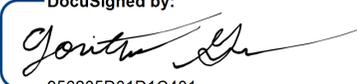


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Barbaric Beasts:
Visual Representations of Barbarians and the Book of Revelation

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B.A., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2012

M.Div., Denver Seminary, 2014

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of
Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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2022

Abstract

Barbaric Beasts: Visual Representations of Barbarians and the Book of Revelation
By Jonathan C. Groce

This project addresses the complex entanglement between the book of Revelation and the Roman empire. Many existing studies have shown the ways in which Revelation is, fundamentally, an anti-imperial polemic. Central to this interpretation of Revelation is the depiction of the beasts in chapters 13, 19, and 20. Typically, studies highlight how the polemics native to Jewish Apocalyptic cast Roman power, and those associated with it, as evil “beasts.” My study looks at the way “beast” may have been a lexeme in the Greco-Roman cultural imagination by considering the “bestly” historical enemies of Greece and Rome: the people they call “barbarians.”

This study juxtaposes the anti-Roman polemic in Revelation 13 with Roman visual representations of “barbarians,” or non-Roman people groups, with an emphasis on the pieces visible in Asia Minor. The strategy of this juxtaposition will be to look at the way those visuals mark “barbarians” as “other,” and then show how Revelation marks imperial power as “other” in precisely the same way. What I will argue is that these representations of non-Roman peoples would have affected the rhetorical impact of Revelation’s polemic. Revelation’s earliest readers would have seen in its imagery this startling claim: the Roman empire is the real “barbarian.”

This project extends existing conversations on Revelation’s anti-Roman polemic, showing that the book’s Roman context supplies not only the target of its polemics, but the imagery and method of that polemic. It shows one more way in which Revelation can be understood as an anti-imperial text. And, in the vein of some postcolonial approaches to Revelation, it shows how Revelation’s imperial resistance can also be a form of imperial entanglement, as the book’s polemic implements the strategies of otherizing found in the imperial culture it ostensibly aims to resist.

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Acknowledgments

A dissertation is supposed to be a solitary journey. In many ways, that was true of my experience. The majority of the many months in which I worked on this project passed with various levels of lockdowns in effect due to the exigencies of the Covid pandemic. Those societal restrictions had ways of intensifying the feeling of isolation that normally accompanies dissertation writing. Despite these things, I was hardly alone. The institutional support provided to me by Emory University—not only the generous financial package delivered by the Laney Graduate School but also the continued support from the David R. Scott fellowship—meant that financial stress did not weigh down this journey. Perhaps even more remarkable was the generous culture of support at Emory. Not once did I feel that my colleagues and advisors had anything less than the most unwavering faith in me, my work, and my abilities. My work was always read with compassion and care, consistently leaving my curmudgeonly inner critic malnourished and disarmed. The colleagues closest to me in the program—Steve, Ebby, Donghyun, Zane, and Hyunju—have made Emory a wonderful place to be. And the support of my advisor, Susan Hylan, has been a non-negotiable necessity throughout this process. Her feedback and counsel has consistently been efficient, clear, and humane. I have left every conversation with her feeling recharged and able to approach the next task.

My community beyond Emory has been an abundant source of support. Numerous friends from All Souls Fellowship church have felt like family to me, offering unwavering

reassurance, understanding, and—when I have sought it—accountability. In the last few months before completing this project, I also received indispensable support from The Academic Writers Space (TAWS), a community of academic co-workers whose combination of encouragement, accountability, and commiseration kept me on track to bring this project to a close.

Most important, however, has been the steady presence of my wife Kathryn and my daughter Eliza. Kathryn consistently went out of her way to partner with me in navigating the impossible burdens of full-time work and co-parenting throughout this project. I could not have completed this journey without her with me. And my daughter Eliza has shown me lavish love in ways that she may never understand. Her presence, often literally at my side, has given meaning and purpose to the struggles that accompany a project like this one. She has consistently reminded me that whatever I may one day accomplish in academic or pastoral work, my true calling is in fact the little one right next to me. I dedicate this work, and whatever successes may flow from it, to Kathryn and Eliza.

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Chapter 1

Approaching Anti-Roman Polemic in the Book of Revelation

In its long reception history, Revelation 13 has been a harbinger of barbarity; by aligning the monsters of the chapter with the figures or institutions they oppose, interpreters of the passage have used the passage to render elements of their world barbaric. G. B. Caird rightfully identifies Revelation 20 as the “paradise of cranks and fanatics.”¹ But some of the wildest interpretations of Revelation have drawn on readings of chapter 13. Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, in their reception-historical commentary on Revelation, declare that “pride of place” for being “a happy hunting ground for decoders of the Apocalypse” belongs to this chapter.² Revelation 13 is such a fertile breeding ground for interpretive diversity because its interpreters have used its polemical language as ammunition for their own polemics. Whether identifying the beasts as the catholic church or as specific political or religious leaders, the passage has often served as a mirror that reflects whatever readers consider the vilest “beasts” of their own context.

¹ G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, BNTC (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1966), 249.

² Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 148.

For instance, John Bale's 1548 commentary, one of the first protestant expositions of Revelation, takes the first beast of 13:1–10 as representing the Catholic church.³ Various features of the beast's description are allegorized to line up with Catholic offices and practices.⁴ He identifies the beast's seven heads with offices in the church; its ten crowns with the church's cultural dominance and erroneous doctrine and practice (such as confessions, saint-worship, and Latin services); and its blasphemous names with high titles like "pope" and "cardinal" (cf. 13:1).⁵ The beast's mortal wound (13:3) represents the continued work of the Catholic church even in the face of persecution.⁶ Its ability to acquire worship from the whole world (13:4) touches on Catholicism's universal impact. The blasphemous utterances of the beast (13:5) pertain to the demands placed upon the Catholic congregant, such as the requirement of penitent confession.⁷ These features of Catholicism—its offices, its doctrine and practice, and its widespread power and impact—would not be seen as problematic to an ordinary Catholic person. But by aligning Catholicism with the first beast, Bale can talk about those features of Catholicism as though they were evil, dangerous, or barbaric. The passage, in Bale's reading, is a rhetorical weapon; this mode of interpreting Revelation 13 takes something otherwise benign and deploys the imagery of the beast to transform it into something terrifying.

Contemporary scholarly interpretation of Revelation 13 argues that John the seer was doing something just like this—representing figures or institutions in his world as monstrous and

³ John Bale, "The Image of Both Churches, Being an Exposition of the Most Wonderful Book of Revelation of St. John the Evangelist," in *Select Works of John Bale*, ed. Henry Christmas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1849), 249–640.

⁴ In 17:3 the Whore of Babylon appears riding the beast. From his interpretation of chapter 17, it seems that he takes the Whore as Rome itself (Bale, "Image," 493–94), which would make the beast with which it is associated the Catholic church.

⁵ Bale, "Image," 421–23.

⁶ Bale, "Image," 427–28.

⁷ Bale, "Image," 431.

evil—when he composed the passage. Standard interpretation of Revelation 13 views it as a polemic against Roman figures and institutions. The first beast (13:1–9) is generally taken to represent Nero, who is possibly a stand-in for Roman emperors in general. The second beast (13:11–18) is taken as either the imperial cult in its totality or some specific element of that institution.⁸ Such interpretation presupposes that the passage relates to Revelation’s Roman context by taking some ostensibly noble figure or institution from that context and re-presenting it in a negative, polemicized light. The polemical force of the passage does not come from Revelation’s Roman context, but what Revelation does with its Roman context as an Apocalyptic and polemical document.

This project aims to move beyond that presupposition. Its impetus is the observation that Hellenistic and Roman images with which Revelation’s first readers may well have been familiar—including specific images that have been used in the interpretation of Revelation—possess a polemical rhetoric of their own. Many visual depictions of “barbarians”—people groups who live outside the “civilized” borders of Greek, and later Roman, society—represent them as the “Other” against which Hellenistic or Roman identity is defined. While the people in these territories could become Roman subjects through conquest and incorporation, their pre- or non-Roman way of life could be pejoratively represented as inferior or uncivilized. Such stereotyped representations of non-Roman people served not only to support the notion of Roman superiority, but also to justify Roman conquest as a kind of favor to annexed peoples.⁹ This dissertation explores the relationship between otherizing representations of the “barbarian” and the representation of the Roman empire itself in the book of Revelation. How might

⁸ See section II below for examples of this kind of interpretation.

⁹ For elaboration on these points related to the nature of the barbarian concept, see chapter 2.

Revelation's audience have received the book's anti-Roman polemic in light of pejorative representations of "Others" with which they would have been familiar?

The primary claim of this project is that the book of Revelation negatively represents Roman imperialism in a way that mirrors the representations of the nations as "Other" in the Hellenistic and Roman artwork visible in Asia Minor. Visual representations of barbarians cement contrasts between the civilized and the uncivilized. In the imperial environment of first century CE Asia Minor, the "civilized" party was the Roman empire, and the "uncivilized" were the nations on its fringe. The author of Revelation, viewing the reach of Roman imperial authority as an inherent evil, wants to oppose such rhetoric by showing that affiliation with Rome is dangerous, even barbaric. The novel contribution I make in this project is a demonstration that the book of Revelation presents the Roman empire as a harbinger of barbarity rather than civility. Existing studies of Revelation's anti-Roman polemic contend that, while there is indeed a Roman "target," the "arrows" come solely from the Jewish imagination. John intends, such interpretive work contends, to reverse otherwise positive associations with Nero or the whole Roman empire. What I aim to show is that Revelation's anti-Roman polemic mimics the patterns that Roman imagery deploys in representing people groups annexed by the Roman empire.¹⁰ While Hellenistic and Roman artwork makes the case that non-Roman people groups are uncivil, Revelation's counter-imagery implies that empire itself is barbaric.¹¹ In other words, there are Greco-Roman "arrows" at work as Revelation takes aim at its Roman "target."

¹⁰ My usage of the verb "mimics" intentionally refers to the category of mimicry common to postcolonial studies, often citing Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 121–31.

¹¹ The Pergamene artwork discussed in chapter 3 has a Hellenistic origin, but in its first century CE context would have been understood as making a pro-Roman rhetorical statement. For that reason, I here say that "Hellenistic *and* Roman" artwork marks non-Roman, rather than non-Greek and non-Roman, as "uncivilized."

Where Existing Studies Leave Off

Jewish Sources and Roman Targets

As a study in Revelation's anti-Roman polemics, this project will foreground Revelation's portrayal of the beasts. Revelation 13, which provides the primary description of the beasts, has a long history of being understood as an anti-Roman polemic. Ancient interpreters of Revelation were often happy to connect the beasts to whatever evil they saw in their own time and wanted to oppose, as John Bale did by treating the polemic as a criticism of the Catholic church. Many other individuals or institutions have been deemed the target of the passage.¹²

However, most modern interpreters of Revelation engage in what Hermann Gunkel calls "contemporaneous exegesis:" interpretations of Revelation's imagery that consider the historical *realia* to which the images may have referred while also allowing for the imagery to be a representation of the author's imagination or expectations.¹³ Modern "contemporaneous" interpretation of Revelation 13 reads the beasts chiefly as an anti-Roman polemic.¹⁴ As long ago as 1920, in R. H. Charles' ICC commentary, the current standard view regarding the target and method of Revelation 13's polemics had already taken shape. In an opening summary statement on the pair of beast images in Revelation 13, Charles says, "as transformed and incorporated in the present context, they refer to the antichristian Empire of Rome as incarnated in Nero

¹² Political and religious figures and historical movements of various kinds have been identified with the beasts, whether the empires Rome overcame in its ascension, the Catholic church, or the prophet Mohammed. For a listing of examples, see Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, 152–59. It is worth noting that Victorinus read Revelation 13 and 17 as a Rome polemic because he too was interested in contemporaneous exegesis.

¹³ Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12.*, trans. K William Whitney, The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 130–50.

¹⁴ Some interpreters are careful to leave room for the passage's meaning to go beyond its anti-Roman polemic, allowing for the passage to be a polemic against a wider range of general evils. See, e.g., Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 250. The passage can also target "paganism" in general; see Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 114–15.

redivivus and the heathen priesthood of the imperial cult.”¹⁵ This view—that the beasts from the sea and land respectively represent Roman imperial authority and the imperial cult in a polemical fashion—remains standard today.¹⁶ Another element of Charles’ interpretation of Revelation 13 has also remained standard: a split between Jewish polemics and Roman targets. Charles’ view of the polemic in Revelation 13 can be helpfully summarized with an archery metaphor: Revelation’s Roman context supplies the target of the polemic; Jewish literature antecedent to Revelation supplies the arrows.

The split between Jewish polemic and Roman target appears in sharp relief in Charles’ commentary because he takes a source-critical approach. He attributes the polemical phrases of the passage to a Jewish source, taking the Rome-specific references as later insertions. For Charles and his predecessors in the History-of-Religions school, Nero and the imperial cult constitute the elements of Revelation’s Roman cultural milieu that are reflected in the passage. But according to Charles’ source-critical analysis, the passage is a reappropriation of apocalyptic texts that, in their original forms, have no specific reference to Nero or to the imperial cult.¹⁷ The references to the mortal wound in 13:3 and the 666 in 13:18 convince Charles that the passage invokes Nero. But he sees these as later insertions.¹⁸ The same goes for 13:14b–15, which constitutes the reference to the priesthood of the imperial cult that induces worship of the

¹⁵ R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:333.

¹⁶ For a useful summation, see Adela Yarbro Collins, “Portraits of Rulers in the Book of Revelation,” in *Neues Testament Und Hellenistisch-Jüdisch Alltagskultur*, ed. Roland Deines, Jens Herzer, and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, WUNT 274 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 278–83. Keystone treatments in major commentaries include David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 729–730, 737–40, 755–57, 775–79; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 689–93, 712–17; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 580–84, 590–91, 601–604.

¹⁷ Charles, *Revelation*, 1:340–44.

¹⁸ Charles, *Revelation*, 1:349–50.

emperor.¹⁹ The rest of the passage—the pairing of the beasts, the Daniel-inspired monstrosity of the first beast, the signs and wonders in 13:11–13 and 16–17—these come from earlier Jewish Apocalyptic sources written in Hebrew. The elements of the passage that relate it to specific elements of its Roman context are insertions that take the passage’s existing polemical arrows and point them toward specific Roman individuals (either Caligula or Nero),²⁰ or toward the institution of the imperial cult. As Charles puts it, the depiction of the sea-beast and land-beast “were united by the final Apocalypticist, who by means of various additions made the entire chapter refer to the entire Roman Empire, Nero *redivivus* and the imperial cult.”²¹

The separation between Jewish polemic and Roman target that emerges in Charles’ reading also emerges in later exegesis of the passage. In part because source- and redaction-criticism has fallen out of fashion in Revelation studies, this separation has not emerged by interpreters continuing to use a source-critical method.²² Other methods, ranging from tradition-historical to social-scientific to rhetorical to postcolonial studies have been employed in making sense of the passage.²³ Although the identification of the first beast with Nero and the second with the imperial cult has not been overturned, the use of these diverse methods has refined knowledge about the deployment of those Rome-references in the passage. Nonetheless, a split between Jewish polemical content and Roman targets has, for the most part, endured. These

¹⁹ Charles, *Revelation*, 1:359–61.

²⁰ Charles (*Revelation*, 1:338–39) agrees with his predecessors that 13:3 probably developed as a polemic against Caligula that was retooled by addition the mention of the mortal wound in 13:3 and 13:14.

²¹ Charles, *Revelation*, 1:340.

²² Among major recent commentators, only Aune makes a source-critical appraisal of the passage. Rather than taking the references to Roman imperialism as the components added at a later editorial stage, Aune (*Revelation 6–16*, 749, 769) identifies 13:9–10 and 13:18 as explanatory glosses added to the image of each of the beasts. It would therefore be a stretch to say that source-critical approaches necessarily lead someone to treat the polemical images of beasts as one original underlying source that knew nothing of Revelation’s Roman context. A source-critical approach may have nothing at all to say about how the anti-Roman polemic in chapter 13 works.

²³ See below for a larger discussion of such studies.

studies understand Revelation 13 to be reversing positive associations that the book's readers might otherwise have with Roman figures or institutions. Whether discussing Nero or the imperial cult, the idea is that the passage alludes to something Roman and employs imagery from Jewish tradition to represent that Roman institution in negative terms. In what follows, I will show how interpreters of Revelation 13 understand the passage to engage either with Nero tradition or the imperial cult. Aside from some studies that highlight a more complicated relationship between Revelation and the imperial cult, analyses of anti-Roman sentiment in Revelation 13 see the Roman context as providing the target, rather than the polemical means, of the passage.

Engaging Nero tradition in Revelation 13

The dominant approach to making sense of the polemics in the first half of Revelation 13 has been a tradition-historical approach. These studies have clarified the relationship between the passage and other religious traditions that provide its garish imagery. Indebted as it is to scholars in the History-of-Religions school, Charles' interpretation of chapter 13—or at least the underlying sources that lack references to Nero or the imperial cult—is both a source-critical and tradition-historical reading. He reads the depiction of the first beast as a reworking of the succession of kingdoms in Daniel 7 that takes the Roman empire as the fourth kingdom, in keeping with other Jewish texts that take up Daniel 7.²⁴ He takes the false prophet as a reworking of Jewish or Christian antichrist traditions in the vein of 2 Thessalonians 2.²⁵ More recent major discussions of the first beast in Revelation 13:1–9 have taken a tradition-historical approach to

²⁴ Charles, *Revelation*, 1:345–46, cf. Yarbro Collins, “Portraits of Rulers,” 276.

²⁵ Charles, *Revelation*, 1:342–44.

make better sense of the Nero allusions in the passage and provide more thorough expositions of the traditions that John uses in order to represent Nero polemically.

The relationship between Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 has long been taken for granted as a starting point for making sense of Revelation 13's polemical force. G. K. Beale's commentary, centered as it is on Revelation's usage of the OT, brings in further OT comparanda, but it again is largely centered around Daniel 7.²⁶ His interpretation of the second beast depends on the tradition of deceptive and offensive paganism influencing the covenant community that draws on Daniel 11:30–37 (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:3–12).²⁷ While Beale certainly makes more connections between the OT and Revelation 13 than Charles, both fundamentally agree that Daniel 7 supplies the main stock of imagery for the chapter.²⁸ Their agreement is representative of the unanimity with which interpreters of Revelation 13 see the passage as dependent on Daniel 7 for its polemical edge.

Other tradition-historical readings of Revelation 13 build on the passage's Danielic dependence in attesting to the usage of other traditions. Adela Yarbro Collins' work on the usage of the Ancient Near Eastern combat myth paints shows how that tradition is employed to paint Nero in a negative light. In Revelation 13 she finds a fusion of myths about primordial chaos monsters, the fourth kingdom of Daniel 7:7, and the legends of Nero's return.²⁹ Identifying the fourth kingdom from Daniel 7 with Rome, and expressing an anxiety about the return of Nero, is a pattern that Yarbro Collins identifies in the Sibylline Oracles. Revelation, following the usage of a primordial chaos monster myth in chapter 12, brings in the image of the Leviathan and the

²⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 682–703.

²⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 709–710.

²⁸ Charles, *Revelation*, 1:345–46; Beale, *Revelation*, 728–30.

²⁹ Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion 9 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 174–90; *eadem*. "Portraits of Rulers," 278–83.

Behemoth to dramatize that presentation of Nero's return. The effect of this fusion tells a story of eschatological adversaries and places Nero in it as a key adversary,³⁰ reversing otherwise positive associations with Nero.³¹ Where Nero often identified himself with Apollo the dragon-slayer, Revelation 13 renders him an agent of the dragon. By looking for the polemical thrust of the passage in the mythic traditions it employs, Yarbrow Collins does something very similar to what Charles does in his source-critical approach. She takes the monster imagery as the source of the passage's bite. The reference to Nero supplies the target of its polemic, not the arrows.

The most thoroughgoing exploration of Nero tradition in Revelation 13 is Richard Bauckham's essay "Nero and the Beast," which provides an in-depth look at primarily Jewish traditions that the passage directs against Nero.³² Because it has to do with ancient Jewish traditions that express anxiety about Nero, it is ultimately a study of those traditions rather than a study of Nero himself. A large portion of his essay is devoted to unpacking the usage of *Gematria* to refer to נראן קטר with the number 666, demonstrating that Jewish numerological practices also allow him to connect Nero's 666 number to the numbers of hills and rulers in 17:9–12 and in contrast with the numerical measurements of the New Jerusalem (21:12–17).³³ He goes on to explore the passage's relationship to the legends of Nero's return, providing an exposition of the relationship between Revelation 13 and Sibylline Oracle 5, Ascension of Isaiah 4, and Daniel 7. His work makes a more detailed version of the same argument Yarbrow Collins makes in her dissertation on the combat myth: John appropriates Jewish Apocalyptic traditions to

³⁰ Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 184–86.

³¹ Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 188–90.

³² Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 384–52.

³³ Bauckham, "Nero and the Beast," 384–406.

situate Nero in the mold of an eschatological adversary.³⁴ The work of Bauckham and a few others³⁵ helps to advance the discussion of the anti-Nero polemic in the passage by elucidating the traditions on which John draws in the composition of his vision. But, like R. H. Charles, they nonetheless take non-Roman tradition as the source of the passage's polemical force. The polemic itself, these interpreters argue, does not draw on Roman tradition except insofar as it alludes to Roman figures in order to suggest the target of the polemic.

These interpreters are not unaware that Roman representation of Nero was sometimes negative. Suetonius and Tacitus both include scathing descriptions of Nero in their respective histories.³⁶ Remembered as one of Rome's "bad" emperors, Nero was one of the few to suffer a *Damnatio Memoriae*: the erasure of his memory enforced in part by defacing or destroying images of him, or reworking them slightly so that images originally representing Nero could represent a different, more beloved emperor.³⁷ So Bauckham, for instance, briefly acknowledges "the tradition which remembered Nero as a monster of vice,"³⁸ citing some jabs against Nero from Marcus Aurelius and Philostratus. But he primarily emphasizes that the myth of Nero's return would have been good news for many Roman people in the Greek-speaking eastern Roman empire.³⁹ Likewise, Hans-Josef Klauck opens his discussion of the legend of Nero's

³⁴ Bauckham, "Nero and the Beast," 407–31.

³⁵ Similar work has been done by Hans-Josef Klauck. Discussing the legend of Nero's return, he argues (contra Yarbrow Collins) that Revelation 13 really does depend on a *Nero Redivivus* legend, though is nonetheless aimed at Domitian. See Hans-Josef Klauck, "Do They Never Come Back? Nero Redivivus and the Apocalypse of Joh.," *CBQ* 63 (2001): 693–98.

³⁶ See, e.g., Suetonius, *Nero*, 26–39; Tacitus, *Annals*, XV.32–47. See, e.g., Suetonius, *Nero*, 26–39; Tacitus, *Annals*, XV.32–47. Anti-Nero sentiment among elite Romans might be identified as "the hidden transcript of the powerful;" see Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire*, Paul in Critical Contexts (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 68–70.

³⁷ On Nero's *Damnatio Memoriae*, see Eric Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture*, *Momenta Graeca et Romana* 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 45–85.

³⁸ Bauckham, "Nero and the Beast," 409.

³⁹ Bauckham, "Nero and the Beast," 407–409.

return by showing why someone would want Nero to come back, despite the sometimes mixed reactions to him.⁴⁰ Although there is plenty of anti-Nero sentiment in Roman writings, those reactions have had little to do with the interpretation of the Nero references in Revelation 13. Jewish traditions of eschatological adversaries, not Roman critiques of Nero's vices, have shaped the way readers understand the polemic in the chapter. Thus, these tradition-historical expositions of Revelation's anti-Roman polemic say rather little about Revelation's Roman context itself, at least compared to what they do say about the Jewish traditions on which Revelation 13 draws.

Engaging the Imperial Cult in Revelation 13

Tradition-historical expositions of the polemics in Revelation 13 have largely been limited to the Nero references in the passage; discussion of the imperial cult usually takes a different form.⁴¹ Interpreters of Revelation have a lot to say about the second beast, not least because it has been taken as a cipher for the imperial cult since the 19th century.⁴² That the "beast from the land" refers to the imperial cult in some way is not debated. But there have been debates, and they have centered on the extent of the contestation of the cult. Charles held that Revelation 13 dealt only with the priesthood;⁴³ others have read the passage as a wider

⁴⁰ Klauck, "Do They Never Come Back?" 683–86.

⁴¹ An important exception is Steven J. Friesen, "Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13," *JBL* 123.2 (2004): 301–10. This article explores the imperial cult as a carrier of mythological tradition that Revelation aims to rival.

⁴² Charles, *Revelation*, 1:357. For a survey of the issue as discussed in major commentaries on Revelation see Steven J. Friesen, "The Beast from the Land: Revelation 13:11–18 and Social Setting," in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, ed. David L. Barr, Resources for Biblical Study 44 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2003), 59–63. .

⁴³ Charles, *Revelation*, 1:333.

polemic.⁴⁴ The question concerning the relationship between Revelation 13:11–18 and the imperial cult is not a question of whether such a relationship exists, but the precise details of its extent. For example, even in his attempt to overturn the notion that Revelation responds to a series of problems caused by Domitian insisting on greater adherence to the imperial cult,⁴⁵ Leonard Thompson downplays, but does not dismiss, the importance of the imperial cult for interpreting Revelation 13:11–18.⁴⁶

While studies that link Revelation 13 to Nero emphasize the allusions to Nero contained in the passage, studies that link Revelation 13 to the imperial cult go beyond demonstrating the passage's allusions to the cult; rather, they show how Revelation itself is attempting to rival the imperial cult's project. The imperial cult is important to these interpreters not only because it is the target of the polemics in Revelation 13:11–17, but because it is also a full-blown religious and political system against which Revelation's symbolic universe is posed as an alternative worldview. These studies stress the ubiquity and social advantages of cult participation, contending that Revelation asks its readers to let go of those advantages. Correcting the impression that Revelation's first readers would have been compelled to participate in it on the penalty of state-sponsored violence (the proverb about anticipated violence in 13:9–10 notwithstanding),⁴⁷ they see Revelation 13 less as a charge to embrace punishment, but to refrain from desirable advantages. In the wake of S. R. F. Price's monumental 1984 study treating the

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Duff, *Who Rides the Beast*, 114–15, who takes it as a polemic against paganism in general, with the imperial cult and the “Jezebel” of Revelation 2:20–23 as some more specific, though not exclusive, targets.

⁴⁵ Leonard L Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 95–115, 164–67.

⁴⁶ Thompson, *Revelation*, 163–64.

⁴⁷ Contra, e.g., Charles, *Revelation*, 1:333–34; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 13–22.

imperial cult in Asia Minor,⁴⁸ interpreters of the Apocalypse are keenly aware that imperial cult centers allowed municipal and provincial elites to enter into relationships of benefaction with Roman authorities. Rather than top-down impositions of Roman ideological domination, imperial cults allowed local elites to summon economic and military favor from Roman authorities. That is, the imperial cult was produced by and for local Asian elites in their own interests.⁴⁹ Viewing the imperial cult as a bottom-up structure rather than a top-down one does not mean that pressure to participate in the imperial cult did not exist. But it changes the rhetorical force of the imagery in Revelation 13 from a call to resist persecution to a call to refrain from seeking the same economic and political favors as the local elites responsible for sponsoring the imperial cult.

In a 1991 article on Revelation 13, David deSilva reads the chapter as a direct rejection of the advantages associated with the imperial cult.⁵⁰ The bulk of the article describes the imperial cult, explicating the reasons for which someone would want to participate in it. He shows that the imperial cult performed religious functions for political benefits, allowing the people of the province to make sense of the emergence of Roman imperial authority on their own terms. It allowed locals to represent the Roman emperor as a benefactor who fit in with the mythology with which they were already familiar, simultaneously vying for imperial favor by representing

⁴⁸ S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁴⁹ For studies of Revelation that make this point especially well, see Thompson, *Revelation*, 158–64; J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 132 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Steven J. Friesen, “Cult of the Roman Emperors in Ephesos: Temple Wardens, City Titles, and the Interpretation of the Revelation of John,” in *Ephesos: Metropolis of Asia*, ed. Helmut Koester (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 229–50.

⁵⁰ David A. deSilva, “The ‘Image of the Beast’ and Christians in Asia Minor: Escalation of Sectarian Tension in Revelation 13,” *Trinity Journal* 12 (1991): 185–208.

the emperor as a benefactor.⁵¹ Particularly in Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum, the cult was so widely pervasive that it could not be ignored, possessing an omnipresence that placed a variety of everyday activities within a larger picture that related civic and imperial life to each other.⁵² Having concluded that “The imperial cult honors the emperors as benefactors and saviors, welcoming, in effect, the place of the province under the shadow of the eagle’s wings as a position of prosperity, peace, and security,” he goes on to show how Revelation 13 represents Rome and the imperial cult as satanic evils.⁵³ DeSilva unpacks the imagery the same way most commentators do, pointing as usual to the succession of Danielic beasts,⁵⁴ but the point he drives home is that this imagery is a deliberate protest to a coherent ideology about the presence of imperial influence in Asia.⁵⁵ Rather than just identify Roman rulers and the imperial cult as the targets of Revelation 13’s polemics, deSilva shows that Revelation pushes for a break between its readers and the social arrangements that the imperial cult permits. His work on the imperial cult goes beyond work on the appropriation of Nero tradition because he is not simply showing that the passage targets the cult with its polemics. He shows that the passage contests a larger religious system. But a key similarity between this study and other such studies remains: he reads the imagery in Revelation 13 as reversing an otherwise positive association Revelation’s first readers would have with the imperial cult.

⁵¹ DeSilva, “Image of the Beast,” 187–93.

⁵² DeSilva, “Image of the Beast,” 193–97. DeSilva is not the only one whose starting point for reading Revelation 13 is the pervasive entanglement of the imperial cult. For a similar argument from an explicitly postcolonial perspective, see Jean-Pierre Ruiz, “Taking a Stand on the Sand of the Seashore: A Postcolonial Exploration of Revelation 13,” in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, ed. David L. Barr (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2003), 126–30.

⁵³ DeSilva, “Image of the Beast,” 202–207, quoting 202.

⁵⁴ DeSilva, “Image of the Beast,” 203–204.

⁵⁵ DeSilva, “Image of the Beast,” 207–208.

Where deSilva reads Revelation as forging a community that contests the social arrangements upheld by the imperial cult, Steven Friesen sees a rivalry of mythological systems in Revelation's contestation of the imperial cult. His article titled "Myth and Symbolic Resistance" explains how the appropriation of mythological tradition in Revelation 13 contests the traditions that inform the imperial cult. He identifies three types of mythic tradition that Revelation 13 employs: the pattern of the leviathan and the behemoth, the book of Daniel, and the mythology of the imperial cult. Those first two sources—the ancient Near Eastern leviathan and behemoth myths and Daniel 7—supply the imagery and narrative structure that Revelation 13 uses. Reference to these myths places the readers' struggle against Roman imperialism within the context of a larger cosmic contest. In doing so, Revelation 13 imitates the usage of mythology in the visuals attached to imperial cult sites; they use Greco-Roman imagery to situate the current status of Roman imperial rule within the context of local mythology.⁵⁶ Thus, Revelation "interacts" with Greco-Roman mythology not by alluding to that mythology, but by using Jewish strands of mythology in a manner that parallels the imperial cult's usage of Greco-Roman mythology.

Friesen expands his exposition of Revelation as religious counter-discourse in *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*. While several intersecting methodologies converge in that work, it may best be called an instance of comparative religion. The first half of the book lays out how the imperial cult functioned as a full-blown symbolic universe; the second half shows how the whole book of Revelation—not just polemics against the cult in 13:11–17—responds to the symbolic universe instituted by the cult with the construction of its own symbolic universe. He argues that the imperial cult supplies its participants a view of cosmogony (where the world

⁵⁶ Friesen, "Myth and Symbolic Resistance," 287–303.

comes from), cosmology (the structure of space and time), human maturation (markers of life stages), and eschatology (a vision of where people and the world are going) in which the emergence and prosperity of the Roman empire was foundational.⁵⁷ The imagery in Revelation, Friesen argues, provides an equally robust mapping of the universe that gives readers an alternative orientation with reference to space and time, mythology, community, and the world's ultimate rulers. The anti-Rome polemic of Revelation 13 emerges within each of these foci, placing Rome in a different place in the symbolic universe. Rather than view the empire as the world's center and its calendar as the ultimate measure of time, Revelation 13 marks Roman power as a blasphemous agent whose activities fit within a pre-defined period (13:5).⁵⁸ In place of imagery that situates Rome's history within long-held mythological traditions, Revelation employs the tradition of the Danielic beast to portray its conquests as satanic and deceptive (13:3–4)—and ultimately limited in time (19:11–20:10).⁵⁹ Revelation maligns the community of the imperial cult's priests.⁶⁰ And it presents the worship they sponsored as a demonic parody of what deserves true worship (13:11–16).⁶¹ In this reading, Revelation (including, but not limited to chapter 13) provides a symbolic universe that rivals the one in the imperial cult.

While the relationship between the imperial cult and Revelation that Friesen describes is a complex one, it retains a pattern seen in other works on chapter 13: in his view, the function of the passage is to take otherwise positive associations with Roman institutions and, in part through the deployment of Jewish tradition, reverse them. Summarizing the rhetorical upshot of

⁵⁷ Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 221–31., cf. *eadem.*, “The Beast from the Land,” 63–64.

⁵⁸ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 159.

⁵⁹ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 175–77.

⁶⁰ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 185.

⁶¹ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 202–204.

Revelation 13, Friesen says, “John changed the image of the imperial cult from piety to chicanery and portrayed Asia’s elite families as charlatans whose authority was satanic in origin.”⁶² In his view, Revelation’s overall appraisal of the imperial cult, and not just the elites who run it, is similar:

Imperial cults, according to John, are nothing but a blasphemous imitation of the worship due to the One on the heavenly throne. They grow up around an illegitimate authority. The cults are based on deception and violent opposition to God rather than on obedience.

These negative claims about the imperial cult and the elites who sponsor it depend on Jewish traditions, chiefly the succession of beasts in Daniel 7 and the notion of Satan as an eschatological adversary.⁶³ Once again, Revelation’s Roman background supplies the target of the chapter’s polemic, but the source of its imagery is found elsewhere. Like deSilva, Friesen steps beyond an identification of the Roman institutions to which Revelation 13 refers. He shows that Revelation’s relationship to the imperial cult is not one of opposition but entanglement. To return to the archery analogy, it is as if Revelation’s anti-Roman polemic is not just a bow aimed at a Roman target. Rather, the bow itself is of Roman design. Like the institution it opposes, Revelation’s polemic trades on the deployment of a mythologically-informed symbolic universe. Even though this portrayal of the relationship between Revelation and the imperial cult shows dependence on the cult, and not just opposition to it, it retains a pattern found in other readings of Revelation 13. The role of Revelation 13 is taking a Roman institution that would otherwise be positively regarded, and using imagery pulled from other traditions to render it negatively. The advantages of this approach notwithstanding, it still allows space for the innovation I present in

⁶² Friesen, “Myth and Symbolic Resistance,” 310, cf. *eadem.*, “The Beast from the Land,” 62–63; *eadem. Imperial Cults*, 203.

⁶³ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 202–204; *eadem.*, “Myth and Symbolic Resistance,” 307–309.

this context: a polemic based on “arrows” of Roman origin, using a Greco-Roman source of negativity to shed light on Revelation’s polemic.

Revelation and Visual Culture

Another set of studies deals with the visuality of Revelation itself, situating the book’s textual appeals to the sense of sight alongside other such appeals in Roman culture. Like Friesen’s work, these studies present Revelation’s images as counterimages. Where Friesen’s work shows that Revelation’s deployment of a symbolic universe is in part indebted to the text’s rivalry with the imperial cult’s usage of the same strategy, these studies show that Revelation’s deployment of *ekphrasis* is similarly motivated. Friesen argues that Revelation counters one symbolic universe to counter another; these studies contend that Revelation deploys its imagery to counter other usages of image and spectacle. A primary thesis of Christopher Frilingos’ *Spectacles of Empire* is that Revelation, despite its anti-imperial edge, relies on spectacle like the culture of its Roman milieu.⁶⁴ He opens his argument with a treatment of the vicious spectacles that ancient Romans could have seen, such as animal hunts, public executions, and gladiatorial contests. In these events, the identity of the viewer was shaped by that which was viewed in a pattern of becoming-by-beholding.⁶⁵ More recently, Robyn Whitaker’s *Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion in the Book of Revelation* has argued that the ekphrastic theophanies in Revelation (especially 1:12–19 and chapters 4 and 5) channel divine presence in a manner that parallels plastic visual images of the divine.⁶⁶ I find that their discussion of Revelation’s relationship to its

⁶⁴ Christopher Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation*, Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 10–13.

⁶⁵ Frilingos, *Spectacles*, 27–38.

⁶⁶ Robyn J. Whitaker, *Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion in the Book of Revelation*, WUNT 2/410 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 1–7.

surrounding visual culture is helpful. However, their treatment of Revelation 13 retains some of the gaps present in studies described above. These studies show that Revelation's visuality is indebted to its Roman context, coming closer to finding Roman "arrows" for Revelation's Roman "target." However, the source of the polemics is still taken to be John's Apocalyptic Jewish imagination.

Some interpreters have sharpened the connection between Revelation 13 and the visuality of the imperial cult by arguing that 13:13–15 directly contests visual phenomena tied to the imperial cult. A 1984 article by Steven Scherrer considers the possibility that "staged cultic wonders" accompanied participation in the imperial cult.⁶⁷ Scherrer catalogues several examples of "talking" and "moving" statues and pyrotechnic spectacles in antiquity.⁶⁸ Although he cannot marshal any specific references to the imperial cult in connection to these works, he argues that such events may have been common enough to safely conjecture that Revelation's first readers would have seen events not unlike those described in Revelation 13:13–15. Whitaker takes up Scherrer's conjecture that the imperial cult included staged spectacles.⁶⁹ She goes on to read the imagery in Revelation 12 and 13 as word-pictures that contest the spectacles with which John's readers would have been familiar. John's goal, she argues, is to persuade his readers to believe the messages of his written images rather than messages from spectacles that they may have seen. She notes that the activity of the false prophet deceives people through the sense of sight; it provides spectacles (13:13) and gives a spirit to the first beast's image (13:16). John must therefore convince his audience not to trust what they see from the false prophet, but to trust

⁶⁷ Steven J. Scherrer, "Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13–15," *JBL* 103.4 (1984): 599–610.

⁶⁸ Scherrer, "Signs and Wonders," 601–609.

⁶⁹ Whitaker, *Ekphrasis*, 185–87.

what they hear in the text (cf. 1:3). For this reason, John uses the verb *πλανῶ* to refer to the activity of the dragon and the second beast's signs (12:9, 13:14, 19:20) and invokes OT concerns about idolatry by referring to the beast's image as an *εἰκὼν*. By doing so, John implies that cultic visuals are deceptive.⁷⁰ Christopher Frilingos makes a similar argument as he contextualizes Revelation 13 within the pattern of becoming-by-beholding. He reads the beasts as a threat to John's viewing audience; those who behold the beast's deceptive spectacles (13:3, 14–15) and take its mark (13:16–18) risk becoming victims of perdition (14:9–10).⁷¹ Whitaker argues that these polemics against the beasts buttress the book's portrayals of God and Christ. Casting the visuals associated with the beasts as deceptive parodies of God and the lamb, the book's aniconic images of the divine gain credibility.⁷²

These studies show that Revelation's relationship to its Roman environment is an entangled mixture of opposition and appropriation. Revelation is involved in an anti-Roman polemic, but its mode of launching that polemic is indebted to Roman culture. Like deSilva's reading of Revelation 13, these visibility-based interpretations do more than just show allusions to Roman institutions in the text. The visual texture of the text itself is what Revelation's Roman environment provides, particularly as Revelation aims to contest the veracity of those visuals with its own ekphrases. Like Friesen's work on the relationship between Revelation and the imperial cult, these examinations of Revelation's polemics vis-à-vis Roman visual culture show that the book's Roman environment supplies not only a target of polemic, but also a method of launching that polemic.

⁷⁰ Whitaker, *Ekphrasis*, 180–91.

⁷¹ Frilingos, *Spectacles*, 56–58. Later, Frilingos goes on to argue that the beasts, ultimately under the dragon's control, also has a defective masculinity, another visual argument against identification with the beasts (*Spectacles*, 103–105).

⁷² Whitaker, *Ekphrasis*, 191–96.

The attention these studies bring to the link between Revelation 13 and Roman visual culture makes the same assumptions as other studies discussed above. First, these studies make visuality the center of the Revelation-Roman connection. But like other studies, they largely draw on Jewish tradition to show where the visuals come from. Frilingos, despite a firm insistence that Revelation is a product of Roman culture, draws on the Danielic beasts and the legend of Nero's return, just like the tradition-historical works above. The pattern of becoming by beholding he finds in other Roman spectacle is at play, but without images from a Roman context.⁷³ And while Whitaker wants to show that the visuality of Revelation draws on Greco-Roman traditions about textual visuality, she is also clear that the need to represent God aniconically is a fundamentally Jewish concern.⁷⁴ She also highlights allusions to the Danielic beasts in Revelation 13.⁷⁵ And she shows how the connection between false prophets, fiery spectacles, and idolatry echoes the Elijah narratives.⁷⁶ Although the book's dependence on visuals and spectacle is something that Whitaker rightly attributes to the book's Greco-Roman context, she looks to the book's Jewish textual tributaries for the content of that imagery. Secondly, all of these interpreters—Scherrer, Frilingos, and Whitaker—treat the Roman material to which Revelation alludes as something with positive associations that Revelation's rhetorical task is to reverse.

Conclusion

⁷³ Frilingos, *Spectacles*, 56–58.

⁷⁴ Whitaker, *Ekphrasis*, 3–4.

⁷⁵ Whitaker, *Ekphrasis*, 177, 194.

⁷⁶ Whitaker, *Ekphrasis*, 187–89.

The above survey considers a narrow selection of studies that cover Revelation 13: those that address how Revelation's polemic targets its Roman background. Despite the variety of approaches listed above, they are all characterized by two assumptions. The first is that the targets of Revelation 13's polemics—Nero (and perhaps Roman emperors in general) and the imperial cult (or at least its priesthood)—are by default regarded in positive terms, and that the task of the book of Revelation is to turn the positive associations with those Roman elements into negative associations. The second assumption is that the actual polemical thrust of the imagery does not come from the Roman imaginary, but from the appropriation of non-Roman traditions that are connected to either the emperor or the imperial cult. The first beast, for instance, is seen as a type of Nero because it survives a mortal wound (13:3), but what makes the image polemical is the fact that it is in the tradition of the succession of beasts from Daniel 7. As is the case in Charles' source-critical interpretation of Revelation 13, Rome supplies the target of the polemic, not the arrows.

Connecting Barbarians to Revelation

The studies above treat Revelation's polemic as reversing positive associations that Revelation's readers might have had with Roman institutions with which they would have been familiar. Where Nero is presumed to be a hero, the image of the first beast glues Nero-references to a monstrous beast in order to present Nero as a villain instead. Where the imperial cult situated participants within the noble history of the gods' interactions with humanity, Revelation presents it as a blasphemous bastion of chicanery. And the beastly images and notions of idolatry that motivate this polemic all come, in the view of these interpreters, from the Jewish prophetic and apocalyptic traditions to which Revelation is indebted. I agree with many of the conclusions of

these studies; I have no doubt that Revelation 13 is based on a reworking of Daniel 7 and that it aims to reverse associations with Roman institutions that might otherwise be positive. Moreover, I think interpreters like Friesen, Frilingos, and Whitaker have done a valuable service by showing that Revelation's imagery is indebted to a fundamentally Roman system of image usage. But I want to take it one step further. My goal is not to oppose or correct existing studies that show the Jewish origins of Revelation's anti-Roman polemic, nor those that argue for a similarity between Roman rhetorical forms and Revelation. Rather, I want to add to existing scholarly conversations on Revelation's rhetoric by showing that the book's rhetorical impact is shaped by a particular source of negative associations native to the book's Greco-Roman context: the notion of the "barbarian."

"Barbarian" is a negative term, in both a quantitative and qualitative sense. It is quantitatively negative in that it refers to the lack of something. English synonyms for "barbarian" include words like "uncivilized" or "uncultured," carrying the *un-* prefix that signals a deficit or absence. English dictionaries also acknowledge that "barbarian" means "not from here." But "barbarian" is not only quantitatively negative in that it refers to something absent from barbarian people or barbaric actions.⁷⁷ It is also qualitatively negative, meaning that "barbarian" signals the presence of qualities that are not desirable. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines the term as "a person from an alien land, culture, or a group believed to be inferior."⁷⁸ The inferiority the term connotes is its qualitative negativity. To be a "barbarian," in modern parlance, is to possess undesirable qualities like being rude, crude, or prone to violence. Indeed, the adjective "barbaric" can refer to a type of violence that goes beyond normalcy or necessity.

⁷⁷ Maria Boletsi, *Barbarism and Its Discontents* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 3–4.

⁷⁸ *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. "barbarian," accessed January 13, 2021. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/barbarian>

The negativity associated with contemporary English meanings of the term largely overlaps with the meanings of the ancient term.⁷⁹ A βάρβαρος (Greek) or *barbarus* (Latin) could be a speaker of a foreign language.⁸⁰ A barbarian could also be a foreigner more broadly. In that sense, the ancient concept of the barbarian is quantitatively negative, referring to a person “not from here” or “not speaking Greek.” But βάρβαρος is not strictly synonymous with other terms for foreign peoples like ξένος or ἄλλότριος.⁸¹ Barbarians were the archetypal enemies of Greek and Roman civilization. They could be conceptualized as an antagonistic invading force encroaching on Hellenistic or Roman borders.⁸² They could also be conceptualized as representatives of a regressive or inferior humanity in contrast to which the civilized view themselves as embodiments of forward progress.⁸³ Alternatively, barbarians could be conceptualized as people whose way of life was “inferior” in such a way that conquering barbarians was doing them a favor by civilizing them. As a quantitatively negative notion, “barbarian” meant “un-Greek” or “un-Roman.” As a qualitatively negative notion, “barbarian” could also mean “inferior.” Because of the negativity attached to the “barbarian” in Greco-Roman culture, it is a suitable concept for making sense of how the negative portrayal of the Roman empire could have been received by the imagination of readers or hearers of Revelation

⁷⁹ Boletsi, *Barbarism*, 4–6.

⁸⁰ On the Greek term, see Hans Windisch, “βάρβαρος,” *TDNT* 1:546–52; Moisés Silva, ed., *NIDNTTE* 1:467–68.

⁸¹ See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:135. The term βάρβαρος is placed in a different semantic subdomain than other terms for foreign people groups, acknowledging that the term refers to cultural differences, making it more of a counterpart to Ἑλληνικός and related terms than a synonym to terms like ξένος.

⁸² On barbarians as a “threat” to civilizations, see Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished*, Paul in Critical Contexts (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 64–75. Kahl pointedly calls the characterization of anti-Gaul military efforts a “war on terror.”

⁸³ James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 248–49.

whose imaginations were shaped by the book's Greco-Roman social environment. As a culturally salient negative concept, it is a valid point of connection from which to view Revelation's negative presentation of empire. The pejorative associations with barbarians can work as Greco-Roman "arrows" at work in Revelation's polemical shots at its Roman-imperial "target."

Image 1.1: The Gemma Augustea⁸⁴



One piece of Roman artwork that dramatically illustrates the dualistic, positive-negative bifurcation around which the barbarian notion revolves is the Gemma Augustea (image 1.1). The Gemma Augustea is a cameo, a small sculpture designed for private presentation.⁸⁵ Measuring 23 cm in width, the Gemma Augustea is an Arabian sardonyx with a white layer on top and a

⁸⁴ Photo: the [Gemma Augustea](#) from the collection at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, courtesy of James Steakley via Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

⁸⁵ Diana E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 69.

brown layer behind.⁸⁶ One of its most clearly identifiable features, a feature that makes it particularly useful for illustrating my intention for this study, is its division into two registers. Viewers can clearly identify a slightly larger upper tier with figures in relaxed poses separated by a clear dividing line from the smaller and lower tier with figures either bound or laboring. The center of the upper tier shows Augustus in heroic seminudity next to the goddess Roma. Augustus takes the Jupiter pose, investing him with the divinity and authority of the head of the Roman pantheon, though it is probably most accurate to identify him as the earthly mediator of Jupiter's will because he holds the *lituus* staff, not the thunderbolt that would identify him as Jupiter.⁸⁷ Figures to the left of Augustus correspond to members of the royal family, most notably Tiberius (wearing the toga and wreath), who had several military victories between 7 and 12 CE that are all candidates for the event commemorated by the gem.⁸⁸ In addition to Roma and the divine-adjacent Augustus, several other deities combine in this image to present the reign of Augustus and his dynasty's victories as divinely-blessed harbingers of prosperity.⁸⁹ The lower register is not a gathering of known figures with divine credentials. Commemorating a victory over Germans, the seated figures on the lower register represent German barbarians. They are people brought to heel in a Roman military campaign. The figures standing and holding a pole are soldiers setting up a trophy to mark victory in battle. The helmet of the leftmost figure may

⁸⁶ Niels Hannestad, *Roman Art and Imperial Policy*, trans. P. J. Crabb (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1988), 78.

⁸⁷ John Pollini, "The Gemma Augustea: Ideology, Rhetorical Imagery, and the Creation of a Dynastic Narrative," in *Narrative and Event in Ancient Art*, ed. Peter J. Holliday (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 260–63.

⁸⁸ Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 69–70.

⁸⁹ The other divinities include Victory (the winged one in the back on the left); Oikoumene (holding the crown), the personification of the whole inhabited world; Tellus/Italia (on the right, holding the Cornucopia), a personification of land; and Oceanus, (the male figure on the right), a personification of the sea. Pollini ("Gemma Augustea," 262) notes that the appearance of Land and Sea also occurs in reliefs at the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, which will be discussed in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

indicate Thracian heritage, and the twin spears held by the female figure with her back turned near the center at least possibly connects to Spain—a merismus of the eastern and western spaces incorporated into the empire and supporting its victories.⁹⁰ Oikoumene, the personification of the whole inhabited world, holds the salvation-symbolizing *corona civica* over Augustus's head, implying that he is a savior of the whole inhabited world. The subjugation of barbarians in the lower register implies that these victories are in the service of civilization itself against a barbarian threat.⁹¹

In a variety of ways, the gem presents the barbarian as sharply “other” with respect to the victorious, divine-adjacent Augustan dynasty. The clearest and most obvious dividing line is the literal dividing line running through the gem that splits it into upper and lower registers. Other features set the barbarians apart in a negative way. Most noticeable is the way most of the barbarians sit, bound and defeated with no choice but to reluctantly watch soldiers set up a trophy over them. That the divinities are on the upper register, opposite of the barbarians, makes an implicit theological claim as well: that the barbarians are enemies of the gods, and that the gods are invested in their defeat. Personifications of land (Tellus/Italia, the one holding the cornucopia on the right) and sea (Oceanus, the bearded one on the far right), along with Oikoumene, imply that the victory commemorated in the gem has consequences transcending its local location.

This dissertation is about connecting the dualistic messaging in images like the Gemma Augustea to the clearly identifiable dualism in the book of Revelation. The intended viewership of the Gemma Augustea is debated, and it may not connect with any of the intended readership

⁹⁰ Pollini, “Gemma Augustea,” 270–72.

⁹¹ Pollini, “Gemma Augustea,” 266–67.

of Revelation.⁹² But it has many features in common with other visual installations that were geographically much closer—or even within—the named cities of 1:11. In his exposition of the gem’s messaging, John Pollini observes that the personifications of land and sea also occur in the Augustus-commemorating messaging of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, an imperial cult complex in Asia minor that will be discussed in chapter 4 of this dissertation.⁹³ Moreover, Oceanus himself is a battle partner with Zeus against the giants on the gigantomachy frieze adorning the Great Altar of Pergamon, a major subject of chapter 3.⁹⁴ Like the Gemma Augustea, these installations use spatial differentiation, depictions of defeat, theological messages, and references to cosmic implications in messages about the “otherness” of barbarians. And these images all participate in a broader pattern of using the visual arts to exoticize “others” of various kinds.⁹⁵

My decision to connect these images to the book of Revelation is inspired by the work of Brigitte Kahl and Davina Lopez, scholars who have examined visual representation of non-Roman “others” primarily as background for analysis of Galatians.⁹⁶ Both scholars innovate in their treatments of Galatians by sidestepping long-running debates about Paul’s relationship to Judaism and the law, preferring instead to consider Paul’s mission within its Roman imperial context. Hoping to reclaim Paul’s work for the political situation of the early 21st century, their

⁹² Pollini (“Gemma Augustea,” 285–86) suggests that Tiberius or Augustus himself may have been the intended recipient of the gem.

⁹³ Pollini, “Gemma Augustea,” 262.

⁹⁴ Pollini, “Gemma Augustea,” 266–67.

⁹⁵ For a wide-ranging account of how monsters, demons, *femmes fatales*, and animalization have been employed to represent various types of “others,” see Ziva Amishai-Maisels, “The Demonization of the ‘Other’ in the Visual Arts,” in *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism, and Xenophobia*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich, Studies in Antisemitism 4 (London: Routledge, 2011), 44–72.

⁹⁶ Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*. See also Brigitte Kahl, “The Galatian Suicide and the Transbinary Semiotics of Christ Crucified (Galatians 3:1): Exercises in Visual Exegesis and Critical Reimagination,” in *The Art of Visual Exegesis: Rhetoric, Texts, Images*, ed. Vernon K. Robbins, Walter S. Melion, and Roy R. Jeal, Emory Studies in Early Christianity 19 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017). The definitive work from Lopez is Davina C. Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul’s Mission, Paul in Critical Contexts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

goal is to read Galatians in an otherwise underexplored dimension of its historical context to show that Paul's message has wider political implications than the historically-popular individualistic readings of his message would allow.⁹⁷ In the readings of Galatians that both Lopez and Kahl provide, they construct a semiotic mapping of the oppositions between "insider" and "outsider" communicated through the rhetoric of Roman media, tracing other binaries—male and female, master and enslaved, soul and body—that cleave along the "insider" and "outsider" lines. Kahl's exploration of Galatians begins with the observation that many of the binaries native to Galatians like law vs. faith have also been mapped onto other binaries in Galatians' interpretation such as law vs. grace and Christianity vs. Judaism. She argues that Galatians can be read just as easily—or perhaps even better—not in opposition to Jewish "law," but to a Roman construal of "good works" appropriate for Roman insiders.⁹⁸ As a result, Paul finds himself on the "wrong" side of the Roman-imperial mapping of the universe, identified with "others" rather than "insiders"—a position that ultimately unifies Jew and Galatian against the imperial order.⁹⁹ Lopez makes a similar argument—that Paul finds himself on the "wrong" side of the Roman semiotic mapping of the universe—from what she identifies as a "gender-critical" perspective. Arguing that Roman construal of "self" and "other" also follows the bifurcations between "masculine" and "feminine,"¹⁰⁰ Lopez contends that Paul dis-identifies with the masculine and assumes a solidarity with the defeated.¹⁰¹ Both readings of Galatians situate an

⁹⁷ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 1–17; Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 3–5.

⁹⁸ Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 218–43.

⁹⁹ Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 15–27.

¹⁰⁰ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 26–118.

¹⁰¹ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 137–163.

NT text in opposition to Roman political ideology; as such, they make natural starting points for reading Revelation.

As the New Testament text with the clearest instance of anti-Roman rhetoric, Revelation is a natural book to analyze with questions developed for a counter-imperial reading of something else in the New Testament. Kahl's closing paragraph of *Galatians Reimagined* calls Galatians "an apocalyptic critique of the dominant ideology and idolatry that are inseparably intertwined."¹⁰² If one can read Galatians in this way, how much more can one bring some of her approach to a pointedly anti-idolatrous text that self-labels as an ἀποκάλυψις (1:1)? In some ways, the approach that Kahl and Lopez take in their interpretations of Galatians can fit Revelation even more naturally. A book chapter by Kahl explores an ecological reading of Revelation 12:16 by discussing the verse with reference to visual representations of Gaia. She argues that in Revelation 12 and in the Great Altar of Pergamon, Gaia engages in acts of resistance against a powerful force. On the Pergamene Altar, Gaia leads the fight against the Olympian gods (see image 3.3.4). In Revelation 12:16, the earth herself resists the dragon in Revelation by hiding the sun-clothed woman.¹⁰³ Kahl's own exploration of Revelation only indirectly engages the insider-outsider dichotomies that she and Lopez discuss in their treatments of Galatians. But her decision to interpret Revelation through some of the same artwork she engages in her *Galatians Reimagined* attests to the value of bringing a similar approach to Revelation.

¹⁰² Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 303.

¹⁰³ Brigitte Kahl, "Gaia, Polis, and Ekklesia at the Miletus Market Gate: An Eco-Critical Reimagination of Revelation 12:16," in *The First Urban Churches 1: Methodological Foundations*, ed. James R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn, Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplements 7 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 111–50.

One reason why Revelation is a good place for using Kahl and Lopez’s approach to Galatians is that Revelation is sharply dualistic text.¹⁰⁴ Revelation’s symbolic universe revolves around sharp distinctions between good and evil. Many of the figures in Revelation are either aligned with God and the Lamb and are good—John, the 144,000 (7:1–8, 14:1–5), Michael the archangel (12:7–9), the sun-clothed woman (12:1–6, 13–17), the two witnesses (11:3–17), the New Jerusalem (19:7–8, 21:1–22:5), and so on. Other entities are unequivocally, unambiguously evil: false teachers like “Jezebel” (2:20–23), the beast that fights the witnesses (11:7–10), the dragon (12:1ff, 20:1–10), the beasts conjured by the dragon (13:1–18, 19:17–21), “Babylon” (17:1–19:10), and so on.¹⁰⁵ Such a dualistic outlook allows John to cast individuals or groups as “outsiders,” and to produce that outsider boundary with ferocity.¹⁰⁶ The dualistic outlook of Revelation connects well to the dualistic bifurcations in visual representations of barbarians. The Gemma Augustea presents an implicit worldview with sharp divisions in which barbarians dwell in the spaces below. As chapters 3 and 4 will show, other images use several methods to mark out how different barbarians are supposed to be. The mapping of “insider” and “outsider” that Lopez and Kahl use in their analyses highlights the dualistic bifurcations in representations of barbarians that interfaces well with the dualism in Revelation.

A second reason to bring Kahl and Lopez’s approach to Revelation is that the book depends on ekphrastic visuals far more than perhaps any other New Testament text. It is of

¹⁰⁴ For an overview of dualism in Apocalyptic literature like Revelation, see Jörg Frey, “Apocalyptic Dualism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 273–94.

¹⁰⁵ These figures are helpfully sorted into “Lamb Group” and “Beast Group” in Greg Carey, “A Man’s Choice: Wealth Imagery and the Two Cities of the Book of Revelation,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins, FCNTECW 13 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 147–58.

¹⁰⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Revelation and Its Social Context,” in *To See Ourselves as Other See Us: Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs, Studies in the Humanities (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 203–18.

course perfectly valid to discuss the rhetography—the evocation of images in the minds of readers—with texts that are not intentionally ekphrastic.¹⁰⁷ But with the phrase “And I saw” (Καὶ εἶδον) running throughout the text to introduce many of its paragraphs, the book itself is a visual report. This texture is what allows the visual-culture-oriented studies above. As some of the authors discussed above have noted, Revelation’s depictions of spectacles and monsters are intended to let the book compete in a space with a variety of spectacles available to its readers.¹⁰⁸ Revelation’s visual texture makes it especially appropriate to compare the book to visual representations of barbarians. Unlike Galatians, Revelation does not only interact with the worldviews supported by artwork such as the Great Altar of Pergamon. Revelation, as a collection of things that were seen, also engages with the visuals *qua* visuals.¹⁰⁹ Its ekphrastic, visually charged medium can more closely engage both the message and the medium of the artwork discussed in the following chapters.

The Approach of this Study

My central research question is an exegetical question about the book of Revelation. I ask how Roman visual representation of barbarians would have shaped the impact of the Apocalypse’s anti-Roman polemic. At its core this is a question about how the rhetorical or

¹⁰⁷ See Vernon K. Robbins, “Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text,” in *Foundations for Socio-rhetorical Exploration*, ed. Vernon K. Robbins, Robert H. von Thaden Jr., and Bart B. Bruehler, *Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity* 4 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 375–87. Robbins provides instances of rhetography for each of his six types of Christian discourse, but none is ekphrastic; in fact, his example of Apocalyptic discourse is not even from Revelation.

¹⁰⁸ See for instance the discussion of “dueling images” in Whitaker, *Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion*, 171–207, which takes Revelation’s ekphrases as responses to specific spectacles John’s viewership may have seen. Frilingos (*Spectacles of Empire*, 39–63) casts Revelation’s visual texture, particularly the vivid descriptions of monsters and armies, as a response to the abundant presence of spectacle in the Roman world.

¹⁰⁹ Hence the engagement with the Pergamene Altar that takes place in Andrew R. Guffey, *The Book of Revelation and the Visual Culture of Asia Minor: A Concurrence of Images* (Lanham, MD: Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2019), 149–75.

persuasive force of the book's anti-Roman polemic would have worked. Along with the overwhelming majority of Revelation's interpreters, I take it for granted that the beast imagery is an attempt to persuade readers to view the extent of Roman imperial authority in a starkly negative light.¹¹⁰ What I want to contribute to that consensus is a thesis about how that persuasive effect would have been amplified given readers' familiarity with Roman visual representations of conquered peoples. What does Revelation's polemic have in common with the denigration of barbarians in that imagery? How might Revelation's anti-Roman polemics have been more persuasive given the resonance between its ekphrastic images and Roman visual representation of non-Roman peoples? And how do those connections factor into the contest of worldviews between Revelation's symbolic universe and the symbolic universe constructed by participation in the imperial cult?

Questions like these are not, strictly speaking, questions of authorial intention. While it is possible for John to have been familiar with many of the images relevant for this study, it is excessively difficult to prove concretely that John knows of any specific image, apart from direct allusion. And direct allusions are often difficult to confirm.¹¹¹ Given the polysemy inherent in Revelation's evocative imagery, attempts to pin down Revelation's references to specific pieces of the visual and material culture in its environment may prove slippery.¹¹² As discussed above, a supposed linkage between the "throne of Satan" in 2:13 and the Great Altar of Pergamon, though

¹¹⁰ For an overview of the function of the dragon and beast imagery that I use in my interpretive work, and how that coheres with general consensus, see the first section of chapter 5.

¹¹¹ For a critique of attempts to generate one-to-one correspondences between symbols in Revelation and specific visual *realia*, see Lynn Huber, "Making Men in Revelation 2–3: Reading the Seven Messages in the Bath-Gymnasiums of Asia Minor," in *Stones, Bones and the Sacred: Essays from the Colloquia on Material Culture and Ancient Religion in Honor of Dennis E. Smith*, ed. Alan Cadwallader (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 102–6.

¹¹² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, Second Edition. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 178–79. She helpfully observes that, rather than steno symbols (a one-to-one correspondence between symbol and referent), Revelation uses tensive symbols: figurative language that can evoke a plurality of responses.

once considered promising, has been largely abandoned. Indeed, identifying concrete archaeological referents for the symbols in Revelation 2–3 is riddled with problems. Friesen critiques Colin Hemer’s survey of local allusions in Revelation 2–3 for several reasons, one of which is the problem of finding “many possible parallels but few proven conclusions.”¹¹³ Because the oracles in Revelation 2–3 are all tied to specific cities, those passages are especially promising places from which to forge direct, allusive connections between biblical text and material intertext. But if local allusions are difficult to prove conclusively when reading the locally-identified oracles in Revelation 2–3, then *a fortiori* it becomes more difficult to argue that a less localized passage like Revelation 13 alludes to a specific item of material culture.¹¹⁴ My argument, therefore, is not to say that John is intentionally invoking specific images of barbarians in his anti-Roman polemics.

While I do not argue that John describes Revelation’s beasts as he does because of a specific intention to allude to visual representations of barbarians, it matters that these images are located in the same cultural matrix as John and his readers. The type of connection that this dissertation makes between representations of beasts and barbarians might be identified as what Andrew Guffey calls a “concurrence” of images in his study of Revelation’s visuality.¹¹⁵ Concurrence, as Guffey uses the term, is more specific than parallelism and less specific than

¹¹³ Steven J. Friesen, “Revelation, Realia, and Religion: Archaeology in the Interpretation of the Apocalypse,” *HTR* 88.3 (1995): 301–6, quoting 303. Additional problems include Hemer presupposing that potentially obscure local allusions were well known; bending the evidence to fit his conclusions; indulging substantial hypothetical scenarios; anti-Semitic stereotyping; and atomizing the evidence.

¹¹⁴ It is worth pointing out that the authors above who do try to make localized connections between Revelation 13 and Roman *realia* aim at rather large targets. Whitaker (*Ekphrasis*, 185–87), for instance, argues that Revelation 13:13–15 asks readers to view liturgical spectacles differently. While this interpretation of the passage ties the text to local phenomena, Whitaker only says that there was *some* liturgical spectacle *somewhere*. Her rather modest argument does not bear the burden of proving that Revelation 13:13–15 links to a given specific phenomenon.

¹¹⁵ Guffey, *The Book of Revelation and the Visual Culture of Asia Minor: A Concurrence of Images*, 9–12.

influence. To say that depictions of barbarians influenced John is to make a causal connection. But since I do not say that the barbarian imagery caused the beast imagery to be what it is, I am not saying that the barbarian imagery influenced Revelation's beasts. However, I am making a connection more specific than simple parallelism. While a parallelism can be identified between any cultural products that have any similarity, it matters that the images I discuss are all part of the same Greco-Roman cultural environment. John may not be deliberately alluding to images of barbarians, but his imagery and barbarian imagery are participating in a common vocabulary of otherizing that results from their coexistence in the same broader cultural fabric. That common cultural fabric is what allows the visual representations of barbarians to affect the rhetorical impact of John's imagery.

Instead of making an argument about John's allusive intentions, I will say something about the impact of these images on Revelation's earliest readers. I can argue that Revelation's readers may have understood John's anti-Roman polemic in light of representations of barbarians because both sets of images emerge in the same historical and cultural contexts. And my argument would certainly be supported if John's imaginary has been informed by these images. But readers can understand Revelation's ekphrastic images in light of the plastic images around them without John having the images in mind. Robyn Whitaker uses ancient guidelines for the composition of good ekphrases to make sense of Revelation's presentations of the divine for similar reasons. While she does not commit herself to claiming that John knew these rules or that he deliberately employed them, she leans on them because they show what it might have taken for word-based imagery to have an impact on Revelation's readers.¹¹⁶ Although my argument will not rely on claims of direct local allusion, my exegesis of Revelation, aimed at the text's

¹¹⁶ Whitaker, *Ekphrasis*, 20, 60–64.

rhetorical impact, will have to presuppose exegeses of local *realia*—exegesis that can sometimes be just as detailed as exegesis of NT texts.¹¹⁷

Because I am trying to foreground what Revelation’s readers would have picked up from the artwork in the book’s milieu, the range of what I want to say about these pieces is limited. First, by asking what a first-century Roman viewer would have seen in this artwork I am limited to considering how an item would have functioned at the time of Revelation’s writing, at least as far as such judgment can be made. For example, the Great Altar of Pergamon was more than two centuries old by John the seer’s time. The initial intention of the Great Altar’s creators may have been lost on the first-century CE citizens of Pergamon. My exegesis of the monument therefore depends on its later appropriation as a Roman monument.¹¹⁸ Secondly, the “authorial intention” in the creation of a given image may not always have been available to Revelation’s readers. Elite perspectives, such as those found in ancient primary source descriptions of the images, are not necessarily key resources because their elite perspectives may draw on knowledge that Revelation’s earliest readers lack. Part of what separates New Testament texts from other equally ancient documents that have been preserved for today is that the New Testament contains a non-elite perspective on the world.¹¹⁹ In a similar vein, elite perspectives on ancient art do not necessarily define what Revelation’s first readers would have seen communicated in those pieces. Thus, the similarities I draw between barbarian images and the beast imagery in

¹¹⁷ Kahl, “The Galatian Suicide,” 201–16. Her exegetical work to interpret art includes attention to the piece’s sociocultural and historical location; visual vocabulary; and the grammar and syntax established by spatial relationships.

¹¹⁸ In a similar vein, see Adela Yarbro Collins, “Pergamon in Early Christian Literature,” in *Pergamon: Citadel of the Gods*, ed. Helmut Koester, Harvard Theological Studies 46 (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 183. On Roman reappropriation of the Great Altar, see Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 118–25.

¹¹⁹ Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), xi–xii.

Revelation—that both depict defeat and embodied difference, for instance—are based on features that do not presuppose depth of knowledge about each image’s intentions.¹²⁰

Among the many methodological approaches in New Testament studies, the one that best describes this dissertation is visual exegesis, though it is not quite the only method. Broadly speaking, there are three types of visual exegesis. The first grants attention to the visual texture of a text in order to analyze its rhetography, or the imagery it evokes for its viewers. A second, closely related mode uses the art and spectacle of a text’s cultural milieu to illustrate (both figuratively and literally) the context engaged by the text. A third, reception-historical approach—analyzing artwork as interpretations of biblical texts—is not relevant to this project. But I do engage the first two categories of visual exegesis.¹²¹ The approach of this dissertation most closely matches the second of the three categories because I am using the matrix of self-other oppositions in Revelation’s context to make sense of how Revelation presents empire as an “other.” While the main methodological descriptor of this dissertation is visual exegesis, it has some affinity with other methods. Because I use the concurrence between Revelation’s beast imagery and depictions of barbarians to show something about the persuasive force of the beast imagery, this study tacitly engages rhetorical criticism. Unlike Kahl and Lopez, I am not only using the relationship between text and artwork to present a historically-rooted reading strategy for appropriating the texts. I am trying to show that the persuasive force of Revelation was aided by this imagery. Moreover, because this project foregrounds the relationship between Revelation

¹²⁰ For instance, I briefly discuss the relationship between Hesiodic cosmogony and the Great Altar of Pergamon in chapter 3 to show that the Great Altar imbues the defeat of barbarians with cosmic significance. But arguing that the Great Altar makes a link between cosmological significance and the defeat of barbarians, while certainly aided by thorough knowledge of Hesiod’s *oeuvre*, only depends on the most superficial knowledge of the cosmogonic battles described in Hesiod.

¹²¹ These three methods roughly correspond to the three main sections of Vernon K. Robbins, Walter S. Melion, and Roy R. Jeal, eds., *The Art of Visual Exegesis: Rhetoric, Texts, Images*, Emory Studies in Early Christianity 19 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

and its imperial context, this study is in the penumbra of postcolonial studies.¹²² In showing how Revelation is similar to the empire it attempts to resist, I illustrate—if mostly tacitly—the conundrum of Revelation’s empire-shaped anti-imperial vision.¹²³

Outline of subsequent chapters

Chapter 2 traces a trajectory of the barbarian notion. It starts with the earliest attestations of the βάρβαρος as a term for linguistic difference in the archaic period, and follows major shifts in the concept’s meaning over time. I describe how the classical period, in the wake of the Persian Wars, saw the term become a shorthand for anyone who was ethnically different. A discussion of Greek-Roman relations shows how Romans ultimately adopted and altered the concept. The chapter shows how the otherness of the “barbarian” was a key concept for the construction of self-identity in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.

Chapter 3 moves into discussions of visual representations of barbarians. This chapter foregrounds the artwork of Greek origin that would have been most relevant for shaping the imaginations of Revelation’s viewership in Roman Asia Minor. Those works are the Great Altar of Pergamon and the statues of dying barbarians, both commissioned through the Attalid

¹²² As Moore and Segovia notice, an “X and empire” study is not necessarily postcolonial. See Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, “Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Beginnings, Trajectories, Intersections,” in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, T&T Clark Biblical Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 8. Because my study has very little of the anti-colonial, deconstructive edge of prototypical postcolonial studies, I am hesitant to say that I engage in postcolonial studies here. However, the entanglement between Revelation and empire highlighted in this dissertation is illustrative of fraught patterns like mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence that Bhabha introduces in his seminal works of postcolonial theory.

¹²³ For a full discussion of this problem, see Stephen D. Moore, “Mimicry and Monstrosity,” in *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation: Sex and Gender, Empire and Ecology*, Resources for Biblical Study 79 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 13–37.

dynasty. I begin that chapter by briefly discussing representations of barbarians in classical Greek artwork before a discussion of the nature and intentions of the two main sets of images around which the chapter revolves. I then close by discussing the six visual markers of barbarians present in the Great Altar and the dying barbarian statues.

Chapter 4 presents representations of barbarians in Roman artwork from approximately the first century CE. The format is very similar to chapter 3. I start with a broad discussion of Augustan-era depictions of barbarians that briefly touches on several pieces. Then I move to discuss the intention of two sets of images: the reliefs at the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, and Flavian-era *Capta* coinage. The last segment of the chapter takes the same six visual markers of barbarians as chapter 3 and shows how those attributes are visible—with some Roman-era shifts—in Roman artwork.

The fifth chapter places the book of Revelation in the trajectory of representing barbarians. Just as chapters 3 and 4 include discussions about the nature and intention of the main images at the center of their respective chapters, the first main section of chapter 5 presents an overview of the narrative arc with the dragon and beasts in Revelation. Then, I work through each of the six attributes of barbarians discussed in chapters 3 and 4—defeat, cosmic significance, spatial distinction, embodied difference, warlike disposition, and opposition to the gods—and show how the dragon and beasts meet each of those attributes. The final segment of the chapter discusses the rhetorical impact of representing Revelation's beasts in a barbaric way, showing how the similarity to barbarians points a Greco-Roman "arrow" at Revelation's imperial "target."

Chapter 2

The Barbarian Concept

What exactly is a barbarian? New Testament usage of the term βάρβαρος shows two meanings. In 1 Corinthians 14:11, Paul uses the term in his discussion of the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. He says that if someone spoke in a tongue he could not understand, then he would be a βάρβαρος with respect to that speaker and vice versa. That instance of βάρβαρος is a linguistic term, referring to unintelligibility. Otherwise in the NT, the term refers to ethnic categorizations.¹ Most clearly, Paul uses the phrase Ἑλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάροις as a merismus for the wide range of people whom he wants to reach with his gospel (Romans 1:14).² The term also appears in Acts 28:2–4 to describe the inhabitants of the island Malta. While the term could highlight the difficulty of understanding their language, the usage of βάρβαροι for the Maltese may highlight their physical and cultural distance from the more ethnically-recognizable characters in Luke-Acts and situate Paul’s encounter with them as an encounter with the edges of the earth.³ The usage of βάρβαρος in the NT reflects the transformation the term undertook

¹ Hans Windisch, “βάρβαρος,” *TDNT* 1:551.

² Similarly, Colossians 3:11 uses βάρβαρος alongside Ἕλληνας, Ἰουδαίους, and Σκύθους as an ethnic category. For a reading of Colossians 3 that provides special consideration to Greek notions about barbarians and Scythians, see Deok Hee Jung, “Barbarian and Scythian in Col 3,11: Greek Ethnocentric Reasoning,” *Biblica* 99.3 (2018): 414–30.

³ Cf. Acts 1:8. Windisch (“βάρβαρος,” 1:551) says βάρβαρος is used of the Maltese because they speak a relatively obscure Punic language. On the ethnic connotations of βάρβαρος in Acts 28, including their possible connection to the geographic focus of Acts, see Ronald H. van der Bergh, “The Use of the Term Βάρβαρος in the Acts of the Apostles: A Problemanzeige,” *Neotestamentica* 47.1 (2013): 78–82.

between the archaic period and the first century CE from a description of foreign language to a term for people of a different ethnicity or culture. That transformation is the subject of this chapter.

The notion of the “barbarian” was effectively a Greek invention. Greeks were not the first peoples to talk about other people groups in exoticizing terms. They are certainly not the last. Nor is any notion about “Others” that resembles the Greek-barbarian antithesis necessarily dependent upon the Greek “barbarian” notion; as some recent scholars have acknowledged, ancient Chinese concepts about foreign people resemble the Greek “barbarian” notion.⁴ Such comparative work suggests that the tendency to articulate a meaning of “self” through a *via negativa* based on notions about what “others” must be like is hardly a Greek invention. However, the distinction between Hellene and Barbarian became the ancestor of distinctions between “self” and “other” that would recur for literal millennia. In many ways, the binary typology of “Greek” and “barbarian” still exists in notions about the difference between “orient” and “occident.”⁵

This chapter’s overview of the barbarian concept shows how the notion of “barbarian” became a synecdoche for the Greek distinction between self and other—and how that notion eventually came to mark the distinction between Romans and the groups they saw as other. I begin with a brief discussion of what the Greek self-other distinction looked like in the archaic

⁴ See Randolph Ford, *Rome, China, and the Barbarians: Ethnographic Traditions and the Transformation of Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), esp. 96–129. See also Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 60–62.

⁵ Ancient Greek antecedents of the East-West dichotomy that still operates in current and recent history are acknowledged in Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 55–58. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 99–100; Brigitte Kahl, “Galatians and the ‘Orientalism’ of Justification by Faith,” in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. Christopher D. Stanley, Paul in Critical Contexts (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 206–209.

period before the Persian wars, as some elements of the archaic self-other distinction resurface later on. Then, I discuss the Persian wars, the turning point where βάρβαρος shifted from a kind of speech to signify cultural and ethnic difference. The last part of this chapter shows where Rome fits into this paradigm. While there were tensions between Greeks and Romans, especially in the third and second centuries BCE, eventually the cultures became intertwined enough for Greeks and Romans to, for the most part, regard one another as non-barbarians. This all sets the stage for showing what “barbarian” means in the first-century Greco-Roman context from which the book of Revelation emerged. Chapters 3 and 4 will discuss the associations with barbarians facilitated by key pieces of artwork visible in Asia Minor. What this chapter does is set the stage for those associations by tracing the history and emergence of this marker of difference. It shows how the self-other distinction produced by Revelation’s beast imagery participates in a larger trajectory of marking out “others” to be exoticized.

Greek Self-Identity in the Archaic Period

Even though “not a βάρβαρος” would eventually become a key component of the meaning of “Greek,” the earliest centuries of recognizably Hellenistic culture are marked by abundant cultural exchange. As Kostas Vlassopoulos points out, a transition from independent and discreetly unrelated parochial societies to widespread networks of intercultural exchange was an international phenomenon in the early first millennium BCE, produced by novel expansions of human mobility.⁶ Early Greeks therefore made a great deal of contact with Egyptians, Assyrians, and Phoenicians characterized by exchanges of material and cultural

⁶ Kostas Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 78–85.

goods.⁷ Unlike Roman colonization, early Greek colonization (and similar efforts among widespread Mediterranean societies like the Phoenicians) was not necessarily motivated by an impulse toward imperialist expansion.⁸ Indeed, many of the cultures with which early Greeks interacted were much larger empires, and Greeks related to them as subjects, mercenaries, vassals, professionals, and entertainers—not as citizens of a competing imperial regime.⁹ Practices of *ξενία*, or ritualized friendship, are well attested in the archaic period.¹⁰ As Irad Malkin suggests, the expansion of Greek culture may be better described as “networking” than “colonization” because Hellenic cities were always partially shaped by the non-Greek cultures around them.¹¹ A testament to the friendliness of archaic Greek cultural exchange, modern scholars of the archaic period have used the term “Orientalizing” not to describe a pattern of representing the east as an “other,” but the pattern of incorporating Eastern-inspired artistic forms into their artwork.¹²

The geographic spread of early Hellenic culture was wide, leading to a meaningful linguistic diversity among Greek speakers. Despite the diversity of forms of Greek language, however, there was enough in common for language to be a glue that could bind Hellenic culture together.¹³ Writers like Plato, Herodotus, and Aeschylus recognized a diversity of Greek

⁷ Jensen, *Barbarians*, 39–56.

⁸ Irad Malkin, “Postcolonial Concepts and Ancient Greek Colonization,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 65.3 (2004): 346–48.

⁹ Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 34–52.

¹⁰ Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 131–32; Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 12–13.

¹¹ Malkin, “Postcolonial Concepts,” 356–60.

¹² Jensen, *Barbarians*, 48–50.

¹³ It may be difficult to ascertain exactly how strong that “glue” may be, given the evidence of linguistic diversity of early Greeks. For this reason, Jonathan Hall does not identify language as the *sine qua non* for unifying early Greek identity. See Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 111–17.

dialects—understood by such writers as identifiably different forms of speech that nonetheless allowed mutual intelligibility—coming from Greek speakers from different cities and regions. And despite the many dialects spoken in a variety of locales, classical era Greeks saw themselves as speaking the same language.¹⁴ Unity of language held together a variety of possible focal points of Greek identity; for instance, the ability to speak the language determined who was Greek enough to participate in athletic competitions.¹⁵

The earliest usages of words in the Greek βαρβαρο- word group refer not to any ethnic or cultural distinctions, but to a particular configuration of speech. The earliest clear attestation of any word in that word group is βαρβαρόφωνος, referring to the Carians as a group that speaks a foreign language.¹⁶ In its earliest usage, the concept “barbarian” is fundamentally linguistic. The βαρβαρο- root referred to people whose foreign speech could not be understood. It is an onomatopoeic imitation of the sounds that linguistic utterances have to hearers who cannot understand them, or the infelicitous pronunciation of speakers who are learning a language for the first time.¹⁷ While this sense of βαρβαρός typically referred to human speech that one could not understand, it could also represent animal sounds, like the tweeting of birds.¹⁸ As Edith Hall notes, this term that would later become the seed of the west’s anti-oriental prejudice has an ironically eastern provenance.¹⁹ The *barbara-* root refers to the “stammering” sound of foreign

¹⁴ Edward M. Anson, “Greek Ethnicity and Greek Language,” *Glotta* 85 (2009): 7–12.

¹⁵ Anson, “Greek Language,” 16–22.

¹⁶ Homer, *Iliad*, 2.867.

¹⁷ R. S. P. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1:201. The onomatopoeic explanation of the meaning of βάρβαρος first occurs in Strabo, *Geography*, 14.2.28.

¹⁸ Hans Windisch, “βάρβαρος,” *TDNT* 1:546.

¹⁹ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 4.

language in Sanskrit. Languages in the Babylonian-Sumerian family also use the *barbaru-* root to refer to foreigners and their speech.²⁰

Up until about the Greco-Persian wars in the early fifth century CE, the term was descriptive of the sound of foreign languages.²¹ One of the main reasons why a term for linguistic difference became a general term for outsiders is that the Greek language helped to unite geographically disparate communities whose physical distances from each other may very well have led to cultural distance.²² Before the Greek-barbarian dichotomy emerged as the site of Greek differentiation between “self” and “other,” a Greek person’s identity revolved around their city-state affiliation. In the fifth century BCE, identity as an Athenian, Spartan, or Corinthian was a Greek individual’s primary identity category. Indeed, fallen soldiers could receive benedictions for having fought on behalf of their own cities against all other Greeks.²³ Following the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization, the lack of large-scale power structures near the Aegean Sea allowed the small political structure of the city state to flourish. Colonization brought together citizens of distant, sometimes-rival city-states. As citizens of distant and distinct “mother” cities associated with each other in the establishment of colonies, they had to find common ground as they interacted with—and sometimes fought against—indigenous populations and worked to build a coherent sense of Hellenistic culture.²⁴ Many cultural threads constituted the ties that could bind together Hellenes from diverse city-states. Herodotus

²⁰ Despite some suspicions to the contrary, it appears that Babylonian-Sumerian languages borrowed the *barbaru-* root rather than inventing it (Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary*, 1:201).

²¹ Erik Jensen, *Barbarians in the Greek and Roman World* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2018), 3–4.

²² Anson, “Greek Language,” 5–6.

²³ Robert Browning, “Greeks and Others: From Antiquity to the Renaissance,” in *Greeks and Barbarians*, Edinburgh Readings on the Ancient World (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 258–59.

²⁴ Wilfried Nippel, “The Construction of the ‘Other,’” in *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed. Thomas Harrison, trans. Antonia Nevill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 279–81.

identifies ancestry, religion, lifestyle, and language as the common threads that bind all Greek people together. But he gives pride of place to Greek possession of a common language.²⁵ As a panhellenic identity first emerged, common language became the strongest criterion among many for asserting who in fact could be considered “Greek.” This early concept of Greek identity was based on aggregation, or the identification of qualities common to many groups, and only to a limited extent on opposition, or the negation of qualities supposedly belonging to an “out” group.²⁶

References to “Others” in the archaic period nonetheless contain the seeds of some elements of the Greek-barbarian antithesis. But these “Others” are not usually people groups of a different ethnicity.²⁷ During the archaic period, ethnically non-Greek people were not at the time “barbarians” in the sense that they were not regarded as the “other” or the “antitype” by which Greek self-identification obtained its coherence.²⁸ Terms like βαρβαρόφωνος (“barbarian-voice”) and ἀλλόθροος (“other-tongue”) in Homer’s writings really do refer only to linguistic difference.²⁹ It is true that both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* fundamentally revolve around relationships between Greeks and “others”: the Trojan Wars are a conflict with Achaean Greeks and their opponents; the *Odyssey* is about voyages to the distant (non-Greek) world. For this reason, there has long been an inclination to overstate similarities between, say, the Trojan Wars and the Persian Wars, making the former a forerunner of the Greek-barbarian contrast that emerged with the latter. Some see in Homer the “orientalization” of Troy, interpreting the

²⁵ Herodotus, *Hist.*, 8.144.2.

²⁶ For an “aggregative” model of archaic Greek identity, see Hall, *Hellenicity*,

²⁷ It is worth noting that Homer considered Ethiopians to be the ἔσχατοι ἀνδρῶν, living on the edges of the inhabited world (*Odyssey*, 1.23).

²⁸ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 51.

²⁹ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 12, 19–20.

Trojans as stand-ins for a variety of Anatolian people groups.³⁰ Ultimately, however, the Achaeans and the Trojans have complicated similarities, making them unsuitable for the role of “proto-barbarian.”³¹

As Edith Hall contends, the role of “proto-barbarian” goes to the semi-anthropomorphic, hybrid creatures that live on the mythological outskirts of the world. They are supernatural others—Titans, Centaurs, Amazons, Cyclopes—described in ways that make them antitypes of the Greek ideal. As would be the case with the Greek-barbarian antithesis, these hybrid or supernatural creatures were considered residents of a great “elsewhere,” not located in a distant Eastern empire, but on the edges of the known world itself. In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the divine order is the product of conflict, with Zeus having fought off the supernatural and bizarrely-shaped Titans to establish the dominance of the Olympian gods.³² After the conflict, the Titans are banished to Tartarus, a mythical realm at the outskirts of the earth.³³ In the *Theogony*, the great “others” are the descendants of Earth and Sky who represent chaos. In Homer’s works, the great “others” are fantastical creatures who, like the defeated Titans in the *Theogony*, reside in the world’s outskirts. These creatures exist on a semi-mythical plane, having little in common with the experience of ordinary people.

The supernatural “others” emerge as candidates for “proto-barbarians” not simply because they reside far away and have a different appearance; descriptions of these “others” also notice differences in culture and lifestyle, distinctions that would later be applied to ethnic

³⁰ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 38–40.

³¹ After the Persian conflicts, however, the “others” of the archaic thought world—both the “supernatural barbarians” of the *Odyssey* and the Trojan opponents in the *Iliad*—could be interpreted as precursors to Persian “others.” See Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 67–69.

³² Hesiod, *Theogony*, 617–720.

³³ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 721–819.

“barbarians.” Some descriptions of otherworldly or hybrid creatures possess an ethnographic character.³⁴ In one such passage, Homer describes the land of the Cyclopes, where he notes that they lack civic assemblies, agriculture, and ships.³⁵ These details imply that what the Greeks pride themselves on having are the very things the Cyclopes lack, partly because of the very exoticism of the land they inhabit.³⁶ The Cyclopes are primitive herdsmen, lacking political organization, but other places visited by Odysseus have perfectly functioning civic organization and religion, even showing a utopian character.³⁷ What these diverse places have in common is their geographic distance from the known inhabited world. Significant geographic distance leads to lifestyle difference. While the supernatural “others” of Hesiod and Homer are not necessarily allegorical stand-ins for specific people groups, the ethnographic characterizations of distant characters in Homer set the stage for imagining that the inhabitants of distant places may be starkly different in direct relation to their geographical distance.³⁸

Because the βαρβαρ- root really was limited to linguistic difference in the archaic period, it is not quite right to say that barbarians were the “others” against which Greek identity was constructed through distinction and opposition. However, groundwork for later iterations of the Greek-barbarian distinction did emerge in the archaic period. The first is the primacy of the Greek language as a binding force for Greek culture. That the Greek language helped to unite geographically disparate colonies under a coherent concept of “Greekness” allowed for language difference to become a synecdoche for all kinds of cultural difference. Secondly, even if the

³⁴ Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 172–73.

³⁵ Homer, *Odyssey* 9.105–130.

³⁶ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 21.

³⁷ Vidal-Naquet, *Black Hunter*, 18–30.

³⁸ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 50–54.

Troy-Achaea rivalry in the Trojan Wars was not shaped like the Hellene-barbarian antithesis that emerged later on, its place in the Greek cultural imagination contributed to that antithesis. The defeat of Asia by Hellas was later read as a precursor to the defeat of Persia by Greece.³⁹ Most significantly, however, the archaic period provided the notion of the supernatural “other” where geographical distance translates to significant physical and cultural difference. This notion that geographic or cultural “others” could also be semi-human others continues as the “barbarian” concept acquires its cultural form, and is not lost in the Pergamene art discussed in the next chapter.

Barbarians as people groups after the Persian Wars

The Greco-Persian wars were the key turning point in the transformation of βάρβαρος from a term for linguistic difference to an ethno-cultural classification that effectively means “non-Greek.”⁴⁰ As Edith Hall puts it, “The story of the invention of the barbarian *is* the story of the Greeks’ conflict with the Persians.”⁴¹ In writing about the Persian wars, Greek authors begin using βάρβαρος as a shorthand to refer to any and all non-Greek people groups; instead of Persians, Thracians, Scythians, and Egyptians being referred to individually, Greek authors distinguish themselves from “barbarians” as a whole. The term acquires its pejorative connotation by the middle of the fifth century, soon after the Persian conflicts end.⁴²

The conflicts between Greece and Persia took place from roughly the middle of the sixth to the middle of the fifth centuries BCE and were largely the result of Persia’s highly effective

³⁹ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 68–69.

⁴⁰ For an overview of the Persian war’s impact on Greek self-definition, see Hall, *Hellenicity*, 172–89.

⁴¹ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 57, emphasis mine.

⁴² Nippel, “Construction of the ‘Other,’” 290–291.

territorial expansion across the Mediterranean. Though the Persians were once a vassal of the Medes, they overpowered and conquered the Medes by 550 BCE under the leadership of Cyrus. By the end of the sixth century BCE, Persia had expanded to cover territory including Lydia, Babylon, and Egypt. At the opening of the fifth century BCE, Darius reigned over Persian territory stretching from India to the Aegean. Since Lydia had taken control of Ionian cities in 560 BCE, the Persian conquest of Lydia in 546 put Greek city states under Persian control. The apex of the conflict in the Greco-Persian wars occurred in the early fifth century BCE, prompted by an Ionian revolt in 499 that was met with severe enough backlash for Greek cities to start acquiescing to envoys of Darius in 491. The turning point took place when an allied Greek fleet crippled the Persian navy around 480 at the Battle of Salamis, and the 466 defeat of the Persians by the Athens-led Delian league at Eurymedon effectively concluded the conflicts.⁴³ In the discourse about these conflicts after their conclusions, the Greek-barbarian split became an antithesis between cultures, and not just between languages.

Herodotus' accounts of the Greco-Persian conflicts, like many works appearing in the wake of those wars, demonstrate that the term βάρβαρος had moved from representing foreign speech to representing the Persians as a foreign people.⁴⁴ The very first paragraph of his *Histories* is telling. He says that he provides his account to preserve the memory of “the great and wonderful deeds done by the Greeks and barbarians.”⁴⁵ In this opening paragraph, and throughout the rest of the *Histories*, βάρβαροι becomes a general term for Greece's enemies, usually specifically the Persians. The Greek-barbarian dichotomy is cemented in this account of the Greek-Persian conflict identified as a conflict between Hellenes and the βάρβαροι. Herodotus

⁴³ Jensen, *Barbarians*, 61–69.

⁴⁴ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 9–12, 177–79.

⁴⁵ Herodotus, *Hist*, 1.1, my translation.

does acknowledge that Egyptians call speakers of different languages “barbarians,” showing that the meaning of the term can be a relative one.⁴⁶ Even so, the outlook of his work divides the world into two sides: the Greek and the barbarian.

The Greek-barbarian split did not immediately become a split between superior and inferior. Even though Herodotus’ account shows signs of an emerging Greek-barbarian polarity, he does not unilaterally praise Greeks or vilify barbarians.⁴⁷ After all, the work’s opening implies that both Greeks and barbarians have done “great and marvelous deeds” worth remembering. In fact, Plutarch would later criticize Herodotus for being a φιλοβάρβαρος because he sometimes presents Greeks negatively and non-Greeks positively, or in some cases attributes the origins of certain “Greek” cultural assets to other cultures.⁴⁸ Nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpreters of Herodotus have tended to impute to him the view that Greece was fighting for fundamental human freedom against an enemy that symbolized tyranny itself.⁴⁹ But as Benjamin Isaac shows at length, fifth century BCE Greek writers (including Herodotus) exulted in Greek victories over Persia precisely because of Persia’s strength; Greek honor was found in winning a war against a powerful enemy, not an inferior foe.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.158.

⁴⁷ Hall, *Hellenicity*, 181–82. For a nuanced account of the presentation of Persians in the *Histories* of Herodotus and Aeschylus’ *Persae*, see Erich S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 10–54.

⁴⁸ Plutarch, *De Herodoti Malignitate*, 857A–858E. Plutarch takes Herodotus to task for, among many other things, identifying the philosopher Thales as a Phoenician. As scathing a critique as a writing on the κακοθεία of Herodotus can be, Plutarch’s opinion of Herodotus was not universally negative. See Christopher Pelling, “De Malignitate Plutarchi: Plutarch, Herodotus, and the Persian Wars,” in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium*, ed. Emma Bridges, Edith Hall, and P. J. Rhodes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 145–64.

⁴⁹ Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 255–70. A conversation between Xerxes and Demaratus, an exiled former Spartan, has often been held up as an instance of Greeks believing that they would rather have death if they could not have liberty (Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.101–105). As Jensen (*Barbarians*, 61–63) notes, this has shaped modern reception of Herodotus and of the Greco-Persian wars themselves in ways that include but are not limited to the 2007 film *300*.

⁵⁰ Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 255–83. Isaac’s work traces the emergence of “proto-racism”—the notion that groups of people could have specific, unchangeable superior or inferior qualities based on place of origin or

While Herodotus contributed to the construction of a Greek-barbarian antithesis, other writers would be responsible for making the differences between Greeks and Persians a matter of morality, values, or hierarchy. One often-discussed example of Greek writers imbuing the emerging Greek-barbarian distinction with value judgments is the play *Persae* by Aeschylus. Having been a soldier in the Greco-Persian conflict, Aeschylus wrote the play in 472 BCE—between the Battle of Salamis, the naval victory that had turned the tide in the war, and the Battle of Eurymedon that concluded the conflicts. The subject of the play is the Battle of Salamis itself. The play consists of dialogues between various Persian characters and the Queen Mother, wife of the late Darius and mother of then-current emperor Xerxes who hears of and laments about the Persians' defeat. In the dialogues, the character flaws that lead to Persia's defeat come to light. The greatest failure of the Persians, the play suggests, is their hubris.⁵¹ Animated by the success of imperial expansion and material prosperity, Xerxes commands his fleet to avenge his loss at the Battle of Marathon with a concentrated naval strike.⁵² The Greeks cheerfully fight through the night, proclaiming the will to fight for freedom.⁵³ The will of the gods leads the Greeks to a narrow victory.⁵⁴

Whether and to what extent *Persae* essentializes the Persians as inferior “others” is a matter of some debate. Some find the play to be a thoroughgoing celebration of Hellenistic

descent—in the ancient world. Without denying that a Greek-βάρβαρος split was emerging, he concludes that none of the notions about Asia that meet his criteria for proto-racism emerge until after the fifth century.

⁵¹ Aeschylus, *Persae*, 718–752 features a conversation between the Queen Mother and the host of her husband Darius. The ghost of Darius repeatedly highlights his son's brash foolhardiness.

⁵² Aeschylus, *Persae*, 338–351, 473–479.

⁵³ Aeschylus, *Persae*, 391–405.

⁵⁴ Aeschylus, *Persae*, 500–503, 533–535, 739–746. Gruen (*Rethinking the Other*, 16–18) shows that throughout the play, divine will is what affords the Greeks their victory.

superiority; others find a surprising expression of relative empathy for former enemies.⁵⁵ In Edith Hall's reading of this work, *Persae* puts on display a number of attributes of "barbarians." The Persians are marked by an unrestrained emotionalism and an affinity for immoderate luxuriousness.⁵⁶ Aeschylus portrays the women of the Persian capital Susa lamenting the loss of their husbands; Hall finds that a larger pattern of associating barbarity and defeat with effeminacy characterizes representations of Persians in the *Persae* and in some visual art.⁵⁷ Moreover, the Greeks fight for freedom while the Persian king, perhaps a despotic monarch, says that heads will roll if Greece is captured.⁵⁸ A juxtaposition of freedom-flighter Greeks and a despotic Persian monarch is, for Hall, evidence for her thesis that the emergence of the barbarian was important for the emergence of democracy in Athens; as Athens became a center for democracy, it defined itself against the monarchical political arrangement of Persian "barbarian" foes.⁵⁹ Responding to Hall's reading of the *Persae*, Erich Gruen argues that the play is not built to parody pieces of Persian culture. While he does not consider Aeschylus a universalist or pacifist with compassion for Persia, he argues that the ire of the gods and the arrogance of Xerxes—no other essentialized "barbarian" characteristics—are what Aeschylus blames for Persian suffering.⁶⁰ His reading does not take the *Persae* as an instance of empathy with foes. It does display Persian character flaws; the difference is that they are not flaws that should be attributed to all Persians.

⁵⁵ Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 10–11.

⁵⁶ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 79–84.

⁵⁷ Aeschylus, *Persae*, 11–20. On the effeminacy of the Persians, see Edith Hall, "Asia Unmanned: Images of Victory in Classical Athens," in *War and Society in the Greek World*, ed. John Rich and Graham Shipley (London: Routledge, 1993), 108–33.

⁵⁸ Aeschylus, *Persae*, 369–371, 402–405.

⁵⁹ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 93–98.

⁶⁰ Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 12–21.

Even if *Persae* does not essentialize character flaws as necessary attributes of all Persians, it is a crucial step toward the development of a general western impressions of the east. As a Greek-authored depiction of an eastern people group—even assuming Gruen’s less xenophobic reading is accurate—it exists because a western writer crafted an impression of what the east must be like. Plays like Aeschylus’ *Persae*, and *Bacchae* by Euripides, are what Edward Said identifies as the earliest examples of orientalism.⁶¹ Orientalism, as understood by Said, is a form of knowledge production wherein western authors, artists and scholars produce representations of the “Eastern” world in an effort to define, and thus exert power over, part or all of the “Eastern” world.⁶² The *Persae* is if nothing else a western author producing a depiction of eastern people. The Persians speak, but entirely through Greek words from a Greek author.⁶³ For this reason, Edith Hall identifies the play as “the first unmistakable file in the archive of Orientalism.”⁶⁴ Even if Aeschylus did not intend to provide essentializing generalizations about Persians with his play, *Persae* is a first step toward a much broader pattern of Greek representations of eastern peoples.

Greek writers who discuss Persians some decades after the Persian wars have more unmistakably negative attitudes. One of the principle factors in the escalation of a Greek-Persian antithesis was the sense of political rivalry between Greek city-states united with Athens and the Persian empire. As David Castriota shows, the notion of a just king—so central to Persian

⁶¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 55–58.

⁶² Said, *Orientalism*, 1–9.

⁶³ An interesting artifact of the play presenting eastern people with western words is the fact that several times in the *Persae*, Persian speakers refer to fellow Persians as βάρβαροι.

⁶⁴ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 99.

propaganda—emerges in Greek artwork on the Parthenon.⁶⁵ When Athens conceived itself as the head of an empire, its propaganda ironically began to assume the strategies used in Persian artwork.⁶⁶ Isocrates, trying to unite the fledgling Athenian empire to wage one heroic war against Persia, argued that bringing fight to the Persians would be manageable because of their effeminate attachment to luxury and their lack of martial discipline.⁶⁷ The idea that Persians lacked virtue because of their monarchic political system became common, especially as a contrast to the emerging Athenian democratic system.⁶⁸ In its most severe form, articulated by Aristotle, anti-barbarian prejudice coincides with a theory of natural slavery—the notion that barbarians are inherently servile and meant to be conquered, in contrast to the free and disciplined Greeks.⁶⁹ This notion of natural slavery did not gain universal traction.⁷⁰ Even Alexander, evidence suggests, was known for judging Greeks and Persians alike based solely on character rather than a proto-racist notion of “natural dispositions.”⁷¹ But as Benjamin Isaac shows in his exposition of anti-oriental prejudice among Classical Greeks, the stereotyping conception of Persians preached by Isocrates prevailed over the more balanced perspectives.⁷²

⁶⁵ David Castriota, “Justice, Kingship, and Imperialism: Rhetoric and Reality in Fifth-Century B.C. Representations Following the Persian Wars,” in *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 461–73.

⁶⁶ Castriota, “Justice, Kingship,” 473–79.

⁶⁷ Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, 145–154.

⁶⁸ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 58–62; Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 285–287.

⁶⁹ Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 175–79.

⁷⁰ Nippel, “Construction of the ‘Other,’” 292.

⁷¹ Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 299–301. Isaac notes that attempts to understand Alexander’s viewpoint must be filtered through the secondary and tertiary interpretations of later authors, making it difficult to ascertain precisely what advice Aristotle gave to him regarding barbarians and whether he followed it. Strabo and Plutarch think Alexander did not go into the Persian conquest intending to enslave.

⁷² Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 297–98.

One example of the negative sentiments about Persians that emerge in the wake of the Persian wars can be found in the last chapter of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. The *Cyropaedia* is a somewhat fictionalized biography of Cyrus the Great. And, representing a more benevolent Greek attitude toward the Persians, it largely depicts him as an ideal ruler. Xenophon finds in Cyrus an example of successful empire-leadership that Greeks, their imperial projects having lackluster success, could not provide. But the last book of *Cyropaedia* argues that the Persians in the generations after Cyrus had lost their sense of honor and descended into moral decay.⁷³ Whether the chapter represents Xenophon's genuine opinions about Persians is debated.⁷⁴ But it does represent a view that started to solidify in the mid-fourth century BCE. The Persians post-Cyrus are chided for giving accolades to dishonorable people.⁷⁵ They apparently lack physical discipline, eating all day and forsaking the development of skills like hunting and equestrianism.⁷⁶ An attachment to luxurious quantities of carpets, cups, and clothing means that they are more effeminate than the Persians under Cyrus. And the skill of their military has seen a sharp decline.⁷⁷ Even if this chapter is not written by Xenophon, its author does at least affirm that a sufficiently competent ruler (such as Cyrus) could have prevented their decay; other authors, such as Isocrates, do not even balance their negative portrait of the Persians with such a

⁷³ Xenophon, *Cyr.*, 8.8.2–5. See Kostas Vlassopoulos, "Xenophon on Persia," in *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon*, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 371–73. As Vlassopoulos observes, the idea of former greatness and contemporary decay gives Xenophon the space to simultaneously revere and belittle Persian figures.

⁷⁴ The hypothesis advanced in Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 54–65 is that the anti-Persian sentiment at the end of the book in fact satirizes discriminatory attitudes toward Persians. Older scholarship seems to presuppose that Xenophon could not have written it, but the authorship debate has become more two-sided. Isaac (*Invention of Racism*, 290–91) observes that whatever the outcome of an authorship debate, the view in the last chapter of *Cyropaedia* must represent a post-361 view of contemporary Persians.

⁷⁵ Xenophon, *Cyr.*, 8.8.3–6

⁷⁶ Xenophon, *Cyr.*, 8.8.9–14

⁷⁷ Xenophon, *Cyr.*, 8.8.15–27

detail. The stereotypes about Persian “barbarians”—that they are effeminate, morally dishonorable, undisciplined, and have lost their fighting edge—endured in the Greek imagination.

The notion that barbarians, primarily Persians, are fundamentally “other” is the contribution of the Persian Wars to the development of the “barbarian” concept. This is what it means for the “barbarian” to have been invented in the wake of the Persian Wars. The polarization of Greek and barbarian is a continuation of patterns already in existence. As discussed above, there were emergent distinctions between Greeks and “others” in the archaic period. And the political distinction between πόλις-centered democratic Greeks and alternative forms of political arrangement (of which the monarchic Persians were but one example) was only intensified with the Greco-Persian conflict.⁷⁸ But the archaic period never saw βάρβαρος refer to anything other than language difference, even as language became a key factor in uniting geographically disparate Greek people. The NT usage of βάρβαρος in which the term refers to groups of people rather than a configuration of speech is a result of the term’s transition in meaning. As the notion of the βάρβαρος became tied to specific people groups, it also connected to specific attributes about them. As discussed above, the growth of stereotypes about barbarians developed from proto-orientalist depictions and representations of barbarians. So while βάρβαρος began to take on specific people groups as its referent, the sense of the term accrued notions about components of culture attached to non-Greek people.⁷⁹

Greek, Roman, and Barbarian

⁷⁸ Nippel, “Construction of the ‘Other,’” 287–88.

⁷⁹ Likewise, cultural habits met or exceeded kinship as a criterion for defining Greekness. See Hall, *Hellenicity*, 189–205.

Between the fifth century BCE, when the “barbarian” notion emerged as a pillar of Greek self-identity, and the writing of Revelation in the first century CE, the barbarian concept underwent another significant transformation: “barbarian” became a notion that Romans used to distinguish themselves from others. The Latin term *barbarus* inherited much of its meaning from the Greek term βάρβαρος. Roman authors could speak of “barbarians” as the uncivilized “others” against which they understood themselves, just as Greek authors could in previous centuries. Due in no small part to Roman dependence upon and appreciation of Greek cultural production, there are plenty of similarities between the civilized “self” and barbarian “other” conceptualizations in the Greek and Roman worlds. Of course, this development did not emerge without its tensions. Initially, Romans could be understood as members of the barbarian world.⁸⁰ Likewise, Greeks could earn the disdain of Romans who thought they had lost their edge to decadence, just as the *Cyropaedia* implied about the Persians. But as Rome incorporated Greek territories—or did captive Greece conquer Rome, as Horace famously suggests?⁸¹—identifying “Others” and their ways as barbaric became a Roman practice as it had been for the Greeks.

Roman territorial expansion was naturally the first step in Roman acquisition of this Greek notion. The sphere of Roman influence expanded sharply in the wake of the third-century BCE Punic Wars. Military officials operating in increasingly distant locations resulted in the emergence of provinces, which were originally nothing more than areas in a Roman official’s sphere of influence. Operations headquartered by Rome in distant places started because of the

⁸⁰ Browning, “Greeks and Others,” 262.

⁸¹ Horace, *Epistulae*, 2.1.156–157 has the oft-discussed line saying that captive Greece took her savage captor captive. For a reflection on that notion, see Albert Henrichs, “Graecia Capta: Roman Views of Greek Culture,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 97, Greece in Rome: Influence, Integration, Resistance (1995): 243–61.

wars, but Roman influence did not end after the wars.⁸² Initially, Roman influence abroad lacked infrastructure, but that would eventually change in the second and first centuries BCE. The whole Hellenistic world came under Roman control as Roman diplomatic and military presence moved eastward. The second century BCE saw Greece and Asia Minor largely fall into Roman control. A series of wars with Macedonia in the late third and early second centuries BCE led to Macedon becoming a Roman province. Corinth was captured and burned in 146 in a show of strength when the southern Greek Achaean league refused to cede control to the senate.⁸³ Sometimes, however, the incorporation of Greek territories into the Roman empire was a matter of diplomacy rather than force. Following decades of successful alliances between Rome and the territory controlled by Pergamon, Attalus III bequeathed all of it to Rome at his death in 133 BCE.⁸⁴ While cities that allied themselves with Hannibal in the Punic Wars suffered a harsh reconquest, kingdoms like Pergamon saw a more benevolent presence in Rome. Eventually, however, whether through conquest or diplomacy, the entire Hellenistic world ranging from the Balkans to Ptolemaic Egypt came under Roman control by the end of the second century BCE.⁸⁵ The Roman takeover of Greek territories hardly suppressed Greek culture, however; instead, it set the stage for a long mutual interchange between Greeks and Romans.

Although Romans were non-Greeks who at various points waged war with Greeks, they were not a neat fit for the “barbarian” category. As enemies of Greeks in various conflicts, and ferocious ones at that, Romans could naturally be identified as the barbarians against whom

⁸² Mary T. Boatwright et al., *A Brief History of the Romans*, Second. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 64–66.

⁸³ Boatwright et. al., *History of the Romans*, 68–72.

⁸⁴ David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the Third Century After Christ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 1:30–33. See the next chapter for more on the Roman-Pergamene relationship.

⁸⁵ Jensen, *Barbarians*, 169–71.

Greeks felt an obligation to align themselves.⁸⁶ But Romans were actually able to win battles; their victories made placing them on the “barbarian” side of the Greek-barbarian divide untenable.⁸⁷ In Plutarch’s account of Pyrrhus, a Greek tribal king who fought against the Romans in the early third century BCE, Pyrrhus comments that “The discipline of the barbarians is not barbarous”⁸⁸ as he discusses on the difficulty of advancing toward the Romans. Whether or not there is any historical veracity to Plutarch placing βάρβαρος on the mouths of Pyrrhus and other figures in this biography, it is illustrative of a problem with using the “barbarian” epithet with respect to Romans. Barbarians, so the stereotype goes, fought in a disorganized fashion, often given over to bodily desires through a general lack of discipline. But Roman formations, as Pyrrhus observes in Plutarch’s account, were disciplined and organized.

While there was conceptual space for Greeks to identify Romans as “barbarians,” Greek writers were rarely anti-Roman, more often taking either a positive or an ambivalent stance. Greek opinion about Romans was richly articulated, and it was more complex than simply dismissing them as barbarians who happened to win wars. As Erik Jensen rightly notices, it is extremely unusual for historians to have such rich a record of conquered peoples’ opinions about their conquerors.⁸⁹ A key question for many Greeks was whether the Romans were barbarians, or whether Rome was in fact a Greek city—a claim attributed to Plato’s student Heraclides.⁹⁰ The question of Roman identity sometimes depended on the political situation of a given writer. Polybius, for instance, exhibits an instrumental ambivalence about the identity of Rome. In

⁸⁶ Livy, *History of Rome*, 31.29.14–16.

⁸⁷ François Hartog, “Barbarians: From the Ancient to the New World,” *Thamyris* 29 (2015): 38–39.

⁸⁸ Plutarch, *Pyrrh.*, 16.5 (Perrin, LCL).

⁸⁹ Jensen, *Barbarians*, 171.

⁹⁰ Plutarch, *Cam.*, 22.2.

discussing the Roman military response to the piracy of queen-regent Teuta in the First Illyrian War, he notes that the Corinthians identified Romans as “honorary Greeks.” But in accounts of the Roman-Aetolian alliance of the First Macedonian War, Polybius shows that the Aetolians were criticized for making alliances with Roman “barbarians” who, contrary to the barbarian stereotype, happened to be exquisitely organized on the battlefield.⁹¹ As Craige Champion shows, speeches by Polybius could identify Romans either as barbarians or as honorary Greeks depending on the political situation of his native Achaia with respect to Rome and Macedonia.⁹² For Strabo, Rome was commendable for its military organization and for expanding the reach of the civilized world, thereby facilitating the evolution of humankind.⁹³ At the same time, he remarks that the cities in southern Italy were barbarized when they became majority-Roman. While he believed that Romans were civilizing the rest of the world, he also maintained a Greek-barbarian opposition in which Romans were not all the way on the “Greek” pole of the dichotomy.⁹⁴ But some Greek authors were happy to incorporate Romans into the Greek universe. A poem from Melinno of Lesbos is a hymn to Rome. She calls Rome a daughter of Ares, attributing Olympian glory to her, proclaiming that her rule will extend everlastingly over land and sea.⁹⁵ Likely emerging in the second century BCE when worship of *Dea Roma* began in Asia Minor, the poem is an early example of serious Greek respect for Rome.⁹⁶ For first-century BCE writer Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Rome’s ascendance was unprecedented among the

⁹¹ Craige B. Champion, “Romans as BAPBAPOI: Three Polybian Speeches and the Politics of Cultural Indeterminacy,” *Classical Philology* 95.4 (2000): 427–28.

⁹² Champion, “Romans as BAPBAPOI,” 437–42.

⁹³ Edward Ch. L. van der Vliet, “The Romans and Us: Strabo’s ‘Geography’ and the Construction of Ethnicity,” *Mnemosyne* 53.3 (2003): 263–69.

⁹⁴ Strabo, *Geog.*, 6.1.2. See van der Vliet, “Romans and Us,” 260–62; Jensen, *Barbarians*, 174.

⁹⁵ C. M. Bowra, “Melinno’s Hymn to Rome,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 47.1 (1957): 23–24.

⁹⁶ Bowra, “Melinno’s Hymn,” 28.

world's empires. And he made it the project of his *Roman Antiquities* to argue that the Romans were really Greeks all along.⁹⁷

Just as Romans sometimes earned the criticism of Greeks as Roman territory expanded, some conservative Romans expressed disdain for Greeks. The Roman view of Greeks sometimes analogized to the Greek view of Persians. As discussed above, the last chapter of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* tacks a lament for the undisciplined lifestyle of later Persians to an account that had showcased a Persian leader as an ideal ruler. Similar sentiments could be found among Roman elite who appreciated Greek artwork, mythology, and literature, while sharply criticizing contemporary-to-them Greeks, fearing that Rome was being corrupted by Greek decadence.⁹⁸ Some of the sharpest anti-Greek sentiment from a Roman figure comes from Cato the Elder, a third- and second-century BCE soldier and statesman. He was known for criticizing the influx of Greek culture into Roman society, believing that the Greeks represented a cosmopolitan corruption of Roman strength and discipline.⁹⁹ His distrust of Greek doctors was well-known, as he believed that they would sabotage the health of any non-Greeks they treated.¹⁰⁰ And when visiting Athens, Cato would speak Latin and employ an interpreter despite being conversant in Greek himself.¹⁰¹ The practice, in addition to demonstrating Cato's own parsimony, cohered with his fear that Greek letters were corrupting.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.*, 1.2–5.

⁹⁸ Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 382–84; Jensen, *Barbarians*, 181–82.

⁹⁹ Plutarch, *Cat. Maj.*, 23. For a thorough analysis of Cato's relationship with Hellenism, see Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome*, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 52 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 52–83.

¹⁰⁰ Plutarch, *Cat. Maj.*, 23.3–4; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 29.15.

¹⁰¹ Plutarch, *Cat. Maj.* 12.4–5.

¹⁰² Plutarch, *Cat. Maj.*, 23.3.

Despite the similarity between Cato's views and Greek disdain for barbarians, he does not explicitly identify Greeks as barbarians. Even though Romans sometimes earned the "barbarian" epithet, Greeks were more likely to get the "barbarian" epithet from other Greeks when lacking sufficiently "Greek" character.¹⁰³ But to keep "Greek" and "Roman" categories sufficiently distinguished, there were some authors who chose a tripartite Greek-Roman-barbarian division of the world. Philo, for example, refers to Italy as the envy of both Greeks and barbarians.¹⁰⁴ Cicero also holds a three-part conception of the world's peoples, associating barbarians with cruelty and inhumanity and Greeks with fickle instability.¹⁰⁵ The Greek-Roman-barbarian option allows Greeks and Romans to acknowledge each other as separate without necessarily calling the other "barbarian."

Some authors opted for more positive association with Greek culture. The Roman antithesis of Cato's antihellenism is perhaps best represented by the Scipio family. P. Scipio Africanus was a Roman general and statesman who had been instrumental in the second Punic War. In deliberations about whether to recall him from office, one of the complaints was that he was un-Roman, as he was seen wearing Greek cloaks, going to the gymnasium, reading Greek books, and enjoying the theater.¹⁰⁶ Polybius's account of Scipio's adoptive grandson, P. Scipio Africanus Aemilianus, includes an interesting detail when the younger Scipio brings Carthage to burn. Scipio Aemilianus weeps melancholic tears and quotes the Iliad, reflecting on the finitude

¹⁰³ G. W. Bowersock, "The Barbarism of the Greeks," in *Greece in Rome: Influence, Integration, Resistance*, ed. Charles Segal (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3–14.

¹⁰⁴ Browning, "Greeks and Others," 262, referring to Philo, *Contempl.*, 48.

¹⁰⁵ Stamenka E. Antonova, *Barbarian or Greek?: The Charge of Barbarism and Early Christian Apologetics*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 187 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 73–75.

¹⁰⁶ Livy, *Ant. Rom.*, 29.19.11–12. According to Plutarch (*Cat. Maj.*, 3.7), this earned Scipio Africanus the ire of Cato the Elder.

of any human institution.¹⁰⁷ Such behavior, notes Albert Heinrichs, is hardly expected for a Roman warrior at the glorious end of a *bellum iustum*.¹⁰⁸ Rather, it reflects a confidence that knowledge of Greek literature and philosophy—for instance, always having on hand a copy of Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* as a leadership handbook—meaningfully supports the pursuit of honor and glory typical for Roman aristocracy.¹⁰⁹ As Cato’s derision of Scipio Africanus suggests, open philhellenism was not universally appreciated. But even though Cato was hardly alone in his cantankerous skepticism of Greek “decadence,” his general distaste for Greece was ultimately an outlier.

The open philhellenism of Scipio Africanus was not typical, but Roman elites could espouse or practice a philhellenic disposition. Such attitudes could coexist with ambivalent opinions about Greeks, but this was not much of an obstacle for the proliferation of Greek culture.¹¹⁰ As Erich Gruen shows, Greek language, literature, artwork, clothing, and theater constituted political assets by which elites could use their intimate familiarity with Greek culture demonstrate their own cultural mastery and superiority. Cato’s complaints about Scipio Africanus notwithstanding, Roman nobles did not need to suppress their philhellenic inclinations; instead, knowing Greek language and culture was a gateway to prestige.¹¹¹ It is possible, then, for Roman elites to express positive opinions about the products of Greek cultural traditions, and yet not express unequivocally positive attitudes about Greeks. Cicero, for instance, writes of owing a debt to the intellectual work of Greek philosophers, while suggesting

¹⁰⁷ Polybius, *Histories*, 38.21–22.

¹⁰⁸ Heinrichs, “Gracia Capta,” 250–54.

¹⁰⁹ Gruen, *Culture and National Identity*, 252–56.

¹¹⁰ For a summary of Roman attitudes highlighting ambivalence about Greeks, see Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 381–405.

¹¹¹ Gruen, *Culture and National Identity*, 256–58.

that Greeks lack character in another writing.¹¹² Hellenism was sometimes celebrated by Roman emperors. Caesar Augustus, stopping at Capri during a pleasure cruise near the end of his life, passed out Roman togas and Greek cloaks and asked the Romans around him to speak Greek and vice versa, cracking jokes and making up his own lines of Greek poetry.¹¹³ Nero was famously philhellenic as well.¹¹⁴ Even Cato himself was likely steeped in Hellenism; his writings show hints of familiarity with Greek culture. Although some ancient writers say that Cato only studied Greek literature in his old age, the writing attributed to him implies that even Cato had more than a “taste” of Greek literature, despite his advice that Greek works ought to be enjoyed only in a piecemeal fashion.¹¹⁵ In fact, despite Cato’s explicit statements of distrust for Greek medicine, one passage shows him recommend Greek-sounding medicinal techniques for treating a snakebite.¹¹⁶ As Cato’s subtle Hellenic moments suggest, one does not necessarily have to endorse contemporary Greeks, or even have a generally positive appraisal of Greek culture, to be influenced by it.

Roman usage of the “barbarian” category is a natural outgrowth of the pragmatic philhellenism that developed from Roman appreciation for Greek culture. Following the Roman conquest of Hellenistic territory, Greeks and Romans were different and yet deeply similar, much like the Greeks and Trojans of old; indeed the mythology about Aeneas himself, an

¹¹² Heinrichs, “Gracia Capta,” 259–60; Antonova, *Greek or Barbarian*, 73–78; Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 389–93. On the deficiencies of Greek character, see *Flac.*, 24–25; *De or.*, 2.18. Cicero expresses the debt to Greek intellectuals in *Quint. frat.* 1.1.7–28.

¹¹³ Suetonius, *Div. Aug.*, 98.

¹¹⁴ Browning, “Greeks and Others,” 263.

¹¹⁵ Gruen, *Culture and National Identity*, 56–64.

¹¹⁶ Cato, *Agr.*, 102. As Heinrichs notes (“Gracia Capta,” 248–49), the application of dung recommended in the passage is typical in Greek medicine.

ancestor of the founders of Rome, depicts Aeneas as a refugee of the Trojan war.¹¹⁷ The Roman incorporation of the barbarian concept is a natural outgrowth of the many ways in which Romans adopted and integrated the culture of the Greeks, while giving it their own twist. In addition to being one more Hellenistic cultural piece integrated into the Roman imagination, the barbarian concept also provided Greeks and Romans a space by which to conceptualize who was and was not like themselves.¹¹⁸ As the non-barbarians of the world, Romans could see a continuity between themselves and Greeks (and vice versa), whether by identifying Romans as true Greeks or by using a vision of the world that sees Greeks, Romans, and barbarians as separate.

While Greeks and Romans were usually satisfied viewing one another as somehow the same and different simultaneously, plenty of other groups were the “other” against which Greeks and Romans aligned themselves after Alexander had made the Persian empire a non-threat. During the Punic Wars, Carthaginians took on this role, becoming the common enemy against which inhabitants of the Italian peninsula could unite alongside Republican Rome. While Hannibal commanded some respect due to his military prowess, Roman distaste for Carthaginians could become potent.¹¹⁹ The Parthians, Hellenistic-Persian successors of the Persian empire, to the east of the Seleucid kingdoms, posed challenges for Hellenistic Greeks and imperial Romans.¹²⁰ Even though extensive stereotypes about these people groups to the east

¹¹⁷ Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 243–48.

¹¹⁸ Explaining some of the inconsistencies in the usage of the term, Alexander Rubel concludes that Romans used the term “barbarian” chiefly to complain. See Alexander Rubel, “What the Romans Really Meant When Using the Word ‘Barbarian’: Some Thoughts on ‘Romans and Barbarians’,” in *Rome and Barbaricum: Contributions to the Archaeology and History of Interaction in European Protohistory*, ed. Roxana-Gabriela Curcă et al. (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020), 16–17.

¹¹⁹ On Roman attitudes toward Carthage before, during, and after the Punic Wars, see Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 323–35; Jensen, *Barbarians*, 138–45. Nepos, *Hannibal* 1.1 expresses respect for Hannibal’s military capability.

¹²⁰ Jensen, *Barbarians*, 121–22. Retrieving Roman battle standards from the Parthians who had successfully taken them would hold an important role in late first-century BCE Augustan propaganda. See Paul

and south of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean developed, the “barbarians” in the first century CE were largely Gauls, Celts, and Germans—peoples living north and west in mainland Europe.

In many respects, the Gauls were quintessential barbarians for Hellenistic Greeks and for Romans in both the Republican period and the principate.¹²¹ Even though the Gauls were thought to be tribal marauders from the northwest rather than an expanding imperial force from the southeast like the Persians, these people occupied a conceptual space in the Hellenistic and in the Roman imagination that formerly belonged to the Persians.¹²² The term “Gaul,” derived from *Galli*, the Latin term for people who call themselves Celts in their own language, typically refers to a loosely-associated collection of tribal groups and clans living in northern Italy, the Alps, and other areas in mainland Europe, west of the Rhine. The term “Galatian,” derived from the Greek Γαλάτης, refers to groups of Celts and Gauls who migrated from mainland Europe and settled in the middle of the Anatolian peninsula in the 280s and 270s BCE.¹²³ These groups may not have all considered themselves members of the same coalition.¹²⁴ But in the imaginations of Hellenistic and Roman society, they were together a threatening force inhabiting the space beyond the known, conquered, and pacified borders.

Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 186–92.

¹²¹ A wide-ranging overview of battles between Romans, Greeks, and their Gaul/Galatian opponents is in Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 51–74.

¹²² Jensen, *Barbarians*, 120–123. Julius Caesar’s *Bellum Gallicum* encapsulates many emerging Roman attitudes toward Gauls. For an exposition of the notion about “barbarians” as presented in the *Bellum Gallicum*, see Antonova, *Barbarian or Greek*, 65–73.

¹²³ Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished*, Paul in Critical Contexts (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 48–51.

¹²⁴ Caesar (*Bellum Gallicum* 1.1) notes that the groups in the territory he identifies as “Gaul” do not all have the same laws, languages, or institutions. While this observation may reflect his generalization of Gauls as fractious and disorganized, it may also be a result of the fact that “Gauls” were not all a single society. See Jensen, *Barbarians*, 132–35.

Because the barbarians against which Romans compared themselves were frontier peoples, rather than people from a large, rival empire, the stereotypes Romans assigned to these barbarians could be different than the ones Greeks assigned to the east. As Yves Dauge shows in his thorough discussion of the Roman barbarian concept, Romans associated barbarians with chaos, primitivism, and savagery.¹²⁵ While Romans could fault Greeks with falling into luxurious decadence—just as the Greeks could with the Persians—the Roman stereotype of the barbarian frontier was marked by an unkempt, uncivilized wildness. Like Greeks discussing Persians, Romans could fault barbarians for lacking discipline.¹²⁶ But instead of coming from urbane decadence, the lack of discipline Romans might find in the peoples they identified as barbarians had to do with the wildness of frontier living. Barbarism, as Romans conceived of it, could be a primitive state of existence inferior to imperial civilization because it was lacking in development.¹²⁷

Ethnographic characterizations of barbarians from Caesar and Tacitus express the idea that barbarians could be capriciously dangerous. *The Gallic War* by Julius Caesar chronicles Caesar's battles with Gauls in mainland Europe. The characterization in the ethnographic segments of *The Gallic War* suggests that the Gauls are capriciously violent and superstitious. The common folk, he writes, are effectively enslaved by nobles and subject to brutal punishments for disobeying their decisions.¹²⁸ Execution by fire for the crime of theft, or even no

¹²⁵ Dauge, *Le Barbare*, 424–449.

¹²⁶ Dauge, *Le Barbare*, 407.

¹²⁷ Dauge, *Le Barbare*, 481–94. Dauge lays out various “levels” of barbarism that he discovers operating in Roman texts. While “primary” and “secondary” barbarism refer respectively to a total lack of civilization and to incomplete levels of civilization, there is also a “tertiary” and “final” level of barbarism that refer to the decline and fall of a civilization.

¹²⁸ Caesar, *Bell. Gall.*, 6.13.

crime at all, is apparently a practice borne of religious devotion.¹²⁹ While Caesar's *Gallic War* contains only a brief ethnographic section in what is otherwise a series of battle narratives, *Germania* by Tacitus is purely descriptive. His portrait of the Germans respects their fighting prowess.¹³⁰ Tacitus sees disorganized, primitive savagery as an essential mark of what barbarians are like. To him, inhumanity, tyrannical rule, ignorance, and effeminacy are the faults of a barbarian psyche.¹³¹ The impressions of Gauls and Germans in these respective biographical works are hardly universally negative. As many have pointed out, Tacitus often compares Germans favorably to Romans which may imply that the restrained, simple lifestyle of "primitive" Germans contrasts with the decadence of urban Romans.¹³² And Caesar notes that Gauls and Romans both prize *libertas*.¹³³ But these references to barbarian virtue do not overturn the perception that frontier peoples can be chaotically violent.

There are some similarities between the characteristics assigned to these northern and western barbarians and the ideas that Greeks had assigned to their "barbarian" opponents.¹³⁴ Cicero identifies misuse of Latin as barbarous—a detail suggesting that the relationship between language and the charge of barbarism persists into the Roman era.¹³⁵ Both Greeks and Romans could also consider barbarians to be primitives. Viewing their own ways of life as the advent of civilization, barbarians could be seen as part of the way between a natural or

¹²⁹ Caesar, *Bell. Gall.*, 6.16.

¹³⁰ Tacitus, *Germania*, 6.

¹³¹ Antonova, *Barbarian or Greek*, 80–86.

¹³² Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 159–61. Rubel (“

¹³³ Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 153–55.

¹³⁴ For an overview of the differences between “civilized” and “barbarian” with attention to both Greek and Roman conceptions, see Larissa Bonfante, “Classical and Barbarian,” in *The Barbarians of Ancient Europe: Realities and Interactions*, ed. Larissa Bonfante (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6–25.

¹³⁵ Antonova, *Barbarian or Greek*, 78. Cf. Bonfante, “Classical and Barbarian,” 10–11.

animalistic way of life and a fully humanized one.¹³⁶ Another salient similarity between Greek perception of Persian barbarians and Roman views of barbarism in mainland Europe is tyranny. The concept of slavish soldiers blindly following a tyrannical monarch who rules with an iron fist could be found both in Greek discussions of barbarians.¹³⁷ Roman descriptions of Gauls and Germans see this idea appear again. For instance, part of the ferocity that Caesar attributes to the Gauls is the terror that iron-fisted leaders inflict on their followers, a contrast to the civility of Roman clemency.¹³⁸ Depicting barbarians as antitypes to a superior political system is a feature of both Greek and Roman depictions.

The most significant driver of the difference between Greek and Roman perceptions of barbarians is the relationship to empire. The Persians that Greek authors most readily identified as βάρβαροι were members of an expansive empire. They represented a monarchy in contrast to the democracy emerging in the Greek world. Greeks saw themselves as the antitype of an empire. Romans, as members of an empire, understood barbarians to be the people on the outskirts of their empire. That is, Romans saw barbarians as the antitype of empire. Roman attitudes and actions toward these groups were thus related to the ways in which the empire was reaching out into spaces it was not managing—or, sometimes more accurately, not fully managing yet.¹³⁹

Because Rome was an empire, the distinction between “Roman” and “barbarian” was often ready to destabilize. Because empires by nature expand and incorporates the places that

¹³⁶ On the Roman idea that barbarians are primitives, see Dauge, *Le Barbare* 434–35, 481–94. On the Greek idea, see Nippel, “Construction of the Other,” 286–88.

¹³⁷ Nippel, “Construction of the Other,” 288–93. As Nippel observes, the idea that Persians needed a strong hand to rule over them would later contribute to the notion of natural slavery.

¹³⁸ Caesar, *Bell. Gall.*, 1.33. Antonova, *Barbarian or Greek*, 69–70.

¹³⁹ Thomas S. Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians, 100 B.C.–A.D. 400*, Ancient Society and History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 140–50.

surround them, there was conceptual space for barbarians to become members of the Roman empire. As will be discussed in chapter 4, an important ambiguity in the *ethnos* reliefs in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias is whether the reliefs containing personifications of the nations represent conquered people or energized citizens of empire. In some sense, annexed peoples were both conquered and reintegrated. Cleverly drawing parallels between visual representations of barbarians at the Great Altar of Pergamon and Christian theology, Brigitte Kahl notes that there was a Roman conceptual space for dying and dead Gauls to be “resurrected” as Roman peoples.¹⁴⁰ A chief example of this transition for Kahl is Cicero’s defense of King Deiotaros, which establishes Deiotaros as a “civilized” Gaul in virtue of his alliance with the Romans that makes him embody the virtues of the civilized.¹⁴¹ Romans believed that one justification of imperial expansion was the opportunity to “civilize” foreign people groups.¹⁴²

The realities of the transition from barbarian outsider to civilized Roman were not usually clearly defined swaps from “non-Roman” to “Roman.” As Thomas Burns observes, many patron-client relationships could exist between Romans and barbarians before conquest could take place. The building of Roman governing infrastructure was so often inconsistent enough for the modern notion of “border” and “frontier” to carry more precision than would accurately describe the Roman situation.¹⁴³ Historians of the Roman Britain have had to rethink the extent of Romanization—the sociological changes to a place resulting from Roman presence and conquest—because archaeological discoveries and postcolonial studies have shown how changes

¹⁴⁰ Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 169–207. Kahl draws a parallel between activities that show loyalty to empire and “works of the law” against which Paul describes justification.

¹⁴¹ Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 176–79.

¹⁴² Jensen, *Barbarians*, 192–97; Rubel, “What the Romans Really Meant,” 9.

¹⁴³ Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians*, 145–47.

brought by colonization are rarely straightforward.¹⁴⁴ As binary as the dichotomy between Roman and barbarian could be in theory, the practical realities were often more foggy. And as Alexander Rubel argues, the term “barbarian” itself could be used in a variety of ways. Since it could not be fixed as a designation for specific people groups the way Greeks had once used the term to describe Persians, its most consistent meaning from Roman authors was a lifestyle or culture that a given author wanted to label as not befitting a Roman.

Conclusion

This chapter has, in overview fashion, quickly covered a lot of time, space, and culture. Many details that could be considered in the above exploration have been omitted because my interest here is in tracing a trajectory that starts with archaic Greek imaginings about distant lands and continues into Roman notions about the peoples they conquered. What this chapter shows, starting with the variety of meanings βάρβαρος has in the New Testament and showing how that variety of meanings follows from several centuries of the term’s usage, is that the barbarian concept is flexible. Greeks could identify urbane citizens of the Persian empire as barbarians. Romans would later identify the external-to-empire people of the mountains and forests as barbarians. This dissertation argues that the flexibility of the concept would allow for John’s polemic against Rome to be viewed as suggesting that Rome and its empire is barbaric. What this chapter contributes to that argument—in addition to tracing the dualistic self-other distinctions with which the “barbarian” term is consistently involved—is an overview of the trajectory into which later chapters situate the book of Revelation.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Hingley, “The ‘Legacy’ of Rome: The Rise, Decline, and Fall of the Theory of Romanization,” in *Roman Imperialism: Post-Colonial Perspectives*, ed. Jane Webster and Nicholas J Cooper, Leicester Archaeology Monographs 3 (Leicester: University of Leicester, 1996), 35–49.

The next chapter will show the notions about barbarians developed in Pergamene artwork that likely would have been very familiar to a portion of Revelation's earliest intended readership. What it means for that artwork to say something about barbarians, this chapter suggests, is tied to a centuries-long stream of self-other distinctions. That stream starts with identity formation in the archaic Greek world and continues into the Roman world. Along the way, the exact meaning of the term has demonstrated discontinuity and continuity.

Chapter 3

Pergamene Representations of Barbarians

This dissertation is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between the book of Revelation and its Roman context. Chapter 5 will consider Revelation's polemic against the Roman empire. And the point of comparison against which the book's anti-Roman polemic will be considered is the dichotomy between Romans and barbarians. But as the previous chapter shows, this Roman cultural concept has Greek origins. The Roman-barbarian bifurcation is a descendent of a much older set of self-other distinctions with origins in the archaic period from when Greek culture was taking its earliest shape. And when "barbarian" became a term for identifying people groups rather than speech patterns, the concept was instrumental in helping to construct an idea of what it meant to be Greek. Given the Greek origins of the barbarian notion, it should be unsurprising that some important visual representations of barbarians have Hellenistic origins.

This chapter explores Hellenistic visual representations of barbarians as a tool for reading Revelation's anti-Roman polemic in light of the antithesis between civilized "self" and barbarian "other." At the center of this chapter are two sets of images that would have been familiar to inhabitants of Pergamon, one of the seven cities named in Revelation's early chapters as a destination of the book (1:11, 2:12–17), which was also a vanguard of Greek art and culture during the Hellenistic era. One set of images is the Pergamene "large Gauls," monuments that

commemorate the defeat of Galatian tribes by depicting Galatian soldiers at the moment of death. The other set of images is the reliefs that adorn the Great Altar of Pergamon, a victory monument that was probably constructed in the early second century BCE. Interpreters of Revelation have considered this monument before, identifying it as a possible candidate for the referent of the “throne of Satan” mentioned in 2:13.¹ While that will not be my approach to the Great Altar, I will discuss the Altar’s depiction of barbarians, along with the statues of the dying Gauls, to connect Revelation’s anti-Roman polemic to the Hellene-barbarian antithesis that these images depict.

This chapter, like the subsequent chapter, has three parts. In the first part, I briefly discuss some of the earliest depictions of barbarians in Greek artwork. My goal is not to provide an historical survey, but to show how representing the otherness and defeat of “barbarian” Persians began so as to make better sense of the Pergamene installations at the center of the chapter. Part two provides an overview of the main sets of images under discussion—the Great Altar and the dying Gauls—within the context of Pergamon’s history, a history in which the relationship between Rome and Pergamon had been consistently positive. The final portion of this chapter will introduce six attributes of barbarians present not only in the Great Altar and dying Gaul statues, but in the Roman depictions of barbarians discussed in the next chapter.

¹ The definitive defense of this hypothesis is Adela Yarbro Collins, “Pergamon in Early Christian Literature,” in *Pergamon: Citadel of the Gods*, ed. Helmut Koester, Harvard Theological Studies 46 (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 163–84. For a discussion and rebuttal of this hypothesis, see Steven J. Friesen, “Satan’s Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation,” *JSNT* 27.3 (2005): 356–59; Andrew R. Guffey, *The Book of Revelation and the Visual Culture of Asia Minor: A Concurrence of Images* (Lanham, MD: Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2019), 166–71.

Image set 3.1: Barbarians in Greek Representation

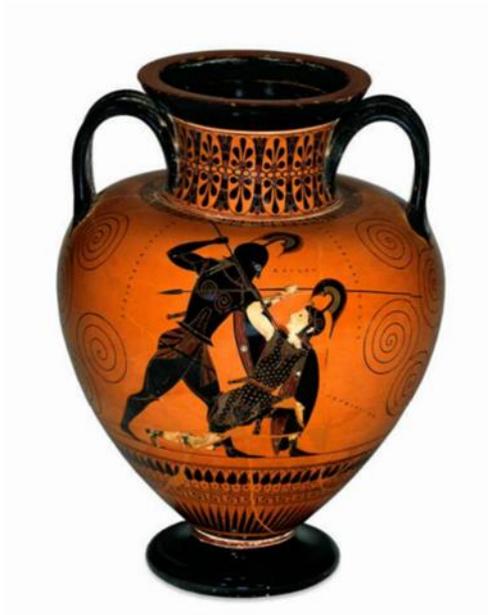


Image 3.1.1: [Amphora signed by Exekias depicting Achilles and Penthesilea](#). Photo credit: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Registration number 1836,0224.127. Licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Image 3.1.2: [Greek and Persian, attributed to the Chicago Painter, ca. 460 BCE](#). Photo credit: © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, accession number 13.196. Image removed for copyright purposes.



Image 3.1.3 (above): The Eurymedon Oinochoe. Photo: Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg. Public domain. Link to left side [here](#) and right side [here](#).



Image 3.1.4 (left): [South Metope from the Parthenon depicting a centauromachy](#). Photo credit: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Registration number: 1816,0610.14. Licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

The “Other” in Earlier Greek Artwork

As discussed in the previous chapter, the earliest precursors of the barbarian concept appeared in the archaic period. The same is true for visual depictions of “others.” Archaic Greek visual representations of non-Greek peoples tend to feature the exotic creatures found in mythologized literary representations. The earliest Greek visual representations of non-Greeks draw upon the mythological stories in which peoples at a great geographical distance also have non- or semi-human forms. One of the earliest vase paintings from about 670 BCE features Odysseus and his compatriots thrusting a stake in the eye of Polyphemos the cyclops as part of their effort to escape from his cave. Centaurs were also featured on very early Greek sculptures. Their human torsos covered in bestial body hair, centaurs represented the dangers of the wild frontier. Visual depictions of cyclopes and centaurs, like the representations of such creatures in the *Odyssey*, were probably not meant to disparage any particular ethnic group. Rather, they represented the dangers and uncertainties involved in braving unknown frontiers as part of colonization efforts.² Pre-classical art also featured Amazons, mythical warrior women from somewhere far northeast of Greece. One amphora signed by the artist Exekias from 540 BCE features Achilles killing Penthesilea, the Amazon queen who died by Achilles’ hand after she helped Troy in battle (Image 3.1.1).³ In the image, Penthesilea lacks the hoplitic armor worn by Achilles, instead wearing leopard skin that reflects her prowess in hunting wild beasts.⁴ Such artwork implies that the earliest antithesis of a Greek “self” is the mythologically exotic or semi-human other. Depictions of Africans, Thracians, and Scythians occur with enough consistency in

² Beth Cohen, “The Non-Greek in Greek Art,” in *A Companion to Greek Art*, ed. Smith Tyler Jo and Dimitris Plantzos, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 457–63.

³ Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthomerica*, 1.548–674.

⁴ Cohen, “The Non-Greek,” 461–62.

ethnic markings for art historians to recognize the ethnicity of the figures being represented.⁵ Such imagery is not without its stereotypes.⁶ However, oppositional imagery between Greeks and non-Greek ethnic groups became much more pronounced following the event that solidified the transformation of βάρβαρος into an ethnocultural term: the Greek's unexpected victories against the Persians in the early fifth century.⁷

As is the case with the “barbarian” notion generally, the Greco-Persian wars mark a shift in the content represented in artwork. Where Greek artwork had before been mostly limited to depicting the mythological achievements of gods and heroes—at least in narrative artwork—visual art following the Persian wars adopted a historical character.⁸ The western-based work of representing the east that occurs in *Persae* occurs in this artwork as well. A mid-fifth century oinochoe depicts a Greek soldier about to kill a cowering Persian (image 3.1.2); such imagery presents a Persian soldier marked with the same anxiety that Persians carry in the play.⁹ Perhaps the most famous example of a visual depiction of Persians and their defeat is the Eurymedon oinochoe. One side has a Greek soldier holding his own penis (image 3.1.3), and the other side depicts a soldier bent over, his costume consistent with other representations of Persians. The inscription says “I am Eurymedon, I stand bent over.” A typical interpretation of this item suggests that the defeat of the Persian army and navy by the Attic-Delian league in the 460s BCE

⁵ Cohen, “The Non-Greek,” 464–75.

⁶ See, for instance, the several chapters on representations of Etruscans, Lydians, Phrygians, Egyptians, and Persians in Beth Cohen, ed., *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

⁷ Cohen, “The Non-Greek,” 475–79. Vlassopoulos (*Greeks and Barbarians*, 186–90) shows that, while ethnic stereotypes became more pronounced in the decades leading up to the Persian wars, the tendency to clearly mark foreign peoples as such catalyzed and intensified following those conflicts.

⁸ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, 66–68.

⁹ David Castriota, “Justice, Kingship, and Imperialism: Rhetoric and Reality in Fifth-Century B.C. Representations Following the Persian Wars,” in *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art*, ed. Beth Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 443–45.

is to be equated with sexual penetration, perhaps cohering with a stereotype about Persian effeminacy. While no other item presents the Greco-Persian conflict in such clearly sexualized terms, this oinochoe exemplifies a turn toward depicting victory by depicting enemies.¹⁰

Not all artwork produced in the wake of the Persian Wars centers on presenting Persians in a position of defeat; depicting Greeks in a position of defeat, or close to it, was surprisingly common in victory art.¹¹ Athenian victory monuments that surround the Parthenon link victories in the Greco-Persian wars to mythological battles, making simultaneous implications about the exoticism of Persians and the magnitude of Greek victory.¹² Surrounding the Athenian Parthenon are numerous sculptures whose uniting theme is the importance of Athens's patron goddess, Athena.¹³ Images of gigantomachy, battles between gods and giants, decorated the pediment of the archaic temple of Athena that the Persians had destroyed.¹⁴ When the Parthenon was built as a thank-offering to Athena following the Persian conflict, sculptures depicting mythological battles—against Trojans, against Amazons, and against Centaurs—were inscribed into the Parthenon, aligning the Persian victories with those mythological events.¹⁵ For example, the centauro-machy images in the metopes on the south side of the Parthenon show a Greek soldier fighting against a centaur (see image 3.1.4). These square reliefs show the threat of the centaur's

¹⁰ Paul Cartledge, "The Machismo of the Athenian Empire," in *When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power, and Identity in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Lin Foxhall and John Salmon, Leicester-Nottingham Studies in Ancient Society 8 (London: Routledge, 1998), 56–61.

¹¹ Claude Bérard "The Image of the Other and the Foreign Hero," in *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art*, ed. Beth Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 394.

¹² Jensen, *Barbarians in the Greek and Roman World*, 70–71.

¹³ T. Leslie Shear, *Trophies of Victory: Public Building in Periclean Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 107.

¹⁴ Shear, *Trophies*, 117.

¹⁵ Shear, *Trophies*, 117–20. Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, 68–70 likewise ties the Persian Wars to a train of conflicts that include battles against Trojans and Amazons to show that Greece's military prowess is a longstanding tradition.

semi-human bestiality. While the Greek soldier wrestling with the centaur appears to fight well, the centaur is clearly a very powerful threat who may possibly win the war. The implication is that all victories in Greek history—ranging from those in the mythical plane to those the Greco-Persian wars—have involved subduing a chaotic and threatening enemy who is fundamentally different. The imagery does not directly depict Persians as centaurs. But it does place victory against Persia in line with mythical victories that were hard-won and mythical in scale and scope. It also suggests that Persia, like the human-horse hybrids of the centauromachy, is fundamentally other.

These examples of early Greek representations of “others” by no means constitute a thorough catalogue of such artwork from the archaic and classical periods. But they demonstrate a handful of patterns that can be seen in the main Pergamene pieces discussed below, as well as the Roman artwork in the next chapter. These patterns include the depiction of ethnic others as defeated and helpless (images 3.1.2 and 3.1.3) and the choice to represent others through reference to hybrid creatures in order to exoticize them (image 3.1.4). The next segment of the chapter shows how Pergamon—a highlight of Hellenism by the second century CE—carries these patterns forward in artwork commemorating Pergamene victories against barbarians.

“Barbarians” in Pergamon

In the history of Pergamon’s rise to supremacy, defeating Gauls played a particularly important role. Pergamon had been a relatively insignificant village before the third century BCE. It quickly gained prominence when King Lysimachos of Macedonia, a successor of Alexander the Great, entrusted his treasury of some 9,000 talents to an officer named Philetairos of Pergamon. Philetairos was able to use his massive fortune—especially after 281 when

Pergamon became *de facto* independent following the deaths of Lysimachos and Seleukos—to fortify the city and fund massive building projects. When Philetairos’s nephew, Eumenes I, successfully won a battle against Antiochos I in 262, leading to Pergamene *de jure* independence, Pergamon was in position to solidify its place as the defender of Hellenism through military success.¹⁶ Around 240 BCE, during the reign of Attalos I, victories against Galatian tribes were responsible for the growth of Pergamon’s reputation. Throughout the reigns of Philetairos and Eumenes, prior to the rule of Attalos, peace with the Galatians was maintained through a “blackmail” payment of the *stipendium*—a payment to keep marauding at bay.¹⁷ Galatian tribes had been pressed into the center of the Anatolian peninsula in the 270s, but the marauding made them a persistent threat in the following decades. In 240, however, Attalos defeated the Tolistobogii, a Galatian tribe, and stopped paying the tax.¹⁸ This victory allowed Attalos I to call himself a βασιλεύς and Pergamon a kingdom. More importantly, Pergamon was able to situate itself as a vanguard of Hellenism, in part because its people were able to defend themselves against the threat of “barbarian” agitators that took the form of Galatian adversaries.¹⁹

With the defeat of Galatian tribes and their Bithynian allies, Pergamon became the protector and savior of Greek culture, a situation that catalyzed Pergamon becoming a center for Hellenistic art as well.²⁰ Pergamon was not just a storehouse or manufacturer of Greek art; it was

¹⁶ J. J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 79–80.

¹⁷ David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the Third Century After Christ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 1:4–7.

¹⁸ Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, vol. 1, *The Celts in Anatolia and the Impact of Roman Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 21–23; Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished*, 60–64.

¹⁹ Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 20–21.

²⁰ Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, 81–84. King Philetairos had also set a precedent of gifting money and artwork to neighboring Hellenistic cities throughout Asia Minor. See Erich S. Gruen, “Culture as Policy,” in *From*

meaningfully innovative. Ann Kuttner coins the term “Asianism” to describe the distinctive features of Pergamene artwork, including the Great Altar discussed below.²¹ As Greek styles became so widespread that “Greek” style was simply “normal,” it became incumbent on non-Greek artists to forge their distinctive styles.²² Attalid artwork in Pergamon simultaneously emphasizes continuity with Greek mythology, Greek ancestral figures, and some elements of Greek style, while also providing a distinctively “Asian” twist.²³ Attalid artwork also pressed Pergamene pride into the world stage.²⁴ Attesting to Pergamon’s place as the new vanguard of Greek artistic endeavors is an Attalid dedication on the acropolis in Athens, where evidence of Pergamene-inspired victory monuments sit just outside of the Parthenon.²⁵ As gifts from Attalos I of Pergamon, and products of the artistic school of Epigonos, the installation at the Athenian acropolis would have helped to cement Pergamon’s place as the vanguard of Hellenistic culture.²⁶ As Stewart observes,

Pergamenes, the Attalid Dedication’s no. 2 constituency, would have gloried in it... For it visibly certified their bravery, power, independence, wealth, taste, and beneficence; it paraded both their Hellenistic roots and their East Greek distinctiveness; it consecrated

Pergamon to Sperlonga: Sculpture and Context, ed. Nancy T. De Grummond and Brunilde S. Ridgway, Hellenistic Culture and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 20–22.

²¹ Ann Kuttner, “‘Do You Look Like You Belong Here?’ Asianism at Pergamon and the Makedonian Diaspora,” in *Cultural Borrowing and Ethnic Appropriation in Antiquity*, ed. Erich S. Gruen, *Oriens et Occidens* 8 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2005), 137–206.

²² Kuttner, “Asianism,” 142–44.

²³ Kuttner, “Asianism,” 144–45, 174–92. It is somewhat ironic that the Great Altar emphasizes Pergamon’s simultaneous Greekness and Asianness, given that Asia Minor had been, at various times, the territory of the Trojans, Persians, and Macedonians, all of which were Greece’s “others” at some point. The Pergamene art discussed below emphasizes the otherness of non-Greeks, ironically, by depicting hybrids as enemies.

²⁴ Such was the mark of both the Ptolemies and the Attalids. See Eric Varner, “The Patronage of Greek and Roman Art,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 158–60.

²⁵ For a detailed account of the Attalid artwork on the acropolis in Athens and its afterlife, see Andrew Stewart, *Attalos, Athens, and the Akropolis: The Pergamene “Little Barbarians” and Their Roman and Renaissance Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁶ Stewart, *Attalos*, 213–18.

their great victory over the Gauls as the climax of all history; and it demonstrated beyond doubt that they both respected and would protect the true font of Hellenism.²⁷

For ordinary citizens of Pergamon, Attalid artwork could naturally support significant pride in both one's own city and the military achievements its citizens have made. What follows in this chapter is an exposition of these images that support Pergamene pride in light of the defeat of the Gauls.

The following sets of images, commissioned in the interest of supporting Pergamon's place as the vanguard of Hellenistic culture, make a number of implicit statements about what "barbarian" Gauls are like. One such group of artistic pieces glorying in the defeat of Gauls is a pair of larger-than-life statues depicting Gauls in the process of actively dying; the other is the Great Altar of Pergamon. As the latter section of the chapter shows, these images include the following visual markers of "barbarians": (1) that they suffer defeat; (2) that their defeat has cosmological significance; (3) a spatial distinction placing barbarians in a diminished position; (4) visibly embodied difference; (5) a warlike disposition; and (6) opposition to the gods. Given that the images of the large dying Gauls are smaller, not all of these features will be present in those sculptures. However, the Great Altar of Pergamon includes all of these features.

Since this dissertation connects attributes of a barbarian to the Roman-era Johannine Apocalypse, it is worth pointing out that the implicit messages in these images would have been appropriated for their Roman context. Even though there is a difference between pride statements for independent Pergamon and statements celebrating the rightness or influence of Roman power, it is unlikely that Roman-era viewers of these statues would have understood them differently. The Pergamene pride communicated by the "authorial intention" of these images

²⁷ Stewart, *Attalos*, 234.

would likely have been understood as Roman pride by its first century CE viewership. One important reason is that alliances with Rome play an important role in Pergamene political history. In the late third century BCE, Attalus I of Pergamon joined an alliance against Philip V of Macedonia, who had just forged an alliance with Hannibal. While his participation against Macedonia was limited, it bought the Roman military time to focus on their battles against Carthage, earning Pergamon a position of Roman favor.²⁸ In the 190s, Eumenes II sided with Rome to avoid rejoining Seleucid territory as demanded by Antiochus III, a situation that allowed Asia Minor to be ruled in Roman interest while expanding Pergamene territory.²⁹ And in 189, Roman consul Manlius Vulso executed a campaign to pacify Asia Minor by suppressing once and for all the threat of the Galatians, who had recently sided with the Seleucids under Antiochus III. The resulting peace of Apamea in 188/189 gave most of the western Anatolian peninsula to Pergamon, keeping the Seleucids and Galatians at bay. Over the next two decades, Rome became the political mediator of conflicts in Asia Minor, maintaining alliances with Pergamon.³⁰ When Attalus III ascended to the throne in 138, having no wife or heir, he was concerned that the vacancy caused by his death would plunge Pergamene territory into chaos. As a result, he willed Pergamon to Rome, a proposition that was promptly accepted at his death in 133.³¹ Pergamon, then, was no oppressed victim of Roman imperialism. And Pergamene military victories had always already positioned Rome as part of the victor's party. For that reason, these images about defeated barbarians would not have to be either statements of Roman pride or

²⁸ Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, 1:11–16.

²⁹ Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, 1:17–20; Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 23.

³⁰ Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 24–26; Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 66–68; Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, 1:21–29.

³¹ Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, 1:30–33; Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 68–69.

statements of Pergamene pride; given the history of friendship between Rome and Pergamon, such sentiments would be anything but mutually exclusive.

Moreover, the general phenomenon of philhellenism—the Roman tendency to regard anything Greek with high prestige or status—would have supported Roman-era appreciation of Hellenistic artwork like the kind produced by Pergamene artists. In early Roman conquests of Greece, artistic “spoils” brought in from Greek territories were reputed to stand out significantly from other types of “booty.” While there was some pushback to the proliferation of Greek art in Rome, Augustus’s determination that Greek art should become public property in Rome led to Greek art serving Roman purposes.³² Between Vespasian and Hadrian’s reigns, Greek art had become fully incorporated into Roman life. As J. J. Pollitt observes, it became “increasingly difficult to distinguish between what was Greek and what was Roman.”³³ Greek artwork and mythology left a strong impression on Roman artwork, particularly in Augustan artwork that aimed to provide a mythological basis for Roman imperial rule.³⁴ As the next chapter will show, images that make positive implicit statements about the origins, effects, and permanency of Roman imperial rule draw on echoes of Greek imagery. And as Ann Kuttner shows, the Roman phenomenon of Philhellenism is especially pronounced with Roman attitudes toward Pergamene art.³⁵ Indeed, she even coins the term “Attalicism” to account for Roman appropriation of Attalid

³² J. J. Pollitt, “The Impact of Greek Art on Rome,” in *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-2014)*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 155–74.

³³ Pollitt, “Impact of Greek Art,” 169. See also the sentiment in Michael Squire, “Greek Art through Roman Eyes,” in *A Companion to Greek Art*, ed. Smith Tyler Jo and Dimitris Plantzos, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Malden, MA, 2012), 604–605.

³⁴ For case studies showing artwork with Greek features produced for a Roman clientele, see Squire, “Greek Art through Roman Eyes.” On the implicit mythology of Roman art, see Zanker, *Power of Images*, 167–238.

³⁵ Ann Kuttner, “Republican Rome Looks at Pergamon,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 97 (1995): 157–78. On the phenomenon of Philhellenism—Roman respect for and imitation of Hellenistic artistic forms, see Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, 150–63.

art forms. Artistic Attalicism complements and pays respect to the reception Pergamon had received as a “university city”—fulfilling the Attalid mission of making Pergamon a cultural successor to the tradition of Athens.³⁶

In fact, nothing less than the sincerest form of flattery demonstrates the positive Roman attitude toward the sets of Pergamene “barbarian” images discussed below. These sculptures were imitated by Roman artists.³⁷ As will be discussed in the following segments, and in the next chapter on Roman visual representations of barbarians, both the Dying Gaul statues and the Great Altar of Pergamon would influence visual depictions of the Roman-barbarian antithesis. Indeed, the first set of images discussed here, the statues of dying Gauls, are known to us not through the Pergamene originals. They are only known to us through Roman-made copies that attest to their usefulness for a Roman audience. To these Hellenistic depictions of Gauls known through Roman copies I now turn.

³⁶ Kuttner, “Rome Looks at Pergamon,” 162–63.

³⁷ In introducing Roman visual depictions of barbarians, Iain Ferris first presents the dying Gauls below. See Iain M. Ferris, *Enemies of Rome: Barbarians Through Roman Eyes* (Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2000), 6–10. For a discussion of Roman appropriation of the Attalid “dying Gaul” statue, see Stewart, *Attalos*, 136–80.

Image set 3.2: The Dying Gauls



Image 3.2.1 (above): [The Capitoline Gaul](#). A kneeling, dying Gaul soldier falls over a bed of armaments. Photo: BeBo86 via Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).



Image 3.2.2 (left): [The Ludovisi Gauls](#). A Gaul couple commits ritual suicide. Photo: Jastrow via Wikimedia Commons. Licensed as public domain.

There is a set of “large” and a set of “small” Gauls, all of which reflect the artistic work of Pergamon’s Attalid dynasty, despite the diverse locations of various copies on display throughout Europe today.³⁸ Above are the “large” Gauls. The “large” and “small” Gauls all have the following things in common: they depict enemies of the Greek speaking world—usually Gauls, but also some Persians; they present them with noticeable musculature, nude or nearly nude, and often near battle armament; and they present them all as dying or dead. The Capitoline and Ludovisi Gauls likely have Pergamene origins. Both of these statues are probably second-century CE Roman copies of sculptures originally made around 230 BCE in Pergamon.³⁹ Drawing a connection to NT textual criticism, Brigitte Kahl appropriately calls them “manufacts”—artifacts that are not the originals but witnesses to them, like NT manuscripts.⁴⁰ It is possible, at least in theory, that some of the details visible in the statues do not exactly represent what ancient Pergamenes would have seen. That said, it is unlikely for the Roman copies of these statues pictured above to differ significantly from the Pergamene originals. The practice of using casts to mold the marble statues means that any divergence from the bronze originals would ultimately be rather minor.

The large Gaul statues depict Gaul soldiers in the throes of death. The Capitoline Gaul, so called because it resides at Rome’s Capitoline Museum today, is the male figure in image 3.2.1. It is also sometimes called the “Dying Gaul” or the “Dying Trumpeter.” This statue is a marble copy of what was probably a bronze monument constructed between 230 and 220 BCE. It

³⁸ For an overview of the “large” and “small” Gauls, categorized as such, see R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture: A Handbook* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 99–104.

³⁹ Stewart, *Attalos*, 208–212.

⁴⁰ Brigitte Kahl, “The Galatian Suicide and the Transbinary Semiotics of Christ Crucified (Galatians 3:1): Exercises in Visual Exegesis and Critical Reimagination,” in *The Art of Visual Exegesis: Rhetoric, Texts, Images*, ed. Vernon K. Robbins, Walter S. Melion, and Roy R. Jeal, *Emory Studies in Early Christianity* 19 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 207.

depicts a Gaul on the brink of death. His body is slumped down as though slain in battle, nearly approaching the ground. Beneath him lies a sword, a shield, and the trumpet after which the statue is sometimes named.⁴¹ The figure is completely naked; while there are armaments on the ground beneath him, he wears no armor of any kind. The Ludovisi Gaul depicts a different scene. This statue portrays what is apparently a heterosexual couple in the throes of death. The male is standing, holding a sword to his throat and plunging it down behind his collarbone. Visible streaks of blood cover his chest. His left arm raises a female figure. She is clothed, unlike the male figure, and apparently has already died or is very close to doing so. What this image depicts, according to a standard interpretation, is a Celtic chieftain who is committing suicide so as to avoid capture and humiliation, having just killed his wife for the same purpose.⁴²

The original positions of these statues would have made their implicit statements about barbarians prominent to a Pergamene viewership. Several bases have been uncovered in Pergamon that are likely to have served as the display pedestals for these statues. As Roland Smith reconstructs the original location of the Large Gauls, they are displayed on an elliptical rotunda with a dedicatory inscription around it.⁴³ Located just outside the temple of Athena, these statues would have sat on a highly visible outcropping, overlooking much of the city.⁴⁴ These “large Gaul” dying barbarian statues support Pergamene pride through a series of implicit statements about the Gauls that were defeated by Roman-Pergamene forces. The clearest of these

⁴¹ The figure is not identified as a trumpeter because a trumpet is visible among his armament. Indeed, the trumpet looks like a minor feature. Rather the title “Trumpeter” may tie the piece to a quotation from Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 34.88) that describes a “Trumpeter” created by the sculptor Epigonos.

⁴² Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 8; Kahl, “Galatian Suicide,” 206.

⁴³ Image from Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 112. For an alternative account of the statues’ original location, see Stewart, *Attalos*, 209–12.

⁴⁴ On the inscribed bases in Pergamon that may have been the resting places of the large Gauls, see Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, 83–84; Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 102.

statements relate to the defeat and the otherness of these figures. The defeat of the figures means that the threat represented by the Gauls, sometimes considered blood-crazed, had been neutralized.⁴⁵ More potently, these statues point to the strange otherness of the Gauls. The hyperbolic, unbalanced musculature was “un-Greek,” as is the death-drive implicit in the suicidal couple.⁴⁶

A series of “small Gauls” join the “large Gaul” statue type represented by the Capitoline Gaul, the Ludovisi Gaul, and some other statues visible in fragmentary form. Ten Roman facsimiles of statues are on display at museums throughout Europe.⁴⁷ These statues are called “little barbarians” because they are approximately two-thirds life-size, unlike the slightly larger-than-life-size Capitoline and Ludovisi Gauls. Some of these small barbarians are Galatian; others are Persian. Some lie on the ground, already slain; others are falling, somewhere between the final blow and the final breath. One holds his arms over his body as if to protect himself from an inevitable strike. Most are basically naked, with the most common exception being a helmet that identifies the figure as a Persian or a Gaul. And all of them represent the bodies of warriors actively losing a battle. Based on fragments of blocks and pedestals, largely discovered in the late 19th century, the Attalid originals of these constitute a long victory monument on the Athenian acropolis just outside of the Parthenon. Some of these statues may have been present on the Great Altar, but that hypothesis has only seen limited support.⁴⁸ As Andrew Stewart

⁴⁵ Stewart, *Attalos*, 228.

⁴⁶ Andrew Stewart, *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 220. For more on the alterity and aggression implicit in the representation of the dying Gauls, see respectively the “embodied difference” and “warlike disposition” sections below.

⁴⁷ Stewart, *Attalos*, 1–10.

⁴⁸ Wolfram Hoepfner has conjectured that the sacrificial table in the Great Altar of Pergamon would have been lined with statues similar to the “small Gauls,” making it look like the dying barbarians were perpetually the objects of sacrifice in the altar’s colonnade. The conjecture is based on some of the cornice blocks in the Great Altar, but Stewart finds this unconvincing. See Stewart, *Attalos*, 307 n. 100.

reconstructs the scenes, a 124-meter sequence of monuments comprising these statues would fill the horizon seen by a viewer, facing south, with the Parthenon to their right. The first monument, a gigantomachy, displays a row of dead or dying giants. A row of dying Amazons, another of Persians, and another with dying Gauls, are each successively to the west of the Gigantomachy, producing a long sequence of defeat monuments.⁴⁹ The Athenian viewer could walk along these rows of statues, seeing enemies dead or near dying, and have a representation of the experience of a battle coming to a victorious conclusion. Situated in Athens, they place the defeat of barbarians on display in the city that classically represented the heart of Hellenistic culture.

The Pergamene artistic school's work makes Pergamene pride—and the imagery of barbarian defeat included in it—a phenomenon that was not geographically limited to Pergamon.⁵⁰ The proliferation of the small Gauls show that the Pergamene-originated visual depictions of barbarians had an influence on cultural imaginations that, though coming from Pergamon and supporting Pergamene pride, transcended Pergamon. Most pertinent to this project is that these images of Gauls—both the small and the large—are known to us only through their Roman copies, most likely produced in the early second century CE.⁵¹ While the skirmishes with Gauls/Galatians in the third century BCE mark the occasion of the statues' production, the continued reproduction of these images demonstrates that they remained compelling to audiences

⁴⁹ Stewart, *Attalos*, 181–98. The succession of war displays that Stewart hypothesizes is based on Pausanias 1.25.2; spaces available in the blocks and pedestals that have been recovered; and the variety of facsimiles still on display today, which include Gauls, Persians, an Amazon, and a Giant.

⁵⁰ Inscriptions show evidence not only of Attalid artwork once visible in Pergamon and Athens, but at Delphi and Delos as well. Many of the depictions correlated with these inscriptions are now lost. See John R. Marszal, “Ubiquitous Barbarians: Representations of the Gauls at Pergamon and Elsewhere,” in *From Pergamon to Sperlonga: Sculpture and Context*, ed. Nancy T. De Grummond and Brunilde S. Ridgway, Hellenistic Culture and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 204–206.

⁵¹ Stewart, *Attalos*, 136–42. The large and small Gauls, in Stewart's best estimation, come from an Aphrodisian workshop during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian. As chapter 3 shows, visual representations of defeated barbarians become much more common during the reign of Trajan.

long afterward. As Andrew Stewart shows, the display of these statues could easily be reappropriated for a Roman context that appreciated the triumphal parades of defeated peoples or the recreations of battles in the arena. It would take a relatively small labor of imagination to view these statues as banners of the champions of civilization against barbarism, whether those champions were Greek or Roman.⁵² The messages about barbarians present in these statues would have been well integrated into the visual cultural of Roman Pergamon and beyond. The nature of that messaging will be discussed in the final section of this chapter alongside another major installation commemorating Pergamene victory against Galatians: the Great Altar of Pergamon.

⁵² Stewart, *Attalos*, 150–52. Stewart here mentions a love of violent spectacle discussed, and linked to Revelation, in Christopher Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation*, *Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 14–38.

Image Set 3.3: The Great Altar of Pergamon



Image 3.3.1: [The hilltop location where the Great Altar once sat](#). Photo: David J. Lull via Creative Commons. Licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#).



Image 3.3.2: [Great Altar model](#). This is a photograph of the model of ancient Pergamon at Berlin's Pergamonmuseum showing the location of the Altar. Photo: Claudio Desteghene via Creative Commons. Licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#).



Image 3.3.3: [Reconstruction of the Great Altar of Pergamon](#). It is at the Pergamonmuseum in Berlin. A few visitors can be seen in the foreground. Photo: Amphipolis via Creative Commons. Licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#).



Image 3.3.4: [Center of the Eastern wall of the Gigantomachy frieze](#). The female figure in the center is Athena. She fights against Titans and Giants. The female figure near the ground is the Giants' mother, Gaia. Photo via Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#).



Image 3.3.5: [Northern frieze selection](#). Panels from the right half of the northern frieze featuring Dione fighting a snake-legged giant. Photo: Claus Ableiter via Creative Commons. Licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#).

The Great Altar of Pergamon is familiar to many interpreters of Revelation, not least because some have identified the “throne of Satan” in 2:13 as related to the Great Altar. The suggestion that “throne of Satan” refers to the Great Altar can be traced to Adolf Deissmann’s *Light from the Ancient East*. In a footnote, Deissmann claims that the site’s hillside visibility

rules out any other contender for the allusion (image 3.3.1).⁵³ This possibility finds its strongest support from Adela Yarbro Collins who argues that the complex of hilltop temples—the Great Altar, plus a sanctuary of Zeus and a sanctuary of Athena above it—together constitute the “throne” referred to in 2:13. The hilltop complex, Yarbro Collins observes, could have seemed in the imaginations of Jewish visitors like an anti-Zion, a religious hilltop meant to rival Jerusalem’s mountain. There, Zeus-devotion would have been a proxy for Rome-devotion, making the hill on which the Great Altar sits a dwelling place of God’s opponent.⁵⁴ With Stephen Friesen and others, I am not convinced that such a specific local allusion can be definitively proven.⁵⁵ But my methodology does not depend on pinning down a textual allusion to this local site. To be relevant for the project, this site needs to contribute to cementing the barbarian concept in the imaginations of Asia Minor’s residents. It does not need to be Satan’s Throne; it just needs to be prominent.

Deissmann’s identification of the Great Altar with the “Throne of Satan” was predicated on something that makes the Great Altar relevant for this project: its pride of place within the city. Situated off a main road leading up to the temple of Athena and visible from many vantage points, the Great Altar would have been in one of Pergamon’s most prominent locations.⁵⁶ Whether or not a Jewish visitor would have viewed the hill as a rival to Zion, the Great Altar would have been an imposing structure near the city center. Moreover, the Great Altar did not

⁵³ Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 280 n. 2.

⁵⁴ Yarbro Collins, “Pergamon in Early Christian Literature,” 166–76.

⁵⁵ Friesen critiques the connection between the Great Altar and the “Throne of Satan” in the same vein as his other critiques of Colin Hemer’s work: it works as a possibility, but not as a definitive conclusion. See Steven J. Friesen, “Revelation, Realia, and Religion: Archaeology in the Interpretation of the Apocalypse,” *HTR* 88.3 (1995): 301–306.

⁵⁶ Guffey, *Revelation and Visual Culture*, 149–53.

just enjoy pride of place; it was also a place of pride. Like the large and small Gauls whose copies ended up spreading throughout the Mediterranean world, the celebration of victory is a main feature of the Great Altar.⁵⁷ The Altar's combination of features from Greek, Macedonian, and Asian artwork coincides with Pergamon's distinct, vibrant mythology that takes pride in the city's founders and rulers.⁵⁸ Both the prestigious location and commemorative function of the Altar place it at the heart of city life in ancient Pergamon. For an ordinary resident of ancient Pergamon, the Great Altar would have been unmissable. As a prominent visual display, it is likely to have been plenty familiar to many of the Apocalypse's earliest readers.

Scholars of the Great Altar agree that the structure is a victory monument, a judgment supported to no small degree by the prominence of the Gigantomachy frieze, a large succession of panels depicting battles between gods and beasts that surround the Altar's base. As should be no surprise, military events control scholarly discussion of the Altar's date. While Roland Smith places the window for the start date of the Altar's construction between 197 and 139 BCE, the strongest hypotheses are a date in the 160s, or 188 BCE, following the treaty of Apamea.⁵⁹ Date proposals in the 170s and 160s revolve around Pergamene victories against various enemy groups. The dedicatory inscription, though fragmentary, has a clear ΑΓΑΘ in it. In other Attalid dedicatory statements, ἀγαθά refers to divine blessings in the form of military victories.⁶⁰ Even if

⁵⁷ It should be noted that commemorating victory is not the only function of the Great Altar, a point that will be relevant in the coming paragraphs. For a discussion of its functions, including the puzzles surrounding the temple in the Altar's second storey, see Andrew Stewart, "Pergamo Ara Marmorea Magna: On the Date, Reconstruction, and Functions of the Great Altar at Pergamon," in *From Pergamon to Sperlonga: Sculpture and Context*, ed. Nancy T. De Grummond and Brunilde S. Ridgway, Hellenistic Culture and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 39–50; Guffey, *Revelation and Visual Culture*, 155–66.

⁵⁸ Kuttner, "Do You Look Like You Belong Here?"

⁵⁹ Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 158.

⁶⁰ Stewart, "Pergamo Ara," 34–39. As J. J. Pollitt observes (*Art in the Hellenistic World*, 97), the phrase "Great Altar" technically refers to the structure that encloses the table itself.

one argues that commemoration of victory in a military struggle is ancillary to the Altar's primary *raison d'être*, the prominence of the Altar's Gigantomachy frieze makes the commemoration of wartime victory an especially conspicuous ancillary feature.

The Great Altar is a massive edifice.⁶¹ It dwarfs comparable structures in ancient Pergamon—even the temple of Athena that overlooks the Great Altar and the second-century CE temple dedicated to Trajan. It sits on a rectangular base that is adorned with the Gigantomachy frieze. The frieze's imagery depicts a succession of battles between the gods and giants.⁶² With panels that are 2.3 meters tall, the figures sculpted into the frieze are slightly larger than life-size.⁶³ A staircase stretches 20 meters across the western side of the edifice, leading up to a colonnade that flanks the Altar's steps and surrounds the enclosure beyond the steps. A handful of animal statues likely decorated the roof of the colonnade, and statues of various figures, not all of them identified, probably stood in the gaps between some of the columns.⁶⁴ Inside the colonnade is the structure traditionally identified as the sacrificial table.⁶⁵ Enclosing the area with the central table inside of the colonnade is another frieze that depicts the life of Telephos, Pergamon's mythical founder. Whatever the table or table-like structure may have been, the

⁶¹ The base, nearly square, measures 36.44 across by 34.2 meters in depth. The total height of the structure is about 10 meters. See Max Kunze, *The Pergamon Altar: Its Rediscovery, History, and Reconstruction* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1991), 21.

⁶² For a detailed, image-filled description of the friezes, see Kunze, *Pergamon Altar*, 21–43.

⁶³ The gigantomachy is a succession of relief panels, approximately 2.3 meters tall, that stretch around the entire perimeter of the Great Altar. Comprising panels ranging from 0.7 to 1.05 meters in width, the whole frieze measures 113 meters, all sides combined. On the dimensions of various segments of the Great Altar, see Volker Kästner, "The Architecture of the Great Altar of Pergamon," in *Pergamon: Citadel of the Gods*, ed. Helmut Koester, Harvard Theological Studies 46 (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 148–59.

⁶⁴ Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 158.

⁶⁵ Not enough remains of that structure for to decisive conclusions regarding its function to be drawn. In fact, the structure may have even served multiple purposes. For a discussion of the parts attributed to the sacrificial table, see Stewart, "Pergamo Ara," 46–49. Stewart hypothesizes that it served multiple purposes, including displaying the spoils of war. For a view disputing that "Altar" is technically an appropriate title, given the uncertainties surrounding the table's function, see Guffey, *Revelation and Visual Culture*, 155–60.

feature of the Great Altar most relevant to revealing messages communicated about barbarians is the imagery in the friezes of the Altar's exterior and interior.

The position of the gigantomachy frieze makes it the Altar's most prominent feature. Merely to approach the Altar's stairs necessarily includes a reminder of the stories told in its scenes. Because of the way the Altar is situated in relation to the road, visitors of the Altar approach on the side opposite the staircase. As a result, the eastern frieze on what is essentially the rear of the Altar is what visitors see first. In order to see the front of the Altar or to approach the central business area within the colonnade, one has to walk past the eastern panels of the frieze, then past either the northern or southern panels.⁶⁶ This arrangement produces an implicit progression away from the lower, outer, and "behind" space marked by the war between gods and giants, and in toward the upper and inner space that tells the story of Pergamon's origins once a viewer gets in front of the Altar and ascends its staircase. The movement from the exterior space featuring battles with barbaric giants to the interior space featuring the founding story of Pergamon provides a wide space in which six visual attributes of barbarians—defeat, cosmic significance, spatial distinction, embodied difference, warlike disposition, and opposition to the gods—can appear. Below, I turn to describing how those attributes appear in the large Gaul statues and the Great Altar.

Attributes of Barbarians in Pergamene Artwork

(1) Defeat

Many details of the dying Gaul statues highlight the clarity of defeat. The marks of victimhood on these sculptures' subjects are fairly obvious. The Capitoline Gaul is nearly on the

⁶⁶ Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 86–89; Guffey, *Revelation and Visual Culture*, 150–52.

ground, his face pointing down. A visible wound under his right breast implies that he has been stabbed. And while the male in the Ludovisi statue with the dying couple is not approaching the ground (the woman in his arms is), the sculpted blood on his chest from the mortal suicidal wound make his impending death clear. The dramatic display of defeat in these statues is consonant with the displays of defeat in visible in the small Gauls, some of whom collapse on the ground already dead, while others have holes from stab wounds carved into their bodies. And while statues of the victorious can include the absence of clothing (see the heroic nudity of emperors at Aphrodisias below), there is a difference between “nude” and “naked.”⁶⁷ The Capitoline Gaul clearly resembles the latter. Lying down, having lost even his battle armor, his bodily pose is the opposite of the heroic nudity where subjects stand, sometimes in action poses, and sometimes wearing body armor. The Ludovisi Gaul stands nude, but with his eyes pointing to the victor who would kill him if he does not kill himself, his pose at best blurs the line between heroic nude and naked dejection.⁶⁸

The defining feature of these statues is that they communicate the power of the victor with a detailed depiction of the victim. It is not that nobody ever made representations of victors. Even though the currently-intact Roman copies of these statues do not include depictions of the victors, it is at best dubious that such sculptures were never made.⁶⁹ Andrew Stewart’s detailed examination of the Athenian acropolis leads him to conjecture that the monuments contained both victims and victors. He remains skeptical of the claim that any of these monuments were originally built without victors—an appropriate skepticism to maintain, given the difficulty of

⁶⁷ Kahl, “The Galatian Suicide,” 204–205.

⁶⁸ Stewart, *Art, Desire*, 220.

⁶⁹ Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, 92–95.

proving a negative.⁷⁰ But even if one assumes that these statues of the defeated were paired with depictions of victors, their representation of the defeated remains striking. At the very least, the existence Roman-era copies of victims attests to the value of depicting victims for a Roman viewership. For Roman viewers, copies of these statues could represent, in static form, the violent excitement of theatrical contests in Roman arenas.⁷¹ The reception of these statues implies that victimhood imagery deserved more preservation effort than depictions of the victorious. It is not necessarily likely that ancient viewers of the large Gauls in Pergamon would have seen these statues apart from depictions of the victors. But given the striking detail of the victims and the reception of statues of the defeated, it is probable that the visual representation of defeat would have been a captivating attestation of local pride.

Both the dying Gaul statues and the Great Altar provide viewers with action-oriented snapshots of defeat in progress, but the Great Altar displays many more moments in the heat of the action. On its friezes, numerous mythological figures are locked in a great battle. Since the great frieze comprises over one hundred panels, the sculptors depict numerous juxtapositions of gods and enemies.⁷² The number of panels implies that numerous, strenuous battles are being fought simultaneously. The images of dying Gauls allow viewers to imagine themselves as walking through a battlefield after the war effort is over and the battle has effectively been secured; if the Gauls are not dead, they surely will be soon.⁷³ But the Great Altar provides the viewer with a frozen snapshot of the action. Because so many figures appear entangled with one another in the middle of dynamic action, the battle may appear to be chaotic. And yet it is almost

⁷⁰ Stewart, *Attalos*, 147–50.

⁷¹ Stewart, *Attalos*, 163–66.

⁷² Kuttner, “Do You Look Like You Belong Here,” 163.

⁷³ Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, 92.

always clear who is winning the war and who is not. Due to the sheer quantity of figures, it is notoriously difficult to identify them all.⁷⁴ But it is clear whether a given figure is part of the victorious or the defeated party. Across the Great Altar, the gods stride through the battle scenes, standing firmly in control. Often, the gods are draped in robes, while the giants against whom they fight are nude. The figures who they are defeating are physically lower on the panels, often kneeling. The imagery fits squarely within the realm of Hellenistic baroque, a style of Greek art so called because its heavy emotional expressions resonate with later baroque art. Heavy expressions of emotion on the faces of the defeated cement the “baroque” identification of the frieze, and express that the giants in the panels are indeed suffering.⁷⁵ Because the battle scenes of the Great Altar appear as a series of frozen snapshots, the ferocity of the giants (see “warlike disposition” below) is in a tight tension with the clarity of their defeat. Unlike Revelation, where the beast from the sea reigns without inhibition at first (13:3–10) followed by a clear defeat (19:17–21), the Great Altar places the giants’ aggression and defeat within the same frame. Despite this tension, the gods remain in clear control while the sinking giants are clearly defeated.

(2) Cosmic Significance

The Great Altar, like the Attalid sculptures in Athens that were sponsored by Pergamene artists and money, represents a fight against barbarians in mythological terms. The most pertinent visual antecedent of the Great Altar’s Gigantomachy is the Gigantomachy on the Athenian acropolis.⁷⁶ Around 400 BCE, hybrid creatures begin to appear in Greek vase painting

⁷⁴ Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 157.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 161.

⁷⁶ Kunze, *Pergamon Altar*, 24.

around to represent barbarian enemies. But monumental sculptures using depictions of giants to represent historical enemies is a Pergamene innovation.⁷⁷ The Athenian Gigantomachy is not a relief, but a series of statues portraying giants facing defeat at the hands of the gods. Andrew Stewart shows that the Athenian Gigantomachy, Persianomachy, Amazonomachy, and Galatomachy are arrayed together to associate each of the wars with one another. The implication of interrelating those conflicts is that the more recent battles against Gallic groups is a successor to the tradition of Hellenistic victories represented by the defeats of barbarian Amazons and Persians and, ultimately, the mythological defeat of the giants.⁷⁸

The narrative wellspring of the imagery of the Gigantomachy frieze draws on the primordial, cosmogonic struggle depicted in Hesiod's *Theogony*. The friezes represent, in a single moment of climactic conflict, the battle in which the Olympian gods must fight against the giants.⁷⁹ The conflict begins with Gaia, the earth deity, and Ouranos, the sky deity, producing fantastical or divine creatures as children. When Ouranos mistreats them, Gaia takes her revenge on Ouranos by emasculating him and using his blood to produce the Titans.⁸⁰ Zeus wins in a great war against the Titans that ultimately grants Zeus and the Olympian gods control of the cosmos.⁸¹ The imagery in the Great Altar's Gigantomachy frieze is reminiscent of this cosmos-orienting conflict.⁸² One of the clearest remaining images of the eastern frieze, the portion on the "back" of the altar that viewers see as they approach the altar, is Gaia being shoved down to her

⁷⁷ Stewart, *Attalos*, 201.

⁷⁸ Stewart, *Attalos*. 200–213.

⁷⁹ Kunze, *Pergamon Altar*, 24–25.

⁸⁰ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 126–210.

⁸¹ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 624–721.

⁸² Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 93–95.

earthly domain as Athena and the goddess of victory hang overhead.⁸³ The fight between Olympian gods like Zeus and Athena against Gaia and the giants connects the frieze's imagery to the Greek combat myths that provide the Hellenistic narratives for the world's origins.⁸⁴

The invocation of longstanding Greek mythology continues with the interior space. The spatial movement between the outer and inner friezes coincides with a narrative progression from the wars of the Gigantomachy frieze to the narrative depicted in the Telephos frieze. Telephos, so the mythology goes, is the son of Heracles, a descendant of Zeus. Together, the panels of the frieze inside the Great Altar's colonnade tell the story of how Telephos, against all odds, reunited with his father Heracles to grow up and fulfill prophecies about winning the battles that led to a Greek defeat of Troy and the founding of Pergamon.⁸⁵ Whereas the Gigantomachy frieze on the outside of the Great Altar represents a single moment of conflict, suspended at its most climactic point, the successive panels of the Telephos frieze depict successive episodes in a narrative about Pergamon's mythologized founder. Heracles is the link between the two friezes. In the Gigantomachy, he appears alongside his father Zeus, fighting the giants. In the Telephos frieze, Heracles is the father of Telephos, implying that Pergamene people—who see themselves as descendants of Telephos—are genealogically related to the gods in the Gigantomachy frieze. While the narrative of the Telephos frieze is related to the

⁸³ For a series of descriptions of the panels in each frieze, see Kunze, *Pergamon Altar*, 22–23. While the identities of some of the gods and giants on the Gigantomachy frieze are not entirely clear, some of them are clear. Not only is the iconography of some figures relatively clear, but some remnants of the friezes label their figures (Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, 101–102).

⁸⁴ On the connection between the imagery of the Great Altar and a variety of ancient combat myths, see Yarbro Collins, "Pergamon in Early Christian Literature," 176–83.

⁸⁵ Kunze, *Pergamon Altar*, 45–47. The 74 panels surround and enclose the main area inside the colonnade that contains the central table. The side behind the table is 26 meters long and 16 meters on either side. The panels, usually about 65–68 cm in width, are about a meter and a half tall. Precise dimensions are described in Kästner, "Architecture," 153–56. On the cultural value of the Telephos legend for Pergamon, see Gruen, "Culture as Policy," 22–24.

cosmogonic conflict in the Gigantomachy frieze, it is composed in a different style and tells the hero's story rather than a frozen moment of conflict.⁸⁶

(3) Spatial Positioning

One of the ways that the Great Altar demonstrates that the giants are suffering defeat is that, with few exceptions, the giants are physically below the gods. Gaia, the earth goddess and mother of the Titans, emerges from below. Her appearance on the eastern wall of the great frieze places her torso partially below the frame (see image 3.3.4). The gods stride through battle, standing tall. Most of the giants have either fallen to the ground or are in the process of falling. In some cases, such as the aforementioned image of Gaia, the giants fall below the frame so that their bodies cannot be seen in their entirety. Their downward movement within the great frieze coheres with the spatial logic that associates down, outside, and behind with the space of the “others,” marking the opposite positions—up, inside, and in front—the spaces appropriate for the victorious.

The narrative movement from giant-conflict moment to founder-hero narrative coincides with a spatial movement from outside to inside. The space inside the Great Altar's colonnade, surrounded by the Telephos frieze, is “insider” space in a variety of ways. As Brigitte Kahl points out, the area in which the Great Altar's official business occurs—whether one really wants to call its central table a “sacrificial altar” or not—is “above” and “inside,” starkly contrasting the “down” and “out” positioning of barbarian-related figures in the Gigantomachy frieze. The structure of the Altar itself almost “leads” a viewer from the images of cosmic conflict on the

⁸⁶ Kunze, *Pergamon Altar*, 45; Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 107–109.

eastern frieze behind the sanctuary, toward the staircase that leads up into the colonnaded area.⁸⁷ The area within the colonnade, surrounded by the Telephos frieze, is a space marked with Pergamon's distinctive Hellenism. As Ann Kuttner shows, Telephos may have fought with other Greeks, including Trojans, but the slabs of the Telephos frieze ultimately stress kinship between Telephos, his friend Pergamos, and other Hellenistic groups.⁸⁸ Just as the Attalid artwork distributed from Pergamon to other Hellenistic centers like Athens stresses the neighborly relationship between Pergamon and those other centers, the depiction of Telephos inside the Great Altar emphasizes a kinship between Pergamene Hellenism and other Hellenistic centers.⁸⁹ The "down" and "out" space of the Great Altar portrays "barbarism" as a particularly chaotic force. The "upper" and "inner" space of the Great Altar, by contrast, stresses Pergamon's ties with the rest of the Hellenistic world. Finally, any official events that took place at the altar would have used the inner colonnade as its central location. The official "insiders" of Pergamon would have situated themselves inside the Great Altar's colonnade. The inside-outside distinction places the war with barbarians on the altar's outside. The gigantomachy frieze places the barbarian-representing giants in a consistently spatially lower position. Both distinctions use space to mark out barbarians.

(4) Embodied Difference

Details in the statues of the dying Gauls attest to the "otherness" of their subjects. In the small Gauls originally built for the Athenian acropolis, ethnicity-specific markings are sometimes very clear, with some statues bearing helmets clearly identified as Persian or

⁸⁷ Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 106–15.

⁸⁸ Kuttner, "Do You Look Like You Belong Here," 145–57.

⁸⁹ Gruen, "Culture as Policy," 20–28.

Galatian.⁹⁰ Such clear identifications are not visible in their larger counterparts. But some bodily features of these figures attest to their otherness. The muscle structure of the Capitoline and Ludovisi Gauls departs from ideal masculine forms because they are overdeveloped.⁹¹ And while the visible body hair may invoke the nostalgia of an untamed virility, such “unkempt” features may have drawn the figures away from idealized masculinity and reinforced the stereotypes about Gauls as uncivilized plainsmen.⁹² The highly detailed wounds also reflect the impression that wounds on Gauls were noticeably more visible and unsettling due to the relative paleness of their skin.⁹³ The suffering the figures experience is the primary focus of the sculptures’ message. But their otherness and alterity is an important secondary feature.

The depiction of the giants in the frieze connect Gallic barbarians to this conflict while intensifying the visual markers of alterity that they embody. The style of the giants is reminiscent of Attalid large and small Gauls: possessing the curly hairstyle, overdeveloped musculature, and body hair of the Attalid Gauls, the giants embody the Gallic “barbarian” physiognomy.⁹⁴ But the Great Altar’s Gigantomachy escalates the alterity of the “barbarian” body. Many of the giants in the Gigantomachy frieze are hybridized creatures. Where the bodily imbalances of the Attalid Gauls might imply a departure from a human ideal, the Gigantomachy’s giants are partially non-human. One giant on the southern wall of the frieze has a bull’s neck; another, a lion’s head and serpent legs. There is hybridity among the gods as well; around the northern projecting hall near

⁹⁰ Stewart, *Attalos*, 9.

⁹¹ Stewart, *Art, Desire*, 93–95; 220. Kahl, “The Galatian Suicide,” 208–209.

⁹² On stereotypes of Gauls see Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 411–25. Roman discourse about the male body would suggest a “golden mean,” where too much cosmetic curation implied softness and effeminacy, but total neglect of self-care was not ideal either. See Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 142–43.

⁹³ Stewart, *Art, Desire*, 220.

⁹⁴ Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, 102, Kuttner, “Do You Look Like You Belong Here,” 185.

the stairway depicts Triton, the son of Poseidon, with wings, horse legs, a fish-like rear, and a human head and torso. Hybridity, then, is not necessarily a marker of enmity. But it does imply exoticism and otherness, in the tradition of archaic Greek associations between radical otherness, geographical distance, and physical difference.

As explored in the above discussion of “others” in archaic Greek art, the association between non-Greek people groups and fantastical or semi-human creatures is part of a longstanding Hellenistic tradition. It is one of the distinctly Greek features of the Great Altar.⁹⁵ Nothing like this occurs in the Roman imagery the next chapter covers. Herodotus’ accounts of the edges of the οἰκουμένη (inhabited world) include semi-human or fictionalized characters like Hyperboreans, Cyclopes, Pygmies, and Amazons, inspired by accounts passed down from Homer.⁹⁶ Many of the exotic creatures featured in the *Odyssey* represent Greek impressions of non-Greek societies, or the way of life that Greeks would have considered “primitive.”⁹⁷ The centaureomachy on the southern wall of the Parthenon similarly associates battles against hybrids with the historical battles against Persia. The Gigantomachy frieze, depicting Gallic-looking giants with hybridized bodies, presents barbarians “others” not only as enemies, but as semi-human enemies of cosmological significance.

(5) *Warlike Disposition*

While the dying Gaul statues clearly depict their subjects as defeated, the striking pathos in the imagery implies that defeat is by no means to be equated with mockery, trivialization, or insult. Interpreters of Aeschylus’ *Persae* can be divided between those who take the play as a

⁹⁵ Guffey, *Revelation and Visual Culture*, 161.

⁹⁶ Nippel, “Construction of the Other,” 282–83.

⁹⁷ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 51–53.

jingoistic display of pro-military propaganda and those who suspect that Aeschylus may be asking his audience to empathize with the plight of their onetime opponents.⁹⁸ Similar ambivalence characterizes this imagery. The pained expression on the faces of both statues and the anguished bodily position of the Capitoline Gaul display the emotions of the figures, possibly eliciting empathy from the viewer.⁹⁹ But the impression that these images carry such emotion may be an instance of modern misreading.¹⁰⁰ Even so, the care taken in these images to represent the emotional states of their subjects is not typical among depictions of the defeated. Among representations of Gauls in the Hellenistic world that predate these Attalid representations, the only image carrying such emotion comes from the head of a statue made in Egypt whose pre-Attalid dating is disputed.¹⁰¹ These images, then, do not represent their subjects through a lens of pure abjection. Indeed, one component of their rhetoric is the implication that the people being defeated are nevertheless capable warriors.

Even though Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum* typically criticizes the disorganized tactics of his Gaul opponents, the writing leaves no doubt that Gauls are proficient enough in fighting to be dangerous.¹⁰² Likewise, some details in these Attalid statues of dying Gauls imply that the enemies defeated in these depictions are strong and even admirable. The musculature of the large Gauls, even if it lacks some of the balance that might have been considered "ideal," is certainly considerable. Accentuating the warrior status of the Capitoline Gaul is the collection of war

⁹⁸ Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 10–11, especially nn. 4–5.

⁹⁹ Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, 86; Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 6–8.

¹⁰⁰ Marszal, "Ubiquitous Barbarians," 195.

¹⁰¹ On pre-Pergamene representations of Gauls, see Marszal, "Ubiquitous Barbarians," 197–200. Marszal connects the head to a defeat of Gallic mercenaries in 275 BCE but acknowledges that most scholars set the piece in the later third or in the second century BCE.

¹⁰² Antonova, *Barbarian or Greek*, 66–69.

paraphernalia—a shield, sword, and trumpet—carved into the ground beneath him.¹⁰³ The dominant interpretation of the Ludovisi Gaul's pose is that he commits suicide in order to avoid capture.¹⁰⁴ Such an act could fit the parameters of the noble death tradition that valorized suicide as long as it allowed someone to die on their own terms or for the benefit or honor of their community.¹⁰⁵ Thus, even though these images represent Gallic barbarians as victims and as defeated enemies, these representations include more than mere polemic. Part of communicating the impressiveness of a victory, these statues imply, is demonstrating the strength and battle prowess of the enemy while making it clear that the enemy is thoroughly defeated. And while these statues show that Pergamon's Gallic opponents indeed suffer a clear defeat, they also elicit fascination. Describing rhetorical features of the small barbarians that equally apply to the large ones, Andrew Stewart notes that their un-Greek bodily excesses signal a layer of desire for them: a nostalgia for the primitive wildness and desire for the forbidden violence associated with barbarians, with perhaps a hint of eroticism.¹⁰⁶ These hints of admiration or fascination by no means undo the references to barbarian otherness or defeat in the images. But they show that representing defeated opponents is not incompatible with ascribing positive qualities to them.

A similar attestation of fighting competence appears in the gigantomachy frieze of the Great Altar. Despite the clear depiction of defeat in this imagery, nothing suggests that the battle is won in a single swift movement. Like the defeated large and small Gauls sponsored by the Attalid dynasty, the giants—though being defeated—possess a well-defined musculature. Even if

¹⁰³ Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 101.

¹⁰⁴ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 8.

¹⁰⁵ On noble suicide by Greek philosophers and soldiers, see Jan Willem Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2002), 12–18.

¹⁰⁶ Stewart, *Attalos*, 229–32.

the bodies of the giants are not evenly balanced, and are thus not “ideal,” they do show that the giants are physically powerful, much the same way that marauding Gauls could be threatening despite the level of disorganization in their armies. The southern frieze depicts a bull-necked giant against whom multiple gods struggle significantly. The most significant signal that the giants represent a legitimate threat is the sheer quantity of divine opponents that opposes them. No insignificant threat requires an entire pantheon for backup.

(6) Opposition to the Gods

The Great Altar’s gigantomachy frieze makes it a point to represent conflict with barbarians in theological terms. As discussed above, the gigantomachy frieze surrounding the Great Altar recalls Hesiod’s *Theogony* in its depiction of the gods and the giants. In addition to the cosmogonic connections discussed in the above subsection, the battle between gods and giants comes with theological implications. The imagery suggests that the battles against Galatians commemorated by the Great Altar, in addition to having political and cosmological significance, is an act of divine beneficence in Pergamon’s favor. The many visual marks of the “barbarian” discussed throughout these subsections help to form a self-other relationship for the Pergamene viewer. The gigantomachy frieze suggests that a Pergamene viewer is victorious in contrast to a defeated other, human in contrast to a monstrous and hybrid other, and civilized in contrast to a bellicose other inclined to fight. The involvement of gods in this imagery suggests that the victorious Pergamene is also a divinely-blessed “self” in contrast to an “other” whose defeat is divine blessing.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ On the Great Altar as a display of self-other distinctions, see Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 92–106.

The statues of the dying Gauls are not directly involved in the theological messaging of these Pergamene representations of barbarians. While their small Gaul counterparts are connected to ancient mythological cosmic battles, the large Gauls themselves have no such collection. However, Wolfram Hoepfner has made an intriguing conjecture: the original location of the large Gauls was the sacrificial altar in the center of the Great Altar. The physical evidence for this conjecture is not exactly conclusive. It is based on the observation that the tabletop surface seems to have marks leaving space for objects like statues to be displayed on it. Whether or not that conjecture is correct, Brigitte Kahl contends that the conjecture surfaces something about the altar's logic. Hoepfner's proposal that statues of Galatians fit on the Great Altar's sacrificial table trades on the observation that the Great Altar itself is a response to bloodshed.¹⁰⁸ Even if it did not display the dying Gauls themselves as sacrificial offerings, its very existence is owed to a logic that views their bloodshed as an instance of divine providence.

Conclusion

Whether or not John had any intention to allude to the Great Altar of Pergamon in 2:13, the city of Pergamon, as a vanguard of Hellenistic culture, would have supplied the readers of Revelation with a visual vocabulary of what barbarism must be like. The Great Altar of Pergamon and the dying Gaul statues that originated from Pergamene artisans impute upon barbarians the attributes of defeat, cosmic significance, spatial distinction, embodied difference, a warlike disposition, and opposition to the gods. These attributes were inscribed into artwork created by and for a Hellenistic people. But a first century CE reader would have been inclined to view these pieces of artwork through the lens of the Roman-barbarian distinction that emerged

¹⁰⁸ Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 116–18.

later on. The bequest of Pergamon to Rome, along with the Roman appropriation of Attalid artwork, would have allowed the messaging of the artwork to carry pro-Roman implications for its first century CE viewership. But Pergamene art is hardly alone in representing the “otherness” of barbarians with pro-Roman implications. Plenty of visual depictions of barbarians were produced for a Roman audience. That artwork is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Roman Representations of Barbarians

The representation of barbarians in Attalid artwork left an impression that captivated the Roman imagination. As I show in the previous chapter, the principal works of Attalid representations of barbarians had considerable influence on the Romans, not least because Roman artisans thought it helpful to copy those works to represent the power of Roman might. Greek culture exerted significant influence on Roman culture, a fact that the influence of Greek art forms on Roman works makes clear.¹ Representation of barbarians is hardly an exception, as one would expect given the continuity between the Greek βάρβαρος concept and its Latin *barbarus* cognate. There is therefore a natural continuity between the Pergamene representations of barbarians in the previous chapter and the Roman pieces that I consider here.²

Just as the previous chapter explores the representation of barbarians in Pergamene artwork, this chapter focuses on Roman representation of barbarians. The structure of this chapter, then, is similar to the structure of the previous chapter, having the same three parts. The central part considers two sets of images that would have been visible to Roman-era inhabitants

¹ On Hellenistic influence of Roman art, see Paul Zanker, *Roman Art*, trans. Henry Heitmann-Gordon (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2010), 1–47.

² Several discussions of Roman representations of barbarians in the literature use reference to the Attalid dying Gauls as a starting point. See, e.g., Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 6–13, Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 29–31.

of Asia Minor at the time of Revelation's writing: a selection of reliefs at the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, and a selection of Flavian imperial coins. Before discussing those two primary sets of images, I begin with a sample of variegated Roman representations of barbarians, mostly from the Augustan era. These items show that the images I discuss in the center of the chapter are hardly outliers; rather, they are part of a larger pattern of representing barbarians in Roman imperial art. As in the previous chapter, this chapter's final section shows how six attributes of barbarians occur as they are represented in Roman art: (1) defeat, (2) cosmic significance (3) spatial positioning, (4) embodied difference, (5) warlike disposition, and (6) opposition to the gods.

Image Set 3.1: Barbarians in Roman Visual Art



Image 4.1.1. [The Grand Camée de France](#). Photo: Janmad via Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).



4.1.2A: Head and Torso of Prima Porta statue



4.1.2B: Parthian hands standards to Roman soldier



4.1.2 C: Personification of Gaul on left-hand side

Image 4.1.2. Prima Porta statue. This is a replica of the statue of Augustus at Prima Porta displayed in Michael C. Carlos Hall at Emory University. Photos by author.



Image 4.1.3. [Torso of Cuirassed statue](#). The head resembles Hadrian, but that is likely a result of editing the statue following Domitian's *damnatio memoriae*, which would make the celebration of Domitian's victories the context of the breastplate. Photo credit: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Registration number 1802, 0102.1. Licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).



Image 4.1.4. [Cup 1 from the Boscoreale Treasure](#) in its current condition at the Louvre. Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen via Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.5](#).

The Barbarian Antithesis in Roman Art

Images of barbarians appear on Roman artwork ranging in size from the miniature—such as coins, gems, and cameos—to the magnificent, like altars and temples. Two items exemplify the extremes of size that such art can possess: the small images struck onto coins, and the massive parade of reliefs on the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, a three-story colonnade. Since these items would definitively have been visible to at least some residents of Roman Asia Minor, they will receive a larger treatment toward the end of this chapter. To show that the representations of barbarians in these items are hardly anomalous or unique, I here contextualize them among

known visual representations of barbarians from various places in the Roman world. In their representations of barbarians, these pieces exemplify Paul Zanker's observation that Roman art tends to carry a systematic character.³ For the most part, barbarians are either in a place of defeat and mourning, or in a position of needing help from the benevolence of the emperor. Throughout, the contrast between powerful Romans and disempowered barbarians is consistent and clear.

A useful starting point for considering depictions of barbarians in Roman art is a carving that been part of the Cabinet des Médailles in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris since 1791: the *Grand Camée de France* (Image 4.1.1). It is a cameo, which is a small, sometimes wearable gem carving commissioned to be displayed in the home of a wealthy patron. At 26.5 x 31 centimeters, the *Grand Camée de France* is the largest of its kind, too big to be worn.⁴ This sardonyx cameo was likely a gift to the royal family at the time of its carving. The images covering the five-layer gem include an assortment of twenty-four personages. These people are arranged in three discreet registers or tiers. The center tier depicts members of the Julio-Claudian royal family. Floating on the uppermost register in a manner evocative of Olympus is a deified Augustus surrounded by other deceased members of the royal family.⁵ Though clearly in a distinct register, the division between the upper tier and the royal family in the center tier is considerably more fluid than the barrier between the center tier and the bottom layer. That bottom layer, far more densely packed than the above tiers, contains personages sharply separated from the rest: the

³ Zanker, *Roman Art*, 87.

⁴ Marie-Louise Vollenweider and Mathilde Avisseau-Broustet, *Les portraits romains du Cabinet des médailles, Catalogue raisonné*, vol. 2 of *Camées et Intailles* (Paris: Éditions de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2003), 217.

⁵ Vollenweider and Avisseau-Broustet, *Portraits romains*, 219. For a complete discussion of the figures on the upper two registers of the cameo, see Luca Giuliani and Gerhard Schmidt, *Ein Geschenk für den Kaiser: Das Geheimnis des Grossen Kameo* (München: C. H. Beck, 2010), 11–30.

defeated barbarians. Much like the *Gemma Augustea* (image 1.1), its sharp dividing lines make the division between Roman and barbarian especially stark.

The primary message of the cameo stresses the dynastic continuity between the deified Augustus and the Julio-Claudian royal family that was in power when the cameo was produced. Like the thematically similar *Gemma Augustea* produced around 10 CE, the pose of the figure enthroned in the center of the *Grand Camée* resembles Jupiter, a staff replacing Jupiter's thunderbolt. The resonance with images of Jupiter, somewhat like Hellenistic depictions of rulers in the guise of Zeus, suggests that the living ruler is a living emissary of the gods' rule, implying that the reign of the current ruler is divinely endorsed.⁶ Its theme of dynastic succession is in place to help close a leadership vacuum caused by Augustus's death.⁷ Whether the *Grand Camée* is a 20s or 30s CE gem featuring Tiberius or gem from about 50 CE featuring Claudius is debated.⁸ Regardless of the identity of the figure at the center, there is agreement on the overall message of the cameo's layers is clear: the Julio-Claudian dynasty continues to enjoy divine favor and approval. The placement of the apotheosis of Augustus on top of the image—also holding a staff and posed like Jupiter—suggests that Augustus is present to oversee what happens beneath. As a result, the ongoing reign of a Julio-Claudian emperor can be taken as an extension of the promises and security associated with Augustan rule.⁹

The bottom tier of the cameo suggests that depicting the ongoing success, security, and divine endorsement of dynasty, can and should include a representation of defeated peoples.

⁶ On the *Gemma Augustea* and other coins that represent Augustus (and subsequent living emperors) in the guise of Jupiter, see Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, 230–38.

⁷ Giuliani and Schmidt, *Ein Geschenk*, 30–31.

⁸ Vollenweider and Avisseau-Broustet, *Portraits romains*, 217–20. The consensus may be shifting from the reign of Tiberius to that of Claudius because the female figure in the central register's left side matches Agrippina Minor in her early Claudian portrait type.

⁹ Diana E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 149–51.

Given the wide range of usage that *barbarus* could have, the figures in this lower register are not representative of any and all non-Roman individuals. Rather, they represent the people whose defeat is a component of the divinely-ordained dynastic continuity represented in the upper registers of the cameo. The armaments of the barbarians in the lowermost register next to huddled and dejected families are not present on a battlefield; these groups represent no threat. In addition to being fully pacified, these figures show the greatness of Roman families by way of contrast. While the upper tiers depict the grandeur of a royal family line, the lower tier presents a mourning woman cradling her child.¹⁰ The depiction of barbarians cements the cameo's primary message of peaceful, dynastic succession by displaying the pacification of enemies. At the same time, it conveys the contrasting fortunes of Romans and barbarians—though the child in the lowest register may have a prosperous future if it “ascends” to join the Roman social order depicted in the upper registers.¹¹ Overall, this cameo stands out as a useful initial example of Roman visual depictions of barbarians because its systematic character is especially clear. But even though other pieces of visual art lack its clear spatial divisions, they do not lack a systematic character. In a wide variety of images that celebrate imperial victory, barbarians are quite literally put in their place—as happens on the *Grand Camée*—and that place is a supporting role in larger pictures of military victory granted through divine blessing.

One type of image that often contains depictions of barbarians within a larger message about divinely-granted military victories is the cuirassed imperial portrait. These statues, usually slightly larger than life-size, depict living and bygone emperors, imperial family members, key generals, and sometimes Mars, the god of war. On this statue type, the cuirass (breastplate) is

¹⁰ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome: Barbarians Through Roman Eyes*, 49–50.

¹¹ See the discussion of the Ara Pacis below. The reliefs include foreign children that may anticipate bright futures insofar as they join the thriving Roman social order.

decorated with imagery that says something about the nature of the triumphs associated with the subject of the statue. When the statue depicts an emperor, it is typical for the breastplate to include some symbolic representation of the battles over which that emperor presided.¹²

Hundreds of complete or fragmentary statues of this type have been discovered.¹³ Many imperial cuirassed statues produced in the decades leading up to the writing of Revelation contain visual representations of barbarians.

A critical example of the imperial cuirassed breastplate appears on a statue of Augustus found at Prima Porta whose ornate imagery places the pacification of enemies in a mythological context. It is one of the most widely known because it is among the earliest, best-preserved, and most ornately decorated of its type.¹⁴ The principal scene, sculpted onto the breastplate's abdominal section, is an image of a Parthian figure handing reclaimed battle standards to a figure in Roman armor. Flanking each side of the central image are personifications of bound and captured Gaul and Hispania. These figures refer to Augustus retrieving Roman battle standards from Gaul, Hispania, and Parthia, all rival groups just outside Roman borders.¹⁵ The center image with a Parthian handing over battle standards is surrounded by divinities representing sun, moon, earth and sky, contextualizing the defeat of Gaul and Hispania, and particularly the

¹² For an overview of Augustan and Flavian breastplate statues with depictions of barbarians on them, see Richard A. Gergel, "Costume as Geographic Indicator: Barbarians and Prisoners on Cuirassed Statue Breastplates," in *The World of Roman Costume*, ed. Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante, Wisconsin Studies in Classics (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 191–208.

¹³ A complete catalog of these can be found in Klaus Stemmer, *Untersuchungen Zur Typologie, Chronologie Und Ikonographie Der Panzerstatuen*, Archäologische Forschungen Bd. 4. (Berlin: Mann, 1978) 168–80.

¹⁴ Gergel, "Costume as Geographic Indicator," 194. The statue from Prima Porta gets plenty of attention from New Testament scholars: see Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 38–42; Harry O. Maier, "Barbarians, Scythians and Imperial Iconography in the Epistle to the Colossians," in *Picturing the New Testament: Studies in Ancient Visual Images*, WUNT 2/193 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 400–402.

¹⁵ Gergel, "Costume as Geographic Indicator," 194. On Augustus reclaiming battle standards, see *Res gest. divi Aug.*, 5.29.

retrieval of battle standards from Parthia, as part of a larger picture of cosmic prosperity.¹⁶ In addition to presenting defeat as a matter of mythological significance, the breastplate has other features in common with some of the representations of barbarians discussed in this chapter. Like some of the reliefs from Aphrodisias and the Flavian *Capta* coins (see below), Gaul and Hispania are personified as women in a mourning pose.¹⁷

Perhaps most pertinent for situating Revelation's context are the statues of Flavian emperors that contain similar elements: combinations of pacified enemies with blessings from Roman divinities. One such statue found in Sabratha in Libya presents the Flavian conquest of Judea. Although the head is missing, interpreters of the statue are fairly confident that it represents Titus or Vespasian, as the bound captive near a palm tree typically represents Judea.¹⁸ Domitian is the likely subject of a handful of other recent finds.¹⁹ One well-preserved example shows a bound captive on each side of the breastplate, likely commemorating his 89 CE twin victories against the Dacians and the Marcomanni, a German tribe (image 4.1.3).²⁰ On this breastplate, bound captives flank each side of the winged *Victoria Augusta*, commemorating Domitian's victories against German tribes. The iconographic program of these statues resembles the imagery on Flavian *Capta* coinage, which is further discussed below. The similarity between these statues and Flavian coinage suggests that the coinage, discussed below, is one part of a larger iconographic pattern.

¹⁶ Zanker, *Power of Images*, 189–92.

¹⁷ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 41–42.

¹⁸ Gergel, "Costume as Geographic Indicator," 197–99. On iconographic representations of Flavian campaigns against Judea, see the discussion of *Judea Capta* coins below.

¹⁹ Richard A. Gergel, "An Allegory of Imperial Victory on a Cuirassed Statue of Domitian," *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 45.1 (1986): 2–15; *eadem.*, "A Late Flavian Cuirassed Torso in the J. Paul Getty Museum," *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 16 (1988): 5–24.

²⁰ Gergel, "Allegory," 10.

This larger iconographic pattern—situating depictions of barbarians within broader, mythologically-charged messages about military victory and imperial prosperity granted via divine blessing—is consistent in a variety of monuments as well. A few installations in Rome from the Augustan period, now in a fragmentary state, depict defeated barbarians on imagery primarily devoted to displaying victory. The Temple of Apollo Sosianus in Rome depicts a battle between Roman and Gaulish cavalry in one relief; another depicts a triumphal procession with Gaul captives on a *ferculum*, a parade float.²¹ The Mantova frieze, likely a relief from the Temple of Castor and Pollux in the Augustan forum, depicts a battle between Romans and Gauls in the heat of the action with naked, unkempt Gauls actively dying in a manner that sharply resembles the Attalid depictions in the previous chapter.²² A variety of similar victory monuments were constructed in the provinces.²³ One of these, the triple-bayed Arch of Tiberius at Orange has numerous recesses above each bay packed with reliefs depicting the booty and armaments of the defeated with images of battle, celebrating Tiberius’s campaigns in Gaul, overhead. Such imagery allowed viewers to see both the cost of defying Roman imperial power and the security of protection it offers—particularly when it was in the provinces. And whether the imagery was in a Roman temple or not, images of Roman deities could be found on or near these victory monuments. Divine blessings accorded to military victory: this was most common context for Roman visual depictions of barbarians.

Not all images of barbarians were meant to celebrate battlefield victories; some imagery, such as the scenes on cup 1 of the Boscoreale treasure, depict what happens after Roman

²¹ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 34–35.

²² Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 32–34.

²³ Julio-Claudian-era arches and reliefs depicting Roman victories over barbarians, preserved with varying degrees of completeness, have been found throughout Roman-occupied territories, ranging from Spain to France to northern Africa. For a survey of these pieces, see Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 39–48, 53–60.

conquest. Cup 1 and cup 2 of the Boscoreale treasure, often called simply “The Boscoreale Cups,” a pair of wine vessels with depictions of Augustus and Tiberius respectively, are examples of emperors’ presence on household objects. Preserved in a wine cellar during and after the 79 CE eruption of Vesuvius, the Boscoreale Cups are so named because they were discovered as part of a treasure horde of gold and silver pieces near the modern village of Boscoreale.²⁴ A depiction of barbarians is central to both scenes on cup 1.²⁵ One side shows Mars leading a procession of women who personify nations—Africa, Asia, Gaul, and Spain—toward Augustus to receive a blessing.²⁶ Next to Augustus’s right hand stands an entourage of divinities: Roma, the Genius of the Roman People, Amor, and Venus carrying a small statue of Victory.²⁷ The other side of the cup features a seated Augustus before a group of barbarian families huddled directly before him. An intriguing feature of these figures is that they present their children to the emperor; whether the families are giving their children to Augustus in the interest of their children’s prosperity or out of submissive deference, Augustus assumes a paternal role with respect to these young barbarians.²⁸

These cups reflect two relevant realities about Roman depictions of barbarians. One is that they show how depictions of barbarians could be a part of everyday domestic art. Paul

²⁴ The Boscoreale treasure is a horde of 109 gold and silver items from the cache that belonged to a group of wine-makers. Although cups 1 and 2 are not the only implements for drinking wine that were discovered in the horde, they are what most people refer to with the title “The Boscoreale Cups,” with “Cup” capitalized. On the history of the horde, see Ann L. Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire in the Age of Augustus: The Case of the Boscoreale Cups* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 6–9.

²⁵ Cup 2, which depicts Tiberius sacrificing a steer in front of the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline, does not have barbarians on it, so it is not as relevant to this chapter.

²⁶ Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 16–17. On the identification of the personification of nations, see Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 70–73. The identification of Asia is disputed, but the point remains that ethnic identifications are visible on the characters in the procession.

²⁷ Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 14–15.

²⁸ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 49.

Zanker's analysis of imagery pointing to imperial mythology in the wake of the Augustan cultural revolution includes numerous objects owned by private citizens; their variety ranges from lamps to table supports to funerary altars.²⁹ As the Boscoreale Cups show, representations of barbarians could be included in that imagery. The presence of such imagery on household objects suggests that this imagery could have been present on smaller objects that enjoy the portability and reproducibility missing from emblems like cuirass statues, signaling that visual representations of barbarians were not limited to central civic locations. The other interesting feature of these cups is their ideological function. Unlike the Arch at Orange or the Prima Porta statue, this depiction of barbarians was not part of a victory monument presenting the emperor as a conqueror. Instead, they stress the emperor's benevolence.

Cup 1 of the Boscoreale treasure emphasizes the virtue of clemency, which is the practice of showing humane leniency toward conquered people, particularly when they were submissive to the *pax Romana*.³⁰ Like the Roman imagery representing barbarians throughout the chapters, its primary messaging is about the emperor rather than barbarians themselves. While clemency was most strongly tied to Julius Caesar, it was an important part of the rhetorical program of Augustus and Nero.³¹ For instance, the *Res Gestae* says that that when Augustus undertook wars, he did his best to spare lives if he could avoid ending them.³² Clemency was also on the list of virtues on the *clypeus virtutis*, an honorific bronze shield replicated throughout the empire that

²⁹ Zanker, *Power of Images*, 265–95.

³⁰ Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 85–86.

³¹ Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire*, Paul in Critical Contexts (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 87–100.

³² *Res gest. Divi Aug.*, 1.3.

listed virtues of Augustus conferred upon him by senate vote in 27 BCE.³³ As much as clemency would have been a virtue that a conqueror could claim, the act of conquest that places a military leader in the position to grant clemency is absent from cup 1. As Ann Kuttner observes, Persia/Parthia—a critical victory for Augustus—is conspicuously absent from the cup. Rather, the imagery depicts blessings for nations who are already being incorporated into the empire.³⁴ Both of the scenes on cup 1 show an Augustus who is about to grant blessings to the nations personified in the imagery. The side with barbarian families huddled before Augustus seems almost to imply that Augustus will be a benevolent father to the women and children who come toward him.³⁵ And while the imagery is not as focused on conquest itself, the entourage of divinities around Augustus shows that divine blessings and Augustan blessings go together, making benevolence toward the nations a matter of divine providence.

The Boscoreale Cups are not alone in depicting Augustan clemency. Ann Kuttner hypothesizes that the cups, much like many Roman imperial coins, is a miniaturized representation of a larger monument now lost.³⁶ Whether or not this is the case, their message of clemency coheres with the upshot of a monument that Diane Kleiner identifies “unquestionably” as “the greatest monument of Augustan state art:” the Ara Pacis Augustae, or Altar of Augustan peace.³⁷ It is an altar surrounded by a rectangular marble enclosure decorated with reliefs

³³ Zanker, *Power of Images*, 95–97.

³⁴ Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 86–87.

³⁵ Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 99–100; Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 48–49. Taking a gender-critical look at these representations of barbarians, Lopez suggests that the presentation of Augustus as a benevolent father is an implicit critique of the masculinity, or lack thereof, of barbarian husbands and fathers. It should be noted, however, that the primary message here is one of Augustan benevolence, so critique of barbarians is likely a subordinate feature of the imagery.

³⁶ Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 195–98.

³⁷ Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 90. On similarities in message between the cups and the *Ara Pacis*, see Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 100–107.

throughout its walls. Images of plants bearing fruit from all seasons of the year, and processions of numerous people—the royal family, lictors and senators, and priests, probably about to make sacrifices—adorn the longer walls, while the shorter walls present scenes from Rome’s mythological founding. Dedicated to *Pax*, the goddess of peace, the altar’s central message celebrates the wealth of prosperity that results from Augustus’s pacification of the nations.³⁸ And like cup 1 of the Boscoreale treasure, the *Ara Pacis* features children. Though the identification has been debated, many interpreters of the image have identified two barbarian children on the procession friezes.³⁹ Ann Kuttner suggests that the younger of these children, a toddler on the north frieze, is one of the babies from the family scene on Boscoreale Cup 1. The presence of these children on the *Ara Pacis* suggests that the prosperity ushered in by Augustan peace benefits barbarian children—insofar as they are also separated from their homelands and families of origin.⁴⁰

While these displays of clemency depart from the typical depictions of barbarian defeat, their overall message is consistent with the displays of defeated people that frequently appear in Augustan and Flavian iconographic programs. With few exceptions, the imagery does not depict battles themselves. The bound captive—present on the *Gemma Augustea*, numerous friezes, cuirassed statues (such as image 4.1.3), and some of the coins that will be discussed below—is not a representation of battle itself. Rather, it presents the pacification of enemies following battle. While the concept of the bound barbarian presupposes a thoroughgoing military victory,

³⁸ For an overview of the imagery on the *Ara Pacis* and its function, see Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 90–99.

³⁹ The south wall’s frieze includes a child who wears a Phrygian cap; the north frieze has a very small child wearing a torque, which may identify it as a Celt or a Gaul. Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 100–101. Kleiner (*Roman Sculpture*, 93) favors the alternative view in which the children are identified as Gaius and Lucius, having been participants in the equestrian games.

⁴⁰ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 27–30.

the imagery focuses on the battle's aftermath. Depictions of imperial clemency do the same. What the military victories bring about is pacification; the threat of wild enemies is held back, and divinely-supported peace and prosperity continues.

The messages of these images are largely coherent and consistent with each other. But would they have been consistent with what Revelation's earliest readers would have known? It is not impossible for Revelation's readers to have been familiar with the themes and messaging of the pieces above. One reason is that the smaller items like the Boscoreale Cups and the imperial cuirassed statues do not have the same geographic limitations as an installation like the Pergamene Altar. Such items, after all, could move from one location to another. But a better testament to their relative lack of geographic limitation is that smaller items could be reproduced and displayed in a variety of places. Images not unlike the Boscoreale Cups that honor Julio-Claudian emperors have been found on drinking vessels in Sudan and western Asia Minor.⁴¹ And many imperial cuirassed statues were discovered in Roman-occupied locations far from Rome.⁴²

More pertinent, however, is the iconographic continuity between items like those above, which were most common in and around Rome, and items that were discovered in the provinces. Whether or not one of Revelation's earliest readers would have seen any of the specific pieces discussed above, the broad characterizations of barbarians present in them could influence artwork throughout Roman-occupied areas, including what was in the spaces known to Revelation's earliest readers. Some imagers would be placed in Roman-occupied territories by imperial fiat, serving as reminders that Roman imperial rule is present, even far from Rome.⁴³ Because of their wide geographic distribution, the Flavian coins discussed below fit in that

⁴¹ Vermule, *Roman Imperial Art*, 125–34.

⁴² See the examples in Gergel, "Costume as Geographic Indicator," 197–206.

⁴³ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 53–54.

category. Some images could be “creoles,” influenced by Roman presence while maintaining strong local affinities.⁴⁴ Still others represent a negotiation between local and imperial power, using local initiative and concepts to represent the favorability of Roman rule—a strategy taken in the next set of images this chapter discusses: the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias.

Roman Visual Representations of Barbarians in Asia Minor

Image 4.2.1 (The remnants of the Sebasteion in modern-day Turkey) can be found [here](#).

Image 4.2.2 (Claudius with Land and Sea); image 4.2.3 (Claudius conquering Britannia); and image 4.2.4 (Personification of the Piroustae) can be found [here](#).

This set of images comes from a location that, for good reason, has already been studied in scholarship on Revelation: the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. It has not received as much attention as the Great Altar of Pergamon because it is not in one of the seven cities to which Revelation was addressed, and because the major archaeological finds pertaining to this site were published in the 1980s. But interpreters of Revelation have engaged it. Steven Friesen’s work relating Revelation to the imperial cult has relied on this site because it is among the best-preserved imperial cult sites.⁴⁵ Indeed, extensive archaeological work has uncovered a wealth of statues and reliefs. Its overall structure remains intact enough for archaeologists to make reasonably confident reconstructions of its layout.⁴⁶ Other interpreters have discussed the Sebasteion

⁴⁴ Jane Webster, “Art as Resistance and Negotiation,” in *Roman Imperialism and Provincial Art*, ed. Sarah Scott and Jane Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 46–51.

⁴⁵ Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 77–95; R. R. R. Smith, “The Imperial Reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987): 137–38.

⁴⁶ Key publications of its contents include Kenan T. Erim, *Aphrodisias: City of Venus Aphrodite* (New York: Facts on File, 1986); Smith, “Imperial Reliefs;” *eadem.*, “Simulacra Gentium: The Ethne from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 78 (1988): 50–77.

because it is a compelling example of the visual and material culture against which Revelation's ekphrastic visuals can be compared.⁴⁷ As a bastion of images that represent Roman rule in mythic terms, it has helped contextualize Revelation's mythically charged representations of the rule of Jesus and anti-Roman polemics.⁴⁸

This site is relevant to my project for two key reasons. The most obvious reason to consider the Sebasteion is that it is replete with visual representations of annexed and defeated people groups. As such, it has frequently featured in studies that foreground representations of Rome's defeated "others."⁴⁹ Numerous reliefs at this location can be relevant for any consideration of the representation of barbarians in Roman visual culture. The second is that it is an imperial cult site. Exegetes of Revelation have traditionally engaged with the Sebasteion because Revelation is a religious (and thereby political) rival to the imperial cult, a factor that is relevant to this project. But what makes the Sebasteion's status as an imperial cult site relevant to this project is not only the relationship between Revelation and the imperial cult, but the power dynamics that the imperial cult reflects. As an imperial cult installation, the Sebasteion is a product of local initiative and local funding even though the imagery was constructed for Roman imperial approval. That the producers and typical viewers of this complex were not Roman raises important questions about the depictions of non-Roman people groups at the complex.

The Sebasteion is a large installation with multiple edifices. The complex runs from east to west, perpendicular to the main street that runs from the temple of Aphrodite to the theater. It

⁴⁷ E.g., Christopher Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation*, *Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 25–27; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 693–95.

⁴⁸ Steven J. Friesen, "Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13," *JBL* 123.2 (2004): 291–303.

⁴⁹ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 42–48; Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 55–60.

comprises four buildings. On the western side of the complex, greeting those who approach from the street, is a two-storey propylon about 12 meters tall, likely adorned with several columns on each level. Past the propylon is a long, paved passageway, about 14 meters wide and 90 meters in length, flanked on each side by three-storey porticoes. At the end of the passageway is a series of steps leading upward toward a temple or shrine. The porticoes are studded with columns every couple of meters, with the North Propylon having 50 intercolumnations total, and the south possessing 45. Because of reliefs positioned behind and between each pair of columns on the second and third storeys, the porticoes comprise a series of “rooms” that make a large statement through the compilation of many individual images.⁵⁰

Its style mixes Hellenistic and Roman elements. Some features of the complex are typically Hellenistic: the columns are Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian on the first, second, and third floors respectively, as is the placing of a colonnaded court near a temple. But the overall structure, not least because of its imposing height, would have been very unusual in the Hellenistic East. Many other features are Roman-inspired, most notably the concept of an enclosed space that “leads” its viewer from one end toward a temple.⁵¹ The most distinctively Roman component of the structure is the upshot of its message: a series of tributes to Augustus and his dynasty.

Only a small minority of the reliefs that would have filled the intercolumnations on the upper storeys of the porticoes have been recovered; nonetheless, their main objective is clear: to honor the reign and accomplishments of Augustus and the Julio-Claudian emperors. The propylon has been largely lost, but inscriptions and fragmentary sculptures reveal that there

⁵⁰ On the overall structure of the complex, see Erim, *Aphrodisias*, Smith “Imperial Reliefs,” 88–95, *eadem.*, “*Simulacra Gentium*” 50–53; Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 77–85.

⁵¹ Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 93–94.

would have been statues of Augustus' and Tiberius' descendants, and Aphrodite, described as the ancestral mother of Augustus.⁵² About eleven reliefs that depict various emperors and family members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty have been discovered. One largely complete relief depicts a heroically nude Claudius standing next to personifications of land and sea (image 4.2.2). Positioning the emperor with a rudder and a cornucopia, the relief implies that his actions bring navigability to the sea and fertility to the land.⁵³ The scene is a general statement of prosperity for the sea and land; it does not represent any specific event, but makes a statement associating the emperor with prosperity.⁵⁴ Another panel that depicts Claudius with his wife Agrippina, next to a third figure likely to have represented the collective Roman Senate and people, represents concord within the imperial family and between the people and the emperor. While the third figure is partially lost, it appears to be crowning Claudius, representing that he rules with the consent of Rome's Senate and people.⁵⁵ Another coronation piece depicts Agrippina the Younger crowning her son Nero, symbolizing his transfer from heir to emperor. Clad in a breastplate with his hands positioned to hold a spear and a helmet at his side, Nero is portrayed as a military leader.⁵⁶ Many of the imperial reliefs that have been reconstructed depict an emperor's military prowess in a different way: they depict the barbarians against whom the emperors fight.

Most of the reliefs that have been uncovered and reconstructed contain some representation of conquered peoples. Typically, the barbarian is a diminutive figure, its small

⁵² Erim, *Aphrodisias*, 111; Smith "Imperial Reliefs," 95.

⁵³ Smith, "Imperial Reliefs," 104–106.

⁵⁴ Friesen, "Myth and Symbolic Resistance," 296.

⁵⁵ Smith, "Imperial Reliefs," 106–110.

⁵⁶ Smith, "Imperial Reliefs," 127–30.

size emphasizing subservience.⁵⁷ These small representations of barbarians augment the primary messages of the reliefs on which they are situated. A relief that features Augustus and Nike holding a trophy includes a stripped barbarian with his back facing the viewer and his hands tied behind him. Even though the sculptor made the unusual decision to depict Augustus heroically nude rather than in battle armor, the remnants of a spear in his hand, combined with the flaunting of enemy armor and the personification of the victory goddess, makes the message of military conquest clear. The barbarian, deposed in a manner reminiscent of the statues of dying Gauls, augments the tribute to military success.⁵⁸ A similar design, though without Nike, shows the Julio-Claudian prince Germanicus holding a trophy next to a German captive.⁵⁹ Yet another relief shows an emperor, probably Tiberius, holding a spear with a small captive next to him.⁶⁰ Like the image of Augustus with a trophy, the presence of captives on these reliefs highlight the military prowess of the main figure honored in the relief. One other image resembles both the coronation images and the trophy displays. An emperor, his identity lost because the epigraphy cannot be recovered, holds a trophy. Standing next to him is a toga-wrapped figure, possibly representing the Senate crowning him. Beneath the trophy lies a female captive. Again, the captive takes a diminutive shape relative to the other figures. Her body appears to have been sculpted quickly, but more effort went into her face, the expression apparently conveying pain.⁶¹ As is the case with the other images, the presence of the captive buttresses the display of military

⁵⁷ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 58–59.

⁵⁸ Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 101–104.

⁵⁹ Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 110–12.

⁶⁰ Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 120–23. As with the image of Germanicus, the captive in this relief is probably also a German, though the ethnic identification is less clear because the main figure’s identity is less clear.

⁶¹ Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 112–15.

power. That she is a female with bared breast makes her similar to two other important reliefs that display Claudius and Nero with deposed women.

Two reliefs appear to show the process of conquest, presenting the conquered person at the center of the relief's message, rather than as a supporting decoration to the side. One shows Claudius over a personification of Britannia. Positioned in front of and over the female figure labeled *BRETANNIA* in the base inscription, the image of Claudius is in an action pose, apparently ready to deal a death blow with a spear. He is heroically nude except for a helmet, cloak, and armament, while Britannia has disheveled, "barbarian" hair and struggles to keep her dress in place as her breast is already exposed (Image 3.4.5).⁶² A similar image depicts Nero and Armenia. In this relief, Armenia wears a Phrygian cap to connote her "eastern" provenance and slumps down, with Nero's hand pulling on her arm. A quiver and bow slipping out of her right hand suggest that she has just lost a battle after some gallant fighting. Unlike the image of Claudius and Britannia, Nero is not about to deliver a "death blow" in this case. Rather his posture may be taken as one of support. The pose with which Nero grips Armenia resembles another sculpture found in fragmentary form at Aphrodisias' Portico of Tiberius in which Achilles holds a fallen Penthesilea by the arm.⁶³ Aiding the weight of her torso with his legs, Nero seems to be nearly ready to raise her up, even if he has also recently conquered her.⁶⁴ Both

⁶² Smith, "Imperial Reliefs," 115–17.

⁶³ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 58; Erim, *Aphrodisias*, 97. In the mythological episode involving Achilles and Penthesilea, Achilles kills Penthesilea, but then falls in love with her (Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthomerica*, 1.548–674). It is not certain that viewers would have linked Armenia to Penthesilea and also linked Penthesilea to Achilles' affection for her. Nonetheless, Nero grabbing Armenia by the arm is not necessarily an image exclusively about military conquest, her fallen bow and quiver notwithstanding. As Roland Smith notes ("Imperial Reliefs," 118–19), Armenia eventually joins the ranks of the Roman empire. Thus, one can also read the pose as his lifting her back up.

⁶⁴ Smith, "Imperial Reliefs," 117–20; Erim, *Aphrodisias*, 116.

Nero and Claudius soon earned unsavory reputations as rulers.⁶⁵ But as far as these reliefs are concerned, both emperors are capable conquerors.⁶⁶ The representation of the emperors presents them as metonymies of Roman imperial might. While these reliefs highlight military conquest like other depictions of barbarians at the Sebasteion, their vivid depiction of the emperor in action represents an escalation. The image of Claudius dealing a death blow to Britannia makes the act of conquering itself part of the message in a way that does not occur in the reliefs that depict small barbarians that decorate a separate scene.

While the images of Claudius with Britannia and Nero with Armenia have been noted as unusually graphic examples of sexualized violence, those portrayals are not the only female-coded representations of nations at the complex. Sixteen *ethnos* bases have been recovered throughout the complex. Each base has an upper part inscribed with the word ΕΘΝΟΣ followed by the name of a Roman province or Greek island; a bearded mask adorned with garland covers the area below.⁶⁷ These bases were apparently also supports for reliefs depicting statues of women dressed in clothing representative of the people group identified on the label.⁶⁸ One relief, the *Ethnos* of the Piroustae, holds a shield (image 4.2.4).⁶⁹ While armament is missing from other statues, the positions of their arms suggest that weapons like spears and swords may have been in their hands.⁷⁰ Like the reliefs depicting Claudius with Britannia and Nero with

⁶⁵ Suetonius, *Claud.*, 17–20, 30–40. Virtually the entire portrait of Nero from Suetonius’ account is acutely negative.

⁶⁶ Probably due to Nero’s *damnatio memoriae*, the name *NERONI* has been removed from the inscription, leaving behind his other dynastic names (Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 119–20). After the removal of Nero’s head, the relief would not have stood for Nero specifically, but the imperial conquering power of any emperor generally.

⁶⁷ Smith, “*Simulacra Gentium*,” 53–57.

⁶⁸ As Friesen notes (*Imperial Cults*, 86–89), subtle features like the details in the garments or hairstyle reflect differing levels of Hellenization, with some statues appearing less “barbarian” than others.

⁶⁹ Smith, “*Simulacra Gentium*,” 60–62.

⁷⁰ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 88.

Armenia, these reliefs use female personifications of territories that have been conquered and incorporated into the Roman empire. Unlike the action scenes with Nero or Claudius, however, the women on the *Ethnos* reliefs stand dignified and armed in their local dress, a far cry from the poses that commemorate the moment of defeat. Together, their display represents Augustus' prowess as an empire-builder, constituting a geography of conquest. Situated near statues of "Day" and "Ocean," they imply that the imperial rule over which the Augustan dynasty reigns is universal.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the statues stand tall atop the bases. They are not shrunken or in any of the binding or subjugation poses that characterize the barbarians in other images at the Sebasteion. The display of conquered people in dignified poses reflects the twin realities of defeating a people group on the one hand, while also, on the other hand, trying to incorporate them into one's own society.

This tension—between constituting a part of the empire and being at receiving end of its power on the other—is not just a feature of the *ethnos* reliefs; it is a reality that underpins the construction of the Sebasteion itself as an imperial cult site. Aphrodisias has a long tradition of showing gratitude to and allyship with Rome, possibly as far back as the second century BCE.⁷² The Sebasteion is a development of an existing pattern of fealty to Rome. But it is a development that the sponsors and artists of the site undertake on their own terms. Indeed, plenty of inscriptions have been discovered naming Tiberius Claudius Diogenes and his family as the

⁷¹ Near some of the basins are reliefs, in a similar configuration, that represent *Hemera* (day) and *Okeanos* (Ocean), which may have been part of a series that included depictions of Night and Earth as well. Alongside the fleet of depictions of nations, these statues would have contributed to a universalizing and totalizing picture of imperial rule. See Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 85–86; Smith, "Simulacra Gentium," 53.

⁷² Joyce M. Reynolds, "The Origins and Beginning of Imperial Cult at Aphrodisias," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 206 (1980): 70–71; *eadem.*, "Ruler-Cult at Aphrodisias in the Late Republic and Under the Julio-Claudian Emperors," in *Subject and Ruler: The Cult of Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Alastair Small, *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement* 17 (Ann Arbor: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1996), 41–43. Fealty to Θεῶν Πόμνη appears in a treaty with the cities of Cibyra and Tabae that are likely to originate with the last quarter of the second century BCE.

complex's sponsors.⁷³ The Sebasteion portrays Aphrodite, Aphrodisias' eponymous patron deity, as an ancestor of the Julio-Claudian family.⁷⁴ As Friesen observes, the Sebasteion represents a local retelling of stories about the current imperial dynasty's claim of power. It integrates the Julio-Claudian family's rule and conquests within the Hellenistic traditions already present at Aphrodisias.⁷⁵ Outside inspection and evaluation maintained some conformity to Roman standards. But as Smith points out throughout his descriptions of the reliefs, the innovative mixture of fidelity to Roman imagery and Hellenistic precedent makes the artwork at the Sebasteion stand out.⁷⁶ The details of the sculpture, along with the integration of Roman imperial rulers with local mythology, falls into the pattern of accommodating external authority within local tradition that S. R. F. Price finds throughout the religious forms of the imperial cult in Asia Minor.⁷⁷

That the Sebasteion is a product of local initiative raises an interesting question with reference to the installation's representations of conquered people. As Price notes, the imperial cult system is remarkable because it was "created and organized by the subjects of a great empire in order to represent to themselves the ruling power."⁷⁸ In representing ruling power to themselves, do the sponsors of the imperial cult also represent themselves? Asia Minor was, after all, a conquered and annexed province.⁷⁹ And as Asia was incorporated into the Roman empire,

⁷³ Joyce M. Reynolds, "New Evidence for the Imperial Cult in Julio-Claudian Aphrodisias," *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie* 43 (1981): 318–20.

⁷⁴ Reynolds, "Ruler-Cult," 44–47; Smith, "Imperial Reliefs," 94.

⁷⁵ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 93–95.

⁷⁶ Smith, "Imperial Reliefs," 133–37.

⁷⁷ S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 235–39.

⁷⁸ Price, *Rituals and Power*, 1.

⁷⁹ On the history of the revolt that led to Asia's conquest and annexation, see David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the Third Century After Christ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 147–58.

some writers were concerned that un-Roman softness and love of luxury would creep into the empire and corrupt it; “barbarian” stereotypes about the province are attested.⁸⁰ Asia is simultaneously a subject of and contributor to the empire. That raises a question of whether Asia would count among the barbarians depicted at the complex.

Despite the “barbarian” status sometimes associated with Asia, however, the upshot of the Sebasteion’s message would suggest that the Aphrodisian viewers of the complex would see themselves not in the conquered Britannia or Armenia, but in the conquering Claudius and Nero.⁸¹ Among the *ethnos* bases is no ΕΘΝΟΣ ΑΣΙΩΝ.⁸² The lack of such a base does not in itself imply that Aphrodisian or Asian viewers would not have seen themselves among the *ethne*. But the incorporation of Julio-Claudian rulers into local Hellenistic mythology suggests an alignment between the local and the imperial that places Aphrodisias on the side of the emperors. Asia’s first provincial cult at Pergamon started in order to align Asia with Augustus so that Asia could be among those who back the winning side in political shifts caused by recent military movements.⁸³ The images of Julio-Claudian military might and success exist to make their victories Aphrodisian victories as well. Because the depiction of barbarians exists to uphold the messages proclaiming the Augustan dynasty’s military strength, the purpose of barbarian imagery throughout the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias is to suggest that, through Roman conquest, Aphrodisias is also victorious. The Great Altar of Pergamon would likely have been received by

⁸⁰ Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 304–311.

⁸¹ Contra Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 25–27. While Frilingos reads the Sebasteion as reminding Aphrodisian viewers of their place as a conquered people, his observation that the complex represents an attempt for the colonized to relate themselves to the colonizers on colonizer’s terms is useful.

⁸² It is not impossible for such a base to have existed and been lost, of course. The sporadic findspots of the *ethnos* bases makes it difficult to precisely identify the literal or symbolic geography that they represented (Smith “*Simulacra Gentium*,” 57–59).

⁸³ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 25–32.

a Roman-era viewership as a representation of the benefits attached to Roman victories. In the same vein, an Asian viewership of the Sebasteion would have claimed the victories depicted at this monument for themselves.

Image Set 4.3: Capta and Related Coinage in the Flavian Era



Image 4.3.1. [Fides exercitum coin](#). Sestertius, 71 CE; Vespasian on obverse, clasped hands with *fides exercitum* legend on reverse. *RIC* 2.1 156, 71. Photo credit: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Registration number 1872, 0709.467. Licensed Under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).



Image 4.3.2. [Judea Capta coin](#). Sestertius, 72 CE. Vespasian on obverse; on reverse, captive personification of Judea beside a palm tree guarded by a Roman soldier holding a *parazonium*. *RIC* 2.1 1181, 144. Photo credit: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Registration number 1913, 0614.5. Licensed Under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).



Image 4.3.3. [Coin with defeated Judea and trophy](#). Aureus, 69 or 70 CE. *RIC* 2.1 1, 58. Vespasian on obverse with bound personification of Judea on reverse next to trophy. Photo credit: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Registration number 1864, 1128.38. Licensed Under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).



Image 4.3.4. [Germania Capta coin](#). Sestertius, 86 CE. *RIC* 2.1 525, 301. Domitian on obverse. Reverse has GERMANIA CAPTA and a trophy in the center surrounded by a seated female German captive and a standing male captive. Photo credit: © The Trustees of the

British Museum. Registration number 1867, 0101.2034. Licensed Under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).



Image 4.3.5. [Defeated Germany seated over armaments](#). Aureus, 86 CE. *RIC* 2.1 no. 432 p. 294. Domitian on obverse; feminine personification of Germany poses on a shield on reverse. Photo credit: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Registration number R.10762. Licensed Under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).



Image 4.3.6. [Armenia Capta coin](#). Denarius from 19 or 18 BCE. Obverse features Augustus; reverse shows an Armenian in a traditional cap and robe. The legend behind the figure reads CAESAR DIV F ARMEN CAPTA IMP VIII. *RIC* 1 no. 520 p. 83. Photo credit: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Registration number 1867,0101.1276. Licensed Under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).



Image 4.3.7. [Roma hands globe to Vespasian](#). Sestertius, 80–81 CE. *RIC* 2.1 no. 167, p. 209. Photo credit: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Registration number R.11198. Licensed Under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

One last set of images would have been familiar to residents of Roman Asia Minor: coinage. While classicists and biblical scholars try to avoid reconstructing historical events

through coins alone, numismatics as a discipline has been profitable for illustrating history.⁸⁴ Such illustration includes the depiction of otherwise-lost statues and sculptures; historical events and people; and, most relevant for my purposes here, official state propaganda. In this section of this chapter, I will consider Flavian coins that depict the conquest and Romanization of non-Roman peoples. One particular type of coin in this category, the *Judea Capta* coin, is likely to be familiar to scholars of the New Testament because it represents, in stark terms, a facet of the relationship between Palestine and the Roman empire following the Jewish revolt of 66–70 CE.⁸⁵ The *Judea Capta* coins of Vespasian and Titus often depict a bound personification of Judea standing next to an armed and armored Roman soldier to represent the triumph of Rome against a Jewish revolt (image 3.3.2). This coin is itself evidence that depictions of non-Roman “others” as captive and defeated barbarians is present in Roman imperial coinage in the decades before the writing of the book of Revelation. However, it is far from the only coin that depicts conquered people in this way. Under all three Flavian emperors—Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian, who reigned between 69 and 96 CE—coinage was struck that represents the conquest and annexation of territories with personifications of non-Roman peoples either captive and defeated or seeking Roman clemency.⁸⁶

Most of the coins I discuss in this section, even though they were not minted in Asia Minor, are likely to have been among the coins that Revelation’s earliest readers would have

⁸⁴ Richard Oster, “Numismatic Windows into the Social World of Early Christianity: A Methodological Inquiry,” *JBL* 101.2 (1982): 195–223.; Casey, *Understanding Ancient Coins*, 36–50.

⁸⁵ See, e.g., H. St. J. Hart, “Judea and Rome: The Official Commentary,” *JTS* 3.2 (1952): 172–204. Larry J. Kreitzer, *Striking New Images: Roman Imperial Coinage and the New Testament*, JSNTSup 134 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 136–44; Davina C. Lopez, “Before Your Very Eyes: Roman Imperial Ideology, Gender Constructs, and Paul’s Inter-Nationalism,” in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, Biblical Interpretation 84 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 119–23.

⁸⁶ For an overview of the many types of coins in these categories, see Jane M. Cody, “Conquerors and Conquered on Flavian Coins,” in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text*, ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 103–24.

seen. Given the presence of major mints in Ephesus and Pergamon, it might make intuitive sense to consider only the coins that come from them, as numismatists have viewed the iconography of coins as a reflection of a city's local identity and its negotiations with empire.⁸⁷ However, the productivity of the mints in Ephesus and Pergamon declined drastically after Augustus.⁸⁸ Early in the Flavian period, Rome became the dominant producer of imperial coinage for the entire empire.⁸⁹ Rome was nearly the exclusive producer of gold coins throughout the Flavian period. Most of the empire's silver coins also came from Rome, though the production of silver coinage in the provinces increased intermittently. Eastern mints were primarily responsible for producing bronze coins. Even so, not all bronze coins in a given area were necessarily local productions.⁹⁰ Coins travel, unlike statues, temples, or cameos.⁹¹ That Rome was responsible for issuing so many larger denomination coins throughout the empire makes its coinage an especially efficient disseminator of official imperial imagery. Thus, even though many of these coins had their origins outside of Asia Minor, the implicit messages carried in their iconography would have been visible to everyday people living in Asia Minor.

⁸⁷ Ephesus and Pergamon had mints that were instrumental during the Augustan period. See C. H. V. Sutherland, *The Emperor and the Coinage: Julio-Claudian Studies* (London: Spink and Son Ltd., 1976), 53–57. For an example of a study that uses coinage to make extrapolate how a particular city negotiates its engagement with a larger imperial presence, see Rosa Maria Motta, *Material Culture and Cultural Identity: A Study of Greek and Roman Coins from Dora* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015).

⁸⁸ Sutherland, *Emperor and the Coinage*, 75. Many coins have been attributed

⁸⁹ On the distribution of Rome-minted coins in the Flavian period, see Harold Mattingly and Edward Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage: Vespasian to Hadrian*, vol. 2 of *The Roman Imperial Coinage* (London: Spink, 1967), 1–5; Ian Carradice, “Flavian Coinage,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*, ed. William E. Metcalf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 386–88.

⁹⁰ Kenneth Harl, *Coinage in the Roman Economy 300 BC to AD 700* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 97–117. For a full account of Roman coin distribution in the provinces, see Andrew Burnett, Michel Amandry, and Ian Carradice, *Roman Provincial Coinage, Volume 2: From Vespasian to Domitian (AD 69-96), Part I: Introduction and Catalogue* (London: British Museum Press, 1999), 8–20.

⁹¹ Hart, “Judea and Rome,” 173–75.

As coins spread from one location to another, they carry official state messages with them. Coinage signifies, not only in its function as currency but in its function as small-scale iconography.⁹² The SC legend on the back of many Roman coins, standing for *senatus consulto* (“by the order of the senate”), implies that the coin’s imagery is senatorily sanctioned.⁹³ And most of the iconography on Roman coins is a statement about Roman imperial rule. Images of the current reigning emperor are standard fare on the obverse of a coin. The reverse of a Roman coin has a wider variety of images. They may include representations of the royal family, important buildings and sculptures, patron deities (like Roma or, in many of Domitian’s coins, Minerva), and important actions of the emperor.⁹⁴ This latter category sometimes included imperial acts of benefaction, like the distribution of food or the sponsorship of games. Another key representation of the emperor’s great deeds on numismatic propaganda is the representation of military victory. Roman imperial coins consistently included representations of victories in battle. In Flavian coinage, it was particularly important.

The representation of military conquest on Flavian coinage is part of a larger project in the cultivation of the emperor’s public image. After Nero’s death in 68 put an end to the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the rapid succession of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, leading to the “year of four emperors,” was a tumultuous time for the Roman empire’s leadership. When Vespasian became

⁹² On coinage as a *semeion* and an expression of cultural identity, see Motta, *Material Culture and Cultural Identity*, 26–30.

⁹³ Both the emperor and the senate were involved in the authorization of coins, but the exact roles taken by each is not perfectly clear. Coins themselves are the only primary evidence for who was involved with what, and they tell a limited story. Regardless of the true extent of senatorial involvement in the production of these coins, the SC marking was responsible for implying that a coin was authorized legal tender. For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Sutherland, *Emperor and the Coinage*, 11–22.

⁹⁴ For images from a representative collection of Flavian coins, see J. P. C. Kent, *Roman Coins* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 25–27 and the associated plates. On images of the Royal family in Flavian coins, see Anetta Alexandridis, “The Other Side of the Coin: The Women of the Flavian Imperial Family,” in *Tradition Und Erneuerung: Mediale Strategien in Der Zeit Der Flavier*, ed. Norvert Kramer and Christian Reitz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 196–201.

the emperor of Rome in 69, he had to deal with the fact that he did not hail from an esteemed dynasty like Nero, Claudius, and Tiberius before him.⁹⁵ Having two sons, Titus and Domitian, was helpful for him. They allowed Vespasian to demonstrate to the senate that his accession represented the start of a new and stable dynasty. But what did the most work in allowing Vespasian to claim legitimacy as a new emperor was his track record as a military leader, most notably his leading the campaign against the Judean revolt of 66–70 CE.⁹⁶ Representations of military conquest are therefore a major theme in Vespasian’s art, not only in sculpture, but also in coinage.⁹⁷ The *Judea Capta* coin series is an important element in the representation of Vespasian’s military exploits. It is not the only coin series that represents Vespasian as a military leader. Some coins present him on horseback, ready to ride into battle; others depicted an armor-clad Roma or Virtus figure as a patron deity of military victory.⁹⁸ One coin type features the legend *fides exercitum*, meaning “faith of the army,” showing the alliance between Vespasian and his army (image 3.3.1). As with the visual representations of barbarians that have been discussed up to this point, the portrayal of the defeated barbarian is a necessary component of imagery that celebrates military victory. In the coinage of Vespasian, and later of Titus, *Judea Capta* coinage serves that function.

While the portrayal of Judea as a captive female is a common feature of this triumphal coinage, Judea’s suffering of military defeat is the most consistent theme. Several types of coins

⁹⁵ Suetonius, *Vesp.*, 1.

⁹⁶ Suetonius, *Vesp.*, 4–8.

⁹⁷ Susan Wood, “Public Images of the Flavian Dynasty: Sculpture and Coinage,” in *A Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome*, ed. Andrew Zissos, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 129–47.

⁹⁸ Examples include Roma handing a globe to a horseback Vespasian as an emblem of his receiving divine support of global domination (*RIC* 2.1, 1533, 175). Another features Virtus on the reverse with a spear and parazonium (*RIC* 2.1 1542, 176).

communicated this message. As shown above in image 3.3.3, the earliest coins commemorating the defeat of Judea simply have a bound barbarian with the sole legend *IVDAEA* on the reverse. The trophy on this particular coin represents the successful conquest of a place (it is visible on the *Germania Capta* coins below), rather than the palm tree associated specifically with Judea. Another coin series, similar to the *Judea Capta*, is the *Judea Devicta* series.⁹⁹ The message and iconography of *Capta* and *Devicta* coins is similar; the biggest difference is that *Devicta* emphasizes the defeat of Judea and *Capta* emphasizes conquest and annexation. More recently, a series of coins with the message *Judea Recepta* on the reverse has been discovered. These coins, in the tradition of Augustan *Armenia Recepta* coins, describe Judea as a “re-captured” territory. They show that Judea’s attempt to break from the empire was foiled and that the conquered territory was re-conquered.¹⁰⁰ All of these coin types—those with the *Capta*, *Devicta*, and *Recepta* messages—emphasize the military defeat of Judea to present the Flavian emperors as victorious leaders. Throughout the variety of coin types, one feature is consistently emphasized: the defeat of Judea. The proliferation of these coins made the depiction of Judea as bound, defeated, and captive a widespread feature of Flavian political propaganda.

Judea Capta coins circulated throughout the reigns of Vespasian and Titus.¹⁰¹ Domitian had *Germania Capta* coins where his father and brother had the *Judea Capta* and related coin series. Unlike Vespasian and Titus, Domitian was not able to claim the end of the Judean revolt as a victory for himself; to present himself as a military leader, he needed to represent a different campaign. The campaign that constitutes Domitian’s claim to fame is his successful conquest of

⁹⁹ E.g., *RIC* 2.1 no. 1120, p. 140. The coin features a female Judea standing next to a palm tree on the reverse with the legend *IVDAEA DEVICTA*, meaning “Judea defeated.” See Hart, “Judea and Rome,” 183–85.

¹⁰⁰ Marco Vitale, “‘Iudaea Recepta’ – Eine Neue Legende Auf Goldmünzen Vespasians,” *Ancient Society* 44 (2014): 243–55.

¹⁰¹ Kent, *Roman Coins*, 26; Cody, “Conquerors and Conquered,” 110.

Germany. A successful campaign against the Chatti, a German tribal group living near the Rhine river gets a clear, if tepid, note of recognition from Suetonius.¹⁰² Domitian's campaign against the Germans did not carry the same historical importance for the empire that Vespasian's reconquest of Judea carried. But for the cultivation of Domitian's self-image, his successful campaigns against a German group validated him as a military leader. Just as Vespasian and Titus depicted defeated Judea in their coins, the *Germania Capta* coin series carries out a military commemoration function in Domitian's coinage.

In its message, and the iconography that expresses it, the *Germania Capta* coin series is remarkably similar to the *Judea Capta* coin. As with the *Judea Capta* coin, multiple coin types represent the defeat of Germany. The one in image 4.3.4 above portrays two German captives surrounding a trophy.¹⁰³ A similar coin type shows a pair of seated captives surrounding a trophy.¹⁰⁴ Unlike the *Judea Capta* coin, the defeated figures are not unarmed. Nor is there an armed and armored soldier standing over the defeated figures. While these coins do not depict the complete disarmament of the defeated person that appears in the *Judea Capta* coins, they do keep the pose found in other images of barbarians. Gender is one way in which the defeated barbarian is marked as such. However, the primary and consistent marker of barbarian "other" in these coins is not gender. Like the *Judea Capta* coin, what marks the barbarian out is its status as a defeated figure, represented here with the compressed and lowered body, often in a mourning pose. The contrast on these coins between obverse and reverse, between Roman emperor and foreign people group, is also the contrast between victorious and defeated.

¹⁰² Suetonius, *Dom.*, 9.

¹⁰³ Cody, "Conquerors and Conquered," 112.

¹⁰⁴ *RIC* 2.1 no. 295, p. 285.

The depictions of defeated people groups on Flavian coinage does not merely existing patterns of representing annexed people in Roman coinage; it intensifies them. Coin series under Augustus, for example, represent the annexation of Egypt and Armenia. These coins bear legends like *AEGYPTO CAPTA* and *ARMENIA CAPTA*. Unlike the Flavian counterparts with similar legends, these coins do not depict a personification of the annexed land with a defeated body in a bound or mourning position. The *Armenia Capta* coin might depict the goddess victory or items associated with Armenian soldiers.¹⁰⁵ But the body of a pacified, defeated, or bound Armenian does not always appear. And when it does, it is not in a bound position (see image 3.5.6). Even though the event commemorated with the *Armenia Capta* and the related *Armenia Recepta* series resembles the correlated series with Judea, the imagery is markedly different.¹⁰⁶ Likewise, the *Aegypta Capta* coin simply refers to Egypt by depicting a crocodile on the reverse.¹⁰⁷ The crocodile represented Egypt, but it was not in some way deposed, even though the coin existed to commemorate the 31 BCE annexation of Egypt following the death of Antony and Cleopatra.¹⁰⁸ By depicting defeated peoples as bound and defeated, Flavian coinage thus moves beyond the imagery from Augustan coins that commemorate similar events, returning instead to a style seen in Roman republican coins from several decades before the Flavian dynasty took power.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ One *Armenia Capta* coin from about 19 BCE depicts Augustus on the front and a winged Victory slaughtering a bull on the back with the *ARMENIA CAPTA* legend; the presence of the goddess represents a military triumph (*RIC* 1 no. 514, p. 83). Another coin bearing the same legend shows a quiver, tiara, and bow-case (*RIC* 1 no. 516 p. 83).

¹⁰⁶ Vitale, "Judea Recepta," 248–250.

¹⁰⁷ *RIC* 1 no. 275a, p. 61.

¹⁰⁸ Boatwright, *Peoples of the Roman World*, 115.

¹⁰⁹ Cody, "Conquerors and Conquered," 106–107.

As the emperors in the Flavian dynasty reigned, their coinage brought the image of the defeated non-Roman into imperial circulation. The propaganda programs of Flavian emperors, then, were responsible for fostering the broad geographic distribution of images that solidified the contrast between victorious Roman and defeated barbarian. The depiction of defeated peoples at Aphrodisias is combined with the ΕΘΝΟΣ statues that present non-Romans in a somewhat triumphal light. Lacking that balance, Flavian coinage instead stresses the military exploits of emperors through the display of conquered people groups, a strategy necessary for upholding the credentials of emperors in a new dynasty.

Attributes of barbarians in Roman Visual Representation

The six visual markers of barbarians discussed in the previous chapter are also visible in Roman visual depictions of barbarians: (1) defeat, (2) cosmological significance, (3) spatial positioning, (4) embodied difference, (5) warlike disposition, and (6) opposition to the gods. But they do not occur in the same ways. Just as the connotations attached to the notion of the “barbarian” morph in the movement from Greek βάρβαρος to Latin *barbarus*, the manner in which these six visual markers manifest themselves in Roman art changes. So even though many of the features of “barbarism” present in Hellenistic depictions of barbarians make a return—a feature that should be unsurprising given the positive Roman reception of Hellenistic depictions of barbarians—they emerge in a distinctly Roman way. Reviewing the pieces of Roman art discussed throughout the chapter, with a special emphasis on the Flavian coinage and the images from Aphrodisias discussed above, this last section of the chapter shows how these six features of barbarism in visual art appear in Roman imagery.

(1) Defeat

While Roman representations of defeated barbarians are clearly influenced by Hellenistic depictions, Hellenistic artwork shows the drama of defeat in a way that Roman art avoids. For example, the Pergamene Altar, taking cues from the centauromachy on the Parthenon, shows its barbaric beasts in their moment of fearsome strength, even if it also shows the Olympian gods confidently and invincibly glide through battle. And as shown in the previous chapter, Attalid depictions of dying Gauls include subtle indications of heroism and nobility, possibly eliciting empathy from their viewing audiences. Roman artwork is not without its moments of empathy, given the high value placed on expressions of imperial clemency. But it does not provide barbarians with the same subtle moments of power and valor that Hellenistic art does. The logic of defeat in Roman artwork does not depend on Roman soldiers winning despite the ferocity of their enemies.

In Roman artwork depicting barbarians, there is no struggle along the path to victory. Instead, the imagery presents the absoluteness of Roman military power. The images are inspired by the post-battle perspective of the Attalid large and small Gauls in that many of the depictions of barbarians above depict the aftermath of battle rather than the battle itself.¹¹⁰ But unlike Attalid works, the strength of the enemy receives little emphasis. Many images—particularly on coins—show barbarians sitting down with their hands cuffed together, often also tied to a trophy. Other images, like the Parthian returning battle standards on the Prima Porta breastplate, depict what happens after the fighting is over. Such imagery, then, favors post-battle events, bringing the viewer’s attention to a battle that has already occurred. And when there are depictions of active battle scenes, such as the Mantova frieze, Roman soldiers crush their enemies in an

¹¹⁰ Philip Hardie, “Images of the Persian Wars in Rome,” in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium*, ed. Emma Bridges, Edith Hall, and P. J. Rhodes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 127–43.

overwhelming rout. The rhetorical implication of such imagery is that the defeat of barbarians is secure and inevitable. Roman artwork does not portray commanding victory despite strong enemies; it shows how Rome's enemies are inevitably, already defeated by an exponentially stronger force.

It would be an overstatement to say that all depictions of barbarians in Roman art include marks of defeat, but it would not be an overstatement to say that all such depictions glorify Roman conquest. The displays of clemency on the Boscoreale Cups and the *Ara Pacis*, for instance, do not present the barbarians in them as bound, defeated captives to be paraded next to a trophy. The same can be said regarding the *ethnos* bases at the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. Instead, these images present the benefits of Romanization. The children on the *Ara Pacis*, for instance, are given the promise of a bright future receiving the benefits of Roman enculturation. The statues on the *ethnos* bases, standing like dignified warriors, represent the promise of formerly non-Roman groups receiving the benefits of Roman power. But the two ideas in tension with each other that these statues represent—nations as conquered subjects and nations as empowered partners—are both products of Roman conquest. The clemency given to the submissive peoples on Boscoreale cup 1 is likewise a piece of the aftermath of conquest. So even in places where the indignity of defeat is absent from the above depictions of barbarians, the conquest—and thus also the defeat—of barbarians is implicitly praised by this imagery.

(2) *Cosmic significance*

Although none of the representations of barbarians discussed above tap directly into cosmogonic myths in the way that the Pergamene Altar invokes Hesiod, plenty of imagery related to the defeat of barbarians also contains depictions of cosmic deities. The Prima Porta

statue and the reliefs at Aphrodisias both contain examples of this. The corners on the left feature the sun God Sol over Apollo, with the moon goddess Luna over Diana. The sky god Caelus hovers overhead stretching out the sky, and Mother Earth reclines beneath.¹¹¹ Likewise, the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias presents Claudius next to personifications of Land and Sea.¹¹² The presence of these deities does not imbue the imagery with protological significance, but it does suggest that the defeat of barbarians possesses cosmic significance.

The upshot of such imagery is twofold. One purpose is to demonstrate the global scope of imperial rule. Indeed, one of Titus's coins shows the goddess Roma handing a globe to Titus as a signal that the whole world was being handed over to the emperor through divine beneficence (image 4.3.7). In the same way, the geographic spread represented by *ethnos* reliefs at Aphrodisias is an expression of the breadth of Roman territorial expansion. But the idea is not only to show that the scope of Roman imperial power; the imagery also shows that flourishing of the cosmos and the flourishing of imperial rule—which naturally includes the defeat of barbarians—is one and the same. As Roland Smith observes, the image of the emperor by the Land and Sea with a cornucopia in his right arm implies that the land will be prosperous and that the seas will be navigable thanks to the his reign.¹¹³ Such messaging is consistent with the overall message of the reliefs on the Ara Pacis, where the images of flourishing plant life suggest that Augustan rule leads to an age of fertility and abundance.

(3) *Spatial positioning*

¹¹¹ Zanker, *Power of Images*, 189–92.

¹¹² Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 104–106.

¹¹³ Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 106.

Although it is more subtle than the high-low, inside-outside bifurcations of the Pergamene Altar, physical space is used to set apart barbarians in Roman imagery. The most consistent spatial contrast for barbarians in these images is in the size and poses of the bound, captive barbarian. In contrast to Roman soldiers who stand triumphantly, barbarians are often seated, as one can see in the *Judea Capta* and *Germania Capta* coins. A seated pose is not in itself evidence that a figure is in a subordinate position; several images discussed above like Boscoreale Cup 1 and the *Gemma Augustea* depict Augustus in a seated position resembling Jupiter to stress his power and allude to his divinity.¹¹⁴ But seated barbarians are often on the ground rather than in chairs, their bodies compacted to make them look smaller. And in one particular relief from Aphrodisias, a captive stands next to an unidentified Roman imperator—but the captive is roughly half the size of Roman prince next to him, even though both figures are standing.¹¹⁵ Likewise, the relative size of standalone statues can be, in itself, an expression of power. The Prima Porta statue is slightly larger than life-size. These instances of diminutively-sized figures emphasize their defeat and subservience. In many ways, their smaller size is simply part of depicting them as defeated.

On some images, spatial divisions can separate barbarians out more dramatically relegating them to definite “lower” spaces. The Julio-Claudian gems best known for depicting barbarians make a sharper spatial distinction between barbarians and Romans. The *Grand Camée* and the *Gemma Augustea* both include sharp visual demarcations between upper tiers and lower tiers, relegating barbarians to the lowest tier. On both gems, barbarian bodies are tightly compressed with their hands tucked behind them, as is often the case, in the many works that

¹¹⁴ Zanker, *Power of Images*, 230–36.

¹¹⁵ Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 120–21; see plate XVIII.

depict barbarians being paraded on trophies. These images are not unique in placing barbarians in spatially lower positions. One marble polychrome statue of a Parthian, for example, has been identified as the base of a tripod built to commemorate Augustan victories over the Parthians.¹¹⁶ Clear spatial divisions like these are not consistent in Roman visual representations of barbarians, but they complement the usage of bodily poses and diminutive statures by which barbarians are consistently situated in spatially marked ways.

(4) *Embodied difference*

There are limited similarities between the markers of embodied difference in Hellenistic and Roman depictions of barbarians. One such superficial feature is the use of ethnicity-specific clothing. The figures in the Persianomachy and the Galatomachy from the Attalid sculptures on the Athenian acropolis can be identified by their distinctive headwear.¹¹⁷ Barbarians in Roman artwork sometimes have such markers. For instance, one of the barbarian children on the Ara Pacis can be identified by his Phrygian cap.¹¹⁸ The *ethnos* reliefs at Aphrodisias also have distinctive clothing that would have been recognized as “un-Greco-Roman.”¹¹⁹ Additionally the disheveled, wild look of the Attalid Gauls recurs in imagery like the slaughtered barbarians on the Mantova frieze.¹²⁰ As Andrew Stewart shows, many features of the Attalid small Gauls—particularly their poses, their musculature, and the beastlike details of their hair and facial expressions—influence Roman artwork. But the examples he provides of the small Gauls’

¹¹⁶ Hardie, “Images of the Persian Wars,” 130.

¹¹⁷ Stewart, *Attalos*, 204, 206.

¹¹⁸ Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 101.

¹¹⁹ Smith, “Simulacra Gentium,” 62–63.

¹²⁰ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 33.

afterlife in Roman artwork comes from the second and third centuries CE.¹²¹ The clearest marker of difference in Pergamene artwork, namely the hybridity and animality of the Titans on the Gigantomachy frieze, is not a feature of Roman depictions of barbarians. But a different marker of embodied difference is present in Roman artwork: gender.

The starkest example of gender being used to distinguish between Roman and non-Roman is the statue of Claudius and Britannia (image 4.2.3). This image has been incorporated into accounts of Roman concepts of gender that associate “female” with “Other” and link territorial conquest to sexual violence and penetration.¹²² While it is a Greco-Roman convention to portray triumphant men in the nude, Iain Ferris points out that its implications cannot be dismissed as mere convention; viewers would have noticed a nude male overpowering a female with her clothes slipping.¹²³ The sexual valence of the imagery is present, though in a different way, in the image of Nero carrying Armenia. As with the depiction of Claudius and Britannia, Armenia is portrayed as an Amazon warrior with a bared breast. And whether the image connotes conquest, as the relief of Claudius and Britannia does, or has a more benevolent valence, the image is not without sexualized implications.¹²⁴ It has as much nudity as the image of Claudius and Britannia. Alone, the gender roles in these images—male conqueror and female conquest—may not mean much. But conquered people are consistently represented as female at

¹²¹ Stewart, *Attalos*, 170–77.

¹²² Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 43–45; René Rodgers, “Female Representation in Roman Art: Feminising the Provincial ‘Other,’” in *Roman Imperialism and Provincial Art*, ed. Sarah Scott and Jane Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 85–86.

¹²³ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 56–57.

¹²⁴ Even if this image is designed to fit the mold of Achilles and Penthesilea, its violent connotations remain; a possible allusion to a myth wherein Achilles has sexual feelings for a woman warrior he had just slain certainly does not empty the image of any connection between military and sexual conquest.

Aphrodisias, even when taking the more triumphant position seen in the *ethnos* statues.¹²⁵ The pattern is particularly strong in the Flavian coinage discussed above.

Commemorating Vespasian's (re-)conquest of Judea, the iconography of the *Judea Capta* coin usually combines the depiction of the bound and defeated barbarian with the gendered contrast in the reliefs at Aphrodisias. The soldier, possibly representing Vespasian but likely representing a generic Roman soldier, represents the empire's military prowess. Paired with the female personification of Judea, the contrast between Roman and non-Roman, between soldier and captive, is also a contrast between male and female.¹²⁶ But, the usage of a female figure to personify Judea is not likely to say anything about Judea specifically.¹²⁷ Rather, it follows a logic by which places can be imagined as females.¹²⁸ By contrast, the soldier standing next to Judea is male. The position of the *parazonium* (a type of dagger) near his groin area counts among what Davina Lopez considers "Allusions to penetration and domination."¹²⁹ Paired with the female and captive Judea, the soldier depicts whatever is Roman as that which is masculine, triumphant, and powerful.¹³⁰ The *Germania Capta* coin also carries gender-coded imagery, though not as overtly or consistently as the *Judea Capta* series.¹³¹ Nonetheless, many coins do feature a

¹²⁵ Barbarians are not the only women in the Sebasteion. But where they do appear, they are either in a subservient position or exist as an adornment for male figures as, for instance, on the relief where Agrippina crowns Nero. See Susan Fischler, "Imperial Cult: Engendering the Cosmos," in *When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power, and Identity in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Lin Foxhall and John Salmon, Leicester-Nottingham Studies in Ancient Society 8 (London: Routledge, 1998), 165–83.

¹²⁶ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 35–38.

¹²⁷ It is worth observing that some ancient Jewish viewers of the coin may have seen an association between female Judea and biblical "daughter Zion" language. See Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 187–91.

¹²⁸ On this metaphorical logic, see the discussion of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias above.

¹²⁹ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 38.

¹³⁰ Not every coin based on the reconquest of Judea uses this gendered logic of the typical coin with the bound and captive; other coin types propagate the message of imperial triumph over Judea. Sometimes, Judea is portrayed as a deposed male figure (See, e.g., *RIC* 2.1 no. 305 p. 80).

¹³¹ See, e.g., *RIC* 2.1 no. 365, p. 290, where the gender of the captive is unidentifiable.

defeated female to illustrate Germany's defeat. Some coins, featuring a personification of defeated *Germania*, show a female figure that, like the personifications of defeated places at Aphrodisias, reveals a bared breast (see image 4.3.5). Along with the reliefs at Aphrodisias, and the personifications of nations as mourning women on the Prima Porta statue, these coins use gender to visibly render non-Romans as "other." Insofar as Romans imagined themselves the inhabitants of a masculine order, they also imagined "others" as feminine.

(5) Warlike disposition

Compared to Hellenistic art, this feature is relatively muted. As the previous chapter shows, Hellenistic art depicts barbarians as capable fighters through their muscular, if somewhat imbalanced, physique; the zealousness they bring to battle; and the armaments that surround them, even in defeat. Only the last of these is really consistent in Roman depictions of barbarians. Where the depiction of barbarian fighting prowess in Hellenistic art amplifies impressiveness of victory against them by showing how aggressive or noble they are, Roman visual depictions tend to make the defeat of barbarians seem effortless. When Roman-made copies of the Attalid dying barbarians were displayed, they were likely clustered together in a way that allowed viewers to walk among them, nearly simulating the experience of approaching a battlefield once victory was already secure.¹³² In keeping with the reproduction and display of these Attalid works, Roman depictions of barbarians generally include only post-battle depictions. An exception is the Mantova frieze, which resembles Attalid artwork with its

¹³² Stewart, *Attalos*, 144–47.

depiction of naked, primitive Gauls falling to their deaths in the midst of battle. But it does not keep the musculature or the empathy-inducing nobility of the larger Attalid Gauls.¹³³

Only in the *Germania Capta* coin type does the visual rhetoric approximate the Attalid dying Gaul (image 4.3.5). Roman stereotypes about Germans made a victory against them worth noting. While stereotypes about Asians and Syrians presented them as effeminate or given to luxury, German people groups were admired for their simplicity and their sense of justice. The negative qualities assigned to them, like wild tempers and residency of an untamed land, made a victory against them an especially worthy venture.¹³⁴ The defeat of Germans thus became a major theme in Domitian's art, as the cuirassed statues of his defeating Germans (see above) shows. His coins carry out a similar function. Many of Domitian's coins used the title *Germanicus* in the legend, a reminder of the nickname Domitian adopted in recognition of his victories against the Germans. Going beyond the inclusion of a nickname on the legend, many of his coins depict defeated Germans. Like some of the dying Gaul statues, this figure is seated over a shield and weapons. Given the stereotypes about Germans as bellicose fighters, the image of a defeated German sitting over her arms may—like the dying Gaul she resembles—remind the viewer that a worthy victory was won.

The images that do the most to celebrate the fighting prowess of barbarians are the *ethnos* reliefs at the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. But the depiction of the fighting prowess of these noble women does not have the same rhetorical function that this feature has in Hellenistic art. Contrary to the goal of making barbarians look like powerful enemies, the warrior women at Aphrodisias show the benefit of Romanization. The selection of *ethnos* bases reflects the people

¹³³ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 32–33.

¹³⁴ On stereotypes about Germans, see Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 427–39.

groups whose conquest is attributed to Augustus. Choices of dress and headgear (when visible) reflect the “otherness” of the people group depicted. And yet some of them stand battle-ready, decorated with armaments. As Roland Smith observes, the imagery reflects “a continuing ambivalence in Roman thinking about the nature of their empire. Was it a series of conquests or a family of equal partners? Both, they liked to think.”¹³⁵ Both sides of this tension, however, point to Roman strength and power. Roman imperial strength and power leads to the conquest of the nations depicted in the statues; that same strength allows them to be dignified warriors. Unlike Attalid artwork, Roman art has little need to showcase power by showing how challenging it is to defeat enemies.

(6) Opposition to the gods

Roman depictions of barbarians do present an oppositional logic between the gods on the one hand and barbarians on the other. But it does not work like the opposition visible on the Pergamene Gigantomachy frieze, where the gods and the barbarian-linked beasts are actively fighting against each other. The theological program of Roman artwork containing visual representation of barbarians stresses the connection between the gods and the Roman figures depicted in them. The piety of emperors is a ubiquitous theme in Roman imperial art. Images discussed in this chapter are hardly an exception to this. Cup 2 of the Boscoreale Treasure, the one partnered with the image of clemency discussed above, shows Tiberius sacrificing a steer at the Capitoline Temple.¹³⁶ The friezes alongside the larger outer walls of the Ara Pacis feature political officials and members of the royal family in a procession, breaking ground for the

¹³⁵ Smith, “*Simulacra Gentium*,” 77.

¹³⁶ Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*,

templum in which sacrifices to Pax will be made. The Sebasteion at Aphrodisias is so called because, as an imperial cult site, it is a place of worship.¹³⁷

And just as Roman artwork shows emperors giving piety to the gods, it shows the gods reciprocate with their divine blessings. Roman military figures are able to achieve swift victories because their deities have blessed them. As Paul Zanker shows, the presentation of deities surrounding the return of standards from Parthia on the Prima Porta statue is part of a larger ideological pattern where military victories are seen as evidence that the “Republic” has won divine favor.¹³⁸ Some depictions, especially the *Grand Camée de France*, emphasize the divination of Augustus to reinforce continuity between the gods and the imperial family—a continuity that coincides with the dejection of barbarians. It is extraordinarily commonplace for depictions of deities like Victory and Roma to accompany images of the emperor or their military conquests. The opposition between gods and barbarians in Roman artwork, then, is a corollary of the close connection between Roman gods and the Roman military. Barbarians are enemies of the gods only insofar as they are enemies of the pious military tasked with subjugating them.

Conclusion

Roman visual representations of barbarians continue the work of their Hellenistic counterparts by depicting ethnic “others” as stereotyped, defeated people groups, albeit in a distinctly Roman way. Where Hellenistic works emphasize the moments of battle and the otherness of enemies, Roman works tend to focus on the moments immediately following defeat,

¹³⁷ Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 89–90.

¹³⁸ Zanker, *Power of Images*, 183–92.

presenting victories against opponents in starkly absolute terms. The rhetorical purpose of such imagery is to make positive claims about the greatness of Roman emperors or the benefits of Roman rule. Images of barbarians support claims emperors are pious and blessed by the gods; that they are harbingers of thoroughgoing military victories; and that they bring prosperity to all of Rome and even to the barbarian nations incorporated through their conquests. These rhetorical aims lead to variations in how barbarians are represented in imagery, but the visual markers of barbarism present in Hellenistic works occur in their own ways in Roman images. And even though the images seen by inhabitants of Roman Asia Minor represent the subset available in one particular province, their continuity with these themes suggest that Revelation's earliest readers would have been familiar with them.

The following chapter will consider the anti-Roman polemic in the portrayal of the beasts in book of Revelation. The key question for this project's argument is whether and to what extent these attributes of "barbarism" can be attributed to the figures that personify Roman power in the Apocalypse. And with an answer to those questions in place, the next key question is how the similarities between Revelation's representations of Rome and visual representations of barbarians can prompt a re-reading of the relevant passages in Revelation. The following chapter considers those questions.

Chapter 5

The Barbarism of the Beasts

As the previous chapters show, representations of barbarians in the Greek and Roman world follow a unified trajectory. The exoticization of others that begins as early as the archaic Greek period continued through the classical Greek period and into the Roman era, as shown in chapter 2. And as chapters 3 and 4 show, ordinary residents of first-century Asia Minor would have been able to see visual representations of barbarian “others” that existed as part of that trajectory. Those visual representations, chapters 3 and 4 argue, possess a series of attributes by which the barbarian-associated figures on them are marked out as “others.” As fits the number of the beast (Revelation 13:18), there are six such markers: (1) defeat, (2) cosmological significance, (3) spatial positioning (4) embodied difference, (5) warlike disposition, and (6) opposition to the gods. Chapters 3 and 4 show how those markers occur in Pergamene and Roman representations of barbarians respectively. This chapter will argue that those markers occur again in Revelation’s representations of Roman imperial power as a dragon-powered beast.

The first of two key goals in this chapter is to show that Revelation’s beasts “look” like barbarians in that the strategies of representing the barbarians as “other” resemble those that otherize barbarians in Hellenistic and Roman visual art. To meet that first goal, I work through the six attributes of barbarians discussed in the previous chapters and show how they apply to Revelation’s beasts. Since the narrative depiction of the beasts is bookended by a defeat—their

narrative starts with the fall of the dragon in 12:7–17 before concluding with their final defeat in 20:7–10—the central section of the chapter will discuss defeat at its beginning and end. Because defeat is mentioned twice, I meet Revelation’s notion of numerological perfection with seven subsections on the barbarism of the beasts: one per each of the six markers, plus an extra defeat.

Having shown that the beasts in Revelation resemble barbarians as depicted in Greek and Roman artwork, this chapter moves on to its second goal: showing what that resemblance would have done to intensify the rhetorical impact of the “beast” imagery. It is not simply the case that Revelation’s beasts possess features that resemble barbarians. The rhetorical impact of the beast imagery overlaps with the rhetorical function of “barbarian” imagery in Greek and Roman artwork. Chief among them is situating the viewer as a victorious “self” in contradistinction from a defeated “other.” But the self-other distinction, as it occurs in Revelation’s depiction of the beasts, reverses the self-other association of visual depictions of barbarians. While the “barbarian” was the non-Greek or the non-Roman “other,” the barbarism of the beasts of Revelation implies that the “other” is in fact the imperial entity associated with Roman power.¹ This interpretation is not just consistent with taking the beasts as an anti-Roman polemic. It amplifies that polemic’s impact in ways consistent with the rhetorical function of visual representations of barbarians.

Following the mold of the previous chapters, where the visual marks of barbarians are discussed after an introduction to the sets of images themselves, this chapter begins with an overview of the narrative arc of which the beast imagery is a critical feature: the drama of the

¹ As the last section of this chapter shows, I interpret the image of the beasts in Revelation as a direct competitor to other images that Revelation’s audience would have seen, taking a cue from a reading of Revelation 12–13 as an image “dueling” with other images known to Revelation’s audience in Whitaker, *Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion in the Book of Revelation*, 169–217.

dragon that runs from Revelation 12–20.² Beyond introducing the narrative segment under discussion, this overview shows how my reading of the beasts as barbarians does not ultimately contest the dominant view in the scholarship. By situating my “beasts as barbarians” reading in the context of that standard view, I show that the interpretation I present here supplements, rather than contests, that reading. And starting with a discussion of how the beast imagery fits into John’s rhetorical goals, I set up the end of the chapter to illustrate how the resemblance between the beasts and barbarians furthers John’s rhetorical goals—whether or not the connection was even John’s intention.

The Beasts in Revelation’s Narrative

The images of the beasts in Revelation play into one of John’s key rhetorical goals: advocating for a Christian practice that eschews participation in Roman civic religion. John has several overlapping rhetorical goals, not all of which are exclusively, or even partially, related to disassociation from empire.³ But the rhetorical goals that concerns this project the most relate to Revelation’s anti-Roman polemic. As will be discussed at length below, Revelation’s beast imagery, through a thinly veiled allusion to Nero, represents a polemic against Roman imperial power and civic religion in line with the Apocalyptic tradition represented in Daniel 7 and elsewhere.⁴ The dragon is John’s monstrous representation of the devil (12:9, 20:2). Its relationship with the beast is John’s way of saying that Roman imperial power, and participation

² Most of the following discussion will focus on Revelation 13, but a full discussion of the beast imagery necessarily pulls in other components of Revelation; an overview of the drama of the dragon running from chapters 12–20 makes sense of why my analysis is not entirely limited to chapter 13.

³ For an overview of John’s rhetorical goals, see David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 65–91.

⁴ As discussed in chapter 1, this view has been standard for over a century. See as a key example Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:330–65.

in religious practice supporting it, colludes with the devil. Such charges against empire make for no light polemic. Indeed, this polemic situates the emergence of Roman imperial power as an outgrowth of the activity of Revelation's central villain. That villain's activity is the narrative arc of the dragon and beasts starting in chapter 12 and ending in chapter 20.

Revelation's story about the dragon and beasts begins with a vignette at the heart of the book: the emergence of the sun-clothed woman and her flight from the dragon that pursues her child (12:1–6). Despite the diversity of accounts of the book's overall structure, many interpreters rightly agree that Revelation 12 constitutes a major structural hinge in the book's overall layout.⁵ It follows the heptads of seals (6:1–8:5) and trumpets (8:6–11:19), the latter of which draws to a conclusion of its own with a climactic hymn (11:16–18). The vision of a temple opening in 11:19 echoes the opening of the heavenly door in 4:1, signaling that a significant revelatory moment has either concluded or is about to begin—or perhaps both. Chapter 12 then introduces the sun-clothed woman and the dragon with the phrase “And a great sign was seen,” an intensified version of the phrase “and I saw” (καὶ εἶδον) that typically opens up new units of visions throughout the Apocalypse. Conventionally, scholars take this transition between chapters 11 and 12 as a turn toward Revelation's second half.⁶ And even in construals of Revelation's structure where chapter 12 is in the middle of a larger literary unit, rather than the beginning of a fully new movement, the dragon's emergence is nonetheless in a central, prominent position.⁷

⁵ For an overview of several issues in the construal of Revelation's structure, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 108–51.

⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 114–15; Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 524.

⁷ See for example the chiasmic analyses that place chapter 12 at the center of a larger, unified macro-segment of the book: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, Second Edition.

Such a structural hinge is a natural entry point for the dragon, as he is the primary antagonist of Revelation, the evil behind the evil of other antagonist figures in the narrative. Before Revelation 12, several antagonists are mentioned, from corrupting agents in the churches such as the Nicolaitans (2:6ff), “Balaam” (2:14–16), and “Jezebel” (2:20–23), and the beast that conquers the two witnesses (11:7–10). These minor antagonists appear and disappear within a short narrative span.⁸ But the dragon holds a more prominent role. He is a direct rival to the Jesus, as implied by his attempt on the life of the Messiah child (12:3–6).⁹ As the deceiver of the inhabited world (12:9), the dragon is engaged in the same business as Jezebel, who may herself be a cipher for John’s primary rival.¹⁰ Unlike the minor antagonists who are mostly limited to a single passage or section of Revelation, the dragon is persistently present throughout the subsequent chapters. And when he is defeated for the last time along with the beasts (20:10), the climactic final judgment (20:11–15) and descent of the new Jerusalem (21:1–3) can proceed, implying that the dragon is the final obstacle to the book’s eschatological conclusion.

As the primary agents of the dragon, the beasts are instrumental in shaping the tension that stretches between chapters 12 and 20 of Revelation. Revelation positions the dragon as the

(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 171–77; Antoninus King Wai Siew, *The War Between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiastic Reading of Revelation 11:1–14:5*, LNTS 283 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 75–88.

⁸ I consider the beast that wars against the two witnesses to be separate from the beasts described in chapter 13. While the beast that fights the witnesses emerges from the abyss (11:7), the beasts in chapter 13 come from the land and sea (13:1, 11). When the sea-beast appears, the absence of an article implies that it is a new creature, not one previously mentioned in the narrative. I do not discount the possibility that the war between the beast and the witnesses is a proleptic telling of the struggle that occurs with the dragon and beasts starting in chapter 12. But if that is the case, I would count it as a retelling of the war between the beasts and witnesses, not a resumption of that narrative. My view is shared by Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation*, 448–49.

⁹ The description of the child the dragon tries to eat in 12:5—the one who will rule the nations with a rod of iron—alludes to the Davidic Messiah of Psalm 2:7, an allusion that recurs in 19:15.

¹⁰ The verb *πλανάω* occurs in the description of Jezebel (2:20), the dragon (12:9), and the beast from the land (13:14). On the Jezebel of 2:20–23 as John’s main rival in the world outside the text, see Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse*, 113–25; Olivia Stewart Lester, *Prophetic Rivalry, Gender, and Economics*, WUNT 2/466 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 48–71.

narrative's supra-antagonist, but wrath of the dragon comes through the beasts. The relationship between the dragon and the beasts can be compared to the relationship between God and the lamb in chapters 4–5.¹¹ While the dragon suffers a defeat in the heavenly war narrated in 12:7–9 (see the “Defeat 1” section below), the rest of chapters 12 and 13 demonstrate the comprehensive power of the dragon and his helper-beasts, setting up their activities as a point of theological tension. The summoning of the beast parodies the relationship between the one seated on the throne and the lamb in chapters 4–5. Whereas the lamb's entrance allows God's scroll to be unsealed (5:1–6),¹² the beasts' entrances allow the dragon's wrath to be executed. The beasts' impressive feats that affect the whole world occur under the authority of the dragon (13:1, 5, 12). The first beast wages war (πόλεμος in 13:4, 7, cf. 12:17) and the second beast deceives (πλανάω: in 12:9 and 13:14), just like the dragon. Since the beasts are the agents of the dragon's activities, the tension of the dragon's story that spans from chapters 12–20 of Revelation is the tension of what the beasts will do with the enormous power given to them by the dragon. Portraying the beasts as challengers of God and the lamb (see section 6, “opposition to the Gods” below) only serves to heighten the tension of their apparent domination, a tension that is not relieved until these creatures are defeated. The interval of this tension—between the initial heavenly defeat of the dragon and the final defeat of the dragon and beasts—is the period in which the rhetorical

¹¹ Some interpreters even grant the title of “Satanic trinity” to the trio of the dragon, the sea-beast, and the land-beast. See e.g. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 89.

¹² Several parallels between the beast and lamb suggest that the beast is trying to mimic the lamb. See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 431–41 and Joe E. Luncford, *Parody and Counterimaging in the Apocalypse* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 245–51. For more on the parallelism between the beasts and Christ, see section 6, “Opposition to the Gods,” below.

exigency of the imagery must be observed. That is the time in which the saints are called to endure (13:10).¹³

The rhetorical exigency of this imagery is for John's readers to exhibit an abstinent endurance. "Abstinence" is the mark of the 144,000 followers in 14:1–5 who image the saints while counterimaging the beasts of chapter 13.¹⁴ By calling the saints "virgins" (14:4) John describes what they refrain from—retaining all the sexual connotations carried by the word "abstinent."¹⁵ Instead of the beast's image (13:16–18), the 144,000 carry the image of God and the lamb (14:1). And unlike the kings of the earth who consort with Rome—figuring Babylon (17:2), the 144,000 avoid the imperial affiliation that the mark would signify. The metaphor of male virginity even has its own anti-Roman connotations, as it contrasts imperial family values that favor fatherhood.¹⁶ But as John makes clear, abstaining from Roman affiliation requires endurance. The angelic declarations in the subsequent verses (14:6–13) pair a call to worship Israel's God (14:6–7) with a call not to worship the beast or receive its image (14:9–11).¹⁷ This summary of core demands on John's audience describes the advantages of dying in the Lord (14:13), reiterating that "here is the endurance of the saints" (14:12). It is not the first place in which a call for the endurance of the saints appears. The exact same words occur at the end of 13:10, following a proverb of sorts promising that the beast's violence against the saints will be

¹³ As Schüssler-Fiorenza (*Justice and Judgment*, 46–51) shows, John's portrait of eschatology is about handling the tension of the not-yet; John is trying to make meaning out of his community's suffering in the present.

¹⁴ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 188–89.

¹⁵ Hanna Stenström, "'They Have Not Defiled Themselves with Women...': Christian Identity According to the Book of Revelation," in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins, FCNTECW 13 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 40–44.

¹⁶ Lynn Huber, "Sexually Explicit? Re-reading Revelation's 144,000 Virgins as a Response to Roman Discourses," *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality* 2.1 (2008): 3–28.

¹⁷ As deSilva shows (*Seeing Things John's Way*, 257–84), the declarations of the angels in 14:6–13 summarizes the main things John wants from his audience.

both unavoidable and haphazard. In fact, the positive characters throughout chapters 11–14 are in situations where they must endure difficulties.¹⁸ So while the images of the beasts are polemical, the rhetorical upshot for the readers is that they are supposed to endure something. What they are supposed to endure is the effects of Roman imperial power on their communities, as the description of the beasts suggests.

The beast that emerges from the sea in 13:1 is conventionally understood to be a cipher for Roman imperial power, particularly as it is manifested through the emperor and the military.¹⁹ The ekphrastic description of its appearance identifies it as a composite creature made up of parts from the first three of the four beasts in Daniel 7:3–8. The tetrad of Danielic beasts has long been understood to refer to the historical empires that took control of the Levant in the centuries leading up to the Hellenistic era, not least because Daniel 7:15–25 identifies them as symbolizing historical kings.²⁰ Interpreters are nearly unanimous, then, in taking Revelation's beast as a cipher for the Roman empire, as it is the latest major conquering force in the area at the time of John's writing.²¹ Other details link this beast to the Roman empire more specifically. The beast's survival of a mortal wound that had healed (13:3, 12) is largely taken as a reference

¹⁸ The sun-clothed woman has been interpreted as a cipher for the church as a whole (see Beale, *Revelation*, 625–27; Blount, *Revelation*, 225–27). She spends most of her time on the narrative stage in protective flight (12:6, 14–16). The two witnesses are briefly “conquered” by a beast (11:7–10), and the saints are commended for not shirking from death (12:11).

¹⁹ As discussed in chapter 1, this view can be traced as standard in historical-critical exegesis of Revelation, see Charles, *Revelation*, 1:332–34.

²⁰ On possible origins of the creatures in Daniel 7, and the historic situations they likely referred to, see John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 295–99. Interpreters of Daniel sometimes understood the fourth beast in Daniel 7 as a reference to the Roman empire. See for instance the discussion of Jerome's interpretation of fourth beast as Rome in Janet L. R. Melnyk, “The Four Kingdoms in Daniel 2 and 7: Chapters in the History of Interpretation” (Emory University, Ph.D. diss., 2001), 59–78. As Aune observes (*Revelation 6–16*, 734–35), some first century CE Apocalyptic Jewish texts like 4 Ezra 11:36–46, 12:11 and 2 Bar. 39:5–7 present a fourth Apocalyptic beast with clear allusions to Rome.

²¹ See, for instance, the discussion in Buist Fanning, *Revelation*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 369–80. Fanning's dispensational approach has him read Revelation 13 as a prophecy of a distant-future adversary, but his exegesis still acknowledges the connection between Revelation 13 and Nero, taking the Roman empire as foreshadowing of a later adversary.

to the legend of Nero's impending return, thanks especially to the enigmatic 666 (or 616 in some manuscripts) in 13:18.²² The beast's impressively irresistible war-making power (13:4, 10) and its control over the entire known world (13:7–8) also allude to Roman power, as the Roman empire was expanding into the frontiers of the known world with an army whose capability was unprecedented at the time.²³ As Siew points out, the mold of the Danielic beast sets a precedent for referring to a kingdom and the king that rules it.²⁴ Thus, Revelation's sea-beast is affiliated with Nero or a Nero-like emperor, while also depicting Roman power more generally.

The beast from the land points to the pervasiveness of Roman civil religion. Because it uses the beast's authority to make the inhabitants of the earth worship the beast (13:12), it has been taken as a cipher for various components of the imperial cult system. One commonly identified referent is the imperial cult's high priesthood.²⁵ A broader approach naming the land-beast as a polemic against any type of civil religion may be consistent with the theological upshot of Revelation's message.²⁶ Friesen points out that the former of these options is too narrow, as there is more at work in the imperial cult than its priesthood, while the latter is too broad, because Revelation 13 definitely is referring to the specific realities of Roman imperial

²² Charles, *Revelation*, 1:350. See also Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 384–452; Hans-Josef Klauck, "Do They Never Come Back? Nero Redivivus and the Apocalypse of Joh," *CBQ* 63 (2001): 693–98; Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 176–86. On references to Nero in Sib. Or. 4 and 5, demonstrating that Nero is a natural target of Apocalyptic critique, see Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 177–82; Harald Ulland, *Die Vision Als Radikalisierung Der Wirklichkeit in Der Apokalypse Des Johannes*, Texte Und Arbeiten Zum Neutestamentlichen Zeitalter 21 (Tübingen: Francke, 1997), 246–50.

²³ Koester, *Revelation*, 579–87. Koester's account shows remarkable continuity with the view from 94 years before in Charles, *Revelation*, 1:349–51.

²⁴ Siew, *War Between Beasts and Witnesses*, 250–52. The four beasts are explicitly identified as kings in Daniel 7:17, but the fourth beast is also a kingdom in 7:23.

²⁵ Charles, *Revelation*, 1:333; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 755–57.

²⁶ See for instance an "all-of-the-above" approach in M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 156–57. See also the theological appropriation in Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness Following the Lamb into New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 123–26.

presence.²⁷ Friesen considers it most persuasive to identify the land-beast as the wealthy elite families for whom empire-devotion was a necessary part of participation in society at the elite level.²⁸ While I find Friesen's interpretation of the land-beast helpful, I do not believe it is necessary to identify which specific piece of the imperial cult operates in Revelation's context. It is adequately specific for my purposes to read the worship encouraged by the land-beast (13:12, 15) to be civic devotion to Rome in whatever form it may have taken.

Because the conclusion of the dragon's tale occurs in chapter 20, the tensions of his activities are not resolved until that point. Many interpreters rightly find the close of this section of the book somewhere in chapter 14 or 15,²⁹ but references to the dragon and beasts continue throughout the scenes preceding the final defeat narratives. The dragon and beasts are involved in one of the eschatological plagues (16:13) and the woman Babylon at the center of 17:1–19:10 sits upon a beast remarkably similar to the sea beast (17:3, cf. 13:1). These references indicate that the activities of the dragon and beasts remain unaddressed, lingering in the background. This loose thread begins to be addressed when Christ triumphantly returns to defeat his enemies (19:11–21), including the beast and the false prophet (19:20). And in 20:2, the dragon enters the stage again, introduced with a string of titles that nearly repeats 12:9 verbatim.

Depicting a final defeat for the monsters that Revelation associates with Roman rule cements the book's case for endurance characterized by a break from Roman imperial power. As Schüssler-Fiorenza shows, John views himself as a prophet with a message for a suffering

²⁷ See chapter 1 for additional discussion. A survey of previous scholarship, with Friesen's own interventions, is in Friesen, "The Beast from the Land: Revelation 13:11–18 and Social Setting," 49–64.

²⁸ Friesen, "Beast from the Land," 61–63.

²⁹ The close of the segment can be the depiction of the 144,000 (14:5), the end of the three woes (14:13), or the hymn preceding the seven bowls (15:1–4). See, e.g., Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 175; Koester, *Revelation*, 112; Beale, *Revelation*, 114; for additional examples, see the discussion in Beale, *Revelation*, 108–51.

community with the task of making meaning out of their current suffering.³⁰ The narrative of Christ's victorious, enemy-defeating return (19:11–20:15) portrays a resolution of the tensions experienced by the suffering community with a reversal of fortunes for those who suffer. In the so-called millennium passage, the resurrection and enthronement of the beheaded (20:4–6) accompanies the defeat of the dragon and beasts (20:7–10). The scene portrays the demand of abstinent endurance from chapters 12–14 as a worthwhile endeavor. At the same time, the defeat of the empire-representing beasts suggests that the advantages of affiliation with Rome will ultimately be nullified.

The narrative tension of the dragon and beasts in Revelation 12–20 has been identified as a reflection of the real-life tension experienced by John and his community. Numerous references to the slaughter of the saints (2:10, 6:9–11, 12:11, 13:9–10, 17:6, 20:4) have led to the supposition that disassociation from normative Roman practices led to persecution of the community.³¹ As Schüssler-Fiorenza understands Revelation's rhetorical situation, John's community experienced harassment and persecution as a result of their non-participation in the imperial cult.³² John's placement on Patmos "because of the word of God and the witness of Jesus" (1:9) might be associated with that harassment and persecution, as some have surmised that John was exiled there.³³ A critical piece of evidence for this construction of Revelation's circumstances is a letter from Pliny the Younger to emperor Trajan from the early second century. In it, Pliny reports that he interrogates suspected Christians about their religion. If they

³⁰ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 46–51. Key passages on this point are 6:9–11, 11:7, and 13:7.

³¹ See Boring, *Revelation*, 13–21; A nuanced can be found in Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgment in the Book of Revelation*, LNTS 586 (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 39–64. Middleton tries to honor both the absence of evidence for broad state-sponsored persecution in the late first century and also the presence of concern about persecution in Revelation and the rest of the NT.

³² Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 192–96.

³³ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, 21–22.

persistently answer that they are Christians, they face execution.³⁴ While this letter comes from the early second century, it shows evidence of brutality against Christians in the interest of the Roman state. For Eugene Boring, this letter is evidence that Christians in John's community anticipated a program of systematic Roman-sponsored persecution.³⁵

A paucity of explicit evidence for widespread persecution in John's context and community leads some scholars to contend that John's sense of crisis is a projection.³⁶ Despite the many references to the death of saints, Antipas is Revelation's single named martyr (2:13)—though other unnamed martyrs may have been known to the community.³⁷ The well-known hypothesis of Adela Yarbro Collins is that John responds to a "perceived" crisis. John's presentation of his readers' situation, she points out, does not necessarily directly reflect the realities of the situation, but rather John's frustration-borne belief that current problems will only escalate.³⁸ Leonard Thompson argues that John's sense of crisis is a direct result of his sectarian withdrawal from mainstream society. Instead of responding to systemic malice from the empire, Revelation's worldview places John and his readers in a cognitive minority, a stance that, by its nature, is inclined to find points of conflict with the mainstream.³⁹ In a similar vein, some interpreters use the conflict between John and rival teachers, most notably the rival prophet codenamed "Jezebel" (2:20–23), to contend that the sense of crisis to which John responds is

³⁴ Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.96–97. It is cited in Boring, *Revelation*, 13–15 and Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 192–93.

³⁵ Boring, *Revelation*, 13–17.

³⁶ For a useful summary of different options for understanding Revelation's crisis, see Duff, *Who Rides the Beast*, 3–14.

³⁷ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, 24–25.

³⁸ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 84–110. She acknowledges that John and his community might be frustrated by several existing and overlapping problems including conflict over wealth, problems with neighboring Jewish or gentile groups, or experiences of trauma like the destruction of the Jerusalem temple of Nero's persecution of Roman Christians.

³⁹ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, 171–97.

principally an intra-Christian conflict.⁴⁰ Paul Duff argues that Jezebel represents a group of moderate Christians whose stance toward Roman civic religion, particularly the eating of sacrificial meat (εἰδωλόθυτα in 2:20),⁴¹ is more permissive. The connection between the beasts, Babylon, and Jezebel suggests for Duff that the polemic against the beast is not about impending Roman-sponsored persecution, but against another Christian faction with a more permissive stance toward the state.⁴² These approaches to Revelation's crisis place a spotlight not only on the imperial power John contests, but the power that John seeks within the Christian community.⁴³

My interpretation of Revelation's dragon and beast imagery below will presuppose, along with interpreters like Duff, Thompson, and Yarbro Collins, that Revelation's crisis is a rhetorical projection.⁴⁴ While the "barbaric" brutality of widespread persecution would certainly support my view that Revelation presents its beasts as violent without restraint (see the "warlike disposition" subsection below), I do not pin my argument on the claim that John's community has experienced a widespread threat of persecution.⁴⁵ With Thompson, I read from the point of view that there was no intensification of state-sponsored persecution to prompt John's exile to

⁴⁰ Robert Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 29–37.

⁴¹ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast*, 51–60.

⁴² Duff, *Who Rides the Beast*, 113–25.

⁴³ DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 66–69.

⁴⁴ I find that the language of "perceived crisis" offered by Yarbro Collins may inadvertently suggest that John's sense of crisis is somehow fictitious or imaginary. The very real threat to a sense of community safety represented solely by the death of Antipas, Revelation's one named martyr (2:13), can be more than mere perception, even if it is an isolated incident. Even so, I proceed as though such minimalist interpretations of the crisis language is correct.

⁴⁵ John's community is presumably aware of the death of Antipas (2:13), whose death has significant symbolic resonance. His death implies that deadly persecution is a reality for Revelation's community of readers, and may—though does not necessarily—imply familiarity with other deaths (Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, 23–25).

Patmos or his writing of Revelation. My primary reason for presupposing this standpoint is not that it necessarily has the upper hand in its appraisal of the historical situation of John and his communities. I take this approach because it minimizes the severity of conflict between the Roman state and John's communities. If I can show that John's images make the empire look barbaric without presupposing that his communities know increasing numbers of people facing state-sponsored sanctions or violence, then *a fortiori*, my case only becomes stronger if, for instance, one interprets the threat of violence in 13:9–10 as a reality already experienced by Revelation's readers. If my argument works while presupposing Thompson's framework, it can work with any framework. Moreover, the diversity of messages to the churches suggests that not all of them experienced crisis to the same extent or in the same way. Smyrna (2:8–11), for instance, is counseled to hold fast despite impending death. By contrast, some of the instructions for the church of Sardis (3:2–4) and Laodicea (3:15–17) aim to push them out of complacency.⁴⁶ So even if some readers of Revelation experienced a sharper crisis of persecution, others may have heard the messages from a different standpoint.

Moreover, placing the narrative arc of a war against the dragon and beasts in the framework of a rhetorical crisis allows some questions about Revelation's *Sitz im Leben* to be sidestepped. For my purposes, it will not be necessary to specify the target of Revelation's polemic any more precisely than this linkage between Revelation's beasts and Roman imperial power. By this I mean that I do not intend to stake a claim in debates related to the dating of

⁴⁶ While prefacing an exposition of the contrast between Smyrna (ostensibly-poor-but-really rich) and Laodicea (ostensibly-rich-but-really-poor), Royalty (*Streets of Heaven*, 151–59) observes that the contrasts in the letters are likely a rhetorical construction in that the differences between congregations might actually reflect the diversity within a congregation.

Revelation.⁴⁷ Nothing argued below should depend, for instance, on whether Nero, Domitian, or any specific emperor is the one currently living king in 17:10.⁴⁸ Nor will the historical circumstances behind Revelation's crisis make a significant difference. Finally, a substantial amount of Revelation scholarship also engages the question of specific offenses for which Revelation criticizes Roman power, such as systemic economic inequality or the slave trade.⁴⁹ While I will show how Revelation implies that Roman imperial power contradicts the values that Roman propaganda suggests it should uphold, my argument does not rely on any specific injustices associated with Roman rule. Instead, in line with Richard Bauckham, I presume John's issue with Roman imperial power is the divine pretensions of imperial power itself.⁵⁰

What is necessary for my purposes is that the beasts in Revelation be understood as a criticism of the Roman empire, the strength of its leaders and military, and the system of civil religion by which people expressed loyalty to the empire. And the struggle with this Roman imperial system is one of the central struggles in the book of Revelation, as it is an expression of the war waged by the dragon, Revelation's chief antagonist. As the above paragraphs suggest, along with the overwhelming majority of Revelation scholarship, Revelation's beast imagery is an anti-Roman polemic. The fundamental argument of this chapter—indeed, of the dissertation as a whole—is that Revelation's earliest readers would have seen references to the barbarian

⁴⁷ On the main hypotheses regarding the date of Revelation, see Koester, *Revelation*, 71–80. Interpreters generally tie Revelation either to Nero's reign or Domitian's. With Koester, I believe that a general date of 80–100 is adequate.

⁴⁸ The numbers of kings in 17:10–12 has invited extensive debate; see Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 58–64. That 68 CE was infamously the “year of four emperors” hardly helps. Ulland (*Vision als Radikalisierung*, 318–20) recommends interpreting 17:10–12 so that the audience is able to allegorize its list of kings from wherever they are with respect to imperial history because, given Rome's ostensible endurance, there will always be another ruler yet to come.

⁴⁹ See for instance J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 132 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Craig R. Koester, “Roman Slave Trade and the Critique of Babylon in Revelation 18,” *CBQ* 70 (2008): 766–86.

⁵⁰ Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 37–38.

notion in the beast imagery. Thus, they would have seen in Revelation's polemic the claim that the Roman empire itself, despite Roman rhetoric to the contrary, is barbaric.

The Barbarism of the Beasts

In what follows, I show the visual marks of "barbarians" that emerge in Revelation's descriptions of the beasts. Because the story of the beasts, and their dragon master, begins and ends with defeat, this account of the beasts' barbarism does the same. Like the dragon's narrative arc in chapters 12–20 of Revelation, this segment of the chapter will begin and end with a discussion of defeat.

(1) Defeat

Chapter 12 of Revelation places the dragon's defeat at its very center. The chapter begins and ends by showing the dragon's unsuccessful pursuit of the sun-clothed woman and her child (12:1–6, 13–17). In between the scenes of this episode, a war emerges in heaven (12:7) in which the dragon is immediately thrown down (12:9) and a heavenly hymn exults in the dragon's fall (12:10–12). This heavenly war against the dragon is an intercalation wedged within the vignette about the struggle between the dragon and the woman.⁵¹ The intercalation interrupts the story of the woman's flight to highlight the heavenly consequences that the dragon faces for his actions. As Brian Blount observes, this heavenly war is the middle of three appearances of πόλεμος language in chapters 11–13. In the first, the beast from the abyss kills the two witnesses (11:7); and in the last, the beast from the sea wages war against the saints (13:7).⁵² But in this middle

⁵¹ Siew (*War Between Beasts and Witnesses*, 124–28) argues for viewing 12:7–12 as the centerpiece of a chiasm in this chapter.

⁵² Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 233–34.

war, also in the middle of the story of the sun-clothed woman's flight, the beasts are not the successful aggressors. Instead, Michael and his angels quickly defeat the dragon.

Details in this scene imply that the heavenly "war" is a relatively simple matter. Aside from the fact that fighting does indeed happen, John simply notes that the dragon "was not able" (οὐκ ἴσχυεν) and that he and his angels had no place in heaven (12:8).⁵³ From there, the dragon is thrown down. In keeping with longstanding biblical and Jewish traditions depicting angelic armies, sometimes led by Michael the archangel, heavenly proxies wage this war.⁵⁴ Their appearance implies that God does not need to act directly; God's servants will be enough to dispatch the dragon and his aides.⁵⁵ The triple use of ἐβλήθη ("was thrown down") in 12:9 is likely a divine passive that makes God ultimately responsible for the dragon's defeat. But divine proxies—Michael and his angels (12:7) and the witnessing saints (12:10–11)—carry it out.⁵⁶ Casting down the dragon quickly and easily implies that it was hardly an equal battle. The ease with which the dragon is cast down resembles the confident control that victors maintain when they are portrayed in the Hellenistic and Roman victory art discussed in the previous chapters. While the Great Altar of Pergamon includes depictions of Zeus and Athena engaging the giants directly, Revelation shows the book's primary antagonist suffer an initial defeat without the involvement of the primary deity.

With the introduction to the dragon having placed its defeat front and center, the dragon's activities are cast as reactions to its defeat. The dragon's initial pursuit of the sun-clothed woman

⁵³ Beale (*Revelation*, 654–55) notes that the wording of no place being found echoes a description of the allegorical defeat of kingdoms in Daniel 2:35 Theod.

⁵⁴ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 629–95.

⁵⁵ Siew (*War Between the Beasts and Witnesses*, 164–67) suggests that Michael and the dragon fight each other because they are each angels, and not at the level of divinity like God and Christ.

⁵⁶ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 695; Blount, *Revelation*, 233.

and her child (12:1–6) can be taken as a response to the child being a threat. The child is “about to shepherd all the peoples with a rod of iron,” (12:5) an allusion to Psalm 2:9 that recurs when Jesus returns to defeat the beasts and dragons near the end of the Apocalypse (19:15). After the vignette of the dragon’s heavenly defeat, it pursues the sun-clothed woman because it saw (εἶδεν) that it had been thrown down (12:13). And it makes war against her remaining descendants out of frustration that the woman stays protected (12:17). As the heavenly voice notes when the dragon falls (12:12), it exercises its great anger (θυμὸν μέγαν) “knowing that it has only a little time.”

The dragon’s frustration over its defeat thus becomes the context for the beasts’ emergence in chapter 13. The beasts are able to exert power over the whole world (13:7–8) in the form of military strength (13:3–4), attracting worship (13:12–15), and organizing the economy (13:16–17). The power of the beasts creates a situation where the saints must be characterized by a kind of abstinent endurance (13:10, 14:4). But as the narrative of the dragon’s defeat implies, the ostensibly awesome power of the beasts is ultimately temporary, a frustrated response to a failed strategy (12:12, 17). Even as the description of the beasts moves on to show how frightening they may be, the call to endure their wrath (13:10) is predicated upon the notion that their expression of power is temporary. Revelation 19–20, depicting an end to the dragon and beasts, provides the main narrative argument that the beasts are only temporary. A preview of this narrative argument accompanies the depiction of the dragon’s initial defeat so that the entirety of the dragon and beasts’ activities are marked as temporary and fleeting problems to be endured.

Because the beasts’ part of the story is bookended with the dragon’s defeat, the narrative can go on to depict the beasts as threatening and nonetheless keep defeat, the cardinal attribute of

barbarians in Hellenistic and Roman art, in view. The awesome power of the beasts, particularly the warrior prowess of the beast from the land (13:3–4, 7–8), is a far cry from, say, the captive bodies on *Capta* coinage. But even though John depicts the beasts as threatening, he also wants to show his readers that they are on the side of the victors in opposing the beasts. This tension is not foreign to visual representations of barbarians. The Great Altar of Pergamon, for instance, must show how the Titans are both powerful and defeated by the Olympian gods. As Whitaker points out in her analysis of Revelation’s ekphrastic rhetoric, John’s word pictures can do things that plastic imagery cannot.⁵⁷ In this instance, the narrative structure of Revelation allows the power of the beasts to be expressed in full in chapter 13 while presenting their ultimate defeat elsewhere, while the Great Altar expresses strength and defeat in the same visual frame. The image of defeat that starts the dragon-beast arc in Revelation provides context that allows the beasts to rage powerfully later on without also dismissing confidence in the finitude of their power.

(2) *Cosmic significance*

In addition to contextualizing the beasts’ emergence as a response to defeat, the narrative of the dragon’s defeat and the beasts’ emergence links them to ancient cosmogonic struggles, a second similarity between the depiction of the beasts and depictions of barbarians. As discussed in chapter 3, Attalid depictions of barbarians recall Hesiodic myths about the origins of the divine order as understood by Greek cultures. The clearest analogue to the combat myth in visual representations of barbarians is the Gigantomachy relief in the Great Altar of Pergamon. Brigitte Kahl has observed in passing that the Gigantomachy reliefs engage ancient combat myths in a

⁵⁷ Whitaker, *Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion*, 219–22.

manner similar to Revelation 12–13.⁵⁸ The Pergamene Gigantomachy is hardly alone in making this connection. The Athenian Akropolis produced by the Attalid school of artists depicts more recent battles against “barbarians” alongside ancient mythical, protological battles against giants to draw comparisons between the historical and ancient battles.⁵⁹ Roman depictions of battles with barbarians similarly engage the mythical sphere. While the Roman artwork discussed in the previous chapter does not engage combat myths with cosmogonic significance, imagery does suggest that the vanquishing of barbarians is in service of broader cosmic harmony. Both Greek and Roman depictions of victory against barbarians link that victory to struggles for cosmic prosperity. In the polarity of “civilization” against “barbarism,” chaos itself was the furthest extreme away from civility, the epitome of wildness at its apex. The association of barbarians with ancient chaos monsters combines many of the negative notions surrounding barbarians: that they are primitive, animalistic, disorganized—in a word, chaotic.⁶⁰ As resurgences of a protological menace, Revelation’s dragon and beasts are similar.

Fitting Revelation’s pattern of linking eschatology to protology, the presentation of the dragon and the beasts links them to ancient antagonistic creatures. The most explicit such linkage occurs in 12:9, characterizing the dragon as the snake of old (ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος).⁶¹ On its own, the adjective ἀρχαῖος gives the dragon a protological connection. But the usage of an article implies that the dragon is an ancient snake with which Revelation’s readers would be familiar.

⁵⁸ Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished*, 121–22.

⁵⁹ Stewart, *Attalos, Athens, and the Akropolis: The Pergamene “Little Barbarians” and Their Roman and Renaissance Legacy*, 224–25.

⁶⁰ Yves Albert Dauge, *Le Barbare: Recherches Sur La Conception Romaine de La Barbarie et de La Civilisation*, Collection Latomus 176 (Brussels: Revue d’études Latines, 1981), 436–40.

⁶¹ The descriptor of the dragon as a beast of old matches other Jewish descriptions of Satan. See Beale, *Revelation*, 655–56; Koester, *Revelation*, 549–50.

Interpreters are unanimous that this ancient ὄφις is the same as the ὄφις in Eden in Genesis 3.⁶² While Genesis itself does not identify the Edenic snake with devil and Satan, Revelation makes that identification in continuity with other Jewish literature.⁶³ The Edenic snake is known for its deception of Eve (Genesis 3:13 LXX); likewise, the dragon and the dragon's co-agents are described in Revelation as deceivers.⁶⁴ The hymn in 12:10 calls the throwing down of the dragon a victory against the accuser, a role that the devil takes in Jewish scriptural tradition.⁶⁵ These descriptors remind the audience that the foe in Revelation is indeed the ancient foe whose enmity goes back to Eden.

The depiction of the beasts in chapter 13 also links to the founding of the cosmos. Sea and land, the origin places of the beasts (13:1, 11), are domains from the creation narrative in Genesis 1. Sea and land are respectively also the domains of the Leviathan and the Behemoth from Jewish tradition. Herman Gunkel made the association between Revelation's beasts and the Leviathan and Behemoth as described in Job 40–41.⁶⁶ That connection maintains widespread support among interpreters of Revelation.⁶⁷ Revelation's description of the beast has verbal parallels with the descriptions of the Leviathan and Behemoth as described in Job 40–41 LXX. The Leviathan and Behemoth tradition here is likely filtered through the same lenses as other Jewish Apocalyptic usages of the tradition. Across these texts, the Leviathan and the Behemoth

⁶² Beale, *Revelation*, 655–56; Blount, *Revelation*, 234–35; Koester, *Revelation*, 549.

⁶³ 1 En 69:6–8, Wis 2:24, 3 Bar 9:7, Apoc. Ab. 23:1–11.

⁶⁴ Cf. 12:9, 2:20, 13:14. While the verb ἀπατάω rather than πλανάω is used, the LXX of Gen 3:13 has Eve say that the snake deceived her.

⁶⁵ The devil functions as an accuser in Zech 3:1–2 and Job 1:9–11.

⁶⁶ Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12.*, 201–5.

⁶⁷ Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 164; Koester, *Revelation*, 579–80; Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 187; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 210–11. For a contrasting opinion, see Keith Dyer, “Beastly Hybridity: Leviathan, Behemoth, and Revelation 13,” *St Mark's Review* 239.1 (2017): 93–104.

are connected to creation.⁶⁸ As in Job 40–41, Jewish Apocalyptic deployment of the Leviathan and Behemoth uses the depiction of their creation and their destruction to display God’s power over creation.⁶⁹ When Revelation’s beasts emerge from the creational domains of land and sea, echoing this tradition, they too call back to the foundation of the cosmos. But as agents of conflict with God, the beasts represent a tradition of primordial events quite different from the one represented by Genesis 1.

Many interpreters of Revelation acknowledge that the conflict with the dragon and beasts in Revelation 12–13 relates to traditions of ancient cosmic conflicts. Hermann Gunkel argued that Revelation 12 has a Babylonian origin. He identifies the conflict with the dragon as a retelling of the conflict between Marduk and Tiamat, taking the dragon as Tiamat and the Messiah-child as a Marduk.⁷⁰ The connection between the dragon-conflict and other origin stories like the *Enuma Elish* has been drawn out in more detail by Adela Yarbro Collins. As her work shows, the dragon’s expulsion from heaven fits a template found in ancient combat myths of ancient near eastern, Egyptian, and Greek myths. Several elements from mythological templates recur in Revelation 12: an attack from a dragon, a defeat and recovery for a champion, restoration of order, and a female ally to a champion or hero figure.⁷¹ As Gunkel had shown by linking Revelation 12 to the *Enuma Elish*, Yarbro Collins links Revelation’s dragon to the chaos monster in a variety of ancient traditions, showing that the depiction of the dragon comes from a

⁶⁸ See 1 En. 60:7–9, 24–25, 4 Ezra 6:47–52, 2 Bar. 29:4. In 2 Bar. and 4 Ezra, the creatures are described as products of the fifth day of creation; the description in 1 Enoch refers to Eden and the domains of the cosmos.

⁶⁹ Job 40:32 LXX refers to God’s war against the Behemoth; 1 En 60:24 and 2 Bar 29:4 have God crush the creatures to become food for God’s people.

⁷⁰ Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 239–46.

⁷¹ Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 59–61. The “removal” of the Christ-child in 12:5–6 takes the place of the champion’s defeat.

similar template as chaos monster traditions.⁷² Perhaps most crucial for linking Revelation 12 to depictions of barbarians is the heavenly battle motif that Yarbrow Collins observes in 12:7–9 and several traditions, including Greek tradition. Ge and Typhon, like Tiamat, are the deities cast down in heavenly conflict.⁷³ And the conflict between the Olympian gods and Ge/Gaia is the subject of the friezes that adorn the outside of the Great Altar of Pergamon. Protological, heavenly conflict, then, not only links Revelation 12 to a variety of myths; it also links Revelation 12 to representations of the otherness of barbarians.

(3) Spatial positioning

A third visual marker of barbarians in Greek and Roman visual art relates to spatial organization. As discussed in the previous chapters, the Roman cameos known as the *Gemma Augustea* and the *Gran Camée de France* famously depict Romans and barbarians through spatially divided images. In both images, barbarians occupy the lowest register. The sharp and rigid delineation between upper and lower registers in these specific depictions of barbarians is unique to these gems. But defining barbarians as occupants of a lower space is not. Whether staying limited to the “low” and “outside” register of the Pergamene Gigantomachy or being compressed into mourning poses in a variety of Roman images, such as *Capta* coinage and the reliefs at Aphrodisias, barbarians are often small, below, or outside. The dragon is big (12:3), and though there is no comment on the size of the beasts, they are often imagined as large creatures.⁷⁴ In this way, the dragon and beasts are more like the giants on the Pergamene

⁷² Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 76–79.

⁷³ Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 80.

⁷⁴ Heather Macumber, *Recovering the Monstrous in Revelation, Horror and Scripture* (Lanham, MD: Lexington/ Fortress Academic, 2021), 126–27.

Gigantomachy than the bound captives on *Capta* coins. But it does consistently associate them with what is beneath, even though the dragon starts his part of the narrative as a great sign in heaven (12:3).

Like the cameos with the two- or three-tier arrangement of figures, Revelation's symbolic universe possesses three spatial tiers.⁷⁵ The search for someone worthy to take the scroll covers three layers: heaven, the earth, and under the earth (5:3), cleanly lining up with the three layers on the *Gran Camée de France*. John sees God's throne behind a door in heaven (4:1), placing God and God's throne in the upper tier. Likewise, the dragon and beasts opposed to God are associated with the lower levels of Revelation's universe. God receives worship from all three domains in 5:13, implying that no tier is outside the created order of God's rule.⁷⁶ But from the ἄβυσσος, lining up with the OT's water basin associated with death and chaos, demonic activity emerges.⁷⁷ It is the place where the beasts go to face their destruction.⁷⁸ Just as the barbarians in the *Gran Camée de France* are relegated to the lowest of three tiers, Revelation's dragon and beasts are associated with the lower tiers of Revelation's symbolic universe.

The initial conflict with the dragon reveals an implicit hierarchy between upper and lower spaces. Because the dragon cannot stay in the upper places, he is more fit for the lower ones. When the conflict breaks out in 12:7, the dragon is thrown (ἐβλήθη in 12:9) because “no place was found for the dragon” (12:8); the defeat of the dragon is described in decidedly spatial terms.

⁷⁵ In 5:13, the lamb receives worship from creation in four domains: heaven, earth, under the earth, and the sea. “Earth” and “sea” can be considered parts of the middle tier comprising the created world. The dragon descends from heaven to both earth and sea (12:12), and the two beasts come out of the sea and land respectively.

⁷⁶ Koester, *Revelation*, 375, 381.

⁷⁷ On the usage of ἄβυσσος in the LXX and its relevance for Revelation, see Edward Gudeman, *The Abyss in Revelation: A View from Below*, Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 28 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2021), 16–22.

⁷⁸ See 9:1–2, 11; 11:7. The abyss is associated with the final destruction of the beasts in 17:8 and 20:1, 3.

As noted above, the dragon's expulsion from heaven is a swift defeat that does not even require God's direct involvement. The recognition that there was no place in heaven for the dragon suggests not only that its defeat is swift, but that it should not have occupied space in heaven in the first place. The dragon is an interloper whose very presence in heaven is a violation of boundaries.⁷⁹ His pursuit of the woman and Messiah-child (12:1–6) are such serious offenses, some interpreters note, that the dragon must be sent down.⁸⁰ The lower domains of the earth and the sea, however, must beware the dragon having come down (12:12). Even though the dragon's time is short, it is still able to exercise power over the earth and sea, eliciting a “woe” for those who dwell there. The dragon's time in the spatial “middle” of the earth and sea is ultimately limited, but it is not as tightly limited as its time in the upper heavenly tier.

Fitting the association between the dragon and lower spaces, the beasts are shown to be residents of a “below” space when the dragon conjures them. In Revelation 13, the dragon summons two beasts: the beast from the sea and the beast from the land. As the dragon calls them forward, they come up (ἀναβαίνω in 13:1, 11) from the sea and land respectively. The emergence of the beasts from the abyss (cf. 17:8) suggests that the abyss is the beast's natural home.⁸¹ A contrast between the intermediate space of land and sea and the upper space of heaven emerges when the beasts come up. While heaven has no place for the dragon once the war against him breaks out (12:8), the intermediate spaces of the land and sea allow for the beasts to emerge from below and wreak their chaos. The war (πόλεμος in 12:7) between the dragon and heavenly angels ends swiftly. But the land and sea, places in which the dragon continues his war

⁷⁹ Heather Macumber, “The Threat of Empire: Monstrous Hybridity in Revelation 13,” *Biblical Interpretation* 27 (2019): 118–19.

⁸⁰ Blount, *Revelation*, 234; Fanning, *Revelation*, 354–56.

⁸¹ Gudeman, *Abyss in Revelation*, 58–65.

(called a πόλεμος again in 12:17) sees no rapid expulsion occur. For a time, the beasts under the influence of the dragon exercise their power with significant success (see section 5 below).

Details of the dragon and beasts' activities also suggest a resentment of the spatially "upper" places and the people with the privilege of inhabiting them. The dragon resumes its pursuit of the woman precisely because it notices that it had been cast to the earth (12:13). When it summons the beast from the sea, the beast carries an antipathy not just to God and the saints (13:7–10), but to heaven itself. When the first beast speaks, it not only blasphemes God's name, but God's dwelling place (σκηνή) and the people who dwell (σκηνώω) in heaven (13:6). In keeping with the note of joy for those who dwell (σκηνώω) in heaven, paired with the warning for those below (12:12), the beast is only able to speak negatively about heaven; it can wage war with and conquer the saints on earth (13:7), but it must do so below heaven.

Reflecting the dragon and beasts' fit for a lower cosmic tier, the ultimate destinies of the dragon and beasts are a final "below." When the dragon is defeated, it continues a downward journey. Using the verb (βάλλω) that depicts the dragon's expulsion from heaven in 12:9, the dragon is cast into the abyss in 20:3 for the millennium. When the dragon and the beasts meet their final fates, they are permanently cast (βάλλω again) into the lake of fire (19:20, 20:14). Revelation does not use explicit "downward" language to describe the transition to the lake of fire or the abyss in these passages in the way that καταβαίνω describes the heaven-to-earth descent in 12:12. Nonetheless, these places do have strong enough associations with Jewish and Greco-Roman "underworld" places to be imagined as spatially downward.⁸²

⁸² Koester, *Revelation*, 761.

The movements among spatial tiers implies that the dragon and beasts are, like barbarians in some Roman conceptions, boundary-crossers.⁸³ The dragon falls from heaven to earth, and the beasts come up from a lower space to the realms of the land and the sea. These movements from one domain to another cement the implication made when no place in heaven is found for the dragon: that the dragon was an interloper all along. One of the key components of anti-barbarian rhetoric—particularly in descriptions of Celts and Gauls—is that they are “invaders.”⁸⁴ Because the dragon is a wrongful interloper in heaven, and because the beasts are invaders who “come up” to the land and sea, the dragon and beasts are aligned with the pattern of spatial invasion typically attributed to nomadic barbarians. And as the next subsection of this chapter shows, the bodily form of Revelation’s beasts also marks them as boundary-crossers.

(4) Embodied difference

Interpreters who use monster theory in the interpretation of Apocalyptic have noted that the construction of monsters is tied to the construction of boundaries. As Daniel Smith-Christopher shows in a discussion of monster theory’s relevance for studying Apocalyptic literature, Apocalyptic texts express concerns about fears of boundary-violation through descriptions of mixed, composite monsters such as the Danielic beast with a lion’s body and eagle’s wings (7:4).⁸⁵ These monsters by their very nature are liminal creatures. They defy known orders of classification, possessing bodies that resist systems built to distinguish among known creatures. Monsters therefore serve as metonymies for the transgression of many types boundaries with the fearsome bodies representing the people, places, or activities that should be

⁸³ Macumber, “Monstrous Hybridity,” 116–20; *eadem.*, *Recovering the Monstrous*, 109–110.

⁸⁴ Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 51–54.

⁸⁵ Frey, “Apocalyptic Dualism.”

feared or avoided.⁸⁶ Drawing on monster theory's linkage between monster bodies and boundary crossings, Smith-Christopher argues that monsters in Apocalypses reflect the anxiety of cultural mixing in a colonization situation. Analyzing the hybrid bodies of the beasts in Daniel 7, Smith-Christopher surmises that their mixed form accentuates the exhortation to avoid mixing with Babylonian culture that runs throughout Daniel.⁸⁷ The Danielic beasts' bodies reflect larger concerns about the cultures the beasts represent. The same can be said about Revelation's beasts—and some manifestations of embodied difference seen in visual representations of barbarians.

Heather Macumber's work brings this interpretive lens to the interpretation of Revelation. She argues that John's primary rhetorical project revolves around the production and management of boundaries.⁸⁸ John places that which is Roman on the other side of an uncrossable boundary by depicting either Roman imperial authority, or affiliation with Rome, in monstrous terms. The bodily form of the Roman-affiliated beasts is monstrous, making the beasts appear dangerous. By extension, the association with Rome that the beasts represent is also dangerous. And one of the keys to making these monsters appear dangerous is their fantastically hybrid appearance.⁸⁹ Like the spatial-domain crossings discussed in the previous section, the hybridity of the beasts marks them as boundary-crossers. The features of the beasts emphasized in the previous two sections—their resemblance to chaotic antagonists from combat

⁸⁶ For a fuller exposition, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3–25.

⁸⁷ Smith-Christopher, "Postcolonial Reading," 186–95. For a similar account of the Danielic beasts, see Heather Macumber, "A Monster without a Name: Creating the Beast Known as Antiochus IV in Daniel 7," *JHS* 15 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2015.v15.a9>.

⁸⁸ Macumber, "Monstrous Hybridity," 108–109.

⁸⁹ Macumber, *Recovering the Monstrous*, 124–33.

myths and their boundary-crossing uprisings—make them dangerous. Their hybridity further accentuates the danger they represent.

The beast from the sea can be considered a supra-hybrid, making the description of its very body a hyperbolic demonstration of the danger that goes with it. It is “like” (ὅμοιος) a leopard, with bear’s feet and a lion’s mouth, possessing the authority of the dragon (13:2). That the first beast comes from the sea makes it dangerous to begin with. But its leopard, bear, and lion features mean that the threat it represents is hardly confined to the sea.⁹⁰ The description of this beast is clearly an allusion to the succession of four beasts in Daniel 7:3–8, the first three of which look like a lion, bear, and leopard. Revelation’s beast from the sea channels many of the threatening features of the Danielic beasts. But it intensifies them in some respects as well. Like the convoluted image of the fourth beast with the “little horn” (Daniel 7:8–10), the many heads and horns of Revelation’s first beast are difficult to plastically conceive.⁹¹ The Danielic beasts have hybrid features, mixing avian wings with animal bodies as they emerge from the sea. But by combining features from the first three of the Danielic beasts, John’s description of the sea-beast implies that it exceeds its Danielic counterparts.⁹² That the Danielic beasts merge features from land, air, and sea creatures makes them impure by Levitical standards.⁹³ Indeed, accounts of monster theory have used Levitical concepts of impurity to illustrate how fear and monstrosity is wrapped up in the management of categories and boundaries.⁹⁴ By merging the already merged

⁹⁰ Macumber, “Monstrous Hybridity,” 121.

⁹¹ Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation*, 55–56.

⁹² Macumber, *Recovering the Monstrous*, 125–26; Blount, *Revelation*, 246. Beale (*Revelation*, 685) takes the merging of multiple Danielic beasts to imply that Revelation’s beast transcends the eras to which the Danielic beasts were limited.

⁹³ Macumber, “Monster without a Name,” 14. The logic of unclean animals in Leviticus 11 is hybridity; the creatures considered “unclean” are generally those whose features mix different parts of creational domains.

⁹⁴ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 31–35. Cf. the discussion of biblical sexual purity in Cohen, “Monster Culture,” 15–16.

Danielic beasts into a superbly merged creature, Revelation's sea-beast is especially invasive of categories. The sea-beast's ability to threaten categories is accentuated as it receives the awe and devotion due only to God and Christ.⁹⁵

For the beast from the land, hybridity is also an important component of what makes it so dangerous. Relatively little is said of the second beast's appearance, but one key detail remarks that it is a hybrid: it has horns like a lamb and talks like a dragon (13:11).⁹⁶ Although the hybridity of the land-beast is less overt than the sea-beast's plurality of animals, its explicit connection to both lamb and dragon makes it threaten one of Revelation's most important categorizations: the distinction between lamb and beast. Revelation's rhetoric depends on a dualistic bifurcation between entities associated with the lamb and with the dragon.⁹⁷ The threat of the land-beast is its insidiousness, represented in its devotion to the sea-beast and dragon-given authority that tricks people into thinking it is a rightful recipient of worship.⁹⁸ Its hybrid body supports the possibility of deception that it represents. Thus, the animalistic features of its body are part of what make it so threatening.

While the beasts co-opt some the worship and authority that ought to belong to the lamb, many divine and/or heavenly beings in Revelation have "beastly" attributes. The beasts summoned by the dragon are not the only figures in Revelation with hybrid or animalistic features. The throneroom theophany includes a tetrad of creatures "like" (ὅμοιος) either a human or various animals who are also covered with eyes (4:6–8). Several kinds of figures represent Jesus: the "Son of Man" (1:12–16), the lamb (5:5–7), and the rider (19:11–16). While not

⁹⁵ On these details, see subsection 6, "Opposition to the gods" below.

⁹⁶ Macumber, "Monstrous Hybridity," 123–24.

⁹⁷ Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse*, 135–36.

⁹⁸ Macumber, *Recovering the Monstrous*, 130–31.

necessarily hybrids, John does describe all three of these manifestations of Jesus in composite terms. The lamb is especially hybridized; it is somehow also the lion of Judah who has the appendages needed to take a scroll, and it is covered with eyes and has a heptad of horns (5:5–7). Macumber observes that the hybrid features of Christ, heavenly agents, and even God contain features often attributed to monsters.⁹⁹ Since there are hybrid creatures among the beings on both sides of John’s great divide between good and evil, hybridity and animality alone cannot be taken as a cipher for evil.¹⁰⁰ But these features are coextensive with two other attributes common to both the good and evil beings in Revelation: their capacity to cross boundaries and their capacity to threaten. God and Christ transcend time and spatial boundaries in Revelation.¹⁰¹ God and the lamb are also certainly wrathful.¹⁰² For both the good and evil creatures in Revelation, then, hybridity serves not as a cipher for evil, but as an intensifier of what the hybrid creature in question represents.

This usage of hybridity and animality is consistent with the appearance of hybrid and animal bodies in visual representations of barbarians. The large Attalid dying Gauls present them in an unkempt, animalistic fashion. These statues, as chapter 3 shows, are related to Attalid installations originally developed for the Parthenon where battles against Giants and Amazons are cast as the prequels to fights against Persians and Galatians. More pertinently, the Great Altar of Pergamon depicts the opponents of the Olympian gods as animal-human hybrids, bringing

⁹⁹ Macumber, *Recovering the Monstrous*, 45–100.

¹⁰⁰ In discussing the hybrid features of divine creatures in Revelation, Macumber (*Recovering the Monstrous*, 60–61) observes an interpretive double-standard. The sea-beast’s horns, for instance, might be taken to represent violence, while the lamb’s horns have the violence they represent diffused.

¹⁰¹ See, e.g., 1:4, 4:1, 5:13, 21:2–3.

¹⁰² See especially 8:6–9:21, 14:14–20; 15:7–16:21, 19:17–21, 20:7–15. For a survey of divine judgment scenes in the Apocalypse, see Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgment in the Book of Revelation*, 132–87.

forward a long tradition of presenting historic foreigners and enemies in animalistic terms. Just as the Athenian Centauromachy and the Pergamene Gigantomachy depict battles with historic “barbarians” as wars with fantastic and hybridized creatures, Daniel 7 presents historical conquering forces like Babylon, Persia, and Greece as vicious animals with land-animal and avian features. With the plurality of animals cited in the depiction of the Roman empire in 13:2, Revelation continues this tradition. As is the case with the frieze adorning the Great Altar of Pergamon, Revelation’s antagonists have hybrid features. And in the same way that Revelation’s beasts are opposed by the hybrid lamb, some of the Olympian gods on the Pergamene Altar have hybrid or animal features. Triton, depicted on the northern hall near the stairs is a human-fish-horse hybrid; Keto, a lion goddess, appears on the northern frieze.¹⁰³ The animality and hybridity of the combatants on the Great Altar’s friezes intensifies the battle that their presence represents. The same goes for the monstrous bodily appearance of the beasts in Revelation.

There is a clear resemblance between descriptions of Apocalyptic beasts and the pattern of representing historic enemies in animalistic terms in Hellenistic art. Roman art, by contrast, is not as clearly represented in this category. As shown in chapter 4, Roman representations of barbarians do include bodily representations of otherness. This often takes the form of presenting barbarians as “feminine,” clothing them in ethnically-marked attire, or presenting barbarians in physically diminished form. As discussed above, Roman artwork also features barbarians who are physically diminished in stature. These visual markers of barbarians seen in Roman depictions of barbarians—feminine gender-coding, ethnic coding, and diminutive stature—hardly apply to Revelation’s beasts.¹⁰⁴ Revelation does present Rome itself in feminine-coded terms, but

¹⁰³ Kunze, *The Pergamon Altar: Its Rediscovery, History, and Reconstruction*, 22–23.

¹⁰⁴ For an argument that the beasts are feminized, see Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 106. Frilingos’ argument is that the beasts are feminized because they lack self-mastery, taking their cues from the dragon. I would

that is primarily limited to the “Babylon” figure of 17:1–19:10.¹⁰⁵ However, as Iain Ferris shows, some Roman depictions of barbarians include the sense of uncultivated roughness present in the depiction of unkempt dying Gauls.¹⁰⁶ Such depictions coincide with a feature of barbarians that is more consistent in Roman representation: the depiction of barbarians’ warlike disposition.

(5) Warlike Disposition

As the previous chapters show, there is not an inherent contradiction between presenting barbarians as summarily defeated and showing their fighting prowess. The previous chapters’ strongest example of affirming combat strength and defeat simultaneously may be the Attalid dying Gauls. Alongside their death poses and unkempt bodies is the depiction of their warrior prowess marked in their musculature and their collections of fighting implements. Roman artwork is less likely to imbue barbarians with the sense of nobility that the dying Gauls possess, but they often contain imagery showing fighting implements. While Revelation’s narrative concludes with a clear defeat for the beasts (see subsection 7 below), the beasts’ warmongering proclivity and capability is hardly absent. Visual rhetoric and stereotypes about barbarians meet those twin demands. In visual representations of barbarians, those twin affirmations are barbarians’ fighting power and the assurance of their defeat. Often, both affirmations occur within the same images, highlighting the tension between the two claims and requiring both to be made with subtlety. Revelation’s narrative framework, by contrast, allows a robust rendition of

take this observation as evidence that the beasts do not meet Roman ideals, of which “masculine” mores like self-mastery were a part.

¹⁰⁵ On the presentation of Babylon as a reversal of a masculine-coded Rome, see Stephen D. Moore, “Raping Rome,” in *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation: Sex and Gender, Empire and Ecology*, Resources for Biblical Study (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 125–54.

¹⁰⁶ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome: Barbarians Through Roman Eyes*, 32–35.

both claims. The assurance of defeat is unambiguous in 19:17–20:10. Just as unambiguously, the fighting power of the beasts is affirmed in chapter 13, making that assurance of defeat a meaningful one.

The presentation of the land and sea beasts in Revelation 13 is an expression of their domineering power, showing that they have profound warmongering capabilities. They dominate the stage quickly and see little resistance. The sea beast is notably fearsome. It can survive a fatal wound (13:3) and when it emerges, imbued with power and authority from the dragon, the “whole earth” is so impressed that people say, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with it?” (13:4). This rhetorical question implies that the beast is uniquely fearsome and that defeat of the beast is ostensibly impossible. As the description of the beast’s activities continue, it is noted for waging war against the saints and conquering them (13:7). Given the weight that *νικάω* carries throughout the Apocalypse, the observation that the beasts “conquer” the saints is no small statement.¹⁰⁷ Finally, the warning that people may have to accept being slain by the sword (13:10) suggests that the beast is so violent that resistance is simply impossible. And while the beast from the land is less violent, it is no less potent. Much of the space devoted to the second beast’s description notes that it can deceive the dwellers of the earth (13:14), compel worship of the first beast (13:12), and exert economic control (13:16–17). This beast uses magnificent signs like conjuring fire from heaven (13:13) and making an image of the first beast speak (13:15). Even though none of this activity is violent, it maintains a global scope of impact much like the first beast (13:14, cf. 13:8).

¹⁰⁷ *TDNT*, 4:944–945. The verb is consistently used to refer to the victories of the saints (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7) and the lamb (5:5, 17:14), making it especially significant when a beast conquers the saints (13:7) or the two witnesses (11:7).

The warmongering power of the beasts is a representation of Rome's historical position as a dominant military force.¹⁰⁸ In fact, Koester refers to the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias in order to show how the description of the beast in 13:3–4 evokes Roman victories over barbarians.¹⁰⁹ But if the fighting capability and power of the beasts is a reason to connect them to Roman power, how can those same attributes make these beasts look barbaric? The previous chapters show one answer: the depiction of barbarian defeat does not contradict a presentation of their warlike disposition. Instead, that defeat recontextualizes their fighting prowess as the aggression of the defeated. Since the beasts are ultimately defeated (19:17–21, 20:7–10), their fighting prowess is cast in that light. In fact, the declaration that anyone subject to the sword must be killed by the sword (13:10), while referring to the aggression of the beast in its heyday, ultimately comes to refer to the routing of the beasts and their armies by the sword of the rider Jesus in 19:20–21.¹¹⁰

Another difference between a civilized, victorious army and a barbaric one lies in the perceived divergence of fighting styles. The association between the Roman empire and Revelation's barbaric beasts is hardly the only association between Romans and barbarians related to Roman military exploits. Greeks initially identified Romans as barbarians because of the Roman warlike disposition with its commitment to imperialism.¹¹¹ One factor that sometimes kept Romans outside of the "barbarian" category was the discipline shown in their controlled fighting formations.¹¹² In the Roman imagination, barbarians were always disposed to war, but

¹⁰⁸ Blount, *Revelation*, 249; Ford, *Revelation*, 221–22; Koester, *Revelation*, 572.

¹⁰⁹ Koester, *Revelation*, 582–84.

¹¹⁰ Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 85–86.

¹¹¹ John Marincola, "Romans and/as Barbarians," in *The Barbarians of Ancient Europe: Realities and Interactions*, ed. Larissa Bonfante (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 350–51.

¹¹² Hartog, "Barbarians: From the Ancient to the New World," 31. See Plutarch, *Pyrrh.*, 16.5

not necessarily toward waging war in a controlled manner. The opening paragraph of Caesar's *Gallic War* describes the Gallic tribes as continually at war.¹¹³ And in a discussion where Caesar deliberates helping the Aedui tribe against the rival Arveni, the latter are characterized as excessive, haphazard, and tyrannical.¹¹⁴ As Yves Dauge shows, wildness, ferocity, and an attraction to permanent war are among the major negative characteristics assigned to barbarians in the Roman imagination.¹¹⁵ And barbaric ferocity is hardly absent from visual depictions; the asymmetrical, naked bodies of dying Gauls are perhaps what attest to this most strongly. By contrast, clemency and restraint were values in the propagandistic presentation of the Roman military.¹¹⁶ Visual representations in the previous chapter attest to this quality, most notably the Boscoreale Cups, the Ara Pacis, and the incorporation of defeated groups at the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias.

Lacking the clemency celebrated in Roman artwork, the beast who conquers the saints (13:7–10) exercises its power with barbaric ferocity. The proverb in 13:9–10 creates the impression that the first beast's violence is haphazard, operating without clear and precise goals. Labeled a call for the endurance of the saints, 13:9–10 is primarily a message about the non-violent resistance of the saints who endure a calamity resembling what Judah faced as exile approached.¹¹⁷ It implies that any saint's destiny, perhaps ultimately under God's control, may be

¹¹³ Caesar, *Bell. gall.*, 1.1.

¹¹⁴ Caesar, *Bell. gall.*, 1.31.

¹¹⁵ Dauge, *Le Barbare*, 428–31.

¹¹⁶ Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire*, 87–91. In fact, in Caesar, *Bell. gall.*, 1.40, a speech before a battle against the Arveni has Caesar confident that the Arveni's leader would accept Roman goodwill as long as he understood what was offered

¹¹⁷ As Aune shows (*Revelation 6–16*, 730–31), the proclamation is a reformulation of Jer 15:2 LXX and 50:11 LXX (43:11 MT), which discuss the fate of the people facing exile.

subject to the violence of the beast.¹¹⁸ But as an implicit characterization of the beasts, the proverb implies that the beasts engage in violence whenever possible. It brings the beast closer to the leader of the Arveni, who asserts the right of conquerors to do as they please with the conquered, than the Julius Caesar who prided himself on offering generous diplomacy.¹¹⁹ While Romans in times of war prided themselves on their discipline, tactics, and organization, Revelation 13:9–10 grants the honor of disciplined endurance to the saints.

Depicting the fighting power of an enemy can serve two functions, neither of which contradict confidence in that enemy's defeat. The first is showing how impressive it is to defeat the enemy and gain victory. Presenting the power of an enemy makes the defeat of that enemy even more meaningful. The second is passing a kind of moral judgment against that foe. By depicting an enemy as an aggressor, interloper, or tyrant, one can show the moral rectitude of defeating that enemy. Both logics apply to barbarians and to Revelation's beasts. When the beasts wage war and conquer, the dwellers of the earth marvel, wondering who is like the beast—a question that parodies the type of marveling that should belong only to God.¹²⁰ Its violence is markedly fearsome. The depiction of the violence, in addition to marking the power of the beast, also shows something of its aggressiveness and ferocity. Far from the clemency that the Roman military displays (at least in propaganda), the land-beast is aggressive whenever possible.

¹¹⁸ Blount, *Revelation*, 253–54. The insertion of $\delta\epsilon\iota$ in some manuscripts implies that some in the scribal tradition though 13:10 read something like “If anyone must be killed by the sword,” with the divine implications that the $\delta\epsilon\iota$ usually carries.

¹¹⁹ Caesar, *Bell. gall.*, 1.36.

¹²⁰ Aune, *Revelation* 6–16. Something akin to “Who is like God?” is a rhetorical question asked in several OT poems (e.g., Exod 15:11, Ps 18:31, 35:10, 89:6). Interestingly, “Who is like God?” is also the origin of the Hebrew name of Michael, the archangel from the previous chapter.

(6) *Opposition to the Gods*

Hellenistic and Roman depictions of barbarians and their defeat place military victories in the context of divine blessings. In the Pergamene Altar reliefs, the gods are literally at war with the beasts who represent barbarian invaders. Reliefs at Aphrodisias stress the divine status of the emperors depicted in them, contextualizing images of conquest within a larger project of the divinely granted prosperity of Rome. The theological implications of the Sebasteion are hardly unique among Roman depictions of barbarians. The *Gran Camée de France*, for example, places the gods at the top register of the cameo, with the barbarians huddled on the bottom tier. Barbarians, such imagery suggests, are not merely enemies of Greeks or Romans. They are enemies of the gods—or at least, their defeat is a divine prerogative and a divine gift. The religious functions of installations like the Sebasteion, the Pergamene Altar, and the Ara Pacis associate expressions of piety with the defeat of barbarians.

One of the clearest attributes of the beasts in Revelation 13 is that they represent the inverse of piety. To make it especially clear that the beast's rage is primarily a theological polemic, John identifies the beast as a blatant blasphemer. A name of blasphemy is on the beast's head when it appears (13:1).¹²¹ Three times in 13:5–6 “blaspheme” occurs as a noun or verb; the repetition of the term in the short space stands out. Pieces of this description tightly echo the talking horn of the fourth Danielic beast. But despite the pretensions of the fourth beast (Daniel 7:25), the word βλασφημία and its cognates do not occur in the LXX of Daniel 7. Exceeding the arrogance (λαλοῦν μεγάλα in Daniel 7:8, 20) of the fourth Danielic beast, Revelation's beast from the sea speaks grandiosely and blasphemously (λαλοῦν μεγάλα καὶ βλασφημίας in 13:5).

¹²¹ The NA-28 reads ὀνόμα[τα] βλασφημίας, reflecting a split in the manuscript tradition about whether to pluralize the name(s) of blasphemy on the beast's heads. Quality manuscripts support both readings, but the singular ὄνομα has the advantage of being the *lectio difficilior*, as it would lightly mismatch a singular blasphemous name to a plurality of heads.

Moreover, Revelation's beast outpaces the offensiveness of Antiochus Epiphanes, the target of Daniel's critique who had merely interrupted worship of Israel's God, by becoming itself the object of worship (13:4, 8, 12, 14–15).¹²²

Intensifying the polarity between God and the beasts is that they only inflict terror on those allied with God and Christ. Even though the beast is primarily a cipher for Roman imperial power expressed through a powerful military, the depiction of its warmongering lists only people connected to God as targets. The whole earth wonders who could possibly resist the beast (13:4), but it fights and conquers only the saints (13:7). Those who worship the beast are the “dwellers of the earth” specifically identified as the ones who will not be among God's redeemed (13:8).¹²³ The proverb warning about the violence of the beast from the sea is identified as a call for the saints exclusively (13:10). Echoing the disaster awaiting the faithless in impending exile in Jeremiah 15:2LXX, the beast's war brings the sword against the faithful.¹²⁴ The beast's violence may be gratuitous and unrestrained (as discussed above), but it is only a threat to saints. John describes a violent beast who directs the full weight of its energy against those associated with God.

In its account of the enmity between God and Christ and the beasts, Revelation goes beyond the bifurcation between the gods and barbarians. While there is an opposition between barbarians and the gods in the depictions of barbarians seen in the previous chapters, Revelation's presentation of God's opponents is not a matter only of antagonism. In addition to opposing God and Christ, the dragon and beasts parallel God as well. Numerous details make

¹²² Koester, *Revelation*, 573.

¹²³ Among Revelation's “universalizing” phrases that refer to global segments of people, οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς is the most consistently negative in Revelation. See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 239–41.

¹²⁴ Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, 209–210.

them parodic mirror-images of Revelation's deities.¹²⁵ One of the critical features of antagonists in Revelation—primarily the dragon, but this includes other antagonists—is the capacity to deceive.¹²⁶ The similarity between God and Christ on the one hand and the dragon and beasts on the other is part of what makes that deception possible. Its indeterminacy is part of the threat.¹²⁷ Just as the above section on embodiment shows, then, the dragon and beasts have many things in common with divine and heavenly beings elsewhere in the book. Hybridity and animality are not all that they have in common; Revelation's dragon and beasts have their own versions of key features that confer power and authority to God and the lamb.

Details about the dragon—beyond the explicit identification as the devil and Satan (12:9)—mark him as a parodic opponent to God. When the dragon emerges, its ten horns, matching Daniel's fourth beast (Daniel 7:7, 20, 24), contest the authority of the seven-horned lamb (12:3, cf. 5:6).¹²⁸ Its power to cast down a third of the stars mirrors thirds of various parts of the cosmos getting wiped out in the trumpet judgments (8:7–13, 9:13–19). The references to the dragon's ἐξουσία also point to his pretention to mirror Revelation's God. Most instances of the term ἐξουσία in Revelation refer to authority delegated to some entity by God.¹²⁹ In the remaining occurrences of the word in Revelation, the dragon is delegating authority.¹³⁰ And just as God confers power and authority to the lamb (5:6–14)—an echo of the enthronement in

¹²⁵ DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 194–203; Lunceford, *Parody and Counterimaging*, 239–61.

¹²⁶ As Robyn Whitaker notes (*Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion*, 180–83), evil and deception go hand-in-hand throughout the Apocalypse. The dragon is described as a deceiver in 12:9, 20:3, and 20:8–10. Other antagonists deceive as well: Jezebel (2:20), Babylon (18:23), and the second beast (13:14, 19:20).

¹²⁷ Macumber, *Recovering the Monstrous*, 129–30.

¹²⁸ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 683–84; Blount, *Revelation*, 229–230.

¹²⁹ 2:26; 6:8; 9:3, 10, 19; 11:6; 14:18; 16:9; 18:1; 22:14. Additionally, 12:10 mentions the authority of Christ, though it seems not to be an example of delegated authority over something. And 20:6 notes the absence of death's authority over the saints.

¹³⁰ See 13: 2, 4–5, 7, 12; 17:12–13.

Daniel 7:9–14—the dragon confers power to the beasts. Not just an opponent of God, the dragon is also a mirror of God. And the beasts are mirrors of Christ.

Throughout chapter 13, many descriptors applied to the beasts parallel descriptions of Christ. When the sea beast rises (13:2) he receives authority and a throne from the dragon (13:2), paralleling the conferring of authority given to Christ in the throneroom theophany (chapter 5) and promised to the saints (3:21, 20:4–6).¹³¹ When the next verse mentions the beast’s mortal wound, the phrase *ὡς ἐσφαγμένην* parallels the way the lamb stands in 5:6.¹³² Later, the phrase *καὶ ἔζησεν* mentioning the beast’s wound-survival (13:14) is a descriptor also applied to Christ (2:9). Together, the phrases *ὡς ἐσφαγμένην* and *καὶ ἔζησεν* have the sea-beast parallel the death and resurrection of Jesus.¹³³ That the second beast has “horns like a lamb” (*ἄρνιον*) (13:11), means that it too is a challenger of Christ. Its expressions of power mimic Revelation’s deities. By calling fire from the sky to trick the inhabitants of the earth with spectacle (13:13), it puts on a show that recollects something only God is supposed to be able to do.¹³⁴

The global admiration given to the beast is especially problematic because it parodies the devotion given to God and Christ in chapters 4 and 5. To be worthy of worship is to be worthy of ultimate authority and value in Revelation’s symbolic universe.¹³⁵ As deSilva observes, the content of the hymns in chapters 4 and 5 signal God’s worthiness in maintaining the cosmos

¹³¹ In 3:21, a God-Christ-saint pattern of rule is established; just as Jesus assumes God’s throne, so are the saints to assume Christ’s throne. In assuming accolades of God and Christ, the beasts cut in on the saints as well. The saints sit on the throne in 20:4–6.

¹³² In 13:3, one of the beast’s heads is wounded “as if slain” (*ὡς ἐσφαγμένην*), just as Christ stands “as if slain” (*ὡς ἐσφαγμένον*) in 5:6. In 2:9, Jesus is the one who became dead and then lived (*καὶ ἔζησεν*); in 13:14, it says the beast has a sword wound and then lived (*καὶ ἔζησεν*).

¹³³ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 431–33.

¹³⁴ The calling of fire from the sky borrows wording from 2 Kings 1:10, 12, 14. It recurs in Revelation 20:9. For further comment, see section 7, “Defeat II,” below.

¹³⁵ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 197–201.

(4:11) and Christ's worthiness in saving a people for God (5:9). Mimicking such fundamental benefits offered by God and Christ, as the beast does, is a serious problem.¹³⁶ Up until chapter 13, the word προσκυνέω is used throughout Revelation to discuss worship of God or Christ.¹³⁷ Once the beast emerges, the verb προσκυνέω is frequently deployed to describe vast swaths of the earth worshipping the beast, making the battle between God and the beast a clash of worship practices.¹³⁸ The scope of worship given to the beast mimics the throneroom worship scene. God and Christ receive the worship of all creatures in all domains of heaven, earth, and below (5:13). The beast's worship is also wide-reaching: "all the earth" (13:2) and "the dwellers of the earth" (13:8, 14) worship the beast, and the recipients of the mark include "everyone: the small and great, the rich and poor, the free and enslaved" (13:16). Of particular note is that the beast claims authority over every "tribe and people and language and nation," (13:7) a reconfiguration of the fourfold description of the redeemed in 5:9 and 7:9.¹³⁹ Much like Roman installations that include representations of several foreign nations, Revelation's depiction of the beasts includes a reference to many people groups. But instead of presenting them as either enemies or beneficiaries of Roman imperial activity, these references to a plurality of nations reflect anxiety over the spread of the beasts' influence.

The parodic relationship between the beasts and the throneroom deities is a part of the enmity between gods and barbarians consistent with visual representations of barbarians, but it expresses anxieties foreign to those representations. John is concerned not only that the dragon

¹³⁶ DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 196–203.

¹³⁷ The verb points to God and Christ in 3:9; 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:1, 16; 14:7; 15:4; 19:4, 10; 20:4, 22:8–9. The one time when it does not is in 9:20, when the unrepentant choose not to stop worshipping demons or idols.

¹³⁸ The verb προσκυνέω refers to worship of the beast or its image in 13:2, 4, 8, 12, 14–15; 14:9, 11; 16:2; and 19:20.

¹³⁹ Usage of the fourfold formula throughout Revelation illustrates the movement of the world's nations from under the power of the beast to aligned with the lamb. See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 326–37.

and beasts have divinity-mimicking power, but that their power can trick people into providing false devotion.¹⁴⁰ The pattern of representing an opposition between barbarians and the divine is thus exhibited in Revelation's representation of the dragon and beasts. But John gives considerably more weight to the theological dimension of the Christ-beast opposition than the artwork in previous chapters gives to the pantheon-barbarian opposition. Because of the considerable concern about the threat of deceit via parodies of the divine, and the belief that such threat can be successful, these theological dimensions of the opposition are intensified.

(7) Defeat: Part II

Chapters 19–20 of Revelation see a conclusion to the drama, anxiety, and tension from the presentation of the beasts in chapters 12–13. The end of the dragon and beasts' narrative arc in Revelation comprises scenes of defeat and captivity between 19:17 and 20:10. The distance between this component and the initial depiction of the beasts in chapters 12–13 allows defeat to be separated from other attributes of barbarians. Visual artwork that depicts barbarians is somewhat hard-pressed to do this. It is of course possible for visual artwork to carry narrative progression; indeed, the Telephos frieze in Pergamon's Great Altar does exactly that. But while many of the visual depictions of barbarians use the very same images to show barbarians' fighting power and their defeat, Revelation's ekphrastic depiction of the dragon and beasts has the flexibility, granted by its narrative format, to keep those pieces separate.¹⁴¹ So while Revelation 13 allows the beasts to stand undefeated, and thus lacking the primary marker of what

¹⁴⁰ One useful axiom in making sense of self-other dichotomies is that the Other has seductive power, and that seductive power is capable of corrupting the "We." See Lawrence M. Wills, *Not God's People: Insiders and Outsiders in the Biblical World*, Religion in the Modern World (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 13.

¹⁴¹ As Robyn Whitaker observes (*Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion*, 213–16), John tends to use the inherent differences between written and plastic depictions in his favor.

it means to be a barbarian in victory art, chapters 19–20 devote considerable narrative time to make the defeat of the dragon and beasts especially clear.

A handful of scenes constitute the narrative of the dragon and beasts' final defeat. They sit in the interlude between the “tales of two cities,” which are the descriptions of Babylon’s fall (17:1–19:10) and the new Jerusalem’s arrival (21:1–22:5). In the unit at the beginning of this interval, where Christ emerges in triumph to destroy his enemies (19:11–21), the two beasts, enter the stage for nearly the first time since chapter 13. The beasts, alongside the kings of the earth and their armies, line up for a confrontation with the rider Christ and the heavenly armies (19:17–21). This scene, rounded off with details about vultures descending to eat the flesh of routed armies, has the beasts quickly defeated, captured, and thrown into the lake of fire. The next scene has the dragon bound and captive for a millennium (20:1–6) before gathering an additional army (20:7–10). And like the army that had attempted to fight alongside the beasts, it is quickly routed, leading to the final defeat of the dragon and beasts.

The final appearance of the dragon and beasts in these scenes signals that the story having begun with their initial arrival—and their initial defeat—is now coming to a close. The beast from the sea appears in 19:19. While it is not named as such, the usage of the article as well as the mention of its false prophet companion and mark (19:20) imply that it is indeed the same beast.¹⁴² Chapter 20’s strongest tie-in to the drama of chapter 12 is in 20:2, which repeats the dragon’s titles as given in 12:9 to intensify the dramatic effect of the dragon’s defeat.¹⁴³ Then,

¹⁴² This is contrary to 13:1, where the absence of an article implies that it is not the same beast as 11:7–10.

¹⁴³ The phrase ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς in 20:2 repeats the dragon’s titles from 12:9 nearly verbatim (ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς). In fact, one might say that the phrasing in 20:2 goes out of its way to do so. Because ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος is in apposition to the accusative δράκοντα, those titles should be in the accusative rather than the nominative case. Indeed, several manuscripts (κ and a handful of minuscules) render those titles in the accusative to correct the solecism. For an analogous treatment of a solecism in Revelation, namely the incorrect case of ὁ ὄν in 1:4, see Beale, *Revelation*, 188.

the binding of Satan in 20:1–3 recapitulates the heavenly war in 12:7–9 while moving beyond it. Where Michael the archangel had pushed the dragon down from heaven in 12:7–9, in 20:1, a different angel uses the key to the abyss (cf. 9:1) to leash the devil.¹⁴⁴ As in 12:7–9, God does not bother to interact with the dragon directly.¹⁴⁵ Instead, a particularly powerful angel attacks the dragon. While Michael’s blow to the dragon casts the dragon (βάλλω in 12:9) from heaven to earth, the key-bearing angel casts the dragon (βάλλω again in 20:3) from earth to the abyss. Finally, unlike the first casting-down, which allowed the dragon to cause unfettered chaos for a short time (12:12), this second casting down fetters the dragon to a prison for a gratuitously long time: a thousand years.¹⁴⁶ The thousand-year interval during which the dragon is bound does not just recall the heavenly conflicts in chapter 12, but has the dragon suffer an escalated version of the suffering he had inflicted. Compared to the ten-day interval of devil-orchestrated imprisonment suffered by the church of Smyrna in 2:10, the devil’s time of imprisonment is indeed quite long.¹⁴⁷ It is also significantly longer than the Danielic period during which the sea beast (13:5) was able to utter blasphemies or pursue the sun-clothed woman (12:14).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52C (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1078.

¹⁴⁵ Blount (*Revelation*, 360–61) reads this as an insult against the dragon: “...for all [the dragon’s] history... God considers its defeat the kind of light work that God need not even get up from the throne to accomplish. The dragon who wants to be God does not even merit God’s direct engagement.”

¹⁴⁶ Jewish texts set a precedent for a two-stage eschatological victory. See 4 Ezra 7:28ff; 2 Baruch 29:3–30:1; 1 Enoch 91:12–16. In the *Apocalypse of Weeks* (1 Enoch 93:1–10, 91:12–17), there is a gap between final judgment and the beginning of a happy eternity. On the millennium and other Jewish (or Jewish-Christian) scenes of final judgment, see Koester, *Revelation*, 748–49 and T. Francis Glasson, “The Last Judgment – In Rev. 20 and Related Writings,” *NTS* 28 (1982): 530–36.

¹⁴⁷ Parallels between the language of 2:9–11, where the church in Smyrna is counseled to be ready for imprisonment, and the events in 20:1–10, are strong. The letter to Smyrna mentions a synagogue of σατανᾶ (cf. Σατανᾶς in 20:2), and says the διάβολος (cf. 20:2) is responsible for casting (βάλλω, cf. 12:7, 20:3) the saints into a prison (φυλάκη in 2:10), while the dragon is released from a prison (φυλάκη) in 20:7 at the end of the chiliasm. The church in Smyrna is promised protection from the second death in 2:11, which is illustrated in 20:5–6, 14.

¹⁴⁸ The woman is protected from the dragon’s rage in 12:13–17 for an interval that 12:14 identifies as καιρὸν καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἥμισυ καιροῦ. Because that measurement of time is Danielic, like the 42 months / 1,260 days

The dragon is released after a period of binding and imprisonment (20:3, 7). That the dragon “must” be released (20:3) is marked with the δεῖ that typically refers to divine necessity throughout Greek classical and biblical literature, including Revelation.¹⁴⁹ One explanation for the δεῖ describing the necessity of Satan’s release is the dependence of Revelation 20 upon other Jewish descriptions of judgment. R. H. Charles notices a temporary chaining or binding of God’s opponents before their final punishment in 1 Enoch 53:4–54:4 and Isaiah 24:22.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, in Daniel 7:12, a passage whose combination of judgment and enthronement is echoed in Revelation 20, three of the four beasts are permitted to live, but with their authority stripped. Jewish traditions in which God’s enemies are disempowered or imprisoned before being destroyed help make some sense of the two-stage defeat of the dragon. But as Christopher Rowland, observes, there is no direct parallel to the two-part defeat seen in Revelation 20.¹⁵¹

Bound and controlled between scenes of defeat, the dragon resembles a barbarian trophy—a resemblance that may even make sense of the two-stage defeat of the dragon and beasts. Triumphal processions were regular events in which a parade of defeated soldiers would be carried, bound and captive, through a city before crowds of onlookers. These processions sometimes included diverse galleries of defeated chieftains in native clothing, emphasizing ethnic otherness alongside defeat.¹⁵² Imperial artwork sometimes depicted these parades,

(see Dan 7:25, 12:7), it is no stretch to identify the singular καιρός in 12:14 as one year and the plural as two, which would make a total of 3.5 years, which is 42 months and 1,260 days.

¹⁴⁹ *TDNT*, 2:21–25. δεῖ has this connotation in Revelation 1:1, 4:1, 10:11, 11:5, and 22:6.

¹⁵⁰ Charles, *Revelation*, 2:142; Aune, *Revelation*, 1078.

¹⁵¹ Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 435.

¹⁵² Shane J. Wood, *The Alter-Imperial Paradigm: Empire Studies & the Book of Revelation*, *BibInt* 140 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 199–201.

particularly in the Flavian era.¹⁵³ In fact, *Capta* coinage can be interpreted as an echo of the procession. Shane Wood argues that the triumphal procession is the best way to understand the two-stage defeat of the dragon in Revelation 20. In much the same way that triumphal processions highlighted the leaders of a defeated army, Revelation 20 has the narrative's main enemy set captive and bound before its final defeat.¹⁵⁴ Wood uses the spectacle of triumphal procession to make sense of why the battle in 20:7–10 so closely recapitulates the one in 19:17–21. Triumphal processions are reenactments of the moment of victory. By reenacting the moment of victory from chapter 19, the final defeat of the dragon in 20:7–10 can be read as a commemoration of the defeat that had already been secured.¹⁵⁵

Whether or not John intends for his audience to see 20:7–10 as a recapitulation of 19:17–21 that acts as a commemorative reenactment, there is a similarity of features and function between this second vignette of defeat and depictions of barbarians. The bound trophy is visible in the Flavian *Capta* coinage discussed in the previous chapter. Artwork depicting barbarians as bound and deposed is hardly limited to that coinage. Numerous trophy monuments were built in the European frontiers to commemorate Roman campaigns against the Gauls. In these monuments, it was common to have depictions of bound bodies that symbolized defeat.¹⁵⁶ Just as this imagery functioned as a commemoration of Roman military strength, the double-defeat in Revelation aims to remind readers of God's power to defeat evil once and for all. Moreover, each of the defeat scenes shows a massive horde just before the moment of decisive defeat. In 19:19, the first beast from chapter 13 gathers the “kings of the earth” as an army before they are quickly

¹⁵³ Wood, *Alter-Imperial Paradigm*, 203–207.

¹⁵⁴ Wood, *Alter-Imperial Paradigm*, 197–99, 209–216.

¹⁵⁵ Wood, *Alter-Imperial Paradigm*, 212–15.

¹⁵⁶ Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 39–48.

routed (19:21). Likewise, Satan gathers an army from the corners of the earth for war that surrounds the encampment of the saints (20:7–8). In both of these scenes, the

The scenes with the dragon and beasts' defeat present a reversal of the power they had shown throughout the narrative. Connections between chapters 12–13 and 19–20 imply that the routing of armies and the capture of the dragon and beasts is both a defeat and a reversal. The thousand-year interval during which the dragon is bound corresponds to and exceeds the period of imprisonment suffered by the church in Smyrna (2:10) and the 1,260-day (or 42-month) period in which the beasts were raging (13:5) and the sun-clothed woman was hiding (12:6). When the dragon's army goes up to the encampment and surrounds it (20:9), God drops fire from heaven that consumes the army.¹⁵⁷ The wording of the fire-fall is derived from the LXX of 2 Kings 1:10, 12, 14. It also has the armies from “Gog and Magog” suffer the same fate as the Gog of Magog in Ezekiel 38:22 and recalls an eschatological type-scene (see Zeph 3:8) where God destroys opposing armies with fire.¹⁵⁸ This fire-fall is also a reversal of the miracle-working orchestrated by the beasts in chapter 13.¹⁵⁹ In 13:13, the second beast performs “great signs,” with a spectacle of heavenly fire being its only named sign. This miracle deceives (πλανάω) those dwelling on the earth in 13:14. But in 20:9, this same action¹⁶⁰ consumes the army of those who had been brought from the corners of the earth and deceived (πλανάω in 20:8). The very supernatural action that made the second beast's work successful in chapter 13 leads to the end

¹⁵⁷ The original wording in 20:9 is not likely to specifically identify God as the sender of the fire. Several manuscripts that replace “from heaven” with “from God” or “from God and from heaven” or something similar. “From heaven” is the simplest reading and the one that best conforms to the LXX of 2 Kings 1:10, 12, 14. But the manuscripts that insert “from God” are likely to be rendering explicit the implicit source of the heavenly fire.

¹⁵⁸ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1099.

¹⁵⁹ Koester, *Revelation*, 790.

¹⁶⁰ Note the parallelism: 13:13 has πῦρ ποιῆ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβαίνειν; 20:9 has κατέβη πῦρ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

of the dragon's final effort in chapter 20. Moreover, the verb used to describe the fire's consumption of the army (κατεσθίω) emerges here for the first time since 12:4, when the dragon attempts to devour (κατεσθίω) the Messiah-resembling child. When the three creatures are thrown into the lake of fire, they are harassed "day and night" (ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός), corresponding to the dragon accusing the saints "day and night" (ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός in 12:10).¹⁶¹ The passage closes saying that the creatures are tormented "forever and ever"—more than counterbalancing the short time (12:12) or 42 months (13:5) during which the dragon and beasts rage.

The end of the war against the dragon and beasts leads to utopia—one final point of similarity between the narrative of the beasts and representations of barbarians. Once the dragon and beasts are defeated and meet their final torment (20:10), the final judgment commences (20:11–15), leading to the utopian descent of the new heaven and earth (21:1–22:5). In the transition from chapter 20 to 21, defeat gives way to utopia. As Eric Gilchrest observes in his comparison between Revelation 21–22 and ancient utopias, the New Jerusalem is utterly free of war. With permanently open walls (21:25), the city no longer has a need for protection.¹⁶² Visual representations of barbarians present prosperity as that which happens after barbarian defeat. Visitors of the Pergamene Gigantomachy would see defeat give way to prosperity in the transition from the lower, outer friezes to the upper, inner ones. The Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, much like the Ara Pacis, also combines images of Roman conquest with Roman prosperity. The New Jerusalem, much like a prosperous Roman empire in the worldview espoused by Roman artwork, thrives as a consequence of defeated enemies.

¹⁶¹ Koester, *Revelation*, 790.

¹⁶² Eric J. Gilchrest, *Revelation 21–22 in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Utopianism*, BibInt 118 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 252–53.

Just like barbarians in the visual representations discussed in the previous chapters, Revelation's dragon and beasts are ultimately defeated. The other markers of barbarians—cosmological significance, spatial positioning, embodied difference, warlike disposition, and opposition to the gods—are also present in Revelation's representations of the beasts. For this reason, the dragon and beasts are what the title suggests they are: barbaric beasts. But how would the conceptual similarity between representations of barbarians and of the beasts impact the rhetorical force of John's imagery? How might John's initial readers and hearers understand John's message differently if they were familiar with the images discussed in previous chapters and the other images like them? To that question the chapter turns.

The Rhetorical Effect of Barbaric Beasts

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the resemblance between the beasts and barbarians affects the rhetorical impact of the imagery by amplifying the messages that John wants to convey. John wants his readers to refuse association with Roman civil religion, whether he or his readers understand that association to be a means of avoiding persecution or a means of obtaining social status gains. That his ciphers for Roman imperial power and civil religion resemble barbarians would only help his case. What this last section of the chapter will show is how similarities between the beasts and barbarians cooperate with some of the rhetorical operations already taking place in John's usage of the imagery.

Adding to the binaries

Apart from the connection between the beasts and barbarians, Revelation is a book that sorts things into binaries. Typical for Apocalyptic literature, Revelation's outlook is marked by a

variety of dualisms.¹⁶³ In contrast to the “Jezebel” party that permits the participation in larger society to the point of allowing εἰδωλόθυτα (2:20), John speaks in terms of sharp dividing lines between what is good and evil.¹⁶⁴ Greg Carey uses the terms “Beast Group” and “Lamb Group” to describe the characters on each side of Revelation’s dividing line.¹⁶⁵ The Lamb Group would be the lamb, God, the various arrangements of the saints, the sun-clothed woman, Michael and the other heavenly angels, the new Jerusalem, and presumably John himself. The beast group includes the dragon, the beasts, the “kings of the earth” and “dwellers of the earth” who cooperate with them, Babylon, and the false teachers whom John rivals. The “choice between two cities” at the end of Revelation, contrasting the woman-city Babylon and the woman-city of new Jerusalem, is the culmination of the contrasts between good and evil figures.¹⁶⁶

The presence of the six markers of barbarians in Revelation’s depiction of the dragon and beasts is a natural outcome of this dualism. The division between good and evil—cosmic dualism—is just one type of dualism running through Revelation and similar Apocalyptic literature.¹⁶⁷ Various other types of dualism have been identified: ethical dualism, the division between righteous and wicked; eschatological dualism, which divides the present world from the coming age; soteriological dualism, which is the division between saved and lost; and several more. Jörg Frey identifies about ten types of dualism discovered by interpreters of Qumranic and

¹⁶³ On dualism in Apocalyptic literature and its antecedents, see Jörg Frey, “Apocalyptic Dualism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 271–94.

¹⁶⁴ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast*, 75–76.

¹⁶⁵ Carey, “A Man’s Choice: Wealth Imagery and the Two Cities of the Book of Revelation,” 148.

¹⁶⁶ Barbara Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 155–65.

¹⁶⁷ Frey, “Apocalyptic Dualism,” 272. On the importance of identifying these types of Dualism, see John G. Gammie, “Spatial and Ethical Dualism in Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic Literature,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93.3 (1974): 356–85.

related literature.¹⁶⁸ Most of the “barbarian” markers follow the dividing lines of types of dualism that have been observed in Apocalyptic literature. The “opposition to the gods” carried by the beasts and barbarians can be identified as either an example of metaphysical or theological dualism. The association with lower spaces shared by the beasts and barbarians engages spatial dualism. And the distinction between justified violence and the barbaric warlike disposition can be identified as a kind of ethical dualism.

Because of the similarity between the attributes of Revelation’s beasts discussed above and the attributes of barbarians discussed in the previous chapters, we can say that the images of the beast engage a different kind of dualism: the dualism between the civilized and the barbarians. The bifurcation between civilized and barbarian is just as significant as many other cultural dualisms. As Yves Dauge shows in his monumental study of the Roman barbarian concept, the lines between Roman and barbarian are associated with other dualisms, some of which are familiar to Apocalyptic literature, like light and darkness or heaven and earth.¹⁶⁹ Many of the words associated with barbarians—savagery, ferocity, the fury of war, discord, and futility—are the antonyms of key virtues, like wisdom, temperance, love of peace, concord, and constancy.¹⁷⁰ For readers familiar with the images discussed in the previous chapters, the “barbaric” elements of the beasts identified in this chapter add the civilized-barbarian dualism to

¹⁶⁸ Jörg Frey, “Different Patterns of Dualistic Thought in the Qumran Library,” in *Legal Texts and Legal Issues: Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Cambridge, 1995: Published in Honour of Joseph M. Baumgarten*, ed. Moshe Bernstein, Florentino Garcia Martinez, and John Kampen, STDJ 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 280–85. The full catalog of dualisms includes metaphysical (God/Satan, though that is somewhat asymmetrical), cosmic (good/evil), spatial (heaven/earth), eschatological (present/future), ethical (righteous/wicked), soteriological (saved/lost), theological (God/humanity), physical (matter/spirit), anthropological (body/soul), and psychological (good/evil within).

¹⁶⁹ Dauge, *Le Barbare*, 580–92.

¹⁷⁰ Dauge, *Le Barbare*, 455–60. See also Rubel, “What the Romans Really Meant When Using the Word ‘Barbarian’: Some Thoughts on ‘Romans and Barbarians,’” 5–6.

the many other kinds of dualism operating in the contrast between the Lamb and Beast Group figures.

Part of what makes the barbarian dualism overlap with so many other kinds of dualistic distinctions is that the civilized-barbarian dualism was a way of expressing the more fundamental distinction between self and other. As discussed in chapter 2, the βάρβαρος concept existed before it referred to the whole contrast between Greek and Persian culture. Its transformation from solely a term of linguistic difference to a synecdoche for the full gamut of ethnic and cultural differences is a reflection of the concept's role in distinguishing self and other. As the barbarian notion became a concept for sorting Romans from non-Romans, it retained, and perhaps even intensified, its function of differentiating the ideal, elite Roman self from a variety of "others," mostly foreign or Greek.¹⁷¹ The oppositional logic contrasting a victorious self from a barbarian other is the most consistent feature of the visual representations of barbarians discussed in the previous chapters. Whether or not one of John's audience members would have known about discussions of barbarians in elite Greek or Roman literature, the visual representations of barbarians visible in and around Asia Minor would have made this oppositional logic visible.

As interpreters of Revelation have shown, John is also invested in this self-other relationship. The sorting of parties into self and other is a natural complement of the dualism that runs through Apocalyptic literature.¹⁷² A corollary of the dualism in which John engages is the sorting of groups into insiders and opponents. John uses a variety of strategies to disparage

¹⁷¹ Dauge, *Le Barbare*, 393–412.

¹⁷² Lorenzo DiTommaso, "The Apocalyptic Other," in *The "Other" in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*, ed. Daniel C. Harlow et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 223–35.

possible rivals.¹⁷³ In the messages to the churches, several parties are named and identified as “other,” including the false teachers—the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel—and the enigmatic groups “who say they are Jews but are not but are a synagogue of Satan.” (2:9, cf. 3:9).¹⁷⁴ Paul Duff argues that John’s response to the assimilationist rhetoric of rival prophet Jezebel is so intolerable that she must be excluded entirely: “John urged his communities to push ‘Jezebel’ and her followers out of the churches for the good of the community as well as for the good of the cosmos.”¹⁷⁵ Whether or not Jezebel is the primary polemical target of Revelation as Duff suggests, the “rhetoric of exclusion” he highlights in his discussion of the rivalry with Jezebel is nonetheless a recognizable feature of Revelation. As discussed in the “embodied difference” subsection above, the work of Heather Macumber shows how one of the primary rhetorical goals of representing empire as a cluster of beasts animated by the devil dragon is to present the empire as an “other.”¹⁷⁶ Polemic via otherization is a well-attested feature of Revelation.

The barbarism of the beasts intensifies the sense of otherness John intends to create with his imagery. Whether or not John had any intention to allude to the imagery discussed in the previous chapters, the resemblance between beasts and barbarians cooperates with the rhetorical intention to represent empire as a monster on the other side of a boundary.¹⁷⁷ Everything that makes the beasts look barbaric would also make the beasts seem exotic, strange, and “other.” Visual representations of barbarians associate characteristics like defeat, embodied difference,

¹⁷³ Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse*, 135–64.

¹⁷⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 79.1 (1986): 308–20.

¹⁷⁵ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast*, 132.

¹⁷⁶ Macumber, *Recovering the Monstrous*, 101–42. For more on Macumber’s analysis of the dragon and beasts, see the discussion of monster theory in the “embodied difference” subsection above.

¹⁷⁷ As I discuss in chapter 3, I am skeptical of the proposition that the Great Altar of Pergamon is indeed the “Throne of Satan” in 2:13.

and a warlike disposition with ethnically different people who live on the edges of the “civilized” world. By imbuing the beast with the characteristics of barbarians in those visual representations—whether by direct intention or not—John adds associations with barbarian otherness to the beasts he describes.

Revelation is not only concerned about naming others; the self-identity of readers is a concern in the book as well. Just as Revelation’s polemics excise rivals and purported dangers as “others,” the book includes several depictions of God’s people intended to tell readers something about who they are. These include the promises to the victorious at the end of the letters in chapters 2–3, the two witnesses (11:1–13), the numerous references to martyrs, the processions of the redeemed (7:1–8, 9–17; 14:1–5), and the new Jerusalem (21:1–8).¹⁷⁸ Perhaps most crucial to readers’ identity formation in Revelation is the procession of the 144,000 in 14:1–5.¹⁷⁹ Readers are meant to see themselves in the victorious army willing to do whatever it takes to “follow the lamb wherever he goes” (14:4). The depiction of this procession makes statements about the identity of the saints (and thus readers who would want to identify as saints) by showing their similarities to the lamb. In addition to following the lamb wherever he goes (14:4), they have the lamb’s name inscribed on their foreheads (14:1), sing secret songs in the divine throneroom (14:3) with a voice like many waters (14:2, cf. 1:15), avoid defilement (14:4), and are blameless in the mold of Isaiah 53:9 (14:5).¹⁸⁰ Perhaps just as critical as the passage’s

¹⁷⁸ All of these categories of identity-forming passages in Revelation receive significant treatment in Gregory Stevenson, *Power and Place: Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation*, BZBW 107 (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2001), 237–72. For a thorough discussion of how Revelation’s ecclesiology depends on martyr imagery, processional imagery, and the New Jerusalem, see Steven W. Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis*, SNTSMS 128 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁷⁹ Stenström, “Not Defiled,” 38–40, Pattemore,

¹⁸⁰ For a detailed exposition of how these attributes contribute to Revelation’s “Messianic Ecclesiology,” see Pattemore, *People of God*, 179–93.

identity-formation via similarity to the lamb is its identity-formation via contrast from the beast. As Schüssler-Fiorenza observes, the 144,000 are a counterimage to the beasts and their worshippers.¹⁸¹ The name of the lamb on their foreheads (14:1) is a direct antithesis to the mark in the previous verses (13:16–18); their worship (14:2–3) counters the worship of the sea-beast (13:4, 14–15); sexual purity (14:4) counters consorting with Babylon (17:2); and the innocent lack of deceit (14:5) counters beastly deception (13:14). What occurs in 14:1–5 and other passages is an attempt to form the identity of the ideal reader. In some cases, this identity-formation occurs by means of contrast—much like in visual representations of barbarians.

Identity formation by means of contrast is also a key rhetorical function of visual representations of barbarians. Admittedly, some depictions of defeated barbarians in frontier spaces existed to remind local non-Roman groups of Roman military might.¹⁸² But one of the primary intentions of such imagery was to allow viewers to participate vicariously in the victories commemorated in the artwork. As Andrew Stewart shows, the Attalid depictions of dying Gauls—produced by Pergamenes for Pergamenes and Athenians, to be later reproduced by Romans—held such appeal for both Hellenistic and Roman audiences. The whole Hellenistic world, with the exceptions of Seleucids, would have had reasons to glory in such artwork. For Pergamenes especially, monuments to their victories against Gauls would have confirmed their country as a major power.¹⁸³ Romans who reproduced those statues did so because the images of barbarian discord and defeat could define the essence of what it means to be Roman via contrast.¹⁸⁴ As discussed in the previous chapters, many of the negative sentiments about

¹⁸¹ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 188–89.

¹⁸² Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 39–48.

¹⁸³ Stewart, *Attalos*, 232–24.

¹⁸⁴ Stewart, *Attalos*, 160–62.

barbarians in depictions of them were meant to express positive sentiments. Barbarian defeat expressed Hellenistic and/or Roman victory; barbarian opposition to the gods meant that the gods were on the viewers' sides. The aggressive polemical disposition of barbarians attested to the Hellenistic and Roman strength it took to overcome them, and highlighted the clemency that the Roman emperor might sometimes extend. Just as the image of the beasts and the 144,000 in Revelation 13:1–14:5 construct a self-other relationship, representations of barbarians also make statements about self and other by means of contrast.

Competing images

Despite a functional similarity with the self-other dynamic in visual representations of barbarians, the beast imagery in Revelation is directly opposed to the messaging of that artwork. Revelation's beast imagery uses patterns present in Roman iconography to make an anti-imperial message. Such usage of Roman assets in the service of an anti-Roman polemic is an established pattern in the book of Revelation. As Steven Friesen shows in his study of the imperial cult in Revelation, the Apocalypse's opposition to the imperial cult is hardly limited to the direct criticism of the imperial cult, though such criticism is present (13:11–18).¹⁸⁵ Revelation's symbolic universe rivals the symbolic universe constructed through the imperial cult through the construction of a rival worldview. The elements of a complete religious system with implicit notions about the cosmos, personhood, and eschatology are present in the imperial cult.¹⁸⁶ Revelation's reorganization of space, time, personhood, and worship is an alternative, rival religious system. Within the symbolic system of the imperial cult is a notion of what the "other"

¹⁸⁵ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 202–204.

¹⁸⁶ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 122–31.

is. In at least one imperial cult installation—the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias discussed in chapter 4—the defeated nations constitute that “other.”¹⁸⁷ Where the “self” with which the imperial cult’s “other” contrasts is the people who align themselves with Roman might, Revelation has an opposite self-other relationship in mind. In Revelation, Roman imperial power is the “other.” And, because it is marked with defeat, cosmic significance, spatial and embodied difference, a warlike disposition, and opposition to the divine, Revelation’s symbolic universe implies that the “other” of Roman imperial power is the true barbarian.

Thus, despite the similarity between the beast imagery and visual representations of barbarians, the messaging of Revelation’s imagery is in direct competition with the representations of barbarians discussed in this dissertation. As Robyn Whitaker shows, some Greco-Roman orators argued that speech was better than sight because, among other things, speech could travel while images could not—a particular advantage when discussing theology, as talking about the gods was easier than going to Olympus to see them.¹⁸⁸ She argues that Revelation’s depiction of the dragon and beasts, particularly the land-beast and the “image of the beast” (13:14), directly competes with imperial spectacle or statuary that Revelation’s readers may have seen. With Whitaker, I do not think it is necessary, much less possible, to identify which specific spectacles John may have had in mind.¹⁸⁹ But John’s emphasis on the deceptive power of his opponents suggests that seeing is not always believing, particularly with reference

¹⁸⁷ For a case study, Friesen (*Imperial Cult*, 77–95) presents the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias as a model of an imperial cult installation.

¹⁸⁸ Whitaker, *Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion*, 171–75.

¹⁸⁹ Whitaker (*Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion*, 181–83) takes the land-beast’s fire-in-the-sky spectacle (13:13) as a reference to a real spectacle that Revelation’s readers may have seen rather than merely a statement about the beast’s potency. But she does not try to identify one beyond pointing out the possibility of animated statuary in the ancient world. On the variety of spectacle in the milieu of Revelation’s readers, see Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 14–38. As Frilingos shows, Revelation engages an environment with a robust variety of visual spectacles.

to Roman spectacle.¹⁹⁰ John's usage of the *θαύμα* word group tends to be negative, representing either the world's enthrallment over the beasts (13:3, 17:8) or John's response to Babylon (17:6–7).¹⁹¹ Such spectacles, one might say, elicit the “awefulness” that monster theorists observe in depictions of creatures simultaneously enthralling and threatening.¹⁹² So while Revelation's beast imagery carries much of the same oppositional logic as the barbarian imagery, John would actually want his readers to see the messaging in barbarian imagery as fundamentally deceptive and misleading. In John's worldview, association with empire, rather than the exoticism of its frontiers, is where barbarity lies.

John's need to compete with pro-imperial imagery and rhetoric explains one of the features of Revelation's dualism: the depiction of the dragon and beasts is thoroughly and unrelentingly negative. Revelation is not entirely without interchange between good and evil domains. The church in Ephesus, for instance, faces an ultimatum despite a partially-positive appraisal of its deeds (2:2–6); conversely, the church in Laodicea receives generous promises despite a negative evaluation (3:15–21). Revelation also depicts the conversion of the nations through the shift in status of the world's peoples. As Richard Bauckham shows in tracing variations of the fourfold “tribe and language and people and nation” formula in 5:9, the nations in Revelation are temporarily in the domain of the beast (13:7–8). But the proclamation of the eternal gospel to the nations (14:6) leads to the nations' destiny to join the people of God (5:9, 7:9, 15:4).¹⁹³ The possibilities of repentance in the congregations or conversion of the nations allow some transfer between Revelation's dualistic domains. No such exceptions or transfers are

¹⁹⁰ Whitaker, *Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion*, 180–87.

¹⁹¹ Whitaker, *Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion*, 203–207.

¹⁹² Macumber, *Recovering the Monstrous*, 48.

¹⁹³ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 326–37.

available for the dragon and beasts. As discussed above, there are resemblances between some Lamb Group and Beast Group figures, largely because John depicts the dragon and beasts as deceptive counterfeits of God and the lamb. But such resemblances hardly suggest the possibility of an interchange between positive and negative domains. If anything, those similarities only serve to make the beasts more threatening because it supports the possibility of deception (13:11–14). There is no conversion and redemption for the dragon and the beasts. In fact, when the dragon is temporarily released after imprisonment, it immediately resumes deceiving the nations (20:7–8) before facing a defeat similar to one from the chapter before (20:9–10, cf. 19:17–21).

In contrast to the starkness that makes the dragon and beasts flatly “evil,” the civilized-barbarian opposition allowed some amount of transfer from one domain to the other. One of the innovations in the Roman concept of the barbarian is an openness to the possibility of Romanization.¹⁹⁴ In fact, one of the challenges to describing the process of Romanization is that the category of “Roman” itself can be a shifting target due to the variety of cultures that blended in imperial spaces.¹⁹⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter,¹⁹⁶ one of the features of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias is a gallery of the nations that exults in the empire’s incorporation of diverse people groups.¹⁹⁶ For barbarians, becoming Roman was possible. The challenge of deciding whether the reliefs on the *ethnos* bases are trophies of defeated people or a parade of prospering new Romans is a reflection of this possibility. Roman visual representations of barbarians are definite attempts to produce and reify a distinction between Roman and non-Roman following

¹⁹⁴ On this concept, and how it was a *novum* of the Roman barbarian concept, see chapter 2.

¹⁹⁵ J. C. Barrett, “Romanization: A Critical Comment,” in *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism: Power Discourse, and Discrepant Experience in the Roman Empire*, ed. D. J. Mattingly, JRA Supplement 23 (Portsmouth, RI: JRA, 1997), 51–64.

¹⁹⁶ Smith, “Simulacra Gentium: The Ethne from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias,” 76–77.

the lines of victorious and defeated, but those distinctions were not always impermeable. The Roman empire was an empire of barbarians because sometimes barbarians could become Romans.¹⁹⁷ There was likewise conceptual space for Greeks and Romans to become barbarous. Seneca, for instance, saw barbarism as a lack of self-discipline to which anyone could succumb.¹⁹⁸ It was possible, then, for the Roman empire to be an empire of barbarians because of Romans losing track of the very values that made them decidedly Roman. As Alexander Rubel argues, the Roman barbarian notion had a flexibility foreign to the Greek concept, largely because barbarians would eventually be integrated into Roman society.¹⁹⁹

As an Apocalyptic writer who presupposes crisis in his engagement with his audience, John leaves little room for such flexibility. John has plenty of expectation for the nations to be integrated into the society that he envisions; the eschatological renewed Eden has a new tree of life with fruit for the nations' healing (22:5). While he envisions an eventual procession of nations far more expansive than the one at Aphrodisias (7:9, 21:24–26), the “barbarians” of John’s visions—the dragon, beasts, and those affiliated with them—are utterly without redemption. Revelation has space for the redemption of “every tribe, people, tongue, and nation” (13:7) under the beast’s authority and hope for the people whom he asks to come out of Babylon (18:4). This hope does not extend to the barbaric beasts in the same way as it extends to the not (yet) Roman barbarians in the images with which Revelation competes. Instead, it only extends to those who choose the path of abstinent endurance John asks of his readers.

¹⁹⁷ On the Romanization of Galatians, see Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined*, 169–91. For an overview of the Romanization concept, and the inherent mixtures of culture involved, see Jensen, *Barbarians in the Greek and Roman World*, 190–204.

¹⁹⁸ Antonova, *Barbarian or Greek?: The Charge of Barbarism and Early Christian Apologetics*, 92–94.

¹⁹⁹ Rubel, “What the Romans Really Meant,” 10–17.

That John needs his readers to make a choice is perhaps the most significant rhetorical difference between the beast imagery and the barbarian imagery. John, focused as he is on what must soon take place (1:19, 4:1), has his eyes on the immediate future. Monuments of victory against barbarians have their eyes on the past. As representations of victories that had already occurred, such images could foreground the indicative rather than the imperative. An installation like the gallery of nations at Aphrodisias could certainly help to facilitate future imperial cult proceedings by telling the story that placed local proceedings within the imperial story.²⁰⁰ But it does not demand the endurance of its viewers in an impending crisis. As John understands the coming struggle, however, he and his community must conquer through fidelity to the Lamb. For that to happen, his listeners must make the right choices. And to facilitate those choices, he must present the alternative as association with an irredeemably barbaric foe.

Conclusion

What this chapter has argued can be summarized in just a few words: Revelation's beasts look barbaric. Whether or not John intended to forge a connection between his depiction of Revelation's chief antagonists and an installation like the Great Altar of Pergamon or any other image discussed in the previous chapters, Revelation's dragon and beasts are marked by defeat, cosmic significance, spatial and embodied difference, a warlike disposition, and opposition to the gods. Hearers of Revelation familiar with visual representations of barbarians would, upon exposure to Revelation's beast imagery, find something recognizably "uncivilized" and "other." The affiliation between these barbaric creatures and Roman imperial power would make a claim

²⁰⁰ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 94–95.

directly counter to a fundamental claim in Roman self-perception: that the empire is the opposite of barbarity, bringing civility wherever it goes.

This implicit message of Revelation's dragon and beast imagery fits well with other facets of the anti-Roman polemic that scholars have already identified. John's polemical representation of the Roman emperor and the imperial cult is built to urge his readers to resist a conciliatory mode of Christian practice, choosing instead to divest from civic religious practices and accept the consequences that go with it. The similarity between barbarians and the beasts helps to uphold this core exigency of the beast imagery. The barbarism of the beasts intensifies the dualisms that place the beasts on the "evil" side of Revelation's many dualistic bifurcations, presenting the empire as the "other" in distinction from the conquering "self" that follows the lamb. That the beasts appear to be barbaric only intensifies the sense of "otherness" that Revelation's dualisms assign to the beasts. Representing Rome as the "other," John is ultimately able to compete with the pro-imperial imagery his audience would have encountered—an irony, considering that some of that pro-imperial imagery supplies the logic of a civilized-barbarian opposition that ultimately supports John's rhetorical goals.

Conclusion

This study set out to connect visual representations of barbarians to the anti-Roman polemic in Revelation's beast imagery. I argued that readers familiar with the Hellenistic and Roman depictions of barbarians in Roman Asia Minor would have seen a resemblance between John's depiction of the beasts and the images of barbarians they had seen. Whether by John's intentions or not, these images make a simple, if shocking claim: the empire is the real barbarian.

Like many works interpreting Revelation, this dissertation is a product of its time—if perhaps unwillingly. The term “barbarian” appeared in the news at the beginning and end of the period in which it was written. In June 2020, a Detroit police chief was suspended and asked to undergo cultural sensitivity training because of a series of tweets in a now-deleted account. The tweets were advocating a more militant police response to the Black Lives Matter protests that emerged following the extrajudicial murder of George Floyd. One tweet said, “I have a better idea: unleash the real cops and let them take care of these barbarians. I promise it will be over in 24 hours.”¹ Nearly two years later, responding to Vladimir Putin's aggression toward civilians in Ukraine, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called Putin's tactics “barbaric and

¹ Ewan Palmer, “Police Chief Who Called BLM Protesters ‘Subhuman’ Keeps Job,” *Newsweek*, 17 June 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/detroit-police-chief-robert-shelide-suspended-tweets-1511438>. As of April 2022, this officer retains his position as chief of police.

indiscriminate.”² Despite the millennia separating us from Revelation and the images this dissertation compares it to, we have not really escaped barbarism, whether by “barbarism” one refers to acts of intense aggression or some deployment of the “barbarian” concept. Although this project was not conceived with either of these situations in mind, they show how the notion of the “barbarian” remains alive and well, and how the notion can be deployed across varied contexts.³

In a sense, this dissertation has been about the dispersion of the barbarian notion across a variety of contexts. The first chapter showed how connecting visual representations of barbarians to the book of Revelation might be a helpful contribution to existing conversations on the book’s anti-Roman polemic. Then, in chapter 2, I traced the trajectory of the “barbarian” notion from its origins as a term for speakers of other languages to a synecdoche for any ethnic “others” in the Greek and Roman imagination. The rest of the dissertation showed how Revelation’s similarity to visual representations of barbarians ultimately allows the Apocalypse itself to be placed in that trajectory. In chapters 3 and 4, I surveyed several pieces of Pergamene and Roman artwork to show the attributes of barbarians they typically represent. I identified those characteristics as defeat, cosmic significance, spatial difference, embodied difference, a warlike disposition, and opposition to the gods. While those attributes did not necessarily all emerge in the same way across all pieces of artwork, they did show some level of consistency in what viewers of those images might have been taught to associate with barbarians through those pieces. Chapter 5 then showed how the story of the dragon and beasts in Revelation engages that hexad of barbarian

² Adam Durbin, “Ukraine: Vladimir Putin Using Barbaric Tactics, Boris Johnson Says,” *BBC News*, 1 March 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-60565392>.

³ For a survey of several deployments of the barbarian concept across history, ranging from the ancient Greeks to post-9/11 America, see Maria Boletsi and Christian Moser, eds., *Barbarism Revisited: New Perspectives on an Old Concept*, *Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex, and Race* 29 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

markers. The attributes of barbarians present in Pergamene and Roman art are also present in Revelation's depiction of enemies.

The similarity between beasts and barbarians, I showed, supports the rhetorical goals that John the Seer would have had in producing the imagery—rhetorical goals that have long been known to interpreters of Revelation. As I said from the outset, my goal was not to oppose or overturn existing studies of the anti-polemic in Revelation 13 but rather to complement it. Existing studies show how John wants to represent empire in a negative way to support his project of persuading readers to disengage from the civic religious activity that he considers idolatrous. I show that the opposition between the civilized and the barbarous maps onto John's anti-imperial polemic, demonstrating that the nature of that polemic coheres with Greco-Roman polemical logics, and not only Jewish ones. By applying to the empire-representing beast figure the attributes of barbarians, John suggests that empire is a source of chaos and instability rather than civility. What John's readers might surmise from the barbarity of Revelation's beasts is that empire is the real barbarian.

In addition to cutting against the grain of Roman imperial self-understanding, this claim also reflects a logical inevitability. The barbarian concept itself logically depends on a concept of civilized self-identity. There is no such thing as a barbarian apart from some group appointing its own ways "civilized" and viewing another group as its uncivilized counterpart. So while John's earliest readers would have heard him criticizing the barbarity of a specific imperial regime, his message—intentionally or not—carries a more sweeping implication: empire inevitably carries barbarism with it. As Edith Hall noticed in her study of the Greek barbarian concept, the consolidation of the Persians as "barbarians" coincided with the ascent of Athens's own imperial

pretensions.⁴ The “barbarians” of the Roman world—whether the Gallic tribes Julius Caesar engaged in his campaigns or the Visigoths who brought the empire’s eventual fall—were always the people right at the imperial border. In order for an empire of insiders to coherently exist, it requires a frontier of outsiders. In that sense, a notion of a “barbarian” is a necessary ingredient of empire.

As is the case with many studies of the relationship between Revelation and empire, this study has unveiled something uncomfortable about Revelation itself: for all of its investment in resisting empire, Revelation has a way of embracing the imperial impulse. The resemblance between the beasts and barbarians is part of a sincere effort to refuse empire. And by using the technique of naming “outsiders” that appears in visual representations of barbarians, the book of Revelation deploys the tools of empire to resist empire. It is not uncommon for interpreters of Revelation to notice that pattern in the book’s interaction with empire. But Revelation’s tendency to use the tools of empire against empire comes with the consequence of the book itself assuming the shape of the imperial structures it was written to resist. Reflecting on Revelation’s pattern of imitating imperial structures in its representation of ultimate reality, Stephen Moore opines that Revelation cannot provide “a conception of the divine sphere as other than empire writ large.”⁵ A similar challenge emerges in representing empire as a barbarian. Revelation teaches its readers to view structures of imperial power with suspicion, but it does so with oppositional insider-outsider logic that was appropriated in Roman contexts to support imperial power.

Even so, there is an important asymmetry between the barbarian notion reflected in visual art and the strategies of otherization in Revelation. The “barbarian” in Revelation’s symbolic

⁴ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, 14–19.

⁵ Moore, “Mimicry and Monstrosity,” 37.

universe is not a people group like the Persians or a collection of peoples like Gauls, Germans, Parthians, or whoever else happens to be on the frontiers. The devil-empowered barbarians of Revelation's symbolic universe represent the empire and patterns of civic religion in service of the empire. If empire itself is the barbarian, then the nations are not.

Avenues for Further Research

This study, engaging in a comparison between the beast imagery in Revelation and visual representations of barbarians, has been relatively limited in scope. Any limitations and shortcomings notwithstanding, this study does demonstrate that an interface between Apocalyptic literature and visual representations of barbarians can yield useful results. Revelation's polemical, ekphrastic imagery and the visual representations of barbarians I have discussed possess several similarities in feature and function that this dissertation has highlighted. There is plenty of room to connect the biblical literature to the Greco-Roman barbarian concept that has not been attempted by this study or others. Visual representations of barbarians could be connected to many genres of biblical text, not just Apocalyptic. Likewise, textual representations of barbarians could connect to the anti-Roman polemic in Revelation. What I outline below is a small number of further studies related, like this study, to visual representations of barbarians and Apocalyptic literature. Even within those conceptual constraints, there is significant space for further work.

1. Reading the Babylon imagery in relation to barbarians

Perhaps the most self-evident avenue for further research is the closest neighbor to this study: a continued examination of anti-Roman polemical figure within Revelation in light of

visual representations of barbarians. As discussed in chapter 4, the manifestation of the “embodied difference” category principally takes the form of a gendered distinction between Romans and barbarians, marking Romans as masculine and non-Romans as feminine or effeminate by comparison. That Rome itself is represented in the feminine figure of Babylon makes a natural point of connection. Stephen Moore at least has drawn attention to the gender of Babylon with reference to gender in Roman representations of barbarians.⁶ A connection between Babylon and representations of barbarians could certainly start with this gender-critical angle, but it could certainly go beyond it. The hymnic declaration of Babylon’s fall in Revelation 18 exults in defeat, the very feature this dissertation has identified as the chief quality of barbarians in visual representation. Revelation 18:11–20 has a taunt listing the brightly-colored cargoes and luxury items that Babylon loses in the moment of judgment. Babylon’s attachment to those luxury items intensifies the accusation of Babylon’s (and by extension Rome’s) effeminacy.⁷ More than that, it also suggests that the Rome criticized by Babylon is itself barbaric, failing to live up to the Roman value of disciplined restraint.

2. Comparison with additional Apocalyptic literature

Although Revelation can be idiosyncratic compared to other Apocalypses, many other Apocalyptic works contain beastly images with anti-imperial messages. The most obvious of these might be the main literary tributary of the beast images in Revelation 13: the procession of beasts in Daniel 7. Responding in large part to Seleucid imperial pretensions, the anti-imperial intention of Daniel’s beast imagery is similar to that of Revelation’s, if perhaps even more

⁶ Moore, “Raping Rome,” 137–40.

⁷ Carey, “A Man’s Choice: Wealth Imagery and the Two Cities of the Book of Revelation.”

pointed. Many of the attributes of barbarians I identify in Revelation's beasts could also apply to Daniel's beasts, not least because of the literary relationship between the beast images. And because of the Hellenistic heritage of Antiochus IV, it is possible that the barbarian concept may have been known to Daniel's audience, making the comparison between Daniel's beasts and barbarians similarly productive. An interpretation of the Danielic beasts would not be able to engage the Roman permutations of the barbarian notion. But there are pointed Apocalyptic critiques of Rome in Apocalyptic literature. References to Nero's return (e.g., *Sib. Or.* 5:93–154, *Asc. Isa.* 4:1–12) might also benefit from the same analysis that this dissertation applies to Revelation 13.

3. Further engagement with Revelation's representations of the nations

As I briefly discuss above, Revelation's symbolic universe presents the empire as the true barbarian, meaning that the nations are not the barbarians. But what happens if one takes representations of non-Roman peoples in Roman artwork not as "barbarians" but as representations of the nations? There can be some interesting implications for interpreting Revelation's visions of the nations. Take for example what happens if one places the procession of the nations in 7:9–17 in contact with the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. Personifications of people groups at the Sebasteion embody the geographical spread of Roman rule under Augustus and his successors. Similarly, the pan-ethnic crowd in Revelation, echoing the throneroom theophanies in chapters 4–5, declares that God and the lamb deserve glory and power (7:12). Both presentations of the nations also represent visions of global salvation. In Revelation, the pan-ethnic crowd is a group that has received saving deliverance from the great tribulation (7:10). Likewise, the people groups presented in ἔθνος reliefs have been incorporated into the Roman

empire; from the viewpoint of the ideology of imperial conquest, incorporation into the Roman empire marks salvation in the form of an opportunity for an improved way of life. Foregrounding Revelation's images of salvation, rather than its condemnation of the beasts, is a productive way to engage how the book might interact with the type of imagery this dissertation has considered.

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