

# Marsanes

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SECTION «TEXTES»

— 27 —

## MARSANÈS (NH X)

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## Information on Marsanes

**B**IRGER A. PEARSON WRITES, "The prophet Marsanes is known from two other sources. He, together with another prophet named Nicotheus (or Nikotheos), is named in the 'Untitled Text' of the Bruce Codex (ch. 7). As noted above, Nicotheus is also mentioned in Porphyry's Life of Plotinus (ch. 16). In the Bruce Codex, Marsanes and Nicotheus are said to be 'great ones' who have seen heavenly verities and revealed them to others. Epiphanius, in his discussion of the Archontics, mentions two prophets honored by them, Martiades and Marsianos, who had been snatched up to the heavens and had come down after three days (Panarion 40.7.6). ('Marsianos' and 'Marsanes' are two different ways of rendering in Greek a name of Syriac origin.) Visionary ascent is certainly a prominent feature of what remains of the Nag Hammadi tractate Marsanes. In this tractate Marsanes gives advanced instruction to a group of his followers who have already been initiated into gnosis. The author of the tractate may be the Gnostic prophet Marsanes himself; alternatively he may be an otherwise unknown teacher who claims to be writing in the name of the prophet Marsanes. Marsanes reflects a good deal of the Platonist school tradition that we have seen in Steles Seth, Zostrianos, and Allogenes." (Ancient Gnosticism, pp. 92-93)

**John D. Turner writes,** "All scholars who have had occasion to comment on Marsanes in relation to other Sethian literature have called attention to its unique postulation of a new supreme principle, the Unknown Silent One, which transcends the Invisible Spirit, who is otherwise the supreme principle of all the other Sethian treatises. This modification of Sethian theology is parallel to a similar phenomenon that occurs in Iamblichus (cf. Damascius On First Principles 1.21,11-14; 25,21-22) and his disciple Theodore of Asine (Proclus Commentary on Plato's Timaeus 2,274,10-20), who placed an ineffable One absolutely unrelated to anything else at the summit of all reality - including Plotinus's supreme One, which was at least 'present to' subsequent reality. Of course, at least in the case of Marsanes and Theodore, this supreme One nevertheless has some relation to its inferiors, since for Theodore, the 'second One' was the aspiration ('breathing'), self-contact, and intelligibility of the first One, and for Marsanes, the Invisible Spirit (which 'has no breath,' 15,1-4; 15,29-16,2)

seems to share both the silence and the activity of the Unknown Silent One. On these grounds as well as the presence of the prophet's name in the Bruce Codex, one might date Marsanes to the late third or early fourth century, contemporary with Iamblichus and Theodore." (The Nag Hammadi Scriptures, p. 631)



## Marsanes

### Translated by Birger A. Pearson

**(10 lines unrecoverable)**

... and a reward. They came to know; they found him with a pure heart, (and) they are not afflicted by him with evils. Those who have received you (pl.) will be given their choice reward for endurance, and he will ward off the evils from them. But let none of us be distressed and think in his heart that the great Father [...]. For he looks upon the All and takes care of them all. And he has shown to them his [...]. Those that ...

**(10 lines unrecoverable)**

... at first.

But as for the thirteenth seal, I have established it, together with the summit of knowledge and the certainty of rest. The first and the second and the third are the worldly and the material. I have informed you concerning these, that you should [...] your bodies. And a sense-perceptible power will [...] those who will rest, and they will be kept from passion and division of the union.

The fourth and the fifth, which are above, these you have come to know [...] divine. He exists after the [...] and the nature of the [...], that is, the one who [...] three. And I have informed you of [...] in the three [...] by these two. I have informed you concerning it, that it is incorporeal ... (1 line unrecoverable) ... and after [...] within [...] every [...] which [...] your

[...]. The fifth, concerning the conversion of those that are within me, and concerning those who dwell in that place.

But the sixth, concerning the self-begotten ones, concerning the incorporeal being which exists partially, together with those who exist in the truth of the All [...] for understanding and assurance. And the seventh, concerning the self-begotten power, which is the third perfect [...] fourth, concerning salvation and wisdom. And the eighth, concerning the mind, which is male, which appeared in the beginning, and (concerning) the being which is incorporeal and the intelligible world. The ninth, [...] of the power which appeared in the beginning. The tenth, concerning Barbelo, the virgin [...] of the Aeon. The eleventh and the twelfth speak of the Invisible One who possesses three powers, and the Spirit which does not have being, belonging to the first Unbegotten (fem.). The thirteenth speaks concerning the Silent One who was not known, and the primacy of the one who was not distinguished.

For I am he who has understood that which truly exists, whether partially or wholly, according to difference and sameness, that they exist from the beginning in the entire place which is eternal, <i.e.> all those that have come into existence, whether without being or with being, those who are unbegotten, and the divine aeons, together with the angels, and the souls which are without guile, and the soul-garments, the likenesses of the simple ones. And afterwards, they have been mixed with [...] them. But still [...] the entire being [...] which imitates the incorporeal being and the unsubstantial (fem.). Finally the entire defilement was saved, together with the immortality of the former (fem.). I have deliberated, and have attained to the boundary of the sense-perceptible world. <I have come to know> part by part the entire place of the incorporeal being, and <I> have come to know the intelligible world. <I have come to know>, when <I> was deliberating, whether in every respect the sense-perceptible world is worthy of being saved entirely.

For I have not ceased speaking of the Self-begotten One, O [...] became [...] part by part the entire place. He descended; again he descended <from> the Unbegotten One who does not have being, who is the Spirit. That one who exists before all of them reaches to the divine Self-

engendered One. The one having being searches [...] and he exists [...] and he is like [...] and from [...] dividing [...] I became [...] for many, as it is manifest that he save a multitude.

But after all of these things, I am seeking the kingdom of the Three-Powered One, which has no beginning. Whence did he appear and act to fill the entire place with his power? And in what way did the unbegotten ones come into existence, since they were not begotten? And what are the differences among the aeons? And as for those who are unbegotten, how many are they? And in what respect do they differ from each other?

When I had inquired about these things, I perceived that he had worked from silence. He exists from the beginning among those that truly exist, that belong to the One who exists. There is another, existing from the beginning, belonging to the One who works within the Silent One. And the silence [...] him works. For as much as this one [...], that one works from the silence which belongs to the Unbegotten One among the aeons, and from the beginning he does not have being. But the energy of that One <is> the Three-Powered One, the One unbegotten before the Aeon, not having being. And it is possible to behold the supremacy of the silence of the Silent One, i.e., the supremacy of the energy of the Three-Powered. And the One who exists, who is silent, who is above the heaven [...], revealed the Three-Powered, First-Perfect One.

When he [...] to the powers, they rejoiced. Those that are within me were perfected together with all the rest. And they all blessed the Three-Powered, one by one, who is the First-Perfect One, blessing him in purity, everywhere praising the Lord, who exists before the All, [...] the Three-Powered. [...] their worship [...] myself, and I will still go on inquiring how they had become silent. I will understand a power which I hold in honour.

The third power of the Three-powered, when it (fem.) had perceived him, said to me, "Be silent in order that you might know; run, and come before me. But know that this One was silent, and obtain understanding." For the power is attending to me, leading me into the Aeon which is Barbelo, the male Virgin.

For this reason the Virgin became male, because she had been divided from the male. The Knowledge stood outside of him, because it belongs to him. And she who exists, she who sought, possesses (it), just as the Three-Powered One possesses (it). She withdrew from them, from these two powers, since she exists outside of the Great One, as she [...] who is above [...], who is silent, who has this commandment to be silent. His knowledge and his hypostasis and his activity are those things of which the power of the Three-Powered spoke, <saying>, "We all have withdrawn to ourselves. We have become silent, and when we came to know him, that is, the Three-Powered, we bowed down; we [...]; we blessed him [...] upon us." [...].

[...] the invisible Spirit ran up to his place. The whole place was revealed; the whole place unfolded <until> he reached the upper region. Again he departed; he caused the whole place to be illuminated, and the whole place was illuminated. And you (pl.) have been given the third part of the spirit of the power of the One who possesses the three powers. Blessed is [...]. He said, "O you who dwell in these places, it is necessary for you to know those that are higher than these, and tell them to the powers. For you (sg.) will become elect with the elect ones in the last times, as the invisible Spirit runs up above. And you yourselves, run with him up above, since you have the great crown which [...].

But on the day [...] will beckon [...] run up above [...] and the sense-perceptible [...] visible [...] and they ...

**(two pages missing, plus 14 lines at top of page after that)**

... the perception. He is for ever, not having being, in the One who is, who is silent, the One who is from the beginning, who does not have being [...] part of [...] indivisible. The [...] consider a ...

**(approx. 20 lines unrecoverable)**

... I was dwelling among the aeons which have been begotten. As I was permitted, I have come to be among those that were not begotten. But I was dwelling in the great Aeon, as I [...]. And [...] the three powers [...]

the One who possesses the three powers. The three powers [...] the Silent One and the Three-Powered One [...] the one that does not have breath. We took our stand [...] in the ...

**(approx. 23 lines virtually unrecoverable)**

... who does not have breath, and he exists in a [...] completely. And I saw [...] him to the great (fem.) [...] they knew him ...

**(approx. 21 lines virtually unrecoverable)**

... is active [...] why, again, (does) knowledge [...] ignorant, and [...] he runs the risk [...] that he become ...

**(9 lines virtually unrecoverable)**

... those [...]. But it is necessary that a [...] does not have form [...] to this one [...] exists before [...] the thought [...] from the beginning [...] the one that ...

... (approx. 6 lines unrecoverable)

... these [...] look(ed) at [...] in nine [...] the cosmic hebdomad [...] in a day of [...] for ever ...

**(8 lines unrecoverable)**

... and [...] after many years [...], when I saw the Father, I came to know him, and [...] many [...] partial [...] for ever [...] the material ones [...] worldly [...] above [...] in addition ...

**(approx. 18 lines unrecoverable)**

... out of [...] into those that [...] them into [...] name them. And (as for) their nomenclature, bear witness yourselves that you are inferior to their [...] and their hypostasis.

But in addition, when ...

**(approx. 18 lines unrecoverable)**

... hidden [...] the third power. The blessed Authority (fem.) said [...] among these and [...], i.e., she who does not have [...]. For there is not glory [...] nor even the one who [...]. For indeed, the one who ...

**(approx. 18 lines unrecoverable)**

... and the signs of the Zodiac [...], and the [...], and [...] which do not have [...] acquire for [...] revolution [...]. But the soul(s) [...] there [...] body(s) of this [...] soul(s) of heaven [...] around [...] shape [...] which is ...

**(approx. 19 lines virtually unrecoverable)**

... all the likenesses [...] them [...] all the forms [...] shape(s), so that they [...] and become [...] themselves [...], and the [...] the animals [...], and the

**(2 pages missing)**

... there. But their powers, which are the angels, are in the form of beasts and animals. Some among them are polymorphous, and, contrary to nature, they have for their names which [...]. They are divided and [...] according to the [...] and [...] in form [...]. But these that are aspects of sound according to the third originate from being. And concerning these, all of these (remarks) are sufficient, since we have (already) spoken about them. For this division takes place again in these regions in the manner we have mentioned from the beginning. However, the soul, on the other hand, has different shape<s>. The shape of the soul exists in this form, i.e., (the soul) that came into existence of its own accord. The shape is the second spherical part, while the first allows it, eEiou, the self-begotten soul, aeEiouO. The second schema, eEiou, ... by those having two sounds (diphthongs), the first being placed after them ...

**(3 lines unrecoverable)**

... the light. Control yourselves, receive the imperishable seed, bear fruit, and do not become attached to your possessions.

But know that the oxytones exist among the vowels, and the diphthongs which are next to them. But the short are inferior, and the [...] are [...] by them. Those that [...], since they are intermediate [...]. The sounds of the semivowels are superior to the voiceless (consonants). And those that are double are superior to the semivowels, which do not change. But the aspirates are better than the inaspirates (of) the voiceless (consonants). And those that are intermediate will accept their combination in which they are; they are ignorant of the things that are good. They (the vowels) are combined with the intermediates, which are less. Form by form, <they constitute> the nomenclature of the gods and the angels, not because they are mixed with each other according to every form, but only (because) they have a good function. It did not happen that <their> will was revealed. Do not keep on sinning, and do not dare to make use of sin.

But I am speaking to you (sg.) concerning the three [...] shapes of the soul. The third shape of the soul is [...] is a spherical one, put after it, from the simple vowels: eee, iii, ooo, uuu, OOO. The diphthongs were as follows: ai, au, ei, eu, Eu, ou, Ou, oi, Ei, ui, Oi, auei, euEu, oiou, ggg, ggg, ggg, aiau, eieu, Eu, oiou, Ou, ggg, ggg, aueieu, oiou, Eu, three times for a male soul. The third shape is spherical. The second shape, being put after it, has two sounds. The male soul's third shape (consists) of the simple vowels: aaa, eee, EEE, iii, ooo, uuu, OOO, OOO, OOO. And this shape is different from the first, but they resemble each other, and they make some ordinary sounds of this sort: aeEoO. And from these (are made) the diphthongs.

So also the fourth and the fifth. With regard to them, they were not allowed to reveal the whole topic, but only those things that are apparent. You (pl.) were taught about them, that you should perceive them, in order that they, too, might all seek and find who they are, either by themselves alone [...], or by each other, or to reveal destinies that have been determined from the beginning, either with reference to themselves alone, or with reference to one another, just as they exist with each other in sound, whether partially or formally.

They are commanded to submit, for their part is generated and formal. (They are commanded) either by the long (vowels), or by those of dual

time value, or by the short (vowels), which are small [...], or the oxytones, or the intermediates, or the barytones.

And consonants exist with the vowels, and individually they are commanded and they submit. They constitute the nomenclature of the angels. And the consonants are self-existent, and as they are changed, <they> submit to the hidden gods by means of beat and pitch and silence and impulse. They summon the semivowels, all of which submit to them with one accord, since it is only the unchanging double (consonants) that coexist with the semivowels.

But the aspirates and the inaspirates and the intermediates constitute the voiceless (consonants). Again [...] they are combined with each other, and they are separate from one another. They are commanded and they submit, and they constitute an ignorant nomenclature. And they become one or two or three or four or five or six, up to seven, having a simple sound, <together with> these which have two sounds, [...] the place of the seventeen consonants. Among the first names, some are less. And since these do not have being, either they are an aspect of being, or they divide the nature of the mind, which is masculine, (and) which is intermediate. And you (sg.) put in those that resemble each other with the vowels and the consonants. Some are: bagadazatha, begedezethe, bEgEdEzEthE, bigidizithi, bogodozotho, buguduzuthu, bOgOdOzOthO. And the rest [...] babebEbibobubO. But the rest are different: abebEbibob, in order that you (sg.) might collect them, and be separated from the angels.

And there will be some effects. The first (fem.), which is good, is from the triad. It [...] has need of ... (1 line unrecoverable) ... their shapes. <The> dyad and the monad do not resemble anything, but they are first to exist. The dyad, being divided, is divided from the monad, and it belongs to the hypostasis. But the tetrad received (the) elements, and the pentad received concord, and the hexad was perfected by itself. The hebdomad received beauty, and the ogdoad received [...] ready ... (1 line unrecoverable) ... greatly. And the decad revealed the whole place. But the eleven and the twelve have traversed [...] not having [...] it is higher [...] seven ...

**(9 lines virtually unrecoverable)**

... promise that [...] begin to separate them by means of a mark and a point, the one which quarrels from the one which is an enemy.

Thus [...] of being ... (1 line unrecoverable) ... the letters [...] in a holy or according to a bond existing separately. And <they> exist with each other in generation or in birth. And according to [...] generation, they do not have [...] these ...

**(10 lines unrecoverable)**

... one [...] speaking the riddle.

Because within the sense-perceptible world there exists the temple, which measures seven hundred cubits, and a river, which [...] within [...] for ever, they [...] three [...] to the four [...] seals [...] clouds, and the waters, and the forms of the wax images, and some emerald likenesses.

For the rest, I will teach you (sg.) about them. This is the generation of the names. That (fem.) which was not generated [...] from the beginning ...

**(9 lines virtually unrecoverable)**

... time(s), when confined, when spread out, when diminished. But there exists the gentle word, and there exists another word which approaches, being [...] in this manner ... (1 line unrecoverable) ... And he [...] the difference [...] and the [...] the all and a [...] the undivided beings, and the power [...] having a share in the joy separately and [...], whether ...

**(7 lines unrecoverable)**

... power [...] he exists in every place, [...] them always. He dwells with the corporeal and the incorporeal ones.

This is the word of the hypostasis that one should [...] in this way: if [...] with their [...] helping those who stir up the [...] manifest [...]. If one knows him, he will call upon him.

But there are words, some of which are two, but others existing separately

**(10 lines virtually unrecoverable)**

... or according to those that have duration. And these either are separate from them, or they are joined to one another or with themselves, either the diphthongs, or the simple vowels, or every [...] or [...] or [...] exist just as [...] exist [...] the consonants [...] they exist individually until they are divided and doubled. Some have the power [...] according the letters that are consonants ...

**(8 lines virtually unrecoverable)**

... by themselves [...] and three (times) for the vowels, and twice for the consonants, and once for the entire place, and with ignorance for those which are subject to change [...] which became [...] together with the entire place [...] Finally.

And [...] they all [...] they are hidden, but they were pronounced openly. They did not stop without being revealed, nor did they stop without naming the angels. The vowels join the consonants, whether without or within, [...] they said [...] teach you (sg.) [...] again for ever. They were counted four times, (and) they were engendered three times, and they became ...

**(2 lines unrecoverable)**

For these reasons, we have acquired sufficiency; for it is fitting that each one acquire power for himself to bear fruit, and that we never cast aspersions on the mysteries [...] the [...]. For [...], which is [...] the souls [...] the signs of the Zodiac [...] a new hypostasis.

And the reward which will be provided for such a one is salvation. But the opposite will happen there to the one who commits sin. The one who commits sin by himself [...] will be in a [...] in a ...

**(2 lines unrecoverable)**

... in order that before you (sg.) examine the one who <...>, one might tell another about an exalted power, and a divine knowledge, and a might which cannot be resisted. But you shall examine who is worthy that he should reveal them, knowing that those who commit sin [...] down to [...] as they [...] the Father [...] that which is fitting. Do not desire to give power to the sense-perceptible world. Are you (pl.) not attending to me, who have received salvation from the intelligible world? But (as for) these <words> - watch yourselves - do not [...] them as a(n) ...

**(3 lines unrecoverable)**

... understand [...], and he takes [...] the rest, I will speak of them. The perfection [...], in order that it might increase [...] who commit sin ... (1 line unrecoverable) ... the embodied souls did not understand them. Those that are upon the earth, as well as those outside of the body, those in heaven, are more than the angels. The place which we talked about in every discourse, these [...] stars ... (1 line unrecoverable) ... book(s) [...] whether already [...] into the [...]. Blessed is [...], whether he is gazing at the two, or he is gazing at the seven planets, or at the twelve signs of the Zodiac, or at the thirty-six Decans ...

**(9 lines virtually unrecoverable)**

... and these numbers, whether those in heaven or those upon the earth, together with those that are under the earth, according to the relationships and the divisions among these, and in the rest [...] parts according to kind and according to species ... (1 line unrecoverable) ... they will submit, since she has power [...] above [...] they exist apart ...

(Of the remaining 26 pages, 10 are missing and the remaining 16 are so badly decomposed that only a few scattered words and phrases are recognizable.)



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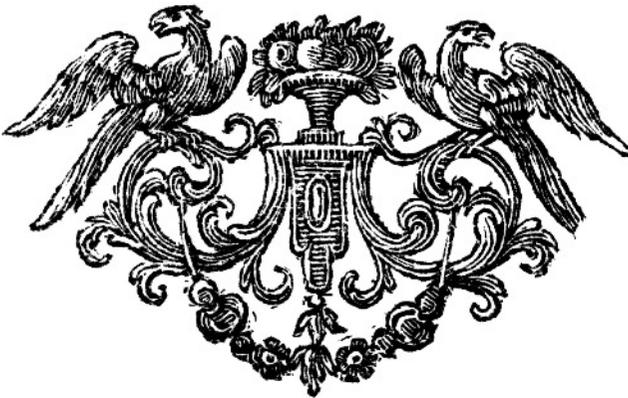
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