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# Astral Motifs in Revelation 12<sup>1</sup>

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The ancient Babylonians are reputed to have observed the position of the sun, moon and stars with respect to the zodiac. Following the conquests of Alexander the Great, this way of observing the heavens was imported into the Mediterranean world, where the heavenly bodies were identified with figures of traditional Greek mythology (e.g., the planets Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury). It was also in the Hellenistic context that celestial observation was combined with the notion of fate and thus used to predict the future (predictive or horoscopic astrology). Overall, observation of the heavens enjoyed widespread popularity within Greco-Roman pagan culture and religion until the fifth century C.E. One recent scholar has described pagan worship of the stars and planets as “the most important and widespread Hellenistic system of piety”.<sup>2</sup> It is important to keep in mind that our modern distinction between astronomy and astrology was unknown in the ancient world: by and large *astronomia* and *astrologia* signified one and the same thing, the observation of celestial phenomena.

Of course the early Christians commonly rejected astrology because of its association with fatalistic determinism. Nevertheless, in light of the pervasive presence of interest in the stars in Greco-Roman society it would be surprising if the early Christians exhibited only unanimous hostility towards the observation of the heavens. Particularly noteworthy is the positive portrayal of the Magi (who were, of course, observers of the stars) in Matthew 2:1-12. In this essay I explore the adaptation and use of ancient astral lore in another early Christian text, Revelation 12:1-17.

The book of Revelation contains many themes and symbols that are loosely related to the stars. Indeed, one recent commentary on the book

of Revelation seeks to interpret the book entirely in celestial terms as a "sky vision".<sup>3</sup> Astrology often lay behind number symbolism in ancient literature and culture. Elements in the text of Revelation such as the references to the numbers 4, 7, and 12 may well have some vague association with ancient astrology;<sup>4</sup> yet one cannot be sure that behind the frequent mention of these numbers (and their multiples) the writer of Revelation saw the planets, the signs of the zodiac, or other matters of technical celestial science. My focus in this paper is on astral features which are clearly and unmistakably present in Revelation 12:1-17.

At the outset of Revelation 12 the writer portrays a great heavenly portent: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, bearing on her head a crown of twelve stars (v.1).<sup>5</sup> The woman's crown, as well as her splendid garments and her footstool, resemble the trappings of royalty. The Egyptian goddess Isis was portrayed using very similar celestial imagery in a second century C.E. text, the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius. The point of Apuleius' description of Isis was to show her to be a heavenly ruler, "regina caeli", who reigns over the stars and fate.<sup>6</sup> It is not unlikely that the portrayal of the woman in Revelation 12 has a similar purpose. Within the larger framework of Revelation, the woman clothed with the sun appears in strong contrast to another powerful female figure, the woman in Revelation 17 who wears the name of Babylon.

Of course, the crown of twelve stars in Revelation 12:1 immediately recalls the zodiac.<sup>7</sup> Ancient Greco-Roman iconography frequently depicted deities as encircled by the zodiac, among them Jupiter, Heracles, Helios/Sol,<sup>8</sup> Pan,<sup>9</sup> Dionysus and Ariadne, Helios and Selene.<sup>10</sup> Similar depictions appear frequently in the iconography of Mithraism.<sup>11</sup> Examples of the zodiac encircling a central figure are found in ancient Jewish tradition as well: for example, a mosaic from the Beth Alpha synagogue includes a figure in a chariot encircled by the 12 zodiacal signs with their names in Hebrew.<sup>12</sup> Female deities were similarly depicted, for example: Ephesian Artemis with the zodiac as a necklace or encircling her bodice;<sup>13</sup> Artemis in her temple surrounded by the zodiac;<sup>14</sup> Victory holding a zodiac which encircles another goddess;<sup>15</sup> a stele from Argos depicting the moon goddess Selene with seven stars around her head and shoulders (there is also a zodiac surrounding the whole figure);<sup>16</sup> and grave paintings from El Salamuni, Egypt, portraying Isis encircled by the zodiac.<sup>17</sup> Incidentally, not all such representations were of benevolent god-

desses: the head of Medusa could be portrayed in this manner as well.<sup>18</sup> The presence of the zodiac on these representations had the effect of emphasizing the cosmic, universal aspect of the particular deity, highlighting his/her role as kosmocrator, "lord of the heavens, who controls the progression of time and events".<sup>19</sup> The deities' cosmic power could also be depicted by associating them with the planets, which were reckoned to be seven in the ancient world (see, for example, the imagery of the Son of Man holding seven stars in his right hand in Revelation 1:16, 20, 2:1, and 3:1).<sup>20</sup> Images of the planets and the zodiac were used together in the ancient temple of Bel at Palmyra in Syria, where the god Bel-Jupiter is portrayed on the ceiling surrounded by the six other planets, around which in turn is a second ring containing the twelve zodiacal signs.<sup>21</sup> From such parallels it is clear that ancient readers of Revelation 12 would have readily understood the circle of stars surrounding the woman's head in cosmological terms, signifying that she is standing in the midst of the zodiac.

More specifically, the woman portrayed in Revelation 12 corresponds to the constellation Virgo. Even though she is wearing the zodiac as a crown she is herself one of the twelve zodiacal signs. We are not obliged to see a contradiction here, rather, this can be the writer's way of drawing special attention to the woman among the zodiacal signs. In any case, we would expect the number twelve to be retained as representing the zodiac.<sup>22</sup> Franz Boll emphasizes that such an astral interpretation of the text would have been natural for both the writer of Revelation and his contemporaries: it should not be regarded as an esoteric reading recognizable only by a learned few. The meaning would have been readily accessible to a general audience.<sup>23</sup> Isis too was interpreted as Virgo in the Greco-Roman world, which offers a clear parallel to this identification of the woman of Revelation 12 with Virgo. The earliest astral association of Isis was with Sothis (i.e., Sirius the Dog Star), whose rising marked the Egyptian new year.<sup>24</sup> That the Egyptian goddess also eventually came to be equated with Virgo is evident from numerous depictions of Isis with the ear of corn ("spica"), which was a basic feature associated with Virgo, Spica being the name of the brightest star in Virgo. To illustrate the point, Boll refers to a gem which features Isis holding her son Horus in her arms. Over her head there is a star, and Horus has an ear of corn. Another ear of corn stands in a basket by the goddess' side.<sup>25</sup> This motif was also appropriated in Christian usage: Boll cites a portrayal of Mary and her child accompanied by ears of corn.<sup>26</sup>

An understanding of the woman in Revelation 12 in astral terms as Virgo is also supported by the astrological nuances with which the next image is described in the text: a dragon, an ancient representation of the constellation Hydra. The words introducing the dragon closely parallel the earlier presentation of the heavenly woman:

And I saw another portent in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on its heads. Its tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman.<sup>27</sup>

Although the verb “to stand” (*histemi*) was the technical term used in ancient astronomical texts to position a constellation in relation to other constellations, it is more likely that the verb *hestēken* in Revelation 14:4a should be understood in terms of early Christian theology, i.e., that it is meant to portray the dragon as the antagonist of the woman and her offspring in keeping with the curse upon the serpent in Genesis 3:15. Indeed, the writer of Revelation explicitly equates the great dragon with “that ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Revelation 12:9)<sup>28</sup> and describes the dragon’s making war upon the woman’s children.<sup>29</sup>

The primary confrontation in Revelation 12:1-6 takes place between the woman and the dragon.<sup>30</sup> This is paralleled in the location of Isis and her arch-enemy, the evil god Seth, as constellations in the northern celestial hemisphere: for example, a royal grave from Thebes refers to the “fore thigh of Seth located in the northern heaven” which is “the seat of Isis” who guards Seth in chains.<sup>31</sup> (In ancient Egyptian cosmology Seth was identified with the seven stars of Ursa Major.<sup>32</sup>) Like Isis guarding the seven-starred Seth, the writer of Revelation portrays the Son of Man holding seven stars in his right hand (Revelation 1:16). In Revelation 12:4, the image of the “third of the stars” being swept down by the dragon’s tail can be understood as a reference to the sheer extent of the constellation Hydra in ancient cosmology: ancient texts refer to Hydra stretching across four of the signs of the zodiac (from Cancer to Libra), that is, across a third of the zodiac.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the seven heads, seven diadems and ten horns of the dragon (Revelation 12:3) are likely more than just examples of apocalyptic number symbolism.<sup>34</sup> It is significant that two other ancient constellations, Corvus (the Raven) and Crater (the Cup), which lay immediately adjacent to Hydra and were frequently associated with it, were understood to have seven and ten stars respectively.<sup>35</sup> Of

course, falling stars, like comets, were widely regarded in the ancient world as celestial omens that signified momentous historical events. They were also evoked in connection with the *ekpurōsis*, the Stoic doctrine of the periodic dissolution of the universe into fire.<sup>36</sup> Falling stars are referred to in Revelation 2:5, 6:13, 8:10 and 9:1.

Aside from the individual correspondences of the woman with Virgo and the dragon with Hydra, the plot of Revelation 12 itself parallels ancient astral myths.<sup>37</sup> The drama of Revelation 12 begins with the woman giving birth: once she is introduced in 12:1 the author relates that “she was pregnant and was crying out in birthpangs, in the agony of giving birth”.<sup>38</sup> It is important to realize that in Revelation this birth is envisioned as taking place in the sky, not on earth.<sup>39</sup> After the dragon has been brought on the scene in 12:3-4a, we read:

Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. And she gave birth to a son, a male child [cf. Luke 2:7], who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron [cf. Psalm 2:9]. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days. And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon...was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.<sup>40</sup>

A later astrological text portrays the planets falling in all directions as they flee before the constellation Draco.<sup>41</sup> The tradition of an astral battle is evident in ancient Jewish sources (Judges 5:20; 2 Maccabees 5:2-4; Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.5.3), and became more common in apocalyptic texts (e.g., Daniel 8:10; Sibylline Oracles 3:796-808, 5:206-213). A particularly vivid example is the following section from Sibylline Oracles 5 (512-531) with its bleak vision of the future:

I saw the threat of the burning sun among the stars  
and the terrible wrath of the moon among the lightning flashes.  
The stars travailed in battle; God bade them fight.  
For over against the sun long flames were in strife,  
and the two-horned rush of the moon was changed.  
Lucifer fought, mounted on the back of Leo.  
Capricorn smote the ankle of the young Taurus,  
and Taurus deprived Capricorn of his day of return.

Orion removed Libra so that it remained no more.  
 Virgo changed the destiny of Gemini in Aries.  
 The Pleiad no longer appeared and Draco rejected its belt.  
 The Pisces submerged themselves in the girdle of Leo.  
 Cancer did not stand its ground, for it feared Orion.  
 Scorpio got under the tail because of terrible Leo,  
 and the dog star perished by the flame of the sun.  
 The strength of the mighty day star burned up Aquarius.  
 Heaven itself was roused until it shook the fighters.  
 In anger it cast them headlong to earth.  
 Accordingly, stricken into the baths of ocean,  
 they quickly kindled the whole earth. But the sky remained starless.<sup>42</sup>

In contrast with a third of the stars being cast down in Revelation 12:4, according to the writer of this portion of the Sibylline Oracles the eschatological battle will cause all the stars to fall. In Revelation 12, the motif of birth followed by flight parallels the nativity story in Matthew 2. In the latter text, while of course the child is not snatched up to heaven, nevertheless Herod's pursuit of Jesus and his family mirrors the dragon's attack on the woman and her child.

The identification of the woman of Revelation 12 with Virgo is not contradicted by her giving birth to a son. In ancient Greco-Roman religions virgin and mother goddesses were not incompatible; in the words of Frances Yates, "The...virgin is...a complex character, fertile and barren at the same time."<sup>43</sup> For example, as we have seen, the figure of Isis holding her son Horus was identified with Virgo. Virgo was associated with several other mother goddesses in antiquity, such as Juno,<sup>44</sup> Ceres/Demeter, Magna Mater, Atargatis,<sup>45</sup> and even Ilithyia, the Greek goddess of childbirth.<sup>46</sup> Boll concludes "das alles ist eins".<sup>47</sup> The paradox of a goddess who is both virgin and mother prompted mockery from early Christian writers.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the paradoxical image of the goddess who was both virgin and mother was apparently seen as eminently useful by the Christian author of Revelation 12, who must have felt it would also be understandable to his Christian audience. It is interesting that a similar paradox also came to be affirmed of Mary in early Christian tradition: the notion of Mary's virginity not only "ante partum" but also "post partum" and "in partu" was developed by the fourth century.<sup>49</sup>

The woman of Revelation 12 descends to earth (implied in Revelation 12:5-6) where she continues to be threatened by the dragon after he is thrown down to earth (Revelation 12:7-9). In the overall plot of Revela-

tion the dragon continues to pose a threat until Christ (in 19:19-20) defeats the beast which the dragon had empowered (in Revelation 13:2). But that beast emerges only after the dragon himself had renewed his pursuit of the woman:

And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.<sup>50</sup>

Wings were a standard part of Virgo's image in ancient cosmography.<sup>51</sup> The "great eagle" (note the definite article!) must have a specific reference. There is precedent for the use of such imagery in Jewish tradition,<sup>52</sup> but we can also discern a reference here to the constellation of the Eagle, Aquila.<sup>53</sup> (It is certainly unlikely that the eagle of Revelation 12:14 is an allusion to Rome, considering the negative portrayal of Rome as "Babylon" in Revelation 17-18.) The eagle (i.e., the constellation Aquila) also appeared earlier in Revelation: it is one of the four living creatures in Revelation 4:6b-7, and in 8:13 its position at the zenith is described by the use of technical astrological terminology – "in midheaven" (*en mesouranēmati*).<sup>54</sup>

The drama of the dragon's opposition to the woman ends in Revelation 12:17 when, having failed to kill the woman, the dragon turns to attack her children. Of course, these latter are the Christians, among whom the author of Revelation numbers himself: they are "the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus" (12:17).<sup>55</sup> Thus in addition to her astral and mythical correspondences, in Revelation 12:17 the woman receives yet a further identification as the church. Of course, just as Israel was portrayed as the bride of God (Jeremiah 31:32; Hosea 1-2) some early Christian texts (e.g., Ephesians 5:22-32) depicted the church as Christ's bride. Such imagery is different from, but not contradictory to, the image of the church as mother of the Christians derived from Revelation 12:17. Indeed, the latter represents a further level of meaning achieved by the incorporation of feminine imagery into early Christian theology.<sup>56</sup>

From Revelation 12:5 we know that the first born son (cf. Luke 2:7) of the woman is Christ. The allusion there to Psalm 2:9 ("he will rule all nations with a rod of iron"), which will be repeated in Revelation 19:15, makes this clear. The birth of Christ took place in the past; the future



coming of Christ is still ahead, at Revelation 19:11ff. However, there is a tremendous difference – indeed, according to Boll, a contradiction<sup>57</sup> – between an “historical” focus on Jesus’ life (such as is evident in the Synoptic Gospels) and the heavenly portrayal of Christ in the book of Revelation. The questions arise: how did the Christian writer of Revelation come to make use of the celestial image of Virgo? how did the image of Virgo the queen of heaven become adapted for use in a Christian account of Christ’s birth in Revelation 12?<sup>58</sup>

Boll argues that early Christian writers were faced with two possible avenues along which Christ’s birth could be described. The point of departure for both of these was the Septuagint of Isaiah 7:14: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign:<sup>59</sup> behold the virgin shall conceive in her womb and give birth to a son and you shall call his name Emmanuel.” In traditional exegesis this text provided the essential connection between the virgin and the mother of the Messiah. The one avenue was that taken by Matthew 1-2 (cf. Luke 1:27), i.e., to portray the woman as an earthly virgin. It was possible to develop such an approach along the lines of the traditional Jewish view which expected the Messiah to be a descendant of David. The other avenue was taken when the Messiah was seen primarily as a heavenly being. This was the approach of the author of Revelation who was able to make the virgin of Isaiah 7:14 to correspond to the celestial Virgo which, as we have seen, was long identified with numerous other virgin and mother goddesses of Greco-Roman religion. There are also other examples of the association of Mary with Virgo in early Christianity. For example, among certain spurious works attributed to John Chrysostom is a homily “On the Birth of Christ” in which the angel Gabriel greets Mary with a slightly altered form of the “Ave Maria” of Luke 1:28: “Greetings, favoured one, O unharvested land of the heavenly ear of wheat.”<sup>60</sup> The “ear of wheat” (*stachus*) also refers to the image of the sheaf that is a regular characteristic of Virgo, and *stachus* is the Greek name of Virgo’s brightest star (Spica). It was by identifying Virgo with Mary that the author of Revelation was able to adapt Virgo for his/her own purposes. Boll’s argument seems more plausible than that of R. H. Charles, who held that Revelation 12 could not have been composed by a Christian but must have been first adapted from its pagan source by a Jewish author.<sup>61</sup> The author of Revelation was not the only early Christian writer who tended to view the Messiah primarily as a heavenly being. The apostle Paul too seems to have had little interest in the “historical” details of Jesus’ life (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:16). In Revela-

tion 12:6 the woman's descent to the wilderness allows for a minimum connection with the earth. This is comparable to Rudolf Bultmann's acknowledgement of the need for an historical "dass" (i.e., the "that" of Jesus' historicity) as a basic minimum to anchor the Christ of faith within history.<sup>62</sup>

The Christian perspective of the author of Revelation is also evident in that the woman of Revelation 12 is subordinated to Christ within the work overall. Outside of chapter 12 she makes no further appearance. It is interesting that pagans could ascribe the statement "I am all that has been and is and will be" to a goddess (in an inscription on a statue of Athene/Isis at Saïs in Egypt<sup>63</sup>). For the author of Revelation such a claim could only be uttered by Christ himself (Revelation 1:4, 8) and not by the woman who is his mother in Revelation 12. In the process of taking her over from pagan religion, the author of Revelation has subsumed the woman's divine power under that of her Son, with the result that she has become a lesser figure than she was before.

The approach taken by the author of Revelation also represents quite a departure from the emphasis on history in traditional Jewish messianic expectation. However, the myth of the woman and the dragon in Revelation 12 is an interesting example of the widespread tendency in Greco-Roman religion to situate the gods in the sky.<sup>64</sup> As we have seen, in Revelation 12:6 the woman's descent to the wilderness (on earth) allows for a minimum connection with the earth. Therefore, she can be the earthly mother for her other children, the Christians (12:17). Since she does not remain in the sky, the woman is *both* heavenly and earthly.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps one price of the author's use of Greco-Roman celestial myths was that he/she was not able to affirm a similar balance in the portrayal of Christ in Revelation 12. Aside from the reference to "the blood of the lamb" in 12:11, Christ is presented as a predominantly heavenly being in this chapter, though of course elsewhere the author does affirm Christ's human suffering on earth (Revelation 1:5, 7; 5:9; 11:8).

What is most remarkable about the twelfth chapter of Revelation is that it demonstrates the author's use of themes drawn from ancient observation of the heavens. The author's interest in, and use of, astral imagery is not sophisticated. Rather, it essentially provides "grist for the mill" for early Christian proclamation of the Gospel. It is interesting that the author of Revelation seems to show none of the suspicion of astral matters that would become so fixed in later Christian writers.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations are used in this paper: CCAG=*Catalogus Codicorum Astrologorum Graecorum*, ed. Franz Cumont et al. (Brussels, 1898-1953); CIL=*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Oxford, 1863- ); CIMRM=*Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae*, ed. M. J. Vermaseren (The Hague, 1956-1960); Helm=Apuleius, *Opera*, ed. Rudolf W. O. Helm (Leipzig, 1955- ); HTR=*Harvard Theological Review*; JBL=*Journal of Biblical Literature*; OTP=*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James Charlesworth (Garden City, NY, 1983-1987); Peek=*Hymnus in Isim Andrius*, ed. Werner Peek (Gräfenhainichen, 1929); PG=*Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1857-1886); RE=*Real-Encyclopädie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, W. Kroll et al. (Munich, 1893- ); Robert=Pseudo-Eratosthenes, *Catasterismorum Reliquiae*, ed. C. Robert (Berlin, 1963); ZNW=*Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*. The biblical quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise indicated.
- <sup>2</sup> Luther H. Martin, "The Pagan Religious Background," in *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to A.D. 600*, ed. Ian Hazlett (Nashville, 1991), 59.
- <sup>3</sup> Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation* (Peabody, MA, 1995). Malina's conclusions are often forced. For example: it is doubtful that the clearly apocalyptic image of the Son of Man in Revelation 1:12ff. refers to some sort of constellation (pp. 52, 67-70); apart from a brief and biased report by Epiphanius we know nothing about "Pharisaic astrology" (p. 78); aside from the views of two groups discussed by Hippolytus, there is no support for the assertion that an allegorical reading of the heavens was "rather usual in the astronomicals of those deviants labelled as 'heretics'" by the early Christians (p. 73). Furthermore, there is no evidence that the "giants" of Jewish legendary tradition (based on Genesis 6:4) were thought to have been "responsible for stone structures of gigantic proportion (Mediterranean dolmen and menhir, like Stonehenge) and [that] their skeletons are still found at times (dinosaur remains identified as the bones of giants)" (p. 64); Aries' turning its neck backwards was understood to mean that it was looking back towards Taurus (Manilius, *Astronomica* 1.264) rather than that its neck was broken (pp. 53, 111). It is also unclear what is the real benefit of translating *angelos* as "sky servant" or *pneuma* as "sky wind" (pp. 61-63 et passim). A further problem with Malina's book is its contention that Revelation should be interpreted cosmologically rather than in terms of apocalyptic eschatology when no such "either/or" is required (see the review by David A. deSilva in JBL 116 [1997] 763-765).
- <sup>4</sup> Franz Boll, *Aus der Offenbarung Johannis* (Leipzig, 1914; repr. Amsterdam, 1967), 20-23.

- <sup>5</sup> Boll, *Offenbarung*, p.98 n.3 rightly points out that *sēmeion mega* can indicate signs of future events as well as evidence of divine power (as in the Gospels).
- <sup>6</sup> “Regina caeli” is the term used in Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.2 (Helm, p. 267.4) by Lucius to address the goddess who turns out to be Isis. Isis’ sovereignty over fate is then affirmed in 11.6 since she is able to prolong Lucius’ life beyond its allotted span (Helm, pp. 270.23-271.6). Her rule over the stars is also mentioned in aretologies from Cyme and from Ios which read “I show the way for the stars, I arrange the course of sun and moon” (Peek, pp. 18.13-14); the version from Ios is almost identical (Peek, p. 19.10-11). See also the Isiac aretology from Andros, where Isis says “I give light to the star-bearers...and I direct the burning, bright-eyed sun, the leader of the circle, from pole to pole” (Peek, p. 26.23, 30-32).
- <sup>7</sup> In Greek *astēr* usually refers to a single star, and *astron* to either a star or a constellation. Boll emphasizes this at length in “Der Stern der Weisen,” ZNW 18 (1917) 40-43; however, in *Offenbarung* p. 99 he admits that in practice the terms are often used interchangeably (see *stephanos asterōn dōdeka* in Revelation 12:1).
- <sup>8</sup> H. Gundel, s.v. “Zodiakos” RE 10A, 628, no. 49 (Jupiter); 629, no. 51 (Heracles); 625-626 nos. 42, 44, 44a (Helios wearing a balteus with zodiac); 649, no. 129 (mosaic with Sol on quadriga). On coins Jupiter was often portrayed surrounded by the zodiac (see *ibid.*, 668-670, and A. B. Cook, *Zeus* [Cambridge, 1914], vol. 1, pp. 752-753).
- <sup>9</sup> Konrad Wernicke, “Pan im Tierkreis,” in W. H. Roscher, ed. *Ausführliches Lexikon der Griechischen und Römischen Mythologie*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1897-1902) 1467-68 (Pan “als Personifikation des Weltalls, als der Allgott”).
- <sup>10</sup> Joscelyn Godwin, *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World* (London, 1981), p. 168, plate 139 (Dionysus and Ariadne); Gundel, “Zodiakos,” 632, no. 59 (Helios and Selene); *ibid.*, 669, no. 188 (coin with Helios and Selene).
- <sup>11</sup> The zodiac surrounds Mithras himself in the portrayal of his birth from an egg on the Housesteads relief (CIMRM 860), his birth from a rock on a relief from Trier (CIMRM 985), and more frequently in the bull-killing scene (CIMRM 75 [Sidon], 810 [London], 1472 [Siscia]). A zodiac may have surrounded the representation of the banquet of Mithras and Sol in CIMRM 1161.
- <sup>12</sup> Gundel, “Zodiakos,” 649, no. 131 and Godwin, *Mystery Religions*, p. 83, plate 50; other synagogue mosaics are listed in Gundel, “Zodiakos,” 650-651, nos. 132-134.1. See also James H. Charlesworth, “Jewish Astrology in the Talmud, Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Early Palestinian Synagogues,” HTR 70 (1977) 193-198. Cf. Genesis 37:9, where the sun, moon and 11 stars bow down to the ground before Joseph in a dream. As

well, in Testament of Naphtali 5.4 there are “twelve rays” (*dōdeka aktines*) under the feet of Judah the patriarch; indeed, this is part of a larger passage (Testament of Naphtali 5.3-6) featuring astrological imagery which is comparable to that in Revelation.

- <sup>13</sup> Gundel, “Zodiakos,” 625, no. 41 and 642-644, nos. 92-113; Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 28. Artemis was also associated with the moon goddess Selene; see Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, 1976), p. 71.
- <sup>14</sup> Gundel, “Zodiakos,” 670, no. 195.1 (on a coin from Ptolemais).
- <sup>15</sup> Gundel, “Zodiakos,” 628-629, no. 50; Godwin, *Mystery Religions*, p. 113, plate 75 suggests that the goddess in the zodiac is Cybele; Nelson Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins* (New York, 1965), pp. 108-110, plates 46, 48 and p. 396 sees her as Tyche-Atargatis.
- <sup>16</sup> Stephen J. Patterson, “A Note on an Argive Votive Relief of Selene,” *HTR* 78 (1985) 439-443. Patterson describes the woman’s crown of stars in Revelation 12:1 as “a slightly depaganized version of the zodiac which encircles Selene,” and he writes that both the figure of Selene on the Argive stele and the woman of Revelation 12 “provide a graphic representation of the universal Queen of Heaven”.
- <sup>17</sup> Gundel, “Zodiakos,” 662, nos. 166.4 and 166.8.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 670, no. 195 (coin); 676-677, no. 213 (gem).
- <sup>19</sup> Patterson, “Note,” 440.
- <sup>20</sup> Note also the seven stars surrounding Selene on the Argive stele (Patterson, “Note”).
- <sup>21</sup> H. J. W. Drijvers, *The Religion of Palmyra* (Leiden, 1976), p. 9 and plate II. The temple dates from the first century C.E.
- <sup>22</sup> Boll, *Offenbarung*, p. 103.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch’s de Iside et Osiride* (Cardiff, 1970), pp. 371-373.
- <sup>25</sup> Franz Boll, *Sphaera* (Leipzig, 1903), p. 211 (“Diese Ähren sagen genugsam, dass hier die als Jungfrau im Tierkreis versternte Isis abgebildet ist....”).
- <sup>26</sup> Boll, *Offenbarung*, p. 115 n.1.
- <sup>27</sup> Revelation 12:3-4a.
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. Revelation 20:2.
- <sup>29</sup> Revelation 12:17.

- <sup>30</sup> Cf. the frequent opposition between God and a dragon (identified as Rahab, Leviathan, Behemoth, etc.) in the Hebrew Scriptures; the passages are listed in R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (Edinburgh, 1920), pp. 317-318. Such "combat myths" between two deities, one of which is usually a monster or dragon, were widespread in ancient Mediterranean cultures. For a discussion of such myths as the background to Revelation 12 see Collins, *Combat Myth*, pp. 57-100.
- <sup>31</sup> Boll, *Sphaera*, p. 163; *Offenbarung*, pp. 110-111.
- <sup>32</sup> *Sphaera*, p. 162. In Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* 21 the Bear is said to be Typhon's "soul", just as the Dog Star/Sothis is the "soul" of Isis. According to Griffiths' comment on this text (p. 373), the equation of Seth and the Great Bear was well established in ancient Egypt. Boll suggests that a comet which appeared at some point in Ursa Major was named Typhon (*Sphaera*, p. 164).
- <sup>33</sup> Boll, *Offenbarung*, p. 102. Vettius Valens, *Anthologiae* 1.2 says that Hydra's head is at the claws of Cancer and its tail is at the claws of Scorpio. A scholium on Aratus' *Phaenomena* 443 states that Hydra contains three signs, Cancer, Leo and Virgo; another that Hydra's head is in Cancer, its middle in Leo, its last part in Virgo and its tail ought to be over the head of Centaurus so that its end is under Libra. Cf. the image of the dragon bearing six of the zodiacal signs on its back in CCAG 5, 2, p. 134.4-5; similarly, the dragon is said to be 180 degrees long (six signs or one half of the zodiacal circle) in a work by the seventh century Syrian bishop Severus Sebokt (F. Nau, "La Cosmographie au VIe Siècle chez les Syriens," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, 2e série, 15 [1910] 254).
- <sup>34</sup> The same may be said of the beast with 10 horns in Daniel 7:7-8, 24 and the beast with seven heads, ten diadems and ten horns in Revelation 13:1.
- <sup>35</sup> See Pseudo-Eratosthenes' *Katasterismoi* 41 (p. 190.19-36 Robert) with parallels from scholia on astronomical texts by Germanicus and Hyginus; Boll, *Offenbarung*, p. 102. Ovid's version of the myth of the Snake, Raven and Cup in *Fasti* 2.243-66 mentions that the three were catasterized together, as does Ps-Eratosthenes.
- <sup>36</sup> Seneca, *Consolatio ad Marciam* 26.6; *Thyestes* 827-874.
- <sup>37</sup> As Boll notes, it is for this reason that the identification of the woman and the dragon is more than a matter "einer behelrenden, aber sachlich belanglosen Analogie" (*Offenbarung*, p. 105-106).
- <sup>38</sup> Revelation 12:2.
- <sup>39</sup> Boll, *Offenbarung*, pp. 104-105. Charles, *Revelation*, p. 319 incorrectly claims that the woman gives birth on the earth.
- <sup>40</sup> Revelation 12:4b-9.

- 41 CCAG 5, pt 2, p. 134.11-17. On Satan's fall from heaven see also John 12:31 and Luke 10:18-19 (which features imagery of snakes as well as scorpions).
- 42 Trans. Collins, p. 405 (OTP v.1).
- 43 *Astraea* (London, 1975), p. 33.
- 44 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 6.4 (Juno is addressed as the virgin Dea Caelestis, worshipped at Carthage).
- 45 CIL 7.759 is an inscription to Virgo along with Caelestis, Magna Mater, Ceres and Atargatis; see Yates, *Astraea*, p. 34.
- 46 Boll, *Offenbarung*, p. 105. Boll (ibid., p. 109) emphasizes the syncretistic aspect of Virgo, noting that "die *Parthenos* am Himmel" was associated "mit so vielen Gottheiten (Dike, Demeter, Magna Mater, Eileithyia, Tyche, Pax, Atargatis oder Dea Syria, Iuno [Venus] caelestis der Karthager)."
- 47 *Offenbarung*, p. 111.
- 48 Firmicus Maternus, *On the Error of the Pagan Religions* 4.1; Augustine, *City of God* 4.10.
- 49 Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, new, updated ed. (New York, 1993), p. 518 and n.2.
- 50 Revelation 12:13-14.
- 51 Boll, *Offenbarung*, p. 113. See the drawing of Virgo with her standard attributes in A. Bouché-Leclercq, *L'Astrologie Grecque* (Paris, 1899; repr. Bruxelles, 1963), p. 140.
- 52 Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 32:11-13; Isaiah 40:31; 1 Enoch 96:2; Testament of Moses 10:8-9 (where Israel rising on the necks and wings of an eagle is paralleled with being fixed in the heaven of the stars).
- 53 Boll, *Offenbarung*, p. 113. Within Revelation, a parallel image to the eagle bearing the woman is the horse bearing Christ (Revelation 19:11). In ancient astronomy the figure of the horse corresponded to Pegasus (i.e., the constellation Equus) which according to myth bore Bellerophon. The latter also has an astronomical referent, the constellation of the Charioteer, Heniochus/Auriga (Manilius, *Astronomica* 5.97-100).
- 54 Boll (*Offenbarung*, p. 38) claims that since in ancient Mesopotamian cosmology Pegasus had been located at the head of the "zodiac of the equator" in the "thema mundi" (i.e., the horoscope at the beginning of the universe) Revelation 8:13 can be read as an eschatological projection of the constellation's position at creation ("Endzeit" recapitulates "Urzeit") (see also Malina, *Revelation*, p. 100). However, it is uncertain whether the author of Revelation would have been familiar with such obscure astrological lore.

- <sup>55</sup> Cf. 1 John 3:9, and the Pauline notion of the heavenly Jerusalem as the “mother” of the church in Galatians 4:26.
- <sup>56</sup> Cf. Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford, 1964) who sees the woman of Revelation 12 as representative of the female figures of the biblical salvation history.
- <sup>57</sup> *Offenbarung*, p. 119 and n.1.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 121.
- <sup>59</sup> *Dia touto dosēi kurios autos humin sēmeion*; cf. the term *sēmeion* in Revelation 12:1.
- <sup>60</sup> PG 61, 737. For other examples of the identification of Mary with Virgo see W. Gundel, s.v. “Parthenos,” RE 18, 4, 1950, 20-28.
- <sup>61</sup> Charles, *Revelation*, pp. 299-300, 308-310.
- <sup>62</sup> “The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus,” in Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville, ed. and trans. *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ* (New York, 1964), pp. 20, 25; Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York, 1955), p. 66.
- <sup>63</sup> Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 9. Another version of the inscription is recorded in Proclus’ commentary on the Timaeus 21E.
- <sup>64</sup> Boll, *Offenbarung*, p. 114, 122. See the analysis of the development of ancient pagan “solar theology” in Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* (New York, 1912; repr. 1960), pp. 92-110.
- <sup>65</sup> Boll, *Offenbarung*, p. 123.