

L'Apocalypse de Paul (V,2)

Author(s):

Rosenstiehl, Jean-Marc
Kaler, Michael

E.I. Peeters (Leuven)
Presses de l'Université Laval (Quebec City)
«Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi [section «Textes»]», 31
2005
XXVII + 326 p.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul informs his readers that he had earlier been ravished up to heaven. Although he gives no details, or perhaps precisely for that reason, this brief allusion to a celestial ascension piqued the curiosity of readers in later generations, some of whom—seeking to fill in the gaps in Paul's account—composed their own accounts of what might have taken place during this ascension. One of these accounts, the *Visio sancti Pauli*, became extremely popular in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and was a strong influence on Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Other accounts of Paul's ascension exist as well, one of which is the *Apocalypse of Paul*. Although this gnostic work, preserved in a single Coptic manuscript, is considerably more obscure than the *Visio*, it is no less fascinating. Its author draws self-consciously on the Judeo-Christian “ascension apocalypse” literary tradition, a genre of writing whose characteristics involve the description of the heavenly ascension of a visionary figure. The *Apocalypse of Paul* uses the motifs of this tradition to provide the material for its own unique tale. The only extant copy of this work is found in the fifth codex of the Nag Hammadi collection. The *Apocalypse of Paul* is of course of considerable importance for those interested in Pauline or apocalyptic writings, but in addition to this, it is a charming story in its own right.

This volume includes a new edition of the Coptic text, accompanied by a French translation; an extensive introduction; an exhaustive commentary (in English); and a Coptic and Greco-Coptic index. It presents the most thorough analysis of this text to date. The author of the commentary argues that *Apocalypse of Paul* should be seen as a work of Valentinian propaganda, composed in order to convince its readers that Paul himself was a gnostic, devoted to liberating his fellow gnostics from the domination of the creator god. The author of the introduction, however, views the work differently.