

I received a request recently about one of the “Apostolic Fathers.” This term does not refer to just any of the post-canonical writers of early Christianity, but to a specific group of ten (or eleven, depending on how you count) authors who were later considered “authoritative” in some sense by proto-orthodox thinkers, but were believed to have been writing after the NT period. They include letters by Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna, and texts called 1 and 2 Clement, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Martyrdom of Polycarp, the Didache, the Shepherd of Hermas, the letter to Diognetus, and the fragments of Papias and Quadratus.

This is one of the most understudied corpora of early Christianity, and I’ve been intensely interested in the texts for well over twenty years. About fifteen years ago I produced a new translation of them for the Loeb Classical Library (2 vols., Harvard University Press, 2004), including versions of the Greek (and a bit of Latin) texts, my translation, introductions, and a few notes.

Many lay folk have never read the writings of this corpus - or even heard of them! But there are some fascinating, and important, parts to them.

In any event, here was the simple request

REQUEST

I would love to read your thoughts on the dating of 1 Clement.

RESPONSE

To make sense of what I want to say about when 1 Clement was written, I need first to explain what the text is, and what we can say about its author. This will take a couple of posts. First, an overview of the text. I have taken this from my Introduction in the Loeb edition

The “First Letter of Clement” is a misnomer, as no other letter from the author survives: “Second Clement,” which is not a letter, comes from a different hand (see Introduction to Second Clement). Moreover, the present letter does not claim to be written by Clement, who, in fact, is never mentioned in its text.

Overview of the Letter

The letter is addressed by the church of Rome to the church of Corinth, and is written in order to ...

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