The Composition and Structure of the Book of Revelation

Introduction

The lack of clarity and scholarly consensus regarding the interpretation of the Book of Revelation is nowhere more apparent than in attempts to understand how the main part of the text is composed. In the 1970's, the Yale scholar Adela Yarbro Collins famously observed: "In current research on the book of Revelation, there is very little consensus on the overall structure of the work and how that structure should be interpreted. There are as many outlines of the book as there are interpreters".[1] Summing up the progress 30 years later, the French scholar Pierre Prigent wrote: "important studies have been devoted in recent years to the quest for the outline of Revelation. These efforts testify to a courage and a hopefulness that cannot avoid a certain degree of naïveté: can one reasonably expect today to discover a structure that has remained elusive for so long, after so many attempts that critical review has always ended up rejecting? But this sense of discouragement must not evolve into laziness: the task of exegesis never remains entirely without results. One is therefore obliged to enter into this overly plowed field with the hope of gleaning some fruits".[2] After surveying recent attempts, he aptly refers to this field as "the troubling sphere of subjectivity" and warns against over-interpretation or, in his own poetic way, against "yielding to the fever of calculations with no longer any clear understanding of whether or not they are solely the products of our intellectual virtuosity". Instead, he gives the following common-sense working principle: "A structure, an outline (and therefore an intention) should only be identified if it appears clearly. It should leap out before our eyes, or rather our ears, for it should not be forgotten that the book of Revelation was intended to be read aloud in public".[3]

This scholarly reflection on the excesses of scholarship in this area not only warns us to try, as much as possible, to keep our investigation simple and clear, but also forces us to question our own intention. What are the fruits that can be gleaned from this "overly plowed field"? What precisely has been, or is to be, gained from these studies on the composition and structure of this text?

The most important finding so far has been the opposite of what we would expect: the rediscovery of the literary unity of the Book of Revelation. Modern scholarship has never taken this for granted, as the history of interpretation shows. For the first 100 years of critical research on this book, it was confidently assumed to have been a compilation of pre-existing and ill-assorted sources, redacted at different times by a more or less competent editor, or editors. Undoubtedly the most outstanding example of this approach is the commentary of R.H. Charles, who explained the apparent discontinuities in Rev 20 as the editorial work of "a faithful but unintelligent disciple".[4] The last serious source-critical study appeared in the late 1990's, in the commentary by David Aune,[5] but by this time the tide had turned and scholars were no longer able to accept the

[1] Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2001; 8.
[2] Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, Eng Trans. Wendy Pradels, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001; 93.
[3] Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 96-7.
[4] R.H. Charles, *The Book of Revelation*, International Critical Commentary, vol. II, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920, 147.
[5] David Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary, Dallas TX: Word Books, 1997, cxviii-cxxxiv.

assumptions of this approach. Compelling criticisms against Aune's compositional theory have been written by both Pierre Prigent and Ian Paul.[6] Since the 1980's, scholars have been offering more and more evidence of the single authorship and literary unity of the text, as well as the literary techniques of cross-references ('interlinking') and 'interlocking' which the author has used to unite its different elements.[7]

At the same time, there has been a parallel revaluation of the significance of the text's structural dimension. Importing the insights of structural analysis, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza was a pioneer in this development: "The unitary composition of Rev. does not result from a final redactor's arbitrary compilation but from the author's theological conception and literary composition. An interpretation of Rev., therefore, must not only highlight the theological themes and intentions of the author but also show how he embodied his theology in a unique fusion of content and form… Against the old dichotomy of content and form, the New Criticism maintains that the form is not a container for the content but the patterning and arrangement of it. If one changes the order of a text one changes its meaning."[8] These insights on the hermeneutical significance of textual composition remain valid to this day, judging by the following affirmation in a recent commentary on the Book of Revelation: "As always, the text's form is not a mere container of content but is meaningful in itself. The medium conveys the message".[9]

Compared to the situation 50 years ago, then, substantial gains have been made: the text is no longer submitted to routine surgery and anatomical dissection in attempts to explain its existence, but is now treated as the product of a single author, who worked diligently to create a unified text, whose many parts relate to each other and work together in a meaningful way. Although it would be going too far to claim that the text's structure is the key to discovering the meaning of the text, it would be no exaggeration to say that the meaning of the text is reflected in its structure, which then helps to confirm and double-check its meaning. Herein lies the value of compositional studies, including the present one.

How the Text *was* Composed

The two terms 'composition' and 'structure' are often used synonymously, but there is a slight difference in meaning that needs to be explained: 'structure' refers to the form of the text as it is now, whereas 'composition' refers not only to this present form, but also to the process whereby it reached the present form. In brief, composition is a broader term that refers not only to how the text is composed now (its structure), but how it was composed originally. The importance of this difference is that a study on the composition of the Book of Revelation must therefore

[6] Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 84-92; Ian Paul, 'Source, Structure, and Composition in the Book of Revelation', *The Book of Revelation: Currents in British Research on the Apocalypse*, eds G.V. Allen, I. Paul, S.P. Woodman, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015; 41-54.
[7] Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 16-18; R. J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993, 9; Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, New York, Oxford: OUP, 1990; 37-73.
[8] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985; 159.
[9] Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 12-22*, Vol 2, International Theological Commentary, London, New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018; 13.

include both aspects: not only an account of its formation but also a description of its final structure. It should deal with how it *was* composed, as well as how it *is* composed.

In his text, the author states clearly and repeatedly that, in obedience to divine imperative, he wrote down what he saw and heard while experiencing a supernatural vision or visions (Rev 1,1.11.19; 4,1; 17,7; 21,9-10; 22,8), which he variously calls a 'Revelation' (1,1), 'Word of God and Witness of Jesus' (1,2.9) or just 'prophecy' (1,3; 22,7.10). The visionary quality of his work is manifest not only in the symbolic character of its content, but also in the frequent use of the verbs "and I saw" or "and I heard" to introduce new sections of his vision. Furthermore, the author's frequent use of the expressions "after this" and "after these things" (Rev 4,1; 7,1.9; 15,5; 18,1;19,1) to join larger sections of text, and his continuous use of the conjunction "and" for joining the smaller units, reflecting the 'waw consecutive' of ancient Hebrew narrative style, gives the impression that the entire text is a narration of successive events. So strong is this impression that there is now a scholarly consensus in favour of the linguistic, literary and narrative unity of the Book of Revelation, as it has come down to us.[10] Richard Bauckham surely speaks for most when he says the book of Revelation is "one of the most unified works in the New Testament."[11] Since its literary features are closely linked to the foundational visionary material, as noted above, it is a short step to argue from literary unity to visionary unity and agree with Bauckham when he writes: "Revelation, by contrast, is really (from 1:10 to 22:6) a single vision".[12]

If there is still any doubt that the author is describing a spiritual and prophetic experience granted to him, there are numerous descriptions in the text which solidify that impression: on four different occasions, he found himself 'in the Spirit', which is to say spiritually elevated and enlightened (1,10) or lifted up (4,1) or carried away (17,3; 21,10). Immediately after the opening vision, all his strength leaves him and he falls 'as if dead' from fear (1,17), only to be restored by the Risen Christ. On countless other occasions, the author converses with angels and other heavenly figures. In the centre of the book, he receives a renewal of his prophetic calling and so becomes an active participant in his own vision (10,11–11,2)—a vision that extends spatially from the earth up to God's throne in heaven and down to the abyss, and temporally from the birth of Christ up to the final judgment at the end of history and beyond, to the renewal and transformation of creation.

In summary, the Book of Revelation presents itself as the precise and complete account of a spiritual or mystical experience granted to the human author. Under divine instruction, John was fully conscious but physically passive, although in the initial stage he was able to write what he saw and heard. He received visions, heard locutions, and experienced sensations which touched all five senses in a spiritual way. He also experienced ecstasy, rapture, and spiritual transport, and received prophetic revelations which regard all the world and its peoples up to, and beyond, the end of the present age, He recorded all these things in obedience to a command from the Risen

[10] Cf. L.L.Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 37-73; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cvii-cx. For other authors, see Antoninus King Wai Siew, *The War Between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiastic Reading of Revelation 11.1-14.5*, LNTS 283; London: T & T Clark 2005; 8-10 and note 15.
[11] Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy,* 1, n. 1.
[12] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, Cambridge: CUP, 1993; 10.

Christ (1,19) and the account of this extraordinary experience forms the substance of the Book of Revelation.[13]

Faced with such a wealth of detail describing the literary origin of the Book of Revelation as an intense ecstatic and spiritual experience, there are two possible reactions:

1. To dismiss it completely out of ignorance of mystical phenomena and disbelief in the Godhead, despite their foundational role in Revealed Religion and Sacred Scripture.
2. To accept the existence of God and the importance of mystical phenomena, but to reject the author's claim to have written his book as an account of a genuine spiritual experience that was granted to him.

To those who hold the first of these two views, little can be said. One could suggest reading *Varieties of Religious Experience*, by the early 20th century psychologist William James, in the hope that it may open the window on a dimension of human life that they have evidently overlooked or ignored. Those raised in Western Culture may benefit from reading criticism of Sigmund Freud's reductionist and mechanistic model of the soul, for Freud's incapacity to conceive of the soul as open to, and strongly influenced by, spiritual experience has helped to close the minds of millions of people over the last century. Freud's rupture with Carl Jung in 1912 can be understood as a direct consequence of his narrow conceptual framework, aided by a certain 'psychological resistance' to belief in a 'Supreme Being'.[14] Jung went on to devote most of his professional life to investigate, in his own way, the relationship between spiritual experience and psychological wholeness. To this group of deniers, one might usefully suggest close attention to Freud's many critics, including Carl Jung, not to mention more modern works on mysticism.

Among modern biblical scholars, however, the second view is more prevalent, due to a skeptical attitude, widespread in academic circles, towards the author's claims. The author may have claimed to write his book as an account of a spiritual experience, and that its words are faithful and true (Rev 19,9; 22,6) and that those who contemplate them are blessed (1,3; 22,7), but for the skeptics this is just a 'way of speaking', a 'literary fiction', to give his writing the aura of authority. According to this view, what is described as a 'revelation' of heavenly mysteries obtained through spiritual experience is really just a creative invention of the author's imagination, springing from contemplation of the scriptures and expressed in traditional apocalyptic style—all to give it the look of a genuine revelation and, again, lend it an aura of authority.

The skeptic's argument derives from the indisputable affinity of the Book of Revelation with other works of the same 'apocalyptic genre'—a group of Jewish writings from antiquity (250 BCE to 200 CE) that were once, in the past, defined by certain common characteristics, which included the device of 'pseudonymity'—attributing the authorship of the work to a famous figure

[13] It is important, at this stage, to point out the gulf, unbridgeable by the human will, between ordinary states of prayer/inspiration and mystic or extraordinary states. This gulf is actually a part of the definition of mystical states: "We apply the word mystic to those supernatural acts or states which our own industry is powerless to produce, even in a low degree, even momentarily", Augustin Poulain SJ, *The Graces of Interior Prayer: A Treatise on Mystical Theology*, Eng trans of *Des Grâces d'Oraison* (1901), Caritas Publishing, 2016; Part I, ch. 1, 1-6.

[14] Cf. Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, ed Aniela Jaffé, Eng trans Richard and Clara Winston, New York: Vintage Books, 1961-63; 163-9; idem, *Symbols of Transformation*, Eng trans R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series, Collected Works, Vol 5, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1976; Foreward to Fourth (Swiss) Edition, xxiii-xxvi; Sigmund Freud, *Origins of Religion: Moses and Monotheism*, Vol 13, Penguin Freud Library, London: Penguin, 1990; 370-1.

from the past. Many of these writings contain reports of spiritual experiences involving the revelation of heavenly mysteries, described in a stereotyped and traditional way similar to the account in the Book of Revelation.[15] So, on the basis of its association with other members of this genre, several modern scholars assumed the Book of Revelation was also written pseudonymously.[16] Although the motives for attributing these writings to a celebrated personality from the past are still debated by modern scholars,[17] the effect of this false attribution of authorship has been to cast a cloud over the authenticity of the works in their entirety.[18] Basically, the pseudonymous attribution of the vast majority of apocalyptic writings has negatively impacted the scholarly appraisal of their truth value, including that of the Book of Revelation.[19]

However, concerning the Book of Revelation in particular, the skeptic's argument has been outdated by new developments. Firstly, the definition of an apocalypse was redefined in 1979 with the publication of the results of the Society of Biblical Literature's Genres Project on Apocalypse, led by John J. Collins, and the new definition does not include pseudonymity as one of the defining characteristics of the genre.[20] A work can be a true apocalypse, arguably even more true,

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[15] It should be stressed that some of the earliest researchers, above all R.H. Charles, accepted the authenticity of the apocalypses without question, equating their inspiration with that of prophecy (*Eschatology: The Doctrine of a Future Life*, New York: Schocken Books, 1963; 174-77). Half a century later, the issue was debated, and still maintained by D.S. Russell, "To distinguish between the two (conventional inspiration of a literary kind and genuine religious experience) is no easy matter, but such an examination indicates that there is probably more evidence of genuine inspiration in the apocalyptic writers than might at first be imagined", *Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964; 158-178, quote from 159. Fifty years later still, Michael Stone and Christopher Rowland are among the few modern scholars still holding the view that apocalypses may describe authentic religious experience, cf. Michael Stone, *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views*, Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2011; 91-96 (reprint of his 'Reconsideration of Apocalyptic Visions', *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol 96:2 [April 2003], 167-80) and Christopher Rowland with Patricia Gibbons and Vicente Dobroruka 'Visionary Experience in Ancient Judaism and Christianity', in *Paradise Now: Essays in Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, April De Conick ed., Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2006; 41-56.

[16] For the names, see Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2014; 67-8. Rev Prof Ugo Vanni SJ, the highly influential Catholic scholar, was among these, cf. *L'Apocalisse: Ermeneutica, Esegesi, Teologia*, Associazione Biblica Italiana, Supplementi alla Rivista Biblica 17, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, pp. 76 and 117.

[17] Cf. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 39-40.

[18] Christopher Rowland states it clearly as follows: "One of the reasons why the Jewish apocalypses have not seemed to be a likely source of authentic visions is the fact that without exception all these visions are said to have been given to figures of the past. The device of pseudonymity has merely increased suspicions that we are dealing in the apocalypses with literary constructions which have little or no contact with actual experience… the stories of the heavenly journeys of patriarchs and prophets is so obviously fictitious that one is tempted to regard the whole corpus of apocalyptic literature as little more than the flights of fancy of certain individuals with a particular theological axe to grand. The question inevitably arises how we are to relate the phenomenon of pseudonymity to the indications that apocalyptic literature does in fact contain relics of visionary experience", *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, 240.

[19] Peter Schäfer unintentionally illustrates the point: "Falsehood is a completely inappropriate (not to say false) category. Invoking this category means that one fails to understand the concept of pseudepigraphy. The authors of ascent apocalypses clearly believed that their heroes (that is, they themselves) had certain experiences, but this does not necessarily mean that these experiences were genuine experiences and not literary constructs", *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009; 338. He seems to be saying that the author's religious experience is remote from, and barely related to, his literary reconstruction described in traditional style. In other words, the pseudonymous apocalypse is like a novel: as a novel may take aspects of experience and dramatize them in a certain way, so with the apocalyptist in his account. And no one would think of criticizing a novel for being false, because if it were true it would not be called a novel. However, Schäfer does not account for the fact that there are apocalypses, like those of John and Hermas, which are not pseudonymous and do claim to speak the truth (Rev 19,9; 22,6).

[20] John J. Collins, 'Pseudonymity, Historical Reviews and the Genre of the Revelation of John', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 39, (1977): 329-343; J.J.Collins, ed., Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre, *Semeia* 14; Missoula, MT:

without being pseudonymous, the main examples being the Book of Revelation and the Shepherd of Hermas.

Secondly, since 1984 Adela Yarbro Collins has argued cogently against the use of pseudonymity in the Book of Revelation and her arguments have been accepted by the majority: "In modern times, some scholars have argued that the book of Revelation was written pseudonymously, because pseudonymity is a typical feature of ancient Jewish apocalypses. This argument is not compelling because there was a revival of prophecy among the followers of Jesus, which led, for a short time at least, to the willingness to prophesy and write books of prophecy in one's own name. The apocalyptic work from the second century called The Shepherd of Hermas, for example, was written by a Christian in Rome, Hermas, in his own name. Another reason that this argument is unpersuasive is that the author would probably have taken care to specify more clearly that he was an apostle or a disciple of the Lord, if he had intended to be so recognized".[21] And so if the author of the text speaks truthfully about his name and about his location at the time of writing—the Island of Patmos—there is no *a priori* rationale for doubting his account of the text's origins in a supernatural revelation, which is to say by means of an extraordinary or mystical state of prayer.

Having overcome the false accusation of pseudonymity, however, we are sadly no closer to acknowledging the supernatural origins of the Book of Revelation. John J. Collins, author of a hugely influential introduction to Jewish apocalyptic literature, skips the issue by blurring the difference between supernatural revelation and inspired literary activity: "The contrast between 'authentic religious experience' and literary activity may be overdrawn. The composition of highly symbolic literature involves a vivid use of the imagination, which may be difficult to distinguish from visionary experience in any case".[22] In a similar way, Ugo Vanni proposes the author's conscious state was somewhere between ordinary inspiration and non-ecstatic mysticism by identifying it with a liturgical experience.[23] The tendency here is not only to confuse ordinary states of prayer and/or inspiration with mystical states,[24] but also to play down the mystical origin

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Scholars Press, 1979, quoted in John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 1998; 4-5: "The thesis presented in *Semeia* 14 is that a corpus of texts that has been traditionally called "apocalyptic" does indeed share a significant cluster of traits that distinguish it from other works. Specifically, an apocalypse is defined as: "*a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world*". This definition has withstood well the test of time, cf. idem, *Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigraphy: On Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2015; 1-20.

[21] *Encyclopedia of Apocalyptism*, vol 1, 385; also Adela Yarbro Collins in *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984; 27-8. For other arguments, see Koester, *Revelation*, 106-7.

[22] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 40.

[23] "En vue d'une approche mystique de l'Apocalisse—qui n'est pas celle d'extases et de visions présumées—il faut tenir compte de la situation d'une expérience liturgique, du langage typique et du symbolisme de l'auteur qui réussit à communiquer ainsi un sens qui s'ajoute au discours conceptual", Ugo Vanni, *Gregorianum*, Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 79/1 (1998), 28 (Résumé). And in the same article, "Un esame più ravvicinato porta ad approfondire. Lo stato estatico di cui si è parlato è, di per sè, un contatto in profondita con lo Spirito, i cui effetti esigono di essere ulteriormente precisati. Le visioni sono anzitutto un espediente letterario tramite il quale l'autore apocalittico comunica il suo mesaggio in termini simbolici. Non c'è nell'Apocalisse un misticismo scontato, di primo mano. Ma proprio il contatto con lo Spirito, il linguaggio usato e il simbolismo introducono a quella che è una esperienza mistica vera e propria, tipica dell'Apocalisse. Quanto stiamo vedendo richiede alcune precisazioni. Anzitutto occorre tener presente la situazione liturgica nella quale è collocate il testo dell'Apocalisse….", op. cit. 6.

[24] See n. 13.

of the Book of Revelation on the grounds that the end product is more or less the same as a piece of inspired creative writing.

The tendency to play down the ecstatic mystical origin of the Book of Revelation may indeed be a reflection of the author's original intent, for although the experience he describes must have been extraordinary, unique, intense, and 'out-of-this-world' in the fullest sense of the words, his description of it is extremely economical, not dwelling on the phenomenon itself, but rather on the content of the visions and auditions presented to him.[25] The stereotyped language of traditional apocalyptic helps him, in this respect, to downplay the details of the experience, in order to direct attention to its content—the divine message that he was told to transmit to the churches.[26]

However, the fact that the author deliberately plays down the description of his mystical experience in order to stress its prophetic content[27] is not to deny that it occurred and that it generated the Book of Revelation. This is certainly not the same as saying that there is little difference between 'authentic religious experience' and inspired literary activity, as Collins has proposed. Perhaps the historico-critical scholar is not able to discern any difference, but to the prophet, the mystic, the mystical theologian and to the churches, there is a huge gulf between the fallible output of the human imagination, even if inspired and scripturally saturated, and the infallible outpourings of divine religious experience.[28] More significantly, in addition to the question of fallibility, there is an issue of credibility. The Book of Revelation claims to contain true God-given insight into the present and future states of the universe and this claim has been endorsed by generations of Church leaders and faithful. If this claim is proven to be untrue, then the writing is a false prophecy calling for immediate rejection, avoidance and contempt. There is no middle ground here for those to whom the Book of Revelation was originally addressed and entrusted: the Church faithful.

So, although on a literary and historical level, it may matter little whether the Book of Revelation is the fruit of 'authentic religious experience' or a work of creative human imagination, it is a matter of great importance on the spiritual, moral and theological level. And so it is noteworthy that there are indeed scholars who lean towards the former. The pioneer of this

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[25] Cf. Pierre Prigent, in his comments on the expression "in the spirit" (Rev 1,10) writes: "The expression occurs again at 4:2 (cf. also 17,3 and 21:10). It undoubtedly refers to a phenomenon more or less resembling that of ecstasy. In similar fashion Peter (Acts 11:5), after having prayed, fell into ecstasy and had a vision. Likewise Paul (Acts 22,17, the narratives of his conversion, and 2Cor 12:1ff). As in these texts, we note here the moderation in tone: no importance is given to the manner in which the ecstasy occurs; the phenomenon does not elicit even the slightest commentary; only the vision thus revealed and the reality of its inspiration are of importance", *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 128.

[26] Even Martha Himmelfarb recognizes that "Conventional language, then, does not preclude actual visionary experience" (*Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, New York/Oxford: OUP, 1993; 113), even though she finally rejects the mystical origin of the ascents in the pseudonymous apocalypses: "Taking account of how they [the authors] worked argues for reading the apocalypses not as fictionalized accounts of personal experiences but as works of fiction from start to finish, although the authors themselves would never have accepted this anachronistic labeling of the genre in which they wrote", *Ascent to Heaven,* 113.

[27] The downplaying of mystical experience is also the reason for Paul's preference to boast of his weaknesses (2Cor 12,1-10), where his description of the experience suddenly changes to the third person (2Cor 12,2-4). This raises the possibility, so far not discussed in the literature as far as I am aware, that an important reason for using the device of 'pseudonymity' was to prevent boasting and preserve the seer-author's humility.

[28] See n. 13. This is not to suggest that all 'the outpourings of divine religious experience' are always infallible, for discernment is especially necessary in this area, cf. Poulain's *Graces of Interior Prayer*, Part IV, pp 273-363. But it does mean that a work that has been discerned and approved by the early Church and then placed in the New Testament Canon can reasonably be expected to have the necessary properties of infallibility.

understanding in the English-speaking world is Christopher Rowland, who in his book "The Open Heaven" builds on the work of Johannes Lindblom, the German scholar of ancient Israelite prophecy.[29]

Visionary Evidence

In his chapter 'Towards an Understanding of the Origins of Apocalyptic', Rowland surveys the evidence of mystical experience in various apocalyptic texts, noting the occasional descriptive reference to the preparations (fasting, prayer, mourning) or internal sensations (cold or heat, vertical and horizontal movement) of religious experience and their similarity to descriptions in later mystical writings. He concludes "The likelihood is…that we have indications here of the experiences of early Jewish visionaries". He then qualifies these observations, "That is not to suggest, however, that all apocalyptic literature can be explained in this way. There are clear signs that some of the visionary material now found in the apocalypses has been subject to considerable redactional activity (e.g. 4 Ezra 11–12), so that often it is impossible to discern the character of an original vision. Indeed, in some instances one must suppose that what purports to be a vision is in fact an artificial construction which has been put together to coincide exactly with the message which the seer wants to get across to the readers. But the point should be made that it cannot be assumed without further investigation that all the visions in the apocalypses arose in this way. It is necessary, therefore, to judge each vision on its merits".[30] This quickly leads Rowland "to try to work towards some kind of criterion for separating out the authentic visions which are contained in the apocalypses".[31]

Choosing to focus on the Book of Revelation for this purpose, because it is not complicated by the device of pseudonymity, Rowland affirms: "The fact that we can be almost certain that we have the writing of an individual who lived in the first century AD rather than the fictitious claims of the Jewish apocalypses that they contain the experiences of men who lived long ago makes Revelation a natural place to start our discussion of this issue. Denial of the claim of the book to contain actual visionary experiences has been widespread, but there have been those who have been prepared to support its claim to incorporate the products of visionary experience." As one of these, Johannes Lindblom defined his own criteria for authentic visionary experience, listed as follows by Rowland: "(i) spontaneity; (ii) concise visions which are only expanded later; (iii) dreamlike character of the experience: the vision may be clear in its detail but as a whole has an unreal and fantastic quality; (iv) the vision is entirely fresh and unsophisticated in its form and content; (v) the vision concerns things on an other-worldly plane; (vi) there are difficulties in expressing the experience in words; (vii) the experience has emotional side-effects; and (viii)

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[29] Christopher Rowland, *Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, New York: Crossroad, 1982; 235-40; J. Lindblom, *Gesichte und Offenbarungen*, Lund, 1968. There is only one other biblical scholar whose work has made an impression in this field, Michael Stone. However, Stone's research has concentrated on the Pseudepigrapha, and particularly on 4Ezra, where he has argued that the author's account is of a genuine religious experience because it realistically describes his spiritual transformation and this is vital to the understanding his work. A good summary can be found in Michael E. Stone, *Ancient Judaism, New Visions and Views*, Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2011; 90-109; *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra*, Hermeneia Series, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990; 32-33. Reference to his writings will be made where appropriate.

[30] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 234.

[31] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 235.

mention is made of the date and place of the vision".[32] According to these criteria, Lindblom then identified authentic visionary material in 11 short passages in the text of Revelation, considering the rest to be "the result of more conventional literary activity".[33] Rightly excluding two of these criteria, (i) and (v),[34] Rowland moves on to propose a criterion of his own: the absence of any signs of conscious interference complicating a vision whose originality is evident in the way familiar images are re-envisioned with new elements and in novel combinations. The authentic vision has a certain autonomy and independence (or transcendence) from the one who experiences and records it. Rowland illustrates his new criterion with an analysis of the vision in Rev 17, showing how the vision (Rev 17,3-6) contains an abundance of novel imagery, which leaves the seer in a state of awe and wonder, not grasping what exactly he saw: "And seeing her I was struck with great wonder" (Rev 17,6), whereupon the angel interprets a few of the more salient aspects, but leaves most of the vision unexplained. Although Rowland initially presents the interpretations (Rev 17,7-18) as the author's own post-visionary reflections, he later modifies this: "No doubt the visionary believed that the interpretation itself was just as much under the influence of divine guidance as the original vision. Although the part which reflection played on the original vision was probably considerable, the evidence which we possess of the apocalyptic seer preparing himself to learn more about the vision which he has already seen suggests that he considered the reflective process itself and the answers which emerged equally the results of divine guidance".[35] Clearly, there is no discontinuity in the vision report, when the seer reports the angel's interpretation (17,7-18), or that of the elder in heaven (5,5; 7,13-15), or that of 'one like a son of man' (1,20), and he is still very much 'in the Spirit'. One can only add that it would be a serious mistake to attribute to the human author what the human author himself attributes to the interpreting angel, even though it offers a tempting way to demystify the text somewhat, and bring it down to a more human level.

Returning to Rowland's criteria, it is the aspect of untampered surplus signification, beyond the author's control and interference, that seems to appeal to Rowland as a reliable criterion of authentic visionary material: "While there are parallels to many of the images used in Revelation, one cannot fail to be impressed by the remarkable freshness of the visions and the lack of any labored endeavours to make sure that the images say all that the author wishes them to. Bizarre and extravagant the imagery may be, but it lacks any hint of the self-conscious desire to make these images as relevant as possible".[36]

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[32] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 235.

[33] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 235; these were Rev 1.9-20; 4,1-5. 8; 11,19; 12,13-18; 15,1-4; 15,5-8; 19,9-10; 19,11-16; 19,17-18; 22,8. At this point Rowland notes "On the basis of the criteria which he enunciated it is difficult to see why he is so reluctant to limit the quantity of authentic visionary material to this relatively small amount. Although one does not want to deny the existence of a considerable degree of redaction in the book as we have it, there seems no reason *not [my correction]* to suppose that the bulk of the material in it did actually originate in a series of visions" n. 48, op. cit. 482.

[34] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 236. In brief, spontaneity (i) is rejected because there is evidence of prior preparation; other-worldliness (v) is excluded because this-worldly visions are also included (e.g., Rev 11,3-13).

[35] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 239-40.

[36] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 238-9. And indeed some of the earliest reactions to the Book of Revelation confirm that there was no noticeable effort, by the author or by anyone else, to make it relevant, or even comprehensible. For example, Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria (c. 250 CE) tells us that "Some of our predecessors rejected the book and pulled it entirely to pieces, criticizing it chapter by chapter, pronouncing it unintelligible and illogical and false. They say it is not John's and is not a revelation at all, since it is heavily veiled by its thick curtain of incomprehensibility", Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, VII.25, quoted here from: *History of the Church*, Eng. trans. G.A. Wiliamson, Rev. ed.

The criteria of both Lindblom and Rowland can now usefully be combined and taken to their ultimate conclusion.[37] According to these two scholars, the characteristics of the authentic visionary material in the text can be listed as follows: known author, date or place of occurrence; difficulty to express the experience in words (but helped by use of stereotyped expressions); affecting the seer's emotions; concise and condensed; fresh and clear, with a surrealistic quality ('unreal and dream-like'); unsophisticated, with surplus uninterpreted meaning; untampered and uncomplicated by author's intentional interference.

On reading this check list of features one wonders whether there is any part of the Book of Revelation that does not score highly on all or most of them. Taken together, they seem to describe the unique and somewhat strange character of the entire book. The very fact that scholars have variously described its imagery as bizarre,[38] extravagant,[39] surreal,[40] vivid and often grotesque,[41] strange and sometimes weird or even monstrous,[42] etc., can therefore be included as evidence for the divine authenticity of its visions, according to the criteria above. A more human approach would certainly have made extensive modifications, and added much more explanatory material. Add this to the observation, stated in the introduction, that the visions in the Book of Revelation all form part of a single multifaceted vision, and there is a strong impression that no author, no matter how creative his imagination, would, or even could, have set out to willfully create such "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma",[43] and then not even attempt to render it more comprehensible for his readers. The enigmatic character of the almost-seamlessly united visionary sequence underlying the entire Book of Revelation is the most patent sign that it is the product of an authentic mystical experience.[44]

Andrew Louth, London: Penguin Classics, 1989; 240. To those expecting the antichrist, Irenaeus (c. 180 CE) felt the need to mention the silence of the Book of Revelation: "Had there been any need for his name to be openly announced at the present time, it would have been stated by the one who saw the actual revelation. For it was seen not a long time back, but almost in my own lifetime, at the end of Domitian's reign", op. cit. 81 (*Against Heresies*, III, 18.2-3; *apud* Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 18.3).

[37] Michael Stone is less certain about the possibility of creating useful criteria for the pseudepigraphic apocalypses, though does not rule it out: "We cannot yet (and indeed may never be able to) provide a litmus tests that will tell us in which description in which work the author is relating his/her own experience through the seer and in which he/she is drawing on a transmitted pool of knowledge in describing what went on in the world of the pseudepigraphic author. However, perhaps reading the works with this factor in mind will itself lead to the emergence of tools or criteria to facilitate in this task. The consideration of the fourth vision of 4 Ezra is a good example of a relevant instance", *Ancient Judaism*, 108.

[38] John Sweet, 'Revelation' in *Early Christian Thought in its Jewish Context*, Eds. John Barclay and John Sweet, Cambridge: CUP 1996, 161.

[39] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 238.

[40] G. Biguzzi, 'A Figurative and Narrative Language Grammar of Revelation', *Novum Testamentum*, XLV, 4, (2003), 399.

[41] Ian Paul, 'The Book of Revelation: Image, Symbol and Metaphor', *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, Ed. Steve Moyse, Edinburgh/New York: T & T Clarke 2001, 131.

[42] H.B. Swete, *Apocalypse of John*, 3rd ed., London: Macmillan 1917, cxxxi.

[43] Sir Winston Churchill's expression for the role the Soviet Union might play in World War II (1939): "I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma, but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest."

[44] It is of note that one of the least attractive qualities of the text, its incomprehensibility, is that which confirms its authenticity. We have made a similar observation regarding authorship: it is precisely the unattractive Semitic quality of the language of the Greek text that, *contra* Dionysius of Alexandria (c. 250 CE), helps to confirm it was written by the Galilean Apostle called John.

One further criterion could be added to those of Lindblom and Rowland, perhaps the least obvious of all: the author shows a profound knowledge of the gradations of mystical experience in his description of the preparation, calling and progress of the 144,000 (Rev 7,1-9; 12,1-17; 14,1-5),[45] and this suggests that he himself had experienced these states. According to the descriptions in the text, his visionary experience alone, and its aftermath, would have been more than sufficient for him to personally identify with the spiritual calling and mission of the 144,000 celibate males described in his narrative.

This raises another important point, which touches on Michael Stone's criterion of 'spiritual transformation' as a sign of authentic religious experience.[46] Is it possible that the author of the Book of Revelation underwent a 'spiritual transformation' after his visionary experience on the Island of Patmos and, if so, are there signs of this in his text? For the answer to this question, we must turn to a passage that he certainly wrote after returning to Ephesus, in which he refers to his exile on Patmos in the past tense: "I, John, your brother and companion in the hardship and kingdom and endurance in Jesus, *was* on the island called Patmos because of the Word of God and the Witness of Jesus" (Rev 1,9). In the same passage, the author conveys a greeting to the seven churches in Asia from the Godhead, in an early formulation of the Holy Trinity (Rev 1,4-6), and then cites an interjection from the Almighty God himself (1,8). There are similar passages in the Epilogue that convey the author's supreme closeness to the Godhead (22,7.12-13.16.17.20), often acting as spokesman. Either these passages can be understood as a literary invention loaded with deception and/or presumption, or they can be seen as evidence that the author was indeed in a state of supreme divine union. Unless the reader has a very negative impression of the author's intent, the second option is certainly the most consistent with truth claims in the same passage (22,6), in which case it represents the author in a state of supreme divine union that endured long after his visionary experience on Patmos. And this, in and of itself, is good evidence of a 'spiritual transformation' that is well-documented in the mystical tradition.

Having experienced the ecstatic states indicated in the text by being 'in the Spirit'—ecstasy (1,10), rapture (4,1), and spiritual transport (17,3 and 21,10)—the author would, according to mystical tradition, have been spiritually prepared to enter into the highest state of divine union—a state that would exactly explain the divine interjections, despite the fact that he was no longer in a state of ecstasy. This mystical state is variously called 'spiritual marriage', transforming union', 'consummated union', 'supreme union' or, in Teresa of Avila's classification, 'the seventh mansion',[47] and is described as "a state in which the soul is habitually conscious of the divine cooperation in all her higher operations and in the depths of her being. No union of a more intimate kind can be imagined. This grace can be considered under another aspect, which gives a still higher idea of it: in concurring in our spiritual acts God makes them His own: He renders them his own; He renders them divine and shows that He does so. There is therefore a transformation of the higher faculties with regard to their manner of operation. The soul is aware that in the supernatural acts of her intellect, her love or her will, she participates in the divine life, in those analogous acts that are in God. This is the essential part of the spiritual marriage".[48]

[45] Cf. John Ben-Daniel, 'Towards a Mystical Interpretation of Revelation 12', *Revue Biblique*, Vol. 114-4 (2007), 594-614.
[46] See n. 29.
[47] Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, 259.
[48] Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, 262-3.

Another feature of this state of supreme union is a continual, or habitual, intellectual vision of the Godhead.[49] All this is important for understanding that, in the aftermath of his 'authentic religious experience' and until the end of his earthly life, the author remained in a permanent state of divine union, in which he possessed the supernatural gifts and the divine authority to write, revise, supplement and shape the account of his visions, so producing the text of the Book of Revelation as it has come down to us today.[50]

How the Text *is* Composed

Having established that the text *was* indeed composed by means of a genuine and extensive visionary experience granted to its author John, it is possible to move on to consider how this has resulted in the composition of the text as it stands today, that is to say in its present structure and outline.

The argument, presented above, that John wrote the Prologue and Epilogue of the Book of Revelation after his return to Ephesus in Autumn 96 CE, can be extended to the rest of the text, which everywhere shows evidence of editorial insertions, including divine interjections (e.g., 9,6.20-21; 13,9-10; 14,12-13; 16.15; 19,9-10; 20,6). This implies that he wrote the final text of his Book of Revelation after his return to Ephesus, no doubt using and incorporating the transcripts, notes and memories of the divine experience he had witnessed while he was on the Island of Patmos. Though the author would not have been in the same ecstatic state as for the original visionary material, according to the mystical doctrine referenced above he would have attained an even higher state of divine union, and was in this condition when he wrote the final text of his account of the entire revelation. This would have been an opportunity for him to re-live his visionary experience and to complete an inspired revision, recollection and contemplation of its content.

So, soon after his return to Ephesus, no more than a few months after he had been granted his divine revelation, [51] John wrote his near-seamless narrative of the entire revelation in his own Galilean Jewish Greek, with some assistance from a bilingual Aramaic-Greek speaker, using as a basis for his account the original visionary material that he had recorded at the time, in his own language, Aramaic, on scraps of leather, wood or papyrus.[52] The present text of the Book of Revelation should therefore be expected to contain both original visionary material and inspired

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[49] Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, 264-7.

[50] Poulain confirms that it would not be unusual for the author, John, in his old age, to have been granted both ecstatic mystical experiences and supreme union: "For with several saints, ecstasies have not seemed to diminish at the end of their life, and yet we may admit the probability of their having arrived at the supreme union", *Graces of Interior Prayer*, 262. And it must be added, this author's state of supreme union would perfectly explain the mystical immediacy and closeness to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (i.e., the "unhistorical" portrayal), providing further evidence of common authorship with the Book of Revelation, during the same period (96-98 CE).

[51] John would have been sent to Patmos sometime during 95 CE and released not before Autumn 96 CE (the start of Emperor Nerva's reign). So his stay on Patmos would have been from 9-18 months long and there is no indication when exactly the Revelation was experienced by him.

[52] There is little doubt that the mother tongue of the author of the Book of Revelation was Aramaic/Hebrew and that Greek was secondarily acquired. As communication during mystical experience is in the mother tongue of the seer, it is therefore most likely that John wrote his first accounts in Aramaic/Hebrew, which he later translated into Greek (cf. our recent article 'The Author of the Book of Revelation was a Galilean Apostle', at http://www.newtorah.org/pdf/The%20Author%20of%20the%20Book%20of%20Revelation%20final.pdf).

recollections and editorial additions in narrative form, making it extremely difficult to separate the two sources, both of which were anyway written, translated and then compiled by the same author in a process called 'redaction'.

So Rowland is quite correct when he writes: "Although we would want to argue that a substantial number of authentic visions have been included, there is no doubt that redaction of that material took place to enable the book to have the considerable degree of order which it manifests".[53] Our only objection to this statement is the implied negative attitude towards the process of redaction, in comparison to 'authentic visions'. We propose it is mistaken to think of 'redaction' in this case as being less worthy, or even 'inauthentic', when compared to the original visions, as if John merely copied out his Patmos notes and filled in the gaps as best he could from his own limited imagination or knowledge of literary devices. As we explained above, being in the highest known state of mystical union, he was now in the best position to know God's will in its fullness, and to write the entire 'Word of God and the Witness of Jesus' in his Book of Revelation. Furthermore, by writing this book he was accomplishing the task assigned to him at the midpoint of the vision itself (Rev 10,11–11,2).

Before starting on the process of dividing the text into its smaller units, it is essential to repeat and emphasize the scholarly consensus, fruit of the last 30 years of research, on the fundamental visionary and literary unity of the Book of Revelation. It is necessary to keep this unity and continuity always in mind in order to make sense of the few interruptions and discontinuities that do exist in the text, to the puzzlement and confusion of many readers. To this end, it is worth outlining the mechanisms by which unity is created and maintained. On the literary level, a superficial reading of the book reveals the author recounting a continuous visionary experience which took place on the Lord's day (Sunday), while he was on the Island of Patmos. He recounts a single continuous vision, moving relentlessly from start finish, with an almost unlimited repetition of the conjugation 'and', as well as 'and I saw', 'and I heard' and 'after these things'. The unity of the author's vision is maintained by the use of a variety of literary techniques including (i) sequential numbering of smaller visionary units, (ii) 'interlinking' with inter- and intra-textual cross-references and allusions, and by using repetitions of stock phrases with minor variations, (iii) 'interlocking' (sometimes termed 'interweaving') of consecutive sections, (iv) 'intercalating' (inserting a section as in a parenthesis), and (v) 'recapitulation' or 'overlapping' of parts of the text. Richard Bauckham strikes a chord when he writes "There have been many divergent attempts to discern the structure of Revelation by identifying its major divisions. The difficulty that has been experienced in these attempts results partly from the fact, as Barr puts it, that 'whereas our concern is to divide the book, John's concern was to bind it together'. As we shall see, John has taken considerable care to integrate the various parts of his work into a literary whole".[54]

Lying behind the text's literary unity, it is not surprising to find a dominant and extensive visionary unity, which has not been widely acknowledged by modern scholarship. However Bauckham is aware of it and describes it as follows: "Revelation, by contrast, is really (from 1:10 to 22:6) a single vision. The imagery is common to the whole. From time to time the scene shifts

[53] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 414.
[54] Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, ch 1. p.2; quoting from David L. Barr, 'The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis, *Interpretation*, 38 (1984), 43.

and fresh images may be introduced, but, once introduced, they may recur throughout the book, Thus John's vision creates a single symbolic universe in which its readers may live for the time it takes them to read (or hear) the book. Both the profusion of the visual imagery and the unity and continuity of the visionary sequence make Revelation distinctive among the apocalypses".[55]

As for identifying the single vision described by Bauckham, one does not have to look further than the activities surrounding the throne of God in heaven, which the author was privileged to observe and describe in detail. These activities are mostly liturgical in character, and are performed in a way that evokes the liturgical services for the Day of Atonement in the second temple and in a setting that recalls many features of that temple in Jerusalem. We have presented elsewhere our analysis of this symbolism[56] and the reasons for regarding this temple-liturgical imagery of the text as the dominant visionary theme.[57] This is the elusive "organizing principle", which both unites and orders all the various visions into a single and coherent vision of a liturgy of reconciliation taking place around the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary, and of its consequences for the lives of the peoples, believers and non-believers, on earth. Everything in the vision that happens on earth is initiated and controlled by the liturgical activity around the throne in heavenly sanctuary.

Having stressed the reciprocal literary and visionary unity in the Book of Revelation, it is now appropriate to move on and identify the smaller units of which it is composed. As no more than a few months passed between the author's divine revelation and the final composition, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the inspired narrative in which the visions were recounted would somehow reflect the order in which the visions were originally received. An authentic way to examine the composition of the text would therefore be to look for literary markers of the original visionary material.

Apocalyptic Structural Convention

Out of the many ways that have been proposed by scholars, few have studied carefully the structural conventions of contemporary apocalyptic literature in order to see if the Book of Revelation also follows those conventions. In 1994, however, Christopher R. Smith demonstrated that not only does the sacred text use these conventions, but that the text divided in this way gives us a glimpse of how it was composed by the author after his return to Ephesus in 96-97 CE.[58] After studying five other ascent apocalypses from the same era (4Ezra, 2Baruch, 3Baruch, 2Enoch, Ascension of Isaiah), Smith finds that significant thematic divisions are indicated by a recurring

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[55] Bauckham *Theology*, 10. See also Leonard L. Thompson: "Revelation discloses in its depth or innerness a wholeness of vision consonant with the intertexture found at the surface level of his language. At all levels signifiers, signifieds, deep structures, and surface structures form homologies, not contradictory oppositions. The logic of the vision does not progress from oppositions to their resolution. Rather, in all its aspects the language speaks from unbroken wholeness to unbroken wholeness", *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, New York/London: OUP, 1990; 74-91, quote from 91.

[56] John and Gloria Ben-Daniel, *The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation*, Jerusalem: Beit Yochanan, 2003, available at www.newtorah.org .

[57] 'The Imagery of the Book of Revelation: The Identification and Importance of Its Dominant Theme', available at http://www.newtorah.org/pdf/Imagery%20in%20the%20Book%20of%20Revelation.pdf .

[58] Christopher R. Smith, 'The Structure of the Book of Revelation in Light of Apocalyptic Literary Conventions', *Novum Testamentum* XXXVI, 4 (1994), 373-393.

convention, which follows a similar pattern, although the precise wording varies. It basically consists of the re-entry of a heavenly intermediary (an angel) into the narrative, along with a reference to a change in the disposition of the seer. New information about the angelic guide and the seer is a widespread, though not universal (2Baruch does not use it), convention used to mark major thematic divisions.

Returning to the Book of Revelation, Smith finds the use of the phrase 'in the Spirit' corresponds exactly to that of the typical apocalyptic structural convention defined above: "We observe that each of the four occurrences of this phrase are in a context in which an otherworldly intermediary enters the narrative. These contexts are deliberately reminiscent of one another".[59] He then quotes the four markers (1,10-11; 4,1-2; 17,1-3; 21,9-10) and recalls the observation of a pervious commentator that 'each occurrence of this phrase locates the seer in a different place: Patmos, heaven, a wilderness, and a great, high mountain'.[60] Accepting the scholarly consensus on the presence of Prologue (1,1-9) and Epilogue (22,10,21), the body of the text then falls neatly into four corresponding sections: the letters (1,9–3,22), the Babylon vision (17,1–19,10), the New Jerusalem vision (21,9–22,9) and the 'long vision' (the rest of the text).

At this point, Smith discovers a fifth structural division in the centre of the 'long vision' "There is yet one more significant intrusion into the narrative and vision sequence by interaction between the seer and a heavenly intermediary. This intrusion is significant because it repeats John's heavenly commission. It does not involve the phrase 'in the Spirit', but as we have seen, apocalyptic writers vary their structural conventions".[61] Smith then quotes the new structural marker (10,8-11) and proceeds to explain why it is "at least a minor structural divide". Having agreed with Smith's analysis up to here, we differ in our assessment of the importance of this marker: in our view it is not only a major structural divide, but also the most significant of all the structural divisions in the text. The angel's intrusion (10,1) also causes a significant change in the author's disposition, as it results in him returning from heaven to earth and being told 'to prophesy again' (10,11), all at a critical time just before the last trumpet (10,7). If the expression 'in the Spirit' is not stated, it is implied, for the author's new location is analogous to what it was in the introductory vision, when he was on Patmos 'in the Spirit' on the Lord's day, before being lifted up to the heavenly throne-room (1,10-3,22). In its present context within the vision narrative, the author's change in location represents, after a considerable absence, his personal reconnection with the affairs of the world just before the last trumpet.[62]

What makes this structural marker and the subsequent vision so significant is that it precisely envisions the chain of transmission in the opening verse of the book: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him to show his servants what must happen soon, and which he made known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bears witness to the Word of God and the Witness of Jesus Christ, of all that he saw" (Rev 1,1-2). Although not stated explicitly, it is implied that here, at the centre of the book, we have the true beginning, the central part to which all the previous narrative was leading. Furthermore, comparing the two passages, the little open scroll represents 'the Revelation of Jesus Christ', which on one hand was given to John show

[59] Smith, 'The Structure of the Book of Revelation', 387.
[60] Merril C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957: 32-33.
[61] Smith, 'The Structure of the Book of Revelation', 387.
[62] One cannot help connecting this with the expected return, from heaven, of the prophets Moses and Elijah, whose powers are given to the two witnesses (Rev 11, 5-6).

God's servants what must happen soon (1,1), and on the other hand, once digested, it contains the 'bitter and sweet' content of his renewed prophecy (10,8-11). In summary, this structural division contains the most important part of the whole book.

If the above conclusion is not obvious it is because this third section of the book is not continuous, but split into two parts by the vision of the sounding of the seventh and last trumpet (11,15-19): the first part is narrated before the last trumpet (10,1–11,14) and the second part is narrated after (12,1–15,4). The two parts are related to each other by the mention of the same two temporal expressions, 1260 days (11,3 and 12,6) and 42 months (11,2 and 13,5), and by the image of the beast that rises from the abyss or sea (11,7 and 13,1). The image of the beast and the two time periods not only link these two halves of the enigmatic third section to each other, but also suggest overlap, in particular a temporal overlap, which is to say that they describe events in the same period of time. If the two parts are to be read in parallel, as concurrent, the problem is then to determine which part is displaced. The solution is given by the recognition that Rev 12,1–15,4 is an '*inclusio*' (an 'inclusion', 'intercalation' or 'interpolation') enclosed by a 'doublet'—a pair of similar expressions—at 11,19 ("And the Sanctuary of God in heaven was opened..") and then again at 15,5 ("and the Sanctuary of the Tent of Witness in heaven was opened.."). The doublet identifies the beginning and end of the inclusion (12,1–15,4) and functions as a parenthesis, marking the 'included' passage as a parallel account, or expansion, of what preceded (especially 11,1-14). The elusive third section of the Book of Revelation therefore comprises two passages (10,1–11,14 and 12,1–15,4), which are to be read in parallel and understood as describing events that are concurrent and immediately preceding the seventh trumpet blast and the final judgment (10,7; 11,15-19).

The reason for the division of this section into two parts, as described above, becomes apparent when we focus on its internal structure, which is dictated by the two temporal expressions, 1260 days (11,3; 12,6) and 42 months (11,2; 13,5), found in both parts.

If the two time-periods, 1,260 days and 42 months, refer to the same period of time, as most scholars assert, then it is legitimate to ask why the author has chosen two different temporal expressions when one would suffice. Firstly, whichever calendar was used, 1,260 days is not exactly the same as 42 months, and the author must have been aware of this.[63] Secondly, according to the contents of the text, the events that characterize each time period are mutually exclusive: the mission of the two prophets during the 1,260 days cannot take place during the 42-month reign of the sea-beast, as they are adversaries of each other, and both the prophets and the sea-beast have the power to destroy their enemies (11,5 and 13,7). If the mission of the two prophets and the reign of the beast were concurrent, they would quickly degenerate into mortal combat, but instead the text notes: "whenever they (the two prophets) finish their witnessing, the beast that is coming up out of the abyss will make war against them and overcome them and kill

[63] At the author's time, two calendars were known: the Hebrew luni-solar calendar in which 42 months lasted 1,239 days (21 days less than 1,260) and the sectarian (Essene) 364-day solar calendar in which 42 months lasted 1,274 days (14 days more than 1,260). The expression "time, two times and half-a-time", cited at Rev 12,14 and meaning 'three and a half years', informs us exactly which calendar the author had in mind. By evoking the time of persecution under the tyrannical "little horn" of Daniel (Dan 7,23-25; 12,7), this expression corresponds to the 42-month reign of the beast, which therefore lasts three and a half years. Under the Hebrew luni-solar calendar, three and a half years contained at least 43 months, due to the 'intercalated' month added every 2-3 years. The author was therefore guided by the sectarian 364-day solar calendar in which 42 months were equal to 3½ years and 1,274 days.

them" (11,7), which is to say that the mission of the two prophets for 1,260 days comes first and is then followed by the reign of the beast for 42 months. These two temporal expressions refer to two different but consecutive time periods of more or less the same duration, which together add up to seven years and provide a clear temporal structure to this end-time prophecy. Moreover, the 42-month reign of the beast is terminated at the final battle and the second coming of Christ (16,12-16; 19,11-21), so the seven-year period is indeed a final 'week of years', or septennium (cf. Dan 9,24-27). The separation of the two parts, before and after the last trumpet, allows the author to focus on different aspects of his prophecy for this final time period: firstly the means by which the prophecy will be publically announced (11,1-14) and secondly the content of the prophecy itself (12,1–15,4).

Before summarizing and concluding this study, it is necessary to reflect on the findings so far. As already noted, the author of the Book of Revelation invested heavily in uniting the various sections of his work, so the process of detecting the original structural divisions has to take into account the ways used by the author to merge its sections. This has been studied by various scholars and is called 'interlocking' or 'interweaving'. As the name implies it involves a gradual introduction of the new section, together with a gradual fading of the previous one. This merging is achieved so successfully that it is often difficult to define exactly where the former section ends and where the new section begins.[64] This partly explains the multiplicity of scholarly proposals for defining the structure of the text. And for this reason our results differ slightly from those of Smith's study, especially on the precise ending of the Babylon and New Jerusalem Visions.

Bearing these minor variations in mind, and basing ourselves on the five structural conventions presented above, there is close agreement between Smith's analysis[65] and our own proposal for the basic structural divisions of the text presented below:

Section	*Our Name for Section:*	*Chapter and verses in Rev:*	*Connection:*
	Prologue	1,1-9	Linked to 22,6-21
1	Introductory Vision and Letters	1,10–3,22	Linked to 21,9–22,5
2	Heavenly Ascent and Liturgy	4,1–9,21; 11,15–19; 15,5–16,21; 19,1–21,8	Sequel of 1,10-20 (4,1)
3	Prophecy of final period	10,1–11,14; 12,1–15,4	Expansion of 7,1-17
4	Babylon Vision	17,1–18,24	Expansion of 14,8; 16,19
5	New Jerusalem Vision	21,9–22,5	Expansion of 21,2
	Epilogue	22,6-21	Linked to 1,1-9

[64] Aptly described as follows by S. Bar-Efrat: "In the field of biblical narrative particularly it seems to be impossible to define the boundaries of the literary units rigidly. In the Bible narratives which are more or less complete in themselves link up with one another so as to create larger literary units. In other words, narratives which on the one hand can be considered as self-contained units, may be regarded on the other hand as parts of larger wholes", 'Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative', *Vetus Testamentum*, 30 (1980), 156.

[65] Smith has the Babylon Vision ending at 19,10, and the New Jerusalem Vision ending at 22,9. The other difference concerns the ending of the central "Prophecy" section, which he calls the 'historical Vision" and concludes at 21,8. The terminology here reveals our main disagreement: what we take as prophecy, Smith takes as history. This result is that although the prophecy is well defined by the literary markers of "intercalation" explained above, it is quite possible that John's original vision made no distinction here, and what started as renewal of prophetic activity, ended by completing the heavenly liturgy vision. In other words, there is a difference here between the literary structure and the visionary structure, most probably explained by the author's redaction activity. This will be explained below.

Clearly the identification of these five basic structural divisions of the text does not preclude further refinement. In fact, the many smaller textual units identified within these divisions can be further arranged in a symmetrical pattern around the centre of the text, in an arrangement called 'concentric parallelism', one of the more common forms known to rhetorical analysts and studied at the macro and micro level of biblical texts. Other examples abound, in a way that is now recognized as an important feature of biblical literary tradition: "The third characteristic of Hebrew rhetoric is the specific manner in which it composes parallel dispositions and most of all concentrical arrangements. Instead of developing its argumentation in a linear way, in the Graeco-Roman fashion, to a conclusion which is the point of resolution of the discourse, it is organized most of the time in an involutive manner around a centre which is the focal point, the keystone, through which the rest finds cohesion".[66]

The concentrical arrangement of the text is strongly suggested by the symmetrical arrangement of the 'Prophecy of the final period' around a central point, easily identifiable as the last trumpet (11,15-19). Extending the arrangement in both directions, with more or less the same textual units as those defined by Smith's method,[67] the following structure emerges:

Symbol	*Our Name for Section:*	*Chapter and verses in Rev:*
A	Prologue	1,1-9
B	Introductory Vision and Letters	1,10–3,22
C	Throne and Judge with Scroll	4,1–6,17
D	Vision of Zion: City of God	7,1-17 (antithetical parallelism)
E	The Trumpets	8,1–9,21
F	Prophecy of final period	10,1–11,14 (prophets)
*	The Final Trumpet	11,15–19
F′	Prophecy of final period	12,1–15,4 (prophecy)
E′	The Libation Bowls	15,5–16,21
D′	Babylon Vision	17,1–18,24 (antithetical parallelism)
C′	Throne and Final Judgment	19,1–21,8
B′	New Jerusalem Vision	21,9–22,5
A′	Epilogue	22,6-21

Although not identical, this result bears a clear resemblance to the scheme proposed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Perhaps the main message, and the principal point of resemblance, concerns and confirms the centrality, in location and in significance, of the prophecy that issues from the little scroll: "In choosing the concentric pattern ABCDC′B′A′ the author makes the small scroll of prophecy in Rev 10:1–15:4 the climactic center of the action. The author has fused his

[66] Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998; 175.

[67] This concentric arrangement requires the further division of a part of Smith's 'long vision' (4,1–9,21) into three sections (C,D,E), with close parallels to later sections (C′,D′,E′). The parallelism between the Trumpets (E) and the Bowls (E′), and between the Throne with Judge and Scroll (C) and the Throne at the final judgment (C′) are both quite straightforward, but the parallelism of the other section is more unusual, because Zion (D) versus Babylon (D′) is an example of 'antithetical parallelism'. Another example is the Babylon Vision (D′) and the New Jerusalem Vision (B′).

materials, patterns, and theological perspective into the unique form-content configuration (*Gestalt*) of Rev." [68]

Discussion of Results

What is especially revealing about Smith's method of structuring the text is that his structural conventions are not only literary markers but also markers of new visions or revelatory activity. This is further evidence that the literary unity is just a facet of the book's original visionary unity, and that it contains a redacted though faithful account of the author's original visionary experience, one that avoids dwelling on the experience, but rather on the divine content. The advantage of this method is that it gives an insight into the various parts of the revelatory process and the way these were combined to compose the final text of Book of Revelation.

There is general agreement that the Prologue and the Epilogue are not based on the author's visionary experience on Patmos, but were added at the time of the writing of the final version of the text, after the author had returned to the mainland.[69] The Prologue (1,1-8) consists of basic introductory material on the origin, transmission, purpose and nature of the book, much of which is reaffirmed in the Epilogue (Rev 22,6-21). It has the typical form of the 'prescript' of an ancient letter, with the details of the sender, addressee and a greeting (1,4-5). As mentioned earlier, the Trinitarian greeting (1,4-5) and the direct interjection from Almighty God (1,8) act as divine authentication of the author John's work and indicate that he was in a state of supreme divine union when he wrote this text. `

The first major section of the Book of Revelation is easily identified by the first occurrence of the marker 'in the Spirit' (1,10) and before the second (4,1). It starts with the author's introductory vision of the angel of the Risen Christ among seven golden lampstands (1,10-20) which is the preparation for his ensuing dictation of messages to the angels of the same seven churches (Rev 2–3). The seven messages contain cross references back to the appearance of the Risen Christ in the introductory vision and forward to the rewards of the faithful, more fully described at the end of the book. The messages to the seven churches are organized in a series of seven and ordered according to the location of the church on a circular route heading north out of Ephesus, then east and south. It is the first of four different series of seven elements in the text, all with a liturgical reference: the seven churches are represented by seven lampstands (1,20), which correspond to the seven-branched candelabra that used to stand in the sanctuary of the Jerusalem temple. The symbolism here refers to the high priest tending the lampstand at the start of the morning service (the *tamid* sacrifice) on the Day of Atonement in the ancient temple. The temple and liturgical symbolism unites this vision to the next, which in turn embraces all the other visions in the Book of Revelation.[70]

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[68] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, Philadelphia: Fortress 1985; 175-7, quote is from 177.

[69] See discussion in the section above, entitled "Visionary Evidence'.

[70] For the identification of the liturgical elements and activities with those of the Day of Atonement in the temple, see John Ben-Daniel, *The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation*, Jerusalem: Beit Yochanan, 2003; 3-79, available at www.newtorah.org .

The second and largest section begins with the second mention of 'in the Spirit' (4,1), which follows on directly, without any interruption, from the first. The same revealing angel accompanies the author on this occasion, as in the first vision (1,10; 4,1), but this vision involves an immediate ascent to the throne of God in heaven (Rev 4). With this ascent, the author begins a narration of successive events that continues through to the end of the book, broken only by the three remaining sections. He narrates the events as the progress of a liturgy surrounding the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary. Every liturgical action initiated in the heavenly sanctuary has effects on the earth, the inhabitants of the earth and all creation.

This is not the place to describe the details of this section, but rather just to outline the narrative sequence, which is conveniently structured into three successive series of seven judgments: the breaking of the seven seals of the Lamb's scroll leads directly to the blowing of the seven trumpets, which ends in the outpouring of the seven bowls of libation, all of which are determined by the progress of the liturgy in heaven. The beginning of this sequence is the ascension of Christ the Lamb to the divine throne in heaven and the end-point is the final judgment at the end of history and the fulfillment of the plan of God. Reflecting the temporal progression of the heavenly liturgy, this 'baseline prophetic narrative' progresses in a linear fashion, like a telescope extending and giving greater attention to the final elements. The seventh and last element of each series of seven judgments not only brings us up to the verge of the eschatological climax, but also gives rise to the next series. On approaching the final consummation, the pace and severity of these judgments increases and their terrestrial effects overlap and merge. This explains the similarity of some of the judgments in the different series (especially between Rev 8,8-9 and 16,3), without resorting to theories of repetition or recapitulation.[71]

The end-point of the 'baseline prophetic narrative', the culmination of the three series of seven judgments, is described in great detail indicating that this was the focus of the author's attention from the start (Rev 11,1-3). The main events include the second coming of Christ, the defeat of the devil and his agents, the final judgment and the new creation, all traditional eschatological events associated with the fulfilment of the plan of God.[72]

The third section is the most important of all the sections: it is embedded in the 'baseline prophetic narrative' at the centre of the book (10,1–15,4) and is divided in two parts by the account of the last trumpet (11,15-19), indicating inspired editorial work by the author, as noted above. The section is presented as a new start, bringing a renewed prophetic commission for the author and a prophecy for the final period of history, the time immediately preceding the last trumpet and the second coming of Christ. There is nevertheless, an unmistakable verbal-thematic link with the 'baseline prophetic narrative' into which it is embedded: the mighty angel holding the little open scroll (10,1-2) recalls the mighty angel guarding access to the scroll at the throne of God in heaven, before it was given to Christ the Lamb (5,1-7). The little open scroll in this section, which prepares the author to write the prophecy for the final period of history, is clearly related to the

[71] As many scholars have done, following the commentary of Victorinus of Petau in the 3rd century. For a clear presentation of the issues and other arguments in favour of progression, see the excellent article by Marko Jauhiainen 'Recapitulation and Chronological Progression in John's Apocalypse: Towards a New Perspective', *New Testament Studies*, 49 (2003); 543-59.

[72] For the chronology of the problematic millennial reign of Christ with his saints, see our 'Revelation 20,1–6: the Millennium and the Mystery of Iniquity' available at http://www.newtorah.org/pdf/Revelation%2020%20%20and%20Mystery%20of%20Iniquity%20final.pdf .

scroll of Christ the Lamb, although is not to be identified with it. Without going into the details of the relationship between the two scrolls, it is sufficient to say that this relationship connects John's renewed prophetic role at this point in the text with the higher purpose of the scroll of the Lamb in heaven, which is none other than the scroll of life.[73] Later in this section, the link is confirmed by the expansion and development of certain themes from the 'baseline prophetic narrative', especially concerning the 144,000 (7,1-8 and 14,1-5) and the great crowd of martyrs in heaven (7,9-17 and 15,2-4; 19,1-6).

The last two sections defined by the structural markers, also articulate with the 'baseline prophetic narrative' and are structurally very similar. Both are revealed and interpreted by one of the seven angels that poured the libation bowls, both take the author to a particular location 'in the Spirit', both expand upon and complete a previous reference in the text (14,8; 16,9; 21.2), both are eschatological events, and both concern cities described as women, the 'fall' (judgment) of Babylon (17,1–18,24) and the 'descent' (realization) of the New Jerusalem (21,9–22,5). The order and complementarity of this pair of visions indicates that they too are to be understood in succession: first Babylon must fall before the New Jerusalem can descend.[74]

The Epilogue brings the Book of Revelation to a close, repeating many of the themes that were raised in other parts of the text and especially in the Prologue: this is an authentic prophecy (1,3 and 22,6.9-10.18-19) by a recognized servant of God (1,1-2.9-10 and 22,8-10) to inform the churches (1,1.3.11 and 22,16) and to encourage the faithful (1,3 and 22,7.12.14). Together, the Prologue and Epilogue prepare the reader specifically for the second coming of Christ and leave no doubt that this book is to be understood as a sacred prophecy, written for the faithful by John in response to a divine command and according to God's will. Taken at its word, this is a uniquely important document, with which there is little to compare in the canon of sacred Scripture (cf. Deut 4,2; Gal 1,6-9).

The Visionary Origins

Our analysis of the structure of the Book of Revelation, using the traditional structural markers identified by Smith, has divided the text into five separate though interconnected sections: the first two sections (Rev 1,10–3,22 and 4,1–21,9) are visionary accounts in sequence and can be read straight through from start to finish as a single vision of successive events on heaven and on earth, from Christ's Ascension to the final judgment and consummation of the plan of God for mankind. We have renamed the second section, which Smith called the 'long vision', the 'baseline prophetic narrative'. The last three sections are to be read in parallel with parts of the longer section, or 'baseline prophetic narrative'. The third section is a prophetic expansion of the period of history immediately preceding the last trumpet (10,1–11,14 and 12,1–15,4), and the fourth and fifth sections are expansions of the 'fall of Babylon' (17,1–18,24) and the 'descent of the New Jerusalem' (21,9–22,5) respectively. There are signs of authorial redaction, especially around the central section, as discussed above. This redaction seems to have been necessary to relate the

[73] For our identification of the seven-sealed scroll in heaven with the scroll of life and its relation to the little scroll, see 'The Final Judgment in the Book of Revelation', available at http://www.newtorah.org/pdf/The%20Last%20Judgment%20in%20the%20Book%20of%20Revelation%20final.pdf .

[74] Bauckham explains this well in his Climax of Prophecy, 3-7.

parallel visions more precisely to the 'baseline prophetic narrative', which functions like a temporal framework spanning the entire course of salvation history from beginning to end. The redactions, then, serve to relate the various sections to the temporal dimension signified by the heavenly liturgy.

However, as we noted previously, the traditional structural markers are not only literary markers for the hearer/reader of the Book of Revelation, but also they are markers of original visionary material experienced by the author. It should therefore be possible to propose a reconstruction of the author's visionary experience. Assuming that this took place over a short period, but not all at once, we suggest that the author experienced these visions in three successive sittings, with pauses in between in order to write and contemplate the material from the previous session;

1. In the first session, the author seems to have experienced the content of the first two sections, starting with the introductory vision of the angel of the Risen Christ (1,10) and letters (Rev 2–3), progressing without a break through the throne vision, seals, trumpets (while omitting 10,1–11,14) and ending with the description of the last trumpet (11,15-19). This indeed brings the vision to a preliminary ending, with the announcement of the main events surrounding the judgment at the end of history. The contents of the vision following the breaking of the sixth seal—a vision of traditional Day of Lord, withheld for the sealing of the 144,000 and of the countless martyrs in heaven (cf. Joel 3,3-5)—would have created a need for further elaboration in the next session.
2. In the second session, the author's visionary experience begins afresh with his encounter with a mighty angel who invites him to swallow a little open scroll (Rev 10,1). This results in a renewal of his prophetic calling and generates a new prophecy which takes up and enlarges on the issues that were left unfinished in the previous session (7,1-17). This vision generates all the material in the rest of the book, including the three signs in heaven, the eschatological harvest, the pouring of the seven libation bowls, the final battle, the final judgment, and ending with the introduction to the New Jerusalem (21,8), while skipping the account of the last trumpet given in the previous session (11,15-19) and the Babylon and New Jerusalem visions (17,1-18,24 and 21,9-22,5) which will be given in the next session.
3. In a third session, the author's visionary experience enlarged upon the two cities mentioned in the previous session, Babylon which fell to the ground (14,8; 16,9) and the New Jerusalem which descended from heaven to be at the centre of the New Heavens and New Earth (21,2). These two visions were given to him by the same bowl angel as a complementary but antithetical pair, in a sequence starting with Babylon (17,1–18,24) and ending with New Jerusalem (21,9–22,5).
4. At this point, the visionary experience seems to have ended, but John remained in a state of supreme divine union for the rest of his life. It was in this state that he later redacted the three visionary experiences into one continuous vision, uniting them into the unifying vision of heavenly liturgy by means of the literary techniques of interlinking, interweaving and intercalating the constituent sections. The function of the author's redaction seems to have been mainly to join up the separate visions into a single unified vision with subtle clues as to how they all fit into the time line.
5. After this work was done, the author wrote and then added the Prologue and Epilogue.

Summary and Conclusion

The composition of the Book of Revelation has baffled the minds of generations of great scholars up to the present day. Many different approaches have been tried, focusing either on 'external factors', such as the text's resemblance to Greek drama, Imperial games, Christian Pascal liturgy, etc., or on 'internal factors' suggested by literary and numerical markers (septenary structure) and/or by thematic/dramatic structure (chiastic or bipartate). One aspect that has rarely been considered, however, is whether the composition of the book may actually be a reflection of the author's original visionary experience. After showing that, according to existing criteria, a great deal of the text is indeed derived from authentic visionary material, as stated unambiguously by the author himself, we have employed a structural method proposed by an American scholar, Christopher Smith, which is based upon traditional structural divisions employed in a variety of apocalyptic works that are more or less contemporary with the Book of Revelation. The results of this approach not only satisfactorily explain the present thematic/dramatic structure of the book, but also lead us to a plausible reconstruction of the author's original visionary experiences and the nature and extent of subsequent redaction by the same author.

The most important conclusion to emerge from this study is that the composition of the Book of Revelation itself is a witness to the truth of the author's claim that it is the product of authentic visionary experience and follows quite closely the order in which the visions were given to him. The author's redaction appears to be limited to uniting his separate visionary experiences in the correct temporal order, within the unifying vision of a liturgy in the heavenly temple, and to writing the Prologue and Epilogue, as well as adding some extra-visionary exhortations and interjections. This was done after the author had returned to Ephesus in Autumn 96 CE, while in a state of supreme divine union. It was the author himself who wrote the first draft of the account in Greek, working from memory of his experience, and from his Aramaic field notes, although he was most likely aided, in a rather limited way, by a team of assistants.[75]

John Ben-Daniel,
Octave of Easter
Jerusalem, 2019

[75] For further speculation on the production and distribution of the first manuscript of the Book of Revelation, see our article on 'The Author of the Book of Revelation was a Galilean Apostle', available at http://www.newtorah.org/pdf/The%20Author%20of%20the%20Book%20of%20Revelation%20final.pdf .