TREATISE ON THE RESURRECTION (Codices Gnosticorum I, 4, 43.25-50.18)

The fourth tractate of Codex I from the NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY. This tractate is a brief, personal communiqué from an unknown Gnostic teacher to his pupil “Rheginos” (43.25). Written in response to the pupil’s questions regarding the nature, means, and goals of personal resurrection from the dead, the document propounds a view of realized eschatology (“already you have the resurrection,” 49.15-16; cf. 49.22-26) which bears remarkable resemblance to the heresy combated in 2 Timothy 2:18.

With respect to physical characteristics, the 262 lines of text (43.25-50.18; fols. 22-25) are cast in a preclassical form of the Subakhmimic dialect, the same dialect used for all tractates in Codices I, X, and the first half of XI. This is a Coptic translation, the original having been composed in Greek—as certain puns, high incidence of Greek loanwords, and syntactical patterns make clear. Further, the orthography of script reveals that this tractate was copied by the same scribe responsible for the first two tractates in Codex XI. With minor exceptions, the eight papyrus sheets are well-preserved and the text is little damaged.

The tractate is cast in the form of a personal letter, even though a praescriptio naming sender and receiver is missing. However, the indisputable presence of the Cynic-Stoic diatribe style and the use of a commonplace philosophical vocabulary in places have led some scholars (notably Martin, 1971; Layton, 1979; and Dehandschutter, 1973) to conclude that it is not a true letter but rather a philosophical tract, a lecture, or a homily. Whatever the resolution, a prior relationship between teacher and pupil (as indicated by the form of address, “son” and “sons,” 43.24; 46.6; 50.2-3; and by a personal rebuke, 49.28-30) suggest that its personal tone is not wholly fabricated.

The author-teacher—whose ideas reflect influences from Valentinian gnosticism (Eastern), Pauline eschatology, and Middle Platonic thought—offers three major teachings: (1) that individual resurrection, though philosophically indemonstrable and seeming fantasy, is, because
of Christ’s resurrection, a certain reality for one having “faith” (46.3-47.10; 48.3-38); (2) that resurrection involves, immediately at death, the shedding of physical flesh and the ascent to the pleroma of an inward, spiritual body (“members”) which retains the personal identity of the deceased (47.4-8; 47.38-48.11—note the use of the Transfiguration as a proof); and (3) that since one knows the inevitability of physical death and participates now in the resurrection-ascension of Christ, he should live as having “already been raised” (49.16-36).

Presupposed by both author and reader is a cosmogonic myth (probably Valentinian) according to which this world has come into being through a split in the heavenly pleroma (which had included the preexistent Elect, 46.38-47.1; cf. 47.26-27) and a consequent devolution of the Divine (48.34-49.5). This makes the “spiritual resurrection” of individuals actually part of a cosmic process of “restoration” of the disrupted Pleroma (44.30-33; 45.36-40).

Though the first editors of the text (Puech and Quispel; see Malinine et al., 1963), held that it was probably written by the arch-Gnostic Valentinus himself around 140-165, most scholars today affirm an anonymous Gnostic teacher to have been the author. Still, the presence of an allusion to Valentinian speculation about the aeon (45.11-13), a fragment of a cosmogonic hymn (46.35-47.1), and Valentinian symbolism (48.34-49.5) make manifest Valentinian associations of the Treatise. Most scholars date it to the late second century.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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