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THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE MURATORIAN CANON.

THE Muratorian Canon is our oldest list of the books of the New Testament. It is a fragment discovered in the Ambrosian library at Milan, and published in 1740 by the librarian Muratori, from whom it takes its name. His object was to give an example of the kind of Latin an ignorant monk could write, but it was soon seen that the document had a very great intrinsic importance, due to the professed antiquity of the Canon of New Testament writings which it contains. Pius, who was bishop of Rome from 146-161 A.D., is mentioned as being almost a contemporary of the author. As it stands, the fragment is anonymous; and, of course, several attempts have been made to identify the author. Muratori himself suggested "Gaius the Presbyter," of whom Eusebius says: "There has come down also to our time a dialogue by the eloquent Gaius, which was addressed at Rome in the time of Zephyrinus, to Proclus, the champion of the Phrygian heresy. He, Gaius, rebukes the precipitancy and rashness of the opposite party in the matter of composing new scriptures, and mentions only the thirteen epistles as belonging to the blessed Apostle, not including the Epistle to the Hebrews with the rest; so also, even to the present day, there are some in Rome who do not regard it as being the Apostle's."

This was, for a time, practically the sum of our knowledge and the limit of critical speculation concerning Gaius. Then came the discovery of a work entitled, *The Philosophu-*

mena, a Refutation of all Heresies. This was attributed to Origen by the first editor on its publication in 1851, and subsequently, by certain critics, to the Gaius in question, together with a number of other works belonging to the second century.

It is, however, perfectly certain that this document is the work not of Gaius, but of Hippolytus. And Lightfoot took the various lesser books which had been ascribed to Gaius, and showed that they also were to be regarded as writings of Hippolytus (*Apost. Fath.*, part i. vol. ii. pp. 378-380). He was, however, unable thus to explain away the Dialogue with Proclus, except by supposing that Proclus and Gaius alike were mere *dramatis personæ*, with no more solid basis for existence than Hippolytus' imagination. Some later authors, finding a book *Gaius against Proclus*, had, he assumed, deduced from it Gaius' reality.

Now if Gaius was a mere lay figure, Muratori's connexion between Gaius and the fragmentary Canon disappears, unless we reserve the case that the fragment is a part of the speech of the assumed Gaius against the imaginary Proclus. And, as all Gaius' other works had been attributed to Hippolytus, it was natural that this should go the way of the rest. The question then arose, to which of the Hippolytean writings did it belong? It is certainly not in any of his extant works, but we have several lists of his writings preserved, and from the titles it may be possible to infer to which of them a Canon of the books of the New Testament should be referred. The oldest of these lists is an inscription on the statue of Hippolytus, which is now preserved in the Lateran Museum. The statue dates from the first half of the third century, and represents the recently deceased Hippolytus as seated in his episcopal cathedra. On the back of his chair there is a list of his works, and Lightfoot quotes the inscription in full. This gives very nearly a complete

catalogue ; though it omits several books to which other writers refer. Eusebius' catalogue (*H.E.* vi. 22) does not profess to be complete, nor does it throw any fresh light. That of the fourteenth century Syrian father, Ebed-Jesu, does, however, include a title which we should not have known from other sources, for it mentions two works noted on the chair—*ὑπὲρ τοῦ κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγελίου καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως*, and just before them inserts, “And chapters against Gaius.” Lightfoot guessed—and, as we shall try to show, the guess was a correct one,—that there was some intimate connexion between this work and the two apologetic treatises, suspecting that it was composed of extracts taken from them.

To return to the Canon itself. Lightfoot not unnaturally attempted to discover the original Greek that lay behind Muratori's text, and his first effort showed that some of the Latin went naturally into Greek Iambics, and it was possible to retranslate the whole into verse. It is true that there were certain metrical licences, but, as Lightfoot pointed out, they were frequently surpassed by writers of the same age. Now near the end of one of the lists of Hippolytus' works was an item entitled *ῥῥαὶ εἰς πάσας τὰς γραφάς*. This was suspected to be a metrical account of the books of the Old and the New Testaments, The first part of this was assumed to have perished, but possibly the second survives in a mutilated form in the Muratorian Canon.

This, then, is a brief outline of the position in which Lightfoot left the study of this fragment. The next phase began with the discovery of a MS. of a commentary on the Apocalypse by Dionysius Bar Ṣalibi, a Syrian father of the twelfth century. The MS. is in the British Museum (Add. 7185), and was there studied by Dr. Gwynn of Dublin.

Dr. Gwynn published the results of his investigations in *Hermathena* (vol. vi. pp. 397-418). He found in the MS.

in question five passages where Bar Ṣalibi quotes from a work of Hippolytus against Gaius. The quotations are introduced with a brief objection by the "heretic" Gaius, who insists in each case that the teaching of the Apocalypse is not in accord with the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. The answer of Hippolytus is given in a condensed form—as, indeed, are nearly all Bar Ṣalibi's quotations from other authors. From these passages Dr. Gwynn deduces three direct and certain conclusions.

1. They establish the separate existence of Gaius, thus refuting the view of his identity with Hippolytus which Lightfoot had put forward.

2. Gaius rejected the Apocalypse on the ground stated above.

3. Hippolytus wrote a work in refutation of this view. This, Dr. Gwynn thinks, is not the same as the *Apology for the Apocalypse and the Gospel*. (But Dr. Gwynn translates the Syriac words "mappaq b'rucha" as "Exposition," although the usual rendering is that of Lightfoot, "Apology.")

To these he adds, as a safe inference, that the Muratorian Canon was not the work of Gaius, since the Canon includes the Apocalypse, while Gaius rejected it. It also seemed equally certain to Dr. Gwynn that Gaius accepted the Fourth Gospel. This is due to the fact that Hippolytus quoted it against him, and was unlikely to appeal to a disputed book. Further, one of the passages quoted proves that Epiphanius knew and used the same work that Bar Ṣalibi employed in this Commentary. This work Dr. Gwynn believed to be the lost "Refutation of the thirty-two heresies," which is now identified with the *Philosophumena*.

The next step was taken by Rendel Harris, in a paper read before the Society for Historical Theology in November, 1895. Dr. Harris has since published this essay (*Presbyter*

Gaius and the Fourth Gospel) in a small volume, entitled *Hermas in Arcadia*. Working on the same material as Dr. Gwynn, the Cambridge scholar found himself able to go further in his knowledge of Gaius, and succeeded in explaining one of the difficulties which hindered our acceptance of the view that Gaius attributed the Apocalypse to Cerinthus. He was also able to show, from Bar Şalibi's commentary on the Fourth Gospel, that Gaius had denied the Johannine authorship of that book in just the same way as he criticised the Apocalypse. Dr. Harris goes on to suggest, by a reference to the passage in Epiphanius already cited by Gwynn, that Gaius was one, perhaps the leader, of the heretics known as the Alogi. It is strange to find that Harnack (*Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur*, p. 227) still refuses to admit that Gaius rejected the Gospel of John, on the ground that Eusebius could not have described him as being ἐκκλησιαστικὸς ἀνὴρ (*H.E.* ii. 25). This is certainly a difficulty; but in the face of the overwhelming evidence which we now have to the contrary, we can no longer agree with Gwynn and Harnack on this point.

Dr. Gwynn (*Hermathena*, vi. p. 410) notes with regret that there are two leaves missing from the MS. of Bar Şalibi on the Apocalypse in the British Museum. Fortunately a MS. of this work has been discovered in the Tûr 'Abdîn, and a transcript has found its way into the collection of Rendel Harris. This MS. is complete, and by one of those strange tricks of fortune which are at once the hope and the despair of the critic, the missing pages contain the solutions of some of the problems which centre round Gaius, Hippolytus and the Muratorian Canon.

The keys that have been already filed will go far towards opening the door; but it is only within the last few months that the exact piece of metal has been found which will fit the lock without further manipulation. This is true, at any

rate, as far as the authorship of the Muratorian Canon is concerned ; and there are one or two other problems whose answer is given with certainty.

Bar Şalibi is a good scholar and a sound critic, and well repays study. The introduction¹ to the Commentary on the Apocalypse is so interesting that it will be well worth quoting at some length :—

. . . “ Now that we have finished the exposition of the Gospel, brethren, fully and very clearly, we come and approach the exposition of the Revelation of John the Evangelist. But do you, readers, with the students of the spiritual enquiries maintain your prayers for Dionysius the stranger, according as you also will be saved. 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 (i.e. in the History of the Church). 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 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,² so saying that

¹ An edition of this work is in course of preparation, under the direction of Dr. Rendel Harris.

² Here the British Museum MS. breaks off. The first page is very defective, and even where whole, difficult to decipher.

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 letters¹ '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,² 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,³ in his 'Address to the Nation,' testifies that there is no proof from the conclusion,⁴ 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."

This is good criticism, and we shall want it again. In the meantime, Bar Şalibi plunges at once into exposition:—

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 13. *ψευδαπόστολοι, δόλιοι ἔργαται.*

² i.e. in the millennium.

³ i.e. Gregory Naz. ?

⁴ i.e. the mention of John's name in Rev. xxii. does not disprove his identity with the fourth Evangelist.

“*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, etc.*—Hence he begins with that which was revealed to him in a vision concerning those things which were about to be.

To His servant John.—He records his name in the Revelation that we may believe what he saw. In the Gospel he does not record his name, because there was no need for it there, since all the Apostles were witnesses of what our Lord did.

John to the seven Churches which are in Asia.—By Churches, he indicates cities, and calls them Churches because of the excellence of the elect who were in them. He says “seven,” because the number seven was in high esteem among the Hebrews in the Scriptures. And there are seven gifts of One Spirit descending on one Church. Hippolytus says that in writing to seven Churches, he writes just as Paul wrote thirteen letters, but wrote them to seven Churches. That to the Hebrews he does not judge to be Paul’s, but perhaps Clement’s.”

We have gone far enough. We have heard something like this before. “Cum ipse beatus Apostolus Paulus sequens prodecessoris sui Johannis ordinem nonnisi nominatim septem ecclesiis scribat ordine tali :—ad Corinthios prima, ad Ephesios secunda, ad Philippenses tertia, ad Colossenses quarta, ad Galatos quinta, ad Thessalonicenses sexta, ad Romanos septima. Verum Corintheis et Thessalonicensibus licet pro correptione iteretur, una tamen per omnem orbem terrae ecclesia diffusa esse denoscitur, et Johannis enim in Apocalypsi licet septem ecclesiis scribat, tamen omnibus dicit.” So runs the fragment of Muratori. What are we to say ?

Muratori’s own guess as to the Gaian authorship of this fragment is at any rate proved to be impossible by the above quotation from Bar Şalibi. For the Canon accepts both the Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel as being

Johannine ; Gaius accepted neither. But the mention of Pius seems to prove that the Canon is at least of the age of Hippolytus and Gaius. The probabilities were, before, on the side of the Hippolytean authorship ; it looks as though they were considerably strengthened. It is obvious, however, that Bar Şalibi is not quoting exactly, and, unfortunately, we have no means of testing his other quotations from Hippolytus, unless Epiphanius be allowed to represent Hippolytus more closely. But we can compare his references to Eusebius with that author's Syriac text, and the result we reach is the certainty that Bar Şalibi's quotations are not necessarily verbal. He only means to reproduce the thought. This being so, we shall have no longer any hesitation in saying that our Syrian Father is quoting the Muratorian Canon as being the work of Hippolytus. The proof is not mathematical, but there seems to be no real objection on *a priori* grounds ; so that there is now as strong a presumption as criticism ever needs, and a much stronger one than it usually finds. If the scale pans wavered at all before, this extra weight will carry them down with a run.

But we now have a further light on the Canon itself. The omission of the Epistle to the Hebrews has puzzled every one, Westcott included. The Canon, however, is universally admitted to be incomplete, and its testimony to the fourteenth "Pauline" epistle would have been most valuable. We have no other indication of Hippolytus' views on the authorship beyond the bare fact that he did not regard it as Paul's. Origen and Eusebius both report that some people have regarded it as being the work of Clement of Rome. Now for the first time we have a name attached to that suggestion, and while we feel that the Clementine authorship is out of the question, it is interesting to note that it had such respectable support as that of Hippolytus in his Canon.

So we come to a further question. What is the work of which this document forms a part? Lightfoot, finding that he was able to write it in Greek verse, suggested the "Odes on all the Scriptures." And this indeed seems at first sight a very suitable place for the Canon. But a scholar of Lightfoot's calibre would probably have little difficulty in rendering any Latin into Greek Iambics, and even if it were originally metrical, it need not have formed a part of the Odes. And we shall find reason to assign it differently.

In the first place we have to notice that this is not a mere guess on Bar Şalibi's part. He knows what he is quoting and he knows its source. It follows from his familiarity with the author that he is familiar with the work containing the passage. Now, so far, we have only detected one single work of Hippolytus on Bar Şalibi's bookshelf. This is the work against Gaius which Dr. Gwynn has referred to the *Refutation of the thirty-two Heresies*, and Lightfoot to the *Apology for the Apocalypse and Gospel of John*. The recognition of the *Refutation* under its pseudonym of *Philosophumena* contradicts the theory of the Irish critic. He was unable to accept Lightfoot's identification of the "chapters against Gaius" with the *Apology*, because he believed that Gaius accepted the Fourth Gospel, and Hippolytus was evidently opposing some one who rejected it. The passage cited from Bar Şalibi proves conclusively that Gaius did not regard John as the author of the Fourth Gospel. He is in the critical position of the "Alogi," and we feel ourselves justified in regarding him as their leader and the principal object of Hippolytus' attack. It is still difficult to explain Eusebius' respect for Gaius, and we do not quite understand how Hippolytus could quote against him from the Fourth Gospel. But we feel that although these objections would have weight in the absence of other evidence, they cannot be allowed to

stand in face of the direct and positive testimony of Bar Şalibi.

The removal of this objection leaves open the way for the other hypothesis—that there is an essential connexion between the “ chapters against Gaius ” and the *Apology for the Apocalypse and Gospel of John*. It may be noted that it is not at all improbable that this was what Ebed Jesu intended to imply in his catalogue of Hippolytus’ works. A very brief acquaintance with the ways of Syriac scribes justifies us in omitting a conjunction, or at least in suspecting its presence. And in all probability Ebed Jesu intended to write first the full title of the work and then denote two of its sections, one concerned with the Apocalypse, the other with the Fourth Gospel. This view is strongly supported by the way in which the combatants are introduced by Bar Şalibi. “ The blessed Hippolytus,” he says, “ opposed this Gaius ”—*qam luqbal hana Gaius*—a phrase so like the title of Hippolytus’ work “ *rishē luqbal Gaius* ” as to justify us in regarding it as a reminiscence thereof. Lightfoot may have felt that Bar Şalibi had robbed him of a favourite theory by proving the existence of Gaius ; he has now every reason for gratitude, for on two points, the authorship of the Muratorian Canon and the identity of the “ chapters against Gaius,” the Syrian Father has unexpectedly vindicated two out of the English critic’s series of conjectures.

Now, this being the only work of Hippolytus which we have found in Bar Şalibi’s hands, the law of parsimony of causes compels us to attribute all quotations from this author to the same document unless we have some fairly strong evidence to the contrary. And an examination of the evidence seems to lead to a conclusion which confirms our first impression. We are now at liberty to use the Canon itself in order to determine its place in Hippoly-

tus' writings. And near the beginning we certainly find a most illuminating passage: "Primum omnium Corinthiis schisma haeresis interdicens, deinceps Galatis circumcisionem, Romanis autem ordinem scripturarum, sed et principium earum esse Christum intimans, prolixius scripsit. De quibus singulis necesse est a nobis disputari." So little has this passage been understood that some editors have even inserted "non" before "necesse." Needless to say, this has no foundation in the MS. and it leaves the passage really more inexplicable than ever. For why should these three epistles be especially mentioned if there is no need to discuss them? The very fact of their selection here shows, as Tregelles saw, that this Canon must have stood at the head of a controversial work. The points of difference will be:—

1. Heresy.
2. Circumcision.
3. Canonicity of certain books of Scripture.
4. Christology.

The word "ordinem" offers a difficulty. Its use in the first passage cited—a list of the Pauline Epistles—shows that it does not mean a definite orderly sequence. And it seems to have been the earliest translation of the idea expressed in the Greek ecclesiastical language by *κάνων*, "Canon," as a Latin word is not quoted in this sense before Augustine, while Quintilian (1, 4, 3) uses "ordo" with almost the same meaning: "Grammatici alios auctores in ordinem redigerunt, alios omnino exemerant numero." We recognize, therefore, that it is not simply the order of the books of the Scriptures, but a list of those which they contain. Moreover, there would be little point in discussing the sequence of the books of Scripture in a treatise which involved the other matters; and as a matter of fact the sequence is immediately set at nought.

Hippolytus' meaning in this extract is clear. He points out how Paul had found it necessary to face and solve certain problems in certain of his Epistles. He remarks that he is faced with the same questions, and will have to discuss these same matters. The connexion in subject between this passage and Bar Şalibi's quotation from Hippolytus is abundantly clear.

This *Cerinthus* was one who taught *circumcision*, and was angry with Paul because he did not circumcise Titus, and the Apostle calls him and his disciples in one of his letters "Sham apostles." . . . 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."

Primum omnium Corinthiis schisma haeresis interdicens, deinceps Galatis *circumcisionem*; Romanis autem *ordinem scripturarum* sed et *principium earum esse Christum* intimans prolixius scripsit. De quibus singulis necesse est a nobis disputari.

The parallel between the various subjects is easily seen when it is remembered that Bar Şalibi does not mean to quote exactly. The question then arises, To which of Hippolytus' works is the passage to be referred? The natural answer is, *The Philosophumena*; but we have that work, and the passages concerned with Cerinthus make no mention of his Judaizing tendency. The *Chapters against Gaius*, however, must have contained sections on all the questions raised in the above citation from the Canon, because they are the points on which Cerinthus differs from the Scriptures. It is by enumerating and discussing such points, as Bar Şalibi tells us, that Hippolytus refutes Gaius' objection to the Apocalypse and Fourth Gospel. It becomes clear, therefore, that the most suitable suggestion for the source of this Canon is the book entitled *Chapters against Gaius*.

One more point may be brought forward. Can we be sure that this Cerinthus passage in Hippolytus comes from the same work as the other answers to Gaius? If it does, we may be fairly sure that our guess is right, and we have reached a point between probability and certainty. For this it is only necessary to turn to that arch-plagiarist, Epiphanius. Dr. Gwynn and Rendel Harris have already shown that he knew and quoted the "Heads against Gaius," and indeed, that his work is largely based on Hippolytus. We come to him with assurance, and find our expectations fully met, in the article on Cerinthus in Epiphanius' work on Heresies. The following extracts will make this sufficiently clear:—

BAR SALIBI.

"The world was created by angels, and our Lord was not born of a virgin."

"This Cerinthus was one who taught circumcision, and was angry with Paul because he did not circumcise Titus."

ΕΠΙΦΑΝΙΟΥΣ.

Patr. Gr., vol. 41, col. 377.
 ἐξηγείται καὶ οὗτος ἐκ Μαρίας καὶ ἐκ σπέρματος Ἰωσήφ τὸν Χριστὸν γεγενῆσθαι, καὶ τὸν κόσμον ὁμοίως¹ ὑπὸ ἀγγέλων γεγενῆσθαι.

Col. 381.

ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν τότε ἐπραγματεύθη κινήθοντα ὑπὸ τοῦ προειρημένου ψευδαποστόλου Κηρίνου ὃς καὶ ἄλλοτε στάσιν αὐτὸς τε καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ εἰργάσαντο ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ Ἱερουσαλὴμ, ὁπνῆκα Παῦλος ἀνῆλθε μετὰ Τίτου, ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς ἔφη, ὅτι ἄνδρας ἀκροβύστους εἰσήνεγκε μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ, ἥδη περὶ τούτου λέγων, κεκοίνηκε, φησι, τὸν ἕγιον τόπον. διὸ καὶ Παῦλος λέγει Ἄλλ' οὐδὲ Τίτος κ.τ.λ.
 (there follows a quotation taken from Gal. ii. 3-5).

Finally, a decisive passage:—

"The Apostle calls him and his disciples, 'Sham apostles, crafty workers.'"

Col. 384.

καὶ οὗτοι εἰσὶν οἱ παρὰ τῷ Παύλῳ εἰρημένοι ψευδαπόστολοι, ἐργάται δόλοιο μετασχηματιζόμενοι εἰς ἀποστόλους Χριστοῦ.

¹ Referring to Carpocrates, the last heretic with whom Epiphanius has dealt.

This does not claim to be more than a preliminary discussion of the subject. A fuller investigation of the questions involved is reserved for the publication of Bar Şalibi's Commentary on the Apocalypse. It may be possible, however, to sum up our results. We may regard as practically certain the following :—

1. The fact that the Muratorian Canon is the work of Hippolytus.

2. The identity of the *Chapters against Gaius* with the *Apology for the Apocalypse and Gospel of John*. Incidentally we may regard it as proved that Gaius really existed.

3. The free use made by Epiphanius of the *Heads against Gaius*. This is one of the subjects that needs further inquiry, and will probably throw no small light on the history of the Church at the end of the second century.

These results may be held to be certain. To them we may add as being highly probable, though not of the same order of probability as the others :—

4. The Muratorian Canon stood at or near the beginning of the treatise against Gaius in which Hippolytus defended the Johannine authorship of the Apocalypse and Fourth Gospel.

THEODORE H. ROBINSON.