

ELS ROSE

INTRODUCTION

The lives of the apostles after Pentecost are described in the books of the New Testament only in part. Details of the apostles' missionary wanderings to the remote corners of the world are found in writings not included in the biblical canon, which we know as the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. In the early Middle Ages, these originally Greek writings were translated and rewritten in Latin and circulated under a variety of titles, of which *Virtutes apostolorum* is the most commonly accepted in contemporary scholarship.¹ These texts became immensely popular. They were copied in numerous manuscripts, both as a comprehensive collection with a chapter for each apostle and as individual texts, echoing the needs of monastic and other religious communities that used these texts to celebrate the apostles as saints.

The First Summer School on Christian Apocryphal Literature (Strasbourg, 2012) concentrated on the transmission of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles in the Latin world. The main aim of the Summer School is to make students acquainted with the state of the art as well as with the most recent developments in methodology and approach. These learning aims are reflected by the contributions collected here by way of proceedings.

Concerning the approach to apocryphal studies in general, the articles in the volume follow the idea of Christian apocryphal literature as a vast literary continent (Picard), where the composition and rewriting of texts related in one way or another to biblical persons, events or genres (Junod) is a continuous process, which covers not only the early centu-

¹ Cf. M. GEERARD, *Clavis Apocryphorum Novi Testamenti* (Corpus Christianorum), Turnhout, 1992, and see the article by Els Rose elsewhere in this collection.

ries of Christianity but also the Middle Ages, and has not stopped to develop until the present day (Gounelle).² Rémi Gounelle offers a state of the art that builds on the new approaches to apocryphal literature developed by the group of editors linked to Corpus Christianorum, Series Apocryphorum. Gounelle presents a definition of apocrypha, characterizes the writings that are collected under this umbrella and focuses on the memorial character of these texts as well as their quality of being ‘founding texts’. Gounelle dismisses the idea that the apocrypha were ‘popular texts’ by revealing the multiple layers of meaning which this literature often comprises. The article is completed with a discussion of formal features and a classification of the development of Christian apocryphal literature in five phases.

With regard to methodology, the authors of the present collection put the manuscripts central, which is particularly reflected in the articles by Els Rose and Maarten Prot. While many early Christian apocrypha, the early medieval *Virtutes apostolorum* included, were edited in print in the early modern period without much explicit attention for the manuscript context, Rose and Prot advocate a return to the manuscripts in order to understand the texts in their contexts of use. The search for a reconstructed ‘Ur-text’ is in the first place very difficult in these texts that are marked by frequent use (which becomes visible in corrections, additions, variants and changes): each manuscript offers its own text. More important is the question whether a reconstructed Ur-text is useful at all if we want to know more about the way these sources were used by specific medieval audiences.

Els Rose investigates the *Virtutes apostolorum* in their manuscript context. The collection as a whole reflects an increasing interest in and importance of the apostles as Christian saints, both as individuals and as a group. The texts themselves, particularly the prologues that precede many of the narratives, give us information on how and why the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles were rewritten and/or translated into Latin in the early Middle Ages. The variety in the presentation of the individual texts in the manuscripts gives rise to a re-assessment of the early modern approach to the Latin apocryphal Acts as a collection, attributable to ‘Pseudo-Abdias’, and justifies a shift in approach: the manuscripts do not support the idea of a coherent collection, just as little as the authorship of (Pseudo-)Abdias. Both the liturgical character of a great number of

² See for more detailed bibliographical references the article by Rémi Gounelle in this collection.

manuscripts in which the *Virtutes apostolorum* are found and the presence of marks of liturgical use in almost all of them ask for a more detailed investigation of the role of the *Virtutes apostolorum* in medieval liturgy, and the reception of these texts in liturgical compositions such as prayers for Mass and chants for the Liturgy of Hours.

Maarten Prot explores the details of the handwritten transmission on the level of texts and presents two principles that enable the establishment of a network of manuscripts on the basis of variants. Prot takes his point of departure in the assumption that variants in the manuscripts are not necessarily incidents and mistakes, but can also be conscious acts of rewriting. In that light, the addition of textual markers that make the text more explicit seems to represent a tendency of innovation. In the presentation of his findings he zooms in on one text in particular, the *Virtutes Bartholomaei*.

A particular methodology is presented in the article by Evina Steinová, where she uses the occurrence of biblical references in the *Virtutes apostolorum* in order to explore the origin of the texts. For this analysis, she uses a model developed by her to chart various degrees of referentiality. Steinová studies the occurrence of biblical excerpts and references in the *Virtutes Petri* and *Virtutes Pauli* in order to come to a more precise indication of time and place of origin of these texts. Both the quantity of biblical references, the particular Bible translations that are echoed by them and the specific character of the third source through which biblical references entered the *Virtutes apostolorum* (viz. the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*) indicate an origin of the texts on Peter and Paul in Italy between the fifth and the ninth century.

Related to the topic of Latin rewritings of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles but dealing with a different period is Roald Dijkstra's article on the representation of the apostles in early Christian art and poetry. Dijkstra also concentrates on a different object of study: not the handwritten transmission, but works of art and poetry that portray the apostles in the centuries following the closure of the biblical canon are his main sources. Dijkstra presents innovative forms of both poetry and pictorial art deployed by Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries that focus on the apostles. Both in poetry and in art the apostles are presented as a group, whereas Peter and Paul are often singled out *pars pro toto*. Apocryphal material is present in poetry but less so in the pictorial arts.

The final part of the present collection consists of the contributions of participants in the Summer School, who studied the early modern printed editions of the *Virtutes apostolorum* in the *Bibliothèque nationale*

et universitaire de Strasbourg. The assignment was to compare the printed editions with a selection of sections in a ninth-century manuscript. The results are reported by two groups of participants: Maïeul Rouquette and Maarten Taveirne next to Evina Steinová, Olivia Adankpo and Damien Labadie. The reports both point in the same direction, providing insight into the methods of early modern scholars and the liberties they took in their editorial work with regard to their medieval sources. The reports also give insight into the methods central to ISCAL and the way of collaboration between teachers and students as well as between students among themselves.

The collection of articles is provided with a separate bibliography that goes beyond the apocryphal Acts or their Latin transmission and deals with Christian apocryphal literature in its broadest sense. The bibliography, compiled by Rémi Gounelle, is divided in four parts: bibliographical tools, main editions and anthologies, studies on Christian apocryphal literature and works that deal with the reception of this literature.