CHAPTER TWO

JEWS AND CHRISTIANS PASCHA

Having established that Christians at Sardis were heirs to a Jewish form of Christianity, and that this was the probable source of their paschal practice we must explore the paschal practice of Jews and Christians in more detail. It has been axiomatic from the first that *Peri Pascha* is in some way related to the Quartodeciman paschal liturgy; it is moreover axiomatic that the Quartodeciman Pascha was in some way a continuation of the Jewish practice of Passover. Clearly there were, as a result of the parting of the ways, differences between Jews and Christians in their Passover ritual, quite apart from matters of theology, and developments in paschal ritual and theology would take place in both communities. However it is reasonable to proceed on the assumption that there will be continuity if only on the basis that the date of the celebration is preserved among the Quartodeciman Christians. Whilst *Peri Pascha* may contain internal clues to the Quartodeciman liturgy, it is necessary to examine both Jewish and Christian paschal ritual in order to be in a position to evaluate these clues.

In this chapter we intend to demonstrate that the paschal haggadah existed in some form before the parting of the ways, and that a domestic seder was practised at this time. This enables us to locate *Peri Pascha* in such a context, and is a necessary preliminary to our formal examination of *Peri Pascha* in which it is intended to demonstrate that it is in part a Passover haggadah. Further to this we intend to demonstrate that the haggadah was intended as a means of commemoration within a commemorative rite, and that this understanding of commemoration was passed on to Christians, and so to Melito. This may provide a rationale for Melito’s paschal practice and for his adoption of the form of the haggadah for his work. These are limited aims; in particular there will be no attempt to chart in detail the development of the Jewish seder between the fall of the Temple and the codification of the Mishnah and so a limited selection of studies is cited.
2.1 The Form of the Paschal Celebration

2.1.1 The Origins of the Passover Haggadah

The writings preserved only in late collections like the Talmud and the Mishnah are notoriously difficult to date. This applies equally to the Passover haggadah, presupposing as it does a liturgy such as that described by the Mishnah. However, if any external evidence concerning Melito's Pascha is to be gathered, then it must come from our knowledge of Jewish Passover liturgy and ritual. Since our certain knowledge of this derives from the time after the destruction of the Temple, and in particular from the Mishnah, we must further be able to show that the seeds of this later ritual at least had been planted before the ways of Christianity and Judaism began to part, in order that it may have been passed to Melito through his tradition.

A number of factors militate against this possibility. Most notable is the silence from Jewish Hellenistic writers such as Philo and Josephus. These mention the Passover and the slaughter of the lambs but have no reference to a domestic seder. It is also to be noted that non-rabbinic Jewish groups such as the Samaritans have no elaborate seder ritual, and that none survives from the Elephantine papyri.¹ On the other hand there have been attempts to date several of the texts making up the Passover liturgy to pre-Maccabean times.²

There are therefore two related questions. The first is that of whether the literary texts comprising the haggadah could have been in existence before the time of the parting of the ways of Judaism and Christianity, and the second is that of whether there existed a liturgical context for such a practice, a seder in other words. We shall attempt to answer these questions in turn.

The first, and most thorough, attempt to date the texts making up the haggadah is that of Finkelstein. The basis of his attempts consist firstly in finding an appropriate political Sitz im Leben for the texts and secondly in producing internal theological evidence by way of support for his historical contentions.

We may begin with his dating of the midrash of Deuteronomy 26:5-8 which is contained in all extant rituals and is the basis for the haggadah.³ He sees a possible Sitz im Leben for this work as a Jerusa-

¹ This silence is found a compelling objection by Stein “Influence” 15 followed by Segal Hebrew Passover 241
² Notably those of Finkelstein “Oldest Midrash” and “Pre-Maccabean Documents”
³ Finkelstein “Oldest Midrash”