

## THE MURATORIAN FRAGMENT: THE STATE OF RESEARCH

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The fragmentary document known as “Canon Muratori” contains the oldest list of books of the NT. This essay will present the state of research regarding the Fragment, with particular attention to its date as well as its historical and theological significance.

### I. THE FRAGMENT

The Muratorian Fragment consists of 85 lines; the beginning and probably the end are missing. The Fragment was discovered by Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672–1750), an archivist and librarian at Modena, in the year 1700 in a manuscript in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan (Cod. Ambr. I 101 sup.), consisting of 76 leaves of coarse parchment. Muratori published the Fragment in 1740 in the third volume of his six-volume collection of essays entitled *Antiquitates italicæ mediævi*, in *Dissertatio XLIII* (cols. 807–880) under the heading “De Literarum Statu, neglectu, & cultura in Italia post Barbaros in eam invectos usque ad Annum Christi Millesimum Centesimum.”<sup>1</sup>

The manuscript originally belonged to the monastery at Bobbio in the Trebbia River valley southwest of Piacenza in northern Italy. The manuscript contains a statement of ownership by the Bobbio monastery: *liber scti columbani de bobbio/Iohis grisostomi*.<sup>2</sup> The manuscript contains several theological treatises of three theologians

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<sup>1</sup> Ludovico Antonio Muratori, “De Literarum Statu, neglectu, & cultura in Italia post Barbaros in eam invectos usque ad Annum Christi Millesimum Centesimum,” in *Antiquitates italicæ mediævi: sive dissertationes de moribus, ritibus, religione, regimine, magistratibus, legibus, studiis literarum, artibus, lingua, militia, nummis, principibus, libertate, servitute, fœderibus, aliisque faciem & mores italicæ populi referentibus post declinationem Rom. imp. ad annum usque MD*. (Mediolani: Ex typographia Societatis palatinæ, 1738–42) 851–56, text 854–55. Cf. Elias A. Lowe, ed., *Codices latini antiquiores: A Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century: Part 3: Italy: Ancona–Novara* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1938) 352; Maurice Geerard, *Clavis patrum graecorum*, vol. 1: *Patres antenicaeni* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983) 1862. On Cod. Ambr. I 101 sup. see Saverio Ritter, “Il frammento Muratoriano,” *Rivista di archeologia* 3 (1926) 215–63; Mirella Ferrari, “Il ‘Codex Muratorianus’ e il suo ultimo inedito,” *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 32 (1989) 1–51, esp. 2, 26–27, 34.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Geoffrey M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 17; the *inscriptio* is misunderstood by Hahneman who thinks that “this inscription assigns the Codex to Columbanus (c. 543–616), presumably some time after 612 when he founded the monastery at Bobbio.” The note does not establish a personal connection with Columbanus; cf. Klaus Zelzer, “§467.2 Canon Muratorianus (Fragmentum Muratori),” in *Die Literatur des Umbruchs: Von der römischen zur christlichen Literatur, 117–284 n. Chr.* (ed. Klaus Sallmann; Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 8.4; München: Beck, 1997) 349. Henri Leclercq, “Muratorianum,”

of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ambrose of Milan, Eucherius of Lyon, and John Chrysostom), concluding with five early Christian creeds.

Later editions of the text come from Samuel Prideaux Tregelles,<sup>3</sup> Theodor Zahn,<sup>4</sup> Hans Lietzmann,<sup>5</sup> Erwin Preuschen,<sup>6</sup> and more recently by Geoffrey Hahneman.<sup>7</sup> Photographs of the three pages have been published by Saverio Ritter.<sup>8</sup> Facsimiles were published by Samuel P. Tregelles and Henri Leclercq.<sup>9</sup> The standard English translation is Wilhelm Schneemelcher's, translated by George Ogg and edited by Robert McLachlan Wilson;<sup>10</sup> a more recent English translation was presented by Bruce M. Metzger.<sup>11</sup> A new German translation is provided by Christoph Marksches,<sup>12</sup> a French translation by Jean-Daniel Kaestli.<sup>13</sup> The older secondary literature on the Fragment is listed by Joseph Verheyden.<sup>14</sup> Extensive treatments of the Muratorian Fragment in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, presented in the context of a discussion of the formation of the NT canon, include those of Hans von Campenhausen,<sup>15</sup> Bruce Metzger,<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Hahneman,<sup>17</sup> and Lee McDonald.<sup>18</sup>

in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (ed. F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq; Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1934) 12.544, argues that the text was written by a hand "plus récente" and points out that the codex is listed as a manuscript of Chrysostom in an inventory of AD 1461.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Canon Muratorianus: The Earliest Catalogue of the Books of the NT* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1867) 17–23 (text), facsimile between pages 16–17.

<sup>4</sup> Theodor Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, vol. 2: *Urkunden und Belege zum ersten und dritten Band* (2 vols.; Erlangen: Deichert, 1890–92) 1.1–143 (with commentary).

<sup>5</sup> Hans Lietzmann, *Das Muratorische Fragment und die monarchianischen Prologe zu den Evangelien* (Kleine Texte für theologische Vorlesungen und Übungen 1; Bonn: Marcus and Weber, 1902).

<sup>6</sup> Erwin Preuschen, *Analecta: Kürzere Texte zur Geschichte der alten Kirche und des Kanons*; 2. Teil: *Zur Kanongeschichte* (SAQ 8/2; Tübingen: Mohr, 1910) 27–35 (based on collations of Hans Achelis and Wilhelm Schüler).

<sup>7</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 6–7.

<sup>8</sup> Saverio Ritter, "Il frammento Muratoriano."

<sup>9</sup> Leclercq, "Muratorianum," tables 8607 a–c.

<sup>10</sup> Wilhelm Schneemelcher, "General Introduction," in *NT Apocrypha*, vol. 1: *Gospels and Related Writings* (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; ET ed. Robert M. Wilson; trans. George Ogg; rev. ed.; Cambridge: Clarke, 1991) 34–36.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the NT: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 305–7, based on the amended text edited by Lietzmann, *Das Muratorische Fragment*; Metzger's translation is reproduced by Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007) 369–71.

<sup>12</sup> Christoph Marksches, "Haupteinleitung," in *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, vol. 1: *Evangelien und Verwandtes: Teilband 1* (ed. C. Marksches and J. Schröter; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 118–20.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Daniel Kaestli, "Histoire du Canon du Nouveau Testament," in *Introduction au Nouveau Testament: Son histoire, son écriture, sa théologie* (ed. D. Marguerat; 4<sup>th</sup> ed.; MDB 41; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2008) 503–5.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Joseph Verheyden, "The Canon Muratori: A Matter of Dispute," in *The Biblical Canons* (ed. J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge; BETL 163; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003) 488–89 n. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Hans von Campenhausen, *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel* (BHT 39; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968) 282–303.

<sup>16</sup> Metzger, *Canon* 191–201.

<sup>17</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*.

<sup>18</sup> McDonald, *Canon* 369–78; cf., implicitly, Lee Martin McDonald, "Hellenism and the Biblical Canons: Is There a Connection?," in *Christian Origins and Hellenistic Judaism: Social and Literary Contexts for*

Scholars generally agree that the Fragment was originally composed in Greek.<sup>19</sup> Julio Campos has demonstrated on the basis of phonetic, graphic, morphological, and lexical features that the translation is best dated to the late 4<sup>th</sup> (or possibly the early 5<sup>th</sup>) century.<sup>20</sup> Retroversions into Greek have been produced by Adolf Hilgenfeld,<sup>21</sup> Paul Bötticher,<sup>22</sup> M. Hertz,<sup>23</sup> Joseph B. Lightfoot,<sup>24</sup> and Theodor Zahn.<sup>25</sup>

The scribe's Latin is usually called barbarous; his attention to accuracy is called careless or erratic.<sup>26</sup> In fact, Muratori was more interested in the poor quality of the Fragment's Latin than in its content.<sup>27</sup> The carelessness of the scribe's work is proven by a comparison of a passage from Ambrose (*Abr.* 1.3.15), which follows the Muratorian Fragment in the codex (fo. 11<sup>v</sup>, line 24 – fo. 11<sup>v</sup>, line 27), and which the scribe copied twice (fo. 11<sup>v</sup>, line 27 – fo. 12<sup>r</sup>, line 25), presumably from the same original, evidently without realizing what he did. A comparison of the two versions reveals the carelessness with which the Fragment was copied. Brooke Foss Westcott comments that the duplicated portion entails "thirty unquestionable cleri-

the NT, vol. 2: *Early Christianity in its Hellenistic Context* (ed. S. E. Porter and A. W. Pitts; Texts and Editions for NT Study 10; Leiden: Brill, 2013) 49.

<sup>19</sup> Muratori, "De Literarum Statu" 851, assumed a Greek original written probably by Gaius, a presbyter in Rome (c. 200). Some have maintained an original composition in Latin: Adolf Harnack, "Über den Verfasser und den literarischen Charakter des Muratorischen Fragmentes," *ZNW* 24 (1925) 1–16; idem, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius* (1893–1904; 4 vols.; 2<sup>nd</sup> exp. ed.; repr. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1958) 330–31, with reference to the phrase *iuris studiosus* in line 4; James Donaldson, *A Critical History of Christian Literature and Doctrine, from the Death of the Apostles to the Nicene Council* (3 vols.; London: Macmillan, 1864–66) 2.210–11; Friedrich Hermann Hesse, *Das Muratori'sche Fragment neu untersucht und erklärt* (Giessen: Ricker, 1873) 25–39; Jacobus Schuurmans Stekhoven, *Het Fragment van Muratori* (Utrecht: Van Huffel, 1877) 27–40; Arnold Ehrhardt, *The Framework of the NT Stories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964) 11–36, who argues for "the actual compilation of the Muratorian document...at Rome" (p. 18). This remains a minority position.

<sup>20</sup> Julio Campos, "Epoca del Fragmento Muratoriano," *Helmantica* 11 (1960) 485–96. Thus already the Zurich *Habilitationsschrift* of Gottfried Kuhn, *Das muratorische Fragment über die Bücher des Neuen Testaments: Mit Einleitung und Erklärung* (Zurich: Höhr, 1892) 301–2; cf. Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 12–13. Zahn, *Geschichte* 2.131, suggests a date and provenance for the Latin translation in 5<sup>th</sup>- or 6<sup>th</sup>-century Gaul; Philippe Henne, "Le Canon de Muratori: Orthographe et datation," *Archivum Bobiense* 12–13 (1990–91) 301–2, suggests 7<sup>th</sup>-century northern Gaul.

<sup>21</sup> Adolf Hilgenfeld, *Der Kanon und die Kritik des Neuen Testaments in ihrer geschichtlichen Ausbildung und Gestaltung, nebst Herstellung und Beleuchtung des Muratorischen Bruchstückes* (Halle: Pfeffer, 1863) 40–41.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Bötticher, "Versuch einer Herstellung des Canon Muratorianus," *Zeitschrift für die gesammte lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 10 (1854) 127–29. Paul Bötticher legally adopted the family name de Lagarde of his maternal line.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Hertz, "Hegesippi Fragmentum Canonis," in *Analecta ante-Nicaena*, vol. 1: *Reliquiae literariae* (ed. Christian Charles Josias Bunsen; London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854) 137–55.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes, Dissertations, and Translations* (London: MacMillan, 1885) 405–13.

<sup>25</sup> Zahn, *Geschichte* 2.140–43.

<sup>26</sup> Metzger, *Canon* 191; Marksches, "Haupteinleitung" 64. Zelzer, "Canon Muratorianus" 348, speaks of "stark verwildertem Latein."

<sup>27</sup> Muratori, "De Literarum Statu" 855. Cf. Verheyden, "Canon Muratori" 487. Heinrich W. J. Thiersch, *Versuch zur Herstellung des historischen Standpuncts für die Kritik der neutestamentlichen Schriften: Eine Streitschrift gegen die Kritiker unserer Tage* (Erlangen: Heyder, 1845) 385, regarded the errors so bizarre that he wondered whether the Fragment might be a hoax from the pen of the editor Muratori.

cal blunders, including one important omission, two other omissions which destroy the sense completely, one substitution equally destructive of the sense, and four changes which appear to be intentional and false alterations.”<sup>28</sup> In addition, we find a persistent misuse and omission of certain letters. This suggests that the Fragment, which is more than two times the length of the Ambrose passage, also contains numerous errors in transcription: “the carelessness of this particular scribe is probably responsible for a significant portion of the barbarous transcription of the Fragment.”<sup>29</sup> However, the fact that the copyist of the Milan Fragment used red ink when he mentions the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John (fol. 10<sup>r</sup>, lines 2, 9) shows that he probably understood what he was writing.<sup>30</sup>

Excerpts from the Muratorian Fragment were discovered in three manuscripts from the 11<sup>th</sup> century and in one manuscript from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, all containing the *Corpus Paulinum*, belonging to the Benedictine monastery on Monte Cassino. The text of Cod. Cass. 349 (saec. xi [C]) was first published in 1897.<sup>31</sup> Manuscripts 235 (C<sup>2</sup>), 349 (C), 535 (C<sup>3</sup>) and 552 (C<sup>1</sup>) contain only minor variations. The Monte Cassino manuscripts comprise lines 42–50, 54–57, 63–68, and 81–85. Since the Latin of the Benedictine manuscripts is significantly superior to the Latin of the Muratorian Fragment, it is plausible to assume that they were copied from a manuscript not directly dependent on the Fragment.

The text begins in the middle of a sentence at the top of folio 10, and ends at the 23<sup>rd</sup> line of the recto of folio 11. The missing beginning of the text probably contained a preamble and a comment on the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>32</sup>

Latin text:<sup>33</sup>

- [10<sup>r</sup>] quibus tamen interfuit et ita posuit  
**tertio euangelii librum secundo lucan**  
lucas iste medicus post a<sup>c</sup>ensum xpi.  
cum eo paulus quasi ut iuris studiosum  
5 secundum adsumsisset numeri suo  
ex opinione concrib<sup>2</sup>set dñm tamen nec ipse  
d uidit in carne et idē pro<sup>ut</sup> asequi potuit  
ita et ad natiuitate iohannis incipet dicere

<sup>28</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the NT* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; London: Macmillan, 1875) 522–23; cf. Tregelles, *Canon Muratorianus* 21–28.

<sup>29</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 8; cf. the discussion on pp. 10–14.

<sup>30</sup> Christoph Marksches, *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen: Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte der antiken christlichen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) 230.

<sup>31</sup> Ambrogio M. Amelli, “Fragmentum Muratorianum: Iuxta Codices Casinenses,” in *Miscellanea Casinense: ossia nuovi contributi alla storia, alle scienze e arti religiose, raccolti e illustrati per cura dei PP. Benedettini di Montecassino*, vol. Anno 1, Parte 1, Fasc. 1: Memorie e Notizie (Nova); Parte 2, Fasc. 1: Documenti (Vetera) (Monte Cassino: Tipografia di Montecassino, 1897). Cf. Adolf Harnack, “Excerpte aus dem Muratorischen Fragment,” *TLZ* 23 (1898) 131–34; reproduced in Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 9–10.

<sup>32</sup> Zelzer, “Canon Muratorianus” 348.

<sup>33</sup> The Latin text reproduces the text of H. Lietzmann (1902). Lines in bold are rubricated in the manuscript.

**quarti euangeliorum' iohannis ex decipolis**

- 10 cohortantibus condiscipulis et ep̃s suis  
dixit conieunate mihi' odie triduo et quid  
cuique fuerit reuelatum alterutrum  
nobis ennarremus eadem nocte reue  
latum andreae ex apostolis ut recognis
- 15 centibus cuntis iohannis suo nomine  
cun<sup>c</sup>ta describ<sup>e</sup>ret et ideo licit uaria sin  
culis euangeliorum libris principia  
doceantur nihil tamen differt creden  
tium fidei cum uno ac principali sp̃u de
- 20 clarata sint in omnibus omnia de natiui  
tate de passione de resurrectione  
de conue'satione cum decipulis suis  
ac de gemino eius aduentu  
primo in humilitate dispectus quod fo
- 25 it secundum pote<sup>s</sup>tate regali <sup>pre</sup>  
clarum quod foturum est. quid ergo  
mirum si iohannes tam constanter  
sincula etiā in epistulis suis proferam  
dicens in semeipsu quae uidimus oculis
- 30 nostris et auribus audiimus et manus  
nostrae palpauerunt haec scripsimus <sup>uobis</sup>
- [10<sup>v</sup>] sic enim non solum uisurem sed <sup>et</sup> auditorem  
sed et scriptorē omnium mirabiliū dñi per ordi  
nem profetetur Acta autē omniū apostolorum
- 35 sub uno libro scribta sunt lucas obtime theofi  
le conprindit quia sub praesentia eius singula  
gerebantur sicuti et semote passionē petri  
euidenter declarat sed <sup>et</sup> profectionē pauli a[b]ur  
be<sup>s</sup> ad spaniā profic[e]scentis Epistulae autem
- 40 pauli quae a quo loco uel qua ex causa directe  
sint uolentibus intellegere ipse declarant  
primū omnium corintheis scysmae heresis in  
terdicens deinceps b callatis circumcissione  
romanis autē ordine scripturarum sed[et]
- 45 principium earum <sup>\*\*\*</sup> esse xp̃m intimans  
prolexius scripsit de quibus sincolis neces  
se est ad nobis desputari cum ipse beatus  
apostolus paulus sequens prodecessuris sui  
iohannis ordinē non nisi nomenatī semp̃tē
- 50 ecclesiis scribat ordine tali a corenthios  
prima. ad efesius seconda ad philippinses ter  
tia ad colosensis quarta ad calatas quin  
ta ad tensaolenecinsis sexta' ad romanos

septima Uerum corintheis et t<sup>h</sup>esaolecen  
 55 sibus licet pro correptione iteretur una  
 tamen per omnem orbem terrae ecclesia  
 deffusa esse denoscitur et iohannis enī in a  
 pocalebsy licet septē eccleseis scribat  
 tamen omnibus dicit uerū ad filemonem una'  
 60 et at titū una et ad tymotheū duas pro affec  
 to et dilectione in honore tamen ecclesiae ca  
 tholice in ordinatione ecclesiastice  
 [11<sup>f</sup>] descepline s̃gificate sunt. fertur etiam ad  
 laudencenses alia ad alexandrinus pauli no  
 65 mine fincte ad he<sup>re</sup>sem marcionis et alia plu  
 ra quae in catholicam ecclesiam recepi non  
 potest fel enim cum melle misceri non con  
 cruit epistola sane iude et superscriptio  
 iohannis duas in catholica habentur et sapi  
 70 entia ab amicis salomonis in honorē ipsius  
 scripta apocalapse etiam iohanis et pe  
 tri tantum recipimus quam quidam ex nos  
 tris legi in ecclesia nolunt pastorem uero  
 nuperrim e<sup>re</sup>temporibus nostris in urbe  
 75 roma herma conscripsit sedente cathe  
 tra urbis romae aeclesiae pio e<sup>p</sup>s fratre  
 eius et ideo legi eum quidē oportet se pu  
 plicare uero in ecclesia populo neque inter  
 profetas completum numero neque inter  
 80 apostolos in finē temporum potest  
 arsinoi autem seu ualentini. uel mitiades  
 nihil in totum recipemus. qui etiam nouū  
 psalmorum librum marcioni conscripse  
 runt una cum basilide assianom catafry  
 85 cum con<sup>st</sup>itutorem

Translation:<sup>34</sup>

... at which nevertheless he was present, and so he placed [them in his narrative].  
 The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke.  
 Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ,  
 when Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law,  
 5 composed it in his own name,  
 according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not  
 seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events,

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<sup>34</sup> Metzger, *Canon* 305–7 (Appendix 4.1, “The Muratorian Canon”).

- so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John.  
 The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples.
- 10 To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write],  
 he said, 'Fast with me from today for three days, and what  
 will be revealed to each one  
 let us tell it to one another.' In the same night it was revealed  
 to Andrew, [one] of the apostles,
- 15 that John should write down all things in his own name  
 while all of them should review it. And so, though various  
 elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels,  
 nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith  
 of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things
- 20 have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the  
 nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection,  
 concerning life with his disciples,  
 and concerning his twofold coming;  
 the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place,
- 25 the second glorious in royal power,  
 which is still in the future. What  
 marvel is it then, if John so consistently  
 mentions these particular points also in his Epistles,  
 saying about himself, "What we have seen with our eyes
- 30 and heard with our ears and our hands  
 have handled, these things we have written to you"?  
 For in this way he professes [himself] to be not only an eye-witness and hearer,  
 but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order.  
 Moreover, the acts of all the apostles
- 35 were written in one book. For "most excellent Theophilus" Luke compiled  
 the individual events that took place in his presence—  
 as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter  
 as well as the departure of Paul from the city [of Rome]  
 when he journeyed to Spain. As for the Epistles of
- 40 Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones [they are],  
 from what place, or for what reason they were sent.  
 First of all, to the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms;  
 next, to the Galatians, against circumcision;  
 then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining
- 45 the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle  
 (or, main theme). It is necessary  
 for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed  
 apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor  
 John, writes by name to only seven
- 50 churches in the following sequence: to the Corinthians  
 first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third,  
 to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth,

- to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans  
seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to  
55 the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition,  
yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church  
spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the  
Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches,  
nevertheless speaks to all. [Paul also wrote] out of affection and love one to Philemon,  
60 one to Titus, and two to Timothy; and these are held sacred  
in the esteem of the Church catholic  
for the regulation of ecclesiastical  
discipline. There is current also [an epistle] to  
the Laodiceans, [and] another to the Alexandrians, [both] forged in Paul's  
65 name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others  
which cannot be received into the catholic Church  
—for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey.  
Moreover, the epistle of Jude and two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of)  
John are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and [the book of] Wisdom,  
70 written by the friends of Solomon in his honour.  
We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter,  
though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church.  
But Hermas wrote the *Shepherd*  
very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome,  
75 while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair  
of the church of the city of Rome.  
And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but  
it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among  
the prophets, whose number is complete, or among  
80 the apostles, for it is after [their] time.  
But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinous or Valentinus or Miltiades,  
who also composed  
a new book of psalms for Marcion,  
together with Basilides, the Asian  
85 founder of the Cataphrygians...

The Muratorian Fragment is not a canon list in the strict sense of the word, as scholars, often somewhat carelessly, state. Franz Overbeck calls the Fragment “a reasoning [*sic*] list of the canonical writings of the New Testament.”<sup>35</sup> Hans Lietz-

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<sup>35</sup> Franz Overbeck, “Der neutestamentliche Kanon und das muratorische Fragment: Eine Prüfung der von A. Harnack neuerdings darüber aufgestellten Ansichten,” in *Zur Geschichte des Kanons: Zwei Abhandlungen* (Chemnitz: Schmeitzner, 1880) 95 (= idem, “Der neutestamentliche Kanon und das muratorische Fragment: Eine Prüfung der von A. Harnack neuerdings darüber aufgestellten Ansichten,” in *Werke und Nachlass* [ed. E. W. Stegemann et al.; Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994] 2:379–526): “Das muratorische Fragment ist ein rasonirendes Verzeichnis der kanonischen Schriften des N.T.” On Overbeck’s view of canon, see Frank Bestebreurtje, *Kanon als Form: Über die Geschichtsschreibung des Neuen Testaments bei Franz Overbeck* (Europäische Hochschulschriften 1009; Bern: Lang, 2005) 15–81.



mann regarded it as a kind of introduction to the NT.<sup>36</sup> Bruce Metzger calls it “a kind of introduction to the New Testament.”<sup>37</sup> Christoph Marksches is reminded of prologues to Bible editions, lexical lists of philosophers and their works, catechetical literature, and epistolary answers to questions regarding the authoritative biblical writings.<sup>38</sup> The combination of texts in the codex suggests that it was some kind of monastic handbook on the Bible.<sup>39</sup> The author of the Muratorian Fragment does not simply catalogue the books that the church regards as authoritative, but provides historical information and theological reflection.<sup>40</sup> Thus the text describes the origins of the Gospels of Luke and John (lines 1–33), of the Book of Acts (lines 34–39), of thirteen epistles of Paul (lines 39–67), the epistle of Jude and two epistles of John (lines 68–69; in lines 26–31 the author alluded to 1 John), as well as the apocalypses of John and Peter (lines 71–80), with the remark that the latter is not accepted for public reading in the church. In connection with the comments on Paul’s letters, the author describes John’s Apocalypse as written to seven churches while speaking to all Christians (lines 57–59).<sup>41</sup> Excluded books are two alleged letters of Paul (to the Laodiceans and the Alexandrians), which are regarded as forged; the writings of Arsinous, Miltiades, and Valentinus; a new book of Psalms for Marcion; and the writings of Basilides and the Cataphrygians (lines 81–85).

## II. DATE

The Muratorian Fragment has been traditionally dated to the time around AD 200, specifically to c. AD 170 by B. F. Westcott,<sup>42</sup> to 180 by G. Salmon,<sup>43</sup> to 196 by L. A. Muratori,<sup>44</sup> to 180–200 by J. P. Kirsch,<sup>45</sup> to 200 by J. Leipoldt,<sup>46</sup> to c. 210 by T.

<sup>36</sup> Hans Lietzmann, *Wie wurden die Bücher des Neuen Testaments heilige Schrift? Fünf Vorträge* (Lebensfragen: Schriften und Reden 21; Tübingen: Mohr, 1907) 53; quoted by David Trobisch, *Die Endredaktion des Neuen Testaments* (NTOA 31; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) 57 n. 149.

<sup>37</sup> Metzger, *Canon* 194. Thus already Lietzmann, *Bücher* 53; Campenhausen, *Entstehung* 285; David Trobisch, *Die Entstehung der Paulusbriefsammlung. Studien zu den Anfängen christlicher Publizistik* (NTOA 10; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1989) 42; Armin D. Baum, “Der Verfasser und seine Adressaten: Einleitungsfragen,” in *Das Studium des Neuen Testaments: Einführung in die Methoden der Exegese* (ed. E. J. Schnabel and H.-W. Neudorfer; rev. ed.; Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 2006) 217; Verheyden, “Canon Muratori” 493.

<sup>38</sup> Marksches, *Theologie* 229.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 230, with reference to Leclercq, “Muratorianum” 546.

<sup>40</sup> Baum, “Verfasser” 214.

<sup>41</sup> It took a long time for the epistolary character, acknowledged in the Canon Muratori, to be recognized as hermeneutically significant; cf. Martin Karrer, *Die Johannesoffenbarung als Brief: Studien zu ihrem literarischen, historischen und theologischen Ort* (FRLANT 140; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986); earlier Theodor Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Theologische Verlagsgemeinschaft; 1924/1926; repr. Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1986) 1.40–41, 160.

<sup>42</sup> Westcott, *Canon* 209: not “much later than 170 A.D.”

<sup>43</sup> George Salmon, “Muratorian Fragment,” in *Dictionary of Christian Biography* (ed. W. Smith and H. Wace; London: Murray, 1882) 3.1000.

<sup>44</sup> Muratori, “De Literarum Statu” 851.

<sup>45</sup> Johann Peter Kirsch, “Muratorian Canon,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (ed. C. G. Herbermann et al.; London: Caxton, 1911) 10.642.

<sup>46</sup> Johannes Leipoldt, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons: Erster Teil, Die Entstehung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1907) 1.34–35 n. 3: “um 200 oder kurz vorher.” Cf. Hermann von Lips, *Der neutestamentliche Canon:*

Zahn,<sup>47</sup> and to c. 220 by C. Erbes.<sup>48</sup> These dates were based (1) on the reference to the Shepherd of Hermas having been written *nuperrime temporibus nostris...sedente cathedra urbis Romae ecclesia Pio* (lines 74–76), given the fact that Pius was bishop of Rome sometime between 138–155; (2) on the references to Marcion (lines 65, 83) and to the “Cataphrygians” (i.e. Montanists) (line 84). These references suggest a date of the Fragment’s composition in the last two decades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century or the first two decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Scholars who suggested a later date were mostly ignored, along the lines of Westcott’s comment: “The opinions of those who assign it to the fourth century, or doubt its authenticity altogether, scarcely deserve mention.”<sup>49</sup>

As regards authorship, a wide range of Christian teachers have been suggested: Papias (c. 215),<sup>50</sup> Hegesippus (c. 154–180),<sup>51</sup> Polycrates of Ephesus (c. 130–196),<sup>52</sup> Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215),<sup>53</sup> Melito of Sardis (died c. 180),<sup>54</sup> and Hippolytus (c. 180–236).<sup>55</sup> Harnack first suggested Rhodon (c. 180–192), later either Victor I (189–198) or Zephyrinus (198–217) or one of their clerks.<sup>56</sup> Westcott argued that the available evidence does not allow us to determine the authorship of the Fragment.<sup>57</sup>

This consensus was challenged by Albert Sundberg who argued in an essay presented to the Third International Congress of NT Studies held at Oxford in 1965 that the history of the NT canon needs to be revised in view of the late date of the OT canon, and that the Muratorian Fragment should be dated to the 4<sup>th</sup>

*Seine Geschichte und Bedeutung* (Zürcher Grundrisse zur Bibel; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2012) 73, 76: “wahrscheinlich das späte 2. Jh....um 200.”

<sup>47</sup> Zahn, *Geschichte* 2.134–35; cf. idem, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, vol. 1: *Das Neue Testament vor Origenes* (2 vols.; Erlangen: Deichert, 1888–89) 340: “ein um 200–210 Schreibender.”

<sup>48</sup> Carl Erbes, “Die Zeit des Muratorischen Fragments,” *ZKG* 35 (1914) 331–62.

<sup>49</sup> Westcott, *Canon* 213, with reference to Karl August. Credner, *Zur Geschichte des Kanons* (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1847) 93–94, who rejects the later dates proposed by Friedrich Gottlieb Zimmermann, *Dissertatio historico-critica scriptoris incerti de canone librorum sacrorum fragmentum a Muratorio repertum exhibens* (Jena: Göpferdt, 1805) and Johann Leonhard Hug, *Einleitung in die Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (2 vols.; 4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Stuttgart: Cotta, 1847) 1.109. Donaldson, *History* 3.210–11, dates the Fragment c. 250 but regards the section on Hermas as an interpolation by the 4<sup>th</sup>-century translator.

<sup>50</sup> Simon de Magistris, *Daniel secundum septuaginta ex tetraplis Origenis nunc primum editus* (Rome: Typis Propagandae Fidei, 1772) 467–69.

<sup>51</sup> Bunsen, *Analecta ante-Nicaena* 1:142.

<sup>52</sup> Gottfried Kuhn, *Das muratorische Fragment: Über die Bücher des neuen Testaments* (Zurich: Höhr, 1892) 33.

<sup>53</sup> John Chapman, “Clément d’Alexandrie sur les Évangiles, et encore le Fragment de Muratori,” *RB* 21 (1904) 369–74.

<sup>54</sup> Vernon Bartlet, “Melito the Author of the Muratorian Canon,” *The Expositor* 2 (1906) 214–24.

<sup>55</sup> Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers* 1.2, 378–413; Theodor Zahn, “Miscellanea 2: Hippolytus, der Verfasser des muratorischen Kanons,” *NKZ* 33 (1922) 417–36 (= idem, “Hippolytus, der Verfasser des muratorischen Kanons,” in *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der altkirchlichen Literatur* [Leipzig: Deichert, 1929] 10.58–75); Nathanael Bonwetsch, “Hippolytisches,” in *Nachrichten von der Königl. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen: Philologisch-historische Klasse* 1923 Heft 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1923) 27–32; Marie-Joseph Lagrange, “L’auteur du canon de Muratori,” *RB* 35 (1926) 83–88; idem, “Le canon d’Hippolyte et le Fragment de Muratori,” *RB* 42 (1933) 161–86.

<sup>56</sup> Harnack, “Über den Verfasser” 15.

<sup>57</sup> Westcott, *Canon* 209–10.

century, suggesting that its origins are not in the West but in the East.<sup>58</sup> It should be noted that Sundberg's position is linked with his aim, proposed in his Harvard dissertation of 1957, to demonstrate that the church did not receive a closed canon of authoritative books from Judaism, but a looser collection of sacred writings which was fixed in terms of an OT canon only in the fourth century.<sup>59</sup> Sundberg's full argumentation regarding the date of the Muratorian Fragment was published in the *Harvard Theological Review* of 1973.<sup>60</sup>

Nils Dahl<sup>61</sup> and Raymond Collins<sup>62</sup> were persuaded by Sundberg's arguments, as were Helmut Koester<sup>63</sup> and Robert M. Grant.<sup>64</sup> Gregory Robbins claims in his *Anchor Bible Dictionary* entry on the Muratorian Fragment that "although Sundberg's thesis is not without its detractors, it has won considerable acceptance and further confirmation."<sup>65</sup> Most scholars dismissed Sundberg in brief comments as unconvincing, including W. G. Kümmel,<sup>66</sup> J. A. T. Robinson,<sup>67</sup> C. F. D. Moule,<sup>68</sup> R. E. Brown,<sup>69</sup> W. R. Farmer,<sup>70</sup> B. S. Childs,<sup>71</sup> H. Y. Gamble,<sup>72</sup> and D. M. Farkasfalvy.<sup>73</sup>

Everett Ferguson answered Sundberg in a short but important essay.<sup>74</sup>

(1) He remains unconvinced by the argument that the phrase *uero nuperrim e(t) temporibus nostris* (lines 73–74), usually translated "very recently in our own times"—

<sup>58</sup> Albert C. Sundberg, "Towards a Revised History of the NT Canon," in *Studia Evangelica 4: Papers Presented to the Third International Congress on NT Studies held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1965, Part 1, The NT Scriptures* (ed. F. L. Cross; TU 102; Berlin: Akademie, 1968) 452–61.

<sup>59</sup> Albert C. Sundberg, *The OT of the Early Church* (HTS 20; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

<sup>60</sup> Albert C. Sundberg, "Canon Muratori: A Fourth Century List," *HTR* 66 (1973) 1–41; Sundberg misrepresents Zahn when he claims that Zahn dates the fragment "as early as the middle of the second century" (*ibid.* 3).

<sup>61</sup> Nils A. Dahl, "The Origin of the Earliest Prologues to the Pauline Letters," *Sem* 12 (1978) 237.

<sup>62</sup> Raymond F. Collins, *Introduction to the NT* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 35.

<sup>63</sup> Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM, 1990) 243.

<sup>64</sup> Robert M. Grant, *Heresy and Criticism: The Search for Authenticity in Early Christian Literature* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 110.

<sup>65</sup> Gregory A. Robbins, "Muratorian Fragment," in *ABD* 4:929; cf., e.g., Ziony Zevit, "The NT Canon as the Embodiment of Evolving Christian Attitudes towards the Jews," in *Canonization and Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), Held at Leiden 9–10 January 1997* (ed. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn; Studies in the History of Religions 82; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 137.

<sup>66</sup> Werner Georg Kümmel, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (21<sup>st</sup> ed.; Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1983) 434–35 (Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the NT* [rev. ed.; NTL; London: SCM, 1975] 492 n. 69).

<sup>67</sup> John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the NT* (London: SCM, 1976) 319 n. 41.

<sup>68</sup> Charles F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the NT* (London: Continuum, 2002) 260 n. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (AB 30; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982) 10 n. 14.

<sup>70</sup> William F. Farmer and Denis M. Farkasfalvy, *The Formation of the NT Canon: An Ecumenical Approach* (New York: Paulist, 1983) 60.

<sup>71</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The NT as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 238.

<sup>72</sup> Harry Y. Gamble, *The NT Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (GBS: NT Series; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 32 n. 25. Gamble later changed his view, arguing for a 4<sup>th</sup>-century date, with reference to Sundberg and Hahneman; cf. Harry Y. Gamble, "Canon. NT," in *ABD* 1:856.

<sup>73</sup> Denis M. Farkasfalvy, "The Ecclesial Setting of Pseudepigraphy in Second Peter and its Role in the Formation of the Canon," *SecCent* 5 (1985–86) 29 n. 50.

<sup>74</sup> Everett Ferguson, "Canon Muratori: Date and Provenance," *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982) 677–83.

a reference to the composition of the Shepherd of Hermas—should be translated “most recently in our time,” referring to the church’s time and not to apostolic time: even if this is granted as a possible meaning, it does not rule out a date in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

(2) Equally unconvincing, according to Ferguson, is the argument for a late date based on the Fragment’s agreement with views of the 4<sup>th</sup> century: there was much continuity between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and Sundberg has not demonstrated that the Fragment agrees with views which could only have arisen in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Arguments from language are unconvincing since, given a Greek original, they take us back only to the time when the Latin translation was made.

(3) The Fragment’s attitude concerning the Shepherd of Hermas is not anomalous for the time around 200, demonstrated by the fact that Tertullian first accepted Hermas (*Or.* 16) and later rejected it (*Pud.* 10.20); Eusebius’s views of Hermas (*Hist. eccl.* 3.3.6–7; 3.25.4; 5.8.7) were not the turning point in regards to the latter’s acceptance in the church as Sundberg assumes: he reports a situation that pertained since Tertullian.

(4) The inclusion of the Wisdom of Solomon is problematic for any view. Ferguson allows that Epiphanius’s inclusion of the Wisdom of Solomon in his NT is one of Sundberg’s stronger points; however, Eusebius’s reference (*Hist. eccl.* 5.8.8) to Irenaeus as quoting from the Wisdom of Solomon suggests a parallel to the Fragment in the West before 200.

(5) Sundberg’s extensive argument that the Apocalypse of John was on the fringe of the Fragment’s canon since it is joined with the Apocalypse of Peter as the last of the accepted books<sup>75</sup> is unconvincing: being listed last does not necessarily imply doubt or lateness of acceptance; the fact that some did not accept a public reading of the Apocalypse of Peter says nothing about John’s Apocalypse; the Apocalypse of John is on a level with Paul (lines 48–50, 55–58), and the Fragment’s reference to the fact that John writing to seven churches meant speaking to all the churches (lines 57–58) agrees better with attitudes of the West than with those of the East where there was more widespread doubt about John’s Apocalypse.<sup>76</sup>

(6) The argument that there are no other lists of NT writings before the 4<sup>th</sup> century is “the strongest argument against an earlier date,” but it is an argument from silence: “Something had to be first, and this may be it. There is no inherent reason why a list could not have been drawn up around 200.”<sup>77</sup> While Eusebius may have had an influence on the appearance of canon lists in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, he essentially repeats views which he attributes to Origen: “the only difference is that Eusebius sought to reduce Origen’s data to list form. If Eusebius is the closest parallel to the *Canon Muratori*, that circumstance itself would throw us back to the time of Origen for the contents and attitudes of the *Canon Muratori*.”<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Sundberg, “Canon Muratori” 18–26.

<sup>76</sup> Ferguson, “Canon Muratori” 679–80.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 680.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Ferguson goes on to list arguments that strongly point to an earlier western setting of the Fragment.

(1) The absence of Hebrews (the West early rejected Hebrews, while the East accepted it, e.g. Clement of Alexandria and Origen).

(2) The heresies mentioned—those of Marcion, the gnostics Basilides and Valentinus, and the Montanists (lines 63–67, 81–85)—are those of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

(3) The composition of summaries of the apostolic message (lines 20–25)—canon of truth, rule of faith—was characteristic of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>79</sup>

(4) The two appearances of Jesus, first in humility and then in royal power (lines 24–25), are mentioned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>80</sup>

(5) Similar accounts of the occasion for the writing of the Gospel of John (lines 9–10) arose in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, perhaps as a response to the Alogi.<sup>81</sup>

(6) The differentiation between two readings in the church as “prophets” and “apostles” corresponds to Justin’s account of a Christian assembly in Rome (*1 Apol.* 67).

(7) The association of Luke with Paul was early expanded to make a connection between the Gospel of Luke and Paul’s authority (lines 3–6).<sup>82</sup>

(8) The reference to a Marcionite epistle to the Laodiceans (line 64) is an argument for an early date, if it is a mistake for Marcion’s letter to the Ephesians (thus Tertullian *Adv. Marc.* 5.17: “another epistle, which we hold to have been written to the Ephesians, but the heretics to the Laodiceans”): this usage would be more readily known at a later date.

In 1993, Philippe Henne reviewed the debate between Sundberg and Ferguson and concluded that the latter has the better arguments: the Muratorian Fragment should be dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>83</sup>

The discussion about the date of the Muratorian Fragment has intensified since the 1989 Oxford D.Phil. thesis of Geoffrey Hahneman, published in 1992,<sup>84</sup> which received wide attention. Hahneman had presented his acceptance of Sundberg in a paper read at the Tenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford in 1987, interacting with E. Ferguson’s critique.<sup>85</sup> Hahneman thinks that Ferguson’s critique of Sundberg, although “the only substantial rebuttal,” is

<sup>79</sup> Ignatius *Trall.* 9; Justin *1 Apol.* 31.7; Aristides *2 Apol.* (Syriac); Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.10; Hippolytus *Not.* 1; *Trad. ap.* 21; Tertullian *Præscr.* 13; *Virg.* 1; *Præx.* 2.

<sup>80</sup> Justin *Dial.* 32–33; 52; 110–111; cf. Tertullian *Apol.* 21; *Adv. Jud.* 14.

<sup>81</sup> Clement of Alexandria in Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 6.14; the Anti-Marcionite Gospel Prologues; cf. Victorinus *Comm. in Apoc.* 11.1; Jerome *Vir. ill.* 9; *Comm. Matt.* pref.

<sup>82</sup> Tertullian *Marc.* 4.5; cf. Irenaeus *Haer.* 3.1.1; 14.1; 10.1; Ambrosiaster on Col 4:4; Jerome *Vir. ill.* 7; John Chrysostom on 2 Tim 4:11.

<sup>83</sup> Philippe Henne, “La datation du canon de Muratori,” *RB* 100 (1993) 54–75.

<sup>84</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*.

<sup>85</sup> Geoffrey M. Hahneman, “More on Redating the Muratorian Fragment,” in *Historica, Theologica, Gnostica, Biblica et Apocrypha: Papers Presented at the Tenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1987* (ed. E. A. Livingstone; Studia Patristica 19; Leuven: Peeters, 1989) 359–65.

“brief and dismissive.”<sup>86</sup> Hahneman restated his case in his contribution to the volume *The Canon Debate* published in 2002.<sup>87</sup>

Hahneman’s monograph has six chapters. In chapter 1, Hahneman surveys the relevant historical data concerning the Fragment, including the blunders of the Latin copyist, the language, the codex, and the views concerning provenance, date, and authorship. Since the Fragment’s statements concerning the Shepherd of Hermas are crucial for dating the Fragment, chapter 2 investigates both the claims of the Fragment and the date of Hermas. Chapter 3 presents an extensive survey of the formation of the canon, and chapter 4 discusses the 4<sup>th</sup>-century catalogues of biblical works, with the conclusion that the Fragment belongs among the 4<sup>th</sup>-century canonical lists due to similarities of form and content. Chapter 5 analyzes the peculiarities of the Fragment, such as the order of the Gospels and the reference to the Wisdom of Solomon, concluding that these features lose their peculiarity if the Fragment is dated not to the 2<sup>nd</sup> but to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Chapter 6 summarizes the argument in terms of a redating of the Fragment in terms of a 4<sup>th</sup>-century date, specifically c. AD 375, and proposes a Syrian or Palestinian provenance.

Hahneman’s argument proceeds in three steps: (1) he suggests that the basis for a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century date is tenuous; (2) he presents a history of the development of the canon without reference to the Muratorian Fragment; (3) he argues that if we ignore the phrase *nuperrime temporibus nostris* referring to the Shepherd of Hermas, which is very problematic, it becomes obvious that the Muratorian Fragment belongs to the 4<sup>th</sup>-century stage of the development of the canon.

As regards the specific date, he has three main arguments: (1) the reference to Miltiades in the Fragment is dependent upon a copyist’s error in Eusebius’s *Historia ecclesiastica* (written c. 303–324), which means that 303 is the earliest possible date; (2) the ascription of the authorship of the Wisdom of Solomon by Jerome in *De viris illustribus* (written in 392) is dependent upon the Fragment, which means that 392 is the latest possible date; (3) parallels with Epiphanius of Salamis (*Panarion*, c. 377), in particular the inclusion of Wisdom of Solomon, the reference to a Marcionite epistle to the Laodiceans, and the presence of Revelation without comment, suggest “a Syrian/Palestinian provenance around 375.”<sup>88</sup>

Some early reviews were impressed with Hahneman’s work. John K. Elliott thinks that the thesis, “despite some weak spots and some special pleading...makes a credible case.”<sup>89</sup> Michael W. Holmes was impressed at least by the material and the arguments presented by Hahneman, but concluded his review by saying, “The book, well written and engagingly presented, leaves this reviewer skeptical of all dates suggested for the MC, but of H.’s more than of the traditional one.”<sup>90</sup> Robert

<sup>86</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 3.

<sup>87</sup> Geoffrey M. Hahneman, “The Muratorian Fragment and the Origins of the NT Canon,” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002) 405–15.

<sup>88</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 217.

<sup>89</sup> John K. Elliott, review of G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, *NovT* 36 (1994) 299.

<sup>90</sup> Michael W. Holmes, review of G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, *CBQ* 56 (1994) 595.

Grant finds the Sundberg-Hahneman theory to be “eminently convincing.”<sup>91</sup> John Barton, in his studies on the biblical canon published in 1997, finds that Hahneman’s arguments are “generally convincing.”<sup>92</sup> Harry Gamble asserts that the claims of Sundberg and Hahneman are regarded as persuasive by many scholars, but acknowledges that “the issue has hardly been decided.”<sup>93</sup> In his monograph on the biblical canon published in 2007, Lee McDonald states his conviction that “Sundberg’s and especially Hahneman’s arguments carry the day” and opts for a date “some time after the mid-fourth century in the East,” although he cautions that “we cannot insist on that.”<sup>94</sup>

The majority of reviews,<sup>95</sup> essays,<sup>96</sup> and comments in monographs<sup>97</sup> have been critical. Joseph Verheyden, in a 70-page essay on Hahneman’s monograph, presented at the Fiftieth Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense in July 2001, published in 2003, concludes:

None of the arguments put forward by Sundberg and Hahneman in favor of a fourth-century, eastern origin of the Fragment are convincing... The author who composed the Canon Muratori in the West at the end of the second or the beginning of the third century probably would never have imagined that his work would be mistaken for a fourth-century, eastern product. After the Fragment was composed, it seems to have been largely forgotten for many decades, until it was recovered, translated, and employed in the fourth century. After it

<sup>91</sup> Robert M. Grant, review of G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, CH 64 (1995) 639.

<sup>92</sup> John Barton, *The Spirit and the Letter: Studies in the Biblical Canon* (London: SPCK, 1997) 10; he adds that an early date of the Fragment is not necessarily fatal to Sundberg’s thesis that the NT canon was not closed until the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. John Barton, “Marcion Revisited,” in *Canon Debate* 343.

<sup>93</sup> Harry Y. Gamble, “The NT Canon: Recent Research and the Status Quaestionis,” in *Canon Debate* 270. Similarly Peter Balla, “Evidence for an Early Christian Canon (Second and Third Century),” in *Canon Debate* 381, who asserts, however, that “a second-century date can be maintained.”

<sup>94</sup> McDonald, *Canon* 378. McDonald does not interact with the critique of both Sundberg and Hahneman that numerous scholars have put forward.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Everett Ferguson, review of G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, JTS 44 (1993) 691–97; Bruce M. Metzger, review of G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, CRBR 7 (1994) 192–94; Charles E. Hill, review of G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, WTJ 56 (1994) 437–38; Lionel R. Wickham, review of G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, SJT 47 (1994) 418–19; J. Neville Birdsall, review of G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, JEH 46 (1995) 128–30; Robert F. Hull, review of G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, JEC 3 (1995) 89–91; Martin Parmentier, review of G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, Bijdragen 56 (1995) 82–83.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Jean-Daniel Kaestli, “La place du Fragment de Muratori dans l’histoire du canon: À propos de la thèse de Sundberg et Hahneman,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 15 (1994) 609–34; Charles E. Hill, “The Debate Over the Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon,” *WTJ* 57 (1995) 437–52; Franco Bolgiani, “Sulla data del Frammento Muratoriano: A proposito di uno studio recente,” *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 31 (1995) 461–71; Graham N. Stanton, “The Fourfold Gospel,” *NTS* 43 (1997) 317–46, esp. 322–23; Riemer Roukema, “La tradition apostolique et le canon du Nouveau Testament,” in *The Apostolic Age in Patristic Thought* (ed. A. Hilhorst; VCSup 70; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 96; Verheyden, “Canon Muratori” 487–556; Kaestli, “Histoire” 483–84, 495.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Zelzer, “Canon Muratorianus” 348–49; Theo K. Heckel, *Vom Evangelium des Markus zum viergestaltigen Evangelium* (WUNT 120; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999) 340–42; Marksches, *Theologie* 28–34; Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013) 163–64.

was copied in the eighth century, it was again buried, this time for almost a thousand years. I am afraid I have to conclude that the suggestion of a fourth-century, eastern origin for the Fragment should be put to rest not for a thousand years, but for eternity.<sup>98</sup>

Christoph Marksches, both in his 2007 monograph on the theology and the institutions of the church in the imperial period, and in his 2012 introduction to a new edition of the NT apocrypha, asserts that the arguments for a 4<sup>th</sup>-century date are not convincing: the traditional date c. AD 200 is supported by the better arguments.<sup>99</sup>

The following discussion of Hahneman's effort to expand Sundberg's arguments for a 4<sup>th</sup>-century date of the Muratorian Fragment summarizes Hahneman's main arguments as well as the critique offered since 1993.

(1) Hahneman thinks that "the reference to the Shepherd of Hermas...remains the crux of the traditional dating."<sup>100</sup> He argues that since the Fragment is wrong with regard to the dating of the Shepherd of Hermas—the Shepherd was written not when Pius was the bishop of the church of the city of Rome (140–155), but thirty or more years earlier—we must also reject what it says about Pius, the bishop of Rome, with whom the author of the Fragment is connected.<sup>101</sup> However, most scholars focus not on the link between Hermas and Pius but on the link between the Fragment and Pius.<sup>102</sup> Hahneman argues that is it "rash" to base a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century date on the phrase *nuperrime temporibus nostris* "in view of the known poor transcription and the suspected careless translation of the manuscript."<sup>103</sup> This argument undermines Hahneman's own case, since it casts doubt on just about any statements made in the Fragment; for example, he places much weight on the reference to the Wisdom of Solomon in the Fragment, without mentioning Zahn's suggestion that a negative particle was left out in line 70.<sup>104</sup>

Despite his efforts, Hahneman has not removed the problem of the Fragment's statement in line 74 that the Shepherd of Hermas is rejected since it was written by the brother of Pius, bishop of Rome, *nuperrime temporibus nostris* ("very recently, in our times"), that is, in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Hahneman uses Sundberg's argument that *temporibus nostris* refers not to the lifetime of the Fragment's author but generally to the post-apostolic period: the phrase distinguishes between the time of the apostles and the post-apostolic time, which is "our" time. The argument that Irenaeus uses a similar remark concerning the Apocalypse of John (*Haer.* 50.30.3) along the same lines is not cogent, since Irenaeus specifically identifies, not separates, his time and the apostles' time—both a part of "this pre-

<sup>98</sup> Verheyden, "Canon Muratori" 556.

<sup>99</sup> Marksches, *Theologie* 234; idem, "Haupteinleitung" 64.

<sup>100</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 30, cf. *ibid.* 34.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

<sup>102</sup> Thus Holmes, review of Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 595.

<sup>103</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 72.

<sup>104</sup> Zahn, *Geschichte* 2.8 (comment on line 74). Cf. Holmes, review of Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 595.



sent time” and “now.”<sup>105</sup> Hahneman argues that since the other comments of the Fragment’s author concerning the Shepherd are either untrue or unprovable, we must reject his claim to be active in the same time period, that is, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. This is not convincing, as Charles Hill argues: “Suppose the fragmentist is wrong in his assertion that the *Shepherd* was written during the episcopate of Pius and suppose that it was written much earlier. He could have been mistaken in the second century as well as in the fourth. And it is hard to imagine why a fourth-century author would deliberately adopt a fictitious, second-century persona just for the purpose of debunking the *Shepherd*.”<sup>106</sup> Joseph Verheyden grants that the Fragment’s information about the date of the Shepherd is “most certainly incorrect” but argues that “there is no reason to suppose that such a statement could only be made at a later date.”<sup>107</sup>

The argument that the emphatic denial of the apostolicity of Hermas requires a date after Origen, since such a tradition was unknown before Origen, is equally unconvincing: Irenaeus once cited Hermas as Scripture, perhaps on the assumption that its author was Paul’s associate in Rom 16:14, and thus provides a plausible setting for the Fragment’s statement that Hermas should be read but that it cannot be classified with the writings of the prophets and apostles and thus should not be read in public worship. Hahneman’s dismissal of Tertullian’s statement that Hermas’s status had been considered by several councils at least by the second decade of the third century, with unanimous negative results (*Pud.* 10), is much too facile.<sup>108</sup> Charles Hill comments, “Tertullian may have been given to flamboyance, but it was hardly his custom to appeal to historical precedents of his own imagination, especially when his appeal entailed an implicit challenge to his opponents to check his sources.”<sup>109</sup>

(2) Hahneman claims that the Fragment is an anomaly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. As regards the Four Gospels mentioned in the Fragment (lines 1–34), he argues that oral tradition and non-canonical tradition and writings, including experiments in gospel harmonization, continued to be influential in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.<sup>110</sup> While Hahneman is correct to note that “acquaintance with the four later canonical gospels does not necessarily imply a Fourfold Gospel,”<sup>111</sup> the occasional

<sup>105</sup> Hill, “Debate” 439.

<sup>106</sup> Hill, “Debate” 439, with reference to Ferguson, review of Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 692.

<sup>107</sup> Verheyden, “Canon Muratori” 512. Carolyn Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 20, dates the Shepherd of Hermas, written over an extended period of time “beginning from the very last years of the first century, but stretching through most of the first half of the second.”

<sup>108</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 63: Tertullian’s “statement that it was rejected by every synod of the churches, even those of the non-Montanists, however, cannot be objectively verified, and might be thought of as an example of his famous rhetoric....Tertullian’s reasons for rejecting the Shepherd are clearly sectarian and it should not be thought that there was widespread rejection of the work.”

<sup>109</sup> Hill, “Debate” 440.

<sup>110</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 93–110.

<sup>111</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 108–9.

use of non-canonical gospels by Clement and Origen<sup>112</sup> does not prove that they regarded these writings as authoritative. Both Clement and Origen knew and acknowledged the Fourfold Gospel canon.<sup>113</sup> J. Verheyden emphasizes that Origen and Clement do not know “a list of canonical works, apart from the list of the four Gospels,”<sup>114</sup> and asserts that the canon of the Four Gospels did not necessarily have to be widely accepted or firmly established in order to be accepted and defended by the author of the Fragment.<sup>115</sup> The fact that the Fragment makes an effort to demonstrate that the Fourth Gospel was written by John the Apostle fits the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century but not the 4<sup>th</sup> century when this question had long been settled.<sup>116</sup> Also, the Fragment shares the concern of Irenaeus and Tertullian to emphasize the fundamental unity of the four Gospels.<sup>117</sup>

As regards the thirteen letters of Paul mentioned in the Fragment (lines 39–68: 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, Romans; 2 Corinthians and 2 Thessalonians; Philemon, Titus, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy), the list presents problems for any dating of the Fragment, particularly the reference to the “seven churches” pattern that both John and Paul followed (lines 47–49). Hebrews is not mentioned, which is included in papyrus P<sup>46</sup> containing Pauline

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. Campenhausen, *Entstehung* 337–54; James A. Brooks, “Clement of Alexandria as a Witness to the Development of the NT Canon,” *SecCent* 9 (1992) 41–55; Ernst Bammel, “Die Zitate aus den Apokryphen bei Origenes,” in *Origeniana Quinta: Historica, Text and Method, Biblica, Philosophica, Theologica, Origenism and Later Developments* (ed. R. J. Daly; BETL 105; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 131–36 (= idem, “Die Zitate aus den Apokryphen bei Origenes,” in *Judaica et Paulina: Kleine Schriften II* [WUNT 91; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997] 161–67).

<sup>113</sup> Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 3.13.93: πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ἐν τοῖς παραδεδομένοις ἡμῖν τέτταρσιν εὐαγγελίοις οὐκ ἔχομεν τὸ ῥητὸν, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῷ κατ’ Αἰγυπτίους (“In the first place we have not got the saying in the four Gospels that have been handed down to us, but in the Gospel according to the Egyptians.” Henry Chadwick, ed., *Alexandrian Christianity* [LCC 2; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954]). Origen *Hom. Luc.* 1.1, 2: “Hoc quod ait: Conati sunt, latentem habet accusationem eorum, qui absque gratia Spiritus sancti ad scribenda Evangelia prosilierunt. Matthaeus quippe, et Marcus, et Ioannes, et Lucas non sunt conati scribere; sed Spiritu sancto pleni scripserunt Evangelia.... Quatuor tantum Evangelia sunt probata, e quibus sub persona Domini et Salvatoris nostri proferenda sunt dogmata. Scio quoddam Evangelium, quod appellatur secundum Thomam, et iuxta Matthiam, et alia plura legimus, ne quid ignorare videremur, propter eos qui se putant aliquid scire, si ista cognoverint. Sed in his omnibus nihil aliud probamus, nisi quod Ecclesia, id est quatuor tantum Evangelia recipienda.” (“The words ‘have tried’ imply an accusation against those who rushed into writing gospels without the grace of the Holy Spirit. Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke did not ‘try’ to write; they wrote their Gospels when they were filled with the Holy Spirit.... only four Gospels have been approved. Our doctrines about the Person of our Lord and Savior should be drawn from these approved Gospels. I know one gospel called *According to Thomas*, and another *According to Matthias*. We have read many others, too, lest we appear ignorant of anything, because of those people who think they know something if they have examined these gospels. But in all these questions we approve of nothing but what the Church approves of, namely only four canonical Gospels.” Joseph T. Lienhard, ed., *Origen: Homilies on Luke* [FC 94; Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996] 5, 6).

<sup>114</sup> Verheyden, “Canon Muratori” 516, quoting Richard P. C. Hanson, *Origen’s Doctrine of Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1954) 143.

<sup>115</sup> Verheyden, “Canon Muratori” 516.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* 519.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, with reference to Irenaeus *Haer.* 3.11.7; Tertullian *Marc.* 4.2.2. Cf. Helmut Merkel, *Die Widersprüche zwischen den Evangelien: Ihre polemische und apologetische Behandlung in der Alten Kirche bis zu Augustin* (WUNT 13; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1971) 56–62.

letters, dated c. 200. The exclusion of the Epistle to the Hebrews would have been considered a “heresy” in the East in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>118</sup> As regards the Catholic Epistles, the reference only to Jude and two Epistles of John (lines 68–69),<sup>119</sup> a combination that is unparalleled in the collections or lists of canonical books, but “is probably less irregular at the turn of the third century in the West, a context which still has not produced any evidence showing that any one author knew and used all seven letters. It would be much more remarkable in the late-fourth century, since, in that period, a seven member canon of the Catholic Epistles is testified to in the West.”<sup>120</sup>

Hahneman’s claim that the Fragment compares with the catalogues of canonical writings of the 4<sup>th</sup> century but is an anomaly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century is not convincing:<sup>121</sup> the Fragment is not a list or catalogue of canonical books, but an introduction into the origin and authority of early Christian writings.<sup>122</sup> Joseph Verheyden points out that Hahneman’s claim that the Fragment does not differ from the later catalogues “is simply not true. Except for Eusebius and Epiphanius, all other ‘later’ authors offer their list of New Testament writings as part of a statement on the biblical canon and preface it with a list of accepted Old Testament writings.”<sup>123</sup> Noting the Fragment’s interest in explaining both the plurality of the Gospels and the particularity of Paul’s letters, and in explicating the criteria for the selection of the writings that he lists, Verheyden comments that “these details distinguish the Fragment from the later catalogues in that they usually lack such elaborate comments.”<sup>124</sup>

(3) Hahneman claims that the presence of the Wisdom of Solomon in a list of NT writings is paralleled only in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, referencing Epiphanius of Salamis (*Pan.* 76) and Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 5.8.1–8).<sup>125</sup> The evidence does not support this claim.<sup>126</sup> Epiphanius gives a list of NT writings (*Pan.* 76.5), which he clearly distinguishes from other writings: the books called *Wisdom*, both the book of Solomon

<sup>118</sup> Verheyden, “Canon Muratori” 528.

<sup>119</sup> Zahn, *Geschichte* 2.143, proposed a Greek original which would make room for (at least) 1 Peter; Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Introduction à l’étude du Nouveau Testament: 1. Histoire ancienne du Canon du Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Gabalda, 1933) 74 n. 2, proposes a reading which accommodates all seven Catholic Epistles: line 28 refers to all three letters of John, and lines 68–69 refer to Jude, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and James. Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 181, allows for “omissions in the Fragment.”

<sup>120</sup> Verheyden, “Canon Muratori” 529, referring to Augustine, several African synods, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Amphilochius, and Jerome in the East.

<sup>121</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 132–82.

<sup>122</sup> Stanton, “Fourfold Gospel” 323, who comments that “the only two later uses of the Fragment are in prologues, not lists.” Cf. Kaestli, “Fragment de Muratori” 616: “Par son contenu et par sa forme, le CM est plus proche du genre des ‘prologues’ que de celui des ‘listes canoniques.’” Thus already Stergios N. Sakkos, *Ο καταλογος του Muratori: συμβολη εις την εισαγωγην εις την Καινην Διαθηκην* (Thessalonike: Aristoteleion Panepistemion, 1970).

<sup>123</sup> Verheyden, “Canon Muratori” 531, critiquing Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 182.

<sup>124</sup> Verheyden, “Canon Muratori” 534.

<sup>125</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 200–5, particularly 204, with reference to Sundberg, *Early Church* 129–69.

<sup>126</sup> William Horbury, “The Wisdom of Solomon in the Muratorian Fragment,” *JTS* 45 (1994) 149–59; Hill, “Debate” 440–41; also Verheyden, “Canon Muratori” 541–45.

and the book of the son of Sirach, are appended. In *Pan.* 8.6 Epiphanius mentions these two books as among books disputed by the Jews; the phrase “apart from some other apocryphal books” describes the status of this text as apocryphal, that is, not as canonical. In *Mens. pond.* 4, Epiphanius explicitly places these two books among the apocrypha, used by and useful for the church but not classed with the authoritative writings. Eusebius mentions the Wisdom of Solomon in a discussion of the books used by Irenaeus, but he does not discuss it as a book of the NT canon. It should be noted that the Fragment lists the Wisdom of Solomon not in the midst of a list of canonical books, but *after* a list of authoritative books and at the beginning of a list of disputed books. This was a widespread practice in the early church. After mentioning the letters of Jude and John as accepted by the church, the Fragment begins its list of disputed books of both testaments, viz. Wisdom of Solomon, the Apocalypses of Peter and John, and the Shepherd of Hermas. The Fragment then asserts that of these, the first three are accepted by the church, although some do not allow the Apocalypse of Peter to be read in the church, and that Hermas must be rejected as post-apostolic. This is followed by a brief list of books that are also rejected. William Horbury comments, “The place of Wisdom in the fragment would then imply not that Wisdom was connected with or even included in the New Testament, but that, like the Revelations of John and of Peter, and (to a lesser degree) the Shepherd of Hermas, it was considered an acceptable book not certainly included in the canonical number. This explanation...is in full agreement with a known status accorded to Wisdom—that of a leading antilegomenon, commonly put first in lists of the ‘outside’ or ‘ecclesiastical’ books from the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>127</sup> Horbury concludes, “This evidence weighs against the claim that ecclesiastical definition of an Old Testament canon first begins in the fourth century, and that we would hardly expect the similar New Testament definition seen in the fragment to precede it.”<sup>128</sup>

(4) Hahneman argues that the reference to the Cataphrygians (line 84–85, Lat. *cataphrycum*), a nickname for the Montanists, proves a 4<sup>th</sup>-century date: the designation in Greek does not occur before Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catech.* 16.8), and the Latin transliteration does not occur before the late 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>129</sup> There is no evidence that forces a late date of the Fragment, however. First, the Latin term *cataphrycum* takes us only back to the translator of the Greek original, who could easily have substituted the term *cataphrycum*, in vogue at his time, for an original “Phrygians.”<sup>130</sup> Second, there seem to be two examples of the Greek term κατὰ Φρύγας for the Montanists from the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. In Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 7.21, originally written in Greek in the early to middle 3<sup>rd</sup> century and surviving only in a Latin translation, the author refers to the Montanists with the phrase *qui dicuntur secundum Phrygas*. Hahneman asserts that this statement does probably not represent an original Greek κατὰ Φρύγας, “because similar Greek phrases in the same paragraph

<sup>127</sup> Horbury, “Wisdom of Solomon” 155.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 159; cf. Henne, “Datation” 60; Hill, “Debate” 442.

<sup>129</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 211–12.

<sup>130</sup> Henne, “Datation” 63–64; Verheyden, “Canon Muratori” 550.

were simply transliterated into Latin, namely 'kata Proclum' and 'kata Aeschinen'"<sup>131</sup> He seems to have overlooked the fact that we find in the same paragraph not only *kata Aeschinen* but also *secundum Aeschinen*, which suggests that the phrase *secundum Phrygas* could indeed stand for *kata Phrygas* / κατὰ Φρύγας.<sup>132</sup> Further, Epiphanius, citing a late 2<sup>nd</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century source in *Pan.* 48.12.4, uses the phrase κατὰ Φρύγας for the Montanists.<sup>133</sup>

(5) Hahneman minimizes the significance of some matters, and he has missed details that render some of his arguments tenuous. The observations concerning orthographical, lexical, and syntactical issues in the Fragment which, according to Heineman, point to the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>134</sup> pertain to the Latin text and have no relevance for the date of a Greek original.<sup>135</sup> He claims that the order of the Gospels in the Fragment (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) is late and Eastern.<sup>136</sup> He acknowledges that this order is already found in Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.1.1), but labels this "an exception."<sup>137</sup> There is no reason why Hahneman could not describe the order of the Gospels in the Fragment as exceptional as well. The sequence of the Gospels in the various catalogs only proves that there was not a uniform order of the Gospels, neither in the East nor in the West, neither in the 2<sup>nd</sup> nor in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Hahneman's discussion of the reference to "the Acts of all the Apostles" in the Fragment, said to be late since no one seems to have a name for this book before Tertullian,<sup>138</sup> missed a reference by name to "the Acts of the Apostles" in Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.13.3).<sup>139</sup> Further, the Fragment's final lines (81–85) support a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century date: it was hardly necessary in the 4<sup>th</sup> century to officially and formally exclude the writings of Arsinous, Valentinus, and Miltiades who are all said to have written a new book of psalms for Marcion "in the same time as Basilides, the Asian, or the founder of the Cataphrygians (i.e. Montanus)."<sup>140</sup>

(6) Hahneman's argumentation is tendentious. He analyzes elements which fit, in his opinion, only with difficulty into a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century context. He does not attempt to falsify his thesis by discussing features of the Fragment which fit well into the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and pose problems for a 4<sup>th</sup>-century context. This is true, for example, of the apologetic tone and the repeated stress on catholicity in the Fragment, which are absent from the 4<sup>th</sup>-century lists but fit the time of Irenaeus. The attempt to formulate the consensus of the Four Gospels (lines 16–26) points to an early date: the criterion of unity is developed narratively, not in the theological language of later theologians.<sup>141</sup> The description of the Gospel of John (lines 4–16, 26–33) im-

<sup>131</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 212.

<sup>132</sup> Hill, "Debate" 442.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 11–12; he relies on Campos, "Fragmento Muratoriano."

<sup>135</sup> Marksches, *Theologie* 233.

<sup>136</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 183–87.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 187.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 192–96.

<sup>139</sup> Hill, "Debate" 440.

<sup>140</sup> Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 332; Marksches, *Theologie* 234.

<sup>141</sup> Henne, "Datation" 65; Heckel, *Evangelium* 342.

plies a critique of the Fourth Gospel that is attested c. 200 in the West.<sup>142</sup> The reference to a twofold coming of Jesus (line 23: *de gemino eius aduentu*) is typical for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>143</sup> The absence of 1 Peter and James in a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century text can be said to be “extraordinary” and evaluated as an accidental omission<sup>144</sup> but is unthinkable in a 4<sup>th</sup>-century canon list.<sup>145</sup> Graham Stanton comments, “In my judgement none of the Fragment’s comments is anomalous in a second century setting; many fit much more readily into that setting than into a fourth century context.”<sup>146</sup>

(7) Hahneman’s view of the formation of the canon, which provides the framework for his redating of the Muratorian Fragment, accepts as a premise the work of Albert Sundberg who concluded that there was no closed canon of the Hebrew Scriptures in the first century AD.<sup>147</sup> Unfortunately, Hahneman does not interact with Roger Beckwith, who concludes his major study of the OT canon with the statement that “the Jewish canon, in all probability, reached its final form in the time of Judas Maccabaeus, about 164 BC, and did so for all schools of thought alike.”<sup>148</sup> Charles Hill argues that if Beckwith’s conclusions are accepted, “much of the wind is taken from Sundberg’s (and hence Hahneman’s) sails.”<sup>149</sup> As regards the canonical status of the four Gospels at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Hahneman is impressed by the fact that gnostic Christians used the Gospel of John and that Gaius of Rome criticized it at the beginning of the third century, concluding, “The Gospel of John is certainly a surprising member of any orthodox gospel canon at the end of the second century.”<sup>150</sup> At the same time, he is forced by the evidence to admit that John’s Gospel “from the beginning of the third century...has been generally accepted in the churches.”<sup>151</sup> Charles Hill comments, somewhat sarcastically, “The reader can only marvel at how this renegade Gospel could have been catapulted into universal approbation in so short a time...on this presentation of the evidence, the acceptance of John’s Gospel virtually overnight in all regions of the church by the beginning of the third century simply has no causal basis in history.”<sup>152</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Henne, “Datation” 65–68; Heckel, *Evangelium* 342; thus already Zahn, *Geschichte* 2.46–49.

<sup>143</sup> Henne, “Datation” 66; Heckel, *Evangelium* 342.

<sup>144</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 181.

<sup>145</sup> Henne, “Datation” 72; Hill, “Debate” 440. Hill, *ibid.* 443–44, implicitly, makes the serious charge that Hahneman has plagiarized passages from Gamble, *NT Canon*.

<sup>146</sup> Stanton, “Fourfold Gospel” 323.

<sup>147</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 73–83.

<sup>148</sup> Roger Beckwith, *The OT Canon of the NT Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 406.

<sup>149</sup> Hill, “Debate” 442.

<sup>150</sup> Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment* 101.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* 102.

<sup>152</sup> Hill, “Debate” 444–45. On the canonical status of the Gospel of John, and Johannine literature in general, see Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); *idem*, “The Fourth Gospel in the Second Century: The Myth of Orthodox Johannophobia,” in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John* (ed. J. Lierman; WUNT 219; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 135–69. Hill dates the Four Gospel canon to AD 125–135. Cf. Richard J. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewit-*

(8) Hahneman downplays the reception of the Fragment. Lee McDonald, who accepts Hahneman's position, thinks that the Muratorian Fragment is not a pivotal document in the history of the formation of the canon; his assertion that it "is not referred to anywhere in the ancient church"<sup>153</sup> ignores the evidence discussed by Zahn and Lagrange who argue that Victorinus of Poetovio (Pettau, modern Ptuj), who flourished c. 270, knew the Fragment and borrowed from it when he commented upon the letters of Paul: compare Victorinus on Rev 1:20 (*Septem autem ecclesiae, quas nominatim vocabulis suis vocat, ad quas epistolas facit, non quia illae solae < sint > ecclesiae aut principes, sed quod uni dicit omnibus dicit*) with lines 47–50/55–59 of the Muratorian Fragment (*cum ipse beatus apostolus paulus sequens prodecessuris sui iohannis ordinē non nisi nomenatī septē ecclesiis scribat...una tamen per omnem orbem terrae ecclesia diffusa esse denoscitur et iohannis enī in a pocalebsy licet septē eccleis scribat tamen omnibus dicit*).<sup>154</sup> Also, Chromatius, bishop of Aquileia in northern Italy from 387–407, knew and used the Fragment's material on Luke in the Prologue of his *Tractatus in Mathaeum*.<sup>155</sup>

### III. HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NT CANON

The Four Gospel canon can be established for the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century without recourse to the Fragment.<sup>156</sup> Consequently, some scholars assert that the Muratorian Fragment does not have the critically central significance that some assume it has.<sup>157</sup> As regards the Fragment's significance, and the process of the formation of the NT canon more generally, the following points are relevant.

1. *Emphasis on the universal validity of the canon.* The Muratorian Fragment emphasizes the universal validity of the historical particularity of the authoritative books of the church. This emphasis is achieved with the help of numerical allego-

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nesses: *The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 425–33, on evidence in the Muratorian Fragment for what Papias says about the Gospel of John.

<sup>153</sup> McDonald, *Canon* 378.

<sup>154</sup> Martine Dulaey, ed., *Victorin de Poetovio, premier exégète latin* (2 vols.; Collection des études augustiniennes 139–140; Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1993) (= idem, ed., *Victorin de Poetovio: Sur l'Apocalypse, suivi du fragment chronologique et de La construction du monde* [SC 423; Paris: Cerf, 1997] 52). Cf. Zahn, "Hippolytus" (= idem, "Forschungen" 10:66); in idem, *Geschichte* 2.137, he was more cautious; see also Lagrange, *Histoire ancienne* 81–82; Verheyden, "Canon Muratori" 495.

<sup>155</sup> Chromatius, *Clavis patrum latinorum* 218; Giulio Trettel, ed., *Cromazio di Aquileia: Commento al Vangelo di Matteo* (2 vols.; Collana di testi patristici 46–47; Roma: Città nuova, 1984); Chromatius refers to Luke as follows: *Dominum in carne non vidit, sed quia eruditissimus legis erat quippe comes Pauli apostoli*. Cf. Joseph Lemaire, "Saint Chromace d'Aquilée témoin du Canon de Muratori," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 24 (1978) 101–2. Metzger, *Canon* 305 n. 2; Angelo de Nicola, "Il prologo ai Tractatus in Matthaeum di Cromazio," in *Chromatius episcopus: 388–1988* (ed. Y.-M. Duval; Antichità altoadriatiche 34; Udine: Arti grafiche friulane, 1988) 81–116; Kaestli, "Fragment de Muratori" 630–34; Verheyden, "Canon Muratori" 552–55.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Heckel, *Evangelium* 353 (summary).

<sup>157</sup> Gamble, "NT Canon" 270–71; Marksches, *Theologie* 235.

ry.<sup>158</sup> The author writes in lines 47–57: “the blessed apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: to the Corinthians first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third, to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth, to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition, yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth (*licet pro correptione iteretur una tamen per omnem orbem terrae ecclesia deffusa esse*).” Christoph Marksches suggests that the author follows here the “rules” of ancient number symbolism in which the number seven implies completeness: Paul’s letters were written for the entire *oikumene* (lines 56–57: *per omnem orbem terrae ecclesia deffusa*).<sup>159</sup>

It should be noted, however, the number seven does not have such a fixed meaning. In the Hellenistic world the number seven was recognized in the Hellenistic world as having a major cosmic role: most people used a seven-day week, and the image of the seven planets was widespread. Philo and Varro saw seven as “a principle of order in all aspects of physical reality and human life.”<sup>160</sup>

2. *Institutional origins.* A. Harnack argued that the Muratorian Fragment represents an official answer of the church in Rome to an epistolary query.<sup>161</sup> Most scholars reject this view.<sup>162</sup>

Christoph Marksches recently suggested that the Fragment probably originates in lectures of unaffiliated Christian teachers.<sup>163</sup> The Fragment provides at several places an extensive and learned argumentation which at times uses symbolical language. An example of the latter is line 68: the statement “for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey” explains why the heresy of Marcion and others cannot be accepted by the church. An example for an extensive argumentation is lines 16–20 (“And so, though various elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels, nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things have been declared in all [the Gospels]”).

3. *Historical, ecclesiastical, and theological contexts.*

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Marksches, *Theologie* 235, who thinks that the author of the *Muratorianum* attempts “die historisch zufällige Gestalt des neutestamentlichen Textcorpus durch Allegorie auf die Ebene des Prinzipiellen zu erheben.”

<sup>159</sup> Marksches, *Theologie* 235, speaks of “rules” of ancient number symbolism; since the number “seven” does not have a clearly defined, uniform meaning in the ancient world. Sakkos, *Murator* 28–33, suggests that this represents an attempt to eliminate the Epistle to the Hebrews from the canon of Pauline writings. Cf. Campenhausen, *Entstehung* 292.

<sup>160</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, “Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature,” *ANRW* 2.21.2 (1984) 1278 (= idem, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* [JSJSup 50; Leiden: Brill, 1996] 127). Scholars who interpret the number seven as signifying completeness follow Johannes Hehn, *Siebenzahl und Sabbat bei den Babyloniern und im Alten Testament: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Studie* (Leipziger semitistische Studien 2/5; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1907), who is not reliable, however; cf. Yarbo Collins, “Numerical Symbolism” 1276–78 (*Cosmology*, 124–27). On numerical symbolism see generally Christoph Riedweg, “Number: 3.D. Numerical Mysticism,” in *Brill’s New Pauly: Encyclopedia of the Ancient World* (ed. H. Cancik, H. Schneider, and M. Landfester; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 9:891–93.

<sup>161</sup> Harnack, “Über den Verfasser” 1–16.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Campenhausen, *Entstehung* 294.

<sup>163</sup> Marksches, *Theologie* 236.



a. *Historical context.* As regards the historical context of the formation of the canon, Johann Salomo Semler argued that there was no general agreement in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century which books could be called divine, that it is impossible to infer the certain divine character of a book's origin from its public reading, that the various Christian parties did not agree which books must belong to the canon, and that the establishment of a definitive canon was the result of an agreement of different bishops, initiated by a consensus of the African and the Roman church.<sup>164</sup> Since the canon is a consensus agreement between bishops, it is up to the individual Christian whether he joins this consensus or not: the bishops agreed on a canon for the servants of the church, not on a canon for the members of the church, which means that the official canon has only an externally binding character.<sup>165</sup>

Ferdinand Christian Baur applied Semler's historical critique to the NT books whose canonical status generates the dogma as divinely inspired writings, as documentary expression of the divinely revealed truth which is supposed to be the authoritative norm for the theoretical and practical behavior of the people; the science of the introduction into the NT must examine whether these writings are what the dogmatic premise claims that they are.<sup>166</sup> The examination of the canon leads to a destruction of the canon. The heading of the second section of his *Kirchengeschichte der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, published in 1853, reveals that Semler's "free" examination of the canon is beset by basic philosophical and historical (Hegelian) premises: "Christianity as general principle of salvation, the opposition between Paulinism and Judaism, and its resolution in the idea of the Catholic church."<sup>167</sup>

The importance of historical context is reflected in the fact that, as Andreas Lindemann has pointed out, the brief descriptions of Paul's letters in the Muratorian Fragment presuppose that Christian teachers were still aware of the original his-

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<sup>164</sup> Johann Salomo Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon* (4 vols.; Halle: Hemmerde, 1771–75) 1.14–15 (§3, 21) (ed. Heinz Scheible; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1967): "1) daß es damalen so geradehin bekannt und ausgemacht nicht war, welche Bücher ganz allein göttliche heißen könnten; 2) daß aus dem öffentlichen Vorlesen nicht auf die ganz gewisse Göttlichkeit des Ursprungs geschlossen werden konnte; 3) daß unter den verschiedenen Parteien der Christen damalen es noch nicht eine allgemeine Einstimmung gewesen, welche Bücher in dem Canon stehen müßten; und daß daher 4) einige Bischöfe sich wegen des Canons eben nun vereinigt haben." For the following survey of the history of research on Semler cf. recently Hermann von Lips, "Kanondebatten im 20. Jahrhundert," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion: Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012) 109–26; idem, *Kanon* 167–72; Christoph Marksches, "Epochen der Erforschung des neutestamentlichen Kanons in Deutschland. Einige vorläufige Bemerkungen," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion* 578–604.

<sup>165</sup> Semler, *Canon* 1.19–20; 2.513.

<sup>166</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur, "Die Einleitung in das Neue Testament als theologische Wissenschaft," *Theologische Jahrbücher* 9 (1850) 478.

<sup>167</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Kirchengeschichte der drei ersten Jahrhunderte* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Geschichte der christlichen Kirche 1; 1853; repr. Tübingen: Fues, 1863) 42–174 ("Das Christenthum als allgemeines Heilsprincip, der Gegensatz des Paulinismus und Judaismus, und seine Ausgleichung in der Idee der katholischen Kirche").

torical conditions in which Paul wrote.<sup>168</sup> Nils Dahl suggests that the Fragment lists Paul's letters in chronological order.<sup>169</sup>

b. *Ecclesiastical context.* The ecclesiastical context of the formation of the canon was emphasized by Theodor Zahn, who wrote his monumental two-volume *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, with 968 and 1,022 pages respectively (a third volume on the NT in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century was planned, but never written),<sup>170</sup> to combat the notion, championed by Semler and, in his own time, Adolf Harnack,<sup>171</sup> that the NT canon is the result of an artificial development and an arbitrary product of the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>172</sup> Zahn held that the NT existed at about the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, without either Marcion or Gnosticism being decisive factors for the formation of the canon. Harnack, who held that Montanism, not Gnosticism provided the decisive impetus for the formation of the NT canon, reviewed the first volume of Zahn's history of the canon in a 112-page pamphlet which appeared within a few weeks.<sup>173</sup> The debate between Zahn and Harnack was described by contemporaries as the "Harnack-Zahnscher-Streit."<sup>174</sup> Harnack traveled on the Semler-Strasse, accepting the premises of the views of Semler and Baur regarding the formation of the canon—Zahn challenged them. Harnack discussed the for-

<sup>168</sup> Andreas Lindemann, "Die Sammlung der Paulusbriefe im 1. und 2. Jahrhundert," in *The Biblical Canons* 349.

<sup>169</sup> Nils Alstrup Dahl, "Welche Ordnung der Paulusbriefe wird vom Muratorischen Kanon vorausgesetzt?" ZNW 52 (1961) 23–42 (= idem, "Welche Ordnung der Paulusbriefe wird vom Muratorischen Kanon vorausgesetzt?" in *Studies in Ephesians* [WUNT 131; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000] 157). Note the critique of Kurt Aland, "Die Entstehung des Corpus Paulinum," in *Neutestamentliche Entwürfe* (TB 63; München: Kaiser, 1979) 329, who argues that the sequence of Pauline letters follows a manuscript where he found this sequence.

<sup>170</sup> Theodor Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, vol. 1: *Das Neue Testament vor Origenes* (2 vols.; Erlangen: Deichert, 1888–89); Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, vol. 2: *Urkunden und Belege zum ersten und dritten Band* (2 vols.; Erlangen: Deichert, 1890–92). On the 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> century cf. Theodor Zahn, *Grundriss der Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons: Eine Ergänzung zu der Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1901).

<sup>171</sup> Adolf Harnack, "Das Muratorische Fragment und die Entstehung einer Sammlung apostolisch-katholischer Schriften," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 3 (1879) 358–408; Adolf Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte. Erster Band: Die Entstehung des kirchlichen Dogmas* (Sammlung theologischer Lehrbücher; Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1886).

<sup>172</sup> Theodor Zahn, *Einige Bemerkungen zu Adolf Harnack's Prüfung der Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (1/1) (Erlangen: Deichert, 1889) 3.

<sup>173</sup> Adolf Harnack, *Das Neue Testament um das Jahr 200: Theodor Zahn's Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (Erster Band, Erste Hälfte) (Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1889).

<sup>174</sup> Uwe Swarat, *Alte Kirche und Neues Testament: Theodor Zahn als Patristiker* (TVG 342; Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1991) 333; cf. Heinrich Seesemann, "Der Harnack-Zahnsche Streit," *Mitteilungen und Nachrichten für die evangelische Kirche in Rußland* 45 (1899) 201–16; Walter Köppel, "Der Zahn-Harnacksche Streit über die Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons," *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 64 (1891) 102–57; Fritz Barth, "Der Streit zwischen Zahn und Harnack über den Ursprung des n. t. Kanons," *Neue Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie* 2 (1893) 56–80. For further literature see Swarat, *Alte Kirche und Neues Testament* 333 n. 185, who points out that while Barth presents the most incisive and fair analysis of the debate, only Seesemann sided with Zahn. For the following summary of the debate cf. Swarat, *ibid.* 331–341. See also Metzger, *Canon* 23–24; Barton, *Spirit* 1–6; Henk Jan de Jonge, "The NT Canon," in *The Biblical Canons* 311; Marksches, "Epochen" 588–90. On the debate between Harnack and Overbeck see Martin Rese, "Harnack und Overbeck über die Entstehung des Kanons des Neuen Testaments: Ein leider vergessener Streit aus dem vorletzten Jahrhundert," in *The Biblical Canons* 617–25.

mation of the canon in the context of the history of church dogma, as did Baur. Zahn discussed the canon in the context of the local assemblies of the church.<sup>175</sup> Harnack followed Semler and Baur in focusing on the theological characteristics of the collection of NT writings as proof of their canonicity. Zahn investigated the specific evidence for such a collection.<sup>176</sup> Harnack expected a clear geographical division of the material in terms of a description of a plurality of concepts of canonical authority. Zahn established a unified concept which required no geographical distinctions.<sup>177</sup> He linked the formation of the canon with the worship services in the Christian assemblies (*Gottesdienst*) and understood the collection of the NT writings as collection of the books that were publicly read in the churches (*gottesdienstliche Vorlesebücher*), with specific reference to the Muratorian Fragment lines 72–73, 77–80.<sup>178</sup> Harnack saw the formation of the canon as an important part of the genesis of the “early Catholic church” (*altkatholische Kirche*) in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, arguing that an anti-Gnostic and anti-Montanist impetus was responsible for the formation of the canon. The norms of ecclesiastical office, rule of faith, and canon bring the Gnostic crisis to an end.<sup>179</sup> Zahn argued that the canon of the church was already fixed during this time, having been established between 80–110. He argued that the formation of the NT canon was a gradual process within the church that began early. However, he acknowledged that the rejection of apocryphal letters of Paul (lines 64–65) is reminiscent of the Marcionite crisis. Harnack charged Zahn not only as presenting a pre-critical picture of the canon’s formation which had long been abandoned, but, more critically, as being caught in the implicit contradiction of speaking of a conceptually already existing canon which exists “qualitatively” but not yet “quantitatively.” In later statements, Harnack was much more positive regarding Zahn: nine years later he called Zahn’s history of the NT canon “the most scholarly work that has been written on the oldest Christian literature in this century.”<sup>180</sup>

Some of Zahn’s premises have become generally accepted, partially already by Harnack, among them the integration of the history of liturgy and piety into the history of the formation of the canon. The systematic-theological differences be-

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<sup>175</sup> Zahn, *Geschichte* 1.83–84.

<sup>176</sup> Harnack, *Testament* 11–12.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Zahn, *Geschichte* 1.141–50, 153, 326, 433. Cf. Zahn, *Grundriss der Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* 11–12. See the critique of this explanation of the formation of the canon by Semler, *Canon* 1.14–15 (“daß aus dem öffentlichen Vorlesen nicht auf die ganz gewisse Göttlichkeit des Ursprungs geschlossen werden konnte”) and by Adolf Harnack, “Die ältesten Evangelienprologe und die Bildung des Neuen Testaments,” in *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 24 (Berlin: Reimer, 1928) 338 (= idem, “Die ältesten Evangelienprologe und die Bildung des Neuen Testaments,” in *Kleine Schriften zur alten Kirche* 2: *Berliner Akademieschriften 1908–1930* [Opuscula 9; Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1980] 819).

<sup>179</sup> Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte* 1 353–425, in particular 353–54.

<sup>180</sup> Adolf Harnack, *Geschichte der alchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*: 2. Teil: *Die Chronologie*, vol. 1: *Die Chronologie der Literatur bis Irenäus nebst einleitenden Untersuchungen* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897) vii: “das gelehrteste Werk, welches in Beziehung auf die älteste christliche Literatur in unserem Jahrhundert geschrieben worden ist.”

tween Zahn and Harnack are obvious: Harnack's church of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century consists of theologians who are involved in the struggle against Marcionites, Montanists, and Gnostics and who implement "early Catholic" norms; Zahn's church consists of a worshipping church and her liturgical order.<sup>181</sup>

Zahn regarded the NT canon as the result of continued collection, augmentation, and growth. Harnack and most scholars who trace the history of the canon regard the canon as the result of a process of delimitation and exclusion. John Barton argues that it is the less strict concept of the canon leads Zahn to an early date (the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century), whereas the stricter concept of Harnack and most scholars leads to a later date, usually in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Athanasius). The process of the growth of the canon and the process of its delimitation took place independently: growth came first, delimitation came later; growth leads to an open collection of authoritative books, delimitation closes the list of authoritative books which then becomes the exclusive canon.<sup>182</sup>

Since the Muratorian Fragment lists all books of the NT canon with the exception of Hebrews and the four Catholic epistles, which constitutes either an oversight or which is the result of the fragmentary character of the Fragment, the process of delimitation seems to have come to a close by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

c. *Theological context.* The theological context of the formation of the canon is emphasized by scholars affiliated with the "theology of the Word of God" who turned on its head the picture of the formation of the canon which focused on the human activity: it is not the church who created the canonical Scriptures, but the canonical Scriptures which created the church. Proceeding from an avowed theological commitment, these scholars explain the collection of the NT writings in terms of the *Selbstdurchsetzung* or self-imposition (or self-enforcement) of the biblical canon. This theological emphasis, formulated against the anthropological turn of theology since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, can be traced to the Reformation theology of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> and the polemics against the tradition principle of the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Karl Barth argues that Scripture has the ability to impose itself as canon: "Warum muß die Erinnerung der Kirche an Gottes geschriebene Offenbarung immer wieder gerade die Bibel zum konkreten Gegenstand haben? Es soll kein Ausweichen vor dieser mit Recht immer neu zu stellenden Frage bedeuten, wenn wir zunächst antworten: die Bibel macht sich selbst zum Kanon. Sie ist Kanon, weil sie sich als solcher der Kirchen imponiert hat und immer wieder imponiert."<sup>183</sup> Gerhard Ebeling used the concept of the *Selbstdurchsetzung* of the NT can-

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<sup>181</sup> Marksches, "Epochen" 591. Harnack had other critics besides Zahn. Lagrange, *Histoire ancienne* 67, argues that Harnack grossly overestimates the impact of Marcion on the church when Harnack suggests that the church formed the NT canon as a response to Marcion's attempts to establish an edited version of the church's authoritative books; Lagrange suggests that the polemical undertone of the Muratorian Fragment reflects the struggle of Hippolytus with Gaius and his refutation of the Montanists.

<sup>182</sup> Barton, *Spirit* 24–31, followed by Jonge, "NT Canon" 311.

<sup>183</sup> Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik I/1: Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes: Prolegomena zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik: Erster Halbband* (Zurich: EVZ, 1932) 110 (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I.1: The Doctrine of the Word of God* [trans. G. W. Bromiley; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936] 107: "It is no evasion of this question, which we

on.<sup>184</sup> Adolf Ritter argues on historical grounds that the NT canon evidently developed on the basis of a purely immanent impetus.<sup>185</sup> Charles Hill, in his monograph on the canonical Gospels published in 2010, argues similarly; the concluding chapter entitled “Who Chose the Gospels?” programmatically states in the sub-heading: “Natural Selection: The Gospels that Imposed Themselves.”<sup>186</sup> He concludes from his discussion of the historical evidence that the church leaders of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century “would have said that neither individuals nor churches had the authority to ‘choose’ which of the many Gospels they liked, but to receive the ones given by God and handed down by Christ through his apostles.”<sup>187</sup>

Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen wrote his monograph on the formation of the canon, first published in 1968<sup>188</sup> and regarded by some as a synthesis of the history of the canon that is still valid,<sup>189</sup> against the background of such theological premises.<sup>190</sup> He argues that the Christian Bible arose “as the Christ book” (*Christusbuch*):<sup>191</sup> the witness of Christ was at the center of the formation of the canon, which was never officially sanctioned or proclaimed by an ecclesiastical authority.<sup>192</sup> Like Harnack, Campenhausen believes that the idea and the reality of the Christian

are always right to raise afresh, if in the first instance we reply at once that the Bible constitutes itself the Canon. It is the Canon because it imposed itself upon the Church as such, and continually does so”).

<sup>184</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, “‘Sola Scriptura’ und das Problem der Tradition,” in *Wort Gottes und Tradition: Studien zu einer Hermeneutik des Glaubens* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964) 91–143: “Neben und vor dem Dekretieren kirchlicher Instanzen, das namentlich beim Abschluß der Kanonsbildung im Interesse der Vereinheitlichung und des Ausgleichs zwischen den Entwicklungen in den verschiedenen Kirchengebieten wirksam war, handelte es sich in der Hauptsache darum, daß sich der kirchliche Gebrauch bestimmter Schriften einfach durchgesetzt hatte und daß dieser ihrer unbestrittenen Autorität nachträglich durch die Kanonsidee, in Entsprechung zum Alten Testament, die Interpretation als ‘Heilige Schrift’ gegeben wurde” (104) (= idem, “‘Sola Scriptura’ und das Problem der Tradition,” in *Das Neue Testament als Kanon: Dokumentation und kritische Analyse zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion* [ed. E. Käsemann; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970] 296; cf. Gerhard Ebeling, “‘Sola Scriptura’ und Tradition,” in *The Word of God and Tradition: Historical Studies Interpreting the Divisions of Christianity* [trans. S. H. Hooke; London: Collins, 1968] 114: “Alongside of and before the official ecclesiastical decision which fixed the canon for the sake of unity and to bring about agreement over the developments taking place in the various provinces of the Church, the important thing that was happening was simply that the use of certain books in church had become obligatory, and that these subsequently acquired their undisputed authority through the idea of the canon, and in agreement with the Old Testament came to be regarded as ‘Holy Scripture’”). The phrase “hatte sich durchgesetzt” does not mean “became obligatory” but “asserted itself” or “took hold.”

<sup>185</sup> Adolf Martin Ritter, “Die Entstehung des neutestamentlichen Kanons: Selbstdurchsetzung oder autoritative Entscheidung?” in *Kanon und Zensur: Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation* (ed. A. Assmann and J. Assmann; München: Fink, 1987) 93–99.

<sup>186</sup> Charles E. Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 226.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 246.

<sup>188</sup> Hans von Campenhausen, *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel* (BHT 39; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2003, with an afterword by Christoph Marksches); ET Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (trans. J. A. Baker; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

<sup>189</sup> Winrich A. Löhr, “Das antike Christentum im zweiten Jahrhundert—neue Perspektiven seiner Erforschung,” *TLZ* 127 (2002) 251; Marksches, “Epochen” 597.

<sup>190</sup> On Campenhausen’s description of the canon cf. Marksches, “Epochen” 591–98.

<sup>191</sup> Campenhausen, *Entstehung* 378.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. 290.

Bible, that is, of the biblical canon, was created by Marcion: as regards the concept of a closed canon of authoritative Christian writings, the church did not precede Marcion, but, viewed from a formal perspective, followed him.<sup>193</sup> Unlike Harnack, who believed that the Four Gospel canon had been established before Marcion, Campenhausen argued that the Four Gospel canon was also a response to Marcion. He thus follows the critique of institutions that characterizes newer research into the canon, even though this critique remains committed to Harnack's view of the early Catholic church setting the norms of the *regula veritatis*.<sup>194</sup> Campenhausen assumes a broad definition of "canon" in terms of the concept of normativity and authority. He argues that the Muratorian Fragment marks the end of the process of the formation of the canon, whose beginning was characterized by a response to Marcion and to Gnostic heretics, and whose end is now established as a bulwark against all heretics and heretical writings.<sup>195</sup> As regards Marcion, recent studies have focused on the philological character of his edition of the Bible,<sup>196</sup> and some scholars have demonstrated that the arguments for a central role of Marcion in the formation of the canon are weak.<sup>197</sup>

A similar focus on Christ is found in Günther Wenz's view that the canon contains the fundamental and irreplaceable witness of the NT authors of God's revelation in Jesus Christ: the process of turning oral witness into written documents and the formation of the canon were driven by the goal to preserve the original witness of God's revelation and thus the uniqueness of Jesus as the Christ.<sup>198</sup>

Lee McDonald argues that even though the criteria of apostolicity, orthodoxy, antiquity, regular use in the churches, adaptability to changing circumstances, and inspiration all played "some role in shaping the NT canon," ultimately "the writings that were accorded scriptural status were the ones that best conveyed the earliest Christian proclamation and that also best met the growing needs of the local

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 174–75; see also John Knox, *Marcion and the NT: An Essay in the Early History of the Canon* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942); Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the NT*, vol. 2: *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982) 8.

<sup>194</sup> Marksches, "Epochen" 594–95. On the differences between Harnack and Campenhausen see Adolf Martin Ritter, "Hans von Campenhausen und Adolf von Harnack," *ZTK* 87 (1990) 323–39.

<sup>195</sup> Campenhausen, *Entstehung* 289: "sucht man es [das Neue Testament] auch jetzt, bei seinem Abschluß, ver ein festes Bollwerk gegen alle irgend bekannten Ketzerschriften und Ketzereien endgültig aufzurichten."

<sup>196</sup> Ulrich Schmid, *Marcion und sein Apostolos: Rekonstruktion und historische Einordnung der marcionitischen Paulusbriefausgabe* (ANTF 25; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995).

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Robert M. Grant, *The Formation of the NT* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 126; David L. Balás, "Marcion Revisited: A 'Post-Harnack' Perspective," in *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and the Early Church Fathers* (ed. W. E. March; San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980) 95–107; John Barton, "Marcion Revisited," in *Canon Debate* 341–54; Barton, *Spirit* 35–62; Löhr, "Das antike Christentum" 252; Marksches, "Epochen" 596, arguing that Harnack, who regarded Marcion as a "reformer" of early Christianity, had personal theological interests in localizing Marcion in the center of his view of history; cf. Kurt Nowak, "Theologie, Philologie und Geschichte. Adolf von Harnack als Kirchenhistoriker," in *Adolf von Harnack: Theologie, Historiker, Wissenschaftspolitiker* (ed. K. Nowak and G. Oexle; Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 161; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001) 189–237.

<sup>198</sup> Günther Wenz, "Kanonbildung und Schriftverständnis in evangelischer Perspektive," *Una Sancta* 44 (1989) 215–21, esp. 218.

churches....The end product of the long and complex canonization process was an authoritative and inspired instrument that continued to be useful in and adaptable to the ministry and worship of a changing church. That instrument clarified the church's essential identity and mission as a community of Christ."<sup>199</sup>

As regards the question whether the church created the canon or whether the canon imposed itself upon the church, Herrmann von Lips argues that Jan Assmann's concept of the canon in terms of its function of establishing the identity of a community,<sup>200</sup> applied to the NT by Guy Stroumsa,<sup>201</sup> defuses this stark contrast: the canon is the reality that establishes the church's identity and is thus foundational for the church (*creatura verbi*), while at the same time the canon developed within the church and lives by the church's acceptance.<sup>202</sup> Similarly, Michael Kruger, in his 2013 monograph on the canon, argues that three definitions of canon imply, reinforce, and complement each other:

If a canonical book is a book given by God to his church (ontological definition) then we might naturally expect his church to recognize it as such and use it as an authoritative norm (functional definition). And if a canonical book is a book used as an authoritative norm (functional definition), we might naturally expect that the church would eventually reach a consensus on the boundaries around such books (exclusive definition). And if the church has reached a consensus on the boundaries around certain books (exclusive definition), then it is reasonable to think these are the books that have already been used as an authoritative norm (functional definition), and also that they are the books that God intended his church to have (ontological definition).<sup>203</sup>

4. *Criteria of canonicity.* As regards criteria of canonicity, the Fragment provides evidence both for Lietzmann's emphasis on prophetic and apostolic origins of the OT and NT books, and for Zahn's emphasis on the public reading of the NT writings.

Most scholars follow Hans Lietzmann's prophetic-apostolic principle: the OT was written by prophets, the NT by apostles; any text that has not been written by an apostle does not belong into the NT.<sup>204</sup> This position rests mainly on the Fragment's assertions concerning the Shepherd of Hermas in lines 73–80.

Hans von Campenhausen disagrees. He emphasizes, also on the basis of lines 73–80, that the Muratorian Fragment includes those books which were old and reliable, that is, the critical principle for inclusion in the canon is historical or, if one wishes, dogmatic and salvation-historical, focused on the witnesses of the Christ

<sup>199</sup> McDonald, *Canon* 421; cf. idem, "Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question," in *Canon Debate* 416–39. McDonald is aware of Zahn (cf. *ibid.* 11), but evidently has not interacted with his research and position.

<sup>200</sup> Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, 1992) 103–129 (Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011] 70–109).

<sup>201</sup> Guy G. Stroumsa, *Kanon und Kultur: Zwei Studien zur Hermeneutik des antiken Christentums* (Hans-Lietzmann-Vorlesungen 4; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999).

<sup>202</sup> Lips, "Kanondebatten" 116.

<sup>203</sup> Kruger, *Question of Canon* 43–44.

<sup>204</sup> Lietzmann, *Bücher* 63.

event and the original teaching of the church.<sup>205</sup> It is obvious that the author of the Fragment makes the reliability of tradition dependent on the age of the texts (lines 63–67, with regard to the epistles to the Laodiceans and to the Alexandrians, claiming to have been written by Paul), although this is not a “historical” interest in the modern sense of the word.<sup>206</sup> Campenhausen argues that it is not the age and the authenticity of the canonical writings alone which render them authoritative: it is also the practice and the judgment of the one true church that exists in the entire *oikoumene* (i.e. not simply the official church): what is valid in the church has not been determined in an arbitrary manner, but rests on sound claims and the fact that they have proven their value.<sup>207</sup> The church does not have authority over the canon, and she is not the source of the canon’s authority, but she is the place where a normative judgment regarding the value, or the lack thereof, of Christian writings is rendered.<sup>208</sup>

Theodor Zahn argues that the public reading of a book in the church assemblies determined canonicity.<sup>209</sup> The statement in the Fragment concerning the Apocalypse of Peter in line 73 indicates that the public reading of a text in the Christian assemblies certainly was an important factor: “some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church.” However, the story of bishop Serapion of Antioch (c. 190–203/211) suggests that the orthodoxy of a local church was more important than the orthodoxy of the book that was read, at least in some cases. Eusebius relates (*Hist. eccl.* 6.12.1–6) that Serapion visited the church in Rhossus on the Gulf of Issos, in which the Gospel of Peter was read in the assembly; Serapion accepted this initially, without reading and knowing this text, because he was convinced of the orthodoxy of the church. Evidently the church had asked the bishop whether it is permitted to read this text in the congregation; since the bishop gave a positive answer, the question does not seem to have been of ultimate significance.<sup>210</sup> When Serapion started to question the orthodoxy of the church in Rhossus when it was suspected of having sympathies for Marcion, he examined the Gospel of Peter and found its contents in parts questionable.

The Fragment’s statement concerning the Shepherd of Hermas in lines 78–80 confirms that both public reading in the assemblies of the church and derivation from the prophets and the apostles were the fundamental criteria for canonicity. Lines 78–80 read: “it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after [their] time.” While other books may be read by Christians, only the Prophets and Apostles may be read publicly. New books are suspect: “Hermas wrote the Shepherd very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome” (lines

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<sup>205</sup> Campenhausen, *Entstehung* 295: “das kritische Prinzip, nach dem die Quellen gesichtet werden, ist...wieder historisch oder, wenn man will, dogmatisch-heilsgeschichtlich bestimmt.”

<sup>206</sup> Marksches, “Haupteinleitung” 65.

<sup>207</sup> Campenhausen, *Entstehung* 302: “sachlich begründet und praktisch bewährt.”

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Zahn, *Geschichte* 1.141–50; idem, *Grundriss der Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* 11–12.

<sup>210</sup> Thus Marksches, *Theologie* 241–42, with reference to McDonald, “Identifying Scripture and Canon” 428.



73–74). The rejection of the epistles to the Laodiceans and to the Alexandrians on account of the fact that they are “forged in Paul’s name to [further] the heresy of Marcion” (lines 64–65) attests to the importance of the authenticity of canonical texts and the derivation from the first witnesses. A text is legitimate, and thus canonical, when it derives from the first witnesses (the prophets and the apostles), and when it is read in the churches. The reality of the canon of authoritative Scriptures has an exclusive dimension: the writings of Marcion, of the Gnostics, and of Montanus are excluded. It is surely due to the inspiration “by the one sovereign Spirit” (line 9) that not only the four Gospels, but all the books of the Prophets and the Apostles are “honey” (*melle*, line 67) for the “people in the church” (*in ecclesia populo*, line 78).

Bruce Metzger regards the Muratorian Fragment as an important witness to the criteria of determining canonicity. The Fragment attests to the rule of faith as fundamental principle of canonicity when it “vigorously rejects the works of heretics” (cf. lines 81–85) and refuses to have “gall mixed with honey” (line 67); the reasons given for the rejection of the Shepherd of Hermas (lines 73–80) attest to the criterion of apostolicity; and the repeated references to the church imply as test of authority for a book the continuous acceptance and usage by the universal church.<sup>211</sup> Both the Fathers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the Muratorian Fragment, written c. 200, attest to the fact that these three criteria—orthodoxy, apostolicity, consensus in the churches—came to be generally accepted and adopted during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century “and were never modified thereafter....though the fringes of the New Testament canon remained unsettled for centuries, a high degree of unanimity concerning the greater part of the New Testament was attained within the first two centuries among the diverse and scattered congregations not only throughout the Mediterranean world but also over an area extending from Britain to Mesopotamia.”<sup>212</sup>

5. *Attempts at synthesis.* Gerd Theissen’s description of *The Religion of the Earliest Churches*, published in 2000, includes a view of the formation of the canon that synthesizes the models of Harnack, Baur, and Zahn, without mentioning their names.<sup>213</sup> Theissen follows A. Harnack and posits three crises which unsettled the early church in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century: the Judaistic crisis in the first century, the Gnostic crisis in the second century, and the prophetic crisis in the first and second centuries.<sup>214</sup> He follows F. C. Baur in regarding the formation of the canon as “a profession of plurality”: the canon preserves and marks off the plurality that had developed in earliest Christianity which brought together four basic streams: Pauline Christianity, Jewish Christianity, the Christianity of the Synoptic Gospels, and

<sup>211</sup> Metzger, *Canon* 199–201, 251–54.

<sup>212</sup> Metzger, *Canon* 254.

<sup>213</sup> Gerd Theissen, *Die Religion der ersten Christen: Eine Theorie des Urchristentums* (3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed.; 2000; repr. Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2003) 339–84 (= idem, *The Religion of the Earliest Churches: Creating a Symbolic World* [trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999] 249–84).

<sup>214</sup> Theissen, *Religion* 283–337 (Theissen, *Religion of the Earliest Churches* 209–48).

Johannine Christianity.<sup>215</sup> Following T. Zahn, he understands the canon as a ritual form of expression as it includes the books that were read in the Christian congregations.

This synthesis indicates that, while there might be major differences in the understanding of systematic premises, there is little doubt that the theological crises of the first and second centuries had some role in the formation of the canon, that the content of the writings of the NT canon can be described in terms of both unity and diversity, and that the reality and the practices of the church and her congregations functioned as catalysts.

The Muratorian Fragment can be understood as a document reflecting such a synthesis. Line 2 describes Luke as “one zealous for the law” while line 43 describes the content of Galatians as being “against circumcision.” Lines 16–17 refer to “various elements” that “may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels”; lines 18–20 assert that “this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things have been declared in all [the Gospels]”; and lines 44–45 describe Christ as the “principle” of the order of the Scriptures (*scripturarum sed [et] principium earum esse xpm*). The role of the church is implicit in the form and institutional origins of the Fragment as an introductory text into the NT writings originating in lectures of Christian teachers, and it is explicit in several references to the church: lines 18–19 speak of “the faith of believers”; lines 56–57 state that “there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth”; lines 58–59 remind the readers that John, “though he writes to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to all”; lines 60–61 assert that Paul’s letters to Philemon, Titus, and Timothy “are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic”; line 66 states that fictitious Pauline letters supporting Marcion “cannot be received into the catholic Church”; line 72 asserts that some Christians, including the author, are not willing that the Apocalypse of Peter “be read in church”; line 78 asserts that the Shepherd of Hermas “cannot be read publicly to the people in church.” The criteria of canonicity include the acceptance of the NT writings in and by the universal church, and the public reading of these writings in the congregations. The Fragment acknowledges differing perspectives in the NT writings and differences of theological outlook in the church, while it emphasizes the apostles as eyewitnesses, the church as a universal reality, and local congregations as the place where Scripture is read.

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<sup>215</sup> Cf. Thiessen, *Religion* 356, 367 (Theissen, *Religion of the Earliest Churches* 261, 270). Thiessen refers to the Canon Muratori only once, in his discussion of the canonicity of the Johannine literature (*Religion* 366 [*Religion of the Earliest Churches* 269]).