

Assessing the Authenticity of the Greek Fragments on Psalm 22 (LXX) attributed to Cyril of Alexandria

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All that remains from Cyril of Alexandria's apparently lengthy *Commentary on the Psalms* are fragments gathered from the catenae. The largest collection of these fragments is in *Patrologia Graeca* 69,717-1273, which is simply a reprint of Cardinal Mai's nineteenth-century collection. As Rondeau has noted, this collection is something of an 'inextricable hodgepodge' ('fatras inextricable'), since it undoubtedly contains fragments that belong to other authors.ⁱ For this reason, the few studies of Cyril's exegesis that exist, such as the classic work by Alexander Kerrigan, usually ignore these fragments, and little work has been done to sort out which fragments are authentic and which belong to other authors.ⁱⁱ Although Devreesse pointed out a number of fragments in this collection that he regarded as authentically Cyrilline, he did not discuss those pertaining to Psalm 22 (LXX), and the few other studies that have appeared since also have not dealt with them.ⁱⁱⁱ In this paper I examine the authenticity of the seven fragments on Psalm 22 that are attributed to Cyril in Mai's collection, and I conclude that six of them are indeed Cyril's, while one is probably not his and remains of uncertain provenance. In assessing the authenticity of these fragments I proceed on three fronts. The first is the occurrence of distinctive Cyrilline vocabulary and phrases. As was noted decades ago by F. L. Cross, Cyril's corpus presents an idiosyncratic vocabulary, as it contains over 1,000 words 'which occur either in Cyril alone or in Cyril for the first time or in Cyril more frequently than in the whole of the rest of Greek literature taken together'.^{iv} Therefore, occurrence of these terms is a good indication of Cyrilline authorship. The second avenue of investigation is to compare the fragments with the biblical passages and theological themes that are prominent in Cyril's unquestioned works. The final way forward, and the weakest one of the three, is to consider whether or not the fragments are

Crawford
Oxford (August 2011)

similar enough to the exegesis of other commentators on the psalter to conclude that a Cyrilline fragment actually belongs to another author. Others in the eastern tradition who commented on the psalter, and whose works might have been falsely attributed to Cyril, include Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Basil of Caesarea, and Didymus the Blind. Before looking at the fragments on Psalm 22, we should make one qualification. Even if there is good evidence that certain fragments indeed originate with Cyril, it is almost certain that a degree of paraphrasing or shortening has taken place, as can be seen in the two different recensions of the prologue to his commentary.^v

The first fragment contained in PG is a comment on the superscription of the Psalm, ‘A psalm of David’.^{vi} There is no distinctive Cyrilline vocabulary in this fragment, but it does contain an allusion to a biblical text that is prominent in Cyril’s other writings. The phrase διδακτοὶ Θεοῦ γεγονότες (‘I will make *them* taught by God’) is a clear allusion to Isaiah 54:13, a passage that he used several times in his corpus to refer to the teaching of Christ, as he does here in his exegesis of Psalm 22.^{vii} It is also significant that this Isaianic text was quoted by the author of the fourth gospel with respect to the teaching of Jesus in John 6:45. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Cyril interpreted John 6 with reference to Psalm 22, so the textual connection between Isaiah 54:13 and Psalm 22, which is present in this fragment, is also implicit in his Johannine commentary through their joint linkage with John 6.^{viii} Furthermore, this fragment is clearly connected thematically with the fragments that follow, strengthening the case that this is an authentically Cyrilline passage.

The second fragment attributed to Cyril comments on the next line of the psalm, and the evidence for its authenticity is more straightforward.^{ix} The text contains the compound verb ἐνσηκάζω, a word that does not appear in any author prior to Cyril, though he uses it several times, always with reference to an enclosure (αὐλή) for sheep, as he does here.^x According to *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, the word is not used again until much later Byzantine texts, leaving little doubt that this text comes from Cyril’s pen. The evidence for

Crawford
Oxford (August 2011)

fragment three is similar, as it contains the phrase εὐανδρία πνευματική which is uniquely Cyrilline, and occurs repeatedly in his extant works.^{xi} The only non-Cyrilline occurrence of the phrase that I can find is in a fragment on Psalm 36:11 attributed to Origen^{xii}, so we may safely conclude that this fragment on Psalm 22 belongs to Cyril, and tentatively propose that the fragment on Psalm 36:11 attributed to Origen might also be his.

Fragment four offers an interpretation of the same line of Psalm 22 as the preceding fragment.^{xiii} In the earlier fragment Cyril interpreted the ‘grass’ and ‘water’ of the psalm as Scripture and the Spirit respectively, while in the present fragment the author interprets these same symbols as paradise and baptism. There is no distinctly Cyrilline language in this passage, and the evidence for its authenticity is therefore more ambiguous. One argument for its authenticity is that the fragment does not closely match the interpretations of the same verse offered in other extant patristic authors. Eusebius and Theodoret both interpreted the ‘water’ in Psalm 22 as baptism, but this is only a superficial similarity to the fragment at hand.^{xiv} A second argument for its authenticity is that this fragment, when joined with the previous one, implies a parallel between paradise and Scripture, which are both symbolized by the ‘grass’ of the psalm, and in at least one other undisputed passage, Cyril makes the same comparison.^{xv} Moreover, the wording of this fragment implies that it follows a previous interpretation of the same verse, since it presents its interpretation of the ‘grass’ and ‘water’ as a ‘more proper’ (κυριώτερον) interpretation.^{xvi} Thus, we can say that there is no good evidence to suggest that this fragment is not Cyril’s, that it displays a known Cyrilline analogy, though one that was not necessarily unique to him, and that it implies a connection with the previous fragment in the series. In the absence of any good evidence to the contrary, we should probably trust the witness of the catenist that this fragment also comes from his commentary.

Fragment five contains a comment on Psalm 22:4 (‘For even if I walk in the midst of the shadow of death’), and offers a further elaboration on the theme of baptism.^{xvii} Baptism is

Crawford

Oxford (August 2011)

compared to ‘death’, in the Pauline sense of ‘being baptized into the death of Christ’ (cf. Rom 6:3). In addition, the fragment gives a short comment on the distinction between a ‘natural and common death’ (ὁ φυσικὸς καὶ κοινὸς θάνατος), which seems to mean the death of the body, and the ‘freely chosen death of the soul’ (τοῦ προαιρετικοῦ θανάτου, τοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς), which is the ‘true death’. These brief remarks add little to the themes of the previous fragments, and, in fact, are almost certainly not Cyril’s. At least two earlier authors describe the ‘shadow of death’ as a ‘common death’ when commenting upon Psalm 22:4. Eusebius of Caesarea notes that the ‘common death’ (τὸν κοινόν θάνατον) is the ‘release of the soul from the body’, in contrast to the ‘death of the soul’. The ‘shadow of death’ spoken of by the psalmist cannot refer to the former, because those in the church do not experience the death of the soul.^{xviii} Didymus similarly describes the ‘shadow of death’ as the ‘common death’ in his lecture on this verse, although he does not contrast it with any other sort of death.^{xix} Both authors are perhaps following the lead of Origen, since there is a fragment on this verse attributed to Origen, which, though of uncertain authorship, offers a strikingly similar interpretation, even using the exact phrase from the supposedly Cyrilline fragment, ‘the natural and common death’.^{xx} The authenticity of this fragment attributed to Origen is unclear, but it must bear some relationship to the fragment at hand that is attributed to Cyril. Whatever the case, it would be unlikely for Cyril at this point to begin following the lead of Eusebius and Didymus, while thus far in his exegesis of Psalm 22 he has clearly departed from them. The dominant motif in the exegesis of both these previous authors is the progress of the soul, a theme that is lacking in the other fragments attributed to Cyril on Psalm 22. Moreover, I can find nowhere else in Cyril’s voluminous corpus where he makes use of the contrast between a ὁ κοινός θάνατος and a ὁ θάνατος τῆς ψυχῆς, while the phrase does show up in other authors like Didymus.^{xxi} A further argument that this fragment is not from Cyril is that when he comments upon the ‘shadow of death’ in his Isaianic commentary, he simply identifies it with a spiritual kind of death experienced by those who are ignorant of Christ,

Crawford
Oxford (August 2011)

and does not contrast it with any other kind of death.^{xxii} For these reasons, it seems best to regard the fragment as not authentically Cyrilline, and as standing in the tradition of Eusebius, Didymus, and perhaps Origen.

The evidence for fragment six is straightforward, since it contains two phrases that are distinctly Cyrilline.^{xxiii} First, ἡ ἀληθῆς εὐζωΐα occurs only in Cyril's writings,^{xxiv} and, similarly, ἡ πνευματικὴ εὐεξία occurs almost exclusively in Cyril's works.^{xxv} The only non-Cyrilline usages of the latter phrase that I can find are one occurrence in a homily by Basil of Caesarea, and two in much later Byzantine authors.^{xxvi} Thus, on the basis of these phrases, the authenticity of fragment six can be regarded as settled. Fragment seven contains no distinctly Cyrilline vocabulary, but there is good reason to think that it also is authentic.^{xxvii} In the fragment the author spiritually interprets the phrase 'dwelling in the house of the Lord for length of days' (Ps 22:6), presenting it as a reference to the 'immutability of the hope of the saints', and offering as a type of this hope the Sabbath rest of Israel. In his commentary on John 7:24 Cyril offers the same typological interpretation of the Sabbath rest, and both there and in his interpretation of Psalm 22:6, he quotes or alludes to Romans 11:29 to substantiate the point.^{xxviii} The similarity of theology and textual resonances in both places suggest that this final fragment is genuine.

In conclusion I wish to note two points. First, according to the description in *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, the psalter fragments attributed to Cyril amount to over 100,000 words. Undoubtedly a portion of these belong to other authors, as I have argued here that one of the seven fragments on Psalm 22 is probably not authentic. However, if further work can be done to sort through these fragments, it would open up a significant amount of primary text as a further avenue of research on Cyril's exegesis, one that has, as of yet, only barely been explored. Second, I believe that based on the evidence examined in this paper we can extend the observation of Cross noted at the outset. Cyril's distinctive language includes not only a penchant for coining neologisms, but also extends to his phraseology. This observation

Crawford
Oxford (August 2011)

could prove useful in further evaluating passages that might be of uncertain authenticity.

ⁱ Marie-Josèphe Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier: (IIIe-Ve siècles)*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 219 (Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1982), 1,131. Rondeau said about Cyril's exegesis of the psalter, 'l'érudition, philologique ou historique, ne retient guère, non plus que les développements moraux ou les spéculations sur la vie spirituelle. Tout l'accent est mis sur la théologie' (1,134).

ⁱⁱ Alexander Kerrigan, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, Interpreter of the Old Testament* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1952), vii.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Devreesse, *Les commentateurs des Psaumes* (Rome: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1970), 224-233. In 1948 Mercati drew attention to a codex in the Bodleian Library that had been purchased in Constantinople in 1635 by Archbishop William Laud (*Bodl. Laud. gr.* 42), and that contained many Cyrilline fragments unmixed with other authors (Giovanni Mercati, *Osservazioni a proemi del Salterio di Origene, Ippolito, Eusebio, Cirillo Alessandrino e altri: con frammenti inediti*, *Studi e Testi* 142 (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1948), 133-9). This collection was only recently published in Chiara Ferrari Toniolo, *Cyrilliana in Psalmos: i frammenti del commento ai Salmi di Cirillo di Alessandria nel codice Laudiano greco 42* (Catania: Centro di studi sull'antico cristianesimo, Università di Catania, 2000). It contains some overlap with the fragments printed in PG, but does not include any passages dealing with Psalm 22. On this new collection, see also Luciano Bossina, 'Note su alcuni frammenti di Cirillo di Alessandria sui Salmi recentemente editi', *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 37 (2001): 487-503. On Cyril's psalter commentary, see also Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier* (1982), 1,131-4; M. A. Rossi, 'Osservazioni sul commento ai Salmi di Cirillo edito da Angelo Mai', *Orpheus* 4 (1983): 116-124; *ead.*, 'Ancora sul "Commento ai Salmi" di Cirillo. A proposito di un recente lavoro sui commentari patristici al Salterio', *Annali di Storie dell'Esegesi* 1 (1984):

45-51. On the history of the catenae on the psalter, see R. Devreesse, ‘Chaines exégétiques grecques’, *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément*, vol. 1 (1928); Gilles Dorival, *Les chaînes exégétiques grecques sur les Psaumes: contribution à l’étude d’une forme littéraire*, 4 vols. (Leuven: Peeters, 1986-1999); Ekkehard Mühlenberg, *Psalmenkommentare aus der Katenenüberlieferung*, Band III, Patristische Texte und Studien 19 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978).

^{iv} F. L. Cross, ‘The Projected Lexicon of Patristic Greek’, in *Actes du VIe congrès international d’études byzantines* (Paris: École des Hautes Études, 1950), 1,392. Most of these words are compounds. It would be especially useful to have access to the list of Cyrilline words to which Cross refers, but he offers no indication of where it might be available. On Cyril’s style of Greek, see Alberto Vaccari, ‘La Grecità di S. Cirillo d’Alessandria’, in *Studi dedicati alla memoria di P. Ubaldi*, ed. A. Gemelli (Milan: Società editrice ‘Vita e pensiero’, 1937).

^v Compare the prologue in PG 69,717 with the much lengthier prologue in Giovanni Mercati, *Osservazioni a proemi del Salterio di Origene, Ippolito, Eusebio, Cirillo Alessandrino e altri: con frammenti inediti* (Citta del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1948), 140-144.

^{vi} Cyril, *In Psalmos* 22:1 (PG 69,840).

^{vii} See Cyril, *In Isaiam* 54:11-13 (PG 70,1208-1212); *In Oseam* 2:15 (P. E. Pusey, *In xii prophetas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1868), 1,65); *Thesaurus* (PG 75,352; 613); *In Joannem* 1:40; 17:1 (P. E. Pusey, *Sancti patris nostril Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini in d. Joannis Evangelium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1872), 1,194; 2,659).

^{viii} Ps. 22:1-2 is quoted at Cyril, *In Joannem* 6:10 (Pusey, *In d. Joannis Evangelium*, 1,415). The reference to Is. 54:13 is made at *In Joannem* 6:45 (Pusey, *In d. Joannis Evangelium*, 1,507).

^{ix} Cyril, *In Psalmos* 22:2 (PG 69,840).

^x See Cyril, *De adoratione* (PG 68,536); *Glaphyra* (PG 69,201; 244); *In Joannem* 10:16 (Pusey, *In d. Joannis Evangelium*, 2,237). The word also occurs in the work *Collectio dictorum veteris testamenti* (PG 77,1237) in a fragment which comments upon Exodus 22:1. The fragments in the *Collectio* are of varied and uncertain authorship, but it would appear that this passage at least is authentically Cyrilline.

^{xi} Cyril, *In Psalmos* 22:2 (PG 69,840-1). For Cyril's other uses of the phrase, see *In Psalmos* 36:11; 46:10; 50:21; 118:96 (PG 69,932; 1057; 1104; 1272); *In Isaiam* 40:29-31; 49:8-12; 53:10-12; 54:16-17; 64:4-6 (PG 70,824; 1060; 1189; 1216.; 1400); *In Lucam* 9:12; 12:4; 12:24; 22:39 (PG 72,644; 724; 740; 920); *Epistulae paschales* 22.3; 28.3 (PG 77,865; 948); *Homily VII* (ACO 1,1,2, 101).

^{xii} *Excerpta in Psalmos* 36:11 (PG 17,125).

^{xiii} Cyril, *In Psalmos* 22:2 (PG 69,841).

^{xiv} See Eusebius, *In Psalmos* 22:1-2 (PG 23,217); Theodoret, *In Psalmos* 22:2 (PG 80,1025). Some of the fragments on Psalm 22 attributed to Eusebius are possibly spurious. I am following Devreesse who listed those fragments that he regarded as genuine (*Les anciens commentateurs grecs des psaumes* (1970), 101). Cf. Cyril's exegesis of John 3:5 in *In Joannem* 3:5 (Pusey, 1.218-9) where, although he does not explicitly mention it, baptism seems to be in view.

^{xv} Cyril, *In Joannem* proem. (Pusey, *In d. Joannis Evangelium*, 1,2).

^{xvi} On Cyril's usage of κύριος in this sense, see Marie-Odile Boulnois, *Le paradoxe trinitaire chez Cyrille d'Alexandrie: herméneutique, analyses philosophiques et argumentation théologique*, Collection des études augustiniennes. Série Antiquité 143 (Paris: Institut d'études Augustiniennes, 1994), 70.

^{xvii} Cyril, *In Psalmos* 22:4 (PG 69,841).

^{xviii} Eusebius, *In Psalmos* 22:3-4 (PG 23,217).

^{xix} Didymus, *Commentarii in Psalmos* 22:4 (codex page 61) (M. Gronewald, *Didymos*

der Blinde. Psalmenkommentar, pt.2 (Bonn: Habelt, 1968).

^{xx} See Origen, *Fragmenta in Psalmos* 22:4 (J. B. Pitra, *Analecta sacra spicilegio solesmensi parata*, vols. 2-3 (Paris: Tusculum, 1883-4)). On the uncertainty of these fragments supposedly from Origen, see R. Devreesse, 'Chaines exégétiques grecques' (1928), 1,1121.

^{xxi} The phrase is used in Cyril, *In Joannem* 8:53 (Pusey, *In d. Joannis Evangelium*, 2,120), but is not presented in contrast to any other sort of death. For Didymus' usage of the contrast, see Didymus, *Commentarii in Psalmos* 32:19 (codex page 181) (M. Gronewald, *Didymos der Blinde. Psalmenkommentar*, pt. 3 (Bonn: Habelt, 1969).

^{xxii} Cyril, *In Isaiam* 9:1-3 (PG 70,248-9).

^{xxiii} Cyril, *In Psalmos* 22:5 (PG 69,841).

^{xxiv} Cyril, *Epistulae paschales* 26.3 (PG 77,925); *In Lucam* 6:42 (PG 72,604); *Contra Julianum* X (PG 96,280 (a fragment of book 10 preserved by John of Damascus)).

^{xxv} For other occurrences in Cyril, see *De adoratione* (PG 68,181; 312; 505; 793; 1089; 1117; 1121); *Glaphyra* (PG 69,381); *In Isaiam* 1:2-3 (PG 70,17); *In Oseam* 2:6 (Pusey, *In xii prophetas*, 1,52); *In Mattheaum*, fr.179 (J. Reuss, *Matthäus-Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche*, Texte und Untersuchungen 61 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957), 211); *In Lucam* 4:3 (PG 72,529).

^{xxvi} Basil, *De jejuniis*, homilia 2 (PG 31,185); Nicephorus I, *Refutatio et eversio definitionis synodalis anni 815* 21; Stephanus, *Vita Stephaniae Iunioris* 2. See a similar construction in Gregory of Nyssa, *De perfectione Christiana* (GNO 8.1, 190).

^{xxvii} Cyril, *In Psalmos* 22:6 (PG 69,841-4).

^{xxviii} Cyril, *In Joannem* 7:24 (Pusey, *In d. Joannis Evangelium*, 1.626). See also his use of Romans 11:29 in *De adoratione* (PG 68,501; 1109); *In Amos* 9:13-15 (Pusey, *In xii prophetas*, 1,545); *In Isaiam* 66:22-23 (PG 70,1448); *Epistulae paschales* 24.4 (PG 77,897).