

*DIE URFASSUNGEN DER MARTYRIA
POLYCARPI ET PIONII UND DAS
CORPUS POLYCARPIANUM*
VOLUME 1: EDITIONES CRITICAE,
VOLUME 2: TEXTGESCHICHTE UND
REKONSTRUKTION: POLYKARP,
IGNATIUS UND DER REDAKTOR
PSEUDO-PIONIUS, UNTERSUCHUNGEN
ZUR ANTIKEN LITERATUR UND
GESCHICHTE 116 A,B

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These volumes are indicative of the recent upsurge of interest in martyrs and martyrdom in the ancient church. They focus on the martyrdoms of the two Smyrnan presbyters, Polycarp and Pionius, and the different versions of their fate in the so-called *Corpus Polycarpianum*. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is of particular significance as it is perhaps the earliest example of Christian martyrological literature.

Volume one briefly traces in the introduction the history of research and the significance of these writings in reconstructing the history of the ancient church (1–4, this is where Zwierlein’s focus lies throughout). Zwierlein summarises as follows:



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Der Urheber des *Corpus Polycarpianum*, der sich selbst im Anhang zum *Martyrium Polycarpi* das Pseudonym “Pionios” beilegt, hat vermutlich um 400 eine Sammlung von “Polykarp-Schriften” zusammengestellt (darunter auch das *Martyrium Polycarpi* und das *Martyrium Pionii*) und diese in eine von ihm selbst verfasste Polykarpvita integriert bzw. um sie herum gruppiert. Er trägt die Verantwortung für eine große Zahl von Interpolationen, die wir heute mühsam aus den einst im *Corpus* zusammengeschlossenen, später teils individuell, teils im Verbund überlieferten Texten wieder auszusondern haben. Aber schon lange vor seiner Zeit waren die Martyrientexte (jedenfalls das *Martyrium Polycarpi*) in großem Umfang redigiert worden. Die vielen Unsicherheiten in den Sachfragen...sind eng mit diesen schwierigen Überlieferungsverhältnissen verbunden (2).

Of particular importance is the comprehensive use of the Old Armenian version (known since its publication in 1888). It provides a Syrian version of the Greek text of Eusebius, which is to be dated around 400 AD. It provides a short version that comes very close to the original version of the *Martyrium Polycarpi*, which, in turn, comes close to the first edition of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius dated around 295 AD. The Greek versions constitute longer versions, which have been supplemented with various additions by redactors. The same is the case for the *Martyrium Pionii*.

Part one of the first volume consists of critical textual editions of the account to the martyrdom of St. Polycarp (the reconstructed original Greek version) – including an English translation, p. 6–11, a critical edition of the *various recensiones*, pp. 16–44, and the Old Armenian text with a German translation and so far as available, the parallel passages from Eusebius, pp. 46–66. It is not clear why the translation is in German and not in English.

Part two is devoted to the *Martyrium Pionii*. Again it offers the reconstructed original Greek version with English translation, pp. 68–77, a critical edition of the various Greek *recensiones*, pp. 82–114, the Old Armenian version from the fifth century with a German translation, 116–135, and the later *Passio Pionii* (*Versio Latina auctore anonymo saec. V*), pp. 136–171. This is followed by a critical discussion of the tradition process, literary quality, place and time of origin of the late ancient *Passio Pionii* (172–194). After a survey of the manuscript tradition, issues of literary form, time and place of origin, Zwierlein examines the echoes of late ancient rhetorical instruction (Sallust, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca tragicus); the cultural milieu of Southern Gallia determined by Cassianus; Faustus Reiensis and the Pelagian position regarding guilt and the freedom of will; the significance of the *Carmen Paschale* of Sedulius as a possible *terminus post quem*; and the tension between the literary claims of the text and faithfulness in translation.

It is welcome to have the different Greek versions and the Armenian version together in one volume. The text critical discussion is demanding and addressed to fellow specialists.

Volume two, entitled *Textual history and reconstruction: Polycarpus, Ignatius and the Redactor Pseudo-Pionius*, is a mixed bag of detailed and highly technical

analysis of the texts, their process of tradition and the various historical and theological issues which they raise. His discussion includes the dating of the death of Polycarpus (around 161–168 AD); issues involved in the reconstruction of the original versions; differences between the various versions; the origin and development of a *Corpus Polycarpianum*; and the dating of Polycarp's letter to the Philippians and of the letters of Ignatius. The volume finishes with detailed indexes of scripture references, early Christian literature, and subjects. It lacks a concluding synthesis of the many detailed observations.

The volumes provide an interesting case-study of the living tradition and development of early accounts of martyrdoms over a period of three to four centuries. It is instructive to analyse what material was added, at what stage in the process of tradition and to examine the motivation for such additions (e.g. references to Jews as witnesses of the martyrdom and their relationship with the Gentile persecutors, see the sections “Pionius über die *lapsi* und die Juden”, 93–96; “Das Zusammenspiel zwischen Teufel und Juden”, 200–202; “Judenpolemik und ‘Antisemitismus’”, 252–255). In comparison with other recent studies of this literature and the questions it raises, Zwierlein's approach is at best, traditional. He barely interacts with research based on the methods of comparative religious studies (with their recent emphasis on regional and local particularity), sociological insights, the mechanisms of constructions of identity and the rhetorical functions of such texts for the community. Also, their theological contribution and intention do not sufficiently become clear. But to be fair, Zwierlein has provided an excellent tool for scholars who wish to pursue these issues further. For the larger background to ancient Christianity in Asia minor, see F.R. Trombley, “Christianity in Asia Minor: Observations on the Epigraphy”, in M.R. Salzman, W.A. Adler (eds.), *The Cambridge history of religions in the ancient world – Volume II: From the Hellenistic age to late antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 341–368.

Other recent volumes on the martyr traditions of the ancient church are, for example, H.R. Seeliger, W. Wischmeyer (eds.), *Märtyrerliteratur: herausgegeben, übersetzt, kommentiert und eingeleitet*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 172 (Berlin, München, Boston: de Gruyter, 2015; see in particular, the instructive introductory essay “Zu Inhalten, Formen und Gestaltung der Märtyrerliteratur”, 1–45) and S. Fuhrmann, R. Grundmann (eds.), *Martyriumsvorstellungen in Antike und Mittelalter*, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 80 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012).