Fire and Water? Apocalyptic Imagination and Hellenistic Worldview in 2 Peter

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After a long period of scholarly neglect and contempt, 1 2 Peter has begun to stimulate the curiosity of exegetes. 2 In the North American context, there have been attempts to read 2 Peter (and the other Catholic Epistles) “with new eyes,” 3 but the contributions from this field, mostly interested in the exploration of “new” rhetorical, narrative, and social-scientific methods, often remain rather unclear on philological matters, partly because they follow a rather “conservative,” “canonical” agenda. It seems that in European critical scholarship the burdens of past debates have been removed to a greater extent. It is widely accepted that the writing is pseudonymous, and most scholars do not feel any further need to date 2 Peter as early as possible or to keep it closely connected with the other New Testament writings. Most critical scholars now accept the view that 2 Peter is probably the latest writing that became canonical, written at some time in the second century (between 110 and 170 CE), and that it has to be read not only in connection with 1 Peter and Jude,

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2 Cf., e.g., some recent monographs: Thomas J. Kraus, Sprache, Stil und historischer Ort des zweiten Petrusbriefes (WUNT 2/136; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001); Michael J. Gilmour, The Significance of Parallels between 2 Peter and Other Early Christian Literature (SBLABS 10; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2002); Karl Matthias Schmidt, Mahnung und Erinnerung im Maskenspiel: Epistolographie, Rhetorik und Narrativik der pseudepigraphen Petrusbriefe (Herders Biblische Studien 38; Freiburg: Herder, 2003); Martin G. Ruf, Die heiligen Propheten, eure Apostel und ich: Metatextuelle Studien zum zweiten Petrusbrief (WUNT 2/300; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Wolfgang Grünstäudl, Petrus Alexandrinus: Studien zum historischen und theologischen Ort des zweiten Petrusbriefes (WUNT 2/353; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

3 Thus Robert L. Webb and Duane F. Watson, eds., Reading Second Peter with New Eyes (LNTS 382; London: T&T Clark, 2010); Eric F. Mason and Troy W. Martin, eds., Reading 1–2 Peter and Jude. A Resource for Students (SBLRBS 77; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).
but also within the context of the Apostolic Fathers and the (Pseudo-)Petrine
Literature that began to flourish in the second century. As the reading of
2 Peter has been generally liberated from the “corset” of conservative apolo-
getics, it has also been liberated from the critical label of “early Catholicism”
and related clichés. More and more, scholars have recognized that 2 Peter is
a writing of its own—in its language and style as well as in its genre, themes,
and theological aims.

1 2 Peter and its Unique Position in the New Testament

The independent nature of 2 Peter holds even in regards to its close relation-
ship with Jude: although 2 Peter is usually read and interpreted in connection
with Jude, which was quite obviously used as a Vorlage (so that most mod-
ern commentaries interpret both writings together), recent scholarship has
come to the conclusion that the issues of 2 Peter—the profile of the oppo-
nents attacked and their particular views, as well as the theology of the author

4 The category “Early Catholicism” was established, among others, by Ernst Käsemann, but
criticized, e.g., by F. Hahn, “Das Problem des Frühkatholizismus,” in Exegetische Beiträge zum
ökumenischen Gespräch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 57–74. As a category
including some later New Testament writings (Pastorals, Jude, 2 Peter, but also Luke/Acts) it
could only point to the difference between these writings and the Pauline views, but it was
not precise enough to embrace all the writings. For 2 Peter it is striking that the writing is
apparently uninterested in ecclesiastical ministry.

5 Cf. the conclusion by Kraus, Sprache, 2: compared with the other writings of the later
canonized New Testament, 2 Peter is “ein inhaltlich, theologisch und sprachlich singuläres
Phänomen.”

6 Apart from the commentaries (see the following footnote), see the most recent and thorough
study by Tommy Wasserman, The Epistle of Jude: Its Text and Transmission (ConBNT 43;

7 Cf. Richard J. Bauckham, Jude, 2 Peter (WBC 50; Waco: Word, 1983); Henning Paulsen, Der
Zweite Petrusbrief und der Judasbrief (KEK 12,2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992);
Jerome H. Neyrey, 2 Peter, Jude (AB 37C; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993); Anton Vögtle, Der
Judasbrief. Der zweite Petrusbrief (EEK 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994); Peter H.
Davids, The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). The same will
be true for the commentary by the present author: Jörg Frey, Der Judasbrief und der zweite
Petrusbrief (THKNT 15,2; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlaganstalt, 2015).