

# THE EARLIEST SYRIAC RECEPTION OF DIONYSIUS<sup>1</sup>

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In this essay I trace the earliest Syriac reception of the *CD*, and hypothesize that this tradition allows us to move closer to the original text and context of the *CD* than does the parallel Greek reception centered around the figure of John of Scythopolis. In the first part of this essay, I introduce some of the problems that we face with the edition of the *CD* that was completed in John's circle, specifically the fact that this edition, in all likelihood, introduced significant changes into an already complicated text tradition and that John's scholia provided for the *CD* an orthodox interpretation that sufficed for posterity. In the second and third parts of this essay, I survey the earliest Syriac reception, which is comprised of three principal texts: Sergius of Reshaina's translation of the entire *CD* from Greek into Syriac; his lengthy Introduction to that translation; and a baffling treatise on mystical theology allegedly authored by Dionysius' own mysterious teacher, entitled *The Book of the Holy Hierotheus*. All three texts betray the influence of (what is often pejoratively labelled) "Origenism," a tradition or movement that, while long under suspicion and officially condemned in 553, survived and even flourished in sixth-century Syrian circles, especially among Syriac-speaking intellectuals. Despite its name, this movement owes much to Evagrius of Pontus, who developed a philosophically-founded spiritual doctrine out of Origen's speculations and a corresponding asceticism centered on the fight with evil thoughts. I argue that the early and enthusiastic reception of the *CD* among such Syriac-speaking Origenists as Sergius and the author of *The Book of Holy Hierotheus* suggests that the original author of the *CD*, whoever he was, also belonged to a similar, if not identical, milieu. One of the most important pieces of my argument is that we no longer have direct access to the original

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text of the *CD*, but only to these two early receptions, the Greek and the Syriac. And although neither preserves the original text and context in all details, I hypothesize that the earliest Syriac reception—replete with Origenistic influences—is a much more faithful, if indirect, witness to that original text and context than the Greek reception, which seems to obscure the overt Origenism of the author. I conclude this essay with some thoughts on how the original Origenism of the *CD* and its subsequent incorporation into orthodox tradition complicates our understanding of such categories as “orthodoxy” and “heresy” during this period.

### *The Earliest Greek Reception*

In order to understand the importance of the earliest Syriac reception of the *CD*, we must briefly recall what we know about its Greek text tradition. Salvatore Lilla<sup>2</sup>, Günther Heil<sup>3</sup>, and Beate Regina Suchla<sup>4</sup> agree that all the known Greek manuscripts derive from a single *editio variorum*, that is to say, a kind of late antique critical edition, which, somewhat later, was provided with commentaries. This *editio variorum* was completed in the circle of John, the first Greek commentator on the *CD* and bishop of Scythopolis in Palestine between approximately 536 and 548.<sup>5</sup>

It was John of Scythopolis whose introduction to and commentaries on the *CD* provided it its standard interpretation. When faced with particularly vexing passages, John gave questionable glosses, which then became the standard view. The fiction that the author was Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian judge who converted to Christianity upon hearing Paul’s famous speech from Acts 17, seems to be the cornerstone of the *CD*. This fiction, however, received in John’s hand even further elaboration, destined to become the standard tradition. Consider for example the famous story from *DN* 3.2, which is allegedly the author’s eyewitness account of the Dormition of Mary, the Mother of God, in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> The text, however, does not say anything like this. It only speaks about an event where “Dionysius,” “Timothy” the addressee of his treatises, “many of their holy brethren,” as well as “James the Brother-of-God” and “Peter, the coryphee and most venerable Head of the theologians,” as well as the author’s teacher, the “holy Hierotheus,” all “gathered together to contemplate the Body that is Principle-of-Life and Receiver-of-God.” After this contemplation, “it was judged just that all the high-priests celebrate, according to their capacities, the infinitely powerful Goodness of the weakness of the Principle-of-Divinity.”<sup>7</sup> In his commentary on this passage, John hazards a guess: “perhaps he [Dionysius] calls ‘Body that is Principle-of-Life and Receiver-of-God’ that of the holy Mother-of-God at her Dormition.”<sup>8</sup> From this hypothesis, however, grew the whole legend of Dionysius’ and Hierotheus’ presence at the Dormition, finally canonised in the service to Saint Dionysius on October 3 by Theophanes the Confessor.<sup>9</sup>

My reading of this text is that here "Dionysius" is not inventing a fictitious story but is encoding a real one; the gathering was that of bishops contemporary to "Dionysius," who are mentioned under pseudonyms, too, so that "James the Brother-of-God" should be the bishop of Jerusalem and "Peter," apparently adorned by the attributes of the "Apostolic See," the bishop of Rome,<sup>10</sup> while the contemplation of the Lifegiving and Godbearing Body is a concelebration of the Eucharist followed by the "celebration of the powerful Goodness of God's weakness," that is, a discussion on the Incarnation. So I believe that here Dionysius describes a council in which he took part, possibly the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>11</sup>

This example serves to illustrate how remote we are with John's edition from the original context of the *CD*. In fact, the Greek *editio variorum* from which all our manuscripts derive was already dealing with a scattered text tradition displaying an unrecoverably corrupt text.<sup>12</sup> If we take this evidence into account, we have to admit that when we speak about "Pseudo-Dionysius," or "Dionysius the Areopagite," or even the "*Corpus Dionysiacum*," we are not speaking about a person, who anyway eludes us, but about a relatively late reception of the original text, a reception that produced the *CD* as we know it and determined its interpretation, and that cannot be dated earlier than the mid-sixth century. We should also consider that we do not have any direct access to even this sixth-century reception of the Greek text. Our oldest Greek manuscripts of the *CD* were written in the ninth century during the second stage of the Iconoclast debate, when the "correct interpretation" of Dionysian theology was very much the order of the day.

### *The First Syriac Reception*

There exist three translations of the *CD* into Syriac: (1) that of Sergius of Reshaina (see below); (2) a thorough revision of Sergius' translation by Phocas bar Sargis completed in 684/686, to which Phocas applied different principles of translation and used as the basis for his revision of the contemporary Greek text, namely the commented edition of John of Scythopolis;<sup>13</sup> (3) an anonymous translation of the *Mystical Theology* only, made on the basis of the Latin translation of Ambrogio Traversari contained in three manuscripts of Indian origin. One might say that these three translations in four editions roughly represent four stages in the Syriac reception of the *Corpus*.

If we are to move closer to the original text and context of the *CD*, we have to leave the Greek-speaking world and turn our attention to the first stage, the earliest Syriac reception, for which the *terminus ante quem* is 536, the year the first translator into Syriac, Sergius of Reshaina, died in Constantinople. Sergius of Reshaina was a chief physician, Church politician, and translator of medical and philosophical texts. Besides the works of Dionysius, he translated several works of Galen, while some other translations, notably of Aristotle and Porphyry, are attributed to him without his authorship being

proven.<sup>14</sup> Sergius' translation is available in only one manuscript, written most probably in the second half of the sixth century or, at the latest, in the beginning of the seventh. So it is *the* earliest extant manuscript containing the *CD*.<sup>15</sup> In addition to his translation, Sergius prefaced his translation with an Introduction, in which he gives a summary of Dionysius' doctrine.<sup>16</sup>

### *Sergius' Introduction to the CD*

From the *Ecclesiastic History* of Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene, we learn that Sergius was a follower of Origen and belonged to the Origenist movement, which was very strong in the first half of the sixth century.<sup>17</sup> This is largely corroborated by Sergius' Introduction to the *CD*, which plainly identifies Dionysius' teaching with that of Evagrius of Pontus, the main authority of the Origenist movement, and interprets the former within the framework of the latter. Although Sergius, as he himself states, wrote the Introduction before starting the translation, he wrote it in good knowledge of Dionysius' writings, already using the vocabulary that he was going to employ in translating the Greek text.<sup>18</sup> In his Introduction Sergius first goes through the main stages of the spiritual life according to Evagrius. He describes the soul's original oneness in which it contemplates God and in which it exists as "pure mind,"<sup>19</sup> whence it falls and acquires the spirited and desiderative faculties of the soul, while its rational faculty is also darkened.<sup>20</sup> To heal the soul in its fallen state each one of its parts needs a remedy. The lower faculties, Sergius insists, should be purified by the "practice of the commandments,"<sup>21</sup> but the mind needs an ascending range of spiritual contemplations, which lead it back to its original state.<sup>22</sup> Sergius borrows the gnoseological structure of these contemplations from Evagrius.<sup>23</sup> They are:

- (1) "*natural science*" or "science of the virtues of the visible beings"; this is the quadrivium of geometry, arithmetics, astronomy and music.
- (2) whatever is above these sciences is called, "under a comprehensive name, spiritual contemplation or divine science"; this is the science of "the substances of the rational and intellectual<sup>24</sup> virtues." This higher contemplation consists of two parts:
  - (2a) "the one that concerns the states<sup>25</sup> that come from without through the free will and which extends to the rational beings"; this is called *second natural science*.
  - (2b) "the hidden and secret vision of the mind, which stretches itself up,<sup>26</sup> as far as it is capable and through a remote likeness received from these [rational beings], toward the ungraspable Ray<sup>27</sup> of the Substance ἰδέσθαι (*itūtō*)"; this is the vision that is "alone called *divine contemplation*".<sup>28</sup>

According to Sergius, this gnoseological structure determines the whole construction of the *CD*, which he presents in the following way:

All those things that are not permitted to communicate and all those that humans do not have the right to speak about, he [Dionysius] committed to his holy books in an elevated way and admirably, in one word, divinely. He exposed all the practice and fulfilment of the commandments and the immaculate purification of the soul in the treatise *On the interpretation of the mysteries of the Church*.<sup>29</sup> There he divinely taught how the mind is refined and purified and how it is clothed in all the power of virtue. In the treatise *On the symbolic expressions and on those that have been divinely composed from the visible natures* he wisely showed the exercise and investigation through the spiritual contemplation concerning the natural science, the one by which the mind begins contemplation. It is evident that in the treatise *On the hierarchy of the rational and intellectual powers*<sup>30</sup> he overtly taught about the spiritual contemplation and the science of the intelligible natures. Finally, in his *Compositions on theology* and in the treatise *On the interpretation of the divine names*<sup>31</sup> he divinely exposed the doctrine on the higher science and the lofty contemplation of the hidden Substance itself.<sup>32</sup>

This systematic ordering of the Dionysian treatises shows how consistently Sergius interpreted Dionysius in the light of Evagrian gnoseology. His exposition establishes the following connections between the Dionysian treatises and their Evagrian stages: *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* [EH]—*praktike*, ascetic and sacramental life; *The Symbolic Theology* [ST: lost]—natural science; *The Celestial Hierarchy* [CH]—second natural science, contemplation of the intelligibles; *The Theological Outlines* [TO: lost]<sup>33</sup>; and *The Divine Names* [DN]—“substantial knowledge.”

Apart from its Evagrian influence, one of the most remarkable features of Sergius' presentation of Dionysius' writings is that he does not distinguish between the “extant” treatises, those that comprise the CD as we now have it, and the so-called “lost” treatises, of which scattered mentions are made in the CD itself and which the majority of scholars consider to be purely fictitious.<sup>34</sup> For Sergius, however, these “lost” works constitute organic parts of the systematic doctrinal exposition that he credits to Dionysius. As Franz Mali has observed, it sounds as if Sergius were speaking in good knowledge of a much wider corpus, having indeed read the “lost” treatises too, although they were not included in the corpus that he translated into Syriac.<sup>35</sup> This might seem a far-fetched hypothesis, given that Sergius's descriptions of the “lost” works could derive from the scattered references to these works in the CD and not from his having had any direct access to them.<sup>36</sup> I do not know whether or not Sergius had indeed read these “lost” treatises; however, I do think that they were not “lost”, but simply published under *different* pseudonyms. In fact, I believe that I have discovered one of these so-called “lost” works: the *De trinitate*, a long and odd theological treatise that Mingarelli erroneously attributed to Didymus the Blind, is in fact, as I have argued

elsewhere, none other than the “lost” *Theological Outlines* of Dionysius.<sup>37</sup> I have collected further philological evidence for this identification, which I intend to publish soon.<sup>38</sup>

### *Sergius’ Syriac Translation*

Sergius’ translation contains the Dionysian treatises in a unique order, not echoed by any manuscript in the Greek text tradition. This is DN-CH-MT-EH-Ep. This ordering seems to mirror Sergius’ elaborate correspondences between the stages of the spiritual life and the Dionysian treatises, treated above. If we supplement it with the missing treatises that Sergius mentions in his Introduction to the *CD*, we get the following order: TO-DN-CH-ST-MT-EH-Ep.<sup>39</sup>

Sergius’ translation of the *CD* permits us to come somewhat closer to the original text than if we rely only on the Greek text from the circle of John of Scythopolis. First of all, I contend that the Greek text was still intact when it reached Sergius, so that a careful philological study of Sergius’ Syriac text will permit a critical reconstruction of the original Greek text. The kind of philological reconstruction I am proposing here is only possible, however, when the Syriac text is very close to our Greek text.<sup>40</sup> At other points the Syriac text seems to diverge substantially from our Greek text. While a certain number of such divergences can be attributed to Sergius’ rather free translation method, other divergences are, I believe, due to the fact that Sergius translated another, earlier, redaction of the same text. This seems to be quite obvious in the case of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, whose chapter structure in the Syriac is entirely different from the Greek. The extant Greek version contains seven chapters (an introduction on the concept of hierarchy and six chapters treating six sacraments, each chapter being subdivided into a description of the administration of the given sacrament and its theoretical/spiritual interpretation); the Syriac contains eighteen chapters with a more linear, less complicated structure, wherein chapter endings often do not correspond to any subdivision in the Greek text of the *EH*. Likewise, in certain instances when the logic of the Greek text is broken, even perturbed, the Syriac offers a perfect logic, consistent with other parts of the *CD*.<sup>41</sup> So too the Syriac contains word-for-word or free citations from Proclus where there is either no citation or a different citation in the Greek. A particularly striking instance of this is the chapter titles, which, in both the Greek and the Syriac, are modelled on the chapter titles of Proclus’ *Platonic Theology*. Although the Greek and Syriac chapters often differ, both sets of titles seem to go back independently to Proclus.<sup>42</sup> Where there are discernable traces of Origenist doctrines in the Greek, those influences are often much clearer in the Syriac.<sup>43</sup> All this gives the impression that the original Greek text, to which Sergius’ translation bears witness, was more openly Origenist, but that John and his circle subsequently softened these references in order to make the *CD* more

palatable to orthodox readers. The most astonishing feature of the Syriac, and one that suggests that it reflects an earlier version of the *CD*, is that, in contrast to the Greek, it is clear and comprehensible, an observation already noted by Sebastian Brock.<sup>44</sup>

### *The Book of the Holy Hierotheus*

Another witness to the earliest Syriac reception of the *CD* is the *Book of the Holy Hierotheus* (henceforward *Hierotheus*),<sup>45</sup> probably written by Stephen Bar Sudhaili, a Syrian monk active at the beginning of the sixth century and (in)famous for his Origenism.<sup>46</sup> Whoever the author may have been, he writes under the name of Hierotheus, whom Dionysius at several points in the *CD* names as his teacher and initiator into the divine mysteries. A Syriac legend elaborates on the connection between these two figures and their writings: Dionysius in fact asked Hierotheus to write this book and then wrote the *CD* as a kind of exoteric commentary thereon: "And when the holy Dionysius had read in this book, it was as holy leaven in his heart; its mystery he concealed, (but) its glory and sublimity he revealed".<sup>47</sup>

*Hierotheus* offers a unique and radical mystical theology that describes the descent of the "divine Minds" from their original unity and their ascent to final union with God in the uncreated divine Substance, where all duality disappears. This spiritual internalisation of the "Origenist myth" is as complicated as it is bold, and is particularly challenging to any interpretative effort. *Hierotheus* is probably contemporary to Sergius' translation, and constitutes a radical rethinking of the *CD* in terms of Origenistic theology.

Whoever he was, the author of *Hierotheus* seems to have known Sergius' Syriac translation of the *CD*: he draws on Sergius' peculiar vocabulary throughout.<sup>48</sup> In my view, the only way to clarify the obscurities of *Hierotheus* and Sergius' translation of the *CD* would be to establish the precise correspondences between their theological lexicons and to interpret the former in light of the latter.<sup>49</sup> But this would be an enormous labor, prior to which we can hazard some hypotheses regarding the relationship between the two. It is possible that the author of *Hierotheus* was among the first to have read Sergius' translation and to use it in his own speculations.<sup>50</sup> It is also possible that both works emerge from one and the same milieu, perhaps a school of Syriac-speaking Origenists, and that their authors knew each other's work. If the author of *Hierotheus* is indeed Stephen Bar Sudhaili, as both ancient West Syrian and modern authors agree, it is entirely possible that the two contemporary Syrian Origenists might have known each other personally. There is an odd and intriguing reference in Sergius' Introduction:

As to our brother, Mor<sup>51</sup> Stephen, who was, from all his soul and all his will, a prompt attendant for the translation of this book, let Christ, the

King of the worlds, deem him worthy of the Ray of His Glory, so that he [Stephen], through the New Life, becomes one with It [the Ray] and remains without motion eternally!<sup>52</sup>

This prayer is remarkable for several reasons, first and foremost for its concise Origenist doctrine. Christ is called here “the King of the worlds” (in plural), a favorite Christological title of Evagrius, who holds that after the first Motion of the rational beings Christ created variegated worlds for housing the fallen minds according to their estates.<sup>53</sup> The final bliss that Sergius requests for Stephen is defined as a unification, through the intermediary of the New Life—a standard expression in Syriac for the Resurrection—with the Ray of Christ’s Glory, or the Substantial Ray, that is, His Divinity, and as an eternal return to the original motionless contemplation in the Unity. It seems that Sergius the Origenist is wishing for this apocatastatic state for the sake of a fellow-Origenist who, moreover, had been his helper in the translation of the *CD*. It is tempting to identify this Mor Stephen with Stephen Bar Sudhaili, whom many believe to have authored the *Book of the Holy Hierotheus*. This hypothesis would give a plausible explanation for the shared vocabulary between the Syriac *CD* and *Hierotheus*: the former could have been a joint work of Sergius and his (most probably younger) “attendant”, whom I am tempted to identify as Stephen Bar Sudhaili.<sup>54</sup>

### *Conclusions*

The earliest Syriac reception of the *CD* is comprised of three parts: (1) Sergius’ translation of the *CD* from Greek to Syriac; (2) his Introduction to that translation; and (3) *The Book of Holy Hierotheus*, probably by Stephen bar Sudhaili, who seems to have known both (1) and (2), and perhaps even helped Sergius to prepare both. The earliest Syriac reception is significant not only because it parallels, but also *antedates* the Greek reception. Furthermore, as I have argued, the earliest Syriac readers and translators were using a different, earlier, redaction of the *CD* than the one issuing from the circle of John of Scythopolis. Through the earliest Syriac reception, then, we can have indirect access to an earlier version of the *CD*, prior to the *editio variorum* of John of Scythopolis and his glosses. At the very least, this fact should give us caution when we speak about “Dionysius” or “Pseudo-Dionysius,” and imagine some monk sitting in a hidden monastery and writing under divine inspiration, or a disguised Neoplatonist philosopher clothing in a “Christian garb” his commitment to the pagan Proclus’ philosophy. Of course there must have existed a real person who wrote the original version of the four treatises and ten letters, but we have no direct access either to this person, whose identity remains obscure, or to his original writings, whose original Greek text was apparently lost. The original author and his original work can still be per-

ceived but, in a very Dionysian way, only through the “veils” of the different redactions, receptions and adaptations, which all have assimilated the original thought to their own milieus and times. I am convinced, however, that from all those veils the thinnest and the most transparent is precisely the first, that is, the earliest Syriac reception.

One of the most conspicuous features of the earliest Syriac reception of the *CD* is that the relevant characters were all dedicated to a specific tradition or movement that many of their contemporaries pejoratively labelled “Origenism” and regarded as a heresy. The most interesting question is whether this is a coincidence or whether it indicates the original provenance of the *CD* and its author. One way of addressing this question is to examine the extant Greek text for traces of Origenist doctrines. Another way is to compare Sergius’ Syriac translation with the extant Greek at those places where the two substantially and meaningfully diverge and to hazard hypotheses as to how the putative text of the *first redaction* was altered in the *second redaction*. My research inclines me to believe that the abundant Origenism evident in Sergius’ Introduction and translation is not entirely his own, but rather testifies to the fact that the author of the *CD*, whoever he was, must also have belonged to an Origenist milieu.

Furthermore, I believe that this explains why the *CD* was so enthusiastically received by Syriac-speaking Origenists in the sixth century: it did not have far to go. After its first condemnation in 400 in Alexandria and Rome and before its ecumenical condemnation in 553 in Constantinople, Origenism was a semi-clandestine underground movement, forbidden but widely tolerated,<sup>55</sup> a situation conducive to diverse writing techniques used to preserve the *disciplina arcani* and to avoid censorship. I am inclined to believe that the original *CD* was never meant to be widely read but was instead produced for a select, esoteric audience of Origenists. According to this reconstruction, it was John of Scythopolis and his circle who wished to produce an edition for a wider, exoteric readership, and so had to alter or simply explain away troublesome passages. In other words a new, second “veil” had to be put before the “light” of the Dionysian discourse, in addition to the first one constituted by the original Dionysian pseudonym. If intellectuals belonging to the Origenist movement, such as Sergius and the author of *Hierotheus* (presumably Stephen) had access to an earlier version of the *CD*, perhaps that was because they were insiders. And if the earliest Syriac reception reflects the original *CD* more accurately, this may be because Syriac itself served as a sort of veil, protecting the original from censorship, to which the Greek text was more exposed. Once again, one way to check this reconstruction is to examine the Greek reception of the *CD* and see whether there were persons who knew about an earlier version and commented upon it. It seems that there were such persons, the most important of whom is John of Schythopolis, who, living in the midst of the “Second Origenist Controversy”, was perfectly aware of the possibility of an Origenist interpretation of certain

passages, as evidenced in his scholia both by his careful denial of such an interpretation in some instances, and by his habit of reintroducing such an interpretation in other instances.

Be this as it may, the recognition of the Origenism of the *CD* is a puzzling fact, for here we have a “heretical” body of literature that has exerted a tremendous influence on “orthodox” tradition. With the Origenism of the *CD*, then, we are facing the borderlines of the categories of “orthodoxy” and “heresy.” The *CD* is another instance in a mounting body of evidence that demonstrates how elements from this specific “heresy” survived—even flourished—in the “orthodox” fold.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps we need to shift our focus from figures (who was or was not a “heretic”?) to specific doctrines, and inquire which elements in the system disparagingly called “Origenism” were rejected and which were incorporated into the orthodox tradition. While the ecumenical condemnations focus on a mythical-metaphysical system labelled “Origenism” that was apparently in circulation in the sixth century, the “Origenists” whom we encounter, Sergius and Stephen included, are more concerned with the ascetic life and the inner contemplation of the soul. This spiritual element of “Origenism” was never condemned; instead, it was warmly welcomed and enthusiastically incorporated into orthodox tradition. The *CD*—in its second edition, to which generations of theologians appended the appropriate commentaries—was one of the main vehicles of this incorporation. “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15).

#### NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to Mr. Emiliano Fiori for his careful reading of and remarks on several drafts of the present article.
- 2 S. Lilla, “Ricerche sulla tradizione manoscritta del *De divinis nominibus* dello Pseudo Dionigi l’Areopagita”, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa [ASNSP]*, Serie II 34 (1965); idem, “Osservazioni sul testo del *De divinis nominibus* dello Ps. Dionigi l’Areopagita”, *ASNSP*, Serie III 10 (1980). See also idem, “Zur neuen kritischen Ausgabe der Schrift *Über die Göttlichen Namen* von Ps. Dionysius Areopagita”, *Augustinianum*, XXXI/2 (1991), pp. 424–426.
- 3 R. Roques, G. Heil, M. de Gandillac, *Denys l’Aréopagite*, Sources Chrétiennes 58, 58<sup>bis</sup> (Paris: Cerf, 1958<sup>1</sup>, 1970<sup>2</sup>), here pp. 42–48.
- 4 B. R. Suchla, “Die sogenannten Maximus-Scholien des Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum”, *NAWG* (1980/3), pp. 31–66; idem., “Die Überlieferung des Prologs des Johannes von Skythopolis zum griechischen Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum. Ein weiterer Beitrag zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des *CD*”, *NAWG* (1984/4), pp. 177–188; idem., “Eine Redaktion des griechischen Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum im Umkreis des Johannes von Skythopolis, des Verfassers von Prolog und Scholien. Ein dritter Beitrag zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des *CD*”, *NAWG*, (1985/4) pp. 179–194; idem., “Die Überlieferung von Prolog und Scholien des Johannes von Scythopolis zum griechischen Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum”, in *Studia Patristica*, 18/2 (1989), pp. 79–83; idem (ed), *Corpus Dionysiacum I. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagit: De divinis nominibus*, PTS 33 (Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), pp. 36–64.
- 5 For John of Scythopolis’ dates see B. Flusin, *Miracle et histoire dans l’oeuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1983), pp. 20–21; P. Rorem and J. C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian corpus: annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 26–27.

- 6 DN 3.2, 681 CD, p. 141, ll. 4–14.
- 7 For understanding the Pauline allusions see 1 Cor. 15:43, 2 Cor. 12:9, 2 Cor. 13:4, Heb. 5:2—the weakness is that of the earthly body, the strength is that of the Divinity, so that the “weakness of the Principle-of-Divinity” is God’s Incarnation. This precisely is also the interpretation given by John of Scythopolis, see his scholion *ad locum*: PG 4, 236 C–237 B.
- 8 PG 4, 236 BC.
- 9 For a vivid and accurate description of how Dionysius was handled by the Iconoclasts and the Iconodules and the circumstances of the composition of Theophanes’ canon, see A. Louth, “Saint Denys the Areopagite and the Iconoclast Controversy” in Y. de Andia (ed), *Denys l’Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident. Actes du Colloque International; Paris, 21–24 septembre 1994* (Paris: Institut des Etudes Augustiniennes, 1997), pp. 329–339, especially 337–339.
- 10 Of course, Peter could also be the bishop of Antioch, but the vocabulary used indicates Rome, in my view.
- 11 If “Dionysius” was present in Chalcedon in the company of his bishop, “Hierotheus,” this means that the Corpus could not have been written much later than twenty or thirty years after, that is, in the 470s, 480s. This slightly contradicts the triple *terminus a quo* established by previous scholarship (the death of Proclus in 485, the Henoticon of Zeno in 482, and the introduction of the Creed into the liturgy by Peter the Fuller in 474). As P. Rorem and J. C. Lamoreaux judiciously note, none of these time barriers can be firmly fixed (P. Rorem and J. C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, pp. 9–10). If it is indeed Chalcedon, “Peter” was present speaking through the *Tome* of Pope Leo, as those present have acknowledged this in fact, and “James,” that is, the Apostolic founder of the see of Jerusalem, in the person of Juvenalius.
- 12 B. R. Suchla, *Corpus Dionysiacum I*, pp. 55–57, 65–66; S. Lilla, “Osservazioni sul testo del *De divinis nominibus* dello Ps. Dionigi l’Areopagita”, p. 196; idem, “Zur neuen kritischen Ausgabe der Schrift *Über die Göttlichen Namen* von Ps. Dionysius Areopagita”, p. 438.
- 13 There is also a second edition of Phocas’ translation, which combines the latter with the Introduction of Sergius of Reshaina and places John’s scholia within the text—this was completed in 766/7 by Cyriacus bar Shamona in Mosul. On these translations see J.-M. Hornus, “Le Corpus dionysien en syriaque”, *Parole de l’Orient*, 1 (1970), pp. 69–93; G. Wießner, “Zur Handschriftenüberlieferung der syrischen Fassung des Corpus Dionysiacum”, NAWG (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972) pp. 3–42.
- 14 See S. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Kottayam: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1997), p. 43, and also Henri Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d’Aristote du grec au syriaque: études sur la transmission des textes de l’Organon et leur interprétation philosophique* (Paris: Vrin, 2004). Although A. Guillaumont put forward the hypothesis that the Syriac translation of the untampered Greek text of Evagrius of Pontus’ *Kephalaia Gnostica* (S<sub>2</sub>) is also by Sergius, a comparative analysis of the translation methods of Sergius and the author of S<sub>2</sub> does not confirm this hypothesis.
- 15 The main part of the manuscript is contained in *Sinai Syriacus 52*, from which the beginning of the first part of the Divine Names and Letters 6–10 are missing because of the truncation of the beginning and of the end. It was hypothetically identified as containing Sergius’ translation by Dom P. Sherwood and Jean-Michel Hornus in P. Sherwood, “Sergius of Reshaina and the Syriac versions of the Pseudo-Denis”, *Sacris Erudiri*, 4 (1952), pp. 174–183, and J.-M. Hornus, “Le Corpus dionysien en syriaque”, *Parole de l’Orient*, 1 (1970), pp. 69–93. Some fragments from the damaged end of the manuscript were found in 1975 in the Monastery and were edited by Sebastian Brock in his *Catalogue of Syriac Fragments (New Finds) in the Library of the Monastery of Saint Catherine, Mount Sinai* (Athens: St Catherine’s Monastery-Mount Sinai Foundation, 1995), pp. 101–105. More recently, Mathias Quaschnig-Kirsch and myself, independently of each other, identified a part of a miscellaneous Paris manuscript BN. *Syriacus 378* (ff. 42–54) as containing part of the missing beginning of the Sinai manuscript. This fragment contains the second half of Sergius’ Introduction and the missing beginning of DN I. See M. Quaschnig-Kirsch, “Eine weiterer Textzeuge für die syrische Version des Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum: Paris B.N. Syr. 378”, *Le Muséon*, 113/1–2 (2000), pp. 115–124, and I. Perczel, “Sergius of Reshaina’s Syriac Translation of the *Dionysian Corpus*: Some Preliminary Remarks”, in C. Baffioni (ed), *La diffusione dell’eredità classica nell’età tardo-antica e medievale. Filologia, storia, dottrina* (Alessan-

- dria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2000), pp. 79–94. This identification has also provided the definitive proof for the attribution of the text in the Sinai manuscript, confirming Sherwood's hypothesis. Finally, Paul Géhin found another separate leaf from the same manuscript in the Ambrosianum in Milano (*A 296 inf. f. 86*), belonging just before the beginning of the Paris MS. See P. Géhin, "Manuscrits syriaïques dispersés I : les fragments syriaïques et arabes de Paris", *Oriens Christianus*, 90, 2006, pp. 23–43.
- 16 The Introduction was published in P. Sherwood, "Mimro de Serge de Rešayna sur la vie spirituelle", *L'Orient Syrien*, 5 (1960), pp. 433–457 and 6 (1961), pp. 95–115, 121–156. The newly identified Paris manuscript contains the second half of Sergius' Introduction, beginning with Chapter LXIV in the edition of Sherwood. My translations in what follows will often diverge from the French translation of Sherwood.
- 17 Ps.-Zachariah Rhetor, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 8.5, in F. J. Hamilton and E. W. Brooks (trans.), *The Chronicle known as that of Zachariah of Mytilene* (London: Methuen & Co., 1899), pp. 266–268.
- 18 It is noteworthy that Sergius' Evagriian interpretation of Dionysius' doctrine does not contain the so-called Origenist myth, namely a consistent cosmological myth about the pre-existence of the souls as incorporeal minds in a unique created substance and their final restoration into the same state, a doctrine that was going to be condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553. While the interpretation that Sergius provides is perfectly compatible with the "myth," it contains none of the doctrines that were later condemned.
- 19 Sergius, Introduction, Chap. LXXII-LXXIII, Sherwood (1961), pp. 112–115, BN Syr. 384, f. 44r<sup>v</sup>: "[The soul in this state] is entirely mind and luminous intellect that receives, just as a pure mirror, the imprint of the character of its Maker."
- 20 *Ibid.*, One might say that this is Sergius' gnoseological interpretation of the so-called Origenist myth.
- 21 *Ibid.*, Chap. LXXV-LXXVI, Sherwood (1961), pp. 114–115, BN Syr. 384, f. 44v<sup>o</sup>.
- 22 *Ibid.*, Chap. LXXVI-LXXVIII, Sherwood (1961), pp. 122–123, BN Syr. 384, f. 44v<sup>o</sup>-45r<sup>o</sup>.
- 23 *Ibid.*, Chap. LXXXI, Sherwood (1961), pp. 124–125, BN Syr. 384, f. 45v<sup>o</sup>. In a study published in 1999, I proposed that the Evagriian gnoseological structure was to be considered the clue for Dionysius' doctrine (I. Perczel, "Une théologie de la lumière: Denys l'Aréopagite et Evagre le Pontique", *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes*, 45/1 (1999), pp. 79–120. I wrote that study before reading Sergius' Introduction.
- 24 "Intellectual": in Syriac ܠܘܚܘܢܐ *rukho*, meaning literally "spiritual". In Sergius' translation of Dionysius this is one of Sergius' standard translations for νοερός that is, "intellectual".
- 25 "States": in Syriac ܠܘܚܘܢܐ *zaw'e*, meaning literally "motions". This is Sergius' standard translation for ἔξεις, that is, "habits", "states". Sergius speaks here of the different ranks of the rational beings, namely angelic ranks, human and demonic states, which, according to the Origenist doctrine, are the consequences of the acts of free will of the rational creatures.
- 26 "Stretches itself up": in Syriac ܠܘܚܘܢܐ *metmatkho*. This is Sergius' standard translation for the Greek ἀνατείνω, "to tend toward something higher".
- 27 "Ray": in Syriac ܠܘܚܘܢܐ *semkho*. This is one of Sergius' standard translations for the Greek ὄκτις.
- 28 It is worth noting that in Sergius' interpretation the *second natural science* relating to the actual states of the rational beings examines their present states, that is, their angelic, human and demoniac hierarchies, not as resulting from their original creation, but as resulting from their acts of free will preceding their incorporation in their present states. If one re-reads the *Hierarchies* in this light, even in their presently available Greek text, one may find out that, notwithstanding the present consensus, this is the real doctrine exposed therein. It is also noteworthy that the final unifying knowledge is obtained via an elevation going through the remote likenesses offered by the rational beings toward the Divine Ray—here called "the Ray of the Substance"—which is to be identified with Jesus in His divine nature, being the condescending manifestation of the Father, who is represented here and in the Corpus by the solar disc being the Source of the Ray (See Perczel, "Une théologie de la lumière", pp. 79–89). One may finally remark the positive, even "substantial" language replacing here the famous extreme Dionysian apophatism; in fact, on the one hand, Sergius is careful to establish the equivalence between the Dionysian "knowledge through ignorance" and the Evagriian "substantial knowledge" (Sergius, Introduction, Chap. LXXX, Sherwood (1961), pp. 124–125, BN Syr. 384, f. 45v<sup>o</sup>) and, on the other hand, in Sergius' translation, instead of some apophatic expression or, simply, of "God" or "divine", many times one finds the terms "Substance", "substantial", either having no

- equivalent in the Greek Dionysius, or translating a number of terms, such as ὑπαρξις (“existence”) or Χρημα (“reality”).
- 29 This is, obviously, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Finally, Sergius adopted a different, much more complicated, translation for the title of this treatise: “On the Order of High-Priesthood that is Followed in the Tradition of the Holy Church” (Sin Syr. 52, f. 80<sup>o</sup>).
- 30 This is the *Celestial Hierarchy*. Sergius’ translation of the title in Dionysius’ text is: “On the Heavenly High-Priesthood.”
- 31 This is the *Divine Names*. Sergius’ translation of the title in Dionysius’ text is: “On the Divine Names” (BN 378, f. 53<sup>o</sup>).
- 32 *Ibid.*, Chap. CXVI-CXVII, Sherwood (1961), pp. 148–149, BN Syr. 384, f. 51<sup>v</sup>–52<sup>r</sup>.
- 33 See BN 378, 53<sup>r</sup>, Syn. Syr. 52, 1<sup>r</sup>, 3<sup>v</sup>, 4<sup>v</sup>, 6<sup>v</sup> etc. In fact the Syriac expression for “Compositions on Theology” is precisely the way Sergius translates the Greek title *Theologikai hypotyposesis*. This has been observed by Emiliano Fiori both in his MA thesis and in a letter to the author, dated 21.01.2008.
- 34 There remains another odd feature of Sergius’ presentation of the Dionysian system, namely that while he includes two of the “lost” treatises, he omits one of the extant treatises, namely the *Mystical Theology* (E. Fiori treated this question in his MA thesis). While it is difficult to give a compelling explanation for this striking omission, here I want to forward the hypothesis that this omission is due to the fact that the apophatic method endorsed by the *MT* did not fit into Sergius’ system advocating positive theology, so that he was unable or unwilling to establish any correspondence between the *MT* and one of the stages of the contemplative life. As we shall see, the way he treated the *MT* within the Dionysian system and the manner he handled apophatic expressions in his translation confirm this hypothesis. This self-distancing from the Neoplatonist apophatic method seems to characterise other sixth-century Origenist works, too, such as the treatises of Leontius of Byzantium and the Pseudo-Caesarius. For Leontius and Dionysius see D. B. Evans, “Leontius of Byzantium and Dionysius the Areopagite”, *Byzantine Studies/Etudes Byzantines*, 7 (1980), pp. 1–34, and I. Perczel, “Once Again on Dionysius the Areopagite and Leontius of Byzantium”, in T. Boiadjev, G. Kapriev and A. Speer (eds), *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 41–85; on Pseudo-Caesarius see idem, “Finding a Place for the *Erotapokriseis* of Pseudo-Caesarius: A New Document of Sixth-century Palestinian Origenism”, in Shafiq Abuzayd (ed.), *Palestinian Christianity: Pilgrimages and Shrines*, ARAM Periodical 18–19 (2006–2007), pp. 49–83.
- 35 See Franz Mali, “Hat die Schrift *De symbolica theologia* von Dionysius Ps.-Areopagita gegeben? Anmerkungen zu den Nachrichten des Sergius von Rēs’ainā über Dionysius Ps.-Areopagita” in M. Tamcke (ed.), *Syriaca. Zur Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirche* 2. Deutsches Syrologen-Symposium (Juli 2000, Wittenberg) (Hamburg: Lit, 2002), pp. 213–224.
- 36 It is in this sense that Emiliano Fiori criticised Mali’s conclusions in his MA thesis (cited above, n. 21).
- 37 See I. Perczel, “Denys l’Aréopagite, lecteur d’Origène”, in W. A. Bienert and U. Kühneweg (eds), *Origeniana Septima. Origenes in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 1999) pp. 673–710, here pp. 690–702.
- 38 The connection between the *CD* and the *De Trinitate/Theological Outlines* is most easily established by the fact that, often, both works draw on the same passages from the same works of Proclus, some of the very passages that early twentieth-century scholars used to prove the pseudonymous character of the *CD*.
- 39 The fact that Sergius inserted *MT* after the *Symbolic Theology* shows that he treated it as having no other organic part in the spiritual education than being a summary of the treatises on contemplation, which it indeed is according to the treatment of the theological method given in chapter 3 of the *MT*.
- 40 I have attempted such a reconstruction, combined with other methods, of a particular Dionysian text in I. Perczel, “The Christology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite: The *Fourth Letter* in its Indirect and Direct Text Traditions”, *Le Muséon*, 117/3–4 (2004), pp. 409–446.
- 41 I have analysed one such passage, also trying to establish a valid methodology for studying Sergius’ Syriac text in Perczel, “Sergius of Reshaina” Syriac Translation of the *Dionysian Corpus*, pp. 79–94. Whatever I published on Sergius’ translation before that study displays

- a very imperfect methodology, which had led me to a number of errors, which I now regret. I believe, however, that with this study I was able to lay down a sound methodological basis for further investigations.
- 42 For such cases see I. Perczel, "Denys l'Aréopagite, lecteur d'Origène", pp. 687–689 and id., "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Platonic Theology", in A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel (eds), *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne* (Leuven and Paris: Leuven University Press and «Les Belles Lettres», 2000), pp. 491–532, here (on the chapter titles), pp. 497–500.
  - 43 For such cases see I. Perczel, "Denys l'Aréopagite, lecteur d'Origène", pp. 685–702, although with a number of regrettable philological errors, and, principally, id., "Pseudo-Dionysius and Palestinian Origenism", in Joseph Patrich (ed) *The Sabbate Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 261–282; here pp. 267–270 and 276–279.
  - 44 "Sergius' translation [...] is much more readily understandable than the difficult Greek original" (S. Brock, *Spirituality in Syriac Tradition* (Kottayam, Kerala: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1989), p. 30).
  - 45 Fred Shipley Marsh (ed and trans), *The Book of the Holy Hierotheos, Ascribed to Stephen Bar-Sudhailé (c500 A.D.), with Extracts from the Prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosios of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and Other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebraeus*, Syriac Texts, Edited from Manuscripts in the British Museum and the Harvard Semitic Museum, Translated and Annotated, with an Introduction and Indexes (London: Text and Translation Society, 1927, reprint Amsterdam: Apa-Philo Press, 1979). For studying this work, its rootedness in and influence upon the Syriac tradition, the recent monograph of Karl Pinggéra, *All-Erlösung und All-Einheit: Studien zum "Buch des Heiligen Hierotheos" und seiner Rezeption in der syrisch-orthodoxen Theologie* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2002), is very useful.
  - 46 Bar Sudhailé's authorship of "Hierotheus" is assumed by John of Dara and Gregory Bar Hebraeus. It is also rendered probable by many similarities between "Hierotheus'" text and the theses that Philoxenus of Mabbugh, who personally knew Bar Sudhailé, attributed to the latter. This identification was first proposed in modern scholarship by A. L. Frothingham Jr., *Stephen Bar Sudhailé, the Syrian Mystic (c500 A. D.) and "The Book of Hierotheos" on the Hidden Treasures of the Divinity* (Leyden 1886, reprint Amsterdam: Apa-Philo Press, 1981), pp. 63–68, and then by Marsh, *The Book of the Holy Hierotheos*, pp. 227–232. See also I. Hausherr, "L'influence du «Livre de saint Hiérophée»" in id., *De doctrina spirituali christianorum orientaliū*, IV, *Orientalia Christiana*, 30 (1933), pp. 176–211, and A. Guillaumont, *Les "Képhalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens* (Paris: Seuil 1962), pp. 311–318. The most comprehensive modern discussion of this question can be found in Pinggéra, pp. 7–26.
  - 47 Marsh, p. 135\*–136\* (Syriac text), p. 150 (translation). "The story of the Holy Hierotheus" is incorporated into the commentary upon "Hierotheus" written by Theodosios Romanus of Takrit, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch (887–896), but, according to Marsh, is an earlier text.
  - 48 A detailed demonstration of this relationship is yet to be published.
  - 49 Some concrete examples for this method and its application can be found in I. Perczel, "A Philosophical Myth in the Service of Religious Apologetics: Manichees and Origenists in the Sixth Century", in Y. Schwartz and V. Krech (eds), *Religious Apologetics—Philosophical Argumentation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 205–236, here pp. 228–234.
  - 50 The recent hypothesis of R. T. Arthur is that Bar Sudhailé's work would be primary to that of Dionysius, whose Corpus would be a reply to Bar Sudhailé—see R. T. Arthur, "A Sixth-Century Origenist: Stephen bar Sudhailé and his Relationship with Ps-Dionysius", *Studia Patristica*, 35 (2001), pp. 368–373, and idem, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth Century Syria* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). I cannot accept this view for a host of reasons, philological, doctrinal and chronological.
  - 51 "Mor" is an honorific title before the names of saints or ecclesiastic authorities, most often of bishops. Here, however, Mor Stephen is called "our brother" and an "attendant" to the translation, which indicates that Mor Stephen fulfilled a lower ecclesiastic task than that of a bishop. A scribe of Sergius' Introduction also gave the same title "Mor" to Sergius himself, who was a simple priest, in Chap. CXXIV, BN 378, f. 52v°.
  - 52 Sergius, Introduction, Chap. CXXIII, Sherwood (1961), pp. 152–153, BN Syr. 384, f. 52v°.

- 53 See, for example, Evagrius of Pontus, KG II.2: "In the second natural contemplation we see the wisdom full of variety of Christ, which he used when he created the worlds; and in the science concerning the rational beings, He has taught us about Himself."
- 54 Once again, this hypothesis was originally proposed by Franz Mali in his study referred to above, in note 35.
- 55 I cannot give detailed references here; at present I am working on a monograph reconstructing (on the basis of the available documents) the history of semi-clandestine Origenism in the fifth-sixth centuries.
- 56 See the converging research done by Gabriel Bunge and others on Evagrius, David Evans on Leontius of Byzantium, Samuel Rubenson on Saint Antony, and György Heidl on Saint Augustine.

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