

L'Exposé valentinien. Les Fragments sur le baptême et sur l'eucharistie (NH XI,2)

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The *Valentinian Exposition* is the second text in codex XI. It is some 18 pages long, to which should be added five pages containing the fragments of a treatise on baptism and the Eucharist. These works are preserved in Coptic translation, in the Sub-Achmimic (Lycopolitan) dialect with some traces of Sahidic. It is written in uncials, slanting to the right, very similar to the style of writing found in the school of Oxyrhynchus, which would suggest that our Coptic text dates from the third century, being itself a translation of a Greek original which would have been composed in the second century. The lacunous state of this work unfortunately makes it impossible to present a detailed thematic commentary, but its Valentinian affiliation cannot be denied.

The *Valentinian Exposition* describes a Pleroma ruled over by the Father and made up of 360 eons, as well as a lower cosmos separated from the Pleroma by the Limit. This lower, and inferior, cosmos was brought into existence as a result of Sophia's error in desiring to create without the assistance of her spouse. According to this work, Christ descends from the Pleroma in order to liberate Sophia and to restore the original completeness and unity of the Pleroma by gathering up the spiritual seeds that Sophia's error caused to be dispersed in the lower world.

The mythological tale of the *Valentinian Exposition* has many features in common with the various Valentinian systems described by the heresiologists, and with the Tripartite Tractate, a Valentinian work from Nag Hammadi codex I. The *Exposition's* vocabulary is distinctively Valentinian, as are its teachings about the Monad, the Ogdoad, the Decad, and the Dodecad. The fall of Sophia, the production of the Demiurge, the creation of hylic and spiritual humanity and the descent of the Saviour in order to separate the higher elements from the passions are also Valentinian doctrines, attested in the systems described by Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, and Epiphanius of Salamis. The three fragments dealing with baptism and two dealing with the Eucharist, following the *Exposition* and also contained in this volume, are to be put in the same Valentinian context as the *Exposition* itself. (The division of the Pleroma into 360 eons, on the other hand, is reminiscent of the celestial numerology that one finds in Eugnostos, a work that is preserved in two Nag Hammadi codices, namely codices III and IV.) Overall, the *Valentinian Exposition*—despite its lacunous condition—is an important primary source for Valentinian beliefs.