

ACT OF PETER

The fourth and last Coptic tractate in the Berlin Codex (BG 8502, 4). The *Act of Peter* is written on the final eleven pages (128.1-141.7), with one papyrus leaf missing from the middle of the text (133-34). The most important person in the story, of course, is the chief apostle, Peter. Unlike other [early Christian](#) pieces in which he is chiefly a teacher and almost never a worker of miracles (e.g., the Pseudo-Clementina), here one of Peter's greatest gifts is his ability to heal the blind, deaf, and lame (128.10-17), which he customarily does on Sundays. On one occasion, he is criticized by one of his acquaintances for not healing his own daughter, who lies partially paralyzed.

In response, he heals his daughter in the presence of many, only to reverse the miracle after bolstering their faith, leaving the girl an invalid again. When the crowd pleads on her behalf, he relates to his visitors that her [physical](#) deformity had preserved her virginity when a certain Ptolemy abducted the girl so that he could marry her, heedless of the objections of Peter's wife. Apparently, Peter relates the unusual circumstances of Ptolemy's attention toward his daughter—then a beautiful, whole maiden—in the missing segment, including her becoming a cripple, an event that allowed her to retain her chastity. In the dramatic sequel, a repentant Ptolemy seeks out Peter, is himself healed of blindness, and becomes converted to the Christian faith.

Before his death, which follows soon after, he wills a parcel of land to Peter and his daughter. Thereupon, in an act reminiscent of the requirement that the property of all proselytes be sold and the proceeds be entrusted to the church's leadership (Acts 4:32-5:11), Peter sells the land and gives "the entire sum of money to the poor" (139.16-27). After he has drawn from this story the lesson that God watches over his own people, Peter distributes bread to the crowd and then retires to his home.

It is generally agreed that the setting for the narrative is Jerusalem,

where Peter lives with his wife and daughter. Further, Ptolemy's rash abduction and his evident intent to force the girl to become his wife seem to presuppose Jewish law. Moreover, on the question of the relation of this text with the collection known as the *Acts of Peter*, preserved in large measure in the Latin manuscript *Actus Vercellenses*, Schmidt (1924) has demonstrated convincingly that the *Act of Peter* was a part of the lost opening of the *Acts of Peter*. Krause (1972) has even suggested a connection with the ACTS OF PETER AND THE TWELVE APOSTLES in [Nag Hammadi](#) Codex VI. In addition, Schmidt has argued for an Encratite influence. But any such influence will have been slight, since the real point of the account is to show that God sought to preserve a Christian maiden's virginity, not to demonstrate that marriage and its attendant sexual relations are to be avoided at all costs. After all, in the story Peter is married and his wife has given birth to a daughter. In addition, Brashler and Parrott (1979) are doubtless correct in suggesting that the obvious Gnostic interests, which brought together the first three treatises in the Berlin Codex, also added the *Act of Peter* because of the allegorizing possibilities in the narrative. The document itself was likely composed in the late second or early third century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brashler, J., and D. M. Parrott, eds. "The Act of Peter." In *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2-5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4*, ed. D. M. Parrott, pp. 473-93. Leiden, 1979.
- Krause, M. "Die Petrusakten in Codex VI von Nag Hammadi." In *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honor of Alexander Bohlig*, ed. M. Krause, pp. 36-58. Leiden, 1972.
- Schmidt, C. "Studien zu den alten Petrusakten I." *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 43 (1924):321-48.
- Till, W. C. *Die gnostischen Schriften des koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502*, ed. H.-M. Schenke, pp. 296-321, 333. *Texte und Untersuchungen* 60. Berlin, 1972.



KENT BROWN

Tags: [Books](#)