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Recommended Citation

Vyhmeister, Nancy, "Junia the Apostle" (2013). *Memory, Meaning & Life*. 115.
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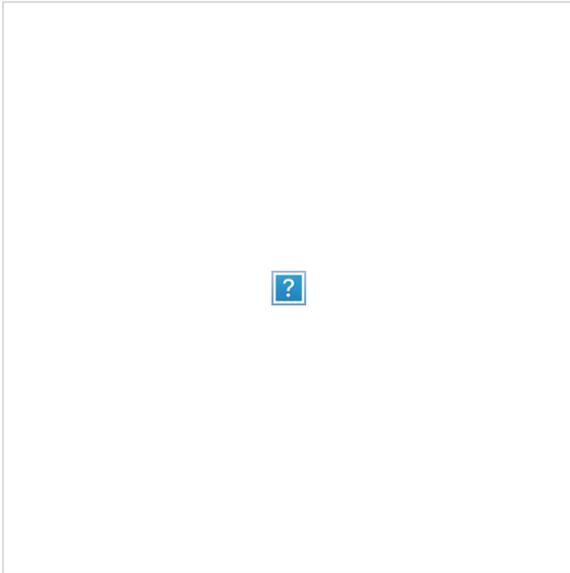
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April 12, 2013

Junia the Apostle

By Nancy Vyhmeister



“Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.”
(Romans 16:8 NKJV)

The Name: *Junia*

The name of this woman, Junia, appears only once in the New Testament, in a list of friends and co-workers in Rome, to whom Paul sent greetings in Romans 16. Through the years, questions have been raised about her identity, especially her gender since original Greek manuscripts did not distinguish between the similar masculine and feminine forms of the name. This essay will review some of the evidence found in ancient manuscripts and writings of the early Church fathers.

The Name in Antiquity

Junia was a commonly used female Roman name, meaning “youthful.” It derived from the goddess Juno and appears more than 250 times in Rome alone in records of the first century. The name also appears in inscriptions in Ephesus, Didyma, Lydia, Troas and Bythinia. Were the name masculine, it should have been Junias in Greek or Junius in Latin. The masculine name Junius is well attested. According to Linda Belleville, there is, however, no attestation for the spelling Junias in any “inscription, letterhead, piece of writing, epitaph or literary work of the New Testament period.”^[i]

Early Christian References

In his commentary on Romans, Joseph Fitzmyer listed 16 Christian Greek and Latin writers of the first millennium who understood Junia to be a woman. Among these, the earliest is Origen (ca. 185-254), whose commentary on Romans was translated into Latin by Rufinus (345-410), and quoted by Rabanus Maurus (ca. 776-856).^[ii] In his *Liber Nominibus Hebraicis*, Jerome (ca. 345-419) lists the name as Junia.^[iii] From John Chrysostom (ca. 344-407) to Peter Abelard (1079-1142), Greek and Latin commentators on the epistle to the Romans used the feminine name Junia.

Those who prefer to see Junia as a male have made much of the *Index Discipulorum*, attributed to Epiphanius (ca. 315-403), where the masculine Junias appears. However, Belleville notes that Epiphanius also identifies Priscilla as a male and makes her a bishop of Colophon, while her husband Aquila was bishop of Heraclea, two very different locations. “Both the gender confusion and the disparate locations call into question the overall reliability of the document,” Belleville concludes.^[iv] Aegidius of Rome (1245-1316) was the first church writer to make Andronicus and Junia “those honorable men.”^[v]

Junia in Ancient Greek New Testament Manuscripts

As the first Greek manuscripts of the New Testament (called uncial manuscripts) were recopied in minuscule-type manuscripts in the seventh century, which forced the use of accents and hence a clearer distinction between genders, the name Junia was written in the feminine form as *Iounian*. According to Eldon Epp, no Greek minuscule manuscripts used the

masculine *Iouniān*.^[vi] The United Bible Society (UBS) *Greek New Testament* notes at least 20 minuscule New Testament manuscripts that use the feminine *Iounían*.

The Name in Printed Greek New Testaments

According to Epp's table, 38 Greek New Testaments, beginning with Erasmus (1516) through Eberhardt Nestle in 1920 use the feminine name *Iounían*. The only exception is Alford, in the nineteenth century, who uses the masculine form but puts the feminine in the apparatus.^[vii]

From the Nestle version of 1927 through the UBS Greek New Testament of 1993, only the Hodges-Farstad New Testament of 1982 uses the feminine; the other 14 versions use the masculine, often without an alternate explanation in the apparatus. This trend is reversed with the 1994 Kurt Aland and the UBS 1998 versions, which return to the feminine, with no alternate reading.^[viii]

Junia in Modern Language Translations

The seven earliest English versions, from Tyndale (1525-1534) to the King James Version (1611), have Junia as a woman. From the Revised Version (1881) until the New Living Translation (1996), 21 English translations have the masculine, while 10 have the feminine.^[ix] Some recent English translations still have the masculine, no doubt because their parent translations did so and the masculine form was in the Greek New Testament from which these versions were translated.

Notable Among or Noticed By?

Paul's comment in reference to Andronicus and Junia also needs some attention. He commented that they are "*of note [epiṣēmoi] among [en] the apostles*". The adjective *epiṣēmoi* refers to something that has a distinguishing mark, like a stamp on precious metal. The word may be used to signal that a thing or person is considered very good, as in Romans 16:7, or very bad, as when it is applied to Barrabas in Matthew 27:16.^[x]

The preposition *en*, can be variously translated as "in," "among," "on," or even "with" or "by."^[xi] It denotes location and means. It is normally followed by a word in the dative case, as is *tois apostólois* (the apostles) here.

Which meaning does *en* have here? Are Andronicus and Junia recognized as being apostles? Were they notable *among* the apostles? This is the *inclusive* view. Or are they recognized *by* the apostles as notable outsiders, not as apostles? This is the *exclusive* view.

The interpretation of this phrase has been debated for many years. Very little discussion on the issue of Junia's apostleship appears until late in the nineteenth century, and when discussions begin to take place, the issue of Junia's gender is decisive in determining whether she is an apostle. William Sanday and Arthur Headlam noted in their 1895 commentary on Romans:

Junia is of course a common Roman name and in that case the two would probably be husband and wife; Junias on the other hand is less usual as a man's name. . . . If, as is probable, Andronicus and Junias are included among the apostles. . . , then it is more probable that the name is masculine.^[xii]

The conflicting interpretations continue to this day. In 1994 the *Textual Commentary* to the UBS Greek New Testament noted: "Some members [of the UBS Committee], considering it unlikely that a woman would be among those styled 'apostles,' understood the name to be masculine." ^[xiii] In contrast, in 2001, Michael Burer and Daniel Wallace proposed that Junia was a woman and that she and Andronicus were admired by the apostles.^[xiv]

Three major responses to Burer and Wallace's study came from Bauckham, Belleville, and Epp.^[xv] Bauckham analyzed the study and concluded that the study was not carefully done.^[xvi]

Belleville replicated the study of Burer and Wallace and showed that the preposition *en* followed by a noun in the dative form signifies normally inclusiveness. For example, Matthew 2:6: Bethlehem is by no means least "among the rulers of Judah." In Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* 438, she found one exact parallel to Romans 16:7: "Most distinguished among whom were our rich countryman Ismenodorus and . . ." ^[xvii]. Belleville's conclusion was clear: Junia was a woman and one of the apostles. ^[xviii]

In 2002, Eldon Epp wrote an extensive article that became the basis for his 2005 book, *Junia, the First Woman Apostle*.^[xix] In it he made a well-documented case for Junia as a woman and one of the apostles.

Among the Apostles

Whatever the specific meaning, “apostles” make up a special group of people who carried out Christ’s mission, much as Paul did. Richard Bauckham suggests that Paul refers to apostles of Christ, like himself, who have been commissioned by the risen Christ, and who, together with the twelve apostles of the gospels, form a larger group.^[xx] Origen stated that Andronicus and Junia were among the seventy-two sent out by Jesus.^[xxi]

For John Chrysostom both Andronicus and Junia were among the apostles. In his commentary on Romans 16:7 he wrote:

Who are of note among the Apostles. And indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even amongst these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But they were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! how great is the devotion (*philosophia*) of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation apostle!^[xxii]

John of Damascus (675?-ca. 749) noted about Junia: “To be called ‘apostles’ is a great thing. . . . But to be even *amongst these of note*, just consider what a great encomium this is.”^[xxiii]

Ute Eisen points out: “In the *Liturgikon*, the missal of the Byzantine Church, Junia is honored to this day . . . as an apostle, together with fifty-six male apostles and the two ‘like to the apostles,’ Mary Magdalene and Thecla.”^[xxiv]

Craig Keener observes:

It is also unnatural to read the text as merely claiming that they had a high reputation with “the apostles.” Since they were imprisoned with him, Paul knows them well enough to recommend them without appealing to the other apostles, whose judgment he never cites on such matters. . . . Paul nowhere limits the apostolic company to the Twelve plus himself, as some have assumed (see especially 1 Cor.15:5-11). Those who favor the view that Junia was not a female apostle do so because of their prior assumption that women could not be apostles, not because of any evidence in the text.^[xxv]

Conclusion

It is difficult to complete this study without concluding that Paul is referring to a woman named Junia, who, together with Andronicus (probably her husband), was part of the New Testament group of apostles. No information is given about her ordination. That was not the issue. Paul recognized her as one of the apostles, a woman who was willing to suffer for the gospel she was active in spreading!

[i] Linda Belleville, “Women Leaders in the Bible,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, ed. Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 117.

[ii] Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 737-738.

[iii] Jerome, *Liber de Nominibus Hebraicis*, *Migne Patrologia Romana*, column 895; there Junia is wrongly listed under the epistle of James, but the footnote indicates that the name really appears in Romans. http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0347-0420,_Hieronymus,_Liber_De_Nominibus_Hebraicis,_MLT.pdf

[iv] Linda Belleville, “Re-examination of Romans 16:7 in Light of Primary Source Materials,” *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005): 235.

[v] Bernadette Brooten, “Junia . . . Outstanding among the Apostles,” in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, ed. Leonard Swidler and Arlene Swidler (New York: Paulist, 1977),

<http://www.womenpriests.org/classic/brooten.asp>

[vi] Eldon Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 45.

[vii] Epp, 62-63.

[viii] Ibid.

[ix] Epp, 66.

[x] Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), s.v. 'Episēmos.

[xi] *TDNT*, s.v. *en*.

[xii] William Sanday and Arthur Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary 32 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), 423. The same reading remains unchanged in much later editions, including a 1962 printing.

[xiii] Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 322.

[xiv] Michael H. Burer and Daniel B. Wallace, "Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-examination of Rom 16.7." *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001): 76-91.

[xv] Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Linda Belleville, "'Iounian . . . 'epīsēmoi 'en toīs 'apostólois: A Re-examination of Romans 16.7 in Light of Primary Source Materials," *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005): 231-249; Eldon Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

[xvi] Bauckham, 172-180.

[xvii] Ibid., 246.

[xviii] Ibid., 248; see also, Belleville, "Women Leaders," 119-120.

[xix] Eldon Epp, "Text-Critical, Exegetical and Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting the Junia/Junias Variations in Romans 16, 7," in *Textual Criticism and Exegesis: Festschrift J. Delobel*, ed. A. Denaux, BETL 161 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 227-291; Eldon Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 45.

[xx] Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 179-180.

[xxi] Pederson, *The Lost Apostle*, 36.

[xxii] John Chrysostom, *Homily 31 on the Epistle to the Romans*, on Romans 16:7
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf111.pdf> (26 August 2012)

[xxiii] Belleville, "Re-examination," 235, quoting John of Damascus, *Paul's Epistles* 95.565.

[xxiv] Eisen, 48; Rena Pederson, likewise, indicates that Mary Magdalene and Thecla were both considered apostles; see *The Lost Apostle* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2006), 48-49, 61-75.

[xxv] Craig Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 242, quoted in Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 195.



Nancy Vyhmeister has forty-five years of experience in teaching future pastors and professors not only in the United States but throughout the world. She continues to have a global ministry in her retirement years, mostly teaching research and writing. She has authored several books, both in Spanish and English, including a Greek grammar for Spanish-speaking students. She was editor of *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*.

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