

MATTHEW C. BALDWIN

Whose Acts of Peter?

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Mohr Siebeck

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Matthew C. Baldwin

Whose *Acts of Peter*?

Text and Historical Context of the Actus Vercellenses

Mohr Siebeck

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To my beloved wife Yael and to my family

Δεινὸν γάρ που, ὦ Φαῖδρε, τοῦτ' ἔχει γραφή, καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ὅμοιον ζωγραφία. καὶ γὰρ τὰ ἐκείνης ἔκγονα ἔστηκε μὲν ὡς ζῶντα, ἐὰν δ' ἀνέρη τι, σεμνῶς πάνυ σιγᾷ. ταῦτ' οἱ λόγοι· δόξαις μὲν ἂν ὡς τι φρονούντας αὐτοὺς λέγειν, ἐὰν δέ τι ἔρη τῶν λεγομένων βουλόμενος μαθεῖν, ἔν τι σημαίνει μόνον ταῦτ' ἀεὶ. ὅταν δὲ ἄπαξ γραφῆ, κυλινδεῖται μὲν πανταχοῦ πᾶς λόγος ὁμοίως παρὰ τοῖς ἐπαίουσιν ὡς δ' αὐτῶς παρ' οἷς οὐδὲν προσήκει, καὶ οὐκ ἐπίσταται λέγειν οἷς δεῖ γε καὶ μή. πλημμελούμενος δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἐν δίκη λαιδορηθεὶς τοῦ πατρὸς ἀεὶ δεῖται βοηθοῦ· αὐτὸς γὰρ οὐτ' ἀμύνασθαι οὔτε βοηθῆσαι δυνατὸς αὐτῷ.

For somehow, O Phaedrus, writing has this awful quality, and is thus truly like painting: the offspring of that art stand there as if they were living beings, but if you should ask something, they remain perfectly, solemnly, silent. And books are just the same: you might believe them to be intelligently saying something, but if you should ask something, wishing to learn from the things which are said, they signify one thing only, always the same. Once you write, every book circulates everywhere – in the same way among those who understand as among those for whom it is not at all suited – and it doesn't know to whom it ought to speak and to whom not. But when it is wronged, and is being unjustly reviled, it always has need of help from its father, for it can neither defend nor help itself.

Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275c–e

Preface

Within the covers of this book, the reader will find a version of my doctoral dissertation, which was originally completed in 2002 at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, and is here presented in a modestly revised form. I wish I could adequately thank all the people who have helped me along the way with this project, from germination to fruit. Since that is practically impossible, I will thank only a few. The many others who have in some way shaped my development and my work will, I hope, both know and believe that I am deeply grateful for the gifts they have given me.

I am grateful most of all to my thesis advisor Adela Yarbrow Collins, and to my original readers, Margaret M. Mitchell and Michael I. Allen. These three all gave me their unwavering support and flawless direction during my time at the University of Chicago. Furthermore, I must thank Prof. Hans-Josef Klauck who first encouraged me to seek publication of my thesis through WUNT II. Dr. Klauck has honored me with his kind support, and I will always be grateful to him.

My colleagues and students at Mars Hill College have my gratitude as well for their patience with me during the long and sometimes tiring process of revision. I want to thank in particular Nathan McMahan for his patient service in copy-editing, and for his assistance with indexing.

I have been helped by many scholarly colleagues, but I have to thank more than any other Dr. Anton Hilhorst, whose kindness and generosity is outstanding. I am also grateful to the librarian at the Biblioteca Capitolare in Vercelli, Anna Cerutti Garlanda, and to Christine Bailey and Curt Bochanyin from the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago. I want to thank as well the Henry Luce Foundation for funding nine months of this project and its research during 2000-2001. I would like to thank by name as well the following teachers, colleagues, interlocutors and friends: Richard Rosengarten, J. Albert Harrill, Dan Arnold, James Kelhoffer, Matthew Calhoun, David Hall, Joseph J. Shepley III, Jeremy Biles, Alexander Dale Mawyer, and Yael J. Goldman.

Finally, I wish to thank of course the publication and editorial team at Mohr-Siebeck. I thank Dr. Jörg Frey, who found this study worthy of publication, and was helpful with several editorial matters, Dr. Henning Ziebritzki, for his editorial suggestions and for supervising and supporting me through the process

of revision, and Ms. Tanja Mix, who helped me navigate the formatting and production of the final manuscript copy you are reading now.

Over the years all the people named above, and others besides, have helped me in countless ways. In regards to this particular work, many of them have directly shaped the project in one way or another. That is so, but it should also go without saying that they ought to be held blameless for any shortcomings that remain. Socrates may be correct to describe a written book as a kind of defenseless orphan. Nevertheless the author alone must assume final responsibility for its signifying, however solemnly and silently the words themselves respond to the difficult questions of readers.

North Carolina, June 2005

Matthew C. Baldwin

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Abbreviations

<i>AAA</i>	<i>Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha</i> . Edited by Richard A. Lipsius. 2 vols. Originally published 1891-1903. Reprinted Hildesheim and New York, 1972.
<i>APt</i>	The most common abbreviation used for the <i>Acts of Peter</i> . In the usage of other scholars, it refers often to the <i>Actus Vercellenses</i> .
Bardy	<i>Eusébe de Césarée: Histoire ecclésiastique</i> . Edited by Gustave Bardy. 4 vols. Sources chrétiennes. Paris, 1984-1993.
<i>Bibl.</i>	<i>Biblioteca</i> . Photius of Constantinople. See Henry, below.
Blaise	<i>Lexicon Latinitatis Medii Aevi</i> . Albert Blaise. Brepols, 1975.
Bremmer	<i>The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism</i> . Edited by Jan Bremmer. Leuven, 1998.
<i>CANT</i>	<i>Clavis Apocryphorum Novi Testamenti</i> . M. Geerard. Brepols, 1992.
<i>CLA</i>	<i>Codices Latini Antiquiores</i> . Edited by E. A. Lowe. 11 vols. and Supplement. Oxford, 1934-1971.
CLCLT	CETEDOC library of Christian Latin texts. [Computer text file versions of the CCSL]. CD-ROM. Turnhout, 1991-
<i>CPG</i>	<i>Clavis Patrorum Graecorum</i> . Edited by M. Geerard. 5 vols. Brepols, 1974-1987.
<i>CPL</i>	<i>Clavis Patrorum Latinorum</i> . Edited by E. Dekkers. 3d ed. Steenbrugis, 1995.
<i>DCB</i>	<i>Dictionary of Christian Biography</i> . Edited by W. Smith and H. Wace. 4 vols. Originally published 1877-1887. Reprinted, New York, 1984.
<i>GAL</i>	<i>Geschichte der altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius</i> . Adolph Harnack. Part I. <i>Die Überlieferung und der Bestand</i> (Leipzig, 1893). Part II Vol. I. <i>Die Chronologie der Litteratur bis Irenäus</i> . Leipzig, 1897.
<i>GNK</i>	<i>Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons</i> . Vol. II. Theodor Zahn. Leipzig, 1890.
Geerard	See <i>CANT</i> .
Henry	<i>Photius: Bibliothèque</i> . Edited by René Henry. 9 vols. Collection Byzantine. Paris, 1959-1991.
Lampe	See below, <i>PGL</i> .
Lipsius	see above, <i>AAA</i> .
<i>NTA</i> ¹⁻²	<i>Neutestamentliche Apocryphen in Verbindung mit Fachgelehrten in deutscher Übersetzung und mit Einleitungen</i> . Edited by Edgar Hennecke. 1 vol. First edition, Tübingen/Leipzig, 1904. Second Edition, 1924.
<i>NTA</i> ⁵	See Schneemelcher, below.
Niermeyer	<i>Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus</i> . J. F. Niermeyer. Edited by C. Van de Kieft. New York, 1993.
Quasten	Quasten, J. <i>Patrology</i> . 4 vols. Westminster, 1953-1986.

- Rehm Rehm, Bernhard. *Die Pseudoklementinen*. 3 vols. Berlin, 1965-1992. [Editors: Johannes Irmischer, Franz Pashke, and Georg Strecker. References are to: Vol. I, 3rd. edition by G. Strecker, 1992; Vol. II, edited by Pashke, 1965; Vol. III, pt. 1 by Strecker, 1986; Vol. III, pt. 2 by Strecker, 1989.]
- SAAA Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles
- Schneemelcher *New Testament Apocrypha*.. Edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher. Translated by R. McL. Wilson. 2 vols. 5th edition. Louisville, 1991-1992.
- Souter *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.* Alexander Souter. Oxford: 1949.
- TQ *Theologische Quartalschrift*
- TS Texts and Studies
- Vouaux Vouaux, Leon. *Les Actes de Pierre*. Paris, 1922.

Chapter I

Text and History

A. Introduction

This project originally began as the preliminary stage of what I imagined would become a modestly sized historical-critical essay on one short passage in one fictional early Christian narrative. The passage in question is found in the *Actus Vercellenses*, a text which is, especially in translation, commonly referred to as the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*.¹ Because the historical-critical interpretation of text requires as a first step that the interpreter attempt to account for the historical context of the original work represented in the writing, it was necessary to investigate this question with respect to the *Actus Vercellenses*. That I set out to do, hoping to serve my own needs as a critic. But as I attempted to account for how the text and provenance of this unusual book had been established in previous scholarship, many problems and questions emerged. Gradually, the passage itself was set aside, and what had been intended as prolegomena became a full study which challenges and revises some common opinions concerning the historical significance of the so-called *Acts of Peter*.

The name *Actus Vercellenses* is modern, being originally coined by Richard Adelbert Lipsius in the 1880's² in order to refer to a unique Latin text which is

¹ For translation under the title "Acts of Peter," see for example Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. and trans. R. McL. Wilson; 2 vols.; 5th rev. ed.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991) vol. II:287–321. Hereafter this work is referred to as "Schneemelcher." For the text itself, see under the title "Actus Petri cum Simone" in R. A. Lipsius and Maximilian Bonnet, eds., *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* (2 vols. in 3; Leipzig: H. Mendelssohn, 1891; repr. New York: G. Olms, 1972) vol. I:45–103. Hereafter this work will be referred to by the abbreviation *AAA* with volume followed by page and line numbers, e.g., *AAA* I:67.1–2. See also the edition and translation by Léon Vouaux, *Les Actes de Pierre* (Apocryphes du Nouveau Testament; Paris: Librairie Letouzey, 1922). Still forthcoming is the long-awaited critical edition of the *Acts of Peter* by Gérard Poupon. Poupon was assigned the task by the Swiss Association pour l'Étude de la Littérature Apocrypha Chrétienne in the early 1980's, and the edition is set to be published in the Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum.

² The technical name *Actus Vercellenses* seems to have originated with Lipsius – he first used it in his three volume *Apokryphe Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden*

extant in only one codex: manuscript number 158 of the Chapter Library (Biblioteca Capitolare) in Vercelli, Italy, a city in the northern region called Piemonte.³ The name means simply “acts from Vercelli.” The majority of contemporary historical studies which focus on or employ material from the *Actus Vercellenses* assume that the question of its identity and origins is settled. The text preserved in the Vercelli manuscript is held to be a translation of a significantly older Greek work, currently non-extant, entitled πράξεις Πέτρου, which was first written of by Eusebius,⁴ and which is sometimes called “the ancient *Acts of Peter*” by modern scholars. It is argued that the ancient Greek *Acts of Peter* was composed sometime in the second century, somewhere in Asia Minor, and translated into the Latin of our *Actus Vercellenses* by the early fourth century at the latest. The translator was, as one critic puts it, “slavishly faithful” to the Greek of the ancient *Acts of Peter*.⁵ Many, if not all, scholars have also accepted the hypothesis that the text found in the *Actus Vercellenses* is the *Acts of Peter* truncated – a truncation which took place either before or after it was translated into Latin – with perhaps the first third of the original *Acts of Peter* being missing in the Vercelli acts. Additionally, some critics also suggest that the Greek *Acts of Peter* underwent at least one light editorial redaction at an early stage of its transmission.⁶

Assuming the consensus to be correct, the attraction of the *Actus Vercellenses* to scholars of early Christianity is therefore obvious. Because many studies also connect the *Actus Vercellenses* (qua ancient *Acts of Peter*), along with other extant apocryphal acts of apostles, to “popular Christianity” in this period, and because the Latin *Actus Vercellenses* is treated as a direct transmission of the final two-thirds of the “second-century,” or “ancient” *Acts*

(1883–1890) – although in his *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* he published the text under the title *Actus Petri cum Simone*.

³ I wish to thank the librarian at the Biblioteca Capitolare, Anna Cerutti Garlanda, who has helpfully and generously provided me with a microfilm copy of the entire manuscript to use during this project. I am also grateful to the most kind and learned Dr. Anton Hilhorst who has lent me a different microfilm containing only the *Actus Vercellenses*.

⁴ On this and other ancient external testimonies to the πράξεις Πέτρου see Chapter Three, below.

⁵ Christine M. Thomas, “The Acts of Peter, the Ancient Novel, and Early Christian History,” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1995) 20, n. 71.

⁶ Gerard Poupon, “Les ‘Actes de Pierre’ et leur remaniement,” *ANRW* II.25.6: 4363–83. Compare Christine M. Thomas, “The Prehistory of the *Acts of Peter*,” in *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: Harvard Divinity School Studies* (F. Bovon, et al. eds.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 39–62. Not all are convinced by this line of scholarship: Schneemelcher reviews Poupon’s ideas briefly, apologizes that he cannot take them up “in detail” and concludes that while “many observations are undoubtedly correct, and take us further in our understanding of this work ... [i]t is however questionable whether the conclusions which Poupon draws are convincing” (Schneemelcher II:280–281).

of *Peter*, it is considered to provide reliable evidence for non-elite, non-ecclesiastical second-century religious thought and piety.⁷ The fictional narratives about Peter found in the *Actus Vercellenses* are supposed to give us evidence of second-century Christian discourse outside of the sphere of theological, exegetical and apologetic literature.

This book offers a different theory of how to account for the text of the *Actus Vercellenses* and the historical context proper for its interpretation. The argument attacks the two major pillars which support the contemporary consensus: first, that a single ancient work entitled *Acts of Peter*, the hypothesized source of the *Actus Vercellenses*, was actually written in the second century; second, that the fourth-century Latin translation we possess can successfully be relied upon as if it presented almost directly “the text” of the (lost) Greek original.

External evidence for the existence of a single second-century Greek *Acts of Peter* is extremely tenuous. The external evidence, if read alongside the Petrine acta – that is, extant accounts of the deeds and/or martyrdom of the apostle Peter, one of which is the *Actus Vercellenses* – suggests that several interrelated but distinct accounts emerged during the same period of story-formation. A written work entitled *Acts of Peter* may not have been in existence much earlier than the mid to late third century C.E., the age of Decius and Diocletian.⁸

Furthermore, the argument casts significant doubt upon the purported “reliability” of the extant Latin text. Although we do not have direct access to the original Greek source of our Latin translation, we do have extant several Greek texts which have been accepted, in some cases trumpeted, as direct though partial descendents of that original Greek source. This study compares the text of the *Actus Vercellenses* with these Greek parallel-texts, and demonstrates that our Latin translator has interfered with the source enough so

⁷ A large number of studies have employed the *Actus Vercellenses* as evidence for research into “second-century Christianity.” To name only one example, see Harold Remus, “Magic or Miracle? Some Second-Century Instances,” *The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2.3 (1982): 127–156, especially 132–133 et passim. Compare Thomas, “The Acts of Peter, The Ancient Novel, and Early Christian History,” who claims *Actus Vercellenses* “offers information on the second century” and explains that “the second century is the focus of my interest in this project” (pages 22, 30, et passim). Although the apocryphal acts are often associated with “popular religion,” a problem with the very category renders this association difficult; I treated this topic during the American Academy of Religion 2003 Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Ga, in the *Europe and the Mediterranean in Late Antiquity Group*, during a session on the theme “Popular Religion: A Category and its Problems,” in a paper entitled “Unpopular Christian Literature: The Case of the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* and the Apocryphal *Acts of Peter*” (Sunday, November 23rd, 2003).

⁸ Indeed, some authors from an earlier period of scholarship on the *Actus Vercellenses* and the *Acts of Peter* did think this to have been the period of the composition of the ancient Greek *Acts of Peter*. Part of this thesis thus advocates, in essence, a return to these earlier views.

that, in accord with a more sophisticated understanding of text and how it signifies, we might do better to treat the *Actus Vercellenses* as a new, “independent” text, relevant to the historical study of the time of its translation – the golden age of Latin Christianity in the west – not to the time of the composition of its Greek predecessor.

B. Problems in the Study of the *Acts of Peter*

The Presumed Date of Composition

For the non-extant ancient Greek *Acts of Peter*, most contemporary scholars assign a date of composition to sometime in the years 180–190 C.E. In order to establish this date, these studies have usually relied, either directly or indirectly, upon a single short essay written by Carl Schmidt in 1930.⁹ Schmidt’s article emerged as the definitive word at a time when most scholars accepted a third-century dating for the old *Acts of Peter*. While a number of the earliest modern studies on the topic had argued that the *Acts of Peter* had its origins in second-century gnosticism, these arguments had been overturned by the time of Schmidt.¹⁰ Earlier arguments were based upon the conviction that narrative motifs and language of the *Actus Vercellenses* were consistent with the spirit of

⁹ Carl Schmidt, “Zur Datierung der alten Petrusakten,” *ZNW* 29 (1930): 150–155. The most important recent studies of the *Actus Vercellenses* (always qua *Acts of Peter*) rely primarily or exclusively on Schmidt’s article. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, whose introductory essay (in translation) is the single most influential piece on the *Acts of Peter* in English-language studies, relies completely on Schmidt’s 1930 piece; see Schneemelcher II:283. Another relatively influential locus from which Schmidt’s article and its thesis has come to dominate the field is Ekhard Plümacher, “Apocryphe Apostelakten,” *PW Supplementband XV*: 11–70; see 24. Specialist studies have also relied, explicitly or implicitly, on Schmidt’s piece. See, e.g. Robert F. Stoops, “Miracle Stories and Vision Reports in the ‘Acts of Peter’” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1982); in fact, Stoops cites Schmidt (6) only to suggest that Schmidt is too conservative and that an earlier second-century date cannot be excluded (7). Numerous other smaller studies also use Schmidt to establish the date of composition. See, e.g., Jan Bremmer, “Aspects of the *Acts of Peter*: Women, Magic, Place and Date,” in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism* (ed. Jan Bremmer; SAAA 4; Leuven: Peeters, 1998) 1–20. On page 17 (and note 58) Bremmer reports Schmidt’s proposed dating, and proposes he has found a few different reasons ultimately to agree with it; however these reasons are not conclusive without the support of Schmidt. Of the 14 other studies in the same volume, only four (Westra, Lalleman, Rordorf, and Poupon) are directly interested in the question of the date or historical provenance of the text. These either grapple with Schmidt (Lalleman, Rordorf, Poupon) or try to support his claim by other means (Westra). For the rest, we can only assume they accept a second-century date as completely established, and so ignore the question.

¹⁰ This position was articulated at first by Richard A. Lipsius and Theodor Zahn, and was advocated again later by Adolf Hilgenfeld and Otto Bardenhewer.

the systems of the gnostics attacked by the early heresiologists and known from other texts. On this basis, the original *Acts of Peter* (from which the *Actus Vercellenses* was thought to descend) had been dated rather arbitrarily to 150–170 C.E. However, another point of view, initiated by Adolf Harnack, had since taken the field. Harnack argued that the original Greek pre-cursor to the *Actus Vercellenses*, far from being gnostic, was in fact “popular catholic” (“vulgärkatholisch”) in origin. Internal evidence from the *Actus Vercellenses* and *Martyrium Petri* and external evidence for the πράξεις Πέτρου convinced Harnack that the work could not have originated earlier than the mid-third century. Schmidt’s own work on the *Acts of Peter* had begun also in this earlier period, with the publication of a monograph on a Coptic text containing a brief Petrine actus.¹¹ Thanks to Schmidt’s arguments, scholars have subsequently accepted the Coptic *Act of Peter* as a fragment of the missing first third of the original Greek *Acts of Peter*. In *Die alten Petrusakten* Schmidt himself had relied on Harnack’s account of the origins of the *Acts of Peter*, although there he wanted to argue for a just slightly earlier third-century date of composition for the original. Harnack had, Schmidt reports, subsequently agreed with him. Their shared point of view then became the standard opinion on the question,¹² reflected most notably in the fact that in 1904 and again in 1924, Gerhard Ficker also adopted it, in his contributions to the first and second editions of Edgar Hennecke’s ground-breaking collection of translations and scholarly introductions to early Christian apocryphal texts, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*. In the introduction to his translation of the small collection of texts he called together the “old *Acts of Peter*,”¹³ Ficker argued that the single writing which stood behind them could not have been composed earlier than the mid-third century. This was the last word on the subject for several years.

Then, in his 1930 piece, Schmidt reported that he was dissatisfied with the status quo because, in his related studies of the Pseudo-Clementine literature, he had aligned himself with those scholars who had suggested that the Clementine literature must have had the ancient *Acts of Peter* (in whatever form) as one of its sources. That scholarship had taken shape in a period when Lipsius’ studies of Petrine acta, which asserted a second-century date for the *Acts of Peter*, defined the consensus. Ps.-Clementine scholarship required an earlier date for

¹¹ Carl Schmidt, *Die alten Petrusakten im Zusammenhang der apokryphen Apostelliteratur nebst einem neuentdeckten Fragment* (TU 24.1; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903).

¹² A minority viewpoint was expressed by Carl Erbes, “Petrus nicht in Rom, sondern in Jerusalem gestorben,” *ZKG* 22 (1901): 1.1–47; 2.161–231. Erbes argued on internal grounds that the text belonged more properly to the late second century, to the reign of Commodus (180–192), or at the latest to the reign of Septimus Severus (193–211). But this opinion had been eclipsed by the differing point of view adopted by Schmidt and Ficker prior to 1930.

¹³ The “collection” included the Coptic *Act of Peter*, followed by chapters 1–29 of the Latin *Actus Vercellenses*, and finished with the Greek *Martyrium Petri*.

the Greek predecessor to the *Actus Vercellenses*, if it was to be regarded as a window into one of the sources of the Clementines, because the Clementine basic-writing (“Grundschrift”) had itself been dated to the early- to mid-third century.¹⁴ However, although Schmidt was not satisfied with the emergent consensus, he stated in “Zur Datierung” that he himself had, until recently, thought that there was no hope of dating the old *Acts of Peter* earlier than the first quarter of the third century.

Schmidt began by pointing out that “if all possibilities [of dating the old *Acts of Peter* to an earlier period] have been investigated on the basis of external and internal evidence [as he thought they had], then only new source material can bring a transformation.”¹⁵ According to Schmidt, we now had that new source material. He then argues, on the basis of a newly discovered manuscript fragment of the *Acts of Paul*, that between the two, the *Acts of Peter* must have had textual priority.¹⁶ Since the *Acts of Paul* had to have been written before Irenaeus first mentioned it (ca. 200 C.E.), the *Acts of Peter* had to have been written before this (probably by 190–195 at the latest). Schmidt had changed his mind; there was now reason to agree with the earlier, discarded theses of Erbes. The old *Acts of Peter* was a second-century writing after all, belonging sometime to the period between 180–192 C.E.

Schmidt’s argument in “Zur Datierung” won the day, and it has subsequently formed the basis of consensus which has reigned until the present day among scholars who study the so-called *Acts of Peter* (i.e. the *Actus Vercellenses* and the *Martyrium Petri*). However, a problem has now arisen for this approach to the question, although it has hitherto gone unnoticed. In the 1990’s, through a series of papers delivered at meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature and published in SBL journals, the debate about the textual priority of the *Acts of Peter* and the *Acts of Paul* has been revived.¹⁷ While influential scholars such as

¹⁴ Schmidt refers us to his *Studien zu den Pseudo-Clementinen* (TU 46.1; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929).

¹⁵ Schmidt, “Zur Datierung,” 151.

¹⁶ The fragment in question was the so-called Hamburg Papyrus. Schmidt’s new opinion on the dependence of the *Acts of Paul* on the *Acts of Peter* reversed the consensus, which was then based on Origen’s citation of the *Acts of Paul*. For more details on Schmidt’s new argument, see Chapter III, below, in the section on “Origen.”

¹⁷ On the relationship between the *Acts of Peter* and the *Acts of Paul* see: Dennis R. MacDonald, “The Acts of Paul and The Acts of Peter: Which Came First?” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1992): 214–224; Robert F Stoops, “Peter, Paul and Priority in the Apocryphal Acts,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1992): 225–233; Richard Valantasis, “Narrative Strategies and Synoptic Quandries: A Response to Dennis MacDonald’s Reading of Acts of Paul and Acts of Peter,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1992): 234–239; F. Stanley Jones, “Principal Orientations on the Relations between the Apocryphal Acts (Acts of Paul and Acts of John; Acts of Peter and Acts of John),” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1993): 485–505; Judith Perkins, “The Acts of Peter as

Schneemelcher have continued to regard the issue as clear and settled, and while all the specialists who have dedicated themselves to the study of the *Acts of Peter* seemingly remain committed to the thesis of Schmidt, a number of thoughtful scholars had successfully demolished any certainty one might have on the subject of the priority of the two texts. The clearest presentation of the issue and the fairest statement of the problems with the arguments on both sides has come from Willy Rordorf, the editor of the apocryphal *Acts of Paul*, who has finally argued that the two texts were likely mutually independent of one another, drawing their shared details from a common environment of traditional materials:

we cannot draw a conclusion from the comparison of the two documents about the dating of either the [*Acts of Paul*] or the [*Acts of Peter*]. Everything remains within the realm of possibilities. To shed light on these problems, we will need to resort to other kinds of criteria.¹⁸

As Rordorf has suggested, some “other kinds of criteria” must be assessed if progress is to be made. Frankly, the only “other kinds of criteria” available are, of course, the same criteria of “external and internal” evidence which were rejected by Schmidt in 1930 as having led to an impasse, and to an unthinkable late date for the *Acts of Peter*. Still, the impasse means that the time has come for a reevaluation of the evidence, because, if Rordorf is correct, then it is no longer adequate to refer to Schmidt’s article as a way to establish the date of composition of the *Actus Vercellenses*. Contemporary scholarship thus has no foundation for its dating of the *Acts of Peter*.

Arguments using “internal criteria” are based on that sort of exegetical study of the text which seeks to relate features of its narratives to data of known historical provenance. It is possible to do some illuminating work with this kind of study, but it is difficult to do so methodically and comprehensively in a way that lets us be sure of the results.¹⁹ Of course, great caution is called for with the

Intertext: Response to Dennis MacDonald,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1993): 627–633; Dennis R. MacDonald, “Which Came First? Intertextual Relationships Among the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,” *Semeia* 80 (1997): 11–42; and Richard I. Pervo, “Egging on the Chickens: A Cowardly Response to Dennis MacDonald and Then Some,” *Semeia* 80 (1997): 43–56. The debate remains unresolved. Problematically, among the published papers one notes that partisans favoring the priority of the *Acts of Peter* over the *Acts of Paul* tend to be scholars who have worked on the *Acts of Peter*, while partisans for the priority of the *Acts of Paul* have worked on the *Acts of Paul*.

¹⁸ Willy Rordorf, “The Relation between the *Acts of Peter* and the *Acts of Paul*: State of the Question,” 178–191 in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism* (SAAA 3; Leuven: Peeters, 1998) 191.

¹⁹ Recent examples are the efforts of Bremmer and Westra, in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism*. Bremmer’s work strives to preserve Schmidt’s second-century dating for the text, although some of his readings of the details of the text suggest a fourth-century date! Westra, on the other hand, finds conservative creedal formulas which he

narratives of apocryphal literature, which, being composed long after the fictive setting of their narrative, mostly strive to overcome anachronism, avoiding references to the frame of the author's own world-context. Without developing extensive theoretical criteria for finding indexes to the real author's context, internal study of such works risks mistaking the fictive narrator for the author.²⁰ I have therefore not taken up this more difficult line of inquiry in this book, but leave such studies for the future.

On the other hand, arguments using "external criteria" are based on the study of early attestations to the existence of a book which can be identified with the work under consideration. The only difficult task of a critical study of external evidence is establishing that the data is really evidence for the *same* work as the one under study. Assuming that arguments for a literary relationship between the work and the attestation can be sustained – that is, so long as we can avoid mistaking evidence of the existence of some other book as evidence for our *Actus Vercellenses* – external evidence can demonstrate with comparable certainty the existence and use of a book at points earlier in history than are indicated, for instance, by the material artifact which preserves the text. External evidence can thus be used to establish a reliable *terminus ante quem* to delimit the horizon of any historical interpretation, including arguments for historical context based on internal criteria.

The Actus Vercellenses as Acts of Peter

Before the *Actus Vercellenses* was known to be extant, the ancient *Acts of Peter*, although presumed lost, was still the subject of study. Scholars would first examine the "external evidence" for the existence of a book which was probably called *πράξεις οὐ περιόδοι Πέτρου*, and proceeded by comparing that external evidence to the known Petrine acta – a wide variety of extant narrative accounts of the deeds of the apostle Peter which had survived from late antiquity and from the medieval period.²¹ But with the discovery of the Vercelli acts, after

says suggest a second-century provenance for the text, although the best that can be said for this claim is to say the formulas in question are compatible with earlier creeds.

²⁰ For the concept of the fictive narrator, see Onega and Landa, *Narratology: an Introduction* (Longman Critical Readers; New York: Longman Publishing, 1996) 9–12.

²¹ I refer to the extant accounts (and also occasionally to hypothetical lost books) of Peter's deeds collectively as "Petrine acta." The term has many advantages which I hope will become clear in the course of the next two chapters. Including the *Actus Vercellenses* and texts discovered after it, the names of the now extant works containing Petrine acta texts include (list not exhaustive): ps.-Abdias, ps.-Linus, ps.-Marcellus (in one Latin and two Greek versions), the *Acts of Nereus and Achilles*, ps.-Hegesippus, the ps.-Clementine *Recognitions* and *Homilies*, Pap. Ber. 8502 (the Coptic *Act of Peter*), the *Martyrium Petri*, and the *Actus Vercellenses*. This list could be multiplied with reference to a wide variety of other late antique and medieval accounts and versions in numerous languages of the deeds and passion of Peter and of his

Lipsius published the text in 1891, scholars quickly decided that the lost *Acts of Peter* had been found. Hennecke was the first to publish it under the title *Acts of Peter*. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the identification of the *Actus Vercellenses* as the *Acts of Peter* was seemingly beyond question. After this point, the other Petrine acta were largely abandoned, their interest for the study of the *Acts of Peter* was – and continues to be – presumably confined to the question of the influence of the *Actus Vercellenses* (qua *Acts of Peter*) on later Petrine acta.²²

I will ultimately argue, first by examining external evidence, and then by philological study of the text and translation, that we misidentify the *Actus Vercellenses* if we take it simply to represent the old *Acts of Peter*. Although it is commonly thought to be accessible in the *Actus Vercellenses*, I maintain that “the ancient, second-century, *Acts of Peter*,” may never have existed, per se. Furthermore, the *Actus Vercellenses*, although it is clearly a translated text, is misrepresented when treated as a literal and reliable transmission of an earlier work.

Terminological Confusions

Part of the problem with contemporary approaches to the *Actus Vercellenses* stems from a systematic confusion of terminology and nomenclature related to the identification of the *Actus Vercellenses* as the *Acts of Peter*. In the older literature, and even in Lipsius 1891 edition, the name *Acts of Peter* is not used to designate the *Actus Vercellenses*. The earliest studies used the term *Acts of Peter* to refer to a hypothetical, presumably unified, but non-extant, literary work from antiquity. This lost work was thought to stand behind the texts of the extant Petrine acta in some fashion, although none of them were identified as its direct descendents. To this day, for many scholars, the term *Acts of Peter* stands for this single ancient work. The *Acts of Peter* in this sense, when it is referred to by contemporary scholars, is sometimes incorrectly referred to as a “text.” But of course it is not a “text” for us, since we have no exemplar of it.

But the current use of the title *Acts of Peter* has been further shaped by the translated editions. Ever since Ficker synthesized the work of Lipsius, Zahn, Harnack, and Schmidt in his 1904 translation, the term *Acts of Peter* has actually

contest with Simon. Interested readers are referred to Maurice Geerard, *Clavis Apocryphorum Novi Testamenti* (Corpus Christianorum; Brepols: Turnhout, 1992) §190–209, which is only a starting place. For further research on this topic, one must also consult the early work of Lipsius, especially his pre-*Actus Vercellenses* book *Die Quellen der römischen Petrus-Saga* (Kiel: Schwerts'sche Buchhandlung, 1872).

²² From the late 1920's until the work of Gerard Poupon and Christine M. Thomas in the 1980's and 1990's, it was as if the Petrine acta other than the *Actus Vercellenses* had been completely forgotten. These two have pioneered a modern return to the old field of Petrine acta.

applied to a small collection of three extant texts which have been brought together artificially in the translated editions. These are the Coptic *Act of Peter* from Pap. Ber. 8502, the Latin *Actus Vercellenses*, and a critical text of the *Martyrium Petri* based on two Greek manuscripts. The term *Acts of Peter* can thus also be used as a collective term for the three selected texts which are published together in the translations. Because the largest block of text in these editions is based on the *Actus Vercellenses*, in modern scholarship one frequently finds the term *Acts of Peter* used to refer to the *Actus Vercellenses* alone. Because the terms *Actus Vercellenses* and *Acts of Peter* are seemingly interchangeable in this usage, one of the problems that emerges is that scholars will sometimes begin by speaking of the “text” of the *Actus Vercellenses* (qua “second-century” πράξεις Πέτρου), and finish by citing the Greek critical text of the *Martyrium Petri*. The *Martyrium Petri* is parallel to the last 11 chapters of the *Actus Vercellenses*, but each writing presents a distinct text of its own. Because the former is in Greek and the latter in Latin, a text-critical edition reconciling the two texts would necessarily result in an artificial, retranslated hybrid reconstruction, which would be, to say the least, of dubious worth as historical evidence for a written work from antiquity.

Terminological confusions continue to pose an obstacle to rigorous historical study of the *Actus Vercellenses*. Recently, apparently realizing that terminology is a problem in this field, one scholar has attempted to solve the problem by distinguishing between the term *Acts of Peter* (italicized) and the “Acts of Peter (not italicized),” as designating respectively an ancient work imagined by scholars versus an extant work known in actual texts.²³ Unfortunately, in practice the distinction breaks down frequently in her own work, and the solution has subsequently been abandoned by its author.²⁴ One reason why it might not have worked is that even where the stipulation is followed, it causes

²³ See the terminological discussion of Christine M. Thomas, “The Acts of Peter,” 19–25, et passim.

²⁴ The main problem with Thomas’ discussion seems to be the confusion of the terms “text” and “work,” with the result that her distinctions break down in practice, as “the Acts of Peter (not italicized)” simultaneously can mean either a group of “individual texts” or “one text.” Other difficulties in her discussion seem to be related to this basic confusion. In later work, Thomas abandons her attempt to distinguish between an “Acts of Peter (not italicized)” and the *Acts of Peter*, preferring rapprochement with the scholarly status quo, in which the term *Acts of Peter* (italicized) indicates quite simply the *Actus Vercellenses*. Compare Christine M. Thomas, “...Revivifying Resurrection Accounts: techniques of composition and rewriting in the *Acts of Peter* cc. 25–28,” in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism* (Bremmer, ed.; SAAA 4; Leuven: Peeters, 1998) 65–83; esp. 65.

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