Riddle Wrapped in an Enigma: Pauline Reception in the Antiochene Acts of Ignatius

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At first blush it might appear that there is not a great deal more to say about the relationship between Paul and Ignatius. After all, as is frequently noted, Ignatius’ use of Paul, imitation of Paul, reproduction of Pauline rhetorical schema, and self-conception as Pauline figure make him truly deutero-Pauline. Yet the Martyrdom of Ignatius as preserved in the Acts of Ignatius has been comparatively ignored. Moreover, in the case of the presentation of Ignatius as Pauline martyr in the letter To the Romans, the situation is more complicated than previous studies have recognized.

Textual Considerations

There is a serious manuscript issue that should force us to broaden our documentary horizons. In addition to the macro-textual and manuscript problems that plague the Ignatian corpus and threaten to destabilize the middle recension, there is the eccentric preservation of To the Romans itself. For, contrary to the way that it is presented in modern critical editions and treated in

2 With the exception of the foundational treatment the text received at the end of the nineteenth century by Zahn and Lightfoot, the Acts of Ignatius has barely been a topic of inquiry in the years since. Theodor Zahn, Ignatius von Antiochien (Gotha: Perthes, 1873); and, Joseph B. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1889–1890). One study that does treat the Martyrdom of Ignatius is ch. 7 in Gary A. Bisbee, Pre-Decian Acts of Martyrs and Comentarii, HDR 22 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), which identifies the trial scene as an authentic residuum from the second century CE.
contemporary scholarship, the earliest version of the letter *To the Romans* is preserved only as part of the *Acts of Ignatius*.

The Greek text of the *Martyrdom of Ignatius* exists in two versions, the Antiochene and Roman. Of these two, only the Antiochene version preserves Ignatius’ epistle *To the Romans* in any form. The Antiochene version is extant in three manuscripts of the same textual family, two of which are, in the words of Lightfoot, “comparatively late,” and one of which—Codex Sinaiaticus 539—omits large portions of the letter. Our best evidence therefore is Codex Parisiensis-Colbertinus, known to those familiar with Michael Holmes’s edition as “G.” Yet in this manuscript—as in those that follow it—the letter *To the Romans* is preserved only as a section of the fifth-century *Acts of Ignatius* and not as a separate document.

Traditionally, and on the basis of brief citations from the letter *To the Romans* in Irenaeus, Origen, and Eusebius, and the articulate arguments of Joseph Barber Lightfoot, scholars have excised the letter from the *Acts of Ignatius* as if the author of the fifth-century *Acts* had preserved the letter perfectly. Certainly it is possible that the author of the *Acts* has done just that. Gary Bisbee argues that section 2, the *commentarius*, dates to the second century and was incorporated into the current form of the *Acts* in a manner similar to that of the letter *To the Romans*. He argues that the current form of the Greek

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4 Eusebius’ description of Ignatius (Hist. eccl. 3.36.5–10). The dating of Ignatius’ letters is itself a subject of huge debate. The discovery, reconstruction, and primacy of the middle recension as now generally accepted by modern scholars are written in the margins of the history of Civil War Britain. See Allen Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Martyr Bishop and the Origin of Episcopacy* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 1–13. It was the royalist archbishop James Ussher who first sought out and published this collection of letters of Ignatius. A consummate textual scholar, Ussher was driven by his belief that Ignatius had written only seven letters and that these authentic epistles would confirm episcopal authority over and against the radical Protestant reformers of his time. Ussher’s investigations led to the 1644 publication of a Latin edition of the middle recension. The Greek reconstruction was supported by Isaac Voss’s publication in 1646 of a Greek manuscript from Florence. This Florentine manuscript, which forms the basis for modern critical editions, contained versions of all the letters in the middle recension with the exception of *To the Romans*. Ruinart’s edition some thirty years later included a Greek text of *To the Romans* from the tenth-century Codex Parisiensis Colbertinus, which was used to round out the middle recension. Part of the difficulty with traditional constructions of the short, middle, and long recensions relates to issues of hermeneutics and dating. For a recent critique of the dating of Ignatius’ letters that may resolve many of these issues, see Timothy D. Barnes, “The Date of Ignatius,” ExpTim 120 (2009): 119–30.