

Before Canonisation

Early Attestation of Revelation

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1 Introduction

Canonisation and chiliasm are usually regarded as main topics in the studies of the reception history of Revelation. A more distinct view of reception history, however, reveals high estimation within early Christianity, even beyond these topics.

This contribution focuses on the issues of attestation and interpretation. Regarding attestation, we have to find clear criteria. Unmarked allusions must be unambiguous; we evaluate exclusively if it is Revelation only which could inspire a distinct phrasing in the text of an ancient Christian author. Common apocalyptic motives as well as the motive of the celestial city (cf. Psalms and Paul, Gal 4:26) or the motive of tree of life (2:7; 22:14) cannot prove the influence of Revelation.

The following overview will be arranged along chronological data.

2 The Second Century

Concerning the second century, Tobias Nicklas follows a general modern trend towards the reduction of hitherto supposed intertextual relations between texts of the New Testament and others by the early church fathers. Only clear textual signals being critically interpreted with regard to philological ambiguities allow the construction of reception history. In accordance to these lines, Nicklas detects testimonies of the Apocalypse in the second century solely in the works of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Melito of Sardes; it is not really certain whether Papias knew the Apocalypse; the letters of Ignatius of Antioch do not provide any word parallel permitting the assumption of the author's knowledge of Revelation.¹ Following this

¹ T. NICKLAS, Probleme der Apokalypserezeption im 2. Jahrhundert. Eine Diskussion mit Charles E. Hill, in: J. Verheyden/T. Nicklas/A. Merkt (eds.), *Ancient Christian Inter-*

critical point of view seems wise to me.² According to Eusebius of Caesarea, Apollonius (end of the second century) used Revelation as well, yet his writings are lost.³

2.1 Justin

Justin, dial. 81.4, uses Rev 20:4–6 in order to provide a Biblical basis for his chiliasm though this passage of Revelation is a secondary witness; in this context, Isa 65:17–25 is more important.⁴ For Justin, the Revelation is an authority, but still not canonical, assuming that other prophetic texts were produced as well.⁵

2.2 The Congregation of Lyons

The letter of the congregation of Lyons provides a clear allusion on Rev 14:4 (the martyr “followed the lamb wherever he goes”) which is not only biblically grounded language but also characterises the eagerness to martyrdom in analogy to the one of Jesus Christ.⁶ Rev 22:11 (“the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right”) is cited as “Scripture”;⁷ in this example, the book of Revelation is interpreted as a prophecy of future events to be fulfilled.

2.3 Melito of Sardes

In the concluding section of *De pascha*, Melito names the deeds of Christ in pre-existence (creation of world and man), the key events in the early life of Jesus as well as his ascension and exaltation to the right hand of God Father. Having mentioned his involvement at the last judgment, Melito emphasises the participation of Jesus Christ in the activity of creation before praising him as the “Alpha and Omega” and as the “beginning and end”, as King, as Lord etc.⁸ For Melito, Rev 1:8; 21:6 function as a convenient formula emphasising the all-encompassing activity of Jesus Christ.

pretations of ‘Violent Texts’ in the Apocalypse, NTOA 92, Göttingen 2011, 28–45, passim.

² For a summarizing overview on the reception of Revelation in the beginning of Christian era cf. also W.C. WEINRICH, *Revelation*, ACCS 12, Downers Grove 2005, XVIII–XXII.

³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.18.14 (GCS 9/1: 478 Schwartz).

⁴ NICKLAS, *Probleme* (n. 1), 37f.

⁵ NICKLAS, *Probleme* (n. 1), 38.

⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.1.10 (GCS 9/1: 404–06 Schwartz).

⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.1.58 (GCS 9/1: 424 Schwartz): the Roman governor and the mass did not abstain from their hate, in order that the Scripture has been fulfilled: Rev 22:11.

⁸ Melito of Sardes, *De pascha* 812–13 (SC 123:124 Perler).

2.4 Irenaeus

Polemics, prophecy, and proof for chiliasm are the main issues of Irenaeus' reception of the Apocalypse, but also part of typological exegesis and textual criticism.

In his *Epideixis*, the bishop of Lyons does not use Revelation at all. Within his *Adversus haereses*, the bishop of Lyons interprets the seer's polemics against the Nicolaitans;⁹ in general, the heretics are precursors of the dragon mentioned in Rev 12:4.¹⁰ An allusion to Rev 3:21 (*nondum ad-sidentes throno eius*) expresses Christian hope.¹¹ Typologically, the birth of the victorious Jacob represents a type of the victorious Christ.¹² Irenaeus is the first known author who interpreted the four animals of Ez 1:5–10 and Rev 4:6–7 with reference to the evangelists. According to him,¹³ the lion represents John, the calf Luc, the man Matthew, and the eagle Mark. Rev 3:7; 5:3 concerns Jesus Christ's dominion over the world, given to him by God himself (Mt 11:27);¹⁴ and this emphasises the unity of God Father and Jesus Christ, and the unity of both Old and New Testament. Within a treatise on God's invisibility, he confirms that God's word makes his glory visible (John 1:18b), and John sees the adventure of the Lord's priestly kingdom; Rev 1:17 corresponds to Ex 33:20; Rev 5:6 and Rev 19:11-16 are other descriptions of the future.¹⁵ Issues of both, adequate theology and balancing biblical antagonisms, reveal Irenaeus' consciousness of exegetical challenges of his time.

⁹ Irenaeus, Haer. 1.26.3 (SC 264:348 Rousseau/Doutreleau); 3.11.1 (SC 211:138 Rousseau/Doutreleau), referring this group to the deacon Nicolaus mentioned explicitly in Acts 6:5f.; cf. especially N. WALTER, Nikolaos, Proselyt aus Antiochien, und die Nikolaiten in Ephesus und Pergamon. Ein Beitrag auch zum Thema: Paulus und Ephesus, in: ZNW 93 (2002), 200–226, 201f. who, with regard to the issue of Irenaeus' estimation of this group, emphasizes the ambiguity of the Latin text: It is not clear whether this group is in right to trace back themselves to Nicolaus or not.

¹⁰ Irenaeus, Haer. 2.31.3 (SC 294:330 Rousseau/Doutreleau).

¹¹ Irenaeus, Haer. 2.28.7 (SC 294:286 Rousseau/Doutreleau).

¹² Irenaeus, Haer. 4.21.3 (SC 1000:680 Rousseau), referring to Rev 6:2.

¹³ Irenaeus, Haer. 3.11.8 (SC 211:160–170 Rousseau/Doutreleau). This mode of reference is repeated by Victorinus of Pettau, in apocalypsin (CSEL 49:50–52); Apponius, In Canticum VII (IV,10), 28 (CC.SL 19) 166 (ibidem other references); Chromatius of Aquileia, Tractatus in Matthaeum, prol. 9 (CC.SL 9 A), 189; and Andreas of Caesarea, Commentarius in apocalypsin (PG 106, 257 AB); Arethas of Caesarea, Commentarius in apocalypsin (PG 106, 572 AB) (Andreas and Arethas refer explicitly to Irenaeus); Theophylact of Achrida, Enarratio in Evangelium Marci, praef., PG 123, 493 B. There are, however, also other lists of references.

¹⁴ Irenaeus, Haer. 4.20.2 (SC 100:628–630 Rousseau).

¹⁵ Irenaeus, Haer. 4.20.11 (SC 100:662–668 Rousseau).

Irenaeus' usage of Revelation has its core in the last book with regard to the final consummation of the world (adv. haer. 5.26.1; 5.28.2; 5.30.1–4),¹⁶ within polemics concerning the issue of fleshly resurrection. The seer identifies the “ten horns” of Dan 7 as the ten kings he did not see yet (Rev 17:12).¹⁷ This proves that the God who sent the prophets and the God who sent the Lord are the same, being only one.¹⁸ Furthermore, the seer predicts the adventure of the antichrist described in 2 Thess 2 as well as the one of the pseudo-prophet who is the antichrist's weapon-bearer.¹⁹ This pseudo-prophet does not do his works by divine power, but by sorcery instead. The demons are his servants and seduce human beings. The number 666 in Rev 13:18 marks the recapitulation of all apostasy,²⁰ whereas the antichrist represents the recapitulation of all evil.²¹ According to Irenaeus, the reading 666 is attested by all serious and old manuscripts (*ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς σπουδαίοις καὶ ἀρχαίοις ἀντιγράφοις τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τούτου κεμμένου/ in omnibus antiquis et probatissimis et veteribus scripturis numero hoc posito*).²² Perhaps some writers wrote the medium number Ξ (= 60) as I (= 10).²³ Referring to Jer 6:16 (“From Dan we shall hear ...”), Irenaeus solves another exegetical riddle of Revelation, i.e. the problem why the name “Dan” (to be expected at the end of v. 6) is replaced by the name Μανασση in Rev 7:5–8.²⁴ Christians should wait for the fulfilment of the seer's prophecy instead of speculating with regard to other names for the antichrist as Eythanos or Teitan²⁵, but they should understand the promises literally, like Mt 26:29; Lk 14:12f.; Isa 11,6–8; 65:25f.; Ez 37:12 etc..²⁶ The “Jerusalem above” named in Gal 4:26 and Rev 21:2 is not referring to Gnostic eons, but to the city planned by God himself; the “new heaven” of Rev 21:1 and Isa 65:17f. is thus not to be interpreted allegorically for being true and real, made by

¹⁶ G. KRETSCHMAR, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Calwer Theologische Monographien B 9, Stuttgart 1986, 75, emphasizes the differences between the seer and Irenaeus concerning the final period of this world.

¹⁷ Irenaeus, Haer. 5.26.1 (SC 153:324 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier).

¹⁸ Irenaeus, Haer. 5.26.2 (SC 153:332 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier).

¹⁹ Irenaeus, Haer. 5.28.2 (SC 153:354 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier). *πλανάω* in Rev 13:14 and *πλανή* in 2 Thess 2:11 leads to this combination; *πλανάω*, *σημεῖα*, and idolatry are combined already in Deut 13:2–6.

²⁰ Irenaeus, Haer. 5.28.2 end (SC 153:356 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier).

²¹ Irenaeus, Haer. 5.29.2 (SC 153:370 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier).

²² Irenaeus, Haer. 5.30.1 (SC 153:370 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier).

²³ Irenaeus, Haer. 5.30.1 (SC 153:372 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier).

²⁴ Irenaeus, Haer. 5.30.2 (SC 153:378 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier). The omission of Dan is remarked but not interpreted also in Origen, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 1.3 (SC 120:58 Blanc).

²⁵ Irenaeus, Haer. 5.30.3 (SC 153:378–384 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier).

²⁶ Irenaeus, Haer. 5.33.1–34.4 (SC 153:404–436 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier).

God for the righteous.²⁷ The seer clearly foresaw the first resurrection and the heritage of the earth in the kingdom, which was also predicted by the prophets, the Lord (Mt 26:29), and the apostles (Rom 8:21).²⁸

3 The Third Century

3.1 Tertullian

In the works of Tertullian, the book of Revelation is a reliable source for ethics²⁹ and anti-heretic polemics and the major source for eschatology; in a creative manner, he alludes to Revelation in order to describe the state of Christianity in his days.

Concerning ethics, quotations from Revelation admonish to accept divine castigation³⁰ and emphasise the warning about luxury³¹; the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6.15) function as an example of libido and luxury, a bad example within an epideictic speech.³² Concerning the possibility of the “second penitence”, we have to distinguish two periods in Tertullian’s thinking. In *De paenitentia* (203/ 204), Tertullian justifies the possibility (which is granted only once): Jesus Christ charges the Ephesians with ‘having abandoned charity’. He reproaches the Thyatirenes for fornicating and ‘eating food sacrificed to idols’. He censures the people of Pergamos for teaching false doctrines. He upbraids the Laodiceans for ‘placing their trust in riches’. Yet he warns all of them in order to repent – even adding threats. But he would not threaten the impenitent if he failed to pardon the penitent.³³ The opposite is true according to Tertullian’s *De pudicitia* (210): Sinners should repent, but there is no chance of pardon granted by

²⁷ Irenaeus, Haer. 5.35.2 (SC 153:444–448 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier).

²⁸ Irenaeus, Haer. 5.36.3 (SC 153:4462–464 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier).

²⁹ Surprisingly, however, Tertullian does absolutely not use the warnings of Revelation against idolatry in his treatise on this issue (196) or the seer’s admonitions with regard to martyrdom in his treatise ad martyres (197). These treatises are works of a relatively early period in Tertullian’s work – did he already know the book of Revelation in these times? If *De cultu feminarum* is to be dated between 197 and 201 (E. SCHULZ-FLÜGEL, Tertullian, in: S. Döpp/W. Geerlings (eds.), *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, Freiburg u.a. 2002, 668–672, 669), our argument would presuppose that the treatise ad martyres is to be dated earlier in this year.

³⁰ Tertullian, *De patientia* 11.4 (CC.SL 1:311 Borleffs) quotes Rev 3:19.

³¹ Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* 2.12.2 (CC.SL 1:368 Kroymann).

³² Tertullian, *Adversus marcionem* 1.29.2 (CC.SL 1, 473 Kroymann); similarly Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 33.10 (CC.SL 1:214 Refoulé). Tertullian wishes to fortify sanctity without condemning marriage but abhorring wrong liberty.

³³ Tertullian, *De paenitentia* 8:1 (CC.SL 1:334 Borleffs).

the bishop. Rev 21:7–8 implies this rigorous point of view; although Rev 2:20–22 is quoted, it is not really discussed.³⁴

Anti-heretical polemics cause the curse of Rev 22:18f. on Hermogenes³⁵ and the prophecy of the out-casted dogs (Rev 22:15) in a general polemic section in adv. Marc.³⁶

The conflict between Christians and the Roman Empire implies an analogic situation which reminds of Tertullian's own description by the allusion to Revelation:³⁷

[...] times for Christians are always, and now at highest level, directed not by gold but by iron; the clothes of martyrs are prepared; the angels which are to carry us are being awaited.

The conflict with Rome provides further background for a remark concerning Biblical language: Using transferred names based on the comparison of crimes is nothing new to the creator: Babylon is the figure of Rome for "our John".³⁸ In his treatise on prayer, Tertullian quotes Rev 6:10 in his comment on Mt 6:10 ("thou kingdom should come"); he does not challenge the issue of revenge, but confesses that he would prefer ruling to serving.³⁹ Tertullian's treatise *De corona militis* written during the author's Montanistic period deals with crowning ceremonies as part of pagan daily life. The real chaplet of Christian soldiers is not a crown worn at festivals of the city etc., but the crown of thorns which Christ wore for him. The adequate reaction to this is the martyrdom for Christ but the Christian should avoid to be crowned for earthly occasions in case that there is no possibility for martyrdom. God himself will crown the Christian life. The "crown of life" (Rev 2:10), the "angle of victory" (Rev 6:2), the elders (Rev 4:4) and the son of man, having his throne above the clouds (Rev 14:14) are visionary elements of hope; a Christian should look up to this. The heavenly kingship for us (Rev 1:6) is better than the earthly crowning.⁴⁰ In his *Scorpiace*, he praises the martyrs as winners who share the promises of Christ written down in the letters to the seven congregations⁴¹, whereas the faithless (Rev 21:8) are punished for their fear which reveals an omission of love.⁴²

³⁴ Tertullian, *De pudicitia* 19.8 (CC.SL 2:1320–21 Dekkers).

³⁵ Tertullian, *Adversus hermogenem* 22.5 (CC.SL 1:416 Kroymann).

³⁶ Tertullian, *Adversus marcionem* 2.5.1 (CC.SL 1:479 Kroymann).

³⁷ Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* 2.13.6 (CC.SL 1:370 Kroymann).

³⁸ Tertullian, *Adversus marcionem* 3.13.9–10 (CC.SL 1:525–26 Kroymann).

³⁹ Tertullian, *De oratione* 5.3 (CC.SL 1:260 Diercks).

⁴⁰ Tertullian, *De corona militis* 15.2 (CC.SL 2:1065 Kroymann).

⁴¹ Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 12.5–8 (CC.SL 2:1093 Reifferscheid/Wissowa).

⁴² Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 12.11 (CC.SL 2:1094 Reifferscheid/Wissowa). The "fear" is the fear mentioned in 1 John 3:16; 4:18; Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 12:4 (CC.SL 2:1093 Reifferscheid/Wissowa).

Concerning eschatology, Revelation testifies a distinct order of times comparable to 2 Thess: The world has to drink the plagues out of the vials of the angels; the city of fornication will receive its deserved doom, and the antichrist with its false prophet wage war on the Church. After the casting of the devil in the bottomless pit, however, the prerogative of the first resurrection may be ordained from the thrones, and then the judgment of the final resurrection may be determined out of the books.⁴³ Revelation also testifies the divergent fate of the souls – the souls of all men go to Hades; the souls of the martyrs, whose death purified them from their sins, rise up to heaven directly.⁴⁴

The important focus, however, is certainly on the Biblical reasoning for Tertullian's chiliasm.⁴⁵

We confess that a kingdom is promised to us on earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the city of Jerusalem built by God's work let down from heaven. The apostle also calls it "our mother from above;" and, while declaring that our *πολίτευμα* or citizenship is in heaven, he predicates of it that it is really a city in heaven. This both Ezekiel had knowledge of and the Apostle John beheld. And the word of the new prophecy which is a part of our belief, attests how it foretold that there would be for a sign a picture of this very city exhibited to view previous to its manifestation.

A purely allegorical exegesis of the well-known Biblical proof texts concerning chiliasm is insufficient: "Figures" must also have a real object of reference.⁴⁶ But even Tertullian sometimes reads Revelation allegorically: The doubly sharp two-edged sword proceeding of the mouth of God needs to be identified with the word of God itself, doubly sharpened in the testaments of law and gospel.⁴⁷ Moreover, other exegetical concerns are part of

⁴³ Tertullian, *De resurrectione mortuorum* 25.1–2 (CC.SL 2:953 Borleffs). P. METZGER, *Katechon*. II Thess 2,1–12 im Horizont apokalyptischen Denkens, BZNW 135, Berlin/New York 2005, 159.

⁴⁴ Tertullian, *De anima* 55.4 (CC.SL 2:862 Waszink).

⁴⁵ Tertullian, *Adversus marcionem* 3.24.3 (CCL 1:542 Kroymann).

⁴⁶ Tertullian, *Adversus mermogenem* 34.1.2.3 (CC.SL 1:426 Kroymann) quotes Mt 24:35; Rev 21:1; 20:14; Ps 101:27; Rev 6:13 and comments (34.3): *Quae Omnia et si aliter putaverit interpretanda, non tamen poterit auferre ueritatem ita futuorum, quomodo scripta sunt. Si quae enim figurae sunt, ex rebus consistentibus fiant necesse est, non ex vacantibus, quia nihil potest ad similitudinem de suo praestare, nisi sit ipsum, quod ali similitudini preaestet.* The sayings of the Apocalypse are the norm for Tertullian's own eschatology which is conceptualized as abolishment of the first earth.

⁴⁷ Tertullian, *Adversus marcionem* 3.14.3 (CCL 1:526 Kroymann). Without the latter differentiation (law/gospel), Origen also offers this exegesis; cf. Origen, *hom. Num.* 7.1.1 (SC 415:168 Doutreleau). *Hebr* 4:12f., though comparing comparatively, could be the background of this exegesis.

Tertullian's reception of Apocalypse: He associates Rev 11:3 with Enoch and Elijah.⁴⁸

In his Montanistic period, Revelation sometimes supports Tertullian's new ideas related to ethics. In his treatise *De monogamia*, the formula "Alpha and Omega" (1:8) describes Christian faith and ethics referring back to the beginnings of creation: This includes freedom in terms of circumcision and food, but also the obliging character of matrimony, i.e. the restriction of divorce.⁴⁹ Rev 1:6 ("he has made us priests...") is an indirect witness for Tertullian's rigorous statement against remarriage in his *De exhortatione castitatis*: The difference between clergy and laymen is stated by the clergy though we are all priests ourselves. If we all reclaim the rights of a priest in different situations we will also have to perform the duties of a priest. According to ecclesial discipline, a priest who marries again cannot be priest any more so that remarriage is also forbidden for laymen.⁵⁰

3.2 Clement of Alexandria

Clement uses the Revelation of the "divine"⁵¹ John for allegorical exegesis of some impressive metaphors as well as for moral teaching. Concerning the life of the author of Revelation, Clement adds the famous story of John and the robber following his return from Patmos.⁵²

Allegorical explanations concern the "elders" of the congregations interpreted as angels,⁵³ the "seven lamps" as the servant spirits⁵⁴, the phrases "living water" as "knowledge",⁵⁵ and the heavenly city as grace proclaimed by the apostles all over the world.⁵⁶

Instead of allegory, moral teaching is the scope of Clement's reception of Rev 6:11. White is the natural colour of clothes, adequate to a pure mind; the relevant context is the warning of colouring clothes: Coloured clothes seduce the mind for cupidity.⁵⁷ Moral teaching is also the essence of Clement's reception of Rev 4:4. The elders of Rev 4:4 and their sitting on 24 thrones are metaphors for the celestial fate of someone not elected to the leading circles of Christian congregation despite living up to the gospel. The criterion of this eldership is righteousness.⁵⁸ He who intended to

⁴⁸ Tertullian, *De anima* 50:5 (CC.SL 2:856 Waszink).

⁴⁹ Tertullian, *De monogamia* 5.2–3 (CC.SL 2:1234 Dekkers).

⁵⁰ Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis* 7,3 (CCL 2:1024 Kroymann).

⁵¹ ὁ θεῖος Ἰωάννης (Clement of Alexandria, *Fragm.* 5, GCS 17:196 Stählin).

⁵² Clement of Alexandria, *Quis dives* 42 (GCS 17:187–191 Stählin).

⁵³ Clement of Alexandria, *Fragm.* 5 (GCS 17:196 Stählin).

⁵⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *Fragm.* 59 (GCS 17:227 Stählin).

⁵⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Str.* 7.104.4 (GCS 17:73 Stählin).

⁵⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 2.119.1 (GCS 12:228 Stählin).

⁵⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 2.108.3 (GCS 12:222 Stählin).

⁵⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Str.* 6.105.2; GCS 15:485 Stählin).

be free from affects and lives in perfection is like an angel on earth, similar to the apostles, who were not apostles by election due to a stipend natural being, but were elected by the one who can foresee the end.⁵⁹ This perfection is based on good deeds rather than just avoiding sin.⁶⁰

According to Clement, “Alpha and Omega” (Rev 1:8) is a proper way of Christological speech conceptualising his notion of Jesus Christ. Combining motifs of Col 1:16; John 1:3 with neoplatonic ones, Clement names Jesus Christ the offspring of all, being like a circle in which all powers are unified. Therefore, he is called Alpha and omega of whom alone the end becomes the beginning and vice versa at the same time without interruption.⁶¹ The phrase “Alpha and Omega”, however, is especially significant with regard to the doctrine of salvation: Jesus Christ is named “Alpha and Omega” as he donates his word which is leading us to perfection and the “rest” in eternal life.⁶²

Comparing Clement of Alexandria with other authors of his time, we can conclude: Issues of future history and martyrdom are not the main interests of Clement. The last point is surprising; in 203 and 215, Alexandria was the centre of persecution. Clement finished his *Stromata* after the death of Septimius Severus in 211⁶³; did he hope – in vain – for a definitive end of persecution? Or did he quote Revelation in his lost *De perseverantia*⁶⁴ – we simply do not know the answer to these questions.

3.3 Origen

Within Origen’s work, Revelation sometimes constitutes as a source of biblical language, e.g. concerning the phrase “neither cold nor warm” (Rev 3:15).⁶⁵ We can analyse the substantial reception of John’s Apocalypse with regard to various aspects, such as martyrdom, Christology and cosmology, ethics, and the theory of consummation of the world.

The martyrs’ right to grant pardon for sinners is witnessed ad vocem ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου (Rev 6:9) to martyrs as well: they function as priests.⁶⁶ In Origen’s exegesis, the altar represents the celestial altar.⁶⁷ If someone becomes timorous while being persecuted, according to Mt

⁵⁹ Clement of Alexandria, Str. 6.105.1 (GCS 15:484–85 Stählin).

⁶⁰ Clement of Alexandria, Str. 6.103.4 (GCS 15: 484 Stählin).

⁶¹ Clement of Alexandria, Str. 4.156.1–2 (GCS 15:318 Stählin, who refers on Plotinus, Ennead. 5.211.7).

⁶² Clement of Alexandria, Paed. 1.36.1 (GCS 12:111 Stählin).

⁶³ Eusebius of Caesarea, Historia ecclesiastica 6.6.1 (GCS 9/2: 534 Schwartz).

⁶⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea, Historia ecclesiastica 6.13.3 (GCS 9/2: 546 Schwartz).

⁶⁵ Origen, De principiis 3.4.3 (SC 268:208 Crouzel/Simonetti).

⁶⁶ Origen, Homiliae in Numeros 10.2.1 (SC 415:280 Doutreleau, with footnote 2 including other references).

⁶⁷ Origen, Homiliae in Iudices 7.2 SC 389:182 Messié/Neyrand/Borret).

10:23, it is better to flee but to give an example for cowardice; yet the penalty for faithless is hard (Rev 21:8).⁶⁸ Such statements were well-debated in the old church (cf. Cyprian).

Concerning the issue of cosmology, Origen denotes ecclesial hierarchy as a reflection of the celestial hierarchy with Jesus Christ as the true and only priest at the top. This tradition is based on the formula ἀγγελος τῆς ἐκκλησίας occurring in Rev 2:1 etc.⁶⁹ With regard to Christology, Origen states: None of the evangelists emphasises the deity as John.⁷⁰ Jesus Christ is the “beginning” (Rev 22:13) according to Prov 8:22; John 1:1, and the “end” according to 1 Cor 15:28.⁷¹ The term “Lamb of God” (John 1:29; Rev 5:6) refers to Jesus as a human being.⁷²

Regarding ethics, Origen states in his comment on Jer 11:4 that the Lord has also led us out of the land of Egypt; which needs to be understood spiritually according to Rev 11:8; we should abstain from sin.⁷³ The same spiritual explanation is further valid for Ex 20:1.⁷⁴ Distance from this world is the predominant meaning in Lev 20:7 according to Rev 18:4.⁷⁵ The eternal gospel (Rev 14:6) is a spiritual one which we need to understand first in order to improve in true spiritual perfectness.⁷⁶ The formula “eternal gospel” (Rev 14:6), however, is not only part of biblical language though it is art of Origen’s theory of the consummation of the world.⁷⁷ The content of the eternal gospel is the reconciliation for all made (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ πατρὸς οὐ πάντη καταλιπόντος τοῦς ἀποπεπώκοντας αὐτοῦ) by the good God. The formula “good God” implies that he is no other than God the creator himself – Origen’s doctrine of reconciliation of all things and his polemics against Marcion are in mutual relationship.⁷⁸

Given the relevance of allegorical exegesis for Origen in general, it is no surprise to observe the use of this exegesis also in Origen’s reading of Revelation.

⁶⁸ Origen, *Homiliae in Iudices* 9.1 (SC 389:214 Messié/Neyrand/Borret).

⁶⁹ Origen, *Homiliae in Iohannem* 23.7–8 (SC 87:320–322 Crouzel/Fournier/Périchon).

⁷⁰ Origen, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 1.22 (SC 120:70 Blanc), referring on John 8:12; 14:16; 11:25; 10:9, 11; Rev 22:13.

⁷¹ Origen, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 1.221–225 (SC 120:168–170).

⁷² Origen, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 6.273 (SC 157:336 Blanc).

⁷³ Origen, *Homiliae in Ieremiam* 9.2 (SC 232:382 Nautin).

⁷⁴ Origen, *Homiliae in Exum* 8.1 (SC321:240 Borret).

⁷⁵ Origen, *Homiliae in Levitium* 11.1 (SC 286:146 Borret).

⁷⁶ Origen, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 1.40 (SC 120:80 Blanc).

⁷⁷ Origen, *De principiis* 3.6.8 (SC 268:252 Crouzel/Simonetti).

⁷⁸ Origen, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 1.82f. (SC 120:100–102 Blanc). Origen uses Rev 14:6 also in contexts of anti-Jewish polemics. In comparison to the “eternal gospel”, the wording “eternal law” (Lev 6:22 [15]) is to be understood only spiritually; the temple in Jerusalem does not exist any more!; Origen, *Homiliae in Leviticum* 4.10 (SC 286:200 Borret).

On the one hand, allegorical exegesis can be useful even for apologetics. Celsus rebuked the Christians for their refusal to build altars and images and temples; according to Origen, real and spiritual sacrifices are the prayers of a pure mind; Origen quotes Rev 5:8 and Ps 140:2 to justify this exegesis.⁷⁹ A treatise on Rev 19:11–16 demonstrates Origen’s consciousness regarding Biblical language: As John writes „the word” in the gospel but refers to „the word of God“ in his Revelation, sitting on a white horse etc., what does John convey via the motifs “opened heaven” and “white horse” in comparison with the notion of the “trustworthy and true word, judging in righteousness” (Rev 19:11)?⁸⁰ The issue in the background is the one of anthropomorphic speech in the Bible. According to Origen, the heaven is closed for ungodly whereas it is opened to the excellent, or those who have their commonwealth in heaven (Phil 3:20). On the white horse sits who is called Faithful, seated firmly on words which run sharply and more swiftly than any other horse; and he is called faithful because he is worthy of faith.⁸¹ The eyes, like a flame of fire, destroy the more material and gross conceptions. The multiplied diadems symbolize the multiplied lies and warring against the word of God. The name unknown to all but to himself refers to the fact that these beings who came into existence after Him are poorer in their nature and cannot behold everything that He apprehends.⁸² The garment sprinkled with blood refers to Jesus’ blood (John 19:34).⁸³ The heavenly army following Jesus as the leader stand for the followers of the Word, and the white clothes represent the dialects in which those voices are clothed.⁸⁴ In this exegesis, one key word of the text functions as point of comparison for allegory.

By applying the allegorical method, on the other hand, Origen is able to interpret some harsh statements of the Apocalypse concerning eschatological destruction in a proper way. “It is not the *ethnē* and the kings of this world that the Apocalypse refers to when it describes their eschatological destruction. According to Origen, it is rather the *dominion of evil* that will be destroyed and demolished up to its very roots by God in human souls, in order to purify people and prepare a basis for a good planting and edification.”⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.17 (SC 150:210 Borret).

⁸⁰ Origen, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 2.45f. (SC 120: 234–236 Blanc).

⁸¹ Origen, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 2.42–49 (SC 120:234–238 Blanc).

⁸² Origen, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 2.57–60 (SC 120:240–242 Blanc).

⁸³ Origen, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 2.61 (SC 120:242 Blanc).

⁸⁴ Origen, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 2.62–63 (SC 120:244 Blanc).

⁸⁵ I.L.E. RAMELLI, Origen’s Interpretation of Violence in the Apocalypse. Destruction of Evil and Purification of Sinners, in: J. Verheyden/T. Nicklas/A. Merkt (eds.), *Ancient Christian Interpretations of ‘Violent Texts’ in the Apocalypse*, NTOA 92, Göttingen 2011, 46–62, 50, on Origen, *Homiliae in Jeremiam* 1.16 (SC 232:232).

Thirdly, allegorical exegesis leads Origen away from the necessity of chiliastic exegesis of Revelation. He understands the “first” resurrection (Rev 20:5) in a general sense of “resurrection of the righteous” (Lk 14:14)⁸⁶ and refutes the fleshly understanding of the Biblical promises, e.g. the city of Jerusalem as a city on earth built with crystals etc.;⁸⁷ he does not realize the anti-Gnostic background of Irenaeus’ exegesis. The well-known critical discussion of the seer’s book by Origen’s pupil Dionysius of Alexandria is prepared; Dionysius of Alexandria tries to refute the view of Nepos of Egypt, who reclaimed Revelation to support for his chiliastic views and emphasized an exegesis of Biblical promises according to Jewish manner, opposing allegorical interpretation.⁸⁸ Sometimes the attack against chiliasm was influenced by anti-Jewish attitudes: Jews and judaizing Christians interpret the promises in a literal way according to Jerome who further criticizes this exegesis.⁸⁹

3.4 Hippolytus of Rome

Hippolytus’ references to Revelation are part of his view on history in both general⁹⁰ and detail; not political, but religious criticism is leading instead when the Roman Empire is interpreted as the fourth of the four beasts of Daniel 7⁹¹ or as being part of the powers hostile to God. This line is of main interest to us.

Hippolytus interprets the first beast of Rev 13 on the Roman Empire, the second on Antichrist⁹²:

⁸⁶ Origen, *Homiliae in lucam*, fr. 83 (SC 87:540 Crouzel/Fournier/Périchon); *id.*, *Homiliae in Ieremiam* 2.3 (SC 232:246 Husson/Nautin). The difference between the first and the second resurrection concerns the issue whether a Christian at the end of the world immediately enters the paradise or whether he has to be purified in an ongoing process.

⁸⁷ Origen, *De principiis* 2.11.2 (SC 252:396 Crouzel/Simonetti).

⁸⁸ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica* 7.24.1–2 (GCS 9/2:684–686 Schwartz). According to Eusebius, however, Dionysius himself used Revelation, at least in metaphorical way: He characterized the emperor Valerianus by referring on Rev 13:5; cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica* 7.10.2 (GCS 9/2: 648–650 Schwartz).

⁸⁹ Jerome, *Commentarii in hiezechielem* 36.1–15 (CCL 75:499); cf. R.L. WILKEN, *In novissimis diebus. Biblical Promises. Jewish Hopes and Early Christian Exegesis*, in: *JECS* 1 (1993), 1–19, esp. 13.

⁹⁰ Hippolytus, *Comm. Daniel* 2.4–5 (SC 14: 188 Bardy/Levèvre). The combination of Ps 90:4 (thousand years are like one day) and Gen 2:3 causes the famous determination of a history of the world of 6000 years (cf. already Irenaeus, *haer.* 5.28.3, SC 153:358 Rousseau/Doutreleau/Mercier). In Rev 17:10, ad vocem “seven kings”, this construction has an additional Biblical ground. Hippolytus’ intention is warning against revalyptic enthusiasm (KRETSCHMAR, *Offenbarung* (n. 16), 76).

⁹¹ Hippolytus of Rome, *Antichrist* 23–25 (BibPatr 10:92–94 Norelli).

⁹² Hippolytus of Rome, *Antichrist* 49 (BibPatr. 10:122–126 Norelli; ET ANF 5:214).

“By the beast coming up out of the earth, he means the kingdom of antichrist; and by the two horns he means him and the false prophet after him. And in speaking of ‘the horns being like a lamb,’ He means that he will make himself like the Son of God and set himself forward as king. The term ‘he spoke like a dragon’ means that he is a deceiver and not truthful. ... In regard to the words ‘he exercised all the power of the first beast ...’ this signifies that, after the manner of the law of Augustus, by who the empire of Rome was established, he too will rule and govern, sanctioning everything by it and taking greater glory to himself. ... Being full of guile and exalting himself against the servants of God, with the wish to afflict them and persecute them out of the world because they do not give glory to him, he will order incense pans to be set up by all everywhere, that no one among the saints may be able to buy or sell without first sacrificing. ... in this way, too, did Antiochus Epiphanes the king of Syria, ... devise measures against the Jews. He, too, in the exaltation of his heart, issued a decree in those times that ‘all should set up shrines before their doors and sacrifice’ But he also met his due recompense at the hand of the Lord ...; for he died devoured by worms” (2 Macc 9).

The interpretation of the “harlot” mentioned in Rev 17–18 with regard to the capital of the Roman Empire is also part of his world view.⁹³ The pains of the last judgment serve as the theme of this text is; Hippolytus does not take any offense on the violent mode of speech. He has to refute Gaius’ objection caused by 1 Thess 5:2 (if the Lord will come “like a thief in the night”, then Biblical predictions of pains are wrong) and counters referring to Mt 24:21; Joel 3:3–4; Amos 5:18–19.⁹⁴ Hippolytus also contributes to the ongoing debate on the identity of the “woman” and her child mentioned in Rev 12. According to him, the woman represents the church, the son is Jesus Christ, and Rev 12:5 (up to the heaven) is interpreted with regard to Christ’s exaltation predicted already in Ps 109 (110):1.⁹⁵

3.5 Cyprian

The main issues in the lives of Cyprian and his contemporaries⁹⁶ are also the main topics concerning his usage of Revelation. Within exhortation to martyrdom, quotations of Revelation comment on the fate of the martyr⁹⁷

⁹³ Hippolytus of Rome, Antichrist, 29 (GCS 1.2:19 Achelis).

⁹⁴ Hippolytus of Rome, Capitula contra gaium, in Dionysius Bar-Salibi, in Apc. (GCS 1:241 Achelis).

⁹⁵ Hippolytus of Rome, Antichrist, 61.2 (BibPatr 10:144 Norelli).

⁹⁶ In a letter to Cyprian (250/51 A.D.), Moyses et al. quote Mt 10:37–38; 5:10–12; Rev 3:21, and Rom 8:35–37 as Biblical call to glorious fight of martyrdom; Novatian, Ep. 31.4.1–2 (CC.SL 4:230 Diercks).

⁹⁷ In Cyprian, Fort. 11 (CCL 3:201–211 Weber), the fate of the martyr is commented by the Lord’s farewell speech (Cyprian quotes John 15:18–20; 16:2–4, 20; 33; Mt 24:4–31, CCL 3, 201–203) compared with the fate of the righteous of all times like Abel, Jacob, Joseph, David ... , the seven Martyrs according to 2 Macc 7 who delivered proofs of faith (Cyprian quotes many passages of 2 Macc 7 here, additionally 2 Macc 6:30). But whereas ancient examples can be numbered, Christian martyrs cannot be numbered as the Revelation testifies (Rev 7:9–15).

and admonish to humility⁹⁸ as well as to patience within persecution: Christians should wait patiently for the day of (God's) vengeance instead of rushing to take revenge for their suffering themselves.⁹⁹ Quotations of Revelation further emphasise the obliging character of the first commandment¹⁰⁰ and the issue of God's wrath which no one can escape¹⁰¹, but also the devil's assaults and divine support within the situation of martyrdom¹⁰² and the eternal hope for the martyr.¹⁰³ Concerning the issue of the so-called lapsed, Cyprian takes a middle position between two extremes: On the one hand, he warns in case that some martyrs and confessors are too quick to reconcile the lapsed, on the other hand, repentance is to be granted; otherwise Jesus' Christ's admonition to repentance would be senseless. Concerning the first point, Cyprian quotes Rev 2:5¹⁰⁴ as well as Rev 6:11: Even the martyrs who cried "How long ... do you not judge and avenge our blood" were bidden to rest, and still to keep patience.¹⁰⁵ Concerning the second point, he emphasizes the necessity to give grant to the so-called lapsi; Jesus would not admonish to penitence if he did not grant pardon to the penitent.¹⁰⁶ However, Rev 18:4 in combination with Mt 10:23 can also justify the flight within persecution; and this needs to be distinguished from collapsing and sacrificing other gods.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, ep. 14.2.2 (CCL 3:81 Diercks): The behavior of the martyr should be congruent to the boasting. Sir 11:30 is the main text; "to be faithful" (Rev 2:10) concerns this congruence between behavior and boasting.

⁹⁹ Cyprian of Carthage, pat. 21 (CCL 3 A: 130–31 Moerschini), referring on Soph 3:8 (Expecta me, dicit Dominus...); Rev 22:10–12 and Rev 6:9–11.

¹⁰⁰ Rev 14:7 testifies that God alone must be worshipped (Cyprian of Carthage, Fort. 2; CCL 3: 188–89 Weber). Rev 14:9–11 testifies God's threatening against who sacrifice to idols (Cyprian of Carthage, Fort 3; CCL 3:190 Weber).

¹⁰¹ Cyprian of Carthage, ep. 58.7.1–2 (CCL 3 C: 329–30 Diercks), referring on Mt 10:28; John 12:25; Rev 14:9–11. In ep. 65.1.3 (CCL 3 C: 427 Diercks), Rev 14:9–11 is used as a witness of God's wrath against those who sacrifice to other gods (Cyprian quotes also Isa 57:6; Ex 22:20, and Isa 2:8–9); this is applied against Fortunatianus who, though he has failed in persecution, reclaimed again to be bishop in Assurae.

¹⁰² Cyprian of Carthage, Ad fortunatum 10 (CCL 3:198–201 Weber) quotes 1 John 4:4; Ps 117:6–7; Ps 19:8–9; Ps 26:3–4; Ex 1:12; Rev 2:10, Isa 43:1–3; Mt 10:19–20; Luk 21:14–15; Ex 4:11–12.

¹⁰³ Cyprian of Carthage, Ad fortunatum 12 (CCL 3:211–214 Weber), quotes Wis 3:4–8; Ps 116:15 (the death of the holy); 125:5–6; Mt 5:10; Lk 6:22–23, and Rev 20:5: They (the martyrs) live and rule together with Jesus Christ.

¹⁰⁴ Cyprian of Carthage, De lapsis 16 (CCL 3:230 Bénévot).

¹⁰⁵ Cyprian of Carthage, De lapsis 18 (CCL 3:231 Bénévot).

¹⁰⁶ Cyprian of Carthage, ep. 55.22.1–2 (CCL 3 B:281–82 Diercks), referring on Rev 2:5, 20–22; similarly ep. 34.1 (CCL 3 B: 167–8 Diercks); cf. already Tertullian, paen. 8:1 (CC.SL 1:334 Borleffs).

¹⁰⁷ Cyprian of Carthage, De lapsis 10 (CCL 3:226 Bénévot).

Even beyond the situation of martyrdom and failure, some passages of Revelation, especially the letters in ch. 2–3, are used by Cyprian. Rev 2:23 is used *ad vocem ἐπαυνῶν* as admonishing for faith, albeit the eagerness to martyrdom,¹⁰⁸ but also as admonition to self-critical consciousness: *cogitemus nos sub conspectu Dei stare*.¹⁰⁹ Rev 3:11 is quoted *ad vocem κρᾶται* in order to underline “that we must press on and persevere in faith and virtue, and in completion of heavenly and spiritual grace, that we may attain to the palm and the crown.”¹¹⁰ For those who feel rich in this world, Cyprian directs Rev 3:17 f. as a warning against self-deception.¹¹¹

The testimonies in (Ps.-)Cyprian, *Ad Fortunatum*, reveal the state of usage of Biblical sentences in the third century; quotations from the Apocalypse deal with matters of anti-pagan self-delineation,¹¹² martyrdom,¹¹³ Christology with regard to both doctrine¹¹⁴ and language,¹¹⁵ salvation,¹¹⁶ and moral life.¹¹⁷ Some texts of this list are well-known by other authors as well.

¹⁰⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, *De mortalitate* 17 (CCL 3 A: 26 Simonetti).

¹⁰⁹ Cyprian of Carthage, *De oratione* 4 (CCL 3 A: 91 Simonetti), referring also on Mt 9:4.

¹¹⁰ Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad Fortunatum* 8 (CCL 3:197 Weber); Cf. Cyprian of Carthage, *De bono patientiae* 13 (CCL 3 A: 126 Simonetti); Gal 6:9 causes the admonition not to become deficient in doing good deeds; Ez 33:12 and Rev 3:11 warn for the consequences of failing.

¹¹¹ Cyprian of Carthage, *op.* 14 (CCL 3 A: 63 Simonetti).

¹¹² Rev 9:13–21 and Rev 14:9–11 give witness on idols which are named gods by the pagans (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 3.59, CC.SL 3, 149–50 Weber).

¹¹³ Rev 6:9–11; 7:9–10.13–17; 2:7.10; 16:15 witness the worth of martyrdom; quoted are also Wis 5:1–9; Ps 115:6; 125:5–6; Mt 10 and Lk 6:22–23 (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 3.16; CC.SL 3:109–11 Weber).

¹¹⁴ Rev 1:12–18 witnesses the majesty of Christ after his resurrection (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 2.26; CC.SL 3:64 Weber). Rev 5:1–5 due to v. 5 witnesses Jesus’ offspring from David (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 2.11; CC.SL 3:44 Weber), Rev 19:11–16 his activity as judge and king (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 2.30; CC.SL 3:70–71 Weber), Rev 19:11.13 his function as “Word of God” (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 2.3; CC.SL 3.32 Weber). Jesus Christ’s Involvement in creation is testified by Rev 1:8 (2.1 ; CC.SL 3:30), his deity in Rev 21.6–7 (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 2.6; CC.SL 3:37 Weber).

¹¹⁵ Rev 5:6–10 witnesses the term “lamb” referred to Jesus (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 2.15; CC.SL 3:50 Weber), Rev 19:6–7; 21:9–11 the term “bridegroom” for Jesus Christ (Test 2.19, CC.SL 3:57.55 Weber).

¹¹⁶ According to Rev 14:1 and Rev 22:13–14, the Cross is salvation for the sealed (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 2.22, CC.SL 3:60–61 Weber). The divine grace is given gratis (Is 55.1; Rev 21:6–7, Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 3.100; CC.SL 3:171 Weber).

¹¹⁷ Fear as base of hope and faith is witnessed by Rev 11:16–18; 14,6–7; 15.2–4 (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 3.20; CC.SL 3:115–16 Weber). Rev 14:4 witnesses the worth of virginity (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 3.32 CC.SL 3:128 Weber); Rev

3.6 Victorinus of Pettau

Victorinus' Commentary on Revelation, written in approximately 260, has some characteristic issues: accent on Christology, emphasis on the unity of the two Testaments, allegorical exegesis, and interpretation in Pauline perspective.¹¹⁸ His commentary is not thoroughgoing as comments on Rev 15; 16; 18; 19 are almost entirely missing. "Violent" texts of Revelation are not regarded in Victorinus' exegesis.

Victorinus of Pettau interpreted Revelation as admonition directed to all churches, but he also justified his chiliasm by this Biblical book. Critique against Rome is implied only in his comment on Rev 17:6: The decrees of that senate are always accomplished against all, contrary to the preaching of the *true faith*.¹¹⁹ Sometimes he inserted polemics against Jews¹²⁰ or heretics.¹²¹ Victorinus justifies his chiliasm referring to 1 Cor 15:25; Rev 15:2; Mt 19:29; 26:39.¹²² The "first" resurrection, mentioned in Rev 20 is moreover described in Rev 14:1; the 144.00 hereby represent the number of Jewish Christians converted by the preaching of Elijah according to Rev 11:3–4.¹²³

Exegetically speaking, Victorinus' commentary promotes ongoing debates, e.g. the one concerning the "two witnesses" of Rev 11. According to Victorinus, many suggest that beneath Elijah Elisa or Moses is meant but both died whereas we do not find anything about Jeremiah's death (the legend of stoning Jeremiah was un-known).¹²⁴

Sometimes allegorical interests are leading. Victorinus shares the interpretation of the four living beings on the gospels: John = lion (John 1:1); Matthew = human being (Mt 1:1–17); Luke = bull (Lk 1:5); Mark = eagle

17:1–4 warns against secular ornament of women (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 3.36 CC.SL 3.130 Weber); Rev 18:4–9 the believers' delimitation from pagan way of life (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad fortunatum* 3.34 CC.SL 3:129 Weber). Rev 22:10–12 witnesses the forbidding of retaliation of evil (3.23; CC.SL 3:120 Weber).

¹¹⁸ K. HUBER, *Aspekte der Apokalypse-Interpretation des Victorinus von Pettau am Beispiel der Christusvision in Offb 1*, in: J. Verheyden/T. Nicklas/A. Merkt (eds.), *Ancient Christian Interpretations of 'Violent Texts' in the Apocalypse*, NTOA 92, Göttingen 2011, 94–117, esp. 113–116.

¹¹⁹ Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 14/17.2 (CSEL 49:132 Haussleiter).

¹²⁰ Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 13/17.3 (CSEL 49:120 Haussleiter).

¹²¹ Cf. his comment on Rev 4:1: The first voice which he had heard when he says that it spoke with him, without contradiction condemns those who say that one spoke in the prophets, another in the Gospel; since it is rather He Himself who comes, that is the same who spoke in the prophets; Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 4.1 (CSEL 49:44 Haussleiter).

¹²² Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 21.4–6 (CSEL 49, 152–154 Haussleiter).

¹²³ Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 14/17.5 (CSEL 49, 140 Haussleiter). KRETSCHMAR, *Offenbarung*, 92, emphasizes the singularity of this exegesis in ancient Christianity.

¹²⁴ Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 11.3 (CSEL 49:98 Haussleiter).

(cf. the prophetic word Mk 1:2).¹²⁵ The opening of the seven seals is not the disclosure of world history but the disclosure of the Old Testament.¹²⁶ The white horse is the proclamation of the gospel all over the world according to Mt 24:14.¹²⁷ The “woman” in Rev 12 is the ancient church congregation of the fathers, prophets and saints who had the groans and torments of its longing until it saw that Christ had taken flesh out of the self-same people.¹²⁸ The child is Jesus; Rev 12:5 refers to his ascension.¹²⁹ The wounded beast of Rev 13:3 is Nero due to his suicide. God will send him again against the Jews and the persecutors.¹³⁰ The number 666 refers to Teitan or Diclux. Diclux is adequate to antichrist due to 2 Cor 11:14.¹³¹ The angel of Rev 14:6–7 is Elijah who anticipates the antichrist in his prophecy.¹³²

3.7 *The Passion of Perpetua and the Vision of Satorus*

Within the Passion of Perpetua, the Vision of Satorus is a secondary addition of the midst of the third century with a clear message: The authority of martyrs is not the same as the authority of bishop: It is the task of the bishop and not the martyrs’, to ameliorate people; in case that a bishop fails to do so he will not enter the heavenly kingdom. In the middle of three scenes, this vision offers two elements well-known from Rev 4–7: the heavenly throne and the elders.¹³³ The editor of the Passio and the I-Report of Perpetua emphasise the authority of martyrs and confessors whereas the vision of Satorus underlines the one of the bishop – the vision of Satorus brings the Passio Perpetua as a whole back to ecclesial mainstream.¹³⁴ Early texts of martyrdom claim authority for themselves as successors of ap-

¹²⁵ Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 4.4 (CSEL 49:50–52 Haussleiter).

¹²⁶ Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 5.1 (CSEL 49:64 Haussleiter); see also Origen, *Commentarii in Ioannem* 5.6 (SC 120:284 Blanc): The “book” named in Rev 5:1–3 is the Scripture as a whole.

¹²⁷ Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 6.1 (CSEL 49: 68 Haussleiter).

¹²⁸ Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 12.1 (CSEL 49:104–106 Haussleiter).

¹²⁹ Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 12.2 (CSEL 49:108 Haussleiter).

¹³⁰ Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 13/17.3 (CSEL 49:120 Haussleiter).

¹³¹ Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 13.18 (CSEL 49:124 Haussleiter).

¹³² Victorinus, in apocalypsin, 14/17.1 (CSEL 49:130 Haussleiter).

¹³³ A. MERKT, *Gewaltverarbeitung und Konfliktbewältigung im Medium des Visionsberichtes. Die Passio Perpetuae und die Apokalypse des Johannes*, in: J. Verheyden/T. Nicklas/A. Merkt (eds.), *Ancient Christian Interpretations of ‘Violent Texts’ in the Apocalypse*, NTOA 92, Göttingen 2011, 63–93, 79: at the beginning of the third century a reader in North Africa could refer it to the presbyters, whereas in the midst of the century the point of relation were the laymen who were responsible for the congregations due to flight or persecution of the clergy.

¹³⁴ MERKT, *Gewaltverarbeitung* (n. 133), 85.

ostolic letters; the vision of Saturus uses Rev 4–7 and relativises new visions by hardly revealing new information.¹³⁵

3.8 Methodius

Rev 14; Rev 7 on the one hand and Rev 12 on the other are the main topics for Methodius of Olympus in his “Symposium”; of course, the praise of virginity was the dominant theme in his selection within the Apocalypse. Further, Methodius is an adherent on chiliasm similar to other Christian authors in early times.¹³⁶

Jesus Christ, who has lived ascetically, is the leader of the virgins; ascetic way of life is for a few people exclusively whereas other people can also be holy¹³⁷ – the Distinction between the 144.000 and the big mass of people according to Rev 7:9 is leading for this exegesis. In the sixth speech, Agathe praises the beauty of the soul which is distorted by the bodiless beauty of her heavenly father. This soul should be kept pure waiting for the coming of the bridegroom (Mt 25). At the end of this speech, Agathe praises herself as a bride of the celestial Logos, as a victress honored in heaven, singing the new hymn and preaching the church and its new grace since it is valid: the choir of the virgins follows always the Lord. The quotation of Rev 7:4 (the virgins who follow always follow the Lord, and 144.000) shows that Revelation is seen as source to describe the ascetic way of life as a way of spiritual perfectness and preparation for paradise.¹³⁸

The eighth speech given by Thecla leads to a comparison between the virgins and the church; the point of analogy is the perfidy of the serpent named in Rev 12:1–6. This leads to an allegorical explanation of this text. The “mother” separated from her children is the church (after the resurrection, all children come to her as predicted in Isa 60:1–4); the moon represents the faith of those who are purified through baptism. Methodius, however, supposes an objection to this exegesis.¹³⁹

Someone might take objection, when the Apocalypse explicitly states that the church brings forth a ‘male child’ ... Remember that the mystery of the incarnation of the Word was fulfilled long before the Apocalypse, whereas John’s prophetic message has to do with the present and the future. And Christ, who was conceived long before, was not the child who ‘was taken up’ to the throne of God for fear that he might be injured by the serpent; rather he descended from the throne of his Father and was begotten precisely so

¹³⁵ MERKT, *Gewaltverarbeitung* (n. 133), 88.

¹³⁶ Methodius of Olympus, *Symp.* 9.3,5 (SC 95:272 Musurillo/Debidour).

¹³⁷ Methodius of Olympus, *Symp.* 1.5 (SC 95:64–66 Musurillo/Debidour).

¹³⁸ Methodius of Olympus, *Symp.* 6.5 (SC 95:176 Musurillo/Debidour).

¹³⁹ Methodius of Olympus, *Symp.* 8.7 (SC 95:216–218 Musurillo/Debidour; ET ACW 27:112).

that he might remain and check the dragon's assault on the flesh. And so, you must admit that it is the church that is in labor, and it is those who are washed in baptism that are brought forth.

The term ἄρσην¹⁴⁰ stands for the manliness (VIII 8 in the midst) which is growing in each of the saints where Christ is formed according to Gal 4:19. The dragon mentioned in Rev 12 is Satan. The stars which he throws down to earth are the heretics¹⁴¹ who intended to have knowledge of the heavenly things but do not stand within orthodoxy. The 1260 days symbolize the highest degree of knowledge during our earthly life; this explanation is based on number speculation.¹⁴² In Symp. 8.13, the beast is allegorically identified with Satan who leads to ἀκρασία etc.¹⁴³

3.9 *Lactantius*

Within his "divine Institutions", Lactantius discusses the future of world and humankind.¹⁴⁴ His starting point is the comparison of the fate of Egypt that oppressed Israel and the fate of the whole world that oppresses the people of God coming from all nations.¹⁴⁵ The end of this eon is near, and this is foreseen also by Seneca who divided distinct periods of Roman history, and by the Sibyls but also by the king Hystaspes who foresaw the fall of Rome even long before the founding of Trojan nation.¹⁴⁶

Then he discusses how the end will come to pass. From the North a most powerful enemy will harass the world with an intolerable rule.¹⁴⁷ War and fame will imply a life pleasant for nobody; people will desire death but will not die (cf. Rev 9:6).¹⁴⁸ God will send a mighty prophet in order to lead humankind to knowledge of him.¹⁴⁹ The enemy will kill the prophet but the prophet will be alive after three days (Rev 11:3, 5–9, 11). The tyrant labels himself God and demands worship as son of God.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁰ Methodius of Olympus, Symp. 8.8 (SC 95:220 Musurillo/Debidour). According to NA²⁸, the masculine reading occurs also in early witnesses of Revelation.

¹⁴¹ Methodius of Olympus, Symp. 8.10 (SC 95:226 Musurillo/Debidour) names Sabellius, Artemas, Ebionites, Marcion, Valentius, Elkesaios.

¹⁴² Methodius of Olympus, Symp. 8.11 (SC 95:228–230 Musurillo/Debidour).

¹⁴³ Methodius of Olympus, Symp. 8.13 (SC 95:234 Musurillo/Debidour).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. in general J. DOCHHORN, *Laktanz und die Apokalypse. Eine Untersuchung zu Inst. 7.15–26*, in: J. Verheyden/T. Nicklas/A. Merkt (eds.), *Ancient Christian Interpretations of 'Violent Texts' in the Apocalypse*, NTOA 92, Göttingen 2011, 133–160, *passim*.

¹⁴⁵ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.15.1–6 (CSEL 19/2:6 Brandt).

¹⁴⁶ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.15.14, 18–19 (CSEL 19/2:633–34 Brandt).

¹⁴⁷ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.16.4 (CSEL 19/2:635 Brandt).

¹⁴⁸ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.16.12 (CSEL 19/2:6637 Brandt).

¹⁴⁹ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.17.1 (CSEL 19/2:638 Brandt).

¹⁵⁰ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.17.4 (CSEL 19/2:639 Brandt). Rev 13:4–8, 12–17 is leading.

All these things are predicted not only by the prophets driven by the Spirit of God but also by seers driven by demons;¹⁵¹ again, prophecies of Hystaspes are underlining this thesis. Jesus descends from heaven, and his angels fight against the Antichrist and his army; the Kings of the earth shall be led in chains to judgement; then the earth will be at rest. No longer handmade gods will be worshipped; their images will be given to the fire, and will be burnt, as the Sibyl has predicted it.¹⁵² The dead will rise, and the king and God Jesus Christ will judge them, but he will judge only those who have knowledge of God; the wicked will not rise.¹⁵³ The son of God will reign among humans and will rule over them in righteousness for 1000 years.¹⁵⁴ The promise of Isa 11:6–8 will be fulfilled,¹⁵⁵ as it is predicted the poets describing the golden age when Saturnus is reigning.¹⁵⁶ Then the kings of the nations will come for adoration.¹⁵⁷ The author concludes this section of his book by personal confession:¹⁵⁸

This is the doctrine of the holy prophets, which we Christians follow; this is our wisdom which they who worship frail objects or maintain an empty philosophy, deride as folly and vanity. We are not accustomed to defend and assert it in public, since God orders us in quietness and silence to hide His secret, and to keep it within our own conscience, and not to quarrel against those who are not willing to learn but only to mock.

In epitome 71, Lactantius begins his description of the last time, referring to general apocalyptic concepts of deteriorating times but without any allusion on Biblical phrases and Biblical language. Increasing wars, fame, disorder in sky are characteristics. A specific Christian concept is visible in 71.6¹⁵⁹, when God comes back in order to change the eon. A wicked king, hostile to God, will arise (the concept of Antichrist is leading); he will persecute the righteous ones 42 months¹⁶⁰ and will 2/ 3 of the destroy. Then Christ comes to the earth and wins the fourth battle against the tyrant¹⁶¹, and judges; than the kingdom of the righteous will be erected for 1000

¹⁵¹ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.18.1 (CSEL 19/2:6640 Brandt).

¹⁵² Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.19.5–9 (CSEL 19/2:645–46 Brandt).

¹⁵³ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.20.5 (CSEL 19/2:649 Brandt). He quotes Ps 1:5 (LXX).

¹⁵⁴ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.24.2 (CSEL 19/2:658 Brandt).

¹⁵⁵ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.24.9 (CSEL 19/2:660 Brandt).

¹⁵⁶ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.24.11 (CSEL 19/2:661 Brandt). Lactantius quotes Vergil, *Ecl.* 4.38–41.28–30.42–45.21f; *OrSib* III 767–792; 619–623; V 281–283. However, Lactantius does not estimate pagan authors as inspired by God but only in a protreptic way as human witnesses, cf. V. BUCHHEIT, Cicero inspiratus – Vergilius Propheta? Zur Wertung paganer Autoren bei Laktanz, in: *Hermes* 118 (1990), 357–372, 370.

¹⁵⁷ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.24.15 (CSEL 19/2:663 Brandt).

¹⁵⁸ Lactantius, *Institutiones* 7.26.8 (CSEL 19/2:667 Brandt).

¹⁵⁹ Lactantius, *Epitome* 71.6 (CSEL 19/2:757 Brandt).

¹⁶⁰ Lactantius, *Epitome* 71.8 (CSEL 19/2:758 Brandt). For the number 42 cf. Rev 11:2.

¹⁶¹ Lactantius, *Epitome* 72.1 (CSEL 19/2:758 Brandt).

years, and peace and fertility will be there – this fertility is the counterpart of the bad period before the end according to the apocalyptic scheme of deteriorating times. Isa 11:6–8 is fulfilled.¹⁶² Then the last judgment against the nations is coming. God will destroy the wicked by fire whereas the righteous are hidden, and at the third day the righteous will see the corpses of the wicked ones.¹⁶³ Then God will renew the world and transform the righteous in forms of angels, and they will serve him in eternity. That is the kingdom of God which has no end. The wicked will arise for eternal punishment.¹⁶⁴ All these things are predicted also by Trismegistos, Hystaspes, and the Sibyl.¹⁶⁵

4 Conclusion

Within so-called orthodox circles, Revelation was seen as the only relevant Apocalypse, repeatedly named but ἡ ἀποκάλυψις,¹⁶⁶ even if the same authors knew other apocalypses as well.¹⁶⁷ Christians perhaps intended to avoid the rebuke of antagonisms with regard to their eschatological hopes.¹⁶⁸

4.1 Most important issues

Chiliasm and martyrdom were the most important issues of reception. The analogy of experience of martyrdom was the basis for high evaluation,¹⁶⁹ and texts of Revelation sometimes offered an adequate way to formulate the own anti-Roman sentiments, whereas the seer's chiliasm was part of debate on the world's future at the one hand, and on literal or allegorical exegesis on the other. The anti-chiliasmic polemics of some Church Fathers were part of their anti-Jewish attitude.

Concerning Christology, Rev 1:8 (“Alpha and Omega”) witnesses the all-embracing power of Jesus Christ, Rev 5:6 (“the lamb”) Christ's role within salvation as well as his human nature.

¹⁶² Lactantius, Epitome 72.2–5 (CSEL 19/2:759 Brandt).

¹⁶³ Lactantius, Epitome 72.7 (CSEL 19/2:760 Brandt).

¹⁶⁴ Lactantius, Epitome 72.8 (CSEL 19/2:760 Brandt).

¹⁶⁵ Lactantius, Epitome 73.1 (CSEL 19/2:760 Brandt).

¹⁶⁶ Clement of Alexandria, Paed. 2.108.3 (GCS 12:222 Stählin).

¹⁶⁷ According to Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.14.1, Clement of Alexandria knew and commented also the so-called Apocalypse of Peter; cf. T.J. KRAUS/T. NICKLAS, *Das Petrus-evangelium und die Petrusapokalypse. Die griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung*, GCS NF 11, Berlin/New York 2004, 89–92.

¹⁶⁸ Concerning this issue, in general cf. Josephus, *contra Apionem* 1.26.

¹⁶⁹ MERKT, *Gewaltverarbeitung* (n. 133), 89.

With regard to eschatology, Revelation is interpreted as prophecy concerning the future of the world, not only with reference to Rev 20.

Within ethics beyond of martyrdom, we had to note general admonitions to penitence, self-delineation from pagan way of life and faith as well as special warnings concerning luxury, digamy, and wealth.

4.2 Most used texts

The most-used texts are Rev 1 and Rev 5 in terms of Christology, Rev 4 concerning the elders as symbols (v. 4) and the evangelists, Rev 14 in terms of martyrdom and virginity, Rev 17–18 concerning the Roman empire, Rev 20 concerning chiliasm, Rev 21–22 concerning the eschatological hope. Strange or violent texts are neither used nor justified in this early period of reception.¹⁷⁰

4.3 Exegetical efforts

Exegetical efforts concern the textual criticism of Rev 13:18, the identity of the two witnesses (Rev 11:3) and the woman and her child (Rev 12). Typological exegesis can be found from early times on whereas allegorical exegesis is well debated due to Rev 20:4–6.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. M. MEISER, *Gewaltphantasien der Johannesoffenbarung in altkirchlicher Auslegung*, in: M. Labahn/M. Karrer (eds.), *Die Johannesoffenbarung. Ihr Text und ihre Auslegung*, ABG 38, Leipzig 2012, 331–345.