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Zwierlein, Otto

Petrus in Rom: Die literarischen Zeugnisse

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96

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This is a thesis with an interesting history. It began as an excursus on Pseudo-Hegesippus's treatment of the Neronian persecution, but it was transformed in the middle of 2008 by the digitalized appearance of the manuscript of the Greek Martyrdoms of Peter and Paul from Ohrid (Macedonia), known about since 1962 but hitherto unevaluated.

The resulting monograph therefore includes a critical edition of both martyrdoms (dated to about 258?), with a German translation on the facing pages and an analysis of the Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Slavonic tradition history of the manuscript. This forms what in effect is a valuable 110-page appendix to the volume.

The body of the monograph is a painstaking examination of the textual traditions relating to Peter's residence and martyrdom in Rome, in which Zwielerlein finds little or no sound history. He starts, naturally, with 1 Pet 5:13 and 1 Clem. 5–6. The former, with its greeting from "the church in Babylon," where "Babylon" is regularly taken as a code word for Rome, is dismissed. "Babylon" is best understood as a metaphor equivalent to Jas 1:1 "in the diaspora," so equivalent to "in exile" (7–12). Hmmm! First Clement 5–6 is equally dismissed: "Of a residence of Peter in Rome, of a persecution of Peter and Paul, and of a martyrdom of both apostles in the city under Nero, the author of 1 Clement knows

nothing. He has generally no knowledge of both apostles apart from what he could draw from the canonical Acts of the Apostles and other NT writings” (30). Clement’s language is indeed obscure, and Ignatius’s lack of reference to such martyrdoms as preceding his own is a lasting puzzle—especially when his reference to them in his letter to Rome contrasts himself as “condemned” with them as ‘free’ (Ignatius, *Rom.* 4.3). But we should not exclude the likelihood that Clement could refer so briefly to the travails of Paul and Peter because he was able to assume that they would have been well known. And what Clement, writing from Rome, meant by claiming that Paul “came to the limit [*terma*] of the West” should not be passed over so lightly by assuming that Clement simply drew it from Rom 15:24, 28 (21).

The textual analysis proceeds through the various Peter-in-Rome traditions with great care and detail, including an interesting speculation on the “Quo vadis” scene at the gate of Rome, with possible reminiscences of John 13:36 and Acts 12:11 and note of the important role that the legend of Peter’s crucifixion played in establishing Peter as the rock on which Christ built his church, including the influence of John 21:18–19 (101–8).

Zwierlein concludes that the tradition that Peter came to Rome appears at the earliest in the controversy with the gnostic heretics, developed from Justin’s interpretation of the statue inscribed “*Simoni Deo Sancto*” beside the River Tiber, and so not before 150–154 (133). The conviction that Simon Magus, the founding father of Gnosis, had visited Rome and spread his teaching there gave rise to the belief that Peter, who had already confronted Simon in Judea, as founding apostle, was also instrumental in freeing the Roman Christians from this false teaching.

In parallel to this conception of the apostle Peter battling with the gnostic Simon in Rome, there developed the idea of more general activity of Peter and Paul in Rome. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth (about 170–174), in claiming that his church had been established by both Paul and Peter (even though Zwierlein believes that Peter, as missionary to the circumcised, had never been in Corinth), claims also the same apostolic foundation for Rome, with no better source than 1 Clement (135, 139). One can recognize the strong desire to be able to claim apostolic foundation (particularly by Peter and Paul) without having to deny Dionysius any grounds for his claim (the possibility that Peter did indeed visit Corinth, and minister to the Jewish believers there, cannot be so lightly dismissed).

The growing tradition of Peter and Paul in Rome is further traced through Irenaeus (between 180 and 189), who presents Peter and Paul as founders of the Roman church (140–56) and initiators of Rome’s episcopal succession (156–62). Any inferences that may be drawn from the Ignatius corpus can be ignored as later interpolations (as in Ignatius,

Eph. 1.2). “The learned deacon who hides himself behind the mask of Ignatius [pseudo-Ignatius], and who propagates his episcopal doctrine through a feigned letter corpus, has developed the (simultaneous) sojourn of the apostles Peter and Paul in Rome in the same way—about the year 170—as did Dionysius of Corinth out of 1 Clement” (237).

A brief section takes a swipe at the “implausible early dating” of Luke’s Gospel and Acts as argued by John Robinson and A. Mittelstaedt (238–44), and the final section of the thesis proper argues for a date for 1 Clement to the period 120–125, and probably about 125.

Zwierlein concludes that the tradition of the martyrdoms of both apostles in the Neronian persecution can be traced at the earliest to the Acts of Peter (180–190) and the Acts of Paul (185–195). The emergence of the tradition may be explained by the transition of the term *martyrêsai* from “bear witness” to “bear witness by a martyr’s bloody death,” as influenced by the report of the martyrdom of Polycarp of Smyrna, which may already have influenced Dionysius, a false interpretation taken up by Eusebius in his *History* (333).

The care taken over textual and philological analysis is impressive, and Zwierlein may well be right in his tracing of the development of the traditions about Peter in Rome. My only hesitation is a concern that he pushes his argument too hard and ignores or plays down too tendentiously data that is open to other interpretation. Some interaction in particular with Richard Bauckham’s “The Martyrdom of Peter in Early Christian Literature” (*ANRW* 2.26.2:539–95) would have been entirely appropriate and very welcome.