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Christianity may have proclaimed a message of peace, but it met with violence right from the beginning. Its founder died on the cross, Peter and Paul were executed as well, and the subsequent period saw so many deaths for the sake of the faith that it has rightly been called the age of the martyrs. Small wonder, then, that so many narratives about the early Christians end in an execution. This is not only so in the Acts of the Martyrs, but occurs just as often in the *Apocryphal Acts of Apostles (AAA)*, with the notable exception of the Acts of John. It might have been expected, therefore, that both bodies of texts should have been associated with each other. In reality, they are nearly always kept apart, both in ancient and modern scholarship. Is there a good reason for this? Perhaps we can find an answer to this question by making a comparison between both genres.

We might even think that there is a terminological indication that they belong together, since both of them are called Acts. This, however, would be misleading. In the Acts of Apostles, 'Acts' represents the Greek term πράξεις, 'conspicuous deeds', whereas

1 See A. Wikenhauser, *Die Apostelgeschichte und ihr Geschichtswert* (Miinster, 1921) 95-8. The AAA is customarily connected with the so-called praxeis literature (cf. ib. 95, 103-4, 106-7), but the differences are rather strong. Moreover, no complete specimen of praxeis literature has survived; Wikenhauser 98-100 can only mention the fragmentary remains of the Πράξεις 'Αλεξάνδρου by Callisthenes (± 330 B.C.; F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, 124 F 14) and Sosylus’s 'Ανντίου Πράξεις (± 200 B.C.; ibidem, 176 F 1).
in the Acts of the Martyrs 'Acts' refers to the trial records on which at least some of the Acts of the Martyrs were based. In Latin there is no ambiguity. Πράξεις is translated by the fourth declension plural actus, whereas the court records are designated by the second declension plural acta. Only in English and other modern languages actus and acta coincide as 'Acts'.

The Acts of the Martyrs

Turning now to the problem, we begin our discussion by sketching the martyrdom literature in its early stage and in its later development. Our point of departure will be the picture drawn by one of the great masters in the field, the Bollandist scholar Hippolyte Delehaye, in his Les Passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires, which appeared in 1921 and was republished in a revised version in 1961, a quarter of a century after his death. His treatment may be summarized as follows.

The martyrdom literature consists of an account of the trial and execution of Christians who refuse to honour the gods of the Empire. Two forms may be discerned: the acta, which contain mainly the interrogation by the judge, and the martyrium or passio, which narrates the events from the arrest up to the death of the martyr. The earliest martyrdom texts stem from the second and third centuries and are evidently written under the fresh impression of the facts. The narrative is unadorned and free from fanciful elements. The judge is often a gentleman, who reluctantly ends by


3 Cf. Thesaurus Linguae Latinae 1 (Leipzig, 1900) 1409. For the canonical Acts of the Apostles both actus and acta have been used, cf. Wikenhauser, Apostelgeschichte, 104.
passing sentence of death on the martyr just because the latter will not accept a compromise. Each text has its individuality, and the account can usually be checked against independent sources. Therefore the value of these early martyrdoms or, to use the expression of Delehaye, historical Passions, 'passions historiques', is priceless. Their number is limited; among the most famous are the Martyrdom of Polycarp, the Martyrdom of Pionius, the Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs, the Acts of Justin, the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas, and the Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne.

After the acceptance of the Church by the Roman Empire the production of texts continues, but their physiognomy changes. The individual features have made way for ready-made elements. Names, places, and chronology are often fictitious; miracles play a predominant role; the martyr grows into a superhuman character, the judge into a monster. Circumstances do, of course, account for this development. Since the author had to rely on distant memories, on meagre and uncertain information, there was nothing left for him but to fall back on the well-known commonplaces. Delehaye calls these late martyrdoms the epic Passions, 'passions épiques', since they follow the procedures of epic poetry, minus, he adds maliciously, the metrical form, the poetic art and the talent to realise such a magnificent idea.

Apocryphal Acts of Apostles as martyrdom texts: the Acts of Andrew as an example

As already mentioned, in most of the AAA the apostle ends in dying a martyr's death. Therefore it should be possible to give these stories their place in the panorama shown us by Delehaye. Delehaye himself, however, hardly takes the AAA into consider-

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ation; so we are left here to our own devices. My approach will be to use the Acts of Andrew (AA) as a testcase. Although it will not be attempted here, it would not be difficult to show that the results are also valid for the other early AAA.

The AA have not been preserved in their entirety. In addition to Greek fragments and a little piece in Coptic we have rewritten parts of the work in Greek and Armenian and an extensive Latin summary of the entire work, made in the late sixth century by Gregory of Tours. In 1982 the existing material was enriched by the editio princeps of a substantial part of the Greek text, narrating the events directly preceding the final part, which we already had.\(^5\) All of the important text-forms appeared in a new critical edition by Jean-Marc Prieur in 1989.\(^6\) A year later, Dennis Ronald MacDonald published his edition of the texts, in which he incorporated the Acts of Andrew and Matthias in the City of the Cannibals.' In doing so he followed the example of Gregory of Tours in the summary mentioned above.\(^8\) Since, however, the atmosphere in the Acts of Andrew and Matthias is so different from that of the other Andrew stories, I cannot believe they were once part of the AA; so they shall not be included here for consideration.

Judging from Gregory’s abridged version, the AA proper

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6 J.-M. Prieur, Acta Andreae (Turnhout, 1989) with an extensive bibliography on pp. XV-XXVI.
8 Gregory of Tours, Andr. 1. I use the edition by M. Bonnet (Hannover, 1885), as reprinted in Prieur, Acta Andreae II, 555-651.
originally consisted of two parts, first Andrew's wanderings from Amasea in Cappadocia to Patras in the Peloponnesus, and second, his stay at Patras and other towns in Achaia. During the second part the apostle comes into conflict with the authorities twice. Both times he is sentenced to death, but only the second time is the sentence executed. This circumstance, and the fact that only the second account is available in Greek, the original language of the Acts, invite us to base our investigation on the latter account.\(^9\)

This account may be summarized as follows. During his stay in Patras, Andrew converts a number of people. One of these is Maximilla, the wife of the proconsul Aegeates. When the latter comes home after a long journey, he is faced with his wife's unwillingness to have any further sexual intercourse with him. Aegeates implores her to reconsider her decision, but fails to win her back. A servant informs him that Andrew has inspired her new attitude, whereupon he imprisons the apostle. Andrew addresses his fellow prisoners, is visited surreptitiously by Maximilla, and is eventually sentenced to death by Aegeates. He is then flogged and bound to the cross. In this position he addresses the crowd for three days and nights in succession. The crowd protests against the execution to Aegeates, who is prepared to release Andrew. Now, however, it is Andrew's turn to protest: his very execution means his liberation. After a last prayer he dies on the cross. Maximilla remains firm; Aegeates takes his own life in despair.

*Features of the epic Passions in the Acfs of Andrew*

This summary already betrays a conspicuous trait of the Andrew story, namely that it is not just a martyrdom story, but shows a wealth of resemblances with the later martyrological texts, the epic Passions of the time after the persecutions. No less than six cha-

\(^9\) i.e. Greek *Acts of Andrew*, ed. Prieur, *Acta Andreae* II, 442-549. Of the 65 chapters of this text, the first 32 are those only available since 1982, cf. n. 5.
racteristic features may be discerned."

First, the martyr enjoys help from heaven which turns him into a superhuman figure. Those having seen him at work are said to fear him 'like some god' (3), notwithstanding his unsightly appearance (26). His divine power shows itself in a number of ways:

- He has the gift of clairvoyance (8, 19, 29, 45).
- He heals the sick (2, 5, 25), including the already mentioned Maximilla (2, 26); this healing consists of a successful confrontation with a demon. He even raises the dead (25). When danger threatens, the brethren become invisible at his prayer (13).
- Miracles make clear that God is with him. The gate of the prison where Andrew is being detained opens spontaneously for Maximilla's lady-companion who wants to visit him (28-9). The Lord himself, disguised as Andrew, brings Maximilla to the prison where Andrew is being kept (46).
- Physical vexations do not harm him. He smiles while hanging on the cross (55), and after three days and nights on the cross he is unbroken (59).

Second, the martyr delivers long speeches: to Maximilla and her brother-in-law in prison (37-42), to the brethren in prison (47-50), a night at a stretch (51), and even three days and nights while bound at the cross (56-8). Of course this preaching is successful, except with those - to use the author's term - whose father is the devil (21, 40).

Third, Andrew as well as the other characters of the story have no individuality, but are stereotypes. Andrew, Maximilla, and her brother-in-law Stratocles are good without reserve, even if there are degrees in superiority. For example, Andrew is always in control of the situation, whereas Maximilla knows fear, as is

10 For examples in the 'epic Passions' see Delehaye, Passions, ch. III.
11 The figures between brackets indicate the chapters in Prieur, Acta Andreae, and MacDonald, Acts of Andrew.
12 The martyr's speeches in prison can be compared to the Martyrdom of Pionius 12-4, although in the latter there is no suggestion of the speech being either interminable or at night.
apparent from the scene in which she is together with Andrew and the brethren at the praetorium. Hearing that her husband is arriving, who is supposed to know nothing of the gathering, she panicks, but Andrew calms her down and organizes a safe retreat for the company (13). Stratocles is an honest brother who hangs on the apostle's lips, but he is somewhat impetuous (in 2 he nearly committed suicide, although this was before his conversion, because a beloved slave of his was dying) and slow-witted (in 52-3 he still works hard for the release of crucified Andrew, entirely against the latter's wish). The proconsul, Aegeates, Maximilla's husband, is unconvertible and a brute. He is a glutton (46), and every night he is drunk (18). After being deceived by Maximilla's female slave Euclia he 'cut out Euclia's tongue, mutilated her, and ordered her thrown outside. She stayed there without food for several days before she became food for the dogs.' (22, trans. MacDonald). When sentencing Andrew he acts as a tyrant: no interrogation is held, but by abuse and sarcasm he makes clear to Andrew that he will punish him properly (26). Judicial correctness means so little to him that he tries to win his wife over by promising to cancel Andrew's execution if she meets his marital wishes (36). Yet Aegeates is the only character with a touch of individuality, and he tends to captivate the modern reader by his desperate attempts to win back Maximilla, his wife, who has embraced the ideal of chastity (22-4, 36).

Fourth, there is a supreme indifference to historical facts. No proconsul resided at all in the city of Patras. All names except Andrew's are fictitious." In the early Acts of the Martyrs pains are taken to formulate the death sentence decently; here, however, we look in vain for that (cf. 26-7).

Fifth, there are numerous improbabilities. In addition to those already mentioned, the following example is telling. Maximilla, who has decided to live in continence, makes her female slave Euclia take her place in the conjugal bed for eight months every
night without the husband being aware of the interchange (17-8).\footnote{14}

Sixth, the terms used to designate the characters are those of the epic Passions. Andrew is called 'the blessed one' (6 ἀγαθοπροσ) time and again; likewise Maximilla is more than once ἡ ἀγαθόρφιτς.\footnote{15} Conversely no term of abuse is too strong to characterize Aegeates. In a prayer to Jesus Christ, Andrew calls him 'that insolent and hostile snake' (16), and to Maximilla he declares that his father is the devil, the serpent (40). Her brother-in-law calls him 'Aegeates the rogue' (52), and the narrator himself has the term 'impious' for him (51).

It can therefore be seen that there is a remarkable similarity between the AA and the martyrological literature of the post-persecution period. How can we account for this? The easiest explanation would be that the AA are likewise a product of the fourth or fifth century. That, however, is simply not the case. The Coptic Utrecht fragment dates back to the fourth century, which enables us to date the Greek text to the beginning of that century at the latest. Moreover, Eusebius mentions them in his Church History (3.25.6), of which the first edition was written approximately in the first decade of the fourth century. This presupposes at least a third century date for the AA. It is therefore best to adhere to the general opinion that the AA were written in the second half of the second century, in the period of the persecutions.\footnote{16}

Earlier discussions

As I remarked before, Delehaye in his standard work on the martyrrological literature hardly deals with the AAA. The justification for this is given in the following curious statement:

\footnote{14} A characteristic transformation of the motif 'Wife has maidservant impersonate her while she goed to her lover', on which cf. S. Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk-Literature IV (Copenhagen, 1957) no. K1843.4.
\footnote{15} Cf. the index of words in Prieur, Acta Andreae II, 782 s.vv.
\footnote{16} For this dating, Prieur, Acta Andreae I, 412-4.
Bien que constituant un genre nettement défini, les Actes apocryphes des apôtres seront cette fois laissés de côté, et nous n'y toucherons qu'en passant. Il n'en résultera aucune lacune importante dans nos recherches. Cette littérature, dont les origines remontent trés haut, a suivi des voies indépendantes, son influence sur les Actes des martyrs se constate relativement assez tard et a Cé exagéré."

There are several points here on which we should have liked to hear more: the definition of the genre, its early origins, the independent ways it followed, the starting point of its influence on the Acts of the Martyrs, the scholars who exaggerated its influence. But what especially stands out is that the author fails to respond to the fact that the AAA nearly always end in martyrdom. To that we cannot object that the martyrdom is only the final phase of a story that encompasses much more events, for he does include quite a few texts which have the same feature, such as the Vita Cypriani, the panegyrics of the fourth-century Church Fathers, the hagiographical novels and other texts." The phrase 'this time' arouses the hope that the author makes up for his omission in other publications, but as far as I know he nowhere deals with the AAA to any extent. This may be no accident. As a Bollandist scholar, Delehaye was interested in reliable information about the saints; in this respect the apocryphal Acts had precious little to offer. Also the peculiar morality and the absence of the institutional element had little to attract him.

A student of hagiography such as Delehaye might be expected

17 Delehaye, Passions, 12. The only places where Delehaye touches upon the AAA as a genre are 8, 9, 12, 226. Individual Acts mentioned are those of John (46), Thecla (101, 188 n.2, 223, 277-8), Andrew and Matthias, Bartholomew, and Thomas (all of them 255 n.6). M. Van Uytfanghe unfortunately saw no opportunity to discuss the apocryphal Acts in his stimulating essay 'L'hagiographie: un genre chrétien ou antique tardif?', Analecta Bollandiana 111 (1993) 135-88, cf. ib. 179, although in a footnote he points out that the apocryphal Gospels and the AAA have much in common with the epic Passions.
18 Delehaye, Passions, 69-77 (Vita Cypriani), 141-69 (panegyrics), 227-30 (novels).
to include the *AAA* in his discussions, since they show many of the features he regards as typical of hagiography, and moreover are as early as the Acts of the Martyrs. One cannot, however, with the same right ask a scholar of apocryphal literature to give his opinion on the Acts of the Martyrs, because he may well argue that they are not of his province. Nevertheless, Wilhelm Schneemelcher in the second volume of his *New Testament Apocrypha* makes the following observation. The central position of the apostle in the *AAA*

makes these works a starting-point for the later hagiographical literature, which set in on a grand scale with the rise of the veneration of the saints. The AGG [apocryphal Acts of Apostles] undoubtedly influenced this literature, especially since individual parts (e.g. martyrdoms) were, evidently at an early date, lifted out of the original AGG and circulated separately. It is certainly not altogether easy, but probably rewarding, to follow up the question of when and how the process of transition from the AGG to the legends of the saints came about.\(^{19}\)

Unfortunately, this does not help us much further. Schneemelcher acknowledges influence of the *AAA* on the martyrdom texts but the picture he offers is inaccurate. Martyrdoms separated from the *AAA* did not stimulate the hagiographical literature, but it is the other way round: the early martyrdom texts, that is, the Acts of the Martyrs, inspired the separation of the martyrdom sections from the larger works. And it is a half truth at best to suggest that the *AAA* underwent a 'transition' to the Legends of the Saints, since the *AAA* had their own posterity: *AAA* were produced far into Byzantine times.

*Possible explanations*

So once more we conclude that we are left to our own devices. To state our problem once again: how do we account for the relation-

\(^{19}\) Schneemelcher, NTA II, 76 (German original II, 72).
ship between the *AAA* and the *martyrological* literature, especially since the martyrdom sections of the *AAA* the second and third century show striking similarities not with the simultaneous Acts of the Martyrs, but with their successors, the fourth- and fifth-century epic Passions? I can imagine three possible explanations.

First of all, we could argue that elements thought to be typical of the epic Passions already occur in the historical ones. Of course it has to be acknowledged that the latter texts may have undergone additions and modifications in the course of their transmission, but there are details even in the original text-forms which we would tend to describe as unhistorical. The miraculous element especially comes to mind. However, if to us what is contrary to the laws of nature is incredible, the pre-scientific world view of antiquity knew of no strict exclusion of the miraculous. Here we cannot apply modern standards. A case in point is the sixteenth chapter of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, which describes Polycarp's death. Since the burning stake fails to kill Polycarp, he is stabbed to death. Thereupon 'there came out a dove and such a quantity of blood that the flames were extinguished, and even the crowd marvelled that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect' (trans. Musurillo). The dove is probably a later interpolation; it is absent from the text-form transmitted in Eusebius's *Church History* 4.15.20 But the blood is a different matter. A natural event such as a stream of blood, which may be supposed to check the fire, is explained as a miracle under the influence of the emotional situation. Not the miracle as such, as Delehaye aptly remarks, but its excessive frequency and stereotypy discredits a text.21 And this is what distinguishes the apocryphal stories about apostles together with the epic Passions from the early Acts of the Martyrs. So this explanation does not apply.

Next we could consider the possibility of the AAA being composed in a closed milieu, in which the authors, unaware of the real state of affairs during the persecutions, could dream up fanciful stories about superior apostles killed by brutal magistrates. The stories may indeed be unrealistic, but it is hard to believe that their authors lived in isolation. Christianity existed in many forms in those days. There were, amongst others, Judaeo-Christians, Gnostic Christians, Marcionites, Montanists and those belonging to the main stream of Christianity. These groups had all sorts of contacts with each other. The martyr Pionius, who proudly declares that he is 'a presbyter of the Catholic Church' (Mart. Pion. 19.5), has the Montanist Eutychianus (11.2) and the Marcionite Metrodorus (21.5) as his fellow martyrs. And to return to the AAA, these were known outside the circles in which they were written, as we can document from such writers as Tertullian (De baptismo 17) and Eusebius (Church History 3.25.6), and it would be strange if the contacts were not mutual. We simply have to recognize that the AAA came into being in a society in which the persecution of the Christians was a common phenomenon. So this explanation helps us no further.

Perhaps then we should say that the apostles were beings of a different order than the martyrs. Many facts, to be sure, militate against this view. Peter and Paul are venerated as martyrs in Rome together with other martyrs. The introduction of the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas declares the recent acts of faith to be as important as those of ancient, that is of New Testament times. The succession lists of bishops join the bishops of the later periods with their predecessors up to the apostles.22

Still we should not give up this explanation too soon. To begin with, an idealization of the figures of the apostles sets in very early, namely in the canonical Acts of the Apostles. Accounts like those of the common property of the brethren in Jerusalem, the Apostolic Council, Paul's speech before the Areopagus, and his stay in Rome no doubt stylize reality. Even wonder-working is present, including punishment miracles like those in the story of

Ananias and Sapphira (5) and Elymas (13.11). Adversaries of Paul's are portrayed in a less than favourable way; thus Paul has no scruples to address the same Elymas by the words: 'You utter fraud, you impostor, you son of the devil, you enemy of all true religion' (13.11, trans. Jerusalem Bible). True, this denigratory stance is not taken towards the Roman authorities and Paul's death as a martyr is passed over in silence, but this may well be a stylizing in its own right, meant to show to the Greco-Roman upper-class how respectable the new religion was.

Furthermore, this explanation can give us more insight if we shift our attention to the Acts of the Martyrs and state with a variant of the formula just used that the martyrs were beings of a different order than the apostles. Of course the early martyrdom texts portray them with admiration. However, they are not yet the canonized saints of the later epic Passions and, indeed, of the AAA. They are contemporaries, fellow men, acquaintances of those who described their steadfastness. No fantasy was needed, for one knew the facts, which were impressive enough.

Conclusion

Thus we reach the following conclusion. The authors who described the deeds of the apostles did not personally know them and had only little factual information about them. They therefore tended to idealize them and to depict them as beings of an extraordinary or even superhuman stature. This process announces itself in the canonical Acts of the Apostles and is in full vigour in the AAA. By contrast, the martyrs were described in records of facts. Only gradually, as their cult developed, did they acquire a status comparable with that of the apostles. Only then were they portrayed, like the apostles in the AAA before them, as invincible men of God.

In this light we can also explain a phenomenon which remains strange in Delehaye's theory, namely the updating of early Acts of the Martyrs. For example, we have no less than three versions of the Acts of Justin. The oldest one offers a terse description of the trial, in the later one the judge Rusticus, the urban prefect of
Rome, let's slip a designation of the accused as 'miserable fellow', \( \pi\alpha\nu\acute{\vartheta}\lambda\epsilon \), and in the latest version he is simply 'a terrible man, a plague, and filled with all impiety'. We know Rusticus from other sources. He is a gentleman to the core, a prominent Stoic philosopher and teacher of Marcus Aurelius. Why then this distortion of the facts? Evidently because they did no longer satisfy the needs of the devotees, who just wanted to see their hero as a superman.

Therefore, in the end we cannot but contradict Delehaye. The typical features we observe in the epic Passions do not make their appearance only in the fourth and fifth centuries: they abound in the \( AAA \) composed in the second and third centuries. Thus where literary history is concerned, these pieces form an organic part of the martyrdom literature, and it is rather the early Acts of the Martyrs, with their sober style and their respect for facts, that turn out to be the exceptions.