

Saint Peter

The Fisherman and the Keys

A source-first historical biography

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1 The Fisherman and the Keys

No follower of Jesus of Nazareth is better documented than Simon Peter, and none carries a heavier weight of later claim. The four Gospels name him more often than every other disciple combined; Paul, writing within about twenty-five years of the crucifixion, treats “Cephas” as a man his readers already know; the Acts of the Apostles opens its story of the Church with his voice. On the words Matthew places at Caesarea Philippi—“thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church. . . And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 16:18–19)—the Catholic Church rests the doctrine of a permanent Petrine office, defined at the First Vatican Council in 1870. Beneath the high altar of the largest church in Christendom, excavators working under Pius XII uncovered a second-century memorial that a Roman cleric named Gaius, around the year 200, had already called “the trophy” of the apostle. A pope announced in 1968 that Peter’s own bones had been identified there “in a manner we can consider convincing.”

Yet the same record is full of silences and reversals. The man the tradition crowns is, in the earliest sources, the disciple who sank in the water, misunderstood the Passion, was called “Satan” moments after being called blessed, and denied three times that he knew Jesus at all. Scripture never says that Peter went to Rome, never describes his death, and gives no date for anything in his life. Everything after the Council of Jerusalem—the Roman ministry, the martyrdom, the upside-down cross, the twenty-five-year episcopate, the tomb—rests on witnesses of very unequal age and character, from sober first-century allusion to frank second-century romance to twentieth-century archaeology whose central identification is still contested.

This biography therefore asks three questions. First, what does the earliest controlled evidence—the Gospels read as distinct witnesses, Paul’s letters, and Acts—actually establish about Simon of Bethsaida, without a silent harmony and without novelistic filling? Second, what can responsibly be said about his end: the cumulative case for Rome and martyrdom under Nero, the much later evidence for the manner of his death, and what the excavations under St. Peter’s do and do not prove? Third, what have legend, liturgy, and doctrine each made of him, and with what actual claims? The method is that of the whole series: earliest evidence first; witnesses separated by decades or centuries never silently merged; legends preserved and labeled rather than suppressed or believed; doctrine reported as the Church’s reception, not converted into first-century data. The terminal appendix states the conventions, chronology, and limits that govern every page.

Four questions in that program are genuinely contested, and this study does not step around them. They are named here so that the reader knows in advance where the argument will slow down and why.

- **The primacy texts.** Matthew 16:18–19, Luke 22:31–32, and John 21:15–17 are the three passages on which the Petrine office is built. They are read in their own contexts below, with the strongest non-Catholic readings stated in the words of those who held them—Origen in the third century, Calvin in the sixteenth—before any answer is attempted. The exegesis is not settled by a biography; what a biography can do is show exactly what the texts say, what they do not say, and which of the competing readings the wording itself constrains.
- **The Antioch incident.** Galatians 2:11–14 records the one occasion when the first of the apostles was publicly rebuked by another for conduct at variance with his own principle. Antiquity found the passage so difficult that it produced three separate escape routes, and the last of them—Jerome’s—provoked a decade-long epistolary quarrel with Augustine that survives in both men’s letters. That quarrel is read here at the letters themselves, because it is the earliest sustained Christian argument about what apostolic authority does and does not guarantee.
- **Rome and the martyrdom.** No first-century text places Peter in Rome in so many words. The case is cumulative, and the honest way to test a cumulative case is to state the case against it at full strength—the silence of Paul’s Letter to the Romans, the silence of Acts, the absence of any narrative of the death—and then ask what the surviving evidence actually carries.
- **The letters.** 1 Peter and 2 Peter come to us under the apostle’s name, and their relation to the historical fisherman is not the same in the two cases. They are graded separately below, with a statement of which of this study’s claims would fail if a given authorship judgment turned out to be wrong.

Where this study reaches a judgment of its own rather than reporting a source, it says so in a block headed *Project synthesis*, states the reasons, states the strongest argument against, and names the specific finding that would change the judgment. Those blocks are the only places where the study speaks in its own name about a disputed question.

2 Simon of Bethsaida

2.1 Three names, and what each carries

The sources give him three names, and each carries information. His given name was Simon; the Fourth Gospel adds his patronymic—“Thou art Simon the son of Jona” (Jn 1:42), while its final chapter addresses him as “Simon son of John” (Jn 21:15–17). That variation is not a slip in the Douay–Rheims. It is a genuine divergence in the Greek transmission, and it can be seen in the apparatus of any edition that records one: the Byzantine textform reads *Iona* at both Jn 1:42 and Jn 21:15–17, and notes at each of those verses that the Nestle–Aland text reads *Ioannou* instead. Matthew’s blessing preserves a third form again, the Aramaic patronymic *Bar-Jona* (Mt 16:17). The father’s name is therefore transmitted in two forms that the surviving witnesses do not reconcile, and no argument in this study depends on which is original.

His second name was conferred: “thou shalt be called Cephas, which is interpreted Peter” (Jn 1:42). *Cephas* transliterates the Aramaic word for rock; it is carried untranslated into Paul’s Greek letters, where it is the apostle’s usual name (*Kephas* at 1 Cor 1:12, 9:5, 15:5, Gal 1:18, 2:9), and *Petros* is its Greek rendering, which the Gospels and Acts prefer and which every later language inherited. Two things follow that are worth stating plainly at the outset. First, the double naming is attested independently in Matthew, Mark, and John, though each places it differently, and only Matthew explains it. Second, John’s clause “which is interpreted Peter” is itself evidence that the evangelist expected readers who did not know Aramaic—the name had already crossed a language boundary by the time the Gospel was written, and the Greek form had won.

A fourth form is rarer and more revealing. At the Jerusalem council James introduces his ruling by saying, in the Greek, “*Symeon* hath related how God first visited to take of the Gentiles a people to his name” (Acts 15:14), using the archaic Semitic spelling rather than the ordinary Greek *Simon*. The only other place in the New Testament where that spelling is applied to Peter is the opening address of the Second Epistle, “*Symeon* Peter, servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Pt 1:1). The coincidence is small, and it will be weighed rather than pressed when the letters are graded below; but it is a real datum, and it is invisible in translation.

2.2 The lake and the household

His world was the fishing economy of the Sea of Galilee. John makes “Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter” (Jn 1:44) his place of origin; the Synoptics locate his working life at Capernaum, where Jesus enters “the house of Simon and Andrew” and heals “Simon’s wife’s mother” lying sick of a fever (Mk 1:29–31; parallels Mt 8:14–15, Lk 4:38–39). The two statements are compatible without being one statement: a man may be born in one lakeside town and keep a household in another, and Bethsaida-origin with Capernaum-household is this study’s synthesis of two witnesses rather than a claim either of them makes alone.

What the texts show of the trade is modest but consistent. Simon and Andrew cast a net from the shore; James and John are in a boat mending theirs, and Mark adds that Zebedee had hired men, so that at least one household in the partnership employed labour beyond the family (Mk 1:16–20). Luke calls the sons of Zebedee Simon’s *koinonoi*—partners in the ordinary commercial sense of men who share a venture—and puts Simon in charge of a boat with a crew large enough to need a second boat’s help with a heavy catch (Lk 5:7, 10). None of this makes him rich; all of it makes him something other than destitute. He is a working owner-operator with a boat, a net, a partnership, and a house.

He was married. The Synoptics establish it incidentally, by healing his mother-in-law, and Paul confirms it decades later in the course of defending his own rights: have we not the power “to carry about a woman, a sister, as well as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?” (1 Cor 9:5). The Greek phrase is *adelphē gynaiḱa*, literally a sister-woman or sister-wife; the construction is why translations differ over whether Paul means a wife or a believing woman who travels with the apostle as a companion and supporter. What the verse establishes either way is that in the fifties, when Paul wrote, the churches knew that Cephas travelled accompanied by a woman, and that this was uncontroversial enough to be used as a precedent in an argument. Nothing in any first-century source names her, dates the marriage, or mentions children.

2.3 Speech, literacy, and the one hostile word

His speech marked him as Galilean even in Jerusalem: “even thy speech doth discover thee” (Mt 26:73). The only comment any source makes on his education is the Jerusalem council’s astonishment in Acts, that Peter and John were *agrammatoi* and *idiotai*—“illiterate and ignorant men” in the Douay’s rendering (Acts 4:13). Both Greek words are narrower than the English suggests. The first means unlettered in the sense of lacking formal scribal schooling; the second means a private person, a non-specialist, as opposed to one trained in a discipline. The sentence is also placed on the lips of hostile officials inside a narrative written to show that untrained men spoke with *parrhesia*, boldness. It is therefore evidence of two things—that Peter had no rabbinic or professional training, and that Luke wished his readers to notice the contrast—and it is not a statement about whether he could read, write, or dictate. That distinction matters later, when the Greek of 1 Peter is weighed, and it is one of the places where a great deal of confident argument has been built on two adjectives inside a hostile speech-frame.

Nothing else is recoverable. No source records Peter’s birth year, age, appearance, wealth, children, or his wife’s name; later traditions that supply such details (including the legend that made the Roman martyr Petronilla his daughter) are treated in the tradition audit. The reconstruction above uses only what the texts say and what the Greek words mean; it makes no use of archaeology at Capernaum or Bethsaida, no site was visited, and no excavation report on either town was consulted for this study.

3 Three Calls, Kept Distinct

The Gospels preserve three distinct portraits of how Simon came to follow Jesus, and they are not one scene told three ways. In Mark, followed closely by Matthew, the call is abrupt and unexplained: Jesus, walking by the sea, sees Simon and Andrew casting nets, says “Come after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men,” and “immediately leaving their nets, they followed him” (Mk 1:17–18; cf. Mt 4:19–20). Luke sets the decisive moment after a night of failure and a sign: “Master, we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing: but at thy word I will let down the net” (Lk 5:5); the catch that follows breaks the nets, and Simon falls at Jesus’ knees—“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Lk 5:8)—to be answered, “Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men” (Lk 5:10). John knows nothing of nets at the call: Andrew, a disciple of John the Baptist, “findeth first his brother Simon” with the words “We have found the Messiah,” and brings him to Jesus, who looks at him and renames him (Jn 1:40–42).

The differences are not decorative. In Mark the initiative is entirely Jesus’; in Luke it follows a demonstration and a confession of unworthiness; in John it comes through a brother who has been listening to the Baptist, and in a setting on the Jordan rather than on the lake. In Mark and Luke the renaming is not mentioned at the call at all—Mark places it later, in the appointment of the Twelve (Mk 3:16), and Matthew places it later still, at Caesarea Philippi. Whether the three portraits represent stages of one history—an earlier Judean acquaintance through the Baptist’s circle, then a Galilean summons—or independent literary shapings of one memory is a question the texts do not answer. Harmonization is available and has an old pedigree; it is also unfalsifiable, since nothing in any of the three narratives excludes the others and nothing in any of them requires them. This study reports all three and builds nothing on a harmony.

What every strand agrees on is the outcome: Simon Peter stands first among the Twelve. Each of the three Synoptic lists of the apostles opens with him—Matthew says expressly, “The first, Simon who is called Peter” (Mt 10:2)—and he acts as the group’s spokesman throughout: asking the meaning of parables, answering questions put to all, speaking for the rest at the crisis in Capernaum when many disciples abandoned Jesus: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68–69). This convergence is worth pausing over, because it is the single most robust result in the whole Petrine dossier and it is reached by four independent routes. Mark, Matthew, and Luke each open their apostolic lists with him, though they order the rest differently; John, who has no such list, gives him the same representative function at the same kind of moment; Paul, who is not narrating anything, names him first in the resurrection formula he received (1 Cor 15:5) and calls him one of the three “who seemed to be pillars” (Gal 2:9); and Acts, whatever its date, cannot construct its opening chapters without him. Four witnesses of different genres, purposes, and communities agree on a fact none of them argues for. That is the strongest form of evidence a first-century figure can leave.

The portrait is not flattering eminence but exposed eminence. It is Peter who asks to come to Jesus on the water, walks, fears, sinks, and cries out “Lord, save me,” and is caught with the rebuke “O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?” (Mt 14:28–31)—a scene only Matthew tells. With Zebedee’s sons he is admitted to the inner circle at

the raising of Jairus's daughter, at the Transfiguration, and in Gethsemane—and in Gethsemane he sleeps. The first of the apostles is, in the sources themselves, the most often corrected of them; the tradition preserved both facts side by side, and any honest life of Peter must do the same.

That double pattern is itself a historical argument, and it is worth naming because it will be needed twice more—at the denials and at Antioch. A community that wished to construct an authoritative founder had every reason to smooth him; the Gospels are not neutral documents and they do smooth other things. They did not smooth this. Whatever else the primacy texts mean, they were transmitted by writers who set them beside “Go behind me, Satan,” the sinking in the water, the sleeping in the garden, and the three denials, and who did not think the juxtaposition damaging. Any reconstruction that treats the exalted material as later invention has to explain why the inventors kept the humiliating material; any reconstruction that treats Peter as simply the chief has to explain why his own tradition remembered him failing.

4 Caesarea Philippi: the Confession and the Keys

4.1 The scene as each Synoptist tells it

All three Synoptic Gospels place a turning point near Caesarea Philippi, north of the lake, at the foot of Mount Hermon and well outside Galilee proper: Jesus asks the disciples who men say he is, then who they say he is, and Peter answers for them all. The three accounts agree on the setting, the double question, Peter's answer, and the command of silence; they differ in almost everything else, and the differences are the evidence.

Mark's form of the confession is bare—“Thou art the Christ” (Mk 8:29)—and is followed immediately by the injunction to tell no one, then by the first Passion prediction, Peter's rebuke, and the words “Go behind me, Satan.” Luke's is “The Christ of God” (Lk 9:20), with the silencing and the Passion prediction but without Peter's rebuke: the third evangelist, who elsewhere keeps Peter's failures, drops this one. Matthew's is the fullest by a wide margin. He alone expands the confession with “the Son of the living God,” he alone adds the beatitude, the rock saying, the keys, and the binding-and-loosing commission—and he alone then reports the rebuke in its harshest form. Because everything later built on this scene was built on Matthew's wording, it must be quoted exactly, in the Challoner Douay–Rheims version used throughout this study:

“Simon Peter answered and said: Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answering, said to him: Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.” (Mt 16:16–19)

The evidentiary situation should be stated plainly before any interpretation is attempted. The rock saying, the keys, and the binding-and-loosing commission stand in Matthew alone. Mark and Luke record the confession and the command of silence but neither the blessing nor the promise. Two chapters later Matthew extends binding-and-loosing language, in the plural, to the disciples together (Mt 18:18), and John's risen Christ gives the power of remitting and retaining sins to the gathered disciples (Jn 20:22–23). Any reading of Mt 16:19 that ignores those two parallels is incomplete; so is any reading that treats them as cancelling the singular address of Mt 16:18–19. Both facts are in the text.

4.2 Matthew's sequel, and why it belongs to the same scene

Matthew's sequel is as characteristic as the blessing, and the evangelist does not separate them. When Jesus begins to teach that he must suffer and be killed, “Peter taking him, began to rebuke him, saying: Lord, be it far from thee,” and receives the harshest words spoken to any disciple: “Go behind me, Satan, thou art a scandal unto me: because thou savourest not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men” (Mt 16:22–23). The two speeches are separated by four verses. The man addressed as *blessed*, whose confession comes from the Father, is addressed within the same conversation as *Satan* and *scandal*, a stumbling-block, on exactly the point where his own judgment was operating.

This is not a difficulty to be smoothed; it is a control on the meaning of what precedes. Whatever Matthew thinks he is recording in verses 18–19, he does not think it makes Peter’s private judgment reliable, and he says so in the same breath. The Church that later defined the Petrine office read both verses; the councils that discussed the office quoted the first pair and did not deny the second. A biography’s obligation is to keep them in the order the evangelist put them.

Six days later Peter stands with James and John at the Transfiguration, offering, characteristically, to build three tabernacles (Mt 17:1–8 and parallels)—the scene that the second Petrine letter later claims as eyewitness memory (“when we were with him in the holy mount,” 2 Pt 1:18). One further Matthean vignette shows his standing in the household: at Capernaum the collectors of the temple tax approach Peter—“Doth not your master pay the didrachmas?”—and Jesus has the coin found for two: “give it to them for me and thee” (Mt 17:23, 26). It is a small scene and it is easy to over-read; what it shows without over-reading is that outsiders in Capernaum treated Peter as the man to ask about the group’s obligations, and that Matthew, who is interested in Peter’s standing, thought the detail worth keeping.

5 The Rock and the Keys: Reading Matthew 16:18–19

This section does one thing: it reads the most contested three sentences in the Petrine dossier slowly, states the strongest arguments against the Catholic reading in the words of those who made them, and then says what the text itself will and will not bear. It settles no confessional question. It does try to make it impossible for a reader to leave with a version of the dispute in which one side has not been heard.

5.1 What the Greek says

The wordplay is real and it is the point of the sentence. In the Greek text Jesus says *su ei Petros, kai epi taute te petra oikodomeso mou ten ekklesian*—“thou art *Petros*, and upon this *petra* I will build my church.” The two words are the same lexical root in two forms. The form applied to Simon, *Petros*, is masculine, as a man’s name must be; the form used for the foundation, *petra*, is feminine, and is the ordinary word for bedrock or a rock mass. This is the datum on which four centuries of argument have turned, so it is worth being exact about what it does and does not establish.

It does not establish that Matthew meant two different things. A Greek writer naming a man “Rock” had no choice but to masculinize the noun; leaving the feminine *petra* as a man’s proper name was not an available option, and the Gospel does not use it as one anywhere. It does not establish that Matthew meant the same thing either, since Greek also possessed *petros* as a common noun for a stone or boulder, and a writer who wanted strict identity could have written “upon this *petros*.”

What tips the balance for most readers of every confession is the Aramaic underneath. In Aramaic the word is *kepha*, and it has no gendered doublet: whoever spoke this sentence in Aramaic said, of necessity, “thou art *Kepha* and upon this *kepha* I will build.” That the underlying saying was Aramaic is not a hypothesis imposed on the text; the text preserves the Aramaic itself. Matthew keeps the Aramaic patronymic *Bar-Jona* two verses earlier (Mt 16:17), and John transliterates the name and then translates it for his readers—“thou shalt be called Cephas, which is interpreted Peter” (Jn 1:42)—which is exactly what a writer does when the original is Semitic and the audience is Greek. Paul, our earliest witness of all, simply calls him *Kephas* in Greek letters without explaining it. The gender difference in Mt 16:18 is therefore best explained as a fact about Greek grammar rather than a signal about meaning.

The second grammatical fact is the demonstrative. “Upon *this* rock” points somewhere, and the nearest available referent is the clause immediately preceding: “thou art Rock.” A demonstrative that skips its adjacent antecedent to reach back to the content of a speech four words earlier, or forward to an unstated Christological referent, is possible in Greek but it is the harder reading. This is the strongest single argument for the identification of the rock with Peter, and it is a grammatical argument, not a doctrinal one.

The third fact is what follows the promise. “I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven” is in the singular throughout, and the image is not generic. A key held by one man on behalf of a household is the language of Isaiah 22:22, where the Lord says of Eliakim, “I will lay the key of the house of David upon his shoulder: and he shall open, and none shall shut: and he shall shut, and none shall open.” That verse describes the transfer of a stewardship from

one officer to another within a continuing royal house. It is the closest scriptural background to Matthew's phrase, and it is a text about an office rather than about a private privilege.

5.2 The readings on the table

Four readings of "this rock" have serious ancient or Reformation-era support. They are not all mutually exclusive, and part of the confusion in popular argument comes from treating them as if they were.

1. **The rock is Peter himself**, the man renamed, as the foundation stone of the community Jesus calls *my church*.
2. **The rock is Peter's faith or his confession**—what he had just said, not the man who said it.
3. **The rock is Christ**, on the ground that Scripture elsewhere names no other foundation (1 Cor 3:11) and calls Christ the rock (1 Cor 10:4).
4. **The rock is every believer who confesses as Peter did**, so that the promise is representative rather than personal.

5.3 The case against, at its strongest: Origen

The fourth reading is not a Reformation invention. Its classic statement is Origen's, in the twelfth book of his *Commentary on Matthew*, written in the first half of the third century and surviving in Greek. Origen begins by generalizing the beatitude: if we say what Peter said, and say it by revelation and not by flesh and blood, "we too become as Peter," and "to us there might be said by the Word, 'You are Peter.'" Then he presses the consequence as an argument:

"But if you suppose that upon that one Peter only the whole church is built by God, what would you say about John the son of thunder or each one of the Apostles? Shall we otherwise dare to say, that against Peter in particular the gates of Hades shall not prevail, but that they shall prevail against the other Apostles and the perfect?... Are the keys of the kingdom of heaven given by the Lord to Peter only, and will no other of the blessed receive them?... For all bear the surname of 'rock' who are the imitators of Christ." (Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 12.10–11)

Origen's argument has a further edge that later polemic often blunts. He applies it directly to bishops: those "who maintain the function of the episcopate" may use Peter's words rightly only "if they have the way of life on account of which it was said to that Peter, 'You are Peter'"; and one who binds and looses while "tightly bound with the cords of his sins" does so "to no purpose," and "being puffed up, has fallen into the ruin of the devil." Whatever one concludes about the rock, this is a third-century Christian teacher reading Mt 16:19 as conditioned by the holiness of the minister, in a commentary that the Church transmitted.

5.4 Cyprian, and a textual controversy that must be named

The earliest surviving Latin use of Mt 16:18–19 for the unity of the Church is Cyprian of Carthage's treatise *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, written about 251 during the Novatianist schism. In the form printed in the Ante-Nicene Fathers translation, its fourth chapter quotes the rock and keys passage, adds "Feed my sheep" from John 21, and then says: "although to all the apostles, after His resurrection, He gives an equal power... yet, that He might set forth unity, He arranged by His authority the origin of that unity, as beginning from one. Assuredly the rest of the apostles were also the same as was Peter, endowed with a like partnership both of honour and power; but the beginning proceeds from unity."

That chapter, however, survives in two forms, and the difference bears directly on the primacy. The 1912 Catholic Encyclopedia's article on Cyprian prints both. Beside the version just quoted stands another that reads: "And though to all His Apostles He gave an equal power yet did He set up one chair, and disposed the origin and manner of unity by his authority. The other Apostles were indeed what Peter was, but the primacy is given to Peter, and the Church and the chair is shown to be one... He who deserts the chair of Peter, upon whom the Church is founded, is he

confident that he is in the Church?” The two forms are alternatives, not a sequence; the version that has circulated most widely in controversy is a conflation of them, and the encyclopedia calls that conflated form “of course spurious.”

The honest statement of the situation is therefore threefold. First, a version of the chapter containing the words “the primacy is given to Peter” is not a modern forgery: it is found in early manuscripts and was quoted by Gelasius, by Gregory the Great, and by Bede, and the encyclopedia’s account concludes that it is most probably Cyprian’s own revision of his text when he sent the treatise to Rome. Second, the conflated text on which a great deal of older Catholic argument rested is not a witness to anything. Third—and this is the point most often lost—the same article insists that in Cyprian “the ‘one chair’ is always . . . the episcopal chair,” and that “it has been a mistake to find any reference to Rome in this passage.” Cyprian’s argument in either recension is that unity begins from one, and that each bishop holds the Petrine chair in his own church; his own later conduct in the baptismal controversy, when he resisted Pope Stephen, shows how he understood the consequences.

This paragraph rests on the 1912 Catholic Encyclopedia’s account of the two recensions, which reproduces both texts and summarizes the manuscript and patristic evidence. The critical editions of Cyprian, the manuscripts themselves, and the twentieth-century scholarship on the question were not consulted for this study; the 1912 judgment that the alternative form is the author’s own revision is reported as that article’s conclusion, not confirmed here.

5.5 Augustine, and the third reading

Augustine’s mature reading is the third of the four. Preaching on John 21 he says of Mt 16:19 that Peter, in receiving the keys, “represented the universal Church,” and then draws the etymology out explicitly:

“For *petra* (rock) is not derived from Peter, but Peter from *petra*; just as Christ is not called so from the Christian, but the Christian from Christ. For on this very account the Lord said, ‘On this rock will I build my Church,’ because Peter had said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ On this rock, therefore, He said, which you have confessed, I will build my Church. For the Rock (*Petra*) was Christ; and on this foundation was Peter himself also built.” (Augustine, *Tractates on John* 124.5)

Augustine is not denying Peter a place; in the same passage he calls him “the first apostle” and speaks of “the primacy of his apostleship.” He is saying that the foundation named in the sentence is the confessed Christ, and that Peter’s role is representative of the Church that confesses him. That this was a considered position and not a rhetorical flourish is clear from its being repeated across his preaching; that it was one of two positions he held at different times is a commonplace of the manuals, resting on his review of his own works, a text this study was unable to reach in a verifiable edition and therefore does not quote.

5.6 The case against, at its strongest: Calvin

The Reformation case is not a repetition of Origen’s. Calvin argues on three fronts at once—lexical, canonical, and historical—and the third is the one a biography must take seriously, because it is an argument from Peter’s own recorded conduct. In the sixth chapter of the fourth book of the Institutes he first disposes of the keys:

“But as Peter had received a command from the Lord, so he exhorts all other presbyters to feed the Church (1 Pet. 5:2). Hence we are entitled to infer, that, by that expression of Christ, nothing more was given to Peter than to the others, or that the right which Peter had received he communicated equally to others.” (Calvin, *Institutes* 4.6.3)

He then turns the Fathers against Rome, quoting Cyprian’s “in the person of one man he gave the keys to all, that he might denote the unity of all” and Augustine’s “when Peter received the keys he represented the whole Church,” and adds his own reading of the rock: “Peter had confessed in his own name, and that of his brethren, that Christ was the Son of God. On this rock Christ builds his Church, because it is the only foundation” (4.6.6). Finally he appeals to the narrative:

“Run over all these passages, and the utmost you will find is, that Peter was one of twelve, their equal and colleague, not their master. He indeed brings the matter before the council when anything is to be done, and advises as to what is necessary, but he, at the same time, listens to the others. . . . Being ordered by his colleagues to go with John into Samaria, he declines not (Acts 8:14). . . . in fine, that Peter, when he was not acting with strict fidelity, was rebuked by him, and submitted to the rebuke (Gal. 2:11).” (Calvin, *Institutes* 4.6.7)

Two of Calvin’s observations are simply correct as readings of the text. Peter is sent to Samaria by the apostles in Acts 8:14; he does defend himself to critics in Acts 11:1–18 rather than overruling them; and at the council of Acts 15 he speaks first but James formulates the decision. A serious Catholic account has to say something about those facts rather than pass over them, and the honest thing to say is that they are there.

5.7 What the text carries

Five statements can be made about Mt 16:18–19 without leaving the evidence.

First, the promise is addressed to one man by name, and the wordplay is on his name. Readings two and three have to explain why the sentence bothers with the renaming at all, and the answers given—that “rock” is a mere pun of transition, or that the demonstrative leaps over its nearest antecedent—are strained in a way the first reading is not. This is a point about Greek and Aramaic, and it does not by itself yield any doctrine.

Second, the powers granted are not exclusive to him. Matthew himself gives binding and loosing to the disciples in the plural two chapters later (Mt 18:18), and John gives the remission of sins to the gathered disciples (Jn 20:22–23). Origen’s question—will the gates of hell prevail against the other apostles?—has no good answer, and the New Testament does not attempt one. Any account that reads Mt 16:19 as conferring a monopoly is contradicted by Mt 18:18 in the same Gospel.

Third, the singular address is nevertheless not dissolved by the plural. It is a familiar feature of the New Testament that something given to one is also given to all without ceasing to have been given first to one: the resurrection formula Paul received names Cephas first *and* the Twelve (1 Cor 15:5). “Also to the others” is not the same statement as “therefore not distinctively to him.”

Fourth, the office language is real, and it is a stewardship. The keys of Isaiah 22 belong to a household officer under a king; they are not sovereignty, and the flock in John 21 remains Christ’s—“*my* lambs,” “*my* sheep.” Every scriptural image used of Peter’s position is an image of delegated service in someone else’s house.

Fifth, the text says nothing whatever about succession. This is the decisive point and it is regularly obscured from both sides. Matthew 16 promises something to Simon; it does not say that what is promised passes to anyone after him, and no first-century text says so either. That a permanent office was instituted is a doctrinal conclusion drawn from the whole shape of the Church’s life and defined as such in 1870; it is not a datum of Matthew 16, and it cannot be established or refuted by exegesis of these three verses alone. A biography can go this far and no further.

Project synthesis — what Matthew 16:18–19 establishes

Judgment. On the wording alone, “this rock” refers to Simon renamed Rock; the keys and the binding-and-loosing formula give him a stewardship in the community that the same Gospel also gives, in the plural, to the disciples together; and nothing in the passage addresses whether that stewardship continues after his death.

Reasons. (1) The demonstrative’s nearest antecedent is “thou art Peter,” and the Aramaic behind the saying admits no gender distinction. (2) The keys image in Isaiah 22:22 is an office image, and Matthew’s audience would have heard it as one. (3) Matthew 18:18 and John 20:23 are in the same canon and are not weaker evidence than Matthew 16:19. (4) Neither Matthew nor any other first-century writer mentions a successor to Peter in this function.

Strongest counterargument. Origen’s, stated above and never satisfactorily answered on its own terms: if the gates of hell will not prevail against Peter as the foundation, and the other apostles are also foundations (Eph 2:20, Apoc 21:14), then the sentence describes what is true of every apostolic confessor and is singular only because one man happened to speak. On that reading the whole weight of the passage falls on the confession, and the naming is incidental to it. Origen’s version of this is stronger than Calvin’s, because Origen is not arguing against a papacy—he is reading the sentence in the third century as a spiritual exegete and reaching the conclusion anyway.

What would change this judgment. A first- or early second-century text—not a later reading of Matthew, but an independent witness—that either applied the rock-and-keys language to the apostolic body as such without reference to Simon, or that spoke of a successor to Peter in a distinctive function, would move the judgment in one direction or the other. No such text is known to this study; the search boundary is recorded in the appendix.

6 The Night of the Denials

6.1 Supper, sword, and prophecy

The last night begins, in John, with a protest. When Jesus kneels to wash the disciples' feet, Peter resists—"Lord, dost thou wash my feet?... Thou shalt never wash my feet"—and, told "If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with me," swings to the other extreme: "Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head" (Jn 13:6–9). The same evening all four Gospels record the boast and the prophecy. In Mark: "Although all shall be scandalized in thee, yet not I," answered by "today, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice," and the more vehement reply, "Although I should die together with thee, I will not deny thee" (Mk 14:29–31). In the garden it is John who names the swordsman: "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it, and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And the name of the servant was Malchus," drawing the command, "Put up thy sword into the scabbard. The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn 18:10–11).

6.2 Luke 22:31–32: the second primacy text

Luke frames the prediction with two verses that carry more doctrinal weight than any other saying about Peter outside Matthew 16, and that are usually quoted without the feature that makes them interesting:

"And the Lord said: Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren." (Lk 22:31–32)

In English "you" hides the pivot. The Greek is explicit: Satan has demanded *hymas*, all of you, plural—the whole group is the target—but "I have prayed *peri sou*," concerning thee, singular, "that *he pistis sou*, thy faith, may not fail"; and the charge that follows, *sterison tous adelphous sou*, "confirm thy brethren," is singular imperative to a man with brothers to strengthen. The sentence moves from the many to the one and back to the many, and the one is named twice at the start. Whatever it means, it does not mean that Peter is simply one of the sifted.

Three things about the saying constrain any use of it.

It is a prayer, not a guarantee of behaviour. Luke places it immediately before the boast and the prediction of the denial. Within thirty verses Peter denies Jesus three times. The evangelist evidently did not think the prayer meant that Peter would not fall; whatever "that thy faith fail not" secures, it is compatible in Luke's own narrative with a catastrophic public failure of nerve days later.

It presupposes the fall. "Thou, being once converted"—the Greek verb is *epistrepho*, to turn back—builds the recovery into the commission. The task of strengthening the others is given to a man on the express assumption that he will first have to be turned around himself. Read as an ecclesiological text it is remarkable for that reason: the confirming of the brethren is entrusted precisely to the one who is about to fail publicly and be restored.

It says nothing about anyone after Peter. Like Matthew 16, this is a saying to a named man in a named crisis. The extension to his successors is a doctrinal development, and the First Vatican Council makes exactly that extension explicit, quoting the verse in its fourth chapter as "the divine promise made by our Lord and Saviour to the prince of his disciples" and inferring from it that the see of Peter "remains ever untainted by any error." A reader is entitled to think that inference sound or unsound; a reader is not entitled to think that the verse states it. The council's own next sentence, in the same chapter, is a limitation that is quoted far less often: the Holy Spirit was promised to Peter's successors not that they might "disclose new doctrine" by his revelation, but that with his assistance they might "devoutly guard and faithfully expound" the revelation handed down through the apostles.

6.3 The denials

The denials themselves are among the best-attested scenes in the Gospels: all four evangelists place Peter in the high priest's courtyard that night, warming himself at the fire ("a fire of coals," Jn 18:18), and all four record three denials before cockcrow. The witnesses vary in the details—Mark alone counts two cockcrows; the challengers shift among maidservants, bystanders, and, in John, a kinsman of Malchus; only Luke has the terrible detail of the glance: "And immediately, as he was yet speaking, the cock crew. And the Lord turning looked on Peter" (Lk 22:60–61).

The variations are the ordinary signature of independent tellings of one remembered event. The event itself is as secure as narrative evidence allows, and the reason deserves to be stated carefully rather than waved at. It is not simply that the story is embarrassing; a religious movement can tolerate a great deal of embarrassment about its founders' early failures if the failure is safely past. It is that this particular failure is load-bearing in the opposite direction. The four Gospels were written in communities that treated Peter as the first of the apostles; three of them report a saying or scene that gives him a distinctive commission; and all four nevertheless record, without softening, that he swore he did not know Jesus. Matthew's ending serves for them all: "he began to curse and to swear that he knew not the man. And immediately the cock crew... And going forth, he wept bitterly" (Mt 26:74–75).

Of Peter at the cross the Synoptics and John say nothing. The last sight of him in the Passion narratives is this exit in tears, and the silence that follows it is complete: no Gospel places him at Golgotha, at the burial, or anywhere at all until Easter morning.

7 Easter Witness and Restoration

7.1 The oldest text in the dossier

The oldest text in the whole Petrine dossier is not a Gospel but a formula Paul says he received and handed on, written to Corinth in the fifties: "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures... he rose again the third day... And that he was seen by Cephas; and after that by the eleven" (1 Cor 15:3–5). Three features of that sentence matter here. It is a formula Paul explicitly says he did not compose. It uses the Aramaic form of the name, *Kepha*, in a Greek letter to a Greek city, which is what one expects of material that reached Paul from Jerusalem. And Cephas stands first, before the Twelve, in a list older than any written Gospel.

Luke preserves what appears to be the same memory as an exclamation in Jerusalem on Easter evening: "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (Lk 24:34)—an appearance neither Luke nor anyone else narrates. The convergence is unusual and should be marked: a pre-Pauline creed and a Gospel tradition, independent of each other, both know of a first appearance to Peter, and neither describes it. What no later editor manufactured is that the first named apostolic witness of the Resurrection is the man who had just denied Jesus. It is the hinge on which Peter's whole later history turns.

The empty-tomb narratives give him a corresponding place: alerted by Mary Magdalen, "that other disciple did outrun Peter," but waits, and Simon Peter enters the tomb first (Jn 20:3–8; cf. Lk 24:12). The detail is characteristic of the Fourth Gospel's handling of the two men throughout—the beloved disciple is quicker, Peter goes first—and it is worth noticing that a Gospel often described as diminishing Peter in favour of the beloved disciple in fact preserves his precedence at the tomb and gives him the longest commissioning scene in the New Testament.

7.2 John 21 and its standing

That scene stands in a chapter whose relation to the rest of the Gospel is a genuine question, and one visible in the text without any critical apparatus. Chapter 20 ends with a formal conclusion—"Many other signs also did Jesus in the sight of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn 20:30–31)—and then a further chapter follows and ends with a second conclusion (21:25), together with a sentence in the first person plural about the beloved disciple's testimony: "we know that his testimony is true" (21:24). A book that concludes twice, and whose second conclusion is vouched for by someone other than the narrator, is telling the reader something about its own composition. Whether chapter 21 is an appendix by the evangelist, by his circle, or by a later hand is not decidable here; what is decidable is that it belongs to the first

century and to the Johannine tradition, and that it was never transmitted without the rest of the Gospel. Its date makes it, whoever wrote it, the earliest surviving text that presupposes Peter's death as a martyr.

7.3 The threefold question

The restoration is staged with deliberate echoes of the failure. At the sea of Tiberias, after a night in which "they caught nothing," the disciple whom Jesus loved says "It is the Lord," and Peter, girding his coat about him, casts himself into the sea (Jn 21:3, 7). On shore there is again a charcoal fire (Jn 21:9)—the word is *anthrakia*, which occurs in the Fourth Gospel exactly twice, here and at the courtyard fire of Jn 18:18—and beside it a threefold question answers the threefold denial:

"Simon son of John, lovest thou me more than these?... Feed my lambs... Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?... Feed my lambs... Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved, because he had said to him the third time: Lovest thou me?... Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee. He said to him: Feed my sheep." (Jn 21:15–17)

The Greek varies where the English does not, and the variation is worth setting out exactly because a large devotional literature has been built on half of it. In the first two questions Jesus uses *agapas me*; in the third he uses *phileis me*. Peter answers all three times with *philo se*. The commission also varies: *boske ta arnia mou*, feed my lambs; *poimaine ta probata mou*, shepherd my sheep; *boske ta probata mou*, feed my sheep. And Peter's third answer varies the verb for knowing—*su panta oidas*, *su ginoskeis*, thou knowest all things, thou knowest.

Two readings of this pattern are current, and the honest position is that the text does not settle between them. On the first, the shift from *agapao* to *phileo* in the third question is deliberate: Jesus descends to Peter's own word, and Peter's grief at "the third time" is grief at being asked in his own diminished terms. On the second, the variation is Johannine style: the same three verses also vary lambs and sheep, feeding and shepherding, and knowing and knowing, in pairs that no one proposes to distinguish theologically, and the evangelist elsewhere uses the two love-verbs of the same relationships without apparent difference. He writes that the Father *agapa* the Son (3:35) and that the Father *philei* the Son (5:20); that Jesus *egapa* Lazarus (11:5) where the sisters had said *hon phileis*, he whom thou lovest (11:3); and that the disciple at the supper is the one whom Jesus *egapa* (13:23) and the one whom Jesus *ephilei* (20:2). The second reading has the advantage of explaining all four variations by one habit rather than one variation by a special theory; the first has the advantage of explaining why the narrator mentions Peter's grief at exactly the point where the verb changes. Translation history illustrates the difficulty rather than settling it: the Latin of the Vulgate keeps the love-verbs distinct—*diligis* twice and *amas* once, with Peter answering *amo te* each time—while flattening the two shepherding verbs to *pasce* throughout; the Douay, translating that Latin, flattens the love-verbs in turn to "lovest" three times. Nothing in this study depends on which reading is right.

What the passage establishes without dispute is its structure and its content. Three questions answer three denials. The commission is pastoral—the flock remains Christ's ("my lambs... my sheep"), and Peter is given care of it, not ownership of it. And the commission is followed at once by a prophecy the evangelist interprets: "when thou wast younger, thou didst gird thyself, and didst walk where thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and lead thee whither thou wouldst not. And this he said, signifying by what death he should glorify God" (Jn 21:18–19).

7.4 What John 21 will and will not carry

The Catholic reading takes the pastoral charge as the conferral of the primacy promised at Caesarea Philippi, and the First Vatican Council cites these verses in exactly that sense, quoting *Pasce agnos meos: Pasce oves meas* in its first chapter. The Reformation reading takes it as the restoration of a fallen apostle to the ministry all the apostles hold. Calvin's version of the objection is the sharpest available, and it does not come from outside the Petrine literature: "as Peter had received a command from the Lord, so he exhorts all other presbyters to feed the Church."

That objection has to be answered from the text, and the text answers it in Peter's own name. The First Epistle of Peter uses the same verb: the writer addresses the presbyters "as a fellow presbyter"—the Greek word is *sympresbyteros*, an unusual compound—and tells them *poiminate to en hymin poimnion tou theou*, "feed the flock of God which is among you" (1 Pt 5:1–2). Whoever wrote that letter, and in whatever relation to the apostle, understood the Johannine charge as something Peter shared rather than monopolized, and said so while writing under his name. A

biography must record that the one text in the New Testament that applies John 21's verb to anyone else applies it to every presbyter, on Peter's own authority.

This does not dissolve the singular address any more than Mt 18:18 dissolved Mt 16:19; a charge given first to one and then extended by him to others is not the same as a charge given to no one in particular. But it does bound the claim that can be made from John 21 alone. What the chapter delivers is: a restoration after a specific failure, a pastoral commission over Christ's flock given to a named man, and a prophecy of a death by which he will glorify God. Written down by the end of the first century, its language of stretched-out hands and another's binding was read from antiquity as crucifixion—though the verse names neither cross, nor city, nor date. John 21 thus closes the scriptural portrait exactly on the threshold of everything the later sections must weigh.

8 Jerusalem, Judea, Caesarea

8.1 The character of the only source

For Peter's next dozen years the almost exclusive source is the Acts of the Apostles, and its character must govern its use. Acts is a canonical theological narrative written a generation later, whose speeches are compositions in character after the manner of ancient historiography, and whose selection serves a thesis—the Spirit-driven spread of the word from Jerusalem toward Rome. Its author is also selective in a way that is demonstrable rather than merely suspected: he does not mention the Antioch incident that Paul reports in his own hand, and Jerome, arguing about precisely this, put the methodological point in one clause—"although the Acts of the Apostles do not mention this, but we must believe Paul's statement." A source whose silences can be shown to omit an event we know independently is a source whose silences prove nothing.

Read within those limits, the portrait of Peter in Acts is coherent and, at key points, independently echoed by Paul.

8.2 The Jerusalem years

Peter opens every decisive scene of the Jerusalem church. He initiates the replacement of Judas (Acts 1:15–26). At Pentecost, "standing up with the eleven," he preaches the first sermon—"God hath made both Lord and Christ, this same Jesus, whom you have crucified. . . Do penance, and be baptized every one of you" (Acts 2:14, 36, 38)—and Luke counts "about three thousand souls" (2:41). At the Beautiful Gate he heals the lame beggar: "Silver and gold I have none; but what I have, I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise, and walk" (Acts 3:6). Arrested, he answers the Sanhedrin with the stone-rejected oracle and the claim that "there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:11–12). Within the community his authority is fearsome in the Ananias and Sapphira episode (Acts 5:1–11), and popular devotion seeks even his passing shadow (5:15). With John he is sent to Samaria to confirm Philip's converts, where he rebukes Simon the magician's attempt to buy the Spirit: "Keep thy money to thyself, to perish with thee. . . thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:20–21)—the seed, as it happens, both of the word *simony* and of a vast later legend cycle.

That Samaria mission is one of the passages Reformation controversy has always pressed, and it should be met rather than skirted: Luke says that the apostles at Jerusalem, hearing that Samaria had received the word, "sent unto them Peter and John" (Acts 8:14). Peter is the object of the verb. He is also, in Acts 11:1–18, called to account by "they that were of the circumcision" for entering a Gentile house, and he answers them by narrating what happened rather than by asserting a right to have done it. Neither scene fits a picture of a monarch among subordinates. What they fit is a picture of a first man inside a collegial body—the same picture the Gospels give, and the same picture Paul gives when he lists "James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars."

8.3 Cornelius

The theological center of the Acts portrait is the Cornelius affair. After a vision at Joppa overturning the clean–unclean boundary, Peter enters a Gentile officer's house at Caesarea: "In very deed I perceive, that God is not a respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34); the Spirit falls on the uncircumcised household while he is still speaking (10:44), and he draws the conclusion—"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?" (10:47)—then defends it before critics in Jerusalem (11:1–18). Luke has thus made Peter, not Paul, the door through which the Gentiles first enter,

and the placing is deliberate: the book that will end in Rome with Paul begins its Gentile mission with Peter, and puts into Peter's mouth at the later council the sentence that decides the question.

The episode also fixes the standard against which the Antioch incident must be measured. Whatever Peter did at Antioch, he did it after he had himself eaten in a Gentile house, defended the act in Jerusalem, and been vindicated there. That is the point Paul presses in Galatians and it is the point Jerome would later concede in so many words: "Peter was the prime mover in issuing the decree by which this was affirmed."

8.4 Agrippa, the escape, and the vanishing

The sequel is persecution. About the year 44 Herod Agrippa I "killed James, the brother of John, with the sword" and, "seeing that it pleased the Jews," seized Peter (Acts 12:1–3), who was "sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains" when the angel struck him awake (12:6–7). The year is one of the very few in Peter's life with an external anchor, and it is worth stating what the anchor is and is not. Josephus records Agrippa's death at Caesarea, of a violent pain in the belly, five days after being hailed as a god, "in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign," of which three were under Claudius. The conventional conversion of that regnal count to A.D. 44 rests on Roman imperial chronology, not on anything Josephus states as a year; Acts and Josephus agree on the manner and setting of the death without either dating it absolutely. "44" in this study therefore means the conventional date of Agrippa's death, and the arrest is placed shortly before it because Acts places it so.

Freed, Peter leaves a message "to James, and to the brethren," and—in five words that have carried a great weight of speculation—"going out, he went into another place" (12:17). Luke never says where, and the phrase has been made to bear a Roman journey by writers from the third century onward. It will not bear it: it is a narrative transition, not an itinerary, and the same book brings Peter back to Jerusalem three chapters later.

Peter reappears once, at the Jerusalem council of about 48–49, recalling Cornelius and rejecting "a yoke . . . which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear": "by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we believe to be saved, in like manner as they also" (Acts 15:7–11). The choreography is exact and often misreported in both directions. Peter speaks first and settles the principle; James speaks last, invokes Peter by his Semitic name ("Symeon hath related"), and formulates the practical decree. Neither man is presiding over a body that has no use for the other.

After Acts 15:11 the Acts of the Apostles never mentions Peter again. The continuous narrative of his life ends eighteen or twenty years before his death, and everything that follows in this study—Antioch, Corinth, the letters, Rome, the martyrdom—has to be reconstructed from letters and from memory outside the canon.

9 Cephas and Paul: the Antioch Incident

9.1 The only contemporary witness

Paul's letters are the only surviving texts about Peter written by a contemporary who knew him, and they were written in controversy, which is precisely why their incidental testimony is so valuable. Three years after his conversion, Paul reports, "I went to Jerusalem, to see Peter, and I tarried with him fifteen days" (Gal 1:18)—a private fortnight, in the mid-to-late thirties, about which historians would give much to know more. The verb Paul uses, *historesai*, is not the ordinary word for visiting; it means to inquire of or get information from a person, and it is the closest thing in the New Testament to a statement that one apostle debriefed another.

Fourteen years later, at the Jerusalem meeting, Paul was recognized by "James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars," who "gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship": "the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed to me, as to Peter was that of the circumcision" (Gal 2:7–9). In Corinth in the fifties, Cephas is a name to conjure with: one party there says "I am of Cephas" (1 Cor 1:12), and Paul cites his traveling household as common knowledge (1 Cor 9:5). Whether Cephas himself had visited Corinth, as Dionysius of Corinth later claimed, the letter does not say.

9.2 The scene

Then comes the one scene of open conflict, and a biography must face it squarely. At Antioch, Peter had been eating with Gentile believers; but “when certain men came from James,” he “withdrew and separated himself, fearing them who were of the circumcision,” drawing the rest of the Jewish believers, “so that Barnabas also was led by them into that dissimulation.” Paul’s response was public: “I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. . . I said to Cephas before them all: If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as the Jews do, how dost thou compel the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” (Gal 2:11–14).

Several limits on the evidence should be noted at once. The account is Paul’s alone, told to win an argument in Galatia; Peter’s side, and the outcome, are unrecorded. Paul’s own charge is not heresy but *hypokrisis*—acting a part—at variance with a conviction Peter demonstrably shared, since the practice Paul appeals to is Peter’s own (“thou. . . livest after the manner of the Gentiles”). And the date is uncertain in a way that changes the moral shape of the story: if the incident followed the council of Acts 15, Peter was dissimulating against a decision he had himself carried; if it preceded it, he was wavering on a question not yet formally settled. Paul’s narrative order in Galatians suggests the former; Augustine, weighing the same question in the fifth century, thought the latter more likely, and said so. Nothing in the surviving evidence decides it.

9.3 Three ancient ways of not reading it

The passage was a scandal from early on—the pagan critic Porphyry, whose attack Jerome quotes, used it to argue that Peter and Paul “quarrelled with each other in childish rivalry” and that Paul had written boastfully out of envy—and antiquity produced three distinct responses.

The first denies that the man was Peter at all. Eusebius reports it from Clement of Alexandria’s *Hypotyposes*: Clement “says that Cephas was one of the seventy disciples, a man who bore the same name as the apostle Peter, and the one concerning whom Paul says, ‘When Cephas came to Antioch I withstood him to his face’” (*Church History* 1.12.2). The theory has a superficial textual hook, since the Greek manuscripts vary between *Petros* and *Kephas* at Galatians 2:11 and 2:14. It does not survive contact with the letter. Paul uses both names of the same man within three verses of the passage in question—*Petros* at 2:7 and 2:8, *Kephas* at 2:9—in both the Byzantine and the Nestle–Aland text, and the person so named at 2:9 is one of the three pillars. The alternation is Paul’s habit, not a distinction between two men.

The second denies that the rebuke was real. On this reading, worked out by Origen in his lost commentary on Galatians and taken over by a succession of Greek expositors, Peter and Paul had agreed in advance: Peter withdrew, and Paul rebuked him, as a staged demonstration for the benefit of onlookers, so that the Jewish believers might see the principle vindicated without either apostle being humiliated. Jerome adopted it in his own commentary on Galatians, the work that provoked Augustine’s first letter.

The third takes the passage at face value. Peter, under pressure, acted against his own conviction; Paul rebuked him publicly; Paul recorded it because it was true. This is Augustine’s position, and he took it up in a letter to Jerome that began one of the longest and most revealing disagreements in patristic literature.

9.4 The Jerome–Augustine exchange

The correspondence can be read as a unit, and it repays being read at the letters rather than summarized from a manual. Its four decisive pieces are Augustine’s Letter 28 (about 394–395), his Letter 40, Jerome’s long reply (preserved as Letter 75 in Augustine’s collection and Letter 112 in Jerome’s, written about 404), and Augustine’s Letter 82 (405).

Augustine’s opening move is not about Peter at all. It is about what happens to Scripture if one concedes an expedient falsehood anywhere in it:

“For it seems to me that most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books. . . For if you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement as made in the way of duty, there will not be left a single sentence of those books which, if appearing to any one difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away.” (Augustine, *Letter* 28.3)

Jerome's reply is a masterpiece of controlled irritation, and it makes three arguments. The first is from authority and is stated as a challenge: he was following Origen, whose five volumes on Galatians he names, together with Didymus, Apollinaris of Laodicea, Eusebius of Emesa, Theodore of Heraclea, and John Chrysostom, "who has composed a very large book upon this paragraph, and has followed the opinion of Origen and of the old expositors." Hence: "suffer me, I pray you, to be mistaken in company with such men; and when you perceive that I have so many companions in my error, you will require to produce at least one partisan in defense of your truth."

The second is that the whole construction was built to answer Porphyry—"not defending the use of falsehood in the interest of religion, as you charge them with doing, but teaching the honourable exercise of a wise discretion; seeking both to show the wisdom of the apostles, and to restrain the shameless blasphemies of Porphyry."

The third is the one that has teeth, and it is an argument from Paul's own recorded conduct in Acts:

"O blessed Apostle Paul, who had rebuked Peter for dissimulation, because he withdrew himself from the Gentiles through fear of the Jews who came from James, why are you, notwithstanding your own doctrine, compelled to circumcise Timothy...? You will answer, 'Because of the Jews which are in these quarters?' If, then, you forgive yourself the circumcision of a disciple coming from the Gentiles, forgive Peter also, who has precedence above you, his doing some things of the same kind through fear of the believing Jews." (Jerome, *Letter* 112, in Augustine's collection *Letter* 75.9)

Jerome presses it through the vow at Cenchrea and the temple purification of Acts 21, and lands where he means to: "To gain the Jews, you pretended to be a Jew; and James and all the other elders taught you this dissimulation." If Paul may accommodate, so may Peter; and if Peter's accommodation was culpable, Paul's was too.

Augustine's *Letter* 82 answers on both fronts. On the *tu quoque* he denies the parallel: Paul's observances were sincere, not feigned, because the rites of the old covenant, though no longer efficacious, had been divinely given and deserved to be honoured out of existence rather than repudiated as profane—"just as it is seemly that the bodies of the deceased be carried honourably to the grave by their kindred, so was it fitting that these rites should be removed in a manner worthy of their origin and history, and this not with pretence of respect, but as a religious duty." What Paul rebuked at Antioch was not the observance but the compulsion of Gentiles that Peter's withdrawal produced.

On the principle he does not move an inch, and he sharpens the charge:

"Paul therefore, as a 'faithful steward' doubtless is to be regarded as approving his fidelity in his writings; for he was a steward of truth, not of falsehood. Therefore he wrote the truth when he wrote that he had seen Peter walking not uprightly... And Peter himself received, with the holy and loving humility which became him, the rebuke which Paul, in the interests of truth, and with the boldness of love, administered. Therein Peter left to those that came after him an example, that, if at any time they deviated from the right path, they should not think it beneath them to accept correction from those who were their juniors—an example more rare, and requiring greater piety, than that which Paul's conduct on the same occasion left us." (Augustine, *Letter* 82.22)

He also names the cost of Jerome's solution: it hands Porphyry a better weapon than the one it takes away, since a critic who is told that the apostles staged a public quarrel may reasonably conclude "that either in writing their letters or in complying with the ordinances of God they practised deceit."

Underneath the exegetical quarrel lies a substantive disagreement neither man disguises. Jerome holds that "the Jewish ceremonies are to Christians both hurtful and fatal; and that whoever observes them, whether he be Jew or Gentile originally, is cast into the pit of perdition"; Augustine holds that they are neither good nor bad in themselves, "not good, since men are not by them justified... and not bad, since they were divinely appointed as suitable both to the time and to the people." Jerome accuses Augustine of falling into the error of Ebion; Augustine accuses Jerome of a doctrine "all the more pernicious because it originates not in mistake, but in deliberate and designed endeavour to deceive." They exchange elaborate courtesies throughout, and Augustine states in the same letter the principle that makes the whole exchange possible: "I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. As to all other writings... I do not accept their teaching as true on the mere ground of the opinion being held by them" (*Letter* 82.3).

No surviving letter in the exchange records either man withdrawing his position on Galatians 2. What can be said with certainty is narrower and more interesting: two Latin Fathers, one of them the greatest biblical scholar of the age and the other the greatest theologian, disagreed in writing for a decade over whether the New Testament records

the first of the apostles doing something wrong, and both of their letters were preserved and copied by the Church that later defined his office.

9.5 What the incident establishes

The honest reading of Galatians 2:11–14 is the plain one, and it is Augustine’s: the first of the apostles, under pressure, temporized on the very principle he had opened at Caesarea and defended at Jerusalem, and was rebuked for it by a colleague. The Church canonized the letter that says so.

For the historian, the incident certifies four things beyond its embarrassment. That Peter was active at Antioch, where later tradition, from at least the fourth century, placed an episcopate and a feast of his “chair.” That his authority was great enough for his example to move “the rest of the Jews” and even Barnabas, Paul’s own colleague—the withdrawal was consequential precisely because of who withdrew. That he was nevertheless answerable: no structure then existing made the question, or the public rebuke, unthinkable. And that the churches of the mid-first century were not yet operating with a settled procedure for such disputes, since Paul resolves this one by confrontation and a letter rather than by appeal.

Project synthesis — what Antioch shows and what it does not

Judgment. Galatians 2:11–14 is decisive against any account of Peter’s position that makes his practical judgment guaranteed, and it is not evidence against his position as first among the apostles. Both halves of that sentence are needed; most polemical use of the passage drops one.

Reasons. (1) Paul’s charge is *hypokrisis*, conduct at variance with a known conviction, not error in teaching—he appeals to Peter’s own practice as the standard Peter is failing. (2) The episode is narratively intelligible only if Peter’s example carried unusual weight; Paul says it moved the other Jewish believers and Barnabas, which is a statement about Peter’s standing, not against it. (3) The First Vatican Council’s definition, when it finally came, was carefully limited to solemn definitions of faith and morals and expressly denied that the Spirit was given to disclose new doctrine—a definition which the Antioch incident does not touch. (4) The patristic embarrassment is itself evidence: Clement, Origen, and Jerome each felt compelled to explain the passage away, which means each of them read it as saying what it appears to say.

Strongest counterargument. Jerome’s, and it is stronger than modern readers usually allow. Paul, on his own showing and on Luke’s, accommodated Jewish practice repeatedly and for exactly the reason he condemns in Peter: fear of giving offence. If the criterion is consistency between conviction and conduct, Paul fails it as often as Peter does, and the rebuke at Antioch looks less like a principled correction than like one apostle’s tactical choice dressed as a principle. Jerome’s *tu quoque* was never answered on its own terms; Augustine answered it by distinguishing sincere observance from feigned observance, which is a distinction Paul himself never draws.

What would change this judgment. Any independent first-century account of the Antioch incident—Peter’s side of it, or a report of its outcome—would change the picture immediately, since everything now rests on one paragraph by the man who won the argument. Failing that, evidence that Galatians 2:11–14 preceded rather than followed the Jerusalem council would soften the charge considerably, because Peter would then be wavering on an open question rather than retreating from a settled one.

10 Two Letters and a Gospel

The New Testament carries two letters under Peter’s name, and a third document, the Gospel of Mark, is attached to him by an ancient and unbroken tradition. Their evidential standing must be graded separately, not presumed, and the grades are genuinely different.

10.1 The First Epistle

The First Epistle of Peter addresses “the strangers dispersed through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pt 1:1)—five Roman provinces covering most of Asia Minor north and west of the Taurus. It is written to communities under social pressure rather than formal persecution: the readers face “the burning heat which is to try you” (4:12) and the possibility of suffering “as a Christian” for the name itself (4:16), which the letter treats as an occasion for glorifying God rather than as a legal emergency.

The writer speaks as “myself also an ancient, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ” (5:1)—in Greek *sympresbyteros*, a fellow-elder, and *martyrs* of Christ’s sufferings—and exhorts the elders to “feed the flock of God,” *poimnate to poimnion tou theou*, “taking care of it” (5:2), where the participle is *episkopountes*, exercising oversight. Both verbs are the vocabulary of John 21 and of the developing church order at once. He names Silvanus at the close—“By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I think, I have written briefly” (5:12)—and signs off: “The church that is in Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you: and so doth my son Mark” (5:13).

Three questions have to be kept apart.

Where was it written? From the second century onward “Babylon” was read as a figure for Rome. Eusebius reports the reading from Clement of Alexandria and Papias: “they say that he wrote it in Rome itself, as is indicated by him, when he calls the city, by a figure, Babylon” (*Church History* 2.15.2). The figure is not arbitrary—Babylon was the power that destroyed the first temple, and Rome had now destroyed the second—but the reading is an inference, and it is a second-century inference about a first-century text, not an independent report. It is corroborating rather than probative.

Who put the Greek together? The letter’s Greek is competent, periodic, and steeped in the Septuagint, which is the principal reason much modern criticism doubts direct composition by a Galilean fisherman. Two cautions belong here. First, the strongest textual basis for the “fisherman could not have written this” argument is Acts 4:13, and, as shown above, *agrammatotai kai idiotai* on the lips of hostile officials means untrained rather than illiterate; it is a slender foundation for a literary judgment. Second, the Silvanus clause cannot settle the question in either direction. The Greek *dia Silouanou. . . egrapsa* is the standard formula for identifying the bearer of a letter, and it is at least as naturally read that way as of a secretary given free compositional rein. The honest position is that direct composition, dictated or secretarial composition under Peter’s authority, and posthumous composition within a Petrine circle at Rome all remain defensible, and that no argument in this study turns on the choice.

How did antiquity receive it? Without hesitation. “One epistle of Peter, that called the first, is acknowledged as genuine,” Eusebius says, “and this the ancient elders used freely in their own writings as an undisputed work” (*Church History* 3.3.1). This study cites the letter as canonical Petrine teaching whose exact literary authorship is unresolved, and uses it for two historical purposes only: as evidence that a Roman association for Peter existed early, and as evidence of how the pastoral charge of John 21 was understood by those writing in his name.

10.2 The Second Epistle

The Second Epistle is a different case, and the difference is not a modern discovery.

It is framed as the apostle’s testament—“as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance. Being assured that the laying away of this my tabernacle is at hand, according as our Lord Jesus Christ also hath signified to me” (1:13–14), an evident echo of the prophecy in Jn 21:18–19. It claims Transfiguration eyewitness in so many words: “we were eyewitnesses of his greatness. . . this voice we heard brought from heaven, when we were with him in the holy mount” (1:16–18). It addresses a problem that presupposes the passing of the first generation—“since the time that the fathers slept, all things continue as they were from the beginning” (3:4)—and it treats Paul’s letters as a collection already being read alongside “the other scriptures” (3:15–16).

To these has to be added a literary fact that a reader can check without any scholarly apparatus, and that this study checked directly in the Greek. The second chapter of 2 Peter and the letter of Jude share not merely themes but sequences and wording. Both invoke the angels who sinned, consigned in chains of darkness and kept for judgment (2 Pt 2:4; Jude 6); both then invoke Sodom and Gomorrah as an example (2 Pt 2:6; Jude 7); and the description of the false teachers ends, in both, with the same Greek clause—*hois ho zophos tou skotous teteretai*, “to whom the mist of darkness is reserved” (2 Pt 2:17; Jude 13), which the Byzantine text extends in both places with *eis aiona*, for ever, and the Nestle–Aland text in Jude only. In one case the clause is attached to waterless springs and storm-driven clouds, in the other to waterless clouds and wandering stars. Two short documents do not share a whole clause by accident. One used the other, or both used a common source; the majority critical judgment is that 2 Peter used Jude, and the direction of dependence is not something this study can establish independently.

Ancient doubt is therefore not an invention of modern criticism. Eusebius classed the letter among the disputed books, and Jerome, cataloguing Peter’s works in 392, records that the second epistle “on account of its difference from the first in style, is considered by many not to be by him” (*On Illustrious Men* 1). A further and more bounded negative deserves notice: the Muratorian Fragment, the oldest surviving list of New Testament books, generally dated to about 170 and Roman in origin, names the epistle of Jude, two epistles of John, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the

apocalypses of John and of Peter—and does not name either epistle of Peter. The fragment is damaged at both ends and its silence cannot be pressed; but it is the earliest canon list we have, it comes from the very church that claimed Peter as its own, and it does not list his letters.

The counterweight is honest too. The letter opens with the Semitic spelling *Symeon* Peter (1:1), a form applied to the apostle only once elsewhere in the New Testament, on James’s lips at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:14). A forger reaching for verisimilitude might have chosen it; so might a writer standing close to the tradition in which it was natural. The datum cuts both ways and is reported here as such.

Most modern critical scholarship regards 2 Peter as the latest writing in the New Testament, composed in Peter’s name in the tradition of the testamentary genre; a minority defends direct authenticity. Its canonical authority is a judgment of the Church about the book and stands on its own basis. This study does not use 2 Peter as uncontested autobiography, and in particular does not use its Transfiguration claim as an independent eyewitness attestation of that scene.

10.3 The Gospel of Mark

One more document belongs to the Petrine dossier by tradition. The earliest statement is quoted by Eusebius from Papias of Hierapolis, who attributes it to “the presbyter”:

“Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers.” (Papias, in Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.15)

Irenaeus, about 180, agrees: “Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter” (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1). The Muratorian Fragment’s opening lines, which survive only in mutilated form, appear to say something similar about Mark’s presence at Peter’s teaching.

What is established and what is not should be stated carefully. Established: that by the first quarter of the second century, in Asia Minor, the second Gospel was already connected to Peter’s preaching through Mark, and that Irenaeus at Lyons repeats the connection independently of Papias’ formulation. Also established: that the same Mark appears beside Peter in 1 Pt 5:13 at “Babylon,” so that the tradition and the letter agree on the association whatever one concludes about either. Not established: that the second Gospel is in fact Petrine memoir at one remove. Papias is writing at two removes—he reports what “the presbyter” said—and his defensive phrase “though not in order” shows that he is already answering a criticism of the book rather than describing it neutrally. Whether the Gospel’s content reflects Peter’s preaching is among the most debated questions in Gospel criticism, and this study takes no position on it.

Project synthesis — the letters and the historical Peter

Judgment. 1 Peter is usable historical evidence for the way the Petrine tradition understood itself within a generation of the apostle’s death, and for the early association of Peter with Rome; it is not usable as a transcript of the apostle’s own Greek. 2 Peter is usable evidence for second-generation reception of Peter’s memory and for the early collection of Paul’s letters; it is not usable as autobiography at all.

Reasons. (1) Antiquity received the two letters differently, and the distinction runs from Eusebius through Jerome; a study that flattens them is less careful than the fourth century was. (2) 2 Peter’s shared clause with Jude establishes a literary relationship with another New Testament document, which no theory of direct apostolic composition explains comfortably in either direction. (3) The arguments about 1 Peter’s Greek are real but weaker than usually presented, since their strongest textual prop is a hostile aside in Acts and their standard solution, the Silvanus clause, will not carry the weight placed on it.

Strongest counterargument. That this grading imports a modern literary standard into an ancient practice. Ancient authors used secretaries with wide latitude; a letter dictated in substance and written up by a competent hand was that author’s letter by every convention of the time, and the pseudonymity thesis assumes a modern notion of authorship that the first century did not hold. On that view 1 Peter is simply Peter’s letter, and even 2 Peter may be the work of a disciple executing an authorized commission rather than a fiction. The argument is serious and this study does not consider it refuted; it declines to rest any historical claim on either answer.

What would change this judgment. For 1 Peter: a demonstrable dependence on a document securely datable after 70, or a demonstrated use of 1 Peter by a witness earlier than any plausible secretarial window, would settle the question in one direction or the other. For 2 Peter: a securely dated witness quoting it before the end of the second century, or a demonstration that Jude depends on 2 Peter rather than the reverse, would substantially strengthen the case for its authenticity.

11 Rome and the Manner of Death

No New Testament text says that Peter went to Rome or describes his death. The case for both is cumulative, and a cumulative case is only worth as much as it survives of the case against it. This section therefore states the case against first, at full strength, and then asks what the surviving first- and second-century evidence actually carries.

11.1 What Scripture gives

Within Scripture there are two pointers, and neither is a statement. The first is the risen Christ's prophecy that Peter, grown old, would "stretch forth thy hands" while "another shall gird thee," written down with the evangelist's comment that it signified "by what death he should glorify God" (Jn 21:18–19). This establishes that by the end of the first century Peter's death was known to have been a martyrdom, and that the Johannine circle expected its readers to know it too. It names no place, no manner, and no date. The second is the greeting of 1 Peter from "Babylon" with Mark (1 Pt 5:13), read as Rome by the second-century tradition. Neither is proof by itself; both were written when the outcome was already memory.

11.2 The case against, at its strongest

Four silences make a serious argument, and they are usually stated too weakly by those who reject the tradition and too dismissively by those who hold it.

The silence of Romans. Paul wrote to the church at Rome about A.D. 57, before he had ever visited it. The letter's last chapter greets some two dozen Roman Christians by name—Prisca and Aquila, Epānetus, Mary, Andronicus and Junia, Ampliatus, Urbanus, Apelles, Herodion, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus and his mother, and a further list of names in households—and never mentions Peter. Paul also states, in the same letter, the principle governing his own mission: "I have so preached this gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation" (Rom 15:20). On his own stated rule, a Roman church already founded and led by Peter is a church Paul would not have written to in this way, and a Peter present in Rome in 57 is a man Paul could not have omitted from that list of greetings.

The silence of the captivity letters. The letters traditionally assigned to a Roman imprisonment name Paul's companions there repeatedly. Colossians lists Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus called Justus, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas; Philemon lists Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke; 2 Timothy says "only Luke is with me" and asks for Mark. Peter appears in none of them.

The silence of Acts. Luke's second volume is structured to bring the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. It ends with Paul in Rome, preaching for two years in his own hired lodging. If Peter had died there in the same persecution, or had ministered there at all, the book that is otherwise so interested in Peter says nothing whatever about it.

The silence of the first century as a whole. No surviving text from the first century—not a Gospel, not a letter, not Acts, not Revelation, not Josephus or any Roman writer—places Peter in the city of Rome.

Taken together these are not trivial. They are decisive against one version of the tradition: the version, developed by the third century and transmitted by Jerome, in which Peter arrived in Rome in the second year of Claudius and held the see for twenty-five years. That version is refuted by Galatians and Acts alike, which have Peter in Jerusalem and Antioch through the late forties, and it is refuted a second time by Romans 16, which has no Peter in Rome in 57. This study rejects it, and rejects it on exactly this evidence.

11.3 Why the silences do not reach the claim actually made

The claim the early sources make is narrower than the claim the silences refute. It is that Peter came to Rome late, taught there, and died there under Nero—within a window that opens after Paul wrote Romans and closes with Nero’s death in 68. Against that claim the silences are much weaker.

Romans and the captivity letters bear on Peter’s whereabouts in the years they were written, which is precisely the period the tradition does not require him to be in Rome. The argument from Romans 15:20 cuts the other way as well: if Paul thought Peter had founded the Roman church, he says he would not have written; he did write; therefore, on his own principle, Peter had not founded it. That is a conclusion about foundation, not about death, and it is one this study accepts. When Irenaeus later calls the Roman church “founded and organized. . . by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul,” he is making a claim about the church’s apostolic ordering and cult, not a claim about who first preached there; Christians existed at Rome before either apostle arrived, as Paul’s own letter proves.

The silence of Acts is the weakest of the four, because it can be shown to be selective rather than ignorant. Acts omits the Antioch incident, which Paul reports in his own hand and which no one doubts; Jerome, arguing with Augustine about that very passage, states the principle without noticing that he is stating it—“although the Acts of the Apostles do not mention this, but we must believe Paul’s statement.” Acts also omits the death of Paul, its own protagonist, though it takes him to Rome and leaves him there under guard. A book that declines to narrate the death of the man it has followed for sixteen chapters is not a book from whose silence one may infer that another man did not die. That is not a modern rationalization: the Muratorian Fragment, about 170, gives exactly this account of Luke’s method, saying that he compiled the events that took place in his presence, “as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter as well as the departure of Paul from the city.” Whatever one thinks of the fragment’s explanation, its author knew both that Peter had been martyred and that Acts does not say so.

11.4 The evidence for Rome, weighed by date

1 Clement, from Rome, about 95–96. The earliest external witness is the letter of the Roman church to Corinth known as 1 Clement, and it repays being read in its context rather than quoted in a clause. Its fourth chapter runs through a series of Old Testament examples of what envy and jealousy have destroyed—Cain, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and Miriam, Dathan and Abiram, David. Its fifth chapter then turns to the present: “But not to dwell upon ancient examples, let us come to the most recent spiritual heroes. Let us take the noble examples furnished in our own generation.” Peter comes first: “Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labours; and when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him.” Paul follows, with a longer notice ending “having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects.” Then chapter six adds “a great multitude of the elect, who, having through envy endured many indignities and tortures, furnished us with a most excellent example”—and among them “those women, the Danaids and Dircae, being persecuted, after they had suffered terrible and unspeakable torments, finished the course of their faith.”

Three features of that passage matter. The letter names no city and no manner of death for Peter, and this study does not pretend otherwise. But it is the church *of Rome* writing, it calls these martyrdoms the examples of “our own generation,” and it sets Peter and Paul at the head of a local mass martyrdom in which women are described under the names of figures from Greek myth, “the Danaids and Dircae.” That those names most probably refer to executions staged as mythological tableaux is this study’s reading of the clause rather than something the letter says; what the letter does say is that these women suffered “terrible and unspeakable torments” as public spectacle. Tacitus describes precisely such staging in the aftermath of the fire of 64: an “immense multitude” convicted; “mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination” in Nero’s gardens (*Annals* 15.44). The Roman letter’s “great multitude” and the Roman historian’s “immense multitude” are describing the same kind of event in the same city within a generation of each other, and one of them puts Peter at the head of the list.

Ignatius, to Rome, about a decade later. Writing ahead to the church of Rome on his way to execution, Ignatius uses the two apostles as the measure of an authority he disclaims: “I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you. They were apostles; I am but a condemned man” (*Romans* 4). The sentence is worth more than its length. It is addressed to the Roman church specifically, it takes for granted that Peter and Paul had stood in a position to command that church, and it comes from Antioch—a second city, independently, treating the Roman association as common knowledge.

Dionysius of Corinth, about 170. Writing to Rome, he says that Peter and Paul “planted and likewise taught us in our Corinth. And they taught together in like manner in Italy, and suffered martyrdom at the same time” (in Eusebius, *Church History* 2.25.8). This is a bishop of one apostolic church writing to another about a shared memory; his phrase about the timing is loose enough to mean the same period rather than the same day, and it is so treated in the tradition audit.

Irenaeus, about 180. At Lyons, with Asian roots, he speaks of “the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul,” and begins the Roman succession from their committing the episcopate to Linus (*Against Heresies* 3.3.2–3); in the previous book he dates Matthew’s Gospel “while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome” (3.1.1).

Gaius, about 200, pointing at monuments. The most concrete witness is the least rhetorical. Eusebius reports that Gaius, “a member of the Church, who arose under Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome”—which dates the dialogue between 199 and 217—in a published disputation with Proclus, the leader of the Phrygian heresy, wrote: “But I can show the trophies of the apostles. For if you will go to the Vatican or to the Ostian way, you will find the trophies of those who laid the foundations of this church” (*Church History* 2.25.6–7). This is not a report of a tradition; it is a challenge to an opponent in the same city to walk out and look. Whatever Gaius meant by *tropaion*—a monument, a memorial, a victory-marker—he expected Proclus to be able to find two of them, at two identified places, and he expected Proclus to accept that they marked the graves of Peter and Paul. The polemical setting is the point: a disputant does not stake an argument on a monument his opponent can check unless he is confident of what will be found there.

The absence of a rival. Finally, and this is a negative that functions as evidence: no other church in antiquity ever claimed Peter’s death or his tomb. Jerusalem, Antioch, and Corinth each had a serious Petrine association and each had every incentive; none of them made the claim. In a world of competing apostolic prestige, that unanimity is difficult to manufacture.

11.5 Manner and date

Crucifixion is early, credible, and not contemporary. The first explicit statement is Tertullian’s, about 200: Rome is the church “where Peter endures a passion like his Lord’s! Where Paul wins his crown in a death like John’s” (*Prescription* 36); and again, of Nero’s persecution, “Then is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross” (*Scorpiace* 15)—a clause that is itself an echo of John 21:18, which is a caution against treating it as independent information. It is compatible with Tacitus’s crosses and with the Johannine prophecy, and no ancient source contradicts it; it is not first-century testimony.

The head-downward detail appears a generation later still. Eusebius reports from Origen, about 230, that Peter “was crucified head-downwards; for he had requested that he might suffer in this way” (*Church History* 3.1.2). It had already been narrated, with a quite different motive, in the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* treated in the next section.

The year is unrecoverable. The persecution opens in 64; the chronicle tradition used by Jerome put the death in Nero’s fourteenth year, 67 or 68. “Between 64 and 68” is all the evidence yields, and even that depends on accepting that the death belongs to the Neronian persecution rather than merely to Nero’s reign.

Project synthesis — the Roman death

Judgment. That Peter died as a martyr at Rome in the 60s is historically well attested and morally certain in Catholic tradition. This judgment is not the same as strict documentary certainty: no surviving first-century text explicitly states the city, date, and manner of his death. That he ever governed the Roman church as its bishop for a term of years is not established by any evidence this study could reach, and the twenty-five-year episcopate is positively excluded.

Reasons. (1) A letter from the Roman church itself, within roughly thirty years of the event, names Peter first among the martyrs of “our own generation” and sets him beside a local mass martyrdom whose details match what Tacitus reports of Nero’s spectacles. (2) An independent letter from Antioch, a decade later, addressed to Rome, assumes that Peter had authority there. (3) Corinth in 170, Lyons in 180, and Rome itself in 200 agree, and the last of them points at visitable monuments in a hostile debate. (4) No competing city ever claimed the death or the grave. (5) By contrast, every element of the long-episcopate version collides with Galatians, Acts, and Romans 16, and this study discards it.

Strongest counterargument. That the whole chain is one tradition propagating, not several witnesses converging. 1 Clement names no city, so its evidential value depends entirely on an inference from where it was written; Ignatius names no city either and could be repeating what he had heard; Dionysius, Irenaeus, and Gaius all write after the Roman church had acquired an institutional interest in the claim, and all three could be downstream of a single second-century Roman conviction whose origin is invisible to us. On this account the tradition is early but not independent, and early unanimity about a claim that only one interested party was in a position to make is exactly what one would expect whether or not it were true.

What would change this judgment. A first-century or early second-century text placing Peter's death anywhere else; or a demonstration that 1 Clement is not of Roman provenance or is substantially later than the conventional date, which would remove the one witness that stands within living memory. Conversely, a securely dated first-century witness naming Rome explicitly would supply the strict documentary certainty that the present cumulative case does not. None of these is known to this study.

12 Quo Vadis and the Inverted Cross

12.1 One book, and what kind of book it is

The narrative everyone knows—Peter fleeing Rome, meeting Christ on the road, turning back to be crucified upside down—comes from a single identifiable source: the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, a Greek romance that M. R. James, whose 1924 translation is used here, judged “written, probably by a resident in Asia Minor (he does not know much about Rome), not later than A.D. 200.” Its character has to be described before its contents are quoted, because almost every widely believed detail of Peter's death comes from it and almost nothing else in it is believed by anyone.

It is a work of devotional fiction with a strongly ascetical programme. Most of its bulk is a wonder-contest at Rome between Peter and Simon Magus—grown out of the eight verses of Acts 8—in which the two men raise the dead in public before a prefect, and which ends when Simon, flying over the city, is brought down by Peter's prayer. The persecution that kills Peter, in this telling, has nothing to do with Nero's fire: it is provoked by the conversion of four concubines of the prefect Agrippa and of Xanthippe, the wife of Albinus, “Caesar's friend,” who withdraw from their partners' beds after hearing Peter preach chastity, so that the two aggrieved men agree to have him killed. Nero appears only after the execution, angry that Agrippa had Peter killed without waiting for him to devise worse torments, and is frightened out of further persecution by a vision. No historian treats any of this as information about the first century. The book is, however, excellent information about the second.

12.2 The two scenes it fixed in Christian imagination

The *Quo vadis* scene: persuaded by the brethren to escape, Peter is leaving the city when

“he saw the Lord entering into Rome. And when he saw him, he said: Lord, whither goest thou thus? And the Lord said unto him: I go into Rome to be crucified. And Peter said unto him: Lord, art thou being crucified again? He said unto him: Yea, Peter, I am being crucified again. And Peter came to himself. . . and he returned to Rome, rejoicing, and glorifying the Lord.” (*Acts of Peter* 35)

Condemned by Agrippa “on an accusation of godlessness,” Peter at the cross asks the executioners: “I beseech you the executioners, crucify me thus, with the head downward and not otherwise” (37). What is almost never quoted is the reason the book gives, which is not humility at all. Hanging inverted, Peter expounds “the mystery of all nature”: “the first man, whose race I bear in mine appearance, fell head downwards, and showed forth a manner of birth such as was not heretofore,” and so reversed right and left, above and below, good and evil; the inverted crucifixion is a figure of the reversal of that first inversion (38). The speech belongs to a distinctly speculative second-century religious idiom, and the same discourse tells the hearers to “blind these eyes of yours, close these ears of yours,” because the visible cross “is another thing, different from that which appeareth.”

The familiar humility motive is a later smoothing, and its first extant appearance is in a patristic summary: Jerome's notice that Peter was crucified head-down “asserting that he was unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord” (*On Illustrious Men* 1). Between the romance and Jerome stands Origen's bare statement, reported by Eusebius, that Peter “was crucified head-downwards; for he had requested that he might suffer in this way”—which

gives the request without any motive at all (*Church History* 3.1.2). The motive, in other words, changes twice between about 200 and about 392, while the physical detail stays constant. That pattern is characteristic of a memorable image acquiring an edifying explanation, and it is why this study reports the head-downward crucifixion as a second-century tradition rather than as a fact about the year 64.

None of this is first-century evidence. All of it is evidence of how the second and fourth centuries venerated a death whose fact they had received.

12.3 The constructed chronology

Around the same figure a chronology accreted, and it must be rejected as chronology while being reported accurately as tradition. Jerome's notice in 392 transmits the developed version in a single sentence: Peter was bishop of Antioch, then went to Rome "in the second year of Claudius"—that is, 42—"to overthrow Simon Magus," and held "the sacerdotal chair there for twenty-five years."

Every element of that has an identifiable weakness. The twenty-five-year episcopate is a construction whose origin cannot be traced: the 1912 Catholic Encyclopedia, no hostile witness, concedes that "we are unable to trace its origin." The Claudian arrival date rides on the Simon Magus legend, since its whole point is to bring Peter to Rome in time to confront Simon there. And the two together collide head-on with the documented record: Peter is in Jerusalem at the arrest of about 44, in Jerusalem again at the council of about 48–49, and at Antioch for the incident Paul reports; and Paul's letter to the Romans in about 57 greets two dozen Roman Christians without a word of him. A man cannot hold the Roman see continuously from 42 and be in all those places. The tradition is late, and it is wrong.

12.4 Sites, relics, and a date

Three Roman traditions of place belong to cult rather than biography, and are named here so that a reader meeting them knows their status. The Mamertine prison, where Peter is said to have been held and to have baptized his guards with water from a miraculous spring, is a site-tradition without an early witness located by this study. The martyr Petronilla, buried in the catacomb of Domitilla, was reinterpreted as Peter's daughter on the strength of her name. The *Cathedra Petri*, the wooden chair enshrined by Bernini in 1666, is described in the 1912 Catholic Encyclopedia as having a plain oak core within later ivory and acacia work; the antiquity of the physical object is not established here, and the feast attached to it commemorates the office rather than the furniture.

The liturgical date belongs to reception history in the same way. A commemoration of both apostles on 29 June is attested from the year 258, in connection with the catacombs *ad Catacumbas*; it became the immovable joint feast of the Roman calendar and remains so. No ancient source establishes it as the calendar day on which Peter died, and the joint celebration with Paul is a statement about how Rome remembered the two apostles together, not a report that they died on one day. Each of these items is tabulated with its earliest located witness in the tradition audit appendix; none is load-bearing in the historical chapters of this study.

13 The Tomb Beneath the Altar

13.1 What was found

Gaius's boast about "the trophy" on the Vatican was put to the test in the twentieth century. Between 1940 and 1949, by order of Pius XII, excavators explored beneath the crypt of St. Peter's and found a pagan and Christian necropolis of the first centuries sloping under the Constantinian basilica's floor. Directly beneath the high altar, on the vertical axis running down from the centre of the dome through the papal altar, they uncovered the remains of a small second-century monument—an *aedicula* of columns and slabs set against a red-plastered wall—built over a simple earth grave, in the plot the excavators called Campo P. The official report (B. M. Apollonj Ghetti, A. Ferrua, E. Josi, and E. Kirschbaum, *Esplorazioni sotto la confessione di San Pietro*, 1951) dated the "Red Wall" complex to about 160 and identified the monument with the *tropaion* Gaius had pointed to; Constantine's builders had encased precisely this spot in marble and centred the basilica on it. Pius XII announced in his Christmas radio message of 1950 that the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles had been found; asked whether the apostle's bones had been identified, he answered, at that date, in the negative.

13.2 The stratigraphic argument, and how it went

The architectural conclusion did not go unchallenged, and the challenge is worth following, because it shows what kind of question archaeology can and cannot answer here. The excavators' claim requires that the earth grave under the aedicula could be as early as Nero's reign. Armin von Gerkan, a distinguished classical archaeologist, argued that it could not: the vault lies too high relative to the second-century tomb chambers nearby, and must therefore sit in earth-fill brought from them, which would make it second-century as well. He combined this with a further hypothesis, that the rough arch by which the Red Wall's foundation passes over the grave was produced by second-century Christians hammering their way in to look for relics.

Two responses met it. Engelbert Kirschbaum, one of the excavators, replied that the uneven contours of the site are ordinary for that landscape and account for the grave's relative height without any large-scale earth-fill. More decisively, Adriano Prandi, who re-excavated the foundation and published photographs and diagrams of it, established that the arching over the grave is original construction and not the result of violence—in his view possibly caused by a gravestone left in place when the wall was built—so that the wall and the grave beneath it are structurally bound together by the builders' own act. Prandi's own reading of Campo P otherwise told against the excavators: he held that none of its burials are first-century. He did not, however, draw from that the conclusion that the vault could not be Neronian, and, on the reviewer's account, no one has yet established the contours of Nero's time precisely enough to eliminate the uncertainty.

One further find bore on the argument from probability. It had been assumed that no burials would have been permitted in Nero's own gardens during his lifetime, so that the whole Vatican necropolis must be Flavian. The discovery in 1957 of a second Vatican necropolis under the parking area, running north–south with graves of Neronian and earlier date, removed that assumption: as Filippo Magi observed, Nero not only allowed burials to continue along the Via Triumphalis but consented to his own slaves being buried there.

That is the honest ceiling of the architecture, and it is worth stating in the reviewer's own careful words rather than in a stronger paraphrase: "We may prudently affirm that at the middle of the second century the tradition of the Christian community was definitely attached to this spot, a tradition invincibly viable and early enough to bear authentic memories" (E. R. Smothers, S.J., *Theological Studies* 27, 1966). A mid-second-century Roman memorial, roughly a century after the death, at the spot the ancient church treated as Peter's grave: that much is secure. The first-century date of the grave itself is not.

13.3 The bones

The bones are a harder story, and the sequence of events is as important as the anthropology.

Three separate groups of human remains are involved and they must not be confused, as they were for years. The first group came from the heap of earth in the vault beneath the Red Wall's foundation; a physician had privately opined that these were the bones of a single robust old man with the skull missing, and the suggestion circulated that they were Peter's. The second was a scattering from the immediate vicinity of the vault. The third came from a marble-lined recess inside "Wall g," a low structure abutting the Red Wall just north of the shrine, covered with pilgrim graffiti and thought important enough by Constantine's builders that they preserved it in place at the cost of the new shrine's symmetry.

The Wall g bones had been removed before the excavators could examine the recess properly. The epigrapher Margherita Guarducci, who published the graffiti in 1958, learned in 1953 that Msgr. Ludwig Kaas, guardian of the fabric of St. Peter's, had had them transferred through the foreman Giovanni Segoni into a wooden casket deposited in the crypt—apparently without the excavators' knowledge. Only in 1956, with Pius XII's consent, were they given to a professional anthropologist, Venerando Correnti of the University of Palermo, whose report was completed in 1964.

Correnti's results settled two of the three groups. The bones from under the Red Wall's foundation proved to belong to three individuals, one almost certainly female and the others relatively young—so that the popular identification of Group 1 with an aged man was simply wrong. The second group was fragmentary and represented as many as five individuals. The bones from the Wall g casket, however, answered the description that had been mistakenly attached to the first: one individual, an old man of strong physique, with about half the skeleton represented and fragments of the skull among them. Mixed with them were traces of earth petrographically like the earth of the vault, fragments of coloured plaster from the Red Wall, and remains of textiles, including purple wool with gold thread.

To this Guarducci added an epigraphic argument. A fragmentary Greek graffito on the Red Wall, first read and published by Antonio Ferrua, she read as *Petros eni*, “Peter is here”; and she argued that it stands in precise juxtaposition to the outer end of the recess and could have been incised after Wall g was built, for no other purpose than to authenticate its contents. On that chain Paul VI announced at the general audience of 26 June 1968 that the relics of St. Peter “sono state identificate in modo che possiamo ritenere convincente”—identified in a way we can consider convincing—adding, himself, that “research, verifications, discussions and polemics” would not thereby be exhausted.

13.4 The limits, stated exactly

The identification has remained contested, and the objections are material rather than merely temperamental.

The removal from Wall g was undocumented at the time, and the chain of custody between the excavation and 1953 depends on later testimony. Antonio Ferrua, the excavation’s own epigraphist, never accepted the Petrine attribution of the bones, and the dispute between him and Guarducci ran until her death in 1999. A medieval coin was found in the recess and three worn coins in the casket, which would ordinarily suggest a late deposition; the reviewer’s answer—that the recess had an open crevice above the marble lining through which coins cast by pilgrims could travel, as a mouse demonstrably did—is a reasonable rebuttal rather than a refutation. Guarducci’s wider system of “mystical cryptography” in the graffiti found little scholarly assent even from reviewers sympathetic to the *Petros eni* reading: Smothers, who calls that reading “thoroughly justified,” says of the rest that “the author’s more speculative interpretations seem to exceed the bounds of a soberly critical assent,” while declining to dismiss the whole theory.

The reviewer’s own summing-up is the fairest available statement of the sympathetic case, and it is deliberately double-edged: could the Wall g bones properly be venerated as authentic relics? “In the strictest sense, it would seem impossible to assert it. . . . A prudent reserve would stand in the way of a categorical judgment of authenticity. There is a positive, serious probability, however, that these are the bones of St. Peter.”

Underneath all of this lies a limit no method can cross. No scientific technique can, even in principle, tie anonymous first- or second-century bones to a named individual: anthropology can say “one man, elderly, robust” and petrography can say “this earth matches that earth,” but neither can supply a name. What the identification actually rests on is an argument about custody and intention—that Constantine’s builders preserved Wall g for a reason, and that someone marked the recess. That is a historical argument, and it is a good one of its kind; it is not a forensic result. The Church’s acts here are acts of cult, not certifications.

What the archaeology establishes is bounded and real: a continuous architectural sequence from a second-century memorial, through Constantine’s enclosure, to the present papal altar, at a spot venerated as Peter’s grave from within a century of his death. What it cannot establish is the identity of any human remains, or the first-century date of the grave itself. This study affirms the first and leaves the rest as the open question the excavators themselves originally recorded. The account above rests on one checked scholarly review of 1966, which reports at second hand the work of the excavators, von Gerkan, Kirschbaum, Prandi, Magi, Guarducci, Ferrua, and Correnti; none of those publications was inspected directly, no site visit was made, and archaeological work after 1966—including the 2013 public exposition of the relics—is outside this study’s evidence and is not relied on anywhere.

14 Doctrine, Feasts, and Images

14.1 What the Church actually defined

A biography owes the reader an accurate statement of what the Catholic Church teaches about Peter’s office, kept distinct from the first-century evidence already presented, and stated at the level of precision the documents themselves use. The controlling text is the First Vatican Council’s dogmatic constitution *Pastor aeternus* (18 July 1870), checked for this study in its official Latin.

Its first chapter teaches that a primacy of true jurisdiction over the whole Church was promised and conferred on Peter alone: Christ, *beatum Petrum ceteris Apostolis praeponens*, setting blessed Peter before the other apostles, “established in him the perpetual principle and visible foundation of both unities.” It cites exactly the two texts this

biography has quoted—Matthew 16:16–19 and the risen Christ’s *Pasce agnos meos: Pasce oves meas* of John 21:15–17. The second chapter defines that this primacy endures by Christ’s own institution in perpetual successors (*perpetuos successores*), and that the Roman Pontiff is Peter’s successor in it. The third defines that primacy as ordinary and immediate jurisdiction over all churches. The fourth defines papal infallibility, and its wording is narrower than its reputation:

The Roman Pontiff, *cum ex Cathedra loquitur*—when he speaks from the chair, that is, when discharging the office of pastor and teacher of all Christians, by his supreme apostolic authority he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church—possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to be endowed in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals; and therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, irreformable. (*Project rendering of the Latin definition, Pastor aeternus ch. 4; the Latin phrases quoted are the council’s.*)

Two features of that chapter belong in any honest summary and are usually omitted. The first is the scriptural basis the council itself gives for the teaching, which is not Matthew 16 but Luke 22:32, quoted in the chapter as “the divine promise made by our Lord and Saviour to the prince of his disciples”—*Ego rogavi pro te, ut non deficiat fides tua*. The second is the limitation the council states in the same chapter: the Holy Spirit was not promised to Peter’s successors “that by his revelation they might disclose new doctrine, but that by his assistance they might devoutly guard and faithfully expound the revelation handed down through the apostles, the deposit of faith.” The definition is about protecting a received deposit under stated conditions, not about the personal reliability of a pope’s judgment, and it is precisely this distinction that keeps the definition and the Antioch incident from touching each other.

These are dogmatic determinations about the constitution of the Church, resting on Scripture read within tradition. The council does not supply, and does not claim to supply, new historical information about the first century. This study reports its teaching as the Church’s authoritative reception of the Petrine texts—the same texts whose critical history was traced above—without either importing the developed papal office back into Galilee or subtracting from what the council actually defined.

14.2 What the Church added afterward

Two later magisterial acts materially qualify the picture a reader might form from 1870 alone, and both are cited here as reception rather than as history.

The Second Vatican Council placed the primacy inside a doctrine of the episcopal college. *Lumen gentium* 22 teaches that “just as in the Gospel, the Lord so disposing, St. Peter and the other apostles constitute one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are joined together,” and grounds the collegiate character of the episcopal order in the ancient practice of communion among bishops and in the councils. The pattern is the one the New Testament evidence itself yields: one man first, inside a body, not above it in isolation.

John Paul II went further, and did something a historian is bound to record because it is unusual. In *Ut unum sint* (1995) he acknowledged that the Catholic conviction about the Bishop of Rome “constitutes a difficulty for most other Christians, whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections,” asked forgiveness to the extent that Catholics are responsible for these, and then invited the other communions to help him reform the exercise of his own office: “I am convinced that I have a particular responsibility... in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation” (§§88, 95). The invitation is to “a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject” (§96). Whether that dialogue has borne fruit is outside this study’s scope and cutoff; that a pope issued the invitation in a magisterial document is a fact of reception history.

14.3 Feasts and images

Liturgy fixed Peter in the calendar early and permanently. Rome kept the joint feast of Peter and Paul on 29 June from at least 258, when a commemoration of the two apostles *ad Catacumbas* is recorded under that date; the day remains the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul in the present General Roman Calendar, with the feast of the Chair

of Saint Peter on 22 February (anciently doubled by a January chair-feast) and the dedication of the basilicas of Peter and Paul on 18 November. The feasts commemorate the cult's history, not documented anniversaries.

Iconography settled just as firmly. The keys of Matthew 16:19 became Peter's universal attribute, and the emblem of the papacy and its flag; they are joined by the inverted cross of the martyrdom legend, the cock of the denials, and boat, net, and fish. From the fourth century artists gave him the same broad face, curled hair, and short beard—a convention of recognition, not a portrait, and not evidence of any kind about his appearance. He is patron of fishermen and of penitents—the tradition loved the weeping Peter—and of the popes who count from him; churches of St. Peter's chains, of the *Quo vadis*, and of the Vatican itself map his legend onto the city.

In the divided Christian memory he remains common ground and contested ground at once. All confessions read the same texts; all venerate the same apostle; and the interpretation of the rock and the keys is still the sharpest single line between them. That question has been given its own treatment above, at the texts, with the strongest arguments on each side in the words of those who made them. It is a question of theology, and this study leaves it where it belongs.

15 Conclusion: the Weight of the Keys

Strip away everything late and everything doubtful, and what remains is still a remarkably substantial life. A married fisherman of Bethsaida and Capernaum was called into the first circle of Jesus of Nazareth, renamed Rock, and stood first in every list of the Twelve; he confessed Jesus as Messiah and misunderstood what that meant; he promised to die with him and denied him three times in one night; he became the first named apostolic witness of the Resurrection and was publicly restored and given charge of the flock; he led the Jerusalem community, opened baptism to the uncircumcised, escaped one persecution, testified at the first council, was rebuked at Antioch by Paul for failing his own principle—and then walked off the documented page, to reappear only in the memory of the church of Rome as its martyred apostle under Nero. All of that rests on first-century texts; the martyrdom at Rome rests on an unbroken chain beginning within one generation. It is more than we can say of almost any other private person of his century.

The four contested questions named at the outset can now be answered in the terms the evidence allows, and it is worth putting the answers together in one place, because each of them is narrower than the use ordinarily made of it. Matthew 16:18–19 addresses one man by name and gives him a stewardship; it also gives the same binding power, two chapters later, to the disciples in the plural, and it says nothing about anyone after him. Galatians 2:11–14 records that the first apostle failed in practice on a principle he himself had established, and the Church canonized the letter that says so; a doctrine of the Petrine office that could not survive that verse would have been dead in the first century. The Roman death is historically well attested and morally certain in Catholic tradition, though that cumulative judgment is distinct from strict documentary certainty; the twenty-five-year Roman episcopate built on top of it is refuted by the same sources that establish the death. The two letters carry his name at different distances from his hand, and antiquity knew it.

The rest is reception, and the reception is itself historical fact of another kind: the second-century memorial under the Vatican hill; the romance that gave him the *Quo vadis* and the inverted cross; the constructed episcopal chronology; the feasts, the keys, the succession the Catholic Church defined dogmatically in 1870 and set inside a college in 1964. This study has kept the strata distinct not to diminish the saint but because the sources themselves do their work only when each is allowed to say what it can. A tradition that has to be protected from its own documents is not being honoured; the Fathers who argued about Galatians 2 for a decade, in letters the Church preserved, understood that better than most of their modern users do.

What the earliest evidence delivers is not a marble prince but the figure the Gospels insist on: the disciple of great grace and great failure, forgiven into leadership. Both halves of that are in every layer. The man given the keys is the man told “Go behind me, Satan”; the man prayed for by name is the man who denied by name; the man told to feed the sheep is the man asked three times because he had denied three times; the man who opened the door to the Gentiles is the man who backed away from their table. It is a strange foundation, and the sources never pretend otherwise.

The unresolved questions—the year and manner of his death, the authorship of his letters, the first-century date of the grave, the identity of the bones beneath the altar—are stated in the appendix and left open, as honesty requires. Each of the study's own judgments is set out in its labelled synthesis block with the finding that would overturn it.

The historical Peter ends at a Roman execution ground; everything since is the long history of what his confession, his failure, and his restoration have been worth to those who believe that the keys were real.

A Scope, Chronology, and Evidence

A.1 Identity, names, and range

Subject: Simon Peter (Simon; Cephas, Aramaic *kepha*, “rock,” glossed in Jn 1:42 as “interpreted Peter”; Greek *Petros*), son of Jona or John (both forms transmitted in the Greek witnesses), fisherman of Bethsaida and Capernaum in Galilee, apostle, and martyr. Whole-life range used in this study: birth unrecorded; active in Jesus’ following c. 28–30/33; documented leadership at Jerusalem to the council of c. 48–49; death at Rome under Nero between 64 and 68. Principal places: Bethsaida, Capernaum, and the lake; Jerusalem, Samaria, Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea; Antioch; Rome. No civil record, contemporary inscription, or dated document attests any event of his life; every date below is inference from literary sources.

A.2 Reader, question, and thesis boundary

Written for a serious general reader, student, or researcher who wants one coherent, evidence-graded life. The governing questions are stated in the opening section. The organizing synthesis—a substantial first-century core, an early and convergent but non-contemporary martyrdom tradition, and clearly stratified layers of legend, archaeology, and doctrine—is historical.

This study does not adjudicate the exegesis of Matthew 16:18–19, Luke 22:31–32, or John 21:15–17 among Christian confessions. It states the competing readings, quotes the strongest arguments on each side from their own authors, and says in labelled *Project synthesis* blocks what it judges the wording of those texts to carry and not to carry; those judgments are grammatical and historical, not doctrinal, and each names the finding that would overturn it. Neither does the study settle the literary authorship of the Petrine letters, the year or manner of the death beyond the stated ranges, the first-century date of the Vatican grave, the identity of the Vatican bones, or any doctrinal question. It claims no theological, archaeological, forensic, or rights review and no ecclesiastical approval. Saint Paul, Jerome, Augustine, Origen, Cyprian, and Calvin appear only where Peter’s evidence or its reception requires them, and their own lives and systems are outside its scope.

A.3 Corpus and citation conventions

Scripture is quoted in English from the Challoner revision of the Douay–Rheims Bible as transcribed at drbo.org (public domain), cited by conventional book, chapter, and verse; its renderings translate the Latin Vulgate. Where a point turns on the Latin, the Clementine Vulgate text presented alongside it at the same site was read (John 21 in particular).

Where a point turns on the Greek, this revision read the Greek directly in the Robinson–Pierpont Byzantine Textform, in the Unicode CSV form of Professor Robinson’s CCAT files distributed by the *byztxt* repository and registered in this repository’s source library with exact hashes. That edition prints an inline apparatus marking divergences from the Nestle–Aland text, and this study reports such divergences wherever they touch a claim—at Jn 1:42 and 21:15–17 (*Iona* / *Ioannou*), at Gal 1:18, 2:11 and 2:14 (*Petros* / *Kephas*), and at 2 Pt 2:17 (*eis aiona* present or absent). Greek and Aramaic words are transliterated in the text. This is an identified edition of one textual tradition with a divergence apparatus, not a critical edition, and no manuscript, collation, or original-language critical work was undertaken.

Patristic and other ancient sources follow identified public-domain translations, read at the loci cited: 1 Clement and Origen’s Commentary on Matthew in the Ante-Nicene Fathers volume 9 (Keith; Patrick); Ignatius and Irenaeus in ANF volume 1 (Roberts–Donaldson; Roberts–Rambaut); Cyprian in ANF volume 5 (Wallis); Tertullian in ANF volume 3 (Holmes; Thelwall); Eusebius in McGiffert’s translation (NPNF series 2, volume 1); Jerome’s *On Illustrious Men* in Richardson (NPNF series 2, volume 3); Jerome’s letters to and from Augustine and Augustine’s letters in Cunningham’s translation (NPNF series 1, volume 1) with Jerome’s own letter numbering checked at the parallel NPNF series 2, volume 6 presentation; Augustine’s *Tractates on John* in NPNF series 1, volume 7; Tacitus in

Church–Brodrigg (1876); the *Acts of Peter* in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924), an apocryphal romance cited as such. Calvin’s *Institutes* follow Beveridge’s public-domain translation as transcribed at CCEL. *Pastor aeternus* was checked against the Holy See’s official Latin text as registered in the repository’s source library (exact artifact hash re-verified during this study); *Lumen gentium* and *Ut unum sint* were read in the official English texts on the Holy See’s site. All web transcriptions were read as retrieved on 2026-07-25; translations quoted are public domain except where a brief scholarly quotation is identified as such.

A.4 Evidence classes

Class	Meaning
A	Subject-authored evidence: none uncontested. 1–2 Peter are canonical works in Peter’s name whose direct literary authorship is argued, not presumed; each use is graded in place.
N	Contemporary or near-contemporary external witness: Paul’s undisputed letters (Gal, 1 Cor, Rom, and the greeting lists of the captivity letters); the four Gospels and Acts as first-century canonical witnesses, each read by its own date, genre, and purpose, never harmonized silently; Tacitus and Josephus for context and for the one external chronological anchor.
E	Early received tradition: 1 Clement; Ignatius; Papias, Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius of Corinth, Gaius, and Origen as preserved at exact loci in Eusebius; Irenaeus; the Muratorian Fragment; Tertullian; Cyprian; Origen’s Commentary on Matthew; Jerome and Augustine as fourth- and fifth-century readers of first-century texts.
L	Later hagiographic and devotional tradition: the <i>Acts of Peter</i> and the legend cycle; the 25-year episcopate and Claudian arrival; Mamertine, Petronilla, chair relic; iconography.
M	Official ecclesial reception, limited to each act’s object: <i>Pastor aeternus</i> ; <i>Lumen gentium</i> 22; <i>Ut unum sint</i> ; the liturgical calendar; papal announcements of 1950 and 1968 concerning tomb and relics.
K	Named modern critical reconstruction: the 1951 excavation report and its review literature (Smothers 1966, with von Gerkan, Kirschbaum, Prandi, Magi, Guarducci, Ferrua, and Correnti as there reported); the 1912 Catholic Encyclopedia on the Cyprianic recensions and on the episcopate notice; standard critical positions on the letters, cited as positions.
S	Source-grounded project synthesis, never attributed to a source. Every consequential instance is inside a labelled <i>Project synthesis</i> block and carries its own counterargument and defeater.

A.5 Chronology

Dates are claims with stated bases; Gospel-era events are relative to a ministry usually placed c. 28–30/33, and no absolute date in Peter’s life is documented before the persecution of 64.

Date	Event	Basis	Status
unknown	Birth; Bethsaida origin, Capernaum household; marriage	Jn 1:44; Mk 1:29–31; 1 Cor 9:5 (N)	Places/status secure; all dates unknown
c. 28–30	Call into Jesus’ following; named Cephas/Peter	Mk 1:16–18; Lk 5:1–11; Jn 1:40–42 (N; three distinct portraits)	Secure event; date approximate
ministry years	First of the Twelve; confession at Caesarea Philippi; rebuke; Transfiguration	Mk 8:29 par.; Mt 16:16–23; Mt 17:1–8 (N)	Secure within Gospel witness
30 or 33	Denials during the Passion; restoration and pastoral commission after Easter; first named Resurrection witness	All four Gospels; Jn 21; 1 Cor 15:5; Lk 24:34 (N)	Event secure; year 30/33 unresolved

Date	Event	Basis	Status
c. 30/33–44	Leadership of the Jerusalem church; Samaria; Lydda–Joppa; Cornelius at Caesarea	Acts 1–11 (N, Lukan narrative)	Sequence secure as Luke’s portrait; dates approximate
c. 35–38	Paul’s fifteen days with Cephas in Jerusalem	Gal 1:18 (N); date relative to Paul’s conversion (K)	Secure event; date range
44	Arrest under Herod Agrippa I; escape; “went into another place”	Acts 12 (N); Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> 19 for Agrippa’s death in his seventh regnal year (N); the absolute year is a conventional conversion (K)	Event secure; year conventional
c. 48–49	Council of Jerusalem; Peter’s testimony; pillars’ agreement	Acts 15:7–11; Gal 2:7–9 (N; relation of the two accounts debated)	Secure; absolute date approximate
after the council	The Antioch incident; Paul’s public rebuke	Gal 2:11–14 (N; Paul’s account only)	Event secure; date and outcome unrecorded; Augustine argued for a date before the council
50s	Cephas known to the Corinthian church; traveling household	1 Cor 1:12; 9:5; 15:5 (N)	Secure at letter’s date
c. 57	Paul writes to Rome, greeting some two dozen Roman Christians; Peter is not among them	Rom 15:20; 16:1–16 (N)	Secure as a negative for that year only
60s	Final ministry at Rome; 1 Peter associated with “Babylon” and Mark	1 Pt 5:13 (canonical, authorship graded); second-century reading as Rome (E)	Probable; not directly documented
64–68	Martyrdom at Rome under Nero, by crucifixion in early tradition	Jn 21:18–19 (N, prophecy); 1 Clem. 5–6 (E, c. 95–96); Ignatius, Dionysius, Gaius, Tertullian, Origen (E); Tacitus 15.44 (N, context)	Historically well attested and morally certain in Catholic tradition, but not strictly documented; year and manner not fixed
c. 95–96	1 Clement, from Rome, names Peter first among the martyrs of “our own generation”	1 Clem. 5–6 (E); conventional dating (K)	Witness secure; date and provenance conventional
c. 110	Ignatius writes to Rome: “I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you”	<i>Romans</i> 4 (E)	Secure as witness; traditional date
c. 160	Aedicula (“trophy”) built over the Vatican grave site	Excavation report 1951; Smothers 1966 (K); Gaius c. 200 (E)	Secure as archaeology; the grave beneath it is not securely first-century
c. 170	Muratorian Fragment: Luke omitted “the martyrdom of Peter”; no epistle of Peter listed	Fragment, Metzger’s translation (E)	Witness secure; text damaged, silence bounded
199–217	Gaius, disputing with Proclus at Rome, points to the “trophy” on the Vatican and the Ostian way	Eusebius, <i>Church History</i> 2.25.6–7 (E); Zephyrinus’s dates supply the range	Secure as witness
258	29 June commemoration of both apostles <i>ad Catacumbas</i>	Depositio martyrum notice as reported in CE 1912 (E/K)	Secure as cult date
313–337	Constantinian basilica centered on the aedicula; Wall g preserved within it	Excavation literature (K/M)	Secure

Date	Event	Basis	Status
392	Jerome's notice: Antioch, 25 Roman years, inverted cross, Vatican burial	<i>On Illustrious Men</i> 1 (E/L)	Notice secure; contents graded as tradition
394–405	The Jerome–Augustine exchange on Galatians 2:11–14	Augustine, <i>Letters</i> 28, 40, 75, 82 (E)	Letters secure; no withdrawal recorded on either side
1870	<i>Pastor aeternus</i> defines the perpetual Petrine primacy and papal infallibility	Official Latin text (M)	Secure
1940–1949	Excavations under St. Peter's; official report 1951	Esplorazioni (K); Pius XII 1950 announcement (M)	Secure
1953–1968	Wall-g bones episode; Guarducci's studies; Correnti's anthropology; Paul VI announces relics "identified... convincingly"	Smothers 1966 (K); audience of 26 June 1968 (M)	Events secure; identification contested
1964–1995	<i>Lumen gentium</i> 22 sets the primacy within the episcopal college; <i>Ut unum sint</i> invites dialogue on its exercise	Official texts (M)	Secure

A.6 Traditions and their status

Each memorable tradition treated in this study is recorded here with the earliest witness located for it, the evidence that tells against it, and the treatment it receives above. "Earliest located" is bounded by the witnesses actually checked for this study and is correctable.

Tradition	Earliest witness	Counter-evidence	Treatment
Martyrdom (manner unspecified)	1 Clem. 5 (c. 95–96)	No place or manner named in the letter	Anchor witness; affirmed
Death at Rome	Implied: 1 Pt 5:13; Ignatius <i>Rom.</i> 4; explicit: Dionysius c. 170, Gaius c. 200	No first-century text names Rome; silences of Rom 16, Acts, captivity letters	Affirmed as historical judgment with the counterargument stated
Death by crucifixion	Tertullian, <i>Prescription</i> 36; <i>Scorpiace</i> 15 (c. 200)	Not contemporary; Scorpiace echoes Jn 21:18 and so may not be independent	Reported as early and credible, not as documented fact
Head-downward crucifixion	<i>Acts of Peter</i> 37–38 ($\leq$ 200); Origen c. 230	Motive differs in every witness: cosmic symbolism, then none, then humility	Labeled legend-stratum
<i>Quo vadis</i>	<i>Acts of Peter</i> 35	Apocryphal romance whose author, per its translator, "does not know much about Rome"	Quoted and labeled; not biography
Simon Magus contest at Rome	<i>Acts of Peter</i>	Grown from Acts 8:9–24	Named as legend on a canonical seed
Twenty-five-year Roman episcopate	Third-century notice via Jerome, <i>On Illustrious Men</i> 1	Origin "unable to trace" per CE 1912; collides with Gal, Acts, and Rom 16	Rejected as chronology
Arrival at Rome in Claudius's second year (42)	Eusebian chronicle tradition; Jerome	Rides on the Simon Magus legend; contradicted by Acts and Galatians	Rejected as chronology
Bishop of Antioch	Jerome (392); later chair-feast	Gal 2:11 attests presence only	Presence affirmed; episcopate reported as tradition
"Babylon" = Rome	Clement of Alexandria and Papias via Eusebius <i>HE</i> 2.15.2	A second-century reading of a first-century text	Used as corroboration, flagged as interpretation

Tradition	Earliest witness	Counter-evidence	Treatment
Mark as Peter’s interpreter	Papias via <i>HE</i> 3.39.15; Irenaeus <i>AH</i> 3.1.1	Papias reports at two removes and is already defending the book	Reported; not used to harmonize the Gospels
Cephas at Antioch a different man	Clement of Alexandria via <i>HE</i> 1.12.2	Paul alternates <i>Petros</i> and <i>Kephas</i> of one man in Gal 2:7–9	Rejected
The rebuke at Antioch was staged	Origen, via Jerome’s <i>Letter</i> 112	Augustine’s objection: it destroys the credibility of the text that reports it	Rejected with the counterargument stated
29 June as the death day	No ancient source; 258 as cult date	Feast date only	Stated as cult history
Same-day martyrdom with Paul	Dionysius via <i>HE</i> 2.25.8	His phrase may mean “about the same time”	Reported with its ceiling
Tomb under the Vatican altar	Gaius c. 200; aedicula c. 160	The grave beneath the aedicula is not securely dated to the first century	Affirmed at its archaeological ceiling
Identification of the Wall-g bones	Guarducci 1965; Paul VI 1968	Undocumented removal; Ferrua’s dissent; coins in the recess; no method can supply a name	Reported as contested
<i>Petros eni</i> graffito	Ferrua’s first reading; Guarducci’s restudy	Referent debated; Guarducci’s wider cryptography criticized	Reported with attribution
Mamertine prison and spring	Late Roman site tradition; no early witness located	—	Named as late legend
Petronilla as Peter’s daughter	Late Roman legend on a catacomb name	—	Named as late legend
<i>Cathedra Petri</i> relic chair	CE 1912 description	The physical chair’s antiquity not established here	Named as cult object

A.7 Method, limits, and negative results

Earliest controlled evidence governs; each Gospel, Acts, and each letter is treated as a distinct witness; no harmony is asserted anywhere. Every judgment of this study’s own on a contested question is confined to a labelled *Project synthesis* block that states its reasons, states the strongest opposing argument in the terms its holders would accept, and names the finding that would overturn it.

Linguistic and material limits: the study reads English translations throughout, together with the Greek of the identified Byzantine-textform edition at the specific loci named above, brief Latin of *Pastor aeternus* and of the Clementine Vulgate at John 21, and no other original-language material. No manuscript, collation, palaeographic, epigraphic, or osteological inspection was made; no site was visited. The 1951 excavation report, Guarducci’s volumes, von Gerkan’s and Prandi’s studies, the *Depositio martyrum*, the Liberian Catalogue, the Greek of Clement of Alexandria’s *Hypotyposes*, Jerome’s Latin commentary on Galatians, Jerome’s Letter 120 to Hedibia in full, Augustine’s *Retractations*, the critical editions of Cyprian, and all archaeological work after 1966 were not inspected; every claim depending on them is ceilinged in place as reported at second hand, and no clause in this study rests on an unreached source alone.

Bounded negative results from the searches of 2026-07-25 over the witnesses listed in the References: no New Testament statement that Peter went to Rome; no first-century statement of the manner or place of his death beyond Jn 21:18–19’s prophecy; no mention of Peter in Romans 16 or in the greeting lists of Colossians, Philemon, or 2 Timothy; no pre-Tertullian explicit statement of crucifixion; no pre-third-century witness to the 25-year episcopate (its origin untraceable per CE 1912); no ancient evidence establishing 29 June as the death day; no first- or early second-century text known to this study that names a successor to Peter in a distinctive Petrine function, or that applies the rock-and-keys language of Matthew 16 to the apostolic body without reference to Simon. These are bounded, correctable literal results over the named witnesses and translations, not proofs of absence. Mutable online sources

(drbo.org, New Advent, CCEL, vatican.va, basilicasanpietro.va, osservatoreromano.va, earlychristianwritings.com, theologicalstudies.net, wikisource, and the pinned byztxt repository state) were used as checked on 2026-07-25.

A.8 Rights and review state

Project prose is original. Quotations follow public-domain translations: Challoner Douay–Rheims and the Clementine Vulgate; ANF/NPNF (1880s–1890s); Beveridge’s Calvin (1845); Church–Brodribb Tacitus (1876); Whiston’s Josephus; M. R. James (1924, public domain in the United States). The Greek text quoted in transliteration is the Robinson–Pierpont Byzantine Textform in a form its distributors place in the public domain. Brief Latin quotations from *Pastor aeternus* are from the Holy See’s web text with project rendering identified as such; *Lumen gentium* and *Ut unum sint* are quoted briefly from the Holy See’s official English; Paul VI’s 1968 sentence is quoted briefly with translation. Smothers 1966 and one clause of Metzger’s translation of the Muratorian Fragment are quoted briefly under scholarly fair use with full attribution. This publication has received internal editorial and production checking only: no independent historical, theological, archaeological, linguistic, or rights review, and no ecclesiastical approval, is claimed or implied.

B References

All web sources were accessed and checked on 2026-07-25. Ancient-work citations in the text use conventional titles and loci with the translations listed here.

Scripture

- The Holy Bible, Douay–Rheims version, Challoner revision, as transcribed at drbo.org (public domain). Chapters checked verbatim for this study: Mt 4, 10, 14, 16, 17, 26; Mk 1, 3, 8, 14; Lk 5, 22, 24; Jn 1, 6, 13, 18, 20, 21; Acts 1–5, 8, 10, 12, 15; Rom 15–16; 1 Cor 1, 3, 9, 10, 15; Gal 1–2; Eph 2; Col 4; 2 Tim 4; Philemon; 1 Pt 1, 4, 5; 2 Pt 1–3; Jude; Apoc 21; Isa 22 (chapter pages under <https://drbo.org/chapter/47016.htm> and the same numbering pattern, e.g. 50021 for John 21, 55002 for Galatians 2).
- The Clementine Vulgate as presented at the same site (<https://drbo.org/lvb/chapter/50021.htm>); John 21:15–17 read in Latin for the *diligis/amas* and *pasce* renderings.
- *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform*, ed. Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont (RP2018), in the Unicode CSV form of Robinson’s CCAT files with inline variant apparatus distributed by the byztxt/byzantine-majority-text repository, which states that all code and text it contains is in the public domain. Files for Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Galatians, 1–2 Peter, and Jude were retrieved at the pinned repository state 27a45ff1 and registered with exact SHA-256 hashes in the repository’s source library (<src/sources/works/robinson-pierpont/>); they are bound in <research/source-bindings.toml>. Loci read in Greek: Mt 16:16–19; Mt 18:18; Lk 22:31–32; Jn 1:42; 3:35; 5:20; 11:3, 5; 13:23; 18:18; 20:2; 21:9, 15–19; Acts 4:13; 12:17; 15:7, 14; Gal 1:18; 2:6–14; 1 Cor 9:5; 15:5; 1 Pt 1:1; 5:1–2, 12–13; 2 Pt 1:1, 14, 16–18; 2:4–6, 11, 17; Jude 6–7, 9, 12–13.

Ancient witnesses

- Clement of Rome (attributed), *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 4–6, in the translation presented at New Advent and there attributed to John Keith, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9 (Buffalo, 1896), ed. Allan Menzies (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1010.htm>). Conventional dating c. 95–96 as reported in the 1912 Catholic Encyclopedia, “Pope St. Clement I” (<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04012c.htm>).
- Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans* 4 and *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 3, middle (“shorter”) recension, trans. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, ANF vol. 1 (Buffalo, 1885), at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0107.htm>; <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0109.htm>).
- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1 and 3.3.2–3, trans. A. Roberts and W. Rambaut, ANF vol. 1, at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103301.htm>; <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103303.htm>).

A catalog-level source-library record of ANF vol. 1 exists in the repository and is bound in `research/source-bindings.toml`.

- Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 12.10–14, trans. John Patrick, ANF vol. 9, at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/101612.htm>); the fullest ancient statement of the reading that makes every confessor a “Peter.”
- Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church* 4–5, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, ANF vol. 5 (Buffalo, 1886), at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050701.htm>). The two recensions of chapter 4, and the account of their manuscript and patristic attestation, are taken from J. Chapman’s article “St. Cyprian of Carthage,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (New York, 1908) (<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04583b.htm>), which prints both forms.
- Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics* 36 (trans. P. Holmes) and *Scorpiace* 15 (trans. S. Thelwall), ANF vol. 3, at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0311.htm>; <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0318.htm>).
- Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History* 1.12, 2.15, 2.25, 3.1, 3.3, 3.39, 6.20, trans. A. C. McGiffert, NPNF series 2, vol. 1 (New York, 1890), at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250101.htm>; <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250102.htm>; <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm>; <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250106.htm>) and CCEL (<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.viii.xxxix.html>); preserving Papias, Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius of Corinth, Gaius, and Origen at the loci cited in the text.
- The Muratorian Fragment, lines 34–39 and 68–72, in Bruce M. Metzger’s English translation of the critically amended text (*The Canon of the New Testament*, Oxford, 1987, appendix IV), as transcribed at Early Christian Writings (<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/muratorian-metzger.html>); one clause quoted under scholarly fair use. Dating to about 170 follows the transcription’s headnote.
- Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 1, trans. E. C. Richardson, NPNF series 2, vol. 3, at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2708.htm>).
- Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44, trans. A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb (1876), at Wikisource ([https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Annals_\(Tacitus\)/Book_15](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Annals_(Tacitus)/Book_15)).
- Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 19 (Agrippa I’s death at Caesarea, “in the seventh year of his reign”), trans. William Whiston, Project Gutenberg text 2848 (<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2848/pg2848.txt>). A catalog-level source-library record of the Whiston edition exists in the repository and is bound in `research/source-bindings.toml`.

The Jerome–Augustine correspondence on Galatians 2

- Augustine, *Letter* 28 (to Jerome, 394 or 395), *Letter* 40, and *Letter* 82 (405), trans. J. G. Cunningham, NPNF series 1, vol. 1, at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102028.htm>; <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102040.htm>; <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102082.htm>). All three read in full for this study.
- Jerome, *Letter* 112 (to Augustine, c. 404), printed as *Letter* 75 in Augustine’s collection, same translation and series (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102075.htm>), with the parallel presentation among Jerome’s letters, NPNF series 2, vol. 6 (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001112.htm>). Read in full. A catalog-level source-library record of NPNF series 1, vol. 1 and of NPNF series 2, vol. 6 exists in the repository and both are bound in `research/source-bindings.toml`.
- Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 124.5, trans. John Gibb and James Innes, NPNF series 1, vol. 7, at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701124.htm>); the *petra*/Peter etymology and the “Peter represented the Church” reading.
- Jerome, *Letter* 120 (to Hedibia): NPNF series 2, vol. 6 gives only an abstract of its twelve questions (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001120.htm>). The letter’s remark about Peter’s use of different interpreters, sometimes cited in discussions of 1–2 Peter, could not be verified in a reachable edition and is therefore not used in this study.

Apocrypha and later tradition

- *The Acts of Peter* (apocryphal; Greek, Asia Minor, “not later than A.D. 200” per the translator’s headnote), chs. 26, 33–38 for the wonder-contest, the concubines, the *Quo vadis*, and the martyrdom, in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), as transcribed at Early Christian Writings (<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/actspeter.html>).
- “St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11 (New York, 1911), at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11744a.htm>); source for the 258 Catacombs notice, the feast history, and the judgment that the 25-year-episcopate notice’s origin is untraceable.
- “Chair of Peter,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 (New York, 1908), at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03551e.htm>); the chair feasts and the relic-chair description.

Reformation reading

- John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.6 (“Of the primacy of the Romish see”), sections 3–7, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), as transcribed at CCEL (<https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.vi.vii.html>). Read in full for this study; a catalog-level source-library record of the work and translation was created and is bound in **research/source-bindings.toml**.

Archaeology of the tomb

- E. R. Smothers, S.J., “The Bones of St. Peter,” *Theological Studies* 27 (1966) 79–88, read in full in the publisher’s open PDF (<https://theologicalstudies.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/27.1.4.pdf>); the principal checked scholarly control for the excavation report (Apollonj Ghetti–Ferrua–Josi–Kirschbaum, *Esplorazioni*, 1951), von Gerkan’s stratigraphic objection and Kirschbaum’s reply, Prandi’s re-excavation of the Red Wall foundation, Magi’s 1957 Vatican parking-area necropolis, Guarducci’s graffiti volumes and *Le reliquie di Pietro* (1965), the Kaas–Segoni removal, and Correnti’s anthropology—none of which was inspected directly.
- Paul VI, General Audience of 26 June 1968, Italian text, Vatican website (https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/audiences/1968/documents/hf_p-vi_aud_19680626.html); source of the quoted announcement and its qualifications, including the retrospective description of Pius XII’s 1950 answer on the bones as suspensive.
- “A striking discovery,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, June 2024 (<https://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/2024-06/ing-026/a-striking-discovery.html>); checked for the official narrative of the excavations, Pius XII’s 1950 radio-message announcement, and the aedicula dating.
- “The Necropolis,” official presentation, St. Peter’s Basilica website (<https://www.basilicasanpietro.va/en/products/the-necropolis>); the current official shrine claim, cited as such.

Ecclesial reception

- First Vatican Council, dogmatic constitution *Pastor aeternus* (18 July 1870), official Latin text, Vatican website (https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/i-vatican-council/documents/vat-i_const_18700718_pastor-aeternus_la.html); verified byte-identical to the repository source-library artifact (SHA-256 032a5f65...) on 2026-07-25 and bound in **research/source-bindings.toml**. Chapters 1–4 read, including the Luke 22:32 citation and the limiting clause on the promise to Peter’s successors.
- Second Vatican Council, dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964), §22, official English text, Vatican website (https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).
- John Paul II, encyclical *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995), §§88–97, official English text, Vatican website (https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html).

- General Roman Calendar (*Calendarium Romanum Generale*, Missale Romanum, editio typica tertia, 2002): identified through the repository's source-library record; feast statements in the text also rest on the Catholic Encyclopedia articles above and carry the 2026-07-25 currentness cutoff.

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