The Author of the Book of Revelation was a Galilean Apostle

Introduction

The identity of the author of any book in the New Testament is important for many reasons, not least because it can tell us more about the book itself: its witness about the people and events it describes, its social and historical background, its purpose and motivation, its literary and religious influences and so on. With the Book of Revelation, there is another important aspect, arising from its self-presentation as revealed prophecy (Rev 1,3; 22,7). As far back as the time when it was written, the first step in the discernment of every prophecy has focussed on the fidelity and moral integrity of the prophet, as these characteristics are closely tied to the trustworthiness of the prophetic revelation (cf. 2,20-23; *Didache* 11). Only after establishing the *bona fides* of the author of the prophecy can the process of discernment move on to examine the contents and meaning of its message. Concerning the Book of Revelation, this discernment was performed in the second century CE, when the ecclesiastical authorities in the Western Church decided to include it at the end of the New Testament canon. We do not know the precise reasons for their decision, but it appears that awareness of its apostolic authorship, by John the apostle of Jesus, was the most important consideration. Regarding this particular book, then, the issue of apostolic authorship is of special importance, determining not only its evaluation as true prophecy, but also its inclusion in the canon.

In this present age of critical scholarship, needless to say, these considerations have been superseded by others, reflecting more than anything else the prevailing literary and historical interests of the scholars. Following the lead of critics in the past, and on the basis of the most slender evidence, these scholars have reached a consensus that denies that the Book of Revelation was authored by John, the apostle of Jesus. As there is no single argument that 'proves' it was written by the apostle, it is indeed difficult to prove them wrong. But it is nonetheless important to do so, since the authority and authenticity of the entire work are diminished as a result, for the reasons given above. A prophetic book of this kind relies to a great extent on the impeccable credentials of its author.

The approach taken below presents the traditional case for apostolic authorship, with additional evidence gleaned from recent research on the Galilean aspects of the text. Although this does not directly prove the author was the Galilean apostle John, son of Zebedee, it aims to demonstrate the plausibility of this traditional view and exclude most of the other suggestions to date. The alternative position is represented by two early opponents, both churchmen (Gaius of Rome, c.200 CE, and Dionysius of Alexandria, c.250 CE), whose denials of apostolic authorship are as relevant today as they were in the early Church, when they led to a serious split of opinion.[1] Their positions will be refuted, and in some points reversed, further tipping the balance in favour of the traditional view. By adding to the evidence in favour of apostolic authorship and taking

[1] Cf. In *The History of the Church* III, 24.18; III, 25.2-4, Eusebius describes it like this: "As to the Revelation, the views of most people to this day are evenly divided" between accepted and disputed. For this reason, he included it among the 'Spurious' books, in addition to listing it with the 'Recognized' (Eng trans by G.A. Williamson, Revised ed., London: Penguin Classics, 1989; 88-89).

away from the counter-arguments, it will be shown that, on balance, the cumulative evidence from both internal and external sources favours apostolic authorship.

The Traditional View

At the beginning and at the end of the Book of Revelation, the author has given us several details about himself: his name is John, from the Hebrew name Yochanan (Rev 1,1.4.9; 22,8). He is one of a community of servants of God (1,1; 22,6), a brother and companion of those whom he is addressing, who are suffering in the cause of Jesus and his kingdom (1,9). Some of his brothers are called prophets and fellow-servants of divine angels (19,10; 22,8). John tells us that, because of the "Word of God and the Witness of Jesus Christ" (1,9), he was on the Island of Patmos, where he saw visions 'in the spirit' on the Lord's day. He was commanded by the angel of the risen Christ to write all that he saw in a book (1,1.11.19) and then send it to seven named churches in the Roman Province of Asia Minor.[2] What he saw is called 'the Word of God and the Witness of Jesus' (1,2) and the title of the book he wrote is 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ' (1,1).[3] The words of this book are a prophecy (1,3; 22,7) informing God's servants and prophets in the churches about events in the near future (1,1; 22,6.16), up to and beyond the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (22,7.12,20). When he writes the opening address he is no longer on the Island of Patmos (1,9), although he does not say where he is. He expects his message to be read aloud in the churches, as was done with letters from Christian leaders (Rev 1,3; Col 4,16; 1Thess 5,27). This is all we know about the author from what he has written in the text. Further information derives from inferences from the text (internal sources) or from external sources and traditions.

After his humble and fraternal self-introduction, the author goes on to address the seven contemporary churches in Asia, as a Church leader, on behalf of the risen Christ. Classical historians are able to confirm that the social profiles of the churches, as described in the seven messages (Rev 2–3), agree well not only with local archeological findings, historical records and topographical characteristics, but also with the traditional date of writing around the end of the first century.[4] According to this information, there is therefore little doubt that the author knew the churches intimately and was well known among them. As these churches were among the largest churches in the province of Asia Minor, which was at that time one of the most important regions in the rapidly expanding Christian world, the author must have been a renowned figure in the Church at large. It would have been odd, to say the least, if there was no memory of such a person among the seven communities and beyond.

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[2] In view of questions about the literacy of the apostles raised in first-century Galilee, to be considered later, it is important to note here that John was indeed asked to write, and was therefore 'grapho-literate', and that he was also asked to send his manuscript to seven churches, all at once, and not individually as Paul did. This raises the possibility that he had access to a 'scribal centre' at Ephesus, where multiple copies of manuscripts could be made simultaneously, by dictation, and then distributed onwards. This insight will be discussed at the end of this paper.

[3] In sacred Scripture and in the Jewish scribal tradition the opening words of the text formed its title.

[4] Cf. Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, JSNT series 11, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989; 2-7. For the traditional dating of 95-96 CE: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 30.3; *apud* Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, III, 18.3; V, 8.6. The date is dismissed by some, often in a most perfunctory way; e.g., Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible, New Haven/London: Yale Univ. Press, 2014; 74.

These inferences are therefore fully consistent with the tradition, which has come down through the Church,[5] that this John is indeed John the apostle of Jesus, who was raised in the Jewish faith, worked as a fisherman on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee and was the younger brother of the apostle James. John and James were the sons of Zebedee by birth, but nicknamed "sons of thunder"[6] by Jesus (Mk 3,17) and, before being called to be apostles by Jesus, they were fishing partners of Simon Peter and his brother Andrew (Mk 1,16-20; Lk 5,10). In view of this partnership, they may also have been natives of Bethsaida, as claimed by a pilgrim called Theodosius as early as 530 CE, and by many others since then. The Synoptic Gospels indicate that, as apostles, John and James, together with Simon Peter, formed an inner circle around Jesus (Mt 17,1; 26,37; Mk 1,29; 5,37; 9,2; 13,33; 14,33; Lk 8,51; 9,28). In the Acts of the Apostles, John is based in Jerusalem and accompanies Peter on local missions, although there is no record of his preaching because he is probably still too young to speak publicly (Acts 3–5; 8,14-25).[7] His brother James was martyred by King Agrippa in Jerusalem in 42 CE (Acts 12,2). Paul describes meeting John in Jerusalem in 47 CE, when he refers to him as one of the 'pillars' of the early Church, along with Simon Peter and James the Lord's brother, the official head of the community (Gal 2,9; Acts 11,29-30). The leadership were also called 'the elders' of the Jerusalem church (Acts 11,30) or 'the apostles and elders' (Acts 15,6).

The last mention of the elders of the Jerusalem church, which probably included John, is just before Paul's arrest in 57 CE (Acts 21,18). According to the historian Flavius Josephus, James the brother of Jesus and some companions were martyred by the chief priest Annas II in 62 CE,[8] but it is doubtful that John was among the victims, for there is a strong and enduring tradition that he spent the rest of his earthly life at Ephesus in Asia Minor. It appears that shortly before the Roman campaign in Galilee, terminating in the siege of Jerusalem (66-70 CE), he joined the large

[5] Finding earliest expression in the 2-3rd century writings of Justin Martyr, Papias (according to Andreas of Caesaria), Irenaeus, the Apocryphon of John, the Acts of John, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Hegesippus, Tertullian, Origen, Victorinus and the Muratorian Canon. The clearest and most concentrated expression of this tradition is to be read in *The History of the Church* by Eusebius (cf. III, 18; III,20; III,23; IV,18; V,8; VI,25), although it is in this book that Eusebius gives full expression to the opinion of Bishop Dionysius that there were two Johns in Ephesus, and that it was the second John who wrote the Book of Revelation (III,39.4-7; VII,25). Eusebius appears to agree with Dionysius, but does not admit this explicitly, presenting instead the traditional view of apostolic authorship (III, 18; 20; 23) and allowing the readers to judge for themselves (III.24,4).

[6] Lit. *'Boanerges'* which seems to be a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew appellation בני רוגז (Bnay Rogez) meaning 'sons of wrath' (cf. Lk 9,54) and, because of the association of wrath with thunder, 'sons of thunder'. What is interesting, here, is that this name is in Hebrew, unlike Peter's name 'Cephas' (Kayfa) which is in Aramaic. This would show that both languages were used by Jesus and the disciples. Going further, one could suggest that Jesus used a Hebrew name for James and John because they were more fluent in Hebrew, indicating they might have had closer ties with Hebrew speakers in Jerusalem, which in turn resonates with the statement that John was known by the high priest (Jn 18,15). It is of significance, too, that John, a 'son of thunder' was chosen to be the recipient of the revelation that prophesies the thunderous theophany (cf. Rev 4,5; 8,5; 11,19; 16,18; 10,3-4) and wrathful judgments of God at the end of history (cf. 6,16; 11,18; 14,10; 15,1; 16,1-21; 18,8; 19,2.15). One could not imagine a more appropriate name for the author of the Book of Revelation than 'son of thunder' (cf. Jn 12,28-29).

[7] A fair guess would be that John was born in 12 CE and died in 98 CE, at the age of 86. He would have been 18 at the start of Jesus' ministry (around 30 CE), making him the youngest of the 12 apostles. A man was not permitted to enter public life before the age of 30 years. In Asia Minor at that time, it was not unknown for a man to live into his eighties (e.g., Polycarp, and most probably Aristion also).

[8] Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* (XX, 200), Eng trans William Whiston, Ware, UK: Wordsworth Editions, 2006; 877.

emigration of Jewish and Hellenist Christians to Ephesus and became an elder of the church there.[9] It is probable that he travelled around the churches in the region, guiding and strengthening the various communities. It was during this time that he was brought before the Roman Authorities for his preaching and was punished with exile to the Island of Patmos.[10] Eusebius notes that he was released on the death of the Emperor Domitian in 96 CE, and returned to Ephesus.[11] According to Irenaeus, he died towards the end of the century, during the reign of Trajan (98-117 CE), when he must have been about 86 years old.[12] The same tradition holds that in the last decade of his life, John not only wrote the Book of Revelation, but also the Gospel and the three Pastoral Epistles in his name. Over his tomb, a large basilica was built in Byzantine times, which now lies in ruins.

Opposition to the Traditional View

With an author who had been so close to Christ and the leadership of the early Christian communities, it is astonishing that there was so much opposition to the Book of Revelation in the Church. It met resistance not only in the Roman Church at the end of the 2nd century CE,[13] but more significantly it was rejected by the Eastern Churches, including those ancient communities to whom it was addressed in their own language, until at least the 7th century CE, a good 500 years after it was written. Henry Swete, the English Biblical Scholar, summed up this opposition by saying "No book in the New Testament with so good a record was so long in gaining general acceptance".[14] In these first few centuries, the main challenges to its acceptance took the form of attacks against its apostolic authorship, confirming that this was one of the main criteria leading to its inclusion in the New Testament canon. The same basic arguments are proposed by scholars up to the present day:

1. The author John is not the apostle but merely a pseudonym for an anonymous author, who wanted the boost the authority of his work by attributing it to the apostle.

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[9] Cf. F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, New York: Doubleday, 1980; 376. The exodus of Church leaders from Jerusalem to Asia Minor most probably embarked at Caesaria Maritima, and included Aristion, Justus Barsabbas, and Philip the evangelist with his three daughters (cf. Acts 21,8-9).

[10] The punishment was called "*Relegam ad insulam*", but the exact reasons for his conviction can only be inferred from the prevailing circumstances. Only the most noble members of Roman society were punished in this way (cf. *The History of the Church*, III, 18), implying that John was regarded by the magistrate as having a very high status. In view the curious remark by Bishop Polycrates' of Ephesus (c.190 CE) that John wore the 'petalon' (cf. *The History of the Church*, V,24), the high-priestly gold plate on the forehead, he may have been presented to the legal authorities as a high priest of the Jews (the rest of whom had disappeared with the temple's destruction in 70 CE). In view of his position as the most senior leader of the Christian Church worldwide, and in view of *Didache* 13,3, this would have been no lie.

[11] Eusebius writes "After fifteen years of Domitian's rule Nerva succeeded to the throne. By vote of the Roman senate Domitian's honours were removed, and those unjustly banished returned to their homes. This is noted by the chroniclers of the period. At that time too the apostle John, after his exile on the island, resumed residence at Ephesus, as early Christian tradition records", *The History of the Church*, III, 20. 8.

[12] *Against Heresies*, II, 33.2; III, 3.4; *apud* Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, III, 23.1-4.

[13] The main opponents in the Western Church were Marcion, the *Alogoi*, and Gaius of Rome (see below); cf. H.B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices*, London: Macmillan and Co, 1906, cvi–cxiv.

[14] Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, cxiii. Similar observations are made by Isbon Beckwith: "So much external testimony to the personality of the author, traceable back to almost contemporaneous sources, is found in the case of almost no other book of the New Testament", *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, New York: Macmillan, 1919; 351.

2. The author John is not the apostle nor an anonymous author, but an unknown second generation Christian prophet of the same name.

The response to these challenges leads to clarifications that actually increase support for the identification of the author with the apostle John.

1. Except for parts of the prophetic books,[15] all the canonical writings of the Old Testament were either anonymous or pseudonymous. Most of the later non-canonical writings were pseudonymous and pseudonymity was the trademark for the genre of writing called 'apocalypse'. For reasons that are still debated, it was the norm for authors to write apocalypse under the name of an important figure from the past.[16] These works often included an account of known historical events up to the author's time as if they were still to happen—the so-called literary device of *ex eventu* prophecy. It is most likely that these were ways of inspiring confidence in the authority and divine foresight of the newly composed apocalypse. Together with a lot of creative literary embellishment and editorial additions, the literary devices of pseudonymity and *ex eventu* prophecy actually give an impression that these works are not genuine revelations of heavenly mysteries, but rather imaginative literary inventions that aim to gain acceptance under false pretenses. For their effect, it appears that they relied heavily on the credulity of the readers and some degree of deception.[17]

Against this background, it was, and still is, perfectly legitimate to question whether the Book of Revelation follows the same tradition of pseudonymity, since it is readily identified as a member of the same literary genre of apocalypses.[18] The resounding answer to this question, however, is negative, because the author writes as a contemporary and well-known leader of those communities he is addressing, not as a famous figure from the near or distant past. John's is the first apocalypse to break away from the tradition of pseudonymity and *ex eventu* prophecy, and return to the personal directness and candour of the ancient prophets.[19] With prophetic insight, John starts by addressing the contemporary situation in seven communities where he was well-known. Precisely because he was well-known, the author feels no need to mention his status or position in the Church, nor mention that he was an apostle or disciple of Christ. By contrast, an

[15] E.g., Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, Haggai and Zechariah.

[16] Among the proposed reasons: to lend authority to the work, to avoid censure and even persecution, in order to be heard in an age (after Ezra) when prophecy had formally ceased and 'prophets' were outlawed, in collective identification with the most celebrated exponent of a particular tradition, because it was the tradition in antiquity (even in Greco-Roman world), as a way of emphasizing divine origin and helping to maintain the esoteric nature of the work. For prophetic and apocalyptic works, attribution to a figure in the remote past allowed the author to give depth and meaning to his account of the present situation; when combined with *ex-eventu* prophecy, it helped to increase faith in the prophecy and overcome the prevailing second temple view that prophecy had ceased; cf. John J. Collins, 'From Prophecy to Apocalypticism', ch. 4 in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Vol 1, ed. John J. Collins, New York, London: Continuum, 2000; 135-6.

[17] Cf. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 1998; 40. For an apologetic stance, see D.S. Russell, *Divine Disclosure: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2007; 65-9; also John Barton, *Oracles of God, Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile,* London: DLT, 1986; 211-13.

[18] Cf. Collins, *Imagination*, 269-73.

[19] The argument that it was written pseudonymously "is not compelling because there was a revival of prophecy among the followers of Jesus, which led, for a short time at least, to the willingness to prophesy and to write books of prophecy in one's own name", Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The Book of Revelation', ch. 11 in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Vol 1, 385. The only other known non-pseudonymous apocalypse is the 2nd cent *Shepherd of Hermas.*

author writing pseudonymously under the name of the apostle John would have felt obliged to describe himself as an apostle or disciple of Christ, if that is what he needed to gain the attention of his readers.[20] He would also have had to explain why this writing had not appeared before, while the apostle was still alive. Finally, in this new 'spirit of truth' and authenticity, John has no need to employ spurious literary devices to generate confidence in his writing, but just to remind the reader that "these words are faithful and true" (Rev 21,5; 22,6; cf.19,9).

Paradoxically, the author's humble and elusive self-presentation not only removes any suspicion that he may have been writing under a pseudonym, but does so in a way that resonates with the great authority of an apostle.

There was only one historically important attempt to attribute the Book of Revelation to an author using the name of John as a pseudonym. Around the year 200 CE, a Roman presbyter called Gaius, followed by an Asian group called the *Alogi*,[21] claimed that this book was written in John's name by the heretic Cerinthus, in order to deceive people it was apostolic.[22] There is no evidence that this was the result of a genuine discovery, but rather it was a crude attempt to undermine the authority and credibility of the Book of Revelation, for its visions had inspired the prophetic Montanist movement, which was attracting many people away from the Church at that time.[23] This was the only early attempt, from within the Western Church, to discredit the Book of Revelation. Of significance is the fact that rejecting the book's apostolic authorship was deemed an effective way of discrediting it.

2. The second challenge comes from those who claim that the author was not the apostle, but another John, who is portrayed as a younger man, otherwise unknown, who belonged to a group of early Christian prophets (cf. Rev 22,9).[24] The current scholarly consensus supports this solution to the identity of the author.[25] Similarly, in times past, the author was distinguished from John the

[20] The author describes himself only as a fellow-servant of God and as a prophet, but not as an apostle or disciple. Some scholars interpret this to mean he should not therefore be identified with John the apostle or disciple of Jesus. However, if this had been stated openly in the text, it would immediately have raised suspicions of pseudonymity.

[21] Identified by Epiphanius of Salamis who coined the name, which means at the same time 'illogical' and 'against the Logos'. According to Epiphanius, the *Alogi* also opposed the Gospel of John because of its *Logos* theology (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 51.1.3-6; 51.32.2-33.3). About whether they ever existed as a group, what they actually claimed and whether there was any connection between the *Alogi* and Gaius, there is much debate, see Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church*, Oxford: OUP, 2004; 172-204.

[22] Reported by Eusebius, Gaius wrote: "But Cerinthus also, by means of revelations, said to be written by a great apostle, brings before us miraculous things in a deceitful way, saying that they were revealed to angels" (*The History of the Church* III,28.2). For the heresies of Cerinthus, see Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2001; 69-73.

[23] According to Charles Hill (*Regnum Caelorum*, 143-59), the Montanists, or New Prophecy movement, were falsely accused of being 'millennialists' in the classical materialist sense, but rather represented the inauguration of a new age of 'Paraclete now', i.e. a kind of inaugurated millennialism, or what would be termed post-millennialism nowadays.

[24] For the biblical argument for this view, see David Aune, The Prophetic Circle of John of Patmos, *Journal of the Study of the New Testament* (1989), 103-16.

[25] E.g., Adela Yarbro Collins, '*The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism,* Vol 1, 385-6; Craig Koester, *Revelation,* 68-69; David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 52a, Dallas: Word Books, 1997; xlviii-lvi; Elaine Pagels, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, & Politics in the Book of Revelation*, New York/London: Penguin Books, 2013; 7-9. See Isbon Beckwith for a scholarly appraisal (*The Apocalypse of John*; 343-379) and for the dismissal of reports that John the apostle was martyred before the year 70 CE (ibid. 379-393).

apostle and identified as an otherwise unknown church leader called "John the elder".[26] The simplest denunciation of this view is that there is no contemporary external evidence for the existence of another author of this name, apart from John the apostle—a fact that is surprising in view of the divine significance of his message and his close relationship with the seven communities in Asia Minor. The proposal therefore raises many more questions than it solves. Is it possible for the author of such an extraordinary work to simply disappear from the collective memory of these communities without leaving any trace? Is it possible that the Church would later canonize the prophetic revelation of a completely unknown author, when the moral character and life experience of the author is an essential index of its trustworthiness and authenticity? Is it possible that the local faithful invented the widespread and enduring tradition of apostolic authorship?

What is most extraordinary, then, is that this proposal requires the rejection of a wealth of reliable, contemporary evidence identifying the author with John the apostle, along the lines presented above,[27] and then replacing this evidence with an unprovable hypothesis about an imaginary author, whose name also happens to be John, but for whom no contemporary record remains.[28] This counter-intuitive proposal appears to rely upon an overly rigid distinction between the early Christian use of appellations like 'apostle', 'elder', 'evangelist', 'prophet', 'disciple', as if they were already, in the first century, a type of 'job description' for highly specialized and suitably qualified individuals. In the New Testament, the use of these terms seems more fluid, so that an apostle can also be described as a disciple, an evangelist, an elder or a prophet, depending on his role in any particular context.[29]

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[26] The figure of John the elder (or presbyter) as distinguished from John the apostle was first proposed in the fourth century (324 CE) by Eusebius, in *The History of the Church* (III, 39.4-6), with his own novel interpretation of a passage from a lost book by Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis, dated to the early 2nd century (c. 120 CE). As it stands, this passage is ambiguous: it could either be telling us that John the apostle was still alive when Papias was collecting his material, at which time he was called the 'elder John', or that John the apostle and John the elder were two different disciples of Jesus. As Eusebius, writing 200 years after Papias, is the first to propose the second option, it is quite likely that that the first option was widely accepted until then, as readers were familiar with the person concerned and did not doubt the identity of John the apostle with the elder John. Eusebius was evidently persuaded by Dionysius of Alexandria (cf. *The History of the Church* VII, 25) that John the apostle did not write the Book of Revelation and seized on this ambiguous passage in Papias to propose a separate, non-apostolic 'elder John' as the author. The existence of a non-apostolic 'elder John' has never been confirmed up to this day (cf. note 28), but this has not stopped many scholars from extending Eusebius' proposal to the Gospel and Letters of John, and then identifying this hypothetical figure as the author, instead of the apostle (e.g., Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, Eng trans John Bowden, London: SCM Press, 1989; esp 109-35).

[27] For an example of the perfunctory arguments adduced for this purpose, see Koester, *Revelation*, 66-67.

[28] Neatly summed up by one scholar: "Questa ipotesi è molto intelligente. Ma non ci sono prove per poterla confermare" ("This hypothesis is very intelligent, but there is no evidence to confirm it"), N. Casalini, *Iniziazione al Nuovo Testamento*, Jersualem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2001; 83. After his survey of research, R. Alan Culpepper writes: "Most Johannine scholars would probably agree with the sentence of Robert Eisler that nowhere in the whole realm of history is there a more elusive ghost than "John the Elder." In fact, even the existence of John the Elder has been contested. D.A. Carson recently concluded: "it is far from certain that there was an 'elder John' independent of the apostle, and if there was, it is still less certain that he wrote anything. The ambiguity of the evidence, which makes disparate interpretations virtually inevitable, lends the whole issue of John the Elder a phantom quality", *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend*, Columbia, SC: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1994; 298.

[29] This is a weakness of arguments, based on Eusebius' novel interpretation of the 2nd century fragment of the work by Papias (cf. note 26 above), against the traditional view that the apostle John was the author of the Book of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel. They continue to distinguish two disciples of the Lord, both called John, one listed among the apostles and the other called 'elder John', as though there is a rigid distinction between these two roles.

However, this observation cannot explain how a proposal representing such a radical revision of first century Church history could have prevailed and persisted in various forms from ancient times up to the present day. Looking back, the origin of this bizarre proposal appears to have been fueled by opposition to the Book of Revelation itself, or certain aspects of it, as denial of apostolic authorship was an effective way of undercutting its credibility and challenging its inclusion in the New Testament canon.[30] This is the likely explanation for its exclusion from the canon of the Eastern Churches for many centuries, and it is instructive to examine how it all began around 250 CE, with the writings of Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, that were preserved for posterity by Eusebius in *The History of the Church*.[31]

Recalling the harsh criticism of the Book of Revelation by the Roman presbyter Gaius and the *Alogoi* 50 years before (see above), Dionysius rejects the claim that it was written pseudonymously by the heretic Cerinthus and suggests instead that the author was an unknown John. After examining the book closely, he negates apostolic authorship on the grounds of literary, linguistic and stylistic differences from the Gospel and first Letter of John, which he takes to be the authentic work of the apostle. He complains that the author of Revelation is promoting himself by often mentioning his first name, whereas the evangelist never writes his name in the Gospel or the Letters, but uses other epithets, such as 'the beloved disciple' or 'the elder'. He adds that John's self-presentation could apply to anyone called by that name, which was quite common at that time.

Next, Dionysius is troubled by the fact that in Revelation, 'the ideas, words and the way they are put together' are totally dissimilar from, and foreign to, those in the Gospel and first Letter. Furthermore, compared with these works, the linguistic style of Revelation is gross: "The first two are written not only without any blunders in the use of Greek, but with remarkable skill as regards diction, logical thought, and orderly expression. It is impossible to find in them one barbarous word or solecism, or any kind of vulgarism. For by the grace of the Lord, it seems their author possessed both things, the gift of knowledge and the gift of speech. That the other saw revelations and received knowledge and prophecy I will not deny; but I observe that his language and style are not really Greek: he uses barbarous idioms, and is sometimes guilty of solecisms".[32] Even though Dionysius is at pains to stress that he is not mocking and does not 'dare to reject the book', and apologizes for not being able to understand it, one wonders how anyone reading this criticism could ever be persuaded to open it and 'keep its words' (Rev 1,3; 22,7). His portrayal is extremely repellent: he argues that the book is not written by an apostle, is not well composed, and

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Apart from a late, imprecise reference to an uncorroborated statement of Papias, traceable to Philip of Side, mid-5th century, that 'John the evangelist' was "killed by the Jews", there is certainly no reason why the two mentions of John, in the fragment of Papias, could not refer to the same person, regarded as an apostle in his younger days and an elder later in life, all the time remaining a disciple of the Lord. In fact, there are good reasons to explain why 'the elder' was a particularly appropriate title for John the apostle, above all to distinguish him from Paul, the founder of the church in Ephesus, who was known locally as "the apostle" and who lived there for 2 years less than a decade before John arrived. It is also quite possible that the title "apostle" had fallen into disrepute because of the multiplication of 'false apostles' at the end of the first century (cf. Rev 2,2; 2Cor 11,5.13; *Didache* 11;). In fact, the word 'apostle' is completely replaced by 'disciple' in the Gospel and letters of John.

[30] Cf. the relevant comments in the section 'Character of the Speaker', by Koester, starting with "People are more likely to be persuaded by someone they trust than by someone they do not trust. When readers have confidence in the character (…) of an author, they are more receptive to the message", *Revelation*, 106.

[31] *History of the Church*, VII, 25.

[32] *The History of the Church*, VII, 25.25-27.

is written in ugly, vulgar, and incorrect Greek by an unknown, self-promoting mystic from who-knows-where.

Of course, neither the criticism of Dionysius (c. 250 CE), nor the amplification of this criticism through its publication in *The History of the Church* by Eusebius (c. 325 CE), were gratuitous. Like Gaius against the Montanists in 200 CE, Dionysius was trying to combat a materialistic form of millennialism in the Church, for which the Book of Revelation was again held responsible.[33] It was not until Augustine of Hippo in the next century that the nuisance of millennialism was finally overcome by a careful exegesis of the text (Rev 20). Meantime, the easiest option was to denounce and degrade the Book of Revelation itself, and its author, with the inevitable result that the book was ignored by the Eastern Churches for at least five centuries and, in some places, many more.

New Evidence for the Traditional View

From a different perspective, however, much of Dionysius' criticism can be reversed and added to other evidence endorsing apostolic authorship. When he observes "his language and style are not really Greek: he uses barbarous idioms, and is sometimes guilty of solecisms", Dionysius is actually confirming that Greek is not the author's mother tongue, which is exactly what one would expect if he was a Jew from first-century Galilee. Summarizing recent research on the unique style, grammar and vocabulary of the Book of Revelation, its style is that of the Hebrew Bible, its grammar is that of the Aramaic language, and its vocabulary is that of Koine Greek. At the end of an extensive grammatical study, Steven Thompson pictures the situation as follows: "Thus one might venture to suggest that, at least in the Apc., the Greek language was little more than a membrane, stretched tightly over a Semitic framework, showing many essential contours from beneath."[34] It appears that the author described his revelation in Aramaic, embracing the style of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures, and then transmitted it as literally as possible in Greek. Although the underlying Semitic structure was well preserved, the result was offensive to the ears of Greek literati like Dionysius. Far from disproving the author was an apostle from Galilee, however, the underlying Semitic structure is entirely consistent with this tradition.

Nevertheless, Dionysius was right to draw attention to the crude Greek of the Book of Revelation, as a feature that distinguishes it from other works of the New Testament. Examining the language more closely, the 20th century English scholar, Henry Swete, identifies the author's main literary transgression as a kind of grammatical 'insouciance': "from whatever cause or concurrence of causes, it cannot be denied that the Apocalypse of John *stands alone among Greek literary writings in its disregard of the ordinary rules of syntax*, and the success with which syntax is set aside without loss of perspicuity or even literary power. The book *seems openly and deliberately to defy the grammarian*, and yet, even as literature, it is in its own field unsurpassed".[35] This may seem irrelevant to the issue of apostolic authorship until we discover

[33] Cf. Dionysius' comments on Revelation immediately follow his account of the schism led by Nepos, Bishop of Arsinoë, based upon a materialist interpretation of Rev 20; *The History of the Church*, VII, 24.
[34] *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax*, Cambridge: CUP, 1985; 108.
[35] H.B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, cxix-cxx (my italics).

that disregard for the rules of grammar was one of the reasons the Galileans were often misunderstood and mocked by their better educated Judaean compatriots.

Galilee and its people were different from those of Judaea, historically, socially, culturally and even religiously. Derisively called 'country people' (*Am Ha'aretz*), they were held in contempt by the rabbis in Jerusalem for their simple piety and less than rigorous application of the religious laws, an attitude echoed not infrequently in the New Testament (e.g., Jn 1,46; Jn 7,41; 7,45-52). The Talmudic rabbis (*Amoraim*) blamed the Galilean imprecision in religious matters on their linguistic carelessness: "Rav said that Rav Yehuda said: the Judaeans took care over their language and the Torah in their possession was preserved, but the Galileans did not take care over their language and the Torah in their possession was not preserved" (b.Eruv 53a). Although the passage is probably 3rd century or later, consistent patterns of Galilean mispronunciation are widely attested from as early as the first century.

The New Testament itself is one of the most ancient witnesses to the existence of a distinctive Galilean Aramaic dialect (cf. Mt 26,73; Mk 14,70; Lk 22,59; Acts 2,7) and to the kind of misunderstanding it could cause (Mk 15,34-36; Mt 27,46-49), for when Jesus, dying on the cross, called out "my God" (*Eloi*), the bystanders thought he was invoking Elijah (*Eli*).[36] Other names too were simplified by Galileans: for example, the name Lazar was the Galilean version of Eleazar[37] and Yeshu was most probably the way Galileans pronounced Yeshua and Yehoshua.[38]

Geza Vermes describes one of the main dialectical differences as the loss of distinction between the various guttural sounds (*alef*, *hey*, *chet* and *ayin*) and adds "One of the commonest jibes directed against Galileans is that they did not speak correct Aramaic".[39] In the Talmud, the rabbis relate several examples of how speakers of the Galilean dialect were misunderstood, including the Galilean who went to the market in Jerusalem and was ridiculed by the merchants, because he could not properly pronounce what he wanted to buy (bEruv 53b). Western scholars have long been aware of these dialectal differences: Gustav Dalman wrote a grammar of the Galilean dialect (1905)[40] and Alfred Edersheim (1897) recalled the rabbinic comment about neglect of study: "Although the Judaean or Jerusalem dialect was far from pure, the people of Galilee were especially blamed for neglecting the study of their language, charged with errors in grammar, and especially with absurd malpronunciation, sometimes leading to ridiculous mistakes".[41]

None of this is surprising in view of the literacy gap between the rural Galilee villages and Judaea, with its large population of literate religious and administrative officials. Being far from the urban centre of Jerusalem and wholly dependent on agriculture, rural Galilee was an oral and

[36] Geza Vermes counsels against citing this as an example of the Galilean dialect, because 'Clarity cannot be expected of the cry of a crucified man at the point of death" *Jesus the Jew*, London: Collins, 1973; 54. This advice seems over cautious, as the entire exclamation seems to have been perfectly clear to the one reporting it, who most likely understood it because he was also a Galilean.
[37] Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 53.
[38] Flusser, *Jesus*, 2nd edition, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998; 24.
[39] Cf. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 52.
[40] "*Grammatik des jūdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch nach den Idiomen des palästischen Talmud, des Onkelostargum und Prophetentargum, und der jerusalemischen Targume*".
[41] Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; 225 and notes.

largely illiterate society in late second temple times. Recent excavations have finally confirmed that schoolrooms existed in the first century, since it has long been supposed that children received Torah-based instruction from the more literate members of the local community, involving reading and memorizing;[42] the rest of their education was left to their families at home, amongst whom there may have been relatives with a variety of basic literacy skills to teach to the younger generation.

Grammatical accuracy should certainly not have been expected from members of such a society. Its people, however were neither uneducated nor ignorant, as education for most was achieved by regular and life-long listening to the readings of the Scriptures in the synagogue on Sabbaths and feast days. The frequent repetition of prayers, songs and religious rituals in the home contributed towards a rich, memory-based education, as Richard Horsley explains: "In such societies, people who are illiterate nevertheless have a rich knowledge of their own cultural heritage… people are still able to recite prayers, portions of religious liturgies, and popular and patriotic songs in particular".[43] However, even for such a society, reading and writing literacy was necessary for internal growth and for contact with the outside world. At a very minimum, someone had to read the Scripture in the synagogues and someone had to be able to write legal and administrative documents. That is to say, even in the most basic agricultural societies in first century Galilee, reading and writing skills would have been encouraged and highly valued, as in the rest of the Greco-Roman empire at the time.

Although the smallest villages may have had no one who could read or write at more than an elementary level (literacy level 0%), there would have been access to literate individuals in a nearby town. Towns like Magdala, Capernaum or Bethsaida, with populations of 1,000 or more, are estimated to have had literacy rates of 1-5% of the population, although levels of performance in reading and writing probably varied considerably.[44] It should be said, moreover, that individuals moving to large cities with higher levels of literacy (2-15%) would have had the opportunity to become literate in the languages they normally spoke, which were Aramaic and to a lesser degree Greek.[45]

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[42] Cf. Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000; 225. Millard's imaginary description of schooling at the time of Jesus is confirmed by the excavation of a schoolroom adjacent to the first-century synagogue at Magdala in Galilee (2009), which is similar to findings in Gamla.

[43] Richard Horsley *Galilee: History, Politics , People*, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 1995; 245.

[44] Concerning general literacy rates in first-century Israel, see Meir Bar-Ilan, 'Illiteracy in the Land of Israel in the First Centuries C.E.', S. Fishbane, S. Schoenfeld and A. Goldschlaeger (eds.), *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society, II,* New York: Ktav, 1992, pp. 46-61, also available at https://web.archive.org/web/20001030203542/http://faculty.biu.ac.il:80/~barilm/illitera.html (accessed 09.09.18). In conclusion, Bar-Ilan writes: "With the assumption that the rural population was around 70% (with 0% literacy), 20% of urban population (with 1-5% literacy), and 10% of highly urban population (with 2-15% literacy), the total population literacy is still very low. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that the total literacy rate in the Land of Israel at that time (of Jews only, of course), was probably less than 3%". This position is largely endorsed by Catherine Hezser, in her *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*, Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck: 2001, cf. especially 'Degrees and Distribution of Literacy', pp. 496-504.

[45] From fragmentary inscriptional evidence, Richard Horsley summarizes the use of language in Galilee, in the early to late Roman periods, as follows "Hebrew may frequently have functioned as a formal and/or sacred language, while Aramaic was primarily a vernacular. Greek would have been familiar to a certain percentage of people in Lower Galilee, but the inscriptional evidence available is not sufficient to indicate that it had become the primary or only language in Galilean towns and villages", *Galilee*, 250; these findings are broadly confirmed by Stephen Fassberg in

So, we propose, it is in this context that we should understand the grammatical 'insouciance' of the author of the Book of Revelation. The improper Greek of Revelation is best explained as the work of an Aramaic-speaking author who was not formally educated in Greek and, although he may have lived several decades among Greek-speakers, he still spoke and wrote Greek like a foreigner and made many grammatical mistakes.[46] Furthermore, judging by the unpolished text that has come down to us, the author seems to have refused to allow scribes to revise the text of the Revelation and convert it into correct, literary Greek. Although his specific reasons for his refusal are still much debated, it is quite likely that he was helped by an inbred Galilean indifference to grammatical correctness, which he would have imbibed as a youth growing up in Galilee.[47] The author was much more concerned about preserving the original Semitic quality of the text than about improving its literary quality or correctness.[48] Incidentally, as the literary quality of a text reflected the scribal skill of the author, the poor literary quality of the Book of Revelation is strong evidence against the accepted view that it was written by a scribe. Thompson calls the language of Revelation "Jewish Greek, to the fullest extent of that term", but perhaps 'Galilean Jewish Greek' would be more apt for his 'peculiar, contemporarily Semitizing Greek'.[49] If, as seems likely, the Greek of the Book of Revelation is a barely edited form of the author's 'Galilean Jewish Greek', then far from disproving apostolic authorship it actually goes a long way to confirming it. But there are other indications too.

'Which Semitic Language Did Jesus and Other Contemporary Jews Speak?' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol 74, No. 2, April 2012; 263-280. This author differs only in emphasizing that Hebrew was still a living language in first century CE Palestine, although Aramaic was more commonly spoken in daily life.

[46] This corresponds to proposition 4 in Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxcix: "The author was secondarily bilingual (i.e., he had no formal instruction in Greek… and he was probably able to speak as well as write in Greek; the Semitisms that undoubtedly exist in Revelation are the results of bilingual interference." According to the grammarians, his main mistakes are in the area of 'concordance', which is exactly what you would expect in somebody who has not been formally taught the language. In adjusting from Aramaic/Hebrew to Greek, the correct use of cases and case-endings would present a formidable challenge.

[47] In this respect, there is an interesting contrast with John's contemporary Flavius Josephus, who was educated as a priest in Jerusalem and clearly aimed for complete mastery of the Greek language. However, towards the end of his life (in 94 CE) he confessed that, even though he had learnt Greek to a high standard, his pronunciation was still imperfect (*Antiquities* XX 11:263). 20 years previously (75 CE) his writing was evidently not perfect either, for he engaged several translators to help him translate his *Jewish War* from Aramaic into literary Greek. He also admitted that learning foreign languages was not encouraged among his people and that he knew of only two or three Jews who had actually been able to become masters of the Greek language (*Antiquities* XX,11:264-265).

[48] On translating the text into correct Greek, it would certainly have lost much of its original Semitic structure, many of its allusions to sacred scripture and something of its significance and authenticity too. Thompson muses "Perhaps the necessity of expressing sacred themes in a gentile tongue was rendered less distasteful so long as it preserved the tenses and other essential syntactical features of the sacred language?" *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax*, 108. Another way of saying this is that the author wished to preserve "the Word of God and the Witness of Jesus" which was given to him in Aramaic (Rev 1,1-3), as accurately as possible in the form it was given to him, realizing, though, that it had to be in Greek, for the sake of the communities he was writing to. Knowing that its message was primarily for fellow Jews, he may have foreseen that, one day, it would be necessary to translate it back into the parent language.

[49] Thompson, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax*, 108. An indication of specifically Galilean origin is given also by G. Mussies in his study 'The Greek of the Book of Revelation' (*l'Apocalypse johannique et l'apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, ed Jan Lambrecht, Leuven: 1980; 167-177), summarized by A. Yarbro Collins as follows: "(G. Mussies) noted that John avoided typically Greek syntactical constructions that had no counterpart in Hebrew or Aramaic. Not only that, but in one type of case he avoided a construction that had a counterpart in biblical Hebrew, but none in Mishnaic Hebrew and Galilean Aramaic. Although there are many Semitisms in Revelation, the ones typical of the Septuagint are avoided" (*Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984, 47). Yarbro Collins calls this a 'peculiar, contemporarily Semitizing Greek' (ibid 47).

After a lifetime of research on the Aramaic translations, or targums, of the Hebrew Scriptures and their relation to the New Testament, Martin McNamara writes: "In fact, after a consideration of the evidence for the relation of the targums… to the New Testament, the present writer has been lead to express the view that the Apocalypse of John is the New Testament book which shows the greatest number of contacts with the Palestinian Targum".[50] This is significant because, although Hebrew was the language of the Bible and of public prayer, the people of the provinces, especially Galilee, spoke a form of Aramaic that was sufficiently different from Hebrew as to make comprehension difficult. McNamara writes: "We can presume that in Jesus' day, in Galilee at least, and most probably in Judaea as well, the Hebrew text was rendered into Aramaic".[51] The frequency of 'targumisms' (terms and paraphrases from the targums) in the Book of Revelation is therefore a sensitive indication of the author's familiarity with contemporary Aramaic targums.

It is conjectured that the written tradition of the targums originated in the schools attached to local synagogues, not only for the Torah instruction of the pupils, but more specifically so that they could learn the appointed reading before reciting it, from memory, at the Sabbath synagogue service: "If the targum rendering was to be developed orally in the synagogue it might well be that the person delivering it, even minors, would have learnt the section by heart already from the advanced school, the *Bet ha-Midrash*".[52]

In contrast to rural Galilee in the first century CE, where Aramaic was the vernacular language and Hebrew was less widely used, it is now understood that Hebrew was the main spoken language in Judaean villages, so there would have been little or no need for an Aramaic targum of the Hebrew Scriptures in rural Judaea.[53] The author's familiarity with the Aramaic targums is therefore a strong indication that Galilee was the place of his formative years, for here it is certain that both the Hebrew Bible and the Aramaic targum were read together in the synagogue

[50] Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010, 213. See also: Paul Trudinger, The Apocalypse and the Palestinian Targum, *Biblical Theological Bulletin*, 1986, vol 16, 78-79; Some Observations Concerning the Text of the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation, *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol 17 (1966), 82-88. The commentary by Pierre Prigent is perhaps the most sensitive to the author's targumisms (*Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, Trans. Wendy Pradels, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

[51] McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited* , 78. The dating of the first written targums for use in the synagogue liturgy is still hotly debated. Even though none of the existing manuscripts contain Aramaic dialects that are older than about 100 CE (Targum Onkelos) or 150 CE (the Palestinian Targums), it is hypothesized that both of these derive from an earlier first-century script (proto PT), which can be reconstructed by scholars, if not actually discovered on a manuscript (see Stephen A. Kaufman, 'Dating the Language of the Palestinian Targums and their use in the Study of First Century CE Texts', *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, Eds. D.R.G. Beattie and M.J. McNamara, JSOT Series 166, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994; 118-130; and Paul Flesher in *The Targums: A Critical Introduction*, Paul V. Flesher and Bruce Chilton, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011; 91-107).

[52] Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 84 . It is not known when the written text of the Targum first appeared, but the latest researches (see note 51 above) suggest it was probably during the first century. Echoes of the Targums in the New Testament, especially in the Book of Revelation, suggest that this must have happened around the beginning of the first century CE, or at the end of the first century BCE. The existence of 'advanced schools', or even elementary schools, at this time is disputed, but the school/study room adjacent to the first-century synagogue excavated recently at Magdala seems to settle the question (see note 42 above).

[53] Cf. Fassberg quoting Bernard Spolsky in 'Which Semitic Language Did Jesus and Other Contemporary Jews Speak?', 276. In Jerusalem the situation was more complex, with both Aramaic and Hebrew being commonly spoken, and also Greek, especially among the ruling classes, government officials and diaspora communities.

liturgy, and probably formed the basis of every young Jew's education.[54] It is therefore quite possible that the author of the Book of Revelation learnt his Bible, in Hebrew and in Aramaic, by being selected to recite the targum in parallel with the Hebrew reading at the local synagogue services. If, according to the tradition, the author was indeed John the apostle, this suggestion gains more credibility on recalling the ambition of his mother Salome (Mt 20,20-21) and the above-average status of his father Zebedee (Mk 1,19-20), who could therefore have been an official on the council of the local synagogue.[55]

It is now well established that, in the early 3rd century BCE, northern Galilee became the home of Enochic mysticism, the seed-bed of Jewish apocalyptic literature, whose prophetic visions later inspired the Essenes, the eschatological preaching of John the Baptist and the cosmic worldview of the early Christian movement.[56] An early pioneer in the study of these writings, R.H. Charles, wrote "This literature was written probably for the most part in Galilee, the home of the religious seer and mystic. Not only was the development of a religious but also of an ethical character. In both these respects the way was prepared by this literature for the advent of Christianity, while a study of the New Testament makes it clear that its writers had been brought up in the atmosphere created by these books and were themselves directly acquainted with many of them".[57]

This introduces another feature of the Book of Revelation that points to a Galilean author: it is one of a small group of ascent apocalypses, which recount the author's ascent to the divine throne in heaven as a preface to his commissioning for a prophetic task.[58] This is not a novel

[54] Even more so if Oscar Skarsaune is correct in saying that "there were no ordinary synagogues in Jerusalem or Judea: the temple itself was close and available and made synagogues superfluous." Furthermore, he continues "In Galilee the synagogue seems to have become the order of the day in the first century, but was possibly quite young as an institution", *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity,* Downers Grove, Il: IVP Academic, 2002; 123. Although several first-century synagogues have now been excavated in Galilee, the lack of evidence for synagogues in Judaea may be due to the total destruction of 985 Jewish settlements there, following the suppression of the 2nd Jewish Revolt in 135 CE.

[55] See note 6 above, for an indication that the sons of Zebedee had a good command of Hebrew, as well as Aramaic.

[56] For a brief and dense presentation of the apocalyptic worldview in *1Enoch*, see George W.E. Nickelsburg, The Apocalyptic Construction of Reality in *1Enoch*, *Mysteries and Revelations*: *Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium*, ed. John J. Collins and J.H. Charlesworth, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991; 51-64. The esoteric nature of these apocalypses probably diminished with the approach of the anticipated Judgement, and so Joseph Klausner (after M. Friedlaender, 1905) could refer to the apocalyptists as "popular prophets" of the common people (*The Messianic Idea in Israel*, New York: Macmillan, 1955; 273, 393). To this day, Galilee, and the town of Safed (Sfat) in particular, remains a centre for the Jewish mystical tradition (Kabbalah).

[57] R.H. Charles, *Religious Development Between the Old and the New Testaments*, New York: Henry Holt, 1914; 9. At a very early stage in pseudepigraphal research, Charles was convinced of the Galilean origin of the Enochic literature and of its connection (doctrinally, geographically and historically) to the early Christian movement (op. cit. 33, 156-7).

[58] The pre-Christian ascent apocalypses are very few: The Book of Watchers (*1Enoch* 1-36), The Testament of Levi, and the Book of Parables (*1Enoch* 37-71). The sequence of ascent, revelation and commissioning is undoubtedly modelled on a very ancient prophetic commissioning sequence, described especially in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel. During the exile, Ezekiel had a vision of the throne-chariot of God leaving the temple and, later, a vision of its return. Despite the restoration of Jerusalem and its temple after the exile, God's presence did not return to dwell in the temple, and remained in heaven. Among the Jews of Judaea, prophecy was redefined at this point as a function of the priest and the scribe (cf. Martin Hengel, 'The Scriptures and Their Interpretation in Second Temple Judaism', *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, Eds. D.R.G. Beattie and M.J. McNamara, JSOT Series 166, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994; 161-64; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, Louisville/London: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1996; 222-26), but the ascent apocalypses describe a continuation of prophetic

invention of the author, but the culmination of the above-mentioned prophetic tradition that emerged 300 years before, with some of the oldest writings in the book of *1Enoch* (The Book of Watchers). These form the groundwork for the other books in the first Enochic corpus, reaching completion around the turn of the Common Era, the time of Christ's birth. What is unique about the earliest visions of *1Enoch* (*1Enoch* 6–16) is that the terrestrial setting for the heavenly 'ascent' is identified as 'the waters of Dan'—the site of a restored Israelite temple near the south-western foothills of Mt. Hermon. Also named in Enoch's vision are Mt Hermon and Abel-Ma'in, only a few kilometers from Dan in northern Galilee.[59]

Indicating the establishment of a prophetic tradition associated with this region, the writer of the later *Testament of Levi* (chs. 2–7) is taken from the same Abel-Ma'in to the top of Mt. Hermon, where the heavens open and the same pattern of ascent to the divine throne followed by a divine commissioning is described.[60] It would appear that the water-rich areas around the south-western foothills of Mt. Hermon were regarded as a gate to heaven and Mt. Hermon itself as the stairs leading up and down (cf. *1Enoch* 6:6).

Scholars have recently reached a consensus that the latest book in the Enochic Corpus (the Book of Parables, *1Enoch* 37–71) was also composed in Galilee, around the turn of the millennium. Geographical identification is made possible by the frequent condemnation of those who 'possess the dry ground', which aptly describes the Roman and Herodian colonists who had acquired most of the drained and fertile land in the Huleh and Ginosar Valleys to the north and west of the Sea of Galilee. The indigenous farmers had been made tenants or day-labourers after losing their land through debt from heavy taxation during the reign of Herod the Great (37–4 BCE) and from the famine in 25 BCE. This dating for the Book of Parables not only accords well with a textual reference (*1Enoch* 56:5-8) to the Parthian invasion of the Holy Land in 40 BCE, but also locates its origin specifically to the same parts of Galilee that witnessed the birth of the Christian movement soon after.[61]

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activity centred in the North, in Galilee. In these writings, the commissioning of prophets now involved ascent to the throne in heaven, a theme developed above all in the writings of *I Enoch*, which form the closest prophetic background for the Book of Revelation. Cf. Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, New York/Oxford: OUP, 1993.

[59] About 30 kms north of the Sea of Galilee, the Israelite temple at Dan was briefly restored by Ptolemy II around 260 BCE. In late second temple times, the borders of Galilee (administered by Antipas) stop a few kilometres south of this area, which was then part of north-western Gaulanitis (administered by Philip). For the geographical sites and their significance, see George Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 100/4 (1981), 575-600; also David Suter, 'Why Galilee? Galilean Regionalism in the Interpretation of *1Enoch 6-16*', *Henoch*, Vol XXV, 2003; 167-212. Suter also examines the connections of the text with local mythology and spiritual practices in the early 3rd century BCE, and suggests it could have been a foundational text for the newly restored Israelite temple at Dan, established by priests who did not qualify for service in the Jerusalem temple.

[60] Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, Levi, and Peter', 588-89.

[61] Cf. James H. Charlesworth, 'Can we discern the Composition Date of the Parables of Enoch?' In *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables*, ed G. Boccaccini, Grand Rapids MI /Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2007; 450-68, esp 467: "The Book of Parables (1 En 37–71) appears to be a Jewish work that antedates Jesus, and the author seems to imagine a connection among the Messiah, the Righteous One, and the Son of Man. The work most likely took shape in Galilee, not far from where Jesus centered his ministry. He, thus, could have been influenced by this writing or the traditions preserved in the *Parables of Enoch*. In this case, his own self-understanding may have been shaped by the relationship between the Son of Man and the Messiah that is found only in the *Parables of Enoch*. If those in the Enoch group were known as the great scholars who had special and secret knowledge, and if

New Testament echoes of the Enoch-Levi tradition can be detected in the account of Peter's commissioning near the sacred pagan site of Paneion (today Banyas), renamed Caesarea Philippi (Mt 16,13-19 *et par*), and in the Transfiguration of Jesus on a high mountain nearby, surely Mt. Hermon or one of its foothills (Mt 17,1-13 *et par*).[62] Peter's commission to lead the Church proceeds from his confession that Jesus, the Son of Man, is indeed the Messiah (Mt 16,13-16), a confession that Jesus then exposes as a gift of divine revelation.[63] If this divine revelation can be identified with the Transfiguration of Jesus, then it would seem the narrative order has been reversed (perhaps for rhetorical reasons) and the ascent of Jesus, with Peter, James and John, up the mountain should have preceded Peter's commissioning in a way that would better fit the traditional pattern of ascent and revelation followed by the commissioning. Either way, the northern Galilean location for the Transfiguration of Jesus and the commissioning of Peter seems to be modelled on that of the more ancient Enoch-Levi tradition.[64] Extending the distance around Mt. Hermon, but still within a day's walk, we could include the post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Jn 21,1-14) and the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9,1-19).

It is in the context of this Galilean tradition of divine revelation and then commissioning that we return to the Book of Revelation, where the same pattern is easily discernible, although the terrestrial setting has shifted to the Aegean Island of Patmos. The author John ascends to the divine throne (Rev 4,1) where he narrates a sequence of liturgical actions leading up to, and including, the eschatological judgments of God, at which point he receives a divine commission to 'prophesy again' (10,11) and metaphorically 'measure the temple'(11,1-2), in a way that mirrors Peter's commission to lead the Church (Mt 16,13-16; Jn 21,15-19).

Evoking, and even fulfilling, the Enoch-Levi tradition of ascent and divine commissioning, the author of the Book of Revelation shows himself to be intimately acquainted with this esoteric Galilean tradition,[65] which was also strongly opposed to the Jerusalem temple and critical of its

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they lived in Galilee, then Jesus would most likely have had an opportunity to learn firsthand about their teachings through discussions and debates." More recently *Parables of Enoch: A Paradigm Shift*, eds. James H. Charlesworth and Darrell L. Bock, London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

[62] A personal review of the area suggested that Mt. Dov, now a closed military zone, could have been the mountain of the Transfiguration.

[63] The identification of Jesus, the Son of Man, with the Messiah was indeed a daring claim, and one that would not have been evident to many Jews at the time, although the ground had been prepared in the Book of Parables (*I Enoch* 48,10; 52,4; 62,5; 69,29), cf. John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd ed, Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2010; 203.

[64] Cf. Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, Levi, and Peter', 575-600. See also Sean Freyne, *Galilee and the Gospel: Collected Essays*, WUNT 125, Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000; 230-70; "Jesus of Nazareth had a Galilean rural background and, as we have seen, Mt. Hermon and its region had in the past provided an alternative location for God's heavenly sanctuary, by way of criticism of the Jerusalem temple and its priesthood. There was, therefore, some precedent upon which a Galilean prophet such as Jesus could have drawn, even if his critique of the temple, in line with his own passion for justice, seems to have had more to do with its economic exploitation than with its clergy's failures to observe the purity regulations as this is expressed in *1 Enoch* and *Testament of Levi*", op.cit. 269.

[65] Nickelsburg notes "In its form as an apocalypse in which the seer is taken to heaven to see the events relating to the coming judgment, this work offers the closest first century Christian analog to the Parables of Enoch. A number of other Enochic elements are present as well", *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honour of Michael E. Stone*, eds. E. Chazon, D. Satran and R. Clements, Leiden: Brill, 2004; 70. For these elements, see the study by Loren Stuckenbruck and Mark Mathews, 'The Apocalypse of John, *I Enoch*, and the Question of Influence', *Die Johannesapokalypse*, Tubingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2012; 191-234. The authors conclude that apart from Exodus, Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel, whose importance for the Book of Revelation is the greatest, the influence of

impurity.[66] Familiarity with this tradition would also explain how young men from Galilee like Andrew, John, Simon Peter and Philip, would have been attracted by the apocalyptic preaching of John the Baptist and might readily have become his disciples (cf. Jn 1,35-51).

Without laboring the point further, these three features of the Book of Revelation (Galilean Jewish Greek, Galilean targumisms, Galilean prophetic tradition) combine to confirm that the author was a son of Galilee, born and bred in the region where most of the first apostles came from and where Jesus first preached. He was intimate with the Bible in Hebrew and Aramaic, used Greek effectively, though somewhat ungrammatically, as a vehicle for carrying his message, and was familiar with the Enochic prophetic tradition associated with north-eastern Galilee. Although this finding does not identify the author precisely as the apostle John, son of Zebedee,[67] it does lend support to the traditional view of apostolic authorship by locating the author's origin in Galilee and thereby excluding a hypothetical author from Asia, Syria, Egypt, Judaea or even Jerusalem.

Relation to the other writings of John

Having turned Dionysius' complaints about the grammar and style of the Book of Revelation into evidence in favour of its apostolic, or at least Galilean, authorship, it is necessary to tackle the other part of his challenge: the lack of any resemblance with the Gospel and first Epistle, which he assumes to have been written by John the apostle. Dionysius' assertion that there is an obvious resemblance of style, vocabulary and ideas between the Gospel and the first Epistle[68] meets with general agreement to this day, so it is not controversial to affirm that the Gospel and the Epistle are the work of the same person. However, although Dionysius was convinced that this author was the apostle John, son of Zebedee, according to Church tradition from the early second century,[69] many scholars have since found it necessary to propose an alternative, hypothetical author.[70]

1Enoch is comparable to that of the other canonical books of the Bible. How, when and where the author of Revelation became familiar with the Books of *1Enoch*, and other sectarian works like the *Book of Jubilees*, is difficult to ascertain. Although already known to the author during his youth, more profound contact could have occurred after the Resurrection, when there was an ardent desire to understand the Scriptures in the light of Jesus. The sectarian literature, including *1Enoch*, would have been available to read in the Essene Quarter, in the 'upper city' of Jerusalem (now called Mt. Zion), which was adjacent to the 'upper room', the first place of worship, and the homes of the first Jewish believers; cf. Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, 185-91.

[66] Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, Levi, and Peter', 587; David Suter, 'Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest: The Problem of Family Purity in 1Enoch 6-16', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol 50 (1979) 115-135; 'Revisiting "Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest"', *Henoch*, Vol XXIV, 2002; 137-142.

[67] Beckwith mentions another feature, with qualifications: "In the contents, spirit, and impassioned language of the book, there is much that is akin to the vehement 'son of thunder', who would call down visible judgment from heaven to consume the enemies of the Lord, Lk 9,54; and herein may be found some confirmation of this conclusion. But this and similar features in the character of the Apocalyptist are too common to justify any sure inference", *The Apocalypse of John*, 353 (cf. note 6 above).

[68] "Gospel and the Epistle have one and the same colour" Dionysius *apud* Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, VII, 25.21.

[69] A particularly solid line of documentation on the apostle John's authorship of the Gospel and Book of Revelation, comes directly from a personal disciple of John: Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, (born *circa* 70 CE and martyred in 155 CE). Polycarp's witness to John was then heard by the young Irenaeus (*circa* 135-145 CE), who recorded

In spite of all the scholarly debate and revisions, the reasons for accepting the early tradition on apostolic authorship are particularly persuasive in the case of the Gospel. However, although the title unambiguously attributes the Gospel to John, the text itself does not identify the author (Jn 21,24) by name, but only impersonally as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (13,23;19,26; 21,7.20),[71] 'another disciple'(18,15), 'the other disciple' (18,15; 20,8), 'the other disciple, whom Jesus loved' (20,2), or is just an unnamed disciple (1,35-40). Nevertheless, it is clear from the text that this disciple was indeed an eye-witness to the events he reports, that he knew the local topography well and that he was very close to Jesus and to Peter. All this matches what is known of John the apostle from the other Gospels and from tradition. Although this disciple probably did not write the final chapter (Jn 21,1-25), he was well known to the redactor who did (21,25), and to those who are called 'the brothers' (21,23), with whom the redactor included himself (21,24).[72] The author was clearly so well known that there was no need to do more than add John's name to the title. The certainty that it was written by John would have passed into Church tradition, where it remains to this day. The text confirms the apostolic identity of the author in other ways too.

The redactor's personal contribution to the last part of the final chapter seems to have been written after the beloved disciple's death, for it deals with questions arising from this, in particular with the belief that this disciple would not die (Jn 21,23; cf.11,25-26). This belief arose because the risen Christ had said of him: "What if I want him to remain until I come?" (21,22), which in turn chimes with Jesus' saying that "there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come in power" (Mk 9,1; cf.13,30). So the author's death raised serious questions about the delay of Christ's Second Coming[73] by alluding to a well-known prophecy associating the author with those who had personally accompanied Jesus. The issue became acute with the death of this author, precisely because he was the last of those who 'were standing around Jesus'. All this points to the author as an original apostle of Jesus, one of his inner circle, who had lived to an old age and died near the end of the first century, just before the Gospel was published. And this again agrees with the tradition identifying the author as John the apostle and son of Zebedee.

However, for the doubters of this tradition there is another piece of evidence to consider. We have seen that the Gospel identifies its author as a disciple from the inner circle of Jesus, who

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Polycarp's sayings in his opus *Against Heresies* (cf. III,1,2; II, 33,3), cited later by Eusebius (*The History of the Church* V, 8.4; III, 23.3; V,20.4-8).

[70] It appears that the Gospel author's evident knowledge of Jerusalem, the Temple, and Jewish Feasts has persuaded some scholars that he must have been an "educated", or even a "priestly", Jerusalemite and therefore could not have been a Galilean—one that had appeared "uneducated and unrefined" to the chief priests, elders and scribes (Acts 4,13). This overlooks the fact that even Jews living in Galilee were well educated in their scriptures and traditions and used to travel to Jerusalem regularly for the pilgrim feasts. Furthermore, we suggest that John only spent the first 20 years of his life in Galilee, before moving to Jerusalem and living there for the next 30 years. In that time John would have got to know Jerusalem, its inhabitants and institutions very well. His acquaintance with the high priest can be explained either through his father's business as a provider of fish, or by having an official position (an elder) in his community.

[71] It should be noted, however, that John, or Yochanan in Hebrew, means 'the one whom God favours'. This is so close in meaning to the 'the one whom Jesus loves' that one wonders if this appellation might not have been intended as a code for his name, Yochanan.

[72] We know that the author was well known by the redactor, the brothers and many others, because he had a reputation among them: 'they thought he would not die' and 'they know that his testimony is true' (Jn 21,23-24).

[73] This must have been of considerable concern, as it also occupies the author of 2Peter 3,1-10 and underlies the Millennial Reign of Christ described in Rev 20.

survived to the end of the first century and, although he had died, he was expected in some sense 'to remain' until the Second Coming (Jn 21,23). The usual explanation is that John 'remains' through his witness to Christ in the Gospel. That may be true, but would apply equally to all the evangelists. There is another explanation that applies specifically to the apostle John and better fits the context of comparing Peter's future (Jn 21,15-19) with that of the beloved disciple (Jn 21,20-23).

Just as Peter is commissioned to fulfil a pastoral role by the metaphorical act of 'feeding Christ's sheep' (cf. Jn 21,15-17; Mt 16,17-19), so in the Book of Revelation John is commissioned to perform a prophetic role by metaphorically 'measuring the temple' (Rev 10,1-11; 11,1-2), which means 'helping to build up the Church' by strengthening the inner part with this prophetic word and rejecting the outer part.[74] This role ends only with the fulfilment of the prophecy he was given, which includes the completion of the temple (15,8; cf. Exod 40,34-35; 1 Kgs 8,10-13) and the Second Coming of Christ (Rev 19,11-21). To perform this role the author must, in some sense, 'remain' until the Second Coming at the end of history. The author's commissioning in the Book of Revelation therefore answers and resolves the enigmatic remark of the risen Christ to Peter "What if I want him to remain until I come?" (Jn 21,22), and identifies the author of the Gospel, the beloved disciple, with John, the author of the Book of Revelation.

This link between the Gospel and the Book of Revelation provides the best internal and textual evidence for the common authorship of both writings by John the apostle: the Gospel tells us that the author was an original apostle of Jesus, one of his inner circle, who would 'remain' until the Second Coming, while the Revelation tells us that the one who 'remains' is its author, John, a Galilean Jew whose prophecy performs an important role in the Church right up until the Second Coming. John's spiritual presence would 'remain' until his prophecy is brought to completion.

In view of this complementarity between John's Gospel and his Revelation, it is not necessary to dissect the differences in vocabulary, style and ideas between these works and then try to explain them by assigning imaginary authors to its different parts.[75] These differences can be explained not only by the evident dissimilarity in literary genre, but, above all, by the literary mediation of an amanuensis and/or redactor. Coming from the totally different cultural background of Galilee, the author of Revelation clearly needed the redactor's help to adapt, that is, 'enculturate' his Gospel message for the prevailing Greco-Roman culture of Asia Minor.[76] As

[74] Of note here is the resolution of an alleged attempt, by the redactor of the Gospel, to portray Peter and 'the beloved disciple' as rivals in a Church leadership contest, discussed in some commentaries. The final chapter resolves this tendentious assertion by indicating the complementarity of the roles assigned to Peter and to the beloved disciple: Peter's role is pastoral while the beloved disciple's role is prophetic. Although the two are different, they are both essential and mutually sustaining.

[75] If one does dissect these differences, one finds many important theological, thematic and literary similarities between the Fourth Gospel and the Book of Revelation, which would be hard to explain without identity of authorship, as documented by Henry Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, cxx-cxxx, and by Isbon Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 353-62. It is also clear that, from the earliest times, many 2nd century literary sources treated the Fourth Gospel, Book of Revelation and First Epistle of John as one 'corpus' of sacred scripture ascribed to John the apostle, cf. Charles Hill, *The Johannine Corpus,* 470-75.

[76] A good example of the redactor's work of enculturation can be mentioned here: in the Book of Revelation, it is the divine angel that reveals what will happen in the future (Rev 1,1; 22,6; cf. 2,7.11.17.29; 3,6.13.22.), whereas in the

noted above, the author had previously refused the services of this scribal redactor in the correction of his Book of Revelation, in order to preserve its original style, tight structure and dense content.

The Author's Literacy

One of the major academic objections to the apostolic authorship of the Book of Revelation arises from a rather static view of the social and educational differences between the oppressed illiterate peasant class in Galilee, who became the first apostles of Jesus, and the writers of apocalypses, identified with learned scribes from Judaea and/or Jerusalem.[77] It is therefore assumed that between the apostle preacher (an illiterate peasant) and the apocalypse writer (a learned scribe), there was such a huge educational gap that the apostle preacher could never have become the writer of an apocalypse.[78] We suggest, on the basis of the evidence presented above, that this is a false assumption. Firstly, young Galileans were certainly *not uneducated* in their sacred texts and prophetic traditions, though they may not have been fully literate (i.e. education and literacy are not identical). Secondly, an intelligent child or adolescent with access to literate or partially literate individuals in the synagogue, or at home, could have achieved a good level in reading Hebrew and Aramaic, as well as basic writing skills in these languages. Those living in mixed Jewish and pagan towns like Bethsaida would also have picked up some colloquial Greek. After migration to a city like Jerusalem, in early adult life, full literacy in these languages could have been acquired without too much difficulty, assuming good motivation, time for extra study and tutoring from professionally trained individuals, of whom there were many in Jerusalem.

During his long residence in Jerusalem (from about 33-63 CE), and then in Ephesus (63-98 CE), it is perfectly plausible for the apostle John to have acquired the level of literacy needed to write the Book of Revelation as it stands. The text as it stands, in fact, is very much the text one would expect an elderly, divinely-inspired, Aramaic-speaking, Scripture-saturated, 'son of thunder' from rural Galilee to write. In order to demonstrate this, though, we must move into the realm of informed speculation, and propose the following literacy, and literary, trajectory for our author from Galilee.[79]

Gospel the same task will be fulfilled by the 'Spirit of Truth' (Jn 16,13-14). As their prophetic function is exactly the same, the divine angel in Revelation can be identified with the promised Spirit of Truth.

[77] Richard Horsley writes "Apocalyptic literature was written by the literate, cultural (…) elite. Jesus and his followers, among whom the Synoptic Gospel traditions originated, were illiterate peasants who cultivated their own Israelite traditions in village communities" (*The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Vol 1, 307).

[78] In order to explain how the work of the educated scribe from Jerusalem (the hypothetical author of the Book of Revelation) ended up in the New Testament, alongside the testimonies of the illiterate peasant apostles, Horsley argues that "Particularly in times of crisis, as they engaged in common struggles, there would have been much more interaction between the Judean scribes and the peasantry than is usual in traditional agrarian societies. Thus, we may presume a considerable degree of common culture across the social divide between scribal circles and peasant villages around the time of Jesus" (*The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Vol 1, 308). This hypothesis fails to explain why the hypothetical scribe did not write the Book of Revelation in correct Greek or ensure it had been properly translated. We dare to suggest that an educated, self-respecting scribe from Jerusalem would be embarrassed and ashamed by the poor Greek of the text as it stands. The comparison with Josephus is instructive, cf. note 48.

[79] This speculative reconstruction does not claim to be a factual account; its purpose is simply to show that there is nothing implausible about an ex-fisherman from Galilee acquiring, through many decades of exposure to spoken and

On settling in Jerusalem in his early 20's, John would soon have become fully literate in his own language of Aramaic (if he was not already). At the same time, he must have started to speak Greek regularly and to learn it from the widely-used Septuagint version of the Bible, since his local missions would have taken him into many of the Greek-speaking communities in Jerusalem, Samaria, Galilee and Caesarea. At this time, he may have received some tutoring in Greek by a bilingual Aramaic-Greek scribe, who was not well trained in Greek grammar, but knew how to improvise it. By the time he moved to Ephesus about 30 years later, his competence in speaking and writing in Greek had surely improved to a moderately fluent level, although his Greek was likely to have been incorrigibly imprinted with Semitisms and irregular syntax. After another 30 years, by the time he wrote the Book of Revelation, his Greek had become more or less what we see in the text of Revelation now.

The Author and His Text

Exiled on Patmos around 95 CE, John was in a literary wilderness, without secretarial help and, perhaps more significantly, without a library of sacred texts, dictionaries or grammar books.[80] It was John, and no one else, whom the risen Christ commanded to write what he saw. John obeyed and wrote, as well as he could, either by dictation (as for the seven messages in Rev 2–3) or from immediate recall of his visionary experience.[81] As revelations of this kind are usually communicated in the mother-tongue of the recipient, which was Aramaic in John's case,[82] it is most likely that his first accounts of the revelation would have been in Aramaic, or more likely in a dialect that mixes Aramaic with Hebrew.[83] It is highly unlikely that he would have had the fluency to write his visions directly into Greek, which he had still not mastered to a sufficient degree. This account, most probably in an abbreviated or note form, would have been written on whatever writing medium was available on the Island, on scraps of leather, on papyrus or even on pieces of wood.

On returning to Ephesus from Patmos in 96 CE, John would have started writing the first draught of the text in his own uniquely ungrammatical 'Galilean Jewish Greek', by translating, revising, rewriting and redacting his original text and notes in Aramaic. Evidence that John wrote

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written Greek, the language skills necessary to write the Book of Revelation, even more so if he was raised in a Greek-speaking environment like Bethsaida. It is based upon the traditional contours of the apostle John's life outlined earlier and the dates postulated in note 7.

[80] Being exiled on the remote pagan island of Patmos is therefore good circumstantial evidence for regarding his text as it describes itself – the authentic account of a genuine supernatural revelation, and not just the product of a scribal exegetical exercise.

[81] There is a 5th century tradition that John had an assistant on the Island of Patmos called Prochorus (*The Acts of John by Prochorus*), one of the 7 deacons selected to serve at the table of the early Church in Jerusalem (Acts 6,5), some 60 years before. If John were accompanied by a 'personal assistant', it is much more likely he would have been a younger man, and not someone of the same age or even older.

[82] Of no little significance is the fact that this was his Lord's language too.

[83] Scholars who have argued for an original Semitic text have differed over whether the original was Hebrew or Aramaic. However, the presence of Aramaisms in Hebrew texts and Hebraisms in Aramaic texts found at Qumran and at other sites in the Judaean desert suggest the possibility that the original text of John's Revelation was in a mixed dialect, most probably Aramaic with many Hebraisms; cf. Stephen Fassberg in 'Which Semitic Language Did Jesus and Other Contemporary Jews Speak?', 274.

first in Aramaic, and then translated it into Greek himself, can be found in the text.[84] Help from bilingual Aramaic-Greek speakers would have been available whenever it was needed. On completing this text, John composed and added the Prologue (Rev 1,1-9) and Epilogue (22,6-21),[85] before submitting his text for correction by his companions, who were literate and bilingual and could have consulted the author, and his original accounts in Aramaic, during their work. The most glaring translation mistakes entered at this stage, due to their incomprehension of the text or misreading of John's handwriting.[86] It was surely to avoid these kinds of errors (in addition to the reasons discussed above) that John had translated the text himself and then refused all but the most superficial changes to it. The only significant changes that were made involved the messages to the seven churches (Rev 2-3), which were purged of Semitisms and cast into a more polished Greek, no doubt so that they could be read and clearly understood in the churches. Finally a master copy was created and further changes could have occurred only in the process of copying.

The Copying of the Text

The Lord's command "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches" (Rev 1,11) raises the important question of how John would eventually convey his 'book' to all seven churches. Is the Lord asking him to painstakingly copy it six times and send it personally to all seven churches? Is he asking him to send it to one church with instructions to copy it and send the copy to the next, until all seven had received a copy, in which case how could he be sure each church had the copying skills and motivation to fulfil the command which the Lord had entrusted to him, and to him alone? Or does the Lord's command not show awareness of an established Christian scribal centre, well known to John, and based in the city of Ephesus, the third most populous city of the Roman Empire? This last interpretation is the most satisfactory, for it gives John full authority and control over the copying and distribution of his book. He, or a trusted companion, simply had to dictate his final text to seven experienced copyists writing simultaneously, then check the seven copies for accuracy, make the necessary corrections, and finally dispatch each copy to the bishop of the appropriate church. A centrally organized manuscript production process seems to be very much in the Lord's mind when he issued this command to John (Rev 1,11) and proceeded to create a novel literary form by dictating seven messages to seven churches at the opening of a single document for the entire Church.

Many important observations flow from this reconstruction of John's task, but only a few can be mentioned here. Firstly, it underlines the author's leadership status in the Church of

[84] E.g., at 9,11, the name of the angel of the abyss is given in the two languages, Aramaic/Hebrew and then Greek, confirming that the translation into Greek was made by the author himself, since no one except the author would take the risk of adding the name in Greek, in view of the warning at Rev 22,18-19.

[85] The past tense in Rev 1,9 "was on the Island of Patmos", indicates that John is writing this section after his release.

[86] Only the presence of mistranslations can distinguish a text that has been translated from one that was merely influenced by foreign idioms, Semitic in this case (cf. Nigel Turner, *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays*, ed. Stanley Porter, JSOT series 60, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991; 175). As evidence of translation from a Hebrew/Aramaic original into Greek, there are signs of mistranslation in the text of the Book of Revelation, by someone other than the author: e.g., in 10,1, 'feet' is a mistranslation of the Hebrew word for leg (רגל), because legs can look like 'pillars of fire', but feet do not; and in 19,16 'thigh' (רגל or ירך) is a misreading of the Hebrew/Aramaic word for 'standard' (דגל) in the original Aramaic.

Ephesus[87] and the community's unquestioning belief in the divine revelation he was given for the Asian churches, although few could have grasped its full significance. Secondly, it confirms the existence of a "Johannine school" in the city of Ephesus, cooperating closely with its leader, John, to produce and distribute Church writings. It identifies this "school" as a scribal centre,[88] established to meet the needs of the expanding church in Asia for officially approved and accurate copies of Church documents, especially—but not only—of the letters of Paul, the three gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, to be followed subsequently by copies of the Book of Revelation, the Fourth Gospel and the letters of John.[89] Thirdly, the identification of this manuscript production centre, officially and centrally organized by the church in Ephesus, under the leadership of John, resonates strongly with the speculations of the eminent papyrologist, T.C. Skeat, on the invention and sudden appearance of the papyrus codex (Latin term for 'book') from a single source in the Eastern Mediterranean, before the year 100 CE.[90] Skeat suggests Antioch as the site of this centre, but the evidence he proposes actually conflicts with its probable Roman origin and Latin name "codex".[91] Furthermore, Skeat recognizes that the production of the papyrus codex, with its unified *nomen sacra* abbreviations and its adaptation for the public reading of the Gospels, required "a degree of organization, of conscious planning, and uniformity of practice among Christian communities which we have hitherto had little reason to suspect, and which throws a new light on the history of the early Church".[92] Such coordination presumes the involvement of the highest authorities in the Church, and these were based in Ephesus at the time.

At the epicentre of the expansion of the Church into Asia Minor, at the end of the first century, the church of Ephesus needed to produce and distribute its texts as covertly and discretely as possible, for Christianity was still regarded with suspicion, as an 'illegitimate association', by the Roman administration. Written in codex form, the new manuscripts could easily have been disguised to look like the common manuals used by engineers and medics.[93] The use of papyrus

[87] A position entirely endorsed by early tradition: "In Asia, moreover, there still remained alive the one whom Jesus loved, apostle and evangelist alike, John, who had directed the churches there since his return from exile on the island, following Domitian's death" (Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, III,23,1).

[88] Interestingly, the similarity between the school master (*magister*) dictating to his young pupils (*pueri*) and the publisher (*librarius*) dictating to his copyists (*pueri*: originally these were slaves) was noted in classical times by the author of two comments (*scholia*) in the margin of a work by the Latin author Horace, cf. 'The Use of Dictation in Ancient Book-Production' in *The Collected writings of T.C. Skeat*, ed. J.K. Elliott, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004; 13-14.

[89] The so-called "Johannine school", which has impressed so many scholars since the 1960's, is explained here as a team of literate professionals that had already been formed, in Ephesus, for the copying and distribution of manuscripts to the rapidly growing Christian communities in Asia Minor. It was not so much a 'conventicle' of prophets, apocalyptists or theologians, meditating on Scripture, as an early "scriptorium", or publishing house, engaged in practical Scripture propagation. For Ephesus as the birthplace of the Fourth Gospel, cf. C. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus*, 472-3.

[90] Colin H. Roberts and T.C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex*, London: British Academy/OUP, 1983; 54-61, and further developed in 'The Origin of the Christian Codex', *The Collected writings of T.C. Skeat*, 79-87, then creatively imagined in ibid. 'Appendix A', 269-78.

[91] *The Birth of the Codex*, 58-61.

[92] *The Birth of the Codex*, 51; quoted from Skeat's contribution to *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Cambridge: CUP, 1969; vol 2, 72-3.

[93] I suggest this (easy concealment and camouflage) was the main reason for the Church's rapid adoption of the papyrus codex, instead of the more cumbersome parchment or papyrus roll. Skeat discusses several possibilities—more economical, more compact, more comprehensive, more convenient in use, more suited for ready reference—in his *The Birth of the Codex*, 45-53, but rejects these as a prime causes because they are only relative and cannot explain the immediate and absolute way in which this change came about. He then suggests that the main reason for the adoption of the codex was the need for a single four-Gospel collection, which would be too long for a roll, but

would have been considerably less costly than parchment and in codex form it could be used on both sides, allowing more text per page.[94] It was a felicitous and timely invention that combined writing media from the East and the West by taking the handy rectangular form of the Roman parchment notebook (*membranae*), and using, instead of parchment, sheets of papyrus cut from rolls imported from Egypt. Several sheets were then gathered together, folded in two, sewn together in quires and bound with a hard cover for protection and disguise. All the evidence points to Ephesus and the "Johannine School" as the origin of this 'game-changing' invention.

If further confirmation is needed to support the existence of a scribal centre in Ephesus, under the leadership of John, it can be found in a short but revealing passage by the Church historian Eusebius on the origins of the Gospel written by John: "*After the three Gospels which had been previously written had already been distributed to all, and even to himself, they say that he welcomed them and testified to their truth, but that there was therefore only lacking to the Scripture the account concerning things which had been done by Christ at first and at the beginning of the proclamation. The record is certainly true*"*... Now they say that on account of these things, the apostle John was exhorted to hand down in the Gospel according to himself the time passed over in silence by the first evangelists and the things which had been by the Saviour at this time…*"[95]

John, in brief, is here given the supremely authoritative task of verifying the three existing Gospels and supplementing them with a fourth and final Gospel. As the other Gospels had already been written and distributed, the date must have been after 85-90 CE. Further precision is possible, however, due to the remark that John, whose position of authority implies that he should have seen and approved the text *before* it was distributed, had only recently been given the text for review. The most obvious explanation for this curious delay in seeking John's *imprimatur* is that he was away 'in exile' on Patmos at that time and had evidently just returned. The date, then, is 96 CE and the narrators are not only close to John, but are also actively involved in the production and distribution of the manuscripts. As members of John's scribal 'school', they clearly wish to emphasize John's overwhelmingly positive reaction to the copy they had given him ("he welcomed them"), despite the fact that he was already familiar with the Gospels and had certainly read them individually on previous occasions. One dares to suggest that what John is joyfully

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admits that evidence of early four-Gospel collections is absent to date, cf. *The Collected writings of T.C. Skeat*, 79-87. The papyrus codex certainly allows for the publication of all four Gospels in one volume, but this was probably the result of its adoption, not the cause.

[94] In his 2nd and 3rd letters, we find John writing on papyrus, mentioning also the use of pens and ink (2John 12, 3John 13). Furthermore, the same length of the two letters has led to the suggestion that it was "determined by the practical consideration of the writing space on one piece of papyrus" (introduction to 2John, *New American Bible*, Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Bible publishers 1986, 1365). It is conceivable that these letters by John, the leader of the Church in Ephesus, are paving the way for the use of papyrus in codex form for the longer texts, and for collections of texts, marking the invention of the papyrus codex in the Church, c. 95-96 CE.

[95] Eusebius' *The History of the Church*, III.24,7.11, from the translation by Charles Hill in 'What Papias Said About John (and Luke): A New Papian Fragment', *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, Vol 49, Pt. 2, Oct 1998; 589. In this study, Hill argues convincingly that this passage (III.24,5-13) by Eusebius is based on a report from Papias' long lost, early 2nd century work *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord*, without acknowledgment of the source. Something very similar is recounted by Origen (*Hom. Lk.* 1, fr.9), who could have read it form the same source (i.e. Papias) as Eusebius. Although Richard Bauckham agrees that the verses quoted here are from a single source, he disputes that source is Papias, cf. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017; 433-37.

receiving is a new presentation of these three Gospels, perhaps his first view of these writings in the papyrus codex form. If this passage does indeed refer to the first emergence of the papyrus codex, the date of 96 CE would correspond well with Skeat's estimate of a date before 100 CE.

Finally this short passage of Eusebius indirectly affirms that John, who had just returned from Patmos and was about to write his Gospel, was acknowledged by those around him to be one of the original apostles and eyewitnesses of Christ's ministry, and for this reason he was asked to verify the three Gospels. On the same note, John himself confirmed he was present at the very start of that ministry by finding omissions in the accounts of its earliest stages, which he could supply in a fourth Gospel. In brief, this passage is further evidence for traditional view that this John was the original apostle, seer of the Book of Revelation, evangelist of the fourth Gospel, head of the church in Ephesus and Asia, and the highest ecclesiastical authority to approve the novel use of the papyrus codex for Church writings.[96]

Returning to the copying and distributing of John's manuscript of the Book of Revelation, in the way proposed above, further small corrections must have been made down the centuries by later copyists, without the help of the author or the original, but always mindful of the severe warning to those who add to or subtract from its words (Rev 22,18-19). More than anything, this warning has prevented major revisions to the text, allowing it to reach the present day more or less as it was when it left the hand of the author John. It is the New Testament book with the least number and variety of textual variants. The text remains essentially his own work.

On what happened after John's Revelation was received, with great anticipation, by the churches, one can only guess. Judging from the reaction of Dionysius of Alexandria, writing more than a century later, there may have been some disappointment. Like Dionysius, they would have been perplexed to receive his work in such an unattractive and obscure form. The language was unseemly and the apocalyptic style was not familiar. They would have found it difficult to read and their comprehension would only have been partial.[97] It was not appropriate for public readings. So, soon after, they may have sent representatives to Ephesus to ask the apostle to write a Gospel that could be read and understood in the assembly. The message would have reached John's scribal community after he had already acceded to their request "to record in his gospel the period which the earlier evangelists has passed over in silence and the things done during that period by the Saviour".[98] John was assigned the person with the best literary skills to help compose his memories and reflections into a culturally acceptable form, including his oral preaching and written vignettes. The result was the fourth Gospel and then the first Epistle.[99] The apostle John was still formally the author, but the literary fluency, vocabulary and syntax of the

[96] Thus infringing the ancient Jewish custom (and Halacha) of only using parchment rolls for Scriptural texts.
[97] Dionysius was no doubt reporting the truth when, around 250 CE, he wrote "Some of our predecessors rejected the book and pulled it entirely to pieces, criticizing it chapter by chapter, pronouncing it unintelligible and illogical and the title false. They say that it is not John's, and is not a revelation at all, since it is heavily veiled by a thick curtain of incomprehensibility", *apud* Eusebius, *The History of the Church* VII, 25.1.
[98] Eusebius, *The History of the Church* III, 24.11.
[99] This is not the place to consider the origin of the 2nd and 3rd letters of John, which tradition rightly includes in the 'Johannine corpus'. Differences in style from other members of the corpus can also be explained as the work a different amanuensis, at a different time. The use of an amanuensis for letter writing was very common in the first century, even by highly literate authors like Paul, cf. Chris Keith, '"In My Own Hand": Grapho-Literacy and the Apostle Paul', *Biblica*, Vol 89 (2008); 39-58.

text are those of the redactor, who appears in the first person at the end of the Gospel (Jn 21,25). The final version of John's Gospel was not completed until after his death at the end of the first century.[100] Explained in this way, the differences between John's Gospel and his Revelation do not, by any means, contradict the traditional view of apostolic authorship.

Final Word

In the words of Isbon Beckwith "It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the question of the personality of the author is altogether subordinate to that of the canonicity of the book and its religious value".[101] Such thoughts seem to have been in the mind of Dionysius when he wrote that he "would never dare to reject the book, of which many good Christians have a very high opinion".[102] But if, like Dionysius himself, these many good Christians understood it only partially and esteemed it mainly because it was deemed apostolic, his criticism of the apostolic authority of the book was bound to have a negative impact on its reception. For the discernment of a work presenting itself as a supernatural revelation of the prophetic Word of God, the moral character and fidelity of the author are of much greater importance than if it was any other kind of writing. The authority and importance of the Book of Revelation continue to be underestimated because of the overly-critical pen of Dionysius and its endorsement by Eusebius.[103] It is time to reject their superficial criticism and remove the negative impact persisting everywhere up to this day, but especially in the Church.

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[100] There is indeed evidence, in the 2nd century writings of Clement and Irenaeus (some of which are recorded in the 4th century by Eusebius), that John the apostle wrote his three principal works in this order: Revelation, Gospel and then First Epistle, cf. Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church*, Oxford: OUP, 2004; 124.
[101] Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 347.
[102] Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, VII, 25.4.
[103] The remarks of Charles Hill summarize well the combined detrimental effects of Dionysius and Eusebius on the acceptance of the Apocalypse: "Though Dionysius continued to treat the work as inspired and refused to lower its esteem in the eyes of the brethren (7.25.4), he effectively helped to loosen it from its place in a conceptual Johannine corpus and opened the door for its rejection by some. For Eusebius' strange equivocation on the book—it is either 'confessed' or it is spurious—is no doubt based upon the report and the researches of Dionysius. Eusebius gave no more credit to the Cerinthus hypothesis than did Dionysius. But now faced with Dionysius' display of stylistic differences between the Apocalypse and the other works attributed to the apostle, and with the same writer's proposal that another John lay buried in Ephesus, and beset by lingering doubts about the book's relation to chiliasm, Eusebius was unable to adjudicate in a definitive way the matters of authorship and canonicity. For Eusebius, if the Apocalypse was apostolic, it was canonical; if not apostolic, its place among the homologoumena was in jeopardy… and if it was not genuine it was a forgery…. Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* was very well read in antiquity", *The Johannine Corpus*, 462f.