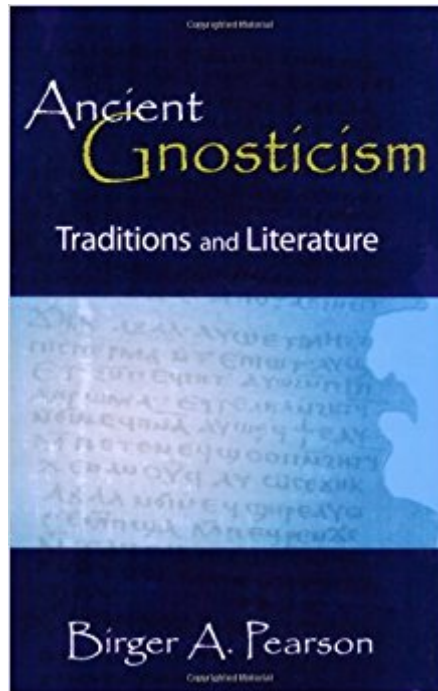




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# Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions And Literature



## Synopsis

Even as public interest is attracted to this esoteric religion, Escholars have debated its origins, its relationship to Judaism and Christianity, and even whether one distinctive and separate Gnostic "religion" ever existed. Birger Pearson's expert and accessible introduction brings the reader into the debate. Directly addressing the nettling questions of origins and definition, Pearson situates the advent of Gnosticism within the Greco-Roman religious world and critically appraises the sources. With illustrations, maps, timeline, and bibliography, Pearson's volume facilitates the pursuit of gnosis, at least historically, by general readers, students and scholars alike.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Great overview in first chapters, then it is so detailed many will not enjoy it.

"A lucid summary of a vast body of ancient literature...One can hardly find a better guide to the various movements active in early Christian centuries and the vast array of literature that they produced." Harold Attridge, Dean of Yale divinityProlegomena:"Orthodox Christianity was deeply and profoundly influenced by its struggles with Gnosticism in the second and third centuries," wrote

Lance Owens, editor of The Gnosis Archive website. This may be evident, but Owens was misled by Walter Bauer's conclusion, of (Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity, 1964/71), that orthodoxy was just one of many forms of early Christianity, stating that "Gnosticism was, at least briefly, in the mainstream of Christianity." Ancient Gnosticism: Birger Pearson, one of few experts on early Christianity not taking Bauer theory for granted, pursued a unique approach to ancient gnosticism mystery that changed the conception of many, including some Copts who followed with fascination an aspect of their own culture, expressed in Alexandrine Neoplatonic religious fantasy. In his survey of the Gnostic traditions and literature, ancient Gnostic thought may have preceded Christianity, flourishing in B. C. Alexandria. Pearson's study of primary literature emanates from a non disputed platform, of the Chenoboskion Coptic library, discovered near Nag Hammadi. In the preface he recounts how he was hooked on Gnosticism after a seminar held in Harvard by Utrecht eminent scholar Gilles Quispel on the Apocryphon of James before its publication in 1964. After introducing Gnosticism, through quotations of early Church fathers, its famous teachers, and recorded 'heresies,' the author, proceeds with a lucid selection of the Gnostic writings from the book of Allogenes all the way to the Codex Tchacos, part of which became a recent best seller as the 'Gospel of Judas.' In his procession through the vast array of breath taking literature, he captures the reader's imagination in a tour de force of Gnostic fantasy. In the Epilogue, Pearson describes 'The persistence of Gnosticism,' as his evident conclusion on manifestations of ancient Gnosticism survival, from Herod's Syria/Palestine to the contemporary Iran. He even posts a recent wedding photo of Mandaean remnants taken on the banks of Karun river in Ahwaz, that brings them back to life as a surviving relic of ancient Gnosis. Engaging Author: Birger Pearson is an outstanding Coptologist, and a leading expert on Gnostic literature. His books, The roots of Egyptian Christianity and 'Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity' offer clues to the roots of Coptic Monasticism by its Jewish Therapeutae founders.

product arrived on time, pleased with product, price, and seller.

I met the Gnostics through Hans Jonas, "The Message of the Unknown God", a book that left a profound impression on my whole way of looking at our religious heritage. Pearson's book, based as it is on the Nag Hammadi library throws a whole new light on this perspective, placing the Gnostic revolution in a Jewish context. It is interesting and eminently readable. However, I am personally convinced that the impact of oriental ideas, especially the doctrine of No God (what we term Buddhism) and the meeting of these, of Greek rationalism, Egyptian mystery cults, and Judaism are

the ingredients that better explain the extraordinary appearance of the conception of the "unknown God". I'm only halfway through the book as yet. Great reading!

My brother loved this book.

It was very boring and dry. Too many people to keep track of. Very repetitious. It seems to be a text book. I certainly would have fallen asleep in class!

Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature arrived on time and in superb condition. Thanks. Now I just have to find the time to read this book.

Written by Gnosticism expert Birger A. Pearson (Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, University of California Santa Barbara), Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature is an overview of all primary literary evidence for ancient Gnosticism, offering a crystal clear introduction to each writing, including the recently published "Gospel of Judas". Chapters cover the classic schools of Christian Gnosticism, Hermetic Gnosis, Manicheism, and the Mandaeanes. Chapters are keyed to standard translations of Gnostic writings, including "The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition" edited by Marvin W. Meyer, for easy cross-reference. Maps and recommendations for further reading round out this comprehensive introduction to who the Gnostics were and what they believed, accessible to religious scholars and lay readers alike.

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