**Rhetorical Textures of Mystery in the Johannine Apocalypse: Transformative Communitarian Performances through Revelations, Metaphors and Symbols**

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**Abstract**

*Unveiling Revelation* is not possible. While uncovering hidden symbolic messages associated with historical realities is unachievable, ancient and current readers are able to engage these symbolic layers, illuminating preterit and present speeches in their specific social loci. By discussing internal and external evidences of a collective composition through literary receptions of the *Apocalypse of John*, this essay asserts that a Transfiguring Church emulates itself through *transgressive*, symbolic language. By investigating the conceptualization of masculinity based on descriptions of ancient heroes in the imperial era, this article identifies rhetorical elements through a *performative* use of sexuality on Rev. 19:11-21. By arguing that economic and imperial civil religious ceremonies denote political domination, this study describes rhetorical, magical elements in symbolic characterizations of the Beasts and the dragon in *Revelation*. Therefore, the focus of this writing is the *texture* of language in some symbolic constructions distributed in the *Johannine Apocalypse*.

**Keywords**: Apocalypse of John; rhetorical criticism; ancient hero; magic; Roman Empire.

**RESUMO**

Não é possível desvelar o *Apocalypse*. Desvendar possíveis mensagens simbólicas associadas a realidades históricas é impossível; entretanto, leitores antigos e contemporâneos podem se aventurar pelas diversas camadas simbólicas do livro, iluminando discursos presentes e pretéritos em contextos específicos. Ao discutir evidências internas e externas de uma composição coletiva por meio de diversos processos receptivos no *Apocalypse* de João, este ensaio indica que uma Igreja, a se transfigurar, emula a si mesma em uma retórica simbólica e transgressiva; ao investigar as concepções a respeito do masculino, a partir das imagens do herói antigo em uma era imperial, este artigo identifica elementos retóricos em usos *performativos* da sexualidade em Apo 19:11-21; ao argumentar que as cerimônias da religião civil Romana evidenciam uma dominação política e econômica, este estudo descreve elementos retóricos e mágicos operando mediante sincretismos religiosos, conforme denunciado pelas

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Now, since proofs are effected by these means, it is evident that, to be able to grasp them, a man must be capable of logical reasoning, of studying characters and the virtues, and thirdly the emotions – the nature and character of each, its origin, and the manner in which it is produced. Thus, it appears that Rhetoric is as it were an offshoot of Dialects and of the Science of Ethics, which may be reasonably called Politics (ARISTOTLE, 1926, 1356b).

Rhetoric, on this conception, is essentially an art of expression and, more especially, of literary conventionalized expression: it is an art of style (PERELMAN, 2001, p. 1385).

Treatises regarding Rhetoric often associate this subject to Ethics, Politics and Epistemology while emphasizing practical demands towards seduction, persuasion and conviction. Reason and emotions complement each other, allowing humans to communicate better and understand a message. Therefore, Rhetoric is an “art of expression” that requires investigating authors, audiences, values, reasonable possibilities and passionate effects. Aristotle mentions three types of Rhetoric (1358): deliberative, relating to persuasion toward a particular action; forensic, a legal connotation in public spheres; epideictic, used to praise or blame someone. These three types are not exclusionary; rather, they may appear together, e.g., transferring legal patterns of speech from forensic rhetoric to normative conduct assists epideictic speeches. These legal characteristics may broaden to connote moral deliberations in forming groups and communities. Furthermore, the study of emotions complements logical means of persuasion based on dialectics. Some contemporary Rhetorical Critics supplement ancient categories and concepts with different forms of Literary Criticism in order to scrutinize singular language games together with human subjectivity, or cultural and social ideologies. Consequently, after the emergence of several methodologies, criticisms and approaches, multiple
intelligible matrices increase understanding of biblical texts. Formal literary types, Rhetorical elements and theological statements operate in tandem, promoting meaning between text and context. “Persuasion is achieved” because of the speaker’s personal character and the ability to convince an audience of speech credibility (1356a). The Philosopher classifies arguments based on the character, morality and confidence of the speaker (ethos); the speaker’s emotional influence on the audience to consider pain and pleasure (pathos); and the argumentations and proofs of the speech itself (logos).

Scholars applying Rhetorical Criticism to biblical texts use rules and techniques for interpreting specific passages, the entire Bible and processes for interpretation in order to investigate motifs, possible audience emotions, literary maneuvers, communication patterns and manners of persuasion. Indeed, within human rational conceptualizations, Rhetoric and Hermeneutics goes pari passu. Text and context are mutually inclusive, since literary expressions inform specific social locations, while simultaneously are reshaped by values, beliefs, emotions, ambitions and theoretical ideas. Moreover, they require readers to co-participate in the multiple textures of communication. As a result, by employing Rhetorical Criticism approaches, scholars explore how literary unities, situations, genres and styles are co-dependent with pragma-

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1 There are critical scholarship associating classical rhetorical ideas together with contemporary forms of historical and literary criticism to the Scriptures. Hebrew Bible narratives, Gospel composition, Pauline letters and Apocalypse genre are some of the canonical examples. Aristotelian Rhetorical types are highlighted in social and ideological critical approaches, since the use of the deliberative rhetoric, in some specific cases, aims to maintain honor and gain a benefit; authority based on tradition and individual authors creates a judicial element; and the use of praising and implying blame has an epideictic aspect (LOHSE, 1971, p. 186-189; FITZMEYER, 2000, p. 185-190; Porter, 2010, p. 9-33).

2 Aristotelian Rhetoric distinguishes between convincing an audience with certainty and infusing credibility. The Philosopher sustains that humans believe in probable things, requiring persuasion for credibility, even for incredible things, depending on how orators use reason and emotions (1400). A skillful orator must select appropriate styles for each audience in order to obtain credibility, merging different types of rhetoric and modes of persuasion to achieve a goal (1416). Even incredible matters in deliberation may be useful when orators and audiences are able to debate on common grounds (1417) or the responsibility of an exaggeration on epideictic type “is attributed to another” authority (1418).

3 Zimmerli argues that relationships between rhetoric and hermeneutics rely on the intentionally validating the probable (1990, p. 156-162), supporting his arguments by following Gadamer on the necessary usage of rhetoric to communicate scientific theories and implement technological developments.

4 The collective texture tapestry image to understand culture transformations throughout dialogues and debates take into account individual efforts and the holistic enterprise (Rosman, 2009, p. 363-364). Vernon Robbins used this analogy to describe multiple approaches to biblical scholarship, integrating several literary investigations and different layers of historical inter-subjectivity together with pragmatic considerations in specific contexts, locations, and forms of speech. (Robbins, 1996). Culpepper attests that this comprehensive approach has rich tools to investigate textual meanings. By following Robbins arguments, Culpepper reasserts the different forms through which literary expressions and historical conceptualizations are “blended together”. Therefore, “possible complementary relationships” among distinct methodological approaches consider “the various textures of texts, contexts and interpretation”, even if a “grand theory” is not possible (Culpepper, 1998, p. 71-77).
tic attempts in particular milieu. In a comprehensive understanding of the act of reading, texts pervade their readers as much as authors, recipients and communities impregnate texts throughout several textures.

Rhetorical approaches to the canonical Apocalypse combine historical insights, literary symbolisms and sociological criticisms. As both epigraphs at this essay corroborate, a rhetorical approach to any form of communication requires studies of individual and communitarian modes of speech, specifically “literary conventionalized expressions”. Hermeneutics and Rhetoric exist in tandem, promoting knowledge, awareness and action. Adela Collins reinforces literary imagination, historical references, cognitive elements, expressive terminologies and evocative language as conditions for hearing the Apocalypse of John. These characteristics create a virtual reality, animating a commitment to faithful actions as an important effect of arising emotions (COLLINS, 1984, p. 141-156). Such symbolic narratives, as well as the inherited apocalyptic conventions, intensify fear and resentment toward Roman imperial domination, and Christian piety toward divine honor (DE SILVA, 1998). Indeed, text and context are continuously interchanging; assuming this indisputable theoretical consideration, scholars investigate Apocalypse’s language in their performative, polyssemic, ideological and political peculiarities (FIORENZA, 1998, p. 211-215). This essay considers some symbolisms in the canonical Apocalypse and their effects on possible ecclesiological self re-imaginations, exploring ways in which political and literary voices overlap in particular loci in the perceived Roman imperial domination in Revelation.

A unique and universal theoretical approach providing univocal apprehensions of the past does not exist; nevertheless, open dialogues provide comprehensive understanding of significant mutually inclusive relations between text and context. By discussing internal and external evidences of a collective composition through literary receptions of the Apocalypse of John, this essay asserts that a Transfiguring Church emulates itself through transgressive, symbolic language. By investigating the conceptualization of masculinity based on descriptions of ancient heroes in the imperial era, this article identifies rhetorical elements through a performative use of sexuality on Rev. 19:11-21. By arguing that economic and imperial civil religious ceremonies denote political domination, this study describes rhetorical, magical elements in symbolic characterizations of the Beasts and the dragon in Revelation. Therefore, the focus of this writing is the texture of language in some symbolic constructions distributed in the Johannine Apocalypse. Unveiling Revelation is not possible. While uncovering hidden symbolic messages associated with historical realities is unachievable, ancient and current

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5 The postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective, 150-155.
readers are able to engage these symbolic layers, illuminating preterit and present speeches in their specific social loci.

Revelation, Metaphors and Symbols: a Transfiguring Church Performs itself in a Cosmic Battle through a transgressive language

Some claim an early date for Revelation and others assert a later time, at the end of the first century. Aune affirms that both possible eras, Domitian’s or Nero’s, contain partially correct solutions. Since the final composition of the book of Revelation was completed at a later period, the first edition of the book was composed earlier based on written and oral apocalyptic traditions (lviii). Accepting a gradual composition demands comprehensive analytical studies on place, time, function and the emergence of distinct traditions present in the Book of Revelation.

Literary Criticism and historical investigations – from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives – function together, creating possibilities for increased understanding of Johaninne Apocalypse historicity, since Biblical texts encompass mnemonic and performative functions. Investigations applying Rhetorical Criticism, specifically those aiming to describe social and cultural understandings in their pragmatic contexts, share similar ideas with scholars who develop Sitz im Leben conceptualizations. By examining how different

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6 van Kooten argues that a later date is based on Patristic evidence. Following Albert Bell, Christopher Rowland, and Christian Wilson, he contends the year of four emperors (68-69) as “a precise dating” (208-210).

7 Friesen states that internal evidences in the context of imperial cults, “do not provide a date for Revelation”; but rather, “access to the dominant discourse against which Revelation should be understood” (2001, p. 135-151). If scholars consider external evidences as well, it is not possible to relate Revelation’s responses to specific historical events.

8 For more than a century, the notion of Sitz im Leben interconnects texts and contexts through detailed studies on genres, traditions, aesthetic, literary criticism and sociological discourses. Historical critical methodologies and new theoretical approaches reinforce distinct characteristics existent in previous academic works, while exploring tendencies that stress considerations central to specific authors and their historical contexts.

9 Byrskog comments about aesthetic and narrative events, as well as the interactions between orality and literacy (24-27). The formative processes of social identity in the Ancient World are based on memory, performative communication, and literacy. Ugo Vanni suggests a liturgical assembly receiving and reading the book of Revelation (2009:46-47). Similarly, the reception and interpretation of Homeric traditions are perceived as a collective task that are “continuously” and “constantly” creating new images, which include mystical, moral, allegorical meanings (LAMBERTON, 1986, p. ix-x; 42-43). Finally, the notion of fiction and imagination in identity construction is important, since, in narratives, invention is a crucial element in creative composition and reception (EISEN, 2010, p. 219, 232)

10 The idea sustaining different concepts of Sitz im Leben is rooted in diachronic researches on biblical traditions. Dialoguing with post-Romantic German scholarship and the emergence of modern sociological understandings, Gunkel stresses conventional, habitual, and traditional literary expressions with specific social locations, within rituals and routines (GERSTENBERG, 2010, p. 58-60; GUNKEL,
techniques and expressions are performed in distinct contexts while appealing to diverse characteristics on human rationality, Rhetorical Critical approaches engage classical ideas, e.g., Plato and Aristotle, and contemporary ways to investigate settings, authors, readers, occasion and literary patterns.\textsuperscript{11}

Therefore, by not preserving any preferential date or purpose for the \textit{Apocalypse of John}, the following rhetorical critical investigations discuss reasons for compositions, receptions and performances of these texts. A collective process is an appropriate representation of ancient composition literary practices. For collective works, \textit{performance} or the \textit{act of reading} in community is important, occurring continuously and through different periods rather than at once. This does not result in different textual sources, but rather over an extended period its composition reveals itself. In this communitarian textual creation, reading, listening, responding and recreating are vital characteristics from which theological assumptions inform literary messages. Additionally, a collective textual creation requires considerable value for genre, semantics and the symbolic language of the book. Therefore, in this process of composition, the \textit{biblical Apocalypse} interacts with many historical events in different pericopes. Thus, in order to contextualize this book and engage its invitation to enter the \textit{symbolic game}, scholars must consider the relevance of these diachronic perspectives as well as the vital role on the partial and final compositions of the book.

Rhetorical approaches acknowledge that \textit{text} and \textit{context} are mutually inclusive while attempting to describe audiences, authors and messages. In the context of the Johannine Apocalypse, research about \textit{persecution} and \textit{prosecution} in the first centuries is essential; the manner in which Jewish elements are used and how “Jews” are described are vital considerations. Additionally, as Ugo Vanni contends (2009; 2010), the ecclesiological performative \textit{ambience} is extremely important. A comparison with other Apocalyptic Literatures is

\textsuperscript{11} One of the goals present in writings that support \textit{Sitz im Leben} conceptualizations is to theoretically uncover specific social locations upon which particular biblical passages originated and were performed. By studying rules of ancient communication throughout biblical texts and inferring formal and institutional cultural expectations, it is possible to investigate codes through narratives as well as speculate author, audiences, and their pragmatic literary interchange (BYRSKOG, 2007).
crucial, regarding not only date, but also genre and language. Finally, an interaction between community, language, genre, *performative* action, effects and pragmatic results are necessary to understand the book and decisive for any attempt of contextualize it.

Patristic external evidence is significant, even though their dating may be imprecise their contextual hermeneutics is paramount. Irenaeus (Adv haer 5.30.3 / Eusebius Hist. Eccl 3.18.3; 5.30.3) is the discussion starter on Revelation’s compositions according to major commentaries. He affirms that the author of the fourth gospel and Revelation are John, and that Revelation existed in Domitian’s period. Clement of Alexandria, Epiphanius of Salamis and Eusebius affirm John’s return after the death of a tyrant, but they disagree about the tyrant’s identity (AUNE, 1997, p. li). Another option is to compare similar literary works such as the apocalyptic literature and Sibylline Oracles. The Sibylline Oracles and 4 Ezra represent an important parallel that can assist with dating and understanding the message of Revelation. Albeit symbolic language causes difficulties for its opacity, historical events or cultural expressions interact with its use. Tonstad criticizes those who defend a definitive allusion to Nero in the Book of Revelation and its potentially important role. He attests there is an absence of Nero’s return in early interpretations of Revelation. Following Hans-Josef Klauck, he affirms that the Sibylline Oracles can be “the missing link’ and the bridge to the alleged appearance of the myth in Revelation” (178-179). As Joseph Kreitzer asserts, this dialogue with the myth of Nero Redivivus does not demand an early date (95). In the second century B.C.E. under Ptolomaic’s reign, there are seven kings and the expectation of another from the sun, which can be associated with the *canonical Apocalypse* (COLLINS: 1972, 593-594). Additionally, the figure of Nero assumed a powerful symbolic meaning by itself, being associated with different emperors in different periods.

Literary internal evidences with their theological meanings do not fully describe a specific historical setting. Some scholars suggest that the reference

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12 Avi Hurvitz argues, “it is through a comparative study” that Hebrew Bible linguistic characteristics can be determined (1997, p. 308). Consequently, not only can the language in its syntactic, semantic and pragmatic perspectives be enlightening, but also the locale in which there is a textual production and possible dates for this writing activity and the respective listening / reading response.

13 The book, itself, attests to a date, thirty years after the destruction of “our city,” which can be a typological phrase based on Ez 1:1. Since internal evidences are complicated because of symbolic meanings, external evidence is crucial, such as the Epistle of Barnabas and the Strimateis of Clement of Alexandria. Stone dates the book at the very beginning of the second century or during the last years of the first century, suggesting Domitian’s period (1990, p. 10).

14 These parallels contribute to the formation of a *Sitz im Leben*, although they do not help determine a strict sense of which material is using the other. Klauck assumes Domitian’s period for dating, arguing that the Book uses a recapitulation of History (2001, p. 697). In this interpretation, Domitian is Nero Redivivus, however, we should notice that this same process can be done with other periods as well.
to the temple in Rev 11 demands a physical presence (van Kooten, 2007, p. 119-121). This affirmation neither takes into consideration well-built literary connections with the book of Ezekiel (Rossing, 1999, p. 2-6), nor acknowledges that Ezekiel is called to measure the temple after its destruction. In the Jewish apocalyptic literature written after 70 C.E., Babylon is often used to depict Rome (Aune, 1997, P. lx; Collins, 1984, p. 77). The importance of numbers in the book is evident. The diverse uses of twelve and its theological message can be critical. Aune (liv) claims that the earliest attestation of the phrase “the twelve apostles” is not earlier than 80 C.E. Therefore, the use of the same phrase in Rev 21:14 suggests a later date. Indeed, the twelve apostles have a profound connection with the gospels and the term, “the twelve” (Oe dw,deka), appears in Lk 8:1; 9:12; Act 6:2, and Rev 21:21. Therefore, the symbolic construction of the twelve has a strong ecclesiological attestation; the use of the term is related to a gradual transformation inside Jesus’ movement to a new Israel in a socio-religious statement. The attestation of the twelve in Revelation is significant, specifically when considering the performative reading of the text. (Bovon, 2002, p. 209-211; Conzelmann, 1987, p. 45; Albright, 1971, p. 118). The significant numeric allusions to Israelite history/story and the notion of the ekklesia as a new Israel furnish strong and diverse metaphors. The enigmatic woman in chapter 12 and the construction of the New Jerusalem in chapter 21 are two examples in which a symbolic interpretation of “twelve” is necessary. The woman, as a personification of Israel and the Church, bears Christ and the saints who build the new community in history. This interpretation is plausible, even though the savage symbolic expressions in Revelation do not permit an absolute proposition.

Ugo Vanni attests that the book of Revelation entices fascination and mystery. In its peculiar language of vertigo and fantasy, the book aims to create a new space despite grammatical and syntactic orders. The genre and its linguistic expressions transcend materiality and historical contexts. In the form of a liturgical narrative, the book of Revelation prophetically speaks beyond the limits of language (2010, p. 7-8). According to Vanni, the expressive apocalyptic language in Revelation leads the reader/listener beyond the restrictions of signification. Therefore, an explicit relation associating symbolic images and reality is not easy. However, as Fiorenza attests (2007, p. 134), there are textual directive elements that bind author and audience through a signification game. A descriptive analysis of historical events through rhetorical and symbolical language, underneath the expressive message of this book, is possible. Nevertheless, decoding these symbolic expressions can lead to misunderstandings or overinterpretations. Fantastic narratives as well as realistic descriptions of humans and animals have rhetorical motifs, including manners for subverting social reality. Instead of a univocal scenario, a pluridimensional
reality is created by ambiguity, opacity and indetermination. Therefore, every categorical affirmation about described historical facts in *Revelation* requires a transcendental argument, i.e., theoretical approaches that aim to be consistent (ordained at least) and complete, but without contradictions or paradoxes. The relevance of an ecclesiological setting and the idea of a purifying Church is magnanimous and consequential for the process of textual formation and reception. The language and symbols in Revelation are a synthesis of reality and imagination. However, these expressions often go beyond the actual and possible, beyond imagination, consequently creating an abundance of meaning in symbolic communication. Thus, if the reader decodifies this language, s/he ruins the reading and the performative power of the book.

The act of reading Revelation demands performative, rhetorical means and theological expressive symbols. External evidence suggests a later date for the writing of the book. Although there is a sense of uncertainty in Patristic evidence, comparative analyses between Revelation and extracanonical texts, such as *Sibylline Oracles* and *4 Ezra*, implies a later time. However, because many traditions present in both texts existed since the Ptolemaic reign in Egypt, these considerations must be carefully analyzed. Conversely, symbolic metaphors and use of the number twelve in Revelation show a connection with ecclesiological realities, especially in the well-documented gospels’ traditions. Therefore, scholars would be tempted to infer that *Revelation* has a profound ecclesiological function in a crisis perceived by the Seer. In addition, assuming the suggestion of this internal evidences, ecclesiological conflicts and the relation to the Catholic letters, such as Jude and Peter, must be analyzed even by those who date the book in the second century. Moreover, one cannot base any relevant arguments on historical persecutions of Christians, since they seem to be local and sporadic. This means that any association with Domitian’s reign as a moment of strong persecution has neither enough sustainability to date nor provide specific purposes for this book. Finally, the reader must celebrate ambiguity, uncertainty and opacity revealed in apocalyptic language. Its theological implication could not be clearer, “Blessed are those who keep the prophetic message of this book” (Rev 22:7). In order to understand this prophetic command, readers must emphasize and preserve the ambiguity of symbols, the opacity of metaphors, and the elusiveness of language.

**A Hyperbolic Masculine Hero Opens the Heavens: Rhetorical Elements of Rev 19:11-21 through the Performative Use of Sexuality**

Tina Pippin indicates that females are represented in Rev 19:11-21, while simultaneously they are absent as subjects: present, yet inactive and voiceless foils in the canonized story (2005, p. 130-132). Consequently, she affirms that
the Apocalypse is not a story for female readers, since it describes an oppressive tale for women (144). Fiorenza, emphasizing the importance of symbolic and rhetorical elements, argues for investigating diverse relations of dominance (2007, p. 130-134). Therefore, she affirms that these female depictions function as anti-language or alternative language. Symbol and ambiguity play a vital role in Revelation, therefore, gender is an important element in constructing metaphors. The text communicates a message that engages social problems, and considers implicit elements and the consequences of transforming them (2009, p. 114-115). As Barbara Rossing demonstrates, these gender considerations are rooted in Classical and Jewish traditions (1999, p. 17-60). Thus, scholars should consider multiple ways to read and interpret these images, while accepting the impossibility of changing the ancient milieu and its cultural expressions. Since metaphors receive and shape reality, scholars must understand their receptions in the performative ways the book of Revelation forms its message.

The Johannine Apocalypse reflects a Hellenistic context in which bodily representations associate masculinity with power. Comparing the image of Jesus in Rev 19:11-21 to Greek heroes allows readers to understand how gender characteristics function in the construction of Revelation’s rhetoric. Comparing Heracles and Christ in the imperial context of Roman Empire avails significant rhetorical descriptions of masculine bodies.

The Construction of an ancient hero in an imperial cosmos

Heracles – Hercules in a Roman reception – is famous in the ancient world and his cult is observed in many Greek cities. As a descendent of Perseus, the man who killed Medusa, he is well-known for his strength, courage, endurance, compassion and his passionate acts. He became an ideal human, considered the universal helper, and was deemed the noble ruler, acting for humankind and elevated to godlike status. Notably, Alexander the Great associated himself with Heracles because of these numerous characteristics. Heracles is the personification of the Greek hero — beautiful and good. Consequently, his excellence / virtue is perceived in different forms. For instance, the stoics represent him as an example of fortitude while other narratives revealed his excellence in activities such as archery and music.15

15 Hera, his jealous rival, cast madness upon him. Thus, he killed his wife, Megara, and their children. After consulting the Delphic oracle, Heracles performed his famous works to obtain purification under Eurystheus’ order. Among his extraordinary stories, Heracles fought against a sea-serpent to protect Troy; the Nemean Lion whose skin was invulnerable; the Hydra, a monster with many heads. Additionally, he searched for the golden apples of the Hesperides and killed the dragon guarding this tree; Heracles descended to the Underground to rescue Alcestis in Euripides’ play; and bring Cerberus before Eurystheus.
Christian authors, including Justin Martyr and Celsus, recognize similarities and differences between Christ and Heracles, creating apologetic arguments against the divinity of the Greek hero. David Aune concludes that during the second and third centuries, Christians and pagans alike saw Heracles and Christ as religious rivals (1990, p. 3). While studying parallels between both characters and their respective receptions, Aune contends that myths, folktales, cults, literary adaptations and artistic representations are intertwined. Although there is not proof of how Christ was conceptualized in the image of Heracles, a comparison cannot be aimed at a genealogical consideration, but rather an analogical approach. The most important aspect is neither mythical nor literary, but found in the ways each character was depicted and taught, particularly each character’s masculinity. Regarding Christ, the message of Revelation is conveyed in various corporeal expressions wherein gender is prioritized. Jesus is the coming Messiah, a hypermasculinity figure who expresses Greek hero ideals.16

The masculine Christ is emphasized in chapter 19 as a powerful King17. The presence of Christ’s incalculable diadems contrasts with finite numbers of diadems among dragon (12:3) and beast (13:1). Christ’s power is significant for ruling (HARRINGTON, 1993 p. 190-191; WITHERINGTON, 2003, p. 242).18 There is an intense correlation with the prophetic works of Isaiah and Ezekiel, indicating a judgment in the eschaton. This image of a conquering

16 Therefore, this analysis can indicate the construction of a hyper-masculinity projection in Jesus and the heavenly court. As Stephen Moore suggests, this literary process expresses “the supreme embodiment of hegemonic hypermasculinity” (1996, p. 139).

17 The description of Christ and his actions are important exegetical considerations with the following elements: faithful and trustful (pistoι kai. avlhqinoι); governs in rightness and makes war (εν dikaiosu,νι kri,nei kai. polemei); his eyes are [like] fire flame (οι` ovfqalmoi. auvtou/ lw`jD flo.x puroj); over his head there are many diadems (ενπι. th.n kefalh.n auvtou/ diadh,mata polla); a name written which no one knows, except himself (ονομα gegramme,non o] ouvdei.j oi=den eiv mh. auvt,oj); being covered (with) a cloth dipped “in” blood (περιβελθμε,νοj i`ma,tion bebamme,non ai[mati); he is called to his name, the Word of God (ke,klhtai to. o`nomα auvtou/ o` lo,goj tou/ qeou). Each characteristic emphasizes force and interacts with innumerable Jewish and Hellenistic traditions. He has a celestial army (ta. strateu,mata Îta.Ð εν tω| ouvranw) and a prophetic sword that comes out of his mouth (ενκ tou/ sto,matoj auvtou/ evkporeu,etai r`omfai,a ovxei/a auvth/| pata,xh| ta. e;qnh). Finally, the messianic meal is described as a gathering of birds eating the flesh of kings as a signal of shame. Every detail adds something significant and has a function in this description (Harrington, 1993, p. 190).

18 There is ambiguity regarding written names and diadems of physical descriptions in the Apocalypse. Diadems are clearly associated with power and the omission of the number, but the mention of several ones (diadh,mata polla,), support the idea of a powerful figure which is corroborated by Roman triumph images. Aune suggests some literary elements, such as the white horse, the diadems, the military perspective, and so forth (1998, p. 1051). Nevertheless, not only the harlot Babylon has written marks (17:5), but the 144.000 (14:1) and Jesus himself (19:12, 16). Consequently, we must be aware of these characteristics in order not to generalize the presence of written names for slaves (GLANCY, 2001, p. 569).
king who destroys and establishes a reign can be associated with the synoptic tradition, which has an impact on imperial realities. Interpreting the book of Revelation in the Ancient milieu included inheriting cultural values and prejudices. Consequently, the use of violence and gender has a primordial rhetorical function, despite any contemporary ethical issues. In mimicking, identity and meaning are rearticulated through metonymies that camouflage some characteristics and intensify others, subverting representations of regulatory power and splitting powerful coercions (BHABHA, 1994, p. 90-91). A study of myth composition and transmission is fundamental for exploring Revelation, especially rhetorical elements of virility and its metaphoric images. As Stephen Moore asserts, there is an intense relationship between the notions of God and body in the formative process of each image (2001, p. 3-4). Consequently, in order to understand and transform these phallocentric cultural expressions, readers must articulate and dis-articulate their ethical challenges, aesthetic considerations, and logical constructions. The production of symbolic languages in Revelation serves a teleological purpose within syntactic and semantic patterns, geared toward gender discriminatory classifications. This latter characteristic reflects a social construction of sexuality that cannot be separated from the Ancient World milieu, unless the reader’s main focus is on the reception of this text. In conclusion, the use of violence by a sovereign king and the functions of gender and masculinity, provide rhetorical, metaphorical constructions for communicating the message of Revelation.

Magical elements in the literary characterization of the Beasts and the Dragon in Revelation: a prophetic condemnation of the amalgamated relationship between pornei,a and fa,rmakon

In chapter 13 of Revelation, the seer observes two beats (qhri,on), one rising from the sea and one from the land. From the former, a direct association with the apocalyptic Daniel is possible; the latter is a false lamb, indicated by its appearance (olmoia avrni,w). It receives authority from the first beast and makes the nations worship it whose mortal wounds are healed. Because

19 Stephen Moore, while analyzing the gospel of Mark and its relation with the imperial Roman order, asserts a contrast in this literary corpus. A possible chiasm provides a comparative reading of these two perspectives in the Markan narrative. Moore analyzes the ambiguity present in the insistence on Jesus returning with power and glory, or faith without reservation on the path through discipleship (2006, p. 44). In addition, the myth of Nero returning and his powerful conceptions should be considered, associating an imperial and triumphal messianic return with different forms of mimicry.

20 Adela Collins’s thesis that the eschatological pattern in Revelation is best understood in the context of ancient combat myths asserts that there are some Semitic elements and traditions adapted from the Greco-Roman world. These mythical interpretations fight against chaos (1976, p. 53-83). Conversely, Andras Pataki interprets Rev 12 as non-violent sovereignty. This interpretation relies on the sacrifice of the lamb and a theological application with victorious consequence (2011, p. 272).
of great signs, this second beast deceives the habitants of the earth, even creating an image of the first beast that can speak. Similarly to Greek oracles, the beast would be a god who pronounces his words through an “instrument”21. In imperial cults, mystery practices, and oracles, animal sacrifices are present in order to obtain divine favor, which contrasts with the lamb’s slaughter. Great signs and a miraculous healing indicate a trace of magic, especially because of the imperial cult within polytheist settings and different religious experiences, which generate political and economic consequences. Upon analyzing selected terms in Revelation 13, there is a clear relation among religion, empire, and economic ideas that is permeated by magical elements.

According to David Aune, the Apocalypse of John interacts with ancient magic perspectives since it mirrors social and cultural amalgams in this milieu: apocalyptic, magic, and wisdom are “broad syncretistic tendencies.” He contends that the author of Revelation uses magical language to deny its very social and theological implications (347-367). This is partially true because it depends, among other things, on how one defines magic and, consequently, if John’s prophetic words themselves carry magical intentions. However, while observing the rejection of “magicians” in some passages of the book, readers may inquire which type of magic is rejected22. The Second Beast, as a false prophet, can be seen as a duplicate representation of Balaam and Jezebel in the first part of the book. There is a strong connection in Jewish traditions between false prophets and magic (THOMAS, 2010, p. 195-196), contrasted with a prophetic voice that condemns an exacerbated syncretism and the fornication (pornei,a), associated with the beast. This is seen in the lists of those who will not enter the heavenly city, compared with Gal 5:20 and also in Rev 9:21. The latter including humans depicted under idolatry (proskunh,sousin ta. daimo,nia kai. ta. ei;dwla), fornication (pornei,a), violence (fo,noj), and magic (fa,rmakon) after the destruction, which was caused by the knights and plagues. Therefore, the vigorous censure and denunciation of the infiltration of imperial cults detect a religious implication that has magic as a substratum and an oppressive power as corollary.

Therefore, analytical studies of the reception and understanding of magic in Revelation is mandatory. This book has a special use of farmakei,a and its

21 Different from the Delphic oracle, a sculpture pronounces the words rather than the sibyl. Nevertheless, the representation of Apollo speaking through the Pythia because of vapor intoxication and the reduction of personal considerations (HUFFMON, 2007, p. 452) is elucidative (SPILLER, 2002).

22 Magic spread through the Mediterranean Coast within diverse syncretic aspects and is present in different types of literature. Thus, the emergence of Christian movements occurs altogether with the absorption of magical aspects from Hellenistic and Jewish traditions. The Book of Revelation seems to condemn magic but, simultaneously, employs different magical traditions, references and motifs (THOMAS, 2010, p. 194-200). Practices associated with pornei,a are rejected.
relative words. Rodney Thomas asserts that Revelation is the book that uses more the term farmakei,a in the NT, however this is inaccurate because this form only appears twice in the NT, Rev 18:23 and Gl 5:20. Other derivations with the same root appear more frequently in Revelation. fa,rmakoj is present in 21:8 and 22:15 in the lists of those who do not inherit the benefits of God’s eschatological reign, which can signify a list of those who are cursed. This is a direct connection with Gl 5:20, wherein works of flesh (ta. erga th/j sarko,j) include idolatry (eivdwlolatri,a) and magic (farmakei,a). The condemnation of magic in the Hebrew Bible and early Christian literature has a prophetic voice against idolatry and different imperial orders.23

In chapter 13, the healing of the beast that emerges from the sea is illustrated by the word qerapeu,w, typically translated “to serve” or “to be serviceable.” However, different from other terms such as dou/loj and diakoni,a, this use denotes a will to serve and an interpersonal relationship that expresses respect or solicitude while aiming to some favor.24 These characteristics are present in the LXX and Jewish writings of the Hellenistic period (TDNT: III. 128-132). Secular uses of serving and the religious sense of worship are frequently translated “to heal,” including the Messiah’s power to heal among other peculiarities in Luke 7:21.25

Beasts, empire, commerce, coercion, and domination: A perceived systemic economic tyranny operating through religious syncretism

To analyze the powerful rhetoric in Rev 13, readers must examine the following terms: qhri,on; avrni,on; yeudoprofh,thj; porneu,w; u`pomonh. qhri,on, typically translated as beast, is a diminutive for wild beasts and refers to several specimens, including insects and birds in the classical world; for a rabbinical exegesis the beast of Dan 7 represents Edom and is associated with Rome (TDNT, III p. 133-135). Additionally, qhri,on denotes a monstrous and violent beast, a chaotic existence contrasted with the cultural elements of human action (BAILLY, 2000, p. 420), being hostile and odious.

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23 This is evidenced in passages from Genesis, Exodus, Daniel. Different terms carrying the same root as farmakei,a are ambiguous, since they are always associated with a drug (Farmakon) that can heal or cause one to be noxious. Therefore, these words have magic connotations, since they are connected with stupefying drinks, enchantments or practice of sorcery (LIDDELL, 1953, p. 1917). Bailly asserts that these terms designate medicinal use as well as the composition and preparation of magic potions associated with poison, easily aligned with general magic acts (923-924).

24 Bailly provides examples of how this term brings also a notion of honor, entertainment and treatment with medicine (417). Liddell adds that this service can be done to gain specific favors, pay a person, maintain temples and provides medical and surgical treatments for healing (792).

25 This relation between power and authority is clear in the gospel narrative where healings and exorcism are crucial elements in the literary creation of Jesus (SMITH, 1998, p. 107-123).
to humans. Apollonius of Tyana calls Nero a *qhri,on* (Philostr Vit. Ap. IV.38), constructing an image of a carnivorous animal of prey with claws and teeth. Therefore, there is an antithetical construction in this passage. This perspective opposes God, Jesus, the martyrs, and the witnesses to the dragon, the beasts, Balaam, and Jezebel. *qhri,on* is immediately related to the slaughtered *avrni,on*. Indeed, the apocalypse of John, the prophetic book of the lamb, is contrasted with the false prophet (*yeudoprofh,thj* in 16:13; 19:20; 20:10) who operates his signs to the kings of the whole world deceiving the nations.

The word for slaughtering is crucial in this context. It comes from *sfa,zw* whose root (*sfa,g*) connects with the blade of a knife or sword (TDNT VII, p. 925-938), and associates with two manifestations of *slaying*: the ritual and the profane. This sacrifice of an animal, often connected with praising the gods, is done by the father in familiar rituals, but only to the priest or his/her delegate for public sacrifice in a temple. There are two types of sacrifice, those in which the meat is eaten, and other sacrifices in which the meat is set apart because of an expiation, the elimination of a curse, or the purpose of an oath. This expression occurs only in the Johannine literature. In the first letter (3:12), it is used as a metaphor for the fratricide in a translation of *gr;h’,* which is in qal and means “to kill.” In the book of *Revelation* Jesus is described eight times as the slaughtered Lamb (Rev 5:6,9,12; 13:14). The

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26 Other passages wherein the term appears can clarify this notion, including the Septuagint version of creation in Gen 1. There is a distinction between wild animals (*qhri,a*) and domestic animals (*kth,nh*), since the first connotation is emphasized by the expression *ta qhri,a th/j gh/j*. Despite apocalyptic visions in the second part of *Daniel*, this word appears in the narrative section as a wilderness where Nebuchadnezzar is banished after losing his mental faculties. This term also appears in some translations of *Job* and in the temptation of Christ, describing his moment of isolation.

27 In this passage, the population’s fear of Nero is described. This emperor is compared to eastern beasts, even though the number of heads is unknown, or whether it has “crooked talons” and “jagged teeth.” Ironically, the text asserts that this beast lives in the city. Nevertheless, his wild nature becomes even more savage so that lions and leopards change their direction with fear. This description of the beast reinforces the courage and enthusiasm of Appolonius of Tyana when he strengthened those who defied imperial orders to banish philosophical activity. Philostractus’ desires to defend him reveals that Appolonius is a “divinely-inspired sage and prophet,” since “Appolonius had been accused of charlatanism, wizardry, and magical practices (s).” This is a common ancient Mediterranean accusation, as some narratives in the canonical Acts of Apostles prove (REIMER, 2002, p. 245-250) and the later segregation of magic perspectives, which are merged with anti-gnostic ideas.

28 Sib. 8.157 Indicates Nero as *qhri,on me,ga*. 

29 Bailly asserts that the priest or familiar chief needs to cut a victim’s throat in order to collect the blood (845). Liddell claims that metaphorically, the word can mean torment, but describes the ritual action of cutting the throat while the animal hangs on a servant’s shoulders (1738).

30 This notion appears with different terms in Paul, when the apostle says that “our Easter (relies on the fact the) Christ is sacrificed” (kai. *ga.r to. pa,sc a h’ mw/n evtu,qh Cristo,j*). Therefore, the theological association of Jesus’ death within diverse early traditions is evident.
martyrs are slaughtered because of the word of God and their witness (6:9; 18:24). In addition, in chapter 19, when a hyper-masculine Christ appears in the skies, he kills his adversaries with a sword that comes out of his mouth. As described above, the root for slain is σφαῖρ, indicating the function of a blade in the sacrificial act. Thus, the author of the book constructs a scenario in which an angel gathers birds to eat the flesh of kings, captains, horses, and riders. This *Apocalypse* conveys its message by describing the defeat of the beast and its followers, using violent images resembling rituals and profane slaughters.

According to Gordon Zerbe, the book focuses on the exposition of God and the Lamb in charge of the cosmos, while the dragon is presented as a “terrifying and destructive beast” being in open war against God and his witnesses (48-52). Two cities metaphorically express different political and economic perspectives, depicted as two female personifications: bride and prostitute (ROSSING, 1999, p. 161-166; ZERBE, 2003, p. 48; RAPPLE, 2004, p. 223-226). In order to propagate domination on a large scale, the Roman Empire operates through “brutal military conquests and the destruction of nature” that bring luxury, wealth, oppression, and arrogance. However, faith in God furnishes perseverance (*ὑπομονή*) and fidelity. The new “Babylon” reproduces itself in order to colonize and extend its power, as one can see in the images of the dragon and second beast that allure Christians. This new world expansion creates a sense of interconnectedness among religion, politics, and economics, and is best visualized through imperial cults’ lenses. In Rev 13, the relationship between δυναμί, and εξουσί,αν reveals that the first beast legitimates the dragon and the second beast’s authority while its own power is legitimated by them. For instance, in verse 2 the dragon gave power, authority, and its throne to the Beast and in verse 12 the power of the second beast, that is derived from the first, is affirmed. Therefore, in *Revelation*, not only are the religious syncretistic aspects rejected, but also international commerce, made by maritime trade, is portrayed as a whore in fornication (*πορνεί,ω*) with all the nations. There is an immediate connection between empire, religious

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31 εξουσί,αν generally means performing an action without any impediment, granted by a higher power that legitimates this action with permission and authority (TDNT, II, p. 562-570). It is not possible to separate authority (εξουσί,αν) and power (δυναμί), since they are interconnected. Since the LXX, this term has received a Jewish theological consideration, as authority is given by God. Therefore, in the NT εξουσί,αν indicates the absolute possibility of action proper to God. In *Revelation*, this is also manifested in a natural realm, since God orders and furnishes the power of destruction (Rev 6:8; 9:3; 9:10:9:19; 14:18; 16:9; 18:1). God lends nature’s power; humans and empires are in nature; meaning that Roman power is a usurpation of God’s sovereignty. The Roman empire’s military power and political authority is vanity from the author’s perspective, since God is the Lord of the cosmos (παντόκρατορ).
cults, and economic praxis that must be eradicated. Therefore, “commerce and imperial cult are blended” (KRAYBILL, 1996, p. 23).

In conclusion, the beast usurps God’s place imitating the divine forces and the lamb. It emerges out from the sea (ēvk th/j qala,sshj qhri,on avnabai/ non) in rebellion against natural orders. God’s answer in Revelation descends from heaven, as Christ the warrior comes down from the skies as well as the New Jerusalem (th.n po,lin th.n a’gi,an Vlerousalh.m katabai,nousan evk tou/ ouvrano/ avpo. tou/ qeou/), both with soteriological connotations. Jesus is the pantokra,twr (1:8) and God is enthroned over the cosmos (4:1). This sovereignty is unattainable to political powers and magic predications. This faith must have an historical, economic, and practical transformation (HOWARD-BROOK, 1999, p. 267): a new polis emerges from the skies through literary and theological inventions; creating a new, different place where the forces of empire have no access, since their concrete representatives were formerly destroyed in a cosmic battle with clear ritual imagery and rhetorical language.

Textures, Knots and Bounds: re-veiling the mysteries in symbols as conditio sine qua non for a Performative Reading of the Johannine Apocalypse

Integrating text and context through the prophetic liturgical narrative of Revelation requires recipients to acknowledge a virtual literary space created without regular restrictions of signification. A collective compositional process of continual writing, reading and reincorporating traditions endows multiple interaction with historical events, albeit decoding the author’s symbolic language is impossible. Nevertheless, the act of reading these figurative expressions bounds text and context through expressive rhetorical contextualization in several literary textures. Fascination, vertigo and fantasy demand pluridimensional, ambiguity, opacity, and indetermination to appreciate different layers in the literary signification game proposed by this book. Disarticulating and re-articulating myth-making practices, rhetorical cultural devices

32 This religious language is perceived with the derived terms from ka,qhmai, which appear thirty three times in Revelation. John’s first vision shows one who is enthroned and holds a sealed book (5:1). This expression can signify sitting, being enthroned and riding a horse. Therefore, there is a chiastic structure generated by the polysemic meaning of ka,qhmai: God’s reign contrasts with the usurpation of the Beast, which is related to the abomination King in Daniel; through a transfiguration of the lamb in chapter 19, Jesus appears as a King mounted on his horse eliminating “God’s enemies.”

33 David Aune suggests that the Alpha and Omega formula indicates this conclusion, since in both Revelation and magical papyri, it correlates with the divine name, which is form of Iaw, a common divine name frequent in Greco-Jewish magical texts. The figure of Jesus perceived in these formulas cannot be controlled by magical predications and incantations, being independent of human control and manipulation (2006, p. 361-364).
and ecclesiastical self-images are essential to partake the journey articulated by the Seer throughout several images. Violence, as well as imperial and gender discourses, are descriptions of this apocalyptic, literary, prophetic fiction, having specific rhetorical purposes in the narrative. Investigating hypermasculinity on Christ’s descriptions side by side to some Heracles’ traditions in particular Hellenistic ritual practices as well as studying interfaces among religion, empire and economic ideas are significant selections on the importance of exploring Rhetorical Criticism in the Johannine Apocalypse. Unveiling the message is not attainable; nevertheless, re-veiling these symbolic narratives in their multiple textures, rhetorical knots and historical bounds, is tangible in different social loci.

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