

*MELITO THE AUTHOR OF THE MURATORIAN
CANON.*

SCHOLARS must be grateful to the Rev. T. H. Robinson for his paper on the authorship of the ancient and enigmatic list of New Testament writings, known as the Muratorian Canon. Once more, too, we have to congratulate Dr. Rendel Harris for being a link in the chain of causes bringing within our reach fresh material for the solution of an old problem. But while sensible of the value of Mr. Robinson's paper as a contribution to the subject, I am not convinced that he has succeeded in identifying the author of what is probably the earliest orthodox New Testament Canon known to us, when he argues anew for Hippolytus, and so virtually for a date at least as late as 200 A.D.

At first sight the new point of contact between the Canon and Hippolytus, supplied by Bar Şalibi, somewhat shook my confidence in another theory of authorship which had been defining itself to my mind for some time past. Yet, on closer examination, it failed to establish Bishop Lightfoot's view as restated by Mr. Robinson, and fitted quite naturally into the theory which it is the aim of this paper to develop.

Mr. Robinson sums up his conclusions as follows :—

1. The identity of the *Chapters against Gaius* with the *Apology for the Apocalypse and Gospel of John*.¹ Incidentally we may regard it as proved that Gaius really existed.

2. The free use made by Epiphanius of the *Chapters against Gaius*.

3. The fact that the Muratorian Canon is the work of Hippolytus.

¹ The exact title in the list of Hippolytus' works on the pedestal of his statue, is *On behalf of the Gospel according to John and (the) Apocalypse*.

“These results,” he says, “may be held to be certain.” As agreeing with the first two, but holding the third to be both unproved and improbable, I have re-arranged them in an order corresponding to the cogency of the evidence. As to the fourth result, that “the Muratorian Canon stood at or near the beginning of the treatise against Gaius,” it of course depends entirely on the third, and must share its lot.

As regards Hippolytus’ authorship of the Muratorian Canon, all turns on the following parallelism, so far as it extends, which may be exhibited most clearly by juxtaposition of the statements in question.

BAR ŞALIBI.	MURATORIAN CANON.
<i>John to the Seven Churches</i>	* * *
<i>which are in Asia. . . .</i> Hippolytus says that, in writing to seven churches, he writes just as Paul wrote thirteen letters but wrote them to seven churches.	Since the blessed Apostle Paul himself, following the method (<i>ordinem</i>) of his predecessor John, writes only to seven individual churches, ¹
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Here it is seen at once that, while Hippolytus makes John write as Paul wrote, the Canon reverses the comparison and makes John’s action the model of Paul’s. Not only so; but the Canon’s way of putting the matter is obviously prior in thought. For it requires some reflection to notice that Paul’s *public* letters are in fact addressed to seven churches (his private ones are also referred to in the Canon, though not by Hippolytus as reported by Bar Şalibi); whereas John’s address to seven churches—and that

¹ De quibus (sc. Epistolis) singulis necesse est a nobis disputari, cum ipse beatus apostolus Paulus sequens prodecessoris sui Johannis ordinem non nisi nominatim septem ecclesiis scribat. . . . Una tamen per omnem orbem terrae ecclesia diffusa esse dinoscitur, et Johannes enim in Apocalypsi, licet septem ecclesiis scribat, tamen omnibus dicit.

in unity, as representing the Church generally—at once strikes the attention. These observations suggest that Hippolytus is adapting an earlier comparison of the procedure of these two Apostles, for the special purpose of refuting by appeal to the usage of the Apostle Paul (whose writings Gaius received) the notion that John was not the author of the Apocalypse. In so doing, he makes the comparison inaccurate in form, by referring to all Paul's thirteen epistles as written to seven churches. What is common to the two passages in their respective contexts, is simply the idea that both in John and Paul *the unity of the Church Catholic* underlay an Apostle's writing to *seven* distinct churches. This is what one church writer would naturally borrow from another. But in no case can Bar Şalibi be citing the passage in the Muratorian Canon, which therefore cannot have stood near the beginning of Hippolytus' *Chapters against Gaius* on behalf of the Gospel and Apocalypse of John.

Further, when we reflect on it, there would be no fitness in a list of New Testament writings standing at the head of a work dealing simply with two Johannine writings. On the other hand, it would be quite precarious to assume that it was in another of his works that Hippolytus made an inverted and less accurate use of an analogy he had himself originated, between John's and Paul's letters to seven churches. In this connexion Mr. Robinson himself argues that the *Chapters against Gaius* "being the only work of Hippolytus which we have found in Bar Şalibi's hands, the law of parsimony of causes compels us to attribute all quotations from this author to the same document, unless we have some fairly strong evidence to the contrary. And an examination of the evidence seems to lead to a conclusion which confirms our first impression." This result he strengthens yet further in the sequel, by showing from a comparison of parallel matter in Epiphanius, that Bar

Şalibi's quotation from Hippolytus touching Cerinthus comes also from the *Chapters against Gaius*. But since our author tries to show that this quotation itself establishes so close a relation between the *Chapters against Gaius* and the Muratorian Canon as to point to unity of authorship, if not identity between the two, we must go into this matter a little further. This is the more needful, that the argument here seems to rest on a misreading of the meaning of a clause in the Canon.

After saying that the Epistles of Paul "themselves declare, for those wishful to gather it, *which* were sent to a given place,¹ and for what cause," the Canon proceeds to illustrate its statement from the four longest of Paul's letters (*prolixius scripsit*): "first of all to the Corinthians, forbidding sectarian schism (*schisma hæresis*, MSS. *scysmæ(e)* and *scisma*); afterwards to the Galatians, (forbidding) circumcision; to the Romans, moreover, intimating the method (*ordinem*) of the Scriptures, but also that their root-principle (*principium*=*ἀρχή*) is Christ."

In this passage Mr. Robinson would take *ordo* as the equivalent of *κανών*; whereas it clearly means "method," "ordered plan," as just below,² where Paul is said to follow John's *ordo* in writing to seven churches individually. Thus the phrase contains no reference to the "canonicity of certain books of Scripture," along with "Christology" alluded to in the ensuing words. Rather it contains two sides of a single idea, viz., that an ordered plan of gradual revelation runs through the Old Testament Scriptures, which receives its full explanation and justification in Christ, who is presupposed throughout. To this topic (as to the two others just named) the writer calls special attention, pre-

¹ *A quo loco* must surely be a copyist's error for *ad quem locum*.

² Also a few lines above, "*sed et (se) scriptorem omnium mirabilium domini per ordinem profitetur*" (sc. *Johannes*).

sumably as meeting some current error, no doubt that of Marcion, to whose heresy he refers a little lower down as being supported by certain supposititious Pauline epistles, and again when ruling out a whole group of false claimants to canonical standing. This explained, the specific references which Mr. Robinson sees in the Canon, to Corinthian errors, fade away. We have simply to remember, in trying to identify the author of the Canon, that he writes in a region where schismatic heresy, circumcision, and polemic against the Old Testament Scriptures as not really Christian in principle, are living issues.

Let us now start afresh on the internal indications in the Muratorian Canon.

(1) Its dominant interest—and this, alone, is fatal to the view that it belongs to the *Chapters against Gaius*—is plainly the Church Catholic and its common faith as embodied in and guaranteed by the four Gospels and other Apostolic writings, particularly the Pauline Epistles. Its whole concern is with the “Canon” of the New Testament, as norm of the Church’s faith and practice, and the exact limits of such a “Canon” as fixed by the general usages of the “Catholic Church.”

(2) Next, it betrays a special interest in and familiarity with the Johannine writings, without any tendency to let these overshadow the Pauline Epistles. The Apocalypse is referred to twice; once as yielding a precedent for the varied local destinations of the Pauline writings, and both times without any suspicion that its genuineness or authority calls for any vindication.¹

But it is on the Johannine Gospel; the authoritative conditions of its origin; and the solemn assurance with

¹ It is strange that our author should have overlooked this almost insuperable objection to the theory he puts forward.

which its apostolic author is at pains in his Epistle to asseverate his eye and ear witness to the wonders of the Lord's life as manifest among men—it is on all this that the Canon lays peculiar stress. Surely these phenomena point to an origin in the region where John had lived and taught, and where we know that he left an abiding influence, in what Lightfoot has called “the School of St. John” in Asia. What, then, could be more natural than to look for its author among the greater names of “the later School of St. John,” in the generation after Papias and Polycarp—men like Melito of Sardis, Apollinaris of Hierapolis, and, somewhat later, Polycrates of Ephesus?

(3) We have just mentioned Papias. A third feature of our Canon is its close affinities with that Asiatic churchman. The opening words of its mutilated beginning seem an echo of what he says touching Mark and his limitations as a Gospel writer. But the resemblance¹ goes deeper, extending to the apologetic motive underlying its references to the Gospels as a whole. As in Papias' day, so in our writer's, the formal differences of the evangelic records on which all ordinary Christians relied, as distinct from “Gnostic” and boldly interpretative spirits, were being magnified to the prejudice of their great common elements. But it is no longer, as with Papias, the substantial identity of the Lord's teaching in his “Oracles” (*Logia*), as recorded in the Church's Gospels, e.g. our Matthew or Mark, that is emphasized over against impugnors of their authority. The Lord's Nativity, Passion, Resurrection, intercourse

¹ It extends even to minor points of detail, which yet are suggestive of abiding local usage. Thus we read: “*Quartum evangelium Johannis ex discipulis. Cohortantibus condiscipulis, etc.*” Here the category “disciples,” rather than “apostles,” applied to John and his fellow-witnesses of their Master's life, recalls Papias' point of view and points to a mannerism in the Asiatic churches: cf. John's Gospel, especially the closing chapters, e.g. xxi. 20, 23 f.

with His disciples, His twofold Advent—first in despised humility, but one day in glorious regal power—these are now the points on which stress is laid, as being the concordant testimony of the Church's four Gospels in virtue of "one controlling Spirit" (*uno principali spiritu, ἐν ἡγεμονικῷ πνεύματι*). This is not accidental; the points affirmed are the echoes of points denied; and in the denials we can hear again, above all else, the accents of Marcion of Pontus, in whom not only Polycarp saw "the first-born of Satan," but Dionysius of Corinth probably recognized the most influential of the aberrant teachers whom he was called to combat by his letters (c. 160–70 A.D.).

It is of no small interest, then, to remember that Melito is distinctly stated by Anastasius of Sinai to have written against Marcion, who by his docetism attacked the true humanity of Christ.¹

(4) But once more, a point on which our writer is obviously most sensitive is any spurious claim to "prophetic" inspiration. This explains his discriminating attitude to the *Shepherd* of Hermas, the "very recent" origin of which "in our own times" (*nuperrime temporibus nostris*²), during the tenure of "the see of the city of Rome" by Pius (c. 140–55 A.D.), he carefully records.³ This work he thinks entitled by the fact that its author was brother of the said Pius, and that it came with the prestige of the great Church

¹ See Lightfoot, *Essays on "Supernatural Religion,"* 230 f.

² Surely a date about 150 A.D., or earlier, could hardly be so alluded to by Hippolytus, writing not before 200 A.D., and perhaps at least a decade later.

³ In this connexion it may be well to meet an argument sometimes put forward in favour of the Roman *provenance* of the Muratorian Canon, viz., that such accurate knowledge can only have been enjoyed locally. To many this explicit account, as less needful on the spot touching a work of the last generation at most, will suggest just the opposite; viz., careful information as to a matter of authorship and origin which was not likely to be within common local knowledge, but which bore upon a problem of great local moment, like "prophets" and "prophetic writings" in Asia.

of Rome, to be read indeed with respect, but not in public worship side by side with the "prophets, (now) complete in number, and the Apostles."

It hardly needs the reference to "the founder of the Cataphrygians," three or four lines lower down, as among heretical writers, to suggest that Montanism was a special danger in the region where this Canon first saw light.¹ But Montanism was largely confined to Asia until after c. 180 A.D., and even later; while everything² we have seen about our document points to a date before rather than after 180 A.D. Here again Melito comes to mind, since he flourished under Marcus Aurelius, and among his works we hear of one apparently anti-Montanist in tendency, "On conduct and prophets" (*περὶ πολιτείας καὶ προφητῶν*), i.e. on the sort of conduct befitting prophets, a matter on which the Montanists were sharply criticized.

(5) Finally, from this point of view we get the best explanation of the strange circumstance that John is described as Paul's "predecessor" in the use of the method (*ordo*) of writing to seven churches as symbolic of the Church's perfect unity in variety. As the reference is to John as the writer of the Apocalypse, it can only mean that this writing is thought of as prior at least to the completion of the Pauline cycle of epistles. This is inconceivable in Hippolytus, who, as Bar Salibi observes, agreed with Irenæus in believing that the Apocalypse was "seen" about

¹ *Assianom* (= *Asianum*) before *Catafrycum constitutorem* is probably a Latin gloss for the readers' sake. In the *Journal of Theological Studies* for April last (vii. 457 f.) Dom Morin shows reason for suspecting that Victorinus of Pettau († 304) was the translator of the Murat. Canon. According to Jerome, *De Vir. ill.* 74, Victorinus was more at home in Greek than Latin, which would quite suit the case.

² Add the absence of all reference either to Hebrews or 1 Peter, neither of which could be reserved, as Mr. Robinson suggests, for mention (out of their proper place) after the heretical writings amidst which the present text of the Canon breaks off.

the end of Domitian's reign. In any case, however we may explain the idea—which, by the by, favours an early rather than a late date for our Canon—it could hardly arise save in a region where the Johannine tradition was even stronger than the Pauline. There only could the notion of making John the norm of fitting action readily occur, without the chronological question, too, needing to be considered very seriously.

With such presumptions in mind, making strongly for authorship in provincial Asia during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–80 A.D.), we may profitably consider the following passage from Lightfoot's essay¹ on "The Later School of St. John."

"Asia Minor appears to have been far in advance of the other Churches of Christendom in literary activity during the second century. . . . The productiveness of the Asiatic Christians in this respect was doubtless stimulated by the pressure of opposition. This region was the hotbed of heresies, and the arena of controversy. Nor is it unimportant to observe that the main subjects of discussion were of such a kind as must necessarily have involved questions intimately connected with the Canon. Montanism, with its doctrine of the Paraclete and its visions of the New Jerusalem, would challenge some expression of opinion respecting the Gospel and the Apocalypse of St. John, if these writings were disputed. The Paschal controversy courted investigation into the relations between the narratives of the Synoptists and the Fourth Evangelist.² Mar-

¹ *Essays on "Supernatural Religion,"* p. 219.

² Observe, in this connexion, the emphasis laid by our Canon on the fact that John's Gospel, written last and in view of the Synoptics, had the joint sanction of all surviving personal disciples of Christ, including the Apostle Andrew (ut *recognoscentibus cunctis* Johannes suo nomine cuncta describeret). Thus, although the various Gospels begin at different points (et ideo, licet varia singulis evangeliorum libris principia doceantur), yet this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by one guiding

cionism, resting as it did on the paramount and sole authority of St. Paul's Epistles and of the Pauline Gospel, would not suffer friend or foe to preserve silence on this fundamental question.¹ And so again, though in a less degree, the disputes with Cerinthians, with Ophites, with Basilideans, with Valentinians,² with all the various sects of Gnostics, could not have been conducted, as we see plainly from the treatises of Irenæus and Hippolytus, without constant appeals to the testimony of written documents—thus indicating, at all events roughly, the amount of authority which the writers accorded to the more prominent books of our New Testament Canon.”

On this single passage, written without reference to the Muratorian Canon and by one who was later to be the protagonist for its Hippolytean origin, one may safely stake the case for the Asian school of St. John as the home of this first sketch of the Church's virtual Canon of New Testament Scriptures, over against both Marcionism and Montanism. It is put forth in a tentative and informal manner, as befits a date before Irenæus published his more elaborate handling of the same class of problems as are here

Spirit all things are in all declared, touching the Nativity, etc. (see above, p. 216, for the list).

¹ Does not this suggest the ultimate reason of the form in which the Canon refers to the Pauline Epistles and their conformity to John's precedent? It looks as though it were the implicit reply to a Marcionite plea, that the Pauline Epistles do not contemplate such “rigid uniformity” of creed and practice as the Church of that day opposed to Marcion's views, for which he probably claimed a Pauline “liberty” in keeping with the varied tenor of his letters to his churches, with their several local differences in faith and practice. When Marcion invited Polycarp to “recognize him” as a fellow-Christian, he may have had this idea in mind.

² Reference is made to these two leading types of *gnosis* in our Canon, as those most dangerous through writings of weight, side by side with Marcionism; whereas Cerinthus' distinctive position was probably no longer any particular menace, nor does he seem to have been represented by writings that could rival the Church's Scriptures.

implied. Let any one but read through the Canon afresh with Lightfoot's words in mind, asking himself "Why are things put just as they are?" and he can hardly fail to feel that "correspondence with environment" which is the mark of vital relation between a document and its original *habitat*. But further, the same essay of Lightfoot's contains much that points to Melito as the actual author. Overlapping, by some forty years or more, with Polycarp, bishop of the adjacent Smyrna, "Melito is a significant link of connexion with the past. At the same time he holds an equally important position with respect to the succeeding age. . . . It may be suspected that he was the very Ionian whom Clement of Alexandria mentions among his earlier teachers.¹ It is quite certain that his writings were widely known and appreciated in the generations next succeeding his own. He is quoted or referred to by Polycrates at Ephesus, by Clement and Origen at Alexandria, by Tertullian at Carthage, by Hippolytus at Rome" (p. 224).

The last reference is particularly suggestive in helping to explain anything that may need direct literary explanation, as touching ideas found alike in the Muratorian Canon and in Hippolytus; for instance, the analogy between John's and Paul's Epistles to seven churches, on which Mr. Robinson leans the whole weight of his theory. It may also help us to decide for Melito rather than a contemporary, like Apollinaris of Hierapolis, in so far as we can infer any literary connexion between Hippolytus and this passage in the Canon. For we do not know of Apollinaris having anything like the same influence outside Asia, at any rate in the West, as Melito, touching whom Hippolytus exclaims (Euseb. v. 28), "Who is ignorant of the books both of Irenæus and

¹ May he not have been Clement's primary (oral) authority for the similar account of the origin of the Fourth Gospel to that in our Canon, given as "a tradition of the elders of an earlier age" (*παράδοσιν τῶν ἀρχαίων πρεσβυτέρων*, *Hypotyposes* ap. Euseb. vi. 14) ?

Melito and the rest, books proclaiming the divinity and humanity of Christ?" Polycrates' testimony to Melito is also worth quoting, as bearing on his general attitude to the Church's faith. Writing to Victor of Rome about 190 A.D., he speaks of Melito as "having lived his life in all things as one inspired" (τὸν ἐν ἀγίῳ πνεύματι πάντα πολιτευσάμενον); and then ranks him among those who "kept the 14th day as that of the Passover according to the Gospel, in no respect deviating, but following the rule of (the) faith" (κατὰ τὸν κανόνα τῆς πίστεως ἀκολουθοῦντες, Eus. v. 24). Is not this just the type of man from whom we should expect a pioneer attempt to define the standard of the Church's faith, its "Canon" in the original sense of norm or objective standard? We know that he was at great pains to define accurately the contents of the Old Testament¹ Canon of Scripture, journeying to Palestine on purpose. Who, then, so likely to concern himself with an analogous problem, when it was pressed upon the churches of Asia, and that before any others in Christendom?

It is one thing to identify Melito as author of the first informal New Testament Canon from the orthodox side, in answer both to Marcion's minimum or Pauline Canon and to the Montanist's tendency in the other direction, that of including recent "prophetic" writings.² It is quite another to name the work of his in which it may have stood.

Eusebius, who gives us a long list (iv. 26), quotes the

¹ Westcott pointed out, and Lightfoot (so too Harnack) supported his view when it was challenged by the author of *Supernatural Religion*, that when Melito refers to his friend Onesimus' desire "to be accurately informed about the ancient books" (τὴν τῶν παλαιῶν βιβλίων. . . ἀκριβείαν), his language suggests the correlative notion of a collection of writings standing to the New Testament as the others to the Old.

² How strong this tendency was in Asia, even beyond Montanist circles, appears from the fact that Tertullian twits the orthodox with the remark that Melito himself was by very many of them considered a prophet (Jerome, *De Vir. ill.* 24).

preface to one of them, the *Eclogæ* or Selections from Scripture, at the beginning of which occurs "a catalogue of the acknowledged Scriptures of the Old Testament," to which reference has just been made. Is it not most natural to suppose that, in complying with the request of his friend Onesimus to supply him with "Selections both from the Law and the Prophets, touching our Saviour and all our Faith," Melito took occasion to complete his proof of the contents of the Church's faith touching the Saviour, by referring to the newer sacred writings (as indicated by use in public worship)? For these set forth the fulfilment of all foreshadowed in the "Ancient" Scriptures on such matters. Indeed, is not this very much what the Canon has in mind in alluding to the "method of the Scriptures, and that Christ is their fundamental principle," as the theme of Paul's Epistle to the Romans?

We may hazard the conjecture, then, that somewhere in Melito's *Selections*, perhaps in the Preface¹ and as the analogue suggested by the authorized list of Old Testament books, there stood originally a list of New Testament books authorized by habitual reading in the churches of provincial Asia, in which the *κανὼν ἐκκλησιαστικός* or "rule of faith," subjectively held in the Church's living belief, recognized its objective norm or *κανὼν*. Such a Canon was meant to define the exact limits within which the teaching of Christ and of His apostles on the things of faith was to be sought, and by which it was to be tested and proved in the face of aberrant views.

If so, it is in Melito that the idea of an objective collection of New Testament writings *exclusive of all others*, after the manner of the Old Testament, emerges for the first time.

¹ Compare Batiffol's remark in *La Littérature grecque*, p. 24: "The style makes one think neither of a Canon, nor of a treatise, but rather of an epistle."

and that at the very date singled out by Harnack on general grounds for the rise of a distinct conception of the Canon as such—a conception due in the first instance to the practical need of defining what was of faith, as distinct from heresy. And as the need first became acute in Asia, and not in Rome, so there, and not in Rome, first arose the answering consciousness of the practical supply ready to hand among the riches of the Christian heritage, as the process of clear differentiation between sacred writings of various degrees of authority there took effect. Harnack seems essentially right in his emphasis on the specific novelty of this conception of an exclusive objective Canon, and on its relatively “sudden” emergence (about 170 A.D.)—after all qualifications are admitted and all misunderstandings¹ of his meaning are removed. On the other hand, if the Asian origin of the Muratorian Canon be admitted, it will involve a restatement of Harnack’s theory that it was in Rome that such a Canon received its first structure. In this light the Roman type—with the Acts and the writings of the original Apostles at the centre, and the Gospels on the one wing and the Pauline Epistles on the other—must be held to be secondary and a modification of the fundamental Asian type seen in our Canon. *The suggestion*, in this, as in other cases, reached Rome from outside; but it was adopted by Roman practical intelligence and also adapted to local feeling. To these 1 Peter was dear, while the Pauline Epistles were in general less congenial than such writings of the other original Apostles as were in local use. In a word, the Asian theory of our document seems to fit into the history of the Canon in the second century like a key-stone into the arch, consolidating the whole construction.

Reviewing our discussion as a whole, and changing the

¹ E.g. even in Dr. Sanday’s most judicious discussion of Harnack’s view in his Bampton Lecture on *Inspiration*, pp. 12 ff. and 61–63.

metaphor, this theory seems to fit too many wards of a highly complex lock to be other than the true key. Certainly it has opened up the allusive meaning of various expressions in the Muratorian Canon to the present writer's mind, as he proceeded to apply it, in a way that causes him to hope that it may commend itself to others also in like fashion. To locate more accurately an early Christian witness of such obvious significance, but of enigmatic origin, is to enhance its potential value to a degree that can only be realized by actual experience. But even though this paper may not lead to the ultimate supersession of the accidental label "Canon of Muratori" by the historically significant title "Canon of Melito"; it will be something gained, if the Hippolytean origin be henceforth considered an exploded hypothesis, and the true path be indicated by the setting up of some fresh finger-posts to the final truth.

VERNON BARTLET.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL.

ABOUT 190 years before the Christian era, one Jesus Ben-Sira produced a book of sage counsel and godly exhortation, which found acceptance, first in Jewry and afterwards in Christendom, as a work profitable to be read "for example of life and instruction of manners." This book, however, was not admitted into the Jewish Canon of "Holy Writ." Some twenty-five years later (so we are called upon to believe) appeared an anonymous work, purporting to be the record of certain acts, prophecies, and visions of one Daniel, who had been carried away as a captive, in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, from Jerusalem to Babylon, and had lived in Babylon until the days of Cyrus and Darius. This "Book of Daniel" found admission into the Jewish