
The Author of the Apocalypse: A Review of the Prevailing Hypothesis of Jewish-Christian Authorship. By Robert K. MacKenzie. Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997. ISBN 0-7734-2423-7. Pp. v+201.

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken.

So writes John Keats, after a fresh encounter with Homer through Chapman's translation. Same material, but a novel perspective. Robert MacKenzie's *Author of the Apocalypse* covers familiar ground in a similar (novel) way.

MacKenzie provides a thorough review of the prevailing hypothesis that a Jewish-Christian wrote the book of Revelation, and he organizes his analysis around three lines of argument typical of the modern discussion. There is first of all the matter of what John (author of the Apocalypse) knew about Judaism and Jewish-Christianity, and whether this knowledge betrays his ethnic background (chaps. 1, 2). It is further claimed that John did not rely on a Greek version of the Old Testament, but rather made his own translations from the Hebrew/Aramaic Scriptures (chap. 3). Finally, there are various theories regarding John's distinct Greek: Was Revelation translated from a Hebrew or Aramaic original? Did the author speak and write in a Jewish-Greek dialect? Was John a bilingual Semite whose second language was Greek? Was John's style idiosyncratic, or did he un/consciously imitate the Scriptures (chaps. 4-6)?

Piece-by-piece, MacKenzie chips away at the prevailing hypothesis, arguing at the close of most sections (41, 88, 111, 113, 166) that there is no basis on which to conclude that the author of the Apocalypse *must* have been a Jewish-Christian and not a Gentile-Christian. Like John (100, 111, 115), MacKenzie uses repetition effectively, and several recurring themes emerge as he accounts for the affinities between Revelation and Judaism, bringing the assumption of Jewish authorship into question. Seven (a fitting number!) examples of his line of argumentation may be noted:

1. Gentiles, as well as Jews, knew and used the Scriptures and were quite at home in its religious thought (12, 28, 39);
2. John made use of earlier Christian traditions (19-20, 46-48);
3. Various religious interests in Revelation were not solely the property of Judaism (22-23);
4. If Jewish-Christian authorship is accepted, it is striking that certain issues of concern to Jewish-Christians are not addressed (22-24, 55-59, 167);
5. With respect to language, John's Greek was often deliberately patterned after the idiom of the Greek Old Testament (80, 113, 147, 168);
6. Unusual grammatical constructions do not necessarily suggest the difficulties of one wrestling with a second language (160-64);
7. Insights drawn from modern linguistics illustrate time and again that the prevailing hypothesis is based on inappropriate assumptions (esp. chap. 4).

MacKenzie is modest in his conclusions: Raising doubts about Jewish authorship does not prove that a Gentile penned Revelation (3, 39-40, 59). Still, the fact that doubts are raised at all over the connection between Revelation and Jewish Christianity is significant.

Elsewhere ("Revelation: A Jewish/Christian Book?," *ARC* 15 [1987]:51-60), MacKenzie observes that regarding Revelation as the product of a minority ethnic group (Jewish) within the early Church may suggest to some that it is not representative of the early Christian movement. As a result, "the historian is not compelled to confront the possibility that the document may well be typical of the views of first-century Christians" (51, 58).

In *Author of the Apocalypse*, he notes that Revelation is frequently used in reconstructing the development of Jewish-Christianity, and in profiling its theological make-up (2). To the extent that he is able to bring into question the Jewish-Christian character of the Apocalypse, he also challenges those reconstructions of Jewish-Christianity that rely on it (3, cf. 167). Positively, a possible gentile provenance "opens new avenues of investigation about first-century Gentile-Christianity and about the significance that John's peculiar Greek style holds for the social description of the early Christian communities" (3).

The earliest statements about the ethnic background of the author—he was the Apostle John and therefore Jewish-Christian—are passed over in this study (e.g., Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, 1, 3, 166). Some readers may find this to be a serious omission. Also unfortunate are the number of misprints—my casual count found over thirty. These considerations aside, MacKenzie's *Author of the Apocalypse* is an important contribution to the study of the Book of Revelation and early Christian history—one which allows new possibilities "to swim into view."

Though one suspects that the contribution of this book will be fully appreciated only when its findings are applied in later work, subsequent research on these subjects will need to acknowledge this impressive study.

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The Context of Scripture. Volume I: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World. General editor, William W. Hallo. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997. ISBN 90-04-10618-9. Pp. 599.

Generations of students have benefited from J.B. Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, the premier English anthology of ancient documents related to the Hebrew (and Aramaic) Bible. The present series of three volumes edited by William Hallo, the first of which is reviewed here, will all but consign Pritchard's volume to the library shelf. *All but*, because not all of Pritchard's incorporated texts are presented as completely as in the earlier volume. Therefore students of ancient literature—in contrast to those interested primarily in the biblical parallels—will still need to consult other editions and translations.