

Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary

Faculty of Theology

**THE THRONE MOTIF
IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

A PhD Dissertation

Submitted by

László Gallusz

Supervisor: Dr. habil. Péter Balla

PhD Program Leader: Dr. habil. József Zsengellér

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DEDICATIONS

*To Heléna, my dear wife,
who believed in this project from the beginning
and patiently provided me encouragement on every step*

*To László and Gabriella, my parents,
who taught me with their personal example
the values of honesty, perseverance and optimistic view on life*

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ABBREVIATIONS

As regards general abbreviations, I follow David J.A. Clines, *The Sheffield Manual for Authors & Editors in Biblical Studies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2nd edn, 2005). The biblical texts quoted from Revelation are the translation of the author of this dissertation, whereas the other biblical texts, unless stated otherwise, are quoted from the Revised Standard Version.

The abbreviations of commonly used periodicals, reference works and serials are the following:

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , ed. David Noel Freedman (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992).
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AGSU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Spätjudentums und Urchristentums
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> , eds. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1972–).
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
<i>AOT</i>	<i>The Apocryphal Old Testament</i> , ed. H.F.D Sparks (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984).
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
<i>APOT</i>	<i>The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament</i> , ed. R.H. Charles (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913).
<i>AsSeign</i>	<i>Assemblées du Seigneur</i>
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>ATR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
AUSDDS	Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
AzTh	Arbeiten zur Theologie
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAGD	Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. William Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, <i>Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Chicago, Ill.: Chicago University Press, 2nd edn, 1979).
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeological Review</i>
<i>BARead</i>	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist Reader</i>
BBRSup	Bulletin for Biblical Research, Supplements
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907).
BDF	Friedrich Blass, A. Debrunner and Robert W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese

BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BibTS	Biblical Tools and Studies
<i>BMC</i>	Warwick Wroth, <i>A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum. A Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Mysia</i> (Bologna: Arnaldo Forni, 1964).
BMCRE	<i>Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum</i> , eds. H. Marringly <i>et al.</i> (6 vols.; London: British Museum, 1873–1922).
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BPW</i>	<i>Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	Continental Commentaries
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
<i>CIJ</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum</i>
CJA	Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
ConBNT	Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
<i>ConcJ</i>	<i>Concordia Journal</i>
<i>Cons</i>	<i>Consensus</i>
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
<i>CTA</i>	Herdner, Andrée, <i>Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques: découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939</i> (2 vols.; Institute Francais d'Archeologie de Beyrouth. Bibliotheque Archeologique et Historique, 79; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1963).
<i>CTM</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
<i>CTR</i>	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
DARCOM	Daniel and Revelation Committee
<i>DBI</i>	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Imagery</i> , eds. Ryken Leland, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1998).
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
<i>DLNT</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments</i> , eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997).
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Edinburgh : T. & T. Clark, 1990–94).

<i>EncDSS</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls</i> , eds. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
<i>EncJud</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
<i>EuroJTh</i>	<i>European Journal of Theology</i>
<i>EuroUS</i>	European University Studies
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>FAT</i>	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
<i>FOTL</i>	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
<i>FRLANT</i>	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>GHAT</i>	Göttingener Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>GKC</i>	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , ed. E. Kautzsch (revised and trans. A.E. Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910).
<i>GNS</i>	Good News Studies
<i>HA</i>	Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HDR</i>	Harvard Dissertation in Religion
<i>HSLA</i>	<i>Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts</i>
<i>HNT</i>	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
<i>HSM</i>	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTA</i>	Historisch-Theologische Auslegung
<i>HTKNT</i>	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HTS</i>	Harvard Theological Studies
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IBC</i>	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> , ed. Geogre Arthur Buttrick (4 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1962).
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>ITC</i>	International Theological Commentary
<i>IVPNTCS</i>	The IVP New Testament Commentary Series
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAARTS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Studies</i>
<i>JATS</i>	<i>Journal of the Adventist Theological Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSJSup</i>	Journal for the Study of Judaism, Supplement Series

<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSPSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha, Supplement Series
<i>JSQ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>JU</i>	Judentum und Umwelt
<i>LCBI</i>	<i>Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>LN</i>	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i> , eds. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989).
<i>MNTC</i>	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
<i>NCB</i>	New Century Bible
<i>NCBC</i>	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>NCBCNT</i>	New Collegeville Bible Commentary—New Testament
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NICNT</i>	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NICOT</i>	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> , ed. Colin Brown (3 vols.; Grand Rapids, 1975).
<i>NIDOTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> , ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (5 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997).
<i>NIGTC</i>	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NovTSup</i>	Novum Testamentum, Supplements
<i>NSBT</i>	New Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>NTAbh</i>	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
<i>NTD</i>	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
<i>NTL</i>	New Testament Library
<i>NTM</i>	New Testament Monographs
<i>NTOA</i>	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library
<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> , ed. James H. Charlesworth (2 vols.; London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983–85).
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>PIBA</i>	Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association
<i>PSB</i>	<i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Real-Encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>RGRW</i>	<i>Religions in the Graeco-Roman World</i>
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>

RIC	Carol V. Sutherland and R.A.G Carson, <i>The Roman Imperial Coinage</i> (London: Spink and Son, 1968).
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
RPC	Andrew Burnett, Michel Amandy and Pere Pau Ripollès, <i>The Roman Provincial Coinage I: From the Death of Caesar to the Death of Viellius (44 BC – AD 69)</i> (London: British Museum Press; Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1992).
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments
SBAB	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBLTCS	Society of Biblical Literature Text-Critical Studies
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SE	<i>Studia evangelica</i>
Semeia	<i>Semeia</i>
SGAWGW	Studien zur Geschichte des antiken Weltbildes und der griechischen Wissenschaft
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions (supplement to <i>Numen</i>)
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SOTBT	Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology
SP	Sacra Pagina
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
ST	<i>Studia theologica</i>
STDJ	<i>Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah</i>
Str-B	Herman L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, <i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch</i> (7 vols.; Munich: Beck, 1922–1961).
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigraphica
TARWPV	Theologische Arbeiten aus dem Rheinischen Wissenschaftlichen Prediger-Verein
TB	Theologische Bücherei
TBA	Tübingen Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964–76).
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , eds. Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry (15 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974–2006).
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
TJ	<i>Trinity Journal</i>

<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (trans. Mark E. Biddle; 3 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson 1997).
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TSAJ	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UBSMS	United Bible Societies' Monograph Series
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VCSup	Vigiliae Christianae, Supplements
<i>VE</i>	<i>Vox evangelica</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum, Supplements
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WBC	World Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
<i>ZPEB</i>	<i>The Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</i> , ed. Merrill C. Tenney (5 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1975).

INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation has, for almost two millennia, been treated as a Cinderella among the major works of early Christianity. It has until recently received only a fraction of the amount of scholarly attention which has been lavished on other extensive works of the New Testament such as the Gospels and the major Pauline epistles. However, the late twentieth century brought the greatest explosion in Revelation studies in history. Not only have magisterial commentaries been published, but new questions have been raised, many of the older views have been challenged and new approaches have been utilized.¹ The scholarly debates evolved mainly around the following broad questions: the use of the Old Testament in Revelation, the genre of the book, the interpretation of its symbolism, the social situation with particular attention to the imperial cults and the different readings emerging from a reader-response approach.² While significant fresh ground has been broken in each of these areas, still some of the key issues have not received the thorough study they deserve. The current research project identifies the throne motif as an area of neglect which calls for an in-depth investigation and has the potential to open up new perspectives regarding the structural and theological understanding of the book.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The great Jerome wrote to Paulinus, bishop of Nola: ‘The Apocalypse of John has as many secrets as words. I am saying less than the book deserves. It is beyond all praise; for multiple meanings lie hidden in each single word.’³ While Jerome’s statement needs to be understood primarily as an expression of his humility and helplessness in approaching Revelation, its

¹ The most representative commentaries published in last two decades are the following: Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation: An Exegetical Commentary* (3 vols.; Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1992–95); Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 1997); David E. Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols.; WBC, 52A-C; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1997–98); Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999); Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002); Gerhard Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (2 vols.; HTA; Witten: SCM R. Brockhaus; Giessen: Brunnen, 2009–11).

² For a comprehensive review of the recent developments in Revelation studies see, Grant R. Osborne, ‘Recent Trends in the Study of the Apocalypse’ in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, eds. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker; Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 473-504. For a review of the major approaches preceding the last two decades, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Revelation’ in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, eds. Eldon J. Epp and George W. MacRae (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1989), 407-27.

³ Jerome, *Ep.* 53.9.

truthfulness concerning the word *θρόνος* in the book is hardly questionable. A basic statistical overview of the term's use already reveals that the throne is a constant point of reference in Revelation: out of the sixty-two *θρόνος* references of the New Testament forty-seven are in this book spread over seventeen out of the twenty-two chapters.⁴ Moreover, it can be argued that the throne motif is not absent even from the majority of the chapters which do not contain explicit *θρόνος* references (chs. 9, 10, 15, 17 and 18), since it is either assumed or referred to by a cognate concept. Ford rightly concludes that the intensive presence of the throne in Revelation 'cannot be a coincidence'.⁵

The structure of the throne motif is far more complex than the vast majority of the motifs in the book. Revelation is not merely permeated with *θρόνος* references that generate a kind of 'snow ball effect', but the motif is featured with particular care at the central locations in the literary structure of the work. A clear indicator of the complexity is that the throne is applied not only to God, but also to the Lamb, his allies and even adversaries. Thus, thirty-six references link God individually to the throne, while the remaining eleven are ascribed in the following manner: two to God and the Lamb conjointly (22:1, 3), two individually to the Lamb (3:21; 7:17), three to the twenty-four elders (4:4[2x], 11:16), one to the saints (20:4), and in regard to God's adversaries, one to Satan (2:13) and two to the beast (13:2; 16:10). Structurally, the visionary part of the book (4:1–22:5) starts and ends with visions that most strongly emphasize the centrality of the throne: the first in a heavenly context (4:1–5:14) and the last in the earthly context of new creation (22:1–5). This *inclusio* suggests that the work has been organized within the framework of throne visions.⁶

There is, however, a serious problem for anyone wishing to enter into an enterprise of a motif study related to the book of Revelation: the lack of a standardized method that would

⁴ The throne references are concentrated mostly in the throne-room vision of Rev. 4–5: 4:2(2x), 3, 4(3x), 5(2x), 6(3x), 9, 10(2x); 5:1, 6, 7, 11, 13. The other references are the following: 1:4; 2:13; 3:21(2x); 6:16; 7:9, 10, 11(2x), 15(2x), 17; 8:3; 11:16; 12:5; 13:2; 14:3; 16:10, 17; 19:4, 5, 20:4, 11, 12; 21:3, 5; 22:1, 3. The references outside Revelation include: Mt. 5:34; 19:28(2x), 23:22; 25:31; Lk. 1:32, 52; 22:30; Acts 2:30; 7:49; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:8; 4:16; 8:1; 12:2. Interestingly, no references to thrones are found in any of the other writings of the Johannine corpus.

⁵ J. Massingberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 76.

⁶ Ricky L. Williamson, 'Thrones in the Book of Revelation' (PhD Dissertation; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993), 2-3; George Koottappillil, 'The Symbolism of *θρόνος* and Its Biblical-Theological Implications in the Apocalypse' (PhD Dissertation; Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1996), 1-2.

suggest how a study of a motif should be conducted.⁷ It is surprising that in spite of the numerous researches in the area of motif studies in the last several decades the question has not been dealt with attentively.⁸ The same is true for motif studies in other bodies of biblical literature. The consequence of the omission is methodological and terminological chaos, since the individual interpreters have often approached the various motifs without keeping in mind a clear definition of a motif and failed to ask all the questions that would make their study exhaustive. Thus, developing a comprehensive motif study methodology is a major need that cannot be bypassed in an attempt to understand such a crucial motif in Revelation as the throne. In this respect, the most fundamental question as the starting point of the research is the following: What is a motif and what kind of methodological procedure is to be followed in a motif study that would help the researcher to penetrate beyond mere textual observations and see the ‘big picture’? Certainly, a deeper inquiry into the throne motif of Revelation necessitates seeking answers to the following questions: How is the throne motif represented in the relevant background materials? How are its cardinal components used in the book’s θρόνος passages? How does the motif develop throughout the book and what role does it play within it? With what rhetorical function did John employ the throne motif? What does it contribute to the theology of Revelation? How does it help in understanding what is happening in the book?

2. JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

The throne motif has attracted much scholarly attention in the last decades. Its significance and function have been examined in various bodies of literature. The works of Metzger are considered among the most significant contributions to the study of the throne motif outside of the New Testament. His two-volume *Königsthron und Gottesthron* is a major comparative study on the concept of throne in Israel and its surrounding nations, as well as between the throne of a king and that of God.⁹ However, this work, due to the author’s iconographic interest, is concerned more with the physical aspect of the throne motif rather than its theological

⁷ Paulien has identified and addressed the same methodological problem concerning the study of the use of the Old Testament in Revelation. See Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12* (AUSDDS, 2; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1987), 1-190.

⁸ For recent motif studies, see sec. 4 n. 40-42.

⁹ Martin Metzger, *Königsthron und Gottesthron: Thronformen und Throndarstellungen in Ägypten und im Vorderen Orient im dritten und zweiten Jahrtausend vor Christus und deren Bedeutung für das Verständnis von Aussagen über den Thron im Alten Testament* (2 vols.; AOAT, 15/1; Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985).

significance, in a similar way to his other shorter publications.¹⁰ The only extensive comprehensive research on the concept of throne in the Old Testament is Nam's dissertation named *The 'Throne of God' Motif in the Hebrew Bible*. While the work focuses on the analysis of the representative כִּסֵּא passages of the Old Testament and even the ark of the covenant imagery is not discussed, its most significant contribution is twofold: (1) it identifies the unique aspects of the Old Testament concept of the divine throne in relation to the neighbouring cultures and clearly establishes its originality; (2) it proposes eight theological meanings of Yahweh's throne on the basis of the exegetical analysis of the throne passages.¹¹ Among the Old Testament throne texts, with the exception of Ps. 110:1, most significant are those belonging to the throne visions (1Kgs 22; Isa. 6; Ezek. 1; Dan. 7).¹² These texts have received much attention in numerous research projects among which the extensive studies of Maier¹³ and Maticich¹⁴ deserve particular recognition, because of their focus on the throne motif and valuable exegetical contributions. The most comprehensive extensive work on the throne motif is Eskola's monograph, which tries within a single study to concisely discuss biblical and Jewish literature, including the Second Temple texts and those of later Jewish mysticism.¹⁵ While such an approach would be generally criticized as inappropriate because it risks shallowness, Eskola's enterprise is justified because of his interest in the throne motif from the point of view of exaltation Christology. It is well known that throne descriptions are basic to the Jewish *merkabah* mysticism. While I will not deal in this dissertation with the throne speculations in this body of literature, it is to be acknowledged that there are number of extensive works that discuss the function of the throne as a kind of uniting feature in the *merkabah* materials. Among these the most influential are the monographs of Scholem,¹⁶ Gruenwald¹⁷ and Halperin.¹⁸ As this short

¹⁰ E.g. Martin Metzger, 'Der Thron als Manifestation der Herrschermacht in der Ikonographie des Vorderen Orients und im Alten Testament' in *Charisma und Institution*, ed. Trutz Rendtorff (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1985), 250-96.

¹¹ Daegeuk Nam, *The 'Throne of God' Motif in the Hebrew Bible* (Korean Sahmyook University Monographs. Doctoral Dissertation Series, 1; Seoul: Institute for Theological Research Sahmyook University, 1994).

¹² Although the throne is not explicitly mentioned in Ps. 110:1, it is only implied by an invitation to sit at the right hand of the Lord.

¹³ Johann Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis: Studien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte der 'jüdischen Gnosis'*; *Bundeslade, Gottesthron und Märkabah* (Kairos: Religionswissenschaftliche Studien, 1; Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1964).

¹⁴ Karen K. Maticich, 'The Divine King and His Throne: A Study of Visions of Yahweh Seated on His Stationary Throne in the Hebrew Bible' (PhD Dissertation; University of Cambridge, 1993).

¹⁵ Timo Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne: Jewish Merkabah Mysticism and Early Christian Exaltation Discourse* (WUNT 2/142; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

¹⁶ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946).

¹⁷ Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (AGJU, 14; Leiden: Brill, 1980).

review reveals, a significant amount of work has been done concerning the throne motif that serves as a valuable background material for investigation of the throne in Revelation, which is our basic interest.

The prominence of the throne stirred scholars of Revelation long before the recent wide acknowledgment of its significance began. It has been pointed out already at the beginning of the twentieth century by Bullinger that ‘no words could be more important as fixing our minds on the great central and all-governing fact which pervades the Book of this prophecy’.¹⁹ Contrary to Bullinger, the older commentators, with the exception of Tenney, Caird, Glasson and Minear, only rarely emphasize the significance of the throne motif for the book as a whole.²⁰ However, the new tide of scholarly interest in Revelation has resulted in an increasing recognition of the significance of the throne motif for the theology of the book. The view of Schüssler Fiorenza is representative in this regard: she argues that while Revelation ‘must be read and contemplated as a symphony of images’ so that its full impact may be experienced, the throne functions as a ‘keynote’ in this symphony, ‘the book’s central theological symbol’.²¹ Similarly, the throne has been described as the ‘pivotal expression’, ‘focal centre’, ‘the interpretive key’ of Revelation.²²

¹⁸ David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel’s Vision* (TSAJ, 16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1988).

¹⁹ Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse: The Day of the Lord* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 2nd edn, 1909), 213.

²⁰ For example, Merrill C. Tenney (*Interpreting Revelation* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991], 170) is one of the exceptions, who states: ‘Beginning with the second vision and continuing through to the end of Revelation the throne is the central point around which all the features of the vision are organized, and from which the major action of the book proceeds.’ Similarly, George B. Caird (*A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* [BNTC; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966], 62) notes: ‘From first to last John’s vision is dominated by this symbol of divine sovereignty.’ Thomas F. Glasson (*The Revelation of John* [CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965], 39) seems to agree with this viewpoint, though he is less explicit in articulating his view: ‘The word *throne* occurs in almost every chapter of Revelation, over forty times; it sounds throughout the book like the ground-bass of a great organ theme.’ See also Paul Sevier Minear, *I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968), 228.

²¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Proclamation Commentaries; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1991), 31, 58, 120.

²² The following modern works acknowledge throne as the central motif of Revelation: M. Eugene Boring, ‘The Theology of Revelation: “The Lord Our God the Almighty Reigns”’, *Int* 40 (1986), 257-69(259); Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 339; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 141-42; Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation* (SP, 16; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1993), 81; Jan A. du Rand, ‘The Transcendent God-View: Depicting Structure in the Theological Message of the Revelation of John’, *Neot* 28 (1994), 557-73(568); Robert M. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998), 48; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), 54; Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 94; Paul Spilsbury, *The Throne, the Lamb & the Dragon: A Reader’s Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002), 51; Ben Witherington, *Revelation* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113; Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament:*

On the other hand, the majority of the commentators still do not qualify the significance of the throne motif or view it more cautiously as only ‘one of the important symbols’,²³ most often as central to the visionary description of the throne room vision (chs. 4–5)²⁴ or at least to the scene of ch. 4.²⁵ The scholarly disagreement on this question is partially due to the lack of significant attention to the topic.²⁶ Unfortunately, even the studies which defend the throne motif’s centrality in Revelation fail to provide compelling evidence in favour of their conclusion. They most often only establish the centrality of the throne with some brief remarks in the exegetical discussion of ch. 4 or in the concise study of Revelation’s theology, but without providing a compelling argument or exploring the development of the motif. In the following, I will evaluate briefly several recent major studies which devoted the most attention to Revelation’s throne motif. While these studies are the inevitable starting point for a detailed inquiry on the topic, it will be shown that ample space is left for a new extensive research project such as this dissertation, as, in spite of the hundreds of pages written on the topic, some of the basic aspects of the throne motif are still unaddressed.

According to my knowledge, two extensive studies have examined the throne motif in Revelation. Williamson in 1993 at The Southern Baptist University and Koottappillil in 1996 at Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana defended doctoral dissertations both demonstrating the

Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2005), 609; Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (LNTS, 337; London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 118; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009), 107.

²³ E.g. Peter A. Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Revelation 12:7-12* (EuroUS, 23/547; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 183; cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 33.

²⁴ E.g. David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1998), 78; Ranko Stefanović, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5* (AUSDDS, 22; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1996), 165; Beale, *Revelation*, 172, 320.

²⁵ E.g. Ronald L. Farmer, *Revelation* (Chalice Commentaries for Today; St. Louis: Miss.: Chalice, 2005), 58.

²⁶ The Hungarian scholarly literature on Revelation is exemplary concerning the lack of attention to the centrality of the throne motif. It needs to be noted that in spite of the recent major interest in Revelation this book remained largely neglected in Hungarian scholarly circles. Still, the following works can be considered as the most valuable contributions of the Hungarian authors: János Bolyki, *A Jelenések könyve 1, 4, 5 fejezeteinek magyarázata* (Budapest: Református Theológiai Akadémia Újszövetségi Tanszék, 1985); Károly Karner, *Apokalipszis: fordítás és magyarázat* (Budapest: Evangélikus Sajtóosztály, 1990); György Benyik (ed.), *Apokalipszis. A föltámadás. Bibliikus konferencia 1991–1992* (Szeged: JATEPress, 1993); Gál Ferenc, *A Jelenések könyve* (Novi Sad: Agapé, 1994); Gyula Takács, *A Jelenések könyve: egzegézis* (Budapest: Paulus Hungarus – Kairos, 2000); Jenő Szigeti, *A Jelenések könyve: az ítélet hírnöke vagy a remény üzenete?* (Budapest: Arany Forrás, 2007). While several commentaries have also been translated into the Hungarian language, none of them can be considered as a seriously scholarly work.

centrality of the symbolism of throne in Revelation.²⁷ Neither of these works has been published. The greatest contribution of Williamson is the grouping of Revelation's throne text into distinct categories on the basis of the occupants of the thrones and the comparison of the common and distinct features of these texts. Whereas he provides an analysis of the literary features and the function of the throne of God, the throne of the Lamb, the thrones of God's associates and the thrones of God's adversaries, the major weakness in his approach is the failure to investigate how these cardinal components are related and how the motif develops throughout the book. Also no attention is devoted to the analysis of the throne's rhetorical function against the situation of the churches in the first century C.E. The question of the theological function of the throne motif is also only partially explored, since the discussion is relegated to only three themes (Christology, nature of prophecy and judgment/justice) which do not account fully for the motif's theological contribution. Thus, Williamson's study may be qualified as incomplete, since after much valuable exegetical and comparative analysis the big picture is not clearly seen. The dissertation of Koottappillil is much more profound in its analysis. After setting the symbol of throne in a broader matrix of the Old Testament, the Pseudepigrapha, the Qumran literature and the Graeco-Roman environment the author turns to the inductive study of eighteen units that he classifies as throne scenes.²⁸ Each unit is examined exegetically and its biblical-theological implications are also discussed. The study accentuates the perspective that the events recorded in Revelation have their ultimate point of reference in the throne room of God. Koottappillil's study certainly cannot be qualified as a motif study, but rather as the examination of the use of the term *θρόνος* in Revelation. It has to be noted that the author do not consider his work a motif study, but the analysis of the symbolism of *θρόνος* in Revelation. However, it is pity that after a thorough background and exegetical ground work he does not raise the questions that would help him delve into the fabric of the throne motif. Thus, similar to Williamson, he remains without the big picture.

The work of Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, rightly suggests itself as the most valuable contribution to the theological interpretation of the throne

²⁷ Williamson, 'Thrones'; Koottappillil, 'Symbolism of *θρόνος*'. The same conclusion is reached also in Robert Eugene Gwaltney, 'The Concept of the Throne in Revelation' (MTh Thesis; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986).

²⁸ Rev. 1:4-6; 2:12-17; 3:14-22; 4; 5; 6:12-17; 7:9-17; 8:3-5; 11:15-19; 12:1-6; 13:1-10; 14:1-5; 16:1-11; 16:17-21; 19:1-10; 20; 21:1-8; 22:1-5.

motif so far.²⁹ Bauckham presents in this book his views on the main theological themes of Revelation demonstrating that the last book of the New Testament canon is ‘one of the greatest theological achievements of early Christianity’.³⁰ He argues that John is doing theology but in an unfamiliar idiom, ‘involving the apocalyptic image of the divine throne, the practice of worship, the careful use of grammar and the literary connections and structures into which, as a literary artist rather than a philosopher, he has put much of his theological expression’.³¹ The throne is viewed as the central symbol of the book, which indicates the decisiveness of its theocentric perspective. However, its function goes beyond evoking transcendence. As Bauckham understands, John’s view of the world is a strong antithesis to the Roman view and in the context of the polemic the main theme of Revelation is the question ‘Who is Lord over the world?’ Viewed against the historical situation of the churches in Asia Minor the throne as a motif appears in a polemical function used against the deification of human power.³² Friesen came to the same conclusion in his monograph entitled *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, in which two conflicting forms of piety are compared in the first-century Asia Minor: the religion of the imperial cults with that of the book of Revelation. While he follows a social-historical approach in his investigation, his conclusion concerning the centralization of space and time in Revelation around God’s throne as a polemic against the worldview propagated by imperial cults is sound in spite of the lack of a detailed exegetical argument.³³ While the view set out by Bauckham and Friesen on the throne’s rhetorical and theological function is basically correct, there is a need to provide a more substantial exegetical argument for supporting this thesis that would emerge from the inductive analysis of the book’s *θρόνος* passages. The ethical force of the throne motif also deserves attention, since the book’s primary aim is to exhort its readers to expect a certain pattern of behaviour as a response.

The object of inquiry of numerous other works has been also related at least partially to the throne motif, but they touch only a very limited aspect of its use in Revelation. These works are generally focused on the study of a particular throne passage in Revelation. Most often there is some attention devoted to the throne in studies that examine the throne room vision of Rev. 4–

²⁹ See sec. 2 n. 22.

³⁰ Bauckham, *Theology*, 22.

³¹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 62.

³² Bauckham, *Theology*, 44-45, 141-43.

³³ Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 152-66.

5 or the temple motif in the book, but without a significant contribution to the throne motif in particular. Among these exemplars are the works of Schimanowski,³⁴ Stefanović³⁵ and Morton.³⁶ In this category, probably the most interesting study is the dissertation of Rotz, defended in 1998 at Rand Afrikaans University, which examined God's characterization in Revelation.³⁷ Developing a personal characterization technique, Rotz takes into consideration both the direct (epithets, naming, physical description and evaluations) and the indirect (actions, gestures, posture and speech) characterization of God in Revelation. She concludes that the expression 'the One sitting on the throne' is the key characterization expression in the book and suggests that the occupant of the throne is a *yeye* God, who is through the entire book sitting on his *yeye* throne, never stepping directly into the action of the narrative. She explains that *yeye* is in Swahili the personal pronoun encompassing all three genders and she uses the term to acknowledge the inclusivity of God.³⁸ While the critic of Rotz's concept of *yeye* God is beyond the scope of the current dissertation, her conclusion regarding the throne as the main characterization image of God which is of central significance for the book would be shared by the Revelation scholars mentioned so far in this discussion: 'The throne is a central power symbol within the Apocalypse, one around which and from which much of the activity is authorized. It functions as a boundary between God and other beings, but it also gives expression to a fluidity between Christological, anthropological (3:21; 20:4) and demonic (2:11; 13:2) categories.'³⁹

As the above review revealed, the throne motif in Revelation is far from being adequately researched. This is very surprising, because of the growing recognition of the major significance of the throne motif in Revelation. Thus, this dissertation aims to fill a not insignificant gap in Revelation studies. The present study employs a different approach to the throne motif from the studies conducted so far in several respects. First of all, it will address the methodological question of motif research and suggest a standardized approach applicable beyond this study.

³⁴ Gottfried Schimanowski, *Die himmlische Liturgie in der Apokalypse des Johannes: Die frühjüdischen Traditionen in Offenbarung 4–5 unter Einschluss der Hekhalotliteratur* (WUNT, 2/154; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

³⁵ Stefanović, *Sealed Book*.

³⁶ Russell S. Morton, *One upon the Throne and the Lamb: A Traditional Historical/Theological Analysis of Revelation 4–5* (SBL, 110; New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

³⁷ Carol J. Rotz, 'The One Who Sits on the Throne: Interindividual Perspectives of the Characterization of God in the Book of Revelation' (D. Litt and Phil. Dissertation; Rand Afrikaans University, 1998).

³⁸ Rotz, 'The One Who Sits on the Throne', 12 n. 18.

³⁹ Rotz, 'The One Who Sits on the Throne', 358.

Second, in the examination of the throne motif, it will move beyond the θρόνος references, seeking to discover cognate concepts that show affinity with the throne motif. Third, it will be sensitive to the development of the throne motif, as it will try to discover the big picture John intended to portray by its systematic employment.

3. PURPOSE AND THESIS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this dissertation as a motif study is to investigate the various aspects of the throne motif in the last book of the New Testament, and discover its deep structure and the rationale of its employment by John. The thesis of this research project is that the throne motif occupies a central place in the literary and theological structure of the book of Revelation. It will be demonstrated that the throne motif constitutes the major, though not the only interpretive key to the complex structure and theology of the book. In the course of this study it will be shown that as such, it is of a fundamental significance for the understanding of the rhetorical strategy and the theological perspective of the book, therefore it is of major value for understanding better what is going on in the drama John depicts. No less importantly, this study also aims to provide a methodological contribution. It is hoped that the comprehensive motif study method that will be suggested and tested in this dissertation will be of help to those undertaking studies on the motifs of Revelation in the future by providing them with basic directions that can be further refined or made more detailed.

4. METHODOLOGY: TOWARDS A SEMANTIC FRAMEWORK FOR A MOTIF STUDY

The analysis of Revelation in relation to various motifs has been largely neglected until the recent tide of interest in the book. However, the last several decades of research have produced a significant number of studies that have addressed motifs in Revelation, approaching them in one of the following three ways: (1) tracing of a particular motif throughout Revelation;⁴⁰ (2) study

⁴⁰ See e.g. Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976); Kenneth A. Strand, 'Chiastic Structure and Some Motifs in Revelation', *AUSS* 16 (1978), 401-08; Stephen Hre Kio, 'Exodus as a Symbol of Liberation in the Book of Revelation' (PhD Dissertation; Emory University, 1985); Jay Smith Casey, 'Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation' (PhD Dissertation; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981); Edwin E. Reynolds, 'The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif in the Book of Revelation' (PhD Dissertation; Andrews University, 1994); Jan A. du Rand, 'Your Kingdom Come "on Earth as it is in Heaven": The Theological Motif of the Apocalypse of John', *Neot* 31 (1997), 59-75; Barbara Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse* (HTS, 48; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1999);

of a particular motif in a selected section of Revelation;⁴¹ and (3) comprehensive study of a motif in a larger corpus of literature that includes a section on the book of Revelation.⁴² Although these research efforts shed much light on the understanding of Revelation, the scholars undertaking these studies have almost all chosen not to address some critical terminological and methodological questions that are fundamental for conducting a motif study.⁴³ In regard to the throne motif in Revelation such a failure is reflected in the fact that some scholars refer to it as imagery, others as a metaphor, and yet others as a motif or a symbol. The reason for the choice of the terminology is usually not explained.⁴⁴ The consequence of such an omission is not only terminological, but also methodological chaos, since the clear definition of terminology and the clarification of the nature of a motif is basic to a sound methodology.

Therefore, my conviction is that before delving into a motif study, it is necessary to provide a semantic framework for the enterprise answering the following questions: What is a motif and how should it be defined? On the basis of what criteria can a motif be established?

Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*; Thomas Michael, 'Evangelistic Motifs in the Book of Revelation: A Critical Analysis of the Book of Revelation with Regard to its Various Evangelistic Motifs' (PhD Dissertation; Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000); Mazie Nakhro, 'The Worship of God in the Apocalypse: Its Function for the Corporate Worship of the Church' (PhD Dissertation; Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000); Thomas W. Fisher, 'The Dragon/Serpent in Revelation: The Rhetoric of an Apocalyptic Motif' (PhD Dissertation; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000); Sun-Bum Choi, 'The Restoration Theme in the Book of Revelation: From Creation to New Creation' (PhD Dissertation; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003); Eva Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City in the Apocalypse of John* (SBL, 67; New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Olutola K. Peters, *The Mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John* (SBL, 77; New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Alan S. Bandy, *The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation* (NTM, 29; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010); Leslie N. Pollard, 'The Function of *Loipos* in Contexts of Judgment and Salvation in the Book of Revelation' (PhD Dissertation; Andrews University, 2007).

⁴¹ See e.g. Håkan Ulfsgård, *Feast and Future: Revelation 7:9-17 and the Feast of Tabernacles* (ConBNT, 22; Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1989); Timothy Hegedus, 'Astral Motifs in Revelation 12', *Cons* 26 (2000), 13-27; Abir, *Cosmic Conflict*; Laszlo Gallusz, 'The Exodus Motif in Revelation 15-16: Its Background and Nature', *AUSS* 46 (2008), 21-43.

⁴² See e.g. Tremper Longman III, 'The Divine Warrior: The New Testament Use of an Old Testament Motif', *WTJ* 44 (1982), 290-307; John Randall Price, 'The Desecration and Restoration of the Temple as an Eschatological Motif in the Tanach, Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and the New Testament' (PhD Dissertation; The University of Texas, 1993); Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT, 17; Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004); Robert P. Seesengood, 'Running with Endurance: Nascent Christian Use of Athletic Metaphors' (PhD Dissertation; Drew University, 2004); Leslie Baynes, "'My Life is Written Before You": The Function of the Motif "Heavenly Book" in Judeo-Christian Apocalypses 200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.' (PhD Dissertation; University of Notre Dame, 2005); Dan Liroy, *Axis of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Temple Motif in Scripture* (SBL, 138; New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

⁴³ Such neglect is characteristic also to the motif studies of other biblical books. Note the following exceptions: Shemaryahu Talmon, 'Literary Motifs and Speculative Thought in the Hebrew Bible', *HSLA* 16 (1988), 150-68; Timothy Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSup, 128; Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1996), 17-18; Baynes, 'Heavenly Book', 15-28.

⁴⁴ Baynes ('Heavenly Book', 15) notes the same for the 'heavenly book' motif that he examines in his dissertation.

What kind of treatment is needed for a motif study? How should a motif study be conducted?
What basic steps should the process involve?

4.1. DEFINITION OF A MOTIF

The use of term ‘motif’ extends to several disciplines including painting, music, architecture, folklore studies and literature. Such interdisciplinary use of term has generated discussion on the meaning of motif, and has been the subject of a significant debate.⁴⁵ Frenzel pointed out that in the older literary studies motif was often equated with idea, theme or problem and for this reason the borders between these terms became blurred.⁴⁶ The case is similar in biblical studies, where to Frenzel’s list of casually used words the terms imagery and metaphor could be added. On the other hand, it must be recognized that significant efforts have been undertaken to deal with the issue and clarify the borderlines between some of these categories.⁴⁷ My conviction is that, as a starting point, biblical studies should turn to the insights of literal studies for a clear definition of a motif in relation to other literary devices.

Freedman contributed significantly to the research on the theory of literary motif. In his influential work entitled ‘The Literary Motif: A Definition and Evaluation’ he discusses two indispensable criteria for establishing a motif.⁴⁸ The first is the frequency of its recurrence. Freedman argues that no specific number of references can be fixed as a criterion for establishing a motif, but it should ‘occur often enough to indicate the purposiveness rather than merely coincidence or necessity’. The motif should ‘pervade the atmosphere sufficiently’ to be at least ‘subliminally felt’. Since more than frequency of occurrence is required, the second key criterion for establishing a motif is the avoidability and unlikelihood of particular uses of a motif: it should appear in the unlikely contexts that ‘do not demand references from the field of the motif’.

⁴⁵ The difficulty of the definition is captured in the statement of Thompson, a well-known folklore researcher, who wrote a basic five-volume work in his discipline (*Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*), in which he sets out 40,000 different motifs. He states in connection with the mentioned work that ‘the most difficult question ever asked me ... is the leading question – what is a motif?’ (Stith Thompson, ‘Narrative Motif-Analysis as a Folklore Method’ in *Beiträge zur Vergleichenden Erzählforschung* [Folklore Fellows Communications, 161; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakademia, 1955], 3-9[7]).

⁴⁶ Elisabeth Frenzel, *Stoff-, Motiv- und Symbolforschung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970), 29.

⁴⁷ For example, Robert Alter (*The Art of Biblical Narrative* [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981], 95) speaks of ‘focusing devices’, because of their role in the composition of the biblical narrative. He defines five of them from the smallest to the most composite ones: (1) Leitwort, (2) motif, (3) theme, (4) sequence of action and (5) type-scene. David J.A. Clines (*The Theme of the Pentateuch* [JSOTSup, 10; Sheffield: Continuum International, 2nd edn, 1997], 22, 85, 144 n. 11) in his ground-breaking work on the theme of Pentateuch is focused on defining of the concept of ‘theme’, but he also briefly deals with ‘subject’ and ‘motif’ in relation to the ‘theme’. Both studies contain valuable insights and they are classical reference works in this area of research.

⁴⁸ *Novel* 4 (1971), 123-31.

Therefore, a motif is defined according to Freedman as a ‘recurrent theme, character, or verbal pattern, but it may also be a family or associational cluster of literal or figurative references to a given class of concepts or objects’. The motif is generally symbolic: ‘It can be seen to carry a meaning beyond the literal one immediately apparent; it represents on the verbal level something characteristic of the structure of the work, the events, the characters, the emotional effects or the moral cognitive content. It is presented both as an object of description and, more often, as part of the narrator’s imagery and descriptive vocabulary.’⁴⁹

The use of *θρόνος* in Revelation meets the two criteria described and qualifies as a motif. First, it is an object that occurs forty-seven times – statistically more than twice per chapter. Therefore, it can be stated with reason that the throne pervades the atmosphere of the book sufficiently to be considered a purposively used motif. Secondly, *θρόνος* appears in unlikely contexts. In a biblical apocalyptic book with a thoroughly Jewish flavour such as Revelation it is natural to expect throne to be reserved exclusively for God as emphasizing his sovereign rule. However, in Revelation other beings apart from God have also their thrones: the Lamb, God’s allies and even his adversaries. Such a feature is not something commonplace in biblical literature.

Much has been said about the complexity of the motif. In folklore studies until Propp it has been believed that the motif is the smallest component of a narrative.⁵⁰ However, Propp tried to formulate macrostructural interpretations of stories in terms of functions and suggested that motifs decompose into even smaller units.⁵¹ This insight is significant for the understanding of the nature of the throne motif in Revelation, since the throne functions in Revelation as a complex motif consisting of recurring constituent elements.

Propp has also called our attention to the fact that the interpretation of a motif should be context-dependent. The role of characters, objects and things should not be viewed in isolation, but rather in correlation. For this reason, the function of the motif needs to be evaluated in the

⁴⁹ Freedman, ‘Literary Motif’, 127-28.

⁵⁰ Vladimir Propp (*Morphology of the Folk Tale* [trans. Laurence Scott; Publications of the American Folklore Society. Bibliographical and Special Series, 9; Austin, Tex.: University of Texas, 1986], 20-22) criticizes Veselovski for claiming that the motif is an unrescindable unity of a narrative and considers his model too limited. He also challenges the approach of Bédier acknowledging, on one hand, his understanding of the differences between constant and changeable elements of a narrative, but on the other calling attention to the lack of explanation of the meaning of these elements and the method of their separation.

⁵¹ Pamela J. Milne, *Vladimir Propp and the Study of Structure in Hebrew Bible Narrative* (Bible and Literature Series, 13; Decatur, Ga.: Almond Press, 1988), 72.

light of its macro-structure, although the necessary precondition of the interpretive process is the analysis of the surface meaning.⁵² Against Propp's view, the examination of the throne motif in Revelation reveals a complex correlation of sub-motifs that constitute a logical unity.⁵³ The relation of different correlative and antithetical thrones suggests that it is appropriate to speak of a fusion of Revelation's throne sub-motifs into a 'motif-network'.⁵⁴

4.2. METHODOLOGY OF A MOTIF STUDY

A good starting point for developing a methodological model for a motif study in Revelation is Culpepper's observation in his ground-breaking *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*. He states that a treatment of the symbolism of John's gospel is needed that is: (1) based on adequate definitions; (2) sensitive to movement and development in the gospel; (3) relates the metaphors, symbols and motifs to one another; and (4) analyses their function within the gospel as a literary whole.⁵⁵ While Culpepper's criteria are sound, the different genre and content of Revelation requires some adaptation. Primarily more sensitivity to the literal and socio-historical background of the book is needed. The present work suggests a five-step methodological outline for an approach to a motif study in the book of Revelation that will be presented as follows.

First, a motif study is to be based on an adequate definition of a motif. As a starting point for the study, this step establishes the presence of the motif on the basis of the above mentioned criteria and clarifies its nature – whether it is a simpler or a more complex literary phenomenon composed of sub-motifs. This step highlights that clear definition is the prerequisite for the adequate investigation of a motif.

Second, the background analysis is based on the conviction that the motifs of Revelation are not born in a vacuum. For this reason before approaching the text of Revelation, an examination must be conducted of the use and variations of the motif in the precedent biblical literature and in the relevant archaeological and non-biblical literary materials.⁵⁶ This stage-

⁵² For the evaluation of Propp's contribution regarding this question, see Lubomir Doležel, 'Narrative Semantics and Motif Theory' in *Literary Semantics and Possible Worlds*, ed. Károly Csúri (Studia Poetica, 2; Szeged: Auctoritate et Consilio Cathedrae Comparationis Litterarum Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József, 1980), 32-43.

⁵³ Baynes ('Heavenly Book', 22) rather uses the expression 'sub-type' referring to the same literary phenomenon.

⁵⁴ This expression is used by Rápplé (*City in the Apocalypse*, 65-105) as applied to the city and woman motifs in Revelation, although she uses 'motif-network' and 'metaphor-network' interchangeably.

⁵⁵ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1987), 188-89.

⁵⁶ Gregory Stevenson (*Power and Place: Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation* [BZNBW, 107; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001], 20-21) in his outstanding monograph on the temple in the book of Revelation calls our attention to

setting step is needed since, as Talmon notes, ‘motifs are effective only as they evoke a clear echo in the listeners’ minds’ and lead to a reaction on part of the audience.⁵⁷

Third, the textual analysis focuses on the inductive literary/exegetical study of the texts in which the components of the motif are represented. While this analysis may take much space depending on the frequency of the motif’s appearance in the book, it is necessary in order to guard against the danger of imposing ‘overall pictures’ of interpreters’ presuppositions to biblical texts.⁵⁸ The goal of this step is to start building progressively and argumentatively, as objectively as possible, our overall picture on the motif under examination with step-by-step inductive analysis.

Fourth, the substantial analysis seeks to establish the deep structure of the motif. For achieving this aim, it analyses the logical connection between the components of the motif and traces its movement or progressive development throughout the book.⁵⁹ Rodway aptly compares the structure of a motif to a chain which carries in itself both textual and contentual elements: ‘A motif for instance is structural in so far as the images making it up are seen as a chain, textual in so far as each is apprehended sensuously as it comes – and contentual, rather than formal, in so

the lack of awareness of ancient material culture in New Testament studies that should be regarded as a ‘major weakness’. He convincingly argues that literary analysis of the biblical texts can benefit from the peculiar insight offered by archaeology and failing to profit from this insight leads to an incomplete picture. Therefore, he suggests that ‘what is needed is an ongoing dialogue between archeology and literary studies, with archeology offering an inter-disciplinary rather than a sub-disciplinary perspective’. Steven Friesen (‘Revelation, Realia, and Religion: Archaeology in the Interpretation of the Apocalypse’, *HTR* 88 [1995], 291-314) argues similarly in favour of the importance of more emphasis on archaeological materials in the interpretation of Revelation. However, Dwyer (*Motif of Wonder*, 26) is right when he warns against two pitfalls in examination of the potential parallels: (1) the famous ‘parallelomania’ lamented by Samuel Sandmel (‘Parallelomania’, *JBL* 81 [1962], 1-13) and (2) the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy: phenomena superficially similar in an earlier culture are not necessarily the cause of later manifestation.

⁵⁷ Talmon, ‘Literary Motifs’, 153.

⁵⁸ See the plea of Peter Balla (‘Individual Texts and Overall Pictures’ in *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity II*, eds. Wallace M. Alston and Michael Welker [Biblical Interpretation in the Reformed Tradition; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007], 34-42) for being on one hand conscious of our own presuppositions that affect exegesis and at the same time remain open for correcting our ‘overall pictures’ under the influence of the exegesis.

⁵⁹ Leonard Thompson (‘Mapping an Apocalyptic World’ in *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. J. Scott and P. Simpson-Housley [Contributions to the Study of Religion, 30; New York: Greenwood Press, 1991], 115-27[119]) called this process the ‘process of circularity and accumulation’, because ‘earlier occurrences of a term, image, or motif becomes a given in the narrative line, to be drawn on in the development of a later scene. That is, a secondary occurrence in the work loops back around the first occurrence of the term, image, or motif, a tertiary occurrence loops back around the first two, and so forth. There is, thus, a kind of recursive process in which an earlier usage becomes a given and provides input into the meaning of a later one.’

far as the chain carries a meaning that one link, an unrepeated image, would not.’⁶⁰ This analysis seeks to go beneath the surface elements of the motif and in this endeavour the identification and examination of the motif’s cognate concepts are of major significance. Foucault rightly pointed out that power lies in arrangement.⁶¹ The rationale of the substantial analysis is that the basic idea of a motif is grasped only in the light of its structure.

Fifth, the functional analysis examines the function of the motif within the book as a literary whole. For this purpose it needs to evaluate on one hand the rhetorical impact of the motif against the rhetorical situation, but also its contribution to the theology of Revelation. Since the motifs are employed with particular purpose, failing to discover the function equals missing the point of the motif.

I concur with Freedman, who notes that to demonstrate the existence of an elaborate motif in a literary work is to ‘demonstrate something that enhances the value of that work’.⁶² It leads the reader to investigate the meaning lying below the surface of the text and helps to understand more profoundly what is going on in the work – it tells the reader ‘subtly’ what the narrative perhaps tells him/her ‘bluntly’.⁶³ Although the motif is not a symbol, due to its repetitive nature it acts symbolically. Therefore, expressed through the words of Jones, it ‘points toward something other than itself and in some way presents and represents that to which it points’.⁶⁴ Its subtlety and complexity enhances the rhetorical force that contributes to the overall effect of the work.⁶⁵

5. LIMITATIONS

This research will be conducted with three limitations:

⁶⁰ Allan Rodway, ‘Motif’ in *Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, ed. Roger Fowler (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2nd edn, 1987), 99-101.

⁶¹ ‘Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation which individuals are caught up’ (Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (trans. Alan Sheridan; New York: Random House, 1977), 202.

⁶² Freedman, ‘Literary Motif’, 123.

⁶³ Freedman, ‘Literary Motif’, 124, 128.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Wai-Yee Ng, *The Symbolism of Water in the Gospel of John* (SBL, 15; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 14.

⁶⁵ Much has been said about the expressing power of the symbols. Stated through the words of Erwin R. Goodenough (*Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1954], 41), the symbols ‘pull together, in non-discursive form, propositions, desires, and attitudes which discursive formulation can only brand as impossible combination’.

First, attention has been drawn earlier in this introduction to the problem of methodological chaos in biblical motif studies and the basic contours of a comprehensive method applicable beyond the current study have been suggested. However, this dissertation by no means provides a definitive study of the method. It provides only basic steps that need further refinement through a research involving specialists from a number of areas.

Second, the wide spectrum of a motif study inevitably poses space limitations on the inductive exegetical analysis of the *θρόνος* texts and the motif's cognate concepts. Whereas the majority of the passages relevant for the throne motif have the potential to constitute by themselves a fruitful topic for an entire dissertation, motif study requires selectivity in analysis. For this reason, in the inductive textual analysis only those aspects of the texts and the questions emerging in the process of exegesis will receive detailed attentions that contribute somehow to enlightening the throne motif. This also applies to the discussion of the rhetorical situation of Revelation, which is inevitable for the evaluation of the rhetorical impact of the throne motif. Since the scholarly literature is extensive on this basically historical area of research, only those aspects of it that are relevant for the purpose of our study will be treated.

Third, the use of the throne motif in the New Testament books will not be discussed within the background analysis, because of the lack of compelling evidence concerning the influence on Revelation's throne motif. Such a discussion would inevitably raise the question of dating these documents, which is beyond the scope of our study. The later Jewish *merkabah* speculations will also not be discussed in a separate section, since much of the materials are anachronistic for our purpose. However, the *merkabah* works pre-dating Revelation will be considered within the chapter on the Jewish literature.

6. ORDER OF PRESENTATION

The introduction has suggested a five-step methodological outline for an approach to a motif study in the book of Revelation that will be followed by an examination of the throne motif. The first step in this approach, an adequate definition of a motif, has been already discussed as a starting point for the study within the section on the semantic framework. The other four steps will be investigated in the four parts of the dissertation that are organized in ten chapters.

The first part analyses the background of the throne motif in three groups of sources: in the Old Testament, the Jewish literature and the Graeco-Roman sources. In the chapter on the

Old Testament background different concepts related to Yahweh's throne will be examined, while particular attention will be paid to Ezekiel's chariot throne, because of its unparalleled popularity among the Old Testament throne texts and the influence on Revelation's throne scenes. Also the basic theological meanings of Yahweh's throne in this body of literature will be identified. The discussion of the Jewish literature will deal separately with the throne visions of God and the heavenly thrones of his allies revealing a clear development of thought in relation to the Old Testament. Since the throne motif is represented also in the not too many ascent materials of the Qumran literature, the relevant texts for our study from this library will be given particular attention. The chapter on the Graeco-Roman sources will not be focused solely on the literary sources as the previous two chapters, but it will examine the origin of the institution of the divine throne also in numismatics and art.

The second part presents findings of the exegetical study of Revelation's *θρόνος* texts. The four cardinal components of the throne motif (the throne of God, the throne of the Lamb, the thrones of God's allies and the thrones of God's adversaries) will be subjects of separate chapters. While the exegetical analysis will focus on the major contexts in which the throne is represented, all the forty-seven *θρόνος* references will be covered. The exegetical investigation will include inquiry into three basic aspects of the texts under examination: (1) contextual and structural considerations; (2) background; and (3) interpretation. Since God's throne is the dominant component of the throne 'motif-network' of Revelation, its examination will somewhat differ from the other chapters. While the foundational vision of ch. 4 will receive major attention, it will also be necessary to discuss extensively the characterization of God by the throne motif in the recurring formula 'the One sitting on the throne' and the phenomena/actions emanating from the throne.

The third part offers a substantial analysis of the throne motif sketching its deep structure. First the literary characteristics of the *θρόνος* texts will be analysed, as their place within the structure of Revelation will be evaluated and the related terms and concepts of the individual references identified and statistic about them presented. Significant attention will be given to the analysis of cognate concepts of the throne motif which are employed in structurally key locations in the book. At the end of this part the macrodynamic of the throne motif's development will be presented, which integrates into a big picture of Revelation's throne motif the main aspects of the results of the examination conducted up to that point. This section will provide a unique

contribution of this dissertation sketching the big picture of the book of Revelation's throne motif.

The fourth part examines in considerable detail the function of the throne motif. It inquires into the rhetorical impact of the motif and its contribution to the theology of Revelation. Since establishing the throne motif's rhetorical force requires reconstruction of the rhetorical situation, the imperial cults as the major expression of the Roman propaganda in the first century C.E. Asia Minor will be discussed in some detail. Particular attention will be given to the ethical-motivational function of the throne motif, since the book of Revelation is written as a pastoral-prophetic response to a particular situation. The examination of the throne motif's contribution to the theology of Revelation will be organized around the basic aspects of two major questions that are closely related in Revelation: the question of God and the question of history.

The conclusion summarizes the argument of this study, draws several major theological conclusions and suggests a few areas that are open to additional research.

Part I

BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament refers to the throne generally with the noun כִּסֵּא, which occurs according to Fabry one hundred and thirty-five times in this body of literature.¹ The variant expression כִּסֵּה has the same meaning and occurs only three times.² The term כִּרְסָא is the Aramaic equivalent, which is represented three times in the Aramaic portion of the book of Daniel.³ All three terms designate both thrones of God and human beings in the Old Testament. This chapter is concerned only with the divine throne, since the thrones of human beings are limited exclusively to the earthly context. The throne of God texts of the Old Testament can be grouped into two categories: the four throne visions (1Kgs 22:19-23; Isa. 6:1-13; Ezek. 1:4-28; Dan. 7:9-10) and the individual references to the throne. While all the throne visions will receive individual attention, the representatives of the other throne texts will also be dealt with. At the beginning of this chapter four basic concepts related to Yahweh's throne in the Old Testament will be discussed: the ark of the covenant, the temple, Zion/Jerusalem and heaven. This will be followed by the detailed examination of Ezekiel's chariot throne, the best-known throne vision of the Old Testament. Finally, the basic theological meanings of Yahweh's throne in the Old Testament will be established through the study of representative texts.

1. CONCEPTS RELATED TO YAHWEH'S THRONE

1.1. THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

The ark of the covenant (אֲרוֹן הַבְּרִית),⁴ one of the most important and most effective symbols of the Old Testament, was the 'holiest of all sacred appurtenances' of Israel's temple cult.⁵ It was a

¹ Heinz-Josef Fabry, 'כִּסֵּא' in *TDOT*, VII, 232-59(242).

² Job 26:9; 1Kgs 10:19(2x).

³ Dan. 5:20; 7:9(2x).

⁴ Terence E. Fretheim ('The Cultic Use of the Ark of the Covenant in the Monarchial Period' [ThD Dissertation; Princeton Theological Seminary, 1967], 10) notes that the Old Testament refers with twenty-one different expressions to the ark of the covenant and demonstrates that the references are most frequently related to God's names.

⁵ Harry Freedman, 'Ark of the Covenant' in *EncJud*, II, 466-69(467). T. Desmond Alexander (*From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* [Carlisle: Paternoster; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2002], 193)

rectangular wooden box overlaid with pure gold, covered with a lid of the same size called כַּפֹּרֶת or ἱλαστήριον, the ‘place of propitiation’. The cover, commonly known as the mercy seat, included two golden cherubim, facing one another with stretched wings.⁶

According to the Old Testament ark-texts, the ark had multiple functions,⁷ but nothing was more intimately associated with it from the presence and power of Yahweh.⁸ Well-known are von Rad’s words in this regard: ‘Wo die Lade ist, da ist Jahwe’ and ‘Wo die Lade hinkam, da war Jahwe’.⁹ The emphasis on the divine presence resulted in the association of the ark with God’s earthly throne set up in the central place of the sanctuary, God’s dwelling place.¹⁰ As noted by Jacob, ‘The ark was conceived, at least in the most ancient tradition, as a real dwelling-place of the deity. Whether it had the form of a throne or ... of a chest, it is certain that it was considered as the dwelling-place of Yahweh, to such a degree that the terms Yahweh and ark of Yahweh are sometimes interchangeable.’¹¹

One of the most influential Old Testament expressions of God’s sovereignty is the metaphor of king. The idea is repeatedly conveyed by the formula יהוה מלך (‘the Lord is/has become a king’), which appears in most books of the Old Testament canon.¹² Eskola convincingly argues that the royal depictions have a ‘key role’ in providing a relevant context for

notes that the divine instructions concerning the building of the sanctuary list the more important sacred objects first and the ark was at the top of the list. The ark’s prominence has also been indicated by miracles associated with its presence (e.g. Josh. 3:14-17; 6:6-21) and by the severe consequences for its misemployment (e.g. 1Sam. 5:6-12; 6:19; 2Sam. 6:6-7) which express divine vindication of its sacredness and honour.

⁶ Exod. 25:10-22.

⁷ For the discussion of the ark’s function, see ch. 8 sec. 2.1.2.1.

⁸ This is most evident in the ark narrative of 1Sam. 4:1–7:2. The text indicates that Yahweh’s involvement was not automatic even though the ark was, in the words of Walter C. Kaiser (*Toward an Old Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991], 159), the ‘pledge of his presence’. M.H. Woudstra (*The Ark of the Covenant From Conquest to Kingship* [Philadelphia, Pa.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing House, 1965], 46) rightly observes that the presence was supposed to be ‘grasped believably’.

⁹ Gerhard von Rad, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (TB, 8; Munich: Kaiser, 1958), 115, 123.

¹⁰ So e.g. Wolfgang Reichel, *Über vorhellenische Götterculte* (Wien: Alfred Hölder, 1897); J. Meinhold, ‘Die “Lade Jahves”’, *TARWPVNF* 4 (1900), 1-45; Martin Dibelius, *Die Lade Jahves: eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (FRLANT, 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906). Nevertheless, the ark is never called a ‘throne’, but an אֲרֹן, a designation which was never abandoned (K. Budde, ‘Die ursprüngliche Bedeutung der Lade Jahwes’, *ZAW* 21 [1901], 193-97).

¹¹ Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1958), 256-57. One of the most telling examples of the close association of Yahweh with the ark is the so-called Song of the Ark (Num. 10:35-36) in which the ark is not only seen as the leader of Israel’s host, but directly addressed as Yahweh.

¹² For the theological use of the expression, see Klaus Seybold, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry, ‘מֶלֶךְ’ in *TDOT*, VIII, 346-75(365-74). For a comprehensive overview of the theological idea in the Old Testament, see Gábor Vladár, *A Róma 13,1-7 parainézisének a kor- és vallástörténeti háttere* (Dissertationes Theologicae, 1; Debrecen: Debreceni Református Kollégium, 1996), 50-67.

the throne descriptions in the Old Testament.¹³ Thus, God's throne functions primarily as a political imagery in the symbolic universe of the Jewish community. At the same time, the ark's cultic aspect is also highly significant, since it forms the essential furniture of the temple ritual towards which worship and praises have been directed.¹⁴

The ark is also identified in number of Old Testament texts with God's footstool, rather than with the throne.¹⁵ Building his argument on these texts Metzger suggests:

Die Lade ist aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach als leerer Thron verstanden worden. Die Aussagen des Alten Testaments über die Lade zwingen an keiner Stelle zu der Annahme, daß sich mit der Lade die Vorstellung eines leeren Gottesthrones verband. ... Aber die Hypothese, daß die Lade als tragbarer Untersatz eines nicht sichtbaren Jahwethrones verstanden worden ist, fügt sich gut in die wechselnden Vorstellungen, die mit der Lade verbunden waren, ein und läßt manche Aussagen über die Lade verständlicher werden, als das bei anderen Hypothesen der Fall ist.¹⁶

Thus, one of the most discussed questions concerning the topic under consideration is what exactly represented the throne of God in the earthly sanctuary. The suggestions have been highly varied. They include the ark, the cherubim, the mercy seat and various combinations, and even the idea that the ark is entirely unrelated to the concept of Yahweh's throne.¹⁷ It seems that making too rigid a distinction between the throne and the footstool on the basis of 'quasi-paradoxical allusions'¹⁸ regarding the function of the ark is not justified. De Vaux calls our attention to the artificiality of such an attempt: 'It is pointless to ask how Cherubim and the Ark could be both a throne and a foot-stool. It is like asking how Yahweh could actually sit down there, and the question would have seemed as absurd to the Israelites as it does to us: both Cherubim and Ark were the all-too-inadequate symbol of the divine presence, the "seat" of this presence.'¹⁹ The inseparability of the function of the ark from the mercy seat is confirmed by the fact that they are never referred to separately in the prose texts of the Old Testament.²⁰

Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the ark together with its cover and the cherubim may have been considered a figurative cherubim-throne which pointed to Yahweh as

¹³ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 45.

¹⁴ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC, 19; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 214.

¹⁵ 1Chron. 28:2; cf. 2Chron. 6:41, Ps. 99:5; 132:7-8.

¹⁶ Metzger, *Königsthron*, I, 367.

¹⁷ For an extensive review of the different positions with a broader focus on the research of God's throne in the Old Testament, see Nam, *Throne of God*, 1-58; cf. Metzger, *Königsthron*, I, 352-65 (§57: 'Thron und Lade').

¹⁸ Robert A. Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (SBL, 10; New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 88.

¹⁹ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), 300.

²⁰ De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 300.

its subject. This sacred furniture was the centre of the Holy of Holies, the place where Yahweh's *kabod* rested visibly and guarded the covenant,²¹ even though Old Testament throne visions seemingly contradictorily locate God's throne to heaven. Since the clue for understanding this tension rests in the metaphorical nature of the concept of temple, I turn now to the clarification of the connection between the throne and the concept of temple.

1.2. THE TEMPLE

The temple was a complex institution that involved several layers of symbolic meanings. Turner points out in his examination of the idea of sacred space that the phenomena is 'one of the most complex developments in human history, rich with meaning and many functions' that finds its fullest development in the temple complex.²² He notes four basic functions of the sacred space: (1) cosmic centre; (2) meeting point; (3) microcosm of the heavenly reality; and (4) immanent-transcendent presence.²³ These functions were as characteristic of the pagan sanctuaries as of the Jerusalem Temple.²⁴ It has been believed that the divine presence and action had a central role in understanding of the nature of sacred space.²⁵ The importance of this concept for Israel cannot be overemphasized. Kaiser rightly considers the experience that God had come to dwell in the midst

²¹ Nahum M. Sarna (*Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* [New York: Schocken, 1986], 209) notes that in ANE religious context the 'most important feature of a temple was a cella, or innermost shrine that housed the image of the god. In Israel, with its uncompromising aniconic, imageless religion, in place of the representation of the Deity came the tangible symbol of His Word – the stone tablets of the Covenant. The Ark and its contents became the focus of the collective consciousness of the community. It remained the symbol of the eternal covenant between God and the people, the record of his inescapable demands upon the individual and society in every sphere of life. It was this ... that occupied the center of attention and that was at the core of the religion.'

²² Harold W. Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (Religion and Society, 16; The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 33.

²³ Turner (*From Temple*, 12) calls our attention to the need of theological understanding of the place that provides context for the spatial setting of worship (theology of space). He integrates insight from the phenomenological approach into the theological studies believing that 'phenomenology and theology ... are each indispensable to and inseparable from the other and through their relationship each gains a new dimension'.

²⁴ Beale (*Temple and Church's Mission*, 29) in his monumental study on the theology of temple argues that the resemblance of pagan temples to Israel's was not likely due to coincidence or to Israel's dependence on the religious ideas of its pagan neighbours. Interpreting the resemblance, he rather speaks of the pagan temples as 'a refracted and marred understanding of the true conception of the temple that was present from the very beginning of human history'. He also notes that Israel might have borrowed religious notions and imagery from the pagans, but the reason was not lack of religious creativity, but rather polemical purpose. For similar analysis, see Angel M. Rodriguez, 'Ancient Near Eastern Parallels to the Bible and the Question of Revelation and Inspiration', *JATS* 12 [2001], 43-64[58-59]).

On the other hand, Pekka Pitkänen ('From Tent of Meeting to Temple: Presence, Rejection and Renewal of Divine Favour' in *Heaven on Earth*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and Simon J. Gathercole [Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004], 23-34) calls our attention to the limitations of the continuity between the Israelite and the pagan concepts of divine presence pointing to the fact of dissimilarities. Beale's and Pitkänen's views are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary, since they emphasize different poles of the relationship: the similarity and the dissimilarity.

²⁵ Turner, *From Temple*, 18.

of his people ‘the single most important fact’.²⁶ Thus, the concept of sanctuary/temple expresses divine entering into a human space, a reality where the heaven and the earth converge.²⁷

The Jerusalem Temple, functionally preceded by the Israelite sanctuaries, has been viewed as the royal palace of Yahweh.²⁸ The general meaning of היכל is temple, but in fifteen Old Testament passages the sense is ‘palace’. There is no separate term in the Hebrew for designation of palace as the residence of a sovereign or of a high dignitary. היכל as palace is interchangeable with בית (‘house’) and it refers primarily to royal palaces.²⁹ Actually, the notions of tabernacle/temple and royal palace are intimately associated within the concept of God’s היכל, often to the point of identification. This relation has been rightly observed by Vos, who points out that the tabernacle ‘is the palace of the King in which the people render Him homage’.³⁰ The royal purpose is also evident in the inventory of precious metals and coloured fabrics, used in the construction of the tent and later the temple.³¹ Not only are the kinds of materials used in the construction informative in this regard, but also their quantity.³² After the dedication of the sanctuary, and later the temple, God symbolically took possession of his house, the temple/palace, which was signalled by a theophany.³³ Entry to the temple/palace was carefully protected. The throne was thus isolated and approaching it was possible only through a controlled liturgy.³⁴ The reason for the ritual lay in guarding the sanctity of Yahweh, the king of Israel, who could not be approached without sacrifice.

²⁶ Kaiser, *Old Testament Theology*, 119. Nowhere is this idea more clearly expressed than in Exod. 25:8 and 29:43-46.

²⁷ Gösta W. Ahlström (‘Heaven on Earth – at Hazor and Arad’ in *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity: Essays in Conversion with Geo Widengren*, ed. Birger A. Pearson [Missoula, Mo.: Scholars Press, 1975], 67-83) sheds some light on the conception of the temple as ‘heaven on earth’. In her analysis of temples in Hazor and Arad she points to the close connection between the temple and the heavenly world. She concludes that the temple was the spot where heaven and earth were united and the gates of the temple were the gates of heaven. This idea is entirely compatible with Old Testament temple theology.

²⁸ For continuity between the previous houses of Yahweh and the temple, see Menahem Haran, ‘The Divine Presence in the Israelite Cult and the Cultic Institutions’, *Bib* 50 (1969), 251-67.

²⁹ For example, the palace of Ahab (1Kgs 21:1), the palace of the king of Babylon (2Kgs 20:18; 2Chron. 36:7; Isa. 39:7) and the palace of Nineveh (Nah. 2:7). Other passages also clearly refer to the royal residence: Ps. 45:8; 15; 144:12; Prov. 30:28; Isa. 13:22; Ezek. 8:16; Amos 8:3; Dan. 1:4; Hos. 8:14; Joel 3:5. Occurrences in the biblical Aramaic are: Dan. 4:1, 29; 5:5; 6:19; Ezra 4:14. If the main occupant of the ‘house’ was the king, the building was called the king’s house, the ‘palace’ (Gen. 12:15; Jer. 39:8).

³⁰ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1948), 168.

³¹ Alexander, *From Paradise*, 194-95.

³² See Exod. 38:21-31.

³³ 1Kgs 8:10. Cloud was in the stories of desert the sign of Yahweh’s presence in the Tent of Reunion (Exod. 33:9; 40:34-34; Num. 12:4-10).

³⁴ Menahem Haran (*Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978], 175-88) in his

The following questions still need to be answered: What kind of relationship existed between the throne and the temple? If Yahweh's throne was located in the Holy of Holies, how is the tension between his transcendence and immanence to be explained? Did Yahweh dwell personally in the Holy of Holies or only his name? In the secular palaces the throne-hall has been considered the most important room and its central feature was undoubtedly the throne which symbolized the authority of the ruler. This principle applies also to Yahweh's temple/palace. Therefore, when one refers to God's presence in the temple (earthly or heavenly) it is with reference to the throne:

For an ancient reader, the intimate association of temple and divine throne was standard. The throne localized the presence of the deity within the temple. Thus, a typical representation of divine presence was that of the enthroned deity within the temple. Cult statues, as those at Ephesus and Pergamum, were often of a deity on the throne. In Jewish tradition, we find a similar association. For Ezekiel, the new temple is to be the place of God's throne (43:6-7).³⁵

The throne thus implies a temple, since there is a need for its housing. However, the relation is two-directional, since the temple also implies the throne as its focal point and purpose of existence as a seat of the divine presence.³⁶

There is a close clear relationship between *גִּשְׁבֵּן*, one of the basic designations of the tent-sanctuary, and the verb *שָׁבַן* ('to tent', 'dwell', 'tabernacle'). This verb points to Yahweh's dwelling with men on earth either in general or in a sanctuary/temple context. In contrast, the Old Testament prefers to designate permanent dwelling with *יָשַׁב* ('to sit', 'to dwell') and it employs the word in reference to Yahweh's dwelling in heaven. Cross convincingly argues that these two expressions contrast the divine transcendence (*יָשַׁב*) with the divine immanence (*שָׁבַן*).³⁷ It has been

groundbreaking study on the sanctuary and the temple established the related principles of material gradation and graded holiness. According to this principle the closer to the divine presence in the innermost divine recesses of the temple, the more valuable, the more complex, the more restricted and the more holy the men and materials involved must be. This recognition formed the basis for numerous studies by other scholars concerning the sacrificial system.³⁵ Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 232.

³⁶ The basic reason for the temple liturgy lay in the belief in Yahweh's presence in the Holy of Holies. The connection between the worship and the temple is prominent, especially in the Psalms (e.g. 27:4; 42:5; 76:3; 84; 122:1-4; 132:13-14; 134). The ark of the covenant played a significant role not only in the theology of divine presence, but also in the theology of atonement. Eskola (*Messiah and the Throne*, 55) notes that the throne actually 'maintained communion between God and his people'. He convincingly argues that in the ceremony of Yom Kippur, in which the ark was directly sprinkled with the blood of sacrifice, the heart of the Jewish theocratic belief was realized: 'God was given his proper status as the king of Israel, and no sin, unbelief or unfaithfulness was allowed to hinder his royal dominion.'

³⁷ Frank M. Cross, 'The Priestly Tabernacle' in *Biblical Archaeological Reader*, eds. David N. Freedman and G. Ernest Wright (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1961), 225-27.

suggested on this basis that Yahweh did not personally dwell in the temple, but only his name.³⁸ The proponents of this view often refer to the words of Solomon: ‘But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built’ (1Kgs 8:27). Yet Yahweh has said: ‘My name shall be there’ (8:29). These words reveal the paradox involved in the suggestion that Yahweh could be homed in the earthly building. However, for the semitic mind Yahweh’s name embodies his identity. For this reason, there is a sense in which he was continuously ‘living’ in the tabernacle (and later in the temple) ‘as long as it is understood that this is metaphorical and does not imply a simplistic understanding of what it might mean to say that God is present’.³⁹ The earthly throne in the Holy of Holies was modelled after the heavenly throne of glory and it functioned in the temple liturgy as a representative of its heavenly counterpart. Mettinger rightly concludes: ‘The heavenly and the earthly may not be regarded as two opposed poles in a field of tension; rather, heaven and earth become one in the sacred space of the sanctuary.’⁴⁰ For this reason it has been believed that God was sitting enthroned on the cherubim in the Holy of Holies as a king in his temple/palace.⁴¹

The Jerusalem Temple was built on the ‘mountain of Yahweh’ and from the time of the prophets Zion takes on a religious meaning as a place where the throne of Yahweh’s glory is located. I turn now to the examination of Zion and Jerusalem as the location of God’s throne.

1.3. ZION/JERUSALEM

The notion of Yahweh’s earthly throne is expanded and geographically extended to Zion and Jerusalem in the prophetic literature. The temple as the ‘focus of holiness’⁴² was located on Zion and in a wider sense in Jerusalem. For this reason Zion, as the hill of the temple, and Jerusalem,

³⁸ E.g. Sven Tengström, ‘Les visions prophétiques du trône de Dieu et leur arrière-plan dans l’Ancien Testament’ in *Le Trône de Dieu*, ed. Marc Philonenko (WUNT 69; Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), 28-99. Sarna (Exodus, 158) went even a step further in his challenge arguing that ‘the sanctuary is not meant to be understood literally as God’s abode, as are other such institutions in the pagan world. Rather, it functions to make perceptible and tangible the conception of God’s immanence, that is, the indwelling of the Divine Presence in the camp of Israel, to which the people may orient their hearts and minds.’ For a conceptual and exegetical critique of Sarna’s view, see James Palmer, ‘Exodus and the Biblical Theology of the Tabernacle’ in *Heaven on Earth*, 11-22(12-15).

³⁹ Palmer, ‘Exodus’, 14.

⁴⁰ Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (trans. Frederick H. Cryer; ConBOT, 18; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1982), 31.

⁴¹ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 54.

⁴² Bertil Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament* (SNTSMS, 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 1.

which is set in parallel with the holy hill,⁴³ have been considered holy to such an extent that going up to Zion has virtually been equated with approaching Yahweh.⁴⁴

Jer. 3:16-17 identifies Jerusalem with the throne of Yahweh in the context of eschatological expectation and claims that ‘all the city will have become a throne, and hence there will be no further need for a separate throne’.⁴⁵ The ark which symbolized God’s throne in the temple would cease to be important, because in the anticipated transformation Jerusalem itself would become the symbol of Yahweh’s presence within the larger context of the world of nations. God’s presence would no longer need a symbolic representation, since it would be plainly discernible. Fabry argues that this passage reflects the controversy over Yahweh’s presence in connection with the ark, especially following its loss. The purpose of the expansion of the throne imagery has a deliberate polemic intention as it questions the idea of the historically grounded assurance of salvation associated with the ark’s presence.⁴⁶

Probably the same idea of expansion is implied also in the vision of Ezek. 40–48, in which the ark is absent from the new temple. Nevertheless, the description climaxes in a statement of God’s presence: the future city of Jerusalem will be called יהוה שמה (‘the Lord is here’; 48:35).⁴⁷ Similarly, in the eschatological statement of Isa. 4:5 the whole area of Zion is referred to as a tabernacle.⁴⁸ In this context should be understood also the epithet יושב ציון (‘enthroned upon Zion’),⁴⁹ which has a clear theological significance, as noted by Eskola: ‘Mount Zion is first identified as the mythological mountain dwelling of Baal, i.e. Zaphon which occurs e.g. in the Ugaritic texts. By exploiting such a metaphor the writer simultaneously

⁴³ Isa. 45:13; Dan. 9:16-17.

⁴⁴ Jer. 31:6. The repeated idea of the Psalms that salvation comes out of Zion points to the Lord as the source of salvation, who dwells at the holy mountain (14:7; 128:5; 134:3).

⁴⁵ H.M. Woudstra, ‘The Tabernacle in Biblical-Theological Perspective’ in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1970), 88-103(97).

⁴⁶ Fabry, ‘בִּצְפֹן’, 255.

⁴⁷ While Ezekiel’s future Jerusalem (‘Yahweh is there’; 48:35) shows close affinity with the idea of Jer. 3:16-17, there is also a significant difference between the two descriptions. While in Ezekiel the reconstructed temple stands as the centre of the future Jerusalem to which the return of Yahweh’s glory is related (Ezek. 43:1-5), in Jeremiah no allusion is made to the temple, but the whole of Jerusalem is considered the ‘throne of Yahweh’ (see Roland de Vaux, ‘Jerusalem and the Prophets’ in *Interpreting the Prophetic Tradition: The Goldenson Lectures 1955–1966*, ed. Harry M. Orlinsky [Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press; New York: Ktav, 1969], 277-300[287-88]).

⁴⁸ As Beale notes (*Temple*, 139-40), the sanctuary language is apparent in Isa. 4:5-6. ‘Fire’ and ‘cloud’ recall God’s presence both at Sinai mountain temple (Exod. 19:16, 18) and in the tabernacle (Num. 9:15-16). In Isa. 4:6 the connection is further emphasized by referring to the ‘canopy’ as a סֹכֶה (booth), which can be a synonym for ‘tabernacle’ (2Sam. 11:11; cf. Ps. 31:20; Acts 15:16-18). For Sinai as a mountain temple, see e.g. Angel M. Rodriguez, ‘Sanctuary Theology in the Hebrew Cultus and in Cultic-Related Texts’, *AUSS* 24 (1986), 127-45.

⁴⁹ Ps. 9:12; cf. Isa. 8:18.

contrasts Baal with the God of Israel. The Lord on Mount Zion is the only true God and the great King who reigns over the whole earth.⁵⁰

At the heart of the Zion theology is the belief that the omnipotent Lord reigns as the Great King over the entire earth. This conviction provided an unlimited sense of security and protection. Since Zion is considered the royal seat of Yahweh, ‘der Mittelpunkt Israels’,⁵¹ this mountain, though actually a ‘tiny הר’,⁵² theologically is seen as the top of the highest mountain, the peak of which reaches into heaven.⁵³ Cohn in his study of the biblical mountain motif persuasively argues that the height imagery is basically positive, since it describes the dwelling place of God alone. He concludes that mountain is a suitable symbol for expressing the paradox of a God who dwells both in heaven and on the earth.⁵⁴ The mountain imagery also echoes the ANE idea of the sacred mountain as the place of the throne of the divine ruler of the universe.⁵⁵

The most ultimate extension of Yahweh’s throne in the Old Testament encompasses even heaven, as will be demonstrated in the following section.

1.4. HEAVEN

In Isa. 66:1 God’s throne grows into a phenomenon of ‘hypercosmic’ dimensions.⁵⁶ Heaven is said to be God’s throne and the earth his footstool.⁵⁷ The text is part of a larger polemical unit, which addresses the issue of correct attitude towards the temple cult. It has been demonstrated

⁵⁰ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 46.

⁵¹ Josef Schreiner, *Sion–Jerusalem Jahwes Königssitz: Theologie der heiligen Stadt im Alten Testament* (SANT, 7; München: Kösel-Verlag, 1963), 279.

⁵² Robert L. Cohn, ‘The Mountains and Mount Zion’, *Judaism* 26 (1977), 97-115(98).

⁵³ See e.g. Ps. 2:6; 28:13; 66:20; 68:16; 87:1; 99:9; Isa. 2:2-4; Ezek. 40:2; Zech. 14:10. István Karasszon (*Az óizraeli vallás* [A Budapesti Református Teológiai Akadémia Bibliai és Judaisztikai Kutatócsoportjának kiadványai, 6; Budapest: Budapesti Református Teológiai Akadémia, 1994], 44) notes in regard to such descriptions that the biblical authors write as they have never seen the geographical Jerusalem. Similarly, John Goldingay (*Israel’s Faith* [Old Testament Theology; Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 2006], 238) points out the lack of logic in the choice of Zion: ‘If the God of Sinai was to move to a mountain in the region of Canaan, it would surely be to Mount Hermon, the highest peak of the Bashan range. That looks like a proper mountain of God, fit to be a new portal between earth and heaven. How strange that the armies of heaven chose to take little Zion’, however ‘theologically, then, Zion towers above the mountains around’. For the theological investigation of Zion symbolism, see Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion, the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult* (JSOTSup, 41; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

⁵⁴ Cohn, ‘Mountains’, 97-115.

⁵⁵ On the relationship of the Zion tradition to the Canaanite cosmic mountains, see Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1972).

⁵⁶ Beate Ego, ‘Der Herr blickt herab von der Höhe seines Heiligtums: Zur Vorstellung von Gottes himmlischem Thronen in exilisch-nachexilischer Zeit’, *ZAW* 110 (1998), 556-69(567).

⁵⁷ This impressive picture occurs several times in the Bible in different forms: Ps. 11:4; 93:2; 103:19; Mt. 5:34-35; 23:22; Acts 7:48-50.

that chs. 65–66, as a literary unit,⁵⁸ play a major role in defining the theological agenda of the whole book and thereby constitute its climax and fitting conclusion.⁵⁹ Nam even goes a step further, suggesting that Isa. 66:1-2 forms the crux of the whole chapter.⁶⁰

According to most commentators Isa. 66:1-4 is in some way directed against the Jerusalem Temple and its cult.⁶¹ The debate has focused on the question of the extent of opposition: Does Isa. 66:1-2 suggest the total rejection of the Jerusalem Temple or only the relativization of its significance? I hold that the rejection of the Jerusalem Temple is implausible, because such interpretation would not be consistent with Isaiah's temple-theology.⁶² As Westermann notes, the author rather seems to attack a particular 'way of thinking', the reliance upon the temple in circumstances of injustice and idolatry.⁶³ Such an attitude is considered by Calvin not only groundless, but 'diabolical and accursed; for they grossly mock God' by 'endeavour to serve and appease him by outward ceremonies'.⁶⁴ The argument of the passage is rightly summarized by Smith: 'The transcendent Yahweh does not *need* a dwelling place (66:1-2a), and certainly does not want one built by defiled hands. The apostates will benefit nothing from its construction because their fate has already been decided by their continuing disobedience in the face of prophetic exhortation and warning.'⁶⁵

It seems that the reference to השמים and הארץ in Isa. 66:1 alludes to the creation account in Genesis. The same terms are used in Gen. 1:1 for the designation of the totality of creation. Their connection with the 'throne' and the 'footstool' in Isa. 66:1 could similarly be interpreted in

⁵⁸ Nam (*Throne of God*, 194-95 n. 3) refers to Lowth, Torrey, Kelly, Bonnard, Pieper, Watts, who argue for the literary unity of Isa. 65–66.

⁵⁹ Marvin A. Sweeney ('Prophetic Exegesis in Isaiah 65–66' in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah. Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, eds. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans [2 vols.; VTSup 70; Leiden: Brill, 1997], I, 455-74) examined the thematic connections and lexical associations of Isa. 65–66 to the other texts and motifs of the book and demonstrated that these chapters form the conclusion to the book as a whole. He follows the group of scholars from Liebreich from the 1950s onwards, who see in the parallels between the first and the last chapter of Isaiah a deliberate framing device.

⁶⁰ Nam, *Throne of God*, 197.

⁶¹ In contrast, Bernard Duhm (*Das Buch Jesaja* [GHAT, 3/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 4th edn, 1922], 481-82) suggested that the reference is to a Samaritan proposal to build their own temple during Ezra and Nehemiah. In spite of its creativity, this view is unsupported by evidence.

⁶² On the basis of what is said in the book about Yahweh's holy mountain (56:7; 57:13; 65:11), his holy and beautiful house (64:11; cf. 60:7, 13), the place where his feet rest (60:13), the hypothesis of radical rejection of the temple fails.

⁶³ Clause Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66* (OTL; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1969), 413.

⁶⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (4 vols.; trans. William Pringle; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1956), IV, 409.

⁶⁵ Paul A. Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction in Trito-Isaiah: The Structure, Growth and Authorship of Isaiah 56–66* (VTSup, 62; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 159.

terms of expressing totality.⁶⁶ The picture is that of Yahweh's immensity whereby the 'earth itself is no more than his footstool'.⁶⁷ The same idea of divine infinity, without reference to the throne, is expressed in the temple-dedication prayer of Solomon, in which it is stated that 'heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee' (1Kgs 8:27). Still, he is portrayed as a transcendent divine king sitting enthroned in heaven (Ps. 2:4; 11:4; 123:1), who at the same time comes to live among his people. As noted by Metzger, Isa. 66:1 conveys the idea that with Yahweh's throne, the heavenly world invades the sanctuary; with the divine throne resting on its base in the sanctuary and soaring into the heavens, the heavenly realm is present.⁶⁸

Nam notes that the book of Isaiah contains only two references to the throne of God: one appears in the throne vision at the beginning of the prophet's ministry (ch. 6), while the other at the completion of it (66:1). This suggests that Isaiah's two throne texts form an *inclusio* not only around the prophet's ministry, but also his book.⁶⁹

After the consideration of four concepts related to Yahweh's throne (ark of the covenant, temple, Zion/Jerusalem and heaven) I turn now to the most extensive and best-known throne vision of the Old Testament recorded in Ezek. 1. This throne text will be given the most detailed attention, since it is not only the longest, but the most influential throne vision of the Old Testament and at the same time the only one in which God's throne appears as a moving object.

2. THE CHARIOT THRONE

The interpretation of Ezekiel's throne visions has been the subject of much scholarly investigation.⁷⁰ The difficulty of the question is noteworthy.⁷¹ My task is going to be restricted

⁶⁶ Nam, *Throne of God*, 198-99.

⁶⁷ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InverVarsity, 1993), 533.

⁶⁸ Martin Metzger, 'Himmlische und irdische Wohnstatt Jahwes', *UF* 2 (1970), 139-58(156).

⁶⁹ For a summary of the contrasts between the two throne passages, see Nam, *Throne of God*, 205.

⁷⁰ Alvin A.K. Low ('Interpretative Problems in Ezekiel 1' [ThD Dissertation; Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985], 23-77) enumerates and evaluates in his dissertation ten different hermeneutical approaches: (1) mythological; (2) poetic; (3) psychological-dream; (4) Jewish-mystical; (5) Jewish allegorical; (6) cosmological; (7) meteorological; (8) UFO; (9) symbolic; and (10) literal. He regards the last as the only viable option.

⁷¹ There is a well-known rabbinic regulation concerning the secrecy in the interpretation of the topic that indicates its difficulty: 'The [subject of] forbidden relations may not be expounded in the presence of three, nor the work of creation in the presence of two, nor [the work of] chariot in the presence of one, unless he is sage and understands his own knowledge' (*b. Hag.* 11b). Also Jerome admitted his difficulty in dealing with the obscurities of the book and puts it in the same category as the Song of Songs and Gen. 1 (Jerome, 'Epistula LUI' in *Epistulae. Pars I: Epistulae I-LXX* [CSEL 54; Vienna: Tempsky; Leipzig: Freytag, 1910], 460-61). For a review of difficulties posed by Ezek. 1 and a survey of interpretations, see Daniel I. Block, 'Text and Emotion: A Study in a "Corruptions" in Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28)', *CBQ* 50 (1988), 418-42.

here to sketching the main aspects of Ezekiel's representation of God's throne as a chariot. Although the book contains three throne texts,⁷² the investigation is going to focus on ch. 1. This vision has deeply influenced the Jewish apocalyptic writings, but also the book of Revelation – particularly the throne room vision in chs. 4–5.⁷³

There is a general agreement that Ezek. 1 is part of a larger context of the prophet's call narrative (1:1–3:15). The structure of the chapter has been vigorously debated, but without achieving consensus.⁷⁴ Still, there is no doubt that the entire vision climaxes in a throne scene (1:22–28).⁷⁵ The preceding elements of the vision provide the setting against which the meaning of the throne is to be understood. Therefore, it is necessary to deal to some extent with the details of the vision, for their cumulative effect makes the intention of the chapter understandable. In the analysis, Block's topical division of the chapter will be followed, since I consider it the most convincing: the fiery cloud (1:4), the four *חיות* (1:5–14), the mysterious wheels (1:15–21), the description of the enthroned figure (1:22–28a) and the concluding summary statement (1:28b).⁷⁶

The throne vision arose out of a storm, which brought a great cloud concealing a fiery, brilliant source of light (1:4). It is well-known that in the tabernacle a cloud covered the place where the glory of God resided (Exod. 40:34). However, Ezekiel's scene is to be understood primarily against the well-known Old Testament image of God as a rider in the sky with the clouds as his chariot. In time of danger Yahweh is often portrayed as a divine warrior, who as a king of the universe comes to the aid of his people on his chariot covered by cloud: 'He rode on a cherub, and flew; he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind' (Ps. 18:10).⁷⁷ The imagery of fire appears six times in the vision as a symbol of the divine presence. Lauderville points out the ambivalence of the imagery in the book, which appears in both positive and negative functions.⁷⁸

⁷² Ezek. 1; 10; 43:7.

⁷³ As it will be demonstrated later, Rev. 4–5 is a pivotal vision not only in regard to the book's throne motif, but the entire work. For the dependence of Rev. 4–5 on Ezek. 1, see e.g. Jeffrey Marshall Vogelgesang, 'The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation' (PhD Dissertation; Harvard University, 1985), 168f.

⁷⁴ For the debate, see Leslie C. Allen, 'The Structure and Intention of Ezekiel 1', *VT* 43 (1993), 145–61.

⁷⁵ Nam, *Throne of God*, 245.

⁷⁶ Block, 'Text and Emotion', 424.

⁷⁷ Probably Ps. 18:8–14 is the closest analogue to Ezekiel's vision. See also Ps. 68:8f.; 104:3; Isa. 63:19; Judg. 5:4f; Deut. 33:2. Hans K. Larondelle (*Chariots of Salvation: The Biblical Drama of Armageddon* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1987], 67) points out that the idea of Yahweh's coming to the aid of his people as a warrior on a cloud receives a theological significance seen in the light of the Canaanite description of Baal as the rider on the clouds. The point of the parallel is the emphasis on Yahweh's supremacy as God and ruler (cf. Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* [SOTBT; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995], 67–68).

⁷⁸ According to Dale Lauderville ('Ezekiel's Cherub: A Promising Symbol or a Dangerous Idol?', *CBQ* 65 [2003], 165–83) the positive uses of fire include the fiery appearance of Yahweh enthroned on his chariot (1:27; 8:2), the

In Ezek. 1 it is used positively and its effect is intensified by the numerous expressions connoting brilliance, magnificence and brightness.⁷⁹

After a brief introduction of a fiery storm theophany the prophet turns to the description of the glory of the enthroned deity, which he attempts to visualize from the bottom upward.⁸⁰ First, he depicts four beings, to which he consistently refers to as חיות. The Hebrew expression seems to denote here its basic sense of a ‘living thing’ (gr. ζῶον) indicating the strangeness of the creatures.⁸¹ Their four faces on the single head have attracted the most scholarly attention. They seem to be the combination of the attributes of the ‘lords’ of animate creation, while the dominant shape of the creatures’ bodies is human. According to a rabbinic source the interpretation of this strange composition is the following:

Four kinds of exalted beings have been created in the world. The most exalted of all living creatures is man; of birds, the eagle; of cattle, the ox; and of wild beasts, the lion. All of these received royalty and had greatness bestowed upon them, and they are set under the chariot of God, as it says, *As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion ... and ... also the face of an eagle* (Ezek. 1:10).⁸²

These ‘most lordly creatures’⁸³ function as the guardians and the carriers of the throne of the Lord of Lords. Given the composite nature of the creatures, it is not surprising that their description is detailed. As Block notes, the beings embody the characteristics necessary for service in God’s proximity: intelligence, fierceness, strength, fertility and swiftness.⁸⁴ The fact that they have four faces makes them visible from all four points of compass. It also indicates

coals of fire between the cherubim of Yahweh’s throne chariot (1:13) and the stones of fire among which the fallen cherub moved in Eden (28:14). Still, the fire imagery is mostly negatively used in Ezekiel as an instrument of judgment (5:4; 10:6; 15:5; 19:12, 14; 22:20, 21; 30:8, 14, 16; 38:22; 39:6).

⁷⁹ Block (‘Text and Emotion’, 430) mentions the following imagery and expressions that indicate brilliance, magnificence and brightness: fire (1:4[2x], 13[3x], 27), brilliance (1:4, 13, 27, 28), burning coals of fire (1:13), torches (1:13), lightning (1:13, 14), like the sparkle of bronze (1:7), of tarshish (1:16), of crystal (1:22), of חשמל (1:4, 27). The rims of the wheels are also spoken of as being ‘majestic and awesome’ (1:18).

⁸⁰ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1979), 120.

⁸¹ D.N. Freedman and M.P. O’Connor (‘כרובים’ in *TDOT*, VII, 307-19[312]) identify seven basic features of the living creatures: (1) human form (1:5); (2) four faces (1:6); (3) four wings (1:6); (4) straight legs with the hoofs of calves (1:7); (5) human hands (1:8); (6) an appearance resembling glowing coals (1:13); and (7) movements like lightning (1:13-14).

⁸² *Midr. Rab. Exod.* 23.13.

⁸³ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* (AB, 22; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 56.

⁸⁴ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel* (2 vols.; NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), I, 96; Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19* (WBC, 28; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1994), 31.

effortless change of direction on their part, since all directions lie straight ahead for them.⁸⁵ The importance of the number four as a number of totality in Old Testament prophetic literature is well documented.⁸⁶ As Zimmerli notes, its employment in connection with the faces of the creatures ‘gives expression to the omnipotence of Yahweh which is effective in every direction’.⁸⁷

The living creatures of Ezek. 1 have often been compared to the winged sphinxes and other composite beings that are pictured as supporting (or constituting) thrones of ANE kings.⁸⁸ The parallels are striking with the hybrid beings appearing in Mesopotamian, Syrian, Phoenician and Babylonian iconography. However, the identification of any of them as an immediate prototype of Ezekiel’s living creatures does not do justice to the biblical data.⁸⁹ Blenkinsopp rightly concludes that the parallelism with motifs from ANE iconography does not necessarily need to signal the lack of originality of the total image.⁹⁰ Moreover, as Eichrodt argues, the prophet seems to be ‘more aware of the differences between his own conception and those of the idols and images of the ancient East than of the similarities ... he purposely abstains from the use of the word “cherub” in order to distinguish the bearers of God’s unique glory from the throng of Babylonian monsters’.⁹¹

In spite of the mysteriousness in Ezek. 1, the living creatures are identified in a later vision with cherubim (10:15, 20). In both visions of Ezekiel they are intimately associated with the divine throne which defines their basic function as the guardians of the boundary between the

⁸⁵ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 45. W. Boyd Barrick (‘The Straight-Legged Cherubim of Ezekiel’s Inaugural Vision [1:7a]’, *CBQ* 44 [1982], 543-50[549-50]) suggests, grounding his argument mostly on external artistic evidence, that the descriptions of the four beings as straight-legged creatures (1:7) indicates that they were not understood to be walking. Paradoxically, the text clearly indicates their motion. Thus, Barrick suggests that viewed from the side these creations are striding forward, but viewed from the front they are standing still. He concludes: ‘The creations, as part of the construction of the divine chariot-throne, rolled along on the wheels’, but ‘they did not use their legs for the purposes of locomotion’. While this possibility cannot be excluded, the suggestion contains a great deal of speculation.

⁸⁶ See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 120.

⁸⁷ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 120.

⁸⁸ For iconographic analysis of Ezek. 1, see Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst. Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sach 4* (SBS, 84–85; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 125-273.

⁸⁹ Freedman, ‘כְּרֻבִים’, 314-18. For an opposite view, see William F. Albright, ‘What Were the Cherubim?’, *BA* 1 (1938), 1-3.

⁹⁰ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1990), 21. The heads with four different faces in the manner of Ezekiel’s living creatures is unprecedented in the ANE sources.

⁹¹ Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (OTL; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1970), 57.

divine and the human realm and a mode of transport for the ‘earthly locus’ of Yahweh’s presence.⁹²

In contrast to the other throne visions in the Old Testament, the throne is portrayed in Ezek. 1 not as a static, but a dynamic object moving within or upon the theophanic cloud. The idea of mobility is represented by the mystical wheels (1:15-21) which give the throne-bearing vehicle the appearance of chariot.⁹³ The wheels are described in language of splendour. Their beaming like ‘chrysolite’ recalls the heavenly aura with which they are associated.⁹⁴ The construction of the wheels implies interrelatedness, allowing movement in any of the four directions without turning.⁹⁵ The perfect synchronization of the movement is further indicated by the statement that the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels (1:21). Strangely, these wheels are ‘full of eyes round about’ (1:18), which symbolically refers to the omniscience and omnipresence, or the infinite intelligence and constant divine watchfulness of the Enthroned One.⁹⁶

The mobility of Yahweh’s throne bears a high theological significance for the entire book of Ezekiel. This becomes particularly clear from the vision of Ezek. 8–11. Cook rightly notes: ‘Normally, the wheels form a key junction of heaven and earth at Jerusalem’s temple. Things are horribly wrong now ... and God’s glory is on the move (Ezek. 10:15; 11:22).’⁹⁷ The geographical movement of the One who sits upon the chariot-throne from the Jerusalem Temple to the exiles in Babylon stresses the notion of divine sovereign control. On the one hand there is portrayed the

⁹² Launderville, ‘Ezekiel’s Cherub’, 182.

⁹³ In the Old Testament the theophanic cloud (wind) is in a number of texts closely connected with a chariot. In Ps. 104:3 Yahweh is described as making ‘the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind’. In Dan. 7:9 God’s throne is similarly equipped with wheels, although the expression ‘chariot’ is not used. Similar connections appear in Zech. 6:1-8, where the four chariots which emerge from the gate of heaven (6:1) are identified as the four winds (6:5). Also in the account of Elijah’s ascension to heaven a chariot of fire appears with whirlwind (2Kgs 2:11). The idea of divine chariot was also widespread in the ANE. See John W. McKay, ‘Further Light on the Horses and Chariot of the Sun in the Jerusalem Temple (2Kgs 23:11)’, *PEQ* 105 (1973), 167-69.

⁹⁴ Bruce Vawter and Leslie J. Hoppe, *A New Heart: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (ITC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: Handsel, 1991), 28.

⁹⁵ A. Alföldi (‘Die Geschichte des Throntabernakels’, *La Nouvelle Clio* 1 [1949–50], 537-66[544]) argues on the basis of the chariot of Mithras (Avesta) and that of the sun-god (Veda) that the four wheels of Ezekiel merge into a single wheel as they are located inside each other. Similarly, Greenberg (*Ezekiel 1–20*, 47) holds that a mechanically simpler interpretation is viewing the wheels as arranged in concentric circles. In contrast, Nam (*Throne of God*, 251-52) refers to a number of scholars such as Toy, Fowler and Low arguing that the rim of one wheel is smoothly level with the rim of the wheel it crosses at right angles. Such construction explains movement in any of the four directions without turning, as described in 1:17.

⁹⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 58.

⁹⁷ Stephen L. Cook, ‘Cosmos, *Kabod*, and Cherub: Ontological and Epistemological Hierarchy in Ezekiel’ in *Ezekiel’s Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, eds. Stephen L. Cook and Corrine L. Patton (SBLSymS, 31; Atlanta, Ga.: SBL, 2004), 179-97[185]).

divine abandonment of the temple, but, more significantly, Yahweh's availability to the exiles is emphasized.⁹⁸ The gap between the divine absence from the Jerusalem Temple and the presence in Babylon is bridged by Ezekiel's כבוד theology, which utilizes Israel's wilderness experience, namely the tradition of the mobile יהוה כבוד.⁹⁹ Against this background the ideas of God's absence and presence can be considered as complementary.¹⁰⁰

One of the most important features of the description of the enthroned figure concerns the רקיע ('firmament'; 1:22), which refers to the platform on which the divine throne stood. The term always appears in the Old Testament in the context of creation and functions as a cosmic boundary.¹⁰¹ Whereas in Gen. 1:6-8 it separates the waters above from the waters below, here it indicates the qualitative difference between God as an enthroned kingly figure who is above (על)¹⁰² and the created order below. Whereas the wheels connect the throne vision with the earthly realm, the רקיע connects it with the heavenly sphere.¹⁰³ As Brownlee rightly notes, Ezekiel's vision can thus be considered 'a miniature representation of the cosmos in relation to God'.¹⁰⁴

The climactic part of the vision focuses on the divine throne and its occupant (1:26-28a). The description is reverentially cautious, as the author writes 'with the reticence of a holy fear'.¹⁰⁵ At the same time it is carefully structured. This has been demonstrated by Nam, who convincingly argues for a chiasmic arrangement of 1:26 with דמות כסא ('likeness of a throne') at the focal point.¹⁰⁶ The throne is not only the central motif of the current section, or the vision of ch. 1 alone, but it is of 'paramount importance'¹⁰⁷ for the entire book, as will be pointed out

⁹⁸ For ANE parallels of divine abandonment, see Daniel I. Block, 'Divine Abandonment: Ezekiel's Adaptation of an Ancient Near Eastern Motif' in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Margaret S. Odell and John T. Strong (SBLSymS, 9; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 15-42.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of Ezekiel's כבוד theology, see e.g. Mettinger, *Dethronement*, 106f.; John T. Strong, 'God's *Kābôd*: The Presence of Yahweh in the Book of Ezekiel' in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*, 69-95; Steven S. Tuell, 'Divine Presence and Absence in Ezekiel' in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*, 97-116.

¹⁰⁰ John Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (Biblical and Judaic Studies, 7; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 152.

¹⁰¹ Gen. 1:6-8, 14, 15, 17, 20; Ps. 19:2; 150:1; Dan. 12:3.

¹⁰² The correct translation of the preposition על in Ezek. 1:22 is 'above' or 'over', contrary to KJV's rendering as 'upon'.

¹⁰³ Nam, *Throne of God*, 255.

¹⁰⁴ William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19* (WBC, 28; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1986), 18.

¹⁰⁵ G.A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 20.

¹⁰⁶ Nam, *Throne of God*, 256-57.

¹⁰⁷ Mettinger, *Dethronement*, 106.

below. The only description of the throne in the vision is that it is ‘like the appearance of the sapphire stone’ (כַּמְרֵאָה אֲבֶן-סַפִּיר).¹⁰⁸ The biblical use of the sapphire generally suggests brilliance and preciousness, but it evokes also a sense of holiness.¹⁰⁹ The application of the sapphire symbolism to the throne points to the heavenly realm, as noted by Hengstenberg: ‘That the sapphire is brought forward on account of its heaven-like colour is shown by Exod. 25:10, where the whiteness, or the clear shining of the sapphire, stands in connection with the purity of heaven. The heaven-like colour of the throne indicates *the infinite eminence of God’s dominion* over the earth, with its impotence, sin, and unrighteousness.’¹¹⁰

The expressions of restraint are even more explicit in the description of the throne’s occupant, who is portrayed in 1:26 as ‘a likeness with the appearance of a man’ (דְמוּת כַּמְרֵאָה אָדָם). It is well known that in Ezek. 1 the use of כַּמְרֵאָה and דְמוּת is unusually frequent (seventeen occurrences altogether).¹¹¹ This intensity reaches a climax in 1:26, the only combined circumlocution, which highlights the paradoxical nature of attempting to represent the unrepresentable glory of Yahweh.¹¹² The repeated use of the expression of comparison reflects on the one hand the prophet’s desire to be faithful and exact in his description, but it also indicates his consciousness of the visionary nature of the event.¹¹³ Still, Eichrodt rightly notes that from Ezekiel’s description ‘we got only a vague outline’.¹¹⁴

The basic image of the One Enthroned in 1:26-28 is of a blinding light compared to fiery glowing metal (הַשֹּׁמֵל).¹¹⁵ The mysteriousness of the description reaches its high point in the comparison of God to the ‘appearance of a man’ (כַּמְרֵאָה אָדָם). Whereas in Gen. 1:26-27 it is stated that humanity (אָדָם) is created in the likeness (דְמוּת) of God, here God is portrayed in terms

¹⁰⁸ The description raises the question whether the material of the throne is in view here or rather its basis. MT supports the reading that sees throne itself to be of sapphire, a view supported also by Ezek. 10:1. On the other hand, the idea that sapphire is a pavement on which the throne is located is influenced by Exod. 24:10, which describes the God of Israel as follows: ‘Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself.’

¹⁰⁹ See e.g. ‘Jewels and Precious Stones’ in *DBI*, 451-52.

¹¹⁰ Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *The Prophecies of the Prophet Ezekiel Elucidated* (trans. A.C. Murphy and J.G. Murphy; Clark’s Foreign Theological Library 4/21; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1869), 24.

¹¹¹ כַּמְרֵאָה is used seven times (1:13, 14, 26, 27, 28), while דְמוּת appears ten times (1:5, 10, 13, 16, 22, 26, 28). James Muilenburg (‘Form Criticism and Beyond’, *JBL* 88 [1969], 1-18[18]) argues even for the structural significance in the repetition of דְמוּת. He refers to the term as ‘the key note of each section’ suggesting that the expression occurs at the beginning of each major sections of Ezek. 1 and climactically three times in the final section.

¹¹² For an argument concerning the reason of Ezechiel’s choice of the terms דְמוּת and כַּמְרֵאָה in 1:26, rather than נֹלָם and דְמוּת, see Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 64-68.

¹¹³ For parallels of restrained descriptions in ANE sources, see Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 53.

¹¹⁴ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 38.

¹¹⁵ The meaning and significance of הַשֹּׁמֵל attracted significant scholarly attention and it has usually been connected with the character of God’s personality. For different interpretive options, see Nam, *Throne of God*, 261-63.

of likeness to humanity. As a solution to this tension, Eisemann suggests that the prophet ‘implies that while God is totally devoid of form, he nonetheless employs the term “form” (“likeness”) to help make the image intelligible to the listener’.¹¹⁶ Mettinger’s creative view also merits attention, as he argues that the circumscribing words ‘serve the same purpose as the smoke and the train of the mantle in Isaiah’s throne-vision: to obscure God from human sight’.¹¹⁷

The final detail in the description of the enthroned God is the brightness compared to a ‘bow’, which encircled him (1:28a). The word קַשׁוּב is used in the Old Testament with the meaning of rainbow only in the flood account in Genesis and here.¹¹⁸ The validity of the connection between the two contexts has frequently been denied.¹¹⁹ However, I hold that the close relation is justified, since קַשׁוּב appears in both contexts as a symbol of God’s covenant with the human race. Its function in Ezek. 1:28 is the reassurance of the prophet of God’s faithfulness, the confirmation of his covenantal grace in a moment of a global national crisis.¹²⁰

The theological significance of the throne motif in Ezek. 1 becomes evident against the background of the intention and the overall purpose of the whole vision. The majority view argues for a positive purpose, seeing the vision as a manifestation of divine favour to Ezekiel and his fellow exiles.¹²¹ The key issue for the prophet was a way of convincing his fellow deportees of Yahweh’s kingship over them in spite of their experience of the Babylonian exile.¹²² The vision of Ezek. 1 was a good argument in the prophet’s hand as it offered a glimpse into the transcendent character of the sovereignty of Yahweh, who is free from earthly limitations. It

¹¹⁶ Moshe Eisemann, *Yechezkel: The Book of Ezekiel: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (3 vols.; The ArtScroll Tanach Series; Brooklyn, N.Y.: Mesorah Publications, 1977), I, 86.

¹¹⁷ Mettinger, *Dethronement*, 107.

¹¹⁸ Gen. 9:13, 14, 16; Ezek. 1:28. In the other occurrences it is used as a designation of an instrument for hunting, in a military connotation as a ‘war bow’ or figuratively as a symbol of power, sovereignty or war. For references and detailed elaboration, see Trygve Kronholm and Heinz-Josef Fabry, ‘ קַשׁוּב ’ in *TDOT*, XIII, 201-08.

¹¹⁹ E.g. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I*, 123.

¹²⁰ Laurence Turner (‘The Rainbow as the Sign of the Covenant in Genesis 9:11-13’, *VT* 43 [1993], 119-23) convincingly argues that not only the colour of the theophanic splendour is suggested by the rainbow imagery of Ezek. 1:28, but also its shape. He points out the deficiencies of the view that the rainbow in Gen. 9 represents God’s war bow and demonstrates that the rainbow in both contexts provides a pictorial representation of the firmament. The content of the covenant promise thus meant that the firmament’s original function, the separation of the waters above and below, will be maintained.

¹²¹ For the most important proponents of this view and for its challenges, see Allen, ‘The Structure and Intention of Ezekiel 1’, 145-61. While Allen gives a thorough overview of both positions, he advocates the theory of negative intention, following Kraetzschmar and Brownlee. However, I hold his arguments to be exegetically unconvincing.

¹²² For the evaluation of the rhetorical effectiveness of the book of Ezekiel, see Thomas Rentz’s (*The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel* (VTSup, 76; Leiden: Brill, 1999) monograph, which argues that the book was a fitting response to the situation.

reassures the exiles that the destruction of Jerusalem is not a sign of Yahweh's fall, since he is still seated on the throne as a sovereign. The vision conveys the idea that Yahweh is not limited to a particular location: while his glory dwelt in the Jerusalem temple, the only legitimate place of worship, his chariot-throne now moves to confront the exiles in the unclean land of Babylon.¹²³ Zimmerli qualifies the surprise of moving the chariot-throne to a distant land, 'contrary to correct dogmatics', as 'the miracle of Yahweh's faithfulness'.¹²⁴ The central message of the highly theocentric vision is that 'the spatial distinction between Babylon and Jerusalem is completely relativized' whenever the people of God are viewed from the perspective of the heavenly throne.¹²⁵

As has been noted, the idea of the mobile throne of Yahweh is limited to the book of Ezekiel. I turn now to an examination of Yahweh's throne as the fixed centre of the universe. This will consider the throne visions together with non-visionary throne texts with the intention of establishing the basic theological meanings of Yahweh's throne in the Old Testament.

3. THE THEOLOGICAL MEANINGS OF YAHWEH'S THRONE

The inductive study of the Old Testament throne of Yahweh texts reveals that the motif is employed with five basic theological meanings, which often overlap to a considerable degree within a single passage. This section will provide exegetical evidence for establishing each of these meanings individually. Only representative texts from different periods of Jewish history and from different genres will be analysed here. They will be employed in this discussion with the purpose of pointing out the diversity of meanings within the canonical context.

3.1. SYMBOL OF DIVINE RULERSHIP

Brueggemann in his magisterial *Theology of the Old Testament* points out that 'Israel's preferred mode of theological discourse is political'.¹²⁶ The rhetoric of the Old Testament is permeated

¹²³ Mettinger (*Dethronement*, 106-07) notes that in the vision, Yahweh's כבוד and his throne are related and both move. However, clear distinction should be made between the כבוד and the throne of God beneath. This is clearly implied in the texts describing the כבוד as located above the cherubim (10:19; 11:22) or when it simply abandons the chariot throne (9:3; 10:4).

¹²⁴ Walther Zimmerli, 'The Message of the Prophet Ezekiel' in *The Fiery Throne: The Prophets and Old Testament Theology*, ed. Kenneth C. Hanson (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2003), 75-95(81).

¹²⁵ Brevard S. Childs, 'The Exegetical Significance of Canon for the Study of the Old Testament' in *Congress Volume Göttingen 1977*, ed. John A. Emerson (VTSup, 29; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 66-80(73).

¹²⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1997), 238.

with the motif of Yahweh's kingship.¹²⁷ The main royal images are the court and the throne, which entered the symbolic universe of the Jewish mindset as closely defining God's sovereign rulership. Thus, the representation of God as a heavenly king sitting enthroned in his palace serves as a theological context against which the Old Testament throne texts are to be interpreted.¹²⁸ Maier rightly notes that within the context of Yahweh's kingship the throne motif has a cosmological significance: 'Der ewige Gottesthron als Symbol der Königsherrschaft Gottes garantiert Bestand und Ordnung des Kosmos.'¹²⁹ The motif evokes the ideas of sovereignty and universal divine government over all the created order. It is closely related to the issue of power as it de-absolutizes and de-legitimizes all other governances claiming absolute rule, but at the same time rehabilitates all those in need.¹³⁰ I would like to suggest that all Old Testament throne of God texts evoke the notion of divine rulership, but the majority of them indicate at the same time other meaning(s) which flow from Yahweh's identity as a sovereign king. Thus, it is appropriate to speak of the overlap in theological meanings within numerous throne texts.

One of the strongest expressions of the idea of divine rulership is found in the throne vision of 1Kgs 22:19-23. These texts are part of a larger narrative (22:1-40) that was composed (at least in part) as a means for presenting a theological interpretation of Ahab's death at Ramoth Gilead.¹³¹ The narrative demonstrates that the death of Israel's king was the result of a divine decision. The highlight is the confrontation between the prophets Zedekiah ben Canaanah and Micaiah ben Imlah, who hold opposing views concerning Ahab's success in the battle. The throne vision serves as an argument for Micaiah that verifies him as a true prophet, the genuine representative of Yahweh.¹³²

The locus of the events described in the vision is in heaven. Yahweh is portrayed as sitting on his throne (ישב על-כסא) and acting as chairman for a meeting attended by all the

¹²⁷ The theme of the kingship of God has been one of the most discussed subjects in the field of the Old Testament studies. The investigations have focused on the nature and the origin of the concept and also its relation to the ANE religions. For the history of interpretation, see e.g. Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), 141f.

¹²⁸ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 49.

¹²⁹ Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis*, 102.

¹³⁰ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 239-41.

¹³¹ The historicity of the account has been seriously debated. For an overview of the scholarly discussion, see Marvin A. Sweeney, *First and Second Kings: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 2007), 255-57.

¹³² The vision does not indicate the heavenly ascension of the prophet. Micaiah is not delivering a message of God entrusted to him, but he rather recounts a story (the meaning of דבר could be 'story', as well as 'word') about Yahweh that the king 'is not really supposed to know about' (Jerome T. Walsh, *1Kings* [Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996], 350).

heavenly host (כל-צבא השמים)¹³³ standing (עמד)¹³⁴ around him. The scene clearly conforms to a pattern of divine council.¹³⁵ Although Yahweh is not explicitly termed מלך in the vision, the overall picture is that of an enthroned king. The idea of royalty is indicated by sitting on a throne and making decisions, which determine the future of an earthly, human king. A particular point of theological significance is the juxtaposition of Yahweh's heavenly throne (22:19) with the earthly thrones of Ahab and Josaphat (22:10). First, the kings are described as seated on their own respective thrones (ישבים איש על-כסאו), a description echoed in 22:19 (את-יהוה ישב על-כסאו). The parallel indicates a clear power relation between the earthly thrones of the kings and God's heavenly throne. Namely, the monarchs of both Israel and Judah are portrayed in terms of holding their thrones under the higher court of Yahweh to whose sovereign kingship all the earthly authorities are subordinated.¹³⁶ The motif of God's heavenly throne in this context strongly highlights the central message of the vision that the ultimate purpose of Yahweh cannot be prevented. The throne-parallelism clearly emphasizes the idea that divine intention supersedes all human intentions, even if they are the decrees of kings who hold positions of authority on earth.¹³⁷

Maticich notes that the scene in 1Kgs 22:19-23 represents a 'regular' royal council meeting. She differentiates between this role of the royal court and one that is more centred on

¹³³ For the different possibilities on the identity of the כל-צבא השמים, see Maticich, 'Divine King', 24-26.

¹³⁴ Maticich ('Divine King', 26) opposes the suggestion that a verb of standing followed by the preposition על may indicate service on part of the heavenly host (GKC, §119; BDB, 756). She suggests that 'the context of Micaiah's vision does not make explicit a serving function of the host as a whole, though certainly they seem to be viewed as subordinate to the enthroned Yahweh'.

¹³⁵ David M. Fleming ('The Divine Council as Type Scene in the Hebrew Bible' [PhD Dissertation; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989]) in his dissertation demonstrates that the biblical divine council type-scene conforms to a four-part pattern: (1) an introduction as a vision or other narratorial comment; (2) a setting description which includes heavenly beings; (3) a dialogue of divine council members leading to Yahweh's decree; and (4) a conclusion which explores the effects of the decree. The concept is now generally assumed in the ANE sources. See e.g. E. Theodore Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM, 24; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980); Heinz-Dieter Neef, *Gottes himmlischer Thronrat: Hintergrund und Bedeutung von sôd JHWH im Alten Testament* (AzTh, 79; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1994).

¹³⁶ The idea of subordination is further emphasized by the inferiority of the human monarchs' advisers (four hundred raving prophets) to the heavenly ones. As Barbara Schmitz (*Prophetie und Königtum: Eine Narratologisch-Historische Methodologie Entwickelt an den Königbüchern* [FAT, 60; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 284) rightly observes, the juxtaposition of the two councils is ironical: 'Die Analogie der Ratsversammlungen in Samaria und bei JHWH macht die "irdische" Hofratszene retrospektiv zur Karikatur.'

¹³⁷ Simon J. de Vries, *1 Kings* (WBC, 12; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 270. To the contrary, R. Walter L. Moberly ('Does God Lie to His Prophets? The Story of Micaiah ben Imlah as a Test Case', *HTR* 96 (2003), 1-23[9-12]) interprets the purpose of the vision on the basis of the analysis of Micaiah's communicative strategy in terms of prophetic call to repentance: 'If the message is that the king will die, it is given so that the king may not die.'

legal considerations.¹³⁸ An examination of the latter function will be the object of inquiry in the following section.

3.2. SYMBOL OF JUDGESHIP

The portrayal of Yahweh as a judge is predominant in the Old Testament.¹³⁹ The metaphor pictures Yahweh as committed to a rule of just law, the law of well-being which maintains moral coherence in the universe.¹⁴⁰ One of the clearest texts that elaborates the question of how Yahweh's just rule is exercised is the judgment vision of Dan. 7. This chapter is considered the 'veritable centre',¹⁴¹ the 'pivotal chapter'¹⁴² of the book of Daniel which is at the same time 'one of the great riddles in Old Testament research'.¹⁴³ Its literary structure is generally divided into two major parts: the vision (7:2-14) and its interpretation (7:15-27), framed by a prologue (7:1) and an epilogue (7:28).¹⁴⁴ It has often been noted that the vision itself is chiastically arranged with the judgment scene of 7:9-10 at the centre, supplemented by the scene in 7:13-14.¹⁴⁵ The Aramaic term כְּרִסְאָ (‘throne’) appears twice in 7:9 indicating the prominence of the throne motif at the heart of the vision.

The reference to the plural thrones (כְּרִסְיָן) that is followed by the mention of the single throne of the Ancient of Days (כְּרִסְאָ) has attracted considerable scholarly attention. The number of the thrones and the identity of their occupants have been questions that have dominated the discussion.¹⁴⁶ However, these thrones are of secondary significance in relation to the throne of

¹³⁸ Maticich, 'Divine King', 130-31.

¹³⁹ For a study demonstrating the fundamental importance of the topic for the theology of the Old Testament, see Richard Nelson Boyce, *The Cry to God in the Old Testament* (SBLDS, 103; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1988).

¹⁴⁰ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 234.

¹⁴¹ André Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* (trans. David Pellauer; London: SPCK, 1979), 122.

¹⁴² Norman C. Habel, 'Introducing the Apocalyptic Visions of Daniel 7', *CTM* 41 (1970), 10-26(13).

¹⁴³ Helge S. Kvanvig, 'An Akkadian Vision as Background for Dan 7?', *ST* 35 (1981), 85-89(85). For a recent review of research on the book of Daniel, including the issues raised by ch. 7, see David M. Valeta, 'The Book of Daniel in Recent Research (Part 1)', *CBR* 6 (2008), 330-54.

¹⁴⁴ Paul R. Raabe ('Daniel 7: Its Structure and Role in the Book', *HAR* 9 [1985], 267-75[267]) affirms that such division is assumed by the most studies.

¹⁴⁵ See e.g. Arthur J. Ferch, *The Son of Man in Daniel 7* (AUSDDS, 6; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1979), 136-37. The emphasis on Dan. 7:9-10 may also be indicated by the form of the text, since it is the only section in the immediate context composed as poetry. William H. Shea (*Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation* [DARCOM Series, 1; Silver Springs, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1992], 115) explains the poetic form of the material as 'probably Daniel's own spontaneous reaction to the grandeur and majesty of the scenes that passed before him'.

¹⁴⁶ The suggestions concerning the number and the meaning of the thrones are as numerous in Jewish as in Christian sources. For different interpretations, see Nam, *Throne of God*, 416. In the Old Testament and in the Jewish literature the heavenly beings generally appear in standing posture in front of the throne of God. Nevertheless, Shea (*Prophetic Interpretation*, 121) argues that the occupants of the thrones in Dan. 7 could be heavenly beings, since the

the Ancient of Days, which is clearly at the centre of the scene. The description of the throne is dominated by fire imagery: ‘His throne was flames of fire, its wheels burning fire and a stream of fire. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him’ (7:9b-10a). There is an ambiguity in the Old Testament’s frequent association of fire with God.¹⁴⁷ As is well known, the fire often appears as a symbol of destructive divine judgment.¹⁴⁸ While this notion is clearly indicated in the fiery judgment upon the beast in 7:11, Stefanovic aptly notes that the term for fire in 7:9-10 (נֹר), employed three times in relation to the throne, differs from that in 7:11 (אֵשׁ), though the basic meaning is the same. For this reason, he relates the fiery description of God’s throne rather to the concept of ‘light’ and ‘brightness’ as pointing to the presence and holiness of God.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, this meaning of the fiery imagery does not minimize the throne’s function as the ‘seat of justice’.¹⁵⁰ There is a remarkable similarity between Ezekiel’s chariot throne and the wheels of Daniel’s judgment throne. While this imagery indicates the dynamic nature of the divine presence, no physical movement is mentioned.¹⁵¹

The idea of judgment is further emphasized by two additional elements introduced in 7:9-10: the Ancient of Days and the heavenly books. The title ‘Ancient of Days’ (יְיָוִי עַדְיָק) is unique in biblical literature and it seems to be a representation of God as a person advanced in years. The description of the ‘hair of his head ... like pure wool’ signifies accumulated wisdom that best qualifies him as a judge.¹⁵² His ‘clothing ... as white as snow’ (7:9) represents purity of character,

judgment described in 7:10 is ‘a collective of some sort’. The plural has also been interpreted as a plural of majesty indicating that God’s throne is a kind of ‘superthrone’ (Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* [Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000], 113). Another view relates the thrones to the previous scene of the oppressive powers symbolized by beasts and horns, who occupy thrones, but are then ‘overthrown’ (possible translation of רִבְוִי) (Zdravko Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise. Commentary on the Book of Daniel* [Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2007], 261-62). Neither of these interpretive options detracts from the significance of the throne motif for the vision.

¹⁴⁷ For the interpretation of God’s association with fire in the Old Testament, see Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (3 vols.; trans. J.A. Baker; OTL; London: SCM, 1964), II, 16-20.

¹⁴⁸ Deut. 4:24; Ps. 18:9-14; 21:10; 50:3; 97:3.

¹⁴⁹ Stefanovic, *Daniel*, 262. In contrast, some interpreters see in the fiery description more than a representation of the glorious theophany. According to Nam the fire recalls also ‘the fierce heat of His judgment on sin and on all those opposed to His supreme authority’ (Nam, *Throne of God*, 423).

¹⁵⁰ Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 113.

¹⁵¹ For a comparison of Daniel’s concept of throne with Ezekiel’s chariot-throne, see Maticich, ‘Divine King’, 96-97.

¹⁵² The white or grey hair of the Ancient of Days indicates the hair of an aged man. Significantly, in Ugaritic literature the god El is represented as a white or grey-bearded man. Ahirat addresses El with the following words: ‘You are great, El, you are indeed wise, the grey hairs of your beard indeed instruct you’ (CTA 4 5.65-66). The portrayal clearly links grey hair to wisdom. Some push the concept of the Ancient of Days beyond this interpretation arguing for the idea of the eternity of a deity (e.g. Lacocque, *Daniel*, 142-43; John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* [WBC, 30; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989], 165). For a detailed study of the concept of the Ancient of Days, see Maticich, ‘Divine King’, 87-95.

which indicates objectivity of judgment. Besides the judicial throne and the references to the qualifications of the Judge, integral to the judgment scene are the opening of the heavenly books that evoke the idea of remembrance and function as the source of evidence.¹⁵³ The multitude of servants encircling the heavenly throne seem also to be involved into the process of judgment, acting in a witnessing role, although the text gives no indication of participation.¹⁵⁴ On the basis of this evidence it can be concluded that the function of the divine council in 7:9-10 is clearly judicial.

The concept of divine judgment has two dimensions in biblical literature: positive and negative, or saving and punitive. As noted by Moskala, these two aspects are closely related:

Both aspects are usually presented and are complementary, but it is necessary to emphasize that the primary meaning is undeniably a judgment in favor of God's faithful people (Deut. 32:36; 1Chron. 16:33-35; Dan. 7:22; Heb. 9:27-28). When God judges, it means first of all that He justifies, delivers, saves, vindicates, and protects ... However, those who choose not to be positively judged by God ... stay under His condemnation (Gen. 6:3; Jn 3:36; Rom. 1:18-19).¹⁵⁵

Both aspects of the concept of judgment are represented in Dan. 7: (1) the negative, as directed against the beasts and the little horn (7:11-12, 26) and (2) the positive, as 'given in favour of the saints' (יהב לקדישי; 7:22) who receive God's kingdom as a reward (7:27).¹⁵⁶ In the Old Testament the positive aspect of the judgment is repeatedly related to the throne motif. In this context God's throne appears as an anchor of hope which functions on an individual, historical or eschatological level.¹⁵⁷

It seems, however, that Dan. 7 has much more than just a legal function, as suggested by the scene in 7:13-14, which supplements the central judgment vision of 7:9-10. In these texts it is stated that the Ancient of Days transfers dominion, glory and kingdom to a 'Son of Man' (בר אנוש)

¹⁵³ For the book motif in Daniel, see Baynes, 'Heavenly Book', 90-131.

¹⁵⁴ The expression 'thousands upon thousands' and 'ten thousand times ten thousand' is to be understood as a literary device known as 'numerical progression'. Its function is to describe the totality of God's army which is beyond numbering (Num. 10:36; Deut. 33:2). The Old Testament also describes angels in terms of 'armies', 'hosts' or 'myriads of holy ones' (Stefanovic, *Daniel*, 262).

¹⁵⁵ Jiří Moskala, 'Toward a Biblical Theology of God's Judgment: A Celebration of the Cross in Seven Phases of Divine Universal Judgment (An Overview of Theocentric-Christocentric Approach)', *JATS* 15 (2004), 138-65(140). Although condemnation or destroying is a secondary meaning of the concept of judgment, in some passages this meaning is stressed as having a primary function (e.g. Ps. 143:2; Jn 5:29; Rom. 2:16; Heb. 13:4).

¹⁵⁶ For the justification of translating יהב לקדישי as 'given in favour of the saints' instead of 'given to the saints' (i.e. the saints themselves judged), see Arthur J. Ferch, 'The Judgment Scene in Daniel 7' in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies*, eds. A.V. Wallenkampf and W.R. Leshner (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1981), 157-76(166-67).

¹⁵⁷ For the function of God's throne as the anchor of hope on an individual level, see Ps. 11:4, on a historical level, see Lam. 5:19, Jer. 14:21 and on eschatological level, see Jer. 3:17, Ezek. 43:7.

figure and this act goes beyond the responsibilities usually associated with a law court setting.¹⁵⁸ Shea convincingly argues that the scene indicates establishing of a co-regency between the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man which becomes intelligible against the historical setting of the vision – the first year that Belshazzar is on the Babylon throne (7:1).¹⁵⁹ Namely, another co-regency was established roughly at the time of Daniel’s vision, but in the earthly context, between Belshazzar and his father, Nabonidus. Though the two co-regencies are of quite a different nature, they are analogous.¹⁶⁰ The parallel is theologically significant, since it contrasts the earthly and the heavenly realities.¹⁶¹ The key word of the vision is שָׁלֹטַן (‘dominion’), which occurs eight times in the chapter.¹⁶² The centrality of the term implies that the main question of Dan. 7 is the following: Who holds the dominion, the authority to rule the earth? The vision conveys the perspective that the Ancient of Days sitting on the throne is the sovereign ruler of the earth’s history, who will reverse the historical situation at the end.¹⁶³ Finally, Nam’s insight seems an appropriate conclusion for the discussion of the significance of the throne motif in Dan. 7:

The title of the One who takes the throne, ‘the Ancient of Days,’ points to one side of time, the Urzeit, whence He has been sitting on the throne. But the throne itself points to the other side of time, the Endzeit, when God sitting upon the throne will investigate and judge people ... With all these implications, God and His throne occupy the central position of the eschatological heavenly judgment scene depicted in the apocalyptic vision of Dan. 7.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ Daniel Harrington (‘Review of Arthur J. Ferch, *The Son of Man in Daniel 7*’, *CBQ* 46 [1984], 308-09[308]) rightly notes that ‘there are few problems in biblical field that are ... more burdened with bibliography than the Son of Man question’. For the overview of the discussion with a well-argued case for the identity of the Son of Man as a heavenly messianic figure, see Ferch, *The Son of Man in Daniel 7*, 1f.; Michael B. Shepherd, ‘Daniel 7:13 and the New Testament Son of Man’, *WTJ* 68 (2006), 99-111.

¹⁵⁹ For the interpretation of the chronological data of Dan. 7:1, see Gerhard F. Hasel, ‘The First and Third Years of Belshazzar (Dan. 7:1; 8:1)’, *AUSS* 15 (1977), 153-68.

¹⁶⁰ For the nature of relationship between the two co-regencies, see William A. Shea, ‘The Neo-Babylonian Historical Setting for Daniel 7’, *AUSS* 24 (1986), 31-36.

¹⁶¹ The events in the vision of Dan. 7 are described as taking place on two levels: earthly (7:2-8, 11-12) and heavenly (7:9-10, 13-14). George W.E. Nickelsburg (*Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* [Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1981], 83-84) describes the relation of the two levels with the following words: ‘The beasts appear, act, and are destroyed on earth. The court is a heavenly one, and it is there that the one like a son of man is exalted.’ The divine judgment ‘passed in heaven has immediate consequences on the earthly level’. For an opposing view locating the whole vision on earth, including the divine council scene, see Goldingay, *Daniel*, 164-65.

¹⁶² Dan. 7:6, 12, 24(3x), 26, 27(2x).

¹⁶³ For the thematic reversal in the book of Daniel as a literary device producing a heightened emphasis, see Zdravko Stefanovic, ‘Daniel: A Book of Significant Reversals’, *AUSS* 30 (1992), 139-50.

¹⁶⁴ Nam, *Throne of God*, 426-27.

In the Old Testament visions of God's throne the prophets are involved to a different degree into the course of the visions they receive. In Ezekiel's (Ezek. 1) and Micaiah's (1Kgs 22:19-23) throne visions they are mere spectators of the events, while in Dan. 7 the prophet converses with an *angelus interpretes* about the meaning of the scenes he has seen. The highest degree of the prophet's involvement appears in the vision of Isa. 6 in which Isaiah receives relevant information for his ministry directly from God's throne with the possibility of a response. In this vision God's throne appears as a place of revelation, which will be the focus of the next section.

3.3. PLACE OF REVELATION

The theological meaning of God's throne as a place of revelation is clearly expressed in the call-narrative of Isaiah (6:1-13),¹⁶⁵ whose preaching, according to von Rad, represents the most powerful theological phenomenon of the whole Old Testament.¹⁶⁶ As Fleming notes, the form of the report is a 'dramatic vision with a divine council frame'.¹⁶⁷ The scene is taking place in אֵלֵי־הַכִּסֵּא setting centred on the action around God's throne.¹⁶⁸ The throne vision establishes the prophet's authority as a messenger of the divine council and provides at the same time a conceptual framework for the message of judgment which is to be proclaimed by Isaiah. This agenda is reflected in the structure of the vision in which the account of the prophet's commissioning (6:1-8) is followed by the revelation of the prophetic message entrusted to him (6:9-13), which becomes the 'focal point and epitome for "the message" of the book of Isaiah'.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Norman Habel ('The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives', *ZAW* 77 [1965], 297-323) investigates the form of biblical call-narratives identifying their common elements. He argues for the continuity of Isa. 6 with the calls of Gideon, Moses and other prophets. The major argument against this conclusion is the uniquely departing feature of the Isaianic account in which the prophet voluntarily responds to God's call (6:8). Another significant attempt to deal with the genre of Isa. 6 is the study of Mordecai M. Kaplan ('Isaiah 6:1-11', *JBL* 45 [1926], 251-59), who revived Caspari's thesis (see Carl P. Caspari, *Commentar til de tolv foste Capitel af Propheten Jesaia* [Christiania: Mailing, 1867], 240-45) by questioning the idea of a prophetic call in the vision. He rather views it as picturing 'the sense of despair which came over Isaiah in the course of his career'. For a critique of Kaplan's thesis, see Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; CC; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1991), 256-58.

¹⁶⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Die Botschaft der Propheten* (München: Siebenstern Taschenbuch, 1967), 115.

¹⁶⁷ Fleming, *Divine Council*, 94-95.

¹⁶⁸ There has been much speculation whether אֵלֵי־הַכִּסֵּא in Isa. 6 is to be located in the heavenly or the earthly setting. For the summary of different views, see Metzger, 'Wohnstatt Jahwes', 144 n. 15.

¹⁶⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1998), 61. There is no unanimity concerning the chapter's division. For the varying opinions, see e.g. Francis Landy, 'Strategies of Concentration and Diffusion in Isaiah 6', *BibInt* 7 (1999), 58-82(59 n. 4). Edward J. Young (*The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* [3 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965-72], I, 234) convincingly argues that the vision and message of Isa. 6 are complementary: 'The

The vision is focused on God who is portrayed as a divine king seated on his throne in a full regal authority. No detailed description of the throne or the enthroned deity is given. The only expression that probably qualifies the throne is ‘highly exalted’ (רם ונשא), but the description may also refer to God who is seated on the throne.¹⁷⁰ In spite of this uncertainty, the emphasis on elevation should be clearly interpreted as pointing to royalty and transcendence. God’s greatness is further emphasized by referring to the voluminous size of his robe (שוליי), which fills the temple/palace (היכל).¹⁷¹ The cumulative force of these symbolic details strongly highlights the notion of God’s kingship, which is also reflected in the employment of the divine titles אדני (6:1) and המלך יהוה צבאות (6:5). The introductory reference to the death of King Uzziah (6:1) probably also bears a theological significance in line with the observations above. While the remark may serve only the purpose of dating the reported vision, it is more probable that the author employed it with the theological purpose of contrasting the transitoriness of the human kings with the abiding quality of the divine king.¹⁷²

The detailed description of the throne’s surroundings serves the purpose of emphasizing God’s exalted nature. The uniqueness of his very being is indicated by the *trishagion* or the threefold sanctus of the seraphim’s acclamation (6:3).¹⁷³ The concept of God’s holiness has central significance in Isaiah’s theology and it is closely connected with the ancient Jerusalemite tradition.¹⁷⁴ Ringgren persuasively argues for two corresponding aspects of the divine holiness: awesomeness with unapproachability and beneficence.¹⁷⁵ In the vision of Isa. 6 the notion of

vision is necessary for a proper understanding of the message, and the message itself cannot begin to receive its proper force apart from the preceding vision.’

¹⁷⁰ Maticich, ‘Divine King’, 41.

¹⁷¹ The garment in view is perhaps some sort of royal tunic or robe. For possible ANE parallels, see Maticich, ‘Divine King’, 45 n. 12.

¹⁷² See e.g. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 176-77; Young, *Isaiah*, I, 235.

¹⁷³ The Hebrew uses repetition to express superlatives or to indicate totality. Thus, Maticich (‘Divine King’, 55) translates קדוש קדוש קדוש as ‘most holy of all’. For different interpretations on the nature and function of the seraphim, see e.g. K.R. Joines, ‘Winged Serpents in Isaiah’s Vision’, *JBL* 86 (1967), 410-15; Jean de Savignac, ‘Les Seraphim’, *VT* 22 (1972), 320-25.

¹⁷⁴ Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Andrews University Monographs, 5; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1972), 220.

¹⁷⁵ Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (trans. D.E. Green; London: SPCK, 1966), 74. For the dialectical relationship of the two aspects of Isaiah’s holiness theology, see Reinhard Fey, *Amos und Jesaja: Abhängigkeit und Eigenständigkeit des Jesaja* (WMANT, 12; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1963), 105-20.

God's holiness is related to the concept of judgment, since 'Isaiah seems to have regarded the holiness of God as something that was threatening to his people'.¹⁷⁶

The message revealed from the throne and entrusted to Isaiah in 6:9-13 is characterized as 'the oddest commission ever given to a prophet'.¹⁷⁷ The content of the message is God's unequivocal judgment on Israel. The *crux interpretum* is the so-called hardening effect of the prophet's preaching outlined in 6:9-10. While the passage generated much discussion, at the same time it provided an important paradigm for the major theological contributors of the New Testament.¹⁷⁸ In spite of the negative outlook, the concept of remnant is a significant part of the message as reflected in the idea of the remaining tenth and in the clause 'a holy seed is its stock' (6:13).¹⁷⁹ However, Hasel argues that even the remnant motif is used in a negative sense for the illustration of the magnitude of the disaster coming on Israel.¹⁸⁰ Still, the hopeful aspect of the motif, interpreted in 6:13 in terms of a seed of new life, is not ruled out. It actually runs through the entire ministry of Isaiah assuring the permanence of Yahweh's promises to Israel, which 'were not robbed of their power by the catastrophe of judgment'.¹⁸¹

The throne vision of Isaiah appears as the defence of the coming divine judgment. Since the message is revealed in a *היכל* setting as coming from God's throne, it bears an unchallengeable authority. In this sense 'all the rhetorical energy of the chapter'¹⁸² and also Isaiah's prophetic ministry emanates from the divine throne which functions, on one hand, as a

¹⁷⁶ Hugh G.M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 43.

¹⁷⁷ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 78.

¹⁷⁸ For the examination of the obduracy theme in the biblical and Jewish literature, see Franz Hesse, *Das Verstockungsproblem im Alten Testament: eine frömmigkeitsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (BZAW, 74; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1955); Craig A. Evans, *To See and not Perceive: Isaiah 6.9-10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation* (JSOTSup, 64; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989).

¹⁷⁹ For the textual problem of the last clause of the vision and a well-argued case for its genuineness, see Udo F.C. Worschech, 'The Problem of Isaiah 6:13', *AUSS* 12 (1974), 126-38.

¹⁸⁰ Hasel, *Remnant*, 239-40. Gregory K. Beale ('Isaiah 6:9-13: A Retributive Taunt Against Idolatry', *VT* 41 [1991], 257-78) interprets the function of the remnant motif in Isa. 6:13 in the same line of evidence. He even goes a step further, arguing convincingly that 6:9-13 is to be interpreted as a pronouncement of judgment on Israel's idolatry, which is a metonym for the nation's covenantal disobedience.

¹⁸¹ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 275. Hasel (*Remnant*, 223) presents a convincing argument that the remnant motif is present from the very beginning of the prophet's ministry. He demonstrates that judgment and salvation are juxtaposed themes of Isaiah which 'can be pronounced together because both are radically united in the very "holiness" of Yahweh' (cf. Craig A. Evans, 'Isa. 6:9-13 in the Context of Isaiah's Theology', *JETS* 29 [1986], 139-46). For a contrasting view arguing that the concept of remnant is present only in the oracles of Isaiah's later ministry, see e.g. T.C. Vriesen, 'Essentials of the Theology of Isaiah' in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, eds. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962), 128-46.

¹⁸² Landy, 'Strategies', 82.

symbol of God's universal sovereignty and, on the other, as a source of revelation in representation of Yahweh's authority.

Thus far we have established on the basis of the Old Testament throne visions that the throne motif expresses God's authority as a sovereign ruler, supreme judge and an unparalleled divine being able to make revelations. On the following pages I turn to the Old Testament throne-texts which are not part of the throne-visions, as additional theological meanings of Yahweh's throne will be pointed out.

3.4. SYMBOL OF A CREATING POWER

Creation is considered the starting-point and the proper focus of the theology of the Old Testament.¹⁸³ As an 'act of ordering' it 'is an act of sovereignty on the largest scale'.¹⁸⁴

Therefore, it is not surprising that Maier concludes: 'Die Vorstellung vom Gottesthron war in der israelitisch-jüdischen Religion so sehr Veranschaulichung der Welt- und Geschichtsmächtigkeit des Schöpfergottes.'¹⁸⁵

The divine throne appears as a symbol of Yahweh's creating power in Job 26:9. The context of this text is the hymnic section of 26:5-14, which is part of the larger unit of Job 25–26. In these chapters Job reproaches his friends for their miserable comfort by contrasting their arms not having the power to offer help with God's power.¹⁸⁶ As Habel notes, the section emphasizes 'the transcendent mystery and orderly design of the cosmos'.¹⁸⁷ The rhetorical purpose of Job's speech is rightly summarized by Fokkelman:

Paradoxically enough, the point of his brilliant exercise about Creator and creation is modesty, and with this Job places himself and his song of praise in diametrical opposition to Bildad's pretensions and moralising. Bildad uses God's power and transcendence to subdue a friend, and put himself forward as knowledgeable; Job uses his forthright hymn

¹⁸³ See e.g. Rolf Knierim, 'The Task of Old Testament Theology', *HBT* 6 (1984), 25-57. In contrast, Claus Westermann (*Der Schöpfungsbericht vom Anfang der Bibel* [Calwer Hefte, 30; Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1961], 6) argues for the priority of the exodus event. James Barr (*The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* [London: SCM Press, 1999], 473) rightly notes: 'Exodus may thus have considerable importance as a significant stage in the theological development. But if we see the material as story, the reverse is much more important. The starting-point is all-important. What is said at the beginning sets the stage for that which is to follow.'

¹⁸⁴ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 529.

¹⁸⁵ Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis*, 126.

¹⁸⁶ In Job's voice 'a flood of sarcasm' is seen in charging Bildad for his 'hypothetical spirit'. See David Wolfers, 'Job 26: An Orphan Chapter' in *The Book of Job*, ed. Wim A.M. Beuken (BETL, 114; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 387-91.

¹⁸⁷ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1985), 366. For the use of the language of Canaanite mythology in the speech, see James A. Wharton, *Job* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / John Knox, 1999), 108.

to God's power and transcendence to undermine the pretence of all-embracing knowledge.¹⁸⁸

Thus, in the context in which God's power is reinforced it is stated that 'He covers the face of the throne and spreads over it his cloud' (26:9).¹⁸⁹ According to Habel's structural analysis, this verse with its reference to God's throne is of pivotal significance for the section.¹⁹⁰ The text emphasizes the invisibility and inaccessibility of God's throne to Job. The throne is pictured as covered by clouds that function as a kind of 'mask of God' veiling his essential being.¹⁹¹ Clines notes that a term for a cloud mass (ענן) is employed here, therefore the celestial throne is not concealed behind a single cloud, but cloud in general.¹⁹² The veiling of God's earthly presence with a theophanic cloud is a well-known motif from Sinai (Exod. 19:16; 24:15-16), the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34-38) and the Solomonic temple (1Kgs 8:10-11). Whereas the context in all these references is earthly, in Job 26:9 the cloud motif is associated with the realm of God's celestial abode. In both contexts the basic idea is that of concealing – even in the heavenly context, where the cloud is referred to as God's own cloud (ענני). Also the association of 'face' with the throne (פני-כסא) is to be understood as an allusion to the presence of God.¹⁹³

The relevance of Job 26:9 in relation to Job's earlier speeches is indicated in his desire to find God's 'dwelling place' (תכונה; 23:3) for the sake of presenting his suit in God's presence so that he may gain vindication (23:4). However, God dwells in a hidden transcendence behind his cloud and even the 'face' of his throne is hidden.¹⁹⁴ The throne motif stands at the heart of Job's speech on creation as a celestial centre from which God's creating power is generated and his sustaining authority exercised over the whole work of creation. By employing of the throne motif the finitude of the man as a created being is contrasted with God's infinity as a creator.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁸ J. P. Fokkerman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible at the Interface of Prosody and Structural Analysis Vol. 4: Job 15–42* (SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2004), 137.

¹⁸⁹ On the textual ambiguity of the verse and for a convincing argument that refutes the idea that כסה is considered a variant spelling of the noun 'full moon' (כסא), see Nam, *Throne of God*, 320-22.

¹⁹⁰ He divides the structure of the hymnic section into two major sections (26:5-8 and 26:10-13) which are in balance with each other. Both sections are composed of two four-line units and each unit deals with distinct themes focused on creation. 26:9 functions as a balancing pivot claiming the hiddenness of God's celestial throne (Habel, *Job*, 366; cf. Pieter van der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism and the Poetry of the Book of Job* [Oudtestamentische Studiën, 32; Leiden: Brill, 1995], 292). For a different view that divides the section into five strophes without ascribing 26:9 a central role, see Fokkerman, *Major Poems*, 136-37.

¹⁹¹ Habel, *Job*, 372.

¹⁹² David J. A. Clines, *Job 21–37* (WBC, 18A; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 637.

¹⁹³ Habel, *Job*, 372.

¹⁹⁴ Habel, *Job*, 367, 372.

¹⁹⁵ Nam, *Throne of God*, 322.

Since God is radically different from the created beings, his involvement into the affairs of history on the side of his people always has a victorious outcome. The heavenly throne appears in numerous texts as the emblem of the divine victory which guarantees the triumph of God's purpose. I now turn to an exploration of this theological meaning of the throne motif.

3.5. EMBLEM OF GOD'S VICTORY

One of the most pervasive biblical motifs is that of God as a divine warrior.¹⁹⁶ The central principle of the motif is the involvement of Yahweh in the war on behalf of his people, bringing them triumph. The basis for divine intervention is rooted in the concept of covenant: on the one hand, divine protection is promised to God's covenant people from their enemies, but on the other hand, occasionally Yahweh turns against Israel in situations of covenant disobedience.¹⁹⁷ God's involvement in history as a divine warrior is also intimately related to his kingship. Since Yahweh is the sovereign ruler of the universe, 'no nation, no matter how powerful, is finally and ultimately an absolute value' and if it omits to honour God, it will face the consequence of being destabilized.¹⁹⁸

In Jer. 49:38 the divine warrior motif is linked to the motif of God's throne. The text appears in the context of the oracles directed against foreign nations (46:1–51:64) – more specifically, it is part of the address to Elam (49:34–39).¹⁹⁹ However, as Carroll notes, the oracle 'contains no specific historical information and its vague, stereotypical phrases are capable of an a-historical explanation'.²⁰⁰ The centre of attention is on the action of Yahweh, who is portrayed as a sovereign ruler and a victorious divine warrior actively involved into the affairs of the

¹⁹⁶ For an overview of the research on this topic, see Longman, *God is a Warrior*, 19–26.

¹⁹⁷ Longman, *God is a Warrior*, 48–49. G. Ernest Wright (*The Old Testament and Theology* [New York: Harper & Row, 1969], 130–31, 149) convincingly demonstrates the compatibility of this metaphor with the other, 'seemingly' more positive side of his nature: 'God the Warrior is simply the reverse side of God the Lover or God the Redeemer. The seeking love of God is only one side of the Suzerain's activity, because, to change the figure, divine love is a two-edged sword. It is power in action in a sinful world, and redemption is disturbing, painful, resisted ... God as King, Judge, Warrior, Father and Shepherd is accorded ... not as contradictory expressions, but as deriving from royal language which thus expresses the various activities of the Divine Monarch.'

¹⁹⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 420.

¹⁹⁹ Collections of oracles against foreign nations are characteristic to the prophetic literature. See e.g. Amos 1–2; Isa. 13–23; Ezek. 25–32; Zeph. 2:2–15; Jer. 46–51. For a theological meaning of Jeremiah's oracles against foreign nations, see H.G.L. Peels, "'You Shall Certainly Drink!': The Place and Significance of the Oracles Against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah', *EuroJTh* 16 (2007), 81–91; Duane L. Christensen, *Prophecy and War in Ancient Israel: Studies in the Oracles Against the Nations in Old Testament Prophecy* (Berkeley, Calif.: Bibal, 1975), 183f.

²⁰⁰ Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1986), 812.

nation.²⁰¹ The certainty of his triumph in the holy war is portrayed through the symbolism of the breaking of ‘the bow of Elam, the mainstay of their might’ (49:35)²⁰² by Yahweh’s sword of judgment commissioned to consume his enemy (49:37).²⁰³ The description of the divine supremacy climaxes in the setting up of Yahweh’s throne in the foreign land as a visible emblem of his victory (49:38). The picture of a conquering king setting up his throne in a defeated land appears also in 1:15 and 43:10. The use of the motif in these texts significantly enlightens the meaning of 49:35. In 1:15 the setting up of the thrones of the northern kingdoms at the gates of Jerusalem clearly indicates the conquest and the subsequent foreign rule over Judah.²⁰⁴ Similarly, in 43:10 the setting up of the throne and the royal canopy of Nebuchadnessar at the entrance to the Pharaoh’s palace carries an identical meaning. While these texts speak of the conquest of earthly powers over their rivals, the idea of establishing God’s throne in a foreign country is unparalleled in the Old Testament.²⁰⁵ Establishing God’s throne as the emblem of his victory in 49:38 points to the universal divine rulership over the nations of the world in the context of the eschatological expectations.²⁰⁶ Thus, Yahweh’s involvement in history as a divine warrior is intimately connected with the notion of his kingship, and the employment of the motif of his throne as an emblem of his victory fits naturally into this picture.

4. CONCLUSION

The throne motif is represented in all three parts of the Old Testament canon. This chapter has focused on an investigation into the throne of Yahweh; other thrones have only been referenced where they are related to this throne, which is more significant than any other throne in the Old

²⁰¹ Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52* (WBC, 27; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1995), 342.

²⁰² For the expression to ‘break the bow’, see 1Sam. 2:4; Hos. 1:5. Nam (*Throne of God*, 238) interprets the reference to the bow as an allusion to the Elamites as famous archers. However, the Elamites were no more noted for their use of the bow than other nations. See e.g. Isa. 21:17; Jer. 50:29; 51:3.

²⁰³ Yahweh’s sword is an important motif in Jeremiah’s oracles against the foreign nations. See Jer. 46:10, 14, 16; 47:6; 48:2; 49:37; 50:16, 35f.

²⁰⁴ John A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), 154.

²⁰⁵ It has been argued on the basis of the parallel with Jer. 43:10 that 49:38 articulates a divine intention to establish Nebuchadnezzar as Elam’s new Lord (e.g. Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* [Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2002], 616). However, this view is unconvincing, since Nebuchadnezzar’s name is not mentioned in the oracle and no action of human agency is indicated.

²⁰⁶ Christensen (*Prophecy and War*, 223) notes that ‘the prophet is projecting his message in the future where he sees a new day on the horizon, a day when pagan world powers will submit themselves to Yahweh, the suzerain of the nations’. The inclusion of Elam in the oracles against nations may be motivated by the intention to represent the furthest imaginable place on the eastern edge of the geographical horizon and emphasizes thus the universality of God’s eschatological victory (e.g. Louis Stulman, *Jeremiah* [AOTC; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2005], 372).

Testament. Before turning to the throne texts, four concepts were identified and discussed as closely related to Yahweh's throne: (1) the ark of the covenant; (2) the temple; (3) Zion/Jerusalem; and (4) heaven. The significance of these concepts for the study of the throne motif in Revelation is great. Their affinity with the throne motif in the Old Testament indicates that in our research not only the *θρόνος* texts of Revelation need examination, but these Old Testament concepts also.

As the longest and most influential Old Testament throne text, Ezekiel's throne vision has received particular attention in this chapter. The main aspects of the representation of God's throne as a chariot with the other key details of the vision have been examined. It has been concluded that this vision is the only text in the Old Testament which portrays God's throne as a moving object. While all the other throne texts of the Old Testament portray a static throne of Yahweh, closest to Ezekiel's description is the throne of the Ancient of Days in Dan. 7, which is equipped with wheels in spite of a lack of indication of the throne's movement (7:9). An argument has been provided to demonstrate that the moving of Yahweh's throne in Ezekiel bears a strong theological significance revealing Yahweh's positive intentions towards his people in Babylonian exile. While the movement indicates Yahweh's immanence as well as the imagery of the rainbow that encircles the throne, the vision also strongly stresses his transcendence not only through the mysterious restraint in the description of the figure on the throne (1:26), but also through the details of the vision such as the living creatures, the fiery descriptions and the firmament.

The most significant contribution of this chapter lies in establishing the basic theological meanings of Yahweh's throne. On the basis of my inductive study of the Old Testament's throne texts I have suggested five such meanings that have been supported by concise exegetical analysis of representative passages. Among these texts were included all the throne visions in addition to the material in Ezekiel, and also single references to Yahweh's throne. The theological meanings of the throne motif in the Old Testament I have suggested are the following: (1) symbol of divine rulership; (2) symbol of judgeship; (3) place of revelation; (4) symbol of creating power; and (5) emblem of victory. While Ezekiel's vision was not directly involved in establishing this list, its earlier discussion does not reveal additional theological meanings not represented in this list. It must be mentioned that in the majority of the throne texts there is an overlap in the meanings, mainly because the throne appears in each *כסא* text as a

symbol of divine rulership. The significance of this investigation lies in creating a theological basis for comparison with the throne motif's function in Revelation and, as will be demonstrated later, there is a considerable degree of continuity.

JEWISH LITERATURE

Jewish apocalyptic literature has been divided by Collins into two basic categories: those that do not have an otherworldly journey and those that do.¹ The works belonging to the later group, attempting to bridge the gap between the heavenly and earthly realm,² often climax in an encounter with God in which the heavenly throne inevitably appears.³ However, the throne motif finds its place also in the former category of literature that is not ‘of esoteric nature’.⁴ A new development in both groups in relation to the Old Testament is the emerging of the concept of the heavenly thrones of God’s allies, an idea that shows close affinity with the throne motif in Revelation. This chapter will examine first the throne visions of God and will follow this with a study of the heavenly thrones of God’s allies in Jewish literature. Since it is impossible to discuss here all the apocalyptic works containing *merkabah* material, the investigation will focus on those representative texts composed between the third century B.C.E. and the early second century C.E., which are the most influential and significant for the purpose of our study.

1. THE THRONE VISIONS OF GOD

In this section three representative throne visions will be examined. Since they are from slightly different periods, their study reflects progress in the development of the *merkabah* tradition.

¹ John J. Collins, ‘The Jewish Apocalypses’, *Semeia* 14 (1979), 21-59. The idea of heavenly journey is not limited to the Jewish and Christian sources, but is also reflected in various traditions of the Graeco-Roman world. See e.g. Alan Segal, ‘Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity and their Environment’ in *ANRW*, 2.23.2, 1333-94 and the literature cited in it.

² Mary Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (JU, 8; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984), 290.

³ Leif Carlsson (*Round Trips to Heaven: Otherworldly Travelers in Early Judaism and Christianity* [Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008]) divides the ascent accounts into two types: the identity-providing and the death-informing heavenly journeys. He argues that the encounter with God forms the central motif of all identity-providing journeys. However, this feature is not typical of all the apocalypses. For example, in *Greek Baruch* the reason for the absence of climax in theophany is viewed by Christopher Rowland (*The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* [London: SPCK, 1982], 86) in a ‘reluctance on the part of the apocalypticist to indulge in the kind of speculation found elsewhere in the apocalypses’.

⁴ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 25.

1.1. BOOK OF THE WATCHERS

The *Book of the Watchers* is the best-known and the most influential non-canonical apocalypse. It forms the first part of the five-part composite work known as *Ethiopic Enoch* (*IEn.* 1–36). While the dating of the different parts of the book has been a matter of much debate,⁵ the *Book of the Watchers* is generally considered one of the oldest Jewish apocalyptic works originating from the third century B.C.E.⁶ On the basis of the two cosmic journeys recorded in chs. 17–19 and 20–36 the book has been termed a ‘travel catalogue’ by Segal.⁷ For our purpose *IEn.* 14 is of particular significance since, as Gruenwald notes, it contains ‘the oldest Merkavah vision we know of from the literature outside of the canonical Scriptures’.⁸ The influence of this throne scene is well known, because it is considered a ‘model-vision of Merkavah mysticism’⁹ which makes ‘an important transitional point between prophetic and mystical traditions’.¹⁰

The vision of God’s throne appears in the context of the patriarch’s mediation on behalf of the Watchers, who are seeking forgiveness from God for sins committed after they descended into the world. Enoch ascends to the heaven in an intercessory role on behalf of the Watchers. As a result of the ascent the patriarch is given an answer to the plea for mercy, while at the same time he is shown God’s heavenly abode.¹¹ The celestial revelation is closely tied to Enoch’s commission from God, which stands in the tradition of the Old Testament prophetic call

⁵ The discussion has been significantly influenced by the discovery of the Aramaic fragments of *IEnoch* at Qumran. Before the discovery, there was a relatively unanimous agreement concerning the dating, but it has been demonstrated that large portions of the book could be viewed as considerably older. For the older consensus, see R. H. Charles, ‘The Book of Enoch’ in *APOT*, II, 170-71.

⁶ Jozef T. Milik (*The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* [With the collaboration of Matthew Black; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976], 273) places the 4QEnastr^a fragments of the *Book of Watchers* into the second century B.C.E. on palaeographical grounds. Since the book is a composite work with its development, the origin could safely be dated in the third century B.C.E.

⁷ Segal, ‘Heavenly Ascent’, 1359.

⁸ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 36.

⁹ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 36.

¹⁰ George W.E. Nickelsburg, ‘Enoch, Levi, and Peter’, *JBL* 100 (1981), 575-600(581). The connection between Enoch’s heavenly journey and the later *merkavah* texts is evident in the heavenly journey, the idea of a house within a house, Enoch’s fear and the vision of God on the throne surrounded by angels.

¹¹ Since the answer to the plea is negative, George W.E. Nickelsburg (‘The Apocalyptic Construction of Reality in *IEnoch*’ in *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies Since the Uppsala Colloquium*, eds. John J. Collins and James H. Charlesworth [JSPSup, 9; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991], 51-64[53]) concludes that the theme of judgment is central to the book: ‘There is scarcely a page in *IEnoch* that is not in some sense related to the expectation of an impending divine judgment that will deal with human sins and righteousness, and the angelic rebellions that are in one way or another related to them.’

visions.¹² Still, the idea of ascent to heaven as known from *IEnoch* is a crucial development in relation to the Old Testament that will become typical for later apocalyptic writings.¹³

In approaching the divine throne Enoch passes the heavenly realm, which is portrayed through a detailed description. The edifices he goes through clearly reflect features of a celestial sanctuary setting. It has been noted by Himmelfarb that according to the Ethiopic text the patriarch passes through three celestial constructions on his way to the divine throne: a wall, an outer house and an inner house. On the other hand, the Greek version of the narrative mentions a house instead of a wall. Still, a three-part structure is reflected in both instances. While such an arrangement is clearer in Greek, the Ethiopic text also echoes the structure of the earthly temple with the vestibule (אולם), sanctuary (היכל), and the Holy of Holies (רביר).¹⁴ For this reason the throne vision of *IEn.* 14 could be considered a temple vision also, which would mean that we have here the earliest interpretation of heaven as a temple in the non-canonical Jewish apocalypses.¹⁵

The vision climaxes in a scene in which Enoch sees the enthroned God. At the centre of attention is first the divine throne followed by the characterization of its occupant. It is clear from the text that the throne is located in the second house, the innermost part of the heavenly construct. A clear description is given of it (together with the floor and the inner walls of the Holy of Holies) in language of splendour reminiscent of Ezekiel's throne visions (chs. 1; 10): 'As for its floor, it was of fire and above it was lightning and the path of the stars; and as for the ceiling, it was flaming fire. And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne – its appearance was

¹² For the debt of *IEn.* 14 to Ezekiel's and Isaiah's call narratives, see Christopher Rowland, 'The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature', *JSJ* 10 (1979), 137-54(140-44); Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 9-28.

¹³ Of this new development John J. Collins (*Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* [FOTL, 20; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984], 15) rightly notes: 'Biblical tradition by contrast has no clear precedent for the apocalyptic other-worldly journey. The Old Testament does not describe what Enoch or Elijah saw when they were taken up. The prophets are said to stand in the divine council (Jer. 23:18; cf. 1Kgs 20) but in no case is their ascent described. The nearest biblical approximation to this type of apocalypticism is found in Ezekiel's guarded tour of the Temple area in Ezekiel 40-48, but this involves neither an ascent to heaven nor a descent to the netherworld.' For a further discussion on the nature of the notion of heavenly ascent, see Martha Himmelfarb, 'The Practice of Ascent in the Ancient Mediterranean World' in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, eds. John J. Collins and Michael A. Fishbane (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1995), 123-37.

¹⁴ Martha Himmelfarb, 'Apocalyptic Ascent and the Heavenly Temple' in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1987* (SBLSP, 26; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1987), 210-17(210). For further evidence that Enoch's celestial trip was a tour through the heavenly temple, see Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, Levi, and Peter', 580-81. On the discussion of the correspondence of the heavenly temple in *IEn.* 14 with the earthly temple, see Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 14-16. The conclusion proposed there is that 'while it is clear that the heavenly temple of *IEn.* 14 corresponds to the earthly temple, it does not seem to correspond in details to any particular temple described in the Hebrew Bible'.

¹⁵ Carlsson, *Round Trips*, 43.

like crystal and its wheels like the shining sun; and [I heard] the voice of the cherubim; and from beneath the throne were issuing streams of flaming fire. It was difficult to look at it' (*1 En.* 14:17-19). God's throne is portrayed as a 'lofty throne' (θρόνον ὑψηλόν). The same expression appears in Isa. 6:1 (θρόνου ὑψηλοῦ) as pointing to God's supremacy and his kingship. The description shows affinity with the throne theology of the Old Testament prophetic writings and it is reflected also in the other Jewish apocalyptic works.¹⁶ Interestingly, the appearance of the throne in *1En.* 14:18 is depicted in terms of a contrasting pair of ice and Sun. The point of the imagery is not the contrast between the cold and hot, but rather the stressing of the throne's splendour.¹⁷ The impressiveness of the vision is emphasized by the inability of Enoch to view God's glory, which results in the traditional breaking down of human nature in the presence of God.¹⁸ A significant development in the vision as compared to Ezek. 1 is the appearance of the 'river of fire' (ἐξεπορεύοντο ποταμοὶ πυρὸς φλεγόμενοι).¹⁹ The same imagery is also employed in the theophanic descriptions of Dan. 7:10 (ἐξεπορεύετο ... ποταμὸς πυρός). As Black notes, the correspondence seems to indicate at least a common tradition behind both texts.²⁰

God, the occupant of the throne, is characterized in the vision as 'the Great Glory' (ἡ δόξα ἡ μεγάλη; 14:20). While Rowland argues that the description of the enthroned figure is less restrained than in Ezek. 1,²¹ Himmelfarb holds that it is not actually God himself portrayed, but his garment that is 'shining more brightly than the sun' and is 'whiter than any snow' (14:20).²² Regardless of our view on this question, the description is clearly focused on God's holiness, which is further indicated by the restriction that neither people ('no one of the flesh') nor angels are allowed to enter the Holy of Holies and behold God sitting there alone on his throne (14:21).

¹⁶ E.g. *T. Mos.* 4:2.

¹⁷ George W.E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2001), 264.

¹⁸ This motif has occurred twice previously in the vision: *1En.* 14:14, 16.

¹⁹ Rowland ('Visions of God', 142) sees the possible influence of passages as Ezek. 1:13; 47:1; Exod. 19:16 and Zech. 14:18 behind the origin of the imagery. On this feature of the Jewish uranology, see further Hans Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (WUNT, 2; Tübingen: Mohr, 1951), 75.

²⁰ Matthew Black, in consultation with James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Enoch, Or, 1 Enoch: A New English Edition; With Commentary and Textual Notes* (SVTP, 7; Leiden: Brill, 1985), 149.

²¹ Rowland ('Visions of God', 141) argues for a more anthropomorphic description based on the observation that *1En.* 14:20 lacks the qualifying expressions כְּמִצַּחַת כְּמִצַּחַת, significant in Ezek. 1:27. Also he believes that *1En.* 14:21 indicates God's resemblance to human form.

²² While Himmelfarb (*Ascent to Heaven*, 16-20) notes the close parallel of the garment description with Dan. 7:9-10, she suggests an explanation based on the picture of heaven as temple. Referring to Haran, she indicates that 'these garments serve to indicate a kind of dialectical elevation into that sphere which is beyond even the material, contagious holiness characterizing the tabernacle and its accessories'.

In spite of the angels' inability to see God's throne, Enoch enters the Holy of Holies at God's exhortation and approaches the heavenly throne that he may hear a message of judgment concerning the Watchers. Himmelfarb argues that the inability of the angels to approach God in practising their priestly role in the heavenly temple indicates their uncleanness.²³ Here lies the reason for the need of the intercession of a figure such as Enoch in whom the prophetic and the priestly roles coexist in an ideal combination.²⁴ The vision eloquently emphasizes the spatial dualism, but even more the ontological distinction between the divine and the human as it underscores God's absolute transcendence.²⁵

As has been widely argued, the detailed description of the heavenly 'house' and the throne in *IEn.* 14 goes beyond the Old Testament prototypes. Primarily, the active role of the visionary is unprecedented, which makes the description 'qualitatively different'.²⁶ On the other hand, Orlov correctly observes that the 'biblical visions are not completely forgotten' as they 'provide an important exegetical framework' for the Enochic author.²⁷

1.2. TESTAMENT OF LEVI

The *Testament of Levi* is part of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, a collection of twelve self-contained units. While there is a consensus on the Christian origin of the *Testament of Levi* in its final form, the history of its composition is considered one of the most controversial issues of the recent pseudepigrapha research.²⁸ Scholarly opinion is divided over the questions of how much Jewish material has been used and what role did it have in the revision of the final Christian edition.²⁹ Even the discovery of an Aramaic variation on the *Testament of Levi* at

²³ In *IEn.* 15:3-4 the Watchers are accused of having defiled themselves through contact with women. According to Himmelfarb (*Ascent to Heaven*, 21), the blood of women mentioned in the text refers to the blood of virginity. In contrast, David Suter ('Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest: The Problem of Family Purity in *IEnoch* 6-16', *HUCA* 50 [1979], 115-36[119]) argues for menstrual blood, but his argument is less convincing.

²⁴ Halperin (*Faces of the Chariot*, 81-82) even views Enoch as acting in a high priestly role: 'The angels, barred from the inner house, are the priests of Enoch's heavenly Temple. The high priest must be Enoch himself, who appears in the celestial Holy of Holies to procure forgiveness for holy beings' (cf. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* [London: SPCK, 1991], 159).

²⁵ For a compelling argumentation in favour of the understanding of the vision as a polemic against priesthood in Jerusalem, see e.g. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 54; John J. Collins, 'The Apocalyptic Technique: Setting and Function in the Book of Watchers', *CBQ* 44 (1982), 91-111.

²⁶ Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, Levi, and Peter', 579.

²⁷ Andrei A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (TSAJ, 107; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 73.

²⁸ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans; Livonia, Mich.: Dove Booksellers, 2nd edn, 1998), 133-34.

²⁹ Two views are dominant. The work is seen either as a Jewish text with later Christian interpolations or as a Christian writing which has utilized Jewish sources. Among the proponents of the former position are the following works: Jürgen Becker, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen* (AGJU, 8;

Qumran (4Q213 and 4Q214) has not solved the problem;³⁰ however, with Cairo Geniza it provided an avenue for dating the document to the pre-qumranic period before the middle of the second century B.C.E.³¹

For our purpose the most significant part of the work is the ascent vision in chs. 2–5, which includes a throne scene. Collins considers the section a ‘full-blown apocalypse’, because it contains the typical elements of an apocalyptic text such as the opened heaven and the developed ascent structure.³² The indebtedness of the vision to *1En.* 12–14 is generally acknowledged and according to Nickelsburg the dependence implies origin in the same circles.³³ Still, the cultic context is more strongly emphasized in the *Testament of Levi*, which is not surprising, as the work is a testament of the priestly tribe.³⁴ While the precise historical setting is difficult to detect, the central concern of the work is clearly the corruption of the priesthood.³⁵ The throne setting concentrates on the premises of the Levite priesthood and it is appealed to with the purpose of legitimizing them on the basis of God’s choice.³⁶

The cosmology described in the vision is far more developed in comparison with the earlier literature. Similar to the *Book of Watchers*, a prominent feature of the work is the heavenly temple, although the concept of multiple heavens appears, constituting a significant departure from the earlier single heaven cosmology. It has been argued that the concept of multiple heavens might have arisen on the basis of the Old Testament reading of שמי השמים as

Leiden: Brill, 1970); Anders Hultgard, *L’eschatologie des Testaments des Douze Patriarches* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1977). The latter view is strongly advanced in e.g. Marinus de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Study of their Text, Composition and Origin* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1953).

³⁰ Even more, it gave rise to a new theory of Essenic origin of the document advanced in Marc Philonenko, *Les interpolations chrétiennes des Testaments des douze patriarches et les manuscrits de Qumrân* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1960). For a critique of Philonenko’s hypothesis, see Edvin Larsson, ‘Qumranlitteraturen och De tolv patriarkernas testamenten’ in *Svensk exegetisk årsbok* 25, ed. Harald Riesenfeld (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1960), 109-18.

³¹ James C. VanderKam (‘Scripture in the Astronomical Book of Enoch’ in *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone*, eds. Esther G. Chazon, Davis Satran and Ruth A. Clements (JSJSup, 89; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 89-103[89]) even dates the Aramaic Levi to the 300s B.C.E. For the dating and the context of composition of the Aramaic Levi, see Michael E. Stone, ‘Aramaic Levi in Its Contexts’, *JSQ* 9 (2002), 307-26.

³² Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 137.

³³ Nickelsburg, ‘Enoch, Levi, and Peter’, 588-90. See also Hanan and Esther Eshel, ‘Separating Levi from Enoch’ in *George W.E. Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue in Learning*, eds. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (2 vols.; JSJSup, 80; Leiden: Brill, 2003), II, 458-68.

³⁴ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 77-78.

³⁵ For a discussion of different options on the historical situation and the group behind the text, see Carlsson, *Round Trips*, 117-27.

³⁶ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 137.

‘heaven of heavens’ (Deut. 10:14; 1Kgs 8:27; Ps. 68:34).³⁷ There was a rabbinic discussion concerning the meaning of this expression in which the opinions were divided over the question of whether this implies two or three heavens.³⁸ However, the concept of certain number of fixed heavens is not biblically grounded.³⁹ According to the majority view, the vision of the *Testament of Levi* originally stood for a three-heaven cosmology that has been modified and expanded to seven heavens in a later recension.⁴⁰ In this later pattern, the highest is considered the most prominent heaven as it is the location of the ‘Holy of Holies’, the dwelling place of ‘the Great Glory’ (ἡ δόξα ἡ μεγάλη; 3:4). The sixth heaven is also significant in the study of the throne motif, since it is stated that ‘thrones and authorities’ are located there and ‘praises to God are offered eternally’ (3:8). While these thrones are not described further, they appear in a positive connotation and they are clearly distinguished from God’s throne as they relate to him by offering sacrifices.⁴¹

The climax of the vision is Levi’s encounter with the enthroned God in the highest heaven: ‘At this moment the angel opened for me the gates of heaven and I saw the Holy Most High sitting on the throne. And he said to me, “Levi, to you I have given the blessing of the priesthood until I shall come and dwell in the midst of Israel”’ (5:1-2). No detailed description of the divine throne or its occupant is given. The comparison of the throne scene in 5:1-2 with the glimpse of God in 3:4 reveals two terminological differences. First, the seventh heaven as the location of the divine throne is referred to in 3:4 as τὰ Ἁγία Ἀγίων, while in 5:1 the same place

³⁷ See e.g. Benedikt Otzen, ‘Heavenly Visions in Early Judaism: Origin and Function’ in *the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G.W. Ahlström*, eds. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer (JSOTSup, 31; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 199-215(206). The expression ‘heaven of heavens’ also appears in *IEn.* 1:4, but the phrase is hyperbolic, since in Enoch’s heavenly ascents there is no indication of a plurality of heavens.

³⁸ R. Judah (*Hag.* 12b) deduced that there were two firmaments, while others counted three (*Midr. Teh.* on Ps. 114:1).

³⁹ For an in-depth study of the multiply heavens cosmology in Jewish and Christian apocalypses, see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (JSJSup, 50; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 21-138. The work convincingly argues that the notion of three and seven heavens is inspired by Babylonian tradition. However, the idea was not new even for Babylonians, since the notion of seven heavens and seven earths is established already in the late second millennium Sumerian cosmology.

⁴⁰ See e.g. Robert H. Charles, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Translated from the Editor’s Greek Text and Edited, with Introduction, Notes, and Indices* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), 27. In contrast, it has been argued that the Aramaic text does not necessarily presuppose more than a single heaven (Jozef T. Milik, ‘Le Testament de Lévi en Araméen’, *RB* 62 [1955], 398-406[404]; Marinus de Jonge, ‘Notes on Testament of Levi II–VII’ in *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Text and Interpretation*, ed. Marinus de Jonge [SVTP, 3; Leiden: Brill, 1975], 247-60[253]).

⁴¹ For the idea of sacrifice in the heavenly context in apocalyptic literature and for the possible polemical purpose of the expression in the *T. Levi* 3:5, see Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 33-36.

is designated ὁ ναός ὁ ἄγιος. Second, in the first context God is characterized as ‘the Great Glory’ (ἡ δόξα ἡ μεγάλη), while in the later text as ‘the Most High’ (ὁ ὑψιστος). Although these differences seem insignificant at the first sight, they imply a stronger theocratic and cultic character than the scene in 5:1-2.⁴² Although the vision is reminiscent of a prophetic call, Levi’s insensitivity in front of the divine throne is surprising.⁴³ Himmelfarb notes that he ‘betrays no emotion nor even awareness of protocol. He does not shake and tremble, and he neglects to fall on his face.’⁴⁴ The absence of any reaction is explained either with the intention of emphasizing Levi’s distinction as the founder of the priestly line or as an indication of the transformed significance of the priesthood for the author.⁴⁵ Since the focus of the scene is on the revelation and the commission given to Levi, the function of the heavenly throne as the place of encounter with God is to be understood against this authorization.⁴⁶

1.3. APOCALYPSE OF ABRAHAM

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* has been preserved only in the Slavonic language and for this reason it is considered an uncertain and problematic text. Although the work has been probably repeatedly re-worked, according to Segal there are no reasons to consider the *merkabah* description as a late redaction.⁴⁷ The textual evidence points to Hebrew or Aramaic origin, but the Slavonic text has most probably been translated from Greek.⁴⁸ It is commonly held that the apocalypse was written about somewhere in Palestine as a reaction to the temple catastrophe in 70 C.E. The setting of the work is difficult to determine, but the close association with Abraham seems to point to people who sought a new identity after losing the temple. The patriarch’s character was a perfect model in this group’s identity search, since the validity of the promises

⁴² James Kugel (‘Levi’s Elevation to Priesthood in Second Temple Writings’, *HTR* 86 [1993], 1-64) questions the priestly function of the vision. He denies that *T. Levi* 5:2 is the climax of the vision, but views it rather as a Christian interpolation. He interprets the vision as emphasizing merely Levi’s role as a prophetic figure in connection with the end of time. For a critique of Kugel’s view, see Carlsson, *Round Trips*, 114-17.

⁴³ The similarities with the prophetic call scene of Isa. 6 are striking. The common motifs include the propitiary sacrifice, worship, trembling, incense, purification and commissioning (Carlsson, *Round Trips*, 111-13).

⁴⁴ Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 32.

⁴⁵ Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 32.

⁴⁶ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 79.

⁴⁷ Segal, ‘Heavenly Ascent’, 1362 n. 100. On the text of the work, see Émile Turdeanu, *Apocryphes slaves et roumains de l’Ancient Testament* (SVTP, 5; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 173-200.

⁴⁸ For arguments in favour of a Hebraic composition, see Arie Rubinstein, ‘Hebraisms in the Slavonic “Apocalypse of Abraham”’, *JJS* 4 (1953), 108-15; Idem., ‘Hebraisms in the “Apocalypse of Abraham”’, *JJS* 5 (1954), 132-35. In contrast, A. Pennington (‘The Apocalypse of Abraham’ in *AOT*, 363-92[366]) proposed an argument for the Christian composition of the work which is generally not supported.

given to him did not depend on a visible earthly sanctuary. The bitter reference to the destruction of the Temple (ch. 27) indicates that the work was written shortly after the event – somewhere between 70 C.E. and the first decades of the second century C.E.⁴⁹

The book naturally divides into two parts. The first recounts the story of Abraham's conversion from idolatry (chs. 1–8), while the second constitutes the apocalyptic part in which the patriarch's heavenly journey is described (chs. 9–32).⁵⁰ Abraham is guided on his tour by Jaobel, his *angelus interpres*, and sees seven visions of which the third is a throne scene (18:1-4).⁵¹ In contrast with the visionaries of other contemporary apocalypses, the patriarch does not ascend through the cosmic structures, but he is taken directly to the seventh heaven, the location of God's throne.⁵² Unique to Abraham's heavenly journey is on the one hand the direct transport of the visionary to the final destination and on the other hand the transparent cosmological structure which makes it possible for Abraham to view the expanses under his standing-place. As Halperin notes, the combination of an ascent through several heavens with a throne vision, characteristic to the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, is rare in the apocalyptic literature, since the visionary either 'progresses through several heavens, or sees the *merkabah*, but not both'.⁵³

Before reaching God's throne, Abraham is instructed to sing a hymn of praise that an angel has taught him. This praise concentrates on the names and attributes of God and it is the longest *merkabah* hymn in the apocalyptic literature (17:8-21). Its recitation invests Abraham with a heavenly status enabling him to step before God's throne. The striking similarity of this

⁴⁹ For a persuasive argumentation, see Rubinkiewicz, 'Apocalypse of Abraham' in *OTP*, II, 681-719(683); James R. Mueller, 'The Apocalypse of Abraham and the Destruction of the Second Jewish Temple' in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1982* (SBLSP, 21; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1994), 341-49.

⁵⁰ On the connection between the two parts of the book, see Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 66.

⁵¹ Gruenwald (*Apocalyptic*, 53-54) plausibly suggests that the name Jaobel is a combination of the three root-letters of the Tetragrammaton with the well-known 'el' ending (Yhwel). Jaobel himself declares that he possesses God's 'ineffable name' (10:8; cf. 10:3). His description includes elements reminiscent of God's appearance (11:2). On this basis Jarl E. Fossum (*The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* [WUNT, 36; Tübingen: Mohr, 1985], 318-20) argues that Jaobel is the glory of God. For a critique of this view, see Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1988), 88-89. The question of the relation of Jaobel with the Metatron tradition is beyond the scope of this study. For its discussion, see e.g. Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965), 41-42; Orlov, *Enoch-Metatron*, 136-43.

⁵² The seven-heaven cosmology of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* has been recently challenged by Alexander Kulik (*Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* [SBLTCS, 3; Leiden: Brill, 2004]) and John C. Poirier ('The Ouranology of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*', *JSJ* 35 [2004], 391-408), who argue for an eight-heaven scheme.

⁵³ Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 72. Halperin provides a source-critical explanation for exemption of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* from this rule.

hymn-singing to the *hekhalot* literature has been widely acknowledged.⁵⁴ The place of the vision in relation to the earlier and the later *merkabah* texts has been rightly observed by Dean-Otting: ‘In the Apocalypse of Abraham is found a text which bridges the gap between the biblically-rooted, earlier heavenly journeys, such as 1 Enoch, Testament of Levi and 3 Baruch, and the later esoteric texts of the Hekaloth literature.’⁵⁵

The throne vision takes place at the same time as Abraham’s recitation of the hymn. For the sake of comparison with Ezekiel’s *merkabah* vision the text is quoted here:

And as the fire rose-up, soaring to the highest point, I saw under the fire a throne of fire and the many-eyed ones round about, reciting the song, under the throne four fiery living creatures, singing ... And while I was still standing and watching, I saw behind the living creatures a chariot with fiery wheels. Each wheel was full of eyes round about. And above the wheels was the throne which I had seen. And it was covered with fire and the fire encircled it round about, and an indescribable light surrounded the fiery crowd (18:3, 12-13).

Rubinkiewicz rightly concludes that Ezek. 1 and 10 were the ‘sources of inspiration’ for the vision in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. This is evident from the numerous parallels: the fiery description, the four living creatures, the wheels decorated with eyes around them and the encircling of the divine throne chariot by light.⁵⁶ On the other hand, there is a strong discontinuity in relation to Ezekiel’s description, since the throne’s occupant is invisible. Rowland speaks of a radical paradigm-shift manifested in the ‘abrupt termination of the description of the throne’.⁵⁷ This development becomes even more significant in the light of some continuity in the order of description between the two visions. Since the vision in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* aims ‘to exclude all the reference to the human figure mentioned in Ezek. 1’, the development is clearly intentional.⁵⁸ Rowland interprets this restraint as a sign of ‘a definite trend within apocalyptic thought away from the direct description of God and his

⁵⁴ Carlsson (*Round Trips*, 133, n. 252) refers to number of leading scholars of the ascent literature such as Himmelfarb, Scholem, Nickelsburg, Halperin, Stone and Dean-Otting who are proponents of this view. For points of contact between the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the *hekhalot* literature, see Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 51-57.

⁵⁵ Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys*, 255.

⁵⁶ Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham en vieux slave: Édition critique du texte, introduction, traduction et commentaire* (Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego: Źródła i monografie, 129; Lublin: Société des lettres et des sciences de l’Université catholique de Lublin, 1987), 87; cf. Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 108-09.

⁵⁷ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 86. He suggests that the development may have been at least partially the result of cultic influence due to the lack of physical representation of the deity in the Holy of Holies (Idem., ‘Visions of God’, 152).

⁵⁸ Halperin (*Faces of the Chariot*, 120-23) notes that the anti-anthropomorphic reinterpretation of Ezekiel’s vision can be detected also in the Targums.

throne'.⁵⁹ Similarly, Orlov argues for consistent reshaping of the 'traditional theophanic imagery in accordance with a new anti-anthropomorphic template that insists on expressing the divine presence in the form of the deity's voice'.⁶⁰ This development is not understood as a rejection of the anthropomorphic theism *per se*, but rather a synthetic adaptation of the *merkabah* imagery into the framework of the aural paradigm, 'which has led to the construction of a new symbolic universe in which the two trends can coexist'.⁶¹

After the examination of three influential heavenly throne visions of the Jewish apocalyptic literature and establishing a line of development, I now turn to the study of an entirely new development in the non-canonical Jewish literature regarding the use of the throne motif, the concept of the heavenly thrones of God's allies.

2. THE HEAVENLY THRONES OF GOD'S ALLIES

Dan. 7:9-14 is the only Old Testament text which reports the existence of heavenly thrones other than God's.⁶² Another canonical text that comes close to the idea of other heavenly throne is Ps. 110:1 – a noteworthy Christological passage which in spite of the absence of the term כִּסֵּא implies heavenly enthronement of a figure other than יהוה.⁶³ In the non-canonical Jewish literature the notion of the thrones of God's allies develops into a motif which is clearly and repeatedly articulated. The following discussion will be organized around two lines of thought concerning this motif which will be enlightened through representative texts: the heavenly enthronement of heroic figures and short references to the thrones of patriarchs and the pious.

2.1. THE MOTIF OF HEAVENLY ENTHRONEMENT

By a heavenly enthronement scene I mean God's honouring of different figures by granting them the privilege of sitting on the divine throne. As will be demonstrated, such enthronement scenes vary to a significant degree, particularly in regard to the relation of God to the throne.

⁵⁹ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 87.

⁶⁰ The tendency for replacing the anthropomorphic depiction of God with expressions of the divine voice or name is not a novel innovation of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. For the biblical roots of this tradition and its adaptation in *Apocalypse of Abraham*, see Andrei A. Orlov, 'Praxis of the Voice: The Divine Name Traditions in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*,' *JBL* 127 (2008), 53-70. On the hypostatic voice of God, see James H. Charlesworth, 'The Jewish Roots of Christology: The Discovery of the Hypostatic Voice,' *SJT* 39 (1986), 19-41.

⁶¹ Orlov, 'Praxis of the Voice', 69.

⁶² See ch. 1 sec. 3.2.

⁶³ For a detailed elaboration of the Christological application of the text, see Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 119-225.

2.1.1. MOSES' ENTHRONEMENT IN THE *EXAGOGE*

The *Exagoge* is a Hellenistic-Jewish drama based on the Exodus event that was written by Ezekiel the Dramatist. The work is clearly pre-Christian, written no later than the second century B.C.E., since it is quoted by Alexander Polyhistor.⁶⁴ According to Horst, the *merkabah* vision of the book is the 'most puzzling passage of all'.⁶⁵ God's throne, which is related to Sinai, appears as a 'great throne' (θρόνος μέγας) of gigantic dimensions that 'reached to the corners of heaven' (frag. 6.69). God, who is portrayed in terms of anthropomorphic theophany as 'a noble man' (frag. 6.70), instructs Moses, the main character, to take his place on the throne. He is also invested with a great sceptre and a royal diadem, while the throne, shockingly, is vacated by God. The key for unlocking the meaning of the vision is offered by Raguel, who interprets the exaltation of Moses as an indication of his unique status.⁶⁶ While his reception of a divine revelation clearly indicates a status of prominence, the throne as a symbol points rather to a royal and judicial authority.⁶⁷

The placement of Moses on the divine throne and even more the unique idea of the throne's vacation by God as signalling the transfer of occupancy have generated much scholarly discussion concerning the status of Moses. It has been argued that the throne scene in *Exagoge* implies the deification of Moses.⁶⁸ This interpretation is in line with the well-known convictions in some Jewish circles about Moses' status as a divine being. The most important example of this trend is Philo's *De Vita Mosis*, in which the prophet's divine kingship over the universe is argued.⁶⁹ As an alternative view, it has been suggested that Moses' enthronement in *Exagoge* indicates rather a function as God's vice-regent.⁷⁰ I consider Bauckham's interpretation the most

⁶⁴ On dating, see e.g. Howard Jacobson, *The 'Exagoge' of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 5-13. For an unconvincing argument in favour of a later, Christian-era dating, see Rick van de Water, 'Moses' Exaltation: Pre-Christian?', *JSP* 21 (2000), 59-69.

⁶⁵ Pieter W. van der Horst, 'Moses' Throne Vision in Ezekiel the Dramatist', *JJS* 34 (1983), 21-29(23).

⁶⁶ Kristine J. Ruffatto ('Raguel as Interpreter of Moses' Throne Vision: The Transcendent Identity of Raguel in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian', *JSP* 17 [2008], 121-39) interprets the seeming absence of angels in the vision as a possibility of identifying Raguel with a figure of a transcendent identity, an angelic guide and interpreter of Moses' throne vision.

⁶⁷ Pierluigi Lanfanchi, 'Moses' Vision of the Divine Throne in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian' in *The Book of Ezekiel and Its Influence*, eds. Henk J. de Jonge and Johannes Tromp (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 53-59(56-57).

⁶⁸ E.g. van der Horst, 'Moses' Throne Vision', 25.

⁶⁹ For a systematic analysis of the divinity of Moses in ancient Jewish and non-Jewish literature, see Wayne A. Meeks, 'Moses as God and King' in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. Jacob Neusner (SHR, 14; Leiden: Brill, 1968), 354-71; Louis H. Feldman, *Philo's Portrayal of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (CJA, 15; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 331-57.

⁷⁰ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovTSup, 14; Leiden: Brill, 1967), 148-49.

convincing: he denies the idea of deification and argues rather for an entirely symbolic representation of the role of Moses pointing to the role he is supposed to take up as an earthly ruler over Israel.⁷¹ This view is in line with the Old Testament concept of kingship, in which the ruler is not considered a monarch, but rather God's vice-regent on earth. Orlov, on the other hand, interprets the throne scene of the *Exagoge* rather through the notion of a heavenly counterpart, a concept closely related to vice-regency.⁷² In spite of the slight difference between Bauckham's and Orlov's positions, both would share the view of Hengel that the deification of Moses 'would have as a consequence the "abdication of God"'.⁷³

2.1.2. THE ELECT ONE ON THE THRONE IN THE *BOOK OF SIMILITUDES*

The *Book of Similitudes* is the second part of the composite work of *1 Enoch* (chs. 37–71). While the document has been composed most likely in Aramaic, it is considered a Jewish writing⁷⁴ which may have been translated into Ethiopic, the version now extant.⁷⁵ The question of the work's dating has generated much discussion. While no agreement is achieved, still there is a consensus concerning the origin no later than the beginning of the second century C.E.⁷⁶

The 'throne of glory' is a prominent motif in *Similitudes* and appears seven times in the book.⁷⁷ The occupant of the throne is the Elect One, the key character of the work. The identity of this figure is a notoriously difficult problem, since it combines the attributes and functions of the Son of Man from Dan. 7, the Servant of Yahweh from Isa. 40–66 and the Davidic Messiah.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Richard Bauckham, 'The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus' in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origin of the Worship of Jesus*, eds. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila and Gladys S. Lewis (JSJSup, 63; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 56-57. Larry W. Hurtado (*One God*, 57-59) goes a step further arguing that Moses' vice-regency does not extend only to Israel, but to all the creation.

⁷² Orlov, *Enoch-Metatron*, 165-76, 266-67.

⁷³ Hengel, *Studies*, 191. Jacobsen (*Exagoge*, 272-93) even goes a step further, seeing in Ezekiel's account a polemic against the idea of Moses' deification.

⁷⁴ In contrast, Milik (*Books of Enoch*, 91-92) suggests that the work is a Christian text which came as late as 270 C.E. For a critique of this suggestion, see Christopher L. Mearns, 'Dating the Similitudes of Enoch', *NTS* 25 (1978-79), 360-69; Michael Knibb, 'The Date of the Parables of Enoch: A Critical Review', *NTS* 25 (1979), 345-59.

⁷⁵ See the discussion in Michael Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), II, 38-42.

⁷⁶ Greenfield/Stone, Collins and Rowland date the work in the first century C.E. Knibb puts it a little later (about 100 C.E.). Nickelsburg argues for dating around the turn of the era. On the other hand, VanderKam following Charles, advocates a first century B.C.E. date. For an overview of the debate, see Christopher L. Mearns, 'Dating the Similitudes of Enoch', *NTS* 25 (1979), 360-69; Carlsson, *Round Trips*, 48-53.

⁷⁷ *1 En.* 45:3; 51:1; 55:4; 61:8; 62:5; 69:27, 29.

⁷⁸ While the principal title is clearly the Elect One which designates an eschatological saviour figure, the three titles seem to be used interchangeably as referring to a single composite figure. For an argument in favour of this view, see James C. VanderKam, 'Righteous One, Messiah, Chosen One, and Son of Man in *1 Enoch* 37–71' in *The*

The ambiguity is enhanced even more by identification with Enoch in the climactic vision of the work (chs. 70–71) in spite of the distinction maintained between the two figures throughout the work.⁷⁹ However, there is no doubt over the dual role of the Elect One, who functions as the agent of God’s judgment and the champion of his people.⁸⁰

It is necessary to discern between the passages indicating the throne occupancy of the Elect One and the scene of his enthronement. In this sense, 45:3, 51:3 and 55:4 can be considered as anticipatory references to the enthronement, an event of major significance taking place in 61:8 towards which the whole book is progressing. Not only the identity of the throne’s occupant, but also the question of the ultimate owner of the ‘throne of glory’ has been a subject of debate. According to the majority view the expression refers to God’s own throne, since כבוד כסא functions as a *technicus terminus* in the Old Testament and in Rabbinic literature designating the throne of God.⁸¹ This view has been challenged by Black, who argues that the occupant of the throne ‘sits on his own throne’.⁸² Hannah convincingly refutes this suggestion as exegetically fallacious with the following argument:

Classical Ethiopic or Ge’ez, like Latin, has no definite article. Thus, it is at least theoretically possible that the phrase in question could be rendered ‘a glorious throne’ rather than ‘the throne of glory.’ ‘A glorious throne’, however, cannot be the intended meaning in the Similitudes. This is certain, first, because of the unlikelihood of there being more than one throne of glory in a heavenly context. This is true even though there are no definite articles in Ethiopic and, what is of even more importance, we cannot know whether or not the original Hebrew/Aramaic text included the article in this phrase.⁸³

Moreover, in 47:3 and 60:2 the ‘throne of glory’ is used also in reference to God, who as ‘the Antecedent of Time’ appears as its occupant. There is no indication in the text that this ‘throne of glory’ is different from the ‘throne of glory’ occupied by the Elect One.

Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity. The First Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian Origins, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992), 169-91.

⁷⁹ The question of the identity of the Elect One and its relation to the Enoch figure is beyond the scope of this study. For different textual and interpretive possibilities, see Daniel C. Olson, ‘Enoch and the Son of Man in the Epilogue of the Parables’, *JSP* 18 (1998), 27-38; Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 187-91.

⁸⁰ Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 249.

⁸¹ See Darrell D. Hannah, ‘The Throne of His Glory: The Divine Throne and Heavenly Mediators in Revelation and the Similitudes of Enoch’, *ZNW* 94 (2003), 68-96(81-87); Beate Ego, ‘Gottes Thron in Talmud und Midrash: Kosmologische und eschatologische Aspekte eines aggadischen Motivs’ in *Le Trône de Dieu*, 318-33. The term is very rare in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, primarily because a very small amount of writings has been preserved in Hebrew. Nevertheless, Hannah concludes: ‘The evidence we do have indicates that there was a marked tendency to reserve the phrase הכבוד הכסא הבור for God’s throne.’

⁸² Black, *Book of Enoch*, 220.

⁸³ Hannah, ‘Throne’, 82-83.

The installation of the Elect One on the divine throne is closely related to his role as an eschatological judge. This function is evident already from the above mentioned anticipatory throne references. As the Elect One is authorized to execute the task usually reserved for God (eschatological judgment), in accordance with it he is granted the privilege of sitting on God's own throne.⁸⁴ Thus, he becomes the symbol of hope for the oppressed righteous, who 'with this exalted judge of the end time on their side ... will be the ultimate victors'.⁸⁵

2.1.3. ENOCH'S AND ANGELIC ENTHRONEMENT IN *2ENOCH*

2Enoch is a much-revised document that has survived only in Slavonic translation in two recensions and the relationship between them is disputed.⁸⁶ The writing includes a full description of a heavenly journey reflecting both Jewish and Christian characteristics. The difficulty of the dating is reflected in the diversity of the suggestions that vary from the first century B.C.E. to the 900s C.E.⁸⁷

In accordance with the other apocalyptic throne visions of the Jewish literature, Enoch's heavenly journey culminates in a scene before God's throne, which is located according to the shorter version in the seventh and to the longer version in the tenth heaven.⁸⁸ The patriarch is in his encounter with God allowed to see the face of the Lord (22:1) to which he reacts by falling on his own face (22:4).⁸⁹ As a result of the encounter he receives new clothes and is anointed with

⁸⁴ Hannah, 'Throne', 87.

⁸⁵ James C. VanderKam, *Enoch: A Man for All Generations* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 142.

⁸⁶ The differences between the so-called longer and shorter recensions are extensive and substantial. For this reason their relationship constitutes a major textual problem. See the overview of the debate by Francis I. Anderson ('2 [Slavonic] Enoch' in *OTP*, I, 93-94), who argues that neither recensions can be accepted as original and suggests the existence of a third text form (cf. Christfried Böttrich, *Weltweisheit, Menschheitsethik, Urkult: Studien zum slavischen Henochbuch* [WUNT 2/50; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992], 59-114).

⁸⁷ Carlsson (*Round Trips*, 70 n. 89) refers to the works of Charles, Rowley, Collins, Stone, Anderson, Böttrich, Bugge and Hammershaimb who support an early dating between the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. A.S.D. Maunders ('The Date and Place of Writing of the Slavonic Book of Enoch', *The Observatory* 41 [1918], 309-16) suggests that *2Enoch* was the work of the Bogomils. This hypothesis has been convincingly refuted by R.H. Charles ('The Date and Place of Writing of the Slavonic Enoch', *JTS* 22 [1921], 161-63).

⁸⁸ Scholars are generally unanimous in the view that everything points to the reliability of the shorter version in the rendering of the earliest form of the text. The seven-heaven cosmological structure also appears in the contemporary heavenly journey literature as the *Martyrdom of Isaiah*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the Greek version of the *Life of Adam and Eve* and the *Testament of Levi*.

⁸⁹ Enoch falls on his face twice as a result of the sight of God's awesomeness (21:2; 22:4). His distress expressed to Gabriel as a feeling of 'fear and horror' (21:4) is in a striking contrast with the absence of any emotions in the account of Levi's vision of God in the *Testament of Levi* (Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 40).

oil, while he experiences a transformation into an angelic being.⁹⁰ As noted by Himmelfarb, the combination of clothing and anointing might reflect ‘a heavenly version of priestly investiture’.⁹¹ This suggestion is additionally supported by the fact that in 16:3 the patriarch is referred to as God’s chosen one, who carries away the sins of people. Further, the concluding chapters of the work are devoted to the succession to the priesthood after the patriarch’s ascension, which clearly implies Enoch’s priestly role.

Enoch is twice offered a seat in chs. 23–24: by Vereveil (23:4) and by God himself (24:1). While the throne is not directly mentioned in the second reference, earlier in the book God is depicted as sitting on an ‘exceedingly high throne’ (20:3) that is ‘not made by hands’ (22:2). There is a considerable difference between the longer and the shorter recensions regarding the invitation of God directed to Enoch. In the longer text Enoch is simply called to sit ‘to the left of me with Gabriel’, while in the shorter recension God places the patriarch to the left of himself ‘closer than Gabriel’ (Ближе Гаврила). Thus, according to the shorter version of 24:1, three beings are sitting on the heavenly throne simultaneously: God, Enoch and Gabriel. However, the angel’s position on the throne is not permanent, since it seems to be related to his function of escorting Enoch to the throne.⁹²

The scene of Enoch’s enthronement in 24:1 does not display the standard features, since a function of judging or ruling is not indicated.⁹³ It is rather related to Enoch’s initiation into the ultimate secrets of the universe. The sitting on the heavenly throne at God’s side ‘closer than Gabriel’ with the idea of initiation seems to suggest the supra-angelic character of Enoch’s installation that may have constituted a link with the later Enoch/Metatron developments.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ On the transformation of the visionary in the apocalyptic literature, see Martha Himmelfarb, ‘Revelation and Rapture: The Transformation of the Visionary in the Ascent Apocalypses’ in *Mysteries and Revelations*, 79-90.

⁹¹ Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 40.

⁹² Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus: A Philological-Historical Study of the Key Jewish Themes Impacting Mark 14:61-64* (WUNT 2/106; Tübingen: Mohr, 1998), 164-65.

⁹³ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 105.

⁹⁴ Michael Mach (‘From Apocalypticism to Early Jewish Mysticism’ in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. John J. Collins [3 vols.; New York: Continuum, 1998], I, 229-64[251]) suggests that ‘the exaltation to a rank higher than that of the angels as well as the seating at God’s side have their parallels and considerable development in Enoch’s/Metatron’s transformation and enthronement as depicted in *3Enoch*’. Orlov (*Enoch-Metatron*, 165) concludes similarly that the patriarch’s profile as the vice-regent of deity in *2Enoch* represents ‘the initial, not fully elaborated, sketch of the later Metatron developments’. For studies arguing for a deep connection of *2Enoch* with the *merkabah* mysticism, see e.g. Hugo Odeberg, *3Enoch: Or, The Hebrew Book of Enoch* (The Library of Biblical Studies; New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1973); Andrei Orlov, ‘The Origin of the name “Metatron” and the Text of 2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) *Enoch*’, *JSP* 21 (2000), 19-26.

As has been pointed out above, the heavenly enthronement of figures other than God is to be differentiated from the various references to the occupation of heavenly thrones. While in the case of enthronement the focus of the activity is always God's throne, in the second instance this line of thought is not consistently followed. In the following discussion the heavenly thrones of patriarchs and the pious in Jewish literature will be examined.

2.2. THE HEAVENLY THRONES OF PATRIARCHS AND THE PIOUS

Again representative works are going to be discussed in which the throne motif appears in different theological functions.

2.2.1. TESTAMENTS OF THE THREE PATRIARCHS

The *Testaments of the Three Patriarchs* is a collection of three similar works (*Testament of Abraham*, *Testament of Isaac* and *Testament of Jacob*) which spring from an apocryphal book written probably in the first century C.E. by a Jewish author. The Christian redaction of the work is generally accepted.⁹⁵ Heavenly thrones different from God's appear in a significant role in the first two testaments. They are thrones of eminent patriarchs described in a glorious manner.

In the *Testament of Abraham* the patriarch is shown an elaborate heavenly judgment-scene within the context of a traditional heavenly journey (chs. 11–13). In the first part of the scene two ways are portrayed leading to two different gates – symbolically to life and death. A golden throne (θρόνου κεχρυσωμένου) located outside the gates is shown as occupied by Adam, who observes souls passing through either of the gates and reacts strongly to their destiny with rejoicing or mourning. Since no judicial procedure is indicated, Adam's role is clearly not that of a judge. He is merely an observer of the fate of his descendants as the proto-ancestor, 'the first-formed Adam' (ὁ πρωτόπλαστος Ἀδάμ).⁹⁶

The complexity of the throne motif in the *Testament of Abraham* is enhanced by the appearance of another throne related to a more significant glorified being which stands inside the broad gate. This throne functions as 'the centre of a heavenly tribunal'⁹⁷ and it is occupied by

⁹⁵ E.P. Sanders, 'Testaments of the Three Patriarchs: Introduction' in *OTP*, I, 869(869). For the debate on the Jewishness of the work, see e.g. Dale C. Allison, *Testament of Abraham* (CEJL; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2003), 28–31.

⁹⁶ For the Adamic tradition in the *Testament of Abraham*, see Silviu Bunta, 'One Man (φῶς) in Heaven: Adam–Moses Polemics in the Romanian Versions of *The Testament of Abraham* and Ezekiel the Tragedian's *Exagoge*', *JSP* 16 (2007), 139–65.

⁹⁷ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 107.

Abel, the appointed heavenly judge of the entire creation (13:3).⁹⁸ The rationale for Abel's judging role is based perhaps on his proto-martyrdom.⁹⁹ His throne is portrayed as a 'terrifying throne' (θρόνος φοβερός) with the 'appearance of terrifying crystal, flashing like fire' (12:4). The appearance of the throne is reminiscent of other Jewish theophanies; however, the identity of the throne occupant is a major difference.¹⁰⁰ Since God is not related to the throne in the vision, this does not imply his absence from the larger picture of the judgment. Namely, in 11:1–13:7 four figures or groups are mentioned as involved in the process: (1) Adam, who as an observer is bypassed by all the souls; (2) Abel, the judge of the souls; (3) the twelve tribes of Israel, who appear in an assisting role in the final judgment; and (4) the 'Master God of all', who functions as the final judge.¹⁰¹ It has been rightly concluded by Bock against this larger picture that the role of Abel is only preliminary and temporary, in spite of his throne being described as 'terrifying', because the judgment process started by him is continued by Israel and finalized by God.¹⁰²

The *Testament of Isaac* contains a throne vision in the heavenly Temple (6:4-5), but it also refers to Abraham and Isaac as occupying personal heavenly thrones (2:7). Isaac's ascension is focused on the theme of life after death, which provides the context for interpreting the promise of a prepared throne for him beside his father Abraham. The two great figures of the Old Testament appear in this work as righteous characters who are recipients of the heavenly reward. The ascension is in primary service of their enthronement, though no description of the actual event is given in the book; only the thrones are referred to.¹⁰³

2.2.2. ASCENSION OF ISAIAH

The *Ascension of Isaiah* is a composite work consisting of two basic parts, the martyrdom (chs. 1–5) and the ascension (chs. 6–11) sections, which were later compiled into a unified Greek

⁹⁸ No other ancient texts speak of Abel as an eschatological judge. Francis Schmidt ('Le Testament d'Abraham: introduction, édition de la recension courte, traduction et notes' [PhD Dissertation; University of Strasbourg, 1971], 64f.) suggests that in the Hebrew original the 'Son of Man' is actually appointed as a judge and the introduction of the Abel figure is the result of mistranslation. For a critic of this hypothesis, see George W.E. Nickelsburg, 'Eschatology in the Testament of Abraham: A Study of the Judgment Scene in the Two Recensions' in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham*, ed. George W.E. Nickelsburg (SBLSCS, 6; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 23-64(36).

⁹⁹ Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 281; Nickelsburg, 'Eschatology', 35.

¹⁰⁰ Rowland (*Open Heaven*, 108) notes that 'this difference should not disguise the fact that there are certain similarities between this throne-scene and other theophanies'. He refers to *IEn.* 14, Dan. 7 and Rev. 20 as the closest parallels.

¹⁰¹ For a comprehensive discussion of these traditions, see Phillip B. Munoa, *Four Powers in Heaven: The Interpretation of Daniel 7 in the Testament of Abraham* (JSPSup, 28; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998).

¹⁰² Bock, *Blasphemy*, 117.

¹⁰³ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 116.

text.¹⁰⁴ It was probably written in Hebrew in the early second century C.E. and translated soon after into Greek.¹⁰⁵

The ascension section contains a classical Jewish description of a heavenly journey. While the work advocates a seven-heaven cosmological structure, scant information is given about the heavenly world.¹⁰⁶ The unique feature of the cosmology of the *Ascension of Isaiah* within the context of apocalyptic thought is the idea that each heaven has a separate throne except the sixth one, which is directed by the ‘powers of the seventh heaven’ (8:7).¹⁰⁷ Although the presence and centrality of God’s throne is presupposed in the seventh heaven, the throne is not directly mentioned.¹⁰⁸ However, within the same realm multiple thrones are referred to as the possession of ‘all the righteous from the time of Adam onwards’ (9:8). It is stated of these glorified saints that while they dwell in heaven and after they have received their garments, they do not occupy their thrones, nor do they wear their crowns of glory (9:10). The explanation for this scene is given by an *angelus interpres*: ‘They do not receive the crowns and thrones of glory ... until the Beloved descends in the form in which you will see him descend’ (9:12). Thus, the thrones are going to be received by the righteous only after the ascension of Christ to the seventh heaven (9:17-18), the completion of his salvific journey.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, other heavenly thrones are mentioned that are going to be granted to all the believers (9:24-26), including Isaiah, who is going to experience the fulfilment of this promise even before he reaches the seventh heaven (7:22).

The significance of the throne motif, employed to indicate the reward of the righteous, is central in the *Ascension of Isaiah*. The whole work is rightly considered by Hall ‘a book about

¹⁰⁴ There is a growing consensus concerning the acknowledging of the book’s unity. For representative studies arguing this view, see the overview in Robert G. Hall, ‘Disjunction of Heavenly and Earthly Times in the *Ascension of Isaiah*’, *JSJ* 35 (2004), 17-26(18 n. 2).

¹⁰⁵ For a convincing argument in favour of the second century C.E. dating, see Jonathan Knight, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (JSPSup, 18; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 33-39. Robert G. Hall refers to Pelikan, Gonzalez and Charles, who argue for early dating of the ascension section. However, the second century date enjoys a wider support. For a discussion, see Robert G. Hall, ‘The Ascension of Isaiah: Community of Situation, Date and Place in Early Christianity’, *JBL* 109 (1990), 289-306.

¹⁰⁶ The reason for this restraint lies in ‘author’s over-riding concern with soteriology’ (Knight, *Ascension*, 69).

¹⁰⁷ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 59.

¹⁰⁸ Even though the throne is not explicitly mentioned, angels are portrayed as they praise God in singing hymns. The reason for the absence of the traditional, climactic *merkabah* vision might be its intentional replacement by a message of Christian character, though the basic content of the vision is completely in line with the Jewish apocalyptic worldview (Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 110).

¹⁰⁹ According to Gruenwald (*Apocalyptic*, 61) this idea clearly reveals the hand of a Christian editor.

how Isaiah attains a heavenly throne'.¹¹⁰ Beyond Isaiah, it is viewed as a source of knowledge for its readers, who wish to gain one of the thrones for themselves.¹¹¹ Eskola observes the novelty in the approach of the *Ascension of Isaiah* in reinterpreting the theme of the enthronement of the pious, in which the enthronement of the patriarchs is now broadened to include all the believers.¹¹²

2.2.3. TESTAMENT OF JOB

There is a consensus that the *Testament of Job* is a Jewish writing, even though the evidence for the text derives from Christian sources. The work was most probably composed in Greek and there is a sharp disagreement concerning its dating.¹¹³ While Spitter argues for an earlier composition between the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E.,¹¹⁴ Nickelsburg dates it in the second century C.E. However, his cautious statement that the dating of the composition 'cannot be fixed with certainty' is indicative of the difficulty of this question.¹¹⁵

Since the springboard for the apocalyptic speculation in this work is the Old Testament book of Job, it is natural that the problem of theodicy lies at the focal point of the interest. Collins observes that the theological perspective is achieved by contrasting the 'heavenly realities with the earthly transience' which is 'overcome by heavenly insight, and finally by transportation to the divine realm'.¹¹⁶ The throne motif appears at the climax of the work and it is to be evaluated against the work's distinctive theological outlook, which stresses the cosmological superiority of the heavenly realm.

¹¹⁰ Hall, 'Isaiah's Ascent', 477.

¹¹¹ For the interpretation of the instructions of the Ascension of Isaiah on how to get a heavenly throne, robe and crown, see Hall, 'Isaiah's Ascent', 478f.

¹¹² Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 111.

¹¹³ The Greek text is heavily influenced by LXX of Job. For details of the dependence, see Berndt Schaller, 'Das Testament Hiobs und die Septuaginta-Übersetzung des Buches Hiobs', *Bib* 61 (1980), 377-406. Charles C. Torrey (*The Apocryphal Literature: A Brief Introduction* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1945], 143) argues for an Aramaic origin on alleged linguistic grounds; however, his arguments are not considered convincing.

¹¹⁴ For an overview of the discussion on dating, see R.P. Spitter, 'Testament of Job' in *OTP*, II, 829-68(833).

¹¹⁵ Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 321.

¹¹⁶ John J. Collins, 'Structure and Meaning in the Testament of Job' in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1974* (2 vols.; SBLSP, 7; Cambridge, Mass.: SBL, 1974), II, 35-52(49). In contrast, Bernd Schaller ('Zur Komposition und Konzeption des Testaments Hiobs' in *Studies on the Testament of Job*, eds. Michael A. Knibb and Pieter W. van der Horst [SNTSMS, 66; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 46-92[91-92]) denies any real theological significance of the work holding that it is simply intended to shape various aspects of the religious life of its audience. For a further discussion of the views on the theological outlook of the *Testament of Job*, see Robert A. Kugler, 'Testaments' in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul*, eds. D.A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien and Mark A. Seifrid (2 vols.; WUNT 2/140; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), I, 189-214.

The throne motif is introduced in the lament of Eliphaz, in which the former glorious state of Job is contrasted to his present despair. The frequent repetition of the rhetorical question ‘where then is the splendour of your throne?’ functions as a refrain of the speech in ch. 32 which is supposed to point to Job’s degradation.¹¹⁷ The throne motif is also utilized in the answer of the patriarch with the purpose of disclosing the mistaken understanding of the reality on the part of his friends. In a bold assertion he claims that he has been promised a throne at the right hand of God: ‘My throne is in the upper world, and its splendour and majesty come from the right hand of the Father’ (32:3). The throne motif lies at the essence of Job’s argument: in place of a throne and splendour in this transitory world Job has an eternal glory reserved for him in heaven. As Bauckham concludes, this heavenly reward is depicted ‘as the eternal reality of which his kingdom in this world has been only a worthless shadow’.¹¹⁸ Job’s throne is contrasted later with the throne of Elihu, which is characterized in strongly negative language as ‘rotted’ – an idea expressed by an even sharper claim that ‘the honour of his tent lies in Hades’ (43:7).

In spite of the prominence of Job’s heavenly throne, God’s throne, identified as ‘the chariots of the Father’ (33:9), is clearly given centrality in the text.¹¹⁹ Job’s throne is closely related to the throne of God, since its location at the divine right hand indicates a legitimizing purpose. Thus, Job’s throne functions as a positive motif which expresses the true basis of the patriarch’s hope, the orientation towards the heavenly realm in his suffering. This hope is eschatologically oriented as the throne appears with the function of a theological symbol of the imperishable eschatological reward.¹²⁰ This view is consistent with the portrayal of Adam as the prototype of the exalted patriarch in the *Apocalypse of Moses*, whose enthronement will take place in the resurrection on the last day (*Apoc. Mos.* 41:3).¹²¹

I turn now to the discussion of the throne motif in the Qumran literature, which confirms the diversity of the ideas encountered so far in our study of the concept in Jewish literature.

¹¹⁷ *T. Job* 32:2(2x), 3, 4, 5, 6,7, 9, 10, 11, 12.

¹¹⁸ Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 30-31 n. 5.

¹¹⁹ Eskola (*Messiah and the Throne*, 101) argues that the chariot imagery is a clear indicator that the scene displays *merkabah* speculation and it is apocalyptic.

¹²⁰ Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis (*All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* [STDJ, 42; Leiden: Brill, 2002], 208) notes that besides this interpretive possibility another view should not be excluded: ‘There is then a long and well-established tradition in which a real, non-eschatological, experience of ascent and heavenly enthronement would make sense’.

¹²¹ John J. Collins (‘A Throne in the Heavens: Apotheosis in Pre-Christian Judaism’ in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, 41-58[50]) claims that the concept of the heavenly thrones as eschatological rewards becomes current only from the first century C.E.

3. THE HEAVENLY THRONE IN QUMRAN

Ascent materials are not plentiful in Qumran, since the motif of the heavenly throne appears only in three Dead Sea Scrolls fragments. These texts are part of the same library, but they represent three different ideas which have been encountered in the other Jewish writings discussed so far: the chariot-throne of God (4Q400–07), the heavenly thrones of human beings (4Q491) and the thrones as eschatological rewards (4Q521). Now these ideas appear together within one body of literature.

3.1. *SONGS OF THE SABBATH SACRIFICE* (4Q400–07)

The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* are a series of thirteen related compositions arranged into a coherent liturgical cycle. The work is also known as the Angelic Liturgy,¹²² since it describes worship of the angelic priesthood in the heavenly temple.¹²³ According to Collins it is ‘the most elaborate document dealing with the heavenly host’ in the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹²⁴ Though the work focuses more on the angels than on God, specifically their praise, the throne motif appears three times at strategically important locations.¹²⁵ This indicates the significance of the motif for the work, which cannot be considered peripheral.

Newsom notes that the composition as a whole consists of three sections (songs 1–5, 6–8 and 9–13), which are arranged in a chiasmic structure. The midpoint of the chiasm is the seventh song that ‘provides both a climax of praise and an anticipation of the final section of the cycle (songs 9–13)’.¹²⁶ This song describes the throne of God in the Holy of Holies in a context of a

¹²² This descriptive title is given by J. Strugnell (‘The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran – 4Q Serek Šîrôt ’Olat Haššabbāt’ in *Congress Volume: Oxford, 1959*, ed. G.W. Anderson [VTSup, 7; Leiden: Brill, 1960], 318-45).

¹²³ For the differences concerning the heavenly ritual of angels in 4Q400–07 and the other Jewish sources, see Bilhah Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry* (trans. J. Chipman; STDJ, 12; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 289.

¹²⁴ John J. Collins, ‘Powers in Heaven: God, Gods, and Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls’ in *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. John J. Collins and Robert A. Kugler (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 9-28(11). There has been some doubt concerning the sectarian origin of the work. Carol A. Newsom (‘“Sectually Explicit” Literature from Qumran’ in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, eds. William H. Propp, Baruch Halpern and David N. Freedman [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 167-87) considers it a non- or pre-Qumranic document. His conclusion has been given support by James R. Davila (‘Heavenly Ascents in the Dead Sea Scrolls’ in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, eds. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam [2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1998-99], II, 461-85[479]), while Collins (‘Powers in Heaven’, 13) opposes it claiming that ‘the whole atmosphere of the work ... and especially its putative function, would seem to fit the context of the Qumran sect more closely than any other’.

¹²⁵ Carol A. Newsom (‘Merkabah Exegesis in the Qumran Sabbath Shirot’, *JJS* 38 [1987], 11-30[12]) notes that ‘if anything may be said to be the theme of the work as a whole, it is the subject of praise, the act of praise itself’.

¹²⁶ Carol A. Newsom, ‘Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice’ in *EncDSS*, II, 887-89(888). This view has been criticized with the objection that Newsom fails to give enough attention to the progression towards a climax in the ninth to thirteenth songs. See e.g. Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis, ‘Heavenly Ascent or Incarnational Presence? A Revisionist

praise liturgy. Though the description is dependent on Ezekiel's throne vision, the passage concludes with a reference to plurality of animate thrones (מרכבות) praising God: 'And the chariots of his inner shrine praise together, and their cherubim and the[ir] ofanim bless wonderfully' (4Q403 frg. 1 ii 15).¹²⁷ A similar description of multiple chariot-thrones is found at the end of the eleventh song in which the inner shrine of the heavenly temple is depicted (4Q405 frg. 20 ii 3). The closest parallel to this idea is in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, a later mystical text which describes thousands upon thousands of chariot-thrones singing doxologies to God.¹²⁸

The end of the eleventh song is in one sense incomplete – leaving the reader in a state of climactic anticipation. The Holy of Holies and the throne's environs have been described, but the description of the throne of Glory is postponed. The anticipation is answered by the detailed description of the divine throne-chariot in the twelfth song, in which the throne is portrayed as bearing God's glory.¹²⁹ The passage presents in a 'systematic fashion'¹³⁰ the praise offered to God by various creatures associated with the divine throne (4Q405 frg. 20 ii 8). While the strong influence of Ezek. 1 is noteworthy, the nature of the source text's use has generated some discussion.¹³¹ Unlike Ezekiel's *merkavah* vision, the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* concludes with the description of the sacrifices and the garments of the priests rather than emphasizing God's kingship through a throne scene as a climax of the revelation. This feature of the qumranic text highlights the value of worship and points to the authority of the priesthood.¹³²

Finally, it is also significant to note Scholem's observation regarding the text's influence in the development of the *merkavah* tradition. He convincingly argues that the throne motif in 4Q400–07 appears as a forerunner of the later speculations of the *hekhalot* literature. Thus, it makes the missing link between the Old Testament throne motif and the later chariot tradition.¹³³

Reading of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1998* (2 vols.; SBLSP, 37; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998), I, 367-99(382-83).

¹²⁷ All the DSS translations are taken from Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1998).

¹²⁸ *Ma'aseh Merkavah* 6.

¹²⁹ Newsom, 'Merkabah Exegesis', 15.

¹³⁰ Carol A. Newsom, 'Throne' in *EncDSS*, II, 946-47(946).

¹³¹ See the discussion of Newsom ('Merkabah Exegesis', 16f.) who speaks of 4Q400–07 as the 'example of implicit exegesis' rather than explicit expounding of Ezek. 1.

¹³² Fletcher-Louis ('Heavenly Ascent', 393-98) explains the strange ending with the argument that the conclusion emphasizes the elevation of the true High Priest as the embodiment of the Glory, that is, the embodiment of God.

¹³³ Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 128. See also Lawrence H. Schiffman, 'Merkavah Speculation at Qumran: The 4Q Serekh Shirot 'Olat ha-Shabbat' in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altman*, eds. Jehuda Reinharz and Daniel Swetschinski in collaboration with Kalman P. Bland (Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 5; Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982), 15-47.

3.2. SELF-GLORIFICATION HYMN (4Q491)

The *Self-Glorification Hymn* has been published by Baillet as a fragment of the War Scroll (4QM).¹³⁴ Since this categorization is no longer plausible,¹³⁵ 4Q491 is viewed as a variant form of a hymn in the *Thanksgiving Scroll*.¹³⁶ Although the text is in a very fragmentary condition, some striking phrases are quite clearly preserved.

It has been suggested by Davila that the *Self-Glorification Hymn* contains ‘the most striking account of the exaltation of a mortal to heaven’.¹³⁷ The author, an anonymous figure, claims to have sat on a ‘mighty throne in the congregation of the gods’ (כסא עון בערת אליים). His exalted status is expressed in the first person in boastful language: ‘My glory is in[comparable] and besides me no-one is exalted, nor comes to me, for I reside (ישבתי) in [...], in the heavens, and there is no [...] ... I am counted among the gods and my dwelling is in the holy congregation’ (4Q491 frg. 11 i 5-7). Such boasting by a human figure has no parallel either in the Qumran library or in other Jewish literature. The writer not only claims the possession of his own heavenly throne, but even numbers himself among the gods. It seems that a kind of *apotheosis* is in view here.¹³⁸ Wolfson rightly argues that this passage is the only Qumran text which can be legitimately categorized as ‘mystical’, since similar to later Jewish mystical texts of the *hekhalot* literature it is concerned with the themes of mystical ascents and heavenly enthronement.¹³⁹

The identity of the exceptional, throne-occupant figure has been the subject of significant scholarly discussion. Baillet, the original editor, thought that the speaker must be an angelic figure and titled it ‘Cantique de Michel’ (the Canticle of Michael).¹⁴⁰ Smith challenged this view arguing persuasively that the figure is rather a human being who is enthroned in heaven.¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ Maurice Baillet, *Qumrân Grotte 4. III (4Q482-4Q520)* (DJD, 40; Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 26-30.

¹³⁵ For the critic of Baillet’s view, see e.g. Morton Smith, ‘Two Ascended to Heaven – Jesus and the Author of 4Q491’ in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 290-301(295).

¹³⁶ Three copies of variant versions of 4Q491 have been identified in the Qumran library: 4Q427 frag. 7, 4Q471b, and 1QH^a cols. 25-26. As Esther Eshel (‘4Q471B: A Self-Glorification Hymn’, *RevQ* 17 [1996], 175-203) notes, it is possible that the variants reflect two recensions of the same hymn.

¹³⁷ Davila, ‘Heavenly Ascents’, 473.

¹³⁸ The account is reminiscent to the transformation of Enoch into an angel in *3Enoch*, a writing of a much later date (Davila, ‘Heavenly Ascents’, 475).

¹³⁹ Elliot R. Wolfson, ‘Mysticism and the Poetic-Liturgical Compositions from Qumran: A Response to Bilhah Nitzan’, *JQR* 85 (1994), 185-202(200-01).

¹⁴⁰ Baillet, *Qumrân Grotte 4*, 26-30.

¹⁴¹ Morton Smith, ‘Ascent to the Heavens and Deification in 4QM^a’ in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The New York University Conference in Memory of Yigael Yadin*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman (JSPSup, 8; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 181-88.

Collins proposed the Teacher of Righteousness as a candidate,¹⁴² but parallels with Jesus and even Paul have also been suggested.¹⁴³ It seems that the identity of the figure remains obscure; however, for our present purpose attesting the idea that human beings hold thrones in heaven is significant.

3.3. MESSIANIC APOCALYPSE (4Q521)

The *Messianic Apocalypse*, commonly referred to as the ‘Resurrection fragment’, has become one of the most famous Qumran texts since its publication in 1992.¹⁴⁴ Whether the designation ‘apocalypse’ is fully justified has been a matter of discussion.¹⁴⁵ It is well known that 4Q521 is based on Isa. 61:1, a famous text which, according to Hengel, is the passage most aptly applicable to Jesus.¹⁴⁶ It is not surprising that the passage attracted a considerable interest, because of its point of contact with the messianic passages of the Synoptic traditions.¹⁴⁷

Unlike the two Qumran throne-texts discussed above, the throne motif is not central in the *Messianic Apocalypse*. For this reason the question has not attracted much scholarly attention. There is only one throne reference in the work, which appears in the context of ‘the eschatological visitation in which God lifts up the oppressed and rewards his faithful’ (4Q521 frg. ii 4-9).¹⁴⁸ The throne motif is employed for indicating the promise of eschatological reward according to which ‘He will glorify the pious with the throne of the eternal kingdom’ (4Q521 frg.

¹⁴² John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 146-49.

¹⁴³ See e.g. Martin G. Abegg, ‘Who Ascended to Heaven? 4Q491, 4Q427, and the Teacher of Righteousness’ in *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 61-73(73); John C. O’Neill, ‘Who is Comparable to Me in My Glory? 4Q491 Fragment 11 (4Q491C) and the New Testament’, *NovT* 42 (2000), 24-38.

¹⁴⁴ For the publication of the text, see Émile Puech, ‘Une Apocalypse messianique (4Q521)’, *RevQ* 15 (1992), 475-522.

¹⁴⁵ Émile Puech (‘Messianic Apocalypse’ in *EncDSS*, I, 887-89[888]) holds that the dominant messianic and apocalyptic theme suggests apocalyptic genre, while F. García Martínez (*The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* [Leiden: Brill; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995], 394-95) characterizes 4Q521 rather as a ‘sapiential poem’. On the other hand, Géza G. Xeravits (‘Wisdom Traits in the Qumranic Presentation of the Eschatological Prophet’ in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*, ed. F. García Martínez [BETL, 168; Leuven: Peeters, 2003], 183-92[185-88]) argues that the views of Puech and Martínez should not necessarily exclude each other; however, James D. Tabor and Michael O. Wise (‘4Q521 “On Resurrection” and the Synoptic Gospel Tradition: A Preliminary Study’, *JSP* 10 [1992], 149-62[150]) note that the fragmentary state of the surviving manuscripts ‘preclude any firm decision as to the text’s genre’.

¹⁴⁶ Martin Hengel, ‘Jesus der Messias Israels. Zum Streit über das “messianische Sendungsbewußtsein” Jesu’ in *Messiah and Christos*, eds. Ithamar Gruenwald, Shaul Shaked and Gedaliahu A.G. Stroumsa (TSAJ, 32; Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 155-76(164).

¹⁴⁷ On the relation of 4Q521 and the Synoptic traditions, see Michael Becker, ‘4Q521 und die Gesalbten’, *RevQ* 69 (1997), 73-96.

¹⁴⁸ Tabor, ‘4Q521’, 158.

1 ii 7). It has been noted that the expression כסא מלכות עד ('throne of the eternal kingdom') is without biblical precedent, although it is similar to כסא מלכות, the expression referring to earthly human thrones in the Old Testament.¹⁴⁹ In the text it is clearly indicated that God is the subject, who is granting the throne to the glorified human beings as the recipients. Thus, the throne appears in 4Q521 as the eschatological reward of the pious in the context of the messianic era.¹⁵⁰

4. CONCLUSION

The throne motif in Jewish literature has been discussed in this chapter in two respects: the throne visions of God and the heavenly thrones of God's allies. The motif in Qumran literature has been given separate attention, on the one hand, because of the uniqueness of this library and, on the other hand, with the purpose of establishing the consistency of the motif's use in this literature in comparison with the other Jewish works.

The examination of the representative throne visions revealed major development in relation to the Old Testament. The progress is particularly evident regarding the ascent structure, the cosmology and the active role of the visionary. While the Old Testament visions provided a significant exegetical framework for these materials, it became evident in our investigation that the throne visions of Jewish literature are qualitatively different. From an examination of the throne vision in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* it became particularly clear that there is a tendency in Jewish literature towards reshaping the traditional theophanic imagery in terms of avoiding the description of the throne and its occupant.

Our study of the thrones of God's allies led us to the conclusion that we have an entirely new phenomenon in relation to the Old Testament, in which heavenly thrones different from God's throne are only specifically mentioned in Dan. 7:9-10. I have suggested that these throne materials can be organized into two groups: the heavenly enthronement of the Old Testament heroic figures and the short references to the possession of thrones on the part of patriarchs and the pious. It has been demonstrated that the purpose of the enthronement lies in indicating vice-regency with God (*Exagoge*), authorization to a specific task as participating in eschatological judgment (*Similitudes*), or initiation into the heavenly secrets (*2Enoch*). On the other hand, the short references to the heavenly thrones may point to the idea of judgment, but the dominant notion is that of imperishable eschatological reward. Also, a clear progression in the development

¹⁴⁹ Est. 1:2; 1Chron. 28:5.

¹⁵⁰ Newsom, 'Thrones', 947.

of the idea of heavenly thrones of other beings different from God has been established, since the idea that heroic figures hold thrones is broadened in some works to include all the pious.

I have suggested that the three Qumran texts in which the motif of the throne features are appropriate representatives of the diversity of the tradition in the Jewish literature with the following ideas: the chariot-throne of God (4Q400–07), the heavenly thrones of human beings (4Q491) and the thrones as eschatological reward for the pious (4Q521). The utilization of the throne motif in these three texts clearly reflects three major steps in the development of the throne theology in Jewish literature: the throne of God is still central, but there also emerges the idea of heavenly thrones for heroic human beings, which is later broadened to include all the saints.

GRAECO-ROMAN SOURCES

Recently, it has been stressed that there is a lack of awareness of the ancient material culture among the interpreters of Revelation, and also among New Testament scholars generally.¹ This deficiency was called to our attention more than forty years ago by Grant, who saw the problem as ‘one of the major weaknesses of New Testament study’.² The need for ongoing dialogue between archaeology and literary studies is rightfully argued, since both disciplines are limited in their view of ancient life.³ Oster observes that ‘visual language was part of the lingua franca in a way foreign to our present experience’ and for this reason ‘iconography was no less powerful or cogent than written or spoken communication’.⁴ For this reason any interpretation of the imagery and symbolism of Revelation, including the throne motif, which does not take into account the visual makeup of the ancient society is deficient, since the last book of the New Testament canon was not written in a vacuum.⁵

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the Graeco-Roman background of Revelation’s throne motif both through written sources and through artefacts. This joint enterprise in which the different disciplines appear as complementary to each other will, it is hoped, contribute to a more objective picture. First of all, the question of the origin of the institution of the divine throne needs to be addressed and this will be followed by an examination of literary, numismatic and artistic evidence relevant for this study.

¹ Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 19-27; Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 5-22.

² Robert M. Grant, ‘American New Testament Study, 1926-1956’, *JBL* 87 (1968), 42-50(48).

³ Stevenson (*Power and Place*, 19-20) warns that the textual evidence and the archaeology are mistakenly not considered equal partners, since in reality ‘textual evidence takes priority and archaeology, when employed at all, functions as a sub-disciplinary partner’. He argues for the need for ‘inter-disciplinary’ rather than ‘sub-disciplinary’ partnership between the two approaches: ‘Each discipline brings its own contributions and limitations to the table and the contributions of the one can help to offset the limitations of the other.’ The result of such a dialogue of the disciplines is that the ‘material culture provides a physical context for disembodied texts’.

⁴ Richard Oster, ‘Numismatic Windows into the Social World of Early Christianity: A Methodological Inquiry’, *JBL* 101 (1982), 195-223(200).

⁵ Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 22.

1. THE ORIGIN OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE DIVINE THRONE

The Greek *θρόνος* is linguistically related to *θρᾶνος* ('seat', 'bench') and *θρῆνυς* ('footstool'). According to Homer, *θρόνος* was a chair with a footstool attached, a higher seat for honoured guests.⁶ Athenaeus differentiates between three main types of Greek seat: *θρόνος*, *κλίσμος* and *δίφρος*. He defines *θρόνος* as a 'chair with a footstool for a man of high birth' (*ἐλευθέριος καθέδρα σὺν ὑποποδίῳ*). Of the other two seats he states: 'The *κλίσμος* is provided more sumptuously with an inclined back. Poorer than either of these was the *δίφρος*'.⁷

θρόνος as a piece of furniture has been widely used in different contexts of everyday life.⁸ The Thessalian throne has been considered a special piece of furniture – the 'most comfortable seat for the limbs'.⁹ Unfortunately, a pictorial representation of this special type of seat is not available. From the time of Plato *θρόνος* also designated the teaching chair of philosophers. In *Protagoras* Socrates finds Hippias, the famous sophist sitting on a throne as he is encircled by his students, who occupy benches.¹⁰ Similarly, Palladas of Alexandria refers to the throne as the regular seat of the sophists,¹¹ while in Philostratos it appears merely as the seat of philosophers.¹² From these references it is evident that *θρόνος* was used originally without a particular symbolic meaning – as a piece of everyday furniture. The use of the Latin *thronos* has been very varied in the Latin world. With the establishment of the Republic the throne became a more widely used symbol of authority, occupied on official occasions by high-ranking magistrates. It was only much later that it took the meaning of a seat reserved for rulers or gods as the emblem of royal and divine power.¹³ In the Roman Empire the throne of the emperor was given a special prominence by its elevation on a podium. This became a common practice by the reign of Caligula (37–41 C.E.).¹⁴

⁶ Homer, *Od.* 1.130; 8.65; 19.57

⁷ Athenaeus 5.192 e, f.

⁸ For detailed study on the ancient Greek furniture, see Gisela M.A. Richter, *The Furniture of the Greeks, Etruscans and Romans* (London: Phaidon Press, 1966). On the furniture in the ancient Asia Minor, see Elisabeth Simpson, 'Furniture in Ancient Western Asia' in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (4 vols.; New York: Scribner's, 1995), III, 1647-71.

⁹ Athenaeus 1.28 b.

¹⁰ Plato, *Prt.* 315 c.

¹¹ *Gk. Anth.* 4.174.

¹² *Vit. Soph.* 2. 588, 591, 613.

¹³ Aeschylus, *Cho.* 565, 969; *Pro.* 912; Sophocles, *OT* 237; *OC* 426 (cf. Dieter Sängler, 'θρόνος' in *EDNT*, II, 156-58[156]).

¹⁴ Tessa Garton, 'Throne' in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (34 vols.; New York: Grove, 1996), XXX, 774-86(775).

The notion of the interplay between the earthly and heavenly powers is essential for the understanding of the institution of the throne in the ancient world. Blending points out: ‘Characteristic for oriental thought is the mutual interplay of ideas of regal and divine power, something which was foreign to Greece until the time of Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.E.). The earthly ruler was honoured as the “Son”, or even (as in Egypt) as the incarnation of the divine. The nature of their kingship was similarly represented.’¹⁵ Thus, divine and human royal powers are perceived as being in a dynamic relationship – without an essential separation. Nevertheless, the throne as a symbol of power is not originally a Greek institution. As Ernst Honigmann notes, its origin is derived ‘aus dem Orient, wo der absolute Herrscher auf einem prachtvoll geschmückten Thron saß, der gewöhnlich auf einer mehrstufigen Basis stand, und so die Macht des Herrschers über seine Untertanen ausdrückte’.¹⁶

2. DIVINE THRONES IN GRAECO-ROMAN LITERATURE

Divine involvement is given a certain prominence in the Greek writings from the earliest periods of literary activity. Kearns rightly notes: ‘Without the Gods the epics would be quite different from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that we have, and surely also from the tradition that produced the poems.’¹⁷ It has even been argued that drama has a sacred origin, because of the prominence of the intersection between the divine and human in the tragedies and the emphasis on the limitation of human understanding and endeavour.¹⁸ Due to the religious character of the Graeco-Roman literature, it is not surprising to discover a widespread convergence of divine figures and thrones.

A comprehensive study of the use of the term *θρόνος* in Graeco-Roman literature cannot be attempted here because of the space limitations, therefore my aim will be to identify basic ideas evoked by the motif on the basis of exploring representative passages. Though the texts that will be examined here originate from different periods, the majority precede the composition of Revelation by several centuries. In spite of the significant time-gap the following argument from Stevenson is a valid justification for considering them as a background material for the study of Revelation:

¹⁵ Christian Blending, ‘*θρόνος*’ in *NIDNTT*, II, 611-15(612).

¹⁶ Ernst Honigmann, ‘*θρόνος*’ in *RE*, VI, 613-18(613).

¹⁷ Emily Kearns, ‘The Gods in the Homeric Epics’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Louis Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 59-73(59).

¹⁸ For tragedy as a religious phenomenon, see Scott Scullion, ‘Tragedy and Religion: The Problem of Origins’ in *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. Justina Gregory (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 23-37.

One should not assume that standard practices in Athens of the fourth century B.C.E. mirror those in Ephesus of the first century C.E., but neither should one assume that attitudes and practices of first century Ephesus arose and operated in a vacuum. Setting a broader context allows us to see how certain ideas or practices persisted, ceased or evolved. It also enables us to recognize certain foundational ideas or patterns that remain consistent through differing expressions in distinct places and periods.¹⁹

In this section I will suggest meanings for the throne motif in the writings of the Graeco-Roman writers. In the first place, the throne as the emblem of power will be investigated; I consider this to be the dominant meaning of the motif in this body of literature. This will be followed by an examination of the dignity of the throne, which is closely associated with the previous idea. Attention will be given also to specific actions originating from or occurring related to the divine throne. The section will be concluded with a discussion of the figurative meaning of the motif.

2.1. EMBLEM OF POWER

The best-known ancient Greek text in which *θρόνος* appears as a symbolic expression of divine power is Homer's *Iliad* 12.433-44. Apart from a few Linear B documents that name individual deities, the Homeric poems are considered the oldest available testimony of Greek perception of the gods.²⁰ They are pictured in the *Iliad* as 'rational, comprehensible, anthropomorphic beings', who are distinct from men, each having its individual temperament, sphere and attributes expressed in mythical terms.²¹ The formative influence of the epic is well known, though attention has been called to the 'general and far-reaching distinction between the gods as they appear in the *Iliad* and the gods as they were actually worshiped'.²² Homer's contribution has been summarized by Herodotus, who claims that the great Greek epic poet, together with Hesiod

¹⁹ Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 41. Similarly, Peter Balla (*The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment* [WUNT 2/155; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 6) points out: 'In general terms, there are cases where one can suppose that the ideas contained in earlier writings had an impact upon later authors, because we do know that the earlier writings were transmitted and discussed even centuries later.' He argues that establishing of libraries in the Hellenistic period should be considered as evidence for the deliberate preservation of many writings from the earlier period. For examples of Homer's studies by the later generations, see Nigel Wilson, 'Griechische Philologie im Altertum' in *Einleitung in die griechische Philologie*, ed. Heinz-Günther Nesselrath (Stuttgart: B.G. Teuner, 1997), 87-103.

²⁰ Unless we date as in Martin L. West, *Hesiod: Theogony* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 40-48.

²¹ Michael Silk, *Homer: The Iliad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 2004), 26. For a bibliography on modern sources of the Homeric gods, see Kearns, 'Gods', 73.

²² Kearns, 'Gods', 61-62.

‘made a theogony for the Greeks and gave the Gods their eponyms and divided up their honours and crafts, and indicated their appearance’.²³

In the *Iliad* 8.433-44 passage divine figures are portrayed as gathered at Olympus and engaged in a discussion about an approaching earthly battle. While they are sitting on χρυσεοί κλισμοί (‘golden chairs’), Zeus takes his place on his χρύσεος θρόνος (‘golden throne’; cf. 8.426) as he arrives at this meeting of the gods in a chariot. The description of the physical attributes of the seats is limited to the single characteristic of being golden. However, the authority of Zeus is emphasized by the choice of a type of seat that designates his distinct status: the prestigious θρόνος as opposed to the ordinary κλίσιμος. His power vis-à-vis the other gods is also emphasized by Olympus quaking in his presence, explained by the fact that his feet rest upon the mountain. Schrade points out that for Homer the throne is regarded as ‘Symbole der göttlichen Herrschaft und Gewalt ... ein Unterpfand der Gottesmacht’.²⁴ Similarly, Jung concludes in his analysis of the text from the *Iliad* that ‘der Thronos des Zeus als ein besonderes, feststehendes Symbol oder gar Unterpfand der Gottesmacht zu verstehen ist’.²⁵

I would like to suggest that the employing of the throne motif in this *Iliad* text implies clear power relations. This is indicated in the dispute of Hera and Athena with the enthroned Zeus concerning the outcome of the Trojan War. At the end the endeavour of the goddesses appears meaningless, since it is affirmed that human affairs follow the plan of Zeus in spite of apparent setbacks. The idea of the supremacy of Zeus is introduced even at the beginning of the epic: ‘the will of Zeus was being brought to fulfilment’ (1.5), he took away from them the day of their return (1.9). The question at the beginning of the *Iliad*, ‘Who then of the gods was it that brought these two together to contend?’ (1.8), also supports this line of evidence.²⁶ Thus, the dominant position of Zeus in Greek mythology is already evident in Homer. His ideas have been

²³ Herodotus 2.53.2.

²⁴ Hubert Schrade, *Götter und Menschen Homers* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1952), 69.

²⁵ Helmut Jung, *Thronende und sitzende Götter: zum griechischen Götterbild und Menschenideal in geometrischer und früharchaischer Zeit* (Habelts Dissertationsdrucke: Reihe klassische Archäologie, 17; Bonn: Habelt, 1982), 24.

²⁶ The concept of divine causation does not entirely eliminate the human element. It seems that an event could frequently have at the same time both a divine and a human cause – the so-called ‘double motivation’ or ‘over-determination’. For this topic, see e.g. Albin Lesky, *Göttliche und menschliche Motivation im homerischen Epos* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1960); Eric R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1951), 1-18; M.M. Willcock, ‘Aspects of the Gods of the *Iliad*’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Quarterly* 14 (1970), 1-10.

later developed by the religious thinkers of the Classical and Hellenistic age into the concept described by Graf as ‘Zeus monotheism’.²⁷

Though the above analysed scene from the *Iliad* differentiates between the seat of Zeus (θρόνος) and that of the other gods (κλίσιμος), such a distinction is not generally maintained in Greek literature. θρόνος is also associated with the gods different from Zeus.²⁸ Moreover, the Greek tragedians use the plural of the term (θρονοί) not only for referring to the power of the gods, but also for signifying the authority of earthly kings.²⁹ It seems that the term became synonymous with royal power generally. Thus, in Sophokles’ *Antigone* Kreon addresses the Theban elders, saying ‘I know how constant was your reverence for the throne of Laios’ (σέβοντας εἰδῶς εὔ θρόνων ἀεὶ κράτη).³⁰ Similarly in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus* the fall of Kronos is referred to in terms of falling ‘from his sovereignty and throne’ (δηλαιῶν θρόνων).³¹

2.2. DIGNITY OF THE THRONE

The dignity of θρόνος is not only indicated by the association with gods and kings, but also by epithets and descriptions related to it. Richter notes in her research on the ancient furniture the following attributes that qualify thrones in the Graeco-Roman literature: high (ὕψηλός),³² gleaming (φαιινός),³³ shining (σιγαλόεις),³⁴ golden or inlaid with gold (χρύσειος, χρυσόθρονος),³⁵ silver-studded (ἀργυρόηλος),³⁶ made of silver and gold (ἄργυροῦν καὶ χρυσοῦν),³⁷ many-coloured (ποικιλόθρονος),³⁸ well wrought (δαιδάλεος),³⁹ beauteous (εὖθρονος),⁴⁰ provided with a

²⁷ Fritz Graf, ‘Zeus’ in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, eds. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd edn, 1996), 1636-38(1638). To Aeschylus Zeus had begun to move away from the object of simple human knowledge (‘Zeus, whoso’er he be...’; *Ag.* 160f.) towards a nearly universal function (‘Zeus is the ether, Zeus is earth, Zeus is sky’). Sophocles upholds Zeus’ involvement in all human affairs (‘and Zeus hath wrought it all’; *Trach.* 1278). The main document of the ‘Zeus monotheism’ is a hymn by the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes, in which Zeus, the mythical image of the Stoic logos, becomes the commander of the entire cosmos and its ‘universal law’ (*SVF* 1.121.537). According to Graf this view ‘marks the high point of a development’, since the other gods ‘become insignificant besides this Zeus’ though they are not denied.

²⁸ Pindar, *Ol.* 2.141; Euripides, *Her.* 753; Aristophanes, *Ran.* 765.

²⁹ Aeschylus, *Eum.* 912; *Pro.* 220; Soph., *OC* 426.

³⁰ Sophokles, *Ant.* 164f.

³¹ Aeschylus, *Pro.*, 912.

³² Homer, *Od.* 8.422.

³³ Homer, *Il.* 18.422.

³⁴ Homer, *Od.* 5.86

³⁵ Pindar, *Pyth.* 4.260.

³⁶ Homer, *Od.* 7.162.

³⁷ Xenophon, *Hell.* 1.5.4.

³⁸ Sappho, fr. 1.1f.

³⁹ Homer, *Od.* 1.131.

⁴⁰ Pindar, *Isthm.* 2.5.

footstool (θρήνυς)⁴¹ and strewn with purple coverlets (τάπητας πορφυρέους).⁴² These attributes clearly indicate the language of splendour, which conveys the idea of elevation.

The throne as a seat of dignity expresses the value and social ranking of the person taking his place on it. It is well known that honour and shame were viewed as the pivotal values, ‘the two poles of social evaluation’, in the ancient Mediterranean World.⁴³ Inviting somebody to take his seat on a throne was considered an expression of a special honour. This idea is expressed in *Odyssey* by the words of an old councillor to king Alcinous when Odysseus is pictured as sitting in the ashes after being shipwrecked: ‘Come, make the stranger arise and set him upon a silver-studded throne’ (θρόνου ἀργυροῆλου).⁴⁴

In the *Bibliotheca Historica*, a forty-volume work on universal history written around the turn of the era, the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus reports an episode from the life of Alexander the Great which illustrates the seriousness of disregard for the dignity of his royal throne:

Once when the king was being rubbed with oil and the royal robe and diadem were lying on a chair, one of the natives who was kept in bonds was spontaneously freed from his fetters, escaped his guards’ notice, and passed through the doors of the palace with no one hindering. He went to the royal chair, put on the royal dress and bound his head with the diadem, then seated himself upon the chair and remained quiet. As soon as the king learned of this, he was terrified at the odd event, but walked to the chair and without showing his agitation asked the man quietly who he was and what he meant by doing this. When he made no reply whatsoever, Alexander referred the portent to the seers for interpretation and put the man to death.⁴⁵

This unique incident is interpreted as predicting trouble, a sign of the death of Alexander.⁴⁶ The disregard of the royal throne’s dignity not only evoked feelings of surprise and discomfort on the

⁴¹ Homer, *Od.* 1.131; Athenaeus 5.192e.

⁴² Homer, *Od.* 20.150.

⁴³ John George Peristiany, *Honor and Shame: The Values of a Mediterranean Society* (The Nature of Human Society Series; Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 21. The values of honour and shame have formed the cornerstones of Malina’s works which validate the value system across a range of biblical data. On his major contribution, see Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / John Knox Press, 3rd edn, 2001), 27. Malina has recently co-authored major commentaries on some New Testament books that affirm the centrality of honour and the related models he refers to. See Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1998); *Ibid.*, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2nd edn, 2003); Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2000); *Ibid.*, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006); *Ibid.*, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2008).

⁴⁴ Homer, *Od.* 7.162f.

⁴⁵ Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 17.116.2-4.

⁴⁶ Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 17.116.1.

king's part, but also apprehension, as it is evident from Alexander's reaction. To occupy Alexander's throne in royal regalia without his permission symbolized a challenge to his royal authority. This was the reason for punishing such disregard by the death penalty. The respect for the dignity of royal throne is similarly seen in another incident recorded by Diodorus in which Alexander orders the removal of the footstool of the throne of Darius but later regrets his decision, viewing it as an act of arrogance.⁴⁷

2.3. PLACE OF REVELATION, PETITIONS, WORSHIP AND COMMISSIONING

The works of Euripides serve as appropriate examples for the function of divine thrones as places of multiple activities. The last of the three great tragedians of classical Athens (besides Aeschylus and Sophocles), Euripides, lived in the fifth century B.C.E. and wrote nearly ninety plays.⁴⁸ He is known as an 'intellectual dramatist' with a 'curiously modern look',⁴⁹ whose works reflect 'impatience with traditional religion'.⁵⁰ His dramas depict a universe in which, in spite of the existence of gods and their exercise of irresistible power, human beings claim 'a power of survival ... and a moral sovereignty which gods by their nature cannot share'.⁵¹ Thus, the idea of divine will guiding the world has disappeared in the worldview of Euripides and chance has taken its place.⁵² In the following, I will focus on texts from *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Helen* in investigating the multiple functions of the throne motif in them.

In *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1249-83 a divine θρόνος is mentioned three times. It is located in the palace at Olympus as the property of Zeus. No physical description of the throne is provided apart from the reference to a 'tripod of gold' (1253). It is qualified as a 'throne of truth' (1254), a

⁴⁷ Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 17.66.3.

⁴⁸ For Euripides' surviving plays, his contribution, topics and techniques, see P.E. Easterling and B.M.W. Knox (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature: Greek Literature* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), I, 316-39; Humphrey D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study* (London: Routledge, 2nd edn, 2002), 250-87.

⁴⁹ Easterling, *Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, 65.

⁵⁰ Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, 189. Euripides is known as a religious sceptic, even accused for atheism. His often quoted line, 'If gods do evil, they are not gods', is spoken by an unknown character in a lost play called *Bellerophon* (frag. 294) and it does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the dramatist. Philip Vellacott (*Ironic Drama: A Study of Euripides' Method and Meaning* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975], 22) argues that the charge of irreligion is unjustified and it may be countered by the argument that Euripides' references to Zeus are serious, even when sceptical, and they are seldom ironic.

⁵¹ Vellacott, *Ironic Drama*, 20. On tragedy as a religious phenomenon, see Scullion, 'Tragedy and Religion', 23-37.

⁵² Poulheria Kyriakou (*A Commentary on Euripides' Iphigenia in Tauris* [UALG, 80; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2006], 17) in her commentary on *Iphigenia in Tauris* notes concerning the understanding of chance in the drama: 'The gods are able to bring about what they want with minimal pain, but the problems they encounter, or the chance events that thwart their plans, if only momentarily, accentuate human vulnerability to chance. The destruction or salvation of humans is thus to an extent a result of chance, or at least of the interaction of gods and chance.'

characterization indicating freedom from all deceit and trustworthiness. Three activities are directly related to the divine throne which point to its dynamic function. First, the throne appears as a source of ‘revelation of heaven’s design’, a place from which dream-visions originate (125). Second, it is the location where the petitions of Phoebus are offered: he prayed ‘with child-arms clinging to Zeus’ throne’ (1271). The purpose of his supplication was to appease the wrath of Zeus and thus to cause the prophetic dreams to stop. Zeus answers the petition positively, smiling, because ‘the costly oblations of his worshippers jealous, so swiftly had come’ (1274-75).⁵³ Third, the last section of the song portrays the throne as a place of worship, where ‘the thronging nations bowed ... where he (Zeus) sang fate’s doom’ (1282-83). According to Kyriakou the throne is presented in this scene as hospitable, because its occupant appears as ‘a benevolent ruler who offers “hospitality” to all who visit him’.⁵⁴

In Euripides’ *Helen* the leitmotif is the gap between appearance and reality.⁵⁵ The drama presents a story in which the heroine at Troy turns out to be a mere phantom, while the real Helen is a captive at the place of Proteus in Egypt. She laments her past and fate which binds her to a place far from the homeland. She holds that her Egyptian captivity is the result of Hera’s will, portrayed in *Helen* 240-42 as the ‘stately bride of Zeus’, seated on her golden throne. Apart from qualifying Hera’s throne as golden, no description of the actual throne or its occupant is given. The throne appears in this drama as a place of commissioning from which Hera ‘sent the son of Maia’ (Hermes) to Helen with a task of relocating her from a pleasant rose-garden to Egypt, a ‘loveless land’, to dwell in the ‘Brazen House’.

So far we have examined Graeco-Roman texts referring to literal thrones which appear as emblems of power, objects of dignity or sources/recipients of specific activities. I turn now to an examination of the figurative use of the throne motif using three examples.

2.4. FIGURATIVE USE

We find the first example of the figurative use of the throne in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*. The Greek dramatist, who lived in the fifth and sixth century B.C.E., is known as the father of tragic drama. He is known as a ‘profoundly religious’ person, whose dramas reflect interest in matters of

⁵³ For the laughter of Zeus on similar occasions, see Homer, *Il.* 21.508; *H. Hymn* 4.389; Callimachus, *H.* 3.28.

⁵⁴ Kyriakou, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 407.

⁵⁵ Easterling, *Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, 197.

religion and theology.⁵⁶ In *Eumenides* 229 he equates heaven with Διὸς θρόνος. This idea reminds us of the corresponding statement in the Old Testament (Isa. 66:1) that we have already dealt with in this dissertation.⁵⁷ The same idea is attested in Theocritus' *Idylls* 7.93, written two to three centuries after Aeschylus.

A different kind of figurative throne appears in Plato's most well-known work, the *Res Publica*. In 8.553.b-c there are two references to θρόνος, both with the meaning of one's own soul. Plato warns against the danger 'to establishing on ... [the] throne the principle of appetite and avarice' and as a consequence suffer its playing 'the great king within'.

The last kind of figurative throne I discuss here comes from a text by Diodorus Siculus. In his *Bibliotheca Historica* the advice of Eumenes is given, which is supposed to contribute 'much to harmony and the general good' after the death of Alexander the Great. He suggests on the basis of a strange vision that a golden throne (χρυσοῦν θρόνον; 18.60.6) should be made from the royal treasure and that the whole royal insignia should be put on it – the diadem, the sceptre and the crown. It is further suggested that 'all the commanders must at daybreak offer incense to Alexander before it, hold the council meetings in its presence, and receive their orders in the name of the king just as if he were alive and at the head of his own kingdom'.⁵⁸ Diodorus reports that the advice of Eumenes is unanimously accepted and considered a matter of general interest. Here, the golden throne clearly represents the rule of Alexander portrayed as continuing even after his death.

3. THRONES IN NUMISMATICS

Greek coins have been generally viewed as representing more than currency and 'objects of beauty'.⁵⁹ It is well known that they functioned as vehicles of civic propaganda, as they reflected contemporary attitudes.⁶⁰ For this reason even the smallest figure, sign, object or inscription

⁵⁶ John Ferguson, *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1972), 35.

⁵⁷ See ch. 1 sec. 1.4.

⁵⁸ Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 18.60.6; cf. 19.15.4.2.

⁵⁹ David Sacks, Oswyn Murray and Margaret Bunston, 'Coinage' in *A Dictionary of the Ancient Greek World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 63-64(64).

⁶⁰ See e.g. Carol H.V. Sutherland, 'The Intelligibility of Roman Imperial Coin Types', *JRS* 49 (1959), 46-55. On the other hand Richard Sullivan ('Royal Coins and Rome' in *Ancient Coins of the Graeco-Roman World: The Nickle Numismatic Papers*, eds. Waidemar Heckel and Richard Sullivan [Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press for the Calgary Institute for the Humanities, 1984], 143-58[143-44]) calls our attention to the ambiguity of numismatic evidence. He claims that while the coins reflect extraordinary moments in the history of the Ancient Near East, at the same time they may also reflect two surprises: 'The first surprise comes when one finds no clear correlation emerging necessarily between a given stage of Roman intervention and its reflection in coins ... Coins did serve as

conveyed a significant message. The imperial control over the activities of the mint made it possible for people in the provinces to become familiar with the image, the titles and the pretensions of the emperor through the coins, which functioned in a certain sense as broadcasting tools.⁶¹ Besides an informative function, coinage served also as a means of integrating the diverse population into a coherent Empire.⁶² Since most Greek coins ceased being produced during the Roman period and the Greeks relied mainly on coins minted by Rome,⁶³ the focus of my numismatic investigation will be on the coins issued by the Empire, primarily those minted during the reign of Domitian.

The numismatic motif of an enthroned deity, holding a sign of authority in his hand, visually represents the notion of power.⁶⁴ From the time of the Greek rulers the most frequent numismatic utilization of the throne motif has been the image of the enthroned Zeus. Later the Roman Jupiter, who became the cornerstone of Domitianic propaganda, has been portrayed similarly.⁶⁵ On some coins the deity appears in a temple context, though not always in a sitting position.⁶⁶ Representation in the temple is understandable in the light of the conviction that the temple functioned as the deity's house.⁶⁷ Stevenson notes two numismatic motifs from Pergamon that represent the presence of a cult statue of the enthroned Zeus in the Temple of Zeus Philios and Trajan on the acropolis.⁶⁸ Similar numismatic testimony is attested at Ephesus from the time of Domitian and later Hadrian. Domitian's coin depicts the seated Zeus as holding a statue of Artemis in his outstretched hand.⁶⁹ According to the view of Jones, this picture is a

propaganda in the East, as in the West, but often in forms precisely opposite to our expectations now. That is, coinage could turn from the new relationship to Rome and emphasize instead local, Eastern institutions, as if to reassure the citizenry that the oncoming Latins made no fundamental differences. The second surprise is that the first surprise did not always occur. Kings did drop by the mint to encourage terms like *Philoromaïos*. If one must warn the populace that Roman power lays behind one at need, why not force them to carry the reminder about to buy bread?

⁶¹ Ernest P. Janzen, 'The Jesus of the Apocalypse Wears the Emperor's Clothes' in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1994* (SBLSP, 33; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1994), 637-57(647).

⁶² László Medgyessy, *A kijelentés 'néma' tanúi: bevezetés a bibliai numizmatikába* (Budapest: Medgyessy László, 2007), 17.

⁶³ Sacks, 'Coinage', 64.

⁶⁴ Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 103.

⁶⁵ On Roman imperial coins Jupiter frequently appears as enthroned in a temple holding a thunderbolt and a sceptre. See Carol H.V. Sutherland and Robert A.G. Carson, *Roman Imperial Coinage* (10 vols.; London: Spink and Son, rev. edn, 1984), I, 207, no. 42; 213, no. 127; 269, no. 31.

⁶⁶ According to the research of Stevenson (*Power and Place*, 46 n. 42-48) such coins are attested for Artemis at Ephesus, Aphrodite at Aphrodisias, Apollo at Miletus, Artemis Leucophryene at Magnesia on the Maeander, Nemeses at Smyrne, Kore at Sardis and Artemis at Perge.

⁶⁷ Pausanias, *Desc. Gr.* 2.2.8; Pseudo-Lucian, *Luc.* 41; *Greek Anthology* 5.15; Apuleius, *Met.* 11.24.

⁶⁸ Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 48 n. 64 (*BMC Mysia*, 141, no. 259; *BMC Mysia*, 142, no. 262-66).

⁶⁹ *BMC Ionia*, 75, no. 215.

representation of the cult statue of Zeus at Ephesus, modelled after the well-known statue of Pheidias that similarly held a figure in his hand.⁷⁰ Though divine figures are usually depicted on coins as enthroned, occasionally dignitaries are also represented in the same position. Notorious example is the mint of Tiberius of his mother Livia, who is depicted as seated on a throne holding a sceptre with ears of corn.⁷¹ Similarly, Domitia, the wife of Domitian, appears on a throne with the motifs of a sceptre and a child, which express the idea of rule.⁷²

The reign of the Flavians brought a dynamic evolution of the Jovian theology within the Roman imperial ideology. Fears convincingly demonstrate the political motivation behind the new development:

The pliant role of the Senate was not sufficient to grant legitimacy to emperors who so clearly owed their position to the praetorians or the legions. Unlike Claudius and Augustus, they could not appeal to the charisma of the dynasty or to a divine father. Like the Diadochi they sought to surround themselves with an aura of divine sanctions and in particular their followers circulated tales of omens which indicated that ... Jupiter himself had clearly foreordained them for rule.⁷³

In light of these developments it is not surprising to discover a new, prominent role for Jupiter reflected on the coinage from right at the beginning of Flavian rule.⁷⁴ A series of coins associated with the revolt of Vindex honour Jupiter with the reverse side inscriptions: OPTIMVS, MAXIMVS, CAPITOLINVS, LIBERATOR and CVSTOS. The obverse type associates Jupiter with ROMA RESTITVTA and with GENIVS P(opuli) R(omani), honouring him as the guardian and the liberator of the Roman Empire.⁷⁵ The message conveyed by the early Flavian issues has been that Jupiter had bestowed world rule upon Vespasian (69–79 C.E.), who was succeeded by his sons Titus (79–81 C.E.) and Domitian (81–96 C.E.). Still, it was only with Domitian that Jovian theology developed powerfully into a basic element of the imperial ideology.

⁷⁰ C.P. Jones, 'The Olympieion and the Hadrianeion at Ephesos', *JHS* 113 (1993), 149-52(150).

⁷¹ *BMC* 251.

⁷² On one coin she is depicted draped and veiled, sitting on a throne and touching a small boy with her hand. He holds the sceptre of world dominion in his left hand while blessing the world with his right. The inscription is: DIVI CAESAR(IS) MATRI (*BMCRE* II 501). On another coin Domitia is represented as an enthroned Pietas holding a sceptre and extending her right hand towards a child, who is standing left of her feet with right hand raised (*BMCRE* II 502).

⁷³ J. Rufus Fears, 'The Cult of Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology' in *ANRW*, 2.17.1, 3-141(74-75). For the omens concerning Vespasian, see Suetonius, *Vesp.* 5.

⁷⁴ Fears ('Cult of Jupiter', 75) notes the contrast between Jupiter's eminence in Vespasian's coinage as compared with the earlier period. For a comprehensive study of the coinage during the Flavian reign, see Ian Carradice and Theodore V. Buttrey, *The Roman Imperial Coinage. Vol. 2. Vespasian to Hadrian* (10 vols.; London: Spink & Son, 1926).

⁷⁵ *BMCRE* I 294-95.

The new impetus during the Domitianic reign was rooted in the emperor's personal piety towards Jupiter and it was shaped by his vision for the Empire.⁷⁶ The intention of Domitian was establishing a new order based on a 'new mythology of imperial power'.⁷⁷ Minerva, as his personal divine patroness also played a significant role in the propaganda. However, her role was not opposed to that of Jupiter, but rather complementary.⁷⁸ The long series of Domitianic coinage, issued from 84–96 C.E., honours Jupiter as CONSERVATOR, CVSTOS and VICTOR.⁷⁹ The role of the emperor in relation to Jupiter is clearly defined. The message of a coin first issued in 85 C.E. defined Domitian's role as the warrior vice-regent of Jupiter on behalf of mankind, similar to Hercules who once served Jupiter and the gods. The occasion of the issue was the victory over the Chatti and it was repeated between 86–96 C.E. The emperor is pictured on the coin in a military garb, holding a spear in his left hand and a thunderbolt in his right hand, while he is crowned by Victory.⁸⁰ According to Fears, the thunderbolt in the emperor's hand is to be understood in terms of drawing a parallel between Jupiter and Domitian: as Jupiter had destroyed the Giants with his thunderbolt, similarly Domitian as his earthly vicegerent wielded thunderbolt and spear against Chatti as he fought a *bellum Iovis*. The parallel has further aspects:

Domitian wields the thunderbolt to signify that Jupiter has delegated all these powers and functions to him. The role of the emperor as the warrior vicegerent and subordinate of Jupiter is emphasized iconographically by the fact that he wears military garb and holds a spear, not the long sceptre, the supreme attribute of the king of gods and men. Together with the celebration of Jupiter as *Conservator* and *Victor*, the role of Domitian as the vicegerent of Jupiter was a constant numismatic motif for the last decade of the reign.⁸¹

The idea of Domitian's vicegerency is confirmed in the writings of Statius.⁸² Martial even goes a step further, equating Domitian with Jupiter.⁸³ This comparison of Domitian with Jupiter is not

⁷⁶ For the personal piety of Domitian, see J. Rufus Fears, *Princeps a Diis Electus: The Divine Election of the Emperor as a Political Concept at Rome* (Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome, 26; Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1977), 222f.; Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1992), 99–100.

⁷⁷ Fears, 'Cult of Jupiter', 77.

⁷⁸ Minerva's role was to complement Jupiter serving as his warrior vice-regent on earth, similar to the emperor. This explains her appearance on the coinage as bearing the thunderbolt of Jupiter (*BMC* II 447). It is recorded that Minerva appeared to Domitian late in his reign with the message that she cannot protect him longer *quod exarmata esset a Iove* (Suetonius, *Dom.* 15). The image of Minerva with thunderbolt reappears after Domitian only on a few of Hadrian's issues (*BMCRE* III 298, 379, 564; cf. M. Lestaw, 'The Symbolism of Minerva on the Coins of Domitian', *Klio* 59 [1977], 185–93).

⁷⁹ For a comprehensive study on the coinage of Domitian, see Ian Carradice, *Coinage and Finances in the Reign of Domitian C.E. 81–96* (BAR International Series, 178; Oxford: B.A.R., 1983).

⁸⁰ *BMCRE* II 372, 377, 381.

⁸¹ Fears, 'Cult of Jupiter', 79.

⁸² Statius, *Silv.* 4.3.128–29.

without precedent, since it belongs to the well-established tradition of the ruler cult. Moreover, Domitian's celebration of his status iconographically on coins reflects deliberate propaganda, as he was using the issues to convey a message about his authority.⁸⁴

Numerous coins minted during the Domitianic reign utilize the throne motif to convey a message about the ruling power. On the coins minted by the previous rulers of the Empire the throne has usually been related to Zeus, who holds in one hand a sceptre and in another a branch, Nike, eagle, patera or thunderbolt. Domitian continued the tradition of minting coins with the image of Zeus enthroned,⁸⁵ but he strongly favoured Jupiter on his issues.⁸⁶ The throne motif is also associated on Domitianic mints with other gods such as Apollo,⁸⁷ Pluto,⁸⁸ Minerva,⁸⁹ Cybele,⁹⁰ Tyche,⁹¹ Athena⁹² or Dionysus.⁹³ Interestingly, the throne motif appears on several coins as the central object without a divine or a human occupant. In these issues a significant motif is a helmet on an empty throne: a symbol of war and rule.⁹⁴

Though the throne became a more important numismatic symbol during the Domitianic reign than it was under his predecessors, it was not the only numismatic means of expressing royal authority. It seems that the sceptre is a more important symbol in communicating sovereignty, because different divinities and people hold a sceptre on coins, while not seated specifically on a throne or even not seated at all. Another propagandist numismatic way of expressing the status of power was the symbolic reference to *apotheosis*. The main numismatic symbol of *apotheosis* is the eagle and the wreath – symbols derived from the East. The eagle appears as a messenger of the Sun entrusted by its master with the task of bringing back the liberated soul to the sky. On the other hand, the wreath functions as a symbol of the ultimate

⁸³ Martial, *Epig.* 5.5, 8; 7.2, 5, 34; 8.2, 82; 9.28, 66. For the discussion of Martial's intentions in laudating Domitian, see ch. 9 sec. 1.2.

⁸⁴ From Alexander the Great the Hellenistic world portrayed its rulers in the guise of Zeus. In Rome this tradition also found its place as a significant component of the mythical foundation of the Empire. For the portrayal of Augustus and Tiberius in the guise of Jupiter, see Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (trans. Alan Saphiro; Jerome Lectures Sixteenth Series; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 230f.

⁸⁵ *RPC* II 1012, 1057, 1073, 1094, 1095, 1123, 1214, 1262, 1385, 1391, 1393.

⁸⁶ *RPC* II 406, 464.

⁸⁷ *RPC* II 985, 1039, 1052, 1294, 1326.

⁸⁸ *RPC* II 1109, 1113.

⁸⁹ *RPC* II 867.

⁹⁰ *RPC* II 1021, 1324, 1343, 1344, 1364, 1388, 1392, 1411, 1412, 1415.

⁹¹ *RPC* II 1225.

⁹² *RPC* II 1320.

⁹³ *RPC* II 1321.

⁹⁴ *RIC* 51c.

triumph of the soul.⁹⁵ The classical tendency to elevate Domitian to a status far above that of other mortals on the coinage is also evident in the series minted with the legend: CO(n)S(ul) XIII LVD(i) SAEC(ular) FEC(it) ('[Domitian] held the Secular Games when consul for the fourteenth time').⁹⁶ The legend reflects the Secular Games celebrated in the autumn of 88 C.E. after the model of the *ludi saecularis* held by Augustus in 17 B.C.E. Hannestad argues that the series 'marked a high spot in the reign of Domitian and their aim, expressed particularly in the coins, was to extol the advent of a new golden century, the Flavian era'.⁹⁷ The scene is dominated by the figure of the Emperor, who is standing before the temple dictating the prayers to kneeling matrons who hold out their hands in supplication before their lord. The Emperor is portrayed in a colossal format, which emphasizes his authority. Also he marks the distance between him and ordinary mortals with his right hand.

4. THRONES IN ART

The literary and numismatic evidence on the Graeco-Roman understanding of the concept of throne is amplified by the representations on artistic monuments. There is some ambiguity concerning the artistic representation of ancient thrones, as noted by Richter: 'It is difficult to be certain whether a piece is a Greek original, or a direct Roman copy of a Greek original, or a Roman variant – unless there is external evidence for the date.'⁹⁸ In this section I will focus only on the Greek monuments. The reason for this limitation is grounded in the well-known fact that the Roman conquest of Greece and Asia Minor was only military, since from the point of view of art the two 'cultural forces met as equals'.⁹⁹ For this reason the fact of the Roman conquest of Asia Minor does not necessitate investigation of the Latin artistic sources for the purpose of our study.

The throne is a widely used motif on Greek artistic monuments. It appears on reliefs, friezes, sarcophaguses, sculptural monuments, wall-paintings, steles, bells, volute-craters and different types of ancient pottery such as vases, amphora, lekythos, kantharos and kylix. These

⁹⁵ John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire* (Aspects of Greek and Roman Life; London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), 96.

⁹⁶ *BMC* II 424.

⁹⁷ Niels Hannestad, *Roman Art and Imperial Policy* (Moesgard: Jutland Archaeological Society, 1986), 141.

⁹⁸ Richter, *Furniture*, 100. In some cases an inscription (contemporary with the seat) helps to make a decision concerning the origin.

⁹⁹ Cornelius C. Vermeule, *Roman Imperial Art in Greece and Asia Minor* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 1.

monuments are often elaborately decorated with scenes from Greek mythology which are usually associated with gods or goddesses, most frequently with Zeus. Also ancient kings, heroes and occasionally ordinary human beings are portrayed as sitting on a throne.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, on some of the sources the throne is unidentifiable.¹⁰¹

The model for the artistic representation of a god sitting on its throne was the colossal statue of the throne of Zeus at Olympia made by Pheidias. The monument, dated to the fifth or fourth century B.C.E., portrays the king of gods sitting on his throne with a wreath on his head, a sceptre in his left hand and a winged figure in his right hand.¹⁰² Pheidias has allegedly claimed that he had taken Homer's poetry as the model for his work.¹⁰³ The throne is described by Pausanias as 'adorned with gold and precious stones, also with ebony and ivory, and with painted figures and wrought images'. The details of the throne's construction are also known: it had a richly decorated back and footstool, as well as an additional supports from foot to foot.¹⁰⁴ The statue of the enthroned Zeus, pictured as seated in majesty, magnificently typifies the authority and sovereignty of the main god of the Greek pantheon. The influence of Pheidias' iconography reached every generation that followed. Since the Zeus at Olympia 'was acknowledged as the highest fulfilment of plastic art in the representation of divinity', it has not without reason been counted among the wonders of the world.¹⁰⁵

Pedley argues that the second most influential representation of the enthroned deity in the earlier period besides the statue at Olympia was the relief of the east pediment of the Parthenon,

¹⁰⁰ Some of the major figures of Greek culture (as Socrates, Epicurus, Sophocles, Chryssippos) are often portrayed in a sitting position, but the posture itself is not necessarily an indicator of an association with a throne. See the pictorial material in Margarete Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age* (New York: Hacker and Books, 1981).

¹⁰¹ For an in-depth study of the throne as a Greek furniture from artistic point of view, see Richter, *Furniture*, 13-33, fig. 41-165. This monumental work not only traces the evolution of the ancient throne as a furniture from archaic period onward, but also provides rich pictorial evidence for the different phases of the development.

¹⁰² Karim W. Arafat ('Zeus in Art' in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, eds. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd edn, 1996], 1638[1638]) notes that in the Archaic period Zeus is often represented as he strides with a thunderbolt. In contrast, in the Classical period he is quieter, often seated – as in the statue at Olympia. Ken Dowden (*Zeus* [London: Routledge, 2006], 26) explains the paradigm shift in Zeus' depiction as follows: 'Now the lightning bolt is replaced in the Zeus-enthroned genre by the goddess Nike (Victory), whose proportions, unfortunately, we do not know. This is a modernish change, resting on a more anthropomorphic rendering of Zeus's supremacy. The goddess Nike is somehow more sophisticated than a thunderbolt and more suited to this static pose.'

¹⁰³ Dio Chrysostom, *Disc.* 12.25.

¹⁰⁴ Pausanias, *Desc. Gr.* 5.11. For further details concerning the throne of Zeus at Olympia, see Stavros Vlivos, *Der thronende Zeus: eine Untersuchung zur statuarischen Ikonographie des Gottes in der spätclassischen und hellenistischen Kunst* (Internationale Archäologie, 62; Rahden: Marie Leidorf, 1999), 5-21.

¹⁰⁵ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (trans. John Raffan; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 124. For the iconographic analysis of the motif of Zeus' throne in the late Classical and Hellenistic statuary art, see Vlivos, *Thronende Zeus*, 21-110.

built between 447–432 B.C.E.¹⁰⁶ The central figure of the portrayed scene is Zeus, who is pictured as sitting enthroned in the group of twelve deities. The gods are identified primarily by their grouping.¹⁰⁷ The authority of Zeus is emphasized by the fact that he is the only one sitting on θρόνος, while the other gods occupy only their κλισμοί.¹⁰⁸

The thrones of cult-statues, located in the temples, were elaborate pieces of art. One of the best known examples is the throne of Apollo at Amyklai, near Sparta, created by Bathykles. It was an altar/tomb for Hyacinthus with four female figures supporting the throne: the mythological figures of two Graces (Χάριτες) and two Seasons (Ἐσπερίαι), who are bestowing their blessings on all present. Even though it was built in the late Archaic period, Pausanias saw it still in the second century C.E. and left us a detailed description.¹⁰⁹ He claims that the monument was decorated with more than forty mythological scenes. It has also been noted that ‘das Götterbild nicht auf dem Throne saß, sondern innerhalb des Thronsitzes stand’.¹¹⁰ Pausanias similarly provided a description of the throne of Asklepios at Epidauros. The monument is characterized as ‘decorated with reliefs representing the deeds of the Argive heroes’.¹¹¹ In his account of the throne of Demeter at Lykosoura, the Greek geographer and writer claims that the statue, the throne and the footstool have been all made of a single block of stone.¹¹²

Thrones also played significant role in processions. Athenaios recorded the details of the famous procession of Ptolemy II in which many thrones appeared, constructed of gold and ivory. Different objects are described as being placed on the thrones: a golden diadem on one of them, a gilded horn on another and a golden crown on still another. The throne of Ptolemy Soter has been given a distinct prominence as a crown of ten thousand gold coins has been placed on it.¹¹³ These and similar thrones have been considered as sacred to gods and to the dead of heroic status.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁶ John Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 73.

¹⁰⁷ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 124.

¹⁰⁸ Honigmann, ‘θρόνος’, 615.

¹⁰⁹ Pausanias, *Desc. Gr.* 3.18.9-16. For further description of the monument and its attempted reconstruction, see 3.19.3; R. Martin, ‘Bathyclès de Magnésie et le “Trône” d’Apollon à Amyklæ’, *RA* (1976), 205-18.

¹¹⁰ Honigmann, ‘θρόνος’, 616.

¹¹¹ Pausanias, *Desc. Gr.* 2.27.2.

¹¹² Pausanias, *Desc. Gr.* 8.37.3.

¹¹³ Athenaios, 5.202.

¹¹⁴ Richter, *Furniture*, 15.

The custom of representing the thrones of invisible deities without the images of the gods became a common practice due to Asiatic influence.¹¹⁵

Although Greek thrones have been artistically classified into different types, generally the variants have been designed for providing seating for just one occupant.¹¹⁶ However, artistic evidence confirms the existence of the rarely occurring double-throne with seating for two deities – most often Zeus and Hera. Honigmann states of such discoveries: ‘Schwer zu bestimmen sind zwei Persönlichkeiten einer Elfenbeingruppe im Tempel der Artemis Orthia in Lakonien, die auf einem Thron mit hoher Rückenlehne sitzen ... Gottheiten auf Doppelthronen wurden auch später dargestellt, wie Demeter und Despoina in der Gruppe von Damophon ... Auch im gallorömischen Kulturkreis finden sich zwei Gottheiten auf einem Thron.’¹¹⁷

5. CONCLUSION

It has been demonstrated on the basis of literary, numismatic and artistic evidence that the throne was a significant symbol in the Graeco-Roman context in which the book of Revelation was born. The study of the motif in sources of various kinds has revealed some significant parallels with the use of the motif in Revelation as will become evident in the course of this dissertation. The conclusions of this chapter will be summarized as grouped around the three types of sources examined.

The study of the use of divine thrones in the Graeco-Roman literature revealed four basic aspects of the motif’s meaning. Most importantly, the throne functions as an emblem of power – similar to the use in the Old Testament and Jewish literature. In a number of texts it expresses the dignity and the social ranking of the person taking their place on it, while it appears also as a place of revelation, petitions, worship and commissioning. The figurative use of the throne is also varied. The throne references in the texts examined evoke the ideas of heaven, human soul and the rule of Alexander after his death.

On the basis of the examination of numismatic sources it can be concluded that Domitian’s coins reflect the new imperial mythology in which the emperor viewed himself in the

¹¹⁵ Honigmann, ‘θρόνος’, 616.

¹¹⁶ The classification of the ancient thrones is based on distinct types of legs. Richter (*Furniture*, 15-33) classifies them as thrones with (1) animal feet; (2) turned legs; (3) rectangular legs; and (4) solid sides. Garton’s (‘Throne’, XXX, 775) classification follows Richter with minor terminological and conceptual differences: (1) legs square or rectangular in section; (2) legs in the form of animal legs; (3) legs roughly circular in section; and (4) mixture of animal legs in front and square or rounded legs behind.

¹¹⁷ Honigmann, ‘θρόνος’, 615.

role of Jupiter's vicegerent called to establish a new order. The throne appears as a significant motif in the imperial propaganda as conveying a message of royal authority. However, it was not the only symbolic representation of the imperial power as the frequent employment of the motifs of thunderbolt and sceptre or the exaggeration of the physical dimensions of the emperor's figure reveal. Still, the appearance of the throne on coins became more frequent in Domitianic issues than in the previous period of Roman rule. The throne in these issues is occasionally occupied by Zeus or other gods, but also well-known is the representation of an empty throne with a helmet on it symbolizing war and rule. It seems that the purpose of Domitian's intensified utilization of the throne motif on his mint was part of his deliberate propaganda for creating a new *Imperia*.

The study of the throne motif in artistic sources revealed wide use, of which the throne of Zeus at Olympia made by Pheidias was the most important. It also provided evidence for the significant role of empty thrones in processions where they were often shown carrying different objects that also symbolized authority. It has also been noted that there is artistic evidence for the existence of double thrones occupied simultaneously by two deities.

Part II

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

THRONE OF GOD

The throne of God is the main cardinal component of Revelation's throne motif. This is reflected in the fact that 76.6% of the book's *θρόνος* references (thirty-six out of the forty-seven) are throne of God texts. Almost half of them are concentrated in the throne room vision of Rev. 4–5, which is the first vision in the central part of the book (4:1–22:5). Since the scene of ch. 4 is fundamental for the throne motif because it introduces the details of the heavenly realm with God's throne at the centre, it will receive a detailed attention in our examination. The focus in our study will be primarily on those elements of the vision which enlighten the throne motif. The second part of this chapter will investigate the use of the formula 'the One sitting on the throne' that runs through the book as the most frequent characterization expression of God. This expression constantly refers back to the vision as the 'theological fountainhead'¹ of the book. The study of the throne of God texts will reveal that we are not dealing here with a static object. For this reason the examination of God's throne cannot be complete without an inquiry into the dynamics of the throne, and that will be the subject of the last section of the chapter.

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE THRONE (4:1-11)

The throne room vision of Rev. 4–5 is generally considered to be the pivotal section of the book of Revelation.² It provides the most detailed picture of the divine throne and the heavenly realm in the entire work. The concentration of the *θρόνος* references is the highest in the book: the word appears nineteen times in twenty-five verses. As noted rightly by Schüssler Fiorenza, Rev. 4–5 lays 'the rhetorical foundation and provides the key symbolic images for all that follows'.³ Thus, the high frequency of the *θρόνος* references indicates the centrality of the throne motif not

¹ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1989), 102.

² Opposed to the majority view, Rowland ('Visions of God', 150) views Rev. 4 as 'incidental to the overriding purpose of the work as a whole'. For a critic of this suggestion, see Larry W. Hurtado, 'Revelation 4–5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies', *JSNT* 25 (1985), 105-24(118).

³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 58. Similarly, George R. Beasley-Murray (*The Book of Revelation* [NCB; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978], 29-30) states that Rev. 4–5 'introduces the main body of the Revelation. This vision ... supplies the key to the theology of the entire work, but it also occupies a key position in the structure of the book'.

only for this keynote vision, but also for the entire work. Therefore, the importance of understanding the throne motif in this vision cannot be overemphasized.

The literary and thematic unity of Rev. 4–5 has been often demonstrated.⁴ Though the two chapters are clearly linked into a larger passage, at the same time they form two units in themselves. Müller aptly calls this literary phenomenon a ‘double scene’, since ch. 5 is the continuation of ch. 4, but at the same time a new unit in itself.⁵ While the two basic components of the vision share numerous verbal and thematic parallels, their emphasis is different: the focus of ch. 4 is on God and his throne, whereas in ch. 5 the attention is shifted to the Lamb and his redemptive mission.⁶ This literary relation justifies our intention to deal here only with God’s throne in ch. 4, while the Lamb’s relation to the throne in ch. 5 will be discussed in the next chapter.

1.1. CONTEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

It has been widely recognized that the contextual relation of Rev. 4–5 to the immediately preceding Seven Letters addressed to the churches in Asia Minor (chs. 2–3) is of major significance for understanding the intention of the vision. It seems that the relation is not only thematic, but deeply theological.⁷ This view has been argued by Smalley, who claims that the throne room vision ‘looks back to the life of the people of God on earth, described in the messages to the seven churches of Asia ... by setting out the theological perspective given to this life by the Church in eternity’.⁸ Thus, the earthly and heavenly realities are contrasted with the intention of encouraging the church militant portrayed in chs. 2–3 through the disclosing of the

⁴ For example, Morton (*One upon the Throne*, 68-70, 80 n. 149) views evidence for the unity in similar motifs in the chapters, the similarity of the hymnic material and the dependence of 5:1-2 on the preceding scene. He refers to the works of Lohmeyer, Charles, Allo, Kraft, Zahn, Swete, Beasley-Murray, Ladd, Farrer, Murphy, Roloff, Thompson, Beale and Mounce, who acknowledge the unity of Rev. 4–5. In addition to the textual evidence, R. Dean Davis (*The Heavenly Court Judgment of Revelation 4–5* [Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992], 16-19) suggests a structural parallel between the two chapters as the indicator of intentionally paired narratives. Differently, Aune (*Revelation 1–5*, 276) views chs. 4–6 as ‘structurally ... a single text unit’.

⁵ Ekkehardt Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4–11* (AUSDDS, 21; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1996), 204. For a syntactical display of the two chapters and a comparative table of the recurring words and phrases within the respective units, see pp. 77-83, 94-95.

⁶ See e.g. Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1967), 262.

⁷ Beale (*Revelation*, 311-12) rightly concludes of the thematic relation of the two visions: Rev. 4–5 ‘draws into itself the major themes of chs. 1–3’.

⁸ Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2005), 109; cf. Choo Sung Kim, ‘Revelation 4–5 and the Jewish Antecedents to the Portrait of God and of the Messiah in the Old Testament and Apocalyptic Literature’ (PhD Dissertation; Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2002), 97.

indisputable supremacy of the heavenly power-centre introduced in the vision of chs. 4–5. While this perspective enlightens the basic pastoral intention of the vision, Paulien convincingly argues for a more profound relation. He observes a particular literary technique of Revelation according to which the key to the meaning of major sections of the book often lies in the concluding statement of the preceding section. These key texts are called ‘duo-directional passages’ by Paulien, since their role is to conclude the preceding section and at the same time to introduce a new unit.⁹ Regarding the vision under consideration, 3:21 functions as a duo-directional passage providing an interpretive clue. The text mentions the enthronement of the overcomers as an eschatological reward which is paralleled to Christ’s sitting on the Father’s throne. While ch. 4 elaborates God’s throne, and ch. 5 Christ’s enthronement, the eschatological victory and reward of the overcomers is the topic of 7:9-17.¹⁰ In line with Paulien, Osborne rightly concludes that these larger sections could be considered in some sense as a commentary on 3:21.¹¹

There has been a considerable variety of suggestions concerning the structure of 4:1-11. While some attempts have been made to discover a chiasm, the interpreters of Revelation are more inclined to follow a more or less detailed outline.¹² Since it seems that everything is portrayed in the chapter in terms of the relation to the divine throne, I hold that it is appropriate to structure the chapter around this thematic centre. After the typical apocalyptic opening of the vision (4:1-2a), first, the heavenly throne is introduced with its occupant (4:2b-3), which is followed by the description of the throne’s surroundings (4:4-7) and the hymnic adoration given to the occupant of the throne (4:8-11).¹³ The overall picture of the chapter is that of concentric

⁹ Jon Paulien, *The Deep Things of God* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2004), 115. Ranko Stefanovic (‘Finding Meaning in the Literary Patterns of Revelation’, *JATS* 13 [2002], 27-43[27-28]) calls the same literary technique a ‘springboard principle’, which ‘suggests that the inspired author has clearly defined his intention regarding the understanding of the text, a fact that rules out one’s search outside the book for creative interpretation’.

¹⁰ Paulien, ‘The Seven Seals’ in *Symposium on Revelation—Book I*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (DARCOM Series, 6; Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 199-243(202-03); cf. Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2002), 161.

¹¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 218.

¹² There is a disagreement among the proponents of the chiasmic structure of Rev. 4 concerning the focal point. For example, Müller (*Microstructural Analysis*, 207) views the four living creatures at the centre, while Charles H. Giblin (‘From and before the Throne: Revelation 4:5-6a Integrating the Imagery of Revelation 4–16’, *CBQ* 60 [1998], 500-12) the theophanic manifestation of 4:5-6. Nils Wilhelm Lund’s (*Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiasmic Structures* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992], 325-26) double chiasm is more complex with the focal points at 4:5b-6 and 4:10a. From these suggestions only Giblin’s view may be considered as possibly viable, because of the emphasis on the divine throne as the focal object of the chapter. However, I am more inclined to follow the majority view that advocates an outline structure.

¹³ This outline is similar to that of Morton’s (*One upon the Throne*, 83) with the minor difference that he views only 4:1 as the introductory statement.

circles made up of a rainbow (ἶρις), the four living creatures (τέσσαρες ζῶα) and the twenty-four elders (εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι) with the ‘awe-inspiring throne’¹⁴ at the focal point. The series of concentric circles is further expanded in 5:11 and 7:11 including a great host of angels. Such arrangement is suggested by the repeated use of κυκλόθεν (‘around in a circle’) and κύκλω (‘around in a circle’), the adverbs of place both occurring three times in Revelation – always in connection with the elements or beings encircling the throne.¹⁵ The idea that the heaven is arranged in concentric circles with the divine throne at the centre is not unique to Revelation, since it is attested in *1En.* 71:6-8 and in a more elaborate form in *3En.* 33:1–34:2.

1.2. BACKGROUND

The heavenly throne room scene of Rev. 4 encompasses cultic and political aspects.¹⁶ The two aspects should, however, not be divorced by a false dichotomy, because in John’s thought-world the religious was considered part of the political.¹⁷ These two aspects form together the larger interpretive context for the vision. The first interprets the imagery against the background of the Jewish tradition, while the second points to Graeco-Roman practices.¹⁸ Both of these will be discussed briefly.

1.2.1. CULTIC SYMBOLISM

Extensive evidence has been provided that Rev. 4 is pervaded by cultic imagery.¹⁹ Although the term *ναός* is absent from the vision, the cumulative force of the numerous allusions point to

¹⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 112.

¹⁵ κυκλόθεν appears in 4:3, 4, 8, while κύκλω in 4:6; 5:11; 7:11. Osborn’s (*Revelation*, 228) suggestion that the concentric arrangement may reflect a hierarchical order should not be excluded as a possibility. However, the place of the rainbow in the ‘hierarchy’ poses a challenge to this hypothesis, because the rainbow does not appear as a representation of any living being who is adoring the divine occupant of the throne.

¹⁶ Bauckham, *Theology*, 33-35; Barr, *Tales*, 63.

¹⁷ See ch. 9 sec. 1.2.

¹⁸ For an attempt to understand the imagery of Rev. 4–5 as rooted in the ANE mythology, see Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen. 1 und Ap. 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895).

¹⁹ See e.g. James Valentine, ‘Theological Aspects of the Temple Motif in the Old Testament and Revelation’ (PhD Dissertation; Boston University, 1985), 210-11; Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, 118-43; Jon Paulien, ‘The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation’, *AUSS* 33 (1995), 245-64; Stefanović, *Sealed Book*, 202-06; Franz Tóth, *Der himmlische Kult: Wirklichkeitskonstruktion und Sinnbildung in der Johannesoffenbarung* (ABG, 22; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), 201-88. See also the following works that acknowledge the cultic setting without discussing the details: Ford, *Revelation*, 70-76; Kenneth A. Strand, ‘The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation’, *AUSS* 25 (1987), 107-21; Idem. ‘The “Victorious-Introduction” Scenes in the Visions in the Book of Revelation’, *AUSS* 25 (1987), 267-88; Bauckham, *Theology*, 33-34; Beale, *Revelation*, 315-16; Dan Liroy, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus* (SBL, 58; New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 131.

cultic symbolism as the major background of chs. 4–5.²⁰ The most exhaustive study of the allusions to the Old Testament היכל in Revelation’s throne vision is provided by Davis. He connects (1) the heavenly throne with the Most Holy Place; (2) the precious stones of jasper, sardius and emerald with the breastplate worn by the high priest; (3) the rainbow with the covenantal relationship central to the sanctuary; (4) the number and function of the twenty-four elders with the Old Testament priesthood; (5) the lightening, voices and thunder with Sinai, Yahweh’s temple/throne prior to the construction of the wilderness sanctuary; (6) the seven torches of fire with the menorah; (7) the sea of glass with the molten sea, the portable laver and the bronze platform; and (8) the four living creatures with the cherubim.²¹ Paulien adds another three connection points to this list, while he rightly omits the third and the fifth parallels suggested by Davis. First, he suggests that the open door of 4:1 might refer to the door of the heavenly temple, since in LXX θύρα occurs scores of times in relation to the Israelite tent/sanctuary, temple and liturgy. Second, he interprets the voice like trumpet in 4:1 against a cultic background, since the trumpets have been used in the Old Testament both in a military as well as a cultic context (Num. 10:8-10). Third, he suggests that the four faces of the living creatures (4:7) should be viewed against a Jewish tradition that associates the lion, calf, man and eagle with the four banners which surrounded the Israelite camp in the wilderness.²² Finally, Paulien rightly concludes that no passage in the whole book contains ‘a larger quantity or a wider variety of allusions to the Hebrew cultus’ than the vision of the heavenly throne room.²³ The exhaustive list of the allusions mentioned indicates the intention of the author that the vision should be understood primarily against a cultic background. However, the interpretation also needs to take into account the political symbolism present in the vision, which made a lot of sense to the original audience.

1.2.2. POLITICAL SYMBOLISM

In his ground-breaking study on the topic, Aune advanced a suggestion which attracted much discussion: ‘John’s depiction of the ceremonial in the heavenly throne room has been

²⁰ Surprisingly, Andrea Spatafora (*From the ‘Temple of God’ to God as Temple: A Theological Study of the Temple in the Book of Revelation* [Tesi Gregoriana Seria Teologia, 22; Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997], 127-247) in his study of the temple motif in Revelation fails to give attention to Rev. 4–5. The reason for this major omission is methodological, since the study focuses exclusively on examination of the ναός passages.

²¹ Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, 118-34.

²² Paulien, ‘Hebrew Cultus’, 249-50.

²³ Paulien, ‘Hebrew Cultus’, 251.

significantly influenced in its conceptualization by popular images of Roman imperial court ceremonial.²⁴ While he admits that this thesis is difficult to demonstrate, the idea that Rev. 4 correlates with the religio-political context John addresses gained wide support in scholarly circles.²⁵ Aune points out a considerable number of parallels between the throne room scene and Roman imperial imagery: (1) the twenty-four elders corresponding to the lictors of the emperor; (2) honouring the ruler with the presentation of crowns; (3) the act of prostration; (4) the hymns with their acclamations that reflect the cultic practices of ancient Mediterranean regions. He argues also that the parallels are most evident in the honorific titles which are in Revelation applied to the Lamb, but in imperial terminology to the Caesar.²⁶ The most well-known examples are κύριος and θεός, the employment of which in Rev. 4:8, 11 is interpreted as ‘an antithetical reflection of the application of those titles to Roman emperors’.²⁷

The parallelism between John’s throne vision and the Roman imperial court ceremonial is motivated by a rhetorical purpose on part of the author. Bauckham rightly notes that the point of the similarities lies not in the comparison, but rather the opposition of the two.²⁸ As will be demonstrated later, it is appropriate to interpret the parallels as ironical indicators of a larger parody.²⁹

²⁴ David E. Aune, ‘The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John’, *BR* 38 (1983), 5-26(22).

²⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 59-60; Sophie Laws, *In the Light of the Lamb: Imagery, Parody, and Theology in the Apocalypse of John* (GNS, 31; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), 76-77; Bauckham, *Theology*, 34-35; Boring, *Revelation*, 103; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of all Things* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 75-76; Barr, *Tales*, 63-64; Morton, *One upon the Throne*, 180-85. For a critic of Aune’s thesis, see Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 251 n. 12.

²⁶ Aune (‘Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial’, 20) mentions nine frequently used titles of the imperial terminology which are parallel to Christ’s portrayal in Revelation: (1) god; (2) son of god; (3) god made manifest; (4) lord; (5) lord of the whole world; (6) lord’s day; (7) saviour of the world; (8) epiphany; and (9) emperor. For the use of political language in Revelation reserved for the praise of emperors, see Dominique Cuss, *Imperial Cult and Honorary Terms in the New Testament* (Paradosis, Contribution to the History of Early Christian Literature and Theology, 23; Fribourg: Fribourg University Press, 1974), 55-88.

²⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 310.

²⁸ Bauckham, *Theology*, 43.

²⁹ For the rhetorical force of Revelation’s throne motif, see ch. 9 sec. 2. While Aune (‘Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial’, 5) employs the term ‘parody’ for the rhetorical phenomenon of Rev. 4, Laws (*In the Light of the Lamb*, 77) uses rather ‘counter-parody’, because of the reverse flow. For an in-depth study on the use of the rhetorical techniques of parody in Revelation and for the limitations of this approach, see Harry O. Maier, *Apocalypse Recalled: The Book of Revelation after Christendom* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2002), 164-97.

1.3. INTERPRETATION

1.3.1. ASCENT TO HEAVEN

John's ascent to heaven is briefly stated in 4:1-2a, an introductory statement somewhat distinct from the rest of the chapter which sets the stage for glimpsing the heavenly throne room.³⁰ The vision is opened by the combination of two apocalyptic motifs: the door and the open heaven. The door to heaven is a well-known apocalyptic concept that symbolizes access to God and eternal bliss.³¹ Aune notes that the motif occurs only twice in the Old Testament (Gen. 28:17; Ps. 78:23), but it is more prominent in the Graeco-Roman tradition, particularly in southwest Asia Minor. For instance, he points to numismatic and literary evidence from the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus which had a door in the front pediment that was used for the ritual epiphany of the goddess.³² In Rev. 4:1 the heavenly door is qualified by ἠνεώχθη ('was opened'), a passive perfect participle implying a divine action of opening the door in heaven for the visionary.³³ While this motif has been traditionally understood against the basic apocalyptic idea of entrance to the heavenly realm, Paulien convincingly argues that θύρα is to be viewed against the cultic background and as such it points to the door of the heavenly temple and the visionary's entrance in it.³⁴

The simplicity of the ascent's description is striking, since after the call into heaven by a 'voice like a trumpet'³⁵ the attention is immediately shifted to the heavenly throne and its occupant.³⁶ John does not proceed from outer to inner spheres of holiness, but he is instantly

³⁰ Most commentators view this text not only as the introduction of a new thematic unit, but also all the visions of Revelation until the end of the book. See e.g. John Sweet, *Revelation* (TPI New Testament Commentaries; London: SCM; Philadelphia, Pa.: Trinity Press, 1990), 47; Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, 70-71; Beale, *Revelation*, 317.

³¹ *IEn.* 14:10-11; 15:14; 104:2; *T. Levi* 5:1; *3Macc.* 6:18. For a detailed discussion of the Jewish background, see Schimanowski, *Die himmlische Liturgie*, 67-76. For the motif in ancient religious traditions, see Otto Weinrich, 'Türöffnung im Wunder- Prodigien- und Zauberglauben der Antike, des Judentums und Christentums', *TBA* 5 (1929), 200-464.

³² Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 281.

³³ Smalley, *Revelation*, 113.

³⁴ Paulien, 'Seven Seals', 207.

³⁵ For the background of the trumpet imagery, see Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 203-21.

³⁶ John's ascent has been connected with the heavenly trips in apocalyptic tradition (e.g. Gerhard Krodel, *Revelation* [ACNT; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989], 154; Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation* [trans. J.E. Alsop; CC; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993], 68). However, there is no compelling reason to interpret the expression ἐν πνεύματι as a release of the soul similar to in the Jewish apocalypses. The phrase should rather be understood as an idiom indicating that John's revelatory experience took place in a vision trance (Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 12-13; Robert H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John: With Introd., Notes, and Indices, also the Greek Text and English Translation* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), I, 22; Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT, 16a; Tübingen: Mohr, 1974), 95.

taken to the heavenly throne room.³⁷ Revelation's concept of a single heaven is in sharp contrast to the elaborate description of the plurality of the heavens widespread in Jewish literature.³⁸ Interpreting Revelation's concept of heaven Gruenwald suggests that the author may have not been aware of the latest developments in Jewish apocalyptic thought, since his cosmology reflects an outmoded view of only a single heaven.³⁹ In contrast to this reasoning much persuasive is Hurtado's argument, which claims that the simple description of the heavenly ascent reflects John's conscious choice, because the 'description of multiple heavenly layers simply forms no part of his purpose'.⁴⁰ Namely, the intention of the author lies not in conveying knowledge about the heavenly geography, but rather in his explanation of the nature of the connection between the heavenly and the earthly realities.⁴¹ Since John 'spends not a syllable on curiosity-titillating descriptions of the heavenly journey itself', his energy may remain focused entirely on the throne.⁴²

1.3.2. THE THRONE AND ITS OCCUPANT

The throne is the very first thing John glimpses in heaven (4:2b). There is no attempt to describe its physical features.⁴³ It is only stated that the throne 'was located in the heaven' (ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ). Since it is stated in 4:1-2 that both the open door and the throne are located in the heaven, the double reference seems to emphasize the shift to the heavenly realm at the beginning of the vision.⁴⁴

There has been some discussion concerning the meaning of ἔκειτο. It has been argued that this form is a passive of τίθημι ('to place'), which indicates the immediacy of the action, the possibility that the act of placing occurred in heaven at that point.⁴⁵ Beale even goes a step

³⁷ For the comparison of John's ascent to the concept in *1 Enoch*, see e.g. Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 88.

³⁸ The term οὐρανός is used in the singular throughout Revelation, except in 12:12. It has been argued that this may be ascribed to the influence of Isa. 44:23 (Robert H. Mounce, *Revelation* [NICNT, 17; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977], 133 n. 3; Smalley, *Revelation*, 113).

³⁹ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 48.

⁴⁰ Hurtado, 'Revelation 4-5', 111.

⁴¹ Similarly, William Hendriksen (*More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1962], 84) notes that the scene of Rev. 4-5 is not so much a description of heaven as of 'the entire universe from the aspect of heaven' (cf. Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John* [The New Testament in Context; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998], 170).

⁴² Boring, *Revelation*, 102; cf. Williamson, 'Thrones', 103.

⁴³ Similar to the other throne visions of the Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic literature. The only possible exception is *1 En.* 14:18: θρόνον ὑψηλόν καὶ τό εἶδος αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ κρυστάλλινον ('lofty throne – its appearance was like crystal').

⁴⁴ Strand, "'Victorious-Introductory" Scenes', 271.

⁴⁵ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 67.

further suggesting that ἔκειτο may reflect the setting up of thrones in Dan. 7:9 (θρόνοι ἐτέθησαν).⁴⁶ However, it seems more likely that κείμεαι ('to set') is in the mind of the author functioning as a verbal copula,⁴⁷ and the prepositional phrase ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ appears as a predicate with κείμεαι.⁴⁸ It is not indicated in Rev. 4:2 how the throne got to the place where it stood – the emphasis is only on its heavenly location.⁴⁹ Thus, God's throne is portrayed in Rev. 4 as the *axis mundi*, the immovable centre of all reality, unlike the description of the *merkabah* texts in which the throne appears as a dynamically moving object.

The identity of the throne's occupant is not immediately disclosed. He is referred to by a circumlocution ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος ('the One sitting on the throne'; 4:2). The avoidance of naming the enthroned figure at the beginning of the vision generates a tension which is resolved in the hymnic section of 4:8-11, where the worshipping of the figure and the reference to his title, κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ ('Lord God Almighty'), unmistakably identifies him as the Father God. Since the recurring circumlocution for the name of God is of major theological significance for our research, it will receive detailed attention later in this chapter.⁵⁰

While the author is very reserved about the use of any anthropomorphic imagery concerning the enthroned figure,⁵¹ it is made clear that a person is in view here, not a principle or an elemental force.⁵² The lack of explicit description is made up for by the comparison of 'the One sitting on the throne' to three precious stones. He is characterized as 'similar in appearance to jasper stone and a carnelian' (ὅμοιος ὁράσει λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι καὶ σαρδίῳ), while the rainbow encircling the throne is depicted as 'similar in appearance to emerald' (ὅμοιος ὁράσει σμαραγδίνῳ). There is a disagreement concerning the interpretation of the meaning of the precious stones for the vision. While separate significance has been ascribed to the individual

⁴⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 320.

⁴⁷ Similarly to εἶμί or γίνομαι.

⁴⁸ Similarly, in Rev. 21:16 κείμεαι is used to indicate the position of the New Jerusalem without reference to action. Aune (*Revelation 1–5*, 284) refers to a verbal parallel with Cebes *Tabula* 5.1 (θρόνον τινα κείμενον κατὰ τὸν τόπον; 'a throne situated in the place') as supporting this conclusion.

⁴⁹ Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John* (UBS Handbook Series; New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 88; cf. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 340.

⁵⁰ See sec. 2.

⁵¹ In contrast, Rowland ('Visions of God', 146) argues that the lack of anthropomorphic terminology is only superficial. He speaks of a 'subtly disguised' anthropomorphism, because of the text's indebtedness to Ezek. 28:13 in which 'jasper and carnelian' occur in the same successive order as in the description of the *Urmensch*. Rowland's argument is inconclusive, since the background of the precious stones of Rev. 4:3 is much wider. For a comprehensive discussion of the issue, see e.g. Davis, *Heavenly Court Scene*, 119-20; Osborne, *Revelation*, 226-28.

⁵² Maier, *Offenbarung 1–11*, 259.

stones by some interpreters,⁵³ the view that they are meant to be taken together is supported by the majority.⁵⁴ It has been also recognized that all three stones of 4:3 are part of the twelve jewels in the breastplate of the high priest (Exod. 28:17-21) and they appear also on the list of stones of the paradise (Ezek. 28:13).⁵⁵ I concur with Osborne that the concept of God as light probably provides the best explanation for the meaning of the precious stones, because the overall impression of the description is that of majestic splendour.⁵⁶ Following the same line of reasoning Beale concludes: ‘The stones intensify the light around the throne by reflecting the unapproachable brightness, and hence glory, surrounding God himself.’⁵⁷ He also reasonably argues that the three stones might be interpreted at the same time as the ‘summary and an anticipation of the fuller list of precious stones in ch. 21’.⁵⁸

A peculiar feature of the heavenly throne is the rainbow (ἶρις) which directly encircles it (4:3).⁵⁹ The term ἶρις appears in the New Testament besides this reference only in 10:1. The image recalls Ezekiel’s throne vision in which the radiant light surrounding the figure on the throne was likened to a rainbow (קשת; Ezek. 1:28).⁶⁰ Since קשת is translated in LXX with τόξον (‘bow’), Aune argues that John’s use of ἶρις reflects intentionality, holding that the choice of a pagan term is probably for the sake of clarity.⁶¹ In spite of the close affinity of the two contexts, there is a significant difference between Ezekiel’s and John’s use of the rainbow imagery. In Ezek. 1:28 the divine splendour is only likened to the appearance of a rainbow (כַּמְרָאָה הַקֶּשֶׁת), while in Rev. 4:3 John sees a rainbow encircling the throne, which is likened to an emerald in

⁵³ E.g. William Milligan, *The Book of Revelation* (New York: Armstrong, 1901), 67-68; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1966), 104; Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 342.

⁵⁴ E.g. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 496-97; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), 72; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Forth Worth, Tex.: Dominion, 1987), 150; Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC, 20; Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2nd edn, 1987), 86; Krodell, *Revelation*, 155; Sweet, *Revelation*, 117; Harrington, *Revelation*, 81.

⁵⁵ E.g. Ford, *Revelation*, 71.

⁵⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, 228; cf. Karner, *Apokalipszis*, 78. For the concept of God as light, see Ps. 18:12; 104:2; 1Tim. 6:16; 1Jn 1:5, 7.

⁵⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 321. He convincingly argues that the precious stones and the rainbow in Rev. 4:3 are ‘an incipient hint’ of the new creation that already began in heaven by the inauguration of Christ’s redemptive work.

⁵⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 320-21.

⁵⁹ Some MSS mention ἱερείς (‘priests’) instead of ἶρις (κ* A 1611²³²⁹). For text critical discussions, see Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (3 vols.; trans. John Moore Trout *et al.*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1953), I, 319 n. 4; Josef Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Textes* (2 vols.; *Münchener theologische Studien*; München: Zink, 1956), II, 73.

⁶⁰ For the rainbow imagery in Ezek. 1:28, see ch. 1 sec. 2.

⁶¹ He refers to *Ant. 1.103* in which Josephus explains to his readers that the terms τοξεία and τόξον mean ἶρις (Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 286).

appearance (ὅμοιος ὁράσει σμαραγδίνῳ). As Bauckham concludes, the rainbow imagery ‘moves from simile to reality’.⁶² Though in John’s throne vision it evokes primarily the idea of God’s glory, at the same time it introduces the theme of covenant developed later in the book.⁶³

The brevity of the introduction of the heavenly throne and its occupant as the centre of reality in Revelation is surprising in light of the motif’s prominence in the book. This feature reflects a theological purpose on part of the author. Namely, the detailed attention to the description of the heavenly throne’s surroundings rather than focusing on the occupant implies the protection of the unknowable transcendence of God.⁶⁴ The reference to God primarily by the circumlocution ‘the One sitting on the throne’ conveys the same purpose. I would like to suggest that the linguistic style of the chapter not only protects God’s transcendence, but stresses the centrality of his throne. Every detail of the vision – all beings, objects and activities – are directly related to the heavenly throne as the focal point of John’s cosmology and find significance only in their placement around this centre of the universe.⁶⁵

1.3.3. THE SURROUNDINGS OF THE THRONE

Jewish apocalypses describe throne scenes in varying levels of detail. Some elaborate on a host of beings in varying ranks, while others provide a less complex picture. Similar to these writings John presents ‘an all-encompassing cosmic map’⁶⁶ at the beginning of the visionary part of Revelation, but his description is one of the least elaborate.⁶⁷ The following pages will present a discussion of the major elements of the throne’s surroundings.

Closest to the heavenly throne, though not first in the order of description, are the seven burning lamps of fire that are located in its proximity, in front of it (ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καιόμεναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου; 4:5). The interpretation of this symbol is given in the text, as it is identified with the seven Spirits of God (ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ). The imagery is cultic in nature: just as in the sanctuary the menorah was located in front of Yahweh’s ark, the symbol of

⁶² Bauckham, *Theology*, 51-52.

⁶³ Thus Bauckham (*Theology*, 51), who convincingly argues that John ‘saw in Ezekiel’s allusion to the rainbow the sign of the covenant with Noah’.

⁶⁴ Bauckham, *Theology*, 32; du Rand, ‘Transcendent God-View’, 569; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 188.

⁶⁵ For a detailed discussion, see ch. 9 sec. 2.1.

⁶⁶ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / John Knox, 2009), 97.

⁶⁷ Barr, *Tales*, 70.

his throne, in 4:5 the seven lamps are placed in front of God's throne.⁶⁸ The seven lamps have also a background in the Old Testament.⁶⁹ In the throne vision of Ezek. 1 'torches' are mentioned as moving 'back and forth' (1:13) in contrast with the fixed torches of Rev. 4:5. Likewise, the author may also have been alluding to the seven lamps of Zech. 4:2, 10, which are similarly located before God and are identified with his eyes (cf. Rev. 5:6).⁷⁰ The influence of these sources on Revelation's imagery is very likely, but nevertheless the statement that the seven lamps are the 'Seven Spirits of God' is considered John's unique contribution.⁷¹

The identity of the Seven Spirits in 4:5 has generated some debate. A number of scholars have cautiously identified them with heavenly angelic agents, who hold a specific ministry in connection with the Lamb.⁷² Since in the primitive mind fire and flame were generally associated with divinity,⁷³ it seems more plausible to interpret the imagery as a reference to the Holy Spirit. There is a strong exegetical basis for this interpretation, because the Seven Spirits have similarly been introduced as being in front of God's throne (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου; 1:4) in the book's prologue. The immediate context of this reference provides a key to identification, because it is given within the trinitarian context of the epistolary salutation in which the Seven Spirits are referred to between the greetings of God and Christ.⁷⁴ The number seven may refer to the fullness indicating the deity of the Spirit, but at the same time it may also be related to his presence in each of the seven churches addressed in the messages of chs. 2–3.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Exod. 25:31-38; 2Chron. 4:7. Davis (*Heavenly Court Judgment*, 124) notes that 'all the furniture of the Holy Place and even the altar and laver of the court stand before the throne – that is, in the presence of – by virtue of the fact that it is connected with the temple'.

⁶⁹ Gunkel (*Schöpfung und Chaos*, 294-302) suggests astrological influence on the imagery of the seven lamps. His argument is, however, highly speculative. For a critique of this hypothesis, see Morton, *One upon the Throne*, 94-96.

⁷⁰ For the connection between the menorah imagery and the seven lamps as the seven 'eyes' of God in Zech. 4, see Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery*, 55f.

⁷¹ Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT, 16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1926), 47.

⁷² The seven principal angels standing in God's presence is a well-known motif of Jewish angelology (Tob. 12:15; *IEn.* 20; 4QShirShabb). The angelic interpretation is advocated in Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (MNTC; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947), 7-8; Mounce, *Revelation*, 69-70; Charles Homer Giblin, *The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy* (GNS, 34; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 71-72; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 34-35.

⁷³ James Moffatt, 'The Revelation of St John the Divine' in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (5 vols.; London: Hodder and Stoughton; New York: George H. Doran, 1910), V, 279-494(379).

⁷⁴ Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 424-27; Sweet, *Revelation*, 98; Smalley, *Revelation*, 119; Bauckham, *Theology*, 25, 110-15; Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1993), 23-24; Osborne, *Revelation*, 231; Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (trans. Maria P. Johnson and Adam Kamesar; Italian Texts & Studies on Religion & Society; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 136.

⁷⁵ On the Spirit in Revelation, see F.F. Bruce, 'The Spirit in the Apocalypse' in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, *Festschrift C.F.D. Moule*, eds. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge

Besides the seven lamps, the preposition ἐνώπιον relates something that appears to be ‘as sea of glass like crystal’ (ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλίνη ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ; 4:6) to the heavenly throne. There is no consensus concerning the meaning of this imagery. While it has been interpreted symbolically, it has also been viewed as simply adding to the magnificence of the scene.⁷⁶ It seems most plausible to argue for complexity in this context, since several Old Testament ideas are alluded to that are not mutually exclusive. First, the ‘molten sea’ of the Solomonic temple is reflected against the cultic background (1Kgs 7:23-26).⁷⁷ Similar to the ‘sea of glass’ in Rev. 4:6, the ‘molten sea’ was located in front of the throne/ark, because the court was considered part of the temple both geographically and theologically.⁷⁸ Second, there is an allusion to Ezek. 1:22 where the appearance of the firmament is compared to ‘crystal’ or ‘ice’. In both contexts the imagery designates the floor of God’s heavenly throne.⁷⁹ The description, written using the language of splendour, recalls Exod. 24:10 in which a sapphire pavement undergirding the throne of God is mentioned. The heavenly sea is also a common motif in apocalyptic literature.⁸⁰ However, given the lack of association with a throne scene, a direct dependence is hardly plausible.

God’s throne is encircled in Rev. 4 by two groups of beings. First, twenty-four elders are portrayed (εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι; 4:4), whose individual thrones are related to God’s throne by κυκλόθεν.⁸¹ Since the thrones of the elders appear as heavenly thrones distinct from God’s, they will receive detailed attention later in this dissertation within the chapter on the sub-

University Press, 1973), 333-44; R.L. Jeske, ‘Spirit and Community in the Johannine Apocalyp’, *NTS* 31 (1985), 452-66; J.C. de Smidt, ‘The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation – Nomenclature’, *Neot* 28 (1994), 229-44.

⁷⁶ For example, Mounce (*Revelation*, 137) views the sea of glass as part of the larger picture heightening ‘the sense of God’s separateness from his creatures’ without a precise figurative meaning (cf. Morris, *Revelation*, 88; Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 353). While Mounce’s interpretation of the effect of the sea of glass is basically valid, the background of the imagery at the same time suggests a more profound meaning.

⁷⁷ Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 97; Glasson, *Revelation*, 40; Leonard Thompson, ‘Cult and Eschatology in the Apocalypse of John’, *JR* 49 (1969), 330-50(337 n. 24); Ford, *Revelation*, 73; Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, 126.

⁷⁸ See e.g. Gerald A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible* (BBRSup, 1; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 162.

⁷⁹ Rowland, ‘Visions of God’, 148; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 230; Beale, *Revelation*, 327; Jonathan Knight, *Revelation* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 60; Smalley, *Revelation*, 119; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 136; Morton, *One upon the Throne*, 90-92.

⁸⁰ In *T. Levi 2:7* the first heaven is described as a place where ‘much water was suspended’. *2En. 3:3* refers to a ‘vast heavenly ocean’, while *T. Abr. (B) 8* indicates that Michael lifted Abraham in bodily form via a cloud over ‘the river Ocean’.

⁸¹ κυκλόθεν is employed also in 4:3 referring to the rainbow which encircles the throne. In 4:8 it appears in the context of the physical description of the four living creatures which are portrayed as beings ‘around and within ... full of eyes’ (κυκλόθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν γέμουσιν ὀφθαλμῶν).

motif of God's allies.⁸² I will focus here on the innermost concentric circle, in which there are four living creatures (τέσσαρα ζῶα) whose relation to the divine throne is defined by the preposition κύκλω (4:6). These beings show a close affinity with the cherubim imagery of Ezek. 1.⁸³ While numerous similarities have been identified,⁸⁴ the differences are also significant and need explanation.⁸⁵ Swete and Rowland interpret the differences as a sign of John's tendency to simplify the *merkabah* material of Ezekiel.⁸⁶ One of the weaknesses in this suggestion lies in the lack of explanation for the six wings of John's living creatures (Rev. 4:8) as opposed to the four wings of the cherubim (Ezek. 1:6). Also the unceasing praise of God in Rev. 4:8 contrasts with the silence in Ezek. 1. The differences are convincingly explained by Fekkes as the result of John's combination of Ezekiel's cherubim imagery with Isaiah's seraphim (Isa. 6:2-3):

The transition from Ezekiel to Isaiah coincides with a shift from the physical description of the living creatures to a presentation of their function (Rev 4:8b-9). Whereas in Ezekiel the duties of the cherubim are limited to the movement and activity of the divine throne chariot and have no function of worship or praise, the seraphim of Isa 6 serve as close attendants who lead in worship. Thus, while John takes over various physical attributes of Ezekiel's living creatures, their role as *merkabah* attendants is abandoned in favor of the worshiping seraphim of Isaiah.⁸⁷

Revelation's imagery of the living creatures reveals that, in spite of the formative influence of Ezek. 1, the role of Isaiah's throne vision is not relegated to an 'ornamental color or liturgical filler' of John's throne vision.⁸⁸ It rather functions as an important source for the theological substructure particularly regarding its strong emphasis on God's sovereignty. This conclusion is

⁸² See ch. 6 sec. 2.

⁸³ Besides the Old Testament the following sources of the imagery have been suggested: (1) astrological speculation (Boll, Gunkel, Kraft, Malina) and (2) Jewish apocalyptic visions as *1En.* 14; 71 and *Apoc. Abr.* 18 (Charles, Hannah). For a comprehensive critic of these suggestions, see Morton, *One upon the Throne*, 96-104.

⁸⁴ Hendriksen has observed the following similarities: (1) the beings are called 'living ones'; (2) their number is identical: four; (3) the appearance of their faces is compared to that of man, lion, ox and eagle; (4) they are closely associated with the throne; (5) fire moves to and fro among them; (6) they are covered all over with eyes; and (7) a rainbow encircles the throne that is guarded by the creatures (Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 86-87).

⁸⁵ Charles (*Revelation*, I, 119) notes the following differences: (1) in Rev. the creatures have four faces, while in Ezek. only one; (2) in Rev. they have six wings and not four as in Ezek.; (3) they are standing immediately around the throne in Rev. and not bearing it as in Ezek.; (4) they sing praises contrary to the silence in Ezek.; (5) while in Rev. the creatures are 'full of eyes', in Ezek. the eyes are associated with the rims of the wheels; and (6) in Rev. the throne is fixed and the creatures are not in motion as in Ezek.

⁸⁶ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 71; Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 223.

⁸⁷ Jan Fekkes III, 'Isaiah and the Book of Revelation: John the Prophet as a Fourth Isaiah?' in *As Those Who are Taught: The Interpretation of Isaiah from the LXX to the SBL*, eds. Claire M. McGinnis and Patricia K. Tull (SBLSymS, 27; Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 125-43(135). For an extensive study on John's use of the Ezekiel tradition, see Vogelgesang, 'Interpretation of Ezekiel'; Beate Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der Offenbarung des Johannes* (SBB, 52; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004).

⁸⁸ Fekkes, 'Isaiah and the Book of Revelation', 136.

further supported by the shared motif of the *trishagion* sung both by John's living creatures (Rev. 4:8) and Isaiah's seraphim (Isa. 6:3).⁸⁹

The most confusing detail in the characterization of the living creatures is their position in relation to the divine throne. They are pictured in their introductory description as taking place ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου ('in the midst of the throne'; 4:6). The meaning of this prepositional phrase is a well-known *crux interpretum*. It has been suggested by Hall that John's description is modelled on the ark of the covenant as attested in the Old Testament (Exod. 25:17-22).⁹⁰ That would mean that John's living creatures are situated within the space of the throne as the integral components of the mercy seat.⁹¹ According to this view God's throne appears as a kind of 'living entity'.⁹² While it has been argued that the evidence is insufficient for a verdict on this question,⁹³ Hall's thesis can be challenged on several grounds. First, ἐν μέσῳ is clearly used differently in 5:6 as defining the position of the Lamb in relation to God's throne, the living creatures and the elders.⁹⁴ Second, ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου is clarified in 4:6 by the immediately following κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου, which is applied to worshipping angels in 5:11 and 7:11 implying separateness from the throne. Third, the living creatures appear twice in Revelation as falling down in worship before 'the One sitting on the throne' (4:9; 19:4). The scene indicates a difference between the worshipers and the point towards which the worship is directed. Fourth, the concept of a heavenly throne with heavenly beings as its living components is not attested in earlier or contemporary literature. In Ezek. 1 the cherubim are beneath the throne, while in Isa. 6 the seraphim hover around it. Fifth, the cultic background sheds some light on the double reference to the position of the living creatures (ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου). Whereas the two cherubim of the כַּפְרִית have been related to the ark of the covenant as being in the role of guardians, at the same time cherubim are portrayed on the walls of the Most Holy

⁸⁹ For further details on the use of Isa. 6 in Rev. 4–5, see David Mathewson, 'Isaiah in Revelation' in *Isaiah in the New Testament*, eds. Steve Moyise and Maarten J.J. Menken (The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 189-210(190-91).

⁹⁰ It is stated by Josephus that to 'the cover [of the earthly ark] were affixed two ... "cherubs" ... and Moses says that he saw them sculpted on the [heavenly] throne of God' (*Ant.* 3.137). Similarly, *PRE* 4 and *Midr. Rab. Cant.* 3.10.4 claim that the four cherubim were engraved on parts of the heavenly throne itself.

⁹¹ Robert G. Hall, 'Living Creatures in the Midst of the Throne: Another Look at Revelation 4.6', *NTS* 36 (1990), 609-13; cf. Darrell D. Hannah, 'Of Cherubim and the Divine Throne: Rev. 5.6 in Context', *NTS* 49 (2003), 528-42; Harrington, *Revelation*, 80; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation* (IVPNTCS, 20; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 93; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 136.

⁹² Michaels, *Revelation*, 93.

⁹³ See e.g. Dale C. Allison, '4Q403 Fragm. 1, Col. I, 38-46 and the Revelation of John', *RevQ* 12 (1986), 409-13(411).

⁹⁴ For a detailed discussion of ἐν μέσῳ in Rev. 5:6, see ch. 5 sec. 1.3.3.

Place (1Kgs 6:23-29). The cumulative force of the evidence suggests that it is more appropriate to interpret Rev. 4:6 in terms of implying the ‘extreme closeness’⁹⁵ of cherubim to the throne, the surrounding of the centre of the universe with their presence, rather than being situated within the throne as its living components.⁹⁶

The role of the living creatures needs some further clarification. There have been some attempts to interpret the arrangement set out in 4:6 as reflecting that of the Greek amphitheatre.⁹⁷ Such an approach is unnecessary in the light of the cultic and political background of the vision. It is clearly indicated in Rev. 4 that the living creatures appear as a distinguished group of celestial beings acting in the role of guardians of the heavenly throne.⁹⁸ At the same time their symbolic interpretation is very likely. Though several hypotheses have been proposed in this regard,⁹⁹ the most viable is the one that views the living creatures as representatives of the whole created order of animate life.¹⁰⁰ This interpretation sets the divine throne symbolically in the broadest context, portrayed as encircled by all the sentient creation gathered around it. Since the praise of the living creatures is unending, the throne appears in their midst as the epicentre of the praise.¹⁰¹

1.3.4. HYMNIC ADORATION

The throne-room vision of Rev. 4–5 with its five doxological scenes is considered to be one of the richest liturgical sections in the entire book. In the throne-scene of ch. 4 the hymnic material is concentrated in the concluding verses in which the adoration of the four living creatures (4:8) is followed by praise offered by the twenty-four elders (4:9-11). The interpretive role of these

⁹⁵ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 183-84.

⁹⁶ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 70; Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 501-02; Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 354; Beale, *Revelation*, 328-29.

⁹⁷ Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 501-02; Raymond R. Brewer, ‘The Influence of Greek Drama on the Apocalypse of John’, *ATR* 18 (1936), 74-92; Ford, *Revelation*, 74.

⁹⁸ There is a significant terminological and conceptual difference between the various sources concerning the highest order of angels associated with God’s throne. In Ezek. 10:2, 20 cherubim are designated as the carriers of the throne, while in Isa. 6:2-3 it is stated that seraphim are hovering around the highly exalted throne. *1En.* 71:7 mentions cherubim, seraphim and ophanim together – the last not known from the Bible. In *2En.* 20:1, 21:1 and 22:2 some other orders are also mentioned, while there is stated that the number of the orders is ten (21:1).

⁹⁹ Osborne’s (*Revelation*, 233-34) list of the different symbolic interpretations is an appropriate representation of the variety of suggestions: (1) the four gospels (church fathers); (2) the four corners of the zodiac (Charles, Farrer, Kraft, Beasley-Murray); (3) the representation of royalty with winged sphinxes or winged lions (Albright, Ford); (4) the divine attributes or spiritual characteristics (Walvoord, Johnson); (5) the four tribes of Israel (Scott); and (6) the whole of animate creation (Swete, Ladd, Mounce, Harrington, Wall, Roloff, Giesen, Beale).

¹⁰⁰ For interpreters supporting this view, see Charles Brütisch, *Die Offenbarung Jesu Christi* (3 vols.; ZBK, 18; Zürich: Zwingli, 1970), I, 230-33. Beale (*Revelation*, 330) goes a step further arguing for a ‘double symbolism’ as the representation of also the Creator besides the created order.

¹⁰¹ Barr, *Tales*, 71.

hymns has been convincingly argued by Beale, who claims that they ‘make explicit the main point of the vision and of the whole chapter: God is to be glorified because of his holiness and sovereignty’.¹⁰² The function of Revelation’s hymnic material scattered throughout the book will be discussed in detail later;¹⁰³ our intention here is to focus on the contribution of the two hymnic passages mentioned to the throne motif in this context.

A logical relationship between the hymns of Rev. 4 can be established. The praise sung by the four living creatures (4:8) is an initial anthem followed by the antiphonal response of the twenty-four elders (4:11).¹⁰⁴ The entire hymnic block of 4:8-11 is introduced by the idea of the unceasing worship characteristic to the apocalyptic literature.¹⁰⁵ The idea is strongly highlighted by the expression ‘they have no rest day and night’ (ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός). This characterization of the praise appears to be a double reference, because the emphasis on worship day and night is sufficient in the light of the statement about the non-existence of rest in the presence of God.

The first hymn focuses on the character of ‘the One sitting on the throne’. God’s distinctiveness is emphasized immediately at the beginning by the employment of a *trishagion*, drawn from Isa. 6:3, which is an appropriate opening anthem within a temple setting.¹⁰⁶ The *trishagion* is followed by two complex divine titles: κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ (‘the Lord God Almighty’)¹⁰⁷ and ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (‘the One who is and was and is coming’).¹⁰⁸ Though the throne’s occupant has been characterized until this moment only by

¹⁰² Beale, *Revelation*, 331-32.

¹⁰³ See ch. 8 sec. 1.2.

¹⁰⁴ It has been suggested that the hymnic material of Rev. 4–5 reflects the contemporary liturgical practices of John’s Christian community (e.g. Otto Piper, ‘The Apocalypse and the Liturgy of the Ancient Church’, *CH* 20 [1951], 10-22[15-18]; Lucetta Mowry, ‘Revelation 4–5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage’, *JBL* 71 [1957], 75-84[84]; M.H. Shepherd, *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse* [London: Lutterworth, 1960], 78-79). This hypothesis is, however, not supported adequately by evidence and at the same time it shows serious fallacies on methodological ground. For an adequate critic of the hypothesis, see Morton, *One upon the Throne*, 110-12. For summary of the wider debate, see Donald Guthrie, ‘Aspects of Worship in the Book of Revelation’ in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honour of Ralph P. Martin*, eds. Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige (JSNTSup, 87; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 70-83(71-73).

¹⁰⁵ See e.g. *1En.* 39:12; 40:2; 71:7; *2En.* 19:6; 21:1; *2Bar.* 51:11; *T. Levi* 3:8.

¹⁰⁶ Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, 143.

¹⁰⁷ This divine name, fusing the three divine titles, occurs seven times in Revelation: 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22. The shorter form, ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, occurs only twice (16:14; 19:15). Bauckham (*Theology*, 30) notes that the term παντοκράτωρ indicates ‘not so much God’s abstract omnipotence as his actual control over all things’. The full title is a recurrent use of יהוה אלהי הצבאות in the LXX (e.g. Amos 3:13; 4:13; 5:14-16; 9:5, 15; Hos. 12:6; Nah. 3:5; Zech. 10:3; Mal. 2:16).

¹⁰⁸ This divine title is also used in 1:4 and 1:8. 4:8 follows the order of 1:8, but 1:4 reverses the past (ἦν) and the present (ὦν). The title expresses the idea of God’s infinity and sovereignty. The overemphasis of any of the three

circumlocutions, the content of the hymn discloses his divine identity. The two divine titles set a theological tone for the entire chapter by highlighting the ideas of God’s absolute kingship and sovereign control over history and time.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the content of the first hymn is consistent with the theological message the throne motif conveys with its strong centrality in the chapter.

While the first hymnic passage contains the praise of the creatures in the concentric circle nearest to the throne, the second hymnic section records the response of the twenty-four elders as the group situated in the second circle. The relationship of the two worship scenes is indicated by the temporal clause of 4:9 introduced by ὅταν (‘whenever’), which modifies the main clause of 4:10.¹¹⁰ These two verses act as an introductory statement for the second hymn’s transcript in 4:11. Still, they contain four references to God within the context of describing the act of worship. He is twice referred to by the circumlocution ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ, while also twice by the title τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, which appears here for the first time in the book and continues the emphasis of the first hymn on God’s sovereignty as rooted in his eternal nature.¹¹¹ In the same texts three acts of the twenty-four elders are mentioned, which clarify their relationship to the occupant of the central throne: (1) they bow down before God vacating their thrones; (2) worship him; and (3) cast their crowns before the throne. All three acts are acts of subordination. Their combination indicates vassalage – the acknowledgment that homage belongs exclusively to the enthroned One. Aune has observed that, while the scene of casting down crowns before the divine throne is without parallel in Jewish literature, it is comprehensible against the ceremonial traditions of Hellenistic and Roman ruler worship.¹¹² A further parallel has been noted by Stevenson in his examination of the act of placing crowns at the feet of the conqueror by the conquered rulers (Cicero, *Sest.* 27; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.29). His conclusion about the Revelation scene is set against the Graeco-Roman context:

The performance of the elders should be understood as an imitation of such an act of subordination. By vacating their thrones and casting their crowns at the feet of the one on

parts is not justified – such as the emphasis Thomas (*Revelation 1–7*, 363) puts on the element of the past. Bauckham (*Theology*, 28) notes that the title in its complete form is used three times in the book, while its simpler two-part form (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν) occurs twice (11:17; 16:5).

¹⁰⁹ Beale, *Revelation*, 333.

¹¹⁰ ὅταν followed by a future indicative (δώσουσιν) is not the classical usage (BDF, §382.4).

¹¹¹ 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], 196) notes that this phrase occurs five times in different forms in the Old Testament outside of Daniel and in the apocrypha (Deut. 32:40; Esd. 4:38; Tob. 13:2; Sir. 18:1; 37:26). He regards, on the basis of the closest verbal parallels, Dan. 4:34 and 12:7 as the most probable influences on Rev. 4:9.

¹¹² Aune, ‘Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial’, 13.

the central throne, the elders testify either that they have no right to possess for themselves what those objects represent or that they recognize one with greater right. The behavior of the elders thus functions to show that whatever is symbolized by the thrones and crowns belongs to God.¹¹³

The hymn of the elders, similarly to the praise of the four living creatures, shares the focus on God's sovereignty, more specifically the acknowledging of his kingship. The three acts of vassalage finely resonate with the content of the elders' two-segment confession: the first focusing on God's worthiness and the second on the basis of his worship. The transition between the two parts is indicated by ὅτι, which introduces the rationale for the worship as grounded in his universal creatorship (4:11). The hymn of the twenty-four elders, similar to that of the four living creatures, ascribes lordship to God (ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν) and with the emphasis on his creatorship it serves as an indicator of the 'natural disproportion between the one who adores and the one who is adored'.¹¹⁴

It seems appropriate to close the exegetical study of Rev. 4 with the observation of Bauckham, who notes: 'Revelation is theocentric because it offers a vision of the world in which God is the central and utterly decisive reality and in which the worship of God and the truth of God are key elements.'¹¹⁵ Though this theological perspective is conveyed by the book as a whole, the idea is nowhere stronger grounded than in the throne-room vision, in which the foundational picture of reality as focused on the divine throne is given. The reader of Revelation is reminded repeatedly of this viewpoint by the recurring key characterization of God throughout the book, which pictures him as occupying the sign of his authority, the throne. Since this title is foundational for the theological meaning of God's throne, it will be discussed in detail in the next section.

¹¹³ Gregory M. Stevenson, 'Conceptual Background to Golden Crown Imagery in the Apocalypse of John (4:4, 10; 14:14)', *JBL* 114 (1995), 257-72(269). He notes that three types of crowns appear in Revelation: (1) the organic wreath (στέφανος; 2:10; 3:11; 6:2; 12:1); (2) the diadem (διάδημα; 12:3; 13:1; 19:12); and (3) the golden wreath (στεφάνους χρυσοῦς; 4:4, 10; 9:7; 14:14). Traditionally, the diadem has been interpreted as a crown of royalty, while the organic and golden wreaths as wreaths of either victory or royalty. Stevenson rightly holds that this categorization is too simplistic. He demonstrates on the basis of literal and archaeological evidence that the golden wreath worn by the twenty-four elders in Rev. 4 is capable of expressing at least four concepts: victory, royalty, divine glory and honour.

¹¹⁴ Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 137.

¹¹⁵ Richard Bauckham, 'God in the Book of Revelation', *PIBA* 18 (1995), 40-53(41).

2. CHARACTERIZATION OF GOD BY THE THRONE MOTIF

The motif most intimately connected with God in the book of Revelation is the throne. From ch. 4 onward God is referred to as the occupant of the heavenly throne twelve times. The references occur in six different grammatical forms: (1) ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος (4:2); (2) τῷ καθήμενῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ (4:9; 5:13; 7:10; 19:4); (3) τοῦ καθήμενου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου (4:10; 5:1, 7; 6:16); (4) ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ (21:5); (5) ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου (7:15); and (6) θρόνον ... καὶ τὸν καθήμενον ἐπ' αὐτόν (20:11). Also the abbreviated ὁ καθήμενος occurs once (4:3) as referring to the θρόνος in the previous verse.¹¹⁶ The variations are not significant for the basic meaning of the expression.¹¹⁷ Aune convincingly argues that the formula functions as 'a circumlocution for the name of God', since generally no other divine names are placed in syntactical connection with any of the mentioned passages.¹¹⁸ The question of theocentric characterization has been studied extensively by Rotz, who persuasively argues that the expression functions as the key characterization technique for God throughout the book.¹¹⁹ Since the formula is a theologically loaded expression with an essential role in the theocentric perspective of Revelation, detailed attention will be given here to an examination of its background, its use in various contexts within the book and the theological meaning it conveys. I suggest that the expression πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ ('to God and to his throne') in 12:5 functions in a very similar manner to the circumlocution of God's name under discussion, since θεός and θρόνος are juxtaposed within the same sentence. For this reason the text in question should rightfully be classified as a member of the family of characterization throne-texts, and therefore will be discussed on equal terms with the other circumlocution references in this section.

¹¹⁶ This categorization is slightly different from Aune's (*Revelation 1-5*, 284) who groups the text into five groups taking the references in 4:2 and 20:11 as the same grammatical form in spite of the clear differences. He also omits the reference in 4:3. The participle καθήμενος occurs thirty times in the book. For the other occurrences and the discussion of their theological significance, see ch. 8 sec. 2.3.

¹¹⁷ Charles (*Revelation*, I, 112) in his discussion of the variation of cases suggests an explanation following the lead of Alford and Bousset: 'The participle in the nom. and acc. is followed by ἐπί and the acc., and the participle in the gen. and dat. by the gen. and dat. respectively.'

¹¹⁸ Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 284) notes that 7:10 (τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν τῷ καθήμενῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ) and 19:4 (τῷ θεῷ τῷ καθήμενῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ) are exceptions in which the circumlocution is preceded by θεός. Charles (*Revelation*, I, 112) holds that this longer form is actually the full expression.

¹¹⁹ Rotz, 'The One Who Sits on the Throne', 358-407.

2.1. BACKGROUND

The expression ‘the One sitting on the throne’ is not attested in the Old Testament as a circumlocution for God’s name. In Jewish and Christian literature it is rare, but not entirely absent. The closest affinity with Revelation’s circumlocution is shown in Sir. 1:8-9 in which the formula is clearly applied to the divine κύριος portrayed as a creator: εἷς ἐστὶν σοφὸς φοβερὸς σφόδρα καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ κύριος αὐτὸς ἔκτισεν... (‘There is one wise, exceedingly to be feared, the One who sits upon his throne. The Lord himself created...’).¹²⁰ Also God is referred to in the *Life of Adam and Eve* 37:4 as a Lord, who sits on a throne which is qualified as holy: δεσπότης καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ ἁγίου θρόνου αὐτοῦ (‘the Lord who sits on his holy throne’). The expression is applied to human figures in *T. Abr.*, in which Adam and Abel are designated several times as figures occupying thrones.¹²¹ It has been noted by Aune that, in contrast to its scarcity in the Old Testament and Jewish literature, the formula ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ appears as a divine epithet with great frequency in Graeco-Roman sources: within the texts of magical formulas and magical papyri, and also as inscribed on magical gems, lamellae and defixiones.¹²²

As has been argued above, Revelation’s concept of the enthroned God is rooted primarily in the Old Testament throne theophanies.¹²³ This applies in spite of an absence of a precise verbal parallel to the expression ‘the One sitting on the throne’, since in three of the four Old Testament throne visions the concepts of the heavenly throne, God and sitting are closely related.¹²⁴ The meaning of κάθημαι is rooted in the Old Testament concept of כָּשׂ, which denotes more than the physical posture of sitting. It functions as a technical term for ascension to a throne and the designation of reigning with reference to both human and divine subjects.¹²⁵ The theological significance of כָּשׂ as a term denoting Yahweh’s dwelling in heaven is well known. It stresses ‘the stability and duration of his residence there’ as contrasted with the ‘human

¹²⁰ The expression occurs also in Sir. 40:3 as καθήμενου ἐπὶ θρόνου ἐνδόξου (‘from him who sits on the throne of glory’). However, the throne is not related to God here, but it is rather a motif employed in the development of the theme of suffering being the human lot.

¹²¹ *T. Abr.* (Rec.A) 11:4, 6; 12:11; 13:2; (Rec. B) 8:7.

¹²² For details, see Aune’s (*Revelation 1–5*, 284-85) concise discussion of the topic and the literature cited in it.

¹²³ See sec. 1.3.2. and 1.3.3.

¹²⁴ The closest parallels to Revelation’s formula are in Isa. 6:1 (τὸν κύριον καθήμενον ἐπὶ θρόνου) and 1Kgs 22:19 (τὸν κύριον θεὸν Ἰσραὴλ καθήμενον ἐπὶ θρόνου αὐτοῦ), where even the present participle is shared. In Dan. 7:9 the three concepts are related even though the participle is lacking, plural thrones appear and God is named by the unique title ‘Ancient of Days’. Ezek. 1:26 seems to be the furthest away, since κάθημαι is entirely avoided in indicating the sitting position of the enthroned figure.

¹²⁵ M. Görg, ‘כָּשׂ’ in *TDOT*, VI, 420-38. See also ch. 8 sec. 2.3.1.

experience of God on the earth, where for the most part, Yahweh is said to יָשָׁב, dwell, emphasizing the temporary nature of his manifestations'.¹²⁶

God's repeated depiction as sitting on his throne needs to be also evaluated against the common understanding of the sitting posture as a mark of honour and authority in the ancient world. As France notes, 'A king sat to receive his subjects, a court to give judgment, and a teacher to teach.'¹²⁷ In materials from ANE and Greece, sitting is often reserved for deities as a sign of distinctiveness: a god often sits while people stand in front of him in prayer.¹²⁸

Revelation's portrait of God as sitting on his throne is closely related to this idea, reflecting the notion of sovereignty as he takes his seat upon a sign of authority exercising permanent rulership.

2.2. THE USE OF THE CIRCUMLOCUTION IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

The examination of Revelation's καθήμενος passages related to God reveals the use of the expression in five different contexts. The circumlocution is most prominently featured in the heavenly temple scenes, but it also appears in contexts elaborating the day of wrath, the cosmic conflict, the millennial judgment and the new creation. These καθήμενος references will be examined here individually in their respective contexts with the exception of one in the millennial judgment scene (20:11), which will receive a more detailed attention later in this chapter.¹²⁹ The reason for postponing the discussion of 20:11 lies primarily in the decisive role of the text in the judgment scene of 20:11-15 in which the throne appears in the function of typifying decisive divine activity.

¹²⁶ Gerald H. Wilson, 'יָשָׁב' in *NIDOTE*, II, 550-51(551). One of the most significant Old Testament uses of יָשָׁב in reference to Yahweh is the epithet יָשָׁב הַכְּרֻבִים ('who sits on the cherubim'). The expression is a construct phrase that functions as a 'stereotyped epithet applied to Yahweh' (Görg, 'יָשָׁב', 434). Its earliest use in the ark narratives signifies Yahweh's enthronement above the ark of the covenant (1Sam. 4:4; 2Sam. 6:2; 1Chron. 13:6), but it recalls the idea of Yahweh's kingship in other texts not associated specifically with the ark (2Kgs 19:15; Isa. 37:16; Ps. 99:1). Also significant is the epithet יָשָׁב צִיּוֹן ('who dwells on Zion'; Ps. 9:12), which reflects the 'enthronement' of the 'righteous judge' (9:5) and his eternal 'sitting enthroned' upon the throne of judgment (9:8). The epithets בָּשָׁמַיִם יָשָׁב ('who is sitting in the heavens'; Ps 2:4) and הַיֹּשֵׁב בְּשָׁמַיִם ('who is sitting in the heavens'; Ps 123:1) indicate similarly Yahweh's sovereign authority and protective power.

¹²⁷ Richard T. France, 'κάθημαι' in *NIDNTT*, III, 587-89(588).

¹²⁸ E.g. Homer, *Il.* 4.1; *Od.* 16.264; Aeschylus, *Suppl.* 101; Euripides, *Tro.* 884; Pausanias, *Desc. Gr.* 5.17.9.

¹²⁹ See sec. 3.4.

2.2.1. HEAVENLY TEMPLE SCENES

The circumlocution ‘the One sitting on the throne’ appears in two heavenly temple scenes in the book of Revelation. It is the dominant reference to God in the heavenly throne room vision used seven times (chs. 4–5), while an additional reference is found in a cultic setting in the context of the eschatological judgment finale (chs. 19–20).¹³⁰ Shea has demonstrated the close connection between these two visions. They share the basic setting of the throne with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, but they also reveal additional parallels: (1) the appearance of Christ, his direction of motion and function; (2) the parenthetical personal involvement of the prophet with the vision; and (3) the close verbal, thematic and structural relation between the hymnic sections.¹³¹ The relationship of the two visions within the larger structure of Revelation is even more profound, since they form a chiasmic pair within the book’s macrostructure, as will be illustrated in a later chapter dealing with the literary characteristics of the θρόνος passages.¹³²

The circumlocution appears six times in its complete form in the throne room vision (4:2, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13), while an additional reference from 4:3, which is a shorter form of the expression (ὁ καθήμενος), is to be added to this group. Seven as the number of references to God through the throne motif seems to reveal deliberateness on the part of the author since, as Bauckham points out, numerical symbolism concerning the employing of divine titles is one of the ways in which John ‘wrote theological meaning into the detail of the composition of his work’.¹³³ While I concur with this general observation of Bauckham, his suggestion concerning the significance of exactly seven references to the formula ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ in this

¹³⁰ Rev. 19:1-10 has often been viewed structurally as a concluding part of the section on the judgment of the great prostitute (17:1f.) (e.g. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 720; Gibling, *Revelation*, 175; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 353). According to this view the hymnic sections of Rev. 18 and 19:1-10 are considered as belonging together. In contrast, William H. Shea (‘Revelation 5 and 19 as Literary Reciprocals’, *AUSS* 22 [1984], 249-57[250-51]) demonstrated on the basis of the following evidence that the four hymns of Rev. 19 belong together as a separate literary unit: (1) though the first hymn (19:1-2) refers back to the judgment of the prostitute, it is nevertheless a ‘transitional summary statement’; (2) the scene of the action in Rev. 18 and 19 is considerably different, since ch. 18 focuses on earthly affairs, while ch. 19 focuses on heaven (see 19:1); and (3) in the chiasmic structure of Revelation the section of Rev. 17–18 belongs to the ‘Babylon appendix’ as an extended explanation of the Seven Plagues. Because the plagues are balanced with the Seven Trumpets within the structure of the book, the parallels between 19:1-10 and chs. 4–5 are an additional argument for the literal separation of 19:1-10 from the preceding vision.

¹³¹ Shea, ‘Revelation 5 and 19’, 255-56.

¹³² See ch. 8 sec. 1.1.

¹³³ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 33. Bauckham rightly notes of the complexity of John’s literary technique that some ‘titles for God which are most characteristic of Revelation and most important for the theology of Revelation occur seven times each. Especially in the circumstances of ancient writing, this would not have been easy to achieve ... In placing just seven occurrences of these divine titles within his work, John was not just playing a literary game.’

form in the book is highly questionable. He suggests that ‘it looks that John used ... variations quite deliberately in order to keep the number of occurrences of the precise phrase to seven’.¹³⁴ While the point of such a decision on part of the author would not be very clear, I suggest that his numerical deliberateness is probably more evident in the seven καθήμενος references in the pivotal vision of the book in chs. 4–5, in spite of the variations in the formula.

The pervasive nature of the formula’s employment in Rev. 4–5 is also informing. Namely, the throne-room vision is the only section of the book in which it appears in different types of materials within a single vision: in the visionary description (4:2, 3; 5:1, 7), in the introductory/explanatory formula for worship (4:9, 10) and in the texts of the hymnic material (5:13). While the nineteen θρόνος references in the vision with the description of the clear arrangement of the heavenly realm around the divine throne is already a strong indicator of God’s sovereign kingship over created order, this leading theological idea is additionally emphasized by the author’s sevenfold and pervasive use of God’s central characterization formula.

In contrast to the throne room vision in which the circumlocution formula pervades the entire material, in the temple scene of 19:1-10 it appears only as a single reference (19:4). As the introductory scene of the Final Judgment vision (chs. 19–20) the section is dominated by four hymns of praise and the introduction of nuptial imagery in reference to the Lamb’s wedding. It picks up the theme of God’s justice reflected in the elects’ reward and the judgment of their enemies¹³⁵ which has been announced already by the seventh trumpet (11:15-18).¹³⁶ The hymnic material of 19:1-10 records praise offered to God for the demonstration of his sovereign reign in the deposing of Babylon and the salvation of the elect. He is referred to by three names in the four hymns of this temple scene: θεός ἡμῶν (19:1, 5), the fuller version κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν ὁ παντοκράτωρ (19:6) and the circumlocution τῷ θεῷ τῷ καθήμενῳ ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου (19:4). Significantly, the reference at the centre of our attention appears within the description of worship on part of the beings that appear in the throne-room vision as the setting of the divine throne. The text clearly specifies the throne occupant as the object of worship (προσεκύνησαν τῷ

¹³⁴ Bauckham, *Climax*, 33.

¹³⁵ The idea of judgment is closely tied here to the justification of martyrs and to their cry in 6:9-11. It is made clear in chs. 17–18 that Babylon is responsible for the oppression of God’s people and the shedding of their blood (17:6; 18:24). Thus, the text implies the legal action of judging Babylon and avenging the blood of God’s servants (Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 543).

¹³⁶ Caird (*Revelation*, 233-34) notes verbal parallels between the two passages: the servants ... who fear him, both great and small (11:18), the roar of thunder (11:19) and the declaration of divine sovereignty (11:15-16).

θεῶ τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ). The divine throne itself is mentioned again within the same context as a point from which response came in the form of an unidentified voice (φωνὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου ἐξῆλθεν; 19:5). This reference will be discussed later in our study of the phenomena emerging from the throne.¹³⁷

2.2.2. DAY OF WRATH

The only reference to the heavenly throne within the heptad of the Seven Seals is found in the sixth seal, in which is portrayed in the language of the ‘Day of the Lord’ the universal expression of the wrath of God and the Lamb (6:12-17).¹³⁸ The eschatological cosmic turbulence calls forth a twofold reaction from the earth-dwellers: hiding in the caves and rocks of mountains (6:15) and desperately crying in terror to them to fall and hide them from the face of ‘the One who is sitting on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb’ (τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου).¹³⁹ The cry that contains the throne reference reveals that what sinners dread most is not the experience of death, but the revealed presence of God.¹⁴⁰ In the passage two judges are juxtaposed: ‘the One sitting on the throne’ and the Lamb. The most startling aspect of the text is the appearance of the Lamb as a second judge. This function seems paradoxical against the characterization of this figure in ch. 5. However, as Charles concludes, in the sixth seal ‘the sacrificial lamb has become the judge of all, and the Lamb is now filled with wrath’.¹⁴¹ While in the vision of ch. 5 ‘the One sitting on the throne’ and the Lamb share the praises of the

¹³⁷ See ch. 4 sec. 3.3.

¹³⁸ The ‘great day of wrath’ of the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17) recapitulates the ‘Day of the Lord’ texts of the Old Testament. Partially behind Revelation’s scene is the description of Joel’s ‘great and dreadful Day of the Lord’ (Joel 2:31), which is supplemented by the oracle of judgment on Nineveh in Nah. 1:5-6. The following ‘Day of the Lord’ texts might be considered as an additional background material behind Revelation’s description: Isa. 13:9; Zeph. 1:14-18; 2:2-3; Mal. 4:1, 5. For a comprehensive treatment of the ‘Day of the Lord’ concept in the Old Testament, see Mark A. LaRocca-Pitts, ‘The Day of Yahweh as Rhetorical Strategy Among the Hebrew Prophets’ (PhD Dissertation; Harvard University, 2000). For a similar study related to the New Testament, see David Lanier, ‘The Day of the Lord in the New Testament: A Historical and Exegetical Analysis of Its Background and Usage’ (PhD Dissertation; Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988).

¹³⁹ It seems that several Old Testament allusions are combined in this cry. While it may be on the mind of the author primarily the judgment on idolaters in Hos. 10:8, the allusion also seems to include Jer. 4:29 where the idolaters try to avoid the judgment by hiding from God’s anger. Though Jan Fekkes (*Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development* [JSNTSup, 93; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994], 162-63) argues that the parallels are also striking with Isa. 2:19, Aune (*Revelation 6–16*, 420) criticizes this suggestion for the lack of verbal parallels. It seems that both behind Rev. 6:16 and the mentioned Old Testament texts stands an allusion to the well-known incident in the Garden of Eden in which the first couple ‘hid from the presence of the Lord’ (Gen. 3:9).

¹⁴⁰ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 94.

¹⁴¹ Charles (*Revelation*, I, 182-83) refers to Vischer, Spitta, Weyland, Völter and Weiss who argue that ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου in Rev. 6:16 is an interpolation.

totality of creation, in 6:12-17 they act jointly in judgment and no human force is able to oppose the intentions of this holy coalition.¹⁴² It is generally acknowledged that the scene characterized as ‘the day of his great wrath’ (ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ μεγάλη τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ) recapitulates the Old Testament ‘Day of the Lord’ prophecies.¹⁴³

The expression τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου in 6:16 is a typical circumlocution for God. However, evoking the presence of the throne’s occupant by an anthropomorphic reference to his face appears for the first time in the book (ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου). The concepts of God’s face and his throne are associated in two further texts in Revelation. First, it is stated in 20:11, similarly in a judgment setting, that ‘the earth and heaven fled from the face’ of the great white throne’s occupant (τὸν καθημένον ἐπ’ αὐτόν, οὗ ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου ἔφυγεν ἡ γῆ καὶ ὁ οὐρανός). Not only are the circumlocution and the reference to God’s face shared between the two texts, but also the motif of the fleeing of creation from the divine presence. The shared language implies the interpretation of the sixth seal in terms of eschatological judgment.¹⁴⁴ Second, after referring to the shared throne of God and the Lamb as the theocratic centre of the new creation (22:1, 3) it is stated in 22:4 that the elect shall see his face (πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ). Although who the singular αὐτοῦ refers to is a matter of discussion,¹⁴⁵ the viewing of the face of the divine being(s) by the elects is clearly contrasted with the fleeing from it in 6:16 and 20:11. Additionally, it should be noted that the divine formula in reference to the throne in 6:16 possibly points back to the vision in chs. 4–5. While the throne-room scene highlights God’s sovereignty in the heavenly context, the same divine quality is manifested in the action related to the earthly realm within the eschatological judgment of the sixth seal.

¹⁴² Smalley, *Revelation*, 171.

¹⁴³ There is a deep disagreement between MSS, because some testify for αὐτοῦ, while others testify for αὐτῶν in this expression. Both readings are supported by good witnesses. According to Aune’s (*Revelation 6–16*, 386) overview the first variant is supported in A P 046 1 fam 1006¹⁰⁰⁶ 2351 Andreas Byzantine cop arm eth Primasius (*irae eius*), while the second by κ C Oecumenius²⁰⁵³ fam 1611^{1611 1854 2329 2344} 1828 2020 Andreas 1 94 it^{ar gic} (*ipsorum*); Tyc³ (*irae eorum*); Beatus (*irae eorum*); De promissionibus (*irae illorum*); Fulgentius (*irae illorum*); vg syp^{ph h}. On the other hand this variant has often been viewed as an explanatory correction that tries to avoid the ambiguity of the plural pronoun (e.g. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary On The Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2nd edn, 1994], 668; Priegent, *Apocalypse*, 277 n. 39; Beale, *Revelation*, 401-02; Smalley, *Revelation*, 145). For a convincing theological argument in favour of the first reading, see Schmid, *Studien*, II, 100; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 386; Richard Bauckham, ‘Revelation’ in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, eds. John Barton and John Muddiman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1287-1306(1294).

¹⁴⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 400.

¹⁴⁵ See ch. 5 sec. 3.3.1.

2.2.3. COSMIC CONFLICT

The cosmic conflict between God/his allies and the dragon/his allies is widely established as the core theme of Revelation in 12:1–14:20, a vision considered the ‘central axis of the book’.¹⁴⁶ While the formula ‘the One sitting on the throne’ does not appear verbatim in the vision, the reference in 12:5 forms part of our discussion, since God is juxtaposed in this text with his throne.¹⁴⁷

In the immediate context of the throne reference two new characters are introduced, the woman (12:1-2) and the dragon (12:3-4), what is followed by the development of their conflict.¹⁴⁸ The intention of the dragon is clearly stated in 12:4: confrontation with the pregnant woman with the goal of exterminating her male child. The focus of 12:5 is the male child himself, who is identified in terms of the messianic prophecy of Ps. 2:9. The statement concerning the child ruling over all nations with a rod of iron emphasizes his messianic authority and victory over God’s enemies. The description moves immediately to his transfer from earth ‘to God and his throne’ (πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ), which is generally understood as a reference to the ascension of Christ.¹⁴⁹ As is evident, the narrative moves immediately from Christ’s birth to his ascension,¹⁵⁰ while the details of his ministry and death are omitted.¹⁵¹ This literary technique is named by Beale as a ‘temporal telescoping’, an abbreviation pattern consistent with other New Testament concise portraits of Christ’s life.¹⁵² The primary purpose of the employment of this literary technique lies not only in emphasizing Christ’s victory at his resurrection and ascension, but also the rule rooted in the role of the male child as a figure destined to reign over all the nations (μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη).¹⁵³ The

¹⁴⁶ Boring, *Revelation*, 150. For a discussion on the place of the vision in the structure of the book, see ch. 8 sec. 1.1.

¹⁴⁷ God’s throne appears once more in the vision: in 14:3 it designates the location where the 144,000 sing.

¹⁴⁸ The literature on the background of the two figures and their conflict in the Old Testament, ANE and Graeco-Roman literature is immense. See e.g. the works cited in Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 647-50.

¹⁴⁹ Pierre Prigent, *Apocalypse 12: Histoire de l’ exégèse* (BGBE, 2; Tübingen: Mohr, 1959), 8, 136.

¹⁵⁰ Caird (*Revelation*, 149) has argued that ‘by the birth of the Messiah John means not the Nativity but the Cross’. This hypothesis, however, is problematic. For its critic, see Michaels, *Revelation*, 149.

¹⁵¹ It has been suggested by Joachim Jeremias (*The Parables of Jesus* [trans. S.H. Hooke; London: SCM, 1955], 148) that in the ANE there has been a tendency to focus on the beginning and the end of a story, while what happens in between has often been omitted. Mathias Rissi (*Zeit und Geschichte in der Offenbarung des Johannes* [ATANT, 22; Zürich: Zwingli, 1952], 44) views the appearance of this tendency in Rev. 12:5.

¹⁵² Beale, *Revelation*, 639. For the New Testament examples of this literary technique, see Jn 3:13; 8:14; 13:3; 16:5, 28; Rom. 1:3-4; 1Tim. 3:16.

¹⁵³ Beale, *Revelation*, 639. References to Ps. 2:9 occur three times in Revelation (2:27; 12:5; 19:15). In all three contexts the form of the quotation is similar, as it includes ποιμαίνειν and the expression ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ. The present verse, however, introduces two variations: the use of the verb μέλλει and the *inclusio* of the phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. Bauckham (*Climax*, 19) views a link between the references in 12:5 and 19:15 arguing that John ‘has planted

reference to the fulfilment of Ps. 2 highlights that ‘as in ancient times, so again the dragon has been defeated’, but ‘this time the defeat has occurred through the resurrection and ascent of Christ’.¹⁵⁴ The omission of the earthly life of Jesus in Rev. 12 has been similarly explained by Barclay, who argues that the author’s interest is not in the human Jesus, but in the exalted victorious Christ as the rescuer of his people in the time of their distress.¹⁵⁵

The final destination of the male child’s mission in Rev. 12 is at God’s throne. The throne reference of 12:5 not only identifies the geographical location of the child’s ascension, but conveys the theological idea of establishing God’s ultimate rule over the whole of creation through his victory. Moreover, Christ’s close connection with the throne points to his rulership, his right to a legitimate occupation of the heavenly throne, though an enthronement is not directly stated in the text. While Aune suggests that the expression πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ may allude to Ps. 110:1,¹⁵⁶ this view cannot be sustained with certainty, because of the lack of substantial evidence. The reference to the heavenly throne also emphasizes God’s ultimate triumph in the context of the cosmic conflict, since Christ’s relation to the heavenly throne as the emblem of authority seems to be intentionally contrasted with the crowns of the dragon (12:3) that appear also as emblems of power, but inferior in comparison to the heavenly throne.¹⁵⁷

2.2.4. NEW CREATION

The divine throne is referred to four times in the context of new creation envisioned in chs. 21–22. The closely connected throne texts of 22:1, 3 will be given detailed attention later within the discussion of the Lamb’s throne.¹⁵⁸ The other two references are in 21:3, 5, which are similarly related contextually though they are different in nature. The reference in 21:3 serves to indicate

in the preceding chapters a series of pointers to which the vision of the parousia refers back’. Thus, the child in 12:5 who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron is snatched up to God, but in 19:15 he returns to take over the anticipated rule.

¹⁵⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 640. Beale argues for a close parallel of the description with *Odes* 22:1-6, which he considers one of the earliest interpretations of Rev. 12.

¹⁵⁵ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John* (2 vols.; The Daily Study Bible Series; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1976), II, 78; cf. Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 383.

¹⁵⁶ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 689.

¹⁵⁷ On the triumphal aspect in Rev. 12:5, see Robert W. Wall, *Revelation* (NIBCNT, 18; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 161; Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 66.

¹⁵⁸ See ch. 5 sec. 3.

the location of the great voice (φωνῆς μεγάλης ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου λεγούσης),¹⁵⁹ while that in 21:5 is the typical circumlocution formula for God (ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ). Both are part of the vision's 'thesis paragraph'¹⁶⁰ (21:1-8), which functions as a duo-directional passage: at the literal level it is the conclusion of the series of events that constitute the eschaton (19:11–21:8), while at the thematic level it introduces the final vision of the book.¹⁶¹ The section is focused on the theme of new creation, which is expanded further in two sub-sections describing the New Jerusalem in terms of eternal Holy of Holies (21:9-27) and new Eden (22:1-5).¹⁶²

The reference to the 'One sitting on the throne' in 21:5 introduces the climactic section of the 'thesis paragraph' in which the words of the executant of the new creation are recorded (21:5-8). In contrast to the other circumlocution texts, the unique characteristic of the throne's occupant in 21:5 is his speaking – a fact that gives a 'sense of added solemnity' to the passage.¹⁶³ God's speech is only twice directly discerned in the book of Revelation: the first speech in 1:8 is a brief self-disclosure only indirectly related to the throne, while the second in 21:5-8 is introduced with a circumlocution formula.¹⁶⁴ Both speeches will receive detailed attention below within the discussion of phenomena and actions emanating from the throne. For the purpose of our investigation it is enough to note here that the emphasis on the divine throne as the place from which God's speech is delivered has the effect of authentication of the certainty of new creation and more widely the reliability of the entire book of Revelation.¹⁶⁵ The statement of such significance is appropriately introduced by a reference to the circumlocution formula

¹⁵⁹ In place of θρόνου (attested in A κ 94 vg Irenaeus^{Lat} Ambrose Tyc³) some MSS witness οὐρανοῦ (025 046 051 Oecumenius²⁰⁵³ Andreas Byzantine it^{sig} syr^{ph} Tyc² Beatus). The context of 21:5 favours θρόνου, while the origin of οὐρανοῦ is possible to explain as a mechanical repetition of the phrase ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ in 21:2 (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 688; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1110).

¹⁶⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, 727.

¹⁶¹ Paulien, *Deep Things*, 119; Celia Deutsch, 'Transformation of Symbols: The New Jerusalem in Rv 21:1–22:5', *ZNW* 78 (1987), 106-26(109-11); Jan A. du Rand, 'The New Jerusalem as Pinnacle of Salvation: Text (21:1–22:5) and Intertext', *Neot* 38 (2004), 275-302(289).

¹⁶² Beale (*Revelation*, 1039) notes that in spite of the centrality of the new creation theme in the vision, the idea of judgment is not entirely absent (21:8, 27). The two themes are closely related, since 'for a new creation to come into being the old one must disappear or be destroyed' (Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 332). For this concept in Qumran literature, see 4QGrace after Meals [4Q434^a] fr. 1, 2-3; 4QTNaph [4Q215] fr. 4; 4QBer^b [4Q287] fr. 3, 2-4.

¹⁶³ Sung-Min Park, 'More than a Regained Eden: The New Jerusalem as the Ultimate Portrayal of Eschatological Blessedness and its Implication for the Understanding of the Book of Revelation' (PhD Dissertation; Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1995), 171; cf. Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 332.

¹⁶⁴ It has been argued the possibility that the great voice from the temple in 16:1, 17 is also God's voice, though it is not directly identified (e.g. Priegent, *Apocalypse*, 599). To the contrary, Beasley-Murray (*Revelation*, 312) regards 21:5-8 as the only speech of God in the entire book, while Austin Farrer (*The Revelation of St. John the Divine* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964], 212-13) argues that the same text is not an utterance by God heard by John, but rather a report of what God had formerly said.

¹⁶⁵ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 305; Osborne, *Revelation*, 736; Park, 'More than a Regained Eden', 171-85.

recalling the throne motif and pointing thus to God's sovereign authority, the guarantee of the realization of his plan.

2.3. THEOLOGICAL MEANING

In the formula 'the One sitting on the throne' two concepts, God and king, are merged into a single powerful rhetorical device which highlights the 'embodiment of absolute power'.¹⁶⁶ With the focus on the throne itself, avoiding description and naming of God, it is set forth the idea of the duration of his kingship and the safeguarding of his transcendence. The circumlocution presents an immobile and stable image of God, who is never dramatized as a figure actively involved in the course of events.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the idea conveyed by the formula is not passivity, but rather a high theocentricity. Johnson rightly notes that the theological purpose of the imagery lies in highlighting of God's control over the development of the affairs in Earth's history: 'Nothing happens, nothing exists in the past, present, or future apart from God's intention. Whatever authority is given ... is given by God.'¹⁶⁸ As it will be demonstrated in a detailed theological discussion in the last chapter of this dissertation, the strong theocentrism is of utmost importance for Revelation's theological perspective: the emphasis on God's sovereignty conveys a picture of reality which enlarges the 'reader's perspective on their own situation by setting it within the broader context of God's universal purpose of overcoming all opposition to his rule and establishing his kingdom in the world'.¹⁶⁹

The circumlocution reflects the reluctance of naming or describing God directly. There has been pointed out that by avoiding anthropomorphisms God's mysterious transcendence is accentuated, namely the impossibility of expressing his awesomeness. For this reason Raschke

¹⁶⁶ Stephen D. Moore, 'The Beatific Vision as a Posing Exhibition: Revelation's Hypermasculine Deity', *JSNT* 60 (1995), 27-52(32). Cyril T. Gadd (*Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient East* [London: Oxford University Press, 1948], 33) observes that 'God and king are two conceptions so nearly coupled in the oriental mind that the distinction is constantly blurred'.

¹⁶⁷ Moore ('Beatific Vision', 32) suggests that 'among contemporary cultural and subcultural spectacles, it is the bodybuilding posing routine that best encapsulates the surrealistic scenario that Revelation sets before us'. His argument is based on the 'static quality' of 'the One sitting on the throne': 'From his first to his last appearance in the book, he sits immobile and almost aphasic on his throne ... The typical posing routine is less a spectacle of motion than a succession of stills; the bodybuilder hits and holds a pose ... The God of Revelation is similarly engaged in a posing exhibition ... and his celestial audience cannot get enough of him.' While Moore's interpretation of the imagery as the 'embodiment of absolute power' is correct, his perception of God as a body builder is clearly shaped by a reader-response approach reflecting his subjectivity.

¹⁶⁸ Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation: The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 66.

¹⁶⁹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 31. See ch. 10 sec. 1.

cautions that naming God in finality and fullness equals the rousing of the beast.¹⁷⁰ Similarly Rotz and du Rand note: ‘God cannot be tamed, domesticated or analysed. The One who sits on the throne can best be described as jasper and sardius (4:3). The mystery remains, yet Revelation is just that: revelation.’¹⁷¹ This understanding is not contradictory to Moore’s observation that the book is not entirely free from anthropomorphisms, since in 5:1, 7 God’s right hand is mentioned.¹⁷² On the other hand, Boring goes a step further suggesting that avoiding to name God in chs. 4–5 is at least partially due to the book’s intention to emphasize the role of Jesus in God’s plan. He argues that John intentionally leaves ‘a blank center in the picture to be filled in by the figure of the Lamb’ affirming ‘that God is the one who defines himself by Christ’.¹⁷³ The weakness of this suggestion lies in a neglect to give appropriate attention to the Hebraic nature of the circumlocution formula which should not be pressed too far without grounding it on appropriate exegetical evidence. For this reason, more appropriate is to interpret the expression ‘the One sitting on the throne’ against the background of Old Testament throne visions rather than viewing it as an intentional device for emphasizing high Christology.

After the discussion of the description of God’s throne and the major characterization formula of its occupant I am turning now to the examination of the phenomena and actions that are related directly to the heavenly centre in the book of Revelation.

3. PHENOMENA/ACTIONS EMANATING FROM THE THRONE

While it has been pointed out above that God is silent almost throughout the entire book of Revelation and that, in light of the repetition of the circumlocution formula, an impression is generated that the divine throne appears as a static emblem of heavenly authority, still different phenomena and actions are recorded as emanating from the throne. It will be demonstrated on the following pages that these references are most often placed at strategically significant locations within the book as indicators of the decisiveness of the divine involvement. Three aspects of the dynamics of the heavenly throne will be discussed: (1) heavenly phenomena; (2)

¹⁷⁰ Carl L. Raschke, ‘The Image of the Beast, or Theology and the Thought of Difference’ in *New Dimensions in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Carl L. Raschke (Journal of the American Academy of Religion Studies, 49; Missoula, Mont.: American Academy of Religion, 1982), 109-27.

¹⁷¹ Carol J. Rotz and Jan A. du Rand, ‘The One Who Sits on the Throne: Towards a Theory of Theocentric Characterisation according to the Apocalypse of John’, *Neot* 33 (1999), 91-111(97).

¹⁷² Moore, ‘Beatific Vision’, 31.

¹⁷³ Boring, *Revelation*, 103.

speeches; and (3) unidentified voices. Finally, detailed attention will be given to the judgment scene in 20:11-15 as the major event related directly to God's throne.

3.1. LIGHTNING, VOICES, THUNDER

The divine throne in Revelation is a place where God's holiness and power are openly revealed. While significant attention is devoted in chs. 4–5 to the description of the throne's surroundings, at the same time heavenly phenomena are introduced as strongly evocative of the awe and mystery related to the divine θρόνος. The prepositions related to the throne are informative in this regard: κυκλόθεν (4:3, 4) and ἐνώπιον (4:5, 6, 10) focus on the surroundings of the throne and ἐν μέσῳ on its centre (4:6), while at the heart of the vision heavenly phenomena are pictured as emanating from the throne itself, as indicated by the use of ἐκ (ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου ἐκπορεύονται; 4:5).¹⁷⁴ Aune notes that until this point the vision is recorded in the past tense, but in 4:5 the description changes to the present indicative. The significance of the shift is in emphasizing the continuity of the phenomena emanating from the throne.¹⁷⁵

The content of the heavenly phenomena is threefold: ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί ('lightning, voices and thunder'; 4:5).¹⁷⁶ As noted by Holtz, the combined imagery generates the impression of might and stirs up fear with a sense of mystery.¹⁷⁷ It is generally acknowledged that these phenomena are linked to the traditional Old Testament theophanies which are often accompanied by lightning, noise and/or thunder.¹⁷⁸ The primary background of Revelation's imagery is in the Sinai theophany. Rowland suggests that specifically Exod. 19:16 'provided material which could form the basis of the belief in the fiery elements which proceed from God's

¹⁷⁴ It has been noted that Giblin is the proponent of the chiasmic arrangement of Rev. 4 viewing the theophanic manifestation of 4:5-6 at the focal point of the structure (see ch. 4 sec. 1.1 n. 14). Osborne (*Revelation*, 230) shares Giblin's view on the centrality of 4:5-6, although he does not explicitly hold a chiasmic arrangement. For a discussion, see ch. 4 sec. 1.1 n. 13.

¹⁷⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 293-94.

¹⁷⁶ It has been suggested the possibility of translating φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί as 'peals of thunder', a single event instead of two (Bratcher, *Handbook on the Revelation*, 90). The weakness of this view lies in the fact that the intended combination of the two phenomena is in Revelation expressed by the formula φωνῆ βροντῆς without the conjunction of coordination (6:1; 14:2; 19:6).

¹⁷⁷ Traugott Holtz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD, 11; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 56.

¹⁷⁸ Lupieri (*Apocalypse*, 135) argues that the heavenly phenomena 'must be angels'. However, this view fails to take seriously the divine throne itself as the source of the phenomena. On the Old Testament theophanies, see e.g. Jörg Jeremias, *Theophanie: die Geschichte einer alttestamentlichen Gattung* (WMANT, 10; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1965); George W. Savran, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative* (JSOTSup, 420; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005).

immediate presence'.¹⁷⁹ At the same time it seems that the author is influenced also by the chariot vision of Ezekiel. Since this well-known *merkabah* scene forms the most prominent background to Rev. 4, it is not surprising to discover that the heavenly phenomena recorded in 4:5 show affinity with the imagery in Ezek. 1:13.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, Morton has provided a whole impressive list of other possible sources from Old Testament and early Jewish apocalyptic thought.¹⁸¹ Even so, it seems most appropriate to view these texts as the result of the formative influence of the Sinai theophany.¹⁸²

The theological meaning of the threefold heavenly phenomena emanating from the throne in 4:5 is to be understood in the context of the other related references in Revelation. Namely, the formula appears three more times in progressively expanding versions located at critical junctures in the development of Revelation's story-line. Bauckham convincingly argues that the progress is a deliberate stylistic device which is evident once the following four texts are compared:

4:5: ἄστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί

8:5: βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἄστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός

11:19: ἄστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη

16:18-21: ἄστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός ... μέγας ... καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη

As suggested by Bauckham, all four references are built on Sinai theophany and they are closely related to the heavenly temple.¹⁸³ However, a significant difference is that in 4:5 the theophany is limited exclusively to the context of the throne room, while in the other three texts it is related to

¹⁷⁹ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 221-22. While two of the three phenomena of Rev. 4:5 show verbal parallels with Exod. 19:16 (ἄστραπαί and φωναί), the third parallel is only on a thematic level (βρονταί and φωνή ... μέγας).

¹⁸⁰ While the only verbal parallel is ἀστραπή/ἄστραπαί, the moving fiery element of Ezek. 1:13 is strongly reminiscent of Rev. 4:5.

¹⁸¹ Morton's (*One upon the Throne*, 93) list of parallels includes texts such as Ps. 18:6-15; 29; Dan. 7:10; *IEn.* 14:19; 59:1-3; 60:1-4; 4Q405. He refers to the works of Lohmeyer, Rowland and Gruenwald as the sources of some of these suggestions.

¹⁸² For this view, see also Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 115; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 349; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 294.

¹⁸³ Bauckham, *Climax*, 202. This view is somewhat criticized by Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 295), who holds that the conscious influence of the Sinai tradition is exaggerated. He calls our attention to Est. 1:1d-e, where a similar list of four disturbances is found as part of a dream in which violence against the Jews is anticipated. He also points to the Graeco-Roman background of the thunderbolt which was closely associated with Zeus and Jupiter and, as attested by numismatic evidence, it was consequently used by several Roman emperors including Domitian (*BMC* 2:381, no. 381; 389, no. 410; 399, no. 443) and Trajan (*BMC* 3:174, no. 825; 190, no. 899). This view is further developed by Morton (*One upon the Throne*, 93-94), who argues for a conscious influence of this tradition on the theophanic references of Revelation under discussion. While I hold that the emperor cults form a significant political background to the argument of the book of Revelation as a whole (see ch. 9), this connection concerning the atmospheric-seismic phenomena seems exaggerated.

the earth. The difference concerning the sphere of the phenomena's manifestation is indicated by the addition of the earthquake motif (σεισμός) as the fourth element of the formula in the last three occurrences, which would be inappropriate in the heavenly context.¹⁸⁴ These references are connected to the visions of judgment that appear with increasing severity throughout the book as indicated by the progressive expansion of the formula. Their connection to the primary reference of 4:5 points to God as the source of these judgments. Bauckham rightly concludes: 'The progressive expansion of the formula corresponds to the progressive intensification of the three series of judgments. In this way the whole course of the judgments is depicted as the manifestation of the same divine holiness which is revealed in the theophany in heaven in 4:5.'¹⁸⁵

It has been convincingly argued that the repetition of the theophanic formula reflects a pastoral purpose. As noted by Beale, it assures the suffering community that the One from whose throne the phenomena emanate 'has not forgotten them because he has not forgotten their persecutors, whom he will surely judge'.¹⁸⁶ Thus, the manifestation of the divine holiness in 4:5 anchors the later judgment series in God's throne as their source and interprets them as the 'fanfare for the testimony of God's triumph'.¹⁸⁷ I would like to suggest that God's sovereign kingship is brought to the attention additionally by relating all four theophanic texts directly to God's throne: (1) in 4:5 it emanates immediately from the heavenly throne (ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου ἐκπορεύονται); (2) in 8:5 it comes as the consequence of throwing a censer to the earth which is filled with fire from the altar standing in front of the throne (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου; 8:3); (3) in 11:19 it is related to the ark of the covenant, the cultic symbol of God's throne in the Old Testament (ὡφθη ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης ... καὶ ἐγένοντο); and (4) in 16:18-21 it is the result of the declaration of a loud voice coming out of the temple, more specifically from the throne (ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου; 16:17).

¹⁸⁴ For the function of the earthquake as apocalyptic imagery in the Old Testament and apocalyptic literature, see Bauckham, *Climax*, 199-202. It has been aptly noted that the imagery had a great rhetorical power as employed in the first-century C.E. Asian context not only because the Graeco-Roman world took earthquakes seriously as signs of divine displeasure, but because of the devastating earthquakes of the first century in Asia Minor (James S. Murray, 'The Urban Earthquake Imagery and Divine Judgement in John's Apocalypse', *NovT* 47 [2005], 142-61).

¹⁸⁵ Bauckham, *Theology*, 42.

¹⁸⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 326.

¹⁸⁷ Wall, *Revelation*, 93.

3.2. SPEECHES FROM THE THRONE

While all the judgments of Revelation are seen as coming from the presence of ‘the One sitting on the throne’, God is generally silent in the book. His speaking is limited to only two contexts in the entire work (1:8; 21:5-8). Since both divine speeches are connected to the divine throne as the place of utterance, they will be examined here.

3.2.1. FIRST SPEECH (1:8)

God’s first speech in Revelation appears in the final statement of the prologue (1:1-8). Following the foreword (1:1-3), epistolary greetings (1:4-5a) and a doxology (1:5b-6) the prologue ends with a two-partite thematic motto (1:7-8) which introduces the basic apocalyptic perspective of the book.¹⁸⁸ The first statement of the motto is given in a style of prophetic annunciation (1:8), while in the second statement God himself gives a brief self-revelation. His words are a fitting climax of the prologue (1:8), since they point to the identity of the originator of the book of Revelation and they thus bring back the readers to the opening statement of the book (1:1).¹⁸⁹ God’s speaking in the prologue is of critical theological significance, since his short self-declaration appears as the first recorded speech of any character in the book.¹⁹⁰ The fact that God speaks before anybody and before anything is disclosed highlights his privileged position, worthy of undivided attention. As Resseguie rightly notes, this theocentric speech provides ‘theological context for all that follows’ in the book.¹⁹¹

The theme of God’s speech in 1:8 is his own divine nature, as indicated by the presence of the Johannine ἐγὼ εἰμι formula (ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ).¹⁹² It has been convincingly argued that the reference to the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet functions as a

¹⁸⁸ The two parts of the thematic motto are theologically closely connected, since God’s self-declaration in 1:8 provides the basis for the consummation of the history declared in 1:7. Beale (*Revelation*, 199) rightly notes that such ‘confident assertion’ must be rooted in the divine attribute of omnipotence.

¹⁸⁹ Smalley, *Revelation*, 38.

¹⁹⁰ As Meredith G. Kline (*Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1963], 14) demonstrates, the self-identification of the covenant Lord at the opening of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:2) and the ANE treaties reveal a similar pattern of self-declaration.

¹⁹¹ James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John’s Apocalypse* (BibIS, 32; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 106.

¹⁹² In several witnesses ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος (⋈* fam 1611^{1854 2050 2329} 2351 Andreas it^{gig h} vg cop^{bo} Beatus) or ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος (fam 1611²³²⁹ cop^{bo}) is inserted after the τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ self-declaration. Metzger (*A Textual Commentary*, 663) convincingly argues that these longer variants are scribal insertions, since ‘if the longer text were original no good reason can be found to account for the shorter text, whereas the presence of the longer expression in 21:6 obviously prompted some copyists to expand the text here’.

merism¹⁹³ which is supplemented by additional merisms in two other places in the book, where the original self-declaration re-appears.¹⁹⁴ The meaning of this word-play is illuminated by its Old Testament background in Isa. 41–48, where God is portrayed in the context of a polemic against the idols of Babylon in a similar fashion as the only Creator and sovereign Lord of history.¹⁹⁵ The Jewish alphabet symbolism throws additional light on the merism of Rev. 1:8: the Hebrew אמת ('truth') has been understood as a way of designating God as the beginning, middle and end, since א is the first, מ the middle and ת the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet.¹⁹⁶ Against these backgrounds, the 'Alpha–Omega' merism of Revelation appears as stressing the sovereignty of God, who controls the beginning as well as the end and everything in between.¹⁹⁷ Farrer goes a step further, arguing that ΙΑΩ, the rendering of 'I am the Alpha and the Omega', functions as the Greek form of the יהוה tetragrammaton.¹⁹⁸ This forced hypothesis has been convincingly refuted by Aune, who turns our attention rather to the background of the merism in magical papyri, in which ΑΩ designates abbreviation of a divine name.¹⁹⁹ In spite of Aune's suggestion, which merits a closer examination in another study, I align myself rather with Beale, who grounds the interpretation primarily in the Old Testament, noting that if Aune's suggestion is on the mind of the author, it would be only in combination with the Old Testament background.²⁰⁰

The 'Alpha–Omega' self-designation in 1:8 is clearly attributed to God, who is qualified by three divine names in the same verse: (1) κύριος ὁ θεός,²⁰¹ (2) ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος²⁰² and (3) ὁ παντοκράτωρ.²⁰³ Bauckham rightly considers these three titles as

¹⁹³ Merism is a figure of speech which expresses totality by reference to polar opposites.

¹⁹⁴ On the progression in the development of the title τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ in Revelation and its Christological significance, see Bauckham, *Theology*, 54–58.

¹⁹⁵ Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12. For the discussion of the question of translation, see W.J.P. Boyd, "I am Alpha and Omega" (Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), *SE* 4 (1964), 526–31.

¹⁹⁶ For the idea in Jewish literature that the first and the last letter of the alphabet denotes the whole extent of a thing, see Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* (4 vols.; München: Beck, 1922–1961), III, 789.

¹⁹⁷ For this understanding in the early Christian interpreters, see Tertullian, *ACW* 13.78–79; Jerome, *Ag. Jov.* 1.18, *NPNF* 2.6.360; Oecumenius, *Com. Apoc.*, *TEG* 8.268.

¹⁹⁸ Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Westminster: Dacre, 1949), 263–68.

¹⁹⁹ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 57–59; Idem., *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity: Collected Essays* (WUNT, 199; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 361–64.

²⁰⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 200. In contrast, Aune (*Revelation 1–5*, 59) gives the advantage to Hellenistic revelatory magic as the primary source of the divine title.

²⁰¹ Rev. 1:8; 4:8, 11; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 18:8; 19:6; 21:22; 22:5–6.

²⁰² The full version of the title appears three times in the book (1:4, 8; 4:8), while it is twice shortened to contain only two elements: ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν (11:17; 16:5).

belonging among the four most important designations for God in the entire book, together with ‘the One sitting on the throne’.²⁰⁴ The appearance of these key titles within a single verse underscores the strategic significance of the text. The concentrated package at the climax of the prologue serves the purpose of projecting a basic theological outlook for the entire book. Namely, in the focus of Revelation is the notion of God’s supremacy and absolute lordship over the created order, which is manifested in his overseeing all the affairs of human history and directing them towards their ultimate end. The self-declaration of 1:8 discloses and the unfolding of the events in the rest of the book confirms an understanding of God as ‘the source and the fulfilment of all things ... however distant and hidden ... still one who breaks into human experience in unexpected and surprising ways’.²⁰⁵

The throne motif is indirectly related to God’s speech in 1:8. The location from which the divine self-declaration is given is not specified in the verse itself. However, in the same context of the prologue, in the salutary part, God is directly related to the throne which is qualified as ‘his throne’ (1:4). The key for the identification of the speaker in 1:8 with the occupant of the throne in 1:4 is the shared divine title ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος which appears verbatim in both verses.²⁰⁶ While God’s sitting on his throne is only presupposed in the prologue and there is no direct statement about this, the value of my suggestion that a close theological relation exists between the meaning conveyed by the motif of throne and the content of the first divine speech in Revelation is in no way diminished by this fact. While God’s self-revelatory statement strongly stresses the notion of divine sovereignty, the connection with the throne symbolism provides additional theological force to this central idea which remains the focus of the author’s attention until the end of the book.

²⁰³ Rev. 16:14; 19:15. The longer version of the title is ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος which appears seven times in the book: 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22.

²⁰⁴ For a detailed study of these titles, see Bauckham, *Theology*, 25-35.

²⁰⁵ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse* (New Testament Message, 22; Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1979), 8-9.

²⁰⁶ Leonard L. Thompson (*Revelation* [ANTC; Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon, 1998], 52) notes that the repetition of the divine title ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος in 1:4 and 1:8 exemplifies a ring composition, an envelope pattern, in which ‘a word or phrase is repeated at the beginning and at the end of a unit and thus forms a ring around the block of text’. This literary technique is the key for identification of the divine speaker in 1:8. For a detailed discussion of the meaning of this *Dreizeitenformel* in Revelation, see Sean M. McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos* (WUNT 2/107; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 195-231.

3.2.2. SECOND SPEECH (21:5-8)

God's second speech in Revelation is located at the climactic part of the 'thesis paragraph' of the new creation vision (21:5-8).²⁰⁷ It has been rightly noted concerning the significance of this passage that together with the speech of the unidentified voice from the throne in 21:3-4 it 'captures in a nutshell the meaning of the entire Book of Revelation'.²⁰⁸ While God's second speech in the book is considerably longer than the first, the almost verbatim reappearance of the self-declaration from 1:8 in 21:6 indicates a close connection.²⁰⁹ The original formula is, however, supplemented here by an additional title ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος ('the beginning and the end'), which function lies in the interpretation of the original divine self-declaration.²¹⁰

The content of God's second speech in Revelation has not received the attention it deserves in previous studies. While the division of 21:5-8 into seven strophic statements has rightly been noted,²¹¹ the significance of the fact that the ἐγὼ τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ self-declaration is the middle statement of the entire speech has remained unnoticed. I suggest that an investigation of the relationship between the particular statements of the divine speech reveals the possibility of a 'sandwich-chiasm'. By a 'sandwich-chiasm' I mean joining two minor chiasms into a larger structure with a central statement sandwiched at the middle:

A 21:5a – the promise of the new creation (ἰδοὺ καινὰ ποιῶ πάντα)

B 21:5b – the trustworthiness of the divine promise (οἱ λόγοι πιστοί...)

A' 21:6a – the accomplishment of the new creation (γέγοναν)

C 21:6b – the guarantee of the new creation (ἄλφα ... ὦ, ἡ ἀρχὴ ... τὸ τέλος)

A 21:6c – the new creation as a reward (ἐγὼ τῷ διψῶντι δώσω ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς...)

B 21:7 – the climax of the divine promise (ὁ νικῶν κληρονομήσει ταῦτα...)

A' 21:8 – the new creation as a punishment (τοῖς δὲ δειλοῖς...)

²⁰⁷ See sec. 2.2.4.

²⁰⁸ Michaels, *Revelation*, 235.

²⁰⁹ As Aune (*Revelation 17–22*, 1112) notes, three variants appear in the reading of this text: (1) ἐγὼ εἰμι (A fam 1006 Andr 1 n); (2) the omission of εἰμί (x 025 046 051 fan 1611^{1611 1854 2050 2329} Andreas); and (3) the omission of ἐγὼ εἰμι (Andr a b c d f²⁰²³ 94 Byzantine). His argument in favour of the second reading is the most persuasive, since 'the pronoun ἐγὼ frequently occurs when εἰμί is omitted'.

²¹⁰ Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Publishing, 2001), 306; Smalley, *Revelation*, 541. The similar ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος title is attributed to Christ in 1:17 and 2:8.

²¹¹ See Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1114; Smalley, *Revelation*, 533-34. Whereas the number seven is intentional concerning the division here, similarly to the seven beatitudes scattered throughout the book, there has also been suggested a less convincing six-part division of the section (Osborne, *Revelation*, 728).

I would like to suggest that the aim of this ‘sandwich-chiasm’ is the emphasis on the ‘Alpha–Omega’ statement at the focal point of the structure.²¹² Even if this proposal remains at the level of possibility regarding the author’s intention, in a wider sense a simpler chiasm of an ABA’ pattern is certainly justified, since the first part of the structure points to the divine side of the new creation promise, whereas in the second part the attention is shifted to humanity’s destiny in the face of this climactic event. The groups of statements on both sides of the chiasm are related to the actions or commands of God, but the focal statement centres on God’s character as the sovereign Lord of history, the originating cause from whom the eschatological new creation emanates.²¹³

The throne reference is not marginal in God’s second speech in Revelation. Contrary to the brief self-disclosure in 1:8, the longer speech of 21:5-8 is introduced by a formula that directly identifies the speaker by the circumlocution formula related to the throne (καὶ εἶπεν ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ). Besides the throne-related introductory statement two shorter remarks precede the second (καὶ λέγει; 21:5)²¹⁴ and third statement (καὶ εἶπέν μοι; 21:6) of the divine speech. However, they are without particular significance, as they point back to the speaker introduced in 21:5 referring in this way to his authority. The reference to the divine throne at the beginning of the divine speech of 21:5-8 is motivated by a clear intention on the author’s part. It has been convincingly argued that God’s speech in 21:5-8 has the effect of divine authentication not only of the new creation’s certainty, but more broadly of the entire book.²¹⁵ A reference to God by a circumlocution related to the throne is an appropriate introduction for the authentication as it directs the attention to God’s sovereign authority, the guarantee of the realization of his plan.

The theological significance of the relation between God’s two speeches in Revelation has often been pointed out.²¹⁶ The ‘Alpha–Omega’ self-declaration near both the beginning and

²¹² As an alternative view, the first statement of the speech (21:5a) has been considered the centrepiece of 21:5-8 in Roloff, *Revelation*, 237; du Rand, ‘New Jerusalem’, 290. This approach, however, fails to notice a deeper structure of the passage.

²¹³ The meaning of ἀρχή (21:6) is besides ‘origin’, ‘source’, ‘ruler’ also ‘an initial cause’ (*LN* §89.16).

²¹⁴ Several MSS contain the longer reading καὶ λέγει μοι (8 025 051 fam 1006¹⁰⁰⁶ 1841 fam 1611²⁰⁵⁰ Andreas it^a vg syr^{ph} cop^{sa bo} arm eth), but the shorter reading is preferable (*TCGNT*, 764-65; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1111).

²¹⁵ E.g. Charles, *Revelation*, II, 212; Priegent, *Apocalypse*, 600; Wall, *Revelation*, 247; Osborne, *Revelation*, 736. The fact that God himself commissions John to write (γράψον) in 21:5, rather than Christ (1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) or a heavenly being, highlights that the emphasized idea is of fundamental importance.

²¹⁶ See e.g. Bauckham, *Theology*, 27; Metzger, *Code*, 99; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 579; Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 413; Park, ‘More than a Regained Eden’, 171; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 106.

the end of the book (1:8; 21:6) reveals purposiveness on part of the author. It not only forms an *inclusio* around the work, but frames also its theological message. Yarbrow Collins rightly notes the appropriateness of such a literary strategy, which ‘implies that all things in time and space are part of divine providence’.²¹⁷ Beale similarly excludes the possibility of coincidence, arguing that the two opposites underscore God’s absolute control over the totality of the events portrayed between 1:8 and 21:6.²¹⁸ Thus, the ‘Alpha–Omega’ statement functions as ‘a succinct proclamation of the theocracy’,²¹⁹ since ‘the One sitting on the throne’ has the first and the last word in the book, as his purpose is coming to be fulfilled both in the advancement of history (1:8) and in the new creation at eschaton (21:5-8).

3.3. VOICES FROM THE THRONE

Though the auditory aspect of Revelation has been often called to our attention, analysis of the voices appearing in the book has not attracted a considerable amount of scholarly interest.²²⁰ The most profound investigation has been done by Boring, who identified one hundred and forty-one speech units around which quotation marks can be put.²²¹ The variety of voices is great. Not only are divine voices heard, but also voices of heavenly beings and earthly characters participating in the drama of Revelation. Though even the voices of animals and an altar, and the seven thunders are recorded, significantly God’s archenemies, such as the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, Babylon and the prostitute, never speak in the book. Boring convincingly explains their muteness against the background of Jewish polemic contra idols, who in ‘contrast to YHWH the only God ... show that they are no gods in that they are unable to speak’.²²²

One of the largest groups among the many speech units in Revelation is that which includes voices that are not clearly identified.²²³ The identity of these anonymous voices has

²¹⁷ Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 145.

²¹⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 1055.

²¹⁹ Ford, *Revelation*, 367.

²²⁰ For a review of the research on the topic, see M. Eugene Boring, ‘The Voice of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John’, *NovT* 34 (1992), 334-59(334 n. 2).

²²¹ The issue is, however, more complex, as noted by Boring (‘Voice’, 335): ‘The text of Revelation can be thought of as several layers of quotation marks, hierarchically arranged.’ More specifically, Boring notes three layers of speakers: the lector, the written text and John himself as the author. He demonstrates that these layers often overlap with the voice of Jesus as the source of the book (1:1) to such extent that they cannot be clearly separated.

²²² Boring, ‘Voice’, 337-38. On the muteness of the idols, see Ps. 115:5; 135:16; Jer. 10:5; Hab. 2:18-19; *3Macc.* 4:16; cf. 1Cor. 12:2.

²²³ According to Boring’s classification the following texts belong to this group: 4:1; 6:6; 7:4; 9:4; 9:13-14; 10:4; 10:8; 10:9b; 11:12-13; 12:10; 14:2; 16:1; 16:17; 18:4-20; 18:9-10a; 18:10b; 18:11-13; 18:14; 18:15; 18:16-17a; 18:17b-18a; 18:18b; 18:19a; 18:19b-20; 19:5; 19:6-8; 21:3. Only the angels speak more often in the book (thirty-two

attracted some scholarly interest. Charlesworth has suggested on the basis of the apocalyptic literature that Jews (at least some religious ones) believed before 100 C.E. in the existence of the voice of God hypostasized as an independent celestial figure. In his study on the topic he argues with particular reference to the identity of the φωνή in Rev. 1:12 that ‘the author of the Apocalypse ... took the Jewish concept of the Voice and baptized it ... placing it in a context with clearly Christian phrases, terms and titles like the Son of Man and the slain Lamb’.²²⁴ For the purpose of our study it is significant to note that φωνή appears in three different contexts in Revelation as related to the heavenly throne. In all three texts the voice is unidentified, but in 16:17 and 21:3 it is a ‘great voice’ (φωνή μεγάλη), while in 19:5 it is without further qualifications.²²⁵ An additional difference between these references is that in 16:17 and 19:5 the relation of the unidentified voice to the throne is determined by the preposition ἀπό (ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου), while in 21:3 by ἐκ (ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου). In spite of the different prepositions, there is no discernible difference in meaning between the two expressions.²²⁶ As will become evident in the short discussion below, Charlesworth’s hypothesis concerning the identity of the ‘voice’ is not supported in the three mentioned throne texts of Revelation.

In 16:17 the ‘great voice’ announces the eschaton within the climactic seventh bowl plague. The location from which the voice emanates is clearly specified by the reference to the heavenly temple and more specifically the throne located in it (ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου). In spite of the lack of the precise identification of the voice as God’s, the cumulative force of the evidence suggests that the speaker is a divine being.²²⁷ First, it is hardly possible that within the unique context in which the heavenly temple and the throne are juxtaposed the announcement of the completion of the divine plan (γέγονεν; ‘it is done’) would come from anyone other than the

references). For a comprehensive list of different voices in Revelation, see Boring, ‘Voice’, 357-59. For the background of the unidentified revelatory voices in the Old Testament, Jewish literature and Graeco-Roman sources, see Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 561-62.

²²⁴ Charlesworth, ‘Discovery of the Hypostatic Voice’, 38.

²²⁵ φωνή μεγάλη is also applied to different characters in Revelation: angels (5:2, 12; 7:2; 10:3; 14:7, 9, 15, 18; 19:17; 18:2[φωνή ἰσχυρά]), the souls under the altar (6:10), the great multitude (7:10) and the eagle (8:13). The same expression often appears in a heavenly context without the specification of the speaker (11:12, 15; 12:10; 16:17).

²²⁶ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1027.

²²⁷ ⚭ identifies the voice explicitly as God’s, but it omits the reference to the throne, replacing ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου by ναοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. The same omission is attested also in 051 in which this phrase is substituted by ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. In spite of these witnesses there is no compelling reason for questioning the validity of the throne reference in the text. In 2027 pc the throne is qualified as θρόνου θεοῦ; however this reading is not supported by further manuscripts, therefore it is unlikely.

sovereign Lord of history.²²⁸ Second, at the beginning of the same vision the ‘great voice’ is indirectly identified as God’s, since in 16:1 it is stated that it is coming out of the temple and only God is said to be in the heavenly *ναός* in 15:8. On the basis of the evidence it can be concluded that God must be the speaker in both texts. Third, the voice coming out of the temple is an allusion to Isa. 66:6 in which the identity of the speaker is clarified by a parallel phrase ‘a voice from the temple, the voice from the Lord repaying his enemies all they deserve’.²²⁹ Thus, the voice coming from the throne in Rev. 16:17 is clearly a divine voice, though it is difficult to explicitly determine whether God’s or Christ’s voice is in view here.

The identity of the *φωνή ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου* in 19:5 is a more complex question.²³⁰ The voice invites within a heavenly praise scene over the fall of Babylon all the servants of God, who fear him to praise ‘our God’ (*αἰνεῖτε τὸν θεὸν ἡμῶν*). Scholarly opinion is sharply divided over the identity of the speaker, since the reference to God as *θεός ἡμῶν* within the context of a call to worship seems to exclude God as the speaker. For this reason the voice from the throne has been attributed to the one of the four cherubim or the twenty-four elders,²³¹ while Christ²³² or an angel of the throne²³³ have been also viewed as the speakers. Even the fading of several voices into a single voice has been suggested.²³⁴ In the absence of a convincing argument there is no satisfactory answer to this question. As Aune notes, it seems the safest to conclude only that ‘the

²²⁸ The exclamation *γέγονεν* appears twice in Revelation – both references are connected to the divine throne. In 16:17 it expresses the completion of the divine plan concerning the judgment of evil forces, whereas in 21:6 it points to the new creation as the climactic completion of the divine plan of redemption.

²²⁹ Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 679; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 465; Morris, *Revelation*, 186; Beale, *Revelation*, 812; Traugott Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes* (TUGAL, 85; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1971), 132.

²³⁰ In 046 Primasius *θρόνου* is substituted to *οὐρανοῦ*. These witnesses, however, do not provide a compelling reason for omitting the throne reference from 19:5.

²³¹ Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 721; Charles, *Revelation*, II, 124; Kiddle, *Revelation*, 378; Mounce, *Revelation*, 338.

²³² Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 5th edn, 1906), 427; Chilton, *Vengeance*, 472-73.

²³³ Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 243.

²³⁴ This view is advocated by Boring (‘Voice’, 352), who holds that the anonymous voice, the voice of the Lamb, and John’s own voice are inseparable in 19:5. It seems that it is more appropriate to speak of the Lamb’s voice only generally such as when considering the book of Revelation as a whole the expression of his voice (1:1). The Lamb himself does not appear in the vision of 19:1-10, though his wedding (*ὁ γάμος τοῦ ἀρνίου*) is mentioned twice (19:7, 9).

phrase “from the throne” at the very least indicates the divine authorization of the speaker’.²³⁵ Thus, the voice functions as ‘God’s authorized spokesman’ in spite of the ambiguous identity.²³⁶

The last reference in Revelation to the unidentified voice occurs in 21:3 within an introductory statement preceding the announcement which is considered programmatic for the New Jerusalem vision.²³⁷ The statement specifies that the announcement is given in a great voice from the throne (φωνή μεγάλη ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου).²³⁸ Though the identity of the speaker is unclear, it seems that the voice cannot be God’s, since he is referred to in the third person within the announcement (21:3-4).²³⁹ Nevertheless, Beale ascribes the voice directly to God, explaining that the announcement might be seen as expressing God’s ‘own reflections on Old Testament prophecy as he sees it being fulfilled’.²⁴⁰ The weakness of this suggestion lies in the lack of conformity to the pattern of God’s two clearly outlined speeches in which he is directly specified as the speaker, speaking in the first person (1:8; 21:5-8). There is no logical reason to suppose a change to this pattern on the basis of an anonymous voice speaking in the third person about God within a larger passage in which ‘the One sitting on the throne’ is already clearly pictured as speaking (21:1-8). Still, this interpretation of the anonymous voice does not discount its divine authority, just as in 19:5.

3.4. THE THRONE AS THE CENTRE OF HEAVENLY JUDGMENT (20:11-15)

The theme of judgment runs throughout Revelation²⁴¹ reaching its climax in ch. 20, the section entitled ‘judgment finale’ by Strand.²⁴² This notoriously difficult chapter provides the most

²³⁵ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1027; cf. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation: A Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 197; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / John Knox Press, 2009), 343.

²³⁶ Priegent, *Apocalypse*, 522. Though Priegent is right in this observation, he supports Marc Philonenko’s (‘Une voix sortit du Trône qui disait ...’, *RHPR* 79 [1999], 83-89) hypothesis, who quotes several texts of the *hekhalot* literature arguing that the voice in 19:5 is that of the throne of God itself. Since this idea is based on later sources and is completely alien to biblical literature, it is highly speculative.

²³⁷ As Bauckham (*Climax*, 311) notes, the announcement reflects the ‘combination of the language of God’s commitment to his covenant people with the most universalistic reference to all humanity’.

²³⁸ The variant οὐρανοῦ replaces θρόνου in 025 046 051 Oecumenius²⁰⁵³ Andreas Byzantine it^{gig} syr^{ph} Tyc² Beatus. Aune (*Revelation 17–22*, 1110) persuasively argues that the context favours θρόνου, while οὐρανοῦ may be explained as a mechanical repetition of ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ in 21:2.

²³⁹ The commentators most often hesitate to identify the speaker, though the following suggestions have been advanced: cherubim (Swete, *Apocalypse*, 274; Charles, *Revelation*, II, 205; Beale, *Revelation*, 1046), the Lamb (Giblin, *Revelation*, 194; Farmer, *Revelation*, 135) or God (Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 556).

²⁴⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 1046.

²⁴¹ See e.g. Rev. 6:10-11; 6:12-17; 11:18; 14:7; 14:14-20; 16:1-21; 18:6-24.

²⁴² Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines, with Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis* (Worthington, Ohio: Ann Arbor, 1976), 52.

complete discussion of the theme in the book, divided into three sections by the structuring formula *καὶ εἶδον*.²⁴³ Two of these sections begin with a focus on the throne motif, since *θρόνος* references introduce these different judgment scenes (20:4, 11). I will deal here only with the motif in 20:11-15, since a divine throne is clearly in view in this vision; 20:4 refers to thrones other than God's throne and for this reason they will be discussed later, in the relevant section.²⁴⁴

The vision of 20:11-15 is 'a scene of universal accountability',²⁴⁵ which portrays the final judgment and the eradication of sin with its consequences from the earth.²⁴⁶ The passage may be divided into two sub-sections, both introduced by *καὶ εἶδον*. The vision is opened by a theophanic throne scene with a brief description of the reaction of nature (20:11) followed by a judgment scene including the execution of the verdict (20:12-15). While *θρόνος* is mentioned only twice in these texts (20:11, 12), the scene is entirely dominated by the motif: it is opened by the vision of a 'great white throne' (*θρόνος μέγας λευκός*) and everything is pictured as happening in front of this central object (20:12). The throne appears in the scene as the 'single focus of the universe'²⁴⁷ and its vision functions as 'the presupposition of all that happens'.²⁴⁸

There is a major difference between the throne reference of 20:11 and the other throne texts of the book. The throne is qualified here with the adjectives *μέγας* ('large') and *λευκός* ('white') – a description without exact parallels.²⁴⁹ The tradition of the thrones of enormous proportion is well known. Canaanite tradition regarded that gods such as Baal are extremely large, and therefore possess palaces and thrones of colossal dimensions.²⁵⁰ While the immensity

²⁴³ While the *καὶ εἶδον* formula occurs four times in Rev. 20 (20:1, 4, 11, 12), it introduces only three major blocks: (1) the imprisonment of Satan in 20:1-3; (2) the millennial judgment with the eschatological conflict in 20:4-10; and (3) the final judgment scene of 20:11-15. Ekkehardt Müller ('Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 20', *AUSS* 37 [1999], 227-55[228]) is more cautious, stating that the four occurrences indicate 'at least three major blocks of material in Rev. 20'.

²⁴⁴ See ch. 6 sec. 3.

²⁴⁵ Williamson, 'Thrones', 112.

²⁴⁶ William H. Shea ('Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20', *AUSS* 23 [1985], 37-54[49]) convincingly argues that the entire scene chronologically belongs between 20:9a and 20:9b. The rationale for presentation of the vision after the ultimate end in 20:10 lies in projecting a new viewpoint which emphasizes the irreversibility, the 'eschatological and definitive nature of the event' (Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 577). For a review of contrasting views that try to justify the rearrangement of chs. 20–22, see James T.H. Adamson, 'The Concept of the Millennium in Revelation 20:1-10: Its Origin and Meaning' (PhD Dissertation; University of Ottawa, 1990), 139f.

²⁴⁷ David J. MacLeod, 'The Sixth "Last Thing": The Last Judgment and the End of the World', *BSac* 157 (2000), 315-30(319).

²⁴⁸ J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* (JSNTSup, 70; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 143.

²⁴⁹ Differently from Rev. 20:11, in several texts the occupant of the throne is portrayed in white clothing (Dan. 7:9; *1En.* 14:18-21; *3En.* 28:6-7), while in *1En.* 18:8-16 God's throne is of alabaster.

²⁵⁰ Jonas C. Greenfield, '

of Yahweh's heavenly throne is not generally emphasized in the Old Testament, the description as 'high and lifted up' in Isa. 6:1 suggests a tradition to which the author of Revelation may have referred to in 20:11.²⁵¹ The idea of Yahweh's enormous heavenly throne appears also in *Ezek. Exag.* 68–69 and *4Ezra* 8:21. Still, the closest parallel to the Rev. 20:11 description is found in the vision of the 'large white chair' (καθέδρα λευκή ... μεγάλη) in Hermas (*Vis.* 1.2.2). While the adjective μέγας is frequent in Revelation, the greatness of God's throne in 20:11 does not show affinity with any earlier context in the book.²⁵² This uniquely employed attribute points to the grandeur of God's authority, but also to the greatness of the occasion, since the final evaluation of humanity is taking place in the scene.²⁵³

The meaning of the great throne's white colour in 20:11 is more ambiguous. Scholarly opinion is sharply divided over the question. Prigent rightly warns of the danger of inventing meaning by 'guesswork',²⁵⁴ since the white colour in this context evokes the notion of mercy for Allo,²⁵⁵ purity for Swete,²⁵⁶ equity in judgment for Charles,²⁵⁷ the glory of God for Mounce,²⁵⁸ victory for Farrer,²⁵⁹ vindication with holiness for Beale²⁶⁰ and the colour of heaven for Krodel.²⁶¹ Also very often two or more of these ideas are combined in the interpretation.²⁶² It seems that all these concepts are inspired by the well-known white–black antithesis prominent in the Bible which conveys the interchangeable notions of vitality, life, light, holiness and joy as contrasted to the inertia, darkness, evil and sorrow on the other side.²⁶³ However, the interpretation of the whiteness of God's throne in 20:11 needs to give primary attention to the

Ba'al's Throne and Isa. 6:1' in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Mathias Delcor*, eds. André Caquot, Simon Légasse and Michel Tardieu (AOAT, 215; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985), 193–98; Mark S. Smith, 'Divine Form and Size in Ugaritic and Pre-exilic Israelite Religion', *ZAW* 100 (1988), 424–27.

²⁵¹ Aune, *Revelation* 17–22, 1100.

²⁵² μέγας occurs eighty times in Revelation, far more than in any New Testament book. On this basis Mealy (*After the Thousand Years*, 158) concludes that this adjective seems to be among the favourite words of John.

²⁵³ Mounce, *Revelation*, 364.

²⁵⁴ Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 577.

²⁵⁵ E. Bernard Allo, *Saint Jean L'Apocalypse* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1921), 304.

²⁵⁶ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 267.

²⁵⁷ Charles, *Revelation*, II, 193.

²⁵⁸ Mounce, *Revelation*, 364.

²⁵⁹ Farrer, *Revelation*, 209.

²⁶⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 1032.

²⁶¹ Krodel, *Revelation*, 338.

²⁶² E.g. Kiddle, *Revelation*, 402; Osborne, *Revelation*, 720; Roloff, *Revelation*, 231; Johnson, *Triumph*, 297; Smalley, *Revelation*, 516.

²⁶³ Franz Delitzsch, 'Farben in der Bibel' in *RE*, V, 755–62.

use of this symbolic colour in Revelation.²⁶⁴ The prominence of the white colour in the book is indicated by the fact that sixteen out of twenty-six New Testament λευκός references are found in it.²⁶⁵ Of the sixteen references eight designate white clothes, pointing to the idea of belonging to the heavenly realm.²⁶⁶ The other eight also evoke concepts related to the heavenly sphere, but mainly within an eschatological context.²⁶⁷ Thus, it has been rightly concluded by Michaelis that the white colour generally in the New Testament, but more specifically in Revelation, is ‘mentioned almost always in eschatological and apocalyptic contexts or as the heavenly colour’.²⁶⁸ I suggest against this background that the great throne’s white colour relates it to the heavenly realm and points to the full extent of what God’s character stands for. Since the entire vision alludes to the judgment scene of Dan. 7,²⁶⁹ it is possible that the whiteness of the throne reflects the white vesture and hair of the Ancient of Days, the presiding judge (7:9).²⁷⁰ In this case the white colour of the throne of Rev. 20:11 would symbolize the infinite wisdom to render judgment.

There is a divided scholarly opinion over the identity of the throne’s occupant in 20:11. While the figure seated on the throne is not specified, his function is clearly that of the supreme Judge. The basis for the divergence is seen in two different traditions concerning the identity of the judge in Jewish and Christian literature. While numerous texts ascribe the carrying out of the judgment to God himself,²⁷¹ another group of texts assert its delegation to the Messiah.²⁷² As well as the opposing views that place either God²⁷³ or Christ²⁷⁴ on the throne in the role of the executor of judgment, an attempt to bridge the gap between the two positions by arguing the

²⁶⁴ Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 577; Smalley, *Revelation*, 516.

²⁶⁵ In the majority of the texts apart from Revelation λευκός refers to the colour of the heavenly beings’ dresses (Mt. 28:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn 20:12; Acts 1:10) or the garment of the transfigured Christ (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:3[2x]; Lk. 9:29). Only in two references is it used in a secular context (Mt. 5:36; Jn 4:35).

²⁶⁶ Rev. 3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 19:14.

²⁶⁷ Rev. 1:14(2x); 2:17; 6:2; 14:14; 19:11; 19:14; 20:11.

²⁶⁸ Wilhelm Michaelis, ‘λευκός’ in *TDNT*, IV, 241-50(246).

²⁶⁹ See e.g. Steve Moyise, *Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup, 115; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995), 54; Beale, *Revelation*, 1031.

²⁷⁰ Johnson, *Triumph*, 297.

²⁷¹ Mt. 6:4, 6, 14, 15, 18; 18:35; Rom. 14:10; *Apoc. Abr.* 30–31; *Apoc. Elij.* 5; *Apocr. Ezek.* 1–2; *1En.* 1–5; 25; 38; 68; 100–02; *2En.* 65; *2Bar.* 82–83; *4Ezra* 7.

²⁷² *1En.* 45:3; 69:27; Mt. 25:31; Jn 5:22; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2Cor. 5:10; 2Tim. 4:1.

²⁷³ Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 748; Charles, *Revelation*, II, 192; Ladd, *Revelation*, 271; Talbert, *Apocalypse*, 97; Thomas, *Revelation* 8–22, 429; Mounce, *Revelation*, 364; Harrington, *Revelation*, 203; Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation* (SCM Theological Commentary on the Bible; London: SCM Press, 2010), 233.

²⁷⁴ Kelly, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (London: Morrish, 1874), 449; Richard C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 601f.; Walvoord, *Revelation*, 305; Hendriksen, *Conquerors*, 235; Chilton, *Vengeance*, 529-31.

inclusion of both figures in the judgment procedure has been made.²⁷⁵ Boring goes even so far as to claim deliberate ambiguity on the part of the author, who intends ‘to be spared the necessity of distinguishing between God and Christ’, resulting in the two figures merging into one another.²⁷⁶ The weakness of Boring’s hypothesis lies in a failure to recognize the pattern in the visionary part of Revelation which portrays Messiah on the throne only as a Lamb closely related to the throne occupying God. The application of the circumlocution ‘the One sitting on the throne’ in 20:11 to the Lamb or a merged divine figure is not consistent with the pattern of God’s and the Lamb’s characterization in the book. The allusion to the vision of Dan. 7:9 in which only a single figure of the Ancient of Days is seated on the throne provides further support for a single throne occupant. The fact that the Lamb is not placed on the throne in Rev. 20:11-15 does not exclude him from the judgment scene, since the reference to the ‘book of life’ qualified in 13:8 as that of the Lamb (βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου) seems to presuppose his involvement.²⁷⁷

The location of the great white throne has also been discussed to some extent. Though the text does not clearly state where the throne is situated, in Revelation God’s throne and the thrones of his allies appear consistently in the heavenly realm – only the thrones of his adversaries are located on earth. Charles, however, argues against the heavenly location of the great white throne on the basis of the cataclysmic description of the effect the appearance of the eschatological judge brings forth: ‘the earth and the heaven did flee away and place was not found for them’ (ἔφυγεν ἡ γῆ καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ τόπος οὐχ εὑρέθη αὐτοῖς). He suggests that only the great white throne survives the global annihilation besides the New Jerusalem and for this reason locates it ‘somewhere in illimitable space’.²⁷⁸ Charles’ thesis is not generally accepted. According to the majority view the language of 20:11 is understood metaphorically without implying the physical destruction of the universe.²⁷⁹ It rather reflects the tradition of

²⁷⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, 720; Beale, *Revelation*, 1031; Smalley, *Revelation*, 516.

²⁷⁶ Boring, *Revelation*, 211.

²⁷⁷ In 3:5 the concept of the ‘book of life’ is similarly connected to the idea of judgment and Christ’s presence. For an in-depth study of the concept of heavenly books in the Jewish and Christian tradition, see e.g. Baynes, ‘My Life is Written Before You’; Leo Koep, *Das himmlische Buch in Antike und Christentum: eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur altchristlichen Bildersprache* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1952).

²⁷⁸ Charles, *Revelation*, II, 192.

²⁷⁹ For example, Caird (*Revelation*, 258-59) notes: ‘Earth and heaven did not merely vanish like a puff of smoke, they fled; they fled in dismay before the moral grandeur of God, because they were unfit for his continuous presence, because they were contaminated beyond the possibility of cleansing.’ Additionally, Lupieri has noted (*Apocalypse*, 324) that the phrase τόπος οὐχ εὑρέθη αὐτοῖς (‘no place was found for them’) in 20:11 reappears in 12:8 in regard to Satan and his angels (οὐδὲ τόπος εὑρέθη αὐτῶ). By the repetition of the idea in 20:11 the author emphasizes that ‘the demonization of the earth is thus complete’.

cosmic quake which embodies nature's reaction to the phenomenon of theophany.²⁸⁰ The employment of dramatic language emphasizes 'the full extent of the trauma', the degree of the upheaval generated by the judgment.²⁸¹ Against these dramatic events that result even in the fleeing of heaven, the question of the throne's location is rightly considered by Roloff as 'superfluous'.²⁸²

The throne motif in 20:11-15 serves to emphasize the idea of divine justice, a cardinal aspect of God's sovereign rule. The scene harks back to the strongly throne-centred vision in chs. 4-5. While in these chapters the divine throne is encircled by the four creatures, the twenty-four elders and the angelic choirs, at the same time it is hidden from the sight of humanity. In contrast, in 20:11-15 books appear and the humanity is portrayed in front of the throne instead of the heavenly beings.²⁸³ The scene indicates that at the climax of history the throne of God comes out of its 'hiddenness' in which is found for the world and the humanity throughout the book.²⁸⁴ The brevity and starkness of the scene adds solemnity to this dramatic revelation of God's throne.²⁸⁵ The intentional contrast between the two throne visions highlights the notion of universal accountability and at the same time the message of God's supremacy symbolized by the great white throne as the seat of the true authority in the universe, which stands unchallenged at the end of human history.

4. CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the use of the dominant sub-motif within Revelation's throne 'motif-network': the throne of God. The investigation has focused on three aspects: its foundational treatment in Rev. 4, its use in the circumlocution 'the One sitting on the throne' and its

²⁸⁰ See also Ps. 102:25-26; Isa. 2:12-19; 34:2-4; 51:6; 64:1-3; Jer. 4:23-26. Bauckham (*Climax*, 208-09) calls our attention to the relation between the cosmic quakes in 6:12-17 and 20:11 as located on the far sides of the millennium. He views a recurring pattern in the employment of the imagery: 'John uses some of the same images twice, on either side of the millennium: the bride adorned for the eschatological marriage, the gathering of the nations to battle, with allusion to Ezekiel's vision of God in both 19:17-18 and 20:8. It may be that the duplication of cosmic quake should be seen as part of the same pattern. Or it may be that the whole sequence 19:11-20:15 should be seen as another instance of John's method of expanding earlier images in later visions.'

²⁸¹ Johnson, *Triumph*, 297

²⁸² Roloff, *Revelation*, 232.

²⁸³ For further differences between the two scenes, see MacLeod, 'The Sixth "Last Thing"', 317-18 n. 13.; Thomas Johann Bauer, *Das tausendjährige Messiasreich der Johannesoffenbarung: eine literarkritische Studie zu Offb 19,11-21,8* (BZNW, 148; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2007), 270-71.

²⁸⁴ In contrast, Bauckham ('Revelation', 1303) holds that the thrones of Rev. 4-5 and 20:11-15 are two different thrones: 'God's judgment seat ... is presumably a different throne from the one from which he rules the universe (4:2).' This view is, however, not supported by substantial evidence.

²⁸⁵ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 267; Farmer, *Revelation*, 126.

dynamics. The study has demonstrated that the throne of God permeates the book conveying a message not only about the structure of the universe, but also about the function of God within it and about the dynamics of human history.

The study of Rev. 4 led us to the conclusion that God's throne is portrayed immediately at the beginning of the visionary part of the book as the *axis mundi* of the universe. Actually, the throne is the very first thing John glimpses in heaven. However, in comparison to the very detailed description of its surrounding, neither the throne nor its occupant is described. I have argued that the reason for this feature lies on the one hand in the protection of the unknowable transcendence of God, and on the other in stressing the throne's centrality as implied by the linguistic style of the description. While it has been suggested in scholarly circles that John's cherubim constitute part of the throne, one of the contributions of this chapter was an argument offered against this interpretation. I have rather argued for a view of the cherubim as representatives of the whole created order. In this sense, their extreme closeness to the throne indicates symbolically the need for a throne-centred orientation of creation. It has been demonstrated in the first part of this chapter that the foundational picture of reality is focused on the divine throne and everything in the creation finds its significance only in its orientation towards the centre of the universe, the throne which stands for the One occupying it.

One of the most significant representations of the sub-motif of God's throne is found in the repeated characterization of God as 'the One sitting on the throne'. I have argued that this description is primarily rooted in the Old Testament throne visions. It has been established that the expression as a circumlocution for God is employed in four contexts: in heavenly temple scenes, in the 'day of wrath' description, in the cosmic conflict setting and in the final vision of the new creation. It has been demonstrated that the formula is employed with a clear theological purpose, since the reluctance of naming God directly accentuates his mysterious transcendence, the impossibility of expressing his awesomeness. At the same time it implies his absolute control over the developments in the course of history.

While 'the One sitting on the throne' circumlocution presents an immobile and stable image of God, I have demonstrated that the divine throne appears as a dynamic object from which phenomena are issued, statements are pronounced and judgment is passed. The examination of the throne's dynamics revealed God's active involvement, which is clearly indicated by the theophanic formula featured at strategic locations in the book (4:5; 8:5; 11:19;

16:18-21). Significant attention has been given to God's two speeches in Revelation and it has been established that both are related to the throne and a theological relation exists between them that highlights the notion of God's sovereignty. Namely, the fact that God speaks near the beginning and the end of the book indicates that the first and the final word in the human history and all in-between are his – all things are supervised by the divine providence. A particular contribution of this chapter is related to the second divine speech in 21:5-8. I have suggested an argument for the possible arrangement of the seven statements of this speech into a 'sandwich-chiasm' with 21:6b at the focal point stressing God's sovereignty as a guarantee of the new creation. Our study has also contributed to the widely debated meaning of the white colour of God's judgment throne in 20:11, suggesting that the colour relates the throne to the heavenly realm and points to the full extent of what God's character stands for. In spite of the unique characterization of God's judgment throne in 20:11 there is no difference between this throne and the divine throne referred to consistently throughout the book, since the unique reference to the white colour needs to be viewed as stressing the idea of divine justice, a cardinal aspect of God's sovereignty.

THE LAMB ON THE THRONE

Considerable scholarly interest has been shown in the Christology of the book of Revelation in the last two decades. The studies devoted significant space to the specific titles applied to Jesus in the book, although it was recognized at the same time that a purely titular approach provides only limited information in illuminating this topic.¹ With good reason, then, Revelation's Christology was contextualized within the framework of other questions.² Still, fundamental to any Christological investigation is the title ἀρνίου as the leading Christological expression of the book, central for understanding John's rhetorical argument and theology.³ The term occurs twenty-nine times in Revelation, twenty-eight of which are applied to Christ. Significantly, the Lamb is portrayed as related to the throne in three contexts within the visionary part of the book. The nature of the relation has been vigorously debated, since different expressions are employed for its designation: ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου in 5:6, ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ θρόνου in 7:17 and ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου/ὁ θρόνος in 22:1, 3. This chapter will examine these three references, while the only additional reference that pictures the Lamb on the throne (3:21) will be investigated in the next chapter, since it designates also human occupants of the throne.

1. DRAMA IN THE HEAVENLY THRONE ROOM (5:1-14)

Rev. 5 is the most important Christological chapter in the book of Revelation. In this vision the Lamb steps into the scene of Revelation's drama as a major actor holding in his hands the

¹ For representative studies which discuss the Christological titles in Revelation as a whole, see e.g. Joseph Comblin, *Le Christ dans l'Apocalypse* (Bibliothèque de Théologie 3/6; Paris: Desclée, 1965); Traugott Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes* (TUGAL, 85; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1971), 5-26; Ulrich B. Müller, *Messias und Menschensohn in jüdischen Apokalypsen und in der Offenbarung des Johannes* (SNT, 6; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1972); D.E. Lohse, 'Wie christlich ist die Offenbarung des Johannes?', *NTS* 34 (1998), 321-38.

² The literature on the Christology of Revelation is immense. For the survey of scholarship, see e.g. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (WUNT, 2/70; Tübingen: Mohr, 1995), 22-41; Matthias Reinhard Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship Between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation* (WUNT 2/203; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 6-18.

³ For example, Donald Guthrie ('The Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation', *VE* 12 [1981], 64-71[64]) states: 'Since it is so dominant the title Lamb must provide an important clue for determining the purpose and meaning of the whole book.'

solution for the cosmic problem. His unique status is highlighted through occupancy of the heavenly throne which is, as will be demonstrated, indirectly implied in the vision. The emphasis on the centrality of the heavenly throne from the first scene of the throne-room vision (ch. 4) continues in ch. 5 indicated by the five θρόνος references of the chapter. The term appears at the beginning (5:1), twice at the end (5:11, 13) and twice in the heart of the vision (5:6, 7). Since this vision is central to understanding the Lamb's identity and role in Revelation, it is appropriate to devote to it the most detailed attention among the three texts that relate the Lamb to the throne.

1.1. CONTEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

It was noted in the previous chapter that Rev. 5 is closely connected to Rev. 4 as an uninterrupted continuation of the same throne-vision. The unity of the two scenes is supported by numerous verbal, thematic and structural parallels that are presented in the following table:

Rev. 4	Rev. 5
throne (4:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10)	throne (5:6, 11)
the One sitting on the throne (4:2, 9, 10)	the One sitting on the throne (5:1, 7, 13)
the four creatures (4:6-9)	the four creatures (5:6, 8, 11, 14)
the twenty-four elders (4:4, 10)	the twenty-four elders (5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14)
the submission of the created order to 'the One sitting on the throne' (4:10)	the submission of the created order to the Lamb (5:8) and jointly to 'the One sitting on the throne' and the Lamb (5:13-14)
prepositions related to the throne: κύκλω (4:6), ἐν μέσῳ (4:6)	prepositions related to the throne: κύκλω (5:11), ἐν μέσῳ (5:6)
motifs in the hymnic material: (1) ἄξιος (4:11) (2) paying tribute to God (λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν; 4:11)	motifs in the hymnic material: (1) ἄξιος (5:9, 12) (2) paying tribute to the Lamb (λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὺν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν; 5:12)
concepts related to 'the One sitting on the throne': (1) creation (4:11) (2) eternity (4:8)	concepts related to 'the One sitting on the throne' and the Lamb: (1) creation (5:13) (2) eternity (5:13)
narrative section followed by hymnic material (4:1-7 followed by vss. 8-11)	narrative section followed by hymnic material (5:1-7 followed by vss. 8-14)

There is a significant shift of attention between the two scenes of the throne-room vision. Whereas the focus of ch. 4 is the heavenly throne, ch. 5 introduces two new motifs giving them detailed attention: the sealed scroll (βιβλίον; 5:1) and the Lamb (ἀρνίον; 5:5-6). Since these motifs are going to have major roles in the unfolding chapters, the primary function of ch. 5 is to introduce them and set them on the stage of Revelation's drama.⁴ It has been suggested by Müller that the shift of attention causes the centrality of the throne to be lost in ch. 5.⁵ However, this suggestion is vulnerable on several grounds. First, both the sealed book and the Lamb are portrayed as related to the throne (5:1, 6). Second, the central scene of the chapter is the taking of the scroll by the Lamb, which necessitates approaching the divine throne and its occupant, who holds the scroll in his hand (5:7). Third, the repeated reference to θρόνος in five out of fourteen verses spread throughout the entire chapter points to the significance of the motif (5:1, 6, 7, 11, 13). Fourth, the status that the Lamb receives in ch. 5 becomes intelligible only in relation to the divine throne. On the basis of the evidence set out here I suggest that the Lamb with the sealed book appears as the narrative focus of ch. 5; however, the centrality of the throne remains unchallenged by the events occurring around it and the reactions following them.

The literary structure of ch. 5 is framed and punctuated by the καὶ εἶδον formula and the less frequent longer version καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἤκουσα. Aune notes that this formula functions in two ways in Revelation: it either introduces a major break in the narration or marks a change in the focus of the vision.⁶ On the basis of this structuring device the chapter can be divided into three units: the first focuses on the drama of the sealed scroll (5:1-5), the second presents the solution to the cosmic problem in the person and accomplishment of the Lamb (5:6-10) and the third describes the universal reaction to the solution (5:11-14).⁷ References to the heavenly throne

⁴ The following vision in 6:1-8:1 is strongly linked both to the Lamb and the sealed scroll. The Lamb takes the sealed book from 'the One sitting on the throne' (5:7) and opens its seals one by one in 6:1-8:1.

⁵ Müller, *Microstructural Analysis*, 214. Stefanović (*Sealed Book*, 213) is more cautious claiming that the centrality of the throne is lost only at the beginning of Rev. 5, while it is emphasized again in the second half of the chapter (5:11, 13).

⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 329.

⁷ Though καὶ εἶδον appears four times in the chapter (5:1, 2, 6, 11), including the longer form καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἤκουσα in 5:11, a threefold division is the most appropriate, since the formula has in 5:2 a punctuating rather than structuring function. The threefold division is not unanimously accepted and there are variations even among its proponents. See e.g. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 329; Morton, *One upon the Throne*, 133. A simpler twofold division is advocated e.g. in Boring, *Revelation*, 108-12; Giblin, *Revelation*, 74-80; Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (Concordia Commentary; Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing, 1999), 134-47; Blount, *Revelation*, 98-120. For a more complex fivefold division, see e.g. Osborne, *Revelation*, 246; Reddish, *Revelation*, 108-19; Müller, *Microstructural Analysis*, 216.

occur at the beginning of the second (5:6) and the third sections (5:11), while the well-known circumlocution formula ‘the One sitting on the throne’ appears in all three sections (5:1, 7, 13).

1.2. BACKGROUND

There is a close continuity between the basic background of Rev. 4 and 5 that is rooted in cultic and political imagery. The attention in the following discussion will be only on new aspects emerging from ch. 5.

1.2.1. CULTIC SYMBOLISM

The most significant new cultic aspect of the vision is the Lamb imagery. While it is of ‘multivalent character’,⁸ it recalls primarily the paschal lamb imagery of the Old Testament.⁹ The sacrificial role is emphasized at the first place within the introductory description of the Lamb figure which characterizes him as ὡς ἐσφαγμένον (5:6). The same quality is repeated twice more in the chapter in the first two hymns directed to the Lamb (5:9, 12).¹⁰ The term σφάζω means ‘to slaughter, either animals or persons; in contexts referring to persons, the implication is of violence and mercilessness’.¹¹ Michel notes that in spite of the non-biblical use of the term for ritual slaying, σφάζω is in LXX hardly a technical term for sacrificial ritual, but rather a profane expression.¹² However, in a number of cases it appears as the translation of טָבַח or שָׁחַט which

⁸ Mitchell G. Reddish, ‘Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse’, *JSNT* 33 (1988), 85-95(88).

⁹ The interpretation of Christ’s crucifixion as a paschal sacrifice is well known in the New Testament and the early Christian literature (1Cor. 5:7; 1Pet. 1:19; Heb. 9:14; Col. 2:14; Jn 19:33, 36; Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 111.3). The connection is especially clear in the Fourth Gospel in which Christ is designated as ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ (Jn 1:29; cf. 1:36). However, the expression is most likely pre-Johannine (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* [Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1985], 96). Rudolf Schnackenburg (*Die Johannesbriefe* [HTKNT, 13/2; Freiburg: Herder, 5th edn, 1975], 37) notes the same emphasis on the expiatory function of Christ in 1Jn 1:7, 9; 2:1-2; 3:5; 4:10. The typological nature of the paschal symbolism in regard to Revelation’s Lamb is widely recognized: just as the blood of the paschal lamb functioned as the crucial motif of salvation in historical exodus event, similarly the death and resurrection of Christ is the basis of the hope of the eschatological people of God in the last book of the New Testament. For this aspect of Revelation’s symbolism, see the following Christological works: Holtz, *Christologie*, 44-47; Hoffmann, *Destroyer and the Lamb*, 117-19; Byong Kie Choi, ‘The “ἀρνίον”, Lamb, as a Christological Figure in the Visions of the Apocalypse (4:1–22:5): A Christological Study of the Book of Revelation’ (PhD Dissertation; Drew University, 2001), 115-23.

¹⁰ While in 5:6, 12 a perfect passive participle is employed (ἐσφαγμένον), in 5:9 the same verb is in aorist passive indicative (ἐσφάγης). The change, however, does not affect the meaning, since it reflects John’s tendency to sudden and inexplicable shifts among aorist, perfect, present and future tenses ‘without a corresponding shift in the time during which the action being described actually takes place’ (Steven Thompson, *The Apocalypse of John and Semitic Syntax* [SNTSMS, 52; Cambridge: University Press, 1986], 47). For a further discussion, see David Mathewson, ‘Verbal Aspect in the Apocalypse of John: An Analysis of Revelation 5’, *NovT* 50 (2008), 58-77(58-62).

¹¹ *LN* §20.72.

¹² Michel, O., ‘σφάζω’ in *TDNT*, VII, 925-38(930).

designate animal or even human sacrifices.¹³ The perfect passive participle ἐσφαγμένον indicates an abiding condition as the result of a past act of slaying.¹⁴ The sacrificial aspect is further supported by the cultic reference to the Lamb's blood as a ransom for people purchased for God (5:9). Thus, Jörns rightly notes that in the Lamb symbolism of Rev. 5 we have a cultic typology.¹⁵ The particle ὡς in front of ἐσφαγμένον in 5:6 is also significant in this regard. Corresponding to the Hebrew כּ it introduces the Christological interpretation of the Lamb imagery in the form of visionary language.¹⁶

In 5:8 further cultic aspects are introduced. The singing elders hold in their hands cultic instruments (κιθάρα; 'lyre') and cultic utensils (φιάλη; 'bowl'). κιθάρα as a rendering of כּנור in LXX is of central significance among the instruments mentioned in the Old Testament. Although it was used on a wide variety of occasions,¹⁷ its role in the temple context in psalm-singing, liturgical praise and worship was particularly esteemed.¹⁸ Görg notes that כּנור music is a fitting symbol of rejoicing,¹⁹ therefore its appearance in the heavenly praise scene is very appropriate.²⁰ φιάλη, the other cultic object in the hands of the elders in 5:8, designates a libation utensil used in a liturgical setting.²¹ Since LXX renders it always as a translation of מזרק, it becomes a technical term for 'bowl used in offering'.²² These bowls are pictured as filled with incense (γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων), a further cultic aspect which designates the prayers of the

¹³ For animal sacrifices in cultic rituals see: Lev. 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:5, 15, 24, 29, 33, 6:18; 7:2; 14:5, 13; 1Sam. 1:25; Ezek. 44:11. For human sacrifices to Yahweh, see Gen. 22:10; 1Sam. 15:33. For human sacrifices to pagan gods, see Ezek. 16:17-21; 23:39; Isa. 57:5.

¹⁴ Sweet, *Revelation*, 128; Lenski, *Revelation*, 200; Mounce, *Revelation*, 146.

¹⁵ Klaus-Peter Jörns, *Das hymnische Evangelium: Untersuchungen zu Aufbau, Funktion und Herkunft der hymnischen Stücke in der Johannesoffenbarung* (SNT, 5; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971), 50.

¹⁶ In contrast, Nikola Hohnjec ('*Das Lamm, τὸ ἀρνίον*' in *der Offenbarung des Johannes: eine exegetisch-theologische Untersuchung* [Roma: Herder, 1980], 44-45) argues that ὡς modifies the participle ἐσθητός. This suggestion is fallacious, since ὡς functions rather as part of the syntactical construction with ἐσφαγμένον introducing the Lamb (Bratcher, *Handbook on the Revelation*, 101).

¹⁷ Besides the cultic context כּנור occurs on numerous other occasions. It provided music during secular celebrations (Gen. 31:27; Isa. 24:8) and in times of lament or mourning (Job 30:31). However, it could be used by prostitutes and the wicked (Isa. 23:16; Job 21:12), but also in connection with miraculous healings (1Sam. 16:16, 23) and prophetic ecstasies (1Sam. 10:5) (Joachim Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine: Archaeological, Written, and Comparative Sources* [trans. D.W. Stott; The Bible in its World; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002], 16-19).

¹⁸ 2Sam. 6:5; 1Chron. 15:16; Ps. 43:4; 57:7-9; 71:22; 81:1-3; 92:1-3; 98:4-6; 108:1-3; 147:7; 149:3; 150:3.

¹⁹ M. Görg, 'כּנור' in *TDOT*, VII, 197-203(203).

²⁰ κιθάρα appears also in Rev. 14:2 and 15:2 as an instrument accompanying hymns.

²¹ Exod. 27:3; 38:3; Num. 4:14; 1Kgs 7:40f. Bowl imagery in the New Testament appears only in Revelation (5:8; 15:7; 16:1-4, 8, 10, 12, 17; 17:1; 21:9) and it is limited only to two contexts: in 5:8 bowls are portrayed as 'full of incense' (γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων), while in 15:7 as 'full of God's wrath' (γεμούσας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ). There is a theological connection between the two contexts, since the divine retribution in the Seven Bowls vision of chs. 15-16 is the answer to the prayers symbolized by the incense in 5:8.

²² BAGD, 858. See e.g. Exod. 38:23; Num. 4:14; 2Kgs 12:14; 25:15; 1Chron. 28:17; 2Chron. 4:8; Neh. 7:70.

saints.²³ The idea of priesthood is part of the cultic picture of ch. 5, since the twenty-four elders are portrayed as acting in a priestly role. Also, the priestly function is directly stated as an effect of the Lamb's salvific work and is portrayed in terms of making people kingdom and priests (ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς ... βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερείς).²⁴

1.2.2. POLITICAL SYMBOLISM

The parallels of Rev. 4 with the Roman imperial imagery continue in ch. 5 with some new elements. It has been suggested by Aune on the basis of artistic sources that the opening scene of 'the One sitting on the throne' with the sealed βιβλίον in his right hand (5:1) is reminiscent of the depiction of a princeps surrounded by his council and holding a *libellus*, a petition letter in the form of an open scroll.²⁵ More convincing, however, are the parallels between the acclamations addressed to the emperor and the Lamb in 5:9-14. The emphasis on *consensus omnium*, a universal consent, is of a particular significance in this regard. Though Aune acknowledges that little is known about this idea, it is clear that *consensus omnium* is considered of fundamental importance for the legitimacy of the empire and establishing of the principate's authority.²⁶ The liturgical material of Revelation, including the three hymns of ch. 5 (vs. 9-10, 12, 13), reveals close parallels with this Roman idea. Aune convincingly argues that this literary feature reveals a polemical intention on part of the author:

During the late first century, when the *argumentum e consensu omnium* had become particularly important in imperial propaganda, it is striking that the Apocalypticist should emphasize both the social breadth as well as the numerical strength of those who celebrate the sovereignty and power of both God and the Lamb. Indeed, those who proclaim the eternal kingship of God and the Lamb are more numerous and more representative than those who are depicted as participating in the rituals of imperial *accessio* and *adventus*.²⁷

²³ For the incense symbolism, see Kjeld Nielsen, *Incense in Ancient Israel* (VTSup, 38; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986).

²⁴ The idea of the kingly-priestly role of God's people in Rev. 5:10 is an allusion to Exod. 19:6, a text with a well-known cultic significance.

²⁵ Aune, 'Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', 9.

²⁶ The principate of Augustus was founded on the basis of agreement of three powerful groups: the senate, the equestrians and the people. Therefore, the emphasis on the universal consensus became one of the fundamental governing principles of the empire as expressed by the often repeated formula of Augustus in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 34: 'per consensum universorum potitus rerum omnium' ('by universal consent taking control of all things'). For textual and numismatic evidence on the *consensus omnium*, see Aune, 'Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', 16-20; Klaus Oehler, 'Der consensus omnium als Kriterium der Wahrheit in der antiken Philosophie und der Patristik', *Antike und Abendland* 10 (1961), 103-29.

²⁷ Aune, 'Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', 20.

The significance of the imperial background in the interpretation of Revelation's concept of ἄξιός has been often noted (5:2, 4, 9).²⁸ Since the term has no great importance in the LXX and Jewish literature, viewing the concept primarily against the Graeco-Roman background is even more justified. The term appears in the Graeco-Roman context around the turn of the era as a distinctive qualification for a person worthy of a high position and honour. The significance of merit as the reason for holding of an office of influence is well attested. It was even a major qualification in the choice of the emperor, and also in his deification by the Senate after his death.²⁹ Stefanović notes in his comprehensive survey of the Roman ἄξιός/*dignus* concept that this quality, though not reserved exclusively for the emperors, 'when linked to the throne (as in Rev. 4–5) it had royal significance'.³⁰ Similarly, in Josephus the concept is applied to the Israelite kings Saul and Solomon in the context of their coronation.³¹

1.3. INTERPRETATION

1.3.1. THE DRAMA OF THE SCROLL

While Rev. 4 focuses on the heavenly throne and its context, the climax of the vision is reached in the dramatic scene of ch. 5 evolving around the sealed book and the Lamb, which lie at the 'theological heart' of the book of Revelation.³² The scene begins with a reference to 'the One sitting on the throne', the central figure of ch. 4, but the attention is directed to a new feature, the sealed βιβλίον, which is located in his right hand (ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιὰν τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου).³³ The translation of the phrase ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιὰν is problematic, primarily because of the meaning of the preposition ἐπί. Three possible readings have been suggested: (1) God is holding the book 'in' his right hand;³⁴ (2) he is holding it 'upon' the right hand, on the open palm;³⁵ and

²⁸ E.g. Erik Peterson, *Heis theos: epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (FRLANT, 41; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 176-79; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 59; J. Daryl Charles, 'Imperial Pretensions and the Throne-Vision of the Lamb: Observations on the Function of Revelation 5', *CTR* 7 (1993), 85-97; Stefanović, *Sealed Book*, 167-81; Tóth, *Der himmlische Kult*, 302.

²⁹ For the concept of merit in the Roman world, see Martin P. Charlesworth, 'Pietas and Victoria: The Emperor and the Citizen', *JRS* 33 (1943), 1-10.

³⁰ Stefanović, *Sealed Book*, 179.

³¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 6.66; 6.346; 7.338.

³² Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into its Origins and Rhetorical Force* (WUNT 2/167; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 159.

³³ The discussion of the meaning of the sealed βιβλίον is beyond the scope of our study. For a comprehensive survey of the history of interpretation, see Stefanović, *Sealed Book*, 8-117.

³⁴ Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 504; Caird, *Revelation*, 70; Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (trans. George W. Schreiner; New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 144.

³⁵ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 75; Charles, *Revelation*, I, 136; James Moffatt, 'Revelation', V, 382.

(3) the book is located at his right side.³⁶ It is well-known that the expression ‘God’s right hand’ is an Old Testament anthropomorphism representing his power and authority.³⁷ However, the emphasis of the description is not on the physical attribute, but on the close relation of the scroll with the One who holds it and on the hidden nature of the scroll’s sealed content.³⁸ Through this opening picture a sense of expectancy is created, since the details suggest a sort of divine decree.³⁹

The vision of ch. 5 revolves around the rhetorical question raised in 5:2, which provides the focus for the development of the drama: τίς ἄξιος ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον καὶ λῦσαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ (‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’). The opening of the seals is strongly stressed in the chapter, since ἀνοῖξαι⁴⁰ is repeated four times before the introduction of the Lamb and once additionally in the hymnic praise of this redeemer figure.⁴¹ Still, the main emphasis is on the concept of worthiness, the qualification needed to perform the task of opening the sealed book.⁴² It has been convincingly argued that ἄξιος ties the scene together, since the term itself appears repeatedly throughout the drama: in the opening question of the angel (5:2), in John’s response to the universal quest for an ἄξιος figure (5:4) and also in the hymnic material at the end of the chapter (5:9, 12).⁴³

The cosmic significance of the drama around the opening of the scroll is clearly highlighted. The importance of the task is indicated by the motif of universality which is reflected in three different expressions. First, in the formula ‘no one in heaven or on earth or

³⁶ Ranko Stefanovic, ‘The Meaning and Significance of the ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν for the Location of the Sealed Scroll (Revelation 5:1) and Understanding the Scene of Revelation 5’, *BR* 46 (2001), 42-54.

³⁷ E.g. Exod. 15:6, 12; Job 40:14; Ps. 17:7; 18:35; 20:6; 21:8; 44:3; Isa. 41:10; 48:13; Lam. 2:3-4.

³⁸ The sealing of a document to keep the contents secret until the time it is to be revealed is a common apocalyptic theme. See e.g. Dan. 8:26; 12:9.

³⁹ Koester, *End of All Things*, 76. The description of the scroll in God’s right hand in Rev. 5:1 is modelled on Ezek. 2:9-10. On the intertextual relation of the two contexts, see Vogelgesang, ‘Interpretation of Ezekiel’, 24-27, 311-46.

⁴⁰ ἀνοῖξαι is an aorist infinitive expressing purpose or result (BDF §391.4).

⁴¹ Rev. 5:2, 3, 4, 5, 9. Osborne (*Revelation*, 251) argues referring to Beckwith, Charles, Mounce and Thomas that the emphasis on the scroll’s opening is further stressed by the word order in 5:2 with ἀνοῖξαι in the first place. He suggests a *hysteron-proteron* here according which ‘the opening of the scroll is of first priority, and the breaking of the seals the means by which that is to be accomplished’. In contrast, Beale (*Revelation*, 338) views the construction as ‘awkward’ and denies the possibility of *hysteron-proteron*, since the focus of the chapter is on the issue of authority.

⁴² Smalley (*Revelation*, 129) suggests that the qualification is ‘perhaps a combination of physical strength, moral quality and legal authority’. He recognizes that worthiness (ἄξιος) and ability (ἐδύνατο) are identical in this context; however, the inclusion of physical strength as a qualification is exegetically not grounded. The emphasis is not even on the moral quality, although it is certainly supposed. Osborne (*Revelation*, 251) rightly notes that ‘it is authority more than virtue that is the subject’.

⁴³ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 192.

under the earth' (5:3), which is part of the response to the universal search for an ἄξιός figure. Second, in the hymnic statement about the effect of the Lamb's sacrifice, which purchases people 'from every tribe, language, people and nation' (5:9). Third, in worshiping of 'the One sitting on the throne' and the Lamb by 'every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth and in the sea' (5:13). As Roloff rightly notes, the task of opening the scroll is not related to the disclosure of the future, but it rather implies 'the discharge of God's plan for history vis-à-vis the world, the setting in motion of the world event toward the end that God has planned for it'.⁴⁴ The distress over the possibility of this plan not being realized is indicated by John's weeping.⁴⁵ Thus, at the beginning of ch. 5 a rhetorical tension is built by 'underscoring both the importance of history's resolution and the tragedy that proceeds from the lack of such a resolution'.⁴⁶ However, after the dramatization John's attention is directed to the Lion/Lamb figure, who appears on the scene as an ἄξιός figure providing a solution to the cosmic problem.

1.3.2. THE LION/LAMB FIGURE

The Lion/Lamb figure, introduced at the heart of Rev. 5, has been rightly considered to be 'one of the most mind-wrenching and theologically pregnant transformations of imagery in literature'.⁴⁷ As 'a spectacular tour de force',⁴⁸ it is of crucial significance for understanding Revelation's rhetoric and theology generally. For this reason detailed attention will be given here to the sources of this complex imagery, the relation of the two cardinal components within the enigmatic Lamb/Lion antithesis and the purpose of the juxtaposition.

It is while weeping over the cosmic problem that John first hears of 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah' (ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰουδα) as a solution, further qualified as 'the Root of David' (ἡ ῥίζα Δαβὶδ). These titles are drawn from Gen. 49:9 and Isa. 11:1-5. Both were *loci classici* of Jewish Messianic hope in the first century C.E., understood as referring to the rising of the

⁴⁴ Roloff, *Revelation*, 77.

⁴⁵ The reason for John's weeping has been interpreted similarly in Caird, *Revelation*, 73; Beale, *Revelation*, 348. Less likely is the interpretation that argues for weeping over the 'moral incapacity' of the created beings (Swete, *Apocalypse*, 77; Talbert, *Apocalypse*, 28-29) or because John could not find out the content of the scroll (Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 508; Moffatt, 'Revelation', 383). Also a symbolic interpretation of the weeping has been suggested. Roloff (*Revelation*, 77) views John's reaction as 'the retrospective summary of the heretofore vain and shattered messianic expectation of Israel', while Johns (*Lamb Christology*, 163 n. 46), on the basis of the typological function of weeping in the Jeremiah and Baruch tradition, suggests 'a response to the judgment of God', a heightened 'pathos in one's recognition that injustice is prevailing and God's will is being thwarted' (e.g. Jer. 3:21; 4:8; 6:26; 7:29; 9:1, 10, 20; 13:17; 16:4-7; 22:10, 18; 25:33; 31:9-21; 34:5; 41:6; 48:5, 32-38; 49:3; 50:4; 2Bar. 10:4-19).

⁴⁶ Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 170.

⁴⁷ M. Eugene Boring, 'Narrative Christology in the Apocalypse', *CBQ* 54 (1992), 702-23(708).

⁴⁸ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 132.

Messiah, the king *par excellence*, who will sit upon the throne of David.⁴⁹ They were also favourite texts at Qumran that were interpreted with strong militaristic overtone.⁵⁰ Therefore, the connection between the imagery of the Lion of Judah and Root of David and the idea of triumph in Rev. 5:5 strongly evokes messianic overtones and points to the appearance of a new David, victorious over the enemies of Israel.⁵¹

Hearing about the Lion is followed by the vision of the Lamb, who is described in terms of his physical appearance before any motion is indicated. Most importantly, he has been slain (ἐσφαγμένον), but he is pictured also as having seven horns (κέρατα ἑπτὰ) and seven eyes (ὀφθαλμοὺς ἑπτὰ). The question of the source of John's lamb imagery has generated much discussion.⁵² I find the interpretation of the imagery in terms of reflecting primarily sacrificial ideas most convincing. As has been pointed out above, the sacrificial idea is recalled primarily by the paschal lamb typology. This interpretation is supported by the application of ἐσφαγμένον to the Lamb, the strong cultic background of the vision and Revelation's interpretation of the Lamb's victory in terms of a new exodus.⁵³ The Lamb imagery also alludes to the suffering servant of Yahweh in Isa. 53, a concept frequently applied to the passion and crucifixion of Jesus in the early church.⁵⁴ The suffering servant is compared to a lamb led to slaughter (ὡς πρόβατον ἐπὶ σφαγῆν ἤχθη; 53:7), a statement thematically mirrored in the Lamb concept in Rev. 5. Also the idea of the vicarious and redemptive nature of the servant's suffering, running throughout the entire description of Isa. 53, shows close affinity with the concept of ransom in Rev. 5:9. Thus,

⁴⁹ For the messianic interpretation of the 'Lion of the tribe of Judah', see 1QSb 5:29; 4Ezra 11:37–12:2. For the 'Root of David' as a messianic title, see 4QFlor 1:11-12; 4QpIsa^a Frag. A; *Pss. Sol.* 17:24, 35-37; 4Ezra 13:10; 1En. 49:3; 62:2; *T. Jud.* 24:4-6.

⁵⁰ For both passages combined, see 4QP Bless; 1QSb 5:20-29; 4Ezra 12:31-32.

⁵¹ Bauckham, *Climax*, 180-82, 213-15.

⁵² The following general suggestions have been put forth: (1) the Christian interpretation of Isa. 53 (Comblin, *Christ*, 17-34); (2) astrological speculation (Franz Boll, *Aus der Offenbarung Johannis: hellenistische Studien zum Weltbild der Apokalypse* [Stoicheia: SGAWGW, 1; Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1914], 44-46; Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995], 78-79, 101-04, 111-12); (3) Jewish liturgical practices (Holtz, *Christologie*, 44-47; Hoffmann, *Destroyer*, 117-19); (4) traditions of animal imagery in Jewish apocalypticism (Charles, *Revelation*, I, 141; C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954], 230-38). The imagery has also been considered by source critics such as Weyland and Vischer a later Christian interpolation into an originally Jewish source (see Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 111-13).

⁵³ On the exodus motif in Revelation, see Casey, 'Exodus'; Hre Kio, 'Exodus'.

⁵⁴ Acts 8:32; *Barn.* 5:2; *1Clem.* 16:7; Justin, *Dial.* 72:3; 114:2. For the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Isa. 53, see Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher (eds.), *Der leidende Gottesknecht: Jesaja 53 und seine Wirkungsgeschichte* (FAT, 14; Tübingen: Mohr, 1996).

we can speak of a joint paschal/servant of Yahweh sacrificial background,⁵⁵ which might be further supported by the possibility of a common background in the Aramaic ܠܡܒܝܐ with its twofold meaning: ‘lamb’ as well as ‘boy’ or ‘servant’.⁵⁶

Revelation’s Lamb imagery is primarily rooted in a sacrificial background, but it has a militaristic overtone generally in the book. On the basis of Jewish apocalyptic literature, this leads to a suggestion of the influence of the concept of a divine warrior ram alongside or instead of the sacrificial background.⁵⁷ While the Lamb in Rev. 5:6 is pictured with seven horns and the horn as a symbol of power has a long tradition in Hebrew thought,⁵⁸ the evidence for establishing the existence of a militaristic lamb-redeemer figure in the apocalyptic traditions of Early Judaism is weak.⁵⁹ For this reason its influence on the Revelation lamb imagery cannot be demonstrated in spite of the militaristic character of this figure in Revelation. The possibility of translating ἀρνίον as a ‘ram’ has also been suggested.⁶⁰ Under the influence of Charles, attention has often been drawn to the difference between the lamb terminology of the Fourth Gospel (ἀμνός) and that of Revelation (ἀρνίον). However, the fact that, in spite of the exclusive use of ἀρνίον in Revelation,⁶¹ the term also occurs in Jn 21:15 with the identical meaning to ἀμνός has been

⁵⁵ For the possibility of the Aqedah influence on the composition of Rev. 5:6-9, see Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 189. This thesis does not enjoy significant scholarly support.

⁵⁶ Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 109; Beale, *Revelation*, 351.

⁵⁷ Three texts have primarily been used to argue this tradition: *T. Jos.* 19:8; *T. Benj.* 3:8 and *1En.* 89–90. Though *T. Jos.* 19:8 is often viewed as a valid argument (e.g. John C. O’Neil, ‘The Lamb of God in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs’, *JSNT* 2 [1979], 2-30), Joachim Jeremias (‘ἀμνός’ in *TDNT*, I, 338-41[338]) notes: ‘The description of the Redeemer as a lamb is unknown to later Judaism; the only possible occurrence (*Test. Jos.* 19) falls under the suspicion of being a Christian interpolation.’ The same is the case with *T. Benj.* 3:8 (contra B. Murrelstein, ‘Das Lamm in *Test. Jos.* 19:8’, *ZNW* 58 [1967], 273-79). Horned lambs appear also in *1En.* 90:9 representing the Maccabees, while the Messiah appears as a lamb with ‘big black horns’ in 90:30. However, these figures are part of the complex animal allegory of *1En.* 85–90, which portrays David and Solomon also as lambs before they become rams ascending to throne (89:45, 48). Also significant is a late (11th century C.E.) tradition preserved in *Targ. Ps.-J. Exod.* 1:15, in which Moses is portrayed as a lamb who destroys Egypt. Loren L. Johns (‘The Lamb in the Rhetorical Program of the Apocalypse of John’ in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1998* [2 vols.; SBLSP, 37; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998], II, 762-84[774]) refers to the following scholars, who appeal to these traditions as the key for understanding Revelation’s lamb symbolism: Brown, Buchanan, Charles, Chevalier, Dodd, Lohmeyer, Ford, Morris, Mounce, Talbert and Trocmé.

⁵⁸ On the horn imagery, see Margit L. Süring, *The Horn-Motif: In the Hebrew Bible and Related Ancient Near Eastern Literature and Iconography* (AUSDDS, 4; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1980).

⁵⁹ For a comprehensive discussion on the question, see Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 76-107.

⁶⁰ This idea is argued in Friedrich Spitta, *Streitfragen der Geschichte Jesu* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907), 172-224. For a persuasive critic, see Otfried Hofius, ‘ἀρνίον – Widder oder Lamm? Erwägungen zur Bedeutung des Wortes in der Johannesapokalypse’, *ZNW* 89 (1998), 272-81.

⁶¹ ἀρνίον occurs twenty-nine times in Revelation. It refers twenty-eight times to Christ and once to the beast coming out of the earth as a being ‘like a lamb’ (ὅμοια ἀρνίω; 13:11). Bauckham (*Theology*, 66-67) sees theological significance in the number twenty-eight as the number of ἀρνίον references applied to Christ. He argues that this

overlooked. This connection is attested also in numerous Old Testament and Jewish texts.⁶² The linguistic evidence suggests that Revelation's ἀρνίον should be translated as a 'lamb' or a 'little lamb',⁶³ though the character of the figure also includes a military aspect despite the lack of a direct influence of the concept of the apocalyptic warrior ram. It can be concluded that John's Lamb imagery is unique and creative not just because of the Lamb's combined functions, but also because of his unprecedented physical appearance with seven horns and seven eyes.

The Lion/Lamb imagery in Rev. 5:5-6 reflects John's literary technique of juxtaposing more than one image with a single referent.⁶⁴ There is a disagreement concerning the purpose of the juxtaposition, which is understood in various ways, depending on the interpretation of the Lamb imagery.⁶⁵ It has been argued by the proponents of the militaristic lamb figure background that there is neither contrast nor surprise in the Lion/Lamb juxtaposition – the imageries appear rather as complementary.⁶⁶ On the other hand it needs to be observed that the Lamb imagery continues to make its presence felt throughout the book, while the Lion from the tribe of Judah completely disappears. The reason for the Lion's giving way to the Lamb is interpreted by Strawn as grounded in the ambivalent use of the Lion imagery in the precedent literature. As he rightly notes, the symbol is 'potentially ambiguous of an image to serve as the primary metaphor for the Messiah-Christ figure'.⁶⁷ Therefore, it is more appropriate to view the juxtaposition as a technique of reinterpretation of the traditional messianic material. In this regard Sweet rightly argues that 'what John hears, the traditional Old Testament expectation of military deliverance,

number is a combination of seven (the number of completeness) and four (the number of the world), thus 7x4 indicates 'the worldwide scope of his complete victory'. This suggestion together with Bauckham's broader understanding of the word frequencies in Revelation is sharply critiqued in Steve Moyise, 'Word Frequencies in the Book of Revelation', *AUSS* 43 (2005), 285-99.

⁶² Jer. 11:19; 50:45; Ps. 93:4, 6; Isa. 40:11; *Pss. Sol.* 8:28; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.221, 251.

⁶³ Takács uses the Hungarian expression 'bárányka' ('little lamb') consistently in his commentary as a translation for ἀρνίον. For his explanation, see *Jelenések Könyve*, 130. However, it is acknowledged that by the first century the term ἀρνίον most probably had no longer a diminutive nuance (BAGD, 108), but was synonymous with πρόβατον ('sheep'; e.g. Jn 21:15-17). Beale (*Revelation*, 354) rightly notes that 'if the diminutive nuance still held, it intensified the contrast between the powerful lion image of Old Testament prophecy and the fulfillment through the little, apparently powerless lamb'.

⁶⁴ For example, in Rev. 7:4-9 John hears the number of the sealed (144,000), but views the unexpectedly contrasting image of the 'great multitude which no one could number' (7:9). Similarly, in 21:9-10 the angel promises to show John the bride of the Lamb, however it is not a young woman that he is shown, but the city of New Jerusalem.

⁶⁵ For the overview of the discussion, see Rebecca Skaggs and Thomas Doyle, 'Lion/Lamb in Revelation', *CBR* 7 (2009), 362-75(367-71)

⁶⁶ Ford, *Revelation*, 89; Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 213; Schimanowski, *Die himmlische Liturgie*, 213.

⁶⁷ For a comprehensive argument, see Brent A. Strawn, 'Why Does the Lion Disappear in Revelation 5? Leonine Imagery in Early Jewish and Christian Literature', *JSP* 17 (2007), 37-74.

is reinterpreted by what he sees, the historical fact of a sacrificial death'.⁶⁸ The result of the reinterpretation is the forging of a new symbol of conquest by sacrificial death. However, Bauckham rightly warns that the juxtaposition does not dismiss the hopes embodied in John's messianic titles, but only reinterprets them.⁶⁹ In line with this reasoning Knight aptly speaks of 'a powerful subversion of reality', since the conquering, represented by the Lion, alludes to the cross, the manner of the conquest.⁷⁰ Though the object of the conquest is not specified, the cumulative aorist of ἐνίκησεν emphatically stresses the completion of the victory,⁷¹ probably over all that is opposed to God's rule.⁷² Thus, the theology of the cross is given central significance in Rev. 5.⁷³

1.3.3. THE LAMB AND THE THRONE

The Lamb's sharing of God's throne is almost unanimously accepted in reference to Rev. 3:21, 7:17 and 22:3. He is also somehow related to the throne in 5:6; however, the meaning of the ambiguous phrase ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ('in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders') has given rise to divided opinions concerning the precise relationship. The *crux interpretum* is the translation of the expression ἐν μέσῳ. As Aune notes, three major possibilities have been argued concerning this noteworthy translation problem. First, ἐν μέσῳ refers to a position 'in the middle' of an area. Following this rendering BAGD suggests the translation 'on the center of the throne and among the four living creatures'.⁷⁴ Second, the expression points to the distance between two things. According to this possibility the Lamb is positioned somewhere 'between'

⁶⁸ Sweet, *Revelation*, 125.

⁶⁹ Bauckham, *Climax*, 183. It has been also argued that the Lion/Lamb juxtaposition involves mutual interpretation and not simply the replacing of one element with another. For example, Resseguie (*Revelation Unsealed*, 34) points out: 'The Lion of the tribe of Judah interprets what John sees: death on the cross (the Lamb) is not defeat but is the way to power and victory (the Lion). In this instance, seeing also reinterprets the hearing. The traditional expectation of messianic conquest by military deliverance (the Lion of Judah) is reinterpreted so that messianic conquest occurs through sacrificial death (the Lamb)'. While Steve Moyise ('Does the Lion Lie down with the Lamb?' in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001], 181-94[189]) is also a proponent of the mutual interpretation, he criticizes Resseguie for inconsistency in his application of this principle.

⁷⁰ Knight (*Revelation*, 63) rightly recognizes that the association of the victory motif with the cross is a shared idea of Rev. 5 with the Fourth Gospel.

⁷¹ James A. Brooks, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1979), 101-02.

⁷² Though ἐνίκησεν is without object in Rev. 5:5, Bauckham (*Theology*, 74) rightly relates the victory of the Lamb to the defeat of Satan by Michael in 12:7-9.

⁷³ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 352.

⁷⁴ BAGD, 635.

the throne, the four living creatures and the elders.⁷⁵ Third, ἐν μέσῳ designates a position within an area occupied by other objects. The translation is ‘among’ or ‘with’ which positions the Lamb standing in close proximity to the throne.⁷⁶ An argument will be suggested here in favour of the first translation, which positions the Lamb on the throne. While this view has been widely advocated,⁷⁷ no answer has been offered to the objection of the Lamb’s distance from the throne. It has been pointed out by opponents of this view that the text mentions the Lamb’s movement towards the throne and taking of the scroll immediately after the initial introductory description in which ἐν μέσῳ defines the Lamb’s position in relation to the throne (5:6-7).⁷⁸ The discussion in this section, besides offering an argument for Christ’s enthronement in ch. 5, will also attempt to provide a satisfactory answer to this objection.

The occupation of the heavenly throne by the Lamb in 5:6 is often justified almost exclusively on the basis of the wider context of Christ’s enthronement in the book (3:21; 7:17; 22:3).⁷⁹ Knight is one of the rare exceptions, as he goes beyond the contextual argument and provides substantial exegetical evidence.⁸⁰ He convincingly argues that the correct translation of 5:6 needs to be balanced around the three καί rather than the two ἐν μέσῳ references. He suggests that the translation approach focusing on ἐν μέσῳ is inadequate, since it results in removing the creatures from the throne (4:6), at least to the extent that they allow the Lamb to intervene between the throne and them. Since the geography of the throne reflects an arrangement in concentric circles, Knight logically concludes that ‘the Lamb cannot stand between the throne and the creatures *and also* among the elders’.⁸¹ For this reason he claims that the viewpoint focusing on the three καί references and the phrases following them indicate the following interpretation: ‘The first phrase states that the Lamb occupies the throne of God. The second phrase states this means by definition that the Lamb also stands in the midst of the living

⁷⁵ Charles, *Revelation*, I, 140.

⁷⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 352.

⁷⁷ E.g. Hengel, *Studies*, 150-51; Michaels, *Revelation*, 95-96; Richard Bauckham, ‘Throne of God’, 64; Hannah, ‘Of Cherubim and the Divine Throne’, 528-42; Brighton, *Revelation*, 137, 140; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 139; Charles A. Gieschen, ‘The Lamb (Not the Man) on the Divine Throne’ in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity. Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, eds. David B. Capes *et al.* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 227-43(236).

⁷⁸ For the objection, see e.g. Charles, *Revelation*, I, 140; Bratcher, *Handbook on the Revelation*, 100-01; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 352; Beale, *Revelation*, 350; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 207; Smalley, *Revelation*, 132.

⁷⁹ This is usually characteristic to the Christological studies as e.g. Hengel, *Studies*, 150-51; Bauckham, ‘Throne of God’, 64; Gieschen, ‘Lamb’, 236.

⁸⁰ Jonathan Knight, ‘The Enthroned Christ of Revelation 5:6 and the Development of Christian Theology’ in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 43-50.

⁸¹ Knight, ‘Enthroned Christ’, 46.

creatures. The third phrase states that the Lamb sits among the elders in the sense that the elders surround the throne of God and form a protective boundary for it.⁸² Knight's argument is persuasive. According to his interpretation, the text further stresses the central significance of the introduction of the Lamb, who steps into the throne-room drama as a major figure of the book. Though it seems that his introduction is deliberately postponed until ch. 5, he is impressively promoted here to an elevated position indicated through occupation of the heavenly throne.⁸³ It would be strange if the display of the Lamb's unique significance in the heavenly setting was otherwise in a book that advocates high Christology.

An examination of ch. 5 reveals further evidence which indirectly point to the Lamb's sitting on the throne in the throne-room vision. First, the worship offered to the Lamb by the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, the many angels and every creature (5:8-14) implies his divine character. As Gieschen notes, 'The veneration of the lamb ... is another way through which this scene depicts Christ within the mystery of the one God, because to worship anyone other than YHWH is idolatry.'⁸⁴ Out of the five hymns of the vision two are directed to the Father (4:8, 11) and two to the Lamb (5:9-10, 12). While the two pairs of doxologies share a number of motifs that imply the unique relation of the two figures, the praise reaches its climax in the fifth hymn in which they are jointly worshiped.⁸⁵ This scene 'rounds off the vision'⁸⁶ and

⁸² Knight, 'Enthroned Christ', 46.

⁸³ It has been argued on the basis of a three-part ancient Egyptian enthronement pattern that the scene of Rev. 5 is to be interpreted as an enthronement of Christ (See e.g. Holtz, *Christologie*, 27-29; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 110; Roloff, *Revelation*, 75-76). This view has been strongly criticized by W.C. van Unnik ('"Worthy is the Lamb": The Background of Apoc. 5' in *Mélanges Bibliques en hommage au R.P. Béda Rigaux*, eds. Albert Descamps and R.P. André de Halleux [Gembloux: Duculot, 1970], 445-61). More recently, Stefanović (*Sealed Book*, 206-25) argued for an enthronement ritual primarily on the basis of parallels with coronation scenes of the Old Testament. This approach has been supported also by Margaret Barker ('Enthronement and Apotheosis: The Vision in Revelation 4-5' in *New Heaven and New Earth. Prophecy and the Millennium – Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston*, eds. P.J. Harland and C.T.R. Hayward [VTSup, 77; Leiden: Brill, 1999], 217-27). Similarly, Beale (*Revelation*, 356-57) subscribes to this view, mostly because of the close affinity of Rev. 5 with Dan. 7. In contrast, the enthronement view has been recently labelled by Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 336; cf. Idem., *Apocalypticism*, 233-39) as a 'scholarly myth'. He rather views Rev. 5 as describing the investiture of the Lamb, since this concept 'refers to the act of establishing someone in office or the ratification of the office that someone already holds informally'. According to a further interpretive possibility Rev. 5 reflects only a commission in the heavenly court similar to the Old Testament prophetic commissions (Hans P. Müller, 'Die himmlische Ratsversammlung: Motivgeschichtliches zu Apc 5:1-5', *ZNW* 54 [1963], 254-67; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 159-60). Also the combination of the enthronement and commission interpretations has been advocated (Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* [Neue Testament Deutsch; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960], 44).

⁸⁴ Gieschen, 'Lamb', 236.

⁸⁵ The most prominent shared motif is worthiness (4:8, 11; 5:9, 10, 12). Three expressions of paying tribute are also shared: δύναμις, τιμὴ and δόξα. From these expressions τιμὴ and δόξα re-appear in the final doxology which is sung both to 'the One sitting on the throne' and to the Lamb (5:13). It seems that δύναμις is substituted by κράτος in this final hymn.

conveys the closing message that ‘the One sitting on the throne’ and the Lamb are divine beings of equal status, who act jointly towards the same end. It would be inconceivable if the idea of divine unity was not expressed by sharing the same divine throne in a vision which primarily highlights the elevation of the Lamb. Second, the taking of the scroll in 5:7 presupposes an act of coming to the divine throne (ἦλθεν καὶ εἴληφεν; ‘he came and took’). Though the idea of transferring authority has been generally noted in the text, the significance of the background in Dan. 7:13 has often been overlooked.⁸⁷ Beale convincingly argues that this Danielic text is the only Old Testament passage in which ‘a divine, Messiah-like figure is portrayed as approaching God’s heavenly throne in order to receive authority’.⁸⁸ He calls our attention to numerous parallels between the two scenes: the opening of books (βίβλοι in Dan. 7:10; βιβλίον in Rev. 5:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9), approaching God’s throne (ἔρχομαι in Dan. 7:13; ἔρχομαι in Rev. 5:7), receiving authority to reign (δίδωμι in Dan. 7:14; λαμβάνω in Rev. 5:7), designating both figures’ authority by τιμή (Dan. 7:14; Rev. 5:12-13) and δόξα (Dan. 7:14; Rev. 5:12-13), and a universal recognition of the received authority (Dan. 7:14; Rev. 5:13-14).⁸⁹ Again, the Lamb’s possession of the throne is implied by the concepts of authority and reign, and also indicated by the universal recognition of his elevated status. Third, the repeated emphasis on the right hand of ‘the One sitting on the throne’ (5:1, 7) might possibly be an allusion to the enthronement tradition of Ps. 110:1 (ἐκ δεξιῶν μου; ‘at my right hand’),⁹⁰ which played a central role in the expression of Christ’s ascension to the throne in early Christian writings.⁹¹

As mentioned above, the most common objection to the interpretation of Rev. 5:6 in terms of the Lamb’s occupation of the throne is the statement ἦλθεν καὶ εἴληφεν (‘he came and took’) in 5:7. The expression implies distance between the divine throne and the Lamb, and also

⁸⁶ David R. Carnegie, ‘Worthy is the Lamb: The Hymns in Revelation’ in *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. Harold H. Rowdon (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1982), 243-56(251).

⁸⁷ E.g. James D.G. Dunn, ‘The Danielic Son of Man in the New Testament’ in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, eds. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (2 vols.; VTSup, 83; Leiden: Brill, 2001), II, 528-49(536).

⁸⁸ Beale, *Use of Daniel*, 211.

⁸⁹ Beale, *Use of Daniel*, 211-12. The formative influence of Dan. 7:13-14 on Rev. 5:7 has also been recognized in Comblin, *Christ*, 67; Hans P. Müller, ‘Formgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Apc Joh. 4–5’ (PhD Dissertation; Heidelberg University, 1962), 86-87, 141-44; Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or the Day of the Lord* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1909), 239; Farrer, *Revelation*, 95.

⁹⁰ On the contrary, Hengel (*Studies*, 151) denies John’s allusion to Ps. 110:1 here, though, he advocates Christ’s sitting on the throne in Rev. 5:6. He argues that John probably intentionally avoids the language of Ps. 110:1 and the possibility of ‘an all too anthropomorphic conception of a bisellium with two “gods” ... sitting next to one another’.

⁹¹ For the role of Ps. 110:1 in the formation of early Christian Christology, see Martin Hengel, “‘Setzte dich zu meiner Rechten!’: Die Inthronisation Christi zur Rechten Gottes und Psalm 110:1’ in *Le Trône de Dieu*, 108-94; Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 158-216.

movement in the direction of the throne for the purpose of taking the sealed book. This objection is based on the presupposition of chronological continuity between 5:6 and 5:7 which holds that the Lamb's location ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου in 5:6 is the starting point of his movement towards the throne in 5:7. For example, Beale states that the 'broader context of 5:9ff. would imply that there he is sitting on the throne', while 'in 5:6 it appears that the Lamb is near the throne, preparing to make his approach to be enthroned'.⁹² I would like to suggest that there is a chronological discontinuity between 5:6 and 5:7 which explains the tension between the occupation of the throne in 5:6 and the distance in 5:7. The argument in favour of this suggestion is based on the understanding of 5:5-6 in terms of John's identification–description literary technique.

Stefanovic explains the essence of this pattern followed in Revelation: 'Whenever a new key player in the book is introduced, he/she is first identified in terms of his/her personal description or historical role ... Once the player is identified, John moves into the description of the player's function and activities that are especially important to the vision.'⁹³ This literary technique is universally applied to all the major characters of Revelation including the Lamb. Since he appears for the first time in the book in ch. 5, the description of his physical characteristics and status is given before any of his activities are narrated. Actually, the language used in 5:5-6 is the language of identification/description, in contrast with that of 5:7-14, which is the language of action. While 5:7-14 records an action taken by the Lamb with the reactions to it within the heavenly setting, in 5:5-6 he is merely identified in terms of his qualities and status. For this reason the relationship of the two passages within the same vision cannot be interpreted in terms of chronological continuity, because of a major difference in their literary and theological function.

At the end of this discussion it is appropriate to note that the throne motif plays a central function both in the introduction of the Father in ch. 4 (ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος; 4:2) and the Lamb in ch. 5 (ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου; 5:6). While both figures are pictured in the throne-room vision as occupants of the heavenly throne, there is no indication of a throne rivalry, since John's

⁹² Beale, *Revelation*, 350.

⁹³ Stefanovic, 'Literary Patterns', 28-29. This literary technique is first employed in 1:9-20 which introduces the speaker who addresses the seven churches in chs. 2-3. In ch. 4 'the One sitting on the throne' is introduced, while ch. 5 introduces the Lamb, who will break the seals of the book in 6:1-8:1. In 7:4-9 the 144,000, who reappear in 14:1-5, are characterized. In ch. 11 the identification of the two witnesses (11:4) is followed by the description of their activities and experiences. Ch. 12 introduces the women clothed with the sun (12:1) and the dragon (12:2-3), while in ch. 13 the two beasts are characterized before describing their activities (13:1-2, 11). In 17:3-5 the same literary technique is applied to the prostitute sitting on the beast etc.

view is that the Lamb shares God's throne.⁹⁴ This idea is consistent in all the texts which relate the Lamb to the heavenly throne (3:21; 5:6; 7:17; 22:3). Knight rightly concludes of the implication of the concept of a shared throne: 'Two beings, one throne means one shared authority and as close a possible union as it is possible to achieve.'⁹⁵ The rest of the book of Revelation describes how this shared authority is practised and the challenge to it handled.

While Rev. 5 portrays the Lamb's receiving of the heavenly throne within the course of human history, two further texts relate him to the throne in the visionary part of the book, but in different contexts: in an eschatological scene of celebrating the final victory over the antagonists of God's kingship (7:17) and in a new creation setting (22:1, 3). I now turn to a discussion of the Lamb's throne in the heavenly temple festival vision in which his occupation of the throne is stated clearly, in contrast to the indirect reference in ch. 5.

2. THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE FESTIVAL (7:9-17)

The second most developed throne scene in the book of Revelation is described in 7:9-17. The heavenly throne is referred to seven times in the section and it functions as the focal point of this scene of celebration. The term *θρόνος* four times signifies the centre of heavenly geography (7:9, 11[2x], 15), twice it appears within a circumlocution for God (7:10, 15) and in the climactic section of 7:14-17 it is once associated with the Lamb (7:17).

2.1. CONTEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The heavenly temple festival of 7:9-17 forms the climax of the Seven Seals heptad.⁹⁶ The whole of ch. 7 is strategically located after the sixth seal which portrays in the language of the Day of the Lord the universal expression of the wrath of God and the Lamb in terms of cosmic turbulence (6:12-17).⁹⁷ Since the sixth seal is concluded by a rhetorical question concerning the survival of the *parousia* (τίς δύναται σταθῆναι; 'who can stand?'; 6:17), the vision of ch. 7 appears to provide an answer to it. Thus, we have here an interlude that functions as a wider interpretive framework against which the entire vision of 6:1-8:1 may be understood more

⁹⁴ Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Christology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1999), 207.

⁹⁵ Knight, 'Enthroned Christ', 47.

⁹⁶ Thompson, 'Cult and Eschatology', 336. The heptad of the Seven Seals (6:1-8:1) does not envisage the final judgment, but it rather functions as a preliminary warning that proclaims the imminence of God's eschatological judgment. The reason for considering 7:9-17 as climactic to the whole vision of seals lies in its affirmation of God's sovereign kingship and salvation.

⁹⁷ See ch. 4 sec. 2.2.2.

profoundly.⁹⁸ The throne motif indicates not just a literary, but also a theological relationship between the sixth seal and the heavenly temple festival. In both contexts people are depicted as facing the divine throne. While in 6:16 the throne is associated with wrath and judgment, in ch. 7 its function is positive as the elect stand in front of it in celebration.⁹⁹ The contrast between the two groups, standing in front of the throne in two different contexts, is deepened by ascribing universality to both.¹⁰⁰ This connection provides a contextual argument for the centrality of the throne motif for the vision of 7:9-17 in which all of the action revolves around the heavenly centre.

The answer to the question ‘who can stand?’ (6:17) receives a two partite answer in ch. 7, as indicated by the structuring device *μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον / μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον*.¹⁰¹ In the two scenes of the vision the people of God are portrayed through two different descriptions. In 7:1-8 they are the sealed 144,000, while in 7:9-17 they are the great multitude standing in front of the throne. The two scenes are thematically closely related in spite of the shift in the location: while the sealing of the 144,000 takes place on the earth, the celebration of the multitude of elect is in a heavenly context. Since all seven throne references of the vision are found in the heavenly scene, our investigation will primarily focus on 7:9-17.

2.2. BACKGROUND

The scene of 7:9-17 is related to the same heavenly context as the throne-room vision in chs. 4–5. Since both visions share the heavenly temple/palace setting, the cultic symbolism naturally

⁹⁸ The close relation of Rev. 7 with the Seven Seals vision is demonstrated in the following studies: Ulfgard, *Feast and Future*, 31-34; Müller, *Microstructural Analysis*, 252-69; Stephen Pattemore, *Souls under the Altar: Relevance Theory and the Discourse Structure of Revelation* (UBSMS, 9; New York: UBS, 2003), 128-30. These studies argue that Rev. 7 is the expansion of the sixth seal of 6:12-17. This view has been rejected in Frederick David Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective* (BZNW, 54; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1989), 335-36.

⁹⁹ The wicked seek to hide ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου (6:16), while the saved are standing ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου (7:9, 15). Though there is a terminological variety between the references concerning the two groups’ standing before the throne, the difference is not theologically significant.

¹⁰⁰ The group of the ‘kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man’ (6:15) hiding from the throne of God are contrasted to the ‘great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language’ (7:9) which celebrates the victory in God’s presence. While the motif of universality is applied to both groups, their relation to the divine throne seems intentionally contrasted.

¹⁰¹ The vision’s first part is introduced with *μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον* (7:1), the only occurrence of the structuring formula in the book in this variation, while the second part is introduced with *μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον* (7:9). Since the author normally uses *ταῦτα*, this slight variation in style is explained by Aune (*Revelation 6–16*, 450) as ‘an intrusive element in the composition’.

continues. For this reason, I will discuss here the cultic aspect of the vision first. I will then give attention to Israel's prophesied restoration as another major background utilized by John.

2.2.1. CULTIC SYMBOLISM

The similarities between the cultic aspects of 7:9-17 and chs. 4–5 are numerous. It has been persuasively argued that especially the comparison with ch. 5 reveals many striking parallels.¹⁰² In contrast to the throne-room vision, from which the term *ναός* is absent, the location of the heavenly temple festival has been clearly identified. Namely, in 7:15 it is stated that the saints 'are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple' (ἐν τῷ ναῷ αὐτοῦ). On the basis of the parallelism which identifies serving God in his temple (*λατρεύουσιν*) with being before the throne (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου) it can be concluded that the throne is located in the heavenly *ναός*.¹⁰³ A strong cultic connotation is evoked also by the use of *λατρεύω*, which appears in LXX as a 'distinctively religious' expression.¹⁰⁴ Strathmann observes that עָבַד ('to serve') is translated with *λατρεύω* in LXX with religious reference, whereas *δουλεύω* is used for rendering human relations. He concludes that 'the translators ... thus attempted to show even by their choice of words that the relation of service in religion is something apart from other relations'.¹⁰⁵ The priestly function of the saints in the heavenly *ναός* is also indicated by their white garments purified with blood (7:14)¹⁰⁶ and by their service 'day and night' (7:15). As Aune notes, such an unending service in the heavenly throne room exceeds normal worship practices at the Jerusalem Temple which involved cessation of service between the evening and morning sacrifices.¹⁰⁷

The cultic background of the vision surfaces further in the liturgical material of 7:9-12 and possibly in the reference to God's tabernacling presence among his people in 7:15 (*σκηνώσει*

¹⁰² Lund, *Chiasmus*, 367-68; cf. Müller, *Microstructural Analysis*, 280-86.

¹⁰³ Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 255.

¹⁰⁴ H. Strathmann, 'λατρεύω' in *TDNT*, IV, 58-65(60). This is the first of the only two occurrences of *λατρεύω* in Revelation. In the other reference in 22:3 the servants of God are also related to the heavenly throne which appears as the joint throne of God and the Lamb.

¹⁰⁵ Strathmann, 'λατρεύω', 60. For translation of עָבַד as *λατρεύω*, see e.g. Exod. 3:12; 4:23; 7:16, 26; 8:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7, 8, 24, 26; 20:5; 23:24, 25; Deut. 4:19, 28; 5:9; 6:13; 7:4, 16; Josh. 22:27; 24:14-24, 31. עָבַד is translated as *δουλεύω* e.g. in Exod. 14:5, 12; 21:2, 6; Deut. 15:12, 18; Judg. 3:8, 14; 9:28, 38 and consistently in Genesis.

¹⁰⁶ Beale (*Revelation*, 439-40) views here an echo to Exod. 19:10, 14, where people are commanded to consecrate themselves by 'washing their garments' that they may dwell in God's presence. He refers also to Lev. 8:30 as a broader Old Testament background where the priests' garments are sprinkled with blood signifying consecration for service in the tabernacle.

¹⁰⁷ Aune (*Revelation 6–16*, 475) refers to Ezek. 46:1-3 and *m. Tam.* as his primary evidence in making this point.

ἐπ’ αὐτούς) which has been often viewed as an allusion to the concept of God’s *shekinah*.¹⁰⁸ One of the most debated cultic symbols of the vision is related to the palm branches in the hands of the great multitude (7:9). There have been some attempts to link the imagery with the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles arguing that this event comprises the basic background to the entire scene.¹⁰⁹ However, nothing in the text warrants the specific identification of the festival. While the palms in the hands of the saints have been viewed as the major indicator of the Feast of Tabernacles festival in 7:9-17, the imagery does not necessarily connect the scene to this specific festival, since the palm shows also a more general affinity with the Hebrew cultic setting, as both Solomon’s temple and the temple in Ezekiel’s vision were decorated with images of palms. For this reason I rather align myself with Stevenson’s more general and cautious suggestion that 7:9-17 depicts essentially a heavenly temple festival in which the entire community of the faithful is gathered in front of the heavenly throne celebrating victory and offering praise to God.

2.2.2. ISRAEL’S PROPHESED RESTORATION

It has been noted by Beale that the reward set out in the climactic section of the vision (7:15-17) is described in the language of Israel’s latter-day prophesied restoration. Particularly relevant at this point is the idea of God’s tabernacling presence in 7:15 (σκηνώσει), which is an allusion to the restoration prophecy of Ezek. 37:26-28 (κατασκήνωσις) as confirmed by the verbal connection.¹¹⁰ Isa. 49:9-10 lies also in the background to the Revelation scene. The link is supported by numerous parallels related to the theme of the comfort of divine presence: never being hungry or thirsty, protection from the scorching sun, springs of living water and God’s shepherding. The possibility of a link between the innumerable multitude of saints (7:9) and the

¹⁰⁸ Craig R. Koester, *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament* (CBQMS, 22; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1989), 118; Ulfsgard, *Feast and Future*, 88-89. For a critic of this connection, see Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 476.

¹⁰⁹ The most detailed exegetical argument in favour of this view is presented by Ulfsgard (*Feast and Future*, 35-41, 69-107), who believes not only that the ‘exodus pattern’ is of central importance for the understanding of 7:9-17, but also that the Feast of Tabernacles is a secondary influence. Earlier studies emphasizing the Feast of Tabernacle background include e.g. J.A. Draper, ‘The Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles: Revelation 7:1-17’, *JSNT* 19 (1983), 133-47; J. Comblin, ‘Le rassemblement du peuple de Dieu: Ap 7,2-4. 9-14’, *AsSeign* 66 (1973), 42-49. For a critical evaluation of this approach, see Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 448-50. Following a different line of reasoning, Ford (*Revelation*, 126) suggests that the branches may be attributed to the influence of the Maccabean victory, since 1Macc. 13:51 refers to the Jews returning to Jerusalem after their victory ‘with praise and palm branches’.

¹¹⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 441-42; cf. Gregory K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, ‘Revelation’ in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. Gregory K. Beale and Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 1081-1161(1109).

Abrahamic promise of innumerable descendants has been also observed.¹¹¹ The scene of 7:9-17 could be understood against this background in terms of the ultimate fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise, and also as the restoration of Israel in the church, which appears as a continuation of the true Israel.¹¹²

2.3. INTERPRETATION

2.3.1. PEOPLE OF GOD IN REV. 7

Two groups of people of God are introduced in Rev. 7 which appear for the first time in the book: the 144,000 (7:1-8) and the great multitude (7:9-17). There is no consensus on the question of the relationship between the two groups of God's servants. While numerous contrasts have been noted between them,¹¹³ they have also been simply identified,¹¹⁴ or a distinction has been suggested according to which the 144,000 appear as a sub-set of the great multitude.¹¹⁵ I would like to offer an argument here in favour of the view that the two representations highlight two different aspects of the same group. First, this view is based on Revelation's identification-description literary pattern such as when John first hears about a new participant or group in the book's drama and this is followed by a viewing of the same figure or group. Thus, John first hears about the 144,000 and subsequently sees the great multitude – and the vision interprets the audition.¹¹⁶ Second, there is a parallel between the experiences of the two groups. While the sealing of the 144,000 indicates passing through turbulent times in the near future, it is explicitly stated that the great multitude is coming from 'the great tribulation' (7:14). Third, the temporal

¹¹¹ E.g. Mounce, *Revelation*, 162; Sweet, *Revelation*, 150; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 288; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 466-67; Beale, *Revelation*, 426-27; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 150-51; Blount, *Revelation*, 150. Aune notes that the promise to Abraham took two forms: the promise of innumerable descendants and that he would be father of many nations (Gen. 17:4-6; 35:11; 48:19; Rom. 4:16-18; Justin, *Dial.* 119-120; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.115-16). He views the reflection of the former promise in Rev. 7:9a and the later in 7:9b. While this promise began to be fulfilled by the time of the exodus (Exod. 1:7; Deut. 1:10; 10:22) the multitude in Rev. 7:9 reflects the ultimate fulfilment.

¹¹² Beale, 'Revelation', 1109.

¹¹³ Andrew Chester (*Messiah and Exaltation: Jewish Messianic and Visionary Traditions and New Testament Christology* [WUNT, 207; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007], 175) notes the following differences between the two groups: (1) the 144,000 is specifically numbered, while the great multitude cannot be numbered; (2) the former is symbolically represented in terms of the twelve tribes of Israel, while the later is a multinational crowd; (3) the geographical location of the 144,000 is the earth, while the great multitude is set in the heavenly world; and (4) the 144,000 is portrayed before an eschatological disaster, while the great multitude after it.

¹¹⁴ Charles, *Revelation*, I, 199-201; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 288.

¹¹⁵ See e.g. Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 70-71; Mounce, *Revelation*, 161. Some scholars view the earlier group as Jews or Jewish Christians. See e.g. Allo, *L'Apocalypse*, 94; Draper, 'Heavenly Feast', 136-37; A. Feuillet, 'Les 144,000 Israélites marqués du'un sceau', *NovT* 9 (1967), 191-224.

¹¹⁶ Bauckham (*Climax*, 215-16) observes that in terms of interpretation the relation between the two groups is parallel to the relationship between the Lion/Lamb imagery in 5:5-6.

and geographical differences indicate a tension, rather than a difference. Bauckham convincingly argues that both descriptions portray a messianic army, but in a different time and role. Whereas in 7:4-8 a military census preceding a holy war is recorded, in 7:9-10 the successful completion of the battle by the victorious army is celebrated. Bauckham notes that the militaristic interpretation is indicated further by the symbolism of 7:9-17: the term ὄχλος can designate also ‘army’, the white robes appear as the festal garments of the victory celebration (Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 12; 2Macc. 11:8) and the palm branches are a reminder of the celebration of triumph of the Maccabean warriors (1Macc. 13:51; cf. *T. Naph.* 5:4).¹¹⁷ Thus, it is appropriate to hold that the two groups of Rev. 7 represent two distinctive experiences of the people of God: the militant church on earth (7:1-8) and the triumphant church in heaven (7:9-17).

The great multitude is introduced with four characteristics in its identification–description pattern: (1) it is uncountable; (2) it is universally international; (3) it stands before the throne and the Lamb; and (4) the saints who comprise it are wearing white clothes and holding palm branches (7:9-10).¹¹⁸ Most significant for the purpose of our research is the multitude’s standing in front of the throne and the Lamb (ἐστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου; 7:9). The syntax reveals that θρόνος functions here as a circumlocution for God. The form of the circumlocution is unusual, since God is logically expected to be identified with the well-known throne circumlocution formula as in other places even within the same vision (7:15). However, in the construction the Lamb is juxtaposed with the throne, which indicates equality of status between God and the Lamb.¹¹⁹ Though the occupation of the throne by the Lamb is not

¹¹⁷ Bauckham, *Climax*, 225-26. More controversial is Bauckham’s interpretation of the great multitude as martyrs. This view is also supported in Johannes Weiss, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes: ein Beitrag zur Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte* (FRLANT, 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1904), 66-67; Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 288; Johann Behm, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD, 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), 46; Kiddle, *Revelation*, 138-43; Caird, *Revelation*, 95; Harrington, *Revelation*, 131. The martyrological interpretation faces several difficulties. The claim of 7:14 which identifies the great multitude as those ‘who have come out of the great tribulation’ yet have ‘washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb’ does not necessarily imply the idea of martyrdom. White garments should rather be understood as ‘a polyvalent metaphor for salvation, immortality, victory and purity’, the moral quality of those standing in the presence of God (Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 410). Therefore, the emphasis is more on the victory over the satanic forces and faithfulness to Christ in the midst of the eschatological trial.

¹¹⁸ As noted above, the white garments and the palm branches are associated with victory and feast celebration, themes meaningful in a military context of describing God’s holy army. This is far from suggesting that these symbols are capable of conveying only this meaning. For a symbol analysis, see Ulfgard, *Feast and Future*, 81-85, 89-92.

¹¹⁹ Aune (*Revelation 6–16*, 467) tries to solve the problem by a source critical explanation suggesting that the phrase καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου is an addition on the part of the author during the final stages of the composition. He holds the same of the expression καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ in 7:10; 22:1, 3. This explanation, however, is based on his source critical assumption.

stated in 7:10, the unity of the two figures is clearly emphasized in the text as they are pictured functioning closely together.¹²⁰

The throne as the centre of the heavenly realm is brought into focus again in the vision of the heavenly temple festival. A significant aspect of the great multitude's characterization in its identification–description pattern is its standing in front of the throne (ἑστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου). This is the first time in the book that creatures different from celestial beings appear before the throne in a heavenly context. Spatafora interprets the 'standing' of the multitude as an allusion to their resurrection. He differentiates between the functions of the prepositions ἐνώπιον and κύκλω, as they define differing relations to the heavenly throne in 7:9-17: the standing of the elect in front of (ἐνώπιον) the throne refers to the multitude's service, while the angels' standing around (κύκλω) the throne more suggests the notion of belonging to the same sphere.¹²¹ This suggestion is, however, based on an artificial distinction, since standing and serving do not necessary exclude each other in God's presence. On the other hand, ἐνώπιον is used in Revelation not only of the creatures, but also of the seven spirits (1:4; 4:5), the sea of glass (4:6), the golden altar (8:3) and the lampstands (11:4) as merely physical location is indicated. Still, I concur with Spatafora's observation that the standing of the multitude in front of the heavenly throne includes more than just designating their location in the vision. The expression is of theological significance for the development of the throne motif in the book, since it occurs within the identification–description pattern of God's people. While on one hand it gives an explicit answer to the question 'who is able to stand?' (6:17),¹²² more significantly for our research, it introduces the elect primarily in terms of association with the divine throne.

I would like to suggest that a consistent pattern emerges gradually in Revelation which highlights the significance of the throne motif in the book. God is introduced in the visionary part as 'the One sitting on the throne' (4:2), the Lamb as located in the midst of the throne (5:6), and the heavenly beings, including the living creatures, the elders and the angelic hosts, as standing in front and around the throne (4:4, 6, 11), whereas the elect's identity (7:9) is also intimately tied to the heavenly throne. This consistency clearly indicates the identity-defining function of the throne motif throughout the book, which, concerning the great multitude, is

¹²⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, 319.

¹²¹ Spatafora, *From the 'Temple of God'*, 148.

¹²² The profound connection between 7:9 and 6:17 is indicated by the verbal parallel related to the verb ἵστημι.

further highlighted by their depiction as serving God day and night before his throne in the heavenly temple.

2.3.2. FUNCTION OF THE THRONE IN THE CONTEXT OF RESTORED RELATIONSHIPS

The high Christology hinted at in the hymnic acclamation of the celebrating saints (7:10) is expounded in the explanation of the heavenly festival vision by one of the elders in 7:15-17. Though the throne motif is featured throughout the depiction of God's people in ch. 7, it is particularly central to the concluding scene. While the term *θρόνος* appears three times in this section, more significant is that the entire vision climaxes in picturing the Lamb at the centre of the throne (*τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἀνά μέσον τοῦ θρόνου*; 7:17).

The central idea of the scene of 7:15-17 is the fulfilment of the promise of the ultimate restoration of the divine–human relationship.¹²³ Both the human and the divine aspect of the relationship are clearly indicated. On one hand, the devotion of the elect to the relationship is expressed by their engaging in an unending priestly service indicated by the use of the distinctive cultic term *λατρεύω*. The reference point of their service is the divine throne, since they are described serving in front of it in the heavenly temple day and night (7:15; cf. 7:10). On the other hand, the throne is also central to the expounding of the divine aspect of the relationship. In 7:15-17 both the Father and the Lamb are pictured in distinct texts as occupants of the heavenly throne and the benefits of their presence for redeemed humanity are listed only after emphasizing their throne occupation. Thus, in 7:15-16 the promises of spreading God's tent, the protection from hunger, thirst and scorching heat immediately follow the reference to the throne of the Father within the well-known formula *ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου*. Similarly, the blessing of the springs of the living water is preceded by the reference to the Lamb at the centre of the throne.

¹²³ On the basis of structural considerations the scene of 7:1-8 could be related to the time of the sixth seal, while 7:9-17 portrays a scene occurring after the end of the great tribulation (Mounce, *Revelation*, 165; Smalley, *Revelation*, 198). As an alternative view, it has been argued primarily on the basis of temporal aspects that the vision should be understood as an ongoing process that will not be completed until the eschatological consummation (Charles, *Revelation*, I, 212-13; Ulfsgard, *Feast and Future*, 100-04; Beale, *Revelation*, 443-45). For example, Charles argues this thesis on the basis that *οἱ ἐρχόμενοι* in 7:14 retains its temporal force as a present participle, therefore the martyred souls are still in the process of arriving from the great tribulation. On the other hand it has been convincingly argued that in spite of the present participle form *οἱ ἐρχόμενοι* is to be translated in the past tense, since it expresses a simultaneous action with *ἔπλυναν* ('washed') and *ἐλεύκαναν* ('made white'), the two main verbs of 7:14 that are both in aorist (Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 473; cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 324). Daniel B. Wallace (*Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996], 625) confirms this translational possibility: 'The present participle is normally contemporaneous in time to the action of the main verb' (cf. BDF §339).

Thus, both aspects of the restored divine–human relationship meet in the divine throne: the service of the saints is turned towards the throne, which represents its occupants, while the divine blessings are explicitly initiated from the throne. It seems that the centrality of the throne motif in these texts highlights that the sovereign reign of God and the Lamb are the necessary context for the realization of the promises of restoration. The reference to wiping away all tears as the fulfilment of the restoration promise of Isa. 25:8 is an appropriate conclusion for the vision, as it summarizes the effect of the reign of God and the Lamb over the elect in terms of the termination of all curses that were a consequence of the broken divine–human relationships.¹²⁴

There is a close thematical connection between the visions of 7:9-17 and 21:1–22:5, since both portray the realization of the ideal condition of God’s universal reign. While ch. 7 refers to the life in front of the heavenly throne in reference to the victory in the great tribulation, chs. 21–22 depict the perfect communion in the context of new creation in which tribulation is not at all in view. In spite of the difference of perspective, the centrality of the heavenly throne and its joint occupation by God and the Lamb are shared motifs of the two visions. I turn now to the examination of the throne motif in the New Jerusalem vision, where God’s universal reign is featured in the fullest sense.

3. THE THRONE IN THE NEW JERUSALEM (22:1-5)

The vision of the New Jerusalem (21:1–22:5) is traditionally viewed as the ultimate fulfilment of the whole salvation history.¹²⁵ After the introductory vision of the coming of New Heaven and New Earth (21:1-8), the New Jerusalem is portrayed in terms of the Holy of Holies (21:9-27) and the new Garden of Eden (22:1-5).¹²⁶ The most significant appearance of the throne motif in chs.

¹²⁴ Gieschen, ‘Lamb’, 236-37. Gieschen views the concluding statement of ch. 7 as a strong indication of the unity of God and the Lamb. He suggests that the impression from the syntax is that the concluding reference to God in the sentence ἐξαλείψει ὁ θεὸς πᾶν δάκρυον ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν (7:17) encompasses a reference both to ‘the One sitting on the throne’ (7:15) and ‘the Lamb in the midst of the throne’ (7:17). This exegetical alternative should not be discounted, but it lacks the support of compelling evidence.

¹²⁵ William J. Dumbrell (*The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* [The Moore College Lectures; Homebush West: Lancer Books, 1985]) convincingly argues that Rev. 21–22 is constructed to demonstrate the fulfilment of the major ideas of salvation history. He traces the historical development of the themes of New Jerusalem, new temple, new covenant, new Israel and new creation, pointing out how they climax in the New Jerusalem vision. As Dumbrell demonstrates, the vision appears not only as an appropriate way to finish the book of Revelation, but also as a grandiose conclusion of the entire Bible’s story-line.

¹²⁶ There is a growing consensus that 21:9–22:5 elaborates on 21:1-8. However, there is a discussion on the precise nature of the elaboration. Felise Tavo (*Woman, Mother and Bride: An Exegetical Investigation into the ‘Ecclesial’ Notions of the Apocalypse* [BibTS, 3; Leuven: Peeters, 2007], 299-300 n. 20-23) warns that some have made ‘arbitrary schemata’ focusing on how each theme in 21:1-8 is linked to 21:9–22:5, while others have sought to

21–22 is the double reference in the climactic scene of the vision (22:1, 3) which provides the clearest statements in the book about the joint occupation of the divine throne on part of God and the Lamb. Since the other throne references of the vision have been already discussed,¹²⁷ our investigation will focus here on the scene of 22:1-5.

3.1. CONTEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The phrase ἔδειξέν μοι (‘showed me’) in 22:1 clearly indicates the beginning of a new section (22:1-5), similar to 21:9-10.¹²⁸ While in 21:9-17 ‘the bride ... the Holy City’ is revealed, the attention shifts in 22:1-5 to the regained Eden. There is no unanimity concerning the relation of 22:1-5 to the rest of the vision. Rissi, following Lohmeyer, marks off the section as an independent vision, basing his argument on the structuring formula, the repetitions from ch. 21 and the introduction of the new imagery of Paradise.¹²⁹ Similarly, Aune objects that the use of Paradise imagery does not cohere particularly well with the earlier description of the New Jerusalem as an enormous cube.¹³⁰ On the other hand, Fekkes questions the conclusion of Rissi and offers an argument in favour of the thematic unity of 21:22–22:5 based on the use of Isa. 60:19 in *inclusio* fashion in 21:23 and 22:5a.¹³¹ In line with Fekkes, Mathewson observes repetition of a number of significant ideas in 22:1-5 from the preceding section, which indicates continuity according to his interpretation.¹³²

The vision of 22:1-5 is best regarded as the conclusion to all of ch. 21. It seems that the purpose of adding fresh imagery lies in generating a sense of climax.¹³³ The focus is on what

explain the parallel connections in terms of sources which have either been misplaced or were inserted later into the text. See this source for a discussion and extensive bibliographical references.

¹²⁷ See ch. 4 sec. 2.2.4 and 3.3.

¹²⁸ δείκνυμι is a frequent structuring device in Revelation. The aorist form ἔδειξεν appears only in the New Jerusalem vision in reference to the Holy City (21:10) and the regained Eden (22:1). δείξω as a future form is more frequent, introducing ‘things which must take place’ (4:1), the great prostitute (17:1) and the Lamb’s bride (21:9).

¹²⁹ Mathias Rissi, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation 19.11–22.15* (SBT, 2/23; London: SCM, 1972), 52f.

¹³⁰ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1175.

¹³¹ Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 98-99.

¹³² Similarly to Fekkes, David Mathewson (*A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1–22.5* [JSNTSup, 238; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003], 186) refers to the presence of Isa. 60:19 in both 21:23-26 and 22:5 as a link between the two sections. He notes that the shared background of the sections is the description of the temple in Ezek. 47, the use of the number twelve (21:12-14; 22:2) and the ‘street’ (21:21; 22:2).

¹³³ Rev. 21:1-8 has often been separated from the New Jerusalem vision. It has been viewed as a passage which reports the culmination of the eschatological events described in the preceding chapters (19:11–21:8). For example, Celia Deutsch (‘Transformation of Symbols: The New Jerusalem in Rv 21:1–22:5’, *ZNW* 78 [1987], 106-26[109-10]) holds that while 21:1-8 speaks of a new heaven and new earth, and of a descending New Jerusalem, the motif

stands at the centre of the city: the worshiping community's source of life. Thus, 22:1-5 is a new section contiguous with the previous descriptions, but it also introduces fresh imagery for depicting a new aspect of life in the New Jerusalem. The developments in this section clearly reveal rhetorical and thematic progress.¹³⁴ The centrality of the throne motif in 22:1-5 significantly contributes to the climactic tone not only of the vision of chs. 21–22, but the entire book. Moreover, the centrality of the throne in the concluding scene suggests an *inclusio* with the opening throne scene (chs. 4–5) around the visionary part of the book, which provides a further argument for viewing the throne motif as central to the book of Revelation.

3.2. BACKGROUND

There is a consensus that the Garden of Eden tradition forms the primary background of 22:1-5. While it is well-known that different Jewish and early Christian eschatological conceptions draw on Garden of Eden imagery in the same way as John does,¹³⁵ it is often assumed that John's vision is primarily modelled on Ezekiel's utilization of the creation narrative in Ezek. 47:1-12.¹³⁶ I hold that a combined influence of Genesis' Garden of Eden and Ezekiel's utilization of this tradition most appropriately explains the imagery of Rev. 22:1-5.

The influence of Ezekiel's vision is regularly dealt with in the scholarly literature on the topic; however, the examination of the parallels with the creation–fall narrative of Genesis is very often neglected.¹³⁷ To address this need I suggest five parallels in this regard. First, the river of the water of life (ποταμὸς ὕδατος ζωῆς) alludes to the river flowing out of Eden (Gen. 2:10;

itself is developed only in the so called 'Jerusalem appendix' of 21:9–22:5, which is a separate vision (cf. Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 15). On the other hand, 21:1-8 is also viewed as a prologue to 21:9–22:5 (Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21–22 in the Light of its Background in Jewish Tradition* [WUNT, 2/129; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001], 267). Neither view denies the inherent connection of 21:1-8 with 21:9–22:5 in content and use of images. J. Comblin ('La liturgie de la Nouvelle Jérusalem [Apoc XXI,1–XXII,5]', *ETL* 29 [1953], 5-40) tried to justify the unity of Rev. 21:1–22:5 on the basis of a suggestion that the three annual pilgrimage feasts (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles) make a liturgical framework for the vision. For the critic of Comblin's thesis, see Mathewson, *New Heaven*, 199-201.

¹³⁴ Mathewson, *New Heaven*, 187.

¹³⁵ For the comprehensive treatment of the topic in the Old Testament, see Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2–3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature* (CBET, 25; Leuven: Peeters, 2000). For Jewish literature and early Christian interpretations, see Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, *Paradise Interpreted: Representation of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity* (Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions, 2; Leiden: Brill, 1999); Markus Bockmuehl and Guy G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Paradise in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Views* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹³⁶ E.g. Moyise, *Old Testament*, 81; Beale, *Revelation*, 1103.

¹³⁷ Such omission is shown e.g. in Mathewson, *New Heaven*, 187f.; Lee, *New Jerusalem*, 289-92; Comblin, 'La liturgie', 17-20. On the other hand, Sung-Min Park ('More Than a Regained Eden', 238) argues that the Eden narrative of Genesis 'seems to be a *Vorbild* for John's description of New Jerusalem in this division'. Du Rand ('New Jerusalem', 297-98) holds that the Genesis narrative is a source of equal importance to Ezek. 47.

ποταμός). Second, the tree of life appears in both contexts (ξύλον ζωῆς in Rev. 22:2; ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς in Gen. 2:9).¹³⁸ Third, the curse (κατάθεμα) is banished from the New Jerusalem, while in the fall narrative it appears as a consequence of the sin (ἐπικατάρατος; Gen. 3:14, 17). Fourth, the promise of seeing God’s face reflects the undoing of the fall’s consequence of banishment from the divine presence (Gen. 3:23). Fifth, the promise of the elect’s reign (βασιλεύσουσιν) reflects Adam’s original commission to rule over the created world (ἄρχετε; Gen. 1:28). The five suggested allusions do not have equal strength. Whereas the first two are supported by verbal parallels, the other three reflect only thematic correspondence. John does not identify the new creation with the Garden of Eden, but describes the New Jerusalem in the language of Paradise. Such an approach is not new, since in the Old Testament and particularly in the Jewish apocalyptic literature the Garden of Eden imagery and the motif of eschatological temple/city appear as closely related.¹³⁹

The intertextual relation with Ezek. 47:1-12 is also striking. Vanhoye suggests the following parallels: the river flowing out, the tree(s) on either side of the river, the production of fruit and leaves for healing.¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, numerous discontinuities have been also observed with Ezekiel’s imagery: the river *of life*; the river flows *from the throne through the city*; the tree *of life*; the tree apparently stands *in the midst* of the street; the tree produces *twelve* fruits; the healing is for the *nations*.¹⁴¹

For the sake of our research it is significant to note the fundamental difference between Revelation’s, Ezekiel’s and Genesis’ designation of the river’s source. In Genesis the river starts from Eden and it is divided into four branches (Gen. 2:10). On the other hand, in Ezekiel it issues from the temple and runs to the Dead Sea (Ezek. 47:8-9). In contrast, in Rev. 22:1-5 the throne

¹³⁸ The translation of ξύλον ζωῆς in Rev. 22:2 has attracted some discussion. While the form in 22:2 is singular, a common tendency is to understand it in a collective sense (‘trees’). See e.g. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 765; Charles, *Revelation*, II, 176; Bratcher, *Handbook on the Revelation*, 312. The translation as a plural has been criticized e.g. in Édouard Delebecque, ‘Où situer l’Arbre de vie dans la Jérusalem céleste? Note sur Apocalypse XXII,2’, *RevThom* 88 (1988), 124-30; Park, *More Than a Regained Eden*, 235-38; Mathewson, *New Heaven*, 189-90.

¹³⁹ For the comprehensive treatment of the question in the Old Testament, see Terje Stordalen, ‘Heaven on Earth – Or Not? Jerusalem as Eden in Biblical Literature’ in *Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2–3) and its Reception History*, eds. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg (FAT 2/34; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 28-53. Just as it is stated that the earth shall return to a state of primeval chaos, the New Jerusalem is sometimes linked with Paradise itself, not just with the new creation (2Bar. 4:1-7; 1En. 90:33-36). In the description of the consummation of ages in *T. Dan* 5:12 Eden and New Jerusalem are set in a parallel: ‘Saints shall refresh themselves in Eden, the righteous shall rejoice in the New Jerusalem.’ It is also said that Paradise was sometimes hidden only to be revealed in the future (2Bar. 59:8; 4Ezra 7:123; 8:52; 2En. 8:1-6).

¹⁴⁰ Albert Vanhoye, ‘L’utilisation du livre d’Ezéchiel dans l’Apocalypse’, *Bib* 43 (1962), 436-77(470-71).

¹⁴¹ Mathewson, *New Heaven*, 188.

of God and the Lamb is pictured as the source of the water of life, since their presence replaces the temple on the New Earth (21:22). This variety reveals that though John creatively utilized the traditions of Genesis and Ezekiel, his description is distinctive.¹⁴²

3.3. INTERPRETATION

While Rev. 22:1-5 is a textual unit which utilizes the Garden of Eden imagery, there is a shift of tenses in the description. The present participle verbs of the first two verses (ἐκπορεύομενον, ποιοῦν and ἀποδιδούν) are followed by a series of future verbs in 22:3-5 (ἔσται, λατρεύουσιν, φωτίσει and βασιλεύουσιν). Aune explains the change as an indication that the author has shifted from describing his visionary experience to a prophetic scenario expected to take place.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, the throne appears in both contexts as the joint throne of God and the Lamb, I suggest, with two different theological meanings.

3.3.1. THE THRONE AS THE SOURCE OF LIFE

In the concluding vision of the book of Revelation the throne is pictured as the focal point of the new creation. It functions as a life-giving source in 22:1-2 from which wells up the river of the water of life that runs through the city watering the tree of life.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the throne is closely related to two life-images: the ‘water of life’ (ὕδωρ ζωῆς)¹⁴⁵ and the ‘tree of life’ (ξύλον ζωῆς).¹⁴⁶ These images are also juxtaposed in 1QH 8:5-7 and they are found in Hellenistic descriptions of

¹⁴² For discernible patterns in John’s reinterpretation of Ezek. 40–48, see Vogelgesang, ‘Interpretation of Ezekiel’, 113-31.

¹⁴³ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1178.

¹⁴⁴ Several MSS (1611^s 2329 pc) suggest τοῦ στόματος (‘out of mouth’) instead of τοῦ θρόνου as the source of the water. Beale (*Revelation*, 1105-06) notes that the στόματος reading fits into John’s style, because ἐκπορεύομαι (‘proceed’) occurs five times as part of clauses with ἐκ τοῦ στόματος. Nevertheless, τοῦ θρόνου is preferred, because it is supported by a large amount of good quality external evidence.

¹⁴⁵ The ‘water of life’ is also mentioned in 21:6. Jens-W. Taeger (*Johannesapokalypse und johanneischer Kreis: Versuch einer traditions-geschichtlichen Ortsbestimmung am Paradigma der Lebenwasser-Thematik* [BZNW, 51; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1989], 59-60) rightly observes that the descriptive ζωῆς relates the concept to other eschatological imageries of life in Revelation which appear as metaphors for the eternal life (the book of life [3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27], the crown of life [2:10] and the tree of life [2:7; 22:14]). The life-giving water is a frequent motif in the Old Testament (Ps. 36:9; 46:4; Prov. 10:11; 14:27; Isa. 12:3; 35:6-9; 44:3; 55:1; Jer. 2:13; Joel 3:18). In the Fourth Gospel it is applied to Jesus (4:10-14) and to the Holy Spirit (7:37-39). For a celestial river in Jewish literature, see *T. Abr.* (Rec. B) 8:3; *3Bar.* 2:1.

¹⁴⁶ The ‘tree of life’ often has a central role in the concept of eschatological restoration. A frequent motif is the promise that the righteous will be allowed to eat from the tree of life (*T. Lev.* 18:10-11; *Apoc. Elij.* 5:6; *4Ezra* 2:12, 18-19; 8:52; *T. Jac.* 7:24; *3En.* 23:18) and will experience abundance and healing (*4Ezra* 7:123; *2En.* 42:3-5). In *2En.* 8:1-8 the seer encounters in the third heaven the tree of life with other fragrant trees, along with two streams (cf. *Apoc. Paul* 22; *Odes* 11:16).

the afterlife.¹⁴⁷ Bauckham notes that appearing together they ‘represent the food and drink of eschatological life’ which come from God ‘who is himself the life of the new creation’.¹⁴⁸ Thus, God’s presence mediated through these images of life embodies life in its fullest sense, the ‘life which is eternal because it is immediately joined to its eternal source in God’.¹⁴⁹ The entire picture conveys the impression of the ‘fructification of the new cosmos’.¹⁵⁰

It is stated in 22:1, 3 that the divine throne is occupied jointly by God and the Lamb (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀρνίου). This is the third context in the visionary section of the book in which the Lamb is pictured on the throne and at the same time it is the clearest statement of the shared occupancy. Whereas in 5:6 and 7:17 the Lamb’s and the Father’s occupation of the throne are separately stated within the same visions, in the concluding vision of the book they are finally pictured as juxtaposed, sitting together as equal occupants of the same divine throne. Hengel calls our attention to the increasing precision of Revelation’s author in defining the communality of the throne throughout the book that reaches complete clarity in 22:1-5.¹⁵¹ The concluding scene also encapsulates the climactic Christological message of the book, since sharing the throne between God and the Lamb on equal terms implies the notions of divine unity and shared sovereignty.¹⁵²

The vision of the joint throne of God and the Lamb in the eschatological Garden of Eden setting emanates a rhetorical energy which makes it a fitting conclusion of the book’s visionary part.¹⁵³ It has been rightly concluded by Deutsch that: ‘Paradise is, of course, the symbol of primeval completeness, a completeness which follows the defeat of the waters of chaos. Thus, it

¹⁴⁷ Ps.-Plato, *Axiochus* 371c.

¹⁴⁸ Bauckham, *Theology*, 133.

¹⁴⁹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 141. Similarly Tavo (*Woman*, 333) notes: ‘The “river of the water of life” flowing from the throne through the city thus connotes the very life of God here being imparted upon the redeemed (=city).’

¹⁵⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 1107. The same author has provided an extensive argument (*Temple*, 313-34) that the paradise temple of Rev. 21–22 encompasses the entire geography of the new creation. He views the ‘rationale for the world-encompassing nature of the paradisaic temple ... in the ancient notion that the Old Testament temple was a microcosmic model of the entire heaven and earth’.

¹⁵¹ Hengel, *Studies*, 151.

¹⁵² The divine unity is further highlighted in chs. 21–22 by the statement that both God and the Lamb form one temple (21:22) and the shared title Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ (21:6; 22:13; cf. 1:8). Also, the employment of a singular possessive pronoun such as applied at the same time both to God and the Lamb serves the same purpose: δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ (22:3), λατρεύουσιν αὐτῷ (22:3), πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ (22:4) and ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (22:4). See Beale, *Revelation*, 1113; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 356.

¹⁵³ Grant Macaskill (‘Paradise in the New Testament’ in *Paradise in Antiquity*, 64-81[78]) suggests that the river of life is the representation of the Spirit in the throne scene of 22:1-5 and the image functions as ‘a symbol of the fellowship with the triune God that is mediated by the Holy Spirit’. He concludes that the throne in New Jerusalem is the throne of a triune God. While no strong evidence supports this hypothesis and the background in the Paradise tradition is against such symbolical interpretation, Macaskill’s suggestion deserves a further investigation.

is only fitting that the perfection of a restored or new order be symbolized by the image of Paradise. End-time has become primeval time, assuring communities under crisis of the ultimate victory of life and order.¹⁵⁴

The final visionary scene also settles the question of power which is the central issue in the book. It portrays the victorious side of the cosmic conflict, the legitimate occupants of the throne, but at the same time it underscores the fundamental difference between the nature of God's rule and the rule of the earthly powers. Whereas the beast's regime is self-fulfilling and life-denying, God's reign is life giving because it seeks the welfare of his creation.¹⁵⁵

3.3.2. THE CULTIC-GOVERNMENTAL CENTRE OF THE NEW CREATION

In the section of the concluding vision with the series of verbs in the future tense (22:3-5) the throne of God and the Lamb is portrayed as the cultic-governmental centre of the new creation around which all activity revolves. Though Aune holds that the repeated reference to the throne in 22:3 is 'somewhat redundant' after 22:1,¹⁵⁶ I would like to suggest that the author's decision reflects intentionality. Namely, the function of the throne in 22:3-5 is nuanced from its theological meaning in 22:1-2 discussed above. Similar to the throne-room vision in chs. 4–5, the throne appears in 22:3-5 in a blended cultic and political function and it is deliberately freed of all the association of human rule.¹⁵⁷

The New Jerusalem appears in chs. 21–22 as a city of kingly–priestly character.¹⁵⁸ As the seat of the divine kingdom it houses the throne as its 'main quality',¹⁵⁹ the symbol of the ruling authority of God and the Lamb. The fact that a divine throne is present in the city expresses the idea that the political structure of the new creation is theocracy, a veritable kingdom of God.¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, the New Jerusalem is pictured also as the eschatological Holy of Holies, filled by God's immediate presence.¹⁶¹ The need for any temple building ceases, since the divine

¹⁵⁴ Deutsch, 'Transformation of Symbols', 117.

¹⁵⁵ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 73.

¹⁵⁶ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1179.

¹⁵⁷ Mathewson, *New Heaven*, 204.

¹⁵⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott: Studien zum Herrschafts-und Priestermotiv in der Apokalypse* (NTAbh, 7; Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), 352.

¹⁵⁹ Spilsbury, *Throne*, 148.

¹⁶⁰ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Jerusalem in the Revelation of John: The City as Symbol of Life with God* (Zacchaeus Studies; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 62.

¹⁶¹ The statement of 21:3 that ἡ σκηπή τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ σκηνώσει μετ' αὐτῶν is to be understood as a reference to the Jewish tabernacle/temple. σκηπή and σκηνώ appear as the translations of כַּשָּׁב and כַּשֵּׁ, used in the Old Testament for God's presence in the cultic context. σκηπή also appears in σκηπή τοῦ μαρτυρίου, an

presence is unrestricted (21:22). The theocentricity, strongly emphasized in Rev. 4–5, is in focus again in the description of the eschatological kingdom of God.¹⁶²

The location of the throne on earth implies the moving of the divine governmental centre into a new context. The relocation from heaven to the new earth is made possible because of the permanent removal of any curse from the earth announced in 22:3 (πᾶν κατάθεμα οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι; ‘any curse there shall not be any more’). The exact meaning of κατάθεμα and the literary relationship of the mentioned phrase to the rest of the vision is an interpretive ambiguity closely related to the function of the throne. It is often assumed that the term refers to a cursed thing.¹⁶³ However, this is unlikely, since that would account for a mere repetition of the thought from 21:27. It is more appropriate to interpret κατάθεμα as designating the curse itself. As a translation of הָרַם, it includes ‘the sense of the sacred ban placed by Yahweh on enemies of his rule, requiring that they be utterly destroyed’.¹⁶⁴ The idea is employed in this sense in Zech. 14:11 (οὐκ ἔσται ἀνάθεμα ἔτι; ‘there will no longer be a curse’), a text which seems to be in the mind of Revelation’s author, since it refers to the restoration of Jerusalem in the eschatological context.¹⁶⁵ As has been argued above, the reference is to be understood also against Gen. 3:17-19 and in that sense the allusion implies the restoration of the Edenic conditions.

The removing of the curse makes possible the dissolution of all the distance between the occupants of the throne and the created world. The unrestricted approach to the divine throne is closely related to the promise of seeing God’s face (22:4) and reflects the successful undoing of the consequences of a human rebellion in the Garden of Eden.¹⁶⁶ This scene of immediate access to the divine throne is in contrast to the limited approach to God in the throne-room vision of chs. 4–5 in which his face cannot be seen by humanity and even the heavenly beings form inner

expression frequent for translation of אהל מועד, another term for the tabernacle most frequent in the Pentateuch (Wilhelm Michaelis, ‘σκηνη’ in *TDNT*, VII, 368-94).

¹⁶² Bauckham, *Theology*, 140.

¹⁶³ E.g. Swete, *Apocalypse*, 296; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 332; Bratcher, *Handbook on the Revelation*, 313.

¹⁶⁴ Bauckham, *Climax*, 316.

¹⁶⁵ The terminological difference between κατάθεμα (Rev. 22:3) and ἀνάθεμα (Zech. 14:11) is not decisive, for both verbs are a legitimate rendering of הָרַם. Aune (*Revelation 17–22*, 1179) argues against the same background claiming that κατάθεμα refers specifically to ‘the curse of war’. However, this interpretation is too narrow. It is more appropriate to view destruction as the effect of the ban – as Bauckham regards the total destruction of Babylon in Rev. 18:2 ‘the effect of the ban on her’ (Bauckham, *Climax*, 318).

¹⁶⁶ The idea of seeing God’s face reflects full awareness of the presence and power of God in biblical literature (Job 33:36; Ps. 10:11; 17:15; 3Jn 11). It also appears often as an eschatological blessing (Ps. 84:7; Mt. 5:8; 1Jn 3:2; Heb. 12:14; *Jub.* 1:28; *4Ezra* 7:91, 98; *1En.* 102:8).

circles (the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders).¹⁶⁷ The explanation for the contrast between the different manifestations of divine sovereignty lies in the issue of presence and absence of sin in the universe. However, in the final throne scene of Revelation the sin is past and the divine sovereignty meets unrestrictedly with human freedom at the throne.¹⁶⁸

Besides the function of symbolizing the divine ruling presence in the new order, the throne motif also reflects cultic aspects. The community of the redeemed is pictured in 22:1-5 in a dual priestly–royal role. The motif of priesthood surfaces in the use of the cultic term λατρεύω (22:3) and in the idea of access to God’s presence. In this regard, also significant is the expression τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν (‘his name will be on their foreheads’; 22:4), which recalls the inscription ‘Holy to the Lord’ engraved on the golden plate of Aaron’s turban (Exod. 28:36-38), which pointed out Israel’s unique status.¹⁶⁹ The royal character of the community merges with the cultic aspects, since the terms βασιλεύω and λατρεύω designate roles simultaneously practised by the elect. Though the idea of their reigning is not expressed by the throne motif in the final vision of Revelation, the application of βασιλεύω to the elect is to be understood as the climactic fulfilment of the promise in 3:21.¹⁷⁰ The dual function of the elect not only fulfils the priestly–royal promises of the programmatic statement of the exodus (Exod. 19:6),¹⁷¹ but at the same time it indicates the restoring of the ultimate value given to humanity in the Garden of Eden in Adam’s kingly–priestly role.¹⁷² Dumbrell rightly observes that the new

¹⁶⁷ Bauckham, *Theology*, 142.

¹⁶⁸ Bauckham (*Theology*, 142-43) insightfully notes on the convergence of divine sovereignty and human freedom: ‘His kingdom turns out to be quite unlike the beast’s. It finds its fulfilment not in the subjection of God’s “servants” (22:3) to his rule, but in their reigning with him (22:5). The point is not that they reign over anyone: the point is that God’s rule over them is for them a participation in his rule. ... Therefore in the perfection of God’s kingdom theonomy (God’s rule) and human autonomy (self-determination) will fully coincide. Thus Revelation’s final use of its central image of God’s throne (22:3b-5) frees it of all the associations of human rule, which must always have subjects, and makes it a pure symbol of the theocentricity of its vision of human fulfilment’.

¹⁶⁹ An objection raised against the priestly aspect is the lack of explicit attribution of the priestly title to the elect in 22:3b-5 (as found in 1:6, 5:10 and 20:6) and the absence of the temple (Rissi, *Future*, 83; Comblin, ‘La liturgie’, 25). Mathewson (*New Heaven*, 210-11) successfully refutes these objections: ‘Such observations fail to consider the scriptural substructure of John’s vocabulary, which extends beyond the need to include the word “priest”, as well as the cumulative effects of these statements in their present context. Moreover, these verses express what is at heart of and the ultimate goal of priestly service, not just cultic ritual, but the worship of God in his immediate presence.’

¹⁷⁰ The elect’s reign is also anticipated in Dan. 7:18, 27 and Rev. 1:6; 5:10, where the idea of reigning appears without a direct reference to throne(s).

¹⁷¹ For more details on the usage of Exod. 19:6 in Revelation, see Schüssler Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott*, 68f.; John Hall Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 and the Phrase βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα* (NovTSup, 12; Leiden: Brill, 1966), 107-20.

¹⁷² For the priestly–kingly function of Adam in Eden as the first earthly sanctuary, see Beale, *Temple*, 81-87; Gordon J. Wenham, ‘Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story’ in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Period of the Bible* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 19-25.

community is the ‘legatee of all the promises given to national Israel ... In these people all the symbolism of the Old Testament which emphasized Israel’s function – covenant, land, temple, priesthood, kingship – has been gathered together’.¹⁷³

4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter three contexts have been investigated in Revelation in which the Lamb appears as sitting on the throne (5:6; 7:17; 22:1, 3). Whereas the idea of the Lamb’s throne occupation is not disputed in 7:17 and 22:1, 3, scholarly opinion is sharply divided over the interpretation of 5:6. Even the proponents of the Lamb’s throne occupation in ch. 5 justify their interpretation almost exclusively on the basis of the wider context of Christ’s enthronement in the book. One of the major contributions of this chapter was to offer a detailed exegetical argument in favour of this position. An answer has been also suggested to the question of the Lamb’s distance from the throne in the scene, generally avoided by the proponents of Christ’s enthronement in ch. 5. I have argued that the solution for the problem of distance lies in interpreting 5:5-6 in terms of John’s identification–description literary technique, which makes room for the possibility of chronological discontinuity between 5:6 and 5:7.

It has been demonstrated that the Lamb’s throne occupation is never separated from the Father’s, since in all chapters in which the Lamb is on the throne, the Father appears also in the same role. The shared throne occupancy does not indicate a rivalry, but rather a shared authority and a close union that implies high Christology. Thus, the communality of the throne is defined in increasing precision throughout the book as it reaches its climax in the concluding scene of 22:1-5 in which God and the Lamb are clearly juxtaposed in the new creation context.

Two further conclusions emerge on the basis of our investigation which, I suggest, point in the direction of the throne motif’s centrality in Revelation. First, it was demonstrated in the previous chapter that the major characters in Rev. 4 are all identified in their identification–description pattern in relation to the throne: God (4:2), the twenty-four elders (4:4) and the living creatures (4:6). This tendency continues in ch. 5, since the Lamb (5:6) and the host of angelic beings (5:11) are introduced similarly in terms of their relation to the throne. Thus, the identification–description literary technique brings the throne into focus as the point of interest and sets a pattern which is, I suggest, followed consistently throughout the book as discussed in

¹⁷³ Dumbrell, *End of the Beginning*, 160.

regard to the elect in ch. 7. Second, the fact that the visionary part of Revelation starts with a throne scene (4:1–5:14) and also ends with a throne scene (22:1-5) suggests a throne *inclusio*. Significantly, in both scenes the Lamb appears in a major role. In the first vision he is enthroned, while in the last it is disclosed that he practises his ruling authority on equal terms with the Father. Thus, the book is framed by the throne motif and this *inclusio* points to the legitimacy of the divine rule in the universe.

THRONES OF GOD'S ALLIES

Along with the numerous references of Revelation that associate the throne motif with God and the Lamb, in several texts other figures or groups are pictured as seated on throne(s). They belong either to the category of God's allies or his adversaries. The sharp division between the groups is implied in the location of these thrones. While the thrones of God's adversaries are always confined to the earthly context, the thrones of his allies are generally pictured in heaven. These two clusters of thrones make two sub-motifs within Revelation's throne 'motif-network' that stand either in a supportive or an antithetical relationship with the throne of God and the Lamb. Their contrasted relationship with the central throne sets these two sub-motifs in sharp opposition.

In this chapter the throne texts related to God's allies will be examined. Three groups are represented in this sub-motif: the overcomers (3:21), the twenty-four elders (4:4; 11:16) and the judges (20:4). It has been noted by Williamson that all the throne references related to the groups allied with God are short and undeveloped.¹ These groups are either given only corporate names ('overcomers' [3:21]; 'elders' [4:4]) or categorized on the basis of their function ('those with authority to judge'; 20:4). They embody either the totality of the redeemed or act as their representative groups.

1. ENTHRONEMENT OF THE OVERCOMERS (3:21)

The first text in Revelation in which beings other than God are related to the throne motif is 3:21. At the same time, this text is the only in the entire book in which God, Christ and the group named ὁ νικῶν ('overcomers') are depicted within a single verse as sitting on thrones. As will be demonstrated, this enthronement reference as a concluding statement of the Seven Messages vision is of major significance for the theological outlook of the epistolary part of Revelation, but also more widely for the development of some of John's key motifs.

¹ Williamson, 'Thrones', 130.

1.1. CONTEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The statement of the overcomers' enthronement is located at the end of the last of the Seven Messages, preceding the universal exhortation to listen to the Spirit.² Although there is no consensus on the general literary structure of the messages,³ it is widely held that the climax of each individual letter is reached in the concluding promises to the overcomers.⁴ It seems that the location for introducing the throne motif in reference to God's allies is a strategic choice on the part of the author. While it has been demonstrated that the rewards of the seven churches are appropriate to the character of the communities' background,⁵ it has at the same time been noted that the concluding promise in 3:21 goes a step beyond and as a climactic expression of the eternal life with Christ it summarizes all the prior promises of salvation.⁶ Lohmeyer rightly notes: 'Dieser Spruch verheisst die letzte und höchste Würde; er schliesst so wirkungsvoll den Kranz der 7 Ueberwindersprüche wie der 7 Sendschreiben.'⁷

The enthronement promise of 3:21 is most often dealt with within contextual discussions. The 'duo-directional' function of this text which appears as a clue for understanding the following larger sections has been already argued in this dissertation.⁸ I hold that this insight is of critical significance for understanding the development of the throne motif within the book as a whole. On the other hand, it has been often neglected the examination of the theological aspects of our text against the genre of the messages. Such an enquiry enlightens additionally the function of the throne motif in 3:21. While a detailed discussion of the question is impossible

² For the background and the significance of the hearing exhortation for the theology of Revelation, see Anne-Marit Enroth, 'The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation', *NTS* 36 (1990), 598-608; Gregory K. Beale, 'The Hearing Formula and the Visions of John in Revelation' in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honour of J.P.M. Sweet*, eds. Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 167-80.

³ For example, Boring (*Revelation*, 86-91) argues for eight features of the messages, Minear (*I Saw a New Earth*, 41-61) for seven, Robert L. Muse ('Revelation 2-3: A Critical Analysis of Seven Prophetic Messages', *JETS* 29 [1986], 147-61[149]) for five, while Beale ('Hearing Formula', 169) besides a seven-part division considers also the possibility of four broad sections.

⁴ In contrast, Craig R. Koester ('The Message to Laodicea and the Problem of Its Local Context: A Study of the Imagery in Rev. 3:14-21', *NTS* 49 [2003], 407-24[411]) suggests an arrangement of thoughts in concentric circles in the last message. This view challenges the climactic function of 3:21. The major objection to Koester's thesis is that the suggested parallels between 3:16 and 3:20 are unconvincing, and at the same time the correspondence between 3:14 and 3:21 is to be viewed only as an *inclusio*.

⁵ As an alternative view, Bauckham (*Climax*, 6) suggests that whereas the first six promises are appropriate to the church addressed, the promise of 3:21 diverges from this pattern for the reason of anticipating ch. 5. For an argument that challenges Bauckham's conclusion, see Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (JSNTSup, 11; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 205-06; cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 214.

⁶ Roloff, *Revelation*, 65; Krodell, *Revelation*, 145; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 150.

⁷ Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 40.

⁸ See ch. 4 sec. 1.1.

here, I suggest that against the persuasive conclusion of Aune's genre analysis according to which the messages function primarily as royal or imperial edicts, the throne symbolism of 3:21 takes on a theologically loaded meaning.⁹ Namely, if we read the messages at least partially as proclamations issued by the veritable sovereignty, the occupant of the throne that really matters, the promise of the overcomers' enthronement may be viewed as a rhetorical invitation for redefining the readers' perception of reality and as a call for endurance in the face of the circumstances that need to be overcome.

1.2. BACKGROUND

The use of the throne motif in 3:21 shows a strikingly close parallel with the idea of the enthronement of great characters and pious figures in Jewish literature, especially in Qumran. Since an exhaustive discussion of this topic has been provided in the background section of this dissertation,¹⁰ the focus of attention will here be on parallels with the synoptic tradition, where the idea that the followers of Jesus will occupy thrones is also stated. Vos, the author of the most detailed comprehensive study on the synoptic tradition in Revelation, persuasively argues for a close parallel of Rev. 3:21 with Lk. 22:29-30 and Mt. 19:28. He demonstrates that the nature of the relationship is more in 'similar thoughts and ideas than in the identical wording of these thoughts'.¹¹ His thesis is almost unanimously accepted, especially with regard to Luke.¹² However, there is a disagreement concerning the question of dependence. On one hand Bousset and Hadorn hold that the saying in Revelation is the more original form,¹³ whereas Bultmann is

⁹ The following are the main suggestions concerning the genre question: (1) revelatory letter (Klaus Berger, 'Apostelbrief und apostolische Rede: Zum Formular frühchristlicher Briefe', *ZNW* 65 [1974], 190-231[212-19]); (2) prophetic speech forms (Ulrich B. Müller, *Prophetie und Predigt im Neuen Testament: formgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur urchristlichen Prophetie* [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1975], 47-107); (3) covenant suzerainty treaty (William H. Shea, 'The Covenant Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches', *AUSS* 21 [1983], 71-84; Szigeti, *A Jelenések könyve*, 67f.); (4) a type of Greek oratory (John T. Kirby, 'The Rhetorical Situations of Revelation 1-3', *NTS* 34 [1988], 197-207); and (5) royal-imperial edict (David E. Aune, 'Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches', *NTS* 36 [1990], 182-204). I consider the royal-imperial edict suggestion the most persuasive against the *Sitz im Leben*, but the elements of the covenant scheme also deserve serious attention in combination with this view (similar to Beale, *Revelation*, 227-28).

¹⁰ See ch. 2 sec. 2-3.

¹¹ Louis A. Vos, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1965), 101. Only two words are common between the two traditions: *θρόνος* and *καθίζω*. Vos suggests that 2Tim. 2:11-12 may also possibly reflect the same Jesus logion, but no substantial argument is provided in support of his hypothesis.

¹² E.g. Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 233; Charles, *Revelation*, I, 102; Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 37. Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 265) is an exception, who completely omits Rev. 3:21 from his discussion of the sayings of Jesus in Revelation.

¹³ Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 233f.; D. Wilhelm Hadorn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (THKNT, 18; Leipzig: Deichert, 1928), 65.

of opinion that Rev. 3:21 universalizes the synoptic saying that originally applied only to the disciples.¹⁴

The two traditions show numerous similarities, but they also reveal significant differences. Their comparison results in several observations. First, the promise of the eschatological reign is shared, but while the synoptic sources agree almost verbatim on the limited application to the twelve, the saying is universalized in Revelation.¹⁵ Second, the purpose of the enthronement in synoptic tradition is taking part in the judgment, while in Revelation it is not specified. Third, Rev. 3:21 is in a close structural-thematic parallel with the Lucan tradition, since in both contexts the enthronement motif appears with the promise of enjoying an eschatological meal with the Lord.¹⁶ Fourth, there is a major difference concerning the relation of the saints to Christ's throne, since Revelation's concept of saints as Christ's *σύνθρονοι* goes beyond the synoptic idea of the twelve's separate thrones.¹⁷ Vos persuasively argues that the same primitive tradition is behind both forms and 'to determine which of these ... is the more original is an impossibility'.¹⁸ Still, in spite of the differences, the synoptic tradition remains besides Rev. 20:4 the only close parallel in biblical literature to the enthronement promise in 3:21.¹⁹

1.3. INTERPRETATION

1.3.1. THE IDENTITY OF THE OVERCOMERS

The Seven Messages of Rev. 2–3 are historically addressed to seven Christian communities in Asia Minor (1:11). It is generally accepted that 'in a sense the whole book is about the way the Christians of the seven churches may, by being victorious within the specific situations of their

¹⁴ He argues that the saying is a formulation of the early Palestinian Church (Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* [FRLANT, 12; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 10th edn, 1995], 170-71).

¹⁵ In spite of this significant difference, there is a thematic connection concerning the character of the heirs of the throne(s): in Luke the promise is given to those who continue with Jesus in his temptation (22:28), in Matthew to his followers (19:28), while in Revelation to the overcomers (3:21) (Vos, *Synoptic Tradition*, 101).

¹⁶ This connection is widely acknowledged (e.g. Vos, *Synoptic Traditions*, 103; Prigent, *Revelation*, 220). While Bauckham (*Climax*, 107-08) does not deny it, he rather views the parable of the Watching Servants (Lk. 12:37) as the primary source behind the imagery of Rev. 3:20-21. However, it is difficult to imagine that a text without a throne motif would be primarily behind a so crucial throne-text for the theology of Revelation.

¹⁷ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 63; Vos, *Synoptic Traditions*, 102; Osborne, *Revelation*, 214; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 131.

¹⁸ Vos, *Synoptic Traditions*, 103. For a comprehensive treatment of the debate over sharing in Christ's rule in the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, see Hanna Roose, *Eschatologische Mitherrschaft: Entwicklungslinien einer urchristlichen Erwartung* (NTOA/SUNT, 54; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).

¹⁹ The notion of the saints' reign with Christ might be considered a wider thematic parallel which appears occasionally in New Testament (2Tim. 2:12), but with high frequency in Revelation (1:6; 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5).

own churches, enter the new Jerusalem'.²⁰ The messages reveal that many of the churches are unprepared. The need for awaking, prompted by the appeal to the emotions of 'shame and emulation',²¹ is particularly blatant in the message to the believers in Laodicea, the recipients of the promise of enthronement.

The condition for receiving the reward in all messages is overcoming (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), but in the final message to Laodicea it is uniquely highlighted that the analogy for this need is Christ's overcoming (ὡς καὶ γὼ ἐνίκησα; 'as I also overcame'). Therefore, Strand rightly notes that the concept of overcoming as applied here to the believers in Laodicea cannot be separated from the theme of 'Christ as the Overcomer *par excellence*'.²² Namely, the joining of Christ to the Father on his throne after his overcoming provides a model for the Christians, whom are similarly promised that they will join Christ on his throne following their overcoming.²³ The different tenses employed for indicating Christ's and the believers' experience is enlightening in interpreting the analogy. While the references to Christ's victory (ἐνίκησα) and enthronement (ἐκάθισα) are both in a historical aorist, the believers' overcoming is expressed by a present participle (νικῶν) followed by the promise of enthronement in the future tense (δώσω). Thus, Christ's victory and enthronement are referred to as past experiences, while the believers' overcoming is pictured in terms of an ongoing process climaxing in enthronement with Christ in an eschatological context.²⁴ As Smalley notes, the text expresses a tension peculiar

²⁰ Bauckham, *Theology*, 14.

²¹ For the analysis of John's strategic appeals to emotions in the Seven Messages, see David A. deSilva, 'The Strategic Arousal of Emotions in the Apocalypse of John: A Rhetorical-Critical Investigation of the Oracles to the Seven Churches', *NTS* 54 (2008), 90-114.

²² Kenneth A. Strand, "'Overcomer': A Study in the Macrodynamics of Theme Development in the Book of Revelation", *AUSS* 28 (1990), 237-54(251). The close association of Christ with the overcomers is further emphasized by the repeated use of the preposition μετά in 3:20-21 in regard to joint sitting at table (δαιπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ) and joint sitting on the throne (καθίσει μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ). Another μετά connects Christ and the Father in the same context (ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου).

²³ There have been some attempts to distinguish the throne of Christ from the throne of the Father on the basis of 3:21 (Bullinger, *Apocalypse*, 229; Walvoord, *Revelation*, 99; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 325). The idea of separate thrones, however, ignores the notion of the overcomers' becoming σύνθρονοι with the Father on the basis of Christ's sharing the throne both with the Father and them. Also it does not do justice to the Father's oneness with Christ and Revelation's throne theology as a whole in which this idea is expressed climactically in 22:1, 3 (Maier, *Offenbarung* 1-11, 248).

²⁴ There is no unanimity concerning the time of realization of the enthronement promise of 3:21. While the majority view favours eschatological interpretation (e.g. by Charles, *Revelation*, I, 101; Allo, *L'Apocalypse*, 45; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 107; Lenski, *Revelation*, 164; Mounce, *Revelation*, 130; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 57; Bauckham, *Theology*, 125; Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 46), there is a trend among some of the recent interpreters to view the inauguration of this promise in the present reality (e.g. Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 220; Beale, *Revelation*, 310). I rather align myself with the majority view, because of the future tense (δώσω), but even more the

to Johannine eschatology, since it conveys the message that ‘what takes place in eternity cannot be completely detached from Christian faith and praxis, on the part of the Laodicean community, in the present’.²⁵

There have been some attempts to argue the idea of the universal martyrdom of the overcomers in 3:21. This view is reflected in the designation ‘martyr-conquerors’, coined by Franzmann.²⁶ A comprehensive argument in defence of this interpretation has been provided in the dissertation by Reddish.²⁷ His position is summarized as follows:

First, ... on the basis of 2:26-27 and 3:21, ὁ νικῶν is used in the letters to refer to a special group of Christians – the martyrs. They conquer like Christ conquered – through their deaths. Second, the author of Revelation views all believers to be potential martyrs. He does not, however, expect the entire church to suffer martyrdom. This is evident from the general promises contained in the letters (2:10; 3:4; 3:10; 3:20). These general promises are given to all the believers who remain faithful to Christ.²⁸

While the observation of Reddish is correct in regard to the second point, the first suggestion is vulnerable for two reasons. First, the conclusion is supported only by single evidence based on his interpretation of 3:21 which is projected to 2:26-27, a text thematically connected to 3:21. Second, it is not noticed that the purpose of the analogy between the overcomers and Christ lies not in emphasizing the identical fate, but rather the content of the promise, the σύνθρονοι idea. This short critique suggests a point of view similar to that of Sweet, who argues that ‘a man is constituted *conqueror* by his continuing attitude and behaviour, rather than by the circumstances of his physical death’.²⁹

wider throne theology of Revelation which envisions the saints only during the millennium (20:4) and in the new creation (22:3) on thrones or in a reigning position as promised in 3:21.

²⁵ Smalley, *Revelation*, 103.

²⁶ Martin H. Franzmann, *The Revelation of John* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1986), 132. Klaus Berger (*Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums: Theologie des Neuen Testaments* [UTB für Wissenschaft; Tübingen: Francke, 2nd edn, 1995], 326-31) goes even further, arguing for a general tradition in the early church that equates the following of Jesus with martyrdom. He claims that according to this tradition the martyrs are rewarded with eschatological power. For a critique of this view, see Hanna Roose, ‘Sharing in Christ’s Rule: Tracing a Debate in Earliest Christianity’, *JSNT* 27 (2004), 123-48(124 n. 2).

²⁷ Mitchell G. Reddish, ‘The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation’ (PhD Dissertation; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), 132-60. Reddish refers to the following two works that are in line with his viewpoint: Caird, *Revelation*, 32-34; Kiddle, *Revelation*, 63-64.

²⁸ Reddish, ‘Martyrdom’, 149.

²⁹ Sweet, *Revelation*, 83.

1.3.2. THE ENTHRONEMENT PROMISE IN THE LIGHT OF THE OVERCOMING MOTIF

It has been widely recognized that the overcoming motif is of major significance for the structure and theology of Revelation.³⁰ As stated by Swete, ‘The book is a record and a prophecy of victories won by Christ and the Church.’³¹ The word νικάω occurs seventeen times in ten chapters of Revelation, out of the twenty-eight references in the New Testament.³² Since this data indicates at least partially that a certain development of the overcoming motif occurs ‘in a progressive and integrated fashion’ throughout the entire scope of the book,³³ the promise of becoming Christ’s σύνθρονοι in 3:21 needs examination against the unfolding of this motif.

The overcoming motif serves as one of the crucial aspects of the holy war theme in Revelation. Bauckham notes that this connection is often ignored by interpreters, who fail to notice the relation of the motif with the language of battle (11:7; 12:7-8, 17; 13:7; 16:14; 17:14; 19:11, 19).³⁴ Three different groups or individuals are characterized as conquerors in Revelation: Christ is depicted as the most important and the ultimate conqueror, but also the conquering experiences of his allies and the forces of evil are described.³⁵ In chs. 2–3, the immediate context of the text under consideration, the emphasis is on the overcoming of an unspecified group of God’s human allies. The object of the conquest is undefined until 12:11.³⁶ Bauckham persuasively argues that the reason for this delay is intentional, since ‘it is only in chapters 12–13 that the principal enemies of God, who must be defeated to make way for his kingdom, are introduced’.³⁷

The Seven Messages vision is fundamental for the development of the overcoming motif in Revelation. Each of the messages ends with promises given to this group (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5,

³⁰ Ragnar Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror: Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1954), 212-38; Strand, “Overcomer”, 237-54; Bauckham, *Theology*, 88f.; Daniel K.K. Wong, ‘The Johannine Concept of the Overcomer’ (PhD Dissertation; Dallas Theological Seminary, 1995); Reddish, ‘Martyrdom’, 132-60.

³¹ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 29.

³² As noted by Otto Bauernfeind (‘νικάω’ in *TDNT*, IV, 942-45[942]) the basic meaning of νικάω designates “victory” or “superiority”, whether in the physical, legal, or metaphorical sense, whether in mortal conflict or peaceful competition’. See Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 11, 21(2x); 5:5; 6:2(2x); 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7; Mt. 12:20; Jn 16:32; Rom. 3:4; 12:21(2x); 1Jn 2:13; 2:14; 4:4; 5:4(2x); 5:5.

³³ Strand, “Overcomer”, 237.

³⁴ Bauckham, *Theology*, 69.

³⁵ For the analysis of the νικάω texts grouped into these three categories, see Reddish, ‘Martyrdom’, 133-61.

³⁶ Rev. 11:7 is an exception, for in this text the beast ascending out of the abyss is the subject. The overcomers in 12:11 are clearly the saints, who conquer by the means of the Lamb’s blood and the word of their testimony not sparing their life even from martyrdom. The object of the conquest in 12:11 is defined by the personal pronoun αὐτός, which points to ὁ κατήγωρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν (‘accuser of our brothers’) in the previous verse, identified earlier in a detailed description as ‘the great dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called devil or Satan’ (12:9).

³⁷ For an in-depth analysis of the overcoming motif in Rev. 12–13, see Bauckham, *Theology*, 88-94.

12, 21). The significance of this series needs to be evaluated against the New Jerusalem vision (chs. 21–22) which records the reappearing of the individual promises without exception.³⁸ It has been rightly noted by Strand that the glories set forth in the concluding vision of the book go in their ‘vastness and grandeur’ even beyond the promises in chs. 2–3.³⁹ The development of the overcoming motif climaxes in the only *νικῶ* passage of the vision (21:7), in which the promise of granting the overcomers all things harks back to the Seven Messages indicating the climactic fulfilment of all the promises. Strand persuasively argues for the relevance of the following verse (21:8) for the clarification of the overcoming motif in which a characterization of a group contrasted to the overcomers is provided. The comparison of the characteristics listed for the sufferers of ‘the second death’ with the problems peculiar to the churches in the Seven Messages leads us to the conclusion that the ‘categories of non-inheritors in Rev. 21 reflect the very same characteristics as the non-overcomers in the churches’.⁴⁰ This indicates that at the end only two categories of people exist: the overcomers and the non-overcomers. Thus, Revelation’s first and last visions stand in close theological relation and the drama enfolding between them is framed and encircled with the admonitions and promises set out there.⁴¹

It seems appropriate to go a step beyond these observations and suggest a more profound relation of 21:7 and 3:21. A basic parallel between these two statements lies in their climactic nature. As the promise of 3:21 forms the high point of the Seven Messages vision, similarly the climax of the overcoming motif’s development in the visionary part of the book is reached in 21:7. A thematic similarity between the two statements can be established. While in 21:7 the essence of the inheritance is expressed by the well-known covenant formula ‘I will be his God and he will be my son’,⁴² the essence of the *σύνθρονοι* promise in 3:21 is a corresponding idea of a highest possible honour which appears as the most intimate expression of the covenant relationship.⁴³ Thus, the promise of sitting on the throne is a magnificent conclusion to the Seven Messages and an appropriate introduction to the visionary part of the book, which develops in

³⁸ For a detailed list of promise-fulfilment correspondences, see Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 59-60.

³⁹ Strand, “Overcomer”, 249 n. 21.

⁴⁰ Strand, “Overcomer”, 251; cf. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 61; Bauckham, *Theology*, 92.

⁴¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 52.

⁴² This expression sums up both the Abrahamic and the Davidic covenants (Gen. 17:7; 2Sam. 7:14). It has been noted that the ‘father’ of 2Sam. 7:14 is changed to ‘God’ in Rev. 21:7. The probable reason for the alteration is seen in the fact that the father-son relationship is reserved for God and Christ in Revelation (1:6; 2:27; 3:5, 21; 14:1). See Sweet, *Revelation*, 300; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 458; Osborne, *Revelation*, 740.

⁴³ This parallel confirms the thesis that the Seven Messages are ‘the literary microcosm of the entire book’s macrocosmic structure’ (Beale, ‘Hearing Formula’, 168).

apocalyptic fashion the theme of cosmic conflict over the ruling authority. Williamson rightly notes that the throne imagery ‘seems almost inevitable’ at this strategic location in the book.⁴⁴

After the introduction of the group of overcomers in the earthly context (chs. 2–3), another group of God’s allies is depicted, but in a heavenly setting (ch. 4). While the enthronement of the overcomers is a promise for the future, it is stated in the present that the twenty-four elders possess individual thrones in God’s presence. These heavenly thrones, which encircle God’s central throne, will be discussed on the following pages.

2. THRONES OF THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS (4:4; 11:16)

The mysterious group of God’s allies named ‘the twenty-four elders’ (οἱ ἑξήκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι) appear twelve times in Revelation.⁴⁵ In two texts it is stated that they occupy heavenly thrones (4:4; 11:16). These thrones are in two respects different from the throne in 3:21. First, no sense of sharing is indicated, since the elders occupy their own thrones – 4:4 clearly states that the number of their thrones is twenty-four. Second, the reason for the elders’ throne occupation is not specified, whereas in 3:21 a condition of sitting on a throne is overcoming. On these grounds it may be concluded that the thrones of the twenty-four elders are of a ‘different sort’⁴⁶ from those of the overcomers.

2.1. CONTEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The twelve references of Revelation to the twenty-four elders may be grouped into three categories according to their function. The elders are six times pictured as part of heavenly worship scenes,⁴⁷ they are four times referred to when indicating a specific location in heavenly context,⁴⁸ while twice they function in the role of interpreters as they converse with John.⁴⁹ Although the thrones of the elders are specifically mentioned only in 4:4 and 11:16, they are presupposed in the other texts where these heavenly figures appear. This is evident not only in the throne-room vision to which the elders are related in 4:4, but also in worship scenes other than in chs. 4–5 which share the same setting of the heavenly temple.

⁴⁴ Williamson, ‘Thrones’, 132.

⁴⁵ Rev. 4:4, 10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4.

⁴⁶ Williamson, ‘Thrones’, 136.

⁴⁷ Rev. 4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4.

⁴⁸ Rev. 4:4; 5:6, 11; 14:3.

⁴⁹ Rev. 5:5; 7:13.

While the elders are regular participants in the different heavenly throne scenes, their prominence is most clearly indicated in Rev. 4–5. Two observations lead us to this conclusion. First, seven out of the twelve occurrences of *πρεσβύτεροι* in the book appear in the heavenly throne-room vision.⁵⁰ Second, the elders' thrones are not merely insignificant pieces of furniture in the description of the heavenly realm in ch. 4, since their introduction immediately follows the picturing of God's heavenly *θρόνος* (4:4). It has been suggested that the introduction of the elders and their thrones interrupts the logical flow of the heavenly realm's description.⁵¹ Charles views in this literary feature evidence for the author's poor literary skills.⁵² However, his thesis is convincingly refuted by Hurtado, who argues for intentionality on John's part:

The author's failure to describe the figures in the scene in concentric circles outward from the throne ... does not necessarily mean that the author was simply illogical or careless. Again, his demonstrated skill elsewhere in modifying apocalyptic imagery suggests that the irruption of the elders into the description of the heavenly scene right after the reference to the throne of God was deliberate, and conveys something of the author's own message and purpose in delivering his vision.⁵³

While Hurtado's conclusion is sound, I prefer refining his suggestion that the elders themselves 'may be the point of emphasis in the scene, second only to the throne of God'.⁵⁴ It is more appropriate to view the function of the elders, closely tied to 'the One sitting on the throne', as a point of significance here. As will be demonstrated later more profoundly, the appearance of the elders' thrones around God's central throne is of particular significance for the development of the throne motif, since their subordinated nature brings the theological perspective underlying the vision to the centre of attention.

2.2. BACKGROUND

The twenty-four elders are unparalleled in early Jewish and early Christian sources. While the plurality of thrones in the context of theophanic visions is characteristic to Dan. 7:9-10,⁵⁵ still it seems that John's imagery shows the closest similarity with *Asc. Isa.* 8:26 and 9:7-18, where the Old Testament saints are portrayed as wearing robes and receiving crowns and thrones after

⁵⁰ Rev. 4:4, 10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14.

⁵¹ For the structure of Rev. 4, see ch. 4 sec. 1.1.

⁵² He suggests (*Revelation*, I, 115) that the description of the elders in 4:4 is a later addition by the hand of the author.

⁵³ Hurtado, 'Revelation 4–5', 111-12.

⁵⁴ Hurtado, 'Revelation 4–5', 112; cf. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 288.

⁵⁵ Beale (*Use of Daniel*, 191) suggests that the image of thrones in Rev. 4:4 is derived from Dan. 7:9-10, while the source behind the elders is possibly Isa. 24:23 (cf. Vogelgesang, 'Interpretation of Ezekiel', 174).

Christ's death and resurrection.⁵⁶ The picturing of the saints with crowns and sometimes with glorified garments in the age to come is characteristic of numerous texts of Jewish literature.⁵⁷

The term *πρεσβύτερος* has a rich background.⁵⁸ Its use in Judaism and Christianity poses a peculiar problem, because of the twofold meaning of the word: *πρεσβύτερος* can point to age, but also to an office – and the two meanings are not always clearly distinguishable.⁵⁹ In ancient Israel the term 'elder' (זקן) was used for designating a position of authority and leadership on various levels: in social groups⁶⁰ and cities,⁶¹ and also at a national level.⁶² De Vaux notes that the elders or heads of families were traditionally the leading citizens who dealt with community affairs in council sessions and served as judges for the people.⁶³ In the Qumran community the elders were given the highest status after the priests.⁶⁴ Also those who held religious or political authority in early Judaism were generally known as 'elders'. In early synagogue organization the *πρεσβύτεροι* were members of the *γερουσία* ('council') of local Jewish communities, though Schürer points out that the earliest dated evidence for the use of *πρεσβύτερος* as a title is dated to the mid-third century C.E.⁶⁵ In early Christianity *πρεσβύτερος* is often used to designate the members of the community in a leadership role.⁶⁶ Interestingly, in Ignatius the college of elders is referred to by *πρεσβυτέριον* ('presbytery'),⁶⁷ an expression employed also for the Jewish Sanhedrin.⁶⁸

It has been argued by Yarbro Collins that the *Sitz im Leben* throws the decisive light on the interpretation of the concept of elders in Revelation. She notes that Revelation's *πρεσβύτεροι* need to be viewed against 'the fact that many social organizations of the time were ruled by councils of elders – the Roman provinces of Asia Minor in cooperation with the Roman

⁵⁶ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 224.

⁵⁷ E.g. 1QS 4:7; 1QH 9:25; *T. Benj.* 4:1; *b. Ber.* 17a.

⁵⁸ For a comprehensive word-study, see Günther Bornkamm, 'πρέσβυς' in *TDNT*, VI, 651-83.

⁵⁹ The age is clearly the only sense in numerous passages as e.g. Gen. 18:11f.; 19:4, 31, 34; 24:1; 35:29. For a New Testament use of the term in the same sense, see e.g. Jn 8:9; Acts 2:17; 1Tim. 5:1-2; 1Pet. 5:5. *πρεσβύτεροι* designates forefathers in Heb. 11:2, the bearers of the normative doctrinal tradition in Mt. 15:2; Mk. 7:3, 5, while in 1Pet. 5:5 and *1Clem.* 1:3 it refers to the status of a dignitary in the community.

⁶⁰ The title appears in reference to families, clans and tribes (e.g. Judg. 11:5-11).

⁶¹ Judg. 8:14; 11:3; Ruth 4:1-4.

⁶² For the expressions 'elders of Israel' or 'elders of the people', see Exod. 3:16, 18; 4:29; 12:21; 18:12; Num. 11:14-17; Josh. 7:6; 8:10.

⁶³ De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 152-53.

⁶⁴ 1QS 6:8; CD 9:4.

⁶⁵ cf. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, eds. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar and Martin Goodman (4 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, rev. edn, 1973-87), III, 102 n. 56.

⁶⁶ Acts 11:30; 14:23; 20:17; 1Tim. 5:1, 17, 19; 1Pet. 5:1, 5; Jas 5:14; *2Clem.* 17:3, 5; Hermas, *Vis.* 2.4.2, 3.

⁶⁷ E.g. Ignatius, *Magn.* 2:1; 3:1; 6:1; 7:1; *Trall.* 3:1; 7:1.

⁶⁸ Lk. 22:66; Acts 22:5.

governor, the synagogues, and the local Christian churches'.⁶⁹ While the value of this point should not to be denied, it is more appropriate to view the primary background for the interpretation of Revelation's elders in the Old Testament. Of the numerous uses of $\eta\lambda\delta\epsilon\iota$,⁷⁰ two texts in which elders appear as a group in the presence of Yahweh are particularly significant for our purpose. In Isa. 24:23 they are pictured as witnesses of Yahweh's glory within a description of an eschatological event, while in Exod. 24:9-10 they accompany Moses up to Sinai and experience there a vision of God. It has been convincingly argued that these two texts serve together as the primary influence behind John's concept of the twenty-four elders.⁷¹ However, Schlatter's observation also merits consideration, since he calls our attention to the tradition according to which seventy golden thrones have been arranged around Solomon's throne reserved for his elders as his co-assessors.⁷²

2.3. INTERPRETATION

2.3.1. THE IDENTITY OF THE ELDERS

The identify of the twenty-four elders has been widely discussed, but without achieving a consensus. The ambiguity of the question springs from the lack of clear identification of this group in Revelation. The fact that the noun $\pi\rho\epsilon\sigma\beta\acute{\upsilon}\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\iota$ is anarthrous in its first appearance (4:4) seems to indicate the assumption of the author that this group is unknown to his readers.⁷³ The numerous interpretive suggestions can be broadly divided into three main categories with further sub-variants:⁷⁴ (1) glorified human beings;⁷⁵ (2) angels;⁷⁶ and (3) figures derived from

⁶⁹ Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 35; cf. Boring, *Revelation*, 106.

⁷⁰ See John L. McKenzie, 'The Elders in the Old Testament', *Bib* 40 (1959), 522-40.

⁷¹ For a persuasive argument in favour of this view, see André Feuillet, 'Les vingt-quatre vieillards del' Apocalypse', *RB* 64 (1958), 5-32(13-14); Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 141f. The elders in Exod. 24:9-10 are clearly human beings. At the same time the interpretation of the elders in Isa. 24:23 as Israel's human leaders is supported by the Jewish tradition (e.g. *Targ. Isa.* 24:23; *Sifre Num.* 92; *m. Ab.* 6.8; *B. Bat.* 10b; *b. Ab.* 6.8; *Kalla* 54a-b).

⁷² Adolf Schlatter, *Das Alte Testament in der johanneischen Apokalypse* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1912), 40.

⁷³ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 287; Smalley, *Revelation*, 118.

⁷⁴ For an extensive analysis of the weaknesses and strengths of the different options, see André Feuillet, *Johannine Studies* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1964), 194-214; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 287-92.

⁷⁵ The main sub-variants of this position are the following: (1) the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles; (2) the saints of the Old Testament; (3) martyr Christians; and (4) the twenty-four authors of the Old Testament. The interpretation of some of these sub-variants is supported according to Osborne (*Revelation*, 228) by Swete, Alford, Walvoord, Feuillet, Sweet, Kraft, Ford, Wall, McDonald and Harrington.

⁷⁶ This view has two sub-variants: (1) angels; and (2) angelic representatives of the community of the redeemed. According to Osborne (*Revelation*, 229) the angelic interpretation is argued by Beckwith, R. Charles, Moffatt, Ladd, Beasley-Murray, Morris, Mounce, Johnson, Roloff, Krodel and Thomas.

astral mythology.⁷⁷ Although no answer is free from difficulties, an argument will be offered here in favour of the identification of the elders with glorified saints, who function as the representatives of the Old Testament and New Testament people of God.

First, the details in the elders' description indicate their identity as glorified human beings. The white garments (ἱματίοις λευκοῖς) they wear are consistently related in Revelation to people faithful to God.⁷⁸ Similarly, the golden crowns (στεφάνους χρυσοῦς) are never ascribed to angelic beings in the book. John's careful choice of word for designating the crowns of the elders (στέφανος) also points in this interpretive direction. Namely, instead of διάδημα, a term with a limited reference to royal authority alone is used, which is capable of expressing more concepts simultaneously such as the idea of victory.⁷⁹ It seems that the imagery characteristic to this eminent group (white garments, golden crowns and thrones) tie the elders to the overcomers of chs. 2–3, to whom these items are promised as a reward for conquering (2:10; 3:4-5, 11, 21).

Second, the content of the elders' speeches and praise point to their strong tie with the elect. Thus, in the hymn of 5:9-10 they are singing of redemption as a personal experience.⁸⁰ On the other hand, they appear in a royal–priestly role, which in Revelation is the function of the redeemed throughout eternity.⁸¹ The elders' participation in the drama of Revelation in announcing the victory of the slain Lamb (5:5), identifying the elect (7:13-17) and praising God at the announcement of his eschatological triumph (11:15-19) also indicate a role closely tied to the interests of humanity.

Third, the term πρεσβύτεροι is more easily applied to humans than to angelic beings. As has been pointed out above, in Old Testament texts that portray elders in the presence of Yahweh the reference is to human beings (Exod. 24:9-10; Isa. 24:23).⁸² In Jewish literature the term is used sometimes for designation of the chief priests as elders.⁸³ As noted by Beale, the priestly character of the twenty-four elders indicated by their mediating functions (5:8) and participation

⁷⁷ Morton (*One upon the Throne*, 109) as a proponent of this theory refers to Gunkel, Bousset, Malina, Yarbro Collins, Murphy and Giesen as supporting this interpretation.

⁷⁸ Rev. 3:4-5, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14.

⁷⁹ For an excellent study on the background and meaning of the crown imagery in Revelation, see Stevenson, 'Golden Crown', 257-72. For the interpretation that the concept of victory is expressed by στέφανος, see Swete, *Revelation*, 69, 74; Charles, *Revelation*, II, 20; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 185.

⁸⁰ For text critical discussions, see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 666.

⁸¹ See ch. 5 sec. 3.3.2.

⁸² See sec. 2.2.

⁸³ E.g. *m. Yom.* 1.5; *m. Tam.* 1.1; *m. Mid.* 1.8.

in the heavenly liturgy (4:10, 14; 11:16; 19:4) is intelligible against this background.⁸⁴

Additionally, the expression πρεσβύτεροι is in Heb. 11:2 applied to the great Old Testament saints.

Fourth, the meaning of twenty-four as the number of the elders also suggests human identification. Various interpretations have been advanced in attempting to explain the choice of this number.⁸⁵ I hold most convincing the view of scholars who argue with plausibility that the number twenty-four is derived from the twenty-four priestly orders of 1Chron. 24:7-18, who function as Israel's representatives in the temple service.⁸⁶ This interpretation seems to be most in line with the cultic character of Revelation's temple scenes in which the elders generally appear. However, it does not rule out taking the number twenty-four as twelve doubled, a significant number in Revelation for designating God's people. Thus, the twenty-four has been often seen as including the twelve apostles and the twelve patriarchs, who represent the unity of the two historical components of the church.⁸⁷ This interpretation finds support in John's vision of the New Jerusalem in which the names of the twelve patriarchs are inscribed on the twelve gates of the city, while on its twelve foundations stand the names of the apostles (21:12-14).⁸⁸ The decision over the meaning of the precise composition of the elders lacks any further evidence; however, the picturing of the group in terms of a royal priesthood and the specification of its number as twenty-four suggests the representation of the Old Testament and the New Testament people of God.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 324.

⁸⁵ Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 291-92) refers to the following main suggestions: (1) the twenty-four hours of the day; (2) the traditional twenty-four authors of the Old Testament; (3) symbols of the cosmos; and (4) the twenty-four lictors of Domitian. Lupieri (*Apocalypse*, 134) connects the number with the 'about twenty-five men' of the vision in Ezek. 8:9-16, who are accused of committing abominable acts of idolatry in the Jerusalem Temple. He interprets the twenty-four elders as the holy counterparts of this group. For the possible parallels of the twenty-four elders with the imperial cult, see Allen Brent, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order: Concepts and Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity Before the Age of Cyprian* (VCSup, 45; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 201-05.

⁸⁶ E.g. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 114; Mounce, *Revelation*, 135-36; Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 224; Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota, Fla.: First Impression, 1997), 109; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 288-89; Beale, *Revelation*, 324; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 134. The twenty-four courses of the priesthood served in the Jerusalem Temple twice a year for one week at a time, from Sabbath to Sabbath (Josephus, *Ant.* 7.365-66). In contrast, the priesthood of the Qumran community was divided into twenty-six courses (1QM 2:2), probably as the result of their own calendar (Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 289).

⁸⁷ This is an old view advocated already by Victorinus, *Comm. Apoc.* 4.3; cf. Swete, *Apocalypse*, 68; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 149; Beale, *Revelation*, 322; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 135.

⁸⁸ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 114.

⁸⁹ For an argument that only Old Testament people of God are included in the elders, see e.g. Feuillet, *Johannine Studies*, 194f. For a critique of this view as too narrow, see Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 185-86.

Finally, our argument is supported indirectly by evidence indicating the unlikelihood of the angelic interpretation. The designation of angels as ‘elders’ is unparalleled in biblical and Jewish apocalyptic literature of the time.⁹⁰ Also angels never sit on thrones, nor do they wear white crowns or white clothing in Revelation. This description is rather characteristic of the saints either in the heavenly setting (7:13-15; 19:7-8, 14) or in indicating eschatological reward (2:10; 3:4-5; 3:21; 20:4). Therefore, the sitting of the elders counts against an angelic interpretation, since the angels generally stand in God’s presence expressing the idea of service through their posture.⁹¹

While I have offered here an argument in favour of the interpretation of the twenty-four elders as glorified human beings, it must be noted that the question of identity is not the central concern regarding this group. Aune rightly notes that John was simply not concerned with specifying more closely the identity of these mysterious figures.⁹² The reason probably lies in the fact that in his mind the function of the elders was far more important than speculation over their identity.

2.3.2. FUNCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ELDERS AND THEIR THRONES

The twenty-four elders form the most prestigious part of the heavenly council in Revelation. The fact that they possess their own thrones arranged so that they immediately encircle the central throne implies a status of honour. This elevated position is clearly unique to created beings in Revelation, denied even to the living creatures.⁹³ The description and the activities of the elders indicate a function of royal priesthood. While the crowns and thrones point to royal status, their primary task is cultic in nature. This is suggested by their function as the leaders of the heavenly worship (4:10-11; 5:9-10, 14; 11:16-18; 19:4) and by presenting the prayers of the saints to God (5:8). In two other texts the elders serve as interpreters interacting directly with John (5:5; 7:13).

It has been rightly observed that the primary significance of the elders lies in the acts they perform: vacating their thrones (4:10), laying down their crowns before God’s throne (4:10) and

⁹⁰ Elders appear rarely as angelic figures in later literature (e.g. *2En.* 4:1). In *Mart. Per.* 12, written about 200 C.E., it is stated that an unspecified number of elders encircle God in his throne room and that they probably constitute his angelic court.

⁹¹ For a similar line of argument against an angelic interpretation, see Feuillet, *Johannine Studies*, 193-94; Ford, *Revelation*, 72.

⁹² Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 288.

⁹³ Hurtado, ‘Revelation 4-5’, 113.

ascribing attributes to God (4:11). Stevenson rightly notes that the elders' performance is to be interpreted against the Roman background as the expression of vasallage:

In antiquity a common sign of vassalage was the taking off of the diadem (symbol of royalty) by the conquered ruler and the placing of that diadem at the feet of the conqueror (Cicero, *Sest.* 27; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.29). The performance of the elders should be understood as an imitation of such an act of subordination. By vacating their thrones and casting their crowns at the feet of the one on the central throne, the elders testify either that they have no right to possess for themselves what these objects represent or that they recognize one with greater right. The behavior of the elders thus functions to show that whatever is symbolized by the thrones and crowns belongs to God.⁹⁴

Bornkamm similarly recognizes that though the elders hold symbols of royalty, they do not exercise dominion. Their function is related rather to the adoration of 'the One sitting on the throne'.⁹⁵ The thrones they possess are not specified as different in size from the central throne,⁹⁶ but it is clear that no rivalry exists between the throne at the centre and those encircling it. The elders' thrones function as 'sub-thrones'⁹⁷ expressing 'delegated authority',⁹⁸ since the elders' performance clearly implies that only God is worthy to possess what the thrones represent.

The thrones of the elders inform significantly the throne motif of Revelation. I would like to suggest a threefold theological function that points to these thrones' significance in relation to God, the overcomers and his adversaries. First, the elders' sub-thrones are inseparably tied to the throne of God. They hold significance only in relation to the central throne. This is evident in the fact that in all appearances of the elders the throne of God is involved either directly⁹⁹ or indirectly by its centrality in the scene¹⁰⁰ or a circumlocution reference.¹⁰¹ It is also significant that the sub-thrones are never at the centre of attention. Moreover, they are vacant in five out of the twelve references to the elders in the book, as these characters give up their place on the thrones by prostrating themselves.¹⁰² It is rightly concluded by Mealy concerning the significance of the repeated throne-vacation: 'Effectively then, the elders are pictured as continuously receiving, yet continuously releasing ... symbols of their authority. The paradoxical image

⁹⁴ Stevenson, 'Golden Crown', 268-69.

⁹⁵ Bornkamm, 'πρόεδρος', 668.

⁹⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 344.

⁹⁷ Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, 122.

⁹⁸ Mounce, *Revelation*, 139.

⁹⁹ Rev. 4:4, 10; 5:6; 5:11; 7:11; 14:3; 19:4.

¹⁰⁰ Rev. 5:5, 8.

¹⁰¹ Rev. 5:14; 7:13; 11:16. The reference in 5:8 differs, because the Lamb, who is enthroned in the same chapter, is involved instead of God.

¹⁰² Rev. 4:10; 5:8, 14; 11:16; 19:4.

evoked is of an uninterrupted reciprocation between divine giving and creaturely giving back of authority. No one in the scene (not even God) stakes a claim to autocratic rule.¹⁰³ Second, there is a correspondence between the characteristics of the elders in 4:4 and the promises to the overcomers in chs. 2–3 which suggests a close relationship.¹⁰⁴ The shared motifs are: the thrones (3:21; 4:4), the white garments (3:5; 4:4) and the crowns (3:11; 4:4). While the throne appears climactically as the last item in the line of the promises in the Seven Messages, it is at the first place in the introductory description of the elders. This feature highlights the throne's eminence among the other items and points to the assurance concerning the promised status of the elect. Third, the thrones of the elders function in a polemical role against the throne of the beast, a false claimant of authority, who appears later in the book as the major antagonist of God and his allies (13:2; 16:10).¹⁰⁵ Whereas a throne and authority are claimed arrogantly by this power for himself, the repeated vacating of the elders' thrones in rendering homage to God highlights his sole sovereignty, as the only one possessing a legitimate right to hold whatever the thrones and the crowns symbolize.¹⁰⁶

I turn now to the third component of the sub-motif of the thrones of God's allies, which is set in a different temporal context from the references discussed so far. While the enthronement promise to the overcomers and the thrones of the twenty-four elders appear in the context of salvation history, the thrones of the judgers in 20:4 are set up at the beginning of the millennium.

3. THRONES OF THE JUDGERS (20:4)

The single reference to the thrones of the judgers in Revelation is found in the passage known as the *locus classicus* of the millennial controversy (20:4-6). It is well known that the thousand-year kingdom was for a long time the most controversial issue debated concerning the book of Revelation and the text under consideration is accordingly loaded with controversy.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, our interest in the throne necessitates only the consideration of the issues that throw light on the development and function of the motif within the immediate and the broader

¹⁰³ Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 104.

¹⁰⁴ Hurtado, 'Revelation 4–5', 113; Vogelgesang, 'Interpretation of Ezekiel', 382-83; LaRondelle, *End-Time Prophecies*, 109-10.

¹⁰⁵ See ch. 7 sec. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Krodel, *Revelation*, 158; Stevenson, 'Golden Crown', 269.

¹⁰⁷ Rev. 20:4-6 caused probably more confusion than any other passage in Revelation. The interpretation of these texts by the second and third century chiliasts was the reason why the bishops and synods of the Easter churches objected to the canonization of the last book of the New Testament. Boring (*Revelation*, 202) rightly notes that the topic has received an amount of attention disproportionate to its place in the book.

context of the passage. The thrones of 20:4 are not elaborated. The description is focused rather on the occupants of the thrones and their function.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, I will attempt to determine what kind of thrones are in view here, and how they function in the overall scene and more widely in the book.

3.1. CONTEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The passage with the reference to the thrones of the unnamed judges (20:4-6) is part of the larger vision of the final judgment and reward in 19:11–21:8. The *parousia* is first portrayed in terms of a final battle in which the King of Kings and Lord of Lords defeats the beast, the false prophet and their allies (19:11-21). The description of the conquest is followed by a discussion of the fate of Satan (20:1-10), whereas the scene of the final judgment (20:11-15) and the new creation (21:1-8) focus on the conclusive termination of the old age and the ushering of the new order. The chronological relationship, particularly between 19:11-21 and 20:1-10, has been a matter of vigorous debate.¹⁰⁹ For the sake of our research, it is sufficient to establish that the throne scene of 20:4-6 lies at the heart of 20:1-10 as the central section of the narrative.¹¹⁰

Regardless of our millennial view, Müller is correct in identifying three phases in 20:1-10 in reference to the millennial kingdom: before (20:1-3), during (20:4-6) and after it (20:7-10).¹¹¹ The throne scene is sandwiched in the centre between the two sections which emphasize Satan's defeat: the binding and throwing into the abyss at the beginning of the millennium and the final destruction at the end of it. Boring notes that 20:4-6 is for John a 'way of picturing the eschatological triumph of God'.¹¹² The throne motif is appropriately employed for this purpose, since Satan as the occupant of the rival throne (2:13) is now dethroned, while God's allies, who

¹⁰⁸ As Aune (*Revelation 17–22*, 1084-85) notes, the tendency of Revelation to refer to the place an individual or group sits before describing it (4:2, 4; 14:14; 20:11) is to be understood as an example of *hysteron-proteron*, a literary device of reversing the logical order of narrative events (3:3, 17; 5:5; 6:4; 10:4, 9; 20:4-5; 22:14).

¹⁰⁹ The list of the verbal parallels between 19:11-21 and 20:1-10 is extensive (see e.g. Ekkehardt Müller 'Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 20', *AUSS* 37 [1999], 227-55[251-52]). However, this feature does not contribute much to the clarification of the chronological relationship between the two sections. Scholarly opinion generally divides into two views, with further sub-variants: (1) chronological progression; and (2) recapitulation. For a discussion, see the following sources and the literature cited in them: Marko Jauhiainen, 'Recapitulation and Chronological Progression in John's Apocalypse: Towards a New Perspective', *NTS* 49 (2003), 543-59; Charles E. Powell, 'Progression Versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1-6', *BSac* 163 (2006), 94-109.

¹¹⁰ Shea, 'Parallel Literary Structure', 42; Müller, 'Revelation 20', 235. It has been argued that 20:4-6 can be further divided into three sections. For two different proposals concerning a three-partite division, see Giblin, *Revelation*, 185; Müller, 'Revelation 20', 235.

¹¹¹ Müller, 'Revelation 20', 230.

¹¹² Eugene M. Boring, 'Revelation 19–21: End Without Closure', *PSB Supplementary Issue* 3 (1994), 57-85(70).

had an appropriate attitude towards God's sovereign rule (20:4) are occupying thrones in the millennial kingdom. The contrast between the defeat and the enthronement highlights the definite nature of 'the exchange of world-sovereignities',¹¹³ which ushers in the quality time of the millennium, since the occupants of the thrones spend it 'with Christ' (μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ).

3.2. BACKGROUND

It is generally accepted that the basic background of the millennial judgment vision of Rev. 20 lies in the Jewish apocalyptic concept of a temporary messianic reign on earth between the end of history and the eschatological new creation. This concept is seen as an attempt to reconcile two very different eschatological ideas in ancient Judaism: the prophetic and the apocalyptic views. According to prophetic eschatology the golden future is expected to take place on the current earth, within time and space, involving people living at the time of its arrival. On the other hand, in apocalyptic eschatology the golden future necessitates a new creation, beyond time and space as we know them, and it involves only those resurrected from the dead. The concept of a temporary messianic reign appears as a kind of synthesis between the current age and the age to come as it combines characteristics of both worlds.¹¹⁴

Bailey in his influential article on the topic of the temporary messianic reign demonstrates the variety in points of view of the writers from different periods.¹¹⁵ While the hope for the messianic kingdom is strongly expressed, besides in Revelation, in two Jewish apocalypses composed roughly at the turn of the first century C.E. (*4Ezra* 7:26-33; *2Bar.* 29:3-30:1; 40:1-4; 72:2-74:3),¹¹⁶ the idea of an interim kingdom, not messianic in nature, is already found in the pre-Christian era as attested in *1En.* 91:12-14.¹¹⁷ The time span for the reign is given by only two

¹¹³ Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 104.

¹¹⁴ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1105.

¹¹⁵ J.W. Bailey, 'The Temporary Messianic Reign in the Literature of Early Judaism', *JBL* 53 (1934), 170-87(170-72); cf. T. Francis Glasson, 'The Temporary Messianic Kingdom and the Kingdom of God', *JTS* 41 (1990), 517-25.

¹¹⁶ The thought of these apocalypses is not close to Rev. 20 in spite of the fact that they envisage the dawn of a new age. *4Ezra* 7:26-33 anticipates a Messianic rule of four hundred years with the Messiah's death that will be followed after seven days by the resurrection, together with the judgment of the world. The texts of *2Bar.* claim that the Messiah's future coming will result in the destruction of the powers of evil, but also in a time of plenty as marked by grapevines which produce thousands of shoots and clusters (29:1-8). This is expected to be followed by Christ's return to heaven, together with the rising of the righteous and the destruction of the ungodly (30:1-5).

¹¹⁷ It has been argued that besides the three mentioned Jewish apocalypses the temporary messianic kingdom is to be found in *2En.* 32:2-33:1 and *Jub.* 1:27-29; 23:26-31 (e.g. David S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200 BC-AD 100* [London: SCM, 1964], 293-94), but the evidence for this hypothesis is weak. For a critique of this suggestion, see Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1105. For the possibility of the presence of the concept in Pauline literature, see Seth Turner, 'The Interim, Earthly Messianic Kingdom in Paul', *JSNT* 25 (2003), 323-42.

works, which differ significantly: *4Ezra* anticipates four hundred years, while Revelation speaks of a millenium. Evidently, there was no traditional, fixed length to the reign.¹¹⁸

Bailey also discusses Samaritan beliefs referring to the works of Cowley, Montgomery, Gaster and Bousset. He points out that the messianic thinking of the Samaritans included the concept of a temporary reign of the *Ta'eb*, the restorer and prophet. It was expected that the *Ta'eb* would restore the nation to the favour of God for a thousand years, which would be followed by his death until the time of the general resurrection. Josephus bears witness to a similar belief in his description of the story about a person who was a pretender to the *Ta'eb* office. It is stated that this person led a movement among the Samaritans in the time of Pilate which called forth such a reaction from the Roman procurator that occasioned his recall in 36 C.E.¹¹⁹ This evidence supports the presence of the Samaritan tradition by the first half of the first century C.E. Bailey logically concludes: 'If this phase of Samaritan thought can be dated as early as suggested it gives the earliest known use of the thousand years for the duration of the messianic era. But if the Samaritans are leaning on old Jewish thinking at this point the idea must be still older.'¹²⁰

The calculation of the duration of the Messianic age was a topic of great interest among the early rabbis. Extensive evidence in this regard is most completely presented by Strack and Billerbeck.¹²¹ The wide variety of opinions with differing scriptural bases for their determination indicate a lack of orthodoxy and settled tradition on the question.¹²² The oldest known rabbinic authority arguing for the period of a thousand years is rabbi Eliezer, who belonged to the generation after the fall of the Temple.¹²³ However, it could be supposed that his view is derived from an earlier source, since he claimed as a disciple of Jochanan ben Zakkai: 'I never ... in my

¹¹⁸ Later the idea of a thousand-year period enjoyed great support in the early Christian writings such as in Justin, Melito, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius and Victorinus. For an extensive treatment of chiliasm in the first centuries of the Christian era, see Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹¹⁹ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.85-89. For a discussion, see e.g. Reinhard Pummer, *The Samaritans in Flavius Josephus* (TSAJ, 129; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 230-43. For a wider discussion of the early history and literature of the Samaritans, see József Zsengellér, *Gerizim as Israel: Northern Tradition of the Old Testament and the Early History of the Samaritans* (Utrechtse Theologische Reeks, 38; Utrecht: Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, Universiteit Utrecht, 1998); Idem., *Az 'igazi' izraeliták: tanulmányok a samaritánus közösség ókori történetéről és irodalmáról* (Simeon Könyvek, 3; Pápa: Pápai Református Teológiai Akadémia, 2004).

¹²⁰ Bailey, 'Temporary Messianic Reign', 179-80.

¹²¹ Str-B, III, 823-27. The whole idea of the future is given with elaboration and minute detail in IV, 799-1015.

¹²² George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (3 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927-30), II, 376.

¹²³ Yitzak Dov Gilat ('Eliezer Ben Hyrcanus' in *EncJud*, VI, 322-24) cautiously dates his activity to the end of the first and the beginning of the second century C.E.

life said a thing which I did not hear from my teacher.’¹²⁴ For this reason it can be safely concluded that John in his vision of the millennial reign builds on the accepted views of his time, but modifies them significantly to fit to his purpose of depicting ‘an essential aspect of his concept of the victory’, the triumph of his people who are depicted as ruling with Christ.¹²⁵

The other significant background of 20:4-6 is the early Christian tradition of the saints taking part in the judgment (Mt. 19:28; 1Cor. 4:8; 6:2-3). A belief of similar nature is attested in the early Judaism. In *T. Abr.* each person is judged by Abel, Abraham and by the twelve tribes of Israel which is expected to be followed by the finalizing judgment of the sovereign God (*T. Abr.*[A] 13:3-10).¹²⁶ Similarly, it is claimed in 1QpHab 5:4 that ‘God will execute the judgment of the nations by the hand of his elect’. The same idea is found also in Wis. 3:7-8; Sir. 4:11, 15; *Jub.* 24:29.

3.3. INTERPRETATION

3.3.1. THE IDENTITY OF THE THRONES’ OCCUPANTS

There is a scholarly disagreement concerning the identity of the thrones’ occupants in Rev. 20:4. The reason for the division lies in the lack of clear specification, since the aorist third-person plural ἐκάθισαν (‘they sat’) is not accompanied by a subject. While it is stated that John saw thrones and they were occupied by figures that were given judgment (ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς), the impersonal use of the third-person plural leaves room for some ambiguity.¹²⁷ The following suggestions have been made with their sub-variants for identification of the unnamed figures: (1) the twenty-four elders;¹²⁸ (2) angels along with additional occupants;¹²⁹ (3) Christ with the saints or the apostles;¹³⁰ (4) victorious and vindicated martyrs;¹³¹ and (5) all the saints as members of the heavenly court.¹³² I will offer here an

¹²⁴ *Suk.* 28.a.

¹²⁵ Bauckham, *Theology*, 108.

¹²⁶ See ch. 2 sec. 2.2.1.

¹²⁷ G. Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek, as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study in Bilingualism* (NovTSup, 27; Leiden: Brill, 1971), 231. Such a construction can be used instead of the passive voice and it occurs in the Old Testament with some frequency (GKC §144f.).

¹²⁸ Walvoord, *Revelation*, 296; Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 109.

¹²⁹ Beale (*Revelation*, 996) argues for exalted believers together with angelic beings, while Bullinger (*Apocalypse*, 613) suggests that the occupants are the seven angelic assessors with Christ, God and the apostles.

¹³⁰ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 258; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 293-95; Harrington, *Revelation*, 199.

¹³¹ Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 739; Bauckham, *Theology*, 106-07; Bratcher, *Handbook on the Revelation*, 287; Mangina, *Revelation*, 225; Blount, *Revelation*, 364-65.

¹³² Mounce, *Revelation*, 365; Ladd, *Revelation*, 263-64; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 292-93; Thomas, *Revelation* 8–22, 414.

argument in favour of the last view based on three lines of evidence: the connection of 20:4a with other parts of the book, the link with Dan. 7 and the exegetical evidence from the text itself.

First, there is a strong thematic connection between the description of the throne occupants in 20:4a and the other parts of the book. Particularly relevant here is the promise of the eschatological enthronement to the overcomers in 3:21. Whereas this group, representing the church militant, is assured of sharing Christ's throne, in 20:4, 6 the saints are depicted as seated on thrones and reigning with Christ. Thus, the millennium throne scene functions as the fulfilment of the promise in 3:21.¹³³ At the same time it also seems to be the realization of the promises of crown and rule from the Seven Messages (2:10, 26-27; 3:11), which evoke concepts that show affinity with the throne.

Second, the thrones of the judges in 20:4 are closely related to the judgment scene of Dan. 7. Several links are of particular significance for our interest. In both contexts the plurality of thrones is mentioned. However, it is not clear why God's throne is not represented with the other thrones in 20:4-6 as in the heavenly court setting of Dan. 7:9 in which thrones are set up in the presence of the enthroned Ancient of Days.¹³⁴ The two contexts also share parallels central to the theme of both visions, the heavenly judgment. The phrase κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ('judgment was given to them') in 20:4 shows verbal parallels with κρίμα ἔδωκεν ἁγίοις ('judgment was given to the saints') in Dan. 7:22. Also shared is the idea of kingdom bestowed on the saints (Dan. 7:27; Rev. 20:6). While αὐτοῖς in Rev. 20:4 can be taken as an indirect object implying that God has given the saints 'authority to judge',¹³⁵ it could also be interpreted as a dative of advantage stressing the idea of judicial vindication 'in favour' of the thrones' occupants.¹³⁶ While the later possibility would be in line with Dan. 7:22, more likely is the emphasis on the saints' judging authority. White rightly concludes that the giving of κρίμα to the heavenly court in Rev. 20:4 'signifies their authorization for that judicial mission in which they will serve as

¹³³ This connection is acknowledged by the majority of the commentators. See e.g. Reddish, 'Martyrdom', 144; Roloff, *Revelation*, 227; Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 108; Beale, *Revelation*, 996; Dave Mathewson, 'The Re-Examination of the Millennium in Rev. 20:1-6: Consummation and Recapitulation', *JETS* 44 (2001), 237-51(243); Osborne, *Revelation*, 698; Smalley, *Revelation*, 506.

¹³⁴ Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 107.

¹³⁵ Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 161-62; Adolf Pohl, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (2 vols.; Wuppertal Studienbibel; Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1983), 266; Boring, *Revelation*, 203; Osborne, *Revelation*, 705 n. 11.

¹³⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott*, 303-06; Roloff, *Revelation*, 227; Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 109; Beale, *Revelation*, 997.

executors of God's decree to avenge the martyr's blood'.¹³⁷ Thus, progress is brought to the attention in relation to the cry of martyrs in 6:9-11: whereas in 6:11 vengeance is delayed, in 20:4 it is imminent.¹³⁸

Third, the exegetical evidence from 20:4 points in the direction of identifying the thrones' occupants with the saints. Namely, the function of the *καί*, preceding the reference to *τάς ψυχάς*, is exegetical. Thus, a further specification of the occupants, who appear clearly as human figures, is introduced. There is a discussion whether only a single group of martyrs are in view here¹³⁹ or room is made for genuine 'confessors' of Jesus, whose experience does not include martyrdom.¹⁴⁰ As a further interpretive option, it has been suggested that the martyrs exclusively are in view here, but they function as representatives of the whole church, which has persevered in faith.¹⁴¹ The interpretation that favours a single group is, however, problematic for several reasons. The use of the indefinite relative pronoun *ὅστις* suggests that room can be made in 20:4 for two groups. Beale rightly concludes: '*ὅστις* ('those who') occurs eight times elsewhere in the Apocalypse, seven times clearly introducing a further description of what precedes it. But only one of those seven have *καί* preceding. That lone exception is in 1:7, where the construction introduces a group that appears to be a subset of the preceding group ("every eye will see him, *even those who* pierced him").'¹⁴² This evidence is further supported by the gender difference between *τάς ψυχάς* referring clearly to the martyrs and *οἵτινες*, which introduces a new clause. The difference between the feminine and masculine forms indicates that *ὅστις* does not function as an adjective. It has been further noted by Beale that if *οἵτινες* were dependent on *τάς ψυχάς*, it should be accusative as a second object of the implied *εἶδον*, but the change in case indicates a new group.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ Randall Fowler White, 'Victory and House Building in Revelation 20:1–21:8: A Thematic Study' (PhD Dissertation; Westminster Theological Seminary, 1987), 133.

¹³⁸ Numerous verbal parallels are shared between 6:9 and 20:4. Schüssler Fiorenza (*Vision of a Just World*, 108) rightly interprets the meaning of the connection as a message that 'now, the number of those who have still to die according to 6:9-12 is complete. The end is here!' Beale (*Revelation*, 997-98), on the other hand, does not deny the connection, but persuasively argues that 20:4-6 is not the first answer to the petition of the martyrs.

¹³⁹ Charles, *Revelation*, II, 183; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 257; Caird, *Revelation*, 252; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Priestess für Gott*, 305-06; Mounce, *Revelation*, 355-56.

¹⁴⁰ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 259; Lenski, *Revelation*, 579; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 569; Wall, *Revelation*, 238; Müller, 'Microstructural Analysis', 247.

¹⁴¹ Krodell, *Revelation*, 334. Osborne similarly argues that the martyrs 'are the focus throughout 20:4 but ... all the saints are also intended in the larger context' (Osborne, *Revelation*, 705; cf. Giblin, *Revelation*, 187).

¹⁴² For the complete argument of Beale, see *Revelation*, 999-1001. Cf. Müller, 'Revelation 20', 245-48.

¹⁴³ Beale, *Revelation*, 1001. For a similar line of argumentation, see Bullinger, *Apocalypse*, 615; Lenski, *Revelation*, 581.

3.3.2. THE ROLE OF THE THRONES' OCCUPANTS

The life and role of the participants in the millennium is pictured in 20:6 in terms of the dual office of priesthood and kingship rooted in the promise of Exod. 19:6. The priestly role is further supported by the possible allusion to Isa. 61:6, a reference to the eschatological restoration of God's people in which the entire nation 'will be called the priests of the Lord'.¹⁴⁴ Still, the main emphasis of 20:4-6 seems to be on kingly rule. The saints' reign is related to Christ's rulership, since they do not appear apart from him in reigning function (ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ ... βασιλεύσουσιν μετ' αὐτοῦ).¹⁴⁵ It is rightly suggested by Boring that the basic conviction of the scene is that 'Christ shall ultimately reign ... and his faithful people shall reign with him'.¹⁴⁶ However, in light of the relationship with the promise of 3:21 the picture of the millennial reigning appears only as 'an intermediate stage',¹⁴⁷ 'a step along the way to the true climax'.¹⁴⁸ While the events of 20:4-6 are confined to the heavenly temple, the goal of Revelation's eschatology is the recreation of the heaven and earth (21:1-8). Therefore, the appropriate context for the elects' eternal reign is the new creation (βασιλεύσουσιν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων; 22:5), in which man's original purpose of reign over the earth is completely restored (Gen. 1:26, 28).¹⁴⁹

The function of the thrones in 20:4 lies in indicating the ruling authority of their occupants. The idea of the elects' ruling is stated twice in the passage, apart from the

¹⁴⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott*, 336-38; Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 113-16; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1093.

¹⁴⁵ Prigent (*Apocalypse*, 570) rightly notes the significance of pairing the verbs ἔζησαν and ἐβασίλευσαν in 20:4. The combination indicates that the saints follow the model of Christ, who himself lives (1:18) and reigns (19:16).

¹⁴⁶ Boring, 'Revelation 19-21', 70.

¹⁴⁷ Knight, *Revelation*, 132.

¹⁴⁸ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 397.

¹⁴⁹ Robert H. Gundry, 'The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People', *NovT* 29 (1987), 254-64(264). Slightly differently, Mealy (*After the Thousand Years*, 116-18) argues that with the millennial reign the saints finally fulfil their original purpose of creation set out in Gen. 1:26, 28. He views the *parousia* as the return of the Edenic conditions and sets the millennium into the new creation. While the continuity between the millennial reign (20:4) and the reign that lasts forever (22:5) is not to be denied, Mealy's view is based on the presupposition that the millennial reign occurs on earth, a thesis which may be challenged on two grounds. First, in Revelation God's throne, Christ's throne and the thrones of elders always occur in heavenly setting apart from ch. 22, whereas only the thrones of God's enemies appear on the earth. Müller ('Revelation 20', 233) rightly concludes: 'Since the term "throne" is associated with heaven as long as it is that of God, Jesus, or his followers, it might be legitimate to suppose that the thrones in Rev. 20:4 are also found in heaven.' Second, the parallel between the literary structures of Rev. 12 and 20 suggests a heavenly setting of the scene in 20:4-6. Shea ('Parallel Literary Structure', 37-54) demonstrates that while the content of these two visions are thematically 'almost reciprocal to each other', their framework is identical as an earth-heaven-earth pattern is followed in both, in which 20:4-6 appears as a section with heavenly locus.

employment of the throne motif (20:4, 6).¹⁵⁰ These two concepts are directly linked also in 16:10, but in a negative setting as related to the beast. Bauckham convincingly argues that the theological significance of the emphasis on reigning in 20:4-6 is to be understood against the broader context of conflict with dragon and his allies. He calls our attention to the following contrasts between the saints and the satanic forces: (1) the kingdom has been taken from the beast and his allies and it is given to the saints; (2) the beast's universal regime is limited to forty-two months, while the saints' rule lasts thousand years; (3) the beast, responsible for the death of martyrs, has been cast into the lake of fire, but the second death has no power over the saints.¹⁵¹ These contrasts indicate additionally that the major purpose of depicting the saints on thrones lies in emphasizing their victory and exaltation.¹⁵² For this reason raising the question who the saints reign over is unnecessary, since 'the picture is complete in itself'.¹⁵³ Thus, the thrones of 20:4 function as emblems of royal rule and point to the saints' eschatological triumph.

The saints' reigning in 20:4-6 also includes a judicial aspect. It is clearly stated in the text that their sitting on thrones is related to judging function, but the description of the activity itself is notoriously restrained (εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς). As Yarbro Collins aptly states, 'Like what the seven thunders said (10:4), these details remain shrouded in mystery.'¹⁵⁴ The fact that there is no mention of the accused, nor any verdict proclaimed, strengthens further the emphasis on the saints' co-reign with Christ. On the other hand, the judging role lies probably in 'agreeing with and praising his judicial decisions', therefore 'their witness becomes a basis for Christ's judgment of the ungodly at the end of the age'.¹⁵⁵ It has been persuasively argued that κρίμα in 20:4 follows the מִשְׁפָּט concept of the Old Testament, which includes at the same time the notions of ruling and judging. Against this background the merging of the saints' reigning and judging role can be established.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 995-96.

¹⁵¹ Bauckham, 'Revelation', 1303; Idem., *Theology*, 107.

¹⁵² Charles H. Giblin, 'The Millennium (Rev. 20.4-6) as Heaven', *NTS* 45 (1999), 553-70[566]. In contrast, Rissi (*Future*, 33) argues that John is here not concerned with the triumph of the believers over unbelievers, but rather with the kingship of the believers 'in the sense of ... their absolute freedom from all human and superhuman forces'. Adamson ('Concept of the Millennium', 80) persuasively points out the deficiency of Rissi's suggestion claiming that 'there is a sense in which this is true of the believer's kingship', but 'perhaps a little more is intended. Christ rules over the others, and it is to this co-rule that the martyrs are admitted'.

¹⁵³ Boring, 'Revelation 19-21', 71.

¹⁵⁴ Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 140.

¹⁵⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 997.

¹⁵⁶ Mounce, *Revelation*, 364. This idea is advanced also by Richard A. Horsley (*Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* [Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993], 199-208) concerning the

4. CONCLUSION

This chapter investigated the thrones of God's allies in Revelation. Three groups, positive towards the kingship of God and the Lamb, are presented as possessing thrones in Revelation: the overcomers (3:21), the twenty-four elders (4:4; 11:16) and the judgers (20:4). Their thrones are bound into the sub-motif of the thrones of God's allies. It is clearly implied that these thrones do not appear in an independent role apart from God's and Christ's throne. Thus, in 3:21 not only the overcomers, but also God and Christ are sitting on throne. In 4:4 the thrones of the elders are arranged immediately around the divine throne which is at the centre of attention in the vision. In the millennial judgment of 20:4-6 the unnamed judgers sit on their thrones, but their reign is joint to Christ's. I suggest that the repeatedly emphasized close relation indicates that the thrones other than God's and the Lamb's receive significance only in the light of the central divine throne. In the following, major conclusions that emerged from the investigation of the components of the sub-motif of the thrones of God's allies will be summarized.

In the climactic statement within the line of the promises of the Seven Messages the overcomers are presented as *σύνθρονοι* with Christ and indirectly with God on the basis of the throne-sharing relation between the two central figures of Revelation (3:21). Since the promise given to the church militant is of eschatological orientation, 3:21 does not state the overcomers' enthronement as a present reality, only envisages it. I have offered an argument against the suggestion concerning the universal martyrdom of the overcomers. I have also addressed the role of 3:21 in the macrodynamic of the overcoming motif in Revelation with contributing a suggestion of a parallel between the *νικάω* texts of 3:21 and 21:7. These texts not only share a climactic nature, the first within the promises of the Seven Messages and the other in the development of the overcoming motif, but thematically point into the same direction: the ultimate realization of God's covenant promises.

The twenty-four elders appear as the most prestigious part of the heavenly council in Revelation, since their individual thrones are pictured in 4:4 as immediately encircling God's throne. Similar to the other important figures in Revelation, the throne motif is directly involved in the introduction of this eminent group. The identity of the elders is a notoriously difficult problem. An argument has been offered in this chapter in favour of the identification with

saints' judicial role in Mt. 19:28 viewed against the background of the book of Judges, in which 'judging' is applied to the role of general governance.

glorified human beings. However, it has been stated that in John's mindset the function of the elders is far more important from speculation over the question of identity. Their function has been established as a royal priesthood and it has been argued that their primary significance lies in the act they perform as the leaders of the heavenly worship. The praise scenes of Revelation reveal clearly that the twenty-four thrones function as sub-thrones in relation to God's throne which is at the centre of the universe. They are vacant five times in the book, since the elders give up their places on the thrones by prostrating themselves. The vacating of the thrones indicates the acknowledgment that the authority the elders possess is delegated and points to the unrivalled quality of God's throne. At the same time these thrones embody a polemical function in regard to the thrones of the false claimants of authority, who appear later in the book in the role of God's adversaries (13:2; 16:10).

The unnamed group of occupants of the heavenly thrones in the millennium judgment is portrayed similarly to the twenty-four elders in a kingly–priestly role. However, this is not compelling evidence for identifying the two groups as the same. Whereas the elders are portrayed as an eminent group around God's throne, an argument has been presented in this chapter in favour of the identification of the enthroned judges with all the redeemed participating in the millennium. While the reigning of the saints in 20:4-6 includes a judicial aspect, it has been demonstrated that the function of the thrones points primarily to the ruling authority of their occupants recalling also the notions of victory and exaltation. Their reign is practised alongside Christ's rulership, since the figures on the thrones do not appear separate from him in this function.

THRONES OF GOD'S ADVERSARIES

The recent discussion on the apocalyptic genre confirmed that two-dimensional perspectives are inherent to apocalyptic literature.¹ The gap between the heavenly and earthly realms is portrayed by striking contrasts and a clear, invariable line of demarcation is made between the good and the evil.² In Revelation the language of contrast surfaces also in regard to the throne motif, since antithetical thrones appear in both the epistolary and the visionary parts of the book. The discussion will focus here on the two adverse thrones in the book: the throne of Satan (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ; 2:13) and the throne of the beast (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ θηρίου; 13:2; 16:10).³ While the dragon is designated as the originator of the throne of the beast in 13:2, the existence of his separate throne is not evident in ch. 13. Since Satan's throne (2:13) and the beast's throne (13:2; 16:10) are clearly separate, they constitute together the sub-motif of God's adversaries within Revelation's throne 'motif-network' which stands in antithetical relation to the throne of God and the Lamb.

1. THRONE OF SATAN (2:13)

The reference to the throne of Satan (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ) in 2:13 is unique in biblical and Jewish literature. It is not part of a developed scene, but appears only as a single reference without elaboration in an epistolary context. No details are provided concerning the physical appearance of this throne, neither about its occupant nor any specific activity occurring around it.

¹ For the comprehensive overview of the recent scholarship on apocalypses and apocalypticism in antiquity, see Lorenzo DiTomasso, 'Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity (Part I)', *CBR* 5 (2007), 235-86; Idem., 'Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity (Part II)', *CBR* 5 (2007), 357-432.

² Strand (*Interpreting*, 18) notes among Revelation's numerous striking contrasts the following as exemplary: 'people of God and people of the adversary, the seal of God and the mark of the beast, the Faithful and True Witness and the serpent that deceives the world, the virgin and the harlot, the armies of heaven and the armies of earth, the marriage supper of the Lamb and the fowls' supper of the men of the earth, songs of praise to God and cries of agony for rocks and mountains to fall, the fruit of the tree of life and the wine of the wrath of God, the New Jerusalem in glory and Babylon in shame, and the sea of glass and the lake of fire'.

³ In contrast to my approach, Williamson ('Thrones', 151-71) argues for the presence of three adverse thrones in Revelation: Satan's (2:13), the dragon's (13:2) and the beast's (16:10). Though the dragon is specified as the originator of the beast's throne in 13:2, the syntax does not justify the separation of the dragon's throne from the beast's, neither is such a throne represented elsewhere in the book.

The reason for the lack of elaboration is to be sought on one hand in the literary place of the reference within the Seven Messages,⁴ but possibly also in its theological function which, I suggest, influences significantly the view of the Seven Messages as a whole.

1.1. CONTEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ reference is part of the letter addressed to the church in Pergamon (2:12-17) which is the third among the seven prophetic messages of Rev. 2–3. It is located at the beginning of the body of the message, following the introductory address and the characterization of the speaker. More specifically, the reference is part of the commendation section that is framed by a dual reference to Satan.⁵ The expression ‘the throne of Satan’ appears on one side of the commendation as a qualification of the place where the church in Pergamon lives (κατοικεῖς ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ). The parallel reference at the other side states that Satan himself dwells beside the believers of Pergamon, not just that they live in proximity to his throne (παρ’ ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ). This parallel has been variously interpreted. It has been suggested that the two clauses are synonymous⁶ or that the throne reference is clarified by the other statement.⁷ However, neither of these views is supported by strong exegetical evidence. It is enlightening to notice that the two clauses have two words in common: (1) the particle ὅπου (‘where’) referring to a place; and (2) the verb κατοικέω (‘dwell’) indicating a permanent residence.⁸ In spite of the similarities, there is a critical difference in regard to the subject of the verb κατοικέω, which is first applied to the believers and then also to Satan. It seems most appropriate to view the two references in light of this difference as antithetical,⁹ employed with a peculiar theological purpose, as it will be demonstrated.

It has often been suggested that Satan’s throne in 2:13 is identical to the dragon’s throne in 13:2. This view is most often argued on the basis of the observation that the dragon, who gives his throne to the beast in 13:2, is identified previously in the vision as the Devil and Satan (ὁ

⁴ Williamson, ‘Thrones’, 156.

⁵ deSilva (‘Strategic Arousal’, 105) notes that the words of commendation in 2:13 are among the most developed in the Seven Messages, besides the commendation in the message to the church in Thyatira (2:19).

⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, ‘Satan’s Throne’, *BAR* 32/3 (2006), 27-39.

⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, 143.

⁸ Stevenson (*Power and Place*, 274 n. 152) points out that in Revelation the terms σκηνώ and σκηνή are reserved for God and those who dwell in heaven (7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 15:5; 21:3), while κατοικέω is applied to those dwelling on the earth (2:13; 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2, 8). For the use of κατοικέω in the New Testament in a metaphorical sense, see J. Goetzmann, ‘House, Build, Manage, Steward’ in *NIDNTT*, II, 247-51(251).

⁹ Similar to Beale, *Revelation*, 247; Mounce, *Revelation*, 97.

καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς; 12:9).¹⁰ The identification of the two thrones is, however, not convincing for several reasons. First, the two references appear in two distinct parts of the book that are different even in genre. Second, in 2:13 Satan's throne is placed specifically in Pergamon, while the throne in 13:2 is not given a location.¹¹ It is hardly imaginable that the place of the beast's throne in ch. 13 is in Pergamon, since the global nature of its influence is repeatedly pointed out.¹² Mounce tries to bridge this interpretive gap suggesting that 13:2 and 16:10 refer to Rome as the centre of Satan's activity in the West, whereas Pergamon had become his 'throne' in the East.¹³ However, this suggestion concerning the existence of two Satanic centres is highly speculative. It is more appropriate to approach the two contexts in Revelation on their own, maintaining only a thematic parallel of a diabolic campaign against God's people.

1.2. BACKGROUND

The reference to Satan's throne is tied specifically to Pergamon, which, according to Pliny, was considered 'by far the most famous place in Asia'.¹⁴ Ramsay argues that the reference to a throne in connection with the city implies dignity and eminence, since 'no city of the whole of Asia Minor ... possesses the same imposing and dominating aspect'.¹⁵ Though the scholarly literature on the ancient city of Pergamon is extensive, a short discussion of the city's pre-eminence focusing on its civic and religious influence is necessary here, since the expression 'Satan's throne' is clearly grounded in the *Sitz im Leben*.¹⁶

¹⁰ E.g. Charles, *Revelation*, I, 61; Kroll, *Revelation*, 115; Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The Revelation of John: An Apocalyptic Response to a Social Crisis', *CurTM* 8 (1981), 4-12(7); M. Robert Mulholland, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Asbury, 1990), 106-07; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 182; Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 128; Beale, *Revelation*, 246; Jörg Frey, 'Relevance of the Roman Imperial Cult for the Book of Revelation: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Reflections on the Relation Between the Seven Letters and the Visionary Main Part of the Book' in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune*, ed. John Fotopoulos (NovTSup, 122; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 231-55(243).

¹¹ This weakness is acknowledged even by Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 182), who identifies Satan's throne symbolically with Roman opposition to early Christianity.

¹² Rev. 13:3, 7, 9.

¹³ Mounce, *Revelation*, 96-97.

¹⁴ Pliny, *Nat.* 5.33.

¹⁵ William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, rev. edn, 1994), 216.

¹⁶ For representative treatments of the city of Pergamon, see the following sources and the literature cited in them: Wolfgang Radt, *Pergamon: Geschichte und Bauten einer antiken Metropole* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1999); Helmut Koester (ed.), *Pergamon, Citadel of Gods: Archaeological Record, Literary Description, and Religious Development* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998). For a detailed discussion of the Great Altar of Zeus Soter as the best-known monument from the city, see e.g. Max Kunze, *Der Pergamon-Altar: seine Geschichte, Entdeckung und Rekonstruktion* (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 1992).

The scholarly opinion is divided concerning the identity of the capital of Asia Minor at the time of Revelation's writing. There is a consensus that the capital was in Pergamon when Rome took over the province. Also it is generally accepted that the centre was moved to Ephesus few centuries later. However, where the capital was located during the first and second centuries C.E. is controversial. Besides the two divided camps which favour either Pergamon or Ephesus, expressing of judgment on the question is widely avoided by the biblical interpreters.¹⁷ It has also been argued that Pergamon was the titular capital, while Ephesus remained the most important city of the province.¹⁸ I am inclined to agree with Worth that a date no earlier than Hadrian would make the most sense for the change,¹⁹ but regardless of Pergamon's civil status by the end of the first century C.E., it is more important for our research to establish the religious position of the city.

It has been argued that Pergamon functioned as the religious capital of the province of Asia at time of Revelation's writing.²⁰ This conclusion was grounded on one hand in the pre-eminence of the imperial worship in the city, and also in the fact that Pergamon was a stronghold of pagan religion, including the cults of Asclepius, Zeus, Athene, Demeter and Dionysius.²¹ The imperial cults and the leading pagan cults in Pergamon 'were not only in spatial approximation, but in a high state of synthesis',²² as Yarbrow Collins demonstrates for the cult of Zeus²³ and Brent for the ritual of Asclepius.²⁴ Friesen recently challenged the view that Pergamon was the centre of imperial cults in Asia. He correctly observes that 'the very notion that imperial cults in Asia had a centre is an unfortunate formulation', because 'sacrificial activity for the emperors took

¹⁷ Roland H. Worth (*The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Roman Culture* [New York: Paulist Press, 1999], 159-61 n. 24-26) names the following scholars as the proponents of the Pergamon theory: Allen, Bengston, Draper, Harrington, Jeske, Loane, Mounce, Webber, Lull and Wilcock. On the other hand the following scholars are referred to as arguing the primacy of Ephesus: Bean, Calkin, Cole, Frank, French, van der Heyden-Schullard, Johnson, Koester, MacKendrick, Meinardus, Miller, Nilsson, Oster, Petit, Ramsay, Scott and Tait. Also Moyise and Barnett are mentioned as refusing to take sides in this unsettled issue.

¹⁸ Worth (*Roman Culture*, 161-62 n. 28-34) refers to the works of the following scholars, who express this view using different designations for the practical primacy of Ephesus: Lyall, Johnston, Mommsen, Tarn-Griffith, Cotter, Cardoux, Turner, Pentreath and Perowne.

¹⁹ For a persuasive argument and a convincing critique of Friesen's thesis for dating the change in the Augustan period, see Worth, *Roman Culture*, 48.

²⁰ Hemer, *Letters*, 87.

²¹ For the cultic importance of Pergamon, see Ramsay, *Letters*, 207f.; Roland H. Worth, *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Asian Culture* (New York: Paulist, 1999), 112-22.

²² Brent, *Imperial Cult*, 181.

²³ Yarbrow Collins, 'Satan's Throne', 36-38.

²⁴ Brent, *Imperial Cult*, 180-81.

place in a myriad of contexts’ and there were ‘many types’.²⁵ However, this observation does not diminish the pre-eminence of Pergamon as the *protos neokoros*, the precedent for the cults in the other provinces.²⁶ In this regard Frey notes:

Pergamon had the honor to be the first city of Asia where a provincial cult for Augustus and the goddess Rome had been installed in 29 B.C.E. Other cities such as Smyrna and Ephesus followed, causing a severe rivalry between those three cities, and Ephesus might have gained the predominant position with the cult of the Sebastoi granted under Domitian and then with its second ‘neocorate’ permitted by Hadrian, but the privilege of primacy remained with Pergamon.²⁷

Thus, Pergamon enjoyed a status of eminence as a significant centre both in civic and religious realms. Therefore, its connection with the throne of Satan – whatever its meaning – makes sense against this position.

1.3. INTERPRETATION

1.3.1. THE MEANING OF SATAN’S THRONE

On a symbolic level the throne of Satan represents a power opposed to God, ‘a rebellious kingdom of Satan in opposition to the kingdom of God’.²⁸ However, the very explicit association between this strange motif and the city of Pergamon in 2:13 suggests the intention of a more precise meaning. This is suggested by the articular nature of the reference, which points to a specific ‘throne’ – literal or figurative – recognizable for the audience.²⁹

The discussion over the identification of the ‘throne of Satan’ resulted in a wide variety of suggestions that have all been subjected to scholarly criticism.³⁰ The complexity of the problem is well known and no answer is without difficulties. However, Barr’s statement that ‘we can no longer discern the precise significance of the symbol’ is a pessimistically overstated perspective on the question.³¹ Some of the interpretive possibilities are tied to specific local allusions, while others are very general. Also the synthetization of the possibilities has been often

²⁵ Steven J. Friesen, ‘Satan’s Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation’, *JSNT* 27 (2005), 351-73(363).

²⁶ On the rationale and establishment of the first provincial imperial temple in Pergamon approved for a cult of Roma and Augustus in 29 B.C.E., see Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 27f.; Idem., *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, 116; Leiden: Brill 1993), 7-15.

²⁷ Frey, ‘Relevance’, 243-44.

²⁸ Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 82.

²⁹ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 182.

³⁰ For a comprehensive analysis of the weaknesses of the main proposals, see e.g. Friesen, ‘Satan’s Throne’, 357-67; Worth, *Graeco-Asian Culture*, 130-40.

³¹ Barr, *Tales*, 57.

attempted, as Satan's throne was interpreted in terms of a dual or triple allusion.³² The most well-known interpretations grouped on the basis of their approach are the following: (1) the political explanation which designates the Roman seat of government including the imperial cults³³ or specifically the temple of Augustus and Roma;³⁴ (2) the religious explanation that points to the Great Altar of Zeus Soter,³⁵ the Asclepius cult³⁶ or collectively to the polytheistic climate of the city;³⁷ (3) the geographical explanation based on the majestic physical features of the setting;³⁸ and (4) the hostility theory, with an emphasis on Pergamon as the centre of Christian persecution.³⁹

It seems most convincing to interpret Satan's throne in Pergamon as designating the presence of the imperial power in the city with the imperial cults as the primary expression of its propaganda. Thus, the religious and the political aspects of the Roman imperial power merge into the symbol of the Satan's throne. This conclusion is based on both textual and historical argument. Textually, several pieces of evidence support this suggestion, both in an immediate and a wider context. The death of Antipas in 2:13 points in the direction of the Roman power, since it is well known that the proconsul was the only individual with the power of *ius gladii*, the

³² For examples, see Worth, *Greco-Asian Culture*, 277 n. 18.

³³ Ramsay, *Letters*, 214-16; Charles, *Revelation*, I, 61; Farrer, *Revelation*, 73; Glasson, *Revelation*, 27; Hemer, *Letters*, 87; Ladd, *Revelation*, 46; Mounce, *Revelation*, 96; Krodel, *Revelation*, 115; Thomas, *Revelation* 1-7, 184; Hans-Josef Klauck, 'Das Sendschreiben nach Pergamon und der Kaiserkult in der Johannesoffenbarung', *Bib* 73 (1992), 153-82; Heinz Giesen, *Studien zur Johannesapokalypse* (SBAB, 29; Stuttgart: Katolisches Bibelwerk, 2000), 131-32; Osborne, *Revelation*, 141; Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, Ga: Smyth & Helwys, rev. edn, 2005), 38; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 120. The interpretation that the judgment seat of the Roman official is on mind of the author is too narrow. Probably John would employ the word βῆμα to point to the tribunal (against Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 64).

³⁴ Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), 29; Ford, *Revelation*, 398; Boring, *Revelation*, 91.

³⁵ Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 281 n. 3; Theodor Birt, 'Der Thron des Satans: Ein Beitrag zur Erklärung des Altars von Pergamon', *BPW* 52 (1932), 1203-10; Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 173. For a broader variant including not only the altar, but also the temple of Athena and the temple of Zeus, see Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Pergamon in Early Christian Literature' in *Pergamon, Citadel of Gods*, 166-76; Idem., 'Satan's Throne', 27-39.

³⁶ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 34; Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 211; Zahn, *Introduction*, III, 410-11; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 64.

³⁷ Hugh Martin, *The Seven Letters* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1956), 69; Hanns Lilje, *The Last Book of the Bible: The Meaning of the Revelation of St. John* (trans. Olive Wyon; Philadelphia, Pa.: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 79-80; Roloff, *Revelation*, 51; Metzger, *Code*, 34-35.

³⁸ Peter Wood, 'Local Knowledge in the Letters of the Apocalypse', *ExpTim* 73 (1961-62), 263-64. Worth (*Greco-Asian Culture*, 140) also subscribes partially to this interpretation posing the question: 'Would not the idea of Satan's throne represent a natural combination of the physical setting with theological condemnations?'

³⁹ A distinction must be made here between the old persecution theory and the interpretation in terms of external pressure. While the first is focused on the Roman efforts to destroy the churches during the reign of Domitian (Ramsay, *Letters*, 67-81), the second views the pressure in terms of a tension with mainstream society (Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, 183-84; Friesen, 'Satan's Throne', 365-66).

legal right to pronounce the death sentence on a Roman citizen.⁴⁰ The sword as an appropriate symbol for the almost unlimited authority of the senatorial governor of Asia is opposed by a contra image in Christ's introduction at the beginning of the message to Pergamon, since he is portrayed as 'the one having the sharp two-edged sword' (2:12).⁴¹ More precisely, Satan's throne points to the imperial cults, since the Christians faced the threat of Roman execution on these grounds. Prigent rightly concludes: 'It is obviously the imperial cult which alone is capable of causing Pergamum to appear as a high place particularly dedicated to this confession of allegiance to political and religious faith which showed such intolerance towards the Christian faith.'⁴²

While our interpretation is rooted in the textual evidence from the message to Pergamon, it is also in accordance with the rhetorical perspective of the entire book. As will be extensively demonstrated in the last part of this dissertation, Revelation's anti-imperial rhetoric qualifies emperor worship as an agency of Satanic power, opposed to the true worship of God.⁴³ The historical evidence also leads us in this direction.⁴⁴ The throne as imagery implies a special authority pointing to a seat of a state or institution.⁴⁵ The expression ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ not only reflects Pergamon's political influence in the province, but fits well also with the city's *neokoros* status as the pre-eminent centre of the imperial cults in the first century C.E. Asia Minor. Beale appropriately notes that 'life in such a politico-religious center put all the more pressure on the church to pay public homage to Caesar as a deity, refusal of which meant high treason to the state'.⁴⁶ Thus, Pergamon as a stronghold of the political-religious influence of the Empire is appropriately designated 'the throne of Satan', which posed a major threat to church's existence as indicated by the martyrdom of Antipas.

⁴⁰ For the discussion on the *ius gladii*, see Adrian N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Sarum Lectures; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 8-10.

⁴¹ Caird, *Revelation*, 37-38; Hemer, *Letters*, 85. ῥομφαία is in LXX in some two hundred instances a translation of הַרֵב, which is very commonly also translated as μάχαιρα. These two Greek terms do not differ in meaning as the translations of הַרֵב; however, Wilhelm Michaelis ('ῥομφαία' in *TDNT*, VI, 993-98[994]) notes that ῥομφαία is obviously a larger sword as e.g. that of the cherubim at the gate of Paradise (Gen. 3:24) or of Goliath (1Sam. 17:45, 47, 51; 21:10; 22:10).

⁴² Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 173.

⁴³ See ch. 9.

⁴⁴ For a discussion concerning the extent of the local references in the Seven Messages vision, see Charles H.H. Scobie, 'Local References in the Letters to the Seven Churches', *NTS* 39 (1993), 606-24.

⁴⁵ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 182.

⁴⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 246.

1.3.2. THE FUNCTION OF SATAN'S THRONE

In the statement 'I know where you live – where the throne of Satan is' (2:13) is 'compressed a world of meaning'.⁴⁷ The text implies that permanently living (κατοικέω) in the shadow of Satan's throne put the Christian community in Pergamon in a position of danger from which escape was not a viable option. The severity of the pressure for Christians living in the city is evident from the emphasis on Jesus' knowledge of the church's situation rather than his acquaintance with its works, as in the majority of the other messages to the seven churches.⁴⁸

The theological importance of the throne of Satan goes beyond a mere reference to the tensions between the Pergamon church and mainstream society. This is reflected in the literary structure of 2:13 in which the short account of the martyrdom of Antipas,⁴⁹ a Christian qualified with a nominative of apposition ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου ('my faithful witness'), is sandwiched by a dual reference to the Satanic presence.⁵⁰ It does not make much difference whether this figure of the early church became a victim of a lynch mob or was executed by government authorities, since it is clearly stated that the reason for his martyrdom was his faithfulness to Christianity.⁵¹ The double emphasis on μου in relation to Antipas (ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου) supplemented with another double μου in the same verse related to the church (τὸ ὄνομά μου ... πίστιν μου) brings Christ to the focus as the object of witnessing. However, the endurance of Antipas and the church is more the focus of attention, since Antipas appears in a

⁴⁷ Ramsay, *Letters*, 214.

⁴⁸ In five out of the Seven Messages the emphasis is on knowledge of the Church's works (2:2, 19; 3:1, 8, 15), while in 2:9 and 2:13 Christ refers rather to the knowledge of the circumstances of the addressed churches. The reason for this divergence may lie in the severe persecution of these churches. While the textual divergence of 2:13 from the established pattern is widely attested, in Andreas Byzantine 2351 syr^h τὰ ἔργα σου is added. This variant is to be explained as a scribal insertion, an attempt at harmonization with the recurring pattern. Therefore, the divergent reading of the earlier MSS is to be preferred.

⁴⁹ The name Antipas is a diminutive form of the Greek Antipatros, a form which is not widely attested (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.1.3-4; 17.1.3). On the etymology of the name Antipas and the question of the identity of the martyr in 2:13, see Gerard Mussies, 'Antipas', *NovT* 7 (1964), 242-44.

⁵⁰ This characterization shows close affinity with the description of the risen Christ in 1:5, who is introduced as ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός ('the faithful witness'). Charles (*Revelation*, I, 62) argues that 2:13 is the first technical use of the word μάρτυς to designate martyrdom. It is more likely, however, that the reference in *Mart. Pol.* 14:2 is the earliest example. For a discussion of the discernible process whereby the meaning of μάρτυς was transformed from 'witness' to 'martyrdom', see Allison A. Trites, 'μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study', *NovT* 15 (1973), 72-80.

⁵¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza ('Apocalyptic and Gnosis in the Book of Revelation and Paul', *JBL* 92 [1973], 565-81[570 n. 29]) believes that Antipas died under 'a lynch-law exercised by the citizens' rather than in a persecution. In contrast, Yarbro Collins ('Satan's Throne', 36) argues that the term μάρτυς implies a public verbal testimony under interrogation by the Roman governor.

sense as a representative of Christians in Pergamon,⁵² whose faithfulness is highlighted by an antithesis in which the initial positive qualification (κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου; ‘hold my name’) is repeated and reinforced through a negative statement (οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου; ‘you did not renounce faith in me’).⁵³ The association of the idea of Christian martyrdom with Satan’s throne is of particular rhetorical force, since it conveys the fundamental theological presupposition of the book that ‘light and darkness cannot dwell together in peaceful coexistence’.⁵⁴ I suggest that the antithetical relationship between God’s allies and his adversaries is also indicated by the content of Christ’s knowledge in 2:13 which is twofold: he is aware of the place where the church must live and knows at the same time its faithful witness in spite of the conditions.

The idea of satanic hostility in 2:13 links the letter to Pergamon thematically to the other messages of the vision. Thus, in the message to Smyrna the primary opposing power to the Christian community is the synagogue, which is related to Satan (συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ; 2:9), similarly to the throne in 2:13.⁵⁵ In the same message Satan is also portrayed as active in the imprisoning of the believers (2:10).⁵⁶ The synagogue of Satan re-appears in the message to Philadelphia (3:9), while in the message to Thyatira there is a reference to the ‘depths of Satan’ (βαθέα τοῦ σατανᾶ; 2:24). Clearly, the tense relationship of the churches in Asia Minor with their local environment, and also their internal divisions, are viewed in terms of cosmic conflict. I suggest that the tension between the divine and the diabolic powers is symbolically stressed by a reference to two opposing thrones in the Seven Messages (2:13; 3:21) in which the throne of Satan functions as the ‘adversarial mirror-image of the throne of God’.⁵⁷ Aune’s insight provides further support for our view: he calls our attention to the fact that even the employment of the genre of the messages as a ‘royal or imperial edict’ is to be viewed in terms of John’s ‘strategy to

⁵² While 2:13 mentions only Antipas as a martyr, the possibility is not excluded that as at Smyrna (2:10) many more might die. Eusebius later named Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonice as martyrs in Pergamon (*HE* 4.15.48).

⁵³ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 184.

⁵⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 247.

⁵⁵ For the meaning of συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ, see Mark R.J. Bredin, ‘The Synagogue of Satan Accusation in Revelation 2:9’, *BTB* 28 (1999), 160-64; Jan Lambrecht, ‘Synagogues of Satan (Rev. 2:9 and 3:9): Anti-Judaism in the Book of Revelation’ in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, eds. Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / John Knox Press, 2001), 279-92; Paul B. Duff, ‘“The Synagogue of Satan”: Crisis Mongering and the Apocalypse of John’ in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr (SBLSymS, 39; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 147-68.

⁵⁶ Here ὁ διάβολος is used to denote Satan, a term which occurs only in three contexts in Revelation: in Seven Messages it denotes a persecutor (2:10), in the Cosmic Conflict vision a conquered enemy thrown to the Earth (12:9, 12) and in the millennium vision a chained and condemned adversary of God and his people (20:2, 10).

⁵⁷ Yarbrow Collins, ‘Pergamon’, 166.

emphasize the fact that Christ is the true king in contrast to the Roman emperor who is both a clone and tool of Satan'.⁵⁸

I turn now to the examination of the other adversarial throne in Revelation, the throne of the beast. Since this throne is more at the centre of attention in the drama of Revelation than Satan's throne in 2:13, it will be given more detailed attention.

2. THRONE OF THE BEAST (13:2; 16:10)

The throne of the beast (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ θηρῶν) appears twice in Revelation. In 13:2 its origin is specified as the extension of the dragon's authority, whereas 16:10 points to its fate without mentioning the dragon. Both references are undeveloped and they point metaphorically to the notion of satanic kingly rule. While the throne of the beast is not described, a detailed picture is provided of the activities of the throne's occupant, who steps onto the stage of the book of Revelation as an arrogant anti-Christ power acknowledging only the authority of his throne.

2.1. CONTEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The reference to the throne of the beast in 13:2 forms part of the larger literary context of 12:1–14:20. This material, known as the Cosmic Conflict vision, takes place at the heart of Revelation's chiasm as 'the central axis of the book and the core of its pictorial "argument"'.⁵⁹

The immediate literary context of 13:2 is the vision of 12:18–13:18, which forms a coherent textual unit.⁶⁰ This section is closely related to 12:1-17, since it develops the theme of the dragon's wrath set out in 12:17. Barr rightly notes that the war in 13:1-18 is the continuation of the dragon's offensive which failed in its attempt to destroy the male child and the woman in ch. 12.⁶¹ While Barr's observation is basically correct, he fails to notice that the dragon's defeat is threefold in this context. Namely, the overthrow in the heavenly conflict, including the casting down from the heaven (12:7-9), also needs to be included in the list of the dragon's failures. In line with Barr's reasoning, Prigent rightly concludes that 'we can only interpret Rev. 13 correctly

⁵⁸ Aune, *Apocalypticism*, 232.

⁵⁹ Boring, *Revelation*, 150. For more details, see the discussion on the structure of Revelation in ch. 8 sec. 1.1.

⁶⁰ For different chiastic possibilities within this textual unit, see Laszlo I. Hangyas, 'The Use and Abuse of Authority: An Investigation of the ΕΞΟΥΣΙΑ Passages in Revelation' (PhD Dissertation; Andrews University, 1997), 218-21 and the literature cited in it.

⁶¹ Barr, *Tales*, 125.

as the logical and coherent sequel to the preceding chapter', the unfurling of the defeated dragon's rage.⁶²

The two large textual blocks of 12:1-17 and 13:1-18 are linked by the transitional verse of 12:18.⁶³ This text portrays the frustrated dragon as God's antagonist, who positions himself on the seashore and calls forth the sea beast (13:1-10) and the land beast (13:11-18) as his two agents for the final conflict. While it has been argued that the dragon is essentially extraneous to the narrative in 13:1-18 and his appearance is the result of 'redactional additions',⁶⁴ this suggestion has been convincingly refuted by Siew. He demonstrates that the dragon, who gives the throne to the beast in 13:2b, plays a significant role in the vision as a recipient of the worship directed to the beast. Therefore, his standing in 12:18 is of pivotal significance for the entire vision: 'Even though the role of the dragon is not mentioned after v. 4, the whole of ch. 13 is coloured by the fact that it is the dragon standing on the seashore calling forth the beast from the sea and giving him all the authority necessary to enforce his will on an unwitting world.'⁶⁵

Both beasts appear for the first time in the book in ch. 13. They are introduced in accordance with the identification–description literary technique of Revelation (13:1-2, 11). Since the beast's throne occurs within this pattern, it can be concluded that the tendency to introduce major characters by including a reference to the throne motif continues. Moreover, there is a theologically motivated contrast between the beast's authority symbolized by his throne and the Lamb's enthronement in ch. 5. This antithetical analogy has further aspects which will be developed later.

The second reference to the throne of the beast (16:10) is located within the Seven Bowls cycle (16:1-21). The vision is introduced by a temple scene with a twofold focus: the preparation of the seven angels for the delivering of the bowl plagues and the celebration of the victorious saints (15:1-8). The entire section begins with a formula signalling a new textual unit: καὶ εἶδον

⁶² Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 398.

⁶³ There is a disagreement concerning the place of 12:18 in the textual unit's structure. It has been argued that the standing of the dragon on the sea shore is to be viewed as the concluding statement of 12:1-17 (e.g. Michaels, *Revelation*, 154-55), but the great majority of the commentators interpret it as introductory to the following vision. The central issue of the debate is a text critical problem. While some MSS have καὶ ἐστάθην ('and I [John] stood'; 025 Oecumenius²⁰⁵³ Andreas Byzantine), the variant καὶ ἐστάθη ('he stood') has superior MSS support (e.g. p⁴⁷ x A C 1854 2344 2351). Probably the variant ἐστάθην is the result of accommodation to καὶ εἶδον in 13:1 (e.g. Schmid, *Studien*, II, 77; Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 673).

⁶⁴ Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 357-58; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 735.

⁶⁵ Antoninus King Wai Siew, *The War Between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiasmic Reading of Revelation 11:1–14:5* (LNTS, 283; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 171 n. 126.

ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν ('then I saw another great and wonderful sign in heaven'; 15:1). The phrase ἄλλο σημεῖον refers to the third such sign in Revelation – the first two appear in 12:1, 3. Wellhausen rightly concludes that this literary device connects 15:1–16:21 with the previous narrative and functions at the same time as the title or superscription for the entire textual unit.⁶⁶

It has been widely demonstrated that the entire vision is literary and theologically modelled on the Egyptian plague narrative.⁶⁷ Prigent rightly observes that the theme of salvation modelled on the exodus motif 'is the focal point around which everything revolves' in Rev. 16.⁶⁸ The content of each bowl plague is explained in a sequence. Müller observed a common pattern with five stereotypical features of the individual bowls: (1) the commissioning/empowering of the angels who bring the plagues; (2) the pouring out of the bowls; (3) the general effects introduced by the expression καὶ ἐγένετο ('and it happened'); (4) the effects on the earthly beings within the affected area; and (5) the negative response of people.⁶⁹ The commissioning/empowering of all the seven angels happens at once, before the bowl sequence (15:5-8), while the other four features appear in the description of the outpouring of the individual plagues. The pattern is not slavishly applied to each individual plague; however, for the purpose of our study it is significant to note that the description is the most complete in the fifth plague targeting the throne of the beast, with all the five features represented (16:10-11).

2.2. BACKGROUND

It is generally accepted that John drew on at least two mythic sources in his portrayal of the two beasts of Rev. 13: the Leviathan–Behemoth traditions and the beasts rising from the sea in Dan.

⁶⁶ Julius Wellhausen, *Analyse der Offenbarung Johannis* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1907), 25. This is noted also e.g. in Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 392; Farrer, *Revelation*, 169; Roloff, *Revelation*, 182; Krodell, *Revelation*, 278; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 863; Osborne, *Revelation*, 560.

⁶⁷ See e.g. Hans P. Müller, 'Die Plagen der Apokalypse: Eine formgeschichtliche Untersuchung', *ZNW* 51 (1960), 268-78; Hans K. LaRondelle, 'Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues' in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (DARCOM, 7; Silver Springs, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 133-49; Gallusz, 'Exodus Motif', 21-43.

⁶⁸ Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 455. The bowl septet is not an isolated example of the employment of the exodus tradition in Revelation. It has been demonstrated that the motif permeates the fabric of the entire book. For a typological interpretation of the exodus tradition in Revelation, see especially Casey, *Exodus Typology*; Idem. 'The Exodus Theme in the Book of Revelation against the Background of the New Testament', *Concilium* 189 (1987), 34-43.

⁶⁹ Müller, 'Plagen', 268-70.

7.⁷⁰ While it is acknowledged that these sources are deployed in ‘eclectic and creative ways’,⁷¹ there is a divergence of opinion concerning the extent of their individual influence in the final composition. The two backgrounds mentioned will be discussed here, after which the question of the leading influence within John’s synthesis of the two traditions will be addressed.

Gunkel’s landmark work *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, published in 1895, provided the first in-depth study of the subject of the divine conflict with the dragon and the sea.⁷² Since then, a considerable amount of literature has been written on the topic.⁷³ Gunkel’s exegesis at the point of suggesting that the two beasts of Rev. 13 reflect the mythic tradition concerning Leviathan and Behemoth won widespread support.⁷⁴ He argues that these two demonic monsters in Job 40–41 are two of God’s most powerful mythological creatures,⁷⁵ which were defeated in battle by God during primordial time.⁷⁶ Whereas the beasts continue to exist in a subdued condition in spite of their defeat in the *Urzeit*,⁷⁷ the battle will also have an *Endzeit* manifestation because of the sea beast’s persistent attitude of defiance.⁷⁸ Until then the monsters ‘are constantly held in check’ by God and they ‘may still make attacks on God’s creation from time to time. The ongoing battle between God and these beasts is thus a mythological expression of the constant tension between creation and chaos.’⁷⁹ Thus, in addition to the protological and eschatological aspects a historical dimension of the conflict is also implied.

The Leviathan and Behemoth monsters appear together in three texts of early Jewish literature: *4Ezra* 6:47-52, *2Bar.* 29:4 and *1En.* 60:7-9, 24. Whitney demonstrates that these texts, in spite of individual peculiarities related to the context, represent a single ‘combat–banquet’

⁷⁰ For a discussion of various proposals concerning the sources behind Rev. 13, see J. Ernst, *Die eschatologischen Gegenspieler in den Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1967), 136-37. He rightly regards the criteria for discerning such sources as capricious.

⁷¹ Steven J. Friesen, ‘Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13’, *JBL* 123 (2004), 281-313(303-04).

⁷² Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*.

⁷³ See the following exemplary treatments of the topic: Mary K. Wakeman, *God’s Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, 35; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); William K. Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (HSM, 63; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

⁷⁴ Gunkel’s interpretation is rejected in Allo, *L’Apocalypse*, 223; Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 435-36.

⁷⁵ While the most developed appearance of the Leviathan–Behemoth imagery is in Job 40–41, see also Ps. 74:13-14; 89:10; Isa. 27:1; 51:9; Ezek. 32:2.

⁷⁶ Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 41-69. On different interpretive options concerning the nature and identity of the two monsters, see Day, *God’s Conflict*, 62-87.

⁷⁷ Job 7:12; Amos 9:3; cf. *Apoc. Abr.* 10; 21; *Midr. Rab. Lev.* 13:3; *B. Bat.* 74b.

⁷⁸ *2Bar.* 29:4; *1En.* 60:7-11; *4Ezra* 6:49-52.

⁷⁹ Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 164.

tradition.⁸⁰ The expression incorporates two similarities within the same mythic pattern. First, each of the texts alludes to a primordial event in which God separated the monsters confining them in their respective spheres (Leviathan to the water and Behemoth to the land).⁸¹ Second, in each text also is implied an eschatological dimension according to which the two monsters will appear as food for the righteous.⁸²

John uses the mythic Leviathan–Behemoth pattern in Revelation with significant variations. Not only are the names avoided allowing more flexibility in the deployment of the pattern, but the tradition is applied to the eschatological opponents without including the banquet theme.⁸³ The divergence from the earlier pattern led Gunkel to the conclusion that in Revelation ‘the ancient combat myth has been transformed from a primordial myth into an eschatological myth’.⁸⁴ His suggestion has been developed further by Aune, who notes the theological significance of the two monsters’ emergence in 13:1, 11 from the realms to which they were appointed (13:1, 11). Namely, in the act of rising an eschatological action is indicated which ‘signifies the emergence of chaos from order, i.e., the irruption of chaotic forces as the dying gasp of the old, worn-out creative order just before a period of restoration and renewal’.⁸⁵

Revelation’s beast arising from the sea (ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης θηρίου ἀναβαῖνον; 13:1) shows close affinity with the four beasts of Dan. 7, which ascend from the same realm (τέσσαρα θηρία ἀνέβαινον ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης; 7:3).⁸⁶ The formative influence of the Danielic source, which is particularly strong in the identification–description of the beast in Rev. 13:1-2, has been demonstrated by Beale.⁸⁷ Significantly, this beast is portrayed as taking on the combined characteristics of all four Danielic beasts, but in reverse order. It has even been widely argued

⁸⁰ Whitney notes that Leviathan appears alone in *Apoc. Abr.* 10:10; 21:4 and *Lad. Jac.* 6:13 (long recension, 6:3) in a cosmological role (called ‘the “axis mundi” tradition’). For an in-depth treatment of the ‘combat-banquet’ and the ‘axis mundi’ tradition, and also the Leviathan and Behemoth materials in Rabbinic Judaism, see Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 31-153.

⁸¹ The association of the two beasts with the sea and the land was widespread in the apocalyptic works (*1En.* 60:9; *4Ezra* 6:49-52; *2Bar.* 29:4) and was also confirmed in Rabbinic literature (*B. Bat.* 75b; *Pes.* 188b). The reference to the gender of Leviathan as a female and Behemoth as a male is unique in *1En.* 60:7-8.

⁸² *1En.* 60:24; *4Ezra* 6:52; *2Bar.* 29:4; *B. Bat.* 75a.

⁸³ The banquet theme is represented in Rev. 19:17-18 within a judgment oracle, where it is turned into a call to dine on carrion.

⁸⁴ Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 367.

⁸⁵ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 728.

⁸⁶ Yarbro Collins (*Combat Myth*, 162) notes: ‘The effect of depicting the four kingdoms as beasts of watery chaos in Daniel 7 is to characterize them as rebellious and as manifestations of chaos rather than order.’ Against this background ‘the sea, a symbol of chaos and rebellion from where the beast arises, represents the climax of human rebellion against God’ (Siew, *War*, 252).

⁸⁷ For a detailed comparison, see Beale, *Use of Daniel*, 229-48.

that the seven heads of the hybrid sea monster is the sum of the heads of the four beasts from Dan. 7.⁸⁸ D’Aragon notes: ‘The Seer has blended into one image various characteristics of the four beasts in Dan. 7; the result is a monstrous creature that defies the imagination.’⁸⁹ The combination ‘highlights the extreme fierceness’ of the monster,⁹⁰ symbolizing ‘all that is evil ... all that have gone before it’ regarding the opposition to God and his people.⁹¹ It has been persuasively argued by Beale that the formative influence of the Danielic description is also supported by a structural parallel,⁹² but this issue will be dealt with in the following section.

The relation of the Leviathan–Behemoth myth and the Danielic four beasts within John’s synthesized imagery has received different interpretations. The dividing issue has been the question of primacy.⁹³ The formative influence of the Leviathan–Behemoth myth cannot be denied. Against this background Revelation’s sea beast is rightly interpreted by Yarbrow Collins as ‘the chaos monster, temporarily defeated by the creator god, reviving and returning from his place of imprisonment to renew his revolt’.⁹⁴ However, Beale is also correct in his observation that the argument of Yarbrow Collins must be ‘tempered’ in light of Caird’s view, which points out that ‘no Jewish or Christian writer could use the lens of this myth except as it had been reground by Daniel’.⁹⁵ I also hold that in addition to these two major backgrounds the influence of the eschatological antagonist myth should also be given some attention. This background as related to the beast’s function deserves a detailed investigation, which is beyond the scope of this study.⁹⁶

⁸⁸ E.g. Farrer, *Revelation*, 152; Ernst, *Gegenspieler*, 132; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 175; Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 162; Krodel, *Revelation*, 250; Beale, *Revelation*, 683; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 403. This view has been challenged by Mounce (*Revelation*, 250), who views in the seven heads a reference to the idea of completeness: ‘A seven-headed beast would be an appropriate symbol for the ultimate enemy of the believing church.’

⁸⁹ Jean-Louis D’Aragon, ‘The Apocalypse’ in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy (2 vols.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), II, 467-93(483).

⁹⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 685.

⁹¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 492.

⁹² Beale, *Use of Daniel*, 233.

⁹³ The primacy of the Leviathan–Behemoth myth has been argued in e.g. Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 91; Barr, *Tales*, 108; Friesen, ‘Myth’, 304f. On the other hand the primacy of the Danielic source is defended e.g. in Beale, *Use of Daniel*, 230-31; Roloff, *Revelation*, 154-55; Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to his Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 231; Christopher Rowland, *Revelation* (Epworth Commentaries; London: Epworth, 1993), 112.

⁹⁴ Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 91.

⁹⁵ George B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980), 229; Beale, *Revelation*, 683.

⁹⁶ The value of the eschatological antagonist myth in Rev. 13 has been pointed out in D. Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (HNT, 21; Tübingen: Mohr, 1926), 254-56. For the eschatological antagonist tradition generally, see e.g. Wilhelm Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des*

2.3. INTERPRETATION

2.3.1. ENTHRONEMENT OF THE BEAST (13:2)

There is a close relation between the two central figures of Rev. 12 and 13: the dragon and the sea beast.⁹⁷ The physical appearance of the two characters coincide: both have ten horns, seven heads and wear diadems (12:3; 13:1).⁹⁸ While these remarkable similarities imply a shared pedigree, a difference can be observed concerning the location of their diadems, since they are placed on the heads of the dragon and on the horns of the beast. It seems that this divergence is not of specific significance. However, the joining of the diadems and horns in regard to the beast – both are symbols of power – might possibly imply intensity of influence. The physical similarity highlights the beast's function as the dragon's agent, his *alter ego* in this world.⁹⁹ As noted by Thompson, the point of the correspondence is not the appearance, but the action.¹⁰⁰

While significant attention is given to the physical characteristics of the beast within the introductory–description pattern in 13:1-2, the climax of the figure's depiction is his enthronement in 13:2 as the dragon's deputy. In harmony with the book's identification–description pattern the beast is in his first appearance introduced in reference to the throne motif. The direct transfer of the Satanic authority (ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ δράκων; 'the dragon gave him') is emphasized by a triple authorization formula τὴν δύναμιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξουσίαν μεγάλην ('his power, his throne and great authority'). The order of the authorization terms, I suggest, is of significance here. Namely, 'power' and 'authority' appear as synonymous concepts which sandwich the reference to the throne of the beast, the symbolic representation of these concepts. The authorization of the beast reveals that in spite of the dragon's ejection from heaven, his influence has not disappeared completely. Retaining the status of 'the prince of this world' (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) he is still in a position to confer his power and, as is evident in

Judentums, des neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche: ein Beitrag zur Auslegung der Apokalypse (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895); Ernst, *Gegenspieler*; Gregory C. Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth* (BZNW, 59; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1990); G.W. Lorein, *The Antichrist Theme in the Intertestamental Period* (JSPSup, 44; London: T. & T. Clark, 2003).

⁹⁷ ὁ δράκων appears eight times in Rev. 12 (vss. 3, 4, 7, 9[2x], 13, 16, 17) and three times in Rev. 13 (vss. 2, 4, 11). Apart from two other references in the book (16:13; 20:2) the term is entirely absent from the New Testament.

⁹⁸ Laws (*In the Light*, 38 n. 1) notes that the colour of the two figures is also parallel. While the dragon's colour is specified in its initial description (12:3), the identification of the colour of the beast happens only later (17:3). Although the words are different in Greek, πυρρός ('fiery red') for dragon and κόκκινος ('scarlet') for the beast, Laws holds that 'this is not a point to be pressed'. It seems that the blood-red have been widely regarded as a colour appropriate for dangerous mythological dragons (Homer, *Il.* 2.308; Vergilius, *Aen.* 2.207).

⁹⁹ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 123.

¹⁰⁰ Thompson, *Revelation*, 137.

Rev. 13, he is ‘still actively executing his schemes’ through his agents.¹⁰¹ Thus, the career of the beast needs to be viewed in terms of the dragon’s reign. Nevertheless, the repeated divine passive ἐδόθη in ch. 13 implies the underlying assumption of divine sovereignty and stresses that the ultimate power, throne and authority is derived from God.¹⁰²

It has been persuasively argued that in spite of the beast’s enthronement in 13:2 the dragon is actually the focus of attention in this text. As Siew notes, this is indicated on one hand by the repetition of αὐτοῦ in the transfer formula, which calls attention to the dragon’s ‘power’ and ‘throne’ (ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ δράκων τὴν δύναμιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ), and on the other hand by worshiping the dragon alongside his authorized representative (13:4).¹⁰³ However, the connection between 13:2 and 13:4 is more profound, since the worship account of 13:4 refers back to the transfer with a triple verbal parallel (δίδωμι, ἐξουσία and θηρίον). This points to the dragon’s throne transfer as the basic reason behind the universal worship of him and his deputy. In this way the worship of the satanic ally, repeatedly emphasized throughout the vision,¹⁰⁴ is directly linked to the throne motif and it is contrasted to the universal call to worship God in 14:7.¹⁰⁵ Thus, I suggest that the issue of the legitimate possession of the ruling authority is brought to the centre of attention, further indicated by the contrast between the rival thrones of 13:2 and 14:3.

The significance of the beast’s enthronement becomes more evident against the broad theological pattern followed in Rev. 13. Beale calls our attention to three elements within the schema: (1) the stepping forward of an agent; (2) his authorization; and (3) the effect of giving over power. In the case of the sea beast the stepping forward occurs through emerging from the sea (13:1), the authorization in his enthronement (13:2) and the effect of giving over power is manifested in the universal worship (13:2-4, 8), the power to blaspheme (13:5-6) and the persecution of the saints (13:7). The pattern is modelled on Dan. 7:13-14 in which the Son of

¹⁰¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 687; cf. Caird, *Revelation*, 163. There is a parallel between the enthronement of the beast in 13:2 and Satan’s offering of authority to Jesus in his wilderness temptation. While the only shared words between 13:2 and Lk. 4:6 are δίδωμι and ἐξουσία, the idea of the transfer of authority links the two texts thematically (cf. 2Thess. 2:9; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.25.1). In the synoptic parallel in Mt. 4:9-10 the emphasis is rather on προσκυνέω, which appears as the key word in Rev. 13.

¹⁰² Rev. 13:5(2x), 7(2x), 14, 15. The idea that God is to be viewed as giving authorization for doing things is repeatedly present in Revelation (6:2, 4[2x], 8, 11; 7:2; 8:2, 3; 9:1, 3, 5; 11:1, 2; 12:14; 16:8; 19:8; 20:4).

¹⁰³ Siew, *War*, 171 n. 126.

¹⁰⁴ Rev. 13:4(2x), 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11.

¹⁰⁵ On the theological significance of προσκυνέω as the key word of the vision, see Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says about the End-Time* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1994), 122-23.

Man steps forward to God's throne, receives dominion and, as a result of empowerment, all people, nations and tongues serve him.¹⁰⁶

It has been appropriately noticed by Law that a two-dimensional apocalyptic picture is produced of the beast in Rev. 13, since this character is related not only to the dragon, but also to Christ.¹⁰⁷ It is widely acknowledged that the entire scene is laid out as a distorted counterpart to the Lamb and his heavenly enthronement in ch. 5 through the technique of parody. While some scholars stop at this consideration,¹⁰⁸ others go a step further viewing in the activities of the dragon–sea beast–land beast coalition the emergence of a counterfeit trinity.¹⁰⁹ Since the answer to the question of the exegetical validity of the latter suggestion does not affect our research significantly, the focus in this investigation will remain on the parody of the Lamb and his enthronement that directly involves the throne motif.

The parody as a rhetorical technique is defined by *The Oxford English Dictionary* as 'an imitation of a work more or less closely modelled on the original, but so turned as to produce a ridiculous effect'.¹¹⁰ The original model in our case is the Lamb from Rev. 5, while the beast in ch. 13 is portrayed in terms of his 'parodic mirror image'.¹¹¹ The parody extends to the concept of enthronement which is clearly central to ch. 5 in regard to the Lamb, but also is of major significance for the beast in ch. 13, because his career and the universal response to it are portrayed in terms of the results of the authorization. Before discussing the parody of the Lamb two observations need to be made: (1) though the focus of the Lamb's counterfeit is in Rev. 13, the parody is not confined to this chapter; (2) parody as a rhetorical technique is of major

¹⁰⁶ Beale, *Use of Daniel*, 244-48. Beale's pattern differs from the approach of Müller ('Formgeschichtliche Untersuchungen', 108-11), who argues for only two components as he fuses the Hervortreten of the agent and the Bevollmächtigung (Übergabeakt) into a single element.

¹⁰⁷ Laws, *In the Light*, 40.

¹⁰⁸ The proponents of this view often note that at the same time the dragon functions as the antithesis of God. See e.g. Caird, *Revelation*, 164; Ford, *Revelation*, 219; Roloff, *Revelation*, 155; Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 91; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 83; Thompson, *Revelation*, 137-40; deSilva, 'Strategic Arousal', 14f.

¹⁰⁹ Most often the dragon is viewed as a counterfeit of the Father, the sea beast of Christ and the land beast of the Holy Spirit. See e.g. Otto Böcher, *Kirche in Zeit und Endzeit: Aufsätze zur Offenbarung des Johannes* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983), 90-96; Boring, *Revelation*, 154-57; Sweet, *Revelation*, 206-19; Vern S. Poythress, 'Counterfeiting in the Book of Revelation as a Perspective on Non-Christian Culture', *JETS* 40 (1997), 411-18(411); Wall, *Revelation*, 167; LaRondelle, *End-Time Prophecies*, 291-92; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 369-71. For a critique of this view, see Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 415 n. 2. Farrer's (*Rebirth of Images*, 284-98) interpretation differs in the identification of the third member of the demonic triad, whom he sets in contrasting parallel with the Two Witnesses. Similarly, Bauckham holds: 'The dragon relates to the first beast as God the Father to Christ. The second beast relates to the first beast not as the Holy Spirit to Christ, but as the Christian prophets, inspired by the Spirit, relate to Christ' (Bauckham, *Climax*, 434; cf. Krodell, *Revelation*, 253).

¹¹⁰ *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961).

¹¹¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 83.

significance for the rhetorical strategy of Revelation and it is not limited to the counterfeit of the Lamb.¹¹²

I suggest five basic aspects of the Lamb–beast parody which will be set out here and then will be briefly discussed: (1) the transfer of authority; (2) the effect of the enthronement; (3) the career of the enthroned; (4) the character and the claims of the enthroned; and (5) the universal response to the rule. First, the transfer of authority (δύναμις, θρόνος, ἐξουσία; 13:2) from the dragon to the beast parodies the Lamb’s receiving of the sealed scroll and sitting on the throne (5:6-7, 12; cf. Jn 5:23). Second, the effect of the beast’s enthronement results in a universal rule over every tribe, people, language and nation (ἐπὶ πᾶσαν φυλὴν καὶ λαὸν καὶ γλώσσαν καὶ ἔθνος; 13:7), which parodies the enthroned Lamb’s authority over human beings from the same groups as suggested by the verbal parallels (ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους; 5:9). Third, the beast’s career is the parody of the Lamb’s redemptive ministry in three respects: 1260 days of blasphemy and persecution (13:5-7) contra the similar period of ministry of redemption and blessing (5:9-10); enforcing the mark of the beast (13:18) contra the sealing of God’s people (7:1-8; 14:1); the mortal wound and healing of the beast (ἐσφαγμένην; 13:3) contra the slaughter and resurrection of the Lamb (5:6[ἐσφαγμένον], 12[ἐσφαγμένον], 9[ἐσφάγης]). Fourth, the character and claims of the beast parodies that of the enthroned Lamb: the similarity between the dragon and the beast (13:1) contra Jesus as the image of Father (Jn 14:9); the blasphemous name of the beast (13:1) contra the glorious names of Christ (e.g. 19:11, 13, 16);¹¹³ the beast’s false claim to sovereignty symbolized by ten diadems (δέκα διαδήματα; 13:2) contra the true sovereignty of the King of Kings, who wears many diadems (19:12, 16; διαδήματα πολλά). Fifth, the universal response to the beast’s reign parodies the homage to the Lamb’s enthronement in several respect: the universal allegiance of all nations (ἐξουσία ἐπὶ πᾶσαν φυλὴν καὶ λαὸν καὶ γλώσσαν καὶ ἔθνος; 13:7) contra Christ’s universal lordship (ὄχλος πολὺς, ὃν ἀριθμῆσαι αὐτὸν οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο, ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν; 7:9-10); the dragon and the beast as the recipients of worship together (13:4) contra worshipping the Father and the Son at the same time (5:13); the two questions raised in the hymn of praise, ‘Who is like

¹¹² For a wider treatment of parody in Revelation, see e.g. Maier, *Apocalypse Recalled*, 164-97; William G. Campbell, ‘La Parodie dans l’Apocalypse: Une Investigation Littéraire et Théologique des Thématiques Contrastées qui se Concentrent dans l’Apocalypse’ (PhD Dissertation; Queen’s University of Belfast, 2002); Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 368-75.

¹¹³ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός (19:11); ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ (19:13); βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων (19:16).

the beast? Who can make war against him?’ (13:4) contra the well-known Old Testament rhetorical question ‘Who is a God like You?’¹¹⁴ together with the parody of the name Michael (‘Who is like God?’; 12:7).¹¹⁵

These parallels suggest that Revelation is permeated with a parody of power and might. It has been rightly noted by Maier that ‘the slain Lamb is a kind of theological coefficient that qualifies and “transcontextualizes” all that follows, from chapter 5 onward’.¹¹⁶ The throne motif is of central significance in this parody. Since the throne-room vision introduces the veritable sovereignties in the universe from a heavenly point of view, it is logical to consider the reign of the beast in ch. 13 as the crucial manifestation of the abuse of authority in the book.¹¹⁷ The parody has an unmasking effect in interpreting the true reality about God, the Lamb and their adversaries. Roloff rightly notes that the demonic power and the society under its control is disclosed as ‘nothing unique, only a poor copy, even when it itself is not conscious of it! It usurped power, born out of the negation of God and his claim to dominion, and therefore is capable of nothing constructive, but only of negation’.¹¹⁸ The throne motif centralizes the conflict between the true and the quasi-sovereignties in Revelation and points to the question of the legitimacy of rulership as the major issue in the cosmic conflict.

2.3.2. DETHRONEMENT OF THE BEAST (16:10)

The pouring out of the seven bowls in Rev. 16 has been compared to a seven-stage successive bombing of the earth in which every aspect of it is destroyed until evil’s dominion is completely overthrown.¹¹⁹ The object of our interest is the fifth bowl plague which targets the beast’s throne (16:10-11). It seems that this plague occupies a specific place within the sequence. It is preceded by four bowls that are poured over the major parts of the earth (land, sea, rivers and springs of water, air) symbolizing jointly the whole created world.¹²⁰ At the same time, the last two plagues

¹¹⁴ E.g. Mic. 7:19; Exod. 15:11; Ps. 89:8; Isa. 44:7.

¹¹⁵ Michael ‘the great prince’ or ‘archangel’ is mentioned in Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 1:9; Rev. 12:7. For the Michael tradition in Jewish literature, see Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (WUNT 2/109; Tübingen: Mohr, 1999), 15-121.

¹¹⁶ Maier, *Apocalypse Recalled*, 185.

¹¹⁷ Hangyas, ‘Use and Abuse’, 218.

¹¹⁸ Roloff, *Revelation*, 155. He aptly notes concerning the contemporary application of this principle: ‘Every power trusting only itself that does not inquire into God’s claim on his world, and every society that is based on such autonomous power, becomes without fail a caricature of the authority of Jesus Christ and carries within it the traits of the antichrist.’

¹¹⁹ Barr, *Tales*, 131.

¹²⁰ Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 113.

focus on Armageddon and reflect in addition to the exodus tradition influence of other biblical and apocalyptic sources.¹²¹ The fifth plague seems to be interlocked between these two blocks striking at ‘the heart of the problem’,¹²² the beast’s throne.¹²³

The meaning of the beast’s throne is closely related to the concept of βασιλεία in the context of the fifth bowl. The two terms appear in 16:10 as almost juxtaposed: the ‘throne’ is the targeted realm, while the darkness as the effect of the plague covers the ‘kingdom’ of the beast. However, there is a slight difference between the two concepts. The beast’s throne represents a place from which authority and power are exercised; therefore, it points metaphorically to the centre of his government. On the other hand, the beast’s kingdom designates the realm of his reign including all his followers and worshipers.¹²⁴

Numerous views have been advanced concerning the primary background of the darkness bowl plague. Ford suggests that we should look beyond the Egyptian plagues considering the whole exodus event. According to her understanding, the darkness of 16:10-11 is to be viewed as the antithesis of the pillar of fire by night (Exod. 13:21-22).¹²⁵ While this idea fits into her interpretation of the bowl sequence as an irony directed to a Jewish audience, it ignores the parallel with the darkness plague in the exodus tradition (Exod. 10:21-29). On the other hand, Charles holds, following Spitta, that the darkness over the beast’s kingdom is the result of the smoke from the pit from which demonic locusts are issued (9:1-2).¹²⁶ This view also cannot be taken seriously, since it is based on a fallacious methodology of interpreting the fifth bowl primarily against the parallel trumpet plague. It is most natural to view the model for the darkness bowl of Rev. 16:10-11 in the darkness plague of the exodus (Exod. 10:21-29).

¹²¹ The two most prominent additional motifs in the sixth and the seventh bowl plagues are the motif of the fall of Babylon and the motif of divine warfare. Casey (‘Exodus Typology’, 168) rightly notes that they serve to ‘embellish’ the exodus plague motif, the basis of the whole vision. Thus, we can rightly speak of the ‘fusion’ of motifs here, as noted by Hans K. LaRondelle (‘Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plague’ in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2*, 373-90[381]).

¹²² Jacques Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2002), 149.

¹²³ There is no unanimity concerning the grouping of the bowl plagues of Rev. 16. While their division is most often viewed in a 4+3 pattern, a 3+4 pattern has also been argued (Smalley, *Revelation*, 406) as well as a 5+2 (Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 147). Our suggestion is close to the 4+3 schema, since the first four plagues clearly make a comprehensive whole through the cosmic references to the whole created world. However, it seems most appropriate to view the fifth bowl as an interlocking plague that points to the epicentre of the problem.

¹²⁴ Krodel, *Revelation*, 284.

¹²⁵ J. Massyngberde Ford, ‘The Structure and Meaning of Revelation 16’, *ExpTim* 98 (1987), 327-31.

¹²⁶ Charles, *Revelation*, II, 44-45; cf. Friedrich Spitta, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Halle: Waisenhauses, 1889), 171. For a critique of this hypothesis, see e.g. Mounce, *Revelation*, 297; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 468-69.

Significantly, in both contexts the centre of a kingdom is targeted. Whereas in 16:10 the beast's throne is struck, the exodus plague of darkness was similarly an attack against the Pharaoh's authority. Davies observes that the Pharaoh was considered an incarnation of the sun god Ra, therefore an absence of light had a humiliating effect that struck at the very heart of Egyptian religion.¹²⁷ Similarly, the darkness plague in Revelation affects the ruling ability of the beast and poses a fundamental challenge to the authority of his regime, which claims sovereignty.

The crisis of the beast's empire is additionally called to the attention by the reaction of the people who are part of his kingdom to the darkness plague. It is not immediately clear why the darkness inflicts such an intensive pain that they 'gnawed their tongues in anguish' (16:11). Swete argues that the pain is the result of the previous plagues, particularly the fourth bowl of the scorching sun (16:8-9).¹²⁸ However, a citation from a Midrash on the exodus explains more appropriately the author's intention, as has been widely recognized.¹²⁹ The Egyptian darkness is interpreted in Wis. 17:2 as symbolizing spiritual separation from the true God, while in Wis. 17:21 it designates the eternal darkness of the hell that awaited the Egyptians (cf. *Midr. Rab. Exod. 14:2*).¹³⁰ According to this source the climax of the spiritual terror was that the Egyptian's contemplation of their own wretchedness became 'more burdensome than the darkness' itself (17:21). Against this background the darkness-strike of the fifth bowl can be interpreted as internal anarchy within the beast's empire, 'the total eclipse of the monster's imperial power',¹³¹ which indicates the dethronement of this power.

The bowl plague of Rev. 16:10 is the first judgment in Revelation which directly attacks the power of the beast.¹³² While the victory over the beast and his mark has been already stated in the book (14:9-11; 15:2), only in ch. 16 begins the reversal of the beast's career through the exposure of his rule 'for what it is, a domain of delusion and confusion'.¹³³ With the darkness-strike on the throne of the beast the sense of wondering is replaced by torment (13:3-4; 16:11).

¹²⁷ John J. Davies, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1986), 133-36.

¹²⁸ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 204.

¹²⁹ See e.g. Ford, *Revelation*, 272; Beale, *Revelation*, 824; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 469; Reddish, *Revelation*, 307; Osborne, *Revelation*, 588.

¹³⁰ Lupieri (*Apocalypse*, 240) arrives at a similar conclusion on the meaning of darkness in 16:10, but on the basis of the parallel with the teaching of Jesus on the 'outer darkness', where 'there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). The 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' without darkness occurs also in Mt. 13:42, 50; 24:51; Lk. 13:28. For the motif of interruption of patterns of cosmic light sources in Old Testament and Jewish literature, see Beale, *Revelation*, 483-85.

¹³¹ Caird, *Revelation*, 204.

¹³² Bauckham, 'Revelation', 1299.

¹³³ Johnson, *Triumph*, 230.

More significantly, this crisis signals the beginning of the official collapse of the diabolic empire,¹³⁴ but it is only in Rev. 20 that Satan as ‘the deepest root of the problem’¹³⁵ is finally eliminated.

3. CONCLUSION

Since Revelation as an apocalyptic work is the book of opposition, it is not surprising to discover that besides the positive thrones of God, the Lamb and their allies two adverse thrones are also represented. The throne of Satan appears once in the epistolary part of the book (2:13), while the throne of the beast appears in two contexts in the visionary section (13:2; 16:10). While these thrones cannot be taken as identical, they are closely linked jointly making the sub-motif of the thrones of God’s adversaries in Revelation. Several conclusions emerge with regard to both thrones that will be set out here.

The question of the identity of the throne of Satan (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ) has attracted much scholarly attention. It has been argued in this chapter that the religious and the political aspects of Roman imperial power are merged in this symbol. Thus, Satan’s throne designates the presence of the imperial power in the city of Pergamon with the imperial cults as the primary expression of its propaganda. More significantly for our purpose, I have suggested that Satan’s throne is contrasted in the context of the Seven Messages with the only other θρόνος text in which the throne occupation of God, the Lamb and their allies is stated (3:21). Significantly, these characters, or rather their thrones, form the other three sub-motifs discussed in the previous three chapters of the dissertation. The contrast reveals that the throne of Satan is set up in opposition to the authority of the divine powers and their allies bringing into focus the theme of conflict over the issue of legitimate authority which is central to the visionary part of the book.

The throne of the beast (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ θηρίου) appears in two contexts that, I suggested, are fundamentally connected. The occupant of this throne, the beast emerging from the sea, is depicted in terms of the counterfeit of the Lamb. While numerous aspects of the Lamb’s identity and function are counterfeited, for our interest the parodying of his enthronement in 13:2 is particularly significant. As the Lamb is introduced in reference to the throne and his ministry is

¹³⁴ Jon Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door* (Hagerstown, Md.: Autumn House Publishing, 2008), 95. The collapse of the beast’s empire receives a detailed discussion in 17:1–19:10. This section functions as a clarifying elaboration of the last two plagues of 16:12–21 called the ‘Babylon Appendix’ by Yarbrow Collins (*Combat Myth*, 32) or ‘appended interlude to the bowl septet’ by Schüssler Fiorenza (*Justice and Judgment*, 172).

¹³⁵ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 340.

depicted throughout Revelation against the authority he receives, similarly the enthronement of the beast by the dragon appears as a major aspect of his introduction, which creates a springboard for his career. Not only the beginning, but also the fall of the beast's kingdom is portrayed by employing the throne motif. The darkness plague of 16:10 hits the beast's throne, the centre of his ruling authority, and effects a major crisis from which no recovery is envisaged. Thus, the plague of darkness is to be understood in terms of the dethronement of this quasi-sovereignty. It can be concluded that just as the Lamb's ministry is framed by the throne motif (Rev. 5 and 22:1-5), the beast's career is also (13:2; 16:10). However, in the Lamb's case the enthronement is matched with the affirmation of his eternal reign, whereas in the career of the beast an enthronement–dethronement pattern can be observed.

Part III

SUBSTANTIAL ANALYSIS

THE STRUCTURE OF THE THRONE MOTIF

In the previous two parts of the dissertation the necessary preparation has been made for discussing the deep structure of the throne motif. This chapter will attempt to investigate the logical connections between the components of the throne motif and to trace its movement and progressive development throughout the book of Revelation. The final objective of this enterprise is to discover the big picture of the throne motif and clarify how it is woven into the fabric of the last book of the New Testament canon. In order to achieve this goal, I will first discuss the literary characteristics of the θρόνος texts, locating them in the macrostructure of the book and establishing the key concepts related to them. Since one of the basic convictions on which this chapter is built is that the examination of Revelation's throne motif gives an incomplete picture if confined only to the study of the throne references, attention will be given to the cognate concepts which throw light on the development of the motif. After a detailed discussion of the cognate concepts suggested I will attempt to integrate the results of my study into a coherent whole portraying the big picture of the throne motif by tracing the macrodynamic of its development.

1. LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE θρόνος TEXTS

The Textual Analysis part of this dissertation grouped the θρόνος references of Revelation according to the four major components of the throne motif and examined them inductively within their immediate contexts. The intention of this section is to evaluate these references against the wider context of the entire book. The result of this investigation will be systematic statistical data about the use of θρόνος throughout the book, as well as the identification of the main concepts associated with the throne texts.

1.1. PLACE WITHIN THE STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

It is widely held that the book of Revelation is ‘an impressive coherent whole, the work indeed of a great mind’.¹ However, in spite of the skilled composition, there is no scholarly consensus on the overall structure of the work. The extent of the disagreement is aptly stated in the lament of Yarbrow Collins: ‘There are almost as many outlines of the book as there are interpreters.’² This conclusion is not far from the observation of Lambrecht, who has coined the term ‘structuration’ to draw attention to the problem of chaotic diversity as a result of the interpreters’ subjectivity.³ The significance of the question of the structure of Revelation cannot be overemphasized, since the structure should not be viewed only as a mere container for the content which is of marginal role. As Schüssler Fiorenza rightly observes, it is more appropriate to speak of the ‘fusion of content and form’⁴ in which the structure functions as a vital aspect for understanding the book’s theological perspective.⁵

Lack of space does not allow us entering into an exhaustive discussion on Revelation’s macrostructure.⁶ The intention of this section lies rather in suggesting a structure and locating the *θρόνος* texts within it. As it will be demonstrated later, my conviction is that the repeated featuring of the term *θρόνος* throughout the book and its cognate concepts at strategically important locations is carefully thought through on part of the author.

The intensive research of the last two decades on Revelation’s cultic aspects has revealed that not only the theology, but also the macrostructure of the book is heavily influenced by cultic

¹ Jan Lambrecht, ‘A Structuration of Revelation 4,1–22,5’ in *L’Apocalypse johannique et l’Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, ed. Jan Lambrecht (BETL, 53; Gembloux: J. Duculot; Leuven: University Press, 1980), 77–104(103).

² Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 8. David L. Barr (‘The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis’, *Int* 38 [1981], 39–50[43]) does not find the formulation of Yarbrow Collins exaggerated: ‘There are, unfortunately, nearly as many outlines of the Apocalypse as there are commentators on it.’

³ Lambrecht (‘Structuration’, 77 n. 1) contrasts by a word-play the subjective ‘structuration’ to ‘structuring’ which implies ‘objective certainty concerning a plan consciously intended by the author of Rev.’

⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 159. While David A. deSilva’s (‘X Marks the Spot? A Critique of the Use of Chiasmus in Macro-Structural Analysis of Revelation’, *JSNT* 30 [2008], 343–71[369]) warning against the subjectivity and his call for more rigorosity in demonstration of the structure is to be acknowledged, it seems that the significance of the structure is downplayed to some extent in his statement: ‘We need to keep the *text*, and not the *pattern*, foremost before our eyes.’

⁵ Wayne Richard Kempson (‘Theology in the Revelation of John’ [PhD Dissertation; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982], 37) even goes a step further, holding that ‘the literary structure (of Revelation) is the key for constructing the theological structure’.

⁶ For a literature review of research on the structure of Revelation, see e.g. Ugo Vanni, *La struttura letteraria dell’Apocalisse* (Aloisiana, 8; Rome: Herder, 1971), 7–104; Kempson, ‘Theology’, 44–95; Beale, *Revelation*, 108–51.

motif.⁷ It has been demonstrated that Revelation's 'grand strategy'⁸ is built upon sanctuary typology, therefore the significance of the heavenly temple scenes for the drama of Revelation is of major importance. Strand has convincingly argued that each vision of the book is preceded by a 'victorious-introduction' scene with a temple setting. On the basis of this criterion, he divided the book into eight basic visions, besides the prologue and the epilogue.⁹ Strand's approach has been encompassed and refined by scholars such as Paulien,¹⁰ Davidson,¹¹ Shea¹² and Stefanovic,¹³ who argue rather for structure with seven major visions (besides the prologue and the epilogue) that are all introduced by temple scenes.¹⁴ Tavo has recently persuasively argued, in line with these scholars, that 'for an author to whom almost everything else would have seemed "sevenfold," structuring his work into seven parts would have been the more natural thing to do'.¹⁵ While Tavo does not explicitly employ cultic terminology in his structuring, he speaks of 'transition' passages that switch to a liturgy before the throne.¹⁶

⁷ E.g. Valentine, 'Temple Motif'; B.W. Snyder, 'Combat Myth in the Apocalypse: The Liturgy of the Day of the Lord and the Dedication of the Heavenly Temple' (PhD Dissertation; Graduate Theological Union and University of California, Berkeley, 1991); Paulien, 'Hebrew Cultus'; Spatafora, *From the 'Temple of God'*; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, xcvi-xcviii; John and Gloria Ben-Daniel, *The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation* (Jerusalem: Beit Yochanan, 2003); Tóth, *Der himmlische Kult*.

⁸ Jon Paulien, 'Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions' in *Symposium on Revelation—Book I*, 183-98(186).

⁹ Strand, 'Eight Basic Visions', 107-21; Idem. "'Victorious-Introduction" Scenes', 267-88. An eightfold division is also advocated in Thompson, 'Cult and Eschatology', 334; Michael Wilcock, *I Saw Heaven Opened: The Message of Revelation* (The Bible Speaks Today; London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 114-15, 201-03; George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Biblical Press, 1993), 634-35.

¹⁰ Paulien, 'Hebrew Cultus', 248.

¹¹ Richard M. Davidson, 'Sanctuary Typology' in *Symposium on Revelation—Book I*, 99-130(112-15).

¹² William H. Shea, 'The Cultic Calendar for the Introductory Sanctuary Scenes of Revelation', *JATS* 11 (2000), 120-47.

¹³ Stefanovic, 'Literary Patterns', 32.

¹⁴ The septenary pattern as a key organizing principle for the entire book has been advanced with different results by e.g. Charles, *Revelation*, I, xxiii-xxviii; Günther Bornkamm, 'Die Komposition der apokalyptischen Visionen in der Offenbarung Johannis', *ZNW* 36 (1937), 132-49; Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 1-2; John W. Bowman, 'The Revelation to John: Its Dramatic Structure and Message', *Int* 9 (1955), 436-53; Thomas S. Kepler, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary for Laymen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957); Rissi, *Zeit und Geschichte*, 9-26; Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 13-55; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 35-36; Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 18-19; Talbert, *Apocalypse*, 1994; Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2000), 60-63; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 66-70.

¹⁵ Felise Tavo, 'The Structure of the Apocalypse: Re-Examining a Perennial Problem', *NovT* 47 (2005), 47-68(65). Tavo notes that ἐπτά is used fifty-five times in Revelation which makes roughly 62% of the total occurrences in the New Testament.

¹⁶ Tavo ('Structure', 61) argues for six 'transition' passages: 4:1-5:14; 8:1-5; 11:15-19; 15:1-8; 16:17-19:10; 21:1-8.

My understanding of the book's macrostructure is very similar to the slightly varying structures proposed by the above-mentioned scholars, since it follows a sevenfold division and gives major attention to the temple scenes preceding each vision:¹⁷

Prologue (1:1-8)

Introductory Temple Scene 1 (1:9-20)

Vision 1: The Seven Messages (2:1–3:22)

Introductory Temple Scene 2 (4:1–5:14)

Vision 2: The Seven Seals (6:1–8:1)

Introductory Temple Scene 3 (8:2-6)

Vision 3: The Seven Trumpets (8:7–11:18)

Introductory Temple Scene 4 (11:19)

Vision 4: Cosmic Conflict (12:1–14:20)

Introductory Temple Scene 5 (15:1-8)

Vision 5: The Wrath of God (16:1–18:24)

Introductory Temple Scene 6 (19:1-10)

Vision 6: The Final Judgment (19:11–20:15)

Introductory Temple Scene 7 (21:1-8)

Vision 7: The New Jerusalem (21:9–22:5)

Epilogue (22:6-11)

The fact that Revelation is structured into seven segments, each introduced consistently with a temple scene, poses the question of chiastic arrangement. The structure would in this case centre on 11:19–14:20, which portrays a dramatic struggle for power between the heavenly and earthly forces. This section has already been considered by Bousset as the pinnacle of the apocalyptic prophecy.¹⁸ Its central significance for the book is attested even among numerous scholars who do not discuss the possibility of chiastic arrangement.¹⁹ I hold that the numerous verbal and thematic parallels between the Prologue and the Epilogue, the Seven Messages and

¹⁷ The only difference in comparison with Paulien, Davidson, Shea and Stefanovic is that I see 15:1-4 as the part of the temple scene continuing in 15:5-8. The major differences with Tavo is that he views 16:17–19:10 as a transition passage, whereas I hold that 16:17–18:24 is part of the Wrath of God vision and only 19:1-10 is a temple scene.

¹⁸ Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 335.

¹⁹ E.g. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 105-29; Wilcock, *Heaven Opened*, 110-41; Alan James Beagley, *The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church's Enemies* (BZNW, 50; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1987), 81-82; Mulholland, *Revelation*, 54-59, 214-60.

the New Jerusalem, the Seven Seals and the Final Judgment, the Seven Trumpets and the Wrath of God visions provide compelling evidence for viewing the entire book of Revelation as a composition arranged into a macrochiasm with the Cosmic Conflict vision at the centre.²⁰

The results of the statistical evaluation of the $\theta\rho\acute{o}\nu\omicron\varsigma$ references within the presented structure of Revelation are summarized in the following table:

STRUCTURE	REFERENCES	OCCURRENCES	OCCURRENCES
Prologue (1:9-20)	1:4	1 (2.13%)	1 (2.13%)
Temple Scene 1 (1:9-20)	—	0 (0%)	3 (6.39%)
Vision 1 (2:1–3:22)	2:13; 3:21(2x)	3 (6.39%)	
Temple Scene 2 (4:1–5:14)	4:2(2x), 3, 4(3x), 5(2x), 6(3x), 9, 10(2x); 5:1, 6, 7, 11, 13	19 (40.43%)	27 (57.45%)
Vision 2 (6:1–8:1)	6:16; 7:9, 10, 11(2x), 15(2x), 17	8 (17.02%)	
Temple Scene 3 (8:2-6)	8:3	1 (2.13%)	2 (4.26%)
Vision 3 (8:7–11:18)	11:16	1 (2.13%)	
Temple Scene 4 (11:19)	—	0 (0%)	3 (6.39%)
Vision 4 (12:1–14:20)	12:5; 13:2; 14:3	3 (6.39%)	
Temple Scene 5 (15:1-8)	—	0 (0%)	2 (4.26%)
Vision 5 (16:1–18:24)	16:10, 17	2 (4.26%)	

²⁰ While the parallelism between the Prologue and the Epilogue is generally accepted, Tavo ('Structure', 66) also points out the rarely discussed parallels between the other visions. His comparison reveals the following links:
(a) Seven Messages–New Jerusalem: tree of life in paradise of God (2:7)–tree of life in the city (22:2); new name (2:17b)–(God's) name (22:4); white garments for the overcomers (3:5a)–nothing unclean to enter the city (21:27a); book of life (3:5b)–book of life (21:27b); temple (3:12a)–temple (21:22); name of God (3:12)–(God's) name (22:4); New Jerusalem coming down from my God out of heaven (3:12)–holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God (21:10); my throne and my Father's throne (3:21)–the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1, 3).
(b) Seven Seals–The Final Judgment: rider of a white horse to conquer (6:2)–rider on a white horse to make war (19:11, 14); rider given a great sword (6:4, 8)–rider with a sharp sword (19:15, 21); rider's name is Death followed by Hades (6:8)–Death and Hades thrown into the lake of fire (20:13-14); souls slain for God's word and for their witness (6:9)–souls beheaded for witness to Jesus and word of God (20:4); heaven vanished (6:14)–heaven fled away (20:11); kings, generals, powerful, slave and free (6:15)–kings, generals, powerful, free and slave (19:18); wrath of God and the Lamb (6:17)–wrath of God (19:15).
(c) Seven Trumpets–Seven Bowls: seven angels with seven trumpets (8:6)–seven angels with seven bowls (16:1); first trumpet burned up third of earth (8:6)–first bowl poured on the earth (16:2); second trumpet against third of the sea (8:8-9)–second bowl poured into the sea (16:30); third trumpet against third of rivers and fountains of water (8:10)–third bowl poured into rivers and fountains of water (16:30); fourth trumpet against third of the sun (8:12)–fourth bowl poured on the sun (16:8); fifth trumpet against those without seal of God (9:1-6)–fifth bowl poured on the throne of the beast (16:10); sixth trumpet released four angels at the great river Euphrates (9:13)–sixth bowl poured on the great river Euphrates (16:12); seventh trumpet: 'The kingdom of the...' (11:15)–seventh bowl: 'It is done!' (16:17).

Temple Scene 6 (19:1-10)	19:4, 5	2 (4.26%)	5 (10.65%)
Vision 6 (19:11–20:15)	20:4, 11, 12	3 (6.39%)	
Temple Scene 7 (21:1-8)	21:3, 5	2 (4.26%)	4 (8.52%)
Vision 7 (21:9–22:5)	22:1, 3	2 (4.26%)	
Epilogue (22:6-11)	—	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Several observations emerge on the basis of the presented statistics on the *θρόνος* texts in Revelation. First, the references are distributed throughout the entire book. They appear in all seven segments of the structure: in seventeen out of twenty-two chapters. Second, while only a single reference appears in the Prologue/Epilogue, the introductory temple scenes and the main visions number roughly the same number of references: twenty-four and twenty-two. Third, the *θρόνος* texts appear in four out of the seven introductory temple scenes and they are represented with varying degree of frequency in all the seven main visions. The data in regard to the non-appearance of *θρόνος* in three temple scenes (1:19-20; 11:19; 15:5-8) is, however, misleading for the following reasons: (1) in 11:19 the throne motif is represented by its cognate concept, the ark of the covenant;²¹ (2) while in 15:5-8 God's throne is not mentioned, it is presupposed, since the commissioned angels come out of the temple with the bowl plagues and the throne probably functions as the commissioning centre; (3) the absence of the throne is expected in 1:9-20, since the throne of God and his allies appears only in a heavenly context throughout the book and in this vision the setting is earthly. Fourth, by far the greatest concentration of the *θρόνος* references occurs in the throne-room vision of 4:1–5:14: nineteen out of the forty-seven references which numbers 40.43% of the total occurrences. The disproportionate concentration of the references in comparison with the other visions is not surprising, because of the function of the vision as 'the center that governs the entire main section' of the book.²²

1.2. THE HYMNIC SETTING

The structure of Revelation, presented above, reveals three basic settings of *θρόνος* references in the book: (1) the Prologue/Epilogue; (2) the introductory temple scenes; and (3) the main visions. Still, because Revelation is considered to be the most liturgical work in the New

²¹ See sec. 2.1.

²² Roloff, *Revelation*, 15. For the rhetorical significance of the throne-room vision of 4:1–5:14 for the entire book, see ch. 4 sec. 1.

Testament besides the Epistle to the Hebrews, a statistical evaluation cannot be considered complete without giving attention to the hymnic material that is spread throughout the entire book. The examination of the *θρόνος* texts reveal that about one third of the references appear within a hymnic setting (34.04%; sixteen out of forty-seven) which is sufficient justification for discussing the question separately here.²³

The topic of Revelation's hymnic material has been a fruitful area of research.²⁴ It has often been demonstrated that the hymns are arranged through chs. 4–19 in such a way that each of the vision sections contains at least one of them. Moreover, it has been persuasively argued that the most strategic positions are chosen in the book for the hymnic material. As Ford notes, 'It is not surprising that *all the major events* in the Apocalypse are accompanied by heavenly *hymns*. They are usually sung in the heavenly court, although some of them are joined by beatified mortals. Like the Greek choruses, the hymns of the Apocalypse are essential to its very plot. They occur at key points within the drama.'²⁵ Thus, in one sense 'the hymns carry the "story line" of the Apocalypse, and through them the work gradually moves into a crescendo and reaches a climax'.²⁶

The setting for praise in Revelation is almost always the heavenly temple.²⁷ The hymns are generally sung in front of the heavenly throne and even in the absence of a direct reference to the throne its presence is presupposed. The term *θρόνος* occurs within six out of the eleven hymnic passages of the book.²⁸ In fourteen out of the sixteen references the throne of God is in view, while in 7:17 the Lamb's throne-occupation and in 11:16 the vacating of the elders' thrones is stated in the context of worship. Of the fourteen references to the throne of God five

²³ I accept in the study the list of Jörns (*Das hymnische Evangelium*), who regards the following materials as hymnic in his landmark work: 4:9-11; 5:9-14; 7:9-12; 11:15-18; 12:10-12; 13:4; 14:3; 15:3-4; 16:5-7; 18:20; 19:1-8. For a slightly different list, see John J. O'Rourke, 'The Hymns of the Apocalypse', *CBQ* 30 (1968), 399-409. For a suggestion that 21:1–22:5 also reflects liturgical elements, see J. Comblin, 'La liturgie', 5-40.

²⁴ As representative works, see Jörns, *Das hymnische Evangelium*; Carnegie, 'Worthy is the Lamb', 243-56; Josephine M. Ford, 'The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John', *AUSS* 36 (1988), 207-29; Michael A. Harris, 'The Literary Function of Hymns in the Apocalypse of John' (PhD Dissertation; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Jean-Pierre Ruiz, 'Revelation 4,8-11; 5,9-14: Hymns of the Heavenly Liturgy' in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1995* (SBLSP, 34; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1995), 216-20; Anthony R. Nusca, 'Heavenly Worship, Ecclesial Worship: A "Liturgical Approach" to the Hymns of the Apocalypse of St. John' (PhD Dissertation; Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1998); Schimanowski, *Die himmlische Liturgie*.

²⁵ Ford, 'Christological Function', 211.

²⁶ Ford, 'Christological Function', 208.

²⁷ The hymn of 13:4, called 'a false liturgy' by O'Rourke ('Hymns', 406), is an exception, because it appears as an ironic use of the Old Testament terminology applied to Yahweh (Exod. 8:10; 15:11; Deut. 3:24; Isa. 40:18, 25; 44:7; 46:5; Ps. 35:10; 71:19; 86:8; 89:8; 113:5; Mic. 7:18).

²⁸ Rev. 4:9, 10(2x); 5:11, 13; 7:9, 10, 11(2x), 15(2x), 17; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4, 5.

appear within the well-known characterization formula ‘the One sitting on the throne’.²⁹ The other references are employed for indicating the specific location of different heavenly actions, but even more, they point to God’s presence.

The function of Revelation’s hymns as interpretive commentaries on the visions has often been pointed out.³⁰ It has been demonstrated that the texts of the hymns highlight the central theological concepts of the book – creation, salvation, reign and judgment – which are expressive of God’s sovereign kingship.³¹ The repetition of the term *θρόνος* in the hymnic material makes much sense against the function of the throne as the key theological motif of the book. It is also significant that all the hymnic passages with *θρόνος* references round off main sections of the book, apart from 14:3. They include an anticipatory aspect of demonstrating God’s sovereign acts.³² Thus, the heavenly liturgy and the centrality of the throne motif within it plays ‘a dominating and definitive role’ in the theology of the book.³³

1.3. RELATED CONCEPTS

The images of Revelation function as evocative symbols that invite imaginative participation in the symbolic world of the book. It is generally accepted that the individual visions do not possess their own unique set of symbols found nowhere else in the book. Rather ‘the astonishingly meticulous composition of the book creates a complex network of literary cross-references, parallels, contrasts which inform the meaning of the parts and the whole’.³⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza rightly notes that by employing this literary strategy the author ‘underlines the unitary character of the work through image clusters and symbol associations’.³⁵ For this reason, in order to understand a particular aspect of Revelation’s ‘visual feast’³⁶ such as the throne motif, it is necessary to identify the related main terms, imagery, concepts and motifs so that the rhetorical impact might be fully appreciated.

²⁹ Rev. 4:9, 10; 5:13; 7:10; 19:4.

³⁰ E.g. Gerhard Dellling, ‘Zum gottesdienstlichen Stil der Johannesapokalypse’, *NovT* 3 (1959), 107-37(136); Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 171-72. See also the works referred to in n. 24.

³¹ For the theological aspects of the hymns in Revelation, see Stephen N. Horn, ‘The Author’s Use of Hymns as Summaries of the Theology of the Book of Revelation’ (PhD Dissertation; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998).

³² Carnegie, ‘Worthy is the Lamb’, 252.

³³ Gottfried Schimanowski, ‘“Connecting Heaven and Earth”: The Function of the Hymns in Revelation 4–5’ in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, eds. Ra’anan Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67-84(67).

³⁴ Bauckham, *Theology*, 18.

³⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 171.

³⁶ Maier, *Apocalypse Recalled*, 65.

Since the throne motif permeates the entire book, appearing in all seven visions including the introductory temple scenes, the number of concepts related to it is high. The link is not always evident on the basis of the individual texts themselves, but the immediate context also needs to be given attention. The results of my investigation in this regard are summarized in the following table:

Key concepts related to the throne motif	References
Sovereignty of God	1:4; 4:1–5:14; 6:16; 7:10, 12; 11:15-17; 14:1; 16:18; 19:1-6; 20:11; 21:5-6
Judgment	6:16-17; 8:5; 11:18; 16:10, 19; 19:2; 20:4, 12-13
Worship	4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11, 15; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4-5; 22:3
Covenant (faithfulness)	2:13; 7:15-17; 14:1; 20:4; 21:3; 22:4
Rulership and priesthood	1:6; 5:10; 20:4; 22:3-5
Conflict with Satan and its agents	2:13; 12:4; 13:1-10; 16:10
Redemption	1:5; 5:9; 7:10, 14
Victory	3:21; 21:7
New creation	21:5; 22:1-5
Reward	3:21
Creation	4:11
Trinity	1:4
Sealed Book	5:1
Prayer	8:3
Ascension	12:5
Eschatological end	16:17
Lamb's wedding	19:7-9

Several conclusions may be drawn on the basis of this table. First, the seventeen theological concepts mentioned are not represented with the same degree of frequency. The concepts repeatedly appearing throughout the visions as associated with the *θρόνος* texts are sovereignty, judgment, worship, covenant, rulership and priesthood. They seem to be basic to the throne theology of Revelation. Second, I suggest that while the frequency is an important indicator of the significance of the main concepts, this criteria is, however, not decisive for our purpose. Thus, the new creation is only in the last two chapters of Revelation directly related to the throne motif, although it is well known that the concept constitutes one of the basic components of John's theology. Similarly, the concepts of redemption and victory appear less frequently with *θρόνος*, but they are featured at strategically important places. Third, the most often appearing concepts correspond roughly to the basic theological meanings of Yahweh's throne in the Old Testament, examined in the background part of this dissertation.³⁷ However, the general impression is that the theological concepts touched or evoked by John's throne motif are more numerous than in the antecedent Old Testament throne texts. Fourth, on the basis of this investigation it seems that the overarching concept of the book's theology is divine sovereignty. Besides its symbolic incarnation in the throne motif it is highlighted in almost all throne-reference contexts by divine titles, praise formulas and actions emanating or commanded from the throne itself. Fifth, the other key concepts of the book are all closely related to the notion of sovereignty and point in its direction. Thus, the concept of reign/kingdom (*βασιλεύω/βασιλεία*) is the manifestation of sovereignty on God's part which he delegates to his allies. Worship/service (*προσκυνέω/λατρεύω*) is the legitimate response to the fact of God's sovereignty rooted in covenant faithfulness, while false worship is the denial of this legitimacy as an act of rebellion. Redemption is God's sovereign act in favour of his people, while judgment is a divine response to denying the sovereignty of the 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' (19:16; cf. 17:14).

I have suggested that no examination of a motif can be complete by focusing only on the key term as *θρόνος* in our case. While such study is an appropriate starting point, it is of critical significance to discover cognate concepts and give them detailed attention prompting the question: How do these concepts evoke the motif and how do they contribute to its development? I will proceed in this direction in the following section.

³⁷ See ch. 1 sec. 3.

2. COGNATE CONCEPTS RELATED TO THE THRONE MOTIF

I suggest that three cognate concepts contribute significantly to the understanding of the throne motif in Revelation: (1) the ark of the covenant in 11:19; (2) Mount Zion in 14:1-5; and (3) the *κάθημαι* passages of the book. Though these concepts have not been brought into connection with the throne motif in previous studies on the topic, I suggest that overlooking them results in an incomplete understanding of John's intention. In this section the three cognate concepts mentioned will be examined, while in the next their significance for the development of the motif will be demonstrated.

2.1. THE ARK OF THE COVENANT AS A THRONE SYMBOL (11:19)

It has already been noted in this dissertation that the ark of the covenant (*ארון הברית*) as the 'holiest of all sacred appurtenances'³⁸ of Israel's temple cult has been intimately associated with the presence and power of Yahweh.³⁹ Since the temple functioned not only as a cultic centre, but also as the royal palace of Yahweh (both ideas are encapsulated in the term *היכל*), the ark of the covenant has been appropriately considered the representation of the throne of Yahweh. It is surprising that in spite of the prominence of this cultic furniture in the Old Testament temple theology, it re-appears only twice in the New Testament (*ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης*; Rev. 11:19; Heb. 9:4).⁴⁰ The reference to the ark in Rev. 11:19 is unique in Jewish and Christian literature, since it portrays this holy furniture in the heavenly context, specifically in the heavenly temple.⁴¹ I suggest that this reference, located at strategically significant point of the book, points to God's throne with a clear theological intention.⁴² The demonstration of this point requires exegetical investigation of the text to which I turn now.

2.1.1. CONTEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is no consensus over the contextual placement of 11:19. On the one hand, numerous scholars hold that the text is the natural ending of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19) or even the

³⁸ Freedman, 'Ark of the Covenant', 463.

³⁹ See ch. 1. sec. 1.1.

⁴⁰ Besides these two references, *κιβωτός* occurs in four additional contexts in the New Testament, but in all cases it refers to Noah's ark (Mt. 24:28; Lk. 17:27; Heb. 11:7; 1Pet. 3:20).

⁴¹ Charles (*Revelation*, I, 298) rightly warns that 'it is quite a mistake with some scholars to identify the hidden ark with the ark in the temple in heaven'.

⁴² This equation is generally not recognized by scholars. Webb (*After the Thousand Years*, 146-47) is an exception, since he argues in reference to 11:19 that 'the ark is metaphorical for the throne of God' in the same way as 'the throne of God is metaphorical for that "place" where God's holiness and power stand openly revealed'.

final verse of the first part of the book of Revelation.⁴³ On the other hand, it has been argued that the trumpet septet ends in 11:18, consequently 11:19 functions as an introductory scene to a new series of vision starting with 12:1.⁴⁴ There has been an attempt to reconcile these two views suggesting that 11:19 functions simultaneously as the closing text of the trumpets and the opening verse of a new vision, at least in a sense of preparation for a new cycle.⁴⁵ The question is of considerable importance, since if our text is structurally linked to the Cosmic Conflict vision (12:1–14:20), there must be also a theological connection, characteristic of the relationship between the introductory temple scenes and the main visions, which throws some light on Revelation’s central vision.

It seems that the view which holds 11:19 as introductory to the Cosmic Conflict vision is supported by the strongest structural, literal and theological evidence. Structurally, there is a consensus that 12:1 marks the beginning of a new vision. Every major vision of Revelation is introduced by a heavenly temple scene and there is no strong reason to suppose that the Cosmic Conflict vision is an exception. The temple setting of 11:19 is strongly confirmed by the double reference to *ναός* and by the focus on the ark, the central cultic furniture. Also numerous literal links tie the text to the succeeding vision. The most significant is the use of *ὡς φθῆ* (‘there was seen’), which appears only three times in the book, but all references appear within the same context: in 11:19 in connection with the ark, in 12:1 as related to the woman and in 12:3 referring to the dragon. Osborne rightly recognizes the logical relation between the three ‘revelations’ and views it as the indicator of ‘a linear movement from chapter 11 to chapter 12’.⁴⁶ Similarly, the phrase *ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ* appears in all three texts and provides a further link between 11:19 and the subsequent section.⁴⁷ Finally, viewed from a theological perspective, the vision of the ark of the covenant is a ‘fitting prelude to the Holy War’ set out in the Cosmic Conflict

⁴³ E.g. Collins, *Combat Myth*, 611; Valentine, ‘Temple Motif’, 265-70; Boring, *Revelation*, 149; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 79; Roloff, *Revelation*, 103-04, 138-40; Thompson, *Revelation*, 129-30; Michaels, *Revelation*, 146-47; Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 273-74; Osborne, *Revelation*, 447.

⁴⁴ E.g. Walvoord, *Revelation*, 186; Wilcock, *I Saw Heaven Open*, 110; Paul S. Minear, *New Testament Apocalyptic* (Interpreting Biblical Texts; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1981), 91-92; C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares* (2 vols.; Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1985), II, 58-61, 309-10; Kenneth A. Strand, ‘Eight Basic Visions’, 114; Müller, *Microstructural Analysis*, 325-31.

⁴⁵ E.g. Ford, *Revelation*, 182; Mulholland, *Revelation*, 211, 214; Aune, *Revelation*, 6–16, 661; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 361-62; Johnson, *Triumph*, 154; Smalley, *Revelation*, 255-56.

⁴⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, 448; cf. Jean-Pierre Charlier, *Comprendre l’Apocalisse* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1991), 263. While Müller (*Microstructural Analysis*, 330-31) shares the view of Osborne and Charlier on the close connection of the three texts, he rightly recognizes that ‘Rev 11:19 is different from Rev 12:1 and Rev 12:3, because the term *σημεῖον* is only applied to the two latter verses’.

⁴⁷ For presentation of the literal links between the three texts in a table, see Müller, *Microstructural Analysis*, 329.

vision.⁴⁸ Against its Old Testament meaning, as symbolic of the certainty of Yahweh's triumph over Israel's enemies in the Holy War, the revelation of the ark appears as an appropriate theological introduction for the vision about the cosmic struggle for power between two opposed 'sovereignties'.⁴⁹

The micro-structure of 11:19 highlights the centrality of the ark of the covenant in this short vision. The text contains three motifs: (1) the opening of the heavenly temple; (2) the sighting of the ark within it; and (3) the atmospheric and seismic phenomena. A clear relation can be established between the three motifs: the ark is the focus of the vision, the opening of the temple serves the purpose of the ark's revelation and the atmospheric and seismic phenomena are accompanying incidents connected to the revelation of the ark.

2.1.2. BACKGROUND

It has been already demonstrated that the ark of the covenant was considered Yahweh's figurative throne in the Old Testament.⁵⁰ This section will examine the functions of this sacred object in the Old Testament and the expectations concerning its appearance in the Jewish literature. Attention will also be given to the phenomena of the opening of the temple, a well-known apocalyptic motif. The biblical scholars of the 20th century often tried to understand the nature and function of the ark by relating it to different cultic objects in the ANE.⁵¹ The discussion of these attempts is beyond the scope of our study, since it does not inform the ark symbolism in Rev. 11:19.

⁴⁸ Ford, *Revelation*, 182.

⁴⁹ Minear, *New Testament Apocalyptic*, 91-101. It seems possible that 11:19 is more than an introductory temple vision leading into 12:1-14:20. Since the eschatological aspect of the Cosmic Conflict vision is elaborated in more detail in 15:1-16:21 that is further expanded in the 'Babylon appendix' of 17:1-18:24, it is reasonable to conclude that 11:19 introduces the entire second half of the book. This view is supported by the fact that similar to the introduction of the first half of the book by a throne room scene (4:1-5:14) the second half also starts with the emphasis on God's throne, but this time symbolically: by a reference to the ark of the covenant. The link between the two introductory throne visions is supported by two verbal parallels: (1) while in 4:1 a door in heaven was opened (θύρα ἠνεωγμένη), in 11:19 the temple itself is referred to as opened (ἡνοίγη ὁ ναός); (2) the phenomena emanating from the throne in 4:5 (ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ) reappears in 11:19 in connection with the ark in an expanded form (ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμὸς καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη). On the verbal links between the two visions, see Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 335; Müller, *Microstructural Analysis*, 330.

⁵⁰ See ch. 1 sec. 1.1.

⁵¹ For the survey and evaluation of different critical theories, see Woudstra, *Ark of the Covenant*.

2.1.2.1. FUNCTIONS OF THE ARK IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

There has been a tendency to interpret the function and the symbolism of the ark in exclusive terms. The ark has often been viewed as a piece of furniture containing sacred objects, an empty symbol of Yahweh's residence, a portable throne of Yahweh or a footstool upon which Yahweh was believed to stand.⁵² Though the ark clearly had more than a single use, its intimate connection with the presence of Yahweh suggests an overarching role of a divine throne. This meaning makes sense particularly against the Old Testament's worldview in which God is pictured as a king. Though he neither wears a crown nor holds a sceptre, still he occupies a throne that is located in his palace, in the heavenly temple. I suggest that the ark as a 'pledge'⁵³ of Yahweh's presence, a powerful 'symbol of leadership in time of both war and peace',⁵⁴ embodies three basic functions in the Old Testament: it appears as the symbol of Yahweh's power, the symbol of Yahweh's mercy and a sacred object with a container role.⁵⁵ Each of these functions will be briefly discussed here.

The ark as God's throne primarily evoked the idea of Yahweh's divine-royal authority. In the theology of the Old Testament a clear link is presupposed between the ark/throne in the Holy of Holies and the heavenly throne. In the temple cult the earthly throne was the representative of the heavenly throne, therefore it was believed that God dwelt symbolically in the Holy of Holies enthroned on cherubim. In several Old Testament contexts this symbol of power is strongly tied to the motif of God as a divine warrior. As the visible symbol of God's proximity, his supreme power on behalf of Israel, the ark was occasionally employed as a war palladium in Israel's warfare against its enemies.⁵⁶ It is possible that some military successes were mistakenly interpreted by the Israelites as the result of the manifestation of some sort of

⁵² For these different interpretive possibilities, see John I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC, 3; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 358.

⁵³ Kaiser, *Old Testament Theology*, 159.

⁵⁴ Hans-Jürgen Zobel, 'אָרֶן' in *TDOT*, I, 363-74(371).

⁵⁵ Differently from our view, G.H. Davies ('Ark of the Covenant', *IDB*, I, 222-26) points out four basic interpretations of the ark: (1) the extension or embodiment of the presence of Yahweh; (2) war palladium; (3) container of the testimony; and (4) portable throne for the invisible presence of Yahweh. While these aspects are rightly noted, they could be encapsulated in the concept of Yahweh's throne, not necessarily excluding each other. In contrast, Gerhard von Rad (*The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* [trans. E.W. Trueman Dicken; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966], 112) argues: 'The conception of the ark has not by any means developed along one single, straightforward, ascertainable line.' He rather suggests that an earlier function of the ark as a container was superseded by its throne function. Von Rad's challenge should be given more careful attention by the examination of the possibility of development of the ark tradition within the Old Testament. However, his conclusion is not grounded firmly in the text.

⁵⁶ Briggs (*Jewish Temple Imagery*, 87 n. 148) refers to six texts which give a military sense to the ark of the covenant: Num. 10; 14; Josh. 6; 1Sam. 4; 1Sam. 14; 2Sam. 11:11.

magical power on the part of the ark. According to Briggs this use of the ark may have been irregular, but it probably contributed to the development of the cherubim-riding imagery according to which Yahweh came to the aid of his people on a cherubim chariot.⁵⁷

The ark of the covenant was not exclusively a political symbol limited to the representation of theocratic rule. It has been persuasively argued that the ultimate aim of the representation of Yahweh's power was cultic in nature.⁵⁸ The ark was not only the most important piece of holy furniture of Israel's temple cult, the dwelling place of Yahweh's *kabod* where he 'guarded the covenant', but at the same time it was 'the centre of all Jewish worship'.⁵⁹ The holiness of the ark was protected by a cultic ritual that prescribed a limited approach to it. Only once a year, on Yom Kippur, was the high priest allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies and approach the ark with the purpose of involving it directly in the ritual. By sprinkling sacrificial blood on the כַּפֹּרֶת atonement was made through this ceremony (Lev. 16:14-16). This cultic act highlights the decisive role of God's symbolic throne in maintaining of the covenant. Eskola notes: 'The atonement which was achieved on the Day of Atonement was the realization of the heart of Jewish theocratic belief: God was given his proper status as the king of Israel, and no sin, unbelief or unfaithfulness was allowed to hinder his royal dominion.'⁶⁰ In this sense, the ark functioned as the meeting point of heavenly sanctity and earthly sin, the place where the divine-human relationship was restored.⁶¹

The ark's role as a container is well known – a function that has parallels with some thrones in ANE.⁶² It stored the 'testimony' (עֲדוּת) of God's mighty act, his divine law written on

⁵⁷ Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery*, 87-88.

⁵⁸ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 214.

⁵⁹ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 55.

⁶⁰ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 55.

⁶¹ 'All of these cultic exercises were useless apart from an inward desire to be obedient. This then is where the ark came in as it, better than anything else, brought to the collective mind of the people the reality and remembrance of both the covenant and the God behind it. Such was its symbolism and as such it was to have the desirable effect of galvanizing Israel into living in genuine inward obedience' (Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery*, 91).

⁶² While Haran (*Temples*, 246-59) differentiates between the ark as a container and a throne, Roland de Vaux ('Les chérubins et l'arche d'alliance, les sphinx gardiens et les trônes divins dans l'ancien orient' in *Bible et Orient* [Cogitatio Fidei, 24; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1967], 231-59) points out that the notion of throne includes a container function. For supporting this view he provides a list of parallels from the ANE literature and art in which thrones contained law codes that were binding upon those who worshiped the king or the deity present or believed to be present above the throne-footstool. Margaret Barker (*The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005], 152) examined the different functions of the ark of the covenant from a source-critical perspective and concluded that in Deuteronomy 'the ark was no longer the throne or the footstool of the Lord; it was the box in which the tables of the Law were stored'. She argues that the description of the ark is contradictory in the different traditions of Pentateuch, but her argument is not persuasive.

the stone tables, which was a reminder to the reality of Yahweh's authoritative power and kingship. The ark also housed a jar of manna and Aron's sprouted staff (Exod. 16:33-34; Num. 17:10),⁶³ witnesses of God's providence and grace. Thus, the content of the ark of the covenant served the same dual purpose as the object itself: it was a reminder to God's sovereign authority and providing grace.

2.1.2.2. THE ARK'S DISAPPEARANCE AND EXPECTATIONS IN JEWISH LITERATURE

In spite of the ark's centrality in the Old Testament temple cult, no serious interest is shown in it in Jewish literature.⁶⁴ This neglect is probably due to the disappearance of the ark and the relative disinterest in the later Old Testament prophetic literature. The several available references try to explain the disappearance and give voice to hopes concerning its discovery.

There is no consensus concerning the exact date and circumstances of the ark's disappearance. The reason for this is partially the Old Testament's silence on the question. Theoretically, the ark could have been lost and destroyed during Shishak's attack on Jerusalem (1Kgs 14:25-28) or the campaign of king Jehoash, which resulted in the robbery of the Jerusalem Temple (2Chron. 25:24). Significantly, Nabuzaradan, the commander of the Babylonian imperial guard, did not encounter the ark in 586 B.C.E. when he burnt the temple (2Kgs 25:8-10). While it is recorded that he carried away the holy articles used in the temple service to Babylon, the ark is not mentioned in the list of prayers – probably because of its absence (2Kgs 25:13-17).⁶⁵ Later Jewish sources give contradictory testimonies concerning the fate of the ark. According to one tradition it has been hidden together with the holy tent and the incense altar in a cave on Mount Nebo by Jeremiah (2Macc. 2:4-8) or by an angel (2Bar. 6:7-9).⁶⁶ On the other hand, a different

⁶³ Originally the jar of manna and the staff of Aron had to be placed in front of the ark (Num. 17:4), but according to Heb. 9:4 they were put into the ark. It is well known that already in the time of Solomon the ark contained only the two stone tablets (1Kgs 8:9).

⁶⁴ In the later prophets and the Old Testament wisdom literature the ark is almost completely ignored. It only appears in Ps. 132:7-8 and Jer. 3:16, but neither of these references elevates its role to the level of honour it had in the Pentateuch and in the early prophetic tradition.

⁶⁵ Considering the possibility that the ark may be hidden under the temple mount Randall Price (*Searching for the Ark of the Covenant* [Eugene, Oreg.: Harvest House Publishers, 2005], 207-08) concludes: 'No conclusive evidence exists for the existence of the Ark, nor can its hiding place be definitely located.' However, he argues on the basis of the investigation of biblical, historical and tradition-critical sources that the ark could still exist and can be discovered.

⁶⁶ This tradition is supported by Eupolemus and also by Alexander Polihystor from Milet, whose source was probably the previous writer (Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* 9.39).

Jewish legend designates Josiah as the hider of the ark claiming that the sacred piece of furniture was placed under a rock.⁶⁷

It is well known that the ark was not prepared for the postexilic Second Temple. The absence is confirmed by Josephus, who records Pompei's entering into the Jerusalem Temple in 63 B.C.E. He states that the Roman general saw the pieces of holy furniture, which are named one by one, but the ark does not appear on this list despite even entering into the Holy of Holies.⁶⁸ The ark is also absent from Ezekiel's vision of the new temple (Ezek. 40–48).

In the book of Jeremiah the significance of the ark is marginalized. The prophet prophesized that people of Israel will not miss the ark in the coming days and they will not search for it, because 'at that time they will call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord' (3:16-17). Nevertheless, hopes concerning the ark's discovery have not disappeared completely. A Jewish tradition has maintained an expectation that this cultic object will be found during the end-time related to the restoration of Israel. According to this view the ark will appear during the resurrection and it will become visible on Mount Sinai, the gathering place of the saints.⁶⁹ This expectation, however, cannot be considered universal, since the hope based on the Old Testament rather looked forward to the reappearance of Yahweh's presence in Israel, which the ark actually represented.⁷⁰

2.1.2.3. THE OPENING OF THE TEMPLE

The opening of the heavenly temple of God (ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) is the first motif in the ark vision of 11:19. The ναός in view here is the innermost part of the heavenly temple, since the ark was located in the Holy of Holies of the earthly temple.

In the ancient world the opening of the temple doors by themselves was considered a prodigy.⁷¹ According to a tradition in *b. Yom.* 39b the doors of the Jerusalem Temple opened by

⁶⁷ According to *b. Yom.* 53b-54a, *m. Šeq.* 6:1-2 and *Hor.* 12a Josiah hid with the ark of the covenant, the oil for the anointing, the jar of manna and Aron's staff.

⁶⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 14.71-72; *JW* 1.152-153, 5.5; cf. Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.9.

⁶⁹ *Num. R.* 15.10; *Liv. Proph.* 2:14-15. Margaret Barker (*Temple Theology: An Introduction* [London: SPCK, 2004], 76-77) notes that the first temple was always regarded as the true temple. For this reason, five things have been expected to be restored in the Messianic age that were present in the first temple, but not in the second: the fire, the ark, the menorah, the Spirit and the cherubim.

⁷⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 619.

⁷¹ Xenophon, *Hell.* 6.4.7; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13; Cassius Dio 64.8.2. On prodigies generally in the ancient world, see e.g. Klaus Berger, 'Hellenistisch-heidnische Prodigien und die Vorzeichen in der jüdischen und christlichen Apokalyptik' in *ANRW*, 2.23.2, 1428-69; Raymond Bloch, *Les prodiges dans l'antiquité classique (Grèce, Étrurie et Rome)* (Mythes et Religions, 46; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963).

themselves forty years before the destruction of the city until they were rebuked by Johanna ben Zakkai. Similar prodigies are recorded also in the Graeco-Roman literature. For example, Aune notes a parallel to Rev. 11:19 in Virgil: ‘Scarce had I spoken when suddenly all things shook, the temple, the sacred laurel; the whole hill moved around us. The shrine sprang open; the tripod clanged. As we fell prostrate, a voice came to our ears: “Oh Dardans! Hardy men! The land that first gave you and your fathers birth, with wealth and joy will take you back. Look for your ancient mother...”’ (*Aen.* 3.90-96).⁷² Against this background the motif of the opening of the heavenly temple in Rev. 11:19 could be viewed as a sign which points towards a ‘great turning point in the drama’.⁷³ It seems that the idea of God’s active interference in the course of the cosmic conflict is highlighted here. The language of theophany signals his presence in power and glory which will be manifested in the subsequent vision of 12:1–14:20 both in relation to his people and their enemies.⁷⁴

2.1.3. THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Numerous suggestions have been made concerning the meaning of the appearance of the ark in Rev. 11:19. The role of this short vision has most often been viewed as pointing to the coming divine judgment or/and God’s covenantal faithfulness.⁷⁵ Other explanations interpret the ark scene as a reminder of one of the following ideas: the eschatological reward of the faithful,⁷⁶ the possibility of perfect access to God’s presence,⁷⁷ the status of the faithful and their relationship with God⁷⁸ or the fulfilment of the coming of God’s kingdom.⁷⁹ While I do not discount all of these interpretive possibilities, I would like to argue that they reflect only partially the theological meaning of the ark in this context. The reason for this interpretive deficiency can be found in neglecting some of the key aspects of the Old Testament background, but also in a failure to view the text in the context of the throne motif of Revelation, which sheds significant light on it. I hold that it is more appropriate to interpret the appearance of the ark in 11:19 against

⁷² Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 676-77.

⁷³ Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery*, 93 n. 167.

⁷⁴ Bauckham, *Climax*, 203.

⁷⁵ See e.g. Charles, *Revelation*, I, 297; Mounce, *Revelation*, 233; Knight, *Revelation*, 90; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 361-62; Witherington, *Revelation*, 160; Ben-Daniel, *Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple*, 178-79; Smalley, *Revelation*, 293-95; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 186-88.

⁷⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 619.

⁷⁷ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 142; Spatafora, *From the ‘Temple of God’*, 271; Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 273; Farmer, *Revelation*, 90.

⁷⁸ Wall, *Revelation*, 156.

⁷⁹ Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 75; Boring, *Revelation*, 149.

the Old Testament background than as alluding to the legends of eschatological discovery. I suggest that the ark embodies three basic theological meanings in 11:19 that are closely tied to the themes of the subsequent vision as will be demonstrated in the following pages.

2.1.3.1. COVENANTAL FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

The ark was the visible symbol of God's covenantal promises in the Old Testament, the sacramental emblem of his covenantal activity. Its appearance in 11:19, accompanied by the well-known theophanic signs, indicates God's acting in accordance with his covenantal promises. This idea is confirmed by the precedent text (11:18) which proclaims the arrival of the time of God's specific intervention (ἦλθεν ... ὁ καιρός) – the manifestation of his wrath in judgment. Roloff rightly notes that God is portrayed here as entering 'from his heavenly hiddenness in order to reclaim'.⁸⁰ As the concept of divine judgment in the Old Testament incorporates a punitive and a saving aspect at the same time, it is natural to expect the manifestation of divine wrath in the Cosmic Conflict vision to be consistent with this pattern.⁸¹ Thus, God acts in accordance with his covenant promises, which brings on one hand destruction to the powers trampling his covenant (13:10; 14:17-20), while on the other hand protection to those who are adherent to it as indicated in the characterization of God's people in terms of keeping the commandments (12:17; 14:12).⁸² As the ark went in front of Israel in the holy wars of the Old Testament, God's people are similarly assured of his presence in the events narrated in the second half of the book of Revelation. Stern rightly notes: 'If the ark symbolized God's presence guiding his people, the appearance of the heavenly ark symbolized God's being about to fulfil the rest of his covenantal promises.'⁸³ Since the ark basically evokes the idea of covenant faithfulness, its featuring in 11:19 provides an appropriate introduction into the vision in which positive affirmation of hope is needed for God's people living under pressure, because of their adherence to the covenant.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Roloff, *Revelation*, 138.

⁸¹ See ch. 1 sec. 3.2. The double aspect of God's judgment in 11:19 is also pointed out by Mounce (*Revelation*, 232-33), but he fails to notice the relation of the idea to the vision of 12:1-14:20.

⁸² The concept of covenant is central also in the vision of the Seven Seals (6:1-8:1) and Seven Plagues (16:1-21), which are described in the language of the covenant curses (Deut. 32; Lev. 26). See Paulien, 'Seven Seals', 222-24; Beale, *Revelation*, 372-74; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 215-18.

⁸³ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, Md.: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 823. For a similar line of reasoning, see Karner, *Apokalipszis*, 124.

⁸⁴ Stefanovic (*Revelation*, 362) convincingly argues that the assuring function of the ark in 11:19 is primarily eschatological in its scope, because of the end-time focus of the Cosmic Conflict vision.

Paulien persuasively argues for an allusion to Yom Kippur in the ark vision.⁸⁵ He demonstrates that the seven introductory temple visions of Revelation are chiastically arranged and they climax in this allusion to the feast of feasts. The significance of this insight for the sake of our research lies not only in the fact that Yom Kippur was the only occasion in the temple cult when the ark was directly involved in the ritual, but also in the fact that the concept of judgment was central to the feast.⁸⁶ Thus, Yom Kippur, with its ark ritual, was an appropriate demonstration of the idea that God takes the covenant seriously. The appearance of the ark is, therefore, primarily positive, since its assuring function is rooted in the covenant faithfulness of God.

2.1.3.2 SYMBOL OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

It has been already pointed out that the key issue in Revelation is the question of power. The essence of the clash between the divine sovereignty and the diabolic quasi-sovereignities is portrayed in the Cosmic Conflict vision (12:1–14:20). Since the throne is Revelation's key motif, tension between God's throne and the antagonistic throne of the quasi-sovereign beast (12:5; 14:3 vs. 13:2) is logically expected in this vision of central significance. The introduction of this vision with the ark scene fits appropriately into the picture, since the imagery as a symbolic representation of God's throne points to the true authority, the genuine sovereignty which is actively involved in the events of the vision both positively on behalf of his covenant people and negatively in relation to the powers contesting his sovereignty. In a book which is 'absolutely steeped in the ... Old Testament'⁸⁷ it is highly appropriate to employ at the introduction of a combat vision Old Testament holy war imagery which points to the source of the true authority and appears as the token of God's ultimate victory.

2.1.3.3 ETHICAL MOTIVATIONAL FUNCTION

One of the Old Testament functions of the ark of the covenant was in a depository role. It primarily housed the tables of the testimony (Exod. 31:18), the Ten Commandments, which represented the basis of God's royal authority. The content of the ark has not been separated

⁸⁵ Paulien, 'Hebrew Cultus', 253; cf. Caird, *Revelation*, 144.

⁸⁶ The positive aspect of the judgment was manifested during Yom Kippur in the ritual of sprinkling blood on the mercy seat. Atonement became a possibility for every repenting Israelite, because the ritual assured God's presence within his community (Lev. 16:30). Therefore, the ark could rightly be regarded the 'heart of atonement for the nation' (Osborne, *Revelation*, 448).

⁸⁷ William Milligan, *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1892), 72.

from the ark itself in the minds of people – no Israelite could think of the ark without an immediate consciousness of the Ten Commandments. In this sense, the ark has not only pointed through the Ten Commandments to the commanding God, but at the same time it has highlighted the necessity of a proper relationship with God’s throne, the right attitude towards his rulership. This role of the ark is appropriately designated by Briggs as a ‘practical’ and ‘motivational’ function.⁸⁸

The ethical motivational function of the ark in 11:19 is thematically closely related to the Cosmic Conflict vision in which the throne-conflict is focused on the question of true worship. The centrality of the issue is enhanced by the repetition of προσκυνέω, the key word of the vision. This term appears eight times in 12:1–14:20 of which seven designate loyalty to the diabolic forces,⁸⁹ while once it is applied to the faithfulness to the creator God.⁹⁰ As Paulien pointed out, the conflict around the issue of worship recalls the first table of the Ten Commandments which is summarized by Jesus as having an appropriate attitude to God: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment’ (Mt. 22:37-38).⁹¹ The issue of true worship is further emphasized by the double allusion to the keeping of the commandments of God (12:17; 14:12), which recalls the ark that housed the tablets with the Decalogue.⁹² The employment of the participle regarding the keeping of the commandments (τηρούτων) implies continuity. This seems to emphasize that a positive attitude towards God’s commandments is not dependent on the negative circumstances of God’s people on earth, since their adherence to the covenant is not conditioned (12:11).

The evidence set out in the analysis of 11:19 leads us to the conclusion that this text is one of the most important in the development of the throne motif in the entire book, because of its strategically significant location and deep symbolism. Though it refers to the divine throne by means of a cognate concept, this kind of reference may possibly be motivated by a rhetorical

⁸⁸ Briggs (*Jewish Temple Imagery*, 91-92 n. 160) points out that the covenant itself has not been the primary stimulus in the maintenance of allegiance to God. It was rather God’s presence that rested above the ark of the covenant. Luther understood the point well: ‘He who studies *mandata Dei* (the commandments of God) will not be moved; but he who hears *Deum mandatum* (God commanding), how can he fail to be terrified?’ Clearly, God’s motive (unlike that of Baal) in ‘terrifying’ Israel was a concern motivated by love for protection from breaking the covenant relationship.

⁸⁹ Rev. 13:4(2x), 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11.

⁹⁰ Rev. 14:7.

⁹¹ Paulien, *What the Bible Says*, 121-29.

⁹² There is a slight difference between the two texts referring to the ‘keeping’ of the commandments. Whereas in 12:17 a singular of the nominative participle appears (τηρούτων), in 14:12 the form is nominative plural (τηρούτες). This minor difference, however, does not bear a specific significance.

purpose on the author's part that will be discussed later, as it necessitates the study of the second cognate concept of the throne motif in Revelation.⁹³

2.2. THE ZION SCENE (14:1-5)

It has been suggested that 14:1-5 is 'the most enigmatic' section in the book of Revelation.⁹⁴ The 'exegetical helplessness' of such interpreters as Bousset, Beckwith and Mounce is illustrative concerning the difficulty of the text.⁹⁵ However, as it will be demonstrated, this vision is of crucial significance for the book's throne motif.

It has been rightly noted that the Lamb standing on the Mount Zion in 14:1 is actually the 'context' and not the central interest of the section in which his allies, the 144,000, are portrayed.⁹⁶ However, our investigation will focus on the Zion scene, which throws significant light on the throne motif of Revelation. The vision-audition part of the section (14:1-3) will be examined exegetically to demonstrate the Zion symbolism's affinity with the throne motif and draw attention to its contribution. The questions concerning the 144,000 in 14:1-5 are numerous, but they are beyond the scope of our study, since they do not inform our research interest.

2.2.1. CONTEXTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Lohmeyer rightly considers 14:1-5 without exaggeration to be the 'formal und inhaltlich der Höhepunkt der Apc'.⁹⁷ Already Bousset recognized, what became the subject of widespread agreement, that this section appears as a 'counterpoint'⁹⁸ to the frightening developments in the vision of satanic forces of ch. 13.⁹⁹ The combatants of the eschatological war are placed in sharp antithesis: the beast is contrasted with the Lamb and their followers are also antithetically juxtaposed, since both groups are marked with a peculiar sign of identification which indicates loyalty.¹⁰⁰ The Lamb standing on Mount Zion with his victorious saints is also contrasted to the

⁹³ See sec. 3.2.

⁹⁴ Mounce, *Revelation*, 266.

⁹⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza (*Justice and Judgment*, 181) refers to these scholars as exemplary in this regard.

⁹⁶ Pattemore, *People of God*, 181.

⁹⁷ Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 119.

⁹⁸ Catherine A. Cory, *The Book of Revelation* (NCBCNT, 12; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2006), 61.

⁹⁹ Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 146.

¹⁰⁰ The antithetical parallel between the two signs of identification is only thematic, since the term for the seal of the 144,000 is σφραγίς (7:2; 9:4), while χάραγμα is used for the mark of the beast (13:16, 17; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). The significance of the terminological difference might lie in emphasizing the distinction between the two groups (Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 414-15). However, Beale (*Revelation*, 716) rightly observes of the two signs that they 'are parallel in being spiritual in nature and are intended to be compared', as evident from their close contextual association.

dragon, portrayed as standing on the seashore awaiting the emergence of his two allies from the sea and from the land. This antithetical parallelism has a particular theological significance which will be discussed later in our study. It is significant to establish here a basic perspective that shapes the interpretation of the whole section: the Lamb with the 144,000 is depicted in 14:1-5 as ‘the anti-image of the beast and its followers’.¹⁰¹

The scene of 14:1-5 is also closely interlinked with other visions in the book. The strongest is the thematic and structural correspondence with 7:1-17. Besides the analogous structure,¹⁰² the visions are linked by two motifs: (1) the 144,000 (7:4; 14:1); and (2) the seal of God (7:2-8; 14:1). These parallels provide sufficient evidence for considering the two visions of the 144,000 as complementary descriptions of the same group.¹⁰³ Schüssler Fiorenza notes several additional links between 14:1-5 and the rest of the book which are generally not pointed out systematically by the other commentators: (1) recalling the Lamb’s exaltation and enthronement in ch. 5; (2) pointing forward to the Lamb’s eschatological victory with those with him in 17:14; (3) anticipating the vision and audition of the Lamb’s marriage in 19:10; (4) anticipating the millennial reign in 20:4-6; (5) alluding to the ‘liturgical’ service of the elect with the divine name on their foreheads in the New Jerusalem (22:3-5); (6) recalling the promise to the overcomers in 3:12; and (7) pointing to the new Zion/Jerusalem (21:1–22:5).¹⁰⁴ While not all these links are equally strong, their cumulative effect points to the central significance of the vision in 14:1-5.

The textual unit of 14:1-5 is introduced by *καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ*, one of John’s favourite introductory formulas, which signals an introduction of a new subject. As noted by Schüssler Fiorenza, the entire section has a clearly marked composition with three structural segments: (1) a vision (14:1); (2) an audition (14:2-3); and (3) an explanation (14:4-5).¹⁰⁵ The vision is

¹⁰¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 181.

¹⁰² Aune (*Revelation 6–16*, 796) notes a tripartite shared structure: (1) a vision of the sealing of the 144,000 in 7:1-8 is analogous to the reference to the same group in 14:1; (2) the praise of a great multitude in 7:9-12 corresponds to the new song in 14:2-3; and (3) both visions conclude with an interpretive explanation (14:4-5; 7:13-17).

¹⁰³ Louie refers to the following scholars, who see the two groups as identical: Kraft, Hengstenberg, Lohmeyer, Charles, Walvoord, Ladd, Caird, Johnson, Beckwith, Lenski, Mounce and Seiss. A difference between the two groups is defended by Düsterdick, Bousset, Govett, Lang, Ottman, Newell and Gaebelin. See Louie’s dissertation for a convincing argument in favour of the first view: Jeffrey Louie, ‘An Expository Study of the 144,000 in the Book of the Revelation’ (ThD Dissertation; Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), 76-79.

¹⁰⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 188-89.

¹⁰⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 181. Schüssler Fiorenza’s suggestion has been accepted by the majority of the commentators. For a less convincing suggestion of a six-partite division, see Edmond Power, ‘A Pretended Interpolation in the Apocalypse (14, 4e 5ab)’, *Bib* 4 (1923), 108-12.

interpreted in the audition, while the last segment focuses on the qualities of the 144,000, rather than the interpretation of the vision–audition. Most significant for the throne motif of Revelation is the vision scene (14:1), though the only occurrence of the word θρόνος is in the audition section (14:3) where it functions as the indicator of the new song’s location.

2.2.2. BACKGROUND

Mount Zion (ὄρος Σιών) in 14:1 is a symbol with forceful ‘cognitive effects’¹⁰⁶ which decisively influences the interpretation of the whole scene under consideration. The imagery points to Zion-based eschatology as the primary background of the vision. While a strong presence of the exodus motif here has also been suggested, the influence of this tradition is only secondary.¹⁰⁷ It has been persuasively argued by Resseguie that the mountain motif as an important setting within the literary context of the book appears in ambivalent connotations.¹⁰⁸ Still, Revelation’s only reference to Mount Zion clearly bears a positive meaning designating a place where the Lamb is standing in the company of his people.¹⁰⁹

In the Old Testament צִיּוֹן (‘Zion’) appears hundred and fifty-four times. The ὄρος Σιών in Rev. 14:1 is the rendering of the fuller name הַר-צִיּוֹן (‘Mount Zion’), which alone occurs only nineteen times.¹¹⁰ This form alludes in at least nine contexts to the salvation of the remnant in connection with either God’s name or his sovereign rule, but sometimes both.¹¹¹ As Levenson notes, the concept of Zion has a broad range of meanings in the Old Testament: (1) the name of the fortress in Jerusalem during the period preceding David’s capture of the city; (2) the Temple Mount; (3) the city of Jerusalem; and (4) the people of Israel.¹¹² While three out of these four meanings are related to the domain of topography, the broader significance of the term lies

¹⁰⁶ Pattemore, *People of God*, 179.

¹⁰⁷ Contra Casey, ‘Exodus Typology’, 185-86; William H. Shea, ‘Literary and Theological Parallels Between Revelation 14–15 and Exodus 19–24’, *JATS* 12 (2001), 164-79(166-67).

¹⁰⁸ Resseguie (*Revelation Unsealed*, 84) concludes in this regard: ‘It may represent God’s intervention in history to protect and preserve, to overthrow the forces of evil and to bring about a new creation, a new heaven and earth; or it may also represent a misplaced striving or lusting of humankind that reaches beyond its mere humanness to achieve deification.’ For the mountain motif in the Old Testament generally, with particular emphasis on the significance of ‘profane mountain’ symbolism as the background of the ‘sacred mountain’ motif, see Cohn, ‘Mountains’, 97-115.

¹⁰⁹ Σιών is mentioned only seven times in the New Testament. Five times it occurs within Old Testament quotations (Mt. 21:5; Jn 12:15; Rom. 9:33; 11:26; 1Pet. 2:6), while in Heb. 12:22 and Rev. 14:1 separate from them. In the church fathers the term occurs only in *Barn.* 6:2 – also within an Old Testament quotation.

¹¹⁰ For related terms, see Georg Fohrer, ‘Σιών’, *TDNT*, VII, 292-319(293-94).

¹¹¹ 2Kgs 19:31; Ps. 48:2, 10-11; 74:2, 7; Isa. 4:2-3; 10:12, 20; 37:30-32; Joel 2:32; Obad. 17, 21; Mic. 4:5-8.

¹¹² For Old Testament references, see Jon D. Levenson, ‘Zion Traditions’, *ABD*, VI, 1098-1102(1098-99).

primarily in its theological aspects.¹¹³ It has already been pointed out in the background study of this dissertation that Mount Zion traditionally symbolized the presence of God.¹¹⁴ Its elect status as the site Yahweh's royal temple/palace is to be understood primarily against the cultic significance. However, for our research it is more important to note that the term evokes a whole range of concepts related to Yahweh's kingship, might, justice and faithfulness, and also to the elect's security and beatitude, since they have the privilege to lodge on this sacred mountain and witness Yahweh's (re)enthronement upon it.

In the Jewish eschatological expectations, Zion/Jerusalem appears as the centre of God's rule in the eschatological kingdom.¹¹⁵ It becomes the focus of hopes concerning the restoration as the place from which the people of God expect help.¹¹⁶ It has been prophesied that on God's holy mountain will be installed the Messiah-King, who will judge the ungodly and Zion will be a place of refuge for those who fear him (Ps. 2:6-12). Building on this Old Testament tradition, it has been claimed in *4Ezra* 13:25-52 and *2Bar.* 40 that the Messiah will appear on Mount Zion with the elect, while the nations are gathering for the eschatological warfare. It is expected that the Messiah will defeat his foes by judging them, while he gathers together the community of the elect. Mount Zion becomes, thus, symbolically the centre of God's final victory, a location where God's promise of Israel's restoration is fulfilled. As it is evident from this short discussion, the concepts of hope of deliverance, divine triumph, assembling of remnants, installing the deliverer, judgment of nations and restoration of Jerusalem are closely combined in the eschatological expectations related to Zion. Levenson rightly notes that the general picture emerging is that of 'an enchanted mountain on which the victory of YHWH over all adversaries and in defence of those faithful to him is consummated, celebrated, and perhaps even re-enacted'.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ The origin, development and meaning of the Zion theology has been the subject of extensive study. For major representative works, see Schreiner, *Sion-Jerusalem*; Gunther Wanke, *Die Zionstheologie der Korachiten* (BZAW, 97; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966); Abraham S. Halkin (ed.), *Zion in Jewish Literature* (New York: Herzl, 1961); Ollenburger, *Zion*; Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (eds.), *Zion City of our God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999); Corinna Körting, *Zion in den Psalmen* (FAT, 48; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

¹¹⁴ See ch. 1 sec. 1.3.

¹¹⁵ E.g. Ps. 146:10, 149:2; Isa. 24:23; 52:7; Joel 2:32; Obad. 21; Mic. 4:7; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 14:4-5, 9. For detailed references on the concept of Zion as the centre of the eschatological age of salvation, see Fohrer, 'Σιών', 312-17.

¹¹⁶ For examples of asking for help from Zion, see Ps. 14:7; 20:2; 53:6; 110:2. The expressions of hope and longing for Zion's restoration are numerous. See e.g. Ps. 69:35; 102:13; 137:1; Isa. 35:10; 51:3, 11, 16; 61:3.

¹¹⁷ Levenson, 'Zion Traditions', 1100.

2.2.3. INTERPRETATION

2.2.3.1. THE ZION SCENE

Since the reference to Zion in 14:1 is unique in the book, it has been suggested that a specific Old Testament text lies behind it. However, there is a disagreement concerning the exact source John alludes to here. The two most often argued backgrounds are Joel 2:32 and Ps. 2.¹¹⁸ My view is that Revelation's Zion symbolism functions as a theological idiom which draws from a wide and well-known theological tradition; therefore, the two mentioned texts do not necessarily exclude each other in John's thought. While it has been convincingly argued by Bauckham that Ps. 2 is one of those Old Testament texts which the author 'made fundamental to his work and to which he alludes throughout it' including 14:1,¹¹⁹ this does not automatically rule out the influence of Joel 2:32. Pattemore rightly concludes in this regard:

John has already made extensive use of Psalm 2, both with respect to Christ (6:15; 11:15, 18; 12:5 and later 19:5) and his people (2:26-27). The psalm is thus a readily opened context at this point, and the messianic hope focussed there on the Davidic warrior-king, is here centred on the Lamb. The hope of divine deliverance from and for Zion is perhaps best summed up in those passages which speak of the assembling of the survivors of Israel on Mt Zion. Joel 2:32 (MT and LXX 3:5) is most relevant, as it combines the concept of the salvation of a remnant with that of the judgment of the nations, and the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem.¹²⁰

The location of Zion in 14:1 has been also debated. Three basic views have been argued: (1) a heavenly location;¹²¹ (2) an earthly location;¹²² and (3) a symbolic representation of the seat of the messianic kingdom.¹²³ I hold that in the vision of 14:1-5 heaven and earth are close together, as they are generally in Johannine cosmology. As noted by Neall, the elect are consistently referred to in the book as being in heaven, while the context indicates that the final

¹¹⁸ The Joel 2:32 background has been argued e.g. in Charles, *Revelation*, II, 4; Allo, *L'Apocalypse*, 195; Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 646; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 222; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 439; Mounce, *Revelation*, 267; Sweet, *Revelation*, 221. On the other hand, the background in Ps. 2 is favoured e.g. in Caird, *Revelation*, 178; Ford, *Revelation*, 239; Harrington, *Revelation*, 146; Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 146; Bauckham, *Climax*, 230; Blount, *Revelation*, 265. Differently, Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 804) views the background in Isa. 40:9-11 as primary.

¹¹⁹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 69.

¹²⁰ Pattemore, *People of God*, 180.

¹²¹ Kiddle, *Revelation*, 263; Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 119; Mounce, *Revelation*, 264-65; Sweet, *Revelation*, 221; Giblin, *Revelation*, 137; Thompson, *Revelation*, 144.

¹²² Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 380; Swete, *Apocalypse*, 177; Charles, *Revelation*, II, 4-5; Walvoord, *Revelation*, 214-15; Ladd, *Revelation*, 189-90; Wilcock, *I Saw Heaven*, 132; Krodel, *Revelation*, 261; Michaels, *Revelation*, 168.

¹²³ Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 646-47; Pattemore, *People of God*, 180; Wall, *Revelation*, 179; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 438; Blount, *Revelation*, 265.

conflict is still in progress.¹²⁴ This perspective applies also to the Zion scene. Therefore, Beale convincingly argues that an ‘already-and-not-yet’ end-time view of Zion is in the mind of John, in which the past, present and future are blended.¹²⁵ Thus, Mount Zion is a heavenly location and the Lamb with the people of God standing on it points to their eschatological victory. At the same time, the scene includes also a present aspect, lived out by the militant church in the tribulation. The heavenly location is supported also by additional evidence. First, in Heb. 12:22 a heavenly Mount Zion is identified with Jerusalem that is above.¹²⁶ Second, the voice in 14:2 indicates a heavenly context (φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), but also the Lamb, the throne, the living creatures, the elders and the praise tie the whole scene to the throne room vision of ch. 5. Third, the Lamb is never portrayed on earth in the book, except in the description of the *parousia* in 19:11 in which his descending is preceded by the opening of heaven. Fourth, the celebration of triumph in Revelation is always in heaven until the *parousia* in 19:11 (7:9-17; 11:15-17; 12:10-12; 14:1-5).

While the Lamb acts as a central figure in the visions of Revelation, his endeavours are closely tied to his people.¹²⁷ The Zion scene is one of the clearest expressions of this intimacy in which the 144,000 are depicted as accompanying the Lamb (μετ’ αὐτοῦ; 14:1; cf. 14:4). It has been convincingly argued by Pattemore that the closeness with the Lamb is the most important feature of the people of God in the book of Revelation. This conclusion is based on the observation that their identity and task ‘are defined in terms of their relationship to the Lamb’.¹²⁸

The details of the Lamb’s description bear further significance for the meaning of the scene. His standing posture (ἑστός) has often been interpreted in military terms. Significantly, ἵστημι is also employed in the Lamb’s introduction in the heavenly throne room, where a messianic language is used for indicating his triumph (5:5-6). While in this context the standing

¹²⁴ The point is supported by the following examples: ‘People worship in the temple during the 42 months oppression (11:1-3); the 144,000 stand on Mount Zion while the mark of the beast is being issued and warned against (14:1-5); beast-conquerors sing on the sea of glass before the plagues are poured out (15:2-4); the chosen are with the Lamb when the ten kings make war with him (17:13-14)’ (Beatrice S. Neall, ‘Sealed Saints and the Tribulation’ in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1*, 245-78[271 n. 53]).

¹²⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 732; cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 525; Smalley, *Revelation*, 354.

¹²⁶ For an in-depth study of Zion symbolism in Hebrews, see Kiwoong Son, *Zion Symbolism in Hebrews: Hebrews 12:18-24 as Hermeneutical Key to the Epistle* (PBM; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005).

¹²⁷ The relationship has several aspects in Revelation: (1) the Lamb’s redemption, protection and leadership on behalf of his allies (5:12; 7:10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8; 15:3; 21:23, 27; 22:1); (2) worship and service offered to him (7:9; 21:22; 22:3); and (3) companionship (14:1, 4; 17:14; 19:9; 21:14). The most suggestive metaphor for expression of the depth of this relationship is the nuptial imagery (19:7, 9; 21:9).

¹²⁸ Pattemore, *People of God*, 117.

is related to the victory on the cross (ἔστηκός ὡς ἐσφαγμένον), in 14:1 the focus is on the Lamb's eschatological triumph (ἔστος ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος Σιών). Stuart concludes of the scene that 'all which is intended by the symbols there exhibited is merely to indicate the certainty of victory'.¹²⁹

However, in spite of the absence of the explicit military language in 14:1-5 recent scholars follow the persuasive lead of Caird and Bauckham, who hold that the Zion scene portrays holy warriors celebrating a triumph in war.¹³⁰

The Zion scene of 14:1 is substantially tied to 14:2-3, since the vision is interpreted by the audition which follows it. The focus of the audition is the new song which is sung in front of the heavenly throne (ἄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου). While a transcript of the song is not provided, the background of the concept of a new song in the Old Testament and Jewish writings provides appropriate grounds for interpreting this symbol. Patterson demonstrated that in the Old Testament the new song 'became a motif in its own right but always in recognition of Yahweh's salvation/deliverance, whether past, present, anticipated, or prophesied for the distant future'.¹³¹ It appears as an expression of praise in the context of triumph over the enemy which centres on the works of the sovereign God, sometimes including praise for his creatorship.¹³² Bauckham sheds additional light on the motif of the new song by pointing to the comparable accounts of celebrations after victory in a holy war. He convincingly argues that the expression 'new song' belongs to holy war terminology (2Chron. 20:28; Ps. 144:9-10; 1Macc. 13:51; 1QM 4:4-5).¹³³ In the Jewish writings the new songs of Ps. 33:3; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1 and Isa. 42:10 are applied to the time of the Messiah's coming in the world to come (*Midr. Rab.* Exod. 23:11; *Midr. Rab.* Num. 15:11; *Tanh.* Gen. 1:32; *b. Arak.* 13b), after the redemption (*Midr.* Ps. 1:20), Israel's resurrection (*Midr.* Ps. 104.23) and the defeat of the fourth kingdom (*Midr.* Ps. 18:5).¹³⁴ In Revelation the new song motif occurs also in 5:8-9 related to the Lamb's worthiness to take the sealed scroll, whereas in 15:2-3 the singing of 'the song of Moses the servant of God and the Lamb' occurs in an eschatological scene. In both contexts the motif connotes the saints' praise in

¹²⁹ Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (2 vols.; New York: Van Nostrand & Terrett, 1845), I, 202.

¹³⁰ Caird, *Revelation*, 178-79; Bauckham, *Climax*, 229-32; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 803; Barr, *Tales*, 114; Knight, *Revelation*, 103; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000), 369; Siew, *War*, 70; Lois K. Fuller Dow, *Images of Zion: Biblical Antecedents for the New Jerusalem* (NTM, 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 190.

¹³¹ Richard D. Patterson, 'Singing the New Song: An Examination of Psalms 33, 96, 98, and 149', *BSac* 164 (2007), 416-34(432).

¹³² Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa. 42:10.

¹³³ Bauckham, *Climax*, 230. For a critique of this suggestion, see Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 808.

¹³⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 736.

response to God's triumph. Therefore, it is appropriate to interpret the 'new song' of 14:2-3 as 'a paean of victory' which praises God's deliverance.¹³⁵

2.2.3.2. CONTRIBUTION TO THE THRONE MOTIF

The throne motif is featured in the vision of 14:1-5 on two levels: on a surface level it is represented by the actual use of the term *θρόνος* in 14:3, but on a more profound level by the general picture of the Zion scene in 14:1. While the throne reference has primarily a local significance for the scene itself, I would like to suggest that the employment of the Zion cognate motif has a formative influence for the throne theology of the book as a whole.

God's throne is referred to in 14:3 within a short discussion about the 'new song'. The reference locates the singing of it in God's immediate proximity (*ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου*) and functions as a circumlocution for the name of God. The mystical character of the new song is emphasized in its characterization as a composition, learning of which is available only to a limited circle, the 144,000.¹³⁶ This is the only place in the book where a song is mentioned without quoting its text. The very fact that a transcript is not provided suggests that the author himself is outside this circle.¹³⁷ Aune rightly recognizes that designating the proximity of the heavenly throne as the location of the singing suggests 'that *this is the only appropriate place for this new song to be sung*'.¹³⁸

Barker calls our attention to an interesting parallel recorded in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, a document roughly contemporary with Revelation. In the text quoted by her the concept of learning a new song is related to worshipping in front of the heavenly throne: 'A voice was in the fire like a sound of many waters, like the voice of the sea in its uproar. And the angel said: "Worship, Abraham and recite the song which I taught you"' (*Apoc. Ab.* 17.1). Barker's commentary on the text is enlightening: 'As he experiences the presence of the throne, so Abraham has to learn a song from the angel, a new song, in order to join in the heavenly

¹³⁵ Ford, *Revelation*, 241.

¹³⁶ Ford (*Revelation*, 233-34) points to a parallel in *T. Job*, where Job's three daughters receive the ability to know the songs of angels. However, the influence of this source on John cannot be proved.

¹³⁷ Jörns (*Das hymnische Evangelium*, 124-25) builds on verbal parallel between 14:2 (*ἤκουσα ... ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτων πολλῶν καὶ ὡς φωνὴν βροντῆς μεγάλης*) and 19:6 (*ἤκουσα ... ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτων πολλῶν καὶ ὡς φωνὴν βροντῶν ἰσχυρῶν*) a suggestion that the hymnic material in 19:1-8 might be viewed as an expansion of the new song of 14:2-3. This suggestion might be viable because of the close thematic connection between God's kingship and the defeat of his enemies (cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 736).

¹³⁸ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 808.

worship.¹³⁹ The text indicates that the knowledge of a new song appears as a condition for participating in the heavenly worship as a mark of belonging to the celestial reality. Thus, the concepts of new song, worship and heavenly realm are all closely tied to the heavenly throne which functions as a magnet holding these concepts together. The theological function of the θρόνος reference in 14:3 is analogous to this idea.

Although God's throne is only once mentioned in 14:1-5, several interpreters see in the scene a theology which, I suggest, is substantially related to the book's throne motif. Beale rightly concludes:

Since Zion was also where God sat enthroned in Israel's temple, the Lamb's position on Zion shows that he is the only true claimant to the throne of the cosmos. The mention of 'his father' together with the Lamb further confirms Christ as the only legitimate heir to the throne at Zion in future fulfillment of Ps. 2:6-9. In fact, Acts 13:32-35; Heb. 1:2-5; and Rev. 2:26-28 and 12:5 apply the Psalm 2 text to the resurrection and subsequent reign of Christ (so likewise *b. Sukkoth* 52a with respect to a future resurrection of the Messiah).¹⁴⁰

I hold in line with Beale's observation that the Zion symbolism at the heart of Revelation appropriately brings home the central theological message of the book. It stresses the centrality of the throne motif by a cognate concept. God's and the Lamb's sovereignty contrasted to the quasi-sovereignty of their adversaries, their victory over the quasi-dominion of the satanic forces, is clearly the essence of the entire book as communicated by this symbolism. Thompson rightly notes that 14:1-5 is actually a 'throne scene' which 'reveals the powers that truly control the world' in contrast to the diabolic forces that illegitimately claim power.¹⁴¹ However, similar to Beale, he does not elaborate on a deeper significance of this observation for the book as a whole.

Going a step beyond the significant observations of these two scholars, I would like to suggest a profound connection between the Zion scene of 14:1-5 and the throne room vision of chs. 4-5. The two visions share numerous motifs: the eminent status of the Lamb, the centrality of the throne, the living creatures, the elders, the harps, the praise and the forceful heavenly voice.¹⁴² Some of these connections are recognized by Cory, but she does not elaborate the

¹³⁹ Barker, *Revelation*, 247.

¹⁴⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 733.

¹⁴¹ Thompson, *Revelation*, 143.

¹⁴² While the forcefulness of the voice is expressed in 14:2 with the simile ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτων πολλῶν καὶ ὡς φωνὴν βροντῆς μεγάλης, the parallel expressions in the throne-room vision are φωνῆ μεγάλη in 5:2, 12 and ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου ἐκπορεύονται ... βρονταί in 4:6.

significance of the relation.¹⁴³ I suggest that the concepts of sovereignty and victory provide the key which closely tie the two contexts. Whereas in ch. 5 the Lamb's victory achieved by his death is followed by enthronement, similarly his victory over the eschatological enemies is followed by standing on the symbolic Mount Zion. The scene points to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom in which his kingly rule is universalized. Thus, in 14:1-5 the realization of the hope of Jewish expectations that Mount Zion will be the centre of the eschatological kingdom is depicted, though the Messiah's reign is already inaugurated in the enthronement in ch. 5.

The interpretation of 14:1-5 in terms of a throne scene raises an additional question: Why is the Lamb pictured on Zion as standing and not as enthroned? The following answer has been suggested by Aune:

At least one antecedent of that tradition is Ps. 2:6, where God claims to have 'set my king on Zion my holy hill,' from whence he will conquer his enemies, vv 8-11, where there is no explicit mention of enthronement (this passage is interpreted messianically in *Pss. Sol.* 17:21-25). Further, while the imagery of Acts 7:56 is based on the conception of Christ seated at the right hand of the Father, the Son of Man is nevertheless depicted as 'standing' at the right hand of God.¹⁴⁴

While Aune's view is enlightening, it is only partially satisfactory. As has been argued so far, the purpose of John's Zion symbolism is not only an isolated allusion to Ps. 2:6, but also pointing to the throne motif through this well-known cognate concept. The reason for John's choice of a cognate concept instead of the actual term *θρόνος* seems to lie in his rhetorical intention of reinforcing the motif in the heart of Revelation. The significance of the employment of this literary technique in 14:1-5 for the entire book will be elaborated more fully later in the discussion of the macrodynamic of the throne motif's development.¹⁴⁵ Before turning to this most important part of the chapter, the third relevant cognate concept will be explored: Revelation's *κάθηναι* passages.

2.3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *κάθηναι* PASSAGES

The repeated employment of the term *κάθηναι* in Revelation provides a major contribution to the book's throne motif. While the significance of the term in relation to God, who is in Revelation

¹⁴³ Cory, *Revelation*, 62.

¹⁴⁴ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 803.

¹⁴⁵ See sec. 3.2.

always pictured as sitting on the throne,¹⁴⁶ has been already demonstrated, this section will discuss the κάθημαι texts in relation to other figures and evaluate their contribution to the throne motif.

2.3.1. THE MEANING OF THE TERM

The verb κάθημαι means ‘to sit’, ‘to sit down’ or ‘to set down’ in a neutral sense.¹⁴⁷ It is frequently employed as an indicator of a particular distinction. Schneider points out that the distinctiveness of gods, rulers, judges, teachers and assemblies is set out by their sitting posture.¹⁴⁸ It has been demonstrated on the basis of archaeological materials from Egypt, the Near East and the Greek Hellenistic world that sitting is an important feature in the representation of a deity, while human beings are generally visualized as standing in prayer before it.¹⁴⁹ While a sitting posture is characteristic also of the Antichrist as an indication of his authority (2Thess. 2:4),¹⁵⁰ God’s sitting on throne functions as ‘a liturgical expression of divine dignity’.¹⁵¹

Revelation’s use of κάθημαι is wide ranging. The term is employed regarding all four figures or groups represented in the sub-motifs of the throne motif: God, the Lamb, the allies and the adversaries. Paying appropriate attention to the Old Testament background of the term is of major significance for the interpretation of these texts.¹⁵² κάθημαι is the rendering of ישב (‘to place oneself’, ‘to sit’, ‘to dwell’, ‘to remain’), which is in the Old Testament closely related to the concept of enthronement.¹⁵³ Employed in reference to Yahweh the term designates his sitting enthroned in heaven and dwelling there.¹⁵⁴ Special uses of ישב are the expressions

¹⁴⁶ See ch. 4 sec. 2.

¹⁴⁷ Carl Schneider, ‘κάθημαι’ in *TDNT*, III, 440-44(441).

¹⁴⁸ Schneider, ‘κάθημαι’, 441-43.

¹⁴⁹ E.g. Homeros, *Il.* 4.1; *Od.* 16.264; Aeschylus, *Supp.* 101; Euripides, *Tro.*, 884; Pausanias 5.17.9.

¹⁵⁰ 2Thess. 2:4 uses καθίζω instead of κάθημαι and the throne imagery is absent. However, the idea of ‘sitting’ in a temple as a God implies the concept of enthronement.

¹⁵¹ Schneider, ‘κάθημαι’, 441-42.

¹⁵² Besides κάθημαι, ישב is translated in LXX also as κατοικέω, καθίζω, οικήω, μένω and various others. Alvin S. Lawhead (‘A Study of the Theological Significance of *yašab* in the Masoretic Text, with Attention to its Translation in the Septuagint’ [PhD Dissertation; Boston University, 1975], 103) detects no clear regularity in the rendering of specific nuances in the meaning of ישב, since the translators ‘did not make any conscious or concerted effort to reproduce faithfully each particular grammatical form of *yašab* by a different Greek translation’.

¹⁵³ For a statistics on the Hebrew forms of the 1090 ישב references in the Old Testament, see A.R. Hulst, ‘ישב, ישבן’ in *TLOT*, III, 1327-30(1327).

¹⁵⁴ Ps. 2:4; 29:10; 113:5. Isa. 66:1 even equates heaven with Yahweh’s throne (see ch. 1 sec. 1.4).

(describes Yahweh as sitting enthroned ‘between the cherubim’),¹⁵⁵ יָשָׁב בֵּינָם (refers to Yahweh’s enthronement ‘on Zion’)¹⁵⁶ and יוֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם (points to Yahweh’s sovereignty ‘in heaven’),¹⁵⁷ which are stereotyped epithets of the divine king.¹⁵⁸ יָשָׁב is employed also in reference to human subjects as terminology of accession to the throne and royal residence. It not only designates the king’s occupation of a special seat in carrying out regal duties, but may also have the meaning ‘to become king’.¹⁵⁹

Rossing calls our attention to the significance of the Old Testament יָשָׁב texts that describe the dominion of cities and nations for the interpretation of Revelation. She points out particularly the relevance of the prophetic texts concerning the historical Babylon as a background for interpreting the sitting of the great prostitute in Rev. 17:1, 3 named ‘Babylon the Great’. Her argument is built on observation that ‘nations “sit” (יָשָׁב) enthroned, and they compete to dethrone or unseat one another militarily. Defeats and victories are described in terms of dethronements and enthronements’.¹⁶⁰ This insight is of a particular significance for the throne motif of Revelation, since a direct theological connection can be made between the throne motif and some of the κάθημαι passages on the basis of it.

2.3.2. THE USE OF κάθημαι IN REVELATION

Besides the thirteen κάθημαι texts that relate God to the heavenly throne, the term is applied seventeen times to other subjects in the book. Significantly, it occurs in the context of the *parousia* scene in which the Son of Man figure is pictured as sitting on a white cloud (14:14, 15, 16). Antithetically, the great prostitute is introduced as sitting upon many waters (17:1) and upon the scarlet-coloured beast (17:3). The term also twice implies the sitting posture of the twenty-four elders (4:4; 11:16), once is used in a more general meaning as ‘dwelling’ (14:6) and nine

¹⁵⁵ 1Sam. 4:4; 2Sam. 6:2; 2Kgs 19:15; 1Chron. 13:6; Ps. 99:1; Isa. 37:16.

¹⁵⁶ Ps. 9:11.

¹⁵⁷ Ps. 2:4; cf. 123:1.

¹⁵⁸ For these epithets, see Görg, ‘יָשָׁב’, 434-36.

¹⁵⁹ Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (BZAW, 142; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1977), 104.

¹⁶⁰ Rossing (*Two Cities*, 68. n. 18) demonstrates that this idea is evident in the satirical lament over the historical Babylon in Isa. 47:1, 5: ‘Come down and sit (יָשָׁב) in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit (יָשָׁב) on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans! ... Sit (יָשָׁב) in silence, and go into darkness.’ Similarly, in the taunt directed against the king of Babylon in Isa. 14:13-15 the enthronement is linked to claims to divinity: ‘You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit (יָשָׁב) on the mount of assembly ...” But you are brought down to Sheol.’ Also in Isa. 52:2 Jerusalem’s restoration to power is described in terms of a return to sitting: ‘Shake yourself from the dust, arise (יָשָׁב), O captive Jerusalem.’

times points to the sitting position of different horse-riders (6:2, 4, 5, 8; 9:17; 19:11, 18, 19, 21).¹⁶¹ I suggest that the sitting position of the Son of Man figure (14:14, 15, 16) and the great prostitute (17:1, 3) indicates more than a physical posture and bears a strong theological relevance to the throne motif in Revelation. For this reason attention will be given here to these two contexts, as the theological aspects relevant for our research will be pointed out.

2.3.2.1. THE SON OF MAN ON THE CLOUD THRONE (14:14, 15, 16)

There is a consensus that 14:14-20 describes the appearance of the eschatological judge.¹⁶² The identity of the judging figure characterized as ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου ('similar to the Son of Man') has been a matter of considerable debate. Although it has been suggested an angelic interpretation, the majority view which identifies the figure with Christ seems more convincing, because the combination of the characteristics of the Son of Man implies sovereignty: (1) he is sitting on a cloud (ἐπὶ τὴν νεφέλην καθήμενον); (2) he wears golden crown on his head (ἔχων ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ στέφανον χρυσοῦν); and (3) he holds a sharp sickle in his hand (ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ δρέπανον ὀξύ).¹⁶³

The focus of our interest here is the occupation of a particular cloud by the Son of Man which is described as white in colour even before the introduction of its occupant. Though a cloud of white colour is unique in the book (νεφέλη λευκή), it clearly functions as a positive sign indicating belonging to the heavenly realm.¹⁶⁴ The imagery shows some affinity with the unique description of the heavenly throne in 20:11, which is also white in colour (θρόνον μέγαν λευκόν).¹⁶⁵ The importance of the cloud symbolism is strongly emphasized by a triple reference to the Son of Man's sitting on it (ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῆς νεφέλης; 14:14, 15, 16). I suggest that this

¹⁶¹ Three out of these nine references occur in connection with the eschatological appearance of the divine warrior, who rides on a white horse (19:11, 19, 21). However, these κάθημαι texts are theologically not significant for the throne motif of Revelation.

¹⁶² However, there is a disagreement concerning the interpretation of the nature of judgment. The debate is focused on the question of whether the images of harvest (14:14-16) and vintage (14:17-20) are intended to be alternative images of the same reality or different aspects of the eschatological consummation. For a persuasive argument in favour of the first interpretive option, see Bauckham, *Climax*, 250-56.

¹⁶³ For a convincing argument, see e.g. Osborne, *Revelation*, 550-53. The minority view is argued e.g. in Kiddle, *Revelation*, 285; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 197-98; Morris, *Revelation*, 184; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 800-01.

¹⁶⁴ νεφέλη occurs seven times in Revelation, always in connection to the heavenly realm. Minear (*I Saw a New Earth*, 279-85) demonstrates that the author used cloud imagery 'as a theophanic symbol expressing a profound perception of transcendence'.

¹⁶⁵ Smalley, *Revelation*, 371. Michaels (*Revelation*, 178) goes even a step beyond suggesting a further component of the parallel: the including of the messianic figure seated on a white horse in 19:11. However, this parallel cannot indicate more from originating from the same heavenly realm.

designation is strongly reminiscent to God's repeated characterization as 'the One sitting on the throne'. The fact that the cloud is referred to before its actual occupant is identified is consistent with John's tendency to describe first the place upon which a visionary figure is seated before its introduction (4:2, 4; 19:11). Interestingly, this literary technique is applied only in introducing God and his allies – the throne occupation or 'sitting' of God's enemies are out of this pattern (13:2; 17:1, 3).

The appearance of the Son of Man on the cloud in ch. 14 reflects numerous sources of which Dan. 7:13 is the most strongly alluded to. The two contexts share the cloud motif, the appearance of the Son of Man, the theme of judgment and the notion of sovereignty.¹⁶⁶ In spite of these strong verbal and thematic parallels also present are the influences of Joel 4:13 and the Jewish apocalyptic traditions on the judgment scene as a whole.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, the influence of the synoptic tradition of the Son of Man's coming on clouds is also possibly reflected.¹⁶⁸ While in these texts the cloud appears more as the Son of Man's 'means of heavenly transport',¹⁶⁹ it seems that in Rev. 14:14 the symbolism surpasses this meaning. I suggest that it is more appropriate to view the white cloud here as a kind of throne occupied by the Son of Man in spite of the absence of a direct *θρόνος* reference.¹⁷⁰ This conclusion is supported not only by the traditional association of the cloud imagery with divine glory,¹⁷¹ but also by the fact that the triple reference to the white cloud functions as a circumlocution of the Son of Man in terms similar to the characterization of God by the throne motif throughout Revelation. Similar to our observation,

¹⁶⁶ Rev. 14:14 is one of the three allusions along 1:7 and 1:13 to the Daniel's Son of Man figure, although *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου* is omitted in 1:7. A minor insignificant divergence from the LXX source is the substitution of *ὧς* with *ὅμοιον* before the *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου* in 1:13 and 14:14.

¹⁶⁷ Adela Yarbro Collins, "'Son of Man' Tradition and the Book of Revelation' in *The Messiah*, 536-68(562); cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 771-72.

¹⁶⁸ Mt. 24:30; 26:64; Mk. 13:26; 14:62; Lk. 21:27. On the contrary, Frederick Houk Borsch (*The Son of Man in Myth and History* [London: SCM, 1967], 238-40) denies the awareness of the synoptic traditions. For a counter-argument, see the discussion of Vos (*Synoptic Traditions*, 144-152), who is unfortunately exclusive in his argumentation as denying other influences apart from the synoptic sources.

¹⁶⁹ The expression is of Vermes. See his discussion on the cloud as the means of transport in Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins, 1973), 186-88.

¹⁷⁰ This view is shared also in Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (SNTSMS, 95; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 182; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 229.

¹⁷¹ For an in-depth exploration of the cloud tradition with an attention to Revelation's use of the imagery, see the study of Minear (*I Saw a New Earth*, 282), who notes that the symbolism 'effectively articulated the majestic paradox of the hiddenness of God in his self-disclosure. It carried profound associations of glory and power, judgment and blessing, distance and nearness. The image preserved the reality of God's abiding presence without denying the intermittent character of his disclosures'.

Aune concludes that the imagery functions among others as ‘a mode of enthronement’.¹⁷² He refers to Sir. 24:4 and Vergil *Aen.* 9.638-39 as reflecting parallel ideas.

2.3.2.2. THE GREAT PROSTITUTE ENTHRONED (17:1, 3; 18:7)

In Rev. 17:1 the great prostitute is introduced as a new major participant in the drama of Revelation, who is identified in 17:5 as ‘Babylon the Great’ (Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη). The introduction takes place at the beginning of the vision of 17:1–19:10, which has the overall purpose of interpreting the prostitute’s judgment (κρίμα τῆς πόρνῆς τῆς μεγάλης; 17:1).¹⁷³ The prostitute is in accordance with the identification–description literary technique of Revelation portrayed first in terms of a personal description and role. As will be demonstrated, the significance of the κάθημαι concept is implied already in her initial description.

Rossing notes that κάθημαι appears as one of the key terms in the chapter. Whereas ‘the one sitting’ (ἡ καθήμενη) appears as the most frequent label for the prostitute in the vision (17:1, 3, 9, 15), the statement of Babylon’s arrogant boast – ‘I sit as queen’ (κάθημαι βασίλισσα; 18:7) – seems to crown the repeated use of the term.¹⁷⁴ I would like to carry Rossing’s observations a step further by suggesting that the centrality of the κάθημαι concept in the vision is emphasized not only by repetition, but also by setting it out as the primary aspect of the prostitute’s introduction. The κάθημαι concept occupies the first place both in the audible introduction of the prostitute by the *angelus interpretes* (17:1) and in her visionary depiction (17:3). However, there is a difference between the objects of occupation in these two texts: in 17:1 the prostitute is ‘sitting on many waters’ (καθήμενης ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν),¹⁷⁵ while in 17:3 she takes her seat on ‘a scarlet beast’ (καθήμενην ἐπὶ θηρίου κόκκινου). Both seats point to her powerful influence, an ability to control, as is revealed in the interpretation of the symbolic seats: the ‘many waters’ are explained in 17:15 as multitudes,¹⁷⁶ while the ‘scarlet beast’ points back to the beast in 13:1-10,

¹⁷² Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 841.

¹⁷³ Although the great prostitute appears for the first time only in 17:1, the judgment of Babylon is introduced already in 14:8. The definite article before both references may suggest prior familiarity (Swete, *Apocalypse*, 180).

¹⁷⁴ Rossing, *Two Cities*, 66.

¹⁷⁵ It has been argued that the preposition ἐπί is to be translated here as ‘beside’, since enthronement on waters does not match common sense (e.g. Bratcher, *Handbook on the Revelation*, 242; Smalley, *Revelation*, 426). While such translation of ἐπί is preferable e.g. in Jn 21:1, the nature of the apocalyptic language does not require it in Rev. 17:1.

¹⁷⁶ The universalizing expression λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι ... καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλώσσαι is employed for the identification of the prostitute’s dominion – the same territory to which a three-angel-warning is sent in 14:6 (ἐπὶ πάντων ἔθνος καὶ φυλὴν καὶ γλώσσων καὶ λαόν). The parallel demonstrates the universal extent of the cosmic conflict between the divine and the diabolic forces. The minor difference in the formula does not bear any significance.

which embodies a political power hostile to God.¹⁷⁷ Thus, the ‘double occupation’ indicates the universal dominion of the prostitute over the nations and the political powers of the world.¹⁷⁸ In 17:9 an additional seat of the prostitute is identified: the ‘seven hills’ (ἑπτὰ ὄρη ... ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται). However, this description does not form part of the vision itself, but it is given within the angelic interpretation of the beast’s seven heads.¹⁷⁹

It seems that the repeated reference to the sitting of the prostitute in chs. 17–18 with the culmination in her arrogant self-characterization (18:7) suggests the notion of enthronement. This view is shared by Aune, who notes that though the term *θρόνος* is absent from the vision (as in 14:14-16), the expected regal seat is substituted with the beast.¹⁸⁰ However, it is appropriate to rectify Aune’s conclusion by the observation that the throne is replaced by the subjects of the prostitute’s rule including the beast and the many waters. It may be concluded that the absence of *θρόνος* from the vision is balanced by the strong emphasis on the great prostitute’s sovereignty, as implied by the repeated employment of the cognate concept of *κάθηναι*.

2.3.3. CONTRIBUTION TO THE THRONE MOTIF

Apart from the thirteen *κάθηναι* texts referring to God’s occupation of the heavenly throne and the two references related to the twenty-four elders, the term is applied also in fifteen instances to other figures in Revelation without a specific reference to a throne. The majority of these texts employs the term without a theological significance indicating merely a sitting posture.

However, I suggest that some of the *κάθηναι* texts have close relevance for the understanding of the book’s throne motif, in spite of the absence of the actual word *θρόνος*.

As it has been demonstrated above, *κάθηναι* appears in two contexts as a term reinforced by repetition and implying enthronement. First, in the harvest-vintage *parousia* vision the Son of Man figure appears enthroned on a white cloud (14:14, 15, 16). Second, in the ‘Babylon appendix’ the great prostitute is pictured as enthroned on the beast and on many waters (17:1, 3, 9, 15; 18:7). It is unlikely that the author’s intention is to directly relate these two visions; nevertheless, they are linked by a shared theme of judgment. While in the first vision the

¹⁷⁷ In spite of the difference between the descriptions of the beast in 13:1-10 and 17:3, there is not sufficient ground for challenging the identification of the two figures. It seems that the two contexts narrate different episodes in the career of the beast (Beale, *Revelation*, 853; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 507).

¹⁷⁸ Ladd, *Revelation*, 223.

¹⁷⁹ For different interpretive possibilities of the seven hills in 17:9, see Rossing, *Two Cities*, 66-67 n. 13; Kenneth A. Strand, ‘The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?’ in *Symposium on Revelation—Book II*, 177-206.

¹⁸⁰ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 930, 934; cf. Schneider, ‘*κάθηναι*’, 441.

judgment is presented as God's sovereign decision brought by the *parousia* of the Son of Man, in the second it comes as the consequence of the prostitute's usurping the place and authority of the Godhead. In spite of the absence of the term *θρόνος*, the enthronement concept is basic to both contexts, since the legitimate practice of authority and the illegitimate claim to sovereignty meet as opposing ethical liabilities in these visions. The combination of the enthronement concept with the judgment theme thus points to the cosmic struggle for power centred on the issue of legitimate possession of the throne.

The relevance of the *κάθηναι* concept in chs. 17–18 for the investigation of the book's throne motif is evident in the light of Rossing's convincing suggestion: 'The portrait of the enthroned prostitute in Rev. 17:1-4 is structured as a deliberate contrast to God's great throne room scene in Revelation 4.'¹⁸¹ The following parallels are noted: (1) the visions of both seated figures are prefaced by the invitation 'Come, I will show you' (4:1; 17:1);¹⁸² (2) in both visions the seers are transported 'in spirit' (4:2; 17:3);¹⁸³ and (3) in both settings the central figures are portrayed as seated (4:2; 17:1, 3) and surrounded by gemstones (4:3; 17:4).¹⁸⁴ It seems that the most significant parallel is the sitting posture, since it defines the claim of the central figures to sovereignty. As God is characterized in ch. 4 by employing the throne motif, similarly the primary aspect in the depiction of the great prostitute is her enthronement. On the basis of these parallels it can be concluded that the prostitute is pictured as a figure parallel to God, whose claim to sovereignty poses a direct challenge to God's universal kingship. As noted by Smalley, the parallel suggests an irony on part of the author employed with a purpose of mocking 'the wrongful desire to usurp the throne of God'.¹⁸⁵ Since no one takes a sitting position in Revelation without God's permission, the prostitute's sitting clearly indicates arrogant usurpation of God's throne, which is countered by her dethronement described in ch. 18.

Our examination of the background of the throne motif, the textual analysis of the individual *θρόνος* references, the literal characteristics of the throne texts and the cognate concepts has created an adequate basis for an examination of the throne motif's development.

¹⁸¹ Rossing, *Two Cities*, 67.

¹⁸² The introductory phrase *δείξω σοι* ('I will show you') occurs besides these two references only in 21:9, where it introduces the bride of the Lamb.

¹⁸³ Transport 'in spirit' is emphasized apart from these two visions only in 1:10 and 21:10.

¹⁸⁴ In the depiction of both figures three gemstones are mentioned: jasper, sardius and emerald in regard to God, and gold, precious stones and pearls for Babylon. The difference between the two lists might be intentional as reflecting a difference between characters.

¹⁸⁵ Smalley, *Revelation*, 427-28.

While our study has been mostly inductive so far, the results of this research will be utilized on the following pages in an attempt to build a big picture of the throne motif which, I hope, will break some fresh ground.

3. MACRODYNAMIC OF THE THRONE MOTIF'S DEVELOPMENT

The term 'macrodynamic' has been employed by Strand for the designation of Revelation's 'development of themes in a progressive and integrated fashion throughout its entire scope'.¹⁸⁶

The discussion of the throne motif's macrodynamic will be divided into two sections. First a conceptual framework of Revelation's throne motif will be suggested and this will be followed by a detailed discussion of the motif's development.

3.1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The collective weight of the *θρόνος* references, which permeate the entire book and are at the same time placed at strategically significant locations, creates an impressive cumulative picture. Not only is a 'snowballing effect'¹⁸⁷ generated, but also the motif has a deep structure which goes beyond observations on the literary level. In the past interpreters of Revelation have struggled much over the question of the book's proper division¹⁸⁸ and incomparably less attention has been given to the structural connections. Schüssler Fiorenza rightly points out the need for shifting the focus: 'The author does not divide the text into separate sections or parts, but joins units together ... It is therefore more crucial to discern joints of the structure which interlace the different parts than to discover the "dividing marks"'.¹⁸⁹ Giving attention to the structural connections is nowhere more important than in a motif study. The reason lies in the nature of a motif, since the identification of its cardinal components, the investigation of their relationship and the manner of their integration into a cohesive whole is of a critical significance for understanding the theological idea that it conveys.

The textual analysis of Revelation's *θρόνος* texts has already revealed the complexity of the throne motif. This examination, although without paying significant attention to the cohesiveness of the communication, revealed four cardinal clusters of the motif: (1) the throne of

¹⁸⁶ Strand, "Overcomer", 237-54.

¹⁸⁷ Gordon Campbell, 'Antithetical Feminine-Urban Imagery and a Tale of Two Women-Cities in the Book of Revelation', *TynBul* 55 (2004), 81-108(106).

¹⁸⁸ See sec. 1.1.

¹⁸⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 173.

God; (2) the throne of the Lamb; (3) the thrones of God's allies; and (4) the thrones of God's adversaries. I suggested that these four clusters function as closely related sub-motifs which integrate into a 'motif-network'. The relation between the motif-clusters is not that of the equals. God's throne appears as the central sub-motif, while the other thrones draw their significance from their relation to it. The eminence of God's throne within the four motif-clusters is indicated by its repeated presence throughout the book, whereas the other thrones appear only occasionally. The suggestion is supported also by structural considerations. Namely, God's throne appears in the opening statement of the book after the prologue (1:4) and at the same time it is central in the opening temple scene of the visionary part (4:1–5:14) as it is in the closing vision (22:1, 3). Thus, the whole drama of Revelation is framed by the throne motif which stresses the message of God's incontestable kingly rule.

The sub-motif most closely linked to God's throne is the throne of the Lamb. The intimate relation between these two components of the throne motif is evident in the converging of the two thrones throughout the book. It has been demonstrated in this dissertation that there is a clear progression in the development of the motif-cluster of the Lamb's throne. While the Lamb's sitting on the throne is only indirectly implied in the vision of the enthronement of this major figure (5:6-7), the scene of 7:17 clearly locates him 'in the midst of the throne' (*ἀνά μέσσω τοῦ θρόνου*). In neither of these texts is a distinction made between the Lamb's and God's throne in the same way as, for example, the thrones of the twenty-four elders are clearly defined as separate. Actually, the Lamb's throne occupation is never mentioned independently from a reference to God who is consistently pictured as sitting on the heavenly throne.¹⁹⁰ Climactically, in the concluding vision of the book it is clearly stated that God and the Lamb are sharing the single governing seat of the New Earth throughout eternity. Thus, the two sub-motifs are merged into a single expression of sovereignty.

The sub-motif of the thrones of God's allies reflects God's delegation of authority to characters without divine nature. This sub-motif comprises the thrones of three groups: (1) the overcomers (3:21); (2) the twenty-four elders (4:4; 11:16); (3) and the judges (20:4).

¹⁹⁰ In 3:21 Jesus' enthronement is mentioned in direct relationship to God's throne. The wider vision of the enthronement account of the Lamb (chs. 4–5) is dominated by the centrality of God's throne. In the heavenly festival scene of Rev. 7 God's throne occupancy (7:9, 10, 11, 15) is mentioned in the same context as the Lamb's (7:17), while in 22:1, 3 it is clearly stated that they occupy the same throne together.

Williamson argues that these thrones are of different sorts.¹⁹¹ His observation is generally correct, since the overcomers are pictured as σύνθρονοι with Christ, the elders possess personal thrones, while the thrones of the judges are simply described as being occupied by this group. However, the bond that ties these thrones together is stronger than the differences, since their occupants share allegiance to God. While in the case of the overcomers and judges the allegiance is demonstrated in an earthly context, the twenty-four elders confess God's sovereignty in a heavenly setting by prostration in worship before 'the One sitting on the throne'.¹⁹² Similar to the case of the Lamb's throne, the thrones of God's allies appear only in contexts in which God is portrayed as sitting on his throne.¹⁹³ Therefore, their thrones are not rivals to God's throne, but they reflect God's giving nature expressed in the delegation of his ruling authority.

The sub-motif of the thrones of God's adversaries appears with a negative function within the throne motif of Revelation. The cluster is made up of a reference to Satan's throne (2:13) and another two to the beast's throne (13:2; 16:10). While the dragon is designated as the source of the later throne, his throne-possession is not clearly stated and it cannot be incorporated into this sub-motif.¹⁹⁴ The references to the thrones of God's adversaries differ significantly from the other throne texts. No elaboration of these thrones is provided, neither are activities coming from or happening around them specified. The restraint of John's description is evident also in the lack of the characteristic visionary expressions such as 'I saw' or 'I heard' that appear in the scenes in which the other thrones with positive connotations are represented. It has been rightly noted by Williamson that these throne references are 'flat and one-dimensional, drab and lifeless when compared to the throne visions described elsewhere'.¹⁹⁵ The thrones of God's adversaries are combined into an antithetical sub-motif which poses a challenge to God's sovereign rule.

¹⁹¹ Williamson, 'Thrones', 136.

¹⁹² The concept of allegiance is reflected concerning the overcomers in the ὀ νικῶν title (3:21), since 3:20 points to the need to open the door to Jesus as an expression of repentance and a condition of overcoming. The allegiance of the judges is evident in the detailed characterization in the verse that states that they occupy their thrones (20:4). In contrast, the twenty-four elders demonstrate their allegiance by repeated prostration in worship in God's presence. The significance of this quality is stressed by the fact that while the elders' throne occupation is stated only once (4:4), their vacation of the thrones for the purpose of prostration is stated in five texts (4:10; 5:8, 14; 11:16; 19:4).

¹⁹³ Thus, in 3:21 God's throne and Jesus' throne are mentioned within a single verse with the promise of the overcomers' enthronement. Similarly, the elders' thrones appear within the throne-room vision (4:4) dominated by God's throne, while in 11:16 they presuppose God's throne, because of the prostration in worship. Finally, within the context of the millennial judgment both the thrones of the judges (20:4) and the great white throne appear as the expressions of God's justice.

¹⁹⁴ See ch. 7 n. 3.

¹⁹⁵ Williamson, 'Thrones', 168.

However, these thrones are disclosed in Revelation only as quasi-thrones which embody the abuse of power that is countered by divine judgment at the eschaton (16:10).

This analysis revealed a complex network of correlated and antithetical relationships between the four cardinal components of Revelation's throne motif. The composition is a carefully crafted fusion of the sub-motifs into a 'motif-network' in which the centrality of God's throne is highlighted through the correlative and antithetical relations. The cognate concepts of the throne motif also play a significant role in this complex composition, since they are employed at critical structural locations of the book. Their contribution will be evaluated in the investigation of the progress in the development of the throne motif in the book to which I turn now.

3.2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOTIF

There is a widespread agreement that the book of Revelation as an 'astonishingly meticulous literary artistry'¹⁹⁶ tells a complex story, one that gradually advances as 'building to a grand finale'.¹⁹⁷ Tenney notes that in the unfolding of the book's story-line the motif of the throne appears as 'the one fixed and unchanging center of the kaleidoscopic visions'.¹⁹⁸ While Tenney's conclusion regarding the centrality of the throne in the structure and theology of Revelation is correct, the motif is far from being fixed and unchanging within this strongly dynamic book. The basic questions which suggest directions for the investigation of the throne motif's development are the following: How is the throne motif evaluated within the course of the development of Revelation's drama? How does its unfolding progress throughout the narrative of the book? Is there a centre to the motif's development in which the book's message is concentrated?

At the most basic level Revelation can be divided into four main sections: (1) the prologue (1:1-8); (2) the Seven Messages (1:9-22); (3) the visionary part (4:1-22:5); and (4) the epilogue (22:6-21). The throne motif runs through the first three sections, while it is absent from the epilogue. The reason for the absence lies probably, I suggest, in the fact that the climax in the motif's development is reached immediately before the epilogue in the vision of the eternal reign of God and the Lamb in a renewed Eden/city context. After this grandiose picture of sovereignty in which the true nature of divine kingship and the appropriate response on the side of humanity

¹⁹⁶ Bauckham, *Climax*, ix.

¹⁹⁷ Spilsbury, *Throne*, 116.

¹⁹⁸ Merrill C. Tenney, 'The Theism of the Apocalypse' in *The Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel J. Schultz*, eds. Morris Inch and Ronald Youngblood (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 185-92(187).

is driven home as the proper order of the things, any further throne reference seems needless for the theological message of the book.

The throne motif is launched in the introductory salutation in which John greets the seven churches of Asia on behalf of the Father, the Spirit and the Son (1:4).¹⁹⁹ While God is only briefly mentioned in 1:1, the opening verse of the salutation refers to him by the formula ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος. It seems that the title ‘Father’ is intentionally substituted in this text for the sake of theological emphasis. The formula reflects the basic apocalyptic outlook of the book highlighting the idea of the decisive involvement of God in history.²⁰⁰ This is evident in the replacing of the logically expected ‘will be’ as the last part of the tripartite formula with ‘is to come’ (ἐρχόμενος). The intentional change gives the formula an eschatological dimension, but the emphasis on divine sovereignty remains, since ‘coming’ is the achievement of God’s eschatological rule over the world.²⁰¹ The reference to God’s throne in the context of God’s characterization within the salutation functions as a symbolic representation (1:4). While it seems that the reference is employed primarily for the geographical localization of the seven spirits, at the same time it introduces the throne motif and points indirectly to divine sovereignty as the book’s basic theological perspective on God. Thus, the introductory throne reference in the prologue sets the tone for understanding God’s character and his action throughout the book, but at the same time it anticipates the progression of the motif in the course of the book’s drama.

The next stage in the motif’s development concerns the Seven Messages of Rev. 2–3. These chapters set out a theological framework for the motif’s development. I suggest that there is a sharp contrast between the two θρόνος texts of the vision which stand as the representations of the two conflicting realities. Surprisingly, all four clusters of Revelation’s throne motif are represented in chs. 2–3. They seem to stand in a dynamic relation: Satan’s throne (2:13) is contrasted to three closely tied thrones within a single text: the thrones of the overcomers, the Lamb and God (3:21) – although the thrones of the overcomers, the representatives of God’s

¹⁹⁹ Bauckham (*Theology*, 24) rightly cautions: ‘We must not attribute to John the particular conceptuality of the patristic doctrine of the Trinity which became the norm for the later Christian tradition.’ Nevertheless, he persuasively points out the trinitarian character of the salutation (cf. Louis A. Brighton, ‘Christological Trinitarian Theology in the Book of Revelation’, *ConcJ* 34 [2008], 292-97). This view has been challenged on the ground of identifying ‘the seven spirits’ (1:4) with beings other than the Holy Spirit. For an overview of the major interpretive possibilities, see Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 33-35.

²⁰⁰ Wall, *Revelation*, 57; Beale, *Revelation*, 187; Osborne, *Revelation*, 61.

²⁰¹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 29.

allies, are only envisioned by the promise of enthronement.²⁰² The grouping of the thrones towards two centres in the Seven Messages vision indicates a tension between the divine and the diabolic forces. The arrangement reflects a conflict situation set up by the antithetical *θρόνος* references and introduces early in the book the theme of conflict for the possession of the legitimate right to rule the universe. Since an integral thematic continuity exists between the Seven Messages and the visionary part of Revelation, I suggest that the throne motif in chs. 2–3 sets out a theological framework for the book, as it indicates the centrality of the issue of conflict over power and anticipates the development of this theme in the visionary part. Thus, the throne tension is expected to continue throughout the book and unfold towards its climactic dissolution. However, before sketching the details of the conflict, the victorious side is identified in the strategically significant throne reference of 3:21, in which the Father, Christ and his allies are related to the throne within a single text at the climax of the vision.

The beginning of the visionary part of Revelation picks up the throne motif from the duodirectional statement of 3:21 and builds a strong foundation for the book's throne theology. The throne-room vision (chs. 4–5) sets God's throne at the focus of attention and relates every action within the vision to this central point of the heavenly reality. The high concentration of the *θρόνος* references (nineteen in twenty-five verses) speaks strongly of the eminence of the throne motif in the vision. Witherington rightly observes that in a book in which the throne appears as the 'central theological symbol' the opening of the visionary section with such a throne-centred scene cannot be accidental.²⁰³ Theologically, the throne room vision establishes the rightful cosmic rulers, picturing them as taking their place on their thrones.²⁰⁴ God and Christ are elevated as worthy to be at the centre of the web of all that exists, while the twenty-four elders as God's allies also hold heavenly thrones. All other throne references unfolding in Revelation are built upon or elaborate on this perspective of reality. Spilsbury is correct in his conclusion: 'This

²⁰² Williamson ('Thrones', 156) recognizes the tension effect of the early introduction of Satan's throne in 2:13; however, he fails to view the connection between the antithetical thrones of 2:13 and 3:21. From his unclear formulation it is not evident whether he relates Satan's throne rather to 1:4 or treats it only as a single expression without a reference to God's throne in chs. 1–3: 'The reference to Satan's throne comes early in Revelation, preceded only by the brief mention of God's throne at 1:4, and thus hinting at the tension of spiritual conflict which will be developed in the Apocalypse as thrones and those who occupy them are brought into their respective categories.' Yarbrow Collins (*Apocalypse*, 82) relates Satan's throne (2:13) rather to the vision of God's throne in ch. 4. While this connection is not to be denied, it seems also appropriate to seek an antithetical relation within the Seven Messages vision itself.

²⁰³ Witherington, *Revelation*, 113.

²⁰⁴ Thompson, *Revelation*, 99-100.

initial scene is the hub of the whole book. Everything that happens after it is like spokes, radiating outward from this vision.²⁰⁵ Structurally, each subsequent series of judgments is issued from God's heavenly throne-room and they are to be viewed as the historical consequences of divine sovereignty.²⁰⁶ Rowland rightly notes that Revelation 'is like a drama happening on two levels in which the "higher level" "pre"-figures ... what takes place on the "lowel" level'.²⁰⁷

The Cosmic Conflict vision (12:1–14:20) deserves particular attention in our discussion, because of the specific role of the throne motif in it. Although the vision is the central section in the book's chiasm,²⁰⁸ only three θρόνος references appear within it (12:5; 13:2; 14:3). In spite of the small-scale representation, I suggest that the throne motif is fundamental to the vision and at the same time chs. 12–14 are of major significance for the development of the motif. Similar to the θρόνος texts of chs. 2–3, two references within the Cosmic Conflict vision are sharply antithetical. God's heavenly throne (14:3) is contrasted to the rival throne of his greatest earthly adversary, the beast (13:2). Besides the existence of a rival throne, the beast's challenge to divine authority is also expressed in his arrogant claim to sovereignty. The extent of the influence of this power is implied in the universal response in worship on the part of those who live on the earth (13:4, 8). It has been demonstrated that the beast appears as a counterfeit of the Lamb,²⁰⁹ because he is characterized in his identification–description pattern by possessing a throne, similar not only to the Lamb (5:6-7; 7:17), but also to God (4:2) and his allies (3:21; 4:4). A further point of comparison sets out additionally the role of the throne motif visualizing the opposition between the Lamb and his counterfeit. The Lamb's first appearance in the book is in a heavenly throne-room setting on the occasion of his enthronement (ch. 5). The closing episode in which the Lamb features relates him also to the throne, but this time he is portrayed in the setting of the new creation as sharing a single throne with the Father (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀρνίου; 22:1, 3). Similar to the Lamb, the career of the beast is also framed by the throne motif.

²⁰⁵ Spilsbury, *Throne*, 45; cf. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 108.

²⁰⁶ In the Seven Seals vision the four living creatures summon the four riders (6:1, 3, 5, 7). The Seven Trumpets are blown by the seven angels, who stand in the presence of God in heaven (8:2, 6). The most elaborate picture is found in the introductory scene of the Seven Bowls, where the plagues are depicted as issuing from the heavenly temple. For further details, see Didier Rochat, 'La Vision du Trône: Une clé pour pénétrer l'Apocalypse', *Hokhma* 49 (1992), 1-21.

²⁰⁷ Rowland, *Revelation*, 20. In contrast, Spilsbury suggests (*Throne*, 46-47) that Revelation is to be viewed as a work with three different levels. This suggestion is, however, vulnerable to criticism. The basis of the misinterpretation lies in the failure to recognize that each vision is introduced by a temple scene.

²⁰⁸ See sec. 1.1.

²⁰⁹ See ch. 7 sec. 2.3.1.

Namely, the two *θρόνος τοῦ θηρίου* references are to be understood in terms of his enthronement (13:2) and dethronement (16:10). Thus, both the Lamb's reign and the beast's career start with enthronement, but while the eschaton and the new creation bring affirmation of the Lamb's kingly rule, the beast's quasi-sovereignty is terminated. The employment of the term *κάθηναι* in Revelation implies the same tension. While God is repeatedly characterized as sitting on the throne, the term is also applied repeatedly to the great prostitute as an indication of her enthronement.²¹⁰ These antithetical parallels point to the role of the throne in the cosmic drama as the principal reason for the conflict between the two sovereignties.

The significance of the throne motif for the Cosmic Conflict vision is enhanced even more when considered in the light of the structure of 12:1–14:20. I suggest that these three chapters in the heart of the book are chiastically arranged on the basis of the principal theme of the vision, the cosmic conflict. Thus, we have an additional chiasm at the focal point of Revelation's macro-chiasm:

- A – The history of the cosmic conflict (12:1-17)
- B – The dragon's eschatological strategy (13:1-18)
- C – Victorious celebration of the conquerors (14:1-5)
- B' – God's eschatological warning (14:6-17)
- A' – The end of the cosmic conflict (14:14-20)

While numerous scholars view 14:1-5 as the central point of Revelation's structure, the significance of the throne motif is not recognized in their interpretations.²¹¹ It has been argued extensively in this dissertation that the Zion scene functions as a cognate expression of the throne motif.²¹² Thus, the throne motif appears at the centre of the centre of Revelation as the major theological expression of the book. This interpretation makes much sense against the wider theological context of the vision, since the Zion scene presents an answer to the question of the victorious side in the cosmic conflict. As Shea notes, 'If one were only left with the three angels' messages standing in contrast to the messages about the sea beast and the land beast, then one might ask the final question, who won? This central piece answers that question – the Lamb

²¹⁰ See sec. 2.3.2.2.

²¹¹ Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 119; Giblin, *Revelation*, 15; William H. Shea, 'The Controversy Over the Commandments in the Central Chiasm of Revelation', *JATS* 11 (2000), 216-31(230).

²¹² See sec. 2.2.

wins, and His followers with him.’²¹³ The vision of 14:1-5 points to the powers that are the real rulers of the world in contrast to the quasi-sovereignities. The Zion symbolism with its rich background is an appropriate means of reinforcing their reign and portraying it as the realization of the eschatological kingdom’s establishment. While the actual throne is absent from the scene in 14:1 and appears only in 14:3, the Zion symbolism is still an appropriate indicator for interpreting the book’s central vision as a throne scene. The reason for the employment of a cognate concept at the climactic point in the book’s structure lies, I suggest, in the theological purpose of the author. The employment of the Zion symbolism at the focal point of Revelation’s centre suggests John’s intention to reinforce the centrality of the throne motif not only for the vision, but also for the entire book. This line of reasoning is in harmony with Alter’s observation concerning the development of biblical narratives: he calls our attention to the fact that ‘when repetitions with significant variations occur in biblical narrative, the changes introduced can point to an intensification’ and ‘climactic development’.²¹⁴ As is the case with the throne motif in 14:1-5, ‘when some sort of reversal of an initial impression is intended, the modification of perception is achieved through the substitution, suppression, or addition of a single phrase, or through a strategic change in the order of repeated items’.²¹⁵

The rationale for the employment of the ark of the covenant imagery in 11:19 is similarly to be sought in stressing the significance of the throne motif. The employment of this cognate concept appears again at a strategic structural location, since 11:19 is the introductory temple scene preceding the Cosmic Conflict vision. The evidence presented suggests that the throne motif is strongly anchored at the centre of Revelation. It sets out a tension by references to the two antithetical thrones involved in the cosmic conflict (13:2; 14:3), while at the same time it provides a theological perspective on the conflict through the employment of two cognate concepts at strategic locations – in the introductory temple vision (11:19) and at the centre of the vision’s chiasm (14:1-5). Thus, it can be concluded that the throne motif functions as a theological focus of the Cosmic Conflict vision which points not only to the major theme of this vision, but more widely to the central theological perspective of the entire book.

²¹³ Shea, ‘Controversy Over the Commandments’, 230.

²¹⁴ Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 97.

²¹⁵ Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 98.

Although the question of the legitimate rulers is solved and their victory emphatically set out in 14:1-5, the realization of God's rule advances progressively in the book of Revelation.²¹⁶ The ultimate expansion of God's kingdom becomes reality only in the context of the new creation, following the eradication of evil and its source (20:10, 14-15). As logically expected, the development of the throne motif reaches its climax in the new creation. In the concluding section of the New Jerusalem vision only a single throne is presented which appears as the centre of the new creation (22:1, 3). Portrayed within the eschatological Garden of Eden, it symbolizes the theocratical political structure of the new creation. At the same time it also underscores the nature of God's rule with the metaphor of the throne as the fountain of the water of life. Clearly, the throne motif serves here the purpose of defining the quality of eternity.

The book's concluding throne scene is at the same time the climactic Christological statement of the entire book.²¹⁷ While generally a distinction is made between the Father's and the Christ's throne in Revelation, it disappears in the repeated statement of 22:1, 3 in which these two figures are depicted as occupying jointly a single throne (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀρνίου).²¹⁸ The promise of the saints' enthronement (3:21) and kingly rule (1:6; 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5) also reaches its fulfilment in the final vision. Whereas the saints are not pictured as occupying heavenly thrones, the fulfilment is indicated in the concluding statement of the vision which claims that 'they will reign forever and ever' (22:5). Thus, the visionary part of Revelation closes with the restoration of the original mandate given to the first man (Gen. 1:26, 28): rule over the earth as an expression of God's delegated sovereignty.

The relocation of the throne of God and the Lamb from heaven to the new earth in the final vision of Revelation is also a major aspect in the development of the throne motif. Throughout the book God's throne with the Lamb's throne and the thrones of their allies are located exclusively in the heavenly context. In contrast, the thrones of God's adversaries are limited to the earth. Similarly, the militant church is in Revelation generally portrayed in a heavenly context, whereas the earth appears as the territory of Satan and his allies. Such tension between the heavenly and the earthly realms is characteristic of the apocalyptic thought in which 'heaven and earth are not operationally distinct or separate', but there is correspondence between

²¹⁶ Rev. 4:11; 5:12-13; 7:10; 11:15; 12:10; 19:6.

²¹⁷ See ch. 5 sec. 3.3.1.

²¹⁸ The idea of the sharing of the Father's throne by Jesus as an expression of appreciation for his victory is present in 3:21; however, the same text mentions the throne of Jesus which will be shared with the victorious Christians as a reward for their overcoming.

them as ‘events in the heavens affect the events that transpire on earth, and vice-versa’.²¹⁹ While Revelation embraces the apocalyptic perspective on the spatial dualism, in the final vision this tension is resolved. In the new creation the gap is bridged and an appropriate context for relocating the heavenly throne unto the earth is provided. This decision to move the centre of the universe acknowledges the earth as a territory which, after an episode of rebellion, is again turned towards the divine throne as the legitimate centre of reality.

There is a final point to be considered before the conclusion of this chapter. I have pointed out the consistency in the flowing of each of the seven visions of Revelation from introductory temple scenes,²²⁰ but I suggest that this consistency is even broader. Namely, the endings of the visions are linked by the throne motif, since they are concluded either by a throne scene or a statement announcing God’s reign: (1) the Seven Messages vision climaxes in the promise which depicts God, Christ and the overcomers on throne (3:21); (2) the high point of the Seven Seals is the celebration scene in front of God’s throne which precedes the seventh seal as an interlude (7:9-17); (3) the Seven Trumpets vision ends in a heavenly worship scene in front of God’s throne preceded by the announcement of God’s kingdom (11:15-16); (4) the Cosmic Conflict vision concludes with a *parousia* scene dominated by the Son of Man on his cloud throne (14:14-20); (5) the Wrath of God vision concludes in the dramatic description of Babylon’s dethronement, whose boast in sitting as queen is shamefully reversed (18:1-24); (6) the Final Judgment vision concludes with a judgment scene dominated by the great white throne (20:11-15); and (7) the New Jerusalem vision climaxes in the throne scene portraying the order of the new creation (22:1-5).²²¹ It cannot be accidental that the book is composed in this way. It reflects the authorial intention of utilizing the throne motif as the central principle for conveying the theological message. The throne motif appears as the focus of the author from the outset to the climax of the drama. As demonstrated, the Seven Messages climax in a throne promise (3:21), the visionary part is started (chs. 4–5) and concluded (22:1-5) with visions emphasizing

²¹⁹ John G. Gammie, ‘Spatial and Ethical Dualism in Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic Literature’, *JBL* 93 (1974), 356-85(360).

²²⁰ See section 1.1.

²²¹ Bauckham (*Theology*, 35) similarly recognizes that there is a connecting link at the end of the individual visions: ‘Every stage of God’s victory – through chapters 7–19 – is accompanied by worship in heaven’. While he does not point out the centrality of the throne in these worship scenes and leaves out some of the book’s visions, the recognition of this literary feature is in accord with our observation.

the centrality of the throne²²² and the focal section specifically utilizes the motif with an emphatic reference in the middle of its chiasm (14:1-5). The perspective opened by this investigation by no means discounts the theological value of the other major motifs of the book of Revelation. However, it has been demonstrated here that the throne motif functions as a central principle, the master motif, which frames theologically the entire book. For this reason, any study of the other motifs of the book of Revelation cannot ignore the observance of the throne motif.

4. CONCLUSION

This chapter looked beyond the surface of Revelation's *θρόνος* references and attempted a substantial analysis of the book's throne motif. It has been demonstrated that the throne appears as the central motif of the book, which is integral to the entire work and dynamically develops towards its climax in the final vision. Evidence has been provided for proving that the book is permeated with *θρόνος* references. The statistical data revealed that no vision viewed with its introductory temple scene is without the presence of the throne motif. I also argued that the throne references are closely linked with different concepts which are either directly related to them or occur in their immediate context. The most significant concepts which appear more than once related to the throne texts are the following: sovereignty of God, judgment, worship, covenant, rulership and priesthood, conflict with Satan and his agents, redemption, victory and new creation.

I have suggested that a motif study based exclusively on the examination of the *θρόνος* references is incomplete. In line with this observation, three cognate concepts of the throne motif have been identified and discussed: the ark of the covenant (11:19), Zion (14:1-5) and the

²²² The framing function of the throne motif is also recognized in Bauer, *Das tausendjährige Messiasreich*, 270. Hannah ('The Throne of His Glory', 68-69) similarly shares this view, but he holds that Christ's enthronement is the framing principle: 'The two clearest assertions that the Risen Christ is enthroned on God's own throne appear at the very end of the epistolary section of John's apocalypse (3,21) and then again near the end of the vision about the New Jerusalem, just before the beginning of the work's epilogue ... John's placing of these two statements serves to highlight this theme, for John's heavenly vision proper begins at 4,2, hard on the heels of the dominical saying in 3,21, and it ends in 22,5 with the description of the heavenly Jerusalem which has now descended to earth and contains the dual throne. Thus John has framed his vision, or at least the larger portion of it, with these two declarations of Christ's enthronement alongside his Father on the same throne.' Unfortunately, Hannah fails to recognize Christ's enthronement in ch. 5, therefore his argument is incomplete. It is more appropriate to hold the throne motif more widely as a framing principle which includes also the Lamb's throne that really frames at least partially the visionary part of the book.

κᾶθημαι references. Evidence has been provided that these concepts are employed at strategic locations with the purpose of reinforcing the throne motif as the central theological expression of the book. This conclusion became particularly evident from the analysis of the motif's macrodynamic of development which revealed a masterful crafting of the book.

I have argued that Revelation's throne motif is a complex 'motif-network', a composition with four cardinal components: (1) the throne of God; (2) the throne of the Lamb; (3) the thrones of God's allies; and (4) the thrones of God's adversaries. These clusters function as closely related sub-motifs integrated into the larger picture of the throne motif. God's throne is central within this network, while the other thrones draw their significance from their relation to it, as is highlighted through correlative and antithetical relations.

While the whole discussion of the macrodynamic of the throne motif's development provides one of the most significant contributions of this dissertation to the scholarly discussion of Revelation, three suggestions in this investigation will be mentioned here as particular contributions. First, the only two throne references of the Seven Messages function as representatives of the two conflicting realities: Satan's throne (2:13) stands as opposed to God, the Lamb and their allies, who are all pictured as σύνθρονοι with each other (3:21). The grouping of the thrones towards two centres in the Seven Messages vision points to a tension between the divine and the diabolic forces. Thus, in chs. 2–3 a theological framework is set up for the book, as the centrality of the issue of conflict over power is indicated and the development of this theme throughout the book towards the dissolution of the throne-conflict in the new creation anticipated. Second, I have suggested that the Cosmic Conflict vision as Revelation's central section is chiastically arranged with the focal point in 14:1-5. According to this observation, the Zion scene of celebration appears as the centre of Revelation's centre. The vision provides an answer to the question of the legitimate rulers by utilizing a symbolism that functions as a cognate concept of the throne motif. Thus, the throne motif appears as the theological focus of the Cosmic Conflict vision, which points not only to the major theme of this vision, but more widely to the central theological perspective of the entire book. Finally, I have suggested that besides the already acknowledged consistency concerning the flowing of each seven main visions of Revelation from the introductory temple scenes also a consistency can be established concerning their endings. It has been demonstrated that the main visions are linked by the throne motif, since they conclude either with a throne scene or a statement announcing God's reign.

Part IV

FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

THE RHETORICAL IMPACT OF THE THRONE MOTIF

Since the structure of the throne motif has been established so far in this dissertation, the question which rises naturally in the flow of our study is that of the function of the motif. The last step of the motif study methodology proposed in the introduction, the functional analysis, seeks to discover with what purpose the motif is employed in the book. As the throne is central to the structure and theology of Revelation, addressing its function helps us to understand what is going on in the book on a macro-level. The functional analysis will focus on two basic questions regarding the throne motif. In this chapter its rhetorical impact will be evaluated, while in the next the focus will be on its theological function.

The rhetorical strategy of Revelation has received a major attention in the last two decades. It has been persuasively argued using the tools of classical rhetorical criticism that the book is a highly rhetorical work.¹ Although the throne is the central motif of the book, it has not received significant attention in these discussions. This chapter will try to fill this gap. Since the situation addressed by the author is basic to any rhetorical activity as its ‘very ground’,² I will consider first the rhetorical situation of Revelation, which will provide an adequate basis for evaluation of the rhetorical impact of the throne motif. Though the *Sitz im Leben* of Revelation is a major question with its extensive scholarly literature, its brief discussion is inevitable for understanding the reason for the concern and reaction of the author of Revelation.

1. THE RHETORICAL SITUATION OF REVELATION

A century ago, biblical exegetes started to give considerable attention to the ancient political and cultural context of the book of Revelation.³ Although it has been pointed out by Deissmann that ‘the New Testament is the book of the Imperial age’ and for this reason ‘there arises a polemical

¹ For a review of the discussion and the representative scholarly works, see David A. deSilva, ‘What has Athens to Do with Pathmos? Rhetorical Criticism of the Revelation of John (1980–2005)’, *CBR* 6 (2008), 256-89.

² Lloyd F. Bitzer, ‘The Rhetorical Situation’, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968), 1-14(5).

³ E.g. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*; Boussett, *Offenbarung*; Ramsey, *Letters*.

parallelism between the cult of the emperor and the cult of Christ',⁴ only relatively recently has the subject received the interest it deserves.⁵ It has been recognized that the images of the book are to be related more closely to contemporary historical events and also to the eschatological images current at the time.⁶ As a result, the commentators have almost unanimously acknowledged the fundamentality of the imperial cults for the interpretation of Revelation becoming aware of the extent of their influence on the day-to-day experiences of the inhabitants of the first-century C.E. Roman province of Asia.⁷ My conviction is that this political-religious phenomenon is the most influential factor in the *Sitz im Leben* of Revelation which is fundamentally related to the throne motif's rhetorical function. For this reason the aspects of the imperial cults that are relevant for our motif study will be discussed here.

1.1. THE EXTENT OF THE IMPERIAL CULTS' INFLUENCE IN ASIA MINOR

Friesen has pointed out recently that Revelation had not one, but several social settings defined by the distinct problems of the churches.⁸ While Friesen's observation is correct, the question of the imperial cults was a common issue.⁹ The main aim of the cults was generally seen in

⁴ Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 344, 346.

⁵ Friesen (*Imperial Cults*, 214) notes that although hundreds of pieces of archaeological evidence (inscriptions, coins, sculptures, altars and buildings) related to imperial cults have been excavated and published in Asia Minor, 'only a handful of these have been noted in the scholarly discussions of the Apocalypse of John'. He draws attention to the fact that one (probably the main) reason for this neglect is seen in the methodological difficulty of integrating archaeological data into New Testament studies. It has also been noted that the lack of interest in the topic could be due to the fact that the relationship between Christianity and Judaism was more in the focus of the New Testament studies in the latter half of the 20th century partly because of the 'social context of twentieth-century scholarship itself, in which the Holocaust and the subsequent efforts to reappraise Jewish-Christian relations rightly made the topic most pressing and important' (David G. Horrell, 'Introduction', *JSNT* 27 [2005], 251-52).

⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John', *JBL* 96 (1977), 241-56(241).

⁷ From historical point of view the following could be considered as exemplary monographs on the topic: Fritz Taeger, *Charisma: Studien zur Geschichte des antiken Herrscherkultes* (2 vols.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960); Ronald Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ. The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Hypomnemata, 42; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975); Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Manfred Clauss, *Kaiser und Gott: Herrscherkult im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1999). For a historical overview of the development of imperial cults in Asia Minor, see Thomas Witulski, *Kaiserkult in Kleinasien: die Entwicklung der kultisch-religiösen Kaiserverehrung in der römischen Provinz Asia von Augustus bis Antonius Pius* (NTOA, 63; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2007). See also the following comprehensive review of the recent scholarly discussion: Michael Naylor, 'The Roman Imperial Cult and Revelation', *CBR* 8 (2010), 207-39.

⁸ Friesen, 'Satan's Throne', 352-56. Cf. Sherman E. Johnson, 'Asia Minor and Early Christianity' in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. Jacob Neusner (4 vols.; SJLA 12; Leiden: Brill, 1975), II, 77-145.

⁹ Elias Bickerman ('Consecration' in *Le culte des souverains dans l'empire Romain*, ed. Willem den Boer [Entretiens sur L'Antiquité Classique, 19; Geneve: Vandoeuvres, 1973], 1-25) rightly warns that there was no universal imperial cult in the Roman Empire (cf. P.J.J. Botha, 'God, Emperor Worship, and Society: Contemporary Experiences and the Book of Revelation', *Neot* 22 [1988], 87-102[87-90]). Similarly, Ronald Mellor ('The Local

displaying piety (εὐσέβεια) towards the emperor. However, Price convincingly demonstrates in his influential monograph that the rationale for establishing the imperial cults needs to be rather interpreted in terms of attempting to come to terms with a new type of power.¹⁰

The conviction that Rome is eternal was not rare among the inhabitants of the ancient Mediterranean world. An inscription from an elegant house from ancient Ephesus revealed the following idea: ‘Rome, queen of all, your power will never end.’¹¹ Even Josephus concluded that Rome was invincible: ‘God who went the round of the nations, bringing to each in turn the rod of Empire, now rested over Italy.’¹² The imperial cults were the most important part of the network between Rome and Asia that defined significantly, if not decisively, the power-relations between the inhabitants of Asia-Minor and the emperor.¹³

The influence of the imperial cults was all-permeating. Nothing was left untouched, because they were deeply connected with public religion, entertainment, commerce, governance, architecture, household worship and other aspects of everyday public and private life.¹⁴ As a result of such a deep impact a new cosmology was created that ordered symbolically human society around the Roman Empire.¹⁵ The reconstruction of the picture of reality around Rome involved the redefinition of the two basic categories of human existence: space and time. Thus, we cannot speak of a ‘marginal socioreligious phenomenon’, but rather a serious challenge with the capacity to bring together ‘municipal identities, regional cohesion and competition, and imperial authority’.¹⁶

Character of Roman Imperial Religion’, *Athenaeum* 80 [1992], 385-400[387]) points out the importance of the investigation of the different imperial cults in their local contexts – an approach that has been neglected. He bases his argument on the fact that ‘the core of ancient religion is not a coherent belief ... but ritual ... [and] to ignore specific local ritual is to eviscerate ancient religious experience’.

¹⁰ Price, *Rituals and Power*, 29-32.

¹¹ *I. Eph.* 599

¹² Josephus, *JW* 5.9.3.

¹³ Leonard L. Thompson (*Apocalypse and Empire*, 158-59) argues that the relations between Rome and Asia were expressed through different channels of power that involved religious expressions and social structures such as rituals of sacrifices, political negotiations, taxes or civic claims. All these relations integrated into a network, in which religious aspects expressed also political obligations.

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of the influence of imperial cults on everyday life in the first century Asia Minor, see Price, *Rituals and Power*; Friesen, *Imperial Cults*.

¹⁵ Friesen (*Imperial Cults*, 122) convincingly argues that the ‘imperial cults did not compose an independent, mythic worldview; they were a distinguishable part of their broad, polytheistic cultural context. As such, they did not need to shoulder the whole burden for the religious life of the communities ... (but they) constituted an identifiable feature of the larger symbolic world of Greco-Roman polytheism’. However, the imperial cults should be primarily viewed as religious-political phenomena that aimed to redefine the cosmology.

¹⁶ Steven Friesen, ‘The Cult of the Roman Emperors in Ephesus: Temple Wardens, City Titles, and the Interpretation of the Revelation of John’ in *Ephesus Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to its Archaeology*,

1.1.1. REDEFINITION OF SPACE

Anthropologists recognized long ago that the ordering of space reflects certain social ideas and understanding of the fabric of reality.¹⁷ For this reason political and social changes are likely to influence the reordering of space. This principle is confirmed by Price in the attestation of eighty imperial temples and sanctuaries in over sixty cities in Asia Minor.¹⁸ The imperial temples (called *Sebasteoi*) and sanctuaries that were generally located at the most prominent locations within the city formed only a part of the remapping influence of the imperial cults. The widespread imperial altars, the special imperial space in the porticoes on the main squares of the cities and the rooms for the imperial cults in gymnasia reveal the desire to give the greatest possible honour to Rome. The emperor was even incorporated into the sanctuaries and temples of the traditional gods, although his prominent status did not rival or displace those of the chief deities of the sanctuaries.¹⁹

Price, focusing particularly on Ephesus, describes illustratively the impact of the imperial cults on the transformation of the civic space:

Ephesus was adorned with four imperial temples, a monumental Antonine altar, an imperial portico and four gymnasia associated with the emperor. In addition to these buildings ... there were also a large number of imperial statues, some of which were found in public buildings, such as the theatre and the council house, while others stood in the streets. A monumental nymphaeum, or fountain, contained as its center-piece an over life-sized statue of Trajan, and three other similar buildings also featured imperial statues. A building on the lower square was dedicated to the emperor and three monumental gates, in honour of Augustus, Trajan and the Severi, displayed statues of them and their families. ... The emperor, whose name or image met the eye at every turn, received a striking position in this process of transformation.²⁰

Religion, and Culture, ed. Helmut Koester (HTS, 41; Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995), 229-50(249).

¹⁷ See generally Hilda Kuper, 'The Language of Sites in the Politics of Space', *American Anthropologist* 74 (1972), 411-25.

¹⁸ See Price's (*Rituals and Power*, xxiii) map on which the distribution of the imperial temples in Asia Minor is pictured. He notes (*Rituals and Power*, 162-66) that it is impossible to give the precise figure even for the surviving ruins, because of the problem of identification. However, the above-mentioned figure is astonishing when it is viewed within the context of contemporary religious architecture. The Hellenistic kings received within a two hundred year period from Alexander the Great to the end of the Attalid dynasty only some eleven or twelve temples or sanctuaries. Republican Roma received three or four and Roman magistrates none at all. Part of the reason for this discontinuity in scale could be seen in the fact that ruler cult was much more widespread in the Roman period than earlier. Also the difference in nature between the Hellenistic and the Roman ruler cults is a significant aspect that should be taken into consideration.

¹⁹ Price, *Rituals and Power*, 146-56.

²⁰ Price, *Rituals and Power*, 135-36.

Such ‘spectacular omnipresence’²¹ of the imperial cults and the Roman emperor²² especially in the civic centres of Asia Minor communicated a clear power-relationship.²³ It influenced most aspects of life in the urban setting of Asia Minor having a greater range of effective meanings than any other symbolic system. The many variations of the central idea became unforgettable: imperial geography propagated a reality evolving around the city of Rome.²⁴

1.1.2 REDEFINITION OF THE MEANING OF TIME

Besides the geographical structure of the urban settings the rise of the imperial cults in Asia Minor also reshaped the experience of time. This was achieved through a reform of the everyday and ritual calendar of the province of Asia around 9 B.C.E. This decision is appropriately considered an essential element in creating a mythic worldview, since the reason for the reform did not lie in efficiency, but in honouring Augustus.²⁵ Since this emperor is known for establishing a new order which brought an era of peace and prosperity for Asia Minor, it is not surprising that the imperial cults in the province received a decisive impetus during his reign.²⁶ The provincial council announced a competition with the award of a crown to the person who suggested the highest honour for Augustus. The winning proposal came from Paullus Fabius Maximus, the proconsul of the province, who suggested a reorganization of the calendar around the emperor’s birthday as a means of expressing the greatest honour by Asia.²⁷ As a result September 23rd became the New Year’s Day. The decision reminded the inhabitants of Asia that from a Roman perspective the world was in chaos, on the way to its destruction, until it was

²¹ Jean-Pierre Ruiz, ‘Taking a Stand on the Sand of the Seashore: A Postcolonial Exploration of Revelation 13’ in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, ed. David Barr (SBLRBS, 44; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 119-35(126).

²² John did not discriminate between the Roman emperor and the Empire, since the emperor worship had a clear imperial connotation legitimizing the rule of Rome (Greg Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse: Reading Authority in the Revelation to John* [Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics, 15; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1999], 14).

²³ David A. deSilva (‘The Revelation to John: A Case Study in Apocalyptic Propaganda and the Maintenance of Sectarian Identity’, *Sociological Analysis* 53 [1992], 375-95[379]) distinguishes between a power-relationship and the relationship defined by force. Whereas in the latter the subjects reject authority and must be coerced, the former kind of domination is more effective, because it is based on voluntary respect. On one hand such a relationship gave hope for favourable treatment from Rome, but on the other it was an efficient means of political control, because ‘an active imperial cult replaced the need for the use of the Roman army to keep Roman authority in place’.

²⁴ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 125.

²⁵ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 125. For antecedent calendar reforms in the Roman Empire, see Witulski, *Kaiserkult*, 25-32.

²⁶ Price (*Rituals and Power*, 58) notes that there were at least thirty-four cults established for honouring Augustus in the urban settings of Asia Minor.

²⁷ For the text of the surviving parts of the proconsul’s edict, see Price, *Rituals and Power*, 55.

transformed and restored by Augustus, who gave it a new life. On this basis the emperor's birthday was proclaimed as the most convenient symbol for the annual 'fresh start' representing the transformation of life.²⁸

The growth of imperial cults in Asia Minor also dramatically affected the ritual calendar. Regular festivals were held in honour of the emperor which are considered key events regarding the cults. The most prominent festivals were associated with athletics competitions, music and gladiator battles. Also the old festivals were transformed by adding a dimension of sacrifices and prayers offered to the emperors. According to Price the cults involved not only the elite, but the whole city, therefore their significance extended to numerous areas of civic life.²⁹

The universal response to the imperial cults was clearly stated by Nicolaus of Damascus, a first century writer: 'The whole of humanity turns to the *Sebastos* (Augustus) filled with reverence. Cities and provincial councils honour him with temples and sacrifices, for this is his due. In this way they give thanks to him everywhere for his benevolence.'³⁰ Nicolaus points to gratitude as the basic motive of imperial reverence. However, the logic of participation is much more complex. Therefore, a more detailed discussion of this question follows.

1.2. THE LOGIC OF PARTICIPATION

The popularity of the imperial cults in Asia Minor was unparalleled in the Roman Empire, including the Latin provinces.³¹ The region became not only the 'epicentre'³² of the cult, but it developed emperor worship to the point where it became the most popular religious expression of the province. The reason for the cult's flourishing should be sought in the logic of participation on the part of the provincials. It has been suggested that imperial cults were a means of a mere flattery, exploitation of religion for narrow political ends. However, this view is too

²⁸ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 33-34.

²⁹ Price, *Rituals and Power*, 101-14. In contrast, Martin P. Nilsson argued (*Geschichte der griechischen Religion* [2 vols.; HA, 5; München: Beck, 1950], II, 146-75) that only the upper class had an interest in displaying loyalty to the ruler, while the lower class had little interest in being involved. This position reflects a too limited understanding of the nature of the cults.

³⁰ Quoted in Zanker, *Power of Images*, 297.

³¹ For the reasons for the less popular reception of the imperial cults in the Latin provinces, see Duncan Fishwick, *Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult in the Latin West – Vol. 3: Provincial Cult; Part 1: Institution and Evolution* (RGRW, 145; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 3-4.

³² Giancarlo Biguzzi, 'Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple to the Flavian Emperors, and Idolatry in Revelation', *NovT* 40 (1998), 276-90(281).

narrow, because it reveals unawareness of the imperial cults' tremendous potential for conveying a wide spectrum of attitudes: admiration, gratitude, wariness, even terror and flattery.³³

Price has convincingly argued that the logic of establishing the cults on the part of the Hellenistic cities was actually their attempt to 'come to terms with a new type of power'.³⁴ The rich background of the Hellenistic ruler cults and the possibility of their flexible adaptation made it ideologically possible for Greek cities to represent to themselves Rome as a new master in a traditional guise.³⁵ The giving of cultic dimensions to the new power-relationship was not imposed by Rome, but was voluntarily initiated by the province. In order to understand the motives of participants in the imperial cults, it is necessary to examine the phenomenon against the socio-economic changes that Roman rule brought from Augustus to Asia Minor.

The greatest achievement of the reign of Augustus was the establishment of the *Pax Romana*, which brought physical and economic security to Asia Minor in spite of its exploitive principles.³⁶ Instead of wars, piracy and robbery on the highways the previously lost prosperity of the province was restored, and therefore the triumph of Rome was welcomed with enthusiasm by the Graeco-Asiatic cities.³⁷ Thanks to the new order, Asia, the province with the greatest economic potential according to Cicero, began to develop rapidly especially in urban settings.³⁸ The network with the Empire brought benefits both to the leading and to the lower classes. For this reason Rome became popular on all levels.³⁹ In such a positive atmosphere towards the rule

³³ Ronald Mellor, 'The Goddess Roma' in *ANRW*, 2.17.2, 950-1030(958).

³⁴ Price, *Rituals and Power*, 29.

³⁵ Vladár, *Róma 13,1-7*, 81-82. For the development of the Hellenistic ruler cults in Asia Minor, see Price, *Rituals and Power*, 23-52.

³⁶ Stefen Weinstock ('Pac and the "Ara Pacis"', *JRS* 50 [1960], 44-58) argues that *Pax Romana* as a political phenomenon included different aspects: (1) the concept of ending or lack of conflict; (2) the insider-outsider concept: peace applied differently to Romans and non-Romans; (3) the submissive element; (4) the idea of imperium; (5) paying taxes for *pax sempiterna* and *otium*; and (6) the personification and worship of the 'Pax'. For a comprehensive study of the benefits and the problems of the new order, see Paul Petit, *La Paix Romaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971). For Augustus as a 'second Romulus', see Ottó Pecsuk, *Pál és a rómaiak: a Római levél kortörténeti olvasata* (Budapest: Kálvin Kiadó, 2009), 43-46.

³⁷ Dion Chrysostomus 3.13.9; Strabo *Geog.* 3.2.5.

³⁸ Cicero declared (*Leg. Man.* 14) that 'in the richness of its soil, in the variety of its products, in the extent of its pastures and in the number of its exports it [Asia Minor] surpasses all other lands'.

³⁹ A Roman social historian Michael Rostovtzeff (*The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1957], 117) in his social and economic analysis of Asian society tends to assume a class conflict between the upper and lower class and also an anti-Roman climate of political conflict between Asian provincials (both classes) and Rome. Thompson (*Apocalypse and Empire*, 155) argues that Rostovtzeff's analysis is based on only a few literary sources such as Dion Chrysostomus and Plutarch, therefore he finds the evidence unconvincing. He rather aligns himself with Ramsay MacMullen (*Enemies of the Roman Order* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966], 189) who notes: 'Only one doubtful instance is known of poverty and anti-Romanism conjoined, to be set against a mountain of indirect proof of the popularity of the empire among the lower class.' James H. Oliver (*The*

of Rome, emperor worship emerged spontaneously without being imposed.⁴⁰ Although Roetzel argued that the inner motives of emperor worship cannot be known and for this reason he suggests remaining silent about them,⁴¹ the presented evidence suggests that the emperor was venerated in Asia Minor out of gratitude, while the aspect of personal interest was also not excluded, at least on the part of some.

The cities of Asia Minor realized that their well-being depended on seeking out Rome's favour. Therefore, there was a keen competition between the major cities for the title 'first of the province' (or 'the district') and as Longenecker notes, 'being "first" usually involved being thoroughly committed to the ways of Rome'.⁴² Since imperial worship was a basic ingredient of Romanization, it is not surprising that rivalry between the cities for the favour of Rome is most clearly expressed in the trend of establishing imperial temples. The emergence of the title *neokoros* ('temple warden') during the reign of Domitian (81–96 C.E.) was accompanied by great jealousy.⁴³ The identity of the cities started to be closely tied with the imperial worship as 'the primary means by which the larger cities asserted their status in relation to one another'.⁴⁴ In this way the *Pax Romana* became personified and worshiped as probably the most important cult in the province of Asia, creating unity and divisions at the same time.

Ruling Power [Philadelphia, Pa.: American Philosophical Society, 1953], 953-58), as a proponent of the same view, points out that the imperial control of the provincial politics brought protection especially for the less prosperous and those not involved in politics, since it defended them from aristocratic oppression and irresponsibility.

⁴⁰ See e.g. J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2010), 54f.

⁴¹ Calvin J. Roetzel, *The World that Shaped the New Testament* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / John Knox, 2003), 72.

⁴² Bruce W. Longenecker, 'Rome, Provincial Cities and the Seven Churches of Revelation 2–3' in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B.W. Winter on His 65th Birthday*, eds. Peter J. Williams et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 281-91(287).

⁴³ The first imperial temple was established in Pergamon and it was dedicated to Augustus and Rome in 29 C.E. Until the first half of the second century C.E. Pergamon was the leading city of the province (see ch. 7 sec. 1.2). However, in Ephesus a Domitian honouring imperial temple was established in 89 C.E. and the city publicized itself as a *neokoros*. Pergamon responded by claiming a *protos neokoros* title (the first warden of an imperial temple) and with the establishing of a second imperial temple under Trajan's rule (98–117 C.E.) it introduced a designation *protos kai dis neokoros* (first and twice warden of an imperial temple). Pergamon's privilege of being the only 'twice *neokoros*' did not last long, since during the reign of Hadrian (117–138 C.E.) a second imperial temple was built in Ephesus in honour of this emperor, who declared the city 'the first and greatest metropolis of Asia'. According to the estimation of Price (*Rituals and Power*, 66-67), already at the end of the first century C.E. thirty-five different cities in Asia Minor had the *neokoros* title with fifty-two imperial neocorates. This data speaks of the fact that during and after Domitian's reign the imperial cults were an element of the Asian society that pervadingly influenced things at every level. On rivalry in establishing imperial temples, see Michael Dräger, *Die Städte der Provinz Asia in der Flavienzeit. Studien zur kleinasiatischen Stadt- und Regionalgeschichte* (Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe 3, Geschichte und ihre Hilfswissenschaften, 576; Frankfurt: Lang, 1993), 111-21; Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 50f.

⁴⁴ Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 58-59.

The imperial cults have also often been seen as a way of gaining personal advances. This is evident in the example of the poet and epigrammatist Martial, who attempted to enter into the ‘inner circle’ of Domitian by using flattery. In his earliest work he refers to the emperor with the expression *dominus*, but in his fifth book of *Epigrams* the title is expounded to *dominus et deus*, which reveals a demonstration of zeal for the sake of gaining influence.⁴⁵ It is well known that he used also extravagant language later in attempting to gain access to Trajan.⁴⁶

Kraybill notes that for the provincials there were basically two principal routes of ascension in the social and political pyramid, both closely tied with the Empire: military service or the purchase of a municipal office which gave opportunity for generous donations (λειτουργοί) to the city.⁴⁷ In both avenues a prominent role was ascribed to the imperial cults. Zanker makes this point clearly: ‘As in Rome, wealthy freedman in the provinces used the imperial cult to win for themselves public recognition and honors ... For such “social climbers”, the need for recognition in society was of course especially great, and they were among the first to seize upon the new opportunities.’⁴⁸

1.3. THE CHARACTER OF THE IMPERIAL CULTS

The debate about the character of the imperial cults has centred on the question: Should it be viewed as a religious commitment or only as an expression of political loyalty? It has been recognized that a dichotomical approach indicated by this question is misleading, since it operates within the framework of a too narrow, culture-bound definition of religion which presupposes a western rational approach of separating politics from the sacred. For this reason, it is inadequate for the examination of the character of the ancient concept of imperial cults.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Martial, *Epig.* 5.5, 8; 7.2, 5, 34; 8.2, 82; 9.28, 66. These and other passages are discussed in Kenneth Scott, *The Imperial Cult under the Flavians* (New York: Arno, 1975), 104-09. Thompson (*Apocalypse and Empire*, 106) speculates about the possibility that similar to Martial ‘other potential beneficiaries approaching power from below also probably used titles such as *dominus* and *deus* and were eager to display their zeal for Domitian’.

⁴⁶ Martial, *Epig.* 10.72.

⁴⁷ J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse* (JSNTSup, 132; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 70-72.

⁴⁸ Zanker, *Power of Images*, 316.

⁴⁹ This has been realized by Price (*Rituals and Power*, 7-16), whose work brought a turning point in the approach to the research on the imperial cults. For a persuasive critic of the western concept of religion as an inadequate approach in the examination of the imperial cults, see Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 5-22.

In spite of the earlier dominant view that the significance of the imperial cults lies primarily in the realm of politics and not religion,⁵⁰ in recent years almost unanimous consensus has developed that the cults should be viewed as both religious and political phenomena which are part of the same web of power.⁵¹ The political dimension of the imperial cults is quite obvious, but Price convincingly argues that religion is also concerned with power as much as politics.⁵² Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that both the political and religious aspects are merged in the imperial cults as forming together a controlling system concerning loyalty to the emperor. Building on Price's argument, Thompson drives home the point:

Religious expressions of power are no more a gloss on politics than is politics a gloss on religion ... Social structures such as rituals of sacrifice, political negotiations, taxes, or civic claims are equally channels of power. All these relations together make up the network. No relation is merely symbolic or simply expressive of another. Religious expressions are really about religion, however much they may also express political obligations.⁵³

Such a carefully structured construct imposed a definition of the world that brought Rome stability in society.

1.4. CRISIS UNDER DOMITIAN: RHETORICAL OR REAL?

The developments under Domitian brought the church in Asia into a precarious situation that the book of Revelation addresses. First these new developments will be examined and this will be followed by a discussion of the Christians' situation in Asia Minor in this period.

1.4.1. NEW DEVELOPMENTS UNDER DOMITIAN

Domitian's rule is portrayed by 'standard' Roman sources as a period of a repressive, cruel and savage rule (*saevissima dominatio*) – an era of confusion, disorder and chaos.⁵⁴ Domitian himself

⁵⁰ For example, Clinton E. Arnold (*Ephesians: Power and Magic. The Concept of Power in Ephesians in the Light of its Historical Setting* [SNTSMS, 63; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 37) argues: 'The establishment of the Imperial cult was essentially political. It enhanced the status of the city and usually its more influential citizens.' Mellor (*Worship of the Goddess Roma*, 16) similarly holds that 'it was a cult based on political, rather than religious, experience'.

⁵¹ For a detailed argument, see Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 122-31.

⁵² Price, *Rituals and Power*, 242.

⁵³ Thompson, *Apocalypse and Empire*, 159.

⁵⁴ The standard sources for Domitian and his reign are the following: Tacitus, *Agr.* (98), *Germ.* (98–99), *Hist.* (100–110); Pliny, *Pan.* (100), *Ep.* (105–109); Dion Chrysostomus (c. 40–112), *Discourses*; Juvenal, *Sat.* (115–127); Suetonius, (c. 120); Dio Cassius (c. 215); Philostratus (170–245), *VS, VA*.

is characterized as a megalomaniac tyrant, who ‘became an object of terror and hatred to all’.⁵⁵ This view, assumed by older biblical commentators,⁵⁶ has been challenged recently by Thompson who suggested that Domitian was a good emperor loved by the provincials.⁵⁷ He argues that Domitian’s extremely negative portrait is not in line with epigraphic, numismatic and prosopographical evidence from his period of reign and is based almost entirely on claims from a circle of writers who wrote under Trajan. Such a bias is seen as a rhetorical propaganda, elevating Trajan’s ideology of a New Era after Flavian rule, which glorifies the emperor and his reign as liberty opposed to Domitian’s evil tyranny.⁵⁸ While Thompson’s case is well argued, Beale calls our attention to his omission to see the bias between the sources themselves, since the same authors as Domitian’s contemporaries could also have had the same motives of self-advantage for praising Domitian as they did for praising Trajan.⁵⁹

Domitian was traditionally accused of demanding the title *dominus et deus noster*. In opposing this view and defending a positive picture of Domitian Thompson has argued that the works of Statius and Quintilian, commissioned by the emperor in his last years, do not reflect such a requirement.⁶⁰ On the other hand, Janzen has provided numismatic evidence from the 90s that proves Domitian’s megalomania.⁶¹ Therefore, it seems that Thompson overstates his case and although no strong evidence proves an absolutist policy that demanded the use of the divine title, it is likely that Domitian encouraged the use of cultic language as an expression of loyalty.⁶²

⁵⁵ Suetonius, *Dom.* 10.14.

⁵⁶ For a recent extensive work that argues for the picture of Domitian as persecutor, see Brent, *Imperial Cult*, 164-209.

⁵⁷ For Thompson’s thesis, see *Apocalypse and Empire*, 95-115.

⁵⁸ Thompson (*Apocalypse and Empire*, 115) points out the rationale for the propaganda: ‘The opposing of Trajan and Domitian in a binary set serves overtly in Trajan’s ideology of a new age as well as covertly in his praise. Newness requires a beginning and therefore a break with the past; such a break is constructed rhetorically through binary contrast. Propagandists for a new age have to sharpen both edges of their two-edged sword: both the ideal present and the evil past have to be exaggerated. The sharper the contrast, the clearer the break and the more evident the new era.’

⁵⁹ Beale, *Revelation*, 6; cf. Kenneth A. Strand, ‘Review of Thompson, L.L., *The Book of Revelation. Apocalypse and Empire*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990’, *AUSS* 24 (1991), 188-90.

⁶⁰ Thompson, *Apocalypse and Empire*, 105-06.

⁶¹ Ernest P. Janzen (‘Jesus of the Apocalypse Wears the Emperor’s Clothes’ in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1994* [SBLSP, 33; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1994], 637-57) criticizes Thompson’s work for the lack of interaction with numismatic evidence. He concludes that coins minted in the Domitianic period reveal his claims to deity that exceed the claims of the previous emperors. They even portray Domitian’s wife (Domitia) as the mother of the divine Caesar.

⁶² Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1984), 71-72. She suggests the possibility that John might be aware of the use of the *dominus et deus* title in Asia by the Roman officials and the local provincials, who wished to emphasize by its use their loyalty to Rome. Similarly, David A. deSilva (‘The “Image of the Beast” and the Christians in Asia Minor: Escalation of Sectarian Tension in Revelation 13’, *TJ* 12 [1991], 185-208[199]) believes that Domitian valued ‘cultic language as an expression of

Juvenal's statement is enlightening – he notes a link between the flattery and its effect on Domitian: 'What flattery is more apparent...? There is nothing that he cannot believe about himself when his power is praised as equal to the gods.'⁶³ It seems that the continued flattery affected the emperor's self-image and resulted in an overblown view of himself. As Beale notes, most probably the truth lies somewhere between the two pictures of Domitian, 'since all the ancient testimonies both for and against Domitian contain varying degrees of bias and truth'.⁶⁴

Although there is no evidence that imperial worship was promoted with any particular excess during the reign of Domitian in Asia Minor, still some new developments took place which had an influence on the situation of the churches. Most significantly, a major centre of imperial worship was established in Ephesus by building a provincial temple in the city centre. According to inscriptional evidence, the building was dedicated to the *Sebastoi* in 89/90 C.E.⁶⁵ The archaeological remains speak of the impressive dimension of the building with a colossal image of the emperor which reminded the inhabitants and visitors of the city of the significance of imperial worship.⁶⁶

Also, additional construction work took place in Ephesus that was in the service of the imperial cults. Since the city hosted the Olympic Games to celebrate its new religious status, a new bath-gymnasium of 360m by 240m was built for this purpose which became the largest building of the city. Friesen dates the completion of the project around 92/93 C.E. and states that the Olympics were instituted in honour of Domitian.⁶⁷ If Friesen's chronology is correct, this

social and political relationships' and 'encouraged and even prescribed cultic formulations for political communications to and from those in lower echelons'. If this hypothesis is correct, John's frequent application of the title to Christ in Revelation is of a strong polemical relevance (1:8; 4:8, 11; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 18:8; 19:6; 21:22; 22:5).

⁶³ Juvenal, *Sat.* 4.69-71. Although Juvenal wrote between 115 and 127 C.E., Scott (*Imperial Cult*, 88-146) refers also to sources from Statius and Silius Italicus and provides inscriptional and numismatic evidence from Asia Minor to confirm that Domitian has been addressed as a deity.

⁶⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 6. Beale also notes the possibility that there may have been times when Domitian persecuted people for not showing him loyalty by the using of the *dominus et deus* title. According to the evidence of Pliny (*Ep.* 10.96) this could happen also during Trajan's reign.

⁶⁵ For the most detailed documentation of the thirteen inscriptions available, see Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 28-49.

⁶⁶ For the details and a pictorial presentation of the statue, see Steven J. Friesen, 'Ephesus, Key to a Vision in Revelation', *BAR* 19/3 (1993), 24-37. From the excavated fragments it can be concluded that the statue was four times the natural life-size. It could be about seven meters tall, although it is not possible to reconstruct whether the emperor was portrayed in a standing or sitting position. Biguzzi ('Ephesus', 284-86) points out that the colossal dimensions reflects the emperor's pretence for being super-human.

⁶⁷ As Friesen (*Twice Neokoros*, 139) notes, the immense sporting complex was the most imposing building project during Domitian's reign and it had a parallel only in Olympia, Greece.

development took place not long before the writing of the book of Revelation, therefore it could have given rise to John's concern for the churches because of the idolatrous influence.⁶⁸

The greatest innovation in imperial worship during the Domitianic era was the introduction of the term *neokoros* (temple warden) as a technical title for a city with a provincial imperial temple.⁶⁹ Although the title was first employed in connection with the Temple of *Sebastoi* in Ephesus, it became the most prestigious self-designation which could be used by a city in Asia, since it indicated the presence of a provincial temple dedicated to the worship of the emperors and their relatives. Friesen points out that the 'power of this innovation was explosive', because within a few years 'it changed the public rhetoric of empire in Asia'.⁷⁰

1.4.2. THE SITUATION OF THE CHURCHES

It has been generally held until recently that Domitian launched an empire-wide Roman persecution of the Christians because of their refusal to participate in the imperial cults.⁷¹ This view assumes that Revelation was written as a response to the persecution with the purpose of encouraging the suffering community. However, this view has been fairly challenged and abandoned, because of the lack of support from reliable external evidence.⁷² More recent scholarship interprets the crisis implied in Revelation in terms of social and cultural pressure from society. Thus, Yarbrow Collins speaks of a 'perceived crisis', arguing that John counters in Revelation a critical tension that many in the community did not perceive.⁷³

On the basis of the social, religious and political dynamics in Asia Minor by the end of the first century C.E. and the text of Revelation, the most objective interpretation of the situation that inspired John to write is as a social crisis with several facets including dissension within the Christian church, a tense relationship with the Jews, ideological and social tension with Rome

⁶⁸ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult*, 28-29.

⁶⁹ For the earlier use of term *neokoros* in Asia Minor, see Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 50f.

⁷⁰ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 150.

⁷¹ See e.g. Ramsay, *Letter*, 71.

⁷² Probably the three most important studies that have tried to explain the lack of evidence for persecution are John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976), 221-53; Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 69-110; Thompson, *Apocalypse and Empire*, 95-115. Robinson suggests in the light of the evidence the redating of the Apocalypse. Yarbrow Collins argues that the Christian church was not under persecution, but perceived a crisis-situation. On the other hand, Thompson interprets the persecution in Revelation against the nature of the apocalyptic genre.

⁷³ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 69-110.

and antipathy towards the surrounding gentiles.⁷⁴ This period was rightly described as a ‘period of both external and internal stress’ for the Christian communities in Asia Minor.⁷⁵

The Seven Messages of Rev. 2–3 indicate that the focus of John’s concern lies in developments inside the community. It seems that the crisis was primarily an internal conflict over the appropriate attitude towards society with the issue of the emperor worship at the heart of the problem.⁷⁶ The question was not the complete avoidance of the religious atmosphere in the environment of the church, but ‘how to live within it as different’.⁷⁷ On the basis of the Seven Messages it can be concluded that the church which struggled with the handling of its marginalized position was deeply divided.⁷⁸ False apostles (2:2), Nicolaitans (2:6, 15), Jezebel (2:20-25) and the Balaamites (2:14) are mentioned as rivals of John, who appear to be different manifestations of the same or a similar movement. They propagated an accommodative position considering a compromise with the imperial society as acceptable behaviour.⁷⁹ The challenge of the church was to maintain its identity in the midst of societal pressures and resist the temptation to compromise.⁸⁰

There is no evidence for widespread, official demand during the reign of Domitian for a compulsory participation in the imperial cults in Asia Minor.⁸¹ Still, the environment increasingly expected the public demonstration of loyalty in an atmosphere of a large-scale

⁷⁴ For an excellent study of these aspects of social setting, see Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 84-104.

⁷⁵ Paulien, *Deep Things*, 23.

⁷⁶ Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 14; Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, 162.

⁷⁷ Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 230.

⁷⁸ Paulien (*Deep Things*, 22-23) discovers a certain pattern in the depiction of internal division of the churches in Rev. 2–3. In first three churches (Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamon) the majority resisted the temptation. In the fourth church (Thyatira) the situation is more serious, since there is a 50–50 split – even some of the leaders failed to take the right side. In the last three churches (Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea) the ‘impression of degeneration continues’. Beale (*Revelation*, 32-33) on the other hand sees a chiasmic arrangement of the Seven Messages. He argues that the first and the last churches are on the verge of losing their Christian identity, the second and the sixth have no weaknesses, while the third, fourth and fifth, in the middle of chiasm are in a mixed condition. He suggests that ‘the significance of the chiasm here is to emphasize that the churches in Asia Minor are in serious trouble’. Paulien’s linear approach is more persuasive, while Beale’s chiasm shows serious deficiencies as the lack of a parallel between the first and the last churches (Ephesus, Laodicea).

⁷⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 195; Hubert Ritt, *Offenbarung des Johannes* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1988), 28; Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 228-29; Paulien, *Deep Things*, 24.

⁸⁰ David A. deSilva, ‘The Social Setting of the Revelation to John: Conflicts Within, Fears Without’, *WTJ* 54 (1992), 273-302(301-02).

⁸¹ Price (*Rituals and Power*, 223-24) mentions only four cases when Christians were forced to sacrifice to the emperor. In two the sacrifice was required as a ‘lesser alternative’ after refusing to sacrifice to the gods, while in the other two its offering was required either on his behalf or as directed to his image placed among the cult statues of the gods. Therefore, the claim of Donald L. Jones (‘Christianity and the Roman Imperial Cult’ in *ANRW*, 2.23.2, 1023-54[1023]) is outdated: ‘From the perspective of early Christians, the worst abuse in the Roman empire was the imperial cult.’

enthusiasm seen in the establishment of the provincial cult of the *Sebastoi* at Ephesus. Such an expectation put unusually strong social and economic pressure on Christians to participate, primarily at the occasions of celebrations and festivals.⁸²

It has been suggested that the challenges the church members encountered are to be understood particularly against their relationship with the trade guilds and patron deities.⁸³ The first-century guilds were voluntary organization which provided primarily a setting for social interaction, but also a place where business contacts were made. By the time Revelation was written, guilds were in the Graeco-Roman world on the threshold of their period of maximum influence and it was ‘hardly possible’ for trades people to be commercially viable without membership in a relevant organization.⁸⁴ All guilds had a religious aspect, usually related to the patron gods or goddesses of the association. As some Christians were probably members of guilds, they were expected to attend annual dinners in honour of the patron deities of the association.⁸⁵ Kraybill notes that the imperial cults infiltrated into nearly every guild by the late first and early second century C.E.⁸⁶ Yarbro Collins rightly points out that the heart of the issue was ‘the question of assimilation: What pagan customs could Christians adopt for the sake of economic survival, commercial gain, or simple sociability?’⁸⁷

On the top of the imperial and guild pressures an additional problem was generated for the church by the deterioration of relations with the Jews, who are portrayed in an extremely negative light in Revelation.⁸⁸ By the end of the first century C.E. a parting of the way occurred between the Jewish community and the church which resulted in the fact that Christianity began gradually to lose the benefits of the status of *religio licita* that it had enjoyed so far as a ‘sect’ of

⁸² Hemer (*Letters*, 40) holds that the pressures of the imperial cults on the Christians were not so strong in Ephesus as in the other churches, mainly because the city was a strong and influential Christian centre. The weaknesses of this suggestion have been pointed out by Rick Strelan (*Paul, Artemis, and the Jews in Ephesus* [BZNW, 80; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1996], 108), who notes that Hemer grounds his argument ‘on the assumption of a highly successful Pauline mission’. Similarly, it has been argued by Moffatt (‘Revelation’, 285 n. 2) that Revelation was ‘addressed to tiny communities in the cities of Asia Minor’.

⁸³ E.g. Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 87-88; Kraybill, *Imperial Cult*, 110-17; Beale, *Revelation*, 30.

⁸⁴ Kraybill (*Imperial Cult*, 111-13) points out that the period in which the trade guilds flourished the most was the first part of the second century C.E. While some guilds were active even before and during the New Testament era, Kraybill supposes that the lack of epigraphical evidence is due to the fact that they ‘did not yet have sufficient institutional momentum’.

⁸⁵ For the possibility of the participation of Thyatira church members in guilds, see e.g. Charles, *Revelation*, I, 69-70; Allo, *L’Apocalypse*, 46-47; Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 464-64.

⁸⁶ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult*, 117

⁸⁷ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 88.

⁸⁸ The book identifies twice the synagogue with Satan (2:9; 3:9). See ch. 7 sec. 1.3.2.

Judaism.⁸⁹ As a separate religion, Christianity was no longer exempt from the imperial cults and the new status brought new temptations and threats. Beale notes of the changed circumstances:

Apparently, the Jews made it clear to local government officials that Christians were not a legitimate sect within Judaism but a new religion ... This Jewish pressure would have tempted some Christians to maintain a quieter attitude about their faith so that they would not attract too much attention to themselves before either Jews or Romans ... Though it was sporadic, there was an ongoing threat that Christians would be brought before Roman officials and asked to show their loyalty to the emperor by invoking the Roman gods. For a polytheist to say 'Caesar is Lord' was not problematic, but for a genuine Christian, doing so was a direct contradiction of the confession that 'Jesus is Lord.'⁹⁰

The non-participation exposed Christians to a great deal of antipathy on part of society. Accusations included not only bad, unpatriotic citizenship, but also *superstitio*, because it was held that through the creation of metaphysical disorder a social disorder which disrupted the cosmic harmony of *pax deorum* was caused.⁹¹ Pliny's famous correspondence with Trajan, though later than the book of Revelation, reflects the development of things by 112 C.E. In this document the Christians were blamed for a decline in traditional piety⁹² and as Carey notes, Pliny's assessment may have reflected a general opinion of the Christianity that had developed.⁹³

Revelation was written at a time of increased pressure on the Christian communities because of the local and provincial developments centred on the imperial cults in the late first century C.E.⁹⁴ The perspective of the book is that of expectation of systematic and universal persecution which some of the believers are tempted to escape by seeking shelter in the shadow of the Jewish synagogue or in compromise with the imperial cults.⁹⁵ As Aune notes, John, in line with Jewish and Graeco-Roman apocalyptic traditions, was 'an advocate of passive resistance to prevailing religious and cultural values, norms and behaviour of Roman Hellenism'.⁹⁶ Therefore, his critique was primarily directed against compromise concerning 'an imperial way of life'.⁹⁷ I

⁸⁹ For a magisterial study on the emergence of Christian distinctiveness and the pulling apart of Christianity and Judaism in the first century C.E., see James Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, rev. edn, 2006).

⁹⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 31.

⁹¹ E.g. Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.4; Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2.

⁹² Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.

⁹³ Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse*, 14.

⁹⁴ Friesen, 'Ephesus', 24-37.

⁹⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 13.

⁹⁶ Aune, *Apocalypticism*, 186.

⁹⁷ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 151.

suggest that John strongly utilizes the throne motif to achieve his rhetorical purpose as will be demonstrated in the second half of this chapter.

2. RHETORICAL FORCE OF THE THRONE MOTIF

It has been demonstrated above that by the end of the first century C.E. the most important spatial categories in the cities of Asia Minor were oriented towards the city of Rome, since they were organized around the imperial cults. The most important temporal categories were similarly determined by the imperial influence. This politically structured schema conveyed a persuasive message about the Roman Empire as the sole seat of power of the earthly reality. Revelation's alternative mapping of the two basic categories of human existence struck on one hand at the heart of the imperial propaganda, but on the other posed an ethical challenge to its audience to rethink their life in the light of the picture of the reality disclosed from the heavenly perspective. The rhetorical force of the throne motif will be examined in respect to these two issues.

2.1 THE THRONE AS THE CENTRE OF SPACE AND TIME

In the last few decades considerable attention has been given to the perception of reality in Revelation. The question has often been discussed in the light of the sociology of knowledge, which holds that the construction of reality is part of the experience of the members of any society. Namely, the way a group of people perceives itself and its place in the world constitutes its 'symbolic universe', its worldview, which is most often simply self-evident.⁹⁸ In respect to Revelation, there is a consensus that the rhetorical strategy of the book is built on opposing 'the ordinary view of reality, as anyone might experience it in Smyrna or Laodicea' by projecting an alternative view of cosmology from the transcendent standpoint.⁹⁹ In this way Revelation 'creates a map of the sacred cosmos', a technique peculiar to its apocalyptic genre.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, there is a disagreement concerning the relationship of the world opened up by the text of

⁹⁸ For a systematic, theoretical discussion of the concept from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, see Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991).

⁹⁹ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1986), 143-44.

¹⁰⁰ deSilva, *Seeing Things*, 94. John J. Collins' ('Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre' in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre* [SemeiaSt, 14; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979], 1-20[9]) definition of the apocalypse as a literary genre indicates the essentiality of the construction of a symbolic world in works of this type: "'Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it envisages another, supernatural world.'

Revelation to the empirical reality. Since the answer given to this question bears significant implications for the rhetorical function of the throne motif, the main approaches in this debate will be briefly discussed here before proceeding to the rhetorical function of the motif itself.

One of the most controversial views in the debate has been advanced by Gager. His reconstruction of Revelation's symbolic universe takes as a starting point the structuralist understanding of myth proposed by Lévi-Strauss, who defines it as a knowledge which brings the conflict between hope and harsh reality to a resolution.¹⁰¹ Gager views Revelation as analogous to psycho-analytic therapy which brings to expression tensions that have been repressed by the Christian church on the level of the unconscious. The author uses 'language' through which these conflicts are identified and employs his symbolism in proceeding towards resolution. In Gager's understanding the symbolism of victory and hope, which includes the throne, are opposed to the symbols of oppression and despair. He holds that the function of the language and the symbols of myth are to soften the experience of conflict and views the main goal of John as making possible an experience of millennial bliss, the experiencing of the future as the present, as a living reality. Gager's approach has been strongly criticized for illusory suppression of time and demythologizing Revelation's eschatology into a spatial-cognitive framework.¹⁰²

Similar to Gager, Schüssler Fiorenza finds in Revelation a network of symbols, intended to counteract a crisis experienced by the original audience. However, there is a significant difference between their understandings of the rhetoric of an 'alternative' world. Schüssler Fiorenza holds that the author's 'symbolic universe' functions to overcome the reality of present threats of persecution by inviting the reader to 'imaginative participation' in an alternative reality constructed by John. This way the reader's experience of the reality would be altered and its adherence to the values of the Christian community strengthened.¹⁰³ While the priority of the rhetorical function of symbolism is persuasively argued by Schüssler Fiorenza, her approach has been rightly objected reducing the interpretation of the book's symbolism to social functionalism.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ See John Gager, *Kingdom and Community* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 55; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke G. Schoepf; New York: Basic Books, 1963), 197-203.

¹⁰² For critic of Gager's view, see e.g. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 167-68; Thompson, *Apocalypse and Empire*, 207-08.

¹⁰³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 187-99.

¹⁰⁴ E.g. Thompson, *Apocalypse and Empire*, 205-06; Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration*, 36-38.

Yarbro Collins in her sociological analysis of Revelation, in line with Gager and Schüssler Fiorenza, also holds crisis as the crucial concept. However, her approach differs significantly in this respect. She introduces the idea of ‘perceived crisis’, arguing that Revelation ‘was indeed written in response to a crisis, but one that resulted from the clash between the expectations of John and like-minded Christians and the social reality within which they had to live’.¹⁰⁵ Yarbro Collins holds that the repetition of the themes of persecution, punishment and salvation produces a therapeutic effect which she terms ‘catharsis’ as feelings of fear and resentment within the reader are brought to the surface and are purged.¹⁰⁶ The vision of the heavenly reality is viewed ‘as a compensation for the relatively disadvantaged situation of the hearers or as an imaginative way of resolving the tension between expectations and social reality’.¹⁰⁷ Similarly to Gager’s analysis, Yarbro Collins has rightly been criticized as holding an ultimately escapist perspective, since her concept is based on the technique of creative imagination, which involves withdrawal from empirical reality, from real experience in the everyday world.¹⁰⁸

Thompson’s perspective on Revelation’s picture of reality differs fundamentally from the above-mentioned approaches. Whereas according to the understanding of Gager, Schüssler Fiorenza and Yarbro Collins a sharp distinction exists between two worlds, the world as it is and Revelation’s ‘symbolic universe’, Thompson denies that that the book reveals another world. As he persuasively argues, the book ‘extends or expands the universe to include transcendent realities, and it does this both spatially and temporally’.¹⁰⁹ This means that Revelation does not reveal a new reality, but it rather discloses the hidden dimensions of the world. For this reason it is more appropriate to speak of an ‘encompassing world’ instead of an ‘alternative world’. The concept of ‘symbolic universe’, separated from the social and political realities, is therefore an artificial construct when applied to Revelation, since the book portrays a single reality and it is concerned with disclosing the hidden dimensions. Thompson’s line of argumentation is followed by Gilbertson, who points out that John’s aim with the disclosure was to reveal to his audience

¹⁰⁵ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 165.

¹⁰⁶ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 153.

¹⁰⁷ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 154.

¹⁰⁸ For critic of the approach of Yarbro Collins, see Thompson, *Apocalypse and Empire*, 208-10. However, Thompson overstates the criticism of Yarbro Collins claiming wrongly that her interpretation robs the book of Revelation of its political impact.

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, *Apocalypse and Empire*, 31.

the true nature of reality in order to influence their lives in the present.¹¹⁰ Similarly, deSilva argues that ‘Revelation, like most specimens of the genre, places everyday realities and experiences within a broader context that provides an interpretive lens for those realities and experiences’.¹¹¹ While Bauckham does not avoid the ‘symbolic universe’ expression, he also holds that ‘it is not that the here-and-now are left behind in an escape into heaven or the eschatological future, but that the here-and-now look quite different when they are opened to transcendence’.¹¹²

I hold most convincing the interpretation which views reality as a single whole that encompasses the earthly present of the reader and the transcendent aspect placing them within an ultimate spatial and temporal horizon. While the boundaries within this reality are sharply drawn, the power centres are also clearly marked.¹¹³ In the worldview of Revelation the heavenly throne as the symbol embodying God’s theocratic rule appears not only as a focal point of the heavenly realm, but the ultimate cosmic centre of the whole created order. The power centres of the earth (Satan’s throne, the beast’s throne, the whore’s beast throne) are only illusory constructs that are temporary distortions of reality within the earthly realm. While these actors of Revelation’s drama propagate a fallacious symbolic universe, their propaganda is unmasked by the rhetorical centralization of the throne motif within the symbolism of Revelation. Thus, the book ‘neutralizes their power to threaten the Christian group’s world construction’.¹¹⁴ In light of the fuller picture of reality disclosed in Revelation it becomes evident that the earthly rival thrones cannot be considered power centres in the real sense, since the only true centre is located outside of the earthly realm.

While no precise mapping of the heavenly realm is given in Revelation, the single most important element in the book’s uranology is the orientation of the whole created order towards

¹¹⁰ Michael Gilbertson, *God and History in the Book of Revelation: New Testament Studies in Dialogue with Pannenberg and Moltmann* (SNTSMS, 124; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 72.

¹¹¹ deSilva, *Seeing Things*, 94. He notes (‘Fourth Ezra: Maintaining Jewish Cultural Values through Apocalyptic Rhetoric’ in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse*, eds. Greg Carey and L. Gregory Bloomquist [St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1999], 123-39[124]) in regard to the apocalyptic genre generally: ‘One of the primary vehicles of an apocalypse’s persuasive power is its ability to set everyday realities within a broader context that provides an interpretive lens for those experiences. The disclosure of activity in other realms as well as the revelation of primordial and future history provides the context that lends meaning to present experience, making a threatened world-construction viable once more.’

¹¹² Bauckham, *Theology*, 7-8.

¹¹³ While Thompson’s (*Apocalypse and Empire*, 74-91) analysis of boundary transformation in Revelation is a significant contribution to the field, he fails to identify the centres. For a critic of his conclusions, arguing that boundaries cannot exist without centres, see Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 161-62.

¹¹⁴ deSilva, *Seeing Things*, 95.

the throne of God. This point is communicated most clearly and most extensively in the throne-room vision of chs. 4–5 which as the opening vision of the book’s visionary section introduces ‘an all-encompassing cosmic map’.¹¹⁵ The eminence of the throne as the centre of reality is highlighted by the arrangement of the entire universe in concentric circles around it. This picture defines the order of things that is clearly expressed in the fact that everything in the vision is characterized in terms of the relationship to this power centre.

One of the clearest expressions of this idea lies in the use of the prepositions preceding the θρόνος references in Revelation. While the role of this group of prepositions has been recognized, their contribution to the throne motif has been given insignificant attention.¹¹⁶ An inductive examination of these prepositions reveals a twofold structuring function. First, they define spatial relations, conveying the idea that the whole of reality is organized around the throne. The preposition most frequently used in this function is ἐνώπιον, which connects the seven spirits (1:4; 4:5), the sea of glass (4:6) and the altar (8:3) to the throne. This preposition also points to the physical location of different characters standing or worshipping in front of the throne (4:10; 5:8; 7:9, 11, 15; 20:12).¹¹⁷ ἐπί designates primarily God’s occupation of the throne (4:2, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 20:11, 15), but also is employed for the sitting of the twenty-four elders (4:4; 11:6) and the judges (20:4) on their respective thrones. The same preposition occurs also in the context of the pouring out of the fifth bowl on the throne of the beast (16:10). ἐν appears uniquely as designating the sitting of the overcomers on Jesus’ throne and at the same time Jesus’ occupation of the Father’s throne (3:21). Besides ἐνώπιον the following prepositions and phrases, appearing only a few times in the book, express a close relation to the throne without indicating occupation: κυκλόθεν employed regarding the rainbow and the thrones of the twenty-four elders (4:3, 4), κύκλω regarding the four living creatures and the angels (4:6; 5:11; 7:11), ἐν μέσῳ regarding the four living creatures and the Lamb (4:6; 5:6) and ἀνὰ μέσον regarding the Lamb (7:17). Second, the prepositions connect events and actions to the throne and thus indicate motion in relation to the heavenly power centre. ἐκ points to God’s

¹¹⁵ deSilva, *Seeing Things*, 97.

¹¹⁶ Charles (*Revelation*, I, 117) recognizes that ‘in the description of the throne the phrase relating to the throne always begins the verse’. The theological significance of the phenomenon has been shortly addressed by Müller (*Microstructural Analysis*, 208-09), who concludes on the basis of a very brief and partial discussion: ‘The phrases relating to the throne often begin a verse or the main clause, thus emphasizing the importance and centrality of the throne’ (cf. Trafton, *Revelation*, 58-59).

¹¹⁷ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου is most often synonymous to ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ (3:2; 8:2,4; 9:13; 12:10; 16:19) and ἐνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου (11:4).

throne in the first vision of the book's main part as the source of atmospheric and seismic phenomena (4:5), while in the last vision the same preposition is used for designating the flowing of the river of the water of life from the throne in the context of the new creation (22:1). πρὸς relates the ascension of the male child to the heavenly throne (12:5), while ἀπό connects an unidentified voice to the throne (16:17; 19:5).

As is evident from this discussion, the majority of the prepositions related to the throne motif appear in chs. 4–5, which is not surprising, since the throne-room vision contains by far the most throne references in the book. The message of order in the arrangement of reality conveyed by the repeated employment of prepositions has a major rhetorical impact. Resseguie rightly notes:

This scene of perfect order and symmetry establishes a primacy/recency effect that determines the way the reader reads the subsequent chapters. The overwhelming primacy effect is that order and coherence rules the universe. The cosmos is centered around the throne and the one who sits on the throne. In this dramatic scene there is an unsurpassable unity among all creatures, which binds them to the creator and redeemer in an endless display of worship and praise.¹¹⁸

Thus, God's throne is presented in Revelation as the only meaningful centre of reality which 'infuses all other space with meaning'.¹¹⁹ In the proper order of things the complete created world is oriented towards its Creator.¹²⁰ The throne itself should not mistakenly be taken as the central point of heaven, since it is employed in Revelation generally in the function of a circumlocution for the One who occupies it. Still, the throne is pictured as the centre of John's worldview, since God is beyond the realm of symbolization.

In John's picture of reality not only spatial, but also temporal aspects are mapped out. Since the realm of earth is governed by time, the concepts of space and time are closely related categories that cannot be separated artificially within a worldview.¹²¹ Revelation's view of reality

¹¹⁸ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 175-76.

¹¹⁹ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 65.

¹²⁰ Koester, *End of All Things*, 73.

¹²¹ Thompson (*Apocalypse and Empire*, 31) notes of the interrelation of these two dimensions: 'A radical transcendence which could sever heaven from earth is tempered by the future transformation of earthly into heavenly existence; and a radical transcendence which could sever this age completely from the age to come is tempered by the presentness of the age to come in heaven. Thus, the presence and interplay of spatial and temporal dimensions in transcendence prevent a thorough going dualism in which the revelation of transcendence would become a separate set of forces without present effect on everyday human activity.'

is irreducibly temporal.¹²² The book maps out the temporal dimensions of the earth portraying the present state of affairs, but also the direction towards which history is heading. In this regard Gilbertson speaks of a ‘temporal dissonance’ which is going to find its resolution only in the ultimate future of the new creation.¹²³ The tension between the present situation on the earth and the heavenly ideal presented in the vision of chs. 4–5 raises a question that is basic to Revelation’s concept of time: Is this discrepancy permanent? The book utilizes a rhetorical strategy similar to the most apocalypses in its answer by setting the present experience of God’s people in a broader context which provides an interpretive framework for them.¹²⁴ In this sense, the author of Revelation ‘uses the device of first enabling his readers to place the earthly present within an ultimate perspective, and then refocusing attention back onto the earthly present’.¹²⁵ As deSilva rightly notes, ‘The temporal dimension of Revelation expresses the conviction that, and narrates the process by which, the Christian counterculture’s values and worldview will ultimately be vindicated.’¹²⁶ The starting point for this vindication is rooted in events surrounding the throne of God as the Lamb takes the sealed scroll and becomes enthroned (ch. 5). Since the opening of the scroll brings this age to its conclusive end, the ultimate authority over it is held by the Lamb, who occupies the heavenly throne with God. This throne is viewed as the source from which all the plagues are issued and all the misdeeds of the satanic forces authorized (ἐδόθη) as history progresses towards the resolution of the ‘temporal dissonance’. Thus, in a sense the progress of human history towards the ultimate goal is planned, regulated and directed by the heavenly council under the leadership of ‘the One sitting on the throne’.¹²⁷

Revelation’s concept of time poses a challenge to the calendar of Asia Minor organized around Augustus and the accomplishments of the empire. The flawed eschatology in which the eternal reign of Rome is lauded is disclosed as fallacious in light of Revelation’s concept of time organized around the sole power centre of the universe, the throne of God. This line of thought is supported by Friesen’s convincing suggestion that ‘worship time’ is the first and the most important kind of time in Revelation, a ‘time organized around the throne of God’ in which the

¹²² For a systematic study of the topic, see Gilbertson’s work (*God and History*, 109-42), in which the temporal dimensions of Revelation are analysed according to five different categories: present, primordial past, historical past, penultimate future and ultimate future.

¹²³ Gilbertson, *God and History*, 137.

¹²⁴ For the apocalyptic perspective on time, see Aune, *Apocalypticism*, 261-79.

¹²⁵ Gilbertson, *God and History*, 141.

¹²⁶ deSilva, *Seeing Things*, 100.

¹²⁷ Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, 74.

realms of heaven and earth are bridged.¹²⁸ Since this time is oriented towards the divine throne, namely its occupant(s), it is meaningful above all the other kinds of times. This type of time could not be altered under the influence of Roman propaganda, since it is tied to transcendent reality by a personal experience. Through it all the other dimensions of the concept of time are seen in the light of the heavenly throne, which provides an appropriate perspective for evaluation of their true meaning.

Revelation's picture of reality focused on God's throne, the cosmic centre of space and time, is of a compelling rhetorical force as a strong counter-cultural claim against the situation John addresses. The book's map of reality clearly de-imperializes the worldview of its original Christian recipients by providing 'an antidote for those still staggering under the influence of the worldview promoted and reinforced by the public discourse'.¹²⁹ Still, Tonstad rightly warns against casting the net too narrowly by relegating Revelation only to a critique of the Roman imperial cults. He does not deny that the rhetorical situation is a reference point for understanding Revelation's argument, but persuasively argues that the book's message needs to be viewed against a wider framework as it belongs to a larger narrative. Tonstad concludes: 'The ambiguity of the situation, the theme of cosmic conflict, and the comprehensive aspiration of the book argue against a narrow situational determinant. Accepting that the perspective of the speaker is decisive, Revelation assumes a wide and timeless application for its message (13:9)' which points beyond the rhetorical situation.¹³⁰ Thus, the rhetorical significance of Revelation's throne motif is broader than countering the claims of the Roman quasi-sovereignities of John's time. Namely, the stressing of the unique significance of the only centre of the universe around which space and time revolves counters the initiations of the cosmic rival of the divine government, whose ambitions are expressed in a neglected passage of Isaiah: 'You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High"' (Isa. 14:13-14).¹³¹ It seems that John's rhetorical strategy built around the throne motif seeks to counter the more compelling issue of evil which lies behind the

¹²⁸ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 158.

¹²⁹ deSilva, *Seeing Things*, 104.

¹³⁰ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 37. Similarly Péter Balla (*Az újszövetségi iratok története: bevezetési alternatívák* [Ars Docendi, 2; Budapest: Károli Egyetemi Kiadó, 2nd edn, 2008], 290) holds that the book conveys a message relevant for every generation and for this reason its actuality is continuous.

¹³¹ For Tonstad's exegesis of Isa. 14:12-20 as related thematically to Ezek. 28:11-19 and Rev. 12, see *Saving God's Reputation*, 80-102.

cosmic conflict.¹³² It not only evokes transcendence pointing to the sole power centre of the universe, but it also de-masks the human rebellion of denying the factuality of God's sovereign kingship by deification of human power.

To conclude, Revelation's map of reality seeks to illuminate the true character of the challenges its readers are facing and have to face, and at the same time the true character of the institutions and forces among which they live. However, the throne motif's function is not only to disclose, but to motivate as seeking 'to deepen the loyalty and commitment of its audience'.¹³³ In this sense, the book's countercosmos with God's throne at the centre also bears an ethical force as it highlights the allegiance expected in the light of the cosmic order. I turn now to the discussion of this function of John's throne rhetoric.

2.2 ETHICAL MOTIVATIONAL FUNCTION

The ethical concept of the book of Revelation is a highly neglected area.¹³⁴ Wolter notes: 'Zur Ethik finden sich lediglich ein halber Satz und eine Fußnote innerhalb des Abschnitts über die Ekklesiologie.'¹³⁵ While this observation seems pessimistically exaggerated, it is not far from reality. The throne motif has generally not been related to the ethical issues raised in Revelation and it is entirely absent from the discussion of the topic.¹³⁶ However, I suggest that the book's key motif bears a strong ethical motivation force and its neglecting in the discussion of the book's ethics is unjustified even more, since the subject of power, evoked by the throne motif, is a crucial issue in the social ethics.¹³⁷

¹³² Thus Bauckham (*Climax*, 234), who notes without reference to the throne motif: 'Part of the aim of the book is to alert the readers to the fact that what is going on around them, in the social and political life of their own cities, is part of a conflict of cosmic proportions, the eschatological war of good and evil, the conflict of sovereignty between God and the devil, in which they are called to take sides, to take a firm stand.'

¹³³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 129.

¹³⁴ Unfortunately, incomparably more effort has been invested in the sharp criticism of the ethical dimension of the book (most often by scholars attracted to liberationist ethics) than in the development of the concept. A dialogue with the critic of Revelation's ethics is beyond the scope of our study. For representative works in the discussion and an answer to the criticisms, see Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 185f.

¹³⁵ Michael Wolter, 'Christliches Ethos nach der Offenbarung des Johannes' in *Studien zur Johannesoffenbarung und ihrer Auslegung: Festschrift für Otto Böcher zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Friedrich W. Horn and Michael Wolter (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2005), 189-209(189).

¹³⁶ See e.g. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper, 1996), 169-85; Jürgen Kerner, *Die Ethik der Johannes-Apokalypse im Vergleich mit der des 4. Esra: ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Apokalyptik und Ethik* (BZNW, 94; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1998), 13-161; Georg Strecker, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. M. Eugene Boring; Berlin: W. de Gruyter; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / John Knox, 2000), 543-45.

¹³⁷ Harvey G. Cox, 'Power' in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, eds. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (London: SCM, 1986), 489-91(490).

The throne as a motif, most closely related to God of all the symbolism of the book, expresses unique relations. While the image derives from the human world, in Revelation it evokes transcendence and highlights the ontological difference between the creator and creation. The fact of the absolute power of God as contrasted with the finiteness of the created beings relativizes all human endeavours for acquiring sovereignty.¹³⁸ At the same time it bears an ethical dimension as it poses the question of the right relationship of the creatures towards God's unique status in the universe. Thus, God's legitimate authority as the First Cause of the universe (4:11) whose character provides the basis for moral order is either acknowledged by expressing loyalty or denied by refusing to give him glory (14:6). The two possible choices are modelled in the contrasting responses of the twenty-four elders and the dragon. While the elders express their vassalage by vacating their thrones in prostration and surrendering their crowns (4:10), the dragon retains its crowns as it is driven out of heaven (12:3, 7-9) and does not put away its authority, but delegates a throne to the beast for diabolic purpose (13:2).¹³⁹ Since God is associated with good and his adversaries with evil, the inevitable choice of loyalty is ethicized.¹⁴⁰

The world order set by the beast, as expressed in the concept of Babylon, is guilty of idolatry, blasphemy and self-glorification. It is founded on the illegitimate exercise of authority. Biblically, all power comes from God and belongs to him. God delegates his power to human agents in the form of authority or office (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:5-8). This delegated authority is to that extent legitimate as it is exercised in harmony with God's ethical norms. Since the Babylon coalition is guilty of the abuse of God-given power, its authority appears as illegitimate.¹⁴¹ For this reason the kingdom based on human 'sovereignty' cannot coexist with God's kingdom. It becomes satanic, not because it is imperfect, but because it is totalitarian. As Schrage notes: 'It does not have too little authority but too much authority "over every tribe and people and tongue and nation" (13:7). It is demonic in its totalitarian deification' and for this reason it 'acts as

¹³⁸ Bauckham (*Theology*, 44) rightly notes that 'it is precisely the recognition of God's absolute power that relativizes all human power'.

¹³⁹ Koester, *End of All Things*, 76.

¹⁴⁰ Yarbro Collins (*Combat Myth*, 161) notes that 'there is no reflection upon this association; it is simply assumed'.

¹⁴¹ Ronald H. Nahs ('Power' in *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F.H. Henry [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1973], 522-23) rightly notes the distinction New Testament makes between the power and the authority. δύναμις designates 'physical or spiritual strength, the general ability to do something' (2Cor. 8:3; Eph. 3:16), whereas ἐξουσία is employed for denoting 'lawful power, derived or conferred authority, the right or authorization to do something'.

antichrist'.¹⁴² The people living on earth are facing a moral dilemma: acknowledging God's legitimate authority or supporting the illegitimate authority of the beast's regime. In light of this tension, loyalty to God and the Lamb, even to the point of death (2:10), is the virtue dominating the ethical demand of Revelation.¹⁴³

The 'ethic of commitment'¹⁴⁴ is of central importance in the theology of Revelation. The basic concept for expressing loyalty is worship by which one acknowledges whomever or whatever as possessing true power to order people's lives.¹⁴⁵ The issue of proper and false worship lies at the heart of the book's theology. This is expressed in the contrast between two different kinds of worship modelled in chs. 4–5 and ch. 13, but it is more emphatically indicated in the sharp division of humanity into two groups throughout the book – though the possibility of changing a group by repentance is not excluded.¹⁴⁶ Yarbrow Collins notes that while the division is made explicit in the first half of the visionary part of the book (chs. 4–11), in the second half there is a 'radicalness of dichotomy' (chs. 12–22), since the two groups are characterized more specifically.¹⁴⁷ Barr claims that the proper worship of God is the main theme of Revelation and in this respect he suggests its centrality even in the epistolary section of the book (chs. 2–3).¹⁴⁸ While the conclusion of his research is convincing, his argument based on avoiding idol-meat in 2:14 is insufficient in itself. I suggest that a more compelling argument in the Seven Messages is the tension set out between the two conflicting kingdoms, represented by God's and Christ's throne (3:21) on one side and Satan's throne (2:13) on the other side. These two centres appear as the legitimate and illegitimate representations of power towards which attitude need to be taken by the churches. Additionally, the conflict over worship is nowhere more emphatically stated than in the central vision of the book (12:1–14:20) in which προσκυνέω appear as the crucial word – it appears eight times related to the worship of the beast, his image and the dragon

¹⁴² Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (trans. David E. Green; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 345.

¹⁴³ Michaels, *Revelation*, 36.

¹⁴⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 129.

¹⁴⁵ Wes Howard-Brook, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 206; cf. Spilsbury, *Throne*, 58-59.

¹⁴⁶ Schrage (*Ethics*, 338) notes that the concept of repentance is especially prominent in the epistolary part of Revelation: 'The substance of what is required of Christians is also stated in the seven letters, primarily in terms of the specific conduct for which each church is praised or chastised. Because of the eschatological motivation, it is not surprising that the most frequent theme is the call to repent. The concept of *metanoia* ("change of mind," "repentance") is as central to Revelation as to the Gospels (cf. Rev. 2:5, 16, 21-22; 3:3, 19).'

¹⁴⁷ Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 158-61.

¹⁴⁸ David L. Barr, 'The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment', *Int* 40 (1986), 243-56(255-56).

(13:4[2x], 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11) contrasted with a single reference to the worship of the creator God (14:6).¹⁴⁹ The concept expresses ‘complete dependence on or submission to’¹⁵⁰ the recipients of the act, who is in the New Testament ‘always something – truly or supposedly – divine’.¹⁵¹

By placing the throne motif in the focal point of its theological argument, Revelation confronts all earthly pretensions to power appearing in the form of the praxis of illegitimate authority. By doing so the book unmasks the illegitimate power structures and points to the legitimate centre of the ordered cosmos towards which people are to turn in worship. As noted by Malina, the throne imagery implies a two-directional power-relationship, since it symbolizes both the ruler’s power and the subject’s allegiance.¹⁵² While human beings are as creatures subject to some lordship, their choice regarding allegiance is ethically charged, since the issue of the appropriate attitude towards God’s throne and loyalty to the rule of quasi-sovereignities is basically a choice between good and evil. For this reason the proper attitude towards God’s sovereignty is of fundamental importance and bears far-reaching consequences set out in the book’s judgment theology.¹⁵³

The worldview articulated in Revelation directly reinforces the ethos of John’s audience. The book is not simply an exercise in imaginative thinking, but, as Thompson pointed out, the author ‘is sending a message which intends to create a certain way of living in and seeing the world’.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, Schüssler Fiorenza notes: ‘Revelation seeks to move its audience to action with the power of its images and visions. Its rhetoric does not seek to evoke just an intellectual response but also wants to elicit emotional reactions and religious commitment.’¹⁵⁵ While the hope regarding the *parousia* and the new creation provides a strong ethical motivation for the audience of Revelation, the author’s perspective is not limited to the future, focusing entirely on the reward. The reality of God’s reign provides an equally strong motivation for obedience, faithfulness and endurance in the present for those facing tension in society.¹⁵⁶ On the other hand,

¹⁴⁹ See ch. 8 sec. 2.1.3.3.

¹⁵⁰ BDAG, 882.

¹⁵¹ H. Greeven, ‘προσκυνέω’ in *TDNT*, VI, 758-66(763).

¹⁵² Malina, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 71.

¹⁵³ For Revelation’s judgment theology, see ch. 10 sec. 1.2.

¹⁵⁴ Leonard L. Thompson, ‘Mooring the Revelation in Mediterranean’ in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1992* (SBLSP, 31; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992), 635-53(635).

¹⁵⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 129.

¹⁵⁶ Pattemore (*People of God*, 195) notes that these three words ‘sum up the response called for from the audience ... This involves issues of allegiance and of witness. On the one hand it implies life in keeping with the commandments

to those who believe in an accommodative position and the complacent, self-satisfied church members in Asia Minor the throne motif of Revelation not only brings unease, but also encouragement to repent and take the right action in the face of the deception of the lure of the beast's rule.¹⁵⁷

3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has tried to fill a gap in the discussion of Revelation's rhetorical strategy, since the throne motif has not received as much attention as it deserves in this respect. First, I offered a reconstruction of the rhetorical situation John addresses which created the basis for an evaluation of the rhetorical force of the throne motif. It was demonstrated that the throne motif is a crucial symbol in the author's hand for achieving his rhetorical purpose.

An argument has been presented in favour of the view that the imperial cults were the most influential factor in the *Sitz im Leben* of Revelation. It has been demonstrated that, as a result of an all-permeating influence, a new cosmology was created which symbolically ordered human society with the Roman Empire at the centre. The reconstruction of reality involved the redefinition of the two basic categories of human existence: space and time. I offered an extensive argument to show that Revelation opposes the imperial view of reality by projecting an alternative cosmology from the transcendent point of view. The book does not reveal a new reality, but discloses rather the hidden dimensions of the cosmos that define the map of the universe. In John's 'sacred cosmos' the single most important feature is the orientation of the whole created order towards the throne of God, which is highlighted by portraying the entire universe as arranged in concentric circles around this power centre. As reflected in the throne-room vision (chs. 4–5), in Revelation's worldview everything is characterized in terms of relationship to the throne. Thus, the book's picture of the universe discloses the earthly rival thrones as illusory constructs that are temporary distortions of reality in the earthly realm. It has been demonstrated that in John's picture of reality not only spatial, but also temporal aspects are oriented towards the heavenly throne. The resolution of the 'temporal dissonance' between what is and what ought to be is effected in Revelation from the sole power centre of the universe, and the flawed eschatology in which the eternal reign of Rome is lauded there is disclosed. Moreover,

of God and a total avoidance of idolatry, and on the other, persistent witness to Jesus in the face of extreme hostility, including willingness to die if need be.⁷

¹⁵⁷ Koester, *End of All Things*, 76.

it has been demonstrated that the most important kind of time in the book is 'worship time' and not time which revolves around the imperial cults.

As is evident from these conclusions, Revelation's picture of reality focused on God's throne as the cosmic centre of space and time has a compelling rhetorical force as a strong counter-cultural claim against the symbolic universe projected by the quasi-sovereignities of John's world. At the same time, it has also been concluded that the rhetorical significance of Revelation's throne motif surpasses the situation the author addresses, since it counters the initiations of God's arch-enemy against the divine government. In this sense, John's throne theology as the cornerstone of his rhetorical strategy counters the more compelling issue of evil which lies at the heart of the cosmic conflict.

This chapter has also suggested that the throne motif bears a strong ethical-motivational force that is entirely neglected in the rare discussions of the book's ethics. This function is rooted in the issue of the right relationship towards God's kingly rule symbolized by the throne. Since his authority is the legitimate one in contrast to the illegitimate claims of his adversaries, choices of acknowledging or denying it are presented as the only possible alternatives. The two kinds of responses are modelled in the contrast between the attitudes of the twenty-four elders and the dragon, who either vacate their thrones in light of God's sovereign rule or choose to retain their symbols of power. Since God is associated with good and his adversaries with evil, the choice of loyalty is ethicized and the 'ethic of commitment' becomes of crucial significance in the theology of Revelation.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE THEOLOGY OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation is considered to be one of the most theological books in the New Testament.¹ Maier states in this regard: ‘Die Offenbarung ist prall gefüllt mit theologischen Inhalten.’² At the same time its theology has been strangely neglected.³ Numerous scholars have voiced their concern that even in the historical-critical commentaries on Revelation the theological interpretation is relegated to the margins.⁴ My conviction is that a motif study in Revelation cannot be considered complete, particularly if a motif as major as that of the throne is in view, until its contribution to the theology of the book is evaluated.

In the discussions of Revelation’s theology Caird’s warning is often forgotten that the book ‘is not a handbook of systematic theology’.⁵ As a result the theological thinking is often framed by the categories of systematic theology.⁶ Most often attention is given to the doctrine of God, Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, judgment and eschatology as expounded in the statements and images of Revelation. The problem with this approach is rightly identified by Kempson, who points out that this way the ‘theology is given a patchwork treatment without sufficient attention to allowing the work itself to suggest the theological categories which are central’.⁷ For this reason, a theological discussion needs to take into consideration that Revelation was intended as a prophetic/pastoral response to a particular situation, rather than a theological treatise. Boring points out that two inseparable questions are basic for understanding

¹ See e.g. Bauckham, *Theology*, 22; Michaels, *Revelation*, 32.

² Maier, *Offenbarung 1–11*, 39.

³ Bauckham’s land-mark monograph (*The Theology of the Book of Revelation*) still remains the only full-scale treatment of the topic. Unfortunately, in numerous New Testament theologies Revelation is marginalized to an undeserved brief treatment. The reason for treating Revelation as irrelevant for theological thinking probably lies in the fact that the method and conceptuality of the book’s theology differs from the theological thought of the rest of the New Testament. Also its history of interpretation evoking all kinds of speculation might be considered an additional reason.

⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza (*Vision of a Just World*, 1) notes: ‘If addressed at all, theological issues appear in the form of an excursus on theological themes and motifs that either interrupt the historical commentary on the text or else they emerge in discrete references to or subtle correlations with present-day questions and situations.’

⁵ Caird, *Revelation*, 289.

⁶ See e.g. Swete, *Revelation*, cliv-clxix; Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 310-17; Charles, *Revelation*, I, cix-cxvii; Caird, *Revelation*, 289-301; Knight, *Revelation*, 156-68; Osborne, *Revelation*, 31-49; Maier, *Offenbarung 1–11*, 39-52.

⁷ Kempson, ‘Theology’, 145.

of the book's message: the question of God ('Who, if anyone, rules in this world?') and the question of history ('What, if any, is the meaning of the tragic events which comprise our history?').⁸ These interests are not only fundamental for the theological concern of John, but they 'indicate two very broad ways in which Revelation stands in the tradition of Jewish apocalyptic literature'.⁹ The theological discussion in this chapter, with attention on the role and contribution of the throne motif, will be organized around these two questions which will be elaborated in the categories and concepts suggested by the text itself.

1. THE THRONE AND THE QUESTION OF GOD

It is a generally shared opinion that the theology of Revelation is of a strongly theocentric character. Holtz rightly notes that 'die Offenbarung des Johannes ist ein Buch, in dessen Zentrum, von dem her es gänzlich beherrscht wird, Gott steht'.¹⁰ Similarly, Bauckham has convincingly argued that because 'the book is the product of a highly reflective consciousness of God ... any account of its theology must give priority, as it does, to its distinct ways of speaking of the divine'.¹¹ While it has often been pointed out that the primary theology of Revelation is its eschatology,¹² it is more appropriate to view the different aspects of the question of history as subordinated to the book's distinctive doctrine of God,¹³ which is without exaggeration held by Bauckham as the book's greatest contribution to New Testament theology.¹⁴

Tenney demonstrates that Revelation's theistic teaching has three major aspects: (1) the sovereignty of God; (2) the justice of God; and (3) the grace of God.¹⁵ Our discussion of the

⁸ Boring, 'Theology', 257. Similarly, George R. Beasley-Murray ('Book of Revelation' in *DLNT*, 1025-38[1035]) notes: 'The whole book of Revelation is rooted in its portrayal of God Almighty as the Lord of history and his redemptive activity in Christ.'

⁹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 7.

¹⁰ Traugott Holtz, 'Gott in der Apokalypse' in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, 247-65.

¹¹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 24.

¹² Charles, *Revelation*, I, cix; Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 46; George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, rev. edn, 1994), 669-70.

¹³ Similarly Tenney ('Theism', 187) holds that 'the character and intentions of God are more important than the events themselves' (cf. Kobus de Smidt, 'A Meta-Theology ó θεός in Revelation 1:1-2', *Neot* 38 [2004], 183-208).

¹⁴ Bauckham, *Theology*, 23. He would surely agree with Beckwith (*Apocalypse*, 321), who holds: 'The difference between the Apocalyptic and the other New Testament writers lies not in an essential difference of view regarding God, but in the emphasis which the very nature of his book causes him to lay on certain aspects of the divine character.'

¹⁵ Tenney, 'Theism', 185-92. Henry J. Wicks (*The Doctrine of God in the Jewish Apocryphal and Apocalyptic Literature* [London: Hunter & Longhurst, 1915]) in his in-depth study of the doctrine of God in Jewish literature notes the same three aspects, but with a slight terminological difference: he uses the expression 'transcendence of God' instead of 'sovereignty'.

throne motif's contribution to Revelation's question of God will be organized around these three categories.

1.1. SOVEREIGN KINGSHIP

The primary aspect of Revelation's theism is God's sovereign kingship.¹⁶ The framework of the book is built around this theological idea from the standpoint of God's transcendence over the world.¹⁷ This feature is in line with the outlook of virtually all Jewish and Christian apocalypses which depict the precedence of transcendent reality over earthly powers and affairs. The importance of the concept for the theology of Revelation is well noted by Minear: 'The image of the king is without doubt central to the repertoire of prophetic symbols and a key to the way in which John's mind worked. If this image is misinterpreted, the message of the visions will be distorted. This is not an isolated metaphor but a master-image, since in it a whole congeries of symbols is subtly woven together to produce a complex pattern.'¹⁸

It has been already observed in this dissertation that the rhetoric of the Old Testament is permeated with the concept of Yahweh's sovereign kingship.¹⁹ However, viewed in the context of biblical canon, this theological concept has a far broader significance: as demonstrated by Eichrodt, it binds the Old and New Testaments together.²⁰ Köhler maintains that 'God is the ruling Lord: that is the one fundamental statement in the theology of the Old Testament. ... Everything else derives from it. Everything else leans upon it. Everything else can be understood with reference to it and only it.'²¹ While the elaboration of the relevance of this idea generally

¹⁶ D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo (*An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2nd edn, 2005], 721) note that Revelation 'conveys a sense of the sovereignty of God that no other New Testament book approaches'. Similarly R.J. McKelvey (*The Millennium and the Book of Revelation* [Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1999], 56) states concerning the vision of God in Rev. 4 that 'it would be difficult to find a stronger statement of the divine sovereignty'.

¹⁷ Du Rand, 'Transcendent God-View', 557-73.

¹⁸ Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 228. There have been appeals for rethinking the imagery of Almighty Ruler-God. For example, Gordon Kaufman ('Nuclear Eschatology and the Study of Religion', *JAAR* 51 [1983], 3-14[13]) has called to 'enter into the most radical deconstruction and reconstruction' of this imagery, central to the biblical portrayal of God and Christ. He argues that in the face of the nuclear disaster the traditional imagery of God tends to foster militarism and escapism rather than a sense of responsibility for the fate of the earth. Similarly, in feminist theological circles the idea of a patriarchal God and an all-powerful heavenly Lord has been criticized as legitimizing patriarchal dominion on earth. As a representative work with this approach, see Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (LCBI; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1992). As is evident from the above comment of Minear, any reconstruction of this 'master image' would significantly distort the book's message.

¹⁹ See section ch. 1 sec. 3.1.

²⁰ Eichrodt, *Theology*, II, 26.

²¹ Ludwig Köhler, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. A.S. Todd; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1957), 30.

for the New Testament is beyond the scope of this study, it is sufficient to note for the purpose of our research that Köhler's description is entirely applicable to Revelation, since no New Testament writing demonstrates a higher degree of continuity with this Old Testament perspective on God.²² I will group evidence here into distinct categories in an attempt to demonstrate that the concept of God's sovereign kingship implied in the diverse theological expressions of Revelation are mutually complementary within the shifting pattern of John's language and imagery.

First, the climactic statement of the book's prologue already incorporates three of the most important divine titles of the book (1:8):²³ 'the Alpha and the Omega' (τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ),²⁴ 'the Lord God Almighty' (κύριος ὁ θεός ... ὁ παντοκράτωρ)²⁵ and 'the One who is and who was and who is to come' (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος).²⁶ The fusion of these divine titles within a single verse appears as a concentrated theological expression. The structural location of the text is strategic: the titles appear within the prologue of Revelation, but more significantly, they are part of the first out of the two speeches of God in the book.²⁷ The choice of the literary location of the combination of these divine titles clearly enhances the significance of the text's theology. As Holtz notes, these titles 'artikulieren die Wirklichkeit Gottes, die Wessen und Zeit umgreift'.²⁸ Thus, God's ontological difference and his unrivalled supremacy over the whole of creation are emphatically highlighted.²⁹ Besides God's self-declarations in 1:8 and the ninety-six θεός references of the book the list of the divine titles implying sovereignty includes constructions that rarely or never appear in the New Testament: 'the King of the

²² Revelation's doctrine of God has often been viewed as thoroughly Jewish in character. However, the high degree of continuity with the Old Testament does not rule out Christian features. For a discussion, see e.g. Hurtado, 'Revelation 4-5', 105-24. Charles (*Revelation*, I, cix-cx) rightly notes in regard to the misapprehension of the question: 'The Christian elements are not dwelt upon because they can all be inferred from what the Book teaches regarding the Son; for all that the Son has and is derived from the Father.' Thus, Revelation's concept of Father is complemented by the book's Christology.

²³ These divine titles appear numerous times in different variants throughout the book. For their detailed elaboration and theological significance, see Anton Vögtle, 'Der Gott der Apokalypse' in *La notion biblique de Dieu: Le Dieu de al Bible et le Dieu des philosophes*, ed. J. Coppens (BETL, 41; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1976), 377-98; Bauckham, *Theology*, 25-30.

²⁴ Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13. The phrases ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος (21:6; 22:13) and ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος (1:17; 22:13) are probably equivalent expressions. The τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ and ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος is applied simultaneously to God and to Christ, while ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος forms part of the glorified Christ's self-declaration.

²⁵ Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22. A shorter form ὁ θεός ... ὁ παντοκράτωρ is used in 16:14; 19:15.

²⁶ This designation appears five times with variation: in its full (1:4, 8; 4:8) and shorter (11:17; 16:5) form.

²⁷ On a fuller significance of God's speaking in Rev. 4, see ch. 4 sec. 3.2.1.

²⁸ Holtz, 'Gott in der Apokalypse', 248.

²⁹ Kim, 'Revelation 4-5', 109-10.

Nations’/‘Ages’ (ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν/αἰώνων – depending on textual variant; 15:3),³⁰ ‘the Lord Holy and True’ (ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός; 6:10), ‘the Lord of the Earth’ (ὁ κύριος τῆς γῆς; 11:4). Still, the title indicating most emphatically how decisive God’s sovereignty is for the theological perspective of Revelation is ‘the One sitting on the throne’ (ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος), which has been already discussed extensively.³¹ Newman’s conclusion concerning the use of these divine titles clearly points to their significance for the book’s theology: ‘The unique ways in which Revelation refers to God corresponds to the singular importance of Revelation’s message.’³²

Second, the repeated use of the word-group βασιλεύς (twenty-one times), βασίλισσα (once), βασιλεία (nine times) and βασιλεύω (seven times) underscores Revelation’s worldview as God’s kingly rule.³³ The use of the word-group permeates the entire book, since it occurs in fifteen out of the twenty-two chapters. The complexity of this use is reflected in its antithetical nature, since the word-group is applied besides God’s sovereign kingship and his delegated rule to his allies and also to the dominion of the quasi-sovereignities.

Third, the creatively employed treasury of Revelation’s symbolism serves as a further indication of God’s rule. As the thesis of this dissertation suggests, the book’s dominant symbol of authority is the throne. However, the motif is not the sole indicator of the concept. As Minear argues,³⁴ the author of Revelation employs additional symbolism for connoting the work of ruling, such as sword,³⁵ crown,³⁶ robes,³⁷ keys,³⁸ rod,³⁹ horns⁴⁰ and heads.⁴¹ Abir mentions also

³⁰ Metzger (*Textual Commentary*, 679-80) notes that ‘the weight of external evidence supporting the reading ἐθνῶν (ⲛ^a A P 046 051 most minuscules it^{g,h} cop^{bo} arm eth Cyprian *al*) is nearly the same as that supporting αἰώνων (Ⲫ⁴⁷ⲛ^{*c} C 94 469 1006 1611 1841 2040 2065 2073^{mg} 2076 2254 2258 2344^{vid} 2432 it⁶¹ vg syr^{ph,h} cop^{sa} *al*).’ However, the former reading seems more acceptable, since the αἰώνων might have been introduced by a copyist who recollected 1Tim. 1:17 and the reading ἐθνῶν is more in accord with the context.

³¹ See ch. 4 sec. 2.

³² Carey C. Newman, ‘God’ in *DLNT*, 412-31(426).

³³ The discussions of God’s sovereignty in Revelation often ignore, ironically, this basic piece of evidence. Minear (*I Saw a New Heaven*, 228) rightly notes its importance; however, his statistical data on the occurrence of the individual words is incorrect. My evaluation reveals the following list of references: (1) βασιλεύς – 1:5; 6:15; 9:11; 10:11; 15:3; 16:12, 14; 17:2, 9, 12(2x), 14(2x), 18; 18:3, 9; 19:16(2x), 18, 19; 21:24; (2) βασίλισσα – 18:7; (3) βασιλεία – 1:6, 9; 5:10; 11:15; 12:10; 16:10; 17:12, 17, 18; (4) βασιλεύω – 5:10; 11:15, 17; 19:6; 20:4, 6; 22:5.

³⁴ Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 228.

³⁵ Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 6:8; 19:15, 21.

³⁶ Rev. 2:10; 3:11; 4:4, 10; 6:2; 9:7; 12:1, 3; 13:1; 14:14; 19:12.

³⁷ Rev. 3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 16:15; 19:13, 16.

³⁸ Rev. 1:18; 3:7; 9:1; 20:1.

³⁹ Rev. 2:27; 11:1; 12:5; 19:15; 21:15, 16.

⁴⁰ Rev. 5:6; 9:13; 12:3; 13:1, 11; 17:3, 7, 12, 16.

⁴¹ Rev. 12:3; 13:1, 3; 17:3, 7, 9.

the imagery of the sickle as a symbol of authority.⁴² Similar to the use of the throne motif, some of these symbols are not only related to God, but also to Christ, his allies and adversaries. It seems that while the throne functions as the key motif of God's sovereign kingship, the other symbols of authority appear in a supplementary role. Such complex composition effects an allusive richness in highlighting the book's central theme.

Fourth, the idea of sovereignty is suggested also in Revelation's repeated use of the divine passive. This grammatical expression appears twenty-three times in the book, particularly clustered in the sections of the four horsemen (6:1-8) and the reign of the beast (13:1-18).⁴³ It functions as a clause of divine authorization, 'a circumlocution for the direct mention of God as subject of the action of the verb'.⁴⁴ Many grammars assume that its use was due to the Jewish aversion to using the divine name.⁴⁵ The employment of the divine passive does not by itself indicate positive or negative aspects of the enablement, but draws attention to the divine authority which is in the control of the events. Aune aptly concludes of the theological perspective conveyed by the use of the divine passive in Revelation: 'John does not see the conflict between God and Satan (historically manifested in the conflict between Christians and the state) in terms of a cosmic dualism; rather, he emphasizes the ultimate sovereignty and control of God over events that occur in the world.'⁴⁶

Fifth, the centrality of God's unrivalled status is also stressed by the repeated presence of the worship motif.⁴⁷ The hymnic passages are of particular significance here, since the acknowledging of the divine sovereignty is present in them in at least two ways: (1) by the act of giving homage in prostration (ἔπεσον);⁴⁸ and (2) through expressions of adoration such as δόξα,⁴⁹ τιμή,⁵⁰ εὐχαριστία,⁵¹ δύναμις,⁵² ἰσχύς,⁵³ εὐλογία⁵⁴ and κράτος⁵⁵ which are repeatedly used in the

⁴² Abir, *Cosmic Conflict*, 186-88. Rev. 14:14, 15, 16, 17, 18(2x), 19.

⁴³ Two forms of the divine passive are present in Revelation: the more frequent ἐδόθη (6:2, 4[2x], 8, 11; 7:2; 8:3; 9:1, 3, 5; 11:1, 2; 13:5[2x], 7[2x], 14, 15; 16:8; 19:8; 20:4) and the third plural ἐδόθησαν (8:2; 12:14).

⁴⁴ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 743.

⁴⁵ BDF, 72 (§130.1); Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples* (Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 114; Rome: [s. n.], 1963), 76(§236); Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (trans. John Bowden; New York: Scribner's, 1971), 9-14; Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1994), 135-36; Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 437.

⁴⁶ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 743.

⁴⁷ προσκυνέω appears twenty-four times in Revelation: 3:9; 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 9:20; 11:1, 16; 13:4(2x), 8, 12, 15; 14:7, 9, 11; 19:4; 15:4; 16:2; 19:10(2x), 20; 20:4; 22:8, 9.

⁴⁸ Rev. 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4. The term is used also twice in first person singular aorist (ἔπεσα) designating John's misdirected worship of the *angelus interpres* (19:10; 22:8).

⁴⁹ Rev. 4:9, 11; 5:12, 13; 7:12; 19:1, 7.

⁵⁰ Rev. 4:9, 11; 5:12, 13; 7:12.

texts of Revelation's hymns, but also elsewhere in the book. These expressions presuppose God's heavenly throne which is either explicitly mentioned or implied as the location before which the prostration is rendered and towards which the adoration is directed.

Sixth, God's supreme authority is most effectively stressed by the visual symbolism of the book. The most significant visionary material in this respect is the throne-room vision of chs. 4–5, which is pivotal for the entire book.⁵⁶ In this highly significant section the focus of attention is directed to the throne motif which appears as a theological key-note for the entire work. The statistical data clearly indicates the centrality of the heavenly throne and its occupant, since the term *θρόνος* appears nineteen times in the vision. As has been pointed out in our exegetical analysis, no strong evidence supports a sharp dichotomy between the throne and its occupant in the vision, since the two expressions appear as complementary aspects of the same motif, which is 'the key to God's sovereign activity in Revelation'.⁵⁷

Significantly, anthropomorphic expressions are avoided in the vision.⁵⁸ The intention might lie in indicating the incomparability of God's sovereignty.⁵⁹ The repeated reference to *θρόνος* as the object of rule, rather than the ruler itself, appears as an expression of transcendence. While throughout Revelation there is a dichotomy between heavenly and earthly reality concerning the acknowledging of this authority, Osborne is right in arguing that the sovereignty of God unifies in one sense the worship, joy, peace and triumph typified by the heavenly scenes with the earthly scenes of troubles, chaos, apostasy and judgment.⁶⁰ The drama of Revelation centres on the issue of throne conflict, the challenge of God's sovereignty on earth;

⁵¹ Rev. 4:9; 7:12.

⁵² Rev. 4:11; 5:12; 7:12; 11:17; 12:10; 19:1.

⁵³ Rev. 5:12; 7:12.

⁵⁴ Rev. 5:12, 13; 7:12.

⁵⁵ Rev. 5:13.

⁵⁶ See ch. 4 sec. 1.

⁵⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, 33. See ch. 4 sec. 1.3.2.

⁵⁸ As Swete (*Apocalypse*, 67) notes: 'The description rigorously shuns anthropomorphic details.'

⁵⁹ Bauckham (*Theology*, 44) notes: 'Like most apocalyptic visions of the divine throne, John's does not dwell on the visible form of the One who sits on the throne. All that is said of God's appearance is that it was like precious stones (4:3): this was one of the traditional ways of evoking the splendour of a heavenly figure. The unknowable transcendence of God is protected by focusing instead on the throne itself and what goes on around it.' In contrast, Caird (*Revelation*, 290) suggests that the reason for restraint lies in the Christology of Revelation and the seeing of God face to face is reserved for the eternal city (22:4). For a critique of Caird's view, see Francesca A. Murphy, 'Revelation ("The Apocalypse of Saint John the Divine")' in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker; London: SPCK, 2008), 233-47(245).

⁶⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, 33-34. On the close relationship between heaven and earth in Revelation, see Paul S. Minear, 'The Cosmology of the Apocalypse' in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper*, eds. William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder (London: SCM, 1962), 23-37.

however, the book's story-line indicates a progression towards the realization of God's kingly rule on the earth. The throne-room vision demonstrates that God's sovereignty is perceived as it is already fully acknowledged in heaven, while until the end of the book it will also prevail on earth. In this sense Bauckham correctly observes that the New Testament's last book as a whole could be regarded as the fulfilment of the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:9-10).⁶¹

While the throne motif conveys primarily the idea of God's royal authority and unrivalled power in Revelation, it balances at the same time emphasis on divine transcendence with an immanent aspect. On the basis of the high Christology of the book it is possible to speak of the convergence of God and the Christ-figure Lamb. Williamson observes that the convergence happens in most instances in a throne setting.⁶² This indicates that the Lamb's role in Revelation highlights a specific aspect of God's kingly rule. It reveals that God is related to the world not only as a transcendent sovereign king, but also as a Lamb, slaughtered for the redemption of fallen humanity. Bauckham rightly notes of Revelation's picture of God that if he 'is not present in the world as "the One who sits on the throne", he is present as the Lamb who conquers by suffering'.⁶³ Clearly, the victory of Christ over Satan provides an essential definition of the kind of power by which God establishes his sovereignty. As concluded by Minear, 'This definition had determined the character both of that kingdom where all holy men joined God and Christ on their thrones and of that rival kingdom which could be traced back to the primeval sin of Adam and forward to the death of Death.'⁶⁴ Thus, it is appropriate to agree with the suggestion of Charles that for the sake of a complete picture Revelation's concept of Father must be complemented by that of the Son.⁶⁵

The intimate relation of the book's two key figures does not pose a challenge to the monotheistic perspective of the book's theology, but rather it reflects sharing in divine nature. Evidently, the author of Revelation 'places Christ on the divine side of the distinction between God and creation', but at the same time he is careful 'to avoid ways of speaking which sound to him polytheistic'.⁶⁶ The notion of Christ's glory in Revelation is developed through his attributes, self-declarations, functions and grammatical expressions, but it reaches a climax by

⁶¹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 40.

⁶² Williamson, 'Thrones', 173.

⁶³ Bauckham, *Theology*, 64.

⁶⁴ Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 233-34.

⁶⁵ Charles, *Revelation*, I, cix-cx.

⁶⁶ Bauckham, *Theology*, 61.

placing him in the midst of God's throne so that he receives the same amount of worship as God (5:8-14; 11:15; 22:3-4).⁶⁷ The relation of Revelation's monotheism and Christology is carefully thought through and their meeting in the throne motif indicates that absolute sovereignty is shared between the God Almighty and the enthroned Christ.

It was demonstrated in the analysis of the macrodynamic of the throne motif's development that our motif pervades the entire book and is featured at strategic locations in the macrostructure.⁶⁸ The idea of sovereign kingship is automatically evoked by any reference to the throne either in the form of an affirmation or a challenge posed to it. In the course of the cosmic drama the challenges to God's kingly rule are dealt with and in the concluding scene of the book's final major vision the divine sovereignty is affirmed as universally realized in the context of the new creation. The picture of what ought to be reality, expressed in chs. 4–5, becomes universally realized at the end and the joint throne of God and the Lamb is universally acknowledged as the absolute centre of the created order throughout eternity.

Guthrie notes that 'true sovereignty would be unintelligible apart from some provision for the accountability of the subjects to the King'.⁶⁹ The concept of kingship is therefore closely allied to that of justice and judgment. Since these concepts are among the most significant aspects of Revelation's theology, they will be examined in the following section in relation to the throne motif.

1.2. JUSTICE AND JUDGMENT

Revelation has been a fruitful source of theological thinking about the theme of justice. It has been of significant attraction to the liberation theologians, who have found in this book a major support for their theological agenda.⁷⁰ The theme also raised the interest of New Testament scholars,⁷¹ mainly because of the ethical questions related to violence and vengeance.⁷² The

⁶⁷ For a systematic argumentation, see Boring, 'Voice of Jesus', 355-56.

⁶⁸ See section ch. 8 sec. 3.2.

⁶⁹ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1981), 87.

⁷⁰ For representative studies, see Tina Pippin, 'Political Reality and the Liberating Vision' (PhD Dissertation; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987); Burchel K. Taylor, 'An Examination of the Book of Revelation from a Liberation Theology Perspective' (PhD Dissertation; University of Leeds, 1990); Richard Pablo, *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Bible and Liberation Series; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995); Idem., 'Reading the Apocalypse: Resistance, Hope, and Liberation in Central America' in *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective*, ed. David Rhoades (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2005), 146-64.

⁷¹ The concern for the topic is reflected even in the titles of some works such as Schüssler Fiorenza's *Justice and Judgment* and *Vision of a Just World*. While the book-by-book New Testament theologies often choose to not put

prominence of the judgment theme in the theology of Revelation has often been pointed out. Hanson in his work on the concept of divine wrath concludes that judgment is more central in Revelation than in the other books of the New Testament.⁷³ Similarly, Schüssler Fiorenza observes that ‘the description of God’s judgment takes up such a large space in Rev. that its whole eschatological presentation culminates in judgment and salvation’.⁷⁴ Going a step beyond Hanson, she argues that the issue of justice is ‘the central quest of Revelation in theological terms’.⁷⁵ Bauckham offers a more balanced viewpoint in response to Schüssler Fiorenza’s overstatement. He persuasively argues that the central concern of Revelation is ‘the desire for a just world’ rather than ‘the desire for justice in an unjust world’.⁷⁶ This conclusion indicates that the book’s theology of justice points towards the new creation as the perfect realization of God’s just kingly rule. While the throne is central in the context of new creation (22:1-5), I suggest that the role of the motif is no less significant in the other sections in which the book’s justice theology is grounded. It has been demonstrated in this dissertation that in the Old Testament one of the basic theological meanings of the throne is related to God’s judgeship.⁷⁷ I suggest that in accordance with this background, Revelation’s throne motif functions as the leading symbol in the book’s judgment theology strongly typifying God’s justice.

The notion of divine justice is rooted primarily in God’s character. The reality of his holiness requires a response in fear, giving him glory and worship (14:7). Since justice is ‘inherent in the divine government of the world’,⁷⁸ violation of the cosmic order necessitates a just response. Such a divine reaction is rooted on one hand in the need to vindicate God’s

the topic in the centre of attention but instead discuss it under separate title (e.g. Ladd, *Theology*, 676-78; Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academic Books, 1986], 292-97), they do not avoid the basic aspects of the theme, examining them in relation to other major issues.

⁷² Much of the material in Revelation appears to be violent and vengeful. In fact, Gerd Lüdemann (*The Unholy in Holy Scriptures: The Dark Side of the Bible* [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1997], 36-54) calls this the ‘dark side of the Bible’. For the debate on the violence in Revelation and some possible answers to the ethical aspect of the questions, see the comprehensive surveys in Joel N. Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse* (AUSDDS, 17; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1993), 20-34; Rebecca Skaggs and Thomas Doyle, ‘Violence in the Apocalypse of John’, *CBR* 5 (2007), 220-34. Schüssler Fiorenza (*Justice and Judgment*, 8) rightly concludes that to ‘misread’ the imagery and visions of the book ‘as hate for civilization or as resentment and revenge is a serious misunderstanding of the visionary rhetoric and theology of justice in Revelation’.

⁷³ Anthony T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: SPCK, 1957), 159.

⁷⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 47.

⁷⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 64.

⁷⁶ Richard Bauckham, ‘Judgment in the Book of Revelation’, *ExAud* 20 (2004), 1-24(1).

⁷⁷ See ch. 1 sec. 3.2.

⁷⁸ Tenney, ‘Theism’, 188.

character against the powers of evil which contest his kingly rule, and on the other in the protection of the cosmic order based on values defined by the divine character.⁷⁹ As Tenney notes, ‘Were there no judgment for sin there could be no reason for order in the universe.’⁸⁰ Therefore, divine judgment should not be interpreted in terms of retributive revenge, but rather as God’s protective reaction. For this reason he is throughout the book praised for ‘true and just’ judgments (ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ; 16:5-7; 18:20; 19:2; cf. also 15:3) which correspond to the moral order based on God’s character. Bauckham rightly concludes that ‘the way John portrays judgment is as far as possible from the image of a human despot wielding arbitrary power’.⁸¹

Revelation’s judicial terminology is concentrated entirely in the second half of the book.⁸² This observation is, however, misleading regarding the development of the judgment theme which permeates the entire work. As the other key themes of Revelation, judgment has already appeared in the prologue in which, within the book’s motto statement, it is asserted concerning Christ that ‘all the people of the earth will mourn because of him’ (1:7).⁸³ In the Seven Messages five of the seven churches receive words of admonition to repent. In conjunction with these warnings, promises of judgment are announced should the call go unheeded.⁸⁴ While in chs. 2–3 the subjects of God’s judgment are the churches, the primary focus of the theme in the book is on the unrepentant people and the diabolic forces (chs. 6–20). The judgment theme is strongly developed in the three heptad of judgments, all issued from the heavenly throne-room: the breaking of the Seven Seals (6:1-17; 8:1), the sounding of Seven Trumpets (8:6–9:21; 11:15-18) and the outpouring of the Seven Bowls of wrath (16:1-21). A clear progression can be noticed in the severity of the three judgment septet: the cycle of seals affect a quarter of the earth (6:8), the trumpets a third (8:7-12; 9:18), while the effect of the bowls is unlimited (15:1). The progression suggests that the first two cycles function as warning

⁷⁹ Yarbro Collins (*Crisis and Catharsis*, 123) demonstrates that the reasons for judgment in Revelation ‘are clearly presented and unlikely to evoke sympathy or pathos’. She mentions (1) idolatrous and blasphemous worship; (2) violence; (3) blasphemous self-glorification; and (4) wealth.

⁸⁰ Tenney, ‘Theism’, 189.

⁸¹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 42-43.

⁸² The noun κρίμα or its cognate forms occur seven times in Revelation (14:7; 16:7; 17:1; 18:10, 20; 19:2; 20:4), while the verbal form κρίνω in nine instances (6:10; 11:18; 18:8, 20; 19:11; 16:5; 19:2; 20:12, 13). For the meaning of these terms in Revelation and their Old Testament background, see Musvosvi, *Vengeance*, 221-28.

⁸³ Grant R. Osborne, ‘Theodicy in the Apocalypse’, *TJ* 14 (1993), 63-77(66).

⁸⁴ For the warning passages see: 2:4-5, 14-16, 20-23; 3:1-3, 15-19. The exceptions are the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia.

judgments issued with the purpose of awakening people to repent (9:20-21; 16:9),⁸⁵ while the last series appears as the final retribution (15:1).⁸⁶ The role of the Cosmic Conflict vision (12:1–14:20) is also significant to note for the development of the theme which is located between the second and the third judgment septets. Namely, in 14:7 the coming of the hour of God’s judgment is proclaimed, while in 14:8-11 it is announced that Babylon ‘has lost its lawsuit’.⁸⁷ At the end of the vision the outcome of history is depicted in two well-established judgment images of consummation, harvest and vintage (14:14-20), which reflect the choices made by the people.⁸⁸ Central to this *parousia* scene is the appearance of the Son of Man figure, who is invested with the insignia of royal and judging authority: enthroned on a cloud-throne, wearing a golden crown and holding a sickle in his hand.⁸⁹ In the chapters following the bowl septet the primary focus of attention is on eschatological judgment: a detailed description of the fall of Babylon is given (17:1–18:24), the notion of judgment is further elaborated (19:11-21) and, finally, the millennial judgment is initiated (20:1-15). The prominence of the theme of judgment in the second part of the book is already anticipated in 11:18, which points to the arrival of the *καρπός* of the judgment of the dead, the time of the destruction of those who destroyed the earth. Bauckham rightly notes: ‘The judgments of chapters 16–19 are primarily aimed at destroying the *systems* – political, economic and religious – which oppose God and his righteousness and which are symbolized by the beast, the false prophet, Babylon, and the kings of the earth.’⁹⁰ In line with the rest of the New Testament, the last book of the canon ‘shares the conviction that God’s

⁸⁵ The only account of repentance is recorded in 11:13, which is a response statement of the earth-dwellers to the events narrated in the interlude between the sixth and the seventh trumpets (10:1–11:14). There is a great difference of opinion as to whether this repentance is genuine or forced homage of the defeated. For a comprehensive review of the debate, see Osborne’s (*Revelation*, 433-35) discussion where Swete, Beckwith, R. Charles, Lohse, Caird, Beasley-Murray, Prigent, Sweet, Giblin, Schüssler Fiorenza, Chilton, Krodel, Roloff, Thomas and Holwerda are named as proponents of true repentance contra Hendriksen, Kiddle, Mounce, Beale and Giesen.

⁸⁶ In contrast, it has been argued that the bowls are not only verbally and thematically, but also temporally parallel to the trumpets (e.g. Beale, *Revelation*, 808-12). This position, however, discounts the theological value of the vision’s ‘summary statement’ in 15:1, which states in reference to the bowl plagues that ‘for in them the wrath of God is completed’ (ὅτι ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ). The aorist ἐτελέσθη is a divine passive which indicates the last lawsuit in human history and the eschatological manifestation of the wrath of God in its fullness – as different from the partial effect of the trumpet plagues (e.g. Ladd, *Revelation*, 209; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 342; Osborne, *Revelation*, 561).

⁸⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 7.

⁸⁸ E.g. Isa. 63:1-4; Mt. 13:39-42; Mk 4:20; *4Ezra* 4:28-32; *2Bar.* 70:2.

⁸⁹ Revelation’s picture of Christ as judge is in harmony with the Christology of the rest of the New Testament. As Abir (*Cosmic Conflict*, 183-83) notes, ‘The judgement in Apocalypse is just as Christocentric as is salvation. Because he shares the throne with God, Christ has power to bring down all the created dominions as well as to judge the living and the dead.’ For the judging authority of Christ in Revelation, see John A. Bollier, ‘Judgement in Apocalypse’, *Int* 7 (1953), 14-25.

⁹⁰ Bauckham, *Theology*, 102.

justice is not fully achieved within history but must be finally and definitively enacted for every human individual at the last judgment'.⁹¹ Therefore, human history concludes in a final judgment scene in front of the 'great white throne and the One sitting on it' (20:11). The domination of the throne imagery in the scene of 20:11-15 indicates the conclusiveness of the judgment, which is further stressed by the apocalyptic statement that 'earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them' (20:11). Thus, the climax of the judgment theme is reached in the narrative turn from the old age to the new creation. It has been noted by Beasley-Murray of the general impression of the final scene of human history: 'As in the last day heaven and earth flee away to leave the throne of God as the only reality for mankind to see, so now it fills John's vision as he steps away from earth into heaven.'⁹²

The theological aspects of Revelation's judgment theme have been examined by Pollard. He suggests that on a theological level the theme fulfils four important functions: (1) correlation with the Hebrew notion of truth; (2) retributive or applied justice; (3) vindication; and (4) redemption.⁹³ While Pollard's approach is conceptually convincing, I would like to take the discussion further here suggesting a more precise terminology, developing some of his insights and completely revising the second aspect.

The first aspect of Revelation's judgment theology is that of disclosing. In three texts the attributes 'just' (δικαίαι) and 'true' (ἀληθινά) are juxtaposed as qualifying God's judgments (16:7; 19:2) and his ways (15:3). The repeated connection emphasizes the close relation of God's justice with the disclosure of the truth. In a book where the motif of deception is of a particular prominence,⁹⁴ disclosing the truth about the counterfeit strategies of the diabolic forces is of a decisive significance. This divine activity is based on God's 'reliability' or 'trustworthiness', which signifies according to Bultmann the basic meaning of ἀλήθεια in early Christian usage.⁹⁵ Bauckham rightly concludes that 'God's judgments are true in that they correspond to reality. They establish truth, sweeping away the lies and illusions in which evil cloaks itself. Thus, the

⁹¹ Bauckham, 'Judgment', 17.

⁹² Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 112.

⁹³ Pollard, 'Loipos', 170-74.

⁹⁴ For the motif of deception in Revelation, see ch. 7 sec. 2.3.1.

⁹⁵ Gottfried Quell, Gerhard Kittel and Rudolph Bultmann, 'ἀλήθεια' in *TDNT*, I, 232-51(242). ἀληθινός as an attribute is connected solely to God and Christ in Revelation. God himself (6:10) and Christ (3:7, 14; 19:11) are true, but true are also God's way (15:3), his judgments (19:2; 16:7) and his words (19:9; 21:5; 22:6).

themes of judgment and justice are closely connected with another central set of themes in Revelation: truth and deceit.⁹⁶

Second, the purposive aspect of Revelation's judgment theology concerns the need for evaluating the meaning of God's judgments in light of his plan. The ultimate purpose of God for earthly reality is the new creation. The divine involvement in history is marked by a set of events building progressively towards the climactic goal of 're-establishing the sovereignty of God'.⁹⁷ The realization of this plan necessitates the condemnation of the rebellion on earth and the destruction of the diabolic powers that contest God's kingship.⁹⁸ As Bauckham notes, 'Babylon must fall if the new Jerusalem is to come.'⁹⁹ In this sense the function of judgment is not retributive, but it is rather the consequence of the individual choice of people which results in the involvement of God's hand as he works towards the universal accomplishment of the purpose summarized in the throne-room vision of chs. 4–5.

Third, the vindictive aspect of judgment focuses on the divine reaction to the persecution and martyrdom of God's people. The key text in this regard is the cry of martyrs for vindication in 6:9-10, a reference that records one of the prayers of God's people in the visionary part of Revelation.¹⁰⁰ This text has received tremendous attention in the discussion of the book's judgment theology¹⁰¹ to the extent that it has been even considered the interpretive key to the entire book.¹⁰² Clearly, behind the cry of the martyrs lies a demand for justice. As has often been noted, the issue is not personal revenge, but rather God's reputation if he ignores the reality of sin.¹⁰³ Since divine integrity lies at the focus of attention here, judgment is to be understood as the protection of the basic values of God's kingly rule, which is related to the vindication of the

⁹⁶ Bauckham, 'Judgment', 1.

⁹⁷ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God's Plan for Life on Earth* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2008), 74.

⁹⁸ Bollier ('Judgement', 15) notes that in this sense judgment is to be understood as 'God's method of finally overcoming the opposition to himself and his Messiah'.

⁹⁹ Bauckham, 'Judgment', 8.

¹⁰⁰ The other two references are 5:8 and 8:3-4. For a discussion on Revelation's teaching on prayer based mainly on these three texts, see Richard Bauckham, 'Prayer in the Book of Revelation' in *Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (McMaster New Testament Studies; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 252-71.

¹⁰¹ See Musvosvi's literature review in *Vengeance*, 20-34.

¹⁰² E.g. John P. Heil, 'The Fifth Seal (Rev. 6,9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation', *Bib* 74 (1993), 220-43.

¹⁰³ Caird (*Revelation*, 85) aptly points to the essence of the problem: 'The point at issue here is not the personal relationship of the martyrs with their accusers, but the validity of their faith. They have gone to their death in the confidence that God's word, attested in the life and death of Jesus, is the ultimate truth; but unless in the end tyranny and other forms of wickedness meet with retribution, that faith is an illusion.' (cf. William Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', *CBQ* 28 [1966], 300-11[304]); Priegent, *Apocalypse*, 275; Beale, *Revelation*, 392).

Christian community (16:5-7). In this sense there is a close connection between Revelation's judgment theology and its ecclesiology, and the judgment passages in the rest of the book are to be understood in terms of the fulfilment of the martyrs' prayer for vindication.¹⁰⁴

Fourth, the redemptive aspect points to the purpose of proclaiming the judgment in Revelation which lies in warning the earth-dwellers to repent and avoid destruction. In this sense the notion of God's judgment is part of his salvific efforts.¹⁰⁵ The clearest expression of this idea is found in the proclamation of the judgment in 14:6-7, where the announcement of the hour of judgment is followed by an invitation to repentance. The option of repentance points to the fairness of divine judgment; however, humanity consistently resists heeding the divine warnings (9:20-21).

Thus far we have seen that Revelation's judgment theme strongly utilizes the throne motif mainly in an eschatological context. God's great white throne (20:11) stands as the symbol of his incontestable authority from which the final verdicts concerning the history of sin are pronounced. The Son of Man figure appears seated on a cloud-throne (14:14) with a sickle in his hand which symbolizes his judging authority manifested in reaping and vintage. The fifth bowl judgment targets the beast's throne and brings darkness onto its kingdom implying the dethronement of the major earthly contender of God's sovereign kingship. Thus, the beast's arrogant attack on God's throne ends in a humiliating judgment. From these scenes it is clear that the throne motif functions within Revelation's justice theology as a leading symbol which points to God's authority behind the judgments.

An additional contribution of the throne motif to Revelation's judgment theology merits our particular attention. The heavenly throne functions on a macrostructural level in a role of linking the three septets of judgments. Namely, the seals, the trumpets and the bowls are closely tied to the vision of God's throne-room (chs. 4–5) as each series is issued from the heavenly temple.¹⁰⁶ This structural feature points to the unique significance of God's heavenly throne in

¹⁰⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 48.

¹⁰⁵ George R. Beasley-Murray, *Highlights of the Book of Revelation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1972), 43-44; Mathias Rissi, *The Future of the World* (SBT 2/23; London: SCM, 1972), 83; Koester, *End of All Things*, 142. For a contrasting view against a salvific or didactic element in Revelation's judgment theme, see Philip J. McCormack, 'The Nature of Judgment in the Book of Revelation' (PhD Dissertation; Queen's University of Belfast, 2001).

¹⁰⁶ Bauckham (*Theology*, 41) notes some connection between the three series of judgments which provides supporting evidence for the above thesis: 'It is the four living creatures who summon the four riders of the first four seal-openings (6:1, 3, 5, 7). The seven trumpets are blown by the seven angels who stand before God in heaven (8:2, 6). Most elaborate is the way the seven last plagues, with which "the wrath of God is ended" (15:1), are portrayed as issuing from the throne-room depicted in chapter 4. The heavenly temple is open (15:5); the angels who are to pour

the course of the development of the book's drama, since it is designated as the ultimate source behind all the judgments. Thus, it is highlighted the true authority in the universe, the one in control over the affairs of history in contrast with the boasting quasi-sovereignities who issue illusory claims.

From the discussion of Revelation's theology so far it is evident that the first two aspects of the book's theism, God's sovereignty and justice/judgment appear as closely related concepts, in which development, as established, the throne motif plays a central role. I now turn to the third aspect, the concept of God's grace which has received much less attention in the study of Revelation's theism.

1.3. GRACE

The theme of God's grace has been often marginalized in the study of Revelation's theology. The gracious aspect of God's character, prominent elsewhere in the New Testament, has even been challenged on the grounds that the love theme is completely absent from the book.¹⁰⁷ However, Charles is right in arguing that to draw conclusions only from the direct statements of Revelation on the subject of theism is a misleading enterprise.¹⁰⁸ This is particularly true concerning the book's concept of God's grace, since *χάρις* occurs only twice in the book: once in the benediction of the prologue (1:4) and again in the benediction of the epilogue (22:21). On the other hand, Revelation's strong emphasis on God's transcendence could be interpreted on account of its apocalyptic genre as intended to bring out the cosmic nature of the conflict.¹⁰⁹

The gracious attributes of God are not explicitly brought forward in the book. They are to be inferred from statements that imply God's immanence. Thus, he is named the Father of Jesus

out the bowls of wrath on the earth come out of it (15:6); and one of the living creatures give them the "bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever" (15:7).' Bauckham also recognizes the significance of the repeated and progressively expanding theophanic phenomena (4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18-21) which, he argues, provide 'a more significant ... literary link between 4:5a and the seventh of each series of judgments'. While he is correct in noting the linking function of the phenomena, it seems that it is more appropriate to view them as related mainly to the introductory temple scenes within the structure of the book. According to our macrostructure of the book 4:5 is part of the temple scene introducing the seal septet, 8:5 of the temple scene introducing the trumpet septet and 11:19 of a temple scene introducing the Cosmic Conflict vision. While these three texts are located within the introductory visions, 16:18-21 appears at the conclusion of the bowl septet. Thus, God's sovereign action, indicated by the phenomena, seems to frame the judgment septets and point to God's throne from which the phenomena emanate in 4:5 and 11:19 (throne-ark) – in 8:5 and 16:18-21 the source of the phenomena is not clearly stated.

¹⁰⁷ Herbert Preisker, *Das Ethos des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1949), 205.

¹⁰⁸ Charles, *Revelation*, I, cix.

¹⁰⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 561.

Christ (1:6; 2:27; 3:5, 21; 14:1) and the Father also of the conquerors (21:7), who appears in 7:10 as ‘our God’. The gracious aspect of his character is revealed in his intent to dwell with his people (21:3) and in the promises that he will wipe away tears from the eyes of the elect similarly to a caring mother (21:3-4) and give them the water of life to drink (21:6). The climactic expression of the closeness of God with the elect is that ‘they will see his face’ (22:3), a statement implying the restoration of the Edenic conditions.¹¹⁰ It has been persuasively argued by Bauckham that God’s closeness to his creation is additionally indicated in the remarkable linguistic and grammatical difference between the description of his judicial and salvific activities in Revelation. Namely, in the judgment accounts there is a reticence about God’s direct involvement which is not the case in the texts describing relation to his people. This feature of the book conveys a message that ‘God is not related in the same way to judgment as he is to salvation’.¹¹¹

Revelation’s concept of grace is rooted primarily in its soteriology, most importantly in the Lamb’s decisive victory won through its sacrifice.¹¹² The significance of the book’s theology of cross is highlighted by the fact that death is the only act of the earthly Jesus mentioned in Revelation.¹¹³ The death of Jesus is not understood by John as victimization, but rather as the clear expression of God’s love and power. This idea is basic to Revelation’s soteriology. It is reflected already in the very first characterization of Jesus in the prologue in which he is introduced as the one ‘who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood’ (τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ; 1:5). The idea is repeated in 5:9: ‘you were slain, and have redeemed men to God by your blood’ (ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου). Du Rand notes that of the typical soteriological terms the

¹¹⁰ See ch. 5 sec. 3.3.2.

¹¹¹ Bauckham’s (‘Judgment’, 4-6) conclusion is based on the following argument: ‘It has not often been noticed that Revelation rarely states unequivocally that it is God who acts when judgments occur. In fact, this occurs only in ascriptions of praise and thanksgiving to God for his acts of judgment (16:5-6; 18:8, 20; 19:2; cf. also 14:7; 16:7). In the actual accounts of the judgments there is a remarkable reticence about exactly how they are related to God. On the one hand, there is no doubt that ... the judgments issue from God’s presence, but, on the other hand, in none of these cases is it directly said that God commands or executes them. For the most part the descriptions of the judgments themselves use the passive voice so that the agent of the events is unstated even where the verb clearly requires that there be an agent ... The book of Revelation distances God from his judgments – both linguistically and actually (by the intermediation of angelic agents) – but not from his acts of salvation. The latter are precisely a matter of God’s unparalleled closeness to his creation.’

¹¹² Wilfrid J. Harrington, ‘Worthy is the Lamb’, *PIBA* 18 (1995), 54-70(54).

¹¹³ Boring argues (‘Theology’, 265) that even nothing from the teaching of Jesus is reflected in Revelation. For a counter-argument, see e.g. the comprehensive treatments of the question by Vos (*Synoptic Traditions*) and Bauckham (*Climax*, 92-117).

word groups σωτηρία (7:10; 12:10; 19:1), ἀγοράζω (5:9; 14:3, 4) and λύω (1:5) are represented in Revelation.¹¹⁴ The examination of their use in the book reveals ‘that God is the initiating *origin* of salvation, Christ the Lamb’s sacrificial death is the *means* through which the identity of the followers is constituted and that the believers are freed *from sin*’.¹¹⁵ Thus, the clearest expression of God’s grace in Revelation comes through the teaching about Christ as in John’s thought ‘all that the Son has and is is derived from the Father’.¹¹⁶ In this sense the book’s Christology enlightens its theism, similarly to the function of the New Testament Christology which provides generally an answer to the question ‘Who is God?’ besides the answer to the question ‘Who is Jesus?’.¹¹⁷

The theology of grace underlies John’s understanding of God’s dealing with the world. As Tenney notes, ‘The intervention of God in providing salvation and the option of the offer of repentance are the proofs of the grace that is more potent than the law that death is the necessary consequence of sin.’¹¹⁸ Going a step beyond Tenney’s observation I suggest that God’s grace is conveyed additionally in different ways towards humanity as dependent on their response to God’s soteriological initiatives. In relation to God’s people divine grace is manifested in strengthening the Christian community in perseverance in the midst of crisis. The explanation of God’s purposes matches with the basic apocalyptic purpose of the book. For strengthening the confidence in God’s sovereign guidance particularly significant is the utilization of the exodus tradition which is employed in Revelation as the paradigm for portraying God’s eschatological saving acts.¹¹⁹ With the utilization of this tradition the author of Revelation puts the present experience of the church into the context of *Heilsgeschichte*. His intention lies in indicating that the present conditions are ‘in continuity with the history of the people of God in the past, in which anti-God powers of oppression and injustice which seemed to be in control of the world

¹¹⁴ For the observation on the use of these terms and the semantic field of soteriology in the narrative of Revelation, see Jan A. du Rand, ‘Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John’ in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt (NovTSup, 121; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 468-72. For the wider context of the New Testament’s soteriological terminology, see Stanley B. Marrow, ‘Principles for Interpreting the New Testament Soteriological Terms’, *NTS* 36 (1990), 268-80.

¹¹⁵ Du Rand, ‘Soteriology’, 471.

¹¹⁶ Charles, *Revelation*, I, cx.

¹¹⁷ Schubert M. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (London: SCM, 1982), 20-40; cf. Boring, ‘Theology’, 266.

¹¹⁸ Tenney, ‘Theism’, 189.

¹¹⁹ For an in-depth study of the exodus motif in Revelation, see the dissertations of Hre Kio (‘Exodus’) and Casey (‘Exodus Typology’).

were overthrown by the liberating act of God'.¹²⁰ On the other hand, towards the earth dwellers God's grace is repeatedly manifested in the increasing warning judgments which function as divine calls to repentance. As du Rand suggests, 'If salvation constitutes the one side of the soteriological coin according to the Apocalypse, the *judgment of God* is shown on the other side.'¹²¹ In this sense Revelation's judgments are to be viewed as soteriological initiatives.

Thus far we have not seen the involvement of the throne motif in the development of Revelation's theology of grace. However, two observations, a contextual and a structural, provide additional data for the evaluation of the motif's contribution. First, the majority of Revelation's soteriological references are found in the worship setting, mainly within the hymnic material. The theological axis around which the hymnic passages revolve is the praise of the soteriological accomplishments of God and the Lamb, particularly sacrificial death and its effect on the divine reign.¹²² The last hymn of the throne room vision summarizes the response of the whole created world to the salvific efforts of the God-Lamb coalition: 'To the One sitting on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever' (5:13). The soteriological doxologies are in Revelation sung in front of the heavenly throne, which is either clearly mentioned as in the above verse or only presupposed as in 15:3-4. However, in both cases the praise is directed towards the throne as the centre of reality from which the sovereign grace emanates.

Second, the introductory and the concluding throne scenes of Revelation's visionary part contain specific imagery which turns our attention to the book's grace theology. Namely, in the throne-room vision the throne of God is surrounded by a rainbow (4:3) which signifies the divine covenant mercy. It seems that the imagery conveys the message that God's authority and power are undivided from his gracious desire to redeem the created world.¹²³ The sealed βιβλίον, appearing later in the same vision, seems also to focus the attention on God's redemptive intentions.¹²⁴ On the other hand, the centre of attention in the book's concluding vision is the joint throne of God and the Lamb, which is portrayed as the source of the river of the water of life in the new creation. As Bauckham notes, the water with the fruits of the tree of life

¹²⁰ Boring, 'Theology', 263; cf. Caird, *Revelation*, 292.

¹²¹ Du Rand, 'Soteriology', 473.

¹²² For a detailed survey of references, see du Rand, 'Soteriology', 476-82.

¹²³ Kempson ('Theology', 185) shares a similar viewpoint; however, he is uncertain about the interpretation of the rainbow, therefore he cautiously states that this observation cannot be pressed. For an exploration of the meaning of the rainbow imagery within the context of the entire chapter, see section ch. 4. sec. 1.3.2.

¹²⁴ See ch. 5 sec. 1.3.1.

‘represents the food and drink of eschatological life’ which comes from God himself.¹²⁵ The scene is a representation of God’s life-giving grace which provides the sustaining of life for eternity.¹²⁶ It is generally considered that the two throne scenes emphasize strongly the perfect order in the context of God’s kingship – the first in a now-and-not-yet, while the second in a realized perspective. However, it is generally unnoticed that the two visions are at the same time linked thematically by the notion of God’s grace and they make an *inclusio* around the book’s grace theology in which at the centre are the enthroned God and the Lamb who are portrayed not only as sovereign rulers, but also as the source of sovereign grace.

It has been demonstrated in the discussion of Revelation’s theistic teaching that the throne motif significantly contributes to all three aspects of the question of God. While it plays an essential role in the development of the concepts of God’s sovereignty and justice, it is also not marginal in John’s grace theology. These aspects of Revelation’s theism do not function as abstract concepts, but they define God’s attitude towards the created world. For this reason the question of history is inseparable from the question of God, as the following discussion will reveal.

2. THE THRONE AND THE QUESTION OF HISTORY

It has been argued above that Revelation is a strongly theocentric work in which God’s glory is withheld from a world ruled by the powers of evil. At the same time the book strongly emphasizes the divine involvement within history. In the mind-set of the author the question of God is inseparable from the question of history as in apocalyptic thought generally. The connection is set out at the beginning of the visionary section of Revelation in which within the throne-room vision (chs. 4–5) the attention is focused on the enthroned God, who actively engages in the affairs of history. This is clearly reflected in his involvement in the drama around the sealed scroll which directly affects the course of the earthly events (6:1–8:1). Goppelt rightly notes that the question of history is of central significance for the theology of Revelation, since it provides a framework for understanding the influence of Christ and the church on the course of earthly events.¹²⁷ The discussion of the throne motif’s contribution to the question will be organized around three closely related aspects: (1) the root of the problem in history – the reality

¹²⁵ Bauckham, *Theology*, 133.

¹²⁶ For a detailed examination of this throne scene, see ch. 5 sec. 3.3.1.

¹²⁷ Leonhard Goppelt, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 514.

of evil; (2) the emergency state – the cosmic conflict; and (3) the final outcome – the triumph of God’s kingdom.

2.1. THE REALITY OF EVIL

Evil is one of the basic concerns of Revelation – as in apocalyptic thinking generally.¹²⁸ It disrupts the harmony of God’s created order by refusing to acknowledge that the universe is the unique creation of the sovereign God, who is its sole kingly ruler worthy of worship (14:6). Consequently, evil divides humanity into two irreconcilable camps on the basis of their attitude towards it: rejection or alignment.¹²⁹ In Pauline theology the concept is closely related to the story of Adam.¹³⁰ In contrast, there is no interest shown in the genesis of evil in Revelation – no references to Adam or a developed hamartology appear in the book.¹³¹ Indeed, John’s theology of evil is grounded in the doctrine of creation, since the promise of the new creation appears as a theological assumption and a matter of hope which presupposes the eradication of evil with its supporters and consequences (20:14-15) and at the same time the restoration of the Edenic conditions (22:1-5).

Revelation, as a book strongly preoccupied with the issue of evil, is surprisingly devoid of the usual New Testament hamartological vocabulary. The terms *πονηρός* and *κακός* which most commonly signify evil in the New Testament are almost entirely absent from the book¹³² and sin terminology also scarcely occurs.¹³³ The book’s primary conceptualization of evil lies in a symbolic presentation. The reason for this is probably not only in Revelation’s apocalyptic nature, but also in the author’s thinking. As Holladay suggests, ‘For John, when evil is experienced in its rawest form, ordinary language is inadequate; it can be expressed only

¹²⁸ Stephen O’Leary (*Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994], 20-60) names three focal concerns of apocalyptic thinking: authority, evil and time.

¹²⁹ It has been rightly noted by Resseguie (*Revelation Unsealed*, 197) that evil is actually ‘a hybrid – part human and part demonic’, since ‘the world *below* gains a firm foothold in *this* world by forming an unholy alliance with humankind’. The human aspect of evil is also characterized by Caird (*Revelation*, 293), who notes that ‘though evil may assume a thousand disguises, in the final analysis it has a human face’, since ‘the abyss is a vast reservoir of accumulated evil, from which come many plagues to torment mankind; but it is fed from the springs of human sin’.

¹³⁰ E.g. Rom. 5; 1Cor. 15.

¹³¹ Caird (*Revelation*, 293) warns that because the author of Revelation has little to say about the origin of evil and at the same time speaks of it in vast cosmic symbols ‘it would be a mistake to suppose that ... he therefore believed in mythical demonic powers operating independently of human wrongdoing’.

¹³² *κακός* alone occurs in 2:2 and with *πονηρός* in 16:2, while *πονηρός* does not reappear in the book.

¹³³ The most frequent is *ἀδικέω* (2:11; 6:6; 7:2, 3; 9:4, 10, 19; 11:15[2x], 22:11), while the noun form *ἀδικημα* appears only once (18:5) and *ἁμαρτία* three times (1:5; 18:4, 5).

symbolically.¹³⁴ The most diverse symbolic depiction in this regard is that of Satan (ch. 12), who appears in Revelation as the arch-enemy of God and humanity, the ‘the sum total of evil’.¹³⁵ The numerous titles ascribed to him (ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας,¹³⁶ ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς,¹³⁷ ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος,¹³⁸ ὁ κατήγωρ¹³⁹) reveal the diversity of the tradition,¹⁴⁰ but at the same time imply also the diversity of his qualities and actions.¹⁴¹ The historical manifestation of the power of evil in John’s spiritual enemies is delineated in strongly offensive expressions such as beast, whore, false prophet, Babylon, Balaamites, Jezebel, fornication and synagogue of Satan. The reason for the choice of strongly offensive language in the description of the manifestation of evil lies in its essence – in its deceptive nature.¹⁴² The extreme expressions serve the purpose of disclosing the true face of evil which presents itself always in an attractive light.¹⁴³

It has been argued by Yarbro Collins that the impression on the basis of John’s language is that evil and sin do not just reflect individual choices: ‘They suggest that individuals and even large groups of people can get caught up in collective processes with evil or destructive effects. They imply that there are trends, social structures, ideas, and institutional processes which are human creations, but which get out of human control and turn against their creator, like a Frankenstein monster.’¹⁴⁴ This viewpoint is shared also by Ellul, who holds that a demonic quality inheres in all collective human realities, in all institutions, such as cities, corporations,

¹³⁴ Holladay, *Introduction*, 560.

¹³⁵ Abir, *Cosmic Conflict*, 105.

¹³⁶ The full version ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας appears only in 12:3, 9, while the shorter form ὁ δράκων is more common: 12:4, 7(2x), 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2.

¹³⁷ Διάβολος and Σατανᾶς appear together only in 12:9 and 20:2, while the titles appear separately numerous times: Διάβολος in 2:10; 12:12; 20:10 and Σατανᾶς in 2:9, 13(2x), 24; 3:9; 20:7.

¹³⁸ The full version ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος appears in 12:9 and 20:2, while ὁ ὄφις in 12:14, 15. The shortened version appears also in 9:19, but it does not designate Satan directly.

¹³⁹ Rev. 12:10(2x).

¹⁴⁰ Charles, *Revelation*, I, 317-18.

¹⁴¹ Tonstad (*Saving God’s Reputation*, 13) notes that in New Testament theology little is said about Satan, not only because he is relegated to a relic of mythology, but also because it is assumed that he is a figure of static fixture, who has nothing to say. However, he demonstrates that if more room is allowed for Revelation’s Old Testament allusions in the interpretation, God’s arch-enemy appears as a figure who ‘had not always been dressed in black’.

¹⁴² Jan Lambrecht (‘The People of God in the Book of Revelation’ in *Collected Studies on Pauline Literature and on the Book of Revelation* [Analecta Biblica, 147; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001], 379-94[392]) uses the expression ‘demonization of evil’ for designating John’s approach to evil in Revelation.

¹⁴³ Caird, *Revelation*, 294.

¹⁴⁴ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 173. For a discussion of contemporary applications, see pp. 173-75.

nations, governments and even the church.¹⁴⁵ The purpose of the author of Revelation is to disclose the true face of evil which once let loose into the world becomes a cumulative self-destructive force growing out into gigantic forms far beyond the control of the humanity. While evil appears as of vast influence, Satan is in fact portrayed as a defeated enemy (12:9-11), whose power is limited in comparison with the unlimited ἐξουσία of the θεός ὁ παντοκράτωρ.¹⁴⁶

The author of Revelation undoubtedly sees the solution to the perplexing problem of evil in God. The affirmation of both the reality of evil and the sovereignty of God indicates that the book of Revelation is to be understood as ‘a kind of pictorial narrative theodicy’.¹⁴⁷ This idea is reflected in the title of Tonstad’s monograph *Saving God’s Reputation*, in which it is argued that the truth about God’s character is an essential condition for a world delivered from evil.¹⁴⁸ Tonstad demonstrates that reading Revelation as a theodicy of God’s handling of evil brings into focus two closely related issues: the unmasking of the character of evil and the faithful disclosure of God’s character. The method God uses in this drama is crucial: ‘Since the issue in the conflict revolves around the kind of person God is, the winner of the battle is not determined simply on the basis of power and might ... The deceiver must be *unmasked*, and the task of doing that has in Revelation been accomplished by Jesus in the form of a Lamb “as if it had been slaughtered” (5.6).’¹⁴⁹ Thus, God’s character is defended by the Lamb in history. Satan’s reputation is not enhanced even by his own role in Revelation, which highlights on the contrary the qualities of God that he denies.¹⁵⁰ At the end of the drama God’s character and his purposes are not defeated: his plan reaches its goal although it was frustrated for some time by the evil.

The throne motif plays a significant role in clarifying the essence of evil in Revelation. While the book strongly affirms God’s sovereign kingship in the created world, it has already been implied in the Seven Messages that this authority is contested by Satan, who arrogantly claims a throne for himself (2:13). Not only are the two thrones contrasted as symbols of two

¹⁴⁵ For Ellul’s thinking on this question, see e.g. Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (trans. Dennis Pardee; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970); Idem., *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972). His views on the topic are also woven throughout his commentary on the book of Revelation (*Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*).

¹⁴⁶ The beast as Satan’s chief agent is allowed to operate only within a defined period of time (13:5).

¹⁴⁷ Boring, ‘Theology’, 260.

¹⁴⁸ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 15-16. Similarly, Bauckham (*Theology*, 160) claims that ‘Revelation is overwhelmingly concerned with the *truth* of God’.

¹⁴⁹ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 3.

¹⁵⁰ For characterization of Satan in Revelation, see Abir, *Cosmic Conflict*, 100-16; Pieter G.R. de Villiers, ‘Prime Evil and Its Many Faces in the Book of Revelation’, *Neot* 34 (2000), 57-85; Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 89-102.

antithetical powers (2:13 vs. 3:21), but the Satanic strategy involves choosing earthly agents and investing them with thrones, that is claiming sovereignty over the realm of the earth. He clearly gives a throne to the beast (13:2) and inspires the great prostitute to arrogantly glorify herself claiming that she rules as a queen (18:7).¹⁵¹ The repeated association of the throne motif with the claims to sovereignty on side of these quasi-authorities points to the essence of the satanic aim: dethroning of God and ‘reforming’ (actually deforming) the created order set by Him. This arrogant endeavour reveals the essence of evil as an attack on God’s sovereign kingship. Ironically, the arrogant endeavours of the quasi throne occupants are permitted by God in spite of their deceptive intentions. However, when the true character and the real consequences of evil are fully disclosed, human history reaches its end and its participants face the great white throne (20:11) from which final words will be announced in history about the legitimacy of the moral structure of the universe that is based on God’s character.

Revelation depicts the disruption of the harmoniously created cosmic order into a sharply contrasted kingdom of God and kingdom of Satan. Humanity is caught in the cosmic conflict between the two forces with no possibility of choosing the middle ground: those who are not true Jews belong to the ‘synagogue of Satan’ (2:9; 3:9). While the power of evil which generated the division remains a mystery throughout the book,¹⁵² part of John’s message is to explain the inevitable conflict between the two different kingdoms to which attention will be given in the following section.

2.2. THE COSMIC CONFLICT

There is a broad consensus concerning the major significance of the theme of conflict, combat or war in the structure and theology of Revelation. The most thorough treatment of the topic has been provided by Yarbrow Collins, who developing Gunkel’s thesis on the centrality of the mythic pattern of conflict in apocalyptic literature¹⁵³ demonstrates that the combat myth appears in Revelation as ‘the conceptual framework which underlies the book as a whole’.¹⁵⁴ This view has been confirmed by numerous further studies on the different aspects of the topic which share the

¹⁵¹ The second beast of Rev. 13 (false prophet) is not ascribed a throne probably due to its function as the emissary and propagator of the first beast (13:12, 14).

¹⁵² György Benyik, *Az újszövetségi Szentírás keletkezés- és kutatástörténete* (2 vols.; Szeged: JATEPress, 1996), II, 336.

¹⁵³ Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*.

¹⁵⁴ Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 231.

conviction that the theme ‘pulsates in John’s thought and suffuses John’s lengthy vision of God’s battle for his people’.¹⁵⁵

In Revelation’s view of the world there is a sharp differentiation between good and evil, a dualistic outlook typical for apocalypticism which views things in terms of binary opposites.¹⁵⁶ The present age is characterized by a universal struggle between the forces of light and darkness. The contrast is manifested on two levels which are integrally related. On the cosmic level God’s rule is challenged by Satan’s kingdom and on the social level the community of believers is opposed by the rest of the humanity.¹⁵⁷ Yarbro Collins rightly notes that ‘in the context of the Apocalypse as a whole it is clear that the problem facing the heavenly council is the rebellion of Satan which is paralleled by rebellion on earth ... The old story of Satan’s rebellion against God which leads to the fall of creation’ is presupposed throughout the book.¹⁵⁸ The earthly disorder is viewed as a consequence of the conflict that began in heaven (Rev. 12:7) instigated by the aspiration of ‘Day Star, son of dawn’ (Isa. 14:12). Since each side in the conflict is implicitly associated with either good or evil, the dualism is ethicized.¹⁵⁹

The study of the theme of cosmic conflict is often focused on the second part of Revelation and more specifically on the central vision of the book in 12:1–14:20.¹⁶⁰ The reason probably lies in the fact that the mythic context of the conflict is systematically introduced first in ch. 12. In this chapter Satan appears for the first time in the visionary part of the book and he is identified as ‘the great dragon’ (ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας; 12:9), ‘the chaos beast par excellence’.¹⁶¹ However, the elements of struggle between God and evil are put in the foreground from the beginning of the visionary part of the book, since already in the throne room vision the victory of

¹⁵⁵ Giblin, *Revelation*, 28. For representative studies on various aspects of the topic, see e.g. Richard R. Creech, ‘Christology and Conflict: A Comparative Study of Two Central Themes in the Johannine Literature and the Apocalypse’ (PhD Dissertation; Baylor University, 1984); Snyder, ‘Combat Myth in the Apocalypse’; Bauckham, *Climax*, 210-37; Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*.

¹⁵⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (‘The Phenomenon of Early Christian Apocalyptic: Some Reflections on Method’ in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12–17, 1979*, ed. David Hellholm [Tübingen: Mohr, 1983], 295-316[306]) notes that the choice of apocalyptic language by early Christian authors indicate a certain theological perspective through which reality is understood.

¹⁵⁷ Rowland (*Revelation*, 46-47) rightly warns against understanding Revelation’s dualistic outlook as a simple division between the church and the world. He demonstrates that the author refuses to allow the reader knowing with complete certainty who belongs to the group of elect and who is outside of it, since the Seven Messages indicate that the present practice of the churches is confused.

¹⁵⁸ Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 39.

¹⁵⁹ For ethical aspects, see ch. 9 sec. 2.2.

¹⁶⁰ See e.g. Abir, *Cosmic Conflict*.

¹⁶¹ Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 232.

the Lamb as the clue to history is presented (5:5-6). While the object of the Lamb's conquering is not stated, the concepts of sacrifice and victory make little sense without a conflict in the background, the solution to which necessitates such a radical measure. As suggested earlier in this dissertation, the cosmic conflict theme also appears in the Seven Messages where the stage is set for combat by antithetical references to the throne of Satan (2:13) and the throne of God (3:21).¹⁶² The opposition is even deepened by references to the 'deep things of Satan' (2:24) and the 'synagogue of Satan' (2:9; 3:9), while on the other hand a promise is given to the conquering Christians that they will receive the authority to destroy the nations (2:26-28). Still, Lambrecht is right that in spite of the sharp dualistic tension a consistent opposition pattern between believers and unbelievers cannot be found in the messages, since the emphasis is more on the enemy's presence within the churches.¹⁶³

The intensive use of warfare terminology in the book is well known. The terms πολέμew/πόλεμος and νικάω are more frequent in Revelation than in the other books of the New Testament, while στρατεύμα is also present.¹⁶⁴ On the basis of the terminology a significant distinction concerning the involvement of the opposed sides in the conflict can be established. Klassen in his grammatical literal study notes that God is never described as engaging directly in war (πολέμew), although Christ goes to war (πολέμew) twice in the book (2:16; 19:11). However, he never fights with weapons of warfare, but with the two-edged sword of his mouth. Klassen concludes: 'To be sure, the element of struggle between good and evil remains, and victory is achieved, but it is not a victory fought with literal weapons. The sword which the Lamb uses, which protrudes from his mouth, is the Word of God.'¹⁶⁵ πολέμew is more characteristic of the Satanic activity,¹⁶⁶ though in 12:7 it is applied within a single verse both to Michael and the dragon. The most characteristic military term applied to the faithful followers of Christ is νικάω, which is consistently used in the description of this group though God's people are never

¹⁶² See ch. 8 sec. 3.2; ch. 10 sec. 2.1.

¹⁶³ Lambrecht, 'People of God', 387.

¹⁶⁴ πολέμew/πόλεμος occurs twenty-five times in the New Testament of which fifteen are in Revelation (2:16; 9:7, 9; 11:17; 12:7[3x], 17; 13:4, 7; 16:14; 17:14; 19:11, 19; 20:8). Similarly, νικάω appears seventeen times in the book out of its twenty-five occurrences in the New Testament (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 11, 21[2x]; 5:5; 6:2[2x]; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7). The term στρατεύμα appears only four times (9:16; 19:14, 19[2x]) in spite of the frequency of the term and its cognates in the New Testament.

¹⁶⁵ Klassen, 'Vengeance', 308.

¹⁶⁶ Rev. 11:7; 12:7, 17; 13:7; 16:4; 19:19; 20:8. Contra Klassen ('Vengeance', 306), who holds that the references in 12:7; 16:14; 19:19; 20:8 are used in a neutral sense.

depicted as engaging in battle.¹⁶⁷ The clearest expression of this point of view appears in 17:14 where it is stated that the ten kings make war (πολεμέω) against the Lamb, who triumphed (νικάω) not by his superior force, but because he is κύριος κυρίων ... καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων ('Lord of Lords ... and King of Kings'). The Lamb's followers participate in his triumph (νικάω) without fighting in the war (πολεμέω). This idea is in agreement with the early Jewish apocalyptic holy war tradition in which the victory is won by the divine Warrior – either without or with the assistance of the heavenly hosts.¹⁶⁸ It has a precedent in the stream of the Old Testament holy war tradition that embodies the ideal kind of holy war in which human assistance is not required.¹⁶⁹ Still, John carefully reinterprets the tradition, since the Lamb does not triumph through military warfare and those sharing the victory are not national Israelites. As noted by Bauckham, his victory 'is a victory over evil, won not only in the spiritual but also in the political sphere against worldly powers in order to establish God's kingdom on earth'.¹⁷⁰

The most detailed discussion of the theme of cosmic conflict is reserved for the central vision in Revelation's chiasm (12:1–14:20). The centrality of the theme at the heart of the book indicates a basic theological perspective against which the entire work is to be read. The introductory temple scene of the ark of the covenant (11:19) is an appropriate prelude to the vision, since the appearance of this well-known holy war imagery indicates on one hand the unfolding of a holy war, and on the other God's covenant faithfulness to his people in this conflict.¹⁷¹ A detailed description of the combating sides is provided in the vision. Chs. 12–13 visualize the satanic powers in terms of an unholy trinity (the dragon, the sea beast and the earth

¹⁶⁷ νικάω is also twice applied to Christ (5:5; 17:14) and twice to the Satanic agents – the beast coming out of the abyss (11:7) and the beast coming out of the sea (13:7).

¹⁶⁸ See e.g. *Pss. Sol.* 17:22-24; *2Bar.* 72:6; *Sib. Or.* 3:654, 689; 5:418-19. The one earlier work which provides evidence for the idea of direct involvement of the Israelite army in the eschatological holy war is the War Scroll (1QM). For a detailed discussion of the idea in 1QM, see Martin Hengel, *Die Zeloten: Untersuchungen zur jüdischen Freiheitsbewegung in der Zeit von Herodes I. bis 70 n. Chr.* (AGSU, 1; Leiden: Brill, 1961), 279-87; Yigael Yadin, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* (trans. Batya and Chaim Rabin; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹⁶⁹ Gerhard von Rad (*Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952]) demonstrates that this tradition is characteristic of the earlier period of Israel's history. The most typical example is related to the exodus tradition in which Yahweh alone fought against Israel's enemies as his own enemies. In the period after the Solomonic enlightenment the relation of the divine and human activity continued in a vastly different way – in a way that emphasized human agency. For the comparison of the motifs of holy war and cosmic conflict in Judaism and early Christianity, see Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity* (LNTS, 307; London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 128-34.

¹⁷⁰ Bauckham, *Theology*, 68; cf. *Idem.*, *Climax*, 233.

¹⁷¹ See ch. 8 sec. 2.1.3. Giblin (*Revelation*, 31) goes too far pressing the Old Testament background of holy war in suggesting a הרם as inflicted upon Babylon in 16:18, 21.

beast) which wages war against God's people (12:17; 13:7).¹⁷² It is of particular theological significance to note that Satan's defeat is strongly emphasized before the detailed introduction of the dragon's coalition partners and their careers. This is four times affirmed in ch. 12 by the divine passive ἐβλήθη which indicates that Satan is thrown down (12:9[2x], 10, 13).¹⁷³ The supplementary statement that τόπος is no longer found for the dragon in heaven (12:8) is contrasted to the τόπος prepared for the woman by God in 12:6, 14.¹⁷⁴ The place to which the dragon is thrown down is clearly the earth (12:9, 12) where he continues with his agents on a world-wide scale what he began in the Garden of Eden: 'deceiving the whole world' (12:9). The devil's activity is brought to an end by a second 'throwing down' (ἐβλήθη), but this time from the earth to 'the lake of fire' (20:10). Thus, it seems that the eschatological aspect of the cosmic conflict is framed by the two 'throwing down' events: the references in the first context signal the prelude to the final war, while in the second the end of it.¹⁷⁵ Significantly, in both contexts the throwing down is related to the idea of God's sovereignty. In 12:7-12 it is the result of establishing God's power and kingdom (though the reality of God's rule is implied by the throne in 12:5), while in 20:10 it comes at the end of the millennial judgment that is strongly dominated by God's control as indicated by the centrality of the vision's two throne scenes (20:4, 11).

The other side in the cosmic conflict, the Lamb and his army, are portrayed in 14:1-5 as standing on Mount Zion and opposing the unholy trinity.¹⁷⁶ While the dragon and his coalition partners appear on the scene of Revelation's drama for the first time in the Cosmic Conflict vision, the Lamb and his army have been already introduced (5:1-14; 7:1-17). As has been pointed out, they are identified at their first appearance as related to the heavenly throne and belonging to the sphere of God's kingdom: the Lamb is enthroned in heaven, while the 144,000 are celebrating victory standing in front of God's heavenly throne.¹⁷⁷ Since the answer to the question concerning the conquering side is clear from the beginning of the book, a more significant issue is the manner of conquest achieved not in battle, but on the cross. As Longman

¹⁷² On the concept of unholy trinity in Revelation, see ch. 7 sec. 2.3.1.

¹⁷³ The expulsion of Satan also appears in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4.40.3. For the discussion of the idea of expulsion from heaven in ancient mythologies, see Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 698-99.

¹⁷⁴ Resseguie, *Revelation*, 173 n. 17.

¹⁷⁵ The connection of the two texts is recognized by Otto Bauernfeind ('πόλεμος' in *TDNT*, VI, 502-15[514]); however, he does not address the wider significance of the relation.

¹⁷⁶ Bauckham, *Climax*, 229.

¹⁷⁷ See ch. 5. sec. 1.3.3 and 2.3.1.

notes, the Lamb ‘disarms the powers and forces by death, not by killing but by being killed’.¹⁷⁸ This theological idea is the most dramatic characterization of the divine government in Revelation, since it highlights the way God rules the world.¹⁷⁹ Thus, the holy war motif is demythologized by John and remythologized via the warrior as a suffering servant.¹⁸⁰ The function of Revelation’s high Christology becomes at this point particularly significant as it enlightens the book’s doctrine of God. Though two figures are portrayed on the throne, the focus is on the character of ‘the One sitting on the throne’, since ‘God, the ruler of the universe, has functionally defined his rule with his act in Jesus’.¹⁸¹ The conflict with evil is thus not solved by force, but by a sacrifice which unmask the character of the deceiver and discloses the fruit of his design.¹⁸² As Satan’s fate is characterized by two episodes of throwing down, similarly Christ’s victory also has two stages: the conquest in his death and resurrection (3:21; 5:5) and the conquest at his *parousia* (17:14). Thus, the cosmic conflict theme describes the whole process of establishing God’s kingly rule on the earth.

The Lamb’s victory ‘is of the greatest consequence for the interpretation of the entire book’.¹⁸³ The unfolding events described after his enthronement in ch. 5 are to be understood in terms of the progressive realization of God’s plan, the advancing of the decisive victory of the Lamb.¹⁸⁴ A significant aspect in this respect is the conquering of the people of God summarized in 12:11. The double use of διὰ with the accusative indicates the basis of the conquest: the redemptive event of the Lamb’s sacrifice (διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου) and the saints’ personal involvement through testimony (διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν). At the same time, the construction may imply the means by which the overcoming is achieved.¹⁸⁵ Though God’s people are not engaged in an offensive activity of any kind in Revelation, their role is far from being passive as it is focused on persistent witness to Jesus, which involves obedience to the

¹⁷⁸ Longman, ‘Divine Warrior’, 303-04.

¹⁷⁹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 64.

¹⁸⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, 476.

¹⁸¹ Boring, ‘Theology’, 266.

¹⁸² The complexity of God’s dealing with the problem of evil is noted by Tonstad (*Saving God’s Reputation*, 12): ‘If the opening scene into the heavenly throne room at first gives the impression that worship of the Creator is a foregone conclusion, an issue settled on the basis of the ontological distinction between Creator and creature alone, the presentation of the sealed scroll (5.1-4) suggests a more complicated picture.’

¹⁸³ Mathias Rissi, ‘The Kerygma of the Revelation of John’, *Int* 22 (1969), 3-17(8).

¹⁸⁴ Bauckham, *Theology*, 75.

¹⁸⁵ E.g. Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 342; Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 627; Beale, *Revelation*, 663-64. In contrast, Charles (*Revelation*, I, 329) holds that the construction denotes here only the cause of the victory (cf. Mounce, *Revelation*, 239).

commandments, faithfulness and endurance.¹⁸⁶ While their experience is not always triumph (they are defeated in 11:7 and 13:7), the ultimate victory is secured as it is grounded in the victory of Christ.

Finally, three contributions of the throne motif to the development of the theme of cosmic conflict will be suggested. First, the basic issue in the conflict is the legitimate possession of the throne of the universe. The heart of the conflict concerns the question: who is worthy to be worshiped as the King of Kings? For this reason the major actors in the drama are identified in respect to the throne motif – either as throne claimants or allies of a claimant, who delegates authority to them. The tension between the two sides in the cosmic conflict is clearly set out in the Seven Messages by contrasting the throne of God (3:21) and the throne of Satan (2:13). This tension portrayed by the throne motif points to the essence of the conflict between the two kingdoms: ‘theocracy versus dominion of Satan’.¹⁸⁷ It clearly indicates the cosmic scope of the conflict, since the symbolism points beyond the clash of views between God’s government and the Roman imperial power.¹⁸⁸ Second, God’s triumph in the cosmic conflict is achieved by the Lamb’s sacrifice, which is affirmed in his enthronement in ch. 5. Similarly, the triumph of God’s people by the force of the Lamb’s blood and the words of their testimony (12:11) will be affirmed by fulfilling the promise of sitting on Christ’s throne (3:21; 20:4). However, there is a dramatic difference between the two throne occupations. Whereas the Lamb’s sitting on the throne expresses high Christology, his convergence with God in sharing divine rule, the saints do not step out from the framework of God’s rule over them by participating in his reign. Third, the focal point of Revelation’s chiasm is focused on the scene which portrays the Lamb and his army as the conquerors in the cosmic conflict (14:1-5). Significantly, they are depicted as standing on Mount Zion (14:1). As argued in this dissertation, the Zion symbolism reinforces the reign of the Lamb with his army within the context of the eschatological kingdom.¹⁸⁹ While the actual word *θρόνος* is absent from the scene, the Zion symbolism is a sufficient indicator for interpreting the vision as a throne scene which points to the legitimate ruler of the cosmos, who emerges as

¹⁸⁶ Pattemore, *People of God*, 195.

¹⁸⁷ Ford, *Revelation*, 76.

¹⁸⁸ My point is in line with du Rand’s (‘Your Kingdom Come’, 59-75) view that different levels of narrative may be identified in Revelation. The story of John and the churches form the first level, while the divine and cosmic story the second level (cf. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 232; Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 129).

¹⁸⁹ See ch. 8 sec. 2.2.3.

victorious from the cosmic conflict over the throne of the universe. Thus, God's throne is vindicated as the true throne contra the quasi thrones of Satan and his agents.

2.3. THE TRIUMPH OF GOD'S KINGDOM

As argued above, there is a logical progression in the resolution of the cosmic conflict in the book of Revelation. God's sovereign kingly rule acknowledged in heaven within the throne-room context is to be acknowledged also on the earth. The Lamb's sacrificial victory as the decisive soteriological act in history has a twofold consequence for establishing God's rule. First, regarding the present it provides a basis for the overcoming of the people of God.¹⁹⁰ The Lamb's sacrifice effects the redemption of God's people and makes them kings and priests for the service of God (5:10-11). With their commitment to divine rule God's kingdom breaks through in the earthly realm.¹⁹¹ Consequently, the next step of Christ's conquering programme includes a task delegated to the witnessing church: the conversion of 'the kingdom of the world' into 'the kingdom ... of our Lord and his Messiah' (11:15).¹⁹² Second, the Lamb's sacrificial victory also provides the basis for the final resolution of the conflict between the purpose of God and the forces which frustrate it. The completion of God's triumph in realization of the eschatological expectations will mark an irreversible turning point in the course of human history asserting its meaningfulness, since it advanced towards a meaningful end.¹⁹³ Thus, the triumph of God's kingdom appears as a process which starts with the slaughtering of the Lamb and ends in the restoration of God's created order.

¹⁹⁰ In 22:14 the washing of the robe (for textual discussion, see Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1197-98) is directly related to the citizenship in the city of God's eschatological kingdom. The prospect of victory and the reward for it (2:7, 11, 18, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21) is held out to the people of God from a very early stage in the narrative. The fulfilment of the promises has not, however, been left exclusively to the new creation setting of chs. 21–22. The triumph is stated in 7:9-14; 12:10-11; 15:2-4; 20:4-6 in spite of the ironic use of *νικᾶω* in 13:7 for the description of the beast's power over the elect.

¹⁹¹ Du Rand, 'Your Kingdom Come', 71.

¹⁹² Bauckham (*Climax*, 238-337) uses the expression the 'conversion of the nations' and demonstrates that the question of convincing the nations to acknowledge God's kingship on earth as it is in heaven is central for the prophetic message of Revelation (cf. du Rand, 'Your Kingdom Come', 70-74; Andreas J. Köstenberg, 'The Contribution of the General Epistles and Revelation to a Biblical Theology of Religions' in *Christianity and the Religions*, eds. Edward Rommen and Harold Netland (Evangelical Missiological Society Series, 2; Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1995), 113-40(133-35).

¹⁹³ Caird notes (*Revelation*, 292) that the notion of the meaningfulness of history is conveyed by John in using constant allusions to the Old Testament, typology, the creation myth and eschatological language. These techniques serve to remind the readers of Revelation that 'the events they must live through are part of an all-embracing purpose'.

By virtue of its genre there is a radical incompatibility between the heavenly and the earthly realms in the cosmology of Revelation.¹⁹⁴ Heaven as the place of God's throne represents God's determinative plan and authority, which is acknowledged in a universal worship of all creatures (5:13). For this reason Minear aptly designates the first heaven a 'throne-heaven' as different from the new heaven of 21:1.¹⁹⁵ In contrast, in the earthly realm glory and power are given to the dragon (13:4-8, 14-17) and fornication committed with Babylon (17:2; 18:3). In the theological outlook of Revelation the radical incompatibility of the two realms in the present age is not part of the permanent order of things. While a decisive ending of the challenge to God's purposes is envisaged, the divine intervention is to be viewed in the light of the stark contrast between the two competing power structures: New Jerusalem (chs. 21–22) and Babylon (chs. 17–18).¹⁹⁶ The two descriptions are structured as 'contrast visions' that are to be read in light of the alternative description.¹⁹⁷ As noted by Räßple, the rhetorical force of this city 'motif-network' is grounded in the ancient mythic ideal of the city as a place of security and prosperity with the divine in its midst.¹⁹⁸ Babylon in its obsession with wealth and power represents the perversion of this ideal.¹⁹⁹ Conversely, the New Jerusalem is portrayed as the fulfilment of the ideal worth belonging to. The throne of New Jerusalem appears as a life giving source (22:1) contrasted with the arrogant boast of the self-enthroned quasi-sovereignty of Babylon (18:7). Thus, Babylon must fall and be replaced by New Jerusalem so that God's purposes might be realized: the satanic parody of the ideal of the city must give way to the reality as defined by 'the One sitting on the throne'. Re-creation of the present order, which is in the throes of the de-creation, is needed.²⁰⁰ The triumph of God's kingdom is celebrated in two victory announcements which are shouted out in loud voices expressing the authority of the

¹⁹⁴ For Revelation's cosmology, see the literature cited in Sean M. McDonough, 'Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology' in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, eds. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough (LNTS, 355; London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 178-88(178 n. 2).

¹⁹⁵ Minear, 'Cosmology', 32.

¹⁹⁶ For the comparison of the two cities, see e.g. Campbell, 'Antithetical Feminine-Urban Imagery', 81-108.

¹⁹⁷ Rossing, *Two Cities*, 1.

¹⁹⁸ For the entire argument, see Räßple, *Metaphor of the City*, 139-78.

¹⁹⁹ The essence of the Babylon system has been aptly stated by Thomas F. Torrance (*The Apocalypse Today* [London: James Clark, 1960], 140): 'It is a power that is born of spiritual wickedness in high places, a power that flirts with all the rulers and kings and potentates of the earth and that binds the nations of the world into one empire opposed to the Kingdom of God. Babylon is, in fact, an imitation Kingdom of God, based on the demonic trinity. Ostensibly Babylon is a world-wide civilization and culture, magnificent in her science and arts and commerce, but it is drugged with pride and intoxicated with its enormous success.'

²⁰⁰ McDonough, 'Climax of Cosmology', 179.

announcements.²⁰¹ The victory shout ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!’ (18:2-3) is paired with a positive acclamation of kingship: ‘Alleluia, for the Lord (our) God the Almighty reigns’ (19:6-8). Similarly, the negative punitive vision of 20:11-15 is balanced by a positive victorious counterpart (21:1–22:5).

The outgrowth of the triumph of God’s kingdom is the disappearance of the distance in the context of the new creation between ‘the One sitting on the throne’ and the earth. The qualitative shift indicated by *καινός* in 21:1 presupposes the eradication of evil,²⁰² though Minear rightly argues that the decisive determinant of the newness lies in the dwelling of God’s *σκηνή* with the people (21:3).²⁰³ God’s presence in the temple-city of New Jerusalem becomes the key to all the other symbols of newness which are according to Minear the holy city, the bride, the death of death, the water of life and the sonship of the conquerors.²⁰⁴ Significantly, the merging of the celestial with the terrestrial realm in the New Jerusalem brings about an alteration in the pattern of relationships. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures are not mentioned any longer as positioned around the joint throne of God and the Lamb located at the centre of the Holy City. The new reality points rather to a convergence, synchrony, synthesis and union.²⁰⁵

The moving of God’s throne from the first heaven to the new earth means the relocation of the seat of the divine kingdom – the shifting of the centre of space and time. In the new order God’s dwelling is not found above the cherubim in an inaccessible realm, but it is in the midst of the New Jerusalem where his servants can access him face to face (22:4). Alexander rightly notes: ‘By highlighting the divine throne, John’s final vision reveals that the creation of the New Jerusalem consolidates God’s absolute authority over everything that exists upon the earth.’²⁰⁶ I suggest that at this point the book’s concluding vision brings us back to the starting vision at the

²⁰¹ Kiddle (*Revelation*, 360-61) notes that the strength of the voice makes it impossible for anyone to ignore the message (Thomas, *Revelation* 8–22, 315). The fact that *φωνή* is qualified by *ἰσχυρά* in 18:2 (‘powerful, strong’; *LN*), rather than the more commonly employed *μεγάλη* (‘great’; *LN*; e.g. 5:2, 12, 6:10; 12:10; 19:1) is without theological significance.

²⁰² As compared with *νέος* which signifies ‘what was not there before’ or ‘what has only just arisen or appeared’, *καινός* designates newness in nature or time, superiority in value or attraction. For the use of *καινός* as a leading theological term in apocalyptic promise and the usage in regard to the present salvation in Christ, see Johannes Behm, ‘*καινός*’ in *TDNT*, III, 447-54(449-50).

²⁰³ Minear, ‘Cosmology’, 27. Ferenc Pap (‘*Templom mint teológia: exegetikai és kultusztörténeti kulcsok az Ez 40–48 értelmezéséhez*’ [PhD Dissertation; Debrecen Reformed Theological University, 2008], 54-55) demonstrates that from the point of view of the history of religion the founding of a city and establishing of a temple (both ideas merge in the vision of Rev. 21) is identical to the re-enthronement of Yahweh.

²⁰⁴ Minear, ‘Cosmology’, 27.

²⁰⁵ Koottappillil, ‘Symbolism of *θρόνος*’, 390-95.

²⁰⁶ Alexander, *From Eden*, 75.

beginning of the visionary section. Both the first and the last visions are strongly theocentric throne-room scenes with cultic and political aspects: one located in the heavenly realm and the other in the re-created earthly context. While in the first the emphasis lies on the divine transcendence, the second seems to highlight the notion of immanence. Nevertheless, no theological distinction is suggested between these two scenes of divine rule: in chs. 4–5 God’s immanence is conveyed through the sacrificial mission of the Lamb, while in ch. 22 the throne as the centre of reality still acts as the symbol of the divine transcendence, since God continues to remain the sole sovereignty in the new creation.²⁰⁷ The shifting of the emphasis is due to the problem of evil, which is solved at this point, since in 21:5-8 God personally validates his absolute victory by a triple announcement from the throne. Thus, the visionary section of the book of Revelation is framed by a throne-*inclusio* which indicates the incontestability of the reality of God’s kingly rule with its transcendent and immanent aspects.

3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has completed the last step set out in our motif study methodology: the functional analysis which involved the examination of the rhetorical impact of the throne motif in the previous chapter and the contribution to the theology of Revelation in this last chapter of the dissertation. Since I tried to avoid the pitfall of becoming a slave to the categories of systematic theology, I have analysed the theological function of the throne motif in reference to two closely related questions basic to the understanding of the book: the question of God and the question of history. As the throne motif is the key motif in Revelation, it is not surprising that this study has concluded that any comprehensive discussion of Revelation’s theology which avoids the throne motif for any reason cannot be considered complete.

Since Revelation is by virtue of its apocalyptic genre a strongly theocentric work in which the throne motif is primarily related to God, it was logical to start the theological inquiry with the question of God. The discussion focused on three basic aspects of the book’s theism. First, it has been demonstrated by a comprehensive argumentation that the theological framework of the book has been built around the concept of God’s sovereign kingship, which is the major aspect of Revelation’s theism. It has been established that the role of the throne motif in this regard is of major significance. The discussion has revealed that generally

²⁰⁷ Minear, ‘Cosmology’, 33.

anthropomorphic expressions are avoided in the book and there is no evidence to support the sharp dichotomy between the throne and its occupant – probably for the sake of emphasizing the incomparability of God’s sovereignty. On the other hand, the notion of absolute authority is balanced with the immanent aspect suggested by the Lamb’s enthronement as a demonstration of how God is related to the world. Second, it has been established that the concept of God’s justice is also basic to the theological fabric of Revelation. I have demonstrated that although Revelation’s judicial terminology is concentrated in the second half of the book, the judgment theme unfolds throughout the entire work. The theological aspects of Revelation’s concept of judgment received particular attention and four basic aspects of it have been suggested: disclosing, purposive, vindicating and redemptive. It has been demonstrated that the throne motif functions within Revelation’s judgment theology as a leading symbol not only because of its eminent role in numerous judgment scenes, but because the judgment septets are all pictured as issuing from the heavenly throne. Third, the gracious aspect of God’s character, though not brought forward explicitly in the book, is inferred from statements which imply God’s immanence. It has been demonstrated that Revelation’s grace theology is rooted in its soteriology and that it underlies John’s understanding of God’s dealing with the world. In regard to the contribution of the throne motif two observations are significant. It has been pointed out that the majority of Revelation’s soteriological references that evoke the notion of grace appear in worship settings in which the reference point is the heavenly throne. Also it has been observed that the book’s first and last throne visions (chs. 4–5; 22:1-5), while strongly stressing the order of theocracy, also contain specific images of grace: the rainbow and the river of the water of life which convey the message that God’s authority and power are inseparable from his positive intentions towards the created world.

It has been argued that in Revelation the question of God is closely related to the question of history, since on one hand God withholds his glory from the world ruled by the powers of evil, but on the other hand he is strongly involved in the course of history. The discussion concerning the second question has also been organized around three closely related aspects. First, the reality of evil as the root of the cosmic problem has been dealt with. It has been concluded that the book is strongly preoccupied with the problem of evil, the essence of which expressed in throne language may be defined as an attempt to dethrone God and ‘reform’ (actually deform) the created order set by him. Second, the theme of cosmic conflict is portrayed

as a kind of ‘emergency state’ called forth by the genesis of evil. It has been demonstrated that the global struggle is manifested on two integrally related levels: on the cosmic level God’s rule is challenged by Satan’s kingdom and on the social level the community of believers is opposed by the rest of humanity. It has been established that the most detailed discussion of the theme is reserved for the central vision in Revelation’s chiasm (12:1–14:20) in which the combating sides are portrayed in a detailed description. At the focus of the vision are the Lamb and his army as the conquerors in the conflict. Three contributions of the throne motif to the development of the theme have been suggested: (1) the throne is at the centre of attention of the conflict which is actually a ‘throne conflict’; (2) the overcoming of both the Lamb and the conquerors is rewarded by sitting on throne, though there is a significant difference in the nature of the two enthronements; and (3) at the focal point of the cosmic conflict vision is a throne scene (14:1-5) which points to the legitimate ruler of the universe. Third, the conflict ends in the triumph of God’s kingdom: his throne is vindicated as the true throne challenged by the quasi thrones of Satan and his agents. It has been demonstrated that Revelation presents a logical progression towards the resolution of the cosmic conflict. This process supposes a conquering programme involving both the Lamb and the church. The most significant outgrowth of the triumph regarding the throne motif is the relocation of the divine throne into the context of the new creation. The shifting of the centre of space and time on the new earth clearly indicates the disappearance of the distance between God and humanity, and moreover the establishment of a new order in the universe with its centre on the earth. This development on the one hand seals God’s victory, but on the other stands as the one lasting reminder of his character disclosed in a particular way in the process of vindicating his reputation.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has sought to illuminate the central place of the throne motif in the literary and theological structure of the book of Revelation. It has advanced the thesis that this motif, which pervades the entire book, constitutes the major, though not the only interpretive key to the complex structure and theology of the book. The research presented here has moved beyond the previous studies on the topic as it has attempted in a comprehensive approach – informed by the background, firmly grounded in an exegetical study, sensitive to the cognate concepts and the macrodynamical movement of the throne motif – to discover the big picture of the throne’s contribution to the book. It has been demonstrated in the dissertation that a proper understanding of the throne motif’s role in the structure and theology of the book elucidates more clearly what is happening in the book on a macro scale.

First of all, attention has been drawn to the need for developing a comprehensive motif study methodology appropriate for Revelation studies which would sort out at least partially the terminological and methodological chaos in the area of motif studies. While it was clearly stated that this dissertation is not a methodological study and does not aim to give the final word on the question, basic contours have been proposed for a method which has been applied in the study of the throne motif. The proposed method comprises five steps that follow in a logical sequence: (1) an adequate definition of the motif; (2) background analysis; (3) textual analysis; (4) substantial analysis; and (5) functional analysis. These steps defined the basic structure of the dissertation: while the first step was dealt with in the introduction, the other four comprised the four parts of the study. The following will present twenty major conclusions concerning the throne motif in Revelation that have emerged as a result of this research.

1. The throne motif of Revelation is a complex literary phenomenon which consists of four cardinal components: (1) the throne of God; (2) the throne of the Lamb; (3) the thrones of God’s allies; and (4) the thrones of God’s adversaries. These components function as sub-motifs which are fused into a ‘motif-network’. In this composition not all the components are of equal weight. God’s throne functions as the leading sub-motif which is antithetically related to the thrones of God’s adversaries that are representative of a rival authority to that of God. In contrast with the diabolic thrones, the throne of the Lamb and the thrones of God’s allies have a positive function as they highlight God’s universal sovereign kingship that the

throne of God basically represents. The relationship between the cardinal components of the throne motif clearly implies a tension between two kingdoms which is focused on the question of power, the issue of a legitimate ruler of the universe.

2. Our study of the Old Testament background has revealed that four concepts are closely related to Yahweh's throne: (1) the ark of the covenant; (2) the temple; (3) Zion/Jerusalem; and (4) heaven. Of these concepts the first three are of particular significance for our study: as has been demonstrated, the temple motif has an organizational function in the macrostructure of Revelation (1:9-20; 4:1-5:14; 8:2-6; 11:19; 15:1-8; 19:1-10; 21:1-8) while the ark and Zion are featured in single references at strategic structural locations (11:19; 14:1). It has also been shown that in the Old Testament Yahweh's throne is represented in two sources with wheels (Ezek. 1; Dan. 7), while in the rest of the throne texts such a feature is not mentioned. While the formative influence of Ezek. 1 on the throne-room vision of Rev. 4-5 has been acknowledged in this dissertation, the only movement of the heavenly throne appears in the context of the new creation, from heaven to earth, though wheels are not mentioned as involved in the relocation. The contribution of the background chapter on the Old Testament lies in identifying five theological meanings of Yahweh's throne in this body of literature: (1) symbol of divine rulership; (2) symbol of judgeship; (3) place of revelation; (4) symbol of creating power; and (5) emblem of victory. While these meanings have been suggested on the basis of a concise exegetical study of representative throne texts from different books and it has been asserted that the overlapping is frequent, surprisingly, all five of these theological meanings meet in the book of Revelation. This continuity suggests that while Revelation's throne motif is more complex than the concept in the Old Testament, it is firmly rooted in it.

3. The research on the throne in Jewish literature revealed significant developments in relation to the Old Testament. The throne visions of God reflect a tendency away from the traditional theophanic imagery in avoiding the description of the throne and its occupant. While the throne theology of Revelation is on one hand rooted in the Old Testament, on the other hand this tendency is clearly perceived in the book as God is never described in spite of the repeated reference to him as 'the One sitting on the throne'. Also while a very detailed description of the throne's setting is given, a direct characterization of the throne itself occurs only in 20:11 where its greatness and white colour is described. The most significant development for our purpose is the emergence of the idea of heavenly thrones of beings other than God. Whereas this idea is hinted at but undeveloped in the thrones set up for the divine council in Dan. 7:9, in Jewish literature it has, I argue, two basic aspects: the heavenly

enthronement of the Old Testament heroic figures and the short references to the possession of thrones on the side of the patriarchs and of the pious. In some apocalyptic works only heroic figures are pictured on thrones, while in others the idea is broadened by including all the pious. In the broadest sense the dominant meanings of these thrones are related to the idea of judgment or most often to eschatological reward. These functions show a close affinity with the thrones of God's allies which appear in the book with both of these meanings (3:21; 20:4).

4. Our examination of the literary, numismatic and artistic Graeco-Roman sources has revealed the significance of the throne motif in the historical context in which the book of Revelation was born. I have suggested four basic meanings of the motif in the literature: (1) emblem of power; (2) expression of dignity; (3) place of revelation, petitions, worship and commissioning; and (4) various nuances of figurative meanings. On the basis of the study of Domitian's coins I suggested that the throne as a numismatic motif was more frequently utilized at the time of writing of Revelation or shortly before it than in the previous period of Roman rule. The reason for this development was the emergence of a new imperial mythology according to which Domitian viewed his role as Jupiter's vice-regent destined to establish a new order. The increased use of the throne motif on the coins with the other symbols of authority discussed in this dissertation conveyed the message of unrivalled royal power, a part of the propaganda for creating a new Empire. A significant point for the purpose of our research, emerging from the study of the artistic evidence, is the existence of the double thrones which were occupied by two deities at the same time. This aspect of the throne motif in the Graeco-Roman artistic sources shows affinity with the divine throne in the context of the new creation that is occupied simultaneously by God and the Lamb (Rev. 22:1, 3).

5. It has been established on the basis of an exegetical study of Rev. 4 that God's throne functions in the book as the *axis mundi* of the universe. Though the throne is the very first thing John sees in heaven, I have argued that the lack of a description and the avoidance of dealing with the figure seated on it is motivated by the intention of protecting God's transcendence. At the same time, it has been established that everything in the vision is portrayed in relation to the throne. This feature stresses on the one hand the throne's centrality in the cosmic map of the universe, while on the other it highlights the foundational picture of reality, according to which everything in creation finds its significance only in orientation towards the centre of the universe: the throne which stands for the One occupying it.

6. It has been demonstrated that the most significant characterization of God in the book is ‘the One sitting on the throne’, which repeatedly appears in the book. I have argued that the formula is employed with a theological purpose of accentuating God’s mysterious transcendence and the impossibility of expressing his awesomeness. While this formula, which stands as a circumlocution for God, implies an immobile and stable image, a detailed argument has been provided for demonstrating that the throne is a dynamic object from which phenomena are issued, statements are pronounced and judgment is conducted. A particular contribution in this regard resulted from the study of God’s two speeches in Revelation which are both related to the throne (1:8; 21:5-8). While the theological relation of the speeches is well known, I have suggested that the second speech in 21:5-8 is arranged in a ‘sandwich-chiasm’ with 21:6b at the focal point, which stresses God’s sovereignty as the guarantee for the new creation.

7. The analysis of the texts which state the Lamb’s occupation of the throne in the visionary part of the book (5:6; 7:17; 22:1, 3) reveals an increasing precision in defining the idea. The comparative analysis of these references reveals that the texts cover three major phases of history in which the Lamb’s throne together with God’s is at the centre of attention: in 5:6 he is enthroned within the context of history, 7:17 portrays the Lamb’s throne as the anchor of hope in the context of the eschatological salvation, while in 22:1, 3 the throne appears in the new creation. The most significant contribution of this dissertation to the scholarly discussion on the Lamb’s enthronement lies in providing an exegetical argument in favour of this position in ch. 5. At the same time an answer has been offered to the generally posed objection of the Lamb’s distance from the throne in the scene (5:7). The argument I have suggested is based on viewing 5:5-6 in terms of John’s identification–description literary technique which makes room for the possibility of a chronological discontinuity between 5:6 and 5:7.

8. It has been demonstrated that the use of the sub-motif of the Lamb’s throne is one of the major indicators of Revelation’s high Christology. Interestingly, the Lamb’s occupation of the throne is in neither context stated without a reference to God’s sitting on the throne. Neither is a collision of the thrones implied, since all three scenes referred to above are temple scenes. This leads us to the conclusion that no throne rivalry exists between the two major enthroned figures of Revelation, but it is appropriate to hold their sharing of a single throne throughout the book. This idea is nowhere more clearly expounded than in the concluding vision in which the two figures occupy on equal terms the same throne within the Garden of Eden setting of the new creation. This throne scene emanates a rhetorical energy

which makes it a fitting conclusion to the entire book, since here the climax in the defining of the relationship between God and Christ is reached. On the basis of the throne motif's use in 22:1-5 it becomes clear that in Revelation's Christology 'the Lamb is never an independent figure, but always Lamb-as-representative-of-God; God is never a figure defined apart from Christ, but always God-who-defines-himself-by Christ'.¹

9. The sub-motif of the thrones of God's allies incorporates three groups: (1) the overcomers (3:21); (2) the twenty-four elders (4:4; 11:16); and (3) the judges (20:4). I have attempted to establish the identity of all three groups. I have provided an argument to demonstrate that the overcomers are the church militant, whereas the judges signify the triumphant church in whose enthronement is realized the promise of 3:21. The most detailed argument has been provided for the identification of the elders as glorified saints, who function as the representatives of the people of God. Thus, all three groups of God's allies are actually human in character. It has been shown that their thrones never appear in an independent role apart from the divine throne, but rather a close relationship is implied in all the contexts in which they are represented. This leads us to the conclusion that the thrones of God's allies are of significance only in the light of the central divine throne. Whereas the thrones of the overcomers and the judges evoke more the ideas of reward and victory, the meaning of the thrones of the twenty-four elders is somewhat different. It has been demonstrated that the primary significance of these figures lies in the act they perform as leaders of the heavenly worship, therefore their thrones are repeatedly given up as homage is rendered to God and to the Lamb (4:10; 5:8, 14; 11:16; 19:4). This points to the unrivalled quality of the divine throne, in which light any throne is qualified only as a sub-throne and any authority may be perceived only as delegated.

10. Since Revelation is the book of oppositions, it is not surprising to discover that besides the positive thrones of God, the Lamb and their allies two adverse thrones also appear: the throne of Satan (2:13) and the throne of the beast (13:2; 16:10). The examination of the negative thrones has revealed two significant contributions which throw some light on the dynamics of the throne motif. First, it has been demonstrated that Satan's throne is contrasted with the only other *θρόνος* text in the context of the Seven Messages which states a throne occupation on the part of God, the Lamb and their allies (3:21). Significantly, these two characters and one group, actually their thrones, form the other three sub-motifs discussed so far. Thus, all the cardinal components of Revelation's throne motif are featured

¹ Boring, *Revelation*, 211.

once in the Seven Messages, polarized towards two centres. The purpose of setting up Satan's throne in opposition to the authority of the divine powers and their allies lies in putting into the focus of attention the theme of conflict over the issue of legitimate authority which is central to the visionary part of the book. As is evident, this major theme of Revelation is introduced in terms of a throne-tension in the epistolary section of Revelation. Second, I have suggested on the basis of a detailed argumentation that both the ministry of the Lamb and the career of the beast are framed by the throne motif. In the case of the Lamb this conclusion is quite evident, since his enthronement is stated at his introductory appearance (ch. 5), while his eternal reign with God the Father is affirmed in the book's concluding vision (22:1-5). On the other hand, the career of the beast starts similarly with its enthronement (13:2), but the only other throne reference implies its dethronement (16:10), since the darkness that strikes his throne and kingdom, understood against the exodus background, indicates the beginning of the official collapse of the diabolic empire. It seems reasonable to conclude that the point of this throne parallel lies in contrasting the lasting nature of the divine kingship with the temporary nature of the quasi-sovereignities' earthly reign.

11. The investigation of the literary characteristics of the *θρόνος* texts has revealed that the throne motif permeates the entire book of Revelation, since it is found in seventeen out of its twenty-two chapters. Statistical data has been provided for demonstrating that no vision, viewed with its introductory temple scene, is without the presence of the throne motif. The highest concentration of the *θρόνος* references is found in the throne-room vision of Rev. 4-5, which is widely acknowledged as the pivotal section of the entire book. The inductive analysis of the book's throne texts led us to the conclusion that the throne is closely linked with different concepts of which the most significant are the following: sovereignty of God, judgment, worship, covenant, rulership and priesthood, conflict with Satan and his agents, redemption, victory and new creation.

12. It has been demonstrated that conducting a motif study solely on the basis of the examination of the *θρόνος* references results in an incomplete picture. One of the contributions of this dissertation lies in the identification and the detailed study of three major cognate concepts that are integral to the development of the throne motif: the ark of the covenant (11:19), the Zion scene (14:1-5) and the *κάθημαι* references (chs. 14, 17-18). Evidence has been provided that these cognate concepts are employed at strategically significant structural locations with the purpose of reinforcing the significance of the throne motif as the central theological expression of the book. All three of these cognate concepts

are represented in the second half of Revelation, particularly influencing the Cosmic Conflict vision which lies at the heart of the book.

13. The examination of the macrodynamic of the throne motif's development has revealed that this motif is as far as is possible from a fixed and unchanging symbol. The integration of the results of the inductive analysis into the big picture and the tracing of the throne motif's development constitutes one of the key contributions of this dissertation to the scholarly discussion on Revelation. It has been established that the book utilizes the throne motif as a central principle for conveying a theological message. The throne motif appears as the focus of the author from the outset to the climax of the drama. As has been demonstrated, the Seven Messages climax in a throne motif (3:21), but also the visionary part starts (4:1–5:14) and concludes (22:1-5) with visions emphasizing the centrality of the throne. Moreover, the focal vision of the book utilizes it specifically with an emphatic reference in the middle of its chiasm by a cognate concept (14:1-5). The perspective opened by this investigation does not discount the theological value of the other major motifs of the book of Revelation. However, it has been demonstrated here that the throne motif functions as a central principle which theologically frames the entire book. Therefore, any study of the other motifs of the book of Revelation cannot ignore the observance of the throne motif.

14. Alongside numerous minor insights three major suggestions have emerged in the course of a study of the throne motif's macrodynamic which will be presented here. First, the only two throne references of the Seven Messages function as representatives of the two conflicting realities (2:13; 3:21). The grouping of the thrones towards two centres in the Seven Messages vision points to a tension between the divine and the diabolic forces. Thus, chs. 2–3 set up a theological framework for the book indicating the centrality of the issue of conflict over power (throne conflict) and anticipating the development of this theme throughout the book towards the dissolution in the new creation. Second, I have suggested on the basis of an argument that the Cosmic Conflict vision as Revelation's central section is chiastically arranged with a focal point in 14:1-5. According to this observation, the Zion scene of celebration appears as the centre of the centre in Revelation's macrochiasm. The vision provides an answer to the question of the legitimate rulers by utilizing a symbolism that functions as a cognate concept of the throne motif. Thus, the throne motif appears as the theological focus of the Cosmic Conflict vision, which points not only to the major theme of this vision, but more widely to the central theological perspective of the entire book. Third, I have suggested that besides the already acknowledged consistency concerning the flowing of each of the seven visions of Revelation from the introductory temple scenes, there is also a

consistency concerning the endings of the main visions. It has been demonstrated that they are linked by the throne motif, since they conclude either with a throne scene or a statement announcing God's reign.

15. I have suggested a consistent pattern concerning the introduction of Revelation's major figures which points to the significance of the throne motif in the book's theology. Namely, each major character or group is introduced in reference to the throne. While the throne is not the only feature in the introduction, it is an inevitable part of the pattern. Thus, God is introduced at the beginning of the visionary part as 'the One sitting on the throne' (4:2), the Lamb as located in the midst of the throne (5:6), the heavenly beings including the living creatures, the elders and the angelic beings as standing in front and around the throne (4:4, 6, 11), whereas the elect's identity is also intimately tied to the heavenly throne (7:9). On the other hand, the beast's enthronement is stated in its introductory description (13:2), while the great prostitute is also identified in terms of occupying many waters and a beast-throne (17:1, 3). It seems that the identity of the book's major figures is defined at least partially by the employment of the throne motif. This feature points to the issue of power as lying at the heart of the book and indicating that the proper use of God-given freedom is a major responsibility in living within a power structure defined by the creator of the universe.

16. The rhetorical impact of the throne motif has been evaluated against the rhetorical situation John addresses. An argument has been offered in favour of the view that the imperial cults were the most influential factor in the *Sitz im Leben* of Revelation. It has been demonstrated that as a result of an all-permeating imperial influence a new cosmology was created in John's environment which symbolically ordered human society around the Roman Empire as its centre. The imperial reconstruction of reality involved the redefinition of the two basic categories of human existence: space and time. I have offered an extensive argument to show that Revelation opposes the imperial view of reality by projecting an alternative cosmology from the transcendent point of view. The basis of John's rhetorical strategy lies in disclosing the hidden dimensions of reality and picturing a 'sacred cosmos' in which the single most important feature is the orientation of the whole created order towards the throne of God, the sole power centre of the universe. It has been demonstrated that in John's cosmic map not only spatial, but also temporal aspects are oriented towards the heavenly throne. Such a view of reality struck at the heart of the Roman propaganda, since it disclosed the symbolic universe projected by the Empire as an illusory construct, a temporary distortion of reality's perception. At the same time, it has been also concluded that the rhetorical significance of Revelation's throne motif surpasses the book's *Sitz im Leben*. On a

wider level it counters the initiations of God's arch-enemy against the divine government. In this sense John's throne theology as the cornerstone of his rhetorical strategy is a basic means in the settling of the more compelling issue of evil that lies at the heart of the cosmic conflict.

17. It has been suggested that a significant aspect of the throne motif's rhetorical impact concerns its ethical motivational function, which is rooted in the issue of an appropriate attitude towards God's kingly rule. Since the picture of reality revealed in the book highlights in a dualistic tone that God's authority is the legitimate one in contrast to the illegitimate claims of his adversaries, the decision over acknowledging this thesis is presented as an inevitable choice that needs to be made. No middle ground is possible. The two kinds of responses are modelled in the contrasted attitudes of the twenty-four elders and the dragon, who either vacate their thrones in acknowledging God's sovereign rule or choose to retain their symbols of power. Since God is associated with good and his adversaries with evil, the choice of loyalty is ethicized.

18. The theological function of the throne motif has been investigated in reference to two closely related questions which are basic for understanding of the book: the question of God and the question of history. It has been established that the theological framework of the book is built around the concept of God's sovereign kingship, which is the major aspect of Revelation's theism. The discussion has revealed that the anthropomorphic expressions are generally avoided in the book and no evidence supports the existence of a sharp dichotomy between the throne and its occupant – probably for the sake of highlighting the incomparability of God's sovereignty. However, the emphasis on absolute authority is balanced with an immanent aspect, since the Lamb's ministry reflects how God is related to the world. It has been shown that the throne motif is not only central for conveying the notion of sovereignty, but also divine justice which is similarly basic to the theological fabric of Revelation. The theological aspects of Revelation's concept of judgment have received particular attention and four basic aspects of it have been established: disclosing, purposive, vindicating and redemptive. It has been demonstrated that the throne motif functions within Revelation's judgment theology as a leading symbol not only because of its eminent role in numerous judgment scenes, but because the judgment septets are all pictured as issuing from the heavenly throne. In this sense the throne ties together the judgment narratives, but it is essential also in other judgment scenes (e.g. 20:4, 11). I have argued that Revelation's grace theology is also a major element of the book's theism. Although the throne motif is not of a major significance, its contribution is twofold. It has been pointed out that the majority of Revelation's soteriological references that evoke the notion of grace appear within a worship

setting in which the point of reference is the heavenly throne. Also it has been observed that the book's first and last throne visions (chs. 4–5; 22:1-5), while strongly stressing the order of theocracy, also contain specific images of grace: the rainbow and the river of the water of life, which convey the message that God's authority and power are inseparable from his positive intentions towards the created world.

19. It has been argued that the question of God is inseparable from the question of history, since on the one hand God withholds his glory from the world ruled by the powers of evil, and on the other he is strongly involved in the course of history. The discussion concerning the question of history revealed that Revelation is strongly preoccupied with the issue of evil, the root of the problem. The essence of the problem expressed in throne language may be defined as the satanic attempt to dethrone God and 'reform' (actually deform) the created order set by him. Therefore, the theme of cosmic conflict is essential to Revelation as it portrays a kind of 'emergency state'. It has been demonstrated that the global struggle is manifested on two integrally related levels: on the cosmic level God's rule is contested by Satan's kingdom and on the social level the community of believers is opposed by the rest of the humanity. It has been established that the most detailed discussion of the theme is reserved for the central vision in Revelation's chiasm (12:1–14:20) in which the focus is on the Lamb and his army, the conquerors in the conflict. Three contributions of the throne motif to the development of the theme have been suggested: (1) the throne is at the centre of the conflict which is actually a 'throne conflict' (13:2 vs. 14:3); (2) the overcoming of both the Lamb and the conquerors is rewarded by sitting on throne, though there is a significant difference in nature of the two enthronements; and (3) at the focal point of the structure of the Cosmic Conflict vision is a throne scene (14:1-5) which pictures the legitimate rulers of the universe. It has been demonstrated that there is a logical progression in Revelation towards the resolution of the cosmic conflict. This process supposes a conquering programme involving both the Lamb and the church. The conflict climaxes in the triumph of God's kingdom: his throne is vindicated as the true throne contra the quasi-thrones of Satan and his agents.

20. I have argued that one of the major aspects in the development of the throne motif is the relocation of the divine throne from heaven to the new earth in the final vision of Revelation. Throughout the book God's throne with the Lamb's throne and the thrones of their allies are located exclusively in the heavenly context. On the other hand, the thrones of God's adversaries are limited to the earth. The new creation brings a reversal of the pattern, since it provides a context for relocating the heavenly throne onto the new Earth. The moving

of the centre of space and time to the new earth not only clearly indicates the disappearance of the distance between God and humanity, but also the establishment of a new order in the universe with the centre on earth. This development seals God's victory on one hand, but on the other it stands as a lasting reminder of his character disclosed in a particular way in the process of vindicating his reputation. Whereas the saints are not pictured as occupying heavenly thrones in the new creation, the fulfilment of the promise of thrones from 3:21 is reflected in the statement that 'they will reign forever and ever' (22:5). Thus, the visionary part of Revelation closes with the restoration of the original mandate given to the first man (Gen. 1:26, 28): rule over the earth as an expression of God's delegated sovereignty.

While this dissertation has attempted to fill a significant gap in Revelation studies, it has also opened up some questions that necessitate further research. First of all, the methodology of motif study needs detailed examination. This dissertation has drawn attention to the need for a comprehensive approach suggesting some basic steps. However, these steps need further clarification and more detailed elaboration by specialists from different areas. Second, while the number of thematic and motif studies concerning Revelation has increased significantly in the last decades, still some of the basic aspects lack an in-depth examination or are almost not examined at all. One issue which suggests itself as a fruitful area of research is the covenant motif in Revelation. Third, the fact that Revelation advocates high Christology and at the same time trinitarian elements are present in it – but only the first two members of the trinity are pictured on the throne – suggests the question of the Spirit's role in the book for further examination, including its relationship to the throne.

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