



Resurrecting Parts: Early Christians on Desire, Reproduction, and Sexual Difference (Routledge Studies in the Early Christian World)

By Taylor Petrey



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During the late second and early third centuries C.E. the resurrection became a central question for intellectual commentary, with increasingly tense divisions between those who interpreted the resurrection as a bodily experience and those who did not. The relationship between the resurrected person and their mortal flesh was also a key point of discussion, especially in regards to sexual desires, body parts, and practices. Early Christians struggled to articulate how and why these bodily features related to the imagined resurrected self. The problems posed by the resurrection thus provoked theological analysis of the mortal body, sexual desire and gender.

Resurrecting Parts is the first study to examine the place of gender and sexuality in early Christian debates on the nature of resurrection, investigating how the resurrected body has been interpreted by writers of this period in order to address the nature of sexuality and sexual difference. In particular, Petrey considers the instability of early Christian attempts to separate maleness and femaleness. Bodily parts commonly signified sexual difference, yet it was widely thought that future resurrected bodies would not experience desire or reproduction. In the absence of sexuality, this insistence on difference became difficult to maintain. To achieve a common, shared identity and status for the resurrected body that nevertheless preserved sexual difference, treatises on the resurrection found it necessary to explain how and in what way these parts would be transformed in the resurrection, shedding all associations with sexual desires, acts, and reproduction.

Exploring a range of early Christian sources, from the Greek and Latin fathers to the authors of the Nag Hammadi writings, *Resurrecting Parts* is a fascinating resource for scholars interested in gender and sexuality in classical antiquity, early Christianity, asceticism, and, of course, the resurrection and the body.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Petrey deftly maps the complex landscape of second-century Christian speculations on sexual difference and the resurrection body. Focusing on the vexed place of those bodily "parts" that mark the body as female or male in theories of bodily resurrection, Petrey's study persuasively demonstrates how this seemingly rarefied theological question in fact condenses a broad range of conceptual issues that attend early Christian thinking about the nature of bodies, gender, desire, and sexual practice. *Resurrecting Parts* is a welcome and significant contribution to both early Christian studies and the history of ancient sexuality." - Benjamin H. Dunning, Fordham University, USA

"This book is an elegant and erudite study of bodily resurrection among early Christian authors, with respect to the question of gender and sexuality. Eschewing historiographical models which reproduce the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy, Petrey reads the Treatise on the Resurrection alongside Irenaeus and other early Christian sources, asking not whether a source embraces or rejects bodily resurrection, but rather what kind of body is imagined. The answers are complex and fascinating. This work should be read by all students of early Christianity interested in how the resurrected body was mobilized to tell the truth about the sexual self." - Shelly Matthews, Texas Christian University, USA

About the Author

Taylor G. Petrey is the Lucinda Hinsdale Stone Assistant Professor of Religion and the Director of the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Program at Kalamazoo College, USA.

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