# Chapter 6: Traditions of Paul and the Ignatian Letters

## The *Acts of Paul*

## The *Ignatian Letters*

The Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, known as the Ignatiana, are a complex phenomenon comprising a collection of letters by Ignatius to various communities in Asia Minor and Rome and to one or more individuals – depending on which collection one looks at. The version containing seven letters, now considered genuine, is widely regarded as the oldest non-canonical collection, and is rightly placed by Andreas Lindemann in the “reception history of Paul.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Since I have recently devoted a more extensive study to the various collections of the Ignatiana, here I shall only present information that supplements it.[[2]](#footnote-2) Nevertheless, the following section is not short because of the importance the Ignatiana have for the picture of the beginnings of Christianity up to the present day.[[3]](#footnote-3)

There is currently a consensus in research – one of few in matters of the Ignatiana – that the collection of seven letters, the so-called “middle recension,” is the earliest one to be attributed to the 2nd-century Bishop of Antioch. Apart from it, there exists a shorter version of three of the letters in Syriac, and in addition there is a longer version of all seven, connected with a further six letters. Both the shorter and the longer collection are considered inauthentic and located in the 4th century. The only questions remaining controversial seem to be whether the seven letters of the “middle recension” are authentic or were written by a forger, and whether they were written, as dated by Eusebius of Caesarea, between 107 and 116 C.E., or as Lindemann and others suggest, around 130 C.E., or perhaps, as other researchers argue, even later – in the last third of the 2nd century.[[4]](#footnote-4)

David Trobisch has investigated how collections of letters were created in antiquity by reviewing “about two hundred letter collections from 300 B.C.E to around 400 C.E.,” “written by more than one hundred different authors, covering more than three thousand letters.”[[5]](#footnote-5) In the process, he gained the insight that collections of letters do not usually “just happen,” but rather “develop,” and as a rule do this in three stages:[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. Authorized Recensions  
The author of the letters prepares letters for publication.

2. Expanded Editions  
After the author’s death these editions are expanded. Further editions of published and unpublished letters are produced.

3. Comprehensive Editions  
All the available editions are combined.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Trobisch annotates this overview with the following important comment:

What I personally had not reckoned with was that virtually all the collections I examined, which could be traced back to correspondence that had actually been conducted, had been published in their original form by the letter writers themselves.[[8]](#footnote-8) The author himself was responsible for the selection of letters and for editing them. If this publication was a success, often further letter collections would follow. I will refer to these editions as “authorized recensions.”  
The second stage begins when the author dies. Unpublished letters are collected. If their topic is somehow related to authorized recensions, they are published as appendices to these collections. Otherwise letters covering the same subject or addressed to the same person are put together and published as separate volumes. I will call editions of this second stage “expanded editions.”  
In the third stage of the development of a letter collection scribes try to produce manuscripts containing all known letters. I will refer to editions of this third stage as “comprehensive editions.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

So in order to apply these findings to the Ignatiana, we would not follow the chronological-idealistic path from one author and his “genuine” letters to collections containing mixed, both genuine and “spurious” material, up to “comprehensive editions,” but rather ask about the profiles given to a particular collection and the parts of it over time, and work out the associated projections on the author figure.

Ignatius is a wonderful example in this regard, illuminating the ideas about early history associated with his figure and collections, even if not directly those associated with the beginnings of Christianity.

As I have already tried to show in a retrospective passage through history elsewhere,[[10]](#footnote-10) the almost exclusive research focus on Ignatius’ collection of seven letters is merely a phenomenon of the last 150 years or so. The approach was cemented by the work of two researchers in particular: Joseph Barber Lightfoot (1828–1889) and, before him, Theodor Zahn (1838–1933).[[11]](#footnote-11) Doubts had already arisen earlier about the authenticity of, for example, the four letters to and from Ignatius, which have been preserved in Latin only and not attested before the Middle Ages. They also undermined the authenticity of the collection of the twelve or thirteen letters associated with these four, even though these were also preserved in Greek. This collection of seventeen or, if we only take the letters preserved also in Greek, the thirteen or twelve letters, contained seven letters which were given in both a long version and a short version. Only the latter version was recognized as authentic by Lightfoot and Zahn, and, following these two scholars, is accepted as the genuine letters of Ignatius today. Most importantly, Lightfoot and Zahn also rejected the authenticity of a much shorter version of three of these seven letters existing only in Syriac translation. These three letters were only assumed to be genuine by their discoverer William Cureton (1808-1864).[[12]](#footnote-12) But Lightfoot and Zahn not only rejected Cureton’s view – their writings obliterated his findings for the next 150 years. Based on Lightfoot and Zahn, therefore, all present editions and translations of the Ignatiana contain only the seven letters of what is called the “middle recension,”[[13]](#footnote-13) while their the most recent and final “comprehensive edition” was produced by the same Lightfoot in 1889.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The reduction in the number of Ignatiana, however, began earlier. While the *Codex Monacensis Graecus 394* from the 10th or 11th century still contains a Greek collection of 13 letters from which only the four letters that have been handed down exclusively in Latin are missing, the *Codex Reginensis 81* from thesame time period only includes a Latin translation of twelve of these letters. One of the letters, the opening letter addressed to Ignatius, is missing in the *Codex Monacensis Graecus 394* collection, perhaps because it was not written by Ignatius. A closer examination, however, reveals that the letter may have been eliminated by scribes and later editors not only because it does not claim authorship by Ignatius, but also because it purports to come from a resolute woman, Mary Cassobolites. Still, the omission of Mary’s letter remains astonishing, as the first letter by Ignatius is a direct response to it and appears out of context providing answers to questions that are no longer present in the collection due to the omission.

### The Seven-Letter Collection

The seven-letter collection of the present day consequently offers us an Ignatius free of the enquiries, desires, and concerns of Mary Cassobolites; it also no longer contains the questions and issues negotiated in the Latin letters between Ignatius and John the Evangelist, between Ignatius and the Virgin Mary, and between the Virgin Mary and Ignatius. Despite the anachronological pseudonymy introduced by these exclusively Latin letters, which was certainly not completely hidden even from its contemporary readers, they nevertheless retained a certain authority over the image and conception associated with Ignatius and the early Church in subsequent centuries, beyond their critical assessment and elimination from the manuscripts and editions of the Reformation period. Moreover, both the Letter of Mary Cassobolites and the Latin letters are treasures of the history of religion that remain to be unearthed.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Here, however, I would like to limit myself to the image of the beginnings of Christianity, which takes very different shapes depending on the set of Ignatiana accepted. I shall again proceed retrospectively and begin with the seven-letters collection of the “middle recension,” which is seen as the authentic one today.

Schoedel summarises the state of the research as follows: there is “everything to suggest that the middle recension” of this collection of seven letters will, according to the prevailing majority opinion of research, “remain recognised as what the scholarly consensus today sees in it: a collection of genuine letters of Bishop Ignatius of Antioch,[[16]](#footnote-16) written (as Eusebius indicates) during the reign of Trajan (110-118; Lightfoot II, 21889, 435-472) or shortly thereafter (Harnack II/1, 388-406).”[[17]](#footnote-17)

If this were so, then the Epistles of Ignatius would not only represent, as indicated, our first extra-canonical Christian letter collection, written and collected soon after or parallel to that of Paul, but on their basis the beginnings of Christianity would already reveal the following characteristics, unknown to us for this time period without knowledge of these letters:

The seven letters clearly testify to the fact that, at the latest in the first decade of the 2nd century, “Christianity” (IgnRom 3; IgnMag 10) existed as an entity not only in the minds of non-Christians, but especially in those of the members of this institution, in sharp contrast to an equally established religious and cultural counterpart that these letters call “Judaism” (IgnMag 10; IgnPhilad 6). However, within Christianity there were members who tended to “Judaise” (IgnMag 10).[[18]](#footnote-18)

This contrast between Christianity and Judaism further implies seeing the law of Christ as the antithesis to the Jewish law of Moses (IgnPhilad 6). Consequently, Christianity had developed into an independent entity alongside and outside Judaism during the 1st century, presumably either during Jesus’ earthly ministry or at the latest soon after his death – perhaps since Claudius’ edict in the 40s. Nevertheless, it had not yet completely conceptualised itself as a non-Jewish religious community, since at least Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Christianity, together with the Jewish prophets who foretold Jesus, the apostles, and the Church, occupied a prominent place in Scripture and the Church’s self-understanding (IgnPhilad 9; 5-6; IgnMag 8).

In the congregational performance, the praise of the priests was sung, but higher praise still was given to the high priest, who was considered the door to Abraham and the other authorities mentioned (IgnPhilad 9; 5-6). Finally, part of this hierarchical conception in Christianity is the existence of a single bishop as the sole head of a church (IgnPhilad 4; IgnMag 4). It is this monepiscopos who presides over it in the place of God (IgnMag 6), even if the bishop appears as a young person in contrast to a presbyterate, that is, the body of elders (IgnMag 3). As there is already a bishop for Syria in Ignatius of Antioch (IgnRom 2), so it is insinuated that probably other congregations should also be led by a single bishop. Despite the special position of Christianity in relation to Judaism, the Christianity presented by this reading of Ignatius nevertheless claims that the Christian elders should be understood as the Jewish “Sanhedrin of God” (IgnTral 3). In general, fundamental to the self-assessment of Christianity is the quality of its novelty, expressed in the antithesis between the old order of things and the new hope (IgnMag 9-10), between Sabbath observance and life in the observance of the Lord’s Day (IgnMag 9). For Christians, life is no longer oriented towards the Jewish Sabbath, instead celebrating Sunday (IgnMag 8-9).

The above-mentioned elements are unique features of this early Christianity, found neither in the writings of the New Testament nor in other testimonies from the 1st or the first half of the 2nd century. In addition to these unique characteristics, there are other elements also found in other testimonies of early Christianity, which are, however, often difficult to date.

Thus this collection of seven letters emphasizes the Eucharistic celebration with bread and wine. It also argues for the outstanding importance of Paul’s letters, as will be discussed in more details below, as the first quotation by Lindemann from IgnEph 12, which is “very effusively formulated” and which “surprisingly” speaks of “Paul mentioning the Ephesians ‘in every letter,’” is found in this “middle recension” of the seven letters.[[19]](#footnote-19) The collection of seven letters is also a key witness to the outstanding importance of the idea of martyrdom in early Christianity, in contrast not only to Judaism, but also to the Greco-Roman paganism threatening it. Certainly, Christianity also encompasses elements of Roman cultic ideas, as it has adapted concepts and liturgical practices from its pagan environment,[[20]](#footnote-20) but we can already recognize a distinctly Christian culture and theology, at the centre of which stands Christ’s resurrection as the basis for the resurrection of human beings. Although even the “middle recension” contains only a single quotation from the canonical Gospels (IgnSm 1:1 with a parallel in Mt 3:15, which is a Lord’s saying rather than part of a narrative), the language, often close to Paul, endows the letters with a stylistic proximity to canonical literature.

Thus it is not surprising why, since the work of Zahn and Lightfoot, critics of the authenticity and early dating of the Ignatiana have met with stubborn resistance from their colleagues, since these “middle recension” letters, on the one hand, convey such striking and often unique features of early Christianity not encountered elsewhere, and, on the other hand, constitute one of the most important supports for the image of early Christianity as it is handed down in standard works of the New Testament and Patristic scholarship today. [[21]](#footnote-21)

For if one were to agree with the position of these critical scholars that these letters were only written in the late period of Hadrian, i.e., in the 130s, or even later, in the last third of the 2nd century, Ignatius would appear not as the solitary lighthouse shining far out into the dark sea illuminating numerous questions, but rather, if not in all respects, then at least in many, would assume his place in a thread of other lighthouses on the edge of the shore, joining witnesses such as Justin Martyr, the sophist Lucian of Samosata, and Irenaeus of Lyons. For our research landscape, therefore, the question is whether Ignatius is the great loner, a historical exception and forerunner, or whether he forms part of a wider picture while still retaining an exceptional role as a representative of a gradually consolidating Christianity.

### The Three-Letter Collection

Immediately before Lightfoot and Zahn, William Cureton had discovered versions of three letters from the seven-letter collection in Syriac and in a considerably shorter version than present in the larger collection. After Lightfoot and Zahn relegated this “short recension” to the 4th century as an abbreviation of the “middle recension,” research has largely kept quiet on it until today. However, if one compares the “short recension” with the “middle recension,” one notices how much the two differ in content and what a divergent picture emerges of the early period of Christianity, especially regarding the Christian faith.

The “short recension” comprises only three letters, Ignatius’ letter to Polycarp (IgnPol), his letter to the Ephesians (IgnEph), and that to the Romans (IgnRom), which are indeed considerably shorter than their versions in the “middle recension,” all the while exhibiting individual peculiarities beyond brevity. For example, the final chapter of the “short recension,” IgnRom 8, is found divided into two chapters in IgnTral of the “middle recension” (or vice versa, depending on how one sees the dependence), while the IgnRom 8 chapter of the “middle recension” recounts a different content and is followed by two more final chapters. Finally, it has been established that this “short recension” is first attested in the 6th century and already here shows traces of contamination with the “middle recension.” Often, however, parallels and traces of the “short recension” are found in the Latin translation of the “longer recension,” and, as research has already established in the past,[[22]](#footnote-22) one must always keep a watchful eye on this Latin translation as well as on all textual witnesses including the Oriental translations, as all translations are needed to create a critical text of Ignatius’ letters. Unfortunately, there is still no major critical edition of the Ignatiana, which is an indispensable necessity for any future work with this text corpus. For this reason, my remarks here can only be provisional.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Nevertheless, a few observations can be made here concerning what ideas of the beginnings of Christianity the “short recension” conveys in contrast to the picture suggested by the “middle recension.”

In the “short recension,” Christianity’s relationship to the Jewish tradition is not discussed at all. Indeed, this version of the letter to Polycarp initially reads like a Jewish writing warning with all clarity and modesty against false teachers. These latter seem to dispute the monarchian belief in God, which states:

Expect Him who is above the times. Him to whom there are no times, Him who is unseen, Him who for our sakes was seen, Him who is impalpable, Him who is impassible, Him who for our sakes suffered, Him who endured everything in every form for our sakes. (IgnPol 3:2)

The name of Jesus Christ is not mentioned in the body of the letter – the one mention in the preface is uncertain from the point of view of textual criticism, as the Latin translation of the “long recension” proves – as the singular focus is on the one God who paradoxically is beyond temporality, for whom there is no time, but who still has subjected himself to all that is temporal for the sake of humanity. If one trusts the Latin translation of the “long recension,” then the letter to Polycarp seems to close with this confessional formula, which goes back to the Asia Minor teacher Noët of Smyrna of the 2nd century.[[24]](#footnote-24) If this were so, this part of the letter would also lack any emphasis on the office of bishop, which one reads about in the later chapters of this letter (IgnPol 4-6), and even more so in the further chapters of the “middle recension” (IgnPol 7-8), where, for example, the successional election of the bishop is addressed (IgnPol 7). The institutionalisation of “Christianity” is specifically a characteristic of the “middle recension,” which, for example, includes the remarks on human existence that can still be read in the Latin translation of the “longer recension” to IgnRom 3.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Consequently, while the “middle recension” understands Christianity as an abstract self-description that sets Christians apart from the abstract institutions of both Judaism and paganism, neither this form of institutionalisation nor a self-conscious differentiation of Christians from either Jews or pagans is found in the “short recension.” Christian cult practice is not framed in terms of an antithesis between the law of Jesus (the “new man”) and the Jewish law of Moses as the old way of life. On the other hand, there is no application of the Jewish typology of priesthood or high priesthood to Christian church offices, and the faith and daily life practices of the church are not underpinned by any references to Abraham or David. Neither do we find in any of the three letters of the “short recension” the obsession with the bishop’s office that is so prominent in the “middle recension.” There is also a remarkable difference in how the two “recensions” talk about members who are seen as having gone astray: while the “short recension” demonstrates a soliciting, caring, and non-excluding approach, the “middle recension” draws a clear line and shows a harsh attitude towards them.

### Comparing the Three- and Seven-Letter Collections

The general differences outlined above regarding the special features of the “short recension” of the three-letter collection and the “middle recension” of the seven-letter collection, can now be followed up by more detailed observations.

In the Letter to the Ephesians as given in the three-letter collection, Ignatius expresses his desire to be consumed by the beasts of Rome (IgnEph 1), thus already linking this letter to the subsequent Letter to the Romans (IgnRom 2; 4-5). Even though the bishop is mentioned in IgnEph, one does not read anything about a focus on the episcopal office, a hierarchical submission of the members of the congregation to the bishop, or of the episcopal office as the organ present in all congregations, as is characteristic of the “middle recension” (IgnEph 2-6, “middle recension”). Neither does one find here the diatribe against the false teachers, who are compared to wild beasts and associated with the “prince of this world” in the “middle recension” (IgnEph 7; 9; 16-18; IgnRom 7). Against the backdrop of the desire to be consumed by wild beasts in Rome expressed earlier, this fierce depiction of the heretics in the “middle recension” seems rather surprising, and also clashes with chapter 10 of the letter present in both recensions, which recommends merciful attention to and prayer for those who have gone astray and produce blasphemies (IgnEph 10).

Even though the Letter to the Ephesians and the Letter to the Romans in the three-letter collection are, like IgnPol, clearly oriented towards God the Father, Christ also has a certain place in them. Take, for example, the image of the building site in IgnEph 9[[26]](#footnote-26) or the parallel image of Ignatius bound to Christ (IgnRom 1). Yet, if one compares this version of the letters with that of the “middle recension,” one notices a more elaborated form of Christology,[[27]](#footnote-27) which culminates in the author’s holding out the prospect of writing a second booklet about “the new man Jesus Christ” detailing “the dispensation,” Christ’s “faith,” his “love,” his “suffering,” and his “resurrection,” planned out to elucidate the core of Christian doctrine[[28]](#footnote-28) – how does this ambitious project fit on a martyr’s journey to his place of martyrdom?

Ignatius’ “astonishing density” with its “quasi-confessional narratives” (IgnTral 9,1-2), the “abstract and schematic” formulas (IgnMag 7,2), his “quasi-poetic way” (IgnEph 7,2) of “learning Christ” (IgnPhilad 8,2), or the tying together of the titles “Son of Man” and “Son of God” (IgnEph 20,2) stem solely from the “middle recension.” When, for example, Gregory Vall considers the main theme of Ignatius’ letters to be themes such as Jesus Christ being “God in man” (IgnEph 7:2), or the deeds that were “truly and certainly fulfilled” by Christ (IgnMag 11:1) with emphasis on the “Catholic Church” (IgnSmyr 8:2), these too are all specifics derived from the “middle recension.”[[29]](#footnote-29) In fact, all quotations presented by Vall as typically Ignatian in the overview of his detailed study are found exclusively in the “middle recension.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

The peculiarity of the “short recension” as compared to the “middle recension” becomes even clearer when theology in the strict sense is considered:[[31]](#footnote-31) in the “middle recension,” Christ is the “perfect man” (τέλειος ἄνθρωπος, IgnSm 4:2), the “new man” (... τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον, IgnEph 20:1),[[32]](#footnote-32) descended from the seed of the tribe of David (IgnEph 18:2; 20:2; IgnTral 9:1; IgnRom 7:3; IgnSm 1:1) and truly born of the Virgin Mary (Ign 7:2; 18:2; 20:2; IgnTral 9:1; IgnSm 1:1), whereas the “short recension” speaks only of the Virgin Mary (IgnEph 19:1).[[33]](#footnote-33) Only the “middle recension” adds that Jesus was baptised by John (IgnSm 1:1; IgnEph 18:2), that he truly ate and drank (IgnTral 9:1), and that he was crucified (IgnTral 9:1; IgnSm 1:1; 2; IgnMag 11; IgnEph 19), even though the cross is mentioned twice as a means of salvation in the “short recension.” But the “middle recension” knows other historical details, namely that the crucifixion happened under Pontius Pilate (IgnTral 9:1) and the tetrarch Herod (IgnSm 1:1), that Christ rose from the dead (IgnTral 9:2), or awoke himself (IgnSm 2; 3:1-3), and that he will awaken others (IgnMag 9:2). Only the “middle recension” sometimes calls him simply “Jesus” (IgnEph 2:2; IgnMag 1:2; IgnPhilad 5:1) or “Christ” (IgnEph 18:2; IgnMag 13:2; IgnRom 7:3[?]), as well as simply “God” (IgnEph 7:2; 19:3; IgnTral 7:1; IgnSm 10:1),[[34]](#footnote-34) “the God” (IgnSm 1:1; 6:1), “our God” (IgnEph praef., 15:3; 18:2; IgnRom praef. [2 x]; 3:3; 9:1; IgnPol 8:3), or “my God” (IgnRom 6:3).[[35]](#footnote-35) He is united with the Father (IgnSm 3:3) and also one with Him (IgnMag 7:1; IgnEph 5:1). Twice we read the triadic formula.[[36]](#footnote-36) He is the one who created the world (IgnEph 15:1), the one who knows all things, and from whom nothing is hidden.[[37]](#footnote-37) While in the “short recension” prayers are addressed to God, in the “middle recension” Jesus Christ (IgnRom 4:2; IgnSm 4:1; IgnEph 20:1) is the object of faith, love, and hope (IgnEph 14; IgnPhilad 11:2).[[38]](#footnote-38) But the “middle recension,” despite equating Christ with God and His divine attributes, subordinates him to the Father,[[39]](#footnote-39) even if it does so only in the flesh (IgnMag 13:2; 7:1; 8:2; IgnSm 8:1). On the other hand, the “patripassian” passage in IgnPol 3,2, which already reminded Tertullian editor Emil Kroymann of the confession of Noët of Smyrna, is found in both recensions.[[40]](#footnote-40)

One of the most prominent Christological differences between the “middle” and the “short recension” is the title “Son of the Father,” “Son of God,” or simply “Son” used in the “middle recension,” in contrast to the plain title “Son” found in the “short recension” (IgnEph 4:2; 20:2; IgnRom praef. [2x]; IgnMag 8:2; 13:1; IgnSm 1:1).[[41]](#footnote-41) Similarly, only the “middle recension” speaks of Christ as the “Logos” (IgnMag 8:2; IgnTral 7:1; IgnSm 1:1)[[42]](#footnote-42) and of a “gnosis” of God (IgnEph 17:2) or the Father (IgnEph 3:2).[[43]](#footnote-43) Likewise, only this recension repeatedly refers to Christ by his other Johannine title, “the life” (IgnEph 3:2; IgnMag 1:2; IgnSm 4:1; IgnTral 9:2) and “the hope,” although this title is encountered as many as six times in five of the epistles (IgnEph 21:2; IgnMag 11:1; IgnTral praef.; 2:2; IgnPhilad 11:2; IgnSm 10:2). This frequency indicates that we are dealing here with “a distinctive freshness and vigour in Ign’s thought of Jesus.”[[44]](#footnote-44) The absolute use of ὄνομα (“name”) in describing “Christians” is found only in the “middle recension” (IgnEph 3:1; cf. 7:1; IgnMag 10:1; IgnPhilad 10:1), which, as Lightfoot noted, led later writers to add genitives such as τοῦ Κυρίου.[[45]](#footnote-45)

### Evidence for the Three- and Seven-Letter Collections

Once again, our retrospective review does not directly lead to the question of which of the two recensions and letter collections is older, but rather leads to the more important one of the time and the cultural and socio-political environment in which the collections showed their effect or were engaged with. This question, as my earlier study points out, already preoccupied the competing projects of Cureton, Zahn, and Lightfoot, even if they did not reach the same conclusions. Today we are in a better position, having access to critical editions of many writings, especially those from the 2nd century, as well as a wealth of individual studies discussing the relevant works and their authors. An examination of these sources and studies makes it possible to follow up on the 19th-century controversy, and in doing so I have come to the conclusion that Cureton’s position must at least in part be rehabilitated.

Cureton correctly noted that up to Eusebius, and to some extent even later (i.e., between the 2nd and 4th centuries), all passages quoted verbatim from the Ignatiana, and in part explicitly assigned to the letters of Ignatius, are found in both the “short” and “middle recension,” but none are present exclusively in the “middle recension.” The silence of these early authors regarding references exclusive to the “middle recension” strongly suggests that the seven-letter collection was written after the three-letter one, and carried less authority, as can be seen from the following observations:

The martyrdom of Polycarp is an interesting case in point. While the oldest documented description of the martyrdom, the date of which is disputed but sometimes placed in the second half of the 2nd century, consists in only a single passage of IgnRom found in the three-letter collection,[[46]](#footnote-46) the revision of this narrative by Pionius in the 4th century is found only in the seven-letter collection.[[47]](#footnote-47) Another witness offering pre-4th-century parallels with the “short recension” is Melito of Sardis, who knows IgnPol 3.[[48]](#footnote-48)

A special position is occupied by the pagan sophist and critic of Christianity, Lucian of Samosata. In his books “Peregrinus” and “Alexander or the Lying Prophet,” we find expressions strongly reminiscent of text from the seven-letter collection of the Ignatiana, which amongst scholars has raised the question of whether Lucian was a witness to the “middle recension,”[[49]](#footnote-49) or whether, conversely, the “middle recension” borrowed from Lucian.[[50]](#footnote-50) If we assume the first option to be more likely, it would follow that the first reader of the “middle recension” was Lucian, a critic of Christianity, which perhaps furnishes a reason for why nobody before Eusebius of Caesarea in the 4th century paid special attention to this collection or explicitly attributed to Ignatius texts other than those found in the three letters of the “short recension.” Even if Irenaeus of Lyons in the last third of the 2nd century may have known the seven-letter collection,[[51]](#footnote-51) the only explicit quotation he gives from it derives from IgnRom 4,1, which is already present in the “short recension.” However, the fact that Irenaeus refers to the author of this quotation only vaguely as “one of our own,” an anonymous martyr, makes one wonder whether even the three-letter collection “must have seemed highly enigmatic, if not suspect, to Irenaeus.”[[52]](#footnote-52)

Origen, the writer probably best informed about the Christian literature up to his time, gives indications that he knew the letters of Ignatius. However, he expressly attributes one specific quote that can be found in the Letter to the Smyrnaeans – only present in the seven-letter collection – not to Ignatius’ letters, but to the *Doctrina Petri*. This, in my opinion, is a clear sign that he only knew of the three-letter collection as authored by Ignatius.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Consequently, the “middle recension” first appears in Asia Minor in the last third of the 2nd century (Lucian, Irenaeus) and may have reached Lyon with Irenaeus, where echoes of it can be found in the “Letter of the Churches of Lyon and Vienne.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

Thus the external testimony speaks for the possibility, suggested by Cureton, that Ignatius’ three-letter collection preceded the seven-letter collection. This is supported by the differences in content, theology, and language discussed above, which I have addressed in greater detail in the aforementioned study.[[55]](#footnote-55) If we accept these observations, then we could juxtapose them with those of David Trobisch on letter collections in antiquity and conclude that there was probably first a small edition of three relatively short letters collected under the name of Ignatius of Antioch, and, as far as our testimonies permit us to judge, this collection first became known in the second half of the 2nd century. Whether these letters were genuine or published pseudonymously as a collection cannot be decided at this point, but from a retrospective point of view the question of authenticity is less important than the fact that a collection became known under a specific name, and when it did so. As outlined in Trobisch’s second stage, a few years later four more pseudonymous letters seem to have been added in an expanded edition with contents drawn, like the Letter to the Trallians, from the eighth chapter of the older Letter to the Romans, or using material from other writings, like the *Doctrina Petri* used in the Letter to the Smyrnaeans. Moreover, Trobisch’s model can be supplemented, because with the addition of the new letters, the texts and contents of the three letters of the “short recension” were also adapted to the state of discourse in the last third of the 2nd century: they were linguistically revised, expanded in many places, further Paulinised, interlocked with the novel letters, and, in particular, linked to these through the addition of names that are planted into the old letters and also occur in the new ones, serving as bridges between the two.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Strikingly, the phenomenon of the expansion and further revision of the older three-letter collection as well as the newer seven-letter collection of the Ignatiana can be traced further over the course of the next centuries. In contrast to the tripartite nature of Trobisch’s model, this case demonstrates that we may have to reckon with considerably more stages in the life course of letter collections, or indeed that a clear differentiation of the later stages may even be obsolete. It seems to me that with reference to the Ignatiana with their different versions mentioned so far (the “short,” “medium” and “long” recensions), it would be more appropriate to speak of different letter collections, as has already been done here: the three-letter collection (= the “short recension”), the seven-letter collection (= the “middle recension”), the thirteen-letters collection (= the “long recension”), and with the additional four medieval Latin letters, the seventeeen-letter collection (= the “complete edition”).

If one prefers to retain the concept of recensions, one should rather speak of a “near-original recension” (= the three-letter collection, not always identical with today’s “short” recension preserved in Syriac), of a “revised recension” (= “middle”), and then of the many stages of “further” recensions. An *editio critica maior* would have to be compiled in the future on the basis of these clearly distinguishable perspectives of development.

The historical, retrospective examination of the Ignatiana has shown that the three-letter collection and the seven-letter collection seem to have existed in parallel for a certain time before the seven-letter collection finally became clearly established without, however, completely replacing the three-letter collection. Adding to the complexity, the seven-letter collection must also have had impacts and influences on the transmission, text, and content of the three-letter collection. Then we find that in the course of further copying, translation, and editing of these collections, the three-letter collection in particular must have possessed a weight imparted by tradition, which led to a form of the thirteen-letter collection whose translation from Greek into Latin still clearly shows the textual stock of the three-letter collection, even if the thirteen-letter collection fundamentally builds on the seven-letter collection and the recension of its contents, editing them and adding a further six letters. This can also be deduced from the preserved Greek text of the thirteen-letter collection, which probably first appeared in the 4th-century *Codex Borgensis* 248,[[57]](#footnote-57) and is clearly indebted to the “middle” recension of the seven-letter collection, constituting a revision and expansion of the latter, which, like its Latin translation, was supplemented with the same six additional pseudonymous letters. In addition, the Letter to the Romans, present already in the three-letter collection, and revised and expanded like the other two presumably earlier letters in the seven-letter collection, experienced a transmission distinct from that of the other letters of the seven-letter collection (which, therefore, appears in manuscripts only as a six-letter collection[[58]](#footnote-58)). IgnRom became integrated into a chapter of one of Ignatius’ martyrdoms, whose numerous surviving manuscripts prove most clearly that instead of speaking of just three recensions of this letter, it seems necessary to add many more stages. For we have additional Greek and Arabic testimonies that form the bridge between all aforementioned collections and recensions of the first millennium. Interestingly, in manuscripts the seven-letter collection is always found bound together with the thirteen-letter collection, and we do not know of a single codex in which the seven-letter collection (or, in fact, at least the six letters) of the “middle recension” stand alone.

In sum, the following can be concluded about the complex manuscript evidence base for the various collections and recensions: Trobisch’s picture of the development of epistolary collections has been confirmed in principle, even if it still needs to be nuanced and expanded, especially for late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. After letter collections such as the Ignatiana are created (sometimes pseudonymously), they are subject to further stages of processing of both the collection and the textual stock, are adapted, revised, modified to incorporate new themes and redefined in their scope. Further editions rearrange these collections for various purposes, reduce them, comment on them; in the case of the Ignatiana, the question of attribution remains an important aspect of the adaptations across the centuries. The pseudonymous nature of many of the letters added later also raises the question of whether or not even the first stock of letters was authentic. In any case, the first collection of Ignatius’ letters was definitely a success, as it has grown in stages over more than a thousand years.

### The Thirteen-Letter Collection

Having discussed the three- and seven- (or six-) letter collections, we should now at least briefly review the collection of thirteen letters.

After examining the Acts of Paul, we will be hardly surprised to find that the Seventeen Epistle Collection, first encountered in the 4th century, circulated with a strong focus on marriage and asceticism, as has been suggested.[[59]](#footnote-59) However, research has so far paid little attention to this collection, and where it did, typically questions of authenticity, authorship, and dating have been in the foreground rather than those concerning the social and religious-historical function of this collection.[[60]](#footnote-60) In this respect, Stephanie Cobb only recently made a first attempt:

Ignatius of Antioch, that second-century staunch defender of proto-orthodoxy, zealous supporter of the monarchial episcopacy, and possible masochistic martyr (who confesses “I love to suffer”), wrote twelve letters as he traveled from Syria to Rome to face death: nine to churches – *Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans, Tarsians, Philippians, Antiochians* – and three to individuals – Polycarp, Mary of Cassobola, Hero. Or, at least, such was the thought for the better part of 1200 years. Indeed, these twelve letters, plus a letter from Mary of Cassobola to Ignatius, circulated as the Ignatian epistolary corpus from the late fourth century until 1644.[[61]](#footnote-61)

These 12 letters plus the letter of Mary, which were supplemented in the Middle Ages with four medieval Latin letters, formed an Ignatian collection with which Ignatius remained identified for a very long time. What image did this collection convey not only of Ignatius, but above all of the beginnings of Christianity?

The collection of letters strongly advocates for a merely moderate Christian asceticism and speaks more clearly than many other writings for a sexual intimacy that is not even exclusively designed for procreation, but is simply considered significant for a meaningful life:

Devote yourself to fasting and prayer, but not beyond measure, lest you destroy yourself thereby. Do not altogether abstain from wine and flesh, for these things are not to be viewed with abhorrence, since [the Scripture] says, You shall eat the good things of the earth (*Isa* 1:19). And again, You shall eat flesh even as herbs (*Gen* 9:3). And again, Wine makes glad the heart of man, and oil exhilarates, and bread strengthens him (*Ps* 104:15). But all are to be used with moderation, as being the gifts of God. For who shall eat or who shall drink without Him? For if anything be beautiful, it is His; and if anything be good, it is His. (*IgnHer* 1).

Immediately at the beginning of his letter, the author not only recommends moderate enjoyment of all essential goods, but also warns against over-asceticism and over-spirituality as being self-destructive. Moreover, the ascetic is expressly admonished not to abstain completely from wine and meat.

The connection between wine and meat is not only found in the scriptural passage just quoted, but also appears as a theme in other 4th-century authors such as Jerome. In his letter to Eustochium, for example, we read:

Wine and youth incite each other to sensual pleasure. Why do we pour oil on the flames? Why do we add fresh fuel to the pathetic body that is already blazing? Noah drank wine and became drunk ... his drunkenness was followed by his body being emptied; revelry led to lust (Gen 9:20-21). First the belly is filled, then the other limbs are stimulated. Similarly, in a later passage it says, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.’ (*Ex* 32:6)[[62]](#footnote-62)

In “a side remark ... Chrysostom demonstrates that Jerome was not alone in noticing that drinking wine might endanger one’s sexual integrity, especially women’s sexual integrity.”[[63]](#footnote-63) In contrast to Chrysostom, who in a male-chauvinist way attributes lack of sexual restraint primarily to women, and Jerome, who thinks first of the young who cannot restrain themselves, the collection of thirteen letters is reserved in its criticism of the enjoyment of wine and meat, as well as in that of young people and women. For it is precisely these two groups, which in late antiquity were far lower in the social hierarchy than older men, that this collection vigorously supports. According to its representation, early Christianity is a movement that breaks down such hierarchical structures, as we shall see.

This counter-traditional social dynamics is already evident to some extent in the quoted passage from the beginning of *IgnHer*. The first two biblical quotations argue not only for the enjoyment of meat as food, but also in a figurative sense for sexual activity, as the link with “oil” which “exhilarates” suggests. This figurative sense is further developed by the reference to enjoying meat like plants. Sexuality is thus not something that is exclusively purposeful, serving only the preservation of physical life,[[64]](#footnote-64) but is also meant to contribute delight to life. Just as wine gladdens the heart of man and oil elates,[[65]](#footnote-65) all other things are gifts from God. These are fundamental to the thirteen-letter collection: they are “good things of the earth” that God offers us.

Now, criticism of excessive asceticism was not unusual in the late 4th century, as is evident from the sixth book of the Apostolic Constitutions, even though, as we have seen, there was a growing interest in and concern about ever more rigorous forms of ascetic practice. These forms of ascetic and spiritual practice and the question of their relationship to God’s gift of grace culminated in the dispute between Pelagius and Augustine. In this context, the thirteen-letter collection is strongly influenced by the Pauline Pastoral Epistles, which we will discuss below in more detail; specifically, 1Tim is quoted, a letter defending the drinking of wine and sexuality in marriage with a “clearly anti-ascetic” tendency. Like the Paul of the Pastoral Epistles, the thirteen-letter collection emphasises the importance of marriage and food, and describes these as God’s creation to support the argument, even if it does not reference prayer and the Eucharist.[[66]](#footnote-66) Moreover, while in 1Tim sexuality is strictly oriented towards procreation,[[67]](#footnote-67) in the thirteen-letter collection, particularly in the Letter to Hero, one reads that the sexual act, as long as it is according to the law, “should not be abhorred.” Sexuality and diet are not the only topics in which this collection of letters goes beyond the Pastoral Epistles. The Ignatian collection has a special respect for women and assigns them an elevated role within Christianity, in stark contrast to many church orders and other early Christian writings. The Letter to Hero states:

Do not hold women in abomination, for they have given you birth, and brought you up. It is fitting, therefore, to love those that were the authors of our birth (but only in the Lord), inasmuch as a man can produce no children without a woman. It is right, therefore, that we should honour those who have had a part in giving us birth. Neither is the man without the woman, nor the woman without the man (1 *Cor* 11:11) except in the case of those who were first formed. For the body of Adam was made out of the four elements, and that of Eve out of the side of Adam. And, indeed, the altogether peculiar birth of the Lord was of a virgin alone. [This took place] not as if the lawful union [of man and wife] were abominable, but such a kind of birth was fitting to God. For it became the Creator not to make use of the ordinary method of generation, but of one that was singular and strange, as being the Creator. (*IgnHer* 4)

In this bold passage, the author asserts that the Lord’s “peculiar” birth of a virgin and the creation of the first man “of the four elements” and Eve “out of the side of Adam” were extraordinary events and exceptions to the ordinary way of childbearing through the sexual union of woman and man. However, the thirteen-letter collection goes further by building on these observations to state, based on 1 *Cor* 11:11, that the mutual dependence of man and woman, indeed, their intimacy, is the absolute prerequisite for the existence of the addressees, and thus constitutes a relation that obliges all offspring to honour those who have begotten them; this refers first and foremost to the mother or wife, who therefore, as the passage opening instructs, is to be held not in low but in high esteem. Marital intercourse is not to be abhorred.[[68]](#footnote-68)

As the exhortation to cherish women that opens the quotation shows, this text is addressed primarily to a male readership, a characteristic that is important to note for understanding the opening letter of the collection from Mary to Ignatius. When IgnAnt 9 first mentions men who are to “love their wives,” just as conversely women are to be faithful to their husbands as their only partners, this is a small indication that not only were extramarital relationships known in both sexes, but also that primarily men had to be admonished.

In IgnHer 9, Mary is praised more conspicuously than, for example, Nympha in the Pauline Col 4:15. In IgnHer 9, we read: “Mary my daughter, distinguished both for gravity and erudition, as also the Church which is in her house.” The most outstanding praise of a woman is certainly found in the highly stylised preface of Ignatius’ Letter to Mary (IgnMarC), which, therefore, I will discuss in more detail. As this text is a response to a foregoing letter by an otherwise unknown Mary Cassobolites to Ignatius, we will also look into the latter document.

As we shall see, the thirteen-letter collection paints a picture of the first Christians as favourable to women and young people, and one that, as the argumentation reveals, deliberately constitutes a contrast to the expectations of the time.

Mary, who is described as a proselyte, opens her letter to Ignatius with the request that “Maris, our friend, bishop of our native Neapolis, which is near (Ana)zarbus,[[69]](#footnote-69) and Eulogius and Sobelus the presbyter, be sent to us, that we be not destitute of such as preside over the divine word.” (MarCIgn 2) Thus Mary here appears to lobby Bishop Maris of Neapolis for two men, Eulogius and Sobelus, to preside over her congregation in Cassobola. The problem with these, however, is their youth and the fact that they have consequently only recently become priests (MarCIgn 3).[[70]](#footnote-70)

This is where the peculiarities of this opening letter of the collection begin. Firstly, it is a woman who appears as a spokesperson, writes to Ignatius, and even, according to the manuscripts, provides the opening letter to the entire collection of the Ignatiana; secondly, as will soon become clear from her letter, she aims to undermine the uncritical veneration of old age built on the traditional argument of “the older, the more valuable” (*presbyteron kreitton)* (as evidenced by the “hoary heads” mentioned below in MarCIgn 2),[[71]](#footnote-71) and sticks up not only for these men alone, but with a number of selected biblical examples for youth in general, and precisely concerning questions of sexual abstinence:

They are wise about the flesh, and are insensible to its passions, they themselves glowing with all the glory of a hoary head through their own intrinsic merits, and though but recently called as young men to the priesthood. (MarCIgn 2)

Considering the importance and appreciation in antiquity and to some extent up to the present day of a person’s age and the social position in family and society often associated with it, Mary’s demands and justifications still have an extraordinary impact on today’s reader, as they certainly must have had at the time, even though they echo the message of the Pastoral Epistles – but also go far beyond them (1 Tim 4:12; 5:1-2; 2 Tim 2:22; Tit 2:7). From Scripture, Mary cites famous examples of situations is which the divine choice fell on young men as successful and outstanding role models outshining old men. These examples are of such radicality that older male readers probably felt confronted, which would explain why as a reaction, such older male readers, scribes, redactors, and copyists removed this letter from their collection of Ignatius’ letters. It is all the more astonishing, however, that precisely these remarks appear in two versions inside the collection, once in Mary’s letter to Ignatius (MarCIgn 3-4), and again with editorial changes in Ignatius’ letter to the Magnesians (IgnMag 3), in a passage that is missing from the “middle recension.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

The first of Mary’s biblical examples is “the wise Daniel” who as “a young man, passed judgement on certain vigorous old men, showing them that they were abandoned wretches, and not [worthy to be reckoned] elders” (MarCIgn 3). Who among the readership would like to identify with these “abandoned wretches”? Unfortunately, it remains unclear which biblical story Mary is specifically referring to; she might have been inspired by 2 Sam 12:5–11 and Lev 18:19–27,[[73]](#footnote-73) or perhaps by Rom 1:28–2:1.[[74]](#footnote-74)

If we assume Mary’s text to refer to the former passage, then the young David’s praise reflects his critical self-judgment after he has grown older: while in his youth he was shaped by wise insight, as an older man he has fallen prey to sexual licentiousness. If we add to the text from Mary’s letter the parallel passage from IgnMag 3, the judgement becomes even clearer: at the “age of twelve” David “became possessed of the divine Spirit, and convicted the elders, who in vain carried their grey hairs, of being false accusers, and of lusting after the beauty of another man’s wife.”

The example of David is followed in IgnMag 3 by that of Samuel, which is not to be read about in Mary’s letter. Samuel stands for the “little child” who accuses the great old prophet of nepotism. Another example, which is again found in both versions, is the prophet Jeremiah. Jer 1:7 recounts that Jeremiah wants to reject God’s call in view of his own youth, but that God answers him: “Do not say, ‘I am still so young.’ Wherever I send you, you shall go; and what I charge you with, that shall you declare.” By these and other examples, for Mary the Scripture confirms that God promised his assistance to the young presbyters, providing her with a base to formulate her request as a divine command to Ignatius.

In this letter, which presents itself as the letter of a woman closely connected to the bishop of her native city,[[75]](#footnote-75) one hears a female voice that speaks with divine and prophetic authority and knows how to refer to Scripture. It is noteworthy that in doing so, she does not, or at least not explicitly, base her argument on New Testament passages.

The fact that Mary defends the young men by first pointing out that they are armed against sexual temptations casts a moral shadow over the elders with whom they are constrasted. Deviant moral behaviour and religious practice go hand in hand and both are addressed in Mary’s letter. The young men, called by God and far superior to all their elders, both their parents and their advisors, serve as shining counter-examples according to Mary.

Let us now turn our attention to Ignatius’ response to see what it makes of the strong views and challenges launched in Mary’s letter. First, Ignatius agrees with Mary’s request to support her case. In an elaborate preface, IgnMarC 1 reads:

Sight indeed is better than writing, inasmuch as, being one of the company of the senses, it not only, by communicating proofs of friendship, honours him who receives them, but also, by those which it in turn receives, enriches the desire for better things. But the second harbour of refuge, as the phrase runs, is the practice of writing, which we have received, as a convenient haven, by your faith, from so great a distance, seeing that by means of a letter we have learned the excellence that is in you. For the souls of the good, O you wisest of women! resemble fountains of the purest water; for they allure by their beauty passers-by to drink of them, even though these should not be thirsty. And your intelligence invites us, as by a word of command, to participate in those divine draughts which gush forth so abundantly in your soul.

Using rhetorical embellishments, Ignatius expresses a longing to see Mary physically, but perhaps also offended by her criticism of old, unrestrained incumbents and voyeurs, expresses in a most elegant way that he is content with the second best “harbour of refuge,” namely the written exchange between them. From the outset, he is full of admiration for her intelligence, points out the clear tone of command he senses in the letter, and states that he is drawn to Mary’s divine effusions, her wisdom, faith, exceptionality, and insights. Thus he emphatically calls her by the honorific title of the “wisest of women,” who resembles the “fountains of purest water.”

However, the preface also reveals no small amount of male chauvinism when Ignatius alludes to the beauty of these fountains, which attract the passer-by even against his will.[[76]](#footnote-76) Packaged as praise, it can be read as a masculine rejection of the criticism of the old men’s dishonest behavior in Mary’s letter. According to Ignatius, it is not their fault if they, as ascetics, stay in the proximity of women and then “fall” morally; instead, he equates female beauty with attraction and the latter with seduction, which he tries to represent as the nature of women. The question is whether such nuances are merely the work of a learned male fiction writer, or whether this correspondence is after all based on a historical source, with the first letter in fact being written by a female author and answered by a male minister, and the exchange subsequently being brought into the larger context of the Ignatiana by an editor. Mary’s clear message and her voice praising and commending the young men, but also her subtle yet no less forceful criticism of Ignatius, ultimately perhaps formed the reason why in the course of the later transmission of the thirteen-letter collection Mary’s first letter to Ignatius was excluded from the corpus, especially in the Latin Western tradition, while Ignatius’ response remained part of it, even though with the exclusion or loss of Mary’s letter Ignatius’ response appears out of context. And yet, Mary’s examples found their way into IgnMag. Perhaps this again speaks for the fact that the collection cannot be traced back to a single editor, but that in different geographies and at different times, different hands and minds have tried to make this collection their own and give it their own face.

Without tracing this correspondence in detail here – I have presented a somewhat more detailed interpretation in the study mentioned above[[77]](#footnote-77) – I would like to briefly discuss the picture of the beginnings of Christianity conveyed by it, as compared to that presented by the thirteen- or twelve-letter collection of the Ignatiana.

First of all, it has become clear that the two collections of letters have different messages. The thirteen-letter collection conveys the rare image of a Christianity whose first voice is that of a woman and whose prophets, priests, and kings called by God are young men. Even if this is reminiscent of the function of stories and legends, which have destabilising functions especially for socially discriminated groups,[[78]](#footnote-78) it does not straightforwardly suggest a feminist image of early Christianity; indeed, nothing would be further from the literary reality of this collection. Rather, it shows that self-confident, clever, highly esteemed, and presumably highly educated and well-connected women also did significant work to support a male-organised church led by an entirely male hierarchy. Whether the correspondence between Mary and Ignatius at the opening of the collection is historical or not is less significant than the fact that even the image of the self-confident, downright prophetic woman is shown to stand in the service of this hierarchical male organisation. In this collection, the young men are incorporated by the institution the same way that women are. While they have no voice of their own, a female voice that closely cooperates with the male hierarchy speaks for them with God’s authority, as does God’s own voice of divine calling, and the voice of the bishop.

The twelve-letter collection then specifically drops this inquiring and requesting female voice, so that with Ignatius’ answer, his subtly male-chauvinistic view of women opens the collection. In the further letters, which are the same in both collections, this image of a church dominated by a network of bishops along with other members of the hierarchy and supported by parishioners is developed further. It is precisely the female, deviant, and demonic threat that is most clearly expressed in IgnPhil. The life of the first Christians is dominated by ascetic, anti-heretical, and anti-demonic struggle. Even though the letters preach moderation in all of these, this clear recommendation of being vigilant shows that institutional Christianity is surrounded by much more radical Christian ideas from which the orthodoxy strives to set itself apart as a middle way.

Christianity is presented right from the start as a fixed institution, clearly distinguished from Judaism and the surrounding pagan traditions by its scripture, which encompasses the Old and New Testaments. The Jews are seen as murderers of Christians like Stephen (IgnTar 3). Furthermore, in contrast to the seven-letter collection, here it is claimed that “Judaism has come to an end,” indeed that “where Christianity exists, there can be no Judaism” (IgnMag 10). It becomes apparent how far the Pauline tradition has moved away from a “near-original” version of the three-letter collection, which was still strongly influenced by Judaism, via a “revised” seven-letters collection in which “Christianity” is already understood as a separate entity alongside and outside of “Judaism” (IgnMag 10), towards a rejection and replacement of Judaism by Christianity in the “further” or “long” recension of the thirteen- or twelve-letter collection.

The question arises whether the Ignatian collections, whose elaboration generally follows the stages discovered by Trobisch in his study of the historical development of ancient collections, represent an isolated case in the Christian tradition, or whether, for example, the genesis of the now-canonical collection of Pauline letters evidences similar characteristics.

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1. Thus in O. Wischmeyer, Ed. Paulus Leben - Umwelt - Werk - Briefe (2012), 382-383, 388-389; A. Lindemann, Paulus im ältesten Christentum. Überlegungen zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion über die frühe Paulusrezeption (1979); M. Theobald, Israel-Vergessenheit in den Pastoralbriefen. Ein neuer Vorschlag zu ihrer historisch-theologischen Verortung im 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr. unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Ignatius-Briefe (2016), 289-314. However, Theobald sees in the multiple correspondences of the Pastoral Epistles, the Ignatiana, and the Acts of Paul a shared “tradition from Asia Minor.” He dates the Ignatiana to the second half of the 2nd century and the Pastoral Epistles to before its middle. See also T.D. Still, Ignatius and Paul on Suffering and Death: A Short, Comparative Study (2017); D.J. Downs, The Pauline Concept of Union with Christ in Ignatius of Antioch (2017); H.O. Maier, Paul, Ignatius and Thirdspace: A Socio-Geographic Exploration (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019), Kapitel 5. Cf. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. One need only consider the place of the Ignatiana in critical reviews of my earlier studies, cf. for example M. Edwards, Markus Vinzent on the Resurrection (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On the question of dating and the various proposals, cf. my above-mentioned study. One should add the observation on the use of the term “martyr,” which led Boudewijn Dehandschutter to date the “middle recension” to the second half of the 2nd century, cf. B. Dehandschutter, L’Authenticité des épîtres d’Ignace d’Antioche (2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. D. Trobisch, Paul's letter collection : tracing the origins (1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This opening sentence of the quote is shortened in the English version of Trobisch’s book, but has been added here (own trans.), as taken from D. Trobisch, Die Paulusbriefe und die Anfänge der christlichen Publizistik (1994), 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. D. Trobisch, Paul's letter collection : tracing the origins (1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. J.B.B.o.D. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers. Part II. S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp. Second edition (1889); T. Zahn, Ignatius von Antiochien (1873). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. W. Cureton, The Antient Syriac Version of the Epistles of Saint Ignatius to Saint Polycarp, the Ephesians, and the Romans (1845); W. Cureton, Vindiciae Ignatianae; or the Genuine writings of St. Ignatius, as exhibited in the antient Syriac version vindicated from the charge of heresy (1846); W. Cureton, Corpus Ignatianum: A Complete Collection of the Ignatian Epistles, Genuine, Interpolated, and Spurious (1849). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. J.B.B.o.D. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers. Part II. S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp. Second edition (1889). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A first approach to an interpretation is offered by M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. A.v. Harnack, Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius. 2. erweiterte Auflage mit einem Vorwort von Kurt Aland (1958). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. W.R. Schoedel, Art. Ignatius von Antiochien (1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See further details in M. Vinzent, Ignatius of Antioch on Judaism and Christianity (2020); E. Norelli, Χριστιανισμός e χριστιανός in Ignazio di Antiochia e la cronologia delle sue lettere (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. O. Wischmeyer, Paulus Leben - Umwelt - Werk - Briefe (2006), 388-389. Lindemann in ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. A. Brent, Ignatius’ Pagan background in Second Century Asia Minor (2007); A. Brent, Ignatius of Antioch and the Second Sophistic : A Study of an Early Christian Transformation of Pagan Culture (2006); A. Brent, Ignatius of Antioch : a martyr bishop and the origin of monarchial episcopacy (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. E. Norelli, La mémoire des origines chrétiennes: Papias et Hégésippe chez Eusèbe (2001); E. Norelli, Papias di Hierapolis. Esposizione degli oracoli del Signore. I frammenti (2005); M. Edwards, Markus Vinzent on the Resurrection (2016), 130-133; P.R. Trebilco, Self-designations and Group Identity in the New Testament (2014), 272. Cf. E. Norelli, La mémoire des origines chrétiennes: Papias et Hégésippe chez Eusèbe (2001); E. Norelli, Papias di Hierapolis. Esposizione degli oracoli del Signore. I frammenti (2005); M. Edwards, Markus Vinzent on the Resurrection (2016), 130-133; P.R. Trebilco, Self-designations and Group Identity in the New Testament (2014), 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. A. Urbán, Polycarpi et secundae epistulae Clementis romani concordantiae (2001), 9; F.X.v. Funk and F. Diekamp, Patres apostolici (1901), lvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. B. Gleede, Parabiblica latina. Studien zu den griechisch-lateinischen Übersetzungen parabiblischer Literatur unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der apostolischen Väter (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. R.M. Hübner and M. Vinzent, Der Paradox Eine : antignostischer Monarchianismus im zweiten Jahrhundert (1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The abstract has also been incorporated into the Syriac version of the "short review". [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. "And you are prepared for the building of God the Father, and are lifted up on high by the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, and you are drawn upward by the rope, which is the Holy Spirit; and your pull is your faith, and your love is the means that brings you up to God. “ [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Cf. IgnRom praef. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. IgnEph 20: ... ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ βιβλιδίῳ, ὃ μέλλω γράφειν ὑμῖν, προσδηλώσω ὑμῖν, ἧς ἠρξάμην οἰκονομίας εἰς τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, ἐν τῇ αὐτου πίστει καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ ἀγαπῃ, ἐν πάθει αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναστάσει. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. G. Vall, Learning Christ. Ignatius of Antioch & the Mystery of Redemption (2013), 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid. 23-26 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ignatius, W. Cureton, W. Watts, F. Rivington, J. Rivington and Francis and John Rivington (Firm), Corpus Ignatianum: : a complete collection of the Ignatian epistles, genuine, interpolated, and spurious; together with numerous extracts from them, as quoted by ecclesiastical writers down to the tenth century; in Syriac, Greek, and Latin xxxvii–xxxviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. M. Rackl, Die Christologie des Heiligen Ignatius von Antiochien nebst einer Voruntersuchung: Die Echtheit der sieben Ignatianischen Briefe verteidigt gegen Daniel Voelter (1914), 133-135. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. 136-137 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid. 89-90 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ignatius, W. Cureton, W. Watts, F. Rivington, J. Rivington and Francis and John Rivington (Firm), Corpus Ignatianum: : a complete collection of the Ignatian epistles, genuine, interpolated, and spurious; together with numerous extracts from them, as quoted by ecclesiastical writers down to the tenth century; in Syriac, Greek, and Latin xxxvii. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *IgnMag* 13,1: ἐν υἱῷ καὶ πατρὶ καὶ ἐν πνεύματι; *IgnMag* 13,2: τῷ Χριστῷ καὶ πατρὶ καὶ τῷ πνεύματι. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. M. Rackl, Die Christologie des Heiligen Ignatius von Antiochien nebst einer Voruntersuchung: Die Echtheit der sieben Ignatianischen Briefe verteidigt gegen Daniel Voelter (1914), 191. *IgnEph* 15,3: οὐδὲν λανθάνει τὸν κύριον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ κρυπτὰ ἡμῶν ἐγγὺς αὐτῷ ἐστιν. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid. 194-196. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid. 227-228; E.A.v.d. Goltz and E. Klostermann, Ignatius von Antiochien als Christ und Theologe. Eine dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung. Griechische Excerpte aus Homilien des Origenes (1894); E.A.v.d. Goltz, Das Gebet in der ältesten Christenheit eine geschichtliche Untersuchung (1901). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Q.S.F. Tertullianus and E. Kroymann, Adversus Praxean (1907), xii; M. Rackl, Die Christologie des Heiligen Ignatius von Antiochien nebst einer Voruntersuchung: Die Echtheit der sieben Ignatianischen Briefe verteidigt gegen Daniel Voelter (1914), 367-368; R.M. Hübner and M. Vinzent, Der Paradox Eine : antignostischer Monarchianismus im zweiten Jahrhundert (1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. M. Rackl, Die Christologie des Heiligen Ignatius von Antiochien nebst einer Voruntersuchung: Die Echtheit der sieben Ignatianischen Briefe verteidigt gegen Daniel Voelter (1914), 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid. 70-77, 235 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid. 277-284 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. M.P. Brown, The Authentic Writings of Ignatius. A study of linguistic criteria (1963), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. J.B.B.o.D. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers. Part II. S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp. Second edition (1889), 37. Cf. Lightfoot in his note on IgnEph 3:1: ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019), 279; O. Zwierlein, Die Urfassungen der Martyria Polycarpi et Pionii und das Corpus Polycarpianum (2014), I 19. MartPol 3 encounters IgnRom 5; cf. M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019), 279; O. Zwierlein, Die Urfassungen der Martyria Polycarpi et Pionii und das Corpus Polycarpianum. Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte. 116 (2014), I 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019), 279. MartPol 22:1 encounters IgnEph 12:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Cf ibid. While Hans von Campenhausen was of the opinion that Ignatius was the creator of the doctrinal formula of IgnPol 3 (along with similar formulations in other places in his letters), Reinhard M. Hübner showed that the formula goes back to that of Noët of Smyrna. However, Melito, who omits a decisive Noëtian passage (“begotten and unbegotten”), just as does the “short recension,” thus seems to me to be more of a witness for this “short version” of IgnPol 3, while the “middle recension” does contain said passage and may thus well have drawn on Noët. This would also be supported by the fact that these Noëtian antitheses left further traces in the “middle recension;” cf. on this the passage cited above in my recent work, and the earlier research in H.F.v. Campenhausen, Das Bekenntnis im Urchristentum (1972), 241-246; R.M. Hübner and M. Vinzent, Der Paradox Eine : antignostischer Monarchianismus im zweiten Jahrhundert (1999), 131-154. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. J.N. Bremmer, Lucian on Peregrinus and Alexander of Abonuteichos: A sceptical view of two religious entrepreneurs (forthcoming); A. Brent, Ignatius of Antioch and the Second Sophistic : A Study of an Early Christian Transformation of Pagan Culture (2006), 183-207. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. O. Zwierlein, Petrus in Rom, die literarischen Zeugnisse : mit einer kritischen Edition der Martyrien des Petrus und Paulus auf neuer handschriftlicher Grundlage (2010), 194-201; O. Zwierlein, Die Urfassungen der Martyria Polycarpi et Pionii und das Corpus Polycarpianum. Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte. 116 (2014), II 405-407; K. Waldner, ‘Ignatius’ Reise von Antiochia nach Rom: Zentralität und lokale Vernetzung im christlichen Diskurs des 2. Jahrhunderts (2006), 118. Cf. the discussion in M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019), 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. This is indicated by his description of the Docetists in his work Adv. haer. IV 33,5 with parallels in the writings of the “middle recension” IgnTral 10 and IgnSm 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. R.M. Hübner and M. Vinzent, Der Paradox Eine : antignostischer Monarchianismus im zweiten Jahrhundert (1999), 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. M. Vinzent, 'Ich bin kein körperloses Geistwesen'. Zum Verhältnis von *Kerygma Petri*, "Doctrina Petri" und *IgnSm* III (1999), 260-273. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Cf. in Euseb. Caes., Hist. eccl. V 1 the parallel to IgnEph 11:2, cf. on this M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019), 281; J.B.B.o.D. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers. Part II. S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp. Second edition (1889), 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. On the importance of names in linking the new letters with each other as well as with the old ones, a phenomenon also be noted in later times in the further revision and expansion of the Ignatiana, cf. Ibid. 393-402 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid. 435. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See the Codex Paris. Bibl. Nat. syr. 62 (olim Sangermanensis 38), the Codex Cantabrigensis syr. add. 2023, as well as in the oldest Greek manuscript of the “middle recension,” the 11th c. Codex Laurentianus Plut. lvii. Cod. 7 = Codex Mediceus, and again in the 15th c. Codex Casanatensis G. v. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Cf. L.S. Cobb, Neither "Pure Evangelic Manna" nor "Tainted Scraps": Reflections on the Study of Pseudo-Ignatius (2016), 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019), 379-380. On the question of authorship, cf. L.S. Cobb, Neither "Pure Evangelic Manna" nor "Tainted Scraps": Reflections on the Study of Pseudo-Ignatius (2016), 186; M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019), 379-380. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. L.S. Cobb, Neither "Pure Evangelic Manna" nor "Tainted Scraps": Reflections on the Study of Pseudo-Ignatius (2016), 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Here, Ep. 22,8,2-4 (CSEL 54,154-155 Hartel). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. A. Merkt, Reading Paul and Drinking Wine (2013), 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Here, for example, the Apostolic Constitutions are to be mentioned, which are often associated with the thirteen-letter collection in terms of content and language and are assumed to derive from the same author, cf. on this M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019), 380. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. A contrasting interpretation of this passage is offered, for example, by Chrysostom in Hom. in Eph. 19,1 (PG 62,127-129) and Hom. in Rom. 28,2 (PG 60,652), cf. A. Merkt, Reading Paul and Drinking Wine (2013), 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. H.-U. Weidemann, Engelsgleiche, Abstinente - und ein moderater Weintrinker. Asketische Sinnproduktion als literarische Technik im Lukasevangelium und im 1. Timotheusbrief (2013), 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. E.M. Synek, Oikos. Zum Ehe- und Familienrecht der Apostolischen Konstitutionen (1999), 222. Similarly in the Apostolic Constitutions, cf. on this ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. L.S. Cobb, Neither "Pure Evangelic Manna" nor "Tainted Scraps": Reflections on the Study of Pseudo-Ignatius (2016), 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Out of the several antique cities named “Neapolis,” this mention seems to refer to a city near Antioch, based on the further indication that it is near “Zarbus” – a shortening of Anazarbus (cf. also IgnHer 9). However, the name might have been chosen only as a literary fiction in memory of the place in which Paul and his companions first set foot in Europe (Acts 16:11). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. A. Amelungk, Untersuchungen über Pseudo-Ignatius. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte einer litterarischen Fälschung (1899). One of the few recent studies of this letter is N. Brox, Pseudo-Paulus und Pseudo-Ignatius (1976). An earlier one is A. Amelungk, Untersuchungen über Pseudo-Ignatius. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte einer litterarischen Fälschung (1899). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. P. Pilhofer, Presbyteron kreitton. Der Altersbeweis der jüdischen und christlichen Apologeten und seine Vorgeschichte (1990). However, this criticism of the elderly was already known in antiquity, for example in Juvenal. Even Cicero had to defend his old age; for evidence, see T.G. Parkin, Age in antiquity (1998), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019), 383-387. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Lev 18:19-27 (quoted below in the main text). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Rom 1:28 - 2:1: “1,28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 32 Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. 2,1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.” [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. A. Brenner and C.R. Fontaine, The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (2000), 28-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Cf. also IgnPhil 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. M. Vinzent, Writing the history of early Christianity: From reception to retrospection (2019), 379-394. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. V. Burrus, Chastity as Autonomy. Women in the Stories of Apocryphal Acts (1987), 84; S.L. Davies, The Revolt of the Widows. The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts (1980), 61-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)