

THE REVELATION TO ST. JOHN

Introduction



The Holy Island of Patmos



The Monastery of St. John, Patmos



Detail over the Door



The Cave of the Revelation

Historical Evidence

Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (died c. 120), and if not a hearer of John, Apostle and Evangelist, was certainly the hearer of those close to John and Papias was aware of 'Revelation' and witnessed to its inspired nature.

More certain evidence comes from Justin Martyr's discussions with Triphon, a notable Jew of Ephesus – from Kirchhofer's "Quellensammlung" 1844.

Justin Martyr, (c 100 – 165) a native of Samaria, apparently a Gentile by birth, certainly uncircumcised ; originally a student of philosophy (the Platonic in particular), afterwards attracted to the side of the Christians by their disregard of carnal enjoyments and their contempt for death, and finally, not only a believer in the Gospel, but a witness for it in various parts of the earth, even

THE REVELATION TO ST. JOHN

unto death, is especially important in the history of the canon, because of the position he occupies as equidistant from the Apostle John on the one hand and Irenaeus on the other. . . .

In thus quoting the " Memoirs," Justin quotes books which were not only accessible but also known to opponents, whether heathen or Jewish. Trypho (c 135) says he has read them. It is therefore clear that there were in Justin's day certain well-known historical documents whose contents were " The Gospel ; " which were themselves called " Gospels ; " which were written by Apostles and their companions ; and whose characteristics are indicated in Justin s term " Memoirs " Memorabilia. Everything here seems to identify those Memoirs of Justin's with our canonical books. It is true he does not quote them by name in his works which remain ; but it would have been cumbersome to do so. His one New Testament quotation, which he accompanies with the name of its author, is so extremely circuitous and circumstantial, as to show why he makes that kind of reference very rarely. *" And a certain man among ourselves, whose name was John, one of the Apostles of Christ, in the Revelation which was made to him, prophesied that those who believe in our Christ will spend a thousand years in Jerusalem."* There is something very suggestive in this circumlocution (Dial. 81).

There follows evidence of the book's existence from Theophilus of Antioch (c177), Melito, Bishop of Sardis (c 194), and Apollonius of Ephesus, who testified to the work having been written by St. John. And after these the conclusive work of Irenaeus (c.120 – 200) who declared that 'Revelation' was written by John the disciple of the Lord'. Further, Irenaeus identified the author of 'Revelation' with the author of the fourth Gospel.

In his history of the canon of the New Testament Kirchhofer gives the following table:-

I. OLDEST TESTIMONIES TO A COLLECTION OF SACRED BOOKS.

1. The Peshito Syriac. Second century, Wants Apocalypse, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John.
2. The Old Latin. Second century, Wants Hebrews, 2 Peter, and (perhaps) James.
3. Muratorian Canon. Second century, A.D. 160-170, Text according to Tregelles; text as probably to be read; testimony to Gospels, thirteen Epistles of Paul, Acts (as Luke s), at least two Epistles of John, Jude, and **Apocalypse** ; Apocalypse of Peter.
4. Canon of Origen (from Eus. H. E. VI. 25),- A.D. 184-253, . . 8
Four Gospels, Pauline Epistles, **Apocalypse**, 1 John, 1 Peter, and (as not accepted by all) 2 and 3 John, and 2 Peter ; Epistle to Hebrews characterised, and its authorship discussed (James and Jude else where included by Origen).
5. Canon of Eusebius (H. E. III. 25, about A.D. 260-340), Accepted Four Gospels; Acts, Epp. of Paul, 1 John, 1 Peter, and (perhaps) the **Apocalypse**. Disputed James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John. Spurious Apocalypse (perhaps).
6. Codex Vaticanus.* Fourth century, Contains N. T. canon so far, but the MS is imperfect.
7. Codex Sinaiticus,* Fourth century, Canonical books of N. T., with Acts in a peculiar position ; also Barnabas and Hermas.

THE REVELATION TO ST. JOHN

8. Canon of Athanasius. Middle of fourth century, Exactly the same as our canon.

*The versions of 'Revelation' in Codices Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Ephraemi Rescriptus (5th century) are virtually identical – indicating that the text we have is close to the autograph.

Authorship

During the 2nd century and for the first half of the third Revelation was considered to have been written by John, Apostle and Evangelist. However, there had been some opposition to that from those opposed to the Montanists – these were followers of one Montanus and two women Maximilla and Prisca, who, between them, had exotic visions and produced heretical forms of worship. The Anti- montanist opposition was a prejudice based simply on the fact that the Montanists were 'Seers'.

For a time one Cerinthus was ascribed as author of 'Revelation'. Cerinthus was an approximate contemporary of St. John but a Gnostic heretic who devised an ethic derived from Judaism, Christianity, and Paganism. It was said that John would not stay under the same roof as Cerinthus. It was because of the alleged connection between 'Revelation' and Gnosticism that John's authorship was rejected.

Of much greater importance was the opposition to John's authorship by Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria (247-264). He based his argument on the clear and unquestionable differences in the literary styles of the Fourth Gospel and Revelation. The 4th Gospel has a polish and precision in its Greek, Revelation, however, has Greek which is rough and regularly ungrammatical, and would be the Greek of a person new to the language (I will add a note on this in the 'Date of Writing' section). One must observe that the two works are entirely different in nature – Revelation is an eschatological work in the Jewish tradition and using much Old Testament imagery; whereas the Gospel is a sober, factual history.

It is the belief of the current Orthodox Faithful of Patmos that 'Revelation' was written by John the Divine, Apostle and Evangelist, with the aid of a secretary.

Place and Date of Writing

'Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

I John, your brother and joint partner in the suffering and the kingdom and endurance in Jesus, came to be in the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. So the place of the Revelation is indicated in the text – the sparsely inhabited island of Patmos. No commentator has ever doubted that the book was written on Patmos and the traditional view has been that John was banished there in the time of Domitian's reign (81 – 96) - “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” That is because of John's own promulgation '*of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*'. An alternative explanation is offered in the Catholic Encyclopedia - *Tradition, as Eusebius tells us, has handed down that John was banished to Patmos in the reign of Domitian for the sake of his testimony of God's word (Hist. Eccl., III, 18). He obviously refers to the passage "for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus" (i, 9). It is true that the more probable meaning of this phrase is, "in order to hear the word of God", etc., and not "banished because of the word of God", etc., (cf. i. 2). But it was quite natural that the Seer should have regarded his banishment to Patmos as prearranged by Divine Providence that in the solitude of the*

THE REVELATION TO ST. JOHN

island he might hear God's word.¹

However, there is much debate concerning the date of writing and many commentators favour a date of around 67 during the reign of Nero. 'Revelation' appears to be the work of a person not fully versed in Greek, one who had not completely grasped the grammar and whose own ability to write original Greek prose was limited, and so was compelled to use ready made imagery from the Greek Old Testament and Apocrypha. On the other hand the Fourth Gospel is a relatively polished work – the production of one who had become much more mature and competent in Greek.

Further there is a possibility that 11:1 indicates that the Temple had not yet been destroyed so giving a date prior to 70 :-

Καὶ ἐδόθη μοι κάλαμος ὅμοιος ράβδῳ λέγων, Ἔγειρε καὶ μέτρησον τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας ἐν αὐτῷ

And was given to me a reed like a staff saying; Arise and measure the shrine of God and the altar and *count* the worshippers.

Also the enumeration of the twelve tribes in 7:4-8 tends to suggest that the Jewish nation was still an entity and so before, not only the destruction of the Temple, but also the destruction of the Jewish nation as one to be negotiated with.

Albrecht Durer's illustrations in the text are from Connecticut College's Wetmore Print Collection web site.

1 As one having been a tourist in Ephesus on a supposed 'quiet day', I can quite understand why John would have needed to go to Patmos for contemplation. Ephesus was estimated to have had a population of a quarter of a million people – continually noisy and busy, and so unsuitable for the hearing of the word of God.