



Publié sur *La Vie des Classiques* (<https://96.ip-213-32-20.eu>)

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## SOME FURTHER NOTES ON PRIMASIUS

Following [my post of yesterday](#), I have gleaned a few more details on Primasius of Hadrumetum and his commentary on Revelation (*Commentarius in Apocalypsin*).

A better account of his life and actions can be found in the old 19th century *Dictionary of Christian Biography* volumes, with references, [here](#). It reads:

**Primasius**, bp. of Adrumetum or Justinianopolis, in the Byzacene province of N. Africa. He flourished in the middle of 6th cent., and exercised considerable influence on the literary activity of the celebrated theological lawyer JUNILIUS, who dedicated to him his *Institutes*, which spread the views of Theodore of Mopsuestia in the West. Primasius first comes before us in a synod of his province in 541, the decrees of which are known only through Justinian's decrees confirming them, as given in Baronius, *Ann.* 541, n. 10-12. He was sent to Constantinople in connexion with the controversy on the Three Chapters c. 551. He assisted in the synod which pope Vigilius held against Theodore Ascidas and was still in Constantinople during the session of the fifth general council, but took no part in it, notwithstanding repeated solicitations (Mansi, ix. 199 seq.). He was one of 16 bishops who signed the Constitutum of pope Vigilius, May 14, 553. When, however, Vigilius accepted the decrees of the fifth council, Primasius signed them also. According to Victor Tunun. (Migne's *Patr. Lat.* t. lxxviii. col. 959), other motives conspired to bring about this change. He was at first exiled to a convent, and then the death of Boethius, primate of the Byzacene, aroused his ambition to be his successor. He gained his point, but, returning home, his suffragans denounced him as guilty of sacrilege and robbery. He died soon afterwards. His writings (*ib.* pp. 407-936) embrace commentaries on St. Paul's Epp. and the Apocalypse; likewise a treatise (now lost), *de Haeresibus*, touching on some points which Augustine did not live to treat with sufficient fullness (Isid. *Hispal. Vir. Ill.* xxii. in *ib.* lxxxiii. 1095; Cave, i. 525; Tillem. xiii. 927, xvi. 21). Our Primasius is sometimes confounded with bp. Primasius of Carthage. The best account of Primasius of Adrumetum is in Kihn's *Theodor von Mopsuestia*, pp. 248-254, where a critical estimate is formed "of the sources of his exegetical works. [CHILIASTS.] Cf. also Zahn, *Forschungen*, iv. 1-224 (1891).

A kind correspondent linked to a study by Haussleiter from 1887.<sup>[1]</sup>

I was able to learn of the following manuscripts of the *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*., partly from Haussleiter, partly from a wonderful [twitter thread by Colleen Curran](#). (When will somebody start a project like Pinakes for Latin mss?)

- Oxford, Bodleian, ms. Douce 140. Late 7th / early 8th century. This was in England in the Anglo-Saxon period.

- Kassel, MS Theol. fol. 24. 9th century. From Fulda.
- A = Codex Augiensis 222. Late 8th / early 9th century. Originally from Reichenau. But Curran gives this as “Karlsruhe, MS 212 (s.vii, Reichenau)”.
- C = Paris 2185, once the Colbertinus. Partly 10th c., partly 11-12th. Originally from Corbie.
- G = Paris 13390, once the Sangermanensis 94. 9th century. Also from Corbie.

In Becker’s *Catalogi* of old medieval libraries, various copies of Primasius seem to have existed.

- 2 distinct copies at Reichenau in 822 AD, nos. 348 and 349 in the catalogue.
- 1 copy at St Riquier in 831, no. 191.
- 1 copy in two volumes at St. Gall in one catalogue of the 9th century, nos. 272-3, but only one volume in another catalogue of the same century, this time bound with Gregory but labelled as “corrupt”.
- 1 copy at Bobbio in the 10th century in two volumes.
- 1 copy at St Bertin in the 12th century, no. 211.
- 1 copy at Corbie in the 12th century, no. 253.
- The same single copy in the catalogue of Corbie of ca. 1200, no. 209.

The *editio princeps* of Primasius appears to be in 1535 in Cologne. This was unknown to Haussleiter. The manuscript used is attributed to Jean de Gagny, who seems to have had access to all sorts of monastic libraries in France at this period.

# PRIMASII

AFRI EPISCOPI VTICENSIS,

uiri suo tempore clarissimi, super

APOCALYPSIM

B. Iohannis apostoli, libri quinque,

iam primum typis

excusi.



Colonia, ex ædibus Eucharth,

ANNO M. D. XXXV.

*Sancti Lucae promissio.*

It is delightful to find this edition is online, at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (BSB), [here](#).

The most easily available edition is that of the *Patrologia Latina*, 68, cols. 793-936. This may be found from the links on the right. There is a modern CCL 92 edition, which of course is inaccessible to most people, so I have not seen it.

Here's the Latin for the prologue. I initially scanned Haussleiter – scanning the PL text is a nightmare – but the PL was at least printed by someone who understood it, so I have added back in the capitals at the start of sentences and converted “Jotor” to “Jethron”, which is plainly what it should be, changed elitist spellings and generally changed it back to something that a normal person could work with. I’ve had rather enough of working with partly corrupt Latin texts lately.

Prologus. Tuis, vir inluster et religiose Castor, suasionibus adquiescens, sic librum Apocalypsis beati Iohannis multis mysteriis opacatum, in adiutorio domini nostri Jesu Christi, licet exiguis susceperem viribus exponendum, ut non meis solis tantum fuerim contentus inventis, sed quamquam numero pauca, si qua tamen a sancto quoque Augustino testimonia exinde exposita forte reperi, indubitanter adjunxi. Sed etiam a Ticonio Donatista quondam certa, quae sano congruunt sensui, defloravi, et ex eis quae elegenda fuerant, exundantia reprimens, importuna resecans, et impolita componens, catholico moderamine temperavi. Multa quippe in ipso eius opere reperi et supervacua, et inepta et

sanae doctrinae contraria, ita ut et de causa, quae inter nos et illos vertitur, secundum pravitatem cordis sui loca nocentia captaret, nostraeque ecclesiae noxia expositione putaret mordaciter illudendum. Nec mirum, quod haereticus rem sibi congruam fecerit, sed vel quod invenire potuit defloranda, quod tamen ille facere iniuste temptavit, nobis cura fuit, locorum opportunitatibus nactis, veraciter exsequi, eorumque errorem convincendo cassare. Sicut enim preciosa in stercore gemma prudenti debet curare, collegi, et reperta dignitati ingenuae revocari, ita undecumque veritas clareat, catholicae defeudenda est unitati. Huic enim soli competit quicquid veritas foris etiam personarit. Juste namque fides a perfidis collegit, quod sui iuris esse cognoverit. Nec prodesse potest alienis usurpatum sed filiis, cum iuri matris fuerit redditum. Sic autem Donatistae hinc extolli non debent, sicut de sermone Caiphae quem dixit: *Expediit ut unus homo moriatur pro populo* (John 11), Judaei non debent gloriari. Sed nec nostris esse debet offensio. Si qua enim fuerint ecclesiasticis utilitatibus profutura, nostris sunt instructionibus applicanda neque attendenda persona dicentis, sed qualitas consideranda est dictionis. Sic Moyses (Exod. 19), eruditus omni sapientia Aegyptiorum, post divini sermonis alloquium, cuius pridem meruit beari consortio, Jethron socerum suum, mitissimus rudem, peritus ignarum, magister copiosae multitudinis singularem, Israhelita gentilem devotus audivit, eiusque consilium sequens, mox utilitatem praedictam invenit. Cum regendi populi communicanda per multos onera partiretur, specialiter levigatus, sic certe ab ethnicis auctoribus probabiliter dicta et apostolicis praedicationibus sociata nostro profectui usu meliore cesserunt, unde tamen non sinuntur gloriari gentiles.

Extenditur autem hoc opus in libros quinque. Quorum lectio qualem studiosis sit latura profectum, experimento melius quam nostra pollicitatione probabitur. Verum quia pro diversitatibus opinantium, diversis me modis arbitror fore culpandum, cum alii de huius operis coeperint prolixitate causari, alii autem libri profunda pensantes de exiguitate magis censuerint arguendum. Tali primos reor sermone placandos, quod satius me fatear de paucitate notandum, eo quod latentem ibi mysteriorum plenitudinem divinorum nec penetrare competenter queverim, nec ea quidem quae intellegi potuerunt, idoneo valuerim sermone proferre. Secundis vero hoc alloquio satisfactionis insinuem, nihil me dominis conservisque meis malivole subtraxisse, sed ignorantiae confessione de exiguitate malle veniam postulare. Si enim experto non crederem, sancti tamen Hieronymi edoctus sententia didicissem, qui de hoc libro docens dicit: ‘Apocalypsis Johannis tot tibi sacramenta quot verba: parum dixi et pro merito columinis laus omnis inferior est. In verbis singulis multiplices latent intellegentiae.’ His intercedentibus, et veniam humilis confessio promeretur et praecelsi dignitas libri credentibus saltem, etsi necdum intellegentibus, innotescat. Nam cum intellegentibus alibi raro interponi soleat tropica proprietati narratio, hic tamen aut frequenter intexitur, aut condensior figura sensus generatur ex altera, aut una eademque res sic variis profertur adumbrata figuris, ut non eadem credatur repeti potuisse, sed altera, quod et in principio Ezechielis et in aliquibus Danihelis visionibus invenitur, sed hic amplius. Pro qua re me infirmem vestris amplius orationibus adiuvandum.

I’ve not translated this, but let us note his description of getting material from Tyconius:

“jewels from a dunghill” (“preciosa in stercore gemma”).

1. <sup>[1]</sup>J. Haussleiter, “Leben und Werke des Bischofs Primasius von Hadrumetum: Eine Untersuchung”, Erlangen (1887), online  
<https://archive.org/details/lebenundwerkedes00haus/page/1>↵
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