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THE ACTS OF JOHN WITHIN THE JOHANNINE CORPUS

James W. Barker

This essay reassesses the place of the Acts of John among other Johannine literature. Although the Gospel, three epistles, and Apocalypse were eventually deemed canonical, contemporary scholarship typically treats Revelation separately. Based on patristic testimony and manuscript materiality, I contend that not only the Apocalypse but also the Acts of John should be (re)incorporated alongside the Gospel and Epistles. Charles E. Hill has argued persuasively that the proto-orthodox were unafraid of the Fourth Gospel, despite its popularity among heterodox and heretical groups. I extend the same argument to the Acts of John.

Introduction

At national and international meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, ‘Johannine literature’ means the Gospel and Epistles, but not the Apocalypse. The introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies* also limits Johannine literature to the Gospel and Epistles;¹ the Acts, Apocalypse, and Apocryphon are expressly excluded.² The authorship of all these works has been questioned from the patristic era to the present, so I find it unhelpful to exclude self-titled Johannine works just because they came from different authors; even the Gospel and Epistles likely had different authors. ‘Johannine literature’ should simply denote texts traditionally associated with the Apostle John, including the Gospel, three letters, and the Apocalypse, as well as the Acts of John along with the Apocryphon.³

It is a privilege to dedicate this work to Charles E. Hill. I first wrote to Chuck in 2010, and he graciously took an interest in my work. He continually supported me while I was a junior scholar, and I am immensely grateful for his friendship. While I’m on the subject of kind support from fellow scholars, I sincerely thank Stephen Carlson, Jennifer Knust, Hugo Méndez, Brent Nongbri, and Janet Spittler for very helpful feedback on various parts of this essay.

¹ Judith M. Lieu and Martinus de Boer, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, ed. Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. de Boer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–4, 1.

² Lieu and de Boer, “Introduction,” 2.

³ I admittedly devote too little attention to the Apocryphon of John, but I highly recommend John D. Turner, “The Johannine Legacy: The Gospel and *Apocryphon* of John,” in *The Legacy of John: Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Tuomas Rasimus, *NovTSup* 132 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 105–144. I concur with Turner that the Apocryphon was “in part intended as a concluding sequel to the Fourth Gospel” (p. 105), but that the Apocryphon of John is incompatible with the Johannine epistles (p. 142). I note this point in the conclusion as well.

This essay argues for the inclusion of the Acts within the Johannine corpus, for the Acts see themselves as its completion. The Acts identify John as an apostle (ch. 26), the brother of Jacob (ch. 88). The Acts are fluent in the Gospel's vocabulary. For example, John's Eucharistic prayer in ch. 109 echoes Jesus's "I am" sayings regarding the door or gate (cf. John 10:7, 9) and the resurrection (cf. John 11:25) as well as the way and the truth (cf. John 14:6). The conclusion to Acts of John 59, "for the one who loves precedes the ones who love him," rewrites 1 John 4:19, "we love because he first loved us."⁴ And the Acts' settings in Ephesus and Smyrna (e.g. ch. 45) recall the addressees of epistles embedded in the Apocalypse of John (2:1–11). In terms of parsimony, I suggest that the Acts of John presuppose a collection of the Gospel, First Epistle, and Apocalypse, all of which had already been associated with the Apostle John ben Zebedee. Writing the Acts of John allowed this apostle to cover every genre of New Testament literature.⁵

I am mainly in dialogue with Charles E. Hill's *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church*, a milestone of Johannine scholarship.⁶ Hill's most significant achievement is a thoroughgoing refutation of "the myth of orthodox Johannophobia," the long-held notion that the proto-orthodox were leery of the Fourth Gospel because of its immense popularity among so-called Gnostics. I concur with Hill's assessment, and I find his work highly commendable in two other aspects. One is his use of material evidence along with literary sources. The other is his inclusion of Revelation as part of the Johannine corpus. My main critique—a minor one, given the scope of Hill's project—is that the eventually extracanonical Acts of John receive short shrift.⁷ Herein I demonstrate that much of Hill's reasoning for the proto-orthodox reception of the Gospel of John can surprisingly extend to the Acts of John, despite certain heterodox elements therein.

This essay divides into three main parts. First, I review patristic testimony regarding the Johannine corpus. The Acts of John were not always rejected by orthodox readers, while the Epistles and Apocalypse were not always accepted; moreover, generically referring to 'the Epistles' is imprecise, so it is important to qualify which reader had which epistle(s) at a specific time and place. Second, I give examples of manuscript materiality. Hill suggested that the Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse of John could have circulated in a single, bound codex. Although there is no extant ancient MS like this, it was indeed a codicological possibility [*sic*: either a codicological possibility or codicologically possible]; conversely, the Acts of John also could have been included in such a Johannine codex. Third, I discuss the sociology of reading, particularly book collection. Pieces of Johannine literature could take on different meanings in the hands of different readers who had different collections. In the end, the Acts of John should not be excluded from the Johannine corpus, and it is preferable to speak of plural Johannine corpora.

⁴ φιλόμυενος γάρ φθάνει τοὺς φιλοῦντας αὐτόν (Acts of John 59); cf. ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν, ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς (1 John 4:19).

⁵ Peter likewise gets a Gospel, a book of Acts, Epistles, and an Apocalypse, despite only the Epistles having become canonical.

⁶ Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁷ Hill, *The Johannine Corpus*, 258–263.

Patristic Testimony

This section adduces nine witnesses from the early-second to the late-fourth centuries.⁸ The Johannine corpus expands and contracts throughout this period. My survey ends at the turn of the fifth century, when the New Testament canon was closing, but by no means definitively closed. Eusebius of Caesarea asserts himself as a crucial witness, and I question some of his purported quotations. In particular, I argue that a few lines attributed to his predecessors actually represent Eusebius's own glosses effectively reshaping the Johannine corpus.⁹ Although John's Gospel never appears to have been in doubt, I show that 3 John emerges surprisingly late, that the Apocalypse was not always accepted, and that Acts of John were not always rejected.

Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 35–ca. 107)

Dating to the early second century, Ignatius of Antioch evinced the earliest attestation of the Gospel of John. As I have noted elsewhere,¹⁰ Ignatius said that the Lord did nothing without the Father (*Magn.* 7.1), which echoes Jesus's statement that "the Son can't do nothing by himself" (John 5:19b). Regarding the Spirit, Ignatius said that God "knows from where it comes and where it goes" (*Phld.* 7.1), which agrees nearly verbatim with Jesus's saying in the dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3:8). And Ignatius's letters and the Gospel of John are the earliest Christian texts to call Jesus God, not just the Son of God (e.g., John 20:28; Ign. *Smyrn.* 1.1; *Eph.* inscription). Ignatius cited no source for these sayings, but his familiarity with the written Gospel is well established. I find no convincing evidence that Ignatius knew additional Johannine literature.¹¹

Justin Martyr (ca. 100–ca. 165)

In the mid-second century, Justin Martyr knew the Gospel and Apocalypse of John. Justin writes in *1 Apol.* 61.4, "For even Christ said, 'If you are not born again, you shall not at all enter into the kingdom of the heavens.' And yet that it is impossible for those being once born to embark into their birth-mothers is plain to everyone."¹² As I have argued elsewhere,¹³ Justin's comment about the impossibility

⁸ Dates are taken from F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁹ I follow the approach of T. Scott Manor ("Papias, Origen, and Eusebius: The Criticisms and Defense of the Gospel of John," *VC* 67, no. 1 (2013): 1–21), who adroitly disentangles Eusebius's opinions, which are interwoven with quotations from Papias in opposition to Origen.

¹⁰ James W. Barker, "Tatian's Diatessaron and the Proliferation of Gospels," in *The Gospel of Tatian: Exploring the Nature and Text of the Diatessaron*, ed. Matthew R. Crawford and Nicholas J. Zola, *The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries* 3 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), 111–141, 127 n. 80; for Ignatius's use of John, see also Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 431–41.

¹¹ Cf. Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 441–443.

¹² καὶ γὰρ ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπεν, "Ὅτι μὴ ἀναγεννηθῆτε, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, ὅτι δὲ καὶ ἀδύνατον εἰς τὰς μήτρας τῶν τεκουσῶν τοὺς ἄπαξ γενομένους ἐμβῆναι, φανερόν πάντιν ἐστι.

¹³ James W. Barker, "Written Gospel or Oral Tradition? Patristic Parallels to John 3:3, 5," *Early Christianity* 6, no. 4 (2015): 543–558; see also Charles E. Hill, "The Orthodox Gospel: The Reception of John in the Great Church

of a literal second birth betrays his knowledge of this saying in its Johannine context, and there is no evidence for an independent, baptismal ‘born again’ saying. Revelation is written in the first-person by someone named John (Rev 1:4, 9; 22:8), and Justin qualified that the author was the Apostle John (*Dial.* 81.4): “A certain man whose name was John, one of Christ’s apostles, in a revelation that happened to him, foretold (Christ) to make a thousand years in Jerusalem for those who believed in our Christ.”¹⁴

Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 130–ca. 200)

In the late-second century, besides the Gospel and Apocalypse, Irenaeus of Lyons knew the first two epistles, all of which Irenaeus attributed to the Apostle John.¹⁵ In a lengthy refutation of the Gnostic differentiation between the human Jesus and the divine Christ, Irenaeus quoted John 20:31 and explicitly cited the Lord’s disciple John (*Haer.* 3.16.5). In close proximity Irenaeus quoted 1 John 2:18–19, 21–22 from “his epistle” (*Haer.* 3.16.5). Soon thereafter he curiously quoted 2 John 7–8 as part of the previously mentioned letter (*Haer.* 3.16.8), and the next sentence quoted 1 John 4:1–3 as “the epistle.”¹⁶ Elsewhere Irenaeus ascribed the Apocalypse to John, the Lord’s disciple (*Haer.* 4.20.11), and the same attribution accompanied an earlier quotation of 2 John 10–11 (*Haer.* 1.16.3).¹⁷ Irenaeus reveals no knowledge of 3 John.¹⁸

Anticipating my discussion of manuscript materiality, I add that Irenaeus might have used a codex of the fourfold gospel in the so-called Western order. In *Haer.* 3.11.8 Irenaeus described the Gospels in terms of the four creatures from Rev 4:7. According to Irenaeus, John corresponds to the lion, Luke to the ox, Matthew to the human, and Mark to the eagle. The creatures in the Apocalypse derive from the prophet Ezekiel (1:10), who describes four creatures having four faces. Ezekiel listed the faces in this order: human, lion, ox, and eagle. If Irenaeus’s creatures are rearranged accordingly, then the Gospels’ order would be Matthew, John, Luke, and Mark as predominates in early MSS of the Old Latin Gospels.

prior to Irenaeus,” in *The Legacy of John: Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Tuomas Rasimus, *NovTSup* 132 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 233–300, here 255.

¹⁴ ἀνήρ τις, ᾧ ὄνομα Ἰωάννης, εἷς τῶν ἀποστόλων τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐν ἀποκαλύψει γενομένη αὐτῷ χίλια ἔτη ποιήσειν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ τοὺς τῷ ἡμετέρῳ Χριστῷ πιστεύσαντας προεφήτευσε.

¹⁵ Lorne Zelyck (“Irenaeus and the Authorship of the Fourth Gospel,” in *The Origins of John’s Gospel*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Hughson T. Ong, *Johannine Studies* 2 [Leiden: Brill, 2015], 239–258) convincingly refutes the notion that Irenaeus considered John, “the disciple of the Lord” to be anyone other than the son of Zebedee.

¹⁶ On Irenaeus’s apparent combination of 1–2 John, see John Painter, “The Johannine Epistles as Catholic Epistles,” in *The Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Tradition*, ed. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr and Robert W. Wall (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 239–305, 457–463, 243.

¹⁷ In the mid-third century, Cyprian might also have known 2 John: just as Irenaeus had quoted 2 John 10–11, an admonition to refuse anyone with a different teaching, for receiving them meant participating in their evil deeds (*Haer.* 1.16.3), the same verses were reportedly quoted as an epistle attributed to John the Apostle by Aurelius of Chullabi at the Seventh Council of Carthage under Cyprian (*ANF* 5:572).

¹⁸ *Pace Hill* (*Johannine Corpus*, 99), Irenaeus’s discussion of arrogant presbyters in *Haer.* 4.26.3 does not evoke the condemnation of Diotrephes in 3 John 9, especially given Irenaeus’s long quotations from Daniel/Susanna and Luke.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 215)

Around the turn of the third century, Clement of Alexandria apparently knew multiple Johannine epistles. Clement quoted 1 John 5:16–17 and cited “John, in the greater epistle” (ἐν τῇ μείζονι ἐπιστολῇ; *Strom* 2.15/66–67).¹⁹ Elsewhere Clement quoted 1 John 2:18–19 and attributed it to “the Apostle John” (*Strom*. 3.6/45). Clement likewise quoted John 1:18 as the words of “John the Apostle” (*Strom*. 5.12/81), and Clement said to interpret allegorically Jesus’s commandments, “in the Gospel according to John,” to eat the Son of Man’s flesh and drink his blood (*Paed*. 1.6/38; cf. John 6:53). Clement also writes, “as John says in the Apocalypse,” when alluding to Rev 19:4 (*Strom* 6.13/106), but he offers no details regarding the author’s identity.

Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–ca. 254)

Clement might have accepted that the Apostle John wrote Revelation. By the mid-third century, his Alexandrian successor Origen explicitly said so: “in the Apocalypse of John of Zebedee” (*Comm. Jo*. 1.14/83). Origen also concluded that “the one who reclined in Jesus’s bosom, one of the disciples whom Jesus loved, seems to be John who wrote the Gospel” (*Comm. Jo*. 32.20/260).²⁰ In *Comm. Jo*. 2.23/148–149, Origen alludes to “light of humans” from the Gospel of John (1:4) and adds two sentences later, “in the Catholic Epistle of the same John, God is said to be light” (1 John 1:5).²¹ Undoubtedly, then, Origen’s Johannine corpus comprised the Gospel, First Epistle, and Apocalypse.

I am skeptical that Origen knew 2–3 John, for his two purported attestations are problematic. The first comes from Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 6.25.7–10) in discussing book five of Origen’s commentary on John. The topic is the apostles who wrote epistles, specifically Paul, Peter, and John. Eusebius’s quotation says that besides the Gospel and Apocalypse, “(John) has also left behind an epistle of very few lines. There may also be a second and a third, since not all say these to be genuine; however, both are not a hundred lines” (*Hist. eccl.* 6.25.10).²² Erwin Preuschen’s GCS edition brackets the entire paragraph as Origen *Comm. Jo*. 5.3, admittedly derived from Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.7–10,²³ yet scholars tend to accept the passage as Origen’s.²⁴ I do not deny altogether that Origen raised the subject. But if he did

¹⁹ In the sixth century, Cassiodorus’s *Adumbrations* preserve brief comments on 2 John as from Clement of Alexandria’s lost *Hypotyposes* (*ANF* 2:576–577); my thanks to Stephen Carlson for pointing this out to me.

²⁰ ὁ ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἀνακείμενος, εἷς τῶν μαθητῶν ὃν ἡγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἔοικεν ὁ γράψας τὸ εὐαγγέλιον εἶναι Ἰωάννης.

²¹ ἐν δὲ τῇ καθολικῇ τοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννου ἐπιστολῇ λέγεται ὁ θεὸς εἶναι φῶς. (*Comm. Jo*. 2.23/149; elsewhere Origen alludes to 1 John 5:8 as something stated by “the disciple John in the epistle” (*Comm. Jo*. 6.43/224).

²² καταλέλοιπε καὶ ἐπιστολὴν πᾶν ὀλίγων στίχων. ἔστω δὲ καὶ δευτέραν καὶ τρίτην, ἐπεὶ οὐ πάντες φασὶ γνησίους εἶναι ταύτας. πλὴν οὐκ εἰσὶ στίχων ἀμφοτέραι ἑκατόν.

²³ Erwin Preuschen, *Origenes Werke IV: Der Johanneskommentar*, GCS 10 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903), 101–102.

²⁴ E.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, AB 30 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982) 11; Edmon L. Gallagher, “Origen *via* Rufinus on the New Testament Canon,” *NTS* 62, no. 3 (2016): 461–476, 472; Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 84, 89; Michael J. Kruger, “Origen’s List of New Testament Books in *Homiliae in Josuam* 7.1: A Fresh Look,” in *Mark, Manuscripts, and Monotheism: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado*, ed. Chris

so, then the reference to 2–3 John strikes me as a gloss by Eusebius rather than a highly exceptional statement by Origen.

The second piece of evidence comes from Origen’s purported canon list in a homily on Joshua. The text is preserved only in Rufinus’s translation of *Hom. Jes. Nav. 7.1*,²⁵ and there is debate whether Rufinus contrived the entire list.²⁶ Even those who defend the passages authenticity admit that Rufinus occasionally overtranslates material pertaining to the New Testament canon. Michael Kruger concedes that Rufinus, when translating Eusebius *Hist. eccl. 6.25.7*, has added the number “fourteen” to Origen’s reference to Paul’s writings.²⁷ Regarding *Hom. Jes. Nav. 7.1*, Edmon Gallagher grants that Rufinus likely added 2 Peter.²⁸ Kruger and Gallagher both claim that Rufinus would have similarly added “three” epistles of John if he were altering the Johannine portion of Origen’s list.²⁹ I suggest instead that—if he did include a list of scriptures in this homily—Origen would have written that John wrote a singular ἐπιστολήν; it took the slightest change for Rufinus to say that John wrote plural *epistolas*.

By my count of TLG database searches, Origen’s citations of 1 John total thirteen quotations and three paraphrases.³⁰ I contend that these searchable works accurately construe Origen’s collection of Christian scriptures, for he explicitly cites Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Philemon, Hebrews, Jacob, the Catholic Epistle of Peter,³¹ the Catholic Epistle of John, Jude, and Revelation, as well as the Catholic Epistle of Barnabas,

Keith and Dieter T. Roth, *LNTS* 528 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 99–117, 106; Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, 2 vols. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 2:82–83, 260; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles: A Commentary*, trans. Reginald and Ilse Fuller (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 46; see also Judith M. Lieu, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 2, although she rightly acknowledges that Origen does not quote 2–3 John. Hugo Méndez (“Did the Johannine Community Exist?” *JSNT*, forthcoming) challenges the use of any epistle for reconstructing a Johannine community.

²⁵ PG 12:857.

²⁶ Everett R. Kalin, “Re-examining New Testament Canon History: 1. The Canon of Origen.” *CurTM* 17 (1990): 274–282, 280; I concur with his assessment on p. 277 that “... ‘The Canon of Origen,’ taken from Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.3–14, looks like Origen’s New Testament canon list because Eusebius, a *clever compiler, wants it to*. The other passage ..., Origen’s *Homilies on Joshua* 7.1, looks like Origen’s New Testament canon list because Rufinus, *its clever translator, wants it to ...*” (Kalin’s emphases).

²⁷ Kruger, “Origen’s List,” 105; see also Kalin, “Re-examining,” 280.

²⁸ Gallagher, “Origen *via* Rufinus,” 473.

²⁹ Gallagher, “Origen *via* Rufinus,” 473; Gallagher and Meade, *Biblical Canon Lists*, 98; Kruger, “Origen’s List,” 113.

³⁰ Quotations: (1) 1 John 1:6 in *Comm. Jo.* 2.25/160; (2 and 3) 1 John 2:1b in *Comm. Jo.* 1.22/138 and 1.33/240; (4) 1 John 2:9, 11 in *Comm. Jo.* 2.25/160; (5) 1 John 2:18 in *Comm. Matt.* 15.31; (6) 1 John 2:18 in *Comm. Matt.* 11.1; (7); 1 John 2:22b, 23 in *Comm. Jo.* 19.1/3; (8) 1 John 3:2 in *Comm. Matt.* 17.19; (9) 1 John 3:8 in *Hom. Ps.* 8.7; (10) 1 John 3:8–10 in *Comm. Jo.* 20.13/99–101; (11 and 12) 1 John 3:9 in *Or.* 22.2; *Hom. Jer.* 9.4; (13) 1 John 3:21–22 in *Hom. Ps.* 7.2. Paraphrases: (1) 1 John 1:5 in *Comm. Jo.* 2.23/149; (2 and 3) 1 John 5:8 in *Comm. Jo.* 6.43/224 and *Hom. Lev.* 411.

³¹ Origen only quotes 1 Peter as “the” epistle of Peter. There is an odd reference in *Comm. Matt.* 15.27: the Greek text has a reconstructed reference to “the first epistle of Peter” (τῆς <Πέτρου> πρώτης ἐπιστολῆς (Erich

the Book of the Shepherd to Hermas, and the epistles of Ignatius. Rounding out the Corpus Paulinum, Origen also has numerous quotations and allusions to 2 Corinthians; quotations of Philippians, Colossians, and 1 Timothy attributed to Paul; a quotation of 1 Thessalonians attributed to the Apostle; and a paraphrase of Titus attributed to Paul. Nowhere does Origen qualify “the greater epistle” (cf. Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 2.15/66–67), and neither does Origen refer to the second or third epistles of John. Without exception, John’s epistle is always singular. Therefore, supposing Origen’s lack of 2–3 John is not so much an argument from silence;³² undisputed references to 2–3 John are measurably absent from Origen’s extant writings. I conclude that Origen’s considered the Gospel, (First) Epistle, and Apocalypse to be genuinely Johannine.

Dionysius of Alexandria (died ca. 264)

After Origen, the mid-third-century testimony of Dionysius of Alexandria proves pivotal for the reception of Johannine literature. Eusebius preserved excerpts from Dionysius’s literary works in book 7 of *Ecclesiastical History*. Dionysius undoubtedly used Revelation to interpret his contemporary political situation. He described the persecuting emperor Valerian as the forty-two-month blaspheming beast revealed (ἀποκαλύπτεται) to John (*Hist. eccl.* 7.10.2; cf. Rev 13:5). Dionysius also alluded to Revelation’s martyrs feasting in heaven (*Hist. eccl.* 7.22.4), and when Valerian’s rule ended Dionysius said that the seven years—that is, the tribulation—have passed (*Hist. eccl.* 7.23.4). Dionysius nonetheless interpreted Revelation figuratively, as opposed to the orthodox Egyptian bishop named Nepos, who wrote a treatise against the allegorists by arguing for a literal millennium (*Hist. eccl.* 7.24.1–2).

Dionysius responded by claiming that some of his ecclesiastic predecessors had gone so far as to deem both the title and contents of the book false: it was neither a revelation nor from John (*Hist. eccl.* 7.25.1–2). The detractors attributed the book to the heretic Cerinthus, who envisioned Christ’s kingdom as involving bodily pleasures including marriage and animal sacrifices (*Hist. eccl.* 7.25.2–3). Nepos was by no means a heretic, but Dionysius feared a slippery slope, so he forged a middle path. Dionysius did not reject the book, since many esteemed it. Conversely, he demonstrated the impossibility of taking the entirety of Revelation at face value (*Hist. eccl.* 7.25.6). Dionysius concluded, “For even if I do not understand [the Apocalypse of John], I nevertheless indeed suspect some deeper meaning encased in the words” (*Hist. eccl.* 7.25.4).³³

Accepting the book’s internal claim that it was written by someone named John, Dionysius denied that it was written by “the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, the brother of Jacob, who had written the

Klostermann, *Origenes Werke X: Matthäuserklärung I*, GCS 40 [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1935], 430), followed by a quotation of Paul; however, Rufinus’s Latin translation has the Paul quotation, followed by one from Jude without the quotation from 1 Peter. This would be the earliest intimation of a second epistle by Peter.

³² *Contra Kruger*, “Origen’s List,” 109 n. 52.

³³ καὶ γὰρ εἰ μὴ συνίημι, ἀλλ’ ὑπονοῶ γε νοῦν τινα βαθύτερον ἐγκεῖσθαι τοῖς ῥήμασιν.

Gospel according to John and the Catholic Epistle” (7.25.7).³⁴ Dionysius observed not only that the language is different in the Apocalypse but also that the Gospel and epistle were anonymous: “For the evangelist nowhere subjoins his name; not even does he announce himself neither via the Gospel nor via the epistle” (7.25.8).³⁵ Dionysius quotes Rev 1:1–2, 4a, which includes the first two self-designations of John, but Dionysius adds that “indeed the Evangelist did not write his own name before the Catholic Epistle” (7.25.10).³⁶ Dionysius adduced numerous thematic correspondences between the Gospel and epistle, both of which are written in good Greek; the Apocalypse lacked these common themes while writing solecisms (7.25.17–27).

Dionysius undeniably accepted that the Apostle John authored the Gospel and the First Epistle. The question is whether he knew more than one letter. Immediately following the statement above that the Catholic Epistle was unnamed, Eusebius says, “but not in the second and third bearing John—although they be small epistles—does John set before by name, but the anonymous presbyter is written” (*Hist. eccl.* 7.25.11).³⁷ Scholars typically accept this as Dionysius’s attestation of all three eventually canonical Johannine letters.³⁸ Yet the comment in *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.11 strikes me as a gloss by Eusebius, since it would be the only time Dionysius ever mentions a second or third epistle attributed to John. All seven other times in *Hist. eccl.* 7.25,³⁹ Dionysius mentioned a singular Johannine letter.

It stands to reason that Dionysius knew of the text we know as 2 John, since his early episcopal correspondence concerned Cyprian’s practice of rebaptism (*Hist. eccl.* 7.2, 3, 5, 7). As noted above, 2 John 10–11 was reportedly quoted as Johannine at the Seventh Council of Carthage under Cyprian (*ANF* 5:572). Even if the comment in *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.11 comes from Dionysius, then “the second and third bearing John” could imply that he did not accept them as Johannine. In my estimation, approximately seventy-five years after Irenaeus had a Johannine corpus comprising the Gospel, two epistles, and the Apocalypse, Dionysius of Alexandria attempted to reduce the contents to the Gospel and (First) Epistle.

Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–ca. 340)

According to Eusebius’s list in *Hist. eccl.* 3.25, pieces of Johannine literature fall in every canonical category. The Gospel of John and 1 John are agreed upon (ἐν ὁμολογουμένοις) in the churches of apostolic succession. It is disputed or questioned (ἀντιλεγόμενων) whether 2–3 John come from the

³⁴ τὸν ἀπόστολον, τὸν υἱὸν Ζεβεδαίου, τὸν ἀδελφὸν Ἰακώβου, οὗ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ κατὰ Ἰωάννην ἐπιγεγραμμένον καὶ ἡ ἐπιστολὴ ἢ καθολικὴ.

³⁵ ὁ μὲν γὰρ εὐαγγελιστὴς οὐδαμοῦ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ παρεγγράφει οὐδὲ κηρύσσει ἑαυτὸν οὔτε διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὔτε διὰ τῆς ἐπιστολῆς.

³⁶ ὁ δὲ γε εὐαγγελιστὴς οὐδὲ τῆς καθολικῆς ἐπιστολῆς προέγραψεν ἑαυτοῦ τὸ ὄνομα.

³⁷ ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ φερομένη Ἰωάννου καὶ τρίτῃ, καίτοι βραχέαις οὔσαις ἐπιστολαῖς, ὁ Ἰωάννης ὀνομαστὶ πρόκειται, ἀλλὰ ἀνωνύμως ὁ πρεσβύτερος γέγραπται.

³⁸ E.g., Brown, *Epistles of John*, 11; Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 272; Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 27–28; McDonald, *Formation*, 260; Painter, “Johannine Epistles,” 249; Schnackenburg, *Johannine Epistles*, 274.

³⁹ *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.7, 8, 10, 18, 21, 23, 24.

apostle or a different John.⁴⁰ The Apocalypse of John is paradoxically both spurious (ἐν τοῖς νόθοις) and agreed upon (ἐν ὁμολογουμένοις); Rufinus thus relocated Revelation to the disputed list.⁴¹ In other words, some are convinced that Revelation came from the Apostle John,⁴² while others are convinced otherwise.⁴³ Finally, the Acts of John are clearly written in the name of the Apostle, but Eusebius attributed the book to heretics (τῶν αἱρετικῶν), since it had never been referenced by a single man in apostolic succession.

Eusebius was not always consistent in his categorization. He initially deemed Jacob and Jude spurious (νοθεύεται), since they were not mentioned by the earliest ecclesiastical authorities (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.24–25). But by *Hist. eccl.* 3.25, lack of early attestation simply meant that a book was ‘questioned’ (ἀντιλέγω), not literally ‘spoken against;’ accordingly, Rufinus revised the earlier reference to say that Jacob and Jude were “not received by some.”⁴⁴ By placing 2–3 John in the disputed list, Eusebius meant that they too lacked early attestation; he apparently missed the fact that Irenaeus used 2 John (*Hist. eccl.* 5.8.4–7). Surprisingly, Eusebius offers the first unambiguous mention of 3 John.⁴⁵

Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 315–ca. 403)

Regarding heretical use of the Acts of John, Epiphanius listed the book among the scriptures of the Encratites in the late-fourth century (*Pan.* 47.1.5). Epiphanius (*Pan.* 47.1.6) agreed with the earlier description by Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.26.1), repeated by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.29.2), that Encratites taught both celibacy (ἀγαμία) and “abstention from [eating] living things” (ἐμψύχων ἀποχήν; *Hist. eccl.* 4.29.2). Epiphanius added that Encratites used water rather than wine in the ‘mysteries’ (*Pan.* 47.1.7), and yet they believed in the resurrection of the dead (*Pan.* 47.1.8).

Didymus the Blind (ca. 313–ca. 398)

Not every late-fourth-century reader of the Acts of John was considered a heretic. Didymus the Blind was head of the catechetical school at Alexandria, and his Johannine corpus might have comprised the Gospel, Acts, (First) Epistle, and Apocalypse. Didymus undoubtedly believed John to be the beloved disciple who wrote the Gospel and First Epistle. John was identified as the beloved disciple (*Comm. Zach.* 3.66). Didymus paraphrased Jesus’s saying about laying down one’s life for one’s friend (John 15:13) with an attribution to the Evangelist John (*Comm. Zach.* 4.59). Didymus also attributed quotations of 1 John to the Evangelist John (*Comm. Zach.* 3.296) as well as John the beloved disciple

⁴⁰ Likewise, according to *Hist. eccl.* 3.24.17–18, 1 John is agreed upon but 2–3 John are questioned.

⁴¹ Eduard Schwartz and Theodor Mommsen, eds. *Eusebius Werke II: Die Kirchengeschichte*, GCS NF 6, 3 vols. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999), 1:251; see also the helpful table in Gallagher, “Origen via Rufinus,” 468.

⁴² E.g. Justin (*Hist. eccl.* 4.18.8) and Irenaeus (*Hist. eccl.* 5.8.7).

⁴³ E.g. Dionysius of Alexandria (*Hist. eccl.* 7.25).

⁴⁴ *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.25 (Schwartz and Mommsen, 1:175). Were he consistent in his translation, νόθοις/νοθεύεται would have been rendered “maximally doubted” (*maxime dubitatur*).

⁴⁵ Cf. Hill’s (*Johannine Corpus*, 369) suggestion that “walk in truth” in *Epistula Apostolorum* (38) “is probably borrowed from 2 John 4 or 3 John 3–4.”

who wrote a holy epistle (*Comm. Zach.* 2.169). Although Athanasius's thirty-ninth festal letter counted three Johannine epistles, none of Didymus's extant, authentic writings quote the latter two. Didymus repeatedly quoted Revelation and attributed it to John (*Comm. Zach.* 1.153, 191, 278, 383; 2.274; 3.73; 5.69). Yet nowhere did Didymus identify the author of the Apocalypse as the beloved disciple or Evangelist. Didymus did, however, mention "John, the disciple beloved by the Lord," followed by a reference to "the book of his Acts" (*Comm. Zach.* 4.210).⁴⁶

The extant, incomplete Acts of John do not narrate missionary activity in Jerusalem, but Didymus's statement supports the theory that the text began (like the Acts of Thomas) with "an Apostolic Lottery in Jerusalem, at which John was awarded Asia."⁴⁷ The book ends with the Apostle's death, and (like the canonical Acts) the eyewitness narrator is not a protagonist, so Didymus would hardly have considered John the author. Didymus's reference nonetheless forestalls unqualified characterizations of the Acts of John as a "heterodox 'novel.'"⁴⁸ Didymus was unquestionably orthodox in his era, and he did not question the veracity of episodes in his text of the Acts of John. And while the apocryphal Acts of John can rightly be classified as a novel, so can the canonical Acts of the Apostles.⁴⁹

Didymus resists simple categories. The canonical Johannine corpus was congealing before Didymus's eyes, for Athanasius famously listed the Gospel, three epistles, and Apocalypse. Didymus can literally be said to have accepted that assemblage "more or less." "More" because he quoted the Acts of John without being called an Encratite, Docetist, or Gnostic. "Less" because he concealed any traces of 2–3 John while distancing Revelation from the beloved disciple. Although Athanasius had appointed him head of the catechetical school, Didymus's seemingly exclusive and inextricable connection between the First Epistle and Fourth Gospel reverberates the contention of his more distant Alexandrian forebear Dionysius.

Summary

Albeit uncited, the Gospel of John is attested in the early second century. Within fifty years the Apocalypse was attributed to the Apostle John. By the end of the second century, the Johannine corpus had grown to include the Gospel, two epistles, and Revelation. But appendages could be added or removed. The Apocalypse and 2 John were not always accepted in the third and fourth centuries,

⁴⁶ "As Paul found Silas and Timothy and the Evangelist Luke and the others known, concerning whom a record is reported in his epistles and in the Acts of the Apostles. Equally Peter also, the genuine disciple of the Savior, found Mark the Evangelist and many others. Likewise John also, the disciple beloved by the Lord; those he found inhabiting Jerusalem are reported in the book of his Acts." ὡς εὗρεν Παῦλος τὸν Σιλουανὸν καὶ Τιμόθεον καὶ τὸν εὐαγγελιστὴν Λουκᾶν καὶ τοὺς ἑτέρους γνωρίμους περὶ ὧν μνήμη φέρεται ἐν ταῖς ἐπιστολαῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ ταῖς Πράξεσιν τῶν Ἀποστόλων. Εὗρεν δὲ παραπλησίως καὶ Πέτρος, ὁ γνήσιος τοῦ Σωτῆρος μαθητῆς, Μάρκον τὸν εὐαγγελιστὴν καὶ ἑτέρους πλείονας. Ὡσαύτως καὶ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ὑπὸ τοῦ Κυρίου ἀγαπώμενος μαθητῆς. Φέρονται δὲ οὐς εὗρεν κατοικοῦντας τὴν Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τῶν Πράξεων αὐτοῦ. (*Comm. Zach.* 4.209–210)

⁴⁷ Richard I. Pervo with Julian V. Hills, *The Acts of John*, Early Christian Apocrypha 6 (Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2016), 4.

⁴⁸ Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 259.

⁴⁹ Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

and I have argued that 3 John was not cited before the fourth century. Finally, even the Acts of John found orthodox acceptance in the late-fourth century.

Manuscript Materiality

This section provides an overview of early MSS of Johannine literature. I am particularly interested in material evidence of collection in multiple-text MSS. Hill gave the following account:

It may be that single-codex collections of the three Synoptic Gospels or of the Pauline writings, or both, might have already existed by the time the Fourth Gospel was circulated. It is quite imaginable under these circumstances that all the Johannine works (or several of them) might have been gathered into a codex and published under one cover to send to the churches, more or less concurrently with the practice of publishing the Fourth Gospel by itself or bound with the other three. We do not need to speculate further about which edition might have been first. It is conceivable that all three forms of publication of the Johannine Gospel (alone, with other Gospels, with other Johannine works) coexisted for a time in the second century, before the collections of the four Gospels together became standard.⁵⁰

Hill adds that “the Johannine works were indeed a ‘corpus’ throughout most of the second century. This corpus may well at one time have been expressed in physical form.”⁵¹ There is no positive proof for such a MS, but it was technologically possible, given our knowledge of early Christian codices. Again, though, the Johannine corpus need not exclude the Acts of John. As I demonstrate below, the Acts of John could have fit alongside the Johannine Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse in a single- or multi-quire codex.

The Gospel of John

The oldest artifacts of the Gospel of John reveal that it circulated in single- and multiple-text MSS and in single- and multi-quire codices. The Fourth Gospel was clearly published alongside other Gospels, but other combinations are at least conceivable. Papyrus 5 is a third-century single-quire codex that solely contained the Gospel of John, a remarkable find for visualizing the construction of ancient codices. It was published as P.Oxy. II 208 in 1899 and donated to the British Museum in 1900, where it is cataloged as Papyrus 782.⁵² Via the British library’s digital image of f. 1r, the string $\text{IHC KAI}\overline{\text{Θ}}$ appears

⁵⁰ Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 454. Hill (*Johannine Corpus*, 456–457) claims *Contra Noetum* 15,1–2 as evidence that the Gospel and Apocalypse appeared back to back in the same volume, but here I think it much more likely that the author was quoting 1 John, followed by the Apocalypse. *Contra Noetum* says that the Logos was “from the beginning” ($\acute{\alpha}\pi\prime\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\eta\varsigma$) as in 1 John 1:1 rather than “in the beginning” ($\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\eta\grave{\iota}$) as in John 1:1, 2; for the Greek text, see Robert Butterworth, ed., *Hippolytus of Rome: Contra Noetum* (London: Heythrop College, 1977).

⁵¹ Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 461.

⁵² Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part II* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1899), 1–8; http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Papyrus_782; Pasquale Orsini and Willy

at the end of line thirteen of the left-hand column; across the margins to the right are the letters $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau$. The first string is from John 1:38, when Jesus turns and sees two of John the Baptist's disciples following him;⁵³ the second is from John 20:14, when Mary Magdalene turns to see Jesus.⁵⁴ The entire codex likely comprised twenty-five bifolia that were 25 x 25 cm.⁵⁵ Forty-four pages would have fit in between the two pages of P.Oxy. 208, so the inner margins would have been quite narrow.⁵⁶

Papyrus 66 (P.Bodmer II) is a multi-quire codex that probably contained the Gospel of John alone.⁵⁷ Brent Nongbri has shown that the MS can date anywhere from the mid-second to mid-fourth century paleographically and that the fourth century is more likely based on codicology.⁵⁸ The line count varies; for example, there are twenty-five lines totaling 694 letters on f. 1r,⁵⁹ as compared with nineteen lines totaling 468 letters on f. 45r. Nevertheless, there are 108 nearly complete pages from John 1:1–14:26 before the MS becomes fragmentary. The extant portion preserves just over seventy percent of the text, which works out to 152 pages or thirty-eight bifolia for a complete MS, which is approximately the same thickness as Nag Hammadi Codex II.⁶⁰

Early on, the Gospels were grouped into multi-text MSS. Papyrus 75 (P.Bodmer XIV–XV) has typically been dated to the second or third century, but it may date to the fourth.⁶¹ The MS was a single-quire

Clarysse (“Early New Testament Manuscripts and Their Dates: A Critique of Theological Paleography,” *ETL* 88, no. 4 [2012]: 443–474, 469) uphold the third-century dating. P5 also includes P.Oxy. XV 1781, which preserves portions of John 16:14–30.

⁵³ στραφεις δε ο Ιησοϋς και θεασαμενος αυτους ακολουθουντας.

⁵⁴ ταυτα ειποουσα εστραφη εις τα οπισω.

⁵⁵ Grenfell and Hunt, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri II*, 1; Eric G. Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock), 145.

⁵⁶ By my estimate, when tacketed to a lining strip and perhaps through the cover, approximately three-quarters of the 1 cm gutters of P.Oxy. 208 would be consumed by the rest of the pages in the MS.

⁵⁷ Victor Martin, ed. *Papyrus Bodmer II: Evangile de Jean*, 2 vols. (Cologny-Geneva: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1956–1958).

⁵⁸ Brent Nongbri, “The Limits of Paleographic Dating of Literary Papyri: Some Observations on the Date and Provenance of P.Bodmer II (P66),” *Museum Helveticum* 71 (2014): 1–35; regarding paleography see p. 20, and regarding codicology see pp. 25–34. Accordingly, Pasquale Orsini (“I Papiri Bodmer: scritture e libri,” *Adamantius* 21 [2015]: 60–78, 77) has revised the date of P66 from the mid-third to mid-fourth century; cf. his previous dating to the first half of the third century in Orsini and Clarysse, “Early New Testament Manuscripts,” 470.

⁵⁹ My letter count excludes the title ‘Gospel according to John’ in the top margin and includes twenty-seven reconstructed letters in John 1.

⁶⁰ There are 145 inscribed pages in NHC II; James M. Robinson, ed., *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codex II* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

⁶¹ For a fourth-century date, see Brent Nongbri, “Reconsidering the Place of Papyrus Bodmer XIV–XV (P75) in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament,” *JBL* 135, no. 2 (2016): 405–437. Accordingly, Orsini (“I Papiri Bodmer,” 77) dates P75 around the turn of the fourth century; cf. the first half of the third century in Orsini and Clarysse, “Early New Testament Manuscripts,” 471.

codex containing the Gospels of Luke and John in approximately 144 pages.⁶² Papyrus 45 (Chester Beatty Papyrus I) is dated to the first half of third century,⁶³ and it was a multi-quire codex of the fourfold gospel as well as the canonical Acts of the Apostles in 222 pages of text having nearly 1,900 letters per page.⁶⁴

Yet there was an ongoing market for single-text Gospel MSS. A fourth-century parchment codex of the Gospel of John, P.Oxy. VI 847 (GA 0162), is a likely example.⁶⁵ The extant page measures 15 x 16 cm with a text block of approximately 11 x 12 cm fitting nineteen lines and 23 letters per line. At 433 letters per page, the Gospel of John would fit neatly in 160 pages, likely twenty quartos or ten octavos. Undoubtedly, though, by the third century it was technologically possible to construct a codex of Johannine literature, even if there are no such artifacts. The canonical Johannine writings could fit in a codex smaller than P75, and the Acts of John could fit alongside the (eventually) canonical Johannine literature in a codex smaller than P45.

The Johannine Epistles

The earliest artifacts of 2 John and 3 John are the fourth-century Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. In all likelihood, then, the three Johannine epistles were grouped in the seven Catholic epistles known to Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.25). It cannot be known with certainty how else the Johannine epistles might have circulated. Papyrus Antinoopolis I 12 (GA 0232) is a folio of 2 John from a fifth-century miniature parchment codex.⁶⁶ In the top-center margin of the verso, a page numbering of 165 (ρξε) is barely visible in a second hand. In the *editio princeps*, C. H. Roberts suggested that this was a codex of canonical Johannine writings, that 2 John was preceded by the Gospel, Apocalypse, and 1 John.⁶⁷

⁶² Victor Martin and Rodolphe Kasser, eds., *Papyrus Bodmer XIV–XV: P75*, 2 vols. (Cologny-Geneva: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1961), 1:12.

⁶³ Frederic C. Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri: Descriptions and Texts of Twelve Manuscripts on Papyrus of the Greek Bible; Fasciculus II, The Gospels and Acts*, 2 vols. (London: Emery Walker, 1933–1934), 1x; Orsini and Clarysse, “Early New Testament Manuscripts,” 470.

⁶⁴ T. C. Skeat, “A Codicological Analysis of the Chester Beatty Papyrus Codex of Gospels and Acts (P45),” *Hermathena* 155 (1993): 27–43; repr. pages 141–157 in J. K. Elliott, ed., *The Collected Biblical Writings of T. C. Skeat*, *NovTSup* 113 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 156; cf. Kenyon, *Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri*, vol. 2, pt. 1, p. viii.

⁶⁵ Orsini and Clarysse (“Early New Testament Manuscripts,” 472) concur with the fourth-century dating in the *editio princeps* (Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part VI* [London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1908], 4–5). I agree with Michael Dormandy (“How the Books Became the Bible: The Evidence for Canon Formation from Work-Combinations in Manuscripts,” *TC A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 23 (2018), 39 pages. Online: jbt.org/v23/TC-2018-Dormandy.pdf, 28) that this is most likely a single-text MS.

⁶⁶ C. H. Roberts (*Antinoopolis Papyri I*, *Graeco-Roman Memoirs* 28 [London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1950], 24) dated the MS to the third century, but it has been redated to the first half of the fifth century (Orsini and Clarysse, “Early New Testament Manuscripts,” 472); cf. late fourth or early fifth according to Michael J. Kruger, “The Date and Content of P. Antinoopolis 12 (0232),” *NTS* 58, no. 2 (2012): 254–271, 264.

⁶⁷ Roberts, *Antinoopolis Papyri I*, 24–25.

Others have accepted the theory,⁶⁸ but Michael Kruger has disproved it.⁶⁹ Kruger calculates 405 letters per page,⁷⁰ and I come up with 418; there are fifteen visible lines averaging twenty-two letters per line, but four lines totaling eighty-nine letters are missing from the bottom of the page. Even with 418 letters per page, Kruger is correct that the Gospel of John simply cannot fit in the preceding 163 pages of P.Ant. 12.⁷¹ Moreover, I agree with Kruger that Hebrews plus the preceding Catholic Epistles is the likeliest grouping in this multiple-text MS.⁷²

Papyrus 9 preserves portions of 1 John 4:11–12, 14–16. It was originally published as P.Oxy. III 402 and dated to the late-fourth or fifth century.⁷³ The *editio princeps* listed the dimensions as 8 x 5.2 cm,⁷⁴ but these are misleading; the MS is taller than it is wide because of a narrow fiber sticking up. In other words, most of the visible text fits in a 5 x 5 cm square holding six lines and approximately twelve letters per line. The MS has a hole the size of one letter, which helpfully reveals the total letters per page: the second lambda in ἀλλήλους from 1 John 4:11 would fill the hole on line 2 of the recto; the loop of the alpha in καί before πεπιστεύκαμεν in v. 16 would fill the hole in line 6 of the verso. The same text in Codex Sinaiticus would have 324 letters, and P9 has several extra letters, so I calculate fifteen lines per page and twenty-two letters per line.⁷⁵ The 5 x 5 cm visible square only holds twenty-two percent of the text, so I estimate a 10 x 12 cm text block and a 14 x 16 cm page;⁷⁶ this would be remarkably similar in size to P.Oxy. 847, the aforementioned parchment codex of the Gospel of John, for which I calculated 160 pages.

Papyrus 9 was unquestionably a multiple-text MS. Were the Johannine Epistles paired with the Fourth Gospel, the codex would consume 245 pages, nearly ten percent larger than P45.⁷⁷ In terms of thickness, a more reasonably sized MS could fit the Johannine Epistles and Apocalypse in approximately 170 pages. Another likely possibility is that P9 held the canonical seven Catholic

⁶⁸ E.g., Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 455–456; Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 39–40.

⁶⁹ Kruger, “Date and Content.”

⁷⁰ Cf. Roberts’s (*Antinoopolis Papyri I*, 24) mistaken reference to 400 words per page.

⁷¹ Kruger, “Date and Content,” 165.

⁷² Kruger, “Date and Content,” 269.

⁷³ Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part III* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1903), 2. Orsini and Clarysse (“Early New Testament Manuscripts,” 469) date P9 between 275 and 325, yet they adduce a late-fourth-century comparison for P9 (p. 459) and criticize its dating to the third century (p. 447 n. 17); my thanks to Brent Nongbri for pointing this out to me.

⁷⁴ Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part III* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1903), 2.

⁷⁵ Cf. sixteen lines with twenty letters per line according to Lincoln H. Blumell and Thomas A. Wayment, eds., *Christian Oxyrhynchus: Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015), 184.

⁷⁶ Cf. the 11 x 15 cm page dimensions according to Blumell and Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus*, 184.

⁷⁷ By my count, the in Codex Vaticanus has 69,072 letters in the Gospel of John and 11,450 letters the Johannine Epistles; both figures are slightly lower in Codex Sinaiticus.

Epistles, all of which would fit in less than 120 pages or thirty bifolia—in between the thicknesses of Nag Hammadi Codices II and VI.⁷⁸

The Apocalypse of John

Dating to the third century,⁷⁹ P47 preserves ten folios of Rev 9:10–17:2. Including uncontroversial reconstructions, the MS averaged twenty-seven lines of text and twenty-seven letters per line, yielding an average of 729 letters per page.⁸⁰ Using that average, the entire text of Revelation would fill sixty-one pages,⁸¹ but it would not have been difficult to fit the text into sixty pages.⁸² It is uncertain whether P47 was single- or multi-quired: in the *editio princeps*, Frederic Kenyon explained both possibilities and left the question open;⁸³ Peter Malik opts for single-quired as the simplest solution.⁸⁴ Malik is correct that it would be a somewhat unusual arrangement to have three quires of six, five, and five bifolia respectively.⁸⁵ However, if the first page of the first quire and last page of the last quire were glued to the binding, and if the scribe did not write on the opposite sides of the glued pages, then the page counts line up exactly for the text of P47—that is, the twenty extant pages, the twenty-two pages necessary for Rev 1:1–9:10, and the eighteen pages to complete the book.⁸⁶ The binding was

⁷⁸ There are 147 inscribed pages in NHC III (James M. Robinson, ed., *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codex III* [Leiden: Brill, 1976]), as compared with seventy-eight pages in NHC VI (James M. Robinson, ed., *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codex VI* [Leiden: Brill, 1972]). To visualize the respective sizes of NHC III and VI, see Brent Nongbri's models: <https://brentnongbri.com/2018/07/10/a-model-of-nag-hammadi-codex-vi/>; <https://brentnongbri.com/2018/07/14/a-model-of-nag-hammadi-codex-iii/>.

⁷⁹ Orsini and Clarysse, "Early New Testament Manuscript," 470; cf. 250–325 CE according to Peter Malik, *P. Beatty III (P47): The Codex, Its Scribe, and Its Text*, NTTSD 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 58.

⁸⁰ For comparison, in Codex Alexandrinus, the portion of text in P47 totals 14,762 letters, which would average 738 letters per page; in Sinaiticus, the letter count is 14,505, an average of 725 letters per page. Cf. Malik's (*P. Beatty III*, 39) modification of NA²⁸ and estimation of 14,542 letters in this section of P47 and 727 letters per page.

⁸¹ By my count, Revelation has 44,164 letters in Sinaiticus and 44,602 in Alexandrinus.

⁸² There are between twenty-three and twenty-nine lines per page in P47. The first five folios average twenty-six lines per page, and the last five average twenty-eight. If the scribe continued averaging twenty-eight lines per page for the remainder of the text of Revelation, then eighteen pages would suffice; I calculate 13,446 remaining letters in Sinaiticus and 13,616 in Alexandrinus.

⁸³ Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri: Descriptions and Texts of Twelve Manuscripts on Papyrus of the Greek Bible, Fasciculus III*, 2 vols. (London: Emery Walker, 1934–1936), 1:xi.

⁸⁴ Malik, *P. Beatty III*, 28–30.

⁸⁵ Malik, *P. Beatty III*, 29.

⁸⁶ *Pace* Malik (*P. Beatty III*, 40), I see no need to posit five blank pages at the end of the codex.

stitched,⁸⁷ but this could be the case for a single- or multi-quire codex.⁸⁸ The page layout seems to indicate a single-text MS of John's Apocalypse, a codex thinner than any at Nag Hammadi.⁸⁹

In the fourth century, Revelation was included in megacodices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Yet John's Apocalypse continued to circulate independently or in smaller groupings, sometimes in miniature form. Oxyrhynchus Papyrus VI 848 (GA 0163) preserves a few lines from a fifth-century miniature parchment codex.⁹⁰ From the *editio princeps* until now, the page size, layout, and text have been misunderstood. Grenfell and Hunt gave dimensions of 9 x 3.1 cm, but they have been revised to 8.6 x 3.8 cm.⁹¹ The 8.6 cm width includes margins, and a line of text measures approximately 6 cm across. Both sides of the parchment have four fully visible lines along with a partially visible line above and another below. The height of the four visible lines is approximately 2.5 cm. Most importantly, Grenfell and Hunt miscalculated eleven missing lines of text.⁹² There had to be twelve missing lines, as shown in my transcription and reconstruction in the Table below.⁹³ Accordingly, there were eighteen lines per page, so the text block measured approximately 6 x 11.3 cm; if all the margins were approximately 13 mm, then the page measured 8.6 x 13.9 cm.⁹⁴ Based on the text of Alexandrinus and an average of

⁸⁷ Malik says, "There seem to be binding holes visible" on some pages (*P. Beatty III*, 31 n. 46), and I add that this is definitely the case on ff. 8v–9r where the pricks clearly align in the gutters near the last three or four lines of text.

⁸⁸ There are extant examples of multi- and single-quire codices being stitched, e.g., Nag Hammadi Codices I and II, respectively.

⁸⁹ As Kenyon observed, the midpoint of the text of Revelation coincides almost exactly with the midpoint of P47 (*Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri III*, 1:xi). Dormandy ("How the Books Became the Bible," 27) considers P47 "certainly or plausibly one work." Nag Hammadi Codex X is the thinnest, having sixty-eight inscribed pages (seventeen bifolia), not counting a back flyleaf (James M. Robinson, ed., *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codices IX and X* [Leiden: Brill, 1977]).

⁹⁰ Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part VI* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1908), 6.

⁹¹ Peter Malik, "The Greek Text of Revelation in Late Antique Egypt: Materials, Texts, and Social History," *ZAC* 22, no. 3 (2018): 400–421, here 413; cf. 8.5 x 3.1 cm according to Thomas J. Kraus, "When Symbols and Figures Become Physical Objects': Critical Notes about Some of the 'Consistently Cited Witnesses' to the Text of Revelation," in *Book of Seven Seals: The Peculiarity of Revelation, its Manuscripts, Attestation, and Transmission*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Michael Sommer, WUNT 363 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 51–69, 61. Based on the NTVMR images, the 3.8 height seems to square off the uppermost and lowermost points, whereas 3.1 cm reflects the height at any one point of the MS.

⁹² Grenfell and Hunt, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri VI*, 6; Malik ("Greek Text of Revelation," 413) and Kraus ("Critical Notes," 61) repeat seventeen lines per page.

⁹³ In line 5 of the recto, the omicron is compressed to align with the margin, but the overline for the nu extends into the right-hand margin. On the following line, the last visible trace of a letter would be the sigma at the end of 'earthquake,' so I do not know why Grenfell and Hunt claimed "εγ[ε]" (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri VI*, 6). That would be the longest line of text, and the scribe preferred to begin a new word on a new line when possible.

⁹⁴ Cf. Turner's (*Typology*, 158) reconstruction of 9 x 13 cm, accepted by Kraus ("Critical Notes," 62).

226 letters per page,⁹⁵ John’s Apocalypse would consume 198 pages—perhaps twenty-five quartos—in this miniature codex.

Table 1: P.Oxy. 848 Transcription and Reconstruction	
<u>recto, Rev 16:17–18</u>	letters per line
[του ναου] ἀπὸ τοῦ	12
θρόνου λεγούσα	13
γεγονεν και εγε	13
νοντο αστραπαι	13
και φωνα και βρο̅	15
τ[αι και σει]σμο[ς]	13
<u>reconstructed Rev 16:18–19</u>	
[εγενετο μεγας]	12
[οιος ουκ εγενε]	12
[το αφ ου ΑΝΟΣ εγε]	13
[νετο επι της γης]	13
[τηλικουτος σεισ]	14
[μος ουτω μεγας]	12
[και εγενετο η πο]	13
[λις η μεγαλη εις]	13
[τρια μερη και αι]	11
[πολεις των εθ]	12
[νων επεσαν και]	12
[Βαβυλων η μεγα]	12
<u>verso, Rev 16:19–20</u>	
λη εμνη[σθη ενω]	12
πιον του ΘΥ δου	12
ναι αυτη το ποτη	13
ριον του οινου	12
του θυμου της	11
[ο]ργης αυ[του] και	13

P.Oxy. 848 was not necessarily a single-text MS.⁹⁶ By the fifth century, the Johannine Epistles were widely accepted, and they could have preceded the Apocalypse in P.Oxy. 848. First John ends with a caution against idolatry (5:21), and two of the seven epistles embedded in Revelation rebuke those who eat food sacrificed to idols (2:14, 20). P.Oxy. 848 could contain the Johannine Epistles in another

⁹⁵ The extant portion of P.Oxy. 848 agrees with Alexandrinus against Sinaiticus, and Revelation is 438 letters longer in Alexandrinus than in Sinaiticus.

⁹⁶ Cf. Dormand’s classification of GA 0163 “certainly or plausibly one work” (“How the Books Became the Bible,” 30).

fifty-one pages.⁹⁷ If so, then the combined Johannine Epistles and Apocalypse could fit in 249 pages, thirty-two quartos or sixteen octavos. Moreover, such a multiple-text MS would pair nicely with a similarly sized codex of the Gospel of John, namely GA 0217, which has nineteen lines per page averaging sixteen letters per line. By my count, the verso of GA 0217 held 909 letters, so the Gospel would fill approximately 223 pages, possibly twenty-eight quartos. This admittedly calls for speculation, but there is material evidence supporting the hypothesis of a two-volume collection of canonical Johannine writings.

Cf. The Shepherd of Hermas

Fragmentary evidence can raise as many questions as answers, particularly regarding single- versus multiple-text MSS. In association with the Apocalypse of John, I adduce one MS of the Shepherd of Hermas. P.Oxy. XIII 1599 is a fourth-century papyrus codex preserving *Sim.* 8.6.4–8.8.3 (72.4–74.3). The *editio princeps* gives the dimensions 19.8 x 24.5 cm.⁹⁸ The single-columned pages have twenty-eight lines averaging thirty-six letters each, 2,020 in these two pages. If P.Oxy. 1599 was a single-quire codex, then the complete text would fill 136 pages in thirty-five bifolia.⁹⁹

Even a 136-page single-quire codex could accommodate additional texts. Shepherd of Hermas is three times as long as John's Apocalypse, and the Apocalypse of Peter was incredibly short, approximately 5,800 letters.¹⁰⁰ Early MSS such as P45 evince the textual phenomenon of grouping texts by genre rather than author. By extension, I raise the possibility of an apocalyptic codex of Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of John, and Apocalypse of Peter, arranged from longest to shortest. To be sure, there is insufficient evidence that any such MS existed,¹⁰¹ but the possibility should not be discounted. Among early Christian literature, Shepherd of Hermas is more widely attested at Oxyrhynchus than everything but John's Gospel.¹⁰² The reader's aids in P.Oxy. 1599 could indicate that the Shepherd was

⁹⁷ The Johannine Epistles are missing in Alexandrinus, but by my count they comprise 11,450 letters in Vaticanus and 11,354 letters in Sinaiticus; my calculation uses the longer of the two.

⁹⁸ Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part XIII* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1919), 15.

⁹⁹ I have used the Greek text of Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), accepting reconstructions and abbreviating God, Lord, Son, and Spirit; by my count this amounts to 135,255 letters. The preserved portion of P.Oxy. 1599 is nine percent shorter than Holmes's text, so mine are conservative estimates.

¹⁰⁰ The stichometry in Codex Claromontanus (f. 468) lists 4,000 lines for Hermas, 1,200 lines for Revelation, and 270 lines for Apocalypse of Peter, which falls right in between the lengths of Colossians (251 lines) and 2 Timothy (289 lines), which are 7,603 and 3,597 letters respectively; for the codex, see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84683111/f869.image>.

¹⁰¹ However, Enzo Lucchesi ("Le Pasteur d'Hermas en Copte: Perspective nouvelle," *VC* 43, no. 4 [1989]: 393–396) reconstructs a two-volume Coptic edition of John's Apocalypse and the Visions (vol. 1) along with the Mandates and Similitudes (vol. 2).

¹⁰² See Malcolm Choat and Rachel Yuen-Collingridge, "The Egyptian Hermas: The Shepherd in Egypt before Constantine," in *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approaches*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas, *Texts and Editions for New Testament Study* 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 192–212.

read in public worship, and Clement of Alexandria quoted the Apocalypse of Peter as scripture (*Ecl.* 41, 48, 49). A single-quire codex the size of P.Oxy. 1599 could fit all three of these apocalyptic texts in forty-eight bifolia, a MS having fewer letters and fewer pages than P46 (Chester Beatty Papyrus II), an early-third-century single-quire codex of a Corpus Paulinum.¹⁰³

The Acts of John

In the ninth century, Photius of Constantinople listed the Acts of Peter, John, Andrew, Thomas, and Paul as a singular book (βιβλίον). As a rough estimate, such a codex of the apocryphal acts would have been slightly smaller than the Greek New Testament and could have fit into 600 pages, which was large but by no means unmanageable at this point in the middle ages;¹⁰⁴ for comparison, the ninth- or tenth-century majuscule Codex Ψ (GA 044) contained the entire New Testament except for Revelation in slightly more than 600 pages with roughly 1,000 letters per page.¹⁰⁵

Knut Schäferdiek infers the early “transmission of the five Acts as a closed collection,”¹⁰⁶ since the Manichaean Faustus is said to have referenced all five by the end of the fourth century (Augustine, *Faust.* 30.4). As corroborating evidence, stories from each work are reflected in the Manichaean Psalm-book,¹⁰⁷ which Schäferdiek dates between 250 and 275.¹⁰⁸ Yet there are no extant MSS preserving the five apocryphal Acts in an single volume.¹⁰⁹ In the patristic era, all five apocryphal Acts would have filled a megacodex like the New Testament portion of Vaticanus.

¹⁰³ Kenyon, *Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, Fasciculus III*.

¹⁰⁴ The lengths of the apocryphal acts cannot be known with certainty. Nicephorus’s ninth-century stichometry (PG 100:1055–1060) claims 2,750 lines for Acts of Peter, 2,600 for Acts of John, and 1,700 for Acts of Thomas; these total fifty more lines than Nicephorus’s figures for the Synoptics. Yet the extant Greek text of the Acts of Thomas would be closer to 4,700 lines; this is like adding the entire canonical Acts to Nicephorus’s line count. The stichometry in Codex Claromontanus (f. 468) claims 3,560 lines for Acts of Paul, forty fewer than its figures for Mark and John combined. I am unaware of any stichometry for the Acts of Andrew, but if it were the average of the other four (using the larger figure for Acts of Thomas and using the UBS² word counts via the TLG database), then a codex of the five apocryphal acts would total ca. 118,000 words; this is approximately the same size as the entire New Testament minus its longest book, the Gospel of Luke.

¹⁰⁵ Here I approximate fifty folios for Matthew and the first half of Mark, which are lacunose in Ψ; for another comparison, the ninth- or tenth-century minuscule 1424 contained the entire New Testament in 671 pages with roughly 1,000 letters per page.

¹⁰⁶ Knut Schäferdiek, “The Manichean Collection of apocryphal Acts ascribed to Leucius Charinus,” in *New Testament Apocrypha II*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 87–100, 90.

¹⁰⁷ Schäferdiek, “Manichaean Collection,” 88.

¹⁰⁸ Schäferdiek, “Manichaean Collection,” 91–92.

¹⁰⁹ Along with other works such as treatises by John Chrysostom, the Acts of John according to Prochorus is joined by the Acts of Thomas in the sixteenth-century Milan Biblioteca Ambrosiana Codex 063 inf. (Aemidius Martini and Domenico Bassi, eds., *Catalogus codicum graecorum Bibliothecae Ambrosianae*, 2 vols. [Mediolani: U. Hoepli, 1906], no. 798, 2:894–895). Conversely, the Acts of John according to Prochorus is the only work of

Smaller volumes were far more prevalent, and some apocryphal Acts certainly circulated as single-text manuscripts. For example, P.Oxy. VI 849 is a page from an early fourth-century miniature parchment codex of the Acts of Peter. The page measures 9.8 by 9.0 cm, and all margins are visible, revealing a text block almost exactly 7 x 7 cm. The pages are numbered 167 and 168 (ρξζ, ρξη), and each page has fourteen lines of approximately twenty letters per line. Judging from Nicephorus's stichometry, the Acts of Peter would be around 88,000 letters.¹¹⁰ Assuming that P.Oxy. 849 contained the entire text, the MS would be require slightly less than 320 pages.¹¹¹ These 160 folios could be constructed by forty quires of quartos or twenty quires of octavos, and the complete MS would be approximately 5 cm thick.

The oldest extant copy of the Acts of John is P.Oxy. VI 850, which dates to the fourth century and was considerably larger than the Acts of Peter in P.Oxy. 849.¹¹² The “upper portion” of P.Oxy. 850 measures 12.1 x 10.7 cm with nineteen lines having forty-one letters per line,¹¹³ but this was only about half a page. In my estimation, these were 20 x 25 cm pages, the same as in P45 (the fourfold gospel and canonical Acts) and P.Oxy. 1599 (Shepherd of Hermas).¹¹⁴ Based on Nicephorus's stichometry, a single-quire papyrus codex of such size could contain the Acts of John in sixty-four pages or sixteen bifolia.¹¹⁵ This would be a very thin book given its height (thinner than any of the Nag Hammadi Codices, for example), so I consider it highly probable that P.Oxy. 850 was a multiple-text MS, either single- or multi-quire.

One can only guess at what might have accompanied the Acts of John in the MS, but it was at least technologically feasible to have produced a single-volume Johannine corpus, which would have

apocryphal acts in the fourteenth-century Patmos MS 188, which includes a dozen other works such as sermons and lives of saints (Ioannes Sakkelion, *Πατριωτική Βιβλιοθήκη* [Athens: Alexandros Papageorgios, 1890], 108–109).

¹¹⁰ Nicephorus claims 2,750 lines for Acts of Peter, slightly less than the canonical Acts of the Apostles (PG 100:1055–1060).

¹¹¹ In my estimation, the page numbers probably indicate that this was a complete MS of the Acts of Peter; cf. Matthew C. Baldwin's conclusion (*Whose Acts of Peter? Text and Historical Context of the Actus Vercellenses*, WUNT 296 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005], 142–151) that P.Oxy. 849 was an excerpt. There is admittedly a discrepancy between Nicephorus's stichometry, wherein the portion of P.Oxy. 849 would occur near the midpoint of the text, and the extant Actus Vercellenses, according to which approximately one-third of the narrative remains after the text of P.Oxy. 849; see Marietheres Döhler, ed., *Acta Petri: Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar zu den Actus Vercellenses*, TU 171 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018).

¹¹² Kim Haines Eitzen describes P.Oxy. 850 as “less calligraphic and less regular than that for P.Oxy. 849,” but she adds that “it certainly remains within the range of professional bookhands for the fourth century” (“The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles on Papyrus: Revisiting the Question of Readership and Audience,” in *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World*, ed. Tobias Nicklas and Thomas J. Kraus, *Texts and Editions for New Testament Study* 2 [Leiden: Brill, 2006], 293–304, 301).

¹¹³ Grenfell and Hunt, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri VI*, 12, 14.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Turner's (*Typology*, 144) “?” for the size of P.Oxy. 850.

¹¹⁵ Nicephorus claims 2,600 lines for Acts of John, the same size as the Gospel of Luke (PG 100:1055–1060).

contained just shy of 220,000 letters.¹¹⁶ Averaging 1,500 letters per page as in P.Oxy. 850, there would be 147 pages, which break down into thirty-seven bifolia in a single-quire codex—thinner than Nag Hammadi Codex III, P46, and even P66 for the Gospel of John alone. Each piece of Johannine literature is attested at Oxyrhynchus, so if we are to imagine a Johannine codex in the patristic era,¹¹⁷ the Acts of John need not be excluded.

Summary

In terms of construction, there are single- and multi-quire papyrus codices as well as multi-quire parchment codices of Johannine literature in the early Christian centuries. In terms of collection, there were both single- and multiple-text MSS, but even single-text MSS would have been read alongside other texts. The Johannine literature was undoubtedly dispersed among multiple-text MSS grouped by genre. But it was indeed technologically possible to construct a multiple-text MS of the Johannine corpus, including the eventually extracanonical Acts. Even if no such MS actually existed, there is indisputable material evidence that the Gospel, Acts, (First) Epistle, and Apocalypse of John were all being read at Oxyrhynchus in the patristic era.

Sociology of Reading

A typical estimate of early Christian literacy is no more than ten percent,¹¹⁸ and recent scholarship has focused on the sociology of reading and book collection.¹¹⁹ The question of readership has been asked regarding Christian apocrypha,¹²⁰ the apocryphal Acts in particular. Kim Haines-Eitzen has shown persuasively that “reading in antiquity remained predominantly a leisure of the elite few” and that “these apocryphal Acts were read not by the ‘popular’ masses or necessarily by ‘women’ but rather by those members of the upper-echelons who likewise enjoyed poetry, history, and perhaps

¹¹⁶ Using higher numbers wherever possible, I calculate the following letter counts: Gospel (69,072 in Vaticanus), Epistles (11,450 in Vaticanus), and Apocalypse (44,602 in Alexandrinus; for the Acts of John, I use the Gospel of Luke (94,587 in Vaticanus). By this measure, less than sixty-one percent of the Acts of John has survived, since—by my count, without adjusting for *nomina sacra*—the text of chs. 18–115 has less than 58,000 letters in Maximilian Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, vol. 2, part 1 (Leipzig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1898).

¹¹⁷ Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 454–461.

¹¹⁸ Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 5.

¹¹⁹ E.g. William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities*, *Classical Culture and Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); George W. Houston, *Inside Roman Libraries: Book Collections and Their Management in Antiquity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Larry W. Hurtado, “Manuscripts and the Sociology of Early Christian Reading,” in *The Early Text of the New Testament*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 49–62; Gamble, *Books and Readers*.

¹²⁰ Larry W. Hurtado, “Who Read Early Christian Apocrypha?” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha*, ed. Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 153–166.

philosophy.¹²¹ Similarly, Larry Hurtado considered it “likely that for at least some Christian readers more generally *Acts of John* and the other apocryphal acts were read variously as interesting, provocative, and edifying texts.”¹²² In this section, I offer a concurring opinion by showing how purportedly heterodox and heretical portions of the text are not necessarily problematic. In particular, proto-orthodox readers of the Acts of John could be exonerated from Encratism, Docetism, and Gnosticism.¹²³

Encratism

Clement of Alexandria said that Encratites do not procreate (*Strom.* 1.15/71), and the *Refutation of All Heresies* elaborated that they abstain from meat, drink water only, and forbid marriage (*Haer.* 8.20).¹²⁴ The word ἐγκρατεία means ‘self-control,’¹²⁵ and the Acts of John (ch. 84) includes ἐγκρατεία among such descriptors of Christian piety as fasting, prayer, baptism,¹²⁶ Eucharist,¹²⁷ and burial practices; the list also includes nonspecific references to Christians’ food,¹²⁸ drink, and clothing.

Epiphanius says that Encratites use water rather than wine in the mysteries (*Pan.* 47.1.7), and Klauck emphasizes that the Acts of John mention only bread in connection with the Eucharist.¹²⁹ However, it is significant that the Acts of John mention neither water nor wine, so interpreters could read their beverage of choice into the text. Even those who celebrate the Eucharist with bread and water could find support from the Gospel of John. The Synoptics’ Last Supper identifies Jesus’s blood with wine, “the fruit of the vine” (Matt 26:27, 29//Mark 14:23, 25//Luke 22:18). Conversely, the Fourth Gospel has Jesus talk about his followers drinking his blood (6:53–56), and Jesus had previously turned water into wine (2:7–9). The point is that early Christians could celebrate a Johannine Eucharist with water, which was mysteriously or symbolically supposed to be wine, which was in turn mysteriously or symbolically supposed to be Jesus’s blood.

¹²¹ Haines-Eitzen, “Apocryphal Acts,” 303; on women readership, cf. Virginia Burrus, “Christianity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of the Apocryphal Acts,” *Semeia* 38 (1986): 101–117.

¹²² Hurtado, “Who Read Early Christian Apocrypha?” 159.

¹²³ I do not presuppose an exclusively Christian readership; see Ian N. Mills, “Pagan Readers of Christian Scripture: The Role of Books in Early Autobiographical Conversion Narratives,” *VC* 73, no. 5 (2019): 481–506.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Didascalia* 6.20, which says to flee from heretics who abstain from meat, forbid marriage, and do not believe in resurrection. By contrast, Epiphanius says that Encratites believe in resurrection of the dead (*Pan.* 47.1.8). As I discuss below, celebrating the Eucharist at Drusiana’s tomb in the Acts of John anticipates general resurrection.

¹²⁵ Paul preached ἐγκρατεία as a virtue in Acts 24:25 and Gal 5:23.

¹²⁶ Pace Hans-Josef Klauck (*The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction*, trans. Brian McNeil [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008], 18), ch. 57 is not the only reference to baptism in the Acts of John, for here in ch. 84 the “holy washing” (λουτροῦ ἁγίου) resembles the “washing of rebirth” (λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας) in Titus 3:5.

¹²⁷ Pace Hill (*Johannine Corpus*, 262) there is no “soft-peddling of sacramental theology,” given the presence of baptism and Eucharist in the Acts of John.

¹²⁸ Encratite vegetarianism would entail abstaining from animal sacrifices, Jewish and pagan alike.

¹²⁹ Klauck, *Apocryphal Acts*, 18.

The Johannine corpus does not speak with one voice on the topic of celibacy. In the Gospel of John, Jesus can appear supportive of one marriage when attending the wedding at Cana in Galilee (2:1–11), just as he can decry multiple marriages when visiting the Samaritan city of Sychar (4:18); unlike the Synoptics (Matt 8:14//Mark 1:30//Luke 4:38), Simon Peter is not said to be married in the Fourth Gospel. The Apocalypse of John lauds the 144,000 virgins (παρθένοι), “who were not defiled with women” (14:1, 4).¹³⁰ John says in the Acts that he himself is “pure and untouched from womanly intercourse” (ch. 113),¹³¹ and Drusiana has chosen celibate marriage (ch. 63). In terms of reception history, Augustine depicts the Manichaean Faustus reading the Acts of John, calling John a virgin, and encouraging celibacy without coercing anyone to remain a virgin (*Faust.* 30.4); by his own admission, Augustine had a concubine while he was a Manichaean auditor (*Conf.* 4.2). Although Faustus defended virginity based on Jesus’s saying that some men had castrated themselves (*Faust.* 30.4; cf. Matt 19:12), the Acts of John 53–54 oppose the literal interpretation and application of that saying.¹³² As Klauck observes, celibacy is “not elevated into a general norm” in the Acts of John.¹³³

My intent is to put the Acts of John in wider perspective. The book can undoubtedly be read as Encratite, but so-called Encratites could readily conform the Gospel and Apocalypse to their beliefs and practices as well. And although Encratism turned out to be too strict for the proto-orthodox, asceticism might have been preferable to the eternal carnal pleasure Cerinthus allegedly interpreted from John’s Apocalypse (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.8; 7.25.2–3). The Acts of John would offer precisely this kind of corrective.

Docetism and Gnosticism

Chapters 87–105 of the Acts of John are widely regarded as a Gnostic interpolation, and there is only one extant MS of this section (Vienna hist. gr. 63). Janet Spittler has incisively questioned whether the text should be considered a fragment, since it “works on its own” and may best be seen “as an independently circulating episode.”¹³⁴ I think Spittler is exactly right, and her work serves as an important reminder that “the Acts of John,” as it is known to modern scholarship, is a scholarly abstraction. There is no ancient or medieval MS corresponding to the text of modern critical and popular editions.¹³⁵ I nonetheless include the so-called interpolation for discussion. My purpose is to say that even these chapters could be acceptable to proto-orthodox readers.

The polymorphous Jesus of the Acts of John alternates between appearances as a child and adult (ch. 88), elderly and pubescent (ch. 89), flabby and muscular (ch. 89), and exceedingly tall and short (ch.

¹³⁰ οὔτοί εἰσιν οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, παρθένοι γάρ εἰσιν.

¹³¹ καθαρὸν καὶ ἀθιγῆ μίξεως γυναικείας.

¹³² Klauck, *Apocryphal Acts*, 23–24.

¹³³ Klauck, *Apocryphal Acts*, 38.

¹³⁴ Janet Spittler, “Is Vienna hist. gr. 63, fol. 51v–55v a ‘fragment’?” *Ancient Jew Review*, 6 May 2019. Online: <https://www.ancientjewreview.com/articles/2019/4/30/is-vienna-hist-gr-63-fol-51v-55v-a-fragment>.

¹³⁵ E.g., Eric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli, eds. *Acta Iohannis*, 2 vols, CCSA 1 (Brepols: Turnhout, 1983); Pervo, *Acts of John*.

90). These episodes allegedly verge on Docetism, since polymorphy “clearly reduces the bodiliness and the humanity of the earthly Jesus,”¹³⁶ but they are not entirely different from canonical miracle stories. Jesus’s hovering just above the earth and leaving no footprints in the Acts of John (ch. 93) complements Jesus’s walking on water in the Gospel of John (6:16–21), and the glorified Jesus of the Fourth Gospel could materialize in a locked room and present himself as tangible (20:26–27). This section of the Acts of John is clearly inspired by the Synoptic account of the transfiguration (ch. 90). The Acts of John simply multiply examples of Jesus revealing his glory to John prior to the resurrection.

In ch. 94 Jesus told the apostles to make a circle (γῦρος) by holding hands, and they revolved (κυκλεύω) around him. Jesus sang the lyrics, and the apostles responded with the Amens. The performance is later called a choral dance (χορεύω; ch. 97), which some scholars have reified into a Gnostic ritual that replaced the Eucharist.¹³⁷ For comparison, I do not think that the feet washing in the Gospel of John represents a rejection of the Eucharist, since the Gospel elsewhere refers to eating Jesus’s flesh and drinking his blood (6:51b–56). Neither do I think the choral dance in the Acts of John rejects the Eucharist, which is mentioned repeatedly throughout the book. The dance can be envisioned as a ritual, since it is called a ‘mystery’ (chs. 96; 101).¹³⁸ Conversely, a straightforward proto-orthodox reading of Acts of John 94–96 could merely fill a gap from the Synoptics: the text of Matt 26:30 and Mark 14:26 reads verbatim, “And having sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives;”¹³⁹ the Acts of John then tells what they sung and that they moved in a circle.¹⁴⁰ Chapters 94–96 also create a Christological catch-22, for the hymn begins and ends with, “Glory to you, Father,” a disruption of the Christomonism, Modalism, or Monarchianism permeating the rest of the book.

Monarchianism resumes immediately after the song and dance, as Jesus appears to John in a cave while others watch Jesus being crucified (chs. 97–101). Accordingly, Jesus both suffered and did not suffer (ch. 101). This paradox is sometimes regarded as a “critical revision of and attempt to supersede

¹³⁶ Klauck, *Apocryphal Acts*, 32. Junod and Kaestli (*Acta Iohannis*, 2:493) do not classify the Acts of John as Docetic, since Christ maintains a physical body; cf. Pieter J. Lalleman, *The Acts of John: A Two-Stage Initiation in to Johannine Gnosticism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 209–210.

¹³⁷ E.g., Klauck, *Apocryphal Acts*, 33–34; Paul G. Schneider, “A Perfect Fit’: The Major Interpolation in the Acts of John,” in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1991* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 518–532, 525. Cf. Lalleman’s (*Acts of John*, 65) notion that the dance was an initiation rite and that the Eucharist held a continuing function. Also, Schneider (“A Perfect Fit,” 531–532) claims that the Gnostic interpolation represents a rejection of martyrdom, but this is overstated. As Spittler observes, in contrast to other apocryphal Acts, persecution and martyrdom are measurably absent from the Acts of John (Janet E. Spittler, “Joking and Play in the Acts of John,” in *Delightful Acts: New Essays on Canonical and Non-canonical Acts*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, Dennis R. MacDonald, and Clare K. Rothschild, WUNT 391 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017], 209–225, 224).

¹³⁸ Junod and Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis*, 2:621–627.

¹³⁹ καὶ ὑμνήσαντες ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν.

¹⁴⁰ I grant that readers of Irenaeus would associate the reference to the Ogdoad in Acts of John 95 with Gnosticism, but the Eight are all Johannine terms, viz. Father, Grace, Only-Begotten, Truth, Word, Life, Person, and Church (*Haer.* 1.8.5).

the Fourth Gospel.”¹⁴¹ However, Richard Pervo observes more closely, “Despite appearances, *John* 19 is not to be extirpated and replaced with *AcJn* 98–101. The latter seeks to interpret the former.”¹⁴² The Monarchianism in the Acts of John attempted to affirm Jesus’s saying that “I and the Father are One” (John 10:30) while denying that the God the Father could suffer.¹⁴³

Pervo’s attention to Johannine trajectories aligns with the practice of book collection. The author of the Acts of John had collected the Gospel, (First) Epistle, and Apocalypse, and I read the Acts as an intentional attempt to complete a Johannine corpus. Arguments that the Acts intended to replace the Gospel are unsustainable.¹⁴⁴ I say so because known readers of the Acts of John in antiquity also read the Gospel of John, and both texts were authoritative. On the heretical side, the Manichaeans accepted John’s Gospel and Acts.¹⁴⁵ Among the orthodox, Didymus the Blind accepted the Gospel as well as the historicity of the apostolic mission he read in the Acts of John. While Eusebius accepted the Gospel and rejected the Acts, there is no trace of an individual or group accepting the Acts and rejecting the Gospel.

Ancient readers could gather numerous texts and interpret them as a collection having greater and lesser degrees of coherence. The fourfold gospel itself is a case in point. Thomas Kazen helpfully imagines, “Had the Gospel of John been discovered under similar circumstances to the *Gospel of Thomas*, and without 1 John being present in the canon, it would have been seriously questioned by many and regarded as foreign when compared to the canonical (Synoptic) gospels, because of its abstract language, its metaphors and its ideology.”¹⁴⁶ Even in antiquity Origen opined, “If someone carefully examined the Gospels with regard to the historical disharmony that each one shows ..., then the person would surely become dizzy from trying to confirm the Gospels as true” (*Comm. Jo.* 10.3). And Porphyry read the fourfold gospel as false and contradictory, while Augustine insisted that all

¹⁴¹ Alastair H. B. Logan, “The Johannine Literature and the Gnostics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, ed. Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. de Boer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 171–185, 178.

¹⁴² Richard I. Pervo, “Johannine Trajectories in the *Acts of John*,” *Apocrypha* 3 (1992): 47–68, 65.

¹⁴³ To be sure, some proto-orthodox writers opposed Monarchianism. At the earliest, Justin Martyr knew of Christians “who affirm the Son to be the Father” (1 *Apol.* 63.15). Yet Justin had his own notion of a polymorphous Jesus based on Old Testament Christophanies. He describes Jesus “appearing sometimes in the form of fire, but sometimes also in an incorporeal semblance” prior to becoming and remaining human to suffer (1 *Apol.* 63.10 ἐν ἰδέᾳ πυρὸς ποτὲ φανείς, ποτὲ δὲ καὶ ἐν εἰκόني ἀσωμάτων). Such an interpretation would prevail at Nicaea, but other aspects of Justin’s Christology would fail, namely his subordinationism and divisibility. Justin placed Jesus Christ “in second position” and the prophetic Spirit “in third rank” (1 *Apol.* 13.3: ἐν δευτέρᾳ χώρᾳ ... ἐν τρίτῃ τάξει), and he described the Father’s begetting the Son as one fire kindling another (*Dial.* 61.2), as opposed to Nicene, indivisible “light from light.”

¹⁴⁴ E.g., Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 260–261; Lalleman, *Acts of John*, 65, 116, regarding the Gnostic interpolation; Logan, “Johannine Literature and the Gnostics,” 178.

¹⁴⁵ The Gospel of John was essential for Mani’s claim that the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth granted his apostolate (*Keph.* 14; Epiphanius *Pan.* 12.6; Augustine, *Faust.* 32.17).

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Kazen, “Sectarian Gospels for Some Christians? Intention and Mirror Reading in the Light of Extra-Canonical Texts,” *NTS* 51, no. 4 (2005): 561–578, 566 n. 25.

four were literally true.¹⁴⁷ Different readers could draw different conclusions, and Hill has convincingly refuted “the myth of orthodox Johannophobia,”¹⁴⁸ that the Gospel of John was not Gnostic just because Gnostics revered it. By extension, neither should the Acts of John be judged guilty by association.

Even though the Acts of John are not attested at Nag Hammadi, Gerard Luttikhuisen has carefully shown how Gnostics might have read and appreciated Acts of John 94–102.¹⁴⁹ For example, a Gnostic reading of the resuscitation miracles could mean that “John’s converts are reborn and resurrected to a new spiritual life in spite of the fact that they still (or again) live in this world.”¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Klauck says that the Gnostic interpolation reinterprets the other miracles in the Acts so that “resurrection happens here and now.”¹⁵¹ At the same time, I emphasize that the resuscitation of Drusiana only occurred when John took the brethren to break bread at the tomb two days after she had died (Acts of John 72). As known materially from the catacombs and textually from the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (6.22.2),¹⁵² the Acts of John portray orthopraxy reflecting belief in bodily resurrection—a belief not shared with Gnostics.¹⁵³

Gnostics could nonetheless interpret the eternal punishment in Acts of John 36 as referring to the soul (ψυχή) disembodied from the flesh (σάρξ) as in the Apocryphon of John (NHC II 27), whereas proto-orthodox readers could intuit the punishment of reanimated corpses as in the Apocalypse of John (Rev 20:5, 12–15). Similarly, John’s promise that “you will have your indestructible soul” (ch. 104) can be read as a Gnostic denial of bodily resurrection,¹⁵⁴ while the orthodox could interpret the promise in line with Jesus’s warning, “fear instead the one able to destroy even the soul and the body in Gehenna” (Matt 10:28b).¹⁵⁵

Additionally, before John raises Drusiana, he prays to the God, “for whom the whole observed creation (κτίσις) is measured” (ch. 79). Gnostic readers could still see creation as subject to the ineffable (ἄφραστος) God (ch. 79), even if it be the work of the evil Demiurge Yaldabaoth as in the Apocryphon

¹⁴⁷ For an overview of the first seventeen hundred years of John’s relation to the Synoptics, see my *John’s Use of Matthew*, *Emerging Scholars* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 2–7.

¹⁴⁸ Hill, *Johannine Corpus*.

¹⁴⁹ Gerard Luttikhuisen, “A Gnostic Reading of the Acts of John,” in *The Apocryphal Acts of John*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, *Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* 1 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 119–152.

¹⁵⁰ Luttikhuisen, “Gnostic Reading,” 151.

¹⁵¹ Klauck, *Apocryphal Acts*, 41.

¹⁵² For the Syriac text, see Arthur Vööbus, ed., *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, 4 vols., CSCO 401–402, 407–408 (Leuven: CSCO, 1979), 407:261; for the Latin, see Franz Xaver von Funk, ed., *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, 2 vols. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1905), 1:376; see also Erik Tidner, *Didascaliae Apostolorum, Canonum Ecclesiasticorum, Traditionis apostolicae versiones Latina*, TU 75 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1963), 98.

¹⁵³ I agree with Lalleman (*Acts of John*, 35) that most of the sections of the Acts of John “do not contain clear Gnostic features.”

¹⁵⁴ ἀκαθαίρετον ὑμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν ἔξετε.

¹⁵⁵ φοβεῖσθε δὲ μᾶλλον τὸν δυνάμενον καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα ἀπολέσαι ἐν γεέννῃ. On his deathbed, John commands Gehenna to be extinguished (Acts of John 114).

of John. Yet the Demiurge myth is nowhere made explicit in the Acts of John, so proto-orthodox readers could interpret the *κτίσις* as the work of Jesus the Logos, the Creator God of John 1:1–5.

In the Acts of John, Callimachus’s attempted necrophilia was the work of the polymorphous Satan (ch. 70), and ch. 94 refers to Jesus’s arrest by “the lawless—and given laws by a lawless serpent—Jews.”¹⁵⁶ Manichaeans read this as dualistic,¹⁵⁷ but proto-orthodox readers could interpret Acts of John 94 in line with Jesus’s saying that “the Jews” are “from the father, the devil” in the Gospel of John (8:31, 44) along with the references to “the synagogue of Satan” in the Apocalypse of John (2:9; 3:9).

The supersessionism of the Acts of John is not unlike the canonical Johannine literature or other New Testament texts, so the Acts do not have to be dualistic. In fact, the same scribe likely copied the Acts of John (P.Oxy. 850) and the supersessionist Epistle to the Hebrews (P.Oxy. VIII 1078).¹⁵⁸ Based on the correspondence of the third-century local clergyman Sotas, AnneMarie Luijendijk has discerned “the contours of a Christian scriptorium at Oxyrhynchus,”¹⁵⁹ which could indicate the same readers—not just the same scribe—of these texts.¹⁶⁰ Regardless, in the end there is no *prima facie* Gnostic or orthodox interpretation to the passages I have highlighted. Much like the polymorphous Jesus in apocryphal Acts, the very book of the Acts of John could take on different meanings depending on which readers beheld certain passages within the purview of other pieces of Johannine literature.

Conclusion

Hill charted “the use of the Johannine writings in the second century,” but he restricted the corpus to the eventually canonical Johannine literature.¹⁶¹ He also included the Acts of John as a witness to the Johannine corpus rather than a part of it. So I offer an alternative, Table 2, including fewer witnesses but a longer *durée* to show who read what; an X signifies use of a text, an asterisk represents disuse of a text, and a question mark designates uncertainty as to which epistle(s) might have been Clement of Alexandria’s ‘lesser’ one(s). As material witnesses, I have included the Oxyrhynchus papyri, Codex Sinaiticus, and Jerome’s Vulgate. I have excluded the Apocryphon of John from this table, since none of my select witnesses attest to it.¹⁶² I have also excluded the Manichaeans, although they definitely accepted the Gospel and Acts of John.

¹⁵⁶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνόμων καὶ ὑπὸ ἀνόμου ὄψεως νομοθετουμένων Ἰουδαίων.

¹⁵⁷ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 63.1; Hegemonius, *Act. Arch.* 24.19; 46.22; 50.31; 51.23; 54.22.

¹⁵⁸ Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part VIII* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1911), 11.

¹⁵⁹ AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, HTS 60 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 151; see esp. 144–151 on “book production at Oxyrhynchus.”

¹⁶⁰ Luijendijk has elsewhere noted in general that “Grenfell and Hunt did not conduct a stratigraphy so that we lack the immediate archaeological context of these papyri—Christian and others” (AnneMarie Luijendijk, “Sacred Scriptures as Trash: Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus,” *VC* 64, no. 3 [2010]: 217–254, 226).

¹⁶¹ Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 450.

¹⁶² At the same time, I accept that so-called Gnostics likely had a Johannine corpus of the Gospel and Apocryphon. Those two could be read as complementary, but I consider the Apocryphon incompatible with the Apocalypse and Epistles. Along similar lines, see Turner, “Johannine Legacy.”

Table 2: A Sample of Orthodox Johannine Corpora

	Gospel	Acts	1 John	2 John	3 John	Apocalypse
Ignatius	X					
Justin	X					X
Irenaeus	X		X	X		X
Clement	X		X	?	?	X
Origen	X		X			X
Dionysius	X		X			X
Eusebius	X	*	X	X	X	X
Sinaiticus	X		X	X	X	X
Athanasius	X		X	X	X	X
Didymus	X	X	X			X
Oxyrhynchus	X	X	X			X
Vulgate	X		X	X	X	X

As of the last quarter of the second century, every subsequent witness used the Gospel, First Epistle, and Apocalypse, even as doubt crept in around Revelation. This would be the Johannine corpus if defined in terms of common denominators. Eusebius knew the full gamut of Johannine literature. He offered the first reference to the Acts of John and deemed them heretical. Conversely, I have argued that Eusebius offered the first reference to 3 John, which he considered ‘disputed.’ And he was indecisive regarding the Apocalypse. Nevertheless, all of Eusebius’s non-heretical Johannine writings were codified in Codex Sinaiticus and the Vulgate, and Athanasius included the same texts in his list of New Testament divine scriptures.¹⁶³ The eventually canonical Johannine literature was gaining traction, but Didymus the Blind cautions against presuming the closure of the canon by the end of the fourth century. That is, Didymus appears to have excluded the latter Johannine epistles while granting authority to the Acts. My overall point is simple: in the patristic era, there was not a singular Johannine corpus; instead there were plural Johannine corpora, and the Acts of John could fit naturally.

The material production of early Christian literature explains the lack of uniformity concerning who read which parts of the Johannine corpus. Writers imitated their predecessors, and readers collected and compared highly similar works.¹⁶⁴ Christians adopted the codex practically from its inception,¹⁶⁵ and works circulated as both single- and multiple-text MSS. As single-text MSS, anyone’s Johannine corpus was necessarily a multi-volume set, so different readers could have known about and preferred different works. And there are various possibilities for multiple-text MSS. Scribes could have produced single-volume codices of Johannine writings, but any number of combinations were possible, and I have demonstrated that the Gospel, Acts, three Epistles, and Apocalypse all could have fit in a codex roughly the same thickness as P46, P66, and NHC III. Early Christian literature was also grouped by

¹⁶³ See Gallagher and Meade, *Biblical Canon Lists*, 118–129.

¹⁶⁴ For Christian, Jewish, and pagan examples of the proliferation, collection, and complementarity of related texts, see my “Tatian’s Diatessaron and the Proliferation of Gospels.”

¹⁶⁵ Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 43–93.

genre. In that case, readers could collect a fourfold gospel book, a book of Catholic Epistles, a multiple-text MS of apocalyptic texts including John's, and a single- or multiple-text MS of apostolic Acts including John's.

Finally, the allegedly heterodox and heretical aspects of the Acts of John should not be overstated. To be sure, Monarchian Christology would have become increasingly problematic in the third and fourth centuries, beginning with Tertullian's *Adversus Praxean*. Similarly, some readers opposed the Acts' leanings toward Encratism and Docetism, and the so-called Gnostic interpolation of chs. 87–105 could have raised questions. Even so, I have tried to show that the Acts of John are open to multiple interpretations and that the text's purportedly heterodox and heretical tendencies could be curbed precisely by reading the Acts alongside the Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse, the combination of which finally composed a complete Johannine corpus.