The Peri Pascha Attributed to Melito of Sardis: Setting, Purpose, Sources

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Published by Brown Judaic Studies

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Preface

The Peri Pascha (PP), attributed to Melito, late second century bishop of Sardis, has become an important catalyst in recent studies of Jewish Christian relations. But I was initially attracted to the homily by its few quotations from the Hebrew Bible and the possible patterns of quotations it might share with contemporary Christian works. As I explored the homily from that angle I became more frustrated with the general analyses on its background and usefulness in explaining Jewish Christian relations in the second century. Thus what started as a narrow focus on only one aspect of the homily grew quickly into a more comprehensive study of the text as a whole. In reflecting on the homily’s argument, especially as it was supported by Jewish Scripture quotations, I was persuaded that this homily reveals less about Jewish Christian relations, and more about Christian relations. That is, I became convinced that the homilist’s rhetoric was focused on an intra-Christian debate centered on the person of Jesus. The following book is an attempt to explain and substantiate my ideas on the Peri Pascha. Unfortunately, a detailed analysis of the text by Alistair Stewart Sykes, The Lamb's High Feast, Vigiliae Christianae, Supp. 42, (Leiden: Brill, 1999), was unavailable to me at the time this manuscript went into production.

I am indebted to many people who, by contributing their support and knowledge, helped me complete this book. I would like to thank especially Ross S. Kraemer, whose insightful comments were most constructive. I also wish to thank Robert A. Kraft, my dissertation supervisor, for both his patience and his stimulating questions which clarified my arguments. My appreciation extends to my editor, Shaye Cohen, for his careful evaluation and encouragement.

In the middle of the project we moved to Kenya; I would like to thank Paul Njoroge and Benjamin Gachehu who helped our family settle and kept our house in order. I am grateful to my colleagues at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Nairobi, Kenya, for their friendship and interest in my work.
This book would not have been possible without the support of my family. I owe so much to my husband, Jim, whose patience in handling computer problems and indexing kept me sane. I am grateful to my brother, Christopher Harrison, and his wife, Carla, who offered moral support as well as xeroxed material and then mailed it to me. Many thanks to my parents, Scott and Sally Harrison, for their unwavering belief in me. I am grateful to my children, Charles James and Sarah Bloom Cohick, who cheered me on, and so it is to them that this book is dedicated.