

Introduction

Rethinking Earliest Christianity in Alexandria

A gloom seems to billow like a fog over the earliest Alexandrian church history, and scholars have but rarely espied more than a candle light glistening over the deep. The dictum of Adolf von Harnack is often on historians' lips: "The worst gap in our knowledge of early church history is our almost total ignorance of the history of Christianity in Alexandria and Egypt ... up until 180 AD."¹ Other scholars offer somewhat rueful restatements: "The obscurity that veils the early history of the Church in Egypt ... does not lift until the beginning of the third century";² "there are only the sketchiest indications of the presence of Christianity in Alexandria before the last years of the second century";³ "we hear next to nothing of an Alexandrian Christian *community* until the end of the second century."⁴

¹ Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. James Moffatt, 2 vols. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1908), 2.158 ("Die empfindlichste Lücke in unserem Wissen von der ältesten Kirchengeschichte ist unsere fast vollständige Unkenntnis der Geschichte des Christentums in Alexandria und Ägypten ... bis zum Jahre c. 180").

² Colin Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 1.

³ Roger S. Bagnall, ed., *Roman Egypt: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 152.

⁴ Martin Ritter, "Das frühchristliche Alexandrien im Spannungsfeld zwischen Judenchristentum, 'Frühkatholizismus' und Gnosis – zur Ortsbestimmung clementisch-alexandrinischer Theologie," in *Charisma und Caritas: Aufsätze zur Geschichte der Alten Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 117–138 at 125: "Gleichwohl ist bis zum Ende des zweiten Jahrhunderts so gut wie nichts von einer alexandrinischen Christengemeinde zur hören" (emphasis in original). Cf. also Malcolm Choat, Jitse Dijkstra, Christopher Haas, and William Tabbernee, "The World of the Nile," in *Early Christianity in Contexts: An Exploration across Cultures and Continents*, ed. William Tabbernee (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 181–222 at 207.

For some historians, the history of Christianity in Alexandria does not genuinely begin until the rise of Demetrius as bishop in 189 CE.⁵ In a widely cited history, Joseph Mélèze Modrzejewski refers to “the sudden emergence of an Alexandrian Christian community, sprung up overnight” in the Severan period (late second–early third century CE).⁶ Problematically, this observation all too easily bypasses Christian figures like Basilides, Isidore, Carpocrates, Epiphane, Marcellina, Valentinus, Julius Cassianus, Prodicus, and other Christian thinkers in early to mid-second-century Alexandria.

Perhaps all this is to be expected. Experts in patristics have traditionally focused on those figures that were received as “orthodox” by the father of church history, Eusebius of Caesarea (263–339 CE). Eusebius focused on Pantaenus, Clement, Demetrius, and Origen as his religious forbearers in Alexandria. This book, by contrast, focuses on the Christian texts and figures that have been, until recently, shunted into the category of “apocryphal,” “gnostic,” and “heretical.” The focus, in other words, is on figures whom Eusebius did not recognize as fathers of his Christian group in the early fourth century CE.

To be sure, the frequent lament that we lack sources for Alexandrian Christianity prior to 180 CE is justified to a certain degree. In my estimation, however, the darkness is often overdrawn. Samuel Rubenson, for example, remarks that “there is almost no information in any sources about Christianity in Alexandria until the end of the second century A.D.”⁷ In fact, there are considerable sources indicating Alexandrian Christian figures and movements prior to 200. Some of these sources, such as the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*, have been known for a long time. Others, such as the *Letter of Eugnostus*, have more recently appeared from the Nag Hammadi codices. Naturally, one can dispute whether these works are Alexandrian, but one cannot dispute, I think, the relevance of Alexandrian works from the likes of

⁵ Stephen J. Davis, for instance, leaps from “Saint Mark to Demetrius” in *The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 1–20. A similar leap occurs in Lois M. Farag, “The Early Christian Period (42–642): The Spread and Defense of the Christian Faith under Roman Rule,” in *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith and Culture*, ed. Lois M. Farag (London: Routledge, 2014), 23–38.

⁶ Joseph Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt from Ramses II to Emperor Trajan*, trans. Robert Cornman (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 227.

⁷ Samuel Rubenson, “From School to Patriarchate: Aspects on the Christianisation of Alexandria,” in *Alexandria: A Cultural and Religious Melting Pot*, ed. George Hinge and Jens A. Krasilnikoff (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009), 144–157 at 145.

Basilides, Carpocrates, Epiphanes, and Julius Cassianus. Of course, the works of such figures exist in fragments and polemical summaries – but when combined and critically sifted, the data are substantial and worthy of more scholarly attention.

BAUER AND HIS CRITICS

Every scholar of early Christianity knows Walter Bauer's theory about the predominance of "gnostic" forms of Christianity in first- and second-century Egypt. Bauer's influential paradigm continues to inform research till this day.⁸ A fairly current statement by the seasoned patrologist Manlio Simonetti basically confirms Bauer's view. Simonetti writes:

The sparse evidence we have [for earliest Christianity in Alexandria] does allow us to hypothesize a virtually absolute cultural dominance of the gnostics for a good part of the 2nd c., especially of those who professed more philosophically elaborate doctrines and were also the most Christianized (Basilides, Valentinus and his disciples); this is not surprising if we consider how the culturally syncretistic tendencies of the gnostics harmonized with the intellectual vivacity of cultured Alexandria and the different influences at work there (Greek philosophical doctrines, Hellenized Judaism, Eastern religions, apocalyptic literature). Gnosticism presented itself as a kind of superior knowledge with respect to that of the ordinary Christian and thus took hold, esp. among the more cultured and intellectually ambitious of Christian society who were also those of higher social status.⁹

Simonetti's remarks are astute. Since his time, however, many scholars have – rightly, in my view – jettisoned the macro-category "Gnosticism."¹⁰ They do so for many reasons. Labeling Valentinus, Basilides, and other teachers "G/gnostics" obscures their more patent Christian identity. "Gnosticism" has in the past been viewed as a religion in its own right,

⁸ It appears prominently in works like Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁹ Manlio Simonetti, "Alexandria," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, Volume 1, A–E, ed. Angelo di Berardino (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 78–81 at 79. According to Birger Pearson, "Christian Gnosticism, in various manifestations, was the dominant form of Christianity in Alexandria until the last quarter of the second century, particularly during the last decade" ("Earliest Christianity in Egypt," in *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity: Language, Literature, and Social Context: Essays in Honor of David W. Johnson*, ed. James E. Goehring and Janet A. Timbie [Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2007], 97–112 at 111).

¹⁰ Michael Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003).

distinct from both early Judaism and Christianity.¹¹ “Gnostic” became a heresiological label for a great variety of groups with a whole panoply of characteristics (dualism, anticosmism, an evil creator, the notion of a divine spark, and so on).¹² It is almost impossible to control which characteristics filter into the larger category of “Gnosticism,” despite the fact that some scholars have tried to offer more nuanced definitions of the phenomenon.¹³ Recent studies have convincingly shown that figures such as Basilides, Valentinus, and Carpocrates were not “gnostic” since they do not match the predetermined and often negatively colored features of “Gnosticism.”¹⁴

While Bauer’s paradigm must be redrawn, his advances need not be discarded. Recently, Bauer’s notions of “doctrinal pluriformity” in Alexandria and the prominence of “individual teachers” has been dismissed as a “neatly drawn conspiracy theory.”¹⁵ To be sure, one could overly emphasize the idea that later theologians wanted to drown the voices of early Alexandrian theologians who did not conform to later ideals. At the same time, I do not find anything conspiratorial about the claim that the earliest known Christian theologians in Alexandria – indeed, the earliest known speculative theologians anywhere – were Valentinus, Basilides, and Carpocrates, all of whom are dated by Clement to the reign of Hadrian (117–138 CE).¹⁶ Prodicus apparently appeared somewhat

¹¹ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1963); Gilles Quispel, *Gnosis als Weltreligion: Die Bedeutung der Gnosis in der Antike*, 3rd ed. (Bern: Origo, 1995); Birger Pearson, “Gnosticism as a Religion,” in *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 201–223.

¹² Ugo Bianchi, ed., *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina 13–18 Aprile 1966* (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

¹³ Christoph Marksches, *Gnosis: An Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 16–17; April D. DeConick, “Crafting Gnosis: Gnostic Spirituality in the Ancient New Age,” in *Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honour of John D. Turner*, ed. Kevin Corrigan and Tuomas Rasimus, NHMS 82 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 287–305.

¹⁴ Christoph Marksches, *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins*, WUNT 65 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); Winrich A. Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule: Eine Studie zur Theologie- und Kirchengeschichte des zweiten Jahrhunderts*, WUNT 83 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996); M. David Litwa, *Carpocrates, Marcellina and Epiphane: Three Early Christian Teachers of Alexandria and Rome* (London: Routledge, 2022).

¹⁵ Tabbernee, et al., “World of the Nile,” 207. See further Thomas Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined: The Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1988).

¹⁶ Clement, *Strom.* 7.17.106.4–7.17.107.1.

later, as did Julius Cassianus, Isidore (Basilides's son), Marcellina, and Epiphanes (the last two being disciples of Carpocrates).

So the question still looms: Was Bauer on the right track when he discussed earliest Christianity in Alexandria? The only way to answer this question is to do something not often done these days – to engage directly with Bauer's work, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*. When one takes a fresh look at his chapter on Egypt, there is a mix of both surprise and dismay. Bauer began by lamenting the darkness obscuring earliest Alexandrian Christianity. Yet he barely mentioned Basilides, Carpocrates, Isidore, Julius Cassianus, and other known Alexandrian theologians.¹⁷ Instead, he turned to Eusebius. Some of Bauer's remarks on this score have become famous (for instance, that the names of Eusebius's Alexandrian bishops are, until 189 CE, "a mere echo and a puff of smoke").¹⁸ Generally speaking, however, statements about the "deathly silence" of earliest Alexandrian church history were already hackneyed and do not take us very far.¹⁹

Bauer tried to eliminate sources for reconstructing earliest Alexandrian Christianity. He rightly rejected as spurious the letter of Hadrian to Servianus as quoted by "Flavius Vopiscus" in the fourth-century *Historia Augusta*.²⁰ Surprisingly, Bauer attempted to discard the *Epistle of Barnabas* – not because it was not Alexandrian, but because it was not (or is not) "orthodox." Today, his arguments in this regard seem particularly weak: *Barnabas* "seems docetic" and its Christology contains nothing "anti-heretical."²¹ The first claim is incorrect and the latter is one of Bauer's (in)famous arguments from silence.

¹⁷ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 48–49.

¹⁸ A century ago Andreas Heckel tried to show numerical patterns in the lists of Alexandrian bishops (*Die Kirche von Ägypten: Ihre Anfänge, ihre Organisation und ihre Entwicklung bis zur Zeit des Nicänum* [Strasbourg: J.S.Ed. Heitz, 1918], 13–43). The *Suda* (1.4695) says that the Alexandrian novel writer Achilles "Statius" (aka "Tatius") became a Christian bishop (ἐπίσκοπος) – a development that would interrupt the neat list of bishops (re)produced by Eusebius.

¹⁹ Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* 45.

²⁰ SHA, *Vita Saturnini* 8. See further Alessandro Galimberti, "The pseudo-Hadrianic Epistle in the Historia Augusta and Hadrian's Religious Policy," in *Hadrian and the Christians*, ed. Marco Rizzi (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 111–120; Francesco Massa, "Devotees of Serapis and Christ? A Literary Representation of Religious Cohabitations in the 4th Cent.," in *Beyond Conflicts: Cultural and Religious Cohabitations in Alexandria and Egypt between the First and the Sixth Century CE*, ed. Luca Arcari, STAC 103 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 263–282.

²¹ Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* 47–48.

Another of Bauer's arguments is better known, yet no less problematic: Since the *Gospel According to the Egyptians* arose in Egypt, and since it is "heretical," earliest Egyptian Christianity must also have been heretical.²² At present, one winces to see a person of Bauer's intellectual stature make such a simplistic and value-laden argument. Yet it gets worse: The *Gospel of the Hebrews* – which has "nothing to do" with the *Gospel of the Hebrews* mentioned by Jerome and Epiphanius – must have been written by "Jewish Christians of Alexandria."²³ This means, according to Bauer, that the *Gospel According to the Egyptians* was written by Gentile Christians, who also were also "gnostic."

Today, these arguments appear erroneous because they are based on wrong assumptions: First, that we can separate, in a vast cosmopolis like Alexandria, a distinct Jewish and Gentile Christian mindset; and second, that we can speak of a concrete division between "orthodoxy" and "heresy" in this period. Bauer of course knew that these "two types of Christianity were not yet at all clearly differentiated from each other," but he still used "orthodoxy" and "heresy" as his main analytical categories.²⁴ As most scholars today acknowledge, the use of these – essentially religious – categories are anachronistically applied to first- and second-century forms of Christianity.

If we abandon the "orthodoxy vs. heresy" binary, we can begin to evaluate the accuracy of Bauer's smaller claims. To my mind, for instance, Bauer was basically correct that orthodox Christians of the fourth century CE and beyond wanted (selectively) to forget certain figures in earliest Alexandrian Christianity or to categorize them as something other than Christian.

EUSEBIUS

Take, for instance, Eusebius. Eusebius had many aims in writing his *Ecclesiastical History*. One of these was to define those whom he considered to be Christians – to relate their story, and to disqualify certain competitors as "savage wolves" (*Acts* 20:29).²⁵ Sometimes Eusebius mentioned these perceived competitors – people such as Simon of Samaria, Basilides, Marcion, and Carpocrates. Yet there are several – and

²² Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* 50.

²³ Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* 51–52.

²⁴ Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* 59.

²⁵ Eusebius, *HE* 1.1.1.

several distinctly Alexandrian – figures whom Eusebius did not mention at all. One will look in vain, for instance, for Isidore (son of Basilides), Epiphanes (son of Carpocrates), Marcellina (disciple of Carpocrates), Prodicus, and Julius Cassianus.²⁶ It is also significant that Eusebius omitted Ptolemy and Heracleon (disciples of Valentinus), who seem to have spent time in Alexandria. All these figures are missing – despite the fact that Eusebius knew them from his reading of Irenaeus and Clement.

When Eusebius did not have data for earliest Alexandrian Christianity, he chose to report his own party's late and unreliable foundation legend. According to Eusebius, Mark the evangelist was the first missionary and bishop of Alexandria, a legend that was not apparently known to two of the most famous Alexandrian theologians, Clement and Origen. Both of these theologians – despite their voluminous literary remains – never mentioned it. (Nor, significantly, did Irenaeus or the mid-third-century Alexandrian bishop Dionysius.) Eusebius cited no specific source for his legend, transmitting only a vague report led by “they say” (φασίν):²⁷

They say that this Mark was the first dispatched to Egypt to preach the gospel which he had composed, and that he was the first to found churches at Alexandria itself. In that place such a vast multitude of men and women who believed came together at the first attempt in such a philosophic and serious discipline that Philo decided to inscribe their studies, meetings, banquets, and their whole mode of life.²⁸

Eusebius here referred to Philo of Alexandria's *Contemplative Life*, which described a Jewish ascetic group in the mid-first century (the “Therapeutae”).²⁹ No contemporary historian, to my knowledge,

²⁶ Eusebius may refer to Julius Cassianus as a chronographer in *HE* 6.13.7, but he did not seem to recognize him as the one attacked by Clement in *Strom.* 3.13.91–95.

²⁷ Melissa (formerly Philip) Sellew noted the problem: “Eusebius's typical use of the verb φασί seems to be to report traditions for which he has no clear written authority ... it would be more precise to say that Eusebius normally cites a tradition with the verb φασί when repeating oral legends” (“Eusebius and the Gospels,” in *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, ed. Harold Attridge and Gohei Hata [Leiden: Brill, 1992], 110–138 at 117). Ilaria L. E. Ramelli argues that since Eusebius did not mention the Alexandria connection in *Dem. Ev.* 3.5.89–95, the report about Mark in Alexandria must have come from Clement (“The Birth of the Rome-Alexandria Connection: The Early Sources on Mark and Philo and the Petrine Tradition,” *SPhA* 23 [2011]: 69–95 at 77–78). This is neither a necessary nor a plausible deduction.

²⁸ Eusebius, *HE* 2.16.1–2.

²⁹ See further David M. Hay, “Foil for the Therapeutae: References to Other Texts and Persons in Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa*,” in *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen*, ed. David Aune, Torrey Seland, and Jarl Henning Ulrichsen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 330–348; Mary Ann Beavis, “Philo's Therapeutai: Philosopher's

believes that the Therapeutae – despite the insistence of Eusebius – were Christians. Some scholars doubt the very existence of the Therapeutae.³⁰ The claim connected to it – that Mark came to Alexandria – can be firmly traced no earlier than Eusebius.³¹ Other fourth-century sources were unfamiliar with this foundation legend, for example the author of the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*.³²

Eusebius's (sub)apostolic founding of Alexandria may reflect developments in his own time. If we examine his *Chronicle*, we note that by 42 CE, Eusebius had Peter installed as first bishop of Rome. The very next year, Peter's "interpreter," Mark, announced his gospel in Alexandria (43 CE). This was one year before the first bishop of Antioch, Evodius, was installed in that city.³³ Thus we have an implicit episcopal ranking of the churches in Eusebius's day: first Rome, then Alexandria – who receives Peter's "son" Mark (1 Pet 5:13) – then Antioch. In terms of chronology, 43 CE seems a bit late for the debut of the Jesus movement(s) in Alexandria. If Acts 2:10 presents a plausible scenario (people from "Egypt" hear Peter on Pentecost), then Jews on pilgrimage from Egypt to Jerusalem should have brought back lore about Jesus to Egypt between 30 and 35 CE – assuming the date of Jesus's death to be around 30 CE.³⁴

Dream or Utopian Construction," *JSP* 14.1 (2004): 30–42; Joan E. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo's Therapeutae Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). On Eusebius's reception of the Therapeutae, see David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 216–222; Sabrina Inowlocki, "Eusebius of Caesarea's *Interpretatio Christiana* of Philo's *De vita contemplativa*," *HTR* 97:3 (2004): 305–328; Joan E. Taylor and David M. Hay, *Philo of Alexandria on the Contemplative Life: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, PACS 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 45–51.

³⁰ Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa* as a Philosopher's Dream," *JSJ* 30:1 (1999): 40–64; cf. Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 57–116.

³¹ The evidence of Clement's *Letter to Theodore* reputedly discovered by Morton Smith in 1958 must be bracketed because the letter is a suspected forgery of the fourth or twentieth century. See Litwa, *Carpocrates* 163–200; Geoffrey S. Smith and Brent C. Landau, *The Secret Gospel of Mark: A Controversial Scholar, a Scandalous Gospel of Jesus, and the Fierce Debate over Its Authenticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023).

³² Ps.-Clement, *Hom.* 1.8.3–1.14.7.

³³ Rudolf Helm, ed., *Eusebius Werke Siebenter Band – Die Chronik des Hieronymus: Hieronymi Chronicon* (Berlin: Akademie, 1956), 179. The Armenian version presents the date of Mark's arrival as 41 CE (A. Schöne, ed. *Eusebii Chronicorum canonum quae supersunt* [Berlin: Weidmann, 1866]).

³⁴ Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 52–58.

One suspects that the Mark legend is a countertradition crafted to oppose the assertion that Glaucias came to Alexandria and taught Basilides, the first known speculative Christian theologian of Alexandria.³⁵ Both Glaucias and Mark were said not only to be disciples of Peter; they were both named his “interpreter.”³⁶ Accordingly, both were thought to be (sub)apostolic missionaries to Alexandria. The Glaucias tradition is attested by Clement who ascribed the datum to Basilides himself. Clement wrote more than a century before Eusebius. Basilides, by Eusebius’s own reckoning, was Hadrianic (117–138 CE).

Obviously we are gazing into the mirror of reception; there is no reliable evidence that “apostolic” missionaries came to Alexandria at all. The push to make Alexandria an apostolic foundation can be traced to the early second century CE. The author of *Acts* strove hard to find apostolic founders for many areas: Peter and John for Samaria (*Acts* 8), Peter for Joppa and Caesarea (*Acts* 10), Paul for Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome (*Acts* 18–19, 28). If he could have found an apostolic founder for Alexandria, presumably he would have. The fact is, the author of *Acts* shows almost no interest in Alexandria (see Chapter 2).

In light of these problems, it is intriguing to hear a modern historian such as Birger Pearson observe that “Eusebius’s instinct [in *HE* 2.17.2] is correct ... when he stresses that the ‘apostolic men’ in Alexandria during Philo’s time were ‘of Hebrew origin and thus still preserved most of the ancient customs in a strictly Jewish manner.’” Pearson added some cautionary remarks, affirming, as is customary, the lack of secure data. In the end, however, he still concluded that “there can hardly be any question that the earliest missionaries to Alexandria were Jews coming from Jerusalem and that the earliest Christian converts were Jews.”³⁷

³⁵ Clement, *Strom.* 7.17.106.4. See the comments of Löhr, *Basilides* 19–23. In his Chronicle, Eusebius had Basilides “sojourn” (*commoratur*) in Alexandria in 132 CE (Helm, *Chronik* 201). This does not mean that Basilides only appeared at this date.

³⁶ Γλαυκίαν ... τὸν Πέτρου ἑρμηνέα (Basilides in Clement, *Strom.* 7.17.106.4). Μάρκος μὲν ἑρμηνευτὴς Πέτρου (Papias in Eusebius, *HE* 3.39.15). Löhr considers the Mark-as-interpreter tradition earlier than the Glaucias-as-interpreter tradition because the former comes from Papias (“Christliche ‘Gnostiker’ in Alexandria im zweiten Jahrhundert,” in *Alexandria*, ed. Tobias Georges, Felix Albrecht, and Reinhard Feldmeier [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013], 413–433 at 420). But Basilideans would not have tried to compete with the Papian tradition, since Papias never placed Mark in Alexandria. I disagree with Bentley Layton (“The Significance of Basilides in Ancient Christian Thought,” *Representations* 28 [1989]: 135–151 at 146) that Glaucias was τὸν Πέτρου ἑρμηνέα because he interpreted 1 Peter.

³⁷ Birger Pearson, “Christians and Jews in First-Century Alexandria,” in *Gnosticism and Christianity* 82–99 at 88. Cf. Ramelli, “Rome–Alexandria Connection,” 78–79. Despite

In fact, we can question both points on the grounds that Pearson himself stated: There is simply no reliable evidence. The tradition that “Mark,” a Jerusalemite Jew (*Acts* 12:12), came to Alexandria and converted those who became the Therapeutae is, for all we know, miles away from the truth. The Egyptians mentioned in *Acts* 2:10 were not missionaries, they are not called Alexandrians, and they may, after immigrating, have been permanent residents in Jerusalem (*Acts* 2:5).³⁸

So why would a scholar such as Pearson follow Eusebius’s fourth-century “instinct”? The answer, it seems, is the work that Pearson cites: the 1979 study of Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*. In this short work, Roberts argued, against Bauer, that Valentinus and Basilides must have been part of a larger context of “orthodox” Christian teachers – even though there is no early second-century evidence for those later recognized as “orthodox” until Pantaenus about 180 CE.³⁹ Roberts further argued that there are no “Gnostic papyri” during the first two centuries, with the exception of an Oxyrhynchus fragment from the *Gospel of Thomas*.⁴⁰ (Third-century fragments of the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Wisdom of Jesus Christ* are extant, among several other Christian gospels.)⁴¹

In my view, it is wrong to call Robert’s point “a powerful argument” against Bauer’s view for several reasons.⁴² First of all, “Gnostic” (which

refinements, Pearson’s thesis has remained consistent over the years. See his “Earliest Christianity in Egypt: Some Observations,” in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger Pearson and James E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 132–160; Birger Pearson, “Gnosticism in Early Egyptian Christianity,” in *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 194–214; Birger Pearson, “Cracking a Conundrum: Christian Origins in Egypt,” *Studia Theologica* 57 (2003): 61–75. Similar views are put forward by Attila Jakab, *Ecclesia alexandrina: Évolution sociale et institutionnelle du christianisme alexandrin (IIe et IIIe siècles)* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 49–53.

³⁸ The list of peoples in *Acts* 2:7–11 seems originally to have identified major Jewish communities in the Diaspora. For its function, see J. A. Brinkman, “The Literary Background of the ‘Catalogue of Nations’ (*Acts* 2,9–11),” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 418–427; A. J. M. Wedderburn, “Traditions and Redaction in *Acts* 2.1–13,” *JSNT* 55 (1994): 27–54; G. Gilbert, “The List of Nations in *Acts* 2: Roman Propaganda and the Lukan Response,” in *JBL* 121 (2002): 497–529.

³⁹ Roberts, *Manuscript* 50–51.

⁴⁰ Roberts, *Manuscript* 51–52; Lincoln H. Blumell and Thomas A. Wayment, ed. *Christian Oxyrhynchus: Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015), 238–241.

⁴¹ See further Joseph van Haelst, *Catalogue des Papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1976), 99–220; Cornelia Römer, “Manichaeism and Gnosticism in the Papyri,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 623–643 at 626–632.

⁴² Pace David Brakke, “The East (2): Egypt and Palestine,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 344–363 at 347.