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Introduction
Intriguing and Enigmatic: The Apostolic Fathers and Current Research

SCOTT D. HARROWER

The Apostolic Fathers (AF) are a para-apostolic and post-apostolic corpus of writings, a group of texts composed beside and after the New Testament. This corpus constitutes an important precursor to the Christian apologists and pre-Nicene theologians of subsequent centuries. The words *intriguing* and *enigmatic* aptly describe both the collection itself as well as the current state of scholarship on them. The AF are an intriguing body of literature because they provide an important window into the lived religion of Christians in the late first and early second century. The intrigue only deepens once we look *at* and *through* these windows. Looking at them, the AF offer colourful portraits of key protagonists – much like stained-glass windows, they provide colour but only an outline of the people depicted in the artwork. For example, we know the names and some biographical details and have depictions of Polycarp and Papias, but our knowledge of them is otherwise fragmentary and scant. Looking through the AF, we observe ancient Christian people with their practices, diversities, debates, anxieties, hopes, and worship; this leaves us with many impressions but even more questions.

The intrinsic intrigue of the AF is furthered by the seeming randomness of the collection itself. It is an artificial corpus and modern invention by church historians in the seventeenth century. The ancient church did not know of a New Testament separate from a collection of Apostolic Fathers and separate again from the Apologists. Some of these writings could conceivably be placed in the New Testament by virtue of their dating to the apostolic era, be located among the apologists because of their apologetic contents, or else identified within early Christian apocrypha because of their pseudonymity. The literary works included in this corpus have varied over time, depending on the sensibilities and tastes of the editor, with some documents like the *Shepherd of Hermas* showing a consistent history of inclusion in such a collection, whereas other writings such as the *Epistle to Diognetus* do

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not. Today a settled consensus includes *1 Clement* and *2 Clement*, the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the seven letters of Ignatius, Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians*, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Epistle to Diognetus*, the fragments of Papias, and the fragments of the *Apology of Quadratus*.[1]

The AF is, then, a lively yet "artificial collection of somewhat disparate texts."[2] Generally, two criteria have been used to draw them into a category that can accommodate them, namely: they can be "dated roughly between the late-first and the mid-second centuries – and the view that their authors either knew one of the Twelve Apostles or were taught by somebody who had."[3] As this volume shows, beyond these two criteria most other details and referents of this literary corpus have been the subject of long-running and significant debates. Notwithstanding this, the AF were a central part of early Christian literature and they function, somewhat flexibly, as a bridge between the New Testament and the later Patristic period. However, the scholarly essays in this volume treat the AF as more than a mere sequel to the New Testament. Instead, they are representative of the growth and diversification of early Christian communities and writings that began to flower in the post-apostolic period.

These texts are largely enigmatic because we often know so little of their origins, circulation, and reception. Or else, beyond debates over content, there are questions about the connections between these texts themselves, links to the earliest Jesus traditions and apostolic writings, concerns over authenticity and integrity, and discussions over cultural influences and relationship to various Christianities.

Because of the intriguing and enigmatic nature of the AF, we should not be surprised when they generate important questions, such as about the nature and diversity of local Christian groups in the second century. This volume aims to take these questions seriously and to demonstrate the nature and shape of both the critical and constructive research on the AF collection. Thus, the volume demonstrates best-practice scholarly efforts with respect to dealing with the AF's intrigue and enigmas.

[1] See Paul Foster, "The Text of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers," Chapter 5 in this volume. On the origins of the designation "Apostolic Fathers," see David Lincicum, "The Paratextual Invention of the Term 'Apostolic Fathers,'" *JTS* 66 (2015): 139–48.

[2] Foster, Chapter 5 in this volume.

[3] Stephen E. Young, "The Jesus Tradition in the Apostolic Fathers," Chapter 4 in this volume..

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Our hope is that readers will be drawn in by the AF themselves and by the best lines of scholarly research suggested by our authors.

The first section of this volume treats the generative traditions, contexts, and backgrounds to the documents comprising the AF collection. Chapter 1, "The Roman Empire in the Era of the Apostolic Fathers," introduces the complex and evolving Greco-Roman context for the communities that produced the AF. Michael J. Svigel provides an analytic survey of the Roman period from the emperors Nero to Marcus Aurelius (54–180 CE), during which most of the AF corpus was composed. Svigel sets the chronological scope for studying the AF with particular emphasis on the period of the "Five Good Emperors" (96–180 CE). With some notable exceptions, the Roman Empire during this "golden age" realized political consolidation, territorial expansion, general peace, and internal cohesion – a social context in which Christianity could steadily grow with relative ease and suffer only sporadic interference from imperial and local authorities.

In Chapter 2, "The Image of Jews and Judaism in the Apostolic Fathers," Philip Alexander tackles the portrayal of Jewish groups and Judaism in the AF. He begins by pointing out that the period from the fall of the Temple in 70 CE to the end of the Bar Kokhba war (135 CE) – the period of the AF – is not well documented. The most significant development on the Jewish side, Alexander says, was the emergence of the Rabbinic movement in Palestine – a movement, centered on the Rabbinic Houses of Study (Batei Midrash), which was eventually to dominate Judaism. But there was no sudden triumph of Rabbinism after 70 CE. The Rabbis then did not command the allegiance of the majority of Jews even in Palestine, nor did they have the resources or the standing to project their authority into the Diaspora, which continued to follow a pattern of diasporic Jewish life centered on the synagogue. Judaism was probably as diverse after 70 as it had been before. Nevertheless, there was a "common Judaism" to which most Jews subscribed based on respect for the Torah of Moses, the keeping of Sabbath and festivals, the dietary laws (*kashrut*), and circumcision. According to Alexander, the image of Judaism in the AF (such as it is) confirms this picture, but with two somewhat unexpected additions: it seems to point to a continuing Jewish interest in the temple sacrifices (despite the fact that the temple had been destroyed) and in fasting. This picture is probably accurate and reflects the fact that many Jews after 70 did not accept that the cessation of the cult was final but looked for its imminent restoration. The fasting was an expression of repentance aimed at moving God to return in mercy to his people. While references to Jews

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and Judaism appear in several writings of the AF, the *Epistle of Barnabas* is by far the most engaged with Judaism. Alexander proceeds to demonstrate that the author seems to be aware of the sentiment within the Jewish community, particularly the hope for the rebuilding of the temple. The author is burdened with the "anxiety of influence," engendered by the fact that Christianity is so heavily indebted to Judaism and has, consequently, a problem in establishing its independence and authenticity. He hammers out a radical supersessionism that was to prove influential in later Christian attitudes toward Judaism. Central to this is a massive allegorical appropriation of the Jewish law. But his aggressive anti-Judaism has to be set in its historical context: it reflects a time when Christianity was struggling to forge a separate identity in the looming shadow of a larger, more prosperous, more influential Jewish community that was bent on making life difficult for it. *Barnabas* is thus indicative of the type of internecine rivalry between Jews and Christians as the identity of these two groups were crystallizing and, eventually, drifting apart.

Chapter 3, "Second-Century Diversity," by David E. Wilhite, deals with one of the most challenging debates to do with how the AF relate to the concept of "Christianity" itself. Wilhite contends that Christian diversity can be considered along several different lines, such as a geographic diversity and a diversity of sources. The primary debate today among scholars deals with doctrinal diversity, and so this essay reviews the major "heresies" or "Christianities" known in the second century. When compared in particular to the AF corpus, some surprising results come to light. The resulting picture is one of less doctrinal diversity than has been posited by some recent studies, and yet there is also no evidence of the unanimity traditionally claimed for early Christianity.

The focus of research shifts to the Jesus tradition in Chapter 4. Stephen E. Young's "The Jesus Tradition in the Apostolic Fathers" surveys the evidence for the continuing impact of the Jesus tradition in these writings in light of recent debates about continuing orality and the textualization of the Jesus tradition. The essay pays particular attention to the *Didache*, *1 Clement*, Polycarp's *Philippians* and the *Papias Fragments* with respect to discussions about oral versus textual tradition, the flexibility and stability of the Jesus tradition, various contexts of preservation and transmission of tradition, and secondary orality. It shows that Jesus' words were very much paramount in the post-apostolic church even if no consensus has been reached regarding the media in which those words were transmitted.

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Chapter 5 deals with the relationship between New Testament texts and the AF. Paul Foster's "The Text of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers" makes it clear that the continuous text for any New Testament writing cannot be reconstructed from the scant citations and allusions contained in the writings of the AF. Instead, this study looks to establish which New Testament writings might have been known to the authors of the various AF texts under consideration. The discussion moves through the texts that became the New Testament in their final canonical order with the goal of showing which writings from among the AF might cite or allude to the New Testament text in question. The table at the end of the discussion presents, in summary fashion, the results of this enquiry. It reveals that several of the texts that later became the New Testament cannot be detected among the writings of the AF.

In Chapter 6, "The Reception of Paul, Peter, and James in the Apostolic Fathers," Benjamin Edsall points out and explores the markedly limited presence of Paul, Peter, and James in the AF collection. These writings appeal to Peter and Paul in a variety of contexts – pertaining to their authority as teachers, their noble deaths, and their connections with Jesus and the other apostolic and non-apostolic leadership figures – though these appeals are not evenly divided among the writers. Ignatius and *1 Clement*, for instance, appeal to both figures while *Hermas* makes no mention of either. James, moreover, is almost entirely absent from the collection. All this amounts to the fact that roughly half of the authors or writings of the AF do not feel the need to appeal explicitly to any of these apostolic figures in the course of their arguments, however much they may be indebted to them on the level of broader early Christian discourse.

A number of highly controversial and long-standing issues are treated in the next three essays. Chapter 7, "Between Ekklēsia and State: The Apostolic Fathers and the Roman Empire," by Andrew Gregory, discusses the AF in the context of the Greek-speaking Roman Empire. Gregory begins by surveying a range of approximately contemporary sources that show how other authors understood or negotiated the boundaries between followers of Jesus and the wider society in which they lived. In the first part of this survey he considers non-Christian texts that reveal how some Roman authors viewed followers of Jesus, and what they expected of them if they were to take their part in the civic life of the Roman Empire alongside their pagan contemporaries. In the second, he considers a range of Christian sources, including some of the writings of the New Testament, as well

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as some of the earlier texts usually labeled as Early Christian or New Testament Apocrypha, and writings of the Apologists. Gregory then turns to the AF themselves, noting whether and how they refer to the relationship between their communities and the wider world in general, and the functions of the Roman State and Roman imperial or civic religion in particular. Most of the texts are focused on the internal life of the communities that they address, but tensions between their addressees' exclusive allegiance to the God whom they variously associate or identify with Jesus and the competing demands of Roman religion and civic life surface in a number of ways, not least through their fear or experience of martyrdom for refusing to participate in the imperial cult.

Chapter 8, "Church, Church Ministry, and Church Order," by David J. Downs, employs three questions to explore representations of the church in *1 Clement*, *2 Clement*, the *Letters of Ignatius*, the *Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians*, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Epistle to Diognetus*: (1) How is the identity of the church presented? (2) What is the work of the church? (3) What, if anything, is said about the ordering and structures of the church?

Chapter 9, "The Apostolic Mothers," by Clare Rothschild, focuses on Christian women of the first four centuries either named as apostles or playing the same role as apostles, or remembered as having done so, in direct line of succession to the companions or early followers of Jesus. Sixteen women are identified, who represent the under-acknowledged group of apostolic mothers of the church. This provocative essay is likely to generate further research into the presence of women in the early church.

The next section of this volume deals with particular documents. This begins with Chapter 10 by Janelle Peters, "*1 and 2 Clement*." Peters argues that *1 Clement* develops the place of the offices of bishop and presbyter from earlier texts such as Philippians and 1 Peter. The author situates the legalistic language of codicil and the contention over the roles, not to the interpersonal strife often found among Greco-Roman associations but to the contemporary shift in Roman Greek priesthoods from temporary to lifelong appointments. Given that the Pauline Corinthian house-churches were not the only example of discord and that Clement feels free to only loosely and sporadically cite the contents of 1 Corinthians, Peters disagrees with the theory that *1 Clement* is a general letter with fictionalized churches. Though *1 Clement* does indeed use generalized language, Clement's chosen

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location is not merely a text-based one. Peters does not find evidence for a conflict between wealthy patrons and other members of the churches. Instead, she follows the text in arguing that the issue at hand is the stated conflict of a dispute in how leaders may be selected. For *2 Clement*, by contrast, almsgiving is a central feature of the text, with repentance and eternal salvation being the goals of this almsgiving. *2 Clement* shares many of *1 Clement*'s foundational texts but it is written by a different author, speaking more generally and probably later.

Chapter 11, "The Letters of Ignatius." by Jonathon Lookadoo, outlines three broad positions on the much-disputed and interrelated topics of when the letters were composed and whether they are authentically Ignatian. The essay considers what the letters say about the communities that Ignatius addresses as well as the opponents who may have circled in and around Ignatius' audiences. Unity provides a key way in which Ignatius exhorts his readers regarding who Jesus is, how God's people should relate to one another, and what their lifestyles should look like. Lookadoo reflects on two further matters of interest within the letters: the sources that may have influenced Ignatius, and the question of whether the letters are best read individually or as a corpus. While there is much that is uncertain or debated in studies of Ignatius' epistles, the letters continue to be an important part of the collection known as the AF.

Chapter 12, "Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians* and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*," by Paul Hartog, deals with the ecclesial context, life, work, and death of one of the most influential Christians to follow the canonical apostles. The burden of the essay is on the ethical dimensions of the roles that the figure of Polycarp played in early Christianity. Following a crucial evaluation of sources to do with Polycarp, Hartog proceeds to examine important aspects of the self-understanding of early Christian groups in relation to Polycarp. These include their views on virtue and community boundaries. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, its relationship to New Testament literature, and contemporary critical debates receive special attention, with the conclusion that it was produced with a view to enshrine particular communal and individual virtues within what at the time were marginal religious communities.

In Chapter 13, "*Didach*e," Clayton N. Jefford argues that the *Didache* likely arose in first-century Syria, featuring catechetical training and liturgical rituals from an anonymous cluster of early messianic groups. The text as known from later manuscripts also features directives on worship and community rules, concluding with

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apocalyptic warnings. Variously referenced by patristic authors, the tradition eventually yielded to the norms of post-Constantinian Christianity.

In Chapter 14, "*The Epistle of Barnabas*," Reidar Hvalvik discusses the standard introductory issues, focusing especially on the much-debated questions of date and provenance, proposing that there are no decisive arguments that can settle these questions; we have to speak about a probable date (most likely 130–2) and place of origin (Syria-Palestine or Alexandria). There is also a critical evaluation of the traditional view that *Barnabas* is a treatise/tract, accentuating the epistolary features and the traits that seem to be reminiscent of a preaching or teaching situation. Hvalvik highlights the author's anti-Jewish polemic and his commitment to the right understanding and interpretation of Scripture. Special attention is also given to the question of occasion and purpose of *Barnabas*, this being a key issue in several recent contributions to the writing. The essay concludes with a short presentation of the major trends in *Barnabas* research during the last century, showing that scholars' interests and approaches have changed radically: from focusing on sources to a focus on the epistle itself. Moreover, from being a literary foil, the "Jews" in the text have been perceived as reflecting real people and social realities.

Chapter 15, "The *Shepherd of Hermas*," by Dan Batovici, examines one of the most historically popular documents within the AF. Batovici offers an introduction to the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the range of problems it raises – textual, compositional, theological, and reception historical – surveying current approaches in the scholarship devoted to this peculiar text. Batovici presents first the issues posed by the literary outlook of the *Shepherd* that lead to various theories of redactional layers in the composition of the book and the solutions proposed for identifying its type of apocalyptic genre. This is followed by a survey of the main themes of the book: church, baptism, repentance, and its intricate Christology. In the next section Batovici discusses the title of the book in its transmission, the author as identified in later traditions and as it transpires from the narrative, its provenance and dating, and briefly the community behind the *Shepherd*. The essay concludes with an overview of the reception of the book in its Greek manuscripts, ancient translations, patristic works, and canonical lists.

In Chapter 16 Michael F. Bird and Kirsten H. Mackerras survey lesser-known documents. In their "The *Epistle to Diognetus* and the *Fragment of Quadratus*," Bird regards *Diognetus* – notoriously disputed concerning integrity, authorship, date, and provenance – as a mid-to-late

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second-century apology for Christianity to a real or imagined pagan enquirer, written quite possibly in Alexandria. *Diognetus* is distinguished by its account of Christians as a "new type of people" and the "soul" of the world; it has a robust theology of God's redemptive plan and the Son's incarnation and a memorable account of the atonement; its ethical exhortations have analogies with Stoicism, while the homiletic section illustrates a growing tradition of allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament. Mackerras describes the *Fragment of Quadratus* as part of an apology written in the early second century, whose author was one of the successors to the apostles' ministry. The fragment, preserved by Eusebius, describes Jesus as a miracle worker of genuine power; *Quadratus* probably responded to the charge that Jesus did miracles by sorcery. Mackerras does not think that there is sufficient evidence to identify Quadratus' apology with *Diognetus* confidently.

The volume concludes with Chapter 17, Stephen C. Carlson's groundbreaking work on "The Fragments of Papias." Carlson argues that the "The Fragments of Papias" are the remains of a five-volume exegetical work on the "dominical oracles" by Papias of Hierapolis who flourished in the first decades of the second century and passed on traditions from the last decades of the first century. Among the most important of the surviving fragments, Papias passes on traditions about the writings of Mark and Matthew, as well as materialistic speculation about the future kingdom of Christ. Unfortunately, his work has perished, leaving only scattered quotations of varying reliability. Despite significant obstacles and challenges to research into these fragments, Carlson is able to advance a number of proposals to do with important themes in Papias' writing and theology.

These essays, taken together as well as individually, demonstrate and deal with the Apostolic Fathers' unavoidable intrigue and enigma. Our hope is that readers will be not only drawn in by both the AF themselves as well as the cutting-edge scholarship provided by our authors, but will be inspired to follow the lines of research that this volume opens up.

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1 The Roman Empire in the Era of the Apostolic Fathers

MICHAEL J. SVIGEL

1.1 INTRODUCTION

When considering the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* for the period of the Apostolic Fathers, we immediately face difficult and debatable decisions regarding the dating of this collection. For a few of these texts, scholarship has settled on a rather narrow range of likely dates. For example, *1 Clement* is generally dated in the 90s CE, and the epistles of Ignatius of Antioch are most commonly dated during Trajan's reign between 98 and 117, though even these have had notable exceptions. On the other hand, over the last several decades some *Didache* scholars have moved its date of composition from the second century into the late first century; others have settled on an even narrower range of 50–70 CE. Likewise, the *Epistle of Barnabas* can be reasonably situated either in the years immediately following the First Jewish Revolt (*c.* 75–80 CE) or those following the Bar Kokhba Revolt (*c.* 135–140 CE). Also, prominent scholars of the *Shepherd of Hermas* have imagined its composition or redaction spanning several decades from as early as the 90s to the 140s. And depending on one's conclusions regarding the unity of Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians*, it could be dated anytime between about 110 to 140. Though a few have ventured to date the *Epistle to Diognetus* in the early second century, most favor a much later date, perhaps in the late second century. The same is true of the so-called *Second Epistle of Clement* and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp.*

Given the unresolvable variables with regard to dating the Apostolic Fathers, this historical survey will begin with what we might call an "establishing shot" at the widest angle – beginning briefly with the historical backdrop of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty (27 BCE–68 CE) as a possible context of the *Didache* for those who favor an early date (after 50 CE). Then I will sketch the developments of the Flavian Dynasty (*c.* 69–96 CE) as the possible setting for *Didache,* the probable composition of *1 Clement,* and a plausible context for *Epistle of Barnabas* and

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