

Marsanès (NH X)

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The treatise entitled *Marsanes* is a revelation discourse in which a prophet-teacher named Marsanes reports upon his spiritual ascent into the beyond. The treatise is affiliated with a non-Christian, Platonizing branch of the Sethian gnostic movement. Originally composed in Greek towards the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century, perhaps in Alexandria, this treatise reflects mythological traditions that are more fully and precisely expounded in other texts belonging to a distinctively Platonizing group of Sethian texts, especially *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*; its peculiar interpretation of traditional Sethian mythemes suggests its location towards the end of the literary evolution of the Sethian corpus.

Occupying the whole of codex X, *Marsanes* is one of the most poorly preserved of the fifty-four treatises of the Nag Hammadi Library. The object of the treatise is to establish Marsanes' authority as prophet, visionary, and spiritual head of his community, and to present his detailed teaching concerning the first principles of Sethian theology with special reference to the nature and the destiny of the soul. Its revelation of the various levels of reality is based upon the ascent of a visionary to the very summit of being itself, a common feature of apocalyptic literature.

One of the most distinctive features of *Marsanes* is its concern for the proper understanding of the correct nomenclature to be used in dealing with the powers, angelic and divine, as well as planetary and cosmic, that control the destiny of the soul—whence its emphasis upon the ability to manipulate the grammatical and astrological symbols that represent them. In addition, throughout the treatise one finds the author's exhortations to be aware of the connections between the knowledge he conveys to his audience and their access to salvation.

The reader is therefore confronted with a discourse in which philosophical conceptuality is subjected to religious ends, such as one finds in other contemporary treatises, especially the *Hermetica*. *Marsanes* is heavily indebted to Greek thought, especially in matters of grammatical theory, astrological and arithmological speculation, and metaphysics; in this respect, certain features of *Marsanes* closely approximate those found in the Neoplatonic philosophers Iamblichus and Theodore of Asine.

The English introduction is written by J. D. Turner, the Coptic text is edited by W.-P. Funk and translated into French by P.-H. Poirier, who is also responsible for the French language commentary.