

'I never knew the Man': The Coptic Act of Peter (Papyrus Berolinensis 8502.4) Its Independence from the Apocryphal Acts of Peter, Genre and Legendary Origins

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The *Act of Peter*, Papyrus Berolinensis 8502.4, was discovered some years before the end of the 19th century, near Akhmim in Upper Egypt. It was brought to Berlin and subsequently published in 1903 by Carl Schmidt, who provided its first critical analysis at that time. Since Schmidt's study, much of the overall debate has centered on this text's relationship with the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* (preserved in its most complete form in the Latin manuscript, *Actus Vercellenses*). Schmidt viewed the *Act of Peter* as part of the long-lost first third of the *Acts of Peter*. Although his 1903 introduction received a fairly warm reception, he was challenged by Gerhard Ficker in 1904, a position Ficker reaffirmed in 1924. Schmidt responded and since then his arguments have attained general acceptance. It is Molinari's contention that the scholarly community has been hasty in its acceptance of Schmidt's position, which under scrutiny reveals itself to be built on assumptions that are tenuous at best.

The first part of this study refutes Schmidt's theory that the *Act of Peter* was originally part of the *Acts of Peter*, addressing his argument point by point. By means of this analysis, Molinari demonstrates that Schmidt is working from an underlying assumption of a single source of Petrine traditions which is untenable based on the broad range of extant Petrine traditions that originate from diverse locations throughout the Mediterranean. Molinari illustrates that Schmidt's alleged nine points of consensus between the *Act of Peter* and the *Acts of Peter* are scarcely more than a collection of motifs common to the early Christian milieu. Moreover, the author suggests that each of Schmidt's ancient witnesses, the *Acts of Nereus and Achilleus*, Augustine, *Contra Adimantum* 17.5 and *Acts of Philip* 142, were privy to other Petrine traditions not known from, or ever associated with, the *Acts of Peter*. Finally, Molinari offers literary and theological reasons why the pertinent texts are incompatible.

The second part of this study discusses the issues of genre and origins. Molinari concludes that the *Act of Peter* is best understood when it is divided into three sections: 1) a healing miracle story; 2) an exemplum, which, in this case, is a story about a father's attempt to protect his daughter's chastity; and 3) homiletical remarks. He explains how the first section displays a structure typical to that of a miracle story which naturally ends with the motif of the crowd's approbation of the miracle. However, this classic miracle goes terribly wrong as the miracle is reversed. This reversal is the key to understanding the author's purpose for including the miracle as the author is not concerned with miracles per se but with addressing the topic of why bad things happen to good people. Molinari describes the Graeco-Roman concept of "exemplum" and demonstrates how the middle section of the *Act of Peter* (131,15-139,17) is used by the author to illustrate his argument that the status of Peter's daughter is "beneficial". His consideration of the third section, homiletical remarks, focuses on the literary technique of the author. It surveys the way in which the author had returned to his or her original thesis regarding God's concern to do good to us, even when the situation seems grim. He explains how the author has successfully used the rhetorical technique of exemplum to argue a case that, at least on the surface, seemed untenable.