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 Codex and Epiphanius' account of the "Archontic" gnostics (see below 40.7.6). According to these external testimonia Marsanes was a visionary who experienced an ascent into the heavens. An ascent experience and heavenly revelations are also features of the tractate *Marsanes*. In terms of literary genre, *Marsanes* is an "apocalypse" in which the author speaks in the first person to a group of initiates. The author is either someone named Marsanes, or, more likely, one who writes in the name of a prophet by that name. ("Marsanes" is probably a Syrian name; *mar* means "master" in Syriac.)

The first ten pages are relatively intact, and contain material relating to a gnostic ascent experience, or perhaps an ascent ritual. It includes a discussion of various levels of reality, symbolically referred to as "seals," ranging from the "worldly" and "material" (2,16–21) to the realms of the invisible "Three-Powered One," the "nonbeing Spirit," and the "unknown Silent One" (4,12–23).

Enough material is preserved in the middle of the codex to indicate that it contains speculations on the mystical meaning of the letters of the alphabet, and their relation both to the human soul and to the names of the gods and angels of the heavenly spheres.

The very fragmentary pages at the end contain material dealing with visionary experiences and a baptismal ritual.

The tractate concludes with a word of encouragement to "those who will know him" (68,17, probably referring to the supreme Father mentioned at the beginning, 1,11–25).

Marsanes, a non-Christian gnostic text, belongs to those tractates whose features reflect a common "Sethian gnostic" system. The name "Seth" does not appear in the extant portion of the text, but it is possible that "Marsanes" is here considered an "avatar" of Seth, like "Zostrianos" in the tractate that bears his name (Pearson 1981a: 494–98). *Marsanes*, also like *Zostrianos*, is one of the tractates in the Nag Hammadi corpus that have been profoundly influenced by Platonist philosophy. The others are *The Three Gospels of Seth* and *Allogenes*. *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos* were read in Plotinus' school in Rome, and it is possible that *Marsanes* was one of the "other," unnamed "apocalypses" referred to in Porphyry's account (Porp. Vit. Plot. 16).

The kind of Platonism reflected in *Marsanes* is one that coheres well, both in terms of its metaphysics and its ritual references, to that of the Syrian Neoplatonist philosopher, Iamblichus of Chalcis (ca. 250–325 C.E.). For *Marsanes*, as for Iamblichus, matter is not evil per se, and is even capable of salvation (5,14–26). The ritual material in *Marsanes* is comparable to "theurgy" as discussed by Iamblichus in his famous treatise, *On the Mysteries of Egypt* (Pearson *fc.*). The original Greek version of *Marsanes* was probably written sometime in the 3d century, perhaps in Syria.

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MARSENA (PERSON) [Heb *marsēnā*?]. One of the seven princes of Persia and Media who were the advisers of King Ahasuerus (Esth 1:14). See **CARSHENA (PERSON)**. Although the presumption that the names of these counselors are Persian is reasonable (see the arguments of Millard 1977: 481–88, who counters the excessive caution of Moore [*Esther* AB, XLI–XLIV] regarding the reliability of the MT spellings), no name equivalent to this has thus far been found in the extant extrabiblical literature nor has a generally acceptable Persian etymology been suggested. The ending *-nā*?, however, could well exhibit the same patronymic suffix *-ina* that has been postulated for the name "Carshena," another of the seven advisers (Millard 1977: 485). For attempted etymologies see Paton *Esther* ICC, 68 and Gehman 1924: 324.

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MARSH. See **GEOGRAPHY AND THE BIBLE (PALESTINE)**.

MARTHA (PERSON) [Gk *Martha*]. Martha (from the Aramaic meaning "lady" or "mistress") appears in the gospel of Luke as the sister of Mary (Luke 10:38–42). She reappears in the gospel of John as the sister of Mary and Lazarus (John 11:1–12:11). The family were inhabitants of Bethany, a town located about two miles (ca. 15 stadia; cf. John 11:18) from Jerusalem. Luke does not mention that Martha had a brother named Lazarus nor that the sisters hailed from Bethany, but his placing of the story of Jesus' visit to their home immediately after the parable of the Good Samaritan which mentions the road from Jerusalem to Jericho (Luke 10:30–37, v 30) argues for a situs of their village near Jerusalem.

A. Luke

Scholars generally agree that the Lukan story has its basis in historical tradition. Martha was apparently the elder of the two sisters and the householder, since it was she who received Jesus into her house (Luke 10:38). For apparently unmarried women to have received a teacher into their home and engaged him in dialogue represents an unusual social situation in 1st-century Palestine.

A practical woman, Martha was distracted with the many

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demands of hospitality during Jesus' visit and petitioned his assistance in obtaining her sister's help. Her request apparently merits a mild rebuke from Jesus (Luke 10:41–42, whose Gk text exists in several variant readings). Jesus' words do not denigrate Martha's household service, but imply that the female disciples of Jesus, as the male disciples, are first called to be hearers of the word (cf. Luke 11:27–28). Some commentators take the repeated "Martha, Martha" of v 41 as an indication that Jesus' seeming rebuke is, in fact, a call to discipleship (cf. Gen 46:2; 1 Sam 3:4; Acts 9:4; etc.).

B. John

In the Fourth Gospel, Martha and Mary, along with their brother Lazarus, are said to be loved by Jesus (John 11:5). In the canonical gospels they are the only persons so described. The Johannine story of the encounter between Jesus and the family at Bethlehem (John 11:1–12:11) is one of the longest in the NT. Scholars dispute among themselves as to the relationship between the Johannine narrative and various Lukan accounts (principally Luke 10:38–42, but also Luke 7:11–17, 36–50; 16:19–31; and 19:41–44), as well as the historical character of the Johannine story, but they stand in almost unanimous agreement in the affirmation that the Johannine characteristics of the account clearly mark it as a Johannine composition. The story has two principal parts, the story of Lazarus' resurrection (John 11:1–44), in which Martha enjoys a principal role, and the story of Jesus' anointing (John 12:1–11), where Martha's role is secondary to that of Mary.

In general the character portrayal of Martha in John 11–12 is similar to that of Luke 10:38–42, especially her initiative in dialogue and her service at table, but the central role accorded to the dialogue between Martha and Jesus in John 11:17–37 is proper to the Fourth Gospel. Martha has been inserted into the narrative by the evangelist as a mouthpiece for his own theology. The evangelist's composition of vv 20–27 and 39b–40 allows him to use Martha as a foil for Jesus' affirmation that he is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

Like the mother of Jesus (cf. John 2:3, 5), Martha sets the scene for Jesus' self-manifestation (John 11:21–22, 24, 39). Her belief is initially inadequate, not going beyond the future eschatology of the Bible and some contemporary Judaism (John 11:24). Later, in response to Jesus' question, "Do you believe?" Martha responds with the most fully developed confession of faith in the Fourth Gospel: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world" (John 11:27). Martha's profession is a model for the evangelist's own community. She sees in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, and the one sent by the Father.

That the evangelist considers Martha to be a model believer is evidenced not only in her confession of faith, but also in the fact that she is beloved by Jesus (11:5), is the recipient of a self-revelation by Jesus (11:25–26), and tells another about Jesus (11:28). Thus, despite her initial grief (11:19) and seeming incomprehension (11:39–40), she manifests the full pattern of discipleship.

C. Later Tradition

Many of the traits attributed to Martha by the evangelists correspond to those of deacons in early Church communities. Her portrait could be cited as a precedent for women deacons. An occasional feminist reading of the Lukan narrative suggests that the Lukan story, with its rebuke of Martha in 10:42, may have served to restrict women's leadership in the Church. The longer variant Greek readings of 10:42 may indicate that some Church circles found the shorter statement too radical. The short reading ("one thing is necessary") has often been used to contrast the active and contemplative lives, but this represents a use of the text beyond the exegetical warrants.

In the Coptic version of the early 2d century *Apostolorum*, Martha is portrayed as a witness to the resurrection, and the first to tell the apostles about the risen Jesus, only to have her testimony rejected by them (see APOSTLES, EPISTLE OF). Her presence in this version is apparently in opposition to Mary Magdalene, the heroine of the gnostic tradition, whose presence in an analogous role is cited in the Ethiopian version of the manuscript.

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MARTYR, MARTYRDOM. In dealing with the phenomenon of martyrdom in the ancient Western world one immediately comes up against a complex of definitional problems (see also SUICIDE). Simply put, martyrdom refers to the act of choosing death rather than renouncing one's religious principles. Death then is voluntary, but not wholly so, since some element of compulsion exists, and some noble cause (in this case a religious one) is at stake. Is there a difference between taking one's life directly and allowing one's life to be taken? In some of the cases cited below the traditional "martyrs" seem eager to embrace death. Often there is a way of escape, some alternative to choosing death (as in the classic case of Socrates), so the degree and kind of compulsion can vary. It is particularly difficult to sort out the distinction between deaths motivated by religious principles, and others perhaps equally noble and morally motivated, but not directly associated with formal dogma. "Suicide," a comparatively recent word in English (Daube 1972), is often used to label cases of voluntary death which are viewed as less than noble, while "martyrdom" reflects a wholly positive evaluation.