

FRAZER MACDIARMID

The Memory of Ignatius of Antioch

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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Mohr Siebeck

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581



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The Memory of Ignatius of Antioch

The Martyr as a Locus of Christian Identity,
Remembering and Remembered

Mohr Siebeck

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Abbreviations and References

- ANF *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325.* Ed. Donaldson, J. and Roberts, A. with Coxe, A.C. American reprint of the Edinburgh Edition. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985.
- BDAG *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* Ed. Arndt, W.F., Gingrich, F.W. and Bauer, W. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- LCL Loeb Classic Library.
- LPGL *A Patristic Greek Lexicon.* Ed. Lampe, G.W.H. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon.* Ed. Liddell, H. J. and Scott, R. 9th revised edn. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940.
- NPNF 2 *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series.* Ed. Schaff, P. and Wace, H. 14 vols. Reprinted Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994. Originally published Oxford; New York: Parker; Christian Literature Company, 1890–1900.
- OCD^d *Oxford Classical Dictionary.* Ed. Hornblower, S., Spawforth, A. and Eidinow, E. 4th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- PG *Patrologia Graeca.* Ed. J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris: 1857–86.
- PL *Patrologia Latina.* Ed. J.-P. Migne. 217 vols. Paris: 1844–64.
- RSV *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, containing the Old and New Testaments.* New York; London: Collins, 1973.
- SC Sources Chrétiennes

Letters of Ignatius

Middle and long recensions:

Ephes. – *Letter to the Ephesians.*

Mag. – *Letter to the Magnesians.*

Trall. – *Letter to the Trallians.*

Rom. – *Letter to the Romans.*

Phld. – *Letter to the Philadelphians.*

Smyrn. – *Letter to the Smyrneans.*

Pol. – *Letter to Polycarp.*

Long recension only:

Mary to Ign. – *Letter of Mary to Ignatius.*

Ign. to Mary – *Letter of Ignatius to Mary.*

Tar. – *Letter to the Tarsians.*

Phlp. – Letter to the Philippians.

Ant. – Letter to the Antiochenes.

Hero – Letter to Hero.

References to Ignatius' letters are in italicised type with a full stop separating chapter and verse. By contrast, references to Paul's letters are in roman type with a colon separating chapter and verse.

As it engages with both the middle and long recensions, in part III all references to Ignatian letters are prefixed by either MR- or LR-.

The bibliography of primary sources lists all other abbreviations of ancient texts employed in this study.

Note to the reader: All translations are my own unless specified otherwise. Where I translate or cite a primary text in its original language, I supply the editor and page number when useful, e.g. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Saint Macrina* 1 (ed. Maraval, 140).

For the Greek text of the MR I rely upon Holmes, M.W. (2007) *The Apostolic Fathers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, pp. 166–271. For the Greek text of the LR I rely upon Lightfoot, J.B. (1889) *The Apostolic Fathers: Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp*. Part II. Vol. III. 2nd edn. London; New York: Macmillan, pp. 135–273.

Introduction

Scholarship on Ignatius of Antioch has traditionally concerned itself first and foremost with questions of authorship, authenticity, and date. It is almost obligatory that each new piece spend a good deal of space summarising the historical arguments, weighing their merits and faults, and then situating itself within the raft of opinions offered on the debate over the centuries. The prevailing opinion since Theodor Zahn and J.B. Lightfoot (writing at the end of the 19th century) has been that the seven letters of the so-called middle recension (MR) were written by the Syrian bishop in the early second century.¹ Yet even the combined testimony of scholars of such calibre is not allowed to settle before increasingly more convoluted studies emerge to reconsider the interrelations of the recensions: that the long recension (LR) in fact predates the MR;² that the Syriac short recension (SR) is really the most ancient;³ or that Ignatius wrote just four letters, which relate to our current corpus only via many subtly interconnected mutations.⁴ Others accept the MR as earliest, but argue for a date considerably later than traditionally ascribed.⁵ Clearly, these kinds of discussions are important in their own right; they are valuable for highlighting the provisionality and ambiguity of the source material, and the sensitivity with which it must be treated. They also stem from a very proper concern about authenticity, that a text's purported author is also its author in fact.⁶

As is slowly being recognised within the academy, however, Ignatian scholarship is saturated with such studies, and each new attempt met by the logic of diminishing returns. None, it is commonly accepted, has been able to upset the Lightfoot/Zahn consensus.⁷ Some of the most influential studies of Ignatius have given relatively little attention to the problem of historical authenticity;⁸

¹ Zahn (1873); Lightfoot (1889).

² E.g. Hannah (1960); Weijnenborg (1969).

³ Vinzent (2019), esp. 327.

⁴ Rius-Camps (1980).

⁵ E.g. Barnes (2008); Hübner (1997).

⁶ Lookadoo (2020b) admirably attempts to make sense out of the voluminous scholarship produced since 1997 on the question of the MR letters' dating and authenticity.

⁷ Foster (2006: 489) nuances the notion of consensus: "perhaps it would be better from a text-critical perspective to say that they [the seven MR epistles] represent the earliest recoverable stage of the textual transmission of the Ignatian letters."

⁸ E.g. Corwin (1960); Schoedel (1985).

indeed, some of the most recent articles make no reference at all to the debate, and proceed on the assumption that the MR represents what Ignatius really wrote.⁹ I join these in accepting the MR as ‘genuine’ – that is, written in the early second century by the man Ignatius, whose remarkable journey from Antioch to Rome we are led to believe ended in the arena. (To anticipate chapter 6, I follow Lightfoot and J.D. Smith who believe the LR to have been a late fourth-century work, probably composed in Antioch.¹⁰) By accepting this, in full knowledge of the attendant problems, the scholar is freed to move the conversation on, to consider the figure of Ignatius as he is known and met *through* the letters. Nonetheless, it will become clear that much of my argument would stand even if discussion of the MR required the name ‘Ignatius’ to be surrounded by quotation marks.

Every piece of literature, whether fictional or non-fictional, ‘forged’ or ‘genuine,’ invites the reader to infer an authorial persona. For this reason, all the recensions that make up the Ignatian corpus are open to a study of how they portray the figure of Ignatius. This allows the scholar effectively to bypass questions of ‘historical authenticity’ and investigate the more stimulating questions surrounding the locus of *memory*. The letters of the MR assume of their audiences certain memories, sacred and profane. How does Ignatius evoke these memories, and transform them towards the cause of Christ and community? How does Ignatius portray himself as a figure to be remembered in the MR? How does this compare to the manner in which he has indeed been remembered in the church, such as in the LR and in martyrological texts?

Such questions have only begun to receive attention in scholarship. Elizabeth Castelli uses Ignatius as a case study in her exploration of how the early Christian experience of martyrdom and persecution became a “form of culture making, whereby Christian identity was indelibly marked by the collective memory of the religious suffering of others.”¹¹ She expresses a similar frustration as I with insoluble questions of ‘what really happened,’ and employs memory because of its particular suitability to ask “how particular ways of construing the past enable later communities to constitute and sustain themselves.”¹² Candida Moss has recently undertaken an analysis of the style of the Antiochene martyrology’s memorialisation of Ignatius as a Pauline martyr.¹³

⁹ E.g. Hartog (2019); Lookadoo (2019). I, like these scholars, remain conscious that the MR is to some degree a scholarly construct: we rely upon the Antiochene *Acts* to supply the text of *Romans*, and corrections to the other letters are often supplied on the basis of the Latin translation or quotations from other authors. See Lookadoo (2020b).

¹⁰ J.D. Smith (1986).

¹¹ Castelli (2004), 4.

¹² Castelli (2004), 5.

¹³ Moss (2016).

Memory has already proved to be a popular tool to break the stalemate of ‘historical Jesus’ research,¹⁴ and elsewhere in New Testament (NT) and patristic scholarship.¹⁵ My study takes a cue from Dale Allison (among others), who points out that some aspects of a person’s character and significance are not accessible to the person themselves, or even to their contemporaries, but are only appreciable *after* their death: “Self-perception is only partial perception, and while the passing of time dims memories, it can also unfold significance.”¹⁶ The LR is proof that Ignatius continued to be significant centuries after his martyrdom. The present study questions the privileging of the MR as our *only* source of insight into Ignatius, and the second century as the definitive context in which the meaning of Ignatius’ words must be decided.

However recently ‘memory’ has attracted interest within the academy, it goes without saying that memory was as important for the ancients as it is for us moderns. Indeed, Carruthers notes a dissonance between the modern tendency towards a pejorative view of the faculty of memory as merely functional and uninteresting, compared to the ancients’ awe and esteem of it as the seat of the intellect, morality, and identity.¹⁷ The broad conceptual structure of all Abrahamic religions lends particular significance to memory, as the means of contextualising current lives within the divine economy and in reference to God’s revelation to humanity.¹⁸ Christianity has a particularly strong relationship with memory as it understands God himself to be the object of memory, in the life of the human being Christ. Remembrance of the person of Jesus was from very early on central to the worship and praxis of the believing community.¹⁹ The Jesus of each gospel is constructed in relation to (and as the culmination of) centuries of history, prophecy, divine election and economy, as well as elements thought outside of that relationship with God; Jesus presents himself to be remembered in certain ways, and patristic theology may in part be seen as the charting of that memory. Most apostolic and post-apostolic Christians show a concerted interest in the ‘memoirs’ and lineages of ‘living memory’ stemming from witnesses to the NT events, and often orientate their own authority in relation to them.²⁰ Ignatius demonstrates a similar connection with and interest in memory, and benefits from treatment in the light of it.

However, ‘memory’ can be a term as vague and elusive as it is evocative and penetrating. Although its popularity in the humanities increased from its

¹⁴ See Keith (2015), (2015a) for an overview of the project’s progress.

¹⁵ E.g. Bockmuehl (2010), (2012).

¹⁶ Allison (2009), 24; cf. Bockmuehl (2010), 18–29.

¹⁷ Carruthers (2008), 1–16.

¹⁸ The atrocities of the Holocaust sparked a revival of Jewish scholarship rediscovering the centrality of memory for Judaism. See particularly Yerushalmi (1982), Spiegel (2002).

¹⁹ See Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24–25.

²⁰ Bockmuehl (2010), 22–29.

most influential modern study by Maurice Halbwachs almost a century ago,²¹ successful application in one field does not necessarily guarantee the same in another. Its use in the NT field has not met with universal approval. Some nervousness regarding such a theory-based approach goes without saying,²² but the heart of some scholars' mistrust seems to be the over-confidence with which memory studies are employed to establish the historical validity of the gospel accounts, particularly the words of Jesus.²³ More generally, there is a large degree of uncertainty about the relation between the *presentist* concerns of 'social' or 'collective memory,' and the past events of historical reality.²⁴ Doubtless some scholars, especially in historical Jesus research, have exploited this uncertainty to claim maximal correspondence between memory and history,²⁵ though others are more circumspect.²⁶

Many of these criticisms are valid. To them might be added: the multiplicity of 'memory theorists and theories'; the historian's lack of qualification in choosing just one of these, and in applying it appropriately; and the polysemy of the word 'memory' not only between disciplines, but even individual people.

It will be seen, however, that my use of the word memory largely escapes such pitfalls. My project does not use memory with the (implicit) aim of confirming certain historical facts, nor does it rely on 'memory theory' in a specialist or technical sense.²⁷ Rather, I believe Ignatius to be a figure whose contours and significance are thrown into particularly sharp relief by the *idea* of memory. For this reason, and because of the diverse uses to which I put the word throughout this study, it is impossible to give a single definition of the term 'memory,' other than what is commonly understood by the word in its non-technical, everyday use. Whereas most other early Christian martyrs are available to us only through the words and reflections of others,²⁸ Ignatius is peculiar in having left us his own thoughts about his impending death, and so specially lends himself to such an investigation. I wish to unpack how memory can help us to understand what Ignatius (or the author of the MR) considered valuable to hand on to posterity, both in continuing the memory of pre-existing Old Testament and pagan figures, and also in forging anew a memorial for himself. Memory also covers the remit of reception history, with which I intend to examine how Ignatius has in fact been remembered. This will be based around the LR whose first-person biographical testimony must be rare if not

²¹ Republished Halbwachs (1992).

²² Crook (2013), 61–67; Foster (2012), 201–2.

²³ Foster (2012), 191–92.

²⁴ Foster (2012), 196–98; as noted by Halbwachs (1992), 182–83. Cf. Erll (2011), 39.

²⁵ Foster (2012: 200) suggests Bauckham (2006).

²⁶ Foster (2012: 201) suggests Allison (2010).

²⁷ Practitioners of 'memory theory' are occasionally consulted for their hermeneutic value, accompanied by appropriate caveats.

²⁸ See Buol (2018).

unique in antiquity, but also examines martyrological accounts of Ignatius. I hope thereby to expand the work of Castelli and other scholars of Christian hagiography, to understand how the memory of Ignatius has created meaning, purpose, and culture out of Christians' experiences of suffering and earthly estrangement. In short, my project seeks to discover the interpretative potential of memory understood as a *creative* faculty and exercise.

Since its marginalisation by Zahn and Lightfoot, the long recension has been largely overlooked in scholarship. "While each decade brings forth a new dispute on the authenticity of seven letters attributed to Ignatius, the second-century bishop of Antioch, barely a drop of ink is spent on the persona that he acquires in [the LR]," writes Edwards.²⁹ This is partly due to a fascination with 'authenticity,' and a corresponding apathy towards anything convicted of pseudepigraphy. As I demonstrate in this volume, questions of 'authenticity' and 'authorship' are far more complex than they appear, and opinion regarding what constitutes each has altered considerably since the first centuries of the Christian church. An examination of the LR reveals that these 'forgeries' contain reminiscences of the second-century bishop, which demonstrate the continued influence of Ignatius' persona. These are interesting as much for the light they shed on their own age as for the manner in which they are 'resurrected' and exploited in the service of specific theological, social, and polemic causes. The figure of Ignatius who emerges from the LR as the intended authorial persona is found to be a catena of individuals and communities that have each contributed towards the memorial tradition of Ignatius – written testimony for the continuing life and relevance of the bishop through the centuries. The LR's memorial of Ignatius is one of several in fourth-century Christianity, each competing for legitimacy, historical verisimilitude, and the right to claim the martyr for themselves. My study goes some way to exploring the untapped potential in the LR, and providing the "exhaustive examination of all the important features of the forger's work" called for by Ehrman.³⁰

In part I, I investigate how Ignatius situates himself as a participant in the divine economy by evoking certain memories in the minds of his readers. Ignatius characterises the election, history, prophecy, and heroes of Israel as preparation for the revelation of Christ, and the proper inheritance of Christian communities (chapter 1). Ignatius also constructs Christian identity in relation with pagan things, people, and events, sometimes concluding that these too are ultimately to be brought within the fold of God's love (chapter 2). In this first part, I approach the MR from a text-critical perspective, and interrogate the relationship between these memories and Christian identity as understood by Ignatius, with particular reference to its borders with potential 'Jewish' and

²⁹ Edwards (2013), 342.

³⁰ Ehrman (2013), 469.

‘pagan’ identities. While my research at times intersects with that of other modern scholars, this is a largely novel approach to Ignatius, and yields original findings.

Part II is entitled “‘Memory Poiesis’ – Ignatius as a Forger of his own Memorialisation” and looks at the ways in which Ignatius constructs himself as a figure to be remembered in the MR. Central to this issue is the question of whether, and if so, how, Ignatius portrays himself as a sacrifice. Chapter 3 involves a close reading of the passages in question. I ask what kind of sacrifice might be intended and the reasons for it, investigating potential sources for this notion. The fourth chapter builds upon the third and tests the suggestion of Allen Brent that Ignatius considered himself to have been a scapegoat for his communities’ sake. Whereas Brent describes only a vague ‘social-psychological theory,’ without any workable mechanism, I employ the mimetic theory of René Girard, whose affinities with Ignatius are striking. Although Ignatius’ self-presentation might be said to show an awareness of his (and Christians’ in general) function as a scapegoat in a Graeco-Roman context (as Brent suggests), he himself wishes to undermine this impulse to violent mimesis by offering himself, like Christ, as a model of nonviolence and self-denial to be imitated by Christians and the world. He longs for his legacy to be the establishment of a system of ministry by which this positive mimesis might be promulgated. Part II may be seen to compare conventional text-critical methods with modern anthropological theory, as hermeneutical tools for Ignatian studies. While some clear discrepancies arise, the two chapters produce strikingly similar conclusions with regard to Ignatius’ understanding of his suffering as vicariously beneficial.

Since most of the texts which memorialise Ignatius ‘dissemble’ in some way (the LR is pseudepigraphic, the martyrologies employ first-person narration), I begin part III with an analysis of literary ‘forgery’ (chapter 5). I consider what it means to write ‘honestly’ or pseudepigraphically, authentically or inauthentically, using one’s own words or the words of another, and attempt to critique some of these common false dichotomies. This analysis takes in evidence from the early church, and engages with modern scholars of literature, philosophy, and theology. I end with a discussion of the ‘genre’ of biography in antiquity, and in this regard compare the biographical elements present in Athanasius’ *Life of Antony*, Gregory’s *Life of Saint Macrina*, and the long recension, which all adopt the epistolary form for their projects. As the LR constitutes the most substantial literary memorialisation of Ignatius, chapter 6 looks in depth at the probable context of its composition, and the ways in which its author ‘resurrects’ Ignatius to speak to the issues of his own day. The combination of redacting the seven MR letters, and composing six from scratch, grants the author unique command over the authorial voice of Ignatius; moreover, it allows me to compare how these two modes depict the martyr, and to draw out common-

alities and themes. I also examine the LR's theological persuasion, anti-heretical polemic, ecclesiology, and the means by which he attempts to create verisimilitude. Finally, chapter 7 turns to three other early reminiscences of Ignatius, namely the Antiochene and Roman martyrologies, and John Chrysostom's *Homily on the Holy Martyr Ignatius*. As well as examining their portrayal of Ignatius, I trace how each bears witness to the novel devotional, liturgical, and material phenomenon of the cult of saints. A comparison of these portrayals of Ignatius with his own self-memorialisation finds divergence as well as surprising points of commonality, particularly surrounding the efficacious nature of his suffering for fellow Christians.

Due to the breadth of this study, I have decided that the relevant secondary literature is best dealt with in the context of each chapter, rather than in a prefacing section. In a voluminous chapter of his 2019 book *Writing the History of Early Christianity*, Markus Vinzent has provided something of a history of scholarship on the three recensions since the Enlightenment.³¹ Even if my project quite quickly diverges from his, Vinzent convincingly demonstrates the value of applying a retrospective perspective to Ignatius,³² of considering the chronically-overlooked LR, and indeed the worth of studying Ignatius at all.³³ That Ignatius is a figure who has “impacted,” well as been a “product of” various “social, political, ethical and religious constellations,” is a point at which our projects coincide.³⁴

The need for a study such as this is, I believe, quite clear. In the year I began this project, Harry Maier hinted at the generative potential of applying a lens of memory to the figure of Ignatius, which I have taken as encouragement for the first two parts of my project.³⁵ Similarly, Markus Bockmuehl speaks of his study on the memory of Simon Peter³⁶ as a “test case for both the potential promise and the limits of an approach that seeks to attend more carefully to the way Christianity's originating figures left a footprint in living memory.”³⁷ His project has more than vindicated such an approach, and I offer my study as a further opportunity for its potential to be plumbed and extended in a second-century context. The third part of my study has received backing from Bart Ehrman, who in 2013 considered “a full critical commentary on the Pseudo-Ignatians” to be a “major desideratum in the field.”³⁸ The three parts together

³¹ Vinzent (2019), 266–409.

³² See Vinzent (2019), 273–74.

³³ See Vinzent (2019), 272–73.

³⁴ Vinzent (2019), 409.

³⁵ Maier (2017: 212): “Social memory – both what is past and the form that Ignatius creates in the course of his writings – is central to Ignatius's strategies as religious entrepreneur vouching for a particular vision of God and the social consequences he derives from it.”

³⁶ Bockmuehl (2010) and (2012).

³⁷ Bockmuehl (2012), xiv–xv.

³⁸ Ehrman (2013), 469.

demonstrate the immense wealth of meaning able to be held within this single figure Ignatius, and the power of memory to unlock it. The work of Jan and Aleida Assmann on the connective power of memory,³⁹ though explicitly mentioned in these pages only occasionally, has been instrumental in encouraging me to pursue this project. I would count it a great compliment if echoes of their words are detected among my own.

It is one of the many ironies about Ignatius that he places more trust in what he writes than in his verbal testimony and physical presence.⁴⁰ The fixity and durability of writing was appealing to one whose bodily (and perhaps mental) circumstances were so unpredictable. Indeed, it is appropriate that though Ignatius wishes to be annihilated bodily, he longs to be remembered literarily;⁴¹ while other writers hope to remain in their writings *in spite* of their death, Ignatius hopes to remain *because of* his death. My study charts the nature of this hope, and the manner in which it is realised.

³⁹ E.g. J. Assmann (2006), 1–30, 81–100; (1995), 128–33; A. Assmann (2010), 17–20.

⁴⁰ *Rom.* 7.2: “If upon my arrival I myself should appeal to you, do not be persuaded by me; believe instead these things that I am writing to you.”

⁴¹ *Rom.* 4.2; cf. *Rom.* 2.1 where he hopes that through death he will become λόγος θεοῦ, as opposed to φωνή if he remains alive. Space does not allow me a full exploration of Ignatius’ rich (and enigmatic) use of the conceptual locus λόγος, which is coupled both with φωνή and στή/ήσυχία.

Part I.

The Remembering Ignatius

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