LIBERTY UNIVERSITY RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

THE DATE OF THE MURATORIAN FRAGMENT:
AN INFRINGEMENT TO THE BEST EXPLANATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA
AUGUST 15, 2019
PROOF SHEET

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the faculty who played such an influential role in this dissertation. Special thanks goes to my chairman, Dr. Ken Cleaver and to my readers, Drs. Doug Taylor and Ben Laird. Also thank you, Dr. Ed Smither, who proctored my Latin examination. Others who encouraged me in the process include my good friends, Ramfis Mendez, James Mindrup, Jeff Edwards, and Dr. Darren Slade. I am profoundly grateful for your encouragement. Finally, I would like to thank my parents who have been cheering me on from heaven. And last, but certainly not least, I thank my dear wife Kimberly who always believed in me on the days that I had lost all faith in myself.
Abstract

Three hundred years after its discovery, scholars find themselves unable to identify the more likely of the two hypotheses regarding the date of the Muratorian Fragment, whether it is a late second- to early third-century composition or a fourth-century composition. In light of the lingering problem of the Muratorian Fragment’s date and its significance, a new study has been conducted, and this dissertation features an exposition of that study’s conduct and findings. The study sought to break the impasse and identify the more likely of the two hypotheses regarding the date of the Fragment—that it is either a late second- to early third-century composition (the Early Hypothesis) or a fourth-century composition (the Late Hypothesis). This study found that, by making an inference to the best explanation, the Early Hypothesis is preferred. This methodology consisted of weighing the two hypotheses against five criteria: plausibility, explanatory scope, explanatory power, credibility, and simplicity. The Early Hypothesis surpassed the Late Hypothesis in every category. The problem of whether the Muratorian Fragment is a late second- to early third-century or a fourth-century composition warrants consideration because the elimination of one of the hypotheses will contribute to the resolution of other critical problems surrounding the document. Of arguably greater import, answering the question of the Fragment’s date would ultimately shed light on the residual effects of ancient orthodox theology’s interaction with heterodoxy upon the twenty-first century, effects possibly having a direct correlation with the authority Christianity ascribes to the texts which it currently includes in the New Testament. What makes this dissertation unique in its contribution to both theology and apologetics is the fact that it marks the first time the rigorous application of an objective methodology, known as “inference to the best explanation” (or IBE), has been applied to the problem of the Fragment’s date insofar as its findings have implications for Bibliology,
and the demonstration of its methodology may serve as a template for the resolution of apologetic problems.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A Problem

Background of the Problem

In 1700, in the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana of Milan, philologist and historian Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1750) discovered a manuscript fragment of eighty-five lines featuring a list of Christian texts.¹ During the two and one-quarter centuries following the publication of this “Muratorian” Fragment, most scholars believed that the list constitutes the oldest orthodox catalog of New Testament texts, or canon, in existence, dating it to the late second or early third centuries.² In general, they inferred these dates from the Fragmentist’s references to two data. First, the Fragmentist states that the *Shepherd of Hermas* was written during his own lifetime and during the bishopric of Pius (p. ca. 140 - ca. 154).³ This suggests that the Fragmentist lived and

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¹ In 1740, Muratori published the fragment in the third volume of a six-volume compilation of works entitled *Antiquitates italicæ mediævi*, in *Dissertatio XLIII*. Ludovico Antonio Muratori, ed., *Antiquitates italicæ mediævi: sive dissertations de moribus, ritibus, religione, regimine, magistratibus, legibus, studiis literarum, artibus, lingua, militia, nummis, principibus, libertate, servitate, foederibus, aliisque faciem & mores italici populi referentibus post declinationem Rom. imp. ad annum usque MD*. (Mediolanum, IT: Ex typographia Societatis palatinae, 1740), cols. 3:853-4. The document is considered a “fragment” because it appears to be a copy of a text which begins mid-sentence.


³ Muratorian Fragment, lines 73-6. From here throughout the paper, references to portions of the Muratorian Fragment will be noted parenthetically in-text. For the chronology of the bishops of Rome and the time of Pius’s bishopric see Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 4.11; 5.6, 24.
wrote during or after this period. Second, the two heresies mentioned, Marcionism and Montanism (lines 65, 81-5), prevailed during the second century, so their mention indicates a possible composition date in the late second or early third century. While initially only one scholar, Friedrich Zimmermann, disagreed with this hypothesis of a late second- or early third-century date, canon scholar B. F. Westcott, in his General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament, dismissed Zimmermann’s protest as unworthy of serious consideration.

However, in the late 1960s and again in the early 1990s, two scholars argued extensively that the Fragment is a composition of the fourth century. First, New Testament scholar Albert C. Sundberg, Jr. cast doubt on the hypothesis of a second-century date by questioning the traditional interpretation of the evidence leading to it. Instead, he looked to other evidence which he believes points less ambiguously toward the fourth-century and argued for an eastern origin. Though the majority of canon scholars summarily dismissed Sundberg’s conclusion, distinguished patristics scholar, Everett Ferguson, furnished a reasoned, extensive response to Sundberg, maintaining that the Fragment’s evidence is better explained by the hypothesis that it is second-century composition. Later, Episcopalian priest, Geoffrey M. Hahneman, joined Sundberg in arguing that the Fragment is a composition of the fourth century, and he also

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5 Ibid.


brought several new reasons to the debate.\textsuperscript{9} Again, Ferguson weighed in on the issue by reviewing Hahneman’s book and questioning several of the latter’s assumptions.\textsuperscript{10} Professor of New Testament, Joseph Verheyden, responded to Hahneman by highlighting the similarities between the Fragment and other known second-century texts, concluding that the Fragment could not be a fourth-century composition.\textsuperscript{11}

Therefore, as the twentieth century closed, the question of the Fragment’s date, which previously appeared to be settled since its discovery, hung in the balance. Sundberg and Hahneman had challenged the \textit{status quo}, and Ferguson and Verheyden had questioned their assumptions. Both sides agreed on one thing, the debate appeared to be at a standstill. For example, Ferguson acknowledged the real complexity of what appears to be an otherwise simple problem by highlighting the significant roles the evidence, coupled with one’s presuppositions, plays. According to him, “the issue . . . is not clear cut, and the evidence is finely balanced. There needs to be caution exercised, moreover, about the framework in which this material is put.”\textsuperscript{12} In the wake of Sundberg’s and Hahneman’s work, canon scholar and fourth-century adherent Lee Martin McDonald conceded that “we cannot insist on” a fourth-century date.\textsuperscript{13} It is


\textsuperscript{12} Ferguson, review of \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 697.

\textsuperscript{13} Lee Martin McDonald, \textit{The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 693.
for this reason that, while, on one hand, professor of New Testament and early Christianity, Charles E. Hill believes “the stage is set for important work to be done in this area,” on the other hand, professor of religious studies, Harry Y. Gamble, acknowledges that “it is hard to imagine what more could be said on either side.”

Nevertheless, in the twenty-first century another argument for a fourth-century date surfaced. In an article entitled “The Muratorian Fragment as Roman Fake,” biblical scholar Clare K. Rothschild, argued that the Fragment is a fictional piece, written in the fourth century in an attempt to link the standards of canonicity back to the second century by pretending to have been written then. According to her, this forgery “betrays itself through anachronisms . . . clichès, and mistakes.” Like Sundberg and Hahneman, Rothschild favors the fourth-century yet for altogether different reasons. Rothschild also cited several scholars who seem to have come close to drawing similar conclusions. First, in 1845, around the one-hundredth anniversary of Muratori’s publication of the Fragment, philologist and theologian H. W. J. Thiersch insinuated that the Fragment was a hoax, but one of the eighteenth century. In addition, Westcott noticed that the Fragment appeared to constitute a compendium of several different sections, possibly written by more than one unknown person and edited together by the Fragmentist, yet Westcott

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16 Ibid., 59.

17 Ibid., 60n13, 62, 79n122.

18 H. W. J. Thiersch, Versuch zur Herstellung des historischen Standpunkts für die Kritik der neutestamentlichen Schriften (Erlangen, DE: Carl Heyder, 1845), 384-7, which contain endnote 7 for Ch. 16.
favored a second-century date.\textsuperscript{19} Also, Rothschild cited Robert M. Grant, in his review of Hahneman’s book, as acknowledging that, though the Fragment dates itself to the second century, it can only be a work of the fourth.\textsuperscript{20} Thus, with two separate conclusions having been reached, each apparently carrying arguably equal weight, yet stemming from a variety of presuppositions, disparate evidence, and dissimilar reasons, Rothschild concedes that with regard to the date of the Muratorian Fragment’s composition, “today scholarship has reached an impasse.”\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Statement of the Problem}

Three hundred years after its discovery, scholars find themselves unable to identify the more likely of the two hypotheses regarding the date of the Muratorian Fragment, whether it is a late second- to early third-century composition or a fourth-century composition.

\textbf{Significance of the Problem}

The problem of whether the Muratorian Fragment is a late second- to early third-century or fourth-century composition warrants consideration because the elimination of one of the hypotheses will contribute to the resolution of other critical problems surrounding the document. For example, scholars still have not reached a consensus on who authored the Fragment. The list of possibilities manifests remarkable diversity, including the names of Papias, Irenæus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Clement of Alexandria among others.\textsuperscript{22} Furthermore, because of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Westcott, \textit{A General Survey}, 223.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Rothschild, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 79n122; Robert M. Grant, review of \textit{The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon}, Geoffrey M. Hahneman, \textit{Church History} 64, no. 4 (December 1995): 639.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Rothschild, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 58.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} For a list of some of the possible authors and the scholars who suggest them see Schnabel, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 240.
\end{itemize}
recently suggested possibility that the Fragment is a fourth-century composition, the list of possible authors has now expanded to include the Cappadocian Fathers, Athanasius, Eusebius, Lactantius, and Hilary. However, solving the problem of the Fragment’s date would establish a *terminus a quo* and a *terminus ad quem*. In other words, for example, if the Fragment proved to be a fourth-century composition, no author who died prior to ca. 300 could possibly have written it. The finding with regard to date thus narrows the pool of authors to a more manageable number of “more-likely” names. Scholars could then further narrow the list by comparing the possible authors with the Fragment’s internal evidence to determine which authors are more likely to have written it. If, on the other hand, for example, the Fragment proved to be a second-century composition, Tertullian, while a possible author, might prove to be an unlikely author given the Fragment’s apparent censure of Montanism.

Moreover, knowing the likely author leads to the resolutions of other questions such as: in what language was the Fragment probably originally written, Latin or Greek? What is its provenance? What was its destination (if any)? What was the situation the author sought to address? The possible answers to each of these questions could be further narrowed by filtering them through the Fragment’s internal evidence, just as could be done to determine the author. While this process does not necessarily lead to certainty based on indisputable evidence, it does result in higher likelihood based on a preponderance of circumstantial evidence.

Furthermore, and finally, the answers to these questions lead to the solutions of problems of arguably greater import. If one could reasonably determine the most likely author, original language, provenance, destination, and situation; one may also be able to infer conclusions regarding the author’s theology, including his theological method (theological sources,
epistemology). In turn, understanding the theology driving the Fragment’s composition leads to a greater comprehension of the factors driving the development of other New Testament canonical lists (or not driving them, as the case may be). Also, the theology driving and controlling the compilation of these lists has remarkable implications for the historical development of ancient Christian theology as well as for the more momentous issue of what most scholars consider to be orthodox theology’s interaction with heterodoxy. In the final analysis, answering the question of the Fragment’s date would ultimately shed light on the residual effects of ancient orthodox theology’s interaction with heterodoxy upon the twenty-first century, effects possibly having a direct correlation with the authority Christianity ascribes to the texts which it currently includes in the New Testament. Coming to an understanding of which of these texts are the “right” ones is critical, for it is primarily from the New Testament that Christianity claims to derive its theology. As D. F. Strauss recognized, the problem of the New Testament canon may very well be Christian theology’s Achilles’s heel.

This significance is not lost on scholars. For example, McDonald acknowledges that knowing whether or not the Fragment is a second- or fourth-century composition has a direct bearing on our understanding of “the concerns and criteria of the church . . . in establishing its canon of Scriptures.” For this reason, an understandably substantial corpus of literature related to this problem of the Fragment’s date has emerged.

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23 The traditional view of the very nature of early Christian theology has at times been challenged and reaffirmed by scholars. For examples see Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen, 1934) and Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture’s Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).


Review of the Related Literature

Muratori’s hypothesis that the Fragment was written in 196 initially encountered some dissention, but the vast majority of these disputation revolved around the late second or early third centuries as the period of composition. Every scholar seemed to have his particular year of preference, whether it be 170, or 196, or 220, or others. Nevertheless, for the most part, Muratori’s hypothesis offered a good explanation for the evidence. That said, the question is: how did the issue of the Fragment’s date become such a controversy, expanding the possibilities from a sixty-year period (from ca. 160-220) to a 215-year period (from ca. 160-392)?

The following review of the related literature answers this question by tracing the manner in which scholars have tried to explain the available evidence.

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Muratori, as its discoverer, was the first to suggest a date for his Fragment, and he argued that it was a second-century work. He did this by linking the Fragment’s reference to the Cataphrygians with a controversy in which a Roman priest Caius played a role by debating one Proclus, “who contended for the Phrygian heresy.”28 According to Photios of Constantinople, a Caius flourished around 196, and Muratori credited this Caius as the Fragment’s author, supposing that he had written it that year.29 In addition, Muratori reinforced his hypothesis with what he calls “a stronger argument,” namely the Fragmentist’s claims that the Shepherd of Hermas was written “very recently in our time” and that Hermas was a contemporary of Pius.30 These statements appear to establish a date in the second century.

However, in his Dissertatio historico-critica scriptoris, theologian Friedrich Gottlieb Zimmermann declared that he was not convinced that the Fragmentist’s statement about Hermas and Pius is best explained by a second-century date because he doubts the veracity of the Fragmentist’s claim that Hermas and Pius were brothers, a claim that he posits has never been verified. In addition, while Zimmermann agreed that Caius flourished around 196, he was not so quick to form a connection between the Fragmentist’s Cataphrygian heresy and Caius’s debate with Proclus. The link is not necessary as it is likely, in Zimmermann’s opinion, that many would have agreed with Caius against the Cataphrygians, and the Fragmentist may simply have been one of them. Furthermore, and contrary to Muratori’s hypothesis, Zimmermann concluded

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29 Muratori, Antiquitates italicæ mediiævi, col. 3:851.

30 Ibid., col. 3:852; the Latin for “very recently in our times” in the Latin is “nuperrime temporibus nostris.”
that the Fragmentist did not live before the fourth century because the Fragmentist’s treatment of Christian texts (i.e. his approval of some and his rejection of others) betray a fourth-century theological context.  

Other scholars’ positions did not fall so neatly on one side of the line or the other. In *Einleitung in die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, theologian and biblical scholar Johann Leonhard Hug disagreed with both Muratori and Zimmermann. He believed the Fragment to be an early third-century work though he made no mention of the supposed relationship between Hermas and Pius, nor did he point back to Zimmermann’s doubts about it. Siding with Muratori, Karl August Credner (*Zur Geschichte des Kanons*) believed both Zimmermann’s fourth-century date and Hug’s third-century date to be impossibilities due to the evidence which, in his view, betrays a Fragmentist who clearly places himself in the second century. Credner maintained that the document was composed around 170, or “possibly a few decades later.” He cited the Fragmentist’s mention of Hermas and Pius as evidence of this.

Because of these disagreements, in his *Critical History of Christian Literature and Doctrine*, classics scholar James Donaldson understood that “we must content ourselves with an approximation to a date.” He contented himself with the early third century. He preferred an approximation because he, like Zimmermann, did not believe the Fragmentist’s reference to

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33 Karl August Credner, *Zur Geschichte des Kanons* (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1847), 84.

34 Ibid.

Hermas and Pius was well explained by the second-century hypothesis. The Fragment’s mutilated condition, apparent omissions, the author’s poor use of Latin, and the possibility of interpolations all detract from any confidence one may have in establishing a date based on internal evidence. In addition, *nuperrime temporibus nostris* may not mean during the author’s lifetime but instead may have been the author’s way of drawing a distinction between the times of the apostles and his own. Also, the expression “sitting in the seat of the church of the city of Rome” betrays a context more in line with that of Cyprian of Carthage (ca. 200-258) than with Tertullian (ca. 155-220), leading Donaldson to date the Fragment in the early third century. Moreover, Donaldson denied the historicity of the person of Hermas, but he cited no reason for this departure from the hitherto held consensus that the putative author of *Shepherd* existed.

However, biblical scholar, textual critic, and theologian, Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (*Canon Muratorianus*), like Muratori and Credner, argued that the Fragment is as early as 160 due to the author’s statement that Hermas had written his *Shepherd* “very recently in our time” while Pius was “sitting.” Tregelles did not believe that more than twenty years passed between the composition of *Shepherd* and the Fragment.

On the other hand, though theologian George Salmon (“Muratorian Fragment,” in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines*) did not consider the statement about Hermas and Pius to be conclusive, he concluded the Fragment is a late second- or early third-century composition. He argued that the Fragment was written during the bishopric

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36 Donaldson believes the Fragment to be of a North African provenance thus his reference to these two particular Fathers. The Latin for “sitting in the seat of the church of the city of Rome” is “sedente cathetrarum urbis romae aeclesiae.”

37 “Sitting” is “sedente” in the Latin here.

38 Tregelles, *Canon Muratorianus*, 64.
of Zephyrinus (p. ca. 199 - ca. 217). First, and in accord with Donaldson, Salmon believed the expression *temporibus nostris* does not necessitate a date within the speaker’s lifetime, and Salmon cited Irenæus and Eusebius as having used similar expressions regarding events which clearly took place before their lifetimes. Acknowledging this to be a possibility allows for a case in which the Fragmentist may have been contrasting “our time” against the time of the apostles and not referring literally to a point in time during his own life. Against Tregelles, Salmon maintained that even if the Fragmentist wrote fifty or sixty years after the death of Pius, he could conceivably have used such an expression. Also against Tregelles, but in agreement with Donaldson, Salmon believed the Fragmentist’s language, in his assertion that the *Shepherd of Hermas* was written with Pius “sitting on the seat of the church of the city Rome,” betrays a date after the time of Pius and Hermas. According to Salmon, the date of composition was so removed from their time that the writer probably had no recollection of the struggle for the bishopric of Rome that had taken place during the second century.39 However, Salmon provided no evidence for such a contested See of Rome. Perhaps he was referring to Justin Martyr’s remark regarding the numerous possibilities of places for Christians to meet in that city as evidence that a single church from which a bishop could rule had not yet become common practice. Regardless, Salmon concluded that the Fragment was written at some time between Tertullian’s *Prayer* and his *Modesty* due to Tertullian’s change in position on the authority of *Shepherd*.40 While at one point, Tertullian cited *Shepherd* as normative, at another he called it


40 Ibid., 1002-1003.
“that apocryphal ‘Shepherd’ of adulterers.”\textsuperscript{41} Between these writings, says Salmon, apparently both the church catholic and the Montanists came to look askance at \textit{Shepherd}, and Salmon believed this is why the Fragmentist is against its public reading with the prophets and the apostles (lines 73-80). Salmon believed that the Fragment possibly represented the church’s official step in censuring \textit{Shepherd}.\textsuperscript{42}

Salmon was the last of the nineteenth-century scholars to cast a skeptical eye on a literal interpretation of the internal evidence offered by the Fragmentist regarding the date of the work. Until Sundberg in the 1960s, the rest considered the statement regarding Hermas and Pius in a literal sense and as best explained by either a second or third century Fragment. For example, the New Testament canon scholar Theodor Zahn, in \textit{Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons} and his article “Muratorian Canon” in \textit{The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge}, did not doubt that the Fragmentist lived during the time of Pius as claimed. However, Zahn thought it likely that he had only been a child during the bishop’s reign and that he penned the Fragment after Pius, the work being “a writing of about 200-210.”\textsuperscript{43} In addition, Zahn shunned the notion of a fifth-century, or even a fourth-century Fragment because it was his opinion that the question regarding the public reading of the \textit{Shepherd of Hermas} was limited to the time around 200.\textsuperscript{44} Also, Westcott was under the impression that the mention of Hermas and Pius in the Fragment offers support for a second-century date, and he corroborated this internal evidence


\textsuperscript{42} George Salmon, “Muratorian Fragment,” 1003.


\textsuperscript{44} Zahn, “Muratorian Canon,” 54.
by citing a Latin, anti-Marcionite poem which makes the same statement and is attributed to Pius himself.\textsuperscript{45} Thus Westcott had no doubt that the Fragment comes from the second century, and he considered the author’s statement regarding \textit{Shepherd’s} having been written during his and Pius’s time as “perfectly clear, definite, and consistent with its contents, and there can be no reason either to question its accuracy or to interpret it loosely.”\textsuperscript{46} Likewise, patrologist Johannes Quasten took the Fragmentist’s statement about Hermas and Pius at face value and concluded that it was written sometime between the death of Pius (ca. 155) and the end of the second century.\textsuperscript{47}

However, in the middle of the twentieth century, the hypothesis that the Fragment is a second- or third-century composition faced perhaps its greatest challenge. In 1957 at Harvard University, Albert Sundberg authored his dissertation arguing that the Old Testament canon was not fixed until the fourth century and that the church, prior to that time, had received and recognized only a loose list of putatively authoritative Jewish scriptures.\textsuperscript{48} For this reason, Sundberg believed that the history of the New Testament canon stands in need of revision and that the Muratorian Fragment represents the work of a fourth-century author, thus resurrecting the Zimmermann thesis. Sundberg initially presented this theory about the New Testament canon in 1965 at the Third International Congress of New Testament Studies held at Oxford in the form

\textsuperscript{45} Westcott, \textit{A General Survey}, 199.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 215n1.


of an essay entitled “Towards a Revised History of the New Testament Canon.” Later, Sundberg
turned this essay into his landmark article “Canon Muratori: A Fourth-Century List.”

In making his case for a fourth-century Fragment, Sundberg first dismantled scholars’
confidence that the statement regarding Hermas and Pius was necessarily explained by the
second-century hypothesis by casting doubt on their translation of the phrase nuperrime
temporibus nostris. While, as some claimed, the term nuperrime should be translated “very
recently,” Sundberg showed that it could just as viably mean “most recently.” Sundberg
contended that, in this way, the Fragmentist was comparing the Shepherd of Hermas’s
composition with the previously mentioned texts. In other words, the Fragmentist was stating
that, of all these texts, Shepherd was written last, or most recently, not necessarily that it was
written during his own lifetime.

Moreover, inasmuch as some scholars had translated the expression temporibus nostris to
mean “in our lifetime,” Sundberg insisted that it may also indicate a broader period of time after
the apostles, and therefore could be more general in nature and include any time, both within or
subsequent to the second and third.

The church fathers made a sharp distinction between
themselves and the apostles. For example, church historian Hegesippus (ca. 110-180)
contrasted the time of the apostles with his own by declaring that during the apostles’ time the
church “was not yet corrupted by vain discourses.”

Later, in the fourth-century, Eusebius also
drew a line between the “apostolic age” and subsequent times. More significantly, Irenæus (ca.

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49 Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 8.
50 Ibid.
51 Ignatius, To the Ephesians 13; Polycarp, To the Philippians 3.9.
53 Ibid., 3.31.6 (NPNF 2:1:163).
used language almost identical to that of the Fragmentist (except in Greek) when characterizing the Apocalypse as having been written “almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.” For Irenæus to have considered Domitian’s time (ca. 81-96) as his own, when about nineteen years had passed between Domitian’s death and his own birth, he had to have been “utilizing the tradition which differentiates between apostolic and subsequent time.”

In short, Sundberg does not find a solution to the problem of the Fragment’s date in the reference to Hermas and Pius due to a perceived ambiguity in the language. Given this doubt, yet acknowledging the possibility that the expression nuperrime temporibus nostris may still mean what it had traditionally come to mean to most scholars, Sundberg next sets out to offer a positive conclusion for the date. Sundberg transitions from this negative argument to his positive one by making it clear that

the language of Canon Muratori can be understood as making its case against the Shepherd of Hermas without any reference to the lifetime of the author of the list. It is to be noticed that I do not argue that the alternative translation, “but Hermas wrote the Shepherd most recently, in our time (i.e., in post-apostolic times), in the city of Rome, while his brother Pius was the bishop occupying the episcopal chair of the church of the city of Rome,” is the only possible translation but that this is a possible translation and that it is a viable alternative to the traditional dogmatic interpretation of the passage. This means that the argument that the author of the fragment must have been born before the death of Pius is inconclusive, and that the phrase “nuperrime temporibus nostris” understood as contrasted with the times of the prophets and of the apostles is another viable meaning of the passage.

Continuing on and in seeking a date, Sundberg found what he believed to be stronger evidence for a date elsewhere in the Fragment. According to Sundberg, the Fragmentist’s treatment of several of the texts listed betrays a fourth-century context in the East rather than any

54 Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 9-10; Irenæus, Against Heresies 5.30.3 (ANF 1:560), “ἄλλα σχεδόν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεάς, πρὸς τῷ τέλει τῆς Αομετίανον ἀρχῆς.”


56 Ibid., 11.
context in the West. First, Sundberg considers the Fragmentist’s treatment of the *Shepherd of Hermas* to be more consistent with Eusebius’s (303) and Athanasius’s (367) than with the Fathers of the second and third centuries.\(^\text{57}\) Second, no parallels to the way the Fragmentist handles the *Wisdom of Solomon* explicitly present themselves prior to Eusebius, Epiphanius (ca. 310-403), and Athanasius.\(^\text{58}\) *Wisdom*’s usefulness in the church did not become an issue until the fourth century, which is consistent with the Fragmentist’s inclusion thereof. Finally, the Fragment’s apparent equivocal treatment of the Apocalypse (i.e. John’s) and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, by placing them last in the list, appears to match the way Eusebius treats the same, a development which did not manifest until late, and then only in the East. Based on these observations, Sundberg concluded that “it has become increasingly clear that there are several salient features of Canon Muratori that have no place in the early western church but find their earliest parallels in the eastern church during the late third and fourth centuries.”\(^\text{59}\) Therefore, if the Fragment is a second-century composition, it constitutes an “anomaly.”\(^\text{60}\) Based on this conclusion, Sundberg later went on to downplay the Fragment’s role in the overall history of the New Testament canon.\(^\text{61}\) Sundberg’s theory initially faced mixed reception during the 1970s. Yale New Testament professor Nils A. Dahl thought Sundberg “proved” his case, but New Testament scholar John A. T. Robinson believed Sundberg’s argument to be “questionable at


\(^{58}\) Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.1-8; Epiphanius, *Refutation of All Heresies* 1.1.8.6.4. Sundberg maintains that Melito’s Old Testament does not contain the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and that after him, no eastern Father included it in the Old Testament but tended to place it in the New Testament, a practice which is apparently consistent with that of the Fragmentist. Sundberg, “The Old Testament,” 220n69.

\(^{59}\) Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 34.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 35.

many points.”\

Almost a decade after Sundberg published his findings, in his “Canon Muratori: Date and Provenance,” Everett Ferguson responded to Sundberg point-by-point.

Regardless of Sundberg’s minimizing the traditional view of *nuperrime temporibus nostris*, Ferguson asserted that interpreting it as “in our lifetime” is “the most natural meaning of the author’s statement.”\

Also, contra Sundberg, Ferguson argued that Irenæus’s expression ἄλλα σχεδόν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεάς means “almost to the present generation” [emphases added]. Ferguson was illustrating how close to his time the Apocalypse was written, not distinguishing between apostolic times and post-apostolic times. If, as Sundberg claimed, Irenæus was using the same type of language as the Fragmentist, then the former’s ἡμετέρας γενεάς is equivalent to the latter’s *temporibus nostris*, and this argues against Sundberg; it puts the *Shepherd of Hermas* within the lifetime (or generation) of the Fragmentist. Ferguson conceded, agreeing with Sundberg, that the Fathers made a distinction between their own times and those of the apostles, but he held that this was not the way they did it. Moreover, Ferguson found that the Fragmentist’s highlighting the lateness of a text to demonstrate its lack of authority finds a parallel in Tertullian. To Ferguson, it seemed that not all in the Fragment is post-second-century.

Ferguson further charged Sundberg with the need to show that features in the Fragment could only have existed during the fourth century and not before. This task is rendered the more

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63 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 678.

64 Ibid. Ferguson supports this use by citing others: *1 Clement* 5, Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 3.32.8, 5.8.6, 5.26.22.

65 Tert., *Prescription against Heretics* 30; idem, *Against Marcion* 4.5
difficult given the likelihood that the text was not originally of Latin because one can make no firm determination based on linguistics other than perhaps determinations which shed light on the milieu in which the original was translated into Latin. Ferguson did not believe the original was Latin but highlighted the fact that, if it was, it can only have a western provenance. However, if it was originally written in Greek as Sundberg and most scholars hold, it could have an early provenance in both East and West. Notwithstanding this possibility, for the sake of argument Ferguson cited two lexical features in the Fragment which have affinities in the second century. The Fragmentist’s use of *disciplina* (line 63) sounds like Tertullian’s “rules” and “discipline” for the church, and the Fragmentist’s reference to the bishop’s chair finds a parallel in Irenæus’s mention of the “chair” as the “symbol of teaching.”

Ferguson also rejected Sundberg’s notion that the Fragmentist’s attitude toward the *Shepherd of Hermas* is a uniquely fourth-century one. According to Ferguson, the Fragmentist may have been attempting to counter a second- or third-century wholesale approval for *Shepherd* similar to the perceived approval found in Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria. In addition, he saw Tertullian’s eventual reluctance toward *Shepherd* as a parallel to the Fragment’s proscription against its being authoritatively and publically read. It is not impossible that both the Montanist Tertullian and the church catholic found fault with *Shepherd* though for different reasons and to varying extents. Unlike Sundberg, Ferguson does not see a turning point regarding *Shepherd* in Eusebius but rather a report of a condition that had existed since around the time of Tertullian, a

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66 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 678; Tert., *Prescription against Heretics* 36, 44 (ANF 3:261, 265) and idem, *The Veiling of Virgins* 16 (ANF 4:36-7); Irenæus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 2.

67 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 679; Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 12-3; Irenæus, *Against Heresies* 4.20.2; Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.7; Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 1.17, 29; 2.1, 9, 12.

text which “has been disputed by some, and on their account cannot be placed among the acknowledged books; while by others it is considered quite indispensable, especially to those who need instruction in the elements of the faith. Hence, as we know, it has been publicly read in churches.”

With regard to Sundberg’s claim that the *Wisdom of Solomon* was not explicitly listed among the New Testament texts until Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Athanasius, Ferguson highlighted the fact that Eusebius’s mention of *Wisdom* is in the context of Irenæus’s New Testament, a point which Sundberg noticed but seemed to brush over. Says Eusebius of Irenæus’s New Testament,

> Since, in the beginning of this work, we promised to give, when needful, the words of the ancient presbyters and writers of the Church, in which they have declared those traditions which came down to them concerning the canonical books, and since Irenæus was one of them, we will now give his words and . . . he uses almost the precise words of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, saying: “The vision of God produces immortality, but immortality renders us near to God.” He mentions also the memoirs of a certain apostolic presbyter, whose name he passes by in silence, and gives his expositions of the sacred Scriptures.

Thus, as Ferguson noticed, “the New Testament canon of the Muratorian fragment has a parallel . . . before 200.”

Finally, Ferguson deemed Sundberg’s statements regarding the Apocalypse and the *Apocalypse of Peter* uncertain. First, the Fragmentist’s placement of the Apocalypse toward the end of the list does not necessarily mean it was on the “fringe” of acceptance, as Sundberg asserted. Something had to come last and since the *Apocalypse of Peter* was not permitted to be

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69 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 679; Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 3.3.6 (*NPNF* 2.1.135).

70 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 679.

71 Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.1, 8 (*NPNF* 2.1.222, 223).

72 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 679.

73 Ibid., 680.
publically read by some, and the fact that both books are eschatological in character, placing them together at the end seems only natural. Also, not all in the East had doubts about the Apocalypse, and as Sundberg himself conceded, the Fragmentist’s attitude toward it is more positive than that of Eusebius. In addition, Ferguson did not see a convincing argument in Sundberg’s understanding that *Apocalypse of Peter* was only known in the East and that the Fragmentist’s treatment of it finds a parallel in Eusebius; Eusebius appears to be more negative while the Fragmentist more positive. This positivity may also account for why Clement of Alexandria offered “in the *Hypotyposes* [now lost] abridged accounts of all canonical Scripture, not omitting the disputed books, — I [i.e. Eusebius] refer to Jude and the other catholic epistles, and Barnabas and the so-called *Apocalypse of Peter,*” a fact not unknown to Sundberg.

To summarize the Sundberg/Ferguson debate at this point, Sundberg cast doubt on scholars’ interpretation of the author’s statement that Pius lived during his lifetime. Sundberg sought to replace this doubt with confidence in another indication of the Fragment’s date by arguing that evidence for a fourth-century date could be found in the Fragmentist’s attitude toward the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the Apocalypse, and the *Apocalypse of Peter*. However, Ferguson, in turn, cast doubt on Sundberg’s interpretation of these statements. Ferguson went on to argue for the second century in the West. He cited the Fragmentist’s silence on the epistle to the Hebrews (a likelihood greater in the West rather than in the East), his treatment of the heresies, his emphasis on the “rule of faith,” his language when referring to the two advents of Christ, his description of the Fourth Gospel, and his classification of the

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75 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 680.

“prophets and the apostles,” as all proving consistent with a second-century milieu. While the Fragment furnished evidence of its date, Sundberg and Ferguson interpreted that evidence differently, and the two hypotheses persisted.

Nevertheless, for the remainder of the 1980s most scholars dismissed Sundberg’s arguments as unpersuasive. The exception to this trend was New Testament exegete Raymond Collins who opined that Sundberg’s consisted of a “careful analysis” and that Sundberg succeeded at showing the Fragment to be of the fourth century. While initially Harry T. Gamble found Sundberg’s argument “interesting” but “not convincing,” he later changed his view and stated his belief in a fourth-century Fragment. Had the Fragmentist written “nuper” instead of “nuperrime,” or even simply “temporibus nostris,” F. F. Bruce would have inclined towards Sundberg, yet Bruce held to a second-century date though he credited Sundberg with making an impressive case. However, from the late 1980s into the early 1990s, Sundberg’s hypothesis would garner support and expansion through the work of Geoffrey M. Hahneman.

In 1987, Hahneman presented a paper to the Tenth International Conference on Patristic Studies at Oxford in which he expressed his agreement with Sundberg that the Fragment is a fourth-century composition. Hahneman cast doubt on the interpretations of the evidence pointing to a second-century date by questioning the veracity of statements by the Fragmentist

77 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.


regarding Hermas, Pius, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. In 1992, Hahneman published his 1989 D.Phil. thesis, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, in which, like Sundberg, he dismissed the likelihood that the Fragment is a second-century work and made an argument that any dependence on *nuperrime temporibus nostris* should be set aside as featuring too many difficulties to lead to a reliable conclusion.  

He then proceeded to argue for a fourth-century date via three avenues. First, he attempted to demonstrate that the Fragmentist’s mention of “Miltiades” betrays a dependence on Eusebius, thus the earliest possible date for the Fragment would be 303. Second, he sought to show that Jerome looked to the Fragment as a source, putting its latest possible date at 392. Third, Hahneman saw three similarities between the Fragment and the *Refutation of All Heresies* of Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 377): Epiphanius’s inclusion of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, his mention of the supposed Marcionite *Epistle to the Laodiceans*, and the presence of the Apocalypse.

Hahneman’s summation of and supplement to Sundberg’s work met with credence from several scholars. For example, while conceding that Hahneman’s monograph had “weak spots and some special pleading,” J. K. Elliott believed it made a “creditable case,” and Lee McDonald believed both Sundberg and Hahneman “carry the day.”  

So convinced by Hahneman was Robert M. Grant that he declared “the Sundberg-Hahneman theory is eminently convincing, and the Muratorian fragment . . . should be permanently removed from the second century.”

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However, other scholars did not find Hahneman persuasive and launched arguments against his case.\textsuperscript{85} First, Ferguson contended that Hahneman failed to show proof that the evidence can only be explained by a fourth-century date, and he highlighted inconsistencies in the way Hahneman treats portions of the Fragment. Much of Ferguson’s contention with Hahneman centers on the way the latter defines “canon” and other notions. For example, whereas Hahneman views parallels in the fourth century as “canon forming,” Ferguson considers them to be “canon settling.”\textsuperscript{86} Indeed, Ferguson questioned many of Hahneman’s presuppositions regarding the idea of “canon,” as these presuppositions appear to steer his interpretation of the evidence and his reasoning. Also, whereas Sundberg found his primary dissenter in Ferguson, professor of New Testament Joseph Verheyden offered his rebuttal of Hahneman’s argument in an essay presented in July 2001 to the Fiftieth Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense, which was published two years later in The Biblical Canons. Verheyden opined that, though there is “no ‘hard’ evidence for the traditional dating . . . there is an abundance of ‘circumstantial evidence.’”\textsuperscript{87} He flatly rejected the suggestion that the Fragment is from the fourth century. He still considers the information given regarding Hermas and Pius to be integral to the question of date, and he believes the similarities between the Fragment and other second-century works cannot be ignored. For him, a second-century date best explains the apparent problems.

\textsuperscript{85} In 1993 Philippe Henne published an article reviewing both Sundberg’s and Ferguson’s arguments (not Hahneman’s) and sided with Ferguson due to what he considers to be the “new” arguments of the latter. Philippe Henne, “La Datation du ‘Canon’ de Muratori,” Revue Biblique 100, no. 1 (1993): 54-75.

\textsuperscript{86} Everett Ferguson, review of The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon, Geoffrey M. Hahneman, Journal of Theological Studies 44, no. 2 (October 1993): 695.

\textsuperscript{87} Verheyden, “The Canon Muratori,” 556.
In addition to Ferguson’s and Verheyden’s responses in the wake of Hahnemann, other scholars disagreed with Hahneman’s argument. In his review of Hahnemann’s book, professor of New Testament and early Christianity Charles E. Hill acknowledged that whereas Hahneman supported Sundberg’s case with further examples of parallels of the Fragment in the fourth century, he expressed reservation for a wholesale two-century displacement of the Fragment’s date. As promised, a year later, Hill published a longer article detailing his reasons for siding against Hahneman’s case. Hill believes Hahneman’s agenda (i.e. a reconsideration of the date of the formalization of the Old Testament canon) drove his analysis and that the traditional, early explanation does the most justice to the evidence. In their consideration of Hahneman’s case, New Testament scholars Michael W. Holmes and Robert F. Hull questioned the manner in which Hahneman handled the evidence. Holmes believes that Hahneman tended to push the ambivalent evidence in his direction and that he could have been more convincing had he treated the evidence more “evenhandedly.” Hull perceives a weakness in the way that, in his view, so much is dependent upon Sundberg’s and Hahneman’s view of “canon” as a concept. This pre-

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90 Hill, “The Debate Over the Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon,” 437, 452.

conception informed the dating to the extent that Hahneman too greatly minimized the opposing position.⁹²

At the time of this writing, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, scholarship seems to favor a nuanced early date. Theologian Peter Balla proposes that a second-century date “can be maintained” despite the respected efforts of both Sundberg and Hahneman.⁹³ Jonathan J. Armstrong contends that the author is Victorinus of Pettau (ca. 250-303) due to parallels in Victorinus’s work and in the Fragment, thus he places it in the late third-century, though he still agrees with Hahneman regarding the unlikelihood of the Hermas-Pius connection.⁹⁴ Finally, theologian Christophe Guignard believes that Verheyden has soundly refuted Hahneman, and “one can therefore consider that the older consensus (i.e. on an earlier date) has now been widely restored.”⁹⁵

Nevertheless, since Schnabel’s 2014 “State of Research” on the Muratorian Fragment, a new voice has emerged, or perhaps the echo of some old voices. In her “The Muratorian Fragment as Roman Fake,” Clare K. Rothschild has resurrected the nineteenth-century theory that the Fragment is a hoax. Rothschild argues that the Fragmentist intentionally misrepresented himself as a second-century author.⁹⁶ She seeks to reconcile features of both the second- and fourth-century arguments. Rothschild looks to both external and internal evidence, concluding

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that the Fragment is indeed a fourth-century composition. In this way, her position falls in line with that of Sundberg and Hahneman. In short, with Rothschild, yet another fourth-century conclusion has been reached, though simply by incorporating different evidence and approaching the problem with new presuppositions.

In any case, Rothschild’s hopes of offering a “conciliating position” notwithstanding, the problem of the impasse remains.\(^{97}\) The very nature of her argument means that the Fragmentist essentially “planted” evidence. Therefore, any evidence in the Fragment is suspect, yet Rothschild must show two things. First, she must show evidence that the Fragmentist did this. Second, she must show that the Fragment is from the fourth century. Unless she does these, exhaustively considering all the other arguments to date, the evidence points away from any conclusive interpretation of the text to an even greater degree.

In summary, the history of Fragment research is a history of scholars’ attempts to explain why the evidence points either to a late second- to early third-century composition, on one hand, or to a fourth-century composition, on the other. Upon examination of this history, several methodological issues manifest themselves. First, the scholars bring different presuppositions to the inquiry. For example, Sundberg comes espousing a differentiation between “scripture” and “canon,” while others may not necessarily make this distinction.\(^{98}\) Second, different evidence is considered to greater or lesser degrees over the years. For example, none seem to consider the issue of idiolect until Donaldson’s link between the Fragmentist’s expression regarding Rome’s bishopric and a particular milieu (for Donaldson this milieu shares similarities with that of Cyprian). However, more recently, this tendency to favor some evidence over other evidence has


\(^{98}\) Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 35.
been identified; for example, Holmes observes that Hahneman seems to “cherry pick,” preferring evidence which supports his position over evidence which does not.\textsuperscript{99} Moreover, the scholars interpret the evidence differently. For example, whereas adherents to the second-century hypothesis translate \textit{nuperrime} as “very recently,” Sundberg argues that a possible translation may be “most recently.”\textsuperscript{100} Again, for some \textit{temporibus nostris} is understood as “during our lifetime,” yet for others, “during the post-apostolic age.”\textsuperscript{101} Given, these various approaches and interpretations, it is no wonder that neither hypothesis has yet to manifest itself as the best explanation of the evidence for the Fragment’s date.

\textbf{The Present Study}

\textbf{Purpose of the Study}

In light of the lingering problem of the Muratorian Fragment’s date and significance, this dissertation seeks to break the impasse and identify the more likely of the two hypotheses regarding the date of the Fragment— that it is either a late second- to early third-century composition or a fourth-century composition. What makes this dissertation unique in its contribution to both theology and apologetics is the fact that it marks the first time the rigorous application of an objective methodology, known as “inference to the best explanation” (or IBE), has been applied to the problem of the Fragment’s date insofar as its findings have implications for Bibliology, and the demonstration of its methodology may serve as a template for the resolution of apologetic problems.

\textsuperscript{99} Holmes, review of \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 595.

\textsuperscript{100} Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 8.

\textsuperscript{101} Salmon, “Muratorian Fragment,” 1002.
The Research Question

The study strives to answer the following question: Which of the two hypotheses regarding the date of the Muratorian Fragment is more likely—that it is a late second- to early third-century composition or that it is a fourth-century composition?

Delimitations

This study limited its inquiry to the consideration of evidence that has bearing on the date of the Fragment’s composition. It treats questions of authorship, provenance, and language to the extent as these issues have bearing on the primary problem under consideration, that of date.

Definitions

For the sake of brevity, when referring to the hypothesis that the Fragment is a late second- to early third-century composition and to the hypothesis that it is a fourth-century composition, the dissertation uses the terms “Early Hypothesis” and “Late Hypothesis” respectively.

Methodology

The Nexus: Problem, Purpose, and Plan

Inasmuch as Muratorian Fragment scholars formulated hypotheses (e.g. that the Fragment is a second-century composition) which explain the evidence (e.g. the statement that the Shepherd of Hermas was written “very recently in our times”), they engaged in abductive reasoning, that is, they exhibited “a preference for . . . one hypothesis over others which would equally explain the facts.”102 This process has come to be known as drawing an “inference to the

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best explanation,” hereafter referred to as IBE. According to epistemologist Gilbert Harman, this type of inference takes place every time a person infers the veracity of a hypothesis from that hypothesis’s ability to explain the evidence. Scholars interested in determining the Fragment’s date have been engaged with this type of reasoning for almost three hundred years, and they have formulated two possible hypotheses, or explanations, but which one is the best?

Harman understood that, at times, while applying IBE, multiple hypotheses will manifest, and these will naturally compete for preference. For this reason, Professor of History and Philosophy of Science, Peter Lipton sees IBE as a two stage process. The first stage consists of hypothesis generation. From 1740 to 2018, Fragment scholars have been in this stage. Stage Two “is the process of selection from among those live candidates.” Harman lays the groundwork for this selection process by alluding to several criteria that scholars can bring to bear in choosing one hypothesis over the others. Thus, according to him, “there is, of course, a problem about how one is to judge that one hypothesis is sufficiently better than another hypothesis. Presumably such a judgment will be based on considerations such as which hypothesis is simpler, which is more plausible, which explains more, which is less ad hoc, and so forth.”

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104 Harman, “The Inference to the Best Explanation,” 89.

105 Peter Lipton, Inference to the Best Explanation, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 149.

106 Harman, “The Inference to the Best Explanation,” 89.
The Harman-McCullagh Criteria

Where Harman and Lipton leave off, history philosopher C. Behan McCullagh takes over. In justifying descriptions of the past, which is the task of history, McCullagh sees a use for IBE in cases where there is no evidence to provide strong direct support for a particular hypothesis about the kind of information an historian wants to discover, and so the historian has to draw upon very general knowledge to arrive at plausible hypotheses about its origin. As the name of this form of inference suggests, it proceeds by judging which of the plausible hypotheses provides the best explanation of what is known about the creation of the evidence in question.\textsuperscript{107}

Moreover, like Harman, McCullagh knew that at times two hypotheses manifest. He suggests that in cases where scholars are “unable to exclude all but one of the possible explanations of their evidence, . . . they have to weigh up the comparative merits of each.”\textsuperscript{108}

At this point, McCullagh builds on Harmon’s criteria and describes the process by which one weighs the merits of competing hypotheses. Among competing hypotheses, the one that meets these criteria to a greater degree than the others possesses a greater likelihood of being the correct hypothesis. The criteria which preferred hypotheses more satisfactorily meet are the standards of \textit{plausibility}, \textit{explanatory scope}, \textit{explanatory power}, \textit{credibility}, and \textit{simplicity}.\textsuperscript{109} First, hypotheses that demonstrate \textit{plausibility} are those which are implied by the evidence, such that, in McCullagh’s words, “it [the hypothesis in question] could well have been.”\textsuperscript{110} Second, the amount of evidence explained by a hypothesis constitutes the hypothesis’ \textit{explanatory scope};

\textsuperscript{107} C. Behan McCullagh, \textit{The Logic of History: Putting Postmodernism in Perspective} (London: Routledge, 2004), 49.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{109} McCullagh, \textit{The Logic of History}, 51-2.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 52.
the greater the amount of evidence explained, the greater the hypothesis’ explanatory scope. Third, hypotheses that explain the evidence to a greater degree of likelihood possess *explanatory power*. Fourth, there should not exist any evidence which implies the hypothesis to be unlikely, nor should there be any existing evidence which a hypothesis cannot explain; hypotheses which meet this standard exhibit *credibility*.\(^{111}\) Fifth and finally, superior hypotheses demonstrate *simplicity*. They require no unsubstantiated assumptions in order to stand, and when challenged, they do not resort to such assumptions. If a hypothesis does, it makes itself susceptible to Ockham’s razor.\(^{112}\) McCullagh explains simplicity best when he observes that a preferred hypothesis does “not include ad hoc components, designed simply to accommodate data which appear to disconfirm it.”\(^{113}\) To date, no scholar has weighed the merits of the two hypotheses regarding the Fragment’s date in a deliberately and rigorously conducted “Lipton Stage Two scenario.” This suggests that scholarship may profit from this present study, one which weighs the hypotheses through the application of the Harman-McCullagh criteria.

The question of the date of the Muratorian Fragment’s composition is historical in nature, and scholars have employed historical methods to gather evidence, form hypotheses, and challenge one another. This present study, also historical in nature, supplements their work and builds upon it because it implements IBE Stage Two by considering the evidence they have gathered and by evaluating the hypotheses they have formed through the application of the

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\(^{111}\) McCullagh, *The Logic of History*, 52. This is McCullagh’s insistence that acceptable theories are “not disconfirmed by other reasonable beliefs,” this author has labeled it “credibility” as it is a type of implementation of the law of non-contradiction in probabilistic statements.

\(^{112}\) The principle of Ockham’s razor “says that a theory that postulates fewer entities, processes, or causes is better than a theory that postulates more, so long as the simpler theory is compatible with what we observe.” Elliot Sober, *Ockham’s Razors: A User’s Manual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2.

\(^{113}\) McCullagh, *The Logic of History*, 52.
Harman-McCullagh criteria. In this way it identifies the more likely of the two hypotheses regarding the date of the Fragment. Because they describe events that cannot be repeated, historical descriptions lack certainty. They can only be said to be likely true, possibly true, or impossible. These are what McCullagh calls the “degrees of credibility,” and this study makes use of this concept when evaluating the likelihood of the veracity of the descriptions treated within.114

Preview of the Findings

The study found that, by making an inference to the best explanation, the Early Hypothesis is preferred. This methodology consisted of weighing the two hypotheses against the five criteria: plausibility, explanatory scope, explanatory power, credibility, and simplicity. The Early Hypothesis surpassed the Late Hypothesis in every category. The study found the Early Hypothesis to be somewhat plausible, to exhibit broad explanatory scope, to have some explanatory power, to be credible, and to have a high degree of simplicity. The study found the Late Hypothesis to be only minimally plausible, that it demonstrates considerable explanatory scope, it has relatively limited explanatory power, it lacks credibility, and it has a comparatively low degree of simplicity. In the two essential categories of plausibility and credibility, the Early Hypothesis implies more items of evidence than does the Late Hypothesis, and it is not disconfirmed by any evidence as is more likely the case with the Late Hypothesis. For the two categories of explanatory scope and power, while both hypotheses explain about an equal share of the evidence, the Early Hypothesis demonstrates greater explanatory power in that its explanations of five items of evidence seems more likely to be the case than the Late Hypothesis.

114 McCullagh, The Logic of History, 12.
is able to show for any of its explanations of the phenomena in the Fragment. In the less critical areas of credibility and simplicity, the Early Hypothesis faces no evidence disconfirming its believability, while the Late Hypothesis does, and the Late Hypothesis is beset by four unsubstantiated assumptions, the Early, only one. Through implementing the methodology of inference to the best explanation, it appears more likely the Muratorian Fragment was written during the second or third centuries than that it was written during the fourth century.

Summary

The problem of the Muratorian Fragment’s date has vexed scholars since its discovery in 1700. While the majority of scholars believe the Fragment was composed in the late second- or early third-century, some have recently made the case that it represents a work of the fourth-century and reflects a more evolved understanding of which texts should make up the Christian New Testament canon. Resolving the problem of the Fragment’s date is important because of the implications for understanding the theology of ancient Christianity, which ultimately drives contemporary theology. This present study, in seeking to determine the more likely date of the Fragment, implements an epistemological methodology known as “Inference to the Best Explanation” (IBE), a methodology often used to resolve historical problems. The methodology calls for the weighing of two hypotheses based on five criteria: plausibility, simplicity, explanatory scope, explanatory power, and credibility. The hypothesis which best meets these criteria is the preferred hypothesis. To that end, the next chapter offers a description of the Fragment’s background.
CHAPTER 2

THE MURATORIAN FRAGMENT

Perhaps one of the reasons scholars have found it so difficult to date the Fragment is because it is so singular. No other known ancient sources explicitly cite it, and it was not discovered until the very end of the seventeenth century. Until that time, the earliest extant list of widely accepted New Testament texts was that of Origen, of which we have an account from Eusebius in the fourth century. Also, the discovery of the Fragment is essentially a relatively recent and modern development. In order to conduct the type of evaluation for which this present study calls, it is critical to have a basic understanding of some of the facts concerning the Fragment itself. This chapter serves as an effort to furnish the reader with that type of background information.

First, the chapter describes the Fragment’s discovery and its contents. For the reader’s reference, it also includes two Latin transcriptions of the Fragment (original and revised) as well as an English translation; these can also be found in the appendices). Second, and of primary interest to the question of date, the chapter discusses the Fragment’s authorship, provenance, and language, particularly as reflected by the determinations of scholars. Much of the debate about when the Fragment was composed depends in part on the solutions to these three special problems. Finally, the chapter offers a brief summary of how scholars may eventually use the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{115}}\text{Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 217. Hahneman sees possible allusions in some fourth-century works, but none of these exhibit a clear dependence on the Fragment.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{116}}\text{Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 6.25.3-14.}\]
answer to the date question in conjunction with the issues of provenance and language to resolve the authorship question by narrowing the list of possible authors.

**Description**

On September 7, 1607, Cardinal Federico Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, founded the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana in that city, “as a college of writers, a seminary of savants, a school of fine arts.”  

It was the second public library in Europe, the first being the Bodleian at Oxford. Scholar and historiographer, Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1750) began working at the library in 1694. In 1700, Duke Rinaldo I asked Muratori to serve as his librarian in Modena but not before Muratori had discovered the Fragment in the Ambrosiana. Forty-years later, in Modena, he published the Fragment in Volume 3 of his six-volume collection of essays, *Antiquitates italicæ mediævi, in Dissertatio XLIII* (cols. 807-880), “De Literarum Statu, neglectu, & cultura in Italia post Barbaros in eam invectos usque ad Annum Christi Millesimum Centesimum,” which deals with the topic of religion in Italy as well as with other subjects such as institutionalism, economics, and social customs. According to Tregelles, Muratori’s design in publishing the Fragment was to present it as an example of the poor Latin of the medieval Italian scribes, illustrative of a period during which learning suffered remarkable neglect. It is likely due the Fragment’s corrupted condition that Tregelles, along with several other scholars, made some corrections and revisions to the Latin found in the Fragment, an otherwise “blundering and

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118 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Lodovico Antonio Muratori.”

119 Ibid.

120 Tregelles, *Canon Muratorianus*, 2, 9. Tregelles viewed the Fragment toward the end of August, 1857 and made a facsimile tracing.
illiterate transcript of a rough and rustic translation of a Greek original.”\textsuperscript{121} However, notwithstanding the poor orthography in the Fragment, Tregelles felt that “the peculiarity of its transmission in this form gives, if anything, a farther weight to its testimony as being something the genuineness of which is self-evident.”\textsuperscript{122}

Muratori discovered his Fragment within a 27 x 17 centimeter, 76-leaf, coarse parchment manuscript codex (Cod. Ambr. I 101 sup.). An inscription inside the codex identifies it as belonging to the Bobbio monastery which is located on the Trebbia River southwest of Piacenza in northern Italy. Scholars believe the codex is from the eighth century. It contains theological treatises of Ambrose of Milan, Eucherius of Lyon, and John Chrysostom. The first three chapters are defective, but the fourth features a writing of Eucherius. Next, the Muratorian Fragment follows. After this begins an extract from Ambrose. In addition to these, the codex includes five early Christian creeds. All the datable works in the codex appear to be from the fourth and fifth centuries, but Hahneman concedes it is possible that a second-century work could be included in a codex of later texts.\textsuperscript{123} In other words, for Hahneman, if the Fragment is a fourth-century composition, its presence in the Bobbio codex would merely be corroborative. The codex is currently housed in the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana.\textsuperscript{124}

As for the Fragment itself, it consists of 85 lines of relatively poorly composed Latin and inconsistent orthography.\textsuperscript{125} At the top of folio 10 of the codex, the text of the Fragment begins

\textsuperscript{121} Tregelles, \textit{Canon Muratorianus}, 10.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{123} Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 21.
\textsuperscript{125} Muratori, \textit{Antiquitates italicæ mediævi}, col. 3:855.
mid-sentence with a portion of what is supposed by scholars to be a description of the Gospel of Mark ( . . . quibus tamen interfuit et ita posuit). The Fragment takes up both sides of folio 10 and twenty-three lines of folio 11, the rest of which contains the beginning of Ambrose’s extract. The copyist used red ink when referring to the Gospels of Luke and John (folio 10r, lines 2, 9).

The original reading of the Muratorian Fragment follows. Words in bold are rubricated in the manuscript. The letters depicted in parentheses had been erased by correctors, and the letters in italics were added by correctors, either by means of substitution or superscription.126

[folio 10r] quibus tamen Interfuit et ita posuit ·

tertio euangelii librum sec(a)undo Lucan

Lucas Iste medicus post ascensum xπi.

Cum eo Paulus quasi ut iuris studiosum.

5 Secundum adsumisset numeni suo

ex opinione concribset dām tamen nee Ipse

(d)uidit in carne et idó prout asequi potuit ·

Ita et ad natiuitate Iohannis incipet dicere.

quarti euangeliorum Iohannis ex decipolis

10 cohortantibus condescipulis et επι sui

dixit conieiunate mihi · odie triduo et quid

cuique fuerit reuelatum alterutrum

nobis ennarremus eadem nocte reue

latum andreae ex apostolis ut recognis

126 This particular transcription of the Fragment was copied from Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 6-7.
15 centibus cuntis Iohannis suo nomine
cuncta discriberet et ideo licit uria sin
culis evangeliorum libris principia
doceantur Nihil tamen differt creden
tium f(e)idei cum uno ac principali ἡπὶ de
20 clarata sint in omnibus omnia de natiui
tate de passione de resurrectione
de conversatione cum decipulis suis
ac de gemino eius aduentu
Primo In humilitate dispectus quod (fo
25 tu) secundum potentate regali pre
clarum quod futurum est. quid ergo
mirum si Iohannes tarn constanter
sincola etiā In epistulis suis proferat
dicens In semeipsu Quae uidimus oculis
30 nostris et auribus audiuismus et manus
nostrae palpauerunt haec scrisimus (uobis)
[folio10v] Sic enim non solum uisurem sed (&)
auditorem
sed et scriptorō omnium mirabiliū dīi per ordi
nem profetetur Acta autō omniu apostolorum
35 sub uno libro scribta sunt Lucas obtime theofī
le conprindit quia sub praesentia eius singula
gerebantur sicut(e) et semote passioné Petri
euidenter declarat Sed (&) profectionó pauli
a(d)b ur
be(s) ad spaniā proficescentis Epistulae autem
40 Pauli quae a quo loco uel qua ex causa directe
sint uolen(ta)tibus intellegere Ipse declarant
Primū omnium corintheis scysmae heresis In
terdicens deIncepsb callaectis circumcisione
Romanis autē or(ni)dine scripturarum sed
(et)
45 principium earum (osd) esse ἁπτα Intimans
prolexius scripsit de quibus sincolis Neces
se est ad nobis desputari Cum ipse beatus
apostolus paulus sequens prodecessoris sui
Iohannis ordinó nonnisi (c)nomenatī semptaó
50 eccles(e)iis scribat ordine tali a corenthios
prima.ad efesios seconnda ad philippines ter
tia ad colosensis quarta ad calatas quin
ta ad tensaoleneensis sexta. ad romanos
septima Uerum cor(e)ntheis et thesaolecen
55 sibus licet pro correbttione Iteretur una
tamen per omnem orbem terrae ecclesia
deffusa esse denoscitur Et Iohannis eñi In a
pocalebsy licet septó eccleseis scribat
tamen omnibus dicit uerū ad filemonem una ·
60 et at titū una et ad tymotheū duas pro affec
to et dilectione In honore tamen eclesiae ca
tholice In ordinatione eclesiastice

[folio 11r] d(e)isciplinā scribī sunt Fertur etiam ad
Laudecenses alia ad alexandrinos Pauli no
65 mine fincte ad heresem marcionis et alia plu
ra quae In c(h)atholicam eclesiam recepi non
potest Fel enim cum melle misceri non con
cruit epistola sane Iude et superscrichtio
Iohannis duas In catholica habentur Et sapi
70 entia ab amicis salomonis in honoró ipsius
scripta apocalapse etiam Iohanis et Pe
tri tantum recip(e)imus quam quidam ex nos
tris legi In eclesia nolunt Pastorem uero
nuperrim e(t) temporibus nostris In urbe
75 roma herma conscripts sedente cathe
tra urbis romae aeclesiae Pio epīs fratre(r)
eius et ideo legi eum quidó Oportet se pu
plicare uero In eclesia populo Neque inter
profe(*)tas conpletum numero Neque Inter
80 apostolos In finó temporum potest.
Arsinoi autem seu ualentini. uel mitiad(ei)s
nihil In totum recipemus. Qui etiam nouũ
psalmorum librum marcionis conscriptum
runt una cum basilide assianum catafry
85 cum consitutorem . . .

Next is David J. Theron’s “restored” reading with more precise Latin spellings.127

[folio10r] quibus tamen interfuit et ita posuit
tertium euangeli librum secundum Lucam
Lucas iste medicus post ascensum Christi
cum eum Paulus quasi itineris sui socium
5 secum adsummet nomine suo
ex opinione conscriptum — Dominum tamen nec ipse
uidit in carne — et idem prout assequi potuit
ita et a nativitate Iohannis incepit dicere
quarti euangeliuorum Iohannis ex discipulis
10 cohortantibus condiscipulis et episcopis suis
dixit coniciunate mihi hodie triduum et quid
cuique fuerit reuelatum alteratrum
nobis enarremus eadem nocte reuelatum
Andreae ex apostolis ut recognis-
15 centibus cunctis Iohannes suo nomine

cuncta describeret et ideo licet varia singulis euangeliorum libris principia
doceantur nihil tamen differt credentium fidei cum uno ac principali spiritu de-
20 clarata sint in omnibus omnia de natu-
tate de passione de resurrectione
de conversacione cum discipulis suis
et de gemino eius aduentu
primum in humilitate despectus quod fu-
25 it secundum potestate regali praec-
clarum quod futurum est quid ergo
mirum si Iohannes tam constanter
singula etiam in epistolis suis proferat
dicens in semetipso quae uidimus oculis
30 nostris et auribus audiuiimus et manus
nostrae palpauerunt haec scripsimus uobis

[folio10v] Sic enim non solum uisorem sed et
auditorem
sed et scriptorem omnium mirabilium Domini per ordi-
nem profitetur Acta autem omnium apostolorum
35 sub uno libro scripta sunt Lucas optimo Theophi-
lo comprehendit, quae sub praesentia eius singula
gerebantur sicut et remote passionem Petri
evidenter declarat sed et profectionem Pauli ab urbe ad Spaniam proficiscentis epistolarum autem

40 Pauli quae a quo loco uel qua ex causa directae sint uolentibus intelligere ipsae declarant primum omnium Corinthiis schisma haeresis interdicens deinceps Galatis circumcisionem Romanis autem ordine scripturarum sed et

45 principium earum esse Christum intimans prolixius scripsit de quibus singulis neces-se est a nobis desputari cum ipse beatus apostolus Paulus sequens prodecessoris sui Iohannis ordinem nonnisi nominatim septem 50 ecclesiis scribat ordine tali ad Corinthios prima ad Ephesios secunda ad Philippenses tertia ad Colossenses quarta ad Galatas quinta ad Thessalonicensibus sexta ad Romanos septima uerum Corinthiis et Thessalonicen-

55 sibus licet pro correptione iteretur una tamen per omnem orbem terrae ecclesia diffusa esse denoscitur et Iohannes enim in A-
pocalypsi licet septem ecclesiis scribat
tamen omnibus dicit uerum ad Philemonem unam
60 et ad Titum unam et ad Timotheum duas pro affec-
tu et dilectione in honore tamen ecclesiae ca-
tholicae in ordinatione ecclesiasticae
[folio 11r] disciplinae sanctificatae sunt fertur etiam ad
Laodicenses alia ad Alexandrinos Pauli no-
65 mine fictae ad haeresem Marcionis et alia plu-
ra quae in catholicam ecclesiam recipi non
potest fel enim cum melle misceri non con-
gruit epistola san Iudae et superscriptio
Iohannis duas in catholica habentur et Sapi-
70 entia ab amicis Salomonis in honorem ipsius
scripta apocalypses etiam Iohannis et Pe-
tri tantum recipimus quam quidam ex nos-
tris legi in ecclesia nolunt pastorem uero
nuperrime temporibus nostris in urbe
75 Roma Hermas conscripsit sedente cathe-
dra urbis Romae ecclesiae Pio Episcopo fratre
eius et ideo legi eum quidem oportet se pu-
licare uero in ecclesia populo neque inter
prophetas completum numero neque inter
80 apostolos in finem temporum potest

Arsinoi autem seu Valentinu uel Mitiadis

nihil in totum recipimus qui etiam nouum

psalmorum librum Marcioni conscripse-

runt una cum Basilide Assianum Catafygum

85 constitutorem. . . .

Finally, Bruce M. Metzger’s English translation follows:128

[folio 10r] … at which nevertheless he was present, and so he placed [them in his narrative].

The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke.

Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law, composed it in his own name, according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events, so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John.

The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples.

10 To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write], he said, ‘Fast with me from today for three days, and what will be revealed to each one let us tell it to one another.’ In the same night it was revealed

to Andrew, [one] of the apostles,

15 that John should write down all things in his own name
while all of them should review it. And so, though various
elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels,
nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith
of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things
20 have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the
nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection,
concerning life with his disciples,
and concerning his twofold coming;
the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place,
25 the second glorious in royal power,
which is still in the future. What
marvel is it then, if John so consistently
mentions these particular points also in his Epistles,
saying about himself, “What we have seen with our eyes
30 and heard with our ears and our hands
have handled, these things we have written to you”?

[folio 10v] For in this way he professes [himself] to be not only an eye-witness and
hearer,
but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order.
Moreover, the acts of all the apostles
35 were written in one book. For “most excellent Theophilus” Luke compiled
the individual events that took place in his presence—
as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter
as well as the departure of Paul from the city [of Rome]
when he journeyed to Spain. As for the Epistles of
40 ... Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones
[they are],
from what place, or for what reason they were sent.
First of all, to the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms;
next, to the Galatians, against circumcision;
then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining
45 the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle
(or, main theme). It is necessary
for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed
apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor
John, writes by name to only seven
50 churches in the following sequence: to the Corinthians
first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third,
to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth,
to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans
seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to
55 the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition,
yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church
spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the
Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches,
evertheless speaks to all. [Paul also wrote] out of affection and love one to Philemon,
60 one to Titus, and two to Timothy; and these are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic
for the regulation of ecclesiastical
[folio 11r] discipline. There is current also [an epistle] to the Laodiceans, [and] another to the Alexandrians, [both] forged in Paul’s
65 name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others which cannot be received into the catholic Church
—for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey.
Moreover, the epistle of Jude and two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) John are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and [the book of] Wisdom,
70 written by the friends of Solomon in his honor.
We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter,
though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church.
But Hermas wrote the Shepherd
very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome,
75 while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair of the church of the city of Rome.
And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among
the prophets, whose number is complete, or among

80 the apostles, for it is after [their] time.

But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinous or Valentinus or Miltiades, who also composed

a new book of psalms for Marcion,

together with Basilides, the Asian

85 founder of the Cataphrygians…

After Muratorian’s discovery of the Bobbio codex in Milan, four additional manuscripts containing excerpts of the text of the Fragment surfaced. These belonged to the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino, three of which date to the eleventh century and one from the twelfth, all of which contain the Corpus Paulinum. Because the Latin in these is comparatively better than that in the Bobbio copy, scholars believe that they are not dependent on it, but upon another source.129 These Benedictine manuscripts feature lines 42-50, 54-7, 63-8, and 81-5 of the Milan Fragment.130 These were first published in Miscellanea Cassinese, in 1897.131

Content

Due to its content, some have dubbed the Fragment “the Muratorian Canon.” It features a list of texts, most of which comprise the currently recognized canonical New Testament. It omits Matthew and Mark (probably the missing piece at the beginning), Hebrews, James, and 1 and 2

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Peter. After listing the canonical books, the Fragmentist then mentions several “non-canonical,” questionable texts. These include the *Wisdom of Solomon* (possibly not intended by the Fragmentist to be counted among the Christian works), the *Apocalypse of Peter*, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. It also mentions several rejected works following Paul’s writings: the pseudo-Pauline epistles to the Laodiceans and the Alexandrians. Finally, after the list of questionable texts, the Fragmentist categorically rejects anything written by Arsinous, Valentinus, Miltiades, Basilides, the Asian Cataphrygians, as well as a circulating Marcionite psalter.

The Fragmentist does not merely list these texts. Instead he offers a sort of ancient New Testament “introduction,” and because of this it appears more likely that the Fragment was not intended to list the books of the canon *per se*, as much as it sought to explain the importance of the “why” behind the acceptance of some texts and the rejection of others. Writing with an apologetic tone, the Fragmentist emphasizes each book’s authorship, purpose, and destination, and throughout the Fragment runs the theme of unity. This unity not only binds each of the accepted texts together, but it also extends to the church. In other words, the accepted Christian texts are unified in their message and essential for the unified church. This unity manifests itself first in the Gospels inasmuch as “although different points are taught us in the several books of the Gospels, there is no difference as regards the faith of believers, inasmuch as in all of them all things are related under one imperial Spirit” (lines 16-20). The Fragmentist emphasizes the unity of the Pauline epistles as well; though Paul wrote to several churches, it remains true that “there

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is one Church spread abroad through the whole world” (lines 55-7). In addition, of the accepted books, Jude and the Johannine epistles are likewise “reckoned among the Catholic” (line 69).

Finally, and arguably of the utmost import, one theme brings this unity to fruition, and that is the Fragmentist’s attention to the person of Christ. After he discusses the Gospels, the Fragmentist ties them together with a statement of the regula fidei; the Gospels speak to Christ’s “nativity, concerning [His] passion, concerning [His] resurrection, concerning [His] walk with His disciples, [19] and concerning His double advent: the first in humility when He was despised, which has been; the second in royal power, glorious, which is to be” (lines 20-6). Moreover, the theme of Christ makes itself more explicitly apparent when the Fragmentist highlights Paul’s emphasis that “Christ is the first object in these [i.e. the Scriptures]” (lines 45-6).134

Authorship

Knowledge of the author of the Fragment would lead to a greater understanding of the theological foundations undergirding its content, with regard to its methodological, as well as its substantive, underpinnings. This understanding, in turn, would shed light on the development of the New Testament as well as on the greater question of the historical development of ancient Christian theology. This is why grappling with Fragment’s date is so important; knowing the date narrows the list of possible authors and thus lends to the ultimate desired outcome, that of understanding the early church’s New Testament canon and theological authority. Once the list of authors is narrowed, addressing the problem of the Fragment’s provenance, based on internal and relevant external evidence, would lead to a further narrowing of the author list. Coupling a study of the Fragment’s provenance with a similar study of its likely original language would

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134 For a list of scholars who treat the problem of the Fragment’s purpose see Schnabel, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 238n35-239n41.
serve to both narrow the list of authors and corroborate tentative conclusions regarding those potential authors. For example, if the date is late, the list of authors is narrowed to only those who lived and worked during the fourth century. If the evidence points to a western provenance, one can conclude that the original language was probably Latin. Understanding who wrote it, from where, and in what language, would help in determining who composed the Fragment, and this may also assist scholars in grasping some of the possible factors which drove its composition as well as an understanding of what the Fragmentist may have hoped to accomplish.

Over the years, scholars have proposed a number of different possible authors of the Fragment. Early Hypothesis adherents have suggested Caius, Papias, Hegesippus, Clement of Alexandria, Rhodon, Victor I, Zephyrinus, Hippolytus, Melito of Sardis, Apollinaris of Hierapolis, Polycrates of Ephesus, and Victorinus of Pettau.\footnote{Muratori, Antiquitates italicæ mediævi, col. 3:851; Simon de Magistris, Daniel secundum septuaginta ex tetrapsis Origenis nunc primum editus (Rome: Typis Propagandae Fidei, 1772), 467–9; C. Bunsen, Analecta Ante-Nicaena (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), 1:142; J. Chapman, “Clement d’Alexandrie sur les evangiles, et encore le Fragment de Muratori,” RBèn 21 (1904): 369–74; Adolf von Harnack, “Über den Verfasser und den literarischen Charakter des Muratorischen Fragments,” Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft (1925), 15; Vernon Bartlet, “Melito the Author of the Muratorian Canon,” The Expositor 2 (1906): 214–24; Gottfried Kuhn, Das muratorische Fragment über die Bücher des Neuen Testaments: Mit Einleitung und Erklärung (Zurich: Höhr, 1892), 33; Armstrong, “Victorinus of Pettau,” 1, 18.} Other possible early authors include Cyprian, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, and Irenæus. Westcott did not bother suggesting an author as he believed “there is no sufficient evidence to determine” who wrote it, and that “such guesses” as those listed above “are barely ingenious.”\footnote{Westcott, A General Survey, 216.}

Perhaps for this reason also, Late Hypothesis adherents are reluctant to venture any guesses, though they would probably not count Lactantius, Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, or Augustine as likely candidates due to these Fathers having written in Latin (most Late Hypothesis proponents hold to a Greek original of the Fragment). Both Sundberg and Hahneman
quoted Westcott on the author question, and share the latter’s pessimism that there is not enough evidence to make an educated guess.\footnote{Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 2-3; Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 31.} Rothschild stands out as a sort of exception due to her hypothesis that the Fragment is pseudepigraphic. She suggests that it was written in the wake of the First Council of Constantinople (381) by Chromatius of Aquileia, Jerome, and Isidore of Seville, “whose writings are often considered dependent on the Fragment,” in conjunction with Ambrose, in his role as a bishop, as supposed early evidence against heresy.\footnote{Rothschild, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 81.}

**Provenance**

The traditional view of the Fragment’s provenance is that it comes from the West.\footnote{Encouraged in part by the extensive research conducted by Harnack. Harnack, “Über den Verfasser,” 5-7. However, Hugo Koch disputed Harnack’s belief that the Fragment was an official church document in Hugo Koch, “Zu A.v.Harnacks Beweis für den amtlichen römischen Ursprung des Muratorischen Fragments,” \textit{Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft} 24 (1925): 154-63. Quasten agrees with Koch that “there are too many reasons against such an opinion.” Quasten, \textit{Patrology}, vol. 2, 208.} Muratori believed this mostly due to his supposition that it was a work of Caius.\footnote{Muratori, \textit{Antiquitates italicæ mediævi}, col. 3:851.} Because Donaldson saw parallels between the Fragment and the writings of Cyprian, he also believed it to have been written in the West.\footnote{Donaldson, \textit{A Critical History}, 212.} In addition, because the Fragmentist expresses familiarity with Pius’s family and refers to Rome as “urbs” (lines 38-9), Salmon thought it likely that the work hinted at a Roman situation.\footnote{Salmon, “Muratorian Fragment,” 1000.} For Zahn, the absence of James and Hebrews in the Fragment, as well as the manner in which the Fragmentist writes of Pius’s office, indicate to him that its provenance is the West.\footnote{Zahn, “Muratorian Fragment,” 54.} While Ferguson did not insist on a Roman provenance, he did see a
western situation, “a place where Rome was important.” In addition, with Zahn, Ferguson considered the omission of Hebrews and the Fragmentist’s treatment of the Apocalypse as more consistent with a western attitude than with an eastern. Likewise, Rothschild believes it to be of a Roman origin, albeit a fraudulent one. With the exception of Rothschild, scholars who believe in a western provenance for the Fragment tend to be adherents to the Early Hypothesis.

Simon de Magistris placed the Fragment in the East, as did Kuhn and Lightfoot. Sundberg did not take an explicit position on the Fragment’s provenance but concludes that any “linguistic argument for the designation of place of writing as Rome is lost.” Like Sundberg, Hahneman did not reach a conclusion regarding the Fragment’s provenance. For him its favorable mention of the Apocalypse is not remarkable unless the Fragment is post-fourth century. Also, Hahneman maintains that, due to the extant copy’s defective writing, conclusions based on the omission of any New Testament books are “inconclusive,” rendering the Fragment’s provenance “uncertain.” To summarize, a Greek and western Fragment is most likely to be early, and most scholars have concluded as much to be the actual case. A Greek and eastern Fragment could be early or late. On the other hand, a Latin and western Fragment would

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144 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 677.
145 Ibid., 681, 680.
146 Rothschild, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 82.
150 Ibid., 27.
more likely be late, though this does not completely rule out the possibility of a third-century Fragment, as Donaldson and Armstrong (the overwhelming minority) have concluded.

**Language**

Though the Fragment’s discoverer, Muratori, believed it to have originally been composed in Greek, several scholars over the years have argued that it has always been in Latin. Donaldson maintained that the Fragment was written in Latin in North Africa sometime between about 225 and 250.\(^{151}\) Furthermore, Friedrich Hermann Hesse believed it unlikely that the original was Greek due to the difficulty in re-translating it back into that language from Latin.\(^{152}\) Armstrong thought the Fragment to have originally been composed in Latin and that its poor quality is not due to an inept copyist but rather the result of its having been “penned by a notably poor Latinist,” in other words, by Victorinus of Pettau, who was bilingual.\(^{153}\) According to Jerome, Victorinus “was not equally familiar with Latin and Greek. On this account his works though noble in thought, are inferior in style.”\(^{154}\)

The notion that the Fragment was originally composed in Latin has some, albeit limited, implications toward a likely hypothesis for its date. The church had begun to make the transition from Greek to Latin in Rome as early as the middle of the second century, the transition complete by the third century.\(^{155}\) The church did not use Latin in the East. Therefore, it is

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\(^{154}\) Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 74.

unlikely that a Latin Fragment would have made its appearance prior to 150 in the West, and highly unlikely in the East at any point in time. However, if it were to be incontrovertibly ascertained that the Fragment was originally of Latin, this knowledge would still not necessarily lead to a greater understanding of a date, whether second, third, or fourth century, due to the beginning of the western transition from Greek in the second. Nonetheless, if the Fragment was originally written in Latin, it seems more likely that it was composed late.

Muratori assumed the Fragment first appeared in Greek as he makes his case for Caius’s authorship, and de Magistris, the first to write on the Fragment following Muratorí’s description, agreed. In the nineteenth century, both Tregelles and Westcott held to a Greek original. Salmon argued for a Greek original based on his supposition that were the Fragment’s transcriptional errors corrected, no original Latin written by an “educated man” could accommodate a corrected copy; only a Greek vorlage can explain the idiomatic expressions found in the Fragment. Further, Salmon also favored a Greek original because he understood that Greek was the language of Rome in the second century. Sundberg thought the Fragment was originally written in Greek and he looked to Julio Campos for support. Campos’s research of the Fragment’s Latin found that it could have come no earlier than the early part of the fifth century. Sundberg held that putting the Fragment’s Latin at such a late date precludes the


158 Tregelles, Canon Muratorianus, 4-5; Westcott, A General Survey, 214.

159 Salmon, “Muratorian Fragment,” 1000-1001.

possibility of an early Latin original since the Fragment “contains elements that must be dated earlier than the Latin of the text.”¹⁶¹ Ferguson agreed on a Greek original, and noted that, if this is the case, any conclusions based on the Latin of the Fragment only bespeak the context during the time of translation.¹⁶² In 2015, Christophe Guignard reopened the question of the Fragment’s original language. Assuming an early date for the Fragment, he concluded that the gap in time from the original to the extant Latin manuscript, as well as the features of the Latin therein, demonstrate a greater likelihood that the Fragmentist wrote in Greek rather than in Latin.¹⁶³

If, as most scholars suppose, the Fragment was originally written in Greek, it could have been written at any time from the late second through the fourth centuries. However, in this case, it would have more likely come from the East than from the West. Nevertheless, as the West did not complete the full transition from Greek to Latin until the fourth century, a Greek original could still have obtained in the West as late as the third century.¹⁶⁴ In short, if the Fragment was originally written in Latin, it only could have originated in the West, but it could have been composed either early or late, but more likely late. If it was originally composed in Greek, again it could have been written early in the East or West, but if late, only in the East. In other words, an original Greek Fragment yields an equal likelihood of being early or late.

¹⁶¹ Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 2n8.
¹⁶² Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 678.
Summary

Muratori discovered the Fragment in Milan in 1700 and published it in 1740. Several other manuscripts of the same texts were discovered in the Monte Cassino abbey and published in 1897. Most scholars believe the Fragment to be a corrupt Latin translation of a Greek original. The considerations of date, provenance, and language together lead toward a reduction of the possible authors by means of a process of elimination, so an early (i.e. second through third century) Fragment originally written in Greek in the West means that, of the suggested authors, only Caius, Victor I, Zephyrinus, and Hippolytus remain. On the other hand, if the Fragment was early, and always in Latin, Donaldson’s suggestion of Cyprian may warrant consideration. However, because most of the suggested authors are early, eastern, and Greek, the possibilities still remain daunting to scholars as that list allows for authorship by Papias, Hegesippus, Melito, Apollinaris, Polycrates, Clement of Alexandria, and Victorinus of Pettau.

Also, a late, western, and Latin Fragment could have been written by Ambrose, Chromatius of Aquileia, Jerome, and Isidore of Seville. While, scholars have not suggested possible authors in the case that the Fragment is late, eastern, and Greek, possibilities range from the Cappadocian Fathers, to John Chrysostom, to the Antiochian Fathers (i.e. Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia), to Cyril of Alexandria. Athanasius would not be included as he published his own New Testament canon which is remarkably different from that of the Fragment. Once a list of possible authors is determined, other evidence, both internal and external to the Fragment, can play a role in further narrowing the lists of possibilities.

In order to apply the six criteria for which this study calls, it is crucial to have an exhaustive familiarity with the evidence compiled by scholars from 1740 to the present and cited in support of their claims regarding the Fragment’s date. Only once this knowledge is attained,
can one begin to determine the degree to which the evidence implies the two hypotheses under investigation. Therefore, the following chapter offers a catalog of that evidence along with scholars’ interpretations.
CHAPTER 3

A DATE: THE EVIDENCE

The previous chapter provides the reader with a basic description of the Fragment along with a discussion of several of the primary problems which vex scholars. Questions surrounding the document’s authorship, provenance, and language are considered due to their relationships to the issue of the Fragment’s date. All of these questions, and their potential answers, play a contributing role in understanding each other more fully. While this particular study concerns itself primarily with the Fragment’s date, this cannot be done in a “vacuum”; an understanding of each background element works in synthesis to lead to the most likely answers. Having surveyed a relevant portion of the debate regarding the Fragment’s content and background, the study now turns to consider the evidence proffered by scholars in their quest to determine its date.

With this in mind, the present chapter features a collection of that evidence compiled by scholars from 1740 to the present. In support of their positions they cite evidence from the Fragment regarding its references to the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, the Johannine Corpus, the non-Johannine general epistles, disputed texts, pseudo-Pauline epistles, a catalogue of heresies, and the likely ecclesiastical context in which the Fragmentist finds himself. Along with each item of evidence, this chapter includes brief discussions of scholars’ interpretations. The study considered this evidence in its weighing of the two hypotheses.
The Evidence
The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles

The Fourfold Gospel

The Fragmentist subscribed to the notion that there were four Gospels, and he explicitly mentioned two of what are now considered the canonical Gospels, Luke and John. He listed these two Gospels, that of Luke, which he called the “third book of the Gospel” (*tertium euangelii librum*) and that of John, which he called the “fourth of the Gospels” (*quarti euangeliorum*) (lines 2-9). The condition of the Fragment precludes knowing what the Fragmentist listed as the first and second Gospels, though they were likely Matthew and Mark. In this way, the Fragmentist exhibited an acquaintance with four Gospels.

Hahneman believed these mentions to be evidence for a fourth-century date. For him, not until that time did an exclusive Fourfold Gospel canon achieve recognition, therefore it would prove surprising for a list of this type to appear in a second-century manuscript. He maintained that while it is not impossible for the Fragment to witness to a Fourfold Gospel in the way that Irenæus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria do, it “is unlikely because the Fragment bears none of the marks of recent development for the Fourfold Gospel.”  

Hahneman concluded this because, according to him, lists of biblical texts prior to the fourth century typically show canonical development but not canonical finality. For Hahneman, canonical finality is characterized by the identification of rejected works, something which according to him, we only see in the fourth century, and the Fragment includes this feature.

On the other hand, and against Hahneman’s view of the Fragment’s treatment of the Gospels, Verheyden argued that Clement of Alexandria and Origen knew of *only* four canonical

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Gospels, and thus did demonstrate a sense of exclusivity in the texts they selected. While Clement cited the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, he made a distinction between it and the four Gospels, noting that the four were “handed down to us.” Thus it appears that Clement was conceding more authority to the four than to *Egyptians*. Origen was more explicit; he declared that “you should know that not only four Gospels, but very many, were composed. The Gospels we have were chosen from among these gospels and passed on to the churches.” In addition, Schnabel highlights Tertullian’s belief in four Gospels and Irenæus’s explicit assertion that “it is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are.” In this way, contra Hahneman, Early Hypothesis proponents show that features of “canonical finality” manifested themselves prior to the fourth century.

**The Order of the Gospels**

In ordering the Gospels, the Fragmentist placed Luke before John. He listed Luke as the third (*tertium*), and explicitly identified John’s as the *quarti euangeliorum* (i.e. fourth of the Gospels) (lines 2, 9). Whether his list included Matthew and Mark, and in what order, cannot now be known with certainty due to the Fragment’s damaged beginning. However, that two other Gospels preceded those listed is certain.

According to Hahneman, this sequence betrays a fourth-century context. An order such as that in the Fragment found in the second century would be “remarkable,” but it “would not be in

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the least extraordinary” two hundred years later. If the Fragment was a second-century work, this order of the Gospels would constitute an exception. However, there appears to be no “hard-and-fast” rule for ordering the Gospels. Irenæus listed them in this order on one occasion, though it is true that on four other occasions he lists them in different orders. In addition, two fourth-century canons list the Gospels in a different order than that found in the Fragment and in Irenæus’s “exception.” The stichometric list in the Codex Claromontanus (dated around 300 by Zahn and Adolf von Harnack) has Matthew, John, Mark, and Luke. The Cheltenham Canon (ca. 360) has Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke. The Gospel orders in Irenæus and later in Claromontanus and Cheltenham suggest that the order of the Gospels was not unique to a particular era within early Christianity.

**Gospel Identification**

The Fragmentist identified Luke’s Gospel as the “book of the Gospel according to Luke” (*euangelii librum secundum Lucam*) (line 2), and he referred to John’s Gospel as “fourth of the Gospels” (*quarti euangeliorum Iohannis*) (line 9). Balla noted a significance in these expressions insofar as, when referring to Luke’s Gospel, the Fragment used a “title-like” nomenclature: “Gospel According to Luke,” but with John’s, he used a different type of designator, a “plural phrase”: “Fourth of the Gospels.” Graham N. Stanton saw these types of reference as evidence that the Fragment fits “much more readily” in a second-century context than in a fourth, because

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171 Irenæus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1; 3.9.1–11.6; 3.11.8; 3.11.7; 4.6.1.


173 Ibid., 311.

the manner in which the Fragment identified the Gospels is similar to that of Irenæus.\textsuperscript{175} For example, the Fragmentist’s reference to Luke’s Gospel (line 2) is a verbatim match to the Latin translation of Irenæus’s “secundum Lucam.”\textsuperscript{176}

**The Pauline-Lucan Association**

The Fragmentist linked Luke with the apostle Paul, so it appears the author knew them to be associates (“[Luke] cum eo Paulus quasi ut iuris studiosum”) (line 4).\textsuperscript{177} Ferguson noted that over time this association became an issue of authority, particularly that of apostolic authority backing Luke’s Gospel.\textsuperscript{178} Even as early as the late second century, this authoritative link had been noted by Irenæus.\textsuperscript{179} Later, Tertullian, Jerome, John Chrysostom, and the Monarchian Prologues would acknowledge the Pauline-Lucan relationship was more than a mere companionship.\textsuperscript{180} Ferguson’s point is that, were the Fragment later than the second century, the author likely would have mentioned Luke’s Pauline authority to write, particularly given the apparent objective of the Fragment’s list. Instead, the Fragmentist mentions how Luke wrote “as

\begin{footnotes}
\item[175] Stanton, “The Fourfold Gospel,” 323.
\item[176] Irenæus, Against Heresies 3.11.7. This Latin rendering is a “very literal” translation of the now missing Greek original as seen when compared to extant Greek fragments of Irenæus’s work, according to Quasten; Johannes Quasten, Patrology, vol. 1, The Beginnings of the Patristic Literature (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1950), 288, 290-1.
\item[178] Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.
\item[179] Irenæus, Against Heresies 3.1.1, 3.14.1.
\end{footnotes}
he was able” (lines 5-7). A statement of this type would be more likely prior to Irenæus who declared that Luke wrote what Paul preached.\footnote{Irenæus, \textit{Against Heresies} 3.1.1.}

\textbf{The Acts of the Apostles}

The Fragmentist was careful to highlight Luke’s eyewitness-status to the events which he recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Of Luke’s second work, he wrote,

the Acts of all the Apostles are comprised by Luke in one book, and addressed to the most excellent Theophilus, because these different events took place when he was present himself; and he shows this clearly-i.e., that the principle on which he wrote was, to give only what fell under his own notice-by the omission of the passion of Peter, and also of the journey of Paul, when he went from the city-Rome-to Spain (lines 34-9).

The Fragmentist emphasized that Luke was an authoritative witness to the events he recorded by noting the conspicuous absence of events such as Peter’s martyrdom and Paul’s travel to Spain. In this way he drew a comparison between Luke and John who was a witness to the events he recorded regarding the life of Jesus.

Hahneman and Rothschild consider the manner in which the Fragmentist refers to Acts as an indication of a fourth-century date. Irenæus also referenced Luke’s text but simply as “the Acts of the Apostles,” rather than as “the Acts of all the Apostles.”\footnote{Ibid., 3.13.3.} Tertullian referred to the book as “the Acts of the Apostles” on five occasions but as simply “Acts” on four occasions.\footnote{Tert., \textit{Baptism} 10; idem, \textit{The Flesh of Christ} 15; idem, \textit{The Resurrection of the Flesh} 39; idem, \textit{Against Praxeas} 28; idem, \textit{Appendix: Prescription Against Heretics} 1. Cf. Tert., \textit{Baptism}. 7; idem, \textit{The Flesh of Christ} 23; idem, \textit{Antidote for the Scorpion’s Sting} 15; idem, \textit{Against Praxeas}. 17.} However, the Fragmentist seems to have gone out of his way to emphasize the fact that the “Acts of \textit{all} the Apostles are comprised . . . in \textit{one} book” [emphases added] (lines 34-5). Both Hahneman and Rothschild agree that this type of “amplification” is seen only in texts of the

\footnotetext[1]{\textit{Ibid.}, 3.13.3.}
fourth century. For example, Gregory of Nazianzus called it the “catholic Acts of the wise apostles.” Hahneman suggested that such amplifications were needed in the fourth century, for the purpose of disambiguation, due to the proliferation of apocryphal “Acts,” in particular the Manichaean compendium of the Acts of Paul, of Peter, of Andrew, of Thomas, and of John. However, each of these were in circulation as early as both the second and third centuries. Tertullian spoke of the Acts of Paul when he mentioned “the writings which wrongly go under Paul’s name,” and which made certain claims regarding a woman Thecla. The Acts of Peter was probably composed around 190 and the Acts of John between 150 and 180. The third century likely saw the writing of the Acts of Thomas and those of Andrew. It is neither more nor less likely that during the second- or third-century the Fragmentist was disambiguating the “one book” of the “Acts of all the Apostles” from these multiple, second- and third-century apocryphal Acts than that he was doing so during the fourth-century, as Hahneman proposed. Moreover, there are two other third-century apocryphal Acts, that of Peter and Paul, and that of Thaddeus. Perhaps the Fragmentist was disambiguating from these as well. Regardless, proponents for an early date making nothing of the Fragment’s inclusion of Acts of the Apostles nor of the Fragmentist’s title for it.

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185 Gregory of Nazianzus, Lamentation for the Soul 12.13. For other examples of this type of fourth-century amplification see Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 193.
187 Tert., Baptism 17.
188 Quasten, Patrology, vol. 1, 133, 135.
189 Ibid., 137, 139.
The Johannine Corpus

The Fourth Gospel

Regarding the Fourth Gospel, the Fragmentist writes,

The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples. To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write], he said, “Fast with me from today for three days, and what will be revealed to each one let us tell it to one another.” In the same night it was revealed to Andrew, [one] of the apostles, that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it. (lines 9-16).

Just as with Luke (and presumably Matthew as well as Mark), the Fragmentist identified the Gospel and furnished some background material as if to justify its status. In this case, he offered an explanation as to what prompted John to write it.

Proponents for an early date see the Fragmentist’s explanation of the Fourth Gospel’s origin as reason to hold their position. Zahn believed the Fragmentist’s apologetic tone about John’s Gospel means that he was probably aware of the Alogi attacks. Ferguson recognized this tone as common during the second century, and he also thought that an anti-Alogi polemic may have prompted the Fragmentist here. Stanton noted this as well and added that during the fourth century such a defense of the Fourth Gospel as John’s was not necessary but that it would have been necessary earlier. In addition to the Alogi, the second century also featured Caius who apparently may not have favored Johannine authorship for the Gospel in his contention with the Montanists, particularly in light of his disdain for the Apocalypse. All of this means that

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191 Zahn, “Muratorian Canon,” 54; Epiph., Refutation of All Heresies. Proem 1.4.5, 1.5.6. According to Epiphanius, the Alogi did not accept John’s Gospel.
192 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681, 681n19.
194 Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 3.28.
the Fragmentist may have felt it necessary to describe the occasion which prompted the Gospel’s composition as a way to justify its authority, an action which, according to some, would make the most sense in the second, or early third-centuries.

On the other hand, some interpret the Fragmentist’s comments on the Fourth Gospel as evidence for a fourth-century context. Hahneman argued for a late date based on the details in the account of the Gospel’s origin, particularly with regard to certain participants in the Fragmentist’s narrative about it. This explanation in the Fragment is similar to other accounts about the Fourth Gospel which scholars have come to term the “Johannine Legend.” First, Hahneman highlighted the fact that the Fragmentist referred to John’s instigators as his “fellow-disciples and bishops” (line 10).195 Hahneman argued that this inclusion of bishops betrays a later development. Clement of Alexandria did not mention bishops in his account of the Fourth Gospel but stated that John was “urged by his friends.”196 Hahneman believed the vagueness of Clement’s reference prompted the “later elaboration” seen in Victorinus of Pettau and Jerome where they both declare that bishops also encouraged John to write.197 Second, because the Fragmentist recounted that John’s having participated in a fast led to the Fourth Gospel’s inspiration (line 11), Hahneman concluded that this also indicates a fourth-century context. Clement made no mention of a fast, and like the reference to bishops, this too was possibly seen as a requisite elaboration and “as such represents a later development.”198

195 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 188.
197 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 189-90; Victorinus of Pettau, Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John 11.1; Jer., On Illustrious Men. 9; Jer., Commentaries in Matthew, Preface.
198 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 190.
However, Armstrong showed a possible third-century connection by highlighting the manner in which the account of the Fourth Gospel in the Fragment is followed up with a statement of the *regula fidei*. Armstrong did something similar. According to Victorinus, the Apocalypse is a measure rod, and

> the measure of God's temple is the command of God to confess the Father Almighty, and that His Son Christ was begotten by the Father before the beginning of the world, and was made man in very soul and flesh, both of them having overcome misery and death; and that, when received with His body into heaven by the Father, He shed forth the Holy Spirit.

This confession follows Victorinus’s assertion that “the bishops . . . compelled him [John] himself also to draw up his testimony.” Therefore, scholars who disagree with the second-century view conclude that these parallels point to a later context (third or fourth centuries), a context in which the Fragmentist would have been a contemporary of Victorinus or Jerome, or as in Armstrong’s case, Victorinus himself.

**The Epistles**

Regarding John’s epistles, the Fragmentist stated the following: “John brings forward these several things so constantly in his epistles also, saying in his own person, ‘What we have seen with our eyes, and heard with our ears, and our hands have handled, that have we written’.” (lines 26-31). Later, after this quote from 1 John, he wrote, “two belonging to the above-named John—or bearing the name of John—are reckoned among the Catholic epistles” (lines 68-9). How many Johannine epistles the Fragment lists is a matter of interpretation. Did the Fragmentist list

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201 Ibid.
one, two, or three epistles of John? Peter Katz deemed it highly unlikely that the Fragmentist meant a total of two. He asked, “how could any Canon have mentioned [only] two Johannine epistles? By their tenor and by tradition second and third are so closely connected that we should expect one only, the first, which was adduced earlier, or all three.”

Katz contended that the Fragmentist included two epistles in addition to 1 John, which is “the Catholic epistle.”

Regardless, on neither side of the date-debate do scholars express much confidence in the Fragmentist’s information about these epistles. Donaldson believed that if the Fragment’s physical condition can be trusted, the Fragmentist appears to have omitted 3 John. Recall that Donaldson favored an early date. However, Hahneman believed the Fragment includes 2 and 3 John, and he notes that this is consistent with the later date because these “are elsewhere found only in larger collections of the catholic epistles, which were accepted as canonical only in the fourth century.”

Ferguson had doubts about how much can be learned from the evidence regarding these epistles. Nevertheless he understood that this information appears to be “an anomaly for any time and place,” though it lends itself more plausibly to the second century rather than to the fourth. Thus, he believed it to not be “exactly paralleled” with later lists. The Fragmentist’s treatment of the Johannine epistles seems early.

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203 Ibid., 274.


206 Ferguson, review of *The Muratorian Fragment*, 695.

207 Ibid., 696.
The Apocalypse

The Fragmentist compared the Pauline corpus with John’s epistles to the seven churches which the latter included in his Apocalypse. He recognized that “the blessed Apostle Paul, following the rule of his predecessor John, writes to no more than seven churches” (lines 47-50). Further on, he added, “it is yet shown-i.e., by this sevenfold writing-that there is one Church spread abroad through the whole world. And John too, indeed, in the Apocalypse, although he writes only to seven churches, yet addresses all” (lines 55-9). Later, he explicitly endorsed the Apocalypse by declaring “we also receive also [only] the Apocalypse of John” (lines 71-2).208 The Fragmentist’s qualification through his use of the word “tantum” implies that John’s may have been one of several apocalypses in circulation and that his was accepted for a reason.

Scholars view this evidence from different perspectives. For example, Donaldson highlighted the Fragmentist’s emphasis on the number “seven” as having a third-century parallel.209 Like the Fragmentist, Cyprian found significance in the number when he wrote against the Jews that the seven children in 1 Sam 2:5 “are the seven Churches; whence also Paul wrote to seven Churches, and the Apocalypse sets forth seven Churches.”210 Armstrong considered this same evidence regarding seven churches to be an indication that the Fragment is a composition of Victorinus of Pettau, and therefore a third-century text.211

208 The original Latin rendering here is “apocalapse etiam iohanis et petri tantum recipimus.” Tantum means “only,” but S. D. F. Salmond omits it in his translation; see ANF 5:604. Those who include a translation of tantum as “only” are Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 305-7, and Theron, Evidence of Tradition, 106-13.


210 Cyprian, Ad Quirinum testimonia adversus Judaeos 1.20.

Sundberg did not give attention to the content of the Fragmentist’s description of the Apocalypse as much as to its placement in the order of texts. According to Sundberg, because it is located toward the end of the list, between the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, it was considered at the time to be on “the very fringe of acceptance.” Like the Fragmentist, Eusebius also had reservations about the Apocalypse. He placed it among the “accepted writings” but conceded that “some . . . reject, but which others class with the accepted books.” Of particular interest is Eusebius’s comment that it should be placed after the other accepted books; “after them is to be placed, if it really seem proper, the Apocalypse of John.” Sundberg contended that since the time of Dionysius, the Apocalypse faced doubts, and that these doubts manifested themselves explicitly during the fourth century in Eusebius. However, Sundberg also admitted that his hypothesis faces the challenge of the Apocalypse’s acceptance in Byzantium and particularly in Egypt given Athanasius’s unquestioned acceptance in his *Festal Letter* 39 of 367.

Ferguson countered that Sundberg placed too much stock in the order of texts found in the Fragment. He noted that “in a list something has to be last,” a “fitting” location for an apocalypse. In addition, Ferguson did not read much into any supposed association between the Apocalypse and the *Apocalypse of Peter*; doubts about the latter say nothing about the

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213 Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.2, 4.
214 Ibid., 3.25.2.
216 Ibid.
former. Similarly, any large-scale doubt about the Apocalypse in the East is tempered by its acceptance by some there, so those doubts should not be considered any more seriously than those which Caius may have had in the West.\textsuperscript{218} Furthermore, the statement about the catholicity of the apostles’ writing does not find parallels limited to the third (with Cyprian) or fourth centuries (with Victorinus), because Tertullian made a similar statement when he declared that in Paul’s individual letters “the apostle did in fact write to all.”\textsuperscript{219}

Contra Sundberg and Ferguson, William Horbury argued that the Fragmentist has deliberately placed the Apocalypse in a list of \textit{antilegomena}, texts that were accepted by the church but not necessarily canonical.\textsuperscript{220} Horbury made note of the fact that many Fathers treated the acceptable books of the both the Old and New Testaments together and subsequently did the same with the \textit{antilegomena}, and then finally they dealt with the rejected texts. Given the condition of the Fragment and the missing portion which probably included the first two Gospels, Horbury inferred that this missing section probably also held a list of the received Old Testament books coming prior to the Gospels. Thus, the list of canonical New Testament books ends with the epistles of Jude and John, and the non-canonical list of acceptable texts begins with an Old Testament apocryphal text, the \textit{Wisdom of Solomon}. The Fragmentist then went on to continue listing \textit{antilegomena} but that of the New Testament: the Apocalypse, the \textit{Apocalypse of Peter}, and the \textit{Shepherd of Hermas}.

\textsuperscript{218} Euseb., \textit{Ecclesiastical History} 3.28.

\textsuperscript{219} Tert., \textit{Against Marcion}. 5.17.

\textsuperscript{220} Horbury, “The Wisdom of Solomon in the Muratorian Fragment,” 152-6.
Other Epistles

Hebrews

The Fragmentist made no mention of the Hebrews epistle either among the Pauline or otherwise, and only one other catalog makes this type of omission, the Mommsen Catalog, also known as the Cheltenham Canon, of the late fourth century. Likewise Eusebius made no explicit mention of Hebrews in his list, but may have had it in mind when he stated that Paul’s epistles are among the recognized.221 If this is the case, this practice of implicitly including Hebrews among Paul’s epistles would prove consistent with Clement of Alexandria’s assertion that it is indeed Pauline, but anonymous due to the Jews’ unfavorable view of Paul.222 The remainder of fourth-century lists include either Hebrews explicitly or implicitly among Paul’s “fourteen” epistles.223 Origen included Hebrews but argues it is not Pauline.224 The Codex Claromontanus omits Hebrews, but Zahn believed this to have been accidental, and Metzger chalked it up to scribal or translator error.225 Hahneman agreed with both Zahn and Metzger that the composer intended to include it.226

A few scholars have weighed in on the meaning behind the Fragmentist’s omission of Hebrews. First, Muratori saw it as an indication that Caius is the composer, and thus of the

221 Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 3.25.2. Hahneman dates Eusebius’s catalog prior to 325.


224 Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 6.25.11-4.


226 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 143.
second century, based on testimony by Eusebius and Jerome.\textsuperscript{227} However, Eusebius and Jerome merely stated that Caius did not attribute Hebrews to Paul, which may or may not have suggested the latter’s position on its suitability as part of a canon.\textsuperscript{228} Second, Ferguson believed the Fragmentist’s silence regarding Hebrews becomes more problematic the later the Fragment is dated.\textsuperscript{229} Had the Fragmentist wanted to reject Hebrews, in all likelihood he would have been as explicit about it as he is with the other rejected works he mentions. Hahneman saw the Fragmentist’s exposition of the Pauline corpus as “somewhat confusing” due to the way the latter stopped and started again on the topic. Hahneman implied that the Fragmentist considered Hebrews to Pauline along with the other but that it “may have been lost in the confusion” for some reason.\textsuperscript{230} The absence of Hebrews from the Fragment appears to more in keeping with an earlier date, as it seems unlikely for a list of New Testament texts to completely omit as late as the fourth century.

**James**

As in the case of Hebrews, the Fragment included no mention of the epistle of James. Clement of Alexandria may have included James in his reference to “Jude and the other Catholic epistles,” but this cannot be known with certainty.\textsuperscript{231} Moreover, as in the case of the Fragment,

\textsuperscript{227} Muratori, *Antiquitates italicæ mediiævi*, col. 3:851-2.

\textsuperscript{228} Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 6.20.3; Jer., *On Illustrious Men* 59.

\textsuperscript{229} Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.

\textsuperscript{230} Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment*, 181.

Origen made no mention, and Eusebius listed it as “disputed.” All other lists include it with the exception of two fourth-century catalogs, the Mommsen and the Syrian.

Scholars who favor an early date see James’s absence from the Fragment as a point to consider. Donaldson considered its omission to be suggestive of the third century. Ferguson interpreted James’s absence as evidence of a second-century composition; its omission shows that the Fragment is “not exactly paralleled in the fourth century.” On the other side of the debate, Hahneman had no explanation for its omission, just that it is “extraordinary.” As with Hebrews above, James’s absence does not fit well into a fourth-century context.

The Petrine Epistles

As with Hebrews and James, the Fragmentist made no mention of any epistle of Peter. As in the case of James, Clement of Alexandria may have included at least one of them in his catholic epistles, but whether he had it in mind is unknown. Origen included one “catholic” epistle of Peter as “acknowledged” but a second as “disputed.” In a like fashion, Eusebius stated that “the epistle of Peter must be recognized” but that “the second epistle of Peter” is disputed. All other lists include at least one epistle of Peter with the exception of the fourth-century Syrian catalog, which has neither.

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232 Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 6.25.3-14; 3.25.1-7.
233 Donaldson, A Critical History, 212.
234 Ferguson, review of The Muratorian Fragment, 695.
237 Ibid., 6.25.5, 8.
238 Ibid., 3.25.2, 3.
As with James, the Fragmentist’s omission of the Petrine epistles give the appearance that the Fragment is earlier rather than later. For Donaldson, the omission of Peter points to a third-century context.\textsuperscript{239} Just as with James, Ferguson highlighted that this silence is more indicative of an earlier context rather than a later one.\textsuperscript{240} Hahneman did not explain the omission but simply noted what he considers the unusual nature of a fourth-century list not including 1 Peter.\textsuperscript{241} The Fragmentist’s omission of the Petrine epistles is more likely to be an early phenomenon rather than a later one.

**Jude**

The Fragmentist accepted Jude in his declaration that “the Epistle of Jude” is “reckoned among the Catholic epistles” (lines 68-9). Clement of Alexandria included Jude among the canonical texts and “the other Catholic epistles, but Origen made no mention of it.”\textsuperscript{242} Eusebius listed it among the disputed texts.\textsuperscript{243} As for the fourth-century catalogs, all include James except the Mommsen and the Syrian, with Cyril of Jerusalem and Amphliochus possibly implicitly including it among their seven “catholic epistles.”

In contrast to James’s absence, the presence of Jude appears to place the Fragment later. Hahneman viewed Jude’s presence in the Fragment as evidence of a fourth-century context because it was typically “found only in larger collections of the catholic epistles, which were

\textsuperscript{239} Donaldson, *A Critical History*, 212.

\textsuperscript{240} Ferguson, review of *The Muratorian Fragment*, 695.

\textsuperscript{241} Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment*, 181.

\textsuperscript{242} Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.1; 6.25.3-14.

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid., 3.25.3.
accepted as canonical only in the fourth century." Ferguson did not make explicit mention of Jude’s inclusion by the Fragmentist, but he simply stated that the information provided by the Fragment on the catholic epistles appears to be anomalous for any date. Nevertheless, he still considered it more likely to be earlier rather than later.

Disputed Texts

Wisdom of Solomon

The Fragmentist expressed his acceptance of the Wisdom of Solomon with the words, “and the book of Wisdom, written by the friends of Solomon in his honor,” appearing to list it as received among the catholic epistles and the Apocalypse (lines 68-71). The author of Barnabas (ca. 70-135) cited Wisdom as authoritative by linking it closely with a quote from the Septuagint translation of Isaiah. Because of this Metzger believed the Barnabas author viewed Wisdom as being among the writings of the prophets. Of Wisdom, Epiphanius stated that the Jews considered it canonical but that this was “disputed.” Thus it appears that Wisdom met with Jewish skepticism but Christian acceptance. That said, Horbury believed that the place of Wisdom in the list serves as indication that the Fragmentist considered it an accepted Old Testament text but a non-canonical one at that.

244 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 181.

245 Ferguson, review of The Muratorian Fragment, 694.

246 Wisdom of Solomon 2:12; Isaiah 3:9-10; Barnabas 6 (ANF 1:140n19). The dates for Barnabas are from Quasten, Patrology, vol. 1, 90-1.


248 Epiph., Refutation of All Heresies 1.6.4.

Such acceptance also makes itself apparent in *1 Clement* and in Irenæus’s *Against Heresies*. Tregelles believed that *1 Clement* 3 features a quote from *Wisdom* 2:24.\(^{250}\) Interestingly, Tregelles believed that *Wisdom* was a recent (i.e. Christian era) book, so recent that he saw its author alluding to Rom 5:12.\(^ {251}\) This would mean that either *Wisdom* is a first-century composition or possibly an older text with early Christian interpolations. Also, Irenæus indicated that he considered the text authoritative as he quoted from *Wisdom* 6:19.\(^ {252}\) Eusebius interpreted this use by Irenæus as an acknowledgement of canonical authority, that Irenæus was furnishing an account of the traditions handed down to him “concerning the canonical books.”\(^ {253}\) After noting how Irenæus considered the *Shepherd of Hermas* to be Scripture, Eusebius made the following remark: “And he [Irenæus] uses almost the precise words of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, saying . . . .”\(^ {254}\) Eusebius also stated that in one of Irenæus’s works he “mentions the Epistle to the Hebrews and the so-called *Wisdom of Solomon*, making quotations from them.”\(^ {255}\) In light of all this Tregelles believed that “there must have been some cause which led Eusebius, or other earlier authors whom he may have followed, to speak of this book amongst Christian writings, much as it is introduced in the Muratorian fragment.”\(^ {256}\)

\(^{250}\) Tregelles, *Canon Muratorianus*, 55.

\(^{251}\) Ibid., 54.

\(^{252}\) Irenæus, *Against Heresies* 4.38.3.

\(^{253}\) Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.1.

\(^{254}\) Ibid.

\(^{255}\) Ibid., 5.26.

Sundberg considered the Fragmentist’s reference here to be evidence of a fourth-century context because he viewed the Fragment’s list to be a canon of the New Testament in the strictest sense of the term. Given his understanding that this is the case, it would follow that Wisdom does not have a place in the Old Testament canon. Sundberg saw this as consistent with Eusebius, Athanasius, and Epiphanius. In other words, by the time the Fragment was written, it had become clear that Wisdom could only find a place in a New Testament list; the Old Testament was complete and did not include Wisdom, at least in the East. However, Ferguson countered Sundberg’s conclusions by highlighting Melito’s omission of Wisdom from his Old Testament as well as the fact that what Sundberg viewed as Eusebius’s treatment of Wisdom actually belongs to Irenæus. Ferguson went on to point to Clement’s use of Wisdom (mentioned above), the possibility that the writer of Hebrews quoted from it, and Tertullian’s treatment of it as authoritative where he quoted from Wisdom 1:1 on two occasions in his anti-Marcionite polemics. Nevertheless, Ferguson conceded that it is unknown whether these considered Wisdom to be in the Old or New Testament.

Because the Fragmentist did not attribute Wisdom to Solomon, Hahneman saw this as evidence of a late date. Only the earliest church fathers considered Solomon to have been the author. These include Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, and Cyril of

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257 Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 15-8, 17n58; Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 5.8.1-8; Athanasius, Festal Letter 39; Epiph., Refutation of All Heresies 1.1.8; 76.

258 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 679. Eusebius writes in Ecclesiastical History 4.26.13 that Melito considered as part of the Jewish Scriptures “the Proverbs of Solomon, Wisdom also,” but this “Wisdom” here mentioned is commonly considered by scholars to refer to Proverbs. See NPNF 2:1:200n17, 2:1:206n36.

259 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 679; Wisdom of Solomon 7.25; Hebrews 1:3; Tert., Prescription Against Heretics 7; idem, Against the Valentinians 2.


261 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 201.
Jerusalem, among others.\textsuperscript{262} Not until Augustine does one see an attribution to any other than Solomon, yet Augustine, like the Fragmentist, considered it canonical Scripture.\textsuperscript{263} Thus, not until the late fourth century does a context present itself for the Fragmentist’s view of Wisdom.

Armstrong found a parallel similar to the Fragmentist’s use of the word \textit{catholica} in reference to \textit{Wisdom}. Armstrong noted that this is an “extremely uncommon construction in earliest Latin Christian literature.”\textsuperscript{264} However, Victorinus of Pettau used it in his commentary on the Apocalypse.\textsuperscript{265} Nevertheless, Armstrong also conceded the fact that Tertullian used the expression in similar way.\textsuperscript{266} In the final analysis, the presence of \textit{Wisdom} in the Fragment appears to betray an early date.

\textbf{Apocalypse of Peter}

Along with the Apocalypse, the Fragmentist also accepted the \textit{Apocalypse of Peter} but remarked that “some amongst us” do not allow it to be read in the church (lines 70-3). Clement of Alexandria also accepted the \textit{Apocalypse of Peter} as Scripture and appears to have quoted from it.\textsuperscript{267} Methodius quoted from it and called it one of the “inspired writings.”\textsuperscript{268} Nevertheless, Eusebius listed it among the rejected books. He also remarked that it was not universally

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Clement of Alexandria, \textit{Miscellanies} 6.11; Tert., \textit{Against the Valentinians} 2.2; Cyprian, \textit{To Fortunatus: Exhortation to Martyrdom} 2; Lactantius, \textit{Epitome of the Divine Institutes} 42; Cyril of Jerusalem, \textit{On the Catechetical Lectures} 9.2.
\item Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 201.
\item Armstrong, “Victorinus of Pettau,” 25.
\item Victorinus of Pettau, \textit{Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John} 1.7, 4.5, 12.4.
\item Armstrong, “Victorinus of Pettau,” 25n76; Tert., \textit{Prescription Against Heretics} 30.
\item Euseb., \textit{Ecclesiastical History} 6.14.1; Clement of Alexandria, \textit{Extracts from the Prophets} 48.
\item Methodius, \textit{The Banquet of the Ten Virgins}, Theophila 6.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
accepted and that citations from it cannot be found among any “ecclesiastical writer, ancient or modern,” though this latter remark may be an exaggeration.\textsuperscript{269} Writing between 439 and 450, regarding the period between 324 and 425, Sozomen testified that “the book entitled the \textit{Apocalypse of Peter}, which was considered altogether spurious by the ancients, is still read in some of the churches of Palestine.”\textsuperscript{270}

Sundberg and Hahneman found parallels for the Fragmentist’s cautionary tone regarding the \textit{Apocalypse of Peter} in the fourth century.\textsuperscript{271} Up until that time, the work appears to have been widely circulated and accepted.\textsuperscript{272} Consistent with this, Hahneman observed that no second-century writer expressed doubts like those of the Fragmentist. Notwithstanding the early acceptance, during the fourth century some expressed doubts, namely Eusebius, Jerome, and the scribe of the Codex Claromontanus, while others still seem to have accepted it including Methodius and Sozomen. Horbury agreed that this ambivalence coheres with the Fragmentist’s including it in the \textit{antilegomena}, but Horbury did not agree this leads to a second-century date conclusion.\textsuperscript{273} Ferguson downplayed the perceived similarity between the Fragmentist’s and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{269} Euseb., \textit{Ecclesiastical History} 3.25.4; idem, \textit{Ecclesiastical History} 3.3.2 (\textit{NPNF} 2:1:134n11); Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 28.
\item \textsuperscript{271} Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 26-34; Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 205-8.
\item \textsuperscript{272} According to Hahneman, witnesses to this circulation include “Theophilus of Antioch, Methodius of Tyre, Eusebius in Caesarea, the Stichometry of Nicephorus in Jerusalem, Macarius in Syria, Jerome in Bethlehem, and Sozomen, a native of Bethelia in Palestine (exceptions are Clement of Alexandria and the probably Alexandrian catalogue in the Codex Claromontanus),” thus it appears that most known NT manuscripts included it. Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 208.
\item \textsuperscript{273} Horbury, “The Wisdom of Solomon,” 154, 159.
\end{itemize}
Eusebius’s views on the *Apocalypse of Peter*, interpreting the Fragmentist as more sanguine about the otherwise questioned work.  

This apparent sanguinity may support a third-century date due to a parallel perceived by Armstrong between the Fragmentist and Victorinus of Pettau. Armstrong highlighted a quote from Victorinus in which the latter identified the *Apocalypse of Peter* as Scripture. Armstrong concluded, “the phenomenal rarity of authors who accepted the *Apocalypse of Peter* speaks all the more forcefully for a Victorinan theory of authorship.” The early acceptance of the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the doubts regarding it that came about later appear to place the Fragment in that transition period perhaps in the third century.

**Shepherd of Hermas**

With regard to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the Fragmentist wrote,

> The Pastor, moreover, did Hermas write very recently in our times in the city of Rome, while his brother bishop Pius sat in the chair of the Church of Rome. And therefore it also ought to be read; but it cannot be made public in the Church to the people, nor placed among the prophets, as their number is complete, nor among the apostles to the end of time (lines 73-80).

Scholars give special attention to two items in this passage: the date of *Shepherd’s* composition (*nuperrime temporibus nostris*) and the reception of *Shepherd*. They give special consideration to the impacts that these items have on determining the Fragment’s date due to their reference to time.

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274 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 680.

Nuperrime temporibus nostris

Second- and third-century proponents translate the expression *nuperrime temporibus nostris* as “very recently in our times.” Muratori believed this shows that Caius would have had opportunity to write the Fragment as he lived during the period in question.²⁷⁶ Donaldson entertained the possibility that “in our times” may be the writer’s way of distinguishing between the apostolic and post-apostolic eras. If this is possible, one cannot insist on an early date.²⁷⁷ Like Donaldson, Salmon did not think that the expression “in our times” should be “too severely pressed,” and he also thought that the Fragmentist could have even been writing fifty to sixty years after Pius’s death and still legitimately have used such an expression.²⁷⁸ In this way, Salmon allowed for his understanding that the Fragmentist is a contemporary of Zephyrinus. However, Zahn asserted that even if the term *nuperrime* could allow for an interpretation which points to separate apostolic and post-apostolic periods, one must understand that the expression *temporibus nostris* is conclusive that the author had to have been born prior to Pius’s death.²⁷⁹ In this way, proponents of the Early Hypothesis insist that the Fragmentist is a contemporary of Pius and could not have feasibly written his work later than the third century. In other words, the question is not whether the Fragmentist distinguishes between apostolic and post-apostolic eras; it is clear from line 80 that he does. Rather, the issue is whether or not he lived and wrote during or at least shortly after, Pius’s lifetime. Proponents of the Early Hypothesis say he did.


²⁷⁸ Salmon, “Muratorian Fragment,” 1002.

This interpretation of *nuperrime temporibus nostris* persisted as the general consensus for over two hundred years. Still, Sundberg questioned it. First, Sundberg doubted that *nuperrime* must only be translated as “very recently.” He argued that another viable translation is “most recently.” This opens the possibility that the Fragmentist (or at least some Latin translator) did not necessarily mean that *Shepherd* was written as recently as were the other books he lists, but instead it could mean that *Shepherd* was the most recently written in the list. Ferguson agreed with Sundberg that this is a possibility, but Ferguson contended that Sundberg’s translation does not necessarily rule out a second-century date either. That said, Ferguson did not believe Sundberg’s alternative interpretation to be “the most natural meaning.”

Hahneman agreed with Sundberg that the possibilities are open, but he did so primarily in light of the chance that the Fragment in its extant form is a translation. Therefore, Hahneman expressed caution that “there may be ‘limited value’ in dating the Fragment upon this simple three-word Latin phrase.”

Second, Sundberg did not believe that one must interpret the phrase “in our times” to mean during our lifetime. According to him, another possible interpretation can be found in the understanding that early church writers set apart “the apostolic time from subsequent periods of church history.” In other words, when the Fragmentist wrote “our times,” he could have meant the times since the death of the apostle John. For example, Sundberg grounded his position in the fact that Irenæus used a similar expression when describing the Apocalypse as

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281 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 678.

282 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 34.


having been written during the reign of Domitian, “almost in our generation” (σχεδόν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεάς).\textsuperscript{285} Surely, Irenæus did not mean that the Apocalypse was written during his lifetime or that of his readers.\textsuperscript{286} On the other hand, Ferguson believed instead that the quote Sundberg cited from Irenæus argues against Sundberg’s interpretation.\textsuperscript{287} Ferguson contended that Irenæus was using the expression “in our generation” in reference to his lifetime because he stated that the Apocalypse was written “almost” as recently as “our generation” especially given the probability that John wrote it during the early 90s and Irenæus was born as early as the 120s. Ferguson also cited Eusebius who stated that “the generation of those that had been deemed worthy to hear” the apostles “had passed away”; it appears that Eusebius equated “generation” (i.e. γενεάς) with lifetime.\textsuperscript{288}

In short, Early Hypothesis proponents consider the Fragmentist’s comment that Shepherd was written nuperrime temporibus nostris to be remarkable. Late Hypothesis proponents place none. Sundberg and Hahneman preferred to look elsewhere for evidence of the Fragment’s date.\textsuperscript{289} Hahneman summed up the problem as follows:

The real point of the argument in the Fragment’s statements about the Shepherd is not that it is heretical, but that it was written too late to be considered apostolic. The temporal references of “nuperrime” and “temporibus nostris” in this case should perhaps then be read as relating only to the Shepherd of Hermas and the apostolic age, and not to the date of the Fragment itself. The argument in the Fragment for a late dating of the Shepherd need not correlate it with the lifetime of the Fragmentist, but only with that of Pius of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{285} Irenæus, Against Heresies 5.30.3.
  \item \textsuperscript{286} Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 10. Rothschild, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 70-2. Rothschild calls this the “periodic reading.”
  \item \textsuperscript{287} Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 678.
  \item \textsuperscript{288} Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 3.32.8.
  \item \textsuperscript{289} Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 11; Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 34, 72
\end{itemize}
Rome. The language of the Fragment can be read as making its case against it without reference to the dating of the Fragmentist. 290

Reception of the *Shepherd of Hermas*

The Fragmentist allowed for the reading of *Shepherd*, but he proscribed its public reading, and he denied it a place among the writings of the prophets or the apostles due to its having been written after their time. Arguably, both Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria accepted *Shepherd* as authoritative Scripture, quoting from it and alluding to it approvingly. 291 Tertullian quoted *Shepherd* in order to justify a point with his readers, who ostensibly accepted it, but whether at this point Tertullian himself accepted it or not remains unclear. 292 Nevertheless, most scholars see an explicit rejection of *Shepherd* by Tertullian during his Montanist years; according to him the universal church had also rejected it as “apocryphal and false.” 293 On the other hand, in Alexandria, Origen apparently accepted it even though he knew that not all agreed with him. He noted that *Shepherd* is “a Scripture which is in circulation in the church, but not acknowledged by all to be divine.” 294 Eusebius also acknowledged that *Shepherd* was not universally acknowledged but disputed. 295 Those who accepted it had read it publically in church, and “most of the ancient writers used it,” among these being Irenæus. 296 Nevertheless,

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291 Irenæus, *Against Heresies* 4.20.2 quoted *Shepherd of Hermas* 2.1; Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 1.17, 29; 2.1, 9, 12 quoted and alluded to *Shepherd of Hermas* 1.3.4, 8, 13; 2.4.2, 11; 3.9.16.

292 Tert., *Prayer* 16.


294 Origen, *First Principles* 1.3.3, 2.1.5, 3.2.4, 4.1.11; *Commentary on Matthew* 14.21. Origen quotes from *Shepherd of Hermas* 2.1; 2.6.2.

295 Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 3.3.6-7.

296 Ibid., 3.3.6, 5.8.7.
Eusebius did not recognize *Shepherd* at all; he rejected it without qualification.²⁹⁷ Athanasius did not include *Shepherd* in his canon, but allowed for its limited use “by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness.”²⁹⁸

Salmon believed that based on the evidence of how the Fragmentist treats *Shepherd*, the Fragment was composed during the bishopric of Zephyrinus of Rome, between the times that Tertullian wrote *Prayer* (ca. 200) and *Modesty* (ca. 217).²⁹⁹ This places the date in the beginning of the third century. Zahn noted that the issue of using *Shepherd* in public worship presented itself most prominently around 200, not as late as the fourth century.³⁰⁰

Against this, because *Shepherd* does not appear in any New Testament lists after Eusebius’s censure of the text, Sundberg viewed Eusebius’s time as the transition point with regard to sentiment about *Shepherd*; previously it had been accepted and disputed, but by the time Eusebius wrote his *Ecclesiastical History*, it had come to be rejected.³⁰¹ Notwithstanding this transition apparent by the time of Eusebius and later Athanasius, Ferguson maintained that the evidence in the Fragment with regard to the reception of *Shepherd* could still allow for a second-century context. The Fragmentist may have had Irenæus and Clement in mind when he approved of *Shepherd’s* private use but not of its ecclesial reading.³⁰² Further, Ferguson did not

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²⁹⁷ Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.4.


³⁰⁰ Zahn, “Muratorian Fragment,” 54.


think that Eusebius marks a transition point, but rather that he was describing a condition in history that had existed since Tertullian.

Hahneman saw the Fragmentist’s comments about *Shepherd* as consistent with a fourth-century context. Tertullian’s rejection was an exception due to that Father’s sectarian bent, not because of a wholesale consensus by the western church, so it does not necessarily indicate an early context.\(^{303}\) In other words, *Shepherd* was generally accepted in the East until after Origen, and in the West until the time of Jerome. In response to Hahneman, Ferguson highlighted the understanding that *Shepherd* itself shows evidence of being a composite work, possibly spread out over a period time.\(^{304}\) Thus it is possible that a portion of it was written earlier, during the time of Clement of Rome (see *Shepherd of Hermas* 1.2.4), and that its final form was published while Pius was bishop of Rome. This means that Hermas would have had a long career which Ferguson argued is not an impossibility. If Hermas gave Clement a copy around 99, toward the end of the latter’s episcopacy, forty-one years later, at the beginning of Pius’s bishopric, the much older Hermas may have finished it. This means it would have been written after the age of the apostles and during the time of Pius, as the Fragmentist attests, *as well as* during the time of Clement as *Shepherd* attests.\(^{305}\) Contra the notion of a Fraternity “Legend,” if Pius was born around 81, it is not inconceivable for him to have had a brother close to the same age.\(^{306}\) Quasten put it this way: “The two dates are accounted for by the way in which the book was compiled.

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\(^{303}\) Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment*, 70.

\(^{304}\) Ferguson, review of *The Muratorian Fragment*, 692.

\(^{305}\) Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment*, 53, 71. This is contra Hahneman’s insistence that the Fragmentist could not have been a contemporary of Hermas or Pius. Also, the date during Clement’s time coheres with Hahneman’s belief that *Shepherd* was written around 100.

\(^{306}\) Ibid., 52. This is contra Hahneman’s supposition that the two were not brothers on the grounds of the time span.
The older portion would most likely go back to Clement’s day while the present redaction would be of Pius’s time. Critical examination of the contents leads to the same conclusion. This shows that parts of the work belong to different periods. ³⁰⁷ For these reasons also (and more) Rothschild’s claim, that the Fragmentist’s testimony regarding Shepherd is fraught with inconsistencies and errors, seems doubtful. ³⁰⁸ In conclusion, the link between Shepherd and Pius place the Fragment squarely in the second or third centuries, but its rejection allows for a Fragment written as late as the fourth.

Pseudo-Pauline Epistles

After the Fragmentist listed and described the Pauline Epistles, he identified at least two Pauline pseudepigrapha, and he mentioned a few other works. About these he stated, “There are [epistles] also in circulation one to the Laodiceans, and another to the Alexandrians, forged under the name of Paul, and addressed against the heresy of Marcion; and there are also several others which cannot be received into the Catholic Church, for it is not suitable for gall to be mingled with honey” (lines 63-8). According to Tertullian, the Marcionites referred to the canonical epistle to the Ephesians as having been written to the Laodiceans by Paul. ³⁰⁹ Because the Fragmentist listed Ephesians earlier, he either misunderstood that these were the same epistle, or he understood them to be two separate epistles. Epiphanius related that in Marcion’s supposed

³⁰⁷ Quasten, Patrology, vol. 1, 92-3.

³⁰⁸ Rothschild, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 72-4. Rothschild contends that it is unlikely that poverty-stricken Hermas could have been a bishop’s brother, that Pius’s bishopric is too late to have taken place during Shepherd’s writing, that Pius’s brother was probably not named “Hermas,” and that it is illogical for the Fragmentist to receive Shepherd, a book written after the apostles’ time.

canon he included both the Ephesian epistle and “parts of the so-called Epistle to the Laodiceans.” Jerome mentioned a putatively Pauline epistle written to the Laodiceans which he said, though it is read by some, “it is rejected by everyone”; he listed this in addition to Ephesians.

Attempts to identify the Alexandrian epistle have fallen short; scholars simply do not have extant a work to which the Fragmentist is likely referring. Hahneman points out that due to apparent corruptions in the text, it is possible that the reference to forgery only applies to the Alexandrian epistle as related to Marcion, or that it refers to neither epistle, only to some other works related to Marcion. Nevertheless, scholarship has weighed in on how these references enhance an understanding of the Fragment’s date. First, Muratori believed that during the time of Caius the Laodicean epistle was being circulated, so Muratori simply assumed that this supposed pseudonymous work was flourishing during the second century. Second, Zahn saw the presence of the Laodicean epistle in fourth-century New Testament manuscripts as the “belated influence” of the past, an influence against which the Fragmentist protested as a “live” issue of his day. In other words, Zahn saw no reason to believe the mention of this epistle indicates a fourth-century date for the Fragment. Third, Hahneman asserted of the Laodicean epistle, “there is no evidence of its existence earlier than the late fourth century,” this notwithstanding evidence that the Marcionites believed in one, though they may have inadvertently been referring to

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310 Epiph., Refutation of All Heresies 42.9.4. Cf., 42.11.9, 42.13.1.
311 Jer., On Illustrious Men 5.
313 Muratori, Antiquitates italicæ mediiævi, col. 3:853.
314 Zahn, “Muratorian Fragment,” 55.
Ephesians according to Tertullian. Hahneman saw a parallel between the Fragment and Epiphanius who also listed both Ephesians and Laodiceans; if the Fragment is second-century, it is unique with respect to Laodiceans. Regardless, there existed within the early third century, or earlier, the perception (albeit a Marcionite one) that an epistle purported to have been written by Paul (whether true or not), and purported to have been written to the Laodiceans (whether true or not). Nevertheless, establishing a date for the Fragment based on this evidence remains difficult. Ferguson conceded as much when he admitted that he could only justify an early date if the Fragmentist mistook Laodiceans for Ephesians, like the Marcionites may have done. On the other hand, Ferguson noted that the Fragmentist probably did not do this because Ephesians is mentioned among Paul’s orthonymous writings (line 51). If this is the case, the Fragmentist may have been referring to the Latin Laodicean epistle, in which case the Fragment must be dated much later. Finally, Rothschild believes that either the Fragmentist was wrong about Ephesians and Laodiceans in which case it is probably an unreliable fourth-century work posing as a second-century work, or the Fragmentist was referring to the Latin Laodicean epistle of which there is no second or third-century attestation.

The Catalogue of Heresies

Toward the end of the Fragment, the author expressed his rejection of the work of certain individuals. He declared, “Of the writings of Arsinous, called also Valentinus, or of Miltiades,

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316 Tert., *Against Marcion* 5.17. *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Marcionite Prologues”; the so-called “Marcionite Prologues” bear resemblance to Marcion’s order of the Pauline epistles, but they do not exhibit a great deal of Marcion’s teachings, and do not seem to contribute to this present debate.

317 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.

we receive nothing at all. Those are rejected too who wrote the new Book of Psalms for Marcion, together with Basilides and the founder of the Asian Cataphrygian” (lines 81-5). In one of his anti-Marcionite works, Tertullian mentioned what he considered to be a heretical psalter written by Valentinus.\(^{319}\) Whether this is the same psalm book mentioned by the Fragmentist is uncertain, but that it was of the same general persuasion is likely.

As with the other evidence presented here, Fragment scholars view this “catalogue of heresies” as supporting their respective positions on its date. Muratorii cautioned that the “Mitiades” in the Fragment must not be confused with Miltiades of which both Eusebius and Jerome spoke and who wrote for the church catholic.\(^{320}\) Donaldson did not see the value in dating the Fragment based on this passage due to what he considers to be its corrupted condition. Even if one could correctly interpret the Fragmentist’s mention of the Cataphrygians as a condemnation, this does not necessarily place the Fragment prior to Tertullian because it may have been Montanism’s spread in Africa which prompted this reference.\(^ {321}\) Salmon saw the Cataphrygian mention as an indication of the Fragment’s having been written during Zephyrinus’s bishopric.\(^ {322}\) On the other hand, Zahn saw it quite the opposite. For him, the Fragment appears to be one written after the Roman church had condemned the doctrines of Montanus, Valentinus, Basilides, and Marcion, thus no earlier than 195.\(^ {323}\) In addition, Ferguson asserted that the “heresies mentioned are those of the second century” (he associates Basilides

\(^{319}\) Tert., *The Flesh of Christ* 20.


\(^{322}\) Salmon, “Muratorian Fragment,” 1003.

\(^{323}\) Zahn, “Muratorian Canon,” 54.
and Valentinus with Gnosticism).\textsuperscript{324} Since other known fourth- and fifth-century writers against heresy (e.g. Epiphanius and Theodoret) listed heretics of their own day along with those of the second century, Ferguson argued that if the Fragment is a fourth-century work, one can reasonably expect to see something similar here.\textsuperscript{325} Hahneman considered the catalogue of heresies evidence of a fourth-century date for three reasons. First, he believed the Fragmentist betrayed a dependence on Eusebius because he mistakenly identified Mitiades as a Montanist due to a possible copyist error in Eusebius.\textsuperscript{326} Second, Hahneman took notice of the absence of references to Cataphrygians prior to the fourth century; up until that time, the prefix had not yet been added to the term “Phrygian.”\textsuperscript{327} Third, he also noted silence until the fourth-century regarding a Marcionite psalter.\textsuperscript{328} Armstrong looked to the evidence here to support his argument that Victorinus of Pettau authored the Fragment. He saw parallels between the two in Victorinus’s commentary on the Apocalypse in the latter’s condemnation of the Montanists.\textsuperscript{329} Also, if Pseudo-Tertullian’s Against Heresies belongs to Victorinus (and Armstrong believed it does), Armstrong contended that this argues even more conclusively for his claim primarily in the way that document contests the doctrines of the “Cataphrygians,” Marcion, and Valentinus.\textsuperscript{330} Rothschild believes the list of rejected dissenters “looks less anti-Montanist or

\textsuperscript{324} Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.

\textsuperscript{325} Ferguson, review of The Muratorian Fragment, 696.

\textsuperscript{326} Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 209-11.

\textsuperscript{327} Ibid., 211-3.

\textsuperscript{328} Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 213.

\textsuperscript{329} Armstrong, “Victorinus of Pettau,” 28; Victorinus of Pettau, Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John, 2.4, 10.2.

\textsuperscript{330} Armstrong, “Victorinus of Pettau,” 28-9; Pseudo-Tertullian, Against Heresies 4, 6.
anti-Marcionite than like a medley of stereotypical second-century heretics jumbled together to exude a disapproving aura for an audience either unaware or uninterested in the facts,” this in support of her contention that the Fragment constitutes a later work attempting to portray itself as an earlier.  

Ecclesiastical Context

The Doctrine of the Gospel

After his treatment of the Gospels, the Fragmentist highlighted a theme which runs through them for the universal church “as regards the faith of believers” (lines 18-9). He then explicated what is ostensibly a regula fidei formula: “the Lord’s nativity, His passion, His resurrection, His conversation with His disciples, and His twofold advent,—the first in the humiliation of rejection, which is now past, and the second in the glory of royal power, which is yet in the future” (lines 20-6).

Both Donaldson and Ferguson viewed this statement as indicative of an early context for the Fragment. Its simplicity and content show similarities with similar formulas found in Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Aristides, Irenæus, and Tertullian. Though this “rule of faith” is structurally dissimilar to that of Victorinus of Pettau in his commentary on the Apocalypse, Armstrong noted that they both follow immediately after the writers’ exposition of the Fourth Gospel and Victorinus’s versions compare closely to the Fragment’s in other ways as well.

331 Rothschild, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 76.

332 Donaldson, A Critical History, 212; Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681, 681n17, 682; Ferguson, review of The Muratorian Fragment, 696; Ignatius, To the Trallians 9; Justin Martyr, First Apology 31; Aristides, Apology 2; Irenæus, Against Heresies 1.10; Tert., Prescription Against Heretics 13; idem, The Veiling of Virgins 1; idem, Against Praxeus 2.

333 Armstrong, “Victorinus of Pettau,” 9; Victorinus of Pettau, Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John 1.2, 3; 3.1; 5.3.
The Church

In two ways, the Fragment offered a glimpse into ecclesial social context. First, throughout the Fragment, the author made reference to the all-important reception of texts by the church at large by highlighting the otherwise assumed criticality of catholicity. He noted that the personal epistles of Paul, though not written to entire churches per se, are “hallowed in the esteem of the Catholic Church” (lines 59-63). On the other hand, the pseudo-Pauline “cannot be received into the Catholic Church” (lines 64-7). Additionally, the epistles of Jude and John are “reckoned among the Catholic” (lines 68-9). Second, the Fragmentist held the personal epistles of Paul to be just as vital for the “regulation of ecclesiastical discipline” as the apostle’s public epistles (lines 62-3).

Donaldson asserted that the phrases “the Catholic Church,” and “ecclesiastical discipline” belong to the late second to early third centuries and not prior.334 Because the Fragment in its current form may be a translation, Ferguson conceded that comparisons made between its idiolect and that of other documents can yield only limited fruit.335 Nevertheless, he pointed out a parallel between the Fragment’s notion of ecclesiasticae disciplinae and a similar idea throughout Tertullian’s work.336 In addition, at one point, the Fragment uses the term “catholic” substantively rather than attributively as in the other two times. Armstrong found this remarkable due to the paucity of instances where such a substantive construction of the adjective catholica was employed in early Christian literature.337 Victorinus of Pettau used this construction in his

334 Donaldson, A Critical History, 212.
335 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 678.
336 Ibid.; Tert., Prescription Against Heretics 36, 44; idem, Prayer, passim; idem, The Veiling of Virgins 16; idem, Against Marcion 5.21.
commentary on the Apocalypse, so Armstrong saw a parallel here. However, Armstrong also conceded that Victorinus more frequently made use of the attributive construction of *catholica*, and he conceded that Tertullian used the term substantively as well.

**The Chair**

In describing a bishopric, in this case Pius’s, the Fragmentist stated that Pius “sat in the chair of the Church of Rome” (lines 75-6). Regarding this expression, Donaldson observed that it has no parallel in the period from about 110 to 180, nor does Tertullian use it. However, he noted that Cyprian used similar expressions at times. According to Salmon, the expression’s implication that a mono-episcopacy prevailed in Rome betrays a time much later than that of Pius, during whose ministry the constitution of the church did not call for a single occupant of the bishop’s chair. Ferguson considered this expression to be parallel to Irenæus’s idea of a chair of magisterium.

**Church Reading of the Prophets and the Apostles**

In his distinction between books that “ought to be read” but “cannot be made public in the Church to the people,” the Fragmentist implied a difference between the Old and New Testaments with his explicit mention of two separate categories of writings: those which are

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339 Ibid., 4.4, 12.4; Tert., *Prescription Against Heresies* 30.2.


341 Cyprian, *To the People, Concerning Five Schismatic Presbyters of the Faction of Felicissimus* 5; idem, *To Antonianus About Cornelius and Novatian* 9.

342 Salmon, “Muratorian Fragment,” 1002.

“among the prophets” and those which are “among the apostles” (lines 77-80). Ferguson highlighted the fact that Justin Martyr makes just such a distinction as well. Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681; Ferguson, review of The Muratorian Fragment, 696. Whereas the Fragmentist linked these two categories to public reading in the church, so too Justin wrote that on Sundays, at the Christian meetings, “the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read.” Rothschild adds to this with her observation that other second-century works make this distinction between the prophets and the apostles in the same manner; these include Ignatius, Polycarp, and the Didache, but she believes the Fragmentist is merely imitating this supposedly earlier notion rather than speaking about the context in which he found himself. Rothschild, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 77n112; Ignatius, To the Philadelphians 9; Polycarp, To the Philippians 6; Didache 11.

Summary

This chapter has enumerated the evidence upon which Muratorian Fragment scholars typically consider regarding the date of its composition. In addition, it has offered brief expositions on their interpretations of that evidence. In some cases, evidence is used by both camps, while in others, individual items are only considered important by proponents on one side of the debate. However, in all cases, it is likely that scholars’ assumptions color the evidence they examine. The combination of assumptions with evidence then leads to the various, and at times conflicting, interpretations they proffer. In other words, scholars’ hypotheses derive from their interpretations of the evidence, rather than on the evidence directly, and those interpretations result from the assumptions the scholars bring with them to the debate.

344 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681; Ferguson, review of The Muratorian Fragment, 696.
345 Justin, First Apology 67.
346 Rothschild, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 77n112; Ignatius, To the Philadelphians 9; Polycarp, To the Philippians 6; Didache 11.
In applying the Harman-McCullagh Criteria to answer the research question, the study examined whether or not, and to what degree, each item of evidence listed above implies the hypotheses. Moreover, because these hypotheses are, albeit indirectly, products of scholars’ assumptions, the study considered to what extent unsubstantiated assumptions play a role in coloring scholars’ interpretation of the evidence. To that end, the following chapter features a description of both the Early and Late Hypotheses, and it identifies the assumptions made by scholars on each side of the debate.
CHAPTER 4

A DATE: THE HYPOTHESES

Inasmuch as the study calls for an examination of how well the two hypotheses under consideration explain the evidence, the preceding chapter offered a catalog of the evidence to which scholars point in support of their positions. The present chapter features descriptions of these hypotheses, first of the Early Hypothesis and then of the Late Hypothesis. Where applicable, it offers discussion regarding potential counters to the reasons driving each of them as well as exposure to their basic assumptions and apparent indiscretions in logic.

The Early Hypothesis

Since Muratori’s publication of the Fragment in 1740, the belief that it constitutes a second- or third-century composition prevailed among scholars for over two hundred years. Scholars who subscribe to the Early Hypothesis include Muratori, Hug, Credner, Donaldson, Tregelles, Salmon, Zahn, Westcott, and Quasten. After the hypothesis faced Sundberg’s challenge in the 1960s, the Early Hypothesis persisted in the work of Ferguson, Verheyden, Balla, and Armstrong. These contend that the Early Hypothesis best explains the evidence through three lines of reasoning. First, the Fragmentist implied that he was a contemporary of Pius. Second, the Fragment exhibits literary features similar to those found in second- and third-century literature. Third, the Fragment possesses elements which seem to betray an apparent second- or third-century historical/theological context. This section offers a discussion of some
of the issues involving a subscription to the Early Hypothesis with its supporting reasons and the evidence upon which those reasons are supposedly based.

Reason #1: The Fragmentist, a Contemporary of Pius

The Plain Reading

Proponents of the Early Hypothesis conclude that the Fragment is a second- or third-century composition because they maintain that the Fragmentist claimed to be a contemporary of Pius, the bishop of Rome. The Fragmentist states that the *Shepherd of Hermas* was written “very recently in our times (*nuperrime temporibus nostris*) in the city of Rome, while his brother bishop Pius sat in the chair of the Church of Rome” (lines 73-7). It is a recognized fact among church historians that Pius was bishop of Rome from about 138 to 155.347

The interpretation of the expression “in our times,” as equating to the lifetime of Pius, appears on the surface to be a logical understanding of the text. Among the scholars who read the Fragment with this meaning are Muratori, Tregelles, Zahn, Westcott, and Ferguson.348 Westcott maintained that this interpretation was the best inference because it did not derive from interpreting the passage “loosely.”349 Likewise, Ferguson held to the notion that this was “the most natural meaning.”350 Rothschild dubbed this type of interpretation, the “Plain Reading.” 351

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347 *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Pius I (d. ca. 155).”


349 Westcott, *A General Survey*, 215n1

350 Ferguson, “Canon Muratorian,” 678.

The Periodic Reading

However, others believe the Fragmentist had a broader meaning in mind when referring to the time of Shepherd’s writing as “in our times,” and this can be seen if one employs what has come to be called a “Periodic Reading.” A periodic reading, while allowing for the possibility that the plain reading may be valid, also allowed for the possibility that the Fragmentist was referring to the post-apostolic period in general. In other words, the Fragmentist was making a distinction between the times of the apostles and his own. For example, both Donaldson and Salmon, reluctant to stake their understanding of the Fragment’s date on the plain reading, allowed for a periodic reading. Nevertheless, these still argued for an early date albeit for other reasons.

Of these two hermeneutic methods, only the plain reading requires a period of time tied to Pius’s lifespan. The periodic reading has no such restriction; the period began with the death of the last apostle and extends indefinitely into the future, with no terminus ad quem. This possibility means that it is no longer necessary to consider the Fragmentist and Pius to be contemporaries, and by implication, no longer necessary to date the Fragment in the second century. As such, it allows for the Fragment to have been written either during Pius’s lifetime or during a subsequent time period. Sundberg, in his development of the Late Hypothesis, capitalized on this possibility. He questioned the assumption that “in our times” had to necessarily mean within Pius’s lifetime, and this opening provided him with the opportunity to posit the Fragment’s date in the fourth century.


However, Sundberg did not remain content to simply allow for the likelihood of an early date. In several of the church fathers, notably Ignatius, Polycarp, Hegesippus, and Eusebius, he observed a distinction made between the time of the apostles and the remainder of church history, and he likened the Fragment’s reference to “our times” as an indication of a similar distinction. Of special interest to Sundberg’s case is Irenæus’s statement that the Apocalypse was written “almost in our generation.”

It would be surprising that Irenæus could use such language to describe a lapse of time approaching a century apart from the fact that he is utilizing the tradition which differentiates between apostolic and subsequent time. It is clear that he believed that the Apocalypse of John was written about the end of the apostolic period, i.e., “almost in our own generation” (σχεδόν επί της ημετέρας γενεάς). And the similarity of the language used by Irenæus to describe the time in which the Apocalypse of John was written to the language used in the Muratorian canon to describe the time in which the Shepherd of Hermas was written leaves the argument poorly founded that the words “temporibus nostris” can mean nothing else than within the lifetime of the author.

With his reference to a century’s “lapse of time,” it appears that Sundberg began to go beyond any allowance for an early date but was moving completely away from such a possibility. Interestingly, Sundberg equated the meaning of the two expressions, the Fragmentist’s “in our times,” and Irenæus’s “in our generation.” For him, they both mean “in the post-apostolic period.” Hahneman agreed with Sundberg and further argued that should one interpret Irenæus as meaning “our lifetime,” doing so would put undue tension on the term “almost”; it is less problematic to have “almost” mean “almost in the post-apostolic period” than to have it mean “almost in our lifetime,” considering that the latter would need to encompass a distance in time of about sixty to one hundred years.

355 Irenæus, Against Heresies 5.30.3.


357 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 35.
considering Irenæus’s statement that the Apocalypse was written “not a long time ago,” and it accords better with the Fragmentist’s contrast between *Shepherd* and the writings of the apostles.  

Ferguson argued against the conclusion of Sundberg and Hahneman by noting that while the Fragmentist and Irenæus have similar expressions, their intentions were different, and in fact contrary. He believed that whereas the Fragmentist sought to increase the distance between *Shepherd* and “our times,” Irenæus sought to decrease the distance between the Apocalypse and “our generation.” Ferguson contended that “if the words ‘our times’ and ‘our generation’ are indeed parallel, then the Irenæus passage argues against Sundberg by unequivocally putting Hermas in the lifetime of the author of the *Canon*.” Thus, while the terms may indeed be parallel, the authors’ intended uses for those terms were not. In this way, Ferguson negates the validity of Irenæus’s statement as an exactly parallel passage with which to compare the Fragment, and takes the steam out of Sundberg’s and Hahneman’s dependence upon a periodic reading.

Through their employment of a plain reading, Early Hypothesis proponents interpret “in our times” as meaning in the lifetime of the author of the Fragment, because they assume that this hermeneutic approach is to be preferred. What evidence do they bring in support of their presumption? In support of the plain reading, Ferguson offers three other examples of instances where “in our times” means “in our lifetime.” The author of *1 Clement* (ca. 96 CE) speaks of the apostles having been put to death “in our own generation.” Eusebius speaks of a generation


359 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 678.

360 *1 Clement* 5.
who had heard the apostles and then passed away; to hear them, they had to have been contemporaries.\textsuperscript{361} In addition, Eusebius quotes an anti-Montanist as having personally witnessed some martyrdoms “in our time.”\textsuperscript{362}

On the other hand, in support of a presumptively periodic reading, scholars cite evidence for a distinction between the apostolic and post-apostolic eras.\textsuperscript{363} Hegesippus described his time as one of heresy which followed the period during which the church had as yet been uncorrupted as he saw it, before the “sacred college of apostles had suffered death.”\textsuperscript{364} As for Eusebius he makes explicit reference to an apostolic age.\textsuperscript{365} However, while it is true that these latter examples which scholars proffer as support of the periodic reading are evidence of a distinction between the apostolic and post-apostolic ages, they are not evidence that a periodic reading should be preferred over a plain reading in the case of the Fragment.

Moreover, though of considerable interest to the problem of understanding the Fragmentist’s reference to the date of \textit{Shepherd}, little has been said by scholars with regard to the mention of Pius in support of either of the two readings. Why did the Fragmentist mention his bishopric at all? Given the Fragmentist’s intention to distinguish between \textit{Shepherd} and the apostles’ writing, he could have simply stated that \textit{Shepherd} was written in “our” times and therefore not to be considered among the apostolic works; in this case, there is no reason to insert a word about Pius and his seat in Rome. Instead, it appears that while the Fragmentist may have indeed been speaking of a post-apostolic period, with his reference to “our time,” he may, in

\textsuperscript{361} Euseb., \textit{Ecclesiastical History} 3.32.8.

\textsuperscript{362} Ibid., 5.16.22.

\textsuperscript{363} Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 9.

\textsuperscript{364} Euseb., \textit{Ecclesiastical History} 4.22.4, 3.32.8.

\textsuperscript{365} Ibid., 3.31.6.
addition to this, have chosen to set a delimiter on the timeframe of *Shepherd* within that period. In other words, it may be true that, by the Fragmentist’s account, *Shepherd* was written in the post-apostolic era, but apparently he believed it to have been written during a specific portion of that era, namely the time of Pius’s bishopric. The existence of such a statement regarding a precise timeframe fits less problematically in a plain reading than in a periodic reading. If the Fragmentist intended a periodic reading, the statement is unnecessary, but if he intended a plain reading, the mention of Pius adds extra weight to the Fragmentist’s overall intended contention that *Shepherd* should not be considered with the apostles because both he and his audience can, in fact, recall personally when it was authored.\(^{366}\)

In short, Early Hypothesis proponents believe the Fragment is a second- or third century composition because the Fragmentist implied that he is a contemporary of Pius. In interpreting the evidence for this belief, they employ a plain reading to interpret the Fragmentist’s statement that *Shepherd* was written “in our times” during Pius’s bishopric. This plain reading leads to an interpretation of “in our times” as meaning “in our lifetime.” Support for the assumption that the plain reading should be preferred is found in patristic literature where it is clear that the writer was referring to his own lifetime when using the same expression the Fragmentist used to date *Shepherd*. In addition, given the Fragmentist’s intention to distinguish *Shepherd* from the apostolic writings, his reference to Pius’s bishopric only offers value to an understanding of the text if a plain reading is employed (as opposed to a periodic reading). Thus, adherents to the Early Hypothesis believe it explains the evidence (i.e. “in our times . . . while . . . bishop Pius sat

\(^{366}\) Sundberg hinted at the possibility that the Fragmentist simply misunderstood the situation in Rome because he did not live closely enough to Pius’s time to understand the situation in Rome insofar as he seems to suggest that Rome’s was a mono-episcopacy at the time. Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 10n30, 12n33. Hahneman believed that the reason the Fragmentist mentioned Pius was due to a desire to refute the supposed apostolicity of *Shepherd*. However, this mention of Pius would then be unnecessary if, as Hahneman contends, the readers clearly understood “in our times” to mean the post-apostolic era. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment*, 52.
in the chair of the Church of Rome") because it assumes a plain reading, a reading which is preferred over a periodic reading due to its having been substantiated by similar use in other early Christian works.

Reason #2: Literary “Parallels” in Second- and Third-Century Literature

In addition to their direct inference from the Fragmentist’s statement regarding the contemporaneity of Pius’s bishopric, Early Hypothesis proponents also reason that the Fragment is early because they believe it features literary parallels with known second- and third-century writings. Early Hypothesis proponents cite four items of evidence in support of their premise that the Fragment possesses literary features parallel to literary features found in known second- and third-century literature. First, the Fragmentist and Irenæus referred to Luke’s Gospel using the same expression; they both called it *euangelii librum secundum Lucam* (i.e. “book of the Gospel according to Luke”) (line 2). Second, the Fragmentist and third-century writers place significance on the number “seven” (lines 47-50, 55-9). Armstrong sees Victorinus of Pettau do this, and Donaldson notes something similar in Cyprian. Third, the Fragmentist, Tertullian, and Victorinus of Pettau all used an uncommon construction of the word *catholica* (line 69).

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367 Stanton, “The Fourfold Gospel,” 323; Irenæus, Against Heresies 3.11.7. Quasten, Patrology, vol. 1, 291. This Latin translation of the Greek original comes from the West around the late third to early fourth centuries, when Latin flourished, and thus is, in all likelihood, a reliable one.

368 Donaldson, A Critical History, 212; Cyprian, To Quirinius: Testimonies against the Jews 1.20; Armstrong, “Victorinus of Pettau,” 16-17; Victorinus of Pettau, Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John 1.7.

Fourth, the Fragmentist, Irenæus, and Cyprian characterize the bishop’s chair similarly (lines 75-6).\textsuperscript{370}

At this point it is important to highlight two critical assumptions that Early Hypothesis proponents make when considering literary parallels which appear to exist in the Fragment and in second- and third-century literature. First, they assume that language changes over time.\textsuperscript{371} According to Professor of Historical Linguistics Theodora Bynon, this is not an unreasonable assumption. She maintains the following:

that language does in fact change during the course of time soon becomes evident when documents written in the same language but at different periods in time are subjected to examination . . . it may fairly be assumed that such texts are a representative sample of the spoken language as it was when they were committed to writing . . . This means that it is possible to abstract the grammatical structure of the language of each period from the documents and in this way a series of synchronic grammars may be set up and compared. The differences in their successive structures may then be interpreted as reflecting the historical development of the language.\textsuperscript{372}

Professor Emeritus of Linguistics Lyle Campbell agrees. He acknowledges that “change in language is inevitable . . . All languages change all the time (except dead ones). Language change is just a fact of life; it cannot be prevented or avoided.”\textsuperscript{373}

However, Bynon also issues a cautionary note lest interpreters of historical literature place too much stock in perceived changes, and this leads to the second assumption that Early Hypothesis proponents make in their consideration of parallels. They assume that expressions

\textsuperscript{370} Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 678; Irenæus, \textit{Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching} 2; Donaldson, \textit{A Critical History}, 209, 212; Cyprian, \textit{To the People, Concerning Five Schismatic Presb\textsuperscript{yters of the Faction of Felicissimus} 5; idem, \textit{To Antonianus About Cornelius and Novatian} 9.

\textsuperscript{371} Late Hypothesis proponents also make this assumption when they cite literary parallels between the Fragment and fourth-century writings as a reason for their conclusion regarding the Fragment’s date.


used in the second and third centuries, were not used in the fourth but by that time had gone “out of vogue.” In other words, in order to make the assertion that, for example, the Fragment is likely a third-century composition, and not a later one, because a third-century church father (e.g. Cyprian) uses the same verbal expression, one must believe that the use of that expression went out of vogue by 300. Bynon believes that in order to systematically study the change in language over time, a time lapse of four to five centuries is “optimal.” Long periods may mean that one is not necessarily dealing with the “same language”; shorter ones mean that an insufficient amount of change has taken place upon which to base a rule. What does this mean for the consideration of literary parallels in dating the Fragment? How valuable is this evidence in the debate?

The citation of literary parallels as evidence in support of a hypothesized date for the Fragment is valuable, but this value is limited, insofar as the difference in time (i.e. from the mid-second century through the fourth), a period of about 250 years, falls below Bynon’s threshold. While one is still treating the “same language,” not enough time has passed to form a rule regarding the use of certain expression. In the case of the Early Hypothesis, these expressions include the way the Fragmentist and second- to third-century writer use the terms, the “book of the Gospel of Luke,” the use of the number “seven,” the term *catholica*, and the bishop’s chair. In other words, it is not unthinkable that if these expressions were used in the second or third, they would also find parlance in the fourth. Thus, while Early Hypothesis proponents may be safe to in basing their conclusion on the notion that language change is a reasonable expectation, it is not so apparent that second-century literary expressions would have

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375 Ibid.
passed entirely out of vogue by the fourth century. Thus, the identification of apparent literary “parallels” may not be strong reason to believe the Fragment was composed in the second or third-centuries.

In short, Early Hypothesis proponents believe the Fragment is a second- or third century composition because the Fragment and known second and third-century literature feature several literary parallels. Early Hypothesis proponents make two assumptions. They believe that language changes over time and that expressions used in the second and third centuries likely became passé by the fourth. While the first of these assumptions seems self-evident, the second assumption appears questionable due to the chance that the cited expressions could still be used in the fourth century. This means that, while the two aforementioned reasons proffered in support of the Early Hypothesis can be considered reliable when taken together, Reason #2, on its own, may not be as strong as Reason #1.

Reason #3: Indications of an Early Historical/Theological Context

Along with perceived literary parallels, Early Hypothesis proponents also reason that the Fragment is early because it seems to possess elements which betray a second- to third-century historical/theological context. These elements fall into two general categories. First, the reception which the Fragmentist affords the various texts he mentions seems similar to the way that these texts were received by known second- and third-century writers. Second, within the Fragment are theological notions consistent with those manifest during those two centuries.

The Treatment of Texts

First, the manner in which the Fragmentist treats the various texts in question seems more befitting an earlier historical context. According to Early Hypothesis proponents, the manner in
which the Fragmentist characterized two of the received texts more likely points to an early date as opposed to a later one. First, in his treatment of Luke’s Gospel, the Fragmentist refrained from linking the apostolic authority of Paul with the Lucan corpus. Ferguson contends that by the time of Irenæus that Luke’s writings bore the authority of Paul had become an explicit acknowledgement. Anything short of this, would more than likely betray an earlier time. Therefore, inasmuch as the Fragmentist leaves out the authority of Paul and merely mentions his companionship with Luke, he seems to be writing from a time pre-dating Irenæus.

Also, the Fragmentist’s treatment of the Fourth Gospel appears to be apologetic in nature. Because by the fourth century, the Fourth Gospel had been widely received, Early Hypothesis proponents argue that such a defensive position by the Fragmentist would have been unnecessary. Such a posture would have been more at home during the second century, when the Alogi had challenged the reception of both the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse. Therefore, since the Fragmentist makes a case for the acceptance of the Fourth Gospel, and the Alogi did not accept it, he probably knew about their concerns and may have been addressing them here. Because some in the second century polemicized in favor of the Johannine corpus, it is reasonable to believe that this was a “live” issue in the second century, so the argument goes.

Furthermore, while texts like Luke and John enjoyed widespread favor, others were not so readily accepted, and the reluctance expressed by the Fragmentist when addressing these reflects a second- to third-century context, according to the Early Hypothesis. First, the Apocalypse of Peter seems to have been universally received, but not acceptable for reading in

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376 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.
378 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.
the church (lines 71-3). Armstrong highlighted a similarly positive attitude in Victorinus of Pettau, and he noted that, the Fragment is the only New Testament list which accepts it. By the fourth century, Eusebius did not share the Fragmentist’s sentiment regarding the Apocalypse of Peter. He listed it among those which some thought were pseudepigraphic. Ferguson conceded that while the Fragmentist did not express wholesale acceptance, his does not seem as negative as the position held by Eusebius in the fourth century.

Additionally, as with the Apocalypse of Peter, the Fragmentist accepted Shepherd of Hermas but did not permit it to be read in the church (lines 73-80). Salmon noted that while Shepherd was accepted as Scripture early, by the later years of Tertullian it had become shrouded in doubt. Zahn held that the question of its public reading reached its zenith around 200 and then diminished so that by the time of Eusebius the issue had resolved itself in the classification of Shepherd as pseudepigrapha.

However, whereas Salmon saw the change in attitude toward Shepherd of Hermas as having manifested between Tertullian’s writing of Prayer and Modesty (ca. from 200 to 217), Sundberg argued that this change did not take place until Eusebius. Ferguson counters this with the possibility that Eusebius expressed a pre-existing sentiment. Nevertheless, at least on the surface, the Fragmentist’s attitude toward Shepherd does not go quite so far to the negative as

380 Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 3.25.4.
381 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 680.
383 Zahn, “Muratorian Fragment,” 54; Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 3.25.4.
Eusebius’s. It seems more likely that the former’s reception of *Shepherd* matches that of writers in the second century than that of those in the fourth.

In addition to listing texts which were received and some which were disputed, the Fragmentist made explicit mention of some which were not to be accepted for any reason. The names associated with these writings are Arsinous, Valentinus, Miltiades, Marcion, Basilides, and the Cataphrygians (lines 81-4). It is widely acknowledge by scholars that these names are associated with belief systems which flourished during the second century. For this reason, Ferguson argued for a second-century date and bolstered his claim with the observation that fourth-century writers had explicitly spoken against belief systems current in their own day which they deemed to be threats to Christianity. Had the Fragmentist been writing in the fourth century, it would be more reasonable that he would have mentioned these latter beliefs rather than that he merely reach back two hundred years. Armstrong saw the possibility for Victorinian authorship here due to Victorinus of Pettau having spoken against Montanism, Marcionism, and Valentinus.

While the Fragmentist explicitly treated the aforementioned texts, either approvingly or otherwise, he omitted several canonical New Testament texts altogether. These include Hebrews, James, and the Petrine Epistle. Early Hypothesis proponents reason that as time went on, it seems less likely that books which came to be recognized, or outright rejected would be ignored. The absence of their mention may be an indication that the Fragmentist had not known about these books or possibly that neither he nor anyone within his circle had yet been exposed to them in

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386 Ferguson, review of *The Muratorian Fragment*, 696.


388 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681; Ferguson, review of *The Muratorian Fragment*, 695.
order to render a judgment. Late Hypothesis proponents react to these omissions by conceding that they are unusual, and they do not offer any explanation for them other than that the Fragmentist may have not communicated clearly in this case.\textsuperscript{389}

**Fragmentist Theology**

Furthermore, the theology of the Fragmentist seems to be more at home in the second or third centuries rather than in the fourth, according to the Early Hypothesis. The hypothesis sees evidence for its case in three areas of evidence. First, it appears the Fragmentist placed an apparent *regula fidei* after his treatment of the Fourth Gospel (lines 18-26). A similar formula is seen in early writers such as Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Aristides, Irenæus, Tertullian, and Victorinus of Pettau.\textsuperscript{390} Second, the Fragmentist emphasizes the importance of both the “catholic church” and the “ecclesiastical discipline” (lines 59-69), two features which have parallel emphases in the second and third centuries.\textsuperscript{391} Third, as in the case of Justin Martyr, the Fragmentist considers the “prophets and the apostles” to be a standard of authority when evaluating texts for public use in the church (lines 77-80), and Ferguson views this as evidence for an early context.\textsuperscript{392} Rothschild also sees a similar function for the prophets and the apostles in Ignatius, Polycarp, and the *Didache*.\textsuperscript{393}

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\textsuperscript{389} Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment*, 181.


\textsuperscript{392} Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681; Ferguson, review of *The Muratorian Fragment*, 696.

\textsuperscript{393} Rothschild, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 77n112.
Though scholars who disagree with the Early Hypothesis have not mounted arguments against these three reasons, at least one cautionary note is in order about one of the items of evidence cited. In his calling attention to the Fragmentist’s not making mention of Luke’s Pauline authority to write, Ferguson’s reasoning may have succumbed to the informal logical fallacy of arguing from silence, at a minimum. Perhaps even more devastating to his logic is that the consideration of this as evidence may constitute a formal fallacy known as “Denying the Antecedent,” a situation which would render the Early Hypothesis an unreliable argument, granted though only with regard to this particular line of evidence. Ferguson reasons that if the Fragmentist had mentioned Luke’s Pauline authority, this would represent a later development due to what he sees as an expansion of their connection. Thus, anything shy of linking the Lucan corpus with Paul’s authority would more likely be an early postulation. In other words, if mention is made of Paul’s authoritative relationship to the Lucan corpus, such mention is later, but since in the Fragment, this is lacking, the Fragment is early. To deny the antecedent is to make an inference “which involves denying that the antecedent holds [in this case denying the idea that Pauline authority in the Lucan corpus was a present understanding during the Fragment’s writing] and then concluding that the negation of the consequent [in this case a negation that the Fragment is a later work] must also hold.”

In short, Early Hypothesis proponents believe the Fragment is a second- or third century composition because the Fragment has features which indicate that it may have a second- to third-century historical/theological context. It treats the texts in question in much the same way that early writers did, and it highlights several theological themes which seem to have enjoyed

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394 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.

395 Paul Tomassi, Logic (London: Routledge, 1999), 379.
the spotlight during the second and third centuries. That said, in one area Early Hypothesis reasoning may exhibit weakness inasmuch as a relatively small portion of it may be the result of fallacious logic based in part on the Fragmentist’s silence or ignorance.

In closing, the Early Hypothesis is an attempt by some scholars to explain the evidence present in the Fragment by dating its composition in the late second to early third centuries. They conclude that it is early for three reasons: the Fragmentist claims to be a contemporary of Pius, perceived literary parallels, and indications of an early context. Of these three, the first reason offers the greatest promise in supporting the Early Hypothesis’s claim to explain the evidence. The other two reasons, while somewhat sound, suffer to a degree from assumptions that lack full substantiation and from faulty logic. Nevertheless, notwithstanding these shortfalls the argument of the Early Hypothesis, while not necessarily strong, remains reliable.

The Late Hypothesis

In the late twentieth century, Sundberg and then Hahneman challenged the traditional consensus that the Fragment was a pre-fourth-century composition. The notion that the Fragment was composed in the fourth century finds credence among scholars such as Zimmerman, Hahneman, McDonald, and Rothschild. Sundberg and Hahneman argued that the Late Hypothesis best explains the evidence through three lines of reasoning. First, the Fragment’s appearance to be a canon can only mean it is a fourth-century composition. Second, the Fragmentist betrays a dependence on Eusebius’s Ecclesiastical History (ca. 303). Third, the Fragment possesses elements which seem to point to its having been composed in a fourth-century historical/theological context. This section offers a discussion of some of the issues involving a subscription to the Late Hypothesis with its supporting reasons and the evidence upon which those reasons are based.
Reason #1: The Fragment’s Designation as a Canon

Late Hypothesis proponents believe that because the Fragment is practically a “canon,” it cannot pre-date the fourth century. This reason for the Late Hypothesis is rooted in three premises. First, the Fragmentist knew of a closed Old Testament canon. Second, the Old Testament canon was not fixed until Athanasius. Third, it is unlikely that the church would have defined a New Testament canon, such as the Fragment, one and a half centuries prior to its doing so for the Old Testament. Hahneman believes

> The Muratorian Fragment as traditionally dated at the end of the second century contrasts greatly with the establishing of the Old Testament in the fourth century. The Fragment clearly represents a New Testament canon. To accept its traditional date would suggest that the Church was engaged in defining a New Testament canon more than 150 years before it began fixing an Old Testament canon. While this is not impossible, it is unlikely, and it must have been such a consideration that encouraged Sundberg to reconsider the date of the Fragment.

The first of these premises, that the Fragmentist had a closed Old Testament canon appears to be likely in some sense. In speaking of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the Fragmentist declared that it cannot be read among the prophets because their number is “complete” (lines 73-9). Sundberg noted that the term “prophets” was used by the church as a designation for the writings of the Old Testament, and thus it appears that the Fragmentist wrote during a time when no texts could be added to that particular list. Furthermore, this also seems evident if Horbury’s theory about the Fragment is correct. Recall that in Chapter 3, this study notes how Horbury left open the possibility that the missing piece from the beginning of the Fragment may

396 Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 15.
have contained a list of Old Testament texts, particularly given the remarkably strange location of the *Wisdom of Solomon* in the list. Sundberg assumed that the Fragment represented only texts which its author considered as part of his New Testament and that he did not consider the Old Testament at all. Thus for Sundberg the inclusion of *Wisdom of Solomon* in such a “New Testament canon” as the Fragment meant that the Old Testament had to have been closed by then.

The second of the premises, that this Old Testament canon (i.e. the Prophets) was not fixed until the time of Athanasius, is not without its difficulties. For example, against Sundberg’s belief that this condition could have only obtained in the fourth century is the possibility that a similar type of limitation to the Old Testament existed during the time of Justin. Justin remarked that during Christian meetings, “the writings of the prophets are read”; it seems more reasonable to believe that this list was discreet than that it would be open to anyone’s idea of what was acceptable. Also, Melito of Sardis reported that he had “learned accurately the books of the Old Testament,” implying that it was possible to “know” them inaccurately.

The third premise states that the church did not define a New Testament canon until the fourth century because it seems unlikely that the church would have done such a thing prior to the closing of the Old Testament. This does not follow. For example, that the church had limited its acceptance to only four Gospels is apparent as early as Irenæus. Thus it does not appear to

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404 “It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are.” Irenæus, *Against Heresies* 3.11.8.
be necessarily the case that Christians were reluctant to make such restricting decisions when it came to the question of sacred texts.

Moreover, there is reason to believe that the Fragmentist did not intend his catalogue to be considered in the way that a canonical list would have been used. Hahneman offered some insight into his view of “canon,” and what he inferred was Sundberg’s view as well. According to Hahneman,

“Canon” is then a closed collection of “scripture”, to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be subtracted. Whereas the concept of canon pre-supposes the existence of scriptures, the concept of scripture does not necessarily entail the notion of canon. It is entirely possible to possess scriptures without having a canon, and this was in fact the situation in the first few centuries of the Church.  

Stanton’s determination that the Fragment is more of an introduction about the degree of authority held by the various supposed sacred texts of Christianity takes some of the power out of Hahneman’s contention that the Fragment as canon could not be second-century. Stanton also noted the fact that the other copies of the Fragment’s text found in the Benedictine manuscripts are prologues, not lists consistent with the commonly accepted nature of a canon. In fact, none of the wording in the Fragment is as limiting as Hahneman’s notion of canon, insofar as a canon is that “to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be subtracted.” At the most the Fragmentist ensured that his readers knew about the rejected heretical writings, but he did not explicitly declare that the canon was closed, as Irenæus did with the Gospels. Even given Hahneman’s definition of canon coupled with his belief that the canon was solidified in the fourth century, his conclusions contradict the evidence. Several of the fourth-century canons

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405 Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment*, 73.


include texts that others do not and omit texts that others include.\textsuperscript{408} Thus it would appear that a true canon as Hahneman understood the term had not obtained even by the end of the fourth century as he claimed.

In short, Late Hypothesis Reason #1 is not without problems. In particular, two problems present themselves. First, while the overall argument, consisting of the three premises, constitutes sound deduction, it is invalid. Its last two premises are doubtful. The second problem with Reason #1 lies in the degree to which the third premise is dependent upon Hahneman’s unsubstantiated assumption that the church would not have restricted its list of sacred Christian texts until after it had done so for its sacred Jewish texts. Also, that the Fragment constitutes a canon in the way Hahneman defines the term is not a foregone conclusion.

Reason #2: The Fragmentist’s Apparent Dependence on Eusebius

Proponents of the Late Hypothesis also conclude that the Fragment is a fourth-century composition because they maintain that the Fragment shows a dependence on Eusebius’s \textit{Ecclesiastical History} in its reference to Miltiades. At the end of the Fragment, in his Catalogue of Heresies, the Fragmentist states that he and his people do not accept the writings of one “Miltiades” (line 81). Hahneman maintained that this inclusion of Miltiades in this list of heretics is “extraordinary” if it is to be believed accurate.\textsuperscript{409} It may be rather, Hahneman supposed, that the Fragmentist had read Eusebius’s mistaken reference to a certain Montanist in which Eusebius accidently rendered to him the appellation of “Miltiades.” Hahneman argues that more than

\textsuperscript{408} Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 132-56.

\textsuperscript{409} Ibid., 211.
likely this Montanist was actually one “Alcibiades,” that Eusebius had gotten his name wrong, and that the Fragmentist simply copied what Eusebius had written.

An Orthodox (and a Montanist?) Miltiades

Most references to Miltiades in the literature speak of an orthodox anti-Montanist. Tertullian, though eventually a Montanist himself, spoke in high regard for Miltiades in his polemic Against the Valentinians, calling him the “sophist of the churches” and counting him among the likes of Justin and Irenæus.\(^{410}\) Tertullian’s mention of him here means that Miltiades was probably an anti-Gnostic who flourished during the reign of Marcus Aurelius and was apparently known in North Africa.\(^{411}\) Known in the East as well, Eusebius states that Miltiades authored three books, one against Montanism, one against the Greeks, and a third against the Jews.\(^{412}\) Eusebius considered him to be of like mind as Justin, Tatian, and Clement of Alexandria.\(^{413}\) Jerome named his books, Against the Nations and the Jews and an Apology to the emperors of his lifetime, probably Marcus Antoninus, Marcus Aurelius, or Commodus.\(^{414}\) That Jerome mentions him means he was known in Rome as well as in the East and in North Africa.

Hahneman believed that Eusebius inadvertently called this anti-Montanist “Alcibiades” at one point. In discussing Miltiades’s authorship of an anti-Montanist book, Eusebius made reference to the book by attributing it to Alcibiades, and Hahneman thought this attribution to be

\(^{410}\) Tert., Against the Valentinians 5.

\(^{411}\) NPNF 2:1:233n1.

\(^{412}\) Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 5.17.1, 5.

\(^{413}\) Ibid., 5.28.4.

\(^{414}\) Jer., On Illustrious Men 39. See also Jer., Epistle 70, to Magnus an Orator of Rome 4.
an error on both Eusebius’s part and that of his amanuensis.\textsuperscript{415} Down further in the text, Eusebius once again refers to this person as “Miltiades” as he rightly should, according to Hahneman.\textsuperscript{416} If Eusebius confused the two men, as Hahneman claims, there was only one Miltiades, and he was not a Montanist. For Hahneman, there simply is no evidence of a Montanist named Miltiades.\textsuperscript{417}

However, Professor of Church History, Arthur C. McGiffert suggested that Eusebius possibly also refers to another Miltiades who was indeed a Montanist. In one place (\textit{EH 5.3.4}), Eusebius refers to this Montanist as “Alcibiades,” but both Salmon and McGiffert believed this could represent an error.\textsuperscript{418} Because Eusebius had just written of an orthodox confessor named Alcibiades, these two scholars offer that Eusebius still had him in mind when turning to describe the Montanist Miltiades and that he (or his amanuensis) had inadvertently written “Alcibiades.”\textsuperscript{419} For this reason, McGiffert also believes that where the manuscripts and versions have “Miltiades” later where they refer to this Montanist (5.16.3), no change to “Alcibiades” is warranted, this against the beliefs of several other scholars.\textsuperscript{420} These scholars believe that there is no Montanist named Miltiades, and that Eusebius wrote “Miltiades” in error in 5.16.3; for them it should read “Alcibiades.”\textsuperscript{421} Nevertheless, while McGiffert does not insist on the existence of a Montanist Miltiades, he does suggest the possibility. He concludes that “until we get more light

\textsuperscript{415} Euseb., \textit{Ecclesiastical History} 5.17.1; thus all the manuscripts and versions. Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 209-10.

\textsuperscript{416} Euseb., \textit{Ecclesiastical History} 5.17.5; Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 210.

\textsuperscript{417} Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 210.

\textsuperscript{418} NPNF 2:1:218n3; 230n7.

\textsuperscript{419} Euseb., \textit{Ecclesiastical History} 5.3.2, cf. 5.3.4.

\textsuperscript{420} NPNF 2:1:230n7.

\textsuperscript{421} Ibid.
from some quarter we must be content to let the matter rest, leaving the reason for the use of Miltiades’s name in this connection unexplained. There is, of course, nothing strange in the existence of a Montanist named Miltiades.”

A Montanist (and an Orthodox?) Alcibiades

In addition to orthodox Miltiades (and possibly a Montanist Miltiades as seen above), Eusebius also mentioned a Montanist named Alcibiades. He listed this individual in the company of Theodotus as well as with Montanus himself. Hahneman believed that in 5.16.3, Eusebius accidently called this Alcibiades “Miltiades,” where he wrote of the “heresy of those who are called after Miltiades”; he actually meant Alcibiades here.

However, McGiffert preferred to hold to the manuscript evidence, and insisted that there existed an anti-Montanist Alcibiades. He believed that the “Miltiades” of EH 5.17.1a is an overlooked scribal error, and that had Eusebius been paying attention, he would have ensured 5.17.1a read as 5.17.1b reads, with “Alcibiades” instead. Nevertheless, McGiffert concedes that “of the Alcibiades who wrote the anti-Montanistic treatise referred to, we know nothing.”

In summary, Hahneman argued that Eusebius mistakenly recorded “Miltiades” as a Montanist. The Fragmentist read this not knowing that it was an error and as a result listed

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422 NPNF 2:1:230n7.

423 Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 5.3.4.

424 Ibid.


426 NPNF 2:1:233-4n1.

427 Ibid.

428 Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 5.16.3; Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 210-11.
Miltiades among the heretics rather than among the orthodox. This means that Eusebius must pre-date the Fragmentist, and therefore the Fragment must be a fourth-century composition.

On the other hand, against Hahneman, it is possible that the Fragmentist is not referring to a “Miltiades” at all. The text of the Fragment actually reads “mitiad(ei)is” not “Miltiades”; Hahneman assumed that it referred to Miltiades, and he admitted as much. Like Hahneman, Tregelles, who personally examined the Fragment, saw no reason to doubt that Miltiades was the intended referent. In addition, the manuscripts with the Fragment’s text discovered at the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino have Mitiadis, Mi(ti)adis, and Mitididis. No existing Latin transcript of the Fragment’s contents reads “Miltiades,” and McGiffert suggested that it is “doubtful whether a Miltiades is mentioned at all in that document [i.e. the Fragment].”

Three possible explanations present themselves. First, the Fragmentist read and copied Eusebius’s error, “Miltiades,” believing that this was the name of a Montanist. This is possible, but there is no evidence which makes it more likely than the following two scenarios. Second, there was a heretic with the same name as the orthodox polemicist Miltiades, and this was the individual to whom the Fragmentist referred. Like option one, this too is possible, but the textual evidence suggests otherwise, and points more to the third option. The third option is that the Fragmentist was referring to one “Mitiades,” a heretic, possibly a Montanist, possibly a Gnostic. Not only is the third option possible, it appears to be more likely given the fact that the

430 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 209.
431 Tregelles, Canon Muratorianus, 65.
432 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 29, 209; Rothschild, The Muratorian Fragment, 75.
Benedictine documents also have Mitiadis, Mi(ti)adis, and Mitididis, all of which also lack the letter “L.” In addition, as Hahneman concedes, “the Latin of the excerpts in the later Benedictine manuscripts is significantly better than that in Muratori’s Fragment and this suggests a source for the Benedictine manuscripts not directly dependent upon the Muratorian Fragment.” In other words, there is no reason to believe the Fragmentist had Miltiades in mind, whether this supposed individual was the renowned orthodox polemicist (based on Eusebius’s error) or an unknown heretic. The Late Hypothesis reasons that the Fragment is a fourth-century composition because of a perceived dependence upon Eusebius. However, this perception is rooted in at least two unsubstantiated assumptions. First, it is rooted in the presupposition that Eusebius allowed a scribal error in EH 5.16.3 when he wrote “Miltiades,” instead of “Alcibiades,” a supposition for which there is no conclusive evidence. Second, it is dependent upon the notion that “Miltiades” is misspelled in the Ambrosian Fragment and the Benedictine manuscripts as well as in the likely source upon which these copies are alleged to be dependent.

Reason #3: Indications of a Late Historical/Theological Context

In the same way proponents of the Early Hypothesis perceive elements in the Fragment which betray an early historical/theological context, so those of the Late Hypothesis see indications of a later context. These indications of a late context fall into two general categories. First, the way the Fragmentist treats certain texts seems consistent with how others in the fourth century treated those same texts. Second, the Fragment appears to possess certain idiosyncrasies, or “peculiarities” which have parallels in other literature known to have obtained during the fourth century.

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434 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 10.

435 Ibid., 183-214.
Of special significance to this portion of the study, which deals with the reasoning behind the Late Hypothesis, is a comment made by Sundberg in “Canon Muratori.” In response to Tregelles’s comparison of the Fragment with authorities of the second century, Sundberg established the standard by which to judge the evidences pointing to the Fragment as a fourth-century composition. These evidences consist of “features in the canon which cannot be paralleled within the second-century church fathers and which find parallels only in substantially later materials [emphases added].” Ferguson held Hahneman to Sundberg’s standard when evaluating The Muratorian Fragment. Ferguson, like Sundberg, believed that in order to conclusively show the Fragment to be a fourth-century work “there must be in the contents of the Fragment something only possible in the fourth century or something impossible in the second century.”

The Treatment of Texts

The Late Hypothesis argues that the Fragmentist treated the texts in question in the same manner that only fourth-century writers treated them. For example, the discussion regarding the Wisdom of Solomon may be of the greatest import regarding the question of how well the Late Hypothesis explains the evidence. While one could argue about how the Fragmentist received the Apocalypse, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the Shepherd of Hermas, the problem of Wisdom is the foundation for Sundberg’s overall contention regarding the Fragment’s date and its status as a canon. However, as well as being an integral part of the Late Hypothesis, the Fragmentist’s mention of Wisdom may also be its “Achilles’s Heel.”

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436 Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 12.

437 Ferguson, review of The Muratorian Fragment, 691.
Both Sundberg and Hahneman make much of the Fragmentist’s inclusion of the *Wisdom of Solomon* in what they presuppose is a New Testament list.\textsuperscript{438} Hahneman reiterates Sundberg’s argument that the Fragment’s inclusion of *Wisdom* in its New Testament means its exclusion from the Old.\textsuperscript{439} This has parallels in Athanasius and Epiphanius who also exclude *Wisdom* from the Old Testament. It is for this reason, along with others, that Sundberg believes the Fragment reflects a fourth-century situation, one in which the Old Testament would have finally been closed. The Fragmentist had to include *Wisdom* here, in this supposed New Testament list, because he could not consider it among the Old Testament texts.

However, this view of Sundberg’s is not without its difficulties. First, unlike the Fragmentist, Athanasius does not place *Wisdom* in his New Testament list.\textsuperscript{440} Therefore, it cannot be said that in this regard, the Fragment is parallel with all fourth century New Testament lists. Even more problematic for Sundberg’s case is the fact that Irenæus, like the Fragmentist, includes *Wisdom* in his New Testament, thus with regard to its reception of a text, the Fragment has a parallel in the second century.\textsuperscript{441} This fact invalidates the reason to believe that the Fragment could only have existed within a fourth-century milieu.

Furthermore, the Fragment’s location of *Wisdom* in its list has parallels which led Horbury to believe that the Fragmentist may not have considered it as part of his New Testament but rather as a part of his Old Testament.\textsuperscript{442} Contra Sundberg and Hahneman, Horbury suggested

\textsuperscript{438} Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 16-8; Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment*, 201.
\textsuperscript{439} Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 16.
\textsuperscript{440} Athanasius, *Festal Letter* 39.
\textsuperscript{441} Euseb., *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.1-8; Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 17.
\textsuperscript{442} Horbury, “The Wisdom of Solomon in the Muratorian Fragment,” 152-6.
that the Fragmentist had intended to list *Wisdom* as Old Testament antilegomena. This suggestion is based on what appears to be the common “practice of listing the disputed books of both Testaments together.” Horbury believed the first, and missing, part of the Fragmentist’s list included the accepted Old Testament books (and ostensibly the Gospels of Matthew and Mark). Within the extant portion of the document, the author continued with the accepted books of the New Testament, beginning with Luke and continuing through John’s epistles. Next, having finished with the accepted texts, the Fragmentist began his list of antilegomena, starting with the Old Testament, of which there is only one book in that category, i.e. *Wisdom*, and continuing with the New Testament antilegomena the Apocalypse through the *Shepherd of Hermas*. After this, he concludes with the rejected texts, the Catalogue of Heresies. In other words, Horbury believes the Fragment was meant to be organized as follows:

1. Received Texts (Old and New Testaments)
2. Disputed Texts (Old [*Wisdom*] and New [Apocalypse, *Apocalypse of Peter, Shepherd of Hermas*] Testaments)
3. Rejected Texts (Old and New Testaments)

Horbury cites several examples of writers who list the antilegomena of both the Old and New Testaments together. When listing the texts of Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius began the disputed portion with *Wisdom*. Athanasius, Epiphanius, Rufinus, and Jerome did the same. Therefore, it appears more likely that *Wisdom* was never considered a New Testament

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444 Ibid., 153-4.
446 Athanasius, *Festal Letter 39.7*; Epiph., *Refutation of All Heresies* 76.5; Rufinus, *Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed* 37-8; Jer., *Preface to the Books of Samuel and Kings*. 

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book and that it has always been counted among the Old; there is no direct evidence that it should be counted in the New, merely the speculation of Late Hypothesis proponents.

With regard to the Fragmentist’s treatment of other texts, Hahneman remarked that the mentions of Jude and the *Apocalypse of Peter* are an indication of a fourth-century context, but according to Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria considered these to be canonical Scripture as well; so, their acceptance was not merely a fourth-century phenomenon. To be precise, Eusebius, in the fourth century, was not as accepting of Jude or of the *Apocalypse of Peter* as the Fragmentist or Clement were.

In short, the Late Hypothesis reasons that the reception that the Fragment affords to the texts in question mirrors that of the fourth century and that in no case does it find parallels prior to that period. However, as has been demonstrated above, this is simply not borne out by the evidence. In several instances, earlier writers come close to expressing an attitude similar to that of the Fragmentist regarding these texts. Moreover, the place of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, which critical for Sundberg’s case, seems to parallel other works which place that text among the Old Testament antilegomena rather than among the books of the New Testament. Given Sundberg’s stated criterion that features within the Fragment must not have parallels in the centuries preceding the fourth, it remains unclear how the Late Hypothesis proponents can place dependence upon the way the Fragment treats certain texts to support their overall claim.

“Peculiarities”

The Fragment has features which Late Hypothesis proponents claim are peculiar to the fourth century. First, the Fragmentist, in his enumeration of the Gospels, listed Luke as the third

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(tertium), and John’s as the fourth (quarti) (lines 2, 9). Scholars assume that the missing beginning of the Fragment included Matthew and Mark, and likely in that order. Hahneman states that such an order would fit well in the fourth century, but would be unusual. As noted in Chapter 3, this order is not unique to the fourth century as Irenæus listed them similarly on one occasion. While statistically, the likelihood of such an order is more prevalent in fourth-century works, it does not require a fourth-century context, but it would find itself among more like it than it would in an earlier situation. Second, Hahneman considered certain statements made by the Fragmentist about the Fourth Gospel to be evidence of a fourth-century context, such as his reference to “bishops” having encouraged John to write as well as the statement that John participated in a fast prior to his receiving the inspiration for the book (lines 10-11). According to Hahneman, these are notions that show theological development, a development which does not pre-date 300. Third, the Fragmentist called the book of Acts, the “Acts of all the Apostles” (line 34), an elaboration which Hahneman views as more necessary in the fourth century than earlier due to the proliferation of apocryphal “Acts.” Again, the supposed need for this cannot considered peculiar to the fourth century as there were other apocryphal “Acts” in the second century from which disambiguation may have also required.

Finally, with regard to the Catalogue of Heresies found toward the end of the Fragment, Late Hypothesis proponents believe it shows a fourth century context for two reasons. First, the Fragmentist’s designation of the Montanists as “Cataphrygians” seems more at home in the fourth century than earlier when writers had called them “Phrygians” (line 84). Second, there

449 Irenæus, Against Heresies 3.1.1.
450 Hahneman, The Muratorian Fragment, 188-90.
451 Ibid., 193-4.
452 Ibid., 211-3.
is no mention of a Marcionite Psalter until the fourth-century (line 83). In both of these suppositions, Hahneman is committing the informal logical fallacy of arguing from silence. The apparent absence of such phenomena in extant writings prior to the fourth century does not necessarily (or even probably) lead to the conclusion that they did not occur before that time, and one need not conclude that because of their absence, the Fragment could only have obtained in the fourth century.

In closing, the Late Hypothesis is an attempt by some scholars to explain the evidence present in the Fragment by dating its composition in the fourth century. They conclude that it is early for three reasons: the Fragment as a canon can only be fourth century, it shows a dependence on Eusebius, and it possesses features which were only known in a fourth-century context. However, each of these reasons has remarkable problems. First, there is reason to doubt that the Fragment was intended to function as a New Testament canon in the sense in which Late Hypothesis proponents understand the term; it may not have been a canon per se, and it may not have been merely a *New Testament* list. Second, there is reason to doubt that the Fragmentist intended to include Eusebius’s “Miltiades” among his heretics; he may have been referring to an otherwise unknown person named “Mitiades.” Third, there is evidence of second- and third-century writers treating texts in a manner similar to that of the Fragmentist; such phenomena are thus not unique to the fourth century as Sundberg claimed. The reasons which Late Hypothesis proponents offer for their claim find their bases in a few unsubstantiated assumptions, contradictory evidence, and arguments from silence.

**Summary**

This chapter has described the Early and the Late Hypotheses. The proponents of the Early Hypothesis conclude that it is the best explanation of the evidence for three reasons. First,
they maintain that, based on a plain reading of the text, the Fragmentist implied that he was a contemporary of Pius. Second, according to the Early Hypothesis the Fragment possess literary parallels found in works known to be of the second and third centuries. Third, the Fragment contains historical and theological features which point to its having been composed during the second or third centuries. The reasons furnished by Early Hypothesis proponents are based on several assumptions. First, they assume that a plain reading of “in our times” is to be preferred over a period reading, an assumption that is not without historical precedence. In addition, they assume that language changes over time. Again, in light of the work of historical linguists, this assumption is reasonable. Third, they assume that language typical of the second and third centuries would have gone out of vogue by the fourth. However, historical linguists maintain that a longer time lapse would be necessary for this to be the case. The Early Hypothesis also suffers from faulty logic to a relatively small degree. In some cases it makes its argument from the silence of the Fragment on certain texts, and, to some extent, it also commits the formal logical fallacy known as “Denying the Antecedent.”

Late Hypothesis proponents hold to their position for three reasons as well. First, they believe that because the Fragment is canon, based on their understanding of the term, it could not have obtained prior to the fourth century. However, there is doubt about the validity of these reason due to the possibility that the Fragment may not constitute a canon as they have defined it and due to the questionable assertion that the church did not beginning restricting the books it held as authoritative until the fourth century. Second, Hahneman argues that the Fragmentist depended on Eusebius and that the former based his writing on a scribal error committed by the latter. However, there is credible reason to believe that this is simply not the case. Third, the Late Hypothesis believes that the features with in the Fragment which indicate its time period are only
found in the fourth century, an assertion which has been shown to be contrary to the evidence that several of these features are also found in earlier writings.

In these ways both hypotheses attempt to explain the evidence. Each hypothesis comes as the result of reasons based on the available evidence and are the products of this evidence combined with scholars’ interpretations of that evidence. The evidence (Chapter 3) implies the evidence, to a lesser or greater degree, as the case may be, and the hypotheses (Chapter 4) based on various reasons explains the evidence, to a lesser or greater degree. In the next chapter, the study weighs each of the hypotheses based on the five Harman-McCullagh criteria, plausibility, explanatory scope, explanatory power, credibility, and simplicity. It considers the evidence from Chapter 3 and the explanations each hypothesis claim to proffer in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 5
WEIGHING THE HYPOTHESES

The previous chapters have offered a general overview of the Fragment and some of its problems, a list of the evidence which scholars cite when attempting to determine the date of its composition, and a description of each of the two hypotheses which derive from scholars’ interpretation of that evidence. In this chapter, the study weighs each of the hypotheses using the five Harman-McCullagh criteria. It considers the plausibility, explanatory scope, explanatory power, credibility, and simplicity of each hypothesis.

The Early Hypothesis

By way of review, the reader will recall that scholars who conclude the Fragment is a second- or third-century composition reach that conclusion for three reasons. First, they understand the Fragmentist to have been a contemporary of Pius. Second, they perceive literary parallels in both the Fragment and Christian literature from the second and third centuries. Third, they observe features in the Fragment which have commonalities with literature known to have been composed during the second and third centuries.

Plausibility

In order to determine the plausibility of the Early Hypothesis, one must ask the question: does the evidence imply that the Fragment was written during the second or third centuries and no later? In other words, unless the evidence reasonably suggests the greater likelihood that the Fragment was written prior to 301, it does not imply the Early Hypothesis. Conversely, if the
evidence does reasonably suggest the greater likelihood that the Fragment was not written after 300, it does imply the Early Hypothesis.

First, Early Hypothesis proponents see significance in the way the Fragmentist refers to the Gospels of Luke and John as the “book of the Gospel according to Luke” (euangelii librum secundum Lucam) (line 2), and as the “fourth of the Gospels” (quarti euangeliorum Iohannis) (line 9) respectively. According to Stanton, these forms of identification do not appear in any fourth-century writing, but the second century furnishes evidence of their use by Irenæus. Nevertheless, the absence of this type of identification for the Gospels in the fourth century, an argument from silence, does not necessarily mean the Fragment could not have been written during that period. Thus, the manner in which the Fragmentist identifies the Gospels does not imply the claim of the Early Hypothesis.

Second, in his articulation of the Early Hypothesis, Ferguson expressed his belief that because the Fragmentist referred to Paul and Luke as associates (line 4) and did not highlight the Pauline authority in the Lucan corpus this serves as an indication that the Fragment was written early and that it may pre-date Irenæus. However, the Fragmentist’s unique way of referring to Paul and Luke may not have been an early development. There is no of knowing if this type of language was used by the greater community when mentioning the two men together or simply the Fragmentist’s unique manner. In addition, given second-century references to the Pauline authority in Luke, it seems unlikely that this phenomenon was linked to any one particular period over another. Thus, the Fragmentist’s omission of Pauline-Lucan authority does not imply the claim of the Early Hypothesis.


454 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.
Third, the way the Fragmentist singles out the Fourth Gospel (lines 9-16) for what appears to be special treatment may serve as an indication that some may have had problems accepting its authority. Early Hypothesis proponents view this as having a greater likelihood of being necessary in the second century than in the fourth because by the fourth century such questions had resolved themselves.\textsuperscript{455} The Fragmentist’s felt need to describe the occasion of its writing coupled with his inclusion of a sort of \textit{regula fidei} point more readily to a date prior to the fourth century. Thus, the Fragmentist’s apparent special treatment of the Fourth Gospel implies the claim of the Early Hypothesis to be more likely the case than the notion that the Fragment was written later.

Fourth, the Fragmentist apparently accepted the Apocalypse but may have included it among the antilegomena if Horbury’s theory is correct.\textsuperscript{456} In either case, whether the Fragmentist indeed intended to list the Apocalypse among the antilegomena cannot now be known; to insist that he did or did not is to conjecture. Also, the Fragmentist’s notice of and emphasis on the number “seven,” highlighted by Early Hypothesis proponents does not necessarily point to an early date. Cyprian’s similar emphasis in the third century may have been an influence on the Fragmentist and led to its inclusion in the latter’s work. The evidence regarding the Apocalypse does not imply that the Fragment must pre-date the fourth century, so it does not imply the Early Hypothesis.

Fifth, the Fragmentist does not mention Hebrews at all, and Ferguson viewed this as less problematic for an earlier date than for a later one.\textsuperscript{457} That Caius rejected Hebrews is unclear,

\textsuperscript{455} Zahn, “Muratorian Canon,” 54; Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681, 681n19; Stanton, “The Fourfold Gospel,” 324.


\textsuperscript{457} Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.
and even if he had, were he the Fragmentist, as Muratori believed, he likely would have still listed it among the rejected texts. While Ferguson’s logic regarding the slim chance of a fourth-century list omitting Hebrews is valid, it is none the less possible that such could be the case. Several of the lists from the fourth century either include Hebrews by implication among Paul’s epistles or omit it outright. While limited in number, the Fragment does have parallels among the fourth century lists with respect to Hebrews. Thus, the absence of Hebrews in the Fragment does not imply the Early Hypothesis.

Sixth, the Fragmentist also leaves out any mention of James. The case of James’s omission is similar to that of Hebrews. Because fourth-century lists omit it altogether, there remains a chance that the Fragment is of the fourth century. Therefore, the omission of James does not imply that the Fragment is early.

Seventh, no epistle of Peter is listed in the Fragment. While this omission flummoxes Late Hypothesis proponents, other scholars see this as suggestive of an early date. This appears to be the case especially given the fact that only one fourth-century catalogue (the Syrian) leaves the Petrine epistles out. Thus the likelihood that the Fragment is reflective of an early context seems greater. While admittedly an argument from silence, with no comment on these epistle either positive or negative, it seems more reasonable to conclude that this absence implies the Early Hypothesis over the Late due primarily to the fact that every later list includes Peter’s epistles except one.

Eighth, with regard to the Apocalypse of Peter, Armstrong saw a parallel in the Fragment and in the work of Victorinus of Pettau inasmuch as it appears Victorinus accepted it as

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Scripture.\textsuperscript{460} This suggests an early date. However, the Fragmentist notes that some had reservations about its being read in church (lines 71-3). This does not indicate a clear parallel with Victorinus. In addition, given similar reservations noted by fourth-century writers, it cannot be reasonably believed that the evidence points to an early date.\textsuperscript{461}

Ninth, the Fragmentist’s comments regarding the \textit{Shepherd of Hermas} suggest that he wrote prior to the fourth century. Assuming a plain reading of the text (and as seen above, there is evidence to suggest this is the most reasonable reading), the Fragmentist lived and possibly wrote during the lifetime of Pius. Arguably, this evidence is the most suggestive of an early date and implies the Early Hypothesis more strongly than any of the other evidence. In addition, the question over the public reading of \textit{Shepherd} had apparently been resolved by the fourth century, so the Fragmentist’s remarks addressing the problem would also imply an earlier date.\textsuperscript{462}

Tenth, though the heresies mentioned toward the end of the Fragment obtained during the second century, their censure herein does not necessarily point to an early date. While it may appear to be reasonable to conclude that the Fragment is early based on this evidence, the evidence regarding these heresies may be incomplete due to their location at the point where the Fragment ends as a result of some damage which prevents scholars from knowing how the text concludes. Ferguson noted that these were early heretical teachings, and he made the observation that were the Fragment of the fourth century, the author likely would have included a condemnation of contemporary heresies.\textsuperscript{463} However, one cannot not know this given the

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\textsuperscript{460} Armstrong, “Victorinus of Pettau,” 28.
\textsuperscript{462} Zahn, “Muratorian Fragment,” 54.
\textsuperscript{463} Ferguson, review of \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 696.
placement of the list toward the end. Perhaps the author did include a list of fourth-century heresies. Thus, the evidence in the Fragment regarding the catalogue of heresies does not imply the Early Hypothesis.

Eleventh, the presence of a type of *regula fidei* in the Fragment suggests an early date (lines 18-26). Similar forms, which seem rather free in their makeup, are not found after Irenæus and Tertullian. More “fixed” formulas do not appear until around the beginning of the third century with Hippolytus’s baptismal formula. Had the Fragmentist written in the fourth century, he would more likely have deferred to the Nicene Creed or used another fixed form rather than make a free-form confession of faith. Thus it appears more likely that this free-from *regula fidei* betrays an early date; it would seem out of place after the third century. The Fragmentist’s inclusion of this confession implies the Early Hypothesis.

Twelfth, while Early Hypothesis proponents cite evidence from the Fragment regarding its mention of the “catholic church” and “ecclesiastical discipline,” the author’s use of these terms does not rule out its having been written after the third century. Parallels can be found in Tertullian and Victorinus of Pettau, and it is likely that these terms do not pre-date the second century, but their presence in the Fragment does not limit it to having been written early. Thus, the use of these terms does not imply the Early Hypothesis as some have tried to claim.

Thirteenth, as with the case of the Fragmentist’s references to the “catholic church,” his expression regarding the bishop’s chair also does not rule out a post-third-century date. Though

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similar expressions are found in the third century, it would be a leap of logic to conclude that such terminology is limited to the early time period. Therefore, it cannot be said that the evidence found in the Fragment regarding the episcopal chair implies the Early Hypothesis.

Finally, Ferguson highlights the parallel in Justin Martyr regarding the reading of the prophets and the apostles, which seems to mirror the Fragmentist’s remark (line 79-80). Others who use the term “prophets and apostles” in a technical sense include Ignatius, Polycarp, and the Didache. However, once Tertullian refers to these authoritative writings as the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament” in Against Praxeas, the use of “prophets and apostles” used in a technical sense is not seen again. Thus it appears unlikely that the Fragmentist would have used such an expression in the fourth century. It seems more likely that he would have employed the current terminology, that is, the Old and New Testaments. This does not constitute an argument from silence, because writers after Tertullian were not silent; they simply replaced the terms used to express the same idea. In light of this, the Fragmentist’s use of the expression “prophets and apostles” points to a second-century context and therefore implies the Early Hypothesis.

In summary, some of the evidence implies the hypothesis that the Fragment is a late second- to early third-century composition. The evidence cited which does not imply the Early Hypothesis consists of the way the Fragmentist identifies the Gospels, the association of Luke and Paul, the Fragmentist’s treatment of the Apocalypse, the Apocalypse of Peter, his omission

\[467\] Cyprian, To the People, Concerning Five Schismatic Presbyters of the Faction of Felicissimus 5; idem, To Antonianus About Cornelius and Novatian 9.

\[468\] Justin, First Apology 67.

\[469\] Ignatius, To the Philadelphians 9; Polycarp, To the Philippians 6; Didache 11.

\[470\] Tert., Against Praxeas 15.
of Hebrews and James, his list of heresies, his characterization of the church, and his understanding of the bishop’s “chair.” On the other hand, the evidence cited which implies the Early Hypothesis is as follows: the Fragmentist’s defense of the Fourth Gospel, his omission of the Petrine epistles, his dating of the *Shepherd of Hermas* and characterization of its reception, his inclusion of what appears to be a nascent *regula fidei*, and his use of the expression “prophets and apostles” instead of “Old and New Testaments.” In short, of the fifteen items of evidence cited by Early Hypothesis proponents in support of their position, six items imply their conclusion. Next, the study examined the Early Hypothesis’s *explanatory scope*.

**Explanatory Scope**

Assessing the explanatory scope of the Early Hypothesis, requires asking the following question: what (i.e. how much) evidence does the hypothesis explain, or at least attempt to explain? The hypothesis which has an explanation for the greatest amount of evidence is preferred. The Early Hypothesis has an explanation for all of the evidence cited by scholars regarding the Fragment’s date with the exception of four items. The first item of evidence for which the Early Hypothesis has no explanation consists of the Fragmentist’s identification of the book of Acts as the “Acts of all the apostles” (line 34). While Late Hypothesis proponents see this as evidence for their claim, the Early Hypothesis does not address the issue at all. Nevertheless, while it may appear that the Fragment was disambiguating the book of Acts from supposed apocryphal “Acts” of the fourth century, there were also apocryphal “Acts” in the second and third centuries. It remains possible that the Fragmentist was disambiguating Luke’s work from these.

Second, the Early Hypothesis cannot explain the Fragmentist’s treatment of the Johannine epistles (lines 68-9). The Fragment appears to mention only two of the epistles, and
scholars debate about how this is to be understood.\footnote{Katz, “The Johannine Epistles,” 273-4.} Both Donaldson and Ferguson see issues with the condition of the text, and while these are the only two Early Hypothesis proponents who address the question, neither of them express the slightest degree of certainty in their understanding of the passage.\footnote{Donaldson, A Critical History, 212; Ferguson, review of The Muratorian Fragment, 695-6.}

Third, the Early Hypothesis does not attempt to explain the Fragmentist’s omission of Jude. Ferguson does not specifically refer to the problem of Jude. Instead, in general terms, he laments the difficulty in understanding the Fragmentist’s treatment of the general epistles.\footnote{Ferguson, review of The Muratorian Fragment, 695-6.}

Finally, proponents of the Early Hypothesis do not proffer an explanation for the presence of the pseudo-Pauline works mentioned in the Fragment (lines 63-5). Rather, they simply declare that there is no reason to believe these are fourth-century works. Ferguson conceded that looking to this evidence for clues regarding the date of the Fragment is difficult unless one knows whether the author was confusing Paul’s Ephesian epistle with that of the one supposedly addressed to the Laodiceans.\footnote{Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.}

In summary, the Early Hypothesis explains the preponderance of evidence cited in support of the Fragment’s date. In short, it explains eighteen of the total twenty-two items of evidence relevant to the debate. Next, the study examined the Early Hypothesis’s explanatory power.
Explanatory Power

For any hypothesis to be preferred, it must powerfully explain the evidence it cites in support of its reasons to be believed. In the case of the Early Hypothesis, it must demonstrate that the phenomena which it cites as evidence for its claim find themselves more “at home” in the second or third centuries than in the fourth. In other words, it cannot merely be possible that the evidence comes from an early context, it must be likely. The Early Hypothesis demonstrates a remarkable amount of explanatory power in the way it explains the existence of five phenomena found within the Fragment. First, and arguably the most compelling, the Early Hypothesis explains the Fragmentist’s statement that he is a contemporary of Pius. Of note is the link between this “temporal” declaration and the very question of date. The proposition that Pius was bishop in Rome “in our times” offers a direct response to the question of when the Fragment was written. Late Hypothesis arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, the plain reading of the text, which this study has been shown to be appropriate, is epistemically superior to the periodic reading proposed by Sundberg and his subscribers. In addition, whereas the Late Hypothesis does not in any way explain why the Fragmentist mentioned Pius, Early Hypothesis proponents understand that by referencing his bishopric the Fragmentist was offering a precise time period in support of his own argument that the *Shepherd of Hermas* was too recent to be considered among the apostles. Thus, with regard to the Fragment’s evidence in reference to Pius, the Early Hypothesis’s explanation seems more probably true and contributes to its consideration as the preferred hypothesis.

On the other hand, the Early Hypothesis does not powerfully explain the second reason to conclude an early date for the Fragment; the perceived literary parallels with second- and third-century works could just as possibly exist in fourth-century writings. In other words, there is no
compelling reason to believe that the Fragmentist’s nomenclature for the Gospels, his emphasis on the number “seven,” his use of an uncommon construction of the term *catholica*, or his understanding regarding the bishop’s authority in “the chair” must be limited to the early period. Each of these could just as possibly been used in the fourth century; their use is not limited to a particular time period.

However, the some of the features which indicate an early historical/theological context are best explained by the Early Hypothesis. In other words, they are best understood as having obtained prior to the fourth century. First, the Fragmentist’s apologetic tone in his description of the Fourth Gospel’s background serves to justify its authority. This was more likely to have been needed earlier rather than later as observed above. Second, the manner in which the Fragmentist measures the *Shepherd of Hermas’s* suitability seems more at home prior to the fourth century. It is more likely that this question was resolved to a greater degree in the years following the third century. Coupled with this is the measuring stick with which the Fragmentist determines this suitability. He compares *Shepherd* with the “prophets and the apostles,” a technical term for the biblical canon, terminology which was replaced in the fourth century with the designation of the “Old and New Testaments.” Fourth, as noted above, the inclusion of an informal *regula fidei* had later been replaced by more fixed formulas of faith statements. Thus it seems more likely that the Fragmentist would have offered up his free-form confession prior to the creeds and baptismal formulas which became the norm in the fourth century. Fifth, Early Hypothesis serves as the best explanation for the omission of the Petrine epistles. Though admittedly an argument for silence, the overwhelming majority of fourth-century catalogues include at least one of Peter’s epistles. That the Fragment has neither seems more likely to fit within an early context than in a later one.
In summary, the Early Hypothesis potently explains the evidence which it cites in support of its reasons to be believed. While it is merely possible that the Fragment has literary parallels in the second and third centuries, it is likely that the Fragmentist was a contemporary of Pius and that the Fragmentist was composed in an early historical/theological context. In short, the Early Hypothesis appears to powerfully explain the evidence behind two of the three reasons for its conclusion that the Fragment is a second- or third-century composition. Next, the study examined the Early Hypothesis’s credibility.

Credibility

Hypotheses that are credible are those for which there is little to no evidence suggesting they are unlikely to be true, and, conversely, credible hypotheses do not make it unlikely for any of the evidence to be true. In other words, preferred hypotheses correspond to reality. While the Early Hypothesis does not cast any of the relevant evidence in a negative light, there may be reason to believe the Early Hypothesis is unlikely. This comes about due to problems related to the evidence in the Fragment regarding the Shepherd of Hermas, arguably, and ironically, the strongest element within the Early Hypothesis’s claim. Hahneman casts doubt on the believability of the Fragmentist’s testimony regarding the date of Shepherd’s composition, on the tradition that Hermas and Pius were brothers, and on the conclusion that the Fragmentist’s portrayal of the Shepherd’s reception should lead to the early dating. Nevertheless, though Hahneman cast doubt on the Early Hypothesis’s credibility, did the evidence he furnished disconfirm it?

First, Hahneman argued that the Shepherd of Hermas was written, not during Pius’s bishopric (140-155), but over thirty years earlier (i.e. pre-110). Throughout the third chapter of his book on the Fragment, Hahneman cites various evidence which suggests an early date for
Shepherd, as early as toward the end of the first century, possibly while John the apostle was still living.\textsuperscript{475} According to Hahneman, having Shepherd written during the first century or early second century, rather than the late second century, better explains the following: the author’s reference to Clement of Rome, the apparent plurality of Roman bishops at the time of writing, and the ongoing persecution which seems to be that of either Domitian or Trajan. Therefore, Hahneman concludes that it is impossible for Shepherd to have been written by Hermas during the period between 140 and 155.

However, Ferguson contends that this need not be the case. Hermas could have begun writing the Shepherd of Hermas in the late first century and completed it at, or around, the mid-second-century point. Clement of Rome’s bishopric ended in 99 and Pius’s began in 140, a space of forty-one years. It is not inconceivable for the author of Shepherd to have completed the composition of his work over a forty-year period. Admittedly, as Ferguson notes, this would have meant “a long career” for Hermas.\textsuperscript{476} Ferguson adds that “Shepherd gives many indications of being a composite work, if not of composite authorship; the date of the materials is not necessarily the date of final writing, editing, or redacting.”\textsuperscript{477} So too Quasten, who held that there is no reason to doubt Shepherd’s reference to Clement and the Fragmentist’s assert that he and its author were contemporaries. “The two dates [i.e. Clement’s and Pius’s] are accounted for by the way in which the book was compiled. The older portions most likely go back to Clement’s day while the present work would be of Pius’s time. Critical examination of the contents leads to the same conclusion. This shows that parts of the work belong to different periods.”\textsuperscript{478} Furthermore,
as Hill highlights, having the Fragmentist make such statements about *Shepherd* in the fourth century seems to create more problems than having him do so in the second.\footnote{Hill, “The Debate Over the Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon,” 439.}

Second, Hahneman believed it “unlikely that the Hermas of the *Shepherd* was the brother of Pius.”\footnote{Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment*, 52.} In support of this, Hahneman leans upon his supposition that *Shepherd* was written much earlier than the Fragmentist would lead to believe, but as also seen above, this need not be the case. Additionally, however, Hahneman doubts a fraternal relationship between Hermas and Pius, the bishop for three other reasons. First, Hermas was a slave and would not know who his parents were.\footnote{Shepherd of Hermas, *Vision* 1.} Second, “Hermas” is a Greek name and Pius a “Latin.” Third, Hermas never mentioned a brother.

However, the link (or “non-link” as the case may be) between Hermas and Pius is irrelevant. Early Hypothesis proponents who cite this passage in the Fragment as evidence usually focus on the connection between Pius and the Fragment, not the connection between Hermas and Pius.\footnote{Holmes, review of *The Muratorian Fragment*, 595; Schnabel, “The Muratorian Fragment,” 246.} The Fragmentist claims that Pius was bishop “in our times.” Regardless of who Hermas was, or who the Fragmentist perceived wrote the *Shepherd of Hermas*, or when the Fragmentist believed it was written, the fact remains that the Fragmentist appears to be aware that Pius was bishop of Rome in his lifetime and counts on this fact as an essential part of his argument, an argument which would have failed if his readers did not believe this to be the case.

Finally, Hahneman believes the reception of the *Shepherd of Hermas* as portrayed by the Fragmentist points to a fourth-century context. Many second- and third-century writers accepted
Shepherd and at times appear to equate it with canonical, authoritative Scripture. According to Hahneman, this acceptance began to evaporate with Eusebius, and doubts about the full suitability of Shepherd continued through the fourth century. In a way similar to these fourth-century Fathers, the Fragmentist too expressed reserve about Shepherd (lines 73-80). Thus, Hahneman infers that the Fragment is from the fourth century.

In reaction to Hahneman’s view of the reception of the Shepherd of Hermas, Schnabel speculates that Irenæus may have cited Shepherd as Scripture due to his assumption that Hermas was Paul’s associate (Rom 16:14). Also, in Ferguson’s view this type of acceptance by Irenæus and others in the second century may have been that against which the Fragmentist was polemicizing. In addition, Tertullian, in his invective against Shepherd cites its wholesale rejection by “by every council of Churches . . . among apocryphal and false (writings).” Hahneman doubted the factuality of Tertullian’s statement, but as Hill pointed out, “Tertullian may have been given to flamboyance, but it was hardly his custom to appeal to historical precedents of his own imagination, especially when his appeal entailed an implicit challenge to his opponents to check his sources.” As far as Eusebius’s apparent skepticism is concerned, Ferguson believed Eusebius was pointing to a regard for Shepherd which likely pre-dated himself.

486 Tert., Modesty 10.
It appears then in the final analysis that, while Hahneman makes a case which casts some doubt on the credibility of the Early Hypothesis, his case does not render the hypothesis unlikely. Hahneman also makes much of the poor condition of the Fragment where this passage is located. He declares that the traditional dating of the Fragment in the second century is “rash in view of the known poor transcription and the suspected careless translation of the manuscript,” however as Ferguson and Schnabel point out, the condition of the Fragment works against Hahneman’s argument just as much as it does against any interpretation of the manuscript. Therefore, Hahneman’s case notwithstanding, one can conclude that there is no evidence which renders the Early Hypothesis to be unlikely and that the hypothesis thus exhibits credibility. Next, the study considered the Early Hypothesis’s simplicity.

Simplicity

In the evaluation of a hypothesis’s simplicity one must ask if its proponents make unsubstantiated assumptions either in linking the evidence to its premises or in defending it against counterarguments. Hypotheses which have fewer ad hoc components (i.e. statements not backed by evidence) are to be preferred. In the development and defense of their conclusion, Early Hypothesis proponents make four assumptions, three of which are evidenced and one that is not.

First, and already discussed in detail above, the Early Hypothesis depends on the assumption that the expression *temporibus nostris* should be read plainly. This assumption is

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490 In the case of Early Hypothesis, Reason #3, which deals with the historical/theological context question, the hypothesis commits a logical fallacy in its understanding of the Lucan-Pauline association, but such fallaciousness does not constitute an unsubstantiated assumption and is therefore not included in this section. Reason #3 remains strong due to its dependence on other evidence.
based on evidence found in other ancient church writings in which the authors use such terminology in a literal sense. In other words, when this expression is used elsewhere it refers to the author’s lifetime.

Second, in their reasoning that the Fragment possesses literary features with parallels in the second century, thus attempting to render the fourth century a less likely context, Early Hypothesis proponents make the assumption that language changes over time. Evidence supports this assumption. This is borne out by research in the field of historical linguistics.491

The third assumption appears in the defense of the hypothesis. In reaction to Hahneman’s assertion that Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria appear to have accepted the *Shepherd of Hermas* without reservation, indicating a fourth-century context given the Fragmentist’s caveat, Ferguson makes an assumption. He speculates that the Fragmentist was arguing against the type of acceptance of *Shepherd* which Irenæus and Clement espoused. Contra Hahneman, there is evidence to support Ferguson’s supposition inasmuch as Tertullian mentioned the rejection of *Shepherd* by church councils. Not all accepted *Shepherd* in the second century. This fact means that the Fragment would not be out of place in that period with regard to Shepherd’s reception.

Finally, Early Hypothesis proponents make one unsubstantiated assumption. They assume that language makes noticeable change over two and one-half centuries, change drastic enough to allow for the assignment of dates to literature for which there is no other external evidence. However, research in the field of historical linguistics suggests that this is not enough time. The dating of literature based on language change is not reliable within fewer than four hundred years.492 Anything shorter may not be sufficient to notice a difference.

491 Bynon, *Historical Linguistics*, 2; Campbell, *Historical Linguistics* 3.

In summary, most of the assumptions that Early Hypothesis proponents make are substantiated by evidence. The simplicity of the hypothesis is marred by one unsubstantiated assumption which effects one of the three reasons to believe the hypothesis true, that of the supposed literary parallels between the Fragment and literature of the second and third centuries. The other reasons are left intact.

To recapitulate, in the foregoing section, the study weighed the Early Hypothesis by judging it against the Harman-McCullagh criteria of plausibility, explanatory scope, explanatory power, credibility, and simplicity. It found that the hypothesis is implied by six of the fifteen evidences cited (40%), that it explains eighteen of the total twenty-two evidences cited by both sides (82%), that it powerfully explains two of the three reasons to be believed (66%), that no evidence contradicts it (100%), and that one of its three assumptions are unsubstantiated (66%), for an overall average score of 71%. Next, the study weighed the Late Hypothesis using the same criteria. Those findings follow.

The Late Hypothesis

Scholars who subscribe to the Late Hypothesis do so for three reasons. First, they claim that because the Fragment constitutes a canon of the New Testament, it was not likely to have been composed prior to the fourth century, insofar as they assume that there were no formal canons prior to that time. Second, they contend that the Fragmentist demonstrates an apparent dependence upon the work of Eusebius. Third, in their view, the Fragment exhibits features which betray a fourth-century historical/theological context.
Plausibility

The plausibility of the Late Hypothesis depends on the answer to the following question: does the evidence imply that the Fragment was written during the fourth century and no earlier? In other words, unless the evidence reasonably suggests the greater likelihood that the Fragment was written after 300, it does not imply the Late Hypothesis. Conversely, if the evidence does reasonably suggest the greater likelihood that the Fragment was not written before 301, it does imply the Late Hypothesis.

First, Late Hypothesis proponents argue that because the Fragment exhibits an adherence to the notion that there are only four authoritative Gospels, it was likely to have been written during the fourth century and not before. For them up, up until that time, the number of Gospels was not restricted. However, there is evidence from the second and third centuries that several of the church fathers were adamant that there were only four recognized Gospels. Therefore, it does not appear that the evidence in the Fragment regarding the number of accepted Gospels implies that it was written in the fourth century and no earlier.

Second, Hahneman observed the order of the Gospels in the Fragment as evidence for a fourth-century date stating that it would be unusual to see this order early. However, Irenæus listed them in this order. As a result, though this order is rare prior to the fourth century, one cannot be insistent on a fourth-century date for the Fragment based on this. The Gospel order in

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496 Irenæus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1.
the Fragment is not exclusively implicative of a fourth century date. Granted, while it may lean in that direction, the evidence on its face does not imply that it was composed in the fourth.

Third, where the Fragmentist designates the book of Acts as the “Acts of all the Apostles,” Late Hypothesis proponents view this as indicative of a fourth-century date. They contend that due to the proliferation of apocryphal “Acts” such specificity was necessary to disambiguate this text from others which were not about the acts of “all” the apostles, a specification required in the fourth century. However, there is reason to believe that such disambiguation was called for as early as the second century as well. During that earlier period a number of apocryphal Acts were making their way around. Therefore, the arguments of those who see a fourth-century Fragment notwithstanding, this evidence does not imply the Late Hypothesis.

Fourth, Hahneman argued that the way the Fragmentist described the origin of the Fourth Gospel betrays a fourth-century context because according to the former, John was urged to write it by the “bishops.” Early sources claim that John was encouraged by his γνώριμοι. According to Hahneman, not until the fourth century does it become known that John write at the behest of “bishops.” Hahneman assumes that “with the passage of time the identity of those who urged John to write his gospel became more important, as did the gospel itself. In Jerome’s retelling and in Victorinus’ story those who urged John are episcopi; this introduction of bishops into the tradition is probably a later element.” However, as noted above, the acceptance of the

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Fourth Gospel was less likely a contentious issue by the fourth century than it had been earlier; the need to identify it with the authority of bishops would have been of greater significance in the second century than in subsequent centuries. Perhaps this is why Victorinus of Pettau, writing in the third century of a tradition that more than likely predated him, stated that John was compelled by the bishops around him.\textsuperscript{501} Thus it does not seem necessary to limit such references to the fourth century; the evidence here does not point exclusively to a fourth-century context and therefore does not imply the Late Hypothesis.

Fifth, Hahneman sees the Fragmentist’s inclusion of the Johannine epistles as evidence of the fourth century because they are “found only in larger collections of the catholic epistles, which were accepted as canonical only in the fourth century.”\textsuperscript{502} However, against this Origen included the Johannine epistles, acknowledging that some questioned their authenticity.\textsuperscript{503} Also, Origen seems to have possessed some idea of a canonical list.\textsuperscript{504} In addition, contra Hahneman’s suggestion that the epistles of John were in fourth-century lists and “accepted as canonical” is Eusebius’s inclusion of these epistles among his disputed texts.\textsuperscript{505} Therefore, it is unlikely that the Fragmentist’s mention of the Johannine epistles are evidence of the Late Hypothesis, at least not for the reasons that Hahneman suggests. However, the evidence here does appear to imply a late date for another reason. In the Fragment, the authority of the Johannine epistles is accepted without qualification, something which cannot be said of Origen’s or Eusebius’s accounting. In


\textsuperscript{502} Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 181.

\textsuperscript{503} Euseb., \textit{Ecclesiastical History} 6.25.10.

\textsuperscript{504} Ibid., 6.25.1, 3.

\textsuperscript{505} Ibid., 3.25.3; Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 181.
every fourth-century catalogue after Eusebius’s (ca. 303, quite early in the fourth century), the epistles of John are accepted as canonical just as in the Fragment. When all the evidence is considered, it may be that the Johannine epistles moved from a situation in which they were disputed (Origen and Eusebius in the third and early fourth centuries) to one in which they were accepted (post-Eusebius, most of fourth century, and the Fragment). Thus, this evidence regarding the Johannine epistles points more toward a late date than to an early one, and therefore implies the Late Hypothesis.

Sixth, Sundberg believed the evidence in the Fragment regarding the Apocalypse pointed toward its having been written in the fourth century. The Apocalypse’s placement in the list among the disputed texts (i.e. the Apocalypse of Peter), according to Sundberg, betrays a later date when doubts about the Apocalypse began to arise. However, several factors mitigate against the likelihood of this. First, as a matter of fact, the Fragmentist accepts the Apocalypse without question. Here merely lists it here in proximity to another apocalypse probably more for organization’s sake than as an indication of the text’s acceptability. Toward the beginning of the Fragment, the author compares the Apocalypse with the epistles of Paul, stating that it was written for the whole church (lines 39-59). Second, in Origen, the Apocalypse is accepted and it is attributed to John, as in the Fragment. Therefore, it cannot be said that the Fragmentist’s remarks about the Apocalypse could make sense in only a fourth-century context, and they no not imply the Late Hypothesis.

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506 Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 6.14.1. Clement of Alexandria accepted the general epistles but of these only Jude is certain. It is unclear if Clement had James, the Petrine epistles, or the Johannine epistles in mind.


508 Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 6.25.9.
Eighth, as in the case of the Johannine epistles, Hahneman sees the mention of Jude as indicative of the fourth century. However, whereas the inclusion of the Johannine epistles implies the Late Hypothesis, the inclusion of Jude cannot be understood as having only a place in the fourth century. Clement of Alexandria included Jude in his canon, known through Eusebius’s explicit reference. Therefore, in contrast to the other general epistles, this evidence in the Fragment does not imply the Late Hypothesis.

Ninth, in consequence of his presupposition that formal canons of the Old and New Testaments were unknown until the fourth century, Sundberg concluded that the Fragment is a fourth-century canon due to its inclusion of the *Wisdom of Solomon*. Had the Old Testament canon not been closed by this time, the Fragmentist would not have been compelled to place this respected text among his books of the New Testament. Moreover, Epiphanius included *Wisdom* in his New Testament, a point that Ferguson concedes. Additionally, Hahneman considered the Fragmentist’s denial of Solomonic authorship evidence of a late date. Many of the early Fathers attribute *Wisdom* to Solomon, unlike the Fragmentist who attributed it to Solomon’s friends, the later church fathers did not hold that Solomon authored it. Nevertheless, a couple of factors cast doubt on these. First, Irenæus considered *Wisdom* to be among his New Testament Scriptures. Second, there is Horbury’s suggestion that *Wisdom* in the Fragment is among the

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511 Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 16.

512 Epiph., *Refutation of All Heresies* 1.1.8; 76; Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 679.


514 For a list of these see ibid.

antilegomena, not a part of a New Testament canonical category. Third, the Late Hypothesis’s consideration of *Wisdom* depends on its assumption that exclusive canonical lists of the New Testament did not obtain until the fourth century, an assumption that has not been substantiated. These possibilities cast doubt on the conclusion that the evidence in the Fragment with respect to *Wisdom* implies the Late Hypothesis.

Tenth, the manner in which the Fragmentist described the reception of the *Apocalypse of Peter* implies the Late Hypothesis. It was accepted, but not allowed by all to be read in church (lines 71-3). Such a qualification would appear out of place prior to the fourth century. Clement of Alexandria accepted it as Scripture, and Methodius (d. 311) quotes from the *Apocalypse of Peter*, assuming it to be of “the inspired writings.” Not until the fourth century did this text come to be received with some doubt. In light of the evidence regard the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the Fragment appears to have been written during the fourth century.

Eleventh, in the Fragment, the *Shepherd of Hermas* is acceptable private reading material, but not to be read publically in church due to its non-apostolicity (lines 73-80). Late Hypothesis proponents consider this to be evidence of a fourth-century context. While it is true that Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria appear to have accepted *Shepherd*, quoting authoritatively from it, whether they believed it should be read publically as part of the church’s liturgy or if they considered it apostolic cannot be known. By the time of Tertullian, it had come to be rejected by several synods. It may be that these synods explain why Origen,

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518 Irenæus, *Against Heresies* 4.20.2 quoted *Shepherd of Hermas* 2.1; Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 1.17, 29; 2.1, 9, 12 quoted and alluded to *Shepherd of Hermas* 1.3.4, 8, 13; 2.4.2, 11; 3.9.16.

Eusebius, and Athanasius came to acknowledge its circulation in the church with the understanding that it was questioned by some, yet still seen as somewhat useful.\textsuperscript{520} Therefore, whereas Sundberg held that Eusebius marked the turning point for Shepherd, the evidence points more toward the time of Tertullian.\textsuperscript{521} Therefore, the Fragmentist may be reflecting a sentiment in place around the early third century or possibly earlier depending on the time of the synods mentioned by Tertullian.\textsuperscript{522} As a result of this, it does not appear that the evidence about the reception of \textit{Shepherd} implies the Late Hypothesis.

Twelfth, with regard to his reference to a pseudo-Pauline epistle to the Laodiceans, Hahneman assumes that the Fragmentist is writing of a distinct epistle which should not be confused with the known canonical epistle to the Ephesians (a question for some scholars) because this is mentioned in another part of the Fragment. For Hahneman this must be the Latin Laodicean epistle of which the earliest evidence is from around the fifth century. In addition, Hahneman noted that there was no evidence of the existence of such a Laodicean epistle prior to the late fourth century.\textsuperscript{523} As a matter of fact, there is no evidence of such an epistle prior to the fifth century, by Hahneman’s own admission. Thus the evidence within the Fragment with reference to a pseudo-Pauline epistle to the Laodiceans does not imply the Late Hypothesis.

Finally, Hahneman believed that evidence from the Fragmentist’s catalogue heresies points to a fourth-century date.\textsuperscript{524} First, he argued that the inclusion of Mitiades in the list betrays

\textsuperscript{520} Origen, \textit{First Principles} 1.3.3, 2.1.5, 3.2.4, 4.1.11; \textit{Commentary on Matthew} 14.21. Origen quotes from \textit{Shepherd of Hermas} 2.1; 2.6.2; Euseb., \textit{Ecclesiastical History} 3.3.6-7, 3.25.4; Athanasius, \textit{Festal Letter} 39.

\textsuperscript{521} Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 13-4.

\textsuperscript{522} This dating depends on Quasten’s assessment of when Tertullian wrote Modesty. Quasten, \textit{Patrology}, vol. 2, 313.

\textsuperscript{523} Hahneman, \textit{The Muratorian Fragment}, 197-200.

\textsuperscript{524} Ibid., 209-13.
a dependence upon Eusebius, a notion which has been shown to be unlikely in this paper (see Chapter 4). Second, that the Montanists were known as “Cataphrygians” prior to the fourth century is unlikely, according to Hahneman. Third, there is no reference to a Marcionite psalter prior to the fourth century. These last two reasons proffered by Hahneman are arguments from silence. The absence of earlier mention does neither necessitates nor makes a later date more likely. Thus the evidence from the Fragment’s catalogue of heresies does not imply that it constitutes a fourth-century composition.

In summary, very little of the evidence implies the hypothesis that the Fragment is a fourth-century composition. The evidence cited which does not imply the Late Hypothesis consists of the Fragment’s Fourfold Gospel, the Gospel order, the Fragmentist’s defense of the Fourth Gospel, his title for Acts, his regard for the *Wisdom of Solomon*, his inclusion of Jude, his treatment of the Apocalypse, his reception of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, his mention of the pseudo-Pauline epistles, and his list of heresies. However, the evidence cited which implies the Late Hypothesis consists of his characterization of the reception of the *Apocalypse of Peter* and his inclusion of the Johannine epistles. In short, of the twelve items of evidence cited by Late Hypothesis proponents in support of their position, two items imply their conclusion. Next, the study considered the Late Hypothesis’s *explanatory scope*.

Explanatory Scope

In order to weigh the Late Hypothesis’s explanatory scope, the study asked what (i.e. how much) evidence does the hypothesis explain, or at least attempt to explain? The hypothesis which has an explanation for the greatest amount of evidence is preferred. The Late Hypothesis explains most of the evidence cited by scholars regarding the Fragment’s date with the exception of eight items. Five of these unexplained evidence items are cited by Early Hypothesis
proponents in support of their position. These items are not even mentioned by those who subscribe to the Late Hypothesis. They include the way the Fragmentist identifies the Gospels, the apparent *regula fidei*, the Fragmentist’s expression regarding the church and the bishop’s chair, and his use of the prophets and the apostles as a litmus test of authority. The other three items of evidence, the Fragmentist’s omission of Hebrews, James, and the Petrine epistles, are simply shrugged off as confused or anomalous.

Nevertheless, the Late Hypothesis has an explanation for most of the evidence cited in support of the Fragment’s date. In short, it explains fourteen of the total twenty-two items of evidence relevant to the debate. Next, the study assessed the Late Hypothesis’s *explanatory power*.

**Explanatory Power**

Believable hypotheses powerfully explain the relevant evidence. For this to be the case with the Late Hypothesis, it must demonstrate that the phenomena which it cites as evidence for its claim were more likely to obtain in the fourth century and not before. In other words, it cannot merely be possible that the evidence comes from a later context, it must be likely. The Late Hypothesis exhibits little explanatory power in the way it explains the evidence. First, Late Hypothesis proponents explain the Fragmentist’s declaration that the *Shepherd of Hermas* cannot be included among the prophets and the apostles because their time is past by concluding that the Old Testament canon must have been closed when the Fragment was written. It is for this reason, coupled with an assumption that this “closing” did not take place *until* the fourth century, that they conclude the Fragment is a fourth-century work. However, as noted above, there is reason to believe that as early as Justin Martyr and Melito of Sardis an exclusive Old Testament canon was recognized. In addition, Sundberg’s assumption that formal and exclusive canons did not come
to be recognized until the fourth century is not without problems. The evidence, particularly from Irenæus (his Fourfold Gospel), in support of limited acceptance of authoritative texts, works against both Sundberg’s and Hahneman’s arguments. In the final analysis, Reason #1 of the Late Hypothesis does not explain the evidence regarding the criterion by which *Shepherd* was judged in a powerful way. In other words, the Late Hypothesis does not convincingly demonstrate that the Old Testament was still open until the fourth century not does it show the likelihood that the notion of a restrictive canon did not come to fruition before then; it is possible that the evidence of the Fragmentist’s characterization of *Shepherd* could still be “at home” in the second century.

Second, the Late Hypothesis does not powerfully explain the Fragmentist’s reference to an individual supposed to be named “Miltiades.” The hypothesis is dependent, in part, upon the likelihood that the Fragmentist depended on Eusebius when compiling his catalog of heresies. Against the likelihood that this is the case, is the evidence that the Fragmentist did not have the name “Miltiades” in view here, but rather that he intended to write “Mitiades,” as indeed the text itself bears witness. The other copies of the Muratorian canon from Monte Cassino also agree with this spelling. There is no evidence to suggest that Eusebius naively copied “Miltiades” from the Fragment, and though while possible, it does not appear likely that he did so. In addition, there is no evidence of a heretic with the same name as the allegedly orthodox Miltiades. Reason #2 to believe the Late Hypothesis does not powerfully explain the spelling of “Mitiades” in the Fragment’s catalog of heresies.

Finally, the critical evidence which initially drove Sundberg to develop the Late Hypothesis is explained by the hypothesis, but not in a powerful manner. While the explanation Late Hypothesis proponents proffer with respect to the evidence in the Fragment regarding the *Wisdom of Solomon* is possible, there is reasonable doubt that the explanation is likely to be the
case. According to Sundberg, “the matter that first attracted my attention to the question of place and date of the Muratorian fragment” deals with the question of Wisdom’s inclusion in the Fragmentist’s list.\textsuperscript{525} Whereas, the Fragment’s evidence regarding the Shepherd of Hermas is the critical piece in the Early Hypothesis, so the evidence about Wisdom for the Late. For Sundberg, the likelihood that that Fragmentist was writing in fourth century, after the closing of the Old Testament compelled the latter to place Wisdom (an apparently canonical writing) in his New Testament list between the Johannine epistles and the Apocalypse.\textsuperscript{526} However, Irenæus included Wisdom in his New Testament as well.\textsuperscript{527} Did he include it there for the same reason the Fragmentist did, because the Old Testament was closed? If so, the Late Hypothesis does not potently explain why this evidence cannot lead to the belief in a second-century Fragment. One cannot know. Sundberg’s inference that this is the reason for the Fragment’s inclusion is speculative. Irenæus’s parallel inclusion means that there did exist during the second century a theological/historical context which allowed or called for it. It is possible that this was the context for the Fragmentist’s inclusion.

However, on the other hand, if the Fragment was written in the fourth century, this would allow for the unconditional acceptance of the Johannine epistles as authoritative, which is apparent how the Fragmentist perceived them. Given the express reluctance to receive these universally in Origen and Eusebius’s acknowledgement that not all had accepted them, it is remarkable that every other fourth-century canon does so.\textsuperscript{528} Additionally, a fourth-century

\textsuperscript{525} Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 15.

\textsuperscript{526} Ibid., 16-18.

\textsuperscript{527} Euseb., Ecclesiastical History 5.8.1-8.

\textsuperscript{528} Ibid., 3.25.3; 6.14.1; 6.25.1, 3, 10.
Fragment better explains the partial acceptance of the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Up until that time, the *Apocalypse of Peter* was accepted as Scripture by all, but in the Fragment and in the fourth century there was a refusal to ascribe it full authority.

In summary, the Late Hypothesis does not powerfully explain the evidence. While, the Late Hypothesis is a reasonable and powerful explanation for the Fragmentist’s acceptance of the Johannine epistles and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, it is not for the Fragmentist’s criterion by which he judges the *Shepherd of Hermas*, for his listing “Mitiades” in his catalogue of heresies, or for his placement of the *Wisdom of Solomon* in between the Johannine epistles and the Apocalypse. In short, the Late Hypothesis does not appear to powerfully explain the evidence behind any of the three reasons for its conclusion that the Fragment is a fourth-century composition. Next, the study examined the Late Hypothesis’s *credibility*.

**Credibility**

Is there evidence which renders the Late Hypothesis unlikely to be correct, or conversely does the Late Hypothesis give rise to critical doubts about the likelihood of the viability of any relevant evidence? If so, it is not a credible hypothesis and should not preferred. As explained above, most of the evidence does not imply the Late Hypothesis, but all the evidence could exist within a fourth-century composition with the exception of one item: the evidence regarding the Fragmentist having been a contemporary of Pius. A plain reading of *temporibus nostris* points to the likelihood that that Fragment is not a fourth-century composition. As demonstrated above, the plain reading is to be preferred over the periodic reading suggested by Sundberg.

Several issues here warrant emphasis. First, the plain reading of *temporibus nostris* leads to the conclusion that the Fragmentist and Pius were contemporaries due to the expression’s interpretation as meaning “in our lifetime.” There is precedence for reading it this way within
other ancient patristic literature, and the mention of Pius rules out the likelihood that the
Fragmentist was broadly referring to a long period of time following the end of the apostolic era.
Second, Sundberg concedes that his is not the only possible interpretation. Rather he understands
that his

is a possible translation and that it is a viable alternative to the traditional dogmatic
interpretation of the passage. This means that the argument that the author of the
fragment must have been born before the death of Pius is inconclusive, and that the
phrase “nuperrime temporibus nostris” understood as contrasted with the times of the
prophets and of the apostles is another viable meaning of the passage.529

In other words, for Sundberg, neither interpretation, the plain reading nor the periodic reading,
yield anything with respect to making a positive determination of the Fragment’s date. However,
in some sense, the plain reading does yield a determination against the Fragment’s having been
written in the fourth century. While Sundberg may be correct that both readings are acceptable
alternatives to one another, a plain reading means that his Late Hypothesis is not credible. In
short, because it is more likely that the plain reading is to be preferred over the periodic reading
(based on ancient precedent), and because a plain reading casts reasonable doubt on the
likelihood of the Late Hypothesis, one can conclude that the hypothesis lacks credibility. Next,
the study considered the Late Hypothesis’s simplicity.

Simplicity

The reasons to believe the Late Hypothesis are dependent on five assumptions, one of
which is evidenced and four that are not. First, in his belief that the Fragment constitutes a
formal canon, Sundberg assumed that the Fragmentist’s Old Testament canon was one that was
closed. There is evidence that this was the case inasmuch as the Fragmentist states that the

529 Sundberg, “Canon Muratori,” 11.
Shepherd of Hermas should not be read among the prophets because their time is “complete” (lines 73-9).

The second premise, which underscores Sundberg’s belief that the Fragment is a formal canon, holds that the Old Testament canon was not a closed canon until Athanasius. However, not only is this an unsubstantiated assumption, there is evidence to suggest that this was not the case. This evidence consists of Melito’s insistence that he learn the accurate list of acceptable Old Testament books, which also must mean that there was an inaccurate list; this points to the idea of a closed Old Testament.530

Third, Sundberg maintains that the early church would not have settled on a restrictive list of New Testament books until it had reached a consensus on the closure of the Old Testament. This is possible, and may be even likely. However, there is no way of knowing this. This is a supposition for which there is no evidence. Even if it is found likely to be true, it remains a meaningless notion for the Late Hypothesis insofar as the closure of the Old Testament seems to have been earlier (per Justin and Melito) than Sundberg and company believe it to have been. To summarize the case against Sundberg’s seeing the Fragment as a formal canon: it is likely that the Old Testament was closed by the time of the Fragment, it cannot be shown to be likely that this did not take place until Athanasius, and it cannot be shown that the church would have closed the New Testament canon (in the Fragment, for example) until the Old Testament was closed. Sundberg’s deductive logic is valid, but his reasons leave his argument unsound due to the lack of evidence to support them.

The final two unsubstantiated assumptions in the Late Hypothesis are Hahneman’s. For him, the Late Hypothesis relies on Eusebius’s dependence on the Fragment. To show this,

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Hahneman argued that Eusebius transcribed a scribal error when he (or his amanuensis) indiscriminately copied “Miltiades” from the Fragment. However, there is no evidence that this happened, and there are two other possible scenarios. The Fragmentist may have been referring to a known heretic named “Miltiades,” but it seems more likely that the Fragmentist was referring to a heretic named “Mitiades,” especially since all the extant copies agree with this spelling. Hahneman assumes that they are all misspelled. It would be more likely that Eusebius depended on the Fragment, if the text of the Fragment read “Miltiades” instead of “Mitiades,” and more likely if the most well-known Miltiades was a heretic instead of an orthodox father in the church.

In summary, most of the assumptions upon which the Late Hypothesis depends are not substantiated by evidence. Two of the three reasons which lead to the Late Hypothesis cannot stand without the five assumptions described above, four of which are based on no evidence. Only the third reason to believe the hypothesis, that the Fragment contains elements which betray a fourth-century theological/historical context, is free of unsubstantiated assumptions. Thus, one can conclude that the Late Hypothesis does not exhibit simplicity and seems for the most part based on ad hoc components for which there is no evidence leading to the likelihood that the hypothesis should be believed beyond a reasonable doubt.

To summarize the second half of this chapter, the study weighed the Late Hypothesis by judging it against the Harman-McCullagh criteria of plausibility, explanatory scope, explanatory power, credibility, and simplicity. It found that the hypothesis is implied by two of the twelve evidences cited (16%), that it explains fourteen of the total twenty-two evidences cited by both sides (64%), that it did not powerfully explain any of the three reasons to be believed (0%), that there is evidence which contradicts it (0%), and that four of its five assumptions are
unsubstantiated (20%) for an overall average score of 20%. The next and final section compares the two hypotheses based on the results of weighing them against the five criteria.

**The Findings: A “Winner”**

Judging the two hypotheses in question against the Harman-McCullagh criteria of plausibility, explanatory scope, explanatory power, credibility, and simplicity, this study found that the Early Hypothesis (that the Muratorian Fragment is a late second- to early third-century composition) is to be preferred over the Late Hypothesis (that the Muratorian Fragment is a fourth-century composition). In the two critical categories plausibility and credibility, the Early Hypothesis implies more items of evidence than does the Late Hypothesis (40% against 16% respectively), and it is not disconfirmed by any evidence as is more likely the case with the Late Hypothesis (100% against 0% respectively). For the two categories of explanatory scope and power, the Early Hypothesis explains more of the total evidence than the Late (82% against 64% respectively). Also, the Early Hypothesis demonstrates greater explanatory power in that its explanations of the evidence in support of two of its three reasons is greater than the Late Hypothesis is able to show for any of its explanations of the phenomena in the Fragment (66% against 0% respectively). In the less critical areas of credibility and simplicity, the Early Hypothesis faces no evidence disconfirming its believability, while the Late Hypothesis does (100% against 0% respectively), and while the Early Hypothesis is beset by one unsubstantiated assumptions of its three, the Late is by four out of five (66% against 20% respectively). With an overall average percentage score of 71%, the Early Hypothesis appears to be the best explanation in contrast to the Late Hypothesis, with an overall average percentage score of 20%.

Of remarkable import to the arguments presented by each of the two sides are two items of evidence esteemed to be particularly crucial. The Early Hypothesis depends heavily on the
Fragmentist’s statement about the *Shepherd of Hermas*, that it was written “in our times” during the bishopric of Pius. This evidence strongly implies a second century date, and the hypothesis that the Fragmentist was apparently written early powerfully explains the *raison d’être* of this statement. In addition, this evidence remains viable despite the attacks upon the Early Hypothesis which come in the form of doubts about the date of *Shepherd’s* composition and the denial of a fraternal relationship between Hermas and Pius. Finally, the Early Hypothesis shows its simplicity inasmuch as the plain reading of *temporibus nostris* is an evidenced assumption and preferred interpretation.

On the other hand, the Late Hypothesis depends to a crucial degree upon two things. First, it depends on unsubstantiated (and arguably irrelevant) assumptions about how and when the New Testament canon developed. Second, it looked to the evidence in the Fragment with regard to the *Wisdom of Solomon*. The evidence in the Fragment about *Wisdom* does not imply that the Fragment could not have been written in the second or third centuries, nor does the Late Hypothesis well explain how Irenæus, like the Fragmentist, also included *Wisdom* in his list of accepted texts. By basing their conclusion on such questionable factors, proponents of the Late Hypothesis have not set themselves up to ably deal with the evidence in the Fragment about Pius, something which the Early Hypothesis proponents have competently leveraged. In the final analysis, it seems more likely that the Muratorian Fragment is a second- or third-century composition.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Recapitulation

Since 1740, when it was published, scholars have struggled with the question of the Muratorian Fragment’s date of composition. This struggle became more acute in the 1960s when Albert C. Sundberg Jr. questioned the general consensus that it is a late second- or early third-century document, and postulated that it was written in the fourth century. Because answering this question is important for understanding how early Christians viewed written authority as it relates to the establishment of their theology, this present study sought to determine whether the traditional consensus (herein called the “Early Hypothesis”) or Sundberg’s suggestion (the “Late Hypothesis”) should be preferred by historians. Thus, in answer to the question of which of the two hypotheses regarding the date of the Muratorian Fragment is more likely, this study found that, by making an inference to the best explanation, the Early Hypothesis is preferred.

This methodology consisted of weighing the two hypotheses against five criteria: plausibility, explanatory scope, explanatory power, credibility, and simplicity. First, the study considered the plausibility of each hypothesis. A hypothesis is plausible if the relevant evidence implies that hypothesis. The study found that, while some of the evidence implied the Early Hypothesis, very little evidence implied the Late Hypothesis. The Early Hypothesis is implied by the Fragmentist’s apologetic tone with regard to the Fourth Gospel, his failure to mention the Petrine epistles, his understanding of the date and reception of the Shepherd of Hermas, his allusion to what patristic scholars call the regula fidei, and his use of the term “prophets and
apostles” in lieu of “Old and New Testaments.” In contrast, the Late Hypothesis is only implied by the Fragmentist’s regard for the *Apocalypse of Peter* and his inclusion of the Johannine epistles. The Early Hypothesis appears to be more plausible than the Late.

Second, the amount of evidence explained by a hypothesis constitutes its explanatory scope. When the study compared the hypotheses explanatory scope, it discovered that the Early Hypothesis possesses a broader sweep. It proves itself able to explain all but four of the items of evidence considered. The Late Hypothesis leaves eight items without explanation.

With regard to the third criterion, explanatory power (the degree to which a hypothesis is able to better explain the evidence), two of the premises which scholars cite as reasons to believe the Early Hypothesis prove to be likely explanations of the evidence. It is probable that the Fragmentist and Pius were contemporaries (in the second century), and it also appears likely that the Fragment betrays the same theological/historical context seen in second- and third-century Christian literature. On the other hand, the Late Hypothesis falls short and does not as powerfully explain the evidence. For example, it is not necessarily true, nor even more likely, that the Fragment as a formal canon should be restricted to having only obtained in the fourth century. Also, the Late Hypothesis’s premise that Eusebius depended on the Fragment to write his *Ecclesiastical History* is wanting because there is another suitable (and more likely true) explanation for the Fragment’s mention of one “Mitiades.” Finally, the Late Hypothesis does not convincingly explain the Fragmentist’s location of the *Wisdom of Solomon* within the list. Thus, the Early Hypothesis more powerfully explains the evidence.

Geoffrey M. Hahneman attempted to cast doubt on the credibility (the fourth criterion) of the Early Hypothesis by bringing forth evidence to disconfirm it. Hahneman questioned the Fragmentist’s attestation to the date of the composition of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the view that
Hermas and Pius were brothers, and the Early Hypothesis proponents’ belief that the Fragmentist’s characterization of the *Shepherd’s* reception points to the second century. However, none of his objections gain traction in his effort to cite them as reasons to disconfirm the Early Hypothesis. In other words, there is no evidence which renders the Early Hypothesis to be unlikely. By way of contrast, if one accepts a plain reading of *temporibus nostris*, such an interpretation disconfirms the likelihood of the Late Hypothesis. If, Pius was bishop of Rome “in our [life] times,” it is impossible that the Fragmentist was writing in the fourth century. This evidence proves devastating to the Late Hypothesis’s credibility, so that the Early Hypothesis appears to be more believable.

Finally, the study considered the degree to which each hypothesis demonstrated simplicity of argument. To what extent did they resort to unsubstantiated ad hoc components to bolster their respective claims? The Early Hypothesis is weakened by one unsubstantiated assumption in that it is not warranted in its preconception that language changes enough over a two hundred-year period to locate the time of the Fragment based on parlance. On the other hand, the Late Hypothesis suffers from comparatively less simplicity. The majority of its assumptions are not substantiated by evidence such that two of its three major premises cannot stand without four un-evidenced assumptions. Therefore, the Early Hypothesis demonstrates a greater simplicity.

To synopsize, in the two essential categories of plausibility and credibility, the Early Hypothesis implies more items of evidence than does the Late Hypothesis, and it is not disconfirmed by any evidence as is the case with the Late Hypothesis. For the two categories of explanatory scope and power, the Early Hypothesis explains four more items of evidence than does the Late Hypothesis, and the Early Hypothesis demonstrates greater explanatory power in
that its explanations of five items of evidence seems more likely to be the case than the Late Hypothesis is able to show for any of its explanations of the phenomena in the Fragment. In the less critical areas of credibility and simplicity, the Early Hypothesis faces no evidence disconfirming its believability, while the Late Hypothesis does, and the Late Hypothesis is beset by four unsubstantiated assumptions, the Early, only one. It is apparent that through implementing the methodology of inference to the best explanation, historians should conclude that it is more likely the Muratorian Fragment was written during the second or third centuries than that it was written during the fourth century. The foregoing study is unlike others in that it offers the discipline of Bibliology a solution to the problem of the Fragment’s date. It contributes possibilities for apologetics as well in that it may pave the way for its methodology’s use in order to resolve issues in that field as well.

**Implications for Historical Study of the New Testament Canon**

This finding, that the Muratorian Fragment is probably a second- or third-century work, has several potential implications for the study of early Christianity. First, it shortens the list of possible authors, because it appears much less likely that the Fragment was written by anyone who flourished during the fourth century. Instead, especially in light of the Fragmentist’s reference to his being a contemporary of Pius, it could have been written by anyone who lived during that time (ca. 138-155). However, restriction to this timeframe more than likely eliminates Caius, Hippolytus, Victorinus of Pettau, Cyprian, and Polycarp.⁵³¹ This leaves Papias (60-163), Justin Martyr (100-65), Apollinaris of Hierapolis (flourished ca. 177), Hegesippus (110-80),

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⁵³¹ While most of these are too late, Polycarp is probably too early if the Fragmentist is indeed referring to the bishopric of Pius as a past event.
Melito of Sardis (c. 180), Rhodon (flourished 180-92), Polycrates of Ephesus (130-96), Victor I (d. 199), Irenæus (130-202), Clement of Alexandria (150-215), and Zephyrinus (d. 217) as possibilities. In addition, the theology of the Fragmentist betrayed in his work means that some of these can be eliminated due to what is known about their particular New Testament canons (e.g. Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria), and it means that others do not stand out simply because so little is known about their views on the same. However, of all these, Justin’s life and theology pose no problems for perceiving a congruence between him and the Fragmentist. This is not to say that Justin is the likely author (or that it comes from a “Justinian School”), simply that it seems the most possible among the options. Both Justin and the Fragmentist had several things in common: they wrote apologetically, they wrote in the mid-second century, they were both familiar with the ecclesiastical politics of Rome, they both assigned significance to the liturgical reading of the prophets and the apostles, they both accepted the Apocalypse as authoritative and normative, and they both spoke out against Marcion.  

In addition, the Fragmentist’s attitude toward the texts he lists is not inconsistent with attitudes in the early West. The rejection of the Fourth Gospel by the Alogi very possibly during Justin’s lifetime is consistent with the Fragmentist’s apparent felt need to justify its authority. Moreover it is also in keeping with Justin’s logos doctrine and his belief in the need to be “born again.” Also, Fragmentist’s omission of Hebrews is not inconsistent with the absence of Western writers’ declaration of its authority, though it is alluded to; it was not accepted as early in the West as in the East.  

Similarly, the non-mention of James is not inconsistent with the

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532 Justin, Dialogue with Trypho 81; idem, First Apology 67, 26.
533 Zahn, “Muratorian Canon,” 54; Epiph., Refutation of All Heresies, Proem 1.4.5, 1.5.6; Justin, Dialogue with Trypho 105.1; idem, First Apology 61.
534 Justin, Dialogue with Trypho 116; Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 681.
Mommsen catalog, a fourth-century Western canon. Indeed, as with these canonical New Testament texts, there is nothing inconsistent between the Fragmentist’s and early western writers’ attitudes toward the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*.\(^{535}\)

Second, finding that the Early Hypothesis is preferred means the greater likelihood that the Fragment was originally a Greek text. Inasmuch as the western church had not begun to transition from Greek to Latin until the middle of the second century, it stands to reason that the Fragment was probably written in Greek originally.\(^{536}\) Though admittedly, there is still is the slightest possibility that the original was in Latin. A Greek Fragment does not eliminate the possibility that Justin Martyr, or a Justinian School, could have composed it in the West. For example, Guignard, who has studied the language and date relationship greater than anyone, argues that the Fragment is early and Greek.\(^{537}\) None of this is inconsistent with a context surrounding Justin.

Third, if the Fragment was written in the second century, by Justin or his followers, it would more than likely have a western provenance. As noted above, this provenance also enjoys the consensus of Muratori, Donaldson, Salmon, Zahn, Ferguson, and Rothschild. In addition, a western provenance is consistent with the locations of the extant manuscripts’ discovery in Milan and in the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino. There is no evidence of a “Fragment-like” catalog in the East. Also, the Fragmentist shows a familiarity with Rome. This does not necessitate a Roman origin, but does make a western one seem much more likely than an eastern.

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\(^{535}\) See paragraph on “provenance” below.


\(^{537}\) Guignard, “The Original Language of the Muratorian Fragment,” 596.
In addition, several other factors correspond to a western context. First, the *Shepherd of Hermas* was the subject of scrutiny in the West to a greater degree than in the East, a reluctance echoes of which resound in the Fragment.538 Second, the *Wisdom of Solomon* was considered important in the West from an early date and considered worthy of listing by the Fragmentist.539 Third, with the exception of Caius, western acceptance of the Apocalypse was firm, and the Fragmentist’s emphasis on the number “seven” matches that of the Apocalyptist and Tertullian.540 Fourth, the Fragmentist’s emphasis on the bishop’s chair is also found in Cyprian.541 Fifth, the Fragmentist’s *regula fidei* is not unlike similar formulas found in Justin, Irenæus, and Tertullian.542 Finally, the Fragmentist’s catalog of heresies seems like a list which would have special significance only to western readers. He wrote of Arsinous, Valentinus, Miltiades, Marcion, and Basilides. While the locations of Arsinous and this Miltiades are unknown, Valentinus “came to Rome [and] . . . flourished under Pius” thus making him a contemporary of the Fragmentist in the imperial capital.543 It is also known that Marcion lived in Rome during the mid-second century. As for Basilides, he lived in Alexandria, which may explain why the Fragmentist, ostensibly writing from the West, referred to him as “the Asian”

538 Ferguson, “Canon Muratori,” 679.

539 Hebrews 1:3; 1 Clement 3:4, 7.5, 27.5.

540 Tert., *Against Marcion* 5.17.

541 Cyprian, *To the People, Concerning Five Schismatic Presbyters of the Faction of Felicissimus* 5; idem, *To Antonianus About Cornelius and Novatian* 9.

542 Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 31; Irenæus, *Against Heresies* 1.10; Tert., *Prescription Against Heretics* 13; idem, *The Veiling of Virgins* 1; idem, *Against Praxeas* 2.

543 Irenæus, *Against Heresies* 3.4.3.
Lastly, the Fragmentist mentioned the Montanists who eventually had a formative influence in the West particularly on Tertullian.

**Further Research**

The finding that the second century is the most likely timeframe for the composition of the Muratorian Fragment means more work for scholars. Further research is needed on the methodology of *inference to the best explanation*. Arguably the methodology appears promising in answering many of the questions regarding early Christian history which have continued to flummox its students over the previous two millennia. However, in order to be considered reliable, testing needs to be conducted against questions for which the answer is already known to some. Only in such blind testing can its value be confidently ascertained.

Also, with regard to the content of this present study, more research must be conducted in understanding the Fragment’s probable author, language, and provenance. Answering these questions (preferably using *inference to the best explanation*) is the only way that the true significance of this present study can be realized. Coming to a consensus on the answer of who most likely wrote the Fragment will yield an understanding of this “first” of Christian canons and may shed invaluable light on the connections between the current accepted New Testament and that of the earliest Christians.

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544 Ibid., 1.24.1.
Appendix A

The Original Latin Fragment

The original reading of the Muratorian Fragment follows. Words in bold are rubricated in the manuscript. The letters depicted in parentheses had been erased by correctors, and the letters in italics were added by correctors, either by means of substitution or superscription.545

[folio 10r] quibus tamen Interfuit et ita posuit ·

_tertio euangelii librum sec(a)ndo Lucan_

Lucas Iste medicus post ascensum xpi.

Cum eo Paulus quasi ut iuris studiosum.

5 Secundum adsumsisset numeni suo

ex opinione concrīset dām tamen nee Ipse

(d)uidit in carne et idó prout asequi potuit ·

Ita et ad natiuitate Iohannis incipet dicere.

_quarti euangeliorum Iohannis ex decipolis_

10 cohortantibus condescipulis et ēpsa suis
dixit conieiunate mihi · odie triduo et quid
cuique fuerit reuelatum alterutrum

nobis ennarremus eadem nocte reue

latum andreae ex apostolis ut recognis

15 centibus cuntis Iohannis suo nomine
cuncta describeret et ideo licit uaria sin

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545 This particular transcription of the Fragment was copied from Hahneman, _The Muratorian Fragment_, 6-7.
culis euangeliorum libris principia
doceantur Nihil tamen differt creden
tium f(e)idei cum uno ac principali spu de
20 clarata sint in omnibus omnia de natie tate de passione de resurrectione
de conversatione cum decipulis suis
ac de gemino eius aduentu
Primo In humilitate dispectus quod (fo
25 tu) secundum potentate regali pre
clarum quod futurum est. quid ergo
mirum si Iohannes tarn constanter
sinacula etiã In epistulis suis proferat
dicens In semeipsu Quae uidimus oculis
30 nostris et auribus audiuis et manus
nostrae palpauerunt haec scripsi mus (uobis)
[folio10v] Sic enim non solum uisurem sed (&)
auditorem
sed et scriptoró omnium mirabiliú dñí per ordi
nem profetetur Acta autó omniu apostolorum
35 sub uno libro scribta sunt Lucas obtime theofi
le conprindit quia sub prae sentia eius singula
gerebantur sicut(e) et semote passionó Petri
euidenter declarat Sed (&) profectionó pauli
a(d)b ur
be(s) ad spaniā proficescentis Epistulæ autem
40 Pauli quae a quo loco uel qua ex causa directe
sint uolen(ta)tibus intellegere Ipse declarant
Primũ omnium corintheis scysmae heresis In
terdicens deIncepsb callaectis circumcisione
Romanis autē or(ni)dine scripturarum sed
(et)
45 principium earum (osd) esse xþm Intimans
prolexius scripsit de quibus sincolis Neces
se est ad nobis desputari Cum ipse beatus
apostolus paulus sequens prodecessoris sui
Iohannis ordinó nonnisi (c)nomenatĩ semptaó
50 eccles(e)iis scribat ordine tali a corenthios
prima.ad efesios seconda ad philippinses ter
tia ad colosensis quarta ad calatas quin
ta ad tensaoleneconsis sexta. ad romanos
septima Uerum cor(e)ìntheis et thesaolecen
55 sibus licet pro correbtione Iteretur una
tamen per omnem orbem terrae ecclesia
deffusa esse denoscitur Et Iohannis eñi In a
pocalebsy licet septó eccleseis scribat
tamen omnibus dicit uerū ad filemonem una ·
60 et ad titũ una et ad tymotheũ duas pro affec
to et dilectione In honore tamen ecclesiae ca
tholice In ordinatione eclesiastice
[folio 11r] d(e)iscipline scìficate sunt Fertur etiam ad
Laudecenses alia ad alexandrinos Pauli no
65 mine fincte ad heresem marcionis et alia plu
ra quae In c(h)atholicam ecclesiam recepi non
potest Fel enim cum melle misceri non con
cruit epistola sane Iude et superscriptio
Iohannis duas In catholica habentur Et sapi
70 entia ab amicis salomonis in honoró ipsius
scripta apocalpse etiam Iohani et Pe
tri tantum recip(e)imus quam quidam ex nos
tris legi In eclesia nolunt Pastorem uero
nuperrim e(t) temporibus nostris In urbe
75 roma herma conscirpsit sedente cathe
tra urbis romae aeclesiae Pio épis fratre(r)
eius et ideo legi eum quidó Oportet se pu
plicare uero In eclesia populo Neque inter
profe(*)tas conpletum numero Neque Inter
80 apostolos In finó temporum potest.
Arsinoi autem seu valentini. uel mitiad(e)iš
nihil In totum recipemus. Qui etiam nouũ
psalmorum librum marcionis conscripse

runt una cum basilide assianum catafry

85 cum consitutorem . . .
Appendix B

The Restored Latin Fragment

This appendix features David J. Theron’s “restored” reading with more precise Latin spellings. Words in bold are rubricated in the manuscript.

[folio10r] quibus tamen interfuit et ita posuit

**tertium euangelii librum secundum Lucam**

Lucas iste medicus post ascensum Christi
cum eum Paulus quasi itineris sui socium
5 secum adsumisset nomine suo
ex opinione conscripsit — Dominum tamen nec ipse uidit in carne — et idem prout assequi potuit
ita et a nativitate Iohannis incepit dicere

**quarti euangeliorum Iohannis ex discipulis**

10 cohortantibus condiscipulis et episcopis suis
dixit coniuniate mihi hodie triduum et quid cuique fuerit reuelatum alteratrum
nobis enarremus eadem nocte reuelaturn
Andreae ex apostolis ut recognis-
15 centibus cunctis Iohannes suo nomine
cuncta discriberet et ideo licet varia singulis euangeliorum libris principia

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doceantur nihil tamen differt creden-
tium fidei cum uno ac principali spiritu de-
20 clarata sint in omnibus omnia de natiui-
tate de passione de resurrectione
de conversatione cum discipulis suis
et de gemino eius aduentu
primum in humilitate despectus quod fu-
25 it secundum potestate regali prae-
clarum quod futurum est quid ergo
mirum si Iohannes tam constanter
singula etiam in epistolis suis proferat
dicens in semetipso quae uidimus oculis
30 nostris et auribus audiuiimus et manus
nostrae palpauerunt haec scrupsimus uobis
[folio10v] Sic enim non solum uisorem sed et
auditorem
sed et scriptorem omnium mirabilium Domini per ordi-
nem profitetur Acta autem omnium apostolorum
35 sub uno libro scripta sunt Lucas optimo Theophi-
lo comprehendit, quae sub praesentia eius singula
gerebantur sicut et remote passionem Petri
evidenter declarat sed et profectionem Pauli
ab ur-
be ad Spaniam proficiscentis epistolae autem

40 Pauli quae a quo loco uel qua ex causa directae sint ulentibus intelligere ipsae declarant primum omnium Corinthiis schisma haeresis interdicens deinceps Galatis circumcisionem Romanis autem ordine scripturarum sed et

45 principium earum esse Christum intimans prolixius scripsit de quibus singulis necessae est a nobis desputari cum ipse beatus apostolus Paulus sequens predecessoris sui Iohannis ordinem nonnisi nominatim septem 50 ecclesiis scribat ordine tali ad Corinthios prima ad Ephesios secunda ad Philippenses tertia ad Colossenses quarta ad Galatas quinta ad Thessalonicensibus sexta ad Romanos septima uerum Corinthiis et Thessalonicensibus 55 sibus licet pro correpzione iteretur una tamen per omnem orbem terrae ecclesia diffusa esse denoscitur et Iohannes enim in Apocalypsi licet septem ecclesiis scribat tamen omnibus dicit uerum ad Philemonem unam
et ad Titum unam et ad Timotheum duas pro affectu et dilectione in honore tamen ecclesiae catholicae in ordinacione ecclesiasticae

[folio 11r] disciplinae sanctificatae sunt fertur etiam ad Laodicenses alia ad Alexandrinos Pauli no-
65 mine fictae ad haeresem Marcionis et alia plura quae in catholicam ecclesiam recipi non potest fel enim cum melle misceri non congruit epistola san Iudae et superscriptio

Iohannis duas in catholica habentur et Sapientia ab amicis Salomonis in honorem ipsius scripta apocalypses etiam Iohannis et Petri tantum recipimus quam quidam ex nostris legi in ecclesia nolunt pastorem uero

nuperrime temporibus nostris in urbe

75 Roma Hermas conscriptis sedente cathedra urbis Romae ecclesiae Pio Episcopo fratre eius et ideo legi eum quidem oportet se publicare uero in ecclesia populo neque inter prophetas completum numero neque inter apostolos in finem temporum potest

Arsinoi autem seu Valentini uel Mitiadis
nihil in totum recipimus qui etiam nouum

psalmorum librum Marcioni conscripsisse-

runt una cum Basilide Assianum Catafrygum

85 constitutorem. . . .
Appendix C

An English Translation of the Fragment

Metzger’s English translations of the Fragment follows. The author chose to use Metzger’s as an exemplar for the reader due to the fact that, though Metzger leans toward the Early Hypothesis, he is not an active proponent of either of the two hypotheses and thus his work is less likely to betray bias. Words in bold are rubricated in the manuscript.

Metzger’s English translation follows:

[folio 10r] … at which nevertheless he was present, and so he placed [them in his narrative].

The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke.

Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law, composed it in his own name, according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events, so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John.

The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples.

10 To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write], he said, ‘Fast with me from today for three days, and what will be revealed to each one let us tell it to one another.’ In the same night it was revealed

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to Andrew, [one] of the apostles,

15 that John should write down all things in his own name
while all of them should review it. And so, though various
elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels,
nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith
of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things
20 have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the
nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection,
concerning life with his disciples,
and concerning his twofold coming;
the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place,
25 the second glorious in royal power,
which is still in the future. What
marvel is it then, if John so consistently
mentions these particular points also in his Epistles,
saying about himself, “What we have seen with our eyes
30 and heard with our ears and our hands
have handled, these things we have written to you”?

[folio 10v] For in this way he professes [himself] to be not only an eye-witness and
hearer,
but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order.
Moreover, the acts of all the apostles
35 were written in one book. For “most excellent Theophilus” Luke compiled
the individual events that took place in his presence—
as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter
as well as the departure of Paul from the city [of Rome]
when he journeyed to Spain. As for the Epistles of
40 ... Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones
[they are],
from what place, or for what reason they were sent.
First of all, to the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms;
next, to the Galatians, against circumcision;
then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining
45 the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle
(or, main theme). It is necessary
for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed
apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor
John, writes by name to only seven
50 churches in the following sequence: to the Corinthians
first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third,
to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth,
to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans
seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to
55 the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition,
yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church
spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the
Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to all. [Paul also wrote] out of affection and love one to Philemon, 60 one to Titus, and two to Timothy; and these are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There is current also [an epistle] to the Laodiceans, [and] another to the Alexandrians, [both] forged in Paul’s 65 name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others which cannot be received into the catholic Church—for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey. Moreover, the epistle of Jude and two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) John are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and [the book of] Wisdom, 70 written by the friends of Solomon in his honor.

We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church. But Hermas wrote the Shepherd very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, 75 while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among
the prophets, whose number is complete, or among

80 the apostles, for it is after [their] time.

But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinous or Valentinus or Miltiades, who also composed

a new book of psalms for Marcion,

together with Basilides, the Asian

85 founder of the Cataphrygians…
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