

HUMA 3457 Gnosticism

Sept. 18: Heresy Hunting

Read for Today: Denzey Lewis ch. 2; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* ([PDF 1](#), [PDF 2](#)); Epiphanius of Salamis, *Against Heresies* 33.3.1-33.7.10 (=Ptolemy's *Epistle to Flora*) ([PDF](#)); Acts 8:9-25.

****Ptolemy's *Epistle to Flora* analysis due today, if you chose that text ****

1. Apologetic Literature

- apologies written to explain Christian ideas and practices to the authorities and the literate
- three main accusations: atheism, cannibalism and incest; also uneducated and libertine
- Justin (ca. 100-165); from Gentile colony in Samaria; schooled in philosophy and turned to Christianity in 130; moved to Rome ca. 150 and set up a school; martyred ca. 165
- *First Apology* addressed to emperor Antoninus Pius ca. 155, *Second Apology* to the Roman senate in 162 sees similarities in Greek thought and credits the philosophers with having discovered glimpses of the truth; they tapped into the logos, the universal reason that governs all reality; he says Jesus is the Logos; the pagans knew the logos but only dimly; those who are Christian know it fully
- Clement of Alexandria (150-215) and Origen (185-254) also embraced philosophy, particularly Platonism, as a way of articulating Christian belief
- Tertullian (150-225) wanted a fine balance between philosophy and tradition

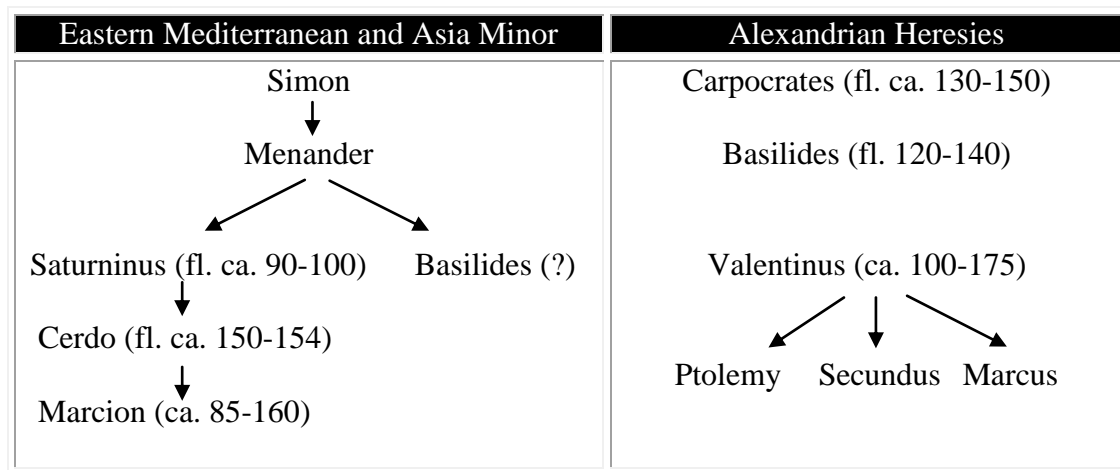
2. Heresy Hunters

- responsible both for the preservation of heretical teachings and for their eradication
- the problem of perspective: winners and losers; Roman Christian hegemony is anachronistic
- statements of belief: Jesus Christ is the Messiah, Jesus Christ is the Lord, He died for our sins, etc.; creeds
- the three pillars of faith: apostolic succession, rule of faith, canonical scriptures
- achievements of heretics: first to bring up speculative questions of cosmology, anthropology, Christology and Trinitarian doctrine; first to begin process of Christian-only canon of scripture

3. Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*

- Justin Martyr's *Syntagma*; charges: Gnostics calumniated the creator, disparaged the OT, and gave Christians a bad name
- Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons ca. 130/150-200
- wrote *The Refutation and Overthrow of the Knowledge Falsely So Called (Against Heresies)* for a friend to expose heretical thought, particularly among the Valentinian school
- in the process of repudiating the heretics he also sets the standard for orthodoxy

- contents:
 - I: describes the heresies in question, sometimes sarcastically
 - II: shows their absurdity
 - III: basis of Christian doctrine in scripture and tradition is laid down and its essential points, the unity of God and redemption through Christ, are enlarged on in detail
 - IV: defends against Marcion the unity of the two covenants
 - V: resumes the discussion of redemption and passed on to the last things and the hope of the world to come
- “Gnostic” sects described by Irenaeus:

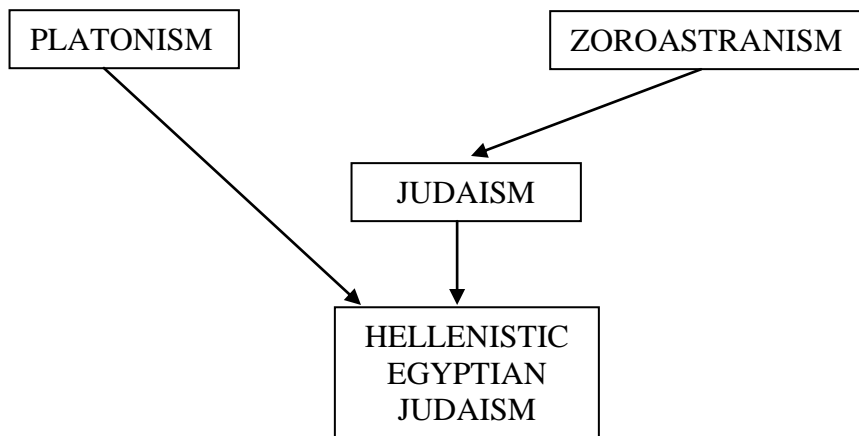


- Other schools:
 - Nicolaitans: name from Nicolas of Antioch (see Acts); eat food sacrificed to pagan gods (see Rev.)
 - Ebionites: Jewish-Christian sect based in northern Judea/Palestine and southern Syria; name derives from Hebrew word for poor; Jewish in practice and do not believe in the virgin birth; only read Matthew and did not read Paul
 - Cerinthus: Jewish-Christian from Egypt who debated John the apostle in Asia Minor
 - Montanus: ca. 156/157 introduces the “New Prophecy”; resurgence of apocalyptic thought in wake of persecutions; emphasized life of renunciation, continence and fasting, and to be ready to confess the name of Christ at the (welcome) risk of martyrdom
 - Encratites: Christian renunciants associated with Tatian, a Syrian Christian and student of Justin Martyr
- Other heresiologists:
 - Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170-236 CE), *Refutation of All Heresies*
 - Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 CE), *Stromateis*
 - Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185-254 CE), *Against Celsus*
 - Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 376-400 CE), *Panarion*

4. Defining Gnosticism

- truth and fiction in the heresiologists: the heretics are often women or use women to spread their heresies; the Gnostics rejected the need for martyrdom; the Gnostics rejected the need for martyrdom; the Gnostics subverted proper Church authority; the Gnostics reject Scripture; The Gnostics considered themselves to be “saved” already; the Gnostics have crazy mythologies with endless stories of horrors in the heavens
- the Messina Definition (1966)
- Rethinking “Gnosticism” (Williams 1996 and King 2005): abandon the term, or use subcategories
- the Yale School: people did call themselves Gnostics
- the Bauer School: orthodoxy, heresy, proto-orthodoxy

5. The Origins of Gnosticism



6. Ptolemy's *Epistle to Flora* (Discussion)