TIMOTHY P. HENDERSON

The Gospel of Peter and Early Christian Apologetics

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 301

Mohr Siebeck

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Rewriting the Story of Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This book is a lightly revised version of my dissertation submitted to the faculty at Marquette University. It was during my first semester at Marquette that I was in a doctoral seminar on the formation of the gospel tradition. What I did not know at the time was that one of the papers I submitted in that course was a mustard seed of sorts, since it is that 12-page effort that has eventually grown to become this book. Many people deserve recognition for their part in seeing this project to its completion.

I first would like to thank Dr. Julian Hills, who was my advisor from day one of my time at Marquette and who directed my dissertation. His encouragement to be continuously improving my work has been a rewarding challenge for which I owe a debt of gratitude. I hope to emulate his commitment to the highest standards of scholarship.

Thanks to Dr. Michel Barnes, who, in addition to being on my dissertation committee, has frequently helped me better understand the development of Christian thought during the second and third centuries. I would also like to thank Dr. Andrei Orlov for his interest in my work and for his generous willingness to help me in a variety of areas during my studies at Marquette. Gratitude is also due to Dr. Deirdre Dempsey, who graciously volunteered to be a member of the dissertation committee and whose enthusiasm for biblical studies has been apparent to me. The feedback I received from these fine scholars has allowed me to improve several aspects of this book.

The community of graduate students in Marquette's Theology Department was an oasis of encouragement, rewarding dialogue, and friendship. This was one of the most pleasant surprises of my doctoral journey. Thanks to everyone who walked this path with me.

I would like to extend my gratitude to two individuals for their role in seeing this work through the publication stage. Dr. Jörg Frey, editor of WUNT II, enthusiastically accepted the work for inclusion in this prestigious series. Anna Krüger, from Mohr Siebeck's production department, provided invaluable help in formatting this project for publication.

My family deserves the highest thanks of all. My oldest son, Justin, was only a toddler when I began my research, yet today he can read nearly every word of this book. His regular barrage of questions about its contents

never ceases to put a smile on my face. I am grateful for the recent arrival of his younger brother Joshua during the time that I have been working toward publication. Lastly, I am certain that I would not have seen this project to its completion if it were not for the patient love and sacrifice of my wife, Jenny. She has been a constant source of strength and encouragement beyond what I deserve, and for this I am most grateful.

St. Paul, Minnesota, February 2011 Timothy P. Henderson

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Introduction

Gospel studies witnessed the rise of several new methodological approaches during the 20th century. Karl Schmidt, Martin Dibelius, and Rudolf Bultmann pioneered the form-critical study of these texts, giving attention to the period in which stories about Jesus were transmitted orally. They then classified these stories according to their form in an effort to ascertain the particular context in which a given form would have been most valued in early Christian communities. Research on this period of oral tradition has been enhanced by subsequent studies of memory and orality, as reflected in the publications of Werner Kelber, Birger Gerhardsson, and others. Soon after form criticism entered the scene redaction criticism arrived in the work of Willi Marxsen, Günther Bornkamm, and Hans Conzelmann. This approach sought to understand the ways in which the authors of the gospels edited their sources. In doing so, these scholars attempted to recover each evangelist's unique theology and setting.

These New Testament (NT) practitioners of form- and redaction-criticism were preceded by their Hebrew Bible counterparts in some regards. Hermann Gunkel had already been employing form-critical methods in the study of Genesis and Psalms. And the Documentary Hypothesis – in the version proposed by Julius Wellhausen in the 19th century – had a strong redaction-critical component. Wellhausen detected four sources behind the pentateuchal books and judged that each had been edited and creatively integrated with one another by later editors.

The vast majority of form- and redaction-critical research on Christian gospels has been devoted to those gospels that came to be included in the NT. Over the past several decades, however, there has been a growing interest in noncanonical gospels. This resurgence began in 1945 with the discovery of the *Gospel of Thomas* and the eventual publication of this text at the end of the 1950s. Most recently, a copy of the long lost *Gospel of Judas* was found and subsequently published in 2006 with much media fanfare.

Although it has been over one hundred years since an ancient copy of the *Gospel of Peter* was discovered in an Egyptian cemetery, this gospel continues to intrigue those with an interest in early Christian literature. On the one hand, it bears striking similarities to the accounts of Jesus' death,

burial, and resurrection that are found in the NT gospels; but on the other hand, it deviates significantly from those stories at points. This has made it difficult to understand the specific relationship between this noncanonical gospel and its canonical companions. Furthermore, while scholars have offered various descriptions of the religio-social context in which this text was composed, many have been unconvinced by what has been suggested thus far in this area.

The path I follow in this study is important because it revisits old questions and offers new answers. As previous gospel critics have shared the same methodological insights as their Hebrew Bible counterparts in utilizing form and redaction criticism, I wish to do likewise in my suggestion about the proper analogy for understanding the *Gospel of Peter*'s relationship to the NT gospels.

Specifically, I will be appealing to a category of Second Temple Jewish literature that has come to be identified as "Rewritten Bible." These texts, though differing in genre, authorship, and date, are united in that they retell portions of the Hebrew Bible in order to address the new situations of their authors and readers. It will be my contention that the relationship between these "Rewritten Bible" texts and their biblical antecedents is precisely the type of relationship between the *Gospel of Peter* and the NT gospels. As such, my work is largely redaction-critical in nature, and my focus is on the apologetic nature of the editorial work in this gospel.

While previous scholarly literature has often referred in passing to the apologetic interests of the *Gospel of Peter*, the issue has rarely been documented and analyzed in a systematic fashion. What has not been addressed specifically is the influence that criticism from those outside the Christian movement may have had on the development of the traditions in this gospel. Various sources of the first few centuries C.E. preserve some of the thoughts of those who were critical of emerging Christianity. Included among these are critiques of details found in the NT gospels. Justin Martyr purports to give many of these in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, and the remnants of Celsus' similar objections, written originally in his *True Doctrine*, have been left behind in Origen's reply to him. These and other works provide evidence of the types of criticisms that were made against some of the accounts in the NT gospels. To date, though, no significant work has been done to explore how these might shed light on the situation in which the material in the *Gospel of Peter* developed and how this background may provide an explanation for the heightened apologetic tendencies in this text. My study seeks to fill this gap that currently exists in scholarship.

Many have continued to explore the factors that influenced the transition of the early Christian movement from what was originally a small Jewish sect to what became an almost entirely Gentile religion that in most

outward respects was distinct from Judaism. This "parting of the ways" has been studied extensively by James D. G. Dunn, Judith Lieu, and others. Because of its strong anti-Jewish polemic, the *Gospel of Peter* potentially sheds some light on the question of the relationship between Christians and Jews in the communities where the text originated. At this point I will go beyond the results of my textual analysis in an attempt at social reconstruction and it is here that my thesis is more speculative and thus its results less certain. But if this reconstruction over-interprets the text in my search for the original setting of this gospel, it is still the case that I have presented more accurately than previous studies the relation between the *Gospel of Peter* and the canonical gospels.

As for technical matters, unless otherwise noted, I use the NRSV for all English Bible translations. All English translations of modern German and French scholarship are my own. Except where noted, I follow the English translation of the *Gospel of Peter* in the critical edition edited by Tobias Nicklas and Thomas Kraus, and I am also dependent on this source for the Greek text. When providing block quotations of ancient texts, I include the title and citation followed by the English translation used and its page number(s) (e.g., *1 Apol.* 48; Falls 85). In these instances see the "Primary Sources" section of the bibliography to locate a specific author.

Chapter 1

The History of the Gospel of Peter and Its Status As Rewritten Gospel

The purpose of this first chapter is to review the history of the *Gospel of Peter* (hereafter, GP) itself and of the research on it, and to set out my own claims and procedure for this study. After reviewing the patristic references to GP, I will summarize the details surrounding the discovery of a fragment from it near the end of the 19th century. I will then outline the history of scholarship, noting in particular the ways in which its relationship to the NT gospels has been understood and referring to some proposals that have been made concerning the social and religious background to it. Following this, I will present my own thesis and procedure for this study.

1.1 The Early History of GP

As is true of many works written in antiquity, the sands of history once swallowed GP, leaving behind not a single manuscript containing any of its words. For centuries this gospel was known only from the testimonies of patristic writers. There are, in fact, seven such authors or texts to be discussed – Serapion (preserved in Eusebius of Caesarea), Eusebius himself, Origen, Didymus the Blind, Jerome, Theodoret, and the *Decretum Gelasianum*. In addition, I will review a statement from Justin Martyr that has been claimed by some to be an allusion to GP. As I will point out, however, this should not be understood as a reference to our gospel.

The earliest writer to refer to GP is Serapion, bishop of Syrian Antioch near the end of the second century. He composed a short tract entitled "Concerning the So-Called *Gospel of Peter*" (περὶ τοῦ λεγομένου κατὰ Πέτρον εὐαγγελίου). While this work has been lost, some of its contents have been preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea, who apparently possessed a copy of it.[1] The entire passage from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* is worth quoting:

[1] On Serapion's comments, see already Henry B. Swete, *The Akhmîm Fragment of the Apocryphal Gospel of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan, 1893), ix–xi; Léon Vaganay,

Now it is likely, indeed, that other memoirs also, the fruit of Serapion's literary studies, are preserved by other persons, but there have come down to us only those addressed To Domnus, one who had fallen away from the faith of Christ, at the time of the persecution, to Jewish will-worship (τὴν Ἰουδαΐκὴν ἑθελοθρησκείαν); and those To Pontius and Caricus, churchmen, and other letters to other persons; and another book has been composed by him *Concerning what is known as the Gospel of Peter*, which he has written refuting the false statements in it, because of certain in the community of Rhossus, who on the ground of the said writing turned aside into heterodox teachings. It will not be unreasonable to quote a short passage from this work, in which he puts forward the view he held about the book, writing as follows:

"For our part, brethren, we receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ, but the writings which falsely bear their names we reject, as men of experience, knowing that such were not handed down to us. For I myself, when I came among you, imagined that all of you clung to the true faith; and, without going through the Gospel put forward by them in the name of Peter, I said: If this is the only thing that seemingly causes captious feelings among you, let it be read. But since I have now learnt, from what has been told me, that their mind was lurking in some hole of heresy, I shall give diligence to come again to you; wherefore, brethren, expect me quickly. But we, brethren, gathering to what kind of heresy Marcianus belonged (who used to contradict himself, not knowing what he was saying, as ye will learn from what has been written to you), were enabled by others who studied this very Gospel, that is, by the successors of those who began it, whom we call Docetae (for most of the ideas belong to their teaching) – using [the material supplied] by them, were enabled to go through it and discover that the most part indeed was in accordance with the true teaching of the Saviour, but that some things were added, which also we place below for your benefit." (*Hist. eccl.* 6.12.1–6; Lake and Oulton, 2:39, 41, 43; all parentheses and brackets are original)

Unfortunately, Eusebius does not proceed to quote the items from GP to which Serapion alludes as having been added to the "true teaching of the Saviour."

We may note several features of this excerpt. First, there was a text known as the "Gospel according to Peter" (τὸ κατὰ Πέτρον εὐαγγέλιον) circulating in the regions around Cilicia and Syria near the end of the second century. Second, Serapion was apparently unfamiliar with this gospel prior to his first visit to Rhossus.[2] This is the best way to explain his change of opinion concerning it. Had he already been acquainted with this work, it is doubtful that he would have given his initial approval to read it. Since Serapion's episcopacy is most frequently dated to the last decade of the second century, a *terminus ante quem* of 180–190 C.E. can be established for GP. Third, and only at a time after his first visit to Rhossus, Serapion learned that certain "Docetae" (heretics, in his estimation) had

L'Évangile de Pierre (2d ed.; EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1930), 1–8; Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas, *Das Petrusevangelium und die Petrusapokalypse: Die griechischen Fragment mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung* (GCS[2] 11; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 12–16.

[2] Swete, *Akhmîm Fragment*, xi.

been using this gospel to support their teachings. He goes even further in claiming that it originated with the Docetae. Fourth, Serapion himself finally read the gospel and judged that it was largely "in accordance with the true teaching of the Saviour," although it had added some things to what he considered to be orthodox ideas.

Fifth, it should be asked whether Serapion's opinion of this gospel was influenced by his acquaintance with those who were reading it. Clearly, he knows members of the group led by Marcianus and is in disagreement with them. How much of Serapion's judgment about GP has been colored by his theological differences with those who held it in esteem? Sixth, it is interesting to note that Domnus, an acquaintance of Serapion's, had left the Christian movement to join a Jewish group during a time of persecution. The source of this conflict is not stated, but this may be indicative of tension between Jews and Christians in the time and place in which GP was composed and/or circulated. There is a strong anti-Jewish tone permeating this gospel, and Eusebius' comment here adds intrigue to the background to our text. At the very least, it appears that Christian and Jewish groups were in close social proximity to one another in the area where GP was being read in the latter part of the second century.

At a previous point in his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius had provided his own opinion about GP after having discussed the question of the authenticity of the two epistles written in the name of Peter:

> On the other hand, of the Acts bearing his name, and the Gospel named according to him (τὸ κατ' αὐτὸν ὠνομασμένον εὐαγγέλιον) and Preaching called his and the so-called Revelation, we have no knowledge at all in Catholic tradition, for no orthodox writer of the ancient time or of our own has used their testimonies. (*Hist. eccl.* 3.3.2; Lake and Oulton, 1:192–93)[3]

In light of his comments regarding Serapion, Eusebius undoubtedly judged that the gospel known to him as the "Gospel according to Peter" was the one of which Serapion wrote. We must remember that Eusebius had access to the writings of numerous Christian authors and was familiar with a very wide range of early Christian texts.[4] With this in mind, while Eusebius was acquainted with two letters written in Peter's name, he knew of only one gospel attributed to the apostle. It seems virtually certain that the text

[3] Treatments of this passage appear in Swete, *Akhmîm Fragment*, ix; Vaganay, *Évangile de Pierre*, 9–11; Kraus and Nicklas, *Petrusevangelium*, 17.

[4] Summaries of this topic typically show up in works addressing the role of Eusebius in the development of the NT canon. Two recent estimates of the scope of texts with which Eusebius was familiar appear in Everett R. Kalin, "The New Testament Canon of Eusebius," in *The Canon Debate* (ed. Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 386–404; David L. Dungan, *Constantine's Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

known to this early church historian is the same one that was circulating in and around Syria and Cilicia at the end of the second century.

Origen makes a passing reference to GP in his commentary on Matthew.[5] After quoting a passage that mentions Jesus' family members (Matt 13:55–56), he comments on how those outside Jesus' family viewed him:

> They thought, then, that He was the son of Joseph and Mary. But some say, basing it on a tradition in the Gospel according to Peter (κατὰ Πέτρον εὐαγγέλιου), as it is entitled, or "The Book of James," that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary. Now those who say so wish to preserve the honour of Mary in virginity to the end. (*Comm. Matt.* 10.17; *ANF* 9:424)[6]

The "Book of James" is most likely the text known today as the *Protevangelium of James*, since there are several points at which this work alludes to Joseph having children from a previous marriage (*Prot. Jas.* 9.2; 17.1; 18.1). Origen eventually affirms his belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary, though he seems to trace this idea back to GP or the *Protevangelium of James* rather than to Matthew. Where Serapion condemned the use of GP among Christians, Origen found in it an ally for his own theological position. However, there is no passage in the extant fragment of GP that would fit with a scene like the one mentioned by Origen.

In the middle of the fourth century, Didymus the Blind used the gospels attributed to Thomas and Peter as examples of books falsely ascribed to authors (βιβλία ψευδεπίγραφα), which were not to be read by Christians.[7] It is unclear whether Didymus had firsthand knowledge of GP or was dependent on hearsay.

Moving to the end of the fourth century, we find two references to GP in Jerome's *Lives of Illustrious Men*, a work that Jerome acknowledged as owing a large debt to Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*.[8] Jerome refers to GP in the context of discussing the various writings that have been attributed to Peter:

> He wrote two epistles which are called Catholic, the second of which, on account of its difference from the first in style, is considered by many not to be by him. Then too the Gospel according to Mark, who was his disciple and interpreter, is ascribed to him. On the other hand, the books, of which one is entitled his Acts, another his Gospel, a third his Preaching, a fourth his Revelation, a fifth his "Judgment" are rejected as apocryphal. (*Vir. ill.* 1; *NPNF*^{2} 3:361)

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[5] See Swete, *Akhmîm Fragment*, x; Vaganay, *Évangile de Pierre*, 8–9; Kraus and Nicklas, *Petrusevangelium*, 16–17.

[6] Greek text in Kraus and Nicklas, *Petrusevangelium*, 16.

[7] Greek text, German translation, and discussion in Kraus and Nicklas, *Petrusevangelium*, 18–19.

[8] Summaries of these excerpts in Swete, *Akhmîm Fragment*, ix, xii; Vaganay, *Évangile de Pierre*, 11.

Later, in his brief summary of Serapion's accomplishments, Jerome again mentions the gospel:

> [Serapion] wrote a volume also to Domnus, who in time of persecution went over to the Jews, and another work on the gospel which passes under the name of Peter, a work to the church of the Rhosenses in Cilicia who by the reading of this book had turned aside to heresy. (*Vir. ill.* 41; *NPNF*^{2} 3:372)

Nothing new can be learned from either of Jerome's comments, as they appear to be restatements of what he has found in Eusebius. They indicate that the two writers share the same perspective on GP.

In the fifth century, Theodoret refers to GP in his description of the sect known as the Nazoraeans:

> The Nazoraeans are Jews who honor Christ as a righteous man and use the so-called Gospel according to Peter. (*Haer. fab.* 2.2)[9]

It is uncertain how much direct knowledge Theodoret had regarding this group, but one feature that characterized its members is that they used a "Gospel according to Peter."

Efforts among some early Christian leaders to ban the use of noncanonical texts were strong in the sixth century. This is reflected in the so-called *Decretum Gelasianum*, which lists over fifty texts that were to be rejected by everyone in the church.[10] Among the gospels to be excluded is a "Gospel under the name of the apostle Peter," which in all likelihood is the gospel mentioned by the previous authors I have surveyed. The compilers of this decree knew that multiple gospels were associated with other names, since they list "the Gospels under the name of Bartholomew" and "the Gospels under the name of Andrew," but they are aware of only one gospel written in the name of Peter.

One final reference needs to be addressed, and it is in fact earlier than all of the others discussed thus far. Justin Martyr, writing in the middle of the second century, frequently mentions texts that he identifies as ἀπομνημονεύματα τῶν ἀποστόλων ("memoirs of the apostles").[11] He

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[9] I am unaware of any published English translation of this work. My translation is based on the Greek text found in Vaganay (*Évangile de Pierre*, 11): οἱ δὲ Ναζωραῖοί Ἰουδαῖοί εἰσιν τὸν Χριστὸν τιμῶντες ὡς ἄνθρωπον δίκαιον καὶ τῷ καλουμένῳ κατὰ Πέτρον εὐαγγελίῳ κεχρημένοι. On this passage, see also Swete, *Akhmîm Fragment*, xi–xii; Vaganay, *Évangile de Pierre*, 11; A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (NovTSup 36; Leiden: Brill, 1973), 51–52; Kraus and Nicklas, *Petrusevangelium*, 18.

[10] ET and background information in *NTApoc*^{2} 1:38–40. The inclusion of GP in it is discussed in Kraus and Nicklas, *Petrusevangelium*, 20.

[11] On Justin's use of this phrase, see Arthur J. Bellinzoni, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Writings of Justin Martyr* (NovTSup 17; Leiden: Brill, 1967); Charles H. Cosgrove, "Justin Martyr and the Emerging New Testament Canon: Observations on the Purpose

refers to these memoirs thirteen times in *Dial.* 98–106, and it has been suggested that one such occasion concerns GP:

> And when it is said that [Jesus] changed the name (μετωνομακέναι) of one of the apostles to Peter; and when it is written in the memoirs of Him (καὶ γεγράφθαι ἐν τοῖς ἀπομνημονεύμασιν αὐτοῦ) that this so happened, as well as that He changed the names (ἐπωνομακέναι) of other two brothers, the sons of Zebedee, to Boanerges, which means sons of thunder. (*Dial.* 106.3; *ANF* 1:252)[12]

There are two questions to address about this passage. First, in the phrase ἀπομνημονεύμασιν αὐτοῦ, who is the antecedent of αὐτοῦ: Jesus or Peter? Second, in light of our answer to the first question, how should we understand the expression? There have been three main responses to these questions: 1) the phrase means "memoirs of Jesus," in which case they are memoirs *about* Jesus; 2) it indicates "memoirs of Peter" and refers to a text known as the "Gospel of Peter"; and 3) it means "memoirs of Peter" and refers to the Gospel of Mark. The first and third options, in my judgment, are more probable than the second.

The translation in *ANF* has taken αὐτοῦ to be a reference to Jesus, as indicated by the capitalization of "Him" in the phrase "the memoirs of Him." This has been the judgment of the majority of scholars.[13] Paul Foster has contended that grammatically "the pronoun αὐτοῦ is far more likely to refer to the same person who changes the names of the sons of Zebedee, since the infinitive ἐπωνομακέναι assumes Jesus as its subject without signaling any change from the previous subject designated by the

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and Destination of the *Dialogue with Trypho*," *VC* 53 (1982): 209–32; Martin Hengel, "The Titles of the Gospels and the Gospel of Mark," in idem, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 75–77; Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 36–43; Paul Foster, "The Writings of Justin Martyr and the So-Called *Gospel of Peter*," in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* (ed. Sara Parvis and idem; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 104–12; Katharina Greschat, "Justins 'Denkwürdigkeiten der Apostel' und das Petrusevangelium," in *Das Evangelium nach Petrus: Text, Kontexte, Intertexte* (TU 158; ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 197–214.

[12] Throughout this project I will typically utilize the translation of Thomas B. Falls (*Saint Justin Martyr* [FC 6; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948]) for Justin's works. However, his translation is inadequate here: "Now, when we learn from the Memoirs of the Apostles that He changed the name of one of the Apostles to Peter (besides having changed the names of the two brothers, the sons of Zebedee, to that of Boanerges, which means 'sons of thunder')" (313). The rendering "Memoirs of the Apostles" is not accurate and it glosses over the question that ἀπομνημονεύμασιν αὐτοῦ poses. For this reason, I have opted not to use Falls here.

[13] Foster, "Writings of Justin Martyr," 107.

pronoun αὐτοῦ."[14] In this view, αὐτοῦ is an objective genitive, and the expression means "the memoirs about Jesus."

However, what if ἀπομνημονεύμασιν αὐτοῦ is taken to signify "the memoirs of Peter"? There are two alternatives. The first is that Justin is, indeed, referring to a text known as the "Gospel of Peter." Walter Cassels was among the first to claim that Justin had GP in mind here.[15] More recently, Peter Pilhofer has advocated this position.[16] He has argued that whenever Justin uses a modifier with ἀπομνημονεύματα elsewhere, it is to indicate that the memoirs are associated with the apostles (e.g., ἀπομνημονεύματα τῶν ἀποστόλων).[17] So, following this logic, combined with the nearby antecedent Πέτρον, it is best to understand αὐτοῦ as referring to the apostle. However, Foster's point about there being no indication of a change in the sentence's subject lessens the force of Pilhofer's argument here. But what if Pilhofer is correct in his claim and the phrase should be understood to mean "the memoirs of Peter"? Does this necessarily mean that Justin is writing about a text he knows as the "Gospel of Peter"?

Graham N. Stanton and others have taken a middle way, so to speak.[18] Stanton suggests that the phrase probably does mean "memoirs of Peter," but that by this expression Justin is referring to the Gospel of Mark. In support of this contention he refers to the early tradition among some proto-orthodox Christians of the second century – such as Papias and Irenaeus – that behind Mark's gospel was the testimony of the apostle Peter. Furthermore, in the passage from Justin that we are examining, the apologist refers to Jesus changing the names of both Peter and the sons of Zebedee in the memoirs. However, only Mark, and no other known gospel, includes something like Justin's phrase "Boanerges, which means sons of thunder" when giving the new name of the sons of Zebedee (Mark 3:17). While it is of course possible that GP also included such a phrase, we have nothing to indicate this.

Papias, writing 120–130 C.E., included a similar tradition about Mark as the preserver of Peter's preaching, and he traced this claim to an individual

[14] Ibid., 108.

[15] Cassels, *The Gospel according to Peter: A Study by the Author of "Supernatural Religion"* (London: Longmans, Green, 1894), 20–25.

[16] Pilhofer, "Justin und das Petrusevangelium," *ZNW* 81 (1990): 60–78.

[17] Ibid., 68.

[18] See, for example, Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 100–101. Stanton (101) claims that Adolf von Harnack and Theodor Zahn shared his view, but he cites no sources for this.

whom he identifies as "John the Presbyter."[19] Eusebius relays the words of Papias as follows:

> And the Presbyter used to say this, "Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them." (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15; Lake and Oulton, 1:297)

In light of this widespread early tradition connecting Peter to Mark, Stanton's suggestion is at least as plausible as the idea that Justin is referring to a text he knows as the "Gospel of Peter."

In the end, I am not persuaded that Justin is referring to a writing identified as the "Gospel of Peter." It is most likely that he has in mind the "memoirs about Jesus" or possibly that he is associating Mark's gospel with the apostle Peter. For this reason, Justin is not to be included among the earliest witnesses to GP.

This survey of the evidence from the first six centuries indicates that many Christian writers were acquainted with GP, either through firsthand knowledge or via hearsay. These authors represent a broad geographical area, too. However, like most gospels that were excluded from the emerging NT canon, GP eventually was attributed to heretics and condemned by proto-orthodox church leaders, and finally faded from the pages of history for well over a millennium. It is ironic and perhaps fitting that around the very time that GP vanished from the ancient historical record, a manuscript containing an excerpt from it was buried in an Egyptian cemetery. And it is this artifact that would one day allow us to have access once again to this long lost text.

1.2 The Discovery and Identification of GP

In the winter of 1886–87 a group of archaeologists from the French Archaeological Mission at Cairo discovered a manuscript which contained the Greek text of a writing that would come to be identified as a portion of GP.[20] To be more precise, the manuscript is a codex containing all or part

[19] Clement of Alexandria is familiar with this same tradition, which Eusebius preserves in *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.6–7.

[20] The *editio princeps*, which details the discovery, appears in Urbain Bouriant, "Fragments du texte grec du livre d'Énoch et de quelques écrits attribués à saint Pierre," in *Mémoires publiés par les membres de la mission archéologique française au Caire* 9.1

of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *1 Enoch*, the *Martyrdom of Julian of Anazarbus*, and GP. It was found in a grave located near Akhmîm (ancient Panopolis), Egypt. While the earliest commentators and many subsequent ones have specified that the grave belonged to a Christian monk, Peter van Minnen has noted that, aside from the Christian texts found with the body, there is nothing to indicate that it was the burial place of a monk.[21] This manuscript has been officially catalogued as P.Cair. 10759, although it is most commonly referred to as the Akhmîm manuscript.[22]

The codex is a collection of fragments which were penned by four different scribes.[23] In the *editio princeps*, Urbain Bouriant included no photographs or other images of the manuscript. The Greek text was included as a transcription. The following year, Adolphe Lods, another member of the French Archaeological Mission at Cairo, re-transcribed the text and also provided heliographic images of the manuscript.[24] It is generally agreed that Lods' transcription was an improvement over that of Bouriant.

(Paris: Libraire de la Société asiatique, 1892), 91–147. Although the codex was discovered during the winter of 1886–87, Bouriant did not publish his work until 1892. Very recently, the circumstances of the discovery have been recounted in Foster, "Are There Any Early Fragments of the So-Called *Gospel of Peter*?" *NTS* 52 (2006): 1–3; idem, "The Discovery and Initial Reaction to the So-Called Gospel of Peter," in Kraus and Nicklas, *Evangelium nach Petrus*, 9–14; Peter van Minnen, "The Akhmîm *Gospel of Peter*," in Kraus and Nicklas, *Evangelium nach Petrus*, 53–60.

[21] Minnen, "Akhmîm *Gospel of Peter*," 54.

[22] The "P.Cair." designation signifies "Papyrus Cairo," indicating that it was housed at the Coptic Museum in Cairo, Egypt. A few years ago confusion arose about whether this manuscript had been lost. At one point, Foster stated that the Cairo museum could no longer locate the manuscript and had not been able to do so for several years ("The Gospel of Peter," *ExpTim* 118 [2007]: 320). Thomas J. Kraus, in personal correspondence with me (May 22, 2009), confirmed that it is currently housed at Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Egypt. However, subsequent attempts by others to locate the manuscript at this location have been unsuccessful. It is catalogued in the Leuven Database of Ancient Books (Trismegistos) at the following website address: http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/text.php?tm=59976 (accessed May 23, 2009). Photographs of the manuscript were taken in the 1980s and are available in Kraus and Nicklas, *Petrusevangelium*, 165–85. These same photographs are available online in higher resolution images that can be expanded and allow for more viewing precision: http://ipap.csad.ox.ac.uk/GP/GP.html (accessed May 23, 2009). The website is maintained by the Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents, at Oxford University (http://www.csad.ox.ac.uk).

[23] Minnen, "Akhmîm Gospel of Peter," 53–58. The fragments of GP and the *Apocalypse of Peter* were copied by one scribe, and the remaining fragments were composed by three different scribes.

[24] Lods, "L'Évangile et l'Apocalypse de Pierre avec le texte grec du livre d'Hénoch: Text publié en facsimile, par l'héliogravure d'après les photographies du manuscript de Gizéh," in *Mémoires publiés par les membres de la mission archéologique française au Caire* 9.3 (Paris: Libraire de la Société asiatique, 1893), 217–31, 322–35. Foster ("Dis-

Scholars have reached diverse conclusions regarding the date of the codex. Bouriant dated it to the 8th–12th centuries.[25] In the past few decades, however, most have tended to place it at or before the early end of this range. Foster judges it to be from the 7th to the 9th centuries, while Minnen places it in the late 6th century.[26]

It was Bouriant himself who first identified one of the works in the codex as the text known in antiquity as the "Gospel according to Peter."[27] Recently, however, Foster has suggested that the Akhmîm text might not be a fragment of GP.[28] He notes that Bouriant, in his initial publication of this text, "contemplated no other possibility than identifying the first fragment as being a detached episode from the previously non-extant apocryphal Gospel of Peter."[29] One of Foster's reasons for questioning the identification of this text with GP is that there were numerous texts that circulated in the name of Peter during the first few centuries of the Christian movement. Because of this, there is "the possibility that more than one gospel-like text may have been associated with that apostolic figure."[30] He concludes in one of his articles that "it is no longer possible to assert that the first text discovered in the Akhmîm codex is definitely a witness to an archetype [of GP] dating to the second century."[31]

A few comments might be made by way of reply to Foster's suggestion that our text is not to be identified with the ancient "Gospel according to Peter." Regarding his argument that the proliferation of Petrine literature means that there may have been more than one "gospel-like text" in the name of this apostle, we may recall my earlier review of the early witnesses to GP. Beginning at the end of the second century and continuing into the sixth century – which is very near the time that the Akhmîm text was copied – the testimony is entirely consistent: there was only one gospel in the name of Peter. Serapion, Origen, Eusebius, Didymus, Jerome, Theodoret, and the compilers of the *Decretum Gelasianum* all knew of one, and only one, "Gospel according to Peter." Furthermore, several of these writers were acquainted with additional texts in Peter's name (e.g., two epis-

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covery and Initial Reaction," 22) describes the process of creating heliographic images: "[It] involves the formation of an engraving obtained by a process in which a specially prepared plate is acted on chemically by exposure to light."

[25] Bouriant, "Fragments," 93.

[26] Foster, "Are There Any Early Fragments?" 1; Minnen, "Akhmîm Gospel of Peter," 54.

[27] Bouriant, "Fragments," 94.

[28] Most notable is Foster, "Are There Any Early Fragments?" 1–28; idem, "Discovery and Initial Reaction," 13–14, 16.

[29] Foster, "Discovery and Initial Reaction," 13–14.

[30] Ibid., 16.

[31] Foster, "Are There Any Early Fragments?" 27.

tles, the *Acts of Peter*, the *Preaching of Peter*, and the *Apocalypse of Peter*). More importantly, they were aware that some apostolic figures had more than one *gospel* written in their names. For example, the sixth-century *Decretum Gelasianum* indicates that there were multiple gospels in the names of Bartholomew and Andrew, but reflects familiarity with only one in the name of Peter. In addition, each of our other witnesses affirms that there was only one "Gospel according to Peter." Therefore, in order for Foster's suggestion to be correct regarding the possible existence of more than one "gospel-like text" being associated with Peter, we would have to say that if multiple texts (say, two) existed, then at least one of them completely escaped the notice of every early Christian writer whose works are known to us. We would have to conclude that every author with knowledge of multiple Petrine writings knew of one and only one Petrine gospel. This is not likely, as there is not a trace of evidence to indicate multiple gospels attributed to Peter.

So, if there was only one "Gospel according to Peter" that existed in the earliest centuries of Christianity, how do we know that the Akhmîm text is to be identified with it? First, what we have in the Akhmîm fragment almost certainly belongs to the gospel genre. In addition to the passion, burial, and resurrection stories, the extant text seems to presuppose certain other features of the missing portion of the work. For example, the reference to the "twelve disciples of the Lord" (GP 14:59) points back to them having a role earlier in the narrative, and the mention of Levi and Jesus together in 14:60 appears to be recounting an earlier incident with which the readers would be familiar. To what degree the entirety of GP might resemble one or all of the canonical gospels cannot be determined with certainty, but it is undeniable that the Akhmîm text, when compared to every other genre of early Christian literature, most closely resembles certain other gospel texts. Furthermore, by having Peter as the narrator, it is highly probable that this gospel would have been associated with this apostle.

Let us look again at Foster's claim that "it is no longer possible to assert that the first text discovered in the Akhmîm codex is definitely a witness to an archetype [of GP] dating to the second century."[32] Of course, the addition of the word "definitely" makes the statement immune to disproof, considering that there are no other manuscript witnesses that have a very high probability of representing the text of GP.[33] Fortunately, historical

[32] Ibid.

[33] Some have claimed that other manuscript fragments may contain excerpts of GP (e.g., P.Oxy. 2949, P.Oxy. 4009, P.Vindob. G 2325, P.Egerton 2). See, for example, Dieter Lührmann, *Die apokryph gewordenen Evangelien: Studien zu neuen Texten und zu*

judgments need not reside in the realm of certitude; we should instead be content to base them on probability. Without further manuscript discoveries, it is impossible to determine the degree to which the Akhmîm text reflects the "original" form of GP, so any arguments to this effect are wholly speculative. As it stands, then, we can say that the likelihood is strong that the Akhmîm text is a representative of the work known by early Christian writers as the "Gospel according to Peter."[34] What once was lost has now been found, or at least a portion of it.

1.3 GP Among the Gospels

The Akhmîm fragment of GP begins with the condemnation of Jesus by Herod, and continues by recounting the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Next, it describes the disciples returning to their homes, as some of them take their nets and go to the sea, apparently to resume their work as fishermen. The text then ends, but this seems to be the beginning of an appearance story, perhaps similar to the one found in John 21.

In its narrative framework GP is very similar to the parallels in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But in the details, it diverges significantly at numerous points. For example, whereas Jesus is condemned to death by Pilate in the NT works, Herod plays this role in GP. In the NT gospels, the Romans crucify Jesus; the Jews do this in GP. With the exception of a Roman centurion named Petronius (GP 8:31), all of the named characters in GP appear in at least one of the canonical gospels, although often their role and/or actions in GP differ from what is found in the NT texts.

It is this combination of similarities and differences that has led to a variety of descriptions of the relationship between GP and Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Has the Petrine evangelist used one or more of the canonical texts as a source for his own work? Or did the writer compose his gospel independently, with no knowledge of the NT texts? Or is GP, in fact, an earlier narrative and thus the potential source for Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John? Versions of these three proposals have been advocated in the history of study on our gospel.

In addition to the issue of literary relationship, the question has occasionally been asked about the social context in which GP was written.

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neuen Fragen (NovTSup 112; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 55–104. Foster ("Are There Any Early Fragments?" 1–28) rejects all of these possibilities. I, too, remain unconvinced.

[34] Even Foster seems to have changed his opinion on the matter. In a more recent publication, he writes, "While [the Akhmîm text] may, more likely than not, be the same text as the *So-called Gospel of Peter* mentioned by Serapion, certainty is not possible" ("Gospel of Peter," 325).