THE IMPORTANCE OF P. BODMER XX, THE APOLOGY OF PHILEAS AND ITS PROBLEMS*

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Among the Bodmer papyri is an account of the judicial examination of an Egyptian bishop during the Diocletianic persecution of the early fourth century. The papyrus is of early date: the terminus ad quem has been limited on palaeographical grounds to the middle of the century.1 The text was edited by Victor Martin as Papyrus Bodmer XX. L’Apologie de Philéas, évêque de Thmouis (Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Cologny/Genève, 1964).2 This publication was the last contribution by Martin to the P. Bodmer series before his death in 1964. He had previously been engaged in the editing of Bodmer texts of the Gospels of Luke and John, the Iliad and Menander’s Dyscolus.3

His last publication was also his first in the field of hagiography. Scholars with an interest in this field found the Apology to be a hagiographical gem.4 One such scholar, the Bollandist François Halkin, collaborated with Martin in connection with the latter’s work on the editing of the Apology. Halkin turned his attention to the Latin form of the Apology, the so-called Acta proconsularia, extant in a number of Medieval manuscripts.5 He was able to bring to light a

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2. The Apology formed part of a codex; the run of the fibres shows that it came at the centre of a quire. On the back of the last page of the Apology is the beginning of P. Bodmer IX (Psalms 33 and 34). For the hypothetical grouping of P. Bodmer V, VII-XIII and XX (all religious texts, by a number of hands) into the one codex, see Martin, pp.8-10; E. de Strycker, La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques. Recherches sur le Papyrus Bodmer 5 (Brussels, 1961), pp.21-22. The hypothesis has been contested; it is renounced by E.G. Turner in Akten des XIII. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses (Munich, 1974), p.438.
4. Cf. M. Bogaert, review article, Revue bénédictine 75 (1965), 171; ‘C’est une perle de la littérature hagiographique...un des joyaux les plus authentiques de la collection des Actes des Martyrs’.

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previously unedited text of the *Acta* in the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique which he stated to be earlier and better than any previously edited. He published a collation of this and six other texts in 1963, together with a text of the Greek *Apology*.\(^6\) Martin for his part incorporated Halkin’s text of the *Acta* into his own edition of the *Apology*. Both Halkin and Martin enjoyed the cooperation of Emile de Strycker, who is well known for his work on another Bodmer text, P. Bodmer V, *Nativité de Marie* (ed. M. Testuz, 1958).\(^7\)

The title ‘Apology of Phileas’ is carried by the Greek text itself. Phileas is designated επίσκοπος of Thmuis (a town located in the Nile Delta, some 150km east of Alexandria and a little west of Tanis; a number of other early bishops of Thmuis are known\(^5\)) and ἄρχων of Alexandria.\(^9\) Phileas is referred to in several early sources. Eusebius in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* gives an account of Phileas’ attributes, accomplishments and martyrdom, and appends an extract from a letter by Phileas to the Thmuites concerning the sufferings of the persecuted;\(^10\) with Eusebius’ account is to be compared the translation by Rufinus. Phileas was responsible, along with three other Egyptian bishops, Hesychius, Pachomius and Theodorus, for a letter of protest sent to Meletius at the beginning of the Meletian schism;\(^11\) that the letter failed in its purpose seems clear from a reference to it in a letter from Peter, bishop of Alexandria, to his diocese.\(^12\) Jerome mentions the bishop in his *De Viris Illustribus*, where he is said to have been a native of Thmuis,\(^13\) and the Hieronymian Martyrology refers to Phileas


6. Halkin, ‘L’<Apologie>’. Halkin gives the date of the new manuscript as the tenth century.

7. de Strycker, *Protévangile* (see n.2).


12. ibid. XVIII, coll. 509-510.

under February 4.\textsuperscript{14}

In Eusebius the martyrdom of Phileas is described in conjunction with the martyrdom of an important official in the imperial administration, Philoromus. The two are cited as examples of martyrs in Egypt who were especially noteworthy, being conspicuous for wealth, birth, reputation, learning and philosophy and yet counting all secondary to true piety and faith. The two are said to have resisted the entreaties of relatives, friends, officials and the judge (who is not named) and to have withstood threats and insults from the judge, and so to have submitted bravely and ‘philosophically’ to execution.

P. Bodmer XX adds considerably to this picture. According to the \textit{Apology}, Phileas appeared in court on five occasions before being martyred. The reason for his original arrest is not given, though in at least the third, fourth and fifth hearings the requirement is to sacrifice. In the first hearing he may have suffered considerable physical violence (the readings are not entirely clear); in the next three hearings the interrogation was attended with blows. On the fifth occasion he was not tormented physically but was subjected to a long interrogation apparently designed to break his will by theological argument and by appeals to reason, to family considerations and to self-interest. The dialogue of this final interrogation is related in great detail and is the focus of attention in the work. The account closes with Phileas remaining immovable in the face of all entreaties.

The points of theological import touched on during the fifth hearing merit attention.\textsuperscript{15} Certain broad issues arise: sacrifice to God, the resurrection of soul and body, denial of the faith, oaths, the divinity of Christ, the status of Paul, conscience, the attributes of God. In discussing sacrifice Phileas refers to the Jews, maintaining that they now transgress by not confining their ritual to Jerusalem, and in an unfortunately fragmentary section, describes the sacrifices which God requires.\textsuperscript{16} In the following passage on resurrection, Phileas surprises the judge by affirming the resurrection of the body (τό σώμα, ἡ σάρξ); references are made to recompense (ἀμοιβήν), punishment (κόλασιν), righteousness (δικαιοσύνην) and, it seems, eternal life (ζωήν αἰώνων), although the exact significance of these references is obscured by textual defects. In the passage on denial of the faith, Phileas is adamant in defending Paul against the charge that he was guilty of denying the faith; this debate passes into a discussion of oaths, where Phileas quotes Scripture to support his case against 14. On the early sources see G.D. Kilpatrick, review of P. Bodmer XX, \textit{Theologische Zeitschrift} XXI (1965), 218-220.


swearing. In his affirmation of Christ's divinity, Phileas argues that Christ had no need to say that He was God because His miracles, of which Phileas offers a list, were sufficient testimony. In response to the judge's query as to how it could have been possible for God to be crucified, Phileas says that Christ knew beforehand the suffering and death He was to undergo and submitted voluntarily; mention is also made of predictions in the Scriptures. The beginning of the discussion of Paul's status is marred by lacunae; when one reaches firmer ground, the judge is asking a question as to Paul's being a common man (διώτης) who spoke Aramaic. In reply, Phileas defends Paul's religious eminence and his superiority in speaking Greek. The relative status of Paul and Plato is touched on; once more, however, the text becomes fragmentary. The question of conscience (συνειδησία) is taken up briefly. Phileas then has an opportunity to describe God. He does so in terms of God's creation and by employing various negative epithets, invisible (αόρατον), unmoved (ατρεπτον), incomprehensible (απεριστον); thereafter, the description becomes very fragmentary.

The presiding judge at the fifth hearing is called ο ἡγεμών and Κονλκιανός; he appears to have been the judge at the other hearings as well. Clodius Culcianus is known to have been in office as prefect of Egypt as early as 28 February 303 (five days after the promulgation of Diocletian's first edict against the Christians) and still to have been in office on 29 May 306. His term of office may have extended into 308 at the very latest. Within these limits the date of the martyrdom of Phileas is uncertain. His letter to the Thmuites reflects conditions which must have prevailed after the fourth edict of 304, and the bishop's martyrdom would therefore have been subsequent to that edict.

The Latin Acta go beyond the Greek in adding the appearance of Philoromus, who intervenes on Phileas' behalf, the condemnation of both martyrs, the passage to the place of execution and the execution scene itself. The Latin, on the other hand, begins at a point later than the Greek, viz. the beginning of the hearing which the Apology states to be the fifth. Prior to the appearance of P. Bodmer XX a minority of prominent scholars had expressed doubts as to the historicity of the Latin version. The principal charge was that the Acta were compiled on the basis of Rufinus' translation of Eusebius, in which Rufinus departs substantially from Eusebius' text as we have it. It was

17. Martin's reading πρό Ελλήνωλ, suggesting predictions in Greek sources, was ruled out by E.G. Turner, who read προειμάλτης ('A Passage in the Apologia of Phileas', Journal of Theological Studies n.s. XVII (1966), 404-405).
18. The judge at the first hearing is ὁ ἡγεμών; for the second, third and fourth hearings no reference to the position or name of the judge survives.
argued in reply that, while there are indeed significant similarities between Rufinus and the *Acta*, this could indicate that Rufinus was incorporating matter from a separate hagiographical account available to him, and that this account was an ancestor of the Latin version now extant.\(^{20}\) The publication of the *Apology* injected an important piece of fresh evidence into the debate.

The historical significance of the Greek account has been variously interpreted. Some have called into question its reliability. Martin himself found fault with the introductory narrative: for him the references to violence were hagiographical rhetoric, untrustworthy in themselves and inconsistent with the attitude of Culcianus as Martin found it in the dialogue of the fifth hearing. Nevertheless Martin maintained, with modest qualifications, the reliability of the dialogue, viewing it as a close representation of original records of proceedings in court.\(^{21}\) Unfortunately, his treatment, which was not exhaustive, proved in some respects to be counter-productive. He took the view, for example, that the alleged contradiction between the introduction and the dialogue was a confirmation of the authenticity of the dialogue; it was rejoined that one could draw the opposite conclusion.\(^{22}\) He held that the dialogue was a substantially accurate report preserved for edification and for apologetic purposes (in line with his interpretation of the title *ἀπολογία*, which he took to indicate ‘défense de la doctrine chrétienne’); this did not dissuade some from suspecting that in the compilation of the work theological interests would have taken precedence over regard for precise historical objectivity.\(^{23}\)

The way was open for a wide range of speculations. Claire Préaux suggested that the *Apology* could be a literary composition in dialogue form. In her view, Culcianus’ questions are ‘presque trop pertinentes’, giving Phileas the opportunity for a complete profession of his Christian faith, while the conciliatory attitude of Culcianus is designed to increase the heroism of Phileas. She saw the casting of Culcianus and Phileas as giving the impression of a tragic literary composition comparable with the dialogue of Creon and Antigone.\(^{24}\) Jacques Schwartz considered that Culcianus’ forbearance was a literary invention and suspected that the work could be predominantly a literary composition for purposes of religious edification, a form of catechism.\(^{25}\)

One stumbling-block to such approaches, as Préaux and Schwartz themselves admitted, was the apparent mistake on Culcianus’ part of confusing Paul with

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24. ibid.
25. art. cit.: ‘une sorte de catéchisme par questions et réponses, provenant d’une controverse de type littéraire, qui n’a été conservée que sous cette forme’ (p.438).
Peter in his questions on denial of the faith. One may add that the section on Paul's denying the faith also suggests a lack of literary development: in a deliberately constructed composition one could expect the matter to be treated with more distinctness and greater consequence. Indeed it is the form of the dialogue as a whole which chiefly obstructs theories adducing the content of the dialogue as proof of predominantly literary composition. If the *Apology* reproduces a report of court proceedings the content of the dialogue may be remarkable, but the form is not. Speakers are introduced in the briefest manner. The abbreviated introductory-verb form *ei* which is used in the *Apology* appears as a regular feature in reports of proceedings from the middle of the third century onwards (dominating the full *ennev*) and suggests that P. Bodmer XX could be placed early in the evolution of the text from an original protocol\(^{26}\). The exchanges of the dialogue continue without editorial interruption, except for a brief passage of narrative before the final question and answer.\(^{27}\) The brevity and pointedness of the exchanges, free as they appear to be from literary embellishment and pious sensationalism, together with their life-like quality, lend further support to a view which would class the *Apology* with the Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs (proceedings dated to 17 July 180) and the Acts of Cyprian (proceedings dated to 14 September 258) as possibly the closest of all extant Greek and Latin Acts to primitive court records.\(^{28}\)

On purely formal grounds, therefore, one may suspect with a greater margin for safety that the *Apology* is worthy of substantial consideration as a historical document recording the judicial examination which Phileas underwent. If, however, the historicity of the *Apology* is broadly accepted, one is confronted with the problem of placing Culcianus' attitude in its setting. There are two main questions involved. The first is the allegation that Culcianus' attitude at the fifth hearing contradicts the harsh approach which according to the introduction was taken earlier. In the second place, if an inconsistency exists and the evidence of

26. See R.A. Coles, *Reports of Proceedings in Papyri* (Papyrologica Bruxellensia, 4; Brussels, 1966), pp.44-45. A relevant work unfortunately not available for consultation when this article was written is G. Lanata, *Gli atti dei martiri come documenti processuali* (Studi e testi per un Corpus Iudiciorum, 1; Milan, 1973).

27. There are also two minor expansions where a speaker is introduced in Col. IV, line 5 and Col. IX, lines 16-18.

28. On the latter two Acts see Musurillo, *Christian Martyrs*, p.xxii. Cf. also the Acts of Maximilian (proceedings dated to 295). Coptic martyrologies are notorious for the proportion of fantastic elements which they contain. Exceptional is the Martyrdom of Coluthus, published with translation by E.A.E. Reymond and J.W.B. Barns in *Four Martyrdoms from the Pierpont Morgan Coptic Codices* (Oxford, 1973). This martyrdom includes a relatively unadorned report of court proceedings and is, as the editors have pointed out, in a number of ways comparable with the *Apology*. The date of the proceedings is given in the text as May 304 (Redaction I) or May 305 (Redaction II); the place is given as Antinoopolis (Redaction I) or Shmoun, i.e. Hermopolis Magna (Redaction II).
the introduction is discounted, one needs to establish the relationship between
the allegedly mild picture of Culcianus in the dialogue of the *Apology* and the
severity attributed to him and to the Roman administration in general in other
sources.  

Martin was disposed to maintain a contradiction, reject the evidence of the
introduction and allow the possibility that Eusebius generalized on the basis of
exceptional cases in his lurid descriptions. If Martin's approach were secure it
would mean that the *Apology* falsifies one traditional view of the magnitude of
the Roman administration's repression. But the linchpin of Martin's argument,
the alleged inconsistency, is weak. It is true that in the fifth hearing physical
brutality is not used in an attempt to force Phileas to submit. Culcianus is
dilatory in the fifth hearing, and we find him explicitly evincing a desire to spare
the bishop: he says, for some undisclosed reason, that he is moved in his attitude
by a regard for Phileas' brother and maintains that he is showing consideration
because of Phileas' socio-economic standing. Yet neither lack of brutality nor
Culcianus' dilatoriness need imply inconsistency. The purpose remained the
same as before, to lure Phileas into submission, and possibly thereby to
undermine the obstinacy of other Christians of lesser status in the church.
Nothing but submission (or apparent submission) could save him from the final
penalty. The rigidity of the judicial process was temporarily stayed in its
effects but not mitigated.

The status of the *Apology* as a fourth century statement of Christian
attitudes must remain high whatever the degree of historicity one accords to the
account. If a faithful record, the debate displays a Christian bishop's
combination of high courage and theological acumen as he stands firm in the
face of pagan scepticism and a stern judicial process. If a literary element is
allowed to dominate, the debate remains a valuable idealization, at theological
and psychological levels, of an instructed Christian's posture during persecution.
In either case the *Apology* is an exhibition of firmly held beliefs at which

29. See Eusebius' judgment of Culcianus, *H.E.* ix. 11.
30. Reymond and Bams, *Four Martyrdoms*, considered that, by contrast with Arianus,
praeses of the Thebaid, in the Martyrdom of Coluthus, Culcianus 'is seen in *Phileas* as a
brusque and peremptory inquisitor' (p.14), though clearly not displaying the exaggerated
villainy characteristic of judges in the 'epic' martyrdoms (p.15). The abrupt form of the
interrogation in the *Apology* may, however, be largely referred to the compiler's source
material.
31. We know nothing about Phileas' brother except that, according to the Latin *Acta* (§8),
he was one of the 'aduocati'. He could well have made a plea for Phileas between the fourth
32. Cf. the conciliatory treatment which Apollonius receives at the hands of the proconsul
Perennis in the Martyrdom of Apollonius (proceedings in Rome, dated to 180-185; text and
311-312.
33. For cases of 'apparent submission' see Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palaestinae* i 4.
persecution struck, and as such deserves the closest scrutiny. The points of theological interest which are touched on are numerous and their pedigree has not yet been adequately explored. This direction of study may prove to be one of the most interesting ways ahead in the elucidation of the Apology and may show itself to have a significant bearing on the vexed question of historicity.

It is a misfortune that progress is impeded to some extent by deficiencies in the available editions of the text. C.H. Roberts and E.G. Turner have proposed important emendations of Martin’s diplomatic text, as has J. Schwartz. Martin’s treatment of lacunae is open to improvements since he failed at times to keep strictly to the spaces available. A supplementary booklet which was issued with the original edition, Apologie de Philèas, évêque de Thmouis. Essai de reconstitution du texte original grec, could further mislead the reader. It included ‘corrected’ spellings and highly speculative restorations (even whole sentences entirely invented on the basis of the Latin version) and gave no indication of doubtful readings. This procedure had unfortunate effects at an early stage: the text of the Apology published by Halkin received much of the Essai, including ‘corrected’ spellings, without comment, apart from a covering foot-note, ‘Je m’en tiens régulièrement aux restitutions et corrections de M. Martin’.

The problems of Halkin’s edition are compounded by the admission into the text or apparatus of additional conjectural emendations and supplements correcting the scribe and filling in lacunae without observing limitations of space. Herbert Musurillo furnished a re-edition, departing not infrequently from the diplomatic text of Martin, in The Acts of the Christian Martyrs (Oxford, 1972), yet even his text and apparatus require review. Uncertainties also arise concerning the reconstitution of the actual papyrus. Three pages of text are intact, but ten others have been re-assembled with varying degrees of completeness from a large number of fragments, while a residue of thirty fragments was left unplaced by Martin. One consequence of the confusion is salutary: the investigator is driven back to the set of photographs accompanying the original edition of P. Bodmer XX.

Clearly the importance of P. Bodmer XX in a variety of areas, historical,
hagiographical, theological, textual, is considerable and study of it deserves to be placed on a sounder footing by a further clarification of readings and by more extensive attention to comparative material.38

38. Turner sounded a warning note: 'Whether Culcianus really asked these questions at the trial or they are put into his mouth it is premature, as A. Momigliano tells me, to discuss until the Acta Martyrum of the fourth century are completely surveyed' ('A Passage in the Apologia', 405). The so-called Acta Alexandrinorum (cf. H. Musurillo, The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs, Acta Alexandrinorum, Oxford, 1954) provide material of a pagan nature for the study of the development of martyrological literature from records of court proceedings.