Authorship of 1-3 John
and Date of the Gospel of John

Author, 1-3 John

1. External Evidence: There are references found in the books as early as the late first and early second century.
   (a) 1 Clement of Rome (A.D. 96) uses the term “perfected in love” to describe God's people (1 Clem 49:5; 50:3). This phrase is used in 1 John 2:5; 4:12, 17-18.
   (b) Didache (A.D. 90-120) uses a similar phrase (10:5-6) including a reference to the world passing away (1 John 2:17).
   (c) Epistle of Barnabas (A.D. 130) refers to Jesus as the “son of God come in the flesh” (5:9-11; 12:10) just as 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7 do.
   (d) Polycarp (A.D. 135) speaks about false brethren using the familiar phrase of “For everyone who does not confess Jesus Christ to have come in the flesh is Antichrist” (Phil. 7:1) which is a clear reference to 1 John 4:2-3 and 2 John 7.
   (e) These all suggest that by the late first to early second century at least two of these letters were well known by Christian writers.

2. The first author to identify John as the author of one of these epistles was Papias in the middle of the second century (as reported by Eusebius).
   (a) In Eusebius' words he “used testimonies drawn from the former Epistle of John” (H.E. 3.39.17)
   (b) By Irenaeus’ day (A.D. 180), the 1st and 2nd epistles of John were attributed to the apostle John (Adv Haer 3.16.18).
   (c) In the late 2nd century Clement of Alexandria apparently knew of more than one epistle of John because he speaks of a “greater epistle” (Strom 2.15.66).

3. Though 1 John is readily attested, early confirmation on 2 and 3 John is harder to come by.
   (a) This is understandable because of their length (thus less likely to be quoted) and that there is less theological principles to quote from them.
      i. Irenaeus and Clement both acknowledge more than one epistle from John as well as Origen (A.D. 253), though the latter does so to say that not all accepted that 2 and 3 John were authentic.
      ii. Dionysius of Alexandria (died in A.D. 265) stated that John wrote the fourth gospel and 1 John and knew about 2 and 3 John.
      iii. The three epistles of John are not attributed to anyone but the apostle John in the ancient church.

4. Internal Evidence for 1-3 John having the same author as the Gospel of John
   (a) There are striking similarities between the Gospel of John and 1 John. Just notice the similar use of polarities (two polar opposites):
      i. Light and darkness
      ii. Life and death
      iii. Truth and falsehood
      iv. Love and hate
   (b) A number of similarities in both syntax and the “scheme of salvation.”
   (c) 2 and 3 John clearly must have the same author as 1 John because of the strong links between the vocabulary and theme.
      i. An example lay in the similar ideas such as
         A. “Christ come in the flesh” (2 John 7, 1 John 4:2)
         B. “Deceiver” and “antichrist” (2 John 7, 1 John 2:22)
         C. “From God” being used to describe Christians 3 John 11, 1 John 3:10; 4:4, 7)

5. Two other areas arguing for an apostle writing these books:
   (a) In several places the author uses “we” in the context of himself and the other eyewitnesses in contrast to the Christian readers (“you”) like 1 John 1:1, 3; 4:14; 5:6-7.
(b) Notice the authority, across congregations (2 and 3 John) the author speaks with (1 John 2:1-2, 8, 15, 17, 23, 28; 3:6, 9; 4:1, 8, 16; 5:21). Could any but an apostle have spoken with such authority?

6. In conclusion, the author of the Gospel of John and 1 John seems to be one in the same. Since 2-3 John seems to share the same author as 1 John that places the apostle John as the author of the Gospel of John and the three epistles of John.

Date of the Gospel of John

1. For a time, some argued that John was to be dated in the 2nd century.
   (a) However, the finding of P52 (A.D. 130), the earliest piece of manuscript we have of a NT book, has effectively disproved so late a date.
   (b) There are also two other pieces of manuscript P66 (John 1-14) and P75 (most of Luke, John 1-11, parts of John 12-15) that date from the end of the 2nd century.
   (c) This early manuscript evidence makes it highly unlikely that John was written as late as the 2nd century.

2. It seems to be evident that Peter had died by the time of John's writing considering John 21:19. this makes a date before A.D. 64-65 unlikely.
   (a) Plus, the inference that can be made from this passage seems to be that Peter had died, and John has lived a considerable amount of time (John 21:21-23).

3. This said, some still believe in a date sometime between A.D. 65 and 70 A.D. Because of:
   (a) Remarks are made that speak as if Jerusalem and its temple complex are still standing (such as:
       i. “There is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate” (John 5:2).
       A. However, John frequently uses the present tense in Greek for things in the past.
   (b) No discussion of the destruction of the Temple, which is surprising since such a remark would greatly help John 2:19-22.
       i. But arguments from silence are notoriously unreliable.

4. The most likely date seems to be one towards the end of the 1st century between A.D. 85-95 which is supported for a number of reasons:
   (a) Strong evidence from the church fathers indicates John lived to a ripe old age to the reign of Trajan (A.D. 98-117) from Irenaeus (Adv. Haer., 2.22.5; 3.3.4).
       i. Jerome, in the 4th century, stated that John died in the 68th year (about A.D. 98) after the Lord's Passion (De vir. Ill. 9).
       ii. There is strong evidence that John wrote last (Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 3.1.1; Clement, H.E. 6.14.7; Eusebius H.E. 3.24.7).
       A. This all being said, this is all secondary information.
   (b) In the past, it was argued that the term “put out of the synagogue” (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) reflects the situation after the Council of Jamnia to ban Christians from synagogues (A.D. 85). The phrase written before that time would be anachronistic.
       i. This interpretation is seriously challenged by a number of scholars now and has lost considerable power.
   (c) Some details like no mention of the Sadducees (huge in the religious life before A.D. 70, declined afterwards) seem to indicate a later date.
      i. But John doesn't speak much on the scribes either whose influence actually increased after A.D. 70.
   (d) The theology, particularly the “High-Christology” (Jesus clearly shown as God) would seem to lend towards a later date.
      i. But this same idea about Jesus is seen as early as the mid 50's (Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-20)

5. These all have their issues but one of the more compelling ideas seems to be that it is hard to see the destruction of the Temple NOT being mentioned with a date not long after 70 A.D.

6. All in all, a date sometime between 80's-90's A.D. Seem the best choice.

1-3 John

1. The dating of these letters lay in dating the Gospel of John since John arguably seems to be responding
to gnostic perversion of his gospel.
(a) Thus, these letters should be dated sometime in the 90's A.D.