A Topical Research on Authorship of Revelation

By

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The Book of Revelation is the last Book of the New Testament and the individual one which is an Apocalypse. It is one of the most difficult to understand books because of its prophetical nature, inexplicable and unfamiliar extravagant symbolism. This book contains some Old Testament prophecy and related with another symbolism of futuristic idea and explanation of unseen things, combining of visions from the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, which contributes an extra attention to this book. How to interpret these symbols, numbers, or descriptions that are taken from Ezekiel and from Daniel is Hermeneutical and Homiletically challenge; but the basic question raises that who wrote this extravagant book? Its author, acknowledged as “John” in the title and called ‘the theologian’ or ‘the divine.’ Traditionally, authorship was associated with the Apostle John, but some have different ideas, questions and challenges on this authorship. This paper will focus on to present the authorship debate of the Book of Revelation.

**Historical debate**

The debate of Authorship’s source started, because, the author of the Book of Revelation calls himself John in 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8 but he never claims to be John the Apostle. When John wrote the Gospel he clearly identified himself as the John who is beloved to the Lord and every early sources and other Gospels prove us that John is the Apostle but in Revelation he just stated that he is a John. Traditionally the Book of Revelation’s authorship is associated with Apostle John, the title of John the Apostle with Revelation occurs in several MSS\(^1\) including the Codex Sinaiticus,\(^2\) and John was called

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\(^1\) MS means Manuscript where as MSS means Manuscripts. It is not just a plural but it informs number of pages and versions or books that contained within the script or text.
‘the theologian’ in later MSS of the title, was traditionally held to be John the Apostle. Beale notes that there are three possibilities for the meaning of book’s identification with John:

1. The book had one author, who is John
2. The book had multiple authors, one of whom is John
3. The book was composed by the Johannine community and is thus pseudepigraphical

Justin Martyr in his book, Tertullian of Carthage in his writings, and Hippolytus of Rome mentioned and identified ‘John’ as the son of Zebedee. Dionysius of Alexandria suggested that the author was the elder John, which is mentioned by Eusebius. Another suggestions are from Cerinthus, and Gaius.

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2 Codex Sinaiticus is also known as ‘Aleph’ which is first letter of Hebrew consonants; which is found in 1859 at the monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai. This was the reason it is also called “Sinai Bible” which contains most portions of Old Testament and complete New Testament, it has been written in late 4th century in Greek.

3 ‘the divine’


5 Beale, The Book of Revelation, 34.


7 Dialogue, 81

8 Against Marcion, 3.14.24


10 Eusebius, Church History 7.25.7-27.

11 Epiphanius, Panarion, 51.3.4.

12 Eusebius, Church History, 2.25; 7.25.
Papias is “a hearer of John,”\(^{13}\) he is a friend and companion of Polycarp and Irenaeus was a pupil of Polycarp and he also acquainted with Papias.\(^{14}\) There is a cent percent possibility of Irenaeus learning or listening from Papias about John’s teaching and writings. Several early fathers cited Church leader Papias as an early source of information but none of Papias’s works survived today. Who ever quoted Papias references are now indirect quotations of early sources. Eusebius mentioned Papias and admired his efforts to find out the key features of prominent figures of late first century and early second century times including John the Apostle.

Dionysius, the prominent bishop of Alexandria and pupil of Origen,\(^{15}\) was the first within the church to question its apostolic authorship. From the time of Dionysius, the apostolic origin of the book was disputed in the East until Athanasius of Alexandria\(^{16}\) twirled the wave toward its agreement. In the West, the book was widely accepted and was included in all the principal lists of canonical books from at least the middle of the 2nd century on.\(^{17}\) Some Eastern writer and Councils\(^{18}\) did not include it in their Canon and this Book was rejected from the Peshitta,\(^{19}\) and Armenian\(^{20}\) versions.

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\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Saint Dionysius of Alexandria is also know as Saint Dionysius the Great, who lived ca. 200 – 265 and became 14\(^{th}\) bishop of Alexandria and he is a greatest opponent to Sabellianism.

\(^{16}\) Athanasius of Alexandria is also known as Athanasius the Great, Athanasius the Confessor was the 20\(^{th}\) bishop of Alexandria (ca. 295 – 375).


\(^{18}\) St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St John Chrysostom, Council of Laodicea, Theodore of Mosquista and Theodoret.

\(^{19}\) Peshitta is the official Bible of the Church of the East, Peshitta is a Aramaic word means ‘Straight’ which they mean it is the original and pure New Testament.
Another John, who is well known and an early disciples of Jesus; John the Baptist is suggested by Ford\textsuperscript{21}; or John Mark;\textsuperscript{22} or the shadowy Presbyter John or John the Elder,\textsuperscript{23} another lesser-known prophet John.\textsuperscript{24} Traditional view of the author is John the apostle, son of Zebedee, so identified by early tradition.\textsuperscript{25} Some argued that John the Apostle also appears to be the view of the author of the *Apocryphon of John*,\textsuperscript{26} possibly dated in an early form to the mid-second century or late.\textsuperscript{27} This became the dominant tradition among patristic authors.\textsuperscript{28} The ‘John Mark’ theory was already raised by the third-century Dionysius of Alexandria,\textsuperscript{29} and it was dismissed by himself because of the lack of evidence for John Mark’s presence in Asia. The most conceivable of this alternative is to find who is John the Elder,\textsuperscript{30} and traditional view is always came along.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{20} Armenian version is another Bible in Old Syriac version, which has The Gospels, Acts and Pauline Epistles only and translated in 5\textsuperscript{th} century, and this translation has been ascribed to Mesrob and Issac the Great.


\textsuperscript{22} Example references Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37

\textsuperscript{23} Eus. *H. E.* 3.39.2–6 sometimes identified with ‘the Elder’ of 2 and 3 John.


\textsuperscript{25} Justin, *Trypho* 81.4; a tradition earlier indeed than the identification of the apostle with the Fourth Evangelist.

\textsuperscript{26} *The Apocryphon of John*, also called The Secret Book of John is written in the late 2\textsuperscript{nd} century which belongs to Sethian Gnostic Christian text of secret teaching.

\textsuperscript{27} Helmbold 1961; Feuillet 1965: 96.


\textsuperscript{29} Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 7.25.15.


There is a significant association between the traditional representations of John the Apostle and the ‘implied author’ of the Apocalypse. Both are Jewish followers of Jesus, probably of Palestinian provenance,\(^\text{32}\) for whom Greek would have been a second language.\(^\text{33}\) Both were recognized leaders within the Christian community,\(^\text{34}\) such that they could be identified simply as ‘John.’\(^\text{35}\) Both came to be associated with the Roman province of Asia, including the city of Ephesus.\(^\text{36}\) Both, moreover, could experience dissent from their position within the church.\(^\text{37}\) Indeed, it would not be inappropriate for a text such as Revelation, with its fiery visions of judgment, to spring from the pen of one known to posterity as a ‘son of thunder.’\(^\text{38}\) This ‘John,’ who is a pseudonym, is the strongest argument for the critiques from centuries.

**Textual Criteria**

Critiques point of textual differences in the comparison of John’s Gospel, and letters with Revelation lead them to another conclusions, let’s look at the textual differences. There are some differences in style and language between the Gospel and the Revelation or between the epistles and Revelation.

\(^{32}\) Mk 1:19–20; Rev. 1:1; 2:9; 3:9

\(^{33}\) Rev. 1:4; on Revelation’s rather eccentric Greek, as it is mentioned in Charles 1920: I, pp. cxvii–clix; Maier 2002: 108–16

\(^{34}\) Mk 9:2–8, Acts 3:1–11; Gal. 2:9; Revelation 1–3.

\(^{35}\) Acts 3:1; Rev. 1:9; 22:8.

\(^{36}\) Irenaeus. *Adversus Haereses*. 3.1.1; Rev. 2:1–3:22.

\(^{37}\) Gal. 2:9; Rev. 2:2, 6, 14–15, 20.

\(^{38}\) Mk 3:17; Lk. 9:51–56.

Literary differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gospel and Epistles</th>
<th>Revelation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There is a clear self identification to look for author</td>
<td>Author identified himself as ‘John’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Author did not presented his name or identity at the beginning</td>
<td>Author gave his name at the beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Author identified himself as a one whom Jesus loved, or the one who leaned back on Jesus etc.</td>
<td>Here he never mentioned as any of these not even as a eye witness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Theological conceptions of epistles and Gospel is Love and Logos</td>
<td>There is no match with Gospel or epistles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Written in flawless Greek</td>
<td>Greek use is not accurate, according to Dionysius there are broken sentences, use of unnecessary pronouns, confuses genders, use of proper case of a noun after a preposition etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Literary skill in reasoning and construction</td>
<td>Semitic style of writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Literary Similarities**

Similarities between Gospel of John and Revelation is one way to find out what exactly is relation and textual equality of the texts to know more about the authorship of Revelation. This is where some mid and present century critiques agreed and disagreed on authorship of Revelation is by John the Apostle. There are some variances in style and language between the Gospel, the Johannine epistles, and the Revelation, but there are also substantial similarities. For example, only the Gospel and Revelation refer to Jesus as the Word of God and the Lamb as it shown in the above map. The theme of “witness” is also particularly prominent in all five books. The best view is that the John of the Revelation was in fact John the apostle, brother of James, son of Zebedee.40

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This is map shows the textual similarities in between Gospels, Epistles and Revelation. This map is made by Xmind.
The difference in the language can be found due to the difference of its genre of the each book. Gospel and epistles are different from Revelation genre, they are not completely prophetic but where as Revelation is prophetic. Gospel and epistles are focused to record more past events of history but Revelation is focused on futuristic events. As Osborne said, “Such powerful experiences as the ecstatic visions would naturally affect one’s writing style.” As Blomberg notes that literary differences are been exaggerated to deny the Book of Revelation, “The overall vocabulary and level of writing of Revelation are still more like the other writings of John than unlike any other new testament documents.” Since any of the textual criticism or the dialectical differences proved, who is the author of the Revelation but it just raised points the authorship of John the Apostle. If it event the ‘other John’ there is no such proof or text to cross check with the genre of their to deny the John the Apostle’s authorship. Hence, textual criticism falls short to deny as the John the Apostle as author.

Critique

The Book of Revelation had its cause in a time of catastrophe, but it remains effective and significant for Christians of all time. Authorship is one of the problems for some scholars or critiques bothers in believing the Christ’s futuristic kingdom reign and other issues that are presented in Revelation. Authorship debate presented as ‘Historical’ section and Literary contradictions are discussed and explained briefly to prove that

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literary argument falls short in any case of this argument. When it comes to the matter of Authorship there needs to be some clarification in each case.

Ford’s identification of Revelation’s ‘John’ as John the Baptist, while highlighting the Apocalypse’s profoundly Jewish character, requires a complex theory of composition which has failed to convince many. It also depends upon Revelation being an essentially non-Christian text, whereas the gospel story of the crucified and risen Christ permeates the whole. The suggestion that the author is a less well-known John should only be resorted to when better-known candidates have been ruled out, which is not the case here.43

It seems unlikely that any other first-century Christian leader would have had the authority or was associated closely enough with the churches of Asia Minor to have referred to himself simply as John.44

However, Eusebius’ differentiation between ‘John the disciple’ and ‘John the Elder’ may be due to a misunderstanding of Papias, on whom he is dependent. Similarly, the two tombs of John at Ephesus45 may well be memorials to the same John, rather than to two46 different figures.47 The ‘John Mark’ theory was already raised by the third-

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45 Eusebius. Historia Ecclesiastica. 3.39.6; 7.25.16.
46 Jerome, De Viribus Illustribus. 9.
century Dionysius of Alexandria, only to be dismissed by him because of the lack of evidence for John Mark’s presence in Asia.\textsuperscript{48}

Irenaeus who states\textsuperscript{49} that John lived until the time of Trajan (98-117), Eusebius quotes\textsuperscript{50} Irenaeus to the effect that Revelation was seen almost in the memory of men then living, namely “toward the end of the reign of Domitian” and who died in 96. All this evidence warrants the conclusion that Revelation is the last of John’s writings.\textsuperscript{51} Its bitterly hostile attitude towards Rome indicates that the Book cannot be earlier than the persecution under Nero in A.D. 64, which disproves the possibility of John the Baptist and John Mark too. If the ‘number of the beast’ is correctly interpreted as ‘Nero’ then this would bring some connection with the Roman emperor but the problem is Nero’s death disproves the early date and Nero was not really dead and the idea of \textit{Nero Redivivus} was never the famous and never proved by any historic figure or a writer, and that brings to the later date as written by Irenaeus. The letters to seven churches is in Asia Minor which never been reached until the time of Emperor Domitian who reigned through AD 81-96. So, the book date is also matches to the Irenaeus and Eusebius records. Along with Papias, Irenaeus and Eusebius, Justin Martyr, who was a resident of Ephesus clearly identified the Apostle as the author of the Book of Revelation, \textit{“And further there was a man with us, whose name was John, one of the Apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a Revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in Christ would dwell a

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} Heresies III, 4.4.

\textsuperscript{50} Eusebius. \textit{Historia Ecclesiastics}, 5.8.

\textsuperscript{51} R. C. H. Lenski, \textit{The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation} (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1955), 7.
thousand years in Jerusalem.”52 The Book of Revelation was found in Muratorian Canon, and other early Christian writers like Tertullian (ca. 155-220),53 Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-211),54 and Origen (ca.185-254).55

Two objections might be made to this tradition of apostolic authorship, however. First, John of Patmos presents himself as a prophet rather than an apostle.56 But scholarship should beware about hard-and-fast distinctions between ‘apostles’, ‘prophets’ and ‘visionaries’: the apostle Paul could refer to both his prophetic gifts and his visionary experiences,57 and also describe himself, as does John, as a ‘servant’.58 It is not inconceivable that one of the Twelve should emphasis his prophetic credentials in a text, which claims to transmit the prophetic word of the Lord.59 The second objection relates to Revelation’s description of the ‘twelve apostles of the Lamb’ as the foundations of the New Jerusalem: i.e. as figures of a past apostolic age. Yet this may not be as insurmountable as at first appears, for Revelation’s New Jerusalem vision is a vision not of the past but of the eschatological future. Its description of the Twelve, moreover, is not wildly dissimilar to their designation in an earlier period as ‘pillars’, presumably pillars of the new temple.60

52 In the Dialogue with Trypho, 81; which is taken from Historia Ecclesiastica 4.18, where Justin quoted Revelation 20:4-5.
55 Johann. 1.14 which is from Historia Ecclesiastica 6.26.9.
57 1 Cor. 14:19; 2 Corinthians 12.
58 Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; cf. Jas 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1; Rev. 1:1.
59 In imitation of the prophet-Lord whose apostle he was: e.g. Mk 6:4; Jn. 4:44.
60 Gal. 2:9.
John the Apostle who survived the persecution at Patmos from the time Domitian wrote this prophetical and futuristic book to encourage the church and to warn ahead by giving signs to prove that Christ is coming back for His followers. It is the matter why John proclaimed himself as a prophet instead Apostle, according to William Barclay, it is when John was writing, and the prophets had a very special place in the Church. The prophets were greatly respected, to question the words of a true prophet was a sin against Holy Spirit. The prophets were regarded as uniquely the men of God, and John was a prophet.

Bibliography


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"Revelation" answers to apokalupsis, in Revelation 1:1. The oldest form of the title would seem to be simply, "Apocalypse of John," the appended words "the divine" (theologos, i.e. "theologian") not being older than the 4th century (compare the title given to Gregory of Nazianzus, "Gregory theologian"). The two questions of canonicity and authorship are closely connected. Eusebius states that opinion in his day was divided on the book, and he himself wavers between placing it among the disputed books or ranking it with the acknowledged (homologoumena). "Among these," he says, "if such a view seem correct, we must place the Apocalypse of John" (Historia Ecclesiastica, III, 25). Revelation 14 Chapter Summary The actors in the drama have been introduced in chapters 7, 12, and 13, and the situation on an earth dominated by evil has been clearly drawn. Lamb John sees the ____ on earth, surrounded by the 144,000, who complete sing His praise. Their work on earth is apparently _____ (14: 15). Revelation 18 Chapter Summary John sees yet another angel who announces the fall of Babylon the Great, the great satanic system of evil that corrupts every human society: a blend political of ____ and _____ power, a composite of swirling desires and religion passions, a web of institutions that befit the powerful and oppress the weak commercial ____.