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## WHY CAN'T I FIND THIS PASSAGE FROM CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA'S "COMMENTARY ON JOHN" IN THE TEXT?

A correspondent writes to ask why he can't find the text for this Latin passage, taken from this 1618 edition of Bucer, *De gubernatione ecclesiae* (p.50), in any modern version of Cyril of Alexandria's *Commentary on John*:

Ad cuius rei confirmationem statim profert duo testimonia ex Evangelio Ioannis et Cyrillum ita loquentem: 'Magnum revera apud Iudaeos opprobrium ducebatur, si quem de Synagoga eiecissent. Sicut enim nunc homicidae, vel adulteri, vel caeteri capitalibus criminibus rei ab ecclesia pelluntur: ita tunc confessores Christi a Iudaeorum synagoga eliminabantur.'

i.e.

On this matter confirmation is at once brought forward from two testimonies from the Gospel of John, and Cyril therefore saying, "In fact great reproach was expressed among the Jews, if someone was expelled from the synagogue. For just as today murderers, or adulterers, or parties to other capital crimes are expelled from the church: so at that time confessors to Christ were thrown out from the synagogue of the Jews."

This passage is indeed present in the 1520 Latin translation - the Greek had yet to be printed, as may be seen in the online copy [here](#). It appears on p.242, in book 6 of the commentary, in chapter 20, commenting on "You were born in utter sin, yet you teach us? And they threw him out." (John 5:34) The translator is George Trapezuntius, literally "George from Trebizond". He was one of the circle of young Greek exiles around Cardinal Bessarion.

If we look at the 1638 edition of Cyril, with Greek and Latin, p.636-7, or PG 73, [col. 1006](#); or at the English translation from the 19th century, we find in book 6 this:

And here again learn that what was done is typical of a true event: for that the people of Israel were going to utterly loathe the Gentiles as nurtured in sins from erroneous prejudice, any one can recognise from what the Pharisees said to that man. And they expel him, exactly as they who plead the doctrine of Christ are expelled and cast out by the Jews.

The last phrase "exactly as..." corresponds to "ita tunc confessores...". But the bit before doesn't. So what's going on?

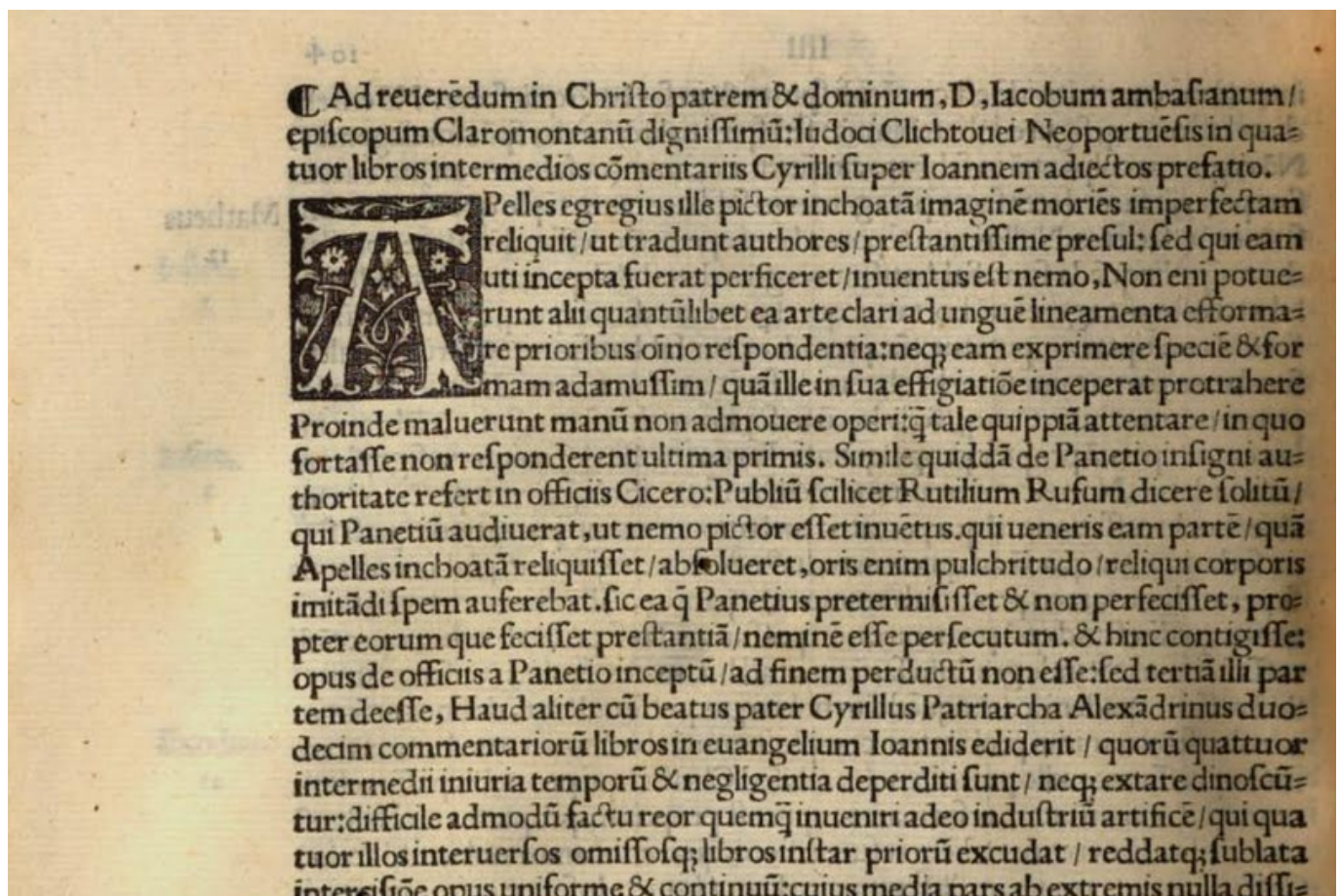
The answer is to be found in a 1988 article about the use of Cyril by Erasmus in his

*Annotationes* on John.<sup>[1]</sup> This tells us:

The first printed edition of the *Commentarium* on John was the Latin translation made by George Trapezuntius before 1486, published by Josse Clichtove and printed by Wolfgang Hopyl at Paris in 1508. But Trapezuntius had known only the first and last thirds of the *Commentarium*; Books 5-8, covering John, 7, 25-12, 48, were lost and hence not represented in his translation. Clichtove reports in his preface that these books are missing not only in the manuscript he used for his edition but also in three Latin and two Greek manuscripts in the library.

In a reissue of the 1508 edition made in 1513-1514, Clichtove and Hopyl inserted between the end of Cyril's Book 4 and the beginning of his Book 9 Clichtove's own supplement of the missing books, numbered 5-8 and composed largely from the *Homilies* on John by Chrysostom and the *Tractates* on John by Augustine. The supplement had its own preface describing what Clichtove had done and its own pagination, but in all other respects the edition was identical to that of 1508. It was the supplemented edition that was revised and reprinted in 1520, this time with new title page, colophon, and pagination.

What an extraordinary proceeding! The publisher composed his own "books 5-8", and sold them embedded in the old translation by George Trapezuntius! The "preface" on p.104 of the 1520 edition is hardly visible as such, and the spurious material is clearly labelled as Cyril in the running headers at the top of the page.



Clichtove's preface in the 1520 edition of Cyril of Alexandria's "Commentary on John"

Based upon this misleading edition, Erasmus then quoted the material. From Erasmus it passed into other literature of the period, including Baronius' *Annales* (p.398 in this late reprint).

It's a very interesting discovery, and a warning when dealing with old editions.

(My thanks to our correspondent, who looked up all the old editions and references which I have made use of above).

1. <sup>[1]</sup>Jane E. Phillips, "Erasmus, Cyril, and the 'Annotationes' on John", *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, vol. 50, No. 2 (1988), pp. 381-384. [JSTOR↵](#)
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