

The Anamnesis of Sophia: A Clinical Encounter

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Introduction: *Invite audience into a brief mindfulness exercise bringing awareness to breath and one's own heart. (Slide 1) Play video of Suheir Haddam's reading of her poem, break(clustered), beginning at minute 2 @ 2012 TED talk, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAj1hsXp18c>.*

Gnosticism (Slide 2)

Gnosticism is deeply intertwined with the foundation of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions and an integration of the surrounding myths and cultures of the Hellenistic period. Jung went so far as to say that Christianity sprung from Gnosticism, "The roots of Gnosticism do not lie in Christianity at all – it is far truer to say that Christianity was assimilated through Gnosticism" (Jung, CW 12, para 453) **(Slide 3)** *Introduce the concept of Pleroma using a quote from Seven Sermon's to the Dead.*

The Pistis Sophia Myth (Slide 4)

In the story of *Pistis Sophia*, Sophia is the thirteenth aeon and gets a glimpse of the Treasury of Lights. She dares to aspire to be closer to this light and so the other twelve Aeons conspire to trick, oppress and tyrannize her. Mead makes the point in his introduction to his translation of *Pistis Sophia* that this text was not meant for common consumption (2005). It was for the initiated. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus tells his disciples (who are male and female) Sophia's story. She falls because the lion-faced power, the triple powers and the Self-willed (names Jesus uses to describe the various twelve Aeons) take advantage of her longing and trick her by putting a light that is "counterfeit" in the chaos. They take advantage of her longing for the light and then not only steal her light away from her but also mock her while doing it. What follows is thirteen series of repentances from Sophia that are passionate and delivered with a feeling of religious fervor. At one point in the story, Jesus takes pity and moves her to a more

spacious area within the chaos; he still has not received the commandment from The First Mystery to receive her repentances. This quiets the Self-willed because they fear that her repentances are being accepted, and when they realize that Sophia's repentances are not being accepted, they renew their ill treatment of her vehemently. Eventually, The First Mystery hearkens and does give the commandment to Jesus to redeem Sophia because of her unshakable faith and her endurance of the suffering. There is also a shift in the series of repentances where there is a sense that Sophia is now beginning to be conscious of both her value and her power. Sophia is crowned in a wreath of light "so that from now on the emanations of Self-willed could not have dominion over her" (Mead, 2005, p. 97).

The story resonates so deeply with the relentless and harrowing sojourn of individuation. The ego endures a separation, loneliness, and utter abandonment. In order to move towards wholeness and the Self, the ego must surrender. "For this reason the experience of the self is always a defeat for the ego" (Jung, CW 14, para. 778). In this divine drama, Sophia is brought low, very low. Sophia is a victim, yet she takes full responsibility for her own desires and vulnerability that participated in her story. For thirteen long series of repentances, she praises the Light and reflects on her own participation in her circumstances. It feels relentless as you read *Pistis Sophia*. How many repentances must she say? It is a long and arduous journey. There are no quick fixes or bypasses to psychic wholeness. One suffers through the chaos until a transformation is constellated. The figure of Jesus in the story explains to his disciples why Sophia was crowned with the wreath and redeemed, "She had been deluded through the god-like Self-willed, and had not been deluded through anything else, save through

a light-power, because of its resemblance to the Light in which she had had faith" (Meade, 2005, p. 83).

There is a transforming process in Sophia's redemption which is much more satisfying than Job's plight with Yahweh. There are lesser divine beings that conspire to bring about and foster Sophia's suffering, but The First Mystery is a deity from the Treasury of Lights that Sophia glimpsed through the veil which is in a sense above the Aeons that would participate in such cruelty. It is a more complex and multivalent image of the divine and points to forces and energies that are mediated and beyond what a human might directly encounter, let alone a lesser aeon. Jesus is the form that then comes to save and redeem Sophia. For Sophia, she comes through this experience wiser from the encounter and will no longer be vulnerable to the Self-willed who robbed her of her light.

Spirit in Matter (slide 5)

Sophia falling into chaos and being imprisoned in matter has been likened to humanity's original divine nature going into the unconscious and being forgotten. "...for humanity, from a state of self-knowledge to one of ignorance, from consciousness of its divine origin and nature to forgetfulness" (MacDermont, 2010/1978, p. 42). The Gnostic idea that is found in *Pistis Sophia* is the concept of the divine being redeemed in humanity. Through the encounter of an embodied lived experience with self-reflection, the ego learns to identify and separate from archetypal forces. The ego both comes to terms with its own humanness and at the same time restores the archetypal forces to their proper place.

Playing with the opposites of masculine/feminine and human/divine, what is called for is a divine sacred re-marriage of Yahweh and Sophia as an image of the Self.

And just as the *hieros gamos* unites Yahweh with Sophia (Shekinah in the Cabala), thus restoring the original pleromatic state, so the parallel description of God and city points to their common nature; they are originally one, a single hermaphroditic being, an archetype of the greatest universality (Jung, 2002/1952, p. 86).

This image that Jung speaks of is an image of psychic potential in the individual and in spirit. As Jung explores in *Answer to Job*, the human ills, conflicts and the suffering that we are cursed with cannot be repaired and healed by a human solution. A divine solution is required on a mythopoetic level (**Slide 6**). It may be helpful to look to an image from the alchemical series *Spendor Solis* to further contemplate this archetypal image of the Self as both wholly masculine and feminine. Consistent with a motif in *Pistis Sophia*, there is a purification of the light that is a part of her process before being redeemed. The number five is of particular interest here. Throughout Jung's work he looks to the number four as number of wholeness, yet the number five is a number of wholeness in the natural world and sacred to the Goddess (Walker, 1988, p. 74).

Jung used this image in *Psychology and Alchemy* (**Slide 7**).

"The triangle symbolizes the tendency of the universe to converge towards the point of unity... The whole picture corresponds to the alchemical *opus*, the tortoise symbolizing the *massa confusa*, the skull the *vas of transformation*, the flower the 'self' or wholeness" (1980, p. 154, fig.75).

Sophia is interpreted as the lotus, a symbol of the culmination of the individuation process. In our attempt to explore any image of Sophia, we can only look at her as a part of a greater whole of a larger process, much larger than any person can comprehend, but we can

get glimpses of her numinous nature and the transformative potential of the individual and the collective when she is freed from imprisonment in matter and elevated to her proper heavenly domain.

Sophia's Celestial Body (Slide 8)

An archetypal experience that resonates with Sophia is the orienting and numinous experience of star worship and stargazing. Often in drawings and paintings, the star is depicted as a five-pointed star, again a reference to the number five as a symbol of natural wholeness. Historically, the constellations have been used to navigate and orient us mortals in time and space. In *Psychology and Alchemy*, Jung uses the image “*Traité de la cablae*” to illustrate a dynamic relationship between the individual and the stars (1980, p. 151, fig.74). The image in the text is used to amplify the collective inferior function. Jung explains, “The feminine element in the deity is kept very dark, the interpretation of the holy ghost as Sophia is being considered heretical” (1980, para. 192). Jung goes on to elaborate on the collective resistance to valuing the inferior function, “This was in keeping with this psychological fact that the Holy Ghost should be heretically interpreted as Sophia, for he was the mediator of birth in the flesh, who enabled the deity to shine forth in the darkness of the world” (1980, para. 192). The “darkness of the world” connects back to the theme of evil and the faithlessness of Yahweh in the *Book of Job*, explored at length in Jung’s *Answer to Job*. As an image of the feminine Divine and as the Holy Spirit, Sophia is a source of light *within* the darkness.

Sophia as Spark (Slide 9)

Another name for Sophia is the Divine Spark. As the “the mediator of birth in the flesh, who enabled the deity to shine forth in the darkness of the world” (Jung, 1980, para. 192); she oversees the spark of life. This spark connects and ignites. Sophia is present in the biological act of creation as well as being present in artistic creations and also present as unconscious material emerges into consciousness. Present in the moment of inspiration, an act of animation, she infuses the artist with the image of what desires to be created. Although Sophia is not a material body, she is the air and fire of a spark in earth and water. Psychologically, she can be experienced as the “ah-ha!” moment in analysis, when content that has previously been unavailable to an analysand comes into consciousness. There is a feeling of illumination often felt as a dawning and a physical sensation of tingling or an electric feeling is reported by the analysand experiencing this inner awakening. Psychically some *thing* is being born out of the darkness of the unconscious into the ego’s capacity to receive and assimilate the content. In these moments, there is retrieval of soul where there had previously been an experience of soul loss often as a result of trauma and splitting. In these acts of redeeming a part of one’s soul, Sophia is also in an incremental way redeemed as well. She has been associated with the *anima mundi* or world soul. An image from a 1618 copper engraving visually gives us the experience of her *Sapientia Dei* in all her glory (Slide 10).

Dual Mother

There is a tension between the matter that imprisons and the Gnostic Sophia that is imprisoned. The matter as *mater*, or mother, calls forth many images of the Terrible Mother/Devouring Mother. It is the Great Goddess that ensnares like a spider's web or tomb. It brings up the dark side of the feminine that traps and is the bearer and bringer of death **(Slide 11)**. It is the antithesis of the spirit and light of the Gnostic Sophia that is not made up of matter but of ether - if she's made of up of anything at all. For the Greeks the ether or "star stuff" was the matter of soul and considered the fifth element. The Gnostics, Jesus and other holy spirits were "bodies of light" (Walker, 1988, p.74). In one version of the Gnostic myth, Sophia is seduced down into matter by a light. She perceives a reflection of the light of the Ineffable Father in the earth and is tricked into believing that it is the source, not seeing that it is a mere reflection and is compelled and drawn further and further into matter seeking this light. Sophia's desire and longing for the connection to the Light of Lights is the cause of her fall from her heavenly domain and the separation from her wholeness symbolized in the Pleroma.

(Slide 12) Psychologically, this archetypal phenomenon can be witnessed when one projects their light onto another. This can occur when one's potential or light is unconscious to them and to their ego stance. It is a positive shadow that is first experienced in a projection onto another. Like all projections, the psychic purpose is an attempt to show the ego an aspect of the self that is not yet assimilated into consciousness. The problem is that the ego all too often only experiences this projection as an objective truth of the other. What is dangerous about this, as is clearly depicted in the Gnostic myth of Sophia, is that it makes the one

projecting their light vulnerable to seduction and in a sense blinds them to the other and their shadow pulling and trapping the ego into the darkness and chaos.

Fadia (Slide 13)

For about 8 years I worked with a young Palestinian-American woman, whom I will refer to as Fadia, a feminine Arabic word for “savior.” First generation of refugees. Fadia started her analysis at 23 and was in her last year of a master’s program in education. Fadia had recently moved back in with her mother at the mother’s request. Traditionally in her culture it is the oldest daughter who would be responsible for the care of the mother, but Fadia’s oldest sister was recently married so the responsibility fell to Fadia.

The spark of Sophia within her felt quite strong and bright and was captivating. Fadia was not only stunningly beautiful, but she was also incredibly charming. Fadia presented as self-reflective, thoughtful, warm, dynamic, creative and talented. At a young age, Fadia had already received accolades for her creative and academic pursuits. In my supervision, it quickly was brought to my attention how I was idealizing her. And, I sure was. Even after years of working with Fadia, I was still quite enamored by her, but the problem in initially working with her and idealizing her was that it did blind me to her split off and deeply wounded feminine side. There was a very young and very wounded child that was being overlooked and abandoned, taking years to emerge into our sessions. Fadia’s little self, I will refer to as Fa as this mimicked a way

in which the client and I eventually referred to and differentiated between her high functioning persona self and her deeply deprived, mistreated and neglected self.

The most significant events that Fadia began in her early analysis to process occurred when she was 19. For a summer live work experience, Fadia passionately wanted to go to a Sufi residential retreat center outside of the city in nature. When Fadia was about to leave the house for the summer, her bags packed and a car waiting for her; Fadia's mother became highly emotionally dysregulated and proceeded to hang herself from the kitchen light with a dog leash. The younger sister was there and witnessed this attempted suicide. Fadia called 911, and her mother was hospitalized for a short time. Fadia's plans were successfully thwarted, and she did not leave for the summer. Only two months later, Fadia's younger sister with a history of cutting herself, made a much more serious suicide attempt by cutting her wrists length wise.

Fadia reported that she could not imagine being in a place where she would be driven to physically hurt herself. There was also a fear in her that she was aware of that she would somehow be driven to this act since both her mother and younger sister found themselves vulnerable to acts of suicide. Fadia was inspired to get a tattoo to protect herself from this possibility to remind herself of her own strength and resilience **(Slide 14)**. The tattoo is a quote from the Quran which reads, ""It is He Who makes the stars as beacons for you, that you may guide yourselves, with their help, through the dark spaces of land and sea" 6:97. It is reference to the divine shining down and guiding one through the darkness and chaos of life that Fadia and her family of origin were all too familiar with.

As Fadia began the real process of individuation and psychologically untangle herself from the mother, her mother was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. This occurred right as Fadia was about to graduate with her Master's degree and had solid plans to move out. On a psychoid level, it was a repetition to the early event in Fadia's history. Once again Fadia sacrificed her own path. Fadia became her mother's primary care taker. Archetypally, Fadia could not have been more in the grip of the Death Mother – the dark aspects of the Goddess. Nathan Schwartz-Salant writes quite poignantly in *The Black Nightgown: The Fusional Complex and the Unlived Life* about an experience clinically in the field that resonates here for both the plight of the Gnostic Sophia and for Fadia's personal story with her mother,

Experiencing this bottomless chasm with another person often leads to an intense feeling of guilt or blame for trying to separate from what feels like "the other's" dangerous insatiability. In opening to experiencing the field, it is not uncommon to feel nausea that seems to say, "this is unacceptable," as though the body were revolting from a dreadful state – and a demand to rescue the other person from it. The field may feel unwholesome, putrid, so that every cell of the body wants to get away from it. (2007, p. 9)

Fadia was compelled to care for her mother. It was not surprising that at certain point she developed her own tumor in her throat. It turned out to be benign but did require surgery to remove and a part of a bone that Fadia says, "looks like a butterfly", was partially removed. For Fadia, her association to a butterfly was psyche and that this was the price of her Negative Mother Complex.

The focus and the priority needed to be Fadia's self-care. The Self was demanding it. Clearly now to her ego, she could no longer afford to be identified with the Savior archetype. The wounded and imprisoned feminine that she was projecting onto her mother desperately

needed her attention and attunement. At this point in her journey, the Savior energy needed to be re- directed inwardly to redeem and reclaim this part of her soul that was trapped within *mater*.

For the first time in the midst of this tension, Fadia was able to choose herself despite her mother's dire medical condition and immanent death. Fadia moved out of her mother's home, delegated her care in an appropriate way, started a new job and got herself her own apartment. Nothing about this was easy and took time and conscious effort to extract herself and not succumb to the external and internal voices of judgment and condemnation for being "selfish". She was not only breaking the taboo of her personal family but a taboo within her heritage and religion.

Fadia was working full-time and seeing her mother in the evenings and on the weekends. The schedule was exhausting but slightly more sustainable. As she started to move on with her own life, she was more and more resistant to seeing her mother and resistant to physically caring for her. The colostomy bag was a particular source of revulsion. It was the image of the waste and stench of her mother's deteriorating body and was exposed and out in the open. Fadia was physically very engaged in the care of her mother i.e. feeding her, bathing her and changing the offending colostomy bag.

Throughout her mother's illness, Fadia's father had been in and out of the picture. Then one day Fadia got a call that her father was in the hospital. Fadia went to visit him and within days he died. This was unexpected and sudden. Her father had suffered from alcoholism and his

death seemed a result of a life of hard drinking and poor self-care. Within the year following her father's death, her mother was moved into a nursing home and finally passed away.

The death of both parents rendered Fadia a true orphan. The mourning process was presenting as the grief over losing the parents, the mother in particular. The pain and the loss were palpable. However, to me it seemed out of the crisis of caring for her clinging and dying mother, Fadia was able to start the long and hard process of grieving for all the holding and attunement *she* did not receive as a child. Her story had been eclipsed by the drama and the trauma of the parents. Now, there was finally space for her to begin a much deeper analytic process that was not focused on simply surviving but on starting to live. Fadia joined a support group for adults who had lost their parents and also started to find time and space to be creative. She began to bring in paintings of the emotional experiences of her grieving process. One image that was particularly charged was of an image of a female figure in a bed suspended in a dark red background and outlined in gold. Now that her mother had passed away, it was Fadia's inner feminine figure that needed all the intensive care.

Then in one session, Fadia revealed that her mother had always called her Fa and this was her name from childhood. It was not until she went to university that she was known as Fadia. In this moment, I felt in the field more intensely than before the little child within her that had been so overlooked and poorly cared for emerging, making herself known. Fadia was so accomplished and resilient that it had hidden this part of her away for safe-keeping. In exploring this further, I invited Fadia to do a sand tray and to find a figure for the grown woman Fadia and a figure for little Fa. Without touching the sand, she placed two figures in the tray

(Slide 15). The one for Fadia was an Isis figure and the other was this little fox figure that was from a Japanese animated game called Pokémon. The disparity was striking and I mused over all of her stories of being powerful, creative and capable in the world, and all along was this little wounded one hiding out waiting for things to quiet down long enough to be noticed.

Tears for Fa came when we explored what Fadia would do for a little girl who had just lost her parents and was suddenly orphaned. Fadia cried and her heart opened as she spoke of all the ways that she would comfort and care for such a little girl. The nurturing positive mother was highly developed in Fadia but had primarily been directed to another and towards her mother. As a parentified child, Fadia had “mothered” her mother longing for her mother’s happiness. The delusion was that Fadia could make her mother happy and that this happiness would somehow make her mother whole enough to in turn be a mother to Fadia. This part of Fadia’s story is not unlike the Gnostic Sophia’s where the protagonist is pulled deeper and deeper into the earth seeking a light that was not a source but a counterfeit light, amplifying the sheer inertia of being pulled into and trapped in a Negative Mother Complex.

(Slide 16-18) *Share the story of giving this text to the client for her process and consent to have this material shared for lectures or possible publication. In response to reading the content of this presentation, she brought in this beautiful three-dimensional collage. When you lift up the first layer, you see a woman and then through the panels (veil) there is a gorgeous heart surrounded by nature and flowers.*

Conclusion

Our world is filled with suffering and forces that are truly evil and want nothing but to destroy and feed the lion-faced power within and without. How do we dare to love ourselves and others in such a treacherous and potentially doomed collective? We are in dire straits. Erich Neumann expressed the inexpressible in regard to Sophia **(Slide 19)**.

“Thus the spiritual power of Sophia is living and saving; her overflowing heart is wisdom and food at once. The nourishing life that she communicates is a life of the spirit and of transformation, not one of earthbound materiality. As spirit mother, she is not, like the Great Mother of the lower phase, interested primarily in the infant, the child and the immature man, who cling to her in these stages. She is rather a goddess of the Whole, who governs the transformation from the elementary to the spiritual level; who desires whole men knowing life in all its breadth, from the elementary phase to the phase of spiritual transformation” (1974, p. 331).

For our modern era, Jung’s argument in *Answer to Job* for the redemption of Gnostic Sophia becomes more and more compelling. We, as mere mortals, can just possibly repair a divine split in our ancestral myths by redeeming the feminine divine within ourselves through our own personal individuation stories. If we dare and if we stay constant to our own divine heart wisdom, then there may just be hope, yet **(Slide 20)**.

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Poem: *break(clustered)*
by Suheir Hammad

<https://youtu.be/UAj1hsXp18c>

The Anamnesis of Sophia: A Clinical Encounter

Presented by Hilda Guttormsen

The Nothing, or fullness, is called by us the PLEROMA. In it thinking and being cease, because the eternal is without qualities. In it there is no one, for if anyone were, he would be differentiated from the Pleroma and would possess qualities which would distinguish him from the Pleroma.

In the Pleroma there is nothing and everything: it is not profitable to think about the Pleroma, for to do that would mean one's dissolution.

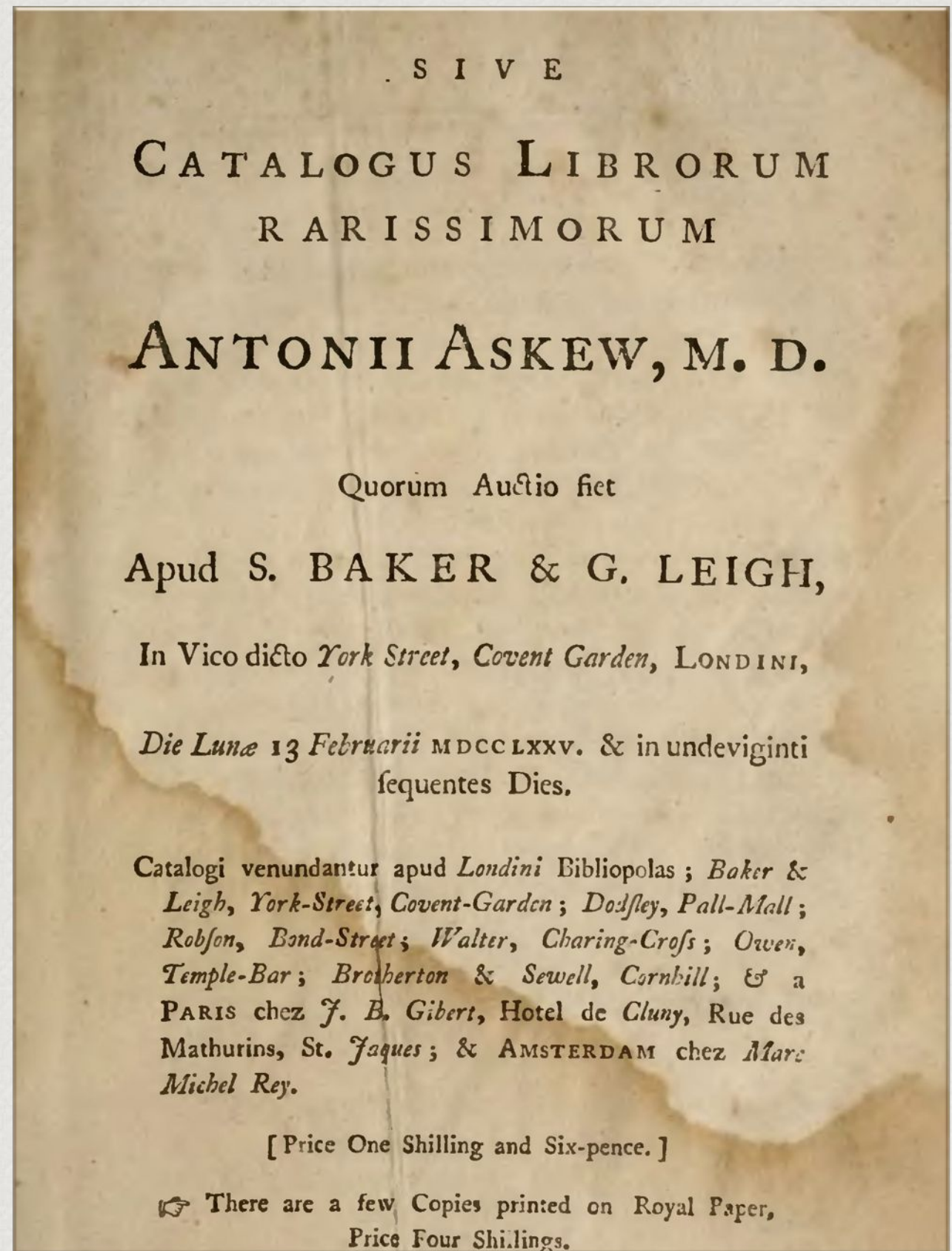
THE SEVEN SERMON TO THE DEAD

BASILIDES OF ALEXANDRIA

*Pistis
Sophia*

“Faith/Power Wisdom”

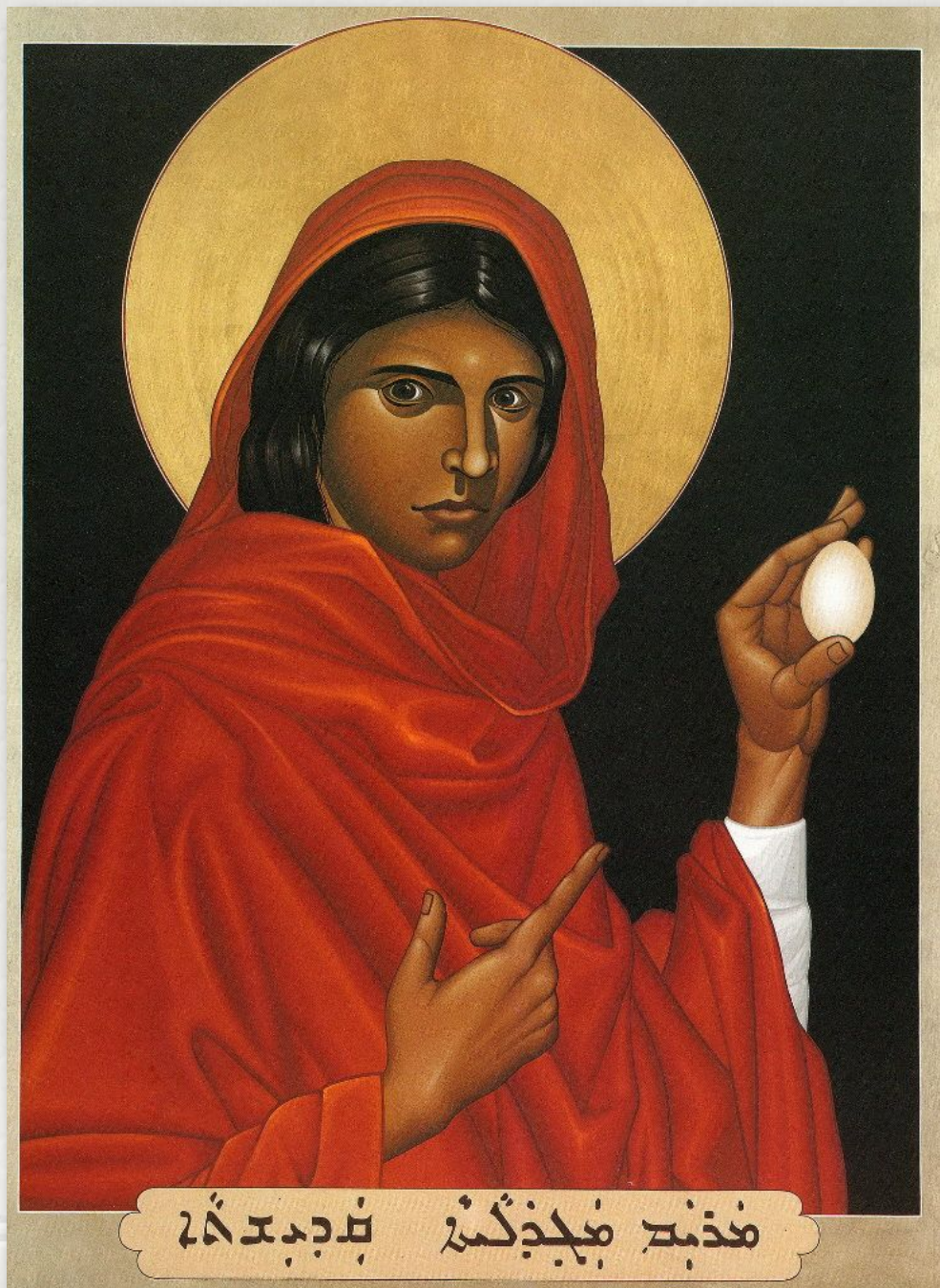
- *Part of Askew Codex*
- *G.R.S. Mead's translation (1921)*
- *Controversy over title*
- *Later found also in Nag Hammadi Scriptures*
- *Jung & Mead*



The Fall of Sophia

A Gnostic Text on the Redemption of Universal Consciousness

by Violet MacDermot



- *Interpretation of the myth the three world ages (Father, Son & Holy Spirit) prophesied by the 12 c. Cistercian abbot Gioacchino da Fiore*
- *First English Translation directly from the Coptic*

TRISMOSIN: Splendor Solis
16th century



PLATE IX.—THE FIFTH PARABLE.

The Fifth Parable

“And just as the *hieros gamos* unites Yahweh with Sophia (Shekinah in the Cabala), thus restoring the original pleromatic state, so the parallel description of God and city points to their common nature; they are originally one, a single hermaphroditic being, an archetype of the greatest universality” ~Jung in ATJ



“The triangle symbolizes the tendency of the universe to converge towards the point of unity... The whole picture corresponds to the alchemical *opus*, the tortoise symbolizing the *massa confusa*, the skull the *vas of transformation*, the flower the ‘self’ or wholeness“ CW12, p154



from *Traité de la cabale*

Jung's *Psychology of Alchemy*, fig



Sophia as Spark Scintilla

Hildegard von Bingen

From Liber Scivias
12 Century, Germany

THE ETERNAL FEMININE



A Psychological Phenomenon: projection of one's light





“It is He Who makes the stars as
beacons for you, that you may guide
yourselves, with their help, through the
dark spaces of land and sea” ~Quran
6:98

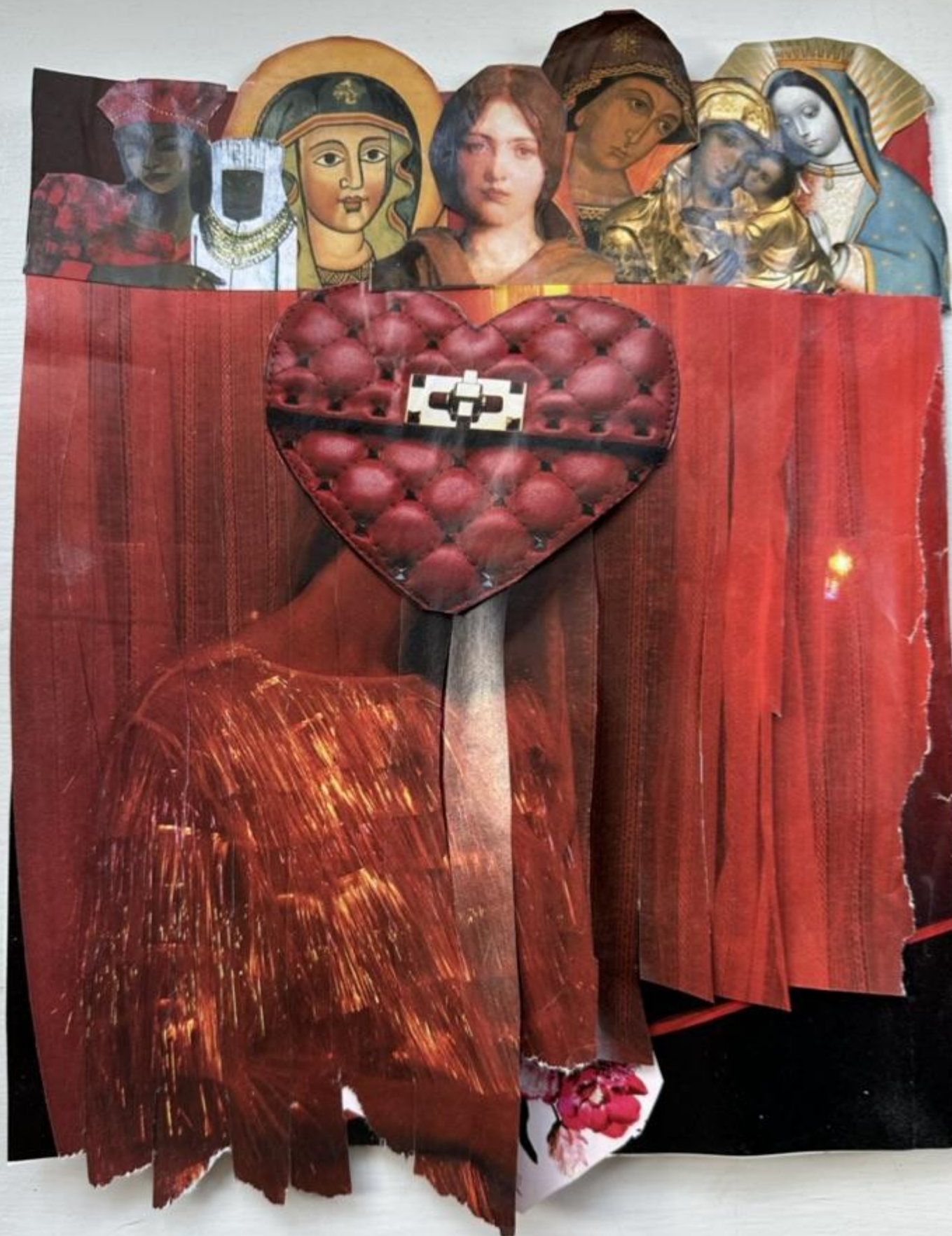
هو الذي يجعل النجوم منارات لكم حتى ترشدوا أنفسكم بمساعدتهم
عبر فضاءات البر والبحر المظلمة.

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Spiritual Transformation

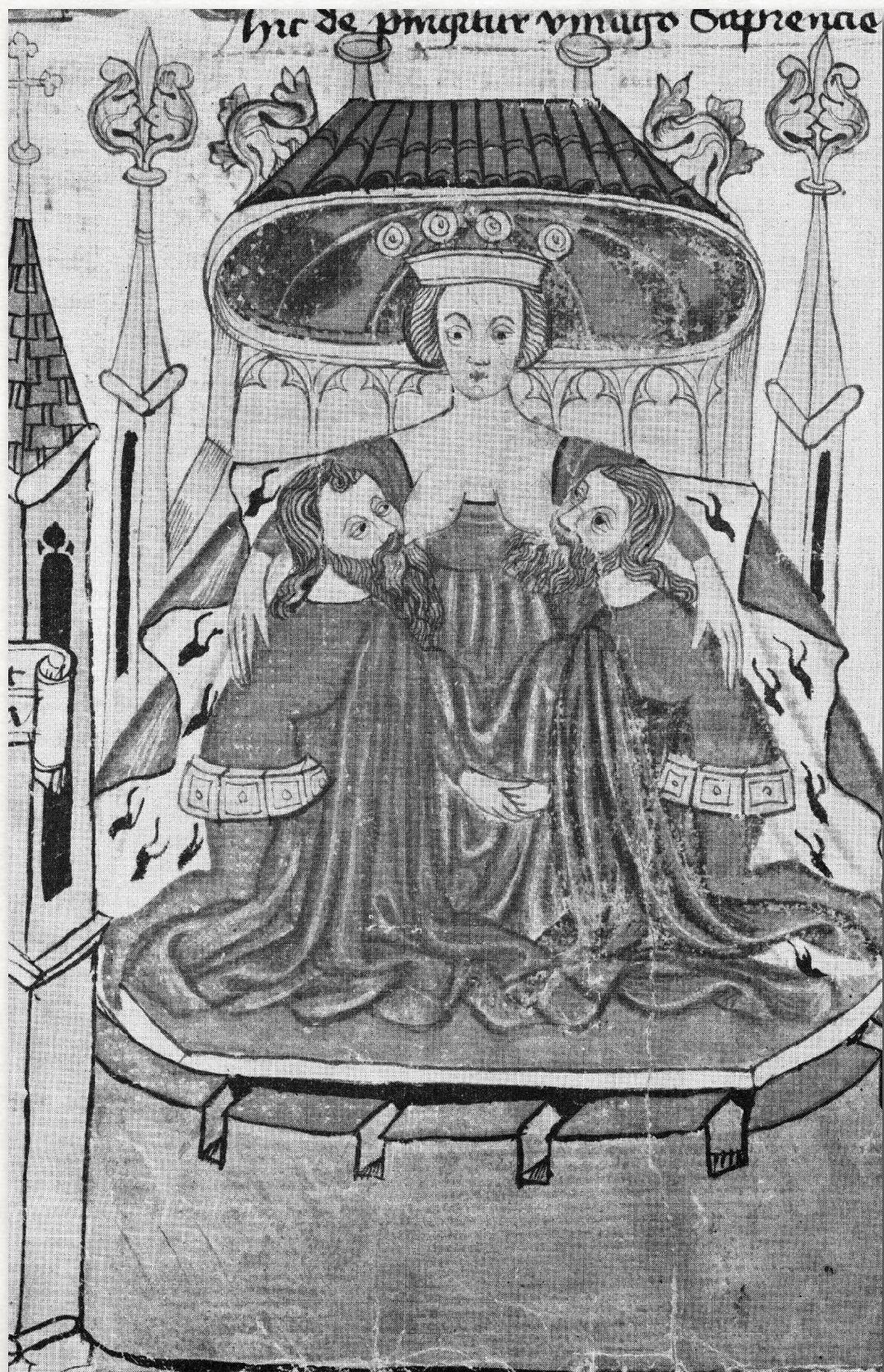


Image from Erich Neumann's
The Great Mother

"Thus the spiritual power of Sophia is living and saving, her overflowing heart is wisdom and food at once. The nourishing life that she communicates is a life of the spirit and of transformation, not one of earthbound materiality. As spirit mother, she is not, like the Great Mother of the lower phase, interested primarily in the infant, the child, and the immature man, who clung to her in these stages. She is rather a goddess of the Whole, who governs the transformation from the elementary to the spiritual level; who desires whole men knowing life in all its breadth, from the elementary phase to the phase of spiritual transformation."

