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Backgrounds, Backdrops, and Other Important Starting Points

If there is one thing that Christians know about their religion, it is that it is not Judaism. If there is one thing that Jews know about their religion, it is that it is not Christianity. If there is one thing that both groups know about this double not, it is that Christians believe in the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ (the Greek word for Messiah) and that Jews don't, that Jews keep kosher and Christians don't. If only things were this simple.

– Daniel Boyarin[1]

READING REVELATION AS A JEWISH TEXT

Let us begin by establishing Revelation as a Jewish text. Contrary to popular opinion, the notion that the Apocalypse shares affinities with ancient Judaism is nothing new. I will explain this in four main points. First: language. As biblicists often note, Revelation is written in Greek, but the writing style indicates that its author's first language was either Hebrew or Aramaic[2] – that is, a language spoken by many Jews. Furthermore, while many biblical and extrabiblical sources were anonymously or pseudonymously written, Revelation's author self-identifies as *Iōannes* (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8),[3] the Greek version of *yōchanan* (i.e., "John"), four times within the text. *Iōannes* was a popular Jewish name in antiquity, and it would have registered as Jewish in the minds of ancient readers/listeners regardless of whether it was written in its Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek versions. What we

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[1] Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 1.

[2] More probably Aramaic.   [3] The name *Iōannes* means "YHWH is gracious."

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can gather from this is that John – regardless of whether he was actually born a "John," and regardless of whether his Greek was actually better than his writing illustrates – wanted to be *read* as taking part in Jewish culture.

Such a reading becomes heightened when taking into consideration the second point, which has been championed in large part by David Frankfurter: Revelation's halakhically oriented theology.[4] Already in chapter 2, for instance, John accuses those at the church in Pergamum of following the teachings of Balaam[5] over and against those of the Israelite God: "But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and engage in improper sex acts" (Rev. 2:14). The impropriety alluded to here is, at base, a response to faulty ideals – at least in the eyes of John. This becomes clear when reading verse 14 alongside its most obvious intertext: Numbers 22–31. There, Balaam is depicted as a non-Israelite prophet who was so blind to YHWH's commands that even his she-ass could understand his desires better than he did. And even though Balaam does eventually bless the Israelites as YHWH commands, his blessings backfire quickly. In Numbers 25, the Israelites begin to intermarry, worship false gods, and eat food sacrificed to idols, thus making it seem as if Balaam's blessings are really curses. Balaam, in turn, is blamed for the Israelites' wrongdoings – i.e., their non-halakhic practices – and he is put to death for leading the Israelites astray (Num. 31:8, 16). Thus, by referring to these Numbers passages in his critique of Christ-followers at Pergamum, John makes it clear that implied readers must abide by the Jewish commandment to honor the God of Israel – to eat food dedicated to that God, and not to fornicate with – that is, worship – others' Gods (cf. 1 Cor. 8).

In the third place – and this is paramount – John reveals a persistent concern with Jewish nationalism. Throughout the text, we learn that 144,000 law-abiding (i.e., halakhically oriented) Jews from every tribe of

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[4] In the words of Frankfurter, Revelation is filled with "extensions, or consequences, of [John's] hyperpurity" (David Frankfurter, "Jews or Not? Reconstructing the 'Other' in Rev 2:9 and 3:9," *Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 4 [October 2001]: 414). In Frankfurter's view, the level at which Revelation insists its implied readers keep halakha becomes clearer when one compares its theology to the theology espoused in Paul's letters. In 1 Corinthians 8, for instance, Paul says that it is appropriate for Christ-followers to eat of food dedicated to idols: "Food will not bring us close to God" (1 Cor. 8:8). Frankfurter contends that the Apocalypse advocates for the utmost practice of Jewish law, thus marking it as a Jewish text.

[5] For extrabiblical reference to Balaam, see 4Q339 2; Philo, *Migr.* 113–114, *Mos.* 1.227, 294–299; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.129–130, *L.A.B.* 18:13–14.

Israel[6] will be sealed in the end times, and that, in addition to the 144,000, "a great multitude … from *every nation*" will also be sealed (Rev. 7:9). While it is clear that this sealing gives the 144,000 access to the New Jerusalem (14:3–4) and also marks those who are sealed as having priestly status (5:9–10), it appears less clear to which ethnic group(s) "the great multitude" belong. The traditional view is that the great multitude signifies a Gentile population, as the Greek term for "nation" (*ethnos*) is often thought to designate a Gentile populace. Of course, if the book of Revelation is read as a Jewish text for halakhically oriented followers of Christ, as I am suggesting here, it might appear jarring that a great multitude of Gentiles are sealed *alongside* 144,000 law-abiding Jews. The notion, however, that *all* nations – that is, Jews and Gentiles – will enter the kingdom of heaven in the end of days still reflects a first-century, Jewish worldview and an expansionist vision of Jewish nationalism centered on the messianic expectation that emerged from post-exilic prophetic literature (Isa. 60; Jer. 3:15; Tob. 13:11; Zech. 14; Mic. 4:2–4). While Jews in the first century internalized the messianic expectation in different ways, the general understanding of it was that a messiah/anointed one, often viewed as being in the line of King David,[7] would come to overthrow the powers that be and establish a new kingdom in which the God of Israel would be the God of all people. Although recognizing the nuance within the meaning of "all," Amy-Jill Levine nevertheless summarizes:

The coming of the messiah meant that there would be a manifest difference in the world . . .. The messianic age, or the "world to come," was the time of proclaiming "release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind" – not just some captives, but *all*; not just some who are blind, but *all*.[8]

Pamela Eisenbaum is helpful on this, too, as she stresses even more the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles in the coming world. In her work on

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[6] That 144,000 tribe members are sealed is numerically symbolic in Jewish tradition, not only because such survivors come from the twelve tribes of Israel, but also because 144,000 is a multiple of twelve (perhaps representing 12,000 survivors from each tribe), which represents a form of Jewish eschatological "completeness." See Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 158. Revelation's repeated focus on the number seven (1:4, 11, 12, 16, 20, etc.) is also significant, as it is represented as the "perfect number" in many ancient Jewish writings; for a prominent example, see Philo's *On the Creation*.

[7] For nuance, see John Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York, NY: Anchor Bible, 1995).

[8] Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2007), 57. Emphasis added.

Paul, for instance, she concludes that Paul's request for Gentile Christ-followers to *stay* Gentile is for the specific purpose of inaugurating the messianic age. In her words:

Paul … believes his mission is to help inaugurate this event by drawing the Gentiles in – not literally going to Jerusalem but turning them from their worship of idols to a recognition of the one, true God, and thus integrating them into the family of God. Furthermore, Paul believes that the ingathering of the nations constitutes the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that all the nations would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3; 18:18). In order to achieve the realization of this promise, Gentiles cannot become Jews. Undergoing circumcision, which is the signature mark of Jewish identity, would effectively turn Gentiles into Jews, and would not, therefore, constitute a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and the prophetic vision of the ingathering of the nations.[9]

The point for Eisenbaum, then, is that even though God-believing Gentiles are included in the end-times, such an age still operates within a specifically Jewish framework and with the God of Israel serving as ruler over all peoples.

This gets us back to Revelation. For if we put these views in conversation with John's Apocalypse, we discover that Revelation might indeed include Gentiles in the New Jerusalem as a product *of* its Jewishness. In John's text, it is Jesus who fulfills the role of messiah. He is the Davidic King who will establish a new world order in which he and the Israelite God will rule over all believing Jews and Gentiles in the New Zion. This New Zion, moreover, functions for John as a bigger and better Jewish Temple; it is the "Holy of Holies," matching the exact measurements of the Temple sanctuary outlined in 1 Kings 6:20.[10]

Finally, by way of this contextualization: Of the text's 404 verses, at least 278 of them allude to stories or images within traditional Jewish texts that require no explanation.[11] The lack of background information

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[9] Pamela Eisenbaum, "Jewish Perspectives: A Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles," in *Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods*, ed. Joseph A. Marchal (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 141. See also E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 212–218.

[10] In preparing for this destiny, the text includes a measurement of the Jerusalem Temple with the exemption of the Temple's courtyard. Such measuring represents not only reverence of the Israelite God (see Ezekiel 40–42), but also the anticipation of a new age without non-believers, as the Temple courtyard was the only location where non-YHWH worshippers could visit and/or operate within the Temple's walls. See Frankfurter, "Revelation," 478, 480.

[11] This oft-cited estimate is from Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1906), cxxxv.

implies that summary was unnecessary for his intended audience. Its apocalyptic associations also position it within a larger body of visionary literature that was well steeped in ancient Judaism, "reach[ing] back to Isaiah 6, the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, *1* and *2 Enoch*, and forward to the various apocalypses in 'John's' own time composed under the names of *Ezra* and *Baruch*."[12]

So, What's the Problem?

Despite these oft-noted affinities with ancient Judaism (some more than others), Revelation is more commonly labeled a Christian text. To date, John W. Marshall's *Parables of War: Reading John's Jewish Apocalypse* is the only monograph that deals extensively with the Jewishness of Revelation.[13] A primary reason for this, I suggest, is because the field of biblical studies has a long history of misguided – and often times even anti-Semitic – interpretations of ancient Christ-centered texts. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for instance, biblicists contended regularly that Judaism became a sterile entity after Jesus' death, and that Christianity advanced through Jesus' resurrection as not only the *right* tradition, but also a fully developed one. Some even described the Judaism of the Second Temple period as "late Judaism," which implied that it was, to use the words of Shaye Cohen, "a sterile, lifeless organism, waiting in vain for the infusion of spirituality that only Christianity could provide."[14] As such, Judaism was seen as the obsolete "parent" of a grace-filled child.

Interpretations of Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 have stood at the forefront of this view. In these verses, John displays apparent animosity toward

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[12] Frankfurter, "Revelation," 464.

[13] See John W. Marshall, *Parables of War: Reading John's Jewish Apocalypse*, Studies in Christianity and Judaism 10 (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001). Passing acknowledgments of Revelation's Jewishness may be found in the work of a number of scholars. Elaine Pagels, for example, states: "John not only sees himself as a Jew but regards being Jewish as an honor that those who fail to observe God's covenant – especially non-Jews – do not deserve" (Elaine Pagels, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation* [New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012], 61). Greg Carey writes: "Revelation reflects no awareness of a 'Gentile'-dominated 'Christianity' that has abandoned the primary symbols of Jewish identity…. Revelation expresses its counter-imperial agenda through its foundation in subaltern Jewish tradition" (Carey, "The Book of Revelation as Counter-Imperial Script," 159–160).

[14] Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 7.

ioudaioi[15] ("I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" [2:9]; "I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying – I will make them come and bow down before your feet" [3:9]), which has led scholars to assume that the text is setting itself apart from Judaism and must therefore be Christian, or, at the very least, Christian-like.[16] Traditional interpretations of these passages – and, by extension, Revelation writ large – are epitomized in Philip Mayo's 2006 evaluation, which, although not inherently anti-Semitic, illustrates the field's misguided tendencies. In his words, Revelation

is a decidedly Christian text written by a Jewish Christian author to likely predominantly Gentile churches. John, who is an ethnic Jew, seems to deny the very name "Jew" to his ethnic kin while accusing them of belonging to Satan (2.9; 3.9). Nevertheless, he does not abandon his own Jewish background and theology…. It is John's mix of Jewish imagery with a Christian message that may provide some insight into his perspective on the relationship between these two increasingly polarized sects.[17]

On Mayo's reading, John is clearly interested in Jewish *things*, but neither he nor his text can actually be Jewish *fully*, as John and Revelation recognize Jesus as the Christ, all while calling "Jews" in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 followers of Satan. Despite the fact that John never says that these Jews – let alone all Jews – are synagogues of Satan (they only *say* they are Jews), Mayo reads these lines as indicative of Judaism and Christianity becoming distinct entities by the time John wrote his apocalypse. John comes from a Jewish background, on Mayo's reading, but in Revelation he is preaching something *different*.

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[15] Variously translated as "Jews" or "Judeans." There is much debate on this issue. For a summary exposition, see Adele Reinhartz, "The Vanishing Jews of Antiquity," *Marginalia*, June 24, 2014, http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/vanishing-jews-antiquity-adele-reinhartz/.

[16] Readings such as these also often rely on *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* for historical contextualization. In this martyr text, Smyrna's evil Jews help the Roman authorities hurt Christ-followers, which has led many scholars to think that the *ioudaioi* in Revelation must be doing the same. Such analysis is not historically dependable. Not only is the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* an unreliable source, but as noted above, John does not suggest that those in Smyrna are Jews at all (they only *say* they are Jews), let alone all Jews or a group symbolic of Rome writ large. See further Marshall, *Parables of War*, 14–16.

[17] Philip L. Mayo, *"Those Who Call Themselves Jews": The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 2–3.

Historical Considerations

It is important to keep in mind, however, that Jewishness in the first century was neither uniform nor static. As noted in the Introduction, Judaism was marked by many sects and subsects, which contributed to the expansion of a variety of Jewish views and practices. It was so varied, in fact, that some scholars have considered it more appropriate to rely on the plural "Judaisms" as opposed to the singular "Judaism." Jacob Neusner is known in particular for championing such a view. In his words, "The issue, how to define Judaism, is now settled: We do not." Instead, he adds, "We define Judaisms . . .. There never was, in real, social terms, that single Judaism, there were only the infinite and diverse Judaic systems, as various social entities gave expression to their way of life, worldview, and theory of the social entity they formed."[18] Not all scholars have agreed with this, however. For example, as Philip R. Davies asserts, a reliance on "Judaisms" still begs the question of a singular Judaism. He explains: "The replacement of the concept of 'Judaism' by the concept of 'Judaisms' solves one problem only to create another, perhaps even more fundamental one – namely what it was that made any 'Judaism' a Judaism . . .. The plural 'Judaisms' requires some definition of 'Judaism' in the singular, in order itself to have any meaning."[19] Others, however, approach Jewish diversity by using the concept of ancient Jewish sectarianism. According to Seth Schwartz, for instance, while Jewishness was constructed in and around the Jewish God, Temple, and Torah,[20] subgroups developed with differing views of this tripartite

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[18] Jacob Neusner, *The Judaism the Rabbis Take for Granted* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), 12, 18.

[19] Philip R. Davies, "Scenes from the Early History of Judaism," in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms*, ed. Diana Vikander Edelman (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 147, 151.

[20] In rejecting multiple "Judaisms" and advocating for the development of Jewish subgroups (i.e., "sects") as part of a larger God–Temple–Torah-based Judaism, Schwartz also argues that there was a "nonsectarian norm" which constructed itself similarly around a God–Temple–Torah ideological complex. In Schwartz's view, then, sectarian groups understood themselves as somehow "set apart" from a more "normative" set of negotiations. It is precisely this point of Schwartz's argument that I think requires further explanation. For example, rather than read sectarian groups as understanding themselves as separate from nonsectarian or more "mainstream" groups, I read sects as promoting nuanced views of a nonsectarian God–Temple–Torah *system of negotiation*. I do not interpret the term "sect" in the modern sense (e.g., a group that holds somewhat separate beliefs from a larger group to which they belong), but rather as a "school" or "philosophy." Sects debated about how to negotiate a broad-based God–Temple–Torah

system. Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, and Jesus-followers are but a few.[21] It is also important to note that, while self-identifying, self-constructing[22] Jews in the early centuries BCE and CE debated regularly about their God, Temple, and Torah – such as how best to interpret the Torah's halakhic codes or how best to understand the messianic expectation – these debates were to the mutual end of determining how best to practice Judaism. Difference, in other words, did not eliminate sameness. By extension, to believe that *Jesus* was the Christ – that *he* fulfilled the messianic expectation – was not a point of difference *from* Judaism, but rather functioned as another nuanced view *within* Judaism. Revelation's Christology does not differentiate it from a Jewish context, but rather situates it that much more within one. John cares deeply about his Jewishness. And he cares deeply that Jesus is a part of it.

Of course, one may argue here that the categories such as "Jewish-Christian" or "Christian-Jewish" are appropriate for Revelation, so long as we recognize "Christian" as another subgroup of ancient Jewish sectarianism. As Daniel Boyarin writes on the matter, "[W]hether or not there were Christianity and Judaism [as separate religions], there were, it seems, at least some Christians who were not Jews, and, of course, many Jews who were not Christians."[23] This implies that there were, in turn, some Christians who were Jews, and some Jews who were Christians – perhaps even "Christian Jews" and "Jewish Christians." Ancient writers seem to support this view, at least in part. Already in the early second century, Roman historians referred to Christ-followers as *Christiani* (e.g., Suetonius *Nero* 16:2) – or *Chrestiani*, a likely misspelling of *Christiani* (e.g., Tacitus *Annals* 15) – which may lead some to question: Should we, like them, implement Christian vocabulary, or even *iudaeus-christus*

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system, but even if that *system* is "norm," I am not sure what a nonsectarian would have looked like. The system itself is one of negotiations. Each self-constructing Jew/Jewish group understood herself/himself/themselves in relation to a broad-based *discursive* Jewish system, and each Jew/Jewish group negotiated an understanding of that system – a "philosophy" of that system – and therefore a "sectarian" view of that system. For more on Schwartz's view of sectarianism and nonsectarianism, see Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2001), 8–10, 49–74, 91–93.

[21] Ibid., 91. Schwartz focuses on Jewish subgroups in Palestine, but also adds that "no doubt sectarians sometimes emigrated" (ibid.).

[22] I add this qualifier to get to Schwartz's astute observation that some Jews may have been only "peripherally or occasionally aware of belonging" to a particular Jewish social system and/or philosophy.

[23] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 7.

vocabulary, when talking about the Apocalypse's Christ-centered orientation?

I think it is wise to avoid Christian language in reference to Revelation. Not only does the term "Christian" not appear in John's own vernacular, but it assumes too quickly separation from Jewishness in the first century. A major reason for this comes down to our own modern assumptions. Because the term "Christian" in contemporary discourse refers regularly to something "other" than Judaism, it becomes all too easy to render Christians as different from Jews in the ancient world. We see evidence of this in our own terminology. If "Christian" registered in our minds the same way that "Pharisee," "Sadducee," or "Essene" do, we would likely not need the Jewish qualifier aside the term "Christian" in order to stress that we are, indeed, talking about Jews. We do not employ "Jewish Pharisee" or "Jewish Sadducee," precisely because we do not assume that being a Pharisee or Sadducee was a point of binary difference within Judaism. As Boyarin himself adds, while "[t]he distinctions of identity/identification [between Jews and Christians] would, *ultimately*, make a difference … *they hadn't yet*."[24] In short, the many characteristics and traditions we see today as inherently "Jewish" or "Christian" were not distinguishable in the early centuries CE.

Here is an example: Although it is a common belief today that Christianity is fundamentally different from Judaism in its reverence for a multiplistic godhead (i.e., God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit), this idea fit well within the parameters of ancient Jewish theology. In antiquity, prior to constructions of the triune, most deists were polytheists or henotheists, contending that there were many gods exuding power over many territories. Even the ancient Israelites believed that the God of Israel was but one god among many; the proclamation "Hear O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone" was not a monotheistic one historically, but rather a henotheistic one. Yahweh was viewed as the God of the Israelites, but not the god of all. Why? Because other people had other gods. The Deuteronomistic declaration "Yahweh alone" did not eliminate the notion of multiple existing deities, but rather highlighted the import of Yahweh specifically for the Israelite people.

By the time of the first century, most Jews did adhere to a monotheistic theology, but nevertheless understood God's divine realm as having space for other divine entities. Rather than attesting to the existence of multiple

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[24] Ibid. Emphasis added.

godheads for multiple peoples, Jews began focusing on the existence of their God – and the existence of their God's divine helpers – over and against the existence of others. The infamous "Son of Man" passage in Daniel 7 is particularly indicative of such Jewish-centered multiplicity. Here, Daniel envisions an angelic being – "one like a son of man" – arriving on the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13). Daniel is then told (by another divine being, no less) that the Son of Man will eventually be given reign over the earth. So while the Jewish God sits on high, that God is nevertheless surrounded by, and even assisted by, other divine beings. Ancient conceptions of the Logos are also indicative of this. According to the prominent first-century Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, for instance, God created the world through the Logos. Because the world was too material for an immaterial God to come in contact with, Philo believed that God used the Logos – often conceptualized as God's wisdom and word, aspects connected yet nevertheless separate from God proper – as an intermediary. Views to Genesis 1 illustrate this notion well; in the beginning, Elohim (a plural enunciation of the Israelite God) spoke the world into existence: "*va-yomer Elohim* (God(s) said), let there be light, and there was light."[25] By extension, to view Jesus as the messiah, as a deity, or even as a hypostasis of God was unique solely in the sense that Jesus was the one fulfilling such a role. As the fourth evangelist states: "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and God was the Logos . . .. All things were created through him . . .. [Jesus too] was in the world, and the world was created by him [as the Logos]" (John 1:1,10; see also 1:14). The difference, in other words, between a Christ-centered implied Self (the Jesus-follower) and the Christ-centered implied Other (the non-Jesus-follower) is not the belief in a multiplistic godhead, but the particularity of the role of Jesus within it.[26] Moreover, while negotiations of Self and Other took place between and across groups (as evidenced already in Revelation's claims of halakhic Christ-following as the right following; more on this below), such discussions do not demand fixed borders. On the contrary, they allude to the multiplicity that was vibrant in Jewish discourse prior to Jesus of Nazareth's life, and also centuries beyond his death.

[25] Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2014), 47–84.
[26] As Boyarin argues, the prologue in John functions as a midrash of Genesis that illustrates a movement from a failed universalistic Jewish Logos theology to a particular Johannine Christology that focuses on Jesus of Nazareth as the Logos (see Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 89–147).

Revelation and the "Parting of the Ways" Debate

My position here is shaped in large part by the "Parting of the Ways" debate. According to the traditional Parting narrative, Judaism and Christianity not only "parted ways" in the wake of the fall of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE (and then even more after the failed Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 CE), but they, in doing so, became "conflicting and categorically different."[27] While this Parting model assumes that the Jesus movement was still negotiating its place within the ever-complex terrain of Second Temple Judaism for most of the first century CE – as difference and debate permeated the Jewish landscape at this time – it nevertheless claims that the destruction of the Temple and subsequent events/conflicts led the traditions to "institutionaliz[e] their differences."[28] Interpreters more recently, however, have debated about the date of such a parting (e.g., was the effective cause really the Temple's destruction?),[29] or if there really was a moment that necessitated a *definitive* split (e.g., was there really an *exact* moment in which Judaism and Christianity became or even started to become "categorically different"?). Some have even questioned whether a parting ever took place at all.[30] As is well known,

[27] Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Introduction," in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 1.

[28] Ibid., 4, 5. Such institutionalization is often attributed to two parallel events that occurred in the wake of 70 CE: The Pharisees' creation of rabbinic Judaism at Yavneh and the Jerusalem church's flight to and subsequent loss of authority at Pella – both events, however, whose historicity has been called into question in recent scholarship. See, for example, Daniel Boyarin, "A Tale of Two Synods: Nicaea, Yavneh, and Rabbinic Ecclesiology, " *Exemplaria* 12 (2000): 21–62; Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 91–92, 151–201; Gerd Lüdemann, "The Successors of Pre-70 Jerusalem Christianity: A Critical Evaluation of the Pella-Tradition," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 1, *The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, ed. E. P. Sanders (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 161–173; Annette Yoshiko Reed, "'Jewish Christianity' after the 'Parting of the Ways': Approaches to Historiography and Self-Definition in the Pseudo-Clementines," in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 189–231.

[29] The failed Bar Kochba revolt in 135 CE has become a leading alternative contender.

[30] Despite my own qualms with the historicity of this narrative, I think it wise to recognize that it nevertheless functions in large part as an attempt to dismantle Christian supersessionism and Christian anti-Semitism. Its origins lie in work such as that of James Parkes. In the third chapter of his 1934 book, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, which he titled "The Parting of the Ways," Parkes concluded that the separation had nothing to do with Jesus or Jesus' own worldviews. Instead, the split occurred toward the end of the first century CE. Although he employed the term "separation" more than "parting," the language within his chapter's title gained

Judaism today maintains a cultural fluidity not unlike that of the early centuries BCE and CE (one here might recall the motto: two Jews, three opinions). But Christianity, too – the non-Jewish, non-halakhic version many of us recognize today – emerged out of the same set of negotiations. Alongside Jews arguing about how best to be Jewish – including whether that "best" should center around Jesus as the Christ – there were Gentile Christ-followers assessing who Jesus was, what Jesus was, how best to follow him, how best to worship him, how best to write about him, and even how best to read about him. These debates also often included views on Jewishness. For example, because Jesus was a Jew, Gentile Christ-followers questioned how they could join the Jesus movement without being Jews themselves. Some asked: Should we convert? Should we stay Gentile? If we stay Gentile, should we read Jewish scripture? If so, in what way(s)? How do we distinguish ourselves from Jews who are reading the same texts?

In many instances, the answers to these questions were not just to be taken seriously, but in dialogue actually the very core of early Christianity. As Gentile Christ-followers expressed their ideas verbally, various groups (e.g., proto-Orthodox, Valentinians, Sethians, Arians, Marcionites, Montanists, etc.) became products of simultaneous convergence and divergence.[31] Their crisscrossing ideologies, moreover, made it so Gentile Christ-followers, alongside Jews (both Christ-followers and not), were part of the same discursive system. The very core of Christianity, in sum, is nothing short of multivocal; there is no coherent story of nascent Christianity other than one that illuminates the many. Even the winning "strand" of Christianity that is reflected in the theology of the Nicene Creed maintained coherence with other Christ-following groups and early Judaism.

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traction, as did his pursuit to highlight the previously overlooked connections between Judaism and Christianity in the first century. Parkes' pursuit then gained even more traction post–World War II, when conversations surrounding the origins of anti-Semitism impacted the scholarly discourse in a way they never had before. Scholars sought not only to dismantle contemporary anti-Semitic claims, but also to expose the anti-Semitism and prejudices of past research. In many ways, then, the "Parting of the Ways" narrative functioned as a response to medieval and modern anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish readings of the New Testament, as well as an avenue by which scholars could combat Christian anti-Semitism. For more on Parkes' role in the "Parting" narrative, see Becker and Reed, "Introduction," 7–16.

[31] Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 9.

Revelation, in fact, offers us insight into this complex give-and-take. The Apocalypse is, in a manner of speaking, textual evidence of the variability of Christ-followingness as an identity and the nascent stages of movements that would eventually establish themselves as "Rabbinic Judaism" and "Christianity." To put it otherwise, Revelation bespeaks the multiplicity inhering in Jewishness *and* a broader Christ-followingness within the first century, as well as the negotiation of a particular type of Jewishness and Christ-followingness within its imaginary. Throughout the Apocalypse, John combats *both* Gentiles who do not follow Jesus and other Jewish sects (perhaps those mentioned in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9?[32]) who do not subscribe to his particular understanding of what it means to be Jewish. For John, it is the halakhically oriented Christ-followers – the *Jewish* Christ-followers – who are rewarded most. This reliance on halakhic ideals, attachment to Jewish scripture, and a Christ-centered worldview is evidenced not only through the glorification of such combination, but also, if not more so, through the text's subversions of those who do not share the same orientation. For example, in addition to forcing the "synagogue(s) of Satan" to bow down and worship in the ways John desires, Revelation also tortures Jezebel, the text's local whore, for her unlawful sex acts and eating practices. Babylon, the text's global whore, is similarly admonished for eating foods unclean – the "blood of the saints and martyrs" – and for leading the world astray through her own non-halakhic, non-Christ following ideals and practices. Again, the words "Christian" and "Christianity" are nowhere to be found in Revelation, whereas notions of "Israel" and, furthermore, "*true* Israel" are alluded to repeatedly with regards to its implied community of readers (see especially Rev. 2 and 7). It is precisely those who abide by John's halakhically oriented theology who are established as God's true Israel,

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[32] Some scholars, in an effort to push against the notion that the *ioudaioi* in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 represent all Jews for John (and, in turn, that John is anti-Jewish), contend that the *ioudaioi* are not Jews at all, but rather Pauline Gentiles claiming to be Jewish (see Pagels, *Revelations*, 60; see also Frankfurter, "Jews or Not?"; and Frankfurter, "Revelation," 469).

While I do not deny the possibility of these "so-called Jews" being Gentile, or being specifically Gentile Pauline/neo-Pauline Christ-followers, I think it plausible that John *was* speaking to ethnic Jews here, although in a way that does not assume a Jewish–Christian split. Rather, he could be arguing with other Jewish sectarians who are not practicing and embodying Judaism in the way he finds most fit. His claims, in other words, could be indicative of intra-Jewish polemic, and given the range of Jewishness in this time period, could even have nothing to do with Christ. In sum, it is just as likely that John was combating Jews whom he thought did not have the right to claim Jewish status.

and who are, in turn, granted entrance into God's New Kingdom. Despite sharing views and referents with other Jews and Gentile Christ-followers, Jews who do not follow Jesus as their Christ are not included in John's end times. Neither are Gentile Christ-followers who bypass Jewish law and scripture.

Such crisscrossing aside, though, and perhaps even more to the point, when John wrote Revelation, there was no "winning" strand of Christianity *or* Judaism for him to rely on. There was no Nicene Creed, no New Testament, no Mishnah, no Talmud – indeed, no Judaism or Christianity in the sense that we might think of today. In other words, even if we agree that the constructions of Judaism and Christianity as separate yet ongoingly related traditions are products of the types of discursivities mentioned here, we do not see the emergence of them as such until centuries after John penned his apocalypse. And, even if they *did* emerge sooner, John certainly would not have wanted to abide by either one of them. His version of a Jewish community – let alone a Christ-following community – is not in line with *either* "winning" movement.

It is also important to remember that, when applying the term "Jewish Christian" or "Christian Jewish" to ancient texts and groups, modern scholarship has all too often marginalized the "Jewish" in favor of a more monolithic Christian Self.[33] To render Revelation as "Jewish-Christian" conflates too quickly, in my view, representations of Jesus-following Jews with prior – and still lingering – supersessionist understandings of ancient Jewish–Christian relations. The origins of reading Revelation as a "Jewish-Christian" text, for instance, do not stem from more recent approaches to Jewish–Christian relations or history, but rather from the misguided and oftentimes anti-Jewish renderings of ancient Jewish–Christian relations mentioned above. Because Revelation was written by a halakhically oriented author and contains developed Christology (Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is divine, Jesus saves believers from their sins, etc.),

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[33] Again, interpretations of Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 illustrate this point well. As noted previously, John here is displaying apparent animosity toward *ioudaioi*, which has led scholars, particularly those influenced by the notion of a first-century "parting of the ways, " to assume that the text is setting itself apart from Judaism and must therefore be Christian – or at the very least, Christian-like. The common interpretation of these passages is that those who "say they are Jews" represent all Jews for John, and that all Jews are therefore followers of Satan. As Marshall observes, for most scholars, "the discussion of people who are named as non-Jews founds an understanding of the Apocalypse that sees 'Conflict with Jews' as a fundamental element of the situation to which the Apocalypse addresses itself" (Marshall, *Parables of War*, 13).

many interpreters have contended that Revelation was in the process of "progressing" from Judaism to Christianity. For those who set the tone for reading Revelation as a Jewish-Christian text (e.g. F. C. Baur; R. H. Charles),[34] John's name, Semitizing Greek, and appeal to Jewish texts and traditions has indicated that he was born Jewish (again, the notion that Revelation shares affinities with ancient Judaism is not a new concept). John's focus on Jesus as the Christ, however, indicates he was "better than" his Jewish counterparts – and that his Apocalypse was "better than" other Jewish texts – so much so that neither John nor his text could possibly be "fully" Jewish. Thus, the theory goes: Revelation, and Revelation's John, are on their way to understanding something "better" – something "Christian" – and so therefore are best read as "Jewish-Christian."

Revelation and Ethnic Difference

Ethnicity does, however, play an important role in this discussion. Whereas some followers of the Jesus movement identified as Jews ethnically (perhaps Boyarin's "Jews who were Christians"), others did not (perhaps Boyarin's "Christians who were not Jews"). In other words, as Frankfurter notes above, Gentiles, too, came to regard Jesus as their Christ, and non-Jewishness is one of the most oft-used descriptors for this group. What are we to make of this?

I propose that the construction of Jewishness in the first century and the boundaries such construction necessitated are key to answering this question. As Cohen observes in *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, individual Jews were not necessarily distinctive from Gentiles in ways that were obvious and unambiguous, but rather *imagined* themselves as Jewish – as members of an imagined Jewish community.[35] He writes, "Sociologists agree that ethnic or national identity is imagined; it exists because certain persons want it to exist and believe that it exists. It can be willed into and

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[34] According to Marshall, the tradition of labeling Revelation a Jewish-Christian text begins primarily with the Tübingen School and F. C. Baur's anti-Jewish constructions of Jewish-Christian relations in the first century (John W. Marshall, "John's Jewish (Christian?) Apocalypse," in *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*, ed. Matt Jackson-McCabe [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007], 236; Marshall, *Parables of War*, 7–9).

[35] Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA, and London, UK: University of California Press, 1999), 3–5. Emphasis added.

out of existence."[36] It does this, he explains, by the boundaries it creates and "the 'cultural stuff' enclosed by the boundary."[37] Many Jews in the ancient world carried their Jewishness ethnically through the observance of Jewish law and ritual, and the use or awareness of particular Jewish referents.[38] Observance included believing in the Israelite God, recognizing the importance of the Jerusalem Temple, and adhering to halakhic codes. If we consider Judaism an umbrella term for this "cultural stuff," as Cohen phrases it, then Revelation and its implied readers are operating within it.

Of course, given the degree to which proper Jewish practice was debated in the first century, certain self-identifying Jewish groups who did *not* render Jesus the Christ might have considered those who did to be non-Jews. In reverse, certain non-halakhically observant Christ-followers, too, might have rendered themselves the true Jews, as opposed to all others. The point here is that Revelation appears in every which way to operate within an ethnically Jewish conversation – it *identifies* and *imagines* and *constructs* a storytelling community as ethnically Jewish and righteous Jewish followers of Christ, regardless of whether other self-identifying Jews disagreed with its claims.[39] The Jewishness of Revelation is demonstrated by John's self-designations, as well as the text's literary heritage, halakhic worldview, nationalistic orientation, *and* focus on Jesus as the Christ.[40]

READING REVELATION AS A POSTTRAUMATIC ANTI-IMPERIAL TEXT

This leads us to a second starting point of this project: Revelation's subversions – its undoings of local and global adversaries – are responses

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[36] Ibid., 5.   [37] Ibid.   [38] Ibid., 7.

[39] Even when passages appear to be anti-Jewish, such as Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 (see above), one can observe the text as illustrating intra-Jewish polemic, as opposed to a "developing Christology" that is somehow different from Judaism. When investigating the writings at Qumran, we discover that intra-Jewish polemic in the first century was not only common, but often even more extreme than what we find in Revelation. See, e.g., the *Halakhic Letter C7–7* and *C26–32*. Like the Temple elite in these passages, the Jews in Revelation's Smyrna can be rendered evildoers – followers of Satan, even – precisely because they are not the *right* kind of Jews. In fact, they may be so far from being the "right" kind of Jews that Revelation insists they are not Jews at all.

[40] I should note here that, in many instances, I challenge scholars' use of the term "Christian" by bracketing it with the phrasing "Christ-followers" or "Jesus-followers."

to Jewish trauma under Empire. My focus on trauma should not be surprising. The apocalypse genre is, after all, often associated with literature of the dejected. In the words of Harry O. Maier, "apocalypses generally are composed against a backdrop of human suffering."[41] The same goes for John's Apocalypse. Revelation, by and large, deploys an affect of suffering countered by a series of hope-filled self-assurances, including the inception of a New Jerusalem.[42] Internal evidence, in other words, suggests that the Apocalypse "feels"[43] the need to identify with those who have experienced emotional persecution and cultural disintegration.[44] Such affectivity is evident in both John's letters (1:9–11:19) and his larger cycle of visions (12:1–22:5). The following passages can serve as examples of this:

I know where you live, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my [Christ's] name, and you did not deny your faith in me [Christ] even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed among you where Satan lives. (2:13)

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls who had been slaughtered because of the word of God and because of the witness they gave. They cried with a loud voice, "How long, Oh Master, holy and true, will it be until you judge and avenge our blood, which was shed by the Inhabitants of the

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[41] Harry O. Maier, *Apocalypse Recalled*, xii.

[42] For more on the illusory inception of the New Jerusalem, see Chapter 5.

[43] According to Adela Yarbro Collins, "the crucial element is not so much whether one is actually oppressed as whether one *feels* oppressed" (Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* [Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1984], 84). For example, while a PTSD diagnosis for the American Psychiatric Association requires survivors to display certain criteria listed in the DSM-5 (more on this in Chapter 2), not all persons will display the same symptoms in the same way, even if they have experienced the same event. And while some might experience an event as a threat to their integrity or sense of personal/communal self (i.e., trauma), others might not experience it as a threat at all. In this way, trauma becomes a relative, or even an individual phenomenon, and we cannot assume too quickly that all apocalypses respond to, make sense of, or deploy a textual affect in the face of imperial oppression in the same way.

[44] As Shane J. Wood puts it, "Throughout the text, Revelation depicts slander, deception, and wealth (re)distribution as … persecutions used against the first century [Jesus-followers] of Asia Minor" (Wood, *The Alter-Imperial Paradigm*, 146). This becomes most clear in John's letters. "[I]n the message to Smyrna," explains Craig Koester, "where it entails denunciation, imprisonment, and possible death (2:9–10)," John writes that they must keep the faith and "show 'endurance'" in the face of such ongoing evil. And if they do, they will "share [with him] in in the kingdom" of God and Christ (Koester, *Revelation*, 250). Or as Koester writes further, the "eschatological affliction [in Revelation] is a present reality … and will continue until Christ's final coming to death the agents of evil (19:11–21)" (ibid.). John, in turn, is the "companion" (1:9) to the afflicted; he "shares in affliction for the faith" (ibid.).

Earth?" They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little more, until the number of their fellow slaves and of their brothers and sisters, who were about to be killed as they had been killed. (6:9–11)

Then [Satan] went to make war . . . on those who keep the commandments of God [i.e., Mosaic law]. (12:17)

Based on these internal cues, the question for many, then, is to which "backdrop of human suffering" Revelation most acutely responds. Is there a particular "when and where," to match the world that Revelation so vividly depicts?

Local and Global Conflict

Because Revelation confronts problems within various Jesus-following communities and then attacks more universal forces of evil throughout its larger vision cycle (e.g., 2:20; cf. 17:1–2), many assert that this backdrop is grounded in both local and global conflict. A common assumption on the local front is that Revelation seeks to condemn Jesus-followers who are sympathetic to emperor worship and the Roman imperial court. As Shanell Smith notes:

A major polemical target in Revelation was the institution and observance of emperor worship, as evidenced by the prominence of the imperial cult in the text. John's contentious views about these imperial practices reflect the fact that the majority of the cities in Asia Minor [and members of churches therein] were devoted to [the cult's] advancements.[45]

In fact, according to some, countering Roman sympathizers is the entire point of the narrative. "Revelation's preoccupation," writes Harry O. Maier, is "to challenge [Christ-followers] who are too enthusiastic supporters of the economic and military might of the Roman Empire."[46]

On the global front – which is indeed a more complicated conversation – older exegesis typically concludes that Revelation responds to an Empire-wide persecution of Christ-followers. Until the mid-twentieth century, it was generally agreed that Revelation responded to persecution under Domitian. This assumption is based largely on Irenaeus' dating of John's vision to the latter years of Domitian's reign (*Adv. Haer.* 5.30.3), paired with Eusebius' portrayal of Domitian as a cold-hearted emperor

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[45] Shanell T. Smith, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire*, 112.
[46] Maier, *Apocalypse Recalled*, xiii. Some interpreters also focus on the conflict espoused in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9.

who annihilated Christ-followers (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.17). This assumption has been supported by a counting of the seven kings that renders Domitian the one "who is,"[47] as well as the ancient belief that Domitian was like a "New Nero" during his reign (Juvenal, *Sat.* 4.38; Pliny, *Paneg.* 53.3–4). This latter point is perhaps most crucial of all, as it seems to evoke not only Domitian's own tyranny, but also the potentiality of a "second persecution" of Jesus-followers.[48]

Recent studies have shown, however, that Eusebius' portrait of Domitian is not historically defensible. There is no evidence to support the claim that Domitian systematically persecuted Christ-followers across the Empire. For this reason, scholars have suggested that we position Revelation against a different backdrop. According to John A. T. Robinson, for instance, Revelation's internal evidence parallels the Neronian persecution of Jesus-followers in the 60s CE:

That violent persecution has already taken place and cries aloud for vengeance is an inescapable inference from such texts as 6:9f.; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20; 24; 19:2; and 20:4. They presuppose that the blood of apostles and prophets and countless [Christ-followers] … had saturated the streets of the capital itself … . The impact of the Neronian terror, already cited from Tacitus and[49] Clement immediately comes to mind, and one is tempted to ask what further need we have of witnesses.

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47 Adela Yarbro Collins, for example, argued that, since Caligula was the first emperor to give Jews significant problems, we should begin counting with him – and then skip Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, since they reigned such a short period of time – to arrive at the following ordering: Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian (Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 64).

48 This questioning is instigated in large part by Melito's second-century CE lost book, *To Antoninus*. According to Yarbro Collins, "It appears that he wanted to show that only those emperors who had a bad reputation among Romans themselves persecuted [Christ-followers], not because [Christ-followers] deserved punishment, but because those emperors were evil. Nero had indeed instigated violence against [Christ-followers] in Rome. Domitian was called a second Nero by some writers, so that it would have been easy for Melito to assimilate the later to the earlier. Once assimilation was made, it seems, it became traditional" (ibid., 56). The notion that Revelation alludes to Nero does not negate a later dating, either. Legends that he survived death were popular throughout the first century, and are even "woven into various apocalyptic texts of the late first century and early second century (*Sib. Or.* 3:63–74; 4:119–124; 138–139; 5:361–365; *Mart. Asc. Isa.* 4:2–8 [Rev. 13:3])" (Koester, *Revelation*, 74).

49 John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000), 231. According to Tacitus (*Annals* 15), Nero persecuted members of the Jesus movement ("*Chrestianoi*") as a means by which to tame the rumors that he had ordered the 64 CE fire that scorched all but four of the Roman districts. Nero is said to have covered Jesus-followers "with the skins of animals and [had them] torn to death by dogs; or they were crucified and when the day ended [they were] burned as torches"

According to Robinson, John did not pen his apocalypse at the end of the first century, but rather in the mid-first century as a vengeful response to Neronian terror. This notion is supported by interpretations that render the king who "is" in Revelation 17 as the emperor Nero,[50] and that the number of the Beast in Revelation 13:18 symbolizes Nero via Jewish gematria (see Chapter 4).[51]

Still, there are problems. As research has also indicated, there is in fact little evidence for mass, systematic persecutions which singled out Christ-followers across the Empire under *either* Nero or Domitian. For this reason, Steven J. Friesen argues that "Revelation studies should focus less on alleged excesses in imperial cult under Nero and Domitian and more on the normative character of imperial cult activity."[52] Some even go as far as to suggest that Revelation does not respond to global hardship at all. On Leonard Thompson's reading, Revelation's internal evidence of global crisis does not share external support: "[T]he conflict and crisis in the Book of Revelation between [a Christ-following] commitment and the social order derive from John's perspective [and personal evaluation of] Roman society rather than from significant hostilities in the social environment.[53] In this regard the Book of Revelation fits the genre to which it belongs."[54] The persecutions in Revelation are simply a product of the *topos* of unrest intrinsic to the apocalypse genre.

(Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* [Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000], 42). Nero, put simply, turned his garden into a circus-show, and the demise of Christ-followers became the main attraction. However, while Clement of Rome writes that Christ-followers were indeed persecuted, he does not name specific emperors at fault (see *1 Clement*). For an overview of Tacitus' use and meaning of the words "*Christus*" and "*Chrestianoi*" (a likely common misspelling of "*Christianoi*"), see Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 29–53, especially 41–45.

[50] If one begins counting with Julius Caesar and then continues in consecutive order, the sixth emperor – that is, the "who is," according to Revelation – would be Nero.

[51] For a more recent, early dating (i.e., pre-70 CE) hypotheses, see George H. van Kooten, "The Year of the Four Emperors and the Revelation of John: The 'pro-Neronian' Emperors Otho and Vitellius, and the Images and Colossus of Nero in Rome," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30, no. 2 (2007): 205–248; and Marshall, *Parables of War*.

[52] Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 135.

[53] At the same time, I do question if John's evaluation might be enough, even if it differs from others', including Thompson's, view of the Roman environment. For more on the subjectivity of environment, particularly related to trauma, see Chapter 2.

[54] Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 175. See also David Arthur DeSilva, "The Social Setting of the Revelation to John: Conflicts Within, Fears Without," *Westminster Theological Journal* 54, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 273–302.

While I agree with Thompson that we cannot link Revelation's urgency around the issue of persecution to any one, specific instance of global communal trauma, we can associate that urgency with an array of known adversities. In other words, rather than emphasize a single, external crisis, I suggest that by focusing "more on the normative character of imperial cult activity," as Friesen so aptly phrases it, we discover that traumatization under Rome happened over time, in both extreme and subtle ways.

Life Under Empire

Much of the collective trauma endured by Jesus-followers was caused by the colonial conditions of life under Empire. For in addition to their "frequent struggles with sickness, starvation, and loss,"[55] Jews, who, like Revelation's John, deployed narrative as a means to communal consolidation, were colonized subjects of imperial Rome. As S. R. F. Price notes, "The civilized, complex cities [of Roman Asia], with their ideals of autonomy and freedom, had to accept subjection to an authority which ... was external to the traditional structures of the city."[56] This meant that they "had to make sense of the [cultural instabilities] that they inhabit[ed]; the emperor, who they had never seen and would never see, had absolute power."[57] As with other subjugated peoples and cities throughout the Empire, Jews in Roman Asia (and elsewhere) were perpetually vulnerable to the Roman gaze, which, in addition to the Roman army, was a prominent method of imperial domination.[58] Such a gaze, we must note,

implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point, it suggests the power to process and understand that which is seen, and it objectifies and interpellates the colonized subject in a way that fixes its identity in relation to the surveyor .... [T]he imperial gaze defines the identity of the subject, objectifies it within the identifying system of power relations and confirms its subalterneity and powerlessness.[59]

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[55] David M. Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 239–240.   [56] S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power*, 1.

[57] Smith, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire*, 111. Here, Smith is in conversation with Price also.

[58] See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 253.

[59] Ibid. See also Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, "A Monument to Suffering: 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16, Dangerous Memory, and Christian Identity," *Journal of Early Christian History* 1, no. 2 (2011): 91–118. On the in/visibility of women in relation to such gaze, see Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, "'Gazing Upon the Invisible': Archaeology, Historiography, and the Elusive Women of 1 Thessalonians," in *From Roman to Early*

I suggest that the effects of Roman imperialism alone give us reason to suspect that there is an external cause for Revelation's dominant affect – its "feel[ings]" of oppression.[60] The Roman eye was always watching, contributing to the production of Roman imperial colonization and molding its subjects into deeper subalternity.[61] This external imperial-colonial situation mirrors Revelation's imaginary. Its narrativizing of persecution, abandonment, and a hope for a better future is animated by this repeated imperial subjugation. And its Othering of those who are sympathetic to non-Jewish, non-Christ-following orientations illustrates its attempt to survive the dominant transcripts – the non-halakhic transcripts – that characterize John's implied, Jewish Christ-following audiences as "Other than."

A POSTCOLONIAL INTERVENTION

Revelation's imperial-colonial positionality, including its adoptions of (anti-)imperial Othering, calls for a postcolonial intervention.[62] While postcolonial critics can differ widely in their understanding of the term "postcolonial," including their understanding of a "postcolonial optic,"[63] scholars do, generally speaking, agree that a postcolonial lens

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Christian Thessalonikē: Studies in Religion and Archaeology, ed. Laura Nasrallah, Charalambos Bakirtzis, and Steven J. Friesen, Harvard Theological Studies 64 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 73–108.

[60] Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 84.

[61] For more on Revelation and the production of knowledge in/and the Roman gaze, see Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[62] The term "postcolonial" was coined by historians in the aftermath of World War II as a marker of a nation's independence in the wake of its emancipation. According to Susan VanZanten Gallagher, a historical approach to postcolonialism focuses on "the period of time beginning in 1947 when nineteenth century European nation-states encountered numerous forms of indigenous resistance in the lands they had colonized and subsequently withdrew from formal legal governance" (Susan VanZanten Gallagher, "Mapping the Hybrid World: Three Postcolonial Motifs," *Semeia* 75 [1996]: 230; see also Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 204). In building upon the pioneering work of post-World War II intellectuals in the global South (e.g., Fanon, Césaire, Memmi), however, American literary theorists (circa 1970) began implementing the term to address the effects of colonization expressed in literature. Postcolonial studies, however, did not coalesce fully as an interdisciplinary field until the early 1990s.

[63] To a certain degree, the term might actually be best defined by its indefinability. Stephen D. Moore highlights the issue well when he writes, "Postcolonial criticism is not a method of interpretation (any more than feminist criticism, say), so much as a critical sensibility

does have several functions. R. S. Sugirtharajah's threefold paradigm works well in this regard. A postcolonial lens, in his words: "(a) examines and explains especially social, cultural, and political conditions such as nationality, ethnicity, race, and gender both before and after colonialism; (b) it interrogates the often one-sided history of nations, cultures, and peoples; and (c) it engages in a critical revision of how the 'other' is represented."[64] Interrogations of Empire and imperialism are inherently connected with these functions. Because Empire is that which exudes control over vast nations, cultures, and peoples – and imperialism, the process *by which* an Empire comes to maintain that control – anticolonial struggles are often packaged as anti-Empire/anti-imperial ones. Postcolonial critics recognize this relationship, and often read postcolonial narratives as that which interrogate and/or mourn the effects of Empire and imperialism.[65] Anti-imperial projects, including postcolonial narratives, thus work "to create new and powerful identities for colonized peoples" through writing back to the systems of oppression that have deemed them "Other than," while at the same time putting words to the affect and experience of the colonized.[66]

The Bible and Postcolonialism

Biblicists have found that the Bible expresses similar hostility toward imperial interventions.[67] Norman K. Gottwald, in fact, has gone as far as to say that "[e]arly Israel was born as an anti-imperial resistance

acutely attuned to a specific range of interrelated historical and textual phenomena" (Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 7).

[64] See R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 12.

[65] Jean Rhys's 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* is one of the most-cited examples in this regard. Retelling the story of *Jane Eyre* in a way that gives voice to the marginalized, Rhys offers a critique of colonial subjugation in the Caribbean. For an exposition on this, see Justin D. Edwards, *Postcolonial Literature*, 54.

[66] Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 3rd ed. (London, UK, and New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 182–183.

[67] Biblical scholars have recognized the Bible's imperial origins before the arrival of a postcolonial critical optic, but postcolonial biblical criticism, as Shanell Smith puts it, "represents an intensification of such efforts" (Smith, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire*, 44). While some biblical scholars have come to prioritize the ancient past and the imperial *Sitz im Leben* of a particular biblical text (e.g., Warren Carter and Richard Horsley), others have more readily put into conversation such ancient colonizing practices with colonial reception histories of the biblical text and/or contemporary postcolonial contexts (e.g., R. S. Sugirtharajah and Musa Dube). See, for example, Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York, NY, and London,

movement."[68] Rather than adhering to the rules and regulations of such centralized states as Egypt, Canaan, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Rome, ancient Israelites and later Jews, Gottwald asserts, aspired to create their own self-regulating communities.[69] Indeed, the Bible is replete with counter-imperial language and imagery, texts that highlight the narrative construction of the Israelites' and early Jews' self-governance and illustrate the reversal of center/periphery, colonizer/colonized binary formations. The book of Exodus, as Musa Dube has argued, is rooted in an "anti-conquest ideology," with the phrase "Let my people go" operating as its primary theme.[70] Warren Carter has argued similarly on the Gospel of Matthew. He posits that Matthew is "a counternarrative" and "a work of resistance" written *for* Jews, which "stands and/or speaks over against' the status quo dominated by Roman imperial power and synagogal control. It resists these cultural structures."[71] As ex-centric texts, Exodus and Matthew seek to deconstruct center/periphery, Self/Other bifurcations, so as to expose their constructedness, and also offer new "centers of discourse, new subject positions, and new loci of freedom and power."[72]

I recognize, of course, that some may refute such an emphasis on imperial colonization in relation to biblical texts by stating that colonialism's roots are in modern European expansionist history, and therefore should not be retrospectively superimposed onto earlier contexts.[73] While

UK: T&T Clark International, 2008); Richard A. Horsley, "Introduction: The Bible and Empires," in *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Louisville, KY, and London, UK: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 1–7, in contrast to R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts: The Bible in Colonial and Contemporary Culture* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008); Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000); Smith, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire*; and Lynne St. Clair Darden, *Scripturalizing Revelation*.

[68] See Norman K. Gottwald, "Early Israel as an Anti-Imperial Community," in *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Louisville, KY, and London, UK: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 9.

[69] Ibid. [70] Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 60.

[71] Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (London, UK, and New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2004), 1.

[72] John Clement Ball, *Satire and the Postcolonial Novel*, 2.

[73] As Stephen Moore explains: "European colonization was qualitatively different from pre-capitalist colonial enterprises. European colonizers did more than extract tribute and other forms of wealth from subjugated peoples: they restructured the economies of those peoples, enmeshing them in a symbiotic relationship with their own, and thereby ensuring a constant two-way flow of human and natural resources (settlers, slaves, raw materials,

I do not want to insinuate a difference-leveling comparison between the ancient and the modern, I do think it wise to recall that subjects under the Roman Empire were susceptible to a variety of systems of oppression endorsed by an imperial center. In the first centuries CE, Rome dominated the Mediterranean Basin, and in so doing exerted its values, policies, and power over its many territories. I am not alone in this assertion. As Stephen Moore has shown, despite colonialism's heights in the modern period – as well as its modern foundations in capitalism – "many earlier Empires, not least those of the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean Basin, also engaged in colonization."[74] Historian David J. Mattingly

has arrived at a similar conclusion, stating that, while some commentators have argued that the *imperium Romanum* was quite distinct from the modern [imperialisms]. . . . [T]he nature of Rome as a cosmopolis or metropolis [developing *coloniae*[75]] fits more readily into analysis of imperial systems than of other ancient cities.[76]

If we understand imperialism more broadly as the means by which a centralized power-system (e.g., an Empire) exerts influence and control over other groups and territories, and colonialism as a common effect of such exertions (including, but not limited to, control of others' lands, goods, and general wellbeing), then I think it justifiable to recognize Rome as an imperial power-center engaging in pre-capitalist modes of colonization. Thus, like Mattingly, I "believe that there are issues relating to the exercise of power and the responses that power evokes, where it is legitimate to draw comparisons as well as contrasts between ancient and modern."[77]

More than this, however, it is the indeterminable effects and affects of both ancient and modern imperialism and colonization – indeed, the trauma shared across and between the two – which lead me to identify the book of Revelation as a "postcolonial" text. For despite the term's inclusion of the word "post," postcolonial need not assume separation from a colonial atmosphere. Instead, as elucidated above, it refers in large part to discursive strategies that are "ex-centric"[78] – that deconstruct center/periphery, Self/Other bifurcations, so as to expose and oppose their

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and so forth) and a one-way flow of profits into their coffers" (Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 8).

[74] Ibid., 9.   [75] The Roman *coloniae* referred to settlements established by Rome.

[76] David J. Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2011), 5.

[77] Ibid., 5–6.   [78] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 6.

constructedness, as well as offer new "centers of discourse, new subject positions, and new loci of freedom and power."[79] Postcolonial narratives are thus often defined as those which "emerge out of a concrete social reality and history of colonization and domination."[80] Literary theorist John Clement Ball says it well when he writes:

> Two of the chief distinguishing features of postcolonial texts, as theorized in the emergent discourse of postcolonialism, are oppositionality and referentiality. Oppositionality is variously articulated as resistance, subversion, counter-discourse, contestatory narrative, writing back, and critique. Referentiality ... is related to the concepts of agency, materiality, and historicality, through which specific local or national contexts and subjects for writing are privileged.[81]

The "postcoloniality" of postcolonial narrative thus pairs a historical positionality with an oppositional framework.[82]

   John's Apocalypse, although technically *pre*-colonial and *pre*-postcolonial,[83] bears witness to a history of colonial oppression that subtends its cultural and psychological existence while imaginatively bringing into being a "postcolonial" (form of) community. This postcolonial reimagining is demonstrated not only in Revelation's claims of trauma and the value of a Jewish cultural self in the face of that trauma – integral parts of postcolonial-posttraumatic repair, as we will see – but also in its subversion of the imperial transcript(s) that have deemed Jews "Other than." In other words, although the book's postcoloniality is not marked by what some might consider "postcolonialism proper,"[84] it still reflects elements of this modern formulation. According to Sugirtharajah, in fact, modern biblical scholarship has all too often made readers "for[get] the initial and primary tasks of postcolonialism [which are] 'writing back' [to Empire] and 'listening again' [to Other voices]."[85] It is in *this* sense – this *writing back to* and *bearing witness to* colonial imperialism – that Revelation can be viewed as a postcolonial text.[86]

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[79] Ball, *Satire and the Postcolonial Novel*, 2.   [80] Ibid.   [81] Ibid.

[82] "In general, postcolonialism can be seen as a discourse of opposition to and liberation from coercive political structures, epistemologies, and ideologies" (ibid., 2–3).

[83] See footnote 62 of this chapter.

[84] See Gerald O. West, "What Difference Does Postcolonial Biblical Criticism Make? Reflections From a (South) African Perspective," in *Postcolonial Interventions: Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah*, ed. Tat-Siong Benny Liew (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press Ltd, 2009), 267.

[85] Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 25.

[86] We do need to be careful, however. In his 2009 essay "What Difference Does Postcolonial Biblical Criticism Make?," Gerald West argues, akin to Sugirtharajah, that reading biblical texts as postcolonial risks an evacuation of the specificity of the postcolonial

At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the new subject positions constructed in postcolonial narrative can also often appear similar to older ones. In other words, while postcolonial narrative often works to illustrate anti-imperial resistance – and can even create new self-governing communities – it also often does so in ways that are themselves imperialistic. As Ania Loomba explicates on the postcolonial state's response to Empire, "[It] often uses an anti-imperialistic rhetoric of nationalism to consolidate its *own* power."[87] Dube, among others, agrees. On her reading, even in their resistance, both the Exodus and Matthew narratives absorb, appropriate, and inscribe an imperialist agenda. While Exodus, for example, eventually highlights the Israelites' pursuit to conquer land outside of Egypt, Matthew comes to posit its own imperialist gaze upon intra-Jewish rivals.[88] In both cases, then, there is a "deflect[ion] … from the root cause of oppression, the imperialists, and [a] focu[s] instead on other victims."[89]

It is the inherent ambivalence within the postcolonial condition that characterizes the discourse and, therefore, the discipline that is

condition. Rather than recognize the importance of postcolonial materiality – of a text writing back to imperial centers "@home" and the *reasons* for writing back @home – postcolonial critics, who are often writing from Western centers of intellectual elitism, have all too quickly removed postcolonial writings from their "colonized context(s)." East becomes West. South becomes North. In this way, the postcolonial can become yet another colonial discourse. West thus motions us back to the critical partnership of context and critique that defines the authentically postcolonial narrative (see pp. 259, 261). The modern realities of postcolonial bodies in the Global South *must* be centered. Let me be clear when I say, then, that my intention here is not to appropriate the specificity of such modern postcolonialities for Revelation. Instead, my intention is to recognize Revelation's shared affinity with contemporary postcoloniality (i.e., bearing witness to and writing back to imperial colonization). In many instances, in fact, it is precisely this "bearing witness to" that I attempt to *recover* throughout this project. As we have seen, New Testament writings have all too often been detached from their Jewish contexts and replaced with Christian ones. To apply the words of West, the New Testament was "moved" from Judaism to Christianity – from what many have described as that which is "lesser than" to that which is "better than." Part of my work here has been to read Revelation in its Jewish historical context and, in doing so, to recognize the import of its Jewish context. My application of a postcolonial hermeneutic is thus not to erase Revelation's peripheral writing back to Empire – or to erase the realities of contemporary postcoloniality – but to highlight them. Just as we might characterize the postcolonial as the interrogation of colonial imperialism @home, we might read Revelation as a Jewish text that bears witness to the traumatic effects of Jewish imperial colonization at *its* home.

[87] Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 201.
[88] See Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 66–70, 134–135.
[89] Ibid., 135. Here, she speaks specifically about Matthew, but her analysis of Exodus exudes a similar sentiment. See pp. 66–70.

postcolonial studies. Firmly rooted in deconstruction, postcolonial studies exists under the umbrella of poststructuralism, focusing, as it does, on the multiple and contradictory tides of signification. By unmasking internal contradictions and inconsistences within texts, postcolonial thinkers – akin to poststructuralists such as Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva – bring to the forefront the notion that words and texts are not bound to any one signifier, context, or discourse; texts evade concretization, given the weight of signification and intertextual cues in any given word or phrase – past, present, or otherwise.[90] Even if postcolonial narratives work to respond to particular historical or political moments, they are still enmeshed in dynamic and dialogical modes of communication.

Postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha has been especially influential in this regard, in particular through his various representations of the give-and-take between colonizers and colonized that manifests as both resistance and reduplication in postcolonial writings.[91] In fact, three of the central terms Bhabha developed to signify this process – *hybridity*, *mimicry*, and *ambivalence* – have become common parlance in postcolonial theory.[92] *Hybridity* refers to the complex that is the flow of power, culture, and ideas within the postcolonial situation (e.g., the cross-fertilization of ideas between the ideologies of an imperial/colonizing center and the ideologies of those on the margins) which, in turn, undoes the very notion of a monolithic central system. Bhabha's notions of colonial *mimicry* and *ambivalence* are inextricably linked to this phenomenon. Colonial mimicry can occur in the hybrid space between colonizer and colonized. It is often exhibited in the imitation of the colonizer by the colonized, who, as Moore phrases it, have been "coerce[d]," into

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[90] As Moore notes on the relationship between postcolonialism and poststructuralism: "Much contemporary postcolonial criticism may be broadly classified as 'poststructuralist,' or, more narrowly, as 'deconstructive,' because it entails repeated demonstrations of how texts emanating from colonialist cultures—whether histories, travel narratives, or canonical works of literature (Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, say, or Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, or Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*)—are enmeshed in elaborate ideological formations, and hence intricate networks of contradiction, that exceed and elude the consciousness of their authors" (Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 6).

[91] For his influence on biblical critics, see, for example, Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah, eds, *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (London, UK, and New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009); R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1998); Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*; Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*; Smith, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire*; and Darden, *Scripturalizing Revelation*.

[92] See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 3–7, 121–131.

"internalizing and replicating" the colonizer's culture.[93] The affective result upon the colonized subject manifests itself, according to Bhabha, in a psychic state of deep ambivalence; the colonized depict the desire to, on the one hand, *be like* the colonizers, but on the other hand, to discount them entirely.[94]

At the same time, hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence are not entirely sites of/for deconstruction. In Bhabha's view, they can actually contribute to and/or construct larger discourses and productions of knowledge.[95] Utilizing Renée Green's image of the stairwell, Bhabha argues that liminal spaces initiate new meaning. He quotes Green:

I used architecture literally as a reference, using the attic, the boiler room, and the stairwell to make associations between certain binary divisions such as higher and lower and heaven and hell. The stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness or whiteness.[96]

To which Bhabha responds:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.[97]

In Bhabha's view, then, it is precisely these "hither and thither" moments – in the "in-between" – that instantiate (opportunity for) the construction of new subjectivities. These spaces become the very grounds for developing "strategies of selfhood – singular and communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself."[98] In sum, there is a give-and-take between colonizers and colonized that can come out simultaneously as resistance, reduplication, and resignification in postcolonial writings.

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[93] Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 26.
[94] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 153–173. This is also where Bhabha references "doubling" and the work of Frantz Fanon.
[95] Foucault's work on the production of knowledge is particularly influential for Bhabha (and other poststructuralist/postcolonial thinkers). See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Vintage, 1980), 92–102.
[96] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 5.   [97] Ibid.   [98] Ibid., 2.

Revelation and Postcolonialism

The Bible expresses similar modes of resistance and reduplication. To quote Moore, yet again, biblical texts can often, "insidiously reinscribe imperial and colonial ideologies even while appearing to resist them."[99] Empire-critical and postcolonial readings of Revelation have tended to highlight this issue. According to Allen Dwight Callahan, for example, John of Revelation writes in Greek so as to subvert the master's language.[100] Greg Carey furthers this argument by stating that John's Greek functions as a "symptom of resistance."[101] In "demanding dis-identification from the larger society,"[102] Carey suggests, John of Revelation takes on a "discursive hybridization."[103] The seer's negotiation between decolonization and comprehensibility thus becomes one of heres and theres; "[o]n the one hand, his language had to be close enough to the language of conventional discourse that [it] could be understood; on the other, he had to coin an idiolect sufficiently deviant to privilege."[104]

Others, however, go beyond these assertions to suggest that Revelation does not merely adopt Roman ideologies as a means by which to *resist* Rome, but also as a means by which to *become the new* Rome. In the words of Robert Royalty, "Opposition to the dominant culture in the Apocalypse is not an attempt to redeem that culture but rather an attempt to replace it with a [Christ-centered] version of the same thing."[105] Or, as Moore adds, "Revelation's *anti*colonial discourse, its resistance to Roman omnipotence, is infected with the imitation compulsion, and hence with ambivalence, it contains the seeds of its own eventual absorption by that which it ostensibly opposes."[106] In other words, by countering the language of Empire with its *own* language of Empire, Revelation, the argument goes, is less about *undoing* Rome than it is about *outdoing* Rome.

It is precisely in the call to read Revelation as a postcolonial text that we recognize the ways in which Revelation, even in its resistance, subsumes a new imperial role. Whereas John's violence against Rome illustrates an anti-Roman agenda, the means by which he destroys and eventually replaces Rome mimics imperial force and conquest. By mocking, torturing, and eventually burning alive those who do not

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[99] Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 14.
[100] See Allen Dwight Callahan, "The Language of Apocalypse," 453–470.
[101] See Greg Carey, "Symptoms of Resistance in the Book of Revelation," 173–177.
[102] Ibid., 173.   [103] Ibid., 176.   [104] Ibid., 177.
[105] Robert M. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven*, 246.
[106] Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 31.

worship Christ or abide by John's strict halakhic worldview (17:16; 19:19–20; 20:10), Revelation appears seduced by Roman standards. As Moore notes on Revelation's most targeted adversary, "Not for nothing is Rome figured in Revelation as a prostitute – indeed, as 'the mother of whores' (*hē meter tōn pornōn*, 17:5): what better embodiment, for the seer, of seductive repulsiveness, of repulsive seductiveness."[107] As God and Christ become the new overlords of the New Jerusalem, we are haunted by images of the Roman past. Just as Rome was secured via war, rape, and conquest, so too is Christ's New Kingdom.[108]

READING REVELATION IN DIALOGUE

Finally, reading Revelation as a Jewish postcolonial text does not imply that the Apocalypse, its author, or its implied audience occupied an exceptional space, separate from the larger cultural milieu of the Greco-Roman world. Jewish antiquity was so enmeshed with Hellenism,[109] in fact, that by the first century BCE, there were Jews who "knew no Hebrew, spoke no Aramaic ... [and] heard their Bible in a special form of Greek."[110] And while the Greeks and Romans often commented on the distinct differences they perceived in the traits of non-Roman or non-Greek peoples (i.e., their hairstyle or the cut of their beard, their size, skin tone, even the texture of their skin), there remains no commentary on the "look" of Jews.[111]

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[107] Ibid., 30.

[108] For more on the violent origins of Rome, see David S. Potter, "Introduction," in *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire*, ed. David S. Potter and David J. Mattingly, New and expanded (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 1–16.

[109] As Tessa Rajak remarks, "It is fair, after all, to describe the Greek way of life as the most dynamic 'package' with which the Jews engage . . .. Greek culture was deeply intertwined with Jewish life from the early Hellenistic period to an extent where contemporaries were not themselves wholly aware of the strands" (Tessa Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome: Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction* [Leiden, Netherlands, Boston, MA, and Köln, Germany: Brill, 2002], 3–4).

[110] Ibid., 4.

[111] Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 28. The rabbis restricted certain hairstyles, and even relate a story of a man changing his hairstyle so as to pass as a Gentile, but this does not infer that all Jews, let alone all rabbis, actually wore their hair a certain way. Although Jewish sources note the use of *tzit-tzit* and *tefillin*, Cohen concludes that, based on the evidence, many did not actually wear them. See ibid.

Jewishness and Hellenism in Dialogue

A major reason for this has to do with the sheer success of Hellenization. With the Greeks' fifth-century BCE defeat of the Persians, Hellenistic culture saturated the Mediterranean like a deluge, and by the fourth century BCE, Palestine was bombarded by Greekness.[112] Such bombardment deepened when Alexander the Great transformed every newly conquered province into a mirror of Athenian public life. The prestige associated with these New Greek cities led others to want to adopt the Greek life also.[113] Thus Jews, like others, were culturally constituted within the Hellenistic milieu. While many chose to live in smaller Jewish communities,[114] as a means of support and by which to maintain their Jewish identity, they did not, to quote Erich Gruen, "huddle in enclaves."[115] Even in Palestine, where Jews were arguably less exposed to Hellenization than their diasporic counterparts (a debated contention in its own right), they, too, did not live in isolation.

Internal evidence suggests that Revelation does not huddle and hide, either. The text's beasts, for instance, are commonly noted as being crafted within a shared Jewish-Greco-Roman framework. Whereas the image of the dragon in Revelation 12, for example, bears a likeness to the mythic monsters of the Hebrew Bible (Ps. 74:13–14; Job 40:25; Dan. 7:2–8), his rivalry with the woman clothed with the Sun (Rev. 12:1–9) mirrors popular Greco-Roman myths.[116] And while older scholarship has traditionally focused on a particular myth with which to compare these passages, interpreters have more recently articulated the means by which myth is often remembered and transcribed without consistency in form or meaning.[117] In the words of Craig Koester:

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[112] Ibid., 25.

[113] We can look to Gramsci's conception of cultural hegemony to make sense of this (see Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg, vols. 1 & 2.

[114] Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2002), 5.

[115] Ibid., 6.

[116] For more on this, see, e.g., M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011); Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12 – Primary Source Edition* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1895); Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Reprint edition (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1976); Jan Willem van Henten, "Dragon Myth and Imperial Ideology in Revelation 12–13," in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 181–203.

[117] Koester, *Revelation*, 528.

[The] origins of mythic images do not determine their meanings. Authors could shape the mythic images to make different, even contradictory, points in different contexts …. myths are characterized by variety rather than uniformity. Mythic patterns share certain typical elements while exhibiting variations in detail. Sometimes, ancient plotlines were combined.[118]

Although not identical to any one story from any one culture, it is clear that Revelation borrows elements from multiple contexts.[119]

Bakhtinian Dialogism

That ancient plotlines were combined leads me to my third starting point: that Revelation is, and as hinted to above, a product of *dialogism*. Coined by Mikhail Bakhtin, the term "dialogism" refers to the cross-pollination of meaning (and meaning making).[120] To understand an utterance – to give meaning to it – Bakhtin explains, is to dive into its web of interactive relationalities.[121] Echoing Saussurean semiotics, dialogism assumes that there is no inherent relationship between the things we name and the names we assign them (there is no inherent relationship, for instance, between the letters T-R-E-E and the arborous plant under which my

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[118] Ibid.
[119] See also Barbara R. Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999); John W. Marshall, "Gender and Empire: Sexualized Violence in John's Anti-Imperial Apocalypse," in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins (London, UK, and New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2005), 21.
[120] Related terms include hybridity, polyglossia, and heteroglossia. To define the terms briefly: *Hybridity* refers to the idea that there is a mixing of multiple linguistic referents – a double-voicedness – within a single utterance. Rather than focus more largely on the mixture of multiple and even conflicting cultural cues (e.g., center vs. periphery, à la Bhabha), Bakhtin examines such cues linguistically. This is not to say, however, that Bakhtin's notion of hybridity does not bleed into Bhabha's own theories, as language in and of itself calls attention to larger cultural scripts. In a similar vein, *polyglossia* refers to the notion that an utterance can invoke two national language systems simultaneously. And, on a slightly larger scale, *heteroglossia* refers to the idea that any utterance will bear a different meaning depending upon the speaker, listener, sociopolitical conditions, etc. that are set at/in the particular time and space the utterance is made/heard.
[121] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981).

six-year-old dog insists on storing his favorite toys).[122] Any given utterance – whether from a live speech-act or literary work – carries with it an infinite number of cultural cues and syntactical scripts that make sense only when put into conversation with those particular cues and scripts. These utterances, in turn, shape the social world in which they are contextualized.[123] We use them "to not just represent reality, but to constitute it and construct it."[124] Utterances create worlds, and worlds create utterances.

At the same time, however, dialogism shows that there is no direct relationship – no one-to-one set of meanings – between the words that float betwixt a given speaker and listener, author and character, story and reader, and so forth. Even the sound of one's voice can generate multiple and multivalent understandings pertaining to multiple and multivalent ideas, lending to multidimensional interpretations. The same is true of author and text. The idea of authorial intent gives the illusion of unity, as does the seeming stability of words on a page. Any form of discourse – whether living or otherwise – constantly carries with it a complex web of textual and contextual associations that escape any one-to-one system of meaning. While an utterance "requires a context and structure in order to

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[122] Rather than utilizing Saussurean semiotics to read with a structural objectivism, Bakhtin, as explained in more detail below, views all utterances as inherently multivocal and unstable. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy, trans. Wade Baskin (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001 [1916]).

[123] In this way, discourse – whether a living speech-act or a conversation taking place within a text – is first and foremost social. It is "a social phenomenon – social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest abstract meaning" (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 259). The social implications of Bakhtin's work should not be overlooked. For even though Bakhtin theorized concepts that, in large part, apply to his understanding of literature – and in particular, to the novel – his theories apply first and foremost to the interconnected relationships between self, other, and larger social constructs more generally. As Graham Allen explains, there is "[n]o word or utterance from [Bakhtin's] perspective [that] is ever neutral" (Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* [London, UK, and New York, NY: Routledge, 2000], 18). In fact, it is only after Bakhtin recognizes a text's or novel's social-semantic components – the living discourses surrounding the author(s), character(s), and words themselves – that he analyzes its story. As Bakhtin himself expounds, "[The] internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the *indispensible prerequisite* for the novel as a genre" (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 263; emphasis added). For reasons such as this, Ken Hirschkop advises that "[t]he social functions that discourse performs, and the practical effects it initiates, *should* be the object of our inquiry" (Quoted by Barbara Green, *Makhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*, Semeia Studies 38 [Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000], 36; emphasis added).

[124] Danna Nolan Fewell, "The Work of Biblical Narrative," 5.

communicate meaning,"[125] that context and structure is complex, non-homogenous, and multivalent. As Graham Allen puts it, "The word in language is [always at least] half someone else's [i.e., *double-voiced*]."[126] Even when a text attempts to "deny the dialogic nature of existence and attempt to be the only and final word,"[127] it is "always already permeated with traces of other words, other uses."[128] In this way, all utterances are also *unfinalizable*. A story's ending is only seemingly an ending. An Empire's authority is only seemingly absolute. They are never actually fixed, but rather infer and intersect with a complex web of infinite dialogism, which can, in turn, be subverted by that very dialogism. Because totalitarian regimes, such as Empires, implicitly and explicitly endeavor to govern speech and thought through the monolog, David Valetta asserts, "all instances of dialogism in literature serve to undermine controlling authorities and voices."[129] In this way, utterances not only gain meaning contextually, but also signify *beyond* word/phrase/speech to contribute *to* the production of knowledge and the discursive contextualities in which such utterances gain meaning.[130] According to Bakhtin, in fact, texts that intentionally set out to undermine monologic discourse, which "attempt [t] to be the only and final word," represent a more sophisticated and liberating form of discourse.[131]

These concepts are akin to Julia Kristeva's poststructuralist conception of intertextuality, a term employed to destabilize meaning (as monologic) within and across texts. Utilizing Bakhtinian theory, Kristeva writes that "whatever the semantic content of a text, its condition as a signifying practice presupposes the existence of other discourses …. This is to say that every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it."[132] This does not negate entirely a text's situatedness, however. Again, texts come to life via social contextualization, whatever that may be. Peter D. Miscall writes:

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[125] David M. Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions: A Satirical Reading of Daniel 1-6* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 43.
[126] Allen, *Intertextuality*, 28. On double-voicedness, see footnote 120 of this chapter.
[127] Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 45.   [128] Allen, *Intertextuality*, 28.
[129] Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 45.
[130] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 92–102.   [131] Ibid., 45.
[132] Kristeva, cited and translated by Jonathan D. Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London, UK: Cornell University Press, 2002), 105. See also Kristeva's essay "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora and Alice A. Jardine (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), 64–91.

From the perspective of intertextuality, textual authority and status are always in question since texts are interdependent and use each other. No text is an island. Displacement and decentering, rather than replacement and chaos, are two terms and concepts that attempt to express the questioning of authority and status and not the complete loss of either. The text is not undone and replaced. It may have moved elsewhere but it is still somewhere. It does not disappear. To destroy a text's center is to reduce it to chaos; to decenter it is to move the center elsewhere, an elsewhere that is no longer an absolutely controlling and dominating site. Textual authority and status are in question because the original text no longer has the necessary site and center to exercise its previous authority. But the authority and status are "in question" and are not totally removed or denied.[133]

In a similar vein, Bakhtinian dialogism highlights the cross-pollination of meaning betwixt and between discursive formations. While dialogism recognizes the displacement and decentering of utterances, the questions of authority, status, and situatedness are at the same time "not totally removed or denied." Where Kristeva and Bakhtin differ, however, is in their focus. While Bakhtin considers *specific* historical, cultural, and social encounters interacting within the dialogic encounter, Kristeva utilizes more general terms, such as "text" and "intertext," in favor of a more unstable textual model. For this reason, some scholars have questioned whether Kristeva implements Bakhtinian theory into her semiotic construct

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[133] Peter D. Miscall, "Isaiah: New Heavens, New Earth, New Book," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 45. For further examples of Bakhtinian biblical scholarship, see Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History. Part 1: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1980). See also his second and third volumes: *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History. Part 2: 1 Samuel* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989); *David and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History. Part 3: 2 Samuel* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993). In addition, see Roland Boer, *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); Carol A. Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," *The Journal of Religion* 76, no. 2 (April 1, 1996): 290–306; Green, *Makhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship*; Fewell, "The Work of Biblical Narrative"; Robert S. Kawashima, "Biblical Narrative and the Birth of Prose Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 51; Kendra Haloviak Valentine, *Worlds at War, Nations in Song: Dialogic Imagination and Moral Vision in the Hymns of the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015). For a Bakhtinian analysis paired with Bhabhan postcolonial theory, see Virginia Burrus, "The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles," in *The Bible and Postcolonialism, 13*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (New York, NY, and London, UK: T&T Clark, 2007).

appropriately. She seems to lose, according to Simon Dentith, the importance of the "historical location" of the "dialogic encounter."[134]

Despite this scholarly quandary, Kristeva does share with Bakhtin "an insistence that texts cannot be separated from the larger cultural or social textuality out of which they are constructed."[135] In other words, while Bakhtin foregrounds the specificity of context, Kristeva understands context to function within a complex textual-intertextual signifying system. In the exegetical chapters to follow, I use both Bakhtinian dialogism and Kristevan intertextuality to highlight the interactions between Revelation and other texts. I privilege dialogism, however, due to my particular interest in and emphasis upon the sociohistorical milieu in which Revelation was written, the traumatic ramifications of Empire upon its implied author and community, and my reading of the text's own Jewish-Greco-Roman situatedness.

A historical predilection strengthens dialogical analysis also. As noted above, the Roman world was a product of cultural hybridization, a cultural effect of various dialogical associations – none more prominent than Greece.[136] We might even say that ancient authors were trained in the art of dialogism. Using *paraphrasis*, rhetoricians were trained to revise, transform, improve – indeed *dialogue with* – other literary texts, genres, themes, and styles. According to Austin Busch, in fact, literary dialogism was so pervasive in the ancient Greco-Roman world that writers ultimately engaged in "an act of assimilative amalgamation rather than cataloging."[137] He cites Seneca, who wrote: "We too ought to imitate these bees …. [W]e are out to conflate the various things we have extracted … so that it may still appear to be something other than its source, even if from where it was obtained will be apparent" (*Ep.* 84.5).[138]

Revelation and Dialogism

We saw earlier that Revelation's extraction of Jewish and Greco-Roman texts is perhaps most evident in its wild mixing of Jewish scriptural and

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[134] Quoted by Allen, *Intertextuality*, 56–57.   [135] Ibid., 35.

[136] For more on this, see Andrew S. Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised: A Study in Early Christian History and Difference* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 9.

[137] Austin Busch, "New Testament Narrative and Greco-Roman Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 66.

[138] Ibid., 66–67.

Greek mythological elements in the tale of the woman clothed with the Sun. But as Busch, and Seneca, point out, intertextualities can be minimalist and difficult to identify. Revelation's use of humor is at times dependent on a more subtle dialogism, one that includes broad literary and cultural resonances without direct citation or quotation, nevertheless maintaining a similar form and style to those of its Jewish and Greco-Roman intertexts. Even if these subtleties are only referential for the modern reader, their/this referentiality indicates in and of itself a framework worth considering, all the more so when we are reading an ancient text whose author and audience would have been particularly attuned to such literary devices and linguistic modalities. Busch continues:

> [W]e must conclude that [ancient writers and readers] would have been far more sensitive to subtle invocations of pagan Greek texts than most readers are today. If a plausible case can be made for even faint echoes of these writings in New Testament narratives, and if it can be demonstrated that their recognition deepens our understanding of the texts in which they appear, we ought to acknowledge that we have belatedly hit upon a semiotic complex that largely ceased to be recognized.[139]

A dialogical reading thus does not preclude a culturally or historically sensitive reading of the text, but rather supports the historical-critical project while allowing for and highlighting (textual) fluidity and instability, regardless of whether that instability is subtle or overt.

Although not identical to any one story from any one culture, it is clear that Revelation borrows elements from multiple texts and contexts.[140] This does not position Greco-Roman-ness and Jewishness at odds with each other, but rather acknowledges the mutual exchange that occurred between these cultures at the same time. Whereas a monologic reading of Revelation might interpret the book, as its author, establishing authority and identity over and against Roman power and culture (right down to John's self-identification as Jewish in name, language, and ideology), internal and external evidence suggest that John and his text were undoubtedly impacted, indeed fashioned, by the larger Greco-Roman world. It is significant that, even though John writes *against* the Greco-Roman power system and *against* his contemporaries immersed in that system, he does so with recourse to Greco-Roman story and, as with stories of Judah Maccabee, *in Greek*. As Busch might phrase it, were his a reading of Revelation, the book "encompasses [Judaism's] expansion

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[139] Ibid., 67.
[140] And perhaps even more directly the Heracles narrative that Rossing proposes.

beyond Judea into the wider Greco-Roman world, a larger canvas that benefits from the full palate of literary colors [it] employs, including questions and echoes of classical Greek writings scattered throughout [its volume]."[141]

But therein lies the rub. For just as reading Revelation within a Jewish context does not negate its Greco-Romanness, Revelation's immersion in Greco-Romanness does not negate its reflections of Jewish trauma under Empire. As Rajak explains of Jewish–Hellenist relations, ethnic boundaries were still drawn, and tensions were still raised.[142] Although many Jews "got by," "blended in," or "passed" and, in so doing, "enjoyed the benefits of Roman commerce ... and Hellenistic culture,"[143] they still languished under a colonial regime of dehumanization, destitution, exploitation, and enslavement.[144] Rajak adds:

> While there is good reason to view the distinctions as activated only intermittently, we may suspect that, in the group memory, the rare occasions of tension may have loomed as large as the links; for those moments when Jews saw themselves as diametrically opposed to what Greeks [and Romans] stood for, in the broadest sense, were indeed defining moments. At such moments physical violence often accompanied ideological conflict and this will have left a lasting mark which justifies their prominent place in the historian's reckoning.[145]

The epitome of hybridity, Revelation's emotive rhetoric unequivocally indicates Jewish opposition to all that the Greeks and Romans represented and, yet, is itself representative of (the immense influence of) Empire. The book's tensions loom as large as the links and appear, indeed, to be defining moments.

The overarching scheme of Revelation is thus one of both/and. There is adaptation, and there is opposition. There is assimilation, and there is trauma. Indeed, assimilation in itself can sit alongside trauma. It is precisely this both/and – the conflict and the conjunction – with which Revelation strives and struggles, and as such, it is the lens through which I propose we read the Apocalypse.[146] Revelation's author, put simply, combines elements of the world around him, and in so doing (unwittingly?), he constructs his own hybrid world(view). This "world" consists

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[141] Busch, "New Testament Narrative and Greco-Roman Literature," 66.
[142] Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome*, 6.
[143] See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 127.
[144] Ibid.   [145] Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome*, 6–7.
[146] The name "Israel," after all, means to strive with God.

of Jewishness *and* Greco-Romanness, assimilation *and* antagonism. In the words of Shanell Smith, this is "John's revelation, and *his* side of the story."[147] Though not all of his readers were suffering, John makes clear that he identifies absolutely with those who are afflicted.[148]

LOOKING FORWARD

As a referential text that both exposes subjugation under Empire and unveils an ambivalent opposition/attraction to the Roman imperial system, Revelation, despite its ancient context, functions as a postcolonial narrative. It exudes an anticolonial sentiment by "interrogating [its] colonial past" and present.[149] It exposes the construction of Roman hegemony by envisioning an alternative mode of being. Its postcoloniality is expressed not in the sense of being written *post* colonial-imperialism, but as Sam Durrant puts it, in the "performative sense." Revelation "bear [s] witness to the various histories of [colonized] oppression that underwrite local, national, and international privilege and continue to inform, if not determine, cultural and psychological existence in the hope that their literary witnessing will bring into being a truly *post*colonial form of community."[150] To put it differently, Revelation is as *post*traumatic as it is *post*colonial, and as we will see next chapter, posttraumatic signification does not imply the termination of trauma – regardless of whether the traumatic "event" proper has passed or still lingers (such as in cases of repeated assault, ongoing systems of oppression, and ongoing imperial colonization) – but rather attests to traumatic events (past or present) and various *remaining* psycho-social responses. Revelation, through the serious, even somber, use of humorous storytelling, "writ[es] back" to Empire, and encourages readers to respond/"liste[n] again."[151]

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[147] Smith, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire*, 115.
[148] See Koester, *Revelation*, 250.
[149] Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), 4.
[150] Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*, 2.
[151] Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 25.