

Translation, Commentary, and Notes¹

Chapter 1: Damascus

Witness: Textual basis: an unpublished Coptic fragment in the John Rylands Library (P. Ryl inv. 44); *APL* 9. P. Yale 87. Supplementary texts: **APL* 9, D-text of Acts 9, *Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul*, **The Epistle of Pelagia*, *Epistula Apostolorum* 32.

Version based upon Cherix (Rordorf, 1127) [*The glorified Christ is speaking to Paul*] “[...] . . . today . . . but now go to [Damascus. After] . . . leave that place and go to Jerusalem.” Now when Paul had heard this, he went to Damascus in considerable [fear]. And when he was entered, he found them . . . [keep]ing . . . the fast . . .

Who will be sent away from those . . . of the sort that . . . violently, because the one who . . . treasures . . . *verso* your mouth . . . holy ones . . . saved by which in Jesus . . .

Alternative translation: (Crum, “Manuscripts,” 501) (Recto?) . . . today . . . but go now down to . . . and when (?) thou hast quitted that place, do thou go to Jerusalem. Now when Paul had heard this, he went to Damascus in great joy (?). And when he was entered in, he found them . . . ing . . . the fast . . . (Verso?) “ . . . Lo (?), God will accept (?) . . . faith (?), for ye are . . . ye (have?) received it, it being (inherited) from your fathers; that ye might (not) remain therein as in an iniquitous city, but . . . the great treasure without (?)” . . .

1. A Note on the *sigla*. An ellipsis... marks a gap (lacuna) in the manuscript. These lacunae may be delineated by brackets []. Proposed restorations are normally *italicized*. Most of these are logical or exemplary (i.e., “something to this effect”), and are the work of other scholars, in particular Schmidt, *Acta*, and Rordorf (et al.). Only controversial cases are discussed. Non-italicized restorations may be regarded as virtually certain. Brackets also mark the beginning and end of mss. Italicized portion of the translation identifies passages suspect as later additions.

Comments

As is the case with all the ApocActs save *AThom*, the opening is lost. The position taken here is that *APL* opened with an account of his “conversion” near Damascus. See also Rordorf, “Conversion.” Chapter 9 refers to the event. This does not exclude an earlier account, for the canonical Acts, a major model for *APL*, reported the experience in chap. 9 and repeated it in first-person speeches by Paul in chaps. 22 and 26. The two texts may disagree about the place where Paul’s change took place, but this is not certain, since the flashback account in chap. 9 is not quite specific. Although the Rylands fragment lacks any context, it is usually presumed, with good reason, to stem from chap. 1.

Summary of the (presumed) Events. Paul was in the vicinity of Damascus, whither he had possibly come from *Tarsus*. (*APL* does not present Paul as an agent of Jerusalem.) He was persecuting followers of Jesus (chap. 9). Outside of the city Paul had a vision of the risen Christ, in which he was commanded to go to Damascus and then to Jerusalem (P. Ryl.). After some time under the tutelage of Jude the brother of Jesus (the name comes from Acts 9:11; the author has identified this person with Jesus’ brother), Paul experienced success as a preacher. He then set out, evidently in accord with the Lord’s command, for Jerusalem. In the course of that journey he baptized a lion (chap. 9). According to a document kindly supplied by Rordorf in 1994 (“Reconstitution du contenu des *Actes de Paul*,” presumably a draft for his forthcoming commentary), Cherix has calculated that eight pages are missing from the beginning of P.Hamb, six prior to chap. 2. This calculation is welcome but far from certain. It would allow for an episode of modest length. It is not clear how much the report of the events after Paul’s conversion in chap. 9 repeats chap. 1 and how much there is new.

An important question is whether chap. 1 contained the story of the baptized lion. Ancient popular literature in general and *APL* in particular are not likely to leave gaps of this nature for later narration to fill in. Chap. 1 probably had some form of the lion story. This would put Paul ahead of Thecla, who will encounter a lion in chap. 4. Moreover, it conforms to the gospel parallel (Mark 1:12–13. See Table 1.1, p. 62). Little space would have been available for more than a summary of Paul’s visit to Jerusalem. The Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul* may reflect that report.

It transpires that Paul is upon a mountain (a favored site for epiphanies), “the mountain of Jericho.” That site evokes the apparent initial scene of the *APL*. Paul asks the youth the road to Jerusalem—a feature not in harmony with Galatians, although it could fit the *APL*. The child says, “I know who you are Paul. You are he who was blessed from his mother’s womb. For

I have [come] to you so that you may [go up to Jerusalem] to your fellow [apostles]" (18, 14–19, trans. MacRae and Murdock, 257). Nicetas (82,) reports that Paul went from Damascus to Syrian Antioch (although he reports the escape in accord with Acts 9).

Rordorf (who holds that *APL* does not use Acts) stresses that Galatians is the major source of this story ("Conversion"). He is correct. It is also true that Acts prefers Galatians 1 to the source used in Acts 9. Each account of Paul's encounter with the risen Christ in Acts is a bit closer to Galatians 1. Assuming that the author knew Acts 9, some details may have been borrowed from it, especially those providing dramatic detail.

Czachesz ("Between") seeks to find traces of both the D-Text of Acts 9 and the *APL* 1 in the work of Ephrem Syrus. His object is to identify a three stage development from the early text of Acts to the D-Text to *APL*. This is an important insight into the history of early Christian literature. See also Pervo, *Acts*, 233 and 249. One rather clear feature of the D-Text is emphasis upon Paul's great fear in the face of the christophany. It is likely that *APL* would adopt and possibly intensify this emotion. Czachesz identifies these features: Paul's ignorance, his confession of sins, and his acceptance of Christ's message. These items shift the narrative in the direction of a "conversion story" proper. Attribution of "ignorance," applied to gentiles in Acts 17:30, Eph 4:18, and 1 Peter 1:14, is applied also to Paul in 1 Tim 1:13, for example. See Pervo, *Making*, 14–15.

P. Yale 86 mentions Damascus three times in fourteen lines of the verso (ll. 3, 8, 13) and Jerusalem in ll. 4–5. Line 11 has the phrase "the manifestation (*epiphaneia*) of the lord." This may be in a speech from a later chapter reporting the conversion; it does not seem to come from chap. 1.

Notes

Crum ("Coptic Manuscripts," 501) describes Rylands inv. 44 as probably the oldest in their collection. It is part of a vellum leaf, c. 15 x 12 cm. (and thus not a papyrus), written in small square uncials, like a fourth-century papyrus in form. The dialect is Achmimic.

Tarsus. See *Epistle of the Apostles* 32, where Paul proceeds to Damascus from Tarsus rather than Jerusalem.

"Go to Damascus." Cf. Acts 9:6; Acts 22:10.

Fast. The practice, both individual and communal, is common in *APL*: 2.3; 3.23; 6.5; 9.27; 10.2–4; 13.1. Fasting, for several purposes, was widespread

The Acts of Paul

among early Christians, with variety regarding the length and frequency of the fast.

Fear. Crum supplied *joy*. Cherix prefers *fear*, based upon the D-text of Acts 9:5: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Overcome with fear at what had happened to him, he said, “Lord, what do you wish me to do?” Czachesz (“Between,” 111), however, prefers “pride,” based upon Ephrem’s commentary.

Bibliography

- Ephrem Syrus. *Commentary on Acts*. Quoted in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, edited by Frederick J. Foakes Jackson, and Kirsopp Lake, 3:373–453. New York: Macmillan, 1920–1933.
- Crum, W. “New Coptic Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library.” *BJRL* 5 (1920) 497–503.
- Czachesz, István. “The Acts of Paul and the Western Text of Luke’s Acts: Paul between Canon and Apocrypha.” In *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, edited by Jan N. Bremmer, 107–25. Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996.
- Klauck, H.-J. *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. An Introduction*. Translated by Brian McNeil. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008.
- Murdock, William R., and George W. MacRae, eds. “The Apocalypse of Paul.” In *Nag Hammadi Codices V 2–5 and VI with Papyrus Berolensis 8502, 1 and 4*, edited by Douglas M. Parrott, 47–63. Nag Hammadi Studies 11. Leiden: Brill, 1979.
- Pervo, R. “A Hard Act to Follow: *The Acts of Paul* and the Canonical Acts,” *Journal of Higher Criticism* 2, no. 2 (1995) 3–32.
- Rordorf, W. “Paul’s Conversion in the Canonical Acts and in the *Acts of Paul*.” *Semeia* 80 (1997) 137–44.

Chapter 2: Antioch on the Orontes (in Syria)

Witness: P Heid 1–6, renumbered by Cherix as pp. 9–13. Secondary witnesses: *Acts of Titus* 4; Nicetas of Paphlagonia 82r.

1. (p. 9) [...] but [...] he [*verb*] ... He took [...] is Anchares [...] husband. Paul went into [*the house*] to the place where the [*corpse*] had been laid out. Now Phila [*the wife*] of Anchares was upset [...] She [*angrily*] told her husband, “My husband, you have gone off [*because of*] ... this sorcerer, and you didn’t [...] the wild beasts. You have not taken [...] your son [...] whence [...]?”

(p. 10) [...] having [...] looked for something to eat [...] son placed on [...]” But [Paul] stood up in the presence of all. He prayed until the ninth hour, until the crowd came from the city and carried off the young boy. After Paul had prayed for a long time, he lives [...] and Jesus, the Messiah [...] the [*young*] boy [...] [...] the prayer [...] (p. 11) [...] crowd [...] eight days [...] Paul [...] and so that [...] this one, so that [*they*] might recall that he had raised the [*young*] man.

2. But after Paul had stayed [...] (p. 12) [...] seated [...] there [...] behind him, the people [...] sent for Anchares [...] they cried [...] “[*We*] believe, Anchares [...] but save the city.” [...] Many people expressed these sentiments. [*Anchares*] said to them: “Judge if their [claims] [...] (p. 13) [...] can [...] but I testify [...] God [*who has*] son [...] salvation, and for me [...] [O] my [*brothers and sisters*] [*believe*] that there is no other God than [Jesus,] the Messiah, the Son of [the] Blessed one, to whom be the glory [*for ever,*] amen!”

3. But when they gathered that he would not return to them, they [*thereupon*] chased Paul, seized him and brought [him] back to the city for condemnation. They stoned him and expelled him from their city and their region. As Anchares would not return evil for evil, shut the door of [his house and remained] inside, with his wife [...] in fasting and prayer [...] and [...] when night? arrived, [*and Paul came*] to him, saying [...] the Messiah.

Comment

Nicetas and *ATit* provide a vague outline of the story. The fragments add a few bones, not all of which seem to fit the outline. According to Nicetas (82r) Paul preached at Syrian Antioch, was imprisoned, and subsequently rescued. The chief magistrate of the city saw in a vision his son, who had died. His wife was also restored. *ATit* 4 speaks of Barnabas, the son of *Pancharas*, whom Paul raised.

These authorities are not summarizing Acts, in which Barnabas is an early diaspora Jewish believer, who took Paul under his wing, so to speak (Acts 4:36; 9:27; 11:25–26). To reiterate what was stated in the introduction (sec. V), failure to follow Acts does not mean that *APL* does not know Acts. *APL* wishes to view Barnabas as a dependent follower of Paul. That he was of polytheist background is not anti-Jewish. The author is largely indifferent to Jews. The typical convert comes from a polytheist background. The imprisonment and rescue noted in Nicetas, however, do not fit comfortably into the surviving fragments.

As §1 opens, Paul appears to be a free agent, evidently summoned to the home of Ancharas because their son has died. Ancharas might well have been the chief magistrate, a character far from unusual in ApocActs. What is unusual is that Ancharas seems to have been attracted by Paul's message before his wife was converted. Her labeling of the apostle as a "sorcerer" suggests that he has been working miracles and/or enticing members of households to follow him. Paul had been arrested and condemned, perhaps to the beasts, by the chief magistrate, Ancharas (although Syrian Antioch was in fact the seat of the governor of Roman Syria). After the death of his son, Ancharas had a vision of the youth that led him to release the apostle.

His wife Phila was angry with him because of his attention to Paul and his evident neglect of his son's corpse. The body had been laid out in a house, evidently theirs, to which Paul goes. This residence evidently lay outside of the city. (Antioch was notable for its suburbs.) The apostle stood, presumably by the bier, and engaged in continuous prayer. At 1500 mourners came to transport the corpse to its place of burial.

After this lengthy build up, the resuscitation of the boy was announced rapidly. The subsequent reference to *eight days* is not clear. It may refer to eight days during which Paul was incarcerated or to eight subsequent days. Section 1 closes with action, presumably verbal, by which Paul recalls public attention to the wonder.

Phila evidently collapsed in shock at the miracle and had also to be rehabilitated. §2 opens with an indication that strong hostility to Paul endures. Many of the populace confront him. This may not be a formal trial.

The chief magistrate, Anchares, is summoned. General expressions of faith usually signal mass conversions motivated by a miracle. In this instance the crowd may affirm the raising of the young man but still judge Paul to be a menace to the civic order, possibly as a magician. Cf. Mark 5:1–20. Anchares invites the public to reach its own conclusions about the charges laid by Paul's antagonists while making a firm confession of faith. The crowd's specific wish is not clear. This desire is evidently related to the claims of Paul's adversaries. They may see him as an opponent of traditional religion. Anchares responds with an affirmation of Christian faith.

§3 is a rather more typical example of a pattern known from various Acts. The apostle's frustrated adversaries must resort to pursuit and capture of their prey, who is returned to the city to receive his due, which includes stoning and expulsion. Anchares refused to retaliate and remained inside his home, where he and Phila fasted and prayed. Paul, neither debilitated nor intimidated by stones, returned, probably that evening, to console the couple. Cf. Acts 14:18–20. A less likely alternative is that he returned in the form of a vision.

Notes

Antioch. Many cities (including, for a period, Jerusalem) in the ancient world were given the name Antioch (after Antiochus, founder of the Seleucid dominion, an empire that, at its greatest extent, reached from present day Pakistan to the borders of Egypt). According to Acts 11:19—14:23, Syrian Antioch was the center of the early mission to gentiles.

(P)anchares. The name “Anchares” in Coptic is due to two ways of reading *panchaes*: “p.Anchares,” in which “p” is the definite article, thus “Anchares,” and “Panchares.”

Sorcerer. See, e.g., Poupon, “L'accusation.”

Wild Beasts. The link to chaps. 1, 4, and 9 is apparent. Anchares may have condemned Paul, who was released prior to execution.

Ninth hour. This time (1500) has symbolic value as the hour at which Jesus died (Mark 15:34). Cf. also Acts 10:3, 30.

The Crowd. Cf. Luke 7:11–17.

The Acts of Paul

Eight days. This number is also symbolic. From the perspective of Genesis 1–2, the eighth follows the seventh, the day of weekly rest, and is thus the time of ultimate rest. Astronomical theory identified the eighth sphere as that of rest (which was judged superior to motion). Within this were the spheres of the seven “planets” (which means “moving bodies”). (Ancients included earth’s moon and the sun among the seven.)

No other God than [Jesus]. Anchaes’ initial statement is Monarchian, followed by the claim that Jesus is the son of God.

Evil for evil. This is an ethical commonplace in Greco-Roman (e.g., Musonius Rufus, ed. Lutz 76–80), and Jewish (Prov 17:13; *Asen.* 28.4 *et passim*; 2 *Enoch* 50.1–4), as well as Christian (e.g., Rom 12:17) thought. By this single example the narrator illustrates Anchaes’ moral transformation.

They stoned him and expelled him from their city and their region. The themes are borrowed from Acts: expulsion, 13:50 (Pisidian Antioch); stoning: see 14:5 (Iconium); and return after stoning, 14:19–20 (Lystra).

Bibliography

- Poupon, Gérard. “L’accusation de magie dans les Actes Apocryphes.” In *Les Actes apocryphes des Apôtres: christianisme et monde païen*, ed. François Bovon et al. 71–93. Publications de la Faculté de Théologie de l’Université de Genève 4. Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1981.
- Rordorf, Willy. “In welchem Verhältnis stehen die apokryphen Paulus akten zur kanonischen Apostelgeschichte und zu den Pastoralbriefen?” In *Text and Testimony. Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A. F. J. Klijn*, edited by T. Baarda et al., 225–41. Kampen: Kok, 1988.
- . “Was wissen wir über Plan und Absicht der Paulusakten?” *Oecumenica et Patristica*, 71–82. FS W. Schneemelcher. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1989.