

Now, in response to the question I started answering a few days ago, I discuss the earliest account we have of the martyrdom of Peter. It is an odd account, and not widely known. Here is what I say about it in my book Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene.

Peter as Martyr

The death of Peter by execution is already alluded to in the Gospel of John - which evidently, then, had been written after the event occurred. As Jesus tells Peter after the resurrection:

When you were younger, you girded yourself and walked wherever you wanted; but when you grow old, you will reach out your hands and another will bind you, and lead you where you do not want to go. (21:18)

The author concludes this quotation by noting "He said this to signify the kind of death he would experience to glorify God."

It is clear that Peter is being told that he will be executed (he won't die of natural causes), and that this will be the death of a martyr (by it he will "glorify God"). Some interpreters have thought that the reference is more specific than that: that the author is indicating that Peter will be crucified. The argument is that the text speaks of the immobilization of the hands, which may refer to being nailed, or tied, to a cross. Such an interpretation is possible, but it should be pointed out that the binding of the hands appears to occur before Peter is to be led off to be executed. And so the passage may simply refer to a martyrdom (by any means) yet to come.

In any event, by the end of the first and into the second century it was widely known among Christians that ...

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