CHAPTER ONE

PHILIP IN THE SECOND CENTURY

In the second century of the Christian era, whenever Christian sources mention Philip, it is the apostle of the same name who is in view. There is no evidence to suggest the existence of competing or parallel traditions of two early, influential Christian figures who happened to share the name Philip. Both the later ecclesiastical view that carefully distinguishes the “deacon” Philip from the apostle of the same name and the pervasive modern assumption that there were two high profile Philips in the earliest days of the church are based solely on Luke’s presentation in Acts. Were it not for Acts, there would be no clue that a problem existed with respect to Philip’s identity. The privileged place of this canonical source has led to a confident revisionism with regard to the plain testimony of the second-century witnesses. Scholars have simply presumed that these later authorities have confused Philip the apostle with Philip the evangelist. Yet, since Philip, along with his daughters, is often invoked in various polemical contexts to legitimate this or that group’s theological positions and social/eclesiastical practices, it can hardly be imagined that the appeal is to anyone other than a clearly recognized authority, that is, an “elder,” the most potent form of which is an apostle. It is an issue not only of credibility but also effectiveness.

1 See, e.g., Apostolic Constitutions 8.17, where the ordination procedure for deacons is placed on Philip’s lips. Some manuscripts include a special note pointing out the difference between Philip the apostle and Philip the evangelist. For all the care taken to discriminate between the two Philips on the basis of Acts, it is still possible, as Apostolic Constitutions 6.7 among other texts shows, to refer to the Philip of Acts 8 as an apostle. Convenient surveys of the noncanonical evidence for Philip are available in François Bovon, “Les Actes de Philippe,” ANRW II 25/6:4456–60; and Frédéric Amsler, Acta Philippi: Commentarius (CCSA 12; Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 7–9, 441–68.

2 See, e.g., JoAnn Ford Watson (“Philip, 6 and 7,” ABD 5:311), who states that “later tradition confuses Philip the Apostle and Philip the Evangelist.” The same conclusion is offered by H. H. Platz (“Philip,” IDB 3:785: “References to Philip in the second century reflect a tendency to confuse the apostle with Philip the evangelist”), and the vast majority of commentators who review the second-century material. See my entry, “Philip the Apostle and Evangelist,” EDB 10:47.

Consequently, before discounting the documentary evidence of the second century, it is worthwhile to consider whether Luke’s use of traditional material concerning Philip has in some way led to a denial of his apostolic rank.

The supposition that the tradition behind Acts 8 concerns Philip the apostle has a scholarly pedigree, though it has not been worked out in any detail. Doubts about the Lukian portrayal have surfaced especially in connection with the disjunction between the task that the Seven are called to fulfill in Acts 6:1–7 and what Stephen and Philip, who are included in their number (6:5), actually do in the following scenes. Notable is the comment of Julius Wellhausen that Philip “ist einer von den Sieben, aber so wenig wie Stephanus Diakon, sondern Evangelist (21,8) d.h. Apostel.” The manner in which Luke appropriated independent traditions concerning Philip in Acts 8 will be examined in detail in chapters two and three. For now it will suffice to indicate that when viewed from the perspective of the second-century witnesses to be treated in this chapter, the traditions about Luke’s Philip (i.e., the Philip with four prophetically gifted daughters, Acts 21:9) in Acts 8 are most naturally identified as stories about an apostle rather than some lesser figure. This conclusion is also bolstered by a consideration of onomastic data for Palestine encompassing the period of the early church.

A consideration of the onomastic material available for Palestine between 330 BCE and 200 CE yields a total of seven Jewish men known by the name Philip. Four of these are mentioned in Josephus:

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1 Julius Wellhausen, *Kritische Analyse der Apostelgeschichte* (AGWG, n.s., 15/2; Berlin: Weidmann, 1914), 14. Walter Grundmann (“Das Problem des hellenistischen Christentums innerhalb der Jerusalemer Urgemeinde,” *ZNW* 38 [1939]: 59 n. 33) asks concerning Philip: “Ist er aus dem Kreis der Zwölf in den der Sieben übergegangen oder handelt es sich um zwei Persönlichkeiten?” Martin Hengel (*Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 14) points out that “we cannot exclude the possibility that, say, Philip was originally one of the ‘Twelve’ and now went over to the ‘Seven.’” Even though Hengel historicizes the groupings of figures in the lists of the Seven and the Twelve, there is reason to believe that the lists of the Seven and the Twelve both refer to the same Philip. This option is developed below.

2 The following summary concerning the plausibility of the hypothesis identifying the two New Testament Philips on the strength of the onomastic data is written in light of personal discussion with Dr. Tal Ilan, during her tenure as Research Associate in the Women’s Studies in Religion Program at Harvard Divinity School in 1992–93, about her onomastic research in connection with her study, “The Status of the Jewish Woman in Israel in the Hellenistic-Roman Period (332 BCE–200 CE)” (Ph.D. diss.; Hebrew University, 1990–91). A revised version of this study which was written in Modern Hebrew is now available in English: *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine: An Inquiry into Image and Status* (TSAJ 44; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996).