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John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus
Annotating the Areopagite

PAUL ROREM
and
JOHN C. LAMOREAUX

CLARENDON PRESS. OXFORD
1998
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would here like to acknowledge the aid of a number of colleagues and friends. For reading and commenting upon earlier versions of various chapters we are grateful to Elizabeth Clark, David B. Evans, Alexander Golitzin, Patrick T. R. Gray, Wayne Hankey, Andrew Louth, Joshua Sosin, and Kenneth Paul Wescue, as well as the readers and editors at Oxford University Press. Thanks also to Julian Plante, former director of the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, for facilitating our access to microfilms of the various manuscripts used in this study. For his invaluable help in collating the Syriac, we wish to acknowledge the grateful appreciation we owe to our dear friend 'Abd al-Mas'ūd Sa'dī. Beate Regina Suchla deserves a special measure of recognition: not only has she answered many questions over the years, but also without her seminal researches a study such as this would not even have been conceivable.

P.R. and J.C.L.
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# ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAST</td>
<td>Atti della accademia delle scienze di Torino; Classe di scienze morals, storiche e filologiche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACO</td>
<td>Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHC</td>
<td>Annuarium historiae conciliorum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Byzantine Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZ</td>
<td>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAF</td>
<td>T. Kock (ed.), Conciliorum Atticorum Fragmenta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCGS</td>
<td>Corpus christianorum, series graeca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH</td>
<td>The Celestial Hierarchy</td>
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<tr>
<td>ChH</td>
<td>Church History</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPG</td>
<td>Clavis patrum graecorum</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSCO</td>
<td>Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHGE</td>
<td>Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques</td>
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<tr>
<td>DN</td>
<td>The Divine Names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOP</td>
<td>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Dictionnaire de spiritualité</td>
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<tr>
<td>DTC</td>
<td>Dictionnaire de théologie catholique</td>
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<tr>
<td>EH</td>
<td>The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy</td>
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<td>EO</td>
<td>Échos d’orient</td>
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<td>EP</td>
<td>Epistles</td>
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<tr>
<td>FGrHist</td>
<td>C. Müller (ed.), Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum</td>
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<tr>
<td>FHC</td>
<td>E. Jacoby (ed.), Fragmenta der griechischen Historiker</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCS</td>
<td>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte</td>
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<td>HJ</td>
<td>Historisches Jahrbuch</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEJ</td>
<td>Israel Exploration Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>JECST</td>
<td>Journal of Early Christian Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lampe</td>
<td>G. W. H. Lampe (ed.), A Patristic Greek Lexicon</td>
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<td>LCL</td>
<td>Loeb Classical Library</td>
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<td>LSJ</td>
<td>H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones (eds.), A Greek–English Lexicon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mansi</td>
<td>G. D. Mansi (ed.), Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio</td>
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<td>MSR</td>
<td>Mélanges de science religieuse</td>
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INTRODUCTION

The book of Acts tells us that Paul's missionary journeys took him to Athens and that there he debated with Jews in the synagogues as well as with passers-by in the city square. Eventually he was brought before the council of the Areopagus. There, prompted by having seen an altar dedicated to an unknown God, he gave a remarkable speech about the God in whom we live and move and have our being. The speech, we are told, was moderately successful, for some became believers on this occasion. Among the converts mentioned by Luke was a certain 'Dionysius, a member of the council of the Areopagus' (Acts 17: 34). Nothing else was heard from this Dionysius for about half a millennium. It was then, in the early sixth century, that there began to circulate in the Christian east a corpus of writings ascribed to him. This corpus was fascinating to its medieval readers not only for the light it shed on apostolic times, but also for the innovative ways it philosophized about the subject matter of Christian theology. Quickly accepted as the authentic works of an apostolic contemporary, their status as such remained almost unchallenged until the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The labours of modern scholars have begun to make clear something of the influence that the writings of Dionysius exercised during the thousand or so years which intervened between the time when they first appeared and the time when their authenticity began first to be suspected. Especially intriguing is what we are now beginning to learn about how the works of Dionysius were a stimulus to further, creative theological reflection. Much of this reflection was enshrined in the various medieval commentaries on the Dionysian corpus. At the head of the long list of commentators stands the obscure figure of John of Scythopolis. This John composed an extensive set of scholia or marginal annotations to the works of Dionysius. These scholia were in turn prefaced by a prologue in which John set out his reasons for commenting on the corpus. A single generation at most separates John's interpretative labours from the earliest appearance of the works of Dionysius. More significant even than their early date, however, is the influence which John's comments exercised on the earliest form of the Dionysian tradition itself.
Introduction

As documented by the studies of Beate Regina Suchla, the exemplar from which all Greek manuscripts of the Dionysian corpus descend was characterized by a number of distinctive features. This exemplar was provided with interlinear or marginal variant readings. It was, in other words, an editio variorum, a primitive critical edition. More notably, however, it was already augmented with John’s Scholia and Prologue. For a number of reasons, Suchla dates this editio variorum to the first half of the sixth century. Inasmuch as it and John’s labours were contemporary and so closely intertwined, Suchla further argues that this editio variorum must be assigned to the circle of John of Scythopolis. It may in fact have been John himself who was responsible for it.

John’s scholia were eventually intermixed with comments written by other authors. Hitherto it has been impossible to distinguish John’s remarks from those of these later authors. Now, however, thanks again to the labours of Beate Regina Suchla, this situation has begun to be rectified. She has discovered an early recension of the scholia, a recension which contains only those comments authored by John. Her research in this regard has opened up a new world of possibilities for investigating not only John, but also the earliest reception of the Dionysian corpus itself. For subsequent generations did not read the Aepopagite; they read the annotated Aepopagite—and John had the early monopoly on those annotations. It is hard to overemphasize the significance of this literary phenomenon, this linkage of text and exegesis. It is as if there were no New Testament but that of Erasmus, no Shakespeare but that of Bowdler. This close connection between text and commentary suggests a host of questions which cannot be easily or quickly answered—among these, how did John’s work affect subsequent readings of the Aepopagite? Or perhaps even, how might the Dionysian corpus have been read and received had it not been intertwined with John’s interpretations? Such questions are not answered in this book, but the groundwork for investigating them is here prepared. One must first encounter what John himself had to say and this, at last, is possible.

This book introduces John of Scythopolis and his presentation of the writings of Dionysius. Our primary objective in this study is to survey John’s sources, methods, and theological concerns in the hundreds of scholia which he appended to the Dionysian corpus. These scholia are sometimes a few words in length; at other times they fill a whole column or more in Migne. They are at times repetitive and not infrequently obscure. At first glance the individual scholia may seem self-contained, atomistic: a comment here, a comment there, each capable of standing on its own, each able to be interpreted by itself. The atomistic nature of the scholia can, however, be misleading. For the individual scholia are embedded within a number of different contexts and the full significance of John’s comments can only emerge when read against these diverse backgrounds.

The scholia themselves form one such context. Each of John’s comments must be read against the background of all his comments as well as against his own explicit concerns as set forth in his Prologue. It is only when they are linked together, compared, or contrasted, that the full weight of John’s arguments can emerge. At the same time, one must always keep in mind that John is commenting on another text, the Dionysian corpus. He is weaving his comments around another text, garnishing its margins with his lubrications, providing his readers with clues to what he considers significant and perhaps at times diverting their attention from potential problems. Any attempt to understand John’s strategies as a commentator must read his scholia against the background of the Dionysian text itself. Yet again, John’s comments are embedded in a particular theological tradition. The participants in this tradition were most often Christians, but sometimes included Jews and pagans. Whenever John treats of a particular theological problem in his comments one must be careful to attend to the ways that his reflections are caught up in the nexus of this wider historical context. And finally, John was himself an important participant in the theological debates that wrecked the eastern churches in the aftermath of Chalcedon. He was the bishop of the metropolis of Palestine Secunda, a large and important see. He could not ignore contemporary controversies, nor could he be ignored by his opponents. This contemporary context presents us with the fourth and final background against which one must read John’s comments.

The complexity of the scholia and the many contexts in which they are embedded have presented us with a number of challenges, the primary of these being that of reducing the manifold concerns of the scholia and their fragmentary manner of presentation to some sort of comprehensible order. But order there is. As we have shown, John’s Scholia are united by a common set of doctrinal concerns and a unified theological methodology. As one begins to see the proverbial forest for the proverbial
Introduction

trees John starts to emerge as a creative theologian in his own right and to take his place among the important theologians of the sixth century. At the same time, it must be emphasized, John's works are themselves a new and important source for the intellectual history of the Greek east in the sixth century and as such offer fresh insights into some of the problems which beset the study of this period.

Accounts of the intellectual history of the Greek east in the sixth century have tended to take one of two forms. To many modern observers this period is one that is consumed by Christological controversies, the particular challenge being to interpret the Formula of Chalcedon in ways compatible with the legacy of Cyril of Alexandria and thus reconcile to the imperial theology those theologians of Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere who revered Cyril and rejected Chalcedon. This is one narrative. But there is another as well. This version tells of the decline and fall of ancient philosophy. The main character in this dramatic narrative is the cruel Justinian; the hapless victims, the last representatives of philosophy. Amidst these tribulations philosophy herself must go into exile or hiding, as the golden chain of the Platonic succession is at last broken. Or such at least is the narrative. In the sixth century, the writings of the mysterious Dionysius suddenly appeared and were quickly accepted as apostolic. The modern, perhaps overly suspicious perspective on this timing is to frame all questions about the Dionysian corpus and its early reception within one or the other of these narratives. Cui bono? Someone must after all be profiting from this skilful, deliberate forgery. Were these treatises composed to further a Christological agenda? Or do they perhaps represent a resurfacing of the prohibited philosophical tradition? We would submit that this bifurcated approach to the early history of the Dionysian tradition ignores too much. Not only does it present a selective reading of the Dionysian corpus, but it also passes over in silence a great deal of what we now know about the early reception of the corpus. In short, the formative period of the Dionysian tradition simply cannot be adequately understood on the basis of these two epic narratives.

Our treatment of John of Scythopolis and his reading of the Dionysian corpus will, we hope, add a measure of nuance to the way intellectual history in the sixth century east has traditionally been conceptualized. It is true that many of John's comments concern Christology, and that some touch on the Areopagite's orthodoxy in other respects, while at the same time other scholia defend the integrity of Dionysius as an apostolic writer in the matrix of a dialogue with Neoplatonism. All of this is fascinating, to be sure, and will be treated below, as fully as space allows. Yet even taken together, Christology and Neoplatonism do not monopolize John's concerns. Just as the insights and complexity of the Dionysian corpus cannot be reduced to a single polemical strategy, so also John's Prologue and Scholia offer the modern reader more than just another chapter in these two familiar narratives. Rather, they give a rare glimpse of a sixth-century theologian at work, interacting with Scripture and other earlier sources, invoking liturgical traditions, and directing his attention to a myriad of concerns not directly related to Chalcedon or Greek philosophy. Of course, one can argue for a polemical import to any theological comment—an author chooses to say one thing and not another within a particular context of alternatives: indeed, conspiracy theories of the Dionysian forgery will suspect everything of contributing to the fraud. It is equally true that some of the scholia may have polemical subtexts which we have not noticed. But to approach the Dionysian corpus and John's Scholia with this hermeneutic of suspicion is, we would submit, reductionistic. We offer this major work of sixth-century theology, previously of uncertain attribution, in hopes that the reader will not simply attend to the dialogue with Neoplatonism, the Christological polemics, or even the debates about the authenticity of the Dionysian corpus, as significant as such issues may be. John is concerned with far more than these issues and we hope that his readers will share something of his broader interests, many of which shaped the reception of the Dionysian corpus for centuries.

Being the first, as far as we know, to write about the overall landscape of John's comments, as clearly distinguished from later additions to the Prologue and the Scholia, we have sometimes felt like Moses' scouts bringing back an account not only of the terrain ahead but also of the magnitude of the task yet to be accomplished. 'There we saw the Nephilim...and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers...' Any one of our sections below can and should be superseded by more detailed analyses now that John's interpretative labours can be identified with confidence. For the moment it is enough to share a broad report on the sources and methods, the theological concerns and philosophical perspectives of John of Scythopolis, the first and perhaps the most influential of all Dionysian commentators.

Our study is structured as follows. We begin in Chapter 1 with a re-evaluation of the earliest reception of the Dionysian corpus. In Chapter 2 we analyse the evidence for John's life and reconstruct his now lost theological works, before taking up the question of his Prologue and
Introduction

_Scholia_ to the Dionysian corpus and arguing that his *Prologue* provides an overview of almost all his major concerns in his _Scholia_. Chapters 3 to 5 treat those major concerns. In Chapter 3 we investigate how John uses a diverse body of sources in order to facilitate his interpretative agenda. In Chapter 4 we probe John's treatment of the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology, creation, and eschatology. In Chapter 5 we explore John's defence of the authenticity of the works of Dionysius, paying particular attention to John's handling of philosophical materials in general and Plotinus in particular. Following this, we offer a translation of John's *Prologue* as well as of a large selection of his _Scholia_.

PART I

John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus
The Earliest Reception of the Dionysian Corpus

After fifteen hundred years the identity of the author of the Dionysian corpus remains a mystery. Even an accurate date for the composition of these works is lacking. In order to establish a terminus a quo for their appearance, appeals are often made to three factors, none of which, we would submit, can provide anything more than a very rough guide. In The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy Dionysius twice seems to allude to the recitation of the Creed in the course of the liturgy. It is usually asserted that Peter the Fuller first mandated the inclusion of the Nicene Creed in the liturgy in 476. But as Bernard Capelle has convincingly argued, this assertion can hardly be maintained. It is far more likely that Timothy the patriarch of Constantinople was responsible for this liturgical innovation toward 515. Secondly, it is often suggested that because Dionysius seems to eschew divisive Christological language, he was probably writing while the Henoticon of Zeno was in effect, in other words, sometime after 482.

1 For a survey of the various proposals, Ronald F. Hathaway, Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius (The Hague, 1966), 3-5. For the most recent attempt, Michel van Exbroeck, 'Pater the Fuller and Dionysius the Areopagite', DCP 59 (1993), 217-27.
2 EH 3.2 (88-21) and 3.2 (87-88, 9).
3 See, for example, his 'Les Lettres 6 et 7 pour une présentation du corpus PROJECT', in Johan van Oeckel et al., Dionysian Studies. Proceedings of the Third Dionysian Conference (Maastricht, 1992), 35-53.
To be sure, our mysterious author studiously avoided the traditional Christological formulae, but this may have had little to do with the influence of the *Henoticum*. It may rather have arisen from the Areopagite's attempt to preserve an overall apostolic ambience for his works. At any rate, it must be remembered that the *Henoticum* was not rescinded until the accession of Justin in 519. Finally, thanks in large measure to the labours of Stiglmayr and Koch, it is clear that Dionysius 'borrowed' many of his views, especially on the nature of evil, from the works of Proclus (d. 485), even at times employing passages from Proclus with little or no variation. What of a *terminus a quo*? Here we encounter some difficulties, for the earliest references to the Dionysian corpus occur in works which are themselves difficult to date. The first firm date, however, is 528, the year in which Severus' treatises against Julian were translated into Syriac, though the treatises themselves may have been composed as many as nine years earlier—exactly when we know not, the chronology of Severus’ exile and his controversy with Julian being rather opaque. Be that as it may, the authors of this study are inclined to push the date of composition of the Dionysian corpus well into the sixth century, the closer to the date of their first appearance the earlier.


According to Stiglmayr, the earliest theologian to make use of Dionysius was Andrew, the bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia ('*Aufflammung*'), 11–17. At issue here: his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (ed. Schmid), a text which Stiglmayr dated to the end of the 4th cent. It is now known that Andrew's commentary was written in the early 7th cent. See Adele Monaci Castiglioni, 'Il problema della datazione dei Commentari all’Apocalisse di Eucarismo e di Andrea di Cesarea', *ASST* 114 (1986), 323–40. Among the earliest works containing references to the corpus, Stiglmayr ('Aufflammung', 47) alsosignals a treatise against Proclus ascribed to Procopius of Gaza (d. c. 538). Later scholars (including Stiglmayr himself) have shown that this refutation of Proclus was in fact written by Nicholas of Methone, a 12th-cent. Byzantine author. Although Johannes Dräcke ('Prokopios' von Gaza 'Vorleigung des Prokopios', *BZ* 5 (1897), 55–61) has argued that the similarities between this fragment and the work of Nicholas are to be explained by supposing that Nicholas had plagiarized an original work of Procopius, Nicholas' integrity has been defended so well by Josef Stiglmayr (The "Schriftsteller des Prokopios von Gaza" gegen den Neuplatoniker Prokoplos', *BZ* 8 (1899), 263–301) and Giovanni Mercati (Notizien von Prokopios Dioneio, *Manuale Catecismo e Trattato Mingiatti* (Vatican, 1931), 264–6) that Athanasios D. Angelou can declare, 'the controversy is not alive anymore' ('Nicholas of Methone (Leiden, 1982), 811). On this point the *CPG* (2440) should be corrected. Although it appeals to L. G. Westerlind ('Proclus, Procopius, Paschasius', *Mnemosyne*, 3rd ser. 10 (1942), 275–80) to support the contention that a tract by Procopius of Gaza against Proclus was in existence up to the 13th cent. and goes on to imply that this tract was identical with the work from which came the fragment in question, such a conclusion is not supported by Westerlind's evidence.

The Earliest Reception of the Corpus

better, for it is hard to imagine that the corpus would have left no mark for decades, or that an author as resourceful as the mysterious Dionysius would not have made sure that his work was ‘discovered’ sooner rather than later.

It is commonly believed that when the works of Dionysius first appeared on the stage of history, they were immediately pressed into service by Monophysite theologians in their attempts to confute the Chalcedonians. Only later were the works able to circulate unproblematically in Orthodox circles; it was necessary first that Chalcedonian authors, such as John of Scythopolis and Maximus the Confessor, vaccinate readers against the Areopagite’s dubious Christology and cosmology—and this, through lengthy commentaries whose ‘dominant tendency’, according to Jaroslav Pelikan, ‘was to bring Dionysius into conformity with Orthodox spirituality and dogma’. As we ourselves shall argue in what follows, John’s commentary was indeed specifically designed to defend the authenticity and orthodoxy of the Dionysian corpus. But a detailed analysis of the earliest stages of the reception of the corpus does not support the contention that the Monophysites had the early monopoly on it.

In what follows we first examine the scarce evidence for the early use of the corpus by Severus in the 520s, arguing against the common view that he had pre-empted the Dionysian corpus in an offensive strike against the Chalcedonians. Following this we turn briefly to the *Collatio* of 552 in which Hypatius is said to have objected to Monophysite use of the Dionysian corpus. As we hope to show, Hypatius’ rejection of the works of Dionysius as heretical is not nearly as straightforward as is usually suggested. And finally, a brief overview of sixth-century appeals to the Dionysian corpus shows clearly that it was being used by just about all parties in the Christian east and that at no point was it the exclusive preserve of the Monophysites.

**DIONYSIUS IN THE HANDS OF SEVERUS**

Severus of Antioch (d. 538), whose works contain the first datable reference to the works of Dionysius, cited the corpus just three times: twice in his polemics against Julian of Halicarnassus, and once in his third

John and the Dionysian Corpus

letter to John the Hegumen. This is all: nowhere else in his copious extant works do we find him appealing to the authority of Dionysius. Two other passages, however, are occasionally wrongly presented as further evidence that Severus made broad and general use of the works of Dionysius. At the Lateran Council of 649, a treatise of Themistius (fl. mid-sixth century) against Golluthus was cited in which Themistius referred to the precedent of Severus in defence of his own use of the saying ‘theandric energy’.

Of the same [Themistius] from his work Against Golluthus the heretic, wherein he bears witness that Severus the heretic also confessed of Christ one theandric energy: ‘It is quite easy to see that the blessed Severus similarly desired to confirm the theandric energy (not only the divine energy) in that he says of Christ that “the same does some things divinely and others humanly.”’

From this passage it has been concluded that Themistius was defending his own use of the phrase ‘theandric energy’ by appealing to Severus’ prior use of the same expression. It is rather the case, as our translation of the rather tangled Greek shows, that Themistius was defending his use of ‘theandric energy’ by reference to Severus’ statement that Christ does some of his deeds divinely and others of them humanly.20 Again, the Oratio theologica of Theodosius I patriarch of Alexandria (c. 535–66) has also been signalled in this context.21 In this oration Theodosius mentions the prior labours of Severus in expounding the works of Dionysius, saying that ‘Severus of blessed memory no less than they [i.e., the Chalcedonians] and no less diligently read the works of St Dionysius’.22 From what follows in the oration, however, it is quite clear that Theodosius draws this conclusion not because he has evidence that Severus actually made use of the Dionysian corpus; rather, he has inferred this from the general tenor of Severus’ works, naturally fighting as they do against the misinterpretation of the corpus.23

Severus twice appealed to Dionysius in his works against Julian, who

was, of course, not a Chalcedonian but Severus’ erstwhile anti-Chalcedonian ally and then Monophysite foe. In chapter 41 of his Contra additiones Juliani, Severus attempted to defend the proposition that the flesh of God the Word was constituted from the blood of the Virgin Theotokos.24 In proof of his thesis, in addition to citations from Theophilius of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom, Severus brought to bear the witness of:

Dionysius the Areopagite bishop of Athens whose memory is preserved in the Acts of the apostles, in a treatise concerning The Divine Names which he addressed to the bishop Timothy, [who] wrote thus: ‘The most evident idea in theology, namely, the sacred Incarnation of Jesus for our sakes, is something which cannot be enclosed in words or grasped by any mind, not even by the leaders among the front ranks of the angels. That he undertook to be a man is, for us, entirely mysterious. We have no way of understanding bow, in a fashion with variance with nature, he was formed from a virgin’s blood.’

This treatise is difficult to date. At most one can say that it was written sometime after the beginning of Severus’ exile to Alexandria in 518, but before the year 528, when it was translated into Syriac by Paul of Callinicus.25 A second reference to the works of Dionysius is found in chapter 25 of Severus’ Adversus apologistam Juliani.26 For purposes quite similar to those which led him to invoke the authority of the Dionysian corpus in the Contra additiones Juliani, Severus cites the same passage from The Divine Names. Again this treatise is difficult to date: after 518 and before 528.

The only other place where Severus appeals to the authority of Dionysius is his Third Epistle to John the Hegumen, which is only partially preserved in the florilegium Doctrina patrum de incarnatione Verbi.27

12 Severus, Con. additiones Juliani 41 (ed. and tr. Hespel), 157 (1), 157 (2), citing DN 2.9 (138, 5–9).
17 Rene Descartes, Julien d’Halcarnasse (Louis, 1636), 72.
18 Severus, Adversus apologistam Juliani 25 (ed. and tr. Hespel), 204–5 (1), 205 (2).
Although a date of 510 was once suggested for this letter and is still occasionally encountered in the secondary literature, there is absolutely no evidence which supports it. Lebon maintains rightly that there is at present no way to date the letter. At any rate, Severus writes, again not to a Chalcedonian foe but to a fellow Monophysite:

We, just as we have already written in greater detail elsewhere, by the saying of the all-wise Dionysius the Areopagite which reads 'rather, by being God-made-man he accomplished for us something new, the theandric energy'—by this we have understood and do now understand one composite [energy]. The saying cannot be understood otherwise, insofar as it has always been held as a dyad. This we confess is the one theandric nature and hypostasis, as also the one incarnate nature of God the Word. . . . We proclaim as of the one himself one composite nature and hypostasis and energy, anamathematizing also all those who teach of him a dyad of natures and energies after the union.

A second fragment of this letter adds:

It follows therefore from the one composite (as we have understood it) and theandric energy that of such a sort also is the nature and hypostasis which bears it [i.e. this energy], as it can have nothing in its energy which is contrary to its nature.

It should be carefully noted what Severus is here arguing. He is attempting to show that the adjective 'theandric' is not only applicable to the energy (as Dionysius had used the term), but also that it applies to the nature or hypostasis which bears the energy. Furthermore, because 'theandric' is the equivalent of 'composite', according to Severus, Dionysius' phrase expresses the traditional Cyrillic formula, 'one incarnate nature of God the Word'. The language which Severus here uses—

Franz Hippler, *Dionysius der Areopagita* (Regensburg, 1861), 163, was apparently the first to suggest a date around 510, but he offered no evidence for this contention. Stighmura, *Aufkommen*, 48 n. 1, cites the dating of Hippler, but does not seem eager to endorse it; in 1928 (Der sog. Dionysius Areopagita und Severus von Antiochen, *Scholastik*, 3 (1928), 177) he expressed still more hesitation as to the date. Hippler's suggestion (through Stighmura?) lies behind the references to 510 as a terminus a quo quem for the corpus: Gerard O'Tally, *Dionysius Areopagita*, *TRE* 8 (1981), 772; Hathaway, *Heraclius*, 4 n. 4, 35; John M. Rist, *In Search of the Divine Demi*, in *The Seed of Wisdom* (Toronto, 1963), 123; R. Roques, 'Denys le Pseudo-Ariopagite', *DBGE* 14 (1960), 267; idem, 'Denys l'Areopagite', *DS* 3 (1957), 249; Adolf Martin Ritter (ed.), *Über die Mystische Theologie und Brüste* (Stuttgart, 1934), 7 n. 19.


It is not known where Severus had already written about this matter. Perhaps in his first and second letters to John the Hegumen (no longer extant). If Severus had discussed this matter in works which were other than private, it is hard to imagine that they would have escaped the notice of Themistius (see above).

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'One composite nature and hypostasis' is extremely rare among the Monophysites. Indeed, according to Lebon, it is only in this passage that Severus uses it, the adjective 'composite' being more commonly applied to Christ or the incarnate Word. Severus is adamant that this is the proper interpretation of the Dionysian text: 'we have understood and do now understand', 'the meaning cannot be understood otherwise', and 'as we have understood it'. As Lebon has argued, given the whole tenor of this letter, as well as the extraordinary lengths to which Severus is going to reconcile this Dionysian passage with Monophysite Christological formulae, it must be concluded that Severus has offered this interpretation because his colleague and correspondent had reported to him a dyophysite interpretation of this Dionysian text, an interpretation which he was eager to rebut.

What then of the general nature of Severus' use of the works of Dionysius? It is indeed the case that Severus offers our earliest dated reference to the works of Dionysius. But this fact should not be allowed to overshadow the nature of his appeals to the corpus. Twice he had turned to Dionysius in his polemics against errant, fellow Monophysites. But even then, just a single Dionysian text was at issue. Once again, Severus, in a private letter to a fellow Monophysite, attempted to clarify the proper interpretation of a Dionysian passage, but the nature of his remarks suggests that he was responding indirectly to an earlier dyophysite interpretation of the passage. Nothing in these three appeals to the corpus permits the conclusion that Severus has pre-emptively seized upon the works of Dionysius and has employed them as a key element in his polemic against the Chalcedonians.

THE COLLATIO OF 532

The year 532 found Justinian actively engaged in the attempt to reconcile feuding Monophysites and Chalcedonians. Part of his plans was a meet-


If this is the correct interpretation of Severus' Third Epistle to John the Hegumen, it is interesting to examine his p. 22 (PO 12/12 214-15) in its light. This letter (written probably in 529 or 530) says that the Arians (i.e. the people of Jerusalem) have 'in a chancy fashion and by a new and very curious expression' named the 'trinity a threefold entity or the trinity of hypostases'. From the Syriac translation of the letter it is not entirely clear what this 'composite word' may have been in the Greek original. It is possible, however, that it represents the Greek adjective οὐρανοδενερας, a word popularized by Dionysius, if not, however, coined by him. This reading of the letter would suggest that Severus was on the offensive in his attempts to appropriate the authority of Dionysius.
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transcended every natural order entered into our nature while maintaining the unchanged and unconfused foundation of its own [things].

The Monophysites hoped to deduce from this passage two points. First, the union in Christ took place via composition: this is confirmed when Dionysius says that 'the simple Jesus became composite'. Secondly, God the Word joined with a complete human nature, pace Apollinaris: this Dionysius implies when he uses the adverb 'completely'.

The Monophysites go on to conclude that if God the Word became incarnate by joining to himself ensouled and rational human flesh which he made his own by joining with it in composition, then of necessity one must confess a single nature of God the Word.

So much for the opening fusillade of the Monophysites. When once the battle is joined and the Collatio opens, the arguments take a different turn. As the details of what transpired are recorded by Innocentius, Hypatius the metropolitan of Ephesus acted as the spokesman for the Chalcedonians. It should be emphasized that Hypatius was a strict dyophysite, along the lines of theologians such as Theodoret. Although he adhered to Chalcedon, he would have been rejected by the Chalcedonian avant-garde as a Nestorian, in large measure because of his rejection of the theopascite formula. For our purposes Innocentius' account of the second day of the Collatio is of primary concern. After summarizing the results of the previous day's discussion, Hypatius turns his attention to the proof-texts which the Monophysites had used to support their cause. Hypatius discusses these in some detail, at length suggesting that they had been forged by the heretical Apollinarians of old. When the Monophysites offer to verify them against ancient copies in the archives of Alexandria, Hypatius responds by claiming that because those archives had long been in Monophysite hands, their books could no longer be trusted. Finally Hypatius turns to the Dionysian proof-text.


19 The most important parts of this letter are preserved in the Chronicle of Pseudo-Zacharias of Mytilene, 9. 15 (tr. Hamilton/Brooks), 246–53, repr. by Freind, Rise of the Monophysite Movement, 362–5.

Those testimonies which you say are of the blessed Dionysius, how can you prove that they are authentic, as you claim? For if they are in fact by him, they would not have escaped the notice of the blessed Cyril. Why do I speak of the blessed Cyril, when he blessed Athanasius, if in fact he had thought them to be by Dionysius, would have offered these same testimonies concerning the consubstantial Trinity before all others at the council of Nicea against Arius' blasphemies of the diverse substance. But if none of the ancients made mention of them, I simply do not know how you can prove that they were written by Dionysius. 21

The impression that here emerges is that Hypatius is caught off-guard by the works of Dionysius. He devotes a great deal of attention to the other texts which the Monophysites had cited, whereas his response to the Dionysian passage contains not of theological examination or detailed historical criticism, but of simple statement that the Monophysites cannot prove these testimonies to be authentic. Moreover, it is only by implication that Hypatius can be said to class the Dionysian corpus among the heretical writings. His statements are directed against its historicity, not its orthodoxy. Hypatius even goes so far as to suggest that both Cyril and Athanasius would have used these works if they had known them. This implies that Hypatius must have been willing to grant the orthodoxy of at least certain parts of the corpus. Whatever Hypatius' final judgement on Dionysius may have been, we should be careful to maintain perspective on the relative weight that was given to Dionysius at the Collatio. 22 Neither party saw the debate to turn upon the witness of this supposed contemporary of the apostles. Of much greater importance were the other well-written proof-texts, those from Felix and Julius of Rome, Cyprian, Athanasius, and the Gregories.

THE RECEPTION OF DIONYSIUS IN THE SIXTH CENTURY

If now we turn to the larger questions of who was using the works of Dionysius in the sixth century and for what purpose, we shall see that it is impossible to maintain the thesis that the works of Dionysius were primarily being used by the Monophysites against the Chalcedonians. Representatives of just about every major Christological party in the early sixth century at some point appealed to the authority of Dionysius. We have already discussed Severus and the Collatio of 532: other Monophysites to appeal to the authority of Dionysius include Theodotus I (d. 568) and perhaps also Eumenius (fl. 539), as well as Themistius (fl. mid-sixth century), founder of the sect of the Agnoetes, and the Trithis, John Philoponus (wr. between 546 and 549). 23 As for the Chalcedonians, Leontius of Byzantium (d. c. 543), the patriarch Ephrem (stili 527–43), and Job the Monk (fl. mid-sixth century), all made explicit use of Dionysius. 24 Leontius of Jerusalem, probably writing between 538 and 544, betrays a knowledge of the Dionysian corpus in a number of passages, although he nowhere explicitly cites it. 25 Of later sixth-century Chalcedonians, Pamphilus gives Dionysius a place of relative importance in his theological arguments. 26 So also, Leontius the Scholastic, author of the De sectis, writing probably in the last quarter of century.


24 Ducetium subtilis (CCSG 30), qu. 2, 108–19 (cf. DN 1, 5, 7, qu. 3, 111–22 (DN 1, 4, 113, 4, 114, 1), qu. 11, 90–91 (DN 1, 2, 110–2, 40); cf. also qu. 10, 214–21 (DN 1, 2, 110, 3, 4, 6).
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126. 3–128. 7. Ephraim used the corpus against the Monophysites (DN 1. 4, 113. 6–12). The Monophysite Theodosiustus employed it in controversy with the Chalcedonians (DN 1. 4, 113. 6–12; 2. 6, 130. 5–11). Theimosius turned it against the Severians (EP 4, 161. 9). Other authors, such as John Philoponus, were attracted to historical references in the corpus, or like the Euthymian History (perhaps stemming from the sixth century), to its treatment of Mary. What objections were made to the authenticity of the Dionysian corpus? Hypatius is our only dissenting voice. But even the assertion that Hypatius rejected the Dionysian corpus should be nuanced, as we have argued. The more subtle indictment of the corpus, that it is tainted with the stain of pagan philosophy, is nowhere explicitly put forward in works to survive from the sixth century.22

Given the sheer volume of theological compositions produced in this time period—massive doctrinal syntheses on the part of both Chalcedonians and opponents of Chalcedon, polemical works of the utmost vigour, florilegia which tend to reach lengths of tedium—it is perhaps surprising that the works of a supposed contemporary of the apostles were not cited a great deal more than in fact they were. Indeed, the few appeals to Dionysius are almost inconsequential in comparison with the many thousands of times Athanasius, the Gregoryes, Cyril of Alexandria, or Basil the Great were introduced into the controversies of the first half of the sixth century. For this reason, one ought studiously to avoid conveying the impression that the works of Dionysius washed over the theological landscape of eastern Christianity and radically changed the way theology was being done. Far from it! Apart from John’s own work, one must search far and wide for any evidence that the works of Dionysius were being read at all.14

When John came to compose his Scholia between the years 332 and

14 See the fragment of the Euthymian History found in sect. 18 of the Sermon secundus in gloriam domini nostri Iesu Christi et spiritus sancti in honorem sanctae Theotokos (PG 66: 747–752). We follow Homiliani’s conclusion as to its date (’Jewish of Jerusalem’, DOF 5 (1950), 267–270, cf. M. Juge, Le Récit de l’histoire euthymiaque sur la mort et l’assomption de la Sainte Vierge’, EO 25 (1956), 385–392. This hagiographical text attempts to account for why the Virgin left no relics, along the way explaining that both Dionysius and Eusebius were present as witnesses of her dormition (DN 3. 2, 141. 4–14 is cited verbatim).

15 See further the discussion in Ch. 5.

16 To be sure, the peculiarly Dionysian lexicon, his idiosyncratic use of philosophical language—this we find seeping into the cracks and crevices of even the most unhistorical of theological writings throughout the course of the 6th cent.: e.g. the hagiographer Cyril of Scythopolis could not resist the temptation to use that distinctively Dionysian word leippeis (ed. Schwartz, 95. 5, 224. 10). Cf. Josef Stiglmayr, ‘Uber die Terminologie und die Kirchengeschichte’, ZKT 22 (1869), 67–77.
543, the Dionysian corpus had already begun to make its way on to the stage of sixth-century theological controversy, albeit in bits and pieces. But let us keep in mind the extent to which the Dionysian corpus was still an open question. Each of the major theological parties was beginning to take its stand on the way the text might be used, but none had yet established an interpretative framework such that questions about the proper interpretation of the Dionysian corpus were fixed and competing readings had to start from within this framework. There was certainly no Monophysite monopoly which needed to be broken. Let us also emphasize how close in time John’s comments stand to the earliest appearance of the Dionysian corpus in the Christian east. Ten or twenty years at most separate the earliest references to the corpus from the dates for John’s labours. John’s exquisitely detailed commentary thus offers modern scholars not only their most vivid evidence for the way the Dionysian corpus entered into the dogmatic controversies of the Christian east, but also insight into the very earliest stages of this process.

John of Scythopolis

Sources for an examination of John’s life are unfortunately quite meagre, consisting mostly of scattered comments in the theological and hagiographic works of John’s near contemporaries, as well as later encomiastic notices relating to his theological activities. From materials such as these it is quite impossible to derive more than an outline of John’s life. Furthermore, the vast majority of John’s theological works have not survived the corrosive effects of time. The loss of these works has greatly diminished our understanding of the first generation of Neo-Chalcedonian theology in Syro-Palestine. But judging from the praise of his supporters, the condemnation of his opponents, and the information garnered from those parts of his œuvre which do remain, John’s theological speculations were profound and his impact upon contemporaries significant. In this chapter we first examine the fragmentary evidence for the course of John’s career in general and then present his (largely lost) theological works. Following this we introduce John’s Scholia and Prologue to the works of Dionysius the Areopagite.

John’s Career

It is clear that in his activities as a theologian John made a noticeable impression upon his contemporaries and later theologians. Appeal can be made to the materials discussed in the second section of this chapter such as the use of his dogmatic works in later conciliar acts, the existence of at least one of his works in the patriarchal archives of Constantinople, the circulation of his works among contemporary theological opponents such as Basil of Cilicia and Severus of Antioch, as well as among later