

# Egyptian Origin of the Book of Revelation

**John H.C. Pippy**



## Chapter 31. Perspectives<sup>1400</sup>



The almost overwhelming number of parallels between the Book of Revelation and ancient Egyptian writings, beliefs and traditions suggest that practically all of the book can be understood within the context of Egyptian sources. For example, Revelation's opening scene and the letters to the seven churches closely resemble the opening scene of the *Book of the Divine Cow* wherein the sun-god calls together his high-ranking deities to discuss what should be done about mankind's rebellious activities. Similarly, Revelation begins with a throne scene in which a central deity dictates a series of ultimatums to the inhabitants of seven localities, advising several of them to cease their rebellious ways or face severe punishment, even war. The structure of these ultimatums is similar to certain chapters in the *Book of the Dead* and the *Book of Caverns* while their details parallel a variety of commonly held Osirian beliefs, most of which are recorded in the *Book of the Dead*.

With the opening of the scroll in Rev. 5, the reader is introduced to a group of scenes which follow the same general sequence as similar scenes near the middle of Egypt's *Amduat Series* of scenes. Next, scenes which parallel events in Rev. 6-7 are found in the 6<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> Divisions of the *Amduat* and, as in Revelation, end with a scene in which a great multitude carrying palm branches stand before a deity's throne. After several accounts of manifestations of the wrath of God in Rev. 8-9, which parallel events in several Egyptian sources, the scenes switch back in Rev. 10 to parallels in the 5<sup>th</sup> Division of the *Amduat*. Parallels then temporarily switch from the *Amduat* to scenes in two other Egyptian texts. Firstly, the *Book of Aker* parallels Rev. 11 and presents a story about two "witnesses" which culminates in a great earthquake and the death of 7,000 people. Next, in scenes in the *Books of the Heavens* which parallel those found in Rev. 12, we read of the birth of a god-child and conflict with a dragon. From there, Egyptian parallels to events in Rev. 13-14 switch back to the remaining parts of the *Amduat* where the sequence of parallel events reverse, flowing backwards from the 4<sup>th</sup> through 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions and culminating in the destruction of evil doers on the earth in the well-known metaphor of the reaping of the harvests of the fields of the earth described in Rev. 14. Meanwhile, parts of the *Amduat Series* are frequently augmented by brief scenes and passages from other Egyptian sources such as the *Book of the Dead*, the *Victory Hymn of Thutmosis III* and the *Annals of Thutmosis III*.

The second series of scenes, the *Book of Gates Series*, covers most of the remaining chapters (Rev. 15-22) which contain scenes and sequences of scenes resembling those found primarily in the *Book of Gates* and the *Books of the Heavens*. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division of the *Book of Gates* we find seven deities who dispense the fiery wrath of the sun-god while a nearby group of twelve singers stand by a lake of fire. Similarly, in Rev. 15, seven angels dispense the wrath of God while singers by a lake of fire sing the “Song of Moses” which itself parallels a section of the well-known Egyptian *Victory Hymn of Thutmosis (Thut-moses) III*. Next, the description of the drying up of the Euphrates River in Rev. 16 paints a picture similar to a dried-up riverbed scene in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division of the *Book of Gates*. And the battle of Armageddon in the same chapter of Revelation contains significant similarities to events portrayed in both the 6<sup>th</sup> Division of the *Amduat* and the *Annals of Thutmosis III*. The story of the conflict between the harlot and the kings in Rev. 17 parallels events shown graphically in the 9<sup>th</sup> Division. Then, events associated with the wrath of God described in Rev. 18-19 parallel Egyptian descriptions of catastrophes caused by the eruption of a volcano in the Aegean Sea in c. 1628 BCE. And just as the capture and chaining of the ancient serpent is followed by a 1,000 year reign of the faithful in Rev. 20, Egypt’s ancient serpentine enemy of the sun-god is captured and bound with a chain in the 10<sup>th</sup> Division where reference is also made to a 1,000 year period. Furthermore, in both sources the serpent is described as once again being free and then recaptured and punished yet again. Rev. 20 then switches to resurrection and judgment scenes which have significant parallels in the *Books of the Heavens*. Finally, the arrival of a new heaven and earth in Rev. 21 leads us to the conclusion of the *Book of Gates* in its 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Divisions where we find a dramatic picture depicting the re-creation of the cosmos and a new celestial city whose physical characteristics conform with Revelation’s Holy City in Rev. 21-22.

Significantly, evidence for these and many other parallels includes not only scenes and sequences of scenes but also the identities of individual characters. Exquisite details of the physical attributes of many of these characters and groups of characters in scenes and sequences of scenes conform so well with those in Egyptian texts and pictures as to render them unequivocal parallels.

Individual parallels and the sum total of all the various types of parallels found in this study represent strong evidence for an Egyptian link to the Book of Revelation; the crowning piece of evidence is the similarity between the overall organization of the Book of Revelation and that of parallel compositions and scenes painted on the walls and ceilings of the tomb of Ramesses VI. When confronted with this remarkable volume of parallels, from the minutiae of possible Egyptian homonyms to the overall organization of scenes and chapters, it is practically impossible to conclude anything other than that the Book of Revelation is of Egyptian origin.

In spite of this conclusion, no part of the Book of Revelation is an obvious translation of any of the Egyptian texts examined. Instead, the book seems to merely allude to Egyptian sources. This is not necessarily an abnormal weakness when considering ancient manuscripts; biblical scholars have come to the same conclusion about references in Revelation to events described in the Old Testament. For example, Sweet (1993) tells us that,

Biblical metaphors and images – dragon, lamb, harlot, bride – come to new life in his [John's] imagination. There are allusions to or echos of practically every book in the Hebrew Bible. Daniel and Ezekiel are particularly formative; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Psalms are pervasive influences; so too are the stories of creation and Exodus, and of the return from Babylon and rebuilding of Jerusalem, which Isaiah depicted as a new Exodus and act of creation. ... though no doubt Jewish, the author is also a citizen of Greco-Roman world and knows its myths and astrology.<sup>1401</sup>

The main difference between Sweet's conclusion and the current one is that the parallels observed here not only appear to be allusions to Egyptian texts, but they are almost all found in discrete, parallel series of events which themselves fit within larger sequences of events (the *Amduat Series* and the *Book of Gates Series*). The same is not true of Revelation's apparent allusions to events in the Old Testament where they do not follow the same order. This difference is quite significant and weighs in favor of an Egyptian rather than a Jewish connection.

The current findings do not, however, negate Sweet's comment that the author of Revelation is Jewish; a Jewish background could indeed account for many of the apparent allusions to Old Testament "metaphors and images" (for example, Jezebel, Gog and Magog, Megiddo, and the New Jerusalem) even if their primary sources were Egyptian. Their presence in the Book of Revelation may even suggest a Jewish author who lived in Old Testament times, centuries before early Christian scholars discovered the book's existence; the original version could even have existed for hundreds of years in an Egyptian library until its discovery by early Christian or Greek scholars.

Of course the reader may ask, "If so many Egyptian parallels are so obvious in the Book of Revelation, why have they not been noticed before? How is it that they remained unnoticed for so many centuries?" One possible reason is that the book also contains many allusions to what seem at first glance to be New Testament images and themes. But if early Christian scribes sincerely believed their Greek versions of the book to be a genuinely Christian document, they might very likely have interpreted the word *christos* ("the anointed one") to refer to Jesus the Christ of Christianity and hence, used this as a basis for translating and interpreting certain passages in early redactions of the book. Also, references to Horus the king and son of god Re could have been interpreted to refer to Jesus the Christ, Christianity's son of God. For example, we have seen how both Horus and Christ were referred to as "the anointed one," "the first born of the dead," "the ruler of the kings of the earth" and each acted as "a faithful witness" and advocate for the individual in the final judgment. Furthermore, the overall acceptance of the book by early Christian scribes and scholars could have been influenced by the similarity between expressions such as "the lamb of Re" (i.e., the juvenile form of the well-known, ram-headed representation of the sun-god) in Egyptian beliefs and "the Lamb of God" used for Jesus by the apostle John (1John 1:29, 36); the Egyptian "lamb of Re" was, as in Rev. 5:12, believed to have been worthy, died, reanimated (resurrected) and subsequently received "power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" Other similarities between the "lamb of Re" and the Christ of Christianity are equally

relevant, not the least of which are the contexts of scenes and events in which they are portrayed.

As pointed out in Chapter 1, *The Enigmatic Book of Revelation*, the controversy surrounding the acceptance of the Book of Revelation by the early Christian churches waged on until 508 CE when it was finally accepted by both the western and eastern Christian churches of the day. Ever since those early years, interpretations of the book's many passages have been based almost entirely on Judaeo-Christian beliefs and traditions along with a modest sprinkling of references to other Middle Eastern beliefs and mythologies. The intervening centuries have witnessed inordinately large numbers of conflicting treatises and commentaries on the origins and meanings of its symbolism by both early and modern Christian scholars. Indeed, as discussed earlier, Christian giants such as Luther, Zwingli, and Erasmus felt the book was not of Christian origin. The results of the current research suggest a reason for this opinion: the Book of Revelation should, instead, be interpreted from a non-Christian perspective – an ancient Egyptian rather than a Christian one.

Prophecy concerning the end times has been traditionally considered the main theme of Book of Revelation. The book contains visions of political unrest and confusion, war, and dramatic destruction by, among other things, earthquakes and fire, all of which contribute to its placement in the genre of apocalyptic literature. Christians have typically associated these images with the end of the world, the second coming of Christ and the final judgment when His followers are rewarded for their faithfulness and sinners are punished. In the end, a New Jerusalem, the celestial city of the blessed appears in the sky where the faithful live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. A purely Egyptian perspective on these same themes provides us with a dramatic set of parallels to all these and many more events, an observation which may suggest the Egyptians had a basically similar view of events at the end of time.

With respect to the arrival of the holy city in the sky, it should be pointed out that the Egyptians considered their celestial city to have a river running through it – to be a heavenly counterpart of their own Nile River valley with its own cities, towns, villages, waterways, fields and farms; it was considered to be the very abode of the blessed dead. This equivalence included a belief that events in the heavenly sphere had counterparts on earth with many earthly events being more or less mere reflections of realities playing out in the spiritual world. This view of the cosmos leads us to look closely at seemingly prophetic events in the Book of Revelation which could span two interacting worlds – heavenly and earthly conflicts, wars, catastrophes and judgments.

It should be noted that the cyclical appearance of the sun in the morning sky, its voyage across the heavens and its final demise in the evening forms a context for interpreting what appear to be visions of the future in the Book of Revelation. The sun-god daily entered the morning sky to bless and reward his earthly followers and to punish his enemies. Later, he and his followers fought a celestial war with the forces of evil before his body died (his soul did not die) and he passed into the Netherworld at sunset. The great cosmic cycle was completed with his rejuvenation through the re-uniting of his soul with his dead body (i.e., Osiris, thus affecting his reanimation/resurrection), and his triumphant appearance with his faithful, celestial followers in the morning sky to once again rule over the earth.

It is within this broad context that we take note of the opening theme of Revelation which conforms with events during the early days of the sun-god's reign on earth as described in the *Book of the Divine Cow*. Just as Revelation opens with orders from the throne of God for letters to be sent to groups of rebellious followers warning them to change their ways or face war, the sun-god's first action is to announce from the throne that he will destroy those who had rebelled against him. Meanwhile, in the *Book of Gates*, with multitudes of the faithful looking on, a scroll is opened and a detailed account of all that is to happen during the sun-god's journey through the sky is revealed. The great celestial war to be fought against Apophis and his followers is to be reenacted on earth where soldiers are to be recruited from among the faithful and promised great rewards in the hereafter if killed in battle. To this is added the promise that the sun-god's full power will be brought to bear on the enemy by the release from the very depths of the earth the most powerful natural forces of the then-known cosmos: volcanic eruptions, powerful earthquakes, fire, floods and tsunamis. His wrath will ultimately destroy not only all evil, but all of creation as well; the destruction of evil is likened to the harvest of grain and the cosmos is thoroughly cleansed of all evil before being renewed. Those of the faithful who die from the release of these terrible forces are promised bodily resurrection and privileged positions in the heavenly abode where they will live and rule in bliss with their partners, friends, relatives, servants – and their sun-god – as he traverses the next, newly created sky over his newly created kingdom, the earth. Modern Christians consider many of the events in the Book of Revelation to be prophetic while Egyptians considered similar events to be part of the natural unfolding of each great cosmic cycle of time.

On earth, the king's throne was thought of as being representative of the sun-god's heavenly throne while the king, the son of Re, was the sun-god's representative on earth. And just as heavenly wars were declared against Apophis and his followers, earthly wars were declared against the sun-god's enemy and his followers on earth. Hence, Revelation's seven letters are identifiable as "military dispatches" or even "declarations of war" against the king's rebellious subjects or suzerainties. Evil doers are accused of being the followers of Seth, who at times was considered to be the equivalent of Baal the chief god of the Palestine area. Egyptian recruits and seasoned soldiers are assured that the sun-god's full power will be brought to bear on the enemy, including the release of the most powerful forces of the cosmos, just as outlined for the hereafter in books such as the *Amduat*, the *Book of Gates* and the *Book of Aker*. Veterans of the coming war are promised plots of productive farmland and a plentiful food supply for themselves and their families as they live in peace along the Nile with their beloved protector, Horus, the son of Re. Those who die in battle are promised bodily resurrection and privileged situations in the celestial abode where they will rule with their sun-god for 1,000 celestial-years (equivalent to one day on earth) as he passes through his newly created city in the sky.

We may well ask, "Where do the current findings leave the debate on the provenance of the Book of Revelation?" When answering this question we should bear in mind that the debate began during the days of the early Christian church when the book first came to the attention of Christian scholars; it ended in about 500 CE when

the western churches finally capitulated to a Christian origin. But about a thousand years later, the leaders of the Reformation followed the lead of Jerome, an early Christian theologian, that the book should not be held as canonical because it was not of apostolic origin and “lacked the heart and spirit of John the Divine” (see Chapter 1, *The Enigmatic Book of Revelation*,). Nevertheless, meaningful debate on the issue of the book’s provenance effectively stalled after the Reformation when the church settled back into an attitude of a general acceptance of a Christian origin (in spite of the opinions of Luther and others). Perhaps the most important contributing factor to this acceptance was the complete absence of an alternative context for interpreting its many enigmatic passages. The results of this study fill this void and enable a new round of meaningful debate on the subject to be considered in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The main reason for the delay in the recognition of Revelation’s likely association with ancient Egyptian beliefs and texts is the long time it took for Egypt’s hieroglyphic texts to be deciphered. After they were first translated in the early 1800’s and slowly gave up their secrets during the rest of the century, a vast body of knowledge about Egyptian beliefs finally came into focus. Nevertheless, it was not until 1907 that a possible relationship between the Book of Revelation and ancient Egyptian beliefs was first suggested in a publication by Gerald Massey. The style and/or the level of scholarship of Massey’s publication did not resonate with Egyptologists, however, and his basic conclusions remained largely untapped and fallow throughout the twentieth century. The results of the current research adds many new and significant findings to Massey’s work; they suggest the time has come for Christian theologians to seriously examine the very real possibility that the Book of Revelation is, in fact, not of Christian origin.

A relatively simple and straightforward starting point for such a review would be a critical comparison of the parallels found in this study with generally accepted parallels suggested in footnotes on the pages of many modern versions of the Book of Revelation. A valid question to pursue may well be, “Does the substance and the sum total of Egyptian parallels found in the current study carry more – or less – weight to the argument than Old Testament parallels identified by biblical scholars in Judaeo-Christian texts?” A cursory look at many of these footnotes suggests the answer will likely be that the nature and full spectrum of types of Egyptian parallels found here are more relevant than the results of previous work by ancient to modern Christian theologians. Very likely, the final outcome of such a study will suggest the need for more in-depth analyses which will, in turn, ultimately support the conclusion of this work and confirm an Egyptian origin of the book.

Of course, concurrent studies should certainly be conducted by scholars specializing in ancient Egyptian beliefs. These should include critical examinations of the evidence presented here along with reexamination and reinterpretation of certain passages found in the *Book of the Dead*, the *Amduat* and other relevant sources. It is to be expected that many parts of the Book of Revelation will shed new light on the meaning of certain Egyptian texts and how the Egyptians may have understood their already ancient texts as well as how these interpretations were expressed in their day-to-day lives. For example, it may well be found that they interpreted parts of the texts as being, not only religious and historical in nature, but

also prophetic in the same sense as Christians currently view the Book of Revelation, especially as it relates to political and apocalyptic events and the judgment of the dead at the end of time. Other studies may well reveal even more convincing evidence for an Egyptian origin. This last suggestion is based on the sometimes almost daily discoveries of new parallels encountered throughout this study. Such discoveries seemed to emerge like bright beacons from the Egyptian texts; very likely, there are many more to be identified.

In the opening paragraph of Chapter 1 of this book, the reader's attention was brought to a statement by Fiorenza (1985) that "Despite all scholarly efforts, no generally recognized or accepted consensus has been reached in regard to the composition and the theological interpretation of the book." She added that,

While serious scholarly works are rare, popular and fundamentalist writings abound. No wonder that Rev. is still considered to be the most difficult book in the NT [New Testament]. Scholars seem to have arrived at a consensus that the book does not provide us with any details of church – or world-history nor give us a calendar of future events, while popular interest still focuses on such information.

On the same page, she opens her introductory section on "Historical-Critical Analyses" with the comment, "It is universally acknowledged that Rev. has to be understood in its historical-cultural and religious context." Of course this statement was made in the context of an assumed Judaeo-Christian origin. The results of this study strongly suggest that the book be re-examined from an Egyptian and possibly an Egyptian-Judaeo origin.

If future research and learned and considered opinions conclude that the Book of Revelation is indeed based on Egyptian rather than Christian or other Middle Eastern beliefs, it should best be assigned to the corpus of literature from ancient Egypt, albeit a corrupted version of a now-lost, earlier work possibly written in Greek. Such research would broaden our understanding of the religious beliefs and traditions of the ancient Egyptians, including the influence on their world view of major natural catastrophes. It should also be useful in garnering a greater depth of knowledge about the role religious beliefs played in Egypt's political affairs and military exploits, both internally and internationally. At the same time, acceptance of the current results will offer an alternative basis for the understanding of what has been for many centuries the most enigmatic book in the annals of Christian literature.