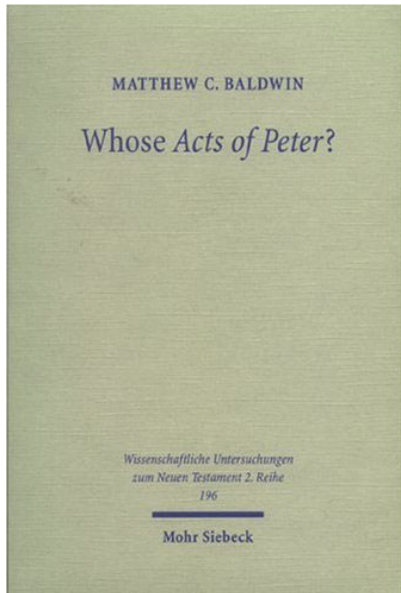


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**Baldwin, Matthew C.**

***Whose Acts of Peter? Text and Historical Context of the Actus Vercellenses***

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This is a “modestly revised version” (vii) of Matthew C. Baldwin’s dissertation written under the supervision of Adela Yarbro Collins (and the original readers Margaret M. Mitchell and Michael I. Allen) and submitted at the University of Chicago in 2002. Baldwin focuses on the *Actus Vercellenses*, part of Codex Vercelli Bib. Cap. 158, a Latin manuscript of the seventh century in the Chapter Library (Biblioteca Capitolare) in Vercelli, Italy. Among scholars this *Actus Vercellenses* is often referred to as the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, which is regarded as having derived from a lost Greek text (πράξεις Πέτρου) written in the second century in Asia Minor and translated into Latin (*Actus Vercellenses*) sometime in the fourth century. Today the majority of scholars are convinced that the *Actus Vercellenses* preserves a short version of the original *Acts of Peter*, truncated before or during the process of translation. Baldwin now ventures to examine the *Actus Vercellenses* as what it is at first glance: a manuscript and a work in its own right. This appears to be a bold undertaking, since such an investigation might end with results opposed to the mainstream views of the *Acts of Peter* and of this significant witness to them. Nevertheless, in the eyes of someone who works on manuscripts, this is the only methodologically sound way of doing research into a manuscript and its extant text. Only then can implications and conclusions help to modify, verify, or even falsify long-established hypotheses. Baldwin disputes such hypotheses and succeeds in attracting attention to the manuscript itself and its texts.

Manuscripts that preserve any part of texts that did not make it into a canon and/or that are called New Testament apocrypha are of outstanding value, due to their rarity (in comparison with manuscript witnesses to the canonical writings of the New Testament) and the information they provide. In this respect, the genre of Acts is really extraordinary, as it reflects the interests of the early Christians in the destiny of the apostles. If only a few manuscript witnesses are available, as is the case with the *Acts of Peter*, the text has to be reconstructed and/or a manuscript must be accepted as the main witness, which then receives most (and sometimes sole) attention. What happened with the *Actus Vercellenses* is that it was integrated into a hypothetical conception about the origin of the *Acts of Peter*. The manuscript itself has never been investigated as a work and an artifact in its own right. That is why Baldwin dedicates six chapters to the text and the historical context of the *Actus Vercellenses*, as the title of his monograph tells.

In his introductory chapter (1–25) Baldwin defines the most significant terms and how he uses them throughout the book. He also lays the methodological foundation for his approach by pointing out problems in the study of the *Acts of Peter*: the presumed date of composition, the identification of the *Actus Vercellenses* as *Acts of Peter*, and some terminological confusions. Moreover, he clarifies his understanding of “text” and “book” and makes a programmatic statement that interpreters of ancient texts should always be aware of and accept for their work with manuscript witnesses: “Whatever we may have to say about the current condition of the text, this [the *Actus Vercellenses*] is no autograph, and the text was not composed of whole cloth from the imagination of a creative writer and shaped into its current manuscript form” (25).

Chapter 2 basically consists of a full-scale *Forschungsbericht* (26–62). Although this is very informative, sound in its summaries, and written in an attractive narrative, the specialist will find nothing new. The conclusions Baldwin draws from his history of scholarship are more or less descriptions of the following chapters and how they are the results from the shortcomings of research, or, in other words, how he himself attempts at solving the problems unsolved so far.

In chapter 3 Baldwin examines the external evidence for the *Acts of Peter* (63–133). Here he performs “a more thorough review of the evidence” (63), what he regards as a major deficiency of scholarly work. Then he deals with the issue of Petrine *Fabulae* and book titles between 190 and 326 C.E., starting with Clement of Alexandria and ending with Eusebius (and, of course, his classic categorization of Christian books into four groups in *Hist. eccl.* 3.25), before he addresses the Petrine materials to 858 C.E. The depiction of sources is sound, their treatment precise, and their discussion plausible, so that an attentive reader really profits from the information provided. In sum, “there is very little evidence for the early existence of a written *Acts of Peter*, and the data about the contents

of early Petrine traditions are ambiguous.” For some readers it may be an unlucky decision to mention this conclusion on page 61, that is, prior to the investigation into the external evidence. Be that as it may, the existence of a written *Acts of Peter* in the first quarter of the fourth century is proved by Eusebius, but we know nothing else about the book other than its name. Baldwin convincingly shows that Nicephorus cannot serve as a witness to the assumption that we are missing a third of the original (source behind) *Actus Vercellenses*, because his reference to the Περίοδοι Πέτρου is so vague that it may point to another Greek text. Further, different versions of the *Acts of Peter* seem to have circulated among Christians, above all in late antiquity. Interestingly, “Photius’ *Bibl. codd.* 112–113 associates an *Acts of the Apostle Peter* with the ps.-Clementine *Recognitions*” (133), and *Codex Vercellenses* 158 also preserves exactly these *Recognitions* together with the *Actus Vercellenses*.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the “Paleography and Latinity of the *Actus Vercellenses*” (134–93). Again Baldwin’s approach is meticulous and his conclusions cautious. The details provided help to illustrate what kind of manuscript Cod. Vercelli Bib. Cap. 158 actually is, though some of his statements need further reflection. In note 32 on page 143, for instance, he argues that “long lines” are a clue hinting at “individual reading” and not at “liturgical use.” But he neither defines what “long lines” are nor takes into account the size of letters, the number of letters per lines, and the space between lines, details that *are* important to discuss liturgical and private usage. Therefore, the facts he gathers about abbreviations and marginalia (153–54) could be of interest in that respect. Moreover, Baldwin did not see the original manuscript in Vercelli, Italy. Thus, he depends on “two different microfilms” and on “the published sources” (142–43 n. 30). Nonetheless, his selection of appropriate information is mainly correct and his judgments precise. The second part of chapter 4 deals with the Latinity of the *Actus Vercellenses*. Baldwin primarily focuses on orthography, syntax, and Latinity and comes to the conclusion that the text of this part of the manuscript “emerged in Spain in the late seventh century” and that the manuscript “preserves a writing which was translated from the Greek no earlier than the late fourth century, quite possibly even later” (193). In the future this will be a matter of general discussion, if philological investigations can really produce the decisive facts to determine the date of a manuscript. A philological investigation by another scholar might lead to a different result.

Consequently, in chapter 5 Baldwin draws attention to probable Greek predecessors from which the *Actus Vercellenses* was translated (194–301). Here he tackles the *Vita Abercii* (197–242, offering very helpful synopses), P.Oxy. VI 849 (242–51, with an odd note about Grenfell’s and Hunt’s usage of the terms *recto* and *verso* [242 n. 158]), and the *Martyrium Petri* (251–99, again with synopses). Apart from a few words and phrases, the parallels are not very close. If any parallelism is to be stated at all, it is “a ‘source’ parallelism” (300)

between the *Actus Vercellenses* and the *Martyrium Petri*. Thus, Baldwin convincingly shows that the *Actus Vercellenses* is not a literal translation of any of its predecessors. Moreover, he is skeptical about finding the Greek source of a text by means of its Latin version at all (301).

The final chapter (302–14) is a kind of summary leading to the conclusion that the *Actus Vercellenses* must be treated as a work in its own right and that it is important to learn more about “the world of the Latin *scriptor* who composed it” (303). Baldwin’s reflections are tentative and compelling, even if they are rather hypothetical. However, this is the only chance of getting closer to the scribe and his world, and Baldwin wisely titles this section “imagination” (303–8).

In addition to a preface (vii–viii) and a list of abbreviations (xv–xvi), the book includes a fine appendix (“Codicological Notes on Vercelli, Bib. Cap. 158” [315–21], with a table of contents by gathering), a cumulative bibliography (322–29), and indices of modern authors, ancient sources, and subjects (330–39).

Baldwin’s meticulous work challenges traditional notions of the *Acts of Peter* and the *Actus Vercellenses* as its potential main manuscript witness. His thesis will have to be considered by everyone participating in the debate. Of course, his conclusions will be challenged, and only then will we learn if they have the stamina to survive. However, anyone challenging this brilliant work will need a good deal of plausible argumentation and sound evidence to stand up against Baldwin’s results. The author of this fine monograph is to be thanked for having shed new light on the manuscript and for starting the discussion of the *Acts of Peter* (and even of all the other Petrine traditions) anew.