

Martyrdom Recensions: Abbreviated or Expanded?

When faced with multiple recensions of a text, critics try to assign priority to one version over the others. Far from a pedantic or pointless exercise, establishing a hierarchy can shed light on the history of a text's uses and meaning. The editor's task, however, becomes much more difficult when texts are anonymous, cannot be dated, or are not externally referenced. Nevertheless, historical, literary, and philological criteria can still be used to reconstruct a plausible sequence of texts.

Because they are often unattributed and undateable, martyrdom accounts offer a prime opportunity to explore the challenges associated with multiple recensions. Through a close study of two different sets of martyrdom accounts – those of Justin Martyr and his companions and those of Carpus and his companions – this paper challenges the teleological assumption that the shortest text is the earliest. In both cases, philological and structural details can be used to explicate the relationship between different versions. There are no grounds to declare the shortest version of the *Acts of Justin Martyr* the earliest as some have done (e.g. Lazzati, 1956; Musurillo, 1972; Bisbee, 1983), and neither of the short recensions of Carpus' martyrdom clearly has priority over the other (*contra* Moss, 2010).

These different recensions, themselves evidence of the lively literary tradition surrounding *martyria*, raise the important question of why extensive changes were made to such texts in the first place. A full historical understanding of martyrdom accounts will appreciate not just the *realia* to be gleaned from the earliest document, but also the changes and adaptations that such texts endured over the centuries. The paper concludes by considering literary developments in both martyrdom traditions and suggesting some reasons for both abridgement and expansion in different contexts, including the addition of epilogues (Halkin, 1964), epitomization in

calendrical martyrologies (Burkitt, 1909), and expansion in the Byzantine recension of Symeon Metaphrastes (Hogel, 2002). For all their problems as historical documents, the many recensions of martyrdom accounts offer a vexing window into the literary and religious practices of late antiquity and beyond.

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