

Epiphanius' *Alogi* and the Johannine Controversy

*A Reassessment of
Early Ecclesial Opposition to
the Johannine Corpus*

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Introduction

Despite the profound influence that the Johannine corpus has had on Christian theology throughout history, its acceptance and role in the earliest years of Christianity has been a matter of debate for a long time. Scholarship has produced numerous works on the reception of the Johannine literature, many of which have focused on the questions of which person or group was responsible for their authorship, when and by whom these works were first used, and which theological group(s) they originally supported. A number of other studies are devoted to the question of whether the Johannine corpus was originally a 'heretical' production, or if it was always considered to be a part of the accepted writings within the 'orthodox' church.¹

Such inquiries are critically important in seeking to determine the role of the Johannine corpus in the development of the church's canon of accepted writings, and the varying hypotheses that have emerged from these studies

1 Throughout this work the terms 'orthodoxy', 'ecclesiastical', 'heresy', and 'heterodoxy' as well as other similar terms are used despite the fact that such designations are inherently anachronistic and, to one degree or another, imprecise. The difficulties that accompany the use of these terms are perhaps best articulated in the work of Walter Bauer, one of the most notable products of twentieth century scholarship. See Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1934), ET, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, eds. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). Although many of his conclusions have drawn serious questions and intense criticism—this work is no exception—perhaps Bauer's greatest achievement was his appreciation and articulation of the complexity of the theological world in the first centuries of Christianity. It is true that terms such as 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' do not accurately capture the variety of forms within earliest Christianity, or *perhaps* even what comprised the 'majority' and 'minority' representative factions. However, alternative terms such as 'proto-orthodox' or 'proto-catholic' do not provide a satisfactory recasting of the language and perceived notions of such terms. They only serve to blur the existing vocabulary, to soften its edges; they do not provide new, non-anachronistic, and stable categories of understanding the various theological distinctions, divisions, and complexities within early Christianity. Moreover, the argument that there was a severe lack of some discernible form of what has become commonly known as orthodox Christianity in the first two centuries need not be overstated. The witness of the early Fathers and the broad coherence of their theological tenets are not as volatile and incoherent as Bauer suggests. Nevertheless, as with Bauer (xxii–xxiii), in this work I shall use the terms 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' along with their synonyms and derivative terms to represent what one customarily understands them to mean, with the unfortunate realization that such language continues to fail to adequately express the complex world of earliest Christianity.

reflect the complexity of the evidence from this era. Nevertheless, there is one common formulation of the extant evidence that has received widespread acceptance over the past century of scholarship, which postulates that the early church was originally very reticent, if not actively opposed to accepting the Johannine corpus as authoritative. The present study calls into question the viability of this prevailing view commonly known as the ‘Johannine Controversy.’²

It is often said that the early church’s opposition to the Johannine corpus is seen most clearly in its consternation concerning the Fourth Gospel. Indeed, the extant evidence may suggest that those who first appropriated this text in support of their theology were heretical groups such as the Gnostics, Montanists, and Docetists. As these heretics continued to develop their controversial theological claims based on this gospel, the early church was distancing itself from it more and more. In the words of one scholar, ‘To trace the influence of the fourth gospel upon Christian theology would be more than the task of a lifetime; to trace its influence upon the thought of the first half of the second century is easy, for it had none.’³

Thus, if the early church were to have accepted the Fourth Gospel it would have threatened early Christianity by implicitly endorsing and potentially adopting the views of the heretics that preferred this text. In contrast, to reject it as a heretical forgery would serve to rid the church of such cancerous, heretical opinions. The choice was clear, so also was the decision: the early church threw the Johannine baby out with the heretical bathwater. This rejection originally took the form of silence towards the Fourth Gospel by the Apostolic Fathers, eventually graduating into explicit rejection.⁴ The watershed moment when John’s Gospel finally emerged onto the orthodox scene came by way of Irenaeus’ treatise, *Adversus Haereses*, in which he transformed it from a liability to an asset in his efforts to condemn and eradicate heresy.⁵ And yet many

2 A full survey of scholarship that comprises this consensus view on the role of the Johannine literature in the early church is provided in Chapter Two.

3 C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1955), 52.

4 As Bauer notes, ‘If we listen to the sources without prejudice, it seems to me that this is the result: a current of caution with regard to the gospel of John runs continuously through ecclesiastical Rome, that center of orthodoxy, right up to almost the end of the second century—a mood that manifests itself through silence and through explicit rejection.’ Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 208. All citations of this work will follow the pagination of the English translation.

5 In addition to Walter Bauer, other notable works on this topic include (but are by no means limited to): A. Bludau, *Die Ersten Gegner der Johannesschriften* (Freiburg: Herder & Co.,

scholars suggest that Irenaeus was not a fair representative of the greater ecclesiastical opinion towards the writings attributed to John.

In fact, the Fourth Gospel was not the only Johannine work to have a mixed reception. Initially, particularly in the west, the Johannine Apocalypse enjoyed positive welcome and near universal attribution to John the Apostle. However, about the same time that the Gospel of John was finding its rightful place in some of the church fathers' lists of accepted works, the Apocalypse was beginning to disappear, for it too had ties with an assortment of heresies. Some questioned its use by the Montanists, while others claimed it was the work of the arch-heretic Cerinthus. By the fourth century it had completely vanished from the canonical lists of Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory of Nazianzus. Yet, questions about its authenticity and theology had surfaced a century earlier with Dionysius of Alexandria, followed by Eusebius of Caesarea, both of whom had their own suspicions about its authorship and reservations about its chiliastic eschatology.

When all of the bits of evidence are assembled together, the common view is that the early church was initially hostile to the idea of accepting both the Gospel and Apocalypse of John, and to a lesser extent the epistles that bear his name. Although it is undeniable that the evidence surrounding the authority and acceptance of these works in the first centuries of Christendom is complex and at times disjointed, is it possible to say with certainty that the early church had originally set its face against those works that would later steer Christian theology for centuries to come?

Recent scholarship has begun to reassess this question. Most notably, Charles E. Hill, in his important work, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church*, aims to counteract this view that he dubs 'orthodox Johannophobia'.⁶ Hill is not alone. Other scholars have questioned whether the influence of the

1925); J.N. Sanders, *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943); the unpublished dissertation of M.R. Hillmer, 'The Gospel of John in the Second Century,' (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1966); Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, trans. John A. Baker (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972); E. Haenchen, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1–6*, trans. R.W. Funk (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); R.M. Grant, 'The Fourth Gospel and the Church,' *HTR* 35, n. 2 (April 1942): 95–116; T.E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); J. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995); J.D.G. Dunn, 'John and the Synoptics as a Theological Question,' in R.A. Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (eds.), *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 308. R.A. Culpepper, *John: The Son of Zebedee, the Life of a Legend* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

6 C.E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Johannine corpus in the early church, especially that of the Fourth Gospel, has been underestimated.⁷ These studies provide new and valuable considerations regarding the extent of early orthodox appropriation of the Johannine literature. However, despite all the ink that has been dedicated to numerous efforts to discern whether and to what extent the early church did, in fact, use the Johannine literature, there has been surprisingly little attention paid to the evidence concerning whether or not the early church actively opposed these writings. This is a critical issue that, although distinct, should not be divorced from the question of the ecclesiastical reception of the Johannine writings.

And yet the methodological approach of Hill and others to delimit the use of the Johannine writings in early Christianity does not necessarily indicate whether or not the early church wilfully rejected or accepted them. For example, just because the Gospel of John is not explicitly cited among the Apostolic Fathers does not *necessarily* mean that they rejected it. However, one should also exercise caution in regards to counter claims. Just because there is some evidence to suggest that the Gospel of John was familiar to some within early orthodox circles does not require the conclusion that it was widely and positively received. It is equally plausible to conclude that such evidence may only represent particular segments of early Christianity that found it acceptable while others did not. Thus, the question of how and to what extent the Gospel of John was used or ignored cannot produce adequate results to the question of whether or not the early church actively *opposed* it. In order to arrive at the answer to this question, it is necessary to begin from a different starting point that focuses directly on the evidence concerning such opposition. Such is the purpose of the present work.

7 See especially the collection of essays in T. Rasimus, ed., *The Legacy of John: Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel*. *NovTSupp* 132 (Leiden: Brill, 2010). Other notable works include: M. Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (London: SCM Press, 1989) and *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM Press, 2000); Titus Nagel, *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums im 2. Jahrhundert: Studien zur vorirenäischen Auslegung des vierten Evangeliums in christlich-gnostischer Literatur*. *Arbeiten Zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte*, 2 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000); Kyle Keefer, *The Branches of the Gospel of John: The Reception of the Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006). Also, Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); also, 'Papias and Polycrates on the Origin of the Fourth Gospel,' *JTS* 44 (1993): 24–69; Charles E. Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Another recent collection of essays addressing these concerns is: Peter Head (ed.), *Historical and Literary Studies in John: Challenging Current Paradigms*. *WUNT* 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

Where exactly does one find evidence that the early church actively engaged in a campaign against the Johannine literature? After all, if the ecclesiastical leaders made efforts to expunge these texts from the church, it is natural to expect to find some evidence of their anti-Johannine campaign. If this movement were widespread, as is often argued, the volume of evidence should be substantial. The paucity of such evidence is surprising, however. It is not until the fourth century that one finds unambiguous testimony that tells of a faction within the church that rejected the Johannine writings as heretical forgeries. Epiphanius of Salamis is the earliest extant witness to record the anti-Johannine views of a group known as the *Alogi*. This group claimed that Cerinthus was the true author of the Gospel and Apocalypse of John, and thus they should be rejected as heretical forgeries. Although the *Alogi* have achieved significant notoriety in New Testament and Patristics scholarship, many scholars have overlooked, set aside, or were unaware of the various difficulties in establishing the dates, provenance, theology and constituency of this heresy. These questions are important, and a close examination of Epiphanius' testimony in light of other early sources demonstrates that there is much more to the story of this heretical sect than has been recognized.

Epiphanius' *Alogi* and the Early Orthodox Opposition to the Johannine Corpus

In the last quarter of the fourth century, Epiphanius compiled a catalogue of heresies known as the *Panarion*, or 'medicine chest', in order to provide fellow believers with a set of remedies for the 'toxic bites' of the 'snake-like heresies'. This work was in response to the request of two presbyters, Acacius and Paul, who knew of Epiphanius' reputation as a great slayer of heresies and therefore desired a full list of sects to be avoided. Epiphanius was certainly not the first to compile such a catalogue, yet he is the earliest extant witness that mentions a certain group that explicitly rejected the Gospel and Apocalypse of John as works of Cerinthus. He devotes the fifty-first entry of his *Panarion* to this sect, and he furnishes them with the name '*Alogi*'.

Chronologically, Epiphanius places these *Alogi* immediately after the Quartodecimans (*Haer.* 50) and well before the Noetians (*Haer.* 57), thus some time in the late second or early third centuries. This being the case, one might expect to find some evidence of the *Alogi*'s existence in the writings of other contemporary church fathers. Surprisingly, earlier heresy-hunters do not expound upon such a heretical group. The *Alogi* do not appear in Irenaeus' list of heresies, nor are they included in Hippolytus' *Refutatio*. Similarly, the *Alogi*

are not mentioned in Pseudo-Tertullian's work against the heresies; they do not appear on Tertullian's radar; Origen knows nothing about them; and no mention of them is made by Eusebius who was quite taken with matters concerning the authority and integrity of Christian literature.

One would naturally suppose that a group with these anti-Johannine convictions would have caught the attention of one or more of these Fathers, and yet not only is there general silence about these *Alogi* from other early witnesses, Epiphanius himself is not forthcoming in detailing any their defining features. As a result, there is a healthy level of confusion surrounding the provenance of the *Alogi*, with scholarly opinions ranging from Asia Minor to Rome.⁸ The dates that scholars attach to the *Alogi* are equally speculative. Some maintain that they emerged prior to Irenaeus,⁹ while others argue that Hippolytus railed against them in a work that was lost in the unfolding of time.¹⁰ Some believe the *Alogi* were active from the time of Origen to the era of Dionysius of Alexandria.¹¹ Despite the possibility of a century-long window of *Alogi* activity, it remains a period of time in which no other church father mentions them by name.

What about their theological tenets? On this account the *Alogi* are many things to many people. For some, the *Alogi* opposed the Gospel of John because it was the preferred Gospel of the Gnostics.¹² Others maintain that the *Alogi* disliked the Montanist use of John.¹³ Some split the difference, claiming they were scared of *both* Gnosticism *and* Montanism.¹⁴ Why not add the Quartodecimans to the list of John-loving heretics that made the *Alogi* take

8 Rome: see Dom John Chapman, *John the Presbyter and the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 53–4 n. 1; Sanders, *Fourth Gospel*, 35. Asia Minor: see von Campenhausen, *Formation*, 238. See also Fr. Vincent Rose, 'Question Johannine: Les Aloges Asiates et les Aloges Romains,' *Rbib* 6 (1897): 516–34.

9 Vincent Henry Stanton, *The Gospels as Historical Documents* 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), Vol. 1, 200; Robert M. Grant, 'The Origin of the Fourth Gospel' *JBL* 69 (1950), 307; Campenhausen, *Formation*, 242 n. 184.

10 See Bludau, 165.

11 See E. Schwartz, 'Über den Tod der Söhne Zebedaei. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Johannesevangeliums,' *Abhandlungen d. Göttinger Gesellschaft der Wiss. N.F.* VII, 5 (1904), 44–53; also the Ph.D. dissertation of J.D. Smith Jr., 'Gaius and the Controversy over the Johannine Literature' (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1979), 195–6.

12 Sanders, *Fourth Gospel*, 110; C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 66–84.

13 Campenhausen, *Formation*, 242; Schwartz, 'Über den Tod,' 44–53.

14 Haenchen, 23–4.

up arms?¹⁵ Or, perhaps it is sufficient to claim that the orthodox-minded *Alogi* simply detected ‘a spirit of heresy’ in the Johannine literature that could not be reconciled with the ecclesiastical attitude in Rome.¹⁶ Nevertheless, despite all the confusion and conflicting views surrounding the dates, provenance, and theological tenets of the *Alogi*, they are heralded as representing a widespread ecclesiastical movement against the Johannine corpus.

But exactly how widespread were these views? Which members of the early church belonged to this sect? Epiphanius refrains from naming names. In addition to the general notice that they rejected the Johannine Gospel and Apocalypse and attributed both to the heretic Cerinthus, the only identifying information that he provides are two criticisms from this group against the Fourth Gospel and three against the Apocalypse. Against these charges, Epiphanius attempts his own counter-assurances of Johannine veracity and integrity. As a result of the limited information Epiphanius provides, questions have persisted throughout history regarding the precise nature of this heretical group.

It is true that the answers to the questions surrounding the *Alogi* are to be found in Epiphanius’ sources; however, this approach is more complex than one might expect. For centuries scholarly attempts to secure details about this group were largely relegated to speculation due to the fact that there were no clear lines to be drawn between Epiphanius’ account and those of his predecessors. But at the end of the nineteenth century a discovery was made that would breathe new life into the question of the *Alogi*. This recent addition to the pool of evidence came by way of two Syrian sources that were written nearly a millennium after the time of the *Alogi*. Dionysius bar Salibi and Ebed-Jesu both note that a certain ‘Gaius’ held anti-Johannine views that, when juxtaposed to the objections of the *Alogi*, were strikingly similar.

Various conclusions were soon reached as a result of this ‘new’ evidence. For one thing, the relatively obscure third-century Roman church figure, Gaius of Rome, emerged as the leader and possibly the sole constituent of this heretical group. Although this identification has become widely accepted throughout modern scholarship, there is ample reason to suggest that it is the mistaken result of questionable methodology and a sloppy handling of the evidence. In particular, it is assumed that a lost work by Gaius, or perhaps a polemical work against him, was the common source for both Epiphanius and the later Syrian sources. Methodologically, this presumes too much upon Epiphanius’ reliance upon earlier sources and fails to take into account the unique way

15 Grant, ‘Fourth Gospel’, 108–10.

16 Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 208.

that he conceived of and recorded his history of heresy, which, as recent studies have shown, was a blend of fact and imaginative fiction.¹⁷ As to the critical question of his sources, this approach also presumes the content of works that are lost, and which may or may not have existed in the first place.

In order to sustain the current view that Gaius of Rome and his fellow members of the *Alogi* led a sweeping movement against the Johannine literature, it is necessary to cobble together different pieces of evidence spanning over a millennium while presuming the existence and content of works that may be nothing more than a figment. To be sure, the picture of the ecclesiastical figure Gaius of Rome as the leader of the *Alogi* as opposed to his otherwise boring reputation as an 'orthodox churchman' and staunch anti-Montanist makes for a fascinating and compelling story of how the early church once tried to dispose of the Johannine literature. However, this approach relies on a significant methodological problem that must be reassessed. It prioritizes the later evidence rather than the earliest sources, and it makes the fundamental assumption that the later testimonies of Dionysius bar Salibi and Ebed-Jesu are as reliable, or *more* reliable, than the surviving sources from the era in which the *Alogi* supposedly coordinated their anti-Johannine campaign. To determine whether or not this is the case, the veracity of these later sources must be judged in light of what the earlier sources tell us, not the other way around.

Methodology and Outline

The purpose of this book is to ask afresh what has become a very familiar question: Did the early church once reject the Johannine Corpus? However, it departs from similar studies in two fundamental ways. First, in contrast to many works on this topic, it argues that it is anachronistic, presumptuous, and methodologically dubious to begin such an inquiry with the later sources. Because the Syrian evidence of bar Salibi and Ebed-Jesu provides information that is not explicitly found in the earlier testimonies, it has become fashionable to interpret the latter in light of the former; however, this reverses the proper methodology of the historian. Second, this book is not primarily concerned with the related but distinct issues regarding how, when, and by whom the Johannine materials were first appropriated. It is certainly true that this inquiry indirectly relates to others that are concerned primarily with early

17 T. Scott Manor, 'Epiphanius' Account of the *Alogi*: Historical Fact or Heretical Fiction?' *Studia Patristica* 52 (2012), 161–170; Young R. Kim, 'The Imagined Worlds of Epiphanius of Salamis,' (Ph.D. Diss. University of Michigan, 2006).

appropriation of the Johannine literature, but its trajectory is aimed at a very different line of inquiry focused on putative *opposition* to these works.

The guiding methodology of the present work is to refocus attention back on the early evidence that might speak of the existence of early ecclesiastical opposition to the Johannine corpus. As such, the earliest explicit record of such activity provided by Epiphanius, in addition to other second- and third-century sources that are contemporaneous to the time in which the *Alogi* are said to exist, are given primary attention. It is true that for centuries the incongruities of the early evidence ultimately led to a dead end for many scholars who tried to pin down the details about the *Alogi*; however, as I shall argue, the same conclusion is ultimately true of studies that prioritize the later evidence as well. There is clearly a need for a new way forward that makes sense of the all the evidence. And yet the question may rightly be asked; if both of these approaches lead to inconclusive results, how does the methodology of this work shed new light on an old problem?

The inadequacies of both approaches are due in large part to a fundamental misunderstanding of Epiphanius' methodology in composing the *Panarion* and his reasons for creating it in the first place. He approached this work from the perspective of a concerned pastor and rigid theologian whose imagination caused him to occasionally blur the lines between fact and fiction. When compared with earlier heresiologies, the *Panarion* tends to be regarded as historically sloppy and theologically shallow. Yet this is due, at least in part, to the fact that Epiphanius conceived of the entire history of the world as an epic struggle between the faithfulness of God and purity of the gospel message against the erroneous beliefs that deviated from the truth, from the time of Adam to his own day. There is, therefore, an imaginative aspect to Epiphanius' historiography which must be recognized in order to arrive at a better understanding of *why* he composed the *Panarion* the way he did. In turn, the otherwise confusing, disjointed, or garbled aspects of his writing begin to emerge with greater clarity. Ultimately, his imaginative historicizing is best understood in light of the pastoral care he had for his flock in Salamis and elsewhere. The *Panarion* reveals his concern to protect fellow believers against the threat of false belief, actual or potential. In the case of the latter, such fictitious sects are not conjured out of thin air, for Epiphanius does not create heresies; rather, one can discern traces of various sources that he has woven together to create a seemingly coherent picture from a disparate group of evidence. In many ways, therefore, his approach parallels that of many modern scholars that create a coherent narrative based on fragmented pieces of information.

These three issues I have just discussed—the history of scholarship and its deficiencies, Epiphanius' unique perspective of recording history and

refuting heresy, and the methodology he used to accomplish this task—reflect the themes of the three sections into which this work is divided. In the first section, I catalogue the extant evidence followed by a review and dismantling of the scholarship that has interpreted this evidence as bearing testimony to a vibrant ‘Johannine Controversy’ in the early church. Inspired and informed by various challenges to the consensus view, I offer further arguments against the reliability of the later evidence and provide reasons why Gaius of Rome should be exonerated from the false accusations of theological and canonical impropriety. A new paradigm is thus required to provide a new way forward into the question of the *Alogi* and the Johannine Controversy.

The second section examines how Epiphanius’ role and methodology as a historian and heresiologist led him to construct various abstract heresies in the *Panarion*. The *Alogi* is certainly not the only such heretical sect that suffers from dubious historical grounding. When one considers the historical and theological context that preceded Epiphanius, his rationale for wanting to secure the theological and canonical integrity of the Fourth Gospel and, to a lesser extent, the Apocalypse becomes more apparent.

The third and final section assesses how Epiphanius went about constructing the *Alogi*. In fact, he used a variety of earlier sources in this account, each of which makes some mention of the Gospel or Apocalypse of John; none, however, fully reflect the way Epiphanius describes the *Alogi*. They are like pieces of a puzzle, each of which adds to the picture Epiphanius paints. A close look at the relationship between Epiphanius’ account and sources such as Papias, Irenaeus, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria, and Eusebius reveals that he has amalgamated aspects from each of these sources and used them as ‘building blocks’ for his account.

Over the years many scholars have told different versions of the story of the secretive and menacing *Alogi*, and yet I find it surprising that to date there has not been a full-length study devoted to this heretical group. Does the evidence support the story of a subtle yet forceful ecclesiastical movement against the works attributed to John the Apostle? Or were the *Alogi* a cleverly devised heretical figment that Epiphanius constructed in order to vanquish the heretical opinions of those who failed to understand and appreciate the integrity of these works? The conclusions reached in the following pages point toward the latter. As such, they are at odds with those of many illustrious patristic historians past and present who have contributed to the overall discussion with which this work is concerned. Yet when the evidence does not tell the same story as its interpreters, there is a need to dismantle the broken paradigm and provide an alternative explanation. Such is the primary contribution of this work. An equally important contribution of

this work is the new light it sheds on the misunderstood and often maligned fourth-century bishop.

Epiphanius is almost always interpreted through paradigms and criteria that produce negative results. From a strictly historical point of view, his work tends to be seen as frequently garbled and a poor substitute for the works of his predecessors on which he relied heavily. As a theologian, he is known less for his doctrinal insights and theological acumen than for his all-consuming anti-Origenism. As a man, he comes off as a rigid, disenfranchised blowhard. In fact, as one scholar notes,

Of all the church fathers, Epiphanius is the most generally disliked. It would be easy to assemble, from the writings of patrologists and historians of religion, a bill of particulars against him. He is a heresy hunter, a name caller, and “nasty.” His judgments are uncritical. His theology is shallow and his manner of holding it intransigent. Above all he vehemently opposed the teachings of the great commentator Origen, the first Christian systematic theologian and as a thinker far superior to Epiphanius.¹⁸

In no way do I claim that such an assessment is entirely unfair or inaccurate. However, there is more to the story of this Cypriot bishop and the works he composed. The story of the *Alogi* demonstrates this, and yet it only begins to scratch the surface of this complex church father and his writings. Reconsidering Epiphanius within the context of his own biography and historiographical methodology reveals a parallel storyline of a concerned pastor and exegete whose imaginative approach to history and theology had a more significant impact on contemporary and modern readers of his work than has been recognized thus far.

18 Frank Williams, trans., *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Book I (Sects 1–46)*. 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1994), xxxi.

The Evidence

By the latter part of the nineteenth century virtually nothing was known with any certainty about the *Alogi*. It was seen as an anomalous heresy of the early church, mentioned by name only in the writings of Epiphanius and largely ignored by other early sources. That was then. Today, the *Alogi* are regarded as the epicentre of a full-scale ‘Johannine Controversy’ in the Roman church at the dawn of the third century. Over the past century it has become commonly accepted that one of the members of the *Alogi*, the bishop Gaius of Rome, spearheaded an influential movement to reject the Gospel and Apocalypse of John as the products of Cerinthus, the heretical nemesis of the Apostle John. In his day, Gaius’ position was not only ‘permissible’; it also reflected the general ecclesial sentiment of the time.¹ It was only after many years of sustained counterattacks by Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen and Eusebius that the dangerous ideas of the *Alogi* were finally put to rest.

To understand this fascinating rise in the *Alogi*’s significance and its role in the so-called ‘Johannine Controversy’ it is necessary to account for the full range of primary evidence and how scholarship over the past century has arranged these disparate pieces to create such a narrative. One of the most surprising aspects of such an investigation is that none of the evidence on its own supports this tidy summary of the church’s battle over the Johannine literature. However, when taken together, numerous pieces of evidence spanning over a millennium have been arranged to seemingly support this grand narrative. Whether or not such a configuration is valid is the central question at hand.

Although Epiphanius alone claims to know all of the particulars of the *Alogi*, other sources that span over a millennium may have made implicit references to this group. What follows is a catalogue of these lost and extant primary sources along with necessary comments and explanations. The first of these sources comes from the earliest staunch defender and advocate of the Fourth Gospel, Irenaeus.

1 Cf. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 207.

1.1 Irenaeus

The Bishop of Lyons never mentions the *Alogi* directly; however, he makes two brief comments that have been interpreted as implying his knowledge of this heresy. The first comes from his work *Against Heresies* in which he describes a group who rejected both the Paraclete and the Fourth Gospel. There are clear parallels between Irenaeus' comments and Epiphanius' final description of the *Alogi* (*Haer.* 51.35.1–3) such that the two seem to be linked.²

Others (*Alii*), indeed, in order to frustrate the gift of the Spirit, which in the most recent times—according to the pleasure of the Father—was poured out on the human race, do not admit that appearance in the Gospel of John, where the Lord promised that he would send the Paraclete; but they reject both the Gospel and the Prophetic Spirit. Wretched men indeed, who want³ to be false prophets, they in fact reject the prophetic grace from the Church, just like those who—on account of those who come in hypocrisy—also abstain from communion with the brethren. I understand, moreover, that those of this kind (also) do not accept the Apostle Paul; for in that epistle which is to the Corinthians, prophetic gifts are mentioned, and he (Paul) knows men and women prophesying in the Church. Sinning against the Spirit of God in all these things, therefore, they fall into the irremissible sin (Mt. 12:32; AH 3.11.9).⁴

² Cf. Chapter 7.3.

³ Many scholars have proposed amending the Latin text by replacing the word '*nolunt*' for '*uolunt*', thus: '*qui pseudopphetas quidem esse nolunt*' ('they do *not* wish to be false prophets'). Other emendations include transposing '*pseudopphetas*' for '*pseudopphetas*'. These emendations are generally proposed to clarify a reading of Irenaeus that presumes the prophetic Spirit is a reference to the Montanist Paraclete. J.D. Smith, Jr, who does not believe any emendations are necessary, states the issue well: if Irenaeus is referring to a group of anti-Montanists in this passage, 'Why would such persons desire to be prophets at all, especially false prophets, since it is this very audacious activity with respect to the prophetic charisma which is suspect to them and has resulted in their own repudiation of the Gospel of John?' Smith, 'Gaius,' 147. For a summary of scholarly positions on various emendations, see Bludau, 31ff.; Pierre de Labriolle, *La Crise, Montaniste* (Paris: Ernst Leroux, 1913), 234ff. Although such a textual amendment is entirely understandable and possibly reflects the original text, I have chosen to preserve the standard Latin reading because the transmitted text is comprehensible and coherent as it stands.

⁴ Latin text from A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, *Irénee de Lyon: Contre les Hérésies*, Livre III. SC 211 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1974), 170–2.

The second piece of evidence from Irenaeus' writings comes at the end of another work, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. Here he references another anonymous group, which some have linked with the similarly unidentified *Alii* of *AH* 3.11.9.⁵

Others do not accept the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and repudiate the prophetic charisma which enables men to bring forth the fruit of divine life. These are those of whom Isaiah (Is. 1:30) said, "You shall become like a terebinth stripped of its leaves, and like a garden that has no water." These are good for nothing to God for they are incapable of bearing fruit (*Dem.* 99).⁶

1.2 Hippolytus of Rome

In contrast to the evidence from Irenaeus, that from Hippolytus is far less straightforward. As such, the supposed link between Hippolytus and Epiphanius requires elaboration. Although Epiphanius is often criticized as being over reliant upon Hippolytus, the surviving evidence that directly links the latter with the former's account of the *Alogi* is slim. Nevertheless, there are two key pieces of evidence (both of which are now lost) that are often touted as undeniable proof that Hippolytus knew and refuted the *Alogi*.

First, in 1865, Lipsius was the first to argue for the reliance of Epiphanius, Philaster of Brescia and Ps.-Tertullian upon a common document (*Grundchrift*), presumed to be Hippolytus' lost *Syntagma Against Thirty-Two Heresies*, noted by Photius (*Bibl.* 121).⁷ There is, however, no indication from corroborating sources that the *Alogi* was included in Hippolytus' *Syntagma*; nor was it listed in Hippolytus' extant work *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* (*Elenchos*). Lipsius himself excluded the *Alogi* from his reconstructed *Syntagma* although others assumed its presence.⁸ There is, however, another major piece of evidence that may indicate Hippolytus wrote against this sect.

Secondly, and perhaps the most compelling piece of evidence to support the notion that Hippolytus refuted the *Alogi* is the title of his work, ὑπὲρ τοῦ κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγελίου καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως listed on the back of the plinth of

5 Cf. Smith, 'Gaius', 163; Campenhausen, 239, n. 159.

6 Tr. from Campenhausen, 239, n. 159.

7 R.A. Lipsius, *Zur Quellenkritik des Epiphanius* (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1865), 16–32. The *Syntagma* is also mentioned in *Chronicon Paschale* 8.

8 Cf. Chapter 5.2.

the statue of Hippolytus in Rome.⁹ Although many scholars have argued that this work may have been foundational to Epiphanius' account¹⁰ it has not survived, thus relegating any link between it and Epiphanius' *Alogi* to the realm of conjecture.¹¹

1.3 Gaius of Rome

The only primary evidence that comes from the hand of Gaius of Rome is preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea, and this comes by way of a number of decontextualized fragments.¹² Indeed, Eusebius only employs the words of Gaius when they conveniently serve his own purposes.¹³ The work cited in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is the *Dialogue with Proclus*, a polemical treatise against a leader of the New Prophecy, composed during the episcopate of Zephyrinus (ca. 198/9–217 AD). A few certifiable facts may be derived from these fragments: Gaius was in Rome, he was an anti-Montanist, and he rejected the 'scriptural' status of Montanist writings.

But I (Gaius) have the trophies of the apostles to show (you), for if you (Proclus) were to go to the Vatican or the Ostian Way, you will find the trophies of those who established this church. (*HE* 2.25.7)

Gaius, whose words are quoted earlier, in his disputation, investigates these things concerning this man [Cerinthus]. He writes, 'But also Cerinthus, who through revelations (*ἀποκαλύψεων*) as if having been written by a great apostle (*ἀποστόλου μεγάλου*), introduces marvellous stories to us that he falsely claims have been given to him by angels,

9 For images of the Statue, see the Plates provided in Brent, *Hippolytus*, XIII–XXXVI.

10 Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers* i, 2 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1890), 394–5 (hereafter *AF*); Theodore H. Robinson, 'The Authorship of the Muratorian Canon', *The Expositor* 7.1 (1906): 494; Smith, 'Gaius,' 209; Bludau, 165; and Prigent, 'Hippolyte, commentateur de l'Apocalypse,' *TZ* 28 (1972), 407–412. Labriolle argued that Epiphanius used either (or both) the Hippolytan work *Heads against Gaius*, noted by the later Syrian writer Ebed-Jesu, and *Defense of the Gospel etc.* in his chapter on the *Alogi*. (Pierre de Labriolle, *Les Sources De l'Histoire Du Montanisme* [Paris: Ernst Leroux, 1913], LXXI).

11 The issue of Epiphanius' dependence upon Hippolytus is significant and will be addressed more fully in Chapter 5.2.

12 Chapter 3.2 provides additional details from other sources that reference Gaius of Rome, but as these are primarily dependent upon Eusebius, they are not included here.

13 Cf. T. Scott Manor, 'Proclus, the North African Montanist?' *Studia Patristica* LXV (2013): 139–146.

saying after the resurrection there will come an earthly kingdom of Christ, and that flesh dwelling in Jerusalem will again be enslaved to desires and pleasures. And being hostile to the scriptures of God, desiring to lead [others] astray, he says there will be a thousand years for marriage festivities.' (HE 3.28.1b-3)¹⁴

Although the following citation is from Proclus—perhaps in response to Gaius' claim of the 'trophies' (above)—it should be noted here as one of the few fragments of Gaius' *Dialogue* that still exists.

After him¹⁵ there were four prophetesses, the daughters of Philip, at Hierapolis in Asia. Their tomb is there and the tomb of their father. (HE 3.31.4)

As far as Eusebius' estimation of Gaius, we are told he was an 'ecclesiastical man' (ἐκκλησιαστικὸς ἀνὴρ, HE 2.25.6) and a 'very learned man' (λογιωτάτου ἀνδρός, HE 6.20.3).

1.4 Origen

In his *Commentary on John*, Origen emphasizes the discrepancies among the gospels in an effort to demonstrate the need for his allegorical exegesis. Because the *Alogi* also criticized the Gospel of John for not aligning with the Synoptic Gospels, and given some parallels between the criticisms of Origen and the *Alogi*, it has been frequently noted that Origen's work is a clear allusion to the 'Johannine Controversy'.

They say—those who accept the four Gospels and who suppose that the discrepancy (διαφωνίαν) is not to be resolved through analogical interpretation (διὰ τῆς ἀναγωγῆς)—they will have to explain the difficulty noted beforehand, about the forty days of the temptation, a period for which there is no room that can be found in the account of John, (and) when the Lord came into Capernaum . . . But if we ask when Christ was in Capernaum the first time, they will say to us, according to the words of Matthew and the other two, it was after the temptation, when 'leaving

14 GCS 9,1, 256–8.

15 Because Eusebius excludes the earlier portions of this statement, the referent of 'him' is unknown.

Nazareth He came and stayed in Capernaum next to the sea.' But how can they claim both the account of Matthew and Mark be true—that it was on account of Him hearing that John was delivered up that he withdrew into Galilee—and that according to John, [which states] after a number of other events than just His stay at Capernaum alone, namely His going up to Jerusalem, and His journey from there to Judea, that John was not yet cast into prison, but was baptizing in the Aenon near Salim?" And there are many other points where, if someone carefully scrutinizes the Gospels concerning their historical disagreement, (τὰ εὐαγγέλια περι τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἱστορίαν)—we will try to present each as they happen, insofar as we are able—he will surely become dizzy and will either shrink from confirming the Gospels as true, and choose one of them at random since he would not dare to deny completely the faith concerning our Lord, or accept that there are four <and inquire> that their truth is not to be found in the outward characteristics (σωματικοὶς χαρακτῆρσιν; *Comm. Jo.* 10.2).¹⁶

Later, in the same book, Origen provides some additional comments that have been compared with Epiphanius' comments on the *Alogi*.

I have cited lengthy sections from the Gospels, but I think it has been necessary to do so in order to render the stated discrepancy. Three Gospels place these events, which are assumed to be the same as those written by John, as occurring in *one* journey of the Lord to Jerusalem. But John places them in connection with *two* visits, which are divided from each other, in between which there were many acts of the Lord and journeys made to other places. Therefore, I find it impossible for those who accept nothing other than the history in their interpretation to admit that these discrepancies are in agreement. And if someone thinks that we have not provided a sound exposition, let him produce an intelligent rebuttal to our view (*Comm. Jo.* 10.15).¹⁷

1.5 Dionysius of Alexandria

Of course, the *Alogi* rejected not only the Fourth Gospel, but the Apocalypse as well. Without a doubt the clearest and most viable connection between

16 Cécile Blanc, *Origène, Commentaire sur Saint Jean. Tome II (Livres VI et X)*. SC 157 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970), 386–390. Cf. Epiphanius, *Haer.* 51.18.6.

17 Emphases mine. SC 157, 464. Cf. Chapter 8.

Epiphanius' testimony regarding the Apocalypse and the early extant literature is the testimony of Dionysius of Alexandria, as preserved by Eusebius. Dionysius takes a non-literal interpretation of the Apocalypse. It is wrong, he claims, to think that there will be a thousand years of bodily pleasures that will contain eating and drinking and marrying in an earthly Jerusalem (*HE* 7.25.1–3). Furthermore, he attributes this view to Cerinthus. This is how Eusebius records the words of Dionysius:

Some before us (τινὲς...πρὸ ἡμῶν) have set aside (ἤθετήσαν) and dismantled (ἀνεσκεύασαν) the whole book, amending (διευθύνοντες) each chapter, and displaying it as unintelligible (ἄγνωστον) and illogical, and maintaining that the title is a lie. For they say (λέγουσιν) that it is not from John, nor is it a revelation because it is covered thickly and deeply by a curtain of ignorance (ἀγνοίας). And they say that none of the apostles, neither the saints, nor anyone in the church wrote it, but that Cerinthus, who founded the sect, which is called the Cerinthians after him, desiring trustworthy authority for his own forgeries, assigned the name. (*HE* 7.25.1–2)¹⁸

1.6 Epiphanius of Salamis

In the last quarter of the fourth century Epiphanius compiled his list of eighty heresies along with his own refutations, or antidotes, to the 'bites' of these snake-like sects. The account of the *Alogi* is far too lengthy to fully reproduce here, but the most notable sections are provided below. He opens his account of the *Alogi* in this way:

Therefore these *Alogi* (Ἄλογοι)—for this is the name I am giving to them. From now on, they shall be so called, beloved. We shall call them this name, these *Alogi*, for they held to the heresy for which [that] name <was worthy>: they rejected the books of John. Since they do not accept the Word, which John has preached, they will be called *Alogi*. Being absolute strangers to the message of truth, they deny the purity of the message and accept neither the Gospel of John nor the Apocalypse. And if they accepted the Gospel, but rejected the Apocalypse, we would say they are doing it on account of precision—not accepting an 'apocryphon' because of the deep and dark sayings in the Apocalypse. But when they do not

18 GCS 6,2, 690. Cf. Chapter 10.3.

receive the books which are preached from Saint John, it is clear to everyone that they and those like them are those concerning whom Saint John said in his general epistles, 'It is the last hour, and you heard that the Antichrist is coming and now behold there are many Antichrists' (1 Jn. 2:16) . . . For they say that these works are not from John but Cerinthus and are not worthy to be affirmed in the Church (*Haer.* 51.3.1–6).¹⁹

And it can be shown from this hostility that, 'They neither understand what they are saying nor what they maintain strongly' (1 Tim. 1:7). For how can the words against Cerinthus be by Cerinthus? Cerinthus says that Christ is 'recent' and only a man, but John has proclaimed that [Christ] is the eternal Word who has come from on high and been made flesh. Therefore their frivolous attack has been put to shame as a false accusation and unaware from where it is refuted. For they appear to believe as we do, but not holding to the certainties that are from God revealed to us through Saint John, they will be convicted of shouting against the truth about things that they do not know. They will be known to them, if they return to sobriety of mind and knowingly understand; for we are not rejecting the teachings of the Holy Spirit, which are important and authoritative (*Haer.* 51.4.1–4).²⁰

In his lengthy portrayal and refutation of this sect, he presents two primary arguments of the *Alogi* against the Gospel of John and three against the Apocalypse. The first objection concerns the fact that the Gospel of John does not record the forty-day temptation, whereas the Synoptics do. This objection is divided into two parts (*Haer.* 51.4.5–10; 51.17.11–18.6). The second objection to the Gospel of John is much more succinct and concerns the discrepancy in the number of Passovers that John record as compared to the Synoptics (*Haer.* 51.22.1).

1.6.1 *Objection 1—Gospel of John*

For they say against themselves—I do not say against the truth—that [John's] books do not agree (ὅν συμφωνεῖ) with the other apostles'. And now they believe they can attack the holy and inspired teachings. "And what did he say?" he asserts (φησίν). "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the word was God." And that, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we knew his glory,

19 GCS 31,2 *Epiphanius II*, 250–1.

20 GCS 31,2 *Epiphanius II*, 251.

glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” And immediately, “John bore witness and cried, saying, “This is the one of whom I was telling you.’” And that “This is the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

And next [John] says, “And those that heard him said, ‘Rabbi, where do you dwell?’” and in the same breath he says, “in the morning Jesus wanted to go into Galilee and found Philip and Jesus said to him, ‘Follow me.’” And after a little while he says, “And after three days there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the wedding supper, and his mother was there.” But the other evangelists say that he spent forty days in the wilderness being tempted by the devil, and then returned to choose his disciples. And they [the *Alogi*] have not seen that each evangelist has taken care to say what the others had said, in agreement with them, while at the same time revealing what each had not proclaimed, but had neglected to disclose. For the will was not their own: but the sequence (*ἀκολουθία*) and teachings came from the Holy Spirit. If these opponents attack these writings [of John], they must learn that the other three of these [Gospels] did not begin in the same way (*Haer.* 51.4.5–12a).²¹

Epiphanius then provides a lengthy rebuttal to this initial criticism before picking up the second half of this first objection, which reads:

Not understanding the power of the Gospels they say, “Why have the other evangelists said that Jesus fled from before Herod to Egypt, and after the flight he came back and remained in Nazareth; then, after receiving the baptism, went up into the wilderness, and returned after these things, and after his return began to preach? But the Gospel which was issued under John’s name lies,” they say (*φασί*). For, after it says that “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” and a few other things, immediately it says that there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee (*Haer.* 51.17.11–18.1).²²

But they say that the Gospel according to John is non-canonical (*ἀδιάθετον*) because it did not mention these things—I am speaking about the events of the forty-day temptation—and they do not deem it worthy of being accepted, since they are deceived about everything and mentally blind (*Haer.* 51.18.6).²³

21 GCS 31,2 *Epiphanius II*, 251–2.

22 GCS 31,2 *Epiphanius II*, 274–5.

23 GCS 31,2 *Epiphanius II*, 275–6.

1.6.2 *Objection 2—Gospel of John*

But they accuse the holy evangelist again, more so the Gospel itself, because, he says (φησί), 'John said that the Savior kept two Passovers over a period of two years, but the other evangelists describe one Passover' (*Haer.* 51.22.1).²⁴

Towards the end of his account, Epiphanius records the three objections that the *Alogi* had against the Apocalypse of John.

1.6.3 *Objection 1—Apocalypse*

And again these people are not ashamed to take up arms against the things said by Saint John, believing that they are able to overturn the truth, but being unaware that they are attacking themselves rather than sound teachings. For they say mockingly of the Apocalypse, 'What use is it to me, he says (τί με, φησί), when the Apocalypse of John tells me about seven angels and seven trumpets?'—not knowing that such things were essential and profitable to the correctness of the proclamation" (*Haer.* 51.32.1–3; cf. Rev. 8:2).²⁵

1.6.4 *Objection 2—Apocalypse*

Again some of them attack the following text in the Apocalypse and say in contradiction that 'He said, in a contradiction, 'Write to the angel of the church that is in Thyatira,' and there is no church of Christians in Thyatira. How then did he write to a church that does not exist?' In fact these people destroy themselves since they are compelled by their own declarations to confess the truth. For if they say, 'There is now no church in Thyatira,' they show that this was foretold by John.

For since those who are of the Phrygians settled there [and] grabbed the minds of the simple believers like wolves, and converted the whole area to their heresy, those that reject the Apocalypse attacked this text at that time in an effort to discredit it (*Haer.* 51.33.1–3; Rev. 2:18).²⁶

²⁴ GCS 31,2 *Epiphanius II*, 283.

²⁵ GCS 31,2 *Epiphanius II*, 305.

²⁶ GCS 31,2 *Epiphanius II*, 306–7.

1.6.5 *Objection 3—Apocalypse*

But again these people get excited in their boundless hunt for texts to give the notion of throwing out the books of the holy apostle—I mean the Gospel and Apocalypse of John (and perhaps the Epistles also, for these are also in accord with the Gospel and Apocalypse)—and they say (φασιν) that, ‘I saw, and he said to the angel, “Loose the four angels that are upon the Euphrates.” And I heard the number of the host, ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, and they had been fortified in breastplates of fire and sulfur and hyacinth.’ (Rev. 9:14–17) For these people considered that the truth might somehow be <a kind of> joke (*Haer.* 51.34.1–3a).²⁷

At the end of his account, Epiphanius summarizes the sins of the *Alogi* in this way:

But since these people have not received the Holy Spirit they are judged for not observing the things of the Spirit, and being willing to speak against the words of the Spirit. They do not see the gifts of grace in the holy Church, which, with understanding and a sound mind, the Holy Spirit set out in detail, so also the holy apostles, and the holy prophets have followed truly and vigorously. Among these, St. John has given his gracious gift to the holy church, through the Gospel, the Epistles and Revelation. But as it is said, ‘He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in the one to come.’ (Mt. 12:32) For they have also waged war against the words spoken by the Spirit (*Haer.* 51.35.1–3).²⁸

This account represents the earliest extant evidence of any opposition to the Fourth Gospel *and* the Apocalypse. As noted above, others such as Philaster of Brescia later followed Epiphanius’ notice of a group that rejected the Gospel and Apocalypse of John. None of these sources, however, provided any further details than what has been catalogued thus far. This all changed in the late nineteenth century, however, when one scholar stumbled across a commentary from a writer who was active seven centuries earlier. The incorporation of this evidence would drastically change the way many interpreted the earlier evidence.

²⁷ GCS 31,2 *Epiphanius II*, 308–9.

²⁸ GCS 31,2 *Epiphanius II*, 310–11.

1.7 Dionysius bar Salibi

In 1888 the Irish scholar John Gwynn published some fragments of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse, Acts and Epistles*, written by the twelfth-century Jacobite Bishop of Amid, Dionysius bar Salibi (d. 1171).²⁹ Although bar Salibi's work makes no mention of the *Alogi*, it does identify another figure of the early church as a Johannine antagonist who, in a debate with a certain *Hippolytus Romanus*, offered similar objections to those of the *Alogi* against the Apocalypse. Bar Salibi identifies this person only as 'Gaius', and since Eusebius mentions a certain 'Gaius of Rome' who was active around the same time as Hippolytus, the two quickly became linked.

In this putative debate between Hippolytus and Gaius the 'heretic', the latter offers five objections against the Apocalypse based on its incompatibility with other scripture.³⁰

1.7.1 *Objection 1*

Gaius' objection to Rev. 8:8, concerning the notice that a great mountain will be cast into the sea and a third of the sea became blood.

On this, Caius the heretic objected to this revelation, and said that it is not possible that these things should be, inasmuch as, '*as a thief that cometh in the night, so is the coming of the Lord*' (1 Thess. 5:2).³¹

1.7.2 *Objection 2*

Gaius' objection to Rev. 8:12, concerning the notice that the third part of the sun was darkened, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars.

On this Caius said that, Just as in the Flood the heavenly bodies were not taken away and suddenly submerged, thus also is it to be in the end, as it

29 John Gwynn, 'Hippolytus and his 'Heads against Caius,' *Hermathena*. A Series of Papers on Literature, Science and Philosophy, by Members of Trinity College, Dublin. Vol. 6 (1888), 397–418. Bar Salibi's work on the Apocalypse is published in its entirety by Sedlacek, I. (ed.) *Dionysius Bar Salibi. In Apocalypsim, Actus et Epistulas catholicas*. CSCO 60. Scriptores Syri. Versio. Series Secunda. Tomus CI. Romae: Excudebat Karolus de Luigi, 1910. Hereafter referred to as *Comm. Apoc.*

30 The list of Gaius' objections and Hippolytus' rejoinders is found in Gwynn, pp. 399–404.

31 *Comm. Apoc.*, 8; cf. Gwynn, 399. *Caius haereticus impugnavit hanc visionem et dixit: Impossibile est, ut ista fiant, nam, «sicut fur, qui venit noctu», ita erit adventus Domini.*

is written (Mt. 24:37); and Paul says, *When they shall say, Peace and safety, destruction shall come upon them* (1 Thess. 5:3).³²

1.7.3 *Objection 3*

Gaius' objection to Rev. 9:2–3, concerning the notice that locusts came out of the smoke and were given power like the power of scorpions on the earth.

Here Caius objects, how will the unrighteous be consumed by the locusts, when Scripture says that *sinners prosper* and the righteous are persecuted, *in the world* (Ps. 73:12); and Paul, that the faithful *shall be persecuted and the evil shall flourish, being deceived and deceiving* (11 Tim. 3:12–13)?³³

1.7.4 *Objection 4*

Gaius' objection to Rev. 9:15, concerning the angels, which are loosed to slay a third of mankind.

On this Caius says: It is not written that angels are to make war, nor that a third part of men is to perish; but that *nation shall rise against nation* (Mt. 24:7).³⁴

1.7.5 *Objection 5*

Gaius' objection to Rev. 20:2–3, concerning the notice that Satan will be bound for a thousand years.

On this Caius the heretic objects: that Satan is bound here, according to that which is written, that Christ *Went into the strong man's house and bound him, and seized us who were his goods* (Mt. 12:29).³⁵

32 *Comm. Apoc.*, 9; cf. Gwynn, 400. *Caius dixit: Sicut in diluvio elementa non sublevata sunt, et subito aquis submersa sunt, ita etiam in fine erit, sicut scriptum est; et Paulus: «cum dicent: Salus est et securitas, surget in eos interitus».*

33 *Comm. Apoc.* 10; cf. Gwynn, 401. *hic obiicit Caius: Quomodo scelesti percutientur locustis, cum dicat Scriptura peccatores prosperaturos et iustos persecutioni obnoxios fore in mundo; et Paulus: «Fideles persecutionem patientur et mali prospere agent, errantes et decipientes?»*

34 *Comm. Apoc.* 10; cf. Gwynn, 402. *Caius (dicit): Non est scriptum angelos bellum gessuros esse, nec tertiam partem hominum perituram esse, sed: «Surget gens contra gentem».*

35 *Comm. Apoc.* 19; cf. Gwynn, 402–3. *Caius haereticus obiicit: Satanus hic vincit est secundum quod scriptum est: «Ingressus est Christus domum fortis et ligavit eum et rapuit nos, vasa eius».*

Gwynn noticed that Gaius' fourth objection concerning whether the angels mentioned are to be released to slay the third of mankind (Rev. 9:15), was almost identical to one of the arguments lodged by the *Alogi* (*Haer.* 51.34.2–8).³⁶ In addition, both Epiphanius and Hippolytus make the same appeal to Deut. 32:7–9 as justification in their rebuttals.³⁷ The implication was clear: there must be some connection between the source(s) of bar Salibi's commentary and Epiphanius' account of the *Alogi*. Either Epiphanius and bar Salibi were dependent upon the same Hippolytan work, or perhaps bar Salibi simply altered the testimony of Epiphanius and provided missing information that connected the *Alogi* with Gaius of Rome. Gwynn was drawn to the former and concluded that a Hippolytan work entitled *Heads Against Gaius*, mentioned only in the *Catalogue* of Ebed-Jesu (below), was the common source of both.³⁸

Yet a full connection between Gaius and the *Alogi* was missing one crucial element: the bar Salibi commentary in Gwynn's hands only recorded Gaius' rejection of the Apocalypse, whereas the *Alogi* rejected the Gospel of John as well. In fact, Gwynn argued that Gaius could *not* be identified with the *Alogi* because it appears he was receptive of the Gospel of John. This is seen in Hippolytus' replies to the first and final charges of Gaius against the Apocalypse where he cites the Gospel of John (11:10, 12:35–36; 14:30), 'evidently as an authority admitted by his opponent.'³⁹ Furthermore, Gwynn noted that none of the criticisms of Gaius demonstrate that he 'went to such lengths in his condemnation of the Apocalypse as to assign it to Cerinthus.'⁴⁰ According to Eusebius, in his *Dialogue with Proclus*, Gaius opposed Cerinthus' carnal chiliasm as expressed in an apocalyptic work that Cerinthus falsified under the name of a 'great apostle' (*HE* 3.28.1–2). Is this a reference to John's Apocalypse? For Gwynn, if Gaius had actually gone so far as to attribute this work to Cerinthus, surely Hippolytus and bar Salibi would have included and refuted such a position. Thus, the absence of any such reference led Gwynn to

36 Gwynn, 402, 406–7; *Comm. Apoc.*, 10.

37 Gwynn, 406–7. Cf. *Haer.* 51.34.5–7; *Comm. Apoc.* 10.

38 Hippolytus' *Heads Against Gaius* was, according to Gwynn, a distinct work from another work listed in the *Catalogue* of Ebed-Jesu entitled, *Defense of the Gospel and Apocalypse according to John*. *Ibid.*, 404–5.

39 Gwynn, 406; *Comm. Apoc.* 8, 19.

40 Gwynn, 408–9.

conclude that Gaius could not have attributed the Johannine Apocalypse to Cerinthus, as had the *Alogi* (*Haer.* 51.3.6).⁴¹

However, shortly after Gwynn's publication, J. Rendell Harris and T.H. Robinson provided additional bar Salibi materials that indicated Gaius probably rejected the Gospel of John as well as the Apocalypse. Harris discovered some manuscripts of the bar Salibi commentary on the Gospel of John, while Robinson stumbled upon a separate copy of bar Salibi's commentary on the Apocalypse that contained a portion of the prologue that was missing from Gwynn's copy of the same work.

Here is the extract of Harris' discovery of a Latin translation of bar Salibi's commentary on the Gospel of John made by Dudley Loftus:

*Gaius haereticus reprehendat Johannem quia non concors fuit cum sociis, dicentibus, quod post baptismum abiit in Galilaeam, et fecit miraculum vini in Katna. Sanctus Hippolytus e contrario (l. adversus eum) scilicet . . .*⁴²

A heretic Gaius rebukes John because he was not in agreement with his companions, since after the baptism he went into Galilee, and made the miracle of wine in Cana. Saint Hippolytus said against him . . .

Harris noted a significant corruption in the manuscript tradition, however. After reviewing two manuscripts of the same work, housed in the British Library (MSS Codd. Add. 7184 and 12,143), Harris suspected that 'the name of Gaius was not in the primitive draft of the Commentary.'⁴³ In MS. Add. 7184 the text reads: 'A certain heretic had accused John . . .' above which a later hand prescribed the name Gaius. The second British manuscript (MS. Add. 12,143) contains the same objection but with no mention of the name 'Gaius' at all. In

41 Ibid., 405–6. Shortly after Gwynn's publication, Adolf von Harnack also argued that Gaius did not reject John or ascribe it to Cerinthus, only that he may have utilized elements of the *Alogi's* arguments against Revelation. Adolf von Harnack, *Das Neue Testament um das Jahr 200* (Freiburg: J.C.B. Mohr, 1889), 63ff.

42 J. Rendell Harris, 'Presbyter Gaius and the Fourth Gospel.' In *Hermas in Arcadia and Other Essays*, 43–59 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896): 48. See Harris (48) for the full reproduction of Hippolytus' response in the Latin. Harris located this Latin translation by Dudley Loftus in the Bodleian Library, *Fell MSS.* 6 and 7, which Loftus translated from the Syriac MS listed in the Manuscripts Department of Trinity College Library, Dublin as: TCD MS 1512 fol. Chart., s.xii. Syriac—Dionysius (Jacob) Barsalibi; *Commentarius in Quator Evangelia. Written by Matthew, son of John, for his nephew Matthew, son of Bakhittitjar, A. Gr. 1509; AD 1198.*

43 Harris, 48.

the words of Harris, 'as we can see no reason for the omission of the name of Gaius in these two copies, we suspect that it has come in by editorial correction. Indeed the opening words which answer to the Greek ἀίρετικός τις would of themselves suggest the absence of the name of the heretic.'⁴⁴ However, given that this anonymous objection is followed by a rebuttal by Hippolytus, as in the case of the objections to the Apocalypse, Harris maintained Gaius' name was rightly added by a later source for the sake of identification.

It did not take long for the third and final piece of 'new' evidence from the bar Salibi commentaries to arrive. In 1906, T.H. Robinson published an article in which he argued that Hippolytus was the author of the *Muratorian Fragment*.⁴⁵ This conclusion was based on Robinson's assumption that Epiphanius was wholly reliant upon a *singular* work of Hippolytus, as Harris had suggested. Robinson also argued that the defense of the Gospel of John recorded in the *Muratorian Fragment* is too similar to the response of Hippolytus against Gaius to deny that the *Muratorian Fragment* is a product of Hippolytus as well.⁴⁶ To prove this, Robinson published the introduction to bar Salibi's *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, which had been missing from Gwynn's copy of the same work.⁴⁷ In this recovered portion one finds an historical introduction in which Gaius is portrayed as clearly rejecting *both* the Gospel and Apocalypse of John and attributing both to Cerinthus.⁴⁸ As to where bar Salibi got this information, Robinson concluded that the law of parsimony of causes necessitates that all of bar Salibi's quotations must have come directly from Hippolytus' *Defense of the Apocalypse and Gospel of John*.⁴⁹

... At the beginning of the treatise we must say that there are many teachers who are in doubt regarding the Revelation of John, and say that it is not his. And Eusebius of Caesarea declares the same thing in his ecclesiastical writings. For Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, says that the Revelation was not that of John the Apostle, but of another John, 'the Presbyter,' who lived in Asia. The reason is, that the style of the Revelation is not like the

44 Ibid., 48–9.

45 Robinson, 'Authorship,' 481–495.

46 Ibid., 494–5.

47 See Gwynn, 410.

48 Robinson (487) translated the preface to bar Salibi's work, which includes this statement: 'Hippolytus of Rome states that a man named Gaius had appeared, who said that neither the Gospel nor yet the Revelation was John's; but that they were the work of Cerinthus the heretic.'

49 Ibid., 491.

type of the language of the Gospel. Also John makes no mention of his name at all in the Gospel, but does put his name at the beginning and end of the Revelation. Now we agree that he received the Revelation of which he wrote from our Lord. Irenaeus the bishop, and Hippolytus of Bozra say that the Revelation is that of John the Evangelist, and that it was granted about the end of the reign of Domitian. And Eusebius of Caesarea agrees with this, but immediately says that some do not accept it as being the Revelation of John the Apostle, so saying that it is the work of John the Elder, who was a contemporary of John the Apostle. And there are two tombs in Asia, one being that of the Evangelist, the other that of John the Elder.

Hippolytus of Rome states that a man named Gaius had appeared, who said that neither the Gospel nor yet the Revelation was John's; but that they were the work of Cerinthus the heretic. And the blessed Hippolytus opposed this Gaius, and showed that the teaching of John in the Gospel and Revelation was different from that of Cerinthus. This Cerinthus was one who taught circumcision, and was angry with Paul when he did not circumcise Titus, and the Apostle calls him and his disciples in one of his letters 'sham apostles, crafty workers.' Again he teaches that the world was created by angels, and that our Lord was not born of a virgin. He also teaches carnal eating and drinking, and many other blasphemies. The Gospel and Revelation of John, however, are like the teaching which the Scriptures contain; and so they are liars who say that the Revelation is not by the Apostle John. And we agree with Hippolytus that the Revelation is the Evangelist John's. This is attested by S. Cyril and Mar Severus, and all the teachers who bring evidence from it. Also the Theologian,⁵⁰ in his 'Address to the Nation,' testifies that there is no proof from the conclusion, and says, 'as John taught me by his Revelation; He made a way for thy people, and these stones'—where he calls the heretics and their teaching stones.⁵¹

Later, in the middle of the twentieth century, thanks to the contributions of M. Chabot towards the critical editions of the bar Salibi commentaries, Pierre de Labriolle was made aware of another copy of bar Salibi's commentary on the Gospels in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. This manuscript (*Cod. parisinus syr.* 67) contains the name 'Gaius' as part of the original text. Labriolle cites it in this way:

50 Robinson understands this figure to be Gregory of Nazianzus.

51 Robinson, 487. Latin translation in Sedlacek (ed.), *Comm. Apoc.* 1–2.

*Caius hareticus arguebat Iohannem quod non consentiret Evangelistis eius sociis qui dicunt (sic) quod post baptismum iuit in Galileam et fecit Canae miraculum uini.*⁵²

It is readily apparent that another textual issue arises, though not pertaining to the inclusion of Gaius' name. The translation of this manuscript reads incoherently:

Gaius the heretic accused John because it does not agree with the other Evangelists who say (pl.) that after the baptism he came into Galilee and made the miracle of the wine in Cana.

In fact this is the Johannine chronology, not that of the Synoptics as is indicated in this passage. Labriolle suggested the original reading must have read, '... dicunt quod post baptismum iuit <in desertum, dum ipse dicit quod statim iuit> in Galileam, etc...'⁵³ Labriolle also noted that another copy of the bar Salibi commentary (*Cod. Paris. syr.* 68) neglected to include the objection of Gaius altogether. He also referenced a relatively recent copy (1904) of a seventeenth-century manuscript that provides a text analogous to that of *Cod. parisinus syr.* 67, which includes Gaius' name.

1.8 Ebed-Jesu

The last major piece of evidence comes from the Syriac *Catalogue* of Ebed-Jesu (ca. 1300). The seventh chapter of this work lists a number of works by 'Hippolytus, bishop and martyr' (*Hippolytus Episcopus & Martyr*). Lightfoot translated the entry into Greek, Assemani into Latin.⁵⁴

Lightfoot Translation

Assemani Translation

Κύριος Ἰππόλυτος μάρτυρ

1 *Sanctus Hippolytus martyr*

52 Labriolle, *Crise*, 285, citing *Cod. parisinus syr.* 67 Fol. 270, r^o, col. 2. Not surprisingly, Smith based his translation on this manuscript due to its inclusion of Gaius' name. See Smith, 'Gaius', 201, n. 2.

53 Labriolle, *Crise*, 285, n. 1

54 Lightfoot, *AF* i, 2, 350. See also J.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, tomi tertii pars prima Romae (Rome: S.C. Propaganda Fide 1719–1728) III.1, 15.

καὶ ἐπίσκοπος ἔγραψε βιβλίον περὶ οἰκονομίας καὶ ἐρμηνείαν	2 <i>Et Episcopus composuit librum De Dispensatione: & expositionem</i>
Δανιήλ τοῦ μικροῦ καὶ Σουσάννας	3 <i>Danielis minoris & Susannae</i>
καὶ κεφάλαια κατὰ Γαΐου καὶ ἀπολογία ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀποκαλύψεως	4 <i>Et capita adversùs Cajum: 5 Et Apologiam pro Apocalypsi</i>
καὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰωάνου [sic] τοῦ ἀποστόλου καὶ εὐαγγελιστοῦ.	<i>Et Evangelio Joannis Apostoli & Evangelistae</i>

Blessed Hippolytus, martyr and bishop wrote a book concerning the interpretation of *Little (or 'Young') Daniel* and *Susannah*, and *Heads (or 'Chapters') against Gaius*, and an *Apology* for the Apocalypse and Gospel of John, Apostle and Evangelist.

With the addition of this last piece of evidence, the preceding entries in the catalogue of evidence concerning the *Alogi* and Gaius would seem to fall in place. Ebed-Jesu's *Catalogue* appears to acknowledge the existence not only of the lost work inscribed on the plinth of the Statue of Hippolytus, but also the unknown source that informed the commentaries of bar Salibi. Although the *Alogi* are not mentioned, the parallels between Gaius' criticisms and those of the *Alogi* would steer scholarship throughout most of the twentieth century towards the conclusion that the former mounted an ecclesiastical campaign against the Johannine literature. The following chapter will outline in greater detail this trajectory of scholarship.