

Eriugena's Commentary on the Dionysian  
*Celestial Hierarchy*

by  
PAUL ROREM

The book is a comprehensive study of John Scotus Eriugena's commentary (*Expositiones*) on the Pseudo-Dionysian *Celestial Hierarchy*, with special attention given to its literary form and theological content.

The order for introducing various aspects of the *Expositiones* follows the format of the work itself: first in John's own order comes the Dionysian text in translation, followed by a paraphrase or two and then by Eriugena's own comments, sometimes on particular sources, more often on the points of doctrine he wants to expound. Thus this book starts with the author, that is, John's perspective on Dionysius himself (Chapter I: "Dionysian Biographies"). For Eriugena, Dionysius was the Athenian Areopagite, but was he also the Parisian martyr Saint Denis? Turning to the text of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, the particular Greek codex John was working with contained its own variants and challenges (Chapter II: "The Greek Manuscript and Its Problems"). Next comes a study of John's "Patterns of Translation and Paraphrase" (Chapter III). After his multiple paraphrases, Eriugena often adds his own expository remarks, sometimes invoking other sources, especially the remaining works of the Dionysian corpus (Chapter IV).

Those interested primarily in John's philosophical theology could turn directly to the last three chapters, spanning the arc of "procession and return" so characteristic of the *Periphyseon*. The *Expositiones* show a particular interest in creation (Chapter V), anthropology (Chapter VI) and "Christ and Salvation" (Chapter VII). Eriugena's treatment of the doctrine of creation includes a particularly innovative understanding of *creatio ex nihilo*. His anthropology turns on the question of humanity's relationship to the divine, whether immediate (unmediated) or mediated or somehow both. The discussion of Christ includes skillful expansions of the biblical and Dionysian images for Christ, and a presentation of salvation as "theosis" or deification.

Translations of major sections of the *Expositiones* are appended, as well as John's prologue to his earlier translation of the Dionysian corpus. The book also contains a bibliography, an index of premodern and modern names, a scriptural index, and an index to the works of Eriugena.



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PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE OF MEDIAEVAL STUDIES

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## *Abbreviations*

BN gr 437	Bibliothèque Nationale, Cod. Gr. 437
Carmina	<i>Carmina Iohannis Scotti Eriugena</i> , ed. Michael W. Herren (SHL 12 [1993]); ed. L. Traube (MGH Poetae Latini 3 [1896], pp. 518-556)
CCCM	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis</i> , Turnholt: Brepols
CCSG	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca</i> , Turnholt: Brepols
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i> , Turnholt: Brepols
CH	The Celestial Hierarchy. Ed. G. Heil, <i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i> II (PTS 36 [1991]), Berlin/New York: de Gruyter
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Vienna
DN	The Divine Names. Ed. B. Suchla, <i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i> II (PTS 33 [1990]), Berlin/New York: de Gruyter
EH	The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy. Ed. G. Heil, <i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i> II (PTS 36 [1991]), Berlin/New York: de Gruyter
Exp	<i>Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem Iohannis Scotti Eriugena</i> . Ed. J. Barbet (CCCM 31 [1975])
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
MT	The Mystical Theology. Ed. A.M. Ritter, <i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i> II (PTS 36 [1991]), Berlin/New York: de Gruyter
<i>Periphyseon</i>	<i>Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon</i> . Ed. Édouard Jeuneau, I (CCCM 161 [1996]); II (CCCM 162 [1997]); III (CCCM 163 [1999]); IV (CCCM 164 [2000]); V (CCCM 165 [2004]). Trans. I.P. Sheldon-Williams, rev. J.J. O'Meara, Montreal: Éditions Bellarmin; Paris: J. Vrin, 1987
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graeca</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris (rpt. Turnholt: Brepols)
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris (rpt. Turnholt: Brepols)
SC	Sources Chrétiennes, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf

*Preface*

Amid his magisterial contributions to Eriugian scholarship, M. Cappuyns offered a striking visual image for John the Scot's corpus. He pictured it as "a remarkable triptych, in which the central panel is the *De divisione naturae* and the side panels, unfortunately damaged, are the two commentaries on Dionysius and Saint John (with the homily on the prologue)."<sup>1</sup> A generation later, Édouard Jauneau introduced his own masterful volumes on Eriugena's Homily and (partial) Commentary on Saint John by way of Cappuyns' imagery, praising it as an "ingenious comparison" and calling the Johannine works the "third panel" of the triptych.<sup>2</sup> Since Cappuyns, the central panel, the *Periphyseon* (the Greek title by which *De divisione naturae* is more widely known), has received enormous attention, in scholarly editions and multiple translations as well as detailed doctrinal examinations.<sup>3</sup> Since and indeed because of Jauneau, the Irishman's work on the Gospel of John has also received direct attention, including translations.<sup>4</sup> But what of the other panel of this triptych, Eriugena's commentary or *Expositiones* on Dionysius the Areopagite's *The Celestial Hierarchy*? Even with a full, modern edition of the *Expositiones*,<sup>5</sup> comparatively little attention has been given to its contents. Scholarly studies of Eriugena's

1. "... un remarquable triptyque, dont le panneau central est le *De divisione naturae* et les volets, malheureusement endommagés, les deux commentaires sur Denys et saint Jean (avec l'homélie sur le prologue)." M. Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Érigène, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1933; rept. Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1964), p. 182.

2. "Reprenant une ingénieuse comparaison de Dom Cappuyns, on peut dire que les principales œuvres philosophiques et théologiques de l'Érigène se présentent à nous comme un triptyque ..." Édouard Jauneau, "Introduction," *Commentaire sur l'Évangile de Jean*, SC 180: 11-12. "Suivant l'ingénieuse comparaison de Dom Cappuyns ..." Jauneau, "Introduction," *Homélie sur le Prologue de Jean*, SC 151: 47.

3. The scholarly editions of the *Periphyseon* now culminate in the massive labors of E. Jauneau, *Periphyseon* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1996-2004). The English translation used here is that of I.P. Sheldon-Williams and J.J. O'Meara, *Periphyseon* (Montreal/ Paris: J. Vrin, 1987). One of the best monographs on Eriugena concentrates heavily on the *Periphyseon*, namely, J.J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). See also D. Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

4. Besides Jauneau's French renditions cited in n2, see also the less scholarly English translation: *The Voice of the Eagle, Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John*, trans. Christopher Bamford (Hudson NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1990). The homily is also translated in O'Meara's *Eriugena*, mentioned in the previous note.

5. *Expositiones in ierarchiam coelestem*, ed. J. Barbet, CCCM 31. *The Celestial Hierarchy* will also be cited according to the modern Greek edition by G. Heil, *Corpus Dionysiacum II*



thought rarely refer to it, and no translation into a modern language has yet been published.

When Cappuyns in 1933 described the Dionysian panel of the triptych as damaged, he meant that it, like the Johannine commentary, seemed incomplete: the Floss edition in *Patrologia Latina* 122 lacked the text from early in chapter three to early in chapter seven. In 1950-1951, however, H. Dondaine published an edition of the missing material, allowing J. Barbet to present the entire treatise in her 1975 edition.<sup>6</sup> This noteworthy edition made further work on the *Expositiones* possible, but little has in fact been done to supplement the careful studies of the first section by Barbet's own teacher, R. Roques, who published essays on chapters one through three.<sup>7</sup> During the recent surge of scholarly interest in John's corpus, even writings not represented in the image of a triptych—his poetry and the early work on predestination—have received fuller treatments than has his commentary on the Dionysian treatise.<sup>8</sup> The two notable exceptions to the dearth of work on the *Expositiones* are Donald Duclow's examination of chapter thirteen regarding Isaiah and the seraph and Steven Chase's translation of part of chapter seven.<sup>9</sup>

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(Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991) and the English translation by C. Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

6. H. Dondaine, "Les 'Expositiones super Ierarchiam caelestem' de Jean Scot Érigène," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 18 (1950-1951): 245-302.

7. Roques' three major essays on the *Expositiones* were reprinted in his collection *Libres sentiers vers l'érigénisme* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1975), namely, "Téatologie et théologie chez Jean Scot Erigène" (pp. 14-43), "'Valde artificialiter': Le sens d'un contresens" (pp. 44-98), and "Traduction ou interprétation? Brèves remarques sur Jean Scot traducteur de Denys" (pp. 99-130). Roques' seminar reports add further detail, including a discussion of "hierarchy" in the third chapter: *Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études* 77 (1969-1970): 305-315, and 79 (1971-1972), 338-344.

8. *Carmina*, ed. Michael W. Herren, SLH 12. *Treatise on Divine Predestination* trans. Mary Brennan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1998). The more recent collection of papers from the Eriugena Conference in 2000 (*History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time*, ed. J. McEvoy and M. Dunne [Leuven: University Press, 2002]) also gives considerable attention to the treatise on predestination, as befitted the theme, and of course the *Periphyseon*, but barely mentions the *Expositiones*.

9. D.F. Duclow, "Isaiah Meets the Seraph: Breaking Ranks in Dionysius and Eriugena?" in *Eriugena: East and West*, ed. B. McGinn and W. Otten (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 233-252. S. Chase, *Angelic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), pp. 161-186.

Why has John's Commentary on *The Celestial Hierarchy* not been fully studied, with the result that it remains relatively under-utilized in Eriugenian scholarship? Paradoxically, Cappuyns' comments and Barbet's edition may have led to the relative neglect of the *Expositiones*. Cappuyns himself gave only minimal attention to the work, and effectively dismissed its significance. Coming after the *Periphyseon*, "it scarcely adds any new ideas."<sup>10</sup> Such a sweeping judgment may be true, in that the work coheres completely with the *Periphyseon* and does not present any substantial change in Eriugena's thought. Yet perhaps subsequent scholars took Cappuyns too much at his word, not heeding his qualifying remarks about the nuances and details of Eriugena's comments on the Dionysian treatise. Even if there is little radically new in this work, John's ways of interpreting the Areopagite and his own doctrinal expositions deserve attention in their own right.

Although Barbet's edition facilitates this effort, it may also have contributed indirectly to the comparative neglect of this treatise in Eriugena studies. In her introduction and in her layout of the text, Barbet rightly highlighted how the format of the *Expositiones* gives more emphasis to Dionysius than to Eriugena. Not only did John include the entire text of his translation of *The Celestial Hierarchy* sentence by sentence; every such passage is also immediately paraphrased, often more than once. This pattern of presenting and re-working the Dionysian text is relentless, indeed invariable. Only after repeated re-statements in the Areopagite's voice does Eriugena usually (not always!) add his own comment or brief exposition. For readers primarily interested in Eriugena's own doctrinal insights, such seemingly endless repetitions can be tiresome to read.

Has the very format of the *Expositiones*, nicely emphasized and visible in Barbet's edition, left the impression that this is mostly Dionysius and minimally Eriugena? Perhaps such an impression, coupled with Cappuyns' assurance that there is nothing new here, has encouraged Eriugena scholars to concentrate on the *Periphyseon* and its background and to neglect the subsequent *Expositiones*. Perhaps one needs an interest in the Dionysian tradition in its own right, such as my own projects on the Areopagite and then the *Scholia*<sup>11</sup> in order to have the patience to work

10. "Les Expositiones n'y ajoutent guère d'idées nouvelles." Cappuyns, *Jean Scot*, p. 220.

11. *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and, with John C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

through John's particular ways of translating and paraphrasing *The Celestial Hierarchy*, and thus to appreciate Eriugena's own interpretive agenda and to isolate his conceptual patterns. In any case, it is the conviction of the current study that this neglected side panel deserves our attention because of its significance both for Eriugenian studies as a whole and also for the overall trajectory of Dionysian translations and commentaries.

When Cappuyns first framed his triptych image for Eriugena's works, he added immediately, "it remains for us to study them."<sup>12</sup> The aim of the current volume is to study *Expositiones* in terms of its literary form and theological content, in hopes of contributing both to Eriugena studies and also to the study of the traditions of Dionysian translators and commentators. Chapter four of John's work, for example, long thought to be lost, contains significant discussions of creation, anthropology, and Christology, but has nevertheless not yet been fully integrated into Eriugenian studies. It thus receives some emphasis below, building on Roques' excellent examinations of chapters one and two (and part of three).

The order for introducing various aspects of the *Expositiones* below follows the format of the work itself: first in John's own order comes the Dionysian text in translation, followed by a paraphrase or two and then by Eriugena's own comments, sometimes on particular sources, more often on the points of doctrine he wants to expound. Thus this book starts with the author, that is, John's perspective on Dionysius himself (Chapter I: "Dionysian Biographies"). For Eriugena, Dionysius was the Athenian Areopagite, but was he also the Parisian martyr Saint Denis? Turning to the text of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, the particular Greek codex John was working with contained its own variants and challenges (Chapter II: "The Greek Manuscript and Its Problems"). Next comes a study of John's "Patterns of Translation and Paraphrase" (Chapter III). After his multiple paraphrases, Eriugena often adds his own expository remarks, sometimes invoking other sources, especially the remaining works of the Dionysian corpus (Chapter IV).

Those interested primarily in John's philosophical theology could turn directly to the last three chapters, spanning the arc of "procession and return" so characteristic of the *Periphyseon*. The *Expositiones* show a particular interest in creation (Chapter V), anthropology (Chapter VI) and "Christ and Salvation" (Chapter VII). Eriugena's treatment of the

12. "Il nous reste à les étudier." Cappuyns, *Jean Scot*, p. 182.

doctrine of creation includes a particularly innovative understanding of *creatio ex nihilo*. His anthropology turns on the question of humanity's relationship to the divine, whether immediate (unmediated) or mediated or somehow both. The discussion of Christ includes skillful expansions of the biblical and Dionysian images for Christ, and a presentation of salvation as "theosis" or deification.

Appended are selected translations, first of John's prologue to his early translation of the Dionysian corpus, and then of portions of the *Expositiones*. These four portions are particularly illustrative of his method, and significant for his doctrinal contributions: chapter one, pp. 1-12 in the Barbet edition; chapter two, the final section, 45-55; chapter four in its entirety, 66-82; and chapter eight, the final section, 128-133. John's *Expositiones* cover every chapter, indeed every phrase, of the Areopagite's *Celestial Hierarchy*, yet he never explicitly states why he took up the task of writing a commentary on it at the end of his career, or why he confined himself to only this one work. We are left to speculate that he began the work out of respect for the venerable Father who had been so important to his own thought, and did so by beginning with the first work in the Dionysian corpus, but did not live long enough to do more.

Much of this book was drafted during my 1998-1999 sabbatical from Princeton Theological Seminary as a Visitor in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton. For that year's work I am indebted to the seminary for its generous sabbatical policy, to the Lilly Foundation for a Faculty Fellowship administered through the Association of Theological Schools, and to Giles Constable and the Institute's entire community for the collegial camaraderie of the medievalists in residence that year. Wayne J. Hankey and Donald Duclow helped improve certain chapters even beyond the specific acknowledgments given below to their work. A portion of Chapter VII below was published in an earlier version as "Christ as Cornerstone, Worm, and Phoenix in Eriugena's Commentary on Dionysius," *Dionysius* 21 (2003): 183-195. As noted more fully on p. 179, the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies kindly gave permission to use Michael Herren's translation of Eriugena's poem, *Lumine sidereo*.

For developing this text toward publication I am grateful for the careful critiques offered by several Ph.D. students at Princeton Theological Seminary, and especially for the thorough work of Jaehyun Kim, particularly on the notes, and of Andrew Wilson on the index. Revisions were

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undertaken during a 2002-2003 sabbatical at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, with helpful comments and suggestions by Johanna Froehlich Swartzentruber and Istvan Perczel. The final preparation for publication was greatly aided by the thorough copy-editing of Jean Hoff of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. Such errors or misjudgments that remain after such generous help are solely my own.



*Dionysian Biographies*

In the course of his voluminous comments about the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, Eriugena also made a few remarks directly about the writer himself. These biographical observations occurred principally and naturally when he introduced his translation of the Dionysian corpus early in his career, but he makes other pertinent remarks on aspects of his author's life and career while commenting on specific texts in the *Periphyseon*, the *Expositiones*, and elsewhere. Although Eriugena was much more interested in philosophical theology than in historical biography, direct discussions of the life of Dionysius are found in the prologue (*Valde quidem admiranda*) and poem (*Lumine sidereo*) that introduced Eriugena's translation of the corpus.<sup>13</sup> These contain two distinct questions of identity, two lives of Denis, so to speak: Dionysius as an apostolic Athenian, and Dionysius as a Parisian martyr.

In this chapter I will discuss, first, John's comments pertaining to the traditional identification of his author as the Areopagite of Acts 17, who later became the bishop of Athens, and, second, his treatment of the more recent claim that this same Dionysius was Denis the Apostle to the Gauls, bishop of Paris and beheaded martyr. I will then survey the few occasions when John's comments on specific Dionysian texts include biographical references to the author himself.<sup>14</sup> Although Eriugena knew the tradition of Dionysian hagiography, specifically as handed down by Hilduin, as an original thinker he never repeated prior formulas or narratives, but as always spoke for himself.

John's few and usually brief references to the life of Dionysius are mainly found in his introduction to his own Latin translation of the corpus, comprising an initial poem (*Hanc libam*), a letter of prologue to King Charles the Bald (*Valde quidem admiranda*), and another poem (*Lumine sidereo*) just before the corpus itself begins with *The Celestial Hierarchy*. The poetic dedication that begins the work (*Hanc libam*) is

13. *Valde quidem admiranda*: PL 122: 1031-1036; MGH *Epistolae* 6, no. 14, pp. 158-161; translated below, pp. 174-179. *Lumine sidereo*: PL 122: 1029-1030; *Carmina*, ed. Herren, no. 20, pp. 108-109; ed. Traube, no. VII.11, p. 548. Herren's translation is given below on p. 179.

14. Eriugena's stray remarks did not really influence the larger tradition regarding Dionysian authorship; for some pertinent bibliography, see Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary*, pp. 12-18.

not germane to Dionysian biography, although it is important for its information about John himself and his patron King Charles, as seen in the opening lines:

This cake stuffed with the sacred nectar of the Greeks  
I John, a foreigner, dedicate to my Charles.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever it may reveal about John and Charles, and their joint effort to extract the sacred nectar of the Greeks, the poem contains no specific references to this particular Greek author.

The prose prologue, however, once it has dispensed with initial salutations and further praise for Charles as the patron of such Hellenic pursuits, goes on to present the life of Dionysius quite directly, and more fully than anywhere else in John's works.

We have translated from Greek into Latin the four books of the holy father Dionysius the Areopagite, bishop of Athens, which he wrote to Timothy, bishop of the Ephesians, and his ten epistles. [This is] a work, we think, very tortuous and far removed from modern sensibilities, inaccessible to many and open to few, not only because of its antiquity but also because of the height of its celestial mysteries. Now this Dionysius is held to have been the disciple and assistant of the Apostle Paul, by whom he was made bishop of the Athenians, whom Luke mentions in the Acts of the Apostles [17], as does Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, a man of ancient times, and also blessed Polycarp in his letter to the church of Athens, and likewise Eusebius [student] of Pamphilus in his *Ecclesiastical History*, and also even Pope Saint Gregory in his homily where he briefly expounds the orders of the angels. Not the aforementioned men but others of modern time assert, as far as his life-story attests having been handed down by trustworthy men, that this same man came to Rome in the time of Pope Clement, namely the successor to the Apostle Peter, and was sent by him to the land of the Gauls for the sake of preaching the Gospel, and was crowned with the glory of martyrdom in Paris, along with his most blessed companions, namely, Rusticus and Eleutherius.<sup>16</sup>

15. "Hanc libam sacro Graecorum nectare fartam/Advena Iohannes spondo meo Karolo." *Carmina*, ed. Herren, no. 20.1-2, p. 108; ed. Traube, no. VII.1 1-2, p. 547. This and other translations of the poems will be cited from the Herren edition, even where questions can be raised about the translation, as in the choice of the term "cake" for *libam*.

16. PL 122: 1031D-1032B; MGH *Epistolae* 6, no. 14, p. 159: libros quattuor sancti patris Dionysii Areopagitae, episcopi Athenarum, quos scripsit ad Timotheum, episcopum Ephesiorum, et decem epistolas ejusdem de Graeco in Latinum



This extraordinary passage bristles with fascinating details, such as the juxtaposition of these particular “ancient” sources to attest to the Athenian history with the more recent and anonymous tradition in support of the Parisian story. Specific aspects of the question of Eriugena’s perspective on Dionysius will be investigated in the order suggested by the passage itself, namely, first Athens and then Paris. Other texts, especially from John’s poetic output, will be integrated into our exposition, but this portion of the prologue to the Dionysian corpus nicely poses the two basic questions: what did John say about Dionysius as the Areopagite and bishop of Athens, and what did he think of the identification of this Dionysius with the Denis of Paris, the missionary martyr buried at the Abbey of Saint-Denis?

*Dionysius the Areopagite and Bishop of Athens*

It may seem superfluous to examine Eriugena’s comments about his author as the first-century Areopagite, much less to raise the modern and apparently anachronistic question of *Pseudo-Dionysius*. Even though the question of authorial authenticity was raised at the time of the initial reception of the Dionysian corpus in the sixth century, was it not an established and unquestioned tradition in John’s time that these writings were indeed the work of the first-century Areopagite? After all, Eriugena’s own first statement about Dionysius itemizes all the traditional features of first-century authorship: the holy father, Dionysius the Areopagite, bishop of Athens, responding to Timothy, bishop of the Ephesians, with some works that are difficult in part because of their

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transtulimus, opus valde, ut opinamur, anfractuosum, longeque a modernis sensibus remotum, multis invium, paucis apertum, non solum propter antiquitatem, verum etiam caelestium altitudinem mysteriorum. Fertur namque praefatus Dionysius fuisse discipulus atque adjutor Pauli apostoli, a quo Atheniensium constitutus est episcopus, cujus Lucas commemorat in Actibus apostolorum, et Dionysius, episcopus Corinthi, vir antiquus, beatus quoque Polycarpus in epistola ad ecclesiam Athenarum, Eusebius item Pamphili in ecclesiastica historia, nec non etiam sanctus Papa Gregorius in homelia sua, ubi breviter angelorum ordines exposuit. Hunc eundem quoque non praefati viri, sed alii moderni temporis asserunt, quantum vita ejus a fidelibus viris tradita testatur, temporibus Papae Clementis, successoris videlicet Petri apostoli, Romam venisse, et ab eo praedicandi Evangelii gratia in partes Galliarum directum fuisse, et Parisii martyrii gloria coronatum fuisse cum beatissimis suis consortibus, Rustico scilicet atque Eleutherio.

See the appendix for annotations to this prologue, including sources for the references to Eusebius and others.

antiquity. Nevertheless, the question of authorship should be raised, not only on the general principle that doubts about Dionysian authenticity also arose in the ninth century,<sup>17</sup> but also because of the way John himself sometimes commented on the life of Dionysius.

In his overview of medieval perspectives on Dionysian authenticity, from Hilduin to Lorenzo Valla, David Luscombe credits Eriugena with “touches of a scholar’s caution,” specifically in the prologue quoted above.<sup>18</sup> Echoing Gregory the Great, John remarks that this Dionysius “is held” (*fertur*) to have been the disciple of Paul, who ordained him bishop of the Athenians. Does such a wording indicate that John himself is not convinced of the traditional identification? By itself, this one word is not decisive, but Luscombe’s observation at least raises the question as we look at the rest of John’s comments on Dionysius. The prologue *Valde quidem admiranda* did not end its biographical discussion with the paragraph cited above, but went on to provide more detail about the early life and literary career of this author.

Therefore, Saint Dionysius, as we said before, the Areopagite named from the place of Mars (for war is called Ares by the Greeks), was educated in the studies of the Academy from the first flowers of his youth, and was then stirred by the divine and ineffable miracle of the solar eclipse which took place when our Lord Jesus Christ was fastened to the crossbar of the cross. For, as he mentions in one of his letters, when he was near Heliopolis together with Polycarp the bishop and the others who were there at that time, as arranged by divine providence, he saw that the moon came over the sun in a marvelous way, and because of this the sun was eclipsed. And soon, he followed that most holy man, the disciple of the Apostles, namely Bishop Hierotheus, whom he mentioned in the third book of this work and called him his venerable master, whom he did not hesitate to prefer with respect to theology over the other co-bishops of that time after the Apostles. With him and with many other saints gathered together, he contemplated Christ bodily after the resurrection; also present there, as he says, were James the brother of the Lord and Peter, the highest of the Apostles. Urged on by men of such stature and number, and illuminated by the

17. At least in one report by Photios, *The Library*, trans. J.H. Freese (London: S.P.C.K., 1920), p. 17; PG 103: 44-45; summarized in Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary*, p. 41 n12.

18. David Luscombe, “Denis the Pseudo-Areopagite in the Middle Ages from Hilduin to Lorenzo Valla,” *Fälschungen im Mittelalter* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1988), p. 144.

mysteries of the divine scriptures, he wrote these books at the encouragement and request of Saint Timothy, and others the names of which [books] he often declares in the course of this work, and whose doctrine he briefly indicates.<sup>19</sup>

This narrative about Dionysius also contains several significant features, such as Eriugena's understanding that it was Christ's body, not Mary's, which was mentioned in *The Divine Names* (3.2, 681C). But with its references to the Academy, the eclipse, Hierotheus, and Timothy, this account flows smoothly on to the introduction of the individual books of the Dionysian corpus that concludes the prologue without any hint of reservation over the Athenian identity of the author. The emphasis on Hierotheus is significant, especially given the absence here of Saint Paul, as we shall see. But Eriugena gives no room for any doubt about the identity of Dionysius as the first-century Areopagite.

Similarly, no doubts about Dionysius' Athenian identity can be found anywhere in the entire *Periphyseon*, from its opening pages where the very first author named as a source is "Dionysius the Areopagite," through the many quick references to the "father" or to "Saint Dionysius," on to the single full-fledged identification: "the highest theologian, Dionysius the Areopagite, most famous Bishop of Athens."<sup>20</sup> John's major work thus cites Dionysius often, and always with the greatest respect and deference, as befits a father from the apostolic age.

19. PL 122: 1032D–1033B: Sanctus ergo Dionysius, ut praediximus, Areopagita, ex vico videlicet Martis denominatus—Ares namque a Graecis bellum vocatur—primis juventutis suae floribus academiae studiis eruditus, deinde divino atque ineffabili miraculo solaris eclipseos, quae facta est confixo Domino nostro Jesu Christo crucis patibulo, commotus—ipse siquidem, ut in quadam suarum epistolarum commemorat, dum esset juxta Heliopolim cum Polycarpo episcopo ceterisque, qui tunc aderant, divina procurante providentia mirabilem in modum conspexerat lunam soli subeuntem, ac per hoc solem defecisse—moxque sanctissimum virum, apostolorum discipulum, Ierotheum videlicet episcopum, secutus, cujus in tertio hujus operis libro memoriam facit, eundemque magistrum suum venerabilem nominat, ceterisque tunc temporis coepiscopis post apostolos in theologia praefere non dubitat, cum quo multisque aliis sanctis in unum convenientibus Christum post resurrectionem corporaliter est contemplatus, aderantque ibi, ut ipse ait, Jacobus, frater Domini, et Petrus, vertex apostolorum—talibus ac tantis admonitus, divinarumque Scripturarum mysteriis illuminatus, scripsit hos libros, hortante ac postulante sancto Timotheo, aliosque [MGH], quorum nomina in processu hujus operis saepissime declarat, doctrinamque breviter insinuat.

20. *Periphyseon* III 1061-1062, p. 38 (644B); trans. Sheldon-Williams, p. 263: summi theologi Ariopagitae Dionysii praeclarissimi Athenarum episcopi.

Turning to Eriugena's commentary on *The Celestial Hierarchy*, we find immediate and decisive confirmation for this identification. Our author is explicitly identified at the outset as "holy Dionysius the Areopagite" and "the blessed Dionysius, bishop of Athens."<sup>21</sup> In these texts, others yet to be cited, and the dozens of further occasions when Dionysius is named, there is no hesitation whatsoever about the identification of the author as the Areopagite, the first-century Athenian converted by Saint Paul. Apostolic authority is assumed throughout, with numerous casual references and a few substantive applications to the passage at hand, as we shall see below. And yet, the *Expositiones* also provided Luscombe with a second occasion to point out that there is something cautious about Eriugena's perspective on Dionysius in Athens. In *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter six, Dionysius refers to his own "sacred initiator" or "holy perfector." John comments:

His divine and holy perfector, he says, is Hierotheus, the theologian bishop who first perfected him, a convert to faith in Christ, in the knowledge of divine things, whom he glorifies with fuller praises in the book *On the Divine Names*; or rather the Apostle Paul, who made him bishop, as they say, of Athens, to whose mysterious teachings he always paid heed, as the evangelist Luke bears witness.<sup>22</sup>

The phrase "as they say" is a second and more substantial indication of some caution by Eriugena regarding the Dionysian biography, but on what point, specifically? The location of the phrase is crucial: *vel certe Paulum apostolum, qui eum Athenarum, ut aiunt, perfecit episcopum.*<sup>23</sup> Perhaps John meant to signal some qualification not on the general identification of Dionysius as the Areopagite, but rather on a specific feature of that identification, namely, the claim that Saint Paul ordained him as the first bishop of Athens. In this light, Eriugena's wording back in the prologue

21. Exp 1.1, p. 1: Sancti Dionysii Areopagite, and Exp 1.138-139, p. 4: Beatus ... Dionysius, Athenarum episcopus. Citing this text, E. Jeaneau says, "Naturellement, Érigène admet que Denys fut évêque d'Athènes," "L'Abbaye de Saint-Denis introductrice de Denys en occident," in *Denys L'Aréopagite et sa postérité en orient et en occident*, ed. Ysabel de Andia (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1977), p. 372 n45.

22. Exp 6.93-100, p. 89: Diuinum autem suum et sanctum perfectorem dicit Ierotheum episcopum theologum, qui primo eum ad fidem Christi conuersum in diuinarum rerum cognitione perfecit, quem in libro *De diuinis nominibus* amplissimis laudibus glorificat; uel certe Paulum apostolum, qui eum Athenarum, ut aiunt, perfecit episcopum, cuius mysticis dogmatibus, teste Luca euangelista, semper auscultabat.

23. Exp 6.98, p. 89.

(the single word *fertur*) may indicate the same specific note of caution: “Now this Dionysius *is held* to have been the disciple and assistant of the Apostle Paul, by whom he was made bishop of the Athenians.” In both texts the qualifications (“as they say” and “is held”) seem linked to the specific question of Dionysius’ relationship to Saint Paul, and particularly regarding becoming the bishop of Athens. There is yet another text along these lines, not mentioned by Luscombe. In the poem *Lumine sidereo* which closes the prefatory material introducing the Latin translation of Dionysius, John expresses metrically much of the same biographical material first presented in prose: the brilliant Athenian, converted by the eclipse, follows Hierotheus. At this point, however, Saint Paul now enters the narrative after Hierotheus:

For they say that Paul, who spread Christ to the world,  
imposed his blessed hands upon him.<sup>24</sup>

Again, the qualification (*ferunt*, they say) accompanies the assertion that Saint Paul himself ordained Dionysius. Although this wording could simply be a poetic device to suit the narration or meter (even though there seem to be no other such uses anywhere else in John’s poetry), it confirms the pattern of the other two qualifications. It seems that Eriugena does show a “scholar’s caution,” as Luscombe put it, in these three related texts, but always about the same point, namely, Paul’s ordination of Dionysius, and not on the general identification of Dionysius as the Areopagite of Acts 17 and even as bishop of Athens. But why?

The traditional identification of Dionysius, the one passed on by Dionysius of Corinth and Eusebius, was that Saint Paul ordained him as the first bishop of Athens. Eriugena reports this tradition with the qualifications mentioned, and without ever calling Dionysius the *first* bishop of Athens. Having read the Dionysian writings very carefully, he knows that a full biographical narrative must also account for Hierotheus, who figures so prominently there as Dionysius’ master and teacher but who is completely absent in the reports by Eusebius and others. Both in the prologue and also when he puzzles over this question in the *Expositiones*, Eriugena refers to Hierotheus as a bishop. This may have raised the doubts and caused the caution Luscombe noted: Dionysius could have had two masters and teachers, but if the local one, Hierotheus, was a bishop, should not he rather than Dionysius be considered the first

24. “Namque ferunt Paulum, qui Christum sparsit in orbem/Ipsi felices imposuisse manus.” *Carmina*, ed. Herren, no. 21.11-12, p. 110; ed. Traube, no. VII.11 11-12, p. 548.

bishop of Athens?<sup>25</sup> And if so, should not he rather than Paul have ordained Dionysius as bishop in his turn? This perspective, which became in fact the Byzantine tradition, could have led to John's qualifying expressions. The ambiguity over Hierotheus seems the likely explanation for the specificity of Eriugena's reservations about the Dionysian career in Athens, given his sweeping and unambiguous affirmations about the Areopagite's identity in general.

*Denis the Missionary and Martyr of Paris*

Did Eriugena believe that Dionysius left Athens for Rome, whence he was sent by the pope to Gaul as a missionary, and ended his life as a Parisian martyr, buried at the Abbey of Saint-Denis? John's patron, King Charles the Bald, was heavily involved with this Abbey and its patron saint. At the time of his birth, Charles was dedicated to Saint Denis by his father Louis the Pious; he often visited and bestowed gifts on the Abbey, and spent the last decade of his life as abbot of this same house. Back in 834 or so, Louis had asked the Abbot Hilduin to compile a life of Denis, using all available sources, such as an earlier *Vita* and the Dionysian writings themselves that had recently been given to the King, deposited in the Abbey, and translated into Latin under Hilduin's supervision. Hilduin's *Post beatam ac salutiferam*, tracing the story of Dionysius from Athens to Rome to Paris, became immensely influential and looms in the background of Eriugena's remarks a generation later.

In contrast to Eriugena's relatively frequent and detailed observations about Dionysius in Athens, the prologue shows more than just "touches" of caution about Dionysius in Gaul. John's reservations pertain not just to some specific detail but to the entire topic. As quoted above, John went on from the ancient sources about Dionysius in Athens to the more recent narrative of local and royal interest.

Not the aforementioned men but others of modern time assert, as far as his life-story attests having been handed down by trustworthy men, that this same man came to Rome in the time of Pope Clement, namely the successor to the Apostle Peter, and was sent by him to the land of the Gauls for the sake of preaching the Gospel, and was crowned with the

25. On this point, see Peter Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), p. 305.

glory of martyrdom in Paris, along with his most blessed companions, namely, Rusticus and Eleutherius.<sup>26</sup>

Eriugena's intriguing way of introducing the material about Dionysius in Rome and Paris includes two complications, one regarding a variant reading in his text and the other regarding his knowledge of the prior Life, or rather Lives, of Denis. At issue first of all is the phrase "not the aforementioned men but others of modern time" (*quoque non praefati viri, sed alii moderni temporis*). In the MGH edition, Dummler follows one manuscript tradition, notably F or Ph from the tenth century, which does not include this phrase. Having named Luke, Dionysius of Corinth, Polycarp, Eusebius and Pope Gregory in the previous sentence, Dummler's text has Eriugena say, "they assert ... that this same man came to Rome ... and was sent ... to the land of the Gauls." The difficulty here is that these authors asserted nothing of the kind, leaving this reading to imply falsely that there is general patristic support for the second and Gallic phase of the life of Dionysius. Floss, the editor of the *Patrologia Latina* edition, on the other hand, followed another pair of manuscripts (M, eleventh century and C, twelfth century) which do include this phrase, thus distinguishing sharply between the ancient sources for Dionysius in Athens and those authors "of modern times" who wrote about Dionysius in Rome and Paris. On external grounds, both readings have strong manuscript support, leaving the decision to rest on internal considerations. It is much more plausible that a scribe left out this qualifying phrase rather than that some later author with a stronger and more critical grasp of the sources than Eriugena added it.<sup>27</sup> It is perfectly consistent with John's overall treatment of the subject of Dionysius in Paris that he should make such a qualification about the recent sources.

Secondly, what Eriugena says about these recent authors is also crucial. They "assert, as far as his life-story attests having been handed down by trustworthy men," that Dionysius came to Rome, etc. John's remarks here pertain to the question of Hilduin and Hilduin's sources. Since he clearly used the same Greek manuscript of the corpus, the one housed at Saint-Denis, it has been natural to assume that Eriugena read and knew Hilduin's work, not

26. See above p. 2 and n4.

27. Regarding the words in this particular phrase, omitted by Dummler, Jeanneau ("L'Abbaye," p. 372) says, "A priori, on ne voit pas pourquoi ils ne seraient pas authentiques."

only profiting from the earlier translation of the Dionysian texts, but also referring here to Hilduin's famous life of Denis, *Post beatam ac salutiferam*. Although there seems to be no textual evidence to support this assumption, at least not the usual kind of verbal borrowings, since Eriugena in fact has so little to say about the life of Dionysius and all of it apparently original, a different, and striking, form of hard evidence proves that Eriugena did in fact read Hilduin's work on Denis. John's own handwriting has been convincingly identified. What is even more remarkable for our present inquiry is that E. Jauneau, the leading specialist in Eriugena's autograph, has identified this very hand (known as 11) in the margin of a manuscript of Hilduin's *Vita*, characteristically adding Greek words where appropriate!<sup>28</sup> Therefore, that John read and knew Hilduin's work is not merely a reasonable assumption but an objective fact.

In this light, what Eriugena has to say about Dionysian hagiography confirms the current perspective on Hilduin's work. Once thought to have invented the legend about the Areopagite dying in Paris by conflating the Athenian biography of Dionysius with the well-established tradition about a Denis who was the first bishop of Paris, Hilduin is more recently understood instead to have inherited this conflation from his predecessors and to have popularized it in his influential work. At issue is the dating of *Post beatam et gloriosam*, a *Vita* of Denis which contains the conflated biography and many of the details popularized by Hilduin. Eriugena's wording (*vita ejus a fidelibus viris tradita*) coheres with the current view that Hilduin used an earlier *Vita*, such as the *Post beatam et gloriosam*, when writing his own Life of Denis (the *Post beatam ac salutiferam*) especially for the narrative that Dionysius went from Athens to Rome to Paris, where he was crowned with a martyr's glory.<sup>29</sup>

John's way of introducing the second and Parisian part of the Dionysian biography, namely, that it is based on the tradition of trustworthy men, seems to soften the implied reservation that this is a recent claim. There are no further comments on Dionysius and Paris to confirm this impression, however. When the prologue does go on to give more biographical detail, it confines itself to Athens. This seems entirely natural to the narrative, since the prologue culminates with the works Dionysius wrote to Timothy, presumably from Athens, giving a synopsis of each.

28. E. Jauneau and P.E. Dutton, *The Autograph of Eriugena*, *Corpus Christianorum Autographa Medii Aevi* 3: 40-41 and plate 85.

29. See, for example, Michael Lapidge, "The Lost 'Passio Metrica S. Dionysii' by Hilduin of Saint-Denis," *Mittelaltinisches Jahrbuch* 22 (1987): 56-79.



Similarly, in all of the *Periphyseon*, there is no mention of a Parisian connection in the few biographical details provided. The *Expositiones* offer a few more texts pertinent to the life of Dionysius but here too the references pertain to Athens only, never to Rome or Paris. It is true that there are not very many such biographical references, since John was much more interested in the writings than in the writer. Nevertheless, it is at least somewhat suggestive that never once in the *Periphyseon* or in the *Expositiones* did John make any allusion to any aspect of the Western Dionysian narrative, such as a missionary journey or a martyr's fate. There is, however, another important source for Dionysian biography in Eriugena's works, namely, the poetry.

John's many poems have often been neglected as sources for his thought, but the thorough and appreciative edition by Michael Herren can contribute greatly to any such inquiry, including the question of Eriugena's understanding of the career of Dionysius.<sup>30</sup> John's overall poetic output must be understood in the context of the court of Charles the Bald, for we are dealing here, as Paul Dutton puts it, with "Eriugena, the Royal Poet."<sup>31</sup> Many of the poems, such as those discussed here, are explicitly addressed to the royal patron, and were therefore composed with that context and audience in mind. Charles, as mentioned above, was particularly devoted to his patron saint, Dionysius, and to the Abbey of Saint-Denis, where he would frequently spend long Easter holidays as well as occasional visits during the October commemorations of the saint himself. In this, Charles was following the path set for him in childhood by his father, since Louis the Pious had shown a particular devotion to the martyr saint and had dedicated his son to him. Both Louis and Charles showered gifts and visits upon the Abbey of Saint-Denis, and Charles even ended his royal career there as the lay abbot, from 867 until his death in 877. The royal Carolingian devotion to Saint Denis and to the Abbey that housed his remains is directly pertinent to the interpretation of John's poetic references to Dionysius. The poems were intended for a context in which the Parisian career of Dionysius the Areopagite was not only assumed but indeed central to the spiritual self-understanding of the king himself.

Dionysius appears in only two (or three) of John's two dozen poems, but these few references are significant. The poem *Graculus Indaeus* praises

30. See especially Herren's notes to *Hanc libam* and *Lumine sidereo*, *Carmina*, pp. 152-153.

31. Paul E. Dutton, "Eriugena the Royal Poet," in *Jean Scot Écrivain*, ed. G.-H. Allard (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1986), pp. 51-80.

Charles in his dual role as “theologian and king” and then intercedes for Charles directly with Saint Dionysius himself. It may even have been composed when Charles assumed the lay abbacy of Saint-Denis. As the poem addresses the saint, the poet is also addressing the king.

O Dionysius, bishop of Athens, companion of Paul,  
Having a martyr’s distinction, revered by all of Gaul,

From your high seat of celestial life cast down your gaze  
Upon the homage of Charles your son who decorates  
Your holy relics and temple with mighty works,  
With gold and gems that flash like fire.  
Your altars are redolent with incense everywhere.<sup>32</sup>

The initial statement that the *Praesul ab Athenis* and comrade of Paul is the famous martyr revered by all Gaul provides a clear identification of the Areopagite from Athens (not just *of* Athens, as in Herren’s translation) with the missionary bishop of Paris. This part of the poem is addressed to the patron saint of that very house where a service seems to be taking place, giving Charles some credit for the beauty of the occasion, perhaps because of a specific gift to the Abbey church. In this poem, within its context, Eriugena’s wording coheres with the understanding of the Parisian Dionysian biography shared by the king, the court and the Abbey.<sup>33</sup>

32. *Carmina*, ed. Herren, no. 10.12-18, pp. 96-97; ed. Traube, no. IV.ii 12-18, p. 545:

Praesul ab Athenis Dionysi CYMMAXE Pauli  
Inclyte martyrio, cui servit Gallia tota,  
Prospice caelestis vitae de sedibus altis  
Vota tui TEKVI Karoli <tua> AETHYVA sancta  
Ornantis gratamque tuam magnalibus aedem,  
Instar flammaram gemmis flagrantibus auro,  
Undique turicremis redolent altaria fumis.

33. This poetic affirmation of Dionysius as the martyr of Paris may find a second expression in a poem written entirely in awkward Greek, although the attribution is ambiguous. *Carmina*, ed. Herren, App. 8, pp. 126-127; ed. Traube, VI 1-3, p. 546. See also Jauneau, “L’Abbaye,” pp. 369-370:

Today, O prudent and revered ruler, Charles,  
See how the martyr Dionysius shines brightly from on high,  
Whom God glorifies from heaven as you do on earth.  
(Semeron, autokrator fronimos kai timie Karle,  
Martyros ypelos lampei dyonisos, idoy,  
On theos oyranonen epiges kai soy, megalinay.)

Although John employs, at least this once, the conventional perspective on Dionysius as the local saint, this reference must be contrasted with his studied silence on the subject everywhere else. Is it a form of poetic license, given the royal expectation, which John himself did not believe? His qualifications on the Areopagite's mission to Paris in the prologue and his silence on the topic everywhere except in this poem would support such speculation. It remains to examine the single most important poem on the Dionysian biography, the *Lumine sidereo*.

As we have seen, the prose prologue provided the bulk of the material for our consideration of John's understanding of the life of Dionysius. The opening statement about Athens and Paris contained the qualification about sources as discussed above; the rest of the prologue rehearsed the early history of Dionysius just up to the point of his writing these works for Timothy. The works themselves are then introduced and the prose prologue ends with a summary of the fourth and last book, *The Mystical Theology*. Considering that this prologue is a letter of dedication to his patron, King Charles, such minimal reference to the Parisian Denis is striking. But the poem that concludes John's prefatory remarks, *Lumine sidereo*, is another review of the Dionysian biography, starting with the conversion and moving on to the reference to Saint Paul already mentioned. Here the presentation of Dionysius is also striking for what John does not say, even to King Charles, and for what he says instead.

The poetic narration of Dionysius' career starts naturally enough with the eclipse; then Hierotheus plays his part, and Dionysius is reborn and becomes the teacher of the Athenians. Only at this point in the poem does Saint Paul make an appearance ("For they say that Paul ... imposed his blessed hands upon him"). But the role of Saint Paul is crucial for what comes next, and it is not a trip to Paris.

Thereafter following Paul, he flew above the lofty stars  
of the Empyrium and gazes upon the third kingdom of heaven.  
And there he sees the Seraphim in the first rank and the holy Cherubim,  
...<sup>34</sup>

34. *Carmina*, ed. Herren, no. 21.15-17, p. 110; ed. Traube, no. VII.ii 15-17, p. 548:

Alta dehinc volitans Paulum super astra secutus  
Empyrii caeli tertia regna videt.  
Suspicit et Seraphym primos sanctosque Cherubym ...

After itemizing the remaining celestial orders, e.g., the Thrones, the Principalities and Powers, the Archangels and Angels, John concludes:

The mystical sayings of the aforesaid father  
teach that these ranks are bounded by a limit of nine.<sup>35</sup>

This leads smoothly into the opening of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, the first work of the corpus.

One of Michael Herren's strongest conclusions about Eriugena's poetry concerns the care evident in the conceptual structure of the poems, especially in the sequence of topics covered. Herren does not cite this poem, but it too illustrates Eriugena's brilliance in structuring a poem, within the context of the Carolingian court's expectations about the Parisian Denis. How can John start in Athens and not end in Paris, especially when his audience of one is King Charles? By referring to Saint Paul's journey to the third heaven, John has Dionysius following the Apostle on a celestial journey which eclipses the earthly one. Dionysius does indeed travel beyond Athens, not to Paris, but to paradise. Thus armed with a special vision, the Areopagite introduces the nine ranks of angels, which is the subject of the first treatise, *The Celestial Hierarchy*. Choosing this sequence of topics for the structure of his poem, Eriugena has again avoided the Dionysian biography after Athens, and brilliantly so. In this respect, John gave a new and certainly unintended meaning to Hilduin's pun about Paris and paradise, for Dionysius' higher destination is "*non Parisiaco, sed paradisiaco.*"<sup>36</sup>

This explanation, that Eriugena, skeptical about the tradition identifying the Athenian Areopagite with the Parisian martyr, cleverly avoided ending the narrative in Paris because he doubted that claim as a whole, is admittedly without explicit evidence. It is based in part on the eloquence of silence in the face of royal expectations, and on the hypothesis that Eriugena may have resorted to poetic license to affirm what the king believed about his patron saint. On balance, it would seem more reasonable to conclude that Eriugena did not believe that the Areopagite ever came to Paris, rather than to argue that he believed it and yet kept silent about it even when recounting the

35. *Carmina*, ed. Herren, no. 21.23-24, p. 110; ed. Traube, no. VII.ii 23-24, p. 548:

Hos igitur numeros terno ter limite septos  
Praedicti patris mystica dicta docent.

36. Hilduin, MGH *Epistolae* 5, no. 20, c. 12.22-23, p. 333.

Dionysian biography to the king himself, not just once but several times. In any case, this poetic reference to the biblical “third heaven” and the application to the Dionysian triple triad of angels lead us to the issue of the intersection of the writer’s biography and the writings themselves, especially *The Celestial Hierarchy*.

#### *Biography and Exposition*

Beyond the questions of Dionysius’ identity—whether apostolic Athenian or missionary martyr or both—there is another dimension to Eriugena’s scattered biographical comments about his author. As just noted in *Lumine sidereo*, Eriugena could apply some aspect of the Areopagite’s career to the exposition of his writings. But the reverse could also happen. Occasionally a passage, especially in *The Celestial Hierarchy*, could prompt a discussion about the author himself. In this section, we consider John’s overall characterization of Dionysius in the course of his commentary on *The Celestial Hierarchy*.

The opening chapter of John’s comments on the Dionysian treatise signals how he refers to his author in general, in terms which are mostly routine. In the first line he simply names “holy Dionysius the Areopagite,” then plunges into exposition of the title and opening sentence of the chapter. This material so engrosses him that it is not until several pages later that he adds a reference to “blessed Dionysius, bishop of Athens.”<sup>37</sup> Still later, he praises the words of “the great theologian Dionysius.”<sup>38</sup> Eriugena routinely calls the blessed Dionysius a “theologian” and “father,” and some of these references seem to give the Areopagite pride of place before other theologians and fathers.<sup>39</sup> Phrases like these are not confined to the *Expositiones*. Typical of the many such references in the *Periphyseon* is the comment, “For we accept and religiously believe and use the

37. Exp 1.138-139, p. 4: *Beatus autem Dionysius, Athenarum episcopus.*

38. Exp 1.584-585, p. 17: *magni theologi Dionysii*; the reference to “theologian” in 1.135 is not to Dionysius but rather to the Apostle James, whose epistle (Jas 1.17) is cited at the outset of the *Celestial Hierarchy*.

39. For fuller discussions of Dionysius as an authority, relative to other authorities, see Goulven Madec, “Jean Scot et ses auteurs,” in *Jean Scot Écrivain*, ed. G.-H. Allard, pp. 143-186; and Giulio d’Onofrio, “The *Concordia* of Augustine and Dionysius: Toward a Hermeneutic of the Disagreement of Patristic Sources in John the Scot’s *Periphyseon*” in *Eriugena: East and West*, ed. B. McGinn and W. Otten (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 115-140. For more on the Dionysian texts and other sources, see Chapter IV below.

authority of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite and other Fathers ...”<sup>40</sup> Only one of the eighty-some namings of Dionysius in the *Periphyseon* adds any biographical information to this routine praise: “the great Dionysius the Areopagite ... the highest theologian, Dionysius the Areopagite, most famous Bishop of Athens.”<sup>41</sup>

In the *Expositiones*, Dionysius is called “this highest theologian”<sup>42</sup> and is given other such titles, which are laudatory but minimally biographical. There are a few references that are more revealing, but only a few. The particularities of the Dionysian style of writing once prompted from John this remark: “Often he repeats the praises of the celestial essences by the same arguments, but with the words eloquently changed according to rhetorical usage, since he was not only a theologian but also a supreme rhetorician.”<sup>43</sup> John often praises the eloquence and subtlety of the Greek writings, but only here in this one passage does he draw a conclusion about the writer himself, that he was a *summus rhetor*. Ironically, however, as we shall see in the next chapter, the use of repetition that John here singles out for praise was not an example of the author’s rhetorical skills but in fact the result of scribal error.<sup>44</sup>

Of the Dionysian texts with some biographical import, John shows the most interest in the explicit or implicit references to Hierotheus.<sup>45</sup>

40. *Periphyseon* II 2473-2475, p. 102 (600A); trans. Sheldon-Williams, p. 209: et religiose credimus et sancti Dionysii Ariopagitae aliorumque patrum sanissima auctoritate utentes approbamus. Cf. III 371-373, p. 15 (627C): nec absque sanctorum patrum auctoritate, et maxime Ariopagitae Dionysii; III 1156-1158, p. 41 (646C): et hoc ex uerbis praedicti patris Dionysii aliorumque potest approbari. Not all references are merely stock epithets, however. He is also called “the industrious investigator of divine providence” (diuinae prouidentiae solers inuestigator, III 133-134, p. 7 [622B]; trans. Sheldon-Williams, p. 237) and once “the great and divine revealer” (magno et diuino manifestatori, III 944, p. 34 [641C]; trans. Sheldon-Williams, p. 260).

41. *Periphyseon* III 1047-1048, 1067-1068, p. 38 (644B); trans. Sheldon-Williams, p. 263: magnus Dionysius Ariopagita ... summi theologi Ariopagitae Dionysii, praeclarissimi Athenarum episcopi. See above p. 5 and n8.

42. Exp 4.189, p. 70: summus iste theologus.

43. Exp 4.269-272, p. 72: Sepe repetit celestium essentiarum laudes eisdem rationibus, mutatis tamen copiose uerbis usu rhetorico, quoniam non solum theologus erat, uerum etiam et summus rhetor.

44. See below, p. 32.

45. John once links Dionysius to Jerome, but only by way of contrasting interpretations of Daniel 7. “Thus blessed Jerome translated; holy Dionysius,

When Dionysius credits his “sacred initiator” in chapter six with the triadic arrangement of the celestial orders, John the Scot observes that this term could apply to Bishop Hierotheus or to Saint Paul.<sup>46</sup> Eriugena does not indicate which person is meant here, until Dionysius later refers to this initiator by yet another title. At that, John remarks, “Here he undoubtedly reveals who his divine and holy perfector is, namely, Paul the Apostle, whom he often names by such a name as ‘kathegemon,’ that is, leader or master.”<sup>47</sup> From the earlier comment we again see John recognizing the importance of Hierotheus, especially for Dionysius’ completion in the faith, even if Saint Paul eventually gets the credit for the triadic arrangement of angels.

Later in the treatise, Dionysius credits an insight about Isaiah’s encounter with the Seraphim to an unnamed source, called only his “teacher.” Nevertheless, Eriugena links this text to the earlier discussion.

Who he is, we do not know. We could argue, however, that it is either the Apostle Paul himself, whose disciple he was, or else Hierotheus, whom he exalted with great praises in his book *On the Divine Names*. Whoever he was who educated such a great man, I would not doubt that he was wise.<sup>48</sup>

Beyond this double reference to Hierotheus, John’s comments regarding Dionysius himself, as opposed to his texts, are minimal. For example, he refers to Timothy a half dozen times, reminding his readers that when Dionysius writes in the second person, saying “you,” he means Timothy, even where that proper name does not appear in the treatise itself.<sup>49</sup> One such text occurs toward the end of chapter two, where Dionysius said, “And you, my child, must ...” To this Eriugena says, “At the end of this whole chapter, he addresses Timothy, bishop of Ephesus, or indeed all those who will be readers of this speech.”<sup>50</sup> Eriugena shows no concern about Dionysius’

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however, is following an ancient tradition” (Exp 14.31-33, p. 185).

46. See p. 6 and n10 above.

47. Exp 6.123-126, p. 90: Hic incunctanter aperit quis est diuinus suus sanctusque perfector: Paulus uidelicet apostolus, quem sepiissime tali nomine appellat ΚΑΘΗΓΕΜΩΝ, hoc est dux uel magister.

48. Exp 13.633-638, p. 183: Quis autem ille, ignoramus; argumentamur tamen aut ipsum Paulum apostolum, cuius erat discipulus, aut Ierotheum, quem in libro *De diuinis nominibus* magnis laudibus exaltat. Quisquis autem fuerit, qui tantum uirum edocuit, sapientem fuisse non dubitarim.

49. Exp 2.1275, p. 55 (discussed more fully shortly); Exp 4.661-662, p. 81; Exp 9.490, p. 147; Exp 13.638, p. 183; and Exp 15.9 and 12, p. 187.

50. Exp 2.1274-1276, p. 55: In fine uero totius capituli, Timotheum, episcopum

designation of Timothy as his “child,” which had presented a problem for the sixth-century commentator John of Scythopolis: if Timothy was the Areopagite’s predecessor as a convert, he was presumably his elder. Of the several possible answers to this question, John of Scythopolis preferred the view that Dionysius, though newer in the faith, was actually the elder in years and in secular or philosophical learning, which is why Timothy consulted him in the first place.<sup>51</sup>

There are several passages in *The Celestial Hierarchy* that were of biographical interest to John of Scythopolis in his *Scholia* but not to John the Scot in his *Expositiones*. Even the title “Areopagite” interested the scholiast more than the expositor. Beyond its general meaning, which both commentators cover in their prologues, a specific application to Dionysius comes up in a scholion on *The Celestial Hierarchy* in which John of Scythopolis remarks that Dionysius, like Justin the Philosopher, was not embarrassed to use the title that he had before his conversion.<sup>52</sup> But the title held no such interest for Eriugena. When Dionysius refers to “paternally-transmitted enlightenment,” John of Scythopolis took it as a reference to church fathers, and pointed out that the Areopagite did not mean his ancestors but his teachers, “for he was a convert from among the Greeks.”<sup>53</sup> Eriugena, on the other hand, interprets it (more accurately) as a reference to divine enlightenment transmitted by God the Father.<sup>54</sup> More significantly, when John of Scythopolis read that Dionysius acknowledged instruction received from those who are holy in divine things, he gave it a personal application: “Note that priests transmitted these things to the great Dionysius.”<sup>55</sup> Eriugena said something similar, but without any personal application to Dionysius himself: “What he said before, he confirms through the testimony of the high priests.”<sup>56</sup> Most striking along these lines is the biographical

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Ephesi, uel certe omnes qui hunc sermonem lecturi forent, alloquitur.

51. *Scholia* 48.7 on 16.19 (CH 2.5, 145C); trans. Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis*, p. 154.

52. *Scholia* 113.10 on 59.10 (CH 15.9, 340B); trans. Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis*, p. 168. In the Syriac version of the scholia, this comment is attached to the opening of the treatise, where the title included the term “Areopagite.”

53. *Scholia* 32.2 on 7.12 (CH 1.2, 121A); trans. Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis*, p. 149.

54. Exp 1.225-228, p. 7.

55. *Scholia* 80.7 on 34.5 (CH 8.2, 240C); trans. Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis*, p. 164.

56. Exp 8.195, p. 123: Quod predixit, per summorum sacerdotum approbat tes-



emphasis that John of Scythopolis gave to a phrase which he took to mean that Dionysius came from the Gentiles (“those other nations, those peoples from whom we ourselves have come”) whereas Eriugena did not understand it to have any biographical significance at all.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting example of Eriugena’s perspectives on Dionysius based on *The Celestial Hierarchy* is the issue raised by *Lumine sidereo*. Namely, did Dionysius have some special insight into the celestial triads because of a secret oral tradition from Saint Paul, who was taken up into the third heaven? Paul’s experience is strongly invoked in one of John’s comments: “For who could deny that the Apostle was rapt up into the third heaven, plainly into the third hierarchy, where he heard ineffable words unmediatedly from God himself.”<sup>58</sup> Yet John’s interest here, typically, is not in what was specifically revealed to Paul, much less what was then passed on to Dionysius orally and secretly, but rather in the general principle that humanity can relate to God directly and unmediatedly, instead of only through the hierarchies of angels. This belief in immediacy rather than mediation, of course, meant that the authoritative writings of the great Dionysius presented Eriugena with several exegetical challenges, as we shall see below in the chapter on anthropology. But the point here is that such questions of interpretation interested him far more than the supposed biographical issue of an oral tradition about the triadic celestial realms.<sup>59</sup> Even though the *Lumine sidereo* seemed to signal a key linkage between Saint Paul’s rapture into the third heaven and the Dionysian presentation of the three triads of heavenly beings, no such linkage is made in the course of the *Expositiones* on *The Celestial Hierarchy*. The only passage which even hints at such a connection between Paul’s experience and Dionysius’ writings, via oral tradition, is in the formal finale of the *Expositiones*.

Dionysius closed *The Celestial Hierarchy* with a conventional expression of modesty, namely, that he has left out certain things about the

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timonium.

57. *Scholia* 85.6 on 38.11 (CH 9.3, 260D); Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis*, p. 164. Exp 9.412, p. 145.

58. Exp 8.480-483, p. 131: Quis enim abnuerit raptum Apostolum in tertium celum in tertiam plane ierarchiam fuisse, ubi immediate ab ipso Deo ineffabilia audiuit uerba?

59. Not that John made no use at all of the argument about a secret, oral tradition based on apostolic authority, for this was precisely his explanation for the passage which apparently and uniquely credited Melchizedek with being an apostle to the Gentiles, as a forerunner of Christ, Exp 9.454-483, pp. 146-147.

transcendent heavenly realm since he does not know everything and needs his own illuminator or “light-leader.” John characteristically offers a close paraphrase, and then this freer rendition and comment:

As if he were to say: regarding the interpretations of those images for which we do not know the transcendent understanding, we need another master who can teach us these things. He says this, I think, out of humbleness [*tapinosin*], for who is more acute than a disciple of the Apostle Paul except Paul himself, and those equal to him in the teachings of wisdom?<sup>60</sup>

John here honors the convention of authorial humility but nevertheless credits Dionysius with considerable authority as befits a disciple of Saint Paul. Yet it is a very general statement, and occurs at the routine location for such comments. Note that Eriugena did not here cite Paul’s experience of the third heaven, or the specific channel of oral tradition, or Dionysius’ uniquely triadic way of grouping the heavenly ranks. The Pauline lineage, with its justification for the Dionysian angelology, is never stressed by Eriugena, except in *Lumine sidereo*, where it resulted in the geographical diversion noted above. In fact, neither John of Scythopolis in his *Scholia* nor the original author of *The Celestial Hierarchy* himself had made very much of the relationship between Paul and Dionysius in general, much less of the specifically triadic language of the former’s third heaven and the latter’s triple trio of angelic ranks.<sup>61</sup> Thus, Eriugena’s light touch here should not be considered unusual. Nevertheless, it is typical of his low level of interest in the Dionysian biography, whether the two basic questions of identification as a sub-apostolic Athenian and a missionary martyr or the overall portrait of the personal history and

60. Exp 15.1073-1078, pp. 214-215, commenting upon CH 15 59.10-11, 340B: Ac si diceret: in interpretationibus imaginum, quarum scientiam supermundanam ignorauius, alterius magistri quid e talibus nos docere possit, indigemus. Hoc autem dixit, ut opinor, per tapinosin: quis enim Pauli apostoli discipulo acutior preter ipsum Paulum, eique equales in doctrinis sapientie?

61. In the *Scholia*, John of Scythopolis mentions oral tradition regarding the angel who comforted Christ (*Scholia* 60.1 on 23.19 [CH 4.2, 181D]) and regarding the celestial arrangement in general (*Scholia* 64.10 on 27.1 [CH 6.2, 201A]). He refers to Paul’s third heaven (*Scholia* 56.1 on 21.19 [CH 4.2, 180B]), but only once, almost in passing, and links this to the Dionysian insights, as a way of arguing, against the evidence, that the Areopagite’s “sacred initiator” must be identified as the Apostle, not Hierotheus (*Scholia* 64.4 on 26.12 [CH 6.2, 200D]), which also received Eriugena’s attention, as discussed above, p. 17).

characteristics of his author. John the philosopher-theologian was more interested in the thoughts than in the thinker, in the Dionysian writings rather than in Dionysius as the writer. When he turned to those thoughts and writings, he turned to one specific manuscript.