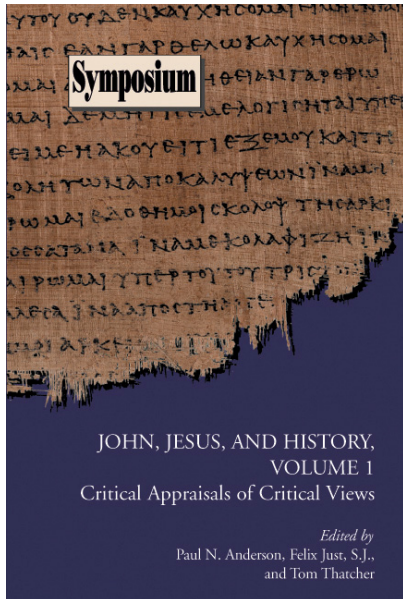


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Anderson, Paul N., Felix Just, S.J., and Tom Thatcher, eds.

John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Appraisals of Critical Views

Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 44

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The John, Jesus, and History group of the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting was formed in 2002 to explore how the issue of historicity in the Fourth Gospel might be approached. It has become a very well attended group, featuring a number of significant scholars with foundational questions about both the nature of historical analysis in the Gospels and the unique nature of the Fourth Gospel. This volume, edited by members of the steering committee of the group, represents some of the significant papers delivered in the earlier phase of the group's work. These are all substantial and important essays, and this volume will soon be a reference point for Johannine scholars and those who engage the broader issue of historicity in the Gospels.

After some short introductory essays on the formation of the John, Jesus, and History group and its focus, the volume opens with a long and important essay by Paul Anderson that engages the issue on a number of fronts. Anderson's essay details many reasons why John has been marginalized as a source for history (or *dehistoricized*, to use Anderson's term), as well as addressing the parallel issue of how the picture of the historical Jesus has been effectively *de-Johannified*; in both cases he has analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the various issues. In the former case, the *dehistoricization* of John's Gospel, Anderson finds the arguments against John's historical value less than compelling. When

he turns to the question of how one might integrate John into the historical discussion, Anderson has a twofold concern: on the one hand, to discuss the theoretical issues of how John might be integrated, but, on the other hand, to recommend his own bi-optic proposals. Unfortunately, the intrusion of his own theories into a general discussion of John and use of John in historical constructions is a bit jarring. The essay overall, however, is a strong apologia for at least reopening the discussion of John and history.

Part 2 of the volume turns to a more general engagement with the history of scholarship on the Fourth Gospel relative to its connection with historical assessment. In this part are essays by Robert Kysar, Marianne Meye Thompson, Jack Verheyden, Mark Allan Powell, and D. A. Carson.

Kysar in a short essay does a remarkable job of surveying recent scholarship on a variety of issues related to John's historical value. His range of topics include the authorship of John, the relationship of John and the Synoptics, Gospel genre, oral traditions behind John, written source theories about John that might incorporate early traditions, the impact of new criticisms on the study, and, finally, engagement with the issue of what "history" is. Kysar not only touches on the main issues that have shaped the direction of recent scholarship on John and history but in short order puts them in perspective. For this reason alone Kysar's essay is important, but he concludes by also engaging the issue of history and the role of perspective in writing and interpreting history, a discussion that is valuable and timely.

A counterpart to Kysar's broad sweep of scholarship is Carson's somewhat more focused review of Johannine scholarship on issues relative to John's historical value. Carson begins with questions of how historicity might be tied to literary dependence or an assessment of the author of the Fourth Gospel. The essay then follows with a very significant discussion on the relative importance, and critique, of the two-level drama approach to John, since this has shaped and dominated much of the scholarship on John since J. Louis Martyn proposed such a reading. Carson ends his essay with thoughtful suggestions about how the impasse presented by the "balkanization" of Johannine studies might be engaged.

Verheyden and Powell each also engage in historical review of John's place in the research on the Jesus of history. Verheyden's emphasis is on nineteenth-century German scholarship and its influence on the question of John and history. He focuses especially on David Friedrich Strauss and F. C. Baur and their complementary approaches. Verheyden spends some time expanding on Baur's overall theory of development in the early church and how that affected his approach to John. Powell's essay extends this historically oriented review of scholarship by dealing with the twentieth century approaches to the

historical Jesus and how that has, in general, marginalized John. Powell pays particular attention to the roles that the criteria of dissimilarity and the emphasis on the Synoptic Gospels have played in this. But Powell turns the issue toward more recent efforts to recognize John as an additional dissonant voice in the early church tradition.

Despite its brevity, Thompson's essay deserves special mention. It does not really fit in this section on the various methodologies, except that it is a response Kysar's essay. Thompson in a very refreshing way argues for a rethinking of how scholars approach the John-history issue. First, she suggests that a reconsideration John's audience and purpose, "as a presentation of Jesus to an unspecified group of readers" (105), would help refocus attention on information about Jesus in John. Second, she argues that John's very theology might inform scholars about the historical Jesus. I found Thompson's essay particularly refreshing and insightful.

The third part of the volume explores background issues that can help shape approaches to assessing the historical value of John. Essays in this section are from D. Moody Smith, Andrew T. Lincoln, Colleen M. Conway, Gilbert van Belle, and John Painter.

Smith is undoubtedly the dean of John-Synoptic studies (full disclosure: I am a product of his mentoring in this very area), and he uses his mastery of this subject very effectively in this essay about whether John can be used as a source for Jesus research. In his own special style of asking provocative questions that deserve more research, he explores various factual and narrative connections of John to the Synoptic Gospels that actually suggest areas in which John offers important information to our quest to understand the Jesus of history. In the end, Smith does suggest that John alongside the Synoptics may offer useful historical data as well as a narrative that better testifies to the "confusion of history."

Lincoln engages the question of whether the witness motif in John might not be an indication of eyewitness testimony and hence an additional support for a claim to historicity. Based on his previous studies on the witness motif in John, Lincoln asserts that there is little necessarily to connect this to eyewitness accounts (*contra* Bauckham here) but that instead the witness language is primarily a literary technique. In particular, basing this on the nature of ancient biographies, he suggests that John is especially creative (i.e., not historically accurate) in key instances, in particular with Jesus' baptizing ministry and the Cana wine miracle.

Conway brings to the question of John and history the larger meta-critiques of the whole enterprise of historical reconstruction that New Historicism brings to the discussion. Rather than asking what is historical that we might discover from the texts (particular

external data that we could discover), this approach sees history and textuality as intertwining concerns. In particular, for instance, she discusses the important role of representation and especially the use of anecdotes in the New Historicism's analysis. Conway suggests that John's *approach* is closer perhaps to that of New Historicism in that the "facts" are of less concern than the "representation." In short, for Conway John and history are very compatible, if the enterprise of "history" is entirely reconceived.

Van Belle, here writing in association with Sydney Palmer, brings naturally the concerns of the Louvain school (with Neiryck still looming large) to the question of historicity and John. While pointing out substantial nuance in Neiryck's and other Louvain scholars' works, nonetheless van Belle suggests that the methodology of valorizing the Synoptic Gospels as the starting point (and measure) of comparisons is correct. Added to that, van Belle reaffirms his own research on John that rejects a signs source or other putative sources. Ultimately, van Belle's conclusion is to reject much historical value in John, since John is derivative of the Synoptics.

Painter's primary focus is on the role of memory in the production of the Gospels and how studying this issue might enhance the discussion of John and historicity. He begins with a discussion of the various ways Socrates was "remembered" by Xenophon and Plato, perhaps somewhat as a model for John and the Synoptics. But in particular Painter emphasizes the unique way that John's Gospel emphasizes the *transformation* of memory (transformed by the resurrection), as opposed to simply the recalling of data.

The fourth part consists of two essays on the temple incident: one by Paula Frederickson, and the second by Mark Allan Powell.

Frederickson focuses her attention on the temple incident in John and its relationship to Jesus' death. Beginning with E. P. Sanders's argument that the temple incident was a prediction of the temple's destruction, not a "cleansing," Frederickson finds that the normal view that is driven by the Markan narrative makes little sense. In particular, she struggles with why Pilate has only Jesus crucified, not his disciples, if indeed Jesus was viewed as a dangerous figure. But John's narrative, while she doubts any of the details are necessarily accurate, better explains Jesus' death alone. Pilate and the priests, through his extensive and multiple visits to Jerusalem, knew Jesus was not dangerous. But Jesus' death served to deflate any growing messianic interest in him by the crowds.

In Powell's response to Frederickson, he finds little to commend the main arguments that Frederickson suggests. He does not agree with the starting point, Sanders's argument about the temple incident, and then in a chain of reasoning does not find other planks in

the argument bear much weight. In the end, Powell finds the Synoptic accounts very reasonable.

Finally, the volume concludes with summarizing review essays by editors Anderson and Felix Just. Anderson's summary finds seven points of convergence among various groups of the authors: (1) John's particular type of memory or historiographic project merits analysis on its own right; (2) the question of what "history" is will affect the shape of future studies; (3) there is a notable departure by the authors from source-critical analysis of John; (4) John's relation to the Synoptics remains a significant issue; (5) there is interest in a fresh approach to history-theology relationships; (6) there is a call for interdisciplinary investigations; and (7) almost all the scholars call for a more nuanced approach to Jesus studies. Just's final epilogue then looks forward to more papers and more volumes in this series.

As I indicated in the opening paragraph, this collection is very stimulating and very important. It should be on the "to read" list for anyone interested in the current state of Johannine studies or historical Jesus studies.