

## Some Notes On The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel

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Note Papyrus evidence on dating – e.g., Papyrus 52 (fragment of Jn 18) from AD 130. Gnostic Basilides (c AD 130) apparently quotes Jn 1:9 acc to Hippolytus.

### External Evidence

Title, “according to John” may or may not have been original. attached to it as soon as the 4 canonical gospels began to circulate together, after AD 125? Not known without it.

“... while Jn the S of Z is not named as the author of this Gospel in the earliest days, there is no other name in the tradition” (Morris, p21).

Tradition virtually unanimous that the Ap Jn, the Son of Z is the author

Marcion (who arrived at Rm in c AD 140) seems to have though the gospel was by Jn, although he thought that the Ap erred (Morris, p26)

Theophilus of Antioch (c AD 180) is the 1<sup>st</sup> recorded person to clearly ascribe the gospel to the Apostle Jn. (Morris)

Ir (end of 2<sup>nd</sup> C) the strongest totally unambiguous ref. Ir personally connected to his source Polycarp, who knew Jn. (*HEV* xx. 5-6). Ir: “John the disciple of the Lord, who leaned back on his breast, published the Gospel while he was resident at Ephesus in Asia” (*Against Heresies* iii 1 2). Distance in terms of personal memory not v great.

Anti-Marcionite prologue: known to us only in somewhat corrupt Latin versions. The gospel of Jn was published while Jn was still alive; written down at the dictation of Jn by Papias, a man from Hierapolis and one of John’s nearest disciples. (Information reported from Papias’ *Exegesis of the Dominical Logia*, which is no longer extant). Some errors in AMP (see Carson p27).

Clement of Alexandria: “But that John, last of all, conscious that the outward facts had been set forth in the Gospels, was urged on by his disciples, and, divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel” (acc to Eusebius *HE* VI xiv 7)

Similar tradition in Muratorian Canon (end of 2<sup>nd</sup> C?) ? based on Jn 21:24.

Gospel of Jn provides the framework for Tatian’s harmony, *Diatessaron*. Implies no doubts about its authenticity.

Papias according to Eusebius (*HE* xxxix. 4-5): “And if anyone chanced to come who had actually been a follower of the elders, I would examine as to the discourses of the elders, what Andrew or what Peter said, or what Philip, or what Thomas or James, or what John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples; and things which Aristion and John the elder, disciples of the Lord, say. [Eusebius comments:] Here it is worth

noting that twice in his enumeration he mentions the name of John: the former of these Johns he puts in the same list with Peter and James and Matthew and the other apostles, clearly indicating the evangelist; but the latter he places with the others, in a separate clause, outside the number of the apostles, placing Aristion before him; and he clearly calls him the ‘elder’”.

Perhaps the second Jn, a disciple of Jn the S of Z wrote the 4G

Perhaps Ir & Theophilus confused their Jns – Ir can be shown to err on other points

This appeal to Papias is precarious:

- (1) Whilst Eus makes a distinction between the Ap & the Elders (disciples of Ap), Papias does not
- (2) Jn is called an elder by Papias specifically because he is being classed with the Ap
- (3) Elder & Ap appear together in 1 Pt 5:1 with a common referent
- (4) The Gk syntax of Papias may even mean “Jn the aforementioned elder”
- (5) Referring to the Ap as elders may be an echo of 3 Jn 1 (assuming that Pap thought Jn was the author of 3 Jn)
- (6) Perhaps Papias is making a distinction between what those who have died said and what those who are alive say, not between 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Xians
- (7) Eusebius’ dislike for the apocalyptic of Rev makes him keen to assign the authorship of 4G to another Jn

Also an 8<sup>th</sup> C Syriac document which suggests there were 2 Jns, the 4G having been written by Jn the elder

Westcott (1 lix): “it is most significant that Eusebius, who had access to many works which are now lost, speaks without reserve of the fourth Gospel as the unquestioned work of St John”

Dodd: external evidence for Ap Jn “formidable” – “of any external evidence to the contrary which could be called cogent I am not aware” (Carson p68, HTFG, p2).

A few front ranking scholars in this century hold to Ap Jn: Zahn, Westcott, Morris, Bruce, Michaels, Robinson, E. Earle Ellis.

Large majority of scholars against Ap Jn, largely because of internal evidence

Carson: “Most scholars of antiquity, were they assessing the authorship of some other document, could not so easily set aside evidence as plentiful, consistent and plainly tied to the source as is the external evidence that supports Johannine authorship. The majority of contemporary biblical scholars do not rest nearly as much weight on external evidence as do their colleagues in classical scholarship.” (Carson, p69)

### **Internal Evidence**

Westcott (followed by Morris):

The author of the 4G was (a) a Jew (b) of Palestine (c) an eyewitness (d) an apostle, i.e., one of the 12 (e) the apostle Jn

(a) & (b) rarely disputed today – evangelist shows a detailed knowledge of Palestinian topography and of conservative Jewish debates (Morris, p13)– DSS show that period

of Hellenistic expansion unnecessary – Jn’s quotations of the OT are often closer to the Heb or Ar than the Gk

possible eye witness touches (1:14; 19:35?, Morris p14f), place & time refs, call of the disciples, feet washing, names of Malchus & Nicodemus.

Controversies appropriate to reported historical situation, not later church context (Morris, p16)

The author shows a good knowledge of the Apostolic band, making it plausible that he was one of their no. (Morris, p16)

#### The Beloved Disciple:

13:23 – reclining against J at the Last Supper

19:26-27 – at the foot of the cross, commissioned to take care of J’s mother

20:2-9 runs to the empty tomb ahead of Pt

Acc to Ch 21, he is the one who wrote these things down. Acc to some, wrote these things down = caused them to be written (cf. 19:19-22, but this is specific about the exact wording of the notice – Amanuensis ? used as by Pl acc to Rm 16:22 – how much freedom?).

These things could = Ch 21 only

Beloved disciple=evangelist

Natural to identify b.d. with the eyewitness who saw the water and the blood from J’s side

#### Arguments that the beloved disciple was Ap Jn:

His presence at the last supper – only Aps there (13:23, cf. Mk 14:17)

Repeatedly distinguished from Pt: Jn 13:23f; 20:2-9; 21:20 – not to be confused with any of the other disciples named in Jn 13-16

One of the 7 who goes fishing in Ch 21 – by implication not Pt, Thomas or Nathanael → one of the sons of Z

James martyred during the reign of Herod Agrippa I, AD 41-44; Acts 12:1-2, whereas bd lived long enough for the rumour that he would not die (21:23)

Strange that neither James nor Jn are mentioned in this gospel

Plausible that beloved disciple = Jn, who deliberately avoids using his personal name

Strong association between Jn & Pt: Mk 5:37; 0:2; 14:33; Acts 3:1-4:23; 8:15-25; Gal 2:9

JtB only called Jn here: The Ap Jn is the one person who would not feel the need to distinguish JtB from himself

#### Other options on the identity of the Beloved Disciple:

The b d is one of the unnamed disciples in 21:2

Lazarus, whom J loved 11:5, 36 (Filson, Eller)

Or the rich young man of Mk 10:21 (Swete)

The owner of the upper room, as host given the position of honour next to J

(Ruckstuhl) – John Mark (Marsh, Parker) (Sanders thinks that Jn Mk is the evangelist but not the bd)

#### Reasons put forward why the bd cannot be Jn the S of Z and responses:

*Jn the S of Z was a Galilean, but much of the narr of 4<sup>th</sup> G is set in Judea – but Jn had lived for years in Judea – unreasonable to restrict his interest to his place of origin. Theological focus on Jerusalem as the place where the Messiah was rejected.*

*Jn is described as unschooled (Acts 4:13) but 4G shows great subtlety and depth – Acts 4:13 means only that they were laymen without a theological training (like J himself Jn 7:15). In Acts the authorities are surprised at their learning, that's the point! Jewish boys learned to read. Jn's family certainly not poor (owned boats Lk 5:3 and employed others Mk 1:20), so he may have had a better than average education*

*The apparent character of Jn the S of Z does not fit the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel. Jn's title, "Son of Thunder" (→ impetuosity, intemperance and anger) but 4G is placid, almost mystical Jn was vengeful against the Samaritans (Lk 9:54) c.f. Jn 4 These last 2 arguments an implicit denial of the power of the gospel to transform and the observable fact that people can change over time. (c.f. Pl).*

*Acc to 18:15f – the other disciple has access to the HP's court, but it is unlikely that a Galilean fisherman would have had. Assumes this is bd when it could have been someone else. His presence at the arrest implies he is one of the 12. The association with Pt also supports the idea that he is Jn. The idea that a Galilean fisherman could not have had access to the HP does not fit a 1<sup>st</sup> C Palestinian social model – (Rabbis required to have a trade)*

*A Palestinian could not write such fluent Gk. Now a powerful consensus that in Galilee and elsewhere the populace was at least bi-lingual. If Jn had lived abroad for a number of yrs before writing his gospel he would have had ample time to practice his Gk. Whilst competent, the Gk of 4G is not particularly elegant and contains a no. of Semitisms – close to LXX.*

*"In short, the internal evidence is very strong, though not beyond dispute that the beloved disciple is Jn the Ap, the S of Zeb" (Carson, p75).*

#### Was the beloved disciple the fourth evangelist?

*Does he in some way stand behind the gospel? Adaptions & revisions? 21:24-25 the work of a later redactor? "Caused to be written" 21:24. Amanuensis given much liberty?*

*Argued that the evangelist would not call himself the disciple whom J loved (Also, would the author describe himself as in 13:23 given 1:18? – but this would in fact fit the theme of J as the mediator of the Father's love etc.)*

*But the expression need not mean that others were not loved or were loved less. C.f. Gal 2:2. An expression of grace.*

#### *Why would the author not name himself?*

*The author's practice of not naming himself arises from his desire to emphasise Jesus rather than himself. He is already well known to his readers (21:24f).*

*Not an idealisation, but to some extent a model, witnessing to the truth and making much of the love of Jesus.*

If the bd is not Jn the S of Z, it is strange that he is not mentioned by name.

Some think that “these things” in 21:24 only refers to Ch 21.

Sometimes thought that the author is stressing the superiority of bd over Pt, but this is not convincing (Carson, p77f).

Sometimes assumed that 21:22f requires the bd to have died by the time of writing, but this is not necessary.

The later we date the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel, the less likely that the Ap Jn was the author

If the gospel was by Ap Jn, why did orthodox Xians initially take little notice of it? But this is overstated, cf. Ir, Papias, Polycarp.

“For at least some contemporary scholars, there is such a matrix of inherited beliefs, judgements and commitments about the provenance of the Fourth Gospel that it is difficult to postulate apostolic authorship without abandoning the inherited web” (Carson, p80). E.g., tracing the Johannine circle/community/school ? through layers of the text

A. M. Hunter & others argue that the Apostle Jn would not have used the Synoptics if he were to write a gospel (Morris, p9)

Gnostic teachings in the gospel – unlikely to have been written by an Apostle and probably late.

Omission of Transfiguration & Agony of G unlikely if Ap Jn was the author, but Jn makes other surprising omissions (Lord’s Supper) and may have thought that the theological pts were made elsewhere (glory at the cross, 12:27 etc).

Differences with Synoptics imply that the author of 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel did not know the historical Jesus, but more than one portrait possible.

If the gospel were known to be by the Ap Jn, this explicates its acceptance as authoritative and eventual canonization. (note context of heretical use of the gospel).