The Dialogue of the Revealer and John
A new translation and introduction

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The Dialogue of the Revealer and John (Dial. Rev. John; CANT 27) is a fragmentary dialogue between an unnamed Revealer figure and someone named John, presumably either John the apostle or John the Elder. This dialogue is very fragmentary and incomplete and was clearly much longer than what has survived. What remains is a set of questions-and-answers on Genesis, perhaps also Hebrews, specifically with a focus on the deeper meaning or interpretation of the stories discussed. This apocryphal dialogue is also known in scholarship as Bala‘izah fragment 52 (P. Bal. 52) and “Fragments of a Dialogue between John and Jesus.”

Manuscripts and Editions
Dial. Rev. John is extant in a set of Sahidic Coptic fragments, first published by Walter E. Crum in 1943. The main fragment measures 16 cm high by 12.5 cm wide. Two Coptic page numbers are visible (41 and 42) and the text is written in square uncial in a single column. Dial. Rev. John is part of a larger archaeological find excavated in 1907 at a monastery at Deir el-Bala‘izah, approximately twelve miles south of Assayut on the west side of the Nile, under the direction of W. M. Flinders Petrie for the British School of Archaeology in Egypt.1 The find, now held at the Bodleian Library in Oxford—cataloged as Copt. d 54 (p)—was edited by Crum and, with some further editing, placed under glass by Eric O. Winstedt. A significant portion of the collection (approximately 370 of the nearly 3000 literary and nonliterary texts) was published in 1954 by Paul E. Kahle. Here the manuscript appears as number 52 in the collection, leading to its identification as P. Bal. 52. Kahle offered numerous corrections to Crum’s edition and his work remains the standard critical edition.2

Contents
What remains of Dial. Rev. John falls into four blocks of thematic material. The opening of the dialogue sets up a cosmogonic context through which to read the other three blocks of material. Each section includes a mention of “interpreting” (hermeneue) as the basis of the communication, thereby placing emphasis on the didactic exegetical function of the dialogue, alternating between the voice of the Revealer and the voice of John (2:2 Revealer: “I have interpreted for you”; 3:1 John: “also ask you to interpret”; 4:1 Revealer: “I have interpreted regarding”; 5:1 John: “. . . also interpret . . .”).

1. Crum, “Coptic Anecdota.” For an overview of the archaeological find and the monastery at Deir El-Bala‘izah, see Kahle, Bala‘izah, 1:1–21; and Goehring, “Monastery of Apollo.”
1. Protological condition and cosmogonic crisis
   a. Protological purity (pre-fallen state) of humanity (evidently Adam and Eve or the incorruptible Adamas) (1:1–2)
   b. Cosmological crisis and resolution (silence becoming rational power, heavenly paradise, ritual sealing, and myth) (2–3)
2. Questions on Cain and Abel (3)—death and apotheosis/freedom from death
3. Questions on the Noahic flood (4)—baptismal transformation
4. Questions on Melchizedek (5)—priest for all time/without generation

The first thematic block, despite being barely readable, begins with what looks like a discussion of the ideal state of Adam and Eve (Gen 1–2), evoking elements of the pre-Fall condition of the first humans in Genesis: they are naked and sinless (cf. Gen 2:25). The Revealer’s following discussion shifts from protology to cosmology or cosmogony. Specifically, the Revealer offers an exposition on silence, rational power, and the heavenly paradise, highlighting the renaming of this primordial entity (silence/rational power). The cosmic setting of Dial. Rev. John 2 (indicated by the “heavenly paradise”) may suggest that the exposition on Adam and Eve (and their sinless condition in Eden)—or even just Adam (i.e., Adamas)—is not set within the material world, but within a heavenly paradise. Thus, the Fall is not simply that of disobedient humans but is a kind of cosmic fall, perhaps into a material or lower realm (the dialogue is vague in its cosmology). It is likely, therefore, that the protological figures of Dial. Rev. John 1:1 are heavenly counterparts to the human figures of Gen 1–2 and that this opening section establishes a dualistic and cosmogonic crisis. If the dialogue fits a Sethian identification, then this “naked . . . sinless” figure (or figures) in the heavenly paradise likely is the incorruptible Adamas.

3. Given the fragmentary condition of Dial. Rev. John 1:1–2, it is impossible to determine who is speaking or even to be certain what they are saying (see notes to translation below). We could have an answer from the Revealer (i.e., a description of the original condition of humanity) or a question from John (i.e., can you interpret the pre-Fall condition of Adam and Eve?). It is also possible that this opening served as a preface prior to the exchange and functioned as the basis for the question-and-answer exchange on Genesis that follows—i.e., the dialogue begins by establishing the ideal condition from which various crises in biblical history emerged and for which the disciple needs knowledge.

4. It is likely that the author is directly quoting or using Gen 2:25.

5. It is unclear if the dialogue presents an abbreviated origin story for the emergence of the dualistic cosmos (there is a temporal distinction between the name of silence and rational power with a subsequent shift from the heavenly realm to the earthly realm ["And they also who receive . . ."]) or just maps out the cosmos. Thus, we could have a cosmogony or just a cosmology in this opening block of material.

6. The presence of the first humans (Adam and Eve) can only be inferred in Dial. Rev. John 1. It is noteworthy that Eve does not appear in the text, though Adam does (2:2) (unless we read sige as a cosmic Eve; but see Crum, “Coptic Anecdota,” 177). Although it is very likely that Dial. Rev. John 1 connects to the Genesis story of the first humans, it is not certain that the dialogue discusses both Adam and Eve. The mention of Adam at 2:2 could suggest that the dialogue only discusses Adam or a cosmic Adamic figure such as the Sethian Adamas.

7. Contra Parton ("Apocalyptic and Sethian Trajectories," 179–80), who claims that the fragment "does not contain a cosmological construction" (179). Although the cosmology is vague and undeveloped, it is certainly present.

8. Compare with, for example, Gos. Eg. IV 61, III 49,10–51,22; Zost. 6,21–27; Melch. 6,6 and 9,10–10,5; "Pigeradamas" and "[not] (the) true Adam [nor] (the) true Eve"; Norea 27,26; 28,30–29,5. On the possible affinity between the dialogue and Sethianism, see below.
The cosmology presented by the Revealer offers insights into the initial condition of silence and the subsequent transformation of silence into rational power or reason. “Silence” (sige) only becomes “rational power” (tchom nlogikon) as a mechanism to renew a state of “quietness” due to this cosmogonic crisis. It is noteworthy that the dialogue uses two different terms for “silence”: sige, used for a primordial entity (existing prior to the need to be or act as “rational power”), and karōf, for a renewed ideal condition of “quietness” (that mirrors the quietness of the heavenly paradise). This renewal is brought about by “reason” (logikon), ritual (“sealed with the five powers in quietness”), and an ontological transformation into a state of being “rational” (“will become rational”). Coming “to know everything” is the conditional basis and/or result of becoming rational. Noteworthy are the various parallels between the primeval condition of the heavenly paradise and the renewed condition of those who learn the correct interpretation of Genesis from the Revealer:

“sealed in quietness” = “sealed with the five powers in quietness”

“. . . the rational power, before it had been revealed” = “will become rational, coming to know everything”

These parallels—sealed/sealed, quietness/quietness, rational/rational, powers/powers, revealed/know everything—bridge the condition of a cosmological realm and the Christian’s journey to be renewed or corrected post-Fall. It does not seem that the Christian is identified with a heavenly set of beings (as in, for example, Valentinian angelology where the pneumatics rejoin their heavenly counterparts), or that the beings corrected/renewed are those who were in the original state of quietness; rather, it seems that the Christian can also enter into a heavenly state of quietness (and thus perhaps into the heavenly paradise). Thus, there is a mimetic parallel being established along a mirrored cosmological framework. Reason or rationality is the primary mechanism for such transformation with the aid of ritual sealing. A contrast between stillness (as primordial state) and motion (ritual action and rational communication) is centered on the pre-/post-status of “silence”/“rational power”—i.e., the shift from stillness to motion is due to crisis, with the eschatological outcome being a return to stillness or nonmotion. The use of “sealing” is noteworthy in that the pre-crisis condition is a state of being (“were sealed in quietness”), whereas in the post-crisis condition, sealing is a ritual process of entering into a state of being (“being sealed in the five powers”). The two uses of “power/s” (tchom/nchom) also bridge the two conditions, with both “powers” as venue for resolving the crisis. Such a parallel, furthermore, suggests that silence as rational power is equivalent to the

9. This function of rational power is reinforced by the instrumental “noetic symbol” (2:2); i.e., the revelation is delivered by means of mental or intellectual processes. Compare with the Three Forms 49,37–28; Nora 38,11–12; and Marsanes 10,8–9.
10. The statement could be read either as instrumental (means of becoming rational) or result or goal of becoming rational.
12. Contra Schenke, “Fragmente,” 1218–19, who seems to assume that both acts of being sealed relate to the same actor (“soul”), with the second sealing addressing the fallen state of the soul.
five powers, thereby infusing a primordial entity (silence/rational power) into the ritual process of sealing.

The second block of material focuses on the sibling conflict between Cain and Abel, leading to the murder of Abel (Gen 4). It is unclear as to the insights offered by the interpretation of this biblical story. A deeper insight that goes beyond a surface-level reading of the narrative is certainly presented, however. John's request for an interpretation centers not on the murder itself but on the "type" (tupos) that the "killing of Abel" exemplifies. In other words, the goal of the exchange is to look beyond the surface elements of the narrative and to delve into the deeper, more meaningful symbolic value of the story for addressing the cosmological crisis established in the first block of material. Two insightful elements arise in this second block. The first is John's qualification of "if you are willing" (3:1). This qualification could be translated also as "pursuant to your will." There is no indication that there is hesitation on the part of the Revealer, but that John's request to know more about these deeper mysteries stands in harmony with the will of the Revealer. Second, there is the change in spelling of Abel's name to "Abbel" (3:3). The previous two instances of this name have only a single beta. The additional beta at 3:3 could be a scribal error, especially as the name is split between two lines at this point. Alternatively, the double consonant could be intentional, either as a technique to link a divided word at the end/beginning of a line or to offer a more literary reading, to signify a transformation of Abel into Abbel when God confronts Cain about his brother's death. The text breaks off with Cain's response (taken from Gen 4:9) and we are not given the Revealer's interpretation of this biblical story. However, if there is a postmortem transformation of Abel into Abbel, then this block of material may fit the dialogue's general theme of renewal and transformation into a heavenly state of quietness. It is possible that we are seeing a narrative typology for the apotheosis of the Christian (i.e., that through the sacrament of the five seals, the participant overcomes death and attains a state of quietness).

The third block of material comprises the Revealer's response regarding Noah and the ark (Gen 6–8). Again, this block of material is very fragmentary, and our reading needs to be tentative, but the Revealer clearly is offering an interpretation of the Noahic flood as a type for addressing the cosmological crisis. Two key terms are extant in the Revealer's interpretation (4:1): "fullness" and "completion." The term "fullness" can be taken in two ways. First, as a cosmological place name, one that is common in Valentinianism and Sethianism: "the pleroma" (i.e., the spiritual realm or, when plural, heavenly realms/places). Second, the term can be read as referring to a condition of "fullness," which could be related to a person's status or condition, without special spatial connotations. The second key term, "completion," is a state that the referent is brought back into (thus evoking the resolution of the cosmological crisis of the first block of material). The referent is unclear and could be masculine or neuter. Thus, it could be either the disciple (being brought into a completed state of fullness) or the pleroma (thus, the resolution of a dualistic shattering of the spiritual realm, a realm now brought back into a state of completeness or totality). The Noahic type likely evokes baptismal or sacramental processes for bringing about such completion. Reading Gen 6–8 as baptismal in Christian exegesis goes back to at least the end of

13. A similar doubling of a letter appears at 2:2 with "Adam" (lit., "Adalam") and 3:3 (lit/mon), both of which are split between two lines.
The first century (e.g., 1 Pet 3:20–21). The third block of material, therefore, evokes the ritual connotation of the five seals (2:1), the other major indication of ritual activity in the dialogue.

The fourth block of material addresses the uniqueness of Melchizedek (Gen 14:18–24). This enigmatic biblical figure was popular within later Jewish and Christian speculation, taken as either an eschatological figure, a heavenly being, or as a typological figure for Jesus holding a permanent priesthood (Heb 7). Melchizedek in Dial. Rev. John is not identified as a heavenly figure and is certainly not the Revealer for this dialogue; whether or not Melchizedek carries any eschatological role in the dialogue cannot be determined (though it seems unlikely). This fourth block of material, however, quotes directly from Heb 7:3 for its interpretation of Gen 14, quoting the verse with the slight modification of turning it into a question by John (cf. Ps 110:4). Thus, John’s request is for a deeper interpretation of Heb 7:3/Gen 14:18–24, an interpretation that unfortunately is no longer extant in the fragments. If we consider this intertextual connection to Heb 7, then we could have a polemical tone arising in the largely didactic question-and-answer exchange—either as a polemic directed against Jewish authority and cult (as in Hebrews) or directed against other Christian groups with an established ecclesiastical structure/priesthood (cf. Gos. Jud. 38,1–41,4, esp. 40,20–23; note the polemical use of “generation” to criticize other Christians in both Gos. Jud. and Interp. Know. 1,22, a use similar to Dial. Rev. John). Like Heb 7, the dialogue presents Melchizedek as a type for “the Son of God” (Dial. Rev. John 5,1; Heb 7,3). If a polemical tone underlies the dialogue’s interpretation of Melchizedek, then perhaps this question-and-answer exchange was designed to reject alternative ecclesiastical authorities and ritual processes in preference (along an apologetic line) for the baptismal sacrament of the five seals already presented. Given the lack of the Revealer’s response, we can only speculate on the dialogue’s use of the Melchizedek type, but based on what has survived, such a reading of this block of material seems plausible.

Each of these four blocks of material are designed to intersect with the idea of revealing a hidden mystery (2:3) through interpretation of biblical passages. The “noetic symbol” (2:2) and “symbols of truth” (2:3) are directly tied to the result of “coming to know everything” (2:1) and acquiring “perfect knowledge” of a “hidden mystery” (2:3). Thus, there seems to be a sense that a deeper, more complete knowledge of

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15. Contra Pearson, “Melchizedek,” 192–93. Pearson claims: “That the Gnostic author of this dialogue regarded Melchizedek as a heavenly being can be taken as likely, given the other ‘heretical’ cases already discussed. But further speculation is baseless” (193). Horton (Melchizedek Tradition, 147–48) allows for Melchizedek to be identified as a heavenly figure, but is less confident than Pearson. Both base their readings not on what is in the fragment but on the treatment of Melchizedek in other texts that are seen as heretical or gnostic.
16. So also Crum, “Coptic Anecdota,” 178; and Kahle, Bala’izah, 476.
17. Although the dialogue does not make such a move, it is noteworthy that some ancient uses of Melchizedek portray him as “the bearer of the baptismal water” (Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 148).
18. Crum and Kahle translate sumbolon as “allegory” (sumbolon noeror “an intelligible allegory” and sumbolon nte tme “legories of truth”) (2:2–3). Although allegory could work in this context, this term risks obscuring the function of the interpretation. What the Revealer explains to John is not simply illustrative examples for the actual teaching (one sense of the term allegory or analogy, not dissimilar to parables); rather, he offers John a deeper, hidden meaning that needs to be illuminated beyond the surface level of the story (and in this sense the Revealer’s interpretation is like the alle-
The Dialogue of the Revealer and John

the Scriptures can only be attained by an exegesis that goes beyond what is normally given in the Christian reading of Genesis. This more complete exegesis is not simply didactic knowledge; instead, it is vital for correcting the cosmological crisis set out at the beginning of the dialogue (i.e., as a means of returning to a state of quietness and perfect knowledge). The biblical passages, therefore, are infused with coded insights that go beyond simple narrative and, through the Revealer's exegesis or interpretation, are elucidated to John (and thus the reader) as holding a greater symbolic and soteriological meaning. It is also possible that the dialogue was written with not only Genesis in mind, but also Hebrews. Beyond the direct quotation from Heb 7:3, the order of the passages addressed in the dialogue loosely follows what we find in Heb 11: Cain and Abel (Dia. Rev. John 3//Heb 11:4), Noah (Dia. Rev. John 4//Heb 11:7), and perhaps Melchizedek (Dia. Rev. John 5//Heb 11:8–12). The lack of a mention of Enoch (Heb 11:5–6) in the dialogue between the Cain and Abel exchange and the exchange on Noah, and the specific details and themes dealt with in the dialogue, indicate that the dialogue is only loosely following Hebrews, perhaps through secondary orality, and is clearly exegesis of Genesis.

Genre

Dia. Rev. John belongs to the genre of dialogue, where we have a Revealer figure responding to questions from a petitioner, disciple, or visionary. This text fits specifically the erotapokriseis model of question-and-answer exchanges on various exegetical and theological matters. A social context of oral communication or community praxis

gorical exegesis of Philo and Origen). Furthermore, the “symbols” act as a bridge for John (and thus the reader) to enter a state of quietness. The entire dialogue functions as a ritualized (five seals) and mythologized (exegesis of Genesis) bridge into perfect knowledge and quietness.

19. The exegetical focus on a deeper, symbolic meaning of a text set within a question-and-answer framework fits the genre of erotapokriseis-literature (as discussed below). Note Papadoyannakis’s observation (“Instruction,” 95): “But interwoven with this [apologetic dimension], is a strong didacticism that is based on the desire to probe deeper into a particular text or problem. At times the answers to the questions read like exercises in tackling difficult and not always easily solvable questions, a feature that ties them to their philosophical and philological predecessors.”

20. Although Melchizedek is not mentioned at this point in Hebrews, in Genesis Melchizedek is part of Abraham’s story (and Melchizedek is mentioned earlier in Hebrews); Horton contends that the positioning of Melchizedek after Noah in the Coptic fragment demonstrates an awareness of the rabbinc tradition equating Melchizedek with Noah’s son Shem, though such an identification with Shem seems unlikely given the dialogue’s claim that Melchizedek has no genealogy or, as Horton translates it, “Shem’s.” (Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 114–18; followed by Pearson, “Melchizedek,” 193). The identification of Melchizedek with Shem could be viable if the Revealer’s interpretation addressed a possible contradiction between Melchizedek having no generation and yet being the son of Noah, if such an exegetical problem had been posed by John. Such exegesis may suggest a polemic against Jewish interpretations of Genesis or against misunderstood Christian exegesis such as in Heb 7:3 (in which case, the quotation from Hebrews is less an affirmation of Hebrews and more a rejection or correction of Hebrews). Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, however, addressed a similar exegetical issue, claiming that Melchizedek “was a priest, but his seed was not a priest” (t. b. Ned. 32b; quoted from Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 118). Rabbi Ishmael’s reading of Genesis and Ps 110:4 qualifies the “no generation” as not holding a priestly lineage.

The Dialogue of the Revealer and John

often underlies such early Christian works, as does an apologetic or polemical rhetoric, though a more didactic function is often central, especially when constructed as a teacher-disciple exchange within a classroom or monastic setting. Such question-and-response exchanges are often found within what has been termed gnostic literature.

Pheme Perkins, largely building on the work of Martin Krause, offers a typology of what she calls the gnostic dialogue, a genre identification that fits many of the Sethian texts that she studies (notably the Secret Book of John, the Nature of the Rulers, Zostrianos, the Wisdom of Jesus Christ, and Melchizedek; though Perkins does not limit her study to Sethianism and seems to resist such bounded identifications—e.g., she looks at the Letter of Peter to Philip, the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles, and the Dialogue of the Savior). Perkins offers six basic narrative elements in such dialogues:

(1) an introductory epistle (not in all sources, but in three dialogues);
(2) time and location (post-resurrection and often a significant location, such as Jerusalem or the Mount of Olives);
(3) appearance of the Revealer (descriptions of cosmic signs, polymorphous shape of the redeemer, and luminosity);
(4) Revealer’s address (often with a rebuke and “I Am” saying[s]);
(5) list of questions (the actual exchange); and
(6) conclusion (usually some kind of commission).

Krause’s structure is simpler:

(1) setting: post-resurrection;
(2) question-and-answer dialogue;
(3) action (or response);
(4) conclusion.

Content of the dialogue genre usually is of an esoteric nature in the texts analyzed by Perkins and Krause, including exegetical or cosmological questions pertaining to the situation of the disciples (e.g., on themes of suffering in Ep. Pet. Phil.). Beyond such heavenly-earthly dialogues, erotikopriseis texts engage a wide range of topics, including theological and exegetical questions, but also philosophy, medicine, and grammar among others. Exegetical questions within Christian erotikopriseis, at least as found in the Nag Hammadi tractates, typically focus on New Testament material, but also include material from the Hebrew Bible (with Genesis as central for several texts). Polemics or apologetics underlies many corrections on exegetical interpretation and may be a clue to inter- and intra-group conflicts.


Not enough of Dial. Rev. John has survived to establish the text within either Perkins's or Krause's structural components, but clearly the text was structured as a dialogue between two interlocutors (Perkins's no. 5 and Krause's no. 2). The centrality of this question-and-answer structure for the entire text is reinforced by the scribal line break between 2:3 and 3:1 (a *paragraphus* with *coronis*). This line break is an oddity in the manuscript, especially as we have no other such line break in the extant text. The line break does not function to divide two separate writings, but two sections within the same text; therefore, it is best read as marking a minor transition. There is no extra room before or after the line break (as we would expect if a new text was being presented), the content fits together well as part of the same text, and the transitional marker "now" (*de*) at 3:1 only makes sense as a continuation of the same text. However, the line break does not simply mark a new paragraph. It neatly demarcates two separate question-and-answer exchanges. Thus, there may have been other line breaks elsewhere in the text, but which are no longer extant, serving a similar function. If this is how the scribe is using line breaks, then the structure of the dialogue almost certainly continued as a series of tightly compacted exchanges between the Revealer and John with little or no narrative framing. Alternatively, the line break may demarcate the first block of material (as a type of introductory preface) from the other blocks of material that follow (and thus we could have just a single instance of a line break).

Some *erōtāpokriseis* texts were constructed into self-contained units organized around a range of thematic blocks (e.g., Ps.-Justin, *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos*). Dial. Rev. John's tightly compacted structure seems to follow a similar pattern, with each exchange being largely self-contained in addressing a particular exegetical question on Genesis. The overarching structure, however, seems to be a chronological progression through selected narratives in Genesis (a progression that may have been inspired by Hebrews). The opening section, furthermore, seems to suggest a concern with the (protological) human condition and cosmogonic crisis (of stillness and motion, though framed with the image of silence and speech/reason). The opening section offers a general thematic focus for the question-and-answer exchanges that follow. Thus, while the individual units are self-contained, they all build on and develop from that opening presentation.

The *dramatis personae* of the question-and-answer exchanges are closely tied to an educational setting, with teacher/master and student/disciple roles commonly being assigned. In the revelatory exchanges found in various Christian dialogues, the roles

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26. I am indebted to Alin Suciu for his input on this odd scribal element. Suciu suggests that this line functions to divide the sets of exchanges (cf. Crum, "Coptic Anecdota," 176). Such line breaks may also serve to divide texts in a codex, or to indicate paragraph breaks in a manuscript. Given the fragmentary condition of the dialogue, however, the function of the line break is unclear in the fragments. Still, Suciu's suggestion (and my building on that suggestion) makes the best sense of this line break.

27. There is no such line break, however, between 4:1 and 5:1 even though there is a new exchange on Melchizedek (5:1) rather than a continuation of the exchange on Noah (4:1). This lack of a line break is understandable given the fragmentary nature of these closing lines. Most likely a similar line break would have been present in what is now missing.

28. Papadoyannakis, "Instruction," 94. On Ps.-Justin, *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos*, see Papadoyannakis, "Defining Orthodoxy." Although *Dial. Rev. John* focuses on a single text (Genesis), it engages several self-contained stories that are brought into a shared complex established by the opening section.

362
are usually those of a resurrected Jesus (or Savior, Christ, or another title used) and his disciples/apostles, often with a commissioning taking place for the disciples/apostles to continue the mission of the church. Among the Valentinian and Sethian (or similar) texts, the content of the exchange often is a secret or deeper teaching about the nature of the cosmos, redemption, and suffering (e.g., 1 Ap. Jas., Ep. Pet. Phil., Pist. Soph., and Disc. 8–9). There is often an apologetic or polemical tone underlying such didactic exchanges (perhaps even serving a paraenetic function). In apocalyptic texts where the question-and-answer exchange is used, the Revealer could be another heavenly being, such as an angelic figure or an aeon (e.g., Pronoia [Ap. John; Three Forms], Dositheos [Steles Seth], Marsanes [Marsanes], and Derdekas [Paraph. Shem]) or even a mediator of such a revelation (e.g., Adam to Seth in Apoc. Adam and Allogenes to Messos in Allogenes).

Given the prominence of Jesus in Christian dialogues, it is not surprising that previous scholarship has assumed the Revealer in the Dial. Rev. John to be Jesus. Although this identification could be correct, it should be noted that the Revealer is not named in this text. Furthermore, John's description of Melchizedek “as like the Son of God” makes better sense if the Revealer is not Jesus (if, that is, the Son of God is equated with Jesus, as in Heb 7:3). If the Revealer is Jesus, then the setting is likely (though not assuredly) a post-resurrection appearance between Jesus and one of his apostles or followers (though note that some texts, like Gos. Jud., have the revelation take place prior to the crucifixion). Alternatively, if the John of this dialogue is John the Elder rather than the apostle, then the dialogue could be building on the New Testament's Revelation and thus be a later, apocalyptic encounter between the two interlocutors. However, if we leave the Revealer as an anonymous figure, then other opportunities for identification and setting arise. Within Sethian revelations, various other figures function as heavenly revealers. Perhaps one of these figures is playing a role in Dial. Rev. John or perhaps some other, previously unknown, heavenly figure is the Revealer. If Jewish prophetic or apocalyptic traditions were in mind, then the Revealer could be an angelic figure. Another option is to see the Revealer as a human figure. Again, if we look at Jewish testamentary literature, then the Revealer could be a dying patriarch passing along special teaching, in this case on Genesis, to a son/heir or surrogate son/heir (i.e., a disciple).

Other erōtapokriseis texts are set within a classroom, whether in a philosophical school or a monastic setting. Thus, it is possible that the Revealer is an earthly teacher or master, engaging one of his or her students. This narrative setting would fit nicely a monastic milieu for the reading of such a dialogue, especially if the dialogue was composed at the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Deir el-Bala‘izah. Such didactic possibilities for identifying the Revealer open the dialogue to reader reception. Specifically, given the educational setting in the Monastery of Apa Apollo, members of the community reading this dialogue could identify with “John” (as an ideal disciple to emulate) and the Revealer/teacher as an ideal type for the actual teacher(s)/leadership within the Deir el-Bala‘izah community. Whether this dialogue, therefore, served a catechetical function for new initiates, or ongoing education and debate over exegetical matters for members of the community, or some sort of more advanced

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39. A notable exception is Schenke (“Fragmente,” 1217) who refers to the character as an anonymous revelatory figure that could be but need not be identified as Jesus.
teaching for an elite group of students remains unclear. Similarly, a philosophical school could be the setting for this dialogue and/or its reader reception, especially if we identify this dialogue with earlier Sethian communities. As John Turner has demonstrated, the third century saw a shift in Sethianism toward more platonizing and philosophical tendencies, with Sethians, for a while at least, finding an intellectual home within Neoplatonic circles.30

This erōtapokriseis model of question-and-answer exchanges goes beyond purely didactic teaching, such as we might find in a philosophical school context. Rather, the form and content of Dial. Rev. John fits the esoteric framework of an apocalypse.31 Although Melchizedek does not play a revelatory function in this dialogue (and there is no clear indication that the Revealer is an angelic figure), the anonymous Revealer does seem to be more than just a teacher engaging in didactic or catechetical exchange with a student or group of students, even though a pedagogical role is certainly present. Rather, there are indications—content, goal, and audience—that what is revealed is of a special, esoteric nature. The content of the exegesis is a “hidden mystery” that is revealed through a “noetic symbol” and “symbols of truth” (2:2–3). Thus, the very act of “interpreting” is more than just exegesis, it is revelation leading to “perfect knowledge” (of which John has “made a good beginning,” 2:3) that brings the hearer toward the state of “quietness” and being “rational,” having come to “know everything” (2:1).32 Not only do the content and the goal of the exegesis suggest that the dialogue is a revelation, but the audience also reinforces such a genre identification. To select a key apostolic or biblical figure to play the role of student sets the dialogue apart from a simple classroom exchange between a master and disciple. John in particular is noteworthy, given the prominence of this figure (the apostle or elder)33 in other Christian revelations, notably the New Testament’s Revelation but also the Apocryphon of John, the various apocryphal apocalypses of John included in this volume, and the recently translated Revelation of John about Antichrist.34 The direct narrative voice at 3:1 (“When I heard these things, I, John, said”) adds a slight narrative framework for the

30. Turner, Sethian Gnosticism; see also idem, “Gnostic Seth.” An invaluable overview of the methodological problems and possibilities in the study of Sethianism is offered by Williams, “Sethianism.”

31. See also Puech and Blatz, “Fragments,” 388; Erbetta, Gli Apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento, 1:1212.

32. Crum (“Coptic Anecdota,” 178) compares 2:3 to Rom 15:14 and 1 Cor 13:2. When we consider the different contexts of the Pauline letters and that of the dialogue, such a parallel (especially if such interpretuality is read as an oral or literary dependency on Romans and 1 Corinthians) is not convincing. Of the two Pauline passages, however, 1 Cor 13:2 has the greater affinity to Dial. Rev. John. An intertextual relationship with 1 Corinthians could explain John’s comment about being “persuaded by your love” (thus, fulfilling the condition in 1 Cor 13:2 for knowledge and mystery—though prophecy and faith are not in the dialogue—to be authentic; i.e., to be grounded in love, though for the dialogue that love is connected to the Revealer rather than, as with Paul, the Christian community). This reading of “love” in the dialogue counters Crum’s suggestion that agape is the same as “will” (cf. 3:1).

33. It is unlikely that the character is John the Baptist, as there are no other motifs in the dialogue that are typically related to him. However, if the character is John the Baptist, then this would give us a unique look at his preparation as the Baptist, linking John to the baptismal sacrament of the five seals (cf. Pist. Soph. 17). Another possible identification is John Mark, the companion of Paul and Barnabas, who is named “John” and then renamed “Mark” in the Acts of Barnabas (see 31:1–3; 10:2; translated by Glenn E. Snyder in MNTA 1:317–36). More likely, however, is the identification of either the apostle John or John the Elder.

dialogue that is reminiscent of an apocalypse,\textsuperscript{35} where John is portrayed as recounting the question-and-answer exchange. Thus, we are not reading a dialogue, but the retelling of a dialogue. Similar narrative framing occurs in other revelatory and discourse narratives (e.g., Disc. Sav. 1; Ap. Jas. 1,1–32; Nat. Rulers 86,20–27; Parap. Shem 1,1–16; and the Coptic Apoc. Pet. 70,14–20).


dial. Rev. John merges the er\textit{\iota\tau\alpha\pi\kappa\rho\iota\kappa\iota\epsilon\iota}s genre with the genre of the Christian apocalypse. It is unclear, however, if the dialogue's apocalyptic element follows a spatial or temporal apocalyptic axis (or some mixture of the two axis types),\textsuperscript{36} though it does seem to lean toward a temporal axis given the chronological progression through Genesis and the lack of a tour of the heavens (however, see Dial. Rev. John 1–2, which may function as a descriptor of the heavenly realm, though within a cosmogonic progression from silence to rational power or crisis).

Theological Affinities

Dial. Rev. John has been called a "gnostic fragment" (notably by Crum, followed by Kahle) and thus treated as a gnostic text, though a minority of scholarly voices have challenged such a connection to Gnosticism.\textsuperscript{37} A possible Valentinian identification has been suggested based on the reference to Silence (\textit{\sigma\gamma\iota\nu\zeta\eta}), a prominent aeon in Valentinian cosmology, and perhaps the term \textit{pleroma}, if taken as a technical term.\textsuperscript{38} These suggestions, however, are problematic. Gnosticism is far too vague and contested a category to be useful analytically and thus calling this text, or any text for that matter, a "gnostic fragment" is at best meaningless (beyond evoking the dichotomies of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, a dichotomy that is also a suspect historical model) and misleading at worst (i.e., it evokes caricatures of "Gnosticism" while ignoring that the category is a modern invention conveying modern prejudices rather than accurately describing ancient phenomena).\textsuperscript{39} A more refined identification is needed.

\textsuperscript{35} So also Puech and Blatz, "Fragments," 388.


\textsuperscript{37} Schenke, "Fragmente," 1218 (contra Puech and Blatz, "Fragments," 388). Schenke argues that the two key parallels with Gnosticism (the five trees and the sealing of the five powers) need not lead to a gnostic identification. The five trees of paradise also appear in Gos. Thom. 19 (assuming a non-gnostic reading of the \textit{Gospel of Thomas}) and, according to Schenke, the Sethian five seals are "a mystery" and thus different from the sealing in Dial. Rev. John (but see 23). Rather than connecting the dialogue with Gnosticism, Schenke prefers to identify it with an esoteric Johannine tradition that includes such gnostic texts as the \textit{Apocryphon of John}. Lundhaug and Jenott, \textit{Monastic Origins}, 162–63, also are cautious in making a gnostic identification, claiming that key terms (\textit{\sigma\gamma\iota\nu\zeta\eta}, \textit{pleroma}, \textit{gnosis}, and \textit{mysterion}) are common Christian terms.

\textsuperscript{38} See Crum, "Coptic Anecdota," 177, who first suggested this Valentinian connection. Crum claims that the entity being renamed is not Eve but is the Valentinian aeon: "Silence,' as a primordial aeon or emanation, is conspicuous in the Valentinian cosmogony. Despite this connection to Valentinianism, Crum, while discussing other gnostic elements in the dialogue, claims that "[n]either these features, nor the biblical personages involved, suffice to identify more precisely the group of Gnostics whence the text emanated" (177). Similarly, Horton (\textit{Melchizedek Tradition}, 151) cautions that "we do not know the kind of speculation about Melchizedek was involved in Fragment 52." Pearson ("Melchizedek," 194) simply identifies the fragment as emerging from Christian gnostic circles in Egypt. Schenke ("Fragmente," 1218) connects the fragment to an esoteric Johannine tradition, thereby suggesting a possible Asia Minor milieu.

\textsuperscript{39} See Michael A. Williams, \textit{Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious
The Dialogue of the Revealer and John

The Valentinian connection is possible but not assured for two reasons. First, there is nothing in *Dial. Rev. John* that clearly evokes Valentinianism beyond sige. The use of *pleroma* ("fullness") at 4:1 could be interpreted as indicating the Valentinian spiritual realm of the aeons, but the text is far too fragmentary at this point to clearly see a distinct cosmology being applied to Noah and the ark; therefore, to read *pleroma* as a technical term for a spatial realm is methodologically suspect without collaborating evidence. Second, the mention of "silence," while prominent in Valentinianism, is not unique to Valentinianism. Silence also plays an important role in Sethianism. Furthermore, there are several other elements supporting a Sethian over a Valentinian reading.

Sethianism is suggested by the mention of the five seals (2:1; "sealed with the five powers") along with the "five trees" (2:2). The five seals appear in the Providence Monologue of *Ap. John* (II 31,22–25), *Three Forms* 48,30–35 and 49,25–50,12, *Gos. Eg.* IV 56,23–59,29, and the *Untitled Text* in the Bruce Codex 32 (cf. *Second Book of Jeu* 45). The five seals have long been understood as part of a baptismal sacrament, though debate continues over the exact fit of the seals into Sethian baptism (i.e., as a single, final rite? steps within a series of rites? an initiation rite or death rite? or are the five seals pointing to five cosmic entities rather than just ritual actions, etc.? and the relationship of Sethian sealing with Jewish and Christian ritual practices (does the sacrament derive from Jewish sectarian groups or Christian practices, especially practices of anointing/chrism?). It is unclear, for example, if the five seals refer to ritual processes or personified powers in *Gos. Eg.*; interpretation seems to lean toward the latter, though the two options need not be exclusive. Given the sacramental sense found in other Sethian texts (especially *Ap. John*), the five seals likely would have evoked a sacramental tone, merging mythos, cosmos, and ritual into a rich cosmological and soteriological tapestry. The Sethian texts, however, closely associate the sacrament with cosmological ascent, often merging ritual action and mythical descriptions. A transformation of the participant is central in these various descriptions of the five seals. Like these Sethian texts, *Dial. Rev. John* intersects ritual action, mythological (cosmological and biblical) narrative, and transformation—specifically, by presenting biblical stories as typologies for the transformation or renewal of the participant, while centering this baptismal process within a cosmological crisis and an ideal state of "quietness." The description of this sacramental process as five seals associates this dialogue with Sethian ritual. The "five trees" of paradise (2:2) are directly tied back

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40. For a helpful discussion on the range of interpretations of the five seals, see Logan, "Mystery of the Five Seals."

41. Note the five powers who accomplish the sealing in *Zost.* 6,15–17. Here five heavenly powers serve the function of the five seals and, therefore, personified powers and sacramental processes are not distinguished.

42. The most significant discussions of Sethian ritual are Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal sithien*, passim; and Turner, "Ritual in Gnosticism."

to the five seals, mirroring ritual and myth. The content of the interpretation is summarized with a mythical reference for describing the teaching on the sacramental process of entering a state of quietness. This mythical reference brings the discussion back to the heavenly paradise and the pure, pre-Fall state of humanity (perhaps referring to the incorruptible Adamas). Like other Sethian texts that conflate ritual with myth (and the cosmos), the dialogue equates the heavenly paradise (including Adam and the five trees) with the sacrament of the five seals.

The dialogue's presentation of "silence" and "rational power" also parallels other Sethian texts. In Gos. Eg. "silence" is a primordial power and location that is the source from which other powers come forth (IV 56.4–6, 58.23–27, 60.1–12). Silence is the "place where the man rests" (IV 60.27; cf. 56.5) and the object of praise (IV 59.4–12).

From silence emerges "the son of the ineffable silence" (IV 60.8–9; cf. 60.12 "The [son] of the silence and [silence] appeared"), who "appeared in the revealed" (IV 60.18). Along with other powers, notably Providence (IV 58.23; cf. Ap. John II 30.12–31.27) and Christ "the [incorruptible] child" (IV 59.17–18), the (living) Word emerges from silence. This cosmic series of manifestations weaves together motifs of silence (ineffable silence [IV 60.9], a place of rest [IV 56.5–6, 60.27], or personified Silence) and speech (be that giving praise in one accord [perhaps a musical motif exemplifying harmony or unity], revealing, or the personified Word). In all cases, silence precedes and is the source for such speech-motifs. In addition, woven into this cosmological discussion of silence, the Gos. Eg. mentions the five seals, mysteries (including "hidden mysteries"; IV 57.15; cf. 56.16–17 "[. . . invisible] mysteries" and 58.7–8 "mystery of mysteries" [which is directly related to the five seals]), and descriptions of these cosmic powers or places as "pleromas" (IV 59.15). A similar cosmological portrayal of "silence" appears in Marsanes (10.4–9), where negative theology is used to present "the Silent One" as an unknowable primordial entity and the one to come to know through silence. Norea also intersects speech with what cannot be expressed: "voice of truth, upright nous, untouchable logos, and [ineffable] voice, [incomprehensible] Father! It is Norea who [cries out] to them. They [heard] (and) they received her into her place..."
forever” (27,16–24; cf. “the [living] logos” and “[speak] with the mind of the Father” 28,9–12 as well as "And [she began] to speak with words of [life]” 28,12–14).

Dia1. Rev. John similarly begins with a primordial silence that, as a secondary cosmic manifestation, becomes speech ("rational power") whose primary task is to be revealed (2:2). Also, as we find in other Sethian texts, the state of quietness that typifies the cosmos is a place that others (human ritual participants) can enter through sealing. Whereas Gos. Eg. calls such places "pleromas," the opening of the dialogue describes it as the "heavenly paradise ... in quietness" (2:2). Indeed, sealing in the dialogue serves two functions: for the pre-renaming of silence, cosmic entities are in a state of quietness called being sealed; for the post-renaming of silence, sealing is the ritual process of sharing that primordial state of quietness. The Second Book of Jeu 45 also describes this ideal state as a "place" that is "silence and quietness" and a place of "rest"—with sealing the means for "receiving this mystery" and thus the "forgiveness of sins." The Providence Monologue ends with the outcome of being "sealed ... in the light of the water with five seals" (Ap. John II 31,23–24) as overcoming the power of death and going "up to the perfect aeon" (II 31,25–27; cf. "who raised you up to the honored place," 31,13–14). Three Forms inverts the discourse of death by claiming that "[ignorance] will die" when the person "who possesses the five seals ... has stripped off <the> garments of ignorance and put on a shining light" (49,25–35). As with other Sethian texts, the ritual participant enters a place or abode ("abide in them and they also abide in me," 50,11–12). This transformation and relocation are described as an ingathering of what has been scattered, thereby evoking a restorational motif of diversity back to unity (50,5–12). Again, the mechanism for accomplishing such a transformation is the sacrament of the five seals—and such sealing is related directly to speech and silence or ineffability (with a bit of irony in that the five seals are ineffable): "And I proclaimed to them the ineffable five seals in order that ..." (50,9–10).47 It is not surprising, therefore, that this liturgical section of Three Forms ends with a mention of "an incomprehensible silence" and an "Amen" (50,19–20). Thus, there is a place of rest and safety brought about by the revelatory descents of Pronoia and the attendant ritual processes in these texts. Those who enter such a place in the Second Book of Jeu are called the "sons of the pleroma." These textual parallels on silence, speech, sealing, pleroma, and place illuminate Dial. Rev. John not only on the cosmology of the dialogue, but also its soteriology. The overcoming of death in the Providence Monologue may be reflected also in the possible apotheosis of Abel (3:3). The baptismal sacrament (typologically narrated by Noah and the ark) brings about a condition of “completion” that brings the ritual participant into “fullness” (pleroma). “Pleroma” in the dialogue, furthermore, may be equivalent to the pleromas presented in Gos. Eg. with those who are transformed through the five seals becoming "sons of the pleroma" (Second Book of Jeu).

If the dialogue belongs to Sethianism, then it may be helpful to situate it within Sethian history. John D. Turner has discerned six phases in the emergence and development of Sethianism from the early second century up to and beyond the third century. The first phase saw the emergence of two distinct groups (reflected in Irenaues, Haer. 1.29–30)—Barbeloites and Sethites/Ophites—with an emphasis on baptismal and priestly traditions (including the five seals) and developing a sacred history

47. See Sevrin, Le dossier baptismal sétien, 72–75.
as a “seed of Seth.” The second phase has the Barbeloites identifying with Christian baptismal practices, resulting in an overall Christianization of the Sethian tradition. The third phase witnesses an amalgamation of these two groups to form Sethianism by the end of the second century. The fourth phase of the late second to the early third century sees a conflict with other Christian groups and a gradual move away from Christianity. In the fifth phase, Sethianism is attracted towards and transformed by third-century Neoplatonists. Conflict and estrangement with Platonic philosophical schools, in the sixth phase, result in the dwindling of Sethianism into diverse fragments in the fourth century that eventually die out. The transition from the second to third century with a move from Christianity to Neoplatonism, according to Turner’s analysis of the literary tendencies in the Sethian sources, also witnesses a shift from a descent tendency (revelations of a heavenly figure during three periods in biblical history offering the visionary access to redemption) to an ascent tendency (special training often from a revealer figure for ritual ascent of the visionary into the heavenly realm). Dial. Rev. John is difficult to locate within this historical sketch, largely due to the fragmentary nature of the dialogue. However, there are indications that the dialogue incorporates both descent and ascent motifs. The Revealer’s exegesis of Genesis (and possibly of Hebrews) walks John through several key moments in biblical history in chronological order. However, this historical framework does not seem to have (three) distinct descents of a revealer. Furthermore, the dialogue offers John “perfect knowledge through a hidden mystery and symbols of the truth” that allows him to share in the mirrored reality of the heavenly realm of quietness. Such a presentation could reflect an ascendent type of revelation, especially with the emphasis on ritual processes (though ritual is central for both of Turner’s types). The close affinity that the dialogue has with Three Forms and perhaps Gos. Eg. push us toward a third or fourth phase. A polemical and apologetic function, furthermore, could narrow the descent motifs to the fourth phase. Thus, it is possible that the dialogue emerged during a period of transition from the fourth to the fifth phases in the history of Sethianism. Such an identification could suggest an early-third-century date for this dialogue, or at the least an affinity with texts from this period (if the dialogue is a later production, perhaps from phase six).

Although the dialogue can be read through a Sethian lens, it is important to recognize that Sethianism is a modern typological construct that brings together a series of literary works that exemplify a set of shared characteristics. Of these characteristics, to follow Turner’s revision of Hans-Martin Schenke’s criteria, we only have in the dialogue the explicit reference to the five seals. Unfortunately, other characteristics are absent from what has survived, and we cannot assume that other characteristics were present in what is now missing.48 However, given the cosmological parallels with

48. Turner, Sethian Gnosticism, 63–64; Hans-Martin Schenke, "Das saphianische System"; idem, “Phenomenon and Significance of Sethian Gnosticism.” Turner lists the thirteen features that typify the Sethian system and adds a fourteenth (the ritual of the five seals). The features include: (1) Gnostics are the pneumatic seed of Seth; (2) Seth is the heavenly-earthly savior; (3) A heavenly trinity (Father [Invisible Spirit], Mother [Barbelo], Son [Autogenes]); (4) Mother divided into triad (Kalyptos, Protophanes, Autogenes); (5) the Four Luminaries (Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai, and Eleleth) constitute the abode of the heavenly Adam, Seth, and the seed of Seth; (6) the demiurge Yaldabaoth; (7) three ages of history with a savior appearance in each; (8) a special prayer; (9) negative theology; (10) specific philosophical terminology; (11) secondary Christianization; (12) the ministers of the Four
other Sethian texts, there does seem to be a set of shared characteristics between the dialogue and other Sethian texts. These characteristics include the five seals (understood sacramentally and mythically), the connection between silence and reason, and possibly a mention of the incorruptible Adamas at the beginning of the dialogue.

How do we account for these shared characteristics? One option is to identify the text as a Sethian text, thereby extending the Sethian corpus to include Dial. Rev. John. Another option is to recognize the fluidity of concepts that were prevalent within late antiquity. Frederik Wisse argues that instead of identifying a unified Sethian system and sect, the unity and diversity of the Sethian texts were "the inspired creations of individuals who did not feel bound by the opinions of a religious community," who drew upon "'free-floating' theologumena and mythologumena which one could use as one saw fit."49 Wisse's alternative approach allows for a more creative sharing of theological, sacramental, and philosophical motifs between ancient authors than the more rigid social boundaries of sect identification. Even with such fluidity, however, shared characteristics and literary dependency between the Sethian texts may still indicate a movement that could be labeled Sethianism, though as a less centralized, more eclectic movement than typically understood by scholars. Such fluidity, furthermore, elucidates affinities between texts without necessarily classifying them into a specific sect. Dial. Rev. John does not neatly fit Schenke's list of criteria, though as Wisse observes most of the Sethian texts lack many or even most of these characteristics, but the dialogue does have enough in common with Sethianism that some sort of connection should be drawn. Thus, it is possible that the dialogue shares an affinity rather than identification with other Sethian texts. Such an affinity, however, need not negate the historicity of Sethianism. Rather, the dialogue could indicate the influence of Sethian ideas upon other, non- or semi-Sethian texts. Unfortunately, without further textual support it is impossible to establish definitively if the dialogue is Sethian or shares conceptual traits with Sethianism.

Beyond cosmic and sacramental dimensions, Dial. Rev. John also reflects ancient moral philosophy, specifically the ladder of moral progression that was prevalent in philosophical schools. In response to the initial interpretation, John exclaims, "I have made a good beginning. I have attained perfect knowledge" (2:3). Ancient philosophers viewed the perfect human as a person who has progressed to the level of being free from emotion, coming to know intuitively what they should do.50 Such a perfected one is free from pain, emotion (especially anger), and the constraints of the body (pain and pleasure). Philosophical schools differed on the possibility of instruction leading to such freedom, with two major views emerging: Stoic apaetheia (complete freedom from emotion) and Aristotelian metriopatheia (allowing moderate expressions of emotion).51 Theories of moral progress recognized the stages that a person could rise to or descend from, with achieving perfection (and thus complete

50. A helpful discussion of moral progression in ancient philosophical schools and early Christianity (focusing on Gnosticism) is offered by Dunderberg, Gnostic Morality Revisited. Much of what follows is drawn from Dunderberg's excellent overview.
51. Dunderberg, Gnostic Morality Revisited, 41–43.
freedom from emotion) as a rarity. Seneca recognized three levels: those close to perfection, those who may still slip back into vice, and those not yet free from all vice (Ep. 75). Ismo Dunderberg has rightly recognized that Seneca implies that there are also those on the extreme poles of having achieved perfection and those still enmeshed in vice.\(^{52}\) Philo similarly has three levels: the perfect, the progressing, and those who delight in vice (Leg. 3.159). Reason provides the means to remove passion and to free the soul from vice (Leg. 3.124). Such moral progression is prevalent in early Christian moral discourse, especially paraenetic discourse. Dunderberg explores these views of the perfect human in Sethianism, with a focus on Ap. John.\(^{53}\) He recognizes that moral progression in Sethianism is closely tied to body theology and primeval myths of cosmology and anthropogony. As with Dial. Rev. John, Adam's nakedness in paradise in Ap. John is, as Dunderberg translates it, “naked as regards evil” (Ap. John II 20,7; cp. Dial. Rev. John 1:1 “naked ... sinless ... ”).\(^{54}\) Furthermore, the emotions that plague humanity, and that are woven into the soul-body condition of humanity, are literally demonized (Ap. John II 18,14–31). Just as the philosophers posited three to five levels of progression, Ap. John posits five fates of humankind that constitute steps on the ladder of moral progression. As Turner demonstrates, in Three Forms, salvation is also accomplished through a succession of revealed silence and audition.\(^{55}\) The end goal in Sethian theories of progression is to reunite with the spiritual realm. Such moral progression is reflected in Dial. Rev. John with John's exclamation that he “has made a good beginning” and thus “attained perfect knowledge,” an exclamation that suggests that he has moved up the ladder (or has begun to make progress toward perfection). It is possible that the subsequent question-and-answer exchanges were further steps through which John progresses. As with other philosophical articulations of moral progression, reason provides the means of attaining a perfect state (“rational power,” 2:1). Although the label “perfect human” is not used in the dialogue (nor are there clearly delineated stages as in Seneca and Philo),\(^{56}\) the return to a primordial state of “quietness”—hence nonmotion or stillness\(^{57}\)—and thus the Adamic state of being “naked” and “sinless” certainly evokes Sethian views of perfection. Such a return to the primordial condition, as with Philo and Ap. John, centers on an exegesis of Genesis and the bodily condition of Adam.

Finally, we can ask what function this dialogue may have served. It is possible that it was designed for teaching those in or being initiated into the monastery or, if the dialogue originated in philosophical circles prior to circulating to the monastery, within a philosophical school context (e.g., a Sethian group). Such a didactic function is not atypical for such question-and-answer exchanges. More sacramental functions, however, may be reflected in the fragment. There is a clear ritual element in the dialogue,

\(^{52}\) Dunderberg, Gnostic Morality Revisited, 44–45.

\(^{53}\) Dunderberg, Gnostic Morality Revisited, 50–53. Of course, these theories of moral progression are not limited to Sethianism.


\(^{55}\) Turner, Sethian Gnosticism, 153.

\(^{56}\) The notion of the perfect human, however, may be articulated in "perfect knowledge" (Dial. Rev. John 2:3). Cf. with the 1 Apoc. Jas. 15,12 (Codex Tchacos).

The Dialogue of the Revealer and John

an element set in tandem with myth. Perhaps the dialogue was a script for some sacramental performance (be that an initiation, death rite, etc.) or a guide for moral progression (a type of paraenesis)—and perhaps this dialogue, to adopt Wisse’s view of Sethian texts more broadly, was designed for private meditation either for individual or group use. The dialogue also could have served apologetic and polemical purposes. The use of Melchizedek may suggest just such a rhetorical function, especially if Sethian Christians were striving to legitimize their ritual processes in contrast with other, ecclesiastical Christian sacraments. Of course, the dialogue could have been designed or used to meet any combination of these functions.

Language, Date, and Provenance

Dial. Rev. John was either written in or copied into Sahidic Coptic, most likely at the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Deir el-Bala‘izah. Although there are Greek loanwords used, there is nothing in the fragments to suggest a translation from Greek and, therefore, barring further textual finds linked to this dialogue, it is most plausible to consider this text as originating in Egypt, written in Coptic, perhaps even composed at Deir el-Bala‘izah (or copied, as the dialogue could have circulated to the monastery from elsewhere in Egypt, especially if a Sethian connection is accepted). Although the dialogue deals with Genesis and does not seem to engage Christian theologies or narrative events, the text is certainly a Christian rather than a Jewish apocryphal production. Beyond the monastic provenance, the direct quotation from Heb 7:3 (and other possible structural components mimicking Hebrews) reinforces the Christian nature of this dialogue, an identification reinforced by using John as the recipient of the revelation/interpretation as well as the mention of “the Son of God” as a likely Christological reference.

The date of Dial. Rev. John can be narrowed by the dates of the settlement at Deir el-Bala‘izah. Largely based on the nonliterary fragments, Kahle has suggested that the settlement was likely established in the late seventh century and seems to have been abandoned by 750 CE. The literary fragments may date as early as the fourth or fifth century up to the seventh century with very few into the eighth century. This range

60. Contra Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 135, and Schenke, “Fragmente,” 1218, who argue for a Greek original that may date back to the early second century. Puech and Blatz (“Fragmentes,” 388) also argue for an earlier Greek text, but do not date the text earlier than the fourth century, claiming that the Greek original cannot be dated with confidence. Horton and Schenke are followed by Parton (Apocalyptic and Sethian Trajectories, 179), though she dates the dialogue to just after the end of the second century due to possible connections with Ap. John. Schenke sets the terminus post quem of the Coptic text to the fourth century, assumes an underlying Greek text, and dates the Greek text as far as the second century due to parallels with Ap. John. The arguments set forth by Horton, Schenke, and Parton rely on the presence of several Greek loanwords when Coptic equivalents could have been used (Horton is the most meticulous of the three scholars in this regard). This method for identifying such a Greek original was a common approach in the 1970s—i.e., if Greek loanwords are used, then the Coptic text must be a translation from a Greek version. Coptologists have argued that the presence of Greek loanwords in Coptic texts need not indicate a translation from Greek. Often Greek loanwords were used in Coptic texts, especially when the text is liturgical and/or engaging Christian traditions.
61. So also Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 135. The Christian elements in the dialogue are not due to secondary Christianization.
of dates only applies to the extant fragments. Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott favor composition on the later end of the spectrum, despite paleographic indications of an earlier date.\textsuperscript{63} Kahle dates the fragments to the fourth century due to the square uncials,\textsuperscript{64} and Crum suggests a fifth- or fourth-century date.\textsuperscript{65} Of course, the literary texts could have circulated to the monastery long after they were composed and, thus, the dialogue could be dated earlier than the fourth century.\textsuperscript{66} A Sethian connection could push the text back to the third century, if it were to be located at the transition between descent and ascent literary typologies. Schenke has suggested that the dialogue may have originated in Asia Minor in the second century, given a possible connection to an esoteric Johannine tradition.\textsuperscript{67} Such an early date, however, remains highly speculative and perhaps we can speak more confidently of a date closer to the seventh century. Given the language of the fragments, it is improbable that the dialogue was composed outside of Egypt.

\section*{Translation}

The following translation is based on photographs of the fragments in consultation with the Coptic editions prepared by Crum and Kahle, especially taking into consideration several corrections and additions offered by Kahle. Kahle's English translation reproduces and modifies the translation offered by Crum.\textsuperscript{68} Lundhaug and Jenott's translation, like the translation of \textit{Dial. Rev. John} 5:1 offered by Birger Pearson, is a fresh one that translates the dialogue into readable English, but unfortunately these translations are tucked away in a footnote or subsection of a specialized monograph focused on other, more central concerns.\textsuperscript{69} These recent translations, furthermore, do not offer close analyses of the dialogue justifying translation choices. The translation offered below is a fresh translation that strives to present the dialogue in readable English, yet also to elucidate key thematic and theological elements of the text. A chapter/verse system has been offered in place of the line reference system used by Crum and Kahle and the fragment numbers by Schenke with the hope that further textual evidence for the dialogue will be discovered by future scholarship. In addi-

\begin{itemize}
  \item 63. Lundhaug and Jenott, \textit{Monastic Origins}, 162–63, though they do not indicate why a later date is more likely.
  \item 64. Kahle, \textit{Bala'izah}, 473.
  \item 65. Crum, "Coptic Anecdota," 176.
  \item 66. The earliest dating I have found in scholarship is Horton's claim (\textit{Melchizedek Tradition}, 135) that a Greek original version of the dialogue could go back to the early second century, making \textit{Dial. Rev. John} the earliest gnostic text extant. This dating is based on the flawed assumption that the dialogue is a translation from Greek to Coptic (and, furthermore, that a Greek version would be centuries earlier). Parallels with \textit{Ap. John} have been used to reinforce such an early date (so also Schenke and Parton), though such parallels do not indicate the dialogue as part of a version of \textit{Ap. John} but merely overlapping motifs with \textit{Ap. John} (see especially Schenke, "Fragmente," 1217–18).
  \item 67. Schenke, "Fragmente," 1218.
  \item 68. Horton's translation (\textit{Melchizedek Tradition}, 132–34) also reproduces Kahle's translation with various adjustments to bring out Horton's own interpretation of the dialogue. Horton also offers further textual reconstructions through the translation, though I have found these textual suggestions less convincing than Kahle's corrections to Crum's edition of the Coptic text. Similarly, Waldstein and Wisse (\textit{Apocryphon of John}, 195) simply reproduce the Crum-Kahle translation, noting that the fragment has parallels with \textit{Ap. John} (specifically, that they both exegete Genesis and both mention the five seals).
  \item 69. Lundhaug and Jenott, \textit{Monastic Origins}, 162 n. 80; Pearson, "Melchizedek," 192.
\end{itemize}
tion, I have inserted in uppercase the names of each interlocutor (these names do not appear in the fragments) for the reader's benefit. The line break in the fragments is not reproduced here, as it is in Crum and Kahle's Coptic editions (though not in the translations), but its location is noted.

**Bibliography**

**EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS**

Crum, Walter E. "Coptic Anecdota." JTS 44 (1943): 176–82. *(Editio princeps with English translation.)*


**STUDIES**


The Dialogue of the Revealer and John

Gen 1–2; Ap. John II 20, 7; Gen 2:35

Three Forms 49.27–28; Noree 28.11–12; Marsanes 10.8–9; Gos. Thom. 19; Pist. Soph. 1:1–10

Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 13:2

1a... the body(b)... naked... without sin(e)... d... say(f)... 

2 REVEALER: "... the rational power, before it had been revealed, its name was not this but rather its name was silence; since those who were in the heavenly paradise were sealed in quietness. And they who also receive such will become rational, coming to know everything, being sealed with the five powers in quietness. I have interpreted for you, O John, regarding Adam and paradise and the five trees through a noetic symbol."

3 JOHN: When I heard these things, I, John, said, "I have made a good beginning. I have attained perfect knowledge through a hidden mystery and symbols of the truth, having been persuaded by your love."

a. Kahle tentatively marks this side of the fragment the recto, with the verso being untranslatable. It is unclear what side of the page these fragmentary words were on or where specifically this fragment fits within the rest of Dial. Rev. John. As Crum observes (and I agree with him), the context seems to be the story of Adam and Eve prior to the Fall. Thus, it seems likely that the fragment would precede 21–2 and I have therefore marked this as 21–2.

b. Both Crum and Kahle offer the reconstruction pco[ma] ("the body"), which is certainly possible, but remains uncertain.

c. Kahle offers this reconstruction by adding the last two letters for "without sin" (aton[be]). The reconstruction is possible, though given the state of this fragment, uncertain, especially as the omicron is only partially visible.

d. There are seven other word fragments extant that cannot be translated. Of the six lines extant, only a single word is visible on lines 2, 3, and 5. All the letters are flush to the margin and seem to be at the top of a page. Line 6 has some ink present, but nothing further can be discerned.

e. The verso of this fragment has five extant lines flush to the left margin, with untranslatable letters on each line. Kahle lists these as lines 8 to 12. Neither Crum nor Kahle offer any translation of these lines, though Kahle (Balai'izah, 477) notes that line 10 could be the beginning of a sentence on Melchizedek that parallels the opening sentence of 51 (Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 132, accepts this reading and translates: "...[you] hand... that...[you] explain [concerning Melchize]dek..."). This suggestion does not seem likely and Crum’s argument that this opening section of the dialogue refers to Adam and Eve is far more plausible. However, line 10 has the two letters je, which, following Crum and Kahle, are fragments of a larger word (and thus untranslatable or translatable as parallel to 51) or, a suggestion not raised previously, the Coptic indicator marking speech. My suggestion of a speech marker is possible, but highly speculative.

f. Translating logikon as "rational" makes better sense than "spiritual" (as in Crum, Kahle, Puech and Blatz, and Schenke), given the philosophical and soteriological sense of the dialogue (cp. with Interp. Know. 11:36; Rom 12:1; and 1 Pet 2:2). Horton as well as Lundhaug and Jenott also translate logikon as "rational."

3 1JOHN: "Now I wish to also ask you to interpret, if you are willing, regarding Cain and Abel. Specifically, according to what type did Cain murder Abel? And not only this, but also when he was questioned by the one who spoke with him, saying to him, 'Where is your brother Abel?' But Cain denied it, saying to him, 'Am I his guardian?' . . ."

4 1REVEALER: [. . . 6–9 lines untranslatable . . .] "... of the fullness... him (or it) to completion." Behold, O John, I have interpreted regarding Noah and his ark and (?) . . ."

5 1JOHN: "... [I wish for you to] also interpret [to me] regarding Melchizedek. Has it not been said of him that he is without father... [and without] mother... that his generation is unmentioned, that he has no beginning, as like the Son of God, a priest for all time?"g

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a. Or "pursuant to your will." The idea is not just a sense of willingness or reluctance on the part of the Revealer, but a recognition that the revelation of mysteries must be in harmony with the will of the Revealer (or the divine will). The tone here is one of respect and recognizing the cosmological hierarchy of a revelation.

b. Literally "Ab]el." The extra "b" by the scribe is unusual here, especially as "Abel" is spelled with only a single "b" elsewhere. Kahle contends that this unusual form is intentional. Although this is possible, the scribe may have simply made an error, given that the name is split between two lines, with a "b" on each line. In support of Kahle, however, is that this irregularity was not corrected. If Abel is not a mistake, then it is possible that the author is making a theological point about Abel (such as a transformation of Abel to Abbel by means of his death at the hand of Cain; could this be a kind of apotheosis through death?). It is also possible that this double letter was meant to link the two parts of the word appearing on different lines (cf. 2:2 and 3:1 where a similar double letter is used to link a word split between lines).

c. A viable reconstruction followed by both Crum and Kahle. If correct, which I think it is, then "fullness" sits within a genitive relationship to whatever term precedes.

d. The subject is unclear. It could be neuter, which would make "the fullness" (Coptic pleroma) that which is completed or it could be some other unnamed figure ("him") that is brought to completion and thus (perhaps) into the fullness or pleroma. If the latter, then the dialogue could be using Noah and the Flood as a type for coming into a state of completion or in harmony with the pleroma (perhaps a baptismal motif, which would then link the biblical narrative of 4:1 with the five seals of 2:1, a link that would reinforce a Sethian ritual reading of the dialogue). If the former, however, then Dial. Rev. John could be making a point about the pleroma being brought back into a state of completion after the primordial Fall.

e. The possessive is assumed to relate back to Noah, but it is not extant in the fragment. Given the narrative context (i.e., of Noah and the ark), the reconstruction is reasonable, though not certain.

f. Kahle reconstructs mn immediately following the "ark" and translates it as a conjunction. The reconstruction is highly speculative, though possible. Both Crum and Kahle identify the letters nt on the next line (though only the top of the letters are visible), but this line is untranslatable.

g. I am following the more thoroughly reconstructed edition by Kahle.