

**SEVEN HEADS, EIGHT KINGS: PROBING INTO
THE RIDDLE OF REVELATION 17:7-11
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Introduction

The 17th chapter of the Apocalypse of John can easily earn a place among the most puzzling and intriguing sections in the book if not also in the entire Bible. This chapter contains a vision about a prostitute and a scarlet beast on which the woman sits (vv. 1-6) and the interpretation of that vision (vv. 7-18). The lack of consensus regarding the historical identity of the beast's seven heads is alone bewildering and appeals to a new quest for a more satisfying solution. To examine the things pertinent to the beast and its heads again is justified for the following reasons. First, the perusal of the book of Revelation turns into a blessing for the careful reader/listener (Rev 1:3). Second, it has been a considerable time since the topic was lastly approached in Adventist circles. Third, in spite of the careful analysis the previous studies display, not all linguistic features and internal components of Revelation have been considered. Therefore, it is the purpose of this article to fill in this gap and perhaps come closer to establishing a thorough view upon the identity of the beast and its seven heads. Hopefully, the perspective under consideration here will not only integrate what proved relevant from previous studies but also push forward towards new territories.

The methodology of the study brings together textual (semantic, syntactic) and intratextual (internal structural) considerations, as well as various intertextual or extratextual factors that contribute to a better decoding of the literary piece in view and its symbolic vocabulary. These cognate categories are distinguished in semiotic studies of literature in order to show how a text acquires meaning in relation to itself, to other texts and to its original environment.² Thus, the successful interpretation of Rev 17:7-11 entails paying close attention

¹ This draft is a reduced (to half) version of an extended chapter to be published in an upcoming BRI project on Daniel & Revelation.

² Stefan Alkier, "Intertextuality and the Semiotics of Biblical Texts," in *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, ed. Richard B. Hays, Stefan Alkier, and Leroy A. Huizenga (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 3-21. Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos and Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou, *Theory and methodology of semiotics: The tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure*, Semiotics, Communication and Cognition 28 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2020), 282-298. In semiotics, intratextuality refers to "syntagmatic relations" between the signs present in a certain text, whereas intertextuality points to "paradigmatic relations" between signs in the text and signifiers from outside of it. See Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2007), 84. The methodology has been applied to other biblical books. See for example Paul T. Sloan, "For Everyone Shall Be Salted with Fire," in *New Studies in Textual Interplay*, Library of New Testament Studies 632, ed. Craig A. Evans, B. J. Oropeza, and Paul T. Sloan (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 109-120 (esp. 111-112). P. E. Spencer, "Narrative

to the linguistic constituents of the passage, to its echoes in other parts of Revelation or elsewhere,³ and to the world behind the text. Meaning is construed at all three levels [...].

Important for methodology is also the relationship between the symbol and what is signified by it. [...] In the case of symbols, their literal or obvious meaning is superseded by a second, more profound sense acquired by way of analogy.⁴ To apply this to the two most important symbols in Rev 17, the beast refers to a wild animal as primary meaning, but to a political body in a deeper sense. Likewise, the courtesan refers to a woman frequented by higher-class individuals for sexual services, but more deeply points to a religious body, unfaithful to God. [...]

It is in this context that I would like to highlight the importance of the history of interpretation of Rev 17. Ian Boxall draws attention to the fact critical scholarship too readily dismisses later (I would say “historicist”) interpretations of Revelation on account of the distance between the context of the original author/text and these much later applications. [...] Boxall contends that the history of reception (known to specialist by the German technical term *Wirkungsgeschichte*) is not just a history, but an instrument of discovering the rich meaning of the text.⁵ In other words, the variety of interpretations shows the richness of the symbol in case. It is normal to expect the symbol to communicate different things to different audiences. I can only imagine that the generation of the eschaton would best integrate the biblical apocalyptic into their actual context. Meanwhile, we remain tentative while taking advantage of the richness of preceding interpretations.

[...] The apocalyptic prophecy then has the capacity to be relevant on the way to fulfillment.

Several steps will contribute to the achievement of the goal of this chapter. The research begins with a survey of the most significant views in Adventist literature about what the beast

Echoes in John 21: Intertextual Interpretation and Intratextual Connection,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 22/75 (2000), 49–68.

³ [...] Jon Paulien, “Allusions, Exegetical Method, and the Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12” (PhD diss., Andrews University, Berrien Spring, MI, 1987), 165-194. [...] Jon Paulien, “Elusive Allusions: The Problematic Use of the Old Testament in Revelation,” *Biblical research* 33 (1988): 37-53 (esp. 39-40). [...] David Mathewson, “Assessing Old Testament Allusions in the Book of Revelation,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 75/4 (2003): 311-325 (esp. 319). Beate Kowalski, “Selective versus contextual allusions: Reconsidering technical terms on intertextuality,” in *Methodology in the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Context and Criteria*, *Library of the New Testament Studies*, ed. David DeSilva and Steve Smith (London: T. & T. Clark, 2021), 86-102 (esp. 86, 101-102). [...]

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), 15.

⁵ Ian Boxall, “The many faces of Babylon the great: *Wirkungsgeschichte* and the interpretation of Revelation 17,” in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001): 51-68 (esp. 51-57). Ian Boxall, “The Apocalypse Unveiled: Reflections on the Reception History of Revelation,” *The Expository Times* 125/6 (2014): 261–271 (esp. 270-271).

and its phases stand for, showing both the common ground and the bones of contention. Then it proceeds with clarifying the temporal reference of the vision which is critical in the process of interpretation. Lastly, the study continues with defining the interplay between the prostitute and the scarlet beast in light of other beasts and end-time scenarios, discernible in Revelation.

The Identity of the Beast and its Seven Heads in Adventist Interpretation

[...]

Rome under Seven Phases

Uriah Smith⁶ and Stephen Haskell⁷ represent the view that the beast is Rome and the heads are its seven phases. Smith works with the premise that in Revelation 17 there is a distinction between the church and state and he sees the woman in vision as being the religious part of Rome, while the beast stands for its civil counterpart. Following the earlier protestant tradition that the apocalyptic beast is Rome (in both chapters 13 and 17), he defines the seven heads as seven phases of Roman political trajectory: kingly, consular, decemvirate, dictatorial, triumvirate, imperial, and papal. John was living in the imperial stage. [...]

From Babylon to a Confederacy of Evil

Soon the approach changed, and the heads of the beast have come to be interpreted as successive empires who oppressed God's people. Roy Allan Anderson, Jean Vuilleumier, Mervyn Maxwell, Hans LaRondelle, and Jacques Doukhan considered that the count should begin with Babylon. For Anderson, the woman is an ecclesiastical power (i.e. the Roman Catholic Church), whereas the beast is a political power.⁸ Despite this clear distinction, Anderson ambiguously identifies the three temporal phases of the beast ("was, is not, and yet is," Rev 17:8) within the history of the papacy (i.e. the woman in the vision).⁹ About the beast's heads, he considers, we should not be dogmatic, albeit he states they "are clearly indicated": Babylon, Persia, Greece, pagan Rome, the papacy, republicanism/democracy, and

⁶ Uriah Smith, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Daniel and the Revelation* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1882), 748, 750-751.

⁷ "The changes from the rule of a king to the consuls, the tribunes, the decemvirs, and then to the triumvirs, and finally the revolution which turned it into an empire, had each placed the nation more completely under the control of the principles of that prince who strove to exalt his throne above God." Stephen N. Haskell, *The Story of the Seer of Patmos* (Nashville, TN: Southern, 1977), 296.

⁸ Roy Allan Anderson, *Unfolding the Revelation*, rev. ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1974), 170-174.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 174-175.

the last great confederacy of evil (the union of the Papacy, Protestantism, and Spiritism).¹⁰ The temporal reference is not John's day but the post-1798 generation. The falling of the first five kings/kingdoms takes that time as point of reference. After that year, these kings were past. Democracy is the sixth king who is. But this should continue only for a short while. The papacy is becoming more and more popular, Anderson says, and the Protestant America will become its ally.¹¹ [...]

From Egypt to the Revived Papacy/a Worldwide Confederacy

A new interpretation valued (though not adhered to) by Maxwell is briefly affirmed by Kenneth Strand¹² and developed further and promoted by Jon Paulien and Ranko Stefanović. Stefanović argues that the temporal reference must be John's days, otherwise the interpretation, though intended to clarify the first recipient (the writer), would make no sense to the seer. He also suggests that the prostitute stands for the end-time false religious system while the beast represents the secular and political powers of the world. The five kingdoms having been fallen in John's day were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. The imperial Rome was the sixth (the king who is), the medieval ecclesiastical Christianity was the seventh, the beast after healing from the mortal wound is to be the eighth, and is, in fact, the revival of the seventh head.¹³ [...]

The Eighth king is Satan

The difficulty of identifying the eighth king generated one more solution in Adventism, proposed and developed by both Edwin Reynolds¹⁴ and Ekkehardt Mueller.¹⁵ Mueller provides the most complex argument for this position, which is why his two-part study will be reviewed in some detail here. [...] Mueller proceeds in assessing the temporal phases of the

¹⁰ So also Jean Vuilleumier, *L'Apocalypse*, rev. ed. (Dammarie-les-Lys: Les Signes des Temps, 1938), 314-319. Writing from a European perspective, Vuilleumier sees the seventh head as being the confederacy between the New Europe and the Vatican.

¹¹ Anderson, *Unfolding the Revelation*, 176-177.

¹² Kenneth A. Strand, "The Seven Heads: Do They Represent 15 Roman Emperors?" in *Symposium on Revelation—Book II*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 191, 200. Strand refers clearly only to the first six (from Egypt to Rome) but mentions that the sea beast (the 7th head?) was still future from John's perspective.

¹³ Ranko Stefanović, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 517, 522, 525-526.

¹⁴ Edwin Reynolds, "The Seven-headed Beast of Rev 17," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 6 (2003): 93-109 (esp. 101-109).

¹⁵ Ekkehardt Mueller, "The Beast of Revelation 17: A Suggestion (Part I)" *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 10.1 (2007): 27-50. Ekkehardt Mueller, "The Beast of Revelation 17: A Suggestion (Part II)" *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 10.2 (2007): 153-176.

beast. For him, “it was” refers to historical eras, while from “is not” onward, eschatological stages of the beast’s activity are depicted.¹⁶ The division of the seven heads extends between Egypt and the papacy (the same empires identified within the previous model). The “is not” phase is millennial and refers to the exile of Satan here on earth. For Mueller, the statement that the eight is “of the seven” is not understood as “from the seven” or “one of the seven,” but in the sense that the eighth relates to all seven as a whole. Therefore, the beast in its eight phase is Satan after the millennium. [...]

The Eight Is the Earth Beast

The last and most recent proposal, pertaining to Vanderlei Dorneles, is that the scarlet beast is the earth-beast. The term “beast” is attributed in the OT to Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon (i.e., Ezek 34:5, 13, 25, 27, 28; Isa 11:11, 12; cf. Micah 7:12), which gives the starting point of the seven heads. In light of Dan 7, we can add to the list Medo-Persia and Greece. These are the five kingdoms which were fallen by the time of John. Rome was the sixth while the papal Rome stands for the seventh which was supposed to come. The beast is seen as separated from its heads but a historical empire (unlike Mueller) in succession of the seven. This eighth empire is interpreted in light of certain parallels between chapters 12, 13, and 17 of Revelation. Thus, the dragon which wages war against the offspring in 12:17 overlaps the earth-beast persecuting those who do not receive the mark of the beast in 13:11-18, and the scarlet beast, which persecutes the elect in 17:11. It is suggested, therefore, that the eight king is the American imperial power, that is, the earth beast of Rev 13, through which Satan works.¹⁷ [...]

Synthesis

In the table below, the reader can see an overview of all the opinions presented and critiqued above. It is easily perceivable that Adventist expositors were most unsure of the identity of the seventh head and of the beast itself – the eighth version of the monster.

¹⁶ The reasons are: (1) the present tense can be understood as future; (2) Rev 17 is a description of the future judgment of the harlot, in the perspective of the last two plagues; (3) although more a feature of the first 14 chapters, recapitulation is still present in the second part of the book and in this framework the dragon coming out of the abyss in Rev 20 is a recapitulation of the scarlet beast coming out from the same prison in chapter 17; (4) the last argument is a *reductio ad absurdum*; Mueller says that it is impossible to affirm in the present that the woman sits on a beast while, at the same time, the beast is non-existent and neither is it possible to consider heads and horns to be alive on a dead beast.

¹⁷ Vanderlei Dorneles, “The Eight Empire: New Hypotheses for the Symbols of Revelation 17,” *Andrews University Seminary Student Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2015): 17-33.

	Smith Haskell	Anderson	Vuilleu mier	Maxwell LaRond elle	Dou kha n	Strand Stefanović Paulien	Reynolds Mueller	Dorneles
1	Kingly Rome	Babylon				Egypt		
2	Consular Rome	Persia				Assyria		
3	Decemvir ate Rome	Greece				Babylon		
4	Dictatorial Rome	Pagan Rome				Medo-Persia		
5	Triumvirat e Rome	Papacy				Greece		
6	Imperial Rome	Democracy		Wounded papacy		Roman Empire	Roman Empire + the Papacy	Roman Empire
							Roman Empire	
7	Exarchate of Ravenna	Papacy + Protestan -tism + Spiritism	New Europe + Vatican	Revived papacy		Papacy	The earth- beast (America)	Papacy
							Papacy	
8	Papal Rome	The 8th is the 7th		The sum of all demonic powers	The 8th is the 7th	Revived papacy	Satan after the millenniu m	American imperial power
						Worldwide political confederacy		

[...]

Temporal intricacies

One of the most important issue in dealing with the beast and its heads consists of the temporal aspects. And here there are two related things to clarify. The first is whether the past, present, and future tenses used in Revelation 17:8, 10-11 take John's time or the end-time as point of reference. The second is the apparent contradiction between the corporate aspect of the beast (the entity described as being not, v. 8, 11) and its individual aspect (the sixth head "is", v. 10). How should the reader make sense of the way the present tense is used?

Regarding the first issue, one must remember that in an apocalyptic vision tense “anomalies” are usual.¹⁸ This is why John can write in the present or past tense, about things way ahead of his time: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds” (Rev 1:7), “the hour of his judgment has come” (Rev 14:7), and “Fallen, fallen is Babylon” (14:8; 18:2), to name just a few. However, the interpretation of a vision is something else. When the angelic being interprets the meaning of the vision to John, he addresses the prophet considering him what he was – a first century recipient.¹⁹ If this is not accepted, the whole idea of clarification, makes little to no sense. It was John’s marvel which generated the angelic explanation, after all. The seer is the one who needs further explications, and these must have been grounded in his time and space. Therefore, the time reference must be John’s day. By that time, five kings were fallen, one was, and so on.

The second issue is how does one solve the continuous and discontinuous aspects of the beast? On the one hand, the beast “is not” and, on the other hand, its sixth head “is”, as one can see from the table below.

Vv.	Past	Present	Future	
17:8a	The beast “was” (<i>ēn</i>)	The beast “is not” (<i>ouk estin</i>)		The beast “is about to come up” (<i>mellei anabainein</i>)
17:8b	The beast “was” (<i>ēn</i>)	The beast “is not” (<i>ouk estin</i>)		The beast “will come” (<i>parestai</i>)
17:10	Five heads “have fallen” (<i>epesan</i>)	One head (the 6th) “is” (<i>estin</i>)	The other one (the 7th) “will come” (<i>elthē</i>) ²⁰	

¹⁸ See Laurențiu Florentin Moț, *Morphological and Syntactical Irregularities in the Book of Revelation A Greek Hypothesis*, Linguistic Biblical Studies 11, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 191-201. Steven Thompson, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 29-53. Gerard Mussies, *The Morphology of the Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study in Bilingualism*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 27 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1971), 330-340.

¹⁹ Mueller, “The Beast of Revelation 17: A Suggestion (Part II),” 164. Stefanović, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 522. So also Jon Paulien, “The Hermeneutics of Biblical Apocalyptic,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, Biblical Research Institute Studies, vol.1, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2006), 251-252. Jon Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008), 215. Cristian Bădiliță, *Noul Testament – Apocalipsa lui Ioan* (București: Adevărul, 2012), 319.

²⁰ The verbal form is aorist subjunctive, not future indicative, but the subjunctive is formally and semantically very similar to the future, and is many times used in place of future. See Charles Francis Digby Moule, *An Idiom Book of the New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (1959; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21-23.

17:11a	The beast “was” (<i>ēn</i>)	The beast “is not” (<i>ouk estin</i>)		The beast “goes to destruction” (<i>eis apōleian hypagei</i>) ²¹
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Revelation 17:11 seems to be the key to unlock this mystery. This verse discriminates between the beast and its seven heads.²² The beast is “an eighth” king and, no matter what it means that this eighth is also “of the seven”, the Greek of the verse shows a difference between the beast in its last (eighth) phase and the beast in its seven, successive phases.²³ In this sense, the beast exists as long as it has a living head on its shoulders. When it comes to the description of the beast that “was, is not, and will come” (vv. 8, 11), the tenses used are omnitemporal or timeless. They do not have the usual time-orientation. In other words, the phrase as such is true anytime as long as things remain the same. But when something changes the phrase applies to the moment of change. For example, God is always “the One who is, who was, and *who is coming*” even before He comes (6:16-17; cf. 11:17; 16:5).²⁴ Likewise, the beast is anytime “the one who was, *is not*, and *will come/be present*” even before it comes to the state of being not or to the moment of coming out of the abyss.

Its descriptive phrase is a counterfeit title, a clear parody to God’s omnitemporal description “the One who is, who was and who is coming” (Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8).²⁵ The stages “was” and “is not” refer to the first seven heads and are not yet completed in the time of John. This is so because, as the angelic interpretation shows, there has been and will be no interruption in the succession of the heads until the seventh. An interruption seems to intervene between the seventh head and the beast itself. We know this by the fact that while the first seven kingdoms come in succession one after another, the beast comes out after a

²¹ The verbal form is present indicative, but the meaning is clearly future. The present tense can and does express at times future developments. James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Prolegomena*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2006–), 120.

²² As George Ladd well observes: “the beast is sometimes identified with his heads but is sometimes differentiated from them.” George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 230. “The similarity of the threefold formulas applied to the beast (v 8) and to the seven kings (v 10) indicates the corporate identity of the kings with the beast.” Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 871.

²³ Cf. Rev 17:10. The image of the dragon is equally applied to two different historical entities: Egypt (Psa 74:14; Ezek 29:3) and Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar’s leadership (Jer 51:34; [LXX 28:32]). “The beast operates through one head at a time.” Desmond Ford, *Crisis: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, vol. II (New Castle: Desmond Ford Publications, 1982), 670. The synonymous “mountains” proves the same. John did not see seven mountains in the vision but heard the angelic interpreter that the woman “sits on the seven mountains.” A normal woman with two feet cannot stand on seven mountains at the same time.

²⁴ When He comes, He is depicted only as “the One who is and who was” (11:17; 16:5).

²⁵ So also M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 181. “The beast *once was, now is not* ... is probably an intentional contrast with 1:4.” Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 200.

detention in the abyss. What follows is that the phase “will come” refers exclusively to the beast in its eighth phase. Therefore, there is no ontological contradiction regarding the beast in the time of John. The phrase “is not”, though written in the present tense,²⁶ does not refer that in the time of John the beast was dead or absent.²⁷ As mentioned, the “is not” label is part of the beast’s title, contrary to the way some Bible translations suggest.²⁸ By the time of the prophet, the beast was ruling in its sixth phase. Since no interruption is perceived along the succession of the seven heads and since the beast in its last (i.e., eighth) manifestation comes out of the abyss, the reader can assume that the seventh head is the one that is annihilated at some point in time. Only at that eschatological moment, between the seventh and the eighth, the beast “is not”.²⁹ Meanwhile, in the time of John the beast still is, through its sixth head. Identifying the Roman head with a good degree of certainty³⁰, we will be able to place the rest of the heads in history, at the end of the next section.

The Relationship Between the Prostitute and the Beast

The question I will try to answer in this section is when is the woman in control of the beast? Does she ride the beast in all its eight kingships or only in some or one of them? [...]

²⁶ Rev 17 alone shows that the present tense may refer to present and future actions as well. The actions expressed in present tense and related to the beast are the following: “sitting on a beast” (v. 3), “the one bearing her” (v. 7), “is about to come out of the abyss” (v. 8), “goes to its destruction” (vv. 8, 11), “sits on them” (v. 9), “they give their authority to the beast” (v. 13), “having a kingdom over the kings of the earth” (v. 18). Some aspects apply to the time of the vision, but some clearly point to eschatology.

²⁷ The present tense denotes the perspective of the writer on the action or state described. It usually has a continuous or progressive meaning. James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *A Morphology of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 181. Aspect scholars often exclude time from the present indicative verbs. David L. Mathewson, *Verbal Aspect in the Book of Revelation: The Function of Greek Verb Tense in John’s Apocalypse*, Linguistic Biblical Studies 4 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 67-69. This does not mean that the present never express present realities in the indicative, but time is not always grammaticalized by the verbal form itself, but equally and even more so by the other elements in the discourse (adverbs, adjectives, etc.).

²⁸ Some Bible versions misread the title either by adding the words “once” and “now”, which are not found in the Greek text, or by breaking the sentence unnaturally. From the first category I mention “The beast, which you saw, *once* was, *now* is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction.” (NIV). From the second category, I refer to “La bête que tu as vue était, et elle n’est plus. Elle doit monter de l’abîme, et aller à la perdition.” (LSG, NEG, TOB). One version combines both readings: “The beast that you saw existed *once* but *now* exists no longer. It will come up from the abyss and is headed for destruction.” (NAB). This is misleading, for the adverbs “once” and “now” are interpretative additions, not the original text. They create the impression that the phrase must be related to John’s time. In reality, the phrase is a title set in stark contrast to the divine title “the one who is, who was, and who is coming” (Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8).

²⁹ In this sense, I agree with Grant Osborne who assesses that the phrase “was and is not” points forth forward to the “eighth king” of 17:11. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 615.

³⁰ As Peter Perry reflects, “In the first century, who has an empire over the earth? Rome is the only answer.” Peter S. Perry, “Relevance Theory in the Performance of Revelation 17–19,” *The Bible Translator* 66/3 (2015): 246–257 (esp. 252).

The Symbol of the Prostitute

[...]

The Historical Identity of the Woman

[...]

The Beast and Its Seven Heads in History

The Greek term *thērion* depicts different kinds of wild animals.³¹ The symbolic usage is found primarily in Daniel, where the term stands for a king (Dan 7:17),³² as representative of a kingdom (Dan 7:23).³³ In the Jewish apocalyptic literature, beasts (Leviathan and Behemoth) are pictured as persecuting God's people,³⁴ revolting against the Messiah,³⁵ and being punished in the abyss.³⁶ All these are common motifs in Revelation. The beast with multiple heads³⁷ and horns³⁸ reflects the collective³⁹ feature of a beast, which is a sum of multiple, sequential powers.

[...]

³¹ Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2003), 310.

³² When apocalyptic literature relates a head with a king, usually a kingdom is in view not an individual (cf. Dan. 2:38). Against W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger and William White, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1996), 2:103.

³³ Cf. also Bar 3:16.

³⁴ Leviathan, "the sea-monster," is judged in the *Ladder of Jacob*, being depicted as a king opposing Israel. *Ladder of Jacob* 6:12-13 (cf. vv. 1-3).

³⁵ 2 Baruch speaks about both of them as revealing from their place, as the time for the Messiah to be revealed has come (2 Bar 29:1-4).

³⁶ In the Bible, the abyss represents (1) the chaos before creation and after the destruction of the world (Gen 1:2; Rev 20:1-3), (2) a synonym for the bottom of the sea (Psa 32:7; 77:16; 106:9; Job 28:14; 38:16; Jon 2:6; Isa 51:10; Ezek 26:19; Rom 10:7), (3) a place/state of punishment of demons (Luke 8:31; cf. 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6), and (4) a dungeon of demons and beasts in which they are exiled as a temporary punishment, waiting for their final destruction (Rev 9:1-2, 11; 20:1, 3; Cf. Isa 24:21-22). Outside of the Bible, the last two meanings dominate. [...]

³⁷ The word *kefalē* means throughout the LXX, the New Testament, and secular Hellenistic Greek the leading political factor. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Gerhard Friedrich Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich eds., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 3:673. The seven-headed creature has been part of various ANE cultures, ever since the 2nd millennium BC Mesopotamia and Ugarit. In fact, it seems to be so common that it is impossible to exclusively associate it with a certain people or tradition. The essence of such imagery is that of completeness of God's enemy. Christoffer Theis, "Creatures with Seven Heads in the Revelation of John – A History of the Motif in the Ancient Near East," *Distant Worlds Journal* 5 (2020): 38-58.

³⁸ The word *keras* appears as a metaphor of military power. Deut 33:17; 1 Sam 2:1, 10; 2 Sam 22:3; [...]

³⁹ The association of the seven heads with seven mountains proves the same. The noun *oros* denotes a geopolitical body. Ex.: (1) "Mount Zion" (2 Kgs 19:31; Psa 48:2, 11; 74:2; 78:68; Isa 10:12; 24:23; 31:4; 37:32; Lam 5:18; etc.). (2) "Mount Samaria" (Amos 4:1; 6:1). (3) Babylon is referred to as a "destroying mountain" (Jer 51:25; cf. Rev 18:21). (4) God's eternal kingdom is also a mountain (Dan 2:35, 45). See also 1 Enoch 18:6; 24:2-3; 32:1; 52; 77:5. George W. E. Nickelsburg and Klaus Baltzer, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 285. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 1138.

In the historicist vein, the beginning point of the seven kingdoms is to be established starting from the nature of the beast. This political entity is hostile to God and the faithful. Taking the history of God's people as framework, the starting point is Egypt – the first kingdom which takes Israel into captivity. In fact, Egypt is called a *drakōn* (“dragon,” e.g., Ezek 29:3; 32:2) and this favors the inclusion of this ancient power among the stages of the seven-headed beast (dragon-sea beast-scarlet beast). With one exception, the Hebrew *tān ’nîn* is always translated in the LXX by *drakōn*. The Hebrew noun, which means “sea-monster” and points to Egypt, is used eschatologically⁴⁰ in Isa 27:1, in association with two different Leviathans/serpents, to be punished by God's sword. Apparently, the other two are Assyria and Babylon.⁴¹ All three are beasts who ferociously attacked Israel. Counting from that starting point, Egypt, Assyria (Isa 52:4), Babylon (Jer 50:17), Persia (Dan 5:28), and Greece (Dan 7:6) were the first five kings who were fallen⁴² by the time of the Revelation.

The Roman Empire was the power in exercise throughout John's lifetime.⁴³ The seventh kingdom which was not yet present in the first century was, most probably, Christian Rome plus the ten kings, which are the same 11 horn-powers of the Roman beast in Dan 7:7-8. The dominance of the little horn among the Danielic horns is iterated in Revelation by the preeminence of the scarlet beast over the 10 horns (Rev 17:13, 17).

To see Western Christianity behind the seventh head makes sense historically at least for a few important reasons. The dragon, who tries to kill the male-child (i.e., Christ) in Revelation 12:4-5, is Imperial Rome. The power, the authority, and the throne of Rome are passed on to the Christian leadership in the West beginning with the fourth century. This makes it clear why the imperial benefits of the dragon end up in the hands of the sea-beast, not by a conquest, but by a bequest (Rev 13:2b). This translates in history with the difference

⁴⁰ H. Niehr, “תנין,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 730.

⁴¹ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 295–296. Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2007), 456. Cf. Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 19–39*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 235.

⁴² “To fall” is euphemistic for “a person's violent death, usually in war, in both Israelite-Jewish and Greek literature.” David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52C (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 949.

⁴³ Theodor Zahn professes that the seven heads represent “as many successive kings (and kingdoms).” He begins with Egypt and the neo-Assyrian empires because they were the first two to subjugate Israel. Then, through Dan 2, 7, and 8 the list continues with the neo-Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, and the Greco-Macedonian empires. The ruling empire in the time of the Apocalypse was, of course, the Roman Empire. The seventh, posits Zahn, is a future, Antichristical representation of the Greco-Roman Empire. Theodor Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Erlangen, 1926), 560-566.

between the anterior heads who come to prominence by subjugation and Christian Rome which becomes royal by inheritance.

There are two historical objections to identifying the papacy with the seventh head, which I need to address shortly. First, the prophecy mentions that the seventh head “must remain for a little (*oligon*) while” (Rev 17:10) but history testifies that the papacy has had a long dominion. It suffices to respond with Rev 12:12, which states that after he lost the battle with Christ in the context of His death, resurrection, and ascension, the dragon is enraged knowing that he has but “a little (*oligon*) time”.⁴⁴ The categories of time is in both texts identical. The time of Satan called “little” is definitely longer than the “little” period of papal kingship. The time is called “little” most probably from a prophetic perspective. As we know, in Revelation the time until the end is usually announced to be very short.⁴⁵

[...]

Time of Riding

Some scholars⁴⁶ cannot accept that the woman is (or rather includes) the papacy because it was not in place by the time of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece so its plans could not be carried out by these empires existing long before it. However, the vision does not state that. In fact, the prophecy tells that the woman rides the beast during its crownless dominion, that is, during its “is not” hiatus and during its eighth phase when the beast comes out of the abyss for its definitive fall. Therefore, the woman-Babylon (apostate Christianity) rules over the beast, at the very end of the latter’s saga. To picture this, after the seventh head “is not”, the papacy is no longer in forefront. A metamorphosis of symbols takes place. The papacy survives the blow but recovers not so much as a political empire as it revives religiously. The prostitute is the great city, yes, but more specifically a spiritual city. The eschatological priestess who rides the beast in its recovery mode (in its eighth phase) used to be a kingdom herself. But now she has dominion through illicit relations with the kings of the earth.

⁴⁴ Mueller, “The Beast of Revelation 17,” part II: 166-167.

⁴⁵ László Gallusz, “How Soon is ‘Soon’? Reading the Language of Eschatological Imminence in the Book of Revelation,” in *Faith in Search of Depth and Relevancy: Festschrift in Honour of Dr Bertil Wiklander*, ed. Reinder Bruinsma (Trans-European Division, 2014), 127-144 (esp. 137). Gallusz does a good job in highlighting the language of imminence in Revelation. He offers three perspectives through which the reader should interpret this language: (1) the apocalyptic background characterized by both imminence and delay; (2) salvation-history which makes the Parousia the next event on the divine timetable after Easter; and (3) the hortatory function of the apocalyptic language (pp. 140-144). [...]

⁴⁶ E.g., Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 393.

If the seventh head consisted of the papacy and the 10 horns, after the papacy is depleted of political preeminence, what remains of the seventh head is the 10 kings. They will re-enter the stage in Rev 17:12-16, by the side of the beast itself.

In order to visualize this even more precisely, it is necessary to compare three very similar creatures in Revelation: the dragon, the sea-beast, and the scarlet beast.⁴⁷ First, the dragon and the scarlet beast share a color from the same spectrum (*pyros*/fiery red, 12:3; *kokkinos*/scarlet, 17:3),⁴⁸ the dragon and the sea-beast share the same period of persecution against the saints (12:6 [1260 days], 14 [3.5 years]; 13:5 [42 months]), and the sea-beast and the scarlet beast are described in terms of dying and raising up (13:3, 12, 14; 17:8, 11), as well as by propagating blasphemies (13:1, 5-6; 17:3; cf. 2:9).⁴⁹ Second, all three creatures have seven heads and ten horns, though they differ as to where the crowns are placed. The similarities above and the identical constitution (seven heads, ten horns) raises the hypothesis that here we have the same entity⁵⁰ in different phases.⁵¹ The placement of the crowns reveals the phases of that generic entity.

⁴⁷ Some scholars observed the close relationship between the sea-beast and the scarlet beast. Henry Cowles, *The Revelation of John; With Notes, Critical, Explanatory, and Practical* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1871), 159. Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, trans. Henry E. Jacobs, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 386. Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1919), 406–407. Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 175–176. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 384–398.

⁴⁸ “In my opinion, the explicit causal relationship of the dragon and the beasts (Rev 13:2, 4) and the subsequent likeness between the beast/dragon and the scarlet beast and its woman (17:16–18) make a good argument for perceiving a semantic connection between the two colors.” Cato Gulaker, *Satan, the Heavenly Adversary of Man: A Narrative Analysis of the Function of Satan in the Book of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies 638 (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 124.

⁴⁹ The unique association of blasphemies with sea beast and the scarlet beast and even with the dragon (the synagogue of Satan, Rev 2:9) makes the hypothesis of them being one character very plausible. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 202–205. It seems that the beast, as a generic character it impersonates the dragon, but it also incarnates the sea-beast and the scarlet beast. Robyn J. Whitaker, *Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion in the Book of Revelation*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 410 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 198. Observing such similarities, in talking about the beast in Rev 17, James Resseguie calls it “the scarlet beast from the sea.” James L. Resseguie, “Narrative Features of the Book of Revelation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 37–52 (esp. 42). Similarly also Michael P. Naylor, *Complexity and Creativity: John’s Presentation of Jesus in the Book of Revelation*, Gorgias Biblical Studies 69 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2018), 237.

⁵⁰ Lynn Huber considers the description of the scarlet beast as “full of blasphemous names” and wearing multiple horns and heads (17:3) to be “a clear allusion to the beasts that appear earlier in the narrative and who are aligned with Satan (12:9).” Lynn R. Huber, “The City-Women Babylon and New Jerusalem in Revelation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 307–324 (esp. 315).

⁵¹ Although she speaks of a different topic (the richness of describing God’s people in Revelation), Sarah Dixon extracts an important principle that is at work in John’s use of the symbolic descriptions of the same group. “Changing the imagery not only helps to signal a shift in temporal aspect, but would have also helped John’s first-century audience to find their ‘place’ within the cosmic narrative.” Sarah S. U. Dixon, *The Testimony of the Exalted Jesus in the Book of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies, volume 570 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 95.

	Seven heads	Ten horns	The beast (the 8th king) and the ten horns
Dragon	Crowns (12:3)	-	-
Sea-beast	-	Crowns (13:1)	-
Scarlet beast	-	-	Get authority as kings (= crowns) for one hour (17:12)

The seven-headed monster operates with one head at a time and there seems to be no hiatus from the first to the seventh head (Rev 17:10). The table above indicates that the symbol of the dragon covers the seven-heads period. The sea-beast represents the head with the ten horns, and it receives a mortal wound (13:3).⁵² The fact that it dies makes the sea-beast to be the seventh head of the multi-headed creature, since there is no interruption in the succession of the heads, and yet, the scarlet beast experiences a state called “is not” (17:8). The scarlet beast is without crowns, until the one eschatological hour when, coming out of the abyss, the revived creature in its eighth phase and the ten horns receive kingly authority (i.e., they are crowned) one last time (17:12). The interplay between the three characters is quite evident. The dragon rules uninterruptedly during the first six heads. Then it transfers its throne to the sea-beast (13:2b). The sea-beast becomes the seventh head in the series, and it rules during the kingships of the ten horns, until it is fatally wounded (13:3). The deadly blow causes both the head and the ten horns to cease being kings. Being mortally stricken in chapter 13 is equivalent with being thrown into the abyss in chapter 17. The beast itself (in Rev 17:11) stands for the eighth phase. This is when the prostitute Babylon rules the beast, not before.⁵³

“An eighth” (*ogdoos*) but “of the seven” (*ek tōn hepta*)

In order to identify the beast in its last manifestation, we need to clarify how the beast relates to the seven heads. And this we do by making sense of the statement that the beast a separate entity but also “of the seven” (*ek tōn hepta*).⁵⁴ The formula *ek* + cardinal numeral is

⁵² The fact that the ten horns are not distributed across the seven heads but are all on one head has been observed already by Joachim of Fiore. He argued that the head that had the ten horns is the sixth. See Timothy Beal, *The Book of Revelation: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 105.

⁵³ As Paulien rightly observes: “When John sees the beast in the vision (Rev 17:3), it is in its eighth phase.” Paulien, “Revelation 17 and the papacy,” 13.

⁵⁴ Some scholars consider the formulation in the sense that the beast is similar to the first seven heads. Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Commentary 20

found 17 times in the NT. Within this formula, the preposition refers either to the source/origin of which something comes out (e.g. “out of [ek] the four winds,” Matt 24:31; Mark 13:27; “of [ek] the five breads,” John 6:13; “from [ek] one bread,” 1 Cor 10:17), or to a part of a bigger whole (e.g. “which/one of [ek] the two,” Matt 21:32; John 1:40; “one of [ek] the twelve,” John 6:71; 20:24; “being of [ek] the seven,” Acts 21:8; “one of [ek] the four,” Rev 6:1; 9:13; 15:7; “one of [ek] the seven,” Rev 6:1; 17:1; 21:9). From a semantic standpoint, both meanings are possible in Rev 17:11 and they virtually say the same thing: the beast is both coming “out of the seven” (source) and “part of the seven.”⁵⁵

In Revelation, the regular formulation of the partitive *ek* requires a cardinal adjective to precede the preposition (e.g., “one of [ek],” 6:1; 9:13; 15:7; 17:1; 21:9). In Rev 17:11 this regularity is missing. This may suggest that the meaning of source/origin prevails over the partitive one. The consequence would be that the beast derives from the seven, but it is not necessarily one of the previous heads, as some interpretative views already suggested.⁵⁶ This is not to deny altogether the possibility that the scarlet beast is “one of”⁵⁷ the seven, but this seems to be possible not probable. In conclusion, the beast itself may be “one of the seven”⁵⁸

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 473. Ernest Allo also says the comparison of the beast with the seven heads is “undoubtedly in the moral sense” (“sans aucun doute au sens moral”). Ernest Bernard Allo, *Saint Jean L’Apocalypse*, 2nd ed. (Paris, France: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1921), 249. But this is not what the Greek means.

⁵⁵ Several translations render *ek tōn hepta* (Rev 17:11) as “one of the seven” (NIV, RSV, ESV, GNV, NAS, NAU, NJB), while others prefer a more literal rendition as “of the seven” (KJV, DRA, ERV, ETH). The use of *ek* in Revelation shows that many times this preposition is obviously partitive or it has numerical/quantitative significance in relation to a whole. Take for instance “because of the remaining trumpet blasts” (8:13), which refers to last three (out of seven) sounds of the trumpet session. Another example is found in Rev 11:9 where John sees “of peoples and tribes and tongues and nations,” which is the literal way to refer to people from every category mentioned. See also Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, trans. Mary Grosvenor (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), 768.

⁵⁶ How can the beast be an eighth king and at the same time “of the seven”? Trail summarizes the opinions as follows: (1) he is a reincarnation of one of the seven; (2) he is a reincarnation of Nero; (3) the beast is the Antichrist who appears first in the person of Antiochus Epiphanes and then manifests himself at the end of time; (4) the Greek phrase does not say that he is ‘one of the seven’ but that he is ‘of the seven’; (5) the beast comes out of the seven and so is a successor to them; (6) He is ‘of the seven’ in that he has a similar role to play; (7) while the first seven were kingdoms, the eighth is a king, “a world ruler who comes out of the seventh kingdom, the one that received the fatal wound but recovered from it, and rules over it;” (8) he is in close relation with the previous seven but is not one of them; (9) it simply means that one of the kings will rule twice. Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of Revelation 12-22*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 126.

⁵⁷ The ordinal “eighth”, which describes the scarlet beast, is at times used to express the eighth as being from the same group with seven others. “Noah with seven others” in 2 Pet 2:5 is literally “Noah being the eighth.” Cf. *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 19.1: Polycarp “with eleven others” translates the Greek phrase Polycarp “with those from Philadelphia, he being the twelfth.” Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert Walter Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 130. The phrase “it is of the seven” parallels well Luke’s grammar in Acts 21:8, wherein he refers to Phillip, the evangelist, as “being of the seven,” clearly referring to Phillip as being part or one of the seven deacons (cf. Acts 6:5). Cf. also Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Macmillan, 1907), 217.

⁵⁸ So also Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 436. Moule, *An Idiom Book of the New Testament Greek*, 72. Bădiliță,

but more probably it is “a part which originates with [either one of] the seven.”⁵⁹ And “If something is the origin or source of something, it may often be possible to say that it is the instrument, cause or agent by which something comes about.”⁶⁰ As I will show in the next section, it makes sense to see the scarlet beast as deriving from the seven, more specifically from the seventh head (the papacy + the 10 horns), and developing in a new, separate identity.

Concluding that the beast is to be understood as deriving “from the seven heads” is not all. Rev 17:11 distinguishes between the beast and its seven heads. While the number of the heads is seven, the beast is “an eighth”. Not an eighth head, but probably an eighth king.⁶¹ This eludes the readers of Revelation because the gender agreement of the masculine ordinal “eighth” (*ogdoos*) is probably made with the noun “king” (*basileus*, masculine)⁶² not with the noun “head” (*kephalē*, feminine). This tells us that the beast is an eighth king, but not an eighth head. That is why the beast is, in fact, a part of the seven heads, in a new royalty. In fact, Rev 17:11 can be translated as “the beast which was and is not” is both⁶³ an eighth *king* and part of the seven *heads* and goes to destruction.” What part exactly and how this plays out in eschatology needs to be clarified in the last section where various end-time scenarios in Revelation will be studied in parallel.

Parallel Eschatological Scenarios Inside Revelation

Building on the premise that the dragon, the sea-beast, and the scarlet beast (i.e., the eighth king) represent different stages of the same entity (see two sections back), I will compare the eschatological scenarios of chapters 11, 12, 13, 16, and 17, where these

Apocalipsa lui Ioan, 319-320. Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 249.

⁵⁹ The preposition *ek* has in the NT more meanings: origin, source, agency, basis, cause, and manner. The idea that the beast may have the seventh head as origin, source, basis, and cause may spring from the whole of what the preposition can express. See Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 103-104. Archibald Thomas Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 598. The sense of origin in the use of *ek* in Rev 17:11 has been observed long ago, albeit it has been overlooked by later scholars. See Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, vol. 8 (Groningae: W. Zuidema, 1830), 399. Grotius states that *ek tōn hepta* is the shorter form for *ek tinos tōn* (“out of one of the seven”).

⁶⁰ Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1999), 155.

⁶¹ See also Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 699.

⁶² The immediate concord is with the masculine pronoun “he” (*autos*), but that “he” refers to a king, for which the symbol of head stands. Grammarians call this syntactic agreement a construction according to sense, in which the grammatical concord is made with the individuality standing behind the symbol not with the grammatical features of the word-symbol. For Rev 17:11, see Gerard Mussies, *The Morphology of the Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study in Bilingualism*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 27 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 138.

⁶³ In Greek, the repetition of the preposition “and” (*kai*) has the semantic force of the English “both ... and”. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics—Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 658, 672, 761.

characters appear, in the hope to elucidate who the eighth king might be, both in the language of Revelation and in reality. After all, as Shane Wood puts it, “the beast imagery throughout Revelation must be measured cumulatively.”⁶⁴ The comparison between these chapters is justified not only by the presence of the seven-headed monster in all of them but also by the heavy eschatological orientation of these chapters, together capturing the culmination of beast’s attack on the saints and its complete demise.

[...]

Lining all this up to Rev 17, it seems that the scarlet beast in its eighth phase is the beast coming out of the abyss in 11:7⁶⁵ and corresponds to the image of the sea-beast in 13:14b-18. Here is the most important evidence for the latter point. Both the scarlet beast and the icon of the sea-beast come from the realm of the “is not,” that is they receive life in a symbolic sense⁶⁶ (13:3, 12, 14; 17:8, 11),⁶⁷ both of them are old entities in a new development (image of an existent beast / an eighth but of the seven), and both are in conflict with the Lamb and His followers (13:15; 17:14). The last point is well illustrated by the identical vocabulary. Provided that the beast coming out of the abyss in chapters 11 and 17 is the same, the beast kills (*apoktenei*, 11:7) the two witnesses, just as the image of the sea-beast made those who refuse to worship the image to be killed (*apoktanthōsin*, 13:15). Furthermore, the war (*polemos*) against the witnesses (*martyroi*) in 11:7 corresponds to the war (*polemos*) of the dragon against those who have the testimony (*martyria*) in 12:17. The war alluded to in 12:17 actually represent the assault of the beast in its last phase (image of the sea-beast) against the saints (*hagioi*, 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6). The wisdom and mind that they need in order to oppose the mark of the beast (13:18) is recalled for understanding the scarlet beast

⁶⁴ Shane J. Wood, *The Alter-Imperial Paradigm: Empire Studies & the Book of Revelation*, Biblical interpretation series 140 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 219-229 (esp. 222). The author observes the inadequacy of seeing the beast (Roman Empire) destroying the harlot (Rome), which is why he suggests the adversary is bigger than Rome, it’s the Satan (the dragon). See also Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 46.

⁶⁵ David Chilton argues that behind appearing and disappearing is the elusive character of the dragon who manifests himself through the beast mentioned in 11:7 and the one of chap. 17. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (1987; repr.; Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1990), 433.

⁶⁶ Sigve Tonstad argues that the “is not” characteristic does not refer to a state of non-existence, but rather to “absence and concealment.” Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*, ΠΑΔΕΙΑ Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2019), 244-250. While this is definitely true, the disappearance of the beast fits well not only with regards to the dragon which goes away for war (Rev 12:17), as he suggests, but also to a political entity in stand-by.

⁶⁷ R. H. Charles noticed the relationship between the description of the scarlet beast as “was, is not, will come” and the mortal wound of the sea beast and the creation of its image in the context of the beast’s recovery: “ὁ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν has the same force as the like expressions in 13:3, 12, 14.” Charles, *Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, 2:71.

in its last phase (17:9). These numerous parallels make the identification of the eighth king with the image of the sea beast highly plausible.

Interestingly, the pairs of the image of the beast and the scarlet beast also correspond at two levels, at least. The sea-beast in Rev 13 seems to correlate with the woman-Babylon in chapter 17 because the worshipers of the sea-beast exclaim “who is like [*tis omoios*] the beast” (13:4) just as the seamen ask about the whore-Babylon “who is like [*tis omoia*] the great city” (18:18). Likewise, the war of the sea-beast against the saints (13:7, 10) seems to be reflected in the picture of the prostitute being drunk with the blood of the saints (17:6).

The scarlet beast in its eighth phase is then the image of the sea-beast – an eschatological kingdom which replicates the sea-beast. As argued before, the sea-beast represents the seventh head of the multi-headed monster, in history, the Medieval papacy plus the 10 horns. Rebekah Liu⁶⁸ suggested that the ample presence of the image of the beast in Rev 13 through 16 and 19 to 20 and its curious absence from 17 to 18 may be due to the fact that the concept is overwhelmingly present in these two chapters but undercover. Just that, contrary to Liu, it appears that the image corresponds much more with the scarlet beast than with Babylon.⁶⁹ A further comparison between Rev 13 and 17 will prove the point.

⁶⁸ Rebekah Yi Liu, “The Background and Meaning of the Image of the Beast in Rev. 13:14, 15” (PhD diss., Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 2016), 235.

⁶⁹ Liu argues that the prostitute of Rev 17 is the image of the beast from Rev 13, but the reasons and evidence put forward are not utterly convincing. She tries to identify textual links between the prostitute and the image of the beast through establishing certain parallels between the image and backgrounds such as Gen 2, Dan 3, and Acts 2. The image of the sea-beast would thus be a group of people formed, by an evil spirit through the land-beast, in the likeness of the sea beast (Liu, “The Background and Meaning,” 63-132). Babylon the Great, Liu argues, is made of the unfaithful members of God’s community of faith as symbolically represented by the repentant/conquerors in the seven churches, the woman in chapter 12, and the New Jerusalem (Liu, “The Background and Meaning,” 248-264). In her work, Liu shows that the term *eikōn* in the LXX, Jewish Writings of the Second Temple, and the Greco-Roman literature means image, representation, portrait, idol, likeness, and she suggests that the prostitute might be the icon of the beast. The main problem with this proposal is that of typological misrepresentation. Readers of Revelation would expect the image of the beast to resemble a beast, that is a kingdom, not a religious citadel, just as the human beings bear the image of God, in the sense that they were like Him in certain aspects (Gen 1:26-27). A few examples will illustrate the point. Seth is born in the image of Adam; therefore, he is a human like his father (Gen 5:3). Baal’s icons resemble the Canaanite god (2 Kgs 11:18). Even a statue or an image of a human being reflect a human being (Wis 14:15). As Isa 40:19 (so also Rom 1:23) states, an image (*eikōn*) is a similitude (*omoioōma*). The copy must reflect the original. So it is also in the NT. The image of the Caesar on coins resembles the Caesar (Matt 22:20). Jesus Himself is two times depicted as “the image of God” (*eikōn tou Theou*, 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15) because He perfectly reflects God’s being and character. In light of these examples, to overlap the symbols of the woman-prostitute and the image of the beast is typologically incoherent. Babylon is an imperfect reflection of the pure woman in Rev 12. The image of the sea-beast is more in tune with the sea-beast. Liu discusses the meaning of *thērion* (beast) in the same corpuses wherein she looked for the term *eikōn*, only to conclude that its basic meaning is that of wild animal, bestial character, and monsters symbolic of world powers. The image of the beast, then, is a sort of beast, as well, hence an imitation of the world powers in aggression against God and His people (symbolized by the beast), at the very end of time. But Babylon is rather depicted in religious terms. Babylon is the adulteress priestess who has control over the kings of the earth (Rev 17:18). At some point, Liu suggests that the image of the beast stands for the unholy community of the satanic trinity, in contrast with the faithful who bear the image of the Son (p. 141). Babylon is indeed the expression of false Christianity and would fit this description, but the

The realization of the unity between the 10 kings and scarlet beast in Rev 17:12-13 parallels the pair the sea-beast–its image in Rev 13. Indeed, the separate and simultaneous existence of the sea-beast and its image in Rev 13 and beyond is observable in several ways. First, humanity will be asked to worship both the beast (13:4b, 8, 12) and its image (13:14-15; 16:2; 19:20). Second, the image was erected for the sea-beast during a time when the latter was recovered (13:14b). Third, the warning of the third angel in 14:9 is against whoever worships both “the beast *and* its image,” just as those who will be given the judgment in 20:4c “had not worshiped the beast or his image.” The fact that the sea-beast and its icon are inseparable, and coexisting is replicated in Rev 17 by the 10 kings (a reminiscence of the seventh head or the sea-beast revived) and the scarlet beast itself (i.e., the image of the sea-beast) who receive kingly authority together and form, at the end, a unit (17:13). Only when this unity is realized, as Rev 17:11 puts it, the beast itself is “an eighth” – a new formation, but containing parts “of the seven,” more specifically with reference to the 10 kings, which originate with the seventh head.

As argued before, the woman who rides the scarlet beast in the last phase is a false Jerusalem, a proper symbol of apostate Christianity. The scarlet beast as the eighth king represents the last kingdom, supported by the earth-beast and the 10 horns. Under the influential authority of the terrestrial beast, an eschatological icon of the medieval papacy will be formed at the very end of time. This image will be an institution which, for a while, will be

image of the beast seems to be a representation of the sea-beast to which the inhabitants of the earth are urged to worship.

Liu also connects the prostitute and the image of the beast at a cultural level (Liu, “The Background and Meaning,” 265-276). The ANE cultic iconography testifies of goddesses (e.g., the goddess Inanna, in Sumerian; or Ištar, in Akkadian; both were still popular in John’s time) seated upon their related animal. Babylon and Ištar do share the golden embellishments, some aspects of attire, the prostitution and adultery with kings. But Liu recognizes that Ištar, for example, is represented as riding a lion, not a composite beast like the apocalyptic Babylon. However, the greatest problem with this identification is that nowhere in Revelation do we find the great city being worshipped. In fact, being a prostitute in a figurative sense makes the prostitute to be a worshipper of idols, not vice versa. When the prophets call various cities a prostitute (e.g., Nineveh, Nah 3:4; Tyre, Isa 23:15-18; Jerusalem, Isa 1:21) it is these cities that “worship” the idols not they are the “worshipped” idols. Babylon then, committed sexual immorality with the kings of the earth because she worshipped them instead of God. Even the word *bdelygma* (abomination, Rev 17:4-5), that Liu tries to apply to Babylon as an idol (cf. Ezek 7:20; 8:10; 20:30), is not in reference to Babylon as a character, but to her golden cup which was filled with abominations. In that sense, Babylon is not itself the idol/image but a false priestess adulating the kings of the earth instead of adoring the true God. The abominations in her cup are the expression of the adulterous relationship she has with those kings. On top of all, there is no indication in Revelation that the image of the beast is destroyed by the beast, as Rev 17:16 requires. In fact, when the throne of the sea-beast is covered by the darkness of the fifth bowl (16:10; cf. v. 12), the image of the beast still looms in the background (16:2, 11). In fact, the sea-beast and its image go hand in hand to the very end (14:9; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; cf. 20:2). They seem to reflect the unit the 10 kings-the scarlet beast, just as Rev 17:12-13, 16 anticipates, not the pair beast-prostitute. Babylon, that is, the apostate end-time Christianity that encompasses religious aspect of the sea-beast, is first destroyed, but the image of the beast is only later annihilated, together with the kings of the earth (17:14; cf. 19:19).

under the control of apostate Christianity. What remained of the sea-beast, that is the 10 kings, will yield their power to the scarlet beast and form the image of the sea-beast.⁷⁰ The image represents a new development of what the sea-beast used to be.

[...]

Conclusions

The history of the Adventist interpretation regarding the scarlet beast in Rev 17 betrays a tremendous uncertainty, especially when it comes to the identity of the eighth king. The present study claims that the scarlet beast represents the seven-headed monster in its last (eighth) phase and that this is a different symbol for the image of the sea-beast in Rev 13. From a historical-eschatological perspective, this means that the scarlet beast is a political institution, which derives from the seventh head (through the 10 kings) but it is a new development (an eighth king). In this last phase, the papacy is absorbed into the symbol of the prostitute-queen, which represents a union of false Christianity at the very end of time. When the ultimate political powers (the beast and the ten horns) will turn against the woman, she and her daughters (Rev 17:5; cf. 2:20-23) will be the first victim. The last secular project (the image/the eighth king) wins the battle against religion (both true and false Christianity), yet it is but an apparent victory. In spite of their daring attitude to assault the Lamb Himself, the beast and the kings of the earth will learn with bitter clarity that the ultimate winner is the Lamb, the King of kings and the Lord of lords (17:14).⁷¹

Interpreting the dragon, the sea beast, and the scarlet beast as the same seven-headed entity in different phases and identifying the eighth phase of the beast with the image of beast from Rev 13 has important explanatory advantages. The reader of Revelation must have wondered how come the image of the beast is never described as being destroyed, although is the main adversary in the final events. If this is one and the same entity with the beast in its last role, then it is pictured as being killed (17:14; 19:20). Likewise, one marvels at the timorous and passive involvement of the sea-beast after the mortal wound is healed in Rev 13. But this makes a lot of sense if the revived papacy is more ministerial, as the symbol of the woman suggests, and if the 10 kings (part of the wounded head) are crownless until that last hour. From the angle of Rev 13, it is curious that the image of the beast is absent from the

⁷⁰ [...] Ronald Herms, *An Apocalypse for the Church and for the World: The Narrative Function of Universal Language in the Book of Revelation*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 143 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 163.

⁷¹ [...] See Gregory K. Beale, "The Origin of the Title 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' in Revelation 17:14," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 618-620.

scenario in Rev 17. However, this gets clarified when one identifies the image with the scarlet beast in its last chapter.

This framework (one single entity in different steps) also clarifies how the scarlet beast can be described as being and being not at the same time. The odyssey of the beast goes uninterrupted for the first seven chapters/heads, then for a while is not, and lastly rises up for destruction during the last phase. All in all, although this analysis does not exhaust the complexities of Rev 17 (after all, it mainly tackled vv. 7-11), it seemed to have paid off in appropriating and integrating previous Adventist findings and pushing ahead in some key respects.