Unseeing the Shown, Showing the Unseen: The Images of John's Apocalypse and the
Visual Culture of Ancient Asia Minor

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Abstract

The present study explores the visuality of John's Apocalypse, with particular attention to John's employment of images throughout the book, and in the context of the visual culture of ancient Asia Minor. The central argument of this study is that the images of the book of Revelation obliquely resemble the images (particularly of the divine world and divine persons, i.e., gods) that populated ancient Asia Minor. The question of the relationship between the images of the book of Revelation and those of ancient Asia Minor is not, however, a question of "influence," "sources," or "local reference," but rather one of deep cultural resonance. The symmetry is not in the images themselves, but in their function: to provide for an artificial presence of something perceived to be absent—to "present," by means of the techniques and practices of visual culture, the divine world and its denizens.

The study unfolds in three parts. Part I introduces the problem of "apocalyptic images," surveying two trends in apocalyptic scholarship (Chapter 1), tracing a history of the concept of "images" in apocalyptic studies (Chapter 2), and recommending a specific use of the term "image" in the study of apocalyptic literature which draws on recent Visual (Culture) Studies and Image Studies (Chapter 3). Part II compares images from ancient Asia Minor with images from the book of Revelation: The so-called Great Altar of Pergamum and the throne-room scene of Revelation 4-5 (Chapter 4); Domitianic numismatic iconography and the celestial woman of Revelation 12 (Chapter 5); and Artemis Ephesia, the celestial woman of Revelation 12 and the Great Whore of Revelation 17 (Chapter 6). The comparison of Part II leads to the conclusion that John's images are not dependent on the

images of Asia Minor, but that there is a resonance between them. Part III therefore analyzes the images of the book of Revelation as a work analogous to ancient oratory (Chapter 7). Ancient oratory knew a technique—*ekphrasis*—for evoking the visual in the verbal (Chapter 8), a technique that is strikingly similar to the Apocalypse's images (Chapter 9).

The images of the New Testament book of Revelation, or the Apocalypse of John, have long vexed interpreters: their presence has long been noted, but any coherent theory of the role of vision and images in the book of Revelation is lacking. This study is a first step towards such a theory. The book of Revelation, I conclude, is a fundamental work of Christian *paideia*: it is an education in unseeing the shown—the images of the divine in the visual culture of Asia Minor—and showing the unseen—the divine world of John's Christian imagination.

Dedicated…

To the memory of my beloved father,
Ronald Paul Guffey,
…καὶ ὄψονται τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ,
καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν…

And to my beloved mother,
Nancy Ann Guffey,

To my beloved bride,
Emily Ann Williams Guffey,

And to my beloved sons,
Owen Nathaniel Guffey and Ezra James Guffey,

Without whom…

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To my big brother, Aaron Guffey, I owe the pleasure of many bruises, a good example to follow (especially in learning what I could *not* get away with), great conversations while watching Hawkeye football (usually by long distance), and many excellent moments in life. To my mother, Nancy Guffey, who has never been anything but proud of her "baby boy" as far as I can tell, what can I say? Thank you, Mom! Thank you for being so fiercely and sacrificially supportive. It is with not a little sadness that my father, Ronald P. Guffey, could not see me to this stage of my journey. You wanted so to see my name in print, but you were unable to make it this far. I still miss you. Every day.

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When one contemplates the incomprehensibility of these divine mystical words, let him not castigate our audacity, we who have undertaken to understand them.
~ Nerses of Lambron
Prologue, *Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John*

Introduction: Seeing the Apocalypse

> My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to
> make you hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you see. That —
> and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according
> to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm — all you demand;
> and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.
> Joseph Conrad, "Preface" to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*[1]

To some, Joseph Conrad's much-quoted preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*
smacks of obscurantism. "Scores of anthologists and critics," writes critic Ian Watt in a
subtle rebuke, "have given it their most bated breath, or intoned 'To make you *see*' as a
sovereign charm against blindness."[2] Undoubtedly Conrad is partly to blame for the
mystification of this phrase, though he must have meant it in many senses: to bring before
the reader's eye certain pictures, to establish a perspective for the reader, to make the reader
grasp (i.e., "see") a "glimpse of truth." Whatever we make of Conrad's phrase, it rings subtly
true when applied to John's Apocalypse. "Encouragement, consolation, fear, charm"—all
these are to be found in the book of Revelation. John himself describes his prophecy as
more than a glimpse of truth. And does not John reach for all of these particularly by trying
to make his audience see?

"Of all the biblical books," writes Michael Camille, "the Apocalypse is the one
predicated on the sense of sight."[3] The book is presented as (the record of) a vision, and
within that vision are many vivid "images." John repeats the refrain, "I saw" ([καὶ] εἶδον)

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[1] Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (New York: Doubleday, 1914), 14.

[2] Ian Watt, "Conrad's Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus',*" *Novel* 7 (1974), 101.

[3] Michael Camille, "Visionary Perception and Images of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 277.

forty-five times in the book.[4] In the proemium, John proclaims, "Look! [ἰδού] He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him [ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμός]…" (Rev 1:7). In truth, the book of Revelation invokes many senses, but sight remains primary.[5] The revelation that John receives begins with a voice (1:10), actually, signaling something of the aurality of the book. But John barely allows his audience to become comfortable with the audition. He promptly turns "to see" (βλέπειν) the voice, and when he does he is confronted with seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of them "one like the Son of Man" (1:12-13). After this encounter with Christ, in which Christ designates John his secretary to the churches of seven prominent cities in Asia Minor, John sees another sight: "I looked (εἶδον), and there in heaven a door stood open." (4:1). The first person singular invites the audience to identify with the author as the receptor of this vision. The orator, in this case also a visionary, becomes a cipher for the experience of the audience. "John" establishes the audience's *point of view*. Identifying with John the audience now is invited to *see*. Immediately, the voice says to John, "Come up here and I will show [δείξω] you what must happen after these things" (4:1), but John is not the only one who gets to see the sights. The audience is invited to view, along with John, what Christ will show. The Apocalypse from the very beginning draws the audience's attention away from the verbal medium to the visual objects and events. "John's Revelation is visual theology," suggests Hans-Ruedi Weber, "It must be *seen* in order to be understood."[6]

The present study explores the visuality of John's Apocalypse, with particular attention to John's employment of images throughout the book, and in the context of the

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[4] Rev 1:12, 17; 4:1; 5:1, 2, 6, 11; 6:1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 12; 7:1, 2, 9; 8:2, 13; 9:1, 17; 10:1, 5; 13:1, 2, 11; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:1, 2, 5; 16:13; 17:3, 6; 18:1; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1, 2, 22.

[5] Ian Boxall, *Revelation: Vision and Insight* (London: SPCK, 2002), 2-9.

[6] Hans-Ruedi Weber, *The Way of the Lamb: Christ in the Apocalypse* (Geneva: WCC, 1988), vii.

visual culture of ancient Asia Minor.[7] The fundamental question for the study is, What is all

of this rhetoric about vision and what are these images doing? Their presence has long been

noted, but any coherent theory of the role of vision and images in the book of Revelation is

lacking. The present study is a first step towards such a theory. Toward that end, I have

availed myself of the resources and tools of Visual (Culture) Studies. For most biblical

scholars and historians of early Judaism and Christianity, for instance, the very word

"visuality," used above, may seem a barbarism, but it is a term of art in Visual Studies. (I will

discuss the term more fully in Chapter 3.) Most basically, Visual Studies focuses on images

produced in and/or for a culture, the visual practices associated with those images, and the

cultural discourse and constructed subjectivity that obtains in the relationship between the

two.

Unfortunately, for all its current interdisciplinarity, Biblical Studies has shown little

interest in Visual Studies. Jane Heath has well-described this blind-spot[!] in biblical studies

(and theology in general) in her recent monograph. With just a touch of cheek, Heath

suggests, "By the early 21st century, one almost has to be a theologian or biblical scholar if

one hopes to avoid pulling off the shelf endless books about the look, the gaze, the

spectacle, surveillance, iconology, and scopic regimes."[8] For Heath, this is not just a matter

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[7] By "Asia Minor" I mean to designate western Anatolia, or what is now western Turkey.

[8] Jane M. F. Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety: Metamorphosis of the Beholder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10. Heath does note a few exceptions—she points to studies on mysticism and the *visio dei*, archaeological studies, and studies of visual exegesis. Another glaring exception from the study of ancient Israel and Judah is the work of the so-called Freiburg School of iconographic exegesis, esp. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury, 1978); idem, "Iconography and the Bible," *ABD* 3: 358-74; Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); Christoph Uehlinger, ed., *Images as Media: Sources for the Cultural History of the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean: 1st Millenium BCE* (Freiburg: University Press, 2000); Izaak J. de Hulster, *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); Izaak J. De Hulster and Rüdiger Schmitt, eds., *Iconography and Biblical Studies: Proceedings of the Iconography Sessions of the Joint EABS/SBL Conference, 22-26 July 2007, Vienna, Austria* (Münster: Ugarit, 2009); and several others. In New Testament studies we should note, Annette Weissenrieder, Friederike Wendt, and Petra von Gemünden, eds.,

of keeping up appearances. "Such visual practices [as studied in the field of Visual Studies]

matter," she writes, "because they are part of the fabric of social and religious life."[9]

Understanding the visual culture of apocalyptic, then, is of vital interest to the historian of

early Judaism and Christianity, since such visual culture is an integral part of "the fabric and

social and religious life" of those who produced the apocalypses.

The Argument

The present study draws on the kinds of questions asked in Visual Studies and

applies those questions to the book of Revelation. More specifically, the present study

attends to images (their production and use), mediality (in which medium images appear),

and the effects of viewing practices for the spectators. It is thus similar to the work of

Christopher Frilingos, but with rather less attention to the political role of the spectacle and

rather more to the images of the Apocalypse in their visual environment.[10] The central

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Picturing the New Testament: Studies in Ancient Visual Images (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); and in the study of Early Christianity, Mark Edwards, *Image, Word and God in the Early Christian Centuries* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2013). Though one easily comes away from these latter works with the suspicion that they are the exceptions that prove the rule.

[9] Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety*, 8.

[10] Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Frilingos argues that the early Christians found the book "appealing" because it participated in the Roman culture of spectacles: "Revelation…permitted its audience to do what Mediterranean populations under the empire had already been trained to do: gaze on a threatening 'Other'" (1). In so doing, these populations could know such threatening Others, and thereby dominate them. For Frilingos's argument to work "symmetry in the treatment of Revelation and the Roman Empire" must be "a primary methodological objective" (5). Unlike the overwhelming majority of scholars who read the book of Revelation as an anti-imperial book, Frilingos rightly recognizes that the book offers a "frankly imperialist narrative," which "predicts the end of the Roman Empire and the beginning of a Christian one" (1). Frilingos reads the book of Revelation with, rather than against, the grain of Roman culture, to a productive end. Rather than beginning with the assumption of cultural dissimilarity, he begins with the (to my mind) more probable assumption of cultural consonance. I agree with Frilingos that "the appeal of the Apocalypse…must…be located here, in the power of the spectacle," or at least, in the realm of visual culture. After all, "For all of its martial imagery, the new heavens and new earth that Revelation finally envisions is not an empire of warriors but one of viewers" (120). My conception of visual culture differs significantly from Frilingos's focus on the spectacle, though. I am interested less in the spectacle—a multi-sensory, culturally meaningful event (though largely visual, it seems, in Frilingos's conception), with a politico-ethical valence—and more in the ways visual

argument is that the images of the book of Revelation obliquely resemble the images (particularly of the divine world and divine persons, i.e., gods) that populated ancient Asia Minor. I find no reason, however, to claim John used these images as sources. The question of the relationship between the images of the book of Revelation and those of ancient Asia Minor is not a question of "influence," "sources," or "local reference," but rather one of deep cultural resonance; the symmetry is not in the images themselves, but in their function: to provide for an artificial presence of something perceived to be absent—to "present," by means of the techniques and practices of visual culture, the divine world and its denizens. The gap between the images of Asia Minor and those of the book of Revelation is due to the different media in which the images appear. The cult images and iconography of Asia Minor explored below were transmitted in visual or material medium. The images of John's Apocalypse were transmitted in verbal medium. A bridge from Hellenistic and Roman visual images to John's verbal images can be found in the rhetorical device of *ekphrasis*, a feature of the art of rhetoric that resembles John's compositional craft. It is through an exploration of ekphrasis that we will find the potential functions of John's intense imagery.

The dissertation will proceed, then, in three parts. Part I is introductory. It first describes the fortunes of current studies of ancient apocalypses and apocalypticism, documenting a rift between two competing approaches to apocalyptic texts, one which prefers to see them as records of religious experiences, and one which prefers to treat them as works of literary craft. I suggest that the dichotomy prevents us from attuning ourselves

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images, visual practices, and the development of visual subjects infused the religious elements of culture. My interest in ancient visual culture is subordinate to my interest in ancient religion and ways of being religious. The present absences of the gods, or their virtual presence, in the images of them that proliferated in the ancient Mediterranean, the practices that attended those images, and the way viewers were religiously shaped by encounters with such images—these are the basic points of comparison for the present study.

to the potential for religious experience in the performance of a text. In other words, the dichotomy is far more complex than has usually been admitted, and circumscribes our understanding of any particular instance of the genre apocalypse, such as the book of Revelation. I then turn to describe the scholarly tradition of identifying "images" as part of John's literary craft and the cultural assumptions smuggled into that scholarly terminology. Both approaches to apocalyptic literature affirm the presence of apocalyptic images, especially in the book of Revelation, but each means something different by the term. Tracing the history of the term "image" in apocalyptic studies and studies of the book of Revelation brings us to a redescription of the analytic category. It is here that I draw most heavily on Visual Studies, for in the past few decades a whole body of literature devoted to understanding "images" has developed. In brief, I summarize that body of research (and in the process I must severely simplify it), arguing that images are of three basic kinds— visual/material, mental, and verbal—depending on their media of transmission. Visual images or artifacts are primary to any definition of an image. Mental images and verbal images are so called by analogy with visual images.[11] This regrettably but necessarily simplistic account of images can then be applied to the book of Revelation and other ancient apocalypses. I advocate using the term only to apply to what might be called "pictorial language," as opposed to metaphorical or tropological language.

The methodological discussion of Part I gives way to an exploration in Part II of some of the verbal images of the book of Revelation and their possible visual counterparts from ancient Asia Minor. Part II compares visual artifacts from Asia Minor—e.g., the Great

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[11] We could say, loosely following Ian Hodder, that mental and verbal images are "entangled" with visual objects. See Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012).

Altar of Pergamum, numismatic iconography, and the iconography of Artemis Ephesia—with passages from the book of Revelation. The findings of Part II are largely negative. I do not find compelling evidence that John drew directly on any visual images of Asia Minor in his visions. John did not use the visual images surrounding him and those to whom he wrote to source his literary "visions." At the same time, there are intriguing points of intersection between various visual images and John's visions. The problem is largely methodological: we simply cannot prove, apart from actual citation on John's part, the use of such visual images. The main difficulty for such a project is the disparity between the media—visual and verbal—employed by each. Quotations and allusions are easy to spot in texts; resemblance between images is usually apparent. But resemblance of a visual image in a verbal text is difficult to establish without explicit reference. Since John does not explicitly reference any images, we may assume that even if he did use visual images as sources, he has no desire or need to advertise the fact. Either he thought it obvious, or it did not matter.

The negative findings of Part II do not entail, however, that a comparison between the ancient visual images of Asia Minor and the verbal images of the book of Revelation is fruitless. The possible points of connection lead to Part III, wherein I situate John's Apocalypse in the culture of oratory of Asia Minor in the first century CE. Ekphrasis was an element of Greek and Roman rhetorical theory and practice. Others who have used ancient rhetoric (though they have been few) and ekphrasis more especially (even fewer) to analyze John's Apoclaypse have failed to stipulate the terms on which they do so. Are we to think that John has benefited from rhetorical training and Greek education, or that he "picked it up" from his environment, or are the rhetorical categories simply useful for analysis? The main evidence for John's potential rhetorical education comes from John's peculiar use of

Greek. The evidence is ambiguous, though. The reasons for John's "bad" Greek are not clear. But given the fact that John writes in Greek at all, and considering that John's book would have been written to be heard—i.e., to be orally enacted—as well as the fact that the book was composed around the same time as the birth of the Second Sophistic, a comparison with Greek oratory provides a surprisingly rich analogy for John's composition. John may or may not have drawn directly on Greek and Roman rhetorical theory, but his book does function in much the same way.

Part III will also outline the theory surrounding ekphrasis and concomitant themes like *enargeia* and *phantasia*. These terms point to a phenomenon that extends beyond Greek rhetorical forms or exercises: the dis/parity between verbal and visual representation. Even if John did not receive an education in Greek rhetoric, his images function like ekphrases. Ekphrasis has been unduly limited to the description of works of art, but such limited use is a modern circumscription of the term.[12] I examine ancient rhetorical theory on ekphrasis, which reveals a far more powerful tool than rhetorical ornamentation. Ekphrasis was not part of persuasive speech because it was pretty, but because it was powerful; it effected a near-seeing of what was described, which is to say a near-presentation of something absent. The book of Revelation and other apocalypses certainly display anxiety about God's activity in the world; many of them are concerned with theodicy.[13] The goal of John's ekphrastic book was not simply persuasion, but as sure a means as he could provide of answering anxieties over theodicy. By making the divine world (and the future) virtually present, John

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[12] J. J. Pollitt (*The Ancient View of Greek Art: Criticism, History, and Terminology* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974], 87, n.2) notes (following Eva C. Harlan) that the term originally designated a rhetorical device that described a historical event, later, the description of a secluded place. Only in the third century CE did the device come to be applied to the description of works of art (as in the Elder and Younger Philostratus and Callistratus).

[13] See Paolo Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and its History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).

can both make the reality of the perceived conflict seem more real and assuage the anxiety of his audiences.

Preliminaries

There are a few matters that require abrupt treatment. Quotations from the Hebrew Bible or New Testament are generally after the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise noted. I have tried to indicate when I have modified the NRSV translation, though sometimes the alterations were very slight and may have escaped my notice. Translations for quotations of other ancient texts are cited when they are not mine. Editions and translations of ancient texts on which I have drawn are cited in the first part of the bibliography. Abbreviations follow *The SBL Handbook of Style*, supplemented when necessary from the fourth edition of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*.[14] I have generally left Greek terms in Greek font, but occasionally I have transliterated or Anglicized them. In the case of the latter, I use italics unless the words recurs often, in which case the first instance in a chapter will be italicized, but all subsequent occurrences will not. The consistency of the practice is, admittedly, somewhat subjective.

I use "the Apocalypse (capitalized)," "John's Apocalypse/Apocalypse of John," and "the book of Revelation/Revelation" synonymously throughout the study. I refer to the author of the Apocalypse as "John," as the book itself identifies its author (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). I do not think we can ascertain to which John (John the son of Zebedee, John the Evangelist, John the Baptist, John the Elder, or some other) the book refers, nor even that the author's

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[14] Patrick H. Alexander, et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 68-152, 237-63; and Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawnforth, and Esther Eidinow, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), xxiv-liii.

actual name was John. I am not even sure we can speak of one author for the book. But I

will use "John" as a shorthand for the author, and just as importantly for the performer (i.e.

reader), of the book. For whoever read the Apocalypse out for a gathered community would

have adopted the persona of John (cf. Rev 1:9: "I, John…"). I adopt a similarly agnostic

stance on date for the most part. I agree with scholarly consensus that the book was

probably either written in the wake of Nero's reign (i.e. ca. 70 CE) or in or near the reign of

Domitian (ca. 95 CE). For the purposes of this study it is not of crucial importance to

decide between these two dates, and I will only hint at the problem when describing visual

artifacts from specific reigns (e.g. the discussion of Domitianic iconography in Part II). It is

enough to admit that the book of Revelation was written in approximately the last third of

the first century CE, and that it was addressed from the island of Patmos off the western

coast of Asia Minor to seven prominent cities in Western Asia Minor.

My use of the terms "apocalypse" and "apocalyptic" should be acknowledged.[15]

Current scholarly practice in North America tends to insist upon a discontinued use of

apocalyptic as a substantive. In its place, three supposedly more precise terms are to be

adopted: "apocalypse" to designate a literary genre, "apocalypticism" to designate a

symbolic universe, social ideology, or worldview, and "apocalyptic eschatology" to designate

that theological emphasis of apocalypticism or apocalypses (it is not always clear from which

the purported theological emphasis arises) found in writings of other genres. I continue to

think that the broad term "apocalyptic"—yes, as a noun—is a useful synthetic term. For

one thing, it is not at all clear to me that precision requires just these three terms: the list

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[15] For a brief discussion of these issues, see the articles by Grabbe and Collins in *Knowing the End from the Beginning: the Prophetic, the Apocalyptic, and their Relationship* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak; London: T&T Clark, 2003), 2-7, 16-24, 44-52, 107-33. Problems with the genre apocalypse will be raised also in Part I.

could probably be expanded considerable. We need to keep the precise terms apocalypse and apocalypticism, but we need not stop with apocalyptic eschatology as the third member of the group. I deem the eschatological center of all things apocalyptic to be long de-centered by two facts: first, not all apocalypses *are* primarily eschatologically driven, and second, even in eschatologically-oriented apocalypses, eschatology is not always the *central* concern.[16] It is therefore inaccurate to designate apocalyptic themes that appear in other writings as "apocalyptic eschatology." There is also apocalyptic theology, apocalyptic social systems, apocalyptic economics, apocalyptic aesthetics, and the list could go on.

Moreover, while it is certainly useful to be able to distinguish literary genre, social movement, and worldview or conceptual furniture of both the literature and the social group(s), each of the three necessarily implicates the other two. If they did not so interpenetrate, then I do not know why we should call them all apocalyptic in any specific sense—as an analytical designation. The authors of the apocalypses are no longer available to us. Thus, it is generally true that we must start with the apocalypses as our sources for understanding apocalypticism. But we need to be careful here. It is not simply the case that the genre determines the evidence for the social movement or worldview. We start with the apocalypses, because they represent our only *surviving* evidence. The designation of the genre is itself a construction, originally built by modern scholars on analogy with the book of Revelation. It is neither an ancient designation for a genre (at least, not until late in the history of the supposed genre), nor an innocent modern description of an ancient genre. If we overplay the significance of the genre, we risk forcing the evidence for apocalyptic social movements, religious experiences, theology, etc., into the limited matrix of a modern analytic

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[16] These points have been argued especially by Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 23-48.

device. I am not suggesting that we start, either, with apocalypticism or apocalyptic religious experience, or some other less certain construction. My claim is that the definition of apocalyptic worldview and apocalyptic social movement is always in a dialogical relationship with apocalyptic genre. That is one reason why the boundaries of the genre are so indistinct. What about texts that show apocalyptic concerns, but are not formally apocalypses? We call them apocalyptic, just not apocalypses. Surely, then, the macro-term apocalyptic can be retained profitably precisely to designate this macro-level of coherence—to designate the entire apparatus of literary, social, ideological, material phenomena that we feel compelled to analyze as apocalyptic. The basic distinction between apocalypse and apocalypticism, then, is good and useful, but not in all circumstances necessary.[17]

In the study of culture, literary production, mythological discourse, politics, material realia, and much more besides all interpenetrate and are implicit in all social groups. While it may be heuristically useful at times to distinguish between literary production and, say, theological commitments, the cultural realities that underlie both suggest the distinction is artificial. There are times when it is more useful to remember the connection between the social, religious, and literary phenomena than the distinctions we use for analytic purposes. For that purpose I still deem the use of the term "apocalyptic" useful. In the present study, then, I will use *apocalypse* to designate a literary genre or a member of that genre and *apocalypticism* to designate a worldview or "system" of thought, but I will also use *apocalyptic* to designate the entire literary, social, religious phenomenon, particularly when the boundaries

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[17] As for the unreasonably popular contention that using apocalyptic as a noun is bad English—i.e., that an adjective should not be used as a noun—I consider this a vacuous argument that simply does not appreciate the ambiguities of the English language. English is a splendidly infelicitous language which can, as Lester Grabbe has pointed out, use words like "academic" and "religious" as nouns as well as adjectives. I suspect anyone learning English as their second language would not bat an eyelash at the use of an adjective as a noun; they would simply note it as yet one more peculiarity of the language.

between the various aspects of the phenomenon are unclear. Such use of terms will not, I

trust, greatly affect the argument, but the way one uses them seems to be something of a

shibboleth in current apocalyptic studies. I cannot give a full justification for my way of

pronouncing these terms here, but the following chapters will, I trust, cast a bit more light

on my reasoning.

Part I: Apocalyptic and Visual Culture

Part I of the present study has two goals. First, it serves as a basic introduction to the state of apocalyptic studies (Chapter 1). On my reading, apocalyptic studies is divided between what I call a history-of-literature perspective and a history-of-religions perspective. The division is not always antagonistic, though apologists on either side of the divide have sometimes presented it as such. Understanding the two perspectives, how they arose, and what they hope to accomplish—the ultimate interpretive ends toward which they strive—is crucial for understanding the difficulties that attend the study of apocalyptic images. The second goal of Part I (Chapters 2 and 3) is to serve as an introduction to apocalyptic images in the context of Visual Studies and Image Studies. We will need to rehearse the history of scholarship on apocalyptic images more specifically. The two perspectives on apocalyptic studies have generated two different impressions of apocalyptic images. The history-of-literature perspective tends to understand "images" as rhetorical devices, tropological language, or emotionally evocative illocutions. The history-of-religions perspective is more complicated. It tends somewhat more to emphasize images as visually evocative language or as verbal representations of visual phenomena, though, owing to its affinity with tradition-history also highlights the biblical and sometimes mythological literary traditions from which the images are pulled. Thus, although scholars working within what I call the history-of-religions perspective are generally comfortable positing visionary experience behind the apocalypses, they have found it difficult to come to grips with the visuality of apocalyptic images. The main problem that surfaces in the history of scholarship is a problem of terminology: what is meant by "image" in the study of apocalyptic? Intimately bound up

with the answer to this question is a further consideration: do these "images" operate in

verbal mode, visual mode, or both? To answer these questions I will introduce the

rudiments of Visual Studies and Image Studies as a theoretical basis from which to move the

discussion of apocalyptic images forward. Because of the breadth and eccentric nature of

these fields, this introduction will be necessarily reductionistic and partial, but it will highlight

the attention Visual Studies has paid to the verbal-visual dichotomy or the word-image

opposition, and the stimulating discussions of the nature of images from Image Studies.

Chapter 1. Two Tales of Apocalyptic

> But, when we consider the conditions under which scholars addressed themselves in those days to the study of the Apocalypse, we cannot but acknowledge that a valid interpretation was wholly beyond their reach. For such an interpretation they were without the necessary equipment. They had no knowledge at all, or at best the very slightest, of Jewish Apocalyptic—a disability under which ninety-nine out of every one hundred expositors of the Apocalypse have labored in the past.
>
> R. H. Charles, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*[1]

> So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false? – It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments.
>
> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*[2]

"Apocalyptic" and Vagaries of Meaning

What is apocalyptic? In his treatment of Jewish religion and society before 70 CE, Seth Schwartz identifies God, Temple, and Torah as the covenantal ideological system of Jewish religion.[3] But covenantal ideology was only one part of the religious system of early Judaism. The other side of the ideological complex of ancient Judaism, which challenged and compensated for the covenantal ideology, Schwartz calls simply "The Myth."[4] By this term Schwartz intends something like Jewish apocalyptic. He is careful, though, not to employ the term apocalyptic too readily, and as warrant for his caution he cites the "still controverted definition of apocalyptic."[5] Such candor is refreshing, as the majority of

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[1] R. H. Charles, *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922), 3.

[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* (3d ed.; trans. G. E. M. Anscombe; Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), §§ 241, 242.

[3] Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), esp. 62-66.

[4] Schwartz, *Imperialism*, 74-82.

[5] Schwartz, *Imperialism*, 75.

scholars who review the current state of apocalyptic studies generally display more

confidence in the "progress" that has been made since the 1970s.[6]

In English-writing scholarship, the term "apocalyptic," used as a noun (actually, a

substantive adjective), is derived from the German *Apokalyptik*. But to what does this

substantive term apply? A literary genre? An historical movement? A particular social

ideology or worldview? A distinctive theological perspective? As Adela Yarbro Collins puts

it, the retention of the term "apocalyptic" in English scholarship "converted a respectable

German noun into the substantive use of an adjective with a vague reference."[7] Yarbro

Collins follows the standard procedure of North American apocalyptic scholarship in

suggesting the term "apocalyptic" as a substantive be dropped, in lieu of the terms

"apocalypse" to denote a literary genre and "apocalypticism" to reflect a worldview, social

ideology, or theological system or perspective. The division of terminology which seeks to

overcome the controverted definition of apocalyptic referred to by Schwartz actually

highlights the fact that, regardless of the terminology, two different perspectives on the

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[6] John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998); Adela Yarbro Collins, "Apocalypse Now: The State of Apocalyptic Studies Near the End of the First Decade of the Twenty-First Century," *HTR* 104 (2011): 447-57. Other useful overviews of apocalyptic studies include Bennie H. Reynolds III, *Between Symbolism and Realism: The Use of Symbolic and Non-Symbolic Language in Ancient Jewish Apocalypses 333 – 63 B.C.E.* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 36-59; Lorenzo DiTommaso, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity (Part I)," *CBR* 5 (2007), 235-86; idem., "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity (Part II)," *CBR* 5 (2007), 367-432; and Lester Grabbe, "Introduction and Overview," in *Knowing the End from the Beginning: The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic, and their Relationships* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak; London: T&T Clark, 2003), 3-7; and for scholarship up until the 1960s, see especially J. M. Schmidt, *Die jüdische Apokalyptik: Die Geschichte ihrer Erforschung von den Anfängen bis zu den Textfunden von Qumran* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969). Other introductions to defining the term apocalyptic/ism include: Michael Tilly, *Apokalyptik* (Tübingen: A. Francke, 2012), 9-19; Crispin Fletcher-Louis, "Jewish Apocalyptic and Apocalypticism," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1569-1607; David E. Aune, "Understanding Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic," *Word & World* 25 (2005): 233-45 (=*Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 1-12); John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1-11; idem, "Genre, Ideology and Social Movements in Jewish Apocalypticism," in *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium* (ed. John J. Collins and James H. Charlesworth; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 11-32.

[7] Yarbro Collins, "Apocalypse Now," 447.

ultimate object of study for apocalyptic studies vie with each other: a history-of-literature

approach that privileges apocalypses as the object of study and a history-of-religions

approach that has as its goal a description of apocalyptic/ism as a historical phenomenon

(social, cultural, and religious).[8]

Apocalyptic and Religionsgeschichte

Until the 1980s, the history-of-religions approach to Jewish and Christian apocalyptic

was the dominant perspective. Scholars like Hermann Gunkel, Wilhelm Bousset, and Philip

Vielhauer, not to mention the overwhelming majority of contributors to the extremely

important Uppsala conference on apocalypticism in 1979, were interested in the total

religious phenomenon of apocalyptic, and not merely the literature.[9] Their concern was with

the religious phenomenon, which they thought could be explored in the apocalypses—

especially the book of Revelation—but also beyond them.

Although they gave rise to the history-of-literature approach to apocalyptic, Klaus

Koch and Paul Hanson also stand in the history-of-religions tradition. Many scholars claim

that apocalyptic studies was in a state of disarray before 1970, when Klaus Koch published

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[8] I do not mean these labels in a technical sense, but in a descriptive sense. The history-of-religions perspective, for instance, does not bear a direct genetic relationship with the so-called *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though the former does resemble the latter somewhat in its emphases and aims.

[9] Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006 [1895]); Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (6th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906); Philip Vielhauer and Georg Strecker, "Apocalypses and Related Subjects" in *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume Two: Writings Relating to the Apostles; Apocalpyses and Related Subject* (ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher; revised English ed., R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 542-68 (NB: Most of this introduction to apocalyptic literature is the same verbatim in the fifth German edition of 1989—wherein the introduction to apocalyptic was revised by Georg Strecker, and which serves as the text for the revised English translation—as in the third German edition of 1964, and was penned by Vielhauer); David Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (2d ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989 [1983]).

his provocative little book, *Ratlos vor der Apokalyptik*.[10] One of the reasons Koch thought

scholars were "at a loss" over apocalyptic was lack of precision in terminology.[11] The term

"apocalypse," as Koch noted, had been used to designate ancient books that resembled the

book of Revelation, but alongside the generic definition the more general term "apocalyptic"

had been applied "not only to the common mental and spiritual background of the relevant

late Israelite and early Christian writings," but also "to characterize a certain kind of religious

speculation about the future of man and the world."[12] The term was determined, therefore,

not by any stable methodology, nor was it controlled by any set of texts, but was at the

mercy of any particular scholar's proclivities. The textual evidence for apocalyptic was

determined by a specific text's resemblance to the book of Revelation. The parameters of

what counted as "resemblance," however, were entirely at the judgment of each individual

scholar. Without a defined set of texts that served as evidence for apocalyptic, there was no

way to corral the widely differing notions of what exactly counted as apocalyptic.

Terminological precision—the terms upon which any constructive debate could take place—

was at stake. Koch therefore recommended that the term "apocalypse" be used of the

literary genre, while the broader term "apocalyptic" be used of the historical movement

stipulated by assuming a common *Sitz im Leben* for the literature. The connection between

literature and historical movement, for Koch, depended entirely on the form-critical

assumption that specific forms of literature arise under the conditions of certain situations of

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[10] *Ratlos vor der Apokalyptik* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1970); English translation, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1972).

[11] It should be noted that Koch also found scholars to be unsympathetic if not actually antipathetic toward the theological perspective and imagery of the apocalyptic books. For Koch, this scholarly disposition was at least as influential on scholarly puzzlement over *Apokalyptik* as the terminological imprecision. See Koch, *Rediscovery*, 18-20.

[12] Koch, *Rediscovery*, 20.

life, which provides a mechanism for preserving an organic connection between the

literature and a historical movement.

Paul Hanson capitalized on Koch's suggestion by arguing that a tripartite

terminology was actually required.[13] Hanson protested the vague use of "apocalyptic" to

stand for a literary genre, a social ideology, and also those eschatological elements in early

Christian literature or other writings that were often called apocalyptic.[14] He argued

influentially that the macro-term "apocalyptic" should be replaced with distinctions between

the literary genre *apocalypse*, *apocalyptic eschatology* as the central perspective of apocalyptic

thought, and the social ideology or symbolic universe *apocalypticism*. These terms were to

remain distinct, and yet somehow connected. Let us consider the following statements:

> *Apocalypse.* This term designates a literary genre which is one of the favored
> media used by apocalyptic writers to communicate their messages. It is by
> no means the exclusive, or even the dominant, genre in most apocalyptic
> writings, but is found alongside many others, including the testament, the
> salvation-judgment oracle, and the parable. The socioreligious phenomenon
> of apocalypticism, therefore, must not be uncritically identified with the
> literary form of the apocalypse.[15]
>
> Apocalyptic eschatology…is neither a genre, nor a socioreligious movement,
> nor a system of thought, but rather a religious perspective, a way of viewing
> divine plans in relation to mundane realities. …[I]t is a perspective which
> individuals or groups can embrace in varying degrees at different times, even
> as the modern person or community can vacillate between religious,
> superstitious, and scientific perspectives.[16]
>
> While apocalypticism cannot be identified with the perspective of apocalyptic
> eschatology, a relation does exist: apocalypticism is latent in apocalyptic

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[13] Paul D. Hanson, "Apocalypticism," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume* (ed. K. Crim; Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 28-34.

[14] As in Ernst Käsemann's famous claim that "Apocalyptic was the mother of Christian theology" by which he meant simply that Christian theology arose under the pressure of the expectation of the imminent *parousia* of Jesus. Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (trans. W. J. Montague; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 102. The essay in which Käsemann made this statement, "The Beginnings of Christian Theology" was originally published in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* in 1960.

[15] Hanson, "Apocalypticism," 29.

[16] Hanson, "Apocalypticism," 29.

> eschatology, and can grow out of the perspective it provides.
> …Apocalypticism refers to the symbolic universe in which an apocalyptic
> movement codifies its identity and interpretation of reality. This symbolic
> universe crystallizes around the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology which
> the movement adopts. Since the symbolic universes generated by different
> apocalyptic movements will differ from one another as a result of conditions
> surrounding the organic growth of the individual symbol systems, it is not
> possible to give one formal cognitive definition of apocalypticism.[17]

For Hanson, it seems, everything truly begins with the social movement. The apocalyptic
writers used the genre apocalypse; apocalypses cannot be identified with the historical
movement, though. Apocalyptic eschatology is the basic perspective of this social
movement, with a pessimistic if not antagonistic disposition toward "dominant society."
Apocalypticism is the full-blown symbolic universe of the movement that resulted if the
apocalyptic society's situation (*Sitz im Leben*) so pushed the eschatological perspective over a
tipping point. But since each community's situation was its own, no two instances of
apocalypticism would be quite the same. In other words, fundamentally all things
apocalyptic begin with a historical social group with a basic eschatological perspective.
Situation, context, and historical accident determine whether or not that group's perspective
developed into a coherent apocalypticism and whether or not that group produced out of its
social experience any apocalypses, or whether they produced other kinds of writings
(testaments, oracles, parables, etc.). These latter writings legitimately can be called
apocalyptic because of their basic eschatological perspective and/or the evidence of an
apocalyptic symbolic universe informing the text at hand.

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[17] Hanson, "Apocalypticism," 30.

Apocalypse as Literature

Although they advocated further study of a literary genre apocalypse, through their form-critical commitments both Koch and Hanson were beholden to a history-of-religions perspective.[18] Even so, they unwittingly gave rise to a more narrowly construed history-of-literature approach to apocalyptic. The now standard definition of the genre was published in 1979 in the journal *Semeia* (volume 14).[19] The work of the group who produced this definition (the Apocalypse Group of the Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project) took its cue from Koch and Hanson, as John Collins's introduction to the volume makes clear. The project echoed the general consensus of the Uppsala Colloquium, which also took place in 1979, that further research should proceed "*contra definitionem, pro descriptione.*"[20] The "definition" offered by the group was really at heart a "description" of the main features of ancient apocalyptic literature. But at the same time, it deferred description of apocalypticism.

One methodological consequence of scrutiny over the genre apocalypse, however, was the severing of the connection between social group/religious movement and literary genre. Collins already noted in his introduction to *Semeia* 14 that "our analysis of the genre does not presuppose that all the works identified as 'apocalypses' have a common social milieu."[21] In a later contribution he writes, "It does not seem to me that social setting can be

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[18] Cf. Paul D. Hanson, "Prolegomena to the Study of Jewish Apocalyptic," in *Magnalia Dei: The Might Acts of God* (ed. Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller, Jr.; New York: Doubleday, 1976), 403-404.

[19] John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: Morphology of a Genre* (*Semeia* 14; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1979), 9: "'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world."

[20] Cf. David Hellholm, "Introduction," in Hellholm, *Apocalypticism*, 2.

[21] Collins, *Apocalypse*, 4.

inferred from literary genre."[22] The goal of defining the genre was to establish a clear set of

texts which would form the center of what apocalyptic (either as an adjective or a noun)

might mean. In several places, Collins has cited Koch as a warrant for beginning with a

specific group of texts ("apocalypse") rather than a vague family resemblance

("apocalyptic"): "If we are to succeed at all in the future in arriving at a binding definition of

apocalyptic, a starting point in form criticism and literary and linguistic history is, in the

nature of things, the only one possible."[23] There is some irony here. Form criticism, after

all, posits a direct correspondence between literary form (which is not necessarily equivalent

with the term genre) and life situation, or social milieu. In Koch's words, "[N]o biblical text

can be adequately understood without a consideration of the setting in life of its literary type.

And vice versa: no way of life in ancient Israel and in the early Christian community can be

exhaustively detailed without a thorough study of all literary types relating to it."[24] The

reason Koch advocated a literary approach was because he thought it would reveal the *Sitz

im Leben* of the *religionsgeschichtliche* phenomenon. Hanson likewise thought literary genre

would lead to social situation: "Such analysis of form will open the door to…the

sociological matrix within which apocalyptic arose."[25] With Collins, the connection between

texts and sociological matrix had been severed. So, when Collins paraphrases Koch as

saying, "the word 'apocalyptic' refers first of all to a body of literature, and any analysis of

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[22] Collins, "Genre," 19.

[23] Koch, *Rediscovery*, 23.

[24] Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Traditions: The Form-Critical Method* (New York: Scribner's, 1969), 33.

[25] Hanson, "Prolegomena," 403. Hanson shows more caution than I have in talking about *Sitz im Leben*, a caution which should be noted in conjunction with my discussion: "We hesitate to use the designation *Sitz im Leben* for this inquiry, since the original scope of Gunkel's *Sitz im Volksleben Israels* has been narrowed and weakened in nearly all scholarship since his time; whereas Gunkel could speak of dealing in the question of *Sitz im Leben*, with the movements of the masses, the term has come to apply almost exclusively to the *cultic* setting of Israel's genres. …We must broaden the scope of form-critical research so as to investigate this broader setting [of the masses]. …Application of insights from sociology, and even cautious application of modern analogies, promise to make more intelligible the background and thus the essential nature of apocalyptic."

the phenomenon must begin with an analysis of the literature," his reading is a little too simplistic.[26] It is not clear that for Koch or Hanson "'apocalyptic' refers first of all to a body of literature" so much as it refers both to a body of literature *and* that literature's setting in life, though it certainly is true that for Koch at least "any analysis of the phenomenon must begin with an analysis of the literature."[27]

Since the 1980s most North American scholarship on apocalyptic has followed the history-of-literature approach.[28] The fundamental conviction of this strand of scholarship is the following: "The use of the term ['apocalyptic'] should be controlled by analogy with the apocalyptic texts, and not allowed to float freely as an intuitive 'theological concept.'"[29] These are not, however, the only alternatives. Certainly, loose theological concepts are no firm basis for establishing a common definition of apocalyptic. Collins is absolutely right that we must begin with texts—we do not have anything else to start from. The apocalyptists are not now (if ever they were) a distinguishable social group. We have no distinguishable material evidence for apocalyptists that we are aware of. For the ideology of such persons or groups we have only their texts. But the modern scholarly language of

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[26] Collins, "Genre," 13.

[27] It should be noted, however, that Koch acknowledged that literary forms could outlive their original *Sitz im Leben*. The literary and oral forms persisted even when the original life situation had changed significantly. Even so, that means that not only may many literary forms arise from the same life situation, but indeed over the course of its history, one literary type may reflect a variety of life situations. Koch acknowledges, "*The relationship of a literary type or a formula to its setting in life* is so close that it is rarely capable of expression in simple terms, for it *is subjected to extremely various and far-reaching changes*" (Koch, *Growth*, 37; emphasis original).

[28] There is an exception: New Testament scholars interested in the apocalypticism of Jesus, and especially of Paul, have generally not generated their conceptions of apocalyptic from the extant apocalyptic literature; e.g., Ernst Käsemann, "The Beginnings of Christian Theology," and "On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic," in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 82-107, 108-37; Richard E. Sturm, "Defining the Word 'Apocalyptic': A Problem in Biblical Criticism," in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards; Sheffield: JSOT Press), 17-48; though see Martinus C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 1* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988).

[29] Collins, "Genre," 24.

apocalypse and apocalypticism, though related to ancient terminology, is anachronistic, as Collins freely admits. What Collins seems to miss is that the modern construction of the terms means the priority of the texts is epistemic, not ontological. The emphasis on the literature is *procedural* and therefore contingent. Understanding apocalyptic texts is our ticket into any discussion at all—the *sine qua non*—but not necessarily the end-goal. It may be that our only interest is in the literary genre apocalypse, but many scholars wish to go further and ask questions about the religious thought or experience that gave rise to the literature. In this case, once inside the conversation the procedure must become dialectical—between literature and religious phenomenon—or it will always be trapped talking only about literature. If we cannot posit a direct relationship between genre and social setting—and I agree we cannot—we nevertheless cannot simply jettison the idea that the texts may serve as evidence for actual religious phenomena *beyond* the literary.

In his review of the Uppsala volume Florentino García Martínez worried that Collins's work ultimately led to a reduction of apocalyptic to the literary genre.[30] Collins rejected this charge, writing that the methodological starting point with a specific body of texts "is not to say that apocalypticism should be reduced to the literary genre, or viewed only as a literary convention. It is simply to affirm the methodological necessity of a common starting point."[31] It is hard to escape the impression, though, that the only questions Collins thinks worth asking are literary questions. And certainly some of Martha Himmelfarb's arguments do seem to reduce apocalyptic to a literary phenomenon, precisely

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[30] F. García Martínez, "Encore l'Apocalyptique," *JSJ* 17 (1986), 229: "L'effort pour determiner le genre littéraire des apocalypses est méritoire et éclairant. Mais la tendance à réduire l'Apocalyptique au genre littéraire Apocalypse mène à une vision a-historique des texts, à méconnaître leur function et à ignorer la place que des elements apocalyptiques comme Jub. 23 ou Test. Lévi 2-5 ont dans les livres dans lesquels ils ont été transmis."

[31] Collins, "Genre," 13.

when one inquires about the religious experience evidenced by apocalyptic texts.[32] But what if the questions of current interest are precisely questions about the religious experience of apocalyptists? What if we want to inquire about the religious world in which the apocalyptists lived and moved and had their being? The history-of-literature approach offers no path from literature to religious experience.

Apocalypse as Religious Phenomenon and Religious Experience

      The history-of-literature path has largely been a North American affair.[33] Across the Atlantic apocalyptic studies adopted a different set of emphases, and it continued to be interested in a history-of-religions approach. In 1982 Christopher Rowland published his seminal account of apocalyptic, *The Open Heaven*, in which he argued that the center of the apocalyptic religious outlook is concerned not with eschatology (*pace* Hanson), but with the direct disclosure of heavenly secrets.[34] "The key to the whole [apocalyptic] movement," writes Rowland, "is that God reveals his mysteries directly to man and thereby gives them

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[32] Martha Himmelfarb, "Revelation and Rapture: The Transformation of the Visionary in the Ascent Apocalypses," in Collins and Charlesworth, *Mysteries*, 87: "[W]e need to confront head-on a crucial fact…: the apocalypses are literature, indeed one might even say fiction." Cf. Martha Himmelfarb, "The Practice of Ascent in the Ancient Mediterranean World," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane; Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 123-37. For further elaboration, see also Martha Himmelbarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 95-114.

[33] The prominence of Collins and the history-of-literature approach in North America is indicated in Lorenzo DiTommaso's review of apocalyptic scholarship. DiTommaso attributes the modern study of apocalyptic to the instigation of Käsemann and Pannenberg, and he identifies the "advent of a new era of critical scholarship" with the works of Koch, Hanson, Vielhauer, Collins, the volume *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'apocalypse dans le Nouveau Testament* (Jan Lambrecht, ed.; Gembloux: Duculot, 1979), *Semeia* 14 (Collins, *Apocalypse*), and the Uppsala volume (Hellholm, *Apocalypticism*). Notably missing (though not missing in Collins's own account) is Christopher Rowland's seminal work: *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982). Either this is a simple oversight, or more likely it is a blind-spot created by the history-of-literature methodology. Also missing are Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980) and Michael Stone's important article, "Lists of Revealed Things in Apocalyptic Literature," in Cross, et al., *Magnalia Dei*, 414-52.

[34] Rowland, *Open Heaven*. Rowland acknowledges his debt to Continental development in apocalyptic studies, citing G. Bornkamm, D. Flusser, J. Frey, J. Schreiner, and M. Hengel (449, n. 2).

knowledge of the true nature of reality so that they may organize their lives accordingly."[35]

The emphasis on the revelation of heavenly mysteries has been a constant concern of all of

Rowland's work on apocalyptic since.[36] Rowland holds onto the term "apocalyptic" as a

noun to refer both to the literary genre and to a specific religious outlook, but he writes of

apocalyptic first and foremost as a way of being religious with literary manifestations: "The

literary form in which this type of religion normally manifested itself was the apocalypse, a

Jewish literary genre of a fairly fixed type."[37] Whereas for Collins, Himmelfarb, and others

the matter under investigation is apocalyptic literature, for Rowland the religious outlook of

a movement who privileged immediate divine revelation is of prime concern. In other

words, Rowland begins precisely where Collins argued we cannot—with apocalypticism,

rather than apocalypse. Or, to put it more accurately, Rowland's interest in the literature has

less to do with generic and formal features and far more to do with the literature as evidence

for a distinctive kind of religiosity. Rowland sees a religious outlook as the unifying center

of the literature, whereas Collins considers literary form to be the unifying principle.[38]

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[35] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 11.

[36] See also Christopher Rowland, "Apocalyptic: the Disclosure of Heavenly Knowledge," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism, volume three: The Early Roman Period* (ed. William Horbury and W. D. Davies; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 776-97; and Christopher Rowland, "Things into Which Angels Long to Look: Approaching Mysticism from the Perspective of the New Testament and the Jewish Apocalypses," in Christopher Rowland and Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1-216.

[37] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 49. This perspective is found throughout the book: "[T]he unifying factor which joins both [Daniel and Revelation] and separates them from other contemporary literature is the conviction that runs through both, that man is able to know about the divine mysteries by means of revelation, so that God's eternal purposes may be disclosed, and man, as a result, may see history in a totally new light" (13).

[38] It will do us little good to examine this problem further here. Needless to say both procedures are circular. Collins assumes that in establishing a literary genre he can work in a purely inductive mode to arrive at apocalypticism (the apocalyptic worldview). But the modern definition of genre is already beholden to a conventional set of texts which were originally grouped together and labeled apocalyptic by their affinity with the book of Revelation, especially in their eschatological aspect. Rowland's procedure is more obviously circular, claiming to study a religious outlook evident in a particular genre, but largely defining the genre by the religious outlook.

Although Rowland is primarily concerned with challenging the prevailing association

of apocalyptic with eschatology, he also ends up challenging the notion that apocalyptic is at

base a literary phenomenon. Rowland highlights the close relationship between apocalyptic

texts and early Rabbinic mystical speculation on the Creation and on the Merkavah.[39]

Moreover, Rowland assumes that the visionary character of the apocalypses is not merely

rhetorical, but rather reflects visionary experience.[40] Whereas the history-of-literature

approach has dominated the bulk of apocalyptic studies in the last thirty years, recent

scholarship shows a marked tendency to consider religious experience (i.e. mysticism) as the

core of apocalyptic. The Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism group of the Society of

Biblical Literature (now the Esotericism and Mysticism in Antiquity group) has drawn a great

deal of interest since 1995. In 2006 a set of papers from the group were published, edited by

April DeConick.[41] Included are a paper by Rowland on visionary experience, one by James

R. Davila on the ancient Jewish apocalypses in comparison with the *Hekhalot* literature, and

indeed an entire section on apocalypticism. Even a brief perusal of the contents of the

volume shows how closely wedded apocalypticism and mysticism are in this recent

scholarship.

Crispin Fletcher-Louis proposes that this trajectory of scholarship hails a new stage

in the study of apocalyptic.[42] This new perspective on apocalyptic is marked by attention to

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[39] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 3. Cf. Rowland and Morray-Jones, *Mystery*, 28-31; Rowland, "Apocalyptic," 786-87. See also Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*.

[40] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 49-61, 214-47, 271-357. Cf. Rowland and Morray-Jones, *Mystery*, 26-31; Judith L. Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 35-37, 40-42; Rowland, "Apocalyptic," 780; and Christopher Rowland, with Patricia Gibbons and Vicente Dobroruka, "Visionary Experience in Ancient Judaism and Christianity," in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (April D. DeConick, ed.; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 41-56.

[41] DeConick, *Paradise Now*.

[42] Crispin Fletcher-Louis, "Religious Experience and the Apocalypses" in *Experientia, Volume 1: Inquiry into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Francis Flannery, Colleen Shantz, and Rodney A.

experience (religious, mystical, and/or visionary). Rowland conceived of apocalyptic visionary experience as "direct" and unmediated.[43] For Fletcher-Louis apocalyptic experiences were prepared for in the temple cosmology of the apocalyptists; the experiences were theologically mediated. Jim Davila has traced the role of preparatory ascetic techniques in the mystical (shamanistic) journeys of the "descenders to the chariot" of the *Hekhalot* literature.[44] Michael Stone has argued that only a visionary experience behind 4 Ezra could grant coherence of meaning to the text.[45]

Religious experiences are, of course, grounded in a larger religious matrix and mediated (i.e. prepared for or conditioned) by cultural patterns of religion. They presuppose and are shaped by the religious traditions on which a religious community draws. April DeConick, who works mostly with early Christian mysticism, has suggested that a "new *Traditionsgeschichtliche* approach" to early Christianity is necessary. DeConick claims that the work of historians of early Christianity has stalled:

> [T]he results of their studies have been restrictive because they have further
> suspended us inside individual texts so that we are left to garner meaning of
> the traditions in isolation from other ancient texts and their traditions.
> …The Academy is in the precarious position of supporting a reconstruction
> of the history of Jesus and early Christianity that is historically implausible if
> not impossible, a reconstruction that empties the texts of the Christians'

Werline; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 125-45; Fletcher-Louis, "Jewish Apocalyptic." In addition to visionary experience Fletcher-Louis notes the increased interest in temple cosmology at the roots of early Jewish mysticism in general and apocalyptic in particular (Fletcher-Louis, "Jewish Apocalyptic," 1591-7).

[43] A notion Fletcher-Louis has rightly contested ("Jewish Apocalyptic," 1592). Indeed, Rowland seems to move away from unmediated experience in a more recent article on the subject (Rowland, Gibbons, and Dobroruka, "Visionary Experience"), where he explores recent research which draws on Riceour's interpretation of *mimesis* to explicate the psychological conditions for such experiences.

[44] James R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People Behind the Hekhalot Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). See also his comparison of shamanic technique—which he derives from cross-cultural studies of shamanism— in the *Hekhalot* literature to apocalyptic literature in James R. Davila, "The Ancient Jewish Apocalypses and the *Hekhalot* Literature" in DeConick, *Paradise Now*, 105-26.

[45] Michael Stone, *Fourth Ezra* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990); Michael Stone, "A Reconsideration of Apocalyptic Visions," *HTR* 96 (2003): 167-80; Michael Stone, *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 90-108; Michael Stone, "On Reading An Apocalyspe," in Collins and Charlesworth, *Mysteries*, 65-78.

strong feelings about and hopes for religious experience, a reconstruction
that fails to recognize that the Christian texts came out of living communities
of people with deep roots in streams of Jewish religious traditions.[46]

It does not take much imagination to see how DeConick's indictment could also be leveled

at the history-of-literature perspective withing apocalyptic scholarship. Scholarship

following this approach also seems to "suspend us" inside individual texts or at least inside a

specific genre. Religious experience and the living communities of which the apocalyptists

were a part tend to fall out of discussion. As just one example we might cite the way key

phrases, like "I saw" in John's Apocalypse, are taken as structural indications rather than as,

say, evocations of vision or even the attempt to present visionary verisimilitude.[47] DeConick

takes her inspiration from the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, and its concern to situate early

Christianity in its religious and cultural milieu. The recent wave of apocalyptic scholarship

which is consonant with Rowland also ultimately owes a debt to the *Religionsgeschichtliche*

Schule.[48] Wilhelm Bousset's commentary on the book of Revelation has proven particularly

influential, especially through its influence on Philip Vielhauer's article on apocalyptic. But

even when the debt to the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* is not explicit, a fundamental sympathy

with the aims of the *Schule* can be observed.

Especially important in this vein of scholarship is the increased attention to the

connections between apocalyptic visions and Jewish mystical traditions. Already in 1980

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[46] April DeConick, *Recovering the Original* Gospel of Thomas*: A History of the Gospel and its Growth* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 5. I am not convinced that "*Traditionsgeschichtliche*" is quite the right label for DeConick's approach, since *Traditionsgeschichte* was in my estimation more textually inclined than DeConick. I have instead, therefore, opted for *Religionsgeschichtliche*.

[47] So, e.g., Ralph J. Korner, "'And I Saw…' An Apocalyptic Literary Convention for Structural Identification in the Apocalypse," *NovT* 42 (2000): 160-83.

[48] Jarl Fossum takes a cue from Martin Hengel's blurb on the back cover of the first American edition of Larry Hurtado's *One Lord, One God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), wherein Hengel identifies Hurtado as one member of a new *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. Gauging by Hurtado's main interlocutors, Fossum infers that other members of this nascent movement include Christopher Rowland, Alan Segal, Jarl Fossum, and Carey Newman (Jarl Fossum, "The New *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*: The Quest for Jewish Christology," *SBL Seminar Papers, 1991* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1991], 638).

Ithamar Gruenwald had examined the similarities between apocalyptic and Merkavah

mysticism.[49] I have already mentioned that these connections were pivotal also for

Rowland's work. Jim Davila draws connections between the ancient apocalypses and the

Hekhalot literature.[50] April DeConick discusses the centrality of Jewish mystical thought to

apocalyptic thought.[51] Crispin Fletcher-Louis has emphasized the role of temple cosmology

in generating the religious experiences of the apocalyptists.[52] DeConick explains the notion

of temple cosmology, pointing especially to the themes of the divine *Kavod*, the divine throne

(*Merkavah*), and the heavenly temple: "These themes collectively represent the 'worldview'

or cosmology that undergirds mystical discussions within early Judaism and Christianity, a

cosmology that appears to have strong connections with older Jewish priestly

traditions…."[53] The temple could be construed as a microcosm of the world, but in the

period under discussion I think it would be more appropriate (if oddly phrased) to turn the

formula around—the early Jewish and Christian mystics saw the world—indeed the earth

and the heavens—as a macrocosm of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple is understood as

the center or navel of the universe.[54] These connections between temple cosmology and

Jewish mysticism have been underscored by the work of Rachel Elior.[55] These scholars

agree that real religious (usually "mystical") experiences underlie the literary expressions

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[49] Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic.*

[50] Davila, "Ancient Jewish Apocalypses," 105-25.

[51] April D. DeConick, "What is Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism?" in DeConick, *Paradise Now*, esp. 18-22.

[52] See also especially Margaret Barker's many works, e.g. Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2004); *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991).

[53] DeConick, "Early Jewish," 11.

[54] The notion of a sacred site as a navel of the universe was, of course, famously explored by Mircea Eliade in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005 [1959]), esp. 12-17.

[55] Rachel Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (trans. David Louvish; Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004); cf. idem, "The Emergence of the Mystical Traditions of the *Merkavah*," in DeConick, *Paradise Now*, 83-103.

called apocalypses, and increasingly they point to temple traditions—temple cosmology, temple theology, and even temple piety—at the heart of these mystical traditions.

Literaturgeschichte or *Religionsgeschichte*?

Sometimes these two perspectives on apocalyptic have been pitched as inherently at odds. The history-of-literature scholars have sometimes charged the history-of-religions scholarship of "setting back" scholarship by failing to take into account the need to begin with the literature and control scholarly discourse about what counts as apocalyptic by the generic features and individual exemplars of the genre. Consider also Collins's response to Lester Grabbe's argument that *apocalyptic* (as a noun) is still a viable analytic category:

> Grabbe is not proposing that we abandon 'apocalypse' as the name of a literary form, but in speaking of 'apocalyptic' he is, if I understand him correctly, refusing to take the literary form as the starting point of the discussion, and the touchstone for what should count as 'apocalyptic.' …To revert to this usage, in my view, is to set the discussion back to the state of confusion that prevailed before Koch wrote his monograph. I should add that 'apocalypticism' should not be the starting point of the discussion either. We need to start from a specific body of texts, not from the vague notion of family resemblance.[56]

I suspect the difference between Grabbe and Collins is not simply about one's starting point so much as one's final goal. Grabbe retains the term "apocalyptic" because he is interested in describing the religious phenomenon. Meanwhile those who hold a history-of-religions perspective have voiced frustration that scholarship from the history-of-literature perspective seems trapped in the literature, with no avenue toward the larger religious, social, and cultural phenomenon that gave rise to the literature (see the concerns of García Martínez above).

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[56] John J. Collins, "Prophecy, Apocalypse, and Eschatology: Reflections on the Proposals of Lester Grabbe," in Grabbe and Haak, *Knowing*, 47.

Increasingly, however, these two approaches are seen as complementary. A rather salient indication of this fact is the juxtaposition of an article on "Apocalypse" by John Collins and an article on "Apocalypticism" by Christopher Rowland in a recent scholarly dictionary.[57] The term "apocalypse," Collins writes, is "used to refer to [literary] works like the Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse of John."[58] Rowland acknowledges that "apocalypticism" "is used to designate a pattern of religion found in a variety of forms in a variety of religious traditions."[59] These two articles stand side by side as complementary approaches to apocalyptic studies. History-of-literature scholars increasingly recognize that although generic features are important to understanding the texts better, individual texts may point to religious thought or experiences behind them.[60] History-of-religions scholars readily acknowledge the gains made by intense scrutiny of the genre and the individual texts.[61]

Even so, there are areas of research that are greatly affected by the decision to adopt one or the other of these approaches. Presuppositions in interpretation are never without consequences. The operating assumptions one brings to apocalyptic, for instance, also influence what one means when they examine apocalyptic images. In practice, privileging

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[57] John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow, eds., *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 341-48. The fact that this dictionary was co-edited by John Collins and one of his students, and that they nevertheless invited an article on apocalypticism by Rowland should be noted, I think, as a significant irenic gesture that recognizes the complementarity of the two approaches.

[58] Collins, "Apocalypse," in Collins and Harlow, *Dictionary*, 341.

[59] Rowland, "Apocalypticism," in Collins and Harlow, *Dictionary*, 345.

[60] Himmelfarb ("Revelation," 87-88) recognizes that the answer to "the question of whether the apocalypses represent a reflection of actual experience…is surely different for different apocalypses, and each needs to be considered in its own right." She points to Michael Stone's contribution as an exemplary model of such a consideration. Himmelfarb is willing to grant that at least some apocalypses may represent actual religious experiences.

[61] Again, see García Martínez's remarks ("Encore L'apocalyptique," 229): "L'effort pour determiner le genre littéraire des apocalypses est méritoire et éclairant. Mais…." Also, Fletcher-Louis's acknowledgment ("Jewish Apocalyptic," 1578): "The implementation of [the *Semeia* 14] definition has…advanced the study of Jewish apocalyptic in several respects. There is now greater attention to the specific character of individual texts that tended to be lacking in earlier synthetic or thematically descriptive treatments."

apocalyptic texts also privileges the literary and textual quality of apocalyptic imagery, whereas privileging apocalyptic as "a religious outlook claiming to derive from dreams, visions, and otherworldly journeys, modes of revelation that convey insight into mysteries of the heavenly world and/or the course and climax of history," the visuality (dreams, visions) of apocalyptic imagery may come to the fore.[62]

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[62] Rowland, "Apocalypticism" in Collins and Harlow, *Dictionary*, 345.

Chapter 2. Apocalyptic Images Beyond the Verbal-Visual Opposition

> A *picture* [*Bild*] held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.
> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*[1]

> In the history of Western literature, the importance of the image as a dimension of poetic language does not remain constant.
> Paul de Man, "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image"[2]

Everyone admits that the book of Revelation is full of images, and most have agreed that the same could be said of many if not most ancient apocalypses. What those images are doing, and even what they are, is another matter. "Image" as an analytic term for interpretive ends, is of modern vintage.[3] Its influence on the interpretation of apocalyptic works has nevertheless been palpable. As ubiquitous as the use of "image" and "symbol" are in the study of the apocalypses, few scholars have taken the time to define their terms. Consequently, most scholars use these terms intuitively or they define them implicitly. In this chapter, we will review the use of the term "image" in previous scholarship and the definitions implied therein. We will also need to give some space to the term "symbol," which is so often used as a synonym for "image." The analytic term "image" originated among the Romantics, signifying both something visual and something transcendent. In the study of apocalyptic it became increasingly associated with a literary feature that had little to

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[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (3d ed.; trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, trans.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), I.115: "Ein *Bild* hielt uns gefangen. Und heraus konnten wir nicht, denn es lag in unsrer Sprache, und sie schien es uns nur unerbittlich zu wiederholen."

[2] Paul de Man, "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," in *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism* (ed. Harold Bloom; New York: Norton, 1970), 65. The article is also reprinted as chapter one of Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

[3] As noted by Richard Lanham, *Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (2d ed.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 89-90. By "modern," I mean not simply recent, but "post-Enlightenment."

do with visuality. At the end of the twentieth century, however, important work on the nature of apocalyptic language has opened the way toward a renewed appreciation of the importance of visuality in the images of a book like John's Apocalypse.

The Romantic Image, the Book of Revelation, and Apocalyptic

Austin Farrer may have overreached slightly when he called John's Apocalypse "the one great poem which the first Christian age produced," but his assessment that the book "contains a whole world of spiritual imagery to be entered into and possessed" reiterates a long-standing scholarly opinion on the book and on apocalyptic writings in general.[4] It is from the Romantics and their conception of the "Image" that we receive this notion.[5] Frank Kermode helpfully delineated the term "Romantic" "in a restricted sense, as applicable to the literature of one epoch, beginning in the late years of the eighteenth century and not yet finished." It refers to "the high valuation placed during this period upon the image-making powers of the mind at the expense of its rational powers, and to the substitution of organicist for mechanistic modes of thinking about works of art."[6] Primarily a literary movement, the defining features of Romanticism are the emphasis on the imagination and "organicist" notions of art.[7]

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[4] Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: On the Making of John's Apocalypse* (London: Dacre, 1949), 6.

[5] As far as I can tell, no one has yet noticed the legacy of Romanticism in the study of the book of Revelation, and therefore in apocalyptic studies. This brief exposition is entirely inadequate, but must suffice. I hope to offer a fuller, book-length exposition in due time.

[6] Frank Kermode, *The Romantic Image* (New York: Vintage, 1957), 43.

[7] Although written in 1957, Kermode's judgment that Romanticism continues to the present day can still be claimed. As Forest Pyle has noted, the persistence of Romanticism and the Romantic image is still alternately lamented (Badiou) and valorized (Rancière) (Forest Pyle, "The Romantic Image of the Intentional Structure" in *Releasing the Image: From Literature to New Media* [ed. Jacques Khalip and Robert Mitchell; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011], 181-203, esp. 181-87). By "organicist" I take Kermode to mean a holistic process of artistic creation, inspired art, rather than technical art. See, for instance Kermode's quote on the next page.

Although Romanticism is still alive and well in many ways, Kermode primarily analyzed those whom we might call the classical Romantics, from Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) to William Butler Yeats (1865-1939).[8] The poet and the art of poetry were central for the Romantics. According to Kermode two fundamental beliefs infused the Romantics' idea of poetry: the belief "in the Image as a radiant truth out of space and time," and the belief "in the necessary isolation or estrangement of men who can perceive it."[9] The author was perceived as a lone genius, a "seer," toiling at his art in melancholy but possessed of a superior artistic vision (hence their "isolation or estrangement"). Kermode is more expansive regarding the "Image":

> The work of art itself is symbol, "aesthetic monad"; …"concrete," yet suggestive; a means to truth, a truth unrelated to, and more exalted than that of positivist science, or any observation depending upon the discursive reason; out of the flux of life, and therefore, under one aspect, dead; yet uniquely alive because of its participation in a higher order of existence, and because it is analogous not to a machine but to an organism….[10]

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[8] These pivotal figures are somewhat arbitrary. Handbooks and companions to the Romantic Era or Romanticism or Romantic Literature (the terminology is just as torturous as definitions of apocalyptic!) tend to identify Romanticism with the period from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. The *Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* (ed. Stuart Curran; 2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) identifies the Romantic Era as beginning in 1785 and ending in 1825. The companion volume on German Romanticism (Nicholas Saul, ed., *Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009]) likewise identifies the period as the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. In *The Romanticism Handbook* (ed. Joel Faflak and Sue Chaplin; New York: Continuum, 2011) Joel Faflak identifies the period more specifically from 1789-1837 (2). In the *Handbook of Romanticism Studies* (ed. Joel Faflak and Julia M. Wright; Oxford: Blackwell, 2010) the editors helpfully acknowledge that for a long time Romanticism studies was centered on the "Big Six": William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley (1). But they also acknowledge Yeats as a "latter-day Romantic" (4). Indeed Yeats is nearly always studied as a Romantic, perhaps the last of the Romantics, even though his dates situate him well outside of the "Romantic Period." No doubt Yeats is a large part of the reason Kermode claimed Romanticism as a literary movement was still active in 1957. My choice of a German author and a British author also brings to the fore the fact that it was a phenomenon with various roots and expressions in different cultures.

[9] Kermode, *Romantic Image*, 2.

[10] Kermode, *Romantic Image*, 44.

The *image* was the whole of a work of art and not just a feature.[11] The image was apprehended in a vision, and herein is a double entendre, since the work brought images before the mind's eye of the reader or viewer, and yet the Image was also the product of Vision, i.e. the artist's perspicacity of aesthetic insight or perception.

A full analysis and critique of the Romantic Image is not possible here, of course, but this preliminary description by Kermode points up a few problems with the term. The Image (as an analytic term) was more exalted than scrutinized, which allowed the term a wide range of rhetorical—but not analytic—utility. As literary theorist W. J. T. Mitchell writes:

> In Romantic and modern poetics the verbal image retained its hold over the understanding of literary language, and the confused application of the term to both literal and figurative expression continued to encourage a lumping of notions such as description, concrete nouns, tropes, "sensory" terms, and even recurrent semantic, syntactic, or phonemic motifs under the rubric "imagery." In order to do all this work, however, the notion of imagery had to be sublimated and mystified. Romantic writers typically assimilate mental, verbal, and even pictorial imagery into the mysterious process of "imagination," which is typically defined in contrast to the "mere" recall of mental pictures, the "mere description of external scenes, and (in painting) the "mere" depiction of external visibilia, as opposed to the spirit, feeling, or "poetry" of a scene.[12]

The image was mystified as the genius vision of an artist and elevated as a guarantor of non-discursive truth. The Romantic "mystification" of the image is found among nearly all major interpreters of the Apocalypse from the end of the eighteenth century to the end of the

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[11] As W. J. T. Mitchell writes: "The progressive sublimation of the image reaches its logical culmination when the entire poem or text is regarded as an image or 'verbal icon,' and this image is defined, not as a pictorial likeness or impression, but as a synchronic structure in some metaphorical space—'that which' (in Pound's words) 'presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'" (W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986], 25). The use of image to point to the entire work of art is not unequivocal. Yeats, for instance, described the *image* as replete with "emblems," which is to say, *images* of the *image*; for which, see Paul de Man, *Rhetoric*, 145-238, 301-19 (=ch. 8: "Image and Emblem in Yeats").

[12] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 24.

twentieth, and it is still the dominant notion of "image" in the study of the book of Revelation and apocalyptic literature.

The eminent critic, poet, theologian, and scholar Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) was a founding figure of German Romanticism, and he applied his talents more than once to the book of Revelation.[13] For Herder the book of Revelation presents "things which are worth knowing for [Christ's] servants," because when they "read them, hear them, and keep them, they receive the prize of happiness."[14] But only if one has eyes to see and ears to hear. For Herder, as with his mentor Hamann, the adequate interpreter of any piece of literature required a certain *Einfühlung* or empathy with the author's spirit and aims, particularly in the case of the poet. The poet put into words and language the spirit of a people (*Volksgeist*), and the truth of their spirit. In order to grasp that truth the interpreter must enter into that spirit. So, too, with the book of Revelation, one must stand in the place of the seer, adopting a transcendent position in order to grasp the truth of the book: "The more we stand in the viewpoint—raised above all divisions, multliplicity, dispersions of Time—in the viewpoint of the One, of the Future, in Communion and Concord with him: the more will our eyes also see!"[15] Comprehending the Apocalypse, for Herder, meant *seeing.*

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[13] Herder wrote two works on John's Apocalypse: *Johannes Offenbarung: Ein Heiliges Gesicht* (1774) and *ΜΑΡΑΝ ΑΘΑ: Das Buch von der Zukunft des Herrn, des Neuen Testaments Siegel* (1779), both collected in *Sämmtliche Werke,* volume 9 (ed. Bernhard Suphan; Berlin: Weidmansche Buchhandlung, 1893), to which all citations herein refer. For Herder as a founding figure in German Romanticism, see Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (ed. Henry Hardy; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), esp. 40-67. For an introduction to Herder's general hermeneutic stance, see Michael N. Forster, "Herder's Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation: Three Fundamental Principles," *The Review of Metaphysics* 56 (2002): 323-56. For his application of these philosophical notions to the Bible see Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 183-201.

[14] Herder, *Johannes Offenbarung*, 5-6: "Sie betrift Dinge, die seinen Knechten wissenswerth sind, darüber sie, wenn sie sie lesen, hören, bewahren, Preis der Gluckseligkeit empfangen."

[15] Herder, *Johannes Offenbarung*, 7: "Je mehr wir in dem Gesichtspunkte stehen, über alles Theilbare, Vielfache, Zerstreuende der Zeit erhöhet, im Himmel, im Gesichtspunkt des Einen, der Zukunft, Versammlung und Einigung zu ihm hin: desto mehr wird auch unser Auge sehen!"

"Seeing" is particularly important for the Apocalypse, because like the Hebrew prophets before him John employed a *Bildersprache*—an image-language. Poetry, for Herder and Hamann, is the highest expression of a people's spirit, and among the Hebrews the prophets were the true poets.[16] John's use of vivid images participates in the imaginal truth, as it were, of the language of the prophets. These images are conveyed to John by an angel. Most importantly, they are meaningful (*bedeutenden*) images: they are images "and not hieroglyphs, even less riddles, still less meaningless nonsense."[17] In fact, there is no poetry that is quite so full of symbols and images as Hebrew poetry.[18] Herder draws comparisons between the *Bildersprache* of the Hebrew prophets (John included) with that of the Greeks and Romans. If we are able to comprehend the images of Greco-Roman artwork, poetry, philosophy, and the like, how, Herder asks rhetorically, are we unable to comprehend "the most understandable image-language, the language of the Hebrew prophets?"[19] How *do* such images *mean*, though? Autonomously, we might say: "An image must speak for itself, if it is to mean."[20] It must be kept in mind that Herder was a Romantic, who believed in the transcendent truth of Beauty. Herder noted and approved of Johann Joachim

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[16] So Johann Gottfried Herder, *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie* (2 vols.; Dessau: J. A. Barth, 1782-1783) (ET, James Marsh: *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* [2 vols.; Burlington: Edward Smith, 1833]); following Robert Lowth, *De Sacra Poesie Hebraeorum* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1753) (ET of the 4th ed., G. Gregory: *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* [London: T. Tegg, 1839]).

[17] Herder, *Johannes Offenbarung*, 6: "Bilder und keine Hieroglyphen, noch weniger Räthsel, noch minder Deutungsloser Unsinn."

[18] Herder, *MAPAN AΘA*, 231: "Keine Bildersprache ist reiner blieben und bewährter worden, als ihre: keine Bildersprache ist auch, wie sie, so tief im Genius des Volks, keiner Schrift und Sprache gebildet. Die Ebräische Poesie ist gleichsam ganz Symbol, Bild, heilige, erhabne Rede: selbst die Prosaisten und Geschichteschreiber müssen in Bildern reden, weil ihre Sprache es so fodert; die Lehrer und Propheten noch mehr."

[19] Herder, *MAPAN AΘA*, 231: "Ist uns eine Metapher, eine Allegorie, eine Münze, eine Statue, ja eine ganze Mythologie von Bildern in Gedichten, Reden, Philosophie, Kunstwerken verständlich, sobald sie nur bedeutend spricht, und wir gnug Data ihrer Verständlichkeit haben: ist dies bei Griechen und Römern wahr, und wird ohne Widerspruch angenommen und ausgeübet; wie denn nicht bei der verständlichsten Bildersprache, der Sprace der hebräischen Propheten?"

[20] Herder, *MAPAN AΘA*, 234: "Ein Bild muss selbst sprechen, wenn es bedeuten soll."

Winckelmann's complaints that the whole tradition of philosophy on beauty was impoverished. "The ideal share in art," wrote Herder, "the beholder's sublime awareness of the beautiful and of beauty, these he found nowhere as he found them in his soul, as he wished them to be treated."[21] As with the images of artwork, the images of the Hebrew poets and of John's Apocalypse encounter the reader more immediately. They are to be seen and their truth thereby grasped.

The finer points of Herder's exposition need not detain us here.[22] We need only note that the idea of the book of Revelation as a poetic work richly drawing on an "image-language" has a Romantic pedigree and was early employed in modern work on John's Apocalypse. John's Apocalypse is full of images, which beg to be *seen*, and in that participation in the imaginal world of the book, the Apocalypse discloses its truth. Herder's work commanded a great deal of respect in Germany, and even influenced at least one prominent American exegete of the nineteenth century.[23] The exhaustive research of Gottfried Christian Friedrich Lücke (1791-1855), whose work on the book of Revelation arguably dominated nineteenth-century scholarship and set the stage for the modern study of the genre apocalypse, was clearly indebted to Herder on this point.[24] In 1832 he published his *Versuch einer vollständigen Einleitung in die Offenbarung des Johannes*, and in 1852 he

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[21] Johann Gottfried Herder, "Winckelmann: A Commemorative Essay," in Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of Ancient Art* (trans. Alexander Gode; New York: Frederick Ungar, 1968), xii.

[22] Something of his position can be gleaned from J. M. Schmidt, *Die jüdische Apokalyptik: Die Geschichte ihrer Erforschung von den Anfängen bis zu den Textfunden von Qumran* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 87-95.

[23] Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (2 vols.; Andover, Mass.: Allen, Morrill & Wardwell, 1845), esp. 150-55.

[24] So does the modern study of apocalyptic literature as a distinct class of writings, according to John Collins (*The Apocalyptic Imagination* [2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998], 2-3). There were modern commentators on the Apocalypse before Lücke, of course, of which Eichhorn and Herder are probably the most important. Other interpreters of note before Lücke include Bossuet, Ewald, Hartwig, Kleuker, and De Wette. But none of these would dominate the next century and a half of research on the Apocalypse (and apocalyptic in general) like Lücke.

published a much revised and much refined second edition.[25] As with Herder, Lücke argued

the apocalyptist received his visions in ecstasy, and then put forth the transcendent truth he

had "seen" into words: "According to the ecstatic-visionary design of prophetic thought,

the representation is altogether symbolic. As the seer has beheld and heard everything in the

image, in the symbol—since no mortal is able to understand heavenly things otherwise—so

he also represents everything in image and symbol."[26] The apocalyptist represents what he

has seen in images and symbols because he has seen everything in images and symbols: "But

when the apocalyptist beholds God himself, Christ, the Spirit, Satan, they appear to him in

images [*im Bilde*]."[27] Lücke attributes this imagery to poetic representation, but especially to

apocalyptic poetic representation, in which the nature of those things or persons which appear

> is not arbitrarily chosen in accord with the image, or rather the symbol, with
> free license and art—so also the difference between image and idea. [The
> nature of each thing that appears] is rather given as the original conception-
> form with the apocalyptic vision, and therefore as the necessary, spirit-given
> expression of apocalyptic thought.[28]

The poet receives a vision in ecstasy, and he writes down the verbal representation of what

he has seen. But he does not control the meaning of the image, or rather, the symbol. The

symbol comes to the seer whole, we might say, *as an image.* The apocalyptist just puts words

on the representation, or puts the representation into words.

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[25] Citations in this study will follow the second edition: Gottfried Christian Friedrich von Lücke, *Versuch einer vollständigen Einleitung in die Offenbarung des Johannes, oder Allgemeine Untersuchungen über die apokalyptische Litteratur überhaupt und die Apokalypse des Johannes insbesondere* (2d ed.; 2 vols.; Bonn: Weber, 1852).

[26] Lücke, *Versuch*, 1.402: "Der ekstatischen visionären Conception der prophetischen Gedanken entsprechend ist die Darstellungsweise durchweg die symbolische. Wie der Seher alles eben nur im Bilde, im Symbol geschauet und vernommen hat, weil eben kein Sterblicher die himmlischen Dinge anders zu erkennen vermag, so stellt er auch alles im Bilde und Symbol dar."

[27] Lücke, *Versuch*, 1.402: "Aber selbst Gott, Christus, der Geist, der Satan, wenn der Apokalyptiker sie schauet, erscheinen ihm im Bilde."

[28] Lücke, *Versuch*, 1.402: "Dies ist nun allerdings poetische Darstellung, aber die apokalypisch poetische, in welcher ihrer Natur nach das Bild oder vielmehr das Symbol nicht willkürlich gewählt erscheint mit dem Bewusstsein freier Vergleichung und Kunst und somit auch des Unterschiedes von Bild und Idee, sondern mit der apokalyptischen Vision gegeben ist, als die ursprüngliche Conceptions-form, also der pneumatisch gegebene nothwendige Ausdruck der apokalyptischen Gedanken."

Lücke's study clings closely to the two terms *Bild* and *Symbol*, both of which are marks of poetic art.[29] At the same time, Lücke goes to pains to explain why the poetic art involves no "mere" representation, but genuine revelations granted to the seer in ecstasy. "Image" and "Symbol" are the language of apocalyptic literature because they are the conduits of apocalyptic revelation. These are the expressions of apocalyptic thought. For Lücke, these images or symbols (he does not clearly distinguish between them) are poetic signs, which refer to divine truths:

> And as it is not given to man to understand the Divine directly—that is, in absolutely divine manner, but rather only in the image [*im Bilde*]—so it is with what he beholds in apocalyptic ecstasy—the sphere of existence of which is taken from *image* [*Bild*], and which God gives him to behold as the likeness [*Abbild*] of his truth.[30]

How exactly these images are likenesses of revealed truth is never made clear. Nor is it clear what it means for these images or symbols to bear a likeness to truth or to refer to revealed truth, though Lücke seems to mean that the truths disclosed in the images is non-discursive. Their meaning is simply their being, as it was with Herder. The difference with Lücke is that by extending his discussion to a whole class of writings that resemble the book of Revelation, he made *Bilder* constitutive not just of John's Apocalypse, but indeed of *Apokalyptik* in general.

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[29] This is mostly true of the second edition. The first edition did not rely as heavily on these two terms in particular, though the notion of the language of the Apocalypse as prophetic poetry was already in the 1832 edition.

[30] Lücke, *Versuch*, 28: Und wie es dem Menschen auch in diesem Zustande nicht gegeben ist, das Göttliche unmittelbar, d. h. in schlechthin göttlicher Weise, zu erkennen, sondern nur im Bilde, so ist, was er in der apokalyptischen Ekstase schauet, das seiner Daseinssphäre entnommene Bild, welches Gott ihm zu schauen giebt als Abbild seiner Wahrheit.

From "Romantic Image" to Poetic Craft

By the beginning of the twentieth century, this *Bildersprache*, as a characteristic feature of apocalypses, had become a liability in comparison with the prophetic writings. The apocalyptists were deemed fanatical, the ecstatically devolved progeny of the prophets. Whereas with Herder John's use of an image-language was consonant with the prophets, by the twentieth century it was contrasted with the tenor and message of the prophetic writings. In his commentary on the Apocalypse, for instance, Wilhelm Bousset (1865-1920) suggested the main difference between the prophets and the *Apokalypiker* fell along the verbal-visual dichotomy: "In prophetic preaching the spoken or written word takes precedence, in apocalyptic, the image [*Bild*]. The prophet hears and proclaims the word of Yahweh, the apocalyptist sees and recounts the image [*Bild*], the vision [*Visionen*]."[31] Bousset admits that "symbolic-ecstatic" visions do play a role in prophetic texts as well, but only a secondary one. Among the apocalyptists, such visions are nearly everything (*beinahe ein und alles*). The prophets were mostly given to aural and verbal forms of revelation, whereas the apocalyptists saw visions and related them. The prophets dealt in preaching and texts, the apocalyptists in visions and images. A classic nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarly prejudice against apocalyptic and in favor of prophecy peeks through here.[32] For Bousset the *Wort* is at the heart of prophecy, whereas the *Bild* is at the heart of apocalyptic compositions.

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[31] Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (6th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 3: "In der Prophetischen Predigt steht das gesprochene oder geschriebene Wort, in der Apokalyptik das Bild an erster Stelle. Der Prophet hört und verkündet das Wort Jahves, der Apokalyptiker schaut und erzählt das Bild, die Vision."

[32] This was one of the complaints Klaus Koch lodged against the confused state of apocalyptic studies in 1970 (*The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* [London: SCM, 1972], 18-20, 36-56). Koch attributes the "lower status" assigned to apocalyptic texts to the literary-critical school of Wellhausen and Duhm (36).

The visions of the apocalyptists most resemble dream visions.[33] The apocalyptists "naively" believed dreams conveyed revelation from God, and thus they were convinced of the reality of the revelation so obtained.[34] Alongside the analogy of dream reports, however, belongs the recognition that the visions are seen in an ecstatic state, that is, an ecstatic, visionary experience (*Erfahrung*) undergirds the vision reports.[35] In fact, Bousset suggests that the apocalyptists increasingly moved away from dream reports toward ecstatic visions.[36] Thus, apocalyptic visions were primarily visual, and they were received in ecstatic experiences. Such a judgment does not preclude literary craft for Bousset, any more than it did for Herder and Lücke. The medium through which the apocalyptists expressed their visions was allegory.[37]

Many of the allegorical images of apocalyptic literature are indebted to prophetic visions, though certainly not all of them.[38] The visions of 4 Ezra, for instance, already have predecessors in Amos 7 and 8, and Jeremiah 1. In fact, the apocalypses are composed in complexes of such smaller allegories: "These small allegorical visions are like the germ cells,

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[33] An observation explored recently also by Frances Flannery-Dailey, "Lessons on Early Jewish Apocalypticism and Mysticism from Dream Literature," in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (ed. April D. DeConick; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 231-48. Cf. Frances Flannery-Dailey, *Dreamers, Scribes, and Priests: Jewish Dreams in the Hellenistic and Roman Eras* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[34] Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 3-4: "Mit dieser Charakterisierung des apokalyptischen Gesichtes als eines Traumgesichtes soll natürlich nicht gesagt sein, daß die Apokalyptiker nicht von der Realität der im Traum empfangenen göttlichen Offenbarung überzeugt gewesen seien. Man lebt der naiven Überzeugung, daß Traume unmittelbar gottlichen Ursprungs seien."

[35] Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 4: "Neben der Traumer fahrung ist aber in der Apokalyptik auch die wirkliche visionäre, ekstatische Erfahrung bekannt."

[36] Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 4: "Es scheint, als wenn die jüdische Apokalyptik sich mehr und mehr von der Richtung des einfachen Traumgesichtes zur ekstatischen Vision bewegt hat."

[37] Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 8: "Das durchgängige Mittel aber, das der Apokalyptiker bei seinen Zukunftsvisionen zu diesem Zwecke anwendet, ist die Allegorie."

[38] Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 8: "Die Allegorieen kann man nun wieder nach ihrem Gehalt einteilen in frei erfundene Allegorieen und solche, die einen bereits gegebenen Stoff für den dem Apokalyptiker vorschwebenden Gedanken verarbeiten."

out of which the apocalypse grows by degrees."[39] The vision accounts of apocalyptic texts,

therefore, are the compounded effect of aggregated smaller allegorical visions. Susan

Niditch, writing of symbolic visions in the biblical tradition, identifies this as the "baroque"

stage.[40] The "baroque" feel of the apocalyptic visions is part of what makes them so

attractive.[41] But this account of apocalyptic vision reports implies that they are literary

compositions, and this account of apocalyptic visions seems to conflict with the supposedly

ecstatic state in which the visions were experienced: "Do we have before us in the Jewish

apocalyptists a band of ecstatics or is the visionary ecstasy in Apocalyptic only a literary form

and book wisdom?"[42]

Bousset's work thus already anticipates the fissure in scholarship presented in the last

chapter. Explanations for the visions of apocalypses from religious experience and

explanations from literary tradition both seem plausible. Bousset's solution is fairly simple:

"The smaller, more concise, more uniform the image (*Bild*), the more likely is the immediacy

of the experience. The grander, more extensive, more complex—the more artistically

composed—an apocalypse (*Apokalypse*) is, the more we get the impression of a purely literary

production."[43] John's apocalypse falls into the latter category: it is "a work of literary art,

not the diary of a seer."[44] Even so, Bousset hastens to point out that simply because John

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[39] Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 8-9: "Diese kleinen allegorischen Visionen sind gleichsam die Keimzellen, aus denen allmälich die Apokalypse erwächst."

[40] Susan Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in the Biblical Tradition* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars 1976), 177-241.

[41] Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 12: "Die Allegorie ist also das erste und oberste Mittel des Apokalyptikers, seiner Weissagung einen geheimnisvollen Zauber zu geben, mit dem er die Leser und Hörer zu fesseln und ihre Aufmerksamkeit und ihr Interesse zu erregen sucht."

[42] Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 13: "Haben wir in den jüdischen Apokalyptikern wirklich eine Schar von Ekstatikern zu sehen oder ist das visionär Ekstatische an der Apokalyptik nur literarische Form und Buchweisheit?"

[43] Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 15: "Je kleiner, abgerundeter, in sich einheitlicher das Bild, desto wahrscheinlicher die Unmittelbarkeit der Erfahrung. Je größer, umfangreicher, komplizierter, je künstlicher komponiert eine Apokalypse ist, desto mehr erhalten wir den Eindruck einer rein literarischen Produktion."

[44] Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 16.

composed his visions does not mean he had no visionary experiences at all. Bousset rather

supposes John had an experience that he subsequently wove into a complex literary work.

It is noteworthy that of the simpler visions, which probably represent immediate

visionary experience, Bousset uses the term *Bild*, whereas of the more complex literary

productions he does not. Image, for Bousset, retains a fundamentally visual character, even

if complex vision reports are to be understood as *Buchweisheit* (i.e. "book wisdom"). Even

when literary art can be discerned, the apocalypses and their vision reports remain grounded

in visionary experience. Bousset's views were given a broader hearing by Philip Vielhauer's

now classic article on apocalyptic.[45] Vielhauer also posited the visionary mode of

apocalypses as a defining formal feature. "The apocalyptist," he wrote, "receives his

revelations mostly in visions."[46] Moreover, "The vision itself is a picture [*Bild*]: either a

picture which represents the occurrences themselves directly, or a picture which portrays

them indirectly, in the form of symbols and allegories."[47] For Vielhauer, the apocalypses are

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[45] Philip Vielhauer and Georg Strecker, "Apocalypses and Related Subjects" in *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume Two: Writings Relating to the Apostles; Apocalpyses and Related Subject* (ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher; revised English ed., R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 542-68. Although a revised version was published later, this article represents scholarship before the 1970s. The passages under discussion here are the same in the fifth German edition (1989, wherein the introduction to Apocalyptic was revised by Georg Strecker, and which serves as the text for the revised English translation cited) as in the third German edition (1964), and were penned by Vielhauer.

[46] Vielhauer and Strecker, "Apocalypses," 545.

[47] Vielhauer and Strecker, "Apocalypses," 546. Philip Vielhauer and Georg Strecker, "Apokalypsen," in *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung, Zweiter Band: Apostolisches, Apokalypsen und Verwandtes* (ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 495: "Der Apokalyptiker empfängt seine Offenbarungen meist in Visionen…. …Das Geschaute selbst ist Bild: entweder Bild, das die Ereignisse selbst direct darstellt, oder Bild, das die Ereignisse indirect, in Form von Symbolen und Allegorien schildert. …Die Bilder der Visionen sind weitgehend traditionell; oft widersetzt sich ein übernommenes geprägtes Bild der restlosen allegorischen Ausdeutung. Manchmal fügt der Seher einem übernommenen Bild sekundär ein neues hinzu, das die Beziehung auf die aktuelle Situation herstellen soll. Nach W. Bousset ist die kleine allegorische Vision die Keimzelle der Apokalypsen; entweder wird in ihnen eine Menge von Einzelzügen zu gereiht. Im Hinblick auf den traditionellen Charakter der Bilder und der Art ihrer Komposition stellt sich die Frage nach der Erlebnisechtheit der apokalyptischen Visionen. Die Apokalyptik ist Buchweisheit, 'Literatur', und zwar Sammelliteratur, Aber di Glut der Erwartung und die Stärke der Hoffnung sind echt."

I have not emended the English translation here, even though it introduces a problem in the translation of the German word *Bild*. *Bild* carries the meaning of picture, a pictorial phenomenon, as well as

the records of apocalyptic visionary experiences, presented in pictures, either

representational or symbolic. Vielhauer really only diverges from Bousset in his claim that

the image may be representational/pictorial or symbolic/allegorical.[48]

R. H. Charles (1855-1931) also acknowledged the distinction between the visual

experience of the apocalyptist and the auditory experience of the prophet. "When we wish

to distinguish the prophet and the seer," he wrote, "we say that the prophet *hears* and

announces the word of God, whereas the seer *sees* and recounts his vision."[49] But he rightly

pointed out that both vision and audition pertain to both prophecy and apocalyptic. The

experiences by which the prophets and the seers received their revelations—in dreams,

visions, trances, etc.—were fundamentally the same. For Charles the difference seemed to

lie in the way the message was communicated. The quote above not only divides prophets

and apocalyptists along the verbal-visual dichotomy, it also privileges the verbal over the

visual. Note that the prophet hears the *word of God*, and *announces* it. The procedure sounds

straightforward: the prophet received a word from God, which he then communicated to an

audience. The apocalyptist, on the other hand, sees *his* vision, and *recounts* it. Charles may

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image in a broader, more elusive sense. A succinct account of the meanings of *Bild* in the context of Image Studies are the remarks of Gottfried Boehm: "In German, *Bild* means the material and spiritual aspect of the image, considered together; and the power of production, of forming. …*Einbildungskraft* means the power of producing the image. *Bildung* means the social process by which you can come to share your own culture. Those distinctions are always bound together in the German word *Bild*, and I think that differs from other languages" (in James Elkins and Maja Naef, eds., *What is an Image?* [University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011], 27). In the same discussion, Tom Mitchell points to the English distinction between image and picture as potentially useful for analytic purposes (28). For a less succinct account of *Bild*, and a good introduction to the variety of meanings it carries, see Marion Müller, "What is Visual Communication: Past and Future of an Emerging Field of Communication Research," *Studies in Communication Sciences* 7 (2007): 7-34, esp. 9-14.

[48] The distinction I draw here between representation and symbolism is the difference between denotation and connotation. The former indicates the depiction, whereas the latter indicates the value or meaning that attends the depiction. A representation may simply constitute the likeness of a person, for instance, wheras a symbolic image may represent a person in academic regalia or imperial dress to communicate further meaning. The former has as its goal only the representation of the object, the latter seeks to add meaning or value to the representation.

[49] R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), civ.

not have meant to imply that the vision belongs to the apocalyptist, but the possessive

pronoun stands in some contrast to the "from God" of the previous line. Indeed, Charles

further clarified the "means which the seer uses in order to set forth his message": *psychical*

experiences, and reflection or rather reason embracing the powers of insight, imagination, and judgment."[50]

Although the prophet seems to have been a relatively passive vessel for the Word from God,

the apocalyptist is clearly very active in the presentation of his message.[51]

For Charles, the apocalyptists received visions, which were ineffable experiences of

the divine.[52] Literal descriptions of these experiences, in Charles's view, were hardly ever

possible. Only in simple visions was such a thing possible. As an example of a simple vision

Charles drew from the same well as Bousset (if not from Bousset himself), pointing to Amos

8, wherein Amos sees a basket of fruit, and he says he saw a basket of fruit. This is a literal

description of what Amos saw. For Bousset, this vision and its description was a prime

example of one of the simplest building blocks with which the baroque apocalypses were

built.[53] For Charles, the complexity of the apocalyptic visions did not rest so much on the

use of sources as it did not the ineffability of the experience.[54] Since the spiritual experiences

of the seer were of such sublime character, he "attached the symbols more or less

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[50] Charles, *Revelation*, civ.

[51] This judgment is somewhat confirmed by Charles's remarks on the cohesiveness of prophetic and apocalyptic works (*Revelation*, cvii-cviii): "Now, whereas the collected works of a prophet do not necessarily and in point of fact never show strict structural unity and steady development of thought, it is otherwise with the seer…." The arrangement of materials in apocalypses (especially in the book of Revelation) is evidence of the use of reason and reflection, and indeed literary craft.

[52] The judgment of Charles (*Revelation*, cv)—"Of the reality of such psychical experiences no modern psychologist entertains a doubt"—has often been cited in favor of affirming the reality of the religious visionary experiences behind the apocalypses. But Charles rightly noted it is not the reality of the visions that really matters, or at least that is not what mattered to the ancients who would have taken such experiences as given. If we can twist Charles's position a little, we can affirm that the question is not whether the *experience* is real, but whether that which is purportedly *experienced* is real (in Charles's language, "the source from which" such experiences sprang). This question is, of course, a theological one, and not a historical one.

[53] Charles, *Revelation*, cvi. Cf. Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 8.

[54] Charles, *Revelation*, cvi: "But in our author the visions are of an elaborate and complicated nature, and the more exalted and intense the experience, the more incapable it becomes of literal description."

transformed that these naturally evoked in his mind, symbols that he owed to his own waking experience or the tradition of the past; and the sounds he heard naturally clothed themselves in the literary forms with which his memory was stored."[55] And thus we come to Charles's verdict on apocalyptic images:

> In the attempt to describe to his readers what was wholly beyond the range of their knowledge and experience, the seer had thus constant recourse to the use of symbols. Hence in his literary presentment of what he has seen and heard in the moments of transcendent rapture, the images he uses are symbolic and not literal or pictorial.[56]

Having set up the visual character of the apocalypses it is odd that Charles tossed it away in the end. Sight and audition do not seem to pertain to the kinds of experiences the apocalyptists underwent, though we may call them "visions" or "auditions." Instead, a kind of noetic, transcendentally true experience is put into imminent and therefore fallible language. The result is "naturally" a dense and fantastic use of language. But the language is not "literal"; that is, it is not to be taken as pictorial language. The operation is not so much representational as semiotic. John does not wish to depict a form, but to convey a message. The "symbols" he used to do so were those of his environment and tradition.

Charles is perhaps the first author to make a distinction, however haltingly and partially, between apocalyptic images as pictorial language and apocalyptic images as symbolic language. The use of images in John's apocalypse at least must be symbolic because of the nature of the experience behind the images, which is merely posited by Charles. The deferral to transcendent experience has consequences, though. It privileges content over form, message over medium, and thereby is forced to apply the notion of symbolic reference. It also makes Charles's discussion of the visuality of the apocalypses

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[55] Charles, *Revelation*, cvi-cvii.
[56] Charles, *Revelation*, cvii.

versus the aurality of the prophets meaningless, and indeed the images themselves ironically

meaningless, since there is no direct connection between the message and the medium.

Finally, invoking transcendent experience ultimately makes the experience itself irrelevant for

interpreting the apocalypse because such an invocation contains apocalyptic "images" within

a certain use of symbolic language. That said, Charles recognized more than many that the

images employed in the book of Revelation and other apocalypses are deeply indebted to the

environment in which they were seen and composed.

Austin Farrer (1904-1968) followed Charles's intuition that the kind of "vision" at

work in John's Apocalypse was an experience of an ineffable reality. The book of Revelation

represents most clearly for Farrer the "rebirth of images" that can be traced throughout the

New Testament, and it is primarily a work of poetic art ("the one great poem which the first

Christian age produced," cited above). The book of Revelation is clearly not a

straightforward communication of doctrine, but the peculiar tenor of the book cannot

simply be attributed to visionary experience, either, "for the visions when examined appear

to have little to do with the visual imagination, they are 'seen with the mind.' But 'seeing

with the mind' is just a bad metaphor. Things 'seen with the mind' are *thought*…and if they

are not thought in visual images, they are probably thought in words."[57] The "if" in this last

sentence, though, is striking. The grounds for Farrer's contention that the images "have

little to do with the visual imagination" are not stated.

The problem seems to be one of the relationship between medium and message,

form and content.

> If a visionary mind writes what he is moved to 'see' or to imagine, the words
> go down on the page, the pictures do not. If the purpose of his writing were

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[57] Farrer, *Rebirth*, 304-305.

> to convey shapes and colours, the result might be what is called word-painting; the visions would remain in control of the words, even though words, not pigments, were the medium of expression. But if his purpose is to let the visions speak, to convey not so much the look as the meaning of them, then the words will surely wrest control from the pictures, for words are the very embodiments of meaning.[58]

I think one would be hard-pressed to find a clearer example of the linguistic location of meaning (akin to Derrida's *logocentrism*) than this. The description of images has no meaning, it is just word-painting. To assign John's images to pictoriality would be to rob them of meaning. As Farrer writes, "St John's images do not mean anything you like; their sense can be determined." But would not a more pronounced sense of pictoriality in fact fit Farrer's very next statement: "But they still have an astonishing multiplicity of reference"?[59] In fact, it is the contention of the present study that the verbal-semantic and visual-pictorial are not always so neatly separated. Farrer seems to agree with respect to the act of imaging:

> Imagining is not like seeing, where the picture is presented by an independent object; it is like painting in evanescent colours. As in day-dreaming, we imagine what we will and paint our changing picture over and over as our thought moves. We often do not know whether we are dreaming pictures or telling ourselves tales; the streams of vision and discourse melt into one another and direct one another in the smoothest, the most natural way.[60]

Indeed, as I will be arguing later, this blurring of vision and discourse is a central feature of John's Apocalypse. But that means that we should not too quickly dismiss the pictoriality of John's images.

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[58] Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 25.

[59] Farrer, *Rebirth*, 19.

[60] Farrer, *Revelation*, 25-26.

Myth, Symbol, and Allegory Beyond Referentiality

Part of the problem here is with the implied dichotomy between word and image, between verbal, textual, linguistic phenomena and visual, pictorial phenomena. More precisely, the problem is knowing what to do when the visual interferes with the verbal or vice versa. It has to do with modes of representation and referentiality. When John Collins turns to discuss the imagery of apocalypses, his discussion falls under the heading, "Apocalyptic Language."[61] As in his work on the book of Daniel, imagery for Collins refers to a particular use of language, mostly confined to the repurposing of traditional (either mythological or "biblical") motifs.[62] The roots of this tradition-historical approach reach back to Hermann Gunkel. As Collins puts it, "[B]y pointing to the mythological roots of much apocalyptic imagery, Gunkel showed its symbolic and allusive character. Apocalyptic literature was not governed by principles of Aristotelian logic but was closer to the poetic nature of myth."[63] Apocalyptic images are mythological, symbolic, and allusive; they are expressive or evocative. For a scholar concerned with terminological precision, this is a fair number of oblique terms to use to describe apocalyptic images. What Collins tries to convey with this barrage of terms is the way the meaning of apocalyptic images seems to extend beyond even deliberate referentiality—that apocalyptic images are not simply reducible to discursive meaning.

Collins is absolutely correct in his assessment that biblical scholars have been overly preoccupied with "the referential aspects of language and with the factual information that

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[61] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 14-21. Cf. John J. Collins, "Apocalyptic Literature," in *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters* (ed. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg; Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 345-70.

[62] John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1977).

[63] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 17.

can be extracted from a text."[64] Some scholars have therefore taken apocalyptic images to

be uni-referential, "steno-symbols" in Norman Perrin's terminology.[65] Such symbols are

exhausted when they are translated into a plainer description of their referents. Collins

thinks—and I heartily agree—that this notion of apocalyptic language is too reductionistic.

The images do not have just one referent, but may have several. Even when they refer to

something specific, their meaning is not exhausted only by the referential function. Instead

of steno-symbols, Collins prefers to see apocalyptic imagery as "poetic and mythological

material," or, "expressive language, articulating feelings and attitudes rather than describing

reality in an objective way."[66] The best way reasonably to understand the images is to

appreciate the fact that they are drawn from myths *and therefore* have a certain pathetic (i.e.

emotional) rhetorical utility.

Collins highlights three terms that have been used to describe apocalyptic language:

myth, symbol, and allegory. For his discussion of myth and symbol, Collins relies on the

early work of Paul Ricoeur.[67] Ricoeur distinguished between symbol and myth, symbols

being the building blocks of myth, so to speak. More precisely, myths are "symbols

developed in the form of narrations and articulated in a time and space that cannot be co-

ordinated with the time and space of history and geography according to critical method."[68]

Myths are symbols cast into a narrative. Collins helpfully illustrates by pointing out the

difference between exile as "a historical event made to signify human alienation analogically"

(symbol) and the exile from Eden (myth) which utilizes the symbol of exile in a narrative.

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[64] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 17.

[65] Norman Perrin, "Eschatology and Hermeneutics: Reflections on Method in the Interpretation of the New Testament," *JBL* 93 (1974): 3-14. Cf. Norman Perrin, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Message of Jesus," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Literature* (1972), 2:543-72.

[66] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 17.

[67] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

[68] Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, 18.

What Collins, following Ricoeur, means by symbol, then, is *social* symbol: an element of the symbolic universe, worldview, or foundational story that a society and members of a society tell in the quest for meaning and a sense of identity. Collins further highlights three aspects of myth in Ricoeur's analysis: myth aims at universality through the use of archetypal characters and narratives; myth presents an ideal history with foci on the beginning and end (*Urzeit und Endzeit*); and myth reframes human history in terms of the ideal history of the gods.[69] For Collins, myth is a transcendental, archetypal narrative with a social function as an etiological or foundational story with universal aims. Of course, this analysis is not what any interpreter of apocalyptic literature meant by "symbol" or "myth" before the birth of symbolic anthropology in the 1920s (and really not until symbolic anthropology bloomed in the 1960s). We have already seen what Herder, Lücke, and Bousset, for instance meant by "symbol" and it is certainly not akin to Ricoeur's social symbolism. They rather meant something much closer to Collins's third term, allegory.

Allegory "simply means saying one thing when you mean something else."[70] Allegories may be stories in "code language," telling a story for an insider group so that an outsider group will not understand it is about them. Collins points out this conception of allegory is closest to what Perrin means by steno-symbolism. Collins then recalls two very fine observations, from Michael Murrin and Northrop Frye, respectively. Murrin's observation was that well-told allegories have a narrative integrity quite apart from (what I will call) their symbolic references. Frye's observation was that allegories are not simply "a

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[69] John J. Collins, "The Symbolism of Transcendence in Jewish Apocalyptic," *BR* 19 (1974), 13; cf. Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, 27.

[70] Collins, "Symbolism," 14.

disguised form of discursive writing." Allegory is "a structure of images, not of ideas."[71] In other words, the allegorical form is not merely dispensable once one has arrived at the de-coded content. Collins offers the example of the four beasts who come out of the sea in Daniel 7:

> The four beasts can be correctly identified as the kingdoms of Babylonia, Media, Persia, and Greece. Can we say, however, that the statement in Dan. 7:2: "four great beasts came up out of the sea" is adequately paraphrased by the interpretation, given in Dan. 7:17: "these four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth?" Surely not. Even a reader who is ignorant of, or chooses to ignore, the echoes of Canaanite mythology and of the biblical Leviathan in the beasts which rise from the sea, must concede that the vision has an evocative power which is lacking in the interpretation.[72]

Allegorical form, in other words, creates a surplus of meaning that a simple declarative statement could not effect.[73] Collins calls this effect the allegory's "evocative power."

Collins locates this "power" in the wrong place. When he calls this kind of language "expressive language, articulating feelings and attitudes rather than describing reality in an objective way," he comes very close to locating the "evocative power" of apocalyptic images in the psychology of the author and readers. He suggests that instead of looking for referentiality, scholars should appreciate the poetic richness of the mythological images as expressions of (apparently) subjective mental states.[74] In other words, to invoke expressionism is to arrive at an interpretative stalemate. In part, Collins has cornered himself by the designation of apocalyptic images as mythological. His understanding of

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[71] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 90; quoted by Collins, "Symbolism," 15.

[72] Collins, "Symbolism," 15.

[73] "Surplus of meaning" comes from another work of Ricoeur's, of course, though one written after Collins's article: Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

[74] This is how expressionism is generally taken in philosophical aesthetics, at least. An example from Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routlege, 1997), 59: "Whereas under imitation theories of art, artists are said to attend foremost to mirroring the objective world, by the early nineteenth century, artists were becoming more attentive to the subjective or 'inner' world of experience."

apocalyptic images is thus bound to his understanding of myth, which in turn is bound to

Ricoeur's notion of social symbolics. In his discussion of key terms, however, Collins

missed a fairly obvious one: image. Collins gives absolutely no room to the visuality of the

images. It is precisely here that I think the "surplus of meaning" or the "evocative power"

should be located, which is why we might better name it the "aesthetic power" of

apocalyptic images.[75]

Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza has pioneered perhaps the most consistent attempt to

reconceive the imagistic language of the book of Revelation. In an article penned in 1980,

she wrote, "Exegetes and theologians have still to discover what artists have long

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[75] Dan Via's work on the parables argues a similar point: Dan Otto Via, Jr., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974). A number of scholars have echoed Collins's position. The same basic approach is taken by a standard handbook of New Testament form criticism (James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992], 207):

Revelation is unique among apocalypses because of its extensive use of symbolism and apocalyptic imagery. Such imagery, drawn from the Christian tradition, Jewish apocalypticism, and especially the Hebrew scriptures, contributes greatly both to the appeal and the ambiguity of the book. …It is crucial for the modern reader to attempt to understand the evocative power these symbols would have had as Revelation was read aloud in early Christian communities.

The interest of the authors is, of course, *literary* forms. Small wonder, then, that the images are attributed to Jewish apocalypticism, Christian tradition, and the Hebrew Scriptures, as though the imagery should be wholly bound by literary traditions. The next line is perhaps most telling, though: where Collins talks about the allusive and expressive character of the images of apocalyptic works, Bailey and Vander Broek write about the ambiguity of the "symbols" and their evocative power.

As I have already mentioned, I take the deferral to "evocative power" as a sign of the failure to take the visual and verbal together—to actually think outside of referential language. Bailey and Vander Broek admit that a strict referential understanding of language is not enough to do justice to the images of the book, but their steps away from referential notions of language are stumbling steps. The more they press the point that these symbols are a kind of evocative language, the more their tone sounds evasive. One might be forgiven for thinking that the authors display a certain interpretative fear the further they must stray from the safe havens of referential language. Symbols from the Hebrew scriptures (Lamb, Babylon, etc.) "would have been readily understood by the hearer," and are presumably clear to the modern interpreter as well (207). The heavenly and future scenes are "more difficult" to interpret: are they meant to be "actual"—that is, descriptive—representations of future or otherworldly phenomena or "symbolic" representations of transcendent noumena (208)? Finally, "[t]he highest level of interpretive skill" must be reserved for those "symbols" that seem "open-ended and ambiguous" (208). The proposed need for greater skill only masks the failure of interpretive operations that cannot think outside of the realm of the verbal. We might ask, for instance, what if the "open-ended and ambiguous" symbols for which the "highest level of interpretive skill" is required are not symbols at all? What if they do not need to be resolved *because they do not have a symbolic referent*? What if the logos of these images are not logocentric, but, in a word, *iconocentric*? In that case it is not a question of interpretive skill, but merely of the appropriate frame of reference.

understood: The strength of Revelation's language and composition lies not in its theological argumentation or historical information but in its evocative power, inviting imaginative participation."[76] She charges biblical scholars and exegetes of reducing "the imaginative language of Revelation to a one-to-one meaning" by "historicizing images and visions," objectifying "symbolic-allegorical expressions," and reducing "mythopoeic vision to abstract theological or philosophical principles."[77] At the same time, she rightly criticizes those who have taken a more literary approach, "overlooking the fact that John did not write art for art's sake, but that he had a definite purpose in mind when writing the book."[78] Grasping the "aesthetic power" of the book is, she argues, essential to its proper interpretation.

Schüssler-Fiorenza picks up all of the best aspects of Collins's argument, but she adds the feature of "imaginative participation." More recently Schüssler-Fiorenza has aligned this participation with political concerns, treating "Revelation's multivalent language, mythic images, and visions of doom and bliss as subaltern rhetorical discourse."[79] One might spot here yet another reduction of the images—not to theological principles or historical referents, but to a utilitarian function in a particular political ethic. For all of her efforts to convince scholars to attend to the aesthetic power and imaginative participation in the images of Revelation, she has herself not attended to the aesthetic properties or imaginative reception of the images. Schüssler-Fiorenza also fails to account for the visual

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[76] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Revelation," in *The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters* (ed. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae, S.J.; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 417. Here she also cites William A. Beardslee, "New Testament Apocalyptic in Recent Interpretation," *Interpretation* 25 (1971): 419-35.

[77] Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Revelation," 418.

[78] Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Revelation," 418.

[79] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), v.

dimension of the images, and is thus unable to relinquish the reduction of the images to discursive meaning.

Richard Bauckham seems to have been caught in the same bind. Bauckham has noted that the book of Revelation stands out from other apocalypses in the proportion and prominence of "visual imagery" or "visual symbolism."[80] These images, or symbols, "create a symbolic world which readers can enter so fully that it affects them and changes their perception of the world."[81] Bauckham consistently emphasizes the visual quality of these images by use of the qualifier "visual" (visual images, visual symbols). But he then goes to pains to emphasize that although the imagery is "visual," it nevertheless does not do its work primarily in the visual field. Although "the images of Revelation are symbols with evocative power inviting imaginative participation in the book's symbolic world," writes Bauckham, "they do not work merely by painting verbal pictures."[82] Bauckham is caught in a bind here, recognizing that the images are visual, and yet needing them somehow not to be confined to the visual field: "This is not to be explained simply by supposing that John had a remarkably powerful visual imagination. The power, the profusion and the consistency of the symbols have a literary-theological purpose."[83] In other words, the images need to have a discursive meaning.

In his 1989 *Interpretation* commentary, Eugene Boring maintained that the pair "pictorial"/"propositional" offers a better frame for the language of the Apocalypse than the pair "literal"/"figurative." Whereas figurative language can be taken literally, and, we might

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[80] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 9-10.

[81] Bauckham, *Theology*, 10, cf. 17.

[82] Bauckham, *Theology*, 18, here echoing Farrer.

[83] Bauckham, *Theology*, 10.

add, literal language can be read figuratively, a more proper dichotomy rests in the pictorial/propositional divide.[84] The following are traits of propositional language, according to Boring: 1) It is objectifying; that is, "it supposes it is talking about objects, realities that can be grasped by our minds and described by our language."[85] 2) If and when it uses symbols it uses them as "signs" or "steno-symbols," as coded language for "literal, objectifying meanings."[86] Propositional language is 3) logical and 4) diachronic. Perhaps most importantly, 5) it opposes "myth" and "truth."[87] Pictorial language is very much the opposite: 1) non-objectifying; 2) with "tensive, evocative, and polyvalent" use of symbols; 3) non-logical and non-inferential; 4) synchronic; 5) utilizing myth as a vehicle of truth.[88] While the book of Revelation employs both, "to a degree greater than other apocalyptic texts, the language of Revelation is visionary language that deals in pictures rather than propositions."[89] Again, Boring clearly picks up the main points of Collins's argument, but he turns it quite nicely to the visual. *Pace* Bauckham and Farrer, the language of the book of Revelation is precisely pictorial language, and that is why it is so "visual." The visual aspect of the book, moreover, is not a shortcoming, but rather its greatest strength: "*Ultimates can best be expressed in pictures, especially word pictures, by artists, rather than in logical, propositional statements.* …[T]he pictures of Revelation communicate the *meaning* of the end and goal of

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[84] An interesting case in point is found in the counterpoint between N. T. Wright's reading of apocalyptic discourse (following George Caird) as metaphorical language, and Edward Adams's argument that the language of cosmic catastrophe was in fact quite literal. See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 280-338; and Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall from Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

[85] M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 51.

[86] Boring, *Revelation*, 51.

[87] Boring, *Revelation*, 52.

[88] Boring, *Revelation*, 52-9.

[89] Boring, *Revelation*, 52.

history without claiming to give scientific descriptions of it."[90] The images, in other words, "hold vivid pictures before us," which "point beyond themselves to ultimate reality."[91] This pictorial language is not only "expressive poetry," but also "referential language." Herein lies the evocative power Collins sought to reveal: pictoriality provides for both referential and non-referential (i.e., discursive and non-discursive) meaning. Expression and referentiality are not mutually exclusive, but can both subsist in pictorial language.[92] Just as allegories have narrative integrity of their own, so images have a pictorial integrity beyond allegorical or symbolic application. Like allegories, pictorial language thus retains a surplus effect (if not a surplus meaning, exactly) beyond the communication of information.

From The Apocalyptic Imagination *to* L'imaginaire *Apocalyptique*

These first two chapters have documented trends in apocalyptic scholarship and the use of "image" in apocalyptic studies, especially in studies of the book of Revelation, to demonstrate that previous handling of apocalyptic images comes up short. The point is not merely the accurate description of the literature, or even of the religious experience behind the literature. The two paths upon which apocalyptic studies has travelled still do not arrive at the most important question regarding apocalyptic images: *why*? What we want to know is what sort of function these images had, or why John or any other apocalyptist would write a book this way. And for that question both answers—because John was following generic predecessors, or because those are the images he saw in his visions—are less than satisfactory. They explain *how* John's Apocalypse took the shape it did, but they offer only

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[90] Boring, *Revelation*, 52, emphasis original.

[91] Boring, *Revelation*, 53.

[92] See especially the important discussion of expression and its relationship to representation in Nelson Goodman, *Langauges of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 45-95.

very weak answers as to *why* John would write in these images. Was he attempting to

comfort an oppressed community, or one under relative deprivation? There are other means

of exhortation at John's disposal. The idea that John was speaking in coded language so as

to escape the notice of Rome is not useful, since John occasionally offers interpretations of

his visions (e.g. Rev 17:9-14). Why write a coded book if you are going to reveal the code?

And even if one did do such a thing, John's interpretations do not always point to Roman or

even "political" referents (e.g. Rev 1:20).

The use of the term "image" in apocalyptic studies has suffered from confused

definitions of the term. Every generation of scholars seems to think they are merely

following the predecessors when they actually import whatever notion of image, symbol,

myth, or allegory is convenient for their purposes, derived from the currents of their own

time, but without much reflection on that fact. What Herder meant by image is not quite

what Lücke meant; what Lücke meant is not quite what Bousset, Charles, or Farrer meant;

and so on. In a recent conference volume devoted to the topic, "Imagery in the book of

Revelation," the editors claim, "Understanding the book of Revelation means understanding

its imagery."[93] After reviewing the articles in the volume, however, the editors admit the

authors have not really tackled the methodological problem of "images," concluding, "There

is still some need to further elaborate and define the phenomenon of imagery itself."[94] The

foregoing review of scholarship reveals just how applicable to the whole of scholarship on

the book of Revelation, if not of apocalyptic scholarship generally, such a statement is.

Collins's attempt to wrest apocalyptic images from referentiality is a step in the right

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[93] Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu, "Introduction: The Rhetorical Power of Imagery – Imagery in the Book of Revelation," *Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (ed. Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu; Leuven: Peeters, 2011), vii.

[94] Labahn and Lehtipuu, "Introduction," xvi.

direction—to proceed from the apocalyptic message to the apocalyptic imagination. But rather than grounding the meaning of "image" in "myth," or social "symbol," I think our understanding of apocalyptic images needs to be grounded in the notion of image *qua* image. If we are going to look at apocalyptic images, we should have a clearer sense of what we are investigating. I have already hinted that I think "image," as an analytic category, should somehow include a notion of visuality. Instead of a mythological, symbolic social imagination, we need a better sense of the (apocalyptic) imaginary.

In 1940, Jean-Paul Sartre published *L'Imaginaire: Psychologie Phénoménologique de l'Imagination*, which sought to describe the object of imagination.[95] Sartre calls the imaginary the "noematic correlate" of imagination.[96] This is Husserlian jargon. Husserl distinguished between the noematic and the noetic, or, roughly, what is thought and the act of thinking. Sartre thus distinguishes between what is imagined (the imaginary) and the act of imagining (imagination). John Collins's *The Apocalyptic Imagination* is an excellent guide to the ancient apocalyptic literature, as all admit. It is not much of a guide to the apocalyptic imagination, however, much less the imaginary in apocalyptic. The synopsis on the back cover of the revised edition reads, "Apocalyptic literature evokes an imaginative world that is set in deliberate counterpoint to the experiential world of the present. Apocalypticism thrives especially in times of crisis, and it functions by offering a resolution of the relevant crisis, not in practical terms but in terms of imagination and faith." In the discussion above, we saw

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[95] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (ed. Alette Elkam-Sartre; trans. Jonathan Webber; London: Routledge, 2004), originally published in 1940, and edited for a second edition by his adopted daughter posthumously. Webber's translation is based on the second French edition (1986). In 1936 Sartre published his first philosophical work, *L'Imagination* (ET: *The Imagination* [trans. Kenneth Williford and David Rudrauf; London: Routledge, 2012), which was written with *L'Imaginaire*; in fact, the two were conceived and written as one work. *L'Imagination* was to be the historical prolegomenon for *L'Imaginaire*.

[96] Sartre, *Imaginary*, 3.

that this means the re-deployment of social symbols and mythological narratives. It has little to do with images and the imaginary.

Collins is in some ways an easy target, because he is such a prominent figure in current research on apocalyptic. It should be clear from the discussion above that I find much to approve in Collins's understanding of symbolism in apocalyptic literature. And yet, Collins is no closer to a description of the imaginative processes of apocalyptic than his predecessors. The present study seeks to address this desideratum, deliberately (but judiciously) drawing on the fields of visual and image studies.

Chapter 3. What is an Image?

> When we say the word "image" we tend not to be explicit about what we
> mean by the term. We do not usually make a point of differentiating
> between different image types and experiences. …At a basic level, it would
> seem useful to begin to make more analytical sense of the *variety* of image
> types and processes. Equally, however, we might accept the fact that when
> we use the word "image" we may not always know what we mean, or, rather,
> we may be saying more or less than we first thought.
>
> Sunil Manghani, *Image Studies*[1]

As the previous chapter showed, the term "image" can mean a variety of things. In Plato's *Sophist*, Theaetetus and the Visitor from Elea, discussing the nature of a sophist's task, decide sophists have an expertise in making images (εἴδωλα). The Visitor then interrogates Theaetetus about this term εἴδολον. If Theaetetus should present such a charge without understanding what it is he says, after all, the sophist is likely to laugh at the suggestion: "He'll ask about what runs through all those things which you call many, but which you thought you should call by the one name, *image*, to cover them all, as if they were all one thing."[2] Like Theaetetus, literary scholars and biblical scholars have both failed to account for their use of the term image, and this in spite of the fact that the analytic term "image/*Bild*" has been native in the study of apocalyptic literature for some time. In their article for the most recent edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Tom Mitchell and Brian Glavey write, "*Image* and *imagery* are among the most widely used and poorly understood terms in poetic theory, occurring in so many different contexts that it

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[1] Sunil Manghani, *Image Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013), xxiii.

[2] Plato, *Sophist*, 240a. Translation modified from Nicholas P. White, "The Sophist," in *Plato: Complete Works* (ed. John M. Cooper; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 260. There was a difference in antiquity, of course, between εἴδολον and εἰκών, which the translation has elided. Even within the *Sophist* (236a-b), Plato subdivides εἴδολον into εἰκών (likeness) and φάντασμα (appearance). Cf. F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), 45-46, 51. The deliberate translation above of εἴδολον as "image" is for illustrative purposes, of course, and nothing of my argument depends upon it.

may well be impossible to provide any rational, systematic account of their usage."[3] Poetic

theory is clearly not the only discipline with such a wide range of usage. In this chapter, I

will recommend a taxonomy of images for analytic purposes, based on the work of theorists

from the field of Image Studies. Image, I will argue, is a term that should be used for

phenomena that operate in visual register, whether that visuality is actual or imaginary, a

direct visual encounter or part of what Sartre called the *irréel*.[4] This reflects the fact that the

basic sense of image refers to a visible object. The extension of the term to include

imaginary images or mental images reflects not a difference of kind, but of media, a point for

which I will draw on the theory of art historian and theorist Hans Belting. In this chapter,

therefore, I argue that use of the term image in apocalyptic studies should be reserved for

the more precise analytic purpose of understanding the visual, pictorial aspect of apocalyptic

writings.[5]

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[3] W. J. T. Mitchell and B. Glavey, "Image," in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (4th ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 660.

[4] Sartre's *irréel* seems to be related to Husserl's notion of *irreal*, as Jonathan Webber's translator's notes to the English edition point out (Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* [trans. Jonathan Webber; London: Routledge, 2004], xviii). By this term, Sartre does not mean unreal, i.e. "non-existent." "Rather," Webber writes, "an irreal object…is an object as imaged by consciousness. The object may be real: the irreal Pierre may be the real Pierre as imaged. Conversely, unreal object that are never imaged will never be irreal" (Sartre, *Imaginary*, xviii).

[5] For many readers this chapter will perhaps be though overly technical and unnecessarily theoretical. Manghani's view seems right on target: "Rather than enumerate yet another set of political critiques of the image and visual culture, the intention of this book—and more generally in marking out the field of 'image studies'—is to slow down our engagement with the image. Social, political critique is important…[h]owever it is vital we do not rush to overlay a critical analysis that has not first engaged with an exploration of images at a more fundamental level" (Manghani, *Image Studies*, xxviii). This chapter (indeed these first few chapters) may seem to have slowed down our engagement with apocalyptic images, but that may in fact be for the best. Until we have wrestled with apocalyptic and images at a more fundamental level, it is unlikely an examination of apocalyptic images will be fruitful.

Image Studies and its Questions

Following on the heels of Visual Studies, in the early 2000s a new field that took the

name Image Studies began to attract scholarly interest. In truth, Image Studies grew out of

the same ferment as Visual Studies, only with "the image" and "image culture" as a focal

point, rather than "visual culture." James Elkins identified Image Studies as a synonym for

Visual Studies in his 2003 introduction to the latter, though he recognized it was not yet a

term much in use.[6] Elkins mentioned in a footnote a forthcoming reader in Image Studies

by Sunil Manghani and Jon Simons, which appeared in 2006.[7] More recently, Manghani has

released an introduction to the field, and a far more extensive, four-volume reader as well.[8]

If we can tentatively judge a field by its major publications, these works by Manghani and his

colleagues cut the profile of a field distinct from, yet considerably overlapping, Visual

Studies. Scholars like Erwin Panofsky, Nelson Goodman, Michel Foucault, and W. J. T.

Mitchell (just to name a few!) are just as prominent in Image Studies as in Visual Studies.

Both readers in Image Studies mentioned above trace the concerns of image studies back to

Genesis and Exodus, Plato and Aristotle, though the work of Mitchell is probably the most

proximate inspiration.[9] Image Studies is thus the heir of what Panofsky dubbed

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[6] James Elkins, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), 7.

[7] Sunil Manghani, Arthur Piper, and Jon Simons, *Images: A Reader* (London: SAGE, 2006).

[8] Manghani, *Images Studies*, and idem, *Image Studies: Critical and Primary Sources* (4 vols.; London: Routledge, 2013). Other important works include the following: W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); idem, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); idem, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); James Elkins, *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); James Elkins and Maja Naef, eds., *What is an Image?* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

[9] Especially important are Mitchell, *Pictures Want?*; idem, *Picture Theory*; and idem, *Iconology*.

"iconology."[10] As a coherent and distinguishable field Image Studies is nascent, though its

pedigree is fairly well established. Its future remains to be seen.[11]

What distinguishes Image Studies from Visual Studies is the emphasis of the

questions it raises, questions especially pertinent to our study of apocalyptic images. "At the

heart of [this] book," Manghani writes in his introduction to the field, "are two deceptively

simple questions: (1) What is an image? and (2) How do images differ to words? Alongside

which, we can ask: What is it that images *do* and/or what is it we *do* with images?"[12]

Explicitly building on Mitchell's work, Manghani stresses, "we need to go beyond a

hermeneutics of the image, to ask not simply what is *in* an image, but also more practically

what we use images for, how we make or manipulate them and how their use informs our

understanding of them and more generally of the world around us."[13] What are images?

How do they differ from words? Not what do they *say*, but what do they *do*? These

questions mirror the questions we need to ask regarding apocalyptic images: What are

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[10] Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

[11] This represents English-language scholarship on Image Studies. A parallel and robust development with some cross-fertilization from English-language scholarship (again, particularly Mitchell's work) has taken hold in German-language scholarship under the similarly obvious name *Bildwissenschaft*. A very good introduction from the German side is Matthias Bruhn, *Das Bild: Theorie—Geschichte—Praxis* (Berlin: Akademie, 2008). A short list of other titles would include: Gustav Frank and Barbara Lange, *Einführung in die Bildwissenschaft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010); Klaus Sachs-Hombach, ed., *Bildtheorien: Anthropologische und kulturelle Grundlagen des Visualistic Turn* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2009); idem, ed., *Bild und Medium: Kunstgeschichtliche und Philosophische Grundlagen der Interdizsiplinären Bildwissenschaft* (Cologne: Halem, 2006); idem, ed., *Bildwissenschaft: Disziplinen, Themen, Methoden* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2005); idem, *Das Bild als kommunikatives Medium: Elemente einer allgemeinen Bildwissenschaft* (Cologne: Halem, 2003); Martin Schulz, *Ordnungen der Bilder: Eine Einführung in die Bildwissenschaft* (Munich: Fink, 2009); Gottfried Boehm, ed., *Was ist ein Bild?* (Munich: Fink, 2006); Lambert Wiesing, *Artifizielle Präsenz: Studien zur Philosophie des Bildes* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2005) (ET: *Artificial Presence: Philosophical Studies in Image Theory* [tranls. Nils F. Schott; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010]); Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropolgie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Munich: Fink, 2001) (ET: *Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, and Body* (tranls. Thomas Dunlap; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[12] Manghani, *Image Studies*, xxii. The first two questions come directly from Mitchell, *Iconology*. Manghani goes on immediately to reference the three books of Mitchell's I have cited above.

[13] Manghani, *Image Studies*, xxii.

apocalyptic images? What is the relationship of words or textuality to these images? What do these images do?

The contents to Manghani's four-volume reader provides a good sense of the rudiments of the field. The first volume is titled "Understanding Images," and the excerpts and articles it contains are divided into three sections: Image Studies, Defining Images, and Image and Ideology. The first volume thus tackles the larger question of what Image Studies is, but more centrally is focused on the question, what is an image, and how is it culturally situated? The second volume is titled "The Pictorial Turn," a phrase lifted from Mitchell's work. We will look more closely at Mitchell's "pictorial turn" below. The volume is likewise divided into three parts: Image Philosophy, Text and Image, and Image as Thought. The readings in this volume are thus focused on the distinctiveness of the image over against discursive texts and reasoning, and also its inextricability from the latter. The third volume, "Image Theory," looks more closely at the variety of approaches to defining and analyzing images, including art historical, semiotic, psycho-analytic, and phenomenological approaches, as well as the difference the medium of an image makes to its analysis. The final volume, "Image Cultures," explores the contexts in which study of images may be crucial: visual culture, memory, images as visual evidence, scientific imaging, and the making of images.

Our brief tour of Manghani's collection of "critical and primary" readings in Image Studies points to a few themes particularly relevant for the present study. The first theme, to which an entire volume is committed is Mitchell's notion of the "pictorial turn."   With a nod to the "linguistic turn" in philosophy identified by Richard Rorty, Mitchell argues that in the humanities and public culture "a complexly related transformation is occurring," to

which he gives the name "pictorial turn."[14] Unlike Rorty's "linguistic turn" the pictorial turn

is not so much an epistemological move from things to ideas to words, and now to images.

Instead, evidence for a pictorial turn turns on the observation "that pictures form a point of

peculiar friction and discomfort across a broad range of intellectual inquiry."[15] Mitchell

elaborates,

> The simplest way to put this is to say that, in what is often characterized as
> an age of "spectacle" (Guy Debord), "surveillance" (Foucault), and all-
> pervasive image-making, we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what
> their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world,
> how their history is to be understood, and what is to be done with or about
> them.

It is the dual recognition that images are not simply holders of information, and that they are

not simply harmless representations without any power or communication that has created

the condition which Mitchell calls the pictorial turn.

If we are going to attempt to understand apocalyptic images, we too must find

ourselves in the midst of a pictorial turn, away from a linguistic or even an ideational

reduction of images. The pictorial turn charts a course *beyond* the linguistic turn; it is not a

nostalgic privileging of the image (*à la* Romanticism). As Mitchell writes,

> Whatever the pictorial turn is… it should be clear that it is not a return to
> naïve mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a
> renewed metaphysics of pictorial "presence": it is rather a postlinguistic,
> postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between
> visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality.[16]

As we will glimpse below, such a judgment does not mean that mimesis itself, other theories

of representation, or a phenomenology of pictorial presence are necessarily precluded from

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[14] W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn," in *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 11-34.
[15] Mitchell, "Pictorial Turn," 13.
[16] Mitchell, "Pictorial Turn," 16.

the pictorial turn. The point is merely that on this side of the linguistic turn images still resist reduction to language. The picture, the image is in this sense the other of language. But not simply so, since the image can also be "figured" in language, and images can function semiotically (though not necessarily as a "language"). The pictorial turn does not indicate the *opposition* of text and picture, but the "complex interplay" of language and image.[17] Images may be translatable into linguistic information or into ideas, but their impact seems to extend beyond any such neat translations. Something is always lost, it seems, in such translation. I can write an essay on the "meaning" of the Mona Lisa, or the confluence of love and death in the "Madonna" of Edvard Munch, but neither the discursive meaning I might find in the Mona Lisa nor the ideas of love and death rival the images themselves. The pictorial turn describes a recognition across a number of fields that previous attempts to apprehend and understand images have failed, that images seem to resist the kinds of questions that have been foisted upon them up to now.

Making the pictorial turn thus forces a return to the more basic question: What is an image? Defining images, or more precisely, understanding what they are and what they do, is a question that has not often been raised, at least not in biblical and theological studies, and even less often answered satisfactorily. I hope the last chapter amply demonstrated that this is certainly true of apocalyptic images and those who have studied them. The remainder of this chapter will be largely concerned with posing this question and offering a working answer. Related to the question of what an image is, is the recognition that images are

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[17] Jacques Rancière also makes this point well: "[T]he image is not exclusive to the visible. There is visibility that does not amount to an image; there are images which consist wholly in words. But the commonest regime of the image is one that presents a relationship between the sayable and the visible, a relationship which plays on both the analogy *and* the dissemblance between them. This relationship by no means requires the two terms to be materially present. The visible can be arranged in meaningful tropes; words deploy a visibility that can be blinding" (Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* [New York: Verso, 2007], 7).

subject to changes of mediality. Images are not all of one kind, but are present in a variety

of media. Understanding images also means tracing the media through which they travel

and in which they appear. Not far from the importance of mediality is the question of the

relationship between texts and images. Apocalyptic images, whatever their origins, are only

preserved in textual form, which means that we cannot actually study apocalyptic images in a

literal sense. Whatever we might mean by "apocalyptic image," it will always be at least one

step removed from visual images. The question we will need to address is whether these

images are merely preserved or transmitted in a verbal medium, or if the verbal medium

negates the root of the designation as a primarily visual phenomenon. Can images survive

textualization and remain images?

In the midst of the pictorial turn, therefore, we find ourselves much better resourced

for exploring the perennial questions of apocalyptic images. The twin questions, What are

images? and What is the relationship between images and texts?, have never been more

thoroughly explored. Since "image" has played a leading role in the central questions of

apocalyptic literature, apocalyptic studies is perhaps better situated than any other sub-field

of scholarship on early Judaism and early Christianity to make the pictorial turn. Clearly,

though, just as the pictorial turn is not a simple return to early modes of thought, but a

postsemiotic transformation, so too a pictorial turn in apocalyptic studies cannot simply be a

return to the sublimation and mystification of the image promulgated by the Romantics. We

can (and should) accept the imagistic intuition of the Romantic interpreters of the book of

Revelation, without reinscribing the category confusion to which they were prone. What we

need is a clearer conception of a *post-Romantic* image.

Making the Pictorial Turn: The Apocalyptic Image after Romanticism

The terms image and imagery are used in scholarly studies to designate at least three things: visual images (e.g., iconography); verbal images (i.e., metaphoric or figurative language); and/or (more elusively) mental images.[18] The second and third terms are derivative; they are based on the concept of images as visual phenomena. The point is obvious but needs to be said. The fundamental connection of "imagery" to the visual will no doubt strike some readers as overly determined, nitpicking, or hair-splitting, which are all different ways of saying, precise. The dissociation of verbal or mental "imagery" from the visual is attributable to the imprecise ways the term has been used in literary criticism and biblical studies.

Consider the term (verbal) imagery. When we loosely speak about the imagery of light and dark in, say, the Johannine writings, we very often mean something like the themes of light and dark, or of the polarity or complementarity of them. We do not really mean the images of light and dark, because image means, well, image, picture, depiction, figure.[19] The loose use of the term is a common confusion in literary scholarship in general, and biblical studies in particular. The author of a very fine study of the book of Revelation makes this same slip: "Through images, such as the image of history as a pilgrimage, medieval thinkers

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[18] A new generation of scholars in the Fribourg tradition of iconographic exegesis has also taken up this question with similar results. That is perhaps not surprising as they also draw on Tom Mitchell's work, but it is promising nonetheless. See especially Izaak J. de Hulster, "What is an Image? A Basis for Iconographic Exegesis," in *Iconography and Biblical Studies: Proceedings of the Iconography Sessions of the Joint EABS/SBL Conference, 22-26 July 2007, Vienna, Austria* (ed. Izaak J. de Hulster and Rüdiger Schmitt; Münster: Ugarit, 2009), 225-32 (cf. Mitchell, *Iconology*, 7-46). Also worth noting, though not as cognizant of very important work in Image Studies (e.g. Mitchell, *Iconology*) is the edited volume, Annette Weissenrieder, Frederike Wendt, and Petra von Gemünden, eds., *Picturing the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

[19] Ian Paul makes a similar point: "It is convenient to talk of Revelation's 'imagery' and 'symbolism,' but Revelation is a text, and while words can be symbols and images, in this context the imagery or symbolism referred to concerns that which the text appears to depict and not the text itself" (Ian Paul, "The Book of Revelation: Image, Symbol, and Metaphor," in *Studies in the Book of Revelation* [ed. Steve Moyise; London: T&T Clark, 2001], 135).

found a variety of ways to conceptualize and understand their own experience of history…."[20] What this author properly means is that medieval thinkers thought about history via the *metaphor* of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage, strictly speaking, is not an image, though it is a concept that conjures images—of hooded figures laboriously walking with staffs down a dirt trail, or twenty-somethings drinking a beer on the Camino de Santiago, or some such picture. Verbal "imagery" is a metaphor, then.   As Mitchell puts it, "The phrase, 'verbal imagery'…seems to be a metaphor for metaphor itself!"[21] Verbal imagery, it would seem, is not properly imagery at all, but a metaphor—a specific, "improper" use of language to refer to something else (in this case, a specific use of language) by means of a different, though perhaps suggestive, name.

The idea of mental imagery is ancient. Among a variety of Greek and Roman philosophers (especially Atomists and Epicureans, but also Platonists, Peripatetics, and Stoics) visual perception entailed physical impressions of the seen object on the mind or *psyche.* The idea of mental imagery corresponding to the visual world (even if a poor reflection thereof) was recast among the modern epistemologists Hobbes, Locke, and Hume.[22] These philosophers understood mental images as the mediators between the world as the realm of appearances and the mind as the realm of language and thought. The word "lamp" refers to a mental sketch of a lamp—what Kant would later call a concept—which reflects (however adumbrated or poorly) one's sensory experience of lamps. The idea of mental imagery as a mediator between the world and the mind is founded on an analogy. As Christopher Gauker explains, "[Mental] Imagistic representations are of course not literally

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[20] Lynn Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned: Reading Metaphor in John's Apocalypse* (London: T&T Clark), 9.

[21] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 21.

[22] See Mitchell, *Iconology*, 22-4. On Locke in particular, Christopher Gauker, *Words and Images: An Essay on the Origin of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford, 2011), 17-49.

pictures. A mental image of a poodle is not a picture in the brain that we could look at in a brain and recognize as a picture of a poodle just by looking at it."[23] Or as Mitchell more vividly writes, we certainly cannot compare physical and mental images "by cutting open someone's head to compare mental pictures with the ones on our walls."[24] Unlike verbal imagery, though, mental imagery is based on a direct analogy. Verbal imagery, as used above (i.e. for tropological language) need have nothing to do with visual perception, but mental imagery depends upon the idea of perception. We intuitively label the mental image of a lamp as inhabiting a similar perceptual field as a physical, visible lamp. That is why we speak of the "eye(s) of the mind" to describe that elusive perceptual faculty of the mind to, as it were, see things without the eyes seeing them. We can, for instance, imagine things, people, events, without having seen them and without the mediation of language.[25]

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[23] Gauker, *Words and Images*, 147.

[24] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 15.

[25] Christopher Gauker imagines what would be involved in replacing a washer in the hot water valve of his sink:

"First, I unscrew the cap labeled 'H' on the handle. Then I stick the screwdriver into the cylinder inside the handles and unscrew the screw at the bottom. Then I lift the handle out of its seat. Then, using my hand, I unscrew the escutcheon cap (the chrome 'skirt' surrounding the stem). Using a wrench, I then unscrew the ring that holds down the stem and lift it off. Then I pull the stem out. At the bottom of the stem is a screw holding in the old washer. I unscrew that screw using a small washer, and, finally, reverse all of the above operations" (Gauker, *Words and Images*, 149).

All of this Gauker imagines—he did not actually take the valve apart—and as he points out, he would not have needed to use words to *imagine* this sequence of events. For our purposes, we might even say he is able to *picture* the sequence of events. This is an excellent example of Gauker's larger argument that not all thought is discursive or based in language, but that even problem-solving can be accomplished by what he names "imagistic cognition." It is important to note that Gauker's description works so well because it is detailed and vivid. An account that merely narrated, "I changed a washer in my sink," seems far less imaginative, far less *imagistic*. Even so, do not the words "washer" and "sink" conjure images, and does not "changed" evoke a kind of pictorial narrative, fuzzy or brief though it may be?

Gauker's study is important because he supports his case both philosophically and by examining scientific studies of cognition. We should also point out that while Gauker argues for even a problem-solving level of imagistic cognition, he also recognizes that humans often think in language (language-mediated thought). Gauker does not valorize imagistic cognition; he merely argues there is such a mode of thought. Gauker's argument is that humans *can* and often *do* think in pictures, to put the matter crassly, whereas the Romantics believed the image (which meant both one thing and many things, as we have seen) almost superseded thought, resided at the limit of thought, and revealed the highest possible truth. Moreover, Gauker maintains a sharp distinction between conceptual thought and verbal imagery. See Gauker, *Words and Images*, esp. 256-84.

At this point the discussion of mental imagery leads back to verbal imagery. One may "find words to describe" what one imagines.[26] Language is secondary to this imagining process. Even so, we are usually able to describe in words what we imagine. More importantly, we are able to help others imagine through language. If verbal imagery is commonly used as a cognomen for tropological language, it is nevertheless also used as a label for this pictorial function of language, or "the verbal representation of visual representation."[27] This latter is James Heffernan's popular definition for *ekphrasis*. We will examine ancient views on ekphrasis in another chapter, but the term, as a shorthand for the phenomenon we have just been describing (the power of language to evoke [mental] imagery), has provoked a great deal of interest from modern theorists as well. What makes the current interest in ekphrasis helpful for the present study is its connections with the kinds of images (i.e. apocalyptic images) under discussion. Verbal representation is at once able and impotent to represent images. In describing images, an ekphrasis might bring those images "before the mind's eye," but, as Mitchell paraphrases Nelson Goodman, "No amount of description adds up to depiction."[28] Descriptions—words, texts, verbal representations—are not *literal* pictures or images. But in bringing what is described before "the mind's eye," descriptions do evoke (I do not say, "create") mental images. The imagistic function of language betokens a second and more analytically useful meaning of

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[26] As Gauker clearly did. Cf. Gauker, *Words and Images*, 150.

[27] James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 3. Cf. James A. W. Heffernan, "Ekphrasis and Representation," *New Literary History* 22 (1991), 299, wherein the formulation was "the verbal representation of graphic resprescntation."

[28] Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 152. Goodman wrote: "No amount of familiarity turns a paragraph into a picture; and no degree of novelty makes a picture a paragraph" (Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976], 231).

"verbal imagery."[29] While the relationship between figurative language and visual images may be wholly metaphorical, the relationship between this idea of verbal imagery—as description, verbal representation, ekphrasis—operates in concert with mental images, by analogy with visual images.

Studies on the book of Revelation and apocalyptic poetics vacillate between these two (very different) meanings of (verbal) imagery. Studies that emphasize the literary character of the apocalypses tend to emphasize the figurative, allusive, or symbolic language of the texts. Studies that emphasize the visionary character of the apocalypses tend to emphasize the depictions suggested by the descriptions. I am more in agreement with the latter than the former, though I recognize that the images are not literally pictures and I make no claims about what the apocalyptist "actually saw." In short, I am suggesting that in the analysis of the book of Revelation and other apocalypses, the terms image and imagery should be reserved for the picture-making function of a text. Imagistic language is not metaphorical or tropological language, but image-evoking language. Such a circumscription has the added benefit of forcing clarity in talking about tropological language as well. We

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[29] To be fair, then, the lack of precision regarding verbal or literary "imagery" is a problem across literary criticism and academic discourse, not simply among biblical scholars. The second edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, for instance, defined an image as "the reproduction in the mind of a sensation produced by a physical perception." Friedman's article goes on to identify three possible definitions of image as, 1) mental image; 2) figures of speech; or 3) "imagery or image patterns as the embodiment of 'symbolic vision' or of 'nondiscursive truth'" (N. Friedman, "Imagery," in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* [Enlarged ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974], 363). Only the first of these three definitions is truly coherent with the original definition, while the second and third definitions indicate further ways the term is used. Richard Lanham's *Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* likewise equivocates. Lanham identifies "image" in the study of literature as "a thing that represents something else; a symbol, emblem, representation." Lanham notes the pictorial ("image-making") use of the term, but since his list is meant to be descriptive of the way terms are used in literary criticism rather than prescriptive, he acknowledges the more common meaning of the term as "figurative expression generally" (Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* [2d ed.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991], 89-90). As late as 1986 Tom Mitchell could claim, "Figurative language…is what we ordinarily mean when we talk about verbal imagery" (W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986], 21). This broad use of *image/ry* is at least as confusing (I would argue more so) than the nominal use of *apocalyptic*, simultaneously making alternative concepts like *symbol* and *metaphor* less potent and obscuring the potential for analysis of a literary work's *visual aspect*.

should be specific—does this passage employ metaphor, euphemism, hyperbole, irony, paradox, pun, simile, or metonymy? The list goes on, of course. I suggest that this use of verbal imagery—to talk about thematics, poetics, symbolism, metaphor, metonym, synecdoche, or any other kind of tropological language—should be abandoned in the analysis of apocalyptic images. The more "literal" sense of verbal images as pictorial language is the use of language that should be retained for the analytic concept of "(verbal) imagery" in the study of apocalyptic writings.

Image, Medium, Body

It is no wonder there is confusion about how to interpret the images or symbols or metaphors of the book of Revelation if scholars cannot even agree whether what they are discussing are images or symbols or metaphors, and do not care to make distinctions between the terms in the first place. If we mean to study the symbols of the Apocalypse, then we need to be clear about what it means to call them symbols; if metaphors, then we need to be clear about the definition of a metaphor. So, too, with images. What, then, is an image? If verbal imagery and mental imagery should be so named by analogy with physical or visual images, how do we they cohere with the root concept of the visual image?

Critical theory on images is based on a fundamental distinction, as Hans Jonas puts it, between "the represented, the representation, and the vehicle of representation (the imaging thing, or physical carrier of the image)."[30] To avoid controversial debate over the term representation, it may be better for now to distinguish these three aspects of the image

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[30] Han Jonas, "Homo Pictor and the Differentia of Man," *Social Research* 29:2 (1962), 207. In the German version of this paper, based on the English original, Jonas uses the terms *das Darstellung, die Darstellung und das Darstellende*.

rather as the depicted, the depiction, and that which depicts (or, the depicting).[31] Whatever

terms are used, the basic idea is that in an image, say, of an emperor stamped on a coin, one

can distinguish the image of the emperor (depiction) from the emperor himself (depicted).

One can further distinguish both of these from the stamped piece of metal that carries the

depiction (the depicting).

A useful model for understanding images that builds on this distinction is that of art

historian Hans Belting. Belting generated a great deal of discussion with his book

Bildanthropologie, published in 2001, English translation 2011.[32] The core of his

"anthropology of images" is sketched by the subtitle, "Image, Medium, Body." "Images,"

writes Belting, "are neither on the wall (or on the screen) nor in the head alone. They do not

exist by themselves, but they *happen*; they *take place* whether they are moving images…or not.

They happen via transmission and reception."[33] The fundamental insight of Belting's

anthropological approach is that "images," being culturally determined, exist neither without

an act of fabrication or transmission, nor without a perceiving subject, and a specific act of

perception. "Images," he writes, "rely on two symbolic acts which both involve our living

body: the act of *fabrication* and the act of *perception*, the one being the purpose of the other."[34]

This analysis of images suggests a complex arrangement of phenomena we might identify as

images. An image is identified by the perceiving subject *as an image*, or else it is just another

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[31] Since the language of *representation* triggers longstanding debates in Western philosophy of literature and the arts on mimesis and imitation, and is therefore potentially obfuscating, we need not accept the term "representation" to affirm Jonas's basic distinction. In his translation of Lambert Wiesing's *Artificial Presence*, for instance, Nils Schott prefers the terms *depicted, depiction, depicting*. See Schott's translator note, Wiesing, *Artificial Presence*, 136, n. 23. We could also just as easily use the terms *imaged, image, imaging*, though these terms invite confusion regarding the distinction between the second term and the object which is divisible into these three aspects.

[32] Hans Belting, *Bildanthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Munich: Fink, 2001). English translation: *Anthropology of Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[33] Belting, "Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology," *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2005), 302-3.

[34] Belting, *Anthropology of Images,* 3.

piece of wood, canvas, rock, etc. But once so perceived, the images are replicated on the medium of the body—that is, in the brain. From there the images may be further replicated in fabrication, in remembrance, in language, or lost to oblivion. But the negotiation of images remains with the human capacity for imagination and image-making. Thus, images are not accessible outside of a specific kind of cultural exchange, and that exchange only happens at the locus of the body: "The human being is the natural *locus of images*, a living organ for images, as it were. …[I]t is within the human being, and only within the human being, that images are received and interpreted in a living sense."[35] So, with verbal images, Belting argues, "Language transmits verbal imagery when we turn words into mental images of our own. Words stimulate our imagination, while the imagination in turn transforms them into the images they signify."[36] Verbal images are thus twice at a remove from material images, but because they produce or, as it were, participate in mental images, pieces of languages garner to themselves the name "images."

When we find words to mediate between images and imagination we are dealing with what properly for analytic purposes should be called verbal imagery. In the book of Revelation I am prepared to call the description of the heavenly figure in the opening christophany an image; likewise the divine throne, the four living creatures, the four horsemen, the dragon, the woman clothed in the sun, the beast from the sea, the beast from the land, etc. But I would not call number symbolism, for instance, imagery. The symbolic iteration of numbers is certainly part of the scheme of the book, but I do not think we should call such language "imagery." So, we have three kinds of interrelated images. Material images, mental images, and verbal images. The first two play, either literally or by

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[35] Belting, *Anthropology of Images*, 37.
[36] Belting, "Image, Medium, Body," 306.

extension, in the visual register. The latter is so called when it also evokes visuality. That these three phenomena can be understood together under the same term—"image"—already points to the different media by which images can be transmitted. Material images are transmitted in matter, in visual objects. The medium of mental images is the mind, the brain, and therefore the body. Verbal images are carried by language, a medium only fully perceptible by human bodies.

Belting's model has not gone without criticism, but it is extraordinarily useful in drawing connections between material, verbal, and mental images while maintaining a fundamental emphasis on visuality (though Belting does not use this term).[37] It is particularly helpful for apocalyptic scholars who wish to examine the visuality of apocalyptic texts, since Belting is able to allow for the pictoriality of language through the medium of the human mind. Belting's model will prove fruitful as we look in the next chapter at a tradition of apocalyptic images.

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[37] See the judicious review by Christopher Wood, *Art Bulletin* 86.3 (2004), 370-373, and also the review of the English publication by Jonathan Miller, *Anthropological Quarterly* 85.2 (2013), 627-32.

Part II: Revelation and Realia

An historical account of apocalyptic images must attempt to locate the images in their ancient cultural contexts, in terms both of production and of reception. For that aim, literary sources are necessary but not sufficient. If we wish to understand the images in their visual cultural environment, then they are best studied in the context of other visual artifacts. Unfortunately, most apocalypses (nevermind their images) are difficult to place in a historical and social setting in anything but a general way. The specific settings of most apocalypses are conjectured, but the book of Revelation identifies both a proximate provenance (Patmos—which does not necessarily tell us much about John's cultural background) and an original address (seven cities in Western Asia Minor). The original cultural location is therefore far more specific and assured than any other apocalyptic book. The cities of Western Asia Minor, indeed nearly all of the Mediterranean cities, were "cities of images."[1] Statues, reliefs, frescoes, and mosaics abounded, portraying gods, heroes, emperors, lovers, nature scenes, mythic figures, buildings, wars, family members, and the list goes on. The world in which John, or at least his audiences, lived and moved and had their being, was full of images, which no tourist—never mind a resident of one of the cities—could fail to notice. At least some of these cities are as well-documented as any other locale of the Hellenistic or Roman imperial periods, with the exception, perhaps, of Rome. Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum were particularly well-known in the Roman period, and along with Sardis and Laodicea have hosted several and sustained excavation projects.[2] (Philadelphia and Thyatira

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[1] Cf. Peter Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6; after C. Bérard et al., *A City of Images: Iconography and Society in Ancient Greece* (trans. Deborah Lyons; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[2] See, e.g., Wolfgang Radt, *Pergamon: Geschichte und Bauten einer antiken Metropole* (2d ed.; Darmstadt: Primus, 2011); Helmust Koester, ed., *Pergamon: Citadel of the Gods* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press

unfortunately suffer from both ancient and modern neglect.) With at least some of these

cities, then, a more specific range of images with which to compare the imagery of the book

obtains than is the case with other apocalypses. The book of Revelation therefore provides

a good case study among the (later) apocalypses for understanding the relationship of verbal,

apocalyptic imagery to visual, material images and artifacts.[3]

Three distinguishable uses of visual artifacts can be discerned in scholarship on the

Apocalypse. Some scholars have drawn on visual culture to show that John's images were to

some extent sourced from the images he and his audiences encountered every day. This is

most prominent among scholars who think John's message was particularly anti-

Roman/imperial. For these scholars John drew on imperial imagery precisely to reject it as

monstrous or blasphemous, or to parody it. Other scholars find references to local sights in

John's symbols, without any kind of visual evocation on John's part; a word or phrase is

thought to stand for this or that sight.   Finally, there are those who draw on the material and

visual culture of Asia Minor as evidence of cultural production and meaning-making

analogous with John's composition. The realia of Asia Minor and the literary production of

John's Apocalypse are thus cultural comparanda, but without any necessary or direct

relationship. Visual artifacts from antiquity have been employed as sources for John's

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International, 1998); Helmut Koester, ed., *Ephesos: Metropolis of Asia* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press
International, 1995); Anton Bammer, *Ephesos: Stadt an Fluß und Meer* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u.
Verlagsanstalt, 1988); George M. A. Hanfmann, et al., *Sardis: From Prehistoric to Roman Times* (Cambridge, Mass.:
Harvard University Press, 1983); George E. Bean, *Aegean Turkey: An Archaeological Guide* (2d ed.; New York:
Norton, 1979); J. M. Cook, *The Greeks in Ionia and the East* (New York: Praeger, 1963).

[3] Some of the confidence inspired by the state of knowledge of ancient Asia Minor needs to be
moderated, however. I will show in the next chapter that some things that are "known" about Asia Minor,
particularly about the so-called Great Altar of Pergamum, are not quite as assured as we would like. Colin
Hemer, whose study on the local setting of the seven churches of Asia Minor repays continued reading, often
reminds his readers that his case is cumulatively circumstantial, and that the evidence remains fragmentary
(Colin Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986; reprinted
with a foreword by David E. Aune: Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001]).

images, as referents to which John's images point, or as exempla of cultural production for comparison with John's images.

The major contributions to this project of "reading Revelation in the ruins" in the twentieth century have come from William Ramsay, Colin Hemer, and Steven Friesen. A devotee of the Tübingen school early in his career, Ramsay's travels through Turkey around the dawn of the twentieth century and his determination to take the archaeological record seriously eventually convinced him that there was far more historical material in the New Testament than was admitted by the Tübingen scholars. Ramsay is also known for his work on Acts, which he thought was historically reliable in the main, based in part on his evaluation of Luke's use of geographical detail.[4] He also wrote a volume on the seven letters that open John's Apocalypse (Rev 2-3).[5] Ramsay saw early Christianity in Asia as a fusion of East and West, of Asian and Roman society. He considered this synthesis important for his own times, in which he felt "the long-unquestioned domination of European over Asiatic [was then] being put to the test, and probably coming to an end."[6] Ramsay saw the synthesis in Christianity of East and West as a potential boon for the fraught relations between East and West in his own day, for "there is a higher plane on which Asia and Europe may 'mix and meet.'"[7] These comments appear in the preface to his study of the seven letters of the Apocalypse; the letters reflect their background and therefore the early Christian synthesis of Rome and Asia. More than that, however, they do so through visual evocation. Ramsay provides a number of Figures throughout the book. "The Figures," he says,

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[4] William M. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (2d ed.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915).

[5] William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (New York: Armstrong & Son, 1905).

[6] Ramsay, *Letters*, vii. Ramsay was writing in a time of upheaval in Turkey, when the Ottoman Empire was drawing to a close.

[7] Ramsay, *Letters*, vii.

are intended as examples of the symbolism that was in ordinary use in the
Greek world; the Apocalypse is penetrated with this way of expressing
thought to the eye; and its symbolic language is not to be explained from
Jewish models only (as is frequently done). It was written to be understood
by the Graeco-Asiatic public.[8]

John drew, in other words, on the local visual culture to convey his message, not just on literary imagery. While most of the images Ramsay adduced were from Roman imperial coinage, not all the visual referents were imperial or numismatic. Ramsay gives the example of Revelation 2:10: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." This promise, writes Ramsay, contains an "implicit allusion to a feature of the city, which was a cause of peculiar pride to the citizens: 'the crown of Smyrna' was the garland of splendid buildings with the Street of Gold, which encircled the rounded hill Pagos."[9] Instead of pride in this architectural "crown," John advised, the Christians of Smyrna should seek the crown of life.

Ramsay admitted his was an "imperfect essay."[10] The imperfections of Ramsay's study are in part due to the limits of the archaeological record from which he had to work, but also in part from the conjectures he felt compelled to make. No doubt, that is why Colin Hemer set out to reassess Ramsay's work in his 1986 study of local references in the letters to the seven churches.[11] Hemer, for instance, acknowledged that "crown" (Gr: στέφανος) "may have originated in the physical appearance of the city rising symmetrically to its 'crown' of battlements." "But," he hastened to add, "once adopted, the idea was developed in various aspects of city life."[12] "Crown" was a pliant social symbol, then, with

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[8] Ramsay, *Letters*, viii-ix.

[9] Ramsay, *Letters*, 205; cf. 256-59.

[10] Ramsay, *Letters*, viii.

[11] Hemer, *Letters*. This work is an abbreviated form of his 1969 Manchester D.Phil. thesis.

[12] Hemer, *Letters*, 60.

reference that extended far beyond the special architectural configuration of the city. Even so, Hemer's work was very much in line with Ramsay's intention of noting local references in the images of Revelation 2-3. Hemer's "contention" was that "the symbolism of the letters was forcibly applicable to the original readers."[13] His study is, as he put it, a work of "audience-criticism," attempting to place the book in its original *Sitz im Leben.* In order to do so, he thought conjectures from the theological motivations of John were not sufficient. If the images were to be applicable to the original readers, they must have resonated with or referred to the built and social environments in which the audience(s) lived. A truly historical approach, argued Hemer, requires nothing less. His point generally has been accepted, though not a few of Hemer's references have been ultimately unconvincing.[14]

Although a biting critic of Hemer's work, Steven Friesen has nevertheless accepted Ramsay's and Hemer's premise, namely, that archaeological evidence is extremely valuable for interpreting the book of Revelation.[15] Friesen's main criticism of Hemer is his positivism, along with his "atomization" of the evidence.[16] Because Hemer primarily used archaeological evidence to elucidate obscure texts, he often fell into the trap of suggesting a direct connection between the archaeological evidence and the texts, connections that may have been simply circumstantial. Friesen's goal, however, remains very much the same as Ramsay's and Hemer's: "[I]nterpretation must attempt to locate the book of Revelation in its first-century social setting, and…this requires consideration of the full range of known

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[13] Hemer, *Letters*, 210.

[14] For a critique, see Steven J. Friesen, "Revelation, Realia, and Reality," *HTR* 88 (1995), 291-314, esp. 301-306.

[15] Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[16] Friesen, "Revelation," 305-6.

productions from that same setting."[17] In Friesen's view Ramsay and Hemer were prevented

from adequately doing this because they (at least tacitly?) clung to a dichotomy between

artifacts and texts. Rather than seeing both as social productions, they (especially Hemer)

tried to align two different kinds of evidence. The phrase "social setting" from Friesen's

quote is telling. Rather than positing a direct relationship between texts and visual artifacts,

Friesen posits a connection in the web of social context, in which any particular exemplum

(image, text) is connected via a series of other connections, but not necessarily in any direct

line. "Realia and literature," Friesen writes, "are both products of their social contexts."

But, "This does not mean that there will necessarily be any connection between an artifact

and the literature of a given place and time," merely that they are both evidence for the

reconstruction of social life in Roman Asia.[18]

Hemer's (and to some extent also Ramsay's) project was a sourcing or genetic

project, seeking the sources or genetic connections between realia and Revelation. Friesen's

project is a comparative project, comparing exemplars of cultural production. In his

celebrated monograph on the Apocalypse and imperial cults, for instance, Friesen compares

the imagery of Revelation with artifacts of Roman Imperial cults in Asia Minor under four

topics: cosmogony, cosmology, human maturation, and eschatology.[19] The result is not the

kind of symmetry between the realia of Asia Minor and the images of the book of Revelation

that Hemer's work seemed to want (if ultimately unable to actually provide), but an

intracultural interaction. There is a homology between the two kinds of evidence, even if the

message of each is contrapuntal.

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[17] Friesen, "Revelation," 308.

[18] Friesen, "Revelation," 307-8.

[19] Friesen, *Imperial Cults*.

Friesen's work has the better part of methodological wisdom, as the treatment of the Pergamum Altar below will suggest. Rather than seeking sources for John's images in the imagery of Roman Asia—which could never really be proved with the available evidence—they should both be considered evidence of cultural production. Whereas Ramsay, and to a lesser extent Hemer, sought to interpret visual artifacts as sources for John's symbolic language, or at the least as the visual "language" through which John communicated his message. Friesen, rather than assuming a genetic relationship, prefers to interpret visual artifacts as points of comparison, which can be mutually illuminating but need bear no actual relationship to one another, either as source or as communicative medium.

All three scholars agree that the ruins and visual artifacts of Asia Minor must be helpful in interpreting the book of Revelation. But they take different paths toward making meaning from the material realia. Are the images of Asia Minor best understood as the basis for coded references, as direct sources for images, or as useful comparanda? The remainder of this chapter examines three sets of images or visual artifacts from ancient Asia Minor to try to answer just this question. We will first look at the so-called Pergamum Altar. This monument has sometimes been aligned with the "throne of Satan" mentioned in Revelation 2:13. In a close analysis of the monument, however, such a neat correlation cannot be maintained. Neither can it be ruled out. The monument does, however, offer a rich comparative exemplum for the throne-room scene of Revelation 4-5. Next, we will examine numismatic iconography of Domitian, which has recently been read as evidence for a post-Domitianic dating of the Apocalypse. Because John references such iconography, the argument goes, if only to contest or parody it, John must have written during or after Domitian's time. To the contrary, I argue that the links between the iconography and John's

Apocalypse are weak and rest on poor evaluations of the coins. Finally, we will consider one of the most famous images from Asia Minor—the cult statue of Artemis of Ephesus—and consider whether this image has had any effect on the imagery of the Apocalypse. Although a number of interesting parallels will surface, I will finally conclude that none of these visual images can have been source material for John's Apocalypse, nor are they demonstrably referents of John's images. The images do have some comparative value, and they modestly suggest a resonance between John's verbal images and the visual images of Asia Minor. The difference in media is the prime methodological hurdle between the visual images of Asia Minor and the verbal images of John's Apocalypse. In the next part, we will see how John's use of verbal medium allowed him greater flexibility in imagery, even as the elements of his images somewhat resemble the visual artifacts of Asia Minor.

Chapter 4. ΘΡΟΝΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΣΑΤΑΝΑ
The Great "Altar" of Pergamum and the Divine Throne-room (Rev 4-5)

> I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives.
>
> Revelation 2:13

> *Pergamo ara marmorea magna alta pedes quadraginta cum maximis sculpturis; continet autem gigantomachiam.*

> At Pergamum there is a great marble altar, forty feet high, and with extremely large sculptures; it consists of the battle of the giants.
>
> Lucius Ampellius, *Liber Memorialis*[1]

In Revelation 2:13, John dictates these words from Christ to the Christians at Pergamum: "I know where you are living, where the throne of Satan [θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ] is." At the end of the verse, he again acknowledges that Pergamum is "where Satan dwells." What did John mean by this? How would John's Pergamene audience have received this revelation? What would they have envisioned, if anything? Some scholars have argued that the throne of Satan was the so-called Great Altar of Pergamum.[2] This argument has not won the day, but it has generated a dedicated minority report. Through a close examination of what is known about the Pergamum Altar (and what is not), I will argue in the present chapter that the attempt to identify the Pergamum Altar as the throne of Satan is fraught with insuperable methodological problems. I will further argue, however, that the

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[1] Trans. J. J. Pollitt, *The Art of Ancient Greece: Sources and Documents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 114.

[2] For reasons that will become clear, I would prefer to refrain from labeling the monument an altar. In short, this title prejudges many issues in the interpretation of the monument. Unfortunately, the convention is strong, and at times greater clarity necessitates the use of specific term. This chapter will therefore occasionally use "Altar" or "Great Altar" (capitalized) to refer to the monument.

monument nevertheless provides a rich comparandum with certain features of John's images in the Apocalypse, particularly the divine throne-room scene of Revelation 4-5.

Throne of Satan

Pergamum was one of the most culturally powerful cities of Asia Minor, owing both to its close ties to Rome and to the legacy of the Attalid dynasty. During the Roman period, it vied with Ephesus and Smyrna for top honors.[3] One of the cultural moments in which that power was inscribed was the so-called Great Altar of Pergamum. What remains of the monument is housed in Berlin, in the Old Pergamum Museum. Re-discovered in the 1870s by German engineer Carl Humann, and (partially) reconstructed in Berlin by the 1880s, the Altar was a monumental structure approximately thirty-six and a half meters by thirty-four meters at the base, and approximately ten meters tall.[4] It was nestled on the Pergamene acropolis, overlooking the Caicus plain to the West below from an elevation of about eight hundred feet (Plate 1). Most of the city up until the second century CE—with the major exception of the Asklepeion—was contained on the acropolis and the slope to its south.[5] Up the acropolis from south to north climbed a series of terraces. The Altar stood on the terrace below the temple of Athena, and one terrace above the terrace of the Upper Agora. As one entered the main gate to the city at the Upper Agora—that is, from the South—one could have in view both the Great Altar and the temple of Athena.

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[3] The rivalry was well-known: e.g. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 34.48, 51; Cassius Dio 52.37.10; Philostratus, *Lives* 539-40; Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.55-6. Aelius Aristides's *Or.* 23 (περὶ ὁμόνοια ταῖς πόλεσιν [On Concord among the Cities]) was composed ca. 167 CE as an irenic oration to foster goodwill between the three cities.

[4] Wolfgang Radt, *Pergamon: Geschichte und Bauten einer antike Metropole* (2d ed.; Darmstadt: Primus, 2011), 171; Max Kunze, *The Pergamon Altar: Its Rediscovery, History, and Reconstruction* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1995), 21.

[5] J. Schäfer, "Pergamon," *PECS*, 688-91.

The Altar monument was a winged structure with two levels (Plate 2). Along the pediment of the monument, around the outer walls and running up the staircase on the monument's western side, was the magnificent, continuous relief that depicted the war of the giants against the gods. The gigantomachy ran up the sides even of the broad, steep staircase (Plate 3). The staircase led to an upper court, which was enclosed on three sides (North, East, and South) by walls displaying to the interior of the court a shallow-cut, narrative frieze depicting the myth of Telephos, child of Heracles and "founder" of the Attalid dynasty.[6] Running around the exterior of the upper court was an Ionian colonnade which was doubled across the staircase at the Western entrance, and roughly three dozen female statues stood between the columns facing the exterior of the monument. Atop the colonnade were akroteria: probably horses, but also centaurs, griffins, and lions.[7] The monument was disassembled during the Byzantine period to fortify the walls around the acropolis. The scattered remains make it difficult to reconstruct the monument perfectly, though the gigantomachy and Telephos friezes have been reliably reconstructed.[8]

The Altar terrace was enclosed in a temenos or precinct, accessible from the main road which rose into the citadel from the Lower Agora. Thus, the monument may have struck visitors initially from its perch on the acropolis looking down on the plain, but as one approached the acropolis, one would have viewed the Altar from the south and from one terrace below, and then, if one entered its precinct/terrace, one would have first been struck

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[6] An eponymous ancestor Pergamos is also attested, but Telephos provided a Greek origin for the rulers of Pergamum, a city which had not been a Greek colony, and thus seems to have striven even harder to prove its Hellenism.

[7] Wolfram Hoepfner, "Model of the Pergamon Altar (1:20)," in *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar* (ed. Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph; San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1997), 2:59-67, esp. 67.

[8] The reconstruction of the gigantomachy was facilitated by deciphering the coded marks on the extant cornice blocks that corresponded to certain deities or groups. For detailed figures, see Jakob Schrammen, *Der Grosze Altar, Der Obere Markt* (*AvP* 3.1; Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1896), 24-25.

by the scenes of the gigantomachy on the Altar's Eastern face. Thus, although the staircase would have been prominent and visible from the plain below, as one approached the Altar, the staircase was hidden from view, and the Altar resembled more a solid, monumental structure.

Because its western face seems to have been axially aligned with the temple of Athena (though, importantly, not *oriented* to Athena's temple; Plate 4), and perhaps also with the temple of Zeus in the Upper Agora, the Altar has been thought to be the main sacrificial site for one or both of these cults. The remains of the architrave and cornice work of a winged structure has long been thought to be the remains of the sacrificial table.[9] The sacrificial table, it has been supposed, would have sat in the center of the upper court.

It is this monumental structure that Adolf Deissmann identified as the "throne of Satan." In his classic work, *Light from the Ancient East*, he recollected and opined in a footnote:

> On Good Friday, 1906, I had the advantage of seeing Pergamum under the guidance of Wilhelm Dörpfeld. Actual inspection of the place suggests that "Satan's throne" … can only have been the altar of Zeus; no other shrine of the hill-city was visible to such a great distance and could therefore rank so typically as the representative of satanic heathendom.[10]

One may very well sympathize with Colin Hemer's judgment that this kind of claim is "only a picturesque association which might appeal to a modern visitor without necessarily relating to an ancient reality."[11] Some scholars have therefore rejected Deisssmann's impressionistic account. Others have followed his assessment, though few have put forward any more

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[9] So, e.g., Volker Kästner, "The Architecture of the Great Altar and the Telephos Frieze," in *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 2 (ed. Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph; San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1997), espe. 77-82.

[10] Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (2d ed.; trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911), 280, n. 2.

[11] Colin Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 185.

evidence than Deissmann himself to support the claim. In the end, both supporters and

detractors of Deissmann's hypothesis rely on interpretations of the Altar that are fragile.

Deissmann's most slippery assumption was that the phrase "throne of Satan" must

have pointed to some "shrine…representative of satanic heathendom," perhaps a fine

intuition, but hardly the basis for a firm argument. Deissmann's authority does seem to have

compelled every commentator on the Apocalypse, however, to mention the possibility that

the phrase θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ could point to the Altar, even though nearly all go on to

argue the correlation is probably incorrect, unnecessary, or unprovable.[12] Those who reject

Deissmann's hypothesis (like Hemer) do so because they see in the phrase "throne of Satan"

something less specific, but just as oppressive—usually the Roman Empire and the

promulgation of the Imperial Cult.[13] To be sure, the modern imagination of the scene might

indeed be a "picturesque association" without foundation in any "ancient reality"—and

therefore poorly understood as an *argument*—but that does not mean an argument cannot be

produced from the initial intuition. After all, "Imperial cults were everywhere,"[14] but Satan's

dwelling appears to be particular and local. David Aune points out that θρόνος is articular

(*the* throne), which "suggests that the author is alluding to a specific throne (either literally or

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[12] Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2002), 141, apparently following Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 457-58; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 2005), 68; Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 38; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 57. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) combines the Altar with imperial power, and thus maintains a weakened form of identification (37). So does Adela Yarbro Collins, "Pergamon in Early Christian Literature," in *Pergamon: Citadel of the Gods* (ed. Helmut Koester; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1998), 166-76.

[13] This position is found in the overwhelming majority of commentaries. See, e.g., David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (Dallas: Word, 1997), 182-84; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of St. John* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 57-9; Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 120.

[14] Steven J. Friesen, "Satan's Throne, Imperial Cults, and the Social Settings of Revelation," *JSNT* 27 (2005), 363.

figuratively), which he expects the readers to recognize."[15] The local concern of the letter is obvious from the opening words of the message. Whereas five of the other six letters opens with "I know your works" (Rev 2:2, 19; 3:1, 8, 15), the letter to Pergamum opens with "I know *where* you are living" (Rev 2:13).

Of those who defend Deissmann's thesis, Adela Yarbro Collins has provided the most cogent and well-crafted argument.[16] Yarbro Collins picks up on the local character of the letter, but she goes a step further: the association of Satan's throne with Pergamum "suggests that there was something *visible* giving rise to the image in the imagination of the author, and that the original audience had very little difficulty in making the connection between the symbol and the visual phenomenon."[17] Yarbro Collins argues, in other words, that the reference is not just to Pergamum, but to some particular focal point within Pergamum—something visible. The throne of Satan here is apparently not simply imperial power writ large, but some sight specific to Pergamum that was somehow associated with the exercise of Roman imperial power in Pergamum. Yarbro Collins has no doubts that Roman imperial power is to be equated with Satanic power in the Apocalypse. In Revelation 12, the dragon who contends with heaven and is cast down to earth is called "the Devil and Satan" (Rev 12:9). In Revelation 13, a beast that apparently stands for the Roman Empire— the head that receives a mortal wound but is healed (Rev 13:3) seems to reference the myth of Nero redivivus—receives its power from the dragon. Thus, the Satanic power in Revelation 2 must be Roman imperial power.

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[15] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 182.

[16] Yarbro Collins, "Pergamon," 166-76. Others who identify the Pergamum Altar as the "throne of Satan" include Hans-Joachim Schalles, "Rezeptionsgeschichtliche Nachlese zum Pergamonaltar," in *Modus in Rebus: Gedenkschrift für Wolfgang Schindler* (Berlin: Mann, 1995), 188-89; L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford, 1994), 173; Wolfram Brandes, "Apokalyptisches in Pergamon," *Byzantinoslavica* 47 (1987), 9; Robert North, "Thronus Satanae pergamenus," *Verbum Domini* 28 (1950): 65-76.

[17] Yarbro Collins, "Pergamon," 167, italics mine.

In light of these presuppositions, Yarbro Collins identifies three criteria by which one might identify a particular sight as the "throne of Satan."[18] A successful argument must: 1) Explain which visible phenomenon suggested the image of "throne" to the author; 2) Show how the emperor and Satan are tied together in the "throne"; and 3) Explain why John selected Pergamum as the location for Satan's throne.[19] One major concession must be made for Yarbro Collins's argument to work. Yarbro Collins assumes the referent for "throne of Satan" must be visual, just as Deissmann assumed any candidate for the appellation must have been a particular sight. It is an unnecessary supposition, but one easily qualified: *If* John had a particular visible phenomenon in mind, or *if* his audience might have received the phrase that way, we might very well want to inquire further. Let us indulge for the moment.

Let us begin with the first criterion: What kind of referent would have suggested the idea of a Satanic throne? Thrones of deities in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, writes Yarbro Collins, were often associated with mountains (e.g. Mount Zion), and these were also the sites of royal thrones. The acropolis at Pergamum, overlooking the city and the Caicus plain, may have struck John as such a mountain-throne. "This dominating feature of the landscape," she writes, "may have captured John's imagination as the locus of a Satanic epiphany."[20] Because gods of other nations were commonly held among Jews and Christians to be demons, the chief of such unclean spirits—Satan—would correspond to Zeus in the Olympian pantheon. Thus a winged structure atop a "mountain" associated

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[18] Yarbro Collins, "Pergamon," 167.
[19] Yarbro Collins, "Pergamon," 167.
[20] Yarbro Collins, "Pergamon," 171.

with Zeus may well have evoked a throne of Satan. Visually speaking, Yarbro Collins thinks only the Altar resembles a giant throne.

The second criterion asks how this visual phenomenon, as a Satanic epiphany, also evokes the emperor's throne. Three monuments dominated the acropolis in the first century CE: the sanctuary of Athena, the Great Altar, and the sanctuary of Zeus. Yarbro Collins follows the hypothesis that the Altar was a joint altar, dedicated to Zeus and Athena "since they are in equal proportions the two most prominent deities on the eastern part of the outer frieze" (the part of the frieze visible when entering the Altar terrace).[21] Citing numismatic evidence from the reigns of Domitian and Hadrian depicting the emperor with features of Zeus, Yarbro Collins further posits a conflation of Zeus and the Roman emperor. Thus, the altar connects Satan (i.e. Zeus) with the Roman emperor.

The third criterion—why Pergamum?—is satisfied by the reference to Antipas, who had been killed. Yarbro Collins thinks this Antipas was probably killed by the Roman authorities during the reign of Domitian. Thus, the seat of Satanic (i.e. Roman) power in Asia was Pergamum, where blood had been shed in the shadow of the monumental Altar which depicts a great combat myth. Since Yarbro Collins has argued extensively that the book of Revelation is deeply indebted to a combat myth, the Altar and the order it stood for must have seemed the exact parody of John's imagination of God's throne and God's reign.[22]

That the Altar would have struck John as a parody of God's throne is an interesting thought to which I will return below. But in the meantime, we have to highlight the

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[21] Yarbro Collins, "Pergamon," 173.
[22] Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1976); Yarbro Collins, "Pergamon," 176-83.

obstacles to Yarbro Collins's argument. Steven Friesen gives Yarbro Collins's argument

surprisingly short shrift, but he does take exception with Yarbro Collins's assumption that

"Satan's throne" was something visible.[23] He further objects to the process by which Yarbro

Collins assimilates the emperor to Zeus ("by importing [such assimilation] into this cult from

elsewhere"). Friesen is on to something here. The only concrete evidence by which Yarbro

Collins connects the Altar (dedicated to Zeus) to the emperor are instances of imperial

iconography that are not necessarily germane to the monument at hand.[24] There is no

evidence of imperial cult at the Altar itself, or that the original monument supported the

ruler cult under the aegis of Zeus (and Athena). Moreover, Friesen wonders, if the Altar was

dedicated to Zeus and Athena, what has happened to Athena's role in this imperial

assimilation? What is missed in this entire exchange is that both Collins's and Friesen's

arguments depend on the Altar's dedication to Zeus (and Athena) and that the Altar was an

altar at all. Both suppositions are in fact questionable.

The Great Altar of Pergamum?

Although celebrated and well-studied, the Altar remains very much a mystery. As a

prominent art historian of the period has written,

> The Great Altar of Pergamon makes an obligatory appearance in all the
> handbooks. Its splendid Gigantomachy, its innovative Telephos Frieze, and
> its breathtaking reconstruction in the heart of Berlin make it a centerpiece of
> Hellenistic art and architecture. Yet its date, program, and function (or
> functions) all remain deeply problematic. We do not know for sure when
> and to whom it was dedicated; where much of its freestanding sculpture

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[23] Friesen, "Satan's Throne," 359, n. 20.

[24] Brigitte Kahl (*Galatians Re-imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010], 118-25) is on better footing when she supplements Collins's argument by positing a political message in the Altar from the beginning which was transferred from the Attalid rulers to the Roman rulers.

stood or what it signified; and (most embarrassingly) exactly what purpose it served.[25]

Older scholarship identified the Altar as the "Great Altar of Zeus" at Pergamum. It must be admitted that there is very little reason to suppose the Altar was dedicated to Zeus (or at least not *only* Zeus). If its alignment matters, then it is the alignment with Athena's temple that is most direct. The iconography of the gigantomachy frieze, with the Zeus-Athena group prominently displayed may suggest a joint altar, but this group was already a fixed iconographic convention on, for example, the Siphnian Treasury in Delphi. Moreover, the Altar actually dwarfs both the temple of Athena and the much smaller temple of Zeus.

Most telling, however, may be the dedicatory inscription from the architrave. Only two fragments have survived. The second fragment is better preserved, on which is clearly discernible the end of a sigma and the next word ΑΓΑΘ-, perhaps "good things," or "benefits" (ἀγαθά). The first fragment has been reconstructed as (ΒΑ)ΣΙ(Λ)ΙΣΣ(Η)Σ ("of Queen").[26] The inscription almost certainly refers to Queen Apollonis, mother of Eumenes II, to whom, perhaps along with his father Attalos I, he dedicated the Altar. Of course, Eumenes (or his brother Attalos II) could have dedicated the Altar to a "queen" of heaven (i.e. Hera, Isis, etc.), though a reference to Apollonis seems more likely. In any event, Max Fränkel's reconstruction of the inscription—"King Eumenes, son of King Attalos and Queen Apollonis, for the favors that have been shown to us, to Zeus and Athena

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[25] Andrew Stewart, "*Pergamo Ara Marmorea Magna*: On the date, reconstruction, and functions of the Great Altar of Pergamon," in *From Pergamon to Sperlonga: Sculpture and Context* (ed. Nancy T. deGrummond and Brunilde S. Ridgway; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 32; cf. Elizabeth Kosmetatou, "The Attalids of Pergamon," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (ed. Andrew Erskine; Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 165: "Although the Great Altar is considered by most scholars as the crown of Hellenistic art, we know surprisingly little about it. …We do not know to whom it was dedicated, when exactly it was built, its purpose or its impact on artistic developments of the period, while its reconstruction remains a matter of fierce debate among art and architectural historians."

[26] See R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture: A Handbook* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 158.

Nikephoros"—absolutely overshoots the evidence at hand, even though it is reconstructed on the basis of other Attalid inscriptions.[27] There is, then, no sure inscription for the dedicatee (or even the dedicator), and we therefore have no firm way of knowing who received worship at this altar, if indeed the monument was an altar.

By comparing the Pergamum Altar with other winged altars at Priene, Magnesia, Teos, and Claros, Andreas Linfert has argued that the Altar is actually a luxury altar (*Prunkaltar*) *within* a luxury altar.[28] The sacrificial table, if indeed there was one, may have resembled such a luxury altar in size and proportion, but a luxury altar *within* another much more grand altar, the likes of which was completely unknown, would have been altogether unprecedented. Even so, most scholars continue to posit a sacrificial table within the upper court. The supposition has become one of the most controversial features of the monument: whether there was an actual sacrificial table within the upper court, and indeed whether the monument actually functioned as a sacrificial altar. There are at least three opinions on this matter. Some follow the original reconstruction which places a functioning, sacrificial table in the inner court.[29] Others maintain that the Altar was never finished, and therefore although constructed to be used with a sacrificial Altar in the upper court, such a use never materialized.[30] Finally, a brave few scholars maintain that the upper court probably did not house any sacrificial table at all, and that to label this monument an Altar is problematic at best, and possibly just plain wrong.[31]

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[27] In *AvP* 8.1, 54-55 (no. 69).

[28] Andreas Linfert, "Prunkaltäre," in *Stadtbild und Bürgerbild im Hellenismus* (ed. M. Wörrle and P. Zanker; Munich: Beck, 1995), 131-46.

[29] Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*; Kunze, *Pergamon Altar*. Cf. Schrammen, *Grosze Altar*.

[30] Suggested by Wolfram Hoepfner, "The Architecture of Pergamon," in Dreyfus and Schraudolph, *Pergamon*, 2:23-57.

[31] Brunilde S. Ridgway, *Hellenistic Sculpture II: The Styles of ca. 200-100 BC*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 28-32.

The monument has long been thought to be or house a sacrificial altar based on the reference of Lucius Ampelius, quoted in the epigraph. Ampelius, probably writing sometime in the third or fourth century CE, clearly identified the monument with the impressive gigantomachy as an altar (*ara*). But what does Ampelius mean by "altar"? The Latin word *ara*, as Andrew Stewart points out, could refer to a monument dedicated to a god, a hero, or other living or deceased figure, presumably with or without sacrificial function.[32] Some have argued that an extant coin in the British Museum and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, minted in Pergamum during the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211 CE), depicts the altar in use on its reverse, thus confirming Ampelius's claim (Plate 5).[33] I agree with Brunilde Ridgway that the coin is ambiguous evidence (at best) of the Pergamum Altar, much less of its sacrificial function.[34] Even if we allow the evidence of the coin and of Ampelius, we can do no better than to posit a late second or early third-century function of the structure as a sacrificial altar, and even then we cannot be sure what sort of offerings might have been made thereon. What its function was originally and/or in the first century CE cannot be gathered from these pieces of evidence.

There are other problems with the description of the Pergamum Altar as a sacrificial site. Decorated cornice blocks thought to belong to the sacrificial table were found scattered across the entire site.[35] If the cornice work does belong to a table (Wolfram Hoepfner suggests they might belong to nearby Palace V, Ridgway suggests it might belong to the

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[32] So Stewart, "*Pergamo*," 32, cf. 51, n.2.

[33] British Museum number: G1874,0715.279. See Warwick Wroth, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Mysia* (London: British Museum, 1892) 152, cf. pl. xxx.7. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin identification number: 18200036.

[34] Ridgway, *Hellenistic Sculpture II*, 29-30.

[35] Ridgway, *Hellenistic Sculpture II*, 28-29.

propylon for the Altar terrace),[36] it is impossible to know *where* such a table might have stood—inside the Altar, on the Altar terrace? The state of preservation of the pavement stones for the upper court reveals no clues either for the inclusion or exclusion of a sacrificial table. The cornice work is also stylistically distinct from rest of the monument, and indeed from other monumental altars. The cornice blocks contain, for instance, lion-headed water spouts which were nevertheless either unfinished or for merely decorative purpose, because they were non-functional. But decorative or unfinished, water spouts on a structure holding a sacrificial table is otherwise unknown in antiquity.

There are yet further problems with assigning a sacrificial table to the upper court. The remains of this table suggest a three-sided barrier with a height of approximately six feet. The sacrificial table, then, would have been protected by these corniced barriers and may have sat at an elevation of only about four feet. Such large altars were known in antiquity, but on top of the barriers there are a number of irregular cuts and dowel holes for some sort of affixtures. A sacrificial altar with super-mounted items is highly unusual. The decorative cornice work and/or other decorations would have been damaged by the smoke from burnt offerings. Moreover, a sacrificial table of this size in the upper court would have obscured the view of the Telephos frieze that ran around the inner walls. Finally, the steep staircase, not to mention the narrow colonnade on the western side, whose intercolumniations were a mere 1.2 meters or about four feet, would have made it impossible to lead victims to the altar.[37] These problems have led to a virtual stalemate in assessing the

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[36] Hoepfner, "Architecture," 39; Ridgway, *Hellenistic Sculpture II*, 31.
[37] A point also made by Stewart, "*Pergamo*," 47.

purpose(s) of the monument.[38] In brief, the remains of what appears to be a sacrificial table would fit somewhat awkwardly in the upper court of the monument, and the monument itself seems unsuitable for burnt sacrificial offerings.

If we cannot know that the Altar of Pergamum was even an altar, much less an altar dedicated to Zeus and/or Athena, then Collins's argument evaporates. If this is not Zeus's sacrificial seat, and not even Zeus's seat at all, maybe, then the alignment of Satan=Zeus= emperor and imperial rule falls apart, and Collins's second criterion (identifying a visual object that combines emperor and Satan) remains unmet. At the same time, Friesen's problem with the disappearance of Athena loses its luster, and his own claim that Imperial cults were everywhere comes back to haunt his critique. For if it could be plausibly shown that the Altar was in fact a royal monument of some sort, which thus displayed a focal point of ruler cult, then the Altar could more plausibly have served as a focal point of Imperial cult under the Romans, and Friesen's claim that there is no reference to imperial cult in the first three chapters of Revelation could be brought into question. In fact, a number of recent interpretations of the Altar portray it in just such a light.

Brunilde Ridgway offers the most revised account of the monument, suggesting that the Altar may be a heroic monument.[39] She draws parallels with the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, and she interprets the evidence of the Gigantomachy, the Telephos frieze, and the possibility that the apsidal building over which the Altar was built might have been a heroön for Telephos, to suggest that the Altar is a monument that glorifies the Attalid dynasty. The possible dedication to Queen Apollonis and the situation of the Altar to

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[38] For good overviews of the problem: Ann Kuttner, "'Do You Look Like You Belong Here?': Asianism at Pergamon," in *Cultural Borrowings and Ethnical Appropriations in Antiquity* (ed. Erich S. Gruen; Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005), 137-207; Stewart, "*Pergamo*," 32-4, 46-9; and Ridgway *Hellenistic Sculpture II*, 25-32.

[39] Ridgway, *Hellenistic Sculpture II*, 19-102.

overlook the largest (burial?) mound (Jigma-Tepe) on the plain below might confirm such a

reading (Plate 1). Nevertheless, Ridgway can do little more than suggest here, and her

arguments have not persuaded everyone.

Wolfram Hoepfner has argued that the sacrificial table may have existed, but because

there are no signs of fire damage, the table was not actually used for burnt offerings.[40]

Instead the monument functioned most basically as a victory monument. The interior

winged structure resembled a sacrificial table, but on top of its cornice were placed the

statues of the Lesser Attalid Dedication. After his defeat of Gauls and Seleucids,[41] Attalos I

dedicated a series of sculptures at Athens. Pausanias says Attalos dedicated a Gigantomachy,

a depiction of the battle of the Athenians against the Amazons, the battle of the Persians at

Marathon, and his own defeat of the Gauls (Pausanias, *Descr.* 1.25.2). Among Roman copies

of these dedications one finds both a larger, monumental-sized group, and a smaller group,

roughly two-thirds life-size, corresponding to the fragments of descriptions of Attalid

dedications from Pliny the Elder and Pausanias.[42] It is these smaller versions that Hoepfner

argues sat atop the cornice of the winged structure. The message of the upper court thus

matched the political message of the gigantomachy: victory. This would perhaps be an ideal

location for a royal banquet. Hoepfner's suggestion could be further supported by the

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[40] Hoepfner, "Architecture," 55, 57.

[41] Brigitte Kahl's energetic analysis of the monument as a symbol of Gallic/Galatian suppression and oppression does a fine job of taking account of *most* current scholarship on the Altar, but her exclusive focus on the Galatians skews her argument. Attalos and the Attalids did not celebrate only their victory over the Gauls, but also over the Macedonians and Seleucids. In other words, the domination proclaimed by Attalid monuments was not ethnically specific, as the dedications of Attalos and the iconography of the monument itself attest. Kahl, *Galatians*, esp. 77-127; cf. Andrew Stewart, *Attalos, Athens, and the Akropolis: The Pergamene "Little Barbarians" and their Roman and Renaissance Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Hoepfner, "Architecture," 53-57; Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 98-104; J. J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 79-97.

[42] Cf. Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 100.

resemblance between the upper court of the Altar and the peristyle courts of the Attalid palaces.[43]

Andrew Stewart questions Hoepfner's placement of statues atop the barriers of the inner altar.[44] The irregular spacing of the cuts and dowel holes, and the lack of characteristic signs of statuary (either the footprints of bronze or the kind of cuttings required for marble), lead Stewart to suggest instead—following the earlier views of Fränkel in *Inschriften von Pergamon*—that spoils of war were hung from these anchors. This solves the problem of placing statuary on top of the inner altar, which would have broken the roofline of the monument. But Stewart suggests yet other problems this solution resolves:

> A display of spoils…would also have directly referenced the Telephos Frieze behind the display—dominated at this juncture by battle and triumph. And it would have added a triumphal climax to the heroönlike overture of the Altar's own eastern side and its stoalike western one. …Did this allusion signal to the alert visitor that he was about to encounter a celebration of Pergamene *arete* and its results, to the glory of the city and its gods? And might it also explain the Altar terrace's subsequent popularity with the Pergamene *demos*, for any portraits of benefactors set here would automatically have placed them within this heroizing milieu? Finally, as for the Altar's stoalike western side, any Greek would have known that stoas were favorite places to display spoils and other polemical paraphernalia.[45]

Instead of an altar, then, Stewart sees within the upper court a kind of war monument resembling a stoa, festooned with spoils of battle. Again, this adds to the overall message of victory, glorification of the Attalids together with their gods.

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[43] The peristyle of Palace V, for instance, built around the same time as the Altar (if a later date is accepted), measured approximately twenty-two meters square (Bonnie Lea Kutbay, *Palaces and Large Residences of the Hellenistic Age* [Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1998] 13). The upper court of the Altar was comparable, measuring approximately twenty-nine meters by thirty meters, though if one accounts for the Telephos frieze and does not measure the wings that protruded over the staircase, the actual space would have been closer to twenty meters by fifteen meters.

[44] Stewart, "*Pergamo*," 48.

[45] Stewart, "*Pergamo*," 49.

Ann Kuttner's article on the Altar resembles Ridgway's interpretation somewhat, but she goes further in trying to situate the monument as a distinctively Asian creation. "This is a palace citadel," she writes.

> The ruler would officiate for at least some important ceremonies, just like the royal officiants shown inside on the Telephos Frieze. The priestly ruler speaking to gods on mountain heights was a powerful icon for the Anatolian and Middle Eastern peoples, not Greeks. …At palatial sites there is one essential star of any spectacle: the living dynasty. The Altar was a stage set for kings in ceremonial performance. …The location would not surprise Asian subjects, who were used to salvific royal heroa that stood next to citadel palaces and in city centers, in Lydia, Karia, and Lykia, decorated with national myths and triumphal histories. Non-Asians could not miss the point either.[46]

The identification of the monument as a palace citadel depends, for Kuttner, on a distinctly Asian view of the ruler and ruler cult. Did the Attalids have such an exalted view of the ruler? Probably so. The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, an essentially Greek monumental tribute to the Persian satrap Mausolus, begun before his death, demonstrates that Western Asia Minor was susceptible to Persian conceptions of the ruler, which exalted him to a position between humans and the gods.[47] Hellenistic ruler cults, and those of the Attalids in particular, straddled the same line. R. E. Allen has pointed out that the Attalids received various kinds of cult, though they were not deified until at least 188 BCE, and even then usually only after death. Festivals were set up in honor of Attalid rulers: the Philetaireia at Cyzikos, the Attaleia at Cos, the Eumeneia at Pergamum itself. Thus the Attalids enjoyed a position comparable to the Persian kings.[48] The largest tumulus on the Caicus plain, Jigma-

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[46] Kuttner, "Asianism," 179.

[47] Cf. Simon Hornblower, *Mausolus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982); G. B. Waywell, *The Free-standing Sculptures of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1978).

[48] R. E. Allen, *The Attalid Kingdom: A Constitutional History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 145-58.

Tepe, is directly aligned with the Altar. If this is a royal burial mound, as some have

supposed, then the connection with ruler cult could be further strengthened.

Kuttner agrees with Hoepfner that this space may have been a banqueting space. If

so, she argues the sacrificial table must have sat outside the monumental structure, perhaps

in front of the staircase, on the terrace—in which case, the priest would have sacrificed

either Eastward toward the monument, with the king potentially seated in its midst, or

Westward toward the tumulus on the plain. The inner court then would have been filled

with *klinai* for dining.

I find all of these interpretations of the Great Altar somewhat attractive, but none of

them are built on very firm evidence. Arguments are made through a host of analogies and

suppositions on all sides. What we do know about this structure is that it was an

unparalleled monument charged with heroic, political, and cultural power, possibly

connected with a sacrificial function, certainly tied to the *arete* of Pergamum, and probably

also its Attalid rulers.

And what of the gigantomachy frieze? Can it shed any light on the Altar's purpose

or message? The iconography of gigantomachy is a distinctly Greek phenomenon.

Gigantomachies are also found or reported woven into the peplos of Athena Polias for the

Panatheneia, in the Temple of Zeus Olympios, and metopes of the Athenian Parthenon.

While these are all religious sites, they are also highly politicized pan-hellenic locations.

Olympus and Delphi were festooned with dedications after Greek success in the Persian

Wars. The Gigantomachy became a standard way to portray the victory of (Greek)

civilization over the barbarians. The resemblance of many of the giants in the

Gigantomachy to the dying Gauls and the Macedonian symbols on some of their shields

reinforces the point that this monument may indeed be a victory monument (if only in part), celebrating Attalid victories over the Galatians and Seleucids.[49]

The most striking section of the Gigantomachy is also the scene that would have confronted the visitor as they entered the Altar terrace. As the observer entered the terrace from the East, his or her eye would probably have rested on one of two points. On the northern end of the Eastern frieze the portrayal of Athena defeating Alcyoneus(?) arrests the observer's gaze (Plate 6). Iconographically, this is the most dramatic scene of the Eastern frieze. Athena holds the giant by his hair (lifting him from the ground?), and Ge rises from the ground to plead on behalf of her children the giants. Nike crowns Athena while Athena's snake delivers a fatal blow to the giant's side. Zeus's scene is directly to the left of Athena's scene, and the angular depictions of Zeus and Athena mirror one another (Plate 7). If we opt for a focal point in the center of the Eastern frieze, the other potential point of reference would have been the depiction of Hera. Some scholars have thought the central position of Hera to indicate the importance of matriarchal figures for the Attalids, especially Queen Apollonis, mother of the rulers Attalos II and Eumenes II.[50] The panel is fragmentary, however, and there is a gap on either side, so the extent of the spectacle of Hera's scene cannot be determined.

The arrangement of the East frieze has the effect of introducing most of the major gods of the Greek pantheon. Ares shares a corner with Aphrodite on the Northern end of the East frieze after the Athena scene. As the observer scans the East frieze southward from

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[49] On the gigantomachy theme as political propaganda and the Pergamon Altar's gigantomachy in particular, see Philip Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Andrew Stewart, *Attalos*, 181-236; Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 158-59.

[50] Queen Apollonis does appear to be referenced in the very damaged inscription on the monument. See Stewart, "*Pergamo*," 34-39.

Athena, he or she observes Zeus (with eagles), Herakles (presumed), Hera, Apollo, Leto, Artemis, and Hecate, who shares a corner with Asterie and Phoebe. The major Olympian deities and their family connections, then, are depicted on the East frieze. Again, the family ties have been considered by some scholars to indicate the strong familial bonds of the Attalids, but these groupings are also part of iconographic convention.

Not only are the gods associated by familial ties, but also by connections of abode or other implied relation. The North-western corner is dominated by sea imagery, for instance. Down the stairs of the South-west corner one or more nymphs may be embattled with giants. Around the corner on the frieze of the Southern West-facing wing, Dionysus (with satyrs in entourage) is prominent. On the Western corner of the South frieze, Cybele/Rhea rides a lion into battle. Dionysus and Cybele represent the most Asian divinities (either by popularity or origin), so their depiction together is perhaps fitting. The other recognizable divinities (gods and Titans) on the South frieze are connected with cosmic themes: Eos, Helios, Selene, Phoebe, Asterie.

So far the iconography in the monument seems Greek, but there are hints of native elements as well. The grouping of Dionysus and Cybele is not accidental and probably hints at pride in these (supposedly) Asian deities. Cybele's lion is a strikingly Asian theme (though also found in other Gigantomachies). There is a more interesting leonine figure depicted in the Gigantomachy, however. One of the giants on the South frieze wrestling with a god or hero has a lion's head and claws (Plate 8). Lion-monsters of this kind are unknown in Greek mythology or iconography (although hybrid creatures such as griffins or chimaeras are known). The giant is reminiscent, rather, of a very popular image in Persian iconography—the king or hero fighting a standing lion, which represents a long-standing Persian theme of

the king as mighty hunter: the "Royal Hero."[51] Pierre Briant offers an excellent summary of

this iconographic theme:

> [O]n many reliefs a royal figure is depicted confronting real or imaginary
> animals (lions, bulls; monster with a horned lion's head or bird's head). Most
> often, the different kinds of combat are depicted side by side as if they
> constitute the elements of single iconographic discourse. In general, the
> combatant grasps the animal's mane (or horns) with his left hand while
> plunging the sword in his right hand into the belly of the beast. Less
> commonly, the Royal figure smothers a lion with his left arm: his left hand
> holds a lotus blossom, his right hand a dagger with which he is about to kill
> the lion.[52]

Briant's description points to another potentially Eastern figure in the Gigantomachy. Also

in the South frieze, a giant with horns and a bull's neck appears to be ramming his opponent

(Plate 9). Is this also the Persian theme of the Royal Hero battling a powerful creature?[53]

Another of the adversaries to the Royal Hero Briant mentions is a bird-headed creature.

While no bird-headed creatures appear on the Gigantomachy, a bird-like giant is depicted in

a losing battle against Leto (Plates 10, 11). At first, the figure does not look so different

from other giants. Wings protrude from his back, but he is by no means the only winged

giant in the Gigantomachy. If one looks closely at the giant's hand, grasping a stone for

support, one can see that the giant is grasping not with fingers, but with talons. The figure

is, in fact, a pteromorphic giant. Apart from griffins, no other composite monster of this

sort is known from Greek mythology or iconography. Again, where Greek references fail,

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[51] Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 216-32.

[52] Briant, *Cyrus*, 218.

[53] Another Near Eastern prototype may stand behind this bull-giant. A very old mythical figure in Assyria was a bull-man. Dominique Collon, "Bablyonian Seals," in *The Babylonian World* (ed. Gwendolyn Leick; London: Routledge, 2007), 101. These bull-men were sometimes benevolent, sometimes not. They are depicted as standing upright with long bull-horns and with bull legs. These earlier figures come from Assyrian seals of the seventeenth century BCE. In Persian iconography these bull-men are usually quadripedal, as on the famous Xerxes Gate. It is possible that a bit of Persian mythology has made its way into the Pergamene Gigantomachy, although iconographically the bull-giant appears more closely related to the older Assyrian models.

an Eastern reference presents itself. A relief slightly older than the Persian reliefs, but also closer to Asia Minor, from Late Hittite Karatepe depicts a humanoid creature with wings and a bird's head.[54]

The connecting thread among all of these iconographical representations from the East is the emphasis on the exalted status of the king. Whether the king is seen to do battle with a bull-monster or a lion, or whether such hybrid features are found on the gates and stairways of buildings with royal functions or references, all of these images of Eastern monsters emphasize the place of the king between the gods and humans.[55] The suggestion that arises from this examination is that the Pergamene monument is a structure, not only of royal patronage, but also of royal function, mostly Greek in conception, but possibly with hints of local mythology and memory. The hints of Eastern monsters, of Asian pride (Cybele and Dionysus), of cosmic victory (Helios, Selene), of victory at Sea (Triton, Poseidon), of the supremacy of the gods (literally) undergirding the establishment of the dynasty through Telephos, makes this monument a fitting place for the Attalid kings to hold ceremonial counsel.

A winged structure within a winged structure may have protected a sacrificial altar. It may also have protected a throne. For that matter it may have protected a number of thrones for the royal family. Perhaps the Attalids used this space to sit at court, like the Persian rulers. From this position they could look out on the city, petitioners could approach them from below, up the daunting stairway. Asia Minor was more prone to

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[54] Briant *Cyrus*, 236, fig. 31. Similar figures are fairly common in Mesopotamian iconography; cf., e.g., *ANEP*, no. 617.

[55] Briant, *Cyrus*, 24-54.

Persian forms of government, and evidence has already been offered for Attalid ruler cult.[56]

All of these arguments concern the altar in its original design and purpose. When he died in

133 BCE Attalos III bequeathed the city of Pergamum to the Romans. The Pergamen

acropolis had been a Roman site for nearly two hundred years by the time John saw his

Apocalypse. If the Altar had been a palatial citadel, the Romans may have repurposed the

monument as they saw fit, perhaps even turning it into an altar for the Imperial Cult.[57] The

famous Severan coin, which depicts smoke rising from an altar, may depict the Great Altar if

by this time Roman Emperors had begun burning incense to the genius of Caesar.[58] If the

Severan coin does depict the altar in use, it may be a depiction of the Altar's *Roman* function.

In that case, Ampelius, writing some centuries after the transition to Roman rule, would

quite rightly have known the monument at this site as an altar, and his description of the

monument as an *ara* explained. Unfortunately, this is all more speculation.

If Not Satan's *Throne…*

In the end, we know very little about the function of the Great Altar of Pergamum.

At least, we know too little to make any neat identification between the "throne of Satan" in

Revelation 2:13 and the monument. Volker Kästner suggests that perhaps the anguipedal

giants of the Gigantomachy seemed particularly satanic, precisely because of their serpent

legs (Plate 12), an interpretation that is again impressionistic. Myths of serpents and dragons

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[56] Cf. Allen, *Attalid Kingdom*, 145-58; Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 114-40.

[57] This suggestion was also made by Holger Schwartzer, "Untersuchungen zum hellenistischen Herscherkult in Pergamon," *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 49 (1999), 249-300.

[58] On Roman imperial cult and its interaction with Pergamum see Marianne Palmer Bonz, "Beneath the Gaze of the Gods: The Pergamon Evidence for a Developing Theology of Empire," in Koester, *Pergamon*, 251-76; and Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 27-32.

were stock elements in Greek mythology as well as Near Eastern lore, particularly with

respect to cosmogonic mythology.[59] Undoubtedly the anguipedal depiction of the giants

corresponds to Apollodorus' comment (Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.6.1) that the giants had dragon's

scales for feet (εἶχον δὲ τὰς βάσεις φολίδας δρακόντων). But anguipedal giants are

attested at least since the fourth century BCE in Greek vase painting.[60] Whether John would

have seen it or the early Christians would have heard it as an iconographic tradition is

another matter—and probably an insoluable problem. Satan is generally not described as

particularly reptilian in antiquity except in Revelation 12.

So, if the Altar cannot be identified as the throne of Satan, is it more or less useless

for interpreting early Christianity and the book of Revelation in particular? Not necessarily.

The iconographic and spatial semantics of the monument offer the interpreter of the

Apocalypse some intriguing lines of inquiry. A genetic or genealogical relationship may not

exist between the two, but a rich comparison can be enjoined.

The three monstrous figures I highlighted in the Gigantomachy (lion, bull, bird-

monster) have some resonance in apocalyptic tradition as well. Another interesting

reference to such monsters is found in Ezekiel (1:4-8, 10), where Ezekiel describes a

theophany:

> As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud,
> with brightness round about it, and a fire flashing continually forth, and in
> the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming bronze. And from the midst of it
> came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance:
> they had the form of men, but each had four faces, and each of them had
> four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the

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[59] On which, see Daniel Ogden, *Drakōn: Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and James H. Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol became Christianized* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[60] *LIMC* "Gigantes," nos. 389 (first quarter of the fourth century BCE) and 400 (third quarter of the fourth century BCE).

sold of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. …As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man in front; the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle at the back.

Although these creatures are a composite of three animal-type creatures and a human, it is important to note that these three animals are the most popularly depicted as hybrid or monstrous creatures.

These creatures re-appear in Revelation 4, where the four creatures have only one face each, and each creature receives one of the faces from the four of the living creatures in Ezekiel: the face of a lion, a bull, a human, and an eagle: "Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle" (Rev 4:6-7). It would have been ideal if the four monsters had aligned with the four sides or the four corners of the Great Altar, but alas, they do not. The lion is an interesting feature in the monument. Characteristically paired with Cybele, but also appearing in monstrous form, probably among the akroteria, as well, and intriguingly, in a twist on the Telephos myth, the abandoned Telephos is suckled not by a wolf, but by a lioness. The parallel is faint, of course, and the connections to Near Eastern iconography more prevalent—each creature has six wings, for instance. Leonine imagery is especially intriguing considering the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who appears in Revelation 5. All of these iconographic moments are perhaps suggestive, but not really all that useful.

When we sink deeper into the poetics of the Gigantomachy, however, the resonance becomes more apparent. Regardless of how we read the entire structure of the Altar—it

carries funerary, victory, and palatial, and possibly also sacrificial overtones all at the same time—the upper court tells a story about the Attalid dynasty, a dynasty literally founded upon the taming of chaos by the (not just) Olympian gods. The Gigantomachy, like the literary Titanomachies, the Amazaonomachies, the defeat of the Persians at Marathon, and the dying Gauls, signifies the right ordering of the world by the suppression of chaos. These are the agonistics from which the world—that is the social and religious order—arises. Above the Gigantomachy hover the female statues, perhaps like the twenty-four elders of the Apocalypse, displaying the triumph of civilization over barbarism.

The battle of the dragon—Satan—against heaven and against the saints casts the present misfortunes (whatever they might have been) of John's congregations onto a cosmic canvas. The whole tenor of the letters in Revelation 1-3 indicates communities in turmoil, real or imagined. In the book of Revelation the cosmic adversary responsible for their plight is given a name (Satan) and a form (dragon), and even a home (Pergamum). Antipas of Pergamum's death shows the power of this adversary at work. The monsters around the throne, the four living creatures of the Apocalypse, are guardians, they are apotropaic, all seeing (they are covered with eyes) and elemental. But the Christian communities contend with the unnatural beasts of the earth and the sea in Revelation 13, given their power by the great dragon of Revelation 12. The Apocalypse, like the Gigantomachy, is a battle between the anthropic divinities of heaven and monstrosities from the earth.

Ascending the stairs of the Altar one ascended, as John ascended, into the royal divine presence, and a narrative unfolded of the deeds of the founder. For the Altar, this was Telephos, for John, this was the Lion who nevertheless was also the slain Lamb. As the elders sing,

> "You are worthy to take the scroll, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth." Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev 5:9-11)

The victory of the Lamb is proclaimed. His right to rule affirmed.

Scholars have long pondered an odd turn of phrase in Revelation 5:6. The NRSV translates the verse, "Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered…." The Greek is not so forgiving: Καὶ εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζῴων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἀρνίον ἑστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον (And I saw in the middle/midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the middle/midst of the elders…). Surely John did not mean "middle" here, for what could it possibly mean to be standing in the middle of a throne? Most assume John's Greek syntax is characteristically poor here. But perhaps we should not be so hasty. Picturing a figure standing in the upper court of the Great Altar (or should we say, Great Throne?), the phrase ἐν μέσῳ would have made perfect sense.

Like the Great Altar of Pergamum, the book of Revelation leads the reader through the chaotic battle, ascending up into the inner sanctum of the Royal Divine, where peace reigns. A victory monument is, after all, a monument of peace—peace at a price, and possibly even peace barely brokered—but peace nevertheless, and to the victor go the spoils. Like the Gigantomachy, which assures the viewer that the gods will master the chaos even as the battle yet rages—for the Giants are visibly losing—the book of Revelation casts the

chaos of the Christians in terms of a cosmic battle being waged, and assures them of the peace above: "Listen!" proclaims the Christ of the letters, "I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev 3:20-21).

This word "conquers" (νικάω) appears thirteen times in the book of Revelation, seven of them in the letters of Revelation 2-3 (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). In each of these letters is the charge to conquer, to overcome the Satanic forces, just as the Lamb overcame. To the one who overcomes, promises of beatitude are made. The next four occurrences concern forces unleashed upon the world as judgments by God or from the activity of the Satanic forces. The first of the horsemen goes out "conquering and in order to conquer" (6:2). The two witnesses of Revelation 11 are conquered by a beast coming up out of the pit in Revelation 11:7. The beast coming out of the Sea in Revelation 13 made war against the saints and conquered them (Rev 13:7). The tide shifts in Revelation 15, where "those who had conquered the beast" are mentioned (Rev 15:2). A last-ditch effort is made by the Satanic forces in Revelation 17, but the Lamb "conquers" them (Rev 17:14). Revelation 21:7 returns to the charge to conquer: "And the one seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children."

The imperial ideology (whether viewed as Attalid or Roman) that was so remarkably chiseled in stone in Pergamum, was also cast on the canvas of John's imagination and that of

his audiences. John pictured for his audience a monumental space that was founded on victory over chaos, and one that could inspire hope for the future. As one entered the Altar terrace one would have been confronted with a raging battle, terrifying and fierce. The melee all in a confusion of bodies and violence, some heroes and gods wounded or on their heels. (The Attalids and Romans both had strong traditions regarding the enemy—whoever the next one was—at the gates.) But as one spotted the patron goddess Athena one would have seen the crown of victory almost upon her head from the outstretched arm of the goddess Nike. A promise of victory, confirmed by the settled peace of the inner court. The Christ of John's visions likewise promises victory to a group for whom the enemy is already at the gates (in fact, owns the gates). And then he chisels before their eyes the story of how it has and will happen.

Chapter 5. Domitianic Iconography and the Woman of Revelation 12

Not a few scholars have suggested that John's visions effect a kind of parody or counter-imaging of Roman images.[1] Allen Brent has argued, in part on the basis of Domitianic iconography that the currently conventional date for the Apocalypse in the closing years of the first century—rather than a date shortly after the reign of Nero—is correct.[2] Brent responds especially to the argument of Brian Jones for a Neronian date, but any number of other scholars could be invoked here, most recently T. D. Barnes.[3] Barnes does not think it possible to assign a date for Revelation from external evidence, but that a solid case for a Neronian date can be made nevertheless from internal evidence: "The dating of Revelation must proceed from the fact that it contains no detectable allusion to any historical event later than the supersession of Nero by another emperor in 68 and the hopes and fears of his imminent return which began to circulate within weeks of his death."[4] Barnes focuses his case on the internal evidence in Revelation 13:18 and 17:9-11:

> This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred and sixty-six. (13:18)

> This calls for a mind that has insight: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain for only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. (17:9-11)

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[1] E.g. Joe E. Lunceford, *Parody and Counterimaging in the Apocalypse* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2009); Richard Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 17.

[2] Allen Brent, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order: Concepts and Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity before the Age of Cyprian* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 165-69.

[3] Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1992), 116; Timothy D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 37-40.

[4] Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography*, 37.

Barnes acknowledges the widespread scholarly opinion that the number of the beast in 13:18

is an instance of gematria, the translation of a word or phrase into a numerical value,

referring to the name Nero Caesar (Gk.: Νέρων Καῖσαρ; Heb.: נרון קסר). Revelation 17:11

refers to the beast "that was but is not," referring to the beast upon which the harlot sits

(17:3, 8), which has the same number of horns (ten) and heads (seven) as the beast from the

sea (13:1-3). Barnes seems to suppose these two beasts are one and the same, though the

identification is not explicitly made in Revelation 17. If they are the same, then one may

suppose the beast from the sea (Nero) is the beast "that was but is not," and is also the

expected eighth beast. Barnes uses the implicit identification of the beast of Revelation 17

with the beast from the sea in Revelation 13 to argue that the list of kings in Revelation 17

also includes Nero, who must be the fifth/seventh (who "was and is to come").

John must have been writing, then, in a situation in which Nero had died (in June of

68), another was reigning (Galba), but the future events were still unfolding. John could not

predict the assassination of Galba in mid-January of 69 and his replacement with Otho.

Following John Marshall's reading of Revelation as the work of a Jewish writer deeply

concerned with the fate of the temple in Jerusalem, surrounded by Vespasian's forces,

Barnes thinks John expected Vespasian (coming from Jerusalem) to be the seventh king, not

Otho, and that he must have been writing while Galba was reigning or at least before word

of his assassination had reached him.[5] "Contemplating the world late in the year 68," Barnes

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[5] Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography*, 37-40. Cf. John W. Marshall, *Parables of War: Reading John's Jewish Apocalypse* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001). Barnes also picks up Marshall's notion that John did not see himself as a Christian, but as a Jew, but he does not seem to have taken Marshall's point to heart. Barnes claims John was writing "at a time when the Christian churches of Asia still regarded themselves as part of the worldwide Jewish community" (40). Marshall's claim is actually more radical; namely, that we should not even make the distinction. John's *audiences* did not see themselves as different from Jews, but simply as Jews.

writes, "as both a Jew and a Christian, he awaited the imminent end of the world in a convulsion that would destroy Rome and create a new heaven and a new earth." And for good measure, he adds, "Such hopes were dead long before the traditional [Domitianic] date of Revelation."[6] Based on the evidence of Revelation 13 and 17, Barnes argues that the book was clearly written in a time when John's Jewish anxiety about Rome was heightened (because the temple was under siege), that it refers to Nero as the beast from the sea and presumably also the beast of Revelation 17, and that it hints at the myth of Nero's return.

Brent's criticism of Jones could be applied also to Barnes. That Nero is the fifth/seventh king would only be obvious to a person "who is in a position to know the specific details of the history of the Principate. The author of the *Apocalypse*, which was a semi-literate work, was hardly such a person." "Semi-literate" is an unwarranted conclusion. Even if John's Greek is due to imperfect understanding of the language rather than an affect, that would only make John semi-literate in Greek. That does not mean news of the Principate could not have reached him, particularly through a version of the Nero myth— either that Nero would return from the East or from the dead.[7] The fifth book of the *Sibylline Oracles* (27-34, 93-110, 137-154, 214-227, 361-385), and possibly also the fourth (119-124), refer to a version of the Nero myth, and both books set the myth in historical reviews.[8] *Ascension of Isaiah* (4) also appears to be aware of the Nero myth. It must be admitted,

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[6] Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography*, 40.

[7] On the two versions of the Nero myth, and the apparent presence of both in the book of Revelation, see Richard J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 384-452.

[8] For discussion of these passages, see John J. Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1974), 73-95, 183-201; and Kenneth R. Jones, *Jewish Reactions to the Destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 173-243.

however, that these texts do not display any specific knowledge of the actual history of the

Roman Principate.[9] Brent makes the further claim, however, that John

> would get his information from non-literary artefacts like temples of the
> Imperial Cult such as those at Ephesus, Smyrna, or at Pergamon, and from
> prominent and striking statues and numismatic iconography of particular
> emperors to be found there. He took over such a kaleidoscope of non-
> literary imagery and refashioned his fragmentary images into new patterns.
> Though those patterns bar the influence of his Judaeo-Christian background,
> they also retain the impress of their original pagan matrix.[10]

Brent, too, thinks one can date the Apocalypse from internal evidence, but he thinks there

are indeed references—not the least, iconographic references—to the reign of Domitian.

For our purposes, the main interest is Brent's claim that John's images were

somehow derived from the Roman imperial images he saw around Asia Minor. Brent's

intuition is worth entertaining, and he has provided some overtures toward the thorough

examination it deserves. In Revelation 12:1-6, for instance, John describes a woman clothed

with the sun, the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars upon her head. She

bears a son who is to rule with a rod of iron. He is "snatched away" (ἡρπάσθη) and taken

"to God and to his throne" (πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ; Rev 12:5).

Brent points to two coins in the British Museum to explain this imagery. Domitian's wife

Domitia gave birth to a child in 73, but the child died young. Both mother and child are

commemorated on the two coins. On the first, a sestertius from 81/82 (Plate 13), Domitia

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[9] Cf. John J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles: A New Translation and Commentary," in James H.
Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseuepigrapha*, volume 1 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 322: "Despite
their wealth of historical allusion, the Sibylline oracles cannot be expected to provide reliable chronological or
factual data. Some books, especially the later ones, show only the vaguest knowledge of the events they
describe." With the fifth book, this may well because of the further "alienation" of the author(s) from the
gentiles and from the hope of salvation by a Ptolemaic rule (Collins, *Oracles*, 117).

[10] Brent, *Imperial Cult*, 165; cf. also 190: "The imagery of the Seer's vision is undoubtedly composite, with
images derived from a number of sources both Jewish, early Christian, and pagan. Those images have
doubtlessly been refashioned, in fantastic proportions, into a bizarre vision which has been very successful in
concealing its true historical and cultural roots."

is depicted enthroned on the reverse, her right hand gesturing toward her son, her left hand holding a scepter.[11] The inscription reads DIVI CAESAR MATRI. The form of the child is discernible, but not in detail. His hands, for instance, are much obscured. Brent claims that this child holds a scepter in his left hand while extending his right in a gesture of blessing toward the world. "Domitia's child thus shows, with his sceptre and globe, close correspondence" to the child of Revelation who will rule the world with a "rod of iron."[12]

The other coin that Brent examines is an aureus from 82/83 (Plate 14).[13] The obverse displays a bust of Domitia, as did the sestertius, but on the reverse only the child is commemorated. The inscription reads DIVVS CAESAR IMP[ERATOR] DOMITIANI F[ILIVS]. This coin thus depicts the divinized child. Like a cherub, the child sits upon a globe, his hands outstretched, while seven stars surround him. Brent's interpretation of this coin highlights the fact that "the child has died and become one with the imperial family in deification, just like the child of the *Apoc.* 12,5."[14] Here, however, the attributes given the child have been transferred to the woman: "Thus in the image of *Apoc.* 12,1 we find the infant's circle or crown of seven stars interchanged with those of the woman" who has a crown of twelve stars upon her head.[15] John has lifted this imperial imagery from coinage available to him in Asia Minor and repurposed it for his Apocalypse.

There are a number of problems with Brent's interpretation of these two coins. Both coins were minted in Rome, for instance; they are not provincial coins. And even if such a coin had made it to Asia, it is certainly unlikely that a person of John's presumed

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[11] *BMC* 2: 413, no. 501, and plate 82.8 (Brent's citation). British Museum number: R.11462.

[12] Brent, *Imperial Cult*, 167.

[13] *BMC* 2: 311, no. 62, and plate 61.6 (Brent's citation). British Museum number: R.10760.

[14] Brent, *Imperial Cult*, 167.

[15] Brent, *Imperial Cult*, 167.

status would find himself in possession or even in close proximity with an aureus. It is just as unlikely that John would have known these images intimately as that he would have been familiar with the history of the Roman Principate. A more grievous problem is Brent's overdependence on the somewhat journalistic account of Ethelbert Stauffer, who—maddeningly—did not cite his sources.[16] Stauffer refers to both of the coins, and Brent raises no questions about Stauffer's interpretations. Consider the following line from Stauffer: "[I]n his left hand the sceptre of world dominion and with his right hand blessing the world."[17] Compare with this line from Brent: "He holds in his left hand the sceptre of world dominion whilst blessing the world with his right."[18] In fact, the child is not holding a scepter; his mother holds the scepter.[19] It is also not clear that the child's gesture should be construed as blessing. And while the state of the coin might possibly allow for a globe in the child's hand, my eyes, at least, have been unable clearly to discern one. Brent went to the trouble of finding this coin, but he does not seem to have looked at it very closely. Without a globe or scepter the child looks significantly less like the son born in Revelation 12.

Brent's interpretation of the second coin is more convincing. Surely this refers to the divinized child of Domitian. But what is the significance for Revelation 12? Brent refers to an epigram of Martial, who depicts the child moving through the air and playing with the seven stars, meaning the seven planets.[20] Unfortunately, Brent does not cite which epigram he has in mind. That is because he got this bit of information from Stauffer: "Martial took

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[16] Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (London: SPCK, 1955). Brent acknowledges both his debt to Stauffer and his own frustration with Stauffer's failure to cite his evidence (Brent, *Imperial Cult*, 166).

[17] Stauffer, *Christ*, 151.

[18] Brent, *Imperial Cult*, 166-67.

[19] The state of the coin might suggest a vertical object in the child's left hand. This appears to me to be an illusion produced by the wear on the coin (i.e. a scratch). If it is a scepter, it is held, apparently, by both mother and child. At any rate, we should not make overly hasty judgments from such evidence.

[20] Brent, *Imperial Cult*, 167.

the occasion of a circus which was held in snowy weather to glorify the dead prince in a gracious epigram, which begins with a word from Virgil's advent poem—*aspice*—and ends with a poetic picture: the prince moves through the air, playing with the seven stars, and bombarding his father with snowflakes."[21] Stauffer is referring to Martial's *Epigram* 4.3. Martial does have the prince frolicking in the aether (*quis…ab aethere ludit*), but he does not mention "the seven stars," and certainly not in a way that would suggest the seven planets. One of the constellations Martial mentions is *Helice* (i.e. Ursa Major), which has seven stars, but there is no connection from the constellation to the seven planets. Brent further refers to the seven stars as an attribute of divinity in Revelation 2:1, where Christ is referred to as "the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand." For Stauffer, and presumably Brent, the seven stars refer to the seven planets, so that the one who holds them or enjoys their company presumably may be considered divine. The stars of Revelation 2:1 might refer to the seven planets, and thus symbolize world dominion, though these are the stars referred to in 1:16, and interpreted as the angels of the seven churches in 1:20.[22]

Does Revelation 12 refer to a divinized child, though? This again is part of the reason Brent finds a correspondence between Revelation 12 and the aureus, since, like Domitian's son, the son born to the woman in Revelation 12 has died and gone on to join the royal family. The verb here used is ἁρπάζειν, "to seize." David Aune documents the use of ἁρπάζειν and similar verbs in a popular "seizure motif" in scenes of apotheosis or deification.[23] Aune offers an impressive list: Ganymede (Homer, *Il.* 20.234); Pelops (Pindar,

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[21] Stauffer, *Christ*, 152.

[22] For discussion on possible meanings of the seven stars, including the constellation Ursa Major and the seven planets, see David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 97-98.

[23] David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 689-90. Aune points to Hans Dieter Betz, *Lukian von Samosata und das Neue Testament: Religionsgeschichtliche und Paränetische Parallelen* (Berlin: Akademie, 1961), 169, n. 3, for further references to this motif.

Ol. 1.40); Cleitus (Homer, *Od.* 15.250-51); the child Dionysus (Pausanias, *Descr.* 73.18.11).

Some are carried off to far away places: Europa to Crete (Lucian, *Syr. d.* 4); Orion to Delos

(Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.4.4); Philip to Caesarea (Acts 8:39); Enoch to the Garden of Eden (*Jub.*

4:23). Not all of these passages indicate deification or apotheosis through death. Wisdom of

Solomon 4:10-11 nevertheless does seem to use the verb to indicate an early death. Wisdom

4:7 refers to the righteous man, who, though he may die early, will nevertheless be at rest.

Verses 10-11 take up the theme: "He pleased God and was loved by him, and while living

among sinners was taken up (μετετέθη). He was caught up (ἡρπάγη) so that evil might not

change his understanding or guile deceive his soul." David Winston notes that the verb was

used also in epitaphs of those who died early deaths.[24] The language of this passage seems

to refer back to Enoch as well ("He pleased God…"; cf. Gen 5:24), who of course became a

paradigmatic figure for heavenly ascents. The author of Wisdom apparently interpreted

Enoch's translation as a premature death.

Premature death is an act of protection in the theology of Wisdom 4. Those who die

early are snatched up by God so that evil cannot touch them. The parallel with the child and

salivating dragon of Revelation 12 is patent. Just as the woman clothed in the sun goes into

witness protection in the wilderness (Rev 12:6), so too the child is taken up to heaven for

protection.[25] One need not see this "seizing" of the child as death, however. For New

Testament scholars ἁρπάζειν is well-known from Paul's description of being "snatched into

Paradise" (2 Cor 12:1-10).[26] Based on a parallel account to Revelation 12 in *Apocalypse of*

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[24] David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979), 140.

[25] Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1976), 69-70.

[26] James Buchanan Wallace, *Snatched into Paradise (2 Cor 12:1-10): Paul's Heavenly Journey in the Context of Early Christian Experience* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011); James D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1986). Under

Adam 78:6-26, Adela Yarbro Collins detects a Jewish tradition of "translation," in which an individual is taken up to heaven to await the time when he will fulfill an eschatological function. Other examples are the translation of Elijah, and the ascension of Christ. The latter of these further examples has long been associated with the "snatching" of the child in Revelation 12:5.[27]

Even if we allow the parallel between the two children—one caught up to deification, the other to divine protection—it is perhaps too hasty to assume John merely attributed the features of the deified child to the woman of Revelation 12. The stars among which the child plays are not a crown, and there are only seven. The image of Martial's epigram, if relevant, does not describe a crown of stars, but a child playing in the aether among the constellations. Indeed, twelve stars would fit the notion of constellations more neatly, since it would reference the zodiac. Alternatively, we could see in the twelve stars the twelve tribes of Israel. Either way, twelve is not seven. Brent elides these features all too easily, and indeed unnecessarily.[28] One does not need to go quite so far to find more fitting iconographical sources for the depiction of the woman of Revelation 12. Adela Yarbro Collins is far more convincing in her claim that the woman is depicted as a queen of heaven, like Artemis of Ephesus, Atargatis, or Isis.[29] Of these the most likely to have donated her

the influence of this passage, the meaning of ἁρπάζειν increasingly tends toward this valence of mystical rapture in Patristic literature; see Lampe, *ad loc* ("ἁρπάζω"), §6, and compare with BDAG.

[27] And still is: G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 639-40.

[28] One is left with the impression the evidence is being made to fit the thesis (i.e. that the iconography specifically of imperial cult is behind the images of the Apocalypse) rather than the other way around at this point. The only reasons to work so hard to make the numismatic evidence reflect Revelation 12 are, 1) if one feels they must find a mother and child together in iconographic sources, or 2) if one is bound to explore only imperial iconography. Mother and child are rare in iconography, perhaps, though in the myths of the gods, for instance, there are a number of examples (e.g. Leto and Apollo). More fitting parallels can be drawn, so long as we are not bound only to images of Roman rule. It must be said this is not a large piece of Brent's overall argument, which still carries a great deal of force. This is one of the more explicit points at which Brent attempts to establish a direct connection (or close to it) between imperial iconography and John's images.

[29] Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 71-6. Cf. the discussion also in Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 680-82.

iconography to John's Apocalypse, if only because of geographical proximity and

prominence, would have been Ephesian Artemis.[30]

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[30] Yarbro Collins prefers Isis (*Combat Myth*, 75) because Atargatis was not well-known in Western Asia, and because Ephesian Artemis had no direct connection to the sun ("clothed in the sun"). Among the cities of Western Asia Minor, however, Ephesian Artemis had a much higher profile than Isis. Likewise, as I point out further below, although Artemis bore no direct relation to the sun in mythological sources, iconographically Ephesian Artemis was often portrayed wreathed in a nimbus (cf. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 681). There also seems to have been some cross-fertilization between the cults of Atargatis and Artemis in the East; see John Kampen, "The Cult of Artemis and the Essenes in Syro-Palestine," *DSD* 10 (2003), 214-18.

Chapter 6. "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"
The Woman of Revelation 12 and the Great Whore of Revelation 17

> As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we are not going to listen to you. Instead, we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials, used to do in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem.
>
> Jeremiah 44:16-17

Artemis of the Ephesians was one of the most celebrated goddesses of the Mediterranean world.[1] Probably around 167 CE Aelius Aristides wrote with a touch of hyperbole that "all who dwell between the Pillars of Heracles and the River Phasis [from the Western edge of Spain, that is, to the Easternmost boundary of the "civilized" world] would consider Ephesus favorably (πάντας...ὀρθῶς ἂν διανοεῖσθαι), both for the accessibility of its harbors, and for all its other warm receptions. For all journey to it as to their homeland (πάντες γὰρ ὡς εἰς πατρίδα καὶ αὐτὴν κομίζονται)…" (Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 23.24). The primary reason he gave for the honor due to Ephesus was the honor (τιμή) of its

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[1] On Artemis of Ephesus, see the following: Charles Picard, *Ephèse et Claros: Recherches sur les sanctuaries et les cultes de l'Ionie du nord* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1922); Guy MacLean Rogers, *The Mysteries of Artemis of Ephesos: Cult, Polis, and Change in the Graeco-Roman World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Guy MacLean Rogers, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesos: Foundation Myths of a Roman City* (London: Routledge, 1991); Hermann Thiersch, *Artemis Ephesia: Eine Archäologische Untersuchung* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1935); Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 254-56; Anton Bammer, *Das Heiligtum des Artemis von Ephesos* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1984); Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Camridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 20-7; Gerard Mussies, "Artemis," in *DDD*², 91-7; Richard Oster, "Ephesus as a Religious Center under the Principiate, I. Paganism Before Constantine," *ANRW* II.18.3 (1990): 1661-1728; Richard Oster, "The Ephesian Artemis as an Opponent of Early Christianity," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 19 (1976): 24-44; Dieter Knibbe, "*Via Sacra Ephesiaca*: New Aspects of the Cult of Artemis Ephesia," in *Ephesos: Metropolis of Asia* (ed. Helmut Koester; Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1995), 141-55; Lynn R. LiDonnici, "The Images of Artemis Ephesia and Greco-Roman Worship: A Reconsideration," *HTR* 85 (1992): 389-415; Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 19-30; Rick Strelan, *Paul, Artemis, and the Jews in Ephesus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 24-94; Robert Fleischer, *Artemis von Ephesos und verwandte Kultstatuen aus Anatolien und Syrien* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); Robert Fleischer, "Artemis Ephesia," *LIMC* II.1: 755-63. A brief glimpse at Ephesian Artemis's iconography can be found in *LIMC* II.2: 564-73.

goddess.[2] That the book of Acts records a riot incited by craftsmen of images of the

goddess (19:23-41) demonstrates the prominence of Ephesian Artemis and early Christian

recognition of the devotion of her adherents.[3]

 Ἄρτεμις Ἐφεσία or Ἄρτεμις Ἐφεσίων clearly bore a special relationship with

the city of Ephesus. The city and the goddess enjoyed a "covenant bond": Artemis

functioned as the protector and benefactor of the city and its citizens, including its status in

the hierarchy of honor, and the Ephesians in turn bore the responsibility for the protection

and aggrandizement of the goddess's cult.[4] The citizens of Ephesus, it must be said,

exercised their part of the covenant extraordinarily well. The cult of Artemis of Ephesus

was not confined to Ephesus. There are reports of a cult to the Ephesian goddess in Sardis.[5]

A statue of Ephesian Artemis from the late second century CE surfaced in Caesarea

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[2] Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 23.25 (Behr): "Yet how is it reasonable for [Ephesus] to be of use to all men in common, but not to receive good will from all men in common, and for it to be of equal importance to all that the city flourish? And in Persian times for Artemis to have received such great reverence by the barbarians, but when her temple itself has been erected greater than before, and the greatest and most important empire of all has been established, for this one fact not to be sufficient to draw men into friendship with the city, the fact of the goddess's honor, both that with which she has honored the city and that which it is reasonable that she receive from mankind?"

[3] The scene has elements of plausibility: the temple keeper (ναοποιός), the reference to Asiarchs, the economic impact of a message denying the divinity of the gods, the fervor aroused by religio-patriotic slogans ("Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"). Some have suggested that Luke is drawing on at least some recollection of real events here (I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980], 314-17; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1998], 655; Darrell Bock, *Acts* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2009], 606-607). Richard Pervo notes the abundance of local color before issuing his verdict: "Abundance of detail will not gain Luke any kudos for historical accuracy in chap. 19" (Richard I. Pervo, *Acts* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009], 464). Ernst Haenchen certainly recognized problems with considering the scene a straightforward historical account (Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 575-79), but he also recognized "this is not the most important question" to ask of this episode (558). Whether or not such a riot took place, the verisimilitude of the scene is enough to show that Luke at least understood how powerful the cult of Artemis of Ephesus was. Luke included the scene (or composed it) as the representative scene of the contra-pagan message of Paul's gospel, which in itself testifies to the prominence of Artemis Ephesia.

[4] So Oster, "Ephesus," 1700-6.

[5] See Dieter Knibbe, "Ein religiöser Frevel und seine Sühne: Ein Todesurteil hellenistischer Zeit aus Ephesos," *JÖAI* 46 (1961-63), 175-82.

Maritima.[6] Konrad Wernicke noted evidence for the dissemination of Artemis Ephesia in

thirty-three locales in Phrygia, Lydia, Mysia, Achaea, and even Syria, including the cities of

Ancyra, Aphrodisias, Chios, Clazomenae, Corinth, Cyzicus, Epidauros, Prusa, and Smyrna,

but also, of course, Rome.[7] The map (Karte II) in Robert Fleischer's magisterial study

shows the distribution of coins carrying the Artemis Ephesia type across all of Western Asia

Minor. Whether or not the Ephesians actively spread the cult beyond Ephesus, the goddess

clearly roamed all of Asia Minor, parts of Syria, and even made her way to Rome.[8] If John

were going to base his depiction of the heavenly woman in Revelation 12 on a Queen of

Heaven with local recognition in Asia Minor, he could hardly have done better than to

acknowledge the great Artemis of the Ephesians.

Identifying the Goddess

It is often claimed that Artemis Ephesia was an instance of *interpretatio Graeca*, that is,

that she was essentially an Anatolian fertility goddess interpreted as the Greek goddess

Artemis. Robert Fleischer, the foremost expert on the iconography of Artemis of Ephesus,

unequivocally claims she was the "local form of the Anatolian 'Great Goddess' in Ephesus,

equated by the Greeks with Artemis."[9] Others have suggested that at the very least Greek

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[6] Lee I. Levine, *Caesarea under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 43.

[7] K. Wernicke, "Artemis," *PW* 2: 1385-86.

[8] Oster ("Ephesus," 1703, n. 333) follows Louis Robert ("Sur des Inscriptions d'Éphèse: Fête, Athlètes, Empereurs, Épigrammes," *Rev. Phil.* 41 [1967], 39-40) in concluding that officials were sent from Ephesus and stationed in satellite cults. Robert's conclusion that the Ephesians thus commissioned their apostles is a good deduction from inscriptional evidence, but it is not directly supported thereby. An apostolic ministry, as it were, among the devotees of Ephesian Artemis might very well explain why an apostolic cult like early Christianity might have found themselves in competition with such a goddess, but there is no evidence that the Christians found the missionary activity of the goddess's cult problematic so much as they objected to her cult *per se*.

[9] Fleischer, "Artemis Ephesia," 755: "Lokale Ausformung der anatolischen 'Großen Göttin' im Ephesos, von den Griechen mit Artemis gleichgesetzt." Cf. Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament, volume 1:*

Artemis and Ephesian Artemis were two distinct deities, usually on the basis of the diverging

iconographic representations.[10] Daniel Frayer-Griggs goes so far as to assume the

assimilation of the Asian goddess to the Greek, or Ephesian Artemis's appropriation of the

characteristics of Greek Artemis.[11] Paul Strelan is certainly correct, however, that "the

distinctiveness of the Asian Artemis from the Greek must not be overdrawn."[12] We can

push his caution further and recognize that apart from iconographic conventions, Ephesian

Artemis and "Greek" Artemis (that is, Homeric or "literary" Artemis) probably have at least

a common history, and that the rites of Artemis Ephesia probably differ as much from the

cult of Artemis Agrotera, who was invoked before battle, as do the devotions to Artemis

Locheia, who came to the aid of women in labor, and that the cult in Ephesus differs as

much from that in Athens as did Artemis's cult(s) in Sparta.

The gods, as Ken Dowden writes, "live in different, but intersecting, dimensions,

which combine to create the illusion of a single personality." There was no master

mythology or cult for the gods; rather, "…Different Greek cities or *ethnē*…worshiped

broadly similar gods to each other. But the system was far from uniform and the Zeus

imagined in one place might be rather different from the Zeus imagined in another."[13] At

least three coordinates need to be considered in identifying a particular deity, even in the

classical Greek world: name (Zeus, Athena, etc.), epithet (Soter, Polias, etc.), and location

(Olympia, Pergamene, etc.). Not only was Zeus Olympios of Olympus imagined differently

from the way Zeus Karios of Carius was, but Zeus Soter was imagined differently from Zeus

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History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age (2d ed.; New York: de Gruyter, 2000), 184; Mussies, "Artemis," 94.

[10] E.g. Strelan, *Paul*, 44-45.

[11] Daniel Frayer-Griggs, "The Beasts of Ephesus and the Cult of Artemis," *HTR* 106 (2013), 466-69.

[12] Strelan, *Paul*, 45.

[13] Ken Dowden, "Olympian Gods, Olympian Pantheon," in *A Companion to Greek Religion* (ed. Daniel Ogden; Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 41.

Ktesios or Zeus Xenios. In the world after Alexander and during the rise of the Roman

Empire, as the Greek gods flung themselves across the known world and assimilated or were

assimilated to other gods, the situation became even more complicated as Zeus was affiliated

with, for example, Ammon, and other local cults.[14] The picture we have of a consistent

pantheon, with distinct and clearly defined gods, is due to the spell of Homer, who probably

did not create the "literary gods," but certainly arranged them more consistently than they

had been.[15] Moreover, the very literary construction of the "literary gods" undoubtedly

provided an element of continuity across the various manifestations of Zeus.[16]

The goddess Artemis was primarily known across the Greek world as "Mistress of

Beasts" (πότνια θηρῶν), and this epithet was meant in at least two senses: as conservator,

and more obviously as hunter (cf. *Homeric Hymn* 27; Philostratus the Elder, *Imag.* 1.28 [335K];

Philostratus the Younger, *Imag.* 3 [396K]). Artemis was, in the ancient world, typically

portrayed as a youthful virgin goddess in a short or long tunic, carrying a quiver of arrows

and a bow, and usually in the company of a hound, hind, and/or hare, and sometimes also

with a train of nymphs, or her twin brother Apollo (Plate 15). This image of Artemis is

reflected in Callimachus's *Hymn to Artemis*:

> Beginning with the time when sitting on her father's knees—still a little
> maid—she spake these words to her sire: "Give me to keep my
> maidenhood, Father, for ever: and give me to be of many names, that

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[14] See Jon D. Mikalson, "Greek Religion: Continuity and Change in the Hellenistic World," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World* (ed. Glenn R. Bugh; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 208-22.

[15] So Herodotus 2.53: "But it was only yesterday—if I may so put it—the day before yesterday that the Greeks came to know the origin and form of the various gods, and whether or not all of them had always existed; for Homer and Hesiod are the poets who composed theogonies and described the gods for the Greeks, giving them all their appropriate title, offices, and powers, and they lived, as I believe, not more than four hundred years ago" (trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt, rev. John Marincola; *Herodotus: The Histories* [New York: Penguin, 1996]). On the "spell of Homer," see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 119-25.

[16] "Literary gods" is Jon Mikalson's helpful phrase (Jon D. Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion* [2d ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2009], 31-36).

> Phoebus may not vie with me. And give me arrows and a bow…. But give me to be the Bringer of Light and give me to gird me in a tunic with embroidered border reaching to the knee, that I may slay wild beasts. …And give to me all mountains; and for city, assign me any, even whatsoever thou wilt: for seldom is it that Artemis goes down to the town. On the mountains will I dwell and the cities of men I will visit only when women vexed by the sharp pangs of childbirth call me to their aid—even in the hour when I was born the Fates ordained that I should be their helper, forasmuch as my mother suffered no pain either when she gave me birth or when she carried me in her womb, but without travail put me from her body."
> (Callimachus, *Hymn to Artemis* [Mair, LCL])

Of the extant iconography for Artemis, the so-called Diana (or Artemis) of Versailles type, presumably based on an original Greek bronze by Leochares (ca. 325 BCE), mirrors Callimachus's hymn almost perfectly (Plate 16). Artemis is youthful, donning a short hunting tunic (a *chiton*), with bow and quiver, grasping a young stag, or accompanied by a hound or hare. A Hellenistic creation, this type of Artemis statue is extant only in (Roman-era) "copies," a fact which testifies to its currency in the first century CE.

Walter Burkert notes the influence of Homer in this depiction of a young maiden—lithe, uncanny, and free-spirited huntress, generally out of place among warriors and the (patriarchal) world of the polis. In the strife between the gods, Artemis comes off as a petulant teenager, whom Hera roughly chastises (Homer, *Il.* 21.470-514). She is forced to flee the scene in tears of humiliation. As Burkert puts it, "The goddess is forced into the role of an awkward adolescent girl beside a severe step-mother—among warriors she is doubly out of place."[17] This scene probably reflects more on Hera than on Artemis. Artemis has already shown her worth in battle, particularly with her bow. Homer's usual epithet for her is "arrow-pourer" (ἰοχέαιρα) (*Il.* 5.53; 6.428; 9.538; 20.39, 71; 21.480; 24.606; *Od.* 6.102; 11.172, 198; 15.478; cf. *Homeric Hymn* 9). Hera belittles Artemis on account of the

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[17] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 150.

primary use of her bow in hunting rather than in battle, and she humiliates Artemis out of

spite. There was a long-standing feud between Leto and her children and Hera (cf.

Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.4.1). Enraged that Zeus had impregnated Leto, Hera pursued Leto

across the world. Finally Leto evaded Hera and labored long before she brought forth

Artemis, who in turn served as midwife for her twin Apollo. During the birth Hera

approached the place where Leto was hidden, but the Curetes frightened her off with a

boisterous diversion. But even the image of Artemis as youthful, virgin queen of the wilds

and of animals is somewhat whitewashed. Her cult (or what can be recovered of it, at least)

reveals a far more dangerous and bloody side to the goddess.[18] Artemis was not only

goddess of the hunt. She was also looked to in times of war and before battle. Although

Artemis was not a warrior-goddess, that is, not a combatant, she was nevertheless hailed as

Soteira (savior) and Hegemone (leader).[19] Xenophon hints that it was customary to sacrifice

a goat to Artemis Agrotera on the field of battle (Xenophon, *Hell.* 4.2.20).[20]

One of the more celebrated roles for Artemis in classical Greece was as the guide for

girls' transition to womanhood, particularly in the Arkteia at Brauron.[21] During the

Brauronia, young Athenian girls participated in the Arkteia, in which they donned saffron-

colored robes and "played the bear" (Aristophanes, *Lys.* 641-47). The foundation myth(s)

for the Arkteia involves (in its various versions) a maiden playing with a bear sacred to

Artemis. When the bear injured the girl, her brother or brothers killed the bear. When a

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[18] "In point of fact," Burkert writes (*Greek Religion*, 152), "Artemis is and remains a Mistress of sacrifices, especially of cruel and bloody sacrifices." In Euripides's *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1455-1461), for instance, Athena commands that at Artemis's festival in Halae a drop of human blood be shed.

[19] Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 203.

[20] See further Vernant, *Mortals*, 244-57.

[21] See also the discussion of the Arkteia as a rite of passage in Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 136-40, and the fuller account of Robin Osborne, *Demos: The Discovery of Classical Attica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 154-72.

famine descended on Athens Apollo's oracle was consulted, and the god informed the Athenians of Artemis's anger over the killing of the bear. As a consequence, all Athenian girls would be required to "play the bear" for Artemis before she could marry.[22] The theme of Mistress of Beasts is brought together in this festival with another of Artemis's main functions: "Through the Arkteia the girls were, essentially, initiated into the cult of the goddess to whom they as women would turn for help in childbirth and for the care of their own children, the goddess to whom they as women would pray and sacrifice for the rest of their lives."[23] Artemis Locheia watched over childbirth and the care of children, as Callimachus also noted, and the prominence of Artemis among women must in some measure account for the fact that she is one of the most ancient and popular goddesses of classical antiquity.[24]

Such was the goddess of the classical Greek world.[25] Artemis retained certain attributes from her classical past during the Roman imperial period—particularly her role as Mistress of Beasts, and her role in childbearing and child-rearing (e.g. Juvenal, *Sat.*, 13.80; Horace, *Saec.*; Apuleius, *Metam.*, 2.2)—but she also took on other associations, especially as one travelled further from conservative locales like Athens. Probably because of her twin brother's association with the sun, Artemis came to be associated with the moon (Selene) (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.68; Philo, *Decal.* 54; Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.15.20; 1.17.11). If the extant

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[22] Compare the similar summary in Mikalson, *Greek Religion*, 60.

[23] Mikalson, *Greek Religion*, 151.

[24] Most scholars would agree that her name is found in extant Linear B tablets, thus dating her at least to ca. 1200 BCE, and according to Pausanias's account Artemis attracted sixty-four epithets, second only to Zeus, who surpassed Artemis by only three epithets.

[25] For which, see also Vernant, "The Figure and Functions of Artemis in Myth and Cult," in *Mortals*, 195-206.

evidence for this association is any reliable measure, the lunar connection is relatively late—

possibly no earlier than the late second or early first century BCE.[26]

It is possible, then, that Artemis Ephesia represents the assimilation of an Anatolian

fertility or mother goddess to the Greek goddess Artemis. If so, however, the original myth

of the Anatolian goddess had been altogether erased by Artemis's mythology. The main

mythological theme of Artemis Ephesia was the birth of the great goddess and Apollo. The

mysteries of Artemis celebrated at Ephesus were centered on the birth of the goddess and

the warding off of Hera.[27] The mysteries were clearly tied to Greek mythology, and were

therefore, like all ancient Greek mystery cults, of Greek origin.[28] These mysteries were

celebrated in the grove near Ephesus named Ortygia, after Artemis's nurse, at least since the

period of Persian rule in Anatolia in the early fourth century BCE.[29] The antiquity of the

cult of Artemis in this region is supported by Strabo, describing the approach to the

Ephesian coast:

> Then comes the harbor Panormos, with a temple of the Ephesian Artemis;
> and then the city Ephesus. On the same coast, slightly above the sea, is also
> Ortygia, which is a magnificent grove of all kinds of trees, of the cypress
> most of all. It is traversed by the Cenchrius River, where Leto is said to have
> bathed herself after her travail. For here is the mythical scene of the birth,
> and of the nurse Ortygia, and of the holy place where the birth took place,
> and of the olive tree near by, where the goddess is said first to have taken a
> rest after she was relieved from her travail. Above the grove lies Mt.
> Solmissus, where, it is said, the Curetes stationed themselves, and with the

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[26] Gerard Mussies makes the educated guess that Artemis became associated with the moon because of her connection to fertility, therefore menstrual cycle, therefore lunar cycle, though this connection is not made in any ancient source (Mussies, "Artemis," 92). Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.17.36-40, does link Artemis Lochia (Λοχεῖα=Λυχεῖος) with morning twilight (λύκη), as Mussies points out, but he does so without any sense that the connection has anything to do with menstrual cycle, or even indeed the moon. Macrobius was also writing in the fifth century CE, and he has a strong synthesizing interest that has certainly skewed his interpretation of the cults of which he was aware.

[27] The earliest direct evidence of mysteries which commemorated the birth of the goddess comes from the Strabo quote below. For a full investigation and description of the mysteries, see Rogers, *Mysteries*.

[28] On the Greek (rather than Eastern) origins of Greek mystery cults, see Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[29] For the earliest evidence for the mysteries of Artemis in this region, see Rogers, *Mysteries*, 39-40.

din of their arms frightened Hera out of her wits when she was jealously
spying on Leto, and when they helped Leto to conceal from Hera the birth
of her children. There are several temples (πλειόνων ναῶν) in the place,
some ancient and others built in later times; in the ancient temples are many
ancient wooden images (ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἀρχαίοις ἀρχαῖά ἐστι ξόανα), but
in those of later times there are works of Skopas; for example, Leto holding a
sceptre and Ortygia standing beside her with a child in each arm. A general
festival is held there annually; and by a certain custom the youths vie for
honor, particularly in the splendor of their banquets there. At that time, also,
a special college of the Kouretes holds symposia and performs certain mystic
sacrifices (μυστικὰς θυσίας). (Strabo, *Geog.* 14.1.20 [Jones, LCL])

Strabo, writing late in the first century BCE or early in the first century CE, confirms that

there were several ancient temples in this region, which housed wooden images (ξόανα).

The mythology of Artemis here deviates not at all from the "Greek" mythology, apart from

the birth of Apollo and Artemis on Asian soil rather than at Delos (cf. Apollodorus, *Bibl.*

1.4.1; *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*; Pindar, *On Delos*; Hyginus, *Fab.* 140; Virgil, *Aen.*, 3.73;

Callimachus, *Hymn. Del.*).

The presence of *xoana* supports the antiquity of Ephesian Artemis's cult, as does

Strabo's observation (if correct) of many ancient temples (ναοὶ ἀρχαῖοι).[30] These cult

images were made of wood (rather than marble or bronze), were often roughly carved, if at

all, and were often associated with a mythical origin or divine donation. The *xoanon* of

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[30] Jean-Pierre Vernant argued that the *xoanon* belonged to the period of cult images in which the images
provided for the "presentification" of the gods—of making the invisible visible—whereas after Xenophon and
Plato, cult images increasingly tended toward imitation or mimesis. *Xoana* could be rough-hewn because their
purpose was not to resemble the god, but to make the god present. Vernant argues that *xoana* thus represent a
more ancient kind of cult images. See Vernant, *Mortals*, 151-63, esp. 153-55. For a dissenting on the definition
of "*xoanon*" as wooden statues of antiquity, see A. A. Donohue, *Xoana and the Origins of Greek Sculpture* (Atlanta:
Scholars, 1988). Although Donohue is correct in arguing such a strict definition is a modern construct, she is
wrong to assume that there is therefore no truth in the definition at all. Florence Bennett ("A Study of the
Word ΞΟΑΝΟΝ," *AJA* 21 [1917]: 8-21), in a thorough examination of the word in Pausanias, concluded that
although *xoanon* came to synonymous with *agalma* (statue) and *eikon* (image), its more narrow meaning was that
of an archaic wooden cult image. The passage from Strabo would seem to support this argument, since it is the
ancient temples which house *xoana*. For a fine assessment of Donohue, see Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood,
"Xoanon," *CR* 40 (1990): 129-131.

Athena Parthenos of Athens is probably the most famous.[31] Strabo claims there were

several *xoana* around Ortygia. He does not specify, of course, that they were images of

Artemis. But some of them must have been, since her cult came to dominate the region.

Others may well have been images of Apollo or Leto, possibly even Ortygia. Most scholars

agree that the original statue of Artemis Ephesia was a *xoanon*, which was adorned with the

dress in which she appears in later statues (such as the famous pectoral and/or abdominal

protrusions), which is why the exposed parts of Artemis are darker in many depictions.

All of the above suggests that while the Artemis Ephesia may have incorporated

local iconographical themes, she was probably not just a Greek name on an essentially

Anatolian goddess.[32]

The Iconography of Artemis Ephesia

Certain aspects of the goddess's cult bear some resemblance to the description of the

woman of Revelation 12. In Artemis's mythology a pregnant goddess is pursued by an

opposing power, though it is not Artemis but Leto who is pursued by Hera. Artemis is

associated with the birth of a heavenly child—Apollo—though as midwife, not mother. In

this role of midwife, however, she is sometimes treated as a nurse of humanity. It is possible

that John patched together certain aspects of the Ephesian Artemis's myth, combining

attributes of Leto and Artemis in his depiction of the woman of Revelation 12, but the key

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[31] Kenneth Lapatin, "New Statues for Old Gods," in *The Gods of Ancient Greece: Identities and Transformations* (ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Andrew Erskine; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 126-51.

[32] By way of contrast, the Artemis of Gerasa may very well have been an instance of *interpretatio Graeca*, as argued by Achim Lichtenberger, "Artemis and Zeus Olympios in Roman Gerasa," in *The Variety of Local Religious Life in the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (ed. Ted Kaizer; Leiden: Brill, 2008): 133-53.

evidence for this study must in any case be the iconography for the goddess, for our interest is in the construction of the images of the Apocalypse.

Unlike the Artemis of Versailles type, Artemis Ephesia, in all her varieties, retained a basic iconographic form: a frontally-presenting symmetrical female figure, with arms slightly outstretched, wearing an elaborate necklace and pectoral and/or abdominal adornment, famously cluttered with globules interpreted as breasts, fruits, or bulls' scrota, and legs covered with a kind of sheath or apron on which are depicted various beasts: bees, lions, griffins, horses, stags, sphinxes, nymphs, and others (Plate 17).[33] Sometimes she wears a mural crown (a crown resembling city walls), which again is sometimes elaborately festooned with griffins or other beasts (Plates 18, 22).[34] The mural crown symbolizes the close connection between the city and the goddess, a feature often found on the goddess Tyche, and also popular in numismatic iconography of the Roman imperial period (Plates 19-20).[35] Artemis Ephesia is often depicted holding or resting her hands on two pillars or torches, the significance of which is difficult to determine (Plate 21).[36] Finally, a nimbus often wreathes the head of the goddess, upon which, again, are usually depicted various creatures (Plates 17, 22).

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[33] For the following I am, as is everyone who examines the iconography of Ephesian Artmeis, deeply indebted to Fleischer, *Artemis*, and to Thiersch, *Artemis*. It should be emphasized here that there was no single, authoritative statue of Artemis Ephesia which dictated the iconographic repertoire of her representations. One should probably rather speak of the Artemis Ephesia type, since even in the city of Ephesus the details of the statues could vary widely. This is one reason scholars have suggested that the original Ephesian Artemis was a *xoanon* that was freshly adorned for each of the Artemisia (on the analogy of Athena Polias of Athens). See LiDonnici, "Images."

[34] Cf. Fleischer, *Artemis*, plates 15-17.

[35] On the mural crown representing a "covenant bond," see Oster, "Ephesus," 1701. Coins from around 12 BCE were minted with Augustus wearing oak wreath on the obverse, and Agrippa wearing a mural and rostral crown on the reverse (Plate 8). Coins from the reigns of Antoninus Pius and Commodus feature the image of the emperor on the obverse, and Italia with mural crown on the reverse, of which there are a number of examples in the British Museum catalog.

[36] Cf. *LIMC*, "Artemis Ephesia," nos. 3-5, 22-25, 130-131.

The nimbus on the figure may correspond to John's description of the heavenly woman, "clothed in the sun" (περιβεβλημένη τὸν ἥλιον), though a nimbus only around the head would seem inadequate to the Greek here, which suggests the woman was wrapped in the sun. It is possible that John has fused the images of Artemis Ephesia and the related image of Aphrodite of Aphrodisias (Plate 23). Depictions of Helios and Selene are standard features on the apron of the latter, but there is no evidence that they were ever standard in any of the variants of the former. [37] Even if they were, again, the description of the woman "wreathed" (περιβεβλημένη) in the sun would hardly seem adequately accomplished by iconographic portraits of Helios and Selene on the goddess.

As mentioned above, Artemis is sometimes associated with the moon, which may prove the origin of John's description of the moon under the feet of the heavenly woman in Revelation 12:1 (ἡ σελήνη ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτῆς). Some statues of antiquity do assimilate Selene and Artemis, wherein Artemis wears a moon-shaped tiara.[38] Such assimilation hardly evokes the description of the moon beneath the goddess's feet, though, and it is not the form of Artemis Ephesia to which Selene is assimilated. On the reverse side of the nimbus of one prominent exemplum of the Artemis Ephesia type, a crescent moon frames the back of the goddess's head.[39] Since this depiction of the moon is on the back of a frontally-presenting statue it is unlikely that it would have been seen by very many, and thus unlikely John would have drawn directly on knowledge of such iconography. Moreover, the moon is again not under the goddess's feet, but around her head. There are depictions of nymphs on many of Ephesian Artemis's statues that sometimes appear as

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[37] See Fleischer, *Artemis*, plates 65-69, 71, 73.
[38] Cf. *LIMC*, "Artemis," nos. 906-909.
[39] Fleischer, *Artemis*, plate 23. Cf. Plate 5 below.

though the nymphs are supported by a crescent moon, which could give the impression of

the moon beneath their feet. These nymph figures are most prominent on a statue of

Artemis Ephesia from Athens (first century BCE), where two nymphs sit just above the

goddess's knees on either side (Plates 24-25).[40] Similar depictions are found on several of

the extant versions of Ephesian Artemis.[41] These nymphs are kneeling on, or merely

iconographically framed by flowing robes beneath them, which are roughly crescent shaped.

A similar figure is found depicted in the necklace of an exemplum (second century CE) of

the goddess found in Caesarea Maritima (Plate 26). This figure is somewhat different from

the others insofar as the form under her feet looks pronouncedly crescent shaped (though

that could be an illusion caused by the state of wear), and because she is a single figure who

is accompanied by two other female figures, one who stands or sits beside her on the left,

the other crowning her from the right. In its current condition, this figure does indeed give

the appearance of a goddess with the moon beneath her feet. The three figures are probably

Artemis in the center (i.e. with the crescent beneath her feet), accompanied by Demeter, and

crowned by Nike. A parallel relief from Kula in Lydia(?) depicts a goddess seated on a

leonine throne like that of Cybele, with a crescent moon tiara, accompanied at left by a

female figure, and at right by another female who crowns her (Plate 27).[42] The importance

of this relief is that the names for the three figures are intact; they are identified as Artemis,

Demeter, and Nike, respectively. The iconographic use of the moon in this way is not

unknown in Asia Minor. Reliefs of Artemis of Perge (second century BCE) likewise display

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[40] Fleischer, *Artemis*, plates 3-4.

[41] Cf. Fleischer, *Artemis*, plates 7-8, 12(?)-13(?),18-19, 21, 24-26, 34-35.

[42] *TAM* 5.1 ; cf. Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), 30-1 and plate 16; and Maarten J. Vermaseren, *CCCA*, 1:145-6, plate 485.

the goddess over a crescent moon.[43] It is possible that some such figure also inspired John's description, though its connection to Artemis Ephesia is somewhat weak.

Finally, we come to John's description of the woman wearing a crown of twelve stars upon her head (ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς στέφανος ἀστέρων δώδεκα). If Brent's supposition that "star" may stand for "constellation" is correct, then a reference to the zodiac is certainly possible here. In fact, a number of exempla of Artemis Ephesia depict signs of the zodiac, usually around the necklace of the goddess.[44] If John's Greek really is as bad as it sometimes seems, it is not impossible that John wrote "crown" (στέφανος) when he meant necklace, but he could just as easily have decided a crown to be a more striking image than a necklace in his description. Or, of course, his description may not be dependent on the iconography of the zodiac at all. Not all Artemis Ephesia statues depict the zodiac, and even if they did, there is no reason to suppose John would have felt the need to slavishly describe only the images as he saw them.

It is certainly possible, then, that in his description of the woman of Revelation 12 he borrowed elements from the iconography of Artemis of Ephesus or related images like Aphrodite of Aphrodisias or Artemis of Perge. The connections are relatively loose, however, such that we are far from demonstrating any direct or obvious dependence of John on Ephesian Artemis's iconography. It is also unlikely that John would have used either imperial iconography or iconography from a pagan cult for a positive image. The few times in early Christian literature where Ephesian Artemis is explicitly mentioned (Acts 19; *Acts of John* 3, 37, 39, 42, 43, 46; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 22.5; Jerome, *Comm. Eph.*, proem), she is

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[43] Fleischer, *Artemis*, plates 96, 99-100.
[44] Cf. Fleischer, *Artemis*, plates 18, 24, 28, 34.

cast in adversorial tones.[45] There is another character in the book of Revelation that may

owe more to Ephesian Artemis, then, than the woman of Revelation 12.

Great, or the Great Whore?

The title "Mistress of Beasts" (πότνια θηρῶν) would be an ominous title for any

goddess referred to by the book of Revelation, even more so one who was often hailed as

"Great" (μεγάλη).[46] The Great Whore (ἡ πορνὴ ἡ μεγάλη) of Revelation 17 is the anti-

type of the heavenly woman of Revelation 12.[47] She rides a beast (θηρίον), possibly one of

the two beasts of Revelation 13 who apparently represent demonic or satanic power. David

Aune interprets Revelation 17 as an *ekphrasis*, a "detailed description [of a work of art]."[48]

The author of this passage is describing the Great Whore as the goddess Roma, enthroned

on seven hills as she is depicted in a coin minted under Vespasian in 71 CE (Plate 28). This

coin depicts Roma as Athena, an Amazon, or an Amazonian Athena seated on seven hills,

with a mother wolf suckling Romulus and Remus in the lower left, and a small

personification of the Tiber reclining on seven hills as a miniature mirror of Roma on the

right. Aune follows C. C. Vermeule in arguing that the depiction on the coin probably is a

representation of an actual marble or bronze statue, though no sure material remains of such

a statue are extant.[49]

John describes an angel showing him this spectacle (Rev 17:1-6):

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[45] For which, see Oster, "Ephesian Artemis."

[46] Cf. Acts 19:28: μεγάλη ἡ Ἄρτεμις τῶν Ἐφεσίων.

[47] So e.g. J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 252: "…by her *array* (v. 4) she is already revealed as a parody of the glorious *woman* of 12:1ff." See also Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 85-7.

[48] David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 923-28; the brackets are Aune's. Cf. David E. Aune, *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 143; Aune, *Apocalypticism*, 240-49.

[49] See Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 921.

Καὶ ἦλθεν εἷς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἐχόντων τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας καὶ ἐλάλησεν μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ λέγων· δεῦρο, δείξω σοι τὸ κρίμα τῆς πόρνης τῆς μεγάλης τῆς καθημένης ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, μεθ᾽ ἧς ἐπόρνευσαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐμεθύσθησαν οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς. καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με εἰς ἔρημον ἐν πνεύματι. καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα καθημένην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, γέμοντα ὀνόματα βλασφημίας, ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα. καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἦν περιβεβλημένη πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον καὶ κεχρυσωμένη χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ καὶ μαργαρίταις ἔχουσα ποτήριον χρυσοῦν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα γεγραμμένον, μυστήριον, Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς. καὶ εἶδον τὴν γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ. καὶ ἐθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come here! I will show you the judgment of the Great Whore who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have consorted, and on whose wine of prostitution the inhabitants of the earth have become intoxicated." So he carried me off in spirit into a wilderness. And I saw a woman seated upon a scarlet beast, which was full of blasphemous names, and which had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was wreathed in purple and scarlet, gilded with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her prostitution, and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: "Babylon the Great, the mother of whores and of the abominations of the earth." And I saw that the woman was intoxicated on the blood of the holy ones and on the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. And seeing her, I was amazed by the great marvel.

Aune thinks the reference to the Whore sitting on many waters may refer to the depiction of the Tiber, which Roma appears to touch with her foot. The mother wolf suckling Romulus and Remus John may have punned, since in Latin "she-wolf" (*lupa*) could connote "prostitute." The seven heads of the beasts are later interpreted as the seven mountains upon which the Whore is seated (17:9). The name on the woman's forehead may point to the inscription "ROMA" on the coin, which bears some conflation with *amor* in some sources, again suggesting a prostitute figure. The blood of the saints Aune connects to the *parazonium* (short sword) in Roma's hand.

This interpretation of Revelation 17 is as fascinating as it is implausible.[50] The coin was minted in Rome, and I am unaware of any of this type from Asia. At two points at least Aune requires that John, who seems sometimes barely to have command of the Greek language, also know a little Latin, at least enough to know *lupa* can mean prostitute and that *amor*, love, is associated with Roma. Latin was little used in Asia, though, much less in Syria/Judaea from which our author might have hailed. Similarly, if the image on the coin does refer to a real statue, the exemplar is likely to have been in Rome, though we have no evidence that John would have seen that image. It is possible that a coin minted in Rome ended up in Asia, of course, but these coins were only minted under Vespasian, making the likelihood of John's familiarity with it minimal. We can argue more directly, though, by comparing the iconography of the coin with John's description. The goddess is not adorned with in jewels and pearls (though if John were describing an *aureus* she could have been gilded). Roma is not seated upon waters on the coin, but rather the waters (the Tiber) are seated upon their own seven hills. As Aune rightly notes, the woman is not actually depicted as seated on waters in Revelation 17, but rather the angel introduces her as the one seated on many waters.[51] Thus, the waters are not technically part of the ekphrasis. The sword is not a cup of blood, though it could, perhaps, conjure thoughts of Rome's violence. Most importantly, if John were truly describing this particular image (or even one like it), he would not have described the woman sitting on a beast, but upon mountains, as the later interpretation says. Texts are read linearly. John's audience might have been able to guess where he was going when he described the woman seated on a beast with seven heads, but

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[50] *Pace* Osborne, *Revelation*, 608-9, who follows Aune's lead when he claims "the only likely antecedent" might be Roma as depicted on this coin.

[51] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 925.

the image John actually describes has very little to do with the depiction on the coin. If it is

an ekphrasis in sense in which Aune defines the term—the description of a work of art—

then it is a very bad one. More likely, it is simply not a description of this particular image.

The vitality of a cult for the goddess Roma in Asia Minor (or anywhere) in the first

century CE should not be overestimated. Cult associated with Roma was certainly more

pronounced in the East than in the West, but as Robert Turcan has put it, "apart from the

official or festive demonstrations under the patronage of provincial assemblies and

governors, the cult of the goddess Roma made no deep impact."[52] Hadrian was the first to

institute a cult of Dea Roma in Rome, in 121 CE. Smyrna was apparently the first to

dedicate a temple to Roma (195 BCE), but the source for this claim is Tacitus, who records

that the Smyrneans claimed the first temple to the city of Rome (*primos templum urbis Romae*)

not the first temple to the goddess Roma (*Dea Roma*) (Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.56). Personifications

of cities should not be immediately confused with perceived deities. Much of the evidence

for the cult of goddess Roma points to temples, statuary, or festivals dedicated to the Roman

people, or later to Dea Roma in conjunction with other gods (especially Zeus) or emperors.

Seldom is there clear evidence for a cult to Roma alone, as there is for Artemis Ephesia,

which would reflect the kind of prominence of the goddess required by Aune's

interpretation. Ronald Mellor's work on Roma has been the most thorough-going.[53]

Mellor's interpretations of the evidence are skewed by his topic. Consider his treatment of

altars to Roma: "Altars to Roma must once have been found in most cities of the Greek

East, since the altar would be the focal point of all cult celebrations in honor of the goddess

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[52] Turcan, *Cults*, 23.
[53] Ronald Mellor, "The Goddess Roma," *ANRW* II.17.2: 950-1030; idem., *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ: The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975).

Roma."[54] This statement is true only to the extent that cult celebrations in honor of the

goddess Roma were prevalent, which is precisely the point under discussion. He continues:

"Only four of these altars actually survive, though several others are attested on

inscriptions." Only four altars survive from the many Mellor supposes actually to have

existed. Compared to the evidence for Artemis Ephesia, this is paltry indeed! But the

inscriptions Mellor references tell a fuller story: one to Roma and Zeus in Thracian Maronia,

one at Teos to Zeus Ktesios, Zeus Kapetolios, Roma and Agathos Daimon. These

inscriptions show that Roma was usually folded into other cults. Mellor cites two altars

dedicated to Roma alone, one of which sat in a sanctuary for Egyptian gods on Delos, the

other in the headquarters of the Poseidoniasts of Delos. If Roma's altars give little

impressive evidence for her cult, neither does her statuary: "Though every temple of Roma

would have contained a cult statue, and numerous other votive statues were dedicated to the

goddess, only a single statue survives," also in the headquarters of the Poseidoniasts. There

is evidence of sacrifices to the goddess in Melitus, and far more evidence for Roma

festivals.[55] But the most common locus of the goddess's cult was in the temples dedicated to

Roma and Augustus, or, in Ephesus, the temple of Roma and Divus Julius in the Prytaneion.

In short, it is not clear that the goddess Roma on her own would have attracted the

attention John gives the Great Whore of Revelation 17. It may be the case that Roma, as the

personification of the city of Rome, its citizens, and its power, would have attracted such

attention,[56] but in that case a reference to figures of Roma and Augustus, for instance, may

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[54] Mellor, "Goddess," 960.

[55] Mellor, "Goddess," 965-68.

[56] Especially when aligned with Jewish prophetic traditions describing capital cities like Jerusalem, Samaria, and the like as drunken whores, or figuring such capitals as humiliated women (e.g., Hosea; Ezek 23; Isa 47).

have been significantly more effective. The argument for John using a depiction of Roma as

an antecedent for John's description in Revelation 17 is based on the idea that Roma was

widely or specifically seen as the divine power at work in *imperium Romanum*. In fact,

however, the main sites at which Roma received cult in the imperial period in Asia Minor (at

least in the cities of Western Asia Minor) were the temples dedicated to Roma and various

emperors. These were set up, however, not to worship the goddess Roma, but to render

divine service to the emperor. The first of these temples in the imperial period was that of

Roma and Augustus at Pergamum (29 BCE). The introduction of the imperial cult and the

founding of this temple were probably initiated by local elites, but it was Augustus who

insisted on Roma as *synnaos theos*.[57] Roma, it seems, was usually riding on coattails—of other

gods, of the Roman people, or of the emperors.[58]

Artemis Ephesia, on the other hand, rode on no one's coattails. Ephesian Artemis—

whose impressive Artemision outside of Ephesus was settled in an area with a high water

table, and flooded not infrequently—offers at least as plausible a referent for the Whore

"who is seated on many waters" as Roma.[59] Pliny the Elder described the Artemision as

"surrounded by two streams, both called Selinus, coming from different directions" (*Nat.*

5.31.115).[60] In their original (Ionian) foundation, moreover, before the river Cayster had

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[57] See Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 8-15.

[58] Mellor, "Goddess," 957-58. The cult of the emperor was also usually conjoined to those of other gods, for which see S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 146-56; and Karl Galinsky, "The Cult of the Roman Emperor: Uniter or Divider?," in *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (ed. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 1-21, here esp. 4-6.

[59] The Artemision has in fact never been fully excavated because of the natural springs under it, as Oster points out (Oster, "Ephesian Artemis," 32).

[60] About this he is only partially correct, for he supposes the Artemision to be in the city of Ephesus, whereas it in fact sat about two kilometers outside the city. He is correct, however, that stream called Selinus runs close to the Artemision. Cf. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Ephesus: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2008), 104-5.

silted the Ephesian bay and the coastline had shifted, both Ephesus and the Artemision

would have sat on the coast, "upon many waters."[61] Whether John would have known such

information about Ephesus or whether the situation of the Artemision upon the coast was

still in the social memory of the Ephesians remains a matter for speculation.

Just as the woman of Revelation12 was wrapped (περιβεβλημένη) in the sun, so the

Great Whore is wrapped (περιβεβλημένη) in purple and scarlet. There is no evidence that

Artemis Ephesia was gilded, either in whole or in part, though it would not have been

unusual for at least parts of the cult statue to be painted or plated in gold. "Gilded with gold

and in precious stone" could refer to a chryselephantine goddess, or one carved out of

alabaster or marble with gilded highlights. But the precious stone and pearls could also refer

to the elaborate necklace the goddess always wears in her statuary, which without fail

includes a thick garland of pearls (Plates 17-18, 21-22, 24, 26).

The kings of the earth did indeed consort with the Ephesian goddess, as we are told

in a number of sources. There is no shortage of commentators who point out that

prostitution in Revelation 17 is a metaphor for economic dealings. Dio Chrysostom, writing

at the dawn of the second century CE, and thus roughly contemporaneous with the

Apocalypse (even supposing an earlier date), has an extended section in his *Oration* 31 that

reflects the use of the Artemision as a treasury:

> ἴστε του τοὺς Ἐφεσίους, ὅτι πολλὰ χρήματα παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐστι, τὰ
> μὲν ἰδιωτῶν, ἀποκείμενα ἐν τῷ νεῷ τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος, οὐκ Ἐφεσίων
> μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ξένων καὶ τῶν ὁπόθεν δήποτε ἀνθρώπων, τὰ δὲ καὶ
> δήμων καὶ βασιλέων, ἃ τιθέασι πάντες οἱ τιθέντες ἀσφαλείας
> χάριν, οὐδενὸς οὐδεπώποτε τολμήσαντος ἀδικῆσαιτὸν τόπον, καίτοι
> καὶ πολέμων ἤδη μυρίων γεγονότων καὶ πολλάκις ἀλούσης τῆς
> πόλεως.

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[61] See the discussion of the geography vis-à-vis Strabo, with maps, in Murphy-O'Connor, *Ephesus*, 9-14, 26-7.

> You know about the Ephesians, of course, and that large sums of money are
> in their hands, some of them belonging to private citizens and deposited in
> the temple of Artemis, not alone money of the Ephesians, but also of aliens
> and of persons from all parts of the world, and in some cases of
> commonwealths and kings, money which all deposit there in order that it
> may be safe, since no one has ever yet dared to violate that place, although
> countless wars have occurred in the past and the city has often been
> captured. (Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 31.54 [Cohoon, LCL])

The goddess was a protector of more than spiritual treasure. Dio goes on to report that the

Ephesians never "borrowed" or appropriated the funds deposited at the Artemisium. "No,

on the contrary," he writes, "they would sooner, I imagine, strip off the adornment of the

goddess than touch this money (ἀλλ', οἶμαι, πρότερον ἂν περιέλοιεν τὸν κόσμον τῆς

θεοῦ πρὶν ἢ τούτων ἅψασθαι)" (Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 31.55 [Cohoon, LCL]). A little later

in the second century CE Aelius Aristides thought no one was "so ignorant" or went "so

much against what is patent, that he would not concede the city to be the common treasury

of Asia and refuge in time of need (οὐδεὶς οὕτως ἀγνώμων οὐδ' οὕτως σφόδρα ὁμόσε

τοῖς φανεροῖς ἰών, ὅστις οὐκ ἂν συγχωρήσειεν ταμιεῖόν τε κοινὸν τῆς Ασίας

εἶναι τὴν πόλιν καὶ τῆς χρείας καταφυγήν)" (Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 23.24 [after Behr]).[62]

Temples were widely used as depositories in antiquity, including the temple in Jerusalem (4

Macc 4:3), and the more prestigious the temple the more it attracted wealth. The attraction

of wealth was tied up with the deity whose precinct the temple presumably was. As the

home, or νάος, of the deity, the temple precinct was under the protection of that god or

goddess. A deposit at a temple was a mark of trust in the power of the deity into whose

hands the treasure was entrusted. Artemis Ephesia seems to have been widely enough and

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[62] Charles Behr curiously translates ταμιεῖον as "chancellery," potentially stripping the phrase of its economic connotations, though its most common meaning is clearly "storehouse" or "treasury." See P. Aelius Aristides, *The Complete Works* (trans. Charles A. Behr; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 2: 30, and 366, n. 23; cf. LSJ, "ταμιεῖον."

highly enough regarded by those with wealth that her temple became "the treasury of Asia," with which even "commonwealths and kings" did business.

That John was amazed at this sight sounds like a parody on the *epopteia* of ancient mysteries. Artemis Ephesia was the central deity of the mystery rites of Ephesus. Written upon the forehead (ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς) of the Great Whore is her name, which is a mystery, "Babylon the Great (ἡ μεγάλη), the mother of whores and the abominations of the earth."[63] The mystery, the goddess's name, is disclosed. This is written upon her μέτωπον, her forehead. Or perhaps John is deliberately punning here, and the name is not written upon her forehead, but upon her *metope*, on the face of the temple of the goddess. If John were referring to the Artemision, he most certainly might have seen the name of the goddess inscribed on the temple. Artemis the virgin goddess was no mother, though, unless the fertility connotations of her supposed Anatolian predecessor shine through here. She was certainly not the mother of whores, for prostitutes were not to be found in the temple precincts of Artemis Ephesia.[64] The old saw regarding cult prostitution in Asia Minor has been thoroughly debunked.[65] Whether or not John was aware of these details, he certainly

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[63] There is some debate about whether μυστήριον is part of the name or in apposition to the name. John's use of mysterion would imply the latter, and it would fit with the sense of the scene as the revealing of a goddess in a mystery rite.

[64] Artemidorus, *Oneir.* 4.4 (Harris-McCoy): "A courtesan (ἑταίρα) imagined that she had entered the shrine (ἱερόν) of Artemis [Ephesia] and she was freed and left behind her life as a courtesan. For one would not enter the shrine (οὐδὲ...πρότερον εἰσέλθοι ἄν) unless one had left behind (εἰ μὴ καταλύσειε) one's life as a courtesan"; cf. Oster, "Ephesian Artemis," 28. Oster draws on Artemidorous to claim that courtesans (ἑταίρα) were prohibited from the sacred precinct of the goddess. The "future less vivid" conditional construction of this passage rather softens that claim, but it still indicates that courtesans, much less prostitutes (πόρναι), if such a distinction can be made, were generally not part of the temple "scene."

[65] E.g. S. M. Baugh, "Cult Prostitution in New Testament Ephesus: A Reappraisal," *JETS* 42 (1999): 443-60. Baugh cites Everett Ferguson's affirmation of Paul's negative view of Greco-Roman morality in his generally well-wrought *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*: "All kinds of immoralities were associated with the gods. Not only was prostitution a recognized institution, but through the influence of the fertility cults of Asia Minor, Syria, and Phoenicia it became a part of the religious rites at certain temples. Thus there were one thousand 'sacred prostitutes' at the temple of Aphrodite at Corinth" (Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* [3d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003], 70). As Baugh amply demonstrates, the cults of Greco-Roman Asia Minor were not under nearly as much influence from the Anatolian, Syrian, and Phoenician

would have been aware of the globules that adorn the goddess's torso. Did he, as Minucius
Felix and Jerome later would, identify them as many exposed breasts, which might suggest a
nursing mother?[66] Of course, John need not be using the terms "mother" or "whores" in a
literal sense. Indeed, we already saw that John uses the metaphor of prostitution to refer to
economic interactions and transactions. The patron goddess of a city and protector of
harbors like those at Ephesus could easily be construed through the metaphor of
motherhood, possibly even as a metaphor parodying the goddess's virginity.

Artemis Ephesia was sometimes associated with or assimilated to Cybele, the Great
Mother, as well. Artemis and Cybele, moreover, have far more claim to association with
beasts than Roma or other goddesses.[67] A bronze plate from Rome depicts Artemis Ephesia
on one side, and a figure riding a giant lion (probably Cybele) on the other.[68] Such an image
could have given John the impression of a woman riding a beast. Just as likely, the many
animals that decorate the raiment of the goddess in the statuary might have given the
impression of a goddess upon a beast with many heads.

The Gap between Image and Interpretation

Many of the identifications described above are speculative, but they would seem to
fit Artemis of Ephesus better than Roma. If John is describing a work of art, or even more

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cults as Ferguson suggests, nor did those ancient cults obviously employ "sacred prostitutes." In fact, there is
almost no evidence at all that prostitutes were cultic functionaries, and significant evidence that they were
actually prohibited from sacred precincts. (Baugh cited Ferguson's second edition, but as my citation indicates
the error remains in the third as well.) See also Karel van der Toorn, "Cultic Prostitution," *ABD* 5: 510-13.

[66] Lynn LiDonnici ("Images") argues that, whatever the origins of the globules, the Christian sources were
not being disingenuous in their identification of the globules as breasts. She rather argues that by the later
Greco-Roman period Artemis Ephesia was largely thought of as a multibreasted goddess.

[67] A point drawn out recently by both Morna Hooker ("Artemis of Ephesus," *JTS* n.s. 64 [2013]: 37-46)
and Frayer-Griggs ("Beasts") with respect to the *crux interpretum* in 1 Corinthians 15:32.

[68] *LIMC*, "Artemis Ephesia," no. 135; Thiersch, *Artemis*, 64-5 (no. 55; plate 45.2).

broadly an iconographic ensemble, I find it far more probable that he is describing

iconography relating to Ephesian Artemis than other possible antecedents. At the same

time, it must be admitted that the interpretation of the image (Rev 17:9-18) would seem to fit

Rome as the referent far better. The angel who interprets the vision for John explains, "The

woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth (Rev 17:18)." The

seven heads of the beast are interpreted as seven mountains upon which the woman sits

(Rev 17:9). They are also interpreted as seven kings. The beast "was, is not, and is about to

ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction" (17:8). The beast is also an eighth

king, "who belongs to the seven" (17:11). The great city that ruled over the kings of the

earth certainly sounds like Rome, the seven mountains upon which the woman (=the city)

sits reminds one of the seven hills of Rome, and the beast that was, is not, and is coming

could very well allude to a Nero *redivivus* or Nero *redux* myth. Thus, Rome seems to be in

view in the interpretation of the vision of the Great Whore.

But the interpretation of this vision which posits Rome as the referent raises

questions.[69] The vision is well-defined, if a little difficult to imagine (a beast with seven

heads and ten horns). Aune identifies it as an ekphrasis in part because it is a fairly static

description. Unlike dream visions, in which some details blur and shift, the image of the

woman and the beast is clear and distinct.[70] It is the interpretation that shifts under one's

feet:

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[69] A point noted also by Duff, *Who Rides?*, 84.

[70] Ancient dream reports evince as much evidence of the fluidity of dream visions as modern accounts. Consider the shifting and uncertain figures in this report from Aelius Aristides's first *Sacred Tale*: "…And seeing one of the temple servants, I asked him where the priest was. He replied, 'Behind the Temple.' For it was about the time of the Sacred Lamps, and the temple warden was bringing the keys. And at this time the Temple happened to have been closed. Still in such a way, so that although closed, a kind of entrance remained and the interior was visible. I went up to the doors and saw, instead of the old statue, another with

> This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast; they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called chosen and faithful. …The waters that you saw, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth. (Rev 17:9-18)

In the description of the vision the woman and the details of her appearance were primary, whereas in the interpretation of the vision very little attention is given to the woman. In fact, she almost seems an afterthought, identified only in the last of ten verses. Most of the interpretation focuses on the beast she rides. Like the dragon described in Revelation 12:3 and that of the beast from the sea in Revelation 13:1-3, this beast has seven heads and ten horns. It is possible that we are to understand all three of these as the same beast, but that is never explicitly revealed in the book. The seven heads are interpreted as seven mountains, but then again as seven kings. The seven kings have often been interpreted as seven emperors of Rome, though far too much vexed ink has been spilled over which seven, exactly, John implicates. The beast upon which the woman sits (that was, is not, and is yet to come—Rev 17:8) is also identified as an eighth king, who is derived from or one of the seven (ἐκ τῶν ἑπτά ἐστιν). If this is truly a Nero myth, then it means that Nero is represented by one of the heads and the whole beast. Regardless of the Nero myth, in fact,

downcast eyes. As I marveled and inquired where the old statue was, someone brought it to me, and I seemed not wholly to recognize it, but still I worshipped it eagerly" (Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 47.11 [Behr]).

the interpretation sounds as though it equivocates on the identification of the one king as head or whole beast. No one knows what to do with the ten horns, except that they seem to be ten unidentified and undefined client kings of Rome.[71] More perplexing for the Roman interpretation is the prediction that the ten horns and the beast will lay waste the Whore (Rev 17:16). Perhaps this interpretation represents the belief that Nero would return to Rome with Parthian allies and conquer it, but the late date of parallel Nero myths (especially the detail of burning Rome) seems to preclude such an interpretation.[72] At any rate, this would make the Nero myth something of a positive hope for John, which seems unlikely. Margaret Barker has plausibly suggested that the city could be Jerusalem, a reading that certainly makes more sense of the kings burning the Whore/city with fire than the Nero myth.[73]

An asymmetry exists between the image and its interpretation: the allegorical fluidity of the interpretation only highlights the relative stability of the vision itself. How are we to explain such a clear vision with such a slippery interpretation? The simplest explanation is that this is a record of an actual vision in which he saw a woman seated on a beast and richly adorned. Aune's claim that this vision report is best understood as *ekphrasis* would then hold, only not as the description of a "work of art," but of a visionary image. John (or editors after him) then set about making meaning out of the vision. Klaus Berger has noted a "common interpretive triad" to parables and visions: "(a) the image as such, (b) reference to failure to understand, and (c) an 'allegorical' explanation of the image."[74] This triad is

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[71] Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 950-53.

[72] Aune (*Revelation 17-22*, 957) cautiously suggests a version of the Nero *redux* myth here.

[73] Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 282-87. Barker also points to the seven mountains of Jerusalem as described in the Book of the Watchers (*1 En.* 18:8), which brings into question the automatic supposition that the seven mountains must refer to the seven hills of Rome.

[74] Klaus Berger, *Identity and Experience in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 96-97.

readily evident with the vision of the Great Whore: the image as such in Revelation 17:1-6a; the failure to understand in Revelation 17:6b; the allegorical interpretation in 17:7-18. The image and the interpretation do not neatly align. The "image as such" retains a kind of surplus of meaning, of the kind noted in the introductory section of this study. The seven heads of the beast John "saw" can be interpreted in at least two ways. The author or editor of this vision and its interpretation could not decide between two useful interpretations of the seven heads, so he included both. He could not work out how to get from the beast with seven heads to the demonic force (emperor, empire, or what have you) that was to come, so he elided the beast and its heads.

The image itself may very well have antecedents in the iconography of Artemis Ephesia, but if this image derives from an actual visionary experience those elements need not be conscious, nor need they be exclusive to the cult of Ephesian Artemis (or Roma's for that matter). John's visual repertoire would have influenced his vision, if only in piecemeal and fragmented ways. His mind could have drawn on a variety of sources. In this chapter I have suggested possible fragments from Ephesian Artemis's well-known iconography and cult, but there is no way definitively to demonstrate dependence on Artemis Ephesia's iconography, nor can we prove dependence on imperial iconography, or any other set of material images. That is because John is working with a different medium for his images, and he does not explicitly cite any material antecedents. John is not citing visual objects in visual medium, he is rather engaged in the "verbal representation of visual representation."[75]

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[75] This is James Heffernan's short-hand definition of ekphrasis. See James A. W. Heffernan, "Ekphrasis and Representation," *New Literary History* 22 (1991): 297-316; cf. James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Conclusion to Part II

Other images could be put forth as potential sources for or referents of John's

images. Space here forbids a closer discussion of those images, but we can stipulate a similar

result. In our discussion of Artemis Ephesia we noted Cybele and her iconography. The

assimilation of Cybele and Artemis, and common elements of iconography between Artemis

Ephesia and Cybele, encourage further reflection on the role of Cybele in Asia Minor and

possible connection to the the Woman of Revelation12 or the Great Whore of Revelation

17.[1] I have chosen to focus on Artemis Ephesia both because of the distinctiveness of her

iconography and because she held such a prominent position in Asia Minor, not only

religiously, but also economically and politically. The dirge in Revelation 18 over Babylon

highlights just these features of the Great Whore.

Imperial iconography could also be mined more extensively, though Steven Friesen's

work does a fine job of presenting the most important evidence.[2] Part of my justification for

not looking more closely is because, as the foregoing discussion intimates, I do not find the

same kind of compelling parallels in imperial iconography as is found in the more local or

regional cults. In the first century CE the imperial cult was not nearly as established

iconographically in Asia Minor as the monuments of longer-standing cults. A great deal of

imperial iconography, moreover, simply fails to strike the same tone as John's mythologically

fantastic images. We should not draw too fine a line between politics and religion in the

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[1] A task for which one is well-served by the extensive research—iconographical as well as text-based—of Maarten J. Vermaseren: *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977); *Corpus Culturs Cybelae Attidisque, I. Asia Minor* ([=*CCCA* 1]; Leiden: Brill, 1987). Also, Eugene N. Lane, ed., *Cybele, Attis and Related Cults: Essays in Memory of M. J. Vermaseren* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

[2] Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

ancient world, but there was a line, and we can generally place imperial iconography on the political side and John's on the religious side. This is not the place to argue the point in detail, but just to put the observation another way, the Augustan iconographic revolution consisted mostly of images that conveyed political messages with cosmic and religious overtones, whereas John's Apocalypse consists primarily of a cosmic and religious message with real-world—including political—application.

One final example, which I have not been able to incorporate above, will suffice. This parallel comes from the (apparent) cult of Ὅσιος καὶ Δίκαιος ("Holy and Just").[3] We know of this divinity only through inscriptional evidence (sometimes with iconographical reference). One of the more intriguing of such inscriptions is that of a certain Stratonikos:

> Στρατόνεικος Κακολεις τοῦ ἑνὸς καὶ μόνου θεοῦ ἱερεὺς καὶ τοῦ Ὁσίου καὶ Δικαίου μετὰ τῆς συμβίου Ἀσκλεπιαίας εὐξάμενοι περὶ τῶν τέκνων εὐχαριστοῦντες ἀνέστησαν ἔτους τμα'.

> Stratonikos Kakolis, priest of the one and only God, and of Hosios and Dikaios, with his wife Asklepiaia, having prayed about their children, dedicated this, giving thanks, in the year 256/7.[4]

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[3] *TAM* 5.1 (1981), 246; Marijana Ricl, "Hosios kai Dikaios," *Epigraphica Anatolica* 18 (1991): 1-70, and 19 (1992): 71-103; idem, "Hosios kai Dikaios: Nouveaux monuments," *Epigraphica Anatolica* 20 (1992): 95-100; idem, "Newly Published and Unpublished Inscriptions for Hosios and Dikaios and their Contribution to the Study of the Cult," in *Vom Euphrat bis zum Bosporus: Kleinasien in der Antike* (ed. Engelbert Winter; Bonn: Habelt, 2008), 563-79; Thomas Corsten and Marijana Ricl, "A Dedication to Herakles, Hosios and Dikaios, and Chrysea Parthenos from the Kibyratis," *Gephyra* 9 (2012): 143-51; Stephen Mitchell, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews, and Christians," in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede; Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 81-148, esp. 103-5; Nicole Belayche, "*Deus deum…summorum maximus* (Apuleius): Ritual Expressions of Distinction in the Divine World in the Imperial Period," in *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (ed. Stephen Mitchell and Peter van Nuffelen; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 141-66, esp. 153-55; Nicole Belayche, "Religious Rhetoric in Imperial Anatolia," in *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (ed. Jörg Rüpke; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 243-66; Clinton E. Arnold, "'I am Astonished that You are so Quickly Turning Away!' (Gal 1.6): Paul and Anatolian Folk Belief," *NTS* 51 (2005): 429-49; R. A. Kearsley, "Angels in Asia Minor: The Cult of Hosios and Dikaios," *NewDocs* 6 (1992): 206-9; N. Eda Akyürek Şahin, "Zwei Neue Inschriften für Hosios kai Dikaios," *Olba* 18 (2010): 267-80.

[4] For text, see, e.g. Kearsley, "Angels," 208, from which the translation above has been modified.

The inscription comes from Kula in Lydia, just a little east of Sardis and Philadelphia. Other inscriptions come primarily from northeast Lydia and from Phrygia, though they are also found across western Asia Minor and in Macedonia.[5] Much is unclear about Hosios and Dikaios. The two terms seem to refer to one god, possibly even a pagan monotheist conception of divinity, though the Greek of the inscription above may refer to two gods: the One and Only God, and Hosios and Dikaios. Stephen Mitchell calls Hosios and Dikaios "the Phrygian god of justice," though he also identifies Hosios and Dikaios as an angel of Theos Hypsistos.[6]

Hosios and Dikaios is occasionally depicted, but has no stable, universal iconography. As Marijana Ricl helpfully notes, however, the private dedications (like the one above) from Northeast Lydia usually depicted the dedicators, and "if they chose to depict the god, he regularly materialized in the form of a horseman."[7] The monument which preserves the above inscription bears a depiction of a horse and rider, as do many others. The rider's face is typically frontal and he wears robes which billow behind him. There may be more than passing reference to Hosios and Dikaios in the rider on the white horse in Revelation 19:11-16:

> Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called
> Faithful and True (πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός), and in righteousness
> (δικαιοσύνη) he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and
> on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one
> knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is
> called the Word of God. …From his mouth comes a sharp sword with
> which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he
> will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On
> his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord
> of lords."

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[5] Ricl, "Newly Published," 563.

[6] Mitchell, "Theos Hypsistos," 104.

[7] Ricl, "Newly Published," 564.

The rider on the horse has a double name, composed of two adjectives, just like Hosios and Dikaios. His drapery is prominent, and he is associated with justice. If the rider on the white horse is indeed an antitype of Hosios and Dikaios, and if the latter was indeed associated with pagan monotheism, then the name of the rider on the white horse is meaningful. Unlike Hosios and Dikaios, the rider of Revelation 19 is faithful (unlike those who eat foods sacrificed to idols, and those who teach the same; cf. Rev 2:20), and more importantly, he is a true (i.e. not a false) god. There may be a bit of inter-monotheistic polemic here. If Hosios and Dikaios was an angel of Theos Hypsistos, moreover, he would considerably mirror the angelomorphic Christology of the book of Revelation.[8] The closest parallels to John's images, again, are not political, but mythical and religious.

Most of the inscriptions for Hosios and Dikaios come from the third century CE, though there are a few from potentially as early as the first century BCE. It is therefore difficult to demonstrate either use or reference, but it serves as an interesting comparandum. The visual images of Asia Minor reveal a visual culture, particularly with respect to the divine, in which John participated. They are therefore useful as comparanda, but not as stipulated sources or referents. As with all of his images, if John has drawn on or addresses the iconography of Hosios and Dikaios, for instance, he has certainly embellished. No known representations of Hosios and Dikaios picture him with a sword coming out of his mouth, or with eyes like flames of fire, or with inscriptions on his robes. It may be that the

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[8] Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 245-69; Matthias R. Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995); Robert H. Gundry, "Angelomorphic Christology in the Book of Revelation," in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1994* (ed. E. H. Lovering; Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 662-78; Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

iconography of Hosios and Dikaios was somewhere, sometime, so painted. But it is more likely that John, as he is wont to do, has taken advantage of the exceptional plasticity of his verbal medium.

John's use of the verbal medium allowed his images to go beyond the visual medium of the images of the world in which he and the Christians to whom he wrote lived. The verbal medium is more pliant, more expansive, less bound by the necessities of materiality. The fantastic elements of John's images—divine monsters with eyes all over, beasts with multiple heads and horns, composite creatures, and elaborate christophanies—all of these have only loose precedents in ancient material culture, and few of them in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor. If we are going to understand John's imagery, then, a simple comparison with the visual images of Asia Minor is not sufficient. We need also to look at the art of verbal imagery in John's context as well, to which we turn in Part III.

Plates for Part II:

Plate 1. Original site of Pergamon Altar, with tumulus (Jigma Tepe) in background. Photo by Dguendel on Wikimedia Commons, used under the CC-BY 3.0 license.
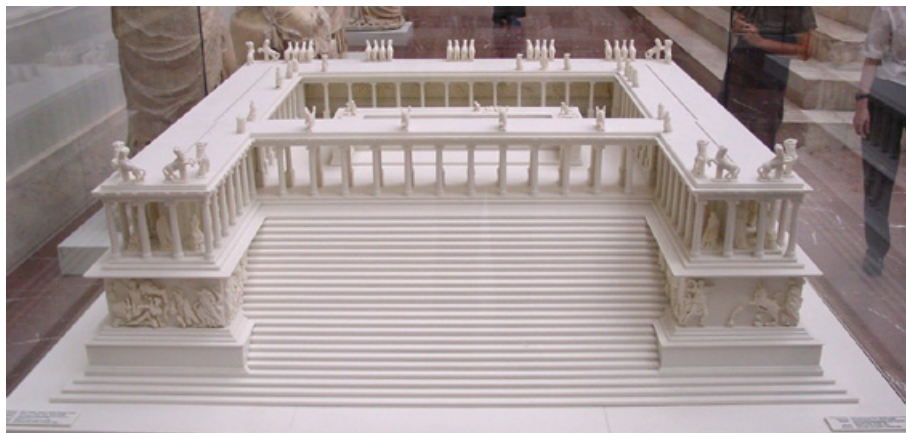
Plate 2. Model of Pergamum Altar by Wolfram Hoepfner, housed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. Photo by Lourdes Cardenal on Wikimedia Commons, used under the CC-BY-SA 3.0 license.

Plate 3. The Altar of Pergamon at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. Photo: Deutsche Fotothek (Richard Peter, photographer), used under the CC-BY-SA 3.0 DE license.
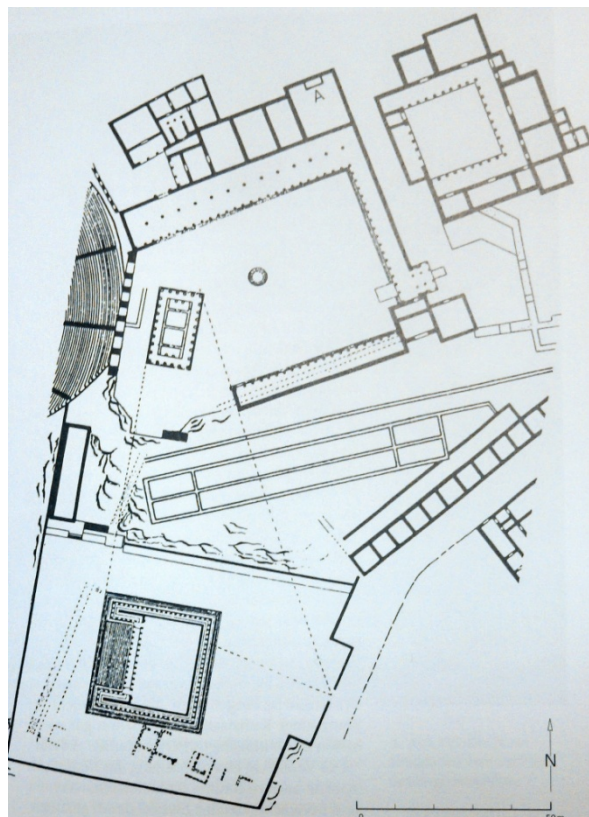
Plate 4. Plan of Pergamon, showing sightlines of Pergamon Altar and Temple of Athena from entrance to Altar temenos on the main street. After H. Kähler, *Der Große Fries von Pergamon* (Berlin: Mann, 1948), Plate 65.

Plate 5. Reverse of bronze coin/medallion from the reign of Septimus Severus (193-211 CE), possibly depicting the Great Altar of Pergamon. Detail of photo, © the Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin (Münzkabinett, Preußischer Kulturbesitz); photographer: Lutz-Jürgen Lübke. Photo is used under the CC BY-NC-SA DE 3.0 license.

Plate 6. Athena defeating Alcyoneus on the Eastern frieze of the Great Altar of Pergamum, left, crowned by Nike, right, with Ge pleading from bottom right. Detail of photo © Antikensammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin; Preußischer Kulturbesitz (photographer: Johannes Laurentius), used under the CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE license.

Plate 7. Zeus from the Eastern frieze of the Pergamon Altar. Detail of photo © Antikensammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin; Preußischer Kulturbesitz (photographer: Johannes Laurentius), used under the CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE license.

Plate 8. Lion giant from Southern frieze of the Pergamon Altar. Photo by Ealdgyth on Wikimedia Commons, used under the CC-BY-SA 3.0 license.

Plate 9. Bull giant from Southern frieze of the Pergamon Altar. Photo after Erika Simon.

Plate 11. Detail of Plate 10. Note the wings on the giant's back, and the talons on his hand.

Plate 10. Giant with bird features vanquished by Leto, from the Eastern frieze of the Pergamon Altar. Detail of photo © Antikensammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin; Preußischer Kulturbesitz (photographer: Johannes Laurentius), used under the CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE license.

Plate 12. Fates battling giants from the North frieze of the Pergamon Altar. Detail of photo © Antikensammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin; Preußischer Kulturbesitz (photographer: Johannes Laurentius), used under the CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE license.

Plate 13: Sesertius, Rome, 81/82, British Museum, number: R.11462. Reverse depicts Domitia with child.
Photo courtesy of the British Museum.

Plate 14: Aureus, Rome, 82/83, British Museum, number R.10760. Reverse depicts child of Domitian with
legend, DIVVUS CAESAR IMP DOMITIANI F[ILIVS], seated on globe, surround by seven stars. Photo
courtesy of the British Museum.

Plate 15: Red-figure vase of Artemis slaying deer, with Zeus (left) and Apollo (right) (c. 410-400 BCE). British Museum number 1867,0508.1340. Detail of photo, courtesy of the British Museum.

Plate 16: "Diana of Versailles," Musée du Louvre, Paris, France; Catalog Number: Louvre MA 589. Photo by Sting on Wikimedia Commons, used under the CC-BY-SA 2.5 license.

Plate 17. Artemis of Ephesus (1st c. CE) from the Selçuk Museum. Photo by QuartierLatin1968, used under the CC-BY-SA 2.0 license.

Plate 18. Artemis of Ephesus in the Efes Museum, Selçuk, Turkey. Detail of photo by Lutz Langer, used under the CC-BY-SA 3.0 license.

Plate 19. Roman copy of Tyche of Antioch with mural crown, originally by Eutychides, ca. 300 BCE. Vatican Museum. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

Plate 20. Reverse of silver Augustan coin (12 BCE), depicting Agrippa with mural (and rostral) crown. British Museum: 1843,0116.1112.

Plate 21. Reverse of Roman tridrachm (cistophorus) from 51 CE, depicting Diana Ephesia with pillars. British Museum: 1867,0101.1603. Photo courtesy of the British Museum.

Plate 23. Aphrodite of Aphrodisias in the Aphrodisias Museum. Photo by William Neuheisel, used under the CC-BY 2.0 license.

Plate 22. Second-century CE Roman variant of Artemis Ephesia. Naples: National Archaeological Museum. (Bronze head not original.) Detail of photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen, used under the CC-BY 2.0 license.

Plate 25. Detail of Plate 24. On either side, note crouching nymphs.

Plate 24. Artemis Ephesia from Athens. Detail of photo by Giovanni Dall'Orto.

Plate 26. Detail of Artemis Ephesia from Caesarea. Jerusalem. Photo by D. Harris, from Fleischer, *Artemis*, plate 9.

Plate 27. Relief, probably from Kula (Lydia) depicting figures similar to those in the necklace of Artemis Ephesia from Plate 26, identifying them as (from left to right) Demeter, Artemis, and Nike. Louvre, Paris. Photo from Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, plate 16.

Plate 28. Reverse of Roman sestertius (71 CE) depicting Roma seated on seven mountains. British Museum: 1872,0709.477. Photo courtesy of the British Museum.

Part III: Ekphrasis and Apocalypse

Ekphrasis is a term that has received a great deal of attention in visual studies as well as in classical studies, especially in studies of classical art history and of ancient rhetoric. With greater scrutiny has come greater clarity about the rhetorical device of ekphrasis. Older assumptions, for instance, that ekphrasis was the description primarily of a work of art, have been overturned. Ekphrasis was once defined by its object—"vivid description of a work of art"—but increasingly scholars have insisted that is should be defined at least as much, if not more so, by its oratorical function. As a rhetorical device, the importance of ekphrasis rests not so much on what it is as on what it does—it challenges the division between verbal and visual. The goal of ekphrasis was not vivid description; that was only its means and its craft. The goal of ekphrasis was to make something virtually visible—and thus virtually present— through the use of language. This part of the study redescribes ekphrasis along the lines of this interpretation, explores the relationship between the book of Revelation and ancient rhetoric, and finally suggests that John's Apocalypse is essentially an ekphrastic work.

In the last chapter we noted David Aune's judgment that the description of the Great Whore in Revelation 17 is an example of the rhetorical device ekphrasis. There I concluded that the scene may well be an ekphrasis, but it is not demonstrably a description of the Roman coin Aune recommended. Aune's intuition was right; his application unconvincing. In this part of the study, we will take a closer look at ancient ekphrasis and its uses in the practice of ancient oratory or rhetoric. Consequently, we will need to look at the rhetorical scope of the book of Revelation. I will suggest that the images of the book of Revelation are well understood as rhetorical devices analogous to ancient ekphrases. I argue

that John's verbal medium retains a plasticity that the plastic arts could ultimately not rival, a trick he shared with the orators of his day.

Chapter 7. Rhetoric and the Book of Revelation

> Hellenistic culture may be said to be concentrated in Hellenistic education. …Not the Greek language only, which became the language of the civilized world, or trade, or art, or architecture, but education: this is what made Greece 'the light' not only of Hellas but of the whole earth. …The special emphasis in education was practical, and centered in oratory, the art of persuasion.
>
> Frederick C. Grant[1]

Every text has a context: it is produced by persons skilled for the task under the pressure of and limited by specific historical conditions. It is impossible, given the current state of our knowledge, definitively to assign the production of John's Apocalypse a specific date, or to identify the author. What we can know about both are largely inferences from the internal evidence of the book. We can be certain that John's Apocalypse was written sometime in the latter half of the first century CE, and that the author(s) went by the name of John. We know that "John" considered himself a prophet, or at least he considered his text a prophetic writing (Rev 1:3; 22: 7, 10, 18-19). But much else—whether it was written shortly before or after Nero's demise, or during the time Domitian, or whether it was written by the same John who presumably penned the Fourth Gospel and/or the Johannine Epistles—is determined through learned conjectures. This chapter takes a step back from questions of date and authorship to place the Apocalypse in the general milieu of the urban Mediterranean world of the first-century CE Roman Empire. In particular, it situates John's Apocalypse as a text of oral performance in a culture quite familiar with orations. The book

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[1] Frederick C. Grant, *Roman Hellenism and the New Testament* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962), 32.

of Revelation, I claim, would have been received much like an oration would have been. A

comparison of John's composition with ancient rhetoric is thus appropriate.

Rhetoric and the Roman Empire[2]

"Sophistic" and "rhetoric" often carry negative connotations today, and that not in

part because of the philosophical (esp. Platonic) critique of rhetoric. In Plato's dialogue,

Gorgias (written ca. 390-380 BCE), for instance, Socrates likens the craft (τέχνη; 449c, *et

passim*) to flattery (κολακείαν; 462c-463c).[3] "Mere rhetoric" and "sophistry," in common

parlance, denote lack of integrity, a "knack…for producing gratification and pleasure" (462c:

ἐμπειρία τινα χάριτός τινος καὶ ἡδονῆς ἀπεργασίας) as Socrates puts it. They are

empty words, words without knowledge (464b-466a). Plato, of course, had his reasons for

attacking the craft of oratory, primarily to distinguish it from philosophy.[4] In spite of

philosophical critique, oratory flourished in the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE.

Ten orators from this period subsequently became "canonical": Antiphon, Lysias,

Andocides, Isocrates, Isaeus, Demosthenes, Aeschines, Lycurgus, Hyperides, and

Dinarchus.[5] These were the paragons of style and substance students were later taught to

imitate.

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[2] For a fine comprehensive account of the art of rhetoric in antiquity, see George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), to which the present section is much indebted. A much abbreviated overview is George A. Kennedy, "Historical Survey of Rhetoric," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 B.C.—A.D. 400* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 3-41.

[3] See also *Prot.*, *Soph.*, and *Theaet.*

[4] On the strife between rhetorica and philosophy in antiquity, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 1-10.

[5] Cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. or.* 4., where he lists Lysias, Isocrates, Isaeus, Demonsthenes, Hyperides, Aeschines as his chosen six orators. We have extant treatises from Dionyisus on Lysias, Isocrates, Isaeus, Demosthenes, and Dinarchus.

Although rhetoric was practiced and promoted before the fourth century BCE, the first two systematic presentations of the subject come from roughly the middle of that century: *Rhetoric to Alexander* (ca. 340 BCE), possibly authored by Anaximenes of Lampsacus, and Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* (finished ca. 335 BCE).[6] Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is by far the more famous. It is a "'formalist' treatise, largely an objective nonjudgmental analysis of the forms that rhetoric took in his time," which represents an "ideal system" of rhetoric.[7] It is first and foremost a description of rhetorical techniques and an evaluation of them on the basis of their *telos*, persuasion. "[Aristotle's] dispassionate analysis of rhetorical techniques is thus analogous to his analysis of the forms of plants and animals in his biological works, or of constitutions, and even of poetry."[8] Aristotle's is not a guidebook for practicing rhetoric, but a philosophical treatise on the subject, and it did not directly influence the rhetorical tradition of its time very much: it was not published and lay dormant for apparently two centuries.[9] The philosophical form of the treatise undoubtedly contributed to its lack of influence, since rhetoric was conceived by most, as Plato's *Gorgias* reminds us, as a craft to be learned and practiced, rather than a topic for philosophical investigation.

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[6] On the authorship of *Rhet. Alex.* see Pseudo-Aristote, *Rhétorique à Alexandre* (ed. Pierre Chiron; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002), lxxxiii-lxxxvi. On the complicated dating for the two works, see also Pierre Chiron, "Relative Dating of the *Rhetoric to Alexander* and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: A Methodology and Hypothesis," *Rhetorica* 29 (2011): 236-62. While *Rhet. Alex.* was probably written around 340 BCE, Aristotle's treatise was probably written and delivered as lectures over a much longer period of time (ca. 350-330 BCE) before reaching its final form. *Rhet. Alex.* is thus probably somewhat indebted to Aristotle, though the two differ significantly. David Mirhady's introduction in the new Loeb edition of *Rhet. Alex.* proposes a date between 340-338 BCE: Robert Mayhew and David C. Mirhady, eds. and trans., *Aristotle: Problems Books 20-38; Rhetoric to Alexander* (LCL 317; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 450.

[7] Kennedy, *New History*, 56; Cf. Stephen Usher, "Introduction," in *Dionysius of Halicarnassus: Critical Essays* (LCL; 2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1: xii.

[8] Kennedy, *New History*, 56.

[9] Kennedy, *New History*, 62-3.

Aristotle does provide a convenient map for understanding contemporaneous and subsequent oratory, however. Rhetoric, in classical antiquity, was both word technique (τέχναι λογῶν; Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.1) and the art of persuasion (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.2.1). The ability to use words well was very useful, especially in classical Athens, where the democratic process required citizens to be able to speak on their own behalf or suffer the potential consequences.[10] Legal disputes required prosecution and defense. Many of the orations of the great fifth- and fourth-century orators (e.g. those of Demosthenes or Aeschines) are thus speeches of prosecution or defense. Aristotle later defined this form of rhetoric as forensic (δικανικόν), and it has its roots in a juridical context. Closely related to forensic rhetoric was deliberative rhetoric (συμβουλευτικόν). Deliberative rhetoric was to be used in public settings, in which a course of action needed to be taken. It was political speech, the rhetoric of statecraft. Epideictic oratory (ἐπιδεικτικόν) Aristotle identified as the rhetoric of praise or blame, the context for which would have been festal or commemorative. In the fifth and early fourth centuries judicial and deliberative rhetoric (to use Aristotle's anachronistic categories) were to the fore. The place of epideictic rhetoric was usually reserved for poetry, tragedy, and comedy.[11]

The art of rhetoric continued to develop in the fourth century, however, and after Alexander epideictic oratory was more prominent. As Kennedy explains:

> A great deal of political debate now took place away from public view, for example in conferences between a ruler and his advisers. An orator might then have the task of announcing policy to the public or of arousing public opinion in favor of the ruler. This opened up the opportunity for epideictic

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[10] Kennedy, "Historical Survey," 7: "The Greeks were a highly vocal, argumentative people, and even the earliest Greek literature shows a consciousness of what later came to be called rhetoric."

[11] These three species of rhetoric are presented in Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.3.

oratory, including encomia and ceremonial addresses flattering a ruler or official at his court or on his visit to some city.[12]

Stylistically, praise and blame give themselves, perhaps, to excesses of ornamentation. At any rate, during the Hellenistic period a rapid, ornate style of oratory developed, which Cicero and others labeled as "Asiatic" and has since been known as "Asianism."[13] "When eloquence once sailed from the Piraeus," wrote Cicero,

> it passed through all the islands and visited all parts of Asia, with the result that it was infected with foreign diseases and lost all that healthiness and what might be called saneness of Attic diction and almost unlearned how to speak. From this came the Asiatic orators, not to be despised for their rapidity and abundance of speech, but too little restrained and too redundant. (Cicero, *Brut.* 51 [Hendrickson, LCL])

Oratory was apparently highly prized in the Greek East, and it led to excesses of style. It should probably be remembered that along with drama and athletic and gladiatorial contests, oratory was one of the main sources of "entertainment" in antiquity. We should not be too surprised, then, if some orators began to resemble actors. At the same time, under the influence of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (among others), the art of rhetoric also became ever more entwined with the art of philosophy, treated by Peripatetics, Stoics, Academics, and, with Philodemus (first century BCE), even Epicureans. The increased attention philosophers paid to rhetoric is partly due to the central role rhetoric played in Greek education in the wake of Alexander.[14] Both philosophy and rhetoric were instruments of *paideia*.[15]

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[12] Kennedy, *New History*, 81. Cf. Usher, "Introduction," 1: xv-xvi.

[13] Dionysius of Halicarnassus was another vociferous opponent of "Asianism" (*Ant. or.* 1). On "Asianism," see Kennedy, *New History*, 95-101; Tim Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50-52; and Usher, "Introduction," 1: viii-xi.

[14] Kennedy, *New History*, 82-4. Cf. H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York: Mentor, 1964 [1956]), 137-39; Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*

In what has become a classic of modern scholarship on education in Graeco-Roman antiquity, Henri-Irénée Marrou outlined a three-step system of ancient education, aligned with three age groups.[16] A kind of pre-school introduced the very young student (παιδίον, to age 7) to the alphabet, pronunciation, syllabification, and the like. Primary education was the next stage for the child (παῖς, roughly ages 7 to 14), which continued the work of recitation and reading. Secondary education was reserved for the adolescent (μειράκιον, ages 14-18), and consisted of basic training in rhetoric.[17] At each stage, the pupil had a different kind of teacher: first the γραμματιστής, then the γραμματικός, and finally the σοφιστής or ῥήτωρ. By the end of this cycle the student would have (theoretically, at least) mastered the whole course of "encyclical studies" (ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία), which included basic literacy, grammar, literary studies, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. One might then go on to study philosophy at one (or more) of the well-known schools, or one might go for advanced study in rhetoric with famous orators. Marrou has had his critics: the reality of the educational system was not quite so neatly stratified, and there were significant differences in educational curriculum and opportunity depending on geographical location and social status, to name just two factors.[18] Even so, the extant handbooks, papyri,

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1-12; Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament, Volume One: History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (2d ed.; New York: de Gruyter, 1995), 97-100.

[15] Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 1-4.

[16] Marrou, *History*. This is the English translation of Marrou's third edition of *Histoire de l'Education dans l'Antiquité*, the seventh edition of which was published in 1975, but in essentials of the argument unchanged.

[17] Cribiore (*Gymnastics*, 2) calls these stages Primary, Secondary, and Rhetorical Education.

[18] For critique of Marrou's schematization, see Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Andrew W. Pitts, "Hellenistic Schools in Jerusalem and Paul's Rhetorical Education," in *Paul's World* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 19-50, esp. 20-7; and Sandnes, *Challenge*, 26-31.

and certainly the evidence from Quintilian at least suggest rhetoric was the primary engine of Greek and Roman education in the first century CE (Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.10.1).

In the context of this pedagogical system, a fresh wave of Greek oratory burst out beginning around the first century CE. Flavius Philostratus (ca. 170-250 CE), the famous hagiographer of Apollonius of Tyana, dubbed this new movement of oratory a "Second" Sophistic (δευτέρα σοφιστική), a label that has been adopted also by modern scholarship for this period of the history of rhetoric (Philostratus, *Vit. soph.* 481). Sophistic, for Philostratus, was "philosophic rhetoric," or "rhetoric supposed useful for philosophizing" (ῥητορικὴν ἡγεῖσθαι χρὴ φιλοσοφοῦσαν; *Vit. soph.* 480), a definition already current with Dionysius of Halicarnassus (ca. 60 BCE – ca. 7 BCE; *Ant. or.* 1; *Isocr.* 16-18). At least by the third century CE and in Philostratus's eyes, the sophist was perceived as something of a holy man, a sage, a divinely inspired envoy.[19] The art of these ancient orators was comparable with the Egyptian, Chaldean, and Indian arts of prophecy (μαντική, θεσπιῳδεῖν, χρηστηριῴδειν; *Vit. soph.* 481). These sophists, moreover, were particularly popular in western Asia Minor.[20] Philostratus reports that after his oratorical defeat by Demosthenes in 330 BCE, the famous orator Aeschines (ca. 397-ca. 322 BCE), whom Philostratus considered the founder of the Second Sophistic, moved to Ephesus before settling in Rhodes (Philostratus, *Vit. soph.*, 508-9). The story's emphasis on Ephesus is implausible, but understandable if Philostratus was compelled to recognize Ephesus as a center of the Second Sophistic in his time and at the same time to provide an Athenian patrimony for the movement. Philostratus's account is far more reliable by the time he gets to Nicetes of

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[19] This of course fits well with the rest of Philostratus's corpus, especially his *Vit. Apoll.* and *Her.*
[20] Kennedy, *New History*, 231; Koester, *Introduction*, 1:337-8; Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 12.

Smyrna (first century CE), an influential orator of Smyrna who was also well-received in

Ephesus (Philostratus, *Vit. soph.* 510-12).[21] One of the most famous orators of the era, Aelius

Aristides, resided primarily in Pergamum.

The philosophical brand of oratory described by Philostratus, which was beginning

to flourish around the same time as the book of Revelation was composed, also drew

somewhat on the performance practice of Asianism, if not always its linguistic and

compositional style. The oratory of this period was intended less to help an audience decide

anything, like a legal verdict or a plan of action, and far more to move an audience. "[T]he

speeches…were delivered for the occasion alone, to solicit the pleasure, admiration, and

respect of the audience," writes Tim Whitmarsh.[22] Philostratus tells the story of Nicetes

moving an accuser to tears with the eloquence of his speech, clearly an ideal outcome of

excellent oratory (Philostratus, *Vit. soph.* 511). The result of a polished composition and

performance was an increase in honor. Persuasion and the ubiquitous goal of *philotimia*

("love of honor") in an "age of ambition" went hand in hand.[23] But *philotimia* and *philonikia*

("love of victory") also went hand in hand.[24] The oratorical world of the Second Sophistic

was a culture of performance, ambitious and agonistic.

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[21] The abrupt shift of Philostratus's account from Aeschines to Nicetes has led some to suspect Nicetes to be a more plausible "founder" of the Second Sophistic. Indeed, Philostratus himself says Nicetes found the science (ἐπιστημή) of oratory dilapidated in the first century, and therefore undertook to rejuvenate the art (511). See Simon Swain, "The Reliability of Philostratus's 'Lives of the Sophists'," *Classical Antiquity* 10 (1991), 149. Cf. Kennedy, *New History*, 230; Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 5.

[22] Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 3. Compare Kennedy, *New History*, 230: "These younger sophists were declaimers, more interested in the artistic treatment of a subject than in persuading an audience of some thesis."

[23] Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 27-53.

[24] Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 38.

Flamboyant though its practitioners may have been in their performances, the "second" sophists were generally conservative when it came to substance.[25] They were also technicians of words, rather than merely inspired speakers, regardless of the appearance they may have given to the contrary. Philostratus describes the speeches of Aeschines, his "founder" of the Second Sophistic, as "inspired speech" (θείως λέγειν) (Philostratus, *Vit. soph.* 509). He also says, "[T]he followers of Aeschines [the Second Sophists] handled their themes [ὑποθέσεις] according to the rules of art [κατὰ τέχνην], while the followers of Gorgias [the older sophists] handled theirs as they pleased [κατὰ τὸ δόξαν]" (Philostratus, *Vit. soph.* 481 [Wright, LCL]). Such a contrast probably is a response to Plato's critique of rhetoric in *Gorgias*, conceding to Socrates that Gorgias's version of rhetoric was not, after all, a τέχνη. But it also points to the fact that in the Second Sophistic oratory was undoubtedly a craft. Aeschines was nearly impossible to imitate, says Philostratus, but that fact only highlights the usual method of oratorical learning: imitation. The rise of handbooks of compositional exercises (προγυμνάσματα) points in the same direction: as inspired as the speech may seem, underneath the veneer of divinity lay the foundation of technique.

Oratorical Gymnastics

The *progymnasmata*—"preliminary exercises" in oratorical, poetic, and prose composition—were integral to the curriculum of education for the orator, in which the τέχνη of oratory was acquired.[26] Our best sources for these exercises are the composition handbooks of the second through fourth centuries CE. The four extant are by Aelius Theon

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[25] Kennedy, *New History*, 231.
[26] Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, 220-44.

(first century CE), "Hermogenes"[27] (third-fourth century CE), Aphthonius (late fourth

century CE), and Nicolaus (fifth century CE).[28] The excercises are first mentioned in the

Rhetoric to Alexander, however: "If we accustom ourselves to them [the elements of rhetoric]

and train ourselves in taking them up according to the preparatory exercises [γυμνάσωμεν

ἀναλαμβάνειν αὐτὰς κατὰ τὰ προγυμνάσματα], we will have great facility both in writing

and in speaking" (*Rhet. Alex.* 28.4 [Mirhady, LCL]).[29] Quintilian (ca. 35-ca. 100 CE), whose

Institutes of Oratory are the historian's gold mine for the state of rhetorical training at the close

of the first century CE, discussed the role of *primae exercitationes* in oratorical education

(Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.1, 4; cf. 1.9; 10.5). There are oblique references to or obvious evidence of

progymnastic training in *Rhetoric to Herennius* (ca. 85 BCE), Cicero (106-43 BCE), and Ovid

(43 BCE-17 CE), and they are put to work in orations and writings at least from the first

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[27] The scare quotes around Hermogenes indicates the doubtful attribution of this handbook to the second-century CE rhetor Hermogenes of Tarsus. For convenience, I will nevertheless refer to the author of the handbook as Hermogenes.

[28] English translations of the four handbooks are conveniently found in George A. Kennedy, ed., *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). For general discussions of progymnasmata, see Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, ix-xvi; Kennedy, *New History*, 202-208; and the extended discussion of Tor Vegge, *Paulus und das antike Schulwesen: Schule und Bildung des Paulus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 121-85. On the dating of the handbooks, Kennedy's introductions to the individual texts is helpful (Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 1-3, 73-4, 89-91, 129-31). For more information on authorship, manuscripts, and dating for Theon, Hermogenes, and Aphthonius, the introductions in Patillon's editions are excellent: Patillon and Bolognesi, eds. and trans., *Aelius Theon*, vii-clvi; Michel Patillon, ed. and trans., *Corpus Rhetoricum* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008-2012), 1: v-lxxvi, 49-111, 165-75.

[29] We noted above that this is one of the two extant works on rhetoric from the fourth century BCE, though it has been overshadowed by Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. The importance of *Rhetoric to Alexander*, as George Kennedy writes, "is simply as an example of a handbook of the time and for its description of techniques that can be found in fourth-century speeches. Orators of the time may not have known this particular work, but they probably knew something like it" (Kennedy, *New History*, 51). Kennedy considers the treatise of minor importance because it was "little known subsequently and made no contribution to the development of a theory of rhetoric, nor to the development of rhetorical terminology" (Ibid.). But it should be considered valuable precisely for that reason. If we grant no spark of originality in the treatise, and there does not seem to be much of one, we can still value it as a quotidian and common handbook on fourth-century BCE rhetorical theory and practice. Such a handbook is more likely to give us an "on-the-ground" perspective on rhetoric than Aristotle's more philosophical exploration. See also Chiron, "Relative Dating."

century BCE on (*Rhet. Her.* 1.12; 2.9; Cicero, *Inv.* 1.27; 2.77; *de Or.* 1.154; Ovid, e.g., *Her.* and *Metam.*).

Quintilian and the handbooks of Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius, and Nicolaus unanimously agree that certain of the progymnasmata are "elementary" while others are advanced.[30] The *progymnasmata* fell along a graded hierarchy, the completion of which would provide the young orator the necessary tools for full, rich, and above all persuasive composition. As Raffaella Cribiore nicely puts it, "The *progymnasmata* were supposed to teach a student how to write on set themes: they were meant to warm up his muscles, stretch his power of discourse, and build his vigor."[31] Even so, all of the *progymnasmata* fit into the more fundamental of the five parts of rhetoric as they are found in Quintilian. "Invention," "arrangement," and "style" were the fundamental elements of rhetoric, and were probably those aspects of rhetoric any student of the basic course of education could hope to master, and it is these that are directly addressed by the *progymnasmata*.[32] The further parts, "delivery" and "memory," were probably largely the domain of more advanced study. The principles of persuasion were condensed into exercises which, when one strove to master them, would inculcate the habits of excellent oratory and writing.

The fourteen exercises described in Aphthonius's handbook were destined to become the standard set: fable (μύθος), narrative (διήγημα), anecdote (χρεία), maxim (γνώμη), refutation (ἀνασκευή), confirmation (κατασκευή), commonplace (κοινὸς τόπος), praise (ἐγκώμιον), invective (ψόγος), comparison (σύγκρισις), personification (ἠθοποιία),

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[30] Quintilian (*Inst.* 2.1) thinks some belong to study with a *grammaticus* and some to study with a *rhetor*.
[31] Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, 221-22.
[32] Kennedy, *New History*, 5-6.

description (ἔκφρασις), argument (θέσις), and introduction of a law (νόμου εἰσφορά). The progymnastic handbooks show a remarkable consistency in identifying roughly these same fourteen exercises, though their arrangement and the discussion of the exercises vary somewhat. The consistency of the handbooks hints at the development of a fairly well codified curriculum of exercises by the first century CE.[33] The evidence from the *Rhetoric to Alexander* may suggest these fourteen exercises were already used in rhetorical training in the fourth century BCE, but *Rhetoric to Alexander* does not actually describe or name the exercises. It seems unlikely that *Rhetoric to Alexander* means something completely different from the later handbook authors, and the relative conformity of the latter over roughly four centuries suggests a long-standing tradition. Even so, the tradition cannot with confidence be traced back beyond the first century CE, when Theon's handbook was composed.

Theon's *Progymnasmata* nevertheless provides a glimpse of the value and purpose of progymnastic exercises in the first century.[34] Theon wrote his handbook to benefit "those wishing to speak in public" (59), though the exercises made one fit also for writing poetry and history (70). In his handbook, Theon regrets that too few students come to rhetoric with the "greatness of mind" cultivated by philosophy, indeed without even a full curriculum of encyclical studies. His handbook is a teaching manual, for the use of instructors of

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[33] The term "*progymnasmata*" was not the only term used for these exercises, as Ronald Hock points out. Theon, for instance, refers to the exercises as γυμνάσματα or γυμνασίαι. The name *progymnasmata* became standard because of the popularity of Aphthonius's handbook, which uses the latter term exclusively. With Hock, I will continue to name these exercises progymnasmata, recognizing that the term itself may be somewhat anachronistic. See Ronald F. Hock, "General Introduction to Volume 1," *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric, Volume 1: The* Progymnasmata (ed. Ronald F. Hock and Edward N. O'Neil; Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 12-15.

[34] I have used Michel Patillon's edition of Theon's text (*Aelius Theon: Progymnasmata* [ed. and trans. Michel Patillon and Giancarlo Bolognesi; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997]), relying also on Kennedy's translation (Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 1-72). Following standard practice, citations of Theon's *Progymnasmata* refer to the page number in Spengel's edition of the Greek text (Leonardus Spengel, ed., *Rhetores Graeci*, volume 2 [Leipzig: Teubner, 1855], 59-130), and I cite Patillon's supplemental pagination for the Armenian MSS (131-44).

rhetoric rather than students. It assumes that those who will be learning rhetoric are younger and will have a teacher to correct them (65-6, 72). The principle of μίμησις was the basic pedagogical method of all education at the time, from grammar school to philosophy and moral formation. Theon's pedagogical principle was no exception: "Reading [out loud] is the nourishment of style; for we will imitate most beautifully when the soul is molded by beautiful examples" (61). The student learns best by imitating the style of the ancient authors and of fair copies provided by the teacher (65-6). Once one has learned to imitate proper style he will be prepared to compose his own speeches on specific themes. This he did through the *progymnasmata*.

The Education of an Apocalyptist in an Age of Sophists?

Whether John was writing at the end of Nero's reign or during Domitian's (or even Hadrian's), he was writing at the beginning of the Second Sophistic. We have already seen that the Second Sophistic was particularly popular in Asia Minor, and that it was deeply tied to Greek *paideia.* Most of our ancient evidence for the development of literacy in the Graeco-Roman world comes from a few sources: Quintilian's handbook, of course, and also anecdotal evidence from ancient authors reflecting on education (e.g. Augustine's famous remarks about hating his Greek teacher in *Conf.* 1.9.14-15), and evidence of school exercises in papyrus, entirely from Egypt.[35] These sources all implicate the reading of poetry (esp. Homer) in the early stages of literary education. They also confirm the close connection

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[35] Karl Orlav Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer: School, Pagan Poets, and Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 40-58; Raffaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996).

between oratory and the acquisition of the skills of reading and writing explored above. The problem with the evidence is that we have almost no evidence for what we might recognize as training in Greek as a second language. "Learning to speak Greek" is what was usually meant by ἑλληνιζεῖν.[36] "Hellenization" was primarily the adoption of Greek language, but it also implied thereby the notion of "becoming Greek." The reason Hellenization was both the acquisition of Greek in reading and writing and also formation in Hellenistic culture was because the curriculum was standard—Homer and the poets for the beginner, the great sophists for the more advanced. Learning to read meant learning to read these works, not just any works. Thus, in the forging of Christian culture over the next few centuries, the curriculum eventually had to be replaced.[37] Did John learn Greek in this way, and if so, was he also familiar with the *progymnasmata*?

Jews clearly benefited from rhetorical education to various degrees. Philo's *De Congressu* represents the perspective of a thoroughly "Hellenized" Jew.[38] Philo wrote, "[W]hen first I was incited by the goads of philosophy to desire her I consorted in early youth with one of her handmaids, Grammar, and all that I begat by her, writing, reading and study of the writings of the poets, I dedicated to her mistress" (*Congr.* 74 [Colson, LCL]). Wisdom begins with encyclical studies, which each have their own virtues: grammar, music, geometry, astronomy, rhetoric, dialectic, "and other such studies" (*Congr.* 11, 14-18). He calls these studies προπαιδεύματα, "preliminaries." Philo had been through the entire set

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[36] Cf. LSJ, "ἑλληνίζω"; Martin Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 7-18.

[37] Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 49-116.

[38] Philo, *De Congressu Quaerendae Eruditionis Gratia*, or, roughly, "On Mating with the Preliminary Studies."

of encyclical studies, but found that they were all only leading toward philosophy, the love of

wisdom:

> Indeed, just as the encyclical subjects contribute to the acquirement of
> philosophy, so does philosophy to the getting of wisdom. For philosophy is
> the practice or study of wisdom, and wisdom is the knowledge of things
> divine and human and their causes. And therefore, just as encyclical
> cultivation is the bond-servant of philosophy, so must philosophy be the
> servant of wisdom. (Philo, *Congr.* 79 [after Colson, LCL])

Thus, Philo, a cultivated Jew of Alexandria, had clearly gone through the entire circuit,

including rhetoric.

It is not simply the case, however, that Philo thought these studies valuable in and of

themselves. Philosophy grants wisdom, which brings with it temperance and other virtues,

but these are "practiced for honour and service of God" (Philo, *Congr.* 80 [Colson, LCL]).

Indeed, Philo's entire discussion is couched in an allegorical interpretation of the story of

Sarai and Hagar in Genesis 16. Sarai represents wisdom and the virtues that accompany

one's participation in wisdom. Hagar represents the handmaiden of encyclical studies, which

lead to the true goal, but are to be dispensed with once one has made full use of them. This

allegory rivals that of (Ps.-)Plutarch, who likewise interpreted the story of Penelope and her

suitors in the *Odyssey* (Plutarch, *Mor.* 7D-E). Philo advocates encyclical studies as a means,

not an end. The end is honoring God, the God of Moses and of the Jewish Scriptures.[39]

For Philo, then, there was no real competition between the Torah and encyclical studies,

provided each was set in its proper place.

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[39] See further Sandnes, *Challenge*, 68-78. The argument has been very plausibly made that Philo was first and foremost an interpreter of the Jewish Scriptures, though certainly with a heavily philosophical eye. This, too, suggests that although Philo "consorted" with encyclical studies, the wisdom of the Mosaic Law was still primary. See Peder Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for his Time* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); and Peder Borgen, "Philo of Alexandria," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (ed. Michael E. Stone; Assen/Philadelphia: Van Gorcum/Fortress, 1984), 233-82.

Paul of Tarsus may represent less well-trained Hellenistic Judaism, but the evidence

of his rhetorical education it scattered throughout his letters. Paul, for instance, often cites

maxims, a common element in rhetorical composition, and one of the *progymnasmata*, as we

saw above (1 Cor 6:12; 7:1, 15; 8:1, 4; 10:23, 31; 13:7; 14:33; Gal 6:7; Rom 13:7; 14:7).[40] His

use of the "diatribe" (cf. Rom 7:1) has been widely discussed, and his style argumentation in

general is indebted to more sophisticated rhetorical training.[41] Clearly, Paul was exposed to a

rhetorical education, but what was the nature of that education? Paul may have received

rhetorical training in Tarsus, which was hyperbolically praised by Strabo for its citizens'

interest in "philosophy and encyclical education," even surpassing the enthusiasm of Athens

and Alexandria (Strabo, *Geog.* 14.5.13).[42] Martin Hengel argues that Paul probably learned

his art in a "Jewish school," in which he learned Greek and some rhetoric, but not according

to the traditional canon.[43] Nowhere in his writings does he display any knowledge of Homer

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[40] See Rollin A. Ramsaran, "Paul and Maxims," in J. Paul Sampley, ed., *Paul in the Graeco-Roman World* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2003), 429-56.

[41] On which see, *inter alia*, J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe, eds., *Paul and Rhetoric* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); Sandnes, *Challenge*, 251-4; Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004); Ronald F. Hock, "Paul and Greco-Roman Education," in Sampley, *Paul in the Greco-Roman World*, 198-227; Christopher Forbes, "Paul and Rhetorical Comparison," in Sampley, *Paul in the Greco-Roman World*, 134-71; Duane F. Watson, "Paul and Boasting," in Sampley, *Paul in the Greco-Roman World*, 77-100; R. Dean Anderson, Jr., *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul* (2d ed.; Leuven: Peeters, 1999); Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tübginen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991); George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 86-96; Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

[42] On the Tarsus of Paul's youth, see Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32-51; Jürgen Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 34-8, 51-6; Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2009), 58-60.

[43] Martin Hengel with Roland Deines, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (London: SCM, 1991), 38: "Paul seems to have gone to a good Greek elementary school, which was a Jewish school—because the literature from Homer to Euripides used in regular teaching was quite alien to him" (see further 18-39). On Hengel's positing of Jewish schools, see Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 1: 78-83.

or the poets, or much else from Greek literature.[44] The apparent absence of Homer, the poets, the historians, and reference to Greek literature in general might be telling, but the absence of Homer from Paul's—extant—letters does not necessarily mean Paul was unfamiliar with Homer or studied the great orators. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor has argued that Paul probably was subjected to the usual course of study: "In the absence of any evidence regarding Paul's youth, we must presume the normal, namely, that Paul was already grown when he left his home in Tarsus. He ventured out into the world, as young men ever have done, only when he had finished his basic education."[45] While this education included reading from Greek translations of the Jewish Scriptures, it would have also included, *de rigueur*, reading from Homer and other classics of Greek literature. Paul's letters certainly display evidence of rich Greek rhetorical training, which effectively balances out the absence of Homer.[46]

Paul's claims not to speak with "eloquent wisdom" (1 Cor 1:17) and his concession that he may be "untrained in speech" (2 Cor 11:6) fall a little flat in the face of the rhetorical skill in his letters. His opponents seem to agree with his negative self-assessments (2 Cor 10:10), but only with respect to his appearance and oral speaking; his letters they acknowledged as "weighty and strong" (βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραί). Kennedy opines that perhaps Paul picked up some rhetoric from one of the handbooks that would have been circulating, but given the extent of Paul's capacity, such a stop-gap education seems

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[44] Apart from the maxim in 1 Corinthians 15:33 ("Bad company ruins good morals"), which may come from Menander or Euripides. Likewise, Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12 remembered Paul as someone who could quote the poets.

[45] Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul*, 46; cf. 46-51.

[46] See further Vegge, *Paulus*, esp. 375-424.

unlikely.[47]   More likely Paul was a good student in his studies, particularly in composition,

but that he had not gone on for further study to work on his delivery. Paul's invention,

arrangement, and style seem fine. His delivery, it seems, was wanting. In short, the evidence

of Paul's rhetorical training is patent, and he probably received that training in Tarsus as a

child, but his curriculum and the precise means by which he received such training remains

obscure.

If Paul's education is difficult to nail down, John's is practically impossible. For one

thing, we do not even know who this "John" was. Aune's summary is a good place to start:

> While the final author-editor of Revelation was named "John," it is not
> possible to identify him with any other early Christian figures of the same
> name, including John the Son of Zebedee or the shadowy figure of John the
> Elder. The otherwise unknown author of Revelation in its final form was
> probably a Palestinian Jew who had emigrated to the Roman province of
> Asia…. He regarded himself as a Christian prophet and his composition as a
> prophetic book, and he was well acquainted with the Christian congregations
> in Roman Asia to which he addressed the final version of his book.[48]

At least with Paul we have some biographical information from his letters and from the Acts

of the Apostles. Even so, there are a few observations about John we can make even from

our paltry evidence. Aune identifies John as a Palestinian Jew, on the basis of six points, the

most important of which are: 1) John's extensive use of the Jewish Scriptures, with

apparently some familiarity with the Hebrew text; 2) his employment of the genre

apocalypse, which was most popular in Palestinian Judaism; 3) his apparent knowledge of

the Jerusalem temple cult and Palestinian geography (e.g., Harmageddon in 16:16); and 4) his

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[47] Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 10.
[48] David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (Dallas: Word, 1997), lvi.

peculiar dialect of Greek, which Aune calls "Semitizing Greek."[49] All of this seems quite

plausible, and it suggests that John may not have been a native Greek speaker.

Whatever John's origins, he found himself in Asia Minor sometime in the last third

of the first century CE, and we know he spoke, and more importantly wrote, Greek. John's

Greek is the most adulterated, "barbaric" Greek in the New Testament. Dionysius of

Alexandria reportedly said of the book, "I observe his style and that his use of the Greek

language is not accurate, but that he employs barbarous idioms (ἰδιώματσιν...βαρβαρικοῖς

χρώμενον), in some places committing downright solecisms (σολοικίζοντα)" (Eusebius,

Hist. eccl. 7.25 [Oulton, LCL]).[50] There are at least three possible explanations for this fact:

1) the book was (woodenly) translated from Hebrew or Aramaic; 2) the language is

deliberately "barbaric," possibly in conformity with Biblical Hebrew (and/or Aramaic) or

even Septuagintal Greek; or 3) the author was bilingual and knew Greek imperfectly, or

thought in Hebrew/Aramaic but wrote in Greek.[51] Of these, the latter two are the most

likely. If the book has been translated, then it has been done by someone bilingual or by

someone deliberately effecting a barbaric dialect. No one has to my knowledge suggested

John's use of an amanuensis.[52] If the book were dictated—not impossible for a prophet

(witness Jeremiah and Baruch)—then perhaps it has been taken down quite literally from a

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[49] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, l.

[50] Such odd expressions and/or solecisms occur at 1:4, 5, 10-11, 12, 15, 20; 2:13, 20, 27; 3:12; 4:1, 4; 5:6, 12; 6:1; 7:4, 8, 9; 8:9; 9:14; 10:2, 8; 11:4, 15; 12:5, 7; 13:3; 14:7, 19; 17:3; 19:6, 20; 20:2; 21:12-14 (cf. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999], 101). Most of these are disagreements of case, number, gender, or person. For a concise grammatical analysis of the language of the Apocalypse, see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, clx-ccxi.

[51] See Aune's similar list of explanations: *Revelation 1-5*, cxcix.

[52] On the use of secretaries/amanuenses, see e.g. Harry Y. Gamble, "Amanuensis," *ABD* 1:172-3; E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991); and Gordon J. Bahr, "Paul and Letter Writing in the Fifth[*sic*] Century," *CBQ* 28 (1966): 465-77.

prophet with imperfect Greek. Most amanuenses probably would have corrected the prophet's grammar as they dictated, although not all amanuenses functioned the same. Gordon Bahr highlights a difference between two of Cicero's secretaries: Tiro, who knew Cicero's mind so well that he could compose a letter on Cicero's behalf with just some notes on the gist of what the latter wanted to say, and Spintharus, to whom he dictated "syllable by syllable" (Cicero, *Att.* 12.25.3: *Ego ne Tironi quidem dictavi, qui totas* periochas *persequi solet, sed Spintharo syllabatim*).[53] The more important letters were dictated very closely, to a secretary who would take it down exactly as spoken. The curse colophon at the end of the Apocalypse testifies to John's desire that the book should stand as it is: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book" (Rev 22:18-19). But the function of the curse colophon probably has more to do with the content than the language. It is unlikely that John is concerned with every jot and tittle, or every barbaric idiom and solecism.

It is still possible that the dialect is effected, and that the solecisms are deliberate. G. K. Beale argues that they are often clues to biblical allusions.[54] Beale writes, "A number of expressions appear irregular because John is carrying over the exact grammatical forms of the allusions, often from the various versions of the Greek OT and sometimes from the Hebrew."[55] There is some plausibility to this interpretation, but it is not universally

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[53] Cf. Bahr, "Paul," 469-70.
[54] Beale, *Revelation*, 100-3.
[55] Beale, *Revelation*, 101.

applicable.[56] Here is not the place to examine Beale's position fully. I will only point out

that in a book so full of biblical allusions and also so full of solecisms, the two are bound to

cross paths often, but that does not mean there is any necessary or compositional

connection between them. More likely in some of these cases is the verdict of G. Mussies

that the syntax of the Apocalypse reflects bilingualism. Through a painstaking grammatical

analysis of the language of the book, Mussies concluded that either the author of the book,

or its translator if it was written in Hebrew or Aramaic, was bilingual.[57] The bilingualism of

John might well explain the apparently vulgar quality of his Greek.

One limitation of Marrou's interpretation of ancient education is that it focuses on

only one demographic of students—namely, the children of the elite, who could afford both

the financial outlay and the leisure (σχολή) for education. Alan Booth has questioned the

neat division between three stages and three distinct teachers in Marrou's account, in part

because it ignores educational realities for different social strata.[58] Booth argues that there

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[56] Beale is probably right with respect to Rev 1:4 and less probably with respect to 1:5, for instance, that the solecisms of these verses are due to allusions to biblical texts (*Revelation*, 188, 192). In Rev 1:4 ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος should be in the genitive, since it is a phrase governed by ἀπό. John correctly puts the next phrase in the genitive (καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων), so why not the prior phrase? Whatever else ὁ ὢν may signify for John, it is almost certainly an allusion to Exod 3:14 (LXX): "And God said to Moses, I am ὁ ὤν." Rev 1:5 likewise uses a nominative in a clause governed by ἀπό: ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς. Beale points out that Ps 88:38 (LXX=MT 89:39) has the line καὶ ὁ μάρτυς ἐν οὐρανῷ πιστός, and πρωτότοκον appears a bit earlier in the psalm (v 27), altered from the accusative to conform with the rest of the phrase. But that does not explain why ὁ ἄρχων is in the nominative, unless it is also accommodating to the biblical allusion. When Beale gets to 8:9 and τὰ ἔχοντα ψυχάς (*Revelation*, 478), again in the nominative when it should be in the genitive, he has to suppose a wooden translation from the Hebrew of Genesis 1:20 (נפש חיה). Here Beale just requires too many concessions.

[57] G. Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study in Bilingualism* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 310-49, esp. 311-13.

[58] Alan D. Booth, "The Schooling of Slaves in First-Century Rome," *TAPA* 109 (1979): 11-19. Booth's argument hinges on the famous epigram of Martial describing the *ludi magister* (10.62.1-5), which he interprets (with surprising plausibility) as an epigram about the education of slaves, not children ("it is noteworthy that Martial makes his prize pupils the pages, not the children of the affluent" [19]).

were certain figures, like the *ludi magister*, the *calculator*, and the *notarius*, who "ran a lowly type of technical school which peddled craft literacy to children, slave and free, to enhance their employability, but that the elements were usually acquired elsewhere by children embarking upon a liberal education."[59] Slaves in the Roman empire, it seems, certainly had opportunity for education.[60] These slaves would still have depended upon their masters as patrons, of course, and were thus the "pages of the affluent" noted by Booth. Even Booth's account finds evidence only for the education of young slaves. Nowhere do we have clear evidence of how an adult—slave, free, or citizen—would have acquired Greek as a second language.[61]

We can certainly say that John received some measure of Greek education, for he wrote in Greek. As Harry Gamble says of early Christian authors in general,

> These authors had the benefit of education, for otherwise they could not
> have written at all. …For axiomatic as it may be that Christians wrote for
> practical rather than aesthetic purposes, there is in writing that intends to
> teach and persuade both the opportunity and the need for literary skill, skill
> that must have been available to Christianity virtually from its birth.[62]

If the Christian apocalyptists (and some of the Jewish ones, too, if we want to make that distinction) were writing in Greek, then they would have had access to Greek education.[63]

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[59] Booth, "Schooling," 19.

[60] Clarence A. Forbes, "The Education and Training of Slaves in Antiquity," *TAPA* 86 (1955): 321-60.

[61] On bilingualism and multilingualism in the Roman Empire, see William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 175-90.

[62] Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 39.

[63] Apocalyptists are also sheltered from the likelihood that they received Greek rhetorical training by appeal to religious experience. The apocalyptists were religious experimenters, as it were, not literary authors. As the book of Revelation shows, so the logic might go, their fumbling ability at literary composition is due to the fact that they were first and foremost mystic seers, who only subsequently had to communicate their revelations. There is, as we have seen, some truth to this claim, but it again inserts a false dichotomy. John was almost certainly a religious seer, but his sophisticated use of the Jewish Scriptures and the very fact that he could write a treatise undermines the supposition that his education was minimal. At least since Jonathan Z. Smith's article, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic," (*Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978], 67-87; originally published in 1975) scholars have also recognized that

We have no way of knowing how an apocalyptist like John would have received his Greek

education, but the fact of his Greek education remains. As with Paul, we can reasonably

assume that John would have received some rhetorical training with his Greek, though it is

difficult to say just how much.

John the Prophet and Jewish(-Christian) Sophist

As noted above, John's Greek was not of a very elevated style, and it may have been

influenced by a Semitic background. But that does not mean his Greek was "bad." Some

scholars have argued that John's grammar does not fall outside of the bounds of acceptable

Greek grammar from the Hellenistic period at all.[64] "Barbarism" and "solecism," the terms

used by Dionysius, were not neutral descriptive terms without social value. They were much

used terms during the Second Sophistic to reinforce Atticism and Greek culture. The

Second Sophistic was much more than a resurgence of oratory; it was also an assertion of

Greek culture in the context of Roman rule: "Oratory was not just a gentle pastime of the

rich: it was one of the primary means that Greek culture of the period, constrained as it was

by Roman rule, had to explore issues of identity, society, family, and power."[65] In this

context, "barbarism" is clearly a term that casts the speaker as a barbarian—a non-Greek.

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apocalyptists were not some sort of primitive (and therefore illiterate) religious practitioners. The dichotomy between mysticism or religious experience and literary education, popular though it is in the post-Romantic modern world, wherein religious experience is thought to be based in emotion and emotion divorced from thought, has no basis in the ancient evidence. Foundational for these false assumptions are such works as Friederich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799) which emphasized the emotional and experiential core of religion, and Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige* (1917) which reduced religious experience to the nonrational *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. For a refutation of the nonrationality of emotion, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[64] See esp. Stanley E. Porter, "The Language of the Apocalypse in Recent Discussion," *NTS* 35 (1989): 582-603.

[65] Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 1.

"Solecism" was likewise "a reference to the uncultured Greek spoken in Soloi, the remote town in Cilicia."[66] Whitmarsh summarizes the trends well: "Sophists, in general, sought to Atticize rigorously. There is hardly a mention of any dialect other than Attic in Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists*—the case of the Doric-speaking Marcus of Byzantium is a telling exception. Attic is always seen here as the vehicle for cultural purity."[67] Purity of culture was the key anxiety in the Atticism of the Second Sophistic. To speak poor Greek (i.e., anything other than vetted Attic) during the Second Sophistic was to be not fully Greek. It is possible, however, that an orator may not want to sound fully Greek, or an orator may wish to effect an even more archaic air than Attic (which was already an archaizing tendency).

In a more recent work, Whitmarsh has pointed to another phenomenon of the time, to which he hesitatingly applies the label "A Jewish Sophistic."[68] He recognizes it was more than Greek identity that was challenged in this period. Indeed, an argument could probably be made that all identities were under contestation and negotiation during the early Roman empire, Roman identity included, though this is not the place to attempt the argument. Whitmarsh's treatment focuses on Jewish identity: "Hellenistic Judaism thus offers a much better expression of what many critics seek in the Greek Second Sophistic, namely a coherent articulation of subaltern resistance through literature. What is intriguing about such literature, however, in contrast to that of imperial Greece, is that it is composed in the

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[66] Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 43. Whitmarsh notes the several texts *On Barbarism and Solecism*, including discussion in Spengel, ed., *Rhetores Graecae*, 3: 9-11, 44, 59, 85.

[67] Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 43.

[68] Tim Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 211-27.

language, and indeed often the genres, of the colonizer."[69] Whitmarsh makes his claim with reference to Ben Sira, and more especially Ezekiel's *Exagogē*. The picture is a bit more complex if one looks at other genres like historiography (Josephus) or allegorical exegesis (Philo), but Whitmarsh is certainly correct that all of these Jewish texts are negotiating identity under more dominant cultural pressures. With Jewish authors of the first century CE the subaltern use of the colonizer's genres and language is only partially true.

The apocalypses, particularly *Fourth Ezra*, *Second Baruch*, and *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which were written in the wake of the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, employ a distinctively (if not exclusively) Jewish genre.[70] These, too, must be considered as part of any "Jewish Sophistic." *Fourth Ezra* was apparently composed in Hebrew, though it was translated into Greek shortly thereafter.[71] *Second Baruch* was translated into the extant Syriac from Greek, though whether there was a Semitic *Vorlage* to the Greek remains an open question.[72] The *Apocalypse of Abraham*, extant in its entirety only in Old Church Slavonic, was translated from Greek, but probably from a Hebrew original.[73] There was, in other words, a thriving Jewish Sophistic that deliberately did not use the language or the genre of the colonizers, Greek or Roman, even if they were soon translated into Greek.

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[69] Whitmarsh, *Beyond*, 213.

[70] On these three apocalypses as responses to the destruction of Jerusalem, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 270-88.

[71] Michael E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), 10-11.

[72] Daniel M. Gurtner, *Second Baruch: A Critical Edition of the Syriac Text* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 10-13.

[73] Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004); Arie Rubinstein, "Hebraisms in the Slavonic 'Apocalypse of Abraham,'" *JJS* 4 (1953): 108-15; and idem, "Hebraisms in the Apocalypse of Abraham," *JJS* 5 (1954): 132-35.

It is altogether possible that the language of John's Apocalypse was likewise a deliberate piece of the negotiation of identity. Recent research on the apocalypses has interpreted them as, among other things, negotiations of imperial rule and cultural domination.[74] The book of Revelation is obviously an apocalypse, albeit with epistolary and prophetic elements. John's choice of genre, then, is already an assertion of cultural identity. In the main it is a distinctively Jewish genre, albeit incorporating a recognizably Hellenistic genre (epistle). Unlike *Fourth Ezra*, *Second Baruch*, or the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, John's Apocalypse seems somewhat more accommodating of Greek culture, which is only natural considering it was addressed to seven cities in Asia Minor. It was, for instance, written in Greek. Both John's language and John's genre are ambiguously Greek and ambiguously "barbaric": they are, as it were, under negotiation.

Is such a deliberate use of a "barbaric" dialect otherwise attested? Macrobius relates a scene in which Caecina Albinus delivers an opinion on when the Saturnalia properly begin (Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.3). While those gathered were praising the prowess of his memory ("as a storehouse of antique lore"/*quasi vetustatis promptuarium*), one Avienus was whispering in the ear of his neighbor (Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.4.1 [Kaster, LCL]). When asked to share his whispers with the whole company Avienus takes issue with certain "novelties of speech" (*verborum novitas*) employed by Caecina. As Robert Kaster says, Avienus charges Caecina with two solecisms and a barbarism. It is the grammarian Servius who comes to Caecina's defense: "who explains each of the usages in turn and shows that what Avienus in his ignorance took

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[74] See especially Anathea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011) and Richard A. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

for *novitas* was in fact *antiquitas*, the usage of the ancients."[75] The irony is that Avienus, it

turns out, is the novel one. He berates Servius for allowing such indecent language and even

justifying it. "As for your loud claim that antiquity appeals to you because it was honorable

and austere and temperate: I say, let's follow the customs of the past in our lives, but let's

use the language of today when we speak" (Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.5.2 [Kaster, LCL]). In a further

twist of irony, Avienus is brought to heel by the most distinguished member of the assembly,

Praetextatus, who points out that even one of Avienus's turns of phrase is an archaism. This

story underscores both the privilege of antiquity, such that it can even excuse solecisms and

barbarisms.

Granted, the example from Macrobius is much later than John's Apocalypse;

Macrobius was no contemporary of John. Nor, indeed, does Caecina's oration come close

to committing as many "errors" as the book of Revelation. But it does offer a possible

justification for a deliberately "barbarized" Greek: antiquity conveyed authority. Fourth

Ezra and Second Baruch, though written after the destruction of the Second Temple are set

in the context of the destruction of the First Temple. Daniel, although written in the second

century BCE, is set in the sixth century BCE. John does not show much inclination to the

same kind of anachronism or allegorization, but it is possible that he made up for it by

writing a kind of deliberately barbarized Greek. John certainly saw himself as a prophet,

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[75] Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 171.

perhaps one among a circle of prophets.[76] Some of the supposed Semitisms could very well

have been retained to emphasize the connection with ancient Israelite and Jewish prophecy.

Apart from his spotty use of Greek John displays all the erudition of a sophist.

Frances Young's discussion of allusion and quotation in ancient rhetorical culture and in the

development of Christian culture is illuminating.[77] She rightly spots that in ancient rhetoric

quotations were not merely for ornamentation, but rather they conveyed authority. She

quotes part of Quintilian's discussion of memorization and emulation, in which he

recommends not merely written exercises, but more importantly a suffusion of excellent

works through memorization. This reading and memorization will acclimatize the student to

a natural sense of good style, but "a further benefit," says Quintilian, is

> a capacity to recall the good remarks of the various authors, which is both a
> source of pleasure in conversation and a useful resource in court, because
> things which have not been contrived for the sake of the Cause in hand have
> more authority (*plus auctoritatis adferunt*), and often win more praise, than if
> they were our own. (Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.7.4 [Russell, LCL])

Young also points to an earlier passage, in which Quintilian says a peppering of poetic

quotations helps the medicine of argumentation go down better, as the example of the great

orators shows (Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.8.10-12). These quotations were never meant to be ham-

fisted block quotations, but an emulation of style and choice phrases from established

authorities (Menander, *Treatise* 2.9.413.25). The early Christians turned from strewing their

orations with garlands of poetic quotations and allusions to strewing them with biblical turns

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[76] See David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 250-60.

[77] Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 97-116.

of phrases. Young's presentation of Gregory Nazianzen's *Oration* 1 is particularly

compelling, since it is full of biblical language, but without any actual quotations.[78]

John's Apocalypse achieved the same surfeit of biblical language already in the first

century CE, though admittedly without the eloquence of Nazianzen's Greek. Biblical

allusions are, of course, difficult definitively to identify, which is why estimates of the extent

of allusions in the book (there are no direct quotations, just like Nazianzen) range so

widely.[79] John draws on the whole scope of the biblical canon, though his allusions are

primarily from the prophets, especially Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and from the Psalms.[80] We

have here another potential reason, then, for John's peculiar Greek. He is not emulating the

masters of style, but the masters of the prophetic word.

Like the sophists, John also shows a propensity for seeking *philotimia* and *philonikia*.

Not only does the theme of victory (νική, νικάω) ground the letters to the seven churches,

but it is also a theme throughout the Apocalypse (2:7, 9, 17, 28; 3:5, 12, 21; 6:2; 11:7; 13:7;

15:2; 17:14; 21:7). We could attribute this theme to John's use of a combat myth.[81] We

could just as easily point to this recurrent theme of *philotimia*/*philonikia* prevalent in the

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[78] Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 98: "So it goes on: there are no full quotations, still less acknowledged quotations, but sections of the speech, though highly wrote rhetorically, depend for their graphic effect on their relationship with scripture texts."

[79] On which, see Beale, *Revelation*, 77, n. 16; cf. Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 62.

[80] Beale, *Revelation*, 77, identifies the following sources: Pentateuch, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Job, the major and minor prophets. It must be admitted that it is difficult to account for such a wide range without a significant degree of literacy and of access to books. It is possible that John could have learned and memorized the Jewish scriptures through synagogue or early Christian liturgy (see Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 205-31), but the concentration of scriptural phrases I think makes it rather more likely that he was a scribe with direct access (at some point in his life at least) to the texts.

[81] Adela Yarbro Collins work on the Apocalypse is consistently centered on this motif. See esp., Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1976).

oratorical milieu of first- through third-century CE Asia Minor.[82] The "disputatious temper"

Whitmarsh claims was "visible everywhere" may provide as likely an explanation of the

agonistics in and behind John's text as the use of a combat myth.[83] Probably better, such a

disputatious temper would have given currency to the use of a combat myth. The mythic

scope of the victory theme in the book of Revelation is patent: one of the four horsemen is

sent out "conquering and with the purpose of conquering" (νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ) (Rev

6:2), the beast from the pit will conquer the two witnesses (11:7), the beast from the sea will

be given the means to conquer the saints (13:7), others will conquer the beast (15:2), the

Lamb will conquer the ten kings represented by the ten horns of Great Whore's beast

(17:14). But as Robert Royalty points out, the contentions in the book of Revelation are not

purely external or cosmic.[84] There is evidence also of intra-Christian (or intra-Jewish)

conflict in the book as well: those who call themselves apostles (2:2); the Nicolaitans (2:6,

15); the pseudo-Jews of the "synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9); those who hold the teaching of

Balaam and of the Nicolaitans (2:14); and the false prophet Jezebel (2:20). John is clearly

positioning himself agonistically (not unlike Paul in Galatians and the Corinthian

correspondence) against certain adversaries, in the voice of the risen Christ. The confluence

of the victory motif and the recognition of opponents (of John/Christ) in the letters strives

for and reflects the sophistic goal of *philotimia/philonikia*.

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[82] Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 39, n. 51, notes the confluence of these terms in Xenophon of Ephesus, *Eph.* 1.9.9; Cassius Dio 6.23.4; 28.96.1; 41.53.2; Maximus of Tyre, *Or.* 16.4; and Athenaeus, *Deip.* 17e.

[83] Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 39.

[84] Robert Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998), 27-38.

Above all, John's Apocalypse was, like Greek orations, intended to be heard; they were both performance art, which is to say they were both part of the "performance culture" of the early Roman Empire.[85] Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1.3.1) classifies the three kinds of rhetoric based on three kinds of hearers (ἀκροαταὶ τῶν λόγων). Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Comp.* 3) remarks on how lines from the Odyssey "allure and enchant the ear (ἐπάγεται καὶ κηλεῖ τὰς ἀκοάς)." "Because authors wrote or dictated with an ear to the words," writes Gamble, "and assumed that what they wrote would be audibly read, they wrote for the ear more than the eye. As a result, no ancient text is now read as it was intended to be unless it [is] also heard, that is, read aloud."[86] The Apocalypse is, as David Barr has argued, a book that was intended for oral enactment.[87] It employs oral techniques which facilitate memory (numerical patterns, intense images, the description of three scrolls), and the use of the first person would have linked the reader to John and even to Jesus, so that the voice of the reader would have made the voice of the risen Jesus actually audible to the audience.[88] It was a work like those of the sages, saints, and sophists of the early Empire, like Apollonius of Tyana, who declaimed before crowds, perhaps even with an oracular air, and who preached a whole way of life (cf. Philostratus, *Vita Apoll.* 4.31).[89] The book of Revelation was, as Christopher Frilingos has argued, a book consonant with the Greco-Roman culture

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[85] Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 22-4.

[86] Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 204.

[87] David L. Barr, "The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment," *Interpretation* 40 (1986): 243-56.

[88] On this theme among early Christian prophets more generally, see M. Eugene Boring, *The Continuing Voice of Jesus: Christian Prophecy and the Gospel Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

[89] Graham Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist: Holy Men and their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1994), esp. 42-85.

of the spectacle.[90] An oration, too, was a spectacle. The sophists were performers; they even worked on their facial expressions, their voice, their dress—their whole appearance, and this communicated as much as the message itself.[91] And sometimes it was the most unusual, the most "deviant" of the orators who commanded attention.[92]

These performances were keyed to specific audiences just as John's was. "Among other things," Whitmarsh writes, "audiences cheered, clapped, and even touched and kissed speakers; they also hissed, tutted, and maintained stony silence. …The words of the sophist did not come together into some fixed, eternal monument: more than any other area of ancient literature, sophistic texts gain their meaning from their reception."[93] The book of Revelation begins with addresses to the churches in the seven cities of western Asia Minor, with reference to their particular situations. This is no geographical "science" (Strabo) or historical recitation (Josephus), even though those, too, could have apologetic purposes. John's purpose in writing is to encourage the churches to endure their current circumstances, and thereby to conquer foes internal and external to the churches. It is a plea to a specific way of being in the world. We could call it, in Aristotle's terminology, deliberative rhetoric. It is not a dispassionate book. Those murdered "for the word of God" (διὰ τὸν λόγον

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[90] Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[91] See Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 24-37.

[92] On which, see Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 35-37. Marcus of Byzantium, for instance, spoke in Doric and was of an unkempt appearance, perhaps not too unlike some of the Jewish prophets of the first century like John the Baptist or Jesus; cf. Philostratus, *Vita soph.* 528-29.

[93] Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 25.

τοῦ θεοῦ) cry out to know how long it will be before they are avenged (Rev 6:10).[94] John is

assured that the 144,000 who have come through the ordeal "will hunger no more, and thirst

no more…and God will wipe away every tear from they eyes" (7:16-17). The promise is

repeated with the vision of the New Jerusalem: "See the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will

wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will

be no more, for the first things have passed away" (Rev 21:3-4). John's book is clearly keyed

to its audience(s), reflecting knowledge of their situation, and playing on their deepest

emotions.

All of these aspects of the book of Revelation identify it as a work of those sagely

sophists and holy men of the early Roman Empire, who, even if they do not quite fit with

the Atticizing elements of the Second Sophistic, lack nothing of the attempt to assert a

distinct, and in many ways subaltern, identity in the face of Roman imperial rule. Like the

sophists, his work was clearly meant to be performed. The "barbaric" John was well-versed

in the Jewish scriptures, particularly the writings of the prophets, to which his Greek

probably owes much. In the face of internal and external pressure to conform, to "eat food

sacrificed to idols and practice fornication" (2:14, 20), John sought to spur his audience to

assert the identity of the saints of God and to thereby "conquer." This oratory was not a

game for John. Getting the message through was nothing short of a life-or-death endeavor.

John therefore made use of vivid imagery to drive his message home. John used a technique

of vivid description very much like that described in the rhetorical handbooks: ekphrasis.

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[94] This explanation of why these saints were slaughtered (6:9: τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφραγμένων), is the same reason John says he found himself on Patmos (1:9).

Chapter 8. Ancient Ekphrasis

>…λάμβανε δὲ καὶ τὴν θέαν τῇ ἀκοῇ· ἁμιλλᾶται γὰρ ἡ γραφὴ πρὸς
>τὰ ἔπη.

>…but receive also the sight with the hearing, for this painting contends with
>the epic.
>
>Libanius, *Progymnasmata*[1]

The ancient rhetorical exercise called ekphrasis has received a great deal of scholarly

attention of late, in part because of its seeming ability to blur the line between the visual and

the verbal. The basic definition of ekphrasis is "vivid description," but the simplicity of this

poor description is misleading; it does not fully capture what ekphrasis is and does, how it

was conceived and used in ancient oratory. The fragment above from Libanius (314-393

CE), heading one of his ekphrases, more finely represents the goal of ekphrasis. As an

example from among his *Progymnasmata*, which were probably composed as fair copies for

his students, it is a written exercise for the sake of oration, a text that was written to be

heard. But precisely because the exercise is an ekphrasis, it is also a text that was meant to

convey a sight, a spectacle (θέα) through a text/painting (γραφή). And in this description—

written in a text, but intended to be heard by an audience—Libanius expected his audience

to "receive the sight with the hearing." This operation—evoking sight through audition—

was the fundamental aim of ancient ekphrasis.

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[1] Libanius, "Description 3: A Race of the Heroes," *Progymnasmata* (ed. and trans. Craig A. Gibson;
Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 433-36.

Defining Ekphrasis

Ekphrasis (ἔκφρασις) is a plastic term with an uncertain etymology. The two parts *ek-* ("out") and *phrasis* ("speaking") can be combined in at least two ways. The term may mean either "speaking out"—perhaps with the connotation of speaking out about a particular subject (i.e., describing it)—or it could mean something like "out of the speech" (i.e., an aside in which narrative flow is interrupted to linger on a particular "sight").[2] Both etymologies are modern conceptions, and neither is advocated by the standard lexica (e.g. LSJ), which define the word and its verbal counterpart simply as "(vivid) description." Both ancient and modern discussions of ekphrasis treat it as a particularly effective rhetorical move that blurs the boundaries between the verbal and the visual, but their definitions are not entirely congruent. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a careful description of ekphrasis as it was theorized and practiced in antiquity. But because modern conceptions have frequently intruded upon analysis of ancient practice, modern use of the term needs first to be acknowledged.

In modern analysis ekphrasis has been both narrowed in scope and widened in application from its ancient meaning. For most of the twentieth century, as Ruth Webb has demonstrated, ekphrasis was almost exclusively reserved for literary works (usually poems) which described specific (if not necessarily *actual*) works of art (e.g. Homer's description of Achilles's shield or John Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn").[3] John Hollander's "gallery" of

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[2] See Ruth Webb, "*Ekphrasis* Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre," *Word & Image* 15:1 (1999), 7-8. Webb notes Jean Hagstrum's reasonable but faulty explanation that through the verbal description the work of art "speaks out," or, as we might rephrase, "ex-presses" itself. Webb also notes Philippe Hamon's idea that the work of art stands "out" from the "speech" in an ekphrasis.

[3] Webb, "*Ekphrasis*," 7-8; Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), 28-37.

ekphrases is an excellent example.[4] The goal of Hollander's book is to analyze how poetry

responds to works of visual art. Hollander's "gallery," then, consists of forty-eight poems

that "represent" visual objects in verbal form. The objects can range from painting to

photography to public monuments to architecture, but the main criterion of an ekphrasis is

that it describes a visual "artistic" subject in verbal representation.[5] Sometimes one also

finds the stipulation that ekphrases describe objects, and not events—the description of a

shield or an urn, for instance, but not a festival or a war.[6] All of this comports well with the

now standard definition of ekphrasis among visual studies theorists: "the verbal

representation of visual representation."[7]

In antiquity, however, rather than a poetic genre or theoretical desideratum,

ekphrasis designated a specific device in the service of the art of persuasion; it was an

element of rhetoric.

The Invention of Ekphrasis: Enargeia, Phantasia, and Ancient Rhetorical Theory

As one of the progymnasmata, ekphrasis was a staple of literary and oratorical

composition. Aelius Theon's handbook, roughly contemporaneous with the book of

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[4] John Hollander, *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[5] Hollander, *Gazer's Spirit*, 32-7, 41-3, 51-69.

[6] Ruth Webb cites Mieke Bal's *Narratology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 130. Here Bal defines "description as a textual fragment in which features are attributed to objects. This aspect of attribution is the *descriptive function.* …In the *Republic*, Plato tried to rewrite fragments of Homer so that they would be 'truly' narrative. The first elements to be discarded were the descriptions." For Bal, the heart of a narrative is a story, and the heart of a story is a *fabula*: "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors" (5). In short, for Bal, description is static, but narrative is dynamic. Webb sees the same logic playing out in modern accounts of ekphrasis which focus on *objects* rather than *events*. As we will see, the ancient rhetorical theorists made no such distinctions in their use of description, i.e. ekphrasis.

[7] See James A. W. Heffernan, "Ekphrasis and Representation," *New Literary History* 22:2 (Spring 1991): 297-316; cf. James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Revelation, gives us a sense of the rhetorical tradition in the first century CE.[8] It is worth

giving a few quotations from Theon's description of ekphrasis:

> Ἔκφρασις ἐστὶ λόγος περιηγηματικὸς ἐναργῶς ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον. γίνεται δὲ ἔκρασις προσώπων τε καὶ πραγμάτων καὶ τόπων καὶ χρόνων.

> Ekphrasis is descriptive discourse, bringing what is portrayed vividly before one's sight. There is ekphrasis of persons and events and places and periods of time. (Theon, *Progymn.* 118 [after Kennedy])[9]

> ἐπιχειρήσομεν δὲ τὰ μὲν πράγματα ἐκφράζοντες ἔκ τε τῶν προγιγνομένων, καὶ ἐκ τῶν συμβαινόντων τούτοις, οἷον ἐπὶ πολέμου διεξελευσόμεθα πρῶτον μὲν τὰ πρὸ τοῦ πολέμου, τὰς στρατολογίας, τὰ πολιορκίας, ἔπειτα δὲ τὰ τραύματα καὶ τοὺς θανάτους καὶ τὰ πένθη, ἐφ' ἅπασι δὲ τῶν μὲν τὴν ἅλωσιν καὶ τὴν δουλείαν, τῶν δὲ τὴν νίκην καὶ τὰ τρόπαια. ἐὰν δὲ τόπους ἢ χρόνους ἢ τρόπους ἢ πρόσωπα ἐκφράζωμεν, μετὰ τῆς παρ' ἑαυτῶν διηγήσεως ἀφορμὰς ἕξομεν λόγων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ χρησίμου καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἡδέος, οἷον Ὅμηρος ἐπὶ τῶν Ἀχιλλέως ὅπλων ἐποίησεν, εἰπὼν ὅτι καὶ καλὰ ἦν καὶ ἰσχυρὰ καὶ ἰδεῖν τοῖς μὲν συμμάχοις ἐκπληκτικά, τοῖς δὲ πολεμίοις φοβερά.

> When composing an ekphrasis we shall treat events both from the point of view of what has gone before, what was included within them, and what results from them; for example, in an ekphrasis of a war we shall first recount events before the war: the raising of armies, expenditures, fears, the countryside devastated, and in addition the capture and enslavement of some and the victory and trophies of the others. If, on the other hand, we are describing places or times or objects or persons, drawing on the narrative account of each we shall have starting points for what to say from the noble and the useful and the pleasant, as Homer did on the subject of the arms of Achilles, saying that they were beautiful and strong and remarkable to his fellow fighers to look at and objects of fear to the enemy. (Theon, *Progymn.* 119 [after Kennedy])

> ἀρεταὶ δὲ ἐκφράσεως αἵδε, σαφήνεια μὲν μάλιστα καὶ ἐνάργεια τοῦ σχεδὸν ὁρᾶσθαι τὰ ἀπαγγελλόμενα, ἔπειτα τὸ μὴ τελέως

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[8] I am following the current consensus on the date of this work. Malcolm Heath ("Theon and the History of the Progymnasmata," *GRBS* 43 (2002/3): 129-60) argues that Theon is a fifth-century CE rhetorician, rather than Aelius Theon. I do not find Heath's evidence all that persuasive, but his argument is a good reminder of how fragile is our knowledge of these handbooks.

[9] As noted also in the previous chapter, citations of Theon's *Progymnasmata* refer to the page number in Spengel's edition of the Greek text (Leonardus Spengel, ed., *Rhetores Graeci*, volume 2 [Leipzig: Teubner, 1855] 59-130), supplemental pagination for the Armenian MSS (131-44) comes from Patillon's edition (Michel Patillon and Giancarlo Bolognesi, eds. and trans., *Aelius Theon: Progymnasmata* [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997]).

ἀπομηκύνειν περὶ τὰ ἄχρηστα, τὸ δὲ ὅλον συνεξεομοιοῦσθαι χρὴ
τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις τὴν ἀπαγγελίαν, ὥστε εἰ μὲν εὐανθές τι εἴη τὸ
δηλούμενον, εὐανθης καὶ τὴν φράσιν εἶναι· εἰ δὲ αὐχμηρὸν ἢ
φοβερὸν ἢ ὁποῖον δή ποτε, μηδὲ τὰ τῆς ἑρμηνείας ἀπάδειν τῆς
φύσεως αὐτῶν.

The virtues of an ekphrasis are as follows: most of all, clarity and a vivid
impression of all-but-seeing what is described; next, one should not recollect
all useless details and should make the style reflect the subject, so that if what
it describes is colorful, the word choice should be colorful, but if it is rough
or frightening or something like that, features of the style should not strike a
discordant note with the nature of the subject. (Theon, *Progymn*. 119-20
[after Kennedy])

Theon defines ekphrasis as, "descriptive speech [λόγος περιηγηματικός], bringing what is

portrayed vividly before one's sight [ἐναργῶς ὑπ' ὄψιν]" (Theon, *Progymn*. 118). These

terms are very important. As we will see below, the importance of vividness (ἐνάργεια and

its derivatives) was well-established in ancient rhetoric and criticism. Just as importantly, the

root of the adjective περιηγηματικός refers to walking around something, scrutinizing it,

paying very close attention to it.[10] Ekphrasis is not merely descriptive speech; it invites—and

when particularly well done, forces—close attention to what is described. That is why

Theon says ekphrasis vividly brings the subject before one's sight. Ekphrasis creates the

illusion that one is walking around something and examining it for him- or herself.

As Ruth Webb has pointed out, though, ekphrasis here does not simply mean

descriptions of objects or works of art. Persons, events, places, and periods of time may all

be subjects for ekphrasis, just as long what is portrayed is brought "clearly before the sight."

Theon gives examples from Homer and Herodotus of the descriptions of people (e.g., the

"round-shouldered, swarthy-skinned, woolly-haired" Eurybates; Homer, *Od*. 19.246) and the

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[10] Patillon's translation takes this into account: "a discourse which presents *in detail* and places before the
eyes… [un discours qui présente en detail et met sous les yeux…]" (Patillon and Bolognesi, *Aelius Theon*, 66,
emphasis mine). See also Patillon's note on the adjective περιηγηματικός (ibid., 149, n. 323).

appearance of various Egyptian animals (ibis, hippopotami, crocodiles; Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.68-76).[11] He also gives examples of events and places: war, peace, storms, famine, plague, earthquake, meadows, shores, cities, islands, deserts (Theon, *Progymn.* 118). Anything that might require vivid description was a potential object for ekphrasis.

The next passage from Theon illustrates the point nicely. It does not presume that what is described is static; in fact, Theon seems to assume that what is described is dynamic. His first example is of a war. A proper description will describe not only the war itself, but those details that make the description vivid: the plans involved, the details of the slaughter, the fates of the vanquished and the victors. This is all temporal language. Even descriptions of persons depend on narrative accounts (διηγήσεις). The modern notion that an ekphrasis describes something static—much less a work of art—does not match the accounts of the ancient rhetoricians. It does not even match the parade examples of ancient ekphrases. The classic example of Achilles's Shield is telling, because the description is not static (Homer, *Il.* 18.478-608). Douglas Stewart reports the reaction of one of his students to Homer's passage: "But that damned thing's moving!"[12] If this passage is a model ekphrasis, then such a description need not describe a static object.

According to Theon the virtues of ekphrasis are clarity (σαφήνεια) and vividness (ἐνάργεια)—and the quality of "all-but-seeing" (σχεδὸν ὁρᾶσθαι) what is described (Theon, *Progymn.* 119). This operation is facilitated by not bogging down the description in minutiae of detail—the proper ekphrasis requires discrimination and selection of features to highlight. Likewise, finding words that match the subject adds to the "all-but-seen" quality of the description. The language chosen to describe the matter at hand should be proper to

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[11] The description of Eurybates was a stock example in several of the handbooks.

[12] Douglas J. Stewart, "Ekphrasis: A Friendly Conversation," *Arion* 5 (1966), 554.

the matter: scary things should be described with scary language, colorful things in colorful

language, etc. (a point we saw Theon himself illustrate above with the adjective

περιηγηματικός). The key point remains the goal of making what is described virtually

visible to the audience. With Theon, then, the key to ekphrasis is not its subject matter

(works of art), but what kind of language it is and what it does to the audience.

In the second or third century CE (Ps-)Hermogenes added to Theon's definition,

"through hearing the expression should effect nearly-seeing (διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς σχεδὸν τὴν

ὄψιν μηχανᾶσθαι)" ([Hermogenes], *Progymn.* 10.6 [Kennedy]). To what extent does

Hermogenes mean this literally? What does he (and Libanius in the epigraph) mean by

hearing producing sight or almost seeing? And what does Theon mean that ekphrasis

should effect "nearly-seeing" what is described? For these rhetoricians this effect seems to

be the property of the key term *enargeia* (ἐνάργεια).[13] A closer look at this term, and the

related notion of *phantasia*, helps us to understand the intended rhetorical effect of ekphrasis.

In his discussion of Lysias's style, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (late first century BCE)

called the vividness (ἐνάργεια) of Lysias's writing a certain power (δύναμίς τις) to bring

what is spoken before the senses (ὑπὸ τὰς αἰσθήσεις) (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Lys.*

7).[14] As Graham Zanker comments, Dionysius understands *enargeia* as the power of

descriptive speech to turn the listener into an eyewitness (ὁρῶν): "he will inevitably see the

events Lysias depicts, and, as it were, feel in the presence of the characters he presents."[15]

Zanker produces an impressive array of texts that bear on the rhetorical function of *enargeia*,

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[13] Nicolaus (*Progymn.* 68-69) says ekphrasis differs from narrative (διήγησις) precisely because of its *enargeia*.

[14] Cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.3.64-5; Graham Zanker, "Enargeia in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 124 (1981): 297-311.

[15] Zanker, "Enargeia," 297.

including both Greek and Latin sources.[16] Although *descriptio* eventually became the Latin

term of choice, a number of Latin terms substituted for *enargeia*. In the *Rhetoric to Herennius*

(early first century BCE), *demonstratio* takes the place of the Greek term: "Demonstration is

when things are expressed in words such that the affair is conducted and the things are seen

before the eyes (*Demonstratio est cum ita verbis res exprimitur ut geri negotium et res ante oculos esse*

videatur)" (*Rhet. Her.* 4.55.68 [Caplan, LCL]). Zanker examines passages also from Cicero and

Quintilian, and rightly concludes that *enargeia* named the rhetorical effect of nearly seeing

what is described. *Enargeia* is one of the prime virtues of ekphrasis because it is that

property by which words transform into images for the audience. Without vividness

(*enargeia*), ekphrasis might be descriptive but it will ultimately fail in its goal to bring what is

described "before the eyes" of the audience.

We might still wonder how the ancient orators thought these images came "before

the eyes" of their audiences, and to what end? Quintilian identifies the mechanism by which

verbal images are "seen" with the mind as *phantasia* (φαντασία), which he renders in the

Latin as *visio* (Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.2.29). *Phantasiai/visiones* are those properties "by which

images of absent things are represented to the mind such that we seem to perceive them

with our eyes and to have them present (*per quas imagines rerum absentium ita repraesentantur*

animo, ut eas cernere oculis ac praesentes habere videamur) (Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.2.29 [Russell, LCL]).

As Quintilian sees it, *phantasiai/visiones* are the building blocks for the capacity to represent in

the mind—to imagine—things not literally present in such a way that they seem almost

present. With Quintilian (as with Theon, actually) a good example of this is the description

of a murder, which makes the events "come to life." In describing the murder vividly, he

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[16] For an overview of the most important ancient authors on *enargeia*, with discussion, see Nina Otto,
Enargeia: Untersuchung der Charakteristik alexandrinischer Dichtung (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2009).

says, the orator *shows* what happened, rather than simply *tells* what happened (Quintilian, *Inst.*
6.2.32: …*quae non tam dicere videtur quam ostendere*).

Quintilian adds to our discussion here with one word—*animo*; *phantasia* presents
images "to the mind." This situation is not so different from the way *phantasia* was
understood among the ancient philosophers. At least since Plato, *phantasia* was considered
an intermediary between perception (αἴσθησις) and judgment (δόξα) (Plato, *Theaet.* 151e-
152c; 158e-160e; 163a-165e). Aristotle placed *phantasia* between perception (αἴσθησις) and
thought (νόησις) (Aristotle, *De an.* 427b-429a). But the term took on more importance
under the influence of the Stoics. *Phantasia* and *aisthēsis* stand at the beginning of Stoic
philosophies of concepts and cognition. The Stoic goal of life and philosophy was to live
according to reason (λόγος) and nature (φύσις), and it was therefore essential that the sage
be able to discern true from false. Dialectic training was the means by which the sage
learned to so discriminate truth from falsity.

For the Stoics, *phantasia* stands at the beginning of the chain of reasoning, from
sense-perceptions to wisdom. The Middle Platonist Antiochus of Ascalon (as preserved by
Cicero) gives us a concise prospectus of the Stoic system:

> For the mind itself, which is the source of the senses, and even itself a sense,
> has a natural force which it directs to the things by which it is moved.
> Accordingly, some sense-presentations [*visa*] it seizes on so as to make use of
> them at once, others it as it were stores away, these being the source of
> Memory, while all the rest it builds into systems by reason of their mutual
> resemblances, and from these are formed the concepts of objects which the
> Greeks term ἐννοίας and sometimes προλήψεις. When thereto there has
> been added Reason [*ratio*] and syllogistic argumentation and an innumerable
> multitude of facts, there comes cognitive perception [*perceptio*] of all these
> things, and thus this same Reason, having been by these stages made

complete [*perfecta*], finally attains to Wisdom [*sapientia*]. (Cicero, *Acad. post.* 30 [after Rackham, LCL])[17]

This process is one of *dialectic* (Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. phil.* 7.46-48; Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.1). While properly classified under logic, dialectic formed the sage in the ability to discern true from false and thus undergirded ethics as well. Dialectic, in short, is the training of one's power of perception (αἴσθησις, *perceptio*) to discriminate between true and false appearances (*phantasiai*, *visa*). That means *phantasia* is the basis of knowledge, as Diocles of Magnesia's epitome says: "*Phantasia* comes first, then thought able to express itself and affected by *phantasia* puts the *phantasia* into a proposition" (Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. phil.* 7.49). *Phantasia* is the first moment of perception. Diocles says "the criterion by which the truth is discerned (κριτήριον ᾧ ἡ ἀλήθεια τῶν πραγμάτων γινώσκεται)" is of the genus *phantasia* (Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. phil.* 7.49). It is important that Diocles does not say *phantasia* itself is the criterion by which truth is discerned, since it is only the correct *discernment* of *phantasai* that leads to truth. Without the training of dialectic the sage will be unprepared for such discernment. For one will be turned "into disorderliness and utter carelessness," as Diogenes of Laertius puts it, "having his impressions untrained [ἀγυμνάστους τὰς φαντασίας]" (Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. phil.* 7.48). The art of truly perceiving reality required training.

The *phantasia* is not an immaterial appearance, though. The idea is that the object impresses itself upon the mind or soul, like a seal in wax.[18] The work of reason is to discern

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[17] See also the discussion of this passage in John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Rev. ed.; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 67.

[18] For further analysis of the complex ways this was construed, see Anna-Maria Ioppolo, "Presentation and Assent: A Physical and Cognitive Problem in Early Stoicism," *The Classical Quarterly*, n.s. 40 (1990): 433-49.

the quality of that impression. Diogenes Laertius's epitome, in his book on Zeno, is worth quoting at length:

> *Phantasia* is an imprint on the soul, the name having been appropriately borrowed from the imprint made by the seal upon wax. There are two kinds of *phantasia*—apprehending [καταληπτική] and non-apprehending [ἀκατάληπτος]. The apprehending *phantasia*—which they say is the criterion of reality [κριτήριον τῶν πραγμάτων]—is that which comes from something really existing [ὑπάρχοντος], corresponds with that reality, and is sealed and stamped on the mind. The non-apprehending *phantasia* is that which does not come from something really existing, or if it does come from something that really exists, it does not correspond with that reality, being neither clear nor distinct. (Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. phil.*, 7.45-6 [after Hicks, LCL])

A *phantasia* is an impression—one gets the impression the Stoics meant a literal impression—of an external appearance on the mind or soul. Unlike their Epicurean counterparts, however, the Stoics recognized the possibility of false impressions. The sage must *assent* to true impressions and *reject* false impressions. "Perception is rightly treated by the Stoics as a form of judgement," writes A. A. Long: "in assenting to the impression we are admitting that our sense-experience corresponds to some expressible fact."[19] When the assent to the impression is understood as truth it is said to be "grasped" (κατάληψις). Sense-perceptions needed to be evaluated and discriminated; not everything that seems bad or painful actually is, but may become so through false assent.[20]

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[19] A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 126; see further 123-31.

[20] Cf. Epictetus, *Ench.* 1.5: εὐθὺς οὖν πάσῃ φαντασίᾳ τραχείᾳ μελέτα ἐπιλέγειν ὅτι φαντασία εἶ καὶ οὐ πάντως τὸ φαινόμενον. ἔπειτα ἐξέταζε αὐτὴν καὶ δοκίμαζε τοῖς κανόσι τούτοις οἷς ἔχεις, πρώτῳ δὲ τούτῳ καὶ μάλιστα, πότερον περὶ τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἐστιν ἢ περὶ τὰ οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν· κἄνπερί τι τῶν οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ᾖ, πρόχειρον ἔστω τὸ διότι οὐδὲν πρὸς ἐμέ.

"Practice, then, from the start to say to every harsh impression [φαντασίᾳ τραχείᾳ], 'You are an impression, and not at all the thing you appear to be.' Then examine it and test it by these rules which you have, and firstly, and chiefly, by this: whether the impression has to do with the things which are up to us, or those which are not; and, if it has to do with the things that are not up to us, be ready to reply, 'It is nothing to me'" (trans. Robin Hard in Christopher Gill, ed., *The Discourses of Epictetus* [London: J. M. Dent, 1995]).

As in the philosophical discussion, so also with Quintilian: *phantasia* denotes an impression on the mind or soul. Lest we miss the ocularcentric values in play, let me hasten to add that the proper analogue to the impression of *phantasia* is *visual*. The root of the Greek term *phantasia* (φαίνω) and Quintilian's and Cicero's Latin gloss (*visio*) both point to the primacy of vision, rather than audition or any other sense. Quintilian praises the virtue of being able to make a subject matter nearly visible, explaining that speech is ineffective if it only reaches the ears (*si usque ad aures valet*) and is not furthermore stretched out before the eyes of the mind (*oculis mentis ostendi*) (Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.3.62). When Quintilian thus refers to the "eyes of the mind" he means the phrase quasi-literally. The *phantasia*—which is produced through the vividness (*enargeia*) of the description (*ekphrasis*)—impresses itself upon the mind, making that which is described *present* to the mind. But the depiction itself was inscribed on the mind: the words produced a *phantasia* which was actually *impressed* on the mind.

The task of the orator, when engaged in ekphrasis, was to conjur *phantasiai* for his audience and convey them in verbal medium. Longinus, a near contemporary of Quintilian, discusses *phantasia* at some length.[21] Longinus claims to be drawing on a popular understanding of the term when he uses it to name occasions when "by enthusiasm and emotion you seem to see those things which you speak and place them under the eyes of your auditors (ὅταν ἃ λέγεις ὑπ' ἐνθουσιασμοῦ καὶ πάθους βλέπειν δοκῇς καὶ ὑπ' ὄψιν τιθῇς τοῖς ἀκούουσιν)" ([Longinus], *Subl.*, 15.2 [Russell]). The use of the second

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[21] I am accepting the scholarly consensus that "Longinus," whoever he was, should not be confused with Cassius Longinus (ca. 213-ca. 273 CE), but was probably a rhetor of the first century CE. Sufficient reason can be found in D. A. Russell's discussion: D. A. Russell, ed. and trans., *"Longinus" On the Sublime* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964). Malcolm Heath is again the dissenting voice, arguing that the attribution to Cassius Longinus is correct: Malcolm Heath, "Longinus *On Sublimity*," *PCPhS* 45 (1999): 43-74.

person here is important, as Longinus is addressing the orator. Sublimity (τὰ ὕψη) is, according to Longinus, "a summit and certain eminence of words (ἀκρότης καὶ ἐξοχή τις λόγων)" ([Longinus], *Subl.* 1.3). When Longinus thus says "you seem to see (βλέπειν δοξῆς)," he means the orator seems to see. Only when the orator can visualize what it is he wants to depict can he bring it vividly before the sight of the audience. Quintilian knows of some who call an orator particularly skilled in imagining to themselves various things, words, and actions εὐφαντασίωτος (Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.2.30).

Longinus's and Quintilian's discussion of *phantasia* sounds very similar to Hans Belting's analysis of images discussed in Chapter 3. Visual images can be carried via the medium of the mind. They can be conveyed in language, and perhaps even turned back into material images by someone who has received them. Ekphrasis was a conveyance of images from the orator to the audience, then. But to what end?

The Uses of Ekphrasis

Ekphrasis, it seems, had at least three uses, and they are not mutually exclusive. The first use must be inferred from the above analysis of *phantasia*. There is a sense in which ekphrasis was thought to make something present. The cognitive event of a *phantasia* was for the Stoics a *physical* event. As Anna-Maria Ioppolo puts it, "Presentation [*Phantasia*] is for Zeno, in fact, almost a blow from the outside."[22] That which is depicted is thus made, in a sense, *physically present* to the soul or mind. Such a device might be quite useful for the presentation of "non-obvious beings."[23] Verity Platt has argued that epiphanies

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[22] Ioppolo, "Presentation," 434.
[23] Walter Burkert employed this phrase to discuss the gods and other beings thought to populate the universe, but which are not normally observable. This designation is also used by Russell McCutcheon and

(manifestations of gods in dreams, cult images, and the like) fulfilled a very important function in the context of Graeco-Roman religion. Platt posits anxiety (cognitive dissonance) over the reliability of beliefs and religious practices regarding the gods in the face of difficulties in observing the gods. Epiphanies offered "cognitive reliability" for these non-obvious beings, or rather for their cults: "[E]piphany provided the deus ex machina by which anthropomorphic tradition might be verified, whether through the visionary inspiration of the artist, or the subsequent appearance of gods in the forms of their images."[24] For Platt, epiphanies were (experiences of) presentations of the gods, which confirmed the representations of cult images and the cultic and cultural practices which attended the gods. But cult images, ekphrastic epigrams, hymns, and dreams also made the gods present in their representations of them, and thus prepared the inculturated viewer, auditor, singer, or dreamer for epiphanic experience.

The ekphrases of an orator could fill a similar position. The vivid presentation of what the orator depicted hinted at its reality; ekphrasis could serve as a validation of a non-obvious being by gesturing toward the reality of what was described. But the gap between the representation and the reality still existed, and the link between them depended on the complex intersection of the vividness of the description, visual-cultural expectations, and the reliability (*ethos*) of the orator. In Plato's *Sophist* the Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus decide the sophist's expertice is in making images (εἰδωλοποιεῖν) (Plato, *Soph.* 240a). Plutarch likens

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Shirley Guthrie (among many others), but Stan Stowers's emendation of it to "not normally observable beings" is perhaps more accurate, as Ross Kraemer also notes. See Stanley K. Stowers, "Theorizing the Religion of Ancient Households and Families," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (ed. John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 5-19, esp. 8-9; and Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religoin, Gender, and Hisotry in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 23.

[24] Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 226.

this highly prized skill in historians to the painter's art (Plutarch, *Glor. Ath.* 347a).[25]

Tellingly, Longinus gives the name *phantasia* to what others call "image-making"

(εἰδωλοποιεῖν) ([Longinus], *Subl.* 15.1).

But these images were not purely contrived. The images on which the orator might

draw arose from the memory, and memory was based on the *phantasiai* one had experienced.

Alcinous (2d c. CE) puts it well:

> Whenever, in the case of perception, an impression occurs in the soul
> through the medium of the sense-organs, which is what sensation consists in,
> and this impression does not subsequently fade away through passage of
> time, but remains and is preserved, such a preservation is termed memory.
> (Alcinous, *Intr.* 4.4 [Dillon])

In Greco-Roman antiquity the conception of memory as a "gallery of mental images" was

widespread.[26] Articulated best by Aristotle, this notion of memory as a kind of store-house

of images was employed also by the rhetoricians. The *Rhetoric to Herennius*, for instance,

recommends that if one is describing a dying man and does not know this person, the orator

should nevertheless imagine someone he knows, to make the description more vivid (*Rhet.

Her.* 3.20.33). For the orator, memory served as a storehouse of images which could be

summoned as *phantasiai* and rhetorically deployed. The orator's ekphrasis was not an

artificial representation, but the communication of his own *phantasia* to his audience.

A second identifiable use of ekphrasis is *testimony*. If the orator has accomplished the

communication of his *phantasia* to his audience his authority and the reality of that which he

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[25] Simon Goldhill may go a bit too far when he suggests Plutarch identifies εἰδωλοποιεῖν as the shared goal of painters and writers. Plutarch does not actually say that both the painter and the writer engage in *eidōlopoiēsis*; he claims that both the painter and the writer have the same goal (*telos*), and he identifies the most powerful historians as those who are able by various means to make images (εἰδωλοποιήσας), which the painter presumably does anyway. The shared goal may be *enargeia* (though Plutarch does not say that directly, either), or bringing a subject before the eyes, but in this passage at least Plutarch is explaining the art of historical writing in an analogy with painting. This is a squabble, of course, and the rest of Goldhill's discussion is very helpful: Simon Goldhill, "What is Ekphrasis For?," *Classical Philology* 102:1 (2007) 1-19, esp. 5-6.

[26] The phrase is from Webb, *Ekphrasis*, 111-13.

describes gains credibility. This function of ekphrasis is a particularly salient example of how Aristotelian rhetorical theory is not always able adequately to describe its subject. If my analysis of the mechanics of ekphrastic persuasion is correct, then a successful *phantasia* can be seen as simultaneously grounded in an external proof (since the *phantasia* impresses upon the mind from outside) and internal, since the proof of the *phantasia* is contained in the *kataleptic* (or *enargeic*) quality of the *phantasia* itself. The artistic proof is thus not exactly *ethos*, nor *logos*, nor yet *pathos*, but a "real" quality that attends the vividness of the *phantasia*. At the same time, the perception of reality created by the vividness of the impression contributes to the *ethos* of the orator. The "logic" (if we can so name it) is circular. The orator conjures a particularly vivid *phantasia*, which he then communicates to his audience. The audience receives the *phantasia* and grasps the reality of what is described according to the success of the orator's vivid depiction. But because the vividness of the depiction lends credibility to the reality of that which is depicted, the orator is esteemed as a trustworthy witness.

The first and second functions of ekphrasis cooperate, and they are influenced by the visual world. The *phantasia* of the orator gains plausibility if it resembles other known phenomena. An orator who described Zeus according to Phidias's visual representation was likely to make a stronger impression on an inculturated Hellenistic audience than one who described Zeus with twelve arms or hurling rice instead of thunderbolts. As Platt's argument advises, the relationship of gods to their images was not completely free. At the same time, if the vividness of the depiction and the circumstances of the appearance of a twelve-armed Zeus seemed plausible enough, the skilled orator stood a good chance of making that Zeus *present*, and thus the description itself would stand as evidence for the twelve-armed, rice-hurling Zeus. Of course, in order to make such an improbable ekphrasis successful, the

orator would need to overcome the previous experience and common sense of his or her

audience, the storehouse of their memories. This is the third possible function of an

ekphrasis, as described by Simon Goldhill—the rhetorical conquest of an audience.

Goldhill calls the "visualization" (*phantasia*) of ekphrasis "a rhetorical weapon to get

around the censor of the intellect, to cut the listener off from the facts, to leave him not just

'as if a viewer at events,' but with the destabilizing emotions of that event."[27] Ekphrasis is

thus a violent rhetorical weapon (not "tool," note), the goal of which is to overcome an

audience—to "dupe" the reader. Goldhill's assessment rather cynically colors a

fundamentally correct analysis. Ekphrasis could be used to amaze the audience, to elicit

emotions and thereby persuade—and *move*—an audience in ways that straight reasoning

could not. In Aristotle's terms, we might say ekphrasis could use *pathos* to fill in the gaps of

logos, and this is the third use of the device.

Goldhill's evidence comes primarily from Longinus and Plutarch. In *On Sublimity*

Longinus says *phantasia* has the power to "enslave" auditors, especially when used in relation

to factual matters (as opposed to poetic, mythological matters) ([Longinus], *Subl.* 15.9).

Goldhill sees "danger" in this power, pointing to Longinus's claim that when *phantasia* is so

used "we are diverted from the demonstration to the astonishment caused by the

visualization, which by its very brilliance conceals the factual aspect," but I seriously doubt

Longinus thought this power dangerous so much as *effective* ([Longinus], *Subl.* 15.11

[Russell]).[28] Longinus says *phantasia* draws the audience away from apodeictic reasoning

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[27] Goldhill, "What is Ekphrasis For?," 6.

[28] Cf. Goldhill, "What is Ekphrasis For?," 4. Goldhill takes this passage as a warning that *phantasia* has the power to distract the intellect and persuade the hearer through amazement (ἔκπληξις), thus *overriding* reason altogether. D. A. Russell's (generally excellent and lively) translation, on which Goldhill relies heavily, encourages this reading (Russell, *Longinus*; D. A. Russell and Michael Winterbottom, eds. and trans., *Classical*

(ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀποδεικτικοῦ) to amazement (τὸ κατὰ φαντασίαν ἐκπληκτικόν). Goldhill thinks this amazement (ἔκπληξις) overrides reasoning, but such a judgment is hasty. After all, just prior to this passage Longinus writes, "In an orator's visualizations…it is the element of fact and truth which makes for success" (Longinus, [*Subl.*] 15.8 [Russell]). Longinus thinks visualization makes for success, especially when linked with an element of fact and truth. Verisimiltude makes *phantasia* successful, because the closer to reality the *phantasia* comes the more believable and spell-binding it becomes.

In his essay on the fame of the Athenians, Plutarch mentions the excellence of Thucydides at *enargeia*. Thucydides, he says, "is desperately keen to make the listener a viewer and to produce in those who read about events the vivid emotions of amazement and confusion [ἐπληκτικὰ καὶ ταρακτικὰ πάθη] that were experienced by those who saw them" (Plutarch, *Glor. Ath.* 347a). Again, I think ascribing to Thucydides the intent of circumventing the reader's reason through emotions is a rash judgment.[29] Even if the claim is that this is Plutarch's interpretation of Thucydides (and Goldhill rightly points out Thucydides is often cited in rhetorical handbooks for examples of ekphrasis), the point Plutarch makes is not that Thucydides aims to override reason; rather, his goal is to make his audience *spectators* of the event itself insofar as he can (οἷον θεατὴν ποιῆσαι τὸν ἀκροατήν). Certainly, the eliciting of terrifying or amazing and disturbing passions would have been frowned upon by the Stoics, who aimed at lack of disturbance (ἀταραξία). But for practitioners of rhetoric effecting empathy was an incredibly useful tool, since it brought

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Literary Criticism [Oxford World's Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989], 162). But this translation already skews the Greek a little: ὅθεν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀποδεικτικοῦ περιελκόμεθα εἰς τὸ κατὰ φαντασίαν ἐκπληκτικόν, ᾧ τὸ πραγματικὸν ἐγκρύπτεται περιλαμπόμενον. There is no mention here of overriding λόγος or the ἡγεμονικόν or any other similar ancient term that would have denoted "reason."

[29] So, Goldhill, "What is Ekphrasis For?," 5-6: "This is not the objective and cold Thucydides, but Thucydides the rhetorician, blinding the reader with his science, leading the reader away from analysis into passion and confusion."

the subject matter vividly to the attention of the audience and involved them personally.

Playing to emotions was a fully legitimate staple of rhetorical theory (e.g. Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.2.8-36).[30]

Ekphrasis, then, could have at least three related uses, depending on the goals of the orator. If the orator wanted to confirm the beliefs of his audience, he might engage in epideictic oratory, and his ekphrasis would serve to "make present" that which he wanted to confirm. This function of ekphrasis is clearest in a religious or theological mode—virtually making present non-obvious beings. If, instead, the orator wanted to persuade his audience of some truth—*introducing* non-obvious beings, for instance, or validating some truth or story—his oratory might resemble a forensic speech, and his ekphrasis could serve as testimony. By making the audience itself feel as though they were eyewitnesses of the events or truth in question, the orator created a sense of his own reliability (*ethos*). The verisimilitude of the vividly drawn scene contributed to the persuasiveness of the orator. Finally, in so making his audience virtually eyewitnesses, he might also draw them emotionally into the scene, eliciting certain passions within his audience to fascinate them (*pathos*). In their deliberation over the theme of the orator, emotion might outbalance reason, or contribute to it, so that the audience was both captivated and moved to agree with the orator. Presence, testimony, and pathos. These were three identifiable functions of ekphrasis in the oratorical arts in and around the first century CE.

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[30] Cf. Jakob Wisse, *Ethos and Pathos: From Aristotle to Cicero* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1989).

Chapter 9. John's Apocalypse as Ekphrasis

"*Ekphrasis*, a vivid portrayal of a scene," as George Kennedy, the reigning authority

on ancient rhetoric noted in 1984, "well describes some of the visions in the Apocalypse."[1]

Very little research on the book of Revelation follows up on Kennedy's intution. We have

(in Chapter 7) somewhat discussed Aune's argument that John's description of the Great

Whore in Revelation 17 is an ekphrasis; Robert Royalty also identifies Revelation 4-5 and 17-

18 as ekphrases.[2] But neither really explores the full scope of what such an identification

might mean. Why would it matter if the throne-room scene, the description of the Great

Whore, or any other of John's images were (or could be analyzed as) ekphrases? This final

chapter applies the category ekphrasis somewhat more broadly to John's images than

previous scholars, and it concludes that John's goals in using such imagery were the same

goals as ancient ekphrasis: to evoke pathos, enhance ethos, and most importantly to make

the divine world and its machinations virtually present for his audience.

John as εὐφαντασίωτος: *A Concise Catalog of John's Images*

One of the flaws in Aune's interpretation of Revelation 17 as an ekphrasis is that he

assumed the object for an ekphrasis was fundamentally a work of art. While Aune is

certainly correct that the vision of Revelation 17 is static, relative to its interpretation anyway,

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[1] George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 23.

[2] Robert Royalty does describe the scenes of Revelation 4-5 and Revelation 17-18 as ekphrases, but these are little more than passing references that do not examine very closely what it means to describe these passages precisely *as ekphrases*. See Robert M. Royalty, Jr., *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998), esp. 177-79.

he wrongly assumed that that fact necessarily meant John's image referred to a work of art.[3]

John could just as easily have been describing, well, a vision—a φάντασμα or a

φαντασία—and such a vision need not be static. Some of John's images, like Revelation 17,

are fairly static. Others, like the reaping of the earth (Rev 14:14-20) or the cosmic battle in

which the book climaxes (Rev 19:17-21), are clearly events, but no less vivid than the static

scenes. The images of blood as high as a horse's bridle (Rev 14:20) or birds gorging

themselves on the flesh of the vanquished (Rev 19:21) are strikingly vivid. These are images

that are brought "nearly before the sight" of modern readers. It is difficult to imagine they

would not also have so struck ancient auditors.

In fact, all of our ancient accounts of the book of Revelation attest to just how

jarring John's images were—how they impressed themselves upon their ancient readers.

Dionysius of Alexandria (d. 264 CE) not only thought the book full of barbarisms and

solecisms, but he suspected behind the troublesome language some more fundamental

rationality: "For even though I do not understand it, yet I suspect that some deeper

meaning [νοῦς] underlies the words." He was aware of those who called the book

unintelligible (ἄγνωστον), but he disagreed. "Assigning to faith the greater value,"

Dionysius instead confessed, "I have come to the conclusion that [these things] are too high

for my comprehension, and I do not reject what I have not understood, but I rather wonder

that I did not indeed see them" (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.4-5). Origen (ca. 185-ca. 254 CE)

wrote, "And who, on reading the revelations made to John, could fail to be amazed at the

deep obscurity of the unspeakable mysteries contained therein, which are evident even to

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[3] Aune (*Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 244-45) does acknowledge that at least among the ancient handbooks, works of art were not the only objects of ekphrasis.

him who does not understand what is written?" (Origen, *Princ.* 4.2.3 [Butterworth]). Andrew

of Caesarea (563-637 CE) was deeply indebted to Origen's polyvalent and allegorical way of

reading Scripture. He saw the book of Revelation as an essentially spiritual book:

> The third part [of Scripture], that is to say, the spiritual part, is found to be
> especially abundant in the Apocalypse of the Theological Man; on the one
> hand, lavishly seen with historical form and figurative speech in the other
> prophets, whereas, on the other hand here, in the Apocalypse, the spiritual
> part is especially seen in abundance since it has been ordered by God to be
> proclaimed to those who are more perfect in knowledge. Therefore, even
> though we ourselves do not understand the entire depth of the hidden spirit
> within it, we too will elucidate what was seen by the blessed one. (Andrew of
> Caesarea, *Comm.* proem. [Scarvelis Constantinou])

What can it be that makes these mysteries unspeakable, but that they are presented not as

propositions or narratives, but in pictures, in images?

Nerses of Lambron (1153-1198 CE), the translator and interpreter of Andrew for

Armenian Christianity, explained what sort of thing the Apocalypse is, arguably bringing this

tradition of Apocalypse interpretation to its culmination: "We understand it not as a vision

visible to the eyes or as an appearance of dreamlike fancies, but as an imprint of the

revelation formed by spiritual appearance before the sight of the inner man." He continued:

> So if the narration of this book includes corporeal apparitions, forms of
> beasts, varieties of colours of precious stones, let it not astonish the hearers.
> …In this regard the reports of the prophets seem not at all unbelievable to
> us, but we know that the revelation of the mysteries is to liken them to bodily
> form; according to this model one must teach here also. Furthermore, the
> quality of hues and colours is incorporeal, although they are found imprinted
> on bodies. So when we hear of precious stones taking on the names of
> various colours, we are to understand incorporeal qualities, and not that there
> are tangible substances in heaven; for tangible things are all images of the
> spiritual.[4]

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[4] Nerses of Lambron, *Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (trans. Robert W. Thomson; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 40-1.

Nerses, even more forcefully than Andrew, made the connection between the images (mysteries likened to bodily form) and spiritual realities. It is the bodily forms that are most striking, even if they only point to spiritual mysteries.

A large swath of Apocalypse interpretation in the West is found in artistic depictions of the images of the book. The earliest depictions were representations of images, particularly from the scene of the divine throne-room in Revelation 4-5 (the Lamb, the four living creatures as the four Evangelists) in church decoration.[5] The reasons the iconography of the Apocalypse made it into church architecture are fairly obvious: they establish the space of the church as sacred space and mark it as heavenly space. But the images of the Apocalypse have exercised the imaginations and creations of artists of in the West, from Albrecht Dürer to William Blake to Gustave Doré to Jean Lurçat. The images have long been the element of the book that fascinate those who read the book or hear it read aloud. John's images may not have been elegant; they may not all have been pleasant, but they were certainly vivid, and they left their mark on the book's audiences. John, it seems, had a good grasp of *enargeia* (vividness).

Enargeia as we saw in the chapter above was a function in antiquity of the ability to grasp and convey *phantasiai*. These impressions, which came before the "eyes of the mind," were the means of vivid description, or ekphrasis. One of the final tasks remaining in this study is to examine John's "word of prophecy" and to pull out those passages that resemble ekphrases, before suggesting the possible intent behind and reception of this imagistic book. The following catalog with remarks must remain concise, as a full iconological treatment

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[5] An excellent overview of this early history is found in John Herrmann and Annewies van den Hoek, "Apocalyptic Themes in the Monumental and Minor Art of Early Christianity," in *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (ed. Robert J. Daly; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2009), 33-80.

would require a rather full commentary.[6] But this concise sampling is, I think, representative

of the whole book. Since, as the rhetorical handbooks affirm, ekphrases can be of persons,

places, events, or periods of times, I hasten to point out that the catalog includes

descriptions of persons, places, and events, at least. Periods of time are also described in the

book, but in somewhat less vivid manner (e.g. Rev 11:2-3; 12:14). That said, the enire book

is cast as a description of "the things which must soon transpire" (1:1).

1. Showing Christ: Revelation 1:13-16

The opening Christophany of the book (Rev 1:13-16) is the first vision John receives.

John tells us he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day when he heard a voice commanding him

to write to the churches of the seven cities. When John turned to see the voice, he instead

saw seven lampstands.

> And in the midst of the seven lampstands I saw one like a Son of Man,
> clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head
> and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a
> flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and
> his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven
> stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was
> like the sun shining with full force. (Rev 1:13-16)

Christ is here portrayed as a celestial figure like those of Daniel 7 and 10. As Aune points

out, the anarthrous υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου of Revelation 1:13 does not mirror the use of the term

in the Synoptic accounts, where the title usually includes the definite article.[7] Instead, the

phrase probably refers to Daniel 7:13 (כבר אנש) or 10:16 (כדמות בני אדם).

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[6] A project to which I hope to return in the future.

[7] David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (Dallas: Word, 1997), 90.

Certainly, John alludes to Daniel 7:13 just before this vision. In 1:7 he writes, "Look!

He is coming with the clouds…" (Dan 7:13: "one like a son of man [υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, LXX]

coming with the clouds of heaven"). The description of the christophany owes more to

Daniel 10, however. There Daniel reports he was standing on the banks of the Tigris, when

he looked up and saw "a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his

waist. His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms

and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a

multitude" (Dan 10:5-7). The appearance of Christ's hair resembles the description of the

Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9, and his voice like many waters (ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν)

has a close verbal parallel in Ezekiel 1:24 (LXX; ὡς φωνὴν ὕδατος πολλοῦ), but the rest of

the features bear closer resemblance to the one described in Daniel 10. A comparison of the

LXX of the latter with Revelation 1:13-16 reveals close parallels:

> Revelation 1:13-16:
> καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη
> καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσᾶν. ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ
> αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκόν ὡς χιὼν καὶ οἱ
> ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλὸξ πυρὸς καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι
> χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ
> ὑδάτων πολλῶν, καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ καὶ
> ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ρομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη καὶ ἡ
> ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.

> Daniel 10:5-6:
> καὶ ἦρα τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς μου καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος εἷς
> ἐνδεδυμένος βύσσινα καὶ τὴν ὀσφὺν περιεζωσμένος βυσσίνῳ, καὶ ἐκ
> μέσου αὐτοῦ φῶς. καὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ θαρσις, καὶ τὸ
> πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ὅρασις ἀστραπῆς, καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ
> λαμπάδες πυρός καὶ οἱ βραχίονες αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ πόδες ὡσεὶ χαλκὸς
> ἐξαστράπτων καὶ φωνὴ λαλιᾶς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ φωνὴ θορύβου.

John has clearly drawn on Daniel 7 and 10 and Ezekiel 1. But the recognition of John's

sources does not actually tell us much about what John is up to here. Certainly he robes

Christ in the garments of a celestial figure, with features even of the Ancient of Days, but it is a composite image drawn from several sources.[8] Moreover, the seven stars in the hand of Christ and the double-edged sword issuing from his mouth are unparalleled in John's literary sources.[9] He does not simply equate Christ with the "one like a son of man" in Daniel 7 or the figure in Daniel 10 by describing them identically or more nearly so, as he almost certainly could have done, given the very close verbal parallels with his sources. Why not?

John's description of Christ does not just serve a theological purpose—to provide Christ with a "high" or vice-regal Christology, which could have been effected more easily by direct equation—but also a rhetorical purpose. Elements of the description appear again in the prescripts to the letters to the seven churches. The prescript of the letter to Ephesus references the seven stars in his hands and the seven lampstands in the midst of which he appears (Rev 2:1), and the seven stars reappear in the prescript of the letter to Smyra (3:1). The two-edged sword appears again in the prescript of the letter to Pergamum (2:12). The eyes like a flame of fire and the bronze feet show up in the prescript of the letter to Thyatira (2:18). The last two letters no longer look back, but forward to the open door of Revelation 4:1. The prescript of the letter to Philadelphia (3:7), for instance, identifies Christ as the one with the key of David, "who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens." Vivid elements of the description of Christ from Revelation 1:13-16 extend out into the letters. This may have been a mnemonic device.

David Barr recognized nearly three decades ago that John's "placing" of images could be a mnemonic device:

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[8] In the marginalia for the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, parallels or allusions to the christophany are suggested from *Joseph and Aseneth*, Daniel, Ezekiel, *1 Enoch*, *Testament of Job*, and Judges.

[9] Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 43.

> The ancient rhetors taught their students to remember by using a combination of places and images: One first memorized a place so as to create numerous "pigeon-holes" into which appropriate images could be placed. These images then, recalled in the appropriate order, would assist one to remember the topics to which they referred.[10]

The techniques of the rhetors varied, actually.[11] A vivid image with several parts could also serve to spur memory. Since the elements of John's depiction of Christ recur, we might suspect just such a device operative in Revelation 1-3.

Another possibility is that John here presents an image that he can then "unpack" symbolically. Jaś Elsner has argued that two modes of viewing art in antiquity were predominant.[12] One mode, represented by Philostratus Major's *Imagines*, assumes that "the 'real world' which art imitates is the world of the beholders' physical and psychological experience—the world of our commonsense expectations."[13] The other mode, represented by Cebes (*Tabula of Cebes*), sought to look behind the work of art to a higher truth, beyond everyday reality. In the *Tabula* of Cebes, the narrator is perplexed by a curious image he and his friends came across in a temple of Cronus, until an old man comes along to explain the image to them. The image, it turns out, is a lesson about life and ultimate truth: the good life is to live virtuously. Elsner argues that both modes are invested in training viewers how to look upon works of art. With Philostratus, imitation is the key to the truth of art; with Cebes, allegorical interpretation is the rule. John likewise has his vision explained to him. The seven stars and lampstands are explained to him as emblems of the seven cities to which

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[10] David L. Barr, "The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment," *Interpretation* 40 (1986), 245. Of course, the memory techniques in the text would be less for the audience and more for the orator.

[11] Fine discussions of the ancient art of memory can be found in Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 1-49, and Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[12] Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 21-48.

[13] Elsner, *Art*, 47.

he is to write (1:20). The vision gives birth to the letters, and telescopes, as it were, to provide themes for the letters. The letters, in other words, are already latent in the vision itself. But the vision is also the precipitant for the letters. This way of looking at the vision is not exactly as an allegorical image, or as an image to be read allegorically; we would do better to call it a symbol, or a symbolic image.

In both of these scenarios—the vision as mnemonic device or as image that points to other, more transcendent truths—it is actually the novel elements (seven stars, double-edged sword), rather than the elements picked up from John's sources, that do the most work. The seven stars that represent the seven churches recur twice more in the prescripts of the letters. John has certainly drawn on prophetic texts for his imagery, but such imagery is an index, not the main point. The imagery may be an index for memory or an index for the messages of the letters. It may also be an index for the sense of divine presence. By drawing on theophoric texts like Daniel 7 and 10 and Ezekiel 1, John is able to conjur the trappings of divinity, but by presenting a composite portrait, the image of Christ strikes the reader/auditor not merely as a literary reference, but as a real vision. It conveys visionary verisimilitude (if not visionary *veritas*). John's *phantasia* of Christ is conveyed to his audiences and brought before the eyes of their minds. From the very beginning of the book, Christ is made virtually visible, and thus virtually present.

2. Divine Women: Revelation 12 and 17

We spent a great deal of Part II looking at the divine women of the book of Revelation: the Queen of Heaven figure of Revelation 12 and the Great Whore of Revelation 17. There I concluded that the description of the two figures may bear some

resemblance to the iconography of Artemis Ephesia or Cybele, though a genetic relationship cannot be proved. I also argued that the depiction of the woman of Revelation 12 does not draw on Domitianic iconography, and that the depiction of the Great Whore in Revelation 17 is not an ekphrasis of the Severan *Dea Roma* coin or of its hypothetical antecedent (*pace* Aune). These conclusions are unsatisfying, if only because they are negative conclusions. Are there positive counterparts to these conclusions?

If the depiction of the woman of Revelation 12 does not draw on Domitianic iconography, does it have any other discernible sources? It is common to posit a combat myth behind this scene.[14] In that context, the woman must appear as a Queen of Heaven.[15] But not all queens of heaven received helial, lunar, or astral associations. Moreover, it is difficult to determine how such a queen of heaven would fit into a combat myth. Adela Yarbro Collins has argued that the combat myth of Revelation 12 bears strong parallels with the Leto-Python myth, and thus is an adaptation of that myth. The depiction of the woman in 12:1, however, Yarbro Collins thinks resembles Isis. The result is an essentially Greek combat myth with an Egyptian goddess as the hero: "We concluded…that Revelation 12 reflects the pattern of the Leto myth, but in such a way that the goddess has been assimilated to the high-goddess Isis."[16] I am not aware of any evidence that would suggest Leto was ever so assimilated in Asia Minor. It is not impossible, of course, but that does not mean it was likely. Leto and Artemis Ephesia certainly shared more in common, and it might be more natural to assimilate Leto to her daughter. That connection only reminds us, however,

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[14] David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 667-74; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1976).

[15] Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 71-6. Cf. Franz Boll, *Aus der Offenbarung Johannis: Hellenistische Studien zum Weltbild der Apokalypse* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914), 98-117.

[16] Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 84.

that the antagonist in the dominant Leto myth in Asia Minor, owing to the cult of her

daughter at Ephesus, was not the serpent Python, but Hera.

In order to make the connection of the woman of Revelation 12 to a celestial queen

Yarbro Collins must overlook resonance with texts from the Jewish Scriptures, which might

personify Israel or Jerusalem as a (pregnant) woman.[17] Her own presentation of the

evidence in an endnote is fairly compelling.[18] She notes the personification of Israel as a

woman (Hos 1-3; Ezek 16, 23; Isa 54, 60, 62, 66; Mic 4:9-10), the sun and moon as personal

attributes (*T. Naph.* 5.3-4; Ps 103[104]:2), and the image of a woman in travail (Ps 48:6[7]; Isa

13:8; 21:3; 37:3; Jer 49:22; 50:43; *1 En.* 62:4), including Israel or Jerusalem as a woman in

travail (Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6; Mic 4:9-11). The difficulty is that none of the

Jewish verbal images is a very close parallel. G. K. Beale mounts an admirable case for

antecedents from Jewish literature, including those noted by Yarbro Collins, and also

Joseph's dreams from Genesis 37; Philo; *Testament of Abraham*; *Midrash Rabbah*; *Targum Neofiti*;

Sifre; *Pesikta de Rab Kahana*; *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*; and others.[19] The parallels Beale adduces all

depend, in my estimation, on the identification of the woman's crown of twelve stars with

the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Gen 37:9). This identification may indeed be correct as a

symbolic reference—the zodiac and the twelve tribes were not infrequently aligned in early

Judaism, a fact to which Beale himself alludes[20]—though John never actually defines the

symbolic content of this depiction. But perhaps, as with the opening christophany of the

book, John is offering a composite picture here, drawing on visual, mythological, and biblical

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[17] Cf. Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 71: "In spite of all the partial parallels from Old Testament figures of speech which can and have been collected, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the image portrayed in 12:1 is that of a high-goddess, a cosmic queen conceived in astral categories."

[18] Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 94, n. 61.

[19] G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 624-28.

[20] Beale, *Revelation*, 626-27.

antecedents. "It is…likely," writes Brian Blount, "that [John] has combined a great many themes from historical and mythical woman/mother images in Israel's and the church's past, present, and future and fashioned them thematically into a representation of the church's corporate existence."[21] In that case, again, John constructs or conveys a *phantasia* that is distinctive, no matter how many parallels can be adduced. If the depiction of the woman was composed from antecedent sources, then John has covered his tracks well, or at least confused them. Perhaps the image is simply what John saw (in a vision). The verisimilitude of a vision image would lend weight to John's authority as a prophet.

At any rate, the depiction of the woman is not truly the aim of Revelation 12; John's main purpose is not to describe the woman, but to describe the conflict between the woman and the dragon and the war to which the conflict gives rise. As we saw with Theon, the description of a war will entail describing what went before, what happened during, and what came after the war. John's narrative is likewise richly described. The fact that scholars seemingly instinctively look to iconographic sources for parallels to this figure attests to the vividness with which John has presented her. At the same time, the vividness of the scene again has the main goal of making the strife between woman and dragon nearly visible to John's audience. The details of the dragon's tail sweeping stars out of heaven (12:4), of him standing ready to devour (12:4), of the woman's initial flight into the wilderness (12:6), the dragon's pursuit (12:13), and the woman being given wings (12:14)—all these vividly narrate an event. The purpose behind such a move would undoubtedly be for John to make his audience truly feel as though they were part of the action, that behind everyday reality is another, spiritual reality in which a war is being waged. As with Elsner's interpretation of

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[21] Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 225.

Cebes, we can appreciate in this passage an attempt to describe a transcendent reality as opposed to apparent reality, though with John that transcendent reality is couched in mythological rather than philosophical language.

3. Here Be Dragons: Revelation 12:3-4, 13-18; 13:1-18; 9:7-10, 17-19

Actual reality might be more scary than apparent reality. A risk is involved in bringing the divine world too nearly into view, for it is—at least for John—a world filled with dangerous creatures, a "well-stocked apocalyptic menagerie," in which some are "good," some "evil."[22] We meet one such creature in the same story as the woman clothed in the sun: "a great red dragon [δράκων μέγας πυρρός], with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads" (Rev 12:3). Dragons (δράκοντες) were, in the Hellenized world, large snakes.[23] They were serpents, as Daniel Ogden's survey of dragons in the Greek and Roman worlds shows, some of which were simply serpents (e.g. Hydra, Python), some of which had serpentine parts (e.g. Typhon, anguipedal giants, Medusa, and Chimaera).[24] A healer like Asclepius was associated with and even sometimes identified as a δράκων.[25] Aune notes that red was in general a positive color for the Greeks, with apotropaic properties.[26] Together, these observations could suggest Asclepius, who had an extraordinarily famous healing shrine at Pergamum, could be the dragon in Revelation 12. In 12:9 the dragon is

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[22] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (3d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 510: "Revelation also has a well-stocked apocalyptic menagerie. On the one side there is the 'four living creatures' (4:6-8), the 'Lamb who was slain yet lives' (5:6), the four horses (6:1-8), the eagle (8:13; 12:14), locusts like cavalry (9:3-11), and the white horse (19:11-16). On the opposite side there is the red dragon (12:3; also known as the ancient serpent, cf. 12:9), a 'beast out of the sea' (13:1-2; this beast combines the qualities of leopard, bear, and lion), another 'beast out of the earth' (13:11), and the scarlet beast (17:3, 7-12)."

[23] Daniel Ogden, *Drakōn: Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2-4. That dragons were essentially snakes is also suggested by Revelation 12:9: ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος.

[24] Ogden, *Drakōn*, 26-115.

[25] Ogden, *Drakōn*, 310-46.

[26] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 683.

called the "Devil" and "Satan," and Pergamum is where "Satan's throne" is (Rev 2:13). If John were referencing Asclepius here, it would again be hard to make the dragon (i.e. Asclepius) fit into a combat myth. Beale thinks he can find in this dragon figure a reference to Egypt and Rome, but the connections are loose.[27]

At this point we should remind ourselves that John's book is an ἀποκάλυψις, a revelation. It does not describe the reality of obvious things, but it rather reveals the non-obvious. When John thus identifies the dragon as Satan and the Devil, it is not necessary to look further for a referent. John's image is a *phantasia* of a non-obvious being, making that being visible and thus somehow present. The fact that John does not bother to explain the seven heads, ten horns, or seven diadems probably means they are there precisely to be striking, rather than for their allegorical meaning.

The same number of heads and horns (though with ten diadems) are attributed to the beast from the sea (Rev 13:1-4): "And I saw a beast rising out of the sea [εἶδον ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον], having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names." This creature is a composite beast: "And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth" (13:2). Because of its composite nature, this creature is also clearly striking. The depiction of the beast is again indebted to Daniel 7: the leopard, bear, and lion features have probably been borrowed from Daniel 7:3-8, where four great beasts come out of the sea (τέσσαρα θηρία ἀνέβαινον ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης), one looking like a lion, one like a bear, and one like a leopard. These four beasts are also composite beasts, but their details are quite different from the beast from the sea of Revelation 12. Unlike the beasts of Daniel

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[27] Beale, *Revelation*, 633.

7, the Beast from the Sea has no wings or tusks. Again, if John has deliberately drawn on Daniel 7, he has reshaped the *phantasia.*

After the Beast from the Sea we are introduced to the Beast from the Earth: "it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon" (Rev 13:11). The Beast from the Earth probably parodies the Lamb of Revelation 5. There we are introduced to "a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (Rev 5:6). Notice, though that both verge on the monstrous. The Beast from the Earth speaks with a dragon's voice. The Lamb of Revelation 5 is standing, but as though slaughtered. Moreover, it has seven horns and eyes. The attempt to envisage such a Lamb is an exercise in the grotesque.

If the Lamb is grotesque, the locusts of Revelation 9:7-10 are even more so:

> In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped for battle. On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, their haird like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noice of their wings was like the noice of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails like scorpions, with stingers, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months. (Rev 9:7-10)

Shortly after the locusts, the sixth trumpet blows, and a cavalry of lion-headed horses, breathing fire, smoke, and sulphur come forward to wreak havoc on the earth. The tails of these horses are biting serpents.

These are images that conjur fear; they play on the *pathos* of John's audience. It is not the first or last time John uses fear. Threat of judgment is implied or explicit in the seven letters (2:5, 16, 22-23; 3:3, 11, 16). The curse colophon at the end of the book also elicits fear (22:18-19). "Fear may be defined as a pain or disturbance due to a mental picture

of some destructive or painful evil in the future," wrote Aristotle (*Rhet.* 2.5 [1382a]).[28] And

he noted the utility of eliciting fear: "[W]hen it is advisable that the audience should be

frightened, the orator must make them feel that they really are in danger of something…."

(*Rhet.* 2.5 [1383a]). John's book is full of such images, which through the device of ekphrasis

he was able to imprint also on the minds of his audiences and make them feel they were

actually (or virtually) in danger.

Exciting fear in one's audience was, after all, a well-known stratagem. As a negative

example, when Lucretius attacks religion early in *On the Nature of Things*, he explicitly

highlights the use of fear:

> You yourself, overcome at times by words of terror from the priests, will
> seek to abandon us. How many dreams indeed they even no invent, to upset
> the principles of life and all your happiness confound with fear. And rightly
> so. For if men could but see a sure end to their woes, somehow they'd find
> the strength to defy the priests and all their dark religion. But as it is, men
> have no way, no power to stand against them, since they needs must fear in
> death a never-ending punishment. (Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 1.102-112 [Melville])

Lucretius puts the fear-mongering priests in a negative light, but Clement of Alexandria

elsewhere mentions the positive value of invoking fear: "[T]his is a good device: to terrify

lest we sin" (*Paed.* 1.8). John thus presents fearful images so that his audience will

understand the stakes of the cosmic battle in which they are embroiled. In order to make

this work, John must be an accomplished εὐφαντασίωτος. As Quintilian says,

> The heart of the matter as regards arousing emotions, so far as I can see, lies
> in being moved by them oneself. …The person who will show the greatest
> power in the expression of emotions will be the person who has properly
> formed what the Greeks call *phantasiai* (let us call them 'visions'), by which
> the images of absent things are presented to the mind in such a way that we

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[28] Cf. Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 86: "The object of a person's fear must, he says, be an evil that seems capable of causing great pain and destruction, one that seems to be impending, and one that the person seems powerless to prevent."

> seem actually to see them with our own eyes and have them physically present to us. (Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.2.26, 29 [Russell, LCL])

John's images of danger, because of their vividness, may have been designed to elicit fear in his audience, and thus move them to a decision toward faithfulness.

It could be objected that John's imagination does not match the visual world of Roman Asia Minor: these images of the Apocalypse are too fantastic, too grotesque, too unimaginable. This is true to an extent if we look only at the visual arts of Asia Minor. The anguipedal and theriomorphic giants of the Pergamon Altar verge on the fantastic, of course, though they are almost the exceptions that prove the rule. Creatures like dragons, chimaeras, sphinxes, and griffins are also known—if not all that prominent—in Greek art, and satyrs and centaurs received frequent depiction.[29] The figures of the zodiac, with hybrid creatures like the Capricorn, were common in ancient art. Moreover, the Hellenized images of these monuments would not have been the only available images. The Egyptian gods were widely ridiculed for their theriomorphic features, which may indicate that their images were known beyond Egypt (e.g., Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.532-537; 15.1-9; Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.43).

Even if we grant John's images are out of place in the context of the visual images of Roman Asia Minor, parallels are forthcoming from verbal images, in particular from other ekphrases. A later, but very fine example, comes from the pen of Libanius (ca. 314-ca. 394 CE). Among his *Progymnasmata* is one of a chimaera, which invites an extended quotation:

> Συνθήκη τριπλῆ γέγονε φύσεων ἐφ᾽ ἑνὸς πάντα πλάττουσα σώματος. κατήρχετο μὲν γὰρ ὅθεν οὐκ ἔληγε, ἐτελεύτα δὲ ὅθεν οὐκ ἤρχετο, καὶ τὸ μέσον αὐτῆς τῶν ἄκρων ἀπήλλακτο. καὶ συνθεῖσα τὰς φύσεις ἡ τέχνη συνθεῖναι τὰς κλήσεις οὐκ ἔσχεν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐξ ἑνὸς προσηγόρευσε τὰ πολλῶν ἀποφήνασα καὶ τοὔνομα προῆλθε τῆς γονῆς ἐνδεέστερον. λέων τις ἦν ὅσον πρῶτον ἰδεῖν, καὶ δράκων τοῦ

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[29] Emma Aston, *Mixanthrôpoi: Animal-human Hybrid Deities in Greek Religion* (Liège: Centre International d'Étude de la Religion Grecque Antique, 2011).

παντὸς ἔληγε σώματος μεσούσης αἰγός. καὶ πῦρ ἐποίει τὸ φανὲν
φοβερώτερον ὥσπερ οὐκ ἀρκοῦντος φοβῆσαι τοῦ πλάσματος. καὶ
θέαμα μὲν ἄλλο πρὸς ἄλλο προήρεχετο, μία δὲ πάντων
ἐτυγχανεγένεσις. ὡρμᾶτο μὲν γὰρ οἷα λέων φοβῶν, κατέπληττε δὲ
οἷα δράκων ἐξελιττόμενος, καὶ φοβεῖν ἡ αἴξ ἀποροῦσα τῇ φύσει
προσθήκῃ πυρὸς τῶν λοιπῶν ἦν φοβερώτερον. οὐκ ἦν ὅ τι ἄν τις
μᾶλλον καταδείσειεν ἀποβλέπων εἰς ἕκαστον. τὸ δὲ μήπω φανὲν
τοῦ φοβοῦντος ἤδη δεινότερον. ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἔφλεγεν, ὁ δὲ
ὑπεσύριττεν, ὁ δὲ χαλεπώτερος ἦν ὠρυόμενος.

A three-fold composite of natures was born, forming everything in a single
body; for it started from where it did not stop, and it ended from where it did
not begin, and its middle is removed from the ends. And art, though it
combined the natures, was unable to combine the names; instead, though it
portrayed the characteristics of many, it named the creature after one, and its
name came forth rather inferior to its generation. A lion was ll that one
could see at first, and a serpent ended the whole body, with a she-goat in the
middle. And fire made its appearance more dreadful, as if the fiction alone
were not sufficient to cause fear. And one marvel after another came forth,
but one origin possessed all of them; for it rushed forth like a lion, causing
fear, while it terrified like a serpent, uncoiling itself, and the she-goat, having
no means of causing fear, was more dreadful than the rest by the addition of
fire to its nature. There was nothing that anyone would fear more while
looking at each individual part, but the part not yet apparent was already
more dreadful than the one causing fear; for one blazed, another hissed, and
another was harder to bear in its howling. (Libanius, *Progymn.* 21.2-5
[Gibson])

Two things strike us in this passage. First, Libanius's description of the Chimaera is just as

composite as John's description of the beasts in his apocalypse. Second, this description has

a purpose: to present the Chimaera as something to be feared. Consider the clustering of

words of fear toward the end of the passage. Libanius is toying with the emotions of his

audience, and he is observing the rules of ekphrasis. A Chimaera is a creature to be feared,

so Libanius uses language appropriate to the subject. Like John's images, the image of the

Chimaera elicits fear. Unlike John's images, Libanius's description is a school exercise and

does not have the aim of moving an audience to a decision. The similarity of technique,

though, and the common invocation of fear, is unmistakable.

4. Divine Spaces: Revelation 4 and 21:9-22:5

The minions and allies of Satan are not the only images that can cause fear in John's Apocalypse, though. When John enters the divine throne-room, drawing his audience with him, he gives them a glance of the heavenly world. Around the throne and in the midst of the throne are four "living creatures" (ζῷα), "full of eyes in front and behind; the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle." These creatures have six wings and "are full of eyes all around and inside" (Rev 4:6-8). Again there are similarities to a prophetic book, this time Ezekiel 1:5-14. The crucial differences between the four living creatures of Ezekiel (חיות) and those of Revelation 4 is that the latter have one face each,

while the former each had four faces each. Moreover, in his indulgent style, John tells us the four living creatures of Revelation 4 are covered in eyes. These creatures seem hardly less scary than those from Revelation 9, 12, or 13. The difference is, they are on the side of the divine; they are among the entourage in the space where God resides.

The visions of the book begin and end in divine spaces. The opening christophany in Revelation 1:13-20 takes place in the midst of seven golden lampstands, which evokes the language of the temple. The space is sacred space. John's next vision takes him directly to the divine throne room, and in front of the throne burn the seven lampstands (Rev 4:5). John is privileged (and his audience with him) to witness the very throne of God and the one seated on the throne. Remarkable is the fact that when John comes to describe the one seated on the throne, his description is not actually all that vivid—"And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian" (Rev 4:3)—colors, maybe even textures, but no form or figure. Even in verbal medium, God remains aniconic for John.

The book also closes with a divine space: the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:9-22:5). This passage is the longest and among the most elaborate descriptions in the whole book. John specifically takes pains to mention the wealth of the city (21:11, 18-21), the walls of the city (21:12), the measurements of the city (21:16-17), the lack of a temple (because God will dwell among them; 21:22), and the river which flows through the city and waters the tree of life (22:1-2). In short, the description of the New Jerusalem promises prosperity, security, and health. If some of the creatures of the Apocalypse are intended to elicit fear, this image is undoubtedly intended to elicit hope, or, in Aristotle's vocabulary—confidence. Confidence, for Aristotle , is the opposite of fear, because instead of being founded on and elicited by that which causes us danger, it is "the expectation associated with a mental picture of the nearness of what keeps us safe and the absence or remoteness of what is terrible: it may be due either to the near presence of what inspires confidence or the absence of what causes alarm" (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.5 [1383a]). This image is meant to convey hope and consolation.

The dangerous beasts have been vanquished, condemned to the pit, and the New Jerusalem has come, with God at its center. The New City is inviolable (Rev 21:27). After inspiring fear, John's book closes by making the security of God's future available through vivid impressions of the New Jerusalem, thus offering comfort as a resolution to the tumultus chaos of most of the book. This image, too, has been drawn from biblical sources. The scene of restoration, centered on the New Jerusalem resembles the visions of (Trito-)Isaiah 65:17-25 and Ezekiel 40-48. Isaiah 65 prophesies a "new heavens and a new earth" (65:17; cf. Rev 21:1) in which there will be no more weeping or distress (65:19; cf. Rev 21:4). In Ezekiel 40-48 the prophet receives a vision of the restoration of the people of

Israel. The prophet is taken up to a high mountain (Ezek 40:2; cf. Rev 21:10) from where he

sees the new temple, which is subsequently measured. In chapter 42, Ezekiel finally sees his

guide measure the outer walls and gates, which is five hundred cubits square (Ezek 42:15; cf.

Rev 21:16). The city in Ezekiel's vision of restoration has twelve gates, three on each side

(Ezek 40:30-34; cf. Rev 21:12). Most importantly, in Ezekiel's vision the name of the

restored city will be "The LORD is There" (יהוה שמה; cf. Rev 21:3, 22-23; 22:3, 5). There is,

of course, one major difference between Ezekiel's account and John's. While most of

Ezekiel's vision of restoration focuses on the temple (Ezek 40:1-47:12), in John's vision

there is no temple (Rev 21:22-23). Among the details of the vision that John highlights but

is nowhere to be found in Ezekiel's account is a description of the ornamentation of the

New Jerusalem, especially the recurring appearance of jasper in the building materials (Rev

21:11, 18, 19), which was also used to describe the appearance of the one upon the throne

(4:3). It is the presence of God in the community of the righteous, and not the restoration

of the temple, that signals true restoration for John.

John's Apocalypse and a Rebirth of Images

From this very concise catalog we can find hints that John uses his images in ways

similar to the three uses of ekphrasis I identified in the last chapter. The theme of testimony

and of the orator's ethos comes to the fore in the Christophany of Revelation 1:13-18. The

images in this passage cut a clear depiction of the Christ, which has the effect of making

Christ virtually present. John benefits from the vividness of the depiction and from the

sense of presence it evokes, because he becomes a primary witness of Christ. To the degree

his description successfully gives the impression of presence, to that degree does John

become an (or the) authoritative spokesperson for Christ. But more importantly John makes

his audience eyewitnesses of Christ.

The divine women of Revelation 12 and 17 give way to the description of cosmic

war. This, too, has the effect of involving John's audience in what is depicted, but now in

such a way that they understand the cosmic stage upon which their sufferings should be

understood. John peels back the sky for his audience so that they can see the cosmic

conflicts that have brought them suffering. They can then understand their own sufferings

(whatever they may be) in terms of this cosmic, mythological reality. In this transcendent

reality lurk dangerous creatures: dragons, multi-headed beasts, and man-eating locusts. With

these fearsome images John is able to invoke fear to move his audience, to strike them at the

level of *pathos*. John's fearsome images move his audience toward (John's version of)

Christian fidelity.

Finally, the book closes with a vision of God and the Lamb in the midst of God's

people. Perhaps more than any other function of ekphrasis, this is the one upon which John

seeks to capitalize most. The affirmation of God's presence and the consolation of the

saints at the end of the book only highlight what we could ascertain already in the letters:

that John and/or the churches to which he writes are undergoing various sorrows, and it

raises questions of theodicy. Like the book of Job, the book of Revelation hints at an

anxiety about whether or not God is in control, and whether or not God will show up and

defend his people. John's imagery not only "says" God will show up, it shows God showing

up.

John's images were not the unmediated visions of some kind of "pure mystic." John

rather drew (consciously or not) on the storehouse or gallery of his memory for his images.

This storehouse probably included images from first-century Asia Minor. It certainly was populated by images from the Jewish Scriptures. In every example we noted potential influence from Jewish scriptural texts. We also noted, however, the sometimes very striking ways John altered those images. John's memory was no slave to the images of the scriptural texts, but it reworked and repurposed themes and constellations of images for an entirely new message. Thus, John's book constitutes not a recapitulation of images, but a "rebirth" of images.[30]

John was, as is widely recognized, particularly skilled in conjuring vivid images, almost to a fault: his work is the work of a εὐφαντασίωτος. We recall that Richard Bauckham compares the book of Revelation with the "powerful visual impressions of Roman imperial power and of the splendour of pagan religion," claiming that "the visual power of the book effects a kind of purging of the Christian imagination."[31] In this chapter we have seen that John employs vivid descriptions of persons/things, of events, and of places as part of a rhetorical project to make the divine world all-but-visible, and therefore all-but-present to his audiences. There is a risk involved in such ekphrastic epiphany, for it draws the world of the divine—a world of monsters as well as of angels—dangerously close to the observable world. But when the observable world seems to be filled with chaos and violence, endangering that world may not seem such a loss. The "purging of the Christian imagination" noted by Bauckham was more than a matter of simple ornamentation, it was an attempt to revolutionize the very perception of reality of the Apocalypse's audiences. As Elsner interprets ancient ekphrasis, the ultimate goal of the Apocalypse's rhetorical project is

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[30] Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (London: Dacre, 1949).

[31] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 17.

to form viewing subjects who can see beyond the obvious and grasp the truth of the non-obvious, viewing subjects who can seize upon Satanic forces ranged against them, and conquer those forces by recognizing also the victorious Lamb among them, and the new world about to dawn.

Conclusions

> It was breathtaking. (Anyway, it took my breath.) A tremendous waterfall of color, the blues of the apex falling, then seething into a turbulence of red; like all truly great works of art, hammering you with its whole before beguiling you with its parts.
>
> J. L. Carr, *A Month in the Country*[1]

Like all truly great works of art, to paraphrase the epigraph, the book of Revelation hammers its hearers with its whole before beguiling them with its parts. Most of those who dare to open the pages of this mysterious book find it breathtaking, though sometimes out of horror more than out of the aesthetic surrender. Regardless, when we turn to ponder the details of John's cacophonic Apocalypse, they are indeed beguiling. Having been hammered with the whole, we are beguiled by the parts. The overall meaning of the book of Revelation seems clear enough. The communities to which John writes appear to be facing some sort of opposition, either explicit or implicit, real or perceived. The basic message is that God and the Lamb win, the promised future reign of God is coming soon, and all will be "well." But when we turn to the parts, they are indeed—for us, at least—beguiling.

D. H. Lawrence put the matter plainly from a quintessentially modern perspective when he claimed the book was, to him at least, "antipathetic." The problem is first and foremost with the imagery—"unpoetic," "arbitrary," "some of it really ugly."[2] Revelation's "splendiferous imagery is distasteful because of its complete unnaturalness. …If it is imagery, it is imagery which cannot be imagined."[3] Lawrence's appraisal is an aesthetic one, and it reflects the age and society in which he lived, but the vexation of interpreters of the

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[1] J. L. Carr, *A Month in the Country* (New York: New York Review Books, 2000 [1980]), 75.

[2] D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation* (ed. Mara Kalnins; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 62.

[3] Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, 61-62.

book throughout history confirms his implication that here is a book both fascinating and repelling, a book that defies the simplicity of determinant interpretations or reductions to a determinate meaning. Images resist reduction to discourse. When we speak of the meaning of images we err if we think in terms of some central quality within the image that can be conveyed, apart from the image itself, in discursive verbosity. One gift of so-called postmodern philosophical critique has been the recognition of our ("modern," "Western") logocentric habits. Unlearning the need to slap language-based meaning on anything that moves (or even just exists) is a difficult process. This study has been, at least for the author, something of a step toward unlearning the book of Revelation. I have wrestled with the visuality of the book, even if the results have been presented in a medium that betrays my continuing logocentric compulsions.

The most concrete conclusions of the study are as follows. First, because of the peculiarities of their different media, the visual images of Asia Minor and the verbal images of the Apocalypse cannot be correlated directly, though a resonance does seem to exist. John and his audiences lived in the image-rich culture of Asia Minor. It was a "world full of gods," and the cities were "cities of images."[4] Part II demonstrated a measure of parity between some of the images of the Apocalypse and visual artifacts from Asia Minor, but the parallels were largely confined to individual elements rather than whole representations, and that part of the study therefore also hinted at a disparity perhaps greater than the parity between the images under comparison.

Second, the images of the book of Revelation are profitably considered as a rhetorical device comparable to ancient ekphrasis. John's Apocalypse and ancient orations

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[4] Keith Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods: The Strange Triumph of Christianity* (New York: Free Press, 2000); and Peter Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.

have much in common, both in their aims and in their original presentation. Like ekphrases, John's images evoke vision; they put what is depicted vividly before the sight, as it were, of the audience. Part III argued that John benefited from at least a rudimentary rhetorical education, though the precise nature and extent of his Greek education are elusive. It then explored ancient ekphrasis, arguing that ancient ekphrasis has often been inadequately described in modern scholarship, and as a consequence the few studies that do attempt to apply the device to John's images have been unconvincing. By re-describing ancient ekphrasis, I concluded that the ancient rhetorical device is best defined by its rhetorical function (to evoke vision through audition) rather than any distinctive object of description (e.g. a work of art), and that ekphrases had at least three uses: effecting a kind of artificial presence, grounding the authority of the orator as eyewitness, and fascinating an audience through emotional connection. Finally, Part III offered a concise discussion of how John's images resemble ekphrases, and how his images might have fulfilled the same uses.

These two points are the fundamental conclusions of the study. But they lead to a methodological and hermeneutical consideration and several other implications. By understandingthe images of the book of Revelation as analogs to ancient ekphrases, we can gain some purchase on a non-referential way of construing apocalyptic images beyond vague notions of "expressive," "poetic," or "symbolic" language and "evocative power." As we saw in Part I, these terms are incredibly vague, but they do point to problems inherent in construing the language of John's Apocalypse as referential language. By drawing on recent work in Visual Studies and Image Studies I am able to suggest a less anachronistic, and thereby a more concrete model, for approaching apocalyptic images as non-referential use of language. Hermeneutically, employing oblique terms like those above leads to an

interpretive stale-mate. Once one has invoked "symbol" or "evocative power" there is little left that can be said; they close down interpretation rather than opening it up. I suggest, instead, taking seriously the visuality of the book of Revelation, which opens up new vistas with respect both to ancient visual culture and ancient rhetorical culture, and thereby also to ancient piety and cultural identity. The difference lies in the fundamental question regarding apocalyptic images. The question is not primarily, What are they?, so much as, How are they (i.e., what do they do)?

Such a methodological concommitment may be extendible to other apocalypses. The study was originally conceived also as a diachronic study, in which proto-apocalyptic and early apocalyptic texts would also be analyzed. Requirements of space and argumentative economy forestalled that original plan, but it is a line of inquiry that should be taken up, because on my reading the images in proto-apocalyptic and early apocalyptic texts (and not all such texts can be said to contain very many such images) were far more indebted to their respective visual cultures than the book of Revelation. In fact, we can chart a development in such images from rather straight-forward verbal representations of visual culture (e.g. temple ornamentation in Isaiah 6) to hybrid visions which drew some on actual visual images, some on images as remembered or imagined (e.g. Ezekiel 1 and 10), to more fully textualized images like John's (also, e.g., Daniel 7), which bear some resemblance to visual culture, but which are thoroughly verbal images and therefore cannot be directly correlated with contemporaneous visual images.

Another area of inquiry envisaged in the early stages of this study, but which must also await further study, is the reception of such images in Late Antique Christianity and Judaism. The images of the book of Revelation demonstrably have been influential in Latin-

speaking Christendom, especially in church architecture and decoration. What has not been spotted quite so often is the similar reception of some of John's images in Greek-speaking Christianity, particularly in the subtle but stable impression it made in Byzantine iconography. The nimbus of Christ is consistently inscribed with ὁ ὤν, a title for Christ that does not occur outside of Revelation. The four evangelists depicted as the four living creatures of the divine throne-room was an iconographic motif of both Latin and Greek Christianity. Christ as Pantocrator is likewise a theme almost certainly drawn from Revelation, where he is equated or at least correlated with ὁ θεός ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ὤν καί ὁ ἦν [καί ὁ ἐρχόμενος] (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 16:14; 19:6; 19:15; 21:22). The only other reference to God or Christ as παντοκράτωρ in the New Testament is 2 Corinthians 6:18, which echoes 2 Samuel 7:14 and Isaiah 43:6, and has seemingly little to do with Christology. Early Christianity took the images of the Apocalypse, in other words, and tried to reinscribe them in material reality; it took the verbal images and made them visual.

Judaism kept to verbal images and used them as aids for meditation and contemplation. Rather than reinscribing the images of Daniel or of Ezekiel in visual images, like icons, mystical practices centered on the Merkavah as evidenced particularly in the Hekhalot literature developed out of reading the verbal images. Whether the reason for this preference for the verbal was due to theological aniconism or material disenfranchisement (the Temple-less condition) of Jewish religion, apocalyptic images (if we can call them such) like those of Isaiah, Daniel, or Ezekiel were left in verbal medium.

A final application of the results of this study to apocalyptic more broadly addresses the two approachs to apocalyptic described in Chapter 1. Austin Farrer assumed that John was responsible—as an artist—for his creation, and as a result he "discovered" a remarkable

poetic scheme through which John created his great poem, an elaborate diagram of which appears on the very last page of *A Rebirth of Images*. Farrer was aware of the difficult position this might put him in with those who assumed the images of the book of Revelation merely to represent the visions John actually saw. To this objection Farrer wrote, "To ask whether St John saw his visions by means of a mystical diagram or through the Holy Ghost, is like asking whether the flight of an eagle is sustained by his wings or by the air. On whatever wind of spirit St John ascended, he moved the sinews of his mind, and we can observe the motions."[5] Based on this study I suggest this statement is only partially true. What we can trace are the motions, but what we cannot trace is the wind. In other words, we cannot peek behind the veil to determine whether John's images are "purely" visual/visionary or whether they are "purely" textual. We can trace John's "ekphrastic" product, but we cannot know what lay behind it, whether visual artifacts, visionary experience, or only linguistic intertextuality.

But this study points beyond the dichotomy, as Farrer also wished to do. We have reason to believe that, because of some of John's images are so vivid and some of them static, some of the images may indeed simply describe "what he saw." At the same time, those images almost always seem somehow embellished: swords in mouths, seven heads and ten horns, etc. What John "saw" need not have been seen in mystical ecstasy, either: *phantasia* (and the related *phantasma*) did not require such experience on the part of the orator. Just as importantly, this study opens up the question of how such images would have been received in an oratorical context, rather than just how they were produced and came to be inscribed in texts. This study, I hope, stands as a challenge to a simple dichotomy

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[5] Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (London: Dacre, 1949), 304.

between passive experience (religious vision) and active imagination. The comparison with ancient ekphrasis, *enargeia*, and *phantasia* points to an activity of the mind in vision and a given set of images for the imagination that deconstructs any neat dichotomy between the two. It is not simply the case that John worked upon his visions or texts, and those are the motions we can observe, but rather the texts John had memorized worked upon his visions just as John himself worked upon the texts, and the visions worked upon John as much as John worked upon them. Images are given and used, experiences are made and had.

Above all, this study has been an exercise in unlearning the Apocalypse—unlearning the attempt to confine its meaning by finding referents for every image, and unlearning the assumption that once one has done so, one has finally grasped what the Apocalypse is "about." If we take seriously the images of the Apocalypse as images, asking what the Apocalypse means is like asking what an iconostasis, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or Salvador Dalí's works mean. The question cannot be answered in the same terms as it can, for instance, when posed to the Pauline writings. At every turn, this study has tried to make the case—if only by implication—that the images of the Apocalypse resist reduction to referentiality. They much prefer to be understood in terms of representation, and even then they seem to resist simplistic notions of representation.

Allen Dwight Callahan has rightly seen the problem as one of a quest for "meaning":

> The reflex of the contemporary critical reader, especially when confronted with a "classical" text, is to interpret it—that is, to reformulate it as information, and thus make it intelligible and conformed to our critical expectations. Analysis then runs riot in the quest for meaning. Criticism devolves to a single line of inquiry: What does this text mean? This quest for meaning, however, is abortive. The real critical task is to try to surmise how this text may have effected its hearers, how, in the parlance of

technofunk musician and composer George Clinton, the text is, "doin' it to you in your earhole."[6]

The critical question with a text like John's Apocalypse is not, "What does it mean?" but, "What was/is it doing?" Maybe even better, "What does this text want?" Every text wants to do something to or for its audience, and form, content, and performance all play a critical role in that agenda. That is why Callahan says the "real critical task" is to attempt to understand the effects of the text on its readers.[7] We might say the task of the interpreter can be understood not simply as the attempt to find the text's meaning, but indeed to discover the meaningfulness of the text, both in antiquity and in the present.

If previous attempts at understanding the images of the book of Revelation have proven unconvincing, it may very well be because they have fought too hard to find a specific "meaning" in them, rather than to allow them to "mean" precisely as images. "These fantastic images can, possibly, be teased into some coherent picture," writes Luke Timothy Johnson, "but the exercise would be quite beside the point. No particular number, beast, or star is significant in and of itself; it is the cumulative effect that creates the sense of mystery and transcendence essential for the dramatic impact of the revelation."[8] Again, this is partially true. The allegorical or symbolic "meanings" are not the essential thing. But the "sense of mystery and transcendence" need not deter us from probing further, and finding in the visuality of the book something to examine and to think through. Allow me to quote Michael Fishbane at some length here.

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[6] Allen Dwight Callahan, "The Language of Apocalypse," *HTR* 88 (1995), 459; citing George Clinton, "P-Funk (Wants to Get Funked Up)," *Mothership Connection*, Casablanca Records #824502, 1975.

[7] I suspect "effected" in the Callahan quote is a typographic mistake, since he does not immediately capitalize on the idea of a subjectivity constructed through the audition of the text. If it is a mistake, it is a happy one, because in my estimation what the book of Revelation wants is something of an effected auditor. Part of what the book "wants" is the construction of a Christian self.

[8] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (3d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 510.

> Like all matters human, theology must be grounded in earthly experience and understood from within its forms. The phenomenal world is all that we have. This is the sphere that lies before us in our everyday existence; it conditions the products of aesthetic perception; and it provides the sphere for theological experience and reflection. However, it would be folly to assume that we experience this world the same way in each of these mental modes, or to deny that different types of surface and depth are disclosed thereby to our consciousness and understanding. For to do so would be to reduce these modes to one type of experience, and disregard the diverse character of worldly appearance or the way "something more" of reality is disclosed through the world by art and theology than it is through one's ordinary (or even extraordinary) experience of things in the natural world. Much (perhaps everything) depends on how we situate ourselves toward the interpreted world, and therefore also on the relationship between the self, who receives the phenomena, and that which is given to perception. In certain circumstances, there is a foreshortening of the depth of "the given" for pragmatic purposes; and this is the everyday world we negotiate our entire lives. But in other circumstances, the stable (or stabilized) depths are transfigured and either reconstructed through the artistic imagination, or deconstructed into the ever-more receding infinities of theology.[9]

We can find in the images of the Apocalypse both imagination and the "ever-more receding infinities of theology," and these are not divorced from the material or "interpreted" world. Rather, they disclose the "something more" of that world.

Ironically, D. H. Lawrence himself suggested something similar. In his preface to a long forgotten book by Frederick Carter called *The Dragon of Revelation*, Lawrence waxed eloquent about how his reading of Carter's book affected him. In and around the "chaos" of the book, Lawrence explains, he would encounter a page or a chapter "that would release my imagination and give me a whole great sky to move in. For the first time I strode forth into the grand fields of the sky. And it was a real experience, for which I have been always grateful."[10] Lawrence pins his experience of Carter's book, which was about the book of Revelation from an astrological perspective, to the "release" of his *imagination*—his "*whole*

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[9] Michael Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), 13-14.
[10] Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, 45-6.

imagination," "not a part only."[11] Through Carter's book, he achieved "the sense of being

the macrocosm, the great sky with its meaningful stars and its profoundly meaningful

motions, its wonderful bodily vastness, not empty, but all alive and doing."[12] Lawrence

locates the only real value of the Apocalypse precisely in this kind of experience. "We do

not care, vitally, about theories of the Apocalypse: what the Apocalypse means. What we

care about is the release of the imagination. …What does the Apocalypse matter, unless in

so far as it gives us imaginative release into another vital world?"[13] Perhaps the book of

Revelation was always meant to be a book for the imagination, taken in its basic sense: the

Apocalypse is a work first and foremost that requests (or demands?) to be imagined. The

images of the book simply ask to be *seen*, interpreted and received *as images*. The images seek

to occupy that mental space that alternates between or blurs the visual and the verbal.

The book of Revelation, as a book of the Christian imagination—or at least as a

book of the imagination of an early Christian apocalyptist—may indeed provide counter-

images to the visual world in which John and his audiences lived, as Richard Bauckham has

argued. "In this context," writes Bauckham,

> Revelation provides a set of Chrisitan prophetic counter-images which
> impress on its readers a different vision of the world: how it looks from the
> heaven to which John is caught up in chapter 4. The visual power of the
> book effects a kind of purging of the Christian imagination, refurbishing it
> with alternative visions of how the world is and will be.[14]

Whether the images of Asia Minor John wished to counter were those of the Roman Empire

or those of "pagan" religion, John's visual and visionary skill and his verbal art placed nearly

before the eyes of his audience an unseen world. The book of Revelation thus is a

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[11] Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, 46.
[12] Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, 46.
[13] Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, 47.
[14] Richard Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 17.

fundamental work of Christian *paideia*: it is an education in unseeing the shown—the images of the divine in the visual culture of Asia Minor—and showing the unseen—the divine world of John's Christian imagination.

☺

So I turned and climbed the ladder for a last look. And, standing before the great spread of color, I felt the old tingling excitement and a sureness that the time would come when some stranger would stand there too and understand.

J. L. Carr, *A Month in the Country*[15]

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[15] Carr, *Month*, 135.

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Abbreviations follow *The SBL Handbook of Style*, supplemented where necessary by *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, fourth edition.

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