Book of Seven Seals

Edited by
THOMAS J. KRAUS and
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The Peculiarity of Revelation, its Manuscripts, Attestation, and Transmission

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Thomas J. Kraus and Michael Sommer

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Thomas J. Kraus, born 1965; studied Catholic Theology and English linguistics & literature; 1999 Dissertation at the Faculty of Catholic Theology, Regensburg University; since 1999 teacher at a grammar school in Bavaria/Germany; since 2013 lecturer at Zurich University, Switzerland.

Michael Sommer, born 1984; studied Catholic Theology at the Faculty of Catholic Theology, Regensburg University; 2013 Dissertation; since 2014 Junior Professor of Biblical Theology, Martin-Luther-University Wittenberg-Halle.

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Preface

The idea to bring together scholars to write about manuscripts and text-critical issues of the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Canon of the New Testament, came up during a conference in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 2011. It was a very vague impression that there might be something special about the manuscript attestation and transmission of this fascinating apocalypse in those days, something that – as we are convinced of – becomes less spongy and nebulous with the help of the present studies in this volume. The story of this book, however, is not a long but a long-winded one. Everyday life and daily routine made it impossible to think of a swift realization of the book project. Besides, it was not that easy to find and convince specialized colleagues and scholars to contribute to a book like this, but, eventually, the search was very successful. Consequently, we thank the contributors to this volume first and foremost for their work and, above all, for the patience they had with us, the editors, also for sticking to the project. In addition, we thank Jörg Frey, main editor of the series, for encouraging us to continue working on and for the publication of the present studies and for accepting the book for publication. And, of course, without the helpful people at Mohr Siebeck this project would never have been realized.

Neumarkt i.d.Opf. and Halle, Saale, June 2016

Thomas J. Kraus
Michael Sommer

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Introduction

Thomas J. Kraus

Of course, it is not entirely coincidental that the title of this collection of essays reads 'Book of Seven Seals'. People familiar with Revelation, the last book of the canonical New Testament, and its text easily recognize this phrase is based on Rev 5:1:[1]

The following chapters of Rev (6–8) depict how the seven seals of this book (or booklet) are opened one after the other.[4] And Rev 6:1–8 starts right away with one of the most popular motives of Rev, the four horsemen. The four riders (details from 6:1–8) have become widely know by means of artistic representations. The renowned Apocalypse of Bamberg, Germany,[5] a lavishly illustrated manuscript from the 11th century with Rev and an evangelistary, shows the horsemen in a rather surprising way as ordinary riders on horseback dressed in contemporary clothes with certain attributes (bow and arrow, sword, scales, and no attribute at all); and Albrecht Dürer's woodcut of the four (circa 1497–1498) standing for death, famine, war, and conquest has probably had the most significant impact on our idea of the dynamics and devastation

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[1] New Testament citations according to NA[28] = Novum Testamentum Graece, ed. by B. ALAND/K. ALAND, Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, Münster-Stuttgart [28]2012.

[2] Nonetheless, the possibility that βιβλίον denotes a roll with writing on both sides is actually discussed in commentaries and has its pros and cons. For a detailed discussion of the alternatives 'codex' and 'roll (i.e., scroll)' with a preference for the latter see D.E. AUNE, Revelation 1–5, WBC 52, Dallas 1997, 338–343.

[3] Cf. T.J. KRAUS, Demosthenes and (late) ancient miniature books from Egypt. Reflections on a category, physical features, purpose and use, in: L. Arcari (ed.), Beyond Conflicts. Religious and Cultural Cohabitations in Alexandria and in Egypt between the 1st and the 6th cent. CE, WUNT, Tübingen 2016 (forthcoming).

[4] The idea of sealing books in the Bible occurs first in Dan 12:4 (NASB): "But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase." Further see Isa 29:11; Rev 22:10.

[5] Cf. N. WOLF, Deutschlands großes Erbe. Die ottonischen Bilderhandschriften, Die Galerie der schönsten Bücher. Buchmalerei erleben, Luzern 2004, 69–93 (with many colour plates). Unfortunately, this volume does not have folios 14r, 14v, 15r and 16r of the famous depiction of the apocalyptic Four Horsemen, which, nonetheless, are very easily accessible online (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Bamberg_Apocalypse; last access 03/11/2015).

brought to humankind by these riders. In 1865, German artist Gustave Doré specialized in depicting the fourth horseman as 'Death on Pale Horse' expressing unimaginable and inexpressible horrors. Even today there are major and explicit forms of referring and representing the four horsemen. The heavy metal band Metallica released the song 'Four Horsemen' on *Kill 'em all* from 1983 and the punk band The Clash a song with the same title in 1979 on *London Calling*. Aphrodite's Child's 'The Four Horsemen' (on their album *666* from 1972) and shock rocker Marilyn Manson's 'The Rusted Four' (on *The High End of Low* from 2009) are further musical attestations of this motive. The popular and hype band Muse even initiated that the album artwork of their *Black Holes and Revelation* from 2006 shows the four riders sitting at around a table with their small four horses on the table. In addition, for those of us familiar with some specific genres of comics, movies, and computer games can easily imagine, the four horsemen perfectly fit there in diverse manifestations.

Very well known and widely distributed even among people who do not know much or anything at all about the Bible and Rev is "the number of the beast" (τὸ ἀριθμὸν τοῦ θηρίου) mentioned in Rev 13:18. William Blake's painting 'The Number of the Beast is 666' (object 1, Butlin 522) has become a classic and the occultist Aleister Crowley put it into the centre of his book, '*Liber al vel legis*, and even called himself the great beast 666.[6] The heavy metal Iron Maiden band stirred a major uproar with their album *The Number of the Beast* and a song with the same title, both released in 1982, and the stylish band HIM celebrated a major success with their 'Your Sweet Six Six Six' and their album *Greatest Love Songs Vol. 666* in 1997. No need to mention, that 666 is also popular on car number plates.

It was again Albrecht Dürer who also impressively visualized 'The Sea Monster and the Beast with the Lamb's Horn' (Rev 13:1–18) in his Rev cycle and formed our idea of these two as well. Other motives and/or phrases have become natural parts of our everyday language. Well known are, for instance, 'the alpha and the omega' from Rev 22:13 (ἐγὼ τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος "I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the least, the beginning and the end" [NASB]), something already used by Irenaeus of Lyon when writing against Gnostic heretics (*Against heresies* 1.14.3 and 6), the lamb of God,[7] a motive that

[6] For some more background information see J. SYMONDS, The Beast 666. The Life of Aleister Crowley, London 1977.

[7] The 'lamb' representing Christ is rather popular with Revelation (cf. 5:6, 5, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9–10, 14, 17; 12,11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 10; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 27; 22:1, 3), while 'lamb of God' only appears in John 1:29, 36.

has become pivotal in Christian liturgy. There is no need to specialize on the kingdom that lasts 'thousand years' (Rev 20:4) and millenarianism (or millenarism), because its painful and horrible effect during the time of German Nationalsocialism is well known today and serves as a reminder of a responsible and sensible reception of Biblical texts.

Moreover, it comes as no surprise that the book itself and some of its major phrases, images, and motives have become popular with poets and novelists, artists and composers alike. For the latter, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in his *Requiem* (1791, posthumously finished by Franz Xaver Süssmayr), Hector Berlioz in his *Grande Messe des Morts* (1837), and Guiseppe Verdi with his *Massa da Requiem* 1874, for instance, admiringly demonstrated how to set the *Dies irae* hymn (with included *Tuba mirum*) – influenced by biblical motives, e.g., Rev 20:11–15, – to affecting music. The manifestations in all sorts of literary genre are *legion* and in light of the many popular phrases and motives Revelation offers just natural, while famous English poet D.H. Lawrence even used it as the foundation of his last work written in the winter of 1929 and 1930, a critical encounter with Western civilization and the structures that finally shaped it.[8]

Caution! Let's stop here and not be completely drawn in by the fabulous and fascinating reception history of Revelation and the deep impact it has had on diverse phenomena of our cultural reality. On the one hand there is what has been briefly delineated above, this overwhelming popularity, when it comes to write about Revelation; while, on the other hand, when we take a closer look at the first few Christian centuries, the exactly same text gives us food for though and casts some doubts about this popularity. It is well known that the book was disputed among early Christian writers and was the last to be accepted into the canon, though not all churches did so. The Syriac Orthodox Church, for instance, rejects Revelation and did not integrate it into their canonical Bible. But it is not so much known that the manuscript transmission and tradition of Revelation is peculiar when compared to other canonical texts of the New Testament, such as J.K. Elliott recently put it at the beginning of a study:[9]

Consequently, it is the special manuscript attestation[10] of Revelation that requires more attention but also its specific transmission, and literary

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[8] Cf. D.H. LAWRENCE, Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation, Cambridge 1980

[9] J.K. ELLIOTT, Recent Work on the Greek Manuscripts of Revelation and the Consequences for the *kurzgefasste Liste*, in: JTS 66 (2015), 574–584. See also J.K. ELLIOTT, Revelations from the *apparatus criticus* of the Book of Revelation. How Textual Criticism Can Help Historians, in: USQR 63 (2012), 1–23, here 2.

[10] Cf. M. KARRER, Der Text der Johannesapokalypse, in: J. Frey/J.A. Kelhoffer/F. Toth (eds.), Die Johannesapokalypse, WUNT 287, Tübingen 2012, 43–78. Further see the collected essays in M. SIGISMUND/M. KARRER/U. SCHMID (eds.), Studien zum Text der Apokalypse, ANTF 47, Berlin/New York 2015.

references and discussion among early Church writers. This forms the centre of this collection of essays and that is going to be highlighted from various perspectives; and by bringing together individual phenomena about and around the extraordinary attestation and transmission of Revelation, a window opens to unveil the peculiarity of Revelation as perceived in the first centuries of Christianity and manifested in archaeological artefacts, i.e., manuscripts, and the lively controversy about the value and orthodoxy of Revelation. All the distinct perspectives accumulated in this collection focus on one aspect approved by all the contributors: Revelation might have been dealt as something particular.

The first part of the collection is dedicated to certain phenomena in specific and/or groups of manuscripts with text from Revelation. Giovanni Bazzana breaks the first ground with his ' "Write in a Book What You See and Send It to the Seven Assemblies": Ancient Reading Practices and the Earliest Papyri of Revelation'. It contains some preliminary observations on the artifactual features of Revelation compared with those emerging from the analysis of the testimonies to two other writings (the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the so-called *Oracle of the Potter*) belonging to the "apocalyptic" literary genre. First, apocalyptic writings seem to have circulated in an extremely rich variety of formats, which in turn indicates a remarkable variety of different socio-cultural uses. Second, the 'private' or perhaps, better, 'unprofessional' mode of production of most manuscripts carrying them indicates that communal (or liturgical) use of apocalyptic literature was a marginal phenomenon, while apocalyptic books were more often than not read and copied by single or small circles of "free readers". The latter's socio-economic position and their level of education probably did not allow them to afford or even enjoy the costly bookrolls of the true elite. However, such situation left them relatively free to experiment with new genres and non-normative communicative forms. It seems reasonable to conclude that books belonging to the apocalyptic genre – with the richness of their imaginative world, the vividness of their narratives, and even the power of their political criticism – should be counted within the 'literature of consumption' that might have appealed to such audiences.

Then, Jeff Cate deals with a very important papyrus in 'The Curious Case of $\mathfrak{P}^{43}$'. *P.Sarga* 12 ($\mathfrak{P}^{43}$) is a tiny scrap of papyrus found at Wadi Sarga in Egypt in 1914 and published in 1922. The fragment has text of Rev 15:8–16:2 on the horizontal fibres and Rev 2:12–13 inverted on the vertical fibres seemingly in another hand. The limited amount of text and material creates difficulties for reconstructing its wording or explaining its original format. Some aspects of the fragment resemble an opisthographic roll, while others a single sheet. Three possible scenarios for the origins of this fragment are explored, but each with its own inherent difficulties. Possibly, the fragment was from a single sheet of excerpts, but this would be

unusual for these passages from the Apocalypse. Maybe the fragment is from a deteriorated roll that was salvaged by copying missing text onto the verso, but such circumstances would be extraordinary. Perhaps, it is from a *rotulus* which was more common in the time and place from which the fragment originates, but this would still be highly unusual. The original format of the tiny papyrus remains a mystery.

Thomas J. Kraus deals with the "consistently cited witnesses" to the text of Revelation in the 27th and 28th editions of the well-known Nestle-Aland, i.e., with the critical Greek editions of the New Testament that is very popular with scholars and students. Among the papyri and the majuscules there are very interesting fragments and/or manuscripts; but the pieces of information they could provide are often overlooked due to a major focus on the text and textual variants they offer. When looked at from a palaeographical perspective these manuscripts may tell more about the way Revelation was copied and used, how it was transmitted, and, possibly how it was regarded in the first few centuries of Christianity. Do these palaeographical aspects shed light on a particular and extraordinary treatment of Revelation? This is hard to answer and needs reference material with other New Testaments texts and more observations of their peculiarities as artefacts.

Then follows Jeff Cate's study of Gregory-Aland 792 (Athens, Greece) and 2643 (Riverside, California), two of the tiniest miniature manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, in his 'Sisters Separated from Birth: An Examination of 792 and 2643 as Private Miniature Manuscripts'. Based on their peculiar features and text, these two minuscules appear to be "sisters" copied from the same exemplar and by the same scribal hand in the thirteenth century. Besides their tiny pages and script, these two miniatures both contain an odd collection of only five books of the New Testament – the four Gospels and Revelation. Collations of the two manuscripts confirm that they seldom differ; even with bizarre readings, spellings, and other orthographical features are kept the same. The pair of miniatures contain an intriguing collection of peculiar abbreviations, large omissions of words, harmonizations among the Gospels, and unusual readings in Revelation.

In the beginning of the second part, Michael Sommer focuses Revelation's minuscules. He analyse in how far the contextual position of the Revelation has changed after its canonization.

In his 'Christliche Apokalypsen in Ägypten vor Konstantin: Kanon, Autorität, kontextuelle Funktion' Tobias Nicklas deals with the history of transmission of three Christian apocalypses in Egypt of pre-Constantinian and Constantinian times: Revelation, the Shepherd of *Hermas* and the *Apocalypse of Peter*. It describes the extant manuscripts and deals with their early reception by ancient authors. The extant material shows that our

Fathers – Apocryphal Writings, obviously did not play a major role for many Egyptian Christians of the pre-Constantinian period.

Lincoln H. Blumell and Thomas A. Wayment investigate into 'The "Number of the Beast": Early Christian Isopsephies and Revelation 13:18'. They bring together the evidence for the use of isopsephy in Christian literary texts, primarily in the Book of Revelation, and analyse it in light of evidence arising out of Christian documentary papyri and inscriptions, including a discussion of a recently published isopsephy from the marketplace in Smyrna. The key example of the use of Christian isopsephy in the New Testament is found in Rev 13:18, and in this connection the paper presents and analyzes the various interpretations of the number 666, or 616 in select manuscripts. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications this proposal has for dating the time of the composition of the Book of Revelation and the practice of isopsephy in Early Christianity.

Part three: Miscellaneous Markus Lembke started collating manuscripts of all books of the New Testament in the Institute for New Testament Textual Research in Münster in 2002. Today, he works in the Institute for Septuagint and Biblical Research at the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel (Germany), as a member of the team preparing the Editio Critica Maiorof the Apocalypse. He is currently finishing a 'Text und Textwert' volume which will contain textual analyses of all Greek manuscripts containing the Revelation of John. His main research interests include the wording and textual history of text-types, based on collation and grouping of manuscripts. The complicated textual tradition of the Apocalypse shows several peculiarities, displayed by the extraordinary huge diversity of text-types and manuscript families. This requires a rethinking in terms, concepts and methods of textual research and criticism. This contribution gives an outline of the main problems. First, the texts of the oldest codices are so different from each other that we cannot speak of an 'old text' as a text-type of existing manuscripts. Secondly, the majority of witnesses is heavily divided into two main lines of transmission, Koine and Andreas, which differ from each other more than a consensus of them from the postulated original text by Nestle-Aland. So there is no Byzantine majority text as a homogeneous text-type. Further, the manuscripts of the Andreas tradition disintegrate into very different families, and beside the Koine and Andreas type we find additional families (partlygenerated by a mix of both). As a result of this, the majority of manuscripts is formed by a combination of those text-types, changing from passage to passage. The consequences of those anomalies are not to be underestimated. We do not have the usual dichotomy between an Alexandrine and a Byzantine text-type, and in some passages the majority of manuscripts preserved the original reading against the old codices. The special situation of the manuscript tradition leads to the question which kind of changes in our previously ap-

plied methods of grouping manuscript and of identifying genealogical relations are necessary to achieve correct results. Ulrich Schmid's article 'Editing the Apocalypse in the twenty-first century' deals with general problems of editing as craftsmanship and claims for a digital edition of the book. In his essay 'The Heavenly Jesus Reinterprets Daniel: the Apocalypse as Corrective for the Olivet Discourse' Scott Charlesworth discusses the neglected relationship between synoptic apocalyptic and Revelation. The destruction of Jerusalem did not usher in the parousia the earthly Jesus had taught (Mk 13par.). Now the heavenly Jesus sets out to recalibrate expectation by reinterpreting Daniel. Because the big cosmic signs accompanying the Parousia occur in the sixth of seven seals opened by the slaughtered but now exalted Lamb (Rev 6:12–17), the consecutive openings imply a sequencing of events and, therefore, a delay. Similarly, the greatest tribulation of all time did not occur in connection with the fall of Jerusalem as Matthew 24:21 has it. John is shown a "great multitude" of people coming out of a "great tribulation" (Rev 7:9, 14) with a primary point of reference in the "time, times, and half a time" period of Daniel and its counterparts in Revelation. But this first great tribulation is to be followed by a second even greater tribulation that will involve the whole earth (13:11–17). Thus, Revelation opens and reinterprets the sealed book of Daniel with a view to failed synoptic apocalyptic. As for the timing of the parousia, the parallels between the sixth seal and the seventh plague imply that the second coming is to accompany the opening of the sixth seal and outpouring of the seventh bowl (16:17–20).

Be that all as it may, the Book of Revelation has evidently been regarded as a 'Book of Seven Seals' and treated in a peculiar way. Some may even call it a mystery. But isn't that exactly what puzzles and fascinates us and, consequently, keeps us preoccupied with this last book of the New Testament? Yes, it is.

Part One

The Peculiarity of Majuscules and Minuscules

"Write in a Book What You See and Send It to the Seven Assemblies"

Ancient Reading Practices and the Earliest Papyri of Revelation

Giovanni Bazzana

The scholarly interest in early Christian (and in particular New Testament) manuscripts as artifacts has witnessed a remarkable growth in the last couple of decades[1] alongside a parallel increase in the attention paid to materiality and material practices in the study of religious phenomena more broadly conceived.[2] This relatively new trend is often limited to the careful analysis of manuscripts and papyri and to the inventorying and registration of scribal "habits" with the ultimate goal of achieving a more solid reconstruction of the elusive "original text" of the New Testament.[3] However, the work conducted by papyrologists and paleographers on non-Christian artifacts – largely indebted to the research on the "history of the book" that flourished in several European countries throughout the '80s and '90s of the past century[4] – shows that much more can be gained through this "material" approach to early Christian written products.

In Italy, for instance, a veritable "school" of papyrologists and paleographers has been studying manuscripts and papyri along these lines

[1] Outstanding examples of the potential inherent in such approach are collected in the two books edited in the series Texts and Editions for New Testament Studies. T.J. KRAUS/T. NICKLAS, New Testament Manuscripts. Their Texts and Their Worlds, Leiden 2006, and T.J. KRAUS/T. NICKLAS, Early Christian Manuscripts. Examples of Applied Method and Approach, Leiden 2010.

[2] For suggestions concerning further developments at the intersection between writing and a materialistic approach to the study of religious phenomena, see W. KEANE, On Spirit Writing. Materialities of Language and the Religious Work of Transduction, in: JRAI 19 (2013), 1–17.

[3] For a sustained criticism of the notion of original text with its methodological and ideological underpinnings, see the classic contribution of E.J. EPP, The Multivalence of the Term 'Original Text' in New Testament Textual Criticism, in: HTR 92 (1999), 245–281, now republished in Perspectives on New Testament Textual Criticism. Collected Essays 1962–2004, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 116, Leiden 2005, 551–593.

[4] See, for instance, R. CHARTIER, L'ordre des livres. Lecteurs, auteurs, bibliothèques en Europe entre XIVe et XVIIIe siècle, Collection De la pensée, Aix-en-Provence 1992, or A. GRAFTON, The Footnote. A Curious History, Cambridge 1997.

for years following the seminal contributions of Guglielmo Cavallo. This paleographer understands written materials as artifacts whose socio-cultural role is best grasped by posing their physical attributes within an ideal "triangle" formed by the interactions among the books themselves, the texts conveyed by them and the bodies of their writers and readers.[5] The results of such examinations are well suited to account for the complexity and variety of socio-cultural functions that characterized ancient books and ancient practices of reading and writing. Within English-speaking scholarship, similar approaches are adopted more and more often, as witnessed, for instance, by the fascinating last chapter of William Johnson's recent book on early Roman reading communities[6] and, in more direct connection to early Christian written artifacts, in Kim Haines-Eitzen's and AnneMarie Luijendijk's contributions on scribes and their social worlds.[7]

The present contribution contains some preliminary observations designed to evaluate the applicability of such analytical tools to the study of the earliest papyrological witnesses to the *Apocalypse of John*.[8] The artifactual features of this group will be compared with those emerging from the analysis of the witnesses to two other writings (the *Shepherd* of Hermas and the so-called *Oracle of the Potter*) belonging to the so-called "apocalyptic" literary genre.[9] Besides its relative statistical significance, this specific selection offers a few advantages beyond the fact that it builds on

[5] G. CAVALLO, Veicoli materiali della letteratura di consum. Maniere di scrivere e maniere di leggere, in: O. Pecere/A. Stramaglia (eds.), La letteratura di consumo nel mondo greco-latino. Atti del convegno internazionale, Cassino 14–17 settembre 1994, Cassino 1996, 13–46, now republished in Il calamo e il papiro. la scrittura greca dall'età ellenistica ai primi secoli di Bisanzio, Papyrologica Florentina 36, Firenze 2005, 213–233, here 213–214.

[6] W.A. JOHNSON, Reading and Reading Cultures in the High Roman Empire. A Study of Elite Communities, New York 2010, 179–198.

[7] K. HAINES-EITZEN, Guardians of Letters. Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature, New York 2000; K. HAINES-EITZEN, The Gendered Palimpsest. Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity, New York 2012; and A.M. LUIJENDIJK, A New Testament Papyrus and Its Documentary Context. An Early Christian Writing Exercise from the Archive of Leonides (P.Oxy. II 209/P[10]), in: JBL 129 (2010), 575–596.

[8] Soundings of some Christian materials have been already attempted by Cavallo and other Italian scholars (whose work will be referenced below), but never in a very systematic way.

[9] Defined according to the by now "canonical" definition usually associated with the name of John Collins: "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality, which is both temporal insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world" (J.J. COLLINS, Introduction. Towards the Morphology of a Genre, in: Semeia 14 (1979), 1–20, here 9).

the general scholarly consensus undergirding the identification of the apocalyptic genre.

First, the selection straddles religious and canonical divisions, mirroring the production of apocalyptic literature in almost all the regions of the eastern Mediterranean in the Hellenistic and early Roman period. Thus, from the point of view of the socio-religious identification of the artifacts any simplistic labeling as "Jewish" or "Christian" can be safely put aside.[10] Indeed, apocalyptic writings are equally distributed in and outside the boundaries of canonical *corpora*, so that one of the main reasons behind the establishment of a definition of the "apocalyptic genre" was to relativize the inclusion in or the exclusion from either the Hebrew Bible or the Christian New Testament.

Second (and certainly related to what has just been observed), apocalyptic literature is preserved – at least for the first four centuries CE – by artifacts that are particularly varied in their physical features and thus remarkably promising for a study such as the present one. This analysis will ultimately indicate that such variety of papyrological and paleographic characteristics reflects in all likelihood the remarkable variety of social functions and reading practices attached to this kind of literary production.[11] In general, traditional studies of New Testament papyri have exceedingly (and often too simplistically) focused their attention on the communal and/or liturgical use of these artifacts, to the point that sometimes this might appear to be the exclusive function conceivably attached to early Christian books. Such methodological presupposition does not by any means surface only in the study of New Testament writings as artifacts and has deep ideological reasons that cannot be further explored here.[12] Indeed, more recent inquiries have started to question this often-unacknowledged assumption and have begun to formulate new hypotheses that would deal more adequately with the diverse wealth of material features emerging in the evidence at our disposal.[13] The present treatment intends to contribute to this line of research

[10] On the "Jewish" character of the Apocalypse of John in opposition to its usual ascription to "Christianity", see J.W. MARSHALL, Parables of War. Reading John's Jewish Apocalypse, SCJ 10, Waterloo 2001.

[11] A similar variety of artifactual features (mirroring a variety of socio-cultural practices) has been recently explored for the case of the Gospel of Thomas in A.M. LUIJENDIJK, Reading the Gospel of Thomas in the Third Century. Three Oxyrhynchus Papyri and Origen's Homilies, in: C. Clivaz/J. Zumstein (eds.), Reading New Testament Papyri in Context. Lire les papyrus du Nouveau Testament dans leur context, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 242, Leuven 2011, 241–267.

[12] For an initial appreciation of these methodological issues, see the seminal contribution of S.K. STOWERS, The Concept of 'Community' and the History of Early Christianity, in: Method and Theory in the Study of Religion 23 (2011), 238–256.

[13] For instance, see the recent reexamination of the origin and nature of the Nag Hammadi library in N. DENZEY LEWIS/J.A. BLOUNT, Rethinking the Origins of the Nag

by offering a few preliminary observations on the material characteristics of the earliest Greek witnesses to the *Apocalypse of John* and on their socio-cultural significance in terms of circulation and use.

1 The Apocalypse of John

It is worth beginning this examination with the *Apocalypse of John*, since the earliest witnesses to its text show in a remarkably clear way the diversity that has been mentioned above. John's apocalypse is also a very good representative of the textual fluidity that characterizes the apocalyptic genre as a whole and that can be attributed – at least in part – to the specific circumstances of its circulation.[14] This is a trait that distinguishes the *Apocalypse of John* from the other New Testament texts and that persistently frustrates scholarly attempts to reconstruct the "original" writing of John of Patmos.[15]

The book of Revelation is preserved by a relatively good number of early papyri and these have received a fair share of scholarly attention, since – due to the failure of John to make the canon of the eastern Churches in the key fourth and fifth centuries – only very few great uncial manuscripts actually carry the text of the *Apocalypse*. I will briefly describe the physical features of the six earliest manuscripts and then I will introduce some more general observations on their significance for an understanding of the reading and writing practices associated with this apocalypse.[16]

Hammadi Codices, in: JBL 133 (2014), 399–419; regardless of the cogency of the new proposal advanced by Denzey Lewis and Blount, the questions raised in this article deserve serious consideration.

[14] Seminal observations on this account in J.K. ELLIOTT, The Distinctiveness of the Greek Manuscripts of the Book of Revelation, in: JTS 48 (1997), 116–124.

[15] Josef Schmid's landmark treatment seemed to have settled the issue (J. SCHMID, Studien zur Geschichte des Griechischen Apokalypse-Textes, Munich 1955–1956), but recent contributions pose serious question to the very methodological foundations of this work: see, in particular, J. HERNÁNDEZ JR., The Creation of a Fourth-Century Witness to the Andreas Text Type. A Misreading of the Apocalypse's Textual History, in: NTS 60 (2014), 106–120, and J.K. ELLIOTT, A Short Textual Commentary on the Book of Revelation and the 'New' Nestle, in: NT 56 (2014), 68–100.

[16] I am leaving aside P^{43} (P.Lond.Lit. 220; LDAB 2824; TM 61673), because its late date (VI–VIII CE) puts it beyond the chronological scope of the present inquiry. These papyri are also examined briefly by T. NICKLAS, The Early Text of Revelation, in: Charles E. Hill/Michael J. Kruger (eds.), The Early Text of the New Testament, Oxford 2012, 225–238.

1.1 P^{98} (P.IFAO 2 31)[17]

A leaf of papyrus containing on its *verso* side the fragmentary text of Rev 1:13–20, it was not identified by the first editor, but only in a later reexamination by Dieter Hagedorn.[18] The German papyrologist states that the *recto* of the papyrus carries the remnants of a still unpublished documentary text. The handwriting on the *verso* is very rough and semi-literary with features that associate it with the so-called "severe style".[19] Thus, Hagedorn dated the papyrus paleographically on a span of time ranging from 150 to 250 CE with a preference for the earlier period. In a recent global reexamination of the paleographic dating of New Testament manuscripts Clarysse and Orsini have instead placed P^{98} in the first half of the third century.[20]

Given the fragmentary state of preservation of P^{98} it is impossible to establish whether the papyrus was the beginning of an entire copy of Revelation or if the scribe had reemployed a discarded papyrus leaf as the support for an amulet or – more likely in this case – for a writing exercise. In any event, the quality of the handwriting witnesses to the fact that P^{98} was probably not intended to be a bookroll in the sense of the elite products described by William Johnson.[21] Indeed, texts written on reemployed leaves and against the fibers of the papyrus – as in the case at hand – can be associated with a set of socio-cultural practices that scholars often designate as "private" in opposition to the "public" functions of the literary bookroll.[22]

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[17] LDAB 2776; TM 61626.

[18] D. HAGEDORN, P.IFAO II 31. Johannesapokalypse 1,13–20, in: ZPE 92 (1992), 243–247.

[19] The latter is more aptly classified as a "stylistic class" than as an actual "style": see M.S. FUNGHI/G. MESSERI, Sulla scrittura di P. Oxy. II 223 + P. Köln V 210, in: AP 1 (1989), 37–42, and L. DEL CORSO, Lo 'stile severo' nei POxy: una lista, in: Aegyptus 86 (2006), 81–106.

[20] W. CLARYSSE/P. ORSINI, Early New Testament Manuscripts and Their Dates. A Critique of Theological Paleography, in: ETL 88 (2012), 443–474, here 457.

[21] "Analogous in many respects as statuary in a garden, or to the luxurious plate on which dinner is served in an elite household, the bookroll-as-object seems, to the modern eye, something more akin to an art object than to a book, and this is, I think, not merely the consequence of our different cultural register. The literary roll exemplifies high culture not just in the demonstration that the owner is literate and educated, but by means of the physical aesthetics the bookroll also points up the refinement of the owner." (JOHNSON, Readers (n. 6), 23).

[22] "Any text written on the back of a roll or sheet discarded as waste declare themselves to be private copies, a view at times borne out by the manner of writing" (C.H. ROBERTS, Manuscripts, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt, London 1979, here 9). For simplicity's sake I adopt here the opposition between "private" and "public", even though its appropriateness is far from established; Johnson's binary "private" and "professional" might fare better (W.A. JOHNSON, Bookrolls and Scribes in Oxyrhynchus, Toronto 2004, here 159). It is worth mentioning that the designation opistographa that is often applied to

P^{98} was in all likelihood produced either by a less experienced (and thus cheaper) scribe or directly by its owner. All these features lead to identify the papyrus as a copy intended for the personal use of someone who might be designated – following Cavallo's categorization – as a "free reader".[23]

1.2 P^{18} (P.Oxy 8 1079)[24]

This papyrus leaf carries on the side written along the fibers a few verses from the conclusion of Greek *Exodus* (from 42:20 to the end) originally published separately by Arthur Hunt as P.Oxy 8 1075 (LDAB 3477; TM 62314). The side written against the fibers carries Rev 1:4–7 and is clearly copied in a different handwriting. Thus, Hunt's original hypothesis was to consider this piece as another exemplar of an excerpt from Revelation written on the *verso* of a reemployed roll. Hunt's interpretation of the evidence has been recently challenged by Brent Nongbri, who maintains that there are good grounds to consider the papyrus a page from a codex that would have contained at least *Exodus* and the *Apocalypse of John*.[25] Nongbri's case is quite convincing and considering P^{18} a codex – albeit a codex containing a somewhat odd couple of texts – has a bearing on the understanding of its function. Hunt had dated the hand on the *recto* to the third century and that on the *verso* to the fourth (but admitting the possibility of placing it in the third). Indeed, the *recto* hand – described by the first editor as a "sloping uncial" – is appropriately dated to the third century and appears as looping and unimodular, possibly derived from bureaucratic practices.[26] The *verso* hand is much less sophisticated (a "medium-sized cursive" in Hunt's words) and is dated by Clarysse and Orsini to the third century.[27]

If one accepts Nongbri's proposal, the relatively informal character of the handwriting suggests a "private" setting for the composition of the codex, a

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pieces such as P^{98} should be reserved only for those rolls in which a single writing is copied beginning with the recto and then continuing on the verso (M. MANFREDI, Opistografo, La parola del passato 38 (1983), 44–54).

[23] "Quanti di questi alfabeti [in the first centuries of the Roman period] acquisivano la capacità di leggere libri (e non erano i più), non tutti o non soltanto erano lettori 'obbligati' a leggere dalle loro funzioni in quanto eruditi, autori-scrittori, tecnici di una qualche professione, maestri di scuola o anche semplici scolari, ma c'erano pure lettori 'liberi'" (G. CAVALLO, Discorsi sul libro, in: G. Cambiano/L. Canfora/D. Lanza (eds.), Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica, I/3, La produzione e la circolazione del testo. I Greci e Roma, Roma 1994, 639–640).

[24] LDAB 2786; TM 61636.

[25] B. NONGBRI, Losing a Curious Christian Scroll but Gaining a Curious Christian Codex. An Oxyrhynchus Papyrus of Exodus and Revelation, in: NT 55 (2013), 77–88.

[26] Similar to the style described in CLARYSSE/ORSINI, Manuscripts (n. 20), 458.

[27] Ibidem, 459, describing it as a "cursive and informal documentary hand" comparable to PSI 3 199 [Arsinoites, February 25th 203 CE].

suggestion that is strengthened by the apparent absence of any punctuation or paragraph spacing in the surviving portion of the papyrus. The association of *Exodus* and Revelation in the same codex is particularly difficult to explain, even for Nongbri,[28] but exactly this coupling shows that the codex was hardly intended for communal or liturgical reading. Indeed, most miscellaneous codices were clearly prepared for "private" use.[29] Moreover, it is worth noting that the case of this codex shows quite clearly the heuristic inadequacy of a binary "private/public", since the texts were copied at least by two different scribes with two different degrees of expertise. The features of the artifact point towards a (small) circle of intellectuals who had some personal interest in *Exodus* and Revelation.

1.3 P^{47} (P.Beatty 3)[30]

It comprises ten leaves from a papyrus codex preserving almost all the text of Revelation between verses 9:10 and 17:2. The handwriting is described by Kenyon, the first editor of the papyrus, as "rather rough in character, thick in formation, and with no pretension to calligraphy". This led him to date the codex no later "than the third century, but it is likely to be late in the century".[31] In their new examination of datings, Clarysse and Orsini describe the hand of P^{47} as belonging to an "Alexandrian stylistic class" derived from the bureaucratic and chancery practices of the second and third century CE with the result that our codex ends up being placed – in agreement with Kenyon – in the third century without a more precise specification.[32]

The scribe of P^{47} was judged "generally correct" by Kenyon, but James Royse – who has examined with extreme care the scribal habits of this copyist – concludes that he or she produced a high percentage of orthographic or nonsense singular readings.[33] The few extant corrections seem to be all from the hand of the scribe.[34] Despite the presence of diaireses and comma between consonants, the codex does not note breathings or has any punctuation mark. It seems almost a general assumption that the

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[28] NONGBRI, Losing (n. 25), 88 refers to a suggestive explanation advanced by E.J. EPP, The Oxyrhynchus New Testament Papyri. 'Not without Honor except in Their Hometown?', in: JBL 123 (2004), 5–55, now this article has been republished in Perspectives (n. 3), 743–801, here 758–759.

[29] E. CRISCI, I più antichi codici miscellanei greci: materiali per una riflessione, in: ST 2 (2004), 109–144.

[30] LDAB 2778; TM 61628.

[31] Editio princeps, XII.

[32] CLARYSSE/ORSINI, Manuscripts (n. 20), 458.

[33] J.R. ROYSE, Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri, New Testament Tools, Studies, and Documents 36, Leiden 2008, 359–398, here 397.

[34] Ibidem, 363–365.

function of all early Christian manuscripts was communal or even liturgical reading. But this does not appear to be necessarily the case for P^{47}. In fact, that a book has the form of a codex does not constitute sufficient proof that it was conceived for public reading in the absence of other indicators, such as *paragraphoi* or punctuation. It is worth mentioning here that, among the many hypotheses advanced to explain the Christian favor for the codex, no one implies that the codex proved itself more suitable than the roll for communal reading. On the contrary, it is usually observed that the width of columns in codices is actually less suitable for public reading than that commonly adopted in bookrolls, unless letters are drawn much bigger than normal (something that does not happen for P^{47}).[35] Moreover, most of the earliest surviving non-Christian codices carry texts – such as astrological, grammatical, or medical manuals – for which a practice of communal reading appears much less likely than personal or private study.[36] In sum, while a communal/liturgical use of P^{47} cannot be excluded in principle, it seems likelier that the codex was produced for personal reading and study by the owner himself or by a scribe hired on the cheap for this purpose.

1.4 P^{115} (P.Oxy 66 4499)[37]

This collection of 26 rather small fragments allows the reconstruction of nine codex leaves comprising the text of Revelation between 2:1 and 15:7. Juan Chapa, the first editor of the papyrus, describes its handwriting as rather informal, but regular and somewhat cursive.[38] Chapa dates paleographically the papyrus between the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century CE, a dating that is retained by Clarysse and Orsini, who classify the handwriting as an example of "severe style".[39]

There is evidence of the activity of a second corrector beside the original scribe of P^{115}. Moreover, the papyrus carries traces of *diastolai* and punctuation at the beginning of verses. With respect to what has been observed above concerning P^{47}, P^{115} appears more likely to have been prepared with public reading or some other kind of communal use in mind. While the handwriting is not overly clear and thus not very suitable for reading aloud, the papyrus has traces of punctuation and the fragmentary

[35] W.A. JOHNSON, Toward a Sociology of Reading in Classical Antiquity, in: AJP 121 (2000), 593–627.

[36] R.S. BAGNALL, Early Christian Books in Egypt, Princeton 2009, here 87–88.

[37] LDAB 7161; TM 65898.

[38] See the introduction of the editio princeps (10–13) and J. CHAPA, Il papiro 115. Qualcosa in più del numero della bestia, in: E. Bosetti/A. Colacrai (eds.), Apokalypsis. Percorsi nell'Apocalisse in onore di Ugo Vanni, Assisi 2005, 311–333.

[39] CLARYSSE/ORSINI, Manuscripts (n. 20), 457.

state of its preservation might obscure the original presence of other graphic reading aids, such as *paragraphoi*.[40]

1.5 P^{24} (P.Oxy 10 1230)[41]

This fragment from a codex leaf preserves merely Rev 5:5–8 on one side and 6:5–8 on the other one. The handwriting is described by Clarysse and Orsini as a "cursive and informal documentary" that they then date to the fourth century.[42] The style of the writing seems to indicate another "private" codex, but any definite conclusion on this issue is hindered by the extremely fragmentary state of the papyrus.

1.6 P^{85} (Strasbourg, Bibliothèque Nationale P. gr. 1027)[43]

Another fragmentary codex leaf carrying the text of Rev 9:19–10:1.5–9. The handwriting belongs to an early stage of formation of the Alexandrian stylistic class with clear and well-formed letters, which are dated by Clarysse and Orsini between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century.[44] This codex could be an example of an artifact produced for "public" use, but any conclusion is again limited by the smallness of the surviving fragments.

Despite the limited number of early papyri that carry the text of the *Apocalypse of John*, a few preliminary conclusions can be drawn from the preceding analysis. First, as hinted before, the variety of material characteristics arguably mirrors a variety of socio-cultural uses to which the text of Revelation was put. Thus, one encounters artifacts that range on a rather wide spectrum from papyri that are almost writing exercises (as in the case of P^{98}) to codices that are apparently intended as attempts of imitation and emulation of the traditional Greek bookroll (as in the case of P^{115} or P^{85}). Second, despite the variety, it appears that the majority of the earliest witnesses indicate some sort of "private" use and circulation for the *Apocalypse of John*. This cannot be unexpected for a writing that struggled so much to be included within the New Testament canon, particularly in the Mediterranean region from which most of the extant papyri originated.

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[40] A.M. LUIJENDIJK, Sacred Scriptures as Trash. Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus, in: VC 64 (2010), 217–254, here 250–251 thinks that P^{115} might constitute an example of a manuscript that was discarded as a whole and torn to pieces.

[41] LDAB 2791; TM 61641.

[42] CLARYSSE/ORSINI, Manuscripts (n. 20), 459, which they compare with SB 8 9907 Hermoupolis, September 19th 388 CE and P.Köln 3 134, a fragment of a roll carrying a few verses of the Iliad and dated to the fourth century.

[43] LDAB 2794; TM 61644; published by J. SCHWARTZ, Papyrus et tradition manuscrite, in: ZPE 4 (1969), 175–182.

[44] CLARYSSE/ORSINI, Manuscripts (n. 20), 465.

However, as hinted above, such observation might also highlight the role played by "free readers" in the spread and circulation of apocalyptic literature. The latter hypothesis, in particular, should be tested by comparing the profile of the textual witnesses to the *Apocalypse of John* with those of other apocalypses.

2 The Shepherd of Hermas

Hermas's work is one of the best represented in the papyrological record and thus provides a rich array of materials for an inquiry such as the present, provided that one accepts its belonging to the apocalyptic genre.[45] Indeed, the *Shepherd* appears in a variety or formats and artifactual situations that is even more diverse than that just surveyed for Revelation.[46]

2.1 P.Oxy 69 4706[47]

The papyrus is constituted by 27 fragments of a roll that was apparently written only on the *recto* side. The original dimensions and layout are difficult to reconstruct; thus, while one knows that the roll certainly contained all the *Visions* and the *Commandments*, it is not as sure that it carried the entirety of the *Shepherd*. The handwriting is a round majuscule tending towards cursive under the influence of chancery practices that are similar to those seen above for P^{47} with more ornamentation in the case of P.Oxy 4706; the first editor, Nikolaos Gonis, describes it as informal with cursive tendencies and rightly assigns it to the beginning of the third century.[48] The handwriting is rather informal, but the papyrus seems to have been designed as a regular bookroll, even though nothing more can be said about its potential uses in public or communal settings due to its fragmentary state.

[45] On the point, see the brief, but still convincing discussion in A.Y. COLLINS, The Early Christian Apocalypses, in: Semeia 14 (1979), 61–121, here 74–75.

[46] The present examination is greatly facilitated by the preliminary observations collected by M. CHOAT/R. YUEN-COLLINGRIDGE, The Egyptian Hermas. The Shepherd in Egypt Before Constantine, in: T.J. Kraus/T. Nicklas, Manuscripts (n. 1), 191–212. This survey will be arbitrarily restricted to the pre-Constantinian pieces for reasons of space.

[47] LDAB 10575; TM 69384.

[48] Some of the Oxyrhynchos comparanda brought up in the edition princeps could even push the dating to the late second century.