

This is the second of my two posts on the Gospel of Peter, and in some ways it is the more important one. Here I talk about what we knew about the Gospel, before it was discovered, from the writings of the ancient church fathers. One of these discussions in particular will provide us with the information I'm heading for, of why the Gospel was not accepted into the canon of the New Testament. (It shows only a single instance of a debate about it, but the terms of the debate are instructive.)

These comments come from the "Introduction" to the Gospel that I wrote for the new translation and edition of the early apocryphal Gospels, that I produced with my colleague Zlatko Plese.

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The third-century Origen is the first patristic author to mention a Gospel allegedly written by Jesus' disciple Simon Peter. Origen indicates that the book may have spoken of Jesus' "brothers" as sons of Joseph from a previous marriage ([Commentary on Matthew 10.17](#)). It is not clear that Origen had actually read the book: nothing that we now know indicates that any such story was in it, and Origen also states that the information may instead have come from a "book of James"-presumably a reference to what is now called the Proto-Gospel of James, a book that does identify Jesus' brothers in this way. The next church father to mention a Gospel of Peter is the fourth-century "father of church history," Eusebius, who twice numbers the book among writings not accepted by the church as Scripture ([Church History](#), 3. 3. 2; 3. 25. 6). On one other occasion, Eusebius discusses the book at some length, in order to show why it had been excluded from consideration from the canon.

The story involves Serapion, a ...

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