

THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND RELIGION: HOW DID THE BOOK OF REVELATION PERSUADE

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Abstract

While not all communication is to persuade, persuasion is an important part of communication. Communication is a process of convergence (or divergence) as two or more individuals exchange information in order to move toward each other (or apart) in the meanings they ascribe to certain events. Given the fact that the book of Revelation is the work of a prophet who experienced sky journeys and sky visions, the author obviously intended to persuade his audience by means of his report of his visionary encounters. Rhetoric from Aristotle on is about persuasion.¹ How did the Book of Revelation function rhetorically?

Introduction

I think I would agree that the author of the Book of Revelation composed his first-century A.D. Mediterranean document in order to communicate with other human beings. 'Communication is a process in which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding (Rogers 1983: 5).

Persuasion 'refers to situations where attempts are made to modify behavior by symbolic transactions (messages) that are sometimes, but not always, linked with coercive force (indirectly coercive) and that appeal to the reason and emotions of the intended persuadee(s)' (Miller 1987: 451). One modifies behavior in one of three ways: by changing existing response, reinforcing existing response, introducing a new response. Most persuasion seeks to immunize, to induce resistance to persuasion, to shape stable response patterns where no stable patterns previously existed. John, the prophet of Patmos, has expressed his theme in the phrase: 'Do not be deceived!'² (see Pilch 1992; 1993). Hence it would seem that he directed his persuasion at reinforcing

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1. It might be useful to note that while one may make all sorts of assertions about rhetoric and its effects, the fact is 'the systematic empirical study of persuasion is a relatively recent scholarly innovation, its roots extending less than 50 years deep into the intellectual topsoil' (Miller 1988: 448).

2. Throughout the work, note the insistence on truth (true: 3:7.14; 6:10; 15:3; 16:7; 19:2.9.11; true one 2:10.13; 17:14; 19:11; trustworthy witness: 1:5; 3:14; trustworthy: 21:5; 22:6).

the prevailing response of his audience. To guarantee the success of previous immunization attempts and to induce resistance alien persuasion, John unfolds what he experienced in an alternate state of consciousness. His goal is to consolidate stable response patterns among the members of his audience.

John's alternate state of consciousness experiences consisted of stellar visions. The new information he offers his audience derived from astronomic episodes that included an experience of God and of stars and among the stars. For those whom John addresses, such information constitutes an instance of an innovation. From the perspective of the persuadee,

at the persuasion stage in the innovation-decision process, the individual forms a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the innovation. . . . At the persuasion stage the individual becomes more psychologically involved with the innovation; he or she actively seeks information about the new idea. Here the important behaviors are where he or she seeks information, what messages he or she receives and how he or she interprets the information that is received. Thus, selective perception is important in determining the individual's behavior at the persuasion stage, for it is at the persuasion stage that a general perception of the innovation is developed. Such perceived attributes of an innovation as its relative advantage, compatibility and complexity are especially important at this stage (Rogers 1983: 169-170).

Presumably, John the prophet was a considerate author. He dresses up his vision report in the form of a letter directed to persons who presumably share his first-century, Mediterranean scenarios of the sky. Since he wished his audience to be persuaded by his presentation, we can presume that they knew how to situate what John told them within a common framework of some generally accepted world view. This means that they could assess the relative advantage of learning about what John knew, that they would find it compatible with their present outlooks on the world, and that they would perceive it as comprehensible and significant enough to win their assent. The outcome would be what John sought: the immunization of his audience and its resistance to any contrary persuasive attempts by others. John's audience would see the point of it all and be persuaded by John's astronomic revelation so as not to be deceived!

How did John carry off this rhetorical feat with his book of Revelation? To answer this question is the task of rhetorical criticism. But to do rhetorical criticism at all, the investigator will have to discover the shared social system that embraced both the author of the document as well as its recipients. For it is the shared social system that of original author and audience that was the reservoir of available meaning. That social system gave meaning to the scenarios shared by the audience and reworked by the author in the process of reading and hearing (see Malina 1991). It was that common social system that endowed meaning on the range of contemporary perceptions accessible to the recipients of the book, and on the available interpretations ascribable to the message at the time.

How did the message that John presented appeal to the reason and emotions of his intended persuadees? The purpose of this essay is to describe what John was up to by describing his social role, by socially situating the scenarios he described, and by relating these to the process of persuasion.

1. Situating John the Prophet

In Second Temple Israel of the first century A.D., prophets were persons who had experiences 'in the Spirit,' with the recognized role of 'prophet' (for example, consider 1 Cor 14:1-39; Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11; 19:6; Rev 1:10). In modern terminology, they experienced altered states of consciousness (see Pilch 1993). However not all such altered states of consciousness experiences are prophecy. For altered states of consciousness would likewise include such events as visions (Jesus in Mark 1:11; John the Baptist in John 1:32; Peter, James, John in Mark 9:2-8//; Stephen in Acts 7; Ananias in Acts 9:10-18), ecstatic celestial journeys (Paul's self-admission 2 Cor 12:2-4) as well as speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14). Upon return to their normal state of consciousness, persons undergoing some altered state of awareness might or might not share their experience with their contemporaries. Speakers in tongues require translator or interpreters (1 Cor 14:5); Peter, Paul and James are explicitly told to tell no one of what they saw (Mark 9:9); Paul 'heard things which cannot be told, which man may not utter (2 Cor 12: 4). Yet some of those altered consciousness states entailed experiences that bore upon the lives of others, such as those states of awareness which resulted in insight and information of significance to others. Prophets had information for their fellow ingroup members ('prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers' 1 Cor 14:22). In this sense, the New Testament documents indicate that John the Baptist was a prophet (who received 'the word of God' Luke 3:2), with a message for Israel about repentance (Mark 1:4), while Jesus has a prophetic message for Israel about the Kingdom of God and repentance (Mark 1:15; Matt 3:2 notes that John the Baptist had the same insight). For his part, Paul too claims an altered state of consciousness experience behind his 'gospel' (Gal 1:12), something that Luke confirms in his own way (Acts 9:3-8; 22:6-16; 26:12-18).

There can be no doubt that the author of the book of Revelation, John, was a prophet, whose experience produced significant information for his ingroup. Furthermore, it would seem that in the mind of a first-century Mediterranean Christian, the type or genre of a writing such as John's Revelation was 'prophecy.' This is rather obvious since the author calls his book 'words of the prophecy' (Rev 1:3), and he is told that he 'must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings' (Rev 10:11), although there is no indication about when and before whom he is to perform this role. The concluding chapter explicitly repeats the label three times: 'How honorable is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book' (22:7.10.18; 'the words of the book of this prophecy' 22:19). He further intimates that there other such prophets in the groups he knew, since a celestial being speaks of other prophets ('your brethren the prophets' 22:9).

John tells us his experiences took place 'in spirit' (Rev 1:10). Such alternate states of consciousness are often labeled sectarian behavior in the Western typologies of religion. The fact is a large number of societies around the world have institutionalized alternate states of consciousness. Just because the West (Europeans those who follow the Enlightenment outlook) are selectively inattentive to the normal quality of alternate states of consciousness is no reason to read the Bible anachronistically. For alternate states of consciousness to work, people who have studied the field note that those who find themselves in these alternate states have certain expectations. Without these expectations, nothing happens, nothing is perceived, even with the best trances or alternate states or transports or sky trips or sky visions. People, without cultural expectations, experience nothing other than that they are not in ordinary states of awareness. So much for experimental science (see Bourguignon 1979: 233-269; Goodman 1990).

The purpose of the first part of this essay is to consider the expectations and experiences of the prophet John described in the book of Revelation. What would he expect to see as he journeyed into the sky? Where would one learn about these expectations. What in fact did he experience? And what is the significance of his portrayal of these experiences? My purpose is to consider sky trips and sky visions in terms of first century expectations. I wish to provide a sort of road map, a touring guide through the book of Revelation with which we may accompany the author on his sky trips and acquire a viewpoint for his sky visions. In conclusion we shall see that as a genre the purpose of the book of Revelation was, to belabor the obvious, to reveal information that would allay ignorance and thus safeguard against prevailing deception.

In terms of rhetoric, the purpose of revealing was to have effect on others by means of the new information presented. This purpose I shall call influence, that is, the ability to exert control on the behavior of others by means of information (Malina 1986). The reason why people needed revelations was that in their ordinary living, they found the availability of required information as limited, concealed, distorted, and the like. They lived in a social system where deception was quite normal (see Pilch 1993). To allay the effects of deception and concealment, revelations were crucial. And for groups in a society based on concealment in order to dishonor and lord it over others, knowledge of what really was going on was a source of honor, a way of deflating the status of those concealing. A statement of what was really going on would be invaluable in the agonistic context of life. Thus for a person, such as a prophet, to know what really was going on served an eminent social function, a social function called 'influence.'

2. Situating John's Scenarios

John's style of prophecy surely differed from that of Paul, and those earlier figures also ranked as prophets, namely, John the Baptist and Jesus. Then consider the prophecy of persons variously called *mantics*, *oraclists*, *diviners*, and *interpreters* of

ancient documents of revelation (for example, documents such as the *Odyssey* or the *Iliad*, or *Genesis* or *Isaiah*). For what is distinctive of John, the seer of Patmos, is that his prophecy was rooted in experiencing and reading the sky. Like others before and after him, John described the impact of stars on the earth. Such prophets reported their reading of the sky by means of sky observations, sky visions as well as sky trips. They were astral prophets.

2.1 What Is Astral Prophecy?

Consequently it seems rather obvious that writings about visions of the sky, involving celestial events and celestial phenomena belong to the category of sky description. In fact the events and entities described in the book of Revelation are not very different from what is generally called 'astronomical' or 'astrological' literature. However the author of the book of Revelation claims to be a prophet; he ranks his work among the prophecy of his day and age. Consequently by his own estimation, his writing would be a subset of the genre or type of astronomical and/or astrological literature, but of a prophetic sort. For there were other writings that formed other subsets of astronomical and/or astrological literature. For example there were writings on the meaning of thunder (*brontologia*), forecasts for the year based on given constellations of the zodiac (*dodekaeterides*), writings indicating which planets and their deities or angels are in control of hours of the day, and of course horoscopes indicating the best 'hour' to begin a trip, a business, build a house and the like. In the Israelite tradition, a number of ancient documents of this kinds can be found among the *Qumran* writings (and in collections such as *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*). But none of these claimed to be prophecy the way John's work does.

The main concern of ancient sky scholars in general was to learn about the impact of celestial bodies on human beings, much like our sky scholars are concerned with the ozone layer and ultraviolet rays. The main difference in scholarly attitude is that our scholars view the world as something impersonal, inert and lifeless. The ancient sky observer believed in living cosmic beings who controlled sky entities and sky phenomena and their resulting impact on human social interaction, especially politics. Stars were personages to be reckoned with; they were living, 'personal' beings.

Aside from the Epicureans, all the major philosophical schools in the Hellenistic era believed in the divinity of the stars. Even the notorious atheist Euhemerus (fl. 300 B.C.) acknowledged that they (at least) were gods. . . . If one supposes, as later Platonism usually did, that stars were composed of soul and body, of sensible and intelligible, of superior and inferior, of ruling and ruled, one would think that only the soul of the star would be divine, and not its body. One response was to say that in the case of the stars, soul was perfectly adapted to body, and the lower and visible part to a higher intelligible part. The 'secondary' gods exist through the higher invisible gods, depending on them as the star's radiance depends on the star. In the star the divine soul exercises a perfect supremacy (Scott 1991: 55 and 57; see Taub 1993: 135-46).

And for the ancients, the term 'star' referred to all visible celestial bodies, i.e. planets, constellations, single stars, comets, meteors, in sum to any bright object in the sky.

Now the main characteristic of those ancient sky scholars who produced astral prophecy was that they presumed that they were given divinely imparted interpretations of celestial phenomena. Their astral prophecy consisted of information deriving from experience with celestial entities: stars, singly or in constellations, personages such as angels or demons, and God (gods). It is this sort of experience, an aspect of their social expectations, that account for what they eventually wrote down. What I mean is that the genre or type of writing that tells of astral experiences derives from a social system where such experiences were known and expected. For genre or types of writing always derive from a social system. For example, a newspaper advertisement such as 'Peaches, \$2.00 a kilo' could very well be confused for the name of a moving picture by persons who have never experienced peaches or money in dollar form or weights in kilos. For the peaches, such an ad presupposes a market or supermarket with a fruit and vegetable section serving to distribute produce from an orchard. The dollar sign presupposes money in the form of dollars, while the reference to kilogram would exclude the U.S. (leaving either Canada, Australia, Hong Kong and Zimbabwe among others as source of the reference).

The point is that literary genres or literary types derive from social systems, and given genres or types reflect their social system of origin. People learn to understand and interpret their experience of the sky by enculturation in a specific social system. When written down, this experience takes the shape of a type or genre of writing, for example a narrative of the experience, a horoscope, an oracular utterance, a list of events shortly to occur, and the like. What is distinctive of the astral prophecy in Revelation (and other writings like it, such as the Book of Enoch, for example) is that the prophet describes events in story form, that is in a narrative (for other genres, see the collection in *Catalogus Codicum Astrologicorum Graecorum 1895-1953*).

So we may say that as a genre or type of writing, astral prophecy like that in the book of Revelation is a type of astronomic writing with a narrative framework which sets forth information derived from the prophet's interaction with celestial entities. In the nineteenth century, the book of Revelation was labeled as eschatological in the sense of describing some final cataclysm. And modern scholars prefer to call this genre 'apocalypse.' As is generally known, the word, 'apocalypse,' is a transliteration of the opening Greek word of the book of Revelation. It was the German scholar F. Lücke (in 1852) who decided to use the word as a label for the genre or category of this document and those documents similar to it, such as the book of Daniel and those Israelite writings called Enoch, Ezra and Baruch (Kvanvig 1989: 40 and 56). Aside from the fact that our ancient and medieval ancestors often chose the first word(s) of a writing to serve as a title, it is difficult to understand why this Greek transliteration has been maintained by historical scholarship to label a genre.

For it is well known that the word 'apocalypse,' originally meant the process of revealing or making known something secret (Smith 1983). Yet even in this sense, the

word is inadequate to describe the book of Revelation. For while it is true that all information imparted by sky oriented prophets and seers of antiquity consisted of uncovered secrets, yet not all revelations of secrets are astronomical, celestial ones. As a matter of fact, all the writings of antiquity labeled 'apocalypses' and dealing with the sky and its impact on the earth, including the book of Revelation, are really a subset of the astronomical and astrological literature of antiquity.

Furthermore, while it is true that early Christian groups often sought to maintain their ingroup boundaries by constantly consoling one another and threatening the outgroup with a 'Just You Wait And See' message, there seems little value in calling this perspective 'eschatology.' 'Eschatology' is a Greek based word that means the study of the end, of final things, usually of the presumed end of the world. This term was coined in 1804 by K. G. Bretschneider, and taken up by F. Oberthür in 1807-1810, thence to the rest of German speaking theologians; a group of Alsatian theologians naturalized it in France from 1828; and it appeared in England in 1844, or even sooner (see Carmignac 1979:133-34). While 'apocalypse' or 'eschatological apocalyptic' sound duly esoteric and learned, the terms really shed little light on the quality of the sub-genre to which the book of Revelation belongs. Perhaps some believe that with such labels they categorize the work appropriately both in the history of scholarship and in terms of appropriate categorical distinctions. Yet today it is obvious that the labels 'apocalypse' and 'eschatology' are simply part and parcel of the theological jargon of the past century that fossilize perception and misdirect interpretation.

To get into the frame of mind necessary to appreciate a writing such as the book of Revelation, one must ask what the book meant to its original audience. And the outstanding and conspicuous feature of this writing is that it dealt with the sky. What did the sky mean to first-century Mediterraneans? I begin with, the prevailing view of the world in the Roman period, emerging from Hellenistic times:

The importance of the Hellenistic period in the history of cartography in the ancient world has thus been clearly established. Its outstanding characteristic was the fruitful marriage of theoretical and empirical knowledge. It has been demonstrated beyond doubt that the geometric study of the sphere, as expressed in theorems and physical models, had important practical applications and that its principles underlay the development both of mathematical geography and of scientific cartography as applied to celestial and terrestrial phenomena. With respect to celestial mapping, the poem about the stellar globe by Aratus (though removed in time from Eudoxus) had encouraged the more systematic study of real globes such as that on the archetype of the Farnese Atlas or those constructed by Archimedes. The main constellations on these artifacts were equated with religious beliefs or legends, mainly in human or animal form. This practice in turn had stimulated a closer study of the sky and its groups of stars. By the end of the Hellenistic period, the celestial globes, although they were artistically decorated, were regarded as credible scientific representations of the sky that in turn could be given astrological uses, as in the compilation of horoscopes, in Greek society at

large. In the history of geographical (or terrestrial) mapping, the great practical step forward was to locate the inhabited world exactly on the terrestrial globe (Dilke 1987: 277).

The inhabited earth was the center of the universe. It was a sphere, with the known habitable portion occupying one fourth of the whole. The sky that impacted on this inhabited region, running from Gibraltar (the Pillars of Hercules) to the Indus, was of the greatest significance. Consider what Brown says about the inhabitants of the region:

The towns of the Mediterranean were small towns (6). For all their isolation from the way of life of the villagers, they were fragile excrescences in a spreading countryside. As in medieval Italy, 'Everywhere the country thrust its tendrils into the town.' (7) Not every tendril was innocent: wild animals drifted into the towns of North Africa, making their lairs in the basements and eating the citizens.(8) Like the country folk, the townsmen lived with their eyes on the sky. Throughout this period, the weather was a more pertinacious persecutor of religious dissent than was any emperor: the *caelites*, the inhabitants of the sky, plural or singular, spoke most forcibly in the sudden hailstorm and in the brazen drought and showed their pleasure most convincingly in the waving wheat fields.(9) As the pagan Emperor Maximin Daia wrote in 311 to the city of Tyre: 'Let them cast their eyes on the wide plains, where already the crops are ripe with waving ears of corn, and the meadows, thanks to the abundance of rain, are bright with flowering plants, and the weather we enjoy is temperate and very mild.'(10) *Pacis haec et annonae otia. Ab imperio et a caelo bene est.*(11) In such towns we move among small human groups. The 'face-to-face' community is the unit of Late Antique religious history (Brown 1978: 3).³

3. Brown's notes (pp. 105-6) are as follows:

(6.) R. Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire: Quantitative Studies* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 259-287. For a firm sense of the limitations of Late Roman urban life, we now have the masterly study of Evelyne Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance: 4e-7e siècles* (Paris, 1977), pp. 156-170.

(7.) Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato* (Harmondsworth, 1963), p. 58.

(8.) Tertullian, *Ad martyras* vi, 1.

(9.) Arnobius, *Adv. Gentes* I, 1-2: *Ipsos etiam caelites, derelictis curis solemnibus, quibus quondam solebant invisere res nostras, terrarum ab regionibus exterminatos. Cf. Symmachus, Relatio iii, 16: sacrilegio annus exaruit. Christian attitudes: Theodosius II, Novella iii, 75 (447): An diutius perferemus mutari temporum vices irata caeli temperie, quae paganorum exacerbata perfidia nescit naturae libramenta servare. Sin positively 'pollutes' the atmosphere: Ps.-Clement, *Recognitiones* V, 27, 1: *Fatigata sceleribus impiorum vincuntur elementa, et inde est quod aut terrae fructus corrumpitur. The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom prays: Hyper eukrasias aeron.**

(10.) Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl. IX, viii, 10*. The best comment on this is the late third-century Boglio stele from Siliiana in North Africa, where the image of God and a scene showing the performance of sacrifices is placed above a procession of cars returning loaded from the harvest: R. Bianchi-Bandinelli, *Rome: The Late Empire* (London, 1961), pl. 200 at p. 217.

(11.) Tertullian, *De Pallio* i.

2.2 The Appurtenances of the Cosmos

For the modern reader it is difficult to recapture the first-century sense of the sky. Most moderns know that the ancient earth-centered perception of an encapsulating sky was displaced by a sun-centered conception of the world (16th-18th century), and then dissolved by a galaxy-centered point of view (18th-19th century). This last model itself has given way to a non-centered sky system (20th century; see Krafft 1990). Hence the need to recover some adequate ancient model of an earth-centered total system of the universe.

Let us begin with the appurtenances of the cosmos. The central earth was encapsulated by a firmament or vault of the sky. This firmament separated the region of God from the region of creation. The fixed stars moved along this firmament. They were fixed in the sense that they formed fixed figures, constellations. The moving stars, called planets, moved across the sky through various constellations. The visible planets were seven in number, with some perceptive scholars noting two invisible planets (see Neyrey 1993: 74-76 on Jude 13: 'wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever') The ancient Indians called them *Rahu* and *Ketu*, the Hellenist called them *Anabibazon* and *Katabibazon* (Doritheus of Sidon; even Tertullian). I suggest they are Revelation's *Gog* and *Magog*. Originally, these latter were darkness personified, the Sumerian meaning of the terms, a tradition intimated in Sibylline Oracles 3:319-322, where these two are associated with blackness. The part of the sky that ostensibly lacked stars, the southeastern Mediterranean sky, was the location of the Abyss into which endless showers of falling stars fell.

There were erratic and often ephemeral stars that at times fell to earth or burned up before traversing the sky. These were called 'hairy' stars, from the Greek '*kometes*.' Depending on what they looked like, there were some thirty names for comets. Pliny, for example, notes the following:

A few facts about the world remain. There are also stars that suddenly come to birth in the heaven itself; of these there are several kinds. The Greeks call them '*comets*' (Latin transliteration: *cometae*), in our language 'long-haired stars' (Latin: *crinitae*), because they have a blood-red shock of what looks like shaggy hair at their top. The Greeks also give the name of '*bearded stars*' to those from whose lower part spreads a mane resembling a long beard. '*Javelin stars*' quiver like a dart; these are a very terrible portent. To this class belongs the comet about which Titus Emperor Caesar in his fifth consulship wrote an account in his famous poem, that being its latest appearance down to the present day. The same stars when shorter and sloping in a point have been called '*Daggers*'; these are the palest of all in color, and have a gleam like the flash of a sword, and no rays, which even the Discus star, which resembles its name in appearance but is in color like amber, emits in scattered form from its edge. The '*Tub star*' presents the shape of a cask with a smoky light all around it. The '*Horned star*' has the shape of a horn, like the one that appeared when Greece fought the decisive battle of Salamis. The '*Torch star*' resembles glowing torches, the '*Horse star*' horses' manes in very rapid motion and revolving in a circle. There also occurs a shining

comet whose silvery tresses glow so brightly that it is scarcely possible to look at it, and which displays within it a shape in the likeness of a human countenance. There also occur 'Goat comets,' enringed with a sort of cloud resembling tufts of hair. Once hitherto it has happened that a 'Mane-shaped' comet changed into a spear; this was in the 108th Olympiad, A.U.C. 408 (i.e. 346 B.C.). The shortest period of visibility on record for a comet is 7 days, the longest 80 (Natural History II, xxii, 89-90, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb I 231-5).

Ptolemy, in turn, tells us:

We must observe, further, for the prediction of general conditions, the comets which appear either at the time of the eclipse or at any time whatever; for instance, the so-called 'beams' (*dokidon*), 'trumpets' (*salpiggon*), 'jars' (*pithon*) and the like, for these naturally produce the effect peculiar to Mars and to Mercury -- wars, hot weather, disturbed conditions, and the accompaniments of these; and they show, through the parts of the zodiac in which their heads appear and through the directions in which the shapes of their tails point, the regions upon which the misfortunes impend. Through the formations, as it were, of their heads, they indicate the kind of the event and the class upon which the misfortune will take effect; through the time which they last, the duration of the events and through their positions relative to the Sun likewise their beginning; for in general their appearance in the orient betokens rapidly approaching events and in the occident those that approach more slowly (Tetrabiblos II, 90-1, trans. F. E. Robbins, Loeb 193-5).

Comets invariably mark negative events. Again, Pliny reports:

There are also faces (= firebrand shaped) that are only seen when falling, for instance one that ran across the sky at midday in full view of the public when Germanicus Caesar was giving a gladiatorial show. Of these there are two kinds: one sort are called *lampades*, which means 'torches,' the other *bolides* (*missiles*), - that is the sort that appeared at the time of the disasters of Modena [44 BC Antony besieged Decimus Brutus there]. The difference between them is that 'torches' make long tracks, with their front part glowing, whereas a 'missile' glows throughout its length and traces a longer path. There are also *trabes* (= beams), in Greek *dokoi*, for example one that appeared when the Spartans were defeated at sea and lost the empire of Greece [at Cnidus 394 BC]. There also occurs a yawning of the actual sky, called *chasma*, and also something that looks like blood, and a fire that falls from it to the earth -- the most alarming possible cause of terror to mankind; as happened in the third year [349 BC] of the 107th Olympiad when King Philip was throwing Greece into disturbance. My own view is that these occurrences take place at fixed dates owing to natural forces, like all other events, and not, as most people think, from the variety of causes invented by the cleverness of human intellects. It is true that they were the harbingers of enormous misfortunes, but I hold that those did not happen because the marvelous occurrences took place but that these took place because the misfortunes were going to occur, only the reason for their occurrence is concealed by their rarity,

and consequently is not understood as are the risings and settings of the planets described above and many other phenomena' (Natural History II, xxv-xxvii, 96-97, trans. from H Rackham Loeb I 239-41).

Moreover it was generally believed that the natural world had no empty space. Just as the earth was full of people and the waters full of aquatic life, so the sky was filled with celestial living beings. Some of these sky beings were visible, such as the stars, planets and comets. But most were invisible, such as angels, demons, spirits and the like. For example, the Hellenistic author, Philo of Alexandria, explains the common view as follows:

It is Moses' custom to give the name of angels to those whom other philosophers call demons, souls that is which fly and hover in the air. . . . For the universe must needs be filled through and through with life, and each of its primary elementary divisions contains the forms of life which are akin and suited to it. The earth has the creatures of the land, the sea and the rivers those that live in water, fire the fire-born which are said to be found especially in Macedonia, and heaven has the stars. For the stars are souls divine and without blemish throughout, and therefore as each of them is mind in its purest form, they move in the line most akin to mind -- the circle. And so the other element, the air, must needs be filled with living beings, though indeed they are invisible to us, since even the air itself is not visible to our senses (On the Giants II, 6-8, §263, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whittaker, Loeb II 449).

And everybody was certain that the visible and invisible sky beings were like persons and had great influence upon human beings on the face of the earth. After all who could doubt sunburn, or being moonstruck (= lunatic), or skin pigmentation, or tides or earthquakes or the weather in general. All these were caused by celestial beings. Similarly, depending on which celestial beings were present overhead at which time periods, we have significant years, months, days and hours that equally impact on geographical areas and even body parts. In the Middle Eastern tradition, Israelite and otherwise, the sky bears evidence of the time of the creation of the cosmos. For while the earth was covered by a flood, the sky was not. And while antediluvian forms of earthly life were wiped out by the flood, the antediluvian forms of celestial life remained in place. It thus comes as no surprise to find all sorts of celestial beings: dragons, odd shaped beasts, monster-sized women, serpents and the like. Anyone even remotely acquainted with constellations would know of the existence of these beings.

Just as ignorance of health care procedures would be inconceivable at any period of human existence, so too ignorance of the sky and its impact on the inhabitants of the earth. More than half of the documents that have come down to us from antiquity are astronomic documents (MacMullen 1971). And astronomy is clearly the most overlooked segment of ancient life in contemporary historiography and interpretation. It surely was not overlooked by first century Mediterraneans.

2.3 John's Visions

To suggest the flavor of some dimensions of astral prophecy, I shall briefly deal with John's first two experiences, his vision of the celestial Jesus and his view of reality from the other side of the firmament. In John's first celestial encounter, it is Jesus, as humanoid shaped constellation (*one like a son of man*), who appears in an act of cosmic lordship. He has seven stars in his right hand, a sword in his mouth, and a message to the seer for the sky servants ('*angels*') of the seven churches. Such celestial visions were well known in antiquity. Hippolytus reports 'heretics' who read constellations in terms of Israel's biblical tradition 'exhibiting a strange marvel, as if the assertions made by them were fixed among the stars' (Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies IV, xlvi, Roberts and Donaldson Ante-Nicene Fathers V 42). Epiphanius speaks of such sky interpretations as traditional among the 'Pharisees' (Panarion 16.2.1, trans. Philip Amidon 1990: 51).

Specifically, to appreciate the typical astronomical quality of the description of John's celestial son of man, consider the following examples. They are drawn from an astrological manual entitled: *Salmeschoiniaka* (also: *Salmeschniaka*; *Salmesachanaka*; see Cramer 1954: 16) used by Nechepso-Petosiris, hence dating to before 150 B.C.. A second-century A.D. copy of the *Salmeschoiniaka* contains a description of the astral deities that control every five degrees of the celestial circumference and every five days. One of these seventy-two deities is described as follows:

The goddess of the month of Aphthysint[?]; she is called the face of the sun. Her appearance is that of a statue of genuine lapis *lazuli*; a woman seated on a throne, having eyes, one like [. . .] and the other Typhon-like, her countenance golden, hands on [her breast], adorned, a royal diadem on her head (cited from Boll 1914: 52).

The *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Grenfell and Hunt 3, 1912: 126-37) has a significant fragment of the *Salmeschoiniaka*. Consider the description of the presiding deity presented in the opening description of this work:

Aquarius that is the month of Pharmouthi 16-20: The presiding deity of that period, his name is Nebu, of which the interpretation is that he is the lord of wars and reason. He is represented by an upright statue with the face of a vulture, wearing a diadem upon his head, and with the face of a serpent behind, having two wings and the feet of a lion and holding four swords, both faces being of gold. He signifies that the governor will . . . evils; there shall be war, dislike and battle, and he will take counsel with the people as a friend. And during his rule there shall be a rebel and there shall be war, and many cities of Egypt with perish on account of the rebel, for the signs of the time are war and dislike and battle, and there shall be destruction (of many?). In this time many shall live by stealth (?), and some shall live by singing and dancing, and some by chanting in the temples, and some by singing at banquets with sweet voices and they end well. This deity causes by reason the conqueror to be conquered and the conquered to conquer, and many live by receiving gratuities and registering and collecting from men what

they have drunk up, and some live by . . . as servants. He causes men to be lame because one foot. . . The sickness in this season is in the intestines and bowels, and there shall be many deaths (loc. cit. 135).

Another example of a constellation deity from the Salmeschoniaka, chosen as a random excerpt by Cramer:

The Lord of Flame. His image is an upright statue of a man with the face of a . . . towards the back, however that of a piglet having a snout in front of its face. Having swords in his hands, four, and a knife. His tongue and face of fire. He indicates that this period makes many find their livelihood as advocates, others as wizards, many as singers of gods and kings, and many as translators of languages and many . . . and from place to place migrating and men earning much without labor nor worry how it was earned . . . are eaten up. Many, however, consume the substance of others. He makes many passive homosexuals, and many cohabiting with their aunts and stepmothers, so as to debauch them . . . (Cramer 1954: 17).

After the presentation of the messages received from the cosmic Jesus, the seer tells of great vision in the sky to which he is privy. The seer beholds this second scenario after moving through an opening in the firmament to behold the cosmos from God's point of view. He gradually introduces his readers to the cast of characters for a drama to follow. The characters include God on a Throne surrounded by twenty-four elders. These elders are *decans*, stars along the celestial equator. While the ancients knew thirty-six decans (one for each ten degrees of the sky circle), by the fifth century B.C., the civilized world from Babylon to Greece knew of twelve lunar months of 30 days (with regular intercalations as needed). Then on the analogy of the year, the day (daylight plus night time) was divided into 12 larger 'double hours,' and 360 smaller units. And these time units were connected with the circular course of the sun, moon and the stars, in terms of the same procedure; a circle's circumference consisted of 12 equal 'double segments' and 360 lesser units (see Eggermont 1973: 119-24).

For example, by the time of John's gospel, it is no surprise when Jesus asks rhetorically: 'Are there not twelve hours in the day?' (John 11:9). These twelve hours corresponding to the twelve divisions of the celestial circle are in fact double hours, hence twenty-four in all. Consequently, our seer could see twenty-four elders along the celestial equator surrounding the central throne of God, each elder presumably in charge of one hour of the day. It is well known that 'the division of the priesthood into twenty-four courses, each of which did service for one week in Jerusalem from sabbath to sabbath . . . was the system prevailing at the time of Jesus' (Jeremias 1969: 199). It would seem that there was some connection between these twenty-four courses and the decanal arrangement of Hellenism. For even in the older portion of the Testament of Adam (chaps 1--2, trans. S. E. Robinson, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha I* 993) we find a worship horarium according to which the twenty-four hours of the night-day cycle are parcelled out among various superearthy beings, including various elements, as their distinctive time frame.

At opposite points about the celestial throne, there were four animate constellations: Leo, Taurus, Scorpio-man, Thunderbird. And in the midst of the sky there was the Lamb standing although slain. This is Aries, known in the Semitic tradition as Taleh, that is Kid, Lamb. One ought note that Aries always has its neck totally twisted around, like an animal with a broken neck, since it stares directly over its back at Taurus; thus this constellational Lamb 'stands as though slain!'

The cast of thousands, of course, includes sky servants (angels), sky winds (spirits) and even earth winds. And colors too are very important since they correlate with the directions of the sky: north is black (Black Sea), south is red (Red Sea, Edom), east is brilliant (brilliant white, green or blue) and west is dull white (White Russia, White Syria). This color scheme comes from China through Persia to the Mediterranean, hence at its center is yellow (*jasper* and *carnelian*: the colors of the throne).

Celestial interpretation, like any interpretation, always takes place within a tradition. Our newspaper horoscopes and the traditional astrological lore behind them derive largely from Rome. Consider the names of the days of the week, the planets and the zodiacal signs for the most part. But Roman lore derived from the Greek, which in turn derived from Babylonia as mediated through Phoenicia (e.g. Dorotheus of Sidon, Philo of Byblos), Israel (Ezekiel, Zechariah, Daniel, Enoch) and Egypt (Hermetic writings). For first century prophets related in some way to the house of Israel, such as the Christian prophets mentioned previously, presuppositions about the sky and its appurtenances were rooted in Israel's traditional lore and its scriptures. Israel had its past astral prophets such as Ezekiel (see Ezek 1:1-28; 10:1-22; 43:3), Zechariah (see Zech 1:8-21; 6:1-8), Daniel (see Dan 7:2-12; 8:1-13), and Enoch. The authors of these biblical documents set the tone for subsequent generations of Israelite astral prophets. Their tradition filtered through the emerging monotheism of the Hellenistic period along with the best known sky sciences of the day (Babylonian lore Hellenized). Within this context of Israelite tradition and Hellenistic astral learning, the Christian prophet John discerned his new cosmic Lord -- as humanoid constellation and as cosmic Lamb.

3. A General Map Through Revelation

From the perspective of astral prophecy, I would break down the book of Revelation into the various sectors of the sky that the prophet experienced. Such a sector approach enables one to become more familiar with the scenarios in the book. Briefly, the main sectors are the following:

- Sector 1:* The Cosmic Role of Jesus the Messiah
- Sector 2:* How God Controls the Universe and Deals with Israel
- Sector 3:* The Cosmos Before the Flood: Why the Present Condition
- Sector 4:* Humankind's First Post-Flood City: Babel and Its Fate
- Sector 5:* The Final City of Humankind: Celestial Jerusalem

Now I would like to unpack each sector in terms of the various scenarios that surface in the prophet's narrative.

Sector 1: The Cosmic Role of Jesus the Messiah. The work begins with three introductions or inaugural points. First there is the general introduction to the book as a whole (1:1-3), followed by a specific introduction to the letters comprising chapters 2-3 (1:4-8). John follows with a description of his introductory or inaugural vision (1:10-20), duly noting the circumstances of his personal condition (altered state of awareness) and time (the Lord's day). Next follows the interaction in which an astral being of constellational proportions (like a 'son of man,' hence like a human being in shape) directs him to write orders to the controlling sky servants of seven specific Christian groups called churches (chaps 2-3).

Sector 2: How God Controls the Universe and Deals with Israel. The inaugural sequence is followed by another opening vision, this time a vision of the other side of the vault of the sky (chapter 4). 'An open door in the sky' (4:1) through which the author passes enables him to see the proper realm of God, at the controlling center of the cosmos. God's throne, attended by seven spirits (4:1.5), is surrounded by the thrones of twenty-four sky entities, that is stars known as '*decans*,' but here called '*elders*' (4:4). At four equidistant and opposing points along the cosmic circle around the throne, there are four living beings, that is constellations in animate shape (4:6-7). The seer is given the privilege to see the cosmos from God's point of view, from the other side of the vault of the sky. Along with the vision, John hears singing, as one might expect in the upper reaches of the sky. The first song (4:8) unceasingly tells of the exclusivity and uniqueness of God, the second (4:11) praises the eternal God as creator.

This opening scenario of what transpires on the other side of the vault of the sky yields to the start of the book's cosmic drama with the cue provided by notice of the sealed scroll at God's right hand (5:1). One of God's 'mighty' sky servants (the 'mighty' type of angel is mentioned here and at 10:1 and 18:21) proclaims a search for some being of sufficiently exalted status (this is worthiness) to be privy to God's secrets (5:2). It is one of the *decans* (elders) who then tells the seer that the one of sufficient eminence for the task is '*the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, the one who conquered*' (5:5). This personage, he sees, is none other than the '*Lamb standing as though slaughtered*,' and located in the center of the decans (5:6). This Lamb is the constellation Aries, who was always pictured in the most ancient representations of the sky with head turned so as to be facing directly over its back to Taurus. Aries, that is, was observed as having a broken neck to see backward, yet standing. It thus was 'slaughtered' yet standing. Once this eminent personage accepts the scroll, the whole cosmos breaks out in song. First the twenty-four decans and four living being constellations sing of the cosmic preeminence (worthiness) of the Lamb (the book's third song 5:9); then God's entourage equally hymns the preeminence of the Lamb (the fourth song 5:13), and finally all created beings second the judgment of all those prominent sky beings by singing of the honor of both God and the Lamb (the fifth song 5:13).

With the scenarios of the God enthroned and the Lamb ready and waiting amid cosmic singing, the action is ready to begin. Chapters 6 to 11 set before us the content of

what God has decreed in the scroll, now disclosed by the Lamb as it opens the seals of the scroll. Any expectations that the scroll might hold a word of peace and prosperity for anyone is quickly dispelled as the first living being thunders out a command: 'Come' (6:1). The rather surprising result is that a horse and rider emerge to gain ascendancy. The object of this ascendancy is presumably some unnamed opponent of God worthy of God's cosmic attention. And given the fact that the whole series of events unleashed here ends up with the partial destruction of 'the great city . . . where too their Lord was crucified' (11:8), the sector obviously deals with the land of Israel, that is the territory of Galilee, Perea and Judea along with the capital, Jerusalem. The second horse and rider responding to the command of the second living being indicates that the conquest is directed to the land. In context, this is the land of Israel. The third horse and rider following the command of the third living being point to food shortages on the land, while the fourth horse and rider, at the behest of the fourth living being, ushers in death over a fourth of the land (6:2-9).

Obviously, the horses and their riders are celestial beings. Now among common names for comets, as we shall see, are 'horse,' 'trumpet,' and 'bowl,' among others. What is distinctive of comets is that they invariably bode ill for the inhabitants of the land over which they appear. These first four horses do indeed indicate evil outcomes for the land of Israel and its inhabitants. The fifth seal, on the other hand, allows the seer's murdered colleagues, now located under the constellation 'Altar' (where the Milky Way passes), to get a hearing with God so as to make their case for vindication of honor, from the 'inhabitants of the Land' (6:10). While we are not yet explicitly told which land is in question, as noted above, it is obviously a land about which God is concerned enough to issue pertinent decrees, hence a land whose inhabitants stand in some relationship with God. Now the opening of the sixth seal results in upheaval among the natural appurtenances forming the human environment: sky and land. Social standing is of little value in providing security (6:15) against the judgment of God and the revenge of the Lamb (6:16).

However, before this judgment and revenge take place, presumably with the opening of the seventh seal, the seer tells us of an intermission in the action (chapter 7), marked by the restraining of the four sky servants at the four corners of the earth (7:1). The purpose of the interlude is to 'seal the slaves of our God upon their forehead' (7:3). Those thus rescued from judgment and revenge include a limited number of Israelites (only 144,000), and a limitless number 'from every nation and tribe and people and tongue' (7:9). These persons join in song to God and the Lamb to acknowledge their rescue (7:6, the sixth song). Their song provokes a response in song by God's cosmic entourage (7:12). After this the seer is informed by a decan as to who the non-Israelites were and of their relationship to the Lamb (7:13-17).

Finally (8:1), the seventh seal is opened provoking a new stage of activity marked by seven trumpet shaped comets. Like previous phenomena signalled by comets, the trumpets too unleash negative events on the land, carried out by remarkable celestial beings (8:2--9:19). The final three trumpet blasts are underscored as particularly shameful and dire, marked by three woes (8:13). After the sixth trumpet, we are

finally told what it is all about; there is no change of heart forthcoming from those who offend God and their fellow humans (9:20-21). Chapter 10 presents an interlude before the final trumpet blast. During this interlude, the seer performs a prophetic symbolic action, indicating that he must further 'prophecy concerning peoples and nations and tongues and many kings' (10:11).

Chapter 11 begins with another prophetic symbolic action, a sort of census of Israelites in God's (Jerusalem) sanctuary (11:1-2). Then two prophets appear who are specifically to witness against this Jerusalemite population about the evil in its midst (sackcloth points to this). These stand before the Lord of the land (11:4), protected by God with authority over fertility-giving water (11:6-7), ultimately killed by an animal, shamed by being left unburied, but raised from the dead by God, then taken to the sky (11:8-12). All of this takes place in the same great city 'where their Lord was crucified,' hence Jerusalem, said to have the qualities of Sodom (inhospitality) and Egypt (idolatry) (11:8). With the removal of the prophets, it is time for the final trumpet blast (11:14-15). The result is the inauguration of the rule of God and God's Messiah over the land. This is announced by sky dwellers, then acknowledged in a cosmic song (the book's seventh) by the twenty-four decans around God's throne (11:15-18). The upshot of it all is the opening of God's sky temple, so much so that one could see the ark of the covenant there (11:19). This marks the close of the second set of scenarios presented by John. The reason for this is that another set begins immediately, that has little direct relation with what preceded.

Sector 3: The Cosmos Before the Flood: Why the Present Condition. The new set of scenarios beginning with chapter 12 has the seer under the vault of the sky, examining some features that fall within his purview. He sees a great sign (the first of three) of a constellation described as a Pregnant Woman with the sun passing through it (12:1-2). This is followed by another sign, that of a constellational Dragon with falling stars in its wake, in the southern sky (12:3-4) waiting for the Pregnant Woman's childbirth. What ensues is a set of 'historical' interpretations explaining these constellations and their interaction. In other words, the seer tells us what happened in the past with these signs. First we find out that the cosmic child was taken up to God and seated on God's throne (12:5). Then we are informed about the Woman's having been sent into some unnamed wilderness (12:6). Finally we are told about the ancient battle of the sky servant Michael and his colleagues who warred against the southern Dragon and ejected it from the sky (12:7-8). The Dragon is the Great Dragon, none other than the Devil and Satan, a personage known from Israel's tradition. These verses, of course, explain Satan's presence in the Garden of Eden; he was ejected from the sky early on in the creation of the universe (12:9). Now a loud sky voice situates the Dragon and his present role (12:10-12). Finally we are told of the Dragon's interactions with the cosmic woman also now on earth; the 'seed' of this woman are none other than Christians (12:13-17)! Hence, they too must have been with God from the time of creation, a viewpoint held, it seems, by Pauline Christians who saw themselves chosen in Christ 'before the foundation of the world' (Eph 1:4).

Next, two more constellations are noted. The first rises in the sky over the horizon of the sea (13:1), and the second rises in the sky over the horizon of the land (13:11). The sea Beast serves as vice-regent of the Dragon, taking on 'the Holy Ones,' while the land Beast in turn substitutes for the sea Beast and leads earthlings to deceptive worship through controlled food rationing (by tatoos).

Meanwhile, the seer recounts a whole series of new scenarios. First the cosmic Lamb 'sets' over Jerusalem, with an entourage of one-hundred forty-four thousand Holy Ones. These, we are told, are the 'sons of God' or sky servants who were undefiled by women in the event recorded in Gen 6:1-4 (14:1-5). Second, a trio of sky servants make quick announcements: the first goes to the zenith of the sky to proclaim good news: the hour of God's judgment has come (14:6-7). Next a second sky servant quickly proclaims the fall of Babylon the Great (14:8). Then a third sky servant warns against any trafficking with the sea Beast (14:9-11). And finally, two sickle shaped comets, at the direction of two sky servants, 'harvest' the earth, a first of presumably various produce, a second of grapes, standing for blood (14:14-20). Harvesting is a traditional symbol of judgment.

Now another (the third) sign appears, consisting of seven bowl shaped comets yielding seven plagues or injuries (chapter 15), standing for God's vindication. Chapter 16 tells of the seven injuries, concluding with the splitting of Babylon into three (16:19), thus heralding the fate of Babylon.

Sector 4: The First Postdiluvian City of Humankind: Babel and Its Fate. Chapter 17 tells of a sky servant who explains the significance of the judgment on Babylon/Babel, the first postdiluvian city of humankind. The city is personified as a Woman, both because this was customary in the Hellenistic period and because Babylon's protecting star at that period was Aphrodite (Venus, Isis, Ishtar). The sky servant carries off the seer (17:3) to see the personified city, and then interprets the various relationships among the Beasts and the Lamb and the City (17:4-18). Chapter 18 opens with another sky servant announcing the fall of Babylon (18:1-3), and still another inviting his proteges to leave the city (18:4-8). Finally we are presented with a set of persons who regularly interacted with the city: kings of the earth, merchants of the earth, seamen (18:9-20). At the close, another 'mighty' sky servant performs a symbolic action indicative of the fate of crushed Babylon (18:21-24).

The first eight verses of chapter 19 narrate the cosmic chorus of praise evoked by God's just judgment. The seer is then directed to write, hence announce the supper of the Wedding of the Lamb (19:9). But before that takes place another supper of sorts takes place. The mounted 'King of kings and Lord of lords,' along with his army, vanquishes the (sea)Beast with its kings, tribunes, the mighty and their horses, freemen and slaves, small and great. All of these cadavers serve as the supper of the birds of the sky. But the (sea)Beast and its false prophet (the land Beast) are thrown into the burning sulphurous pool (19:11-21).

With the two Beasts vanquished, it is finally the turn of the Dragon. The seer sees a sky servant bind the Dragon with a chain for one thousand years (20:1-3), that is for a

'day' in the sight of the Lord ('But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day' 2 Pet 3:8). During this period, those who witness to Jesus live and reign with him (20:4-6). But at the end of this period, a final period is ushered in with the release of Satan for destruction with the Beasts (20:7-10), and with God's judgment of humankind (20:11-15).

Sector 5: The Final City of Humankind: Celestial Jerusalem. The seer then sees a new creation: a new sky and new earth along with a new Jerusalem (21:1-5). Up in the sky, a sky servant shows John the Lamb's bride, the new Jerusalem (21:9--22:6).

The work ends with multiple attestation as to its veracity. The first attestation is by John (21:8). Upon seeing/hearing all this, the prophet attempts once more (see 19:10) to worship the sky servant, but is again repulsed (22:8-9). Then by God (22:13). Then by Jesus (22:16). The author concludes the whole with an ending typical of a letter (22:19-21).

3.1. A Sky Map for John's Revelation

With the general tour guide for John's Revelation in hand, I now offer a cursory overview of the types of celestial bodies and beings which the seer encountered. In this sky map, the commonly used, modern names of the constellations and stars are presented. Evidence for singling out the given star sets in this map as well as a fuller treatment of each sector is presented in Malina 1995. Here the sky map is offered for general orientation and quick reference.

Sector 1: The Cosmic Role of Jesus the Messiah

In the sky: a humanoid constellation

Where: over where the seer was situated, Patmos

When: some time before 70 A.D.

Sector 2: How God Controls the Universe and Deals with Israel

In the sky:

Set 1: constellations: Throne, Aries Leo, Taurus, Scorpio-man, Thunderbird, 24 Decans

Set 2: four comets: Horses from E, S, N, W,-influenced by Jupiter (white), Mars (red), Mercury (black), Venus (pale white) -sent out over 4 years in sequence: year of Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio

Set 3: constellation Altar, Milky Way

+*Set 4:* seven comets: Trumpets; -Falling Star, winged Archers, Centaurs -sky location: Abyss by Altar; Sky River -Colossal Sky Servant, 24 Decans, Temple in the Sky

Where: over Land of Israel in general, specifically over Jerusalem

When: before the total destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Sector 3: The Cosmos Before the Flood: Why the Present Condition*In the sky:**Set 1:* constellations: Pregnant Virgo, old Scorpio (Libra plus Scorpio), Cosmic Child, Orion*Where:* some chaotic wilderness*When:* before Creation is complete*Set 2:* constellations: Cetus, Lupus, Triangle*Where:* over the antediluvian earth, probably Mesopotamia*When:* before the Flood*Set 3:* constellation: Aries rising over celestial Zion*Where:* around the Throne*When:* sometime before the Flood*Set 4:* humanoid constellation preceded by three sky servants and followed by three sky servants wielding sickle shaped comets,*Where:* over the earth and around the City (= Babylon)*When:* before the Flood*Set 5:* seven sky servants at Sea of Glass*Where:* in the sky over the earth*When:* before the Flood*Set 6:* six bowl shaped comets, Altar; old Scorpio, Cetus and Lupus, Sun, Frog stars,*Where:* in the sky over the earth*When:* before the Flood*Set 7:* seventh bowl shaped comet*Where:* in the sky over the earth into three**Sector 4: The First Postdiluvian City of Humankind: Babel and Its Fate***In the sky:**Set 1:* Venus setting over Cetus plus Jupiter*Where:* in the wilderness, at Babylon*When:* right after the Flood*Set 2:* Destruction and Lamentation*Where:* in the wilderness, at Babylon*When:* right after the Flood*Set 3:* Throne, 24 Decans, 4 Living Beings, Wedding of the Lamb*Where:* in the sky*When:* after the destruction of Babel

Set 4: White Horse comet, controlled by humanoid constellation

Sky army and comets, Cetus and Lupus, sky Abyss

When: at time of destruction of the two prehistoric constellations

Set 5: old Scorpio, sky Abyss, Milky Way

Where: in the sky

When: when old Scorpio's influence put in abeyance

Set 6: Gog, Magog, old Scorpio

Where: between sky and earth

When: when Jerusalem was destroyed

Set 7: Throne, Death-and-Hades, Abyss

Where: in the sky

When: final judgment by God

Sector 5: The Final City of Humankind: Celestial Jerusalem

In the sky:

Set 1: the astral Jerusalem, the Wedding of the Gods

Where: in the sky: descending

When: already now

Set 2: The Throne of God and the Lamb, Tree of Life

Where: in the sky

When: already now

Such then is the general conspectus of the types of celestial formations encountered by the seer during his sky visions and sky trips.

4. How John's Scenarios Persuaded

The usual interpretation of the scenarios of Revelation are premised on allegory. The features that the prophet beholds would all stand for something else.⁴ There is really little, if anything, in the work as a whole that commends this approach, for the work has straightforward astral meaning. Now, as astral prophecy how would John's work persuade. First of all, it would persuade by revealing what God has set in the sky at creation. Since that is when the arrangement of the sky had been completed, the

4. There are in fact three passages where the seer's visions are clarified, but in only two are told that what the seer sees stands for something else: in 1:20 where the cosmic Jesus himself explains the meaning of the seven stars as sky messengers and the celestial planetary menorah as seven churches! Yet this may not be an allegory at all, simply an identification of star clusters. Yet there is a sure instance of allegorical explanation in 17:8-18 (while the elder's explanation in 7:13-17 non-allegorical). Perhaps it is the allegory at 17:8-18 that has influenced some allegorical view of 1:20 and contaminated the approach to the whole work. Yet in antiquity such allegorical explanation was rather usual in the astronomicals of those deviants labeled as 'heretics' (noted by Hippolytus, cited previously).

skyscapes and their impact have the certainty of inevitability. Secondly, the work would persuade by informing its readers and listeners of the celestial indicators controlling the destruction of 'the city in which their Lord was crucified,' Jerusalem. Thirdly, the persuasive force in revealing the fate of the first post-diluvial city consisted in the understanding it provided about what to expect from cities and city-empires, and about what to expect of life in the final city arranged by God. Fourthly, the work persuades by authoritatively informing about the ancient inevitable roots of contemporary social unrest, thus providing both assurance of the demise of that unrest and confidence in the positive outcomes of it all. God is in charge. John makes known how God runs the cosmos. The cosmic Lamb is already of great significance in cosmic events. This cosmic Lamb, Jesus the Messiah, will exercise power on behalf of his own as inevitably as the constellation of the Lamb must return to its original position in the sky at the time of the reconstitution of the universe, the position it occupied at that very first time when God called it into existence.

Surely a work as pregnant with theological imagery as this one can be further unpacked. Yet suffice it to note that astral prophecy succeeds admirably in the specific task set forth by the author of the work: to allay unease due to deception, to immunize his fellow Christians against the lies and deceits with which they are faced. From John's narrative of events, his contemporaries learned why things turned out the way they did rather than any other way. They learned what was the point of it all. And above all, they learned what they should do about it? With their newly acquired certainty, they could endure in the cosmic comfort provided by God's sure rule and the faithful role of Jesus the Messiah. As they emerged from the scenarios unfolded in John's narrative and gazed at the star-filled sky overhead, Christians would be able to see in new ways, hence to act in the world in new ways. This undoubtedly was the point behind the original impulse to tell the story of star visions and sky journeys as the author of the book of Revelation does.

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