Preserving the Divine: 
αὐτο- Prefixed Generative Terms and the *Untitled Treatise* in the Bruce Codex

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**Abstract**

In Greek literature from antiquity, there is a set of terms formed from verbs of origination or generation and prefixed with αὐτο-, which are represented primarily in three types of literature prior to the fifth century: in the surviving fragments from Numenius, in apologetic histories which incorporate oracular statements about first gods, and in the reports about and examples of Sethian literature. By considering the range of transliterated words in the Coptic *Untitled Treatise* based upon αὐτο- prefixed generative terms from Greek, we can discern several of the traditions that underlie this text’s multiple, often competing, narratives about the structure and population of the divine world. Many of those traditions are also recorded in apologetic histories, and comparison with these shows that the *Untitled Treatise* is an example of a different mode of historical writing, one which is preservationist rather than explicitly persuasive.

**Keywords**

*Untitled Treatise*, historiography, apologetics, Sethian, Numenius

**Introduction**

The *Untitled Treatise* in the Bruce Codex is an enigmatic text—it is, quite literally, a puzzle on several levels. The condition of its physical survival is one issue: what scholars now call the Bruce Codex was purchased in 1796 as a set of seventy-eight unbound folios, many of which were marked by drawings, diagrams, and specially drawn letters. However, a large portion of the folios had no indices or divisions. At one point, the folios were bound by the Bodleian Library, with no care for orientation or a
reconstructed order.\(^1\) As a result, the origin of the Codex—and many of the details of its existence as a codex—remain mysterious to us. This has not kept scholars from trying to make sense of the contents: though the folios were badly damaged, Carl Schmidt’s early efforts reconstructed a possible set of texts from the Codex. Even though the *Untitled Treatise* was identified as a unified piece of writing separate from the two *Books of Jeu*, its later editors have acknowledged that it is, itself, likely a compilation from a number of other works.\(^2\) Thus, understanding the content of the *Untitled Treatise* is another issue: its mythological narratives and the sources from which they might be drawn are confused, for there are multiple cosmological schemata contained in the *Treatise* which do not necessarily cohere and which the redactor did not exert himself to weave together. Neither the Bruce Codex, nor the texts contained in it, have a clear or easily traceable provenance.

With these complexities, the *Untitled Treatise* can confound even the most dedicated of readers. In this essay, I propose a philologically and historically specific tool for parsing the *Untitled Treatise*, one that can offer a solution to some questions about the *Treatise*. In Greek literature from antiquity, there is a set of terms, formed from verbs of origination or generation and prefixed with αὐτο-, that appear infrequently but which, when they do appear, have quite specific contexts and meanings that are easily traced. They are represented primarily in three types of literature prior to the fifth century: philosophical discussions of the first and second god, as in the surviving fragments from Numenius; apologetic histories incorporating oracular statements about first gods; and the reports about and examples of Sethian literature. By considering the range of transliterated words in the text based upon αὐτο- prefixed generative terms from Greek, we can discern several of the traditions preserved by the *Untitled Treatise*, which records multiple, often competing, narratives about the structure and population of the divine world. Scholars have taken this bewildering proliferation of divine characters in the *Treatise* as a sign that it should no longer be considered a part of the Sethian group, the primary examples of

\(^1\) Introduction to *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*, ed. Carl Schmidt, trans. Violet MacDermot, NHS 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), xi. This edition is based on Carl Schmidt’s edition of the late nineteenth century (Gnostische Schriften in koptischer Sprache aus dem Codex Brucianus. TU 8 [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1892]). I am deeply grateful for the suggestions and encouragement I have received from David Brakke, Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, Gina Brandolino, and the anonymous reader for *Vigiliae Christianae*.

which have a more limited, yet still impressive, number of divine actors. Fair enough, but even more than ruling out a context for the Treatise among Sethian works, attention to the proliferation of divine beings in the text, and specifically to the ways that αὐτο- prefixed generative terms are used about these beings, can yield useful information about the Untitled Treatise’s historical context.

For such proliferation is also a signal of the compiler’s impulse to gather information about the divine, without a concerted effort to harmonize or reconcile the variant traditions he recorded. The Untitled Treatise has been recently dated to the fourth century, and its particular style of historiography, which I will call “preservationist,” is quite different from the style most often employed in late antiquity to report outside accounts of the divine: the persuasive mode exemplified in the apologetic histories written by Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries.\(^3\) Compared to texts like Lactantius’s Divine Institutes and Eusebius’s Preparatio Evangelica, the Treatise represents a unique method, an unapologetic historiographical style, rather unlike that of Lactantius and Eusebius. What is more, given the coincidence of specific terms such as αὐτοπατήρ, αὐτοφυής, and αὐτογέννητος (and their derivatives) in the Untitled Treatise and in works of apologetic history, it is possible that the Untitled Treatise is a response to the evaluative and hierarchical arguments of apologetic historians. To prove these claims, I will explore three areas. First, I discuss the major trends in the use of αὐτο- prefixed generative terms in Greek literature up through the fourth century; second, I show how these trends are represented as potential sources used in the Untitled Treatise, and third, I explain how the inclusion of these trends in the Untitled Treatise is the result of a preservationist historiography.

**Generation of the Divine: The Uses of αὐτο- Prefixed Generative Terms**

In Irenaeus’s second-century work Against Heresies, he records at length the myth of a group that posits the existence of a divine character, the “Self-Originate.”\(^4\) This myth is now recognized as something quite similar to the myth recounted in the Apocryphon of John, taken by scholars as the paragon

\(^3\) See, for example, the discussion of such works in Pier Franco Beatrice’s article, “Pagan Wisdom and Christian Theology according to the Tübingen Theosophy,” Journal of Early Christian Studies 3 (1995): 403-418.

\(^4\) Against Heresies 1.29.
of the Sethian text group. What follows is the Apocryphon’s narration of the origin of the \textit{ⲁⲧⲟⲅⲡⲕⲡⲁⲃ}, a product of the highest god (here called alternately the “pure light,” or “Father”) and the Barbelo, a second divine being:

And Barbelo[n] gazed intently into the pure light. And turned to him and gave birth to a spark of light resembling the blessed light, but he is not equal in greatness. This is the only-begotten One, who came forth from the Father, the divine self-originate \textit{ⲁⲧⲟⲅⲡⲡⲡⲡ}, the first-born Son of all the Father’s [sons], the pure light.\textsuperscript{5}

In this text, the \textit{ⲁⲧⲟⲅⲡⲡⲡⲡ} is an entity produced by the Father and the Barbelo; it is made to resemble the pure light, but is less than that light. Thus it is something secondary and incomplete, later being “completed” by the Father.\textsuperscript{6} As should be evident from this cosmological narrative, \textit{ⲁⲧⲟⲅⲡⲡⲡⲡ} is a title, rather than a description. Though its production is quite special and different from the generation of the multitude of other beings in the \textit{Apocryphon of John}, the “Self-Originate” is not, in any meaningful way, something self-originate.

The titular, rather than descriptive, character of this name persists throughout the Sethian corpus. Though other texts in the corpus recount slightly different activities for and representations of the \textit{ⲁⲧⲟⲅⲡⲡⲡⲡ}, in none of these is the term \textit{ⲁⲧⲟⲅⲡⲡⲡⲡ} an indicator of the nature of the character. In the \textit{Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit}, for example, \textit{ⲁⲧⲟⲅⲡⲡⲡⲡ} is an adjective that applies to a particular god and to a realm into which many beings are baptized. In \textit{Zostrianos}, one of the Platonizing treatises identified by John Turner, the \textit{ⲁⲧⲟⲅⲡⲡⲡⲡ} also remains a title, one of the three revealed powers of the triple-powered aeon: the Hidden, the First Manifest, and the Self-Originate.\textsuperscript{7} There is a Self-Originate, and

\textsuperscript{5} Michael Waldstein and Frederick Wisse, eds., \textit{The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II, I; III, I; and IV, I with BG 8502.2} (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 40-42 (9.5-10.9 of NHC III). There is a variation in BG, having \textit{ⲧⲟⲅⲡⲡⲡⲡ} in place of \textit{ⲧⲟⲅⲡⲡⲡ}. Though the \textit{Apocryphon of John} survives only in Coptic translation, I include it, and other Sethian works, in this survey of Greek uses of \textit{αὐτο} prefixed generative terms.

\textsuperscript{6} NHC II.7.15-17// NHC III.11.3-5.

\textsuperscript{7} See Turner, \textit{Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition} (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, Section “Études” 6 [Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2006], 547-553). Additionally, parts of the \textit{ Untitled Treatise}, to be discussed below, reflect awareness of the tradition of the triple-powered aeon.
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there are self-originate things, but none of these are independent of other divine beings in the way the term \( \alpha \nu \tau \circ \tau \circ \epsilon \bar{\nu} \) would indicate. Though \( \alpha \nu \tau \circ \tau \circ \epsilon \bar{\nu} \) is a compound word, formed in a way that means “self-originate,” Sethian literature is unique for the ways that it has adopted this, and some other \( \alpha \nu \tau \circ \tau \circ \) prefixed generative terms, as titles, signs that do not convey any reliable ontological information about the characters they mark.

By contrast, \( \alpha \nu \tau \circ \tau \circ \) prefixed generative terms are employed to resolve philosophical issues of the nature of divine perfection and divine generation in other roughly contemporaneous literature. Numenius of Apamea, also writing in the second century, incorporates several types of \( \alpha \nu \tau \circ \tau \circ \) prefixed terms in his account of the existence of a monad—one immutable God—alongside the diversity and multiplicity of the material world. In his treatise On the Good Numenius balances a suggestive statement by Plato with an anonymously given title for the highest god, the “self-existent”:

Since Plato recognized that among human beings the craftsman alone was known, while the first intellect, the one called self-existent (ὅστις καλεῖται αὐτόν), was totally unknown to them, that is why he said: “O human beings, the intellect at which you guess is not the first, but [there is] another before this one, older and more divine.”

Reconciling two sources, Numenius produces an account of an intellectual entity behind the obvious craftsman of the cosmos, an entity not created in time. While many simply refer to this highest god as the Existent, τὸ ὄν, Numenius notes that the first intellect has been called “self-existent,” αὐτόν.9 Thus, there is a pattern by which a thing can be made superior by the addition of an \( \alpha \nu \tau \circ \tau \circ \) prefix, and Numenius subsequently follows that pattern to draw information from two seemingly incongruous statements about the divinity: one from the Republic, and one from the Timaeus. In fragment 20 of On the Good, Numenius grounds his case for the other, older intellect in the complexity of Plato’s very words, and in so doing, addresses the issue of participation in divine qualities:

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9) It is unclear where Numenius had heard this term, but one possibility is Alexander of Aphrodisias’s commentary on the Metaphysics, as des Places suggests.
In the *Timaeus* he wrote about the craftsman using normal language, saying, “he was good.” In the *Republic*, he said that the good was the “form of the good.” Thus the good is the form of the craftsman, which appeared to us to be good by participation in the first and only (ὅστις πέφανται ἡμῖν ἀγαθός μετουσίᾳ τοῦ πρώτου τε καὶ μόνου). For just as human beings are said to be modeled on the form of the human, cattle on the form of the cow, horses on the form of horse, thus, too the craftsman: if he is good by participation in the first good, the first intellect would be the form of the good, being self-good (αὐτοάγαθον).10

There are two entities, one that is good in itself and one that is good through participation in the other. In one stroke, Numenius clarifies the presence of the good in the lower of the two entities and preserves the highest entity from participation in any further, still higher, good. Though the two come into focus only through Numenius’s interpretation, his claim is that they are both known to Plato, who speaks of them enigmatically.

Surprisingly, Numenius can speak of both entities as craftsmen. That is the logical procession of his description of forms—horse modeled on the form of horse, and the like—which implies for the second god not only that he is good modeled on the form of the good, but also craftsman modeled on the form of the craftsman. Though this may seem implausible because of the pervasive nature of secondary valences attributed to the term “craftsman” in ancient philosophy, particularly among the interpreters of Plato after Numenius who sought a unitary god unblemished by contact with this world, that is precisely the trope Numenius employs in his most didactic, systematic explanation of the structure of divinity. In fragment 16 of *On the Good*, Numenius writes,

If the craftsman god is the beginning of becoming, then surely the good is the beginning of being. As the craftsman god is analogous to that one, being its imitator, then becoming is analogous to being, as it is its image and copy. If the craftsman is the good of becoming, then wouldn’t the craftsman of being be self-good (αὐτοάγαθον), of one nature with being? For the second one, being double, self-produces (αὐτοποιεῖ) his own proper form as well as the world, being a craftsman of sorts, thereafter entirely theoretical.11

Though less complex readings of Numenius have offered this fragment as proof that Numenius espoused a system of three gods, here there are manifest two beings: one is a craftsman of the stereotypical sort, and the other

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is an entity in the realm of being of which the former is a copy—the first god. Previously marked in Numenius’s treatise as “self-good,” here the first god is the “craftsman of being” (ὁ τῆς οὐσίας δημιουργός, opposed directly to ὁ δημιουργὸς ὁ τῆς γενέσεως). This is unexpected, and distinct—there is only one other example in ancient literature of the highest god being christened a “craftsman,” even figuratively, which we will discuss below.

Describing the highest god as a kind of craftsman is not the only innovation in On the Good. Numenius also introduces a new verb, predicated of the second god: ἀυτοποιεῖ.12 This represents the first extant time a philosopher uses the ἀυτο- prefix in front of a verb of generation or production, and it creates a solution to the problem that talk of participation elicits. The ἀυτο- prefix gives Numenius latitude to address the inevitable problem that arises in a discussion of the qualities and the second god’s partaking in them, namely, that in order for the second god to participate in a quality that the first god is, in itself, there must be a generative act by the first god, or some contact at the very least—inevitabilities that become liabilities to the unity and superiority of the first god. Although the second god, the craftsman, possesses qualities best represented in the highest god, and although he works with forms reflective of that highest god, he self-produces those forms, including his own form. This second god is both the creator of the world and at times the creation itself.13 Thus is nothing generated from the highest god, whether quality or form, and consequently it is not changed or diminished in any way.

Numenius was quite influential—Plotinus, for example, was accused of having borrowed his ideas from Numenius—but his use of an ἀυτο- prefixed generative term for the second of two gods was not adopted by those who admired his work.14 However, such terms do exist in late ancient literature. Though not extremely frequent, ἀυτο- prefixed generative terms appear in a wide range of forms and texts. In addition to being important in the work of later philosophers like Proclus, a large number of their occurrences are clustered in a special genre of late ancient Christian texts: apologetic histories. Best represented by Christian writers at the start of the fourth century, like Eusebius and Lactantius, but also by others like Cyril

13) See, for example, frag. 11 and 21 of On the Good.
14) For the place of Numenius’s works in Plotinus’s curriculum and the charge of overdependence on Numenius, see Porphyry, Life of Plotinus 14, 17.
and Ps-Justin, the apologetic historian effected a reconciliation between Hellenic claims about the divine world, both its ontology and mythology, and the history and theology of Christianity. Instead of rejecting non-Christian sources of information, apologetic historians incorporated these sources into their own accounts—to contain and contextualize the information they reported, but not to concur. With respect to αὐτο- prefixed generative terms, apologetic historians presented authoritative statements about the divine—sourced from oracles, or from Plato himself, often through Porphyry—in order to demote them to mistaken or false claims of Greeks ignorant of the Christian god, or worse, false claims of Greek gods ignorant of their very subordination to the Christian god. In this way, apologetic historians did use such terms to describe what were to them secondary gods, if not the second god of which Numenius spoke.

Let us look at a few examples. A sixteen-line oracle describing the highest god as αὐτοφυής survives in an inscription at Oenanda,15 but in the hands of Lactantius it became a means to present Apollo as confused and misinformed about the divine world.16 Iamblichus in de mysteriis reports a piece of Hermetic literature which suggests Hermes was αὐτοπατήρ, and again, when this same tradition is cited by Lactantius, it is used to demonstrate Hermes’ confusion.17 Ps-Justin, in his Cohoratio, reports a verse about the god of the Chaldeans, who is αὐτογέννητο, then interprets this as a sign of the partial, yet insufficient, truth of Greek religion.18 However, as

15) See the inscription from Oenanda and the discussion of D.S. Potter in his Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sybilline Oracle (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 351.
16) Lactantius, Div. inst. I.7 (Pierre Monat, ed., Lactance: Institutions Divines, Livre I, Sources chrétiennes 326 [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1986], 84); there is also an occurrence of αὐτοφυής in the Sibylline Oracles, but it does not appear related to this specific oracle.
17) Iamblichus, de myst. 8.2 (Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell, eds., Iamblichus: De mysteriis [Leiden: Brill, 2004], 306-308); cf. Lactantius, Div. inst. IV.8.5. Elizabeth Digeiser has pointed out that this is the one place in Div. inst. in which Lactantius disagrees with Hermes (The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius and Rome [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000], 72).
18) Ps-Justin, Cohortatio ad Graecos 11.11 and 24.29 (Miroslav Marcovich, ed., Pseudo-Justinus: Cohortatio ad Graecos; De monarchia; Oratio ad Graecos, PTS 32 [Berlin: deGruyter, 1990], 37, 56); for dating and the possible identification of Ps-Justin, see most recently Christoph Riedweg, Ps-Justin (Markell von Ankyra?) ad Graecos de vera religione (bisher “Cohortatio ad Graecos”) Einleitung und Kommentar, 2 vols. (Basel: Reinhardt, 1994), I:28-53 (dating the text solidly between 275 and 440 C.E. and likely within the first few decades of the fourth century) and I:167-182 (the case for Marcellus of Ankyra as the author, with stylistic parallels).
Eusebius reported a very similar verse, he identified it as a text included in Porphyry’s *Philosophy from Oracles*, only to explain it as a signal moment of Greek failure to understand the nature of God.  

Cyril’s text against Julian records a fragment from another of Porphyry’s works, *History of the Philosopher*, in which Plato is quoted describing the first good as both αὐτογέννητον and αὐτοπατήρ, as well as αὐτοκαλόν.  

Thus, terms such as αὐτογέννητον, αὐτοπατήρ and αὐτοφυής survive in double quotation: represented in apologetic histories as having an original context, in which they are revelations of divine knowledge, and yet they are also evaluated as indices of falseness by these histories.

By this survey, we have seen the use of several types of αὐτο- prefixed generative terms in Greek literature in the first four centuries of the common era. First, the ὄφις and other related terms appear in Sethian literature in a titular fashion. At the same time, an author like Numenius adopts the use of the αὐτο- prefix to distinguish the characteristics of the first god from that of the second, repeating the use of αὐτοόν and apparently, inventing αὐτοάγαθον. Numenius creates an αὐτο- prefixed generative term to speak of a second god, at once craftsman and creation, that self-produces (αὐτοποιεῖ) its form. Lastly, the apologetic historians of the third and fourth centuries preserve a number of αὐτο- prefixed generative terms, oracles or statements of Plato spoken of the highest god and mainly reported via Porphyry. As we will see, all three of these traditions are active in the *Untitled Treatise* in the Bruce Codex.

**Traditions in the Untitled Treatise**

The *Untitled Treatise* has not drawn more than the partial attention of the loosely-bounded field of gnostic studies, but what attention it has drawn

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21) This is not specifically the case for Ps-Justin, in that his use of such a term is in one of the few positive evaluations of Greek tradition in *Cohortatio*; even so, it stands as evidence that the primary purpose of citing these older traditions is to evaluate them.

22) There are many more, of course. After the fourth century, Proclus’s works stand out for having a high number of occurrences.

suggests that it is a difficult text to classify. As Hans-Martin Schenke drew the boundaries of the Sethian textual group over the course of a lecture and two articles, he disclosed that the *Untitled Treatise* was not an important exemplar of the group, but rather was ambiguously related to other, primary Sethian works. Jean-Marie Sevrin’s reconstruction of Sethian baptism contains a similar assessment; the *Untitled Treatise* is, for Sevrin, a text representing receptive criticism of Sethian mythology rather than a primary statement of the Sethian style. Although the connections between the *Untitled Treatise* and other Sethian texts were always tenuous, even in these earliest critical assessments, scholars have contextualized the *Treatise* with Sethian traditions. This is not without reason: some traditions of the Sethian group are indeed operative within the *Treatise*. For example, the narratives of the divine in folios 27 and following of the *Untitled Treatise* closely parallel Sethian accounts of the Triple-Powered One, along with its constituent powers and aeons. Furthermore, there are literary connections between the Sethian work *Zostrianos* and the *Untitled Treatise*, evident especially in the ranks described on folio 51 and following; as Luise Abramowski has detailed, this section of the *Untitled Treatise* depends on the reality of several characters familiar to readers of Sethian texts (the baptizing powers Michar and Micheu, and the four luminaries, three of which are named Eleleth, Dauiede, and Oroiael).

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26) See John Turner’s description of the Triple-Powered trope in Sethian literature. Turner notes, though, that the *Untitled Treatise*’s “position within the group seems to be derivative rather than constitutive” (“The Threefold Gnostic Path to Enlightenment: Ascent of the Mind and Descent of Wisdom,” *Novum Testamentum* 22 [1980]: 324-351, at 325).

Despite these parallels, other scholars have expanded upon the original hesitancy of Schenke and Sevrin to place the text outside the Sethian group and to locate it in a much later, likely fourth-century, context. Based upon the evidence recently rehearsed by David Brakke, there are multiple reasons to think that the *Untitled Treatise* was compiled after the rest of the traditionally identified Sethian group. Whereas Sethian works authorize themselves with pseudonymous figures of antiquity, the *Untitled Treatise* cites recent authors and books; the mythology of the *Untitled Treatise*, while showing some overlap with classic Sethian myth, is much more complex and contains many more characters than its predecessors; even the Coptic of the *Untitled Treatise* suggests that it was written, or translated, much later than the rest of the Sethian corpus.  

Thus, though we should not think of the *Untitled Treatise* as a primary example of the Sethian text tradition, it was certainly influenced by some Sethian works and records a reception of Sethian mythology. If we expand our perspective beyond the question of Sethian identity, however, the *Untitled Treatise’s* collection of divine mythologies offers much more, recording a number of other traditions and reflecting a number of other contexts.

One of those contexts must be Platonic, and specifically Numenian, theology. A portion of the *Untitled Treatise* outlines a theology centered on two gods: the first father and the second father. In this extended meditation on the characteristics of the two, students of the ancient world will recognize familiar philosophical concerns: the superiority of the highest divinity and the preservation of its qualities from the taint of contact with the multiplied divine beings below it. The meditation opens with a manifesto about the superiority of the One, the first father who is a superlative, superior, and unified god, above all other entities.

This is the father of every father. And the god of every god. And the lord of every lord. It is the child of all children, and the savior of all saviors, and the invisible thing of all invisible things, and the silence of all silences, and the infinite thing of all infinite things, the unlimited thing of all unlimited things, the thing belonging to the abyss of all the things belonging to the abyss, and a divinity of all the divinities. It is a single intelligible one, existing before every intellect. What is more, it is an intellect before every intellect.  

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29) *Untitled Treatise* 59-60 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 310).
Though the rhetorical strategy employed here is not the most nimble compared to other philosophical statements regarding the highest god, it is clear that the *Untitled Treatise* in the Bruce Codex argues for a first father surpassing all other categories of being. In the terms of the *Untitled Treatise*, this god remains unspoken, for it is not subject to the intellect (οὐχὶν ημιο Πέ),\(^{30}\) and it is above all and impossible to understand, though the All yearns to obtain him. In the division between the place of the first father and the rest of existence (the All), we may see a reflection of the more general middle Platonic division between the material realm and the god of the realm of being. Thus, in its own slightly repetitive way, the *Untitled Treatise* establishes a first father removed from materiality and change, and by doing so, takes part in the conversation about divine unity and multiplicity.

In its unique contributions to this conversation, the *Untitled Treatise* echoes the theory of Numenius, which survives in his treatise *On the Good*. This is most easily seen in the ways that the text speaks of the “second father,” a second god described in terms operative in late ancient Platonic traditions. As the *Untitled Treatise* explains, “There is a second god who will be called craftsman, and father and logos and source and intellect and man and eternal and infinite. This is the column. This is the overseer, and this is the father of the All.”\(^{31}\) As several of these diverse titles indicate, the second god serves as a mediator to all other beings beyond the first father. That mediation is accomplished in two forms: in addition to being the figure that acts as a craftsman, logos, and father, this second god is also imagined by the *Untitled Treatise* to have a body that appears to correspond to the elements of the cosmos. The aeons form a crown on its head, the light in its eyes reaches to the furthest places in the fullness, its facial hair is the outer worlds, the hairs on its head are the inner worlds.\(^{32}\) This second father exists in a way that humanity can seek and explore, even if humanity does not comprehend it. The second father in the *Untitled Treatise* is much like Numenius’s second god: it is the intellect known to humanity and provides a message to humanity, and yet it is more than an intellect, allowing divinity and humanity a bridge for interaction in its body, the material cosmos.

\(^{30}\) *Untitled Treatise* 1 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 214).

\(^{31}\) *Untitled Treatise* 1-2 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 215–217).

\(^{32}\) *Untitled Treatise* 2 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 217).
Though the *Untitled Treatise*’s discussion of its first and second father alludes in a broad way to the system of two gods described in Numenius’s system, a distinctive passage in the *Treatise* suggests that the compiler was directly influenced by a tradition preserved in *On the Good*. For one particular section of the *Untitled Treatise* bears a conspicuous resemblance to Numenius’s explanation of these two gods. In a description of the second father, the *Untitled Treatise* calls that god the “second craftsman.”33 Such a phrase implies a first craftsman, one which the *Untitled Treatise* identifies in another folio. In a hymn directed to the “One Alone,” namely the first father, the words of praise recorded by the *Treatise* echo those found in Numenius’s work *On the Good*:

For you alone are an incomprehensible one, and you alone are the invisible one, and you alone are the one without substance, and you alone are the one who has given the stamp to every creature. You manifested them in yourself. You are the craftsman of those things which have not yet manifested, because they are known to you alone—they are things which we do not know.34

Such a description suggests that the first father stands by himself, yet is like the “craftsman” of things not yet come into being. The hymn specifies that such things are “known to you”—the first father—“alone.” While the *Untitled Treatise* in the Bruce Codex does not call these unmanifested things forms, they may represent the forms thought of by the first god. The notion of the first god as a type of craftsman, only for the realm of the forms, is a distinctive metaphor, shared among texts in antiquity only by the fragment surviving from Numenius’s *On the Good* and this short prayer in the *Untitled Treatise*.35 Because these two texts contain the only depictions extant of the first god as a craftsman of sorts, and because using “craftsman” in any way to describe the first rather than the second god is so unusual within a Platonic milieu, it is plausible that the two texts have a literary relationship to one another—that the *Untitled Treatise* marks a tradition first seen in *On the Good*.

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33) *Untitled Treatise* 5 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 222).
34) *Untitled Treatise* 45 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 279).
35) There may be a third instance in the *Corpus Hermeticum* 8.2 (“The One that is truly first is eternal, unengendered, craftsman of all: God.”), but it does not specify that this god is the craftsman “in theory” or “of the forms.” See A.D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière, eds., *Corpus Hermeticum, Tome I, Traité I-XII* (Paris: “Belles Lettres”, 1960), 87.
Thus it is quite possible that the Untitled Treatise has adopted a version of Numenius’s theology—positing two gods, the second of which exists as an intellect and as a material world, while both gods can be described as craftsmen of their own realms. Yet Numenius was not the sole source for the Untitled Treatise’s cosmological claims. The redactor of the Untitled Treatise was also influenced by other traditions. One piece of evidence for the mixing and developing of ideas is that the Untitled Treatise describes the first father—a character it shares with Numenius’s On the Good—with αὐτο- prefixed generative terms that otherwise appear, not in Numenius’s works, but rather in the oracular literature discussed in the previous section. Consider the way that the text’s description of the first god is enhanced by the addition of two terms familiar from the reports of oracles.

It is a wise thing beyond all wisdoms, and a holy thing beyond all those who are holy. It is exceedingly good beyond all those good things. It is the seed of all good things. Also, it is pregnant with them all. The self-natured (ⲁⲩⲧⲟⲫⲥⲏⲥ) or the only growing thing that is before the entireties, which bore itself by itself and is existing at every time. It is self-begotten (ⲁⲩⲧⲟⲅⲏⲛⲏⲥ).36

In this description of the highest god, the Untitled Treatise adopts two special titles, terms previously seen in oracles as titles for that highest god. The compiler of the Untitled Treatise appears to have considered the reports of oracular literature to be compatible with the other, philosophical expressions of the highest god’s supreme status. This suggests that, for this writer in antiquity, drawing both from oracles and from discussions of divine qualities was a productive way to express information about the highest god. Put shortly, oracles were on equal footing with philosophers.37

In addition to what it reveals about the breadth of the compiler’s catchment of divine information, the presence of these oracular terms also allows us to accept a non-standard order for the folios of the Untitled Treatise. The acclaim of the first father as αὐτοφύς and αὐτογενηθεῖς

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36) Untitled Treatise 60 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 312). This is not the αὐτοφυής aeon of Valentinian sources, recorded by Irenaeus, as it is here linked to generation.

37) Notably, the Untitled Treatise may have been reflecting a trend toward the inclusion of “religious” texts among the authorities studied in the philosophical curriculum. For the changing approach to such texts in antiquity, see Aude Busine, Paroles d’Apollon: Pratiques et traditions oraculaires dans l’Antiquité tardive (Ier–Ve siècles), Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 156 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), especially the second half of the book and her particular discussion of Christian use of oracles, 361-431.
just cited appears at the end of the current order of folios, and yet, the first father is described on folio 1 as follows:

This is the first father of the All. This is the first eternity. This is the king of those untouched. This is he in whom the All wanders. This is he who gave it form within himself. This is the self-natured (ⲁⲩⲧⲟⲫⲩⲏⲥ) and self-begotten (ⲁⲩⲧⲟⲅⲉⲛⲏⲧⲟⲥ) god. This is the deep of the All; this is the truly great abyss. This is he to whom the All reached. They were silent about him. He was not spoken of, for he is an ineffable one; he is not subject to the intellect.38

The presence of these two distinct terms at folio 1 may mean that the current order of the folios need be rearranged, or rather, replaced to the original suggestion of C.A. Baynes.39 Rather than folios 1-51 followed by the displaced fragments contained in folios 52-60, the displaced fragments make better sense as the prelude to folio 1 and following. This order would keep the two similar accounts of the highest god as ⲁⲩⲧⲟⲫⲩⲏⲥ and ⲁⲩⲧⲟⲅⲉⲛⲏⲧⲟⲥ close to each other.

The Untitled Treatise also uses αὐτο- prefixed generative terms for other gods below the “first father.” These occurrences are concentrated in the enumerative sections of the Treatise: long lists of the unique personal names of parts of the divine order. As an example, consider the list of the “kinships” on folios 10 and 11. There are twelve of these entities, also designated “parents,” each of which has three faces; the Untitled Treatise identifies a name for each face. For example, the second parent has “an uncontained face, an immovable face, and an undefiled face.”40 In some cases, the names of the faces are adopted from more familiar texts: the third parent has “unknown, incorruptible, and Aphedron” faces, Aphedron being an entity that appears in at least two other Sethian works.41 In these lists, terms

38) Untitled Treatise 1 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 214; the citation continues, “This is the first source. This is he whose voice has penetrated everywhere. This is the first sound until the All perceived and understood. This is he whose members make a myriad myriad powers to each one of them.”) While the text seems to call this father a “place” (ΠΑΤΟΠΟϹ ΧΡΑΤΟΦΥΗϹ- ΛΙΨ ΧΡΑΤΟΦΕΝΗΠΟϹ), I translate it as “divinity,” for there is a tradition in first-century Greek philosophers, including Philo of Alexandria, of referring to God as a τότος. See, for example, Philo, On Dreams 1.63-64; this persists in Hebrew-oriented discussions of God as well (cf. Genesis Rabbah 28.11).


40) Untitled Treatise 10 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 228).

41) Untitled Treatise 10 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 228).
understood as characters— as the names of entities—in other treatises appear to be converted to adjectives for the faces of these kinships. Among the faces are “all-father, self-father, and forebegetter” (the sixth parent) and “covered, first-bright, and self-originate” (the ninth parent). Though this latter group clearly refers to the titles given to the three parts of the Triple-Powered One, the compiler makes no effort to explain how these faces might interact with the characters of the Triple Power. Indeed, it is as if the compiler does not understand that the list of kinships includes names that are characters in other treatises at all. These lists are the purest form of cataloging, akin to the catalogs of magic names listed in the other texts in the Bruce Codex, the Books of Jeu. And, such lists are paragons of the proliferation of divine characters leading scholars who study Untitled Treatise to disqualify it from the primary circle of Sethian texts. Though their presence may have caused scholars to abandon one possible context for the Untitled Treatise, these lists and the approach to the past they represent can create a new context for the text, one that reveals information about the effectiveness of apologetic histories at the beginning of the Christian turn to political majority.

Preservationist Historiography

Tracing the use of αὐτο- prefixed generative terms in the Untitled Treatise has allowed us to see that the work shares a set of source traditions, though not a historiographical method, with the apologetic histories. The Untitled Treatise includes in its extensive cosmology elements from Numenius’s On the Good, which survives primarily in Eusebius’s Preparatio Evangelica; several titles from oracles, which survive in various apologetic authors who draw from and respond to Porphyry’s challenge to Christianity; and the character αὐτοπόρτιος, from Sethian works, which until the recovery of the Nag Hammadi cache, were known primarily through Irenaeus’s report. What is common is this: all the texts that record the αὐτο- prefixed generative terms and are also available in the Untitled Treatise recorded them in order to evaluate them. Concerned with the management of religious information from non-Christian, often pagan materials and their incorporation into Christian accounts of human and mythological history, works

42) Untitled Treatise 11 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 230).
43) See also the lists of “deeps” (Untitled Treatise 4 [Schmidt and MacDermot, 218, 220]) and “species” (Untitled Treatise 19 [Schmidt and MacDermot, 242]).
of apologetic history manage and deploy information in evaluative schemata aimed at facilitating a superiority of Christianity. They do this with an acute sense of audience. In other words, most of these texts are explicitly persuasive—they act to influence social and political capital by reforming authoritative knowledge of the divine presented by “others,” be they Hellenes, Hermetists, or Hebrews. And, most of these texts have benefitted from the detailed attention of scholars of early Christianity, especially in the last fifteen years.44 One of the reasons why writers like Lactantius and Eusebius have gotten this kind of attention is directly related to how scholars read, and for what they read. There has been a shift, especially after the adoption of theorists like Michel Foucault by the English-speaking academy, toward investigating questions of power: its manipulation and deployment through universalizing instances of discourse is a central object of study. The texts of Christian writers in the thick of negotiating imperial support and access are rich locations for such an approach and by comparison, it is not surprising that a text like the Untitled Treatise has not garnered the same attention. It does not surrender easily to a reading with tools to understand persuasion, the accumulation of social capital, and the remaking of categories like “religion” or “history.”

It should be clear that the Untitled Treatise belongs in a different category of literature, as an example of preservationist historiography. Texts like the Untitled Treatise are indeed histories, characterized by the use of authorities and previous works, though they are not antiquarian or nostalgic about a past represented in their sources. What qualifies these works as preservationist is that they collect multiple sources that, in their original contexts, may not coincide, whether in their own content or the religious traditions of which they are a part. Such compositions do not present sources in order to evaluate them explicitly with the reader as a marked audience; there is no overt argument about or judgment of sources.45

44) There are too many examples to list, but the most prominent in English include Digeser, Making of a Christian Empire; Aaron P. Johnson, Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius’ Preparatio Evangelica, OECS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jeremy M. Schott, Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). One could also cite the excellent works and editions on apologists and their opponents by Christoph Riedweg (Ps-Justin [Markell von Ankyra?]) and Richard Goulet (Macarius Magnes, Le Monogénès: Introduction générale, édition critique, traduction française et commentaire par Richard Goulet (Paris: J. Vrin, 2003).

45) This is not to say that the authors of such works do not engage in evaluation, only that any evaluation of the sources takes place before their inclusion in the final text.
Indeed, there is a distinct lack of obvious rhetorical staging: a preservationist history presents its collection of information in a factual register rather than a persuasive register, yet it does persuade through its semblance of facticity. As a result, a preservationist history cannot be read fruitfully with the tools used to interpret the dominant mode of history in Christian late antiquity, the apologetic. Indeed, reading for power and persuasion in preservationist texts can make them seem at best, garbled, and at worse, naïve or unimportant.

This is not to say that examples of preservationist historiography are not historically useful or do not help us understand late antiquity. Far from it. As we study a world where apologetic writers sought to shape narratives—historical, religious, and imperial—it can be hard to remember that there were people apologetic historians did not convince or did not reach. Though the compiler of the *Untitled Treatise* had shared many of the same resources as the apologetic historian, he did not order and value them before the eyes of the reader. The compiler remains unaware of, or simply discounts, the hierarchy of traditions that writers like Lactantius work so hard to create; he incorporates traditions elsewhere represented in neoplatonic theology, Sethian mythology, and Greek oracles alongside quotations from Christian scriptures like the Gospel of John as equal and reliable sources about the divine world. When one considers a small and specific category, such as αὐτο- prefixed generative terms, the inclusive bent of the compiler is even more manifest: terms applied in their own contexts to first, second, and many gods, here are adopted when and where useful, in forms that do not necessarily follow their original uses.

The presence of such a text at the end of the fourth century suggests a continuing portion of the late ancient world unconcerned with the arguments presented by explicitly persuasive religious and ethnographic histories. The *Untitled Treatise* and other works written in the preservationist style should be recognized as products of historiography. Likewise, they should remind us to look outside the lens, and scope, of “power” as a scholarly tool of analysis; they must reorder our ideas of the success of Greek history writing employed by Christians in late antiquity; and they should expand our notions of religious diversity in the Christianized world. It was possible for a fourth-century writer to create a theological and cosmological history from sources without overt response to previous religious authorities or critics. For those who were outside the audience of apologetic historians, this way of writing is a return to an authority no quoted text in an apologetic history can command: the source from nowhere, unquestioned, authoritative, and ready to be harnessed.