

*Indagine sul Martirio di San Policarpo. Critica Storica e fortuna agiografica di un caso giudiziario in Asia Minore.*

By SILVIA RONCHEY. Pp. 241. Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo (Nuovi Studi Storici, 6). Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1990. Paper n.p.

THE *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, which has the form of a letter from the Church in Smyrna to the Church of Philomelium and to all the communities of the Holy Catholic Church everywhere followed by miscellaneous appendices, enjoys pride of place in modern collections of the genuine *acta* and passions of early Christian martyrs. Admittedly, the exact date of Polycarp's death has long been a matter of controversy, and in a famous paper first published in 1957 H. von Campenhausen argued that the extant text contains numerous 'Bearbeitungen und Interpolationen'. But even Campenhausen accepted that the original *Martyrdom* really was what it purports to be—a contemporary account by eye-witnesses of the events that it describes.

Silvia Ronchey challenges this consensus of recent scholarship. On the one hand, she dates the death of Polycarp firmly to 23 February 167 and asserts that the question has been definitively settled by P. Brind'Amour, *Anal.Boll.* 98 (1980), 456–62. On the other, however, she argues that the *Martyrdom*, so far from being a contemporary document, was composed between 260 and c.280. In this she explicitly acknowledges that she is adopting and reformulating the views of Theodor Keim, *Aus dem Urchristentum*, i (Zürich, 1878), 126–32, who argued that the *Martyrdom* belongs to the middle of the third century. The main justification which Ronchey gives for adopting so late a date is the 'tendenza irenica, conciliatoria e in definitiva filoromana dell' epistola' (p. 220), which she contends to be historically impossible at any period earlier than the second half of the third century. But she also detects errors and anachronisms in the text which (she holds) show that it cannot be an authentic letter of the 150s or 160s, even if passages such as the criticism of the Phrygian Quintus (4) are removed as subsequent anti-Montanist interpolations into a pre-existing text: for example, she contends that the identification of those responsible for Polycarp's arrest as *διωγμίται καὶ ἱππεῖς* (7. 1) is 'una volontaria anche se sfumata mistificazione' (p. 119).

Although the argument is set out with considerable verve and erudition, few are likely to be convinced by a theory which puts the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* into the same literary category as the *Historia Augusta*.

Unfortunately, there is no index of any sort.

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