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**The coptic apocalypse of Peter (Nag Hammadia Codex VII,3). Text edition with translation, commentary and interpretative essays**

Havelaar, Henriette Wilhelmina

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## Preface

This study aims at making more accessible the Coptic Apocalypse of Peter (Apoc.Pet.), the third text of Codex Seven of the Nag Hammadi library. As a matter of course I will build on earlier research of this complicated text since the first publication in 1973 of the Coptic text and a German translation by M. Krause and M. Girgis.

Over the last two decades several translations of the text have been brought out: M. Krause, M. Girgis 'Die Petrusapokalypse' in: F. Altheim, R. Stiehl (eds) *Christentum am Roten Meer* II, Berlin/New York (1973), 152-179; A. Werner 'Die Apokalypse des Petrus, die dritte Schrift von Nag Hammadi Codex VII, eingeleitet und übersetzt vom Berliner Arbeitskreis für Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften', *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 99 (1974), 575-584; S.K. Brown, C.W. Griggs 'The Apocalypse of Peter, introduction and translation', *Brigham Young University Studies* 15 (1974/75), 131-145; J.A. Brashler *The Coptic Apocalypse of Peter, a genre analysis and interpretation*. Claremont 1977 (Unpubl. Diss.); J.A. Brashler, R.A. Bullard 'Apocalypse of Peter' in: J.M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Leiden 1988; A. Werner 'Koptisch-Gnostische Apokalypse des Petrus' in: W. Schneemelcher (ed.) *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*. Tübingen 5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1989, 633-644. Despite the fact that we now have at our disposal seven different translations (and several translations of parts of the text), considerable interpretational problems have remained.

These problems call for an annotated translation which incorporates the insights articulated by the above-mentioned authors.

The only earlier study exclusively dedicated to Apoc.Pet. was carried out by J.A. Brashler (1977), cited above. It contains the Coptic text, a translation and chapters dedicated to questions of genre, Christology and the identity of the adversaries of Apoc.Pet. The present study owes a great deal to this project but also differs from it to an important extent as will become clear especially in the chapters on genre and Christology. Another significant study, is K. Koschorke's *Die Polemik der Gnostiker gegen das kirchliche Christentum*. Leiden 1978. Koschorke has tried to solve the problem of the identity of the adversaries of the Petrine Gnostics. This problem has here been reconsidered, resulting in an alternative proposal regarding the relationship between the group behind Apoc.Pet. and its opponents.

While a complete commentary on the text has not appeared before, the commentary presented here is indebted to various earlier investigations concerned with different details from Apoc.Pet., namely H.-M. Schenke 'Zur Faksimile-Ausgabe der Nag-Hammadi-Schriften, Die Schriften des Codex VII', *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache* 102 (1975), 277-285; K.-W. Tröger *Die Passion Jesu Christi in der Gnosis nach den Schriften von Nag Hammadi*. Humboldt Universität 1977 (Unpubl. Diss.); J.A. Cozby *Gnosis and the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Gnostic Soteriology as*

*Reflected in the Nag Hammadi Tractates.* Duke University 1985 (Unpubl. Diss.); Ph. Perkins *The Gnostic Dialogue.* New York 1985; G. Shellrude *Nag Hammadi Apocalypses: A Study of the Relation of Selected Texts to the Traditional Apocalypses.* St. Andrews University 1986 (Unpubl. Diss.); U. Schönborn *Diverbium Salutis, Studien zur Interdependenz von literarischer Struktur und theologischer Intention des gnostischen Dialogs, ausgeführt an der koptischen "Apokalypse des Petrus" aus Nag Hammadi (NHC VII,3).* Marburg/Lahn 1987 (Unpubl. Habilitationsschrift).

### The structure of the present study

Different approaches will be used to analyse the text: a philological approach dominates in chapters one, two and three and the registers; a literary approach in chapters four and five. and a combination of philological and literary insights is found in chapter six. Chapter seven has been analyzed with the help of sociological notions. The different approaches are not divided from each other as strictly as is suggested here. The commentary in particular combines aspects of the different methods in order to present a comprehensive interpretation. And in chapter six and seven, for instance, the Christology of Apoc.Pet. and the identity of the adversaries are discussed with the help of philological observations as well. But in general this division will be sustained.

The first three chapters are dedicated to philological questions: a description of the manuscript, an inventory of linguistic peculiarities, an edition of the Coptic text, a translation, grammatical annotations, and a commentary make up this part of the project. It is completed by a register which is included at the end of the book.

The Coptic text, based on my study of the manuscript in the Coptic Museum, corrects on several minor points the first edition by Krause. The translation is as literal as possible, without making concessions to syntactic and grammatical consistency. The commentary draws attention to the difficulties of our text and proposes an interpretation of these difficulties. I will avoid, therefore, piling up information and references that do not directly serve the main goal: explanation of the Apocalypse of Peter.

Chapter four is concerned with the question of genre. This chapter makes more explicit what has silently been assumed in the commentary viz. that Apoc.Pet. is a specimen of the genre apocalypse. Genre study is an important line of investigation in current literary research. The question as to what a genre is and, more specifically, the discussion on the apocalyptic genre, have been of particular importance the last two decades. The genre of Apoc.Pet. will be analyzed with the help of recent insights in the field of literary theory. The text is described as an apocalypse in which both general apocalyptic and more specific Gnostic features have been combined.

One of the features which helped us establish the text as an apocalypse forms the subject matter of chapter five. The abundance of references to Scripture is a characteristic element of

apocalyptic texts. In the case of Apoc.Pet. we deal with the relationship between this text and the New Testament. This relationship is very complicated and requires a thorough description. The text contains over twenty references to New Testament texts, a considerable amount for this relatively short document (14 codex pages). Many of these references seem to be taken from the Gospel of Matthew but other texts from Scripture have also been identified.

The next chapter is concerned with the Christology of Apoc.Pet. It is essential for our understanding of the text to analyze how the Saviour, who is both the subject and the object of the revelation, has been represented. It appears that the interpretation of the crucifixion is revealed to Peter by the narrating Saviour or *angelus interpres*. The crucified Saviour, who can be characterized as docetic, is described as consisting of three non-material 'natures', temporarily connected with a material body. This representation of the Saviour is found in more Christian Gnostic texts. An important parallel with another text from Nag Hammadi can be found in the Second Treatise of the Great Seth in the same codex.

In chapter seven, finally, it is tried to retrieve in which sort of religious community Apoc.Pet. may have originated. It is argued that the text functioned as the programme of a newly formed Christian Gnostic group. The author of the text could have been a spokesman of this group who polemically formulated the religious ideas of his devotees. The adversaries who are so vehemently opposed in Apoc.Pet. are thought to have formed previously a unity with the Petrine Gnostics. It is hypothesized that within this proto-orthodox community, our group gradually became a subgroup. Religious differences, finally, led to a voluntary or involuntary schism which separated the Petrine Gnostics from their parental group. This interpretation partly results from the chapters five and six in which respectively the relation with the New Testament and the Christology of Apoc.Pet. has been described. From both chapters it appears that our text has been influenced to a large extent by the Christian tradition. In particular the canonical story of the Passion has appeared to be fundamental to the composition of Apoc.Pet.