

Ancient Christian Interpretations of “Violent Texts” in the Apocalypse

Edited by Joseph Verheyden,
Tobias Nicklas and Andreas Merkt

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Introduction

The Book of Revelation belongs to the more ‘mysterious’ texts of the New Testament. Historical-critical exegesis has emphasised time and again the importance of the motifs of hope and comfort that are reflected in the text and that would point at an author addressing a readership that is heavily burdened by an ongoing or acute crisis and is longing for salvation in a heavenly Jerusalem that is being announced. Closely connected with these themes are the many images and phrases evoking blood and violence and death and destruction. One may refer to the descriptions of an eschatological war (Rev 16:14; 19:11–21), bloody scenes of trial (Rev 14:6–20), scenes in which the devil and his demons threaten the faithful (Rev 12–13), and all sorts of visions of fear and violence (Rev 6:1–17; 8:6–13; 9:1–21; 16–18). Even the apparently ‘harmless’ letters to the Christian communities of Asia Minor in Rev 2–3 reflect at times a very aggressive attitude towards opponents within and outside of the community (the “Synagogue of Satan” in Rev 2:9 and 3:9).

The Book of Revelation overwhelms the reader. Its numerous powerful images have fascinated and inspired many readers and hearers to often rather adventurous and not uncommonly to even dangerous explanations. The present volume contains thirteen essays on the reception of the Book of Revelation in the early church, with special emphasis on the images of violence that are found in the text. Several of the most important ancient Christian interpreters of Revelation are dealt with, including Lactantius, Tyconius, Victorinus of Pettau, Jerome and Bede in the West and Oecumenius and Andreas of Caesarea in the East. In addition, the volume also contains essays on the Jewish background of the war scenes in Revelation, the earliest reception of the work in the second century, the function and use of language of violence in visions (illustrated from the *Passio Perpetuae*), the use of the Book of Revelation in early Christian liturgy, the reception of the Book and the early tradition of interpretation by Joachim of Fiore and a methodological essay on reading Revelation intertextually.

The volume is the result of an expert meeting that was held in September 2009 at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven. It is the first of a series of meetings the editors have been planning within the larger framework of the *Novum Testamentum Patristicum* project that aims at producing a complete survey of the reception history of the books of the

New Testament in the first seven centuries. The editors wish to thank the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO) for a generous grant and also the editorial board of NTOA/StUNT for accepting the manuscript in its series. In particular they wish to thank Mr Mark Grundeken for his precious cooperation in preparing the manuscript for print.

Joseph Verheyden
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Early Jewish Background of the War Scenes in John's Revelation

Luca Arcari

The present article examines the war scenes in Revelation by analyzing them within their own literary and social contexts, paying particular attention to war scenes present in apocalyptic texts of Second Temple Judaism. I consider how Revelation presents the discrete war scenes within the book as an apocalyptic construction of the world, how Revelation rereads traditional depictions of war and, finally, how military language and scenes of war occur in other contemporaneous apocalyptic works.

I. Revelation as Apocalyptic Construction of the World

Apocalypticism is a literary construction of the world where symbols represent the product of a particular social context; the literary construct might reflect both a real situation of a community and an ideal situation for which the author or the community hope. By using the concept of “symbol” I intend to cast light on a typical literary *instrumentum* active in both prophetic and apocalyptic texts. Utilizing traditional images, apocalyptic writers construct literary universes – apparently cosmic – in which images allude to the concrete social reality of their groups. In such a way, the symbol, meant as literary entity, connects the world of the text and the social context in which the text itself is rooted. Such a “poetic” device aims at founding or affirming the authority of a particular group.

Revelation is integrally associated with the world of Hellenistic-Roman Judaism. This fact emerges from an analysis of John's apocalyptic literary genre.¹ Through an investigation of Revelation, we can infer that the seer, by employing the apocalyptic genre, shares many of the same issues with other Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic writers. Jewish writers have long

¹ See A.Y. Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (JSJ.S 50; Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1996); J.J. Collins, *Seers, Sybils and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (JSJ.S 54; Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1997).

used the apocalyptic genre in order to claim legitimacy; in such contexts, tradition (considered authoritative) would be applied exclusively to the events experienced by a specific group (especially in a situation of “perceived crisis”²).

II. The War Scenes in Revelation

The war scenes in Revelation have caught the attention of a number of scholars, who have assessed these passages and their significance in various ways. For example, Richard Bauckham explored similarities in Revelation and the Qumran War Scroll (1QM).³ According to Bauckham, John has seen war not simply as a conflict between Christ and the forces of evil, but also as an appeal for human participation⁴ in the eschatological era. In Bauckham’s analysis, the seer of Patmos uses military language to defend a non-military means to overcome evil.

David Aune, also analyzing parallels in Qumran literature and Revelation regarding the theme of the eschatological war, concludes that 1QM is a striking example of the *active* model of the eschatological war, while Revelation reflects a much more complex combination of sometimes contradictory eschatological perspectives. The active model is reflected in Rev 7:1–9, 14:1–5, 17:14, while the *passive* model is evidenced in Rev 16:12–16, 19:11–21, 20:8–9.⁵

Also important for this discussion is the 2001 study, *Parables of War: Reading John’s Jewish Apocalypse* by John W. Marshall.⁶ This scholar dates Revelation to 69 CE, the same year as the rise of the Parthian armies against former rulers. Marshall underscores that John’s vision

was a parable of the war, and his message was to stand fast in the face of adversity and of the adversary and to trust that God, through his lamb, would save or even

² On the concept of “perceived crisis”, see the seminal work by A.Y. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1984), 84–110.

³ “The Book of Revelation as a Christian War Scroll”, *Neot* 22 (1988) 17–40 (now in idem, *The Climax of Prophecy. Studies on the Book of Revelation* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993] 210–37).

⁴ *The Climax of Prophecy*, 212.

⁵ “Qumran and the Book of Revelation”, in P.W. Flint/J.C. VanderKam (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years. A Comprehensive Assessment* (2 vol.; Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1998–1999) 2.622–48 (now in idem, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity: Collected Essays* [WUNT 199; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006] 79–98).

⁶ ESCJ; Waterloo, Ontario, CA: Wilfrid Laurier.

extend his people and punish their adversaries. This is the vision we have on John's Apocalypse.⁷

In the final part of his 2005 article on the apocalyptic war in the Dead Sea Scrolls, with special reference to Revelation, A. Bolotnikov⁸ observed that

Many scholars have noticed the similarity between the ideology of the early Christian community and Qumran ... One additional detail is important in comparing the Apocalypse of John with the War Scroll. Both books use symbolic apocalyptic language in order to be understood only by the community and not by the Romans.¹⁰

In this paper, I work from the premise that Revelation was composed near the end of Domitian's reign, around the year 95 CE, after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem.

1 War Scenes in Revelation: Rereading Tradition in a "Perceived Crisis"

In 1962 Norman Gottwald wrote:

The life of Israel is shaped amidst and punctuated by civil and international strife during the six centuries from the Exodus to the Exile. This military preoccupation imparts a vigor to the biblical records but also often casts about them an aura of somber realism and a sense of the fragility of human life.¹¹

Yet the fact that Israel had frequently been under a state of siege did not lead to a unified understanding of war. Instead, there existed several competing traditions or ideologies about warfare.¹² War not only was variously understood in biblical traditions, but it was also the focus of intense debate in Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. It would seem that particular views or perspectives within the Hebrew Bible also gradually led to different interpretations in Second Temple Judaism and, consequently, early Christianity. In Hellenistic-Roman Judaism, war scenes often represent the recontextualization and the repurposing of traditional biblical images, meant as elements of authoritative self-definition.

⁷ *Parables of War*, 2.

⁸ A. Bolotnikov, "The Theme of Apocalyptic War in the Dead Sea Scrolls", *AUSS* 43 (2005) 261–6.

¹⁰ Bolotnikov, "The Theme of Apocalyptic War", 266.

¹¹ N.K. Gottwald, "'Holy War' in Deuteronomy: Analysis and Critique", *RevExp* 61 (1962) 296–310, on p. 296.

¹² For instance, see J.A. Wood, *Perspectives on War in the Bible* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998). More recently, see B.E. Kelle/F.R. Ames (ed.), *Writing and Reading War. Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (Atlanta, Ga.: SBL, 2008).

How are these traditional images rooted in scripture mediated by John? John does not mention scriptures using introductory formulae; no explicit quotation is found by scholars.¹³ Rather Steven Moyise detects different types of “scriptural” references in John’s Revelation. First, he calls our attention to allusions and echoes.¹⁴ Moyise emphasizes that John’s approach is not to present such allusions with an introductory formula or even with a break in discourse.¹⁵ A second kind of reference is where a particular traditional text has contributed to the leading idea within a single passage (though certain elements could also have come from elsewhere).¹⁶ A third kind of approach in John’s use of tradition is when a particular text appears to have contributed to *one* of the ideas in a passage.¹⁷ A final category concerns those texts that could stand in the background but for which verbal agreement is minimal and thematic links slight.¹⁸

John’s language evocative of war is replete with references to events and characters of the Hebrew Bible, and much of its phraseology is taken directly from these biblical texts. Modifications and reinventions of these allusions may be explained in a number of ways. Nevertheless, John has replaced traditional war imagery for his audience; he has contextualized these traditions within new social and cultural contexts.

With regard to the technique of replacing traditional or biblical war narratives, A. Yarbro Collins has stressed:

The second temple period of Judaism can be characterized as a time of tension between Jewish tradition, particularly eschatological expectation and the realities of foreign rule. This tension occasionally erupted into conflict. One such conflict situation was the Hellenizing crisis which led to the persecution of Judaism by Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Maccabean revolt. This crisis is particularly significant because it provided a variety of models for other groups in analogous situation in later times. In such a situation one might of course choose to collaborate with the foreign authorities and assimilate their culture. Or, one might choose to resist. In the latter case, one has two basic options: 1) revolution or armed resistance and 2) active but non-violence resistance. In the crisis under Antiochus Epiphanes both types of resistance were exercised. Although the two types involved

¹³ For example, see S. Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis* (SNTS.MS 128; Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 39.

¹⁴ For example, see S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (JSNT.S 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). More recently see also idem, *Evoking Scripture. Seeing the Old Testament in the New* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

¹⁵ S. Moyise, “The Psalms in the Book of Revelation”, in idem/M. Menken (ed.), *The Psalms in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004) 231–46, on p. 231.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 231–2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.

quite different modes of action, each made use of holy war tradition which has its roots in the Ancient Near Eastern combat myth.¹⁹

More specifically, with respect to the warrior elements in Revelation, Yarbro Collins offered the following definitive summary:

The mythic pattern of combat is used in Revelation to depict the religio-political conflict in which the author's community was involved as a dualistic cosmic struggle. Such a depiction could be combined with a variety of programs for action. Given a situation of alienation from the contemporary ruling power, the book's particular use of holy war tradition would inevitably advocate or reinforce a position on the issue of resistance and violence to be adopted by its first readers.²⁰

2 Traditional War Imagery and Language in Revelation

In addition to the uses of technical terms associated with war (2:16; 9:7, 9; 11:7; 12:7, 17; 13:7, 14; 16:14; 17:14; 19:11, 19; 20:8), military elements in narration (1:16; 2:16; 6:2, 4, 5, 8; 8:2, 6; 9:9, 14, 16, 17; 13:10, 14; 19:11, 15, 19, 21; 20:9), and terms used in symbolical (or metaphorical) senses (for instance, see 2:7, 10, 17, 26, 27; 3:5, 11, 12, 21; 4:9, 11; 5:12; 6:2, 4; 21:7), Revelation includes the Christological rereading of biblical texts involving war (for instance, see Ps 2:9 in Rev 2:27, 12:5 and 19:15, where John reuses a Davidic text,²¹ in which a general revolt of the nations is depicted with a Christological meaning²²). Among other elements, Christ is depicted as the warrior *par excellence*, as he will fight with the holy ones who will live with him at the end of human history.

The Johannine repurposing of traditional images associated with war is usually more allusive; for example, in 2:14–16 the warrior activity of Christ – Jesus will fight his enemies “with the sword of (his) mouth” (2:16) – is depicted by John in a narrative context modeled after Num 22–24, an account of invasion retold so as to highlight Balaam's evil nature (see Num 31:8, 16; Deut 23:5–6; Josh 13:22; 24:9; Judg 11:25; Neh 13:2; Pseudo-

¹⁹ A.Y. Collins, “The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John”, *JBL* 97 (1977) 241–56, on pp. 241–2 (now in *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 198–9).

²⁰ *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 205.

²¹ For a messianic Davidic interpretation in Second Temple Judaism of Ps 2, see *Psalm of Solomon* 17:23. See K. Atkinson, “On the Use of Scripture in the Development of Militant Davidic Messianism at Qumran: New Light from *Psalm of Solomon* 17”, in C.A. Evans (ed.), *The Interpretation of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity: Studies in Language and Tradition* (JSP.S 330; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 106–23.

²² Further bibliography in J. Willitts, *Matthew's Messianic Shepherd-King. In Search of 'The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel'* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 67–9.

Philo, *Lib. ant. bibl.* 18:13–14).²³ Rev 7:1–9 reads like a military census of the tribes of ancient Israel (see Num 1–3), referring to 12,000 sealed from each of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel, for a total of 144,000.²⁴ Rev 14:1–5 contains a scene, modeled on biblical references (for example, see the echoes from Isa 53:9 and Zeph 3:13 in 14:5), depicting the Lamb on Mount Zion with the 144,000; the scene appears to be a fragment of the beginning of an eschatological battle emphasizing Jerusalem as the focal point (see also Rev 20:9 and *4 Ezra* 13:25–50); in Rev 16:13–16 the three unclean spirits are gathered together in a place called Armageddon for the final battle against God, with implicit reference to Megiddo, a place named in Judg 5:19, 2 Kings 9:27 and 23:29, 2 Chron 35:22, 24, and Zech 12:11;²⁵ in Rev 17:14, where John describes a coalition of ten kings waging war on the Lamb, there are echoes of Deut 10:17, Ps 136:3, Ezek 26:7, and Dan 2:47.²⁶

3 Battle Scenes in Revelation

Revelation contains war-scenes where the mythical, or symbolic, dimension of the literary description covers not only different temporal dimensions (primeval and the eschatological), but also historical military events, such as the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

3.1 Rev 12:7–17

The first scene concerns the war fought in heaven by Michael and his angels against the dragon (Rev 12:7–17). The scene depicted in Rev 12 has

²³ See E. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 120–1.

²⁴ The reference to all twelve tribes presupposes an eschatological setting subsequent to the gathering of the twelve tribes; this presupposition is shared with the author of IQM, where all twelve tribes participate in the final series of eschatological battle (IQM 5:1–2), in language also dependent on Num 1–3. See Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic*, 94–5.

²⁵ The noun Armageddon is meant to be the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew Megiddo, the name of a small mountain on which ancient forts were built, that also connected Egypt with Mesopotamia. Megiddo was the location of many decisive battles in ancient Israel. See 2 Chron 35:20–25; 2 Kings 23:29–30. On Armageddon in Revelation, see J. Day, “The Origin of Armageddon: Revelation 16:16 as an Interpretation of Zechariah 12:11”, in S. Porter/P. Joyce/D.E. Orton (ed.), *Crossing the Boundaries. Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder* (Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1994) 315–27.

²⁶ On warrior narrative elements in Revelation, see Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic*, 94–8.

always been problematic.²⁷ Yarbro Collins does not read it as a single construction, but rather as the synthesis of two different traditions: a narration describing the conflict against a woman with a child, and a story illustrating a battle in the sky (vv. 7–9).²⁸ Such a scene, since its debut, appears to refer to numerous biblical precedents, *in primis* Gen 3:15–16: the woman giving birth to a child (v. 2) who is the Messiah (v. 5), Satan, “the old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan”, persecuting him (v. 9; see also 20:2), the woman and her descendants (vv. 6, 13, 17). It is possible to trace this symbolism back to its Hellenistic milieu, a hypothesis explored by Yarbro Collins in her seminal study,²⁹ but the story from Genesis remains the primary reference.³⁰ A mythological tale, as stressed by Yarbro Collins, comes to be cast in a context where the rereading of this authoritative tradition provides the message of the *pre-text* with new literary and ideological elements.³¹

The section is divided into two distinct settings: although presenting the same protagonists, the first section is located in the sky (see 12:1–12), while the second is on earth (12:13–18). There is a striking relationship between sky and earth; an analogous connection is found in the *Book of the Watchers* where the sin of the angels – after they have come down to earth to join the daughters of men, or, in other versions of the tradition, to teach men the forbidden knowledge – affects the earth (see *1 Enoch* 1:2; 2:1; 6:1 ff.).

The basic ideological *schema* in which the author opposes his own authoritativeness is typical of the Enochic tradition, although the nature of the primordial opposition of the rebel angels, guilty of either sexual sin or pride, is unclear. By means of an ideological *schema* deriving from the Enochic tradition, John has introduced the fight between Michael and the sinful angels which ends with the fall of the latter on earth. The fall of the angels is then followed by a hymn of glorification of God and his Messiah along with a lamentation for the “earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” (12:12b).

²⁷ Cf. H. Gollinger, *Das “Grosse Zeichen” von Apokalypse 12* (SBM 11; Würzburg/Stuttgart: Echter/VKB, 1972). More recently, see P. Farkas, *La “donna” di Apocalisse 12. Storia, bilancio, nuove prospettive* (TS.ST 25; Roma: PUG, 1997).

²⁸ Cf. A.Y. Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, Mont.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 101–16; see also J.J. Collins, *Seers, Sybils and Sages*, 122–4.

²⁹ See *The Combat Myth*, 61–70, 101–45.

³⁰ The reference to the snake from Genesis in Rev 12:9 seems to confirm such an interpretation. On the links between Gen 3 and Rev 12, see S.T. Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 61–79.

³¹ See L. Arcari, “Una donna avvolta nel sole” (*Apoc 12,1*). *Le raffigurazioni femminili nell’Apocalisse di Giovanni alla luce della letteratura apocalittica giudaica* (Padova: EMP, 2008), 324–65.

Though its ideological schema derives from the Enochic tradition, John, in Rev 12, opposes a fundamental stance or idea particular to this tradition: the primeval conflict between evil, as symbolized by the dragon, and humankind, as symbolized by the woman, is not irreversible, but awaits final liberation with the advent of the Messiah.

3.2 Rev 19:11–21 and 20:7–10

The second war scene concerns Rev 19:11–21 and 20:7–10. In a seminal monograph, S. Bøe observes that in 19:11–21 and 20:7–10 John alludes to a number of traditional materials; specifically, Bøe finds allusions to the Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. As for the order of the events reported in John's visions, the author discerns an eschatological *schema* in Rev 19:11–21 and 20:7–10. This can be compared to the eschatological *schemata* belonging to writings contemporary to Revelation and to other traditions, such as Ezekiel.³²

In such a description, John alludes to the coming of the rider on the white horse, the battle against the beasts, the confinement of Satan for a thousand years, the millennial kingdom, a second war – this time against Gog and Magog –, the general judgment of all humankind, and the establishment of a New Jerusalem. Among the various references, John alludes to Ezekiel's Gog and Magog in 20:7–10, interpreting the figures as universal categories (coming from the four corners of the earth) rather than as the enemies of Israel, or as ethnic or political designation. In such a section, John reuses tradition as a source of authority. In John's eyes Gog and Magog are not historical figures belonging to past times; instead, John reads Ezek 38–39 as a prophecy, which he expects to be fulfilled in the way he describes the last battle in 20:7–10.

There is a significant correspondence between Rev 19:17–21 and Ezek 39:4, 17–20 as regards one peculiar theme, that of the birds being invited to gorge on the corpses of a defeated army. In Ezek 39 there is a certain concern for the purification of the land (see especially Ezek 39:9–16). But a similar concern is not found in Rev 19:11–21. Even if we read Rev 20:1–6 as consecutive to 19:11–21 in a narrative-chronological sense, there is no reference to a perceived need on behalf of an earthly millennial kingdom for the land to be cleansed. John probably included the motif of the birds' banquet in order to highlight the complete defeat of the beasts' armies, rather than to prepare the land or the earth for any following stage.

³² See S. Bøe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38–39 as pre-text for Revelation 19,17–21 and 20,7–10* (WUNT 2. Reihe 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

The primary function of the war scenes depicted in Rev 19:11–21 and 20:7–10 is to present YHWH as the eschatological victor, much like Ezekiel does. Gog and Magog, like the armies of both the beast and the kings of the earth (19:19), appear as the ultimate enemies, a nameless and faceless horde that attacks the people of YHWH, before YHWH's final triumph in the New Jerusalem.

4 Martial Narrative Elements and “Perceived Crisis”

Neither primeval nor eschatological war scenes in Revelation are merely ideal or fantastic descriptions; their presence within the narration casts light on the theological aims of the seer of Patmos. John's theology is completely founded on the historical “perceived crisis” taking place when John and his followers lived.

It is well known that the fall of the Temple in 70 CE led the Jewish community to profound reflection on the relationship between the cult and the Temple. Certainly some will have wondered how worship was possible in the absence of the Temple. This seems to have been a fundamental question for Jews after the event. It is important to note that, as in the Hebrew Bible and later in the Judaism of the Hellenistic-Roman Period, the idea of the Temple as a place of YHWH's presence had been subjected to analysis because of the social and political changes that Judaism had to accommodate.³³ Thus, it should not be surprising that the concept of the Temple became the centre of lively debates. In fact, Hebrew worship after 70 CE should be read as an alternative to the Temple, intensifying a synagogue-spirituality: the worship of YHWH finds its deepest essence in the actual ‘assembling’ of the community, rather than in the physical place where the community assembles in order to worship.

Such a context accounts for the lack of a temple in the New Jerusalem that is seen by John (Rev 21:22), in which further association between the New Jerusalem and the female symbol of the bride may be read (see Rev 21:2). Through the image of marriage, John stresses that the eschatological group of believers in Christ is reunited to its God through a relationship of total self-denial. The opposition between the image of the *bride* and that of the *whore* (for example, see Rev 17:1, 3 and 21:9, 10)³⁴ mirrors the opposi-

³³ See P. Heger, *Cult as the Catalyst for Division. Cult Disputes as the Motive for Schism in the Pre-70 Pluralistic Environment* (STDJ 65; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 17–41.

³⁴ On the literary and ideological links between Rev 17 and 21 see Arcari, “*Una donna avvolta nel sole ...*”, 367–86. See also B.R. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1999), and G. Campbell, “Antithetical

tion between *cohabitation* and *war*. The eschatological triumph derives from the solution of a crisis experienced in history, and specifically, in the case of John, the fall of the Temple of Jerusalem. One of the causes of such a catastrophic event was seen in the corruption of Judaism with pagan cultic practices, such as the eating of food sacrificed to idols and the abandonment of Jewish customs.³⁵

III. The Early Jewish Background of the War Scenes in Revelation

Martial images attested in biblical traditions serve different social and spiritual functions.³⁶ These polymorphic functions are attested in apocalyptic texts as well, but contextualized in new social contexts. I aim to analyze how apocalyptic texts and contemporaneous Jewish literature transmit revelations of “war” in dialogue with or in contrast to biblical models.

In early Jewish apocalyptic texts battle scenes, often symbolic depictions, respond to a “perceived crisis”; historical crises or perceived historical crises are read in a metaphysical perspective. YHWH dominates human history, and will fight with his people in the final battle; at the end of history, he will set the holy ones free from tribulations of the present, and they will live together with YHWH.

1 The *Apocalypse of the Weeks* (*I Enoch* 93:1–10; 91:11–17)

According to most scholars, the *Apocalypse of Weeks* is the oldest surviving historical apocalypse in Jewish literature; because there is no mention of the events which took place under Antiochus IV, the text was composed before the height of the Hellenistic crisis, perhaps around 170 BCE. The Ethiopic version of *I Enoch* sees the work divided into two parts which are also reversed, while an Aramaic manuscript from Qumran (4Q212) preserves much of the apocalypse in the correct order.³⁷

The text recounts a vision seen by Enoch (*I Enoch* 93:2) and mentions words said by the angels as well as the contents of the heavenly tablets

Feminine-Urban Imagery and a Tale of Two Women-Cities in the Book of Revelation”, *TynB* 55 (2004) 81–108.

³⁵ Further details in Arcari, “*Una donna avvolta nel sole...*”, 287–324.

³⁶ See M.B. Moore, “Fighting in Writing: Warfare in Histories of Ancient Israel”, in Kelle/Ames, *Writing and Reading War*, 57–66.

³⁷ The manuscript is palaeographically dated to the middle of the 2nd century BCE: see J.T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch. Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 245–72; 360–2.

considered to be the source of the revelation that he received (93:1). In the report Enoch describes history from the beginning to the end; history is divided into ten units called “weeks” (93:3). Beginning with the week in which Enoch lived (93:3), the text highlights biblical history (the flood, 93:4, Abraham, 93:5, the Exodus, 93:6, Solomon’s Temple, 93:7, etc.), continues beyond the last biblical episodes to the author’s own time (the seventh week: 93:9), and ends with an account of the final judgment (*I Enoch* 93:10–91:11 = 4Q212 4:11–14). The apocalypse divides the sacred past, present and future into periods, making use of *vaticinia ex eventu*.³⁸

As in Daniel, history is divided into “weeks”; the author compresses the past into seven weeks, placing himself at the end of the seventh week, in which an apostate generation has arisen and at the end of which “the chosen righteous . . . will be chosen” (93:10). The text reveals also what will happen in the following weeks, dividing the future using the same organizing principle (the unit of “week”). In the eighth week a sword will be given to the righteous who execute judgment on the sinners (91:12–13); in the ninth week the judgment of the righteous will be revealed to the whole world (91:14); in the tenth week the watchers will be judged and a new heaven will appear (91:15–16). As F. García Martínez observes,

the author of the Apocalypse of Weeks periodises not only history but also meta-history; the “end” is for him not one event, but rather the unfolding of a process in which several moments can be discerned.³⁹

The idea of a military victory over the nations is developed in the *Apocalypse of Weeks*. The text places the battle of the righteous in an eschatological perspective. The apocalypse ends with the destruction of the hostile nations; “a sword shall be given to it that a righteous judgment may be executed on the oppressors, and sinners shall be delivered into the hands of the righteous” (91:12). As the enemies have oppressed the righteous in the past, at the end of human history the righteous will triumph over evildoers.

2 The Book of Dreams (*I Enoch* 83–90)

The *Book of Dreams* (*I Enoch* 83–90) contains a vision that concerns the whole history of Israel; it is an allegorical or, more precisely, a symbolic

³⁸ J.C. VanderKam, *From Revelation to Canon. Studies in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Leiden/New York: Brill, 2000), 366.

³⁹ “Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls”, in *Qumranica Minora I. Qumran Origins and Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 195–226, on p. 207.

account of the history of Israel that uses animals to represent human beings and white human beings to represent angels.

Military and battle imagery play an important role in the narration; the author refers to past Israelite wars always in a symbolic perspective, opening his account with Adam, the Watchers' fall and the destruction of the Nephilim (see *1 Enoch* 86:1–6, 87:1–4, 88:1–3). The author alludes to the contrasts that have taken place after Abraham's birth (89:11), to Egyptian domination and liberation under Moses and Aaron (89:15–40), to the attacks by the Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites and Esau (89:41–46), to the rise of David's power (89:47–48) and to Solomon's dominion after David's death (89:49). In 89:54 the author describes the various tribes of Israel which have invited in other nations as "betraying [their] place" (i.e. the land promised to their ancestors by YHWH). This part of the *Animal Apocalypse* can be understood as the depiction of the kingdom splitting into the northern and the southern tribes. In 89:55 God abandons Israel because they have abandoned him. There is also mention of seventy shepherds (89:59–65), perhaps angels who destroy Israel and abandon it in the hands of Babylonians and Idumaeans (89:65–67; see Ezek 25:12). In 90:2 ff. the author alludes to the events that occur during Greek domination, that is to say contemporary to him, linking them to past history in a sort of continuum. In the author's view past and present are both under YHWH's control; they are both symbols of YHWH's activity. The last historical references are to the appearance of Judas as leader of the Jewish rebellion against the Seleucids, here portrayed as a ram with a large horn (90:9–16), and the removal of Onias III in 175 BCE and his execution in 171 BCE (90:8; see 2 Macc 4:1–10).

Since nothing is said about the death of Judas, the apocalypse was probably composed after Judas assumed leadership of the rebellion but before his death in 161 BCE.⁴⁰ Milik would date the work to 164 BCE, "probably in the early months of the year, during the few weeks which followed the battle of Bethsur".⁴¹ It follows that the lambs who began to open their eyes, appealed in vain for the sheep to follow (*1 Enoch* 90:6–7), and then grew horns (90:9) correspond to the allies of Judas mentioned in 1–2 Maccabees (see 1 Macc 2:42; 2 Macc 14:6). Beginning in 90:17, the author moves from historical recital to eschatological prediction. He depicts the glory of YHWH who will be with his people to avenge death. An eschatological protagonist will be born (a white bull with large horns; 90:37), and all the

⁴⁰ See G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch I: A Commentary on the Book of Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2001), 360–1; D. Assefa, *L'Apocalypse des animaux (1 Hen 85–90): une propagande militaire? Approches narrative, historico-critique, perspectives théologiques* (JSJ.S 120; Leiden/New York: Brill, 2007), 190–238.

⁴¹ Milik, *The Books of Enoch*, 44.

holy ones will be transformed following their eschatological liberator (becoming white bulls; 90:38). The last section of the book contains a possible allusion to the final battle, where all the nations of the world will march against Israel; they will triumph, however, as regards their enemies, prevailing over the eschatological rivals.

According to the *Book of Dreams*, human history is a degenerating process originating in the past, and human wars, according to the seer, mirror such a degenerative process. But YHWH will reaffirm his power in order to extend his dominion, and consequently the dominion of the holy ones over the world. Therefore, Charles's statement that the *Book of Dreams* was written by a Hasid in support of the Maccabean revolt⁴² is only partially adequate.⁴³ The themes dealt with by the author, on the one hand, involve the destiny of the nation's faith and, on the other hand, the hope of transcending death.

3 The *War Scroll* (1QM)

The *War Scroll*⁴⁴ describes a battle that ends with the victory of the Sons of Light (i.e. members of the Yahad; see 1QM 3:13), and restoration of the cult in Jerusalem. The manuscript also records the organization and the military tactics that should be employed in this war (3–10), the prayers that are to be recited during the different phases of the war (10–14) and a version of the war against the Kittim, with celebration following the victory (15).

Many elements of the Scroll derive from the Hebrew Bible. The scheme of the war in 2–9 relies on Num 1–10,⁴⁵ where the organization of the twelve tribes of Israel prior to entry into Canaan is portrayed; it is likely that the war which 2–9 presents is seen as a new “entry into a promised land” which, like the original entry, involves a period of forty years.⁴⁶ The role of the laymen in 2–9's scheme is much greater than in Num.⁴⁷ As for the plan of conquest itself, the list of nations seems to be based on Gen 10

⁴² See R.H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon, ²1912), 182.

⁴³ See Assefa, *L'Apocalypse des animaux*, 291–327.

⁴⁴ For the edition of 1QM see E.L. Sukenik, *The Dead Sea Scrolls of the Hebrew University* (Jerusalem: The Magnes, 1955), 1–19, pl. 16–34.47. Further bibliography in G. Ibba, *Le ideologie del Rotolo della Guerra (1QM). Studio sulla genesi e la datazione dell'opera* (AISG.TS 17; Firenze: Giuntina, 2005), 19–28, and J. Duhaime, *The War Texts. 1 QM and Related Texts* (New York/London: T&T Clark, 2007).

⁴⁵ For example, see the parallels between 1QM 2:3, 6–7 and Num 1:6, 10:4.

⁴⁶ See P.R. Davies, *1QM, the War Scroll from Qumran. Its Structure and History* (Rome: PIB, 1977), 27–8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

and 25, 1 Chron 1, and to be similar to the list in *Jubilees* 8–9.⁴⁸ The influence of Num 1–10 (see especially 10:1–10) is also evident in the names of some of the trumpets, notably in 1QM 3:2–11.⁴⁹ In the lists of banner-inscriptions in 1QM 3–4 the influence of Num 1–10 is again to be discerned; the twelve tribes of Israel are divided into four camps of three tribes each, and the Levites are encamped separately (see Num 2:33 ff.).⁵⁰ The disqualifications in 1QM 7:4, forbidding who are crippled, blind, lame or with any permanent physical disability to serve as soldiers are very similar to those of Lev 21:17–21, which gives disqualifications for priests.⁵¹ The rules regarding purity of the camp (1QM 7:6–7) are certainly drawn from the Hebrew Bible, specifically from Deut 23:10–15, with slight differences. There are also many elements influenced by the military history of Israel, although depicted in symbolic form, often deriving from both Hellenistic and Roman equipments and tactics: for example, the battle arrays quoted in 1QM 3:6, or the cavalry arrays of 6:8, the arrays of skirmishing battalions in 8:6, or the battle intervals in 3:1, 7 and 16:4. As with biblical representations of military symbolic tales – Ezekiel 38–39 is a seminal example – the author is concerned with the tribulations and hopelessness that his readers are experiencing (see 1QM 1:1, 5, 13–14; 4:2; 11:8; 13:2, 4). He draws encouragement from his “biblical” tradition: the defeat of Goliath at the hand of David (11:1, 2), and Pharaoh at the Red Sea (1:9–10). Coupled with this aspect is his understanding that war and suffering are part of YHWH’s will (see 1:5, 11, 13–14; 15:1). Ultimately, YHWH’s purpose is to exalt the Sons of Light and to judge the Sons of Darkness (1:8–9; 13:5–6, 9–10, 16; 14:16–17; 15:1–3; 16:11–12; 17:1–2, 6–8).

As pointed out by F. García Martínez,⁵² in the Scrolls the biblical elements of a final victory against the nations are clearly present and they are placed in an eschatological perspective (see *4QFlorilegium* [= 4Q174], 4QpIsa^a [= 4Q161], CD 7:20–21). The angelic participation in the final battle is also well attested in the Scrolls (see 1QH^a 11:35), which anticipate the final victory of the forces of light against the forces of darkness (see 1QS 3–4). But in the Scrolls the eschatological battle does not simply coincide with the biblical and apocalyptic visions of a final victory against foreign nations because it comprises the victory over all evil forces.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30–2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 33. The use of banners in the Old Testament is not widely attested. In Num 1:52 we read: “the Israelites shall pitch their tents in formation, each in his own encampment, every man by his standard”; in Ps 20:6 it is written: “... and we plant our banners in the name of our God”. See also 2 Macc 8:23, where we find the use of formulae similar to those of the inscriptions preserved in 1QM is attested.

⁵¹ Davies, *1QM, the War Scroll*, 42.

⁵² “Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls”, 220–6.

The dividing line is not between Israel and the foreign nations but between the Sons of Light (which are the elected ones of Israel) and the Sons of Darkness (a term that covers not only pagans but also unfaithful Israelites).⁵³

According to García Martínez, the ideology of the Qumran group with respect to the eschatological battle and final victory is best reflected in 1QM as a result of the fusion of at least two documents.⁵⁴ One of them is based on Dan 11–12 and Ezek 38–39, and develops the idea of an eschatological conflagration on seven lots in which each one of the sides has the upper part during three lots and which ends with the triumph of YHWH; the second document transforms the war of seven lots into a progressive battle of forty years (following the forty-year *schema* of Exodus) against each one of the nations enumerated in Gen 10, in which the angelic army is guided by the Prince of the Light (1QM 13:10).

4 The Book of Parables (1 Enoch 37–71)

The *Book of Parables* (or the *Book of Similitudes*) is a collection of three similitudes, or “parables”.⁵⁵ The theme is the coming judgment that would punish both the kings and the watchers. The agent of this judgment will be the Righteous One, also designated the Son of Man, the Chosen One, or the Anointed One.

The second parable develops the scenario hinted at in the first (i.e. the announcement of the judgment); the Chosen One, introduced in the first parable, is anticipated here as the eschatological judge. In the final section of the second parable two subsections that describe eschatological events are described (56:5–8; 57:1–3). The first concerns a war and the second covers the return of the dispersion.

In 56:5–57:3 the seer foresees a population from the East that becomes restless and leaves its homelands in order to trample the territory of the elect ones. This invasion is described dramatically by the author of the *Parables*, who also seems to refer to a civil war after the invasion (56:7). The author explicitly identifies the adversaries as “Parthians and Medes” (56:5). I do not consider the references symbolic names. There are no references to Parthians in the Hebrew Bible; association with the Medes con-

⁵³ Ibid., 220.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 222–3.

⁵⁵ The book is to be dated no later than the early decades of the 1st century CE: D. Hannah, “The Book of Noah, the Death of Herod the Great, and the Date of the Parables of Enoch”, in G. Boccaccini (ed.), *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man. Revisiting the Book of Parables* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007) 469–77.

firmly that the author associates the first population with the latter, this one a proper biblical reminiscence.⁵⁶

An allusion to the Parthian invasion of 40 BCE is probably present in this part of the *Book of Parables*;⁵⁷ the seer presents it, however, from a transcendent perspective, which results from a particular ideological and sociological milieu. The ideological locale is the same as that of the *Book of Dreams*: history is a symbolic process which YHWH controls.

It is suggestive that we find the vision of the invasion immediately following the section dealing with the angels of punishment (56:1–4). The degenerating process of history was predetermined by YHWH in the wake of the transgression of the watchers; the Parthian invasion is a product of such a degenerating process. This is the reason why the historical invasion is introduced in an eschatological *schema*: the author begins with a historical recital, but rereads it as an eschatological event, or, better yet, as an eschatological battle preparing for the ultimate triumph of the elect ones.

That the historical event of the Parthian invasion was the basis of *1 Enoch* 56:5–57:3 is evident in the fact that the essential chronological succession of the event, as reported in Josephus,⁵⁸ is reflected in our apocalyptic text. The *Book of Parables* reads the military event or war from the vantage point of a group that considers itself as the true interpreter of the Enochic traditions, and thus human history is viewed by the seer as a degenerating process originating in the primordial angelic sin. The Parthian invasion is a mirror for this degenerative process, anticipating or leading to the final triumph of YHWH at the end of human history.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ See 2 Kings 17:6; 18:11; Jer 25:25; 51:11; Dan 5:28; 6:8, 12, 15; 9:1.

⁵⁷ See L. Arcari, “A Symbolic Transfiguration of a Historical Event: The Parthian Invasion in Josephus and the Parables of Enoch”, in Boccaccini, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 478–86.

⁵⁸ *Jewish War* 1.248 ff. See also Arcari, “A Symbolic Transfiguration”, 479–82.

⁵⁹ More recently, the hypothesis of the reference to the Parthian invasion in the *Book of Parables* has been countered: see T.M. Erho, “The Ahistorical Nature of *1 Enoch* 56:5–8 and Its Ramifications upon the *Opinio Communis* on the Dating the *Similitudes of Enoch*”, *JSJ* 40 (2009) 23–54. This scholar interprets the military scenes in *1 Enoch* 56:5–8 as a (proto-)apocalyptic tradition that expects foreign invaders to attempt to wage war against Jerusalem in an eschatological battle. Certainly, there are few doubts that the *Book of Parables* should be considered an example of (proto-)apocalyptic tradition; however, the clear reference to the name of the Parthians, in a symbolic context, seems to confirm the exegetical operation carried out by the author, i.e. the symbolic transfiguration of a historical event on the basis of his authoritative (= biblical) tradition. It is not by chance that there are no references to the Parthians in Ezek 38–39, which is according to Erho the first example of such a (proto-)apocalyptic tradition.

5.2 *Baruch*

In *2 Baruch* 6–8 the Chaldeans surround Jerusalem; Baruch, the protagonist of the vision, is carried up to the walls of the city and sees four angels with torches setting fire to the walls, but not before another angel has delivered the sacred vessels of the Temple to the earth, which swallows them up until the latter days (6:5–10). Seven days later, Baruch receives a new revelation. He is told that Jeremiah should go with the captives to Babylon, but that he himself must remain at the ruins of Jerusalem, where YHWH will reveal to him what will happen at the end of days (9–12). After fasting for seven days, Baruch receives a revelation concerning the future punishment of the wicked; YHWH answers that the man was instructed in the Law and that now the time will be sped up, referring to the end of days soon to come (13–20).

2 Baruch's account of the destruction in 5:1–9:2 emphasizes the fall of the Temple and the city, while 3:4–9 includes the seer's worries about the loss of the city and the land.⁶⁰ There is no clear point of demarcation between the Temple, the city, and the "region of Zion", i.e. the land, at the time of destruction. The fall of Jerusalem and its Temple involve the loss of the land.⁶¹

Although the scribe in this work writes of Nebuchadnezzar's sack of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, *2 Baruch* is believed to have been written in reaction to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, yet before 135 CE.⁶² The historical destruction of the Temple at the hand of the Romans is symbolically transfigured; it connects the past with the present, associating the present crisis with the first destruction of the Temple conducted by foreigners (called "Chaldeans", a nickname also attested in biblical tradition⁶³). However, playing with the historical *correspondences*, the author is able to connect both the past and the present to the eschatological future: the past invasion of Jerusalem, like the present fall of the Temple (an equivalent of the conquest of the land of Israel, according to *2 Baruch*), are mirrors of YHWH's activity in history, a preparation of the definitive eschatological liberation of Israel.

It is not by chance that after the description of the fall of the Temple, Baruch receives a revelation concerning the evildoers (13–20). Moreover, in 35–40, while sitting near the ruins of the Temple, Baruch receives a new

⁶⁰ On the relationship between the Temple, the city, and the land in *2 Baruch*, see the recent work of L.I. Lied, *The Other Lands of Israel. Imaginations of the Land in 2 Baruch* (JSJ.S 129; Leiden: Brill, 2008).

⁶¹ Lied, *The Other Lands of Israel*, 40–1.

⁶² See F.J. Murphy, "2 Baruch and the Romans", *JBL* 104 (1985) 663–9.

⁶³ For instance, see Isa 47:1, 5; 48:14, 20; Jer 21:4, 9; 32:24–29; Ezek 23:14, 23; Dan 2:2–5.

revelation: on a plain surrounded by mountains and rocks a wood grows and occupies “much space”; a vine rises over against it and from under it a fountain (or a spring) comes forth peacefully; the forest is flooded by the fountain and following the flood, only one cedar remains, but it is cast down and brought to the vine; the vine speaks against the cedar, the cedar burns, and the vine grows. Here the wood is the mighty fourth power (probably the Romans), the spring is the dominion of the Messiah, and the vine is the Messiah himself, who will destroy the last hostile ruler of Zion. Finally, in 53–74, there is a vision where a cloud which arises from the sea rains down twelve times alternately dark and bright waters; this indicates the course of events from Adam to the Messiah.

Also in *2 Baruch* war is like a three-dimensional *mirror*: it testifies to the present “perceived crisis”, connects the present crisis to the past one (considering both equally, in the same metaphysical perspective), and at the same time alludes to the final triumph of both YHWH and his people.

Concluding Remarks

Revelation has been studied as a Jewish apocalypse. John uses this typical Jewish formal instrument, by sharing the literary and social instances emerging from it. The symbol is a dynamic element that highlights a particular social trend, i.e. the self-conscious effort to be the true and authoritative interpreter of tradition.

Apocalyptic symbolism should be analysed on the basis of two perspectives: as the mirror of a revelatory experience that provides a foundation or consolidates the authority of a visionary within a group, and as a literary instrument coming from his/her exceptional experience. It is difficult to separate the former element from the latter. In its literary dimension every apocalyptic symbol recontextualizes an image belonging to biblical tradition: the past might explain the present circumstances of the community waiting for the eschatological future. The literary-hermeneutical dimension of the symbol testifies to the exceptional authority of a visionary: his/her revelatory experience is legitimated through traditionally derived symbols which are seen in the vision.

War scenes in Jewish apocalyptic texts, as hermeneutical scenes deriving from the rereading of traditional biblical scenes or images, express different social and spiritual functions; they allude, however, to a “situation of expectation” in which a social group actually lives. In Revelation, John incorporates and gives new meaning by drawing on the interpretive potential of both the military symbols and scenes deriving from his tradition. He, as a

seer, develops biblical symbols to explain the relationship between the human realm and the divine one as part of an ongoing history.

The use of both military images and war scenes by John demonstrates that it is impossible to reconstruct a spiritual-religious universe of proto-Christianity, in which the latter is separated from Second Temple Judaism. As such, we must keep in mind that biblical images can be reread and reinterpreted for different audiences.

Probleme der Apokalypserezeption im 2. Jahrhundert

Eine Diskussion mit Charles E. Hill¹

Tobias Nicklas

An der Offenbarung des Johannes scheiden sich die Geister: Es gibt wohl kaum einen frühchristlichen Text, der eine so intensive Anziehungskraft auf Menschen verschiedenster Zeiten und Kulturen ausgeübt hat wie die Apokalypse.² Und obwohl dieser Text es auf eher verschlungenen Pfaden geschafft hat, als Teil des Neuen Testaments (und damit als Heilige Schrift) anerkannt zu werden,³ ist er doch nie gänzlich unumstritten geblieben: So sehr die Johannesoffenbarung fasziniert, so sehr hat sie mit ihren Bildern von Krieg und Gewalt immer wieder auch abgestoßen, ja die Frage provoziert, was Derartiges im Neuen Testament zu suchen habe.⁴

Die folgende Untersuchung versteht sich als Teil eines umfangreichen Projekts zur Rezeption der Offenbarung des Johannes in der Antike, der Erarbeitung des Apokalypse-Kommentars in der neuen Reihe "Novum Testamentum Patristicum".⁵ Bei der Vorbereitung dieses Kommentars er-

¹ Ich hoffe, dass Kollege Charles E. Hill den vorliegenden, seiner Arbeit gegenüber kritischen Beitrag als das verstehen mag, was er sein will – eine kritische Würdigung seines Wirkens durch einen Kollegen, der seine Arbeit durchaus schätzt.

² Einen breiten Überblick über die Rezeption der Offenbarung des Johannes in 2000 Jahren Kirchen- bzw. Kulturgeschichte bieten G. Maier, *Die Johannesoffenbarung und die Kirche* (WUNT 25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981) sowie J. Kovacs/C. Rowland, *Revelation* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Malden, Mass./Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). Auf die Zeit von der Antike bis ins frühe Mittelalter hinein konzentriert sich G. Kretschmar, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes. Die Geschichte ihrer Auslegung im 1. Jahrtausend* (CThM.ST 9; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1985).

³ Konkret zur Kanonisierung der Apokalypse vgl. auch A. Jakab, "Réception et canonisation des textes chrétiens. Le cas de l'Apocalypse de Jean", in E. Norelli (ed.), *Recueils normatifs et canons dans l'Antiquité. Perspectives nouvelles sur la formation des canons juif et chrétien dans leur contexte culturel* (PIRSB 3; Prahins: Zèbre, 2004) 133–45 [Lit.].

⁴ Zu den tiefsten Abgründen der Verwendung des Textes im Verlauf der Geschichte dürfte ihre Interpretation im Hinblick auf nationalsozialistische Ideologie durch J. Goebbels gehören. Hierzu weiterführend C.-E. Bärsch, "Antijudaismus, Apokalyptik und Satanologie: Die religiösen Elemente des nationalsozialistischen Antisemitismus", *ZRGG* 40 (1988) 112–33.

⁵ Weiterführend zur Reihe vgl. A. Merkt/T. Nicklas, "Hinführung zur Reihe Novum Testamentum Patristicum (NTP)", in M. Meiser (ed.), *Galater* (NTP 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007) 7–10.

scheint es mir sinnvoll, zwei Linien zu verfolgen, um die zu bearbeitende Materialfülle in den Griff zu bekommen: Einerseits möchte ich chronologisch vorgehen, um Entwicklungen in der Apokalypserezeption nachzeichnen zu können. Andererseits erscheint es sinnvoll, die ab Victorinus von Pettau (um 230–304)⁶ vorliegenden mehr oder weniger vollständigen Kommentierungen der Offenbarung, also “Gesamtentwürfe” zur Deutung der Apokalypse, heranzuziehen, um eine Art von “Rückgrat” des entstehenden Kommentars bilden zu können. Dass dabei trotz etwa der wichtigen Monographie von G. Kretschmar zur Apokalypserezeption im ersten Jahrtausend oder dem neuen Kommentar von J. Kovacs und C. Rowland in der Reihe der Blackwell’s Bible Commentaries⁷ in vielen Fällen Neuland zu betreten ist und auch wenig bekannte, bisher kaum erschlossene Texte zu berücksichtigen sind, liegt auf der Hand.

Aber auch, wo bereits ausführlichere Vorarbeiten vorliegen, ist die Diskussion keineswegs abgeschlossen. So hat vor wenigen Jahren Charles E. Hill eine wichtige, umfangreiche Monographie zur Rezeption des Corpus Johanneum im 2. Jahrhundert vorgelegt.⁸ Hill legt einen Schwerpunkt auf das Johannesevangelium, bezieht dabei aber Johannesbriefe und Apokalypse mit ein. Sein Anliegen besteht darin zu zeigen, dass frühere Arbeiten, die von einer eher zögerlichen Rezeption der johanneischen Schriften in der Alten Kirche ausgehen, im Unrecht sind. Um dies zu beweisen, arbeitet er eine beeindruckende Menge von Material auf. Ich kann und möchte im Folgenden keinen erneuten Gesamtüberblick über die Rezeption des Corpus Johanneum im 2. Jahrhundert vorlegen. Vielmehr nehme ich gegenüber Hill zwei Einschränkungen vor. Ich konzentriere mich einerseits auf die Offenbarung des Johannes und andererseits auf Texte, bei denen ich zu Ergebnissen komme, die von denen Hills abweichen oder bei denen ich anders als er argumentiere. Ausgeklammert werden soll zudem die Frage nach der Rezeption (bzw. weitgehenden Nichtrezeption) der Offenbarung des Johannes in apokryphen Apokalypsen der ersten frühchristlichen Jahrhunderte. In diesem Zusammenhang habe ich jüngst zu zeigen versucht, wie schwierig es ist, die Abhängigkeiten antik-christlicher Apokalypsen von der Offenbarung des Johannes aufzuweisen. In einigen Fällen – so etwa bei der *Ascensio Isaiae*, beim *Hirten des Hermas* oder bei den Büchern 1 und 8 der *Sibyllinischen Orakel* – komme ich deswegen, anders als Hill, zu dem Ergebnis,

⁶ Zur Apokalypserezeption Victorinus vgl. die Beiträge von Konrad Huber und Martin Hantschka im vorliegenden Band.

⁷ Siehe die Titel oben in Anmerkung 2.

⁸ C.E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2004).