

1–2 Peter in Historical-Critical Perspective: Exegesis, Roman Context, and Reception Issues

Jonas Evaristo de Souza Barbosa¹

¹Societas Linguistica Europae | ORCID: 0009-0004-0185-4064

ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Published: February 2026</p> <p>Keywords: 1 Peter 2 Peter Historical-critical exegesis Roman Asia Minor Textual criticism</p>	<p>This article offers a historical-critical and philological study of 1–2 Peter. For 1 Peter, it argues that the letter constructs a “diaspora/sojourner” identity with a precise sociological function: to sustain internal cohesion and to regulate public ethics under recurring social pressure. The most plausible background is local stigma and intermittent hostility rather than a uniform, state-driven persecution. Administrative practice is discussed comparatively with Pliny–Trajan (Bithynia–Pontus) as a control of plausibility, while Roman elite witnesses (Tacitus, Suetonius) illuminate the cultural classification of Christians as a suspect superstition. Archaeology is used primarily to reconstruct the civic-religious ecosystem of Roman Asia Minor (e.g., imperial-cult monumentalization) without over-claiming direct evidence for first-century Christian presence. For 2 Peter, the study examines authorship and reception tensions, literary dependence on Jude, the testamentary character of the discourse, and the community crisis generated by the perceived delay of the parousia. Special attention is given to textual criticism in 2 Pet 3:10, where significant variants affect translation and require probabilistic reasoning. Throughout, the article distinguishes textual data from historical inference and conjecture, aiming to provide a methodologically transparent framework for advanced research in early Christian exegesis and Roman-context studies.</p>

1. Introduction

This study addresses 1–2 Peter as texts situated within the Roman Mediterranean, with two controlled aims: (i) philological exegesis of what the Greek text states and presupposes, and (ii) historically plausible reconstruction of social mechanisms compatible with external literary evidence and material culture. The approach avoids two recurrent distortions: decontextualized theological readings and reductive sociological explanations that dissolve the text into its environment.

Research aims and scope

Research aims and scope. For 1 Peter, the analysis focuses on the construction of a minority “diaspora/sojourner” identity and the resulting public ethic designed to reduce vulnerability under stigma and local hostility. For 2 Peter, the analysis examines community stabilization in the face of rival teachers, authors’ self-presentation and reception debates, the crisis associated with the perceived delay of the parousia, and a key textual-critical problem in 2 Pet 3:10.

Terminological control: “persecution”

Terminological control. The term “persecution” is used analytically and with restraint. In many provincial contexts the more realistic baseline is social pressure, reputation damage, and reactive denunciations rather than a continuous, uniform imperial program. This distinction is necessary to avoid anachronistic reconstructions and to interpret paraenetic strategies (e.g., non-retaliation, reputation management) in their likely social function.

2. Literature Review

The interpretive framework draws on scholarship on social identity formation in 1 Peter, Roman administrative practice, and the reception history of 2 Peter. The literature is treated as a map of competing explanatory models rather than as a source of ready-made conclusions.

1 Peter: identity and Roman Asia Minor

1 Peter: identity, civic-religious pressure, and public ethics. Major lines of research emphasize (a) the reuse of Jewish diaspora language for community formation, (b) honor/shame dynamics and household reputation, and (c) the political-theological ambiguity of terms such as *ktisis* (“human institution/creation”). Imperial-cult monumentalization in Roman Asia Minor provides an environmental control for understanding why non-participation in public rites could be perceived as antisocial.

2 Peter: authorship, Jude, and eschatology

2 Peter: authorship, Jude, and eschatological delay. The history of reception includes ancient hesitation (antilegomena) and modern debates over direct Petrine authorship versus later Petrine tradition. Literary proximity between 2 Peter 2 and Jude strongly suggests dependence or a shared tradition; many models argue that 2 Peter reworks Jude in a broader testamentary discourse. 2 Pet 3:15–16 contributes to discussions of Pauline letter circulation, while 2 Pet 3:10 is a standard locus for textual-critical analysis with interpretive impact.

3. Methodology

Methodologically, the study operates with layered evidence and explicit degrees of confidence. Textual claims are distinguished from historical inference and from conjecture.

Evidence layers and controls of plausibility

Evidence layers and controls of plausibility. The Greek text and its intertextuality with the Septuagint are treated as high-weight evidence for internal claims and identity construction. Extrabiblical materials (e.g., Pliny–Trajan; Tacitus; Suetonius; Lucian; martyr traditions) delimit administrative and cultural plausibility without being used to ‘prove’ local scenarios. Archaeology is weighted highly for reconstructing civic-religious environments and cautiously for specific Christian identification in the first century.

Philological procedure and inferential grading

Philological procedure and inferential grading. Key lexemes and syntagms are analyzed in context (semantic range, marked constructions, rhetorical function), and conclusions are classified operationally as probable, plausible, possible, or speculative. Textual variants are handled with standard critical principles, including attention to how alternative readings change translation without forcing false certainty.

4. Findings

Findings are presented in two blocks: (a) 1 Peter as a strategy of minority survival through identity formation and public ethics, and (b) 2 Peter as community consolidation amid internal conflict and eschatological skepticism, with a dedicated note on textual criticism.

1 Peter: diaspora identity and public ethics

1 Peter: constructed diaspora identity and public ethic. The prescript (1 Pet 1:1–2) deploys paroikoi/parepidēmoi and diaspora language to create a dual identity: high theological status (“elect”) coupled with low social security (“resident aliens”). This tension governs the paraenesis. The letter’s repeated concern for conduct “among the gentiles” (2:12) and for non-retaliation (3:9; 4:16) aligns best with environments of recurring stigma and occasional escalation through denunciation rather than with uniform state persecution. The marked expression ‘human ktisis’ (2:13) supports a pragmatic obedience that does not concede symbolic divinization to imperial claims.

2 Peter: consolidation amid internal conflict

2 Peter: stabilization, rival teachers, and delay of the parousia. The letter frames ‘knowledge’ (epignōsis) as operational formation that produces virtue (2 Pet 1:3–11), contrasting this with rivals who commodify audiences through fabricated speech (2:3). The discourse exhibits testamentary traits (memory, imminent ‘exodus’, legacy transmission), and its proximity to Jude indicates a reworked polemic integrated into a broader program. In chapter 3, the rhetorical problem is the apparent stability of the world and the mocked promise of parousia; the reply combines precedents of disruption (creation/deluge) with a theology of time and patience (3:8–9).

Textual criticism in 2 Pet 3:10

Textual note on 2 Pet 3:10. The variant readings (e.g., ‘will be found/exposed’ versus ‘will be burned’) shift emphasis between exposure-for-judgment and destruction imagery. In either case, the paragraph’s stable argumentative payoff is ethical: the expectation of an end functions to shape holiness and public integrity (3:11–14). Methodologically, this locus illustrates why historical-critical exegesis must separate secure sense from transmission uncertainty and avoid artificial certainty.

Table 1: Competing models for conflict background in 1 Peter (comparative synthesis).

Model	Primary evidence	Mechanism	Relative plausibility
Diffuse social hostility	1 Peter internal rhetoric; honor/shame dynamics	Stigma, ostracism, reputational risk; occasional escalation	High (baseline)
Reactive legal episodes by denunciation	Pliny–Trajan as comparative control; provincial procedure	Interrogation, tests of loyalty; punishment for persistence	Plausible (context-specific)
Uniform, continuous state persecution	Requires stable empire-wide mechanism; not supported by admin evidence	Active hunt and standardized policy across provinces	Low (as global explanation)

Source: Author’s synthesis based on primary and secondary literature.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Taken together, 1–2 Peter are best read neither as a handbook for uniform state persecution nor as abstract moralism. 1 Peter functions as moral and communal engineering for vulnerable minorities: it builds a diaspora identity and derives a pragmatic public ethic aimed at reducing reputational risk under stigma, with administrative escalation best modeled as reactive and locally variable. Comparative controls (Pliny–Trajan) and Roman cultural witnesses help delimit what is historically plausible, while archaeology primarily reconstructs the civic-religious environment that made non-conformity socially costly.

Conclusion

Conclusion. 2 Peter functions as consolidation under internal threat: it redefines knowledge as ethically productive formation, attacks exploitative leaders, and responds to eschatological skepticism by combining historical precedents with a theology of time and patience. The textual problem of 2 Pet 3:10 demonstrates the need for probabilistic, methodologically explicit exegesis where transmission is uncertain.

Recommendations

Recommendations. Future work should (i) avoid collapsing distinct regions and decades into a single ‘persecution’ narrative, (ii) integrate social-identity theory with careful philology of marked constructions, and (iii) treat extrabiblical materials as controls of plausibility, not as direct corroboration. For 2 Peter, further research should combine reception history, intertextual modeling of Jude, and updated textual-critical evaluation of 3:10 within the letter’s stable ethical argument.

References

- [1] Achtemeier, P. J. (1996). *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*. Fortress Press.
- [2] Bauckham, R. J. (1983). *Jude, 2 Peter* (Word Biblical Commentary 50). Word Books.
- [3] Davids, P. H. (1990). *The First Epistle of Peter* (New International Commentary on the New Testament). Eerdmans.
- [4] Elliott, J. H. (1990). *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy*. Fortress Press.
- [5] Friesen, S. J. (2001). *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins*. Oxford University Press.
- [6] Gamble, H. Y. (1995). *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*. Yale University Press.
- [7] Green, G. L. (2008). *Jude and 2 Peter* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament). Baker Academic.
- [8] Horrell, D. G. (2007). The label “Christian” in 1 Peter 4:16: A social identity perspective. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 126(2), 361–381.
- [9] Jobes, K. H. (2005). *1 Peter* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament). Baker Academic.
- [10] Lucian. (1936). *The Death of Peregrine*. In *Lucian* (Vol. V) (A. M. Harmon, Trans.). Harvard University Press.
- [11] Metzger, B. M., & Ehrman, B. D. (2005). *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- [12] Michaels, J. R. (1988). *1 Peter* (Word Biblical Commentary 49). Word Books.
- [13] Pliny. (1969). *Letters and Panegyricus* (B. Radice, Trans.). Harvard University Press.
- [14] Price, S. R. F. (1984). *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*. Cambridge University Press. Suetonius. (1914). *Lives of the Caesars* (J. C. Rolfe, Trans.). Harvard University Press.
- [15] Tacitus. (1937). *Annals* (J. Jackson, Trans.). Harvard University Press.
- [16] Trobisch, D. (1994). *Paul’s Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins*. Fortress Press.
- [17] Wolters, A. (1987). Worldview and textual criticism in 2 Peter 3:10. *Westminster Theological Journal*, 49, 405–413.
- Eusebius. (1926). *Ecclesiastical History* (K. Lake, Trans.). Harvard University Press.