provide a clue as to what may have happened, a clue that is buttressed by other kinds of evidence.

There is a curious passage in John where, seeing a man blind “*from his birth*” the disciples asked, “Master, who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?” (11: 1-2). Now since neither Jesus nor the disciples were imbeciles they would know that the man could not have sinned as an embryo in the womb. So how or when could he have sinned before birth? ... The implication clearly is that he would have sinned *in a previous embodiment as a human being*. A rather similar situation is found in Matthew when Jesus asks the disciples “Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?” and they reply – John the Baptist, Elias, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (16: 13-6). Since the prophets had long been dead and reincarnation is not an element in Judaism, how could it be said that a dead prophet was reincarnated as Christ? ... Jesus himself then does not repudiate such a blasphemous heresy but simply asks “Whom say ye that I am?” ... Then, we meet the strange word *paliggenesia* (usually translated as ‘regeneration’ or ‘rebirth’) in Matthew 19: 28. Here Peter asks what the disciples, who had abandoned everything to follow Christ, will gain and he replies: “...ye which have followed me in the regeneration (*paliggenesia*), when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit...” This is usually taken to refer to transfiguration or rebirth on a higher plane of being – and it may well indicate this. But *palin-genesia* ‘rebirth’ may well mean also ‘again-birth’, ie reincarnation from one embodiment to the next (thus corresponding to the Sanskrit *punar-janma* ‘again-birth’). In the latter case this would mean that the disciples followed Christ from one embodiment to another to attain perfection.

What are we to make of these passages? ... One thing at least is clear enough: Jesus and his disciples somehow knew of reincarnation but this idea, for whatever reasons, was excised from the Gospels leaving only the traces just mentioned. That excisions were made is admitted by most scholars now.

We can find corroborative evidence for this even in the canonical Gospels. There is the well-known passage in Mark after the parable of the Sower (4: 1-9) in which Jesus explains it to the disciples, or those “that were about him” saying, “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables ...” (10-11); similar incidents occur in Mth 13: 36 and in Luke 8: 9-10, while Paul mentions of “secret wisdom” given to “mature” Christians (I *Corinth* 2: 6-7). It is said explicitly, in other words, that Christ had one (mode of) teaching for the multitudes, those “without”, and a different one for the 12 disciples and those few others “about him”. The concluding verse in John says that “there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world

itself could not contain the books that should be written” (21: 15). In other words, Christ taught many more things – not found in John’s or other Gospels.

We can look at this from another angle. Christ taught for, say, two full years which is roughly 100 weeks. This period (even another year of 50 weeks) would not be too long to prepare them for their ministry. Let us assume conservatively that he taught them exclusively (since they were with him constantly) two times a week for two hours: this gives us 400 hours of teaching. Let us also assume that three quarters of this was repetition and exercises, prayers, hymn-singing and the like: we are left with 100 hours of teaching. Yet all the teaching in the Gospels – even if we don’t subtract narrative and repetitions – requires no more than, at most, 12, say 15 hours. What of the other 80 hours or so? A modern undoubting christian scholar writes: “It is, of course, obvious that [Christ] said and did far more than the Gospels record. He was at work for two or maybe for three years, yet all the sayings in the Gospels can be read in a few hours. We are told that ‘he began to teach them many things’ (Mark 6, 34) but nothing is actually quoted ... It seems eminently reasonable then to suppose that many other people knew of things he had said or done which the Gospel writers either did not know, or which for some reason they did not make use of in their books” (Dunkerley 1952: 10).

I suggested above that reincarnation is one of the ideas that are omitted. Another one was almost certainly the idea of return to the original Unity through Self-knowledge. What is also missing is some account of cosmogony and the appearance and nature of man and his function in creation: these are elements present in every religion and it is highly significant that the institutionalized Church adopted wholesale the old Judaic traditional teaching on these matters as found in the old Testament, in the Greek version known as the Septuagint, which is, in fact, a history of the Jewish nation and its culture. It is noteworthy that Marcion, the most Christian of the “heretical” Gnostics, rejects the Old Testament and, among other elements in the NT, the Davidic descent of Christ (Jonas 145-6). In this connection we note another curious passage in John where (8: 3-4), while Christ was teaching, the woman caught in adultery was brought to him by the Pharisees, but “he stooped down and with his finger wrote on the earth”: was this writing drawing of figures or diagrams illustrating some cosmogonic process or laws of creation? We are told no more except that, after those famous words, “He that is without sin amongst you, let him first cast a stone at her”, he stooped down again and wrote on the ground.

Yet, these elements or ideas are unmistakably present in other (proto-) Christian writings, those of the Gnostics. Clement of Alexandria states in several places in *Stromateis* that there was a secret version of Mark’s Gospel and there was a “gnostic tradition” which had come down also to him (Lilla 1971:155). Clement also mentions a Gospel according to the Egyptians (*Strom* 3, 64, 1; 3, 66, 1-2; 3, 92, 2) and Eusebius mentions one according to the Hebrews (*On the Theophany*). Many other such writings are mentioned by others. The most cursory reading of *The Gospel of Thomas*, which is one of the Nag Hammadi Library of 52 tractates, and contains sayings of Jesus recorded by Thomas (Didymos Judas), will reveal both the idea of Unity and the idea of Self-knowledge (or -realisation). Saying 111 contains them both: “The heavens and the earth will be rolled up in your presence. And the one who lives from the Living One will not see death ... Whoever finds (=comes to know, realises) himself is superior to the world.” (NL 138. These Gnostic writings are examined further in the next section.) The idea of reincarnation appears in *The Gospel of Philip*, another text of this collection: “If you become one of those who belong above ... If you become horse or ass or bull ... which are outside or below ...” (79: NL, 156).

These two Gnostic Gospels are attributed to two apostles no less than the canonical Four. In fact, while John was a disciple and Matthew was elected to replace Judas Iscariot, Mark and Luke were followers of the disciples – and in any case, little or nothing else is known about all four. Certain gnostics do admit that they derive their *gnōsis* (=knowledge) from their own visions and experience rather than from the teaching handed down by Jesus himself. But apart from these, why should only the four Canonical Gospels be regarded as valid or true while all Gnostic ones be

dismissed as heretical or false? The only reason is simply the fact that some early leaders (or Bishops) like Tertullian, Origen, Hippolytus and others in the 2nd and 3rd centuries say so in denouncing these “heresies”. It is ironic, in a way, that some of them like Origen and Tertullian themselves broke away from the “orthodox” church late in life and became heretics.

As the church was getting progressively organised on definite lines, certain writings, ie. Gospels, were selected and, as is evident, suitably altered by excisions and additions in accordance with these “orthodox” doctrines. The above-mentioned Fathers give a long list of names of “heretical” teachers like Simon the Magus, Valentinus and his students Heracleon and Marcus, Colorbasus, the Carpocratians, Justinus, Marcellina, Marcion and his followers, Ptolemy, Theodotus et al, and, of course, some of the doctrines these heretics propounded. However, Walter Bauer made clearly an important point. Although he was criticized by other scholars for oversimplifying and overlooking some evidence, few today would disagree with his point that

perhaps – and I repeat perhaps – certain manifestations of Christian life that the authors of the church renounce as “heresies” [ie gnostics] originally had not been such at all, but, at least here and there, were the only forms of the new religion; that is, for those regions, they were simply “Christianity”. The possibility also exists that their adherents ... looked down with hatred and scorn on the orthodox, who for them were the false believers. (1971, p xxii)

As I have very little knowledge of early Christianity, its development and the “politics” of the Church, I shall not delve further into this subject. Many scholars have dealt with it in detail and from many angles (Anderson 1964; Bruce 1969; Chadwick 1981 and 1982; Goodspeed 1966; Nock 1972; Weiss 1959; etc, etc). In any event, orthodoxy and heresy in early Christianity is neither the theme of this paper nor important to it. We shall turn now to the writings of the Gnostics themselves.

V. Gnostic Writings

Before the discovery of the collection of gnostic tractates near Nag Hammadi in Upper (South) Egypt, knowledge of Gnosticism was confined almost entirely on what the early “orthodox” writers had written about them, in condemnatory terms. Now there are many studies based on information derived from original or well-nigh original gnostic texts – written in Coptic. Among the 52 treatises one is a fragment from Plato’s *Republic* (588A-589B) followed by 3 Hermetic texts *The Discourse of the Eighth and Ninth*, *Prayer of Thanksgiving* and the *Asclepius*, which had been known only in its Latin form. But most of the writings are gnostic and some of them are Apocalypses, Apocrypha or Gospels attributed to John, James, Peter and other disciples of Christ.

Here I shall not attempt to describe the whole teaching of the gnostics, their complex cosmologies, their rituals, and so on. Such information can be found in many studies by eminent scholars of this field (Grant 1959, Jonas 1991, Pagels 1981; et al). Better still, one may read J Robinson’s *The Nag Hammadi Library*, which contains all the texts translated into English from Coptic. And it is this translation that we shall make use of in tracing the main Vedāntic ideas we mentioned earlier and particularly the idea that Man issues directly from the Godhead (or Absolute) and through Self-knowledge, perhaps over successive reembodyments, returns to the original Unity.

Here we should make a very important distinction which is not always observable in scholars. It is generally agreed that the terms ‘Gnostic’ and ‘Gnosticism’ refer to many different schools of thought having in common the idea of *gnōsis* ‘knowledge’ (ie secret, esoteric, spiritual and not at all common; knowledge for few not many) that saves from the misery, sleep and ignorance of common mundane existence and elevates into a supra-mundane or divine level of immortality. The distinction I am making here concerns the ultimate destination of the soul of self-realized men (good & pious men, saints, mystics and the like; men with self-knowledge). Attempts at such a distinction

are found in several studies but the distinction is not all that clear whereas it is very clear in the texts.

Let us take two examples. In *Poimandres* the soul (or essential man), having shed everything, unites with the beings of the “eighth state” (*ogdoatikē* : the 8th heaven or whatever) but then ascends even higher “to the Father” and becomes a Power “within God” (*en theōi*): in other words, it unites (or merges) with the Godhead and *is* It, the selfsame substance (or Power). This is very clear in *CH I*, 26. Something similar and equally clear is said, though in different terms, in the gnostic *Gospel of Philip*: “You saw the spirit, you became spirit. You saw Christ, you became Christ. You saw [the Father, you] shall become Father ... you see yourself” (61: 30-5). And this text expounds further the true nature of man: “The Lord said, ‘Blessed is he who is before he came into being. For he who is, has been and shall be’ (64: 11). In other words, when a man knows himself to be truly such, ie of the primordial substance in the Godhead before his embodiment in the creation, *which comes into being and eventually will pass out of being*, he is absolutely immortal. Because, then, such men are such, it is “fitting for the gods to worship them” (72: 4). This is Vedāntic Advaita also.

In other texts, however, Hermetic, Gnostic, Middle Platonist etc, the soul *does not merge in the Godhead*: the soul remains in the seventh or eighth heaven, among gods or first-created angels, among the Aeons, etc, which is the eternity of the fixed stars, the Christian Paradise, also what is called the Ogdoad. As we saw earlier, in *CH X*, 7-8 the soul reaches its “most perfect glory” among the star-gods, no higher. Another example is in the *Apocryphon of John*: “The soul ... through the intervention of the incorruptible one ... is taken up to the rest of the Aeons” (26: 26-31). This is not merging in or uniting with the Godhead. When such Gnostics, Hermetists, Platonists (of all hues) and others within our period write of the “deification” or “divinization” of the soul (*theōthēnai*) they refer to this level of gods (or first-created angels), *which remains separate from the Godhead*. Salvatore Lilla discusses this at length in relation to Clement of Alexandria and other writers, but does not, make this distinction¹⁸. Yet this is the point made – surely – also by the gnostic Hermeticum *Discourse of the Eighth and Ninth*, when beyond “the eighth and the souls that are in it and the angels” the ninth is seen, whereby “the eighth reveals the ninth” (58: 15-20 and 61: 23, *NL* 325-6). Here it is the eighth; elsewhere we meet other names while in Christian texts (like Clement) we find “being with god”, “face to face with god” etc: all these correspond, in fact, to the Vedāntic Brahmaloaka, which, though the highest Heaven, yet remains within the Creation and will come to an end as all this is withdrawn into the unmanifest nature of the Absolute: the souls remain here only until their merit is exhausted, when they get re-embodied. Thus this is not true eternity and does not represent absolute immortality.

Now let us examine some salient passages.

a) *The Apocryphon of James* : “For without the soul the body does not sin, just as the soul is not saved without [the] spirit.(...) For this cause I tell you this, that you may know yourselves. (...) blessed will they be who ascend to the Father!” (12-3: *NL* 35.)

b) *The Gospel of Truth* : “And in you dwells the light that does not fail. (...) Be concerned with yourselves; do not be concerned with other things. (...) this is the Father, from whom the beginning came forth to whom all will return. (...) They rest in him who is at rest, not striving nor being twisted around the truth; and the Father is within them and they are in the Father, being perfect” (32-3, 38, 42: *NL*47,49,51).

c) *The Gospel of Thomas* : “We came from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own accord. (...) It is I who am the light which is above them all. It is I who am the all. From me did the all come forth, and unto me did the all extend. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there (Cf with *CH XIII*,1). (...) The heavens and the earth will be

¹⁸ Lilla, pp 184-9. On p 185, n 1, are cited Kroll, Reitzenstein and Festugière, experts on Hermetism, who also do not make the distinction in respect of the *Poimandres*. Also, more generally, Jonas, Sedlar, Pagels.

rolled up in your presence. And the one who lives from the living one will not see death. ... Whoever finds himself¹⁹ is superior to the world. (sayings 50, 77, 111: *NL* 132, 135, 138.)

d) *The Gospel of Philip* : “Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error. If they do not first receive the resurrection while they live, when they die they will receive nothing.(...) Is it not necessary for all those who possess everything to know themselves? (...) Those who have come to know themselves will enjoy their possessions.”

More passages in the same vein could be cited from *The Dialogue of the Saviour*, *The Teachings of Silvanus*, or *Allogenes*. The idea of reincarnation appears implicitly or explicitly in several texts:

The Apocryphon of John (27, *NL* 120).f); *The Gospel of Philip* (79, 81 *NL* 156, 157); *The Apocalypse of Adam* (78f, *NL* 283-5; for parallels with this passage see Welburn 1995 p 66ff, who follows Rudolf Steiner; also Jonas pp 104-9); *Trimorphic Prottennoia*: (45-7, *NL* 519-20).

It is worth presenting a passage from a fragment of the gnostic *Gospel of Eve* (cited by Professor Jonas) exhibiting again the Unity: “I am thou and thou art I, and where thou art I am, and in all things I am dispersed. And from wherever thou wilt thou gatherest me; but in gathering me thou gatherest thyself ... He who attains to this gnosis and gathers himself from the cosmos ... is no longer detained here but rises above the Archons ... I have come to know myself and have gathered myself from everywhere.” (Jonas, p 60.)

Jonas gives several passages from the Mandaeans also. Although neither the exact region nor the exact period in which Mandaeism first evolved has been fully established, it is thought this might have been Palestine in the early years CE. Later the Mandaeans moved to Mesopotamia. All the extant Mandaean scriptures are composite documents dating from various periods; the individual strata have not yet been clearly identified and dated (Sedlar, 163, 160). In these scriptures there is a God Father and a world of light and many other elements found in Gnosticism; there are archons/ gods governing the world of multiplicity, from which the soul (of light and life) needs to ascend back to its origin.

One passage says (Jonas 90-91): “I went and found my soul – / what are to me all the worlds? ... / I went and found Truth / as she stands at the outer rim of the worlds ... /” Other passages, however, are somewhat unclear implying multiplicity even in the world of light. Thus, “I beheld Life and Life beheld me ... I shall come *amongst the good* whom this Alien Man has loved” and “*They* created the messenger ... He called with heavenly voice” (Jonas, 79, 84: emphasis added). Then, again: “Do thou ascend and behold the place of light”; and “I beheld my Father and knew him / ... / I asked him for smooth paths / to ascend and behold the place of light “ (Jonas, 88, 90). Neither in Jonas nor in Dodd (1985, ch 6) is there a clear explicit statement about absolute identity and Unity such as we noted earlier.

I disagree on one point with Jonas, who finds that the idea of virtue (Greek *aretē*) is absent in Gnosticism (Jonas, 266 ff. He does mention asceticism). This is rather extreme. Great emphasis on virtue is placed in several Hermetica (eg *CHI*, 23, 25; *CH XII*, 4; etc); careful reading of the Nag Hammadi texts also reveals considerable regard for virtue, not only humility, patience, abstemiousness etc but also the Platonic virtue(s) of wisdom, justice, temperance and courage: eg *NL* 41 men wise in their estimation; 90 lawlessness and evil; 126 James the righteous, a wise philosopher; 131 a good man, an evil man and the storehouse of the heart; 147 giving with love; 149 wanton women and lecherous men; 157 good deeds; also opening of *Teachings of Silvanus* (*NL* 381) or *Gospel of Mary* (*NL* 525-6). It is true that libertinism (or what appears as nihilism) was practised by some sects or members of sects, as has been observed by early and modern

¹⁹ Cf transl of saying 67 “If one who knows the all still feels a personal deficiency, he is completely deficient” (*NL*, 134) and “Whoever knows the All but fails (to know) himself lacks everything” in *The Gospel according to Thomas* by A Guillaumont, H-C Puech, G Quispel et al, Leiden (Brill), London (Collins) 1959, p 39.

commentators. One reasonable excuse for such practices is that man ought to go through all experiences that flesh is heir to (Jonas, 273-4). Apart from such a rationale, we must suppose that these libertines probably misunderstood the essential teaching which promoted restraint of appetites but encouraged freedom of action once full knowledge was attained; they thought perhaps that by merely hearing of the Father, self-knowledge and their identity with God, they had the actual knowledge. In the Indian tradition, too, self-realized persons had freedom of action and could lay aside all duties of common laymen, but there is no hint of libertinism in the scriptures. The fulfilment of one's duties (*dharma*) is a prerequisite or, at least, parallel practice to the pursuit of Self-knowledge: "One who has not desisted from bad behaviour (*duṣcarita*) ... who has not calmed the mind, cannot attain Him (ie the Self) through Knowledge" (*Kaṭha Up I*, 2, 24).

I end this brief look at some gnostic writings with a reference to J W Sedlar's more detailed examination of links between gnostic systems and Indian thought (Sedlar, ch XVI). She discusses some 12 important points of doctrinal affinity with the Upanishads, Sāṅkhya and Buddhism. Here I should say a few words about the system Sāṅkhya, leaving Buddhism for comment in a later section. It is true that the gnostic "pneuma" (=spirit) resembles, in some texts, more the *puruṣa* (=spirit) of Sāṅkhya (Sedlar, 130) than the *ātman* of Advaita but the "self" in Gnosticism seems to be the *ātman* 'self' of Vedānta. Another parallel, which Sedlar does not note, is the Sāṅkhya *prakṛti* (feminine) which is the active complement of the inactive observer *puruṣa* (masculine) and encompasses all manifest creation, all material, mental and emotional phenomena – while *puruṣa* is pure consciousness. In Gnosticism it is not always a feminine principle that brings about the creation or cosmos, but in *The Apocryphon of John* it is a female Power, "the first thought", "the glory", that requests of the Monad-Spirit to give her "foreknowledge" and the other powers whereby arise the aeons and all the rest (NL 107-8). A similar process is found in *On the Origin of the World*, the female here being Pistis-Sophia (=Faith-Wisdom: NL 172-3) or in *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NL 513). However, Sāṅkhya, though in large part, deriving also from the Upanishads, does not contain the basic idea of Unity: Purusha and Prakriti are divided and co-existent (originating perhaps in the androgynous entity in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* Upanishad²⁰). The "self" is not unitary: the *Sāṅkhya Pravacana Sūtra* I, 149, says, *janmādivyavasthātaḥ puruṣabahutvam* 'there is plurality of puruṣas since there is a constant condition of [some men] being born and of others [dying]. Another scholar states, "Plurality of Puruṣas [=selves] according to the Sāṅkhyas, is real and not illusory as in ... Advaita Vedānta" (Kumar 1983: 40). The idea of the unitary Self in-every-man that is Absolute is found only in Vedānta.

Here we rest. Although there seems to be sufficient evidence that some Gnostic Gospels were no less genuine than those selected by the institutionalized Church, this matter is not the point of the argument nor important to it. What is important is that these texts contain the idea of the Unity of Being, of Man's Self and the Godhead. This idea is not found in the Persian, Judaic, Egyptian or Greek cultures, as we see in the following section.

VI) Other Cultures.

Here I examine only three, the Judaic, Greek and Egyptian, disregarding the Mesopotamian culture with its polytheism and lack of the ideas of Unity, Selfknowledge and reincarnation (Dalley 1991) and the Iranian tradition since, though influential, this is marked by unambiguous dualism from the very earliest times (Boyce 1989). Although the ideas of selfknowledge and reincarnation are discussed, our main concern remains throughout the idea of the unity of Godhead-Man. Elements in all three traditions appear in all the texts we have discussed. Since the Judaic influences

²⁰ *Bṛh Up I*, 4, 1-7 cited in section III above. The passage reads: "She thought 'How does he unite with me having manifested me from himself? Then, let me hide.' She became a cow, the other [became] a bull [and] united with her and from that [union] cattle were born. She became a mare, the other a stallion ..." And so on: "Thus, indeed, everything existing in pairs was produced down to the ants."

on the Proto-Christian texts, canonical and gnostic, is all too obvious, and since some of these agree with *Poimandres* we take this text as our basis for comparison. In tracing the possible influences of the Judaic tradition, for example, on the Hermetic text, I shall simultaneously establish the Judaic doctrines in respect of self-knowledge, reincarnation and the Godhead-Man Unity in Judaism. I follow the same method, moreover, with regard to the Greek and Egyptian cultures.

1) Judaic Influences.

The Judaic influences, liturgical as well as literary, have been established within reasonable probability by scholars of the 20th cent (Scott, I,7-8, 11-12; II,4-11 etc; Dodd 1985, chs 2& 3; Betz; Wilson 1977; Pearson 1981.). Some Hermetic hymns show kinship with both Judaic and Egyptian originals (Fowden, 72). The Logos doctrine, used in several schools of the period, may well be of Egyptian origin ultimately, even though the Shabaka Text with its Memphite Theology and the clearest exposition of the Logos has now been found (Lichteim 1980, vol 3) to derive from the 25th Dynasty, indeed (ie c 700 BC), and not the Old Kingdom (c 2500). Nonetheless its presence in the *Poimandres* is much more immediately akin to the formulations of the Stoics and of Philo – who flourished in the early half of first cent CE, being a hellenized Jew, steeped in Platonism and Greek thought and other traditions of his time (Dodd 1985: for the stoics p 41; for Philo ch 3 passim). Pearson's suggestion, on the other hand, that *CHI* may derive from Jewish apocalypses rather than Egyptian is unconvincing – though not impossible. The structural and thematic parallels he cites (Pearson 1981: 339) between *CHI* and 2 (*Slavonic*) *Enoch* are circumstantial and insubstantial; in the absence of other clear and firm evidence we cannot know which way the influence runs and in any case they are common features in many writings of the age. Pearson himself points out that “the Hermetic ‘creed’ differs radically from the Jewish” in respect of “gnosticizing” (=Self-realisation), which is ultimately rejected by Philo (ibid 346-7 and n 36.). In his own article, Betz has traced Philo's treatment of the Delphic maxim “know thyself” very ably (277-82). He might have added that, although Philo comes very close to *CHI* on this (*De Migr Abr* 195; Betz, 480, n 86), his concept of knowledge of the Self and of God is more of the intellectual kind than the real knowledge of experience. Furthermore, Philo uses the maxim in *De Spec Leg* I,44, again in the sense that man (Moses) is a low and limited creature who should not aspire towards the unattainable.

All this could be contrasted with the Essene advice, “Bring forth the knowledge of your inner self and ... meditate ...” (Eisenman & Wise, 1993:176). Here we have a specimen of pre-Christian gnōsis. In these texts also the esoteric or mystical ascent remains within the limits of heaven and the vision of angels and the Throne of Glory. G G Scholem, in describing the Mishnah teaching and the Merkabah mysticism, sums it up as follows: “Not only have the seers perceived the celestial hosts, heaven with its angels, but the whole of this apocalyptic and pseudepigraphic literature is shot through with a chain of new revelations concerning the hidden glory of the great Majesty, its throne, its palace ... the celestial spheres towering up one over the other, paradise, hell, and the containers of the souls” (1977:43). But Scholem's citations of prayers (pp 58-9) do show some affinity with similar hymns in the *Hermetica*, while several bizarre elements in some gnostic writers can be described as “Kabbalistic” (pp 63-7), although Kabbalah does not crystallize until much later (pp 18, 74, 220-1).

The important and decisive differences concern the concept of God, man's genesis and man's fate after death. God in the Old Testament may be an omnipotent Creator, but his wrath and vengefulness and his partisan preference of the Jews, make him too anthropomorphic and limited to be the Absolute; then, he is a creator and, moreover, constantly intervenes in human affairs. As creator he made (*epoiēsen*) or formed (*eplasen*) man in his own image but out of earth (*choun apo tēs gēs*) and then breathed life to his face (LXX, *Genesis* I, 27-8 and II,7; in the latter we have two elements found earlier in Egypt, god Khnum, the potter-creator, and the breath of life *t3w 'nh*). Here two versions are involved: in the first the Logos may have been used as with earlier stages (*kai eipen ho theos*, I,4,6, etc), but this is not clear; in the second, God uses material already generated.

In neither version did God engender (*apekuēsen*) Man out of Himself: thus both differ substantially from *CH I*. In some gnostic works this God-creator is presented as the chief archon, an usurper, tyrant and chief obstructor of man's ascent through gnōsis, as is Yaltabaoth in the *Ap. John* (*NL* 110).

In Judaism, man after death neither transmigrates nor ever unites with God. Transmigration (*gilgul*= revolving) appears clearly after 1100 CE in Kabbalistic thought (Poncé: 1997: 215); otherwise it is absent from early Judaic beliefs, though scholars think it may have been known in some sects like the Essenes or the Samaritan Gnostics, through influences from Zoroastrian traditions. (For the Essenes, see Russell 1964:257 ff; for the Samaritans, Isser 1976:196 ff; for Zoroastrianism, Boyce 1989, vol I, 109-23; also vol III, 360ff). However, neither in Zoroastrian texts nor the Dead Sea Scrolls is reincarnation mentioned. In Gnostic sects the idea is present in the successive incarnations of the Illuminator or True Prophet (Zarathustra?) and of the First Thought of the Godhead which, by a series of incarnations, including Helen of Troy, ends up as a prostitute in Tyre (Welburn, 66-7; also *The Apocalypse of Adam*, in *NL*, 277ff; *The Apocryphon of John*, 27, 20, *NL*, 120).

In *Genesis* 37, 35 and Psalm 88, 3ff, we read of Sheol 'grave, pit' where the dead linger on below the earth, just and unrighteous alike, cut off from everything (also Gordon 1965: 134-5, 165). This changes in the other books of the Old Testament. In the early Books of the LXX, patriarchs, kings and prophets die and get "added to one's people" as with Abraham (*Gen* XXV,8), Isaac (*ibid* XXXV,29), Jacob (*genos*, instead of "people", *ibid* XLIX,33), Aaron (*Numb* XX,24), Moses (*Deut* XXXII,50). Another phrase used is "go the way of all earth" as with Joshua (*Josh* XXIII,14), David (*III Kings* II,2). Some occultists discern in these phrases reincarnation in a movement backward in historical time (eg Ouspensky, 1953:491-2). In later Books, with Job and Daniel we hear of resurrection at "the fulfilment of the end (*sunteleia*)" and later, for the righteous, the Age to come and eternal being or life, while the unrighteous are damned (*Job* XLII,17; *Daniel* XII,13). Isaiah tells Heōsphoros, who thought to scale heaven and set his throne above the starry zone, that he will sink into *hades*, at the foundations of the earth (*Esaias* XIV, 12-20). Daniel gives the two conditions: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall arise, some to life everlasting and some to reproach and shame everlasting. And the wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and the many righteous ones as the stars for ever and ever"(XII,2).

Yes, the righteous inherit the Earth and enter the kingdom under the Throne of Glory in the company of angels, but they remain separate from God. There is no hint of union with the Godhead – not until later Gnostic Texts (Eg *Eugnostos*, III,3, 76 and *Sophia*, III,4, 100: *NL* 227-8). So Judaism has affinity with the religious aspect of the Hermetica (hymns of praise, piety and the like) but cannot be the source of the idea of Union in *Poimandres*.

2) Greek Thought

The Greek religious and philosophical traditions are very rich in concepts and schools. Obviously we need not examine all of them since many are not relevant to our enquiry. Thus we can bypass Homer and Hesiod with their polytheism, theogony and ethics of that heroic era; so also the early philosophers like Thales, Pherecydes, Anaximander and so on, of whose doctrines very little has been preserved. For instance, Anaximander seems to postulate the "Infinite" (*apeiron*) as the source of all things and this sounds relevant since one description of the Vedāntic Absolute is "infinite" *ananta*; but other extant passages of his say that man emerged from out of slime or fish (KRS, 105, 117, 141; Veikos: 40, 54). For Anaximenes the First Cause is Air (144, 150, 158). Xenophanes taught that there is only One God moving all things with his mind (KRS 168-9) but says nothing about man's origin regarding him as separate from gods (KRS 179; Veikos 70-1) and Aristotle thought that Xenophanes had not clarified his ideas (KRS 171). Heraclitus advised the pursuit of Self-knowledge (KRS 210; Roussos 2000: 89) but for him the basic cosmic substance is Fire connected with the Principle of measure (*logos* 'proportion') which is divine (KRS 186, 205; Veikos 78-80).

Pythagoras, might have taught ideas that approach our interests but all the accounts are many centuries later. Already, by Plato's time rumour and legend had enveloped his school in mystery and obscurity. Aristotle's treatise *On the Pythagoreans* was lost. Any definite, though not necessarily correct, information appears only late, mainly with the Neo-Pythagoreans and/or Neoplatonists. The idea of reincarnation or transmigration was known by Pythagoras; this was preserved by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 8: 36 (middle or late 3rd cent CE). Preserved was also the notion of the (periodic) recurrence²¹ of everything and the notion of kinship among all living things *panta ta empsucha homogenē* (Porphyry, as n 21). But no idea of Unity between Godhead and man is found even in late sources. Laertius records a summary of the account of Pythagorean doctrines by Alexander Polyhistor (1st cent BC) in which it is stated: – "The Principle of all (*archē apantōn*) is the Monad (=One)"; from that comes the "indefinite Dyad (=Two) serving as material substratum to the Monad, which is the (first) cause" (8: 25). So it all starts with the One. But of man's origin and nature the account is less exalting: "The sun, the moon and the other stars are gods; for in them preponderates heat... There is kinship (*suggeneia*) of men to gods in that man partakes of heat" (8: 27). Thus man's level is not with the Monad but with the star-gods.

Something similar applies to Parmenides, another Presocratic. In his poem *On Nature* (a common title), which has survived only in fragments preserved by later writers (Gallop 1984; E Heitsch 1974; KRS, 239-62), we find the concept of the One (primordial Being) which though "motionless within limits of great/mighty (*megalōn*) bonds" yet "is beginningless and endless"(!); nor is it "lawful" that it should be "unlimited" but circumscribed like a sphere (Tzavaras 1980: 44-49; KRS, 251): clearly this is not the indescribable, illimitable Absolute. Plutarch (c 100 AD) comments on a Parmenidian passage saying that, among many other things, Parmenides "narrated the genesis of men" (*Against Colotēs*, 1114b), but says no more. More interesting is Melissus of Samos (flourished 444-1?) who did away with all limits postulating the 'Infinite' *apeiron*, one, homogeneous and incorporeal; but of his thought little else survives (KRS 396ff 401; Veikos, 126-32).

Empedocles (5th cent BC) is another interesting case but his duality of Love and Strife and his account of the genesis of creatures where man comes from the level of gods but is formed of Love and Strife, (KRS, 287ff) preclude the idea of Man's identity with the Absolute, even though 600 years later Hippolytus thought that Empedocles meant the human soul was absorbed in the divine mind (ibid 314-7). A wider examination of Empedocles and his influence is found in Kingsley 1995, passim: however, Kingsley's claim that some Empedoclean and Pythagorean doctrinal elements derive from the Near East (p 10, 152, 173, 189, 225, 293) ignores the fact that reincarnation itself is not known in that area at that time and leaves this theme unaccounted for (p 286, 366-8); the same holds for the idea of periodic recurrence.

Some religious aspects like the Orphic, Eleusinian and other cultic rites and mysteries may well have had influence on many Hellenistic and early Christian Era cults like Hermetism, Christianity, Mithraism etc; but here again we have very little definite information about the origin of those Mysteries, though some rituals were passed on and adopted by the later cults in the syncretic tendency of Hellenistic times and later. Since Greek religion was polytheist, we can bypass it. (Guthrie 1950; Burkert 1977; Easterling & Muir 1985.)

The Hermetica certainly contain ideas found in the Stoic tradition. The concepts of Logos and apokatastasis (similar to the Pythagorean "recurrence") are thought to derive in large part from the Stoics (Laertius, VII, 148; Long, 1974: 262ff; Sandbach, 1975: 78-9). The "Logos" is thought to be derived from Heraclitus in whose fragments, however, it has the sense of 'measure' or 'proportion'

²¹ Simplicius *Physics*, 732, 30. Also in Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras*, 19. Ouspensky (368-9) examines at length the Simplicius passage and calls the phenomenon 'Eternal Recurrence'. This idea too is found in the Vedic Tradition, *Rgveda* X, 190, 3, being one of the earliest examples: "The Ordainer created (*akalpayat* = formed in order) as previously (*yathāpūrvām*) sun and moon, heaven and earth, interspace as also the realm-of-light (*svāh*)" – where 'as previously' indicates a repetition of the Cosmos.

and like Fire, was a constituent of all phenomena (KRS, 186-99; Roussos 2000: 34-9, 167ff). Another such notion is that of “sympathy”, the inner harmony of the Cosmos expressed in the interconnection and interdependence of its parts (Fowden, 77-8; Laertius, VII,140 for *sumpnoia* and *suntonia*; Long, 285-9, 346; Sandbach, 130-1). No doubt other Greek traditions like the (neo-) Pythagoreans exercised some influence. But the major contributor seems to be the Platonic school; consequently here we turn to those ideas in the Platonic doctrine that relate to the origin and end of Man.

Plato’s philosophical *paideia* aims at Self-knowledge (*Charmides* 169E; *Alcibiades I* 130E-133; *Phaedrus* 229E) and the elevation of the human condition to a supramundane godly state (*Theaetetus* 176A-B; *Laws* 716C). In *Theaetetus* (176 A-B), it is said that we ought to try and escape from earth to the region of the gods and that this “escape is becoming like a god (*homoiōsis theōi*) as far as possible”: “god” here is one of the gods in heaven’s star-zone. This state has certain limitations: the power of the gods is ineffectual against Necessity (*Laws* 741A, 818A ff); the gods are not fully immortal nor indissoluble (*Timaeus* 41B). This is inevitable in Plato’s cosmology where the gods are creatures within the manifest Creation created by the Demiurge. Human beings too are just as limited. Man has the divine element as his Self (or soul or reason) but this does not emanate directly from the Absolute, or the Demiurge; consequently it does not return to unite with the Creator’s substance itself. The origin of man in Plato appears in three versions, at least: a) Aristophanes talks of the original spherical creatures (some androgynous) who got sliced in two by Zeus (*Symposium* 189C ff) – but nothing is said of their genesis. b) Elsewhere, with slight variations, men spring from the Earth (*Menexenus* 237D; *Politicus* 269B; *Protagoras* 320D ff). c) In the *Timaeus*, (41 D ff), the Demiurge fashions human souls *in the form of stars* (and equal in number to them) out of the residue of the material used for the creation of gods but now shaken and mixed to a second and a third degree (of grossness) while the gods fashion the physical bodies in which the souls will be incarnated. Plato nowhere hints that man issues from the substance of the Demiurge, who is the Supreme God. The embodied souls, if they retain (or regain) their purity, will, on death, return to their stellar form in heaven. For Plato, as for Judaism, this is salvation, liberation, immortality – the *periousion agathon*. If souls misbehave on earth, then they will transmigrate to lower forms, even worms and shellfish – until, even these, one day remember and return to their heavenly state (*Tim* 41Dff, 90E). In *Phaedrus*, too, the souls of the blest reach the uppermost celestial limit and behold the area “beyond/above heaven” (*hyperouranios topos*) and see the knowledge that belongs to True Being (*on ontos*: 247C-E). However, they cannot cross the border line and so remain in immortal felicity (*Tim* 42D) as eternal luminaries, but apart from True Being.

My treatment of Plato here seems rather one-sided. This is true of the Presocratics also. The exigencies of this enquiry do not give much scope for more detailed treatment. So, just as we bypassed the duality of Limit and Unlimited in the Pythagoreans, the duality of Anaxagoras’ matter and *Nous* ‘Mind’, the views of the atomists etc, we shall disregard Aristotle’s ungenerated matter and uncreated intelligences which seem to be apart from God (Ross: 1977: 184), and the immanent pantheism of the Stoics (Long, 241).

In respect of the idea of Unity, the immediate successors of Plato and the Middle Platonists in no way broke out of the mould of the Master’s thought; neither did the Stoics and Neo-Pythagoreans. Looking at writers of the first century BCE, we find strong and obvious affinities with the Platonist thought combined with elements of Stoic and Pythagorean descent. However, in all of them we find that the idea of Unity is absent: in all of them man is created of substances, and at a level, lower than the Godhead while immortality is confined to heaven or the star-zone.

The passage of Alexander Polyhistor cited early in this section (“There is kinship of men to gods in that man partakes of heat”, gods being the stars, of course) is typical of the prevalent view – always with regard to our main theme of Unity between Godhead and Man. Regarding this theme, then, little survives of the doctrine of such eminent figures like Posidonius, a Stoic with Platonist affinities who flourished in Apamea (Syria) in the early part of first cent BCE, or of his

contemporary Antiochus, the Head of what was left of the Academy who travelled in the Near East (hence “of Ascalon”: Dillon 1977, esp pp 96-101; for Antiochus, see Fladerer, esp pp 112 ff). We find a clear and complete statement in the Roman Cicero (106-43 BC). In his *De Re Publica*, towards the end of Scipio’s Dream we see the vision of the entire heaven (VI: 16-19): “There were stars. (...) The outermost [sphere] is that of heaven (*caelestis*) which contains all the rest, and is itself the supreme god. ... In it are fixed the eternal revolving courses of the stars ... Below the Moon is nothing but what is mortal ... except the souls given by gods to mankind, while above the Moon all are eternal. (...) Educated men ... have obtained for themselves a return to this region and also others... who with their excellent intellects practised divine pursuits (*divina studia coluerunt*).” Here we do not have the transcendental Godhead of *CH I* and Gnostics but *starry heaven itself* as the supreme god.

We leave other Platonists and Neo Pythagoreans of this period for whose doctrines we must rely and speculate on the fragmentary and divergent accounts of later writers, and turn briefly to Philo of Alexandria, the hellenized Jew mentioned in the preceding section who combines platonic with Judaic ideas. He writes that the soul of “the decent and worthy man” at death “is borne to eternal life”; he links this with the old Judaic notion of “going to one’s fathers”. In this he sees “the imperishability (*aphtharsia*) of the soul which moves its habitation from the mortal body and returns as it were to the mother-city (*mētropolis*)” from which it originally moved to its embodied state (*Quaest in Gen* 1: 16 and 3: 11). As we saw earlier, Philo conceives of man as quite separate from God and incapable of knowing Him; Philo’s affinities with John’s Gospel are discussed at length by Dodd (1985:54-73; see also Dillon 176-180).

From Plutarch (c 45-120 AD) onwards to Albinus and the other Middle Platonists we find the same Platonic ideas regarding man’s genesis and the soul’s final abode. Writing of Albinus, Mansfeld sums up the matter (1989: 67, 78, 79): “[the] soul ... approaches the Supreme, which, however, forever remains exterior to it as its object of contemplation and desire. (...) a higher ascent is impossible. (...) For our turning towards the highest god can only give us an equality, of a kind, with the second-highest god.” By Plutarch’s *floruit*, of course, Christianity was spreading and probably had begun to differentiate itself into sects and cults that later came to be divided into, and known as, orthodox and heretic. Even if subsequent Platonists or NeoPythagoreans (Albinus, Atticus, Numenius et al) were to be found expounding the idea of Man’s inner identity with the Godhead (which they don’t, according to the numerous citations in Dillon 1977 and Mansfeld 1989), the idea cannot be traced in pre-Christian Era Greek tradition. Indeed, Maximus of Tyre (flourished 150-180 AD) does state that “the end of the Way (*hodos*) is not heaven, nor the celestial bodies ... but one must reach beyond these and stretch over (*huperkupsai*) heaven to the true region and the peace (*galēnē*) thereat” (quoted in Greek by Lilla, p 189). And it is probably not insignificant that Maximus is not regarded as a Platonist or even a philosopher but only a sophist (Dillon, 399-400). Of course by the middle of the 2nd cent CE, the idea of Unity would be fairly widespread in the Eastern Mediterranean among the gnostics and in texts like the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Poimandres*, etc.

As the Greek Magical Papyri (=PGM) contain material from pre-Christian times, we ought to cast a glance at them as well.²² Now these contain all kinds of magical spells for the success of self-interested pursuits: thus we have petitions (and corresponding charms) for love, often illicit (eg IV 244, 405, 459; XI 1-19; etc), for inducing in others evil sleep or insomnia (VII 376; IV 3255; XII 376; etc) for gaining a victory at the races (VII 390), and so on. They also contain descriptions of visions or communion with gods – mostly the sun-god Helios. One such description, known as the Mithras Liturgy (PGM IV 475-829) says, “I am a star wandering about with you, King, greatest of gods, Helios...” (573-5). This is hardly union with the Godhead.

Although written in Greek these Papyri contain material from Egyptian sources. So let us now

²² The *Chaldean Oracles* which so impressed the Noeplatonists are definitely from the 2nd cent CE (c 173) and, despite some interesting verse-contents, we shall not examine them. See R Majerick 1981.

turn to the Egyptian culture.

3) Egyptian Originals

The Egyptian case is at once simpler and more complicated. It is simple because the idea of Self-knowledge (-recognition or -realization) is totally absent from all Egyptian literature; in fact, like French or Spanish, Ancient Egyptian has no word for “self” – unless it is K3 (=spirit, character, double), which, however, remains individual and is never used reflexively like “self” or *ātman*; (see Gardiner 1994: 172). Absent also is the idea of the Absolute, though there is One Supreme God under different names in different places and periods: Atum (or variants), Rē, Ptah, Aten, Amun etc. Atum (=the Complete One) approaches the idea in spells 600, 587, 571, 215, 212, in the *Pyramid Texts* (=PT: original, K Sethe 1908-22; transl Faulkner, 1969), but he “evolves” or “becomes” (*kheper*) out of the primeval Water (*Nun*): *there is something prior to him..* The same applies to the concept of man’s emanation from the Absolute and his return to It. The king, certainly, and, later, noblemen and, still later, commoners aspire to unite with God – but always a particular god; Rē, Osiris, Horus, even Khnum,²³ or of being in some god’s company or among the stars.²⁴ And if Herodotus had investigated the matter further, had he been able to read Egyptian or given adequate consideration to mummification, he would not have reported that the Egyptians believed in transmigration, ie that a man’s soul “enters into another animal being born at that time” (*Histories* II, 123). Thus reincarnation also is absent from Egyptian culture. In addition, there are no extant Egyptian texts that resemble the Hermetica even remotely. And here we meet the complication: some scholars maintain that the Hermetica are, in fact, translations from the Egyptian but in the unusual sense of an interpretative rendering in Greek philosophical language. This is known as “interpretatio Graeca” (discussed in Fowden, p 45ff).

Beginning with *Abbamon’s Reply* to Porphyry²⁵ and continued by the Manetho Dedication forgery (Waddell, 1980), a long line of writers have sustained this idea: in the first decades of the 20th cent, Sir Flinders Petrie (1924: 117); later B H Stricker (1949); E Raymond (1977); M Bernal (1987: 145) postulating 6th cent BCE and citing Kroll and Cumont; and P Kingsley (citing among others T McA Scott) who reminds us of “*the role of Hermetism as a tradition of translation*” (emphasis in original, 1993:10). The notion of “interpretatio Graeca” seems to be based on two sources. One is the *Abbamon’s Reply* which says that “the [texts] circulating under the name of Hermes...were translated from the Egyptian language by men who were not unacquainted with philosophy” (Scott, IV,33,19-22; Fowden’s transl p 137). This states also that at first Hermes (= Thoth) promulgated the teaching and subsequently the priest (*prophētēs*) Bitys found them written in hieroglyphics in Sais and translated them (*hermēneuse*: interpreted) – and we are supposed to disregard the inconsistency between “men”, above, and the “priest” here. The other basis is a story about a man who after much postponing, was ordered by god Imouthes (=Imhotep/Asclepius) to finish the translation he had undertaken and in doing so he “filled up defects and struck out superfluties”, in order to narrate briefly “a rather long ... [and] complicated story” (Fowden, 51; Kingsley, 1993:21). This expediency becomes for Kingsley a prime example of the manner in which Egyptian texts got transferred into Greek. As we do not have the Egyptian original, it is impossible to know exactly what was involved. But it all sounds rather like what Plutarch did with the Isis-

²³ For union with Khnum, the Potter-creator, see spell 36, *Book of the Dead* (=BD, its original Egyptian title being “Going forth by Day”): Wallis-Budge (1898); transl by Allen, (1974), & by Faulkner, (1985)⁴. For the other deities, passim in *PT & BD*.

²⁴ See *PT*, spell 215 King-Atum; 250 King-Sia; 412 King among stars, Orion and Sothis, Morning Star; etc etc. See also *Coffin Texts*, spell 42-3 King-Osiris; 75 King-Shu; etc etc, in de Buck, (1935-61), transl Faulkner (1978).

²⁵ This *apokrisis* is generally ascribed to Iamblichus (Apamea) c 300 and is known as *De Mysteriis (Aegyptiorum)*. The ascription is based on a Byzantine scholium heading the ms and on a remark of Proclus *On Timaeus*, I,386, 10-11 (Teubner edn).

Osiris myth, except that he put in much more filling to bridge the enormous gaps in the Egyptian written sources which contain only mystifying snippets of the story.

The “interpretatio Graeca” is highly dubious for two reasons. First, modern scholars have managed to translate in several languages the Egyptian texts – and without help from the Egyptians who were available in antiquity. Well acquainted with the centaur, cerberus, hydra, pegasus and other monstrous figures in their mythology and religion (no less improbable that the Egyptian ones), the Greeks would hardly experience any difficulty with Anoubis, Hathor, Horus, the Scarab (Khepri) crawling out at dawn, Thoth, or any of the incidents in the Osiris myth, as Herodotus, Sikeliotis and Plutarch demonstrate clearly. The cult of the hybrid god Sarapis (or Serapis) provides another good example: this was manufactured under Ptolemy I (305-284 BC), Sarapis being an amalgam of Osiris (death and regeneration) and the sacred bull Apis (=O-Sar-apis) and depicted in sculpture with the head of Zeus. This syncretistic flair produced the Thoth-Hermes cult also, attested clearly in 172 BC in the ostraca (=tablets) of the Egyptian priest of Thoth named Hor.²⁶

At this point the interpretatio-theory has a second line of defensive explanations – sociological. Following Fowden, Kingsley delineates the dilemma the Egyptians faced – either “to turn away from the Greek invaders” or join them “by accepting and adapting”: this tension had the quality of “a life and death struggle ... which we do wrong to overlook” (Kingsley, 1993:21, following Fowden 21-2, 37-44). By all means, let us not overlook it and examine it in the light of other nations in the same predicament. The conquered Jews faced, presumably, the same dilemma, but there was no “interpretatio Graeca” in their case, even though their monotheist culture was probably more alien to the Greeks than the Egyptian: yet we have the “straight” translation of the Septuagint. More recently, when the Indians came under the British Raj in the 17th cent, there was no “interpretatio Britannica” but there followed a slow trickle of translations in the 18th cent and a voluminous stream in the 19th (Wilkins C, *Bhagavad Gītā* 1785 and stories *Hitopadeśa* 1787; Jones Sir W, play *Śakuntala* 1789; etc: see Winternitz, vol 1, p9). It is impossible to see why the Egyptian case should form such a remarkable exception.

Let us apply a different kind of test. If this curious theory is to be at all tenable it must show how various passages in the *Poimandres* and the other Hermetica result from Egyptian originals by the application of Greek philosophical terms. Thus in *CH I*, 18, we have the injunction “Increase ... and multiply ...”. But this is neither Egyptian nor Greek philosophical language: it comes clean out of the Judaic *Genesis* I,28. Let us take a second example: “suffering through the senses the [pangs] of death” and “blocking the senses” *CH I*, 19 & 22. Here we recognize Greek philosophy (eg *Phaedo* 79C-D, 81-82E), but we can find no such notion in Egyptian texts – like the Books of Instructions or, say, the “Negative Confession” (Egyptian *BD*, spell 125). The same is true of the theme of Selfrecognition: we have plainly the Greek philosophical concepts but cannot find anything remotely similar in Egyptian that might serve as original.

Kingsley examines some elements in the beginning of *Poimandres* and finds originals in Egyptian texts, some of them related to Thoth, but they are not convincing: (a) The double

²⁶ Ray, 1976:14-20, 73-80 etc – “of the greatest and greatest god, great Hermes”: hence perhaps, Hermes Trismegistus (=thrice-greatest). On p 92 we find *Dhwty* ‘3’3 “Thoth twice great”. (The formula up to ‘eight-times great’ was used by Egyptians of many deities.)

An earlier attestation is perhaps found in Herodotus who describes the Egyptian town Boubastis and mentions “a temple of Hermes” but does not specify the Egyptian deity (*Histories* II, 138). He also mentions the ibis birds in “the city of Hermes” (II, 67) and since the ibis was Thoth’s emblem (and a hieroglyph in his written name), the reference must have been to Khenmu, which was the centre of Thoth’s cult and was named Hermopolis in Hellenistic times.

etymology for the name “Poimandres” is an attractive idea of course; but, by his own admission²⁷, the Coptic P EIME NTE RE is not attested – any more than the earlier Egyptian P EIME N RE. (b) The “I am ...” of Poimandres and his “I know what you want ...” (*CHI*, 2) are, according to Kingsley (ib, 3, 10-11), derived from the Egyptian religious formula “I am” and the Thoth literature in Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri. All this is unnecessary – even the derivation from the Judaic or other tradition. It is true that in the *Book of the Dead*, the *Coffin Texts* and the *Pyramid Texts* one or other god introduces himself with “I am” giving a list of his attributes: this is the device whereby the dead person identifies with the particular deity and passes into immortality. Here, however, we have a *simple answer* to the simple question “Who are you?” Then, as *CHI*, 6, makes abundantly clear, the vision and the whole event is taking place *within the mind of the narrator himself*; paragraphs 16 and 21 repeat this with “*Nous emos* (my own mind)”. The somnolence, the dream, the figure and the vision in *CHI* are very common devices the world over. (c) The serpent in *CHI*, 4, writes Kingsley, is “one of the divine shapes assumed by Thoth in his cosmic metamorphoses”.²⁸ What Kingsley does not say is that this serpent (*ophei*) is not in any of the mss, that the text makes perfectly good sense without it and that Nock has inserted it quite arbitrarily, because the text here resembles Gnostic texts that do have a serpent (NF ad loc & n 9, p 12; also Festugière 1949-54, vol IV, p 41, n 1).

The foregoing observations are not intended to deny any influence on the Hermetica from Egyptian sources. Since Hermetism flourished in Egypt for centuries it would be absurd to do so. On the other hand it is just as absurd to claim that the Hermetica are translations, to evoke “interpretatio Graeca” when no originals can be adduced and buttress the case with insubstantial or dubious evidence. Mahé (1978-82, vol 2) stresses the affinity with books of *Instructions* (pp 278-312), although this too is doubtful; Fowden brings out the influences of occult practices (79-94) and the temple milieu (155-60); McA Scott (1991) gives numerous plausible parallels with Egyptian epithets and other ideas amplifying considerably Derchain (1962:175-98) and Iversen (1984), but offers not one extended passage in Egyptian that can be said to be the basis for a hermetic translation. Even if we accept that the etymology of “Poimandres” is Egyptian, that the magical papyri and the Egyptian culture as a whole (not just the Thoth literature) have influenced the *Poimandres* text in several aspects, we still have to account for the themes of reincarnation and of Self-realization and the ultimate liberation in the Godhead beyond the Creation; these, the Egyptian culture cannot provide.

VII) Links with India ?

In his *History of Indian Literature* Winternitz wrote: “Starting from the mystic teachings of the Upanishad a thought current reaches the mysticism of the Persian Sufism, and the mystic-theosophic logos-doctrine of Neo-Platonists and the Alexandrian Christians ...” (I, 247). But he gave no evidence to support this claim. Of course, the proximity of Persia to India may well have allowed Upanishadic ideas to filter through long before prince Mohammed Dara Shakoh translated into Persian a collection of 50 Upanishads in 1656 and even before the early-sixth-century translation into Pehlevi of Indian fables by Borzoi, then appearing in a Syriac version c 570 (Lanman 1903: 110-115). Persian acquaintance with Indian thought can, obviously, be assumed from as early as c 520 BC, when Cyrus annexed Gandhara in NW India. Even earlier, in the 3rd or 4th millennium, we

²⁷ 1993, p 7. His earlier allusion (p 6, n 24) to Morenz(1973:129) for Rē as “supreme authority” is highly misleading. Morenz says with great caution that Rē displaces Osiris and thus becomes “supreme authority over justice in Egypt” and not, as Kingsley implies, that the phrase “supreme authority” is a title of Rē.

²⁸ Ibid, 17. Here is cited Rundle Clark 1959: 52-5; but Clark does not mention Thoth at all and, rightly or wrongly, regards Hermopolis as symbolic of “the original state of the world rather than the actual city in Middle Egypt” (p 53); he mentions only Atum and Amun, as found in the sources he discusses.

have the Indo-Iranian common period, but the One Supreme Being that is mentioned in some Vedic Hymns is not found in the Iranian *Zend-Avesta* which presents a duality of good/light and evil/darkness. (See Angra-Manyu's counter creations in J Darmesteter 1965:5ff.) It is otherwise with the Eastern Mediterranean. We certainly find strong resemblance of ideas as was noted by Clement (Alexandria) who quotes Megasthenes' *Indika* III that "All things told about Nature by the ancients are stated by philosophers from outside Greece, some by the Indian Brahmins ..." (*Stromateis* I, 15,72) but it is impossible to trace any direct connection or link between Vedānta and the variety of Gnostic writings. The evidence seems scanty, circumstantial and inconclusive.

Rumour of contacts between India and Greece in the 5th cent BCE and before existed from early on. In his *Lives...* Plutarch records a tradition that the legendary Lycurgus of Sparta visited India and "had talks with the Gymnosophists" there (*Lycurgus*, 6). A similar tradition is recorded by Diogenes Laertius (9: 35) about Democritus, who may thus have been influenced by the atomic theory of the Indian Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system; although Greek atomic theory is cruder and differs considerably, the possibility of Indic influence is admitted by Winternitz (vol 3: 574-5). In fact Diodoros Sikeliotes, Plutarch and Laertius, manage between them to send into the East just about every eminent Greek thinker (with notable exceptions Socrates and Aristotle). Even if many visits to India had, indeed, taken place, it is clear that, whatever influences were brought to Greece, no idea resembling the Brahman-Ātman unity appears in any Greek work before the Christian Era. The same holds for any Indians that, as merchants or conscripted soldiers in the Persian armies (Sedlar, p 79), strayed into Greece and transmitted elements from the Hindu culture. "Moreover, we know in fact of three Greek physicians at the Persian court, Demokedes under Dareios I, Ktesias under Artaxerxis II, and Apollonides whom Ktesias mentions", wrote Keith (1989: 602). Some scholars (Kak 2000) have argued with plausibility that various elements in Greek medicine, art, mythology and philosophy are of Indic derivation²⁹, but again, certainly not the identity of individual and universal Self. What are we then to suppose about the ideas of transmigration and of Selfknowledge (as in the Delphic "know thyself" the origin of which is uncertain)? Both are unknown in Homer and Hesiod. A third idea is the Orphic cosmic egg of which the upper part becomes heaven and the lower earth and from which emerges Phanēs, or an incorporeal god, who creates the rest of the world (KRS, 23-6, with variants). Although most extant Orphic material is dated within the Hellenistic period and later (KRS 22; Athanassakis 1977: vii-viii), the discovery in 1962 of the

²⁹ Prof S Kak writes: ' According to Lomperis (1984), "Plato, through the Pythagoreans and also the Orphics, was subjected to the influence of Hindu thought but he may not have been aware of it as coming from India" ' (Kak 2000). I have not read Lomperis; his view sounds conjectural, given the insufficiency of early Greek sources, but, of course, it is possible. Later in the same article Kak cites Zimmer (1946) and Napier (1986, 1992) who argue that the Gorgon and the Cyclops have elements deriving from India; this too has some plausibility. He also cites Krishna (1980) who thinks the name of the mycenaean city Tiryns "is the same as that of the most powerful Indian sea-faring people called the Tirayans". This sounds utterly improbable. 'Tiryns' (*tirun-th-os*, genitive singular, with stem *tirun-th-*) cannot philologically be a cognate with, or derivative of, 'Tirayan': Greek *upsilon* [*u*] cannot correspond to, or derive from, Sanskrit [*aya*] (cf Greek *kiō* 'move, go', *ōkeanos* 'ocean' and *treis* 'three' and Sanskrit cognates *cay-a*, *āśayāna* and *trayas* where the correspondence is strictly of palatal phonemes); then, we would have to account for the consonant *theta*. If we assumed that this most unlikely linguistic event took place, we would have to suppose then that a band of Indian seafarers before the 17th cent BCE somehow managed to sail into the Mediterranean, got into the gulf of Argolis in the Peloponnese, landed there, travelled inland and somehow established a city or managed to give their own name to an existing community, while at that time, or afterwards, the advancing Greeks were setting up their own cities at Mycenae, Pylos and elsewhere. This I find incredible.

Relevant titles from Kak's bibliography: Krishna N 1980, *The Art and Iconography of Vishnu-Narayana*, Bombay; Lomperis T 1984, *Hindu influence on Greek Philosophy*, Calcutta; Napier AD 1986, *Masks, Transformation and Paradox*, Berkeley, 1992, *Foreign Bodies: Performance, Art and Symbolic Anthropology*, Berkeley; Zimmer H 1946 *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, Princeton.

Derveni Papyrus in a 4th cent grave in North Greece (Laks & Most 1997) indicates that much of this material was current in earlier periods and Kingsley argues that Plato borrowed from it (1995: 112-22; see also Burkert 1992: 127); so the egg mythologem may belong to this period. Now, it is possible that Greek sages themselves thought out these ideas. Yet it is perhaps more probable that these also, like so many other notions appearing during the centuries before the classical period, derive from non-Hellenic sources. Burkert collects (1992: passim) a formidable mass of evidence for the “orientalizing revolution” effected in Greece at that time through influences from the Near East – evidence which in its totality remains convincing even though some of the elements included may owe little to the Near East and may rather be inherited from the original Indo-European stock, since they are found also in the Vedic corpus: eg the teacher-disciple and father-son tradition (pp 43-6) which was mentioned above, section III, end; attacks of demons causing disease (p 59) as in *R̥gveda* VII,104,10ff, X,97,6, etc; substitute sacrifice (pp 73-5) found in the *Sunaḥśepa* story in *R̥gveda* I, 24, 12-3 and in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* VII, 13ff (also, for the theory of substitution, *Śatapatha* VI,2,2ff & *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* II, 8.) However, a serious problem arises here with regard to the afore-mentioned three ideas (selfknowledge, reincarnation, the cosmic egg): they are absent from the Iranian, Mesopotamian (Dalley 1991), Judaic, Egyptian and other Middle-Eastern cultures – except for the egg mentioned in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* spell 85 and the *Coffin Texts* spell 223, representing the soul or air and light (god Shu, upholding the sky). Reincarnation was, of course, known among the Celts in Gaul as Caesar testifies (*De Bello Gallico*, VI,14,5). On the other hand, all three ideas together with the Pythagorean notion of the recurrent creation, as well as the Presocratics’ preoccupation with the One First Principle of the universe, are found in the Vedic tradition (the Orphic egg being related to the ‘golden seed’ *hiranyagarbha*, whence emerged the gods’ one spirit *devānām āsuh*, in *R̥gveda* X, 121, and the cosmic egg *aṇḍa* which divided into two, the silver lower half being earth, the golden upper half being sky, in *Ch Up* III, 19, 1-4³⁰). Consequently the reports of journeys to India, although late and uncertain, may well contain some truth.

We find a report in Eusebius’s *Evangelical Preparation* that Socrates chanced upon an Indian (sage?) who laughed at his investigation of human life as philosophy saying that one cannot understand things human without knowing things divine (XI, 3). Eusebius is quoting the Aristotelian Aristotle’s *On Philosophy* (2nd cent CE) who in turn cites the musician Aristoxenos (4th cent BC); Aristocles connects this supposed exchange with Plato’s view that knowledge of things divine and human is one and that the divine should be examined first and then the human (ibid). Aristocles himself has reservations about that encounter (“if it is true”: Eusebius, ibid). What credence can we place on this report, then, when no other source (Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Laertius et al) is aware of that encounter? It sounds highly improbable but, on the other hand, it cannot be dismissed as altogether impossible. (Laertius does report in II, 45, that a Syrian magician came to Athens and told Socrates he would have a violent death.) In any case, even if that meeting did occur, no doctrine of Ātman-Brahman Unity emerges in the subsequent sources, as we saw in IV, 2.

After Alexander’s penetration into North-Western India many more Greeks naturally travelled there and some, including Alexander himself, definitely had closer contacts with native wise men (Strabo 15: 63-5; Plutarch ‘Alexander’ 7: 405-9; Clement *Stromateis* VI, 6, 38). Again, however, there does not follow as a result any detectable Vedāntic influence on Greek philosophical thought. Sedlar doubts even that Pyrrhon, the reputed founder of the Sceptical School, was much influenced

³⁰ Aristophanes also mentions a cosmic egg begotten of Night (*Birds* 693). It has been seriously suggested by several scholars (in Kingsley 1995, ch 10 passim) that the surviving Orphic literature is of a CE date and borrows from Plato – and others including Aristophanes (whence Aristo-*Phanēs*). This seems possible but much less so than the import of this idea, along with others, from India either in the early period c 600 or in Hellenistic or Roman times along with the notions of the unity of Self and of the hostile archons. In any event this is a secondary issue.

by his sojourn to India accompanying Alexander (pp 75-78); indeed, very far from Indian thought is the Sceptic tenet that knowledge is impossible. Megasthenes's *Indika* has survived only in passages preserved by writers like Sikeliotes, Strabo and Arrian, and we don't know if it contained much more than Strabo reports: "The Brahmanes ... are of the same opinion as the Greeks about many things ... that the universe was created and is destructible ... that it is spherical in shape and that the god who made it and regulates it pervades the whole of it ... In addition to the four elements, there is a fifth natural element of which the heavens and the heavenly bodies are composed" (Strabo 15: 59). The Indian elements in descending order of fineness are – ether (*ākāśa* or 'space' in which things first become manifest) air, fire, water and earth (*Taittirīya Up* I,1,1; *Praśna Up* IV,8).

The fifth element, which may be taken to be more Indian than Greek due to Greek tradition which speaks mainly of 4 elements, was not, in fact, unknown in Greece even before Alexander. Since Empedocles and perhaps before (Kingsley 1995, chs 1-4; Kahn 1985; 133-63), Greek thought deals mainly with four elements – earth, water, air and fire. These remain the same four throughout the subsequent centuries, are found in the writings of the early Christian Era (*CH* II, 11; XIII, 6; *Asclepius*, 3; *Dial Sav* 134: 1-20 (*NL* 250); also Pagels (1981:150) quoting Irenaeus; Jonas, 189-90) and continue well into the Middle Ages. Nonetheless there is awareness and frequent mention of a fifth substance in Plato and Aristotle and others (Plato *Timaeus* 55C, (pseudo?) *Epinomis* 981C (*aithēr*); Aristotle *Peri Ouranou* 270 b 20, *Meteōrologika* 339 b 14). This is given various names: *aithēr*, which usually denotes 'upper bright air' and sometimes 'fire'; *phōs*, which is akin to fire usually; and *kuklophorikon* (and variants) quite frequently with reference to heaven and celestial bodies. Thus the fifth element can hardly be said to derive from Megasthenes.

A late report by Epiphanius (4th cent CE) says that Ptolemy I, in founding the Museum (= Library) in Alexandria, ordered that books should be brought from India as well. It is not known whether this order was carried out and, given the Greeks' disinclination to learn foreign languages, it is doubted whether any Greeks would have been able to read such books (Sedlar, 263-4, following Momigliano 1976:8). On the other hand, Indians resident in Alexandria (see next paragraph) could have provided translations, if there were books. In any case, no other definite information survives. The Library itself went up in flames, first at the time when (48 BC) Julius Caesar was dallying with Cleopatra, then again in 391 CE and finally in the 7th cent with the Moslem conquest of Egypt.

Now by Roman times trade with India had opened up considerably and Indians began to make their appearance in the Empire: envoys were sent to Augustus in Rome (Sedlar, p 81) and an Indian community had formed itself in Alexandria, as Dio Chrysostom attests in his Orations (434 and 538; Sedlar, 81), though the date of its beginning remains unknown.³¹ Members of this community would have been Buddhists, Jainas (both non-Hindus) and Hindus of the lower castes – though again this remains unknown. We have, therefore, the possibility of three kinds of cultural influence from India – Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu. The Vedāntic teaching would not have been promulgated by Buddhists or Jainas, but since Hindu *ksatriyas* (=warriors, government officials) and *vaiśyas* (merchants, traders) could, and some did, study the sacred Vedic lore, they could give information about religious or philosophical ideas. But despite strong prohibition for Brahmins' travelling abroad, the presence of a priest-teacher (necessarily a Brahmin) should not be ruled out – if there were, say, 20 or so Hindu families. Hindu rites (*sanskāras*) concerning conception, birth, wedding and so on, could be performed at home by a priest and did not require a temple. Would such Hindus, including Brahmins, know the tenets of Vedānta? It is possible but by no means certain.

Unlike Hinduism which never tried to proselytize or spread itself (in any of its orthodox forms) outside India, or what broadly was regarded as such at different times, Buddhism tried from its beginnings to expand in every direction. At about the middle of the third century BC Emperor

³¹ Clement (Alex) also knew of Buddhism (*Stromateis* I, 15, etc). However, Harle believes it existed in Memphis from 5th or 4th cent BC, but gives no references (1992: 357ff). It is possible also that the Hyksos who invaded Egypt in the 17th cent BC (before Dynasty 15) had Indo-Aryan elements as David indicates (1993:145).

Aśoka encouraged the spread of Buddhism and sent missionaries to various countries. In one of his edicts we read that “the Beloved of the Gods” (ie *Aśoka*) had won the victory of Righteousness (ie Buddhist religion) “even 600 leagues away in the realm of the Greek King Antiyoka, and beyond Antiyoka among the four kings Turamaya, Antikini, Maga and Alikasudara...” (Basham 1961:53-4). Thus Aśoka took it for granted that he had succeeded in winning over the five Hellenic kings Antiochus II Theos of Syria, Ptolemy II (Turamaya = [P]tu/amaya) Philadelphus of Egypt, Antigonus of Macedonia, Magas of Cyrene and Alexander of Epirus. He had not won, of course, and Greek sources know absolutely nothing of any such Indian emissaries. In modern times, Sir Flinders Petrie, it was thought, had discovered Buddhist graves in Egypt. Many writers, including academics, used this “discovery” as proven fact for their several purposes specifying Memphis or Alexandria as the location and the Buddhists as missionaries of Aśoka. One historian, the authority on Alexandria (Fraser 1972, vol I, 181-4 & vol II, 312, 391), examined the whole affair thoroughly and showed it was of the nature of a rumour and all the supposed evidence “disintegrates on inspection”. Sir Flinders Petrie had not in fact claimed to have found Buddhist graves. Buddhist missionaries there may well have been, but there is no firm evidence. Nonetheless many writers continue to adduce these Buddhist graves or missionaries as factual evidence for the presence of Buddhism in Egypt and its influence on Christianity and/or other sects; for instance Welburn (p 110) writes: “above all, Buddhist missionaries begin to appear in the West, notably in cosmopolitan Alexandria, but no doubt also at other centres”.

On the other hand, Buddhist laymen or missionaries there may have been in Egypt and, undoubtedly, there are many Buddhist-Christian affinities. J W Sedlar lists over 15 parallel incidents in the childhood and life of Christ and Buddha (Sedlar, ch XV, refers to many previous studies; Welburn: 108-122; Kersten 1995:69, 76-7; Pagels 1981:xx-xxi). If we add the similarities of the ethical teachings of the two and the numerous affinities between Buddhism and Gnosticism (Sedlar, ch XVI), the total is quite formidable. (I ignore the traditions of the sojourn to India of Thomas Didymos, who is supposed to have founded a Christian community in Malabar and was put to death later: Sedlar, ch XX; Welburn, pp 110-3). Although the doctrinal similarities are both numerous and important, there is, again, no other firm evidence of Buddhist-Christian contacts.

However, we must set aside Buddhist influences for a very different reason. Although Buddhism, and particularly its northern branch Mahāyāna, which develops just after 100 AD (Winternitz vol 2:245-6; Schuman 1973:95) and so comes too late to take into consideration, contains the idea of reincarnation and many other elements in common with Gnosticism and Christianity, it does not contain the idea of a Self (Ātman) that is identical with the Absolute (Brahman). Similarly the Indian system of philosophy *Sāṅkhya* does not contain this idea (even though, like Vedānta, it too derives from the Upanishads) and must be set aside. So we must look for evidence in different areas.

Some writers claim that Jesus went and trained in India (Kersten 1995²). Although the Gospel tradition mentions only Egypt (eg Mth 2: 13-15, 19), a sojourn to India – theoretically – need not be ruled out. However, these writers offer very little evidence, and even this is thoroughly unconvincing. (That 3 or 4 people claim they have seen a manuscript in a monastery in Ladakh between 1850 and 1930 and that one of them translated this, yet neither manuscript nor translation can be traced – all this hardly constitutes evidence.) So this avenue must be ignored – unless and until better evidence turns up.

The only other substantial evidence of Vedāntic influence from India is Apollonius of Tyana, a Neo-Pythagorean who visited India and then Egypt in the 1st century CE. His story provides a good clue, but certainly no incontestable proof. His extant biography was written by Flavius Philostratus early in the 3rd century utilizing two earlier (lost) biographies, one by Maximus of Agae and one by Moeragenes (4 vols!), and the notes of Damis, one of Apollonius’s students. During a meeting with Indians Apollonius asked whether the native sages know themselves also and one of them replied: “We know everything because we get to know ourselves first and nobody would embark on this philosophy unless he starts by knowing himself” (Conybeare, III, 18). Now this kind of philosophy

sounds pre-eminently like Vedānta, but nothing else is recorded about it. Later on ether (*aithēr*) is mentioned by name as the fifth element and the universe is said to be “a living creature that engenders all things” being itself “of both genders...mother and father”(III, 34). Both ether as an element and the androgynous primal state of the cosmos (as we saw in section III, earlier) fall within Vedānta. Then in Bk IV,7, Apollonius refers to the need for a man who is “a god sent down by Wisdom” to regulate the world and save souls from lusts (*erōtōn*) and avarice. It may be, as here some classicist would claim, that Apollonius’s words should be understood firstly in terms of the Middle-Platonic and NeoPythagorean “idea of a saviour figure” or a “divine man being ‘sent down’ to earth for the benefit of humanity”,³² but we must note three significant points: first, the Philostratus text has *theos* ‘god’ implying thereby a deity being incarnate; second, the notion of a god-saviour (eg Viṣṇu as Rāma, or Buddha) is very much older in India; third, the paragraph with Apollonius’s words opens with the statement that the “Egyptians falsely accuse the Indians of several things” yet they have borrowed Indian philosophical ideas and “even have taught them to others” – which gives us an Indian (-Egyptian) context. Therefore, this may refer to the Indian *avatāra* (=divine incarnation), probably Lord Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: (4: 7-8)³³. Hereafter there is little else of relevance except that the sage spent several years in Egypt (Alexandria and up to the Nile catarracts) discoursing with various types of truth-seekers and with Vespasian himself and Titus.

Did Apollonius acquire the essential Vedāntic teaching of Advaita and bring it to Egypt in the second half of the 1st cent CE? Did some other anonymous traveller even earlier, Greek or Indian, do so without leaving any detectable traces? We simply do not know: there is no concrete evidence. Several scholars admit the possibility but find the available evidence inconclusive (Pagels 1981:xxi; Sedlar: 301-2).

VIII) Concluding Remarks

Winternitz did not provide evidence for his statement that Upanishadic ideas reached early-Christian Alexandria simply because there is no hard evidence acceptable to scholars who invariably require tangible data like manuscripts and reports on people and books or archaeological finds like graves and temples. Such evidence is not lacking altogether: there *are* reports of Indians in Alexandria and of Apollonius. Some scholars have suggested even that Ammonius Sakkas, Plotinus’s (and possibly Origen’s) teacher, was Indian, his second name deriving from the Indian *śakya* (Sedlar pp 199-200), name of Buddha’s tribe. But, certainly, there is no manuscript with passages clearly deriving from some Upanishads (or Buddhist texts). So some scholars, ignoring all other types of evidence (strong doctrinal resemblance, presence of Indians, Greeks and others with knowledge of things Indian), use the argument of independent growth and appearance of an idea. “Since parallel traditions may emerge in different cultures at different times, these [gnostic] ideas could have developed in both places [India and Near East] independently” (Pagels 1981:xxi). It is true, of course, that an idea has sprung up independently in different cultures but it is equally true that the emergence of the idea was preceded by stages of development. This does not seem to be so in the case under discussion.

To begin with, I do accept that most of the gnostic-Christian-hermetic thought could have

³² Kingsley 1995:383 text and n 37. He cites Atticus, Iamblichus and Syrianus all of whom come 100 years and more after Apollonius. In this he follows O’Meara 1989, pp 36-9, 88 and 125-6; and “Burkert 141-6” (but not specifying which one of at least *five* publications is meant).

³³ The *Bhagavad Gītā* is within the Vedānta Canon: see above n 8. A firm date for the *Gītā* itself is not settled and the 1st or 3rd or an earlier cent BC cannot be ruled out. Apollonius’s words could apply to Buddhist Mahāyāna, which admits of Buddha’s re-incarnation as a Saviour, but this school is too late, as was said.

developed quite easily from the Egyptian, Greek and Judaic traditions. But what is new is the Upanishadic teaching of Man's identity with the Godhead/Absolute. This Advaita, Unity or Non-duality, did not "develop" or grow out of these traditions: it just appeared. So did the notion of the cosmic Archons being hostile to men's attempts at liberation, *a notion involving a reversal of the traditional view* of the ordered, good Cosmos (as we saw above, in sections II, end and III, end) – which traditional view, coloured by Christianity, remained dominant well after the Renaissance. Now, while it is possible that some sage(s) somewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean thought all this out independently, it was not present in the traditions of the area before the first century CE. In fact no known Platonist or other thinker has Man's self (soul or spirit) merge fully into the One Godhead – after transcending the forces of an hostile Cosmos. According to one scholar, even Plotinus in the third century (who comes closest to Advaita) holds that union with the One does not "result in abolition of the soul's individual existence;" in describing the two levels of Intelligence, he declares "that the unity-in-diversity of Intelligence persists eternally over and above its contemplation of the One (VI.7.35. 27-33). (...) Plotinus' interpretation of the mystical experience thus differs from that of 'monistic' mysticism, exemplified, for instance, by the non-dualist Vedānta of Hinduism" (Wallis 1972: 89). However on the same page our scholar adds his own interpretation of Plotinus's words: "this is admittedly difficult to square with his [=Plotinus's] accounts of mystical union".

Let us now use a different approach. It is doubtful whether many sanskritists or classicists know of the late A Seidenberg, a distinguished American mathematician and historian of science.³⁴ I have no training in Mathematics and can only accept his words and mathematical proofs. He argued (1962 and 1978) that there is "a single source" for the two distinct traditions in ancient Mathematics, that of the algebraic or computational and that of the geometric or constructive (1978:301). He examined the mathematical data (which I cannot judge) and concluded that this 'original source' was either 'Vedic Mathematics' as formulated in the *Śulbasūtras* or an older system very much like it – rejecting the idea of Babylonian originality or the derivation of Vedic Mathematics from Babylon c 1700 BC (1978:304, 307, 310, 318-9) or from Egypt (1962: 515). He states of this original source: –

"its mathematics was very much like what we see in the *Sulvasutras* [*śulbasūtras*]. In the first place, it was associated with ritual. Second, there was no dichotomy between number and magnitude ... In geometry it knew the Theorem of Pythagoras and how to convert a rectangle into a square. It knew the isosceles trapezoid and how to compute its area ... [and] some number theory centered on the existence of Pythagorean triplets ... [and how] to compute a square root. ...

The arithmetical tendencies here encountered [ie in the *Śulbasūtras*] were expanded and in connection with observations on the rectangle led to Babylonian mathematics. A contrary tendency, namely, a concern for exactness of thought ... together with a recognition that arithmetic methods are not exact, led to Pythagorean mathematics. (1978: 329)

Sanskrit scholars, Seidenberg writes, did not give him a date for the *Śulbasūtras* as far back as

³⁴ I myself am indebted to Dr D Frawley, Director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies, Santa Fe. See Rajaram & Frawley 1997:136-173. Kingsley and O'Meara are not aware of Seidenberg's work.

1700 BC. The earliest they would have given is 600, if that.³⁵ He felt therefore obliged to “*postulate* a pre-Old-Babylonian source for the kind of geometric rituals we see preserved in the *Sulvasutras*, or at least for the mathematics involved in these rituals” (1978:329).

Leaving aside the arguments for the date of the Śulbasutras let us, for the sake of a hypothesis, assume that the Śulbasutras are dated c 2000 and that Seidenberg’s evaluation is correct. How would anyone “prove” that the knowledge in India bifurcated into Old Babylon and Ionia? Is it not too presumptuous to expect that we would discover “hard evidence” for such a transmission?

Let us take another example – the Gundestrup Cauldron, unearthed in Denmark and assigned to the 2nd cent BC.³⁶ Nobody who has seen this cauldron (even in photos like myself) and the Mohenjodaro seal (the horned figure in cross-legged yogic posture) from the Indus Valley Civilization can doubt that the two are linked, and that, since the Mohenjodaro seal is far older (c 2500), the influence runs east-westward. According to the Art historian T Taylor “A shared pictorial and technical tradition stretched from India to Thrace, where the cauldron was made, and thence to Denmark” (1992). Here the similarities of motifs and figures are so great that they leave no doubt about affinity, priority and direction of influence. But there is no “hard evidence”, no reports, names of people and dates for the transmission – and nobody claims that “the pictorial and technical tradition” developed independently in the Indus Valley and Thrace.

Similarly, the Vedāntic idea of Unity between Godhead and Man, I submit, came from India. Although many elements in the gnostic, hermetic and related texts derive from the cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean, yet all these elements together with the idea of Unity are also found in the Upanishads (or systems largely derived from those scriptures). What is actually missing is not the evidence but the connecting link(s). The similarities in the sets of ideas are as startlingly obvious as those between the Gundestrup cauldron and the Mohenjodaro seal. Part of the problem has been the failure of scholars to evaluate adequately the difference between Man’s emanation from the Godhead (as in *Poimandres* etc and in the Upanishads) and Man’s creation at a lower level (*Genesis*, Plato, etc) and that between Man’s return to the Godhead Itself and his return to some heaven.

³⁵ According to Max Müller’s suggestion, which has become received dogma, the Sūtra literature is dated 600-300 BC: eg Burrow (1973:43). But see Seidenberg’s n 43 on p 324, requiring an earlier date.

No scholar, to my knowledge, has yet given serious thought to the question of how the large constructions of cities like Harappa, Kalibangan and Mohenjodaro (large buildings, fixed altars, straight roads, square blocks) and the enormous harbour at Dvaraka could have been built without a system of Maths like that of Śulbasūtras (and all this just as Pharaoh Djoser and his architect Imhotep were putting up the first large structures in Egypt c 2680). I would not hesitate to assign this system to the early 3rd millennium: see note 1 for a much earlier date of the *R̥gveda*. R & B Allchin give – conservatively – 2800 BC for the Early (but 2900 for Kalibangan and several other sites) and 2600 for the Mature Harappan (1997:142-3). The Dvāraka harbour is dated c 1400 BC by S Rao (1991:151).

³⁶ Myles Dillon (1975:138) discusses mythological interconnexions with the Mohenjodaro seal; see also Taylor (1992) and, in unexpected context, a paper by Prof Kak of Louisiana, (1998).

Nonetheless, as was mentioned before, we cannot disregard the possibility that some sage in the Near East early in the CE (perhaps Christ himself?) hit independently upon this idea – or experience (like Plotinus, later) – of the Unity of Being, the identity of Man’s self with the Godhead, and this became a basic theme in various sects and their literature.³⁷

³⁷ This study was done in the mid-1990’s but was published in 2003 in the *Research Bulletin* of the Vishveshvarananda Vedic Research Institute (Hoshiarpur, India). At the time I was not well acquainted with early Christianity. Since then I have examined very thoroughly the recent literature on Hellenistic Philosophy, Judaism, early Christianity, Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism. I note here some seminal studies: Koester H. 1990 *Ancient Christian Gospels* London & Philadelphia; Williams M.A. 1996 *Rethinking ‘Gnosticism’* Princeton 1996; Roukema R. 1999 *Gnosis & Faith* (transl from Dutch 1998) Pennsylvania, Trinity Press; Fredriksen P. 1999 *Jesus of Nazareth* NY, Knopf; Crossan J.D. & Reed J.L. 2001 *Excavating Jesus* San Francisco, Harper; Ehrman B. 2003 *Lost Christianities* Oxford, OUP and 2004 *The New Testament*, Oxford, OUP; Bock D.L. 2002 *Studying the Historical Jesus* Grand Rapids, Balcer Academic; R. King 2003 *What is Gnosticism* Cambridge; Daniel Boyarin 2004 *Border Lines...* Pennsylvania.

There are many more. However, nothing that I have read affects in the slightest my conclusion that the Self-Godhead identity in Gnostic Christianity probably derives from the Upanishadic Vedantic system.

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