A tale of two monsters: The *Chaoskampf* myth and Revelation 13

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Index

Introduction

Sea (θάλασσα) and earth (γῆ) are among the most diversely interpreted motifs in the book of Revelation, particularly in chapter 13. The lack of agreement about all the aspects related to these motifs—nature and function, representative value, mutual relationship within the narrative, allusive referents, and meaning—is paradoxically one of the few things all the scholarly works consulted seem to share. In this research, the bibliographic review of interpretations of sea and earth in Revelation 13 includes more than one hundred sources representing about the same number of authors. Each one quoted or alluded to appears in an appropriate footnote.

To illustrate the diversity of interpretations, I will focus briefly on the various meanings given to sea and earth in Revelation 13 alone. For some authors, each of these two elements stands for just one thing,[1] while others see them as multivalent.[2] A number of scholars treat the sea and earth as symbols pointing to historically identifiable referents in the first century AD.[3] Other interpreters assume that these are only literary images, with

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1   *E.g.*, for Jacob B. Smith, the sea is the Mediterranean while the earth represents Palestine (*A Revelation of Jesus Christ: A commentary on the book of Revelation* [Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961], 192, 202). John T. Hinds thinks the sea symbolizes the agitated state of men and nations, but the earth is for him the Roman Empire (*Revelation* [Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1976], 184, 191). Grant R. Osborne regards both the sea and the earth as representations of the realm of evil (*Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002], 478).

2   For instance, Louis A. Brighton suggests as many as five representative layers simultaneously present in the sea motif: the source and abode of evil, nations in turmoil, chaos, the Western Mediterranean, and wicked people hostile to God (*Revelation*, Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture [Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999], 348, 349).

3   Scholars such as David E. Aune and Gregory K. Beale see in the sea a representation of the Western Mediterranean as the provenance of the Roman dominion from the perspective of Asia (David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16,* WBC 52b [Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998], 732, 733; Gregory K. Beale, *The book of Revelation,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary

no further symbolic value.[4] For some authors, θάλασσα and γῆ in Revelation 13 allude to specific passages of the Old Testament (henceforth OT). Virtually all interpreters recognize some form of literary dependence of Revelation 13 on Daniel 7,2-7. Historicists generally point to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel[5] as the OT precedents of the sea of Revelation 13, as a symbol of heathen nations in a state of political instability or turmoil.[6] And yet other scholars think meaning should be sought for the sea and the earth in ancient Near Eastern cosmogonic myths.[7]

[Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999], 680, 682). Others think it is a symbol of Diaspora Judaism (Rick Van de Water, "Reconsidering the Beast from the Sea," *NTS* 46 [2000]: 245-261). And even others, such as M. Eugene Boring and David L. Barr interpret the sea as a symbol of the Roman empire itself (M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation,* Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching [Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1989], 155, 156; David L. Barr, *Tales of the end: A narrative commentary on the book of Revelation* [Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1998], 127). In regard to the earth, Leon Morris and Josephine M. Ford, among others, point to Asia Minor as the referent behind γῆ, while some others see it as a representation of Palestinian Judaism (Leon Morris, *Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987], 166; Josephine M. Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible 38 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975], 213; Van de Water, "Reconsidering," 245-261).

[4]   Friedrich Duesterdieck, an exponent of this view, says the second beast is said to come out of the earth because it is to work upon its inhabitants. Thus, the reference to the earth is a literary association (Friedrich H. C. Duesterdieck, *Critical and exegetical handbook to the Revelation of John,* translated from the 3rd ed. of the German, ed. Henry E. Jacobs [New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1887], 379). Richard C. Lenski sees the earth and sea as two literary images pointing to a mundane origin, with no further symbolism (*The interpretation of St. John's Revelation* [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1963], 139).

[5]   Isa 17,12.13; Jer 51,13.42.55.56; Ezek 26,3.

[6]   So Simon Kistemaker, *Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 377; Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek text with introduction, notes, and indices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 161.

[7]   Building on the previous work of Hermann Günkel (*Creation and chaos in the primeval era and the eschaton: A religio-historical study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006]), Willhelm Bousset (*The antichrist legend: A chapter in Christian and Jewish folklore* [Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999]), and others; of these, Adela Yarbro Collins has been one of the foremost modern expositors of this view in her *The combat myth in the book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 164-166. See also Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina 16 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 138; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a just world* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 83; Earle Hilgert, *The ship and related symbols in the New Testament* (Assen: Royal Vangorcum, 1962), 43. On an unfounded and excessive earlier enthusiasm on some alleged parallels between the ancient Near Eastern mythical literature and the OT, see Peter C. Craigie, "Ugaritic and the Bible: Progress and regress in fifty years of literary study," in *Ugaritic in retrospect: Fifty years of Ugarit and Ugaritic,*

Revelation 13 and the combat myth

One of the prevalent views on sea and earth in Revelation 13 sees in both motifs, as well as in the beasts directly related to them, an echo of the ancient Near Eastern myth of a primeval chaos and the combat for universal kingship between the forces of evil, disorder, and sterility on the one hand, and a creator deity on the other.[8] Such a conceptual connection is mostly witnessed among those adhering to the contemporary-historical and idealist models of interpretation of John's Apocalypse, either as the only referent behind sea or as one among several layers of representative meaning concurring in that motif.

Adela Yarbro Collins has become one of the foremost contemporary exponents of this interpretation,[9] although she builds on the previous

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ed. Gordon D. Yound (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 100, 101. See also Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 (1962): 1-13; Terence L. Donaldson, "Parallels: Use, misuse and limitations," *EQ* 55 (1983): 193, 196; Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 67, 68. On the main limitations of this kind of comparative studies, see John Court, *Myth and history in the book of Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1979), 18. On the analogic rather than genealogic relationship between the Bible and its contemporary cultural background, see Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (New York: George H. Doran, 1927), 266. On the philosophical and cultural roots and presuppositions informing the history-of-religions movement in nineteenth-century Germany, see George S. Williamson, *The longing for myth in Germany: Religion and aesthetic culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

8   According to this view, each ancient Near people had its own version of that myth. The Babylonians preserved the battle between Marduk and Tiamat in their poem *Enuma Elish* (lit. "When on high"), named after the words with which the story starts. In the case of the Canaanites, the primeval contenders were Baal and the sea god. In the Egyptian version of the myth, the protagonists of the conflict were Horus and Seth. The Greeks had Apollo and Python. With some variations, the essential characteristics of the ANE chaos-combat myth can be summarized as a contest between two deities, one represented as a primeval, chaotic sea opposed to order, life and creation on the one hand, and a creator deity defeating the former after a cruel struggle. In some forms of the myth, the hero recovers after being wounded or even killed by his contender, to finally defeat him, thus bringing order and life from chaos and sterility and becoming the head of the pantheon.

9   See her published dissertation, *The combat myth in the book of Revelation*, 2, 3, 164-166; see also Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse*, New Testament Message 22 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 90, 94, 95. For a more recent sample of Yarbro Collins's sustained chaos myth reading of Revelation, see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and eschatology in Jewish and Christian apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 205; Yarbro Collins, "Source criticism of the book of Revelation," *BR* 43 (1998): 51; "Apocalyptic themes in biblical literature," *Int* 53 (1999): 117, 123-128; Yarbro Collins, "Feminine symbolism in the book of Revelation," in *A feminist*

work of Herman Gunkel, Willhelm Bousset, and others who saw Revelation as the outcome of a long course of apocalyptic tradition, going back as far as the Babylonian creation sagas.[10] For her, the raw material of Revelation is to be traced back neither exclusively to the OT and Jewish religion, nor primarily to the mythic, astrological and religious-philosophical traditions of the various peoples of the Graeco-Roman world.[11] She affirms that the "major images and narrative patterns are best understood in the framework of the ancient myths of combat." She notes as prime

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companion to the Apocalypse of John, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins, Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings 13 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 9, 10, 131-146. Although source criticism and the comparative method of the history of religions have become a working consensus among the critical scholars, particularly in regard to the book of Daniel, one of John's main sources for Revelation 13, there is also an important number of others questioning both the presuppositions and the methodological limitations of both paradigms. See, for instance, Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (New York: George H. Doran, 1927), 266; Arthur J. Ferch, "Daniel 7 and Ugarit: A reconsideration," *JBL* 99 (1980): 75-86; Andrew Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 333-335; Peter C. Craigie, "Ugaritic and the Bible: Progress and regress in fifty years of literary study," in *Ugaritic in retrospect: Fifty years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, ed. Gordon D. Young (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 100, 101; Peter C. Craigie, "The poetry of Ugarit and Israel," *TynBul* 22 (1971): 3-31; Bruce M. Metzger, "Considerations of methodology in the study of the mystery religions and early Christianity," *HTR* 48 (1955): 1-20; Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 (1962): 1-13; Terence L. Donaldson, "Parallels: Use, misuse and limitations," *EQ* 55 (1983): 193, 196; Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 67, 68; John Court, *Myth and history in the book of Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1979), 18; Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, Analecta Biblica 27a (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978), 191; Gregory K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish apocalyptic literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 230, 231; Gregory K. Beale, *Revelation*, 634; Morris, *Revelation*, 156; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 178; Eggler, *Influences and traditions*, 7-14, 28-35. For at least two critical scholars favorable to a biblical provenance of the symbolism of the beasts in Dan 7, see Louis F. Hartmann and Alexander A. DiLella, *The book of Daniel,* Anchor Bible 23 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 212.

[10] See Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Apokalypse Johannis 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895); published in English under the title *Creation and chaos: In the primeval era and the eschaton; A religio-historical study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 91-95; Ford, *Revelation*, 210; Robert H. Charles, *Eschatology: The doctrine of a future life* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 407, note 1. Sharing this view, Gunkel's work was followed by Willhelm Bousset's, *The antichrist legend: A chapter in Christian and Jewish folklore* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), originally published in German in 1895.

[11] Yarbro Collins, *Combat myth*, 1.

examples "the battle of Marduk and Tiamat in Babylon; the struggle between Baal and the Sea in Canaanite literature; the conflict of Horus and Seth in Egypt; and of Apollo with Python in Greece."

Yarbro Collins affirms that

> there was a long-standing Biblical and Jewish practice of adapting the ancient Near Eastern combat myths to interpret the conflicts in which Yahweh and his people had been engaged. The use of the combat myth in Revelation shows that the book should be understood primarily within this tradition. A number of elements in Revelation show, however, that the Old Testament could not have been the only source of the book's imagery, but that there was still direct contact with Semitic mythology. There are also certain key motifs in Revelation which could not have been derived from Semitic myth alone, but can only be explained as adaptations of Graeco-Roman mythology and political propaganda. But these elements are integrated into an overall pattern which owes most to the Semitic-Biblical tradition.[12]

From such an interpretative perspective, Yarbro Collins concludes that "the images of Revelation are best understood as poetic expressions of human experiences and hopes… It should be read as a poetic interpretation of human experience in which ancient patterns of conflict are used to illuminate the deeper significance of currently experienced conflict."[13]

Thus, for instance, Yarbro Collins sees the language and imagery of Revelation 12 and 13—as well as those of Daniel 7—as an adaptation of the ancient myths to the circumstances being faced by the Asian churches at the end of the first century.[14] In her opinion, the salty sea is a traditional symbol of chaos connected with an ancient myth about the struggle between the creator and a sea dragon; that is, between creation and chaos. Thus, the beast from the sea would represent the forces of destruction, chaos, and sterility impersonated, at the time Revelation was written, by imperial Rome and Nero.

According to a popular first-century belief, Nero would return from death at the command of a Parthian army, again an elaboration of the

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[12]   Ibid., 2.

[13]   Ibid., 3.

[14]   See also Ford, *Revelation*, 218.

myth of the conflict over kingship between the creator and the forces of chaos and disorder. The ongoing battle between God and those beasts would thus be a figurative expression of the constant tension between creation and chaos, good and evil. Thus, Yarbro Collins sees two levels of meaning simultaneously present in the imagery of chapter 13: the mythical and the contemporaneous to John.

The whole of Yarbro Collins's thesis rests on two cornerstones: (1) the common material between two documents or traditions means dependence; (2) the older document or tradition is necessarily the source of the shared content. In her own words:

> The similarities between the two narratives [Rev 12 and the Greek myth of Apollo-Leto] are too great to be accidental. They clearly indicate dependence. Since the Leto myth is the older of the two, we must conclude that Revelation 12… is an adaptation of the birth of Apollo.[15]

As a further argument in favor of this view, all its proponents mention the presence—presumably as a witness of the chaos myth—of the sea monster Leviathan and the land monster Behemoth as conceptualizations of all the evil forces opposed to God and his people in the Jewish apocalyptic literature contemporaneous to John's Revelation.[16] Accord-

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[15] Yarbro Collins, *Combat myth,* 67. Albrecht Dieterich was the first to argue that the Leto myth was a parallel to the woman in Rev 12 in his *Abraxas: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des Spätern Altertums* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1891), 117 passim. On this, see Diane Treacy-Cole, "Women in the wilderness: Rereading Revelation 12," in *Wilderness: Essays in honour of Frances Young*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005), 45.

[16] *E.g.*, *4 Esdr* (or *2 Esdr*) 6,49-53; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 29,3-8; *1 Enoch* 60,7-11, 34; *Apoc. Abr.* 10,21; *Joseph and Aseneth* 12. Besides these, Beale also mentions the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *B. Bat.* 74b-75a; *Pesikta de Rab Kahana*, supplement 2.4, and *Mid. Lev* 13,3 (*Revelation*, 682, 683); J. B. Smith also includes *4 Ezra* 4,19; 6,41.42; 16,58; *Sir* 43,23; and *Pr Man* 3 (*Revelation*, 238). See also Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 180, 181, note 294; Leonard L. Thompson, *Revelation*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 138, 140; Boring, *Revelation*, 155; David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, prophecy, and magic in early Christianity: Collected essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 137, 161 passim. However, Aune recognizes that "among the protological and eschatological myths of the Jewish apocalyptic there is no close parallel to Revelation 13" (*Apocalypticism, prophecy, and magic in early Christianity: Collected essays*, 137). Robert W. Wall is even more cautious: "It is not clear how or if he [John] intends to use particulars of that myth [i.e., on the Jewish apocalyptic Behemoth and Leviathan] to interpret the evil role of this second beast" (*Revelation*, New International

ing to them, these would be a further elaboration on the same motifs already present in some Hebrew canonical writings such as Job 40-41; Psalms 74,13.14 (*cf.* Isa 51,9.10); 89,10; Isa 27,1;[17] 51,9; and Daniel 7,2-8.[18]

Problems of the interpretation

The principal problems with this interpretation are four. These are the selective nature of the evidence, the selection of the sources, the missing links, and the anachronisms observed.

The selective nature of the evidence

The main source quoted by Yarbro Collins in support of her thesis is James Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern texts relating to the Old Testament*.[19] However, Pritchard's selection of ancient Near Eastern documents is not an exhaustive representation of that particular worldview. As the title of the collection itself makes clear, only those texts he and his team of

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Biblical Commentary 18 [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991], 171). Gerhard Krodel is openly against any link between the land beast of Rev 13,11 and Job 40 or later Jewish speculation on it (*1 Enoch* 60,7-10 explicitly quoted) on the other (*Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989], 253).

[17] For a comprehensive array of scholarly opinions about the similarities between the Ras Shamra literature and Isa 27,1, see Loren R. Fisher, ed., *Ras Shamra Parallels*, Analecta Orientalia 49 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1972), 1:33-35. Among the authors favorable to the OT borrowing of Ancient Near eastern mythic tales, see Hilgert, *Ship and related symbols*, 43; Vacher Burch, *Anthropology and the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1939), 87 passim. On such proposed parallelisms as unfounded, see Craigie, "Ugaritic," 100, 101; *cf.* Sandmel, "Parallelomania," 1-13; T. L. Donaldson, "Parallels: Use, misuse and limitations," 193, 196; Prigent, *Commentary*, 67, 68; Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, Analecta Biblica 27a (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978), 191.

[18] See, for instance, Beale, *Revelation*, 682, 683. For a reassessment and dismissal of such alleged mythic traces in OT texts, see Rebecca Sally Watson, *Chaos uncreated: A reassessment of the theme of "chaos" in the Hebrew Bible* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 369 and following. On Job 40-41, see ibid., 319, 333-368, 392, 394, passim. On Ps 74, see ibid., 152-168, 193, 391, 394. On Isa 51,9-11, see ibid., 273, 291, 300, 318. On Isa 27, see ibid., 273, 327-332, 366-368, 391, 394.

[19] James Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1969. For an updated collection of ancient Near Eastern mythic documents, see William Hallo, *The context of Scripture: Canonical compositions from the biblical world; The context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), vol. 1.

contributors saw as somehow "relating to the Old Testament" were included, and even that relationship is arguable in some documents.

This recognizedly partial and selective nature of the examples collected in Pritchard's work has to do, not only with its purpose, but also with the sometimes uncertain nature of the materials themselves,[20] and even with a certain degree of subjectivity.[21] These factors no doubt impact the work as a whole, but even some of its parts, as Pritchard's introduction to the section of the Akkadian myths and epics honestly recognizes:

> The material here offered is intended to be representative rather than exhaustive. It is not always possible to draw a sharp line between Akkadian compositions devoted to myths and related material, and those that concern other types of religious literature, not to mention special categories of historical nature. Furthermore, considerations of space and time have tended to exclude sundry literary remains whose bearing on the purpose of this work is not immediately apparent. It is hoped, however, that nothing of genuine relevance has been omitted.[22]

The selection of the sources

There are numerous and important differences among the ancient traditions labeled by interpreters as favorable to the combat myth. In other words, the different traditions invoked in favor of such a myth have too few commonalities to speak of different versions of a basic shared thematic pattern.[23]

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[20] In this regard, S. N. Kramer comments in his introductory note on the Sumerian paradise myth of Enki and Ninhursag: "The main purpose of the myth as a whole is by no means clear and the literary and mythological implications of its numerous and varied motifs are not readily analyzable" (S. N. Kramer, "Sumerian myths and epic tales," in Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 37).

[21] In the introductory comment to his translation of the Hittite myths, epics, and legends in Pritchard's *ANET*, Albrecht Goetze states: "The nature of this publication has made it necessary to be liberal with restorations and to adopt sometimes rather free translations. Some scholars may feel that on occasion I have gone beyond the justifiable in this respect" (Albrecht Goetze, "Hittite myths, epics, and legends," in Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 120, note 1).

[22] Ibid., 60.

[23] To illustrate with an example from mathematics, it could be said that several conjuncts of different components are closely related to each other in the light of some shared elements. If conjunct A includes the numbers 1 and 2, and a conjunct B has 3 and 4, one could say that they have commonalities which link them together: (1) they are integrated only by numbers, (2) they have two numbers each, (3) there is one odd number in both cases, (4) there is one

Pritchard's collection of ancient Near Eastern texts relating to the OT includes fifty-four myths, epics, and legends. Creation is the most prominent theme in at least sixteen of those, while no fewer than twelve[24] of that total are somehow related to conflicts between divine or semi-divine entities.[25] However, even though the chaos or combat myth is said to revolve precisely around creation and conflict, only four of the sixteen creation-related myths were selected by Yarbro Collins as exponents of this myth in the ancient Near East,[26] while she selected only one of the other twelve whose basic plot revolves around conflicts of a varied nature.[27]

The selection made by Yarbro Collins could convey the impression that some sort of primeval conflict between powers representing disorder

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multiple of two in each, and finally (5) there is a progression among the digits integrating both groups. And they are still two different conjuncts. But suppose that we have a conjunct X made up of the numbers 1, 2, 3; a conjunct Y integrated by the elements 0, a, ?, red; and a conjunct Z containing %, *, f5, @, 4. The number and nature of the components is different in each case, and the only thing they have in common is one arabic number each. Thus, it is difficult to see how the three conjuncts could be regarded as variations from a same common ancestor or branches from a same family tree. In the same way, the different mythic materials proposed as an interpretative pattern of Rev 12 and 13 make it difficult to recognize a derivative relationship or a common pattern. On the ANE myths as too historically distant and too dissimilar from the storyline in Rev 12, see András Dávid Pataki, "A non-combat myth in Revelation 12," *NTS* 57 (2011): 271, 272.

24   These are the Egyptian "the repulsing of the dragon and the creation," "the primeval establishment of order," "the repulsing of the dragon," "the contest of Horus and Seth for the rule," the Sumerian paradise myth about Enki and Ninhursag, the tale about Dumuzi and Enkidu, the dispute between the shepherd-god and the farmer-god, the Assyrian creation epic (*Enuma Elish*), the myth of Zu, the Hittite myth of kingship in heaven, the song of Ullikummis, and the myth of Illuyankas. In some of them, the combat motif is only secondary or even tangential.

25   In some cases, both motifs (creation and conflict) are present in the same myth, as two thematic axes within the same narrative. That is the situation in the Egyptian saga "the repulsing of the dragon and the creation," and in "the primeval establishment of order."

26   The Akkadian myth of Zu, the Hittite myth of Illuyankas, the Canaanite or Ugaritic epic of Baal versus Yamm, and the Babylonian saga of Tiamat and Marduk. Besides those Semitic examples, she also includes the Egyptian conflict between Horus and Seth and that of Apollo with Python in Greece (see Yarbro Collins, *Combat myth*, 2).

27   The Egyptian myth of the conflict between Seth-Typhon and Isis-Horus. Although there is an element of struggle in the other four which Yarbro Collins quotes, namely those of Zu and Illuyankas, Tiamat versus Marduk, and Baal versus Yamm, creation, not conflict, is the main thematic focus of these. Even counting all five, they are still not a convincing representation of a pervasive mythic paradigm.

and sterility, on the one hand, and creative order, on the other, was a foundational component in ancient Mesopotamian cosmogonies. This is certainly not the case, either upon close examination of those few selected primary sources quoted or, much less, after a careful reading of Pritchard's selection as a whole,[28] where the conflict motif is present in a proportionally small number of mythic documents. Furthermore, conflict is not the main focus of the narrative, either in the documents related to creation or cosmogony or even in documents where some sort of significant conflict does occur.

In sum, neither a conflict between the forces of chaos and creation, nor a contest over kingship is the pervasive and recurrent motif and theme in ancient Near Eastern mythology. In other words, a close examination of the sources shows that theme to be not as pervasive and constant as one would have expected.

The missing links

The scholarly literature favorable to the chaos myth as the background for Revelation 13 usually gives the impression that it was a prevalent and pervasive component of the ancient Near Eastern mind-set and literature. However, besides its rather scarce representation in that literature, the chaos myth is noticeably absent, even from narratives dealing precisely with topics that should naturally witness such a pervading ideology, namely creation or cosmogony, theogony, and power-related conflicts among deities, as well as between a deity and a dragon-like supernatural creature.

Some kind of conflict among divine powers hostile to each other cannot be denied in the ancient Near Eastern mythic sources, as will be seen in the examples analyzed in the following pages. Besides, power and control were inseparably involved in such a scenario. However, a connection between conflict and creation as a pattern broadly pervading the utilization of the conflict motif, is hardly demonstrable from the sources.

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28   The same applies to a careful reading of those same myths in the more recent compilation by William Hallo, *The context of Scripture*, vol. 1: Canonical composition from the biblical world (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997).

Anachronisms

A primeval and universal precreation chaos is not witnessed in the corpus of ancient Near Eastern literature quoted in support of the chaos myth theory.[29] A good example of this is the Hittite Telepinus myth, where the disruption of an already extant—though not pre-creation—order of things on a geographically circumscribed level is the result of the childish tantrum of Telepinus, son of the storm god. Nothing in the narrative is about any chaotic primeval state or any conflict between supernatural beings over kingship or representation of disorder and sterility in opposition to order and creation.

At most, it could be said that some Mesopotamian myths witness to an etiologic concern to account for some short-term recurrent or cyclic natural phenomena,[30] undecipherable to the pre-scientific mind, in terms of the no less vague and mysterious divine domain. The idea of a universal and cyclic alternation between a disintegration of material reality and its regeneration is, as far as we know, Mediterranean and Greek in origin, not Mesopotamian and Semitic, and appears for the first time in the writings of pre-Socratic philosophers such as Heraclitus, at least one millennium later than the Near Eastern sources quoted as witnesses of that concept of chaos.

The same idea of chaos as a synonym of primeval disorder in an active, open, and deliberate opposition to order and creation has been criticized as a modern theoretical elaboration read back into the literary legacy of some ancient cultures such as that of the Greeks.[31] Their idea of chaos (from the Greek χάσκω, *gape*) as an empty space separating earth and heaven would be, according to Werner Jaeger, a prehistoric heritage of the

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[29] Contrary to E. A. Speiser's introductory comments on the Babylonian creation epic (the *Enuma Elish*): "The struggle between cosmic order and chaos was to the ancient Mesopotamians a fateful drama that was renewed at the turn of each year" (E. A. Speiser, "Akkadian myths and epics," in Pritchard, *ANET*, 3d ed., 60).

[30] A clear example of this are the Egyptian myths known as "The fields of paradise" (Pritchard, 3rd ed., 33), "The repulsing of the dragon" (ibid., 11), and "The repulsing of the dragon and the creation" (ibid., 6), all of them having to do with the "disappearing" of the sun every night and its "rebirth" every morning.

[31] Werner Jaeger, *The theology of the early Greek philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), 13.

Indo-European peoples: "The common idea of Chaos as something in which all things are wildly confused is quite mistaken; and the antithesis between Chaos and Cosmos, which rests on this incorrect view, is purely a modern invention."[32]

Furthermore, and unlike the idea of chaos advanced in favor of the chaos-myth interpretation of Revelation, the Greeks—from at least as early as the seventh century BC—did not regard it as a primeval or pre-creation state of things characterized by confusion and disorder, but as something that had a beginning itself, that came into being and from which some other things and even the gods emerged. Thus, in Hesiod for instance, there is no such thing as a struggle between an evil chaos and the creator gods, but a morally neutral relationship of derivation between them. For Hesiod, the gods came *from* the chaos, and were not *against* it.[33]

Differences between the myths and Revelation

Even taking only one of the proposed myths[34] as the closest to Revelation 12 and 13, there are still too few things in common between the two to regard the latter as dependent upon or derived from the former. Unlike the proposed combat myth, in Revelation 12 and 13:

1. The hero and the dragon never explicitly meet in combat.[35]

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[32]   Ibid.

[33]   Ibid., 14, 32, 55, 63, 67, 139.

[34]   In her dissertation, Yarbro Collins proposes a late version of the Leto-Apollo-Python myth (*The combat myth in the book of Revelation*, 67-70).

[35]   That is, unless we regard the struggle between Michael and the dragon in 12,7-9 as an echo of the combat myth. Nevertheless, there seem to be some obstacles to such an association: (1) That battle is not explicitly said to occur prior to creation—the dragon is hurled down to an already extant earth—nor is related to creation, mostly in the light of 12,7-12. Even the echoes of Eden in 12,1-6 do not preclude a chronological post-creation defeat and hurling down of the dragon (2) nor is it related to a primeval chaos. (3) The most natural reading makes Michael not the divine hero of the story, but the leader of the angelic host defeating the dragon-villain in heaven by God's implicit request. However, it must be recognized that there is a narrative correlation between the Child's being caught up in 12,5.6 and the dragon's casting down in 12,7-9, as is also clear from the chronologic sequence of 12,5.6 and 12,13.14 (*cf*. Phil 2,5-11, Col 1,15-19; 2,10.12.15; 1 Pet 3,22). (4) The long-lasting or even incessant struggle between the deities of chaos and those of creation is totally absent in Rev 12. See Charles Bigg, *The Church's task under*

2. The motivation of the dragon is not to access or preserve a usurped power, but to take revenge after his irreversible loss of power and confinement to the earth.

3. The hero is neither wounded nor explicitly killed in a primeval battle, but goes from his mother's womb straight to heaven; therefore, there is no explicit recovery or resurrection[36] of the hero in the narrative.

4. The woman never engages in combat with the dragon, either by herself or as an ally of her son; fleeing and hiding is her modest script within the whole plot.

5. The woman is neither the sister nor the wife of the hero.

6. The struggle has nothing to do with creation, and in fact it occurs after that, according to 12,10-12.

7. Neither the dragon nor the beasts are divine.

8. The sea is a source of persecution, not of help.

9. Nature is not personified, perhaps with the only exception of the earth helping the woman by swallowing the river spewed by the dragon in Revelation 12,16.

To verify these differences, six myths are analyzed.

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the *Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 50, 51; Charles K. Barrett, *The New Testament background: Selected documents* (New York: Harper, 1961), 120, 130.

36   The reference to Christ's resurrection implicit in the blood mentioned in Rev 12,11 would be chronologically far later than a primeval, chaos-related conflict as that allegedly reflected in Rev 12,7-9; therefore, his death would have no direct narrative connection with the battle between Michael and the dragon. Whenever this conflict occurred far in the past, the son of the woman was still in the future from a historical perspective (*cf.* Gal 4,4; Eph 1,10). If, on the other hand, the conflict in 12,7-9 is chronologically linked to Christ's victory over sin and death, and his consequent enthronement, then the whole scene is neither primeval and pre-creation, as the chaos myth requires, nor eschatological, as the allegedly postexilic elaboration of the same myth implies. Additionally, in Rev 12 and 13, the struggle of the dragon is not about creation. Unlike in the chaos myth, that struggle is not against the God of creation but against the woman and the remnant of her seed (see Rev 12,17). Moreover, the New Testament authors consistently speak of Christ's death as a freely consented action and as a divine initiative (see Matt 26,53.54; John 10,17.18; Phil 2,5-11), not as a defeat inflicted by the forces of evil, as is the case with the hero in some ANE myths prior to his recovery and eventual triumph over his contender. On the chronology of Rev 12, see Paulien, "Hermeneutics," 261-266.

The Babylonian creation epic

In the Babylonian story of creation known as the *Enuma Elish*, the divine sea Tiamat is not a primeval chaos monster opposed to creation,[37] but the female deity, "mother" of all the gods together with the male divine "father" Apsu, representing the fresh waters. In the narrative, the initiative to destroy their unbearably noisy god-children was his. Tiamat's response to Apsu's drastic measure was: "What? Should we destroy that which we have built? Their ways indeed are most troublesome, but let us attend kindly!" (tablet I, lines 45, 46).[38] It is only after Apsu is killed by his god-children, a serious and unjustified provocation against the mother goddess, that Tiamat decides to engage in war against them by creating eleven fabulous beings whose names suggest those of the constellations (such as viper, dragon, sphinx, great lion, mad dog, scorpion, and centaur).[39] Unlike Revelation 12 and 13, the whole

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[37] For Witherington, one of the proponents of the chaos myth reading of Rev 12, 13, "The first of the two Beasts [of Rev 13] comes from the sea and, like Tiamat, is a seven-headed Beast with ten horns" (*Revelation*, 180). Unfortunately, he does not provide the source of such a characterization of Tiamat, which is certainly not evident, either in Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern texts* or in Hallo's collection. On this alleged link between the sea-beast and ancient myth, Beale says: "Many understand the seven heads in Revelation 13 as a reference to a sea-monster myth from before the time of Daniel... Daniel 7 is however the more probable source since other features of the Danielic beasts are also applied to the one beast in Revelation 13:2" (Gregory K. Beale, *The use of Daniel in Jewish apocalyptic literature and in the Revelation of St. John* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984], 230, 231). A further corroboration of what Beale says is that most of the features of the beast in Rev 13 are totally absent in the proposed ancient Near Eastern mythic literature, namely the ten diadems, the ten horns, the ten kings, and the blasphemous names, all of which connect Rev 13 with Dan 7,8ff. Therefore, it seems clear that this OT source and its original context should determine the interpretation of the "coming out of the sea" in Rev 13,1. Contrary to Andrew R. Angel, *Chaos and the Son of Man: The Hebrew Chaoskampf tradition in the period 513 BCE to 200 CE* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 192-200.

[38] The same reluctance to destroy is attested, not this time by the lesser gods, but by the humans in the Sumerian myth of the deluge. See the introductory note to the myth in Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 42.

[39] Contrary to G. R. Beasley-Murray, Tiamat is not represented as a seven-headed monster in the Babylonian literature (*The book of Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974], 208). For instance, tablet IV, line 70 of the *Enuma Elish* in Pritchard's *ANET* has Tiamat with only one neck. In fact, there seems to be no standardized literary or iconographic representation of Tiamat, who at times appears as a domesticated two-horned, one-headed small beast at the feet of god Marduk or Bel (*e.g.*, see Siegfried H. Horn, *SDABD* [1960], s. v. "Bel").

story has no theological—much less eschatological—purpose, but is a mythical explanation of nature, a religious cosmology accounting for the inherent characteristics of the surrounding cosmos (*e.g.*, the unrest of the sea, the shape of the constellations) in the familiar terms of the human experience.[40]

Thus, in the *Enuma Elish*, there is no combat for power or against chaos,[41] but a conflict out of revenge, with no reference to a primeval chaotic state of things. The main contenders are a goddess mother and her god son. The final victor is not a moral hero, but a cruel being characterized in the story by his brutality and his ambition for total control and the subservience of the divine family.[42] Marduk does not die nor is he gravely wounded during the struggle. He is not aided in the conflict by any female character.[43]

The Akkadian myth of Zu

The myth is about the bird-god Zu's stealing of the Tablet of Destinies, the very foundation of the divine authority of the Akkadian pantheon, and about the commission of a loyal god to recover them and punish the villain. Two versions of the myth survive: the Old Babylonian and the Assyrian. In both cases, the god Adad refuses the appointment, while in the second one, the god Shara, firstborn of Ishtar, seems to accept the challenge and the consequent reward with reluctance. At the end of the story, even the identity of the actual champion is missing in both versions in the third edition of Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern texts*.

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[40] The *Enuma Elish* is not theology but rather a religious cosmology in that it is not a reflexion (λόγος) primarily about the deity (θεός), but about nature. Its aim and main interest, unlike in the theogonies, is not the supernatural, but the sensible world. Religion is the envelope rather than the content proper, even though it was at the same time certainly the all-pervading way of expression of a mythical mindset such as that of the ANE.

[41] Against this, E. A. Speiser states in his introductory comment on that Babylonian creation epic: "The struggle between cosmic order and chaos was to the ancient Mesopotamians a fateful drama that was renewed at the turn of each year" (Speiser, "Akkadian myths and epics," in Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 60).

[42] See Tim Dunston, "As it was," *Spectrum* 34, No. 1 (Winter 2006): 33-37.

[43] That is, unless we take the encouragement by an obscure female character called Mummu as material help to defeat his contenders led by Tiamat.

However, Ninurta, the son of goddess Mami, is the champion in the last reconstruction and translation by A. K. Grayson.[44]

As in the other legends proposed as exponents of the combat myth, a number of key elements of the chaos-combat reading are missing. Chaos is mentioned only once, in the conflated text of the third edition of Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern texts*. Here it does not refer to a primeval state of things opposed to creation and life, but is a post-creation part of Zu's punishment for his crime. In that respect, the goddess Mah, Adad's mother and commissioner, prompts her son to "capture [the fugitive] Zu, and [thus] bring peace to the earth which I created while bringing chaos to his abode."[45] Moreover, there is no dragon, wounded or dead hero, or recovery or resurrection of the champion.

The Sea/Iam versus Baal Ugaritic myth

What Yarbro Collins calls in her dissertation "The Sea-Iam versus Baal Ugaritic myth," and which she quotes as one of the main documentary bases for her observation,[46] appears in Pritchard's under the circumspect heading "Poems about Baal and Anath."[47] The material is a collection and arrangement of diverse documents, thematically linked and recognized, in some cases, as too fragmentary to make possible any interpretative pronouncement.[48] The main characters throughout the collection are El, "the Creator of Creatures" and head of the Ugaritic pantheon; "Lady Asherah of the sea," also called "the Progenitress of the Gods"; their son "Prince Baal," "the Rider of the Clouds" or "Lord of earth"; the bloody "Maiden Anath," goddess of war and sister of Baal, and two of El's favorites: the sea

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[44]   In James B. Pritchard, ed., *The ancient Near East: A new anthology of texts and pictures*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 2:22-26.

[45]   Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 112.

[46]   See John J. Collins, *Daniel: With and introduction to apocalyptic literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 76; Collins, "Apocalyptic genre and mythic allusions in Daniel," *JSOT* 21 (1981): 90-93.

[47]   Collins, *Daniel,* 129-142.

[48]   On this, see Arthur J. Ferch, "Daniel 7 and Ugarit: A reconsideration," *JBL* 99 (1980): 76, 77.

"prince Yamm"; and Mot, god of the rainless season and perhaps also of the netherworld.

The plot, lacking any subtlety and resembling the Hesiodic and Homeric sagas about the all-too-human Olympic deities, has Baal longing for a house like those of the other gods. His mother Asherah intercedes in his favor before El, and his sister Anath, honoring her brutal fame, boasts of her exploits against Yamm and Mot, and even threatens her own father El, in case he does not please Baal her brother. In the last tablet of the series, Baal dies and comes back to life, exultantly celebrated by his sister-lover Anath and his father El.[49] Anath claims to have crushed the sea Yamm, destroyed the Flood Rabbim, muzzled an unidentified dragon, and crushed the crooked seven-headed[50] serpent Shalyat or Lotan,[51] which James Pritchard and H. L. Ginzberg, the translator of the Ugaritic myths, epics and legends in *Ancient Near Eastern texts*, equate with the biblical Leviathan that appears in Isaiah 27,1 and Psalms 74,14.[52]

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[49] Ibid., 142.

[50] The fact that mythic monsters such as the Canaanite Lotan, the dragon or serpent of Rev 12, and the sea-beast of Rev 13 are all seven-headed has been seen by the chaos-myth-reading proponents as further evidence of the derivative connection and shared mythic identity behind those fabulous beasts, namely chaos. But seven as the number of heads in both cases is a connection looser than it seems at first glance. That number as a literary expression for fullness has a long history in the literature of the ancient Near East (*e.g.*, Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 47, 52ff., 121, 139, 145, 149, 150, etc.; *cf.* Gen 2,1-3). Thus, a parallel and independent borrowing from a common previous stock of language and imagery would be at least as valid an explanation as the other for this coincidence.

[51] Although this may qualify as conflict, it is, however, not a conflict between a divine chaotic sea and a creation deity. In this respect, Anath is not a goddess of creation, but rather one of destruction. So, in this case we would have chaos conquering chaos, so to say.

[52] On this see H. L. Ginsberg, "Ugaritic myths, epics, and legends," in Pritchard, *ANET,* 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 137, note 10, and 138, note 2. Neither Ginsberg norspeisergive any clue about the rationale behind that connection other than quoting Ps 74,14, where a leviathan of more than one head is mentioned. For a reassessment and dismissal of some claimed mythic borrowings, as those allegedly reflected in Ps 74 and Isa 27, see Watson, *Chaos uncreated*, 152-168, 193, 273, 291, 300, 318, 327-332, 366-368, 391, 394 and following pages; David T. Tsumura, "The creation motif in Psalm 74:12-14? A reappraisal of the theory of the dragon myth," *JBL* 134, No. 3 (2015): 547-555; David T. Tsumura, "The 'Chaoskampf ' motif in Ugaritic and Hebrew literatures," in *Le Royaume D'Ougarit de la Crete a L'Euphrate: Nouveaux Axes de Recherche*, Jean-Marc Michaud, ed. (Actes du Congrès

As in the traditions analyzed so far, almost all the components of the chaos myth are absent in Revelation 13. There is no conflict between a creator deity (El and/or Asherah in this case) and a contender. Baal's death is not the consequence of any confrontation with a dragon-like creature. Neither creation nor chaos is at stake. There is no combat over the kingship. The only two appointed successors of the deceased Baal, Asherah's sons, resign themselves after recognizing their inadequacy to occupy his vacant throne. Even Mot, the only potential villain in the narrative as the impersonation of the netherworld of the dead and represented as having devoured Baal, is invariably qualified as "the godly" throughout the story.[53]

Moreover, the sea is not explicitly linked to evil in the narrative, and its defeat, the same as the crushing of the seven-headed serpent Lotan, is an event previous to the conflict involving Baal, performed by a person other than the hero of the saga, and mentioned in passing, without any direct relationship to the situation addressed.

The Egyptian myth of Horus and Seth

Among the Egyptian heroic tales about the exploits of gods and humans there is one known as the repulsing of the dragon by the god Seth.[54] The tale is about the danger faced by the sun boat in its daily entrance into the western darkness of the underworld at evening to cross it and be reborn in the morning. Since the western darkness was the realm of a huge and powerful serpent or dragon, the god Seth had the mission of repelling the beast so that the rebirth of the sun could be secured every morning. Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern texts* records two versions of the mythical tale. The only noticeable difference between them is that the first (pp. 6, 7) includes some introductory theogonic material and that the serpentine dragon is called Apophis.

International de Sherbrooke 2005, Faculté de Théologie, d'Éthique et de Philosophie, Université de Sherbrooke, July 5-8, 2005), 476.

[53] This kind of formulaic praise title seems to have functioned as a device aimed at placating the netherworld deities or getting their favor (see, for instance, Gilbert Murray, *Five stages of Greek religion* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955], 5 and following pages).

[54] Not included by Yarbro Collins in her study.

As in the case of the other legends so far analyzed, there are a number of important differences between this one and the content of Revelation 12 and 13. First, the repulsing of the dragon of the West by the god Seth is a cosmologic–etiologic myth. It deals with the assumed hidden divine causes and mechanics behind the natural world. It has nothing to do with theology or eschatology. Second, the whole episode is about a recurring daily phenomenon. Third, there is no combat between a hero or champion and a dragon, but only the casting of a spell by one on the other.[55] Fourth, the dragon is never conquered or dead, only repelled. Fifth, there is no female character in the narrative. Sixth, since there is no combat, the paradigmatic wounded or dead hero is also lacking in the story. Finally, the champion never experiences a recovery or a resurrection.

Another Egyptian tale of a conflict between two gods is the so-called *Contest of Horus and Seth for the rule*, dated to the twelfth century BC.[56] The story is about the god Osiris coming of age and the dispute over his succession between Horus, his seemingly too young son, and Seth, the brother of Osiris. Isis, the divine queen mother, backs her son's claim. The whole plot develops in the juridical realm of the Ennead or council of the gods, in front of which the two contenders present their case for eighty years without getting a verdict. The story ends with the whole pantheon recognizing Horus's sovereignty, and with Seth's increasing his wealth, and adding two goddesses to his harem, plus the special patronage or sponsorship of the god Ra as a consolation prize.

As in the stories already reviewed, there is here no primeval chaos or mortal combat between the contenders. There is no wounding, death, recovery, or resurrection of the hero, no dragon, dragon's provisional reign, renewal of battle, annihilation of the enemy, restoring or creation of order, nor persecution of a female character. All these are key components of the combat paradigm described by Yarbro Collins.

Even more relevant to our discussion, the first-century AD Greco-Roman version of the myth seems to have been noticeably

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[55]   Something like the difference between an insect repellent and an insecticide.

[56]   Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 14.

devoid of the conflict factor. In this respect, Charles Bigg summarizes the myth this way:

> The God Osiris was cruelly slain by his wicked brother Typhon. [...] Isis, his faithful wife, wandered over the marshes of the Delta in her papyrus boat, gathering up the fragments of his corpse; Horus would have avenged his father Osiris and slain his murderer, but Isis intervened, cut Typhon's bonds and let him go free. [...] Here we have [...] a God who suffers a cruel death out of love for man, and a divinely human wife and mother, Isis the compassionate and merciful, who loves her husband with a love that is stronger than death, yet sets his murderer free, bidding him go and sin no more.[57]

Even though here a good divine character is put to death by a villain deity and we have a resurrection thanks to the intervention of a goddess, the most relevant characteristics of the chaos myth are also absent, namely the creation connection, the struggle among gods, and most noticeably even the punishment of the wicked.[58]

The Greek saga of Leto, Apollos, Python, Zeus, and Typhon

In the earliest available version of the myth,[59] there is no combat for kingship between the monster Python and Apollo, who kills Python to safely install his sanctuary on the island of Delos. In Hesiod's *Homeric hymns*, the pregnant goddess Leto, one of Zeus's wives, does not flee from any dragon, but wanders in search of a place to give birth to her twins Apollo and Artemis, since Hera, another wife of Zeus, forbade out of envy all sun-reached personified places to assist the mother-to-be. In his *Theogony*, there is no space devoted to the Leto-Apollo-Python story. There are, however, two primeval conflicts mentioned. One is the murderous plot of Obriareus, Cottus, and Gyes against their father,

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[57] Bigg, *Church's task*, 44, 45.

[58] Interestingly, on the mythical struggle between the Persian supreme god Ormuzd and his counterpart Ahriman, the spirit of evil, Bigg comments that "there is no victory of a hero over a villain... That struggle keeps everything in place and working, is the essence of Pantheism" (ibid., 51), something of which there is no echo, either in Revelation or elsewhere in the Bible.

[59] The myth of Hesiod (VIII BC) in his *Homeric hymns* and his *Theogony*. See Hugh G. Evelyn-White, trans., *Hesiod: The homeric hymns and Homerica* (London: William Heineman, 1936).

the god Heaven, with the complicity of their mother, the goddess Earth. Again, there is no dragon, chaos, kingship, hero, or persecuted or fighting lady involved. It is all about revenge because of god Heaven's mistreatment of his three divine sons, either out of shame for their bad behavior or out of envy, according to two different versions of the story.

The other conflict Hesiod elaborates on in his *Theogony* is between the Titans and the Olympic gods commanded by Zeus, with the divine monster Typhoeus's defeat as the outcome. Most of the components basic to what has been labeled as the combat myth are also missing in that legendary composition.

Finally, the same poetic material of Hesiod tells the story of Zeus and his wife Metis. Zeus had been advised by his parents, the god Heaven and the goddess Earth, to devour his wisest offspring to prevent them from becoming kings in his place over the gods. The only close resemblance with this in Revelation is the dragon's standing in front of the woman to devour her son as soon as he would be delivered (12,4b), but that is too loose a connection in view of the multiple differences.

The Hittite myth of Illuyankas

Among the Mesopotamian myths Yarbro Collins quotes in support of her chaos-myth interpretation of sea and earth in Revelation 13, there is one whose main characters are the Storm-god and a dragon called Illuyankas. The story is about the initial defeat of the Storm god by the dragon, and the Storm-god's retaliation and victory through a stratagem consisting of a banquet where Illuyankas is killed after being induced to drunkenness. There are almost no connections between the myth and the prototypical chaos myth proposed by Yarbro Collins as the interpretative frame of the book of Revelation. First, the dragon Illuyankas is not related in any way to the sea. His dwelling place is depicted as an underground "lair." In a later version of the myth the sea plays a combat role on a morally neutral and impersonal battlefield where the Storm-god and the dragon meet to define their final fate. Thus, the sea is not in the plot a primeval impersonation of evil or the main character in the conflict, nor is the conflict related to creation. Second, and unlike the symbolic dragon of

Revelation 12 and 13, Illuyankas defeats the hero[60] at first. Third, the hero does not experience any explicit harm or death. In consequence, there is no recovery or resurrection.

Fourth, the only feminine participation in the narrative is that of a rather obscure deity called Inaras, whose role is to prostitute herself with a man by the name of Hupasiyas at her requested price: to throw an alcoholic party in which the dragon could be induced to drunkenness and finally be killed by the gods. A fifth difference between Revelation 13 and this myth is that here the dragon is not defeated in a battle. Finally, and unlike Revelation 13, the dragon is killed by the hero.

Some preliminary observations on the chaos myth and Revelation 12, 13

To conclude this review of the Near Eastern myths and Revelation, several observations can be made. First, the fragmentary nature of currently available ancient Near Eastern literature and the consequent conjectural interpretation recommend caution in regard to drawing conclusions, making generalizations, and elaborating interpretive models from a too scarce and inconclusive body of evidence.[61] In this respect, in the first edition of *Ancient Near Eastern texts related to the Old Testament*, it is said about the myth of Zu:

> The identity and relevance of some of the gods who are either mentioned or alluded to in this text are quite uncertain, owing mainly to the fragmentary and mutilated nature of the tablet. If Nanshe (on tablet 2, line 41) has been copied and read correctly, is this goddess another name for Ishtar, and is this also true of Mammi (line 48)? And what is Marduk's part? Does he merely sing the praises of the goddess, or does he actually take over the task of subduing Zu? Lastly, did Ninurta figure in this version, as he does in the Assyrian accounts?[62]

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[60]   If the Storm-god can be regarded as a hero of the story—unlike the one in Rev 12—in view of his crime, as in the later version of the same Hittite myth (see Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 126).

[61]   On this, see Craigie, *Ugaritic*, 100, 101; Ferch, "Daniel 7 and Ugaritic," 76, 77. The introductory critical remarks and the footnotes in Pritchard's *ANET*, 3rd ed., are highly populated with expressions such as "unknown," "very doubtful," "uncertain," "fragmentary," "obscure," "poorly preserved," "unintelligible," "quite enigmatic," "not clear," "defective," "incomplete," "breaks in the text," "missing lines and even tablets," "gaps in the narrative," and the like.

[62]   Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 111, note 11.

Even though that note is no longer present in the third edition, due in part to the finding of "a close congener" with which the former and even more incomplete text was recombined, the material is still recognized as incomplete and fragmentary.[63] This necessarily makes its interpretation provisional and conjectural.[64]

Another instance of that sometimes highly fragmentary state of the documents is the Ugaritic poem about Baal and Anath, on which Pritchard comments:

> Because so many letters, words, lines, columns, and probably some whole tablets are missing, not all of the tablets can be declared, with certainty, to be parts of the great epic of Baal and arranged in their proper order within it. However, in the following translations, even small fragments whose pertinence to the larger epic is probable, have, for the most part, been included (if only, in a few desperate cases, in the form of sketchy summaries) and assigned tentative positions within it.[65]

A last example of this could be the introductory comment to the Egyptian myth of Astarte and the tribute of the sea in Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern texts*: "The excuse for introducing so damaged a document is that we may have here the Egyptian version of a tale current in Asia. The badly damaged papyrus gives us little certainty about the purport of the story... Any reconstruction must be treated with great reserve."[66]

Secondly, there seems to be not enough attestation among the ancient Near Eastern mythic literature, either of a monolithic, consensual paradigm or even of an extended common ground that could be regarded as

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[63] Ibid., 111-113 (see the editorial introduction and concluding paragraphs).

[64] In this respect, a line-by-line comparison between the translations of the Myth of Zu in the 1st and 3rd editions of Pritchard's *ANET* furnishes some examples of how interpretative and subjective the translation of ancient documents such as these may be, even in places where the text is complete and well-preserved. For instance, while on line 24 of tablet 2 of the Susa version (as well as on line 53 of column 2 of the Assyrian version), the god Anu is said to command the god Adad not to go on his journey against Zu, according to the first edition of *ANET*, the third edition has Anu bidding the god to forego the journey. There is no need to say how much more subjective and interpretative the task becomes where the text is fragmentary, incomplete, or badly preserved. On this, see also Craigie, *Ugaritic*, 100, 101.

[65] Pritchard, *ANET*, 2nd ed., 129. On these uncertainties, see also Ferch, *Daniel 7 and Ugaritic*, 76, 77.

[66] Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 17.

a paradigmatic combat myth. The differences in nature, purpose, interest, cast, plot, and outcome among the narratives are too many and too important to speak of *the* or even *a* combat myth. Precisely on the challenge of establishing any intertextual correlation among the pieces of such a vast mass of tradition as that represented by the ancient Near Eastern mythography, Hallo says: "The questions of where, when and in what direction an alleged borrowing may have occurred is occasionally raised in the commentary, even if the question frequently cannot be answered."[67]

In the third place, the criteria informing the selection of the ancient Near Eastern mythical materials behind the combat myth paradigm are not sufficiently clear. For instance, sometimes there are several versions of the same tale, quite different from each other in aspects crucial for the model proposed by Yarbro Collins. In this respect, Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern texts* has, for instance, the dragon repulsed twice by the solar god Seth.[68]

A fourth consideration seemingly in play here is that even conceding the existence of a myth such as that of the combat consistently pervading the whole of the ancient Near Eastern cosmogonic lore, there are also a number of substantial differences between such a myth and Revelation 12, 13. In fact, it could be said that the differences between the ancient Near Eastern materials and the content of Revelation, especially chapters 12 and 13, are far more numerous and significant than the few resemblances seemingly linking them within any proposed relationship, either derivative or polemic.

Another problem of the mythical reading, mostly if John is thought of as uncritically borrowing from his milieu instead of polemizing, is the tacit assumption of a transcultural, invariable representative value or symbolic meaning of some motifs and images throughout history, not only within a same region, such as Mesopotamia, but even across such a vast span as Mesopotamia and Northeastern Asia Minor. Many scholars think that a primeval chaos is the referent behind the sea in Revelation 13 since that could

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[67] Hallo, *The context of Scripture*, 1:xxvi.

[68] One under the heading "The repulsing of the dragon and the creation" (Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 6, 7), and another bearing the title "The repulsing of the dragon" (ibid., 11, 12).

have been the case, for instance, in Egypt in the twenty-fourth century BC.[69] Such an assumption should perhaps be the object of a more in-depth study, one based on more solid evidence than merely some literary similarities.[70]

Some arguable presuppositions, characteristic of the History of Religions approach, are evident behind this interpretation of the sea in Revelation 13, particularly the insistence on explaining the biblical material as a literary product or by-product of the same worldview that informed ancient Near Eastern folklore. As a result, some seeming convergences could become overstated and pressed in an unbalanced way into a theological model, to the detriment of a more in-depth and global view of the singular biblical phenomenon. This also affects the perception of the singularity of the biblical material in comparison to its contemporaneous ideological milieu.[71] On close examination, the differences between the ancient myths and their claimed utilization by Bible writers are so many and so meaningful that the presence of any supposed mythical material in the Old Testament or the New Testament cannot be explained as a simple borrowing or derivation.[72] In light of the evidence available,

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[69] According to the Egyptian legend about creation by the god Atum, this came into existence on top of a primeval hillock arising out of the waters of chaos. See ibid., 3.

[70] On this, see Ferch, "Daniel 7 and Ugaritic," 86.

[71] On this, Heinrich Schlier comments: "From the beginning [alluding to 2 Peter] the objection was evidently raised that the original Christian message retailed myths. Equally from the beginning, however, that accusation was rebutted, and this was done with full awareness of the qualitative difference between myth and saving event. From the beginning too the Christian community was warned against myth. Its members, it is said in the pastoral epistles [probably alluding to *e.g.*, 1 Tim 1,4.6; 2 Tim 4,4; Titus 1,14; 2,9] were to be on their guard... The New Testament recognized, therefore... that an abyss separated the *muthos* which they saw in the world around them from the *logos* of Christian preaching" (*The relevance of the New Testament* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1968], 76). On some risks of the comparative method, mostly as applied in the 40s and well into the 70s, see Craigie, *Ugaritic*, 100, 101. On the singularity of the biblical materials in compare to its milieu, see John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the myths: Unique revelation or just ancient literature?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 64-80.

[72] On the relationship between some heathen religions and early Christianity, Bigg asks: "Did Isis and Mithra borrow from the Church or the Church from them?" (*Church's task*, 42). On one hand, these more noble pagan cults no doubt prepared the way for the far more noble Christian doctrine (see ibid., 58, 59). On the other, and mostly from the second century AD, they also paved the way for a deviation of the Christian church from its original and distinctive essence. That explains the many elements—ritual as well as doctrinal—increasingly shared by the church and those religions from the second century on, and mostly in the third and fourth. See

polemical differentiation seems to be the most natural explanation of any proposed contact between the Bible authors, John in our case, and the mythic mind-set around them.

On the contrasts between the setting of the biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts, Hallo says:

> The "context" of a given text may be regarded as its horizontal dimension—the geographical, historical, religious, political and literary setting in which it was created and disseminated. The contextual approach tries to reconstruct and evaluate this setting, whether for a biblical text or one from the rest of the ancient Near East. Given the frequently very different settings of biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts, however, it is useful to recognize such contrasts as well as comparisons or, if one prefers, to operate with negative as well as positive comparison.[73]

In her dissertation, Yarbro Collins insists on the paradigmatic nature of the chaos combat-myth as a literary frame, not only for Revelation 12,

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on this Edwin Hatch, *The influence of Greek ideas on Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1957). One should add the assimilation of paganism into Christianity, mostly in the context of the struggle to prevail in the contest for the adherence of the masses within the Empire, something that lasted into the fourth century. Bigg speaks of "a growing tendency to assimilate Mithra to Jesus... Later heathenism freely appropriated the ideas, the practices, the language of the Christian church" (Bigg, *Church's task*, 56; see also Franz Cumont, *The Oriental religions in Roman paganism* [Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1911], xviii). Thus, assimilation between Christianity and paganism was a two-way road, mostly from the second century. However, an ideological dependence of the former on the latter is still wanting to be cogently demonstrated, mostly when a first century NT is called into play. On a reassessment of the date of the NT writings and the arguments in favor of an early date for them, see John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1976), 221-253. On the danger of some hurried conclusions on religious derivation and borrowing based on outer likeness, Cumont rightly warns: "All these facts constitute a series of very delicate problems of chronology and interrelation [between paganism and Christianity], and it would be rash to attempt to solve them *en bloc*... A word [in common] is not a demonstration, and we must be careful not to infer an influence from an analogy... Resemblance does not necessarily presuppose imitation, and frequently a similarity of ideas and practices must be explained by common origin, exclusive of any borrowing" (*Oriental religions*, xviii). See also Deissmann, *Light*, 266.

[73]   Hallo, *The context of Scripture*, 1:xxv; *cf*. Hallo, "New moons and Sabbaths: A case study in the contrastive approach," *HUCA* 48 (1977): 15-17. On the singularity of the Bible in comparison with its surrounding milieu, see Oswalt, *The Bible among the myths*, 64-80; Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1970), xxvii. On the need of a balance between the extreme proposals of total discontinuity with the environment on one hand, and mere continuity and derivation on the other, see Ferch, "Daniel 7 and Ugaritic," 86.

but for the book as a whole. Noticeably, in the section of chapter 2 de-
voted to the "Accadian [*sic*] and Hittite Parallels" to Revelation 12, only
eight lines are devoted to those two ancient Near Eastern traditions on
the combat myth, without even mentioning the Akkadian *Enuma Elish*.
In the introduction to that section of the dissertation, the author says:

> There are two basic ways in which a goddess associated with the champion may
> function in the combat myth. She may appear in the dragon's reign as the hero's
> wife or mother under attack by the dragon; or she may function as the ally of the
> champion, either by fighting alongside him in battle, or by bringing about his
> recovery and/or fighting the dragon in his stead.[74]

But that is not the case, as we have seen, in the *Enuma Elish*. There
the female sea Tiamat is the mother and at the same time the mortal con-
tender of her son, the divine hero and champion Marduk![75]

There are a number of substantial differences between the ancient
Near Eastern pre-creation combat mythology and Revelation 13. In fact,
it could be said that the differences between those ancient Near East-
ern myths and Revelation 12 and 13 are more numerous than the few
resemblances between them. For instance, in the *Enuma Elish*, the di-
vine and female sea Tiamat is not a primeval chaotic monster opposed
to creation, but the creator of all the gods, together with her consort, the
divine fresh water deity Apsu. The initiative to destroy the unbearably
noisy gods was Apsu's, not Tiamat's. And she only reluctantly conceived
the idea of waging war against her sons/gods after they killed their fa-
ther Apsu and grossly insulted and challenged her. Even though there is
eventually a combat between mother and sons, creation is not the issue
at stake nor the cause of contention. Finally, the language and imagery of
Revelation 12 and 13 are far more naturally and easily explained as a bor-
rowing from the OT, independently of or in a superficial and antagonistic
contact with the mind-set of the first century AD Greco-Roman world,
as the exegetical approach to Revelation 13 shows.

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[74] Yarbro Collins, *Combat myth*, 61.

[75] See Pritchard, *ANET*, 3rd ed., 61-72.

Rome and chaos

A further problem of the chaos myth as a literary frame and inter-pretative model for Revelation 13 is the idea that John saw there a link between the Roman Empire and a chaotic situation. However, how could it be said that he associated Rome with chaos and disorder when all in the empire was precisely order and progress, and was thus perceived by its overtly grateful Asian subjects?[76] Precisely, if there was a corner of the Empire where the Roman administration seems to have been doing well in the second half of the first century, it was the progressive and prosper-ous Asia Minor, at least in the light of the most recent and now prevail-ing historical reconstructions.[77] Thus, if there was something distinctive about first-century imperial Rome, it was order, not chaos, expressed, for instance, in its jurisprudence and the *Pax Romana*, enforced by an army which was itself a masterpiece of order and discipline.[78]

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[76] *E.g.*, William M. Ramsay, *The letters to the seven churches of Asia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1963), 114-127, 140. Asian Christian subjects of the empire seem not to have been an exemp-tion to this rule, in view of the messages to several of the seven churches in Rev 2 and 3.

[77] On this, see L. Thompson, *Apocalypse and empire*, 7, 22, 29, 95; L. Thompson, "A sociological analysis of tribulation in the Apocalypse of John," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 147-174; Krodel, *Reve-lation*, 38; David Maggie, *Roman rule in Asia Minor, to the end of the third century after Christ* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 576-582; Henri W. Pleket, "Domitian, the Senate and the Provinces," *Mnemosyne* 14 (1961): 296-315; Richard B. Vinson, "The social world of the book of Revelation," *Review and Expositor* 98 (Winter 2001): 11-33.

[78] See Clement's commendation of the Roman army in his Letter of the Romans to the Corin-thians (*1 Clem.* 37,1-3), from AD 95-97. Paradoxically, some have proposed a sort of apoca-lyptic reversed perception of order as chaos in virtue of which "apocalyptic faith tends to reverse the original association of destructiveness with chaos and of life with order, because of its strong sense of the repressiveness of order" (William A. Beardslee, *Literary criticism of the New Testament* [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1970], 62). Although such an alleged pattern of reversion could be arguable in a mood like that of the postexilic Jewish apocalypses, two things should be kept in mind to avoid an unfounded reading of such a pattern into John's Rev-elation. On one hand, there are noticeable examples of Jewish apocalypses exhibiting the idea of the Jewish political fate under the foreign Roman invader as God's deserved judgment due to Israel's national apostasy (*e.g.*, *Apoc. Abr.* 27-30; *4 Apoc. Bar.* 6,23; *Jub.* 16,26.34; 23,16-21; Pseudo Philo's *Bib. Ant.* 19,2.3.5-7; *Pss. Sol.* 2,2-20, especially vv. 6 and 20; *1 Enoch* 89,59-64; 90,22.25; Tg. Pseudo Jonatan Deut 32,8; *Pss. Sol.* 8,15; Josephus' *BJ* 3.351-354; 5.412; 6.110; *T. 12 Patr.* 21; 4Q 381). On this, see Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God gave to Him to show to his servants what must soon take place* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 227, 235, 237. On the other hand, the numerous and significant differences between Revela-tion and the postexilic Jewish apocalyptic literature should make one carefully ponder such an

A question remains on this, however. Could it be that John the revelator perceived as chaos what seemed order and progress to the empire and its pagan subjects? After all, was not Rome that had turned Jerusalem and the Jewish temple into ruins only some decades before, resembling what Babylon had done six centuries earlier?[79] And was it not a Roman emperor who smashed the church in the capital in the 60s? Cogent as this could seem at first glance, several facts make such a reading unlikely. First, the church was not the synagogue.[80] Second, even some Jewish apocalyptic literature saw the national disaster of AD 70 as a divine visitation. Third, the attitude of the church in the first century was one of recognition of the divine origin of Roman authority in general.[81] Finally, the book of Daniel as the main OT source of Revelation, including chapter 13, nowhere witnesses any view of worldwide pagan empires as inherently evil.[82] Therefore, John's stand against Rome as inherently evil in Revelation 13, whose sea-beast is clearly dependent on the political beasts of Daniel 7, would mean a drastic change of attitude and scope very hard to explain.

Hyginus and the Leto-Apollos-Python myth

Yarbro Collins bases her interpretative mythical model of Revelation 12 and 13 on a late source, secondary in relationship to the ancient Near Eastern documents she quotes as the earliest witnesses of the myth. As she implicitly recognizes, only the Hyginus version of the Leto-Apollos-Python Greek myth seems to contain most of the elements of the proposed chaos myth model. This Roman librarian lived and wrote in the first century AD (64 BC-AD 16), no less than fifteen centuries after the first proposed Near Eastern witnesses of those myths, presumably

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option, mostly in view of the lack of both external and internal evidence of any anti-Roman stand of John in Revelation.

[79]   *Cf.* SybOr 5.

[80]   See note 71 on the Christian attitude to the Jewish national disaster in AD 70.

[81]   *E.g.*, Mark 12,14-17; Rom 13; 1 Pet 2,13-17.

[82]   See Dan 1,1.2; 2,20.21.37.38.46-49; 4,25.31.32.34-37; 5,18-21; 6,25-27; 9,1-19; 10,13.20. *Cf.* the use of the divine passives in Daniel and Revelation as an affirmation of the divine sovereignty over even the human political powers opposed to him and his people within a covenantal dynamics.

reflected in Job 40 and Daniel 7 as some of the sources behind Revelation 13. Besides, the scarce material on mythology attributed to Hyginus is preserved in a very brief, mid-second-century abridgment, doubted to represent the original.[83] Does this disqualify per se Hyginus's version of the Leto-Apollos-Python myth as possibly behind Revelation 12 and 13? Not necessarily.

However, it is recognized as the only witness of the combat myth in which all its components are in place. This seems to somehow weaken the proposal of an uninterrupted flow of the chaos and conflict model throughout history and space from the twentieth century BC Mesopotamia to the first century Western Mediterranean. On the other hand, was this mid-second-century witness of the myth available to John, who lived in the second-half of the first century?

Daniel 7 as a source of mythical elements

The proponents of the chaos myth as the interpretative model of Revelation 12-13, especially vv. 1 and 11, see some texts of the OT as a kind of refined bridge or transition between the raw material reflecting the Near Eastern chaos and John's utilization of some of the same mythic motifs in his Apocalypse. Thus, some older OT texts, such as Job 40-41,[84] Psalms 74,13.14; 89,10, and Isaiah 27,1; 51,9,[85] and espe-

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[83]   See C. T. Cruttwell, *A history of Roman literature: From the earliest period to the death of Marcus Aurelius* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), 333, 334; Herbert Jennings Rose, *A handbook of Greek literature*, 4th ed. (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy Carducci, 1996), 204, note 59; 206; Giulio Guidorizzi, *Igino, Miti* (Milano: Adelphi, 2000), xxxviii-xlii.

[84]   On the proposed parallelism between some mythological figures in the Ugaritic and Sumero-Akkadian texts and Job's Leviathan and Behemoth, see Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, 3rd ed., Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 268; in support of such a mythic connection and borrowing, see Pritchard, *ANET*, 2nd ed., 83-85. See also, in agreement, Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 215, note 1; Ford, *Revelation*, 216. Boring recognizes, in agreement with Paul D. Hanson and Harold H. Rowley, that the biblical "apocalyptic" as such was not "a late borrowing of foreign ideas" (*Revelation*, 43).

[85]   J. B. Smith broadens the list of OT passages presumably reflecting the Near Eastern chaos myth by including Gen 1,9; Job 7,12; 9,8; 26,8-13; 28,25; 38,8-11; Prov 8,27-29; Jer 5,22; Ps 24,2; 74,12-17; 77,16; 89,9.10, and Isa 51,9.10 (*Revelation*, 238). Contra such a proposed link between those OT texts and some mythic ideas on chaos and combat, see Watson, *Chaos uncreated*, 128, 129, 140, 147-168, 173, 188, 193, 227-368, 391 and following pages.

cially Daniel 7,2-8,[86] also allegedly dependent on and reflecting ancient Near Eastern mythical sources, have been proposed as John's main source for Revelation 13.[87] This postulate deserves at least four observations. First, as was already said of the purported Mesopotamian witnesses of those same myths, the material allegedly shared both by those Near Eastern mythical narratives and Daniel 7 is not enough to claim borrowing.[88]

To the contrary, the language and imagery of Daniel 7 are better and more naturally explained as part of a common stock of language and imagery within the boundaries of the OT earlier and contemporaneous traditions.[89] In this respect, Stephen B. Reid comments:

> The material in Daniel 7:2-7 [...] does not, in our judgment, qualify as a chaos or combat myth. Combat myths usually entail direct conflict and accent divine

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[86] On this, see Beale, *Revelation*, 682, 683; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 16, 40-43; Angel, *Chaos and the Son of man*, 192-200. For a sample of critical scholarship favorable to the Canaanite myths on the struggle between the sea Yam and Baal as the background of Dan 7, see John J. Collins, *Daniel*, 76; Collins, "Apocalyptic Genre and Mythic Allusions," 90-93. For a dismissal of such a background on account of the numerous and important differences between Dan 7 and the Canaanite lore, see Ferch, "Daniel 7 and Ugarit," 79-81.

[87] For a sample of critical scholarship favorable to the Canaanite myths on the struggle between the sea Yam and Baal as the background of Dan 7, see Collins, *Daniel*, 76; Collins, "Apocalyptic Genre and Mythic Allusions," 90-93; Andrew Angel, "The Sea in 4Q541 7.3 and in Dan 7:2," *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010): 474-478; John Day, *God's conflict with the dragon and the sea: Echoes of a Canaanite myth in the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 151-176. For a dismissal of such a background on account of the numerous and important differences between Dan 7 and the Canaanite lore, see Ferch, "Daniel 7 and Ugarit," 79-81.

[88] For an extensive list of statements against such a derivative relationship between the ancient Near Eastern traditions and Dan 7, recognized by Yarbro Collins as the source and prototype of the language and imagery of Rev 13, see Jürg Eggler, *Influences and traditions Underlying the vision of Daniel 7:2-14; The research history from the end of the 19th century to the present*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 177 (Fribourg: Fribourg University Press, 2000), 7-14. He includes there a series of significant differences between the Canaanite version of the combat myth and the content of Dan 7; these are illuminating for the study of the claimed connection between such a myth and Rev 13 (ibid., 13, 14). On this, see also Steinmann, *Daniel*, 333; Ferch, "Daniel 7 and Ugarit."

[89] *E.g.*, Lev 26,19; Hos 13,7.8; *cf.* Jer 4,7.13; 15,12; 28,13.14; 48,40; 49,19.22; 50,17.44; Lam 4,19; Ezek 17,3; Mic 4,13; Hab 1,8. For a discussion of the OT as the closer source of traditions and the main influence on the formulation of Dan 7,2-14, see Eggler, *Influences and traditions*, 28-35. On Hos 13,7.8 as the main beastly figure behind Dan 7,3-7 see Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 156. On the OT rather than the Mesopotamian myths as the source of Dan 7, see Steinmann, *Daniel,* 334, 335.

intervention; whereas Daniel 7:2-7 presents an evolution within history. Succession of the four world empires in Daniel 7:2-7 is dependent, not on combat, but on the demise of the predecessor. [...] Therefore, it may be concluded that there is no combat myth in Daniel 7. Rather, there is an expression of spatial and ethical dualism, which has been conceived by some scholars as implying a chaos or combat myth.[90]

In the same line of thought, Maurice Casey says:

In the OT the sea is used to symbolize the turbulent world and peoples. [...] If Babylonian material lies behind this, it is a long way behind. [...] Above all, clear evidence of this way of thought occurs in the OT. [...] If we consider this now [...] it means that in using the sea as a symbol of hostility to God he was drawing on native Israelite imagery, as a conservative defender of the traditional faith might be expected to. [...] The winds are the four cardinal winds. It is not surprising that they are found in the Babylonian epic of creation, but it is more relevant that they were already in use in Israel.[91]

Jürg Eggler says in agreement:

While the advocates of a general biblical influence on Daniel 7 acknowledge a distant mythological connection, they contend that it is much more likely that the closer biblical tradition was ultimately the main influence on the formulation of Daniel 7 instead of the mythological concepts that underlie the biblical tradition.[92]

Finally, Daniel Steinmann summarizes the state of the question by saying that:

If we must seek literary sources for Daniel 7, the most likely origins for the imagery and thought in Daniel 7 are previously written OT books... hus one has to look no further than the OT itself for parallels to the language and imagery in Daniel 7.[93]

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[90]   Stephen B. Reid, *Enoch and Daniel: A form critical and sociological study of historical Apocalypses* (Berkeley, CA: Bibal Press, 1989), 82, 83; Steinmann, *Daniel*, 333-335.

[91]   Maurice Casey, *Son of man: The interpretation and influence of Daniel 7* (London: SPCK, 1978), 18; Steinmann, *Daniel*, 333-335.

[92]   Eggler, *Influences and traditions*, 33.

[93]   Steinmann, *Daniel*, 334, 335. For a critical scholar favorable to a biblical provenance of the symbolism of the beasts in Dan 7, see Louis F. Hartmann and Alexander A. DiLella, *The book of Daniel*, Anchor Bible 23 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 212.

A third consideration worth noting is that the typically OT counter-mythical or antithetic utilization of contemporaneous mythical elements and motifs[94] is lacking in Daniel 7. In other words, the absence of the implicit or explicit, characteristically polemic or apologetic treatment of those mythical elements, purportedly shared by Daniel 7 and the Mesopotamian or Canaanite mythology, renders unlikely their presence there by way of allusion, much less as an assimilation or borrowing.[95] On the possibility of some mythic strand beneath or behind Daniel 7 in the context of an implicit polemic against such a mythic lore, Steinmann says:

> If there are real and not simply perceived parallels between ancient pagan myths and Daniel 7, it is highly unlikely that the myths provided the genesis of the imagery in Daniel's vision. Instead, the vision may include purposeful polemic against a few chosen pagan commonplaces, such as those that appear in *Enuma Elish*, to demonstrate that Israel's God, not the pagan gods, is in control of human events. Yet even this proposal is speculative at best.[96]

In any case, such a mythic raw matter, provided it really stays behind Daniel 7, would have been too drastically modified by the author of

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[94] An example is the Hebrew cosmogony recorded in Gen 1, which is in a clearly antithetic or polemic dialogue with the ancient Near Eastern mythical cosmogonies prevalent in the second millennium BC. See on this Larry G. Herr, "Genesis One in Historical-Critical Perspective," *Spectrum* 13, No. 2 (1982): 51-62; Jean Flori, *Los orígenes: una desmitificación* (Madrid: Safeliz, 1988); Randall W. Younker, *God's creation: Exploring the Genesis story* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 11; Gerald W. Wheeler, *The two-taled dinosaur* (Nashville, TN: Southern, 1975), 182-191; Dunston. "As It Was," 33-37; Gordon H. Johnston, "Genesis 1 and ancient Egyptian myths," *BSac* 165 (2008): 178-184.

[95] The same argument is also valid against any derivative relationship between Rev 13 and those same myths (on this, see Beale, *Revelation*, 683). For some good examples of that typically counter-mythical use of mythology in Revelation, see, for instance, Jon Paulien, "Basic exegesis of Revelation," in *Revelation*, The Bible Explorer Audio-Cassette Series (Harrisburg, PA: Ambassador Group, 1996), sound cassette 1, theme 7. *Cf.* András Dávid Pataki, "A non-combat myth in Revelation 12," *NTS* 57 (2011): 258-272; Jan Willem Van Henten, "Dragon myth and imperial ideology in Revelation 12-13," in *The reality of Apocalypse: rhetoric and politics in the book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr, Symposium Series 39 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 181-203.

[96] Steinmann, *Daniel*, 334. See also Ernest C. Lucas, "The source of Daniel's animal imagery," *TynBul* 41 (1990): 161-185, especially 185; Beale, *Revelation*, 683; George B. Caird, *The language and imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1980), 229.

Daniel 7 so as to be regarded as an uncritical borrowing.[97] On this proposed drastic modification of a mythic core by the author of Daniel 7, Ferch concludes:

> Even granting the proposed creative freedom claimed for the writer of Daniel 7, it is pointedly apparent that the author has changed the scenes of Canaan beyond recognition. One would not want to press for parallels of all details for no scholar affirms this. Yet, so many modifications have to be assumed that there would be no difference between proposing an extremely fertile creativity of the apocalyptist and a discontinuity between Ugarit and Daniel 7. Cross cautioned against the extreme which conceived of Israel's religion as radically and wholly discontinuous with its environment. The other extreme, also at times rooted in a dogmatic *a priori*, is to neglect the differences evidenced in the data in the interests of a theory. Lone motifs must not be wrenched out of their contextual moorings. Once the single parallel terms are studied in their total context, a discontinuity between Ugarit and Daniel 7 suggests itself.[98]

Finally, the numerous and significant differences between Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 make it advisable not to press too much for an exclusive, one-way derivative relationship between them.[99] Even though some sort of connection seems to be undeniable, a parallel and independent borrowing of some crucial elements from a source of biblical traditions older than both of them should not be set aside.[100]

Revelation 13 and the Old Testament
Leviathan and Behemoth

One of the common arguments in favor of the chaos myth as a literary frame and interpretative key to the book of Revelation as a whole, and of chapters 12 and 13 in particular, is the seeming evocative relationship between the sea and the land or earth beasts on the one side, and the

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[97] On this high transmutation, see Steinmann, *Daniel*, 333; Beale, *Revelation*, 683; Ann E. Gardner, "Daniel 7:2-14: Another look at its mythic pattern," *Biblica* 82 (2001): 250; Caird, *Language and imagery*, 229.

[98] Ferch, "Daniel 7 and Ugaritic," 86.

[99] See also Eggler, *Influences and traditions*, 8, 13, 14.

[100] On these shared OT sources, see Hugo A. Cotro, "Up from sea and earth: Revelation 13,1.11 in context" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2015), 217-263.

Leviathan and Behemoth of the OT and the postexilic literature on the other. Gregory K. Beale gives one example of this when he says:

> The depiction of the two beasts in ch. 13 is based in part on Job 40-41, which is the only OT depiction of two Satanic beasts opposing God. [...] These two beasts are echoed throughout Revelation 13, particularly in the LXX. One is a land "beast" (40:15-24). [...] The other is a sea "dragon" (40:25) who conducts a "war waged by his mouth" (40:32). "Burning torches" and "a flame" going "out of his mouth" (41:11, 13). "There is nothing on earth like him" (41:25). Both are thus given demonic attributes. The Job text alludes to a primordial defeat of the dragon by God (cf. 40:32 LXX [...] but also implies a yet future battle (40:19, 24-24 [*sic*] LXX; 41:25 LXX), which is necessitated by the sea beast's continued attitude of defiance (e.g., 41:33-34 MT). Though the beast was defeated, he continues to exist in a subdued condition (Job 7:12; Amos 9:3). [...] On the assumption that the beginning of history must be recapitulated at the end of history, Judaism crystallized the implicit expectation of Job. Revelation 12:1-11 also echoes this Jewish tradition. The tradition held that on the fifth day of creation God created Leviathan to be in the sea and Behemoth to dwell on land. [...] These two beasts were symbolic of the powers of evil and were to be destroyed at the final judgment.[101]

This statement by Beale deserves a series of comments. On one hand, he says that Job 40-41 is the only Old Testament depiction of two *Satanic beasts opposing God*, but the fact is that there is nothing in the MT of Job 40-41 on which to base that conclusion. To the contrary, what we find there is a depiction of two certainly powerful yet created (40,15; 41,11)[102] animals closely resembling the hippopotamus and the crocodile.[103]

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[101] Beale, *Revelation*, 682; Aune, *Apocalypticism*, 161; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A commentary on the Greek text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 335; William Whitney Jr., "The place of the 'Wild Beast Hunt' of *Sib. Or.* 3:806 in biblical and rabbinic tradition," *JSJ* 25 (June 1994): 80, 81; Bauckham, *Theology*, 89, 90; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 728, 729, 755. Contrary to the alleged presence of the chaos and combat myths in Job 40-41, see, for instance, Watson, *Chaos uncreated*, particularly 319, 333-368, 392.

[102] The MT Hebrew expression translated as "everything under heaven"—or a similar phrasing in the English versions (*e.g.*, NIV, KJV, RSV, etc.)—is כָּל־הַשָּׁמַיִם and appears only seven times in the OT (Gen 7,19; Deut 2,25; 4,19; Job 28,24; 37,3; 41,3; Dan 9,12), either in the context of God's sovereignty over his creation or in a cosmographic sense, but still with a sovereignty-over-his-creation flavor; *cf.* 40,15.

[103] Vern S. Poythress, *The returning King: A guide to the book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 145.

Of Behemoth, Job 40 says that it was a created (v. 15), herbivorous (v. 15) beast, having nose (v. 24), eyes (v. 24), tail (v. 17a), bones (v. 18), limbs (v. 18), muscles (v. 16), sinews (v. 17b), thighs (v. 17b), and belly (v. 16), whose habitat seems to have been the Jordan (v. 23). Leviathan, on the other hand, is described in Job 41[104] as a created (v. 11; *cf.* Ps 103,26), aquatic (v. 1a) animal (v. 33b), with tongue (v. 1), nostrils (v. 2a), jaws (v. 2b), skin (v. 7), limbs (v. 12), face and mouth (v. 14a), teeth (v. 14b), shield-covered back (vv. 15, 16), neck (v. 22), flesh (v. 23), and heart (v. 24). Moreover, the relationship between those two beasts and God in Job 40-41 is not one of opposition but of implicit submission or subordination to their divine Maker in the context of creation (*e.g.*, 40,19).[105] In the words of Poythress: "Revelation, like Job, simultaneously proclaims that God has bounded them from the beginning."[106]

G. K. Beale sees the Leviathan in Job 40-41 as conducting a "war waged by his mouth" (40,32), with "burning torches" and "a flame" going "out of his mouth" (41,11.13), which he calls "demonic attributes." However, that same language and imagery are used in John's Apocalypse and in *4 Ezra* to describe God's Messiah, the son of the Most High.[107] Thus, even though such hyperbolic language and imagery are certainly war-like, this does not make it per se "demonic."

In his statement, Beale recognizes that the seeming mythical resemblances between the beasts of Revelation 13 and those of Job 40-41 are

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[104] In the Hebrew text, vv. 1-34 of chap. 41 are numbered as 40,25 through 41,26.

[105] Contrary to Beale, Meredith G. Kline convincingly argues that the Behemoth and Leviathan of Job 40-41 are not two Satanic representations, but God's champions against Job within the rhetoric plot of the book. See "Trial by ordeal," in *Through Christ's word*, ed. W. R. Godfrey and J. L. Boyd (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985), 90, 91; Meredith G. Kline, *Job*, Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1963), 488. On the Behemoth and Leviathan of Job 40, further and mythically elaborated in later Judaism as an alleged source of the language and imagery of Rev 13, Prigent says: "The two beasts of Job 40 undoubtedly cannot have served as a model here... In later Judaism, their only eschatological role is to serve as food in occasion of the messianic banquet. That is why it seems unlikely that this tradition should be cited to explain the duality of the beasts of Revelation 13" (*Commentary*, 402, note 1; 414).

[106] Poythress, *Returning King*, 145.

[107] *E.g.*, Rev 1,16; 2,12; 19,15.21a; *4 Ezra* 13,10.11; *cf.* also Job 41,18 [LXX 41,10] and Revelation 1,14; 19,12; *4 Ezra* 13,4.

"particularly from the Greek version (LXX)," which is not an unimportant clarification. The LXX is from not earlier than the third century BC, which implies a considerable time span between its version of Job, recognized as one of the earliest OT documents, and the original Hebrew text behind the MT.[108] The LXX provides evidence of additions and interpretative textual amplifications reflecting the influence of the Hellenistic culture and mind-set over the postexilic Jewish world of ideas.[109]

One of those examples, cited by Beale,[110] is Job 40,19; 41,25, where, unlike the MT, the LXX has Behemoth and Leviathan "made to be mocked by the angels," an addition similar to the high angelology, typical of the OT apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, but unattested in the Hebrew canon.[111] Such a Hellenistic influence, more or less evident here and there

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[108] Even from a source, form, or redaction-critical perspective, the final form of the book has been assigned a date not later than the fifth century BC, between two and three centuries before the LXX and Qumran's OT, whose text is notably similar to the twelve-centuries-later MT.

[109] It has been suggested that the LXX reflects a Hebrew text earlier than that of the MT (*e.g.*, Craig A. Evans, *Noncanonical writings and New Testament interpretation* [Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 1992], 73, 74). This poses two questions: (1) Could the Hebrew text behind LXX Job 40-41 be even earlier than that behind Qumran's fragments of Job, which unfortunately do not include the two chapters? This is quite unlikely, considering that one of the Qumran copies of Job is written in the paleo-Hebrew script common before the sixth-century BC Babylonian exile (see Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea scrolls Bible* [San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1999], 590), which takes us back to the date of the final form of the book according to the critics. (2) Since we have two contemporary (from the third and second centuries BC), but different Hebrew texts behind Job, one with some mythical flavor in the LXX and one non-mythical in the MT, we need to find out what happened. There seem to be two options: either an earlier non-mythical text gave origin to a mythologically flavored one in the process of transmission, or an originally mythical text was expurgated later by some orthodox or anti-mythical scribal trend. In view of the consistent and sustained anti-mythical thrust of the OT canonic literature (as exhibited as early as in the Qumran OT), the former is the most likely. Perhaps another evidence in favor of this option is that the Hebrew text of the canonic Qumran is so close to that of the MT, even within a library that included such mythologically flavored books as *1 Enoch* and *Tobit*. In other words, the syncretic variety witnessed in the composition of the Qumran's library would have been a suitable milieu for a mythically flavored version of Job such as that of the LXX.

[110] Beale, *Revelation*, 682.

[111] Another example is found in Mic 1,8, where the LXX renders the MT יַעֲנָה ("ostrich") as σειρήνες ("sirens"). See also Michael W. Holmes on LXX Ps 91,13 [MT 92,12] as a witness of the phoenix-bird myth in the Greek OT (*The apostolic Fathers: Greek texts and English translations* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992], 59, note 66).

in the LXX and which, at least in some cases, could, perhaps be explained as an accommodation or concession to the Hellenistic environment,[112] should not be denied nor pressed excessively.

The seemingly fabulous and mythical nature of Behemoth and Leviathan, according to their depiction in Job 40-41 (*e.g.*, 41,19.20a), is perfectly explainable as a literary device in the light of the stylizations and the hyperbolic language and imagery characteristic of OT Hebrew poetry (*e.g.*, 40,17.18a.23; 41,18-21 [LXX 10-13]).[113] Thus, Leviathan's firebrands and the sparks streaming from its mouth do not need to be interpreted as a literal portrait of actual phenomena ascribed to a fabulous creature inhabiting only the pre-scientific minds of the ancient peoples. Rather, it seems to be a literary resource aimed at making as vivid a graphic depiction as possible, besides captivating and keeping the attention of the audience in a primarily oral culture such as the Semitic one.

Job's mysterious Leviathan has been characterized in most contemporary versions of the Bible as a "dragon," a word inevitably conveying the notion of a fabulous or mythical monster in modern languages such as English. This seems to be the result of the LXX's rendering of the obscure Hebrew word לִוְיָתָן in the MT of Job 40,25 by the Greek δράκων, the root of "dragon" in English and several other modern languages.

The different inflections of the Greek noun δράκων appear forty-two times in the LXX and Theodotion,[114] fifteen times as the rendering of

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[112] Perhaps some good examples of such a relative and superficial accommodation of postexilic Judaism are "The letter of Aristeas," "The wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach" and Philo's works.

[113] Poythress, *Returning King*, 145. Abegg, Flint, and Ulrich say in this respect: "The Hebrew text of the book of Job is the most problematic found in the Bible. This is due not only to its subject matter, but also to the fact that it is also poetry, that it is high dramatic art of lyric quality" (*Dead Sea Bible*, 591); Poythress, *Returning King*, 45.

[114] The distribution is the following according to the software Bible Works version 9: δράκοντα (11 times): Ps 90,13; Job 26,13; 40,25; Isa 27,1 (3x); Ezek 29,3; Bel 1,25.28; Bel (Theodotion) 1,25.28; δράκοντες (6 times): Exod 7,12; Esth 1,1 (Greek addition); 10,3 (Greek addition); Ps 148,7; Jer 27,8; Lam 4,3; δράκοντι (2 times): Sir 25,16; Amos 9,3; δράκοντος (4 times): Ps 73,14; *Pss. Sol.* 2,25; Bel 1,27; Bel (TH) 1,27; δρακόντων (9 times): Deut 32,33; Ps 73,13; *Odes Sol.* 2,33; Job 4,10; 20,16; 38,39; Wis 16,10; Mic 1,8; Jer 9,10; δράκων (10 times): Exod 7,9.10; Ps 103,26; Eccl 4,6 (wrongly included here seemingly due to a confusion between δράκος [the genitive feminine singular form of the noun ἡ δράξ: handful, hand] and δράκων;

the Hebrew תַּנִּין,[115] four times together with ὄφις instead of נָחָשׁ,[116] four times in the place of לִוְיָתָן,[117] twice as the translation of כְּפִיר,[118] and once for פֶּתֶן.[119]

According to the context and the literary structure of the passages where those words appear in the MT, it could be concluded that they refer to an actual animal like the crocodile or some kind of sea-snake,[120] sometimes used to represent in a more or less stylized way heathen nations opposed to God and his people throughout history.[121] Within

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e.g., see the vocabulary at the end of Allen Wikgren, Ernest C. Colwell, and Ralph Marcus, *Hellenistic Greek texts* [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1947], 226); Job 7,12; Jer 28,34; Ezek 32,2; Bel 1,23; Bel (TH) 1,23.27.

[115] Exod 7,9.10.12; Deut 32,33; Job 7,12; Pss 73,13; 90,13; 148,7; Isa 27,1; Jer 9,10; 28,34; Lam 4,3; Ezek 29,3; 32,2; Mic 1,8.

[116] Job 26,13; Isa 27,1 (2x); Amos 9,3; see also Werner Foerster, "δράκων," *TDNT*, 2:281.

[117] Job 40,25; Isa 27,1 (2x); Pss 73,14; 103,26.

[118] Job 4,10; 38,39.

[119] Job 20,16.

[120] In some cases the giant moray eel of the Red Sea could be a good contextual candidate.

[121] This would explain the nuance of evil inextricably associated with that representative animal in those passages. The same phenomenon of the personification of evil in an otherwise morally neutral figure is attested in the very first occurrence of the serpent imagery and language in the Bible, namely Gen 3,1-5.13-15, where it is difficult, if not impossible, to decide when the snake is the actual animal, when a seemingly conscious and voluntary instrument of the Satanic deceit, or when it is Satan himself. For instance, "Satan" could be read instead of "serpent" in Gen 3,1-5, still making perfect sense. For the same phenomenon of interchangeability, see Rev 12,9, which thus seems to operate as a sort of Christian-inspired midrash of Gen 3,15. On this, see Ramsey J. Michaels, *Interpreting the book of Revelation*, New Testament Series 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 125; Ramsey J. Michaels, *Revelation*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 122, 156; Paul S. Minear, *I saw a New Earth: An introduction to the visions of the Apocalypse* (Washington, DC: Corpus Books, 1968), 254, 259; Eugenio Corsini, *The Apocalypse: The perennial revelation of Jesus Christ*, Good News Studies 5 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 231; André Feuillet, *The Apocalypse* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1965), 79. Contrary to Swete, for whom "the woman with child has no parallel in the OT... it may be confidently regarded as essentially a creation of the writer's mind" (*Apocalypse*, cxxxiii). On midrash as an exegetical method reflected in Revelation in general, see Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's trumpets: Literary allusions and the interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), 57-60. This nuance of evil associated with the actual animal, when used as a representation of human powers opposed to God, is not the same as seeing there a derivative relationship with the so-called chaos myth; see also Margaret Barker, for whom "the monsters [commenting on the sea-beast of Rev 13:1] had become political

the first general category are Exodus 7,9[122] and vv. 10, 12; Deuteron-
omy 32,33;[123] Job 4,10;[124] 7,12;[125] 20,16; 26,13; 38,39;[126] 40,25 [41,1
LXX]; Psalms 90,13;[127] 103,26;[128] 148,7;[129] Jeremiah 9,10 [9,11 MT];[130]
27,8;[131] Lamentations 4,3;[132] Amos 9,3; and Micah 1,8. The passages
where such a predator is a symbol of political powers hostile to God

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ciphers long before the time of Daniel [according to a 2nd-century BC dating]. In the Hebrew
Scriptures Egypt was Rahab, the sea monster (Isa 30:7) and the Lord threatened her with the
fate of Prince Sea and Judge River (Isa 19:1, 5)... In the sixth century BCE., Ezekiel has described
Egypt as a dragon (Ezek 32:2, 3)" (*Revelation*, 231).

[122] Noticeably, in the context, which makes "serpent" or "snake" the only viable and reasonable
translation of תַּנִּין here, the software Bible Works has as the only lexicographic note on δράκων
in the LXX of this passage the Bible Societies Greek New Testament's accompanying dictionary
entry for δράκων: "Figurative term for the devil," overlooking thus the fact that this definition
is intended for the only place where the word occurs in the Greek New Testament, namely the
book of Revelation (12,3.4.7.9.13.16.17; 13,2.4.11; 16,13; 20,2), where its only given and ex-
plicit meaning is in fact "the devil" (see 12,9).

[123] The plural תַּנִּינָם in v. 33a implies an animal species, not a mythical singular monster. Further-
more, it is in parallel to the also plural פְּתָנִים ("serpents") in 33b.

[124] The LXX has δρακόντων while the MT reads כְּפִירִים (young lions), which is in perfect and close
correspondence with אַרְיֵה and שַׁחַל, both meaning "lion," in the same verse.

[125] The context, as well as the language and imagery of the passage, is clearly one of creation and
marine life.

[126] The LXX has δρακόντων in v. 39b while the MT reads כְּפִירִים (young lions) there, which is in
parallel to לָבִיא ("lion") in 39a. *Cf*. Job 4,10.

[127] Where the שַׁחַל (lion) of 13a is in parallel with כְּפִיר (young lion) in 13b, and the תַּנִּין of 13b
corresponds to the פֶּתֶן (serpent) of 13a.

[128] Note that לִוְיָתָן is said to be a God-created animal "to play in the sea." Furthermore, neither is
the context related to evil nor has the word such a nuance.

[129] Note the plural denoting an animal species and not only a unique mythical monster, as well as
the order to praise God and the overall creation context and language.

[130] Note the plural, implying an animal species instead of a singular or unique entity, together with
the context of Jerusalem's desolation in the typically covenantal terminology of a city turned
into a wasteland, only inhabited by wild beasts such as the serpents.

[131] The word δράκοντες is an addition of the LXX instead of the Hebrew עַתּוּדִים (male goats) in
the context of God's punishment against his apostate covenantal people according to the classi-
cal OT formula of sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. The plural reinforces this since it
implies a species rather than a unique entity.

[132] The problematic word picture of a serpent suckling her young seems to have prompted most of the
translators to render the Greek δράκοντες for the surprising "jackals" (*e.g.*, ASV, NAB, NIV, NJB).

and his people would include Psalms 73,13.14 (Egypt; *cf.* Isa 51,9.10);[133] Isaiah 27,1 (Egypt and Assyria);[134] Jeremiah 28,34 [MT 51,34] (Babylon);[135] Ezekiel 29,3; 32,2 (Egypt).

The same can be said of the use of δράκων outside the Hebrew canon of the OT, namely in the OT apocrypha of the LXX.[136] For instance, in the story about Daniel and the δράκων[137] (14,23-27 in the Greek version), whatever δράκων stood for was easily killed by a simple mortal and was not in an eschatological context. This is more significant since the story is an example of postexilic Hellenistic Jewish literature characterized, according to G. K. Beale, by its recapitulation of history and its eschatological and divine defeat of the mythical sea-serpent Leviathan.[138] This δράκων cannot be a primeval mythical creature personifying evil and chaos, temporarily subdued by God and held in check until his great and final destruction by the triumphant warrior God. On the other hand,

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[133] This is an interesting example of transition and blurring of literary boundaries between the representative element and the representation based on it. The crushing of the heads (plural רָאשֵׁי) of the sea snakes (plural תַנִּינִים) of v. 13 becomes an apt representation of and is fused with Pharaoh's army's defeat at the Red Sea in v. 14, where the author changes from the plurality of snakes and heads to a unique snake (לִוְיָתָן) with several heads (רָאשֵׁי). For the plurality of heads in a symbolic construct based on an actual animal, see Dan 7,6b, where the four-headed third beast coming from the sea is not a mythical monster, but a symbolic stylization of an actual animal, namely the leopard, representing the Greco-Macedonian Empire (*cf.* Dan 8). The same can be said of the tricephalous Roman eagle of *4 Ezra* 11,1.2, also originated in the sea; *cf.* also the seven-headed serpent of *Pss. Sol.* of Rev 12. Commenting on *Pss. Sol.* 2,25 ("Do not delay, O God, to repay to them [the Gentile oppressors of God's people] on [their] heads; to declare dishonorable the arrogance of the dragon"), Robert B. Wright says: "This may be a pun on 'head'; *i.e.* turn it back on their leader (as happens in the next verses)" ("Psalms of Solomon: A new translation and introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols., ed. James H. Charlesworth [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985], 2:653, note y).

[134] Francesco S. Porporato saw the "fleeing" and the "twisting" of Leviathan in Isa 27,1 as a metaphorical reference to the rapid Tigris and to the sinuous Euphrates, respectively, while the monster with seven heads would represent the Nile with its delta ("Miti e inspirazione biblica," *Civiltà Cattolica* 42 [1941]: 281).

[135] Nothing in the passage would prevent the rendering of תַנִּין as "serpent" or "snake." Even the metaphoric language employed (*e.g.*, the comparative particle כְּ) implies a comparison between two realities familiar to the reader, namely King Nebuchadnezzar and a known animal of prey.

[136] Bel 1,23.25.27.28; Esth 1,1 [LXX]; 10,3; Sir 25,16; *Pss. Sol.* 2,25; *Odes Sol.* 2,33; Wis 16,10.

[137] Translated as "snake" in the NEB.

[138] See Beale, *Revelation*, 682; *2 Apoc. Bar*. 29,3-8.

Daniel 14 says that the Babylonians worshiped this δράκων together with the god Bel. Had the δράκων stood for a primeval, chaotic sea, this would make him another characterization of the goddess Tiamat. However, there is no historical evidence that the Babylonians ever worshipped Tiamat, the sea-chaos goddess defeated in the contest with Marduk. To the contrary, Marduk—not Tiamat—was the most revered figure in the Babylonian pantheon.

In the case of the additions to Esther in the Greek version of the book, the two δράκοντες Mordecai saw in his revelatory dream about the future represented two morally opposed human characters, the wicked Haman and the just Mordecai.[139] The very fact that one of the δράκοντες is also said to symbolize the Jewish "whole race of the just" (1,6.8 LXX) renders any evocative connection to the chaos myth non-viable. Furthermore, even the wicked counterpart of the just δράκων, also "poised for combat" (NAB) and "uttering a mighty cry," could be naturally understood in the light of Genesis 3, where there is also a wicked δράκων/serpent (cf. Rev 12,9) hostile to God's people in the person of the woman and her posterity, and particularly to the Messiah as her male offspring (cf. Gen 3,15; Rev 12,2.5.13.17). There is also an oral element common to both stories (see Rev 13,11b; cf. Rev 16,13.14).

The hyperbole of Sirach 25,16 makes sense only if the δράκων is a living being of the same nature as the λέων. It is improbable that Jesus the son of Sirach thought that sharing the house with an evil woman (cf. Prov 21,9.19; 25,24) would be worse than living with the mythical personification of the primeval chaos and evil. Moreover, δράκων has no definite article, thus making "*a* serpent," rather than "*the* quintessence of evil," the more natural reading of the passage.

On the δράκων of *Pss. Sol.* 2,25, Robert B. Wright comments:

> The dragon image was often applied to Egypt (Ps 74:14; Ezek 29:3) and to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 51:34 [LXX 28:32]). If the common code of identifying Rome with Babylon is employed here, the Roman Pompey would be the incarnation

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[139] See the Greek additions to chap. 10 in the LXX.

of the earlier conqueror of Jerusalem. The crocodile (Heb. *tanin*) of Ezek 32:2 and 29:3 is assumed by some to be the word behind the Gk. *drakontos* (dragon).[140]

Regarding *Odes of Solomon* 2,33,[141] the comparison between wrath and wine is well attested in both Old (*e.g.*, Isa 51,17; Jer 25,15) and New Testaments (*e.g.*, Rev 14,10; 16,19; 19,15b), although the usual comparative pattern (wrath like wine) is reversed here (wine like wrath). The genitive δρακόντων is plural, anarthrous, and parallel to the also plural genitive ἀσπίδων ("serpents"). Thus, the passage is not about a mythical, primeval personification of evil, but simply about serpents, whose anger—as dangerous as their venom—is compared to the wine of the wicked. The structure of the passage seems to suggest that the versatile conjunction καί linking the two parallel comparisons is explanatory and/or appositional here, making 2,33b an expanded repetition of 2,33a. If so, the passage could be translated thus: "Their wine is (like) wrath (or venom) of vipers; yea, (like) (the) incurable (or mortal) wrath (or venom) of (the) serpents."

G. K. Beale points out that Judaism assumed a recapitulation of the beginning of history at the end of history, thus crystallizing what he sees as an implicit expectation in Job 40, 41. He also notes that Revelation 12,1-11 is a witness of that Jewish tradition. While the idea of a reversal of creation to start anew with a new creation is not a novelty of Judaism,[142] repetition as implicit in this idea of reenactment[143] seems

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[140] "Psalms of Solomon," in *The Old Testament pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. Charlesworth, 2:653, note a2.

[141] Curiously, while some works on the Pseudepigrapha state that the second chapter of the *Odes of Solomon* is still lost (*e.g.*, J. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:735; J. Charlesworth, *The odes of Solomon* [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977], 18; J. Charlesworth, *Critical reflections on the odes of Solomon* [Sheffield, GB: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], 38; Rendel Harris and Alphonse Mingana, eds., *The odes and Psalms of Solomon* [London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920], 215), the complete Greek text (vv. 1-43) appears in Alfred Rahlfs's *Septuagint*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (New York: Societate Biblica Americana, 1949), in Henry B. Swete, *The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), as well as in version 9 of the software *Bible Works*, which reproduces Rahlfs's LXX.

[142] *E.g.*, Gen 7-9; *cf.* Rev 20; 21; 2 Pet 3,3-13.

[143] *Webster's third new international dictionary* suggests defining the word as: "To repeat the principal points... stages or phases [of something]" (1966), s.v. "recapitulation."

too cyclic and Greek to fit within the linear view of history characteristic even of Hellenistic Judaism.[144]

On other hand, when Beale says that Revelation 12,1-11 echoes such a postexilic tradition about a recapitulation of the beginning of history at the end of time, the fact seems to be overlooked that the strife there depicted between Satan and Michael is somehow historically situated in the narrative, not necessarily in a primeval, pre-creation stage[145] nor in the *eschaton*, but in the context of the Messiah's ascent and glorification following the cross and the resurrection. Therefore, it is not conceptually connected either to a primeval combat between chaos and creation, nor to the tradition of an eschatological recapitulation of the beginning as a great finale of history on earth.[146]

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[144] The typically postexilic view of history as constituted by two consecutive aeons is a clear example of this. The apocalyptic genre is a paramount witness of such a linear view of history, as well as its periodization, not repetition of history. On the chronology of Rev 12, see Jon Paulien, "The hermeneutics of biblical Apocalyptic," a paper presented to the Biblical Research Institute Committee, Loma Linda, California, February 2001, 62 and following pages.

[145] Unless the hurling down of the dragon and his angels in 12,7-9, which is chronologically earlier than the sheltering of the woman in the wilderness for 1,260 days in 12,6, is pointing to a pre-creation stage. However, the same fact that they are said to be hurled down to an already extant earth (v. 9) seems to disqualify any allusion to the chaos and combat myth which explicitly refers to a stage before the earth was extant (its creation was precisely the cause of contention on the part of the deities of chaos). Even the mention of the stars from heaven as probably an allusion to angels sharing in the dragon's heavenly defeat (12,4)—besides being a representation of God's people temporarily delivered into the dragon's hands (*cf.* Dan 8,10; 7,21.25: 12,2.3)—does not make a date prior to creation mandatory for this conflict. The same seems to be valid for the echoes of Gen 3,15 in the narrative. Therefore, even granting a chronologically dual defeat of the dragon in Rev 12, one on the occasion of Jesus' post-resurrection enthronement, and another in a prior undetermined time, the chronological link between Rev 12 and the chaos-combat myth is still lacking.

[146] In Rev 12, when Satan is expelled from heaven, the world has already been created and populated (vv. 10-12) and God's people, represented by the pure woman, already exist (vv. 1, 2) and are persecuted by him (12,4a; *cf.* Dan 8,10). If, as seems to be the inescapable conclusion, the son of the woman is the Messiah, and the snatching away to heaven is Christ's resurrection and ascension, his long-awaited appearance and his snatching away to heaven are chronological markers in the narrative to organize the content temporally. Thus, the ancient serpent's expulsion from heaven chronologically follows Christ's death, resurrection, and enthronement in heaven, all events well embedded in biblical history. Moreover, the war waged by the ancient serpent against the rest of the woman's descendants (v. 17) implies that his expulsion from heaven is not his final eschatological defeat (see Rev 20). On this, see John Paulien, "The hermeneutics

Even the sources cited by Beale and others as evidence of such a postexilic tradition of an eschatological recapitulation of the beginning of history and a final defeat of two temporarily subdued monsters impersonating the primeval forces of chaos and evil seem to be implicitly against such a mythical reading. In 2 Baruch 29,3-8, Leviathan and Behemoth are explicitly said to be two animals created by God on the fifth day of the first week, together with all the others, thus allusively connecting to Genesis 1, not to any Mesopotamian chaos myth, as its source of language, imagery, and theology.

Furthermore, it would be absurd to have God create the forces of primeval chaos and evil together with order, life, and nature on earth, only to subdue the first for a while until the final defeat of the evil at the end of time, which is not the natural reading of the passage. Moreover, they are said to be "kept as nourishment for all who are left" (*i.e.*, the faithful remnant of God's people) in the context of a burst in the productivity of the earth on the eve of the manifestation of the Messiah (*cf.* John 2; 6,25-58). Thus, they are regarded not only as part of God's animal creation, but also as a source of clean meat destined for the nourishment, literally or otherwise, of God's faithful remnant in the Messianic era, together with the vegetable produce of the land and a reiteration of the manna. It is hard to see a nuance of evil and chaos in Leviathan and Behemoth in that context.[147] They seem, on the contrary, closer to their treatment in Job 40-41.

Something similar is the case of the Leviathan and Behemoth of *4 Ezra* 6,49-53, where they are also explicitly treated as two of God's created animals in the context of Genesis 1 and 2. They are also said there to have been "kept to be food for whom you will and when you will" (v. 53). The connection claimed between them and the chaos myth seems also to be lacking there.

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of biblical apocalyptic," in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005), 1:263-265.

[147] Contrary to Cristopher A. Davis, for whom the eating of the meat of Leviathan and Behemoth in *2 Apoc. Bar.* 29 is a way of saying that God's people will finally "have their enemies for lunch" in the context of the messianic banquet (*Revelation*, College Press NIV Commentary [Joplin, MO: College Press, 2000], 154).

In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, Leviathan is also depicted in terms far closer to those of Job 40, 41 and Genesis 1, 2 than to any extra-biblical mythical tradition. There, it is represented as a reptile inhabiting the deep sea, not as a singular evil entity.[148]

The ladder of Jacob has a clear and negatively connoted reference to Leviathan in 6,12.13, where it is said that "the Lord will pour out his wrath against Leviathan the sea-dragon." But the context makes clear that Leviathan is used as a representation of "the nations who hold them [Israel] by force" (6,2), "those who made them slaves" (6,10), "all the kingdom of Edom... together with all the peoples of Moab" (6,15). This is distinctive OT language linked to the history of Israel and used here to address some first-century AD circumstances faced by the author and his audience.[149] This use of Leviathan has its closest antecedent in passages of the OT such as Psalms 73,13.14 (*cf.* Isa 51,9.10); Isaiah 27,1; Jeremiah 28,34 [MT 51,34]; Ezekiel 29,3; 32,2; *cf.* Daniel 7 and 8 rather than any other mythical extra-biblical source.

1 Enoch 60,7-10, another text cited in support of the chaos-myth reading of Leviathan and Behemoth and the recapitulation tradition, seems to be a witness of the fusion of images or blurring of literary limits between a literal animal and its use to represent the oppressors of God's people, as already discussed in relation to Psalms 73,13 and 14. In *1 Enoch* 60,7-9, Leviathan and Behemoth are depicted in the language and the context

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[148] *E.g.*, "I [the angel Iaoel] am appointed to hold the Leviathans, because through me is subjugated the attack and menace of every reptile" (10,10); "And I saw there the sea and its islands, and its cattle and its fish, and Leviathan and his realm and his bed and his lairs" (21,4).

[149] The literary resource of using in postexilic literature the names of classical enemies of OT Israel as a designation for the foes of a group self-perceived as God's chosen people is attested also in the Qumran library, especially in the commentary genre; *cf.* Rev 11,8; 14,8; 16,19; 17,5; 18,2.10.21; 20,8. About this representative use of Leviathan in *The ladder of Jacob*, Horace G. Lunt comments: "The wicked (clearly the Egyptians) will be punished, Leviathan... will be defeated, and Jacob's justice will prevail. The kingdom of Edom and the peoples of Moab will perish" (Horace G. Lunt, "The ladder of Jacob: A new translation and introduction," in *The Old Testament pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols., ed. James H. Charlesworth [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983], 2:402).

of God's creation.[150] In *Enoch* 60,24 (and all through chap. 61) they still seem to be two animal sources of meat for the "elect ones" ("those who have been devoured by the wild beasts, and... eaten by the fish of the sea" in 61,5) in the future messianic era. But in 60,25 they are explicitly associated with evil ("The punishment of the Lord of the Spirits should come down upon them"). However, the context makes clear that the object of God's eschatological judgments and the referents behind those two creatures are "the oppressors of his [God's] children and his elect ones" (62,12). Thus, the OT language, imagery, and thought patterns are again the closest interpretative key to the use of Leviathan and Behemoth, even in the postexilic literature.

In sum, the language and imagery of Revelation 13 are more naturally understandable in the light of the OT, without the need to resort to mythical sources, either outside or presumably inside the OT.[151] For instance, the literary unity formed by Revelation 12 and 13 finds its natural and most immediate narrative and theological antecedent

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[150] Interestingly, in a note about their designation as "monsters," E. Isaac observes: "Or 'whales.' So B and C. A: 'leopards'" (E. Isaac, "1 [Ethiopic Apocalypse of] Enoch: A new translation and introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:40, note m); *cf*. Dan 7,6. On Leviathan and Behemoth in Job 40, 41 as drawn from images of the crocodile and the hippopotamus (*e.g.*, Ps 74,14) metaphorically used to represent the powerful pagan, former oppressors of God's people (*e.g.*, Ps 74,13.14), see also Sean P. Kealy, *The Apocalypse of John* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 172. On the theme of "chaos" as wrongly read by the interpreters of both Job 40, 41 and Ps 74, see Watson, *Chaos uncreated*, 156-168.

[151] Contrary to Sophie Laws, for whom some passages such as Ezek 32,2-8; Isa 27,1; 30,7; 51,9.10; Pss 74,13.14; 89,9.10 and Job 26,12.13 are evidence of Israel's knowledge of the chaos myth and of its use to interpret their own history (*In the light of the Lamb: Imagery, parody, and theology in the Apocalypse of John*, Good News Studies 31 [Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988], 39; see also Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation*, Bible Study Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983], 127; L. Thompson, *Revelation*, 138). On this, David Chilton agrees: "In the Greek OT, which the early church used, the Heb. word *behemoth* is translated as *therion*, the same word St. John uses for *beast*, and *leviathan* is translated as *drakon* (dragon) in Job 40:15-24; 41:1-34)" (*The days of vengeance: An exposition of the book of Revelation* [Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1987], 342). However, Rev 12-13 has been more cogently recognized as an early Christian midrash on Gen 3, where the LXX has also ὁ ὄφις for Satan (*cf*. Rev 12,9), and where the serpent is characterized also as "more crafty than any of the wild animals [θηρία]" (Gen 3,1; NIV). On θηρία as a general designation of wild animals also including the δράκων / ὄφις *cf*. Acts 28,4.5. On Rev 12-13 as a midrash on Gen 3, see Michaels, *Interpreting*, 125; Michaels, *Revelation*, 122; Minear, *I saw a New Earth*, 259; Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 231; Feuillet, *The Apocalypse*, 79.

in Genesis 3,15, where we explicitly have a prophesied eschatological enmity between the serpent (נָחָשׁ in vv. 1, 4, 13, and 14 of the MT), on one hand, and the woman and her offspring (masculine הוּא in the Hebrew of the MT), on the other (*cf.* Rev 12,17). The eschatological crushing of the serpent's head announced in Genesis 3,15 is matched in Revelation 12,5 through the thematic and literary allusion to Psalms 2,9 (*cf.* also Rev 13,3.12.14).

The δράκων of Revelation 12,3 is explicitly interpreted in v. 9 as ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, a perfect match to the הַנָּחָשׁ of Genesis 3 in the MT and even in the LXX, which has ὁ ὄφις there.[152] Furthermore, it is said that the out-of-the-earth/land θηρίον of Revelation 13,11 deceives the earth/land and its inhabitants not by force, unlike the sea-beast, but by performing great visual wonders and signs (vv. 13, 14) and by speaking ὡς δράκων.[153] Since the only antecedent for that δράκων-like speaking is the δράκων who is

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[152] On the meaning of δράκων in Rev 12, 13, Austin Farrer says: "Dragon in the Greek language means neither more nor less than 'serpent'" (*The Revelation of St. John the Divine* [London: Oxford University Press, 1964], 143; see also John Philip McMurdo Sweet, *Revelation*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries [Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1979], 215; Raymond J. Loenertz, *The Apocalypse of Saint John* [London: Sheed & Ward, 1947], 92; Minear, *I saw a New Earth*, 247, 250). The relevance of this seemingly minor detail is highlighted against the backdrop of a comment by Prigent: "Since long ago, the fabulous tale that we read there [in Rev 12] has seemed impossible to explain solely on the basis of the Jewish tradition. It has therefore been tempting to find sources for the vision in different religious spheres" (*Commentary*, 64). This "impossibility to explain" the picture of Rev 12 "solely on the basis of Jewish tradition" is perhaps in part due to the insistence in translating δράκων as "dragon" instead of simply "serpent," which would have helped the interpreters to recognize in the OT the allusive sources of Rev 12, with no need of looking elsewhere for any mythic parallelism. As Ramsey Michaels and others have pointed out, Rev 12 is basically a Jewish-Christian midrash on Gen 3 (*Interpreting*, 125; Ramsey J. Michaels, *Revelation*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 122; Minear, *I saw a New Earth*, 259; Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 231; Feuillet, *The Apocalypse*, 79). On δράκων as a designation of a serpent, see Ps 91,13 (LXX 90,13), where the Heb. פֶּתֶן (venomous serpent) is in parallel to תַּנִּין (LXX δράκων).

[153] The lack of the definite article usually stresses quality instead of identity, especially when accompanied by a comparative particle such as ὡς (*e.g.*, see James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* [Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979], 67, 68). However, its absence also could be due to the influence of a Semitic idiom, and traceable to the construct state in Hebrew (see Charles F. D. Moule, *An idiom book of the New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959], 117, 177).

ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς,[154] who deceived Eve by the wonder and the content of its speaking in Genesis 3,1.4. This takes us back to Genesis 3, not to a Near Eastern ancient myth, as the allusive antecedent of Revelation 12 and 13.[155]

Behemoth and the beast of Revelation 13,11: Where from?

The provenance and the realm of influence of the second beast of Revelation 13, in contrast to that of the Jewish apocalyptic Behemoth, also should be noted here. While the former is seen by John as coming out of the earth (Gr. γῆ; ארעא in the Peshitta), in contrast to the wilderness (ἔρημος), with its connotation of the realm of the devil and of his antichrist,[156] the postexilic Jewish elaboration of the biblical Behemoth is settled squarely in an invisible desert (*1 Enoch* 60,8), in the dry desert (*1 Enoch* 60,9).

The non-mythical biblical cosmogony

The most natural places to look for traces of the chaos myth in the biblical record would be those passages having to do with cosmogony. In the OT, such a place is *par excellence* Genesis 1, the canonical Hebrew record of the beginnings. However, there is nothing there about

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[154] Recognizing this association between the dragon-like speech of the second beast and the dragon of chap. 12, who is "the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan" (v. 9, NIV), Morris comments, although without elaborating: "His speech resembles that of the evil one" (*Revelation*, 166).

[155] See Siegbert W. Becker, *Revelation: The distant triumph song* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern, 1985), 205. In the context of this dissertation, "myth" means an ancient explanation of reality, nature, or history sometimes based on and evolving from a distant, factual event, which in the process of cultural preservation and transmission became embedded within an ever-growing non-factual kernel. By its very nature, the Bible is in this respect counter-mythic, or at least non-mythic, in that it claims to communicate through divine revelation the true witness of the events the ancient myths could be echoing in a more or less vague way. Consider the *Enuma Elish* and the "Epic of Gilgamesh" compared to the Genesis account of creation and the flood. See also the conflict motif in the Near Eastern combat myths as perhaps a vague echo of a proto-historical event depicted as a battle between Michael and the dragon in Rev 12. On the nuances of μῦθος as the word behind the English "myth," see Gustav Stählin, "μῦθος," *TDNT*, 4:767-768.

[156] *Cf.* Rev 17,3; Matt 4,1; 24,26 and parallels; Acts 21,38. In the OT, the wilderness is also associated with evil (*e.g.*, Lev 16,8.10.26).

a primeval struggle between the God of creation and the forces of evil personified by the sea or any other natural realm.[157] In the words of David Barr, even more significant, since he is in favor of the chaos-related mythical interpretation of sea and earth in Revelation 13: "Israel's creation story has no primeval battle with chaos."[158]

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[157] On the lack of any connotation of evil in the primeval sea of Gen 1, see Younker, *God's creation*, 27; Chilton, *Days of vengeance*, 327 (quoting Gen 1,31 in support of his idea; *cf.* v. 10b); Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 232, 233; Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 161.

[158] Along the same line, Barr, *Tales of the end,* 106; Sophie Laws, while insisting on seeing in the תְּהוֹם of Gen 1,2 a "watery chaos before creation," in what she regards as the "demythologized Israel's creation myth in its normative biblical form," also recognizes that "Israel did not adopt this myth" and that "a battle between God and a chaos monster is no part of the story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2" (*In the light*, 39); *cf.* Hilgert, for whom "this myth is never recounted explicitly in the OT" (*Ship and related symbols*, 43). See also Younker, *God's creation*, 10, 11, 27; Gerald W. Wheeler, *The two-taled dinosaur* (Nashville, TN: Southern, 1975), 182-191; Dunston, "As it was," 33-37; Chilton, *Days of vengeance*, 327; Gerhard F. Hasel, "The significance of the cosmology in Genesis 1 in relation to ancient Near Eastern parallels," *AUSS* 10 (1972): 4-7, 20. Nahum M. Sarna says in agreement: "The Genesis creation account in its non-political, non-cultic and non-mythological nature and function represents a complete break with Near Eastern tradition" (*Understanding Genesis* [New York: Schocken, 1970], 9). David F. Payne also agrees when he comments: "The biblical account [of creation] is theologically not only far different from, but totally opposed to the ancient Near Eastern myths" (*Genesis one reconsidered* [London: Tyndale, 1968], 29). See also David Toshio Tsumura: *The earth and the waters in Genesis 1 and 2*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 83 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 45-61; *Creation and destruction: A reappraisal of the Chaoskampf theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 36-57, 143; "The *Chaoskampf* myth in the biblical tradition," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 140, No. 4 (2020): 963-969; Robert Reed Lessing, "Yahweh versus Marduk: Creation theology in Isaiah 40-55," *CJ* 36 (2010): 239, 240; Gordon H. Johnston, "Genesis 1 and ancient Egyptian creation myths," *BSac* 165 (2008): 178-194 *Cf.* John H. Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and the ancient Near East: Order out of disorder after *Chaoskampf*," *CTJ* 43 (2008): 55, 62; Roberto Ouro, "Similarities and differences between the Old Testament and the ancient Near Eastern texts," *AUSS* 49 (2011): 13, 14; Oswalt, *The Bible among the myths,* 64-80.

On תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ in Gen 1,2 as a synonym of "uninhabited and formless," unlike the idea of disorder and active opposition to creation behind the chaos myth construct, see "Genesis," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1992), 1:220, 221; *cf.* Job 26,7; Isa 40,17.23; 49,4. This is contrary to L. Thompson, for whom the sea in Rev 13,1 is "an image of the abyss of chaos over which God had to be victorious in order to create an ordered world" (*Revelation*, 138). For some other proponents of the Babylonian Tiamat as behind the Hebrew תְּהוֹם in Gen 1, see Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 16, 42, 43; Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse*, 86, 90, 91; Robert H. Charles, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 2:204, 205; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 779; Krodel, *Revelation*, 247; David S. Russell, *The method and message of Jewish apocalyptic* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1964), 123-125; Robert H. Mounce, *The book of Revelation,* rev. ed., The

And according to T. Dunston:

> The difference between these creation stories and the Genesis account is astronomical. Normally, when Genesis is compared with other creation narratives it is to show the similarities. Here are excerpts of the first two chapters […] in particular the glaring absence of a primeval victory for God. […] Where is the violence? Where is the heroic overcoming? Where is the struggle of the new God against a primeval order? On all these topics, Genesis is deliberately silent.[159]

Moreover, the Genesis account of the origins has long ago been recognized as a theological pronouncement. It is precisely against that same mythical conception of the origins prevalent in the Ancient Near East from as early as the second millennium BC.[160]

Even two Jewish witnesses of the first century, the time when Revelation was written, the Palestinian Josephus (AD 37-circa 100) and the Diaspora Jew Philo of Alexandria (circa 20 BC-circa AD 50), know nothing about a primeval struggle for the cosmic kingship between the forces of chaos and those of creation in the Hebrew canonical chronicle of origins.[161]

New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 5; Boring, *Revelation*, 155, 156, 160; Burch, *Anthropology*, 97; Thomas E. Schmidt, "'And the sea was no more': Water as people, not place," in *To tell the mystery: Essays in New Testament eschatology in honor of Robert H. Gundry*, ed. Thomas E. Schmidt and Moisés Silva, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Series 100 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 238, 239.

[159] Dunston, "As it was," 35, 36.

[160] *E.g.*, Herr, "Genesis one," 51-62; Johnston, "Genesis 1 and ancient Egyptian creation myths," 191-194; Gerhard F. Hasel, "The polemic nature of the Genesis cosmology," *EQ* 46 (1974): 81-102; Gerhard F. Hasel, "The significance of the cosmology in Genesis 1 in relation to ancient Near Eastern parallels," *AUSS* 10 (1972): 1-20; Steven W. Boyd, "The genre of Genesis 1:1-2:3: What means this text?" in *Coming to grips with Genesis: Biblical authority and the age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 187-191; Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation out of nothing: A biblical, philosophical, and scientific exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 30-36; Jacques B. Doukhan, *The Genesis creation story: Its literary structure* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978), 18-25; Conrad Hyers, *The meaning of creation: Genesis and modern science* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1984), 42-46; John Stek, "What says the Scripture?" in *Portraits of creation*, ed. Howard J. Van Till (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 229-231; JoAnn Scurlock, "Chaoskampf lost—Chaoskampf regained: The Gunkel hypothesis revisited," in *Creation and chaos: A reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskampf hypothesis*, JoAnn Scurlock and Richard Beal, eds. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 257-268.

[161] Josephus, "The constitution of the world and the disposition of the elements," in *The works of Josephus complete and unabridged*, new updated edition, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA:

This absence is even more significant in two writers whose main agenda was to make Judaism intellectually acceptable to the educated Hellenistic pagan minds of their time, and whose own written production shows clear evidences of Hellenization.[162]

Another postexilic Jewish elaboration on the Genesis creation is found in *4 Ezra* 6,49-53, an apocalypse contemporaneous to John's Revelation. However, it also lacks any allusion to the proposed primeval chaos myth, which is all the more noticeable in a document exhibiting some ideological contacts with the cosmological Greek thought of its time.[163]

In the New Testament, the prologue of the fourth Gospel, John 1,1-3.10, and Colossians 1,16 are perhaps the most conspicuous theological-cosmogonic passages. The affinities and connections between John 1 and Genesis 1 are indisputable.[164] These documents lack, as does Genesis 1, any reference to a primeval cosmogonic conflict between the creator deity, the pre-incarnated Son of God, and the forces of evil.

The counter-mythical program of the Bible

There are certainly some detectable traces in the Old Testament and the New Testament of contact with the folklore and mythology of their cultural environments, and Revelation is no exception. Nevertheless, most of that participation in their surrounding ideological atmosphere seems to be motivated either by evangelism or apologetics, but always

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Hendrickson, 1987), 1.27-33); Philo, "On the creation of the world (De Opificio Mundi)," in *The works of Philo complete and unabridged*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 3-24.

[162] See, for instance, Josephus's "Discourse to the Greeks concerning hades," and Philo's elaboration on the two Adams.

[163] This is noticeable in view of some seemingly anti-materialistic hints in the narrative, such as the absence of any direct contact of the Creator with matter, even in the creation of the human being on the sixth day. This is totally unlike the biblical account of Genesis.

[164] On this, see Raymond R. Brown, *The gospel according to John (I-XII)*, Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 2, 4; Jon Paulien, *John: Jesus gives life to a new generation*, The Abundant Life Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 42, 43.

within an either explicit or implicit counter-mythical aim.[165] There is also a formal borrowing of the language and imagery of some popular beliefs without participating in their ideological contents. Finally, there is also great freedom and creativity in the utilization of previous and contemporary imagery and terminology for the particular purpose of the writer and the circumstances of his original audience.

In sum, any mythical traces seemingly detectable in Revelation could be part of John's counter-mythical program. In view of this, the few elements resembling the proposed model of the combat myth in Revelation 13 (*i.e.*, the mention of the sea and two symbolic evil beasts), provided they are in fact somehow connected with the combat-chaos myth, could have been alluded to by the radically anti-mythical John in his narrative, as part of his counter-mythic agenda.[166]

In the words of G. K. Beale:

> Some commentators think that John has drawn the dragon figure primarily from ancient Near eastern mythologies depicting the god's defeat of an evil sea monster (Collins' *Combat Myth* 57-155 is quoted). But the opposite is true. [...] It is absurd to think that John is a copyist of "ill-digested pagan myths," since the thrust of his whole book is a polemic against tolerance of idolatry and compromise with pagan institutions.[167]

Summary and conclusions

The presence of the chaos myth as an articulate and consistent paradigm to explain the origin of the natural world and life in it in the extant ancient Near Eastern literary sources is open to discussion. As was already noted, the evidence invoked in favor of such an assertion is too fragmentary and conjecturally interpreted to reach a positive conclusion.

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[165] Something resembling the "point of contact-point of conflict" missiological strategy of the early second-century postapostolic Christian apologists. On this, see David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52a (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997), 103-105.

[166] Morris, *Revelation*, 151.

[167] Beale, *Revelation*, 634. See also Beale, *The use of Daniel in Jewish apocalyptic literature*, 230, 231; András Dávid Pataki, "A non-combat myth in Revelation 12," NTS 57 (2011): 268-271.

In the canonical biblical corpus, the language and imagery seemingly referring to that myth are more naturally explainable as sharing the same antecedent of biblical terminology, imagery, and theology. Thus, the chaos myth is not a necessary datum for doing the exegesis of Revelation 12-13. This can be said also of the same elements in postexilic, non-canonical literature. Both bodies of literature are intertextually closer to the Genesis account of creation and later canonical elaborations and extensions (*e.g.*, Daniel 7) than to any ancient mythical source. Their deepest roots take their nourishment from the Pentateuch rather than ancient Near Eastern mythical cosmogonies and theogonies.[168] Following Yarbro Collins's logic, the relationship between two documents or traditions having much in common cannot be explained simply as a coincidence, but as dependence of the more recent one on the older. Since Revelation 12 and 13, as does Daniel 7, share so much with the much earlier Genesis 1-3—far older than Hyginus's version of the Leto-Apollo-Python myth and even than a sixth century BC Daniel 7—this is more likely the allusive ancestor of John's material.[169]

The literary and theological dependence of John's Apocalypse on the OT for its language and imagery is evident even to the casual observer and has been unanimously recognized. Thus the images and vocabulary of Revelation 12 and 13 are more naturally and easily explained and understood in the light of that preexistent biblical tradition.[170]

Postexilic Jewish literature, even closer in genre to the book of Revelation (*e.g.*, *4 Ezra*), does not reflect any dependence on the combat myth

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[168]   Reinforcing this, the association between the serpent and evil, so prominent in Rev 12 and 13, is not consistently witnessed outside the Bible, but in it and from as early as the time Genesis was composed. In contrast to that, there are some noticeable examples of the common association between the serpent and some form of moral good, such as the naasian [from the Heb. נָחָשׁ, serpent] branch of Gnosticism and some Greco-Roman mystery cults as that of Asclepius. In that respect, see, among others, Eduard Lohse, *The New Testament environment* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976), 226, 227.

[169]   Ramsey Michaels recognizes this when he refers to Rev 12-13 as John's midrash on Gen 3,15 (*Interpreting*, 125; Michaels, *Revelation*, 122). See also Minear, *I saw a New Earth*, 259; Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 231; Feuillet, *The Apocalypse*, 79.

[170]   *E.g.*, Gen 3; God's people represented as a pure woman; the Exodus from Egypt as a model of her sheltering from the Serpent Satan; etc. See Beale, *Revelation*, 634.

in its retelling of the Genesis account of creation. This is even more significant in view of the impact Hellenism had on the formative stage of Judaism during the intertestamental period, as is evident in the OT apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. The same is true regarding such first-century AD Jewish sources as Josephus and Philo.

The early Christian understanding of Revelation is another witness making the chaos-myth reading of Revelation 12 and 13 not the best to account for the evidence available and, thus, allowing for further study such as that pursued in this research. The postapostolic fathers and apologists from the early second century AD on would have commented, either from a missiological or polemical perspective, on those mythical elements had they perceived them to exist, as is the case with other portions of Scripture. From the perspective of the early second- and third-century Greek fathers, the chaos myth, had they perceived it in Revelation, would have probably been for them an evidence of God's implanted lesser light within the pagan world in preparation for a further and fuller stage of illumination through the church and the gospel.[171]

From another point of view, the characteristic elements of some representative ancient Near Eastern myths related to creation and the struggle between deities are absent from Old and New Testaments, including Revelation 12 and 13. Such is the case, for instance, of the etiologic and cosmogonic interest perceivable behind those myths, and the recurrence and cyclic repetitiveness of some natural phenomena such as the seasons.

The purported connections between Revelation 12-13 and some selected ancient Near Eastern myths are too few and too loose. The presence of some elements seemingly resembling those myths (a woman somehow allied to a hero, a fabulous sea-related beast, a struggle, etc.) in those chapters of John's Revelation can be more naturally and easily explained in ways other than derived from or dependent on extra-biblical myths. John himself squarely identifies Genesis as his main source for the visionary unit of Revelation 12-13 when he says: "The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who

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[171]   *Cf.* Eusebius's *Preparatio Evangelica*, books 10-15, and particularly 10-12.

leads the whole world astray" (Rev 12,9). Thus, in Genesis 1-3 we have the foretold conflict between the dragon/serpent and the woman and her male offspring, plus the anticipation of the outcome. We also have the deadly wound on a head belonging to the dragon/serpent, as well as beasts coming to life from the sea and the earth or land, and in the same sequence as in Revelation 13,1 and 11. Besides, there are probably additional lesser allusive connections between Revelation 12-13 and Genesis, as the apparel of the woman dressed in the sun, standing on the moon and crowned with the stars,[172] the God-given lordship motif in Genesis 1,28 and Revelation 12,6.[173]

It is no surprise, then, that Revelation 12-13 has been labeled by several scholars as a Christian midrash of Genesis 3. One might ask: Could it be, as some have argued, that there is in Revelation a counter-mythical use of myth, with the polemic purpose of exposing the pitfalls of the Roman Hellenistic pagan propaganda from the Christian perspective?[174]

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[172] *Cf.* Gen 37,9.

[173] Although the clearer OT source of Rev 12,5 is Ps 2,9, in the light of the shared theme and the verb ποιμαίνω instead of κατακυριεύω and ἄρχω in Gen 1,28.

[174] *E.g.*, Witherington, *Revelation*, 44; Paul, *The use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12*, 269-271; Boring, *Revelation*, 55. Steven J. Friesen says on this that "John deployed myths borrowed from Jewish and Gentile sources in creative and disorienting ways for the purpose of alienating his audience from mainstream society in a sort of symbolic resistance by a minority viewpoint in a particular social context," thus making John's Revelation "a classic text of symbolic resistance to dominant society, against social hierarchy and in defense of a minority perspective" ("Myth and symbolic resistance in Revelation 13," *JBL* 123 [2004]: 313). In Paulien's words: "In his use of non-canonical sources, it was not generally John's intention to support the theology found therein. The very thrust of Revelation is in violent opposition to much that the pagan society of the first century stood for (cf., e.g., Rev 2:13-16, 20-23). John advocates withdrawal from such ideas and practices. And although there are many parallels of language and imagery between Revelation and Jewish apocalypses such as *1 Enoch*, the theological differences are very significant. Far more apocalyptic ideas and themes are missing in Revelation than are used. The radical difference between the Revelator's use of the canonical books and his use of non-canonical materials is striking. The revelator... never alluded to more than two percent of any non-canonical book... [He] clearly has a special relationship with the Old Testament. Therefore, it is clear that although the text of Revelation witnesses to his awareness of apocalyptic ideas, he generally alludes more directly to the Old Testament than to other sources. Even where there are strong parallels to a pagan apocalyptic source, it was rarely John's intention that the reader compare what he was reading with some previous non-canonical literary source" (*Trumpets*, 46, note 4; 47). See also Pataki, "A non-combat myth in Revelation 12," *NTS* 57 (2011): 271; Van Henten, "Dragon myth," 181-203.

This may seem self-evident in the light of the anti-mythical way some contemporaneous mythical jargon is used in the book. However, to insist that John somehow shared in the myths surrounding him and his audience,[175] or that such a mythical background was the main literary and ideological matrix informing Revelation 12-13,[176] seems to go farther than the evidence allows.

In this respect, the OT as John's main literary and theological basis for Revelation, chapters 12 and 13 in particular, is currently a growing scholarly consensus and makes the most natural background for decoding the author's originally intended meaning for the language and imagery he uses throughout his book.[177] Besides, it seems highly unlikely that

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[175] Court says that "the author seems to be using... traditional themes [*i.e.*, postexilic Jewish apocalyptic literature plus some pagan religious traditions] and adapting them to have a specific application in the current situation of the churches. So we have a combination of traditional ideas with references to the contemporary situation" (*Myth*, 42). Daniel J. Harrington says, in agreement with the "rebirth of images" concept, that John "gave them [his sources, both biblical and non-biblical] a new meaning and dynamism by placing them in the context of the Christ-event" (*Revelation: The book of the risen Christ* [Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999], 13). For Metzger, what John makes of his non-biblical sources in Revelation is "a new christianized use of Near Eastern and Greek mythical traditions" (Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the code: Understanding the book of Revelation* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993], 72). On some "echoes of the non-Jewish combat myth in Revelation 12," see Witherington, *Revelation*, 33; Paul Spillsbury, *The throne, the Lamb and the dragon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 90, 91; Boring, *Revelation*, 55; Paul, *The use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12*, 269-271. In terms closely resembling Eusebius's *Preparatio Evangelica* and the second-century Christian apologists on the best of paganism as no more than a borrowing from Moses or "the spermatic Logos," Witherington states: "In Christ all the primal myths and the truths they enshrine come true. He proves to be the archetype of which these others are mere types of fictional copies" (*Revelation*, 44).

[176] Yarbro Collins states that Revelation's major images and narrative patterns "are best understood in the framework of the ancient myths of combat" (*Combat myth*, 1, 2); Mounce agrees: Yarbro Collins "demonstrates that the underlying pattern of Revelation and a considerable amount of its imagery have strong affinities with the mythic pattern of combat which was widespread in the ancient Near East" (Review of *The combat myth in the book of Revelation*, by Adela Yarbro Collins, *JBL* 98 [1979]: 461, 462). See also Van Henten, "Dragon myth," 181-203.

[177] See the Old Testament background of Rev 13 in Cotro, "Up from sea and earth," 217-263. On Revelation as not borrowing from Jewish apocalyptic or from syncretic Eastern paganism, see Lenski, *Revelation*, 17; Prigent, *Commentary*, 67, 68. Tenney comments in this respect: "The book does not become more intelligible as one progresses in the examination of its background... When the symbolism of Scripture is explained in its own terms, one feels on safer ground than when he attempts a solution that is founded on purely external criteria"

the intransigent John, allegedly embarked on a crusade against emperor and Roman worship, and clearly opposed to the Asian Christians' partaking of food consecrated to deities such as Isis and Apollo in Revelation 2 and 3, suddenly in chapter 12 evokes the same mythical lore he so hated, now as didactic Christological material. In the words of Martin McNamara:

> The weakness of the comparative method is that it sought to establish a direct relation between a biblical writer and pagan mythologies. This is to forget the intense biblical coloring of the New Testament work. Intrinsically, it is highly improbable that the inspired writer should pass from the imagery of God's relationship with his chosen people to that of the astral deities of pagan religions.[178]

The intransigence of two Jews such as Daniel (*e.g.*, Daniel 1,8; 3) and John (*e.g.*, Rev 2,14.15.20-24), in their respective times and settings, should suffice to produce second thoughts on attributing to either any dependence, even literary, on any ancient Near Eastern mythical tradition. A further confirmation of this could be, for instance, the fact that the outer envelope of idolatry is used by God to accommodate his oracle to the pagan Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2, while basically the same content is relieved of such an offensive envelope for a Jew when reiterated to the Jewish Daniel in chapter 7, where the form is that of animals rather than an idol.[179] It also could be argued that John and Daniel were allying the evil powers with the myth. However, and unlike the rest of the book, elements in Revelation 13 resembling previous and contemporary mythical traditions are not anti-mythical enough or used polemically enough to be explained as a polemic borrowing, mostly in the light of John's overall style and rhetorical strategy.

(*Interpreting*, 112). On pagan mythology as "prominent and purposeful but infrequent" in regard to John's sources, see also Frederick David Mazzaferri, *The genre of the book of Revelation from a source-critical perspective* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 57.

[178] McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, 191. See also Beale, *Revelation*, 634; Beale, *The use of Daniel in Jewish apocalyptic literature*, 130, 131; Morris, *Revelation*, 156; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 178.

[179] *E.g.*, John J. Collins, "Apocalyptic genre and mythic allusions in Daniel," *JSOT* 21 (1981): 83-100.

Another consideration contrary to both John's synthetic sharing in his surrounding mythical world view and to a mildly polemic utilization of myth as that proposed for Revelation 12-13 is the overtly anti-mythical nature of his document and the way he consistently deals with the issue of idolatry in the programmatic letters to the churches, as well as his strategy and purpose throughout the book.[180] In other words, it would be incongruent to adapt mythical material in chapter 12 only to boldly reject it in chapter 17, according to the same interpreters.[181] It would be inconsistent to subtly and smoothly replace Christ by Horus,[182] Apollo, and the Apollo-like Emperor in Revelation 12, while crudely denouncing Rome and the emperor as a monster in chapter 13 and as a prostitute in chapter 17. Besides being suicidal in a document destined to be read aloud in public, such an abrupt change in the narrative and the rhetorical strategy would certainly contradict the portrait Revelation consistently paints of John as a master in his literary and rhetorical art. Moreover, such a lack of consistency in the use of symbolisms would not be attested elsewhere in the book.

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[180] Prigent comments: "The use of astral and other myths shows itself to be inadequate in explaining the images and symbols of the book of Revelation…It is the Old Testament alone that allows us to shed on our text a light that does not only reveal the origin of the materials used, but also highlights the intention of these references and therefore leads us to their meaning…If one were to devote half of the ingenuity deployed to uncover possible mythological parallels of Revelation 12 in seeking similarities on Jewish soil, one would obtain impressive results. This does not mean…that there is nothing in common between these mythologies and the book of Revelation (here and there some symbolic language of the same stock). We must merely raise a doubt concerning the idea that the author of the book of Revelation could have made direct use of the repertory of a paganism that he denounces so vigorously elsewhere, in order to choose within it a scenario that is on the one hand so imprecise, and on the other hand carries so little meaning…He has not transposed a myth (a hypothetical one); rather, he falls in line with a tradition which has taught him to demythologize" (*Commentary*, 64, 67, 68). *Cf*. Boring, *Revelation*, 43; Morris, *Revelation*, 151; Pataki, "A non-combath myth in Revelation 12," 268-272.

[181] On goddess Rome as allegedly turned by John into the prostitute of Rev 17, see Boring, *Revelation*, 179, 180. Instead of focusing on borrowing and dependence, one could perhaps explain some similarities between Rev 12-13 and the Greco-Roman mythic mindset surrounding John as his being familiar with his opponent's language and ideas so as to critique them.

[182] The apparent disappearance of the birth of Horus from the myth before the first century CE has been signaled as a problem for seeing it behind Rev 12. *E.g.*, Pataki, "A non-combat myth in Revelation 12," 271.

The same logic applied to the narrative and rhetorical relationship between Revelation 12 and Revelation 17 is even more pressing in the case of Revelation 12-13. Both chapters constitute a fully integrated, literary, and visionary unit. Therefore, both chapters must be understood in a way consistent with their organic relationship and nature. What this means is that if Revelation 13 is understood as a polemic against myths such as those of Isis-Osiris, Mithras, Dionysus and Adonis, Demeter, and Kore, it is unlikely that the writer was so lenient on those same myths in Revelation 12, the first part of the same visionary unit. In other words, it is highly problematic to find an agreement between an alleged Christianized version of Isis in Revelation 12 and such a bold denouncement of her—as well as the other related deities—in chapter 13. Isis cannot be a heroine in disguise in chapter 12 and a demon in chapter 13. John cannot be so harshly anti-mythical in chapter 13, yet so mildly anti-mythical in chapter 12. Thus, I agree with Michaels and others that Revelation 12-13 is and should be read as a midrash of Genesis 3 rather than as a mythical tradition reworked or elaborated in a Christian fashion.[183] On this, Michaels says:

> If Genesis 3:15 is the proper point of reference, then there is an actual text behind chapters 12-13, not just an unknown cycle of traditions. These two chapters are not so much a myth as a midrash (an expanded paraphrase of an authoritative text). John's vision expands a single text (Gen 3:15) into an extraordinary two-stage account of an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil. Chapter 12 details the enmity between the serpent (the Dragon) and the woman; chapter 13, the enmity between the serpent's "seed" (the Beast from the sea) and the "seed" of the woman (Christian believers). It is no accident, therefore, that one of the Beast's heads is "as slain [σφάζω] to death," and his mortal wound was healed (13:3; see also vv. 12, 14). Words spoken long ago to the serpent in Genesis, "he will strike your head," come true in John's vision. Both, the Lamb's and the dragon's "battle scars" [σφάζω] can only be understood in the terms of Jesus' death on the cross. The logic of John's use of Gen 3:15 suggests that this event was also the wounding of the Beast.[184]

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[183] Michaels, *Interpreting*, 125; Michaels, *Revelation*, 122. See also Minear, *I saw a New Earth*, 259; Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 231; Feuillet, *The Apocalypse*, 79; *cf.* Prigent, *Commentary*, 64; Morris, *Revelation*, 151; Pataki, "A non-combath myth in Revelation 12," 268-272; Van Henten, "Dragon myth," 181-203.

[184] Michaels, *Revelation*, 122, 123.

Besides Genesis 3, Treacy-Cole suggests some other OT antecedents as also possibly concurring on the Revelation 12-13 collage:

> I want to argue that the reader does not need to look beyond the Hebrew Bible to identify a precedent for this apocalyptic woman (namely Agar in Gen 16 and 21). Revelation draws on themes or moments from Israelite history to remind the readers of God's saving acts in history and to exhort them. [...] [Thus, there are] numerous allusions to Isaiah and Daniel throughout the book. The author is familiar with Genesis and the use of Exodus typologies [...] including Joseph's dream of the sun, moon and stars (Gen 37:9-11), the serpent (Gen 3), the earth swallowing the flood (Ex 15:12; cf. Num 16:32-34), the great eagle (Ex 19:4), the stars thrown down to earth (Dan 8:10), and the miraculous feeding (Ex 16:4-17:7). It is curious then that the model for the woman clothed with the sun is drawn from non-Jewish traditions. A pagan antecedent becomes less convincing as the source for this intriguing figure when the woman in Revelation 12 is described not as clothed with the sun, but as the woman sheltered in the wilderness.[185]

In sum, could Revelation 13,1 and 11 reflect in some way some mythic traditions in the air of first-century Asia, traceable back to the ancient Near East, such as that of the struggle among cosmic divine powers? That is a possibility as long as John's anti-mythic program in Revelation is kept in mind. Thus, the resemblances between Revelation 12-13 and the Greco-Roman mythic atmosphere surrounding John could be part of his counter-mythic strategy and agenda. He needed to be familiar with his opponents' language and ideas to critique them. However, it seems that the lack of an overtly polemic usage, plus the allusive DNA so straightforwardly linking Revelation 12-13 and the OT, makes the mythic connection not the best option.

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[185] Treacy-Cole, *Wilderness*, 45, 46.

Appendix: Sea and earth in Revelation

For the authors favorable to the chaos-myth reading of Revelation 13, the sea has an intrinsic mythological significance as a representation of chaos and evil, demonic powers. A. Boesak, for instance, says: "The sea is the nether resource of evil, the abode of Leviathan. Its eternal restlessness is the restlessness of a monster on the prowl, forever moving, forever threatening."[186] However, even if such an inherently negative moral nuance of the sea could be demonstrated in the ancient Near Eastern cosmogonic literature—which is not the case according to the discussion already presented on the Mesopotamian myths—that is certainly not the situation in the book of Revelation,[187] or in the canonical corpus in general.[188]

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[186] Allan Boesak, *Comfort and protest: The Apocalypse from a South African perspective* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1986), 94; Witherington, *Revelation*, 180. Interestingly, Witherington bases his assertion on the demonic nature of the sea on some "ancient beliefs" without providing any reference to any documentary source; see also Charles H. Giblin, *The book of Revelation: The open book of prophecy,* Good News Studies 34 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 132; Prigent, *Commentary*, 402.

[187] Contrary, for instance, to C. Freeman Sleeper, for whom "the sea almost always has a negative connotation [in the book of Revelation]" (*The victorious Christ: A study of the book of Revelation* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 29). Yet, that does not seem to be the case in any of the 26 occurrences of the word θάλασσα there. Interestingly, although of the same conviction, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza does not quote, unlike Sleeper, Rev 12 and 13 in support of such a view, but Rev 9,2; 11,7, where the word used is not θάλασσα but ἄβυσσος, synonyms for Fiorenza, but not according to other interpreters (*e.g.*, Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in introduction with a critical and exegetical commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1967], 633). See Fiorenza, *Just world*, 83.

[188] *4 Ezra* (according to its designation in the Vulgate; 2 Esdras in the LXX and in modern language Bible versions) 13,1-5.25 seems to be a good example of a postexilic, first-century AD, extra-biblical and eschatological witness of a morally neutral symbolic sea, out of which a character as morally pure as the Messiah emerges. This is contrary to J. B. Smith's opinion that *4 Ezra* shows the presence of the sea-related chaos myth (see J. B. Smith, *Revelation*, 235), to that of G. K. Beale, for whom "the writer [of *4 Ezra*], indeed, is aware of the Old Testament meaning of the sea as the origin of cosmic evil" ("The problem of the man from the sea in IV Ezra 13 and its relation to the messianic concept in John's Apocalypse," *NovT* 25 [1983]: 185), and to George Bradford Caird's assertion that in the light of its contextual usage in the Old Testament and, especially throughout Revelation, the sea has the nuance of evil (*The Revelation of St. John*, Black's New Testament Commentary [Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 1966], 65-68). See, in contrast, Hasel, "Cosmology in Genesis 1," 4-7, 20; H. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1943), 39, 40; Dunston, "As it was," 33-37; Wheeler, *Two-taled dinosaur*, 182-191; Chilton, *Days of vengeance*, 327; *cf.* Richard Bauckham, *Resurrection as giving back the dead: A traditional image of resurrection in the pseudepigrapha and the Apocalypse of John*, in

The fact that in Revelation 13,1 the demonic first beast comes out of the sea is not enough to establish a morally evil equation between them.[189] In other words, a bad product does not necessarily mean a bad origin. In Revelation 12, Satan himself and all his minions are seen coming down from heaven, which does not throw any shadow on the moral nature of divinity. Pressing the illustration further, all the angels, including Lucifer, were created by God, which does not make God responsible for Satan's moral debasement (*cf.* Gen 1,31).

The biblical perception of nature

Nature, and the sea as one of its components, is always represented in the Bible as a docile and obedient subject of its divine Creator and Master.[190] Even in the narratives where the overwhelming power of the elements over the human realm is stressed, the underlying and final message is always God's sovereignty, lordship, and control over his creation (*cf.* Mark 4,41). The stress on the strength of the elements is a literary resource to show

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The pseudepigrapha and early biblical interpretation, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Craig A. Evans, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 14, Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity 2 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 291. Another example of a positively connoted sea is Isis's theophanic appearance out of the sea to Lucius in Apuleius's second century *Metamorphoses* 11. While Lucius was still in the shape of an ass, spending the night asleep on the warm sand of the seashore (*cf.* Rev 13,1), he says: "Scarcely had I closed my eyes when lo! From the midst of the deep there arose that face divine to which even the gods must do reverence. Then a little at a time, slowly, her whole shining body emerged from the sea and came into full view" (quoted in Frederick C. Grant, *Hellenistic religions: The age of syncretism* [New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953], 137).

[189] *E.g.*, Beale says in this regard: "He [the dragon] summons them [the two beasts] from the same hellish waters that he presumably came from" (*Revelation*, 681). Moreover, the dragon is never said to have come from the sea in Rev 12, 13, but from heaven (see 12,7-9).

[190] This is a characteristic of the OT sapiential and prophetic literature (*e.g.*, Job 9,8; 11,9; 26,12; 28,14; 38,8; Pss 65,7; 69,34; 89,9; 95,5; 114,3.5; 146,6; Isa 10,26; 43,16; 50,2; 51,10.15; Jer 5,22; 31,35; Amos 5,8; 9,6; Nah 1,4; Hab 3,8.15; Hag 2,6). Interestingly, even in the Akkadian version of the universal flood in the epic of Gilgamesh (tablet XI), from the seventh century BC, the waters occupy a not at all conspicuous place within the narrative and act in compliance with the gods' wishes and command, not in an independent or autonomous way. They are morally neutral, so to say, having neither a good nor an evil intrinsic connotation or shade of meaning. See Maureen G. Kovacs, trans., *The epic of Gilgamesh* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 97-108; *cf.* Pritchard, *ANET*, 1st ed., 1950, 93-97.

humans their comparative weakness (*cf.* Ps 107,23ff.), but nature is never depicted as engaged in an even match against its divine creator.

Revelation and the postexilic literature

As was noted, most of the authors favorable to the chaos interpretation of sea and earth in Revelation 13 quote in their support a series of postexilic sources which mention the sea-related Leviathan and the land-related Behemoth as personifications of the evil forces defeated by God on behalf of his people in an eschatological context. For these interpreters, the monsters are an elaboration of the ancient Near Eastern chaos myth.

The main problem with this assumption of a conceptual derivative connection between the key characters and realms of Revelation 13 —namely, the two beasts, the sea and the earth—and those intertestamental elaborations, is that it tends to overlook the extension and magnitude of the differences between those two bodies of tradition and literature in fields as numerous and varied as their hamartiology,[191] soteriology,[192] angelology,[193] demonology, and even eschatology.[194] In the words of Pierre Prigent, even more significant since he is in favor of such a derivative connection:

> It is true that we find a definite trace of the Jewish traditions according to which the Leviathan is a mythological monster of the seas, while the earth is the realm

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[191] In mainstream postexilic literature, sin with its consequences in human history is the exclusive responsibility of fallen angels, with a rather passive human role tending toward determinism.

[192] Salvation is predominantly ethnocentric in most of the second temple period literature.

[193] *E.g.*, while the distinctively postexilic tradition about the נְפִילִים explains some of the angels' leaving of heaven and presence on earth as their initiative, Rev 12 presents it as a divine decision through their expulsion after a fierce fight. In one case, the angels' presence on earth was their choice (*cf. Apoc. Abr.*; *1 Enoch* 18,14; 21,6), while in the other it is an involuntary confinement and the result of a defeat in battle.

[194] While the eschatological intertestamental Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha insist on the chronological consecutiveness of the present and future messianic aeons, the NT in general, particularly the Johannine and Pauline writings, see history as an overlapping of the two aeons from the perspective of an eschatology realized or inaugurated by the person and ministry of Christ. See, for instance, J. A. Bandstra, "'A kingship and priests': Inaugurated eschatology in the Apocalypse," *CTJ* 27 (April 1992): 10-25.

of Behemoth (*1 Enoch* 60:7, 8; *4 Ezra* 6:49-52; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 29:4). It is no less true that in the last two of these texts the monsters reappear at the end of time. But their eschatological role is very particular: their flesh is served to the righteous who are guests at the great Messianic banquet. Likewise in the rabbinic literature (cf. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* [Munich, 1921-1961], 4:1146, 1147, 1156-1165). That is why it seems unlikely that this tradition should be cited to explain the duality of the beasts of Rev 13. All that we can affirm is the recourse to Daniel.[195]

Thus, any recourse to this literature for clues to the meaning of John's key motifs in Revelation 13 should be balanced by the obvious differences between both traditions, as well as by the recognition of the independent and distinctive use John could have made of the former. Besides, the preeminence of the OT as John's main source of language and imagery should not be lost sight of. Further, most, if not all, the content shared by John and the Jewish apocalypses derives ultimately from that same source. Therefore, it usually occurs that a shared content may be explained as John's borrowing from the OT rather than from the Jewish apocalypses.

The Old Testament as John's main source

The evident high degree of literary dependence of John's Apocalypse on the OT, mostly via allusion or echo, is a long-established fact within the world of Revelation scholarship. In fact, it could be said that with perhaps only a few exceptions,[196] it is one of the few things almost all the specialists agree on. In view of that, it is difficult to agree with those who insist on looking outside the Hebrew OT for some mythical interpretative

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[195] Prigent, *Commentary*, 402, note 1; *cf.* Krodel, for whom the land beast has nothing to do with the Behemoth of Job 40 and *1 Enoch* 60,7-10, but is John's own creation (*Revelation,* 253). On Dan 7 rather than Job 40 as the main OT source of Rev 13 he adds: "The first beast exhausts by itself the symbolism of the vision of Daniel 7. The second beast cannot claim any such traditional model borrowed from the OT" (*Revelation*, 414). As we have already seen, Daniel is one among the OT allusive sources of Rev 13, together with Gen 1-3 and other OT passages to be analyzed in Cotro, "Up from sea and earth", 217-263.

[196] I am thinking of those who insist in looking at the book through the lenses of modern social sciences such as sociology. Bruce Malina and John J. Pilch seem to be good examples of this trend with their *A social sciences commentary of the book of Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000).

keys to Revelation's images, symbols, motifs, and themes, particularly in chapters 12 and 13. In the words of Gregory Beale:

> Some commentators think that John has drawn the dragon figure primarily from ancient Near Eastern mythologies depicting the god's defeat of an evil sea monster [Collins' *Combat Myth* 57-155 is quoted here]. But the opposite is true. The OT is the primary source, as is evident from the exclusive allusions to the Daniel 7 sea-beasts in 12:3 *ff*. and 13:1-7, along with other clear allusions to other parts of Daniel and the OT that John has woven in as part of the overall narrative. It is absurd to think that John is a copyist of 'ill-digested pagan myths,' since the thrust of his whole book is a polemic against tolerance of idolatry and compromise with pagan institutions.[197]

The visionary nature of Revelation

A further consideration regarding John's sources is that one of the most noticeable features of his Apocalypse is his insistence on the visionary nature of the content. Words related to the audiovisual perception of sounds and scenes as part of a revelatory experience abound in the book. This renders rather unlikely the derivative nature of John's imagery and language in chapters 12 and 13 from his immediate cultural milieu, as would be the case of the chaos myth.

One of the few things most Revelation scholars agree on is the radical stance of the seer of Patmos against his first-century AD Greco-Roman ideological milieu.[198] This evident revulsion against the political propaganda—inseparably linked to religious myth—of Rome in Asia makes unviable a synthesis like that of some interpreters favorable to the chaos myth reading propose. Had a Jewish Christian as radical as John relied on the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean myths as a literary and theological frame for the visions he received from the only true God? It is highly unlikely, mostly in the light of the consistent counter-mythical thrust emerging throughout his Revelation.

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[197] Beale, *Revelation*, 634. See also Beale, *The use of Daniel in Jewish apocalyptic*, 230, 231.

[198] In this respect, many have contrasted the seemingly more concessive attitude of Paul in Rom 14 and 1 Cor 8; 10 with the apparently more intransigent stand of John in Revelation.

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