A JEWISH SOURCE OF MINUCIUS FELIX

BY

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The much disputed problem whether the Octavius was written before or after the Apologeticum remains as yet unsolved 1. Our generation, which is more readily impressed by force and temperament than by equilibrium and refinement, will perhaps be inclined to prefer Tertullian, a genius, to Minucius, a compilator 2, but such subjective matters of taste must not prejudice in this question, which should be dealt with more geometrico. The fact that very distinguished scholars, though using the same material, have come to opposite conclusions, seems to indicate that our present information is too scanty to allow of a final conclusion and that only a new point of view may bring some light 3.

1 Bertil Axelson's book: Das Prioritätsproblem Tertullian–Minucius Felix. Lund 1941, which defends the priority of Tertullian, was severely criticized by J. W. Ph. Borleffs in Museum 50, 1943, pp. 216 sqq.

2 Axelson, op. cit., p. 62: „Niemand bestreitet Tertullian, der genialen Persönlichkeit und dem gewaltigen Neuerer, seinen Platz unter den Allergrößten des lateinischen Schrifttums, wie wohl auch niemand leugnet, dass sich der Verfasser des kleinen Dialogs Octavius kaum über das Niveau des gewandten Formtalentes erhebt... auszugehen ist immerhin von der trivialen menschlichen Erfahrung, dass sich in der Regel das Talent an das Genie anlehnt, nicht umgekehrt.“ Against this it may be observed that Tertullian has plagiarized such a literary "talent" as Justinus Martyr in his third book against Marcion (G. Quispel, De bronnen van Tertullianus’ Adversus Marcionem, Leiden 1943, pp. 56 sqq.).

3 J. W. Ph. Borleffs, De Tertulliano et Minucio Felice, Groningen 1925, refutes most of the arguments of R. Heinze (Tertullians Apologeticum, Berichte der K. sächs. Ges. der Wissenschaften 62, 1910, pp. 279 sqq.), rightly stresses the importance of the preparatory study of the Apologeticum, the Ad Nationes, for the whole question, and advances some very strong arguments in favour of the priority of the Octavius.
Having found an argument in favour of the priority of Minucius which has made some impression upon me I submit the following results of my investigation to the criticism of scholars:

1) in my opinion some passages of the Octavius show that its author knew a Jewish apology, large parts of which are preserved in the so-called pseudo-Clementina;

2) when used as a tertium comparationis this Jewish book may reveal that Minucius rendered the text of his source faithfully, whereas Tertullian misunderstood the text of the Octavius in the corresponding passage of the Ad Nationes.

Already H. Waitz, as long ago as 1902, indicated that one of the sources used by the author of the so-called pseudo-Clementinian "fundamental writing" (Grundschrift), from which both the Homiliae and the Recognitiones are derived, must have been a dialogue, which shows no trace of Christian influences 4. The supposition made by Waitz was brilliantly elaborated by Werner Heintze, who was the first to discover that this source had been a Jewish apology and who even managed to determine with some probability the Greek sources of the Jewish author, apparently a man much interested in Greek philosophy 5. Nor did it require subtle reasoning to prove this statement: in a long digression in the Homiliae (IV, 7—VI, 26) "Clement" tells us in a debate with the well-known Alexandrian enemy of the Jews, Apion, how he was converted to Judaism at Rome by a Jewish merchant (Hom. V, 28); this statement is contradicted by the rest of the story, which shows how Clement, still a pagan, made the acquaintance of Barnabas at Alexandria and was afterwards baptized by St. Peter (Hom. I, 7 sqq.).

The results arrived at by Heintze were examined and accepted in a slightly modified form by Carl Schmidt 6. After him Oscar

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5 W. Heintze, Der Clemensroman und seine griechischen Quellen, Texte u. Untersuchungen, XL, 2, Leipzig 1914, pp. 45 sqq.