

Meet the Apostolic Fathers



What Does the Term 'Apostolic Fathers' Mean?

A dual meaning – a group of people and a collection of texts.

- Not the fathers of the Apostles.
- Not predecessors of the Apostles.
- Rather, writings attributed to leading Christian figures in the generations *after* the apostles.

Collections of Writings

The Codex



Codex Sinaiticus



Nag Hammadi Codices



When Did Individual Texts Become Collections?

- The New Testament Gospels?
- The Letters of Paul?
- The New Testament?
- The Apostolic Fathers?

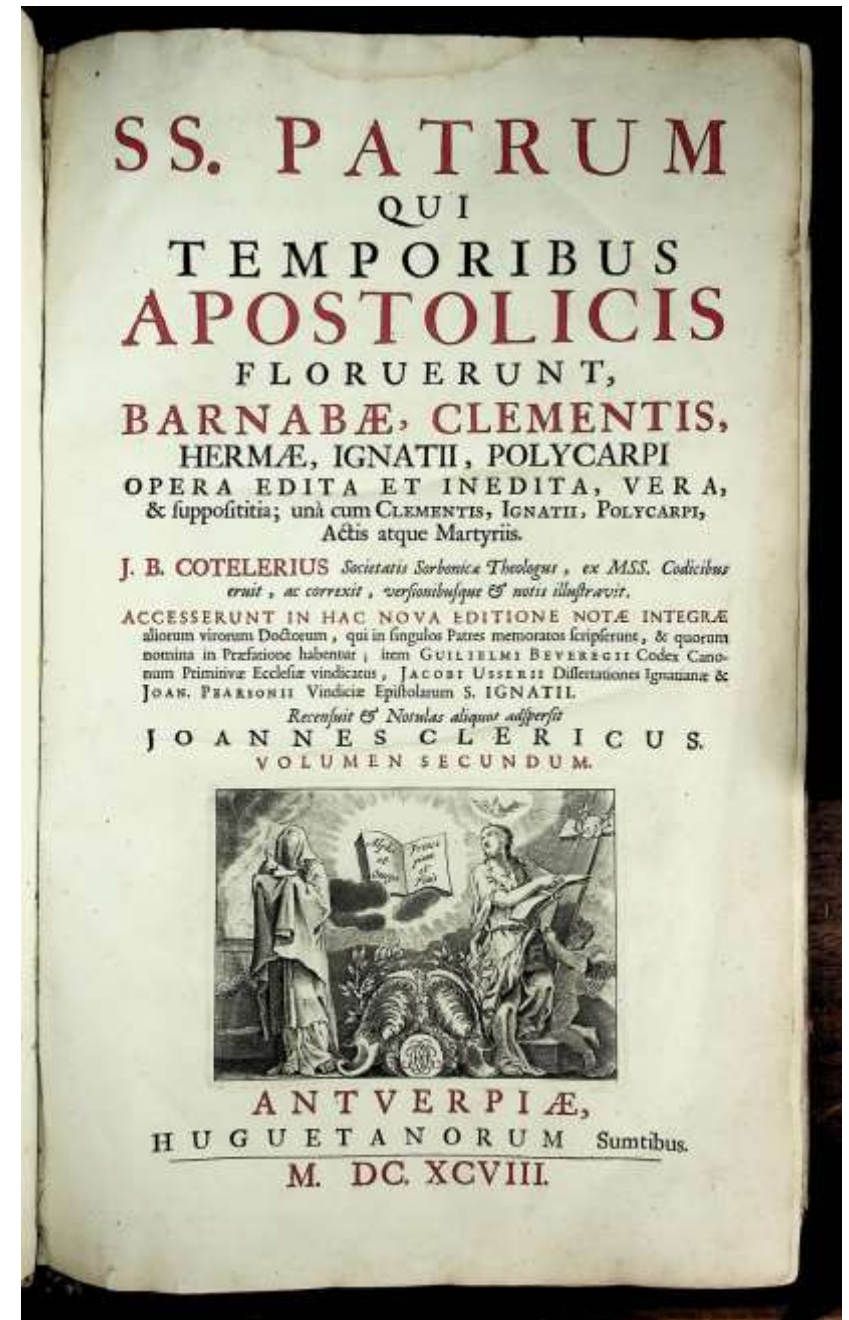
First Published Editions of the Apostolic Fathers

- J.B. Cotelier (1672)

Notice the title:

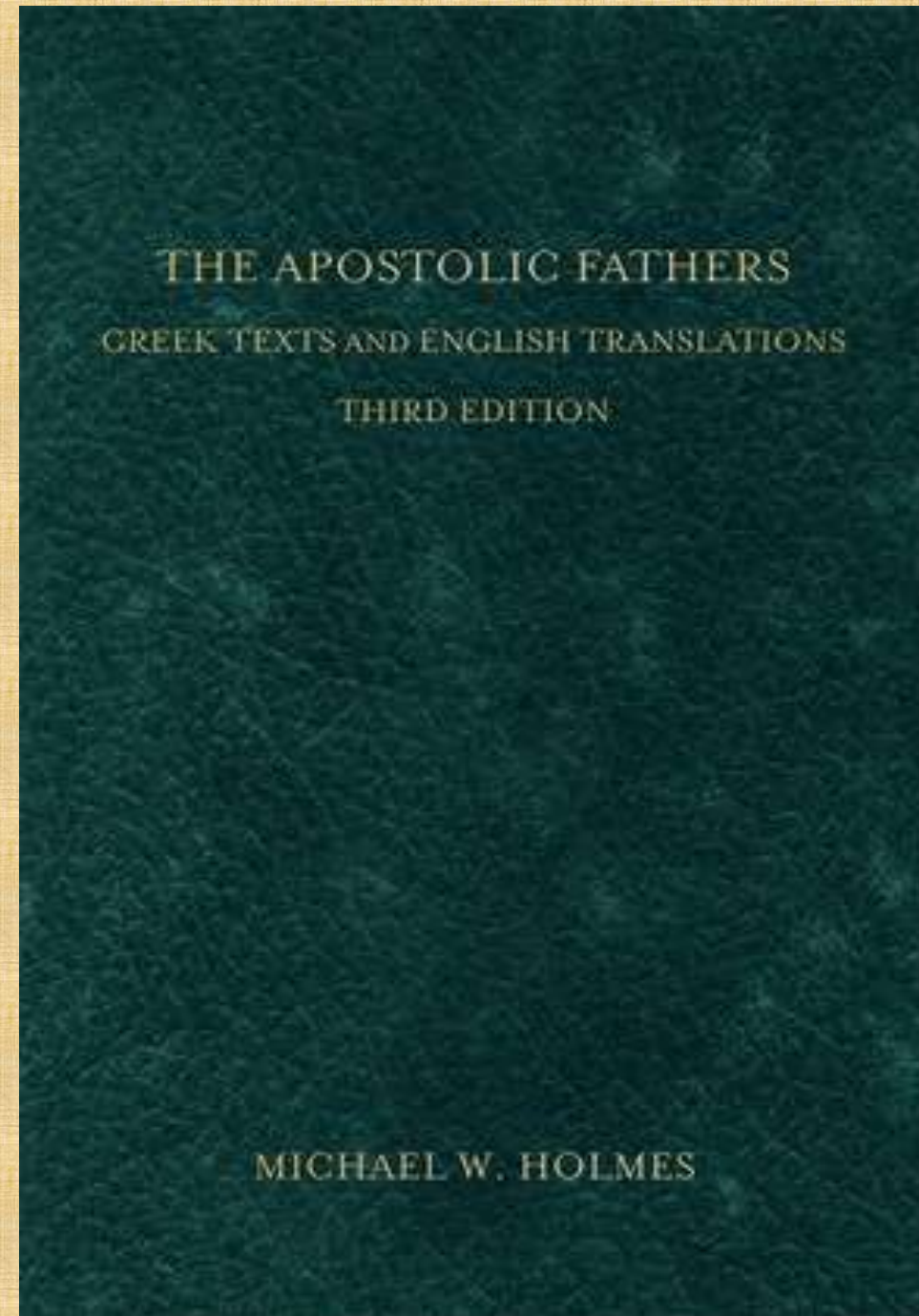
Holy Fathers who Flourished in the time of the Apostles

The figures include Barnabas, Clement, Hermas, Ignatius, and Polycarp.



Current Standard Edition

- Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, third edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007).



The Collection of Texts

1 Clement

2 Clement

Seven Letters of Ignatius

Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians

Martyrdom of Polycarp

Didache

Epistle of Barnabas

Shepherd of Hermas

Epistle to Diognetus

Fragment of Quadratus

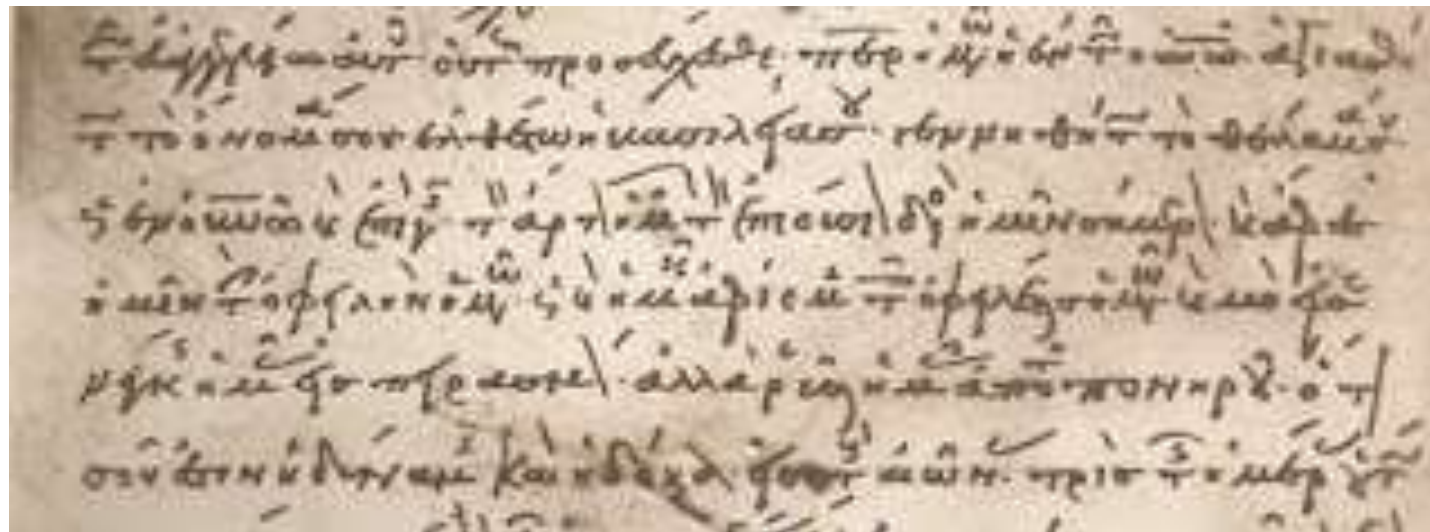
Fragments of Papias (Traditions of the Elders).

Codex Hierosolymitanus (H)

Discovered in 1873 in the Jerusalem Monastery of the Most Holy Sepulchre in Constantinople.

It was written in A.D. 1056 by a scribe called Leo.

It contains the Didache, Epistle of Barnabas, 1 Clement, 2 Clement, long recension of the Letters of Ignatius, and a list of biblical books.



1 Clement – Those Troublesome Corinthians!



A letter from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth.

The name Clement is found nowhere in the text of the letter.

The Corinthians have displaced the older long term leaders.

A dissension or schism because 'one or two people rebelled against the presbyters' (1 Clem 47.6).

The Second Letter of Clement

Not by Clement, not a letter, and not a writing by the author of 1 Clement. Apart from that the title is correct!

How did this writing get its name?

What type of text is it?

Ignatius of Antioch

Seven authentic letters written during a short period while being transported to Rome for execution.

Key themes include:

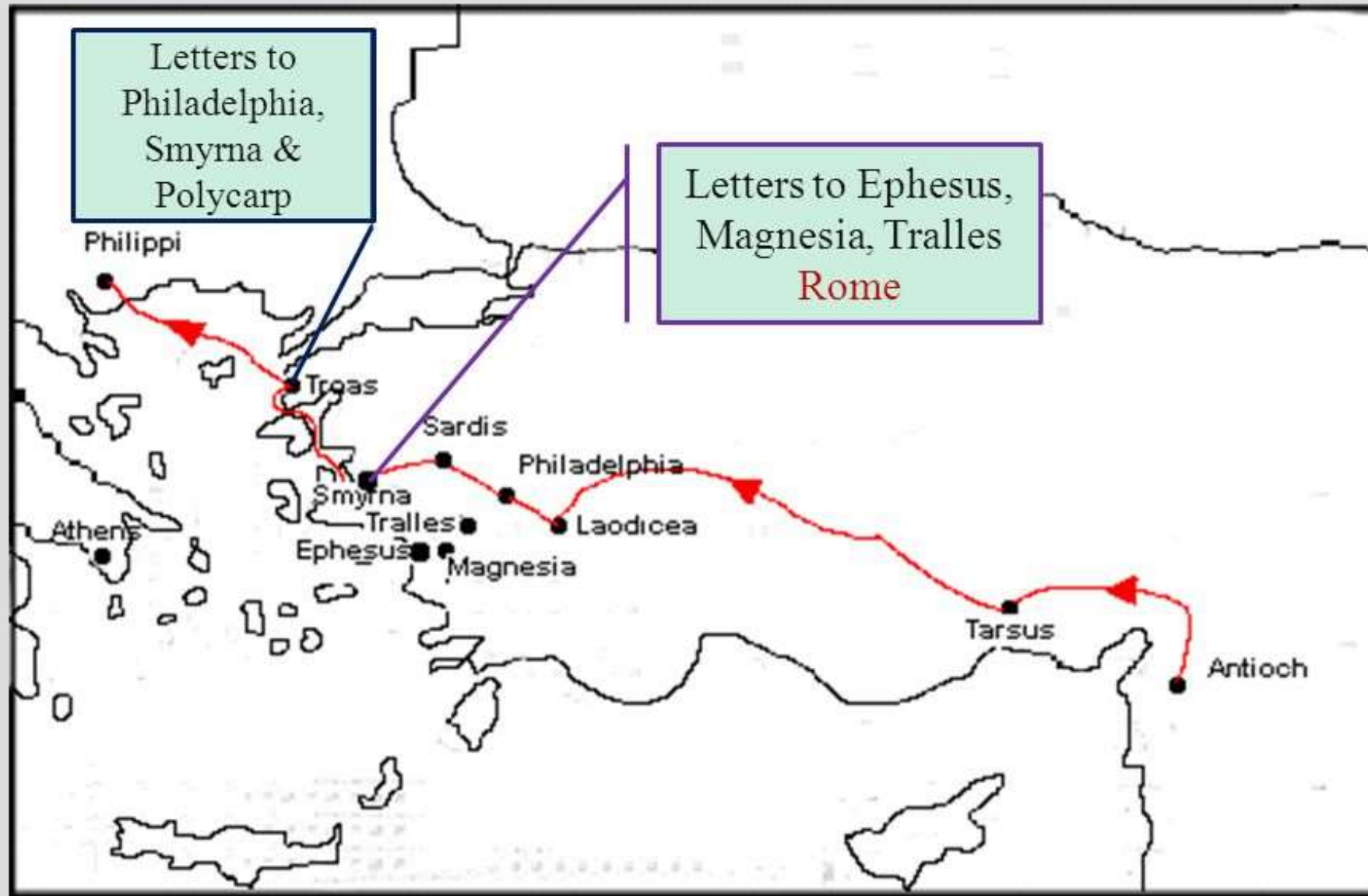
Unity in churches.

Episcopal leadership and the threefold pattern of ministry.

Centrality of the Eucharist.

Refuting what Ignatius views as false christologies and deviant patterns of belief.

Possible Route of Ignatius's Journey to Rome via Smyrna & Troas



Ignatius the Martyr

I am writing to all the churches and am insisting to everyone that I die for God of my own free will—unless you hinder me. I implore you: do not be unseasonably kind to me. Let me be food for the wild beasts, through whom I can reach God. I am God's wheat, and I am being ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, so that I may prove to be pure bread.

Better yet, coax the wild beasts, so that they may become my tomb and leave nothing of my body behind, lest I become a burden to anyone once I have fallen asleep. Then I will truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world will no longer see my body. Pray to the Lord on my behalf, so that through these instruments I may prove to be a sacrifice to God.

(Ign. *Rom.* 4.1-2)

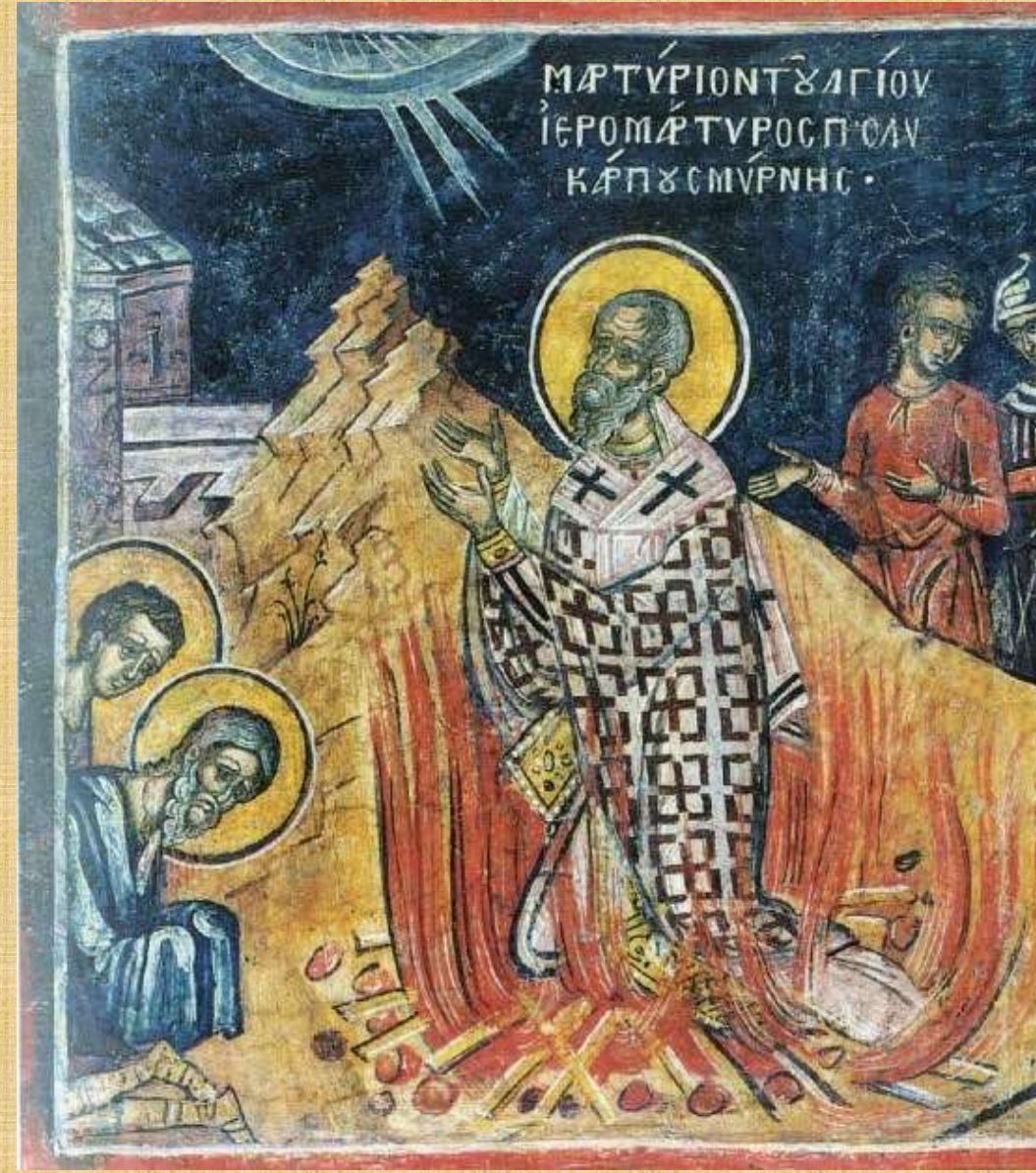


Polycarp of Smyrna



Polycarp (A.D. 69?-155/156)

- Church leaders in Smyrna
- Met Ignatius when he journeyed to Rome
- Wrote to the Philippians
- Travelled to Rome to discuss the Quartodeciman controversy with Anicetus bishop of Rome.
- Irenaeus recalls hearing Polycarp teach.
- Polycarp was put to death by being burnt alive.



Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians

Sole surviving writing from Polycarp.

It responds to a letter from the Philippians.

Cites maybe 8 or 9 of Paul's letters, as well as 1 Peter and perhaps 1 Clement.

Deals with the improper behaviour of the presbyter Valens (Pol. *Phil.* 11.1-4).

Does Polycarp know Ignatius is dead (Pol. *Phil.* 1.1; 9.1), or not (Pol. *Phil.* 13.2)?

Is this one letter, or two (Pol. *Phil.* 1-12 and 13-14).

Martyrdom of Polycarp

Written as a letter from church at Smyrna to church at Philomelium.

Earliest written martyrdom account outside the NT.

Polycarp killed Feb 22 (maybe 23), but which year?

Eusebius – A.D. 167, but Statius Quadratus is proconsul around A.D. 156.

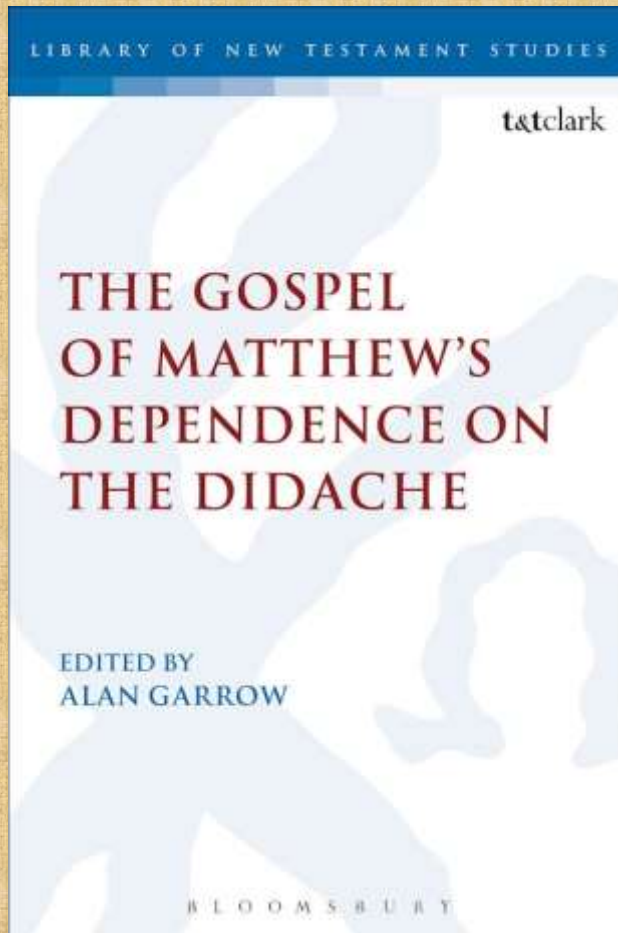
No voluntary martyrdom encouraged – case of Quintus (Mart. Pol. 4).

Material in Mart. Pol. 21 and 22 added later.

Exemplarity – suffering rightly according to God's will.

The Didache

Over to the expert!



Early Christian Instruction

Two Ways of Life

How to baptize

How to perform the Eucharist

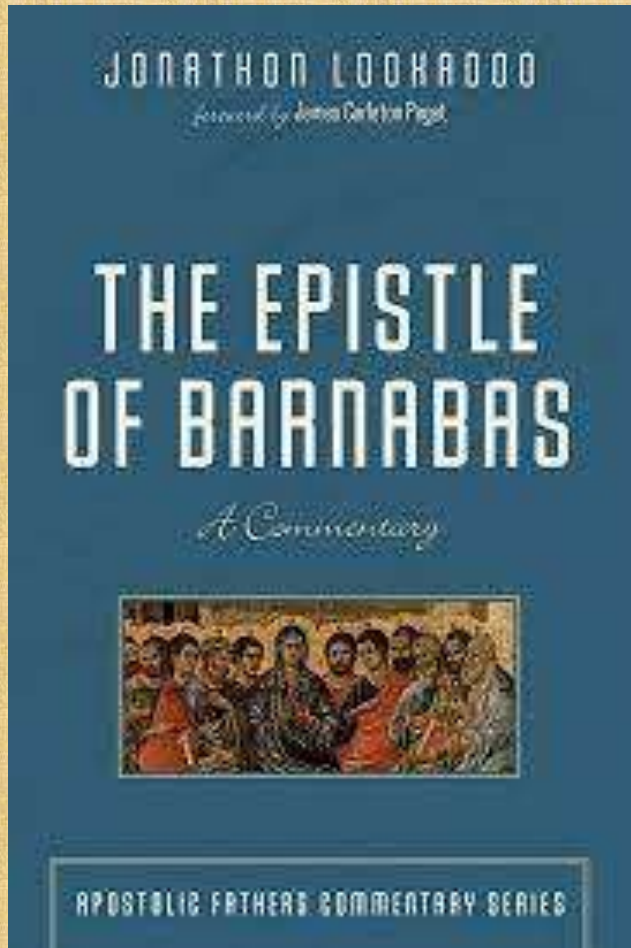
Treatment of Itinerant Teachers

The Epistle of Barnabas

Strongly critical of Judaism.

Jewish scriptures are actually all about Jesus.

Israel lost the covenant because of the apostasy with the golden calf (Exod 32).



The Epistle of Barnabas

Date: Usually stated as between A.D. 70-132.

- Finally, I will also speak to you about the temple, and how those wretched people went astray and set their hope on the building, as though it were God's house, and not on their God who created them.
- For they, almost like the heathen, consecrated him by means of the temple. But what does the Lord say in abolishing it? Learn! "Who measured heaven with the span of his hand, or the earth with his palm? Was it not I, says the Lord? Heaven is my throne, and the earth is a footstool for my feet. What kind of house will you build for me, or what place for me to rest?" You now know that their hope was in vain.
- Furthermore, again he says: "Behold, those who tore down this temple will build it themselves."
- This is happening now. For because they went to war, it was torn down by their enemies, and now the very servants of their enemies will rebuild it. (Barn 16.1-4)

The Shepherd of Hermas

Structure of the Shepherd

Five visions (chaps 1-25)

Twelve Commandments (chaps 26-49)

Ten Similitudes/Parables (chaps 50-114)

The Shepherd of Hermas



Longest text among the AFs.

Piety based on observing commandments and self-control.

Refers to 'the spirit' in a variety of ways.

The Spirit or even angels carry out functions usually attributed to Christ.

The Fragment of Quadratus

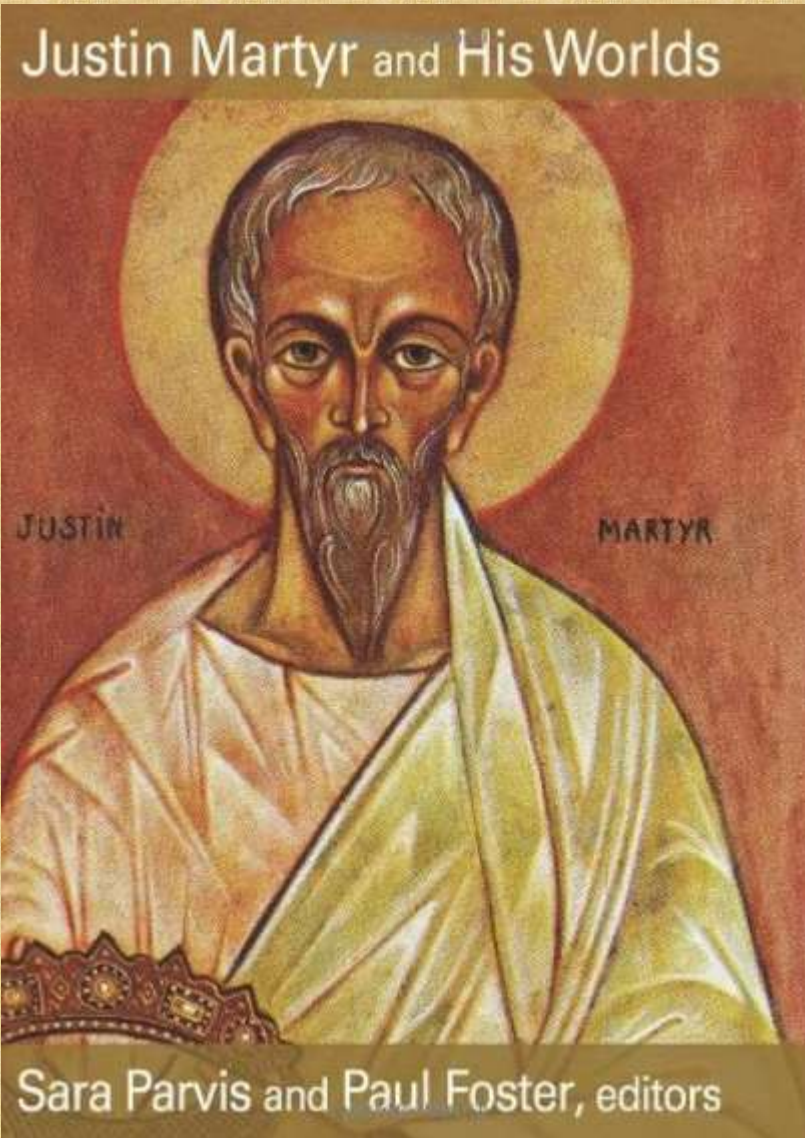
The text:

He shows his early date by what he reveals in his own utterances:

- ‘But the works of our Saviour were always present, for they were true – those who were healed, those who were raised from the dead, who were not only seen when healed and raised, but were always present – and not just while the Saviour was here, but even when he had gone they remained for a long time, so that some of them survived even to our own time.’

Such a person was he. Also Aristides, a man of faith and committed to our religion, like Quadratus left an apology, on behalf of the faith, addressed to Hadrian. His writing, too, is still preserved among most people. (Eusebius, *H.E.* 4.3).

The Apologists – an aside



Quadratus and Diognetus are apologetic writing. An Apologia is a writing providing a defence of the faith.

Other notable apologists include

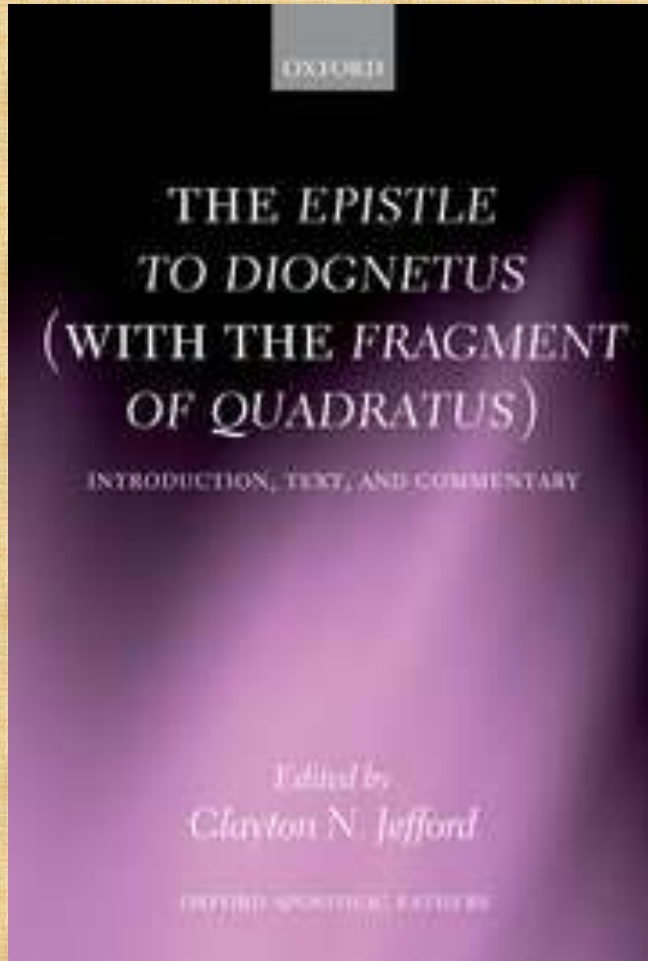
Justin Martyr

Athenagoras of Athens

Theophilus of Antioch

Origen

The Epistle of Diognetus



Text discovered in Constantinople around 1436.

Now no text and no context.

Manuscript destroyed in Franco-Prussian war (1870). The Strasbourg library caught fire.

Papias of Hierapolis

His major work was Λογίων Κυριακῶν Ἐξηγήσις – *The Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord*, written in five volumes. This work no longer exists – apart from a few citations in later authors.

Papias may have lived ca. A.D. 60-130.

Irenaeus states: he was “an ancient man who was a hearer of John and a companion of Polycarp.”



Image from the Nuremberg Chronicle

Papias of Hierapolis

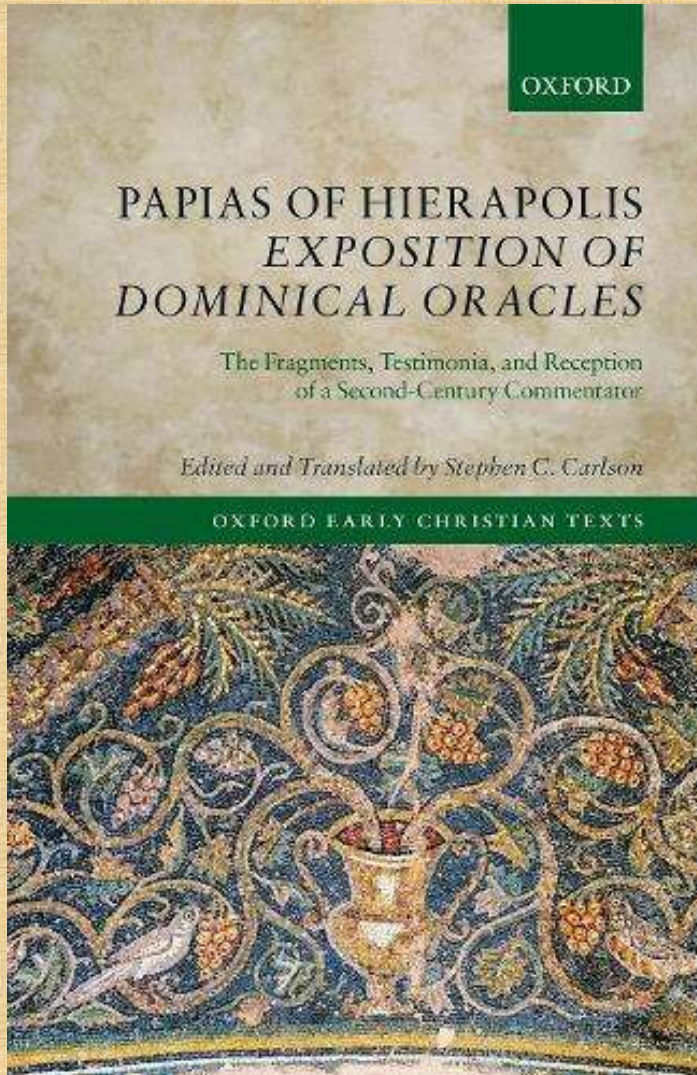
Hunting the Fragments

Carlson splits the evidence between fragments and testimonia.

He identifies:

16 Fragments

98 Testamonia



Further Reading

