

THE PROLOGUE OF PAPIAS

Although a great deal has been written about the prologue of Papias' *Exegesis*, it still contains at least one grammatical difficulty that has not been adequately explained. The chief purpose of this paper will be to show how Eusebius misunderstood Papias' syntax at a crucial point, and how his error facilitated the spread of the theory of the two Johns, which is seen to have no basis in Papias as soon as the syntactical problem is solved aright. The text of the prologue is as follows:

οὐκ ὀκνήσω δέ σοι καὶ ὅσα ποτὲ παρὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καλῶς ἔμαθον καὶ καλῶς ἐμνημόνευσα, συγκατατάξαι ταῖς ἐρμηνείαις, διαβεβαιούμενος ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀλήθειαν. οὐ γὰρ τοῖς τὰ πολλὰ λέγουσιν ἔχαιρον ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοί, ἀλλὰ τοῖς τἀληθῆ διδάσκουσιν, οὐδὲ τοῖς τὰς ἀλλοτρίας ἐντολὰς μνημονεύουσιν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς τὰς παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου τῆ πίστει δεδομένας καὶ ἀπ' αὐτῆς παραγινομένας τῆς ἀληθείας· εἰ δέ που καὶ παρηκολουθηκῶς τις τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις ἔλθοι, τοὺς τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἀνέκρινον λόγους, τί Ἀνδρέας ἢ τί Πέτρος εἶπεν ἢ τί Φίλιππος ἢ τί Θωμᾶς ἢ Ἰάκωβος ἢ τί Ἰωάννης ἢ Ματθαῖος ἢ τις ἕτερος τῶν τοῦ κυρίου μαθητῶν, ἃ τε Ἀριστίων καὶ ὁ πρεσβύτερος Ἰωάννης, τοῦ κυρίου μαθηταί, λέγουσιν. οὐ γὰρ τὰ ἐκ τῶν βιβλίων τοσοῦτόν με ὠφελεῖν ὑπελάμβανον, ὅσον τὰ παρὰ ζώσης φωνῆς καὶ μενούσης.¹

The chief grammatical difficulty presented by this piece of Greek is whether the clause ἃ τε . . . λέγουσιν is a relative clause, as the pronoun ἃ suggests, or an indirect question, as the tense of λέγουσιν suggests, and how it is related to the rest of the sentence.

First, we may consider what construction Eusebius put upon the clause. The key to his interpretation is to be found in the sentence:

Παπίας τοὺς μὲν τῶν ἀποστόλων λόγους παρὰ τῶν αὐτοῖς παρηκολουθηκότων ὁμολογεῖ παρεληφέναι, Ἀριστίωνος δὲ καὶ τοῦ πρεσβυτέρου Ἰωάννου αὐτήκοον ἐαυτόν φησι γενέσθαι· ὀνομαστί γοῦν πολλακίς αὐτῶν μνημονεύσας ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῦ συγγράμμασιν τίθησιν αὐτῶν παραδόσεις.²

Papias, while³ admitting that he received the sayings of the apostles from their followers, asserts on the other hand that he was an actual hearer of Aristion and the presbyter John; accordingly⁴ he frequently mentions them by name and sets down their traditions in his writings.

¹ Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, III, 39, 3-4 (GCS, IX/1, 286).

² *Ibid.*, III, 39, 7 (GCS, IX/1, 288).

³ J. D. Denniston says of μέν . . . δέ: "Often . . . the antithesis carries an idea of strong contrast, so that in English we should make one of the clauses concessively dependent on the other. In such cases the weight is far more frequently on the δέ clause" (*Greek Particles* [Oxford, 1934], p. 370).

⁴ This is not the γοῦν in which the limitative γε predominates (the γοῦν of "part-proof,"

In this sentence Eusebius represents Papias as saying that he had direct acquaintance with Aristion and the presbyter John. Several commentators have expressed their puzzlement as to how Eusebius managed to draw this meaning out of Papias' words.⁵ The explanation is, however, quite simple. These writers cannot understand Eusebius' interpretation because, while they take it for granted that ἄ . . . λέγουσιν is an indirect question, *Eusebius took it as a relative clause.*

What happened in Eusebius' mind was probably something like this. He noticed that the clause under discussion began with a relative and not an interrogative pronoun, and at once concluded that the clause was not coordinate with the questions immediately preceding it. He did *not* think that Papias asked his visitors: *τί Ἀριστιῶν καὶ τί ὁ πρεσβύτερος Ἰωάννης λέγουσιν*; Had he thought so, Eusebius would have been forced to conclude that Papias had no more direct acquaintance with Aristion and Presbyter John than with the apostles. The fact that Eusebius did not draw this conclusion shows that he regarded ἄ . . . λέγουσιν as a true relative clause. But if so, how did he construe it? He must have supplied from the context a verb such as *συγκατατάξω* or *μνημονεύσω*, and taken the meaning to be: "I shall also include the oral teaching of Aristion and the presbyter John." This is awkward, but the syntax is awkward on any interpretation.

Rufinus was equally puzzled by Papias' syntax at this point. He translates thus: "quod si quando advenisset aliquis ex his qui secuti sunt apostolos, ab ipso sedulo expiscabar, quid Andreas, quid Petrus *dixerit*, quid autem Philippus vel Thomas, quid vero Iacobus, quid Ioannes aut quid Matthaeus, vel alius quis ex discipulis domini, quaeve Aristion vel Ioannes presbyter ceterique discipuli *dicebant*."⁶ An inaccurate translation, to be sure; but why did Rufinus change from the subjunctive *dixerit* to the indicative *dicebant*? Clearly because he felt sure that ἄ . . . λέγουσι could not be an indirect question. Jerome too, in his paraphrase, suddenly changes to the indicative, though he illogically translates ἄ by the interrogative *quid*: "Considerabam

as Denniston calls it, *op. cit.*, p. 450), for two reasons. (1) In Koine this usage is rare, and even where *γουν* can be classed under the heading of "part-proof," as in Tatian 28, 1, it does not cast any doubt back upon the preceding clause. Hence the translation "at any rate" is incorrect; Rufinus is much nearer the mark with his "unde." (2) The contents of Eusebius' clause here do not furnish a part-proof that Papias *said* he was a hearer of Aristion and John. Cf. further the long note in J. Chapman, *John the Presbyter* (Oxford, 1911), pp. 28-29.

⁵ "Vraiment," says M. J. Lagrange, "nous n'aurions pas conclu du texte ce dernier point" (*St. Jean* [Paris, 1925], p. xxx). M. J. Routh hazards the view that Eusebius must have had some other text in mind: "vix dubito quin ad alia verba episcopi Hieropolitani spectaverit Eusebius scribens Ἀριστιῶνος δὲ . . . γενέσθαι" (*Reliquiae sacrae* [2nd ed.; Oxford, 1946], I, 24).

⁶ Rufinus, *Eusebii eccl. hist.*, III, 39, 4 (GCS, IX/1, 287).

quid Andreas, quid Petrus, *dixissent*, quid Philippus, quid Thomas, quid Iacobus, quid Iohannes, quid Matthaëus, vel alius quilibet discipulorum Domini, quid etiam Aristion et senior Iohannes, discipuli Domini, *loquebantur*.⁷⁷

We must next consider whether perhaps Eusebius' interpretation is the right one. It has the enormous advantage of making Papias say explicitly that he will incorporate in his work traditions received directly from Presbyter John. On any other interpretation Papias has unaccountably omitted to make explicit mention of his own personal association with the Apostle John,⁸ whom we would expect him to regard as his most valuable source of oral tradition. This consideration seems so important to the present writer that for some time he toyed with the idea that the clause *ἔ . . . λέγουσι* was coordinate with the clause *καὶ ὅσα . . . ἐμνημόνευσα* and depended directly on *συγκατατάξει*. In that case everything from *οὐ γὰρ τοῖς* to *ἢ τις ἕτερος τῶν τοῦ κυρίου μαθητῶν* would have to be regarded as a parenthesis, to be printed in brackets. We might suppose that the prologue was first of all written without the parenthesis, that the parenthesis was added by the author as a marginal note, and that finally it was incorporated into the definitive copy. This solution, fanciful though it may seem, has, in addition to that already mentioned, another great advantage, in that it provides a simple explanation of how the name John, and the phrase "disciples of the Lord," came to be repeated in such a disconcerting fashion. But there are two fatal objections to this solution. First, the connection between the opening sentence and the supposed parenthesis is so close that the writer must have had the "parenthetic" sentence in mind while writing the opening one. The emphatic word *ἀλήθειαν* looks forward to *τοῖς τἀληθῆ διδάσκουσιν* and *ἀπ' αὐτῆς*

⁷⁷ Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, 18 (*PL*, XXIII, 670).

⁸ There is no good reason for rejecting Irenaeus' statement that Papias was an *ἀκουστής* of John: *ταῦτα δὲ καὶ Παπίας ὁ Ἰωάννου μὲν ἀκουστής, Πολυκάρπου δὲ ἐταίρος γεγονώς, ἀρχαῖος ἀνὴρ, ἐγγράφως ἐπιμαρτυρεῖ* (*Adv. haer.*, V, 33, 4 [Harvey, II, 418]; cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, III, 39, 1 [GCS, IX/1, 286]). Papias' prologue is not Irenaeus' sole source, as the prologue says nothing of Polycarp. It is quite possible that Irenaeus received information about Papias directly from Polycarp (cf. *Adv. haer.*, III, 3, 4 [Harvey, II, 12 ff.]; also J. Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 44). Eusebius, too, at the time when he wrote the *Chronicon*, believed that Papias was an *ἀκουστής* of John: *Ἰωάννην δὲ τὸν θεολόγον καὶ ἀπόστολον Εἰρηναῖος καὶ ἄλλοι ἱστοροῦσι παραμείναι τῷ βίῳ ἕως τῶν χρόνων Τραϊανοῦ μεθ' ὃν Παπίας Ἱεροπολίτης καὶ Πολύκαρπος Σμύρνης ἐπίσκοπος ἀκουσται αὐτοῦ ἐγνωρίζοντο* (*Chronicon. Syncell.*, 656, 14, post Traian. ann. 1; Harnack, frag. 13). Hence it seems that Eusebius' later notion (*Hist. eccl.*, I, 1, 6 [GCS, IX/1, 8] tells us that the *Chronicon* was written first) was suddenly suggested to him by his misreading of Papias' prologue—especially as, when discussing again the authorship of the Apocalypse, Eusebius does not repeat the theory of the two Johns (*Hist. eccl.*, VII, 25 [GCS, IX/2, 690–92]).

παραγινόμενας τῆς ἀληθείας. Papias says: "I insist upon the *truth* of this information, for I have always preferred *truth* to quantity, and have sought doctrine stemming from *Truth* Itself." Secondly, if ἄ . . . λέγουσι depends upon συγκατατάξει, it follows that at the time Papias wrote his prologue, Presbyter John, a disciple of the Lord, was still alive. This is in the highest degree unlikely, since we know from Philip of Side that Papias was still writing in the reign of Hadrian,⁹ and it is improbable that he spent about twenty years writing the book and that he wrote the prologue right at the beginning and made no alterations later. Moreover, it is well-nigh certain that John was dead when Papias wrote the other long fragment preserved by Eusebius, since it begins καὶ τοῦθ' ὁ πρεσβύτερος ἔλεγεν ("used to say").

These last chronological considerations dispose equally of what I have suggested was Eusebius' solution, viz., to supply a verb such as συγκατατάξω from the context. Some commentators have, for different reasons, suggested deleting τοῦ κυρίου μαθηταί as an insertion.¹⁰ This is a desperate remedy; no explanation has been given as to why anyone wanted to insert the words; Abbot Chapman shows good reason for thinking that Eusebius read them;¹¹ and it is possible to give a satisfactory solution without deleting them.¹² So, no further time need be spent on this suggestion.

We must, therefore, consider the other possibilities. The simplest is to say that ἄ is an instance of the relative pronoun used as an indirect interrogative. The clause ἄ . . . λέγουσι will then be an indirect question coordinate with those that immediately precede it. New Testament Greek provides a number of parallels to the use of ὅς, ἡ, ὅ as an indirect interrogative pronoun.¹³ However, against this very simple solution is, first of all, the fact that it did not recommend itself to Eusebius or Rufinus (if indeed it occurred to them), and secondly that it raises a set of awkward questions. Why did Papias change from "or . . . or . . . or" to "and . . . and"? Why did he change from the singular direct interrogative τί to the plural indirect interrogative ἄ, when he could perfectly well have carried on with τί δ' Ἀριστίων κτλ.? Why did he use the connective τε, when an adversative

⁹ Cf. C. de Boor, *Neue Fragmente des Papias, Hegesippus, und Pierius* (Texte und Untersuchungen, IV/2 [Leipzig, 1888], 170); J. Kleist, *Ancient Christian Writers*, VI (Westminster, Md., 1948), 122.

¹⁰ So, e.g., Lagrange, *op. cit.*, p. xxxiii.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 21 f.

¹² Papias may well have preferred to repeat "disciples of the Lord" rather than introduce an ambiguity: had he not repeated them, the reader might have wondered whether perhaps Aristion and Presbyter John were others than the disciples of the Lord, since a list of disciples had just been closed.

¹³ Cf., e.g., Matt. 6:8; Luke 8:47; Acts 28:22. F. Zorell (*Lexicon graecum Novi Testamenti* [2nd ed.; Paris, 1931], col. 940) quotes a parallel from the *Tebtinis Papyri* (London, 1902), 58, 41, III aC: γράφε ἡμῖν ἵνα εἰδῶμεν ἐν οἷς εἰ.

particle is needed to mark the difference between *εἶπεν* and *λέγουσιν*? These considerations seem to provide sufficient ground for agreeing with Eusebius that *ἃ* must, after all, be a relative pronoun. If the clause is a relative one, we must either supply a verb such as *συγκατατάξω*, as Eusebius seems to have done, or make it a direct object of the verb *ἀνέκρινον*, coordinate with the noun *λόγους*. The former alternative has been rejected on chronological grounds. The latter, therefore, must be correct. But it still contains a grammatical problem: how are we to explain the tense of *λέγουσιν*? The Greek for "I made investigations about the things that John was saying" is *ἀνέκρινον ἃ Ἰωάννης ἔλεγεν*.¹⁴ This is not *oratio obliqua*, and accordingly there should be no question of using the tense of direct speech.

What, then, is the solution? We might say that Papias has used a fusion of two constructions, so that the relative clause is at the same time virtually an indirect question. But this is to name the phenomenon rather than to explain how it came about. It seems better, therefore, to say that the sentence is elliptical, and that the relative clause *ἃ . . . λέγουσιν* depends upon an indirect question to be supplied from the context. The question that Papias put to his visitors was: what can you tell me about the present teaching of Aristion and Presbyter John? *τί ἔχετε λέγειν περὶ ὧν (= τούτων ἃ) Ἀριστίων καὶ ὁ πρεσβύτερος Ἰωάννης λέγουσιν*; In *oratio obliqua* this becomes *ἀνέκρινον τί ἔχουσι λέγειν περὶ ὧν . . . λέγουσιν*, or in the more idiomatic ("I know-thee-who-thou-art") order, *ἀνέκρινον ἃ Ἀριστίων καὶ ὁ πρεσβύτερος Ἰωάννης λέγουσιν, τί περὶ ταῦτ' ἔχουσι λέγειν*. This last exegetical question is omitted by Papias and must be supplied from the context in order to complete the syntax. The ellipse is admittedly a little difficult; but if the construction had been perfectly simple, Eusebius, Jerome, and Rufinus would not have been upset by it. This explanation justifies the following translation: "I used to make enquiries about the sayings of the ancients—what did Andrew say? or Peter? what did Philip, or Thomas, or James say? what did John, or Matthew, or some other of the Lord's disciples say?—and about what Aristion and the ancient, John, disciples of the Lord, were still¹⁵ saying."

Had Eusebius taken the sentence in this way, he would surely have observed that Aristion and Presbyter John form a second class alongside that of *τῶν πρεσβυτέρων* and that the difference between the two classes is that the members of the former belong to a generation prior to the time

¹⁴ Cf. Acts 22:24.

¹⁵ I have inserted "still" because otherwise the emphasis on the word *λέγουσι*, produced by its position at the end of the sentence, and enhanced by the hyperbaton created by the inclusion of *τοῦ κυρίου μαθηταί*, vanishes.

of Papias' enquiries, while the latter contains the members of that generation who survived into Papias' own. Since Papias says 'Αριστίων καὶ ὁ πρεσβύτερος Ἰωάννης and not 'Αριστίων ἢ ὁ πρεσβύτερος Ἰωάννης ἢ ἕτερός τις, it seems safe to conclude that the second class contained the two members mentioned by Papias *and no others*. At the time of Papias' enquiries, there were only two surviving disciples of the Lord. This conclusion is of extreme importance, since it eliminates the possibility that there were two disciples called John alive in Papias' time. Further, once it is recognized that Aristion and John were the only two survivors, a simple answer suggests itself to another question raised by Eusebius: why is John's name placed after Aristion's?¹⁶ John is kept to the end because he, the "grand old man," was the last survivor of the Lord.

One other point remains to be discussed in connexion with the clause ἄ . . . λέγουσιν. According to the explanation given above, the particle τε marks the link between the substantive λόγους and the correlative substantival clause ἄ . . . λέγουσιν. It is a solitary τε that harks back to no preceding καί. Kleist, in spite of his translation, thinks otherwise: "Note the particles καί (after που) and τε (after ἄ): 'both—and, in particular.'"¹⁷ This connexion, however, is impossible, because the καί to which he refers is in a subordinate (conditional) clause, to which ἄ τε . . . λέγουσιν is not coordinate or even directly related. We are, therefore, presented with a further problem: what is the force of the καί (after εἰ δέ που)?

Denniston points out that εἰ καί and καί εἰ are, in some of their uses, convertible.¹⁸ But in view of the intervening δέ, I do not think that the translation "moreover if" is permissible here, because this simply disregards the δέ. Therefore, καί must be taken with παρακολουθῶς τις, and must mark a climax: "And if perchance (που) someone came my way who had actually travelled about in company with the apostles. . . ." In Eusebius' second quotation from Papias, the same verb παρακολουθέω is used of Mark who travelled about with St. Peter.¹⁹ So it seems that Papias is here claiming acquaintance with some ὑπηρεταὶ τοῦ λόγου,²⁰ and (since καί marks a climax) that he set more store by their reports than by ὅσα ποτὲ παρὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καλῶς ἔμαθον, which must include what he learned directly from John the Apostle. As has already been mentioned, it is most remarkable that nowhere in his prologue does Papias mention explicitly that he is going to

¹⁶ *Hist. eccl.*, III, 39, 5 (GCS, IX/1, 286-88).

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 205, note 10.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 301 (iii).

¹⁹ Παρακολουθέω is used in the same way by Justin, *Dial.*, 103 (PG, VI, 717); Athénagoras uses it of demons and guardian angels in his *Legatio*, 25 (PG, VI, 949).

²⁰ Luke 1:3.

record oral traditions received directly from John. If Papias makes any reference at all to his direct acquaintance with John, it can only be in the clause *δσα . . . ἔμαθον*. To lessen this mystery it may be suggested that perhaps Papias was not long with St. John, or that he had little opportunity to cross-question him, or that he heard him say little that was not also in his Gospel. The scraps of tradition quoted from John in Papias' fragments need not have been learnt directly from the apostle. They are indeed in the form of direct speech but are expressed in the systematically ambiguous style of Papias, not in John's simple Greek. Papias may well have set more store by the reports of the *παρηκολουθηκότες*²¹ because they had been associated longer and more intimately with the apostles than he had himself. In his sentence about Mark: *οὔτε γὰρ ἤκουσεν τοῦ κυρίου οὔτε παρηκολούθησεν αὐτῷ*,²² it is plain that *παρηκολούθησεν* adds something to the meaning of *ἤκουσεν*. So a *παρηκολουθηκώς* is a better witness than a mere *ἀκουστής*.

Let me end with my translation of Papias' prologue:

In addition to my explanations, I shall not hesitate to set down for you in due order all that I learned from the ancients a long time ago and noted with care, and I insist that this information is true. For I was not one to delight (as most people do) in those who talked at great length, but in those whose teaching was true, nor in those whose precepts were from some other source, but in those who taught the commandments given by the Lord to the faith and inherited from Truth Itself. And if perchance at any time there came my way someone who had actually travelled about with the ancients, I would make enquiries about the sayings of the ancients—what did Andrew say? or Peter? what did Philip, or Thomas, or James say? what said John, or Matthew, or some other of the Lord's disciples?—and about what Aristion and the ancient, John, disciples of the Lord, were still saying. For I took it for granted that excerpts from the Books were not so helpful to me as the utterances of the living voice of a survivor.

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²¹ And *παρηκολουθηκῶται* (cf. I Cor. 9:5).

²² *Hist. eccl.*, III, 39, 15 (GCS, IX/1, 291).