VI. The Description of Paradise in the 
_Apocalypse of Peter_

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1. I decided to discuss the description of paradise in the _Apocalypse of Peter_ (ApPt) for two reasons. First, because, according to R.J. Bauckham, paradise has been even 'less studied' than hell; paradise did not excite the fantasy of the artists and writers as much as hell did. The second reason why I chose this subject is because, according to Ph. Vielhauer, apart from the unanimous praise of God, this picture of paradise lacks any religious character, nevertheless it has a pastoral idea: 'die Vorstellung, dass die “Erwählten und Gerechten” Verdammte aus ihren Hollenqualen durch Fürbitte befreien können'.

The main purpose of my paper is to test Vielhauer's position. I attempt to settle the issue by analyzing the description of paradise in the ApPt and comparing it with other descriptions.

Vielhauer bases his statements on c. 14 of the Ethiopic text and on chapters 15-20 of the Akhmim text. The Ethiopic manuscript reads as follows:

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P. Bouet, _Le fantastique dans la littérature latine du Moyen Age. La navigation de saint Brendan_ (Caen, 1986): 'Si l'iconographie du monde céleste se révèle froide et conformiste, les representations des démons et du monde infernal manifestent avec éclat le talent des artistes et la vigueur de l'imagination.'

And then I will give my elect, my righteous, the baptism and salvation which they requested of me. In the field of Akerosya which is called Aneslasleya a portion of the righteous have [sic Buchholz] flowered, and I will go there now. I will rejoice with them. I will lead the peoples into my eternal kingdom and I will make for them what I have promised them, that which is eternal, I and my heavenly Father. I have told you, Peter, and informed you. Leave, therefore, and go therefore, (to) the city which is in the west, to the vineyard (or: wine) (about) which I have told you, that his work of destruction might be made holy from the sickness of my Son who is without sin⁴.

Akhmim text:

15. And the Lord showed me a widely extensive place outside this world, all gleaming with light, and the air there flooded by the rays of the sun, and the earth itself budding with flowers which fade not, and full of spices and plants which blossom gloriously and fade not and bear blessed fruit. 16. So great was the fragrance of the flowers that it was borne thence even unto us. 17. The inhabitants of that place were clad with the shining raiment of angels and their raiment was suitable to their place of habitation. 18. Angels walked there amongst them. 19. All who dwell there had an equal glory, and with one voice they praised God the Lord, rejoicing in that place. 20. The Lord said unto us, 'This is the place of your high-priests <brothers?>, the righteous men'⁵.

2. Concerning paragraphs 15-20 of the Akhmim text, Vielhauer claims that it would lack any religious character, were it not for the inhabitants who with one voice praised God. His statement is true but the reason for this is that the description of paradise has a Greek background – as Albrecht Dieterich demonstrated at the end of the nineteenth century⁶. However, chapter 14 of the Ethiopic text has a Greek background, too, as the terms 'Acherusian Lake' and 'Elysian Fields' suggest.

⁴ I quote the English translation of D.D. Buchholz, Your Eyes Will Be Opened. A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter (Atlanta, 1988) 345, because his translation seems to me to be more coherent than those of others.

⁵ NTA II, 634-5.

The Acheron is a river of Thesprotia in southern Epirus, which breaks through an impenetrable gorge into the Acherusian plain where there was a lake in ancient times. The entrance to Hades was reputed to be there at the confluence of the Cocytus and Pyrphlegethon streams. The setting of Odysseus' convocation of the dead in *Odyssey* draws on the scenery of the Acherusian plain. Circe describes the immediate surroundings of the entrance to Hades (*Odyssey* 10.513-515). But the description belongs to the realm of folklore: both the people and their country 'are part of the irrational world which lies beyond the confines of the real world and surrounds it, itself being bordered by the circumambient Oceanus. Helios rises at the eastern shore of the river which encircles the world (12.4) and sets at the western edges, where we find the pylai of Helios (24.12) and the entrance to the Underworld (24.11-14).'

The Acheron is mentioned by Herodotus, too, concerning Periander's divination for buried treasure: 'Periander had mislaid something which a friend had left in his charge, so he sent to the oracle of the dead, amongst the Thesproti on the river Acheron, to ask where he had put it' (9.92). W. W. How and J. Wells comment on this place as follows: 'The Acheron flows through profound and gloomy gorge, one of the darkest and deepest of the glens of Greece. ... Hence it was a spot likely to be accounted a descent into hell, where the ghost might be summoned back as was Samuel by the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28).'

We find the Acherusian Lake in Plato's *Phaedo* in a context which is similar to that of the *ApPt*: 'Now these streams are many and great and of all sorts, but among the many are four streams, the greatest and outermost of which is that called Oceanus, which flows round in a circle, and opposite this, flowing in the opposite direction, is Acheron, which flows through various desert places and, passing under the earth, comes to the Acherusian Lake. To this lake the souls of most of the dead go and, after remaining there the appointed time,'

which is for some longer and for other shorters, are sent back to be born again into living beings' (112e-113a)\(^\text{10}\).

A. Dieterich collected almost all texts about the Elysian Fields in Greek literature and some in Latin literature\(^\text{''}\). He did not mention Tibullus and Virgil's descriptions of the Elysian Fields; therefore I treat them because they are important for our subject.

In elegy 1.3, Tibullus provides the first surviving description of the Elysian Fields in Roman literature. He adapts the common Greek and Roman picture of the Elysian Fields to the young lovers. Venus will lead Tibullus to the Elysian Fields because he was always addicted to gentle love. There are dances, singing, the birds wander freely; there are aromatic shrubs, sweet-smelling roses. There is no more labour in Elysium than there was in the golden age. Groups of youths hold hands and dance with garlands on their heads. Hell is described as a deep night, contrasting with the dancing series and the reds and greens of the preceding lines\(^\text{12}\). So the phrase referring to hell, *at scelerata iacet sedes in nocte profunda* (1.3.67), means that in hell there is deep darkness; it suggests that in the Elysian Fields, in turn, there is brightness and lightness. In elegy 1.10 Tibullus shortly describes hell: 'there is no crop of standing corn below, no cultivated vineyard' (*non seges est infra, non vinea culta*, 35). Putnam is right when he comments on this statement, 'The sentiment suits the poet's present mood of devotion to the quiet life on the land and complements his description of the Elysian Fields at 1.3.61\(^\text{13}\). Putnam's reading of Tibullus parallels the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which also mentions a vineyard in the description of paradise (14 E).

In Virgil's description, the Elysian Fields are flourishing, there is a charming area of greenery and joyful places, all brilliantly illuminated by rich celestial light, a special sun, and stars. Here the heroes, statesmen, and artists – such as Orpheus – practise their former profession (Aeneid 6.637-50). This Elysium is particular because only a few distinguished souls remain there forever; the rest, after comple-

\(^{10}\) Trans. H.N. Fowler (Loeb).


\(^{13}\) Putnam, *Tibullus*, 149.
ing their period of cleansing, accept their tainting bodies again (Aeneid 6.742-7). The concept of the body as a prison for the soul is of Orphic origin, and entered literature through Plato's works. It is philosophy and contemplation that is able to set us free from the contaminating effect of the body, Plato, too, teaches the purification of some souls: 'And those who are found to have lived neither well nor ill, go to the Acheron and, embarking upon vessels provided for them, arrive in them at the lake; there they dwell and are purified' (Phaedo 113a).

If we now compare the Elysian Fields of the ApPt with those of Greek and Roman writers and poets, we find that the description of the scene is Greek, but the inhabitants and their activities are different. The inhabitants of the Elysian Fields of the ApPt are clad with shining raiment and praise God. The special emphasis on light and the praise of God is Jewish-Christian. Both motifs appear in Psalms 104.1-2: 'Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord, my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with garment' (King James Version) and Ezekiel 1.28: 'As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face'. On the last day the righteous will shine: 'And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever' (Daniel 12.3); 'and the light of God shall shine unto them' (1 Enoch 10.8); 'But for the elect there shall be light' (1 Enoch 5.7); 'And the Great Glory was sitting upon it – as for his gown, which was shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than any snow' (1 Enoch 14.20).

3. As was mentioned above, according to Ph. Vielhauer the description of paradise in the *ApPt* has a pastoral concern: the elect and righteous can free the wicked from the torture of hell. Vielhauer refers to c. 14 of the Ethiopic text in order to demonstrate this idea. The idea cannot be found, however, in that passage. Nor can we find it in the *Akhmim fragment*. The structure of this fragment is quite different from that of the Ethiopic text. The beginning of the fragment is similar to that of the Ethiopic text: it is about the false prophets. Then heaven is mentioned, and the two righteous men and paradise are described. If the original text discussed the elect, as c. 14 of the Ethiopic text does, such a passage must have stood before the story of the two men. But there is nothing comparable in the text. From this I conclude that in the copy from which the fragment was transcribed there was no mention of the elect requesting mercy for the wicked.

The idea that the elect request mercy from Jesus for the wicked in hell originates from a textual emendation of the so-called *Rainer Fragment* made by M.R. James. The *Rainer Fragment* was first printed by Wessely in 1924. K. Priimm wrote an interesting essay on it in 1929, under the influence of which James emended the first sentence of the fragment which originally read as follows:

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\begin{array}{ll}
\varepsilon\xi\omicron\omicron\alpha\iota\tau\omicron\varsigma & \text{I shall grant} \\
\kappa\ell\eta\tau\omicron\varsigma\ \mu\omicron\upsilon & \text{to my called} \\
\kappa\alpha\iota\ \ek\kappa\kappa\lambda\acute{\epsilon} & \text{and my} \\
\kappa\tau\omicron\varsigma\ \mu\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon & \text{chosen God,} \\
\tau\alpha\iota\ \varsigma\tau\acute{\theta}\sigma\sigma\omicron & \text{if they call to} \\
\tau\alpha\iota\ \mu\epsilon\ \ek\tau\acute{\omicron}\varsigma & \text{me in the} \\
\kappa\omicron\omicron\lambda\acute{\omicron}\sigma\varsigma\omicron\acute{\omicron}\varsigma & \text{torment}^{19} \\
\end{array}
\]

The text is written in vulgar Greek, nevertheless it can be interpreted on the basis of Plato’s following statement: 'And those who are found to have lived neither well nor ill, go to the Acheron and, embarking

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19 NTA II, 637, note 43.
upon vessels provided for them, arrive in them at the lake; there they dwell and are purified, and if they have done any wrong they are absolved by paying the penalty for their wrong doings, and for their good deeds they receive rewards, each according to his merits' (Phaedo 113d-e). Here is a case of those who have lived neither well nor ill and therefore after death their souls go to the Acherusian Lake as to Purgatory where they are purified. The idea of Purgatory is to be found both in the Old and New Testament, for example, in Zechariah 13.9: 'And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they shall call on my name, and I will hear them; I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God'; in Matthew 12.32: 'And whosoever speaketh against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.'20 The first sentence of the Rainier Fragment can be interpreted in its original form in a satisfactory manner; therefore we have no right to rectify it.

James emended the above sentence as follows: <παρ>έξομαι τοῖς κλητοῖς μου καὶ ἐκλεκτοῖς μου ὃν Εαν αἰτήσονται με ἐκ τῆς κολάσεως – 'Then will I give unto my called and my chosen whomsoever they shall ask me for, out of torment.'21 This emendation is problematic because its dogmatic content contradicts the torments in hell, about which the ApPt says they are eternal, for example: 'they shall be punished forever' (6 E); 'and this is their judgment forever' (10 E); 'therefore shall they be punished eternally' (11 E) and so on. In spite of this contradiction, James' emendation was taken over without any comment by Peterson22, Vielhauer23, and Bauckham24. James explains his reading in this

21 M.R. James, 'The Rainer Fragment of the Apocalypse of Peter', JThS 32 (1931) 271.
23 Vielhauer, Geschickte, 513.
way: 'I have no doubt of the correctness of my restoration of the opening lines, for they are closely paraphrased in the following lines of *Sib. Orac.* II'\textsuperscript{25}:

\begin{quote}
And for them will almighty, eternal God provide (παρέξει) yet more. To the pious, when they ask eternal God (θεόν ... αἰτήσονται),
He will grant them to save men out of the devouring fire
And from everlasting torments. This also he will do.
For having gathered them again from the unwearing flame
And set them elsewhere, he will send them for his people's sake
Into another life and eternal with the immortals,
In the Elysian plain, where are the long waves
Of the ever-flowing, deep-bosomed Acherusian Lake\textsuperscript{26}. (330-38)
\end{quote}

According to James, these lines paraphrase the *Rainer Fragment*. Therefore, he corrects the *Rainer Fragment* on the basis of this passage. In my opinion, these lines of the Sibyllines have to do with the *Rainer Fragment* only inasmuch as they both originate from Plato. The above lines of the Sibyllines are reminiscent of Plato's following text: 'Those, however, who are curable, but are found to have committed great sins – who have, for example, in a moment of passion done some act of violence against father or mother and have lived in repentance the rest of their lives, or who have slain some other person under similar conditions – these must needs be thrown into Tartarus, and when they have been there a year the wave casts them out, the homicides by way of Cocytus, those who have outraged their parents by way of Pyriphlegeton. And when they have been brought by the current to the Acherusian Lake, they shout and cry out, calling to those whom they have slain or outraged, begging and beseeching them to be gracious and to let them come out into the lake; and if they prevail they come out and cease from their ills, but if not, they are borne away again to Tartarus and thence back into the rivers, and this goes on until they prevail upon those whom they have wronged; for this is the penalty imposed upon them by the judges' (*Phaedo* 113e-114b).

\textsuperscript{25} James, 'Rainer Fragment'. 272.
\textsuperscript{26} Trans. U. Treu in NTA II, 663.
4. From our investigation we can draw the conclusions that the background of the description of paradise is Greek, and the idea of the Acherusian Lake as a place of purification of the souls originates in Plato's *Phaedo*, just as the idea that the souls which are neither good nor bad may receive salvation after purification. This idea is mirrored in the first sentence of the *Rainer Fragment* in its original form. James' emendation, *viz.* that the called and chosen can free from torment 'whomsoever they shall ask Jesus for', is an impossible thought. Bauckham is right when he writes: 'In such situations an easy universalism which extends benevolent mercy equally to the oppressors and the oppressed would be an affront both to the oppressed and to the divine righteousness for which they long'. In spite of this statement, Bauckham accepts James' emendation without any comment.

Nowhere can we find this idea except in the *Sibyllines* quoted above. James is confident that the *Sibyllines* paraphrase the text of the *ApPt*. Nevertheless, it could also be the other way round, as far as chronology is concerned. The *ApPt* could have paraphrased the text of the *Sibyllines* because 'Kurfess dates the Jewish stage of the *Sibyllines II* about the turn of the era and the Christian stage before AD 150²⁸. In theory, it is more plausible that the *Sibyllines* influenced the *ApPt* than inversely, because the *Sibyllines* were more important documents in antiquity than the *ApPt*. Above I proposed Plato's *Phaedo* 114a-b as the source of the *Sibyllines*. Bauckham perhaps thought the same when he wrote:

Some part in the origin of this idea must have been played by Plato, *Phaedo* 114 A-B, according to which a certain class of sinners, who have committed serious crimes but are curable, can escape from torment into purifying waters of the Acherusian Lake only by seeking and obtaining forgiveness from those they have injured³.

²⁷ Bauckham, 'Conflict', 186.
²⁹ Bauckham, *op. cit.* 196.
Appendix

Since a photo of the Rainer fragment was never published, its publication will probably be welcome. I do it with the permission of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek to which I express my gratitude. I also print the Greek text of the fragment and its English and Latin translations.\(^{30}\)

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Then will I grant to my called and chosen God, if they call to me in the torment and I will give to them a precious baptism unto salvation from the Acherusian Lake which men call in the Elysian Field the portion of the righteous with my holy ones. And I shall depart, I and my exulting chosen, with the patriarchs, into my eternal kingdom, and I will perform for them the promises which I promised them, I and my Father who is in heaven. Lo, I have manifested unto thee, Peter, and have expounded all this. And go thou into a city that ruleth over the fornication, and drink the cup which I promised thee, at the hands of the son of him that is in Hades, that his destruction may have a beginning, and thou mayest be worthy of the promise...}
\end{align*}\]

\(^{30}\) See also the text as established by Van Minnen, this volume, Ch. II.

\(^{31}\) I print James' English translation without his correction of the original; cf. NTA II, 637, note 43.
Latin translation:\n\nPraebebo vocatis et electis meis deum, si me vocaverint ex supplicio, et dabo eis pulchrum baptismam in salutem lacus Acherusii, quam in campo Elysio partem iustitiae cum sanctis meis vocant. Et abibo ego et electi mei iubilantes cum patriarchis in aetemum regnum meum, et faciam cum eis promissa mea, quae promisi eis ego et pater meus qui est in caelis. Vide, declaravi tibi, Petre, et exposui omnia. Et proficiscere in urbem, quae prae-
est fomicationi, et eibbe poculum, quod promisi tibi, in manibus filii qui est in Orco, ut principium capiat destructio eius, et tu acceptus promissi[nis...
Photo of the Rainer fragment of the *Apocalypse of Peter* pages 1 and 4

**THE DESCRIPTION OF PARADISE**
of the Rainer fragment of the Apocalypse of Peter, pages 2 and 3