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THE DATE OF PAPIAS: A REASSESSMENT

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Papias was a church leader in the western Asia Minor city of Hierapolis sometime before the middle of the second century. His five-part *Interpretation of the* Oracles of the Lord (*Logiōn Kyriakōn Exēgēseōs*) is unfortunately not extant, but parts of it have been preserved, especially by Eusebius.[1] The portions of Papias' writings that have come down to us are significant for at least two reasons. First, although his exact date is disputed, by anyone's reckoning he wrote sometime between A.D. 80 and 160.[2] This makes him one of a scant handful of witnesses to a period notorious for its paucity of literary remains. Second, according to Eusebius Papias knew of writings by Matthew and Mark.[3] He quoted 1 Peter and 1 John.[4] He claimed to be acquainted with men who had direct access to Jesus' own times and teachings.[5] There is a strong tradition that he knew the apostle John, and he may have had contact with other apostles as well.[6] Thus Papias is important as an early witness to portions of the NT canon and their authors and to the life and development of the post-apostolic, or even late apostolic, Church.

The significance of Papias' testimony, however, depends on when he wrote. It is one thing for a writer to claim (as Papias does) direct access to dominical tradition in the year 100 and quite another to make a similar claim a third of a century or more later. The further removed temporally Papias is from the facts he relays, the less credible his testimony becomes. Moreover, regardless of when he wrote, the temporal location of his work must be established in order to interpret properly his writings in their historical context. A responsible assessment of Papias, therefore, begins with an accurate date for when he wrote.

A distinguished line of scholars agrees that Papias composed his treatises ca. 130 or later. This consensus spans the past century and crosses the boundaries of several schools of criticism. J. B. Lightfoot dated Papias' literary activity at 130

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[1]Ancient references to Papias, which appear in writings as late as the ninth or tenth century, are collected in J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (ed. J. R. Harmer; London: Macmillan, 1891) 513-535; W. R. Schoedel, "Polycarp, Martyrdom of Polycarp, Fragments of Papias," *The Apostolic Fathers* (ed. R. M. Grant; Camden: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 5. 89-130.

[2]A date as early as 80 is suggested by R. Annand, "Papias and the Four Gospels," *SJT* 9 (1956) 46. Many scholars, most notably A. Harnack (*Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius* [2d ed.; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1958] Teil 2, Band 1, 357), have extended Papias' *fluorit* to as late as 160.

[3]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.16.

[4]Ibid., 3.39.17.

[5]Ibid., 3.39.3-4.

[6]Ibid., 3.39.2-4.

or a little later,[7] while his colleague B. F. Westcott opted for the years 140-150.[8] A generation later B. W. Bacon placed Papias' writing at ca. 140.[9] At about the same time in Germany, Walter Bauer was treating Papias as a church official who may have lived to see the advent of Montanism well after the midpoint of the second century.[10] More recently D. G. Deeks, F. F. Bruce and Eduard Lohse have assigned Papias' writings to ca. 130 or later.[11]

This paper will argue that Papias' writings should be dated ca. 95-110 and not 130 or later. The first step in this direction will be to describe and question the reasons why Papias has been assigned such a late date (130 or later). The second step will be to offer evidence that Papias wrote ca. 95-110. The third will be to sketch briefly a few of the implications that arise from dating Papias so much earlier than the current critical consensus allows.

I. Reasons for a Late Date

A little over 100 years ago Papias was thought to have lived until after 160. This belief was based on the seventh-century *Chronicon Paschale,* which records that Papias was martyred at Pergamum about the time that Polycarp died at Smyrna.[12] The year for Polycarp's death is given as 164, and this fixed Papias' date after 160 as well. Lightfoot pointed out[13] that the reference to Papias was due to a copyist mistakenly writing "Papias" for "Papylas" (who died near the time when Polycarp was martyred) as he copied Eusebius' Church history.[14] This eliminated 164 as a *terminus ad quem* for Papias, at least on the basis of the *Chronicon Paschale.* Scholars after Lightfoot persisted, however, in dating Papias as late as 160, [15] although they now had no readily apparent documentary grounds for doing so. Papias had for so long been associated with the mid-second century that scholarship was evidently unable to conceive of him as a witness to a

[7]J. B. Lightfoot, *Essays on the Work Entitled Supernatural Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1889) 150.

[8]B. F. Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (6th ed.; London: Macmillan, 1889) 70 n. 2.

[9]B. W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (London: Constable, 1931) 439.

[10]W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 72.

[11]D. G. Deeks, "Papias Revisited—Part II," *ExpTim* 88 (1976-77) 324; F. F. Bruce, *Tradition Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 108; E. Lohse, *The Formation of the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981) 142.

[12]Lightfoot, *Supernatural Religion* 147-149.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Cf. Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 4.15.48.

[15]E.g., B. W. Bacon (who later changed his mind), *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1900) 30-32; J. Orr, *The History and Literature of the Early Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913) 59.

much earlier era.[16] The influence of Harnack, who in spite of Lightfoot's findings dated Papias 145-160,[17] also had its effect.

The loss of firm evidence for dating Papias late necessarily led to other links being sought between his writings and phenomena of the second century. Most common was the attempt to establish ties between Papias and the gnostics who arose in force after 130. Lightfoot gives a succinct presentation of this position. Papias "undertook, we may suppose, to stem the current of Gnosticism."[18] This may be supposed because "by common consent the work of Papias was written in the later years of his life."[19] Lightfoot suggests, finally, that if it is recognized that Papias wrote "when Gnosticism was rampant, the drift of his language becomes clear and consistent."[20]

Lightfoot here begs the question of the date of Papias, as anyone who tries to link him with the post-130 gnostics must. Lightfoot produces no hard evidence that Papias ever was involved in refuting men such as Basilides and Marcion in the years after 130. He can adduce none because there is none. Only by assuming (1) that Papias is writing ca. 130 or later, (2) that Papias' writings show anti-gnostic *Tendenz*, and (3) that the post-130 gnostics were the objects of that *Tendenz* can Lightfoot make his case. This is not a particularly compelling argument. As Schoedel concludes, there is no clear anti-gnostic polemic in Papias.[21] It cannot be proven, and can only with difficulty be maintained, that Papias wrote against the gnostics.[22] It is better to seek elsewhere for data on Papias' date rather than rely on a finding for which there is so little secure historical evidence.

Many find grounds for dating Papias late not in his supposed allusions to gnosticism but in his lists of early Church authorities who provide him with his book's substance. They suppose that Papias speaks of an "elder John" of the post-apostolic age in addition to the apostle John. This would minimize the possibility that Papias lived early enough to be an apostolic witness and justify dating him well into the second century. Scholars interpret Papias in this fashion on the basis of an extract from the preface to Papias' writings that Eusebius quotes:

> And I shall not hesitate to append to the interpretations all that I ever learnt well from the presbyters and remember well, for of their truth I am confident. For unlike most I did not rejoice in them who say much, but in them who teach the truth, nor in them who recount the commandments of others, but in them who repeated those given to the faith by the Lord and derived from truth itself; but if ever anyone came

[16]Vernon Bartlet noted this scholarly obduracy some years ago; see his "Papias's 'Exposition': Its Date and Contents," *Amicitae Corollae: A Volume of Essays Presented to James Rendel Harris* (ed. H. G. Wood; London: University Press, 1933) 20.

[17]See n. 2 above.

[18]Lightfoot, *Supernatural Religion* 160.

[19]Ibid., p. 161.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Schoedel, "Fragments" 91, 97, 100-101, 104.

[22]For a recent attempt to link Papias with Marcion see R. P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 80-83, esp. p. 83. Martin's case suffers from the same dearth of evidence as Lightfoot's.

> who had followed the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples, had said (*eipon*), and what Aristion and the presbyter John, the Lord's disciples, were saying (*legousin*). For I did not suppose that information from books would help me so much as the word of a living and surviving voice.[23]

Papias, it is plain, here identifies his sources. I understand him to be mentioning three groups: (1) "the presbyters" (who were also "disciples of the Lord") who repeated in former days the commandments given by Jesus to the faith; (2) certain ones who had followed the presbyters and whom Papias had interviewed; and (3) two authorities (Aristion and the presbyter John) who, like the earlier group, were "disciples of the Lord" and who still bore witness (*legousin*) to the facts Papias records. Papias seems to be speaking of the "presbyters" as a group that includes those men whom we designate "apostles." The "presbyter John," in Papias' parlance, may be taken as a surviving member of the select cadre of presbyters (including "apostles") whom Papias associated with earlier times.

The question of whether Papias in the lines above spoke of two Johns seems never to have arisen until some 200 years after Papias wrote. Irenaeus (fl. 180) should have known of and identified a second John in Papias had there been one. After all, Irenaeus had access to Papias' treatises. He grew up in Asia Minor where the aged apostle John had ministered, and he sat at the feet of Polycarp, who was John's pupil and Papias' friend. Yet Irenaeus never mentions a "presbyter John" as one distinct from the apostle.[24] In fact he quotes 2 John (written by "the presbyter") and attributes it to the apostle John.[25] It is noteworthy too that Dionysius of Alexandria (fl. 250), who agonized over the authorship of the Johannine writings, saw no problem in attributing both 2 and 3 John (written by "the presbyter") to the apostle John.[26] Eusebius, it seems, is the first to distinguish two Johns in Papias.[27]

There is space here to do little more than assert that it is extremely problematic whether Papias furnishes clear evidence for two Johns. Even from the standpoint of Johannine criticism the existence of an elder John is a beleaguered postulate.[28] From the standpoint of an exegesis of Papias' own remarks it is doubtful whether Papias uses "presbyter" in the lines above in any sense other than that

[23]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* The translation is that of Kirsopp Lake in LCL.

[24]J. Chapman, *John the Presbyter and the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911) 41-48.

[25]Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 3.16.8.

[26]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.11. Eusebius himself also thought that John the apostle was identical with "the elder" who wrote 2 and 3 John (*Dem. Ev.* 3.5.88).

[27]Dionysius of Alexandria speculated that "there was a certain other [John] among those that were in Asia," but his theory was based not on Papias but on a second-hand rumor about two tombs at Ephesus that were said to belong to men named John (Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.16).

[28]Over twenty years ago F. L. Cross noted "a growing tendency among scholars to deny that Papias countenances any second John at all other than John the Apostle" (*The Early Christian Fathers* [London: Duckworth, 1960] 62). More recently see C. S. Petrie, "The Authorship of 'The Gospel According to Matthew': A Reconsideration of the External Evidence," *NTS* 14 (1967-68) 15-24; G. M. Lee, "The Presbyter John: A Reconsideration," *SE* VI (TU 112) 311-320; L. Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 277-279; J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 309-310; S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Interpreter* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978) 73-74.

which could include an "apostle." [29] As Robert Grant states, "The quotation from Papias *can* be understood to mean that Papias was a hearer of the apostle John."[30] Late-date theories for Papias are nearly unanimous in denying that Papias lived early enough to associate with the apostle John, largely on the basis of a disputed interpretation of one sentence from Papias' preface. It would be more prudent, however, to admit that Papias' wording here is ambiguous and to look elsewhere for conclusive data on Papias' date.

Scholars have dated Papias late for even less compelling reasons. (1) Many suppose that although Papias uses the present tense *legousin* in *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4 (see quote above) he intends to convey a past-tense idea. This would make even Aristion and "the presbyter" John figures of Papias' distant past and would facilitate pushing the time of Papias' writing toward 130 or later. Lightfoot is one of the original defenders of this view. Yet he can argue no more strongly than to say in a footnote that *legousin* "should probably be regarded" in this fashion.[31] What is more, Lightfoot's reason for this choice of tense is to avoid "a chronological difficulty"[32]—that is, if *legousin* were read with its apparent force it would be impossible for Lightfoot's date for Papias to be correct. (2) Bacon proposes that Hadrian's decree in the 130s expelling the Jews from Palestine furnished "the strongest possible incentive" for Papias to write.[33] There is, however, not the slightest shred of proof to support Bacon's contention, nor is Bacon convincing in trying to explain how a decree from Rome affecting Jews in Jerusalem triggered writing by a Gentile in Phrygia. (3) Others rely on Philip of Side's (fl. ca. 400) confused attempt at history to show that Papias wrote during Hadrian's reign (117-138).[34] Recently D. G. Deeks has used Philip to aid in dating Papias.[35] Over 50 years ago, however, even a scholar who wished to date Papias late showed clearly that Philip's evidence is of no value.[36] Schoedel notes that it is "impossible" to use Philip's remarks as reliable evidence for dating Papias.[37]

In summary, a study of reasons given and procedures used to date Papias late suggests that he is relegated to the post-130 era more for the sake of convenience than because of historical evidence. He is a wax nose on the face of early Church history: He may be molded to conform to the sculpture being fashioned by a giv-

[29]It is entirely possible that Papias' use of "presbyter" to equal or include "apostle" is consistent with similar usage in the NT: Acts 11:30; 21:18; 1 Pet 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1.

[30]R. Grant, "Papias in Eusebius's Church History," *Mélanges d'histoire des Religions* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974) 210.

[31]Lightfoot, *Supernatural Religion* 150 n. 3.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Bacon, *Studies* 440.

[34]Philip writes, "Concerning those who were raised by Christ from the dead he [Papias] relates that they survived to the time of Hadrian" (Schoedel, "Fragments" 120).

[35]Deeks, *ExpTim* 88 (1976-77) 324.

[36]Bacon, *Studies* 441-442.

[37]Schoedel, "Fragments" 120.

en historical artist. Thus many scholars have tended to deal with Papias on the basis of their views of the composition of the NT, about which much more is supposedly known, than on the historical evidence for the date of Papias. In any event we have seen that reasons typically given for dating Papias late are either invalid or inconclusive. This requires that we reopen the question of Papias' date with a fresh look at the evidence.

II. Evidence for an Earlier Date

Ancient sources external to Papias' writings provide five clues that aid in dating Papias. First, there is Papias' position in Eusebius' *History*. Eusebius classes Papias with the young Polycarp, Ignatius, and even Clement—that is, with those who were the immediate successors to the apostles.[38] Nowhere in Book 3 of Eusebius' history, in which Papias is treated, does he discuss matters later than Trajan's reign (97-117).[39] In fact Book 4 opens with the twelfth year of Trajan (ca. 109). Without question Papias is viewed as flourishing before 109.

Eusebius' *Chronicon* furnishes a second and related clue for dating Papias. Eusebius places the aged apostle John, Papias, Polycarp and Ignatius—in that order—in the same entry.[40] Next to this entry Eusebius has, as part of his running table of dates, the year "100." With this entry he concludes his treatment of the first century. Unquestionably Eusebius here links Papias with the apostle John as a Church leader at the close of the first century and as a contemporary of Ignatius and the young Polycarp.

A third factor in dating Papias is that Irenaeus calls Papias an "ancient man" (*archaios anēr*).[41] He considers Papias a "most primitive" witness to the faith.[42] If, as is likely, Irenaeus had personal contact with Polycarp,[43] who in turn was a companion of Papias,[44] Irenaeus is not liable to be mistaken in his opinion of Papias' connection with earliest Church origins.[45] Irenaeus could and did invoke Polycarp's name because the latter had been associated with the apostles. But the

[38]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.1; cf. 3.36.1-2.

[39]See Bartlet, "Papias's 'Exposition' " 21-22.

[40]R. Helm, *Die Chronik de Hieronymus* (GCS 7/1; Leipzig, 1913) 193-194.

[41]Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 5.33.4; cf. Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.1. The standard English translation of the Ante-Nicene fathers for some unknown reason does not translate these words, but see *Sancti Irenaei* (ed. W. W. Harvey; Cambridge: Typis Academicus, 1867), 2. 418.

[42]Although W. Bauer dates Papias late, he concedes that Irenaeus considered him to be "a man deriving from the very primitive period—in whom was honored the connective link to the beginning" (*Orthodoxy* 119).

[43]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.4-8.

[44]Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 5.33.4; cf. Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.1.

[45]Elaborate arguments have been advanced to show that Irenaeus actually never knew Polycarp or that he had heard him at such a young age as to make reliable recollection in later years impossible. J. Chapman argues persuasively that Irenaeus could easily have passed his thirtieth year upon meeting Polycarp "in my early manhood": "Papias on the Age of Our Lord," *JTS* 9 (1908) 61. Cf. Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 2.22.5, where "early manhood" begins at thirty years of age.

Bishop of Lyons regarded Papias as an "ancient worthy," an even more venerable witness to the apostolic heritage. The force of this appellation for Papias is strengthened when it is remembered that Irenaeus referred to John as seeing the Apocalypse "no very long time ago, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign" (81-96).[46] If Domitian's reign was in some sense for Irenaeus (b. ca. 125) "almost in our day," then an *archaios anēr* would be early indeed. The term, coming from Irenaeus ca. 180, certainly does not fit a man who lived into the middle of the second century.

A fourth consideration is Irenaeus' statement that Papias was a hearer of the apostle John.[47] Skepticism about Irenaeus' veracity here is common, especially since at one point Eusebius disagrees with Irenaeus.[48] This rejection of Irenaeus, however, is suspect since Eusebius (1) hinges his contention on a questionable reading of one sentence (which he has selected to prove a point) in Papias' preface, (2) lauds Irenaeus' reliability elsewhere,[49] and (3) has an ulterior motive (a pronounced dislike for Papias' chiliastic views) for casting doubt on Papias' trustworthiness by separating him from apostolic contact.[50] Eusebius' objection notwithstanding, Irenaeus may be taken seriously here. The latter's knowledge of Papias' writings, acquaintance with Papias' companion Polycarp, and relative proximity to the time, language and place of Papias' work weighs more heavily than Eusebius' insubstantial allegations.[51]

A fifth clue in dating Papias is that neither Irenaeus nor Eusebius adduces Papias as an anti-gnostic witness. Now when Irenaeus is able to cite earlier authorities (especially Biblical writers) against his ideological opponents, he gladly does so.[52] Eusebius' penchant for quoting copious portions of earlier works is well known. Yet for all the vehement opposition of these two against the early gnostics, it appears that neither turns to Papias for support in his arguments. The most obvious explanation for this is that Papias said nothing about the gnostics, whose teachings Irenaeus and Eusebius were trying to refute—that is, Papias wrote far too early for such gnostics as Valentinus, Basilides and Marcion to be of concern.

There are, then, five reasons external to *Hist. eccl.* 3.39 for concluding that Papias is likely to have written ca. 95-110. An examination of *Hist. eccl.* 3.39 itself, in which Eusebius furnishes a brief description of Papias' writings, provides additional information that argues for this earlier date. First, Papias makes no clear reference to the type of gnostic threat that arose after 130. Second, Papias

[46]Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 5.30.3; cf. Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.6. R. Grant considers it possible that Irenaeus "was simply transcribing the words of his source" ("Papias and the Gospels," *ATR* 25 [1943] 218 n.), but this suggestion has won little if any support.

[47]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.1.

[48]Ibid., 3.39.2.

[49]Ibid., 3.23.1-4.

[50]Grant, "Papias in Eusebius's Church History" 211-213; B. Gustafsson, "Eusebius' Principles in Handling His Sources as Found in His Church History, Books I-VII," TU 79 (1961) 439-441.

[51]For a thorough study of Irenaeus' qualifications to speak about Papias with more authority than Eusebius see H. J. Lawlor, "Eusebius on Papias," *Hermathena* 43 (1922) 216-222.

[52]E.g. Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 1.22.1; 1.26.3; 2.2.5; 2.14.2; 5.33.3.

seems to speak of two personal disciples of Jesus as being alive when he wrote.[53] Third, Papias definitely acknowledges that he knew Philip's daughters, who were adults in the 50s, and this means that Papias was alive well before the end of the first century.[54] Fourth, Eusebius explicitly cites Papias' *archaiotēta*, his status as one of the earliest nonapostolic Christian figures.[55] These and other facts gleaned from *Hist. eccl.* 3.39 make it probable that Papias wrote no later than the end of the first Christian century.

A final test of Papias' date is to compare his writings with others that arose in Asia Minor in the years 95-110. Fortunately we have the letters of Ignatius and Polycarp with which to make such a comparison.[56] Given that extensive external and internal evidence related to *Hist. eccl.* 3.39 indicates that Papias could have written around the turn of the century, it need only be shown that Papias' work reflects conditions and concerns of other writings of this time and locale to settle the question in favor of an earlier date.

Papias, Ignatius and Polycarp all show concern, although with varying degrees of vehemence, about subverters of the faith. Papias speaks of those "who rejoice in them who say much" and "who recount the commandments of others."[57] He is apparently unhappy about many (*hoi polloi*) whose observance of Jesus' teachings is lax. Ignatius also knows of misguided brethren,[58] and he admonishes his readers not to stray from the true doctrines concerning Jesus and the faith.[59] And Polycarp, like Papias, speaks of the wayward many (*hoi polloi*) who talk too much.[60] All three of these early Christian leaders protest that the apostolic faith is being diluted or distorted, and all three do so with a common underlying assumption: They, as direct mediators of the apostolic tradition, must stand firm against these emerging attempts by some to lure believers away from the example and teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Such a common concern supports the idea that they wrote at about the same time.

Papias' writings are similar in another way to those of Ignatius. Papias is determined to preserve first-generation testimony to Jesus' commandments.[61] He gives attention to "the things said or done by the Lord" found in Mark's writings;[62] he relays information on "the words of the Lord" given by Aristion.[63]

[53]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4.

[54]Ibid., 3.39.9; cf. Acts 21:8-9. Even if Papias' Philip were the apostle, not the evangelist, the ages of the daughters would not be appreciably different.

[55]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.13.

[56]I am assuming, against P. N. Harrison (*Polycarp's Two Epistles to the Philippians* [Cambridge: University Press, 1936]), that Polycarp's Philippian letter is a unity.

[57]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4.

[58]Ign. *Eph.* 7.1; 8.1; 9.1; 10.2; 16.1-2; *Trall.* 6.2; 7.1; 10.1; *Smyrn.* 2.1; 4.1; 5.1; 7.1-2.

[59]Ign. *Eph.* 16.1-2; *Magn.* 8.1; 11.1; *Phld.* 2.1.

[60]Pol. *Phil.* 7.2.

[61]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.3-4.

[62]Ibid., 3.39.15.

[63]Ibid., 3.39.14.

These remarks that show concern for accurate knowledge about Jesus as relayed by early witnesses compare favorably with statements made by Ignatius. He stresses "the word of Jesus."[64] He is acutely aware of the need for sound knowledge of Jesus' earthly existence and ministry.[65] He mentions "the commandments of Jesus Christ,"[66] "the law of Jesus Christ,"[67] "the ordinances" of Jesus,[68] "every one of his commandments,"[69] and "the teaching of Christ."[70] While Ignatius does not explicitly name apostles as his sources, his letters have definite Johannine echoes,[71] and in any event he is aware of the important function and example of the apostles in transmitting facts about Jesus.[72] Papias and Ignatius, then, share an interest in the details of Jesus' teachings and ministry as these details had been promulgated by the earliest Christians. Westcott notes that in the years 70-120 "the authoritative teaching of Apostles was fresh in the memories of their hearers."[73] Both Papias and Ignatius evince this vivid recollection of and concern with the apostolic teachings that Westcott rightly deems to be characteristic of the era of the apostolic fathers.

Papias parallels Polycarp as well. Three times Papias employs the distinctive term *logia*.[74] Polycarp uses the word in a fashion similar to Papias.[75] Papias' interest in Jesus' commandments and teachings is also mirrored in Polycarp. Believers should walk in Jesus' commandments.[76] They should remember what the Lord taught.[77] Polycarp writes that believers should "first of all" teach themselves "to walk in the commandments of the Lord."[78] Polycarp expresses a senti-

[64]Ign. *Eph.* 15.1-2.

[65]This aspect of Ignatius' outlook is almost too common to warrant documentation. Two examples of his emphasis on the historical Jesus are Ign. *Trall.* 9 and *Smyrn.* 3.

[66]Ign. *Eph.* 9.2.

[67]Ign. *Magn.* 2.1.

[68]Ibid., 13.1.

[69]Ign. *Rom.* (salutation).

[70]Ign. *Phld.* 8.2.

[71]See B. F. Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (6th ed.; London: Macmillan, 1889) 35-36; R. Grant, "An Introduction," *The Apostolic Fathers* (ed. R. Grant; Camden: Thomas Nelson, 1964), 1. 121-130.

[72]Ign. *Eph.* 12.2; *Magn.* 13.1; *Trall.* 2.2; 7.1; *Rom.* 4.3; *Phld.* 5.1; *Smyrn.* 3.2.

[73]Westcott, *History of the Canon* 19.

[74]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.1, 15, 16.

[75]Pol. *Phil.* 7.1.

[76]Ibid., 2.2.

[77]Ibid., 2.3.

[78]Ibid., 4.1.

ment not foreign to the spirit of Papias' writing when he says, "Let us turn back to the word which was delivered to us in the beginning."[79] Finally, it is significant that Papias and Polycarp both respond to similar challenges by quoting the same works (1 Peter and 1 John) in their writings.

A comparison, therefore, of the writings of Papias, Ignatius and the young Polycarp shows several common elements. The evidence suggests that Papias' writings could have been written in Asia Minor at the same time as, if not slightly earlier than, those of Ignatius and Polycarp, who wrote ca. 106-110 and who were, according to both Eusebius and Irenaeus, Papias' ecclesiastical contemporaries. This is especially probable given the evidence already cited which marks Papias as a church official who flourished early in the reign of Trajan (97-117).

In summary, considerable evidence points to an early date for Papias' writings. The generally accepted date of 130 or later has little to commend it. We conclude that Papias wrote his five treatises ca. 95-110.

III. Implications of an Earlier Date

Dating Papias 95-110 has several specific consequences for NT criticism. It adds another voice—perhaps the earliest—to the chorus of sub-apostolic witnesses to the early authorship and circulation of 1 John and 1 Peter.[80] It verifies the tradition of the aged apostle John's ministry in Asia Minor.[81] It means that when Papias speaks of Matthew's and Mark's writings—and he almost certainly speaks of the gospels[82]—he does so not on the strength of second-century rumor but on the authority of an original disciple of Jesus. Thus there is reason to respect Papias' report that (1) Mark's gospel comprises Peter's teachings[83] and that (2) Matthew wrote a gospel either in Aramaic or, as Robert Gundry has recently argued, in an Hebraic literary style.[84] At several points, therefore, Papias' early date affects key areas of NT criticism. In the past three decades a few scholars—Johannes Munck, C. S. Petrie, A. C. Perumalil and now Robert Gundry[85]—have recognized Papias' ealier chronological setting. Their work provides a starting point for a more complete reassessment of Papias' significance for NT studies.

[79]Ibid., 7.2; cf. Papias' intent to preserve the things "given to the faith" in the beginning by Jesus that "derived from truth itself" (Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4).

[80]Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.17.

[81]Ibid., 3.39.3-4.

[82]See Lightfoot, *Supernatural Religion* 176-177; N. B. Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 14-15 n. 23; 91; E. Lohse, *Formation* 142-143; G. Kittel, *"Logion," TDNT* 4 (1967) 140-141.

[83]Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15.

[84]Ibid., 3.39.16; cf. R. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 609-622. See also J. Kürzinger, "Das Papiaszeugnis und die Erstgestalt des Matthäusevangeliums," *BZ* 4 (1960) 19-38.

[85]J. Munck, "Presbyters and Disciples of the Lord in Papias," *HTR* 52 (1959) 223-243; C. S. Petrie, *NTS* 14 (1967-68) 15-32; A. C. Perumalil, "Papias," *ExpTim* 85 (1973-74) 361-366; "Are Not Papias and Irenaeus Competent to Report on the Gospels?", *ExpTim* 91 (1980) 332-337; Gundry, *Matthew* 609-622.

Yet dating Papias early impinges on an even more fundamental issue. Papias as a witness of the late apostolic age and its writings sheds light on the crucial issue of when the NT itself was written. J. A. T. Robinson and E. E. Ellis have shown that the dating of the NT needs seriously to be reconsidered. The *tempus receptus* of the various NT books is by no means as unassailable as is often presumed.[86] Reevaluating Papias' date underscores generally that Robinson and Ellis merit a careful hearing: An examination of why Papias is often dated late reveals the same sort of disregard for or circumventing of weighty ancient evidence that Robinson and Ellis discover as they probe the bases for the accepted dates of NT books.

Reevaluating Papias also vindicates Robinson at a specific point: He suggests that the "tunnel period" of scanty evidence following the NT era "may have been created by pushing the sub-apostolic literature late so as to leave room for meeting the supposed requirements of NT development."[87] Without question, in the past some have pushed the date of Papias' writing far into the second century out of deference to critical views of NT formation which see the NT as being in flux well beyond the year 100.

To conclude, dating Papias early affects several specific issues in NT research. The implications of an earlier date are substantial, particularly for gospel criticism. An early date for Papias also undergirds the thesis of Robinson and Ellis both generally and specifically. While redating Papias will not in itself foment a revolution in NT studies, it is a significant corrective step in reconstructing the late- and post-NT era, a step that strikes a more judicious balance between the weight of modern critical opinion and the testimony of ancient sources.

[86]J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating;* E. E. Ellis, "Dating the New Testament," *NTS* 26 (1980) 487-502.

[87]Robinson, *Redating* 312.