Introduction

In the summer of 1121, Peter Abelard, the great medieval philosopher and theologian, could not catch a break. In March, he had been rebuked at the Council of Soissons, which required that his book *On the Divine Unity and Trinity* be burned and that he make a public proclamation of the faith. After this humiliation and a brief imprisonment at St. Menard, Abelard was allowed to return to St. Denys in Paris, where all of the monks hated him and his work. Then came the final straw. While perusing the Venerable Bede's commentary on the *Acts of the Apostles*, Abelard noticed a discrepancy between Bede and Abbot Hilduin's *Historia Dionysii*. Shortly thereafter he let slip his observation in a casual conversation, perhaps in some jest, with a few of his fellow monks. The outcry that ensued resulted in a disciplinary hearing convened by the monastery's abbot, Adam. Abelard soon fled from the kingdom of France and found temporary exile in Champagne under the protection of Count Thibaud.[1]

What was this observation that so incensed the monks of St. Denys? Abelard had noticed that Bede, by then an established authority on the history of the church, claimed that St. Denys (Dionysios in Greek), the patron saint of the abbey and of the kingdom of France, had been bishop of Corinth.[2] This contradicted the ninth-century work of Abbot Hilduin (814–880), an earlier abbot of St. Denys, whose research had "confirmed" that the saint interred in the monastery was none other than Dionysios the Areopagite, first bishop of Athens and later a martyr in Paris.[3]

[1] For Abelard's own account of these events, see Peter Abelard, William Levitan, and Debra Nails, "History of Calamities," *New England Review* 25 (2004): 24–25
[2] Bede, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 17.34.
[3] *Vita s. Dionysii, sive Areopagitica*, in *PL* 106.9–50.

Why was this observation so incendiary? Hilduin's research conflated a number of Dionysii that appear in early Christian texts: Dionysios the Areopagite, who was a convert of Paul in Acts 17:34 and later said to be the first bishop of Athens; St. Denys, a third-century Gallic martyr and bishop of Paris;[4] and Pseudo-Dionysios, the pseudonymous fifth- or sixth-century author of theological texts that had been an important conduit for Platonic and apophatic thought in the medieval church.[5] By contrast, Bede's reading of Acts conflated the Areopagite of Acts 17 with Dionysios of Corinth, an influential but little-known bishop from the late second century. To follow Bede's opinion was to suggest that the martyr interred in the monastery may have been a little-known bishop of Corinth or even some other unknown Dionysios/Denys rather than the famous convert of St. Paul, bishop, and theologian. Abelard had suggested, consciously or not, that the martyr around whom the prestige of the monastery was built was not who the monks thought he was.[6] By driving a wedge between Dionysios the Areopagite, convert of St. Paul, famed theologian, martyr, and patron of France, and the Dionysios interred at St. Denys, Abelard's joke rightly struck a nerve.[7]

This incident might well be the only time since the second century CE that bishop Dionysios of Corinth (ca. 166–174 CE) has been the subject of any controversy worthy of the name. In fact, Dionysios is rarely mentioned or discussed in the history of second-century Christianity. This absence is due largely to the fact that Dionysios' corpus of writings has been lost and is known to us now only through summaries and fragments in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. Though much about Dionysios has been lost, what remains suggests that the bishop of Corinth was an influential and controversial figure in the late second century. In his own day, Dionysios was famous enough that his advice was requested from as far as the Black Sea and his letters were tampered with by those seeking to lend his authority to their theological positions. He worked against the spread of Marcion's

[4] An account of this Dionysios' martyrdom in Paris is found in Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 1.30.

[5] Charles M. Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: 'No Longer I'*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[6] Abelard claims that he was only joking (*quasi iocando monstravi*).

[7] In an attempt to placate the angered abbot and the monks of the monastery, Abelard soon penned a letter of explanation and apology, in which he tries to smooth over the wedge that his observation had driven between the various Dionysii around which the abbey's prestige hung (Peter Abelard, *Letters of Peter Abelard, Beyond the Personal*, trans. Jan Ziolkowski (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 133–46 (letter 11).

influence, encouraged a moderate view on celibacy and the readmission of lapsed sinners, argued with bishops in other regions, and negotiated economic assistance from Christians in Rome. He was, in other words, very well connected to the broader politics of second-century Christianity.[8]

DIONYSIOS FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTER

This book is concerned with returning Dionysios to the lively debates of the second century, of which he was an important participant. Since Dionysios is rarely discussed in studies of second-century Christianity, it may help to begin by laying out the basics of his life and writings. Eusebius' information on Dionysios comes from a collection of the bishop's letters that Eusebius possessed in his library in Caesarea (*Hist. eccl.* 4.23). As he describes it, the collection contained nine letters. Of these letters, seven were written by Dionysios to other collectives: Sparta, Athens, Nicomedia, Gortyna, Amastris, Knossos, and Rome (see Figure 0.1). One letter was written to an individual, a woman named Chrysophora. Finally, the collection also included a letter written in response to Dionysios' letter to the collective in Knossos, penned by its bishop Pinytos. These letters comprise the only information that we possess about Dionysios, and all of Eusebius' references to Dionysios and his letters are included in Appendix A for easy reference. Rufinus' translation of Eusebius into Latin frames Dionysios slightly differently but seems to be based on no new information available to him.[9] Jerome mentions Dionysios in his *Lives of Illustrious Men* (27), but Jerome merely summarizes what he has already found in Eusebius. Some have speculated that there are fragments of Dionysios' letters in the Pseudo-Ignatian corpus, but this remains purely speculative.[10]

We know that Dionysios was alive and serving as bishop in Corinth sometime in the late 160s to early 170s CE. We know this because his letter to the Romans mentions Soter as the bishop of Rome (see *Hist. eccl.* 4.23.9). We know of Soter from several sources and can place his term

[8] As Everett Ferguson nicely puts it, "The correspondence of Dionysius mirrors the life of the whole church in the third quarter of the second century" (Everett Ferguson, "The Church at Corinth outside the New Testament," *Restoration Quarterly* 3.4 [1959]: 170).

[9] I plan on writing a future article on how Rufinus' characterization of Dionysios reflects broader interests in Rufinus' translation projects. But here I merely note that Rufinus offers us nothing outside of what is found in Eusebius.

[10] These fragments will be discussed later in the chapter.

FIGURE 0.1 Recipients of Dionysios' Letters. Tiles and Data © Mapbox / OpenStreetMap CC-BY-SA / 2013 Ancient World Mapping Center (AWMC) CC-BY-NC 3.0.

of office roughly between 165 and 175 CE.[11] Dionysios was not the bishop of Corinth during the Quartodeciman controversy in the 190s CE, when the Corinthians were governed by Bacchylus (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.22.1; 23.4). We can thus hypothesize that Dionysios was born in the second quarter of the second century, making him a younger contemporary of Ignatius, Justin Marytr, and Marcion, among others. That he had passed by the 190s makes him an older contemporary of Irenaeus. Whether he was born in Corinth or migrated to the city later in life is unknown.

Notwithstanding the havoc he wrought for Abelard, Dionysios has not been treated extensively by scholars of early Christianity. Walter

[11] Soter is mentioned as a bishop of Rome by Hegesippus (quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.22.1), Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, 3.3; and Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.19.1; 30.3; 5.0.1. Soter is also mentioned by Irenaeus in his letter to Victor during the Quartodeciman controversy (quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.14). Eusebius claims that Soter's reign as bishop lasted for eight years (5.0.1). Karl Leo Noethlichs, "Korinth – ein 'Aussenposten Roms'?: Zur kirchengeschichtlichen Bedeutung des Bischofs Dionysius von Korinth," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum. Ergänzungsband* 34 (2002): 234, gives Dionysios' tenure a later range of 170–190 CE, partly because he dates Soter a bit later than most (168/69–175/76 CE)

Bauer saw Dionysios as a lackey of Rome, an arm of Rome's soft power as the church of the imperial city began to exert its influence over larger swathes of territory.[12] After Bauer, Pierre Nautin offered a rebuttal, arguing that Dionysios was very much his own man and, in fact, was working (subtly) against the interests of Rome.[13] Nautin saw Dionysios as a moderate on issues of celibacy, repentance, and the readmission of penitent heretics, though a moderate who actively fought against more rigorous bishops and actively worked against Marcion. Nautin's reconstruction remains compelling in many respects and is usually the portrait endorsed by scholars who only make passing reference to Dionysios on the way to more interesting projects.[14] To give you a sense of how uncrowded the field of Dionysian studies is at present, I can round out the history of scholarship with two more sentences. Wilhelm Kühnert offered a testy rejoinder to Nautin urging some historical agnosticism in a 1979 festschrift article.[15] In 2002, Karl Leo Noethlichs offered an update to Nautin in a *JAC* supplement volume that offers a compelling synthesis between Nautin and Kühnert on a number of issues.[16] There is thus a lot of room to rethink Dionysios' role in early Christianity.[17]

[12] Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). Bauer argues that the Corinthian collective was "conquered" by Rome with 1 Clement and the money that Bauer suggests was sent with the letter (104–5; 122). For Bauer, Dionysios, as bishop of Corinth and a "devoted servant of Rome," worked to expand Roman interest into the hostile territory of Achaia and the broader eastern Mediterranean (105).

[13] Pierre Nautin, *Lettres et écrivains chrétiens des IIe et IIIe siècles*, Patristica II (Paris: Cerf, 1961), 13–32.

[14] See, for example, the excellent analysis in Richard I. Pervo, *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2010), 145–48. Christine Trevett, "The Church Before the Bible," in *The Bible in Pastoral Practice: Readings in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church*, ed. Paul Ballard and Stephen R. Holmes (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2005), 5–24, also largely follows Nautin.

[15] Wilhelm Kühnert, "Dionysius von Korinth: eine Bischofsgestalt des zweiten Jahrhunderts," in *Theologia Scientia Eminens Practica: Fritz Zerbst zum 70 Geburtstag*, ed. Fritz Herbst and Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber (Wien: Herder, 1979), 273–89.

[16] Noethlichs, "Korinth – ein 'Aussenposten Roms'?," 232–47.

[17] Beyond these more constructive readings, Dionysios is occasionally discussed in the context of early Christian letter collections. See Adolf von Harnack, *Die Briefsammlung des Apostels Paulus und die anderen vorkonstantinischen christlichen Briefsammlungen* (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1926), 36–40, and Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 116–18. I discuss the collection of Dionysios' letters in the Conclusion.

From what we know of Dionysios and the movement of his letters, he must have been far more important in his own time than he has been in early Christian studies. As I will show in what follows, the very fact that Dionysios could contemplate sending a letter thousands of kilometers away to Christians on the south shore of the Black Sea shows that he was able to mobilize forces and resources within tenuous, extended networks. Further, that his letters were occasionally requested by other collectives and adulterated by some of his opponents suggests that he was well known among Christians in the late second century. This book attempts to bring Dionysios back from the margins of early Christian studies and to place him, his letters, and his networks back into the thick of things, and in so doing I hope that this movement from the margins to the center of our attention might help to reshape how we tell our own modern stories about the history of earliest Christianity.

In bringing Dionysios from the margins to the center, I do not merely want to find a place for him within our pre-existing historical frameworks for the development of early Christianity; rather, in moving Dionysios to the center I reimagine him within what I will call an assemblage approach to early Christian history. I read Dionysios within the complex geographic, social, and economic landscapes of the eastern Mediterranean and focus on the ways in which his letters probe the possibilities for connectivity across these landscapes. Dionysios' letters reflect the work that went into creating, maintaining, and (oft-times) losing connections among early Christians. Dionysios' corpus and its afterlife offer us an opportunity to see attempts to build and maintain a network of early Christian collectives and how these attempts eventually decomposed to become fodder for other early Christian social formations. By bringing Dionysios back to the center we have the opportunity to re-imagine early Christianity as a series of tenuous and shifting networks that came together and fell apart as they probed the possibilities and potentialities that constrained and enabled connectivity across the across the ancient Mediterranean.

DIONYSIOS AND EARLY CHRISTIAN DIFFERENCE

The work on Dionysios that I offer in this book emerges out of my own attempts to think how we might rewrite dominant historical narratives about the earliest Christians. I look to Dionysios precisely because he is a marginal figure in these narratives and thus perhaps a vantage point from which to see at least a part of the history of early Christianity

otherwise. While there are many ways that one might look otherwise at early Christian history, in this book I use the letters of Dionysios to work through two interrelated sets of issues. First, I am interested in thinking about how we might speak differently about early Christian difference. How do we speak about the differences between ancient writers, texts, groups, and institutions that we find in our sources without privileging certain voices over others? What terminology is appropriate to map these differences? What is at stake in how we name these differences?

Second, I want to explore a different way of looking at early Christian difference as a function of connectivity, shaped by metaphors of movement and flux, emergence and becoming, networks and flows. Rather than organizing our historiographic frameworks around theological doctrine, textual affinities, or the borderlines of orthodoxy and heresy, I want to privilege the materiality of connectivity, the networks within which early Christians and others negotiated the landscapes of the Roman world. These net*works* involved precisely "work," and it is only by reimagining the costs that were accrued in this work that we can perhaps map early Christianity otherwise. These networks then might allow us to think about the interconnectivities that gave rise to, maintained, transformed, and fed upon different forms of early Christian sociality. In this sense, my second goal is an attempt to answer the problem of the first, namely how to speak about early Christian difference.

One of the central arguments of this book is that studying Dionysios requires a different way of mapping early Christian difference, one that might also help us to write histories of early Christianity otherwise. As we will see in the chapters that follow, Dionysios does not fit into the prevailing binary of orthodoxy and heresy that has governed early Christian historiography since Irenaeus in the late second century. Nor is Dionysios "covered" by the important work that has gone into defining the "varieties" of multiple early *Christianities*. For example, Dionysios' fight with Bishop Pinytos of Knossos (see Chapter 4) pits two authors that Eusebius claims were "orthodox" against one another over questions of celibacy. While Eusebius tries to smooth over this debate, its existence allows us to question the fixity and homogeneity of "orthodoxy," as well as its usefulness in describing the differences that were sites of debate among second-century Christians. What is needed is a new set of categories and a new optics for viewing early Christian difference amid the complex networks of the ancient Mediterranean.

In what follows, I will suggest that one way of looking at early Christian difference *differently* is to pay attention to the networks that

arose as a result of the connectivity between people, places, cities, and collectives in the eastern Mediterranean. A concern with networks and connectivity has long been a focus of Mediterranean studies, going back to the work of Fernand Braudel.[18] Braudel and his *Annaliste* colleagues sought to write histories that eschewed the focus on famous people and events, so as to bring to the fore the anonymous and plural forces that give human histories their shapes.[19] More recent work on the Mediterranean has continued to foreground the importance of networks and movement across the variegated landscapes of the Middle Sea.[20] In what follows, I draw heavily on these previous historical projects while putting them into conversation with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Bruno Latour, who offer the means by which to think of connectivity as an alternative historical ontology that offers a different framework for understanding early Christian difference.[21] Deleuze and Latour help us to see how networks, as haphazard, contingent, and local coagulations of people, ideas, routes, and resources, offer a way of speaking about the formation of Christian socialities, identities, and interdependencies without endowing these formations with essences or stability. What I want to conjure in my reconstruction of Dionysios' network is a historiography that sees early Christian history as a raucous flux of local and translocal networks that

[18] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

[19] On Braudel's historiography, see Cavan W. Concannon and Lindsey Mazurek, "Introduction: A New Connectivity for the Twenty-first Century," in *Across the Corrupting Sea: Post-Braudelian Approaches to the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Cavan W. Concannon and Lindsey Mazurek (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1–14; Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 65–85.

[20] Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000); Irad Malkin, ed. *Mediterranean Paradigms and Classical Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Irad Malkin, *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Irad Malkin, Christy Constantakopoulou, and Katerina Panagopoulou, eds., *Greek and Roman Networks in the Mediterranean* (New York: Routledge, 2009); William V. Harris, ed. *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Cyprian Broodbank, *The Making of the Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean from the Beginning to the Emergence of the Classical World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013).

[21] On how Deleuze and Latour might make a difference in Mediterranean studies more generally, see Concannon and Mazurek, "Introduction," 12–14. Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (New York: Continuum, 2006), has made important steps toward converting Deleuze's work on assemblages into a useful set of tools for historical and sociological analysis.

emerge, change, expand, solidify, and decompose over time. Some of these networks endured, as they expanded, routinized, and institutionalized their connections, while others decomposed, leaving traces here and there that became part of new early Christian machines or dissipated quietly back into the flow of history.

Dionysios is a good place to start a rethinking of early Christian historiography along these lines. During his tenure as bishop in the late second century, Dionysios interacted with a network of early Christian collectives stretching from Rome to the Black Sea, but this robust network and Dionysios' own influence decomposed shortly afterward, such that all that remained for Eusebius and Jerome was a collection of letters. No traditions, no social memory, just a volume on a shelf, which itself has disappeared, leaving only fragments and traces for us. Dionysios helps us to think both about the diversity of early Christian networks and about how little we know about how those networks came into being, survived, and disappeared.

IN FRAGMENTS (IN EUSEBIUS)

An important methodological issue needs to be dealt with before reconstructing Dionysios and his network. As I noted previously, everything that we know about Dionysios comes from fragments and summaries of a collection of his letters in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. Because the evidence for Dionysios comes via an intermediary, it is important to be clear about how I will work with this intermediary source in my reconstructions.[22] I first became interested in studying Dionysios because I could see almost immediately a mismatch between the materials that Eusebius was quoting and the uses to which he was putting them in the broader arguments of the *Ecclesiastical History*. My intuitions about these mismatches will be put to the test in later chapters, but in this section I want to lay out how I will work with the fragments of Dionysios, following in the footsteps of other ancient historians who work from fragmentary literary survivals.[23] As part of this discussion, I include

[22] Noethlichs, "Korinth – ein 'Aussenposten Roms'?," 234, rightly notes that "Dionys-Interpretation auch eine Eusebius-Interpretation."

[23] I was particularly inspired early on in this project by the excellent work of Luijendijk in uncovering the traces of Christians at Oxyrhynchus. See her excellent monograph on the subject: Anne Marie Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Harvard Theological Studies (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

a few examples from the fragments of Dionysios where I see the hand of Eusebius in the framing of the quotation, in the summary of a particular letter, and (perhaps) in a quotation itself. For the complete set of materials relating to Dionysios in Eusebius, the reader should consult Appendix A, where I have organized the relevant passages in Greek with my English translation and textual notes.

Before going into the question of how to read the fragments in Eusebius, I want to discuss briefly two other possible sources for materials from Dionysios, both of which I consider to be implausible. As to the first, Wocher argued in 1830 that the otherwise anonymous letter of 2 Clement was written by Dionysios.[24] This theory had the virtue of explaining how 2 Clement came to be associated with 1 Clement. In one of the fragments of Dionysios' letters (*Hist. eccl.* 4.23.11), he mentions that the Corinthians have a copy of 1 Clement in Corinth, which leaves open the possibility that one of Dionysios' sermons was filed near this text in the Corinthian archive.[25] Second, Wocher's theory was supported by the references in 2 Clement 7 to people sailing to a location to compete in athletic competitions, which he and many later scholars have taken as a reference to the Isthmian Games, which were sponsored by Corinth.[26] Few have been persuaded by Wocher's theory, and there is no definite evidence to support it.

A more plausible, but still unconvincing, argument for other material from Dionysios comes in two fragments from the *Sacra Parallela* of John of Damascus that Harnack put forward as potentially Dionysian in origin:[27]

1. Παρθενίας ζυγὸν μηδενὶ ἐπιτίθει ἐπισφαλὲς γὰρ τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ δυσφύλακτον καὶ μάλιστα ὅταν κατ' ἀνάγκην γίνεται

Do not impose on anyone the yoke of virginity, because it is a thing precarious and hard to bear, especially when it is done by obligation.

2. Τοῖς νεωτέροις ἐπίτρεπε γαμεῖν πρὶν ἢ διαφθαρῶσιν εἰς ἑταίρας

Allow the young to marry, before they corrupt themselves with prostitutes.[28]

In the *Sacra Parallela* these quotations are attributed to Ignatius of Antioch, though they do not appear in any of the recensions of the

[24] Maximilian Joseph Wocher, *Die Briefe der apostolischen Väter Clemens und Polykarpus: nebst einigen Zugaben* (Tübingen: Laupp, 1830), 204.
[25] For more on this fragment of Dionysios' letter to the Romans, see Chapter 6.
[26] On the Isthmian Games and Corinth, see Chapter 2.
[27] Harnack, *Briefsammlung*, 79 n. 1.
[28] The two fragments can be found in Karl Holl, *Fragmente vornicänisher Kirchenväter aus den Sacra Parallela* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1899), 29, nos. 80, 81.