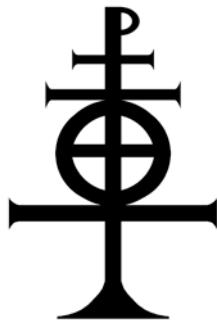


Sethian Gnosticism
By Joan Ann Lansberry



The label Gnosticism covers a varied group of religious and philosophical movements that existed in the first and second centuries CE. Today, those who consider themselves Gnostics seek transformative awakening from a material-based stupefaction. But back in the early centuries of the Christian Era, gnosticism was quite a hodge-podge of ideas deriving from the Corpus Hermeticum, the Jewish Apocalyptic writings, the Hebrew Scriptures themselves, and particularly Platonic philosophy. There's even some Egyptian texts, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and three *Steles of Seth*. Seth? Is this Egyptian Set or Jewish Seth?

Scholars are divided on this subject, but most of them say there is little connection. “Inasmuch as the Gnostic traditions pertaining to Seth derive from *Jewish* sources, we are led to posit that the very phenomenon of ‘Sethian’ Gnosticism *per se* is of Jewish, perhaps pre-Christian, origin.”¹ So who is this Seth who features in Sethian Gnosticism? Birger Pearson says: “After examining the magical texts on Seth-Typhon and the Gnostic texts on Seth, I concluded that no relationship existed between Egyptian Seth and Gnostic Seth.”² He further declares “By the time of the Gnostic literature no Egyptians except magicians worshipped Seth.”³

But were there any magicians who were also gnostics? Pearson continues: “Contrary to his earlier good standing, the Egyptian Seth becomes a demonic figure in the late Hellenistic period. It is inconceivable that Egyptian Seth was tied in with a hero of the Gnostic sect.”⁴ However another participant in the International Conference on Gnosticism, Alexander Böhlig, ventures “We must proceed with caution in assessing the independence of the Gnostic Seth.”⁵ Bentley Layton raises “the possibility that there may be present a literary inversion of values in which Egyptian Seth is revalued and thought of as ‘true’ or Gnostic Seth.”⁶ Carsten Colpe mentioned “In a single magical papyrus from Egypt a mistaken identification has been made between Egyptian Seth and Jewish Seth.”⁷

What if it wasn't 'mistaken'?

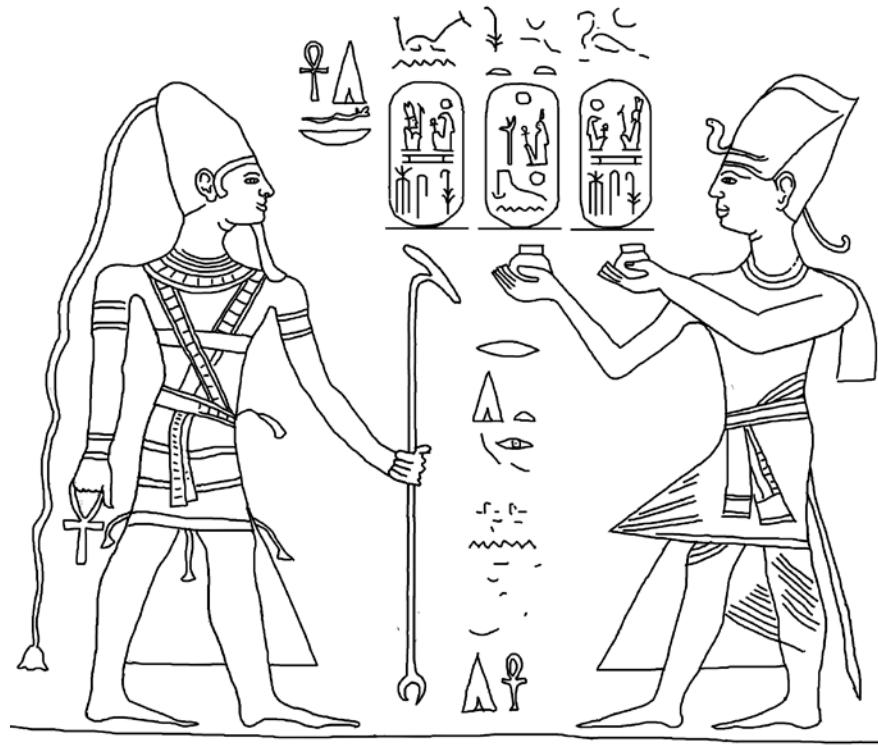
Set has earlier connections with the Canaanite Baal, in which he is a hero. Later, Baal is later subsumed into Yahweh, the Jewish god. And we will see Set's demonization by the

Egyptians because he becomes associated with the hated Semites. How did Seth-Baal evolve into Yahweh?

Set was well-established in Egyptian minds as “the divine Foreigner”. A Ramesside scarab from Tell el-Far'ah shows Set in the tasseled Canaanite kilt and crown streamer, as seen in Fig. 87b of Keel and Uehlinger's *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*. But probably, Ramesses II most remarkable addition to the iconography was a stela created that rather changed how Set would be viewed in years to come.

Te Velde explains while associations between the Asiatic Baal and the god Set had been going on for some time,

“Ramses II caused to be perpetuated on stone later, and which made the worship of Seth in his Asiatic form acceptable in court circles also. On the so-called 400 years stela, Seth is not depicted in the ancient Egyptian manner with his characteristic Seth-head, but as a Baal with a human head. The features are not Egyptian but those of a foreigner, as is to be expected for a god of foreign countries: receding forehead, receding chin, thick nose and thick lips. The dress, ornamented with tassels, is exotic. The headdress, too, is not Egyptian. No crowns or similar attire, but a conical tiara with horns and sun, with a long ribbon hanging down behind. In the right hand, however, he has the ankh-sign and in the left the w3s-sceptre, as the Egyptian gods have.”⁸



“400 Years Stela” from Tanis, now at Cairo Museum

Traced from part of a photo in *The Complete Royal Families of Ancient Egypt*, by Dodson and Hilton

Te Velde continues, “The inscription shows that Ramses II had this stela erected in commemoration of his ancestors and the father of his forefathers, i.e. Seth. Not Ramses

the Second's father king Sethos I, but his great-grandfather Sethos,¹⁾ governor of the bordertown Sile, had celebrated a festival in honour of Seth. He had celebrated this on the fourth day of the fourth month of the summer season of the year 400 of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Seth, great of strength, son of Re, the Ombite, the chosen of Re-Harakhty. These terms show that in spite of his exotic appearance Seth is not a suspect foreigner, but a real Egyptian. He is king! It is erroneous to set the beginning of the domination by the Hyksos at c. 1730 B.C. on the basis of this stela. There is no reason to suppose that the 19th dynasty took a different attitude than the 18th towards this period of humiliation, and would celebrate its commencement with festivities.

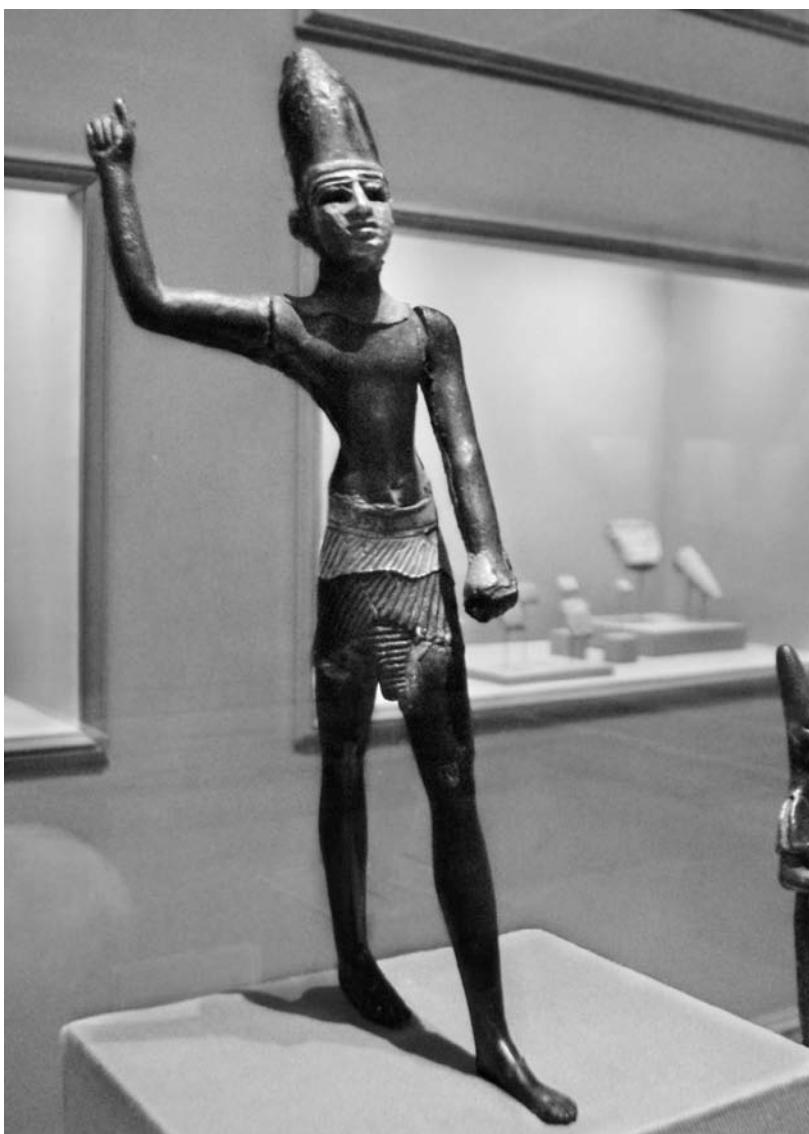
"It might be that Sethos did not celebrate the beginning of the reign of Seth and the domination of the Hyksos, but was celebrating the fact that Seth already ruled before the Hyksos. He goes back 400 years to the time when the cult of Seth had not yet been made suspect and contaminated by the hateful Hyksos. The meaning is clear. If the worship of Seth in his Baalistic form is already at least 400 years old, then it is not a piece of reprehensible modernism. The cult of Seth is not a work of the Hyksos, but goes back to ancient Egyptian traditions. Every Egyptian of proper national thought and feeling can therefore worship Seth in his foreign manifestation without any objection. In the beginning of the Ramesside period there was undoubtedly a strong trend at court and in the army in favour of worshipping Seth in the Asiatic form of his appearance, i.e. as Baal. The kings, who came from a family of Seth priests, will not have been averse to this. With all its appeal to tradition, the setting up of the 400 years stela was an act of reformation. It sanctioned exotic forms of iconography and perhaps of worship, at a time when the frontiers of the Egyptian kingdom were to be sought far in Asia and Africa, and when foreign objects, people and gods were streaming into the country of the Nile. Now the divine stranger appears as a man of foreign features and in foreign clothing. How little the traditional Egyptian state cult was open to foreign influence, is evident from the paradoxical necessity to demonstrate that the divine foreigner had already been known and adored in this form for more than 400 years."⁹

Marc Van De Mieroop explains this blurring of the line between the foreigner and the Egyptian occurred in other ways, as well:

"When Ramesses II and Hattusili III concluded their peace treaty, the gods of both countries witnessed the arrangement. The Hittites saw the storm god as their supreme god and acknowledged a storm god in every major city of the state. All of those appeared in the treaty as written out by the Hittites. When the Egyptians translated this version into their own language to carve it on temple walls, they did not want to use the name Teshub, however, but instead used the name of the archetypal god of foreign lands, Seth. Thus appear:

"‘Seth, the lord of the sky; Seth of Hatti; Seth of the city of Arinna; Seth of the city of Zippalanda; Seth of the city of Pitrik; Seth of the city of Hissaspa; Seth of the [city of Hurma]; [Seth of the city of Uda]; Seth of the city of Sa[pinuwa]; [Seth] of thunder (?); Seth of the city of Sahphina.’ ‘The idea that the Egyptian pantheon covered the entire universe was easily preserved.’"¹⁰

“A side effect of the introduction of Syrian gods into the Egyptian pantheon [...] was that some stories about them entered Egyptian literature as well. They were written in the Egyptian language and hieratic script, but were Syrian in origin. A fragmentary papyrus from the reign of Amenhotep II of the Eighteenth Dynasty contains a myth about the goddess Astarte, involving the battle between gods and the sea. The pantheon represented is multicultural. The sea was an important force in Syrian mythology, as was Astarte, who appears in the myth as the daughter of the Egyptian god Ptah. The sea's opponent is the Egyptian god Seth, identified with Syrian Baal. Some scholars regard the composition as a translation of a Syrian myth, but it was clearly adapted to an Egyptian context. Its title reads, ‘New copy of what he (Baal=Seth) did for the Ennead (i.e.; the Egyptian gods) in order to vanquish the sea.’ Similarly, Egyptian magical papyri contained Syrian spells.”¹¹



Menacing God, Syria or Palestine, (1550-1150 BCE)
Bronze with gold and silver overlay, LACMA, M.45.3.121

The museum info card explains “This figure, possibly the Canaanite god Ba'al, would have held his insignia, a weapon or lightning bolt. Grooves along the back of the arms probably anchored gold and silver foil which would have covered the entire figure.”

You can see the similarity of pose with the Glyptotek Set/Amun statue. “Not a single image of Baal has been found in Egypt, in which he is not also Seth.”¹⁵

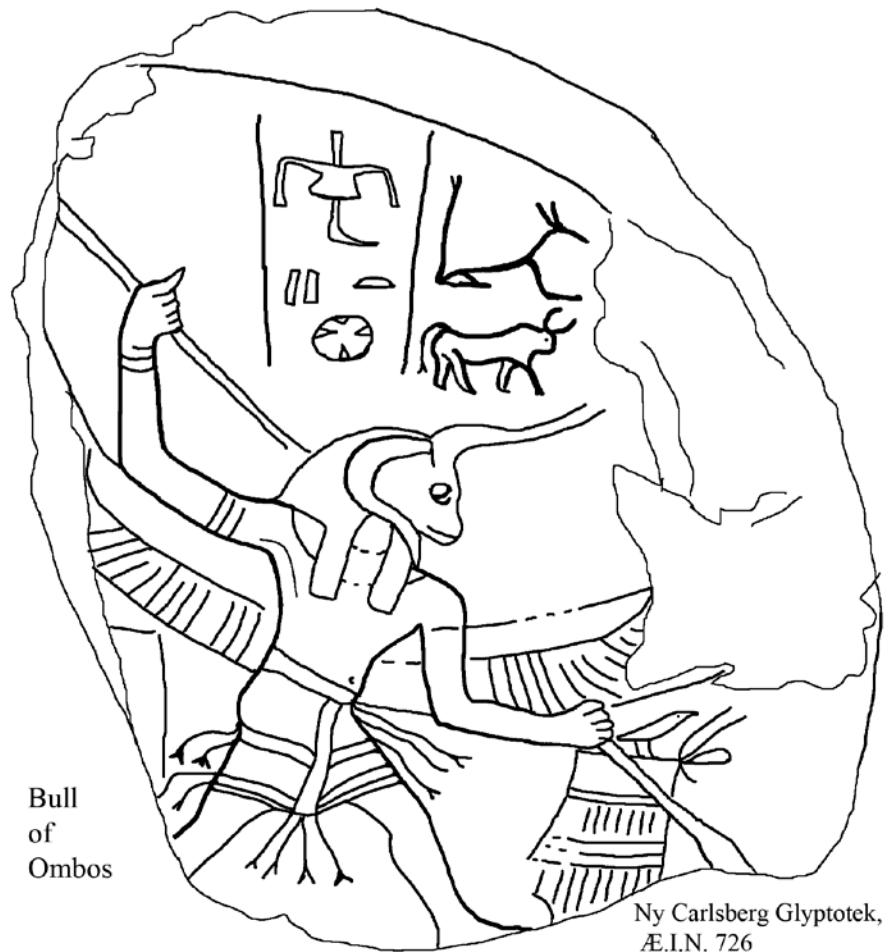


Set-Amun at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 19-20th Dynasty 67.6cm (26 5/8in), Detail of kilt area, suggestion of bull tail?

Traced from scan of photos in Gifts for the Gods: Images from Egyptian Temples, pages 34, 36

“Altered in antiquity by the removal of its upright ears and the addition of horns, this statue retains the characteristic drooping snout of the fabulous Seth- animal. The resulting representation has traditionally been ascribed to Khnum, but the god Amun is more likely.”¹²

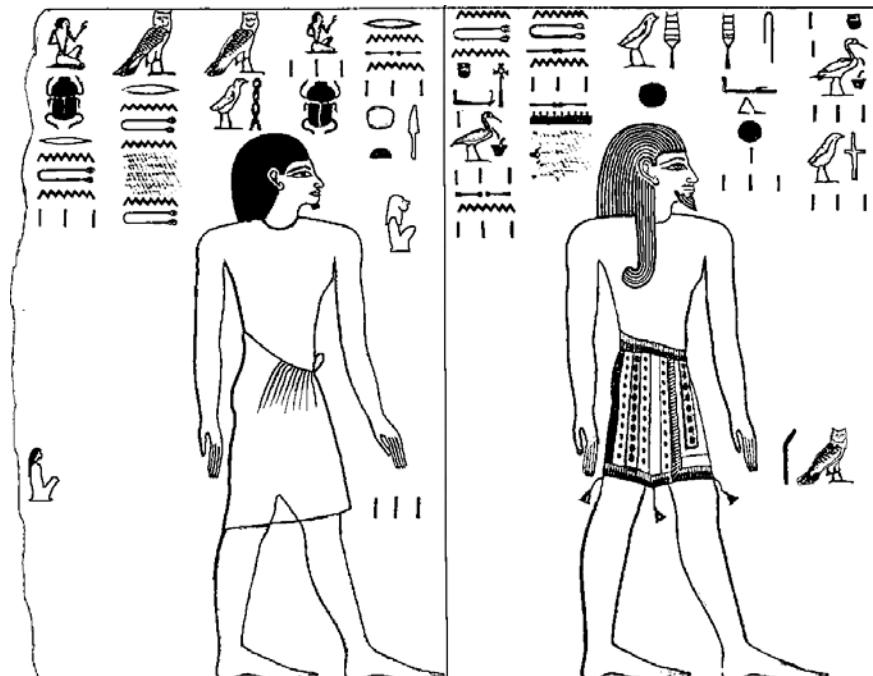
“The Glyptotek Seth's pose recalls more closely representations of foreign gods as warriors, with right arm raised, and the established relationship between the god Seth and Canaanite gods such as Baal and Reshef may provide clues leading to a better understanding of the figure. Metal statuettes of these deities were produced in the Levant during the Late Bronze Age, beginning around 1500 BC. Based on the observation that such deities, unlike kings, were not shown grasping prisoners, Izak Cornelius replaced the term smiting god, which proceeds from ‘smiting pharaoh’, with menacing god, and he suggests that the images conceptualize power by virtue of the gods' raised right arms, even if they do not hold a weapon.”¹³ However, in this piece, “The hollow fists offer no evidence of what they carried.”¹⁴



Upper right fragment of an 18th-20th Dynasty stela at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, AE. I.N.726, winged Set as “**Bull of Ombos**”, *traced from a photo by Bo Christiansen*

Izak Cornelius describes this stela, “A winged, barefooted figure stands at the prow of a boat, thrusting downwards with a long spear”, wearing an Egyptian nemes headdress. “The figure is identified as Seth by the inscription. He is attacking the serpent Apophis from the barque of Amun-Re. However, the kilt and horns are un-Egyptian and the god can best be described as Ba’al-Seth, ie Ba’al with the head of a bull, but with Seth-like wings.” The front part of the barque has “a bird” resting on it. **16**

The tasseled kilt is Canaanite in origin. Seti I's tomb has an example, among other ethnic groups, “They include, left to right: *Mizraim*, ruddy-skinned Egyptians; *Canaan*, bearded Canaanites; and”, [via Lepsius], “*Cush*, swarthy Nubians; and *Put*, richly-robed Libyans.”**17**



Egyptian and Canaanite in Seti I's tomb

Lepsius' original color illustration, which I adapted to B/W, shows the Canaanite with red hair and a brightly colored striped and tasseled kilt. The Egyptian kilt is plain by comparison.

Keel and Uehlinger explain, “The incised depiction of a god who holds a great lance over his head with both hands, ... should be interpreted as a figure that combines the Canaanite Baal (who defeats the sea serpent *litanu* /Leviathan) and the Egyptian Seth (who conquers the Apophis serpent [...]. The same Baal-Seth, this time furnished with wings (in the Egyptian style) and armed with a lance, overpowers the horned snake on a Ramesside level scarab from Tell el-Far’ah (south)(illus. 87b). By means of the combination of Baal and Seth as serpent conquerors, the serpent, an Egyptian symbol of the danger in the dark of night and a Canaanite symbol of the stormy sea, became a symbol of danger in general. The god who could defeat such a creature is treated as a savior, pure and simple.”**18**

Here we clearly have a hero. So what happened?

In the Saite and Persian times, Set's reputation takes a terrible downturn. He was “identified with the Greek giant Typhon, enemy of Zeus; the rebellion of the Titans against Zeus formed an obvious Greek analogy to the rebellion of Seth and his confederates against Osiris. Seth-Typhon was the god of foreigners, and the demonizing of the Seth cult occurred parallel with an increasing Egyptian hatred of foreigners. Egyptian hatred of foreigners is well documented in classical sources of this same period. Invasions of Egypt by Assyria, Babylonia and Persia, often using Greek, Jewish and other foreign mercenaries, led to a new Egyptian xenophobia that started in the Saite period and grew progressively worse throughout the Persian period.”¹⁹ A footnote in Russell Gmirkin’s book declares “A Jewish temple existed at Elephantine before Cambyses’ conquest (...) and Egyptians may have already equated the Jewish god Yahweh worshipped there with Seth, god of foreigners.”²⁰



Detail from Walters #22.49

Detail from Walters Art Museum #22.49, Greco-Roman period, 332-27 BCE,
traced from photo at Walters Art Museum website

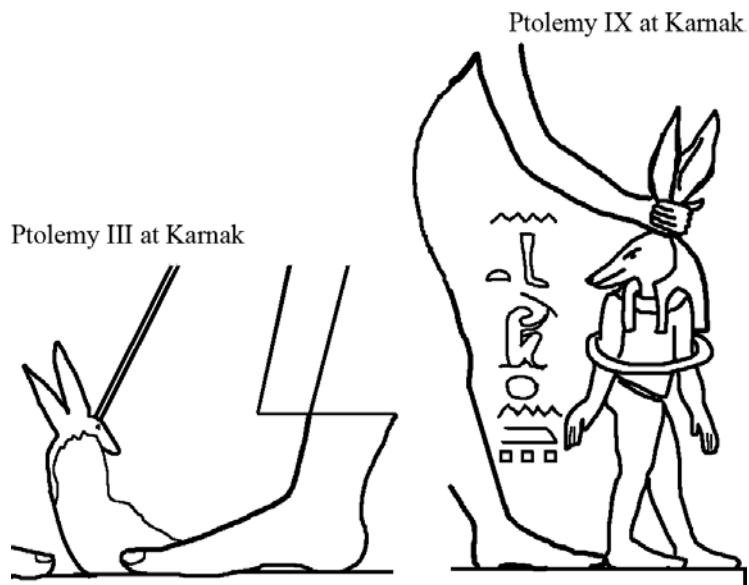
The falcon faced Set is a transition to a new kind of falcon-faced avenger. A stele at the Walters Art Museum shows the familiar stabbing pose, but instead of the Apes, look who is the target of the spear!

Notice the felled man's face, and the thick beard. We recall the illustration in Seti I's tomb of the four races, and it is the bearded Canaanite (aka 'Semite') that is the target.

In addition to the Jewish mercenaries' loyalty to the hated Persians, another thing drew Egyptian ire. “A major factor in identifying Jews as Typhonians was undoubtedly the Jewish sacrifice of animals sacred to the Egyptians such as the ram, sacred to Ammon, and the bull, sacred to Osiris. According to the Persian- era Ritual for the Expulsion of Seth and his Confederates, the followers of Seth deliberately slaughtered all the animals

sacred to the Egyptians.”²¹ To add further insult, “While many Egyptian temples were destroyed under Cambyses, the Jewish temple at Elephantine was spared.”²²

To further compound matters, when the Ptolemaic Greeks took power in Egypt, they adopted all the anti-Set attitudes. “Among the other deeds of Ptolemy V celebrated in the Rosetta Stone, the suppression of a revolt at Lycopolis in the nome of Busiris appeared prominently. As Polybius recorded, the native uprising was extinguished with exceptional brutality. Ptolemy was described as putting down this rebellion in the same manner as Horus anciently defeated his profane enemies (i.e. Seth and his confederates) in the very same locale.”²³



Ptolemy III's image features a crowned human headed assailant, Ptolemy IX's features one with a falcon head and a club, *adapted from details of Lepsius' drawings*

Okay, that's what the Egyptians thought of Set then. But what about those Semites? If the Jews' origins derive from the Canaanites, then what are their feelings about Set? How did they evolve? “Sethianism is now the earliest gnostic movement for which we possess a great deal of textual evidence, apparently antedating and forming a partial source for another equally well-documented form of Gnosticism, the Christian school of Valentinus (120- 160 CE) and his followers.”²⁴

So Sethian Gnostics are the earliest of the lot. Of particular interest is Nag Hammadi, the location in which the earthenware jar was placed which held the Gnostic papyri. Nag Hammadi is a city in Upper Egypt. Nag Hammadi was known as Chenoboskion in Greek. The capitol of Nag Hammadi “was for a few brief periods [...] a capital of Upper Egypt - of the Sa'id.”²⁵ That capital was “on the western bank of the river; but it was the neighborhood around Chenoboskion on the eastern bank which became more particularly famous at about the epoch to which our papyri belong. Its celebrity is linked with the most ancient traditions of Christian monasticism. The Coptic name for the little town was

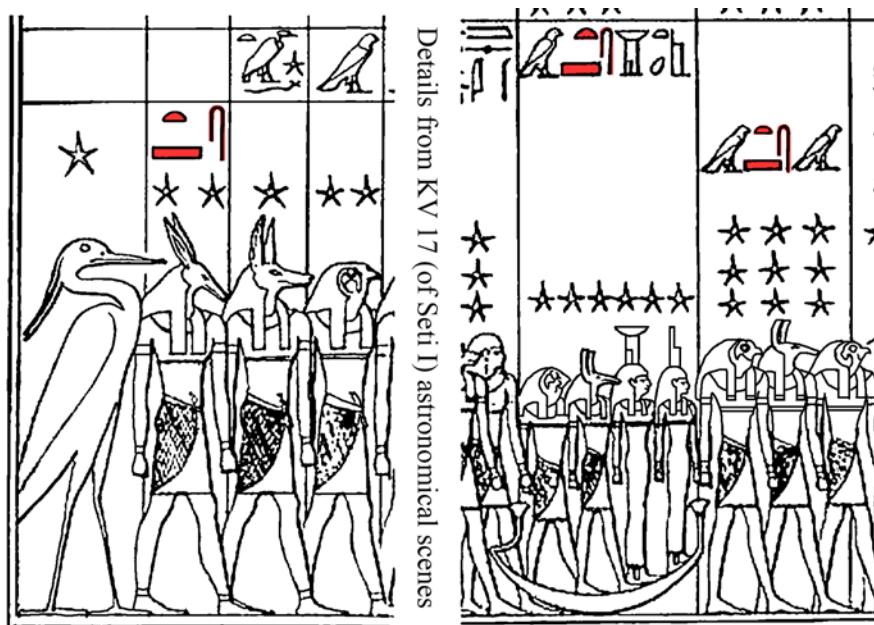
Shenesit - the latest form of an Egyptian name which would signify 'the acacias of (the god) Seth'"²⁶, putting the location in connection with our Egyptian Set.

Of course, Doresse asserts that this "was by chance alone".²⁷

Note elsewhere in the book he says "The god with the head of an ass is the image of the Demiurge Ialdabaôth, the "god of the Jews"... It is upon certain monuments of Egypt that we find the most ancient proofs of the attribution of a donkey's head to a god, who was to become progressively identified with the god of the Jews. This originated from the Asiatic god Sutekh, whom the Egyptians assimilated to one of their greatest gods; Seth, the adversary of Osiris. They represented Seth also...with a human body and an ass's head. Afterwards...Seth was definitely regarded by the Egyptians...as the father of the legendary heroes Hierosolymus and Judaeus—that is, as an ancestor of the Jews!"²⁸

Yet, the location at 'the acacias of Set' is just 'chance'. I don't think so.

Seti I's tomb is one of the earliest instances in which Set has the donkey's head. The glyphs above him clearly identify him, on the left as a donkey and twice on the right with the classic canine head. So what happened to the evolutionary route of Set, son of Nut and Geb; and Seth, son of Adamas as seen in the Gnostic papyri?



Two details from Seti I's tomb (KV17), adapted from Lepsius' drawing

Can a couple of first century CE historians be considered good sources? Jan Assman gives Tacitus' account of Jewish habits, "In their temples they consecrate a statue of a donkey and sacrifice a ram 'in order to ridicule the god Amun' (*in contumeliam Ammonis*)."²⁹ Further, "The strange and particularly absurd motif of the god of the Jews being represented in the statue of an ass finds its explanation in Plutarch, who tells the story in a completely mythologized form. The god Seth, the murderer of Osiris, is driven

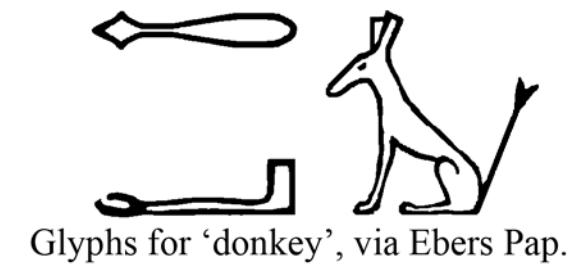
out of Egypt and spends seven days fleeing into Palestine. There he fathers two sons, who he calls Hierosolyma and Juda. Seth is usually associated with the donkey in Egyptian mythology. In Greco-Egyptian texts, the god Iao - the Greek rendering of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton - is equated with Seth and the ass because the name - obviously onomatopoeic - sounded like the Egyptian word for ass.”³⁰

How much of Plutarch's and Tacitus accounts are tainted with anti-Semiticism? If the Jews were indeed mocking the Egyptian gods, this could encourage antagonism as a response. Perhaps as a result, Set became associated with the troublesome Greek Typhon. Yet various magical papyri do invoke Set- Typhon, to some noble purposes and to some rather nefarious. Set-Typhon may or may not be part of the Gnostic papyri. Of Sutekh, TeVelde declares. “The suggested distinction between an Egyptian god Seth and a non-Egyptian god Sutekh, supposed to have been absorbed into Seth,³¹ has now been abandoned.⁴⁾”³¹

But of Set/Sutekh, in his most ancient manifestations, does he move and appear in the Gnostic papyri? It is interesting that nothing older than the New Kingdom's reign of Thutmose I has been found at Set's temple in Naqada. Were any such artifacts destroyed because they didn't fit with Egyptian cosmology?

As everything seems so mixed up in the Gnostic and magical papyri, perhaps the best way to determine who's who is by their roles and descriptions. For instance, in the First Stele of Seth, Seth is addressing his father, “thou art my mind, O my Father,”³² which is placing a very close identification there. Perhaps Jewish Seth derives from Egyptian Set as son derives from father? He calls his father “Thrice Male”³³. Why would he refer to him in that way? As we know, Set's masculinity is very much part of his character. In the contendings with Horus, it is his testicles which get injured and which Thoth repairs. Furthermore, one of Set's titles is ‘Bull of Ombos’. Several scholars have proposed the origins of the Was scepter (which bears Set's head at its top) as being based on the penis of a wild bull. This animal would have been the largest and most powerful creature the Egyptians had seen, possessing a penis “well over one meter in length.”³⁴

That's not all! Gordon and Schwabe point a reason why the donkey came to be associated with the god Set, for “the ass has a disproportionately large penis, which is shaped very much like that of man. [...] Note, too that 'donkey' is written [] in the Ebers Papirus (Ebers, 1889:7)”³⁵



So, we have as important to Set's iconography, his testicles, his scepter based on a bull's penis, and the disproportionately large donkey member! Sounds like 'Thrice Male' to me!

What about Doresse's reference to "Ialdabaôth, the 'god of the Jews'"? Francis Legge explains, "This Ialdabaoth or Jaldabaoth appears in the systems or heresies of the Nicolaitans and of those whom Epiphanius calls 'Gnostics'"³⁶ "Irenaeus and Hippolytus are agreed that the first or immediate son of Sophia was called Ialdabaoth, a name which Origen says, in speaking of the Ophites, is taken from the art of magic, and which surely enough appears in nearly all the earlier Magic Papyri. Hippolytus says that this Ialdabaoth was the Demiurge and father of the visible universe or phenomenal world. Irenaeus also gives the names of the later 'heavens, virtues, powers, angels, and builders' as being respectively Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai, Eloaeus, Oreus, and Astaphaeus or Astanpheus, which agrees with the Ophite document or Diagram to be presently mentioned. The first four of these names are too evidently the names given in the Old Testament to Yahweh for us to doubt the assertion of the Fathers that by Ialdabaoth the Ophites meant the God of the Jews."³⁷

Apparently, several gods were associated with Ialdabaoth. Doress says, "Another god besides Osiris has been compared to Ialdabaôth, a red agate of the Roman period found at Memphis invokes, in Greek, the Egyptian god of Leontopolis - Mahes the lion-faced - the terms reminiscent enough of our monstrous demiurge: 'Here my prayer, thou who dwellest in Leontopolis, installed in the holy sanctuary, darting the lightnings and thundering, lord of the Darkness and the winds, in whose hand lies the celestial fate of eternal nature ...thou, god most glorious of leonine form!'"³⁸

Of lightning, thunder and darkness, does he not sound much more like the Egyptian god Set?

Doresse shows the process of demonization: "the part played by Samael-Ialdabaoth, who, having at first been the highest of the 'thrones', afterwards falls from his dignity and is cast into the abyss. Thus he becomes the 'prince of this world' - of the world here below; thus, also, he engages in battle against the Lord (who is now Sabaoth) in the firmament."³⁹ Francis Fallon elaborates, "Scholem proposed that Ialdabaoth derives from two terms: the Aramaic active participle *yaled* meaning "to beget" and the personal name Abaoth which originated as an abridged form or substitute of Sabaoth and which was used in magical circles. Ialdabaoth then is the secret name of Samael and means 'the begetter of [S]abaoth' or 'the begetter of Abaoth.' The name for Scholem is probably connected with the fact that Ialdabaoth creates six or seven powers in the gnostic sources."⁴⁰ Furthermore, "the figure known ultimately as Samael/Saklas/Ialdabaoth is here associated with origin from chaos"⁴¹

"In NatArch, Sabaoth is presented as a figure less than the high God who is against Satan (Ialdabaoth) from primordial time"⁴² ("NatArch" is an abbreviation for '*The Nature of the Archons*', a document from the Nag Hammadi corpus.) Here begins the battle between the entity of 'light' and the entity of 'darkness'.

Yet the Gospel of Phillip says "Light and Darkness, life and death, right and left, are brothers of one another. They are inseparable. Because of this neither are the good good,

nor evil evil, nor is life life, nor death death. For this reason each one will dissolve into its earliest origin. But those who are exalted above the world are indissoluble, eternal.”⁴³

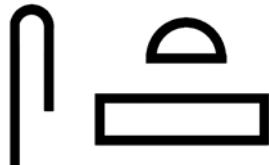
Let's return to IAO and Set. Fossum and Glazer quote Pearson, “There is one possible occurrence in a Coptic curse-manuscript now in Berlin, where the only-begotten Son of God is called 'Seth, Seth, the living Christ' (col. i.9), but later, in a series of magic names, 'Iao Iao Seth Seth' (ii.1) may reflect the identification, Iao = Seth-Typhon.”⁴⁴ His argument is as follows. Since Iaō can be identified with Seth-Typhon in the Greek magical texts, the phrase, 'Seth Seth the Living Christ', as well as, 'Iaō Iaō Seth Seth', within one and the same magical text may be taken to mean that Seth in the former as well as the latter phrase indicates the Egyptian deity.”⁴⁵ Fossum and Glazer go on, “The question for us, however, is whether the Coptic magical text cited above witnesses to a welding of Seth-Typhon and *Christ*.

“Iaō, a Greek form of the name of the Biblical God, Yahweh (above, Arbathiaō), is associated and even equated with many deities in the magical texts. The conjuration in PGM IV.3019-3024 begins, 'I conjure you by the god of the Hebrews, Jesus, Iaba Iae...' Just before the conjuration, we are informed that the phylactery should include, *inter alia*, the names, Iaeo, Iaō, Iaeō. It is clear that Jesus is here identified with the Jewish God, whose proper name is rendered by various Greek forms.”⁴⁶

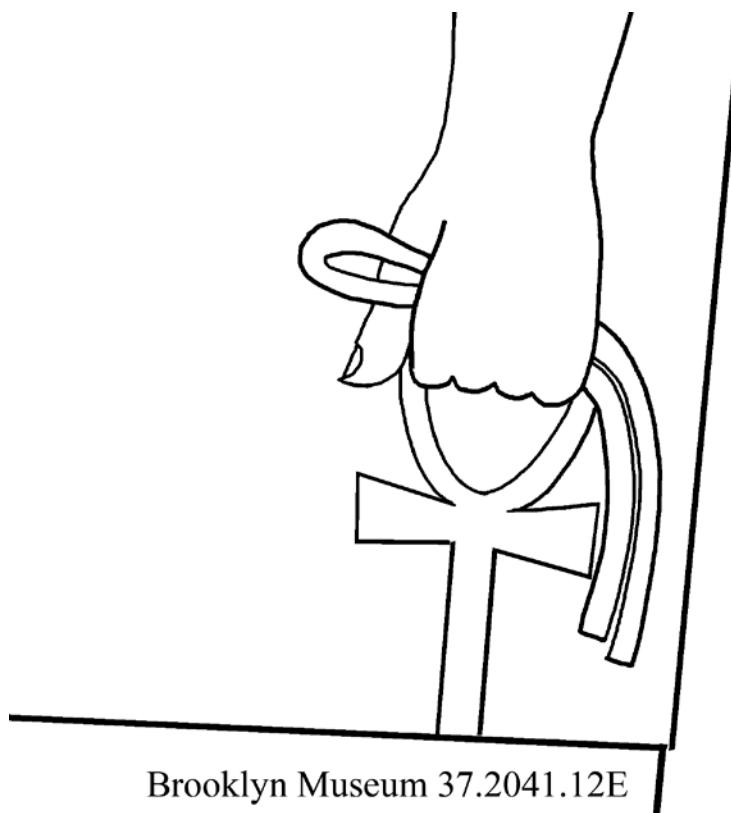
Doresse asserts, “we shall find later some curious traces of a cult of this Seth-Typhon presiding over Judeo-Gnostic rituals in which Adam plays the leading part. That this cult came to be actually codified is attested by the existence of Egyptian figurines of the god Seth, cast in bronze, which are perfectly appropriate to it. The most significant represent the god walking with the hieratic gait, his body girt with a loin-cloth and surmounted by a head which has not, now, the muzzle of the mythic 'Sethian' animal commonly assigned to Seth in the Pharaonic tradition, but the ass's head much more rarely met with. There is no doubt about the identification of the god worshipped in this guise, as one of the great figures of Gnosticism: the pedestal is engraved with the name Aberamenthō, which denoted Jesus.”⁴⁷

Fossum and Glazer refer to a “phrase repeated three times in the untitled treatise (Book IV) at the end of Codex Askewianus, 'Jesus who is Aberamenthō'”,⁴⁸ and notes “that Aberamenthō is a name of Seth-Typhon in a spell in the Demotic Leiden Papyrus”⁴⁹. But they still do not think there is a connection ever such that Aberamenthō=Set-Typhon=Christ. They think rather that Aberamenthō is connected with the Egyptian god Thoth. Aberamenthō comes from a Hebrew phrase which means “power of waters” and the Greek version of the name of the Egyptian god Thoth. From the XXVIth Dynasty onwards, Thot was seen as the god bringing forth and exercising power over the waters of the Nile. In Greco-Roman times, Thoth was also identified with Hermes, the messenger and spokesman of the gods. As the 'Lord of the Holy Words', Thoth-Hermes knew the formulas by which the cosmic powers could be controlled.”⁵⁰ Fossum and Glazer conclude “that Jesus Aberamenthō in the unnamed tractate in Codex Askewianus is assimilated to Thoth-Hermes: he is the Lord of the waters and the formulas controlling the cosmic powers.”⁵¹

But let's take a look at Set's name as it is written in Egyptian hieroglyphs to see the older connection with 'power of waters'. This is the most usual way Set's name is written, found like this in most of the pyramids and as we've seen earlier, in Seti I's tomb.



The rectangular glyph has a 'sh' sound. Richard Wilkinson describes its variations. "The hieroglyphic sign used to denote a lake, pool, or other body of water may be written as a simple rectangle (N37), a rectangle with added lines to indicate the sloping sides of the pool (N38), or - most frequently - a rectangle crossed by vertical wave lines indicating water (N39[])"⁵² He continues, "As in the myths of many of the cultures of the ancient world, water was the primeval matter from which the Egyptian believed all things arose; and the pool could thus signify the primeval waters of the First Time. The divine cow (E4) Hesat or Mekhweret (meaning 'Great Flood') is thus frequently depicted sitting on the pool hieroglyph to represent the original watery chaos from which all life emerged."⁵³ Could the use of the glyph suggest an 'origin from chaos'? The half-circle has a 't' sound and represents a loaf of bread. The other glyph is given the 's' sound when used for its pronunciation value. By itself, it is "Seneb", which means "health". It is said to be a 'folded bolt of cloth', but what if it represents a hook, cord or rope?



Brooklyn Museum 37.2041.12E

Above is a detail from a fragment at the Brooklyn Museum. Here, the hand is holding this symbol, along with an ankh. Possibly, it is the 'seneb' symbol, as a cord or rope.

Consider the Bible verse Ecclesiastes 11:1: "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days"⁵⁴ The Phrase Finder website gives its meaning as found in Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable, "When the Nile overflows its banks the weeds perish and the soil is disintegrated. The rice-seed being cast into the water takes root, and is found in due time growing in healthful vigour."⁵⁵

Could the glyph combination in Set's name be suggesting casting and retrieving of seed for bread? If this is too much of a stretch, at least consider Set's 'power of water' in the storms with which he is associated. The deluge of the storm would be the power of the waters asserting itself on its most dynamic level.

Now we'll change the subject abruptly and discuss the seeds of what eventually became Christianity. The Book of Enoch was written during the second century B.C.E. and holds the origins of many tenets of monotheistic thought. We have seen already the enmity between Sabaoth and Ialdabaoth, now regarded as 'Satan'. It gets worse. From Chapter LXV of the Book of Enoch, we read:

"6. And a command has gone forth from the presence of the Lord concerning those who dwell on the earth that their ruin is accomplished because they have learnt all the secrets of the angels, and all the violence of the Satans, and all their powers--the most secret ones--and all the power of those who practice sorcery, and the power of witchcraft, and the power of those who make molten images for the whole earth: 7. And how silver is produced from the dust of the earth, and how soft metal originates in the earth. 8. For lead and tin are not produced from the earth like the first: it is a fountain that produces them, and an angel stands therein, and that angel is pre-eminent.' 9. And after that my grandfather Enoch took hold of me by my hand and raised me up, and said unto me: 'Go, for I have asked the Lord of Spirits as touching this commotion on the earth.' 10. And He said unto me: 'Because of their unrighteousness their judgement has been determined upon and shall not be withheld by Me for ever. Because of the sorceries which they have searched out and learnt, the earth and those who dwell upon it shall be destroyed.' 11. And these--they have no place of repentance for ever, because they have shown them what was hidden, and they are the damned: but as for thee, my son, the Lord of Spirits knows that thou art pure, and guiltless of this reproach concerning the secrets."⁵⁶

Here we see the beginning of the trend against magicians, as expressed in the words 'sorcery' and 'witchcraft'. There's another religious idea which comes into being, the separation of people into 'right' and 'left': In the Sabaoth account in 'Natarch', there is *The Separation into Right and Left*. The translation of one phrase reads, "the left has come to represent [...] the unrighteousness [...] of the realm of absolute power." Fallon explains "In the OT the distinction between right and left can also indicate positive and negative value, as in Eccl 10:2 ('A wise man's heart inclines him towards the right, but a fool's

heart toward the left') [...] Here the right side represents Israel and the left side represents the heathen..."⁵⁷

I am reminded of the modern distinction between 'Right Hand Path' and 'Left Hand Path', the defining characteristics being RHP: 'Thy Will be done' vs LHP: 'My Will be done'. To direct oneself externally is to divorce oneself from the source of one's magical power, which is of course what authoritarian monotheistic religions want you to do. Our magical efforts are only going to be as powerful as our Will is. For if the Will does not direct, the Mind, Intuition and body cannot follow. If our own Will is not in charge, we are externally directed, 'good little sheep' so to speak. There's also the human-denigrating idea that left to one's own will, one would automatically choose what the ancient Egyptians call Isfet, or basically unethical actions that are harmful and unjust. But if you think of humankind as innately wretched sinners, that's what you think.

And that's what some were beginning to think in the second century B.C.E. Chapter LXXXI of the Book of Enoch declares, "no flesh is righteous in the sight of the Lord."⁵⁸

From there, it is a short step to the fourth century Augustinian concept of "total depravity", which Jack Cottrell, professor of Theology at Cincinnati Christian University, defines: "The main point of total depravity is that all aspects of every person's being are corrupted as a result of the sin of Adam. This includes all of one's intellectual or reasoning abilities. Each individual is thus born with an inherent inability to properly understand spiritual matters, including Scripture. Only the divine intervention of the Holy Spirit can restore one's depraved mind."⁵⁹

This is in contrast to another idea which came about during the same time as Augustine, Pelagianism. "Augustianism, or Calvanism, says that man is totally depraved and can do no good at all by himself and apart from the irresistible work of the Holy Spirit. Pelagianism, on the other hand, says that man is not depraved at all, neither totally nor partially. Rather, he is born perfectly good and can, with equal ability, choose the good or bad. As a matter of fact, some are even sinless. Thus, according to Pelagianism, there is no need for the Holy Spirit or his irresistible grace to help man to do good. Such teaching is thoroughly pagan, and the Christian church soundly rejected it at the Synod of Carthage."⁶⁰

Meanwhile, let's go to another theme of monotheistic religions, that of judgment. Enoch's Admonition to his Children in Chapter XCI of the Book of Enoch declares:

"9. And all the idols of the heathen shall be abandoned,
And the temples burned with fire,
And they shall remove them from the whole earth,
And they (i.e. the heathen) shall be cast into the judgement of fire,
And shall perish in wrath and in grievous judgement for ever."⁶¹

Because that is the monotheistic way, if you ain't doing it our way, you will pay and pay utterly!

Certainly, as orthodox Christianity began to cohere its beliefs, most of the Gnostic papyri didn't make it into accepted Biblical canon. Let's take another look at some of their passages.

Here are the words of *The Second Stele of Seth*, translated by James R. Robinson:

"For their sake thou hast empowered the eternal ones in being; thou hast empowered divinity in living; thou hast empowered knowledge in goodness; in blessedness thou hast empowered the shadows which pour from the one. Thou hast empowered this (one) in knowledge; thou hast empowered another one in creation. Thou hast empowered him who is equal and him who is not equal, him who is similar and him who is not similar. Thou hast empowered in begetting, and (provided) forms in that which exists to others. [...] Thou hast empowered these. - He is that One Hidden in the heart. - And thou hast come forth to these and from these. Thou art divided among them. And thou dost become a great male noetic First-Appearer."⁶²

To have this "empowered divinity in living", it is necessary to recognize that which is divine is "That One Hidden in the heart." There isn't a huge gulf between 'almighty god' and 'depraved' humanity.

Furthermore, from the Gospel of Thomas:

1. Jesus says: 'Let him who seeks cease not to seek until he finds: when he finds he will be astonished; and when he is astonished he will wonder, and will reign over the universe!'
2. Jesus says: 'If those who seek to attract you say to you: 'See, the Kingdom is in heaven!' then the birds of heaven will be there before you. If they say to you: 'It is in the sea!' then the fish will be there before you. But the kingdom is within you and it is outside of you!'
3. 'When you know yourselves, then you will be [...] known, and you will know that it is you who are the sons of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you will be in a state of poverty, and it is you <who will be> the poverty!'"⁶³

He repeats this point further on in the Gospel of Thomas:

71. Jesus says: 'He who knows the All, but has failed to know himself, has failed completely to know, <or to find> the Place!'"⁶⁴

He is consistently saying you will derive the gnosis from within yourself, not from external sources.

Did any of this survive into the accepted Biblical canon?

Let's first look at Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, which is celebrated on Palm Sunday. It is an event mentioned in all four canonical Gospels. It is foreshadowed in Zechariah 9:9:

"Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”⁶⁵

With our study so far, we can understand what the implications are. Set-Baal, as personified by the donkey, is carrying the king.

In chapter twenty-one of Matthew, Jesus asks his disciples, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”⁶⁶ As he rides the donkey, he fulfills the prophecy. The old religion has given support to the new. Now Jesus emerges triumphant.

Before this triumphant entry, Jesus is tested in the wilderness. The “devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'”⁶⁷

We now know the origins of this. Ialdabaôth, 'god of the Jews', as 'father of the visible universe' and 'prince of this world', 'engages in battle against the Lord'.

Meanwhile, there is a remnant of the Gnostic understanding in the New Testament. The New International Version of the Bible does not keep to the Gnostic wording:
“20 Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, 21 nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.’[c]”⁶⁸ The “[c]” leads to a footnote: “c. Luke 17:21 Or is *within you*”.⁶⁹

However, the King James Version retains the "within you" phrasing:
“20 And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: 21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”⁷⁰

So there is a little seed for the deep thinker to ponder where its meaning could lead.

Perhaps more Christians these days are coming to the more hopeful Pelagian view.
Pelagius taught:

“Whenever I have to speak on the subject of moral instruction and conduct of a holy life, it is my practice first to demonstrate the power and quality of human nature and to show what it is capable of achieving, and then to go on to encourage the mind of my listener to consider the idea of different kinds of virtues, in case it may be of little or no profit to him to be summoned to pursue ends which he has perhaps assumed hitherto to be beyond his reach; for we can never end upon the path of virtue unless we have hope as our guide and compassion...any good of which human nature is capable has to be revealed, since what is shown to be practicable must be put into practice.”⁷¹

“We can never end upon the path of virtue unless we have hope as our guide”. If we do not comprehend humankind's capacity to evolve, powered by accessing what is divine within us, any good that we manage to accomplish has been done only under the most grievous hardship.

As we have examined the path of Egyptian Set, Gnostic Seth and beyond, we have seen how later religions came into being. They didn't spontaneously arise fully formed, but gradually developed, appropriating elements from ancient religious iconography and practice.

Footnotes:

1. Birger A. Pearson, "*The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature*", in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale*, Vol. 1, edited by Bentley Layton, (Brill 1981), 504.
2. Pearson, 505.
3. Pearson, 511.
4. Pearson, 510.
5. Alexander Böhlig, commenting on Pearson, 511.
6. Bentley Layton, commenting on Pearson, 511.
7. Carsten Colpe, commenting on Pearson, 510.
8. Herman Te Velde, *Seth, God of Confusion: A Study of His Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion*, trans. Mrs. G. E. van Baaren-Pape (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1977), 124.
9. Te Velde, 124-126.
10. Marc Van De Mieroop, *The Eastern Mediterranean in the Age of Ramesses II*, (John Wiley & Sons 2008), page 220.
11. De Mieroop, 199.
12. Marsha Hill, *Gifts for the Gods: Images from Egyptian Temples*, (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 35.
13. Deborah Schorsch and Mark T. Wypyski, “*Seth, 'Figure of Mystery'*”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 45 (2009): 186.
14. Marsha Hill, 35.
15. Te Velde, 126.
16. Izak Cornelius, *The Iconography of the Canaanite gods Reshef and Ba'al*, (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 163 – 164.
17. Ada Feyerick, Cyrus Herzl Gordon, Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: World of Myths and Patriarchs*, (NYU Press 1996), 76.
18. Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, (Continuum International Publishing Group 1998), 76-78.
19. Russell E. Gmirkin, *Berossus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories*, (Continuum International Publishing Group 2006), 277-278.
20. Gmirkin, 277.
21. Gmirkin, 280.
22. Gmirkin, 280.
23. Gmirkin, 284.

24. John Douglas Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*, (Presses Université Laval, 2001), 747.
25. Jean Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*, translated by Hollis & Carter Ltd. (Inner Traditions, 1986), 129.
26. Doresse, 129.
27. Doresse, 251.
28. Doresse, 42.
29. Jan Assman, *Moses the Egyptian*, (Harvard University Press, 1998), 37.
30. Assman, 37.
31. Te Velde, 2
- 32: *The First Stele of Seth*, translated by James R. Robinson, ed., The Nag Hammadi Library, revised edition. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1990, via The Gnostic Society Library, <http://www.gnosis.org/naghomm/steles.html> (August 2012)
33. TFSoS, Robinson.
- 34: Andrew H. Gordon and Calvin W. Schwabe, *The Quick and the Dead*, (Brill-Styx, Leiden-Boston, 2004), 137.
35. Gordon and Schwabe, 137.
36. Francis Legge, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity from 330 BC to 330 Ad*, (Kessinger Publishing, 2003 of an earlier Cambridge University Press, 1915 edition), 46.
37. Legge, 46-47.
38. Doresse, 274.
39. Doresse, 176-177.
40. Francis T. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, (Brill Archive, 1978), 33.
41. Fallon, 33.
42. Fallon, 34.
43. *The Gospel of Philip*, translated by Wesley W. Isenberg, The Nag Hammadi Library, revised edition. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1990, via The Gnostic Society Library, <http://www.gnosis.org/naghomm/gop.html>(August 2012)
44. Jarl Fossum and Brian Glazer, *Seth in the Magical Texts*, Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik, Bd. 100 (1994), (Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn,Germany), 88-89.
45. Fossum and Glazer, 89.
46. Fossum and Glazer, 89.
47. Doresse, 105.
48. Fossum and Glazer, 91.
49. Fossum and Glazer, 92.
50. Fossum and Glazer, 92.
51. Fossum and Glazer, 92.
52. Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, (Thames & Hudson 1994), 137.
53. Wilkinson, 137.
54. *King James Version of the Bible*, via "The Phrase Finder",
http://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/14/messages/499.html(August 2012)
55. *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, via "The Phrase Finder",
http://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/14/messages/499.html(August 2012)
56. *The Book of Enoch*, translated by R.H. Charles, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917, via Internet Sacred Text Archive, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/boe068.htm> (August 2012)

57. Fallon, 62.
58. *The Book of Enoch*, translated by R.H. Charles, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/boe/boe084.htm> (August 2012)
59. Jack Cottrell, *The Holy Spirit: Power from on High*, (College Press Publishing 2007), 76.
60. Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism: A Study Manual*, (Baker Books, 1972)
61. *The Book of Enoch*, translated by R.H. Charles, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/boe/boe095.htm> (August 2012)
62. *The Second Stele of Seth*, translated by James R. Robinson, ed., The Nag Hammadi Library, revised edition. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1990, via The Gnostic Society Library, <http://www.gnosis.org/naghomm/steles.html> (August 2012)
63. Doresse, 355.
64. Doresse, 366.
65. *The Bible, New International Version*, (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™), <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Zechariah+9%3A9&version=NIV> (September 2012)
66. *The Bible, NIV*, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2021:1-21:11&version=NIV> (September 2012)
67. Matthew 4: 8-9, *The Bible, NIV*, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+4&version=NIV> (September 2012)
68. Luke 17:20, *NIV*, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+17&version=NIV> (September 2012)
69. Footnote, *NIV*, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+17&version=NIV> (September 2012)
70. Luke 17:20, *KJV*, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2017&version=KJV> (September 2012)
71. *The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* by Brinley Roderick Rees, (The Boydell Press 1991), pgs. 36-37, via Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelagianism> (September 2012)