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Patristic Commentaries on Revelation: An Update¹

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INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR AN UPDATE

In March of 2003 I delivered a paper entitled “Ancient Commentaries on the Book of Revelation: A Bibliographical Guide” in which I gave bibliographical information on thirty commentaries on the Apocalypse written between the third and tenth centuries.² At that time only two of those thirty texts had been translated into English. A revision of that paper published as “Patristic Commentaries on Revelation” in a 2008 issue of *Kerux* journal showed that of the twenty-one commentaries on Revelation written between the third and eighth centuries only three at the time had been translated into English.³ In that paper and article I challenged readers to undertake a translation project focusing on these commentaries. “If just one of these commentaries were translated and published each year,” I wrote, “this entire patristic treasury of Revelation commentaries could be available to English-speaking scholars within twenty years.”⁴

Wonderful to relate, within just one decade only two of the seventeen commentaries from the third through early eighth century remain without English

¹ An earlier version of this article appeared in *Kerux* 27:3 (Dec 2012):37-43.

² Francis X. Gumerlock, “Ancient Commentaries on the Book of Revelation: A Bibliographical Guide,” paper delivered at the Southeastern Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Dayton, Tennessee, March 2003.

³ Gumerlock, “Patristic Commentaries on Revelation,” *Kerux* 23:2 (Sept 2008):49-67.

⁴ Gumerlock, “Patristic Commentaries on Revelation,” 65.

translation. They are: the fragments of Hippolytus (c. 235) on the Apocalypse scattered about in a variety of texts and languages, and the large Latin commentary of Primasius of Hadrumetum (540).

In this update I shall review the status of entries #1-17 of the article “Patristic Commentaries on Revelation,” provide locations for new editions and translations, and discuss more recent scholarship on the commentaries. This update is meant as a supplement not a replacement for the aforementioned article. Entries #18-21 in the aforementioned article, which treat commentaries from the late eighth century, will be updated in a forthcoming article entitled “Carolingian Apocalypse Commentaries” which will cover those from AD 750-987.

ABBREVIATIONS

- ANF *Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Church*. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885-1986 with numerous reprints by a variety of publishing companies including T & T Clark, Eerdmans, and Hendrickson. It is also widely available in electronic form on the internet.
- CCCM *Corpus christianorum, continuatio medievalis*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1953-present.
- CCSL *Corpus christianorum, series latina*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1953-present.
- FC *Fathers of the Church*. New York: Cima Publ. Co., 1947-1949; New

York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1949-1960; Washington D.C.:
Catholic University of America Press, 1960-present.

- GCR *Greek Commentaries on Revelation*. William C. Weinrich, trans. Ancient
Christian Texts series. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press,
2011.
- LCR *Latin Commentaries on Revelation*. William C. Weinrich, trans. Ancient
Christian Texts series. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press,
2011.
- PL *Patrologia cursus completes, series latina*, 221 vols. J. P. Migne, ed.
Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1844-1864. Available in reprint from
Brepols, and on compact disk as Chadwyk-Healey Patrologia Latin
Database. Bell & Howell Information and Learning Co.,
1996-2000.
- SSA *The Seven Seals of the Apocalypse: Medieval Texts in Translation*. Francis
X. Gumerlock, trans. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute
Publications, 2009.

1. Hippolytus of Rome (c. 235)

Recent scholarship tends to doubt the existence of two separate lost works on the
Apocalypse, an *Apology for the Apocalypse and Gospel of John the Apostle and
Evangelist* and *Chapters against Gaius*, and tends to think they were one and the same
work.

Fragments of it were found in later Greek, Syriac, and Arabic commentaries on the Apocalypse. Some scholars think that these later commentaries may not necessarily have had the text of Hippolytus on the Apocalypse before them, but rather a *florilegia* of Hippolytus' comments on the Apocalypse gathered from that work and his other works such as *On Christ and Antichrist*.

Also, there is some question about the degree to which the fragments of Hippolytus on the Apocalypse accurately represent the original lost work. For example, the citations may be paraphrases or summaries of Hippolytus or even attributions of their own opinions to Hippolytus.

An article that gives the most recent scholarship on the status of the fragments of Hippolytus on the Apocalypse is Bernard McGinn, "Turning Points in Early Christian Apocalypse Exegesis," in Robert J. Daly, ed., *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 81-105 at 91. According to McGinn, fragments of Hippolytus on the Apocalypse have also been found in Coptic and Old Slavonic texts, and are still being discovered.

Two Arabic commentaries that include citations from Hippolytus on the Apocalypse are those of Paul of Bush and Ibn Katib Qaysar from thirteenth-century Egypt. The former is translated in Shawqi Najib Talia, "Bulus al-Busi's Arabic Commentary on the Apocalypse of John: An English Translation and a Commentary," Ph.D. diss (Catholic University of America, 1987) available from Proquest Information and Learning. Paul of Bush's citations of Hippolytus on Rev 12 are on pages 183 & 189.

The commentary on Qaysar was published in Arabic in Girgis [Jirjis] Filutha'us 'Awad, *Tafsir Sifr al-Ru'ya li-l-Qadis Yuhanna al-Lahuti l-Ibn Katib Qaysar* (Cairo, Egypt: al-Qummus Armaniyus Habashi Shatta al-Birmawi, 1939; Reprint: Cairo: Maktabat al-Mahabbah, 1994). Stephen J. Davis wrote an informative article about the commentary entitled "Introducing an Arabic Commentary on the Apocalypse: Ibn Katib Qaysar on Revelation," *Harvard Theological Review* 101:1 (2008):77-96.

2. Origen (d. 253) and Others

The *Scholia in Apocalypsin*, once attributed to Origen, is translated into English in Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *An Ancient Commentary on the Book of Revelation. A critical edition of the Scholia in Apocalypsin*. Cambridge University Press, 2013. Tzamalikos claims that these scholia are the work of Cassian the Sabaite in the sixth century. Concerning its aim he Tzamalikos writes, "This set of comments seems to have been intended for personal use. Cassian probably also composed this as part of his pastoral care as an abbot, in order to provide his monks with arguments buttressing up the canonicity of Revelation." (p. 60) Tzamalikos, in his "Expanded Notes" in the back of the book, shows that many of the scholia are from Didymus of Alexandria's *Commentary on the Apocalypse*.

3. Victorinus of Pettau (260)

A new translation of the original commentary of Victorinus, not Jerome's recension of it, is translated into English in LCR.

4. Tyconius of Carthage (380)

A reconstruction of Tyconius' Latin *Exposition of the Apocalypse* was completed by Roger Gryson and published in 2011 in CCSL 107A. I have translated the *Exposition* and David Robinson of Toronto wrote an introduction and footnotes. It is scheduled for publication in the Fathers of the Church series from The Catholic University of America Press.

5. Didymus of Alexandria (d. 398)

Panayiotis Tzamalikos, in *An Ancient Commentary on the Book of Revelation. A critical edition of the Scholia in Apocalypsin* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), that the collection of scholia was compiled by Cassian the Sabaite, but that many of the scholia derive from Didymus' otherwise lost *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. See Tzamalikos' "Expanded Notes" in the back of the book to see which of the scholia derive from Didymus.

6. Jerome (398)

Jerome's recension of Victorinus' commentary on the Apocalypse was not translated into English and published in LCR, as projected in my article "Patristic Commentaries on Revelation." But the translated commentary under the name of Victorinus in ANF 7:344-360 is essentially Jerome's recension.

7. Ecumenius, or Oecumenius of Isauria in Asia Minor

Two new English translations of Ecumenius' Greek commentary appeared recently. First in 2006 in FC 112 translated by John N. Suggit under the title *Oecumenius. Commentary on the Apocalypse*, and then by William C. Weinrich in 2011 in GCR who also used the spelling Oecumenius. Almost no one holds that he is to be confused with the bishop of Tricca who shared the same name. Both translators reviewed the scholarly arguments about the date of the commentary and seem to hold that it was written in the first half of the sixth century. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, on the other hand, in her dissertation entitled "Andrew of Caesarea and the Apocalypse in the Ancient Church of the East: Studies and Translation," (Québec: Université Laval, 2008), holds that "Oikoumenios" wrote his commentary at the *end* of the sixth century (pages 15-17).

8. Caesarius of Arles (d. 542)

Homilies 4-6 were published in English in 2009 in SSA, pages 41-48. All of Caesarius' homilies on the Apocalypse were translated into English by Weinrich in 2011 in LCR. Unfortunately, in Weinrich's translation the biblical references in Revelation, on which Caesarius is commenting, are not marked by chapter and verse (only by quotation marks), which makes it difficult when looking for Caesarius' comments on specific passages.

Roger Gryson, in his introduction in *Tyconii Afri Expositio Apocalypseos* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), mentioned that Caesarius wrote the homilies "probablement dans les années 510" or "probably in the year 510" (page 42).

9. Primasius of Hadrumetum (540)

Primasius' commentary is one of the few patristic texts on the Apocalypse in Latin which is still unavailable in English translation. It leans heavily on Tyconius and was influential on many early medieval Latin commentators.

10. Apringius of Béja (548)

Apringius' exposition of Rev 5:1-17 was published in English translation in 2009 in SSA, pages 27-29. The first English translation of the entire extant commentary (which treats only Rev 1:1-5:17 and 18:6-22:20) appeared in LCR.

11. Cassiodorus (580)

The comments on Rev 5-8 were published in SSA, pages 49-51. Since then I have translated the entire commentary, which will be forthcoming in publication.

12. Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia (d. 614)

Two English translations of Andrew's Greek commentary on Revelation were published in 2011. The first was by Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou in FC 123, the second by Weinrich in GCR.

13. Pseudo-Jerome (7thc.)

The comments on Rev 5 & 6 in this short *Handbook on the Apocalypse of the Apostle John* were published in English in SSA, pages 51-52. The entire *Handbook* was translated into English by me and is scheduled for publication with Medieval Institute Publications.

14. Pseudo-Alcuin, *On the Seven Seals*

English translations of the two versions of this short text interpreting the seven seals were published in SSA, pages 30-32.

15. Gregory the Great (d. 604), *Testimonies on the Apocalypse*

Paterius, one of Pope Gregory the Great's disciples, compiled Gregory's comments on the Apocalypse from his other writings. That compilation was known to Ambrose Autpert in the eighth century (CCCM 27:5), but it is believed to have been lost. The compilation in PL 79:1107-22 is believed to have been written not by Paterius but by Alufus of Tornaco (d. 1141). Mark DelCogliano of the University of Saint Thomas in Saint Paul, Minnesota translated into English the *Testimonies on the Apocalypse* of Gregory the Great. Its publication is forthcoming.

16. Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria (7th c.)

This commentary on Rev 7-12 (although it briefly comments on Rev 4 in the introduction and on Rev 13-15 in the conclusion) in the Coptic language was translated into Italian by Tito Orlandi in 1981. In 2011 Francesca Lecci of Milan, Italy translated

Orlandi's Italian version into English; and this was edited by Braeden Fallet and me. Publication of this English translation is forthcoming, but there is a need for an English translation of it directly from the Coptic. The Coptic version is still in manuscript and needs a critical edition.

17. Bede (701-716)

Two new translations of Bede's Apocalypse commentary were published recently: in 2011 by Weinrich in LCR and in 2013 by Faith Wallis in *Bede. Commentary on Revelation*. Translated Texts for Historians 58. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2013. The latest possibly date for the commentary is 716, but in her introduction Wallis argued that Bede may have written it as early as 701.

RELATED WORKS

A Latin fragment entitled *De Enoc et Helia [On Enoch and Elijah]* from the fifth or sixth century says that when Enoch and Elijah come, they are going to preach the coming of the Lord and the Day of Judgment for forty-two months and that each of the twelve tribes of Israel with the exception of Dan will be sealed and martyred for Christ.⁵ Thus it interprets Rev 7:1-7 and Rev 11 in a literal and futurist manner.

Several recent authors who study patristic and early medieval Apocalypse commentaries mention that there was an Apocalypse commentary, dated to the first half

⁵ In *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctorum Antiquissimorum*, Vol 9 (Berlin: Weidmannos, 1892), 63 where it is attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine. On the date of the fragment, see Martine Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio premier exegete latin*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1993), 42.

of the eighth century or between 700 and 750 AD, that is now lost.⁶ However, it was a source for material in later commentaries including the Apocalypse commentary in the eighth-century *Reference Bible*, the Apocalypse commentary of Theodulph of Orleans written in 810, and the anonymous *Cambridge Gloss on the Apocalypse*.⁷ It is very likely that large portions of the lost commentary from the early eighth century can be reconstructed from these three texts.

English translations of comments of Filastrius of Brixia (4th c.) on the author of the Apocalypse, of Ambrosiaster (c. 385) on Rev 2 & 10, Jerome on Rev 17 from one of his letters, Eucherius of Lyons (d. 449) on the seven spirits of God (Rev 1:4), and Quodvultdeus (c. 450) on the two witnesses (Rev 11) and the resurrection (Rev 20) were done by me and have yet to be published.

English translations of a sermon by Chromatius of Aquiliea (d. 407) on Saint John the Evangelist and Apostle, which comments on Rev 10:11 and an ancient preface to the Apocalypse pseudonymously attributed to Jerome are to be published in Chapter Two of *The Book of Revelation and Its Interpreters*. Ian Boxall and Richard Tresley, eds. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

⁶ Roger Gryson, ed., *Commentaria minora in Apocalypsin Johannis*. CCSL 107 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 142, 238, 239 (in which Gryson says that it used Tyconius abundantly), 242, 300 (on which he says that it is from the first half of the eighth century); Martin McNamara, “The newly-identified Cambridge Apocalypse Commentary and the Reference Bible: A Preliminary Enquiry,” *Peritia* 15 (2001): 208-56 at 219-220 in which he says: “The commentary gloss on the Apocalypse on which both the *Reference bible* and the Cambridge text depend must be older still—from the first half of the eighth century at the latest.”

⁷ The Apocalypse commentary in the *Reference Bible* is edited in Gryson, *Commentaria minora*. An English translation of it by me is scheduled for publication by Medieval Institute Publications. The Apocalypse commentary of Theodulph is edited in Gryson, *Commentaria minora*. I have translated this commentary but it is not yet scheduled for publication. The *Cambridge Gloss on the Apocalypse* is edited in Gryson, ed., *Incerti auctoris Glossa in Apocalypsin*. CCSL 108G (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013). Dr. Colin McAllister of the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs is currently working on an English translation of it.

English translations of a few paragraphs harmonizing the last trumpet with the seven trumpets, attributed to Gregory the Great, a preface to the Apocalypse by Isidore of Seville (d. 636), and a sixth or seventh century pseudo-Jerome preface to the Apocalypse found in a ninth-century at Bamberg were done by me but have not been published.

Commentaries on Revelation that are mentioned in ancient literature but have been totally lost include that of Milito of Sardis mentioned in Jerome's *On Illustrious Men* (FC 100:46) and the "Twelve Homilies of Origen on the Apocalypse" mentioned in an early medieval preface to Revelation (CCSL 107:194).⁸ Another lost work appears to have been Sermons or Discourses on Revelation by Basil of Caesarea (d. 379). Mention of these is in Ecumenius' Apocalypse commentary (FC 112:203) and in a writing of Michael Attaliates of Constantinople in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. "He attests to having seen books by Basil of Caesarea, which contained the text of Revelation and sermons on this by Basil along with his *Hexaemeron*."⁹

THE STATUS OF TRANSLATIONS AND A SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

Of the seventeen commentaries on Revelation written between the third and early eighth century, only two remain without English translation. Of these, the most important is probably the large commentary of Primasius of Hadrumetum which relied heavily on Tyconius and which was very influential on many Apocalypse commentators of the early middle ages.

⁸ Joseph F. T. Kelly, "Early Medieval Evidence for Twelve Homilies by Origen on the Apocalypse," *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 (1985):273-279.

⁹ Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *An Ancient Commentary on the Book of Revelation. A critical edition of the Scholia in Apocalypsin* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 22-23.

Now that most of the patristic commentaries on Revelation are in English, one fruitful study would be to search for and isolate any commonalities between the Eastern and Western exegetical traditions on Revelation, and then to investigate the sources of these commonalities, which may most likely be traced back to writers of the earliest centuries of Christianity such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Origen.