

“Tell Me What Shall Arise”: Conflicting Notions of the Resurrection Body in Fourth- and Fifth-Century Egypt

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Abstract:

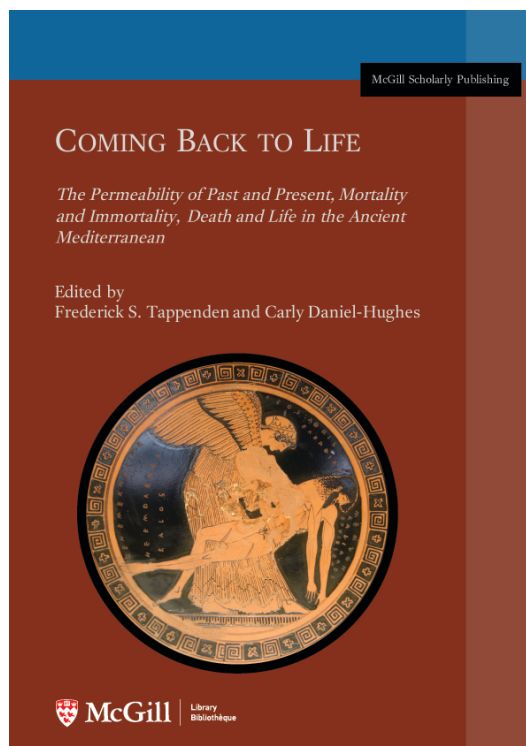
In the turmoil around the turn of the fifth century, controversy over the legacy of Origen took center stage, and questions regarding the nature of the resurrection were among the main points of contention. What was the nature of the resurrection body? In what sense will post-resurrection life represent a continuation or a break with the present one? How are key scriptural passages, such as 1 Cor 15 to be understood? What is the role of ritual or ascetic practice? This essay shows how, when compared with more well-known players of the controversy, two texts from the Nag Hammadi Codices and writings by the powerful Upper Egyptian abbot Shenoute of Atripe may give us additional insight into how these questions were debated. It is argued that on the level of phrases, terminology, and allusions there is much agreement, while important disagreements regarding how to conceptualize the resurrection leads to distinctly different interpretations of the key biblical texts. And while creeds were introduced to curtail certain interpretations, they also led to new interpretations, as credal phrases were also redefined and reinterpreted to suit the preferred conceptual models of different interpreters.

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**“Tell Me What Shall Arise”:
Conflicting Notions of the Resurrection Body in Fourth-
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I. SETTING THE STAGE

In a polemical letter targeting his former friend Rufinus, Jerome complains that there are some who claim to believe in the resurrection of the body without actually believing in it. According to Jerome, “they use the word ‘body’ instead of the word ‘flesh’ in order that an orthodox person hearing them say ‘body’ may take them to mean ‘flesh,’ while a heretic will understand that they mean ‘spirit’” (Jerome, *Ep.* 84 [= [84.5](#) in *NPNF*²]).² In this letter from 399, Jerome is thus accusing Rufinus and others of willfully redefining key terms to suit their own heretical notions, allowing them to keep using seemingly orthodox phrases, while disagreeing with their intention. Rufinus defends himself, however, by stating that what rises in the resurrection “will be this very flesh in which we now live.” He says it is not true “as is slanderously reported by

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² Translation of Jerome is from Dewart (1986, 145). For all primary sources throughout this essay, the embedded hyperlinks connect to open-access scholarly editions, many of which are now dated. While these offer the reader ease of reference, preference should always be given to the more recent scholarly editions/translations noted throughout the essay.

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some men” that he believes “another flesh will rise instead of this.” On the contrary, he affirms a resurrection of “this very flesh” ([Rufinus, *Anast.* 3–4](#); cf. [Apol. Hier. 1.9](#)).³ It is clear that while words and phrases were being redefined, what mattered to the contestants was not just the phrases used, but also the concepts through which they were understood.

The debate between Jerome and Rufinus was part of the controversy over the legacy of Origen in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. The resurrection was a hot topic in this controversy (e.g., Clark 1992, 3, 5, 8, 12; Kelly 1955, 150 n. 268; Russell 2007, 25–26), and the anti-Origenists agreed that Origen and those inspired by him denied bodily resurrection.⁴ While Jerome and Rufinus were notable participants in the debate, the Origenist controversy raged hardest in Egypt, and well before Theophilus of Alexandria turned against the Origenists at the turn of the fifth century, the staunch anti-Origenist heresiologist Epiphanius had noted opposition to the idea of the resurrection of the body among the monks of Egypt, as well as in the writings of Origen himself (Dechow 1988). In his first major heresiological writing, the *Ancoratus*, Epiphanius says that the Origenist monks in the Thebaid “think like the Hieracites” and believe in “a resurrection of our flesh,” but do not interpret it to mean a resurrection of this material flesh, but rather of “another in its place” ([Anc. 82.3](#)].⁵ Hieracas,

³ Translations of Rufinus’s *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* are from Dewart (1986).

⁴ Shenoute and Theophilus extend this complaint to include a denial of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

⁵ Indeed, in the *Life of Epiphanius*, this notion is attributed to Hieracas of Leontopolis as well, a figure he describes in the *Panarion* as being “awesome in his asceticism, and capable of winning souls over to him” (*Pan.* 67.1.6). According to Epiphanius (*Pan.* 67.1.6), “many Egyptian ascetics were led astray by him,” although he predictably claims that Hieracas’s followers were not as sincere in their asceticism as their master. While “Hieracas himself really practiced considerable asceticism,” claims Epiphanius (*Pan.* 67.3.8), “his disciples after him do it as a pretense.” Epiphanius elsewhere connects the

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Epiphanius claims, “took the cue for his denial that the resurrection of the dead is a resurrection of the flesh from Origen—or spat this up out of his own head” (*Pan.* 67.1.6).⁶ According to Epiphanius, Hieracas “says that there is a resurrection of the dead but that it is a resurrection of souls, and also tells some fairy story about ‘spirit’” (*Pan.* 67.2.8).⁷ Epiphanius counters the notion of a resurrection of the soul by stating that “We cannot speak of the ‘rising’ of something that has not fallen” (*Pan.* 67.6.1). In his mind this rules out the soul, for “a soul neither falls nor is buried” (*Pan.* 67.6.2).

Epiphanius uses the same argument against Origen himself: “there is no resurrection of souls, which have not fallen; but there is a resurrection of bodies, which have been buried” ([Pan. 64.63.12](#); cf. [Pan. 64.63.10](#)), and adds that in any case resurrection must apply to the whole body: “There cannot be parts of the body which are raised, and parts which are laid to rest and left behind” ([Pan. 64.63.13](#)). It is evident that the integrity of the body in the resurrection was important to Epiphanius, but this did not mean that he thought that the body would remain constant and unchanged. He is adamant that the resurrection is not a resurrection of the soul only, or of a resurrection body without flesh, but neither is he imagining a resurrection body that is exactly the same as the body that died. What he envisions is a resurrection body that, while being a risen form of the buried body, is in fact a spiritual body consisting of spiritual flesh ([Pan. 64.64.1–9](#)), indeed “a spiritual flesh that will never again have needs,” as he puts it, citing the example of Elijah ([Pan. 64.64.2](#)). Here Epiphanius also brings in the example of Christ’s resurrection body, arguing that “the ensouled body is the same as the spiritual body, just as our Lord arose from the dead, not by raising a different body, but his own body and not different from

Melitians to the Hieracites, saying that Melitus was both a contemporary and successor of Hieracas (*Pan.* 68.1.1).

⁶ Translations of Epiphanius’s *Panarion* are from Williams (1994); *Ancoratus* are my own.

⁷ Cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 67.1.5: “Hieracas too believes that the flesh never rises, only the soul. He claims, however, that there is a spiritual resurrection.”

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his own.” The reason why Christ could pass through closed doors, Epiphanius argues, was because “he had changed his own actual body to spiritual fineness and united a spiritual whole” ([Pan. 64.64.3-4](#)).

II. SHENOUTE

The polemics brought to bear by Epiphanius against Origenist conceptions of the resurrection are also reflected in Coptic sources. One prominent Coptic author who read Epiphanius’s writings with great interest was Shenoute of Atripe,⁸ the famous abbot of the White Monastery near modern day Sohag in Upper Egypt.⁹ Shenoute confronts the Origenists and their heretical teachings on the resurrection in several places. In the partly preserved writing known as *Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, Shenoute confronts the idea that another flesh will arise in place of the material one at the resurrection, together with other erroneous notions of the resurrection, including those of the pagans and Manichaeans.

The introduction to the section where Shenoute deals with those teachings that have an Origenist flavor to them is unfortunately lost in a four-page lacuna, but where the manuscript witnesses pick up, Shenoute is arguing against some people who claim that “‘it is another body that shall sprout up in that very body on the day of the resurrection,’ and ‘this very body shall rot away and perish and it shall not at all come into being (again) after the other new body sprouts up [in] it’” (*Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, DD 80).¹⁰

Interestingly, Shenoute here shows his opponent arguing on the basis of the seed metaphor of 1 Cor 15 while taking issue with Paul’s

⁸ On Shenoute’s use of Epiphanius, see Timbie 2007, 627–28.

⁹ For a convenient short introduction to the life and importance of Shenoute, see Emmel 2004, 1:6–14.

¹⁰ I cite works of Shenoute using a two-letter code for the White Monastery manuscript cited (following Tito Orlandi’s [Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari](#) [CMCL] project and database, and listed in Emmel 2004, 1:xxiii–xxiv), followed by manuscript page number. All translations are my own. DD 80 is unpublished and has been read from a photograph kindly provided by Stephen Emmel.

own interpretation of it, stating that "I do not see that the grain of wheat dies. It became earth and the straw came out of it" (*Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, ZM 59). Shenoute also quotes this person saying that "there is another body that comes on the day of the resurrection, and this one which we are in now becomes earth, and will not at all come into being (again)" (*Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, ZM 59–60),¹¹ thus prompting Shenoute to quote Paul, saying "You fool! What you sow does not live unless it dies. And it is not the body that shall come into being that you sow, but it is a naked grain of wheat or some other seed. God gives it a body as he wished" (*Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, ZM 60, citing [1 Cor 15:36–38](#)). While Shenoute's interlocutor claims that "it is another body that will sprout up in this one" (*Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, DD 83),¹² Shenoute counters by arguing that "it is this very body that shall rise in the resurrection" (*Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, ZM 60). He continues by somewhat disingenuously pointing out that Scripture does not explicitly state what his opponent understands Paul to be saying: "we read in the Scriptures that the dead shall rise," he says, "we have not read that it is another body that will sprout up in the bodies of the dead" (*Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, DD 83). Shenoute indeed continues this line of scriptural argumentation at some length, citing numerous passages where something "sprouting up" from the dead body is not mentioned. One of these is the example of Lazarus: "Lazarus who arose on his fourth (day). Did another body sprout up in the dead body and come out and abandon the dead lying in the tomb? Was it not the smelly body that arose?" (*Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, ZM 63;¹³ cf. [John 11:39–44](#)). For Shenoute, "it is this very body that shall arise, not in weakness, not in shame, but in glory according to the Scriptures" (*Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, ZM 64–65;¹⁴ cf.

¹¹ ZM 59–60 is published in Amélineau 1907–1914, 2:191–92.

¹² DD 83 is unpublished and has been read from a photograph kindly provided by Stephen Emmel.

¹³ Coptic text in [Munier 1916, 136](#).

¹⁴ Coptic text in [Munier 1916, 137](#) + [Wessely 1909–1917, 5:127](#).

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[1 Cor 15:43](#)), and he makes clear that “no other body shall arise in place of this body, nor shall any other body sprout up in this body” (*Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, ZM 64).¹⁵ Nevertheless, although he is adamant that it is the dead and buried body that shall also arise, he does reckon with a transformation of the body, as is clear from another writing of his, where he follows [1 Cor 15:52](#) and [Phil 3:21](#) in saying that “the Lord and his saints have raised others, signifying the great resurrection of the day when he shall sound the trumpet and the dead shall rise incorruptible. And as for us, we shall change, as it is written: ‘this one who shall change the body of our humility into the likeness of the body of his glory’” (Shenoute, *I Am Amazed*, 390 = HB 41).¹⁶

The nature of the resurrection body is described in yet another text, entitled *Good is the Time for Launching a Boat to Sail*, where he explicitly states that “it is as a spiritual body that you will arise” (Leipoldt 1906–1913, [4:190](#)).¹⁷ Despite this emphasis on change, Shenoute is nevertheless concerned about bodily integrity in the resurrection, as is evident when he states elsewhere in the same text, perhaps in conscious rejection of [Gos. Thom. 22](#) or [114](#) (cf. Layton and Lambdin 1989, 62–63, 92–93), that in heaven “the male as male and the female as female all exist together in the kingdom of Christ” (*Good is the Time for Launching a Boat to Sail*; Leipoldt 1906–1913, [4:191](#)).

III. THE TREATISE ON THE RESURRECTION

From the archimandrite of Atripe we turn south to the manuscripts known as the Nag Hammadi Codices and two texts that circulated

¹⁵ Coptic text in [Munier 1916, 137](#).

¹⁶ In citations of *I Am Amazed* I use the numeration scheme established by Orlandi (1985) and followed by Cristea (2011) in addition to the manuscript and page number. The Coptic text consulted is that of Cristea (2011, 166 = HB 41); translations are my own.

¹⁷ For *Good is the Time for Launching a Boat to Sail* I cite the page number in the Leipoldt (1906–1913) edition of the Coptic text.

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among fourth- and fifth-century Egyptian monks.¹⁸ The first, entitled the Treatise on the Resurrection and preserved in Nag Hammadi Codex I, is styled as a letter by an unnamed author to a person named Rheginos, addressed as “my son,” together with his “brothers.”¹⁹ The text sets out to explain the nature and significance of the resurrection, since there are many who do not believe in it ([Treat. Res. 44.8–9](#)).

First of all, the resurrection should not be doubted ([Treat. Res. 47.2–3](#)), and should not be regarded as “a fantasy” ([Treat. Res. 48.10–13](#)). But what is it? The explanation given is complicated, and unfortunately presented in relatively cryptic terms, as the (implied) writer of the letter acknowledges, stating that “I know that I am presenting the solution in difficult terms,” although he tries to reassure Rheginos by saying that “there is nothing difficult in the word of truth” ([Treat. Res. 44.39–45.4](#)).²⁰ The treatise affirms that “the dead shall rise” ([Treat. Res. 46.7–8](#)), but this is not the kind of resurrection advocated by Shenoute or Epiphanius, for we are told in no uncertain terms that the present physical body will be left behind ([Treat. Res. 47.34–35](#)), and that “the visible members” shall not be saved ([Treat. Res. 47.38–48.1](#)). “What, then, is the resurrection?” ([Treat. Res. 48.3–4](#)).

Importantly, despite the dismissal of a resurrection of “the visible members,” the text nevertheless operates with the concept of a resurrection *of the flesh*. Rheginos is told that even “if you did not (pre-)exist in flesh, you received flesh when you came into this world. Why shall you not receive flesh when you ascend into the aeon?” ([Treat. Res. 47.4–8](#)). The Treatise on the Resurrection thus argues that we receive flesh in connection with our entry into this

¹⁸ For the monastic provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices, see Lundhaug and Jenott 2015.

¹⁹ The Treatise on the Resurrection is the actual subscript title of the text in the only manuscript in which it is preserved. I have used Malcolm Peel’s (1985a) edition of the Coptic text. Translations are my own.

²⁰ For a detailed analysis of the resurrection theology of the Treatise on the Resurrection, see Lundhaug 2009.

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world, and therefore we should logically also receive flesh when we leave this world and enter into the next.²¹ Why is this logical? It is logical on the basis of the main conceptual metaphor underlying the text's understanding not only of the resurrection, but also of the nature of this present life and of death. In fact, the text seems to conceptualize this earthly existence in terms of the conceptual metaphor of a pregnancy, and death is understood as a birth (Lundhaug 2009). This is seen especially clearly when the text elaborates on the LIFE IS A PREGNANCY metaphor, stating that “the *χόριον* of the body is old age.” The term *χόριον* does not have any direct English equivalent, but can denote both the membrane that surrounds a fetus in the womb, and this membrane together with the entire afterbirth. Both these aspects of the *χόριον* are important in the elaboration of this conceptual metaphor in the Treatise on the Resurrection—both the membrane that the baby has to pass through and come out of at birth, and the afterbirth, which is discarded at birth as the newborn baby no longer needs it. “The *χόριον* of the body is old age,” states the Treatise on the Resurrection, and explains that “you exist in corruption having the deficit as a profit. For you shall not give (away) that which is better when you depart” ([Treat. Res.](#) 47.17–22),²² thus implying that what is discarded is simply that which is no longer needed. Indeed, Rheginos is reassured that everything that really constitutes us will be saved

²¹ Cf. Peel 1985b, 179. Contrary to Bentley Layton (1979, 77), I do not interpret this passage as a “dialogue between the author and an imaginary interlocutor . . . in which the lecturer himself adduces possible objections and then answers them.” From this premise Layton translates rather freely as follows: “Now (you might wrongly suppose) granted you did not preexist in flesh—indeed, you took on flesh when you entered this world—why will you not take your flesh with you when you return to the realm of eternity?” (23). Peel (1985b, 179) argues that the passage is “addressed straightforwardly by the author to Rheginos,” and characterizes Layton’s translation as “a tendentious effort to make the text conform to orthodox Middle Platonic teaching about survival of the bare soul after death.”

²² The text is here drawing on the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS DEPARTURE.

([Treat. Res.](#) 47.24–27). So, what is it that is actually saved, and what is discarded?

The metaphor of the *χόριον* is also employed by Origen in his *Contra Celsum*. The way he uses it, however, is as a metaphor for the body itself ([Cels.](#) 7.32; cf. Peel 1985b, 182). Using the term specifically in its sense of afterbirth, in Origen's usage it denotes simply that which is discarded. While scholars have suggested that the usage in the Treatise on the Resurrection is similar (Peel 1969, 84; cf. Peel 1985b, 182; Lona 1993, 225), there are in fact important differences. Origen explains that when a baby is born it puts on a new body suitable for its new existence, but discards the *χόριον*, which is no longer necessary. Origen uses this to explain the resurrection, stating that the soul "at one time puts off one body which was necessary before, but which is no longer adequate in its changed state, and it exchanges it for a second; and at another time it assumes another in addition to the former, which is needed as a better covering, suited to the purer ethereal regions of heaven" ([Cels.](#) 7.32).²³ Like Origen, the Treatise on the Resurrection is clearly working with the same conceptual framework of pregnancy and birth, but Origen's metaphorical use of the *χόριον* is only superficially similar to that of the Treatise on the Resurrection, for in contrast to Origen, the Nag Hammadi text does not use *χόριον* as a metaphor for the body as such, but rather as a metaphor for old age. It is old age that is "the *χόριον of the body*." Thus the body cannot itself be the *χόριον*. Instead, the *χόριον* is a metaphor for the bodily effects of aging. "Rheginos" is in effect told not to worry about having to arise in the same old body that dies, but rather in a new one, once old age is broken through and left behind through the metaphorical birth that is the death of the visible body.²⁴ And in contrast to Origen, the Treatise on the Resurrection also plays on the metaphorical implications of the membrane-aspect of the *χόριον*, indicating the boundary that is broken through at death.

²³ Translations of Origen are from *ANF*.

²⁴ For the use of the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS BIRTH elsewhere in Coptic literature, see, e.g., the *Dormition of Mary* (Sellew 2000, 58, 67).

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The Treatise on the Resurrection is in agreement with Origen, however, with regard to the nature of the pregnancy prior to the metaphorical birth constituted by the death of the material body. What is gestated is the resurrection body, a resurrection body that is explained in terms of an inner human being—an inner man.²⁵ This resurrection body is born when the material body dies, but needs to be cultivated in this life. As the Treatise on the Resurrection explains it, the resurrection is to be understood as “the uncovering of those who have arisen,” which can be understood as a reference to the uncovering of the already risen “inner man” at the shedding of the external material body at death.

The resurrection body is envisioned in relatively concrete terms, and the Treatise on the Resurrection speaks about the “living members,” and “the visible members,” and the reception of new “flesh.” The letter explains to “Rheginos” that “you received flesh when you came into this world,” and rhetorically asks: “Why shall you not receive flesh when you go up into the eternal realm?” ([Treat. Res.](#) 47.5–8). But what is the nature of this new “flesh” that one will receive when leaving this world? The reference to two different, but conceptually analogous, “receptions” of flesh, one at birth and the other one at death, is similar to Origen’s description in *Contra Celsum*, and as Origen speaks of a new body for the soul that is fit for life in heaven, the Treatise on the Resurrection indicates that the new flesh is indeed different from the old.

The Treatise on the Resurrection does not so much distinguish between flesh and spirit as between the internal and the external, the visible and the invisible, the perishable and the imperishable. The treatise envisions bodies constituted by internal, invisible, living members and bodies constituted by external, mortal, visible members. Both of these bodies have flesh, but different kinds of flesh—one associated with this present world, and another associated with the next. The view that the material this-worldly flesh shall arise is directly opposed, but the resurrection nevertheless involves a new kind of “flesh” that emerges as the flesh of an inner

²⁵ This is clearly based on an interpretation of [2 Cor 4:16–18](#).

embryonic body that needs to be cultivated in the present life. At the death of the material body, it is this perfectly cultivated inner body that will ascend.

How should this inner body be cultivated? "Rheginos" is told that he should not "live in accordance with *this flesh*" ([Treat. Res.](#) 49.11–12), by which the text refers to the this-worldly material body. What does this imply? How should one conduct oneself? "Rheginos" is not only told that he should realize that he has already risen, stressing the importance of faith, but he should also "practice asceticism (ἄσκησις) in a number of ways" so that "he will be let loose from this (material) element" ([Treat. Res.](#) 49.32–33). So the gestation of the inner man, or cultivation of the resurrection body, seems basically to require faith and asceticism, as well as (to stay within the text's main metaphor) some form of prior conception of the resurrection body in this life. The latter is not further specified in this text, but is likely to be of a ritual nature. Indeed, conception and birth metaphors are common in baptismal texts of this period (see, e.g., Johnson 2001), and baptismal initiation would certainly fit the context here as well, as the time when the inner resurrection body is conceived, whereupon the rest of the earthly life of the Christian could be regarded as a pregnancy that terminates with the birth of the resurrection body at death.

IV. THE GOSPEL OF PHILIP

One text in which the ritual aspect is an integral part of the resurrection theology is the Gospel of Philip in Nag Hammadi Codex II.²⁶ Like the Treatise on the Resurrection, the Gospel of Philip is trying to define the correct way of understanding the resurrection and the resurrection body.²⁷ Interestingly, the Gospel of Philip does so by distancing itself from, on the one hand, an understanding of the resurrection that, according to the anti-Origenist church fathers,

²⁶ For an edition of the Coptic text of the Gospel of Philip, see Lundhaug 2010.

²⁷ For detailed treatments of the Gospel of Philip's understanding of the resurrection, see Lundhaug 2010, 2013.

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is close to that of Origen, and, on the other hand, from a Shenoute-like emphasis on the resurrection of the same body that died.

Thus the Gospel of Philip argues against people who believe in the resurrection of the material body, who are described as those who are afraid to “arise naked,” but it also argues against those who deny a resurrection of the flesh altogether, who say that “the flesh will not arise.” The latter apparently do advocate some kind of resurrection, but not of “flesh,” prompting the Gospel of Philip to ask its interlocutor to “tell me what it is that will arise,” before proceeding to reject the idea of a resurrection of either a “spirit in the flesh” or a “light in the flesh.” The Gospel of Philip cannot accept these solutions and closes its argument by stating that “it is necessary to arise in this flesh, for everything is in it” ([Gos. Phil. 56.26–57.19](#)).

“It is necessary to arise in this flesh” ([Gos. Phil. 57.18](#)). This sentence provides us with the key to understanding the resurrection theology of the Gospel of Philip. It is a polemical statement that clearly emphasizes the necessity of arising “in this flesh,” at least in some sense. But how should this statement be interpreted, when we take into consideration the text’s rejection of the resurrection of the material body? For the text ridicules those who are afraid to rise naked, who do not realize that they are the ones who are naked. What these people are afraid of is to arise without their material bodies, which is why they “wish to arise in the flesh” ([Gos. Phil. 56.26–29](#)). This argument may give the impression that the Gospel of Philip is actually *against* the resurrection of the flesh. It even cites [1 Cor 15:50](#) in support, stating that “flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God” ([Gos. Phil. 56.29–34](#)).²⁸ Nevertheless, the Gospel of Philip still argues that a resurrection of the flesh—and even of “this flesh”—is absolutely necessary, because “everything is

²⁸ Already Irenaeus complained that [1 Cor 15:50](#) was a passage that was “adduced by all the heretics in support of their folly,” namely “that the handiwork of God is not saved” ([Haer. 5.9.1](#)). Irenaeus’s own solution was that, while flesh and blood shall not *inherit*, they shall be *inherited*—by the Spirit ([Haer. 5.9.1–4](#)).

in it" ([Gos. Phil. 57.18–19](#)). The questions that need to be answered are thus, on the one hand, how to understand “everything” (ζῶν ἅμ), and on the other, what kind of flesh “this flesh” (τῆς σαρκός) is, if it is not the flesh of the mortal material body?

The reference to nakedness is important, for it shows that the Gospel of Philip is using the common conceptual metaphor of the body as a garment. The opponents confronted by the Gospel of Philip who are afraid to arise naked, and who therefore believe in the resurrection of the material body, are wrong because they do not realize that there is not just one body, or one garment, but in fact two different ones. The other garment, which the Gospel of Philip holds to be essential for the resurrection, seems to be attainable only through the Eucharist, where we are told that one not only receives “food and drink,” but also a “garment” ([Gos. Phil. 57.1–8](#)). It is this “garment” that is to be understood as the resurrection body. This again implies that the resurrection body is here actually identical to the body of Christ, as received in the Eucharist, and what “It is necessary to arise in this flesh” means is that it is necessary to arise in the body—and flesh—of Christ. This is the flesh that will clothe the soul, which in the Gospel of Philip is associated with the Logos.

The Gospel of Philip quotes [1 Cor 15:51](#), “Flesh [and blood] shall not inherit the kingdom [of God],” but proceeds to distinguish this flesh from another kind of flesh. The flesh that “shall not inherit” is identified as “this (flesh) which is on us,” while the flesh “that shall inherit” is “the flesh of Jesus and his blood” ([Gos. Phil. 56.32–57.3](#)). The “flesh of Jesus and his blood” are acquired by ingesting the eucharistic elements, which are further specified as the Logos and the Holy Spirit respectively: “His flesh is the Logos and his blood is the Holy Spirit” ([Gos. Phil. 57.6–7](#)).

Now where does the Gospel of Philip actually stand in the resurrection debate? Cyril of Alexandria, like his predecessor Theophilus, as well as Epiphanius and Shenoute, all accuse Origen and his followers of denying bodily resurrection. As Cyril says in a letter to the monks of Scetis, “Such an evil doctrine is from the

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madness of Origen” (*Ep.* 81.2 [= [PG 77.373A](#)]).²⁹ This supposedly “Origenist” position is also confronted in the Gospel of Philip when it argues against the statement that “the flesh will not arise.” It is notable and striking that in refuting this position the Gospel of Philip presents a solution similar to that given by Epiphanius against Origen in chapter 64 of his *Panarion*, where he affirms the resurrection of a “spiritual body” with “spiritual flesh,” against Origen’s notion of a resurrection of the soul ([Pan. 64.63.14–64.8](#)). Moreover, both the Gospel of Philip and Epiphanius connect this “spiritual” flesh to the body of Christ. It was the spiritual nature of Christ’s post-resurrection flesh, Epiphanius explains, that made it possible for him to walk through closed doors ([Pan. 64.64.2–9](#)).

V. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

We have seen in the examples given here that while bodily integrity and continuity is stressed by some, others instead put the emphasis on transformation and difference. And while they work on the basis of certain shared assumptions, they interpret them differently. The insistence on the absolute integrity of the body in the resurrection, which is so clear in Shenoute, becomes even clearer in later Coptic texts, such as the pseudo-Athanasian homily *On the Resurrection of Lazarus*, which goes to great lengths in describing in detail the physical processes of the decomposition and subsequent reanimation of Lazarus’s body.³⁰ In a way, what this pseudo-Athanasian text is doing is elaborating—in the extreme—on the example of Lazarus given by Shenoute in his anti-Origenist argument for the resurrection of the body in *Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, when he asks: “Was it not the smelly body that arose?” (ZM 63).³¹

In the examples given above, it is evident that we are witnessing different, and even clashing, cognitive models. As we have seen, resurrection was understood in terms of the metaphors of the seed

²⁹ Translations of Cyril are from McEnerney (1987).

³⁰ For an edition of this text, see Bernardin (1940). For a recent discussion of it, see Brakke (2000).

³¹ Coptic text in [Munier 1916, 136](#).

and the plant, pregnancy and birth, and an implicit sleep and awakening model. In addition, we have seen the importance of the metaphor of the body as a garment. Not only do these different conceptual metaphors work in different ways and promote different understandings of the nature of the resurrection and the resurrection body (cf. Bynum 1995, 6–7), but the metaphors themselves could be utilized in different ways to promote different understandings of the degree of continuity, or integrity, of the resurrection body in relation to the mortal material body.

In his use and explication of the seed and plant metaphor in [1 Cor 15](#), Paul succeeded in highlighting both similarities and differences, both continuity and discontinuity, between the old and the new body, while simultaneously stressing the transformation from the one to the other. According to Paul, the seed dies before the plant sprouts, and there is little resemblance between the two. We have seen that Shenoute, in *Who Speaks Through the Prophet*, opposes what seems to be an understanding of the resurrection that sticks very closely to the seed and plant metaphor as it is used by Paul. Indeed, Shenoute even reports that his interlocutor believes that a new body “will sprout up from” the dead body, just like a plant from a seed. Shenoute reports, however, that this is in opposition to Paul’s own understanding of the implications of the metaphor since his opponent disputes Paul’s claim that the seed has to die before the plant can emerge.

Shenoute himself, however, while acknowledging the importance of transformation, still seems to reason more along the lines of an implicit sleep-and-awakening model, with clear continuity between the dead body and the resurrected body. Clearly Shenoute’s model stresses continuity to a much higher degree than Paul does in [1 Cor 15](#),³² where the latter reckons with different bodies, different flesh, and different glories to an extent not picked up on by Shenoute. The archimandrite is highly aware of Paul’s terminology, but for him transformation from a psychic to a spiritual body does not seem to involve anything more radical than the purging of sin: While the

³² On Paul’s metaphor of the seed, see Bynum 1995, 3–6.

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psychic body, like the bodies of Adam and Eve, is subject to sin, the spiritual body is free from it (Shenoute, *Good is the Time for Launching a Boat to Sail*).

In addition to Scripture, the creed also played an important role in the debate. This is hardly surprising. By the early fifth century, “Not only would the validity of doctrinal propositions by this time be measured against the creed as an authoritative norm in general,” notes Thomas Graumann (2009, 545–46), “but theological reasoning would often also be based directly upon it. Theological treatises attempted an exegesis of the creed and interpreted its wording almost like Scripture.” We have seen that Rufinus did this, and we see it clearly in the Gospel of Philip. Creedal statements serve as the basis for theological reasoning and polemic (Lundhaug 2010, 2013). In the period when the Nag Hammadi Codices were manufactured, there is nothing surprising about this—it was common practice.³³

Statements concerning the resurrection are found in many creeds and professions of faith made in connection with baptism. As Cyril of Alexandria puts it in a letter to the monks of Scetis: “They say that some of those among you deny the resurrection of human bodies, which is part of our confession of faith, made when we go forward to our saving baptism. When we are confessing the faith, we add that we also believe in the resurrection of the flesh” (*Ep.* 81.1 [= [PG 77.372D–373A](#)]). In this way, denials of bodily resurrection, and denials of the resurrection of flesh were curtailed. Nevertheless, in another letter to the monks Cyril laments the fact that some people misinterpret the words of the creed. He has been made aware, he

³³ “From about the second half of the fourth century, concern with creed spilled over from the sphere of specialized debate to a wider audience and into liturgical and homiletical contexts. Catechetical instructions began to include explanations of the creed’s central theological tenets, and its recitation became a feature in the context of preparation for baptism” (Graumann 2009, 546). Instruction in key points of doctrine, including memorization of the creed, was an important part of the pre-baptismal preparations in this period, and some kind of credal interrogation (*redditio symboli*) was an integral part of the initiatory process (see Finn 1992, 4–5), the relevance of which we will see below.

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says, of the fact that “some are diverting what is in the creed into a channel which is not the proper one either because they do not understand the meaning of the words in it or because they are carried away to wrong thinking by an inclination toward the writings of certain men” (*Ep.* 55.7 [= [PG 77.293C](#)]).

In light of Cyril’s concern and Rufinus’s reference to creedal formulations on the resurrection in his defense against the accusations of Jerome, it is interesting to note that the Gospel of Philip in fact stresses the importance of no less than a resurrection “in this flesh,” while still maintaining that what actually rises is a flesh that is different from the material one—exactly the kind of reinterpretation of dogmatic vocabulary that Cyril accuses certain monks of doing, and which Rufinus is accused of, but claims not to be doing. Some years earlier, Epiphanius also complained about prominent “Origenist” ascetics in Egypt who twisted the meaning of the resurrection of the flesh, “and say there is a resurrection of our flesh, yet not this (flesh), but another in its place” ([Anc. 82.3](#)).³⁴

We have seen several sources that oppose the “Origenist” model of the resurrection of a disembodied soul or spirit, but no text that advocates it. While both the Treatise on the Resurrection and the Gospel of Philip clearly oppose the idea of a resurrection of a material body, they still advocate the need for a body of flesh in the resurrection, albeit one consisting of a very different kind of flesh. But then even Origen himself talks about the necessity of a proper resurrection body, fit for heaven, rather than a resurrection of a disembodied soul.

³⁴ Questions concerning the resurrection stayed on the agenda in Egypt for a long time, and “Origenist” views remained a concern well into the fifth century, as attested by Shenoute and others. The discussions of these matters reflected in the Gospel of Philip and the Treatise on the Resurrection are, regardless of the dates of authorship of their hypothetical originals, very much at home in the context of the Origenist controversy in Egypt in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, in the probable time and place of the manuscripts in which they have been preserved.

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The debate over the resurrection body did not take place in a vacuum. There were certain, albeit shifting, parameters that had to be taken into account by everyone. In the various examples given here, we have seen that creedal statements and key scriptural passages not only defined the boundaries of the debate, but also constituted key building blocks with which competing conceptualizations of the resurrection were constructed. We have seen that a major difficulty confronting those who took part in the resurrection debate was how to make sense of Paul's rather confusing explanation in [1 Cor 15](#), and getting it to fit with other biblical passages, creedal formulations, and their own preferred conceptual metaphors. The solutions we have seen here all try to account for continuity and transformation, the change from a psychic to a spiritual body, and the importance of the flesh, but in distinctly different ways. The challenge facing them consisted in making sense of key biblical texts together with the creed in ways that conformed to their preferred cognitive models of the resurrection, and they came up with very different ways of doing so.

On the level of phrases, terminology, and allusions there is much agreement in the treatment of the resurrection between the various texts discussed in this essay, but there are also important disagreements regarding how to conceptualize it, leading to distinctly different interpretations. While creeds were introduced to curtail certain interpretations, attempts to narrow down interpretive possibilities by specifying creedal wording had only limited success, and indeed contributed to the creation of new interpretations as creedal phrases were simply redefined and reinterpreted to suit the preferred conceptual models of the interpreters.

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