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Magical Motifs in the Book of Revelation

Thesis

By Rodney Thomas

University of Durham

25th of June 2007

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Magical Motifs in the Book of Revelation

The first century C. E. was a time dominated by a belief in spiritual forces and the author of Revelation sought to put these into proper perspective. He did this in a number of very creative ways. At times, he condemns practices that he considers to be unacceptable labelling them as φαρμακεία. At other times, he very creatively places these practices in the context of Israel's ancient enemies, especially those connected with 'magic'. In still other instances, John takes over wholesale imagery commonly associated with 'magic' and recasts it into a Christian context. This thesis seeks to examine the question posed by David Aune that Revelation was written as an 'anti-magical' polemic and to explore the general concept of the definition of 'magic' not only from a modern perspective but also from a first-century Asia Minor perspective.

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I would like to thank the wonderful staff at the University of Durham library for their constant assistance and their extraordinary efforts in getting materials from libraries around the world. I express my thanks, too, to Dr. Ken Cukrowski of Abilene Christian University for helping me with access to the library at ACU and for helping me, too, with the logistical details of having a place to stay as I did research.

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I would like express my thanks to my mother (Helen Snider) who taught me many things and always made me feel as if nothing were impossible, because she believed I could do anything. To my dearest Michele, thank you for always being at my side and walking with me through this life. You are my constant companion and support.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the Jesus Christ that I have found to be so vividly displayed in the context of the Apocalypse of John. My admiration for him has grown enormously.

Ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ.

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1. Magical Motifs in the Book of Revelation

A. Defining the Problem

In recent years, David Aune has highlighted a need to explore the use of 'magical' motifs in the Book of Revelation. He says,

> The analysis of the various magical patterns and motifs which underlie some of the writings emanating from early Christianity is a task which has yet to be fully undertaken. In the New Testament the 'Revelation of John' has yet to be fully investigated from the vantage point of the history of religions, and it is precisely that document which shows the greatest impact of magical patterns and motifs in the New Testament.[1]

I will seek to investigate whether there are indeed these 'magical patterns' and 'motifs' by examining a number of instances that have the appearance of affinity with such patterns and motifs. It is my supposition that in a world immersed in themes and images that are derived from the realm of spiritual forces John has a view of these forces that is in keeping with that of much of his audience. He is a man of his own times and does not view the world from either a modern, or post-modern, perspective, and he understands that his audience believes that there are powerful spiritual forces at work in the world that have a direct affect on their lives. He seeks to place the beliefs of his audience in proper perspective in relation to the position of Jesus Christ in the universe and the power of God at work in the world. In doing so he is extraordinarily creative and versatile in his usage of mythological themes and the folk beliefs of his audience.

Others, such as J. M. Hull have noted this aspect of John's composition as well when he states , "...that magic interpreted by Luke and expunged by Matthew is baptized in the Apocalypse of John, where the relationship between Christianity and magic becomes creative, and magical images and customs are taken over wholesale without compromise to

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[1] David E. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, ed. Wolfgang Haase (Vol. 23.2. Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1990), p. 1555.

the essentially eschatological nature of the church's faith."[2] As the present thesis will try to show, Hull's attempt to forge a clear-cut distinction between 'faith' and 'magic' has been regarded as problematic.[3] There also appear to be certain affinities between Merkavah Mysticism, Hellenistic materials, and *Greek Magical Papyri* that may also be present in some form in the Apocalypse.[4] Though the *Greek Magical Papyri* represent a Graeco-Egyptian form of 'magical' texts that date primarily from the 3rd Century C.E. to the 6th Century C.E., due to the conservative nature of the 'religious formulas, hymns and rituals,' that they include, Aune suggests that this type of 'magic' had achieved its 'basic form' by the 1st century C.E.[5]

Other scholars also agree with the assessment of the 'magical' character of the Book of Revelation. One such scholar is Eitrem,[6] another is Betz, who says that, 'One is startled to see the strong interest the apocalypticist has in "knowledge" and "science" (for example, cosmology, astrology, demonology, botany, zoology, pharmacy, and so forth)…'.[7] This statement for Betz functions as a general comment on Apocalypticism as a whole and not specifically on Revelation; however, he then goes on to cite a particular example from Revelation as indicative of what he terms 'Hellenistic-oriental syncretism'.[8] In that example he refers to the 'angel of the waters' (Rev. 16:5-7), which shows a basic agreement with the

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[2] John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series, 28 (London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 144.

[3] cf. Aune points out that although one '…might question Hull's supposition of the alien nature of the magic in early Christianity, his basic view of the 'Apocalypse of John' is certainly correct.' Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity", p. 1555.

[4] Aune observes that there appear to be similarities for securing revelations between Hellenistic materials and Merkavah mysticism, and he notes that there are also significant similarities with the *Greek Magical Papyri.* David E. Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): p. 484.

[5] David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), pp. 349-350.

[6] S. Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament*, 2nd ed., revised and enlarged (Oslo: Aedibus Universitetsforlaget, 1966), p. 28.

[7] Hans Dieter Betz, "On the Problem of the Religio-Historical Understanding of Apocalypticism", *Journal for Theology and the Church* 6 (1969): p. 136.

[8] Betz, "On the Problem of the Religio-Historical Understanding of Apocalypticism", pp. 138, 141-154.

Jewish doctrine of everything having an angel appointed over it.[9] Betz then goes on to draw a comparison between the 'Kore Kosmu', and the 'apocalyptic' section in 'Asclepius' with Revelation 16:4-6, noting the symmetry of tradition between these passages.[10] I suggest that this could possibly indicate a link between Revelation, on the one hand, and 'magical' Egyptian concepts of the world on the other.

It is of note that the author of Revelation seems unequivocally opposed to *φαρμακεία*,[11] and yet, he seems to embrace concepts and terms commonly associated with 'magic'. Aware of this problem, Aune has argued that the Apocalypse was at least in part composed as an 'anti-magic apologetic.'[12] It "... mirrors in a very distinctive way the social and cultural amalgam which constituted late first century Christianity."[13] Judaism itself had been influenced by the oriental cultures it had been in contact with since the sixth century B.C.E. In addition, the use of apocalyptic ideas by Jewish authors indicates the degree of their indebtedness to external cultural forces. It is by similar scenarios and similar patternistic usage that native mythological motifs of kingship and combat are used in the formation of this new amalgam.[14] John adapted mythical and cultural traditions that were clearly outside the realm of what would normally be classed as Jewish, in order to communicate effectively with his audience.[15]

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[9] H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Komentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. 3, Die Briefe, des Neuen Testements und die Offenbarung Johannes : Erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch (Munich: C. H. Becksche Verlagsbuchhandlung Oskar Beck, 1926), pp. 818 - 820.

[10] Betz, "On the Problem of the Religio-Historical Understanding of Apocalypticism," pp. 142-154; A. J. Festugière, ed., *Corpus Hermeticum IV. Fragments Extraits de Stobée, XXIII-XXIX* (Paris: Société D'édition Les Belles Lettres, 1954), pp. 1 ff; Arthur Darby Nock, ed., *Corpus Hermeticum II: Traités XIII-XVIII, Asclepius* (Paris: Société D'édition Les Belles Lettres, 1945), pp. 326 ff.

[11] Rev. 9:21 (*φάρμακον*); 18:23 (*φαρμακεία*); 21:8 (*φάρμακος*); 22:15 (*φάρμακος*).

[12] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", p. 481.

[13] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 481.

[14] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 482; J. Gwyn Griffiths, "Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Era," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, ed. David Hellholm, Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983), , pp. 273-279.

[15] Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion; No. 9 (Missoula MT: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 2.

'Like apocalyptic and wisdom, magic was an ecumenical phenomenon in the ancient world reflecting the broadly syncretistic tendencies of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.'[16] In spite of the obvious spatial and cultural distance between Asia Minor and Egypt, the Apocalypse contains traditions that demonstrate striking similarities with Egyptian concepts though the exact channels of transmission still remain ambiguous.[17] The fact that oral materials seem to have played a significant role in early 'magical' materials does not make the quest for tracing channels of transmission any easier.[18] One example of Egyptian material being used in the Apocalypse '...is the motif of 'the second death' and 'the lake of fire', rarely found singly, but associated only in the Apocalypse (20. 14; 21. 80) and in the underworld mythology of ancient Egyptian mortuary literature (the Coffin Texts; the Book of the Dead)'.[19]

When referring to *φαρμακεία*, the author of Revelation can emphasize the practice of 'falsehood', doing so even to the point of maintaining that those accused of 'sorcery' actually 'love' falsehood.[20] There also is a strong emphasis on those on the inside as opposed to those on the 'outside'.[21] The term *φαρμακεία* is often used to indicate a separation between one person, or group, and another. It is an emphasis that exists throughout the Apocalypse, but it is especially prominent in certain passages, where one group is clearly perceived as being in opposition to the other.[22] 'Apocalyptic literature is often defined as literature evoked by a crisis.'[23] In Revelation, the author perceives and responds to a crisis that has multiple facets.

One such facet is a conflict with Jews: this was especially important, as it was under

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[16] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," pp. 482-483.
[17] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 483.
[18] John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 7.
[19] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", p. 483. 'The motifs of 'τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός' and 'ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος' occur together in ancient Egyptian texts, e.g., Book of the Dead 175.1, 15, 20....'
[20] Rev. 22:15.
[21] Rev. 22:15.
[22] Rev. 7:3 ff.; 9:20; 12:17; 13:8; 14:11; 16:2; 18:4; 19:9; 20:4; 20:9; 20:12 ff.; 21:3; 21: 7-8; 21:27; 22:14-15.
[23] Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), p. 84.

the umbrella of Judaism that the Christians were afforded some legal protection. There was strife with other religious groups among the Gentiles. The monotheistic stance of the Christians did not sit well with polytheistic Gentiles. There was also a conflict between peoples of differing socio-economic levels.[24] Feelings of isolation and anxiety among the Christians are prominent; Collins proposes the idea that the Book of Revelation was written to assist the Christians in dealing with these factors by '…the creation of a new linguistic "world."'[25] Spiritual powers and forces dominate the physical realm in this 'new linguistic world'. Some might even conceive of this world as a world dominated by both 'forbidden' and 'permissible' reliance upon spiritual forces. John seeks to demonstrate why separations are necessary and to demonstrate the consequences of not maintaining such distinctions.

I. Magic in Antiquity

Let us begin to explore the understanding of 'magic' in the ancient world, with the goal of understanding more precisely the ways in which the ancients would have understood the concept of 'magic'. It should be noted from the outset that some have despaired at the use of the term 'magic' altogether in a modern context, having almost reached the conclusion that it has no meaning at all.[26] Despite the controversy surrounding the word 'magic' none of the alternatives seem to improve the situation sufficiently. It should be noted that certainly in antiquity not only the word, but the concept of 'magic' was commonly held across a vast time and across many cultures. It is therefore preferable to try to clarify and understand the concept rather to discard it and replace it with some concept that would alienate us further from the author's and the original audience's frame of reference.

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[24] Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, pp. 84-107.
[25] Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, pp. 165-166.
[26] Edmund Leach, *Social Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.133; Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001, 2003), pp.18-19; Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, "Introduction", in Marvin Meyer, and Paul Mirecki, eds., *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), pp. 1-10; Todd E. Klutz, "Reinterpreting 'Magic' in the World of Jewish and Christian Scripture: An Introduction", in Todd E. Klutz, ed., *Magic in the Biblical World* (London: T & T Clark International, 2003), pp. 1-9.

What was it that determined whether a practice was considered 'magic', and where was the dividing line between 'acceptable' 'magic' and 'forbidden' 'magic'? Where did the general negativity toward 'magic' originate and what is the source of confusion about what constitutes 'magic' in the ancient world? It is my thesis that the modern confusion surrounding the definition of 'magic' mirrors a similar confusion found in the ancient world. It is important to recognise that people of the first century did not perceive their world in the way we perceive the world today. For many in antiquity, the preconceptions of cause and effect had a more spiritual orientation than is commonly held in western society today.

'Ancient man saw himself surrounded by mysterious and miraculous forces, both benevolent and hostile.'[27] In light of this worldview, they were more inclined to be sensitive to a spiritual realm, and its influence over every day life in all areas of activity.[28] The author of the Revelation designed his composition in such a way as to relate to needs he perceived in the recipient churches.[29] In the early chapters of the Apocalypse, the Spirit is made to address the fears and perils that face the churches of Asia Minor at the end of the first century.[30] The writer chose to combat the fears and apprehensions of these communities by providing them with an alternate vision of the world. Rather than deny the existence of 'magic', as a modernist might John chooses to show that it is no real threat to the one who 'does right.'[31]

II. Defining the Task

There are a variety of hermeneutical approaches used to engage biblical texts. Some of these approaches, such as a post-modernist approach might start from the preconceived notion that the original intended meaning of the author is either totally irrelevant or

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[27] Eli Davis, "Magic", in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1972), p. 703.
[28] Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1997), p. 18.
[29] Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 961.
[30] Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, *11* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), p. 1.
[31] Rev. 22:11.

unobtainable. Such approaches then make the reader's interpretation, whether ancient or modern, of primary, if not total relevance. In a sense, such methods can deem the intent of the author as irrelevant in the process of interpretation.[32] Hirsch, while noting that 'authorial intention is not the only possible norm for interpretation,' does note that it is the 'only practical norm for a cognitive discipline of interpretation.'[33] The primary aim of this study will be to ascertain the most likely intent of the author in relation to the question of 'magic'. We shall try to be aware that, at the same time, what one says about original intention is going to be shaped by the contemporary reader's worldview.[34]

In delineating the approach to 'magic' and related motifs taken in this study, we note that interpretation necessarily involves two stages: First, one has to determine what Cotterell and Turner call 'Discourse Meaning'. Attempts to do this should be undertaken by those who have sufficient, extensive knowledge of the '*linguistic context*' shared by a writer and the intended readers. This is ultimately a quest to discover what a given author was consciously attempting to communicate. Second, there is the interpretation of the text. This involves an attempt to transfer the meaning of the ancient text into the interpreter's own world, so that its significance may be understood in the contextual world of the interpreter.[35] During the process of interpretation every effort must be made to avoid confusing 'words' with 'concepts'.[36] The aim of this study, while frequently taking words and motifs in ancient texts and languages as a point of departure, shall move beyond such tracking, in recognition of the importance of meaning in context. This, in turn, will make it possible to preserve the integrity of comparisons, while identifying areas of common understanding that can cross through time, borders, religions and cultures.

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[32] P. D. Juhl, *Interpretation An Essay in the Philosophy of Literary Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 45-65.
[33] E. D. Hirsch Jr., *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 7.
[34] Hirsch Jr., *The Aims of Interpretation*, p. 8.
[35] Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), p. 72.
[36] Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 106-128.

Problems are easily created when one focuses too exclusively on the meanings of individual words without recognising the wider context and the fact that idioms can be an important part of understanding a particular concept.[37] Problems can be avoided by exploring concepts more widely through a variety of periods, cultures, languages, and locales. This should enable us to ascertain more fully shifts in meaning across these boundaries and also meanings that are retained across these frontiers. In most instances the discussions will begin within the Greek text of the Apocalypse and expand from there in order to explore the conceptual framework within the ancient world as it may have shaped the writer and readers' understanding of it. This will aid in delineating what we may assign to their own peculiar ways of understanding 'magic'.

III. Graeco-Roman Magic in Antiquity

Because of the setting of the Apocalypse, it is appropriate to consider the background of the concept of 'magic', both in the Graeco-Roman world and contiguous cultures that may have influenced, dominated, or interacted with Jews and Christians who lived in Asia Minor during the first century C.E. The Greek term *μάγος* is a loanword borrowed from Persian and it was used initially to describe a priestly tribe.[38] The members of this tribe are reported by Strabo to have performed the daily worship of fire.[39] It was necessary for one of the members of this group to be present in order for any sacrifice to be offered.[40] The profession of the *μάγοι* entailed dealing with 'things divine' and they were in charge of all things relating to the gods.[41] Nock asserts that this caste has continued down to the present day, though of course time has brought many changes.[42]

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[37] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, vol. 1*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Society, 1988, 1989), pp. vi-xx.
[38] Herodotus, *The Histories*, I.101; Arthur Darby Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 308.
[39] Strabo, *Geography*, XV 3.15.
[40] Herodotus, *The Histories*, I 132.
[41] Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, VIII.iii.11.
[42] Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, p. 309.

It is a bit puzzling as to why, by the 5th century B.C.E., the term *μάγος* had become a term of derision among the Greeks.[43] In this period, and locality, the term has become indicative of a 'diviner' and not simply 'a magician.'[44] Helen of Troy's disappearance is explained as perhaps being down to *φαρμάκοισιν ἢ μάγων* in *Orestes*.[45] This text seems to clearly represent the *μάγων* as possessing some form of extraordinary power. Hippocrates, in his work *On Sacred Disease* (end of the 5th century B.C.E.) uses the term *μαγεύν* to refer to a mysterious power which seems to cure and appears to be a 'power of godhead'. He goes on to indicate that there may in fact not be any actual spiritual powers at work, but merely the devices of men seeking to make a living;[46] and therefore, the concept of deception is once more brought to the forefront. As these brief selections indicate (along with others that follow), 'magic' in ancient Greece appears to have had a certain negative connotation.[47]

'Magic' could also be seen as so powerful that it rendered the one under its power as free from blame, as is indicated by the discussions in the *Encomium of Helen*.[48] It is in this work that the earliest appearance of the noun *μαγέιας* occurs as a derivative[49] that is linked with sorcery (*γοητείας*).[50] Thus it can be demonstrated that by the 5th century B.C.E. 'magic' had acquired a negative connotation among the Greeks.

Despite this primarily negative connotation, there was still enough positive information available for the optimistic aspect of the *magus* to be exploited by Apuleius in the middle of the 2nd century C.E.[51] Many in the ancient world were still drawn to the promise of power that seemed to be offered by 'magic'. It held an aura of something

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[43] Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 387.
[44] Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, p. 309.
[45] Euripides, *Orestes*, 1497.
[46] Hippocrates, *On Sacred Disease*, III.I-IV.21.
[47] Plato, *The Republic*, 572 E; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 30.1.
[48] Gorgias, "Enconium of Helen," in *Gorgias Enconium of Helen*, ed. D. M. MacDowell, (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1982), pp. 25-26. Section 10-12.
[49] Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, p. 309.
[50] Gorgias, "Enconium of Helen," Section 10.
[51] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 12.

'Persian' and mysterious.[52] It may be that the negative associations with what came to be called 'magic' simply reflected the prejudice of the Greeks (dating from about the 5th century B.C.E.) that may have grown from a reporting of a foreign religion as some form of perversion. Along with this is the assertion that Persian religion was '...so exotic, so different, so ancient, the Greeks must have speculated that the *μάγοι* had access to secret knowledge.'[53]

He remarks:

> Aemilianus' slander was focused on one point: that I am a sorcerer. So let me ask his most learned advocates: What is a sorcerer? I have read in many books that *magus* is the same thing in Persian as *priest* in our language. What crime is there in being a priest and in having accurate knowledge, a science, a technique of traditional ritual, sacred rites and traditional law, if magic consists of what Plato interprets as the "cult of the gods" when he talks of the disciplines taught to the crown prince in Persia? I remember the very words of that divine man [Plato]. Let me recall them to you, Maximus: "When the young prince has reached the age of fourteen, he is handed over to the royal tutors. There are four of them, chosen as the most outstanding among the Persian elders. One is the wisest, one the most just, one the most restrained, one the bravest. One of them teaches [the crown prince] the 'magic' of Zoroaster, the son of Ormazd, which is the worship of the gods. He also teaches [him] the art of being king." Listen to this, you who rashly slander magic! It is an art acceptable to the immortal gods, an art which includes the knowledge of how to worship them and pay them homage. It is a religious tradition dealing with things divine, and it has been distinguished ever since it was founded by Zoroaster and Ormazd, the high priests of divinities. In fact, it is considered one of the chief elements of royal instruction, and in Persia no one is allowed lightly to be a "magus" any more than they would let him be king.[54]

This material illustrates, at best, the controversy surrounding what to make of 'magic': though subject to suspicion, it is associated in the text with ancient science and with practices that might today be referred to as something other than 'magic'. Another aspect that indicates how difficult it is to define 'magic' with precision is the vast range of Greek words that are given a dictionary definition of 'magic', 'magical', or associated with the 'practice' or 'practitioners of magic'. This is demonstrated by the fact that in the Liddell and

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[52] Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 12.
[53] Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 6.
[54] Apuleius, *Apology*, 25-26. Translation is from Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, pp. 110-111.

Scott Lexicon no fewer than 36 Greek words are defined within these parameters:[55] and there are many more with a more remote association with 'magic'. The term *φάρμακος*, and its derivatives, used in the Revelation, are among the words associated with 'magic'.[56]

IV. Persian Magic in Antiquity

The negative aspects of the *magus* do not seem to have been confined merely to Greek literature, however. The negative image in Greek literature may have been accentuated by the fact that in Persian literature there are slight indications of negativity too, but mostly the assertions are positive. According to the Behistûn inscription of Darius the Great, the person who attempts to usurp the throne of Cambyses is identified as 'Gaumâta, the Magian'.[57] It is to be noted that this usurper is specifically designated as a 'the Magian' perhaps indicating in this context a slight negative aspect to the term *Magian*. In the *Avesta,* the term *Magus* occurs only once and does not appear to be associated with 'sorcery'.[58] Moulton sees the usage here as indicative of the fact that this title, that has been used by outsiders in a derogatory sense, is now used by the priesthood to describe themselves.[59] The term 'magus' also occurs in a number of seal inscriptions that belong to the Sasanian period and appears to be a title of some prestige indicative of the priestly class.[60]

It is likely that precisely here we have the beginnings of the mysterious aura that would come to surround the *μάγοι*. The designation was made to describe the priests of this foreign religion that was so alien to the Greeks. Strabo describes these priests as ministering

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[55] s.v. *μάγος, αὐτοψία; βουβωνιακός, διαμαγεύω; δύναμις, ἐκθεόω; φάρμακος, φυσικός, φωταγωγία; γοητεία; ἡλιομαντεία; ἴυγξ; κατάδεσις, μάθευμα; μαγέια; μαγεύω; μαγευτικός, μαγγανευτικός, μαγικός, μυστήριον; οὐσιάζω; πάρεδος, παραστιχίς, περίερψος, περιμάκτρια; περιμάσσω; πραγματεία; πρακτικός, θελκτήριος, ῥάβδος, ῥόμβος, τελετή; ὠδή; ἐπῳδός, φαρμακεύς, λιγαίνω; Ἔγεσος*; Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon* Rev. and Aug. by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie with a supplement (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, 1983).
[56] Rev. 9:21; 18:23; 21:8; 22:15.
[57] *Behistûn Inscription* Col. I, 36.
[58] *Yasna* 65: 7-8.
[59] James Hope Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913), p. 429.
[60] Ernst Herzfeld, *Paikuli Monument and Inscription of the Early History of the Sasanian Empire*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer/Ernst Vohsen, 1924), pp. 80, 82, 121, 213.

around the fire, keeping it continually burning, and 'making incantations ... holding before the fire their bundle of rods.'[61] They also offer sacrifices and '...the Magi touch them with slender wands and make incantations...'[62] over them for a long time. It is not hard to imagine what outsiders would have thought of all these strange procedures.[63] The text of Strabo uses the term *ῥάβδος*, a word that also refers to a 'magic wand' in Greek literature.[64] Though this could have reflected an already existing prejudice on Strabo's part, it would surely have added to the view that these practices were strange and 'magical' to those who would later read of them.

V. Mesopotamian Magic in Antiquity

Beyond this, the ancient chronology of the area known as Mesopotamia indicates a long history of literary materials and 'magical' texts. One difficulty in studying these materials is that early incantations were often transmitted orally, so that even the written texts available from this very early period (before the second millennium B.C.E.) are difficult to translate. These texts often represent only an extract, or a paragraph, from an incantation that must have been known by heart by the 'magicians' of the time.[65] ' ...[I]n the Babylonian magic the gods were prayed to for their assistance, and we often question whether we are dealing with magic or religion; here their name or the angel's or angels' names are simply used, and these are sufficient to invoke their potency, without appeal to the heart or mind of a living deity.'[66] There are an enormous number of texts from the area of Mesopotamia that relate to what might be termed 'magical' phenomena, such as 'Incantations Against Evil Spirits',[67] ghost expelling texts,[68] rituals to invoke revelatory dreams,[69] and 'magical'

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[61] Strabo, *Geography*, 15.3.15.
[62] Strabo, *Geography*, 15.3.14.
[63] Strabo, *Geography*, 15.3.14-15.
[64] Homer, *Odyssey*, 10.238; 10.319; 16.172; *Iliad*, 24.343; Pindar, *Odes*, 9.33; Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.67.
[65] J. Van Dijk, A. Goetze, and M. I. Hussey, *Early Mesopotamian Incantations and Rituals*, vol. 11, Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts (New Haven CN: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 1.
[66] James A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*, vol. 3, The Museum Publications of the Babylonian Section (Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1913), p. 111.
[67] Johannes C. de Moor, "An Incantation Against Evil Spirits", *Ugarit-Forschungen* 12 (1980): pp. 429-432.

figurines, amulets and talismans.[70] This type of material seems to reflect the same sorts of activities that the later Greeks and the contemporary West might describe with the term 'magic'.

VI. Egyptian Magic in Antiquity

In Egypt, the term *heka* is a spiritual force, which would come to be called 'magic' by Coptic scribes. They selected the term to describe the 'magic' of Simon Magus in Acts 8:9. There is a clear equation of these terms, and this is shown again by the Coptic scribes using the term in a way that indicates that it is the quality of 'magic' in Acts 8:11. It is also associated with other Greek terms that have a close connection to 'magic' such as *φαρμακός* ('sorcerer') in Deuteronomy 18:10, and *ἐπαοιδός* ('enchanter') in Daniel 4:4.[71] 'Magic' was a part of every aspect of life in Ancient Egypt. It infiltrated humanity, the animal world, inanimate objects and was even thought to be the spiritual force manipulated by the gods when they performed their mighty acts.[72] The gods themselves are imbued with 'magical' powers.[73] Ginzberg records the Jewish legend that says of Egypt 'Of the ten measures of magic allotted to the world they had taken nine for themselves.'[74]

In Egypt, essentially the spiritual and material realms were interwoven from a common substance and through 'magic' it was considered possible to control the order of the cosmos and to modify destiny by 'magically' combating negative trends.[75] There are also a great many terms that relay the same force as the term *heka*. These are too numerous for us

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[68] Y. Avishur, "The Ghost-Expelling Incantation from Ugarit", *Ugarit-Forschungen* 13 (1981): pp. 13-25.
[69] Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1999), pp. 31-38.
[70] Erica Reiner, "Magic Figurines, Amulets, and Talismans*," in *Monsters and Demons in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Ann E. Farkas, Prudence O. Harper, and Evelyn B. Harrison (Mainz on Rhine: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1987), pp. 27-36.
[71] Robert Kriech Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, vol. 54, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993), p. 14.
[72] A. Rosalie David, "Introduction", in *Egyptian Magic*, ed. Christian Jacq and Janet M. Davis (Warminster: Aris & Phillips Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1985), p. ix.
[73] J. F. Borghouts, trans., *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts*. Religious Texts Translation Series, NISABA. vol. 9 (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1978), No. 84.
[74] Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1911), p. 28.
[75] David, "Introduction", p. ix.

to cite in detail, but Ritner gives an exhaustive list in his work.[76] Ritner also gives an exhaustive and detailed list of practices associated with 'magic', such as 'spitting, licking and swallowing' along with the use of images and intermediaries.[77] There were two basic principles involved in 'magical' practice in Egypt: the first was that sound embodied a creative force and the second was centred on the creative force of an image or model. 'Magic' was used as a system of defence for the most part, and it was used at every level of the society. It played a crucial role in the service of the state and was used to protect the nation and the king from foreign attack. Everything in Egyptian society held a 'magical' function and served as a protective shield.[78]

'Magical' protection played an enormous role in the lives of the everyday populace of Egypt. This is indicated by the widespread and pervasive nature of talismans or amulets that '…were worn to protect against a wide range of evils, and to give assistance against accidents, ghosts and other dangers; those who feared illness also resorted to wearing amulets, and for those who actually suffered from disease, magic could bring about their recovery.'[79] 'Magic' was an integral component in much Egyptian medicine. Though the Egyptians were the first people known to have developed a rational system of diagnosis and medical treatment, they continued to use 'magical' procedures as an important element in treating ailments. This remained the case because it was believed that in addition to a physical cause for an ailment, there was also a hidden cause, which was of a spiritual nature, and it was essential that this cause be identified and treated so that the patient could recover.[80]

The view that the Egyptian practice of religion was 'magic', in truth, begins with the Roman conquest of Egypt. Rome had long viewed foreign religions with both suspicion and

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[76] Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, pp. 30-72.
[77] Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, pp. 74-190.
[78] David, "Introduction", pp. ix- xi.
[79] David, "Introduction", p. xii.,
[80] David, "Introduction", pp. xii-xiii.

hostility often labelling them as 'superstitious' or even as 'magical. The term 'magic' itself is often indicative of a certain form of Roman xenophobia that was often associated with fraudulent trickery and even with demonic 'sorcery'.[81] Although the Greeks were the first to develop this conception, the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt did not disparage Egyptian practice and often even adopted Egyptian religious practice.[82] It may therefore be seen that the source of the disparaging term 'magic', being used of Egyptian practices, has its roots in the same Graeco-Roman perceptions of practices which differed culturally from their normative standards.

VII. Jewish Magic in Antiquity

The Jewish view of 'magic' and 'magical' practice is particularly relevant to a study of 'magic' in relation to the Book of Revelation. Though 'magic' was condemned by the Jewish religious authority,[83] it flourished among the Jews. 'In Jewish as in non-Jewish culture, the dividing-line between medicine and magic, doctor and magician, was extremely thin. Jubilees 10:10-14[84] accepts that demons cause disease.'[85] Josephus records the giving of special knowledge to Solomon with regard to demons, including methods of healing and incantations.[86] According to an early layer of tradition in *1 Enoch*, the fallen watchers teach

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[81] Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, p. 217.
[82] Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, pp. 217, n. 1008.
[83] Exod. 22:17; Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:10-11; *1 En.* 7-8; *2 Mac.* 12:40; *Sib.* 3:218-230; *Ps.-Philo*, 34; *Sanh.* 6:6; 7:7; 11; 10:1.
[84] *And he told one of us to teach Noah all of their healing because he knew that they would not walk uprightly and would not strive righteously. And we acted in accord with all of his words. All of the evil ones, who were cruel, we bound in the place of judgment. But a tenth of them we let remain so that they might be subject to Satan upon the earth. And the healing of all their illnesses together with their seductions we told Noah so that he might heal by means of herbs of the earth. And Noah wrote everything in a book just as we taught him according to every kind of healing. And the evil spirits were restrained from following the sons of Noah. And he gave everything which he wrote to Shem, his oldest son, because he loved him much more than all of his sons.* O. S. Wintermute, trans. and ed., "Jubilees," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 76.
[85] P. S. Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," in *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, ed. Emil Schürer, et al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), p. 342.
[86] Josephus, *Ant.* viii, 45. *And God granted him knowledge of the art used against demons for the benefit and healing of men. He also composed incantations by which illnesses are relieved, and left behind forms of exorcisms with which those possessed by demons drive them out never to return.* Ralph Marcus, trans., *Josephus Jewish Antiquities VII-VIII*, ed. G. P. Goold. Loeb Classical Series; vol. 281 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1934), p. 239.

the art of making incantations and astrology to the people.[87] In 2 Maccabees, there is a record of Judas finding that all of those who had fallen in battle were wearing 'sacred tokens of the idols of Jamina'.[88] Gager suggests that the survivors will have also '...fortified themselves against "anything harmful" by putting on their engraved stones or their inscribed sheets of metal and papyrus.'[89] This could mean that virtually every Jewish soldier that went into battle with Judas felt the need for this type of spiritual protection.

Demons and the fear of demons played a dominant role in much that is called 'magic'. In Jewish antiquity there appear to have been primarily three classes of spirits that were recognised as demons.

> The simplest and most universal form of these was the disembodied spirit, the souls of men or women who, having died, had changed their earthly shape for an incorporeal one. Second to this comes the supernatural being who never was earthly, a phantom or demon, often of grotesque or horrid shape as savage imagination might invent. Lastly, we have a class of demons half-ghostly, half-human, the offspring of intermarriage between human beings and the spirit world, just as we find demigods of half divine origin in all the mythologies.[90]

The view that these supernatural entities were able to inflict harm on human beings was held throughout the Near East from prehistoric times, and is still held by many in that region to the present day.[91] Some see 'magic' functioning as some form of '... psychological compensation for human weakness in the face of hostile physical and often social environment.'[92] Such people in most instances would not accept either the existence or the intervention of spiritual beings. The fear of supernatural beings and their injurious activity is the subject of a great deal of ancient 'magic'. The most well attested form of 'magic' in the

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[87] 1 En. 8:3. *Amasras taught incantation and the cutting of roots; and Amaros the resolving of incantations; and Baraqiyal astrology, and Kokarer'el (the knowledge of) the signs and Tamel taught the seeing of the stars, and Asder'el taught the course of the moon as well as the deception of man.* E. Isaac, trans. and ed., "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 16.
[88] *2 Mac.* 12:40.
[89] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, p. 218.
[90] R. Campbell Thompson, *Semitic Magic* (York Beach MA: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 2000), p. 2.
[91] Thompson, *Semitic Magic*, p. 1.
[92] Peter Hayman, "Was God a Magician? Sefer Yeşira and Jewish Magic," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40 (1989): p. 226.

Jewish context before Bar Kokhba is the exorcism (Tobit 6:3-9, 17-18; 8:1-3, 11Q11, Ant. viii: 46-49).[93] Alexander points out that '...magic played an unusually prominent role in the worldview of the Qumran sect, and they had a deeply magical outlook on life.'[94] 'Magical' texts appear to exist among the people of Israel despite official opposition (Deut. 18:8-14).[95] Key even views the function of the ancient prophets of Israel as a 'magical task.'[96]

Some have tried to postulate that there was not a distinctly Jewish form of 'magic' until the post-Talmudic period.[97] Aune points out, however, that this is clearly an error.[98] The recent discoveries from Qumran seem to support the view expressed by Aune in this respect. They have, for example, shown '...how early and how widespread were magical practices and beliefs amongst all types of Jews.'[99] Though there is some disagreement about how prominent a role 'magic' played in the Qumran community there seems to be an overall consensus that it did play some role.[100]

The worldview of the Qumran community appears to have included the existence of a perceived threat from spiritual beings, as just a small phrase from 4Q510 will demonstrate:

> 4...And I, the Sage, declare the splendour of his radiance in order to frighten and terr[ify] 5 all the spirits of the ravaging angels and the bastard spirits, demons, Lilith, owls and [jackals...] 6 and those who strike unexpectedly to lead astray the spirit of knowledge, to make their hearts forlorn and...[101]

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[93] Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," p. 342.
[94] P. S. Alexander, "'Wrestling against Wickedness in High Places': Magic in the Worldview of the Qumran Community," in *The Scrolls and the Scriptures*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 26; Roehampton Institute London Papers, 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 1997), p. 319.
[95] Bilhah Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry*, trans. Jonathan Chipman, vol. 12, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), p. 228.
[96] Andrew F. Key, "The Magical Background of Isaiah 6:9-13", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967): p. 202.
[97] Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Folk Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), p. 11.
[98] Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity", p. 1520.
[99] Hayman, "Was God a Magician? Sefer Yeşira and Jewish Magic", p. 226.
[100] Armin Lange, "The Essene Position on Magic and Divination," in *Legal Texts and Legal Issues*, ed. Moshe Bernstein, Florentino García Martínez, and John Kampen (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), pp. 431, 433-435.
[101] Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition, vol. 2* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), p. 1029.

The community seems to have viewed itself as being at war with these spiritual forces. One of the weapons in that spiritual war was the singing of praises to God using poetry. Nitzan puts it in these terms: 'Accordingly, the songs are not merely a ceremonial accompaniment to acts of war, but themselves constitute the instruments of war. In other words, one is speaking here of poetry to which magical powers are attributed.'[102]

Josephus records the boast that Solomon was granted knowledge of demons and of healing people that were afflicted with illnesses that were demonic in nature.[103] He also records of the Essenes that:

> They display an extraordinary interest in the writings of the ancients, singling out in particular those which make for the welfare of soul and body; with the help of these, and with a view to the treatment of diseases, they make investigations into medicinal roots and the properties of stones.[104]

This seems to be very similar to the idea in Jubilees 10:12 ff.:

> [12]...And the healing of all their illnesses together with their seductions we told Noah so that he might heal by means of herbs of the earth. [13]And Noah wrote everything in a book just as we taught him according to every kind of healing. And evil spirits were restrained from following the sons of Noah.[105]

From later antiquity numerous sources indicate an immense variety of Jewish 'magic' that ranges from what is contained in the Hekhalot literature[106] to 'magical' amulets and bowls,[107] to 'magical' spells and formulae.[108] In the Hekhalot literature, there is a fascination with journeys into the heavens to a vantage from which to view the throne of God.[109] In the Jewish Talmudic period, many texts express concern over 'magic' and remedies for those found guilty of 'forbidden' 'magic'.[110] There are also discussions on what actually

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[102] Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry*, p. 237.
[103] Josephus, *Ant.* 8:45 ff.
[104] Josephus, *Wars* II.136.
[105] Wintermute, "Jubilees", p. 76.
[106] *Sefer Ha-Razim, Ḥarba deMosheh, Havdalah deRabbi Aqiva, Sefer Ha-Malbush*, etc.
[107] Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, third ed. (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1998).
[108] Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1993).
[109] Gershom Scholem, "Merkabah Mysticism", (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1972), pp. 1386-1389.
[110] *Sanh.* 65b; 100b; 67a; 67b; 68a; Shab. 33b; 61b; 66b; 75a; Ḥul. 105b; 139b; BB. 58a; *Kid.* 39b; AZ. 38b.

constitutes acceptable 'magic' as opposed to that which is forbidden.[111] Despite the fact that there is a strong denunciation of 'magical' practices by religious leaders and the existing biblical prohibitions there still is a persistent preoccupation with 'magic' throughout the Talmudic period.[112] There are also Jewish elements in the *Greek Magical Papyri*, though it is not certain that they were put there by Jews. If they were, however, they may be said to represent a form of practice that differs greatly from the commonly held image of Judaism.[113]

B. The Modern Problem of Definition

Modern researchers are finding it just as difficult to clearly define 'magic' as the ancients did. Despite the fact that much research has been done in the area of 'magic', 'no one definition has reached general use.'[114] For some, this has caused some to despair of being able to define 'magic' at all.[115] Most, however, are not so pessimistic and offer some type of definition.[116] Some seek to create new words to replace the term 'magic', because they see it as bringing with it too much baggage of a negative nature.[117] 'The result has been that even in the scholarly literature the term 'magic' is used with the same rhetorical force as it had in antiquity, a term of contrast to reinforce a cultural self-image of purity and rationality.'[118] Kippenberg says, 'The notion of 'magic' in Western tradition is a loaded term

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[111] *Sanh.* 68a.
[112] s.v. "Magic," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1972), p. 707.
[113] Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, p. xlv.
[114] Alan F. Segal, "Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions*, ed. R. Van Den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), p. 349.
[115] Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, p. xlix, n. 6.
[116] Segal, "Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition," pp. 349-375; Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, pp. 11-36; Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1996), pp. 11-15; G. E. R. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1999), pp. 10-58; Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," pp. 1507-1557; Fritz Graff, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 20-60; Mary E. Mills, *Human Agents of Cosmic Power*, Journal for the New Testament Supplement Series 41 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), pp. 24-35.
[117]Rebecca Macy Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power*, Harvard Theological Studies 44 (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), p. 11.
[118] Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith, eds., *Ancient Christian Magic* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 3.

presenting certain religious activities as deviant/illegal/dangerous.'[119] Aune also makes a point of this issue of 'deviance' in his definition.[120]

Assman associates 'magic' with the domestic usage of what would be classed as 'religion' if it were used in a public setting such as a temple.[121] Along with this, there are the rather public postings of 'confession texts' in local temples in Asia Minor that seem to render it difficult to maintain traditional distinctions between the sphere of 'magic' and the sphere of 'religion' as denoting a contrast between corporate and domestic practices.[122] As Betz points out, 'No single definition of magic can be absolute, since all definitions of magic are relative to the culture and sub-culture under discussion.'[123] The factors that determined the differences between, and the definitions that result from the distinctions between 'magic' and 'religion', were theological, internal issues, from the religious groups and cults involved. These issues differed from one group to another, but they were not arbitrary. In order to evaluate phenomena related to 'magic' and 'religion', a high degree of sensitivity to the inner life and thought of the cults in question must be maintained.[124]

In his well-known work of the nineteenth century, Sir James Frazer discusses the relationship of 'magic' to religion and to science. He then goes on to portray 'magic' as an alternate frame of reference for viewing the world and expresses the view that science is clearly the superior vantage point.[125] His view is that the difference between 'magic' and religion can be determined by looking at the 'psychic attitude' which is taken by a person toward the '...object of the cult, that is, whether he regards that object as something personal

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[119]Hans G. Kippenberg, "Magic in Roman Civil Discourse," in *Envisioning Magic*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg, Studies in the History of Religions series, vol. 75 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), p. 162.
[120] Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity", p. 1515.
[121] Jan Assman, "Magic and Theology in Ancient Egypt," in *Envisioning Magic*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg, Studies in the History of Religions series, vol. 75 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), p. 3.
[122] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, pp. 246 –248. No. 137.
[123] Hans Dieter Betz, "Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri", in *Magika Hiera Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 246.
[124] Betz, "Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri," p. 254.
[125] Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993), p. 712.

and conscious or impersonal and unconscious.'[126] This view is overly simplistic, based on a linear model that certainly does not cope well with the wide range of materials that are available. Frazer's view that human culture develops along static linear evolutionary lines in the areas of human societies, science, social institutions and religious beliefs is now perceived as untenable. His positivist model does not seem to fit well with the development of 'magic' among all peoples and all cultures. People do not always grow from a 'magical' worldview to a religious worldview and then progress onto a scientific worldview.[127] A new era in the study of 'magic', however, was augmented by scholars working in the field of anthropology. Anthropologists approached the study of societies by learning the language and actually living among the people to be studied.[128] They entered into the culture to be studied so that they might view it from an internal perspective.

A pioneer of this new way, Malinowski moved beyond the view of Frazer and linked science and 'magic' as distinguishable only based on terms of social context. He does not distinguish between 'magic' and science on the basis of 'content' but rather in terms of rules which govern their use in social context and which limit their scope and use. 'Magic can be distinguished from science on the basis of how it is used and to what ends, and the means and goals can only be decided in terms of social context.'[129] While science restricts its findings in terms of 'laws' that are more or less empirical, and defines its goals in terms of its findings, Malinowski argued that 'magic' restricts its findings by rules of tradition and cult, and defines its goals in terms of passion and desire.'[130] The absolute parameters for studying 'magic', if based upon the anthropological model, are impossible to use in the study of ancient cultures. The detail required for such complex and intimate interactions, the ones

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[126] Robert J. Thornton and Peter Skalník, *The Early Writings of Bronislaw Malinowski*, trans. Ludwik Kryzanowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 161.
[127] Ann Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East, vol. 8 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), pp. 4-6.
[128] Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, p. 6.
[129] Thornton and Skalník, *The Early Writings of Bronislaw Malinowski*, pp 39-40.
[130] Thornton and Skalník, *The Early Writings of Bronislaw Malinowski*, pp 39-40.

that can so often be obtained by a modern anthropologist living amongst a subject group, is not possible with ancient societies that have passed into the distant mists of time. It is often very difficult to study in a scientific and systematic manner things, which by their very nature are neither systematic nor necessarily rational to the modern mindset.

Our knowledge of any of the societies of the ancient world is limited, and therefore it is based largely on written texts, which incorporate the ideological bias of the authors, and on archaeological remains. We are not able to immerse ourselves completely in these ancient societies in the strict sense that is called for by this type of research.[131] Despite this, there are lessons to be learned from the anthropological approach. One is that the observer needs to be very conscious of the point of view both of the audience and of the author as judgements are made about the meaning of texts.[132] The more one can immerse oneself into the world of the author and the audience, the more likely it is that something can be learned towards the decipherment of original meanings of the text.

The anthropological approach to 'magic' has also given the world new terms to describe the methodological methods used to a given concept, or idea. These terms were coined by Kenneth Pike from the words 'phonetic' and 'phonemic' '(... following the conventional linguistic usage of these latter terms. The shortened versions of these terms are used in an analogous manner, but for more general purposes than simply phonetics.)'[133] The etic approach considers either all cultures or languages, or a specified group of them, at one time, in what might be called a comparative sense. The emic approach, on the contrary, is culturally specific and is applied to only one language or culture at a time.[134] The 'etic'

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[131] Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, p. 7.
[132] Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation*; Hirsch Jr., *The Aims of Interpretation*; E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1967).
[133] Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, Second Revised ed., Janua Linguarum Series Maior 24 (The Hague/Paris: Mouton & Co., 1971), p. 37.
[134] Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, P. 37.

approach is an observer-oriented approach while the 'emic' approach will be subject-oriented.[135]

In a more detailed sense 'Etic statements depend upon phenomenal distinctions judged appropriate by the community of scientific observers.' 'Etic statements are verified when independent observers using similar operations agree that a given event has occurred.'[136] In order to approach the subject of 'magic' from this perspective, it is necessary to measure the evidence in the Book of Revelation against a definition of 'magic' or set of parameters created prior to actually approaching the text.[137] Such an approach has both positive and negative aspects. On the negative side, this approach imposes an artificial aspect to the study in that it looks at the text from a perspective that almost certainly differs considerably from the viewpoint which the author intended, or the audience would have comprehended. The etic approach, however, is advantageous in that it allows the text to be measured in relation to a framework of understanding that can be applied with clarity to other documents and can yield results that reflect what many see as a scientific methodology.

From an etic perspective, there is a great volume of ancient material that authors have clearly designated as 'magical' despite being unable to agree upon a single definition that applies in every instance and to every objection. It is apparent from the titles and the approach of the majority of scholars who have dealt with this material that they do consider certain texts, practices and ideas to be 'magical' in nature in relation to other texts, practices, and ideas.[138] Although it seems a virtually impossible task to adequately define 'magic' with

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[135] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, P. 27.
[136] Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), P. 575.
[137] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, P. 32.
[138] Karl Preisendanz, ed., *Papyri Graecae Magicae Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, vol. 1 & 2 (Stuttgart: Verlag B. G. Teubner, 1973-1974); Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*; Luck, *Arcana Mundi*; Dijk, Goetze, and Hussey, *Early Mesopotamian Incantations and Rituals*; Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*; Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*; Christian Jacq, *Egyptian Magic*, trans. Janet M. Davis, Modern Egyptology (Warminster ; Chicago: Aris & Phillips : Bolchazy-Carducci, 1985); Borghouts, trans., *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts*; Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic."; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*; Thompson, *Semitic Magic*; Key, "The Magical Background of Isaiah 6:9-13."; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and*

the absolute precision that a scientific approach would like, the fact remains that there is a body of literature and practices that are more clearly defined by the term 'magic' than any other term available. From a modern perspective, this material is seen as 'magical' and not simply 'religious' by a major proportion of scholars with expertise in this area of study. In view of this, a comparative analysis of the vocabulary, the imagery, and the symbolism of this type of material may, when compared with material in the Apocalypse, shed light on images, symbols and vocabulary that have remained shrouded in mist as interpreters have failed to recognise that the worldview of the people of antiquity was dominated by 'magic'. A thorough analysis of this aspect of the ancient world produces a more definitive picture that should lead to a clearer understanding of the author's message to the churches of Asia Minor addressed by John.

Some definitions have a more intuitive approach than do others. Susan Garrett gives a striking presentation on perspective in her work. She clearly sees both an etic and emic approach to the study of 'magic' as useful approaches. It is important to note that what may be considered 'magic' from a modern perspective would simply be considered the reality of the world from an ancient perspective. In view of this, a two-pronged approach will be made to the texts of the Apocalypse. The texts will be viewed from an etic perspective as well as from an emic perspective. In this way, it will be possible to explore both, and to understand more clearly the worldview of the author and audience of the Apocalypse. 'The issue is not

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Superstition: A Folk Study in Folk Religion; Hayman, "Was God a Magician? Sefer Yeşira and Jewish Magic."; Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity."; Alexander, "'Wrestling against Wickedness in High Places': Magic in the Worldview of the Qumran Community."; Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*; Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*; Segal, "Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition."; Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience*; Graff, *Magic in the Ancient World*; Meyer and Smith, eds., *Ancient Christian Magic.* Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg, eds., *Envisioning Magic : A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, Studies in the History of Religions ; 75 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997); Frazer, *The Golden Bough*; Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*; Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Henry Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Magic* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995); Hildred Geertz, "An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, I," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6 (1975): pp. 71-89; Lange, "The Essene Position on Magic and Divination," pp. 377-435; Judah Goldin, "The Magic of Magic and Superstition," in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 115-147.

whether the Christians' world view was magical, but how magic functioned as an experience-ordering model within the Christians' world view.'[139]

The prevailing attribute of the practice of magic throughout the Hellenistic world was the cognisance that the spiritual world exercised influence over virtually every aspect of life.[140] This worldview is very different from that held today, and from a modern perspective much of what the people of the first century would have seen as a normal part of existence and well-being would today be considered 'magical' or 'superstitious'. Ultimately the question of whether 'magical' motifs are used, or alluded to, in Revelation will hinge on perspective, and this is applied by the observers, whether ancient or modern.[141] The fact is that humans in the contemporary world have determined that 'magic' is in some sense a definitive category (see footnote 137 above).

The etic definition for 'magic' to be used for this work will be that of those who are experts in their related areas of specialties, whether it be Egyptology, Theology, or a Near Eastern specialist. In antiquity, 'magic' appears to have been an 'irreducibly ambiguous' concept due to its broad range of usage.[142] In modern times, these groups of authors have created a measure by which it can be ascertained whether the author of Revelation uses 'magical' motifs in the composition of his text: motifs that are similar in nature to what these experts consider to be 'magic' in their respective areas of expertise. This group of works, and those that exhibit the same types of characteristics, will be used as comparative materials for an exploration of the Apocalypse along etic lines. This definition should meet the criterion set down by Harris in his definition of the etic approach and yet still allow for an appropriate degree of flexibility.[143]

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[139] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 29.
[140] Arnold, *Power and Magic*, p. 18.
[141] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 108.
[142] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 18.
[143] 'Etic statements depend upon phenomenal distinctions judged appropriate by the community of scientific observers.' Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, p. 575.

This approach will allow for greater latitude than that offered by overly restrictive definitions that see deviance, guaranteed results, and individual goals, as indicative of the difference between 'magic' and 'religion'.[144] Alexander states that, 'It is not yet possible to draw a hard and fast line between Jewish and pagan magic in late antiquity; in fact, given the fundamental syncretism of magic, it may be misguided to try to do so.'[145] Recognition of this level of ambiguity, in turn, casts doubt on recent studies of 'magic' and the New Testament that employ overly rigid definitions or narrow sets of identifying criteria for 'magic'. Such definitions and criteria take for granted that which the ancients regarded as open to dispute.[146]

From the emic perspective, the Apocalypse will be explored in detail alongside information about the author's cultural context and that of his audience. In this way, it is hoped that each instance within the text that is to be explored will be weighed against the cultural context of first century Asia Minor and cultural influences related to this region and to Jewish contextual influences to determine their view of 'magic'. This will entail careful investigation of selected passages along a more exegetical line rather than a history of religions perspective. It is hoped that in this way the message of the Apocalypse can be heard in a way that recovers the impact that it would have had in its original context. An exploration of similar concepts that may have influenced the author and his audience will be explored.

The present research is to investigate carefully and methodically eleven categories in the Book of Revelation in order to determine what the author and readers thought 'magic' was and how these categories relate to it. Alongside this, I shall investigate carefully the likely sources of the images, and the likely frame of reference of both the author and the

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[144] Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity", p. 1515.
[145] Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic", p. 346.
[146] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 19.

audience in order to understand more clearly what has been written, from a history of religions perspective.

The passages selected have been grouped in the following eleven different categories: those (1) which use the term 'quickly' (Rev. 1:1; 3:11; 10:5; 11:14; 22:6; 22:12; 22:20); (2) come at the beginning and end of the work (Rev. 1:8; 1:17; 21:6; 22:13); (3) refer to false prophets (2:14, 2:20, 13:11-15, 6:13, 19:20, 20:10); (4) one that mentions a 'white stone' (2:17); (5) texts referring to seals (5:1, 5; 6:1; 7:2, 4; 9:4; 10:3; 20:3-4); (6) sorcery passages (9:20; 18:23; 21:8; 22:15); (7) a text that refers to thunder speaking (10:3-4); (8) one on 'frogs' (16:13-14); (9) one about the 'angel standing in the sun' (19:17); (10) texts mentioning 'keys' (1:18; 9:1; 20:1); and (11) the one that refers to a talking 'statue' (13:15).

All of these categories will be investigated in order to determine how they relate to 'magical' motifs from an etic perspective. They will also be investigated from an emic perspective in order to understand how John and his audience would themselves have defined 'magic'. This dual approach should unlock ideas and concepts that are easily buried by centuries of prejudice and misunderstanding among readers shackled by their own prejudices about 'magic'. The purpose of this study will ultimately be to gain insight into the message that John intended to convey, and the message that was likely perceived by his audience. The intent is to enable us to come to a greater understanding of how John might have defined 'magic' and what he intended for his audience to understand regarding his position on this subject.

Patently Negative Allusions

2. Sorcery Passages in the Revelation

A. Terminology

The Book of Revelation uses the term *φαρμακεία, and its cognates,* which is often translated as 'sorcery' in English versions, more times than any other book in the New Testament. In fact, except for Galatians 5:20, the Apocalypse contains four of the five occurrences of the word group *φαρμακεία* in the New Testament, though the term is found in the Old Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures.[1] In Revelation 9:21, the term used is *φάρμακον*, at 18:23, it is *φαρμακεία*, at 21:8 and 22:15, it is *φάρμακος*. In Revelation chapters 9, 21 and 22 the word is used in lists that are very similar in nature, the usage in 18:23 differing from the other New Testament usages. The terms *φαρμακεία*, *φάρμακον* and *φάρμακος* are nouns that have been argued by Louw and Nida to have the meaning, in the New Testament, of '...use of magic, often involving drugs and the casting of spells upon people....to practice magic, to engage in sorcery...'.[2]

This same word group is used by Philo to denote 'sorcery,' 'magic,' 'mixer of poisons,' 'poison,' 'magic potion,' 'charm,' and even 'medicine,' 'remedy,' or 'drug.'[3] Since, as in Philo, this word group can be used in a positive manner in conjunction with the practice of medicine, the question is whether in Revelation it ever acquired a positive sense in the New Testament. The question to be answered in this chapter is what was the message that John meant to convey with this term and what can one infer that his audience would have understood by it?

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[1] John H. Elliot, "Sorcery and Magic in the Revelation of John", *Listening* 28 (1993): pp. 261-276.
[2] Louw and Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, vol. 1*, p. 545.
[3] William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 854.

What follows begins with an overview of the usage of this term, and similar conceptual ideas in antiquity. Special attention will be given to the context of medical practice as this is the aspect of this word group that can have a positive inclination. Secondly, based on this background the discussion will turn to an analysis of 18:23 and its immediate literary context. Is John's use of the term (and what he presumes about the audience) totally negative, or is there a possibility that he intends something else? Secondly, to ascertain this, we shall consider the extent to which the term has been shaped by its literary context. Thirdly, we shall compare the occurrences among vice lists in Revelation with similar lists that occur outside of the Apocalypse.

In Revelation 9:21, 21:8 and 22:15 *φάρμακον/ς* is used in its various forms in vice lists similar to the manner in which *φαρμακεία* is used in Galatians 5:20. In the Old Greek translation of Malachi 3:5, a further such vice list refers to *φάρμακος* (cf. Chart 1:1, page 53). Each of these lists appears in a context concerned with impending judgement and the need for the repentance on the part of those hearing the message; at the same time, they are designed to comfort the righteous who are suffering. Here the *φαρμακεία* word group operates as an unambiguously negative category. The passage in Malachi 3:5 forms the prophetic answer to the question in Malachi 2:17: 'Where is the God of justice?' The answer is that he is coming and he is coming as a 'swift witness' (*ἔσομαι μάρτυς ταχὺς ἐπὶ τὰς φαρμακούς*).[4] A similar theme, of the prompt imminent judgment of God is present in the Apocalypse as well, and seems to reflect a common mechanism used in this type of eschatological material (cf. Revelation 2:16; 3:11; 22:7; and 22:12). The idea is to encourage those who are undergoing hardship, and who see the unrighteousness and suffering taking place around them, as they await and yearn for the justice of God. The authors of the lists

[4] This expression will be dealt with in more detail in a later chapter.

highlighted the unrighteous nature of the enemies of God by listing their sinful attributes, or acts, in order to underscore the inevitability of divine justice.

A significant feature of Malachi is the use of such a list in tandem with the 'Day of Yahweh' as a 'day of judgement' for the punishment of the evildoers who belong to the ranks of the covenant people of God.[5] The theme of a point of judgement is developed as a central tenet in the Apocalypse and seems to build on the foundation laid down by the prophets. John uses the list to mark out those who are to be punished including those within the covenant who do not remain faithful;[6] this is a feature in Malachi as well.[7] The listing of the sins of the people who are to be judged is a common characteristic among the prophets of Israel, but the use of such a list containing the word group *φαρμακεία* remains unique to Malachi. In the Apocalypse, those found guilty of the sins listed will clearly and irrevocably be excluded from fellowship with God. For the readers of the text of 22:18, this is all the more obviously the case since the narrative has already described divine judgment in its finality.

As indicated above, the *φαρμακεία* word group not only has an unfavourable connotation, but also a benign meaning which is associated with medicinal remedies in antiquity. It is from its usage in association with medical practice that we can infer a more positive connotation. For some writers of the first century and before, the term *φαρμακεία* applied to something associated with acceptable medical practice. For others, however, the term denoted activity much more sinister, associated with evil intent, or with forbidden spiritual forces on the part of the practitioner. An exploration of the history of the ideas and

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[5] Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi*, The Anchor Bible Series, 25D (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 290.
[6] There are a number of affinities between the lists and the warnings given specifically to the churches in chapters 2 and 3. 'Faithless' in the lists relates to the admonition to remain 'faithful' and to retain 'faith' at 2:10; 2:13; and 2:19. There are warnings against 'fornication' at 2:14; 2:20; and 2:21. There are warnings against having any contact with idols at 2:14; and 2:20. There is praise for finding those who are 'false' at 2:2. There is an emphasis on avoiding the 'false' and 'fornication' inherent in the abhorrence of the Nicolaitans (2:6; 2:14) and in the avoidance of the teaching of Balaam (2:14). There is also an overall emphasis on 'conquering' (2:7; 2:10;2:11; 2:17; 2:23; 2:26; 2:28; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21).
[7] J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 132 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 199.

concepts conveyed through antiquity, by this Greek word group, and conveyed through concepts in other Near Eastern languages will prove helpful in understanding more precisely how John uses the *φαρμακεία* word group and what associations he could presume on the part of his audience.

B. Excursus on Medicine in Antiquity

I. Mesopotamia

Exploring the ancient context is important because John refers to a situation of a time and a world that differed considerably from what western contemporaries might presume. The reputation of the 'medical practice' in ancient Mesopotamia has suffered greatly because of the remark made by Herodotus that the Babylonians, 'having no use for physicians, … carry the sick into the market-place' where they ask advice from passers-by for a cure for their ailment.[8] The state of medicine in Mesopotamia was never as impressive as that in Egypt and always remained at a low state by comparison.[9] It remains, however, that people who were ill in Babylonia could call upon the services of two different types of medical practitioners. The one type used 'magical' means while the other used primarily medicinal means to affect a cure. The practitioner of 'magic' was called *āšhipu* while the practical physician that relied largely on pharmacology was called *asû*.[10] The practice of pharmacopoeia is very ancient in this region with evidence for its usage going back at least to 2100 B.C.E.[11] The distinction between the types of treatment offered by these two types of practitioners was not always mutually exclusive. They were at times intertwined.[12]

It is important to remember that religion dominated every aspect of life in the various civilisations that occupied the area in the midst of the great rivers, from the early days of Sumer, to the very end of the New Babylonian empire. Sickness was thought to have been sent by the gods directly, or via demons to punish the victim either for his own sin, or because of the sins of another family member.[13] The beginnings of the separation between 'magico-religious' and 'empirico-rational medicine' never took place in Mesopotamia as it did in other regions such as Greece and to some degree also in Egypt. There have been no texts discovered that might be described as primarily surgical, or as purely rational medical texts. Surgery was clearly practiced in Babylonia, but for the moment, there are no surgical texts available.[14] There is considerable evidence to indicate that the *asû* would, on occasion

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[8] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* I: 197.

[9] A. Leo Oppenheim and completed by Erica Reiner, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, Revised ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 299.

[10] Edith K. Ritter, "Magical –Expert (=ĀŠIPU) and Physician (= ASÛ) Notes on Two Complimentary Professions in Babylonian Medicine " *Assyriological Studies* 16 (1996): pp. 291-321.

[11] Samuel Noah Kramer, *From the Tablets of Sumer* (Indian Hills CO: The Falcon's Wing Press, 1956), pp. 56-60. cf. Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 46-47; A. Leo Oppenheim, "Mesopotamian Medicine " *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (1962): pp. 97-108.

[12] R. Campbell Thompson, "Assyrian Prescriptions for Treating Bruises or Swellings", *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 47 (1930): pp. 1-25.

[13] A. Falkenstein, *Die Haupttypen der Sumerischen Beschwörung* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1931), p. 51.

[14] Henry E. Sigerist, *A History of Medicine, Vol. 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 409-410. cf. Code of Ḫammurabi 215-223.

use 'magical' techniques and the *āšhipu* used drugs. There were even times when the two would work together to combat an illness.[15]

In time, as the Akkadian world declined, the *asû* ceased to be mentioned in the literature and the 'magical practitioner' takes over as the sole provider of medical treatment. Of course, it may simply be by chance that all the materials mentioning the *asû* have failed to survive, but this seems highly unlikely.[16] It is, however, more likely that the esteem in which medical practitioners were held was low in general terms in Mesopotamia. This is based on the view put forward by Oppenheim that there is a direct correlation between a culture's attitude toward death and the respect given to physicians. If a society held a view that was very deterministic, this would tend to devalue any possible contribution that a physician could offer toward improving the health of an individual. This would also explain the difference in social value accorded a physician in Egypt, as opposed to their social standing in Mesopotamia.[17]

It should be noted that there appears to have been some means of making a distinction, in ancient Mesopotamia, between the 'medical practitioner' and the 'sorcerer'. In the Code of Ḫammurabi, 'sorcery' is a punishable offence and the word for 'sorcery' used here is clearly not the same as the word used for medical practices, of a 'magical' nature or otherwise.[18] There seems to have been some form of clearly definable parameter, which allowed for a differentiation between 'sorcery' and 'medicine' in this society. 'Sorcery' was a capital crime whereas the practice of medicine was clearly allowed, though regulated.[19]

II. Egypt

In contrast, to his view that Mesopotamia had no use for physicians, Herodotus makes the claim concerning Egypt that 'All the country is full of physicians…'[20] In ancient Egypt, there were three different groups of practitioners who treat the various ailments which might be encountered. These were the *swnw*, which likely corresponds to 'physicians'; '*Sachmet priests*', which most closely relates to what we might designate a 'surgeon'; and thirdly the *s3w*, who used what might be termed primarily supernatural methods to treat illness. [21] Medical treatises exist in Egyptian history as far back as the third Millennium B.C.E. Generally, medical documents traced their origin back to a divine source, and associated the practice of medicine closely with the divine.[22] Many of these remedies are used in what appears to be an entirely rational way to us, that is, they appear devoid of any reliance upon

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[15] Joan Oates, *Babylon*, revised ed., Ancient Peoples and Places Series; vol. 94 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), pp. 180-183. c.f. also Samuel Noah Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), pp. 60-64; Steven W. Cole and Peter Machinist, *Letters from Priests to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, State Archives of Assyria series, Vol. 8 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1998), No. 66, pp. 58-59; Robert H. Pfeiffer, *State Letters of Assyria*, American Oriental Series, vol. 6 (New Haven CN: American Oriental Society, 1935), Nos. 281-296; pp. 196-206.

[16] Majno, *The Healing Hand*, p. 40. cf. Oppenheim and Reiner, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 296-297; Oppenheim, "Mesopotamian Medicine ": pp. 97-108.

[17] Oppenheim and Reiner, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 299-305. cf. W. G. Lambert, "The Gula Hymn of Bullutsa-rabi," *Orientalia* 36 (1967): pp. 105-132.

[18] Robert Francis Harper, *The Code of Ḫammurabi King of Babylon* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2002; reprint, 1904), pp. 10-11.

[19] Code of Ḫammurabi 5:33-56; 34:54-35:17. Harper, *The Code of Ḫammurabi King of Babylon*, pp. 10-11, 76-79.

[20] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* II: 84.

[21] *The Papyrus Ebers*, XCIX: 2-3; B. Ebbell, trans., *The Papyrus Ebers* (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard 1937), pp. 14-15.

[22] James Henry Breasted, *The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus, Vol. 1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1930), pp. 5-7. c.f. Papyrus Ebers 75:12-13; 103:1-2.

the spiritual forces. For example, the prescriptions of Papyrus Ebers look remarkably similar to prescriptions of today, and the surgical techniques seem to be based on dealing with an injury or ailment from a natural rather than from a supernatural perspective.

There is also the Egyptian usage of incantations and spells, and it is at this point that many would speak with disparagement of such medical practices, but it should be noted that these practices, where spells are used, are only recommended in certain, limited, cases. It appears that in some instances, the spells were used to give emotional support to the patients and in other instances they were used when the ailment was beyond the scope of the available medical skill and knowledge.[23] In Egypt, as in Mesopotamia, no clear demarcation between the surgeon, the 'magical' practitioner and the physician existed. The 'magician' did not hesitate to prescribe drugs and the most rational physician or surgeon would resort to prayer and magical practice.[24] In time, however, the practice of 'magic' would dominate the physical treatment of illnesses in Egypt in the same way as it did in Mesopotamia.[25]

III. Jewish Concepts

In ancient Israel, illness and disease are clearly regarded as punishments for sin, and God himself is seen as the great healer and deliverer.[26] During this period, God was seen as using illness as a punishment for those who were his enemies (Exodus 7-10) or for those who disobeyed him (Deuteronomy 28:15-35). This view of illness, which conceives of it as an instrument of the deity, was much the same as the view held in Mesopotamia. Illness was regarded as a divine instrument for the punishment of evildoers, and for the testing of the righteous. The main difference between the view of illness in Israel and that of Mesopotamia was that there was full disclosure as to the consequences of breaking the covenant relationship with God. In Mesopotamia, the onset of an illness was often the first sign of a problem with the deity, and then it was often very difficult to determine what a person had done to offend the deity.[27]

Of particular interest in this study is the Hebrew term חרש which is used only one time in the Old Testament at Isaiah 3:3, where it refers to someone 'skilled in magic art, or drugs'.[28] The meaning of the Hebrew root of this word remains unknown, but its cognates have long been known from Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic and have recently been found in Ugaritic as well, where it has the general meaning of 'magic' or 'sorcery'.[29] Jeffers considers the reference in Isaiah 3:3 to refer to someone skilled in the use of medicinal plants as a means of healing. It is of particular interest that the removal of this person from Israel is seen as being part of the curse; bread and water were also to be taken away. The early Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures has an altered text at this point, undoubtedly due to the possible positive implications that could be drawn with regard to 'magicians'. The use of plants in healing was not understood in this period as a purely chemical process, but was considered to be a 'spiritual' or 'magical' process. It was often seen as the spirit of the plant that performed the healing of the person and thus the 'magician' in some way controlled this

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[23] *Ebbell, trans., The Papyrus Ebers, pp. 11-26.*
[24] Sigerist, *A History of Medicine, vol. 1*, pp. 297-298.
[25] Majno, *The Healing Hand*, p. 40.
[26] J. V. Kinnier Wilson, "Medicine in the Land and Times of the Old Testament," in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays (Papers Read at the International Symposium for Biblical Studies, Tokyo, 5-7 December, 1979*, ed. Tomoo Ishida (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982), pp. 337-365.
[27] Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East*, Harvard Semitic Museum Monographs series, 54 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), pp. 243-246.
[28] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), sv. חרש, p. 361.
[29] Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, p. 49.

spirit to bring about the healing. This would then make the person using plants in a medicinal context a 'magician' or 'sorcerer'.[30]

Another Hebrew word group of interest in this study is that which includes the terms כשף and מכשף which are variously translated in the Greek Jewish scriptures with the terms *φαρμακία*, *φάρμακον* and *φάρμακος*.[31] These practitioners were outlawed in ancient Israel and formally subject to the penalty of death.[32] It seems quite significant that Malachi perceives such sorcerers as being judged in the end time along with a list of others considered to be enemies of the covenant.[33] The exact nature of this class of 'magicians' is difficult to determine since the etymology of this word group is very uncertain. Neither the word's etymology nor its usage in the text enables us to compose a full picture of the functions of the כשפים. The Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures uniformly renders this word group with *φάρμακος*, which would indicate that the word was understood as including those curing by the use of herbs, while reciting incantations.[34]

Φάρμακος is also used to translate a number of other Hebrew terms such as לט ('secrecy', 'mystery', 'enchantments'[35]) and in the Old Greek translation is also associated with לחש ('whisper', 'charm', i.e. 'serpent-charmers'[36]). The indication here is that an oral spell of some type was being used to exert power over people and involved an oral activity, an incantation, that wielded a binding force.[37] Jeffers goes into a great deal of detail with regard to the search for an ultimate designation of the practice of the individuals that are called *φάρμακος* and ultimately concludes that this term most often referred to some type of herbalist. She indicates that the negative tone of the Jewish scriptures is due mainly to the fact that such practitioners were primarily associated with pagan practices and associated with foreign royal courts. All of this would have led Israelites to the conclusion that these people were the enemies of God as they were also the enemies of God's people.[38]

It is more likely, however, that this word group was used to describe a number of different practices that were seen to be performed by a variety of practitioners as this seems to have been the same throughout the Greek and Roman period, as will be discussed in the next section. In view of this, it seems highly probable that amongst traditional Jews this word could be used of a variety of suspect practitioners and their practices. It was during the period from the late 3rd through the 1st centuries B.C.E. that the Jews attempted to find theological justification for the use of 'medico-magical' cures, due to the influence of Hellenism. During this time a debate raged with respect to the use of 'magico-medical' cures for the treatment of illnesses.[39] During the Hellenistic period, physicians began to be included as divinely empowered agents of Yahweh, at least in some circles.[40] This view is expounded in *Sirach* 38. This document, written in the 2nd century B.C.E., shows the

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[30] Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, p. 51. p. 51.
[31] G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), p. 466.
[32] Ex. 22:17; De. 18:10.
[33] Mal. 3:5
[34] Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, pp. 65-66.
[35] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, sv. לט; Ex. 7:22; 28:23; 28:14.
[36] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, sv. לחש, Ps. 58:56.
[37] Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, pp. 34-35.
[38] Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, pp. 65-70.
[39] Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "The Book of Tobit and the Problem of »Magic«," in *Jüdische Schriften in ihrem antik-jüdischen und urchristlichen Kontext, Band I*, ed. Hermann Lichtenberger and Gerbern S. Oegema, Studien zu den Jüdischen Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 2002), pp. 258-269.
[40] Howard Clark Kee, "Medicine and Healing", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 4* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 659-664.

influence of Greek culture at many points.[41] Here, the view is that the wise man will not despise that which has been created in order to benefit him.[42]

The *Book of Jubilees*, which also dates from the 2nd century B.C.E.[43] attributes healing and the control of demons to God. These powers were given to Noah, for his protection and for the protection of his ancestors. Herbs are specifically mentioned as being a means of healing.[44] Healing is witheld from the evil forces that were assisting the Egyptians at the time of the plagues on Egypt.[45] In *1 Enoch* 7, however, the knowledge of '...magical medicine, incantations, the cutting of roots...' and the teachings about plants are attributed to rebellious heavenly beings.[46]

The *Wisdom of Solomon* (1st cent. B.C.E.), adopting a view similar to that of *Sirach*, expounds the notion that the knowledge of various plants and roots, along with other things, is God-given (7:15-16:20).[47] The two recensions of the book of Tobit express the tension that appears to have existed during this period with regard to medical practice. The recensions are at odds in a number of areas, one of which is the area of 'medico-magical' cures, which are excluded from the shorter recension. The long recension (ℵ) readily uses the term *φάρμακον*, whereas, the shorter recension (B, A) does not contain this term. Stuckenbruck deems it likely that the longer recension approximates the original text of Tobit more accurately.[48] What is of primary interest in this discussion is that there is a difference, which seems to reflect a level of tension with regard to this issue. The tension displayed in the recensions of Tobit seems to reflect an anxiety within Judaism itself, and the way that this tension is overcome by one faction is by demonstrating that God is in some way seen as the source of the cure. The other faction opposes all reliance upon *φαρμακεία*, as it is not perceived as demonstrating trust in the power of God.

It is of interest that Asa is criticised for his failure to rely upon the Lord, while consulting physicians, but there appears to be no universal condemnation of him with regard to this failure to acknowledge God's sovereignty over illness.[49] He is still seen as one of the faithful kings of Israel despite his failing to recognise God's sovereignty over illness.[50] Justification for a cure can only come if that cure is seen to have an origin in the God of Israel.[51] This viewpoint is still intact at the time of Jesus, and God is explicitly shown to be the source of Jesus' power to heal (Luke 5:17). Negativity is exhibited in the portrayal of the 'physicians' that had made the woman with the haemorrhages worse rather than better, while taking all of her money.[52] Though some have tried to expound the view that certain features of the gospel miracle stories appear to use 'magical-medical' techniques (Mark 8:22-26; John 9:6; Mark 7:32-33; Matthew 15:23-31), Kee does not think there is any validity to such perspectives. The power for Jesus to heal is always implicitly based in the fact that he is the 'anointed' of the Lord.[53] The issue of the use of the term *φάρμακος* in the Book of Revelation will be dealt with more fully after looking at the usage of this terminology in the context of Greek and Roman society.

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[41] Kee, "Medicine and Healing", pp. 659-664.
[42] Sir. 38:4-8.
[43] Wintermute, "Jubilees", pp. 43-44.
[44] Jub. 10:7-14.
[45] Jub. 48:10.
[46] 1 En. 7:1-2.
[47] Stuckenbruck, "The Book of Tobit and the Problem of »Magic«," pp. 258-269.
[48] Stuckenbruck, "The Book of Tobit and the Problem of »Magic«," pp. 258-269.
[49] 2 Chr. 16:12.
[50] 2 Chr. 17:3-5.
[51] Stuckenbruck, "The Book of Tobit and the Problem of »Magic«," pp. 258-269.
[52] Mk. 5:25-26.
[53] Kee, "Medicine and Healing", pp. 659-664.

IV. Greek and Roman Concepts

Greek medicine is often cited as the predecessor to modern medicine and as the source of medicine based upon ethical, rational, independent judgement, sound experience and fine learning. Many modern histories fail to address any element of what today might be termed 'superstition' or 'magical' practice. The fact is that the medical tradition of the Greeks contained a plurality of practitioners in which exorcists, religious healers, root-cutters, folk healers, and healers co-existed in competition with one another.[54] The earliest witness to Greek medicine is in Homer from about the 9th century B.C.E.[55] The earliest surviving Greek medical writings are those of Hippocrates and they date from about 420 B.C.E.[56] For knowledge of Greek medicine before the late 5th century B.C.E. there is very little reliable evidence. Most of what is known before this period is based upon legend and 'modern plausible speculation', and neither is to be accepted as strictly reliable.[57] Anyone who reads Hippocrates' treatise on *Ancient Medicine* will find much to commend in his grasping for cause, but his basic principles themselves are far from scientific by modern standards.[58]

In the Hippocratic Oath there is a clear reliance upon the supernatural. This is displayed by its reference to Apollo and to his son Asclepius, deities petitioned as witnesses to the oath. The oath also has a reference to *φάρμακον*: 'Neither will I administer *poison* to anybody when asked to do so, nor will I suggest such a course.' [59] The term's use here indicates a negative connotation to this word even at the time of Hippocrates. There is not a negative connotation to anything supernatural in *The Oath*, but there clearly is a hostility expressed to the practice of 'poisoning' (*φάρμακον*).

Greek medical practice and Roman medical practice became inextricably intermingled from the 3rd century B.C.E. onward. It arrives first among the ruling classes of the Roman Republic and gradually spreads as urbanisation spreads through the Republic and then later the Empire. The reputation of Greek medical practice among the Romans is far from positive according to Pliny, who says '... all physicians, became an object of loathing.'[60] This reputation was because of the use of the knife rather than because of the usage of drugs or 'magical ' elements. There was always, what might be termed, a 'magical', or 'superstitious' element to much of Roman medical practice and this seems more pronounced than in its Greek counterpart.[61] A line is never drawn completely between what today would be considered 'magical' treatment and totally rational treatment of illness. This is highlighted by the preponderance of temples that were devoted to gods of healing such as Serapis and Asclepius.

Asclepius, the son of Apollo, is the subject of numerous legends and in one of these even raises the dead.[62] At the temples of Asclepius, which flourished throughout the ancient

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[54] Vivian Nutton, "Medicine in the Greek world, 800- 50 BC," in *The Western Medical Tradition 800 BC to AD 1800*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 11.
[55] Majno, *The Healing Hand*, p. 141.
[56] Nutton, "Medicine in the Greek world, 800- 50 BC", p. 12.
[57] Vivian Nutton, "Healers in the Medical Market Place: Towards a Social History of Graeco-Roman Medicine," in *Medicine in Society*, ed. Andrew Wear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 16.
[58] Hippocrates, "Ancient Medicine," in *Hippocrates, vol. I*, ed. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library Series (London: William Heinemann, 1923), pp. 12-63.
[59] Hippocrates, "The Oath," in *Hippocrates, vol. I*, ed. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library Series (London: William Heinemann, 1923), pp. 298-301.
[60] Pliny, *Natural History*, 29: 6
[61] Vivian Nutton, "Roman Medicine, 250 BC to AD 200," in *The Western Medical Tradition 800 BC to AD 1800* ed. Lawrence I. Conrad, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 39-70.
[62] Pindar, *Pythian Odes* III: 55-63.

Mediteranean world, patients would make offerings to the god in the hope of receiving a cure. These temples and practices continued well into the Christian era.[63] Later this cult would be a major player in the struggle between Christianity and paganism.[64] This particualr cult was seen, at a very early stage, as a competitor with Christianity on several levels, first, its relationship with healing, secondly, Asclepius was the son of the god Apollo, born of a mortal woman, and thirdly, there were the stories of his raising of the dead, and fourthly, the association of Asclepius with exorcism.[65] The citizen of the Roman empire had access to medical care from this source across the empire and it provided care that was trusted by much of the populace of the Empire.[66]

'Sorcery' as such is a term with negative connotations in the Greek and Roman world but there are a variety of terms that are used in Greek to denote 'witches' and 'sorcerers'. The terms used for those of the male variety are *ἐπῳδός*, *γόης*, *μάγος*, and *φαρμακεύς*, when female, *φαρμακίς* and *γοῆτις*. Sometimes the masculine forms of *γοῆτις* and *μάγος* are used for female practitioners. Despite the fact that these words have very different origins they come to be used interchangeably to refer to the same practitioners as early as the 5th century B.C.E.[67] In the Odyssey, Circe gives *φάρμακα* to companions of Odysseus and they become as swine.[68] Here the term is used of clearly harmful material, but shortly after this, the god Argeïphontes gives a *φάρμακον* to Odysseus for his protection from the *φάρμακα* of Circe, and it effectively protects him.[69] According to Pindar, *φάρμακα* is part of the healing craft known by the Magnesian Centaur to heal the painful maladies of mortal men.[70]

It would be many centuries before people would learn to trust those who prescribed drugs as a treatments for illness. This was not least because there were many practitioners who were inexperienced in the use of these drugs and so they were as likely to kill the patient as they were to help. The line between what was a drug and what was a poison was very fine indeed. The distinction between a moderate dosage and a lethal dosage was very difficult to determine and a mistake could, and often did prove to be fatal for the patient.[71] In Athens, in the 5th century B.C.E. a case was brought before the law courts alleging that a woman had poisoned her lover. In her defence, she argued that she had intended to give him a drug in order to make him love her more, and thought that increasing the dosage would increase his love for her; instead, he died instantly.[72]

C. Detailed Analysis of Revelation Passages

An exploration of medical terminology and practice provides a considerable amount of background information with regard to the ideas and the tensions associated with practices

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[63] Helen King, *Greek and Roman Medicine* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2002), pp. 3-5.
[64] Henry E. Sigerist, *A History of Medicine, vol. 2* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 60-61.
[65] Justinius, *Apologia* 54, 10; 21, 1-2; cf. Emma J. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies,* vol. 1 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1945), pp. 176-178; Emma J. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies,* vol. 2 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1945), pp. 132-138.
[66] John Scarborough, *Roman Medicine* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), pp. 142-144.
[67] Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001, 2003).pp. 12-15.
[68] Homer, *Odyssey* 10: 230-240.
[69] Homer, Odyssey 10: 300-335.
[70] Pindar, *Pythian Odes* III: 45-54.
[71] King, *Greek and Roman Medicine*, pp. 48-49.
[72] Antiphon 1, *Prosecution of the Stepmother for Poisoning*, 19.

and procedures that could be described under φαρμακεία. In the ancient world, it is certain that the absolute separations that we often make between 'medical practice' and 'religious belief' or 'magical practice' were not so easily made, as these beliefs and practices were inextricably intertwined. It has even been suggested that the 'magical' beliefs and practices of the Ancient Babylonians have survived in Jewish, Syriac and Mandaic channels and on into mediaeval magic.[73]

I. Revelation 18:23

18:23 and the light of a lamp will absolutely not shine in you ever, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will absolutely not be heard in you ever; because your merchants were the magnates of the earth, and because with your sorceries (φαρμακείᾳ) all the nations have been deceived.

The issue to be addressed with regard to this text is whether John was condemning what might be considered medical practice along with malevolent 'magical' practice, or was he simply condemning the one without addressing the other? One of the questions is to determine whether it is possible to distinguish between the two with a reasonable degree of certainty and precision? This issue is illustrated by the fact that not every usage of this term in antiquity was of the same nature. Some might even question whether John uses φαρμακεία rhetorically rather than as a reprehensible activity. Moreover, what does John's usage of these terms imply about his audience? While John clearly expects his readers to accept the negative connotation of this term in the lists, the usage at 18:23 may express a different expectation on the part of his readers. Perhaps the usage at 18:23 does not indicate a totally negative view of φαρμακεία on the part of the audience addressed by John. There is something very enticing about this power as is suggested by the persistence of people to

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[73] L. W. King, "Magic (Babylonian)," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. 8*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1915), pp. 253-255.

pursue involvement in 'magical' practices through the ages. The rhetorical force of 18:23 cannot be fully appreciated without understanding the range of meanings possible.

The text of 18:23 perhaps betrays an awareness that not all of John's readers would have viewed *φαρμακεία* with reservations. It is possible that the readers could have perceived this expression with a certain sense of ambiguity, as has been shown previously. John, on the other hand is unequivicoal in posturing himself with those Jewish traditions that patently reject *φαρμακεία* (Excursus section III). In using this term John is aligning himself with the prophets. In 18:23, as in the rest of chapter 18 the allusions to the prophetic tradition are crucial.[74]

The verse is drenched in the terminology and ideas of the Jewish prophets with 18:23 showing the influence of numerous verses. The first portion of verse 23, *καὶ φῶς λύχνου οὐ μὴ φάνῃ ἐν σοὶ ἔτι* is part of an allusion to Jeremiah 25:10; this phrase is found nowhere outside Jeremiah, and this makes it almost certain that the allusions that occur in Revelation 18:22-23 are primarily dependent upon Jeremiah 25:10. The light of lamps coming through the windows of homes in towns and cities indicates the presence of people and of life.[75] The absence of light would indicate the absence of life, and of people. The sense of this phrase is that judgement has come upon the people and they no longer occupy their houses or their city. The judgment in Revelation has come because of the economic and ethical abuses committed by the Roman Empire and participation in this has brought this sentence down upon those who have not separated themselves from such practices.

The next section *καὶ φωνὴ νυμφίου καὶ νύμφης οὐ μὴ ἀκουσθῇ ἐν σοὶ ἔτι* is used in Jeremiah 25:10 and continues the theme of judgement both in the context of Jeremiah and in

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[74] Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 170-179; Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, Smyth & Helwys Commentary series (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 2001), pp. 339-356; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, pp. 121-124.
[75] David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary series, 52C (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), p. 1009.

the Apocalypse.[76] It is interesting to note that one of the most prominent images in both chapter 17 and 18 is that of Babylon. Most commentators are in agreement that this appellation is used figuratively here as an allusion to Rome. The implication of this designation is that Rome will fall just as Babylon had fallen; this is seen as likely, due in part to the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem which has occurred under both empires.[77]

The next phrase, *ὅτι οἱ ἔμποροι σου ἦσαν οἱ μεγιστᾶνες τῆς γῆς* alludes to Isaiah 23:8, where Tyre is condemned, in Revelation the phrase is used to condemn Rome for its economic domination of the Mediterranean world.[78]

The final clause of this verse, *ὅτι ἐν τῇ φαρμακείᾳ σου ἐπλανήθησαν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* is the second of two causal clauses. In Nahum 3:4 Nineveh is referred to as a harlot who betrays peoples with her 'sorceries'. In Jewish tradition, there is very often a link between idolatry and 'sorcery'.[79] Aune argues that the reference to 'magical spells' at this point would suggest that some saw the ability of Rome to control and to prevail over the Mediterranean world as they did, being connected to 'magic,'. It was the perception of some that it was only through the practice of 'magic' that Rome not only was able to make the initial conquests, but also through this power, that their control was maintained.[80] Collins concurs with the view that the nations were deceived by 'sorcery' but adds that there is also the implication that the nations have participated in the idolatrous worship of Rome. Revelation 18:23 alludes to three of the reasons that Rome would come under the judgement of God: (1) the idolatrous worship encouraged by Rome, (2) its use of 'sorcery' to deceive the nations and (3) its wealth.[81]

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[76] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, pp. 1009-1010.
[77] Adela Yarbro Collins, "Revelation 18: Taunt –Song or Dirge?," in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament* ed. J. Lambrecht, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Thelogicarum Lovaniensium, 52 (Gembloux: Leuven University Press, 1980), pp. 185-204.
[78] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1010.
[79] Nah. 3:4; 2 Chr. 33:6; 2 Ki. 9:22; Mic. 5:10-14.
[80] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1010.
[81] Collins, "Revelation 18: Taunt –Song or Dirge?," pp. 200-203.

Kraybill believes that John follows the tradition of Jewish prophecy, which links 'fornicators', 'sorcerers', and 'idolaters', vilifies syncretists, and condemns anyone who does not demonstrate complete loyalty to Jesus Christ.[82] In the context of Revelation 18:23, there appears to be no doubt, despite the fact that the word group *φαρμακεία* can have a positive connotation in antiquity, that it is being used pejoratively by John. He seems to make a case for an exclusive loyalty to Christ which tolerates no compromise to any other spiritual force, nor allows for a worship to reflect anything other than an unqualified devotion to Christ. In making this assertion, though, John does not in any sense indicate that there is not genuine power in 'sorcery'. He simply couches his argument in terms that indicate that a reliance on any power other than God is counter to God's will, and associates with it condemnation. In this way he could effectively counter the common tendency of Rome to absorb new religious movements into its own religious system.[83]

Belief in the existence and the power of what might be termed 'magical' practitioners such as 'sorcerers', 'magicians', 'witches', 'necromancers', 'diviners', 'astrologers', 'demons', 'exorcists', 'possessors of the evil-eye' and the like was a common feature of the ancient Mediterranean world with which members of Jewish and Christian communities would have been well acquainted.[84] John stands in alignment with the ancient prophets of Israel and a majority of Jewish writings in attributing 'sorcery' and other 'magical' practices to those outside the covenant people of God. Elliot maintains that despite this John does not expand this reference into a more general denunciation of 'magical' practice. He says that John uses the term 'sorcery' as a 'rhetorical means' of distinguishing insiders from outsiders and of labelling outsiders as immoral agents that are beyond the boundaries that God has set for his people. It is Rome, and compromise with corrupt Roman power, that is the object of

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[82] Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, pp. 199-200.
[83] Martin Goodman, *The Roman World 44BC – AD 180* (Routledge History of the Ancient World; London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 289-301. Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic the Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1992), pp. 14-20.
[84] Elliot, "Sorcery and Magic in the Revelation of John", p. 261.

John's denunciation and not 'sorcery' or 'magical' arts in general. John does try to nullify the claims by those outside the realm of God's people, but this is not done by denying the power of 'magic' *en bloc*,. Instead, he counters outsider 'magic' (which is syncretistic) with superior insider 'magic'.[85]

If John were intent upon a general condemnation of all 'magical' power it seems that it would have been incumbent upon him to define quite clearly what he was actually condemning. In the world in which he lived such a demarcation would have been virtually impossible as there were no clear cut parameters between 'magic' and 'religion'.[86] John on the other hand seems intent upon condemning wholeheartedly certain, specific, alliances with spiritual forces, i.e. those that did not exhibit an absolute loyalty to the one God. It is made explicit that all human beings are divided into two groups in the first great cycle of vision accounts (4-11). In chapters 12-22:5 it is made clear that all humanity is made up of worshippers of the Lamb and worshippers of the beast.[87] There is a clear demarcation between insiders and outsiders, but that differentiation is not made based upon some form of blanket rejection of spiritual power, or the refusal to use it.

By interpreting John's use of the term 'sorcery' at Revelation 18:23 in this manner, other aspects of John's use of apparently 'magical' terminology without any indication of negativity toward a general belief in spiritual power is acknowledged so as not to indicate more than he intends to say. (These matters will be discussed in detail in later chapters of this present work.) John remains within the conceptual realm of his contemporaries where 'magic' and religion are overlapping and inseparable entities. From an ancient perspective John is not condemning 'sorcery' in broad terms, but is condemning any 'magical' practice which falls outside the parameters set for God's covenant people. In 18:23, and its context,

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[85] Elliot, "Sorcery and Magic in the Revelation of John", pp. 271-273.
[86] Jan N. Bremmer, "The Birth of the Term 'Magic," in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik; Band 126*, ed. Werner Eck, et al. (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GMBH, 1999), pp. 1-12.
[87] Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, p. 159.

John aligns himself with the prophets of Israel and condemns *φαρμακεία* in a manner that brands it as the means of the deception. This is an improper usage of supernatural power on the part of 'Babylon'.

This subtle difference is important if we are to retain a perspective that allows us to catch a glimpse of the text as a first century reader of the Mediterranean world would have perceived the text. As is demonstrated above, this is a word that at times can even have a positive meaning. With this choice of terminology and contextual framework, he seems to assume that there would be members of his audience who think there is nothing categorically wrong with *φαρμακεία* (i.e. it is reconcilable with their faith) and would observe in its practice a genuine, effectual power.

John chooses not to attack the effectiveness of *φαρμακεία* at 18:23, but to attack the usage of *φαρμακεία* for the purposes of deception. In this manner he challenges his audience to address their world view, to look at their lifestyle, their allegiances, and their devotion and then links Babylon with the ultimate crime of killing the 'prophets' and the 'saints'. Alliance with Babylon carries with it a sharing in the guilt of her crimes; perhaps John thinks it possible that some of his readers would not have recognised this before because, along with the nations, they fall prey to the deception through *φαρμακεία*. In Jewish tradition there was often a link between harlotry, idolatry and sorcery (as was mentioned above).[88] In Isaiah 23:15-18 the harlotry of Tyre is related to her commerce. The issue in Revelation 18:23 is an issue of loyalty, and reliance upon *φαρμακεία* is an act of harlotry, showing disloyalty to God. The passage probably alludes to the imperial cult, which often included the worship of the goddess Roma.[89] Aune deals extensively with the allusion to Roma as the prostitute in

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[88] Nah. 3:4; 2 Chr. 33:6; 2 Ki. 9:22; Mic. 5:12-13.

[89] Dio Cassius, *Dio's Roman History*, 51.20.6-9. Tacitus, *Annals*, 4:37. c.f. David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor, vol. 2* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), pp. 1293-1294, 1333, 1613-1614; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, p. 121; Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, pp. 25-27, 30, 60; Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 323-326; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 608; M. Eugene Boring,

his discussions of chapter 17.[90] The image of Roma as a prostitute fits in precisely with the Jewish tradition that conceives of a link between harlotry, idolatry and sorcery.

John seeks to polarise his audience into insiders and outsiders destroying any illusion of middle ground. He perceives two types of outsiders, (1) those who participate in the imperial cult and (2) those who participate in immorality, which certainly includes idolatry, but which by its generality perhaps includes immorality of other types as well. In 18:23 the emphasis seems to be on the former category, whereas in the case of the lists that are at 9:21, 21:8 and 22:15 the emphasis would seem to be on immorality. While Rome has dominion over the Mediterranean world, John's attention is transfixed upon a significant threat to burgeoning Christianity: the question of participation in the imperial cults.[91] In John's vision, Babylon is a prostitute who offers a cup of wine in a gold cup to the inhabitants of the earth.[92] Revelation 18 draws heavily upon Ezekiel 26-27 and Jeremiah 50-51 for its imagery as well as Jeremiah 25, but John is not simply interpreting scripture, or quoting it, he is refashioning it for his own time. Ezekiel 26 and 27 are oracles directed against Tyre, who rejoiced over the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem; pronoucments of divine judgments follow (Ezekiel 26:3-14). In chapter 27 the prophet takes up an extended lament focusing on the economic benefit that Tyre gave to the earth, in verse 33 this is highlighted:[93] 'When your wares came out from the seas, you satisfied many peoples; in your abundant wealth and merchandise you made the kings of the earth rich' (Ezekiel 27:33).

Revelation, Interpretation Commentary series (Louisville KY: John Knox Press, 1989), pp. 178-189; G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Black's New Testament Commentary series (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), pp. 216-217; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary Series (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), pp. 348-350; Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 32-35, 180-187. All are in agreement that the Harlot represents Rome or Roman power with the exception of J. Massyngberde Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, The Anchor Bible series, Vol. 38 (New York: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 282-289. She sees the Harlot as representing Jerusalem. Most refer to, or seem to have knowledge of the coinage that was minted in Asia Minor during the reign of Vespasian that displays the image of Roma seated on 7 hills. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, pp. 920-921.

[90] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, pp. 920-928.

[91] Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, pp. 188-193.

[92] Rev. 18:1-6.

[93] Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, pp. 204-208.

Where Ezekiel 26-27 provided a context for condemnation of the economic aspects of Rome, Jeremiah supplies the basis for three important images that are used in Revelation 18. At Jeremiah 51:7 we are told, 'Babylon was a gold cup in the hand of Yahweh, making all the earth drunken; from her wine the nations drank, therefore the nations went mad.' In John, the imagery has shifted somewhat with responsibility for the madness seemingly attributed to Babylon, rather than to God. The calls to flee Babylon and rejoice are also echoed in Jeremiah (Revelation 18:2-4), although there are also other prophetic texts at work here as well. Finally, the symbolic action of the mighty angel of Revelation 18:21 is a reworking of the end of Jeremiah 51. After writing down his prophecies a royal official was instructed to take them to Babylon, where they were to be read, then tied to a stone and cast into the Euphrates.

In John's vision, the imagery is developed further and an angel casts a giant millstone into the sea 'with such violence Babylon the great city will be cast down, and will absolutely not be found ever' (Rev. 18:21b). As was noted earlier, John did not simply quote these passages. He took the images that were in them and refashioned them for his purposes'.[94]

II. The Vice Lists

The usage of *φαρμακεία* in the vice lists that follow, varies considerably from the usage in 18:23. In 18:23, the terminology is not used in a stylised contextual framework that is part of the prophetic traditions of Israel, but in a very innovative and calculated fashion that draws heavily upon the current contextual need without relying greatly upon traditional usage. The vice lists, however, do draw considerably upon a very prominent Jewish and even a New Testament tradition, of using stylised lists to expound the charges against those who are being warned. The usage at 18:23 is reliant upon its wider, current historical context

[94] Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, pp. 204-208.

for its meaning, whereas the usage of *φαρμακεία* in the lists is more reliant upon the traditional Jewish understandings of this term.

In the sections that follow, I will first explore, briefly, each vice list in Revelation and then I will compare the three vice lists of Revelation with each other, with the one in Galatians 5:19-21 and the one from Malachi 3:5.

III. Revelation 9:21

The term *φαρμακεία* occurs in this form (*φαρμάκων*) only here in the New Testament. There is a textual variant that supports the more specific *φαρμακειῶν* (A 046 2053 2329 2344 2351 $\mathfrak{M}^{A}$)[95], but the reading of *φαρμάκων* is to be preferred based partly on external support (𝔓47 ℵ C 1006 1611 1841 1854 $\mathfrak{M}^{K}$),[96] but also due to the fact that copyists were more likely to alter the form to *φαρμακειῶν* as it occurs in 18:23 and Gal. 5:20.[97] As was mentioned earlier the term can be used in a medical context, but when used pejoratively, it means either poison (Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 15:89; cf. 15:93) or a 'magical potion' (Josephus *Jewish War* 1:572; *PGM* 13:253; *PGM* 4:2176).[98] In Greek, *φαρμακεία*, and in Latin, the term *veneficium*, are both ambiguous terms that can mean either 'magic' or 'drugs', depending upon the context and often the context retains the ambiguity. This ambiguity is deliberate and reflects the general attitude of Graeco-Roman culture. In this culture, drugs are intimately associated with 'magic'. Those who spoke Greek or Latin, in the time of the writing of Revelation, would have understood this connection. Translations (which really encompasses all English translations) that suppress one of these meanings, without clear contextual intent, are not being true to the appropriate cultural situation in which these words

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[95] Barbara Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998), p. 650.
[96] *Aland et al., Novum Testamentum Graece, p. 650.*
[97] Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament, 3rd ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1975), p. 742.
[98] David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary Series, Vol. 52B (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), p. 544.

were used, and they need to consider how they might convey the ambiguity of the original text.[99]

Noonan has even expressed that in Revelation 9:21, the author does not intend to express a strictly 'magical' meaning for this word and to translate the word as 'magic, 'sorcery' or 'witchcraft' is unwarranted, as it resolves the inherent ambiguity of this word.[100] This word can even be used in a positive fashion by Christians as is shown in chapter 20 of the letter to the Ephesians by Ignatius of Antioch where the phrase *ἕνα ἄρτον κλῶντες, ὅς ἐστιν φάρμακον ἀθανασίας, ἀντίδοτος τοῦ μὴ ἀποθανεῖν, ἀλλὰ ζῆν ἐν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ διὰ παντός* ....' From the New Testament, as a whole, it is not possible to indicate that there is an absolute hostility to 'medicine'. There appears to have been 'good medicine' and 'bad medicine'. Noonan believes that in Rev. 9:21 there is hostility toward 'medicine' and not simply to 'magic' in general. He thinks that the hostility toward 'magic' would also include a hostility toward 'medicine'.[101] This interpretation certainly agrees with what is known of medical practice in this period. It seems impossible to extricate forbidden influences from medical practice in this period.

IV. Revelation 21:8

Revelation 21:7-8 describes those who will inhabit the new heaven and the new earth and those who will not (which includes those who practice *φαρμακεία*).[102] 'Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.' (Revelation 21:7). The adversative *δέ* marks the transition from those 'who conquer' and those who are not conquerors.[103] While the list of those to be excluded from the new heaven and the new earth may be indebted to traditional vice lists (cf. Malachi 3:5; Revelation 9:20-

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[99] John T. Noonan Jr., *Contraception* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 25.
[100] Noonan Jr., *Contraception*, p. 44.
[101] Noonan Jr., *Contraception*, pp. 44-45.
[102] Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary series (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), p. 603.
[103] Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 450.

21; 22:15; Romans 1:29-31; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-20; 1 Timothy 1:9-10), several of the categories listed would have had particular relevance to the situation that John is addressing. The purpose of this list was not to castigate those who were lost, or to rejoice over those who had been lost, but to warn those who were still engaged in the battle.[104] It was intended to warn them to continue to be vigilant in their quest for the New Jerusalem, to persevere in faithfulness toward their goal. Any failure would result in a loss of reward and ultimately punishment.

The punishment envisioned is described as the 'second death' and it will be for those who have not been obedient to Christ and for those who have failed to stay the course to the end. By their failure to remain faithful they show that they are not truly 'of Christ'.[105] The role of God, presented by John, corresponds to popular conceptions of the role of the emperor whose main task was to dispense justice by punishing the disobedient and rewarding those who were obedient and thus serving the empire well.[106] Once again, John draws upon imagery that questions the loyalties of those who claim to follow Christ. This verse would also provide comfort to the righteous who see evil around them continuing to go unpunished. Judgement would ultimately come and it would be served on those who fail to repent.

V. Revelation 22:15

The opposite of the blessing promised in verse 14, is the denial of access to the city, for those named in verse 15. Once again there is a list of those who are noted for practices consistently decried as counter to the will of God and not acceptable in the New Jerusalem. To be outside the Holy City is equivalent to being in the 'lake of fire' (20:15) and to the 'second death' (21:8).[107] Unique to this verse is the term 'The dogs'. Dogs were generally despised in the Jewish Bible as creatures that ate their own vomit (Proverbs 26:11), ate the

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[104] Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 404-405.
[105] In Matthew 25:41, this is described as 'the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'. Brighton, *Revelation*, p. 605.
[106] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1133.
[107] Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 507.

corpses and drank the blood of those that were killed (1 Kings 14:11;16:4; 21:19, 23-24; 22:38; 2 Kings 9:10; 9:36; Psalms 68:23). To be surrounded by dogs is a metaphor for evil doers (Psalms 22:16) and their scavanging habits added to the feelings of contempt that people felt for them. In the New Testament the word 'dog' also maintians its negative connotation as in Matthew 7:6 where the statement not to 'give what is holy to dogs' is followed in Philippians by a warning to 'beware of the dogs' (3:2)[108] and in 2 Peter 2:22[109] imagery referring to false teachers as dogs and swine.[110]

Some have seen in 'dogs' a reference to a male prostitute as in Deuteronomy 23:18.[111] Whatever the exact sins envisioned by John's use of this term, it is clear that they shall dwell ἔξω. This same sentiment is expressed at Psalms 101:7 and in *Psalm of Solomon.* 17:29a where it is written that, 'He will not tolerate unrighteousness (even) to pause among them, and any person who knows wickedness shall not live with them.'[112] There is no indication that the reference to 'dogs' has anything to do with 'magical' practice. Character alone seems to the decisive factor that determines fitness for dwelling in the city as opposed to outside the city.[113] In Deuteronomy 18:9-14 there is a list of practices that will be excluded from Israel after they enter 'the land'. At Deuteronomy 18:10, in the old Greek

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[108] Jac. J. Muller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament Series (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 105-107. It is likely that this is a reference to Judaisers who were advocating a need to be circumcised in order to be righteous before God.

[109] Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, vol. 50, The Word Biblical Commentary Series (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1983), pp. 278-281. It is likely that this refers to Christians who were considering or had returned to their former religious beliefs or practices and were seeking to persuade others that this was the proper path.

[110] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 428. The warning is not to fall back into sin and the appellation 'dogs' is used to describe, in general terms those who have fallen back into sin. O. Michel, "'kýōn'," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), p. 494.

[111] R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John, Vol. 2*, The International Critical Commentary Series (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), p. 177; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, pp. 1222-1223; Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 345; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 791; Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 507.

[112] R. B. Wright, trans. and ed. "Psalms of Solomon" in, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Vol. 639-670; The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday 1985), pp. 639-670.

[113] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John, vol. 2*, p. 178; Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 427.

translation of the Jewish scriptures, one of the practitioners that is included is the *φαρμακός* along with other practitioners of 'magical' arts such as the 'diviner', 'soothsayer', 'augur', 'charmer', 'medium', 'wizard', and 'necromancer'. The list at Revelation 22:15 appears to have been formed based on the tradition in Deuteronomy, according to Aune.[114] The text makes it clear that God is driving the people from the land because they practice such things.[115] Once again, loyalty to God is the emphasis stressed by John. The issue is not simply 'magic' but reliance upon any practice which does not demonstrate complete loyalty to God. Those 'outside' the city are condemned to be separated from the fellowship of God and this image is equivalent to being cast into the 'lake that burns with fire and brimstone' (21:8).[116] Once again, the issue of justice is in view providing comfort for the righteous who see those who currently live lives dominated by sin, ultimately receiving punishment for those sins.

VI. Comparison of the Lists

As was mentioned earlier, the vice list is a common instrument used in texts that show the righteous judgment of God and they are used throughout the Jewish scriptures and the New Testament. The lists are used to recount the sins of the people and to act as a warning to those who are being tempted. The lists vary in the numbers of accusations brought and in the order of the vices. Aune compares the vice list of Revelation 21:8 with the Ten Commandments indicating that there are some parallels with the Ten Commandments and other early Christian vice lists.[117] However, this comparison fails to be of such a nature as to convince us that this is the source of the list at 21:8, as a number of the vices from the list do not occur in the Decalogue, such as *φαρμάκοις, δειλοί, ἄπιστοι*. It

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[114] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1223; Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 285; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John, Vol. 2*, p. 178.
[115] De. 18:12-13.
[116] Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 508; Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, pp. 285-286; Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 453.
[117] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1131.

would seem to be much more probable that the issue is related to standards of purity that were permitted when entering into the presence of the deity. These purity lists are found even outside the confines of Jewish culture and would have been familiar to the people of Asia Minor.

In an inscription from Philadelphia from the late 2nd or early 1st century B.C.E.[118] those having participated in prohibited activities are excluded from entering the temple:[119]

> When men and women, whether free or slave, enter this building they should swear by all the gods that they bear no lies against man or woman, perform no malevolent magic [*φάρμακον πονηρόν*] or malevolent charms [*ἐπωιδάς πονηράς*] against others, that they neither participate themselves nor advise others to participate in love philtres, abortions, contraception, nor anything else that kills children .... Except for sexual relations with his own wife, a man must not defile a foreign woman whom a man has, whether free or slave, and a man must not corrupt a boy or a virgin or advise others to do so.... A woman or man who violates these prescriptions may not enter this building.[120]

There are several categories of prohibitions contained in the inscription, these include: (1) lying or deceit, (2) forms of 'magic', (3) various forms of illicit sexual activity and, (4) abortion and contraception, which are defined as infanticide. After the list, there occurs a section that expounds the consequences of failing to observe the prohibitions and a list of blessings for those who do observe them.[121] Similar consequences are found in the lists of biblical material: in Malachi 3:5 curses and judgment are promised (3:5, 9, 11, 12); in Galatians 5:19-21 the consequence is that 'you reap whatever you sow' (6:7); in Revelation 9:21 the offenders will be killed (9:20); in Revelation 21:8, those who practice such things are thrown into 'the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death'; in Revelation 22:15 they will be forbidden entry into the city.

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[118] M. Eugene Boring, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe, eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), No. 771.
[119] Franciszek Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure*, École française d'Athènes. Travaux et mémoires; fasc. 9 (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1955), 54.
[120] Translation modified from Boring, Berger, and Colpe, eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament*, No. 771. by Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1132.
[121] Boring, Berger, and Colpe, eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament*, No. 771.

In the lists contained in the Apocalypse, as compared to the other lists cited, there seems to be a great deal in common in both form and content. It is to be noted that the expressions that have been translated as relating to 'sorcery' do appear to be prominent enough in these instances to warrant the proposition, put forward by Aune, that indicates that Early Christianity was involved in a struggle against, what they perceived as, 'magical practices'.[122] This was one among a list of competitors for the loyalty of those who claimed to follow Christ. Reliance upon any power or source of comfort that was outside the clearly defined purview of God is condemned in the strongest terms. No compromise or assimilation is to be tolerated. The ecumenical phenomenon that existed in much of the ancient world with regard to the religious practices of the various groups that promoted a tolerance and even a syncretism of these beliefs and practices is unequivocally forbidden for the follower of Christ. It appears that one of the primary purposes for the lists was to exhort the faithful.[123] John perceived that one of the greatest dangers facing the church was that of syncretism. The more the church absorbed the world the greater the danger for disloyalty. John's perspective on the nature of God clearly reflects that of ancient conservative Judaism, which conceives of God as just and jealous (Exodus 34:13-15). His followers are to endure patiently and await the revelation of his justice.

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[122] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", pp. 481-501.
[123] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 405.

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D. Synoptic View: Chart 1

hi 3:5	Galatians 5:19-21	Revelation 9:20-21	Revelation 21:8	Revelation 22:15
ερμακος erer)	D: *πορνεία* (fornication)	C: *εἴδωλον* (idol)	*δειλός* (cowardly)	*κύων* (dog)
φαρμακος terer)	*ἀκαθαρσία* (impurity)	E. *φόνος* (murder)	*ἄπιστος* (faithless)	A: *φάρμακος* (sorcerer)
ψευδος	*ἀσέλγεια* (licentiousness)	A: *φάρμακον* (sorcery)	*βδελύσομαι* (polluted)	D: *πόρνος* (fornicator)
στερέω depriving of wages)	C: *εἰδωλολατρία* (idolatry)	D: *πορνεία* (fornication)	E. *φονεύς* (murderer)	E. *φονεύς* (murderer)
συκοφαντέω ppressing – the	A: *φαρμακεία* (sorcery)	*κλέμμα* (theft)	D: *πόρνος* (fornicator)	C: *εἰδωλολάτρης* (idolater)
ποστρέφω turning aside – the	*ἔχθρα* (enmity) *ἔρις* (strife)		A: *φάρμακος* (sorcerer) C: *εἰδωλολάτρης* (idolater)	B: *ψεῦδος* (one who practices falsehood)
φοβέω not fearing)			B: *ψευδής* (liar)	

John uses Jewish traditions to give his work a continuity with the world that he devalued. He established an eastern Mediterranean ethos for the congregations that he addressed which articulated an understanding of history that was formed by the traditions of ancient Israel. The result of this approach was that it produced a particular kind of continuity, one that could challenge the world view that was current at that time, and declare it a deception. He weaves together not only Jewish stories and traditions, but primarily Jewish traditions to reach his diverse audience and to challenge the worldview advocated by the Roman empire and to label Rome as the agent of chaos and destruction. It is interesting that Rome often depicted its conquests in a mythological setting that portrayed conquered peoples as a corporate female. John reverses the image and portrays Rome as the great prostitute who comes under the judgement of the oracles of God (Revelation 17-18, esp. 18:7-8).[124]

Perhaps this also explains why John says in several places that this will call for 'wisdom'.[125] In this way John sets out his view of the conflict that is actually taking place in the world that surrounds his audience. Not everything, that a great many in the Empire would have considered to be normative, is to be accepted as a matter of course, much is in opposition to God. John condemns the reliance upon spiritual forces associated with the Roman Empire and often associated with its ability to conquer and maintan control. He empties such a reliance of any legitimacy, condemning those who practice such things or are associated with those who did to the wrath of God. The only legitiamte source of power, in John's view, is that which proceeds from God. He labels such practices as *φαρμακεία* and condemns reliance on those things so labelled in the strongest possible terms.[126] He indicates

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[124] Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, pp. 167-179.
[125] Rev. 13:18; 17:9.
[126] Rev. 21:8.

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a definitely negative attitude toward those things which he labels as *φαρμακεία*, the question that remains is what is it that John considers to be *φαρμακεία*?

3. The False Prophet in the Context of the Apocalypse

A. Introduction

The matter of 'false prophecy' is integrally linked with the issue of 'prophecy'. Defining what actually constitutes 'prophecy' is something very fluid that perhaps differs even within a given cultural, ethnic, or religious group. In the opening section of the Book of Revelation, John makes it clear that he views the words that he is to convey as prophecy (1:3 'Blessed is the one reading aloud and hearing the words of the prophecy....'). John appears to envision his purpose as being a prophet delivering a message that is inspired by God.[1] The question is how does John define prophecy in opposition to 'false prophecy?' Hill, along with others, put forward the viewpoint that the book of Revelation as a whole stands in the ancient prophetic tradition, alongside earlier Judaic prophecy.[2] As was often the case in the prophetic works of the Jewish people, those who were considered 'false' prophets were often a major topic of concern. John, similarly, confronts this same dilemma in his first century context.

'False prophets', when identified as such, were thought to constitute a threat to Israel, and they would likewise plague the early church. John gives the impression that he perceives a danger from enemies of God's people. Whether they were wielding influence from inside or from outside the Christian communities, the threat appears to be very tangible to John.[3] This enemy is, at times, cast in the guise 'the false prophet'.[4] Such a person may be like the 'false prophets' of the Old Testament period who were serving the people rather than Yahweh, or they may consciously be servants of the evil forces. Whether they consciously

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[1] David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, The Word Biblical Commentary Series, vol. 52 (Dallas TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1997), pp. lxxv-lxxvi.
[2] David Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John," *New Testament Studies* 18 (1972): 401-418; Frederick David Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-critical Perspective* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), pp. 382-383; Ruth Bowlin, "The Christian Prophets in the New Testament" (Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1958), pp. 290-328; Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung Des Johannes*, Handbuch Zum Neuen Testament series, 16a (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1974).
[3] Rev. 2:1-3:22.
[4] Rev. 2:14-15; 2:20; 16:13-14; 19:20; 20:10.

served the malevolent powers or not, the outcome was the same. They were leading the people of God astray.

John alludes to 'false prophets' in 2:14, 2:20, 13:11-15 and there is a possible allusion in chapter 17, and then he specifically identifies one in 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10. Around the turn of the Common Era, there was a prominent expectation that the time immediately preceding the end would be filled with 'false prophets', or other evil figures that would use signs, wonders, and miracles to lead people astray. This view was widespread in both Jewish and Christian literature such as *1 Enoch* 91:5-7, the *Sibylline Oracles* 2.167, 3:63-67, the *Apocalypse of Elijah* 3:5-13, the *Apocalypse of Daniel* 13:1-13, the *Apocalypse of Peter* 2, Mark 13:22, 2 Thessalonians 2:9 and the *Martyrdom of Isaiah* 4:10. John may have sought to remind his readers of the warnings that had been given by Jesus himself (if he was aware of these as some indicate[5]), and others, to heighten their attentiveness to the often, subtle nature of the danger that they faced. It was a common feature of all the apocalyptic traditions in Early Christian scriptures that those described as 'false prophets' would 'lead astray, the nations and perform 'signs'.[6] Though John never specifically refers to himself as a *προφήτης* his activity and message stand very much in the Jewish prophetic tradition.[7] He is linked with the 'prophets' in 22:9[8] where he is referred to in conjunction with the other 'prophets'.

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[5]Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), pp. 92-117. Bauckham considers it 'almost certain' that John knew the Synoptic Traditions independently of the written Gospels; cf. Dan Lioy, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus*, Studies in Biblical Literature series, 58 (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 7-8; Adela Yarbro Collins, "The "Son of Man" Tradition and the Book of Revelation," in *The Messiah*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 536-568. She indicates that though John does not seem to have been aware of the Gospels he does seem to have an independent source of 'very early christological tradition.' P. 568. Charles disagrees with this and indicates that John 'appears to have used Matthew Luke...' and a number of other New Testament books as source material. R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John,* vol. 1, The International Critical Commentary Series (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), pp. lxxxiii-lxxxvi.

[6] Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum series, vol. 14 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), p. 49.

[7] Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John", p. 410; H. A. Guy, *New Testament Prophecy* (London: Epworth Press, 1947), pp. 21-27.

[8] Rev. 22:9 *... εἰμι καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῶν τηρούντων τοὺς λόγους τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον.*

The Apocalypse itself contains the term προφητεία ('prophecy') in reference to its own contents five times.[9]

It was commonly the case with the prophets of Israel that some were declared true prophets, while others were deemed as 'false prophets'.[10] They often found that their communication conflicted with the message of others who were, in time, declared to be 'false prophets'.[11] John finds that his proclamation conflicts with the statements brought by others, who claim to be prophets, or who are working in such guise, whom John considers to be 'false'.[12] It appears that John envisions the conflict between his message, and that of those described variously as those 'following the teachings of Balaam'[13], 'Jezebel'[14], 'the beast'[15], 'false prophet,'[16] and perhaps the harlot of chapter 17 as evocative of the conflict between the forces of good and evil. He seeks to highlight the nature and the importance of this conflict, and one technique that he uses in the Apocalypse is to draw upon characters from Israel's past. This modus operandi is used in other early Jewish traditions, such as the sobriquets in the Dead Sea Scrolls; [17] also, 'Babylon' is used as a sobriquet in the *Sibylline Oracles* and in *4 Ezra*.[18]

He uses characterisations of the past enemies of Israel in order to intensify the impact his message would have upon his audience. Vilifying one's opponent was a useful weapon

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[9] Rev. 1:3; 22:7; 22:10; 22:18; 22:19.
[10] Deut. 13:1-5; 18:19-20; 18:22. 1 Sam. 3:20. 1 Kgs. 18:4; 22:23. 2 Kgs. 3:12; 23:16-18. 2 Chr. 36:12; Ezr. 5:2; 6:14. Neh. 6:14-16. Isa. 9:14-16. Jer. 2:8; 5:13; 5:31; 6:13; 8:10; 14:14-16; 23:11; 23:13-16; 23:21-25; 27:10; 27:14; 28:9; 29:8-9. Lam. 2:14. Eze. 13:16; 33:33. Matt. 2:17; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 12:39; 24:15. Mk. 1:2. Lu. 4:17; 4:27. Joh. 1:23. Ac. 3:24; 8:28; 13:20; 28:25. Bar-Jesus is declared a 'false prophet' in Acts 13:6.
[11] J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), pp. 210-219.
[12] Rev. 2:2; 2:14; 2:20;
[13] Rev. 2:14.
[14] Rev. 2:20.
[15] Rev. 13:11.
[16] Rev. 19:20.
[17] *1QpHab.* ii:2; v:9; v:10; *CD* i:11; xx:32. i.e. 'Teacher of Righteousness' and 'House of Absalom'.
[18] *Sib. Or.* 5:143; 5:159. *4 Ezra* 15:44; 16:1.

in the arsenal of skilled rhetoricians in the period of the first century C. E., and even before.[19] By using characters from Israel's past, John is able to set in context the serious nature of the situation that now faces the churches. An ascription of 'magical' deeds to the 'false prophet' (19:20) of the Apocalypse seems to lie just beneath the surface according to Garrett. She asserts that in various factions, including both Jewish and Christian groups, it was anticipated that in the last days 'magic' and 'false prophecy' would be Satan's principal means for persuading human beings to worship him.[20] Certainly, this viewpoint seems to have been strongly held by some within the Christian Community as is indicated in a variety of texts.[21] The signs and miracles performed by the 'false prophet' of 19:20 were enacted in order to deceive. Significantly, there is no indication in the text that the author tries to explain away the miraculous deeds performed by this character as tricks, or as hoaxes. The labelling of these signs and miraculous deeds as false was based upon John's conception that the source of the power invoked to perform these signs was not God.

Among the defamatory trends used in Antiquity, that of highlighting 'hypocrisy and falseness' is one of the most poignant according to Du Toit.[22] The 'false prophet' is one example of this type of denigration, and John draws upon the image of the 'false prophet' to develop and to heighten the tension within the text in order to highlight the seriousness of the danger faced from attacks that have originated from within the church itself. Though the term 'false prophet' does not occur in the Masoretic text of the Jewish scriptures, it is used in the Greek translations of those writings.[23] *Ψευδοπροφήτης* occurs 11 times in Early Christian

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[19] Andrie Du Toit, "Vilification as a Pragmatic Device in Early Christian Epistolography", *Biblica* 75 (1994): pp. 403-412. As Balaam is vilified in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, as Rome is in the context of the Dead Sea Scrolls (cf. note 18,) and as Haman is at the festival of Purim.
[20] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, pp. 16-17.
[21] Mark 13:22; Matt. 24:11, 24; 2 Thess. 2:3-10; Rev. 13:11-14; 19:20; *Didache* 16:4.
[22] Du Toit, "Vilification as a Pragmatic Device in Early Christian Epistolography", pp. 404-405.
[23] Jer. 6:13; 33:7, 8, 11, 16; 34:9; 35:1, 36:1, 8; Zec. 13:2.

scriptures, with three of these occurrences being in the Book of Revelation.[24] The concepts that this expression embodies must have been widespread enough to have been understood by John's audience. He uses conventional associations with characters from Israel's sacred history to highlight the reality and the nature of the tension that existed between 'true' and 'false' prophets.

The conception that there is conflict between 'true' and 'false' prophecy, within the context of the Apocalypse, fits well into what Yarbro Collins perceives as the basis for John's composition of this work. She puts forward the viewpoint that John regarded the conflict described in his visions as being between the Christian faith itself, at least as John understood it, and the social situation that he perceived was present in the cultural world in which the church existed. From his perspective there was far too much of the cultural milieu of Asia Minor making its way into the fabric of the church.[25] It seems that John perceived there to be problems in the message that some inside the church were proclaiming.[26] In a similar manner to the way that 'false prophets' were perceived as being in conflict with the true prophets of God in ancient Israel, causing them not to follow God, the mission of the 'false prophets' in the Apocalypse was to lead the people of the church away from God.[27]

B. Revelation 2:14 - Balaam

One sobriquet from sacred history occurs in the words addressed to the angel of the church at Pergamum; here the message refers to Balaam.[28] The common Palestinian tradition, which includes the Targums, Josephus, 4Q339, along with Philo of Alexandria, reflects the view that Balaam was a quintessential villain.[29] It appears that some early

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[24] W. F. Moulton and A.S. Geden, eds., *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*, H. K. Moulton, rev., Fifth ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), p. 1021. Matt. 7:15; 24:11; 24:24; Mk. 13:22; Luke. 6:26; Acts 13:6; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Joh. 4:1; Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10.

[25] Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, p. 106.

[26] Rev. 2:2; 2:24-15; 2:20.

[27] Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, p. 48.

[28] Rev. 2:14.

[29] Targum *Onkelos Num.* 24:14; Targum *Neofiti 1, Num.* 31:16; Targum *Pseudo-Jonathan, Num.* 24:14; 31:16; Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* IV, 126-130; Philo *Moses* I 294-301; 2 *Pet.* 2:15; *Jude* 1:11; *Rev.* 2:14. Judith R.

Christian authors accepted this view (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14).[30] The writers of the Jewish scriptures portrayed Balaam as an instrument of God's blessing upon Israel in Numbers 22-24; however, in Numbers 31:16 he is depicted as an instrument of seduction that gives Balak information which was used to lead Israel into immorality and apostasy. It would appear that during the Second Temple era, Jewish writers were prone to relate the figure of Balaam to Numbers 31:16, thus labelling him as a malefactor.[31] The influence of Numbers 31 was probably stronger than the influence of Numbers 22-24. The main exception to this defamatory view is preserved in the document *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*.[32]

Evidence for the association of the malevolence, with Balaam, has even been found in the very meanings of his name. One proposed etymology construes the name as derived from the Hebrew phrase בלה עם ('he corrupted a people'), which alludes to Balaam's part in leading the people of Israel into idolatry. A second proposed etymology is בלע עם ('he devoured a people'); and is a reference to the results of Balaam's evildoing, which included the deaths of twenty-four thousand Israelites (Num. 25:9).[33] There is no way to be certain that either of these etymological constructions is correct.

Aune is of the opinion that 2:14 draws not simply upon the 'biblical tradition' regarding Balaam, but also reflects haggadic traditions of Balaam that were circulating widely during this era.[34] In the period of Second Temple Judaism, and subsequently, Balaam

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[30] Baskin, *The Pharaoh's Counsellors Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 78-79.
[31] Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. 172-174.
[32] K. G. Kuhn, "Balaam," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 524-525; Du Toit, "Vilification as a Pragmatic Device in Early Christian Epistolography," p. 410.
[33] Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, p. 173.
[34] Baskin, *The Pharaoh's Counsellors Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition*, p. 79.
[35] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 187. c.f. also Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, p. 162-164; Albert Pietersma, *The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, vol. 119 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), pp. 26-31.

is regarded as the very epitome of what it is to be a 'false prophet'.[35] The church at Pergamum is censured because some within their midst 'hold to the teachings of Balaam' and are even advocating the eating of food sacrificed to idols and the practice of *πορνεία*. There was the assumption in early Judaism and in early Christianity that idolatry and sexual immorality were intricately linked and they are often spoken of as using equivalent terminology.[36] In the Jewish scriptures, the idolatry of Israel is frequently condemned using terminology associated with prostitution and sexual immorality (Jeremiah 3:2; 13:27; Ezekiel 16:15-58; 23:1-49; 43:7; Hosea 5:4; 6:10).[37]

There has been an assertion put forward, by some at least, that the issue of sacral meat is behind these accusations of immorality. According to scholars, it was very difficult to find meat in antiquity that had no sacral association attached to it.[38] Barrett does not find the arguments about the rarity of non-sacral meat to be wholly convincing.[39] Aune goes on to state that the ancients rarely ate meat, but when they did, it was typically in connection with some form of religious celebration.[40] Meat that was from such pagan religious celebrations was forbidden to the Jews (*4 Maccabees* 5:2-6:22), and this prohibition was sometimes taken over by early Christians (Acts 15:29). Those at Pergamum, who led others to 'eat food sacrificed to idols, and to practice fornication' are perhaps perceived to be instigators of fresh manifestations of the teachings of Balaam. They are then labelled in terms that indicate that they were performing the role of 'false prophets.'

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[35] Philo *Mos.* 1.263-304; Jos. *Ant.* 4.126-130; Targum *Onkelos Num.* 24:14, Targum *Neofiti 1*, *Num.* 31:16; Targum *Pseudo-Jonathan, Num.* 24:14; 31:16.
[36] Exod. 32:4-6; Wis. 14:12-31; *T. Reub.* 4:6.
[37] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 188.
[38] Hans Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I-II*, Handbuch Zum Neuen Testament series, vol. 9 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1931), pp. 49-52; Arnold Ehrhardt, *The Framework of the New Testament Stories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), p. 280.
[39] C. K. Barrett, "Things Sacrificed to Idols," *New Testament Studies* 11 (1964-1965): pp. 132-153.
[40] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 194-195; Barrett, "Things Sacrificed to Idols," pp. 138-153; H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), p. 33; H. Bolkestein, *Economic Life in Greece's Golden Age* New Edition rev. E. J. Jonkers ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), pp. 9, 23; Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 41.

Those designated as being a *ψευδοπροφήτης* caused a good deal of trouble to the early Church and certain criteria evolved in order for communities to discern a false from a genuine prophet.[41] John addresses this problem extensively in the Apocalypse; as is demonstrated by his use of *ψευδοπροφήτης* and by his vilification of those he appears to conceive of as 'false' prophets. Some Jewish writers were associating the figure with 'magic'. Philo actually uses the term *μάγος* to describe Balaam.[42] He even goes on to say that '...the craft of the sorcerer and the inspiration of the Holiest might not live together.'[43] In view of this, Balaam's 'art of wizardry' (*μαντικός*) was '...banished utterly from his soul...' when the Spirit of Yahweh came upon him.[44]

There is, however, another side to Balaam: he prophesied concerning the 'star of Jacob', which would appear to be a great honour.[45] This indicates that Balaam was a complex figure in the ancient world, that is, not blatantly villianous in every respect.[46] For example, rabbinic tradition portrays Balaam as the last of the Gentile prophets.[47] Aspects of his persona render him as God-fearing and obedient, on the one hand, and as self-serving and evil, on the other. It is the darker side to his identity that is displayed when Balaam gives the advice to Balak that was used to cause Israel to stumble. This advice would ultimately lead some within Israel into idolatry. Perhaps it is due to this contradictory view of Balaam in

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[41] Gerhard Friedrich, "προφήτης," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* vol. 6, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 856-861.

[42] Philo, *Moses* I: 276; *μέρος δ' ἐνθένδε καθεωρᾶτο τῆς τῶν 'Εβραίων στρατοπεδείας, ὃ καθάπερ ἀπὸ σκοπιᾶς ἐπείκνυντο τῷ μάγῳ.* ('From thence a part of the Hebrew encampment was visible, which he shewed as a watchman from his tower to the wizard.') F. H. Colson, trans., *Philo,* vol. 6 ed. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library Series, vol. 289 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1994), p. 419.

[43] Philo, *Moses* VI: 277. He looked and said: "King, do you build seven altars, and sacrifice a calf and ram on each, and I will go aside and inquire of God what I should say." He advanced outside, and straightway became possessed, and there fell upon him the truly prophetic spirit which banished utterly from his soul his art of wizardry. For the craft of the sorcerer and the inspiration of the Holiest might not live together. Then he returned, and, seeing the sacrifices and the altars flaming, he spake these oracles as one repeating the words which another had put into his mouth. Quote from F. H. Colson, *Philo*, vol. 6, p. 419.

[44] Philo, *Moses* VI: 277.

[45] Num. 24:17.

[46] Michael S. Moore, *The Balaam Traditions*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 113 (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 1, 116-122.

[47] *Numbers Rabbah* 14:20. Baskin, *The Pharaoh's Counsellors Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition*, pp. 81-82.

antiquity that John chose to use this particular character as an example; it highlights to his audience that though people and movements may on the surface appear benevolent, or perhaps even ambiguous, a closer look is needed, and John reveals the true nature of what is being taught by some at Pergamum in his warnings.

John has a very narrow definition of fidelity[48] and Balaam, a figure that is multivalent within the textual tradition is understood to be a dangerous figure. Despite his ethical ambiguities, and some (Pseudo-Philo) might even perceive him to be a character who is simply misunderstood, he is in reality, according to tradition, allied with the forces of evil. John calls for a singular loyalty that is to be demonstrated in a refusal to pay even implicit homage to anyone or anything else, whether human, or divine.

C. Revelation 2:15 - Nicolaitans

The next appellation for consideration, of those that may be associated with 'false prophecy', relates to the Nicolaitans. Some scholars have detected a link between those who follow the teachings of Balaam, and the 'Nicolaitans' (2:15). The variety of these theories is, in part, made possible due to the difficulty of identifying precisely the nature of this group. An assortment of explanations have been put forward regarding the designation. One of these draws upon the possible etymology of the Greek word *Νικολαϊτῶν*.[49] This view is based upon a derivation of Nicolaitan from two Greek terms, *νίκη* and *λαός* 'he has conquered the people'.[50] If this etymology is correct, then it likely derived from a comparison of the Nicolaitans to Balaam (2:14), whose name was at times explained as meaning 'he has

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[48] Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, pp. 106-107; Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 16 (Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), pp. 11-12; Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 174-176; David L. Barr, *Tales of the End* (Santa Rosa CA: Polebridge Press, 1998), pp. 178-180.

[49] *Heikki Räisänen, "The Nicolaitans: Apoc. 2; Acta 6," in Aufstieg und Niedergang Der Römischen Welt,* Part II: Principate vol. *26.2,* ed. Wolfgang Haase and Hildegard Temporini (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1995), pp. 1602-1644.

[50] Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 60-61.

consumed or devoured the people.'[51] In this instance the name 'Nicolaitans' would be the Greek equivalent of the term 'Balaamites'. One of the difficulties with this explanation, however, is its reliance upon a widespread knowledge of such a precise meaning for, or associated with the name 'Balaam'.[52]

Though there is the possibility that this explanation is correct, it is equally plausible that this group was named after one of its leaders.[53] One tradition links the Nicolaitans with the Nicholas mentioned in Acts 6:5, when the apostles appointed deacons to assist with the work among the church members at Jerusalem.[54] Räisänen goes on to survey a vast array of theoretical information with regard to the nature and composition of the group spoken of as 'Nicolaitians' by John. One of these views postulates that they were Christians who were willing to make compromises with the wider cultural environment of Asia Minor. It is conjectured that they may have appealed to the writings of Paul for their more accomodating views, or that they were some form of Gnostic libertines.[55] The speculation that the 'Nicolaitans' were some form of Gnostic sect seems to base considerable weight upon the statement of Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.11.1[56]), where this group is associated with the name of Cerinthus, a name that has been associated by some with gnosticism. Despite this evidence, there is no indication that Irenaeus is privy to any knowledge unique to his early position within the church which would allow him accurately identify the precise nature of the Nicolaitans spoken of by John.

Despite not being able to identify the actual teachings, or practices, of the Nicolaitans, the form and structure of the condemnation (i.e. the warning) seems to place them in the

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[51] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 61; Baskin, *The Pharaoh's Counsellors Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition*, p. 79.
[52] This is not the case, as has been noted earlier the meaning of this term is in dispute.
[53] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 61; Räisänen, "The Nicolaitans: Apoc. 2; Acta 6," p. 1608.
[54] Räisänen, "The Nicolaitans: Apoc. 2; Acta 6," p. 1623.
[55] Räisänen, "The Nicolaitans: Apoc. 2; Acta 6," pp. 1603-1606.
[56] 'John the disciple of the Lord, preaches this faith, and seeks, by the proclamation of the gospel, to remove that error which by Cerinthus had been disseminated among men, and a long time previously by those termed Nicolaitans, who are an offset of that "knowledge" falsely so called....' Alexander Roberts and W. H. Rambut, trans., *The Writings of Irenaeus*, .vol. 1, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1868), p. 287.

same category as those associated with the teachings of Balaam and Jezebel (cf. immediately below). This then puts the members of the church in danger of being led away from the truth, that is if they allow themselves to do the 'works' of the Nicolaitans.

D. Revelation 2:20 - Jezebel

The next figure to be considered in this study will be the character referred to as Jezebel. Kraybill suggests that John draws upon the imagery of Jezebel in order to counter the seductive influence that the Roman world was having upon the Christian church.[57] It is most likely the case that the woman described is an actual 'prophetess' at Thyatira, and does not in reality bear the name Jezebel. John has drawn the label 'Jezebel' from the wife of Ahab king of Israel (869-850 B.C.E.). She was the daughter of Ethbaal King of Tyre and Sidon and she became infamous because she influenced Ahab to worship Canaanite gods (1 Kings. 16:31; Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 8.317).[58] Josephus records that she '...went to such lengths of licentiousness and madness that she built a temple to the Tyrian god whom they call Belias, and planted a grove of all sorts of trees; she also appointed priests and prophets (*ψευδοπροφήτας* ; Hebrew term used at 1 Kings 18:19 נביאי) to this god.'[59] Jezebel's marriage appears to have been arranged by Ahab himself in order to seal a mutually advantageous alliance between Israel and the Tyrian Empire.[60] The issue at the heart of this alliance seems to have been a willingnes to accommodate the beliefs of others in order to gain power, or at least in order to get along with one's neighbours.

According to Josephus, Ethbaal, the father of Jezebel, was also a priest in the Phoenician cult of the goddess Astarte.[61] Brenner proposes the theory that Tyre followed the Mesopotamian tradition of appointing an additional female member of the royal household to

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[57] Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, p. 39.
[58] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 203.
[59] Jos. *Ant.* 8:318.
[60] H. Jacob Katzenstein, "Jezebel", in *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* vol. *10* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1972), pp. 99-100.
[61] Jos. *Ag. Apion 1:123.*

the position of priestess, alongside of the male protégé of the female goddess Astarte. She asserts that Jezebel was, therefore, the high priestess to Baal Melqart. This arrangement would have given unprecedented power to the royal family, and would provide an explanation for much of Jezebel's behaviour and authoritative manner. Brenner thinks that the writers of the biblical text suppressed any mention of Jezebel's role as a priestess because they did not wish to admit that there was any validity to any aspect of a female priesthood.[62] Considering the evidence of 1 Kings (esp. 18:19) it is conceivable that those who composed the Jewish texts would not have any desire to provide her with the unique status of being the only priestess mentioned within those texts.

The dark character of Jezebel is in a further fashion displayed in additional texts within the Jewish scriptures. In 2 Kings 9:22 (in the Greek translation of the Jewish sacred texts) Jezebel is clearly linked with *φάρμακον*, and this along with her appointment of those designated as *ψευδοπροφήτης*[63] indicates that in antiquity her name was integrally linked with such practices. Aune suggests that the term 'fornication' used of Jezebel is likely a reference in the Apocalypse to the concept of 'apostasy'. This viewpoint is deemed probable as Jezebel's crimes were described as 'sexual immorality' and with the practice of 'witchcraft' (כשף MT, *φάρμακον* LXX, 2 Kings 9:22).[64] 'Sexual immorality' and 'witchcraft' are often associated with apostasy as is mentioned above.

Kraybill suggests that it may be due to the connection between Jezebel and Phoenicia that John later conjures up the image of Tyre in Revelation 18. It is known from antiquity that Thyatira was renowned for its large number of trade guilds, many more than were in most cities in the Graeco-Roman world.[65] The friendly relations between Tyre and Israel, in the time of Ahab, led to the introduction of foreign religion into the Israelite kingdom. In

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[62] Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, The Biblical Seminar Series, 2 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), pp. 23-26.
[63] Jos. *Ant.* 8:318. *κατέστησε δὲ καὶ ἱερεῖς καὶ ψευδοπροφήτας τούτῳ τῷ θεῷ·*
[64] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 203-204.
[65] Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 151.

Thyatira Christians interacted with the Roman Empire and John believes the exchange is in danger of bringing alien practices into the church.[66]

E. Revelation 13:11-18 – The Second Beast

The latter half of chapter 13 introduces the second beast, the one from the earth (13:11). The first beast (the one from the sea 13:1) is an adaptation of the mythological sea monster Leviathan, while the second beast is modelled after another primordial monster, the Behemoth.[67] According to Jewish legend, the Leviathan and the Behemoth were primeval monsters that were to be killed in the end time when the Messiah comes.[68] These two beasts act in the Apocalypse as a parody of Christ: the second has horns 'like a lamb' but reveals his true nature as he speaks like a dragon (13:11).[69] This mythology might explain the imagery of one being from the sea while the other is from the land. The fact that θηρίον is anarthrous in this context suggests that the author did not anticipate that his audience would be familar with this beast.[70]

Garrow conceives of the characteristics of the second beast as indicative of the opponents of John, i.e. Balaam and Jezebel (2:14-24) that are from within the church. He also makes note of the fact that the beast is a local phenomenon.[71] Brighton envisages the second beast as representing religious authority that works under the first beast, which represents Roman political authority. The second beast works by inspiring the human population to worship the first beast.[72] Thomas perceives ancient Rome to be the source of the initial images that will reach fulfilment with the rise, in the future, of those who will be the ultimate fulfilment of the figures described in the Apocalypse.[73] This would then place

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[66] Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, p. 152. N. 132.
[67] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 257; Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, p. 165; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 732.
[68] 4 Ezra 6:49-52. 1 En. 60:7-10. 2 Bar. 29:3-4.
[69] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 257.
[70] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*.
[71] A. J. P. Garrow, *Revelation*, The New Testament Readings Series (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 89-91.
[72] Brighton, *Revelation*, pp. 357-362.
[73] Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 171-188.

John's objections to the Imperial cult in the arena of loyalty. The Christians maintained and were to maintain loyalty to no one other than Jesus Christ.

The images that were available to John would surely have been drawn from those that had meaning to the original audience and the indications are that this audience would have perceived Rome, and its emperors, as hideously immoral and evil, as the target of much that was negative from a Christian perspective. The localized view held by Aune with regard to the second beast designating the community of Asia seems far too narrow a view to fit with John's use of the term *ἡ γῆ*[74] in chapter 13. The phrase would seem to indicate a phenomenon that was far more encompassing than simply the province of Asia. One of the main tenets of the Book of Revelation is that what is visualized in a small scale on earth is indicative of something of truly cosmic proportions. The earth is a stage showing something that affects and is affected by heavenly phenomena.

An issue that seems also to have a bearing on the interpretation of this passage is the fact that in 16:13; 19:20; and 20:10 this same second beast (13:11) is referred to as a *ψευδοπροφήτης*. This designation relates to substantial historical imagery from Israel's past (1 Kings 22; Jeremiah 28 and perhaps also Numbers 23-24 cf. above). In the time of the first century there was a history of wandering prophets (Josephus,[75] Lucian,[76] and the *Didache*).[77] In Exodus 7, the account of the great conflict between God and the 'magicians' of Egypt surely would be reflected upon by those who read the account of the great cosmic battle between the people of God and Satan in the Apocalypse. The concept that there was a link

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[74] The term *ἡ γῆ* occurs 83 times in one form or another in The Revelation. Certainly in most, if not all of those times it is indicative of something larger than the province of Asia. Also for consideration in chapter 13 are other phrases which seem to indicate a more global scale to things such as the phrase 'the whole earth' (13:3), the giving of authority over 'every tribe and people and language and nation' (13:7), 'those dwelling upon the earth' (13:12, 14) and 'all the small and the great, and the rich and the poor and the free and the slave' (13:16).
[75] *Ant.* 20.169-171.
[76] *Alexander the False Prophet.*
[77] 12-13.

between 'false prophets' and 'magic' may date to a time as early as the time of the translation of the Jewish scriptures into Greek, sometime in the 3rd century B.C.E.[78]

The link between pagan divination and false prophecy may have come into existence because of the physical location and the conceptual proximity of the passages in Deuteronomy that provide teaching about pagan diviners on the one hand (Deuteronomy 18: 9-14) and about evil, idolatrous prophets on the other (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; cf. 13:1-5).[79]

Other Jewish documents also seem to indicate a connection between 'false prophets' and 'magic' such as *Jubilees* 48:9-11:

> *And Prince Mastema stood up before you and desired to make you fall into the hand of Pharaoh. And he aided the magicians of the Egyptians, and they stood up and acted before you. Thus we do evil, but we did not empower them with healing so that it might be done by their hands. And the LORD smote them with evil wounds and they were unable to stand because we destroyed (their ability) to do a single sign.*[80]

There is also the Damascus Document: 'For in the ancient times there arose Moses and Aaron, by the hand of the prince of lights and Belial, with his cunning, raised up Jannes and his brother during the first deliverance of Israel.'[81] It seems that within Judaism, conflict with Israel as God's people was envisaged as reflecting the true conflict of God against evil, spiritual forces.

Garrett explains that even though the word 'magic' is often not used explicitly to identify the 'signs and wonders' of the 'false prophets' the propensity to label an enemies' 'miracles' as 'magic' is presupposed. She cites the *ψευδοπροφήτης* of 19:20 as a particular example of this phenomenon and this would then draw a parallel to the 'second beast' of

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[78] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 13; J. Reiling, "The Use of PSEUDOPROPHĒTĒS in the Septuagint, Philo and Josephus" *Novum Testamentum* 13 (1971): pp. 147-156.
[79] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 14; James C. VanderKam, "The Prophetic-Sapiential Origins of Apocalyptic Thought," in *A Word in Season: Essays in Honour of William McKane*, ed. James D. Martin and Philip R. Davies, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 42 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), pp. 169-173.
[80] Wintermute, "Jubilees," p. 139.
[81] *CD* 5:17b-19; Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), p. 36.

chapter 13.[82] In Acts 13:6 there is the account of Paul's encounter with the Jewish *ψευδοπροφήτης* Bar-Jesus, where he is explicitly linked with 'magic'. Bar-Jesus is the only individual who is actually spoken of as a *μάγος* in the book of Acts despite the fact that confrontation with 'magic' is one of the major secondary themes of this work.[83]

F. Excursus on *Ψευδοπροφήτης*

As is frequently the case in the Jewish scriptures, and in early Christian literature, the existence of that which is called 'prophecy' is taken for granted. The belief, by a group of people, in 'prophecy' creates a dilemma for that group of determining when it is 'true' and when it is 'false'.[84] The issue is, in a sense, one of defining what actually constitutes 'prophecy'. The appellation *ψευδοπροφήτης* is often attached to those deemed to be 'false' in the context of the Jewish scriptures that were translated into Greek, as well as in early Christian literature. Those who are considered *ψευδοπροφήτης* are very often also labelled as practitioners of 'magic'. This is certainly the case from at least as early as the 3rd century B. C. E. when the biblical tradition began to be rendered into Greek[85]

J. Reiling has examined both the frequency and the contexts of the term *ψευδοπροφήτης* in the Greek translation of Jewish scriptures, Philo, and Josephus. In undertaking this examination he points out that there is no term exactly equivalent to the term *ψευδοπροφήτης* in the Masoretic text, but *ψευδοπροφήτης* is used ten times to translate the Hebrew term נביא. Since the word *ψευδοπροφήτης* is not a direct translation equivalent to נביא its usage in these ten places is conceived of as interpretive. By introducing the term *ψευδοπροφήτης* as a translation for נביא in these ten places within the Jewish scriptures, the translators were prejudicing the issue of whether those so referred to are 'true' prophets or 'false' prophets. In the view of the translator of these Greek texts, 'false prophecy' appears to be perceived of as some form of idolatry; it is judged to be linked in some fashion with pagan divination.[86] This is highlighted in the following examples, Jeremiah 27:9 (Ancient Greek Translation of the Jewish scriptures 34:9) and Jeremiah 29:8 (Ancient Greek Translation of the Jewish scriptures 36:8) where the *ψευδοπροφῆται* appear together with soothsayers and dreamers, and are condemned as deceptive.[87] Prophetic function was considered, according to some scholars, to be the Israelite counterpart to the practice of divination by other non-Jewish cultures.[88]

The identification of 'false-prophets' with 'diviners' was due to the belief that the one who was designated as a *ψευδοπροφήτης* may genuinely possess information that could only have been acquired through interaction with spiritual or demonic forces. The issue is not necessarily one of whether or not the information was accurate; rather it was a question of the source of such knowledge. The question of origin is of primary importance for both Jews

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[82]Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 16.
[83] James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Epworth Commentary Series (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1996), p. 175.
[84] Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 175.
[85]Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 13.
[86] Reiling, "The Use of PSEUDOPROPHĒTĒS in the Septuagint, Philo and Josephus ": pp. 147-156.
[87] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 14.
[88] Johan Lust, "On Wizards and Prophets," in *Studies on Prophecy*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, vol. 26 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), pp. 133-142; J. Reiling, *Hermas and Christian Prophecy*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum series, vol. 37 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. 14-15.

and Christians. If the starting point of information is not Yahweh, in the case of Judaism, or God, in the case of Christianity, then the prophet is considerd to be a *ψευδοπροφήτης*. There is a very fine line separating a 'false prophet' from a genuine prophet in some senses. The line between what was acceptable and what was forbidden often must have seemed confusing to the outsider and perhaps at times even to those within Judaism and Christianity. A 'false prophet' in the Jewish scriptures might be called by many names, such as wizard, diviner, liar, or simply נביא.

Another issue that is perhaps of importance in being able to delineate a *ψευδοπροφήτης* from a *προφήτης* is even more insidious than the former, and that is the issue of interpreting the meaning of the information imparted to the person who is to act as a conduit between God and his people. The issue of interpretation is at the heart of the meaning of the term *προφήτης*.[89] Though Joseph is never called a prophet, the interpretation itself is described, by him, as the remit of God.[90] Daniel, who is referred to as a *προφήτης*[91] also serves as an interpreter.[92] There is an imminent connection between interpretation and 'prophecy' and there may have been a developmental flow wherby one who interpreted dreams (i.e. Joseph) would be considered a prophet (i.e. Daniel). 'Apocalyptic' literature, according to Aune, may have developed along a line from 'classical prophecy', onto 'mantic wisdom' literature, and ultimately then into the apocalyptic form.[93] Though at first glance it appears that Aune is following Von Rad[94] in holding this view, that is not the case. Aune acknowledges that there has been influence from mantic wisdom, but he ultimately perceives Apocalyptic to be more directly derived from prophecy. He conceives of the ultimate form that is now designated by the term 'apocalyptic' as being the product of a vast body of influences.[95]

VanderKam discusses in detail the idea that apocalyptic is the product of an evolutionary process that runs from prophecy and he also examines the theory that it developed from mantic wisdom. He concludes that neither influence was ultimately the direct successor of apocalyptic, at least in the classic sense. He concludes that the term 'prophecy' should not be limited by the context of a few 'literary prophets'. If a wider definition is allowed that includes not only the elements of late prophecy, but which also includes the influence of divination, then he concludes that prophecy was the more decisive force in the development of apocalyptic thought.[96] This explanation for the development of this genre might not conform to the perspective held by John. He perceives the words he conveys as being 'prophecy' and there is no indication that he conceives of this as having a meaning that deviates from the view he would have held of 'classical prophecy'.[97]

The experience of the Jewish people as they associated with other nations tended to form a connection in the mind between prophets, and diviners, as their function was not so very different.[98] This point is illustrated by a passage from *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (64:1):

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[89] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., Rev. and Aug. by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie with a supplement (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), s. v. *προφήτης*.
[90] Gen. 40:8.
[91] Matt. 24:15.
[92] Dan. 1:17; 2:27-30; 4:18; 5:12; 9:2-10.
[93] David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), pp. 113-114. Aune provides a detailed discussion of this issue in this work.
[94] Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. *2* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), p. 303.
[95] Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, p. 114.
[96] VanderKam, "The Prophetic-Sapiential Origins of Apocalyptic Thought", pp. 163-176.
[97] Rev. 22:7.
[98] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, pp. 13-14.

> And after this Samuel died, and all Israel gathered together and wept over him and buried him. Then Saul thought and said, "Because I am to expel wizards from the land of Israel, they will be mindful of me after my departure." And Saul scattered all the wizards from the land. And God said, "Behold Saul has not driven the wizards out of the land for fear of me, but to make a name for himself. Behold he will go to those whom he has scattered, to obtain divination from them, because he has no prophets."[99]

'Prophets' and 'wizards' very often had the identical objective of supplying knowledge beyond that which was obtainable through ordinary human channels. Given the fact that there were few, if any, places during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, where either Jewish or Christian prophets were completely isolated from their pagan counterparts, reciprocal influence was always possible. In light of this, it is often an impossible task to disentangle the camp in which influence has originated.[100] The accusation that a certain 'prophet' used 'divinatory methods' (i.e. 'magic') has certainly been legitimate in some instances. There is evidence, that certainly by the 2nd century C. E., Hellenistic revelatory traditions had influenced some within the circle of Christianity.[101]

It was during Israel's sojourn in Babylon that a dramatic decline in prophecy took place.[102] Some claim that there were those within Judaism that believed the Holy Spirit had ceased to inspire prophets entirely after the time of Ezra; some say that it took place after Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Still others contended that 'prophecy' ceased after the destruction of the first Temple and was then given instead to the 'wise' (this viewpoint is noted above).[103] According to Guy, this perspective came into existence, in part due to the increasing difficulty experienced in distinguishing 'true prophets' from 'false prophets'. There are certainly other possibilities that might explain the decline in prophecy, such as the fact that because of the fear of giving power to prophets their suppression caused prophecy to cease to be a living force within Judaism.[104] The already difficult task of delineating true from false prophecy was made even more complicated as Israel was brought into direct contact with the vast array of soothsayers and diviners in Babylon.[105] The picture that emerges from a variety of Jewish, and Jewish influenced texts dating from the late second temple period, through the early 2nd century C.E. is one in which 'magic,' 'false prophecy,' and satanic agency are integrally linked. As has been previously noted, the notion that there is a connection between 'false prophets' and 'magic' may date to the time of the translation of the Jewish scriptures into Greek, in the 3rd century B.C.E.[106]

This type of connection can be discerned in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, a document that originated by at least the 1st century C.E.[107] In this work, a link is apparent between the motifs of 'false prophecy', 'magic' and Satan.[108] Because of Manasseh's association with Sammael '...sorcery and magic, augury and divination, fornication and adultery, and the

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[99] D. J. Harrington, trans. and ed., "Pseudo-Philo," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 376.
[100] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, pp. 14-15; Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, p. 230.
[101] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 15. *Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandate 11.
[102] Guy, *New Testament Prophecy*, pp. 21-27.
[103] James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), pp. 112-115.
[104] James D. G. Dunn, "New Wine in Old Wine-Skins: VI. Prophet", *The Expository Times* 85 (1973): pp. 4-8.
[105] Guy, *New Testament Prophecy*, pp. 21-27.
[106] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 13.
[107] M. A. Knibb, trans. and ed., "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah," in Book *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday 1985), p. 149.
[108] *Ascension of Isaiah* 1:1-3:12; 5:1-16.

persecution of the righteous increased....'[109] An association between Satan and 'magic' is made in other Jewish documents from the Second Temple period too. Within the text of *Jubilees* there is an indication that Satan, called 'Prince Mastema' had a role in the events that surrounded the exodus from Egypt: 'And Prince Mastema stood up before you and desired to make you fall into the hand of Pharaoh. And he aided the magicians of the Egyptians, and they stood up and acted before you.'[110] This passage is paralleled in the *Damascus Document*: 'For in ancient times there arose Moses and Aaron, by the hand of the prince of lights and Belial, with his cunning, raised up Jannes and his brother during the first deliverance of Israel.'[111]

It is not simply a link between 'false prophecy' and evil that indicates that the whole idea of divinely inspired 'prophecy' had fallen into disrepute in some circles. There is an indication that some groups did not even acknowledge the current existence of such prophets.[112] Evidence for the lack of, or at least the rarity of, prophets among the people of Israel after the Babylonian captivity, appears to be highlighted by a passage in *1 Maccabees* 4:45-46.[113] In this passage, at the rededication of the Temple, the stones of the defiled altar were stored until a prophet would come and tell them what to do with them. It might be expected that on such an auspicious occasion a prophet would be present and would be actively participating in the activities (cf. *1 Maccabees* 9:27; 14:41; Psalms 74:9; *Prayer of Azariah* 15). Despite the fact that some have concluded, based on these passages, that prophecy had died out altogether, this analysis is difficult to maintain.[114] It is, however, more likely that in some circles prophecy had been relegated to the past. Nevertheless, in others, the prophetic witness was very much alive, for example in the community at Qumran, in the person of John the Baptist, in Jesus of Nazareth, in numerous messianic claimants, and in the Christian movement as a whole. Christian literature assumes the existence of prophecy in both Judaism and in its own historical frame of reference (Acts 11:28; 13:4-12; 21:10-14; 1 Corinthians 12:10; 13:2, 9-10, etc.).[115]

Even before the crisis of the Babylonian Captivity, there were those deemed to be 'false' in the midst of the Israelite people. Jeremiah speaks of those who speak not the words of Yahweh, but words that come from their 'ungodliness' and words from '...visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.'[116] Their loyalty is not directed toward Yahweh, but toward the people, they serve the people rather than Yahweh.[117] The issue of determining who was a 'false prophet' as opposed to being a genuine prophet is truly an ancient problem. This dilemma is addressed in the Torah[118] and the rabbis would enumerate five types of 'false prophets' based upon the Torah. A person is considered to be a 'false prophet' when:

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[109] *Ascension of Isaiah* 2:5
[110] *Jub.* 48:9
[111] *CD* 5:17b-19a; Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, p. 36.
[112] John R. Levison, "Did the Spirit Withdraw from Israel? An Evaluation of the Earliest Jewish Data", *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): pp. 35-57.
[113] *4:45* And they thought it best to tear it down, lest it bring reproach upon them, for the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, 4:46 and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them. RSV.
[114] Levison, "Did the Spirit Withdraw from Israel? An Evaluation of the Earliest Jewish Data", pp. 35-57. Levison gives a very detailed and thorough examination to this whole issue and concludes that prophecy never completely died out in Israel.
[115] Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, pp. 112-113.
[116] Jer. 23:16
[117] Edward F. Siegman, "The False Prophets of the Old Testament" (Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1939), pp. 54-55.
[118] Deut. 18:19-20.

(1) one presumes to give an oracle in the name of the Lord when God has not commanded him to speak;
(2) one delivers an oracle as his own when it has not been revealed to him personally, but may have been revealed to another;
(3) one who prophesies in the name of idols or false gods;
(4) one who suppresses an oracle that has been revealed to him; and
(5) one who transgresses his own prophecy.[119]

The historical roots of the Hebrew term for 'prophecy' have been the source of much research, and a great deal of provocative and speculative conjecture.[120] As noted previously, the Hebrew term for 'prophet' is נביא, and it can denote a 'genuine' prophet, a 'false' prophet or even a 'heathen' prophet.[121] The term נביא is also found in other West Semitic languages and sometimes refers to people who demonstrate 'foresight', 'foretelling', and 'clairvoyant functions.'[122] The etymology and the meaning of the term נביא have been explained in a variety of ways. There are at least four main views as to the derivation of the word. These views range from the root being Arabic, to the word having originated from a Hebrew root, from an Akkadian root, and finally that it is descended from some unknown Semitic root.[123] All of these views are conjectural and should be approached with extreme caution.[124]

The discernment of the exact meaning of נביא within the Jewish scriptures is complicated by our inability to verify the exact root of the word. The issue is further complicated when προφήτης is used to translate נביא in the Greek translations of Jewish scriptures. Since many of these translations came into existence in Egypt, it has been hypothesized that the original translators adopted an expression that was current in Egypt at the time of the translation. It is known that there were priestly classes in the Egyptian temples that were described using the designation προφήτης. Those that served to interpret and formulate the communications from the gods to men through signs and symbols were described using the label προφήτης. It is also of relevance that the Egyptian sanctuaries were to some extent locations where oracles were delivered.[125]

The concept of what was to be designated as 'prophecy' has evolved and taken many forms in the ancient world. Aune is of the opinion that in Judaism 'prophecy' evolved and adapted into the form that is now called apocalyptic (this viewpoint is articulated above).[126] 'Apocalyptic' is a development that has its roots in the Jewish prophetic literature of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.E.[127] It is to be noted that this was a time of tremendous change for the people of Israel as they dealt with the loss of their Temple, were taken forcibly into captivity, and exposed to ideas outside their normal sphere of habitation. It is during this time that the

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[119] Sanhedrin 89a; I. Epstein, trans., *The Babylonian Talmud; Seder Nezikin, Sanhedrin II*, (London:: The Soncino Press 1935), pp. 590-593.
[120] Harold Henry Rowley, "The Nature of Prophecy in the Light of Recent Study," in *Servant of the Lord*, ed. Harold Henry Rowley (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), pp. 97-134.
[121] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. נביא, pp. 611-612
[122] Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, pp. 81-82.
[123] R. Laird Harris, Jr. Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. *2* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), pp. 544-545.
[124] Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, pp. 82-83.
[125] Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, pp. 26-29.
[126] Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, pp. 112-114.
[127] Anders Hultgård, "Persian Apocalypticism," in *The Encylopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, ed. John J. Collins (New York: Continuum, 2000), pp. 39-83; Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 5-6; Boring, *Revelation*, pp. 43-44; Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-critical Perspective*, pp. 374-378; Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 306-308.

prophet Ezekiel writes of those '...who prophesy out of their own imagination...'[128] and, according to Guillaume, used techniques that are attributed to those associated with 'sorcery' and 'divination', and not with the ways of the prophets of God.[129]

G. Revelation 16:13

The beast from the earth of 13:11-17 is labelled *ψευδοπροφήτης* in 16:13 for the first time.[130] Aune postulates that since 13:11-18 is based upon traditions related to the eschatological antagonist, such as the Antichrist, this suggests a way that the label *ψευδοπροφήτης* arose as an alias for the eschatological antagonist in 16:13; 19:20; and 20:10.[131] Aune deems there to be a connection between the beast of Revelation 13 and 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 where the lawless one associated with Satan performs signs and wonders in a deceptive fashion due to the common element of miracles performed in the context of eschatological conflict.[132] Flusser's viewpoint differs from Aune and others, as he draws a connection between the first beast of 13:1-12 and the antichrist. He bases this to some extent upon a fragment found at Qumran (4Q psDan A^a) where the text describes an eschatological antagonist who opposes the people of God '...and all who dwell on the earth will worship it...' (13:8).[133] Other passages also reflect upon a figure such as the one described in Revelation and the one in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 4:2-13[134] (the power of miracles is

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[128] Ezek. 13:17

[129] Alfred Guillaume, *Prophecy and Divination* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1938), pp. 261-262.

[130] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 2, p. 47; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 894; Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 206; Jonathan Knight, *Revelation*, Readings: New Biblical Commentary series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p. 112; Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 308-309; Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, p. 147.

[131] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 894. Caird and Knight are also is agreement with this assessment. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 206; Knight, *Revelation*, p. 112-113.

[132] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 759.

[133] David Flusser, "The Hubris of the Antichrist in a Fragment from Qumran", *Immanuel* 10 (1980): pp. 31-37.

[134] 2 And after it has been brought to completion, Beliar will descend, the great angel, the king of this world, which he has ruled ever since it existed. He will descend from his firmament in the form of a man, a king of iniquity, a murderer of his mother – this is the king of this world – 3 and will persecute the plant which the twelve apostles of the Beloved will have planted; some of the twelve will be given into his hand. 4 This angel, Beliar, will come in the form of that king, and with him will come all the powers of this world, and they will obey him in every wish. 5 By his word he will cause the sun to rise by night, and the moon also he will make to appear at the sixth hour. 6 And he will do everything he wishes in the world; he will act and speak like the Beloved, and will say, "I am the LORD, before me there was no one." 7 And all men in the world will believe in him. 8 They will sacrifice to him and will serve him, saying, "This is the LORD, and besides him there is no other". 9 And the majority of those who have associated together to receive the Beloved he will turn aside after him. 10 And the power of his miracles will be in every city and district, 11 and he will set up his image before him in every city. 12 And he will rule for three years and seven months and twenty-seven days. 13 And many

specifically mentioned in vs. 10). Here in 16:13, it appears certain, however, that the figure designated as the *ψευδοπροφήτης* is none other than the beast from the earth of 13:11.

Some postulate that John may have had in mind concepts surrounding the Nero redivivus myth when he composed this section dealing with the sixth bowl plague. The Romans held an innate fear of the Parthians and one version of the myth surrounding the return of Nero held that he would lead a Parthian army to conquer and regain Rome.[135] Osborne disputes this assumption because he deems that such an event would lead to a civil war and he puts forward the supposition that the kings from the east join with the kings of the whole earth in preparation for Armageddon. He then goes on to explain the drying up of the Euphrates as being the antithesis of the drying up of the Red Sea, as the Saints are attacked in this instance rather than delivered.[136] Osborne seems to make a number of assumptions here that lead him to clarify a passage that is notoriously difficult and obscure.

This chapter is not the place to clarify all of these issues, but what does seem to be apparent is that the three antagonists from chapter 13 are once again to be understood as in opposition to the truth, deceiving with signs, and leading people into conflict with God's intended purpose. It is to be noted that the source of these signs is portrayed as unmistakably demonic in this context (16:14). The detailed imagery of the frogs will be dealt with in a later section, but it is plain even here that this imagery is meant to convey something unclean, unholy and reprehensible. The source of power for the *ψευδοπροφήτης* is plainly revealed as demonic in this context, and this would also indicate that the source of the power of the *ψευδοπροφήτης* is to be associated with those forces that oppose God. This use of illicit powers is of great concern to the author of the Apocalypse and he takes great strides to warn

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faithful and saints, when they saw him for whom they were hoping, who was crucified, Jesus the LORD Christ – after I, Isaiah, had seen him who was crucified and ascended and who believed in him, of these few will be left in those days as his servants, fleeing from desert to desert as they await his coming. Translation from Knibb, trans., ed. "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah," in Book *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, pp. 161-162.

[135] Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 308-309; Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 206; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 2, pp. 46-47; Knight, *Revelation*, p. 112.

[136] Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 589-591.

his readers of their seductive influence and the ultimate destiny of those who would wield such powers or follow those who do.

H. Revelation 17 - The Harlot

Brighton proposes the idea that the harlot is actually a new portrayal of the henchman of the dragon the *ψευδοπροφήτης* of 16:13.[137] Caird perceives in the image of the harlot a relationship to Jezebel, who is mentioned in 2:20. He bases this upon the fact that Elijah appears to be used in the template for the archetypal Christian martyr at 11:6. Based upon this assumption, that includes the mention of Jezebel at 2:20, and the fact that in ancient Judaism fornication was associated with idolatry, he proposes that the harlot is a new portrayal of the dragon's minions.[138] Reddish also notes that the whore and Jezebel share a great deal in common. Both are accused of fornication and both have a group of followers who have been seduced; both are condemned, along with their followers, to be punished. In fundamental nature, both figures represent manifestations of the same sin: they encourage the people to worship other gods in some form.[139] At the core of the sin committed by the whore, and Jezebel, is the concept of seduction. This is also at the core of what it is to be a *ψευδοπροφήτης*. People are seduced by the power of the knowledge and the signs and wonders associated with the *ψευδοπροφήτης*.

Some authors regard the harlot as an unmasking in some sense of Rome,[140] some envisage it as representative of Jerusalem,[141] and for Brighton, it represents the false church and the apostate church.[142] It is most probable that this imagery is meant to draw attention in some manner to Rome and her religious order, which was very open to multiplicity but very much opposed to exclusivity. John was very much opposed, it seems, to any form of

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[137] Brighton, *Revelation*, p. 434, N. - 438.
[138] Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, pp. 212-213.
[139] Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 324-326.
[140] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 915-916; Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 324-326; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 605; Knight, *Revelation*, pp. 212-214.
[141] Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 282-293.
[142] Brighton, *Revelation*, p. 436.

syncretism that takes away from the singular devotion that he conceives to be at the heart of his message in the Apocalypse. It is highly likely that John did draw upon imagery that was based upon Jezebel in designing his descriptive image of the harlot of chapter 17. She was a figure that was certainly perceived to be associated with many of the same traits that Rome had as it advocated ideas of religious diversity.

Aune does indicate that in the Old Testament this type of imagery is applied to godless cities (Isaiah 1:21 [Jerusalem]; Isaiah 23:16-17 [Tyre]; Nahum 3:4 [Nineveh]).[143] It is of note that in the Greek translation of Nahum 3:4[144] the term *φάρμακον* is associated closely with the image of the *πορνεία*. This would indicate a connection between these two concepts in the context of the Jewish scriptures.

I. Revelation 19:20

In the context of 19:19-21, the end of the great battle emphasizes the ultimate destruction of the forces of the dragon along with his minions, the beast, and the *ψευδοπροφήτης*. The principal opposition in the Apocalypse is not the historical, finite corporeal community of human power and human forces, but the transpersonal powers of evil that have motivated and deceived them. These deceptive and malevolent powers are symbolised by the beast and the *ψευδοπροφήτης*.[145] These forces are defeated through the power of God who actually won the battle against Satan in the historical past, at the time of the resurrection of Christ. According to Reddish, it is at this point in the narrative that the judicial sentence, actually issued at the resurrection, is brought to bear on those who were the enemies of God.[146] The performing of signs, deception, and idolatry are once again linked to the one who is termed a *ψευδοπροφήτης* in 19:20. There is no indication that the power to perform signs was not genuine. Exception is not taken because of the signs being false in the

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[143] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 929.
[144] *ἀπὸ πλήθους πορνείας. πόρνη καλὴ καὶ ἐπιχαρὴς ἡγουμένη φαρμάκων ἡ πωλοῦσα ἔθνη ἐν τῇ πορνείᾳ αὐτῆς καὶ φυλὰς ἐν τοῖς φαρμάκοις αὐτῆς,*
[145] Boring, *Revelation*, p. 199.
[146] Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 369-370.

sense of not in actuality occurring. Exception is taken to the fact that the signs were intended to lead the people into the worship of God, but in reality they deluded people into following Satan.

J. Revelation 20:10

The fate of the *ψευδοπροφήτης* in 20:10 is uninterrupted torment along with Satan and the beast.[147] According to Yarbro Collins the recurring rebellions of Satan impress upon the reader the irrepressible nature of the forces of evil and chaos. The implication appears to be that the forces of order and creation, peace and justice are quite fragile states that are in constant tension with their antithesis. The definitive defeat of Satan and his minions implies that despite the irrepressible character of chaos it is less powerful in reality than the creative order.[148] The forces of Satan are crushed and the reality that God is the creator is exemplified in the fact that they are ultimately destroyed through his power and the source of their deceit is shown ultimately to be Satan himself.[149]

K. Summary

Though Balaam is never described specifically as a *ψευδοπροφήτης* in Revelation, his historical characterisation certainly fits the profile of one who is described by this term. The historical traditions surrounding Balaam would have meant that for the audience addressed by the Apocalypse there would have been a clear understanding that John was drawing upon traditions that associated Balaam with the essence of what is entailed by the term *ψευδοπροφήτης*. Though many modern readers might miss the association between Balaam and 'false prophecy', it appears highly unlikely that the audience of Revelation would have missed this connection. The fact that the term *ψευδοπροφήτης*, is particularly associated with

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[147] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1100.
[148] Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse*, New Testament Message Series, 22 (Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1979), p. 141.
[149] Rev. 20:9-10.

divination at Jeremiah 34:9 and at 36:8[150] may also have meant that the audience of the Apocalypse would further connect Balaam the diviner with practices that would have been deemed as aberrant within the circles of Christianity. It is highly likely that from the cultural perspective of the original audience, they would not have failed to observe what John's references to Balaam are meant to convey. John was offering strong counsel against the dangers associated with '...eating food sacrificed to idols' that ultimately may lead to 'fornication' (i.e. disloyalty to God).[151] He is also warning them to beware of the information received from those claiming to be prophets of God and who, in reality, may represent manifestations of those who should actually bear the appellation *ψευδοπροφήτης*.

With regard to the Nicolaitans, it is somewhat difficult to be certain what practice John is condemning. This is due to the fact that the information regarding the Nicolaitans is so sparse in nature. Despite this, there are indications that the Nicolaitans were involved in some form of oracular utterances that would have connected them with those condemned as a *ψευδοπροφήτης*: 1.) is the connection between the 'teaching of Balaam'[152] and the 'teaching of the Nicolaitans.'[153] 'The word *οὕτως*, ("so, thus, in this way,") coordinates the phrase that it introduces with the statement that immediately precedes it in verse 15, by way of interpretation or explanation. Thus, "the teaching of Balaam" is the same as "the teaching of the Nicolaitans...."[154] 2.) There may also be a connection between the name 'Nicolaitans' and Balaam.[155] 3.) Reddish thinks that there is a possibility that the Jezebel mentioned in 2:20 may have been a Nicolaitan prophetess.[156] It appears that the original audience

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[150] F. H. Colson, ed., *Philo VIII*, The Loeb Classical Library; 341 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 39, N b.
[151] Rev. 2:14.
[152] Rev. 2:14.
[153] Rev. 2:15. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, p. 218; Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 61; Räisänen, "The Nicolaitans: Apoc. 2; Acta 6," p. 1606.
[154] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 188.
[155] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 61.
[156] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 61; Räisänen, "The Nicolaitans: Apoc. 2; Acta 6," p. 1603.

addressed by John will have been aware of who the Nicolaitans were, and therefore there was no need for him to explain to his original audience what they taught.

There is a stark contrast between the honour given to the true prophets of God in Revelation, and the disfavour shown to those who are considered to be 'false prophets'.[157] John perceives of things in terms that make a clear distinction between 'good' and 'evil'. The purpose of the Apocalypse is to resolve the tension aroused by a perceived social crisis. John seeks to make the point that there is no possibility of neutrality in the conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil. The rivals of the forces of good are labelled and then disposed of as an 'out group' by the use of loaded negative terms such as 'Balaam', 'Jezebel' and *ψευδοπροφήτης*.[158]

John definitely exposes the nature of the danger faced by his audience as he continually develops the image of that enemy, and the ultimate source of power of that enemy. The connection between those designated as *ψευδοπροφήτης* and demonic or satanic forces is clearly delineated by the various images that are used such as the beast of chapter 13, the *ψευδοπροφήτης* of chapter 16, the harlot of chapter 17, the *ψευδοπροφήτης* at chapters 19 and 20. There is a close connection between these figures and powers that are used in order to deceive through the use of signs, leading the people into *πορνεία*. The concepts surrounding the figures that are given the designation *ψευδοπροφήτης* have been regarded by some as what would have been termed 'magical' practice.[159]

The connection of these terms with forbidden foreign practices would have struck a resonant tone within the audience, and would have heightened the sense that these forces were deeply dangerous and treacherous. The power that allowed the political situation to prosper at the time the Apocalypse was being composed would ultimately be defeated and

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[157] Rev. 11:3-12; 11:18; 16:5-6; 18:20; 18:24. Judgment on 'false prophets': 2:14-16; 2:20-23; 19:20; 20:10.
[158] Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, pp. 170-171.
[159] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, pp. 16-17; Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," pp. 481-501; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 895; Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, pp. 44-48.; 64-65; Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 175.

justice would come. These capabilities, so potently wielded by those who would ultimately be revealed as being examples of the much derided *ψευδοπροφήτης*, would receive the punishment that was due them. Those that made the mistake of following these deceivers would also follow them into their fate.[160]

[160] Rev. 20:9.

4. John's Beasts and Talking Statues: A Look at Revelation 13:15

A. The Question

The question is, does John intend for his audience to perceive that he is being critical of 'magic' in some manner at 13:15? The phrase: *καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ δοῦναι πνεῦμα τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ θηρίου* is at the core of our discussion on 'magical practice' in Revelation 13:15.

B. Textual Issues

The state of the text in this section indicates some variation, with only one of these being significant enough to make it into the apparatus of UBS[4].[1] There is also a very complicated textual history relating to *τοῦ θηρίου, ἵνα καὶ λαλήσῃ ἡ εἰκων τοῦ θηρίου καὶ* that was caused by haplography because of the two occurrences of *τοῦ θηρίου*. Aune lists other minor textual variations that are not noteworthy in the present discussion.[2] The textual variants in this passage provide no significant insight into the issue of 'magic' with regard to this passage.

C. Is the activity of the beast magic?

Many have perceived in Revelation 13:15 a reference to the worship of the Roman imperial panoply with the beast representing the Roman imperial priesthood.[3] Massyngberde Ford puts forward the view that this passage is referring to Josephus as the second beast, though she would say that this is only a 'tentative' suggestion.[4] It is perhaps most appropriate that she expresses that this is a tentative proposal as it appears to be without

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[1] Barbara Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th revised ed. (Münster: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1994), p. 861.
[2] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 721.
[3] Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, pp. 156-157; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, pp. 360-361; Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, pp. 252-256; Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, trans. John E. Alsup, Continental Commentary Series (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 161-168; Martin Rist and Lynn Harold Hough, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), pp. 587-590.
[4] Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 227-230.

merit. Several interpreters indicate that they see the second beast as not representing official Roman central policy but something much more on a local level.[5] Aune concurs with this view considering the second beast to be the '*commune Asiae*'(cf. chapter 3 and the discussion that follows later in this chapter).[6] Through local pressure, Christians would be compelled to offer sacrifices to the deified rulers of Rome on altars placed in all areas of the city. Long series of these imperial altars have been found by archaeologists to verify that the imperial decrees for their construction were actually carried out.[7]

Thompson cautions against inflating the importance of the imperial cult too highly. He says the real issue revolves around the Christians' relation to adherents of other cults in general and not simply the cult of the emperor. Christians rejected all forms of sacrifice and all other forms of religion.[8] The Christians, therefore, are opposed to all forms of religious assimilation not just the assimilation of the Imperial cult. Friesen points out that the main issue with regard to sacrifices was not so much about worship or deification as it was about relationship. It was a way of maintaining a variety of relationships. For the Asians the offering of sacrifices allowed them to demonstrate reverence for emperors in a context familiar to them. Emperors provided order to society and thus fulfilled the work of the gods and there was a perception that divine authority protected the emperors.[9]

Garrow sees the characteristics of the second beast as indicative of the opponents of John, i.e. Balaam and Jezebel (2:14-24; cf. previous chapter) that are from within the church. He also makes note of the fact that the beast appears to be a local phenomenon.[10] Brighton perceives the second beast as representing religious authority that works under the first beast,

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[5] Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Book of Revelation," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. John J. Collins (New York: Continuum, 2000), p. 397; Collins, *The Apocalypse*, p. 95; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 447.
[6] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 729, 780.
[7] S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 112.
[8] L. Thompson Leonard, *The Book of Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 163-164.
[9] Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros* Religions in the Graeco-Roman World series, vol. 116 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), pp. 146-152.
[10] Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 89-91.

which represents Roman political authority. The second beast functions by inspiring the human population to worship the first beast. He conceives of the basis for this imagery as present in ancient Rome but also something that is still present in earthly regimes in the historical timeline.[11] Thomas perceives that ancient Rome is the source of the images that will one day come to full and complete fulfilment with the rise, in the future, of those who will be the ultimate fulfilment of the figures described in the Apocalypse.[12] This would then place the Christians' objections to the Imperial cult in the arena of loyalty.

The images that were available to John would surely have been drawn from those that would have had meaning to the original audience and the indications are that this audience would have perceived Rome, and its emperors, as hideously immoral and evil, as the target of much that was negative from a Christian perspective. The localized view held by Aune with regard to the second beast, i.e. designating the community of Asia Minor seems far too narrow a perspective to correlate with John's use of the term $\dot{\eta}\ \gamma\tilde{\eta}$[13] in chapter 13 (cf. discussion at chapter 3).

An issue that seems also to have a bearing on the interpretation of this passage is the fact that in Revelation 16:13; 19:20; and 20:10 this same second beast (Revelation 13:11) is referred to as a *ψευδοπροφήτης*. This designation relates to substantial historical imagery from Israel's past (1 Kings 22; Jeremiah 28 and perhaps also Numbers 23-24; cf. previous chapter). In the time of the first century there were clearly wandering prophets in Jewish as well as in a Christian context as is indicated by Josephus,[14] Lucian,[15] and the *Didache*.[16]

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[11] Brighton, *Revelation.*
[12] Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 171-188.
[13] Cf. Note 74 page 68.
[14] Josephus, *Ant.* 20.169-171.
[15] *Alexander the False Prophet.*
[16] 12-13.

Charles sees Revelation 13:15 as referring to 'magical' practice and specifically links it with the Roman imperial cult.[17] Thomas rejects the inference that John had an instance of 'magic' in mind, based upon the fact that the beast 'actually' gives life to the image. He assumes, therefore, that John did not see this as an instance of 'magic', because his definition of 'magic' insists that it cannot be anything other than trickery; there can be no real power to give life or animate an image allocated to the forces of evil. This is therefore not 'magic' to Thomas, because it is real and not simply an example of trickery.[18] This approach interprets the text with a bias that almost certainly did not exist in the period during which the text was written as will be seen from the discussion that follows.

Harrington assumes that John would have had the perception that the statue coming to life and speaking was evidence of the trickery practiced by the imperial cult to make people think that there was actually supernatural power involved when in reality it was only fraudulently made to appear to speak.[19] Once again, this is an approach based upon a preconceived notion that goes well beyond the evidence contained in the text. This position assumes that John would not have believed that it was possible for the second beast to have actually made the image speak. This is despite the fact that this is clearly what the text actually says. Harrington does not give any indication that he perceives evidence, in the language of John, that the speaking of the image is indicative of deception on the part of the priests. He simply seems to assume, from his understanding of the text that the image does not in reality speak. He appears to impose upon John a modern perspective, which regards this incident as nothing other than fraud.

Aune is of the opinion that this verse is in line with the world of ancient 'magic' in which the animation of cult images was an important source of communication with the

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[17] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John,* vol. 1, p. 361.
[18] Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 178.
[19] Harrington, *Revelation*, p. 143.

gods.[20] He does not expound on his reasoning for suddenly inserting the idea of 'magic' into this position, such as the link between 'false prophets' and 'magic'. He may perceive this an instance of 'magic' based upon his understanding of some sort of 'religious deviance', which he perceived as being present in this text.[21] He gives a number of references that explore various aspects of ancient 'magic', some of which are relevant and others of which are not.[22] In his discussion of this passage, he betrays an approach to the text that fails to address John's understanding of the text sufficiently.

Reddish has the perceptive insight to note that, while the use of deceptive "signs" and "miracles" was prevalent in the ancient world, and even in the imperial cult, it is not possible to be certain that John had such specific instances in mind. As noted earlier, the suggestion that the end time would be filled with 'false prophets' or other evil figures working their 'signs' and 'miracles' was a widespread concept in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature.[23] In the *Sibylline Oracle* 3:63-67: 'Then Beliar will come from Sebastenoi and he will raise up the height of mountains, he will raise up the sea, the great fiery sun and shining moon, and he will raise up the dead, and perform many signs for men.'[24] In Mark 13:22 there is the following warning: 'False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.' Also in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 'The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.' (cf. *Ascension of Isaiah.* 4:10 '...and he will set up his image before him in every city.'[25]).

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[20] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 762.
[21] Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," p. 1515.
[22] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 762-765.
[23] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 259.
[24] J. J. Collins, trans. and ed., "Sibylline Oracles," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 363.
[25] Knibb, trans., trans., and ed., "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah", in Book *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, p. 162, n. i. 'An allusion to the cult of the Roman emperors and the practice of erecting statues to them.'

Despite this evidence, Scherrer still finds it difficult to believe that John would attribute 'powerful and impressive miracles' to the archrival and opponent of the Christian message.[26] This again approaches the text from a biased perspective. At this point, an exploration of the ancient view of images, and their attributes, and cultural expectations will prove helpful in arriving at a greater understanding of the concepts surrounding images in antiquity, as these concepts are appropriated in the Book of Revelation.

D. Excursus: Images in Antiquity

I. Mesopotamia

In Babylonian culture, there were specific rituals used to prepare the statues of deities for service: one such ritual was known by the title *mīs pî* (mouth washing) or sometimes *pit pî* (mouth opening).[27] Lewis describes the "opening of the mouth" ceremony as a 'magical' act that enabled the statue to act as a receptacle for the deity.[28] Although the deities themselves lived in heaven or in the underworld, a duplication of their personality inhabited the various cult statues erected for them by mankind. When a statue was first dedicated, the Babylonians would perform the 'Washing the mouth' and 'Opening the mouth' rituals for the statue in order to enable it to be empowered with the divine presence.[29] The statue of the god was then fully identified with the god in question, and was considered by the worshippers to be actually a living being. They thought that it was able to do whatever a human being did, for example, sleep, wake, or eat.[30]

That the statue is to be identified with the god is clearly demonstrated in **TuL No. 27.21** by the phrase 'When the (repair) work of that god is completed ...'.[31] The message of the induction incantations also indicates that the cult image was the culmination of the efforts of man and god, heaven and earth:

> **11. In heaven he was made, on earth he was made. 13. This statue was made in the totality of heaven and earth; 15. this statue grew up in the forest of ashurru-trees; 17. this statue came from the mountains, the pure place. 19. The statue is the creation of (both) god and human![32]**

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[26] Steven J. Scherrer, "Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13-15," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984): pp. 599-600.
[27] Christopher Walker and Michael B. Dick, "The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian mīs pî Ritual," in *Born in Heaven Made on Earth*, ed. Michael B. Dick (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), p. 57.
[28] Theodore J. Lewis, "Divine Images and Aniconism in Ancient Israel", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118 (1998): p. 39.
[29] Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), p. 94. cf. Christopher Walker and Michael Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, State Archives of Assyria Literary Texts (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2001)..
[30] Eiko Matsushima, "Divine Statues in Ancient Mesopotamia: their Fashioning and Clothing and their Interaction with the Society," in *Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Eiko Matsushima (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1993), p. 209.
[31] Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, p. 107.
[32] Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 98-99. STT 200 Incantation.

The image is clothed and placed in position in the temple: the whole ceremony is filled with an aura of 'magic' as incantation after incantation is used.[33] The dwelling place of the statue then takes on the true function of a temple and serves as a point of contact between the human and the divine.[34]

Some ancients clearly believed that the images actually were alive as is demonstrated by the account in *Bel and the Dragon*. '... "Do you not think that Bel is a living God? Do you not see how much he eats and drinks every day?"'[35] There is also the account translated by Frayne, which though fragmentary, clearly indicates that the Mesopotamians saw the statues as living representations of their gods.[36,] There appears to be no case of an image being literally portrayed as speaking in ancient Mesopotamia, but there is an indication that images were installed in order to speak on behalf of human beings, as in the case of Gudea who installs an image to enumerate his pious deeds to the god.[37] Implicit in the 'opening of the mouth' ritual is the understanding that during its construction the image has undergone a process of animation in order to enable direct discourse with the associated deity.[38] In light of all that is known of Mesopotamian culture, the fact that the image was viewed as a living component provides valuable insight into how ancient people might have understood the words of John in Revelation 13:15. It would certainly have been perceived as a powerful sign for an image to speak, and it would have been conceived of as an extension of the belief that the image was living.

II. Egypt

In ancient Egypt, 'magic' was everywhere; it was in rituals, the meaning of architecture, in sculpture, even the images carved upon the walls were considered to be alive.[39] The idea was that the statues, wall-reliefs, and even the entire edifice became alive and active through the performance of the *Opening of the Mouth* ritual.[40] As was the case in Babylon, so also in Egypt there is a particular ritual that is used in order to give life to statues (*Opening of the Mouth*). There is an indication that there must have been either some

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[33] Sidney Smith, "The Babylonian Ritual for the Consecration and Induction of a Divine Statue," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1925): pp. 37-60.

[34] Graham Cunningham, *'Deliver Me from Evil' Mesopotamian incantations 2500-1500 BC*, Studia Pohl: Series Maior (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1997), pp. 75-76.

[35] Bel. 6.

[36] Douglas Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003- 1595 BC)*, vol. 4, The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Early Periods series (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 194-196.

rev. iv 1′-12′ and v 1′-4′ '*to [the statue] of my servant which he fashioned, Zariku, the leader, said nothing to him. My servant truly handed it over to him. I fashioned a statue in his likeness. For the future, for time to come, what a servant has truly handed over to his lord, a statue which he fashioned in his likeness*
Lacuna
Lacuna
...to the doorman, having entered the temple, may it be a living (thing) in the temple. cf. Joan Oates, *Babylon*, Revised ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), p. 174. A central tenet in Mesopotamian religious practice was the belief that man was created in order to serve the gods. This tenet was interpreted literally, and the deity, like the king, was cared for, fed, clothed and so forth by his courtier.

[37] Irene J. Winter, "'Idols of the King': Royal Images as Recipients of Ritual Action in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6 (1992): p. 21. Horst Steible, *Die neusumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften*, Freiburger altorientalische Studien; Bd. 9 (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1991), 7.21-25, 27.47-48.

[38] Winter, "'Idols of the King': Royal Images as Recipients of Ritual Action in Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 21.

[39] A. M. Blackman and H. W. Fairman, "The Consecration of an Egyptian Temple According to the Use of Edfu," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 31 (1945): pp. 84-85.

[40] Christian Jacq, *Magic and Mystery in Ancient Egypt*, trans. Janet M. Davis (London: Souvenir Press, 1998), p. 55.

intercourse between the cultures of the Mesopotamian region and Egypt or that they have had contact with a common civilization at some point in their distant past.[41] Blackman concludes that the Egyptians did not get the rite from the Babylonians.[42] It is important to note that of the similarities shared, there was the offering of food to the gods and the idea that the image actually lived.[43]

In a relief, (from the eighteenth dynasty of Egypt) there is an account that records a command from the throne of one of the ancient gods:

> **The king himself, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Makere (Hatshepsut). The majesty of the court made supplication at the steps of the lord of [gods]; a command was heard from the great throne, an oracle of the god himself, that the ways to Punt should be searched out: "I will lead the army on water and on land, to bring marvels from God's-Land for this god, for the fashioner of her beauty." It was done, according to the desire of her majesty (fem.), in order that she might be given life, stability, and satisfaction, like Re, forever.[44]**

This account suggests that the Egyptians will have seen it as a possibility that an image, or at least his throne, would be associated with communication from the gods, since they regarded it as the god's living representation on earth. The king had clearly gone to the throne of the god in order to communicate with the god. In the account from Papyrus B. M. 10335, there is an instance where the gods clearly seem to be not only speaking, but also interacting with the people and even serving as judges. *And the servant Amunemuia repeated to him (the name of) all the people of the township; and the god nodded at (the name of) the farmer Pethauemdiamūn, saying: "It is he who stole them."*[45] The narrative account continues and the gods both 'nod' and 'speak' on several occasions.[46] It seems that this is an instance where the images are alive, speaking and moving. Maspero also gives a considerable amount of further information with regard to this type of phenomenon in Ancient Egypt.[47]

III. Jewish Concepts

Jewish concepts with regard to images must surely begin with their portrayal in the Torah. In Leviticus 26:1 'You will not make yourselves worthless idols or images or pillars or set up for yourselves stone figures, you are not to bow down (Hishtafel of חוה[48]) to them in your land, because I am the Lord your God.' In Deuteronomy 29:16-18 the instructions continue:

> 'You know how we dwelt in the land of Egypt and how we passed over; and you saw their detested things, and their idols of wood and stone, silver and gold, which were with them. Beware, lest there be in you a man or a woman, or a family, or a tribe whose heart turns away this day from Yahweh our God and goes to serve the gods of those nations, lest there be in you a root bearing bitterest fruit.'

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[41] Aylward M. Blackman, "The Rite of Opening the Mouth in Ancient Egypt and Babylonia", *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 10 (1924): pp. 47-59.
[42] Blackman, "The Rite of Opening the Mouth in Ancient Egypt and Babylonia", p. 59.
[43] Blackman, "The Rite of Opening the Mouth in Ancient Egypt and Babylonia," p. 57.
[44] James Henry Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), p. 116.
[45] Aylward M. Blackman, "Oracles in Ancient Egypt", *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 11 (1925): p. 251.
[46] Blackman, "Oracles in Ancient Egypt ": pp. 249-255.
[47] G. Maspero, *Causeries D'Égypte*, Deuxième ed., Librairie Orientale 35 Américaine series (Paris: E. Guilmoto, 1907), pp. 167-173.
[48] Geoffrey Stewart Morrison, "Teaching the Classical Hebrew Stem System (the Binyanim)" (Master of Theological Studies, Vancouver School of Theology, 1995), p. 146.

Recent excavations support the biblical text's clear assertion that no image was ever made of Yahweh, as no image that can be certainly identified with Yahweh has been found in an Israelite stratum. Along with this is the fact that during excavations it is apparent other iconography diminishes through the course of the Iron Age I and II (1200-600 B.C.E.).[49]

The Jewish conception of idolatry is based upon the biblical idea of monolatry: which reasons that God should only be worshipped according to rituals prescribed and established by Him.[50] There was not a complete ban on all images as is demonstrated by the 'brazen serpent' (2 Kings 18:4), the figures of Cherubim embroidered into the curtains of the tabernacle (Exodus 26:1; 36:8) and in the veil of the tabernacle (Exodus 26:31; 36:35), and the Temple (2 Chronicles 3:14). Cherubim were carved on the walls of the Temple (1 Kings 6:29; 2 Chronicles 3:7; cf. Ezekiel 41:18, 20, 25), the doors (1 Kings 6:32, 35) and the 'molten sea' (1 Kings 7:29, 36). There were two golden Cherubim in the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:18-22; 37:7-9) and in the Temple (1 Kings 6:23-28; 8:6-7; 2 Chronicles 3:10-13). These images seem to have been allowed because of the fact that they were understood to be prescribed by God.[51] Faur goes on to put forward the concept that in Rabbinic Judaism an unconsecrated image would not fall foul of biblical injunctions against idolatry because it had not undergone the life-giving ceremony.[52]

In Leviticus 26:30, there is the use of the term פגר (corpse, carcass) in a figurative manner referring to idols.[53] This could perhaps be seen as indicative of an awareness of the concepts held by the peoples that surrounded Israel that believed their images were alive. There are then numerous accounts that are very much against the construction, consultation, possession, and worship of images in the early Jewish and Christian writings.[54] There are within these texts references that certainly seem to indicate an awareness of the beliefs and claims of the neighbours of Israel with regard to their cultic images. Habakkuk 2:19 ('Woe to the one who says to an article of wood to awaken, to a dumb stone to arise! Will it teach?' Behold, it is sheathed in gold and silver and there is no breath inside of it.') seems to be intended to counter the claims made in the 'Opening of the Mouth' ceremonies of the Babylonians and the Egyptians.

This continues in *Wisdom* 15:15-17, which also indicates an awareness of the supposed bringing to life of the image:

> For indeed they reasoned that all the idols of the nations were gods, though these neither have the ability to use their eyes to see, nor nostrils to draw in air, nor an ear to hear, nor fingers of the hand to feel, and their feet are useless for walking. For man made them, and one having a borrowed spirit formed them; for no one of the nature of man is powerful enough to form a god. He is mortal and

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[49] Michael B. Dick, "Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*, ed. Michael B. Dick (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), p. 5.
[50] José Faur, "The Biblical Idea of Idolatry", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 69 (1978): p. 1.
[51] Faur, "The Biblical Idea of Idolatry", p. 1-3.
[52] Faur, "The Biblical Idea of Idolatry", pp. 5-15.
[53] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 803.
[54] Lev. 19:4; Deut. 29:16-18; 32:19-22; 1 Sa. 15:22-23; 1 Ki. 16:8-26; 21:25-29; 2 Ki. 17:9-17; 21:10-22; 23:4-25; 1 Ch. 10:8-10; 16:25-26; 2 Ch. 15:8; 24:17-19; 33:1-17; Ps. 31:6; 96:4-6; 97:7; 106:34-39; 115:1-8; Ps. 135:15-18; Isa. 2:6-9; 2:17-22; 10:5-11; 19:1-4; 31:6-7; 40:18-20; 44:9-20; 45:15-21; 46:1-13; 48:4-5; 57:11-13; 66:2-4; Jer. 8:18-20; 10:1-16; 50:1-3; 50:35-40; 51:17-19; Ez. 6:1-14; 8:7-11; 14:1-8; 16:35-42; 18:5-18; 20:7-44; 22:1-5; 23:5-10; 23:28-49; 30:10-26; 33:24-26; 36:17-26; 37:21-23; 43:7-9; 44:9-13; Hos. 4:15-19; 8:2-6; 10:1-6; 11:1-3; 13:1-3; 14:7-8; Jon. 2:7-9; Mic. 1:6-7; Hab. 2:18-19; Zep. 1:2-6; Zec. 13:1-3; 4 Ez. 16:66-69; AdEst. 14:6-10; Wis. 14:7-14; 14:27-31; 15:13-17; Sir. 30:19; EpJer. 6:63-73; Bel. 3-7; 1 Mac. 1: 43ff.; 3:48; 10:83-89; 13:47; 2 Mac. 12:40; 3 Mac. 4:16; 4 Mac. 5:2ff.; Ac. 7:39-43; 15:19-21; 15:24-29; 17:16; 21:25; Ro. 2:21-24; 1 Co. 5:9-11; 6:9-11; 8:1-6; 10:6-17; 12:1-3; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Jo. 5:18-21; Re. 2:12-16; 2:18-23; 9:20-21; 21:6-8; 22:14-16.

whatever he makes with lawless hands is dead; for he is better than
his object of worship, as he is alive, but they were never alive.

In *1 Maccabees* 3:48 there is the indication that the Jews assumed that the Gentiles consulted their images in order to seek divine direction ('And they spread out the book of the law to enquire about that which the nations consult the likenesses of their idols.'). There is even a mocking of the speechless nature of the images (*3 Maccabees* 4:16 'Indeed the king was greatly and continuously filled with joy, putting together feasts for all the idols, with a mind led astray from the truth, and with a profane mouth praising dumb things that are not able to speak or to aid one, and even unto speaking out against the supreme God'). Whether the Jewish appraisal of Gentile customs with regard to images was technically correct or not, it appears to have been the perspective that was used to caricature these peoples by the Jews.

Among the early Israelites, the אהל מועד '... was the place in which the God of Israel revealed himself to, and dwelt among his people.'[55] There certainly appears to have been an oracular function associated with the 'tent of meeting'. This perception is also substantiated by the possibility that the root for the Hebrew term כהן was in some sense related to an Arabic root meaning 'seer'. If this is the case, the word must have originally designated a person who served as a guardian '...of an oracle, at a sanctuary....'[56] That the entrance to the 'tent of meeting' served as a place of receiving oracles, or communicating with God is especially apparent in three biblical passages.

The first is Exodus 33:7 'And Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp, far away from the camp, and called it the tent of meeting, and everyone who was seeking Yahweh would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp.' In this passage, the tent appears to primarily, serve as a place where Yahweh was consulted; it was a place used for divination.[57] The second passage is Numbers 11:16-17: 'And Yahweh said to Moses, gather for me seventy elderly men of Israel which you know are elders of the people and officers over them and take them to the tent of meeting and cause them to stand there with you. And I will come down and speak with you there and I will take away from you some of the spirit which is upon you and I will put it upon them and they will lift from you some of the burden and you will not bear it all by yourself.'

The third passage is Numbers 12:4-10 where God meets with Moses, Miriam, and Aaron at the entrance to the 'tent of meeting'. It certainly seems in its earliest form the Tabernacle served as a place of consultation with the divine rather than simply as a place of sacrifice (Amos 5:25; Jeremiah 7:22). It seems quite reasonable to expect that the Israelite community viewed the temples of other nations as having a similar intended function for their gods as Israel's did for its God. It would also seem to follow that they would then conceive of the images in those temples as the central point of address for communication between god and people, as the ark of the covenant was in the 'tent of meeting', and later still in the temple.

IV. Greek and Roman Concepts

In the cities of Asia Minor, the statues of Roman Emperors and gods were numerous; they were placed in the temples, in public buildings, along the streets, in marketplaces, in fountains and on gates. The statues of emperors were often designed to resemble traditional representations of the gods.[58] Within this panoply of images, there are numerous reports of strange phenomena associated with these images, in which it was deemed the gods were

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[55] Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, p. 215.
[56] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 462.
[57] Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, p. 219.
[58] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 258.

giving a sign of some form.[59] Some of these accounts, such as the account of Callistratus (4th century C.E.) regarding the statue of Memnon, date from a time well after the time of the composition of the Apocalypse.[60] Others, however, are far more ancient and surely came to have influence upon the culture of those living in Asia Minor at the time that Revelation was written.

In Ovid's (1st century C.E.) *Metamorpheses* Pygmalion creates a statue that later is brought to life by the goddess Venus and even bears a child.[61] Cicero (1st century B.C.E.) records an incident in which 'the statue of Apollo at Cumae and that of Victory at Capua dripped with sweat....'[62] In an account by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1st century B.C.E.) an image set up in a temple speaks on two separate occasions, both described as distinct and loud.[63] In the first few centuries of the Common Era there are many more accounts. Plutarch (2nd century C.E.) records an incident regarding the statue of Antony near Alba stating that '...sweat oozed for many days, and though wiped away it did not cease.'[64] There is also another incident in which two statues were prostrated to an image that had the name of Antony inscribed upon it.[65] Plutarch records a tale of the eyes falling out of a statue of Hiero the Spartan before his death and of the stone statue of Lysander sprouting a growth of wild shrubs and grass in such an abundance as to cover up the face.[66]

Pausanias (2nd century C.E.) records an incident where a statue that had been broken in two by Cambyses makes the sound like that of a harp or a lyre when the string is broken every day at sunrise.[67] He also records an account where the statue of Theagenes was whipped by an enemy as if it were a living being and on one occasion, it fell on, and killed its tormentor. His sons then ordered the statue to be banished by dropping it to the bottom of the sea. In time, in order to stop a famine, the statue was retrieved and restored to its position and the famine ended. It then became a tradition to set up statues of Theagenes, and these were said to cure diseases.[68] Often in ancient Rome, strange phenomena associated with statues were seen as signs or omens and perhaps even as directly responsible for misfortune such as the incident regarding the statue of Athena that turned and faced a different direction and spat blood.[69] In another instance, statues brought a message to Hannibal with regard to his campaign against Italy by dripping with blood.[70] Great events were sometimes heralded by images moving as one did in the temple of Victory in Tralles where a statue turned toward a statue of Caesar, indicating his victory in battle.[71]

Origen seems to be aware of an association of images with demons and 'magical spells'.[72] Iamblichus (4th century C.E.) indicates that images were designed of certain materials and in such a manner as to be receptacles of the gods. He then specifies that the images of the gods received 'a certain divine portion'[73] and particularly connects these

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[59] Edwyn Bevan, *Holy Images* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1940), p. 25.
[60] Callistratus, *Descriptions*, 9. On the Statue of Memnon.
[61] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10: 243-297.
[62] Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 1.43.98.
[63] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 8.56.2-3.
[64] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives* Antony, 9.50.2.
[65] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives* Antony, 9.50.3.
[66] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Moralia*, The Oracles at Delphi, 397 F.
[67] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Attica, 1:42.3.
[68] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Elis 2, 6.11.6-9.
[69] Dio Cassius, *Dio's Roman History*, 54.7.3 (3rd century C.E).
[70] Dio Cassius, *Dio's Roman History*, 13.56.
[71] Dio Cassius, *Dio's Roman History*, 41.61.4
[72] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VII: 64.
[73] Iamblichus *De Mysteriis Liber*, 5:23; Thomas Taylor, trans., *Iamblichus on The Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians*, (Chiswick: Walworth for the Translator 1821), pp. 266-267.

receptacles with 'theurgy'.[74] Of particular significance to the study of the Revelation are the accounts by Suetonius (2nd century C.E.) regarding the Emperors Gaius Caligula and Nero. Gaius Caligula was reported to '...talk confidently with Jupiter Capitolinus, now whispering and then in turn putting his ear to the mouth of the god, now in louder and even angry language; for he was heard to make the threat: "Lift me up, or I'll lift you."'[75]

Suetonius records this account of Nero: 'For he had received as a gift from some unknown man of the commons, as a protection against plots, a little image of a girl; and since a conspiracy at once came to light, he continued to venerate it as a powerful divinity and to offer three sacrifices to it every day, encouraging the belief that through its communication he had knowledge of the future.'[76] Suetonius also reports the account that after Nero's death the people produced his statues and his edicts as if he were still alive, and soon to return. At one point, someone appeared claiming to be Nero and received the support of the Parthians and they surrendered him with great reluctance.[77] Another significant event is also reported with regard to Gaius Caligula: 'His approaching murder was foretold by many prodigies. The statue of Jupiter at Olympia, which he had ordered to be taken to pieces and moved to Rome, suddenly uttered such a peal of laughter that the scaffoldings collapsed and the workmen took to their heels ....'[78]

E. Summary

Dodds indicates that from the first century C.E. onwards there begins to be the manufacture and 'magical' use of images outside of Egypt.[79] There has been a clear exchange of ideas and information between Egypt and the Greek world from at least the 5th century B.C.E. This especially relates to the sharing of 'magic' and cult ideas, as well as ideas about the other world, and a fiery underworld. There certainly was a transmission of 'magical', mystical and religious ideas from at least this time.[80] As Christianity emerged from within Judaism it tended to absorb 'magical' traditions from the surrounding Graeco-Roman world.[81] Brighton points out that 'magical' deception, spiritism, and witchcraft were common in all layers of society and they were very influential at John's time.[82] The trickery aspect is certainly highlighted by Hippolytus (3rd century C.E.) in his *Refutation of Heresies* where he records several examples of trickery regarding Theurgy and even making a skull to

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[74] Iamblichus *De Mysteriis Liber*, 5:23.
[75] Suetonius, *Lives of Caesar*, 4:22.4
[76] Suetonius, *Lives of Caesar*, 6.56.
[77] Suetonius, *Lives of Caesars*, 6.57.
[78] Suetonius, *Lives of Caesars*, 4.57.
[79] E. R. Dodds, "Theurgy and Its Relationship to Neoplatonism", *The Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947): pp. 63-64.
[80] Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 243-244.
[81] Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," p. 1521.
[82] Brighton, *Revelation*, p. 360.

talk.[83] Lucian also records an account where Alexander uses horsehairs to control a linen serpent's head in order to fool people into believing in his 'magic'. [84]

In light of this tendency toward absorption, and the nature of 'magic' in general, clearly it would have been perceived as a significant threat to Christianity. The imagery (the image made to speak) used in Revelation 13:15 indicates a very negative attitude toward this particular aspect of 'magical' practice. This symbol appears to be particularly poignant in the light of the attempt by Gaius Caligula to place an image in the temple of Jerusalem[85] and in light of the traditions regarding Nero and his little statue of divination.[86] From an ancient perspective, it seems highly probable that John and his audience would have perceived 'magic' to be part of the whole incident regarding the 'second beast' and its 'image'. It is significant that even from a modern perspective authors have perceived that some form of 'magic' was involved. In the world of John and his audience, due to the historical background of images in the ancient world, along with Israel's history of linking 'false prophets' with 'magic', as well as the New Testament connection between 'false prophets' and 'magic', it is most probable that this section is intended to be a highly charged condemnation of 'magical practice'.

Price conceives of Revelation 13:15 as a reference to the attempt to establish the cult of Domitian at Ephesus, which was especially prominent because of its colossal cult statue.[87] He goes on to add that, 'Indeed I have seen no other interpretation which fits the known geographical and temporal contexts.'[88] The main force of this proposal for the identification of the exact instance is of less importance than the fact that once again the context concerns a cult statue. The Christian commentators of the centuries following the first century often

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[83] Hippolytus, *Refutation of Heresies*, 4:8:28, 41.
[84] Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet*, 12. Lucian actually uses the term *μάγος* on two occasions during his account (6, 21).
[85] Suetonius, *Lives of Caesars*, 6:56.
[86] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18: 261-272.
[87] Price, *Rituals and Power*, p. 197.
[88] Price, *Rituals and Power*, p. 197.

reflect in their commentaries on this passage, a bias that is the product of 'a post miraculous age.'[89] Price believes that John regarded the miracles performed by 'the beast' as genuine manifestations of the supernatural, or rather demonic, power.[90]

It would seem there are a great many who hold to the perception that Revelation 13:15 is a reference to 'magical practice' whether or not there is a bias toward the non-miraculous or toward believing that John could have believed that this could be an actual miraculous wonder.[91] It is almost certainly the case that John is referring in a very negative way, in Revelation 13:15, to what he regarded as 'magical practice'. It would also seem apparent that the Emperors of Rome and their tendency toward being ascribed divinity, or ascribing it to themselves, is at the heart of the symbolism used here. This was perceived, in Christian circles as being evil of the most heinous and arrogant type and clearly must be associated with the darkest of evil forces.

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[89] Price, *Rituals and Power*, p. 198.
[90] Price, *Rituals and Power*, p. 198.
[91] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 762-765; Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 258-260; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, p. 361; Boring, *Revelation*, p. 161; Brighton, *Revelation*, p. 360; William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), pp. 93-113; Harrington, *Revelation*, p. 143.

5. 'Key' Passages

A. Introduction

It is Aune's assertion that *κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου* is a portion of the evidence supporting his thesis that the Apocalypse of John was devised as 'an extensive and creative anti-magical polemic' in order to nullify the revelatory claims of the 'pagan' competitors of Christian prophets.[1] It is important to recognise that though defining 'magic' may prove to be difficult from a modern perspective, there was the widespread assumption in antiquity that something designated as 'magic' did exist.[2] 'Magic' was forbidden by the Roman Senate by the time of Pliny the Elder (23-79 C. E.).[3]

Four passages in the Apocalypse contain the word *κλείς* ('key').[4] Two further instances of this expression occur in the remaining books of the New Testament (Matthew 16:19; Luke 11:52).[5] *Κλείς* is not used in a literal sense in the New Testament but always has a figurative significance.[6] Generally the term indicates power over something. There are a number of different images created by the usage of this word in the Apocalypse and each will be examined. This expression occurs for the first time in Revelation 1:18 and relates to the *κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου*. Each passage, of the Apocalypse, employing *κλεῖς* will be examined in order to investigate the validity of Aune's claim that the Apocalypse was written to counter belief in 'magic' in some manner.

B. Examination of Revelation 1:18

A notable aspect regarding the cosmologies of many cultural and religious groups in the ancient world was the notion that the three separate regions of the cosmos were

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[1] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", pp. 481-501.
[2] F. Gerald Downing, "Magic and Scepticism in and Around the First Christian Century", in *Magic in the Biblical World*, ed. Todd Klutz (London: T & T Clark International, 2003), p. 86.
[3] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History* 30.3.
[4] Rev. 1:18; 3:7; 9:1; 20:1.
[5] Moulton and Geden, eds., *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*, p. 549.
[6] J. Jeremias, "'*κλείς* [key]'", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 744.

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connected. Passage from one realm to the other was possible via a system of 'doors' or 'gates'. In antiquity, the conception that heaven was closed off by doors, doors to which certain deities or angels had 'keys', was a commonly held concept. A variety of deities are portrayed as having control over these liminal points separating the underworld from the realm of the living, and the keepers of these gateways are said to have 'keys' that allowed them to control access (e.g., Nedu, Pluto (Hades), Kronos or Isis).[7] Aune, however, states that in early Jewish underworld mythology, the realm of the netherworld has no notion of the underworld possessing doors or gates. Aune postulates that the idea conveyed in the Apocalypse, which conveys an image of Jesus as keybearer, is based upon the popular Hellenistic conception of the goddess Hekate as 'keybearer'.[8] The implication of Aune's proposal is that there could be no Jewish source material for John to draw upon in order to develop his imagery regarding Jesus as 'keybearer', and therefore this imagery can only have come from a Hellenistic source.

There are, however, several passages from the Jewish scriptures that would seem to indicate that such an idea was possible within early Jewish thought.[9] Isaiah 38:10 actually contains the expression, 'the gates of Hades' (*πύλαις ᾅδου*) in the early Greek translation of this verse. The text of the Greek translation of Job 38:17 contains the phrase *πύλαι θανάτου, πυλωροὶ δὲ ᾅδου* ('gates of death, and gatekeepers of Hades'). Cooper puts forward the proposition that Psalm 24:7-10 represents a 'fragment' or a 'remnant' of a descent myth, in

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[7] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", pp. 481-501; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), pp. 97-98, 102. Boring cites Aune and appears to agree with his indication that John may have had Hekate in mind when he composed this imagery. Boring, *Revelation*, p. 84.

[8] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 104. *2 En.* 42:1 mentions '...the guardians of the keys of hell, standing by the very large doors...' but there is no indication that this reference is of an early enough date to be of much use in this discussion. F. I. Andersen, trans. and ed., "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 91-213; Colin Brown, "The Gates of Hell: An Alternative Approach," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 26 (1987): pp. 357-367.

[9] Is. 38:10; Ps. 9:13, 107:18; Job 17:16, 38:17; Jon. 2:6; Wis. 16:13. Nicholas J. Tromp, "Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament," Biblica et Orientalia, series, 21 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), pp. 152-154.

which a high god descends into the netherworld where he confronts the demonic forces of that world.[10] 'Doors' and 'gates' play a prominent role in this story. In the New Testament the phrase the *πύλαις ᾅδου* also occurs at Matthew 16:18.[11] Whether these gates are to be conceived of as literal or figurative does not change the fact that such concepts as 'gatekeepers of Hades' and 'gates of death' can be found within the context of the Jewish writings.

Despite this point, which Aune fails to acknowledge, he, along with others, postulates that the image of Jesus as keybearer in Revelation 1:18 is derived, not from Jewish sources, but from the very famous Hellenistic conception of Hekate as 'keybearer'.[12] Moulton and Milligan who recall the procession at Stratonicea where the priestess carried a golden key, the symbol of Hekate, would seem to express some accord with the ideas held by Aune and those who have followed him.[13] However, a great many scholars do not see the use of *κλείς* as necessarily a reference to anything more than Christ's power over life and death.[14]

Thomas believes that John was so immersed in the contextual world of the Jewish scriptures that it is not at all likely that the reference here could allude to Hekate.[15] To add to the conceptual confusion that this passage seems to create among interpreters, Jeremias notes that in the New Testament the term *κλείς* always has a figurative significance.[16] With this in mind, the issue is what would this symbolic representation have brought into the minds of John's readers? Does John expect his audience to envision the image of Hekate the

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[10] Alan Cooper, "Ps 24:7-10: Mythology and Exegesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): pp. 37-60.
[11] Joel Marcus, "The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:18-19)," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): pp. 443-455; Brown, "The Gates of Hell: An Alternative Approach," pp. 357-367.
[12] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 104.
[13] James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914-1929), p. 345, s.v. κλείς; Charles Diehl and Georges Cousin, "Inscriptions de Lagina," *Bulletin De Correspondance Hellénique* 11 (1887): pp. 5-39. Numbers 6, 7, 14, 37, 41, 45.
[14] Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 41-42; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, pp. 37-38; Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 26; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, pp. 32-33.
[15] Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7 An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p. 112.
[16] Jeremias, "'*κλείς* [key]'", p. 744.

'keybearer', as the backdrop for his reference to Jesus as the one having *τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου*?

A great deal may hinge upon whether the genitives *θανάτου* and *ᾅδου* are objective or possessive genitives (i.e., 'the keys *to* Death and Hades' or 'the keys *belonging* to Death and Hades'). If these genitives are construed as objective genitives then 'Death and Hades' must be understood in a spatial sense, as is the case at 20:13. If they are interpreted as possessive genitives, they must be accepted as personifications, (the keys belonging to the persons 'Death' and 'Hades'), as is the case at 6:8 where *[ὁ] θάνατος, καὶ ὁ ᾅδης* are used as personal terms. Aune concludes that the usage here must be objective, since 'Death' is never described in ancient texts as possessing keys, and very seldom are keys attributed to Hades (Pausanias 5.20.3[17]).[18] Unfortunately, the decision regarding the usage of these genitives does not appear to be based upon the immediate context of this passage, as much as it is based upon the notions that the various interpreters bring to this text. It is not apparent from the immediate context what John intended. In light of this, a determination must be made based upon the wider historical background of John and the culture of his audience in Asia Minor.

Jeremias contends that the spatial idea of *θάνατος* is alien to the Christian scriptures. When *θάνατος* and *ᾅδης* are used together he, along with Kroll, indicates that these words are always to be perceived of in personal terms (Revelation 6:8; 20:13ff. 1 Corinthians 15:55).[19] With this position in mind, he goes on to indicate that in his analysis, 1:18 refers to the keys which Death and Hades carry as lords of the underworld. Jeremias conjectures that the idea in Revelation, regarding Christ having the *κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου* is likely meant to

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[17] 'As to the key they say that what is called Hades has been locked up by Pluto, and that nobody will return back again from there.'
[18] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 103. This would mean that Aune interprets what is written at 1:18 as being in spatial terms.
[19] Jeremias, "'*κλείς* [key]'", p. 746; Josef Kroll, *Gott und Hölle* (Darmstadt: Wissenscaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), p. 10.

convey the idea that the risen Christ has taken over the keys to the underworld from the personifications of 'Death' and 'Hades'.[20] Charles indicates a somewhat different inclination and states that these genitives may be taken either as objective or as possessive genitives.[21] Beasley-Murray is of the opinion that the context of 1:18 does not demand either solution with absolute certainty.[22] Osborne goes a step further and finds a solution to this dilemma as being that the genitives are meant to convey both of these meanings simultaneously to the audience.[23] This seems to be the most reasonable solution, especially in light of the usage of these terms in 20:13-14, where both ideas seem to be conveyed. In one instance 'Death' and 'Hades' are said to contain the dead, and then, in the next instance they themselves are thrown into the 'lake of fire' in a manner that seems to personify these images. This explanation does not necessarily answer our main question of whether John has the goddess Hekate in view as he composes this section, but it may assist in determining John's intentions in using such imagery. It is perhaps useful at this point to take an aside to explore in some depth the background of Hekate in order to understand her role within the cultural landscape of the first century Roman world and Asia Minor in particular.

C. Excursus on Hekate

As noted earlier, it is Aune's postulation, along with others, that the traditions and imagery of Hekate are the perceptual framework which John draws upon as he composes the visionary element that is projected into the psyche of his audience by the phrase *ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου.*[24] If this supposition is correct, it would indicate that John perceives a specific threat from this goddess of sufficient force that it was necessary to counter it in a way that would be perceptible to those reading the Apocalypse. As this goddess was peculiarly associated with 'magical' practice in antiquity it would then perhaps indicate the level of the threat that John perceives to emanate from, so called 'magic', and it may go some way in indicating the definite threat that he sought to combat with his composition of the

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[20] Jeremias, "'*κλείς* [key]'", pp. 744-753. esp., 746.
[21] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John,* vol. 1, pp. 32-33.
[22] G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation,* The New Century Bible Commentary series (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott Publishing Ltd., 1983), p. 68.
[23] Osborne, *Revelation,* p. 96. Beale also postulates this as a solution. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), pp. 214-215.
[24] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," pp. 481-501; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ,* pp. 97-98, 102; Boring, *Revelation,* p. 84; Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament,* p. 345, s.v. *κλείς* .

Revelation. The assumption that John has this specific goddess in mind is based upon a number of criteria which need to be explored in order to understand what may be behind John's construction.

The goddess Hekate is first revealed within the the context of Greek literature in the *Theogony* by Hesiod.[25] The exact origins of Hekate are obscure, and the focus of a great deal of debate.[26] Even the parentage of this goddess is not uniform across the range of available literature. Very often the nature and significance of Hekate have been summed up using a few broad, sweeping statements that are based upon a disappointingly small proportion of the available evidence. This tendency has led to a very narrow perspective on this goddess that fails to recognise the rich diversity that is in reality displayed by the evidence. Until recently, most studies had come to the conclusion that she was simply the dark benefactress of malevolent magicians and the queen of restless spiritual entities. There are, however, indications that many in antiquity perceived of her in quite a positive light and not at all in the dark terms that came to enshroud her image in later literature.[27]

From the 5th century B.C.E. onward there are abundant references to Hekate in literature and in epigraphical sources.[28] The goddess, from an early period, had the role of transmitting disembodied souls on their way to Hades and by the 1st century she had become associated with the moon in such a manner as to share the function of guiding or transmitting disembodied souls or demons across the boundary between the earthly and celestial spheres.[29] Hekate was recognised as ruler over the souls of the dead in folk belief.[30] She was able to use her powers in order to send frightful disembodied spirits to do her evil bidding. She had at her command an army of spirits which were generally believed to be either 'avenging spirits' or those that had died violent deaths.[31]

In relation to the position put forward by Aune, and those who are in agreement with his position, there are lucid indications that Hekate is connected with passage through the various liminal points that separate the various cosmic realms.[32] Clay has suggested that Hekate's participation in a variety of relationships between gods and men implies that she is conceived of as the crucial intermediary between the gods and men (guiding Persephone to and from Hades).[33] The image of Hekate generated by the Homeric literature presents a somewhat confusing picture of her nature and has proven to be difficult to reconcile with earlier descriptions of the goddess. Some features associated with Hekate are repeated in this later literature such as her role in guiding Persephone across a very important boundary.[34]

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[25] Hesiod, Theogony 411-452.

[26] Fritz Graf, "Nordionische Kulte," Bibliotheca Helvetica Roman series, 21 (Rome: Schweizerisches Institut in Rom, 1985), pp. 257-259; Theodor Kraus, *Hekate*, Heidelberger Kunstgeschichtliche Abhandlungen, Band 5 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Univeritätsverlag, 1960), pp. 24; 55-56; Lewis R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), pp. 501-519; Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, American Classical Studies series, 21 (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1990), p. 21.

[27] Robert Von Rudloff, *Hekate in Ancient Greek Religion* (Victoria, British Columbia: Horned Owl Publishing, 1999), pp. 1-4.

[28] Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, pp. 141-142.

[29] Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, pp. 29-38.

[30] Alois Kehl, "Hekate " in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Ernst Dassmann, et al. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann), pp. 310-338; Joseph Heckenbach, "Hekate," in *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie,* vol. 7, ed. Georg Wissowa and Wilhelm Kroll (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Buchhandlung, 1912), p. 2774; Erwin Rhode, *Psyche* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1925), pp. 593-595.

[31] Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, p. 142.

[32] Graf, "Nordionische Kulte," p. 258; Kraus, *Hekate*, pp. 11 ff., 77 ff; Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, p. 21.

[33] Jenny Strauss Clay, "The Hekate of Theogony," *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 25 (1984): pp. 27-38.

[34] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

She is also described using the term *Ἐνοδία* which expresses her connection with roads and more specifially the place where three roads intersect.[35] In popular belief the intersection of roads was commonly believed to be a very dangerous place and one that was haunted by evil spirits.[36] Farnell comes to the conclusion that it is probable that the triple form of this deity came about as a result of her association with this type of cross-roads.[37] The connection of Hekate *trimorphos* (having three forms or shapes) was associated with her threefold identity and this threefold nature is identified with a variety of figures which include Juno Lucina, Trivia and Luna (Catullus 34.9).[38] She is also identified with Selene/Luna in heaven, Artemis/Diana on earth and Persephone/Hekate in Hades.[39] Hekate *triprosopos* ('having three faces') is depicted as being in the conflict on the side of the Olympians in the Gigantomachy on the east frieze of the altar of Zeus from Pergamon.[40] Images were erected of Hekate at crossroads throughout Asia Minor where she was believed to function as an averter of evil. Meals were brought to these images at a certain time each month to appease her and to avert evil.[41]

According to Aune, the cosmic significance of Hekate led to conceptions of her as 'Mother of All', 'Mistress of All', and as the 'Beginning and End.'[42] In *PGM IV* 2785 ff. Hekate is identified with Selene, Persephone, Megaira, Allekto, Artemis, Mene and as the *ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος*.[43] The phrase *ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος* is exactly the phrase used of Christ in Revelation 21:6 and 22:13. This phrase will be dealt with elsewhere, but it is of significance that this phrase is found in connection with both the risen Christ and Hekate. There is universal importance being attributed to Hekate in the Orphic Hymns which were in all probability written during the early 2nd century C.E., in Asia Minor (near in place, and in time, to the composition of Revelation).[44]

It is to be noted that there is also an association of the goddess with places such as doors and entrances in antiquity.[45] In Greece, Hekate was regarded as a familiar door-warder and gate-guardian, and stood before palaces, temples and all private homes[46] (at least in Athens).[47] In addition, Strabo indicates that there are two temples of the Stratoniceans, the most famous of which is attributed to Hekate (at Lagina) and annually there is a famous festival held there involving the 'keybearer' (this procession is also mentioned above).[48]

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[35] Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, pp. 22-23, esp. N - 26; Homer, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 2.24-25; 22.51-59. 22:438-440.
[36] Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, p. 142.
[37] Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, p. 554; Stephen Ronan, ed., *The Goddess Hekate* (Hastings: Chthonios Books, 1992), p. 43.
[38] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 485.
[39] Maurus Servius Honoratus, *Commentary on the Aeneid of Vergil*, 4.511. 'et cum super terras est, creditur esse Luna; cum in terris, Diana; cum sub terris, Proserpina'. Jo. Tzetzae, identified the three forms of Hekate as Selene, Artemis and Hekate. cf. M. Chantry, ed., *Scholia in Aristophanem, Fasc. IVa* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1994), p. 105; 594a; Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 485.
[40] Elisabeth Rohde, *Pergamon: Burgberg und Altar* (München: C. H. Beck, 1982), pp. 84-85; Alfred Laumonier, *Les Cultes Indigènes en Carie* (Paris: E. De Boccard, Éditeur, 1958), p. 350.
[41] Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, pp. 142-143.
[42] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 485.
[43] *PGM* IV 2836 ff. *ἀρχὴ / καὶ τέλος εἶ, πάντων δὲ σὺ μούνη /...*
[44] K. Ziegler, "Orphische Dichtung," in *Der Kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike,* vol. 4, ed., August Fredrich von Pauly (München: Druckenmüller, 1972), p. 357.
[45] Stefan Radt, ed., *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta,* vol. 3, *'Aeschylus'* (Göttingen: VanenHoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), p. 435. Number 388; Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 804.
[46] Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 800-804.
[47] Jacob Rabinowitz, *The Rotting Goddess: The Origin of the Witch in Classical Antiquity's Demonization of Fertility Religion* (Brooklyn NY Autonomedia, 1998), pp. 59-60; Sarah Iles Johnston, *Restless Dead* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 206-211; Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, pp. 501-519.
[48] Strabo, *Geography*, 14.12.25.

There are numerous inscriptions commemorating the festival of the *κλειδοφόρος* ('key-holder') that is held there.[49] Proclus, a mid-5th-century Platonist comments on Hekate's cosmological roles in his commentary on Plato's *The Republic*, and with this contextual backdrop apparently in mind, she is specifically called *κλειδοῦχος*.[50] The word *κλειδοῦχος* expresses an important concept, this word, from archaic times, was often used in a metaphoric sense to express the fact that the person holding the 'key' to something had authority over that thing or place as its master or mistress. Access to a realm is controlled by the one holding the 'keys' to that realm.[51]

The 'key' was in fact one of the symbols used alongside Hekate from Hellenistic times onward.[52] The nature of Hekate appears to have changed dramatically over the centuries with many of the characteristics associating Hekate with witchcraft and the underworld coming into being after the 5th century B.C.E. Indeed, up until this time no one has anything but good to say about her, as was indicated previously.[53] It is very difficult to determine when specific attributes came to be associated with Hekate. It is apparent that there has been an evolutionary process that has taken place with regard to the attributes of this goddess, and these vary not only according to the time but also according to locality where she is mentioned.[54]

An added element of confusion exists in that Hekate was associated with a number of other goddesses and sometimes seems to be totally interchangable with these other goddesses. There is a particularly strong connection with Artemis of the Ephesians, even leading to attributes being interchanged between the two goddesses. There is also an interchangeability of worship as well.[55] Hekate's role as the regulator of entry to or exit from the realm of the dead is highlighted in ancient texts.[56] Other passages of a literary nature, though not specifically mentioning 'keys', contribute to the image of the goddess as being in control of the gates of the Underworld.[57] There are also references to keys in association with Hekate that have no stated connection with the realm of Hades.[58] In art she appears with keys displayed on her images and there appears to have been no need to explain the representation of these keys on her images.[59] The goddess is not, however, unique amongst divine beings thought of as having custody of a variety of keys. *Ἡσυχία*, holds the 'keys' of 'councils and wars.'[60] Proteus holds the keys of the 'chambers of the deep',[61] and Zeus holds the keys to 'sorrow and delight.'[62]

At the doors or gates between the realms a guardian possessed keys that allowed access to be controlled. These keys represented great power and authority on the part of the possessor. Aune points out that a major aspect of revelatory 'magic' involved control over

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[49] Charles Diehl and Georges Cousin, "Inscriptions De Lagina," *Bulletin De Correspondance Hellénique* 11 (1887): pp. 5-39; Numbers 36, 37, 14, 37, 41, 45.
[50] Proclus, *Interpretation Republic*, II.121.124-128.
[51] Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, pp. 40-41.
[52] Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, pp. 40-41.
[53] Rabinowitz, *The Rotting Goddess: The Origin of the Witch in Classical Antiquity's Demonization of Fertility Religion* pp. 35-39.
[54] Rudloff, *Hekate in Ancient Greek Religion*..
[55] Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, pp. 505-507.
[56] Orpheus, *Argonautika*, 985 ff.
[57] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6:245-258; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, XI.2; Seneca, *Oedipus*, 568 ff; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII.234 ff; Lucian, *Philopatris*, 1; Lucian, *The Lover of Lies* 14; 24.
[58] Orpheus, *Hymn*, 1.7. (The reference to 'keys' here clearly has cosmological overtones.)
[59] Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, p. 40.
[60] Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, 8.1-4.
[61] Orpheus, *Hymn*, 25.22.
[62] Orpheus, *Hymn*, 73.76. Aune lists others, some of which at least in their current form likely come from a time later than the composition of The Apocalypse. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 104-105.

the gates of Hades.[63] An aspect of significance to this discussion is that Hekate was particularly popular in southwest Asia Minor during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.[64] In this region her 'universal sovereignty' particularly her role as Mistress of the Cosmos would have made her an obvious rival for the figure of Christ as portrayed by Christianity.[65] It is upon the basis of her popularity in Asia Minor in particular, that consideration must be given to the hypothesis put forward by Aune, and others, that it would seems unimaginable that his audience would not have conceived of the phrase *κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου* as some form of reference to this goddess. If it is the case that Hekate is in the mind of John as he composes this expression then it would be a significant boost to Aune's supposition that the Apocalypse is in fact an 'anti-magical polemic' intended to nullify the claims made by others within the the religious context of Asia Minor.[66]

D. Revelation 1:18 and Hekate

Returning once again to the discussion of of 1:18, the vision that John reports, indicates that this awesome figure who identifies himself using descriptive phrases which are intended to leave the reader in no doubt that he is none other than the exalted Jesus. It is to be noted that he describes himself not only with a series of divine titles ('the First and the Last', 'the Beginning and the End', 'the Alpha and the Omega' and the 'Living One'), but he also refers to his death and resurrection and to the fact that he possesss *κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου.*[67] In Hellenistic Anatolia, the ancient goddess Hekate was a goddess of universal significance, and held to be sovereign over the whole of the cosmos and in popular thought she held the keys to Hades.[68] The perspective of Aune and others is that the people living in this region, at the time that John composed the Apocalypse, would have immediately

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[63] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," pp. 487-488.
[64] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 486; Theodor Kraus, *Hekate: Studien zu Wesen und Bild der Göttin in Kleinasien und Griechenland* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Unversitätsverlag, 1960), pp. 24-56; 166-168; Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, pp. 501-519; Barclay V. Head, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Ionia* (London: British Museum, 1892), p. 104; Barclay V. Head, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Lydia* (London: British Museum, 1901), pp. 28. No. 20. 192 No. 134. 254. No. 125. 355. No. 171; F. Imhoof-Blumer, *Kleinasiatische Münzen*, vol. 1 (Wien: Alfred Hölder, 1901), pp. 156-157. Nos. 111, 112, 113. The goddess is represented as Artemis-Hekate on coins from Ephesus (I, p. 54, no. 42; p. 60, no. 66). This identification is found on a coin minted under Domitian (I, p. 181, no. 6).
[65] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", p. 485.
[66] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 494.
[67] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 116.
[68] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 116-117.

understood John as highlighting Jesus' superiority over Hekate by the use of the expression *κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου.*[69]

Charles, on the other hand, links these two possessive genitives with ideas that are contained within the context of the Jewish scriptures. This is especially the case with Hosea 13:14[70], and its immediate context, Death, Sheol and various other abstract terms, are personified. The meaning would then be that neither death nor Hades can resist the power of the risen Christ. Charles then relates this to the early concept of Christ's descent into Hades and his conquest of the powers that resided there. He connects the concept of the keys to a Jewish context based upon *Targum Yerushalmi* for Genesis 30:22 and Deuteronomy 28:12.[71] The Targum here relates a tradition that is built upon certain biblical texts (Ezekiel 37:12-13). The difficulty with using this material for understanding the text under scrutiny is that the Targums cannot be firmly dated, and it is highly likely that this Targum antedates the composition of the Apocalypse.[72] In addition to this it is to be noted that according to Trebilco there is no evidence that Jewish communities in Asia knew, or followed Rabbinic teaching in the 1st century.[73] This would tend to make the arguments of Charles less than convincing.

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[69] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 104; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 97-98; Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, p. 345, s.v. κλείς.

[70] 13:14 Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your destruction? Compassion is hidden from my eyes. NRSV

[71] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John,* vol. 1, pp. 32-33. Targum Neofiti, Genesis 30:22 'Four Keys there are which are given into the hand of the Lord, the master of all worlds, and he does not hand over them either to angel or to Seraph: the key of rain and the key of provision and the key of the sepulchres and the key of barrenness. <The key of rain>, for thus does the Scripture explain and say: "The Lord will open for you the good treasure from the heavens." The key of provision, for thus does the Scripture explain and say: "You open your hand and satisfy all living things in whom there is good pleasure." The key of the sepulchres, for thus does the Scripture explain and say: "Behold, I will open your graves and will lead you from your graves, my people." The key of barrenness, for thus does the Scripture explain and say: "The Lord in his good mercies remembered Rachel and the Lord heard the voice of the prayer of Rachel and said in his Memra to give her sons.' Martin McNamara, trans., *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*. The Aramaic Bible Series. vol. 1A (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1992), pp. 148-149.

[72] McNamara, trans., *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, pp. 44, 148.

[73] Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*, vol. 69, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 188.

There is a passage from the texts found at Qumran (which certainly predates the Apocalypse) which contains the phrase the שערי מות ('gates of death').[74] This phrase would seem to indicate that it was possible to conceive of 'death' as having 'gates', though certainly in this instance, there is no indication of 'death' being personified. Linking the ideas of their being 'keys' to 'Death' and 'Hades' in the context of Jewish thought does not appear to be as farfetched an idea as is perhaps indicated by Aune's rather definite statement that 'The image of the risen Jesus as keybearer is derived from Hellenistic conceptions of Hekate, though few scholars have made the connection.'[75] The evidence for linking these ideas, definitively, within a Jewish context, do, however, appear far more tenuous than the proposals put forward by Aune from a Hellenistic background. There is far less available evidence to indicate that residents of Asia Minor, and particularly the audience John intended to reach would have been aware of these Jewish links. There is no evidence to identify a knowledge of either Rabbinic texts or the Qumran texts in Asia Minor during the time of the 1st Century C.E.

It is, however, possible that within the context of Jewish thought that 'Death' and 'Hades' may have been conceived of in personal terms (personification of abstract terms such as wisdom[76]), but there is no available evidence to indicate that such ideas would have been part of the contextual milleu of the people of 1st century Asia Minor. The evidence, as far as 1:18 is concerned, would seem to be in favour of the fact that John's audience would have understood his reference to the 'keys of death and Hades' as in some way a reference to Hekate. There is, however, also meaning for those from a Jewish contextual background as well, and John can once more use language that creates images that will bridge the contextual world of his audience in such a way to demonstrate his point. Beale accepts that there is

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[74] *1QH* XIV 24.
[75] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", pp. 484-485.
[76] Prov. 1:20; 8:1; 8:12 ff.; 9:1;

considerable weight to the argument put forward by Aune, but counters with the possibility that instead of this passage being specifically composed to counter Hekate a more general polemic could be intended. This would take into consideration the fact that there were a variety of 'pagan gods' that were popularly thought of as rulers of the underworld.[77]

This possibility has some very appealing aspects and it certainly must be considered, though there is not as much evidence available to indicate this perspective would have been readily understood within the contextual environment of 1st century Asia Minor. The evidence put forward regarding the popularity and prominence of Hekate is compelling and though it is not possible to prove this was definitely in John's mind, it does seem highly probable that the phrase *κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου* would have brought to mind images of Hekate for many in John's audience. The point, in the context of 1:18, may be that Jesus now controls the power not only of death in the present, but he controls death, and those who have died, whenever or wherever they may be. This appears to be the force of the double appellation (*κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου*) indicating that he not only controls death but he also has power over all the dead as is indicated by the fact that he has the 'keys' to the realm of the dead. Having the 'keys to Death' perhaps indicates a power that is more about the present time period (1st century C.E.), with clear consequences for the future. In the same way that Paul sought to assure his audience that Christ has power not only over those who are living at the time of his return, he also has power over those who have died before he returns.[78] Control over Hades perhaps indicates power over those who have died in the past. Jesus, therefore, takes on more power than any figure within the context of the Graeco-Roman panoply of gods. From a Jewish perpective, perhaps John intends to convey the idea that Jesus takes on powers that would have been considered the sole domain of God, thus

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[77] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 215.
[78] 1 Thess. 4:16. I Cor. 15:32.

expressing the deity of Jesus Christ. With a single expression John can elevate Jesus to a position above all rivals and unequivocally affirm his deity.

E. Examination of Revelation 3:7

'And to the angel of the church of Philadelphia write; "these things says the Holy one, the true one, the one having the key of David (*ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυίδ*), the one opening and no one closes and closing and no one opens."' In 3:7 Jesus is said to hold power to open and close something in such a way as to have virtually, absolute control. This description is based upon Isaiah 22:22 where Eliakim is appointed as royal treasurer. In the context of Isaiah the verse had in view the royal palace in Jerusalem, but the Apocalyptist has in mind the Davidic line whose representative is Christ (Revelation 22:16).[79] A relatively close parallel to this text is found in a Coptic 'magical' exorcism text[80] that probably dates from the 5th century C.E. and is almost certainly dependent upon the text of Revelation.[81] Reddish indicates that the exalted Christ is displayed as possessing the 'key of David' denoting his authority to grant or to deny access to the kingdom of God. He then goes on to state that in his view the passage here should be connected with the statement at 1:18 where Jesus has *κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου.*[82] Caird indicates a different interpretation. He postulates that John develops the imagery in quite a different direction. Christ has opened a door in front of the Philadelphian Christians with the expectation that they will sucessfully take the opportunity given to them for the conversion of the Jews. Caird does note that others have perceived this passage not to be indicative of the conversion of the Jews but their ultimate humiliation.[83] There appears to be little reason to commend this perspective.

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[79] Jeremias, "'*κλείς* [key]'", p. 748.
[80] Angelicus M. Kropp, *Ausgewählte Koptische Zaubertexte*, vol. 2 (Bruxelles: Édition de la Foundation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1931), pp. 151-152; London Ms. Or. 5987.
[81] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 235; Victor Stegemann, *Die Gestalt Christi in den koptischen Zaubertexten* (Heidelberg: Selbstverlag von F. Bilabel, 1934), pp. 19-20.
[82] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 74.
[83] Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 51.

Roloff, Beasley-Murray, and others agree with Reddish and link this passage with 1:18.[84] In support of the analysis that there is a connection between this verse and 1:18 some manuscripts replace *Δαυίδ* with *ᾅδου* (104, 218, 459, 620, 2050, 2067) or with *τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου* (1893).[85] Beale goes onto develop his argument by stating that the point of the quotation is that Jesus holds the power over salvation and judgement. Whereas in 1:18 the stress is on his sovereignty over death and judgement the emphasis at 3:7 is upon his authority over those entering into the kingdom.[86] Aune believes that the indeclinable word *Δαυίδ* is an objective genitive, and that the phrase here refers to the Davidic or Messianic kingdom, i.e., to the 'true Israel.'[87] Charles is in agreement with this assessment that the *τὴν κλεῖν Δαυίδ* has a Messianic significance, and that Christ has complete authority over admission to, or exclusion from the kingdom. In the same way that Eliakim carried the keys of the house of David in the time of Hezekiah, so Christ carries the same level of authority over the kingdom (Ephesians 1:22) and this includes the realm of Hades (1:18)[88]

Hahn indicates that in his view the words *ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυίδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει* are a reference to an eschatological function. He indicates that the *κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου'*, mentioned in 1:18 should be distinguished from the *τὴν κλεῖν Δαυίδ* as well as from the *ἡ κλεὶς τοῦ φπέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου.* He suggests that just as the underworld and the kingdom of the dead were thought of as being locked by keys, so also was the world of the future considered to be locked by keys.[89] This perspective is based upon the work of Jeremias where he indicates that 3:7 is intended to describe Christ's

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[84] Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, p. 61; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, pp. 99-100; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 140; Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 187-188; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John,* vol. 1, p. 86.
[85] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 283-284.
[86] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 283-284.
[87] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 235.
[88] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John,* vol. 1, p. 86.
[89] Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), p. 245.

unlimited sovereignty over the 'future world.'[90] He does not elaborate on exactly how he arrived at this perspective and few scholars seem to have considered it of enough note to even make mention of it. It appears to be based solely upon the fact that he considers this section to indicate a power over what will come to pass at some point in the future. Though it is true that Jesus is certainly perceived of as having control of the future, it seems more likely that his overall sovereignty is the point of this passage not simply his sovereignty over the future.

The question is, does linking this passage with 1:18 affect the supposition put forward by Aune that 1:18 is primarily concerned with countering a threat from Hekate to the position of Christ? Beale postulates that 3:7 is possibly meant to counter the view that some were being excommunicated from the local synagogue.[91] Reddish notes the same issue as being at the forefront of this context, especially in noting the expression 'synagogue of Satan' (3:9).[92] The concern in this context seems to be primarily aimed at a Jewish antagonist and there appears to be very little to indicate that any 'magical' or 'pagan' antagonist is in view. The link between this passage and the one at 1:18 seems to be part of a continuing effort on the part of John to indicate that Jesus has sovereignty over everything and everyone. This would bring comfort to those who perceived a threat from an antagonist of any sort.

A factor for consideration in this vein is the size and influence of the Jewish community in Asia Minor during the 1st century C. E. There are indications that Jews formed a large percentage of the total population of Asia Minor. They lived primarily in urban centres, and appear to have been quite influential in these population centres.[93] Baron estimates that there were around one million Jews living in Asia Minor by the 1st century. He goes on to speculate that every tenth Roman was a Jew. East of Italy the Jewish population

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[90] Jeremias, "'κλείς [key]'", p. 748.
[91] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 284.
[92] Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 74-75.
[93] E. Silberschlag, "The Earliest Record of Jews in Asia Minor", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933): pp. 66-77.

was even higher with the possibility that 20% of the population may have been Jewish in the eastern Mediterranean world.[94] We will come back to this passage again later after an examination of other passages.

F. Examination of Revelation 9:1

At 9:1 a 'star' (some form of supernatural being)[95] is given *ἡ κλεὶς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου*. The use of the two definite articles here makes it clear that the notion of the shaft of the abyss was a well known concept to the readers.[96] In the *Greek Magical Papyri* there is an indication that a supernatural being (*θεός*) of some sort rules over the abyss.[97] Reddish puts forward the view that John is in this section adapting the Jewish tradition of fallen angels, with a fallen angel being given the 'key' to the shaft of the abyss. The abyss represents the reservoir of evil where the disobedient angels have been locked away. By opening the abyss a new plague of evil is unleashed upon the earth.[98]

There is a great deal of debate regarding whether John is referring to a good or an evil being in this context. He could be referring either to the archangel Uriel, who was chief 'over Tartarus', or the archangel Saraqael, who was 'over ... the spirits who sin in the spirit' (*1 Enoch* 19:1; 20:1-6; 21:1-10). Beale discusses this issue in some depth and makes a good case for this being a reference that indicates judgment on an angel (cf. *1 Enoch* 86:3; 88:3; Revelation 12:4, 9-10, 13). In addition to the resemblances with falling star depictions, the

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[94] Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Part. I; 2nd edition, revised and enlarged ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), pp. 170-171. cf. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*; M. Stern, "The Jewish Diaspora," in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, ed. S. Safrai, et al. (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp. B.V., 1974), pp. 117-183; John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 259-281.

[95] In Jewish tradition, stars were often equated with some form of spiritual being. Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 176.

[96] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 525.

[97] *PGM* XIII.169-170. 'A god appeared; he was given charge of the abyss [of primal waters], for without / him moisture neither increases nor diminishes.' 481-483. 'And a god appeared and was given charge of the abyss, and therefore without him moisture neither increases nor diminishes.' Quotes from Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, 177, 185.

[98] Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 176-177.

conclusion that this is not a good angel but a fallen angel is also implied by verse 11[99]. Beale, therefore, comes to the conclusion that the angel in verse 1 is either Satan or one of his minions (the latter would perhaps be parallel to *2 Enoch* 42:1[100]). In this context, then, the angel is given 'the key of the abyss' as an indication of the sovereignty that he has over the realm of demons. Beale goes on to link this passage with 1:18 indicating that it must be Christ who bestows this key, since he has overcome Satan and now possesses *κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου* (1:18). The indication is that neither Satan nor his evil servants can unleash the forces of the abyss on the earth unless allowed to do so by the resurrected Christ.[101]

The conclusion, that the 'star' that had fallen from heaven has an evil nature, is supported by the use of the word *ἄβυσσος* in the Greek translations of the Jewish scriptures.[102] The term *ἄβυσσος* is used in these translations to translate the Hebrew term תהום.[103] 'The Deep' was conceived as the abode of God's enemy according to Charles.[104] In *1 Enoch* 18:12 ff. and other parts of *1 Enoch* this place is conceived of as a temporary place of punishment for the 'stars' and hosts of heaven. In Job the 'abyss' is the abode of the cosmic sea dragon (41:23-24). The *ἄβυσσος* is synonymous with the concept of Hades in several Jewish texts (Job 38:16-17; Ezekiel 31:15; Jonah 2:6). The concept that appears to be uppermost is the idea of a place of punishment where evil spirits are restrained under God's sovereign power.[105]

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[99] 'They have over them as king, the angel of the abyss, his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek the name he has is Apollyon.'
[100] 'And I saw the key-holders and the guards of the gates of hell standing, as large as serpents, with their faces like lamps that have been extinguished, and their eyes aflame, and their teeth naked down to their breasts.' Andersen, "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch," p. 166.
[101] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 491-493.
[102] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 493.
[103] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 526.
[104] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, p. 240. cf. Am. 9:3; Ps. 74:13; cf. Job 41:24 *Septuagint*.
[105] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 493.

Once again John uses powerful images to paint a picture that makes it absolutely clear that God is sovereign and that nothing, not even the domain of evil spirits, is beyond the reach of this sovereignty. He does this using images that are primarily drawn from a Jewish contextual base. This does not give us a concise indication of the source of the threat he perceives, whether it is from outside of a Jewish context or not. It does, however, indicate to us that John is deeply immersed in a Jewish contextual worldview that colours his perception of the cosmos. There does seem to be a connection between 9:1 and 1:18 and this connection could shed light upon the supposition of Aune that John has Hekate in view as he composes 1:18. The Jewish context of the *ἄβυσσος* within the Greek translations of their scriptures would seem to indicate a connection between an abode of spiritual beings and the concept of 'Hades'.

It is perhaps of note that in the Apocalypse the beast ascends from the abyss (11:7; 17:8) and it becomes the ultimate abode of Satan (20:1-3), the location where the 'locusts'(9:1-10) ascend to torment, and the 'angel of the abyss' (9:11) is their king. It is, according to Aune, the shaft to the underworld and specifically the dwelling place of demons. It is presented as if it is blocked by a door to which God alone holds the key. The door can be locked and sealed (20:3) as well as unlocked (9:2a) by the one who possess the 'key' (which represents divine authority according to Aune).[106] Aune does not seem to perceive a context outside the realm of Jewish thought for the images here, and if there is a connection between 9:1 and 1:18 it may indeed affect the interpretation of 1:18. If this passage fits within that Jewish context then it would negate the assertion made by Aune that 'In early Jewish underworld mythology, the netherworld was not thought of as having doors or gates.'[107]

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[106] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 526-527.
[107] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 104.

The link between 9:1, 3:7 and 1:18 makes it probable that Beale is correct in his assertion that the background of Isaiah 22:22 is the background for this imagery at 9:1. Even this, though, does not indicate that John does not have pagan rulers of the underworld in mind, especially at 1:18 as Beale also indicates.[108] There is yet one more place that John uses 'key' terminology in the Apocalypse and after an examination of this passage the discussion of this issue can be viewed in light of all its usages in the Apocalypse.

G. Examination of Revelation 20:1

In this section 'an angel descending from heaven with the key of the abyss and a large chain in his hand,' (*Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ ἅλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτου.*) is portrayed. The imagery of an angel 'descending from heaven', occurs with slight variation in 10:1 and 18:1. The utilization of chains in the binding of Satan and his hosts is an apocalyptic motif (*1 Enoch* 54:3-5; *2 Apocalypse of Baruch* 56:13; *Sibylline Oracles* 2.289; Jude 6; 1 Peter 2:4) derived from earlier Greek traditions (Apollodorus, *Library and Epitome* 1.1.2; Hesiod *Theogany* 718; cf. Hyginus *Fabulae* 150). Aune indicates that the Greek mythology appears to have been influenced by the Hittite succession myth.[109] The clearest parallels to the idea of the binding or imprisoning of evil forces in the Jewish scriptures occurs at Isaiah 24:21-22. This passage portrays the evil forces of the 'host of heaven' as being bound as prisoners in a pit.[110] A number of commentators appear to link the 'key' and the 'abyss' of this verse with 9:1.[111] Others, however, note significant differences such as Massynberde Ford who indicates that the former fell (*πίπτω*) while the latter descended (*καταβαίνω*).[112]

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[108] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 215.
[109] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1081.
[110] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 380.
[111] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John,* vol. 2, pp. 140-141; Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 380; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 493; Harrington, *Revelation*, p. 199.
[112]Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 329.

Stefanovic points out that despite the similarity in wording between 20:1 and 9:1 there are differences. It is his position that the star from heaven in the context of 9:1 is none other than Satan himself. He cites as his reasoning that the angel was seen with a 'key' to lock and seal the abyss in this verse, while in 9:1 the fallen star was given power to open the abyss.[113] Beale indicates that it is probably best to understand 'The key of the abyss' as being the same as 'the key of death and of Hades,' which Christ holds in chapter one due to the fact that he has overcome death through his resurrection (1:18). Beale would go so far as to say that the 'abyss' in 9:1-2 and in chapter 20:1 is probably a synonym for 'death and Hades' in 1:18 and 6:8. The context of 6:8 and 9:1-2 shows Satan as being closely associated with the realm of 'death and Hades'. As in 6:8 and 9:1-2, so also in 20:1-3 the Satanic realm is shown to be under Christ's authority. In this instance, then, the symbol of the 'key' in the earlier chapters has in a general sense a degree of overlap with its usage in 20:1, though the precise application in each case is different.[114]

A supernatural being with authority of the abyss is mentioned in PGM XIII.169-170.[115] In a similar vein, in a 'magical' procedure heavily influenced by Judaism, there is the phrase 'I call on you who sit over the Abyss, Bythath' (PGM XXXV.1). In Jewish thought, God is not portrayed as restraining demons himself but leaves that to an angel that is designated to perform this task. This is also seen in PGM IV 3007-3086 where at lines 3024-3026 the 'magician' prays, 'Let your irresistible angel descend and imprison the demon flying about.' The use of the definite article with *ἄγγελος* alongside the word *ἀπαραίτητος* (irresistable) in this context refers to a special angel whose task was to oppose the particular demon mentioned in the 'magical' procedure.[116] The angel of 20:1 then 'binds' Satan for a

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[113] Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 562.
[114] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 984.
[115] 'A god appeared; he was given charge of the abyss [of primal waters], for without / him moisture neither increases nor diminishes.' Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, p. 177.
[116] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, pp. 1081-1082. cf. Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament*, p. 17.

period designated as 'a thousand years'. This restraint is the direct result of Christ's resurrection. Beale defines this binding in light of 1:18 and 3:7-8 and the indication would then be that at this point Satan no longer has authority over the realm of the dead as he did prior to the resurrection of Jesus. Satan himself is now under the Messianic authority of the risen Christ.

H. Summary

The initial purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not there was any validity to the claim made by Aune that this passage provides evidence that supports his thesis that the Apocalypse of John was devised as 'an extensive and creative anti-magical polemic' in order to nullify the revelatory claims of the 'pagan' competitors of Christian prophets.[117] In terms of a 'magical' world view, if someone could be labelled as a 'magician' they themselves would be discredited and therefore their influence would be eroded, at least in most circles. In the context of the social conflict that took place between the messengers bearing the message of Christ and the remainder of the Graeco-Roman world this could prove to be a valuable tool in the social conflict that took place as Christianity became successful in Asia Minor.[118] 'Magic' was indeed a label that could be used to discredit those to whom it was appended. Downing is of the opinion that in the world where the Christian movement began there was no widespread belief in either 'magic' or 'miracle'.[119] This seems to indicate that in his view at least, there would be no reason to combat something that was in reality not a threat in the first instance.

Downing's perspective certainly does not appear to be borne out by the evidence from antiquity. To the contrary, despite the widespread prohibitions against 'magic' in the ancient world, it is said to have flourished.[120] Pliny the Elder's writings also vehemently

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[117] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", pp. 481-501.
[118] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, pp. 4-5.
[119] Downing, "Magic and Scepticism in and Around the First Christian Century", p. 86.
[120] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 11.

disagree with this assessement as he states that '...it ('magic') has exercised the greatest influence in every country and in nearly every age. And no one can be surprised at the extent of its influence and authority, when he reflects that by its own energies it has embraced, and thoroughly amalgamated with itself the three other sciences which hold the greatest sway upon the mind of man.'[121] From what has been discussed in this chapter there seems to have been a major concern with who, or what, held the power of death and controlled the realm of the dead.

In light of the evidence that has been investigated in this work, it is highly probable that John would have been fully aware that many in his audience would indeed have perceived that he was indicating that Jesus Christ was superior to Hekate. This positive affirmation of the cosmic power held by Christ would clearly place him in a position above any potential adversaries. Due to the widespread, prevalent and prominent positioning of the goddess Hekate along with her association with Hades', 'keys' and cosmic credentials it seems that the points highlighted by John are probably targeted to counter her influence.

It should be noted that John makes these statements to counter Hekate in an extraordinarily creative fashion without going outside the contextual bounds of the Jewish writings. He is immensely imaginative in drawing elements from these documents and using them to powerfully counter any possibility of a rivalry from Hekate or indeed from amongst any of the panoply of Graeco-Roman gods. At the same time as he demonstrates the superiority of Christ over these rivals he also powerfully intensifies perceptions of the deity of Christ. He thus is able to silence any potential adversary of Christ that might come from outside a Jewish context as well as dealing decisively with any who might seek to deny in any fashion the deity of Christ. Despite the fact that Aune fails to acknowledge the fact that John draws upon Jewish sources for his concepts of the gates of Hades, Aune does make a

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[121] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, 30.31.

strong argument for accepting that John has Hekate in mind as he composes 1:18 and the other passages related to it. This would then seem to lend considerable credence to Aune's supposition that John wrote the Apocalypse as an 'anti-magical polemic'.

6. Passages That Use *Ταχύ*

A. Introduction

The phrase 'I am coming quickly' (*ἔρχομαι ταχύ*) occurs 5 times in the Apocalypse (Revelation 2:16; 3:11; 22:7; 22:12; 22:20). Aune contends that John's usage of the term *ταχύ* is yet another instance of his turning the tables on contemporary 'magical' practice by placing the promise to come 'quickly' upon the lips of the risen Jesus. John, according to Aune, adds the adverb 'quickly' in order to make his parody of 'magical' practice obvious to his readers.[1] He claims that, 'The ritual impatience of magicians is well known.'[2] This is demonstrated, in part, due to the reality that a number of spells and invocations of the *Greek Magical Papyri* incorporate a range of variations on the formula *ἤδη ἤδη, ταχύ ταχύ* ('now, now! quickly, quickly!).[3] This same type of impatience can also accompany invocations to a god or a demon invoking it to 'come' or to 'appear' quickly.[4]

B. Investigation

Ἔρχομαι, in the current context, represents what some scholars have described as an 'oracular' or 'prophetic' present. This type of usage employs a present tense verb modified by *ταχύ* ('quickly'), imparting a sense of the imminent expectation of fulfilment and a heightened sense of urgency.[5] *Ταχύ* is the neuter singular accusative of the adjective *ταχύς*. The accusative case is the most common case used to form adverbs.[6] The general meaning of this expression can be perceived by noting that it has a meaning that is the opposite of

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[1] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 493.
[2] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 493. He repeats this assertion in a somewhat modified form in his more recent work. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1184.
[3] PGM III.123-124; IV.1593 f., 1924, 2037, 2098; VII.248; 259; 331f; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1184.
[4] PGM I.89ff.; IV.236ff.; VI.14; VII.247ff.; 331ff.
[5] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 493; Nigel Turner, 'Syntax', vol. 3, ed. James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), p. 63; F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, A Translation and Revision of the 9th-10th German edition incorporating supplementary notes of A. Debrunner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 168.
[6] A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville TN: Broadman Press, 1934), pp. 487-488; 294-299.

βραδέως ('slowly'). The double usage of *ταχὺ* to create the formulation *ταχὺ ταχὺ* is commonly found in incantation texts.[7] The earliest of these extant texts, originates in the 2nd century C.E.[8]

Ταχύ occurs in a number of ancient texts (some as early as the 9th century B.C.E.), with the meaning of 'swift', 'quickly', 'swiftly', in 'haste' 'soon' and 'speedily'.[9] In the work *Lysistrata*, by Aristophanes (5th to 4th century B.C.E.), the phrase *ταχὺ γὰρ ἔρχομαι*[10] occurs in simple dialogue that expresses the sense of, 'I will come straight away'.[11] This appears to be one of only two instances where *ταχύ* is used with a verb in the first person, outside of the Apocalypse.[12] *Ταχύ* also occurs in the early Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures,[13] the New Testament,[14] the Pseudepigrapha,[15] Josephus,[16] and in the Apostolic Fathers, [17] but it is not used in conjunction with a first person verb in the manner found in the Apocalypse: this category of usage is quite rare in existing ancient literature.

Most commentators think the term *ταχύ* simply reflects an expectation of the imminent return of Christ.[18] Beasley-Murray, though not accepting that this expression has any relationship at all to 'magical' practice, agrees with Aune that *ταχύ* is not simply

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[7] *Papyri Hawara* 312:8-9. PGM III.123-124; IV.1593f., 1924, 2037, 2098; VII.248; 259; 331f.
[8] Ulrich Wilcken, ed., *Archiv Für Papyrusforschung und Verwandte Gebiete, Fünfter Band* (Leipzig and Berlin: Verlag Von B. G. Teubner, 1913), p. 393.
[9] Homer, *Iliad*, 13:249; Plato, *Statesman*, 279c; *Euthyphro* 7b, c; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.13.1; Pindar, *Olympian Odes* I:108; *Pythian Odes*, X:51; *Nemean Odes*, I:51; Sophocles *Philoctetes* 349; Xenephon, *Anabasis*, 2:3:6,8; *Hellenica* 3.4.14; 5:4:6; *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten* 10799; *P.Mich.* 204; *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 2599; *The Tebtunis Papyri* 592; *The Rendel Harris Papyri of Woodbrooke College, Birmingham* 151.
[10] Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 935.
[11] Jeffrey Henderson, trans. and ed., *Aristophanes; Birds; Lysistrata; Women at the Thesmophoria*, Loeb Classical Library Series, 179 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), Line 935.
[12] The other is *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten* 12.10799 which dates from 24 B.C.E. –14C.E.
[13] Gen. 27:20; Ex. 32:8; De. 9:12; Jud. –B 2:17; 9:54; Jud.-A 2:17; 2 Sam. 17:16; Ps. 36:2; 68:18; 78:8; 101:3; 137:3; 142:7; Pr. 20:25; Qoh. 8:11; Isa. 5:26; 8:23; 13:22; 32:4; 49:17; 51:5; 58:8; Jer. 30:13; 2 Mac. 3:31; 7:37; 3 Mac. 2:20; 4 Mac. 4:5; Sir. 6:7; 6:19; 19:4; 48:20.
[14] Matt. 5:25; 28:7; 28:8; Mark 9:39; Luke 15:22; John 11:29; Rev. 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7; 22:12; 22:20.
[15] 1 En. 97:10.
[16] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 7:394.
[17] 1 Clem. 23:5; Hermas, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandate 9:7.
[18] Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 146; Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 77; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 107; Brighton, *Revelation*, p. 94; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 142.

indicative of the final 'coming' of Jesus.[19] Aune and Beasley-Murray argue that not all five occurrences of the phrase *ἔρχομαι ταχύ*, (2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20; cf. 16:15) carry the same meaning. Thus, according to Aune two different kinds of coming are being referred to by this terminology. While in 22:7, 12, and 20 (cf. 16:15), the verb *ἔρχεσθαι* may very well denote the *parousia*, in 2:16 and 3:11 it occurs amongst statements that anticipate a retribution that precedes the final and decisive judgment of the Christ.[20]

The distinction being highlighted by Aune and Beasley-Murray is that the judgement of Christ described by John is indicative of something that is of imminent importance to his original audience. The urgency in 2:16 is something that is specific to a current situation that exists in Pergamum. The situation in 3:11 relates to a definite set of circumstances that are currently of consequence to the readership in Philadelphia. The difference in the meaning highlighted by Beasley-Murray and Aune, as opposed to the explanation given by most other interpeters, is considerable. The references to Christ 'coming' have in view an immediacy that would compel the churches to take an urgent account of their activities: they will have to reckon with the presence of the risen Christ very soon. Revelation 3:19 highlights this central point: Jesus wants to save those who are the original audience.[21] John is not forecasting some event that may occur in the far distant future. He is calling upon the churches currently being address by the Apocalypse to repent immediately.

Aune makes the assertion that from the perspective of his readers, John deliberately made use of a term that would have been seen as characteristic of 'magical' practitioners. Despite this contention, Aune presents no conclusive proof that John was making use of a term (*ταχύ*) that would have been recognised by his readers as characteristic of 'magical' practitioners. The examples referred to by Aune to demonstrate his supposition originate

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[19] G. R. Beasley-Murray, "The Eschatology of the Fourth Gospel," *Evangelical Quarterly* (1946): pp. 97-108; G. R. Beasley-Murray, "The Relation of the Fourth Gospel to the Apocalypse," *Evangelical Quarterly* (1946): pp. 173-186; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 188-189.
[20] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 188-189.
[21] Rev. 3:19 'Whoever I love, I censure and I discipline; therefore be earnest and repent.'

from a time that is later than the composition of the Apocalypse. It may be that this same type of usage was also common in the 1st century C.E., and before, but Aune is not able to find any literary evidence to corroborate this supposition. Nevertheless, the rarity of the expression, and its frequent usage in the Apocalypse by John intimates that special attention should be given to this appellation.

It could be that interpreters utilizing a very strict definition of 'magic' would conceivably have their understanding hampered by the subtlety of a number of references in Revelation, including this one. It is perhaps conceivable that a meaning that would have been easily comprehensible to a 1st century audience, could be obscured by the perceptual parameters engaged by a contemporary mindset. Fortunately, to Aune's great credit he is often able to focus on 1st century assumptions about what comprised the category designated as 'magic', and he is able to hold taxonomic questions in abeyance to a degree that allows him to illuminate passages that are often obscured by more modern prejudiced assumptions.[22]

If Aune is correct in his suggestion that John uses *ταχύ* to parody either real, or contemplated practices, amongst the members of the audience of the Apocalypse, we may then infer that John used *ταχύ* in order to emphasise Jesus was fully cognisant of this circumstance. If one follows Aune's reasoning for putting this term on the lips of the risen Jesus, in the manner in which he does (i.e. single usage of *ταχύ*), John has Jesus anticipate a potential problem amongst the readers. The single, rather than the double usage of *ταχύ* then reflects a way for John to take issue with both the thoughts and the actions of his audience. He does this in a manner that does not give credibility to any beliefs that they may hold with regard to the power of other gods or spiritual forces. Had John used the complete phrase (i.e. as it occurs in the *Greek Magical Papyri*) it might have been perceived as signifying that

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[22] Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, p. 125, N. 100.

these words were terms that did convey a power that was permissible to those amongst the readership. This could then have promoted this type of practice, rather than discouraged it.

C. Summary

What can be said is that the adverb *ταχύ* when combined with the verb *ἔρχομαι*, as in Rev. 22:7, 12, 20, does function to increase the sense of urgency associated with the anticipated return of Christ.[23] This coming, according to Reddish, should not simply be generalised in such a way as to refer to the presence of Christ in the lives of believers throughout history; it refers to an impending act of judgement.[24] From an original audience oriented perspective, Aune's position is that John uses the phrase *ἔρχομαι ταχύ* to demonstrate that Jesus is more powerful than any other force that his audience might call upon. Despite the fact that Aune's initial proposal relies upon an assumption based upon materials from the 2nd and 3rd century C.E., it has provided an impetus for a more detailed examination of this term. Though it is not possible to prove that *ταχύ* was definitely used in the same fashion as it is to be found in later centuries, it seems highly probable.

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[23] Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 497-498; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 782; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1184.
[24] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 424.

7. Spirits Like Frogs

A. Revelation 16:13, Why Frogs?

Καὶ εἶδον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ δράκοντος καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα ὡς βάτραχοι. The deceptive influence of the three characters that form the evil triumvirate (the dragon, the beast and the false prophet) in chapter 16 is portrayed in terms of three 'unclean spirits', one from each of the individuals.[1] This sentence, in fact, lacks a main verb. According to Aune, the verb that must be supplied is 'to emerge' since it is clearly implied that an 'unclean spirit' that resembled a frog emanated from the mouth of each of these three figures (dragon, beast, and false prophet). The question is, why portray them as frogs? Traditional connections between 'evil spirits' and the mouth or nostrils[2] probably explain why these 'unclean spirits' emerge from the mouth. Reddish perceives it as strange that John has depicted the 'unclean' (*ἀκάθαρτος*) spirits as such benign creatures, as *βάτραχοι*. It might be anticipated that a hideous, loathsome, or dangerous creature might be more appropriate than a 'frog' to depict these representations of evil.[3]

Charles dismisses this imagery completely, by taking the term *ὡς βάτραξοι* as a marginal gloss subsequently inserted into the text. He advocates the removal of the word in order to restore the original reading. Instead of *ὡς βάτραχοι* the text should read *ὡς βατράχους* according to Charles.[4] There is, however, some prececedent for this apparent anomaly in the translation of the Jewish scriptures into Greek; as both Aune and Muraoka have noted,[5] the translators have abandoned the regular case form of the noun following *ὡς* in several

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[1] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 831.
[2] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 894.
[3] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 309.
[4] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John,* vol. 2, pp. 47-48.
[5] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 858. cf. Takamitsu Muraoka, "The use of ΩΣ in the Greek Bible," *Novum Testamentum* 7 (1964/1965): pp. 51-72, esp. 58.

instances, as at Deuteronmy 10:3[6] and *1 Maccabees* 11:1.[7] It is also of note that in the text of Symmachus, at Hosea 12:12, the words *ὡς βάτραχοι* (also in the nominative case) are substituted for the Hebrew כגלים (as heaps).[8] The suggestion by Charles, that *ὡς βάτραχοι* is secondary to the text, also fails to acknowledge sufficiently that this reading is very well attested among the ancient manuscripts; moreover, the reading *ὡς βάτραχοι* is the *lectio difficilior* due to the use of the nominative case. The substantive introduced by *ὡς* should normally be in the same case as the substantive that is modified by the *ὡς* clause (i.e. *πνεύματα*). The more correct reading would then be *ὡς βατράχους*.[9]

B. Background of the 'Frog' in Antiquity

In ancient Egypt, the frog is associated with a figure known as Heqet, a deity noted for providing assistance to women in childbirth.[10] There were also several other primeval gods related to the watery slime of chaos, from where creative matter was thought to have originated. These male gods had frog-heads. A number of other Egyptian gods and goddesses had some connection with the frog; these included Isis, one of whose emblems was a frog. In Egypt, however, the frog primarily symbolised fertility.[11] Prigent argues that John would not have drawn upon frog symbolism from Egypt since this animal signified the life that begins again beyond death.[12] In contrast to Prigent's view, however, one can note that the only reference to 'frogs' in the Jewish scriptures is negative, and it is associated with

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[6] *ἐλάξευσα τὰς δύο πλάκας λιθίνας ὡς αἱ πρῶται* [for *τὰς πρώτας*].
[7] *ἤθροισεν δυνάμεις πολλὰς ὡς ἡ ἄμμος ἡ* [for *τὴν ἄμμον τὴν*] *παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τῆς θαλάσσης*
[8] Fridericus Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum,* vol. 2 (Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendianio, 1875), p. 960.
[9] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 857-858.
[10] W. S. McCullough, "Frog," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* vol. 2, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 326.
[11] Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 204-205.
[12] Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, trans. Wendy Pradels (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), p. 471.

the second plague of Egypt.[13] Thus an Egyptian source for this imagery should not be discounted too hastily, a point which will be addressed more fully later.

Another background for the frogs in 16:13 has been found in Zoroastrianism. Charles notes that frogs were regarded as agents of Ahriman (Angra Mainyu) and served as the source of plagues and death.[14] Ahriman, the evil spirit who dwelt in endless darkness, was in conflict with Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) who dwelt in the region of endless light. The mythology recounts that the long period of struggle between these two figures would ultimately end with the defeat of Ahriman and his evil servants, many of whom would then be cast into hell, so that the whole universe would be renovated.[15] 'Noxious creatures' such as frogs acted as agents of Ahriman and his demons when he attacked the earth.[16] There is also a threat in Zoroastrian writings that if anyone killed the three-headed demonic spirit Azhi Dahaka, this demon would then retaliate by releasing swarms of snakes, scorpions, and frogs.[17]

In the Graeco-Roman world the frog was associated with the goddess Latona who, being desperately thirsty, approached a small lake where she was hindered from drinking by 'Lycian peasants' whom she then transformed into frogs (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.343-385; 8 C. E.). An additional version of this legend was reported by Antoninus Liberalis, *Metamorphoses* 35 (2^{nd} – 3^{rd} century C. E.), perhaps demonstrating it is more than an isolated account known only in a limited period. The 'frog' was regarded as an animal of the underworld (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 207 [405 B.C.E.]; Juvenal, *Satire* 2.150 [1^{st} and 2^{nd} century C. E.]), as shown by the many sculptures of frogs on buildings, or implements (Pliny the

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[13] H. B. Tristram, *The Natural History of the Bible*, Second ed. Rev. and corrected ed. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1868), p. 280.
[14] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John,* vol. 2, p. 47.
[15] *Bundahishn* (9^{th} -10^{th} Century C. E. but reflecting ancient Zoroastrian traditions); Jack Finegan, *Myth and Mystery* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1989), pp. 65-70.
[16] Brighton, *Revelation*, p. 421. N. 418; Finegan, *Myth and Mystery*, pp. 66-68.
[17] *Bundahishn* 3:15; *Vendidad,* Fargard 5:36; 14:5; Plutarch, *The Iside et Osiride*, 46; Rist and Hough, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," p. 485.

Elder, *The Natural History* 37.4 [1st century C. E.]) made from a variety of substances having 'magical', i.e. apotropaic significance. In addition, 'frogs' were associated with Apollo as fortune-tellers from the 1st and 2nd Century C. E. (Plutarch, *De Pythiae Oraculis* 12; *Morals* 13.164a).[18]

There are some indications that 'frogs' were used in mystic practices in Egypt as is indicated by recipes found in PGM XXXVI.231-255[19] and 320-332.[20] Some erotic spells also made use of creatures such as frogs and snakes, along with materials gathered in graveyards.[21] The dating of the material that makes up these texts is notoriously difficult, but the *Greek Magical Papyri* that the above texts are taken from are generally dated to the 4th century C.E., though it is possible that they, in turn, reflect a much earlier tradition.[22]

Other explanations have also been suggested. One of particular interest is found in a sentence by Artemidore of Epheius (or Daldianus, 2nd Century C. E.) in which 'frogs' are said to signify *γόητας καὶ βωμολόχους* (sorcerers and altar thieves).[23] This passage, at first glance, appears to be a substantive piece of evidence for a possible Greek source for the imagery. This text, however, loses some of its attractiveness, as it remains unique. It comes from a key to dreams composed in the 2nd century C.E., and can be explained by the fact that

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[18] Christian Hünemörder, "Frog," in *Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World New Pauly*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), pp. 560-562.

[19] 'Take a lead lamella and inscribe with a bronze stylus the following names and the figure, and after smearing it with blood from a bat, roll up the lamella in the usual fashion. / Cut open a frog and put it into its stomach. After stitching it up with Anubian thread and a bronze needle, hang it up on a reed from your property by means of hairs from the tip of the tail of a black ox, / at the east of the property near the rising of the sun.... "supreme angels, just as this frog drips with blood and dries up, so also will the body of him, NN / whom NN bore, because I conjure you, who are in command of fire MASKELLI MASKELLŌ" (add the other usual items).' R. F. Hock, trans., ed. "PGM XXXVI.231-55," in Book *PGM XXXVI.231-55*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996), pp. 274-275.

[20] '**A Contraceptive, the only one in the world:** Take as many bittervetch seeds as you want for the number of years you wish to remain sterile. Steep them in the menses of a menstruating woman. Let her steep them in her own genitals. And take a frog / that is alive and throw the bittervetch seeds into its mouth so that the frog swallows them, and release the frog alive at the place where you captured him....' John Scarborough, trans., ed. "PGM XXXVI.320-32," in Book *PGM XXXVI.320-32*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz, vol. 1, 2nd ed., p. 277.

[21] John J. Winkler, "The Constraints of Eros," in *Magika Hiera*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 231, 242. N. 102.

[22] Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. xxiv.

[23] Artemidore of Epheius (or Daldianus), *Oneirocritica*, 2:15. cf. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, pp. 471-472.

numerous authors refer to frogs in association with the river Styx: it is an animal from the depths.[24] The work that contains this reading is an exhaustive catalogue, which provides interpretive keys to the images that have been seen in dreams.

C. The Frog in a Jewish Context

Though the history of 'frog' symbolism in antiquity is of some interest, and may ultimately have lent some additional impetus to the diabolical nature of the imagery used by John, it is perhaps preferable to look to a more immediate and economical source as having furnished the imagery in 16:13. That source is associated with the plagues of the bowls which are modelled upon the plagues of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Of particular note for the present discussion is the plague of frogs (Exodus 8:1 ff.; Psalm 78:45; 105:30; *Wisdom of Solomon* 19:10). In the same way that the locusts of the Exodus account served as a model for the supernatural locusts of Revelation 9:1-12, the frogs of the Nile may well have been the inspiration for these demonic frogs at Revelation 16:13. This possibility becomes all the more likely given the view of 'frogs' in Jewish tradition as 'unclean' creatures.[25]

According to Leviticus 11:10, '...everything which does not have a fin or a scale ... they are detestable to you'.[26] Beale also finds a link between these *ἀκάθαρτα* 'spirits' and Babylon's 'deceptive immorality'. This 'deceptive immorality' implies an association between the 'unclean frogs' and idolatry, at 17:4 (*ἀκάθαρτα*), and in 18:2-3 (*ἀκαθάρτου*), which is also linked with Babylon's deceptive nature at 14:8. The same connection is then made with the term *κοινόν* ('unclean') in 21:27: Babylon is described as the 'dwelling place of demons and a haunt of every unclean (*ἀκαθάρτου*) spirit and a haunt of every unclean (*ἀκαθάρτου*) bird [and a haunt of every unclean beast] and hateful thing'. These Babylonian

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[24] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, pp. 471-472.
[25] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 471.
[26] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 309.

spirits deceive people into the worship of idols. The association of *ἀκάθαρτα ... βάτραχοι* with idolatry is implied in 17:4, where Babylon holds in her hand a cup filled with *Βδελυγαμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.* The word *πορνεία* is here a reference to idolatry according to Beale, and the 'frogs' are associated with Babylon in the same way.[27] Beale is surely correct in these assertions.

D. 'Unclean Spirits'

There is an extensive history of belief in the existence of evil spirits and 'ghosts' with powers that are able to bring about disease, sickness, and other maladies in daily life of the people from the Near East. These beliefs stretch back into the time of the Sumerians who believed in three distinct classes of evil spirits, all of which were ready to torment the hapless 'wanderer'. The first type of evil spirit was the disembodied human soul, which could not find rest and wandered from place to place. The second type of evil spirit consisted of hybrid spirits, which were half-human and half-demon. The third group was composed of the demons or devils that were 'of the same nature as the gods' and who rode upon the noxious winds that bring storms and pestilence. Beliefs of this sort migrated with the Semitic peoples wherever they travelled.[28]

The Greek term *δαιμόνιον* originally meant 'divine being' with the distinction between *δαιμόνιον* and *θεός* being unclear in early texts.[29] By the later Hellenistic period, however, there was a clear distinction made between *θεός* and *δαιμόνιον* with the term *δαιμόνιον* being used of an 'evil spirit'.[30] In the New Testament, as well as in other texts written in Greek, the

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[27] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 831-832.
[28] R. Campbell Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia*, vol. 1, Luzac's Semitic Text and Translation Series, vol. 14 (London: Luzac and Co., 1903), pp. XXI-XXV.
[29] Liddell and Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, pp. 365-366. s.v. δαίμων; Eric Sorensen, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 157 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), pp. 75-117; Jonathan Z. Smith, "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1978), pp. 425-439.
[30] Sorensen, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, pp. 80-84; G. J. Riley, "Demon," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 445-455.

δαιμόνιον is revealed as a being that enters into persons causing illness, with the widespread conception being that deserted places were the common habitation of the *δαιμόνιον* (Revelation 18:2; cf. Luke 11:24). In the first century C.E. it was a widespread Jewish-Christian perspective that such beings were worshipped by other nations,[31] including the Persians and Babylonians, and that they were thought to be capable of performing miracles.[32]

The word *δαιμόνιον* can also serve as an equivalent for the phrase *ἀκάθαρτος πνεῦμα*.[33] However, Louw and Nida caution against the tendency to accept the implication that *πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον* is simply a reference to 'dirty demons'. It is important to recognise that the term *ἀκάθαρτον* highlights that such a spirit makes the individual 'ritually or ceremonially unclean.' It then follows that a *πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον* is equivalent in a number of languages to 'a contaminating spirit.'[34] Such a spirit contaminates whatever it touches and is thus to be avoided by those having a desire to maintain ritual purity.[35]

Prigent notes the fact that 'demonic spirits' and 'unclean spirits' may be considered equivalent expressions for the same entities, as is the case in Luke 4:33. These beings have the ability to work wonders, as, for example, occurred with the 'magicians' of Egypt who used demonic spirits when they responded to the wonders performed by Moses.[36] Aune points out that the plural genitive (*δαιμονίων*) used at 16:14, which is an adjective used as a substantive, can be either a descriptive genitive, or a genitive of apposition. Aune rightly

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[31] Ps. 95:5 (Greek) *ὅτι πάντες οἱ θεοὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν δαιμόνια,...*;Deut. 32:16-17; Ps. 106:36-37; *Jub.* 1:11; 11:4-6; 22:16-17; *1 Enoch* 19:1; 99:7; *T. Judah* 23:1-2; 1 Cor. 10:20; Rev. 9:20; Riley, "Demon," pp. 451-454.
[32] Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, p. 163; James D. G. Dunn and Graham H. Twelftree, "Demon-Possession and Exorcism in The New Testament," *Churchman* 94 (1980): pp. 210-225.
[33] Liddell and Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 365; s.v. δαιμόνιον; Arndt and Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 169. s. v. δαιμόνιον.
[34] Louw and Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1, pp. 146-147. cf. Sorensen, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 128; David George Reese, "Demons, New Testament," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 140-142; Riley, "Demon," p. 453; Smith, "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity," pp. 425-439.
[35] Though Wahlen would seem to disagree with this assessment, I do not find his arguments in this area to be compelling. Clinton Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 185 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).
[36] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 472. In the Greek translation of Exod. 8:3 the Egyptian magicians (*φαρμακείαις*) use incantations (*ἐπαοιδοί*) to bring up frogs on the land. In the Damascus Document at 5:17-19 Jannes and his brother are said to have been raised up by Belial. cf. John 10:21.

concludes that the genitive is used in this context in an appositional manner[37] to clarify to the audience the precise meaning of the phrase 'unclean spirits', which is Semitic terminology, while the term *δαιμονίων* is primarily a Hellenistic term.[38] John appears to be using both the Semitic and equivalent Hellenistic terminology to ensure that his audience does not misunderstand his intent.

As was noted earlier, the magicians in Egypt at the time of Moses were able to replicate the first plague. They were also able to reproduce the second plague (of frogs), with the assistance of demons according to some Jewish traditions.[39] Then the evil trio of the Apocalypse go on to deceive people and perform signs in the context of the bowl plagues.

E. Revelation 16:14

We will now explore the immediate context of 16:13, by analyzing 16:14. The initial clause *εἰσὶν γάρ*, introduces an explicit interpretation of the 'unclean spirits like frogs' from verse 13. As noted above, it seems best to take the phrase *δαιμόνιον πνεῦμα* as appositional, though Beale sees very little difference in meaning between the two possibilities (descriptive = 'demonic spirits' or appositional = 'spirits that are demons'). Elsewhere, there is an association between demons and the world's idolatrous system (Revelation 9:20; 18:2-3; 1 Corinthians 10:20-21).[40] According to Davis, the frog plague in Egypt was in part, a polemic

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[37] At *PGM* XV.15-16, the plural genitive is also appositional. The phrase *δαιμόνιον πνεῦμα* also occurs in other 'magical' texts: *PGM* IV 3038-3039, 3065-3066, 3075. cf. *Adolf Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton Publishers, 1927), pp. 252-263; G. Adolf Deissmann, Bible Studies: Contributions, Chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions, to the History of the Language, the Literature, and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity, trans. Alexander Grieve (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1903), pp. 273-300; Albert-Marie Denis, Apocalypsis Henochi Graece, vol. 3, Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamentis Graece (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), pp. 236-238.* However, in *PGM* IV 3081 the terms *πνεῦμα καὶ δαιμόνιον* refer to different types of spiritual beings. This may, however, reflect the fact that the magician wishes to be inclusive of all spiritual beings.

[38] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 895.

[39] Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold, vol. 2 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 350. cf. Stephen D. Ricks, "The Magician as Outsider in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), pp. 136-137; Jacob Milgrom, "Magic, Monotheism, and the Sin of Moses," in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), pp. 251-265.

[40] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 833.

against Heqet, the goddess of resurrection who was represented by a frog.[41] The deceptive activity of the 'evil triumvirate' of chapter 16, is portrayed as froglike. The rationale for this portrayal of the frogs from Exodus, according to Beale, is based, in part, upon the biblical evaluation that behind false gods and idols there are demons. In the Masoretic Text of Hosea 12:12 there is a reference to idolatrous 'altars ...like the stone heaps beside the furrows of the field.'[42] In the text of Symmachus the words *ὡς βάτραχοι* are substituted for the Hebrew כגלים (as heaps).[43]

According to Beale, the substitution of 'frogs' in the text of Symmachus implies that the idolatrous altars in Gilgal are considered both as unclean and as part of a deceptive system of worship. Consistent with this interpretation is the first part of Hosea 12:12, in the Old Greek and Theodotion, which refers to those who are sacrificing on such altars, as *ψευδεῖς*. Perhaps it is no coincidence that allusion is being made to the exodus from Egypt in Hosea 12:9, 13.[44] Of interest also, is that in Assyria the frog was used as a substitutionary offering in the religious cult.[45] In a great variety of ways there seem to be connections between the 'frog' in antiquity and idolatry and religious practice that would have been regarded as 'unclean' and perverse to those from a Jewish background.

The 'demons'in chapter 16 perform signs (*ποιοῦντα σημεῖα*), activity which links them further with the deceptive agents of chapter 13. It is of special note that these 'spirits' are associated with the activity of the second beast or 'false prophet', at 13:13 where his work is described as *ποιεῖ σημεῖα*. Then again at 19:20 the activity of *ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης* is described in terms of *ὁ ποιήσας τὰ σημεῖα*. At 16:14 these 'spirits', the ones *ποιοῦντα σημεῖα*, go out to

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[41] John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1971), p. 108.
[42] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 833. cf. pp. 515-516 for a discussion of the metaphorical usage of animals to denote deception.
[43] Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum,* vol. 2, p. 960.
[44] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 834.
[45] E. Ebeling, "Frosch," in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, ed. E. Ebeling, et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1957-1971), p. 118.

gather the 'kings of the whole world'. Beale, along with others, argue that the specific task of the 'evil spirits' is to deceive the 'kings of the whole earth'.[46] Beale then goes on to postulate that the plague of 'frogs in Exodus was the first of the plagues to actually affect the king. The three frog spirits of the Apocalypse then go on to assemble the 'kings of the earth'.[47] Therefore, he perceives a connection between the frogs affecting the Pharaoh in Exodus and the frogs affecting the kings in Revelation. This may be stretching the evidence.

Beale points out that in the early Greek translation of Psalm 104:30, only the 'kings' were struck by the plague of 'frogs' in Egypt.[48] It is quite apparent that there is some form of allusion to the plagues of Egypt in the narrative of Revelation regarding the seven bowl plagues.[49] There is also a connection in 16:13 ff. between the 'unclean spirits' and *σημεῖα* that are particularly associated with the one designated as *ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης*. The indication in the context of the Apocalypse is that the three figures in 16:13 ff. are able to perform their designated tasks, designed to deceive those not following Christ by means of 'unclean spirits'. There may be a connection with the tradition that the 'magicians' that opposed Moses and God's people at the time of the Exodus did so by the power of demonic spirits.

F. Summary

At the beginning of this discussion, an exploration of why John portrayed these 'unclean spirits' as frogs was set as an aim. In particular, it was noted that Charles wished to excise *ὡς βάτραχοι* from the text, but the textual evidence is very much in favour of retaining it. Following on from this initial exploration, an examination of the manner in which the 'frog' was conceived of in antiquity produces a number of points. From an Egyptian

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[46] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 834; Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 310; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 592; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 492-493.
[47] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 834. Exod. 8:3-4; cf. Ps. 105:30.
[48] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 834.
[49] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 902-903; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 2, pp. 40-48; Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 306-310; Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 576-593; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 482-493; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, pp. 460-472; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 814-834; Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 259-275.

perspective, it appears that the 'frog' was associated with a number of deities and with the concept of life beyond death. Prigent indicates that on this basis Egypt should be excluded as a potential source for this imagery.[50] It must, however, be recognised that the only mention of 'frogs' in the text of the Jewish scriptures is in relation to the plagues of Egypt. This is especially of note because the 'bowls' section of the Apocalypse is particularly reliant upon the plagues sequence from the exodus.[51]

In Zoroastrianism and in the Hellenistic context the 'frog' is related to evil, physical transformations, death, the underworld and the demonic. This background may have contributed to the imagery's dark contextualisation, but it seems almost certain that the imagery is drawn primarily from the background of the Jewish exodus from Egypt. A connection is made, rightly I think, with the concepts of deception and idolatry associated with the imagery of the Babylon of the Apocalypse. The connection to the plagues of Egypt leads one to perhaps conceive of an association between the three adversaries opposed to the people of God in the Apocalypse and the 'magicians' who opposed God's people in the time of the Exodus.

There is also reference made to a connection with *ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης*, a matter which is addressed in more detail in the section dealing with *ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης*. In view of this it seems highly probable that John regards the deceptive forces that oppose God's people on earth as directed and empowered by the spiritual forces allied with Satan. The signs and miracles, that the agents of evil perform, are achieved through the power of these dark forces. John does not deny the reality of the miracles, nor does he question the power behind the miracles; nonetheless, he does deem these powers and miracles to be in opposition to God and his people. The type of power accessed by this evil triumvirate would be considered by many

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[50] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 471.
[51] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 902-903; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 2, pp. 40-48; Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 306-310; Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 576-593; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 482-493; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, pp. 460-472; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 814-834; Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 259-275.

modern authors as 'magical' practice.[52] It is apparent that John perceives of these powers as a threat to the purity of God's people and that he seeks to warn his readers regarding their nature, and ultimately to point out the consquences of following such powers. This would certainly seem to indicate that, at least in this literary context, John is seeking, in a very polemic fashion, to warn his audience regarding the true nature of the conflict that they face.

[52] Cf. Introduction on the definition of 'magic'.

Reorientation of Imagery

8. Seals

In this section, we will examine imagery that is not directly condemned by John, but appears to be reoriented in such a manner as to lend it a positive aspect.

A. 'Seals' and 'Sealing' in the Apocalypse

Σφραγίς and its cognates occur 32 times in the text of the New Testament. The concept of the 'seal' along with the action of 'sealing' are extraordinarily prominent in the annals of the Apocalypse with three Greek terms[1] being used to denote this conceptual arena. *Σφραγίς*,[2] and its cognates, occur a total of twenty-two times in the Apocalypse, and its usage spans the breadth of the book.[3] In order to assist in understanding the possible range of meaning for this concept an exploration of the history of 'seals' and 'sealing' will be undertaken.

B. History of the 'Seal'

I. History in Early Mesopotamia and Egypt

'For seven thousand years the act of sealing has guaranteed authenticity, marked ownership, indicated participation in legal transactions, and protected goods against theft'.[4] Seals served as a legal protection and a guarantee, by marking the item sealed as the property of the seal's owner.[5] The protective nature of seals imbued them with an amuletic value, which offered an element of protection to the rightful owner or wearer of the 'seal'.[6] The origin of sealing to mark ownership probably goes back to the very ancient custom of

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[1] *κατασφραγίζω*, *σφραγίς*, and *σφραγίζω*.
[2] *σφραγίζω*.
[3] Rev. 5:1, 2, 5, 9; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 7:2; 3, 4, 5, 8; 8:1; 9:4; 10:4; 20:3; 22:10.
[4] Dominique Collon, *Near Eastern Seals* (London: British Museum Publications, 1990), p. 11.
[5] G. Fitzer, "σφραγίς," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 940-941; Beatrice Laura Goff, *Symbols of Prehistoric Mesopotamia* (New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 195-211.
[6] Dominique Collon, *First Impressions Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East* (London: British Museum Press, 1987), p. 113.

marking animals and people (slaves) by notching, slitting or branding them.[7] One instance of this is recorded in the Aramaic Papyri found at Elephantine (28:4), where a slave is marked with a yod.[8] In Egyptian, the word for 'seal' sometimes can actually have the meaning of an 'amulet', and 'sealing' was a standard feature in what some labelled as 'magical' techniques.[9]

That the gods of Egypt were closely associated with the protective nature of 'seals' may be observed in a hymn that describes the creator god Amon-Re who appears in the role of 'magician' and states that 'Anything harmful is under his seal.' The harmful forces would then be unable to pass this symbol of his divine authority. The gesture of laying the hand upon a patient was sometimes also linked with the act of 'sealing'. An additional aspect of 'sealing' was that a 'magician' or a patient might be 'sealed' in order to prevent harmful forces from entering into their body. The technique of symbolically 'sealing' the seven natural orifices of the body is mentioned in texts of the late 1st millennium B.C.E.[10]

The use of spiritual protection and deliverance from diseases appears to have been widespread from the earliest times. As an infection continued to grow worse, and as a fever lingered, even the sternest critics of the traditional, or 'superstitious', remedies often turned to the use of amulets:[11] one particular example of the use of a 'seal' as an amulet is a gemstone in the Hermitage collection that was used to treat gout.[12] The wearing of a 'seal' also served as a symbolic pledge of allegiance to a god or to a king. Sometimes 'seals' were

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[7] Fitzer, "σφραγίς.", p. 940-941.
[8] A. Cowley, ed., *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 103.
[9] Geraldine Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1994), p. 109.
[10] Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, p. 84.
[11] Roy Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets," in *Magika Hiera Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 107.
[12] Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets", p. 118-119.

simply worn as a means of adornment in much the way people today would wear a cross or a Jewish Star of David.[13]

Another important aspect of 'seals', which were used as amulets, was that by their very existence they could be perceived of as insuring the survival of the deceased's name for all eternity.[14] Along with the more utilitarian uses for 'seals', those used as items of jewellery were often carved from rare or precious stones.[15] Early stamp-seals bear geometric designs. This may have been because the technical skills required to make designs that are more complicated were not yet developed, but it is also possible that there was some form of taboo about representing deities. The earliest 'seals' that represent what is probably a deity, appear on stamp seals, or their impressions from around 3400 B.C.E. They were discovered in Susa, in south-western Iran. Mesopotamia seems to have been slower in its evolution of depicting deities on seals than other locales. There are, however, depictions of processions of figures approaching temples from around 3300 B.C.E., and symbols that are later associated with the goddess Inanna are also prevalent.[16]

II. History of the Seal in the Persian Empire

The Persian Empire was noted for its reliance upon 'seals' in the administration of its government. Lewis notes that there has been some scepticism, which he partly shares, regarding the accuracy of Herodotus' knowledge of Persian institutions, but nonetheless, he notes a single Herodotean story, that if understood fully, he indicates, explains very concisely the manner in which the Persians exercised power through writing. The story recounted by Herodotus is from the time of the rule of Smerdis (or Pseudo-Smerdis, 6th century B.C.E.) in

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[13] Joan Goodnick Westenholz, ed., *Seals and Sealing in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Symposium Held on September 2, 1993 Jerusalem. Israel*, Bible lands Museum Jerusalem Publications No. 1 (Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem, 1995), p. 8.
[14] Carol Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1994), p. 97.
[15] Collon, *Near Eastern Seals*, p. 21.
[16] Collon, *Near Eastern Seals*, p. 43.

the aftermath of ethnic revolts against Persian rule.[17] Oroites, satrap of Sardis, who is most widely known as the murderer of Polycrates of Samos, did nothing to hinder or help either side during this time of conflation. He is accused of disposing of the satrap of Daskyleion, the other western satrapy, and his son. There is also a connection in the minds of some with the disappearance of a messenger sent by Darius, horse and all.[18]

Darius, once in power, wanted vengeance against Oroetes, not least because of his failure to assist the monarchy in quelling the troubles. A military campaign was out of the question as Darius was still in the process of consolidating his power and Oroetes had considerable resources, having at his disposal a thousand Persian spearman. Darius therefore sought to overcome Orestes using cunning, and after a selection process using lots, one Bagaeus, son of Artontes was chosen to perform the task. Bagaeus, once chosen, had written many letters which concerned a variety of matters and then sealed them using Darius' seal, and off he went to Sardis with his sealed letters. He came before Oroetes and he took out a letter and gave it to the royal scribes who attend all governors for them to read.[19]

Bagaeus' intent was to watch the reaction of the spearman to see if they were loyal to the king and might possibly revolt against Oroetes. He noted that they seemed to pay special regard to the rolls themselves. They were even more attentive to the message of the scroll as it was read out. Bagaeus then gave another scroll to the scribe, which had these words written upon it, '"Persians! King Darius forbids you to be Oroetes' guard", which, when the guard heard they lowered their spears before him.'[20] Upon seeing the reaction of the guards, Bagaeus was emboldened to go even further and he passed the last roll across to the scribe to read. These are the words that the scribe read from the scroll: 'King Darius charges the Persians in Sardis to kill Oroetes.' Upon hearing these words, the spearmen drew out their

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[17] D. M. Lewis, "The Persepolis Tablets: speech, seal and script," in *Literacy and power in the ancient world*, ed. Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 17.
[18] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, 3.126-128, 3.126-128.
[19] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, 3.126-128.
[20] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, 3.128.

scimitars and killed Oroetes immediately.[21] In this story Bagaeus does not have to be able to read or write himself, and neither is it necessary for the guards to be able to read or write. The power of the written word carries the authority of the king through the ability to recognise the 'seal' of Darius.[22]

The implication is that in a society that was largely illiterate the 'seal' performed a powerful function in allowing the people to recognise lines of authority and to allow bureaucracy to function. In such a society, not even the top people needed to have the ability to read and write. This was of crucial importance to the Persians as they came down illiterate from the hills in the 6th century B.C.E. and took over a vast empire that needed an enormous bureaucracy in order to operate effectively. It was through the recognition of the 'seal' of an official that those required to implement edicts were able to recognise the source of authority.

III. History of the Seal in Ancient Israel

One of the problems that confronts us today is that much of the material that would have perhaps given a clearer picture of the day by day beliefs of the ancient people that lived in Israel has been deliberately and systematically suppressed. The Jews had many practical as well as theological reasons for keeping secret, information about both the existence and the practices that were considered by some to be unacceptable.[23] Despite the level of secrecy concerning such practices and beliefs, not everything escaped the censors. Josephus records an incident involving a 'seal' (*σφραγῖδι*) with a root attached, that was used to force a demon to leave a man.[24] Ancient Israel, along with the rest of the societies of the Near East, was according to Cryer, a 'magic society'.[25]

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[21] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, 3.128.
[22] Lewis, "The Persepolis Tablets: speech, seal and script," p. 18.
[23] Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 240.
[24] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8:47.
[25] Frederick H. Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and its Near Eastern Environment*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Series 142 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), p. 324.

IV. History of the Seal in the Graeco-Roman World

It has long been recognised that the concept of a spiritual entity possessing a human being by infiltrating the body and securing control is a Semitic concept. This type of demonic, or spiritual control is 'largely foreign' to the Greek thought of classical and Hellenistic times. The Greeks did have a notion of 'dangerous spirits', but even this may have been due to Near Eastern influence.[26] According to Kotansky, the use of some form of apotropaic tactic against malevolent spiritual entities must have been widespread from the earliest times.[27] It is not entirely clear to what extent the early Greeks adopted the practices of their neighbours. It is, however, apparent that written charms were borrowed from the Egyptians and Phoenicians by the colonial Greeks in the process of adapting the Phoenician system of writing to their own use.[28]

The use of incantations occur in some of the earliest of the Greek writings, as in the example of the text where the flow of blood is checked by the use of some form of charm (9th Century B.C.E).[29] A great many inscribed gemstones have survived through the ages, and they indicate the widespread use of these items for amuletic purposes.[30] 'Seals' were used in the Graeco-Roman world in much the same way that they were throughout the remainder of the Near East.

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[26] Roy Kotansky, "Greek Exorcistic Amulets," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 246-247.
[27] Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets," p. 107.
[28] Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets," p. 124-125.
[29] Homer, *Odyssey*, 19. 455-458. 'Then the staunch sons of Autolycus busied themselves with the carcass, and the wound of flawless, godlike Odysseus they bound up skillfully, and checked the black blood with a charm (ἐπαοιδῇ), and immediately returned to the house of their staunch father.' A. T. Murray, trans., Revised by George E. Dimock, *Homer Odyssey Books 13-24* (The Loeb Classical Library Series, 105; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 268-269.
[30] Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets", p. 114.

C. The Protective Nature of Seals

A clear connection exists between 'seals' and concepts of protection at a level that relies upon forces of a spiritual nature.[31] To be sure, this is only one aspect of the use of 'seals' and the act of 'sealing', but it does appear to be one that has been very seriously ignored: if not deliberately avoided in the study of *σφραγίς* and its cognates. This attitude, I believe, may have severely distorted our interpretation of many Biblical passages and needs to be redressed. This re-evaluation is necessary, if modern scholars are to have a fuller appreciation of the way the people of the 1st century would have understood the writings of the New Testament, and the Apocalypse in particular. Of the societies in which divination and other so called 'magical' practices were prominent, not one of them 'arrived at a stringent understanding of cause and effect which in any way corresponds to the understanding(s) of causation adhered to in "empirically" oriented societies.'[32] Cause and effect become blurred and more than one cause for a given effect is often perceived. This type of reasoning methodology differs markedly from our modern methods of reasoning. It could very easily lead us to wrong conclusions in our quest to understand the meaning of ancient texts if we fail to acknowledge this different reasoning methodology.

D. The Meaning of Σφραγίς, Σφραγίζω and Κατασφραγίζω

The earliest clear attestation of these terms occurs in the 6th century B.C.E.[33] There is, very early on, a wide range of meaning for these words, as is clearly demonstrated by searching through the ancient sources and investigating the uses of *σφραγίς*, *σφραγίζω*, and *κατασφραγίζω*. The most basic meaning for the term *σφραγίς* is that of a 'seal' or a 'signet'.[34]

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[31] Westenholz, ed., *Seals and Sealing in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Symposium Held on September 2, 1993 Jerusalem. Israel*, p. 8.
[32] Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and its Near Eastern Environment*, p. 331.
[33] Aeschylus, *Supplementum*, 947; *Eumenides*, 828.
[34] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, Comp., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Rev. and Aug. by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie with a supplement (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, 1983), p. 1742. Herodotus, *Histories*, 3.41.1,2; Plato, *Lesser Hippias*, 368c; Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae*, 632;

It can also have the meaning of a stone that has been carved (as for a ring),[35] or of the impression made by a seal or signet ring.[36] The verbal form of this word means 'to close' or 'to enclose'[37] with a seal.[38] It can have the meaning of 'to authenticate'[39] as in using the seal as a mark of authentication,[40] or to certify an object.[41] The word may also have all of these meanings in a metaphorical sense. It may be used as a seal impression made on the mind.[42] In a figurative sense, Philo refers to the word of God as that which makes its impression upon the 'logical', or 'reasonable', soul.[43] *Κατασφραγίζω* has the meaning of to 'seal up' and it is most often used in the form of a Perfect Passive Participle with the meaning of 'sealed up, made fast, secured'.[44] This usage of *κατασφραγίζω* at Revelation 5:1 reflects its only appearance in the New Testament.

A great variety of objects were sealed, in order to prevent anyone from tampering with the contents without detection.[45] Sealing was so common in the ancient world that Herodotus could make the statement that 'Everyone has a seal'.[46] Seals were placed upon books,[47] money bags,[48] houses, [49] documents,[50] and stones,[51] in order to make them inaccessible. 'Figurative or non-physical seals were no less important in preventing access.'[52] Figuratively things that were 'sealed' include, 'transgression',[53] 'the law',[54] a

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Sophocles, *Electra*, 1223; Strabo, *Geography*, 9.3.1; Plutarch, *Pompey*, 5.10; Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians*, 44.1.

[35] Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.69.

[36] Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, 615; Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, 155; Thucydides, *Histories*, 1.129.

[37] Liddell, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1742.

[38] Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, 38; Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 828.

[39] Liddell, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1742.

[40] Tob. 7:14 (BA not in S).

[41] Herodotus, *Histories*, 2.38.

[42] Plato, *Theaetetus*, 192a.

[43] Philo, *Noah's Work as a Planter*, 18.7.

[44] Liddell, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 915.

[45] Eldon Woodcock, "The Seal of the Holy Spirit", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998): p. 140.

[46] Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.195.

[47] Jer. 39:44 (Old Greek Version).

[48] Tobit 9:5 (BA and S).

[49] 4 Kings 22:4 (Old Greek Version).

[50] *1 Esdras* 3:8 (Old Greek Version).

[51] Dan. 6:18 (Old Greek and Theodotion).

[52] Woodcock, "The Seal of the Holy Spirit", p. 140.

'vision', and a 'prophet'.[55] The 'seal' of a person was a sign of that person's power and authority: such as the power and authority of a king.[56] Jezebel used the 'seal' of the king on documents, in order to indicate the authority of the king when letters were sent to the elders of Israel.[57] 'Seals' were also used to 'seal' agreements, in important documents, or in agreements between parties, such as a deed of sale,[58] a marriage contract,[59] or a covenant.[60] A 'seal' was, in addition, used as a security measure to prevent unauthorised access to items of great sacred value, such as the vestments of the high priest.[61] Along with this idea of security comes the closely associated concept of protection. If an item was secure, it was in a sense protected. This is where the amuletic value of seals seems to be rooted.

Instruments that were used in 'sealing' were important symbols of power. Individuals, cities and people often had 'seals'. Gods also were considered to have 'seals'.[62] In the case of Apollo the *Orphic Hymns* state 'you have the master seal [*σφραγῖδα*] of the cosmos.'[63] There are 60 words in Greek that may be translated in some manner as 'seal' or 'sealing'. It will not be possible to consider the other 57 terms in this study, but it is worth noting that other words also refer similarly to these same concepts. It should also be noted that along with the rather specific words that refer to 'seals' and 'sealing', there are other terms that can refer to 'seals', such as scarabs, rings[64] or stones.[65] The scarab is a common

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[53] Job 14:17 (Old Greek Version).
[54] Isa. 8:16 (Old Greek Version).
[55] Dan. 9:24 (Theodotion).
[56] Est. 8:8 (Old Greek Version). Thucydides, *Histories*, 1.129.1. cf. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 457.
[57] 3 Kings 20:8 (Old Greek Version).
[58] Jer. 39:10 (Old Greek Version).
[59] Tobit 7:14 (BA, not in S).
[60] 2 Esdras 20:1 (Old Greek Version).
[61] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 15.408.
[62] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 457.
[63] Orpheus, *Hymni*, 34.26; Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *The Orphic Hymns*, Graeco-Roman Religion series; 4 Texts and Translations; 12 (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1977), pp. 48-49.
[64] PGM IV.2954. All references to the Greek Magical Papyri are from the book edited by Karl Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, vol. 1 and 2 (Stuttgart: Verlag B.G. Teubner, 1973-1974).
[65] PGM I.144.

ingredient found in the *Greek Magical Papyri*[66] and in Demotic spells.[67] The seal and the act of inscribing something into stone features in numerous instances among the spells found in Egypt.[68] The so-called 'magical' aspect of seals has been largely ignored in the reference sources that are so often used to ascertain the definitions of Greek terms. This neglect could, in part, be due to the lack of available materials in the past (although it also seems to ignore certain texts such as the *Testament of Solomon*, Josephus, etc.), but no longer. With the discovery and publication of the *Greek Magical Papyri*, this imbalance has been at least partially redressed. These materials can possibly enable scholars to gain added insight into the cultural situation of the time surrounding the composition of the Apocalypse.

The roots of the aversion to what some have termed as 'superstitious' are deep seated, and they have an extremely long tradition. In the Roman Empire, Tacitus records the expulsion of 'four thousand of the freedmen class who were infected with those superstitions.'[69] They were apparently expelled over something to do with Egyptian and Jewish worship.[70] From the reigns of Tiberius to Nero, there were scores of victims accused of witchcraft. The term 'magic' was used as a political tool to rid powerful men of unwanted opponents. It was at about the time of the Emperor Augustus that Roman Society began to differentiate between 'magic' and 'religion and science'.[71] The combination of 'enlightenment and political ruthlessness might, in the end have laid the foundation for the

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[66] PGM V.213-303.
[67] PDM XIV.636-69 in book edited by Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 230; Scarabs were also often used as official seals of Egyptian Administration. Daphna Ben-Tor, "The Origin and Function of Officials' Scarabs from Middle Bronze Age Canaan*," in *Seals and Sealing in the Ancient Near East Proceedings of the Symposium Held on September 2, 1993 Jerusalem, Israel*, ed. Joan Goodnick Westenholz, Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem Publications No. 1 (Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem, 1995), p. 81.
[68] PGM I.144; PGM I.306; PGM IV.2880; PGM IV.2954; PGM IV.3040; PGM V.213-303; PGM V.449; PGM XII.201-69; PGM XII.274; PGM XII.331-33; PGM XXXVI.187-210.
[69] Tacitus, *Annals*, 2, 85.
[70] Tacitus, *Annals*, 2, 85.
[71] Fritz Graff, "Excluding the Charming: The Development of the Greek Concept of Magic," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 41-42.

concept of magic as we now use it.'[72] Indeed, the first centuries of the Common Era were witness to many burnings of books, often of 'magical' books[73], and not a few burnings that included those accused of being 'magicians'.[74]

The fate of ancient materials was down to a number of considerations that include such things as the writing materials used, the composition of the ink, or other mechanism to leave a mark, and the environment where the documents or artefacts were ultimately housed. Other factors would also contribute considerably to the preservation of documents such as whether the societies that composed them had a desire for them to be preserved. Some documents were deemed to be less valuable than others and so the materials used to write them were less durable, but sometimes the documents which were fashionable to one audience would later be deemed as unfashionable or perhaps even as unacceptable by another audience. At times, such unacceptable documents were destroyed, or simply ignored and over time forgotten.[75]

These circumstances along with the rhetoric of the politicians and theologians alike have left what some have called 'magic' a taboo subject. The fact remains, however, that certain practices related to spiritual forces were very much a part of the culture and day-to-day life of the ancient world and to ignore this is to create a distorted image of that world. 'Seals' were a part of this era permeated with a fear of harmful spiritual influences and a desire to conciliate or repel spiritual influences. The utilitarian uses for 'seals' are clearly documented, but Porada would go as far as to say that more important than these utilitarian functions, was the 'seal's' use as an amulet. These amulets were meant to provide protection and to bring good fortune to the wearer.[76] If it is true that this amuletic value was more

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[72] Graff, "Excluding the Charming: The Development of the Greek Concept of Magic," pp. 41-42.
[73] Acts, 19:19.
[74] Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. xli.
[75] Acts 19:19; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 31, 3
[76] Edith Porada, ed., *Ancient Art in Seals* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 3.

important than the 'seal's' utilitarian uses, then surely, in the interpretation of passages where this term is used, the question that should be asked is what would the initial audience have understood from the use of *σφραγίζω* and its cognates when it was used in its original context?

E. Use of Seals in the Biblical Contextual Milieu

Gorelick has done a study that classifies the uses of seals into two categories: bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic. He uses these categories to analyze the usage of seals in both the Jewish scriptures and in the New Testament. His findings are that in the Jewish scriptures the usage is split, with 50% being bureaucratic usages while 50% are non-bureaucratic personal usages. In the New Testament, however, 100% of the time, the terms are used to describe what he terms as bureaucratic usage. This category is used to designate instances that have to do with the designation and delegation of authority and the protection of government property. It includes the sealings of law, or official acts of a witness and as a signature to an official contract or to the sale and purchase of government property. Non-bureaucratic usages are those of a personal nature that are unrelated to the control of the political economy. This category would include usages such as seals employed as votive offerings, amulets, or ornaments, as burial or heirloom items, or as gifts and pledges.[77] Gorelick does not find any of these uses in the New Testament writings.

He also divided the references to 'seals' into categories of 'functional' as opposed to 'metaphorical'. In the Jewish scriptures such concepts were used 30 times with 66.6% (20) being functional while 33.3% (10) were metaphorical. In the New Testament the concepts about 'sealing' were used 31 times with 41.9% (13) being functional, while 58.1% were metaphorical. Gorelick offers the hypothesis that the differences are because in the period

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[77] Leonard Gorelick, "Introduction Ancient Seals and the Bible: an Overview," in *Ancient Seals and the Bible*, ed. Leonard Gorelick and Elizabeth Williams-Forte (Malibu CA: Udena Publications, 1983), pp. 2-3.

when the Jewish scriptures were written the Israelites were a nation and required all the bureaucratic trappings of nationhood. In the time of the New Testament, the early Christians had little money, less power, were not organised into a nation, and therefore had no need to use seals to exert economic or political control.[78]

Gorelick also notes that there is a difference qualitatively between the metaphoric usage in the Jewish scriptures and those of the New Testament: they differ in image or content. He postulates that this is because metaphoric references stem from life experience. It is obvious that the conscious events experienced by the authors of the Jewish scriptures differed from those of the authors of the New Testament. This experiential difference caused the authors of the New Testament to develop protective methods, which included symbols in art and particular types of metaphoric language.[79] This indicates that we should investigate very carefully the ideas conveyed by the authors of the New Testament as they use references to 'sealing'. It is important to attempt to ascertain not only how these usages might relate to the general background of these terms, but to attempt to ascertain the very specific perspective of the author. Despite Gorelick stating that he does not find any amuletic usages of 'seals' in the New Testament he does accept that there is a protective element to the usage of this terminology in the New Testament.

The amuletic character of the seal in antiquity appears to be beyond question. In *PGM* I.144–148 there is a description of an engraved stone, put on a string and placed around the neck as part of what appears to be an incantation. Though in this instance the stone is not described as a 'seal', it does function as some form of 'seal' or 'amulet'. In *PGM* I.306 there is something described as the *σφραγῖδα θεοῦ* (God's signet) which is symbolically used in an invocation as part of a ceremony. In *PGM* IV.3040–3041 the 'seal of Solomon' is used in a

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[78] Gorelick, "Introduction Ancient Seals and the Bible: an Overview," pp. 2-3.
[79] Gorelick, "Introduction Ancient Seals and the Bible: an Overview," pp. 2-3.

spell to help those possessed by demons. This 'is the name of a famous amulet in antiquity.'[80] In a love spell a person is to 'seal' a label with one's 'own ring'.[81] The concept of 'sealing' is also used in another love spell as if this act is of integral importance in the spell being effective.[82] In *PGM* XII.270–350 there is a formula for creating a ring for success and victory. The *Greek Magical Papyri* are from Graeco-Roman Egypt and contain a variety of spells, formulae, hymns, and rituals. The texts date from, mainly, the 2nd century B.C.E. to the 5th century C.E. and they represent but a small fraction of what must have once been a vast body of documents that many have considered to pertain to practices and beliefs that were forbidden.[83]

In the New Testament, there appears to be no clear and immediately obvious indication that the terms 'seal' and 'sealing' are used in any fashion other than in the traditional fashion that these terms have been used throughout the ancient world. It therefore seems appropriate to investigate whether or not usages such as those cited above might prove to be of relevance in our efforts to understand John's employment of these terms in the Apocalypse.

F. Revelation 5

This section contains both the verb *κατασφραγίζω*[84] and the noun *σφραγίς*.[85] 5:1 'And I saw upon the right hand of the one seated upon the throne a scroll having been written upon the inside and the outside sealed with seven seals.' The noun is anarthrous at 5:1 (*σφραγῖσιν ἑπτά*) due to the fact that the 'seals' are mentioned for the first time here and are therefore unknown to the readers. The seven seals are mentioned 10 further times[86] in the Apocalypse

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[80] Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, p. 96, n. 394.
[81] PGM iv 2954.
[82] PGM xxxvi 189.
[83] Betz, "Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri", p. 248.
[84] *κατασφραγίζω* occurs in 5:1.
[85] *σφραγίς* is used 4 times in chapter 5 at verses 1, 2, 5 and 9.
[86] Rev. 5:2, 5, 9; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1.

and in each of those instances the noun will have the anaphoric definite article.[87] According to Beale, the phrase 'sealed with seven seals' is an obvious allusion to Ezekiel 2:9-10, and there also appears to be the merging of the themes from Isaiah 29:11 and Daniel 12:4, 9, where a book cannot be read due to the fact that it is 'sealed'. These texts are brought together because the wording is almost identical and the mutual theme of a 'sealed' book, that conceals divine revelation associated with judgment, is a common subject matter.[88]

The motif of 'sealing with seven seals' is a very common contrivance in the world of 'Jewish magic'.[89] The Jewish Aramaic incantation bowls use this expression on several occasions.[90] The efficacy of the use of the divine name in this type of seal is attested in the text of 51.6-7 of these Incantation Bowl texts.[91] The implication of 'seven seals' is apparently the impossibility of any illegitimate person being able to access what has been 'sealed' in such a manner. This is particularly the case when 'sealed' by God or using the name of God.[92] At *1 Enoch* 89:71 a book is 'sealed' after being read to God, and then the unsealing, and reading of this book (89:76-77; 90:17) appears to involve a scene of judgement.[93] In *4Q550* a scroll is spoken of as being 'sealed' with the 'seven seals of the ring of Darius.'

According to the *Gospel of Peter* 8:33 the tomb of Jesus was sealed with 'seven wax seals' as one part of measures to safeguard the tomb. A Roman prescription demanded that a

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[87] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 322.
[88] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 337-338; Dan, 12:14 (Theodotion). : *σφράγισον τὸ βιβλίον*; 12:9 (Theodotion): *ἐσφραγισμένοι οἱ λόγοι*; Isa. 29:11: *οἱ λόγοι τοῦ βιβλίου τοῦ εσφραγισμένου τούτου ... ἐσφράγισται γάρ.* Cf. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 346.
[89] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 346.
[90] Charles D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, Dissertation Series, Number 17 (Missoula MT: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1975), pp. 40, 80, 81, 82, 83.
[91] Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, p. 116. '...with the great seal of the Lord of the Universe [whose] knot cannot be untied and whose seal cannot be broken.'
[92] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 346.
[93] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 346.

will should be sealed with 'seven seals'.[94] In the text of *4 Baruch* 3:10[95] (First to Second Century C.E.) the earth is spoken of as being 'sealed' with 'seven seals'(*ὁ σφραγίσας σε ἐν ἑπτὰ σφραγῖσιν*).

The question posed in 5:2b is 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?' The word *ἄξιος* does not simply imply that a question of ability is being asked, but it means rather, who is 'qualified'. Scott points out that *ἄξιος* in both verses 2 and 3 is equivalent to the the term *ἐδύνατο* and that these terms connote moral and physical ability as translations for the Hebrew term יכל.[96] The reason for opening the scroll is not so that it may be read, but in order that the eschatological events contained within can be set in motion.[97] Prigent makes this point as well, noting that the contents of the book are not what is of primary importance here. The most important factor here is that the Messiah alone is deemed to be 'worthy' of opening this document.[98] Van Unnik notes that this section is not some separate or independent scene within the book but holds a decisive place in the structure of the whole book. The point of what is described cannot be left out or missed without the sequel becoming unintelligible.[99]

Chapter 5 depicts the scroll and the indespensable condition for its opening, which in turn determines the visions of the Seer that follow.[100] This chapter is not only important from a structural point of view, but also as the starting point for the understanding of the Christology of the book.[101] A number of scholars perceive the scene depicted here as

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[94] Gaius, *Institutes of Roman Law* 2.147; Justinian, *The Elements of Roman Law* 2.10.2-3; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 342; Harrington, *Revelation*, p. 84.
[95] This text is also known by the names of *The Things Omitted from Jeremiah the Prophet* and by its Greek title *Paraleipomena Jeremiou*.
[96] Robert Balagarnie Young Scott, *The Original Language of the Apocalypse* (Toronto: The University of Toronto, 1928), p. 20.
[97] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 347.
[98] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 246.
[99] W. C. Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", in *Mélanges Bibliques en hommage au R. P. Béda Rigaux*, ed. Albert Descamps and R. P. André de Halleux (Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), p. 445.
[100] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", p. 446.
[101] Traugott Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962), p. 27.

indicating the enthronement of Christ.[102] Van Unnik, however, disagrees with this assessment and indicates that in his view, the focal point of this section is to be found in the word ἄξιος (worthy). He points out that when none is found to be ἄξιος to look into the scroll the seer weeps (5:4). Later in verse 9 the Lamb takes the scroll and opens its 'seals' (chapter 6ff.). In verse 12 a great chorus of heavenly creatures says with a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain'. In each of these instances it is the issue of 'worthiness' which is the central point and this is said to be motivated by the work that Jesus Christ had done.[103]

In the *Odes of Solomon* (Late 1st to Early 2nd Century C.E.) at 23:5-9 there is a letter that has a 'seal' which they were not allowed to loosen because the power which was over the 'seal' was better than they were.[104] It should be noted that there are differences between the 'seal' on the scroll in the *Odes of Solomon* and the 'seals' on the scroll in chapter 5 of the Apocalypse. In the *Odes of Solomon* text, the 'seal' itself possesses a certain power that is frightening and strong, but this same characteristic is not found in the Apocalypse. The issue of prime importance in the Apocalypse is 'who is worthy?'[105]

Van Unnik perceives that there are two themes that are central to the context of Revelation 5 and he formulates this into a single question: '*why has this idea of "worthiness" as the" conditio sine qua non" for opening been so closely connected with this mysterious book in the hand of God?'* He believes that the answer to this question cannot be found within the contexts of Judaism and that the solution must be sought in the other part of the environment of early Christianity, the theological conceptions of the Hellenistic world. In pursuing this line of reasoning it is necessary to examine some texts that have no direct relationship to the Apocalypse or its literary genre. This may at first seem to be a detour but

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[102] Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes*, p. 27; Johannes Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament; 16 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (P. Siebeck, 1926), pp. 51 ff.
[103] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", p. 447-448.
[104] James H. Charlesworth, trans. and ed. "Odes of Solomon" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 2; The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday 1985), pp. 725, 755-756.
[105] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", p. 450.

it will assist in elucidating the wider context, the world of ideas in which the term *ἄξιος* could be used, especially in connection with books.[106]

In the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies there is an introduction which is an 'Epistle of Peter to James'(4th century C.E.). In this writing Peter pleads with the head of the Church in Jerusalem not to communicate the books of his preaching to anyone of the Gentiles or the Jews 'before that man has been tested,' but the writing may be passed to them 'if anyone has been proved and found *worthy*'.[107] A similar expression is to be read in the *4 Baruch* 4:4 where Jeremiah tosses the keys of the sanctuary into safe-keeping with the Sun before the capture of Jerusalem. The motive for the removal of the keys is that the people have been *οὐχ εὑρέθημεν ἄξιοι τοῦ φυλάξαι αὐτὰς* (*4 Baruch* 4.5).[108] Here the object under consideration is not a book but keys that are taken away due to the failure of the people to fulfill their duties and therefore they are deemed to have been found not 'worthy'.[109] In each of these cases there appears to be some form of test that is applied in order to ascertain 'worthiness'. In a number of the *Greek Magical Papyri* there are texts that highlight the judgment of the one who applies the test.[110] In order to use these 'magical books' one must be judged to be 'worthy'. They are not allowed to come into the hands of just anyone.[111] Near the end of 4 Ezra (Late 1st Century C.E.) the seer is told to make public twenty-four of the books that had been written, but to keep seventy that were written only for the '...wise among your people.'[112]

In Revelation 5 everything hinges upon the opening of this hermetically 'sealed' scroll with the 'seven seals'. It must be opened in order for the drama of God's judments in

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[106] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", p. 451.
[107] Pseudo-Clementine, *Epistle of Peter to James*, I: 1-2.
[108] Robert A. Kraft and Ann-Elizabeth Purintun, trans. and ed., *Paraleipomena Jeremiou*, Texts and Translations; 1 Pseudepigrapha series; 1 (Missoula MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), p. 20; J. Rendel Harris, *The Rest of the Words of Baruch: A Christian Apocalypse of the Year 136 A.D.* (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, Cambridge University Press Warehouse, 1889), p. 51, 4:4.
[109] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", p. 452.
[110] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", p. 452; *PGM*, IV.739-740; XI.a 715.
[111] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", pp. 452-453.
[112] *4 Ezra*, 14:45-46; Bruce M. Metzger, trans. and ed. "The Fourth Book of Ezra" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1; The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday 1983), p. 517, 555.

chapter 6 to unfold. The idea that secret revelations were not meant for everyone, but only for the 'worthy' is an idea that is found at various places in the literary works from the time of the New Testament.[113] To illustrate this point here are a few examples taken from diverse sources. Philo wrote in *On the Cherubim* 42 as follows: 'For this is a divine mystery and its lesson is for the initiated who are worthy to receive the holiest secret, even those who in simplicity of heart practise the piety which is true and genuine, free from all ornament. The sacred revelation is not for those others who, under the spell of the deadly curse of vanity, have no other standards for measuring what is pure and holy, but their barren words and phrases and their silly usages and ritual.'[114]

Van Unnik suggests that in 1 Timothy 6:1-5 the issue of those who are 'worthy', namely those who serve true piety in a sober and not extravagant manner are the only people allowed to hear what the secret and real sense of the scripture is.[115] Barnabas 9:9 reads, 'He knows this who placed the gift of his teaching in our hearts. No one has heard a more excellent lesson from me, but I know that you are worthy.'[116] At 14:1 Barnabas continues by speaking of the covenant that was given to the people '...But they were not worthy to receive it because of their sins.'[117] 'Worthiness' is lost due to wickedness and sin, which breaks the bond with God. In the case of Christians, that bond has been restored through the sufferings of Jesus and whoever is faithful to him is 'worthy' to receive the 'allegorical explanation.'[118]

A passage from Josephus' *Jewish War* II.138 describes the novitiate among the Essenes whom is tested for a three year period to ascertain whether or not he is 'worthy' to

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[113] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", pp. 452-453.
[114] F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, trans., *Philo,* vol. 2, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library series; 227 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 2001), p. 35.
[115] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", p. 453.
[116] Kirsopp Lake, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. G. P. Goold, The Loeb Classical Library series, 24. vol. 1 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1985), p. 373.
[117] Lake, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 391.
[118] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", p. 454.

be enrolled into the society.[119] Festugière drew a parallel between this text and the much later rule of the 'Iobacches' (found in an inscription in Athens dated by the mention of the death of Herod Atticus in 178 C.E.).[120] In the writings of Iamblichus, regarding the Pythagoreans (4th century C.E.): no one was permitted to be a disciple, unless he had been first tried, and '...if they appeared worthy of sharing in his teachings....'[121] The similarities between the terminology in these disparate passages are striking, with the account of Josephus being the oldest among these examples.[122] There is also another very interesting passage in the writings of Josephus, which is addressed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem as he tries to persuade the inhabitants to surrender to the Romans.[123] This passage seems to indicate that the recital of God's works can only be properly given to those who are 'worthy'. A similar concept is expressed in the Hermetic treatise *Poimandres* (1st to 3rd century C.E): 'And now, why do you delay? Seeing that you have received all, why do you not make yourself a guide to those who are worthy of the boon, so that mankind may through you be saved by God?'[124]

There are also a number of other 'Gnostic' sources that use similar terminology cited by van Unnik. A typical theme in each of these texts is that they all speak out regarding 'secret', 'divine revelations' or 'instructions', which can only be received by the person who is 'worthy'. These doctrines and revelations are not meant to be revealed to all men, but only

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[119] H. St. J. Thackeray, trans., *Josephus The Jewish War Books I-II*, ed. G. P. Goold. The Loeb Classical Library; 203 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1997), pp. 376-377.
[120] Jean Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 3, Études Bibliques (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre J. Gabbalda et Cie, Éditeurs, 1953), p. 110.
[121] Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 17.72; John Dillon and Jackson Hershbell, *Iamblichus On the Pythagorean Way of Life Text, Translation and Notes*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz and Edward N. O'Neill, Texts and Translation 29; Graeco-Roman Religion series 11 (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 96-98.
[122] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5," p. 454.
[123] 'For myself, I shudder at recounting the works of God to unworthy ears; yet listen, that you may learn that you are warring not against Romans only, but also against God.' Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 5.378; H. St. J. Thackeray, trans., *Josephus The Jewish War Books V-VII*, ed. G. P. Goold. The Loeb Classical Library 210 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1997), pp. 120-121.
[124] *Corpus Hermeticum*, Poimandres, 26; Arthur Darby Nock and A. J. Festugière, eds., *Corpus Hermeticum*, vol. 1, Collection Des Universités de France (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1945), p. 16; Richard Reitzenstein, *Poimandres Studien zur Griechisch-Ägyptischen und Frühchristlichen Literatur* (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von B. G. Teubner, 1904), pp. 336-337.

to those who have been deemed as 'worthy'. Van Unnik notes that the concept of being 'worthy' is not simply a technical term that is used in connection with the 'mysteries' of the 'mystery-religions', but a term that is used in a more general sense relating to any divine gift in general. The factor which is typical in all of these texts is that they all speak about 'secret, divine revelations, instructions' which can only be received if a person is 'worthy'.[125]

An awareness of the conception of 'worthiness' is generally known to be a feature of the world in the time and space surrounding the New Testament era, as is revealed in an ironical statement of Hippolytus,[126] and in the writings of Irenaeus.[127] The *Acts of Thomas* utilize this word in a variety of combinations such as: 'worthy to be ministers of Christ, to inherit the heavenly glory, to receive the Holy Spirit or Christ, or true richness, to be worthy of God or partaking in the sacraments.'[128] This body of material would seem to make it imperative that the word 'worthy' be considered in its wider contextual framework. It is a word that is used in connection with a very high, divine objective, which cannot be attained by just anyone. This word is used to describe a person who is able to receive what may be granted because it has become manifest by such a person's life and works that he possesses the merits in order that this divine gift can be entrusted to him.[129]

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[125] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5," pp. 455-456; Esther de Boer, *The Gospel of Mary: Beyond a Gnostic and a Biblical Mary Magdalene*, Journal for the study of the New Testament. Supplement series; 260. (London; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004); Carl Schmidt and Violet Macdermot, *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*, Nag Hammadi studies; 13. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978); Carl Schmidt and Violet Macdermot, *Pistis Sophia*, Nag Hammadi Studies; 9. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).

[126] 'These constitute the astonishing mysteries of Elchasai, those ineffable and potent *secrets* which he delivers to deserving disciples.' Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, IX.10; Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, ed. Miroslav Marcovich, Patristische Texte und Studien ; Bd. 25 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), p. 360. *'...τοῖς ἀξίοις μαθηταῖς.'*

[127] Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, I.25.25; Dominic J. Unger and John J. Dillon, trans. and ed. "St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies" in, eds. Walter J. Burghardt, Tomas Comerford Lawler, and John J. Dillon, vol. 1; Ancient Christian Writers; The Works of the Fathers in Translation; 55 (New York: Paulist Press 1992), p. 89; Philo, *The Special Laws*, I.43; Philo, *On Dreams*, I.117; Philo, *On the Change of Names*, 79-80, 104; Col., 1:10; I Thess, 2:12.

[128] Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, Commentary*, 2nd revised ed., Supplements to Novum Testamentum; vol. 108 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), pp. 69-70.

[129] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", p. 457.

'Worthiness' is not an attribute that actually entitles a person to something divine, but it is the correct inner attitude, which is demonstrated through deeds which enable a person to receive this type of gift. Some form of severe test has usually occurred which brings this factor to light. These connotations are suggested by the way authors from Hellenistic, Jewish and Christian backgrounds use this word. A passage from the *Wisdom of Solomon* demonstrates that the ideas that go together with worthiness did already exist in pre-Christian times and that these ideas were not strictly confined to initiation into the mysteries. Within the context of the Apocalypse, John appears to be using this terminology as an implicit criticism of all forms of 'religiosity', and of all forms of human piety. No one is found that can open the 'seals' amongst all those in the entire universe. Only the 'Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David' is found to be 'worthy'.[130]

In the context of Revelation 5 the idea conveyed by the imagery seems to indicate the unique position occupied by Jesus Christ in the universe. He, and only he, has the proper credentials to be able to break the 'seals' of this auspicious scroll. The 'seals' in this context insure that the contents of the scroll can only be released by the one who is deemed to be 'worthy' to take them from the hand of the 'one seated on the throne'. The recognition of Jesus as the one who is 'worthy' to open the 'seals' of the scroll has wide-reaching ramifications and seems to be a firm affirmation of the deity of Christ. Hurtado states it in these terms '...it would be difficult to imagine a more direct and forceful way to express

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[130] Van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb' The Background of Apoc 5", pp. 457-459. An example of this can be seen in the *Wisdom of Solomon* 3:1-8 (1st Century B.C.E.), 'But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and torment will not take hold of them. In the eyes of the foolish they are imagined to have died, and their departure was thought to be an ill treatment and their departure from us to be their ruin, but they are at peace. And yet in the eyes of men they were punished, their hope is filled with immortality; and having been disciplined a little they will receive a great good, because God put them to the test and found them *worthy* (*ἀξίους*) of himself; like gold in a smelting furnace he tested them and as a whole burnt sacrificial offering he accepted them. And in the time of their visitation they will be revived and run like sparks through straw; they will judge the nations and rule over the people and the Lord will rule over them unto eternity.'

Jesus' divine status.'[131] None other is 'worthy' of such an affirmation and the 'seals' are used as a symbol of the rights of divinity that belong to Jesus Christ alongside of God.

Jesus, and Jesus alone has the authority to unleash the plan of God for the 'judgment, redemption, and final victory over evil ...'[132] In one fell stroke John is able to place the risen Christ on a level above all possible contenders. This would include competitors for allegiance such as the emperor, other gods, or any spiritual force or power. The 'seals' insure that only the rightful heir to the position of power is able to open the scroll. All others who might claim such levels of obeisance are declared mere pretenders by the power of this forceful imagery.

G. Revelation 6 and 8:1

The imagery from the previous chapter continues as the 'Lamb' begins to open the 'seals' of the scroll that he had taken from the hand of the one seated on the throne. The metaphor of the breaking open of a series of 'seven seals' is unique to the Apocalypse, but there is some late evidence for a series of seven being used to narrate the events that will occur just before the inauguration of the eschaton.[133] It is in the context of the chapters following on from the revelation of chapter 5, of the deity of Christ, that the full force of John's argument begins to take shape as he develops his argument that only Jesus is 'worthy' of worship, and faithful obedience. He will ultimately prove victorious over all who would pretend to have a claim to either deity (i.e. the emperors, other gods, or spiritual forces) or the right of judgement.

The opening of the 'seals' demonstrates the authority of Jesus Christ in his role not only as redeemer, but also as judge.[134] The question asked at 5:2 is 'Who is worthy to open

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[131] Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), pp. 592-593.
[132] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, p. 592.
[133] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 392; Sanh., 97a; Meg., 17b.
[134] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 339-340.

the scroll and break its seals?' According to Sweet and Caird this question concerns who in the created order has sovereign authority over this plan.[135] Those suffering may have begun to wonder if the reign of Christ really extends over all things, including those situations where many Christians find themselves in situations of disadvantage and even being martyred due to their faith. According to Beale, Revelation 6:1-8 and 8:1 are intended to show that Christ indeed does rule even over what appears to be a chaotic world. John even goes so far as to indicate that many of the disastrous events that have brought death and destruction are brought about by Christ for both 'redemptive and judicial purposes.'[136]

H. Revelation 7 and 9:4

At Revelation 7:2 there is the introduction into the Apocalypse of the term *σφραγίς* to describe an object used to place a mark upon the foreheads of those that are the 'servants of God'. Not until 14:1 is it made obvious that the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father are written upon the foreheads of those deemed to be faithful (though the term *σφραγίζω* is not used). The terms *σφραγίς* (7:2; 9:4), and *σφραγίζω* (7:3, 4, 5, 8), are used in this chapter and in 9:4 in an eschatological sense according to Aune. This same sense is to be found in Ezekiel 9:4-6 (cited in *Damascus Document* 19:12); *Psalms of Solomon* 15:6 (*τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ θεοῦ*), 9 (*σημεῖον τῆς ἀπωλείας*); *4 Ezra* 6:5; 8:53. 'Sealing' is used here to indicate 'divine protection', as is made apparent by 9:4, where the demonic locusts are told not to harm those who have the 'seal' of God on their foreheads.[137]

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[135] J. P. M. Sweet, "Maintaining the testimony of Jesus: the suffering of Christians in the Revelation of John," in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 122-124; Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, pp. 72-73.
[136] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 370.
[137] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 452.

In the Coptic-Gnostic tractate *The Apocryphon of John* the protective function of 'sealing' is made explicit.[138] According to Aune, 'The protective, or apotropaic, function of 'magical sealing' is a motif frequently encountered in ancient texts, in inscriptions, on amulets, and other *materia magica*'.[139] In one instance an inscription on an Aramaic Incantation bowl reads, '...that seal with which the First Adam sealed his son Seth to protect him from d[emons],'.[140] In the *Acts of Andrew* (3rd century C.E.) 27 there is a text with similarities, where seven demons will not attack Andrew because of the seal on his forehead.[141] The inscription on a Christian amulet reads on the obverse side, 'Seal of the living God, guard him who wears this Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of thy glory.'[142]

Aune states that in the 'Jewish scriptures and in early Judaism there was the 'Anthropomorphic' notion that Yahweh, like earthly kings, had a 'seal'' (Job 9:7; *Sirach* 17:22; *Testament of Moses* 12:9; *Apocalypse of Moses* 42:1).[143] Ysebaert also states this same precept, and then goes on to note a connection in what he calls 'Jewish superstition' where there are accounts of rings with 'magical power'.[144] Aune comes to the conclusion that the idea of '...sealing people with a seal or a signet ring of God is a metaphor drawn from the world of ancient magic, where sealing functions either to protect the person sealed or to

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[138] *Apocryphon of John* 31:22-25 'And I raised him up ' and sealed him in the light ' of the water with five seals, in order that [25] death might not have power over him from this time on.' Frederik Wisse, trans., ed. "The Apocryphon of John," in Book *The Apocryphon of John*, ed. James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper 1990), p. 122.

[139] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 452-453.

[140] Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, 16.13. p. 54.

[141] Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *The Acts of Andrew and the Acts of Andrew and Matthias in the City of the Cannibals*, ed. William R. Schoedel and Dennis Ronald MacDonald, vol. 33 Christian Apocrypha Number 1, Text and Translations Christian Apocrypha Series (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 140-143.

[142] Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, vol. 2, Bollingen Series XXXVII (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), p. 231; Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, vol. 3, Bollingen Series XXXVII (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), fig. 1054. For other amulets containing the 'seal of God' see Gustave Schlumberger, "Amulettes Byzantins Anciens Destinés a Combattre Les Maléfices & Maladies," *Revue Des Études Grecques* 5 (1892): p. 84; Paul Perdrizet, "Σφραγις Σολομωνος," *Revue Des Études Grecques* 16 (1903): pp. 42-61.

[143] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 453.

[144] J. Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, vol. 1, Græcitas Christianorum Primæva (Nijmegen: Dekker & Van De Vegt N.V., 1962), pp. 246-247. cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 8:47; *Gitt*, 68a; *PGM*, IV.3039.

control the evil spirit that is sealed.' He then goes on to indicate that the language of 'sealing' and 'signet rings' occurs frequently in the context of 'ancient magic' where it is frequently difficult to decide whether the contextual origin for the symbolism is derived from 'Jewish magic' or 'Graeco-Roman magic'. This difficulty arises due to the enormous influence exerted by 'Jewish magic' upon 'Graeco-Roman magic'.[145]

Aune is of the opinion that the references to the 'seal of god' are actually referring to the 'name' of the god in a manner that is perhaps reminiscent of the manner in which the names of gods are inscribed upon '*materia magica*' such as 'amulets' and 'papyri'. He postulates that *σφραγίς = ὄνομα = θεός*.[146] One example of an implement that may lend support to this perspective has been published by Kraabel. It is the Wilshere jasper ringstone (ca. 3rd century C. E.), with the divine names *ΙΑΩ ΣΑΩ ΑΔΩΝΙ* (i.e., Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai) written in reverse in three lines *ΩΑΙ ΩΑΣ ΙΝΩΔΑ*.[147] So called 'magical' formulas are commonly written in reverse order for 'magical' effect in 'Jewish magical texts'.[148] It is the supposition of Aune that in the instance of the Wilshere jasper ringstone the name is inscribed in reverse order not for 'magical' affect but in order to be used as a stamp, which seems to be highly probable.[149]

These three divine names (Iao, Sabaoth, and Adonai) do occur frequently in the *Greek Magical Papyri*.[150] Aune indicates that these three Hebrew names for God, as used within the context of the 'magical practitioners' were regarded as three separate deities.[151] The name 'Iao' is of particular importance as it represents a Greek transliteration of a

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[145] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 453. cf. *PGM*, VII.583 'A Phylactery' that speaks of 'the powerful name and seal of the great god'. *PGM*, I.306 *ὁρκίζω σφραγῖδα θεοῦ* (I adjure [you] by the seal of god). *PGM* III.226 *ὁρκίζω σε, σφραγῖδ[α θ]ε[οῦ]*.
[146] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 453.
[147] A. T. Kraabel, "Jews in Imperial Rome: More Archaeological Evidence from an Oxford Collection", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): pp. 50-56.
[148] Joseph Naveh, "Lamp Inscriptions and Inverted Writing", *Israel Exploration Journal* 38 (1988): pp. 37, 40-41.
[149] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 453.
[150] *PGM*, III.266-267; IV.1485-1486, 1534-1535, 1561, 1621, 3053; VII.1220, 1311, 1595-1596.
[151] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 453.

shortened form of the covenant name for God, יהוה.[152] In the *Testament of Solomon* (1st to 3rd century C.E.) a 'seal' delivered to Solomon, from God through Michael (*Testament of Solomon* 1:6-7) allows him to compel demons to build the temple. The theme of the Ring of Solomon is picked up in the Aramaic Incantation Bowl texts and is referred to as the ובחותמא דישלומו מלכא (the sealing of King Solomon),[153] as the עיזקתא דשלמה מלכה (the signet ring of King Solomon)[154]

Aune refers to the the 'ring of Solomon' in Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 8:47, but in reality the ring in that context is never specifically referred to by this appellation.[155] It is the 'root' (*ῥίζαν*) that is referred to as being 'prescribed' by Solomon and what is touted as paramount in this context is the *σύνεσις καὶ σοφία* (understanding and wisdom) of Solomon.[156] This distinction is important, as the purpose of the *Jewish Antiquities* is to illustrate the positive aspects of the Jewish people, and in this case particularly those of Solomon. This appears to be a case of perhaps overstating the case at this point. Aune goes onto refer to 'amulets' or 'magical gems' which depict Solomon as a mounted warrior that is about to pierce a supine female figure with his spear.[157] The 'amulets' of this type are made from hermatite and have the inscription *Σολομων* around the rider, and *σφαγὶς θεοῦ* on the reverse.[158] The Jewish Aramaic Incantation Bowls include a number of pertinent parallels. In text 3.4 the formula used is בישמיה דאלהא רבא ובחתמא רבא דשדא אל[159] (in the name of the great God and with the seal of the great Shadda El), at 48.4-5 דשלמוה מלכא

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[152] David E. Aune, "Iao," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Ernst Dassmann, et al. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1996), pp. 1-12.
[153] Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, Text 7.17-18, pp. 31-33.
[154] Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, Text 47.41, p. 108.
[155] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 454.
[156] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 8.49.
[157] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 454.
[158] Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, vol. 44, Humanistic Series (Ann Arbor MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1950), pp. 208-209; Armand Delatte and Philippe Derchain, eds., *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1964), nos. 369-373, 376-377, pp. 261-264.
[159] Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, Text 3, p. 21.

חתיהין בעיזקתא דאל שדי...ובעיזקתא[160] (sealed with the signet ring of El Shaddai ...and sealed with the signet ring of King Solomon...).[161]

The difficulty with equating the usage of the imagery surrounding the 'seal' from the texts of the *Aramaic Incantation Bowls* with that of the Apocalypse is the late date of these Bowl texts (4th to 7th centuries C.E.).[162] The question that arises is did the usage remain largely the same in the period from the time of the composition of the Apocalypse, to the time when the *Aramaic Incantation Bowls* were composed? Additionally, the question of whether such a usage would have reached as far as Asia Minor is also relevant? However, what is apparent from the context of the Apocalypse is that the 'seal' of Revelation 7 and 9:4 has the affect of protecting those who bear it from the power of the forces of the bottomless pit.[163] This usage therefore does demonstrate striking similarities with the *Aramaic Incantation Bowls*.

Beale points out that the reason that God 'seals' his servants is debated. He gives three main alternatives: (1) 'for protection from physical harm, (2) for protection from demons, and (3) for protection from losing their faith and hence their salvation.'[164] Reddish notes that there are several passages that have the potential to provide the background for the imagery in chapter 7. In Genesis 4:15 God places a mark upon Cain in order to protect him from those who might kill him. In Exodus 12:1-28, the Israelites place a mark upon their doorposts and lintels as protection against the tenth plague in Egypt. The closest parallel

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[160] Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, Text 48, p. 110.
[161] There are a number of other variations in the *Incantation Texts*, 'sealed with the great seal of the Holy One', Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, Text 19.19, p. 62. 'By the seal on which has been carved and engraved the Ineffable Name from the (first) days of the world, the days of the six days of Creation.' Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, Text 17, pp. 56-57. The effectiveness is this type of 'sealing' is the emphasis of the text of 51.6-7. '...and with the signet-ring of King Solomon the son of David, with the great seal of the Lord of the Universe [whose] knot cannot be untied and whose seal cannot be broken.' Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, p. 116. The protective function of the 'seal' against plagues is displayed in 31.2-4. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, p. 83.
[162] Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, p. 9.
[163] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, pp. 281-282; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 409.
[164] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 409.

appears to be in Ezekiel 9:1-11, where God sends one man who marks the people of the city who are to be saved from death, while six others go behind and kill any who have not received the mark.[165]

Of note is the fact that *Σφραγίς* took on the specialised meaning as a synonym for 'baptism' at a very early date.[166] According to Charles, there is however, no allusion to baptism in the context of chapter 7, and the other passages related to it, though he does indicate that baptism did combine the two ideas conveyed in this context. It marked the baptised as God's or Christ's 'property' and it secured the one having been baptised against 'demonic powers.'[167] The theme of spiritual protection seems to be commonly accepted by the commentators surveyed above, to be the main point of this contextual pericope.[168] Upon this at least there seems to be some level of agreement.

I. Summary of Usage in 7 and 9:4

The idea of a mark providing protection is an idea that has a history within the background of the Jewish scriptures as has been pointed out above. The theme of protection from spiritual forces is taken up later in the *Greek Magical Papyri*, the *Aramaic Incantation Bowls* and in other items such as 'seal' rings. Aune indicates that at the very least there may be a connection between this type of usage and the Apocalypse. This argument is perhaps strengthened by the use of concepts of 'worthiness' that are used in chapter 5 and also found in the context of the *Greek Magical Papyri*, Gnostic texts, and others cited above, but it must be noted that similar concepts are also found within the context of the Jewish scriptures.

It is certainly the case that the 'seal' was an image used in later times in documents such as the *Greek Magical Papyri* and in the *Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, the difficulty is in

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[165] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 145.
[166] Hermas, *Sim.*, 9.16.14; *2 Clem*, 7.6; 8.6; *Acts of Thomas*, 2.26-27, 'baptism and chrismation'.
[167] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, p. 197.
[168] 7:2; 3, 4, 5, 8; 9:4.

discerning whether the same or a similar situation existed regarding the understanding of the 'seal' in Asia Minor in the 1st century C. E. It would seem logical to expect that these concepts were in all likelihood known in Asia Minor at this time. It also seems reasonable to suppose that John would have constructed his images, and his discussion, in such a way as to use such imagery to point out the utter uselessness of relying upon such devices in the face of the absolute power demonstrated by God and the risen Christ.

J. Revelation 10:3 and 4

Revelation 10:3-4 'And a great voice cried out just like a lion's roar. And when it cried out the seven thunders spoke their own voices. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was preparing to write, and I heard a voice out of heaven saying, seal up what the seven thunders said, and do not write them.'

John is told to *σφράγισον* 'the message of the seven thunders' at 10:4 and told not to write it down. Aune translates *σφράγισον* as 'to conceal' in this context.[169] Caird concludes that since God's prophet is ordered not to write down what the seven thunders say, but to 'seal' it away, 'this can only mean that God has cancelled the doom of which they were a symbol.[170] Beale points out that the metaphor of to 'seal up' refers throughout all apocalyptic literature to the delaying of the fulfillment of that which has been 'sealed' and not to the cancellation. This is especially the case in the context of Daniel, and since Daniel 12:4-9 is alluded to in Revelation 10:5-7 it seems probable that this is John's intended meaning here.[171] Horn also makes the point that the message of the seven thunders was to be revealed at some point in the future.[172]

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[169] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 562.
[170] Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 126.
[171] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 534. cf. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 331.
[172] F. W. Horn, "Die sieben Donner: Erwägungen zu Offb 10," *Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* 17 (1992): p. 226.

Aune quite emphatically states that this is wrong. He reasons that this is the case in part due to the fact that John uses the expression *σφραγίζω* in a situation where there is nothing written down that can actually be 'sealed.' In this context it must be the case that *σφραγίζω* can mean only that 'something should be kept secret by not writing it down.'[173] This certainly seems to be the interpretation that fits the context most precisely and considers not only the meaning of the word, but also the practical application of the immediate context.

K. Revelation 20:3

20:3 'And he cast him into the Abyss and closed and 'sealed' (*ἐσφράγισεν*) it above him, in order that he might not deceive the nations until the thousand years were completed. Afterward it is necessary to release him for a short time.' The terminology in this section, 'to bind' and 'to cast' ('bind' vs. 2b, and 'cast' vs. 3a), is often found in combat myths.[174] Ouranos wed Gaia, who had two monstrous children, which Ouranos bound and cast into Tarturus.[175] In early Judaism there is a similar tradition that involved the binding and imprisoning of evil angels or demons until the day of judgement.[176] There is in addition a tradition within Judaism of God 'sealing' the abysses of the earth so that no one can open them.[177]

In the *Prayer of Manasseh* (2nd Century B.C.E. – 1st Century C.E.) a similar scene is disclosed where God closes and 'seals' the abyss 'by his powerful and glorious name.'[178] Aune suggests that John is making use of 'a traditional formulation of this protological scene,' and using it in an eschatological sense.[179] There appears to be some form of variation

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[173] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 562.
[174] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1082.
[175] Apollodorus, *Library and Epitome*, 1.1.2.
[176] *1 Enoch*, 10:4-6; 21:1-10; *Jubilees*, 5:6; 10:4-11; *2 Baruch*, 56:13; *Testament of Levi*, 18:12; Jude, 6; 2 Peter, 2:4.
[177] 4Q511, 30:33.
[178] James H. Charlesworth, trans. and ed. "The Prayer of Manasseh" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 2; The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday 1985), pp. 625, 635.
[179] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1083.

on this theme in the Gnostic text *The Hypostasis of the Archons* where 'that angel bound Yaldaboth ' and cast him down into Tartaros ' below the abyss.'[180] According to Aune, there are also 'many parallels from the world of Jewish magic, in which evil spirits are "bound" (אסר *'ăsar*) and "sealed" (חתם *ḥătam*) so that they cannot harm people.' Aune also notes that it is common practice for the names of evil beings to be recited in 'magical texts'.[181] The pairing of the terms 'bind' (*δέω*) and 'seal' (*σφραγίζω*) occurs here in the context of Revelation 20:2-3 and also in the texts of the *Aramaic Incantation Bowls*.[182]

Prigent indicates that in his view the 'sealing' guarantees the restriction of Satan to his own domain, the abyss.[183] Beale notes that 'sealing' may denote an absolute incarceration at times, but it can also represent the general idea of 'authority over'. This is the term's primary meaning in Daniel 6:17 and the 'seal' of God does not protect in every sense in the Apocalypse (cf. Revelation 7:3; 9:4) since those receiving this 'seal' are still tormented.[184] The issue once again seems to revolve around the concept of 'authority' and the 'seal' is used in this context as a symbol signifying that the authority of Satan is restricted. This same type of understanding regarding 'seals' seems to have been quite frequently associated with restricting the influence of spiritual forces in antiquity and it seems highly probable that John is fully cognizant of this. This usage would then demonstrate the absolute authority held by God and the risen Christ over these evil forces.

L. Revelation 22:10

While the speaker is not explicitly identified, the following command is delivered to John: 'And he said to me, do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time

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[180] Bentley Layton, trans., "The Hypostasis of the Archons (II,4)," in Book *The Hypostasis of the Archons (II,4)*, ed. James M. Robinson, Third, Completely Revised ed. (San Francisco: Harper 1990), p. 168.
[181] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1083. cf. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, Text 27.2-3 p.79. '.... Bound and sealed are (3) the demon, the devil, the satan, the curse, and the e[vil] lilliths'.
[182] Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, Text 27.2-3, p. 79;
[183] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 566.
[184] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 985-986.

is near.' It is likely that the speaker is the interpreting angel, whom John had attempted to worship in verses 8 and 9. The phraseology that is used here is a conscious allusion to the motif of Daniel 8:26; 12:4, 9, which is the only apocalypse in which the author receives a divine command to 'seal up' his writing until the end.[185] Gruenwald, however, claims that the motif of 'sealing' a revelatory book in order to preserve its secrets until the eschaton is a common literary convention among Jewish Apocalypses.[186] Aune points out, though, that this motif occurs only in explicit form in Daniel and in Revelation.[187] There are, however, three closely related passages in *4 Ezra*.[188]

In the *Gospel of The Egyptians* (120-150 C. E.) it is claimed that Seth wrote a book and placed it in the mountain called 'Charaxio' in order that it might remain hidden until the end of time.[189] The theme of concealed revelation is also to be found in the *Testament of Moses* (1st Century C.E.), where Moses entrusts Joshua to preserve his revelation, place it in clay jars and place the clay jars in a designated place to await the day of recompense.[190] John is told specifically to reveal the words of his book because the 'time is near.' The indication is that the words of this prophecy are meant for the the current audience and were not simply for those in the far distant future. John is therefore to make his words known to this audience so that they can take heed of that which has been revealed.[191] They are not to be 'sealed' for a future audience.

M. Summary

Seals have been used for a wide variety of purposes and their usage was also widespread throughout Asia Minor. Seals have been used for a period of over seven

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[185] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1216.
[186] Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums ; 14. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), p. 12.
[187] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1216.
[188] 4 Ezra, 12:37; 14:5-6; 14:45-46.
[189] *Gospel of the Egyptians* 68:1-9.
[190] *Testament of Moses* 1:17-18.
[191] Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 606-607.

thousand years. They have served functions that ranged from the guaranteeing of authenticity, to serving as items of importance in rituals of power, to being closely associated with spiritual protection. Seals served as marks of authority for kings and even gods. There has been an association between 'seals' and what some would term as 'magical' practice, and certainly Aune believes that this is relevant to the discussion of this item within the context of the Apocalypse.

Gorelick has done some work regarding the comparison of the usage of seals in the Jewish scriptures and in the New Testament and he found that in the New Testament there are no indications of the personal usage of seals, and that the usage in the New Testament was more often a metaphorical usage than in the Jewish scriptures. He specifically cites the reasoning for the differences in usage as based on the life experiences of the early Christian community and he postulates that they would have felt a need to develop symbols that were related to protective methods. Given these factors which focus upon this protective element, it seems highly likely that John will have been fully cognizant of the cultural mileu surrounding 'seals' amongst the general population and it seems highly probable that he has constructed his discussion so as to counter any tendency to rely upon sources of protection that he does not deem as acceptable. This would almost certainly include reliance upon amulets or incantational protection. His reasoning for not finding amulets as acceptable appears to the source of their power and the control of their power rather than upon the reality of such power's existence.

The issue of being 'worthy' (chapter 5) appears to provide additional evidence that John may have been aware of the role that this terminology was playing amongst certain communities within the ancient world and with his symbolism he can both elevate Christ and show him as the source of 'worthiness' for his followers. John combines this symbolism with the imagery of 'seven seals' which almost certainly has connections with the area of

'Jewish magic' and with matters of earthly power. The issue of 'worthiness' is also common to religious movements which saw this element as an important prerequsite to the disclosure of secret information. John indicates that there is only one who is 'worthy' and therefore he nullifies claims by other groups of their significance.

The 'seal' served in a variety of quarters as a protective device, and in chapter 7 and in 9:4, the imagery of the *σφραγίς* is used to indicate the protection of God for the faithful. There would be no useful protection from any other source or device and therefore no need to seek or rely upon any source or device, such as the 'seal of Solomon'. The absolute authority of the risen Christ and of God is most adeptly expressed with the imagery used by John and therefore it is both unhelpful and perhaps even a dividing of allegiances to rely upon anything other than the protection which is supplied by God through Jesus Christ. The 'seal' of the one true God is all that is necessary or desirable for the faithful followers of Christ.

The term to 'seal' is used in the sense of 'to conceal' or keep something from being revealed at 10:4. The terminology for 'sealing' is used in the sense of 'to restrict' or even curtail the power of a spiritual entity such as Satan at 20:3. In order for John's audience to understand his imagery he would either need to explain in some way that he is using this imagery in a manner different from its everyday usage, in other words redefine the terms, or it would be anticipated that his audience would understand these images in the context of their everyday usage. In the Apocalypse, John does not appear to have redefined the terms. He simply re-orients them to indicate that the source of any legitimate power behind these symbols can only come from the source of the risen Christ and God. In so doing he delegitimises any other usages of these items or symbols and shows that in truth they are powerless in the face of the true source of power in the universe. It is my opinion, that without overstating the case, Aune is correct in citing the materials from the *Greek Magical*

Papyri and other similar sources as being of importance in understanding the imagery surrounding 'seals' that John uses in the Apocalypse.

Such imagery is perhaps only one facet of the multi-faceted approach that John uses in order to convey the absolute power and authority of the risen Christ. John uses this approach to encourage his audience to repent for their failures and to remain faithful in all circumstances to God and to Christ. The usage in this section of the concepts of the 'seal' and 'sealing' demonstrates that there is no need to rely upon any device, power or authority other than that wielded by the risen Christ. No other object, or power will be able to withstand or overcome the will of Christ as he holds the authority to unleash the will of God.

9. Beginning and End Passages

Three expressions will be dealt with under the heading of beginning and end passages.[1] David Aune focuses on these passages as part of the evidence that John wrote the Apocalypse as a polemic against 'magic'.[2]

A. The Beginning and the End

The first of these phrases, *ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος* ('the beginning and the end') occurs 2 times in the Apocalypse,[3] though there are textual variants that would also place it in Revelation 1:8.[4] John's usage of this phrase and its kindred phrases is not something of slight significance for him. The assertion of the sovereignty given expression in this context is at the core of a major theological thrust of the Apocalypse. The use of phrases of this type answers the question of who is, in reality, in control of the universe. The answer is the God who is the initiator of the world as well as its consummator.[5] The origin of the expression *ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος* is the focus of a considerable degree of controversy. Thomas indicates that, in his view, the origin of the phrase is based on the passage from Isaiah 44:6 where the early Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures contains what he perceives to be a similar reading.[6] There are, however, significant differences between the two readings.[7] Aune is of the opinion that the phrase 'the beginning and the end' is derived from Hellenistic religious and philosophical traditions.[8] According to van Unnik the phrase 'the beginning and the end' is

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[1] *ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος* ('the beginning and the end'), *Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὦ*, ('I am the Alpha and the Omega'), *ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος* ('I am the first and the last').
[2] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", pp. 481-501.
[3] Rev. 21:6; 22:13.
[4] Those that include the reading *ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος* are ℵ* fam 1611 $^{1854\ 2050\ 2329}$2351 Andreas it$^{gig\ h}$ cop^{bo} Beatus. Those that include the reading *ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος* fam 1611^{2329} cop^{bo}. These readings are scribal insertions that have been influenced by the use of this phrase in similar contexts in 21:6; 22:13. In both of these instances however, both of the words are articular as in the second instance. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 51.
[5] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 404.
[6] Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 448.
[7] The reading of the Old Greek Translation at Isa. 44:6 is *Ἐγὼ πρῶτος καὶ ἐγω μετὰ ταῦτα.* The reading in the Apocalypse is *ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος.*
[8] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", p. 489.

drawn from Hellenistic religious and philosophical sources that have a cosmological rather than a temporal emphasis.[9]

In the carbonized text of the Derveni papyrus that was discovered in Macedonia dating from ca. 350 B.C.E., there is an Orphic poem, that likely dates from a much earlier time. In this passage at col. 17, line 12 it reads: *Ζεὺς κεφαλή Ζεὺς μέσσα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τελεῖται*,[10] ('Zeus is the beginning, Zeus is the middle, all things are fulfilled by Zeus.').[11]

This text is very similar to the passage in Pseudo-Aristotle *De mundo* 7, *Ζεὺς κεφαλή Ζεὺς μέσσα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται* ('Zeus is the beginning, Zeus is the middle, all things have been made by Zeus').[12] This text is alluded to in Plato *Laws* 4.715e –4.716a, *θεός ...ἀρχήν τε καὶ τελευτὴν καὶ μέσα τῶν ὄντων ἁπάντων ἔχων* ('*god*... holds the beginning and the end and the middle of all things which exist').[13] Further reference to this phrase may be found in the following works: Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.280; *Against Apion* 2.190; Philo, *On Noah's Work as a Planter* 93. It is also to be noted that in the *Greek Magical Papyri*, Hekate is referred to as *ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος εἶ*....[14] The view held by most commentators is that the issue at the heart of the discussion here is the sovereignty of God, and not an issue of combating 'magical' practices, or ideology.[15]

Massyngberde Ford considers the issue being addressed by this phrase to be centred upon the creative power of God. This view appears to be based upon the assumption that the phrase 'the beginning and the end' is found at Isaiah 48:12b.[16] The phrase that occurs in the early Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures is *ἐγώ εἰμι πρῶτος, καὶ ἐγώ εἰμι εἰς τὸν·αἰῶνα* (I

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[9] W. C. van Unnik, *Het godspredikaat 'Het begin en het einde' bij Flavius Josephus en de openbaring van Johannes* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1976), pp. 57-59, 66.
[10] Gábor Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 36-37.
[11] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1126.
[12] Walther Kranz and Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker : Griechisch und Deutsch*, 6. verbess. Aufl ed., vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1951), p. 8. Lines 19 –20.
[13] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1126.
[14] PGM 2836.
[15] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1126; Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 448; Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 404; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 738; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 578-579.
[16] Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 363.

am the first, and I am forever). The phrase in the Hebrew text אני ראשון אף אני אחרון ('I am the first also the last') bears more resemblance to the phrase used by John though there are significant differences. It would certainly appear that the early Greek translator of the Jewish scriptures is interpreting this section in a temporal sense and not simply as being in terms of creative power.

The main vision conveyed by John throughout the Apocalypse is that God and Jesus are sovereign rulers of the universe and nothing occurs outside the realm of their power. If as Yarbro Collins postulates the issue that John is seeking to deal with in his Apocalypse is one of the assimilation to the surrounding culture, then the issue of absolute sovereignty is of central importance. John has created a literary environment in which the tension between what existed and what ought to exist is heightened and clarified. Distinctions are drawn between the rule of God and the rule of Satan, between the rule of Christ and the rule of Caesar using symbols representing the rule of each. The goal of the Apocalypse is to overcome the intolerable tension that is clearly delineated between reality and hopeful faith.[17]

There appears to be evidence from both Jewish and Hellenistic sources, that John could have drawn upon in his usage of the phrase *ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος*. None of these sources that demonstrably predate the Apocalypse clearly indicate a 'magical' context, as none of these sources has been categorised as 'magical'. The issue addressed by John's usage of this phrase appears to be primarily the issue of sovereignty. John is seeking to insure that his audience understands that God and Jesus Christ are in control of the destiny of the universe. In light of this, it might be seen as a phrase that could be used to demonstrate that a dependence upon any and all supernatural powers outside of those completely in alignment with the will of God and of Jesus Christ, would be disloyalty. It is highly probable that John might perceive such a reliance as totally unacceptable.

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[17] Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, p. 141.

B. Alpha and Omega

The next phrase to be examined is *Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὦ*,[18] which occurs 3 times in the Apocalypse (1:8; 21:6; 22:13). Twice this phrase refers to God (1:8; 21:6) and once it refers to Christ (22:13). There is a certain irregularity in the Greek text with regard to this expression as *Ἄλφα* is spelled out, whereas *Ὦ* is not.[19] The reason for this is that the name 'Omega' for *Ω* did not come into existence until a time much later than the composition of the Apocalypse. In the poem 'De litteris monosyllabis Graecis ac Latinis' (No.13 in the second edition of Ausonius's work *Technopaegnion*), the last syllable in each of the twenty-seven lines ends in a monosyllabic name, or sound. *Ω* is included amongst the thirteen Greek letters having a monosyllabic name, or sound to represent them.[20] The name 'Omega' was not coined by grammarians until the 7th century C.E. and it is only after this time that it begins to be inserted into manuscripts of the Apocalypse.[21]

Since alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, this divine title emphasizes the sovereignty of God in ways that are similar to the expressions 'the beginning and the end (21:6; 22:13), and 'the first and the last' (1:17; 2:8; 22:13). In Jewish alphabetic symbolism, the Hebrew term אמת ('truth') was understood by the Rabbis as a way to indicate that God is in fact the beginning, middle and end, because א was the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, מ the middle letter, and ת the last letter.[22] However, there are

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[18] 'I am the Alpha and the Omega'.
[19] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 51.
[20] Arthur E. Gordon, *The Letter Names of the Latin Alphabet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 22; R. P. H. Green, ed., *The Works of Ausonius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 181-182. This is the case as can be seen from the metre of this poem.
[21] Eberhard Nestle, "Alpha und Omega, San und Sigma," *Philologus* 70 (1911): pp. 155-157; Bruce M. Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 6-7 N. 13; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 51.
[22] I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Mo'ed* (London: The Soncino Press, 1938), p. 501 N. 506; E. Lohmeyer, "A und O," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Theodor Klauser, et al. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann Verlags – GMBH., 1950), pp. 1-4; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 57; H. St. J. Thackeray, trans., *Josephus, The Life Against Apion*, ed. G. P. Goold, The Loeb Classical Library Series, vol. 186 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1997), p. 369; N c.

some difficulties with this viewpoint as מ is not actually the middle letter in the Hebrew alphabet.[23]

In later Jewish writings, the rabbis would write about keeping the law in its totality, from א to ת, which are the first and last letters of the Hebrew Alphabet.[24] The idea of such a phrase is not simply that God has dominion over the beginning and the end, but that he has sovereignty over the entirety, from the beginning to the end, and all that lies in between.[25]

Another viewpoint with regard to the identity of the origin of the phrase 'I am the Alpha and the Omega' is that put forward by Massyngberde Ford who postulates that it stands for אורים (*Urim*) and תמים (*Thummim*) respectively. The idea behind this is that the lots used by the high priest to determine the will of God also had the meaning of 'all encompassing'[26]

Though Massyngberde Ford gives no explanation as to where this concept originates there is an indication that it might be due to the explanations given by Philo of the High Priest's breastplate.[27] Some have proposed the view that א and ת were embroidered into the cloth of the bag containing the אורים and תמים carried in the breastplate of the High Priest and symbolising 'truth' and 'enlightenment' in much the same way as the symbols used in ancient Egypt.[28] In ancient Egypt, there is an indication that ancient images were worn by the judges of Egypt when passing judgement as an indication of the veracity of their decisions.[29] These judges too, in earlier times had been priests.[30] Though this view has some appeal, the question must be asked, would this meaning have been accessible to the audience addressed by John? This suggestion is highly speculative and would certainly need substantiation that is more solid in order to be considered entirely plausible.

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[23] מ is actually the 13th letter out of a total of 22 letters.
[24] *Shabbath* 55a; *'Abodah Zarah* 4a.
[25] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 37.
[26] Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 379.
[27] Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3:132. *The Special Laws* I 16:88-92. *Moses II*, 23:112-113; 24:125. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. אוּרִים
[28] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. אוּרִים
[29] Diodorus of Sicily, *Book I*, 48:10-13.
[30] Aelian, *Historical Miscellany*, 14.34.

Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὦ has generally been taken as a reference to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, but there is another possibility suggested by Stanford. He puts forward the view that there is a good deal of evidence in Hellenistic literature, later Greek literature, papyri, and in inscriptions, for the use of the seven vowels in 'magical' and liturgical ceremonies, especially those associated with Serapis and Gnostic type liturgical ceremonies.[31] Stanford is of the opinion that it is highly likely that *AΩ* is an abbreviated way of referring to the chanting of all seven vowels.[32] In the *Greek Magical Papyri*, the seven vowels commonly represent the divine name.[33] The seven-lettered name is referred to in PGM XXI.11ff. where it is said to be pronounced '[in] harmony with the seven [vowel sounds, which are pronounced according to] the twenty-eight forms of the moon...'[34]

Further, the seven vowels often function unequivocally as a divine name.[35] This seven vowel divine name can be used, perhaps under the influence of Egyptian 'magic', in a method where the 'magician' pretends to be the deity:[36] 'I am Oh, I am *AEHIOYΩ*][37] or 'Lord, I imitate [you by saying] the 7 vowels;....'[38] The first recorded instance of a chant using the seven vowels to praise the gods is found in the writings of Demetrius, an Alexandrian philosopher of the 1st century B.C.E. in his essay *On Style*.[39] This explanation fails to elucidate why John would have abbreviated this group of seven vowels in such a fashion. Why would John refer to an abbreviated form of this divine name? If this expression is used here as an abbreviated form of the divine name the context would seem to

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[31] W. B. Stanford, "Two Notes: The Significance of the Alpha and Omega in Revelation 1:8," *Hermathena* 98 (1964): pp. 43-44.
[32] Stanford, "Two Notes: The Significance of the Alpha and Omega in Revelation 1:8," p. 44.
[33] PGM XIII 39 '...you will write the great name with the seven vowels.' Translation from Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, p. 173.
[34] Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, p. 259.
[35] PGM XIII.39; XXI.11-14.
[36] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 57.
[37] PGM III.661.
[38] PGM XIII.207.
[39] Kieren Barry, *The Greek Qabalah* (York Beach ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1999), p. 37. 71. *'In Egypt the priests, when singing hymns in praise of the gods, employ the seven vowels, which they utter in due succession; and the sound of these letters is so euphonious that men listen to it in preference to flute and lyre.'* W. Rhys Roberts, ed., *Demetrius on Style* (Hildsheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1969), pp. 104-105.

indicate that this name actually refers to the ancient God of the Hebrews as well as to Jesus Christ. I fail to see how this furthers John's purpose here.

According to Aune, the phrase, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega', has close associations with 'magical' revelation.[40] He does, however, concede that the first occurrence of this cipher is in the Apocalypse of John.[41] Occasionally $A\Omega$ is found in association with another divine name in the *Greek Magical Papyri* name as in 'Abrasax $A\Omega$'.[42] As previously stated sometimes $A\Omega$ is used as a divine name under the supposition that the seven vowels, individually and in various combinations collectively symbolise the divine name.[43] The divine name most frequently used in the *Greek Magical Papyri* is $IA\Omega$ ('Iao') and it is also frequently used in conjunction with $A\Omega$ in sequences of vowel permutations and functions as *voces magicae*, often being juxtaposed with a series of other divine names.[44] Farrer argues that $IA\Omega$, which is the Greek form of the Tetragrammaton, was in the mind of John, but he says that he was too much of a Jew to write it, and so he referred to it instead, by means of riddles such as 'I am the Alpha and the Omega.'[45]

This supposition seems highly unlikely as it would not seem to be easily decipherable by John's audience in Asia Minor. There does not appear to be either a Jewish or a Hellenistic precedent for such a usage and John appears to have invented the expression himself. The phrase *ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν* ('the one who is and who was') was a formula popular amongst Greek-speaking Jews. It was ultimately derived from the phrase *ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν* ('I am the one who is') in the early Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures, which was a translation of the Hebrew phrase אהיה אשר אהיה 'I am who I am' (Exodus 3:14). The shortened version of this title (*ὁ ὤν*) which is used in the *Greek Magical Papyri* as a divine

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[40] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", p. 489; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 57.
[41] Lohmeyer, "A und O," p. 1.
[42] PGM V.363, 367; cf. IV.528.
[43] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 57. PGM IV.1182-1183 – 'I call upon you with your name *αω ευ ηοϊ̈ αιοη υεωα* ....' cf. PGM IV.992-993, PGM.3240-3241.
[44] Aune, "Iao", p. 1-12.
[45] Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949), pp. 261-283.

name is often found in close association with *Ἰάω* as in PGM LXXI.3-4; XII.111; XIII.1020, 1048.[46]

In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 43,8-44,9 the unpronounceable name is composed of the seven Greek vowels (in a Coptic text), with each being written twenty-two times (one time for each letter in the Semitic alphabet), in the order *IHOΥEAΩ*. Böhlig, Wisse, and Labib speculate that this combination of vowels might possibly mean *Ἰήου ἐ(στιν) Α (καὶ) Ω*, i.e., 'Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega'.[47] For an example of a single letter (א) being used for the name of God in a 'magical' context, see the text of Incantation bowl 19.2.[48] In a text of a similar nature the name of God is expressed as בשום אאאאא.[49] All of these examples, from 'magical' contexts, are later than the text of the Apocalypse and it is difficult if not impossible to prove that this type of usage did not develop at a time later than the composition of the Apocalypse.

C. First and the Last

The next phrase to be considered is *ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος* which occurs in various permutations in the Apocalypse (1:17; 2:8; 22:13). Aune points out that the phrase 'I am the First and the Last'[50] along with the phrase 'the beginning and the end'[51] are also used as divine predicates.[52] These titles are juxtaposed with the phrase 'I am the Alpha and the Omega' in order to emphasize the absolute power and sovereignty of God (1:8; 21:6), or of Christ (22:13), and each serves to define and develop the others.[53] The origin of the formula *ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος* ('I am the first and the last') is usually said to be from Jewish

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[46] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 30-31.
[47] Alexander Böhlig, Frederik Wisse, and Pahor Labib, trans. and ed., *Nag Hammadi Codices III, 2 and IV, 2: The Gospel of the Egyptians: The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1975), p. 173.
[48] Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, pp. 60-61. Text 19.62. בש<ו>ם א.
[49] Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, p. 79. Text 27.72. p. 79.
[50] Rev. 1:17b-18; 2:8; 22:13.
[51] Rev. 21:6; 22:13.
[52] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", p. 489.
[53] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1126.

sources based on the early Greek translation of Isaiah 44:6[54] (c.f. Isaiah 41:4; 48:12).[55] This formula is, however, also found in Greek literature, and has a Hellenistic character.[56] Aune does, however, concede that John has most likely drawn his usage of this phrase from Jewish sources since it occurs in its various forms three times in Isaiah, and since in Greek literature this phrase is not used as a divine predicate.[57] Also the usage in the Hellenistic sources is not of a very similar nature to that used by John.[58]

Thomas is of the opinion that even the contention of Aune that the phrase 'the Alpha and the Omega' is a title derived from Greek literature and has close associations with 'Hellenis-Roman Revelatory Magic' is incorrect. He bases this opinion upon his view that the rest of the titles in the verses have 'too strong an OT flavor, as does the book as a whole, for this to be true.'[59] Reddish concurs with this view by Thomas attributing the use of *A* and *Ω* as symbols for God to the influence of the words of God in Isaiah 44:6, 'I am the first, and I am the last'. There is also the case that within later Jewish writings the rabbis spoke of keeping the Law in its entirety as keeping the Law from א to ת.[60] Aune rejects the view that this phrase is drawn primarily from Judaism and points rather to a Hellenistic source for John's appropriation of this term and points out a multitude of Hellenistic connections to the phrase 'I am the beginning and the end'.[61]

It is a feature of John's style that he uses a juxtaposition of varied elements that are drawn from both Judaism and Hellenism. He does this, however, without being mechanical

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[54] *Ἐγὼ πρῶτος καὶ ἐγὼ μετὰ ταῦτα* ('I am the first and I am after these').
[55] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 101; Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic," p. 489; Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 37-38.
[56] Homer, *Hymn to Apollo* 21. Hesiod, *Theogony* 34. Theognis, *Elegies* 1.3-4. Unnik, *Het godspredikaat 'Het begin en het einde' bij Flavius Josephus en de openbaring van Johannes*, pp. 74-76; Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", p. 489.
[57] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 101-102.
[58] Hesiod, *Theogony* 34. Theognis, *Elegies* 1.3-4. M. L. West, ed., *Hesiod Theogony* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 112, 166.
[59] Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 81, n. 67.
[60] Reddish, *Revelation*, p. 37.
[61] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", p. 489; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, pp. 1126-1127.

in his use of these elements and blends eastern and western traditions in new and exciting ways that use these varied elements to convey a message that is uniquely Christian.[62] This combining of elements would serve John well in reaching an audience that is made up of people from both a Judaistic background as well as those that were steeped in Hellenism. Perhaps it is a more likely scenario that John was aware that his use of these expressions would strike a resonant chord with the people of a Hellenistic background as well as those from a Jewish background. There is a historical and innate tendency among the Jewish community of Asia Minor to combine elements from Hellenism with their culture in a way that is unacceptable to John. This type of blending is demonstrated vividly in Sardis where recent discoveries made in the synagogue complex show a remarkable accommodation by the Jews of that City to the surrounding culture. Their use of sculptured Lydian reliefs in the structure of the Synagogue itself gives the impression that the Jews of this city had a long history of accommodation to their Hellenistic surroundings.[63]

Despite all the examples cited with regard to the usage of *Αω* in 'magical' texts it is certainly possible that the *Greek Magical Papyri*, in particular, are borrowing from Revelation rather than John alluding in some way to a 'magical' tradition by his use of the term. It is after all the case that the phrase *Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὦ*, occurs for the first time in the Apocalypse of John.[64] Clearly this phrase was later used in a 'magical' context as is demonstrated by the references above, but the question of whether John had this type of usage in mind is highly debatable. If he did, and he intended to put a stop to such usage, he appears to have been unsuccessful as the examples cited above would indicate. Evidently, there was a connection between phrases such as 'I am the first, and I am the last' and 'the beginning and the end' within Hellenism. There is also a history within the Jewish context,

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[62] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", p. 489.
[63] D. G. Mitten, "A New Look at Ancient Smyrna," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 29 (1966): pp. 36-68; Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986, 1989), p. 137.
[64] Lohmeyer, "A und O," p. 1; Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", p. 489.

including their scriptures, whereby the phrase 'I am the first and I am the last' would strike a resonant cord within their cognitive reality.

It is possible that John developed the phrase 'I am the Alpha and the Omega' solely based on these 'non-magical' contexts, but clearly later usage would show that some at least viewed this phrase as an expression that could be used in a powerful fashion in 'magical' material. Certainly it has been the case that much of both the Jewish scriptures and the New Testament have been used in a variety of ways in both 'magical' texts and in other texts that depart significantly from the intent of the author.[65] There is nothing in the context of Revelation, or in the contemporary culture of Asia Minor that would indicate unequivocally that John has used the expression *Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὦ* in a fashion that is meant to counter some 'magical' concept specifically surrounding this material.

If as Aune has indicated the Apocalypse was written as an 'anti-magic' polemic then further evidence is needed to say assuredly that there is a link in the intent of John to use this phrase to counter 'magical' practice in any more than a general manner. The variety of explanations as to the origin of this expression would seem to indicate that either the explanation is to be found in John's view of the deity of God and of Christ or a vital piece of the puzzle is yet to surface. If one looks at the emphasis of the Apocalypse as a whole, the issue of the sovereignty of God and of Jesus Christ is clearly apparent throughout the text. John appears to be once again challenging anything that would in any way dispute the absolute and total sovereignty of God and the Risen Christ. This would clearly include 'magical' practice.

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[65] Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, pp. xliv–xlvi.

10. 'White Stone' Passages

A. Introduction

In Revelation 2:17, John wrote: '*νικῶτι δώσω αυτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκπρμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκήν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων.*'

In this context, both the image of the 'manna' and the image of the 'white stone' present significant interpretative difficulties. The first of these images *ὁ μάννα* is clearly anchored in Jewish tradition, but there is significant debate about its function in this context.[1] The second image (*ψῆφον λευκήν*), has been the subject of a very diverse set of proposals and the difficulty is to discriminate among the many alternatives.[2] Hemer suggests that an important question to consider in the discussion of these symbols is whether the point of the symbol of the 'manna' is not somehow explicable in terms of a local phenomenon that would cause the two images to be connected in some way in the minds of the people of Pergamum.[3] This investigation into the contextual background of the *ψῆφον λευκήν* will examine the usage of the term *ψῆφος* in antiquity while also exploring the context of 2:17. The aim of this study is to understand *ψῆφον λευκήν* in relation to the broader context of the Apocalypse and not to focus too narrowly upon one particular aspect.

B. The Term *Ψῆφος*

Ψῆφος is rare in the Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures[4] and in the New Testament,[5] but it is common in other ancient Greek writings. In its most literal form this word is translated as a 'pebble' but it can on occasion denote a gem.[6] *Ψῆφος* may be applied

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[1] Colin J. Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background" (Thesis, The Victoria University of Manchester 1969), pp. 206-208.
[2] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 177.
[3] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", pp. 206-208.
[4] Ex. 4:25; Qoh. 7:25; Lam. 3:16; *4 Mac.* 15:26; *Sir.* 18:10.
[5] Acts 26:10; Rev. 2:17.
[6] Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 3:27; cf. Pindar, *Olympian Odes* XIII.46. It is a word that can be used of the pebbles of the sea by Pindar.

to uses such as 'tablets of stone'. It is used most commonly in the sense of a 'vote' and can be used to denote a resolution (Pindar, *Olympian Odes* 7:87) or even of a place of voting (Euripedes, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 945).[7] In other instances it may be used of a 'token' or 'ticket' of various sorts and semantically comes very close in meaning to the Greek word '*σύμβολον* ' and the Latin term 'tessera'.[8] It may also be used of the stone on which the list of victors is chiseled.[9] Sometimes it is used of a precious stone that is mentioned alongside such materials as gold.[10]

Ψῆφος may also be employed as a designation for stones used in mosaics; significantly, this usage, in addition to ancient classical literature, is also attested in Jewish tradition. It is used of the 'small stones' that were employed in the playing of board games, it can refer to counting (Herodotus, *The Histories* II.36.4), to a treasury account, stones used in astrological calculations, 'magic', and 'soothsaying', but above all else, as indicated above, this word is used of the stones used in voting (Herodotus, *The Histories* VIII.123.2), but it also came to be used of the 'voice' or 'vote' as well (Aristophanes *Wasps* 675). In the Greek translations of the Jewish scriptures the word primarily indicates a 'little stone' or a 'pebble' while at Exodus 4:25[11] it is used of the 'sharp stone' used to cut the foreskin in circumcision.[12]

C. Alternatives for the Source of the Imagery Behind Revelation 2:17

As noted above, there is considerable debate surrounding the meaning of this imagery within the context of Revelation 2:17.[13] Osborne declares, 'It is impossible to know for

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[7] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 242. N. 283.
[8] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 210.
[9] Pindar, *Olympian Odes* VII.86.
[10] Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, III.27.
[11] Ex. 4:25 '*καὶ λαβοῦσα Σεπφωρα ψῆφον περιέτεμεν τὴ· ἀκροβυστίαν τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς...*'
[12] Georg Waldeck Braumann, "ψῆφος," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 604-605.
[13] William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 68.

certain which of these is the best source for the imagery.'[14] The problem is not, as is often the case, that there is nothing with which to relate this imagery, it is the fact that there are such a great number of contemporary practices that could have possibly contributed to John's choice to make use of this expression.[15] The difficulty is being able to discriminate between the various possible alternatives. Hemer suggests that the more important possible alternative suggestions can be placed under seven 'comprehensive' headings; the 'white stone' may be one of the following:

I. A 'jewel' in Old Testament or Jewish Tradition.
II. The judicial *calculus Minervae*, the casting vote of acquittal.
III. A token of admission, membership or recognition.
IV. An amulet with a divine name.
V. A token of gladiatorial discharge.
VI. An allusion to a process of inititation into the service of Asklepios.
VII. Simply as a writing material whose form or colour was significant.[16]

Each of these categories will be discussed in order to determine if they contribute information that provides insight into determining the source of the imagery for the *ψῆφον λευκήν* in 2:17.

I. A 'Jewel' in Jewish Tradition

Under the first of these headings at least three different suggestions have been put forward. The first suggestion, for consideration, is that John is alluding to the rabbinic tradition that 'precious stones and pearls' came down each morning with the manna from heaven when Israel was in the desert.[17] The merit that this solution offers is that it would explain the collocation of the 'manna' with the 'white stone'. The difficulty with this suggestion is that the point of the allusion is not apparent, and it is difficult to ascertain how

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[14] Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 149.
[15] Roland H. Worth Jr., *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Asian Culture*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), pp. 143-153.
[16] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, pp. 94-96.
[17] *Yoma* 75a. Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung, "Yoma," in *The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo'ed*, ed. Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein (London: Soncino Press, 1938), p. 364.

Gentiles among the audience would have been able to gain any sense from such an allusion, due to its obscurity.[18]

Another possible suggestion is that this stone may in some sense refer to the ornamentation of the High Priest. The 'white stone' has been identified with three possible ornaments on the regalia of the High Priest.[19] The first of these suggestions is that this stone refers in some way to the Urim and Thummim found in a pouch on the High Priest's breastplate.[20] The Urim and Thummim have provoked a tremendous amount of speculation amongst biblical scholars.[21] The Jewish scriptures use this phrase, in some form, only seven times.[22] There are, however, a number of other places that allude to the use of Urim and Thummim, though a description of the physical form is never provided.[23] One of the factors contributing to the absence of information regarding the use of this object is that the Urim and Thummim appear to have vanished from usage amongst the Jewish people at some point during their history.[24]

Van Dam has produced an exhaustive study of the Urim and Thummim that surveys the history of interpretation and the treatment of the terms as they occur in a variety of versions, translations and other accounts. Speculative theories associate the Urim and Thummim with the gems on the shoulderpices of the ephod, with precious stones on the high-priestly breastpiece, or with the breastpiece itself.[25] Possible early indications of such an understanding have been found in documents discovered at Qumran in 4Q376:

> *Frag.* 1 col. I 3 [...] for the Urim

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[18] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 96.
[19] *Worth Jr., The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Asian Culture*, p. 145.
[20] Fred D. Howard, *1, 2, & 3 John, Jude & Revelation*, The Layman's Bible Book Commentary series, vol. 24 (Nashville TN: Broadman Press, 1982), p. 63.
[21] Edward Lipinski, "Ūrīm and Tummīm," *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1970): pp. 495-496.
[22] Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num 27:21; Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65.
[23] Victor Horowitz, "True Light on the Urim and Thummim", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 88 (1998): pp. 263-274.
[24] The Talmud attributes this cessation to the time when the 'Former Prophets died ...' *Soṭah* 48a.
[25] Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim* (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), pp. 16-17.

Frag. 1 col. II (= 1Q29) 1 they will provide you with light and he will go out with it with tongues of fire; the stone of the left side which is at its 2 left side will shine to the eyes of all the assembly until the priest finishes speaking. And after [the cloud (?)] has been removed 3 [...] and you shall keep and d[o al]l [that] he tells you.[26]

The shining of the stones is a reference to the two engraved stones on the shoulderpieces of the Ephod of the high priest.[27] The reference to the Urim in 4Q376 would appear to indicate a close relationship between, if not identification between, the Urim and Thummim and the two stones. Another instance of possible association with the stones of the breastplate is to be found at 4Q164[28] where the Urim and Thummim are once again associated with the giving of light.[29]

Donald Guthrie argues that the Urim and Thummim of the High Priest bore a name which the priest was not permitted to disclose.[30] The earliest written reference to the tradition that the name of God was inscribed upon the Urim and Thummim is to be found in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* at Exodus 28:30.[31] This same tradition is carried through history. Van Dam asks whether this interpretation arose from the need to have the enabling divine presence provide inspiration for the words of the High Priest. The divine presence would be

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[26] Martínez and Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition,* vol. 2, pp. 742-743.
[27] cf. Exod. 28:9-12.
[28] 4Q164 '4 all your battlements [of rubies]. Its interpretation concerns the twelve [chiefs of the priests who] 5 illuminate with the judgment of the Urim and the Thummim [...without] 6 any from among them missing, like the sun in all its light. Isa 54:12 And a[ll your gates of glittering stones.]'; trans. from Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition,* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), p. 327.
[29] Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, p. 17.
[30] Donald Guthrie, *The Apostles* (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1975), p. 390.
[31] Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, p. 23. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,* Exod. 28:30: 'You shall put into the ephod of judgment the Urim—the words of which are enlightening and make public the hidden things of the house of Israel, and the Thummim—which fulfills the oracles of the high priest, who, through them, seeks instruction from before the Lord. On them is clearly inscribed the great and holy Name through which the three hundred and ten worlds were created, and which was clearly inscribed on the foundation stone with which the Lord of the world sealed the mouth of the great deep from the beginning. And everyone who brings this holy Name to mind in the hour of affliction is saved, and hidden things are revealed to him....' Martin McNamara and M. Maher, trans. and ed. "Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus" in; *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1994), pp. 241-242.

indicated by the inscribing of the Name on the source of that revelation, or perhaps it was an attempt to dispel 'magical' notions regarding the Urim and Thummim.[32]

If the inscription of the Name onto the Urim and Thummim somehow was seen to obviate the accusation that there is 'magic' at work, as suggested by Van Dam, then this could prove very interesting in the present study. The implication would then seem to be that the inscription of the name of God on the stone would possibly allow the Urim and Thummim to be used by the High Priest without his being subject to a charge that 'magic' was the source of the revelations.[33] The difficulty with this imagery being the background for the 'white stone' is that there in no conclusive evidence to indicate that John would have been aware of such an inscription being upon the Urim and Thummim, whatever their form.

Trench proposed that the Urim was a diamond with the holy name of 'Yahweh' inscribed upon it.[34] Plumptre provides a compelling refutation of Trench's view:[35] it is in fact doubtful whether the diamond was even known in the time when the Jewish scriptures were written. The term *ἀδάμας* was inconsistently applied during the early period; the first clear application of the term to what today is understood to be a diamond occurs in *Astronomica* 4:926 by Manilius (1st Century C.E.).[36] Epiphanius of Salamis (or Constantiensis; ca. 315-403 C. E.), in *De duodecim gemmis*, gives a description of the attire of the High Priest and refers to a diamond which lay on his chest whenever he entered into the Holy of Holies.[37] The evidence regarding the form and function of the object, or objects,

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[32] Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, pp. 23-26.
[33] Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, p. 24.
[34] Richard Chenevix Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia*, 2nd ed. (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, West Strand, 1861), pp. 132-133.
[35] E. H. Plumptre, *A Popular Exposition of the Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 4th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1891), pp. 126-127.
[36] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 212. N. 211.
[37] 'From the right and from the left on top of the shoulders, where two little shields were joined together, two emeralds hung down. In the middle of these was the Manifestation [*hē dēlōsis* = Urim] which was the aforesaid diamond, light blue in appearance. On the upperside of the shoulders were the aforesaid twelve stones. Three times a year, as has been said, (the message) was manifested to the people by means of the gold plate [on the high priest's turban]. And if they were found in sin and if the people did not walk in the commandments which

described by the phrase Urim and Thummim are in some senses contradictory and the dates of the accounts are from a time considerably later than the 1st century C.E. These factors call into question the reliability of arguments based upon this evidence.

There is also difficulty in the fact that the Urim and Thummin appears to comprise two objects rather than a single entity, though Van Dam comes to the conclusion that the plurals are to be understood as *plurales intensivi* that are a hendiadys.[38] Houtman concludes that this interpretation is supported by the text of Exodus 28:30 where the Urim and Thummim appear to be reduced to the single denominator משפט.[39] Kitz disagrees with this assessment and relates the Urim and Thummim to a form of cleromancy, and in such instances he insists there must be more than one object.[40]

The discussion above considers only a small proportion of the debate regarding the form, location, and number of objects that are designated by the appellation 'Urim and Thummim.' The possibility certainly exists that this object, or objects, may have been the background for John's imagery regarding the 'white stone', but if it is, the connection is now lost to us. Another possible parallel is the reference to the use of the 'new name' in the *Testament of Levi* (2nd century B.C.E.) 8:14.[41] Though this text would possibly provide a source for a tradition allowing for the giving of a 'new name', it still would not explain the

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God had given, the colour of the stone became black and from this they knew that the Lord had sent death. When he sent them to war, it became red.... And if it became bright like snow, the people knew that nowhere was there sin and then they celebrated.' Trans. from Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, pp. 27-28. cf. J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus... Ser. graeca v043* ((1864).

[38] Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, pp. 136-139.

[39] C. Houtman, "The Urim and Thummim: A New Suggestion", *Vetus Testamentum* 40 (1990): pp. 229-232.

[40] Anne Marie Kitz, "The Plural Form of 'Ûrîm and Tummîm", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 (1997): pp. 401-410. Others would also argue that there must be more than one object composing that which is designated as 'Urim and Thummim'. Edward Robertson, "The 'Ūrīm and Tummīm; What Were They?", *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964): pp. 67-74; Edward A. Mangan, "The Urim and Thummim", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 1 (1939): pp. 133-138; Lipinski, "Ūrīm and Tummīm," pp. 495-496; Erica Reiner, "Fortune-telling in Mesopotamia", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 19 (1960): pp. 25-35; Victor Hurowitz, "True Light on the Urim and Thummim," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 88 (1998): pp. 263-274. Hurowitz also notes that this is the only form of divination through physical means that is '...expressly sanctioned by various biblical authors...'

[41] *Testament of Levi* 8:14 'But the third shall be granted a new name, because from Judah a king will arise and shall found a new priesthood in accord with the gentile model and for all nations.' H. C. Kee, trans., and ed., "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* vol. 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 775, 791.

imagery behind the context of the *ψῆφον λευκήν*. An additional difficulty with this proposal is that in the context of the *Testament of Levi* this 'new name' is a reference to the priesthood of the Maccabees.[42]

It is highly probable that some of these explantations would not have been advanced apart from the fact that some scholars exclude *a priori* any reference that they consider to be from a non-Jewish background.[43] Hemer notes that it is right to approach this passage by looking for a connection in Jewish materials as its primary background. This is especially important in this context due to its proximity to the 'manna'. Unfortunately, in this instance, this background does not give any clear direction, as no distinctive reference can be found. Despite the reluctance on the part of many commentators it is necessary to allow for the possibility that John has drawn his imagery from a source outside of a strictly Jewish context.[44]

II. The Judicial *Calculus Minervae*, the Casting Vote of Acquittal

The second explanation for John's use of '*ψῆφον λευκήν*' comes from a legal context. It was the ancient practice of jurors to signify guilt or innocence by casting black or white pebbles, respectively, into an urn (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (1st century C.E.) 15.41-42; Plutarch, *Alcibaides* (46-120 C.E.) 22.2; Aeschylus *Eumenides* (5th century B.C.E.) 737-756). This imagery, at first glance, appears unsatisfactory as it does not explain the 'new name' inscribed upon the 'white stone', as the pebbles used in this procedure were not inscribed. Another obvious difference is that in Revelation it is the individual who is given the stone, and a one man jury would hardly have needed such a system in order to count votes.[45]

Hemer does, however, mention several considerations that would favour this explanation: (1) The future 'conqueror' might well have to prove his faithfulness in the face of judicial

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[42] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 212.
[43] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 212.
[44] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, pp. 96-97.
[45] Worth Jr., *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Asian Culture*, p. 143.

condemnation, and these words would then convey to him the assurance of Christ's power to override the flawed verdict of a human court.[46]

(2) Grimm and Thayer point out the connection between *νικᾶν* and *ψῆφος* in language that deals with the courtroom setting.[47] A successful litigant is described as *νικήσας* (Theophrastus, *Characters* (372-287 B.C.E) 17.8) and the 'prevailing' vote is *νικητήριος ψῆφος* (Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* (3rd century C.E.) 3.3) and *νικᾷ δ' Ὀρέστης* (Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 740). (3) The use of *ψῆφος* with the meaning of 'vote' is the most common meaning for this word where there is not an explicit context. It is at least possible that the local, contemporary setting supplied a clear and implicit setting that allowed the reader to choose between the two natural meanings of *ψῆφος*, but if this is the case, this setting still alludes us.

(4) A further instance of *ψῆφος* occurs in the non-forensic setting of the proverbial 'vote of Athene' in Philostratus's account of the sophist of Pergamum (Philostratus, *Lives of Sophists* (231-237 C.E.) 2:568). Hemer considers it possible that Philostratus may have been referring to some form of popular association since he has a propensity to cultivate local colour in his writings.[48] Further indicators point to strong cultural and religious links between Pergamum and Athens, and this is especially the case with regard to the cult of Athena.[49] Under the Attalids, there came to be a major centre of the cult of Athena at Pergamum, here surnamed Nicepherus (cf. indicating a link with Nike Apteros at Athens). Another link between Pergamum and Athens is the fact that there were altars to 'unknown gods' at Athens (cf. Acts 17:23; Pausanius, *Description of Greece* (2nd century C.E.) 1.1.4; Diogenes Laertius, *Epimenides* (3rd to 5th century C.E.) 1.110; Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (215 C.E.) 6:3) and such an altar has also been found at Pergamum (cf.

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[46] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 97.
[47] Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti*, trans., rev. and enlarged ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1886), s.v. *ψῆφος*.
[48] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 97.
[49] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 97.

Deissman, *Paul*[50]). There is the possibility that Athenian traditions were adopted into Pergamene practice, especially in relation to the cult of Athena. Hemer, in cautiously suggesting this connection, readily admits that the evidence, as it currently stands, is not sufficient to prove that this is behind the imagery in 2:17; but he suggests that it merits further investigation at least.[51] Hemer is in fact so tentative in indicating how this relates to the *ψῆφον λευκήν* that the exact nature of his supposition remains vague. There seems to be little to commend his proposal as it currently stands.

(5) The explanation, relating the *ψῆφον λευκήν* to an indicator of acquittal accords well with the context of 2:16 (which refers to making war with the sword 'of my mouth'); Isaiah 11:4 (judging with righteounsess) and Isaiah 49:2 (making his 'mouth like a sharp sword'). These biblical concepts, relating to justice, stand in contextual relationship with ideas such as the proconsul's *ius gladii* ('right of the sword').[52] Brighton puts forward this conceptual mileu as being behind the imagery at 2:17.[53] This perception still leaves open the question of how the *ψῆφον λευκήν* with the 'new name' written upon it precisely fits into the context of 2:17. The pivotal issue of the 'name' is left untouched, as the entire focus is directed toward the issue of acquittal. Though this group of explanations might fit one aspect of the descriptions, John has included the 'new name' and this is a crucial part of the imagery.

III. A Token of Admission, Membership, or Recognition

The next proposal is that the 'white stone' may be some form of *tessera* ('token') which may have served as an indication of admittance, or as a token of recognition.[54] Efird contends that such tokens were used for admission into a given society or group; the connotation in this context would then be that the *ψῆφον λευκήν* denotes admission into God's

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[50] Adolf Deissmann, *Paul a Study in Social Religious History* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1926), pp. 287-291.
[51] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 214.
[52] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 97.
[53] Brighton, *Revelation*, p. 78.
[54] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 98.

new age, freed from the hardships of persecution.[55] Mounce notes that small *tesserae* made from materials such as wood, metal, or stone were used for a variety of purposes in the ancient world and he proposes that in this context the *ψῆφον λευκήν* serves as a token for admission to the heavenly banquet.[56] Others, such as Johnson, have speculated that John's imagery here is meant to denote 'admission emblems' used by Christians entering their own feasts and festivities to insure privacy.[57] The theory behind this suggestion is that in some way the token would allow a person, or group, to recognise someone who presented such a token as worthy of either admission or perhaps some other form of reward or assistance. All of these theories are highly speculative and are based more upon a desire to find a suitable background for the imagery used by John than by the evidence that is currently available.

Hemer lists a variety of other options such as the *tessera hospitalis* (T. Maccius Plautus, *Poenulus* (254-184 B.C.E.) 958, 1047-1049, 1052) where two parties would break in half a *tessera* and then each would retain a severed half. They, or their descendants, would later be able to recognise their pledge by reuniting the two complementary halves. The wide divergence of dates, along with the diversity of the provenance of the attestations, suggests that this practice was widespread. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that the token was either white or inscribed, or for that matter, that it was used in Pergamum. The idea of a personal relationship that is pledged through the use of a secret sign does, however, seem very appropriate to the context here.[58] Swete argues that the general sense here is actually very clear: the *ψῆφον λευκήν* is a pledge that symbolises divine favour which carries with it knowledge of such an intimate nature of God, and Christ, as is only possible for the one

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[55] James M. Efird, *Revelation for Today* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 57.
[56] Robert M. Mounce, *What Are We Waiting For? A Commentary on Revelation* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, Pub., 1992), p. 10. cf. Harrington, *Revelation*, p. 62.
[57] Alan Johnson, *Revelation*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary series (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), p. 46.
[58] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 98.

possesssing the pledge.[59] This explanation then leaves the audience in the position of having to infer the meaning behind the giving of the 'new name'. Thus it seems improbable that John has developed his imagery in such a way as to leave such a crucial issue to the imagination of his audience.

Bousset[60] and Charles[61] cite a passage from *Epitome*[62] in which Titus, the Emperor, dispenses free items to those who retrieve a *σύμβολον*. This instance is then related to the term *ψῆφος* by these authors. Charles goes on to indicate that the idea present in Revelation 2:17 is that the *σύμβολον* indicates that the one possessing it has received a ticket of admission to the heavenly feast.[63] Hemer notes that although there were other instances of such things occurring, they appear to be isolated, and perhaps too obscure for our purposes.[64] It should also be noted that in the passages cited regarding the *σύμβολον* they were not inscribed with a message that would grant admission, but rather granted the bearer the object described, such as 'food', 'clothing', 'silver', or 'gold' vessels, 'horses', 'cattle', 'slaves' or 'pack animals'. This is perhaps of some considerable importance for the current argument since this proposal implies that the *ψῆφος* would connect the 'white stone' with the 'manna', in the context of the heavenly feast, as opposed to that which is provided by an earthly ruler, such as the Roman Emperor.[65] This explanation still leaves the role of the 'new name' hanging uncomfortably without any substantive contextual explanation.

It is certainly possible that some form of local custom existed at Pergamum that might have served as the background for this type of imagery; but if there was, it has yet to be

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[59] Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1906), p. 40.
[60] Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), p. 214.
[61] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John,* vol. 1, p. 66.
[62] Dio Cassius, *Epitome* (2nd to 3rd century C.E.) 66.25.5. *σφαίρια γὰρ ξύλινα μικρὰ ἄνωθεν ἐς τὸ θέατρον ἐρρίπτει σύμβολον ἔχοντα τὸ μὲν ἐδωδίμου τινός ... ἃ ἁρπάσαντάς τινας ἔδει πρὸς τοὺς δοτῆρας αὐτῶν ἀπενεγκεῖν καὶ λαβεῖν τὸ ἐπιγιγραμμένον.*
[63] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John,* vol. 1, p. 66.
[64] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 98.
[65] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 215.

clarified.[66] The most promising prospect, that something of this nature is being used as the background for this symbol, is to be found in a 2nd century C.E. inscription from Pergamum which describes the fees for admission to an unidentified association.[67] The extant section grants a dispensation in 'entrance-fee' ('*εἰσηλύσιον*') to the sons of those who have been members for five years. This right of entrance was evidently a very expensive and highly restricted distinction. In an instance such as this, Hemer proposes that there may well have been a token of membership, and that this type of example, in turn, would fit well into the background of 2:17.[68] Once again the proposal is highly speculative and the issue of the 'new name' is not adequately addressed by this proposed solution.

An additional explanation put forward as a possibility by Hemer is the 'tessera frumentaria' which was distributed by the Emperors among the poor in Rome and entitled them to a regular supply of corn (cf. Suetonius, (2nd century C.E.) *The Deified Augustus* 40.2; 42.3; *Nero* 11.2). Even Hemer readily admits that any connection with this imagery would be of a purely conjectural nature.[69] Moffatt puts forward the possibility that the imagery here may relate to some form of initiation custom but likewise is unable to offer any relevant evidence.[70] Though there is a certain amount of appeal to these proposals, none of them fits the context of 2:17 particularly well.

IV. An Amulet with a Divine Name

Aune makes the observation that the *ψῆφος λευκήν* of 2:17 must be interpreted in connection with a secret name that is written on the stone and not simply as an isolated

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[66] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 215.
[67] H. Hepding, "Die Inscriften", *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts. Athenische Abteilung* 32 (1907): p. 294.
[68] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 215.
[69] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 215.
[70] James Moffatt, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), p. 359.

image.[71] This brings us to the most widely espoused proposal for the background of the imagery of 2:17: that the stone refers to an 'amulet' that has been inscribed with a secret name of some form.[72] A number of commentators will not consider this possibility, because of a predetermined mindset that rules out such an option.[73] This type of methodology would seem to be at odds with exegetical methods that are open to the possibility that John did use imagery drawn from a context outside of Judaism, and would certainly have the potential to taint any results in favour of these predetermined parameters. A more sensible approach would seem to be to allow for all possibilities and to weigh each based on its own merit.

A number of commentators have argued that the *ψῆφον λευκήν* is analogous with a 'pagan' amulet inscribed with the secret name of a patron god.[74] Arndt and Gingrich cite a text that has similarities with 2:17 at Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* (2nd century C.E.) 5.26, where a bronze plate inscribed with the name of Sarapis is hung around the neck.[75] Other similar examples may be found in a variety of texts described by Hemer as 'literature of ancient magic.'[76] In *PGM* V 447-458 a description is given for making a 'magical' stone. It

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[71] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 190.

[72] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 190; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, pp. 66-67; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 88-89; Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), p. 461; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, p. 52.

[73] Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, p. 68. Commenting upon the supposition put forward by R. H. Charles, that the '...true source of the symbol is to be found in the sphere of popular superstition. This needs no answer.' Moses Stuart, "The White Stone of the Apocalypse," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 3 (1843): pp. 461-477; esp. 470. 'It is somewhat improbable, however, that John, who almost never appeals to Grecian objects and modes of representation, should have made such an in appeal in the present instance. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7 An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 199. 'It is also doubtful that the Lord would look to a pagan source for His symbolism in the same message where he has warned so strongly against worldly relations (Smith),'

[74] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 190; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, pp. 66-67; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, pp. 461-463; Wilhelm Heitmüller, *„Im Namen Jesu." : Eine sprache-und religiongeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Neuen Testament*, Forshungen zu Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments; 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), pp. 234-235; Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 36; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 25; Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, p. 215; John Tickle, *The Book of Revelation* (Liguori MO: Liguori Publications, 1983), p. 36; Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Texte zum Neuen Testament, Band 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), p. 28.

[75] Arndt and Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, s.v. *ψῆφος*; p. 892.

[76] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 217.

was inscribed on the back, with the 'magical' name of Sarapis, in order to keep the name hidden from view.[77]

As a historical background for why the names of gods were kept hidden, there are a number of well-known traditions that created such customs. In an ancient Egyptian tradition, the sun god Re had a true name that remained secret until it was revealed to the goddess Isis, who then gained power over the god.[78] According to Aune, 'magical amulets' would normally have an image on the obverse side and a 'magical text' on the reverse. This would then mean that when the amulet was worn, the image would be visible while the text ('often containing secret magical names') would be concealed from sight. He goes on to note that while the exact nature of the 'amulet' at 2:17 is left unspecified, it would seem to be a reward for those who persevere, and that it provides a permanent guarantee of protection to its possessor.[79] Of note, with some striking similarities, is a passage from the *Testament of Job* (1st century B.C.E. – 1st century C.E.)[80] according to which the three daughters of Job are given a protective amulet [*φυλακτήριόν*].[81] There are a number of points of correspondence

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[77] 'On a jasperlike agate engrave Sarapis seated, facing forwards (?), holding an Egyptian royal sceptre and on the sceptre an ibis, and on the back of the stone / the [magical] name [of Sarapis?], and keep it shut up.' Morton Smith, trans. 'PGM 447-58', in Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, 2nd ed. vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 109.

[78] Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, Methuen's Handbooks of Archaeology (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1973), p. 21.

[79] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 190-191.

[80] R. P. Spittler, trans. and ed., "Testament of Job," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 829.

[81] 46:7-47:11. 'And he opened them and brought out three multicoloured cords whose appearance was such that no man could describe, since they were not from earth but from heaven, shimmering with fiery sparks like rays of the sun. And he gave each one cord, saying, "Place these about your breast, so that it may go well with you all the days of your life." Then the other daughter, named Kasia, said to him, "Father, is this the inheritance which you said was better than that of our brothers? Who has any use for unusual cords? We cannot gain a living from them, can we?" And their father said to them, "Not only shall you gain a living from these, but these cords will lead you into the better world, to live in the heavens. Are you then ignorant, my children, of the value of these strings? The Lord considered me worthy of these in the day in which he wished to show me mercy and to rid my body of the plagues and the worms. "Calling me, he furnished me with these three cords and said, 'Arise, gird your loins like a man. I shall question you, and you answer me.' "So I took them and put them on. And immediately from that time the worms disappeared from my body and the plagues, too. And then my body got strength through the Lord as if I actually had not suffered a thing. I also forgot the pains in my heart. And the Lord spoke to me in power, showing me things present and things to come. "Now then, my children, since you have these objects you will not have to face the enemy at all, but neither will you have worries of him in your mind, since it is a protective amulet [*φυλακτήριόν*] of the Father. Rise then, gird

between the passage from the *Testament of Job* and 2:17. One is that the object being given is seen as a reward of great value. The second is that the ultimate source of both objects is the Lord. It is possible that a third point of correspondence between the objects is that they provide some form of protection to the one possessing them. This is certainly the case with the multicolured cords given to the daughters of Job, and there is perhaps the implication of protection in the context of 2:17. This is perhaps implied in the phrase 'upon the stone a new name has been written that no one knows except the one who receives it'.

Amulets were not unfamiliar items to the Jewish people and appear to have been widely used in certain contexts.[82] Trachtenberg indicates that the Jewish peoples living in the Biblical period would have certainly been familiar with the merits associated with such objects. Their use in this period was very extensive and later was accepted by the rabbinic authorities.[83] Penny and Wise even go so far as to describe the era of the Second Temple as a 'magical time'. They note that the difficulty for historians in recognising this fact is that the evidence is indirect.[84] Alexander also observes that 'Magic flourished among the Jews ...' and this was despite the strong and determined condemnation of such beliefs and practices by the religious authorities.[85]

Amongst the documents found at Qumran, there are a number of texts considered to be of a 'magical' nature.[86] Naveh and Shaked also note numerous amulets and 'magic bowls, from late antiquity.[87] Spoer contends that amulets were known to the people who followed the Jewish faith in antiquity and that there was a regular profession of 'enchanters' (Isaiah

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yourselves with them before I die that you may be able to see those who are coming for my soul, in order that you may marvel over the creatures of God." R. P. Spittler, 'Testament of Job', pp. 864-865.

[82] 2 Mac. 12:40. Here the objects described as 'consecrated objects' [*ἱέρωμα*] seem to have been intended to act as a protective amulet. In Isa. 3:20 amulets are mentioned once again using the Hebrew term לחש.

[83] Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 132.

[84] Douglas L. Penney and Michael O. Wise, "By the Power of Beelzebub an Aramaic Incantation Formula from Qumran (4Q560)", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (1994): p. 627.

[85] Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic", p. 342.

[86] 4Q560; 4Q186; 4Q318; 4Q534.

[87] Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*.

3:3; Ecclesiastes 10:11) in Judah. He says that the term לחש is used to designate an 'amulet' (Isaiah 3:20).[88] Naveh even goes so far as to indicate that the 'roots of Jewish magic literature...' are to be found in the period of the Second Temple and even earlier. He particularly makes note of the evidence of 'magic' and 'astrology' to be found in materials from Qumran. He even designates the fragments of 4Q560 as the remains of a 'magic book'.[89]

A passage with some corresponding parallels (i.e. 'white stone') is found at *PDM* xii 6-20.[90] 'Magical' procedures that give instructions about making amulets, along with other 'magical' materials, occasionally point out the importance of inscribing secret names upon these items.[91] In some spells in the *Greek Magical Papyri,* unspeakable names are mentioned.[92] The *Paris Magical Papyrus*, dated to around 300 C.E., makes mention of a *φυλακτήριον* inscribed on a tin sheet that contains a list of powerful secret names, and was to be hung around the neck of a person who was the victim of demon-possession.[93] Reik goes into some detail regarding the apotropaic nature of 'phylacteries' and considers them to have come into being as objects of protection under Persian influences.[94] The Greek term *φυλακτήριον*, which is used at Matthew 23:5, carries the meaning of 'safeguard', or 'means of

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[88] Hans H. Spoer, "Notes on Jewish Amulets", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 23 (1904): pp. 97-105.
[89] Joseph Naveh, "Fragments of an Aramaic Magic Book from Qumran," *Israel Exploration Journal* 48 (1998): pp. 252-261.
[90] 'A ring to cause praise: You bring a ring of iron and you bring a white stone which is the shape of a grape [which] grows / as a fresh plant in the water, there being [a] daimon with the face [of] a falcon ... together with his snake tail, there being a nemes headdress (?) in (?) the ... eye whose face goes to the .... Write / this name on it ... saying, "ABRAXAM PHILEN ...CHNI ...," put a limb of a lion under it together with a piece of gold, put them under it; and / make ... it. Janet H. Johnson, trans., *PDM xii.6-20*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz. The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1996), p. 152.
[91] *PGM* I.144-146 '**And engraved on the stone is:** Helidoros as a lion-faced figure, holding in the left / hand a celestial globe and a whip, and around him in a circle is a serpent biting its tail. And on the exergue of the stone is this name (conceal it).' E. N. O'Neil, trans., *PGM I.42-195*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz. The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1996), p. 7., p. 7. cf. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 191.
[92] *PGM* XIII.763-764, '"Come to me, you from the four winds, ruler of all, who breathed spirit into men for life, whose is the hidden and unspeakable name – it cannot be uttered by human mouth ..."' 845 'whose name not even the gods can utter...' Morton Smith, trans., *PGM XIII.734-1077*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz. The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1996), p. 191.
[93] Folio 33 *Great Magical Papyrus* 3014-3017. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, pp. 255-256.
[94] Theodor Reik, *Pagan Rites in Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Co., 1964), pp. 120-132.

protection',[95] though there are some who would argue that this perception is perhaps stretching the meaning of the term by applying it to *Tefillin*.[96] The use of protective amulets would have been widespread in the Mediterranean world during the 1st century C.E., even among Jews.[97] At the time of the return of the exiles from Babylon, there appears to be a change of attitude toward amulets in official circles. It is stated that an amulet is unacceptable if it is 'not from an expert'.[98]

If 2:17 is to be understood as indicating some form of divine protection, similar to an amulet, it would then indicate that the name written upon the *ψῆφος λευκήν* is that of God or Christ, as is the case in 3:12[99] (cf. Philippians 2:9).[100] The issue of whose name is on the *ψῆφος λευκήν* is at the core of this discussion and the position that suggests that an 'amulet' is behind the imagery here stands or falls by the view taken in this regard.[101] According to Aune, the '*new*' name is probably given in contrast to the great variety of '*old*' 'pagan' names given for various supernatural beings whose names are found written upon amulets and 'magical gems.'[102] These names and epithets are usually in the vocative, though at times they are in the nominative case, and may be regarded as invocations to a deity.[103] Jewish exorcists are purported to have had many 'powerful names' at their disposal (cf. Matthew 12:27; Luke 9:49; 11:19; Acts 19:13; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.45-49; Justin, *Dialogue*, 85; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* 2.6.2). It was also the case that Christians used the name of

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[95] Arndt and Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, s.v. *φυλακτήριον*; p. 868; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, pp. 208-211; Louw and Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains,* vol. 1, 6.195, pp. 176-177.
[96] T. Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 13.
[97] cf. Isa. 3:20; 2 Mac. 12:40.
[98] *Sabbath* 60a; Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets*, p. 13.
[99] Rev. 3:12 'I will make the one conquering a pillar in the temple of my God and he will never go out of it and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, the one coming down out of heaven from my God, and my name, the new one.'
[100] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 217; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 191.
[101] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 217, N. 214.
[102] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 191. p. 191; cf. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, pp. 167-179.
[103] Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, p. 167.

Jesus in the performance of healings and exorcisms (Acts 3:6; 4:10; 9:34; 16:18; Justin *2 Apology* 6.6; *Dialogue*, 30.3; 76.6; 85.2; Irenaeus *Against Heresies,* 2.32.4; *Epideixis* 97; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.6, 25, 67; 3:24; *Acts of John* 41; Eusebius, *Demonstatio Evangelica* 3.6; Arnobius, *Against the Heathen* 1.46; Lactantius *The Divine Institutes*, 2.16; 4.27)[104] From a very early time within Christian tradition the 'purely magical effect of the name of Jesus' has been widely accepted, according to Eitrem and others.[105]

Aune notes that a surprisingly large number of early 'Christian magical amulets' have been discovered and documented, though there are not any that can be dated as far back as the 2nd century C.E.[106] The sense of this interpretation is that the one who knows the name can call upon Christ to save and to protect; and in the context of the Apocalypse the power of Christ is exalted over the power of all rivals. Even Hemer, who does not accept this explanation, concedes that it fits the context of 2:17 well, and corresponds to ancient ways of thought, though he questions whether this is quite the thought here.[107] The theory that the 'white stone' is some form of 'amulet' addresses the concept of permanence, as stone is a very durable writing material and the colour of the stone fits in with concepts regarding purity and victory (the issue of the colour will be discussed later in this chapter), along with the 'name' inscribed upon the stone. No other theory, regarding the origin for the background, for the imagery of the 'white stone' addresses all of these areas of importance in a manner that fits the context of the 2:17 as well as that of the amulet.

Some issues have, however, not yet been addressed regarding this explanation of the background for *ψῆφον λευκήν* in 2:17. One is that some might expect the stone to be pierced

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[104] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 191.
[105] Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament*, p. 31; Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1992), p. 54; Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity", pp. 1546-1547.
[106] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 191; Delatte and Derchain, eds., *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes*, pp. 283-287; Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, pp. 208-228; Robert W. Daniel and Franco Maltomini, trans. and ed., *Supplementum Magicum*, vol. 1 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990), pp. 55-112. Nos. 120-136; Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity", pp. 1545-1549.
[107] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 218.

in some manner in order to allow it to be attached to the body. It is the case that some amulets were worn in little leather amulet bags that were worn around the neck or shoulders. It is also noteworthy that certain stones were believed, probably from very early times, to possess 'magical' qualities in themselves even without the carving of an inscription. It may be that people thought that these powers could be reinforced by carving certain images or symbols upon them. A deity who could give worshippers protection or desirable gifts might be sought as adornments of such stones, and therefore their images or names would be inscribed onto such objects.[108]

V. A Token of Gladiatorial Discharge

To move on to the next category proposed by Hemer, upon discharge from the gladiatorial arena a *tessera* was supposedly given exempting the gladiator from the obligation to risk his life again in the arena.[109] Many examples of such tokens survive, and are documented. They take the form of elongated rectangular tablets composed of bone, and they bear the name of a man. They are also often incised with the letters 'SP' with the day and the year being incised in sequence on the four faces of the object. Most of the examples documented belong to a period from the 1st century B.C.E. to the 1st century C.E. and they come from Rome.[110] The interpretation of *tessera* is very difficult, but this type is most often interpreted in light of the words of Horace.[111] This connection seems highly speculative, as the connection between a *tessera* and a 'foil' is not readily apparent.

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[108] Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, pp. 5-6.
[109] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 99.
[110] Theodorus Mommsen, ed., *Inscriptiones Latinae Antiquissimae*, vol. 1, Academiae Litterrarum Regiae Borussicae (Berolini: APVD Georgium Reimerum, 1863), pp. 195-200. Tessera 717-716.
[111] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 99. Horace, *Epistles* 1:1:1-3. 'You, of whom my earliest Muse was told, of whom my last shall tell – you Maecenas, seek to shut me up again in my old school, though well tested in the fray, and already presented with the foil.' H. Rushton Fairclough, trans., *Horace Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, ed. G. P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library series (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1955), p. 251.

Those that advocate this explanation for the imagery at 2:17 give as the explanation for the 'SP' engraved on the *tessera* the term *Spectatus*, i.e. 'approved' or 'tested',[112] as being the meaning, and this might be fairly regarded as 'a new name.' The idea would then be that this is some form of technical term with the meaning being that of 'discharged'.[113] According to Ramsay, this analogy would be an extremely strong one, if it were correct.[114] However, according to Mommsen 'SP' stands for *spectavit* ('he observes' Perfect, Indicative, Active, Third person, Singular; an active verb) rather than for *spectatus* i.e. 'approved' (Perfect, Passive, Participle, Masculine Nominative, Singular). Mommsen has entirely eliminated the idea that 'SP' is a title and thus this deprives the *tessera* of their most striking point of analogy with the *ψῆφον λευκήν*.[115] Various theories have been postulated for the meaning of 'SP' but none of them makes out that a new name was given to the proven gladiator with the *tessera*. He was simply allowed to retire into a private life after a successful career, instead of being compelled to risk his life and his reputation when his strength and skills were waning.[116]

Hemer agrees that the objections to this theory are decisive and that the gladiatorial *tessera* cannot be seriously advocated as the background at 2:17.[117] This analogy fails essentially due to the fact that, though this was indeed a *tessera* that was inscribed with a name, there is no hint that the name inscribed on the *tessera* could have been associated with the granting of a 'new name'.[118]

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[112] Cicero, *De Oratore* 1:27:124; *In C. Verrem.* 1:10:29.
[113] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", pp. 220-221.
[114] William M. Ramsay, "The White Stone and the 'Gladiatorial' Tessera", *The Expository Times* 16 (1904-1905): pp. 558-561; Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 220.
[115] Mommsen, ed., *Inscriptiones Latinae Antiquissimae*, pp. 195-200. Tessera 717-776; Ramsay, "The White Stone and the 'Gladiatorial' Tessera", p. 558.
[116] William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, ed. Mark W. Wilson, updated ed. (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 221.
[117] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 100. p. 100.
[118] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 221.

VI. Allusion to a Process of Initiation into the Service of Asklepios

Another theory, also put forward by Ramsay, appeals to an obscure passage in the *Hymn to Asklepios*, by Aelius Aristides.[119] Aristides (b. 117 C.E.) was given a new name by the god Asklepios, probably during a vision. This god was said to have cured Aristides of his disease and guided him in life by ordering him to devote himself to oratory. Asklepios favoured Aristides and gave him the name Theodorus.[120] The evidence for this comes at the end of the *Hymn to Asklepios* in which Aristides attributes his rhetorical success before the Imperial family to the encouragement that he received from a *σύνθημα* (a 'token' or a 'sign', in Latin a *tessera*) which he had with him.[121]

The nature of the *σύνθημα*, which Aristides had received from Asklepios, is not explained. The obscurity of this symbol is likely to have been deliberate; there existed a secret between Aristides and Asklepios that was known only to him and a small select group. He, and he alone, had been initiated by the god into this service and the meaning of the *tessera* was not to be revealed to just everyone. According to Ramsay, it was only for those initiated into the same mystery to be allowed to know the word and the sign. All others were to remain ignorant of its existence and its meaning. Ramsay goes on to maintain that Aristides gives a hint regarding the purpose and effect of the *σύνθημα*; it is something that addressed him in an earnest and rousing way and served as proof that the god had singled him out to gain distinction as an orator. It thus served as a motivator and a call to action and gave him the assurance that he was performing his god ordained function.[122]

Ramsay notes that Aristides does not directly connect the *σύνθημα* with the 'new name' that was bestowed on him by the god, but he indicates that 'there can hardly be any doubt

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[119] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 222.
[120] Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 228.
[121] P. Aelius Aristides, *An Address Regarding Asklepios*; Charles A. Behr, trans., *P. Aelius Aristides The Complete Works*, vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1981), p. 250; Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 222.
[122] Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 229.

that the name and the sign stood in some close relation to one another, and were given to him at the same time ....'[123] The importance of the cult of Asklepios at Pergamum has led Hemer to include this example as one that must be considered as being behind the symbolism of the *ψῆφον λευκήν* in the Apocalypse. According to Hemer, it probably offers the most satisfactory analogy for our passage and sets it in sharp contrast with a pagan practice likely to have been current in Pergamum.' He does, however, go on to qualify this statement, noting that the evidence for this custom is both 'circumstantial and inferential.'[124]

This proposal has the appeal of the attachment to Pergamum, which was strongly associated with Asklepios, thus giving a local context for the symbolism. The problem is that the symbolism only fits if one infers that the 'name' is somehow associated with the *σύνθημα*. This link is very weakly attested and, indeed, may be totally inaccurate. The idea that such a practice could be commonly known to the audience addressed by John is also not adequately demonstrated. Another difficulty encountered lies in the difficulty of connecting the *σύνθημα* with the *ψῆφον λευκήν*. Overall, then, this proposal is ultimately weak; with the current level of information available, it cannot be considered a viable explanation for the background of John's imagery at 2:17.

VII. Simply as Writing Material Whose Form or Colour was Significant

The use of stone as writing material may be of special importance with regard to Pergamum, as it is considered to be the source of the writing material known as parchment. The validity and power of something that was written was in some way dependent upon its permanence. Permanence was an important factor, with things, such as laws of a city, being written on such durable materials as bronze.[125] Ramsay perceives that John may be trying to

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[123] Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 229.
[124] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 222.
[125] Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 212, 222-223.

draw a contrast between the durable writing material for which Pergamum is famous, and an even more durable writing surface in the form of the *ψῆφον λευκήν*.[126]

The colour of the writing material itself is also of note. Beale indicates that the white colour of the stone portrays the righteousness of the saints who have not compromised or soiled themselves and because of this righteousness, they are acquitted. The association of 'white' with righteousness and with admission to a banquet is expressed at 19:8-9, according to Beale.[127] The difficulty with this correlation is that *λευκός* is not actually used in connection with the admission to a banquet in the context of the Apocalypse. *Λευκός* is used in the Apocalypse to signify purity and righteousness such as at 3:4-5, 18, 4:4, and perhaps at 19:11. At 6:2, 11, and perhaps at 7:9, 19:11, 14, the word appears to be associated with the idea of 'conquering'. The association of this word with 'righteousness' and 'conquering' fits the context of 2:17. Hemer, however, does caution, correctly, against reading too much into the symbolism of the colour of the stone and of drawing too close an anology with the symbolism of the colour white as it is used elsewhere in Revelation.[128]

D. Whose Name?

With regard to the background of the *ψῆφον λευκήν*, the matter that seems crucial in the discussion is the question of whose name is inscribed upon the stone. Is it the name of Jesus Christ, or is it the name of the recipient of the 'white stone'? Aune thinks that it is likely that this passage refers to the secret name, or names of God, and/or Jesus.[129] Hemer, though, is quite uncertain, and considers it possible that John has in mind both that the name belongs to the believer and that it is a new title of Christ. He does, however, indicate that he perceives the primary emphasis to be upon the name being that of the person possessing the

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[126] William M. Ramsay, "Pergamus or Pergamum", in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1900), p. 751.
[127] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 253.
[128] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 102.
[129] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 190.

ψῆφος λευκήν.[130] Beale, on the other hand, draws a link between 19:12-16 and 2:17. He uses as the basis for this perspective the fact that knowing a name is more than mere cognitive function. It relates as well to experiential access to the character and power that are represented by a name. He proposes that there is nothing in the Apocalypse to suggest that Christ cannot reveal his confidential name to whomever he wills.[131]

Beale goes on to note that there is striking verbal parallelism between 2:17 and 19:12 that points to just such a revelation (...*ὄνομα γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μή*...,19:12; ...*ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μή*..., 2:17; written in both texts with only the addition of *καινὸν* at 2:17). He proposes that the general idea of this phrase is 'a name having been written, which no one knows except'. The concept of Christ making known his character or power to those who believe in him is found elsewhere in the book (e.g. 7:3-4[132]; 9:4[133]; cf. 14:1; 14:3). This would then mean that if Christ's name in 19:12 is not a secret name known only to him, but one that is revealed to others, then the name at 2:17 must be something other than a secret name for each believer; it must be a name that the whole Christian community knows together.[134]

Fekkes disputes this view and argues instead that the purpose of the 'new name' on the *ψῆφος λευκή* has nothing at all to do with empowering the recipient with some form of 'magical protection' or 'spiritual power' over their enemies. He notes, rather, that the promise is for the 'eschaton' when there would be no need for protection in the new Jerusalem. He notes that John offers no formula of immunity from either the sword or captivity (13:10), and that the only safeguard against spiritual evil is to remain steadfast in

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[130] Hemer, "A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background", p. 233.
[131] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 257.
[132] Rev. 7:3-4 'saying, do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we seal the servants of our God upon their forehead. And I heard the number of those having been sealed, one hundred forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel.'
[133] Rev. 9:4 'And it was said to them in order that they might not damage the grass of the earth nor any green thing nor any tree, except the men being without the seal of God upon the forehead.'
[134] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 257.

faithfulness to Jesus Christ. He indicates that the crux of the argument here hinges upon the term *καινός* which would indicate a future expectation for the fulfillment of the promise in line with the other things promised to be *καινός* such as the 'new heavens', the 'new earth', and the 'new Jerusalem'. He connects the reasoning for this with the texts of Isaiah 62:2,[135] and with 65:15,[136] and this is especially the case with this verse due to its proximity to the renewal prophecy of 65:16-20.[137]

However, Beale is likely correct here and the name of Christ at 19:12 is not a secret name known only to Christ but is revealed to others; therefore, the name in 2:17 is not a different secret name for each believer but a name that the whole Christian community knows together.[138] This interpretation of the 'new name' is consistent with an Armenian version that interprets the final clause of 2:17 to mean that believers will receive from Christ a stone with 'the writing of holiness and mingle his name in the numbers of the saints who hold my name.'[139] According to *Similitudes* at *1 Enoch* 69:14-19[140] a secret name is spoken of which has tremendous power over the created world when used in an oath. If this hidden name were revealed then the power attached to this name is open to be used by the one knowing the name.

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[135] Isa. 62:2 'And the nations will see your righteousness and all the kings your glory, and he will call you by a new name which the mouth of Yahweh will designate.'

[136] Isa. 65:15 'And you will leave your name for a curse to your chosen, and the Lord Yahweh will put you to death, but to his servants he will give another name.'

[137] Jan Fekkes III, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Series, 93 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 129-130.

[138] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 257-258.

[139] *arm* 1 in Herman Charles Hoskier, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*, vol. 2 (London: Bernard Quarich Ltd., 1929), p. 74.

[140] 'His name was (then) Beqa, and he spoke to Michael to disclose to him his secret name so that he would memorize this secret name of his so that he would call it up in an oath in order that they shall tremble before it and the oath. He (then) revealed these to the children of the people, (and) all the hidden things and this power of this oath, for it is power and strength itself. The Evil One placed this oath in Michael's hand. These are the secrets of this oath-and they are sustained by the oath: The heaven was suspended before the creation of the world; and forever! By it the earth is founded upon the water; from the hidden places of the mountains come beautiful waters, from the beginning of creation; and forever! By that oath, the sea was created; and he put down for it a foundation of sand which cannot be transgressed at a time of its anger, from the beginning of creation; and forever! And by that oath the depths are made firm; they stand still and do not move from their places from the beginning (of creation); and forever!' Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch," p. 48. This section continues on in this same vein indicating the power this 'secret name'.

Massyngberde Ford notes that to the Jewish people, and to the ancient world at large, the name of an object or a person, was more than a mere label; it was indicative of an essential part of the essence, or personality, of that which was named.[141] Aune makes a link between Revelation 2:17 and 3:12 where Jesus indicates that he will write on *ὁ νικῶν ...τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.* He then links this with 19:12 where Christ appears under the imagery of a conquering warrior with an unknown name written upon him in a manner similar to Beale, indicating that the association of the name of Jesus with his people is a common thread running throughout the Apocalypse. In the following section, the implications of a name within the context of Revelation will be explored more fully. It seems probable that the name on the *ψῆφον λευκήν* refers to the secret name of God, and/or Jesus.[142]

E. The Power of a Name in the Apocalypse

In the Apocalypse, as in the Jewish scriptures, placing the divine name in a location means that the divine presence will also be in that location, and consequently those who receive Christ's 'new name' receive the pleasure of his latter-day presence and his kingdom. Even Beale admits that the 'magical background' of secret incantational divine names may in some way enhance the meaning at this point, especially in the sense of contrasting the true power of Christ with that of 'pagan deities'.[143] It seems hard to conceive of ancient peoples, accustomed to associating the name of a deity with the power of that deity, not, in some way perceiving in this passage the idea that they are being promised a name that is above all others.[144] The calling out of names was fundamental to the practice of what some term as 'magic', and Christianity held the same belief in the 'magical' power of the name of Jesus as

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[141] Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 398.
[142] Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 190.
[143] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 258.
[144] Eph. 1:21; Phil. 2:9-10.

permeated the rest of the ancient world throughout the period that is encompassed by the synoptic gospels until the time of Origen, according to Arnold, Eitrem and Aune.[145]

F. Summary

The imagery of the *ψῆφον λευκήν* is the subject of an extremely wide and diverse set of proposals, many of which are highly speculative and a number of these hypotheses are based upon a set of preconceived interpretive parameters that are perhaps different from those that would have been held by the author and his original audience. The word *ψῆφος* is rarely used in the context of the New Testament and in the Greek translations of Jewish scriptures, but it is widely used in other ancient Greek literature. The diversity of usage in these sources provides little assistance in coming to a determinitive conclusion as to the background of its usage in the Apocalypse at 2:17.

This then leaves open the field for a very wide and diverse set of proposals as to the probable source of the imagery in the Apocalypse. The main proposals for this background can be grouped under seven headings that are proposed by Hemer.[146] A number of these proposals such as those that are related to Jewish imagery attempt to carefully consider the possibility that the author in some way perceives a link between the 'manna' and the *ψῆφον λευκήν*, but none of these proposals provides a satisfactory explanation for this imagery. A number of theories advocating a Jewish source for this imagery are based upon highly speculative connections that appear to be rooted in a deep seated preconception that John would not have drawn upon any imagery from outside some form of orthodox, Jewish background. These commentators set these parameters as preset boundaries in their search for an interpretive key, thus insuring that their own conceptions of orthodoxy are maintained.

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[145] Arnold, *Power and Magic The Concept of Power in Ephesians*, p. 54; Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament*, p. 31; Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," pp. 1546-1547.
[146] Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, pp. 94-96.

There are a number of proposals regarding a variety of images drawn from the background of the people living in Asia Minor (i.e., judicial vote for acquittal, a token of admission, membership or recognition, a token of gladiatorial discharge, an allusion to a process of initiation into the service of Asklepios) in the 1st century C.E. that do demonstrate some similarities to 2:17. These proposals, however, each have significant difficulties associated with them that make them, with the current state of information, unsuitable as sources for the imagery behind John's composition.

Even outside of the group that seems determined to find a solution to the contextual background for the *ψῆφον λευκήν* of 2:17 from Jewish sources, there seems to be a clear bias against any solution that might be in the area that is designated by some as beyond the pale of possibility by being in an arena that some designate as 'magical' practices. For some, the question of whether an amulet is in the mind of John as he develops his imagery of the 'white stone', is a question which primarily hinges upon whose name is written upon the *ψῆφον λευκήν*. If the name is that of the believer the notion is that the *ψῆφον λευκήν* cannot be a reference to an amulet, but if the name is that of God, or of the risen Christ, then this is the probable background.

The most promising background for the imagery used by John in Revelation 2:17 is that of an amulet. Such imagery provides a background that would have provided comfort, assurance, and an independence for those feeling vulnerable. If John has used such imagery in a positive fashion, it is important for interpreters of the Apocalypse to re-evaluate their perceptions regarding how John and other early Christians perceived their conflict with what some would term as 'magic'. Perhaps John's definition of what he, and his audience, would have considered to be 'magic' differs markedly from the stereotypical views that are often displayed in the comments of modern interpreters of the Apocalypse? It appears that perhaps, neither John nor his audience, would have perceived items normally associated with

unacceptable practices, as offlimits simply because of their associations. Such items and practices may have been conceived of as unacceptable because they were perceived to expect assistance from a source that was considered objectionable. In other words, the source of the assistance is more important than the mechanism for accessing that power or assurance.

11. Angel Standing in the Sun

A. Introduction

At Revelation 19:17 the phrase *καὶ εἶδον ἕνα ἄγγελον ἑστῶτα ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ* is used by the author to introduce a new vision report.[1] The use of this phrase is highly unusual, and for this reason should invoke some level of interest. The vision is of an 'angel' standing 'in' or 'on' the sun, calling to the birds in midheaven', which is imagery that presents signs of similarity with Ezekiel 39:17-20 where the 'birds' and 'wild animals' are called to feast upon the flesh and blood of 'the mighty', and the 'princes of the earth'. In Ezekiel 'the Lord God' (אדני יהוה) is the one speaking to the creatures and calling them to the feast, yet in the Apocalypse, it is this mysterious figure of an angel 'standing in the sun'. Bauckham, along with a host of others are of the opinion that John is drawing upon the imagery of Ezekiel here in chapter 19, despite the noticeable differences.[2] There are, however, those who relate the usage here to some type of 'magical' practice.

B. Survey of Commentators on Revelation 19:17

Charles indicates that the 'original idea underlying *καὶ εἶδον ἕνα ἄγγελον ἑστῶτα ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ* is unknown' and he gives as a possible explanation the idea that the angel is using the central position of the sun in 'midheaven' as a platform from which to deliver the summons to the birds of prey.[3] The indication is, that 'standing in the sun' is a good vantage point

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[1] David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22, Word Biblical Commentary Series, vol. 52c* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), p. 1063.
[2] Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), pp. 208-09, G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation, The New Century Bible Commentary Series* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott Publishing Ltd., 1983), p. 282, M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation Commentary Series* (Louisville KY: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 200, G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine, Black's New Testament Commentary Series* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), p. 247, R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John,* vol. 2, *The International Critical Commentary Series* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), p. 138, Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation, Sacra Pagina Series,* vol. 16 (Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 191, Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation, Smyth & Helwys Commentary Series* (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 2001), p. 370, Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), p. 554, Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 an Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 393.
[3] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John,* vol. 2, p. 138.

from which to deliver the invitation to the birds of the air to come to the feast. Aune, on the other hand, notes that there are several 'magical' procedures preserved in *Sepher Ha-Razim* 4.31-67[4] that allow the 'magician' to see the angel of the sun. Without these procedures, this angel is concealed by the bright rays of the sun.[5] Aune thus insinuates that this passage may in some way be related to 'magical' practice, so that John's description of the angel in this context constitutes some form of polemic against 'magic'. Another perspective is put forward by Beasley-Murray. He first notes that at 8:13 an eagle is depicted as flying in *μεσουράνημα* (midheaven) and that this allows the entire earth to be able to hear its cry. Similar to Charles, he then links 19:17 with 8:13, suggesting that the same reasoning applies to both passages.[6] Boll, alternatively, suggests that the author depicts this angel as standing in the sun primarily for literary effect and he finds a connection between the eagle and the sun (as 'messenger of the sun'). He bases this upon an ancient Syrian tradition according to which it would be appropriate for the eagle (=angel) to stand on the sun in order to deliver his message.[7]

To turn for a moment to the issue of an angel being associated with the sun: Aune notes that in Jewish tradition, angels are closely associated with the sun and he cites *Sepher Ha-Razim* 2.148 -151,[8] where an angel whose name is 'Sun' (שמש) is mentioned.[9] Loisy suggests that it is an angel, such as the angel of the sun in the *Sepher Ha-Razim*, who speaks

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[4] Mordecai Margalioth, ed., *Sepher Ha-Razim* (Jerusalem: Louis M. and Minnie Epstein Fund of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966), PP. 97-99.
[5] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, P. 1063.
[6] Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 159, 282.
[7] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, P. 1063, Franz Boll, *Aus Der Offenbarung Johannis, Stoicheia: Studien Zur Geschichte Des Antiken Weltbildes Und Der Griechischen Wissenschaft; Heft 1* (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag B. G. Teubner, 1914), PP. 38-39.
[8] 'I beseech thee O great angel who art called "sun," who ascend the steps of the firmament, who watch the children of men, that you will perform my request and will bring my words before the King of Kings of kings, the (Holy One) Blessed be He, to whom I pray concerning the case of N son of N, who is in trouble and has a bad case ...' Michael A. Morgan, "Sepher Ha-Razim", in *Texts and Translations 25 Pseudepigrapha Series 11* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1983), P. 56.
[9] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, P. 1063. המלאך הגדול הנקרא שמש ('the great angel called the sun'), Margalioth, ed., *Sepher Ha-Razim*, p. 89.

to the birds of the air in 19:17.[10] The 'angel of the sun' is also mentioned in Hekhalot tradition in: *3 Enoch* (5th to 5th century C.E.) 14:4,[11] and at 17:4 'Galagall'el, the Prince, who is in charge of the orb of sun, and with him are 96 angels, mighty and honored, who make the sun's orb run 365,000 parasangs through Raqia' every day.'[12] In *3 Baruch* (1st to 3rd century C.E.) 6:1-3 the sun is described as a man sitting upon a chariot 'wearing a fiery crown' and the chariot is pulled along by 'forty angels'.[13] *2 Enoch* 11:4 also makes mention of the 'sun's chariot' and '100 angels on fire' that accompany the sun.[14] In *Sepher Ha-Razim* 4:8-9 it reads: 'Within the (fourth) firmament is the lovely bridal chamber of the sun, filled with light and all aflame. The angels of fire, girded with strength, surround him (the sun) and lead him during the day.'[15]

If the issue of this 'angel of the sun' relates to problems that John either foresees becoming prominent or are already of some considerable concern to him, then in using this imagery in the way that he does he can draw attention to his perceptions. This would then allow him to address this issue in a manner that demonstrates the authority of Jesus Christ without actually lending any credence to such beliefs. There was an interest in 'angelic beings' within the context of Jewish writings that may have been a matter of concern for John as noted in the sources cited above. Writings that are from a time later than the 1st century C.E. indicate a very pronounced interest in 'angelic beings' and even an interest in the manipulation of such beings for one's own benefit. In some Christian groups, such as the

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[10] Alfred Loisy, *L'apocalypse De Jean* (Paris: Minerva GMBH, 1972), p. 343.
[11] 'These are the names of the princes who guide the world:...Galgalli'el, who is in charge of the orb of the sun;...' P. S. Alexander, trans. ed., "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch", in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 266-267.
[12] Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch", pp. 266-269.
[13] 6:1 'And taking me, he led me where the sun goes forth. 2 And he showed me a chariot drawn by four horses and fire underneath it. And upon the chariot sat a man wearing a fiery crown. The chariot was drawn by forty angels. And behold, a bird runs along before the sun, as large as nine mountains. 3 And I said to the angel, "What is this bird?" And he said to me, "This is the guardian of the world." H. E. Gaylord, trans. and ed., "3 (Greek Apocalypse of) Baruch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, *The Anchor Bible Reference Library* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 669.
[14] F. I. Andersen, trans. and ed., "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, *The Anchor Bible Reference Library* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 120, Rec. [J].
[15] Morgan, "Sepher Ha-Razim", p. 67.

one that preserved and edited the *Testament of Solomon* Christ appears to be relegated to a position that is on a par with the angels.[16] Such a position is antithetical to the position put forward by John in the Apocalypse. At 19:10 John indicates a sensitivity to the issue of 'Angel Worship' by commanding John not to worship him, but to only worship God. The Hekhalot literature and other Jewish literature mentioned above indicate an extraordinary interest in angels, an interest that may well have been unacceptable to some within the context of Judaism.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is quoted as saying that 'there will be signs in the sun' (*καὶ ἔσονται σημεῖα ἐν ἡλίῳ*) at the time of his return.[17] This section is closely associated with the return of Christ, as is Revelation 19:17, and it seems plausible to propose that an 'angel standing in the sun' might well qualify as a 'sign'. Beale notes that the angelic appearance and the introductory formula used in 19:17 are fashioned in the same language and have a great deal in common with the formula used at 18:1 and that this type of angelic appearance and introductory proclamation are not used elsewhere in the Apocalypse.

18:1-2	19:17
εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον ... καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐφωτίσθη ἐκ τῆς δόξης αὐτου, καὶ ἔκραξεν ἐν ἰσχυρᾷ φωνῇ λέγων (" I saw another angel ... and the earth was illumined from his glory, and he cried out in a great voice, saying")	*εἶδον ἕνα ἄγγελον ἑστῶτα ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ καὶ ἔκραξεν [ἐν] φωνῇ μεγάλη λέγων* ("I saw one angel who was standing in the sun, and he cried out in a great voice, saying")

[16] Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1996), pp. 239-40, Chester Charlton McCown, *The Testament of Solomon* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs', 1922), p. 50.
[17] Lk. 21:25 (without parallel in the Synoptic gospel traditions).

The unique verbal resemblance between these two points of introduction suggest, according to Beale, an intention to correlate them. The likelihood that such a correlation is intended is enhanced by the fact that each is directly followed by an announcement of judgement, which is associated with birds (cf. 18:2 and 19:17b).[1]

It might rightly be asked whether there is not some greater significance to the image at 19:17 than that the 'angel' is using the ἥλιος as a platform for this great proclamation. The sun is not normally a place associated with prophecy or as a proclamation point for angelic beings. If the author of Revelation is troubled by practices associated with 'magic' as has been suggested by Aune,[2] some consideration should be given to the idea that the Greek deity Helios is often referred to in the *Greek Magical Papyri* at IV.1167-1226, IV.1928-2005, VII.1017-1026, XIII.254-261. Some of these texts such as XIII.254-261 are unmistakably of Jewish background, and it is to be noted that a Greek prayer is transliterated into Hebrew in a formulaic fashion that is very much reminiscent of 'magical spells' in *Sepher Ha-Razim*.[3] This could perhaps indicate a borrowing of ideas and concepts from Hellenistic sources by some within Judaism. Helios is identified as an archangel in this text. One difficulty with this evidence is that according to Alexander, *Sepher Ha-Razim* cannot have been composed before 312 C.E. and it is even likely that it was not composed before the end of the 4th century C.E.[4] This raises the question of whether the traditions present in texts such as *Sepher Ha-Razim* and the *Greek Magical Papyri* have traditional roots that could extend into a period as early as the late 1st century C. E. An exploration of how the sun was perceived in the ancient world could provide some valuable insight into this question.

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[1] G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Greek Testament Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), pp. 964-65.
[2] David E. Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): p. 494.
[3] Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, p. 179. N.64, Margalioth, ed., *Sepher Ha-Razim*, pp. 12, 99, Morgan, "Sepher Ha-Razim," p. 71 N. 21.
[4] P. S. Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic", pp. 348-49.

In order to unravel the meaning of a given text it is first important to have an understanding of both the Jewish background, the Hellenistic environment and to begin to understand how those two cultural influences have been woven together by the author in order to convey his perspective to the audience. Both facets of the cultural process are essential if we are to have any hope of unravelling the intended meaning of a text with all of its subtle nuances and cultural inflections. Yarbro Collins has produced an approach to Revelation which intimates the necessity of balancing any treatment of the background of the Apocalypse between the Jewish and Hellenistic traditions. It is her thesis that the actual situation behind a passage will assist in the interpretation of that passage, but that the situation behind the Apocalypse is one that is created by a '...complex interaction of inherited tradition and environment. It is true that an apocalyptic work reflects elements of the religious tradition with which its author is primarily identified, but these reflections are modified through the author's experience of the thought-worlds of other ethnic, or cultural groups in his environment.'[5]

C. The Ancient Near Eastern Background

There is a long and widespread history of the sun being regarded as a deity across the Ancient Near East. In Egypt the sun god went by such names as Khepri, Re, Atum, Aton, and Amon-Re, where this god was described as creator, judge, all-knowing and all-seeing. In Mesopotamia, Shamash (Sumerian Utu) was widely worshipped as the patron of justice, the god who protected those who were maltreated and downtrodden. The existence of topographical names in the Jewish scriptures such as Beth-shemesh (a pre-Israelite settlement) indicate that there is a sun cult present on Palestinian soil from an early date.[6] If the proposed restoration of Puech for a 12th century B.C.E. inscription from Lachish is

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[5] Adela Yarbro Collins, "The History-of-Religions Approach to Apocalypticism and the "Angel of the Waters" (Rev 16:4-7)," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): pp. 367-81.
[6] Karel van der Toorn, "Sun", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 237-39.

correct there is also epigraphical evidence for a temple of *Šmš* in early Iron Age Palestine.[7] The Nabataeans are reported to have worshipped the sun, building an altar on top of the house where they poured out libations daily and burned frankincense.[8] In Syria sun worship increased steadily throughout Greek and Roman times.[9]

D. A Jewish Context for Sun Worship and Angel Adoration

Taking into consideration the popularity of the solar cult across the Ancient Near East its absence amongst the Jewish population would be truly incredible. The prophets of the 'Yahweh-alone party' complain about the practice of worshipping the 'whole host of heaven'[10] and Israel's recorders document the practice[11] as existing amongst their people.[12] Moreover, a number of polemical references indicate that accusations of such a practice were certainly not absent amongst these people (Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3; Jeremiah 8:2; Job 31:26-28). Furthermore, we may note that the 'Josianic Reform' was directed against the cult of the sun (2 Kings 23:11[13]). The reforms of Josiah, which occurred just before the Babylonian exile, were short-lived. Ezekiel witnessed a scene of priests worshipping the sun in the courtyard of the temple (Ezekiel 8:16[14]). Worship of the sun is also attested by Palestinian seals of the monarchic period.[15]

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[7] Emil Puech, "Origine De L'alphabet", *Revue Biblique* 93 (1986): pp. 180-82.
[8] Strabo, *Geography* 16.4.26.
[9] Henri Seyrig, "Le Culte Du Soleil En Syrie À L'époque Romaine", *Syria: Revue D'art Oriental et D'archéologie* 48 (1971): pp. 337-73.
[10] Jer. 19:13. Zeph. 1:5.
[11] 2 Kgs. 21:3. 'And he rebuilt the high places which his father Hezekiah destroyed and he erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah as King Ahab of Israel had made and he worshipped all the host of heaven and served them.' Note that the Greek translation has the phrase *προσεκύνησεν πάσῃ τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.*
[12] Morton Smith, "Helios in Palestine," *Eretz-Israel* 16 (1982): pp. 199-214.
[13] 2 Kgs 23:11 'And he removed the horses which the king of Judah had dedicated to the sun at the entrance to the temple of Yahweh by the chamber of the eunuch, Nathan-melek, which was in the court of the temple, and the chariot of the sun he burned with fire.'
[14] Ezek. 8:16 'And he caused me to come to the inner court of the temple of Yahweh and behold, at the entrance, between the porch and the altar were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of Yahweh and facing eastward, and they bowed down to the sun.' The Greek translation of this passage has *προσκυνοῦσιν τῷ ἡλίῳ.*
[15] N. Avigad, "חותם", in *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Yerushalayim: Instituti Byalik, 1958), pp. 68-86. esp. pl. 3, Stanley A. Cook, *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archaeology* (London: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1930), pp. 49-53 and pls. VI-IX, XII, XIII, XV. Even after the Exile, some, such as van der Toorn consider sun worship to be one of the pagan cults that was popular among

In Daniel 3:62 of the early Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures the sun and the moon are called upon to praise God.[16] In Malachi 3:20 of the early Greek translation of Jewish scriptures the promise of salvation to God's people is said to be *τὸ ὄνομά μου ἥλιος δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἴασις ἐν ταῖς πτέρυξιν αὐτοῦ.* This, according to Rudolph, helps to explain why a mosaic of the sun and the planets has been found in the remains of the synagogue at Hammath-Tiberius.[17] Levine dates the synagogue to the 4th century C.E. and indicates that the meaning of this symbol is complicated, and notes that this is partly due to the publication of *Sepher Ha-Razim* that features a prayer to the angel Helios.[18] The sun god along with his chariot is a common feature in the art of synagogue mosaics and may represent a development from Roman art that came to represent a liturgical calendar in the synagogues.[19] Morton Smith is also of the opinion that the *Temple Scroll*[20] furnishes evidence that the Dead Sea sect worshipped the sun.[21] This, I assume, is due to the fact that he deems they held this scroll in some esteem despite the fact that it was not actually composed by this group. Taylor has an extended monograph on the subject of biblical and archaeological evidence for the worship of the sun in ancient Israel.[22] Though the case is not proven for all that Taylor sets out to establish, his monograph would certainly seem to indicate that there has been the accusation of sun worship amongst Jews from the pre-exilic period all the way through to early rabbinic times.

Jews, (Philo, *Spec. Leg.* II 1. cf. Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora, Seper Hafla'a, Shebu'ot* xii 3). Toorn, "Sun," p. 238.

[16] *εὐλογεῖτε, ἥλιος καὶ σελήνη, τὸν κύριον....*

[17] Kurt Rudolph and Trans. Dennis Martin, "Helios", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 123-25.

[18] Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 572-75. 'Holy Helios who rises in the east, good mariner, trustworthy leader of the sun's rays, reliable (witness), who of old didst establish the mighty wheel (of the heavens), holy order, ruler of the axis (of the heaven), Lord, brilliant Leader, King, Soldier. I, N son of N, present my supplication before you, that you will appear to me without (causing me) fear, and you will be revealed to me without causing me terror, and you will conceal nothing from me and will tell me truthfully all that I desire.' Morgan, "Sepher Ha-Razim", p. 71.

[19] Rachel Hachlili, "The Zodiac in Ancient Jewish Art: Representation and Significance", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 228 (1977): pp. 61-77.

[20] Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, vol. 1-3 (Israel: Israel Exploration Society, 1977-1983).

[21] Morton Smith, "The Case of the Gilded Staircase", *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10 (1984): pp. 50-55.

[22] J. Glen Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Series, 111* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

Other authors also indicate that they find solar elements in the worship of the Jerusalem temple.[23] Philo ascribes sun-worship to the Therapeutae[24] and Josephus writes in a similar vein in his description of the Essenes.[25] Josephus goes on to say of the Essenes that they '...dig a trench a foot deep with a mattock – such is the nature of the hatchet which they present to the neophytes – and wrapping their mantle about them, that they may not offend the rays of the deity, sit above it.'[26] Moving on, Smith remarks that the only gods one goes to the roof to worship are those that are visible from that vantage point, i.e. heaven itself, and the celestial bodies. The sun seems to have been the most likely to have been worshipped by the Qumran community according to Morton Smith.[27] However, it seems probable that Morton overstates this case considerably. It is of note in a different vein that Scholem observes similarities between the Qumran material and the traditions that are often termed as 'magical' in the Hekhalot books.[28] Smith discerns that such materials must have played roles of importance in the sect's development.[29]

It is the case that 'angels' or 'spirits were often thought of as being in charge of various created elements[30] and Knibb indicates that this reasoning applies to the 'sun' in Revelation.[31] In the *Ascension of Isaiah,* there is an 'angel of the sun' in a passage that has

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[23] F. J. Hollis, *The Archaeology of Herod's Temple* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1934), pp. 125, 32-39, 209, F. J. Hollis, "The Sun Cult and the Temple at Jerusalem", in *Myth and Ritual: Essays on the Myth and Ritual of the Hebrews in Relation to the Culture Pattern of the Ancient East*, ed. S. H. Hooke (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 87-110, Julian Morgenstern, "The Book of the Covenant", *Hebrew Union College Annual* 5 (1928): pp. 1-151, Julian Morgenstern, "The Gates of Righteousness", *Hebrew Union College Annual* 6 (1929): pp. 1 –37.

[24] Philo, *Contemplative Life*: 89.

[25] Josephus, *The Jewish War* II: 128-129.

[26] Josephus, *The Jewish War* II: 148. Thackeray indicates in the footnote that 'the deity' is a reference to 'the sun'. H. St. J. Thackeray, "Josephus, the Jewish War Books I-II", in *The Loeb Classical Library series, vol. 203* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 379.

[27] Smith, "Helios in Palestine", pp. 199-214.

[28] Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Mekabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), pp. 16-19, 29-30, 48.

[29] Smith, "Helios in Palestine," p. 199.

[30] *1 Enoch* 60:12-22; 65:8; 75:1ff.; 80:1 ff.; 82:10 ff.; *2 Enoch* 19:1-4; *Jub.* 2:2; *Sibylline Oracles* 7:33 ff.

[31] M. A. Knibb, trans. and ed., "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 162.

striking similarities with the Apocalypse.[32] In *2 Baruch* 21:6 (Syriac) there may be an indication of a similar belief expressed regarding beings who are involved in the rule of God and as being constituted of 'flame and fire'.[33] More generally, angelic beings play a prominent role in a number of Judeo-Christian writings such as the *Ascension of Isaiah, 2 Enoch,* and *Jubilees*.[34] The writer of Colossians refers to the worship of angels[35] in a way that has led some to the view that there was such a belief held among the Jews living at Colossae.[36]

However, Stuckenbruck deals with this issue in some detail and concludes that it may not be as simple as it may first appear. There is substantive evidence to indicate that there was not some Jewish sect at Colossae, or anywhere else for that matter, that venerated angels in a way that could be construed as worship during the period in which Colossians was written. He goes on to put forward the view that the problem at Colossae may indicate an emphasis on 'humility and worship of angels,' which was experienced within a visionary medium while they entered the heavenly realms.[37] If this is indeed the case, it would perhaps form a connection with what Aune has indicated when he links this imagery to texts such as *Sepher Ha-Razim*.[38] Arnold, on the other hand, indicates that knowledge of the local cults of Colossae is crucial in gaining a clear understanding of the nature of the issue being addressed

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[32] *Ascen. Isa.* 4:18. 'The the voice of the Beloved will reprove in anger this heaven, and this earth, and the mountains, and the hills, and the cities, and the desert, and the trees, and the angel of the sun, and that of the moon, and everywhere that Beliar has appeared and acted openly in this world. There will be a resurrection and a judgment in their midst in those days, and the Beloved will cause fire to rise from him, and it will consume all the impious, and they will become as if they had not been created.' Knibb, "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah," p. 162. There are, of course, a number of resonances between *Ascen. Isa.* and Revelation, as noted, by Loren Stuckenbruck, "Worship and Monotheism in the Ascension of Isaiah", in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis, *Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism Series,* vol. 63 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), pp. 70-89.

[33] *2 Apoc. Bar.* 21:6.

[34] A. Lukyn Williams, "The Cult of the Angels at Colossae", *The Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (1909): pp. 413-38.

[35] Col. 2:18.

[36] Williams, "The Cult of the Angels at Colossae," pp. 413-38.

[37] Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology, Wissenschafliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament · 2. Reihe; 70* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995), pp. 111-19.

[38] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1063.

in Colossians, and he perceives syncretism and 'magical' practice as likely to be contributing factors to the problems addressed in Colossians.[39]

It seems certain that there either is concern on the part of Paul that some within his audience were already, or potentially, going to engage in activities, which he found unacceptable, and this included *θρησκείᾳ τῶ ἀγγέλων*. The issue may relate to some form of syncretism that Paul finds unacceptable. This tendency toward syncretism is a phenomenon that has been documented within the communities of Asia Minor.[40] There may have also been concern, on the part of John, that such a syncretism would take place within the Christian communities of Asia Minor that he addresses. Just the fact that accusations of such syncretism existed would be sufficient to explain the concerns that John appears to have in the Apocalypse. Hurtado says of Revelation 'that the presentation of Jesus' exalted status is unexcelled among first-century Christian texts ...in particular, the heavenly worship of Jesus is the author's way of claiming the highest validity for the reverence of Jesus.'[41]

The emphasis is such that Jesus is elevated to a position that is worthy of worship, but this elevation is to be afforded to no one other than to the risen Christ and to God: any tendency that might possibly exist to elevate, particularly, 'angelic beings' is resoundingly repudiated. The issue of 'worship' is a concern for the author of the Apocalypse as is demonstrated by the fact that he uses the term *προσκυνέω* 24 times.[42] On two separate occasions John marks his apprehension regarding the possibility of 'worship' of an angelic being ('you must not do that') by giving the clear command to 'worship God'.[43] The word used by John (*προσκυνέω*) can have the meaning of 'to 'bow down to' as it does at 3:9,[44] but

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[39] Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, pp. 107-09.
[40] Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1997), p. 24.
[41] Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), p. 594.
[42] Rev. 3:9; 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 9:20; 11:1, 16; 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:7, 9, 11; 15:4; 16:2; 19:4, 10, 20; 20:4; 22:8, 9.
[43] Rev. 19:10; 22:9.
[44] This is an allusion to Isa. 60:14 and perhaps also to 49:23. David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5, The Word Biblical Commentary Series,* vol. 52 (Dallas TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1997), p. 237.

most of the time it is used in the Apocalypse as a term designating an act that is only an appropriate response to God or to the risen Christ as when John prostrates himself before the angel at 19:10 and 22:9.

E. Greek and Roman History of Helios

In Greece, the sun was an object of only marginal veneration though it did enjoy respect as a symbol of life.[45] Socrates is said to have offered a prayer to the sun.[46] The Greeks were aware that the sun was an object of worship for those whom they deemed to be barbarians.[47] An account of the origin of the god Helios is given in the *Homeric Hymn to Helios* where a description is given of his appearance and some of his attributes. The function of the sun-god, for the Greeks was primarily as a witness to oaths[48] and as a patron of justice and law in a manner characteristic of the ancient east.[49] The universal presence of the sun brings the promise of protection and security. Offerings were accompanied by prayer to Zeus, the earth, and the sun.[50] According to Aeschylus, the sun is the all-seeing witness to the trials of Prometheus.[51] The sun was also a god associated with healing, especially regarding blindness, and could also send blindness as a penalty.[52] The cult of Helios came to be associated especially with the island of Rhodes, where it is said that this land was allotted to him as his share of the lands of the earth and he took a bride of the nymphs and had children that ruled over cities on the island.[53]

A temple to the sun was found on the island and 'sun festivals' were held there with games, competitions, sacrifices, and processions as part of the festivities. There was an emergence of greater interest in the sun under the influence of oriental sun worship and

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[45] Rudolph and Martin, "Helios", p. 123.
[46] Plato, *Symposium* 220d.
[47] Plato, *Laws,* 10.887e; *Cratylus* 397c-d.
[48] Homer, *Iliad* 3.279.
[49] Rudolph and Martin, "Helios", p. 123.
[50] Homer, *Iliad* 3.267-286.
[51] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 5.88ff.
[52] Rudolph and Martin, "Helios", p. 123.
[53] Pindar, *Olympian Odes* 7.

astrological teachings on the one hand, and new philosophical ideas (especially in Stoicism) on the other hand. Helios came to be regarded as equal to a number of other deities such as Apollo who was an oriental sun-god, along with Pluto, Dionysos, Sarapis and Mithras. The sun-god began to play a much larger role in popular religion and Rudolph especially notes an association with 'magical' texts. In the 1st and 2nd centuries of the new era, there was a growing veneration of the sun with a sort of 'solarization' taking place among the gods with Apollo and Dionysos coming to be associated with Helios. The Roman emperors began to add 'New Sun' to their titles starting with Caligula (37-41 C.E.) then Nero (54-68 C.E.), who even had a statue to the sun placed in front of his palace and he minted the first coins carrying an image of the emperor crowned by rays of the sun.[54]

F. Angel Standing in the Sun and John's Christology

The context of Revelation 19:17 is one in which the absolute lordship and authority of Jesus Christ is being presented with vigour. Beale describes his commentary on 19:11-21 with the heading, 'Christ Will Reveal His Sovereignty and Faithfulness to His Promises by Judging Babylon's Former Allies in Order to Vindicate His People'.[55] Aune entitles the section on 19:11-21 as 'The Divine Warrior and His Conquests'.[56] In a paper entitled 'On the Problem of the Religio-Historical Understanding of Apocalypticism', Betz indicates that the most appropriate approach to apocalyptic texts is to attempt to discover what the underlying questions are and how these questions have determined the way in which disparate traditions have been used. Betz also suggests that since Apocalypticism is a '*novum*' over against prophecy, the underlying questions contained within apocalyptic texts have been shaped by factors outside of Judaism.[57]

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[54] Rudolph and Martin, "Helios", pp. 123-24.
[55] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 948.
[56] Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1040.
[57] Hans Dieter Betz, "On the Problem of the Religio-Historical Understanding of Apocalypticism", *Journal for Theology and the Church* 6 (1969): pp. 134-56.

As noted previously, Yarbro Collins has produced an approach to Revelation which intimates the necessity of balancing any treatment of the background of the Apocalypse between the Jewish and Hellenistic traditions. It is true that an apocalyptic work reflects elements of the religious tradition with which its author is primarily identified, but these reflections are modified through the author's experience of the 'thought-worlds of other ethnic or cultural groups in his environment.'[58] In order to unravel the meaning of a given text it is first important to have an understanding of both the Jewish background, and an understanding of the Hellenistic environment. Both facets of the cultural process are essential in order to understand a text.

Taking note of the various cultural influences is important, but it is also vital to give proper consideration to the immediate context of the phrase *καὶ εἶδον ἕνα ἄγγελον ἑστῶτα ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ*. To note that Hellenism and Jewish culture carry with them elements borrowed from the cultural background of the Ancient Near East, in the context of Asia Minor, gives a better hope of understanding the imagery of John in this instance. This study demonstrates that there is a long and embattled history of accusations of sun worship amongst the cultures of the Ancient Near East and that this influence was keenly felt within the context of the Jewish heartland. The Jewish scriptures make it apparent that there was an ongoing conflict amongst Jews regarding this issue. As noted above there are indications that certain Jewish groups, such as the one at Qumran, the Therapeutae and the Essenes, may have held the sun in very high esteem or even paid homage to the sun as a manifestation of God in some manner.

Given the range of evidence among Graeco-Roman cultures that have a propensity to allow adoration of the 'sun', it would seem possible that John is in a very powerful way underlining the authority of Christ over any and all perceived rivals. It should above all be

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[58] Collins, "The History-of-Religions Approach to Apocalypticism and the "Angel of the Waters" (Rev 16:4-7)," pp. 367-81.

noted this tendency to adore the sun is a widespread phenomenon affecting Near Eastern cultures, including Judaism and Graeco-Roman cultures and that there was a particular association between the emperor and the sun at, or near, the time-frame that is the backdrop for much of the imagery of the Apocalypse. Considering all the available evidence it is perhaps not possible to identify one specific point with which to connect John's imagery at 19:17. If due consideration is given to the comments of Betz and Yarbro Collins above, this should perhaps be anticipated due to the complexity of the various factors involved.

It seems highly probable, though, that John has tapped into the long and fraught history of the Jewish people as a backdrop, or point of reference for his imagery here as he has throughout much of Revelation. This, combined with the situation that was current in 1st century C.E. Asia Minor, would have made his use of the imagery regarding *ἕνα ἄγγελον ἑστῶτα ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ* a grand and compelling vision of the power and sovereignty of the risen Christ. He is displayed as having authority over all possible challengers by having the 'angel standing in the sun' proclaim the coming of Christ in might and glory. The use of sun imagery by the emperor of Rome, other gods, Judaism, or in 'magical' practice are all shown to be less than the level of the authority commanded by Christ.

The use of the image of an 'angel' in particular, would seem to indicate that John is very powerfully influenced by Jewish imagery. This being the case, we are drawn back once again to the supposition that the author is very much interested in creating a polemical image that would address unacceptable practices that were present within the cultural frame of reference for his audience. It is certainly possible that that frame of reference may have included such ideas as those that are present in Hekhalot literature or even in 'magical' textual traditions such as those that are demonstrated by texts such as the *Greek Magical Papyri*. This passage is constructed using images that would have significant and powerful meaning for both an audience grounded in Judaism and one influenced by Hellenism. The

entire audience would be able to understand the primary point of this section, which is that Christ is sovereign. With this imagery John can cut across the cultural boundaries and unite his audience in this central message using this one powerful image.

This material does not prove that John had the intention of composing an 'anti-magical' polemic as proposed by Aune above, but it certainly does not in any way indicate that this was not his intent. We are perhaps left in a position of being unable to prove the point from this text, and yet there is much within this text that would also seem to commend this perspective. There is little to commend the viewpoints that do not see any relationship to Helios, or sun worship. Without this perspective we seem to be in position of accepting that we simply do not know why John used this imagery and yet Aune gives us some information that can perhaps lead us to a greater appreciation of this phrase as being very much aligned with the context of the rest of this section.

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12. Seven Thunders

A. Introduction

At Revelation 10:3-4, the text reads, 'And a great voice, like a lion's roar cried out. And when it cried out seven thunders (*αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ*) spoke their own voices (*τὰς ἑαυτῶν φωνάς*). And when the seven thunders (*αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ*) spoke, I was preparing to write, and I heard a voice out of heaven saying, seal up what the seven thunders (*αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ*) said, and do not write them.'

This passage engenders a variety of questions for scholars such as: (1) from where does John draw this imagery? (2) Is the message of *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* intelligible? (3) What is the purpose of the imagery?

B. Source of the Imagery

This passage contains an articular reference to the seven thunders (*αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ*), which poses an immediate problem: it implies that the 'seven thunders' are a well-known entity.[1] There is no specific mention made of these 'seven thunders' either in the Apocalypse or in the Jewish scriptures.[2] This leaves us with a mystery as to the source of John's imagery here, and therefore his intended meaning. It appears in the context that the 'seven thunders' are somehow responding to the powerful angel, perhaps even interrupting him. It is also possible that the message of the angel is somehow being interpreted by 'seven thunders'.[3] This perhaps deepens the obscurity surrounding this imagery and leaves us no closer regarding John's intention in using such an expression.

Horn attempts to prove that the articular usage here is not to some well-known apocalyptic conception.[4] Aune, however, finds Horn's attempt to be 'abortive' noting that

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[1] G. Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as used in the Apocalypse of St. John a Study in Bilingualism*, ed. W. C. van Unnik, vol. 27, Supplements to Novum Testamentum (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), p. 188.
[2] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 330; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 559.
[3] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 559.
[4] Horn, "Die sieben Donner: Erwägungen zu Offb 10", pp. 215-229.

there were 'undoubtedly many more apocalyptic themes and motifs used in the ancient world than have survived in documentary form.'[5] The point is that Horn's failure to identify the exact background for such imagery does not necessarily indicate that such concepts did not exist. On another note there are also a number of other anaphoric uses of the article with a noun, or a noun phrase, that appears for the first time in the Apocalypse, indicating that such a construction may be a feature of this author.[6] The question remains, is it the intention of John for his audience to understand something specific from this articular usage or is this simply some form of grammatical anomaly on John's part? Does John intend for his audience to relate the phrase *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* to a specific concept that was widely known to his audience?

Some have perceived this use of the article in association with the 'seven thunders' as some form of 'speculation' based upon Psalm 29, which speaks seven times of 'thunder' as a parabolic representation of God's word.[7] In parallel with such a theory are a number of other cases in the Jewish scriptures where the voice of God is compared with 'thunder'.[8] Psalm 29 is also of some interest in that it is widely regarded as either having a Canaanite origin or as being strongly influenced by Canaanite mythology, and it is of note that Baal was associated with 'seven thunders'.[9] There is the suggestion, by some, that this ancient mythological

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[5] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 559.
[6] Rev. 6:4, *τὴν εἰρήνην*; 9:1, *ἡ κλεὶς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου*; 11:3; *τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσίν μου*, 19, *ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ*. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 559.
[7] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 330; Otto Betz, "φωνή, φωνέω, συμφωνέω, σύμφωνος, συμφωνία, συμφώνησις," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 296. The word 'thunder' is often rendered by the Hebrew term קול and is frequently followed by the term יהוה or by אלוהים. Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 159.
[8] 2 Sam. 22:14; Job 37:2-5; Ps. 18:13; Isa. 29:6; 30:30-31; Jer. 25:30; Amos 1:2.
[9] H. L. Ginsberg, "Ugaritic Studies and the Bible", *The Biblical Archaeologist* 8 (1945): pp. 52-53; H. L. Ginsberg, "A Strand in the Cord of Hebraic Hymnody", *Eretz-Israel* (1969): pp. 45-50; Theodor H. Gaster, "Psalm 29", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 37 (1946-1947): pp. 55-65; Frank M. Cross, "Notes in a Canaanite Psalm in the Old Testament", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 117 (1950): pp. 19-21; John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 57-61; P. C. Craigie, "Psalm XXIX in the Hebrew Poetic Tradition", *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972): pp. 143-151; B. Margulis, "The Canaanite Origin of Psalm 29 Reconsidered", *Biblica* 51 (1970): pp. 332-348; Aloysius Fitzgerald, "A Note on Psalm 29", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 215 (1974): pp. 61-63; Hans Strauss, "Zur Auslegung von Ps 29 auf dem Huntergrund seiner kanaanäischen Bezüge", *Zeitschrift für*

tradition is behind the phrase *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταί.*[10] Fisher notes that there is a common association of the wording of divine thundering activity in the Northwest Semitic area.[11] However, such imagery does not commonly appear to be associated with the number seven in this region. Care must be taken to insure that the entire contextual framework is held in focus and not simply to focus too narrowly upon a single conceptual notion.

Aune points out that there is a late rabbinic tradition that indicates that the voice of Yahweh was heard at Sinai as 'seven thunders' (*Exodus Rabbah* 28:6). This passage is interpreted using Job 37:5 ('God thunders marvellously with his voice...') as a connection is made with the word הקולת ('voices, sounds, thunders') at Exodus 20:18 where the one voice is perceived as dividing into seventy voices and these into seventy languages (*Exodus Rabbah* 5:9).[12] This same tradition is also found in other Jewish sources with a variety of differing details.[13] Betz postulates that the rabbinic traditions regarding voices of thunder speaking are based upon speculation associated with Psalm 29:3-9 and the related voice of God at Sinai.[14] There is no substantive evidence that leads us to the conclusion that these rabbinic traditions would have been either widely known, or indeed have been known at all, to John, or to his audience.

Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 82 (1970): pp. 91-102; R. Tournay, "En Marge D'une Traduction Des Psaumes", *Revue Biblique* 63 (1956): pp. 172-181. It is perhaps worth noting that within Judaism there have been instances where ideas based on foreign concepts have been appropriated and reformatted in such a way as to possibly combat indigenous beliefs.

[10] Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, p. 59; John Day, "Echoes of Baal's Seven Thunders and Lightning in Psalm XXIX and Habakkuk III 9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in Isaiah VI", *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (1979): pp. 143-151. On the issues relating to the number seven in Canaanite texts cf. W. Roth Wolfgang M, "The Numerical Sequence x/x + 1 in the Old Testament", *Vetus Testamentum* 12 (1962): pp. 300-312; Menahem Haran, "The Graded Numerical Sequence and the Phenomenon of „Automatism" in Biblical Poetry", in *Congress Volume Uppsula 1971*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), pp. 238-267; W. Roth Wolfgang M, *Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament*, ed. G. W. Anderson, et al., vol. 13, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965).

[11] Loren R. Fisher, ed., *Ras Shamra Parallels*, vol. 1, Analecta Orientalia Commentationes Scientificae de Rebus Orientis Antiqui 49 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1972), p. 23. cf. Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, ed. William Henry Propp, Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego; vol. 8 (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003).

[12] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 560.

[13] Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold, vol. 1 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 173; Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 194-195; Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 6 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 39.

[14] Betz, "φωνή, φωνέω, συμφωνέω, σύμφωνος, συμφωνία, συμφώνησις", p. 296.

Aune indicates that a parallel found in the 'Graeco-Roman magical tradition' is no less distant than the speculations drawn from these rabbinic traditions.[15] Powerful divine beings used lightning, thunder, and earthquakes to punish the 'nations of impious people' in such traditions.[16] The phrase *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταί* is a more specific way of rendering the phrase *αἱ ἑπτὰ φωναί.* 'Magical texts and Gnostic texts' both have a tradition of 'the seven voices' and it appears to be a relatively ancient tradition. Aune speculates that this usage may indeed be based upon Psalm 29. The phrase 'the seven voices' occurs in the Coptic-Gnostic treatises as *ntz mphônai* or *ntz mphônê*[17] which preserves the Greek loanword *φωναί* or *φωνή.*[18] There is a tendency for specific terms for 'thunder' and 'lightning' to be avoided and for other terms to be used in their place in some languages.[19] The phrase 'seven voices' is usually a reference to the seven Greek vowels (*αεηιουω*) which frequently function as some form of mysterious divine name.[20] Sometimes reference is made to this name in the form of *ΑΩ*[21] as an abbreviated reference to the seven vowels.[22]

At *PGM* XIII.39 there is an instruction to write '...the great name with the seven vowels (*τὸ μέγα ὄνομα ταῖς ἑπτὰ φωναῖς*).' At *PGM* XXI.11-14 reference is made to '...your name which is seven lettered in harmony with the seven sounds (*φωνάς*)...' The seven-vowel divine name is occasionally used in 'self-predictions as is the case at *PGM* III.661 and at other times the 'ineffable' name of God, the Tetragrammaton, was transliterated using the seven vowels of the Greek alphabet. Aune is of the opinion that the command to keep hidden

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[15] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 560. The *'πολοκράτορες τοῦ οὐρανου'* ('The Pole Lords of Heaven).
[16] *PGM* IV.681-684.
[17] *Pistis Sophia* 1.1, 1.10, 2.86, 4.143; *The Books of Jeu* 2.42, 2.44, 2.45, 2.47; *Gospel of the Egyptians* III, 42; IV, 52, 62-63
[18] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 560.
[19] Louw and Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, vol. 1*, 14.15-14.16, p. 170.
[20] Albrecht Dieterich, *Abraxas: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des spätern Altertums* (Leipzig: 1891), pp. 22-24.
[21] cf. Refer to section on *ΑΩ* in this document.
[22] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", pp. 489-491.

the message of the 'seven thunders' might reflect the view that the 'ineffable' name of God should not be written down.[23]

A phrase, in a variety of forms that has some similarities with the passages currently under consideration (10:3-4), is *φωνὴ βροντῆς*, which occurs at Revelation 6:1(*ὡς φωνὴ βροντῆς*); 14:2 (*ὡς φωνὴν βροντῆς μεγάλης*); and 19:6 (*ὡς φωνὴν βροντῶν ἰσχωρῶν*). This expression is always a metaphor for the articulate speech of a supernatural being in the Apocalypse. Within the contextual environment of Jewish tradition an 'angel of thunder' exists (*3 Enoch* 14:4; *Jubilees* 2:2; *Testament of Adam* 4:3[24]).[25] It should, however, be noted that in each of the instances cited from the Apocalypse above, there is a qualifer in the form of the subordinating conjunction *ὡς*. This would seem to indicate that in each of these instances the 'voice' is like thunder, not that it is thunder. It is also of note that in each of the examples given 'thunder' describes an attribute of the voice in an adjectival manner. Such is not the case with *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* in chapter 10 where 'thunder' acts as the main noun of the clause in both instances with 'seven' serving as the modifying adjective of the subject of the clause.

If the *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* is being used to describe the vocalisation of some heavenly being the nature and stature of that being is of importance in understanding why John might use such imagery. Beale and Smalley come to the conclusion that the *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* represent the 'declarations' of some generic 'heavenly being, or beings'.[26] Prigent goes as far as to speculate that due to the possible reliance upon the imagery of Psalm 29 the *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* might be 'a metaphorical allusion to a divine proclamation'.[27] If this unidentified

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[23] Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic", p. 491; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 560.
[24] 2nd to 5th Century C. E.; S. E. Robinson, trans. and ed., *Testament of Adam*, ed. James H. Charlesworth. The Anchor Bible Reference Library, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday 1983), pp. 989-995.
[25] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 560-561.
[26] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 533; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John* (Downers Grove IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), p. 261.
[27] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 330.

revelatory voice is indeed meant to portray God speaking it would be in line with the rare, though usual usage of such a phenomenon in the Jewish scriptures.[28]

In early Judaism the term 'voice' is commonly used as a circumlocution for the name of God. Unidentified revelatory voices are mentioned with a degree of frequency in the literature of early Judaism (*Greek 1 Enoch* [2nd century B.C.E. to 1st century C.E.], 13:8 ; *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra*[2nd to 9th century C.E.[29]], 6:3; 7:13; *Apocalypse of Abraham* [1st to 2nd century C.E.[30]], 9:1; 10:1, 3; 19:1; *Testament of Job*[1st Century B.C.E. – 1st Century C.E.[31]], 3:1;) *Apocalypse of Sedrach* 2:1-4 [2nd to 5th Century C.E.[32]], *2(Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch* [early 2nd Century C.E.[33]], 8:1; *Pseudo-Philo* [1st Century C.E.[34]], 28:8; Philo, *Decalogue* [1st Century C.E.[35]], 46-49).[36] Unidentified revelatory voices also occur in the Graeco-Roman world.[37]

Victorinus (3rd to 4th Century C.E.) says that the *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* 'signify, the Holy Spirit of sevenfold power'.[38] Massyngberde Ford notes that it is not uncommon for an angel, or its voice, to be identified with Yahweh. She associates the voice of the angel with that of the deity at 10:3-4, and notes the connections that associate the voice of Yahweh with 'thunder' in Psalm 29, and in rabbinic sources.[39] Farrer suggests that the voice is that of

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[28] Num. 8:89; Ezek. 1:28; Dan. 4:31-32; 8:16.
[29] M. E. Stone, trans. and ed., "Greek Apocalypse of Ezra", in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 561-563.
[30] R. Rubinkiewicz, trans. and ed., "Apocalypse of Abraham", in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 681-683.
[31] Spittler, "Testament of Job", pp. 829-834.
[32] S. Agourides, "Apocalypse of Sedrach", in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 605-606.
[33] Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, trans. and ed., "2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch", in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 615-617.
[34] Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo", P. 297-299.
[35] F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, trans., *Philo,* vol. 1, ed. G. P. Goold, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1991), pp. ix-xx.
[36] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 561.
[37] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 561-562. cf. Plutarch, *De Defectu Oraculorum*, 419b-c; Vergil, *Aeneid*, 3:93; Herodotus, 1.159.3.
[38] Robert Ernest Wallis, trans., ed. "Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John", in Book *Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John*, ed. Alexander Roberts and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: The Christian Literature Company 1888), p. 353.
[39] Ford, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 162-163.

Christ on the basis of similarities between 4:1 and 10:4.[40] It should be noted that these similarities are not convincing. Prigent cautions that it would be unwise to attempt too much precision in identifying something which is written in such a vague manner.[41] It is perhaps appropriate to note that at John 12:28-29 the 'voice from heaven' is referred to both as 'thunder' and as the voice of an 'angel'.[42] It seems reasonable to speculate that whatever message *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* conveyed the source is ultimately intended to be perceived as either God, or the Risen Christ, whether it is somehow conveyed through an alternative source or not.

C. Intelligibility of the *Αἱ Ἑπτὰ Βρονταὶ*

There is a degree of debate as to whether the information of *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* is intelligible or not. O. Betz indicates that the reason it is not recorded is 'probably because it cannot be understood.'[43] Aune indicates that such a suggestion seems implausible since John appears to have been on the point of writing down what he had just heard.[44] Charles suggests that it is not written down because it belongs to the ineffable things which human lips may not utter (2 Corinthians 12:4), but not because it is not comprehensible.[45] According to Smalley, the message is heard and understood, but John is prevented from writing it down.[46] There appears to be no reason whatever to conclude that the *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* produced a message that was in some way unintelligible. If there is any indication that something in these verses is not articulate, it is the shout of the 'mighty angel'. The only reason John appears not to record what he hears from *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* is because he is specifically commanded not to record it.[47]

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[40] Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 127.
[41] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 330.
[42] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 533.
[43] Betz, "φωνή, φωνέω, συμφωνέω, σύμφωνος, συμφωνία, συμφώνησις," p. 296.
[44] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 562.
[45] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, p. 261.
[46] Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, p. 261.
[47] For further details on the issued of the material being 'sealed' see the section dealing with 'seals and 'sealing'.

D. Purpose of the Imagery

The probable purpose of the *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* seems to be that John intends to make it clear that there was a message from a divine source revealed to him, a portion of which he was told to keep secret.[48] Whether the device of the 'seven thunders' and their 'sealing' is used only for effect, or whether it has some deeper significance, it is difficult to be certain. It may reflect a situation similar to that described by Paul at 2 Corinthians 12:4 'that no mortal is permitted to repeat.'[49] Caird indicates that the *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* '...conveyed an articulate statement, which he could have written down, had he been allowed to do so.'[50]

E. Understanding of Thunder Communication in the Ancient World

A matter of some importance in the present study is to try to ascertain how someone living in Asia Minor during the 1st Century C.E. would have understood the phrase *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* in the contextual framework of the Apocalypse. There were a variety of ways whereby 'thunder' was understood as communication from the divine world to humanity in antiquity. An exploration of these may prove useful in understanding the message that John intended to convey to his audience. I will undertake the listing of the various ways that the concept of 'thunder' was perceived in antiquity, and where necessary expand upon relevant points.

(1) In the Jewish scriptures, and less commonly in early Judaism, the voice of God is often equated with 'thunder'.[51] (2) Occasionally, the voice of angels is associated with the sound of 'thunder'.[52] (3) The בת קול (literally 'daughter of a voice') is a heavenly voice that is accompanied by thunder.[53] (4) In Hellenistic tradition, Zeus is sometimes thought to

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[48] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 562.
[49] Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, p. 67.
[50] Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 126.
[51] Exod. 19:19; 1 Sam. 7:10; Job 37:2, 4, 5; 40:9; Ps. 18:13; 29:3; 68:33; Isa. 30:30; Jer. 10:13; Amos 1:2; Sir. 43:17; *Sib. Or.* 5.344-345. Also note previous discussions above especially related to the traditions surrounding Psalm 29.
[52] *3 Apoc. Bar.* 11:3-4; 14:1; *Sepher Ha-Razim* 2.43-44. cf. John 12:28-29.
[53] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 561.

respond to prayer by lightning or 'thunder' as a positive response indicating acceptance of the prayer.[54] (5) Hellenistic divination encompassed the usage of *brontologia* (or *brontoskopia*) and the *brontomanteia* that formed part of the Roman divination practices based on the *Disciplina Etrusca*.[55] This type of divination was practiced by the Greeks, the Romans and at least some within a Jewish context.[56]

As noted by Scherrer, it has long been recognised that chapter 13 of the Apocalypse is a 'thinly veiled polemic' directed against the Roman Imperial cult using language from Daniel 7.[57] If this is to be accepted, and I think it should be, then it is of note that certain symbols that were associated with the gods were appropriated by the Emperors.[58] There appears to have been a certain amount of eclecticism in the imperial cult whereby there was a borrowing of imagery from the gods.[59] Contrived religious wonders were not uncommon in the ancient world and according to Scherrer, in the Apocalypse at least, the accusation is that the imperial cult is guilty of using such contrivances. He even notes that based on the evidence available from antiquity regarding staged cultic wonders there is a correspondence between such staged cultic wonders and the imagery ascribed to the minions of the dragon. He recognises that machines, which produced thunder, were among the devices used in

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[54] *Iliad* 2.353; 9.236; *Odyssey* 20.101-104; Pindar, *Pyth.* 4.23. cf. Martial, *Epigrams* 6.10; 7.99; 8.39; 9.3; 9.11; 9.91.
[55] Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 561.
[56] Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la Divination dans l'antiquité*, vol. 1 (Bruxelles: Culture et Civilisation, 1963), pp. 198-204; Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1960), pp. 33-34; Michael Owen Wise, "Thunder in Gemini: An Aramaic Brontologion (4Q318) from Qumran," in *Thunder in Gemini And Other Essays on the History, Language and Literature of Second Temple Palestine*, ed. Michael Owen Wise, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), pp. 13-50.
[57] Scherrer, "Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13-15," p. 599.
[58] Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula*, 52; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 780F; Martial, *Epigrams*, 7.99; 9.39.
[59] H. W. Pleket, "An Aspect of the Emperor Cult: Imperial Mysteries", *Harvard Theological Review* 58 (1965): pp. 331-347.

theatrical presentations as well as by Gaius Caligula in some form of interaction with the gods.[60]

On another note, the use of *brontologia* was not something that was unknown in Israel, this phenomenon was found among at least some within a Jewish context, though it should be mentioned that there was certainly opposition as well within the Jewish community to practices of this type. This was merely one aspect of a Jewish interest in astrological ideas within Second Temple Judaism.[61] Josephus indicates that the seven branches of the menorah in the temple at Jerusalem symbolise the seven planets (i.e., the sun, moon, and the five visible planets) and that the twelve loaves on the table represent the 'circle of the Zodiac'.[62] There is a whole list of signs cited by Josephus that, to the observant at least, should have indicated the impending disaster that was to befall Jerusalem.[63] Some writers of the Second Temple period, such as Artapanus (3rd to 2nd century B.C.E.[64]) ascribe the teaching of astrology to the Egyptians, to Abraham,[65] and according to Pseudo-Eupolemus (prior to the 1st century B.C.E.[66]) Abraham taught astrology to the Phoenicians and the Egyptians.[67] The book of *1 Enoch* credits the giving of information regarding astronomy to Enoch through the conduit of angelic beings.[68]

'Striking testimony to the Jewish use of astrology' in the Second Temple period has been discovered among the texts from Qumran. At least four astrological works have thus

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[60] Scherrer, "Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13-15", p. 600-610. cf. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 4.28-41; Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 4.130; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 780F; Heron of Alexandria, *Die Automatentheater*, 20:4; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 59.28.6.
[61] *Sepher ha-Razim*, Preface 15-16. cf. James H. Charlesworth, "Jewish Interest in Astrology during the Hellenistic and Roman Period," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang Der Römischen Welt*, ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1987), pp. 926-956.
[62] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 5.217. cf. Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 5.214. 6.289-291; Wise, "Thunder in Gemini: An Aramaic Brontologion (4Q318) from Qumran," pp. 14-15.
[63] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 6.288-315.
[64] J. J. Collins, "Artapanus," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p.889-891.
[65] Artapanus, *Fragment* 1. cf. Eusebius, *Evangelica Praeparatio*, 9.18.1.
[66] R. Doran, trans. and ed., "Pseudo-Eupolemus," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p.871-878.
[67] Pseudo-Eupolemus, *Fragments*; cf. Eusebius, *Evangelica Praeparatio*, 9.17.2-9; 9.18.2.
[68] *1 Enoch* 41-44; 72-82.

far been identified:[69] (1) *4Q186*, a physiognomic text written in a cryptic script;[70] (2) An Aramaic text, *4Q561*, which is also a physiognomic text; (3) *4Q534* which appears to predict the birth of Noah and includes physiognomic elements[71]; (4) and the fragmentary Qumran text *4Q318* which is the surviving portion of a *brontologion.*[72]

F. Summary

Revelation 10:3-4 leaves one with a variety of questions whose answers determine the message ascribed to John at this point. Most commentators agree that the source of this imagery lies in the association particularly of the voice of God with Thunder. This seems especially to relate to Psalm 29 which appears to be a passage influenced initially by Canaanite mythology, perhaps associated with Baal. This association of concepts relating thunder with the voice of God is also found in rabbinic sources and an association of 'seven thunders' with the 'Graeco-Roman magical traditions' as noted by Aune.

Most commentators agree that in some way Psalm 29 serves as the backdrop for the imagery as used in Revelation 10:3-4. There is some indication that the idea of the expression 'voice' is at times used as a circumlocution for the name of God. At times an angel acts as an intermediary for God and is identified with God. Farrer postulates based upon a very precarious comparison of texts that the source of the *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* is Jesus Christ. Despite all efforts to identify a specific source for the expression *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* it seems prudent to admit that due to the obscurity of the reference it is not possible to be certain of the immediate source. However, taking into consideration the context of the

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[69] Wise, "Thunder in Gemini: An Aramaic Brontologion (4Q318) from Qumran", p. 15.
[70] John M. Allegro, *Qumrân Cave 4: I (4Q158-4Q186)*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert of Jordan; 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 88-91.
[71] Florentino Garcia Martinez, *Qumran and Apocalyptic*, ed. Florentino Garcia Martinez and A. S. Van Der Woude, vol. 9, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), pp. 1-44; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Aramaic "Elect of God" Text from Qumran Cave IV", *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965): pp. 356-370.
[72] Wise, "Thunder in Gemini: An Aramaic Brontologion (4Q318) from Qumran", pp. 13-50.

Apocalypse and all the data available it seems safe to assume that the source of the *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* in the Apocalypse, is ultimately either God, or Jesus Christ.

Though O. Betz makes the claim that the *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* are not written down due to the fact that they are unintelligible this assertion seems wholly unfounded. A number of reasons are given for not recording the message of *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* including the possibility that somehow it relates to the ineffable name of God, or that the things revealed are things that human lips may not utter such as those referred to in 2 Corinthians 12:4. The purpose of the imagery created by John is cited by some as merely for effect, and by others to indicate that John has not revealed all that he saw in his Revelation.

The understanding of 'thunder' communication in the ancient world takes a number of forms, some unique to Judaism, but most almost certainly would have been known to John's audience. It is possible that, as is indicated by Scherrer, at chapter 13 where there is a thinly veiled polemic against the Roman Imperial cult, perhaps something similar is taking place at chapter 10.[73] This would perhaps indicate that the *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* represent the voice of the one true God as opposed to the counterfeit pretences perpetrated by the emperors as they lay claim to some form of divinity. It would then be the case that John uses *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ* in relation to true deity, as opposed to that which is a pretence, and that God is the ultimate controller of all destiny.

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[73] Scherrer, "Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13-15", pp. 599-610.

13. Conclusion

Did John compose Revelation as some form of 'anti-magical polemic' as argued by Aune? Without question, there is a great deal of evidence that supports the notion that the 'magical' worldview of antiquity was widespread both temporally and geographically. Though many of the literary sources currently extant, designated as 'magical', date, compositionally, from a time later than the 1st century C.E., it seems highly probable that much of the material of this type was widespread at that time.[1] No ancient culture, or period, seems to have been devoid of such literature, and practices such as incantations, divination, exorcism, theurgy, the use of brontologia, astrology, sorcery, appear to have commonly held across the Ancient Near East, and the Roman Empire, in the period previous to, and contemporary with, the composition of the Apocalypse. Despite strongly worded invectives in the Torah and other Jewish materials, it is apparent that eradication of 'magical' practices and beliefs were never totally successful within the Jewish community.

As Christianity emerged from Judaism, it not only absorbed 'magical' traditions from within Judaism, but it also continued to absorb 'magical' traditions from the surrounding Graeco-Roman world.[2] However, investigations into the nature of the pressures faced by John's audience have long been plagued by prejudice and misunderstanding among those who would imagine that Judaism and the early church were somehow uncontaminated by the affects of a cultural world in which they lived and developed. Publications by Garrett, Arnold, Aune, Alexander, and others surely indicate that the impact of 'magic' upon New Testament texts must be given more careful consideration.

Along these lines, the present work has investigated a number of motifs associated with the 'magical' world of antiquity and their possible influence upon John's Apocalypse.

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[1] Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*, pp. 349-350.
[2] Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*, pp. 381-382.

In doing so, we have focused on terms and motifs that occur in both Revelation, and sources from antiquity associated with 'magic', often uniquely associated with 'magic'. The comparisons explored lead to the conclusion that John's relationship to 'magic' was highly complex: on the one hand, he unequivocally condemned it, while on the other hand, he conveys, even espouses, a number of motifs and traditions that could easily be construed and interpreted against a formative 'magical' background; even John's theological worldview was framed by the 'magical' world in which he lived!

1. Open Condemnation

John strongly condemns certain practices and practitioners in the Apocalypse in a fashion that is undeniable. Such condemnation is perhaps not surprising, but it is quite informative as the development of these images express a great deal regarding the particular aspects of these practices and associations that John finds worthy of his condemnation.

A. Sorcery Passages in the Revelation

It is of significance that the Book of Revelation uses the term *φαρμακεία* more than any other book in the New Testament. The Seer appeared to perceive great dangers for his audience from that which he considered to be *φαρμακεία* and the practices and procedures associated with this terminology are certainly considered by most scholars as being in the arena of 'magic'. These practices include the use of incantations, name magic, the use of amulets, and reliance upon spiritual forces other than God or Jesus Christ. This conceptual arena is then connected with those who are associated with the appellation 'false prophets' to form a very negative backdrop for unequivocal condemnation.

B. The False Prophet in the Context of the Apocalypse

John draws upon the imagery of the 'false prophet' when he renounces both practices and individuals he perceives as a threat to the church. John draws upon the known expectation that the time preceding the end would be filled with such figures, thus

heightening the tension for his audience. By using familiar, defamatory figures from Israel's biblical past, John attempts to define the nature and the scope of the threat he perceives to be facing the church.

It is of note that Balaam, in particular, is associated with the use of deception in leading the people of God into 'immorality' and compromising worship. There were contradictory traditions related to Balaam and he was a multi-faceted character who was reliant upon the power of God, while at other times he was held as having been more interested in what would benefit himself personally. He is a figure often associated with 'magical' practices and even with the 'magicians' of Pharoah during the Exodus. Then John moves onto Jezebel, who is associated in biblical tradition with the introduction of foreign religion along with forbidden practices. Certainly in the ancient Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures she is integrally linked with *φάρμακον* (cf. p. 66) and with the appointment of those who were labelled as *ψευδοπροφήτης*. It seems highly probable that the imagery of Jezebel is also used to expose the dangers which John thought were invading the churches.

In Revelation 13 the second of two beasts, is specifically referred to as *ψευδοπροφήτης* (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). This designation once again functions as a link between the readers' imminent circumstances and the 'false prophets' from Israel's past. This figure performs signs and wonders that lead many astray. In agreement with Garrett, we have noted a longstanding and widespread connection in the Jewish (and early Christian) traditions between 'false prophets' and 'magic'.

John seeks to link those whom he designates as *ψευδοπροφήτης* with immorality of the most base type, by connecting those that participate, or tolerate, such practices with the harlot of chapter 17. Such imagery was used in order to unmask the dangers posed by Rome's tolerant syncretistic agenda. There is also a connection in the Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures between *φάρμακον* and *πορνεία*. The deceptive face of Rome would ultimately be

exposed, and the power behind this facade would be defeated, according to the author of the Apocalypse.

C. John's Beasts and Talking Statues (Rev. 13:15)

In Revelation 13:15 the writer introduces beasts who are endowed with what appears to be miraculous powers to perform signs and wonders, as well as the ability to 'give breath' to an image, that is able to speak, are introduced. Many commentators have maintained that John was referring in some way to the element of trickery often associated with practitioners of 'magic'. Their placement of deception, however, is misleading. The text assumes that the signs and wonders and the ability to bring the image to life will actually happen, while the element of deception is only associated with the source of the power to perform such wonders. The source of the power in this instance is Satan and the forces of evil. There is a clear connection to the agenda of the Roman Imperial regime in that they often blurred the line between the various religions and promoted a religious tolerance that was unacceptable to John. It would seem highly probable that the churches of ancient Asia Minor perceived the events portrayed by John to be an attack on practices that were both unacceptable and highly dangerous. This audience would have recognised that John had created a thinly veiled caricature of the demonic power behind Rome and the kind of society it promulgated.

2. Motifs in Revelation

We have also seen that in a number of passages, the text of Revelation may be compared to motifs and traditional elements which in antiquity were being associated with 'magic'. Here, despite John's deliberate rejection of what he openly associates with 'magical' practices, his own language arguably reflects and even builds on the matrix which has sanctioned them.

A. References to 'Keys'

Aune claims that the phrase *κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου* functioned for John as a means to counter influence from competitors to Christ, in this instance Hecate. The imagery associated with this prominent and influential goddess in antiquity was noted at crossroads, gateways, doorways and on public buildings. She was, in particular, associated with having power over the dead, which was claimed by the Christian community, to be the perogative of Jesus Christ. Though a number of figures that have a strong connection to this role in Hellenistic culture, Hecate appears to have been the most well-known, and prominent of such figures, particularly in Asia Minor. Even Beale, who is opposed to Aune's contention that the Apocalypse is an anti-magical polemic, concedes the weightiness of the evidence put forward by Aune with regard to Hecate. It appears that John wants to demonstrate that Jesus is superior to all rivals, in every arena, and in this instance over this popular figure.

B. Passages That use *Ταχύ*

Aune contends that John's usage of the term *ταχύ* was intended as a parody of language that would have been associated with 'magical' texts. As such, the word functioned subtly as a way to undermine overreliance on 'magical' practices that would have either been employed, or were a temptation for his audience. The usage of *ταχύ*, especially in conjunction with a first person, present tense verb is extremely rare and should therefore be carefully investigated. It is also perhaps relevant that the formula *ἤδη ἤδη, ταχύ ταχύ* is commonly found as part of incantational formulas in the *Greek Magical Papyri* along with other texts that have commonly been associated with 'magical' practices. It is Aune's supposition that John has made use of a familiar term in order to strike at the conscience of those who had been less than faithful in their devotion to Christ. This interpretation is likely correct as no other explanation more adequately addresses John's usage of this unusual construction.

C. Unclean Spirits Like Frogs

From the perspective of Jewish tradition, 'frogs' are perceived to be unclean creatures. However, it is the association of 'frogs' with the plagues of Exodus that prompts John to use them here in the Apocalypse. John's use of this imagery succeeds in linking these opponents with the ancient enemies of God's people in Egypt, namely Pharoah's magicians. These enemies are more than flesh and blood and display powers and abilities that are beyond the capabilities of mere mortals. The same power that allowed a deceptive veil to remain over the people of Egypt in the context of the plagues is now at work against the church.

3. John's Reorientation of Imagery

John's view of 'magical' practices did not cause him to condemn categorically all things that might be associated with such practices by a modern mindset. He appears to condemn certain things outright, while other related images he reorients in order to indicate that reliance on them, if Jesus Christ, or God, is the source of the power behind them, is acceptable. It is this reorientation of imagery that is perhaps most surprising, and it provides a way to ascertain more precisely what John perceives to be unacceptable in regard to practices and imagery often associated with 'magic' in such imagery.

A. Seals and Sealing in the Apocalypse

One such concept is that of the 'seal'. John takes this concept, and reorients it so that the only acceptable and trustworthy seals are those that are demonstrably associated with God. Seals have been used throughout history as symbols of power, authority, protection, ownership, and as amulets. It would have been virtually inconceivable that John could have issued a blanket condemnation of all seals in a manner that would have been affective in eradicating reliance upon them. There was simply too much history for such a condemnation to have been affective in achieving John's goal. Rather than attacking such imagery in a

negative fashion, John, it appears, chooses a more subtle creative approach, and he powerfully reorients this imagery in such a way as to convey his central message regarding the authority and divinity of Christ. By using this reoriented imagery, he can demonstrate the powerful position of Christ and of God, and he can empty all other 'seals', other that the seal of Christ and God, of their significance.

B. Passages about 'the Beginning and End'

Aune postulates that the background to passages that refer in some manner to 'the beginning and the end', 'the first and the last', and 'the alpha and the Ω' are evidence in support of his supposition that the Apocalypse is an 'anti-magical' polemic. There is an association between such phrases and the ancient gods and with various 'magical' practices. It is perhaps the case that John is aware of these backgrounds and that he uses these expressions in order, once more, to powerfully indicate the superiority of Christ over all rivals and certainly such phrases are present in the *Greek Magical Papyri* and in other materials that are considered to be 'magical'.

C. White Stone

Aune and a number of other commentators relate the 'white stone' of 2:17 to the 'amulet' in antiquity. Despite the fact that a number of scholars doubt such a correlation, none of them are able to postulate an alternative that addresses the context and the distinctiveness of the imagery in way that is wholly convincing. In a world where the power of amulets was taken for granted, it seems plausible that John chooses to promise those of his audience the ultimate amulet rather than to seek to convince them to rid themselves of reliance on them without any form of replacement.

D. 'Angel Standing in the Sun' (Rev. 19:17)

The context of Revelation 19:17 is one in which the absolute lordship and authority of Jesus Christ is presented with vigour. In order to unravel the meaning of a given text it is

helpful to explore both the Jewish background, and an understanding of the Hellenistic environment. Both facets of the cultural process are essential. There is a long and embattled history of sun worship amongst the cultures of the Ancient Near East. The Jewish scriptures and other Jewish sources demonstrate that there was an ongoing conflict amongst Jews regarding this issue.

This tendency to adore the sun is a widespread phenomenon affecting virtually all Near Eastern cultures, along with Graeco-Roman cultures. There was a particular association between the emperor and the sun at, or near, the time of the Apocalypse. It seems highly probable that John has tapped into the long and fraught history of the Jewish people as a backdrop, or point of reference for his imagery here. This, combined with the situation that was current in 1st century C.E. Asia Minor would have made his use of the imagery regarding *ἕνα ἄγγελον ἑστῶτα ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ* a grand and compelling vision of the power and sovereignty of the risen Christ.

It is certainly possible that the frame of reference may have included such ideas as are present in Hekhalot literature or even in 'magical' textual traditions like those in the *Greek Magical Papyri*. With this imagery John can cut across the cultural boundaries and unite his audience using this powerful image.

E. Seven Thunders (Rev. 10:3-4)

The imagery of thunder speaking is of such an unusual nature as to warrant special attention. Though there is a great deal of debate regarding the ultimate source of such imagery most would agree that in some way this imagery is intended to convey that the will of God is behind the message of *αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ*. There are a number of connections between Psalm 29 and Canaanite mythology that is associated with Baal. Whether John's audience would have been aware of such matters seems highly improbable. There is however, a reasonable degree of probability that the audience will have been aware of the connection

between thunder and communication from a deity. There was also an association of thunder with the claims of divinity expressed by Roman emperors, who especially in Asia Minor, were worshipped as gods. This along with the possible links of thunder to 'magical' practices, whether it be the material from the *Greek Magical Papyri*, or means of divination associated with thunder, there would seem to be an indication that John employed this imagery precisely to dissuade any from relying upon such things.

It has only been possible to examine a small number of the numerous motifs that likely have a connection with 'magical' practices, in the Apocalypse, yet even these demonstrate a significant association with such practices. These images are numerous and centrally arranged within the Apocalypse, indicating the centrality of concerns associated with such motifs. This emphasis leads to the conclusion that certain practices and associations were of significant concern to John and that he very creatively sought to counter them. It seems highly probable that John did indeed write the Apocalypse in such a manner as to identify practices and influences that he deemed to be unacceptable.

Whether or not he would have identified these practices, as 'magic' in every instance is perhaps open to question depending upon how 'magic' is defined. Perhaps it is the case that the message that John intended to convey is more important than the labels that can conveniently be produced by modern scholars. John condemned any and every practice that does not recognise the sovereign, divine authority that is vested in Jesus Christ as the son of God. In the ancient world, reliance upon unacceptable spiritual powers would have been designated using terms associated with 'magic' such as is the case with the term φαρμακεία. There is no need for reliance upon any other power, or authority, outside of the direct Lordship of Jesus Christ, and indeed any such reliance is ultimately deemed to be immorality and it will be punishable with eternal condemnation. For John at least any such dependence

would be considered unacceptable, and it would be considered to be unacceptable and in the category of *φαρμακεία*.

Aune's supposition that the Apocalypse is essentially an anti-magical polemic is perhaps taking the argument too far, but that there is a great deal of anti-magical polemical material within the Apocalypse seems to be the best explanation for a great deal of the imagery that has for so long proven so difficult to interpret for scholars. Aune's approach unlocks new avenues of exploration that should continue to unveil long undisclosed ideas that will assist in understanding this complex and fascinating work.

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