

MYTH AND SYMBOLIC RESISTANCE IN REVELATION 13

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The goal of this article is to examine the use of myth in Revelation 13. I contend that John drew on a range of mythic traditions from Jewish and Gentile sources. Comparisons with the use of myth in other apocalyptic texts and in imperial cult settings lead to the conclusion that John deployed myths in creative and disorienting ways for the purpose of alienating his audiences from mainstream society. In other words, he engaged in symbolic resistance, by which I do not mean hopeless support for a lost cause but rather the dangerous deployment of myths in defense of a minority viewpoint in a particular social context. In order to get to that conclusion, however, I must explain what I mean by myth, lay out comparative material from the mythology of imperial cults in Asia, and then examine the use of myth in Revelation 13.

I. Remythologizing Studies of the Book of Revelation

The starting point for the argument is a simple observation: myth has almost disappeared as an interpretive category in studies of the book of Revelation. The last sightings were recorded in the 1970s by Adela Yarbro Collins and John Court.¹ One reason the category has gone into hiding is fairly obvious: in

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¹ Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976); John Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1979). There have also been some recent exceptions. It is significant that they were published in Europe (see below, pp. 282–83): “Symbole und mythische Aussagen in der Johannesapokalypse

colloquial speech, “myth” normally has a pejorative meaning, referring to “an unfounded or false notion,” “a person or thing having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence.”²

There are also more serious and more subtle reasons for our lack of attention to myth in Revelation. One is that myth has often been portrayed as a primitive attempt at scientific thought. This view of myth grew out of Europe’s colonial encounter with other parts of the world. Myth was not thought to be inherent in the Christian tradition, or at least not a crucial part of the tradition; it belonged instead to the religious life of conquered, “primitive” peoples.³ This imperial, evolutionary view of the world permeated the Western academy and can be seen in such landmarks of twentieth-century biblical studies as Rudolf Bultmann’s project of demythologizing. Demythologization was based on the assumption that myth was a primitive worldview that had been superseded by Western science.

According to mythological thinking, God has his domicile in heaven. What is the meaning of this statement? The meaning is quite clear. *In a crude manner* it expresses the idea that God is beyond the world, that He is transcendent. *The thinking that is not yet capable of forming the abstract idea of transcendence* expresses its intention in the category of space. . . .⁴

The waning of interest in myth in studies of Revelation precisely in the late 1970s, however, was due to another, related reason: the growing international dominance of the United States after World War II and the resulting dominance of American academic concerns. Prior to World War II, European scholarship controlled the disciplines of biblical studies and comparative religion. Ivan Strenski argued that fundamental theories of myth from that period—especially those of Ernst Cassirer, Bronislaw Malinowski, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Mircea Eliade—were constructed on the basis of specific European concerns.⁵ He showed that their theories of myth all grappled in different ways

und ihre theologische Bedeutung,” in *Metaphorik und Mythos im Neuen Testament* (ed. Karl Kertelge; QD 126; Freiburg: Herder, 1990), 255–77; Peter Antonysamy Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Revelation 12*, 7–12 (European University Studies, Series 23, Theology 547; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995); Peter Busch, *Der gefallene Drache: Mythenexegese am Beispiel von Apokalypse 12* (Texte und Arbeiten zum Neutestamentlichen Zeitalter 19; Tübingen: Francke, 1996). I thank Georg Adamsen for these references.

² Miriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, s.v. “myth,” meanings 2b, 3, <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary> (accessed July 9, 2003).

³ Lawrence E. Sullivan, *Icanchu’s Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 7–8.

⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 20 (emphasis added).

⁵ Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-*

with primitivist sentiments in Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. The theories of myth that they developed responded to contemporary political and nationalistic claims about national identity and the attachment of a particular *Volk* to their homeland.⁶

After World War II, dominance in the international economy, politics, and culture shifted from Europe to the United States, and the intellectual center of gravity in NT studies slowly shifted as well.⁷ Dominant culture in the United States, however, is predicated on the dislocation and/or decimation of native populations. So theories of myth that wrestled with European nationalisms and ancestral connections to land were clearly out of place in this country, where discontinuity with native populations and the seizure of their land are crucial aspects of national identity.⁸ American society and economy have been predicated on the eradication of native populations and their “primitive myths,” and so American scholarship has not generally focused on mythology.

In the decades of American dominance in the discipline, studies on Revelation (and NT studies generally) turned instead toward functional descriptions of churches in their social settings, or toward literary analyses of the texts themselves. Neither approach paid much attention to mythology,⁹ and this seems to involve a fourth factor. Myth has often been portrayed as a static phenomenon that is inherently conservative and discourages people from trying to change unjust conditions in this world. Apocalyptic mythology in particular has been described as having an “otherworldly orientation” that results in the renuncia-

Strauss and Malinowski (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987). The strength of this study is the contextualized approach to intellectual biographies, which gives us insight into the development of theories and methods in religious studies.

⁶ See also Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 74–75.

⁷ Marcus Borg, “Reflections on a Discipline: A North American Perspective,” in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 29. Borg notes this shift in the 1970s without discussing possible causes or the relation to World War II. Borg’s article focused on Jesus studies, but with an eye to larger trends in the study of early Christianity. Note also that Borg wrote about “North American” scholarship, while my analysis suggests that trends in the United States and in Canada should not necessarily be grouped together.

⁸ Eliade is an interesting exception in this regard. Although his formative years were spent in India and Europe, his theories of myth and religion found quite a following after his move to the United States (more in comparative religion than in biblical studies). I suspect that the interest in his theories in this country was due to the fact that those theories were formed in part as opposition to Marxism in Eastern Europe. Thus, even though the formative influences on him were European, his rejection of Marxism resonated with American anticommunist propaganda.

⁹ David L. Barr came close to reopening this question, by dealing with mythic patterns and themes under the narratological rubric of “story” (*Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* [Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1998]).

tion of responsible historical action, all of which runs contrary to popular notions in the United States about participation in a democratic society.¹⁰

Since the abandonment of myth as an analytical category, “ideology” has sometimes been chosen as a framework for such discussions, but I am more suspicious of this category than I am of myth.¹¹ The main problem with ideology as an analytical tool is that it was fashioned in the late nineteenth century for the analysis of modern Western industrial societies in which the organization of religion and society is very different from that of the ancient Mediterranean world.¹² A good deal of work has advanced the conceptualization of ideology in the meantime,¹³ but on the whole ideology has been more helpful in analyzing recent historical periods.

A second problem with ideology as a category for our investigation is that it is rarely used with any precision in NT studies,¹⁴ even though the meaning of the term is a matter of wide-ranging debate.¹⁵ This is disconcerting, because particular theories of religion—mostly pejorative—are implicit in the term, depending on how it is defined. Most popular and classical usages of the term presuppose that ideology, and hence religion, is a set of false beliefs that mystify

¹⁰ See, e.g., Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 408–11; the quoted phrase is from 408. Notice also the characterization of apocalyptic myth in the following quotation: “The response on the part of the latter [i.e., the hierocratic leaders of the community] was further oppression [of the apocalyptic visionaries], leading the visionaries to even deeper pessimism vis-à-vis the historical order and further flight into the timeless repose of a mythic realm of salvation” (p. 409).

¹¹ The conceptual pair politics/religion has been employed also in discussions of imperial cults or of Revelation, but the results are seldom satisfying. “Politics/religion” tends to polarize society into distinct sectors, one religious and one political. This might be an appropriate approach to examining modern industrial societies, but it simply confuses the issue when imposed on the ancient world. We need to pose only two questions to see the limited value of these categories: Was Revelation a political or a religious text? Were imperial cults political or religious institutions? Politics/religion does not help us explain anything in these cases.

¹² According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “ideology” first appeared in the philosophical sense of “a science of ideas” in France during the late eighteenth century. Ideology was then redefined for social analysis in the first half of the nineteenth century by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to describe a system of false ideas generated by the dominant class in order to support and to conceal its exploitation of the rest of society (Mike Cormack, *Ideology* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992], 9–10).

¹³ See Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (New York: Verso, 1991), 93–192.

¹⁴ Even a fine study like Robert M. Royalty, Jr., *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998) assumes that we know precisely what is meant by this crucial term.

¹⁵ Cormack begins his study with four recent definitions of ideology that defy homogenization (*Ideology*, 9). Eagleton (*Ideology*, 1–2) begins with sixteen different definitions.

“real” social relations in such a way as to perpetuate oppression.¹⁶ I am quite willing to admit that such theories might provide appropriate starting points for the analysis of Revelation. They should not, however, be a presumed and covert starting point. An overt explanation and defense are necessary.

Thus, the value of the concept ideology for analysis of ancient societies such as those that made up the Roman empire is questionable. My alternative—focusing on myth rather than on ideology—does not solve all these problems, but it does have certain advantages. One is that the modern term “myth” developed as a way of discussing narratives in societies with nonindustrial economies, which should make it more applicable to the Roman empire and its agrarian society. Another advantage is that the study of myth originated in disciplined cross-cultural and historical studies. Thus, myth should have more potential as a theoretical tool for describing first-century topics.

This leaves one last preliminary matter: What do I mean by myth? Five descriptive comments about myth are important for my argument. First, myths are “the stories that everyone knows and the stories that everyone has heard before.”¹⁷ This axiom includes several points that do not require elaboration: myths are narratives; they are shared by an identifiable group (the “everyone” in the quotation); and the story lines are not new.

Second, myths can be distinguished from other stories because they have a special priority for a group of people. Wendy Doniger put it this way:

My own rather cumbersome definition of a myth is: a narrative in which a group finds, over an extended period of time, a shared meaning in certain questions about human life, to which the various proposed answers are usually unsatisfactory in one way or another. These would be questions such as, Why are we here? What happens to us when we die? Is there a God?¹⁸

Thus, the reason that myths are familiar is that they express a particular value or insight that a group finds relevant across time, and so the stories are told repeatedly. In the case of Revelation, the myths tend to address questions such as, Why do the righteous suffer? What is the ultimate fate of people and institutions?

Third, myths often appear to be variants either of other myths from the

¹⁶ In the late twentieth century the pejorative meaning of ideology receded somewhat; see Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 2–4.

¹⁷ Bruce Lincoln, “Mythic Narrative and Cultural Diversity in American Society,” in *Myth and Method* (ed. Laurie L. Patton and Wendy Doniger; Studies in Religion and Culture; Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 165.

¹⁸ Wendy Doniger, “Minimyths and Maximyths and Political Points of View,” in *Myth and Method*, ed. Patton and Doniger, 112. See also Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics & Theology in Myth* (Lectures on the History of Religions n.s. 16; New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 2.

same social group or of myths told by other groups. This has led some scholars to use myth to refer to an abstract story line that explains the variants (or the cross-cultural comparisons). I prefer to call this abstract story line a “mythic pattern” rather than a myth in order to promote clarity in the discussion and to emphasize the point that the abstracted pattern is a heuristic device created by analysts but seldom (perhaps never) occurring in the wild.¹⁹

Fourth, the function of myth in which I am most interested is the way that myths are deployed in particular historical and social settings. A mythic pattern is flexible and is never narrated the same way twice. Sometimes the narrations of the same story line can even contradict each other.²⁰ This implies that myths are not static and timeless, nor do they always support dominant social interests. While myths are often deployed to support the status quo, they can also be used to resist dominant discourse or to develop alternative strategies.²¹ In fact, they are sometimes a crucial component of symbolic resistance.

Fifth and finally, myths are part of an interdependent system with three important components: myths, rituals, and social structures. Myths and rituals are “supple, versatile, and potent instruments that people produce, reproduce, and modify, and instruments they use—with considerable but imperfect skill and strategic acumen—to produce, reproduce, and modify themselves and the groups in which they participate.”²² So changes in a myth, a ritual, or a social hierarchy will have repercussions, eliciting modifications in the other two components. In other words, we are dealing with aspects of a discursive system involving “triadic co-definition . . . in which a social group, a set of ritual performances, and a set of mythic narratives produce one another.”²³

Together, these five points provide a framework for comparing the use of myth in Rev 13 with mythic methods in other apocalyptic texts and in imperial cult settings. Since there is very little discussion in the secondary literature about imperial cult mythology, an overview of myth, ritual, and society in imperial cults of Asia is a necessary first step.

¹⁹ An example of a mythic pattern is what Adela Yarbro Collins called the “combat myth,” which is a set of similar characters and themes that occur in stories from several cultures (*Combat Myth*, 59–61). It is similar to Doniger’s “micromyth” (*Implied Spider*, 88–92).

²⁰ Doniger, *Implied Spider*, 80–83.

²¹ Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 27–37. It is difficult to determine exactly why mythic patterns can be used in so many different ways. It may be because myths are authored by communities in performance, and so they must incorporate a range of viewpoints if they are to be accepted by a range of individuals (Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 149–50). Or perhaps the subject matter of myths contributes to the flexibility of mythic patterns; since myths deal with insoluble problems of human experience, new versions of the myth are constantly generated in order to attempt yet another (partially adequate) solution (Doniger, *Implied Spider*, 95–97).

²² Lincoln, “Mythic Narrative,” 175.

²³ *Ibid.*, 166.

II. The Deployment of Myth in Imperial Cults

Imperial cult mythology was an important resource for the use of myth in Rev 13. This section provides a survey of the use of myth in imperial cult settings in Asia as comparative material for an examination of Rev 13. The crucial questions here are how myth was used and who used it in these ways. I answer these questions with selected imperial cult from examples Miletos, Aphrodisias, and Ephesos.²⁴

The Miletos example shows how local mythologies were incorporated into imperial cult ritual settings in order to support the social structure of Roman hegemony. This reconfiguration of myth and ritual suggested that divine punishment of evildoers was meted out by Roman imperial authorities. The example comes from the courtyard of the Miletos bouleuterion (fig. 1).²⁵ A bouleuterion was a crucial building in a Greco-Roman city and a quintessential expression of ancient “democracy,” which primarily involved a small number of wealthy elite men.²⁶

Of interest to us are the ruins found about a century ago in the courtyard of the bouleuterion. These ruins came from a structure built later than the rest of the complex. Klaus Tuchelt compared these ruins with other structures and showed that the building in the courtyard was a platform for an altar (fig. 2). The platform had decorated walls on all four sides, with access via a wide staircase on the side facing the bouleuterion. The design and ornamentation of the platform altar are of a type widely associated with imperial cult shrines, a type influenced heavily by the Augustan Ara Pacis in Rome.²⁷ Fragmentary inscrip-

²⁴ For a broader examination of the evidence for imperial cults in the Roman province of Asia, see my *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. 25–131.

²⁵ The bouleuterion complex at Miletos is located in the city center on the northeast side of the South Agora. The bouleuterion complex was enclosed by a rectangular wall, 34.84 m wide and 55.9 m deep (exterior measurements). The complex is composed of two parts: a rectangular courtyard in front and the bouleuterion building itself (fig. 1). Inside the building was theater-style seating with eighteen rows of semicircular stone benches. In front of the building the rectangular courtyard had colonnaded halls on three sides. A monumental propylon (Corinthian order) provided entry into the complex from the southeast side, opposite the courtyard from the bouleuterion. For further information, see Klaus Tuchelt, “Buleuterion und Ara Augusti,” *IstMitt* 25 (1975): esp. 91–96; a city plan is found on p. 100, Abb. 2.

²⁶ Hans Volkmann, “Bule,” *KP* 1.967–69. Every city had a *boulē*, a council composed of wealthy male citizens. Although the precise duties of the *boulē* could vary from city to city, during the Roman imperial period a *boulē* normally supervised affairs related to the city’s limited autonomy. The members of the *boulē* oversaw the various officials of the city and made recommendations to the *ekklēsia* (which included all male citizens of the city and met less frequently).

²⁷ Tuchelt, “Buleuterion,” 102–40; Homer Thompson, “The Altar of Pity in the Athenian Agora,” *Hesperia* 21 (1952): 79–82.

tions from the propylon of the bouleuterion allowed Tuchelt to identify the structure in the courtyard as an imperial cult altar.²⁸

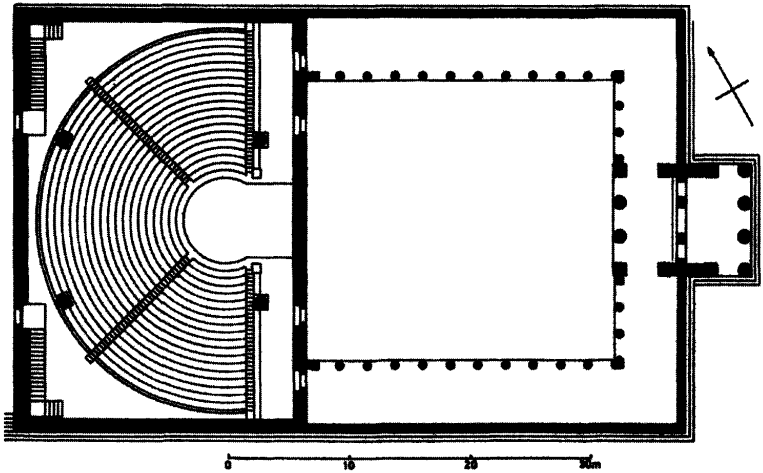


Figure 1. Plan of the bouleuterion at Miletos. This plan does not show the altar in the middle of the courtyard. Courtesy of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin.

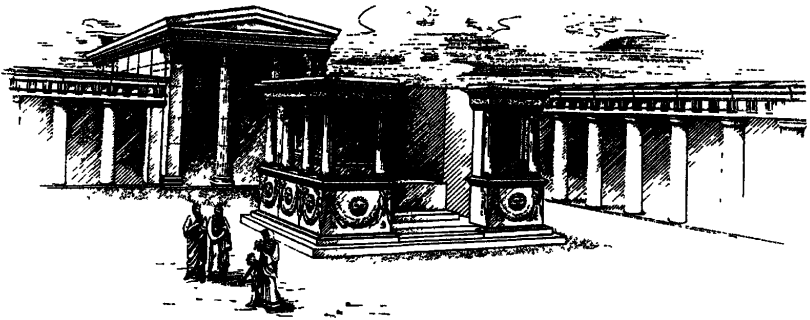


Figure 2. Reconstruction of the altar, viewed from the bouleuterion. The propylon is in the background. Courtesy of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin.

²⁸ Excavators discovered the foundations (9.5 m wide by 7.25 m deep) and some fragments of the superstructure beginning in 1899. These could not have been for the altar of the *boulè* since a bouleuterion normally had its altar inside the meetinghouse for rituals that were a part of the council's governmental activities (Tuchelt, "Buleuterion," 129). Early excavators thought that this might have been a monumental tomb for a wealthy benefactor of the Roman imperial period (Hubert Knackfuss et al., *Das Rathaus von Milet* [Milet 1.2; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1908], 78–79). Tuchelt, however, showed that this was unlikely. Inscriptions from the Miletos bouleuterion propylon support the imperial cult altar identification, mentioning benefactors of a local imperial cult (Milet 1.2:84–87, #7). Peter Hermann ("Milet unter Augustus: C. Iulius Epikrates und die Anfänge des Kaiserkults," *IstMitt* 44 [1994]: 229–34) considered the tomb theory still tenable, but he discussed

The sculptures from the walls of this altar platform provide rare surviving examples of the use of myth in an imperial cult setting. The external walls of the altar platform contained twelve sculptures.²⁹ Only a few pieces of the twelve sculptures were found, so we cannot say what the overall sculptural program might have been. The extant fragments of four identifiable scenes show that local mythology regarding justice and vengeance predominated. Leto and her twins Apollo and Artemis appear in three of the four scenes as examples of local versions of Panhellenic myths.³⁰ One scene is so severely damaged that it is clear only from analogous sculptures that it portrays Apollo with a bow. A second scene appears in two examples: Leto sits on her throne with water nymphs from the Mykale mountain range at her feet (left); Apollo and Artemis (right) stand in her presence.³¹ A third scene, again quite damaged, portrays Artemis shooting the giant Tityos in order to stop him from raping her mother Leto at Delphi (fig. 3). The rest of the story is not pictured (as far as we know): as punishment, Tityos was pegged to the ground in Tartarus, where vultures feasted on his liver. The fourth scene changes characters but not themes: the twin founders of Miletos, Pelias and Neleus, avenge their mother, Tyro, by killing her evil stepmother, Sidero, even though Sidero had fled to the temple of Hera for protection (fig. 4).

Given our incomplete knowledge of the Miletos altar and its sculptures, it is important not to make too much of this evidence. But it is equally important not to make too little of it. If the interpretations of the remains are accurate (and I think they are), we have a good example of local mythology appropriated to support Roman imperialism in a specific setting. New imperial cult rituals were grafted onto the municipal rituals already established for city governance of Miletos, and local myths were used to provide the narrative. By visually “retelling” the mythic stories of Miletos in this ritual setting, their meaning was altered to reflect and to promote a particular social hierarchy. The local stories of vengeance and divine judgment upon evildoers were deployed to support Roman rule and the collaboration of the local elites (the *boulē*) with Rome.

An implication of this conclusion is that we should not expect to find a homogeneous, unified mythology of imperial cults. The ways these myths were

only the inscriptions and did not deal with the architectural and sculptural evidence. Even though the evidence is fragmentary, Tuchelt’s argument is stronger.

²⁹ There were four scenes on the back wall (visible from the propylon); three scenes on each side wall; and a scene on either side of the staircase (visible from the bouleterion).

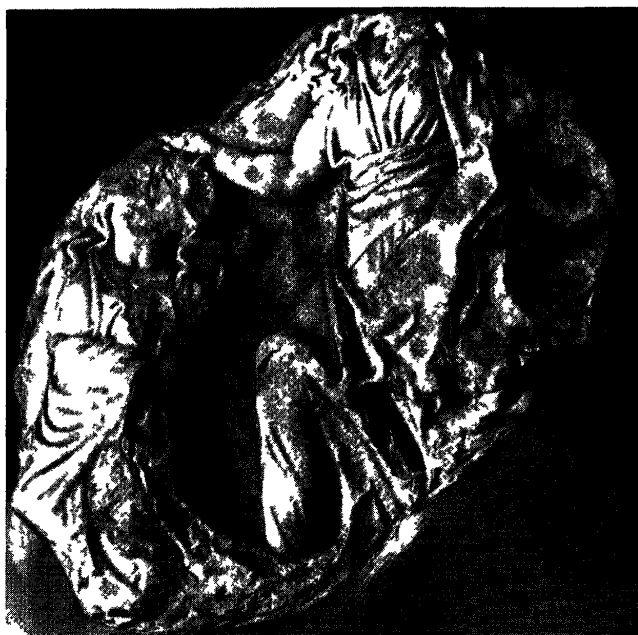
³⁰ On the overlap of local and Panhellenic myths, see Simon Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (Key Themes in Ancient History; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19. Although Delos was named as the birthplace of the twins in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, local tradition in western Asia Minor asserted that the true birthplace was Ortygia, near Ephesos (Strabo, *Geography* 14.1.20). The intimate connection between Artemis and Ephesos is well known. There were also important oracular shrines of Apollo in the region, with the most prominent centers at Didyma (under the control of Miletos) and at Klaros.

³¹ Tuchelt, “Buleterion,” pls. 28–29.



Figure 3 Sculptural fragment from a relief of Artemis defending Leto from rape by the giant Tityos Courtesy of the Deutsches Archaologisches Institut Berlin

Figure 4 Sculptural fragment from a relief of Pelias and Neleus avenging their mother against abuse from Sidero Courtesy of the Deutsches Archaologisches Institut Berlin



articulated in Miletos would have been inappropriate or irrelevant in Alexandria, Damascus, or Trier. There might be a consistent mythic pattern that we can discern, but many inconsistent stories were deployed to support Roman imperialism in various places.

The south portico of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias is our second example. It illustrates the reworking of local myth in imperial cult settings, the mythologization of the emperor and imperial violence, and imperial propaganda about the pacification of land and sea. The Sebasteion complex consists of a long narrow courtyard (ca. 14 x 90 m) surrounded by four buildings: a propylon on the small west side; a temple on the east side (raised on a platform and approached by a monumental stairway); and three-story porticoes on the north and south sides (figs. 5–6). The identification of the Sebasteion as an imperial cult site is secure, for inscriptions on the buildings have dedications, “To Aphrodite, to the Gods Sebastoi [Θεοῖς Σεβαστοῖς], and to the *demos* of the Aphrodisians.”³² Pieces of another inscription indicate that the temple itself was dedicated at least to Tiberius and to Livia.³³

Most of the evidence for the use of myth at the Sebasteion comes from the porticoes, for these were lined with sculptural reliefs on their second and third stories.³⁴ The south portico is more important for the purposes of this study, for the portico’s third floor held a series of forty-five panels that dealt with the emperors in mythic terms, and the second floor displayed a series of forty-five scenes from standard mythic narratives. Together, these provide an impressive example of the use of myth in an imperial cult precinct.

³² From the propylon; see Joyce Reynolds, “Further Information on Imperial Cult at Aphrodisias,” *Studi classici* 24 (1986): 111. The north portico inscriptions are described in R. R. R. Smith, “The Imperial Reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias,” *JRS* 77 (1987): 90; an inscription that dates to the later rebuilding also calls the emperors Olympians: Θεοὶ Σεβαστοὶ Ὀλύμπιοι (Reynolds, “Further Information,” 114). A fragmentary inscription from the south portico probably refers to the goddess Livia and to Tiberius; see Joyce Reynolds, “New Evidence for the Imperial cult in Julio-Claudian Aphrodisias,” *ZPE* 43 (1981): 317–18 #1.

³³ Joyce Reynolds, “The Origins and Beginning of Imperial Cult at Aphrodisias,” *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 206 (1980): 79 #10; eadem, “Further Information,” 110 and n. 12. The four buildings were not completed at one time. Construction probably began during the reign of Tiberius, and there are signs of earthquake damage after that. A second phase of construction began during the reign of Claudius and stretched into the reign of Nero (Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 88–98). For a short summary of the building history, see R. R. R. Smith, “Myth and Allegory in the Sebasteion,” in *Aphrodisias Papers: Recent Work on Architecture and Sculpture* (ed. Charlotte Roueché and Kenan T. Erim; Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement Series 1; Ann Arbor: Department of Classical Studies, University of Michigan, 1990), 89.

³⁴ The south portico originally held ninety panels: each floor had fifteen rooms, and each room provided for the display of three sculptural panels, yielding ninety panels on the façade (forty-five per floor) (Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 95). The north portico was longer, with fifty panels per decorated floor (R. R. R. Smith, “*Simulacra Gentium: The Ethne* from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias,” *JRS* 78 [1988]: 51).

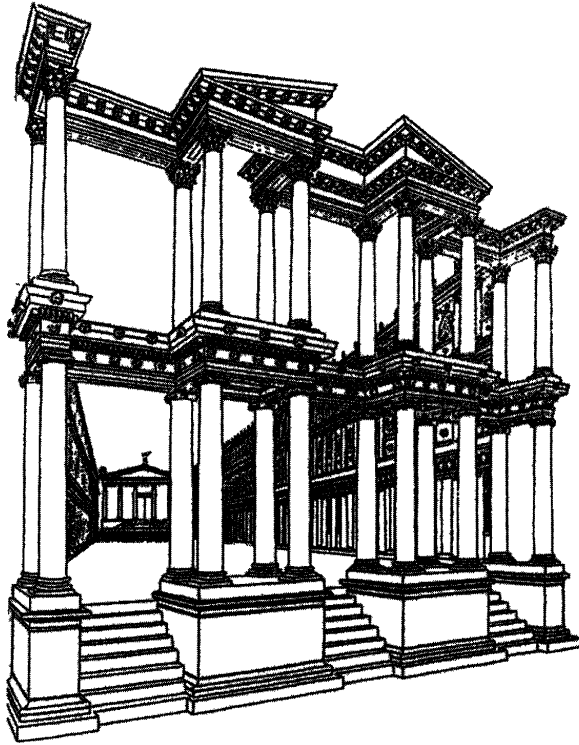


Figure 5. Reconstruction of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. The porticoes on the sides and the temple in the distance are seen through the openings in the propylon. Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias.

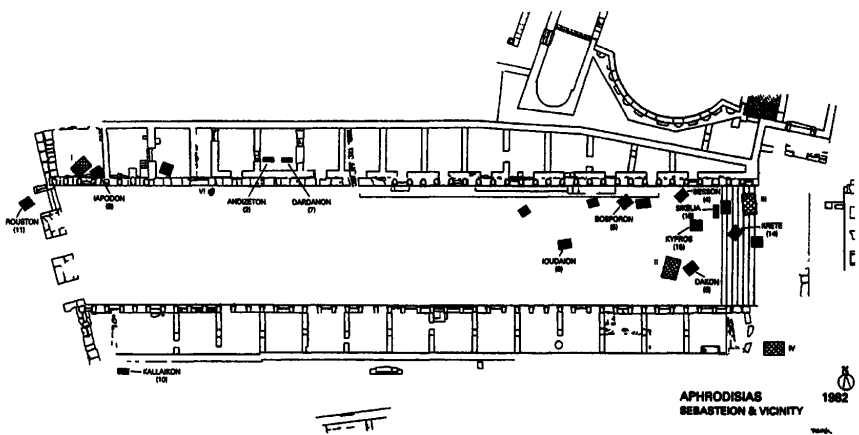


Figure 6. Plan of the Sebasteion courtyard at Aphrodisias. The staircase on the right ascended to the temple platform (not shown). Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias.

Figure 7. Relief of Claudius defeating Britannia. Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias.



From the third floor of the south portico, more than one-third of the panels with imperial figures have been found and their approximate original locations can be determined.³⁵ Four of the eleven extant panels merit discussion in this context. Two of these four panels depict emperors defeating regions on the margins of the empire. In one scene, the victory of Claudius over Britannia (43 C.E.) is portrayed in the following way (fig. 7). The emperor is nude in the style of a hero or god, while Britannia is rendered as an amazon. Claudius has pinned her to the ground. His left hand grasps her hair and pulls back her head, and his right hand holds a spear (now missing) poised for the fatal blow.³⁶ The second panel retells Nero's victories over Armenia (54 C.E.; fig. 8). On this panel the emperor is also a heroic nude figure and the opponent an amazon. The compo-

³⁵ Smith, "Imperial Reliefs," 100, 132.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 115–17, pls. 14–15.



Figure 8. Relief of Nero defeating Armenia. Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias.

sition, however, alludes to the specific iconography of Achilles killing Penthesilea, the queen of the amazons.³⁷

A model developed by Bruce Lincoln helps us describe the deployment of myth in these two scenes. His model contained four kinds of stories—fable, legend, history, and myth—and compared them in terms of truth claims, credibility, and authority.³⁸

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 117–20, pls. 16–17.

³⁸ Lincoln, *Discourse*, 23–26. By “authority,” Lincoln means that the narrative is not simply considered true, but is considered to have paradigmatic status as both a model of and a model for reality.

	<i>Truth Claims</i>	<i>Credibility</i>	<i>Authority</i>
Fable	No	No	No
Legend	Yes	No	No
History	Yes	Yes	No
Myth	Yes	Yes	Yes

Using these categories we can describe at least three ways in which people use myths and related narratives.³⁹

1. Downgrading a myth to the status of history or legend by questioning the myth's authority or credibility.
2. Mythologizing history, legend, or fable by attributing authority and/or credibility to them so that they gain the status of myth.
3. Reinterpreting established myths in new ways.

Returning to the two imperial panels from the Sebasteion, we have clear examples of the mythologization of specific historical events. This is accomplished through stylistic decisions (such as the divine nudity) and through allusion to mythic narratives such as battles with amazons or to the Trojan War.⁴⁰ The process does not create an allegory, however: in the myths, the amazons die; in history, the neighboring regions lived on, either forcibly absorbed into the empire or subdued and granted limited autonomy at the border. The process of mythologization worked by analogy rather than by allegory, proposing similarities between stories of the emperors and myths and thereby investing one with the authority of the other. Note also that the mythologization of imperial military strength was accomplished in a ritual setting. This combination of new myth and ritual at the Sebasteion enforced the Roman social order. It incorporated the emperors into the myths of western Asia Minor, with particular emphasis on their military victories.

Several other panels celebrated the victories of the emperors in mythic terms,⁴¹ although it is no longer clear which emperors were displayed. A third panel for consideration interprets the ambivalent results of those victories (fig. 9). The panel depicts an unidentified emperor standing next to a trophy (the armor of his fallen foe displayed on a pole). On the right stands a Roman figure, personifying either the senate or the people of Rome, who crowns the con-

³⁹ Lincoln provides specific modern examples of these deployments (*Discourse*, 15–23 and 27–37).

⁴⁰ There is also in the Nero panel a hint of an allusion to the story of Menelaus retrieving the body of Patroklos (Smith, "Imperial Reliefs," 118–19).

⁴¹ There are four extant panels from the third story that portray winged Nikes.

queror. In the lower left corner, a kneeling female prisoner with hands bound behind the back looks out in anguish at the viewer.⁴² Here a standard trophy scene is employed in such a way as to highlight the military basis of imperial rule, and to make clear the dire consequences of resistance.

A fourth scene from the sculptures of the Sebasteion's third floor describes the benefits of imperialism—a fruitful earth and secure sea lanes—in mythic terms. The panel is dominated by a standing, nude Claudius with drapery billowing up above his head (fig. 10).⁴³ In the lower left corner an earth figure hands him a cornucopia; in the lower right a figure representing the sea hands him a ship's rudder. The two great elements traversed by humans—earth and sea—offer their gifts to the divine emperor. In these two scenes history again is elevated to myth, but in a more generalized sense. The scenes appear to refer not to specific historical events but rather to a general process of imperial domination.

When we move to the second floor of the Sebasteion's south portico, we find the reworking of local mythology to support Roman rule.⁴⁴ The subject matter on the second floor is no longer imperial exploits but rather a selection of Panhellenic myths. Some of the figures and stories are recognizable, such as the three Graces, Apollo and a tripod at Delphi, Achilles and Penthesilea, Meleager and the Calydonian Boar, Herakles freeing the bound Prometheus, and the young Dionysos among the nymphs. Other scenes contain enough detail to indicate specific stories that are no longer recognizable, for example, a seated hero and a dog flanked by an amazon and a male figure with a crown in his hand, and three heroes with a dog.⁴⁵

The overall arrangement of scenes on the second floor does not appear to be governed by a single strong theme. The reliefs depict instead a range of myths that are perhaps gathered in clusters. One exception where there is clear development, however, is at the east end of the portico near the temple for Tiberius and Livia. Here the three panels from the first room contain overt references to Panhellenic mythology that has special significance for Aphrodisias (fig. 11). The first panel (closest to the temple) has a seated Aphrodite, the principal municipal deity, with an infant Eros on her lap; the male standing next to her is probably Anchises. The central panel from room 1 portrays the flight of Aeneas—the child of Aphrodite and Anchises—from Troy in standard terms

⁴² Smith, "Imperial Reliefs," 112–15, pls. 12–13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 104–6, pls. 6–7. The publication identifies the emperor as Augustus, but Smith is now convinced that the figure's head reflects a standard model of Claudius (personal communication).

⁴⁴ From the original forty-five panels of the second story, more than thirty have been found largely intact, and fragments of most of the other panels are known.

⁴⁵ Smith, "Myth and Allegory," 95–97



Figure 9 Relief of an emperor, crowned as a victor by a Roman figure
Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias



Figure 10 Relief of Claudius, Land, and Sea
Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias

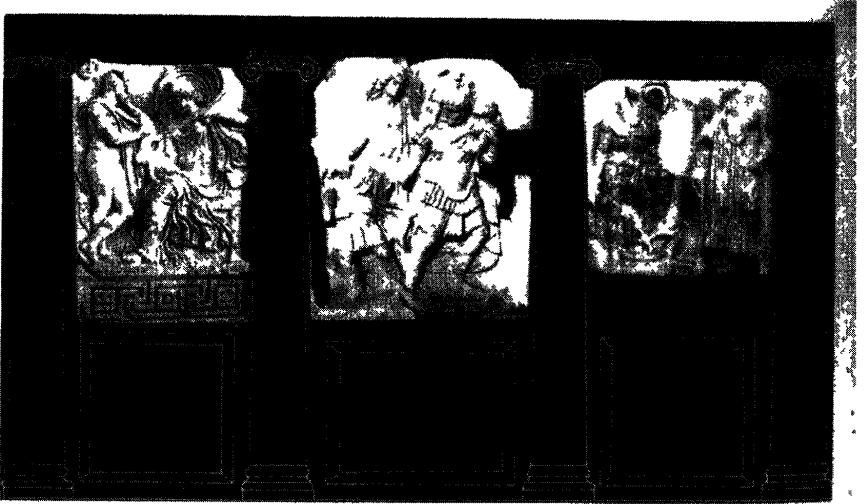


Figure 11. Three reliefs (left to right) Aphrodite and Eros Aeneas's Flight from Troy, Poseidon Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias

except that Aphrodite accompanies him as a figure inscribed into the background of the scene. The meaning of the third panel is uncertain: Poseidon and the other figures might allude to the sea voyage of Aeneas.⁴⁶

In spite of the uncertainties, the gist of this deployment is unmistakable. The panels rework established Aphrodite mythology (Lincoln's third use of myth) to emphasize a special relationship between Romans and Aphrodisians: the local city's eponymous goddess is portrayed as the ancestor of the Romans through Aeneas. Furthermore, there is a direct connection to the reliefs above these (in room 1 of the third story; this is one of the few places where the panels of the second story intersect with those directly above them). Directly above the flight of Aeneas on the second floor is a third-floor panel with Augustus as military victor (fig. 12), which was flanked by panels of the Dioskouroi. Taken together, then, the reliefs of the first rooms of the second and third stories craft a narrative in which the historical military victories of Augustus and the Romans are incorporated into panhellenic myth, and into local myth (Lincoln's second use of myth, but not analogical this time).⁴⁷ It is particularly important that this confluence of myths occurs at the east end of the portico next to the altar area and temple, which was the ritual center of the complex. As the viewer

⁴⁶ Ibid., 97

⁴⁷ Ibid., 100. The scope of this article does not allow discussion of the north portico, where the entire second story appears to be devoted to the conquests of Augustus, see Smith, "Smulacra Gentium."



Figure 12 Relief of Augustus the military victor crowned by a Nike
 Courtesy of the New York University Excavators at Aphrodisias

moves closer to the altar and temple—the focal point for rituals in the precincts—imperial mythology and local mythology converge in support of Roman conquest.

The inscriptions from the Sebasteion complex allow us to turn our attention from how myth was used to the question of who used myth in these ways. Since the style of this complex was local and not imported,⁴⁸ the benefactors who built the complex would have been influential in the design. Inscriptions indicate that two local families built and maintained the Sebasteion. The south portico was undertaken by two brothers, Diogenes and Attalos, but Attalos died before construction was finished and so his wife Attalis Apphion financed his share of the project “on his behalf.”⁴⁹ Attalis was also mentioned as a benefactor of the temple.⁵⁰ The inscription is heavily damaged, so we assume, but do not

⁴⁸ Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 134–37, idem, “*Simulacra Gentium*,” 77, idem, “Myth and Allegory,” 100

⁴⁹ Reynolds, “New Evidence,” 317–18, #1 The fragmentary #2 also mentions her

⁵⁰ Reynolds, “Origins,” 79, #10

know for sure, that Diogenes also financed the temple along with Attalis.⁵¹ Sometime later, Tiberius Claudius Diogenes (son of Diogenes and nephew of Attalus and Attalis) paid for repairs of the south portico, probably after earthquake damage.⁵²

The other two buildings of the Sebasteion—the propylon and the north portico—were built by another family. The primary benefactors named in the inscription are Eusebes, his wife Apphias, and his brother Menander. These buildings also required restoration after an earthquake, and other inscriptions inform us that the remodeling was financed by Apphias, her daughter Tata, and Tata's sons Eusebes and Menander.⁵³

These families would not have designed the reliefs that adorned the Sebasteion, but they would have approved the design, and so we can say at least that the deployment of myth in the precincts represented their interests and their general perspective on Roman rule. Four observations help fill out our picture of this class of people who promoted the worship of the emperors in Asia in the first century. First, we note that they were wealthy municipal benefactors over the course of at least three generations. This means that we are dealing with the small percentage of people at the top of the city's social hierarchy. Second, the two families appear to have been related to each other, so we see the importance of extended family ties among the elite.⁵⁴ Third, the official titles of Attalis Apphion remind us that many of the same people who financed imperial cult projects also served in religious offices. Fourth, it is significant that the second-generation Diogenes obtained Roman citizenship. We do not know specifically how this came about, but it is indicative of the rising status of the municipal elite and their growing collaboration with Rome.

A group of inscriptions from Ephesos provides a larger sample of data regarding those in Asia who promoted imperial cults. The group of thirteen inscriptions commemorated the dedication of a provincial temple in Ephesos for the worship of the Flavian emperors in 89/90 C.E. during the reign of Domitian. The texts come from bases of statues that were once displayed in the precincts of the temple of the Sebastoi.⁵⁵ Among other things, the inscriptions

⁵¹ A third inscription tells us that Attalis was a high priestess and a priestess. The text does not give details, but since the stone was a statue base in her honor and was found in the Sebasteion precincts, at least one of these priesthoods, and quite possibly both of them, served the gods Sebastoi. An Aphrodisian from this same time period whose name suggests that he was related to Attalis's family—a certain Menander son of Diogenes son of Zeno—was a high priest of Claudius and Dionysos (MAMA 8.447, cited in Reynolds, "New Evidence," 320).

⁵² Reynolds, "New Evidence," 317–18, #1.

⁵³ The inscriptions are described in Smith, "Imperial Reliefs," 90.

⁵⁴ Reynolds, "New Evidence," 319–22.

⁵⁵ Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesos, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 116; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 29–40.

mention seventeen elite men from throughout the province who provided the statues from their respective cities. Most of the men's names are preserved (four names are fragmentary or missing), demonstrating that five were Roman citizens and eight were not (the other four are uncertain). These men held important civic offices in their cities, for the inscriptions indicate that their offices included a *grammateus* of the *demos*, four to six *archons*, a *strategos*, a city treasurer, and a superintendent of public works. These same men also held religious offices: two have offices related to temples, one was a priest of Pluto and Kore (at Aphrodisias), and one was a priest of Domitian, Domitia, the imperial family, and the Roman Senate.⁵⁶

The careers of these seventeen men demonstrate that those who promulgated imperial cults in Asia also had extensive governmental responsibilities in the cities of the province. The list of seventeen differs from the Aphrodisian material in that all the individuals are male. Since we know of many women involved in imperial cult activities, this gender differential is probably due to the fact that the seventeen are drawn from materials about the initiation of an extremely prestigious provincial temple. In such instances, men tended to hold all the offices. The data are also different because there is no longitudinal data across generations in this source; all thirteen inscriptions were executed between 88 and 91 C.E. Given these two differences, the overall picture is quite similar: wealthy men and some wealthy women controlled local government and religion through their collaboration with Roman authorities.

The inscriptions from Ephesos also mention another category of individuals whose status was even higher than the people surveyed so far; I refer to this group as the "provincial elite." These individuals were the high priests of Asia who were active in their cities but who also served in the imperial cults of Asia, representing the region in its provincial and imperial affairs. The temple of the Sebastoi was the third provincial cult in Asia, which was the only province to have more than one such cult at this time, so these high priests and high priestesses were in the highest-level status in the province.⁵⁷ The inscriptions from Ephesos mention three of these high priests of Asia. One of them, Tiberius Claudius Aristio, is well attested and provides an individual case study of someone who influenced the deployment of myths in imperial cults. Aristio is mentioned in more than twenty inscriptions from Ephesos, which portray him as a major player in Ephesian and Asian affairs for a quarter century. He was, among other things, high priest of Asia (perhaps more than once),⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 57–59.

⁵⁷ For a complete listing of the known high priests and high priestesses, see my database at <http://web.missouri.edu/~religsf/officials.html>.

⁵⁸ Regarding Aristio's high priesthoods, see Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 102.

Asiarch three times, *prytanis*, *grammateus* of the *demos*, *gymnasiarach*, *neokoros* of the city, and benefactor of several buildings, including two fountains and a library. Comparison with other high priests of Asia shows that his Roman citizenship was normal for this category of people in Asia: twenty-five of twenty-seven (92.6 percent) high priests of Asia known to us by name from the period 100 to 212 C.E. were Roman citizens.⁵⁹

The archaeological record thus supplies us with a good deal of information about the deployment of myth in the imperial cult ritual settings in Asia. Narratives of the exploits of the emperors were elevated to the status of mythology, and established myths were retold in ways that supported Roman authority. The examples surveyed here showed particular interest in the deployment of local myths that were related to the identities of the cities where these cults were located, which explains the variety of imperial cults encountered in Asia and throughout the empire. Several themes appear in the imperial mythologies. In the courtyard of the bouleuterion at Miletos, there is an emphasis on divine judgment against evildoers, which is appropriate for an institution that is responsible for the ordering of city life. At the Sebasteion, the military victories of the emperors are portrayed in mythic terms, and then local myths are retold in order to suggest an intimate connection between the conquerors and their Aphrodisian subjects. The Aphrodisian materials also describe the benefits of Roman rule as a fertile earth and safety at sea.

Gender plays a complex role in these settings. In both locations the mythic materials depict violence against female figures, whether in the stories of rape and abuse from Miletos or the imperial victories from Aphrodisias. The imagery, however, does not encode a simple gendered definition of power with masculine figures dominating female figures. There are powerful positive female figures like Artemis seeking vengeance, or Aphrodite protecting Aeneas in his travels, and also a wicked figure like Sidero. The masculine imagery is clearly dominant, though, reflecting the kyriocentric cultural and political setting of these cults.⁶⁰ Male hegemony is nuanced through the complications of status, wealth, and family.

The archaeological materials also provide information about specific men and women who deployed myth in these ways. They were members of families from the wealthiest stratum of Asian society. These men and women gave significant benefactions and held a variety of religious offices. The male benefac-

⁵⁹ Steven J. Friesen, "Asiarchs," *ZPE* 126 (1999): 279–80.

⁶⁰ Kyriarchy is a term developed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza to describe social systems of inequality. The term "seeks to redefine the analytic category of patriarchy in terms of multiplicative intersecting structures of domination [such as race, gender, class, wealth, etc.]" (see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001], 211; see also pp. 118–24). This allows a more complex analysis of male domination in specific settings, relating gender to other factors relevant to oppression.

tors are more numerous, and the elite men tended to hold the most prestigious priesthoods. The men could also hold governmental offices.

This emphasis in the archaeological record on elite families does not tell us much about opinions of the majority of the population. There are few surviving signs of resistance to imperial cults in Asia, and there is a great deal of evidence for popular participation in the festivals and competitions that accompanied the imperial cult sacrifices. It would be irresponsible, however, to imagine that there were no attempts to counter this use of myth in support of imperialism, for no imperial system can control all areas of social experience, nor can it incorporate all the discrepant experiences of those it dominates. There will always be resistance in some form or another.⁶¹ The Revelation of John is our best example of such symbolic resistance from first-century Asia, and this is the topic of the next section.

III. The Use of Myth in Revelation 13

Commentators are nearly unanimous that Rev 13 deals with Roman imperial power and with the worship of the Roman emperors.⁶² This allows us to examine how the author of Rev 13 deployed myth when dealing with these subjects. Analysis suggests that the author drew primarily on three types of mythic material: traditions about Leviathan and Behemoth; the book of Daniel; and imperial cult mythology.⁶³ He deployed these myths in eclectic and creative

⁶¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 240.

⁶² For example: Wilhelm Bousset, H. B. Swete, R. H. Charles, G. B. Caird, Robert A. Kraft, G. R. Beasley-Murray, J. P. M. Sweet, Pierre Prigent, Adela Yarbro Collins (*Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984]); and "What the Spirit Says to the Churches: Preaching the Apocalypse," *QR* 4 [1984]: 82; Jürgen Roloff, Gerhard Krodel, Leonard Thompson (with reservations), J. Ramsey Michaels, Davie E. Aune, David L. Barr. Exceptions tend to be those who identify the beast from the earth as imperial cults as well as something else or something larger (J. Weiss, William M. Ramsay, Eugene Boring, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, G. K. Beale); those who identify the beast from the earth with the papacy or Roman Catholic Church (Carl Zorn, Gerhard Lenski); and those who see Rev 13 pointing to a future revived Roman empire and world religion (Ernst Lohmeyer, John F. Walvoord, Robert L. Thomas). Even those with a futuristic interpretation sometimes cite Roman imperial cults as a formative influence on the text (Leon Morris, G. E. Ladd, Robert H. Mounce).

⁶³ Wilhelm Bousset's argument that the author of Revelation drew on a stable Jewish tradition concerning the Antichrist has been abandoned. The myth of the Antichrist coalesced in second-century Christian thought on the basis of a variety of traditions about eschatological opponents. See Stefan Heid, *Chiliasmus und Antichrist-Mythos: Eine frühchristliche Kontroverse um das Heilige Land* (Bonn: Borengasse, 1993); and L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *The Antecedents of Antichrist: A Traditio-Historical Study of the Earliest Christian Views on Eschatological Opponents* (JSJSup 49; New York/Leiden: Brill, 1996).

ways, combining and inverting them in a fashion that distanced his audience from mainstream society.

1. The primary structure for the narrative in Rev 13 comes from the mythic pattern of Leviathan and Behemoth.⁶⁴ Leviathan and Behemoth are two primordial monsters known from several Jewish texts. The oldest of these is Job 40–41, where they are cited as two of God's most powerful creations. The exact function of the pair in Job is disputed and not germane to this study except as a contrast to later texts that exhibit a more developed stage in the history of the deployment of these mythic creatures.⁶⁵

Four texts from the early Roman period draw on the story of Leviathan and Behemoth, and the variations among them allow us to describe the mythic pattern at this stage of its development: two enormous beasts from the beginning of history will live, one in sea and one on land, until the end of history, at which time they will become food for the righteous. The earliest of the four variations of this pattern was probably *1 En.* 60:7–9, 24, which employs the basic pattern in the context of cosmological revelations.⁶⁶ This section is found in the third parable of the Similitudes, which was written most likely during the century and a half before Revelation. The preceding second parable (*1 En.* 45–57) deals with the fate of the wicked and the righteous, the son of man, resurrection, judgment, flood, and Israel's enemies. Then, in one of the visions of the third parable, Enoch is completely overcome by the sight of God enthroned and surrounded by millions of angels. Michael raises Enoch up and explains about the eschaton. In this section we learn that the two primordial monsters were separated at creation. Leviathan dwells in the abyss of the ocean at the sources of the deep, while Behemoth dwells in a mythic desert east of Eden (*1 En.* 60:7–9).⁶⁷ Enoch inquires about them and is taken by another angel on a journey to the margins of creation. Along the way to the edge of existence he

⁶⁴ Davie E. Aune, *Revelation* (WBC 52A, B, C; Dallas: Word, 1997–98), 2:728; Barr, *Tales of the End*, 108; and others.

⁶⁵ For contrasting views, see Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (3rd ed.; AB 15; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 268–79, 282–87; and David Wolfers, "The Lord's Second Speech in the Book of Job," *VT* 40 (1990): 474–99.

⁶⁶ E. Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *OTP* 1:7. David Suter dated the parables to the period between the last quarter of the first century B.C.E. and the fall of Jerusalem, with the mid-first century C.E. as slightly more likely (*Tradition and Composition in the Parables of Enoch* [SBLDS 47; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979], 32). Matthew Black thought that at least a Hebrew *Urschrift* of the parables existed before 70 C.E. (*The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: A new English edition with commentary and textual notes* by Matthew Black, in consultation with James C. VanderKam, with an appendix on the "astronomical" chapters [72–82] by Otto Neugebauer [SVTP 7; Leiden: Brill, 1985], 187–88).

⁶⁷ The gender of the monsters is not stable in the traditions. This text is unique in referring to Leviathan as female and Behemoth as male (Kenneth William Whitney, Jr., "Two Strange Beasts: A Study of Traditions concerning Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism" [Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1992], 76).

learns many valuable mysteries, such as where the winds are kept, how the moon shines the right amount of light, the timing between thunders, and so on. When the meteorology lesson is over and he arrives at the garden of the righteous, Enoch is told that Leviathan and Behemoth are being kept until the Day of the Lord, at which time they will provide food for the eschatological feast (60:24).⁶⁸ Thus, the deployment of the myth focuses on God's cosmic, hidden wisdom.

Two other references to Leviathan and Behemoth are brief and were written down around the same time as Revelation. The two confirm the general outline found in *1 En.* 60, but they focus on different aspects of the mythic pattern. In *4 Ezra's* third vision, the author chose to emphasize the cosmogonic origins of Leviathan and Behemoth and to downplay the eschatological theme by having Ezra recite to God the days of creation. According to this retelling, the two monsters were created on the fifth day with the other living creatures, but Leviathan and Behemoth were kept alive. Since the sea was not large enough to hold both of them, God separated them, leaving Leviathan in the depths and assigning Behemoth to land. The section ends with a mere allusion to the *eschaton*: the pair are kept "to be eaten by whom you wish, and when you wish" (*4 Ezra* 6:52).⁶⁹ Thus, the deployment of the myth in *4 Ezra* demonstrates God's power in creation.

In *2 Bar.* 29 the same mythic pattern occurs as in *4 Ezra*, but the creation theme is muted while the eschatological function of the creatures is highlighted.⁷⁰ A voice from on high describes the messianic era that follows twelve periods of distress (chs. 26–28). Regarding the two monsters it is said, "And it will happen that when all that which should come to pass in these parts has been accomplished, the Anointed One will begin to be revealed. And Behemoth will reveal itself from its place, and Leviathan will come from the sea, the two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation and which I shall have kept until that time. And they will be nourishment for all who are left" (*2 Bar.* 29:3–4). A period of unprecedented plenty arrives, after which the Anointed One returns to glory and the righteous and wicked are raised to receive their respective rewards (chs. 29–30). The deployment here focuses on the consummation of history rather than its beginning.

⁶⁸ There are numerous technical problems in the details and integrity of *1 En.* 60 that are not strictly relevant here; see Michael A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in the Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 2:142–48; Black, *Book of Enoch*, 225–31.

⁶⁹ Michael Stone says that this type of allusion is a stylistic feature of eschatological passages in *4 Ezra* (*Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* [ed. Frank Moore Cross; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 188).

⁷⁰ Whitney notes that this text and *4 Ezra* 6:52 are not dependent on each other but are drawing on the same general tradition ("Two Strange Beasts," 59).

Thus, these three texts from the late Hellenistic/early Roman period that refer to Leviathan and Behemoth exhibit the same mythic pattern: two unimaginably large creatures exist from primordial times until the end of time; one is confined to the sea, the other to land; when God brings history to its dramatic climax, the monsters will become food for the righteous. Each of the texts deploys the pattern differently. *1 Enoch* 60 takes the pattern as an occasion to reveal secret wisdom about the hidden places of the world. *4 Ezra*, by contrast, uses the pattern in the context of theodicy, reciting God's mighty works of creation in order to dramatize the question of why this same God does not seem to be able to establish his people Israel in the land he created for them (*4 Ezra* 6:55–59). *2 Baruch*, however, retells the myth as eschatologically informed exhortation for those who are faithful to Torah. “And we should not look upon the delights of the present nations, but let us think about that which has been promised to us regarding the end” (*2 Bar.* 83:5).

In comparison with these three, Revelation is the only text that introduces a serious deviation from the mythic pattern itself. Either the author was drawing on an otherwise unattested interpretation of Leviathan and Behemoth,⁷¹ or he was refashioning an established mythic pattern for new purposes (Lincoln's third use of myth). In John's rendering of the mythic pattern, Leviathan and Behemoth have become eschatological opponents. The power of the beasts no longer provokes the revelation of wisdom (*1 Enoch*) or the defense of God's justice (*4 Ezra*) or the promise of eschatological reward (*2 Baruch*). The two monsters are loose in the world, threatening the world and destroying all opponents. The reasons for this deployment will be clearer after examination of John's other uses of myth.⁷²

The figure of Leviathan (apart from Behemoth) is important for Revelation in another way. While the Leviathan-Behemoth pair organizes the two scenes in Rev 13, a different strand of the Leviathan tradition connects these two scenes to the narrative of ch. 12.⁷³ One of the great mythic patterns shared

⁷¹ Revelation avoids the names Leviathan and Behemoth, which perhaps allows more flexibility in the deployment of the pattern. There are rabbinic stories of Leviathan and Behemoth that develop other themes, some of which use the destructive potential of the beasts. These texts are centuries later than Revelation, however, and take us into a different period in the history of the deployment of the story. See Whitney, “Two Strange Beasts,” 129–33.

⁷² The hostility of the two beasts is perhaps suggested in *1 En.* 60:9, where, according to Black, the two beasts have been separated to consume the victims of the Noachian flood (*Book of Enoch*, 227). It is also possible that the stories of Yahweh's battle with the Sea were the source for this element of John's deployment.

⁷³ This article must not venture too far into Rev 12, since space does not permit a proper treatment of the issue of myth in that chapter. I do not accept the argument that Rev 11–13 is drawing on the *Oracle of Hystaspes* (John Flusser, “Hystaspes and John of Patmos,” in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1988], 390–453). Flusser's argument about hypothetical sources is extremely speculative. A much more convincing approach

by Yahwism and the surrounding religious traditions was the story of a deity defeating the sea.⁷⁴ In Canaan this was a battle between Ba'al and Yamm; in Babylon a battle between Marduk and Tiamat, and so on.⁷⁵ In the texts of Israel it appears as Yahweh's victory over sea dragons. Over time, this mythic pattern came to be associated in Canaanite and Israelite traditions with several names for sea monsters, including Rahab, Dragon, and Leviathan.⁷⁶ The author of Revelation could thus draw on two Leviathan patterns to link chs. 12 and 13: Leviathan the mythic opponent shapes the dragon image of ch. 12, and the Leviathan-Behemoth pattern shapes ch. 13.⁷⁷

To sum up this section, Rev 12–13 is an unusual example of two strands of Leviathan mythology standing side by side, and both strands are employed in a novel fashion. Leviathan as God's serpentine opponent provides a link between the two chapters. Then the Leviathan-Behemoth pair move beyond their traditional role of food for the eschatological feast to become heaven's eschatological antagonists.⁷⁸ John may have come up with this variation himself, since the other known uses of this pattern are quite different. In any event, it is a much more eclectic and eccentric deployment than we have seen either in imperial cult settings or in other apocalyptic texts.

2. The second important mythic resource for Rev 13 is the book of Daniel. While the Leviathan-Behemoth pattern organized the material, Danielic imagery was woven into the story line. Two thematic elements are important

to the mythic background of Rev 12 is found in Richard Clifford, "The Roots of Apocalypticism in Near Eastern Myth," in *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. John J. Collins; vol. 1 of *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. Bernard McGinn, John J. Collins, and Stephen J. Stein; New York: Continuum, 1998), 3–38.

⁷⁴ There are various ways of referring to this mythic pattern, or to the larger pattern in which it plays a role: combat myth, *Chaoskampf*, the Divine Warrior myth, and so on.

⁷⁵ Clifford, "Roots," 7–29; Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 44–67.

⁷⁶ Wayne T. Pitard, "The Binding of Yamm: A New Edition of the Ugaritic Text KTU 1.83," *JNES* 57 (1998): 279–80; John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 71–72; Mary K. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 56–82. Note, however, that Wakeman's theories about Behemoth (pp. 106–17) have not been well received (Day, *God's Conflict*, 84–86; Whitney, "Strange Beasts," 39–40).

⁷⁷ Two aspects of the text make the connection clear. One is the description of the dragon and the beast from the sea as having seven heads, which is an attribute of Leviathan in some texts (Ps 74:13–14; Day, *God's Conflict*, 72). The other aspect is the description of the dragon in Rev 12:9 as the ancient serpent, which is a direct allusion to Isa 27:1, "On that day the Lord with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea." לַיִתוֹן ("Leviathan") and דַּגָּן ("dragon") are both rendered as δράκων ("dragon") in the LXX.

⁷⁸ The theme of feasting appears in Rev 19:17–18, where it is combined with judgment oracles to turn the eschatological banquet into a call to dine on carrion.

here. The first is the way in which the beast from the sea is described by John. The seven heads of the beast from the sea (13:1) could simply be a reference to Leviathan, who was sometimes portrayed with seven heads. John, however, quickly signals other elements in his symbolism. By giving the beast ten horns and the characteristics of a leopard, a bear, and a lion, the author creates a connection to the vision of Dan 7. The seven heads are also the total of the heads of the four beasts of Dan 7,⁷⁹ and the blasphemous names on them (Rev 13:1) may also draw on the arrogant speech of Daniel's fourth beast (Dan 7:8, 11, 20).

This use of Danielic imagery provides us with another strategy for manipulating myth not suggested by Lincoln's list—the compression of several unconnected texts or images into one new text or image. Compression was apparently one of John's favorite tactics. One of the most blatant examples is the image of the risen Christ in Rev 1:13-16, which contains more than a half dozen allusions to spectacular figures from different biblical texts. These are forced into one epiphanic figure in Rev 1, who simultaneously encompasses and surpasses all his predecessors. Another example of compression is Rev 7:17-18, which is a paradoxical pastiche of salvation oracles designed to encourage John's audience. Likewise, John compressed the four beasts of Dan 7 and the Leviathan imagery to produce his own synthesis, a new mythic image as far as we know. By drawing on these particular resources, the new image becomes both an identifiable historical empire and the epitome of opposition to God.⁸⁰ Thus, John engages in the same strategy as that employed in imperial cults—mythologizing Rome—but he does so with different mythic sources, with a different mythic method (compression of myths), and with different goals.

The second thematic element drawn from Daniel is the period of forty-two months allotted to the reign of the beast from the sea (Rev 13:5; similarly 11:2; 12:6). This time period is related to the various designations in Daniel to the three and one-half weeks of Gentile domination (Dan 7:25; 8:14; 9:27; 12:7, 11, 12).⁸¹ By invoking these numbers, John cast the time of Roman rule in mythic terms—but not positive ones. Rather than accepting the dominant

⁷⁹ G. K. Beale's effort to locate the source of this imagery mostly in Daniel with little or no influence from Near Eastern mythology is unnecessary (*The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 682-83). Each of the relevant texts deployed this international mythic pattern in its own ways. Moreover, the author of Revelation often conflated various sources for his purposes.

⁸⁰ Rick Van de Water's recent attempt to deny a connection of the beast with Roman power is unconvincing because it focuses primarily on the rebuttal of persecution theories; "Reconsidering the Beast from the Sea (Rev 13.1)," *NTS* 48 (2000): 245-61.

⁸¹ The exact numbers differ, but they are all closely related (John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, with an essay "The Influence of Daniel on the New Testament," by Adela Yarbro Collins (ed. Frank Moore Cross; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 400.

mythology of eternal Roman rule accompanied by prosperity,⁸² Revelation portrays Roman hegemony as a limited time of oppression and opposition to God that will bring judgment.

Thus, Rev 13 incorporates some specific features of Daniel into its own narrative.⁸³ John took liberties with the details but gained the Danielic perspective for his text. Roman rule is not eternal; the God of Israel allows a limited period of exaggerated opposition to persist until God brings the hostilities to an end. John's mythic methods were again more eclectic than known examples in imperial cults or in other apocalyptic literature.

3. A third mythic resource for Rev 13 is the mythology of imperial cults. Three comments are in order on this point. First, John accepted and adopted one aspect of imperial cult mythology, namely, that Roman rule is based on military victory (Rev 13:4). He attempted, however, to persuade his audience to take a different point of view on those conquests. The victory was ascribed to satanic authority rather than divine authority. This inversion of imperial cult mythology is accomplished by his creative combination of the Leviathan traditions with details from Daniel. The difference in perspective is dramatic. If we use the Aphrodisian sculptures of imperial coronation (figs. 9, 12) as reference points, we could say that imperial cult mythology and ritual attempted to persuade its audience to identify with the figures crowning the emperor, thereby supporting the perpetuation of the imperial social system. Revelation, on the other hand, was an effort to persuade its audiences to perceive themselves—like the bound captives in the sculptures—as victims of Roman hegemony.⁸⁴

Second, John disagreed with the imperial mythology of peaceful sea and productive earth. In this case he did not try for a change of perspective but rather contested the facts. His argument in Rev 13 is twofold. One way of denying the earth and sea mythology was his hostile deployment of the Leviathan/Behemoth pattern. In John's narrative, the sea and land became sources of danger and oppression, not peace and plenty. The other part of his argument is the theme of the mark of the beast, which is required in order to participate in eco-

⁸² See, e.g., *Die Inschriften von Ephesos* 2.412 and 7.2.3801 lines 2–4.

⁸³ Another Danielic theme probably lurks in the background. In Dan 3 is the story of an emperor who requires all peoples and nations to worship a gold statue. However, direct allusions to that story in Rev 13 are difficult to isolate. Another motif—the scroll in which are written the names of the faithful (Dan 12:1)—appears in Rev 13:8, but this theme appears throughout Revelation and is not an integral part of ch. 13. For other details suggesting Danielic influences, see Peerbolte, *Antecedents of Antichrist*, 142–56.

⁸⁴ I do not claim, nor would I want to claim, that John ever saw this sculpture. His personal contact with particular artifacts is irrelevant to the argument. The carved stone is simply an example of the public mythology of imperial cults. It is a representative piece that brings us closer to the public culture that was familiar to anyone living in an urban setting in this part of the Roman empire.

conomic activity (13:16–17). With this theme John cut through the naïve romanticism of the imperial cornucopia (fig. 10), which suggested that the produce of the earth can simply be gathered and enjoyed under Roman rule. John introduced instead the idea that economic, political, and religious systems regulated who was able to purchase and to profit from the earth's bounty. In this way Rev 13 exposed a feature of the audience's experience that was suppressed in the utopian imperial cult mythology.

Third, John presented an alternative interpretation about the elite sector of society and their involvement in imperial cults. In dominant urban culture, those who promoted the worship of the emperors were honored with inscriptions, statues, and religious offices. Revelation 13:11–18, on the other hand, denounced these same families by mythologizing them, a strategy that was used only for the imperial family in imperial cult settings and was never used for elite families. According to Revelation, however, the elites of Asia and of Asia's cities were Behemoth to Rome's Leviathan. John portrayed respected families like those of Attalis of Aphrodisias and prominent provincial statesmen like Tiberius Claudius Aristio of Ephesos as mythic antagonists of God. According to John, the network of elite families was leading the world to eschatological catastrophe.

Along with this mythologization of the social experience of oppression, John also drew in material that would be considered "legend" in Lincoln's terms. The phenomenon of talking statues was well known in Greco-Roman societies.⁸⁵ It is doubtful, however, that such practices were widespread.⁸⁶ Much of the knowledge of talking statues was generated by the denunciation of religious figures as charlatans (e.g., Lucian's portrait of Alexander of Abonouteichos) or by magical speculation. John employed this legendary motif, elevated it to mythic proportions, and turned it against the well-to-do of Asia's cities. Through his use of these two types of materials, John changed the image of imperial cult ritual from piety to chicanery and portrayed Asia's elite families as charlatans whose authority was satanic in origin.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ For a summary of texts, see Aune, *Revelation*, 2:762–66.

⁸⁶ The only statue I am aware of from western Asia Minor that might have been used in this way is the temple statue from the second-century "Red Hall" at Pergamon, which was dedicated to the Egyptian deities (Wolfgang Radt, *Pergamon: Geschichte und Bauten einer antiken Metropole* [Darmstadt: Primus, 1999], 200–209). Moreover, Steven J. Scherrer's argument that Rev 13:13–15 should be taken literally as evidence for imperial cult practice is hardly convincing ("Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13–15," *JBL* 103 [1984]: 599–610).

⁸⁷ John possibly raised legends about Nero's return to mythic status as well. Most commentators conclude that the wounded head of the beast from the sea (Rev 13:3) and the 666 gematria (13:18) are references to the story that Nero would return and take revenge on Rome. It is also possible that the story of Nero's return had already taken on mythic proportions before John wrote, since the idea is present in *Sib. Or.* 5:28–34, 93–100, 137–49; and 4:135–48.

John's use of myth in Rev 13 was extraordinarily creative. He placed distinct Leviathan traditions side by side; he reused the Leviathan/Behemoth pattern in a manner that is unprecedented in our existing sources; he wove Danielic themes into the mix and took liberties with the details; he compressed originally distinct symbols (Leviathan and the beasts of Dan 7) into one monster; and he mythologized social institutions and legendary material. His method was voracious, drawing on a variety of sources. It was also recombinant, producing startling new images and plot twists.

IV. Comparison, Conclusion

The deployments of mythology in imperial cult settings and apocalyptic literature dealt with many of the same themes that are found in John's Apocalypse. The most significant include the administration of justice in particular communities and in the world; the subjugation of nations and peoples; the role of the Roman emperor in these processes; and worship. If there is a common question operative in these themes, it is the question of authority in this world: Who is the king over kings? Imperial cult institutions and apocalyptic texts answered this question differently. Imperial cults in the Roman province of Asia created and deployed myths to show that the (current) emperor was the king of kings. Revelation—written to congregations in this same province—created and deployed myths to show that ultimate authority was not located in this world. In these two sets of materials, then, justice, vengeance, and community come from different thrones.⁸⁸

Imperial cults and Revelation also trafficked in similar methods in their deployments of myth. One important method was mythologization: both settings elevated known characters and stories to a higher level of authority. Another common method was the modification of established myths. This is not an unusual practice; myths are constantly retold and reshaped. Imperial cults and Revelation, however, dealt in an exaggerated form of the practice, introducing new characters for their respective projects. A third method common to imperial cults and to Revelation was the deployment of myth in ritual settings.⁸⁹ Imperial mythology was appropriate in the obvious settings of impe-

⁸⁸ Revelation 13 does not provide enough gendered imagery for a comparison with the kyriarchal character of imperial cult mythology. The imperial cult materials have similarities with other parts of Revelation where gendered imagery is more evident (e.g., Rev 12 and 17–18), but the scope of this article does not allow for an exploration of those themes. For some comments on these issues, see Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 185–89.

⁸⁹ Revelation is more clearly written for a ritual setting than are the other apocalyptic texts examined in this article.

rial temples such as the Aphrodisian Sebasteion and also in other civic institutions such as the bouleuterion at Miletos. Revelation, too, was written for a ritual setting,⁹⁰ although the group and the affiliated institutions were much different. Revelation was written to be read in the rituals leading up to the Lord's Supper. At one level, Revelation's deployment of myth was an attempt to redefine that ritual in the subculture of the saints. The juxtaposition of Revelation and the Lord's Supper would have given the church's ritual a distinctly anti-Roman twist.

The comparative material from imperial cult mythology also allows us to make observations about distinctive features in John's use of myth. First, John displayed a preference for eastern Mediterranean stories. John could draw on ancient Near Eastern or Greco-Roman patterns or myths when it suited his purposes,⁹¹ and it is the nature of really good myths to defy national and ethnic boundaries.⁹² The primary resources for John's text, however, came from the eastern edge of the empire—Israel and its regional neighbors. This marked the text and its audience as marginal to the imperial enterprise rather than central. While imperial cults defined normal society in standard terms from Hellenistic mythology,⁹³ John claimed to reveal truth in themes and characters from a troublesome area at the edge of imperial control.⁹⁴ To accept John's mythology required the audience to acknowledge its distance from the imperial center. The focus on eastern Mediterranean mythology was common to other Jewish apocalyptic texts of the early Roman period. John's confrontational deployment, however, created more dissonance with the values of dominant society.

A second distinctive feature in John's deployment of myth is that he tended to make more dramatic changes in the retelling of established mythic patterns. Imperial cults were concerned with the imposition and maintenance of order in society,⁹⁵ and so it is not surprising that the associated mythology did not deviate far from the norm. Panhellenic and local myths suited these purposes best because they were already well established. Revelation, on the other hand, pursued disruptive ends, and for these purposes the story lines suffered more serious revisions; the versions of the myths that could be accommodated to normal life were not appropriate to John's message. The compression of diverse themes, characters, and allusions in Revelation served these ends as

⁹⁰ Barr, *Tales*, 171–75, 179–80.

⁹¹ Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*.

⁹² Doniger, *Implied Spider*, 53–61.

⁹³ This is especially evident in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias (Smith, "*Simulacra Gentium*," esp. 77).

⁹⁴ Most specialists accept that Revelation was written, or at least edited, late in the Flavian dynasty. This was the same dynasty that distinguished itself and bolstered its claims to authority by defeating the Jewish revolt against Roman rule. John's use of the religious traditions of Israel was thus a significant political choice.

⁹⁵ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 122–31.

well. New versions of myths were supplemented by new relations between myths. In this sense, Revelation can be considered a form of religious resistance literature. Its dreams of destruction were told with a mythic method that disoriented the audience: familiar tales took strange turns, colliding with other stories at unexpected intersections. The method dislodged familiar axioms and appealed to experiences that did not fit mainstream norms.⁹⁶

All of this points to the conclusion that John's Revelation is a classic text of symbolic resistance to dominant society. John deployed myths in an eclectic, disjunctive fashion, and did so for a ritual setting. The production of new, disruptive mythology for a ritual setting is not conducive to the maintenance of social hierarchies. It was a dangerous deployment in defense of a minority perspective.

⁹⁶ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 31–32, 240.



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