CHAPTER FOUR

PERI PASCHA AND
THE QUARTODECIMAN PASCHAL LITURGY

Although the Quartodecimans have been subject to scholarly enquiry since the seventeenth century we do not concern ourselves with the earlier work in this monograph but take as our starting point in this discussion the work of Schmidt in 1919.\(^1\) His was the first attempt to discuss the paschal liturgy of the Quartodecimans on the basis of a document of Quartodeciman provenance, the then newly discovered *Epistula Apostolorum*. Whilst others contributed to the argument it was Lohse who first produced a reconstruction,\(^2\) largely following Schmidt but with the advantage that Bonner’s edition of *Peri Pascha* enabled him to include the evidence presented by Melito. There have been further contributions from Perler,\(^3\) Hansen,\(^4\) Cantalamessa\(^5\) and Rouwhorst.\(^6\)

This is therefore not the first attempt to reconstruct the Quartodeciman paschal liturgy. What is new and unique in this attempt is the fact that after our form-critical examination of the work we are now able to draw upon the evidence provided by *Peri Pascha* in a new way. Heretofore it has been assumed that Melito’s work is uniform in nature and is simply a homily on *Exodus* 12. *Peri Pascha*’s place in the liturgy was assumed therefore to be as part of some kind of “liturgy of the word”.\(^7\) Now that we begin to see *Peri Pascha* as a liturgy almost in its own right, that it may in part be described as a haggadah, and that there are internal divisions within the work, the task becomes one of seeing how this accords with the other evidence we possess of the liturgical observance, enabling us to check the veracity of previous

\(^1\) Schmidt *Gespräche Jesu*. A useful review of the earlier period of scholarship is provided by Lohse *Passafest* 20-40, as noted at 1.2.2 above

\(^2\) Lohse *Passafest* 62-89

\(^3\) Perler *Hymnus*

\(^4\) Hansen *Sitz*

\(^5\) Cantalamessa *Pasqua della Salvezza*

\(^6\) Rouwhorst “Quartodeciman Passover”

\(^7\) Firstly by Lohse *Passafest*, and subsequently universally, with only slight variations of emphasis. Various individuals, such as Wood (Review) and Chrestos “ἐγγύον” have suggested liturgical dimensions to the work, but not as part of any ordered exploration of the liturgy as a whole.
reconstructions against this new evidence, and filling in details of that observance. It is hoped in this chapter to show that Peri Pascha itself is the liturgical text of the seder, on the basis that it is formally a haggadah, and so like the Jewish haggadah belongs in a liturgical setting, on the basis that it is commemorative in intent, as is the paschal liturgy as a whole, and since its shape is dictated by liturgical needs. An examination of the external evidence for the Quartodecimans will, it is hoped, demonstrate that there is a place for Peri Pascha understood in this way.

4.1 THE BACKGROUND AND SETTING OF THE QUARTODECIMAN PASCHAL LITURGY

Before we begin our reconstruction it is necessary to examine certain questions which, whilst not directly pertinent to the task which we have set ourselves, may affect it in some way. These are questions concerning the background to the Quartodeciman commemoration and the paschal disputes of the second century, and in particular the role of Scripture in these disputes. It is primarily these issues which have been for so long subjects of controversy and the discussion of which was transformed by the Epistula Apostolorum. The attempt to distinguish and to answer these Vorfragen thus forms the first part of this chapter; we shall see more of the Quartodeciman background to Peri Pascha, and indeed see whether Peri Pascha casts any new light on these old questions. The posing of the questions may equally illuminate some aspects of Melito’s work.

4.1.1 The Subject of the Quartodeciman Commemoration

We have stated that the function of the Quartodeciman celebration was one of remembrance without stating explicitly what the Quartodecimans remembered. Obviously they remembered the first Passover, as is clear from the reading of Exodus 12 and the graphic description of the slaughter of the Egyptian first-born. Typologically interpreted this is seen as the suffering of Christ, present in the lamb and protecting believers.

Further evidence for this understanding of pascha centring on the suffering of Christ may be gathered from Melito’s statement that pascha gets its name from πάσχειν, and in particular from the suffering undergone by Christ. This was part of the Quartodeciman tradition, and not an insight of Melito alone, since by the time Melito wrote the “paschal pun” was already traditional. For although in Mohrmann’s study of the question Melito is cited as the earliest ex-