



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Dragon myth and imp[er]ial ideology in Revelation 12-13

van Henten, J.W.

**Publication date**  
2006

**Published in**  
The reality of apocalypse. rhetoric and politics in the Book of Revelation

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

van Henten, J. W. (2006). Dragon myth and imp[er]ial ideology in Revelation 12-13. In D. Barr (Ed.), *The reality of apocalypse. rhetoric and politics in the Book of Revelation* (pp. 181-203). (Society of biblical literature symposium series; No. 39). Society of Biblical Literature.

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

## DRAGON MYTH AND IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY IN REVELATION 12–13

*Jan Willem van Henten*

Scholars tend to take the connection between the ideology of the emperor cult and the articulation of certain Christological views in the New Testament for granted, especially if they have their eye on the Revelation of John.<sup>1</sup> In this contribution I would like to discuss one aspect of this connection, namely the incorporation of mythological traditions about dragons and their slayers in the emperor's ideology and the possible implications of this incorporation for the reading of Revelation. The socio-political context of Rev 12–13 is often linked to the imperial cult and other kinds of propaganda for the emperor, no matter whether one is inclined to date Revelation around 70 C.E., at the end of the first century or in the last years of Trajan's rule.<sup>2</sup>

On the narrative level, the dragon and the two beasts clearly function as the antagonists of God, Jesus Christ and God's people. Attempting to contextualize Revelation in first or second century Asia Minor, it is hard to avoid relating the figures of the dragon and the two beasts of Rev 12–13 to the practice and ideology of the

---

I warmly thank Professors Henk Versnel (Leiden), David E. Aune (Notre Dame), and Adela Yarbro Collins (Yale) for their comments on earlier versions of this contribution.

1. See, e.g., A. Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten. Das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1923), 287–324; D. Cuss, *Imperial Cult and Honorary Terms in the New Testament* (Paradosis 23; Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1974), 50–88. J. R. Fears, "Herrscherkult," *RAC* 14:1047–93, assumes a connection between the emperor cult and Christological passages in several New Testament writings, referring to Rom 13; 1 Cor 8:4–6; 1 Tim 2:1–6; Tit 3:1–8 and 1 Pet 2:11–17. Cf. also D. Zeller, ed., *Menschwerdung Gottes—Vergöttlichung von Menschen* (NTOA 7; Fribourg and Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, 1988).

2. Cf. E. Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (London: SCM, 1955), 147–91; Cuss, *Imperial Cult*; P. Prigent, "Au temps de l'Apocalypse II: Le culte impérial au 1er siècle en Asie Mineure," *RHPR* 55 (1975): 215–35; D. L. Jones, "Christianity and the Roman Imperial Cult," *ANRW* 23.2:1023–54; E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 192–99; S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 197–98. See now the sophisticated discussion in S. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Roman government in Asia Minor at the time. A simple equation of the symbolic descriptions of the dragon and the beasts with the devil, the emperor, and the high priest of the imperial cult would not do justice to the complex symbolic universe evoked by John's visions. However, and this is my first readerly step, one should assume some connection with imperial ideology if one aims at interpreting Revelation in the perspective of its ancient urban setting in the Roman province of Asia, as its first readers might have done. After all, imperial propaganda was part of the day-to-day experience of most inhabitants of this province.<sup>3</sup>

A second step in the attempt to read Revelation in the socio-political and religious-cultural context it may have had during the first decades of its circulation is to read it together with other texts, sacred or otherwise, that the readers and hearers might have been familiar with. For example, as many ordinary Christian readers as well as scholars have done and still do, one could interpret Revelation's visions in line with prophecies that became part of the Jewish Bible. Other interpreters, however, especially those of Rev 12, have often referred to non-Jewish traditions, oriental and/or Greco-Roman; whereas other readers turned to traditions from both sides. Earlier scholarship has devoted endless discussions to the mythological traditions that may have been taken up in John's symbolic language that describes the dragon and the beasts. Representatives of the German Religio-Historical School (*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), which was important at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, have argued that John adapted and incorporated Babylonian or Greco-Roman myths about chaos monsters and the divine warrior who destroyed those monsters. Many later interpreters of Revelation have followed in their footsteps. In my contribution I will draw on the material from this discussion, but I do not aim at reviving this debate. I simply assume that such myths were part of the cultural and religious context of Revelation's first readers.

My main focus will be on the application of those myths by those who advanced the emperor's ideology, since the association of the emperor with the slayers of chaos monsters, such as the dragon Python or the partly human and partly monstrous Typhon, implied a claim that should not be misunderstood: the emperor was associated with the supreme god Zeus/Jupiter, or Apollo, or the Egyptian royal god Horus, all of whom restore order by slaying the agent of chaos. The question then arises, of course, how this claim about the emperor's role as the divine protector of order and stability fits in with the message of Revelation as a whole.

My reading assumes that the ancient readers of Rev 12–13, and especially of Rev 13:15, had every reason to connect the visions with the claim for the emperor's divine status which they encountered in their city life, since such a claim is easily refuted by the tenor of the visions. Thus, we may have a case analogous to what another apocalyptic passage, *Sibylline Oracles* 5:28–34, unmistakably suggests, despite its veiled language: a principal ruler demands divine status for himself but turns out to be the agent of chaos; his claim for divine status is false, evidenced by his deeds:

3. See the survey in Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 23–131.

One who has fifty as an initial [Nero] will be commander,  
 a terrible snake, breathing out grievous war . . .  
 But even when being invisible he will be destructive. Then he will return  
 declaring himself equal to God.  
 But God will prove that he is not. (*Sib. Or.* 5:28–29, 33–34)<sup>4</sup>

Assuming that it is most likely that ancient readers connected John's prophecy with current displays of a specific divine emperor, I examine how a reading of Revelation through the lens of Greco-Roman traditions about monster-slayers may have undermined the emperor's claim of divine status, certainly a blasphemous idea in Jewish and Christian circles.<sup>5</sup> This chapter focuses first on the mythological traditions about chaos monsters and their opponents as they may have circulated in the imperial age. It then deals with the religio-political use of such traditions in the depiction of the emperor as a divine figure who restores order by defeating chaos. Finally, it discusses the possible connections between this ideology of a divine emperor and the imperial cult. The conclusion summarizes the implications of my discussion of the Greco-Roman materials concerning chaos monsters for a contextualized reading of Rev 12–13.

#### DRAGON, BEASTS, AND COMBAT MYTHS

Revelation's symbolic depictions of the dragon and the two beasts in the visions of chapters 12–13 are part of a cluster of passages about the antagonists of God, of Jesus Christ, and of the people of God. Chapters 12–13 form the core of this cluster.<sup>6</sup> The dragon passages of Rev 12 correspond to descriptions of dragons in Greco-Roman combat myths. He is called a snake as well as a dragon (ὄφις, Rev 12:9,

4. Translation (slightly revised) by J. J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 1:393. The passage belongs to a complex of Nero passages that is associated with the figure of "Nero redivivus"; see J. J. Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism* (SBLDS 13; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1974), 80–87; L. Kreitzer, "Hadrian and the Nero Redivivus Myth," *ZNW* 79 (1988): 92–115; G. C. Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth* (BZNW 59; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 257–67; J. W. van Henten, "Nero Redivivus Demolished: The Coherence of the Nero Traditions in the Sibylline Oracles," *JSP* 21 (2000): 3–17.

5. Exod 20:3; 23:24; 34:14; Deut 6:13; 1 Cor 8:4–6.

6. See also 11:7; 14:9–12; 15:2; 16:2, 10–15; 19:19–21; 20:1–4, 7–10. Whether one advocates a concentric, cyclical or linear structure for Revelation, one has to take into account that chapters 12–13 are linked with chapters 17–18 on the whore of Babylon, joining a positive image of a woman with a negative one. The connection between these sections is supported by the corresponding motifs and similar vocabulary. The woman of Rev 17–18 sits on a scarlet beast, which is full of blasphemous names (17:3, cf. 13:1). The beast of chapter 17 has seven heads and ten horns, as does the first beast from chapter 13 (cf. 13:1; with 17:3, 9–12; also 17:8 with 11:7). See for further discussion of the cohesion in the "war scroll" of Rev 12–22, D. L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1998); for Rev 12, see Edith M. Humphrey's contribution in this book (ch. 5).

14–15; 20:2; δράκων, 12:3–4, 7, 9, 16–17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13 and 20:2).<sup>7</sup> He has a huge body (12:3 μέγας; cf. 12:4, 15), and several heads and horns (12:3). He first fights in heaven and after his fall against heaven (12:4, 7–9; cf. 13:6–7). The dragon has a destructive character and his aggression is emphasized time and again (12:7, 17; cf. 11:7; 13:4, 7; 16:14; 19:19 and 20:8). His main action in chapter 12 is his attack on the heavenly woman and her child. The imagery connected with the persecution of a woman with her infant by a dragon seems to be absent in the Hebrew Bible and parabiblical Jewish traditions.

Many commentators build on the research done by Dieterich, Gunkel and Bousset around the beginning of the twentieth century, to assume that non-Jewish mythological traditions about chaos monsters are incorporated into Rev 12.<sup>8</sup> Authors may differ on the details or the origin of the myths that may have been incorporated by John, but there can be no doubt that there is considerable consensus on the kind of material that seems to be important. Basically, all relevant mythological traditions have been discussed by Adela Yarbro Collins in her 1996 book *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*.<sup>9</sup> She finds significant correspondences between the narrative of the Rev 12 vision and the pattern of non-Jewish combat myths.<sup>10</sup> She also argues

7. Cf. Fontenrose, *Python*, 10: “. . . nonhuman form: most often that of a snake . . .”

8. A. Dieterich, *Abraxas: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des späteren Altertums* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1891), 111–26; H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895); W. Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (MeyerK 16; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1906), 351–56. Also J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 210, 264; H. D. Saffrey, “Relire l’Apocalypse à Patmos,” *RB* 82 (1975): 385–417, esp. 410–17; A. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 57–100; A. Vögtle, “Mythos und Botschaft in Apokalypse 12,” *Tradition und Glaube: Das Frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt* (ed. G. Jeremias, H.-W. Kuhn, and H. Stegemann; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1971), 395–415; R. Bergmeier, “Altes und Neues zur ‘Sonnenfrau am Himmel’ (Apk 12),” *ZNW* 73 (1982): 97–109; D. E. Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols.; Word Biblical Commentary 52a–c; Dallas: Word Books, 1997–98), 667–74. Survey: P. Busch, *Der gefallene Drache: Mythenexegese am Beispiel von Apokalypse 12* (TANZ 19; Tübingen: Francke, 1996). Skeptical: H. Gollinger, *Das “Große Zeichen” von Apokalypse 12* (SBM 11; Würzburg-Stuttgart: Echter Verlag, 1971), 127–33.

9. See n. 9.

10. Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 61: A. The Dragon (Rev 12:3); B. Chaos and Disorder (Rev 12:4a); C. The Attack (Rev 12:4b); D. The Champion (Rev 12:5a); E. The Champion’s “Death” (Rev 12:5b); G. Recovery of the Champion (Rev 12:7a); H. Battle Renewed and Victory (Rev 12:7b–9); I. Restoration and Confirmation of Order (Rev 12:10–12a); J. The Dragon’s Reign (Rev 12:12b–17).

The capitals are taken from Fontenrose, *Python*, whose pattern of the combat myth is slightly different (262–64). Yarbro Collins concludes that all elements of the pagan combat myth are present in Revelation. In her opinion, the death of the champion (E) is, however, only presupposed (12:5) and the role of victor over the dragon taken over by Michael and the element of the dragon’s reign is put at the end (F). Elements G, H, and I therefore move to an earlier position. If one takes Rev 12 and 13 as well as 19:19–21; 20:1–4, 7–10 as a cohesive cluster, there is no need to change the order of the elements. Two complications of the combat myth pattern in connection with Rev 12 are that (1) the dragon seems to have more than one opponent and (2) the final victory over the dragon comes only much later in Revelation.

for a close similarity between Rev 12 and one specific type of these myths, the traditions concerning the monstrous Python's pursuit of Leto, the mother of the twin gods Apollo and Artemis, and the combat between Python and Apollo after the twins have grown up.<sup>11</sup> Yarbro Collins assumes that John the prophet made use of this specific combat myth: "If we ask which example of this form of the combat myth most closely resembles Revelation 12, the answer is clearly the Leto myth. . . . Revelation 12, at least in part, is an adaptation of the myth of the birth of Apollo."<sup>12</sup> She considers the fact that this myth circulated in Asia Minor in the time when Revelation was composed important support for her conclusion.<sup>13</sup>

Yarbro Collins's discussion concentrates on two types of the combat myth, which were both known in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds: the myths about the dragon Python and its slayer, the god Apollo, on the one hand;<sup>14</sup> and traditions concerning the Egyptian anti-god Seth, who became identified with the brutal monster Typhon from Greek mythology, on the other hand.<sup>15</sup> Both mythological clusters contain the motif of a woman (the goddesses Leto or Isis) pursued by a dragon figure (Python or Seth-Typhon). Yarbro Collins' conclusion that the Python-Leto-Apollo complex was tapped by John builds on the views of Dieterich, Fontenrose and Saffrey,<sup>16</sup> but her argument surpasses theirs because of her careful comparison of the sources on Python and Seth-Typhon with Rev 12. A survey of the mythological material discussed by Yarbro Collins shows significant correspondences between the description of the

11. For a description of the myths on Python and references, see G. Türk, "Python," *Ausführliches Lexicon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* 3/2.3400–3412; Fontenrose, *Python*, 46–69. On traditions concerning Apollo in connection with Revelation, see also A. Kerkeslager, "Apollo, Greco-Roman Prophecy, and the Rider on the White Horse in Rev 6:2," *JBL* 112 (1993): 116–21.

12. Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 67; cf. 83.

13. Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 70–71, 245–52.

14. Hyginus, *Fab.* 140; Lucanus, *Bell. Civ.* 5.79–81; and Lucianus, *Dialogi Marini* 9[10]. Additional sources: Fontenrose, *Python*, 18 n. 9.

15. For descriptions of Seth-Typhon in Greek mythology, see J. Schmidt, "Typhoeus, Typhon," *Ausführliches Lexicon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* 5:1426–54; G. Seippel, *Der Typhonmythos* (Greifswalder Beiträge zur Literatur und Stilforschung 24; Greifswald: Hans Dallmeyer, 1939); Fontenrose, *Python*, 70–93; H. Te Velde, *Seth, God of Confusion: A Study of His Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion* (Probleme der Ägyptologie 6; Leiden: Brill, 1977); J. W. van Henten, "Antiochus IV as a Typhonic Figure in Daniel 7," in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (ed. A. S. van der Woude; BETL 106; Louvain: Peeters, 1993), 223–43, esp. 228–35.

16. See n. 9. Fontenrose, *Python*, 262–65 (cf. 266–73), gives patterns of the combat myth and distinguishes between several subtypes that penetrated the classical world, a "Typhon-subtype" and a "Python-subtype." These share the motif of a dragon that fights the gods, tries to disturb cosmic order and is being defeated by a ruler god. The second subtype would only differ from the first in one respect and would be present in Rev 12, too: "This differs from subtype I only in that the god is killed, and his son fights the dragon, recovering his father's life and throne, usually with actual sovereignty for himself. . . . Here belong Python, Set vs. Osiris, Satan (of Rev 12), Zu . . ." (264). Cf. p. 210 with n. 54 concerning Rev 12.

pursuit of the woman and her offspring by the dragon in Revelation and the myths concerning Python, Leto, and Apollo:<sup>17</sup>

*Python combat myth*

1. Struggle for the sanctuary of Delphi
2. Leto pregnant by Zeus
3. Python pursues Leto and tries to kill her
4. The north wind rescues Leto; help by Poseidon
5. Birth of Apollo and Artemis
6. Apollo overcomes Python
7. ———
8. Apollo establishes the Pythian games.<sup>18</sup>

*Seth-Typhon combat myth*

1. Struggle for the throne
2. Isis pregnant by Osiris
- 3[5]. Birth of Horus
- 4[3]. Seth-Typhon pursues Isis and Horus
- 5[4]. Ra and Thoth help Isis
6. Horus overcomes Seth-Typhon
7. Rule of Horus

It is certain that the Python myths were known in the first and second centuries C.E. in the areas mentioned in Revelation. Ephesus, for instance, was temple warden (νεωκόρος) of Artemis, Apollo's sister, as is mentioned also in Acts 19:35.<sup>19</sup> Coins depicting Leto fleeing from Python while her children Artemis and Apollo shoot their arrows at Python from the time of Hadrian were minted at Ephesus and Magnesia on the Meander.<sup>20</sup> These coins, or similar ones, may have been known to the writer and audience of Revelation.

Nevertheless, there are discrepancies between the Python myths and Rev 12 as well. The figure of Artemis as well as the Pythian games have no counterpart in Rev 12.<sup>21</sup> In Revelation the dragon confronts the woman *after* she has given birth to her son. This does not exactly match the Python myth, because this dragon pursues Leto *until* she gives birth to Artemis and Apollo.<sup>22</sup> The Egyptian combat myth fits better, because Seth-Typhon pursues Isis as the dragon pursues the woman in Rev 12 after

17. I present Yarbrow Collins's pattern of the Seth-Typhon myth here as well, with slight modifications, which is useful for my argument below. One should note that variation in the sequence of elements of the patterns in combat myths is a common phenomenon; see H. S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion*, vol. 2: *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual* (Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 6/2; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 76–77, referring, among other things, to the work of V. Propp and W. Burkert.

18. See Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 66, and for her discussion of the texts, see 62–67.

19. G. Biguzzi, "Ephesus, its Artemision, its Temple to the Flavian Emperors, and Idolatry in Revelation," *NovT* 40 (1998): 276–90, esp. 279–80.

20. Apollo Pythios was worshiped at Ephesus and Pergamum; see Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 248–50; also Saffrey, "Relire l'Apocalypse," 413.

21. The element of the champion's temporary ruling-out is also missing in the myths concerning Python. Fontenrose's construction of this element (*Python*, 86–89) is unconvincing. Cf. Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 64.

22. This is also noted by Gollinger, *Große Zeichen*, 130.

the birth of the child. The rescue of Leto corresponds only in part<sup>23</sup> to that of the woman with the sun in Revelation. The woman in Revelation is brought to safety with the help of the great eagle's wings (Rev 12:14; cf. Exod 19:4).<sup>24</sup> Leto is also helped by Poseidon, the god of the sea, in contradistinction, in Rev 12:15–16 the earth assists the woman against the water sent after her by the dragon.

The pattern of the cluster of combat myths about Seth-Typhon,<sup>25</sup> is rather close to the pattern of Rev 12, including the central element of the pursuit of a woman and her child (Isis and Horus) by the dragon. This myth may partly originate in Egypt, but there are many attestations of the veneration of Isis in Asia Minor.<sup>26</sup> Isis was often represented as a Madonna, a woman holding her child Horus-Harpocrates on her knees or in her arms, and this picture appears also on coins from Asia Minor.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, a version of the Typhon myth, which was not affected by Egyptian traditions, was located in Asia Minor itself. According to this myth Typhon temporarily eliminates Zeus and brings him to his home in the Corycian cave at Cilicia.<sup>28</sup> So, there seem to be serious reasons to include the Seth-Typhon myths in the discussion of combat myths relevant for a contextualized reading of Rev 12–13.

The flight of woman and child may be less prominent in the texts on Seth-Typhon; nevertheless, this theme is present in passages from Herodotus and Plutarch.<sup>29</sup> In a group of texts where Seth and Typhon traditions are fused, the gods' flight before Seth-Typhon becomes an important motif. All gods fled to Egypt and changed themselves into animals to mislead Seth-Typhon.<sup>30</sup>

An additional point may be that the myths connected with Seth-Typhon are fre-

23. Cf. Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 67: "The flight of the woman in Revelation 12:14 with the two wings of the eagle is analogous to Leto's flight from Python with the help of the north wind. The aid of the personified earth in v. 16 is analogous to that afforded Leto by Poseidon, god of the sea." See Hyginus, *Fab.* 140, and Lucian, *Dialogi Marini* 9(10).

24. Leto is rescued by the north wind Boreva ("Borra"), whose name was rendered in Latin as *aquilo* (cf. Dan 11:44; Luke 13:29Vg; and Rev 21:13Vg). This word could have been associated with the Latin word for eagle (*aquila*), which supports the connection with the Python-myths. T. Zielinski, "Die griechischen Quellen der Apokalypse," *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 7 (1931): 156; Aune, *Revelation*, 705.

25. See the pattern above based on the *Hymn of Amen-Mose* (from about 1400 B.C.E.), the so-called Metternichstele (from 378–360 B.C.E.), Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.144, 156, 3.5; Plutarchus, *De Iside*; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl.* 1.21–22, 88; and Aristides, *Apol.* 12.

26. F. Dunand, *Le Culte d'Isis dans le Bassin Oriental de la Méditerranée* (EPRO 26; Leiden: Brill, 1973), vol. 3.

27. V. Tran Tam Tinh and Y. Labrecque, *Isis Lactans: Corpus des monuments gréco-romains d'Isis allaitant Harpocrate* (EPRO 37; Leiden: Brill, 1973); Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 261; for attestations from Asia Minor, see also Dunand, *Culte*, 79, 88–89.

28. See, e.g., Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.6.3; for further references, see Schmidt, "Typhoeus," 1432–40.

29. There are also traditions that Seth-Typhon desired and pursued goddesses such as Aphrodite, Thueris, and Isis; see Fontenrose, *Python*, 84 n. 24, 133, 143 n. 46, 180, 184, 189–91.

30. See, e.g., Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.6.3; Ovid, *Metam.* 5.321–331. J. G. Griffiths, "The Flight of the Gods before Typhon: An Unrecognized Myth?" *Hermes* 88 (1960): 374–76; Fontenrose, *Python*, 75–76, 177; Van Henten, "Antiochus," 230–32.

quently combined with astral imagery, which is important in Rev 12 as well, because the dragon and the woman are depicted as heavenly signs (Rev 12:1, 3). Isis as well as Seth-Typhon have been associated with stars and constellations. Isis was linked to the Dog Star<sup>31</sup> and to Virgo, Seth-Typhon to the polar stars and the Great Bear, and according to some scholars also to Hydra.<sup>32</sup> Such connections to the sky and stars are absent in the Python-Leto-Apollo material.

Thus, a reading of John's visions with an eye to contemporaneous dragon myths should not draw only on traditions concerning Leto, Apollo and Python, but also incorporate the imagery connected with Isis and Seth-Typhon. In fact, Python and Seth-Typhon may have been thought to be part of one and the same mythological cluster, because the appearances and roles of both dragons are very similar.<sup>33</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins supports this view of a fusion of traditions when she discusses the depiction of the woman of Rev 12 and, comparing her with three great goddesses, Artemis, Atargatis and Isis, she concludes that the iconography of Isis most closely resembles the depiction of the woman with the sun in Revelation.<sup>34</sup>

There seems to be one important difference between the two combat myths, though, because the sources about Seth-Typhon deal more prominently and universally with supreme power and rule than those about Python. Seth kills the royal god Osiris and is attacked by the son of Osiris and Isis, Horus, also a royal god. Typhon challenges Zeus' leadership of the gods and tries to take over his power. Diodorus Siculus interprets the myth of Seth-Typhon, Osiris, Isis and Horus as a struggle be-

31. Plutarchus, *De Isid.* 21, 38 and 61 (*Mor.* 359D; 365F; and 376A).

32. Teucer Babylonius, see F. Boll, *Sphaera* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903), 47; Te Velde, *Seth*, 86–87. Bergmeier, “Altes und Neues.” See also F. Boll, *Aus der Offenbarung Johannis* (Stoicheia 1; Leipzig: Teubner, 1914), 98–124; W. Hadorn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (THKNT 18; Leipzig: Deichert, 1928), 131–32; H. Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT16a; Tübingen: Mohr, 1974), 164. Mythographers presented Hydra as a daughter of Typhon (Fontenrose, *Python*, 356). See especially Bergmeier, “Altes und Neues,” 101–2, who has doubts about the connection between Seth-Typhon and Hydra, but makes a reasonable case for the link of Seth-Typhon with the polar stars forming the Great Bear.

33. The traditions concerning Seth-Typhon and Python have clearly undergone a process of clustering. Fontenrose (*Python*, 77–93), among other things, points to the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, in which Typhon is presented as Apollo's opponent. In Plutarch's *About Isis and Osiris* (*De Iside*), Leto acts as helper of Isis against Seth-Typhon and hides Apollo-Horus on the floating island Chemmis near Buto (Plutarch, *De Isid.* 18 and 38% = *Mor.* 357F; 366A). Leto is Herodotus's *interpretatio graeca* of the Egyptian goddess Uto (*W3d.t*); see Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.59, 152, 155; A. B. Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II: Commentary 1–98* (EPRO 43; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 270. Yarbro Collins (*Combat Myth*, 71–76) does not discuss Leto in this connection. See also S. J. Patterson, “A Note on an Argive Relief of Selene,” *HTR* 78 (1985): 439–43.

34. With regard to Rev 12:1, lines 13–4 and 45 of the Cyme aretology from the first or second century C.E. say that Isis determines the paths of the stars, sun, and moon. See J. Bergman, *Ich bin Isis: Studien zum memphitischen Hintergrund der griechischen Isisaretologien* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis Historia Religionum 3; Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1968), 301–3; Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 74–75.

tween protagonists of chaos and order, whereas Osiris is presented as an ideal king.<sup>35</sup> Precisely because of this connection with the power of rulers the myths about Seth-Typhon were frequently taken up in political discourse (as described below).

The two beasts of Rev 13 clearly act as the dragon's agents. The location of the dragon near the sea in 12:18 and the rising of the first beast out of the sea in 13:1 suggest that the vision of the two beasts is the continuation of the vision of chapter 12.<sup>36</sup> The first beast derives its power, throne and authority from the dragon (13:2, 4; cf. 13:5, 7, 12) and resembles the dragon with its ten horns and seven heads (13:1; cf. 12:3). The beast rising out of the earth is closely related to the first beast and speaks like the dragon (13:11). Further on the dragon and the two beasts are again presented as a single group of antagonists (16:13; 20:10, where the second beast is called the false prophet). This cohesion of chapters 12 and 13 calls for a discussion of dragon myth materials in relation to both chapters, and not only chapter 12.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, my attempt to contextualize Rev 12–13 in no way excludes readings that interpret both visions in line with the ongoing use of Jewish traditions within and outside the Hebrew Bible. Daniel and other prophetic writings are echoed many times in Revelation;<sup>38</sup> and Jewish readers may have been inclined to interpret the dragon and the beasts as recreations of biblical chaos monsters like Leviathan, Behemoth and Rahab<sup>39</sup> or considered the exodus tradition or Gen 3 as the point of departure for the interpretation of the dragon in chap. 12.<sup>40</sup>

My reason for linking Rev 12–13 to the Greco-Roman combat myths is that these myths continued to resonate in Asia Minor's urban culture in many ways,

35. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl.* 1.21–22; cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.144; Plutarchus, *De Isid.* 12–13 and 49, *Mor.* 355E; 356AB; 371AB.

36. According to Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 175, the dragon mirrors itself in the sea.

37. Remarkably, most research into the mythological traditions that may have contributed to the depiction of the antagonists is restricted to Rev 12, while the dragon and its companions reoccur time and again (n. 7); see J. W. van Henten, “‘En de draak werd toornig op de vrouw’ (Openb. 12:17),” in *Kleine Encyclopedie van de Toorn* (ed. A. de Jong and A. F. de Jong; Utrechtse Theologische Reeks 21; Utrecht: Faculteit Godgeleerdheid, 1993), 57–75, esp. 64–65 and 73–75.

38. See, e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (New York: University Press of America, 1984); J.-P. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16,17–19,10* (European University Studies, ser. 23; Theology 376; Frankfurt: Lang, 1989); J. Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup 93; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); J. Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretation of Revelation 8:7–12* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1987); S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup, 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (JSNTSup, 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

39. This association may also be supported by the comparisons of Egypt, Babylon, and other empires with Rahab, Leviathan, or Tannin (Isa 30:7; 51:9–10; Jer 51:34; Ezek 29:3–5; 32; Ps 87:4; cf. Dan 7 and 8).

40. Cf. Gollinger, *Große Zeichen*; D. E. Guery, “Les signes de la Femme et du Dragon: Apocalypse 12,” *LumVie* 45 (1996): 23–33; J. Dochhorn, “Und die Erde tat ihren Mund auf: Ein Exodusmotiv in Ap. 12,16,” *ZNW* 88 (1997): 140–42; J. Kalms, *Der Sturz des Gottesfeindes: Traditionsgeschichtliche Studien zu Apoalypse 12* (WMANT 93; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001).

which may have enabled ancient readers to directly associate their internal symbolic universe as evoked by the visions with cultural symbols prominent in the external world. The seven decrees of Rev 2–3, especially those for Pergamum and Ephesus, suggest that the Roman administration and its ideology were linked up with the satanic forces of the dragon.<sup>41</sup>

A reading of Rev 12–13 in combination with contemporaneous combat myths helps to understand several details in their ancient context that hardly have parallels in biblical writings, or are only paralleled by Dan 7 or 8.<sup>42</sup> These details have striking parallels in the Greco-Roman combat myths. Revelation 12:3 emphasizes the red color of the dragon. This can, perhaps, be taken as an allusion to the depiction of Leviathan in Job 41:10–13,<sup>43</sup> but the association with the figure of Seth-Typhon is telling in any case, because Seth-Typhon is not only consistently depicted as a red animal, but the color red was also one of the means to identify animals or humans with this chaos monster.<sup>44</sup> The battle location indicated in Rev 12–13 (12:7, 17; 13:4, 7) does not fit in with the biblical chaos monsters living in the sea, but Typhon's ruinous performance can easily be associated with the heavenly battle of Rev 12:7. The sweeping down to earth of a third of the stars in Rev 12:4 may echo Dan 8:10–12, but this motif is also paralleled by Seth-Typhon's attack against heaven and his casting down of several stars and constellations.<sup>45</sup> According to Apollodorus, Typhon's head often brushed the stars (*Bibl.* 1.6.3). Apollodorus also says that Typhon attacked Zeus, who had just defeated the Giants and got hold of the throne of heaven and earth.<sup>46</sup> Typhon hurled rocks and attacked heaven with hisses and shouts,

41. H.-J. Klauck, "Das Sendschreiben nach Pergamon und der Kaiserkult in der Johannesoffenbarung," *Bib* 73 (1992): 153–82.

42. The first beast of chapter 13 is often interpreted as a creative combination of the four beasts from Dan 7. See, e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 229–39; A. Yarbro Collins, "The Influence of Daniel on the New Testament," in *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ed. J. J. Collins; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: 1993), 90–112, esp. 107–9. The characterization of this beast resembles the description of the fourth beast's eleventh horn in Dan 7 because of the emphasis on its blasphemy and arrogance in combination with its warfare against God and the saints who dwell in heaven (cf. Rev 13:1, 5–7, and 17:3 with Dan 7:8, 20–21, 25 [LXX/Theod]; also the addition in Dan 7:8 [LXX], καὶ ἐποίει πόλεμον πρὸς τοὺς ἁγίους). The first beast's warfare is connected with the dragon's wars; cf. 12:7, 17. Beale (*Use of Daniel*, 231–33, 245) supposes that the dragon's giving of authority to the first beast (13:2, 4) was inspired by the bestowal of authority on the one resembling a human being in Dan 7:13–14. Many scholars have argued that Dan 7 draws on Jewish as well as non-Jewish mythological traditions. See for a synthesis J. J. Collins, "Stirring Up the Great Sea: The Religio-Historical Background of Daniel 7," in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (ed. A. S. van der Woude; BETL 106; Louvain: Peeters, 1993), 121–36.

43. Cf. Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 76.

44. Fontenrose, *Python*, 81, 185; Van Henten, "Antiochus," 236–38, with references. Cf. *Sib. Or.* 8:88 (possibly an allusion to Rev 12:3), referring to a purple dragon.

45. J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel* (HSM 16; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 107.

46. Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.6.3. Fontenrose, *Python*, 71, 84.

while spouting a great jet of fire from his mouth.<sup>47</sup> Thereafter, the gods fled to Egypt, but Zeus took up the fight against Typhon from heaven. Nonnus of Panopolis (fifth century C.E.), who combined several traditions on Seth-Typhon and elaborated them extensively, describes in the first book of his *Dionysiaca* Typhon's struggle against stars and constellations. He dragged them away from their position and even dumped the two Fishes into the sea (*Dion.* 1.165–218; cf. 2.281–90).<sup>48</sup> Typhon's well-known association with comets is connected with this motif. Pliny refers to a comet called Typhon after a king with this name, which was seen in Egypt and Ethiopia and considered ominous.<sup>49</sup> Finally, as suggested already, the combination of astral symbolism and combat myth makes the combat myth about Seth-Typhon an attractive co-text of Rev 12, where we find a similar combination. As a matter of fact, a passage of Plutarch describes three important constellations: the Dog Star, the Great Bear and Orion. It links these constellations to the three key figures of one version of the Seth-Typhon combat myth, namely Isis, Seth-Typhon and Horus respectively. These three figures can easily be compared with the mother, the child and their adversary, two of which are also introduced as constellations (Rev 12:1, 3).

#### POLITICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE COMBAT MYTHS ABOUT PYTHON AND SETH-TYPHON

My discussion of the combat myths about Python and Seth-Typhon has hinted already at a political use of these mythic traditions. This section will deal with the recycling of the combat myths in politics, especially as part of the propaganda for a divine emperor.

One of the pillars in the temple of Apollonis, mother to the Attalid kings Attalus II and Eumenes II, in her native town Cyzicus, showed a picture of Artemis and Apollo's fight against the dragon who threatened them (*Anth. Pal.* 3.6).<sup>50</sup> Other representations of the Python-Apollo-Leto-myth were found on coins of the Imperial period (above). Augustus singled out Apollo for special veneration. He made Apollo into his patron deity and presented himself, particularly before 27 B.C.E., as Apollo's

47. For further references, see Schmidt, "Typhoeus," 1433–34.

48. G. Braden, "Nonnos' Typhon: Dionysiaca Books I and II," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 15 (1974): 851–79; W. Fauth, *Eidos poikilon: Zur Thematik der Metamorphose und zum Prinzip der Wandlung aus dem Gegensatz in den Dionysiaka des Nonnos von Panopolis* (Hypomnemata 66; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1981), 160–66.

49. Pliny, *Nat. hist.* 2.23.91. For further references, see Boll, *Sphaera*, 164. Typhon was connected with storm winds as well; cf. Acts 27:14.

50. Türk, "Python," 3407–8.

incarnation.<sup>51</sup> In Virgil's famous *Fourth Eclogue*, Augustus's reign is associated with a prophecy about the beginning of a new golden age and the reign of Apollo:<sup>52</sup>

The Maid returns, old Saturn's reign returns,  
 Offspring of heaven, a hero's race descends.  
 Now as the babe is born, with whom iron men  
 Shall cease, and golden men spread through the world,  
 Bless him, chaste goddess: now your Apollo reigns (lines 6–10, trans.  
 P. Alpers).<sup>53</sup>

The emperor Nero founded a special corps of five thousand soldiers, who accompanied him on his participation in contests and shows. These so-called Augustiani applauded Nero's performances. Their acclamations betray divine honors and associate Nero with Apollo: "Glorious Caesar! Apollo! Augustus! Unmatched, like Pythios! By thyself we swear, O Caesar, none surpasses you".<sup>54</sup> After Nero's glorious return from his tour in Greece early in 68 C.E., he was welcomed with similar exclamations: "Hail, Olympian Victor! Hail, Pythian Victor! Augustus! Augustus! Hail to Nero, our Hercules! Hail to Nero, our Apollo! The only victor of the Grand Tour, the only one from the beginning of time! Augustus! Augustus! O Divine Voice! Blessed are they that hear you!"<sup>55</sup> Other passages and artefacts can undoubtedly be added to these references, but, already, it is obvious that Roman rulers were associated with Apollo as victor. Several instances of this triumphant role for Apollo go back to his defeat of Python.

51. For a survey, see P. Lambrechts, "Die 'apollinische' Politik des Augustus und der Kaiserkult," in *Saeculum Augustum*, vol. 2: *Religion und Literatur* (ed. G. Binder; Wege der Forschung 512; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 88–107. For further literature, see P. Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (Munich: Beck, 1990), 338.

52. On the *Carmen Saeculare* of Horace with a similar message, see D. Georgi, "Who Is the True Prophet?" *HTR* 79 (1986): 100–126.

53. iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna,  
 iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.  
 tu modo nascenti puero, quo ferrea primum  
 desinet ac toto surget gens aurea mundo,  
 casta fave Lucina: tuus iam regnat Apollo.

Lambrechts (*Die 'apollinische' Politik*, 95) supposes that the child is none other than Octavian-Apollo. A legend concerning Augustus's birth may have confirmed the claim of his special relationship with Apollo. Suetonius, *Aug.* 94, and Cassius Dio 45.1 say that Augustus's mother, Atia, became pregnant in the temple of Apollo after the visit of the god in the shape of a snake.

54. Cassius Dio 62.20.5: "Ὁ καλὸς Καίσαρ, ὁ Ἀπόλλων, ὁ Αὐγουστος, εἷς ὡς Πύθιος. μά σε, Καίσαρ, σὺδεῖς σε νικᾷ. See Cuss, *Imperial Cult*, 77–78. On the meaning of εἷς in this acclamation, see H. S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion*, vol. 1: *Ter unus: Isis, Dionysos, Hermes. Three Studies in Henotheism* (Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 6; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 243. For the connection between Nero and Apollo, see also *Inscriptiones Graecae* 7 no. 36.

55. Dio 63.20.5. Cuss, *Imperial Cult*, 79–80. These exclamations are, of course, also inspired by the Pythian Games won by Nero and Apollo as patron god of the arts.

A search for political applications of the Seth-Typhon myths yields rich material as well. In Egypt, Ptolemaic kings as well as native Egyptians used the myth of the conflict between Horus and Seth-Typhon to blacken their opponents, be they a Seleucid king, an Egyptian rebel or the Ptolemies in indigenous texts, and to propagate their own role as Horus who restores order by overcoming Seth-Typhon.<sup>56</sup> The struggle between Horus and Seth-Typhon was a central theme in Ptolemaic royal ideology.<sup>57</sup> The ceremony of the coronation of the Ptolemaic kings at Memphis included a ritual reenactment of the killing of Seth-Typhon by Horus.<sup>58</sup> Annalina Levi discusses coins from the reigns of Hadrian, probably dating from 134–136 c.e., and of Caracalla (dated 215 c.e.), which seem to build on the imagery of Horus triumphing over Seth-Typhon. On these coins both emperors are depicted in military dress, standing with one foot on a crocodile,<sup>59</sup> matching a traditional representation of the royal god Horus, often portrayed with his feet on a crocodile or hippopotamus, or killing a crocodile.<sup>60</sup> The crocodile and the hippopotamus most probably represent Horus' enemy Seth-Typhon.<sup>61</sup> Other emperors were associated with Horus too: Domitian, for example, bears the Horus title on an obelisk, which now stands on the Piazza Navona in Rome.<sup>62</sup>

In the imperial period, the version of the Seth-Typhon myth that focuses on the battle between Zeus and Typhon is particularly relevant, because Zeus/Jupiter was the god with whom the emperors were affiliated most frequently.<sup>63</sup> Two passages from the first or early second century, a passage in Pseudo-Seneca's tragedy *Octavia* and Dio Chrysostom's first oration on kingship (*Or.* 1), draw extensively on the

56. Van Henten, "Antiochus," 235–42. L. V. Zabkar, "Six Hymns to Isis in the Sanctuary of Her Temple at Philae and Their Theological Significance," *JEA* 69 (1983): 115–37. The first of this series of hymns to Isis from the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphos published and discussed by Zabkar contains the phrase: "You are the divine mother of Horus . . . who causes the rebels to fall" (118).

57. C. Onasch, "Zur Königsideologie der Ptolemäer in den Dekreten von Kanopus und Memphis (Rosettana)," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 24/25 (1976): 137–55; L. Koenen, "Die Adaptation ägyptischer Königsideologie am Ptolemäerhof," in *Egypt and the Hellenistic World* (ed. E. Van 't Dack, P. Van Dessel, and W. Van Gucht; *Studia Hellenistica* 27; Louvain, 1983), 143–90; Van Henten, "Antiochus," 224–25, 238–41. See also D. Frankfurter, "Lest Egypt's City Be Deserted: Religion and Ideology in the Egyptian Response to the Jewish Revolt (116–117 c.e.)," *JJS* 43 (1992): 203–20.

58. Nigidius Figulus, Schol. Germ. (ed. Swoboda, 1964), 123: "Typhon interficitur in templo Aegypti Memphi, ubi mos fuit solio regio decorari reges, qui regna ineunt."

59. A. C. Levi, "Hadrian as King of Egypt," *The Numismatic Chronicle* 6, ser. 8 (1948): 30–38.

60. See the references of Levi W. Barta, "Horus von Edfu," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* 3:34–35; B. Altenmüller, "Horus, Herr der Harpunierstätte," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* 3:36–37.

61. Animals especially linked to Seth were the ass, crocodile, hippopotamus, fish, and pig. See T. Hopfner, "Der Tierkult der alten Ägypter nach den griechisch-römischen Berichten und den wichtigeren Denkmälern," *Denkschriften der (kaiserlichen) Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien* 57/2 (1913), Register s.v. "Settiere," p. 198.

62. Levi, "Hadrian," 35 n. 24.

63. J. Beaujeu, *La religion romaine à l'apogée de l'Empire*, vol. 1: *La politique religieuse des Antonins (96–192)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1955), 71–73; C. P. Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom* (Loeb Classical Monographs; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 117, who refers to the impressive temple for Zeus Philios and Trajan at Pergamum.

Seth-Typhon combat myth. Pseudo-Seneca's *Octavia* depicts the sad lot of Nero's first wife and contains severe accusations of Nero. This passage is all the more fascinating, because many readers of Revelation suppose that the head of the first beast in Rev 13, which was fatally wounded but recovered, and the number of this beast as indicated in Rev 13:18, refer in some way to Nero.

Nero banished his first wife Octavia to Campania and had her killed in 62 c.e. on the island of Pandateira. The *Octavia* describes the fate of this woman, who was sadly disgraced by Nero. In the tragedy, Octavia depicts Nero as a malicious man and accuses him of all kinds of evil deeds. The emperor is consistently characterized as a tyrant (lines 33, 87, 110, 609–10, 620, 899 and 959). Traditions connected with Typhon resound in one section, which seems to allude to events in Nero's life and to his government (*Oct.* 228–41).<sup>64</sup> Lines 228–37 focus on the world of the gods and the stars and in lines 237–41 there follows a comparison of Nero's rule with the destructive performance of Typhon. Both passages are closely connected. Astronomic references in lines 228–37 already characterize Nero's time as a calamitous period:

And oh that the lord of the heaven-dwellers, who often shakes hands with deadly bolt and terrifies our souls with the awful fires and portents strange, would make ready to whelm with flames this impious prince. We have seen a glowing radiance in the sky, a comet spreading its baleful trail, where slow Boötes, numb with Arctic chill, with endless, nightlong wheeling, guides his wain . . . (Pseudo-Seneca, *Oct.* 228–34; trans. F. J. Miller, LCL)

This passage aligns Zeus/Jupiter with Typhon, and recalls the combat myth. The "lord of the heaven-dwellers" (*caelitem rector*) must be Jupiter, as is confirmed by the reference to his bolt (*fulmen infestum*, line 229). The comet (line 232) and the astronomic references of lines 233–34 may be associated with Typhon. Boötes (*Bootes*, derived from Βοώτης, 'Ploughman') is a constellation under its own name or another name for Ἄρκτουρος or Ἄρκτοφύλαξ 'Bearward'.<sup>65</sup> In that case the star is connected with the constellation of the Great Bear, which was sometimes identified with Typhon (see above). The adjective *Arctous* in the ominous phrase *frigore Arctoo rigens* also points to the most northern constellations, to which the Great Bear and the Little Bear belong.<sup>66</sup> The association with Typhon evoked by the text is strengthened by the reference to a comet and the mention of Typhon in line 238. The passage may hint at the bolt of lightning which struck the table at which Nero was eating during a visit to a villa near the ponds of Simbruvium (near Subiaco; 60 c.e.) or the thunderbolt which melted down a statue of Nero in a gymnasium (62–63

64. Commentaries: G. Ballaira, "Seneca": *Octavia* (Corsi Universitari; Turin, Italy: Giapichelli, 1974), 43–44; L. Y. Whitman, *The Octavia: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (Noctes Romanae, Forschungen über die Kultur der Antike 16; Bern: Haupt, 1978), 67–69.

65. Hipparch 1.2.5; Arratus 92. *LSJ* 242. H. von Geisau, "Bootes," *Der kleine Pauly* 1:928–29.

66. Draco also belonged to the northern constellations; see E. Boer, "Sternbilder," *Der kleine Pauly* 5:362.

c.e.).<sup>67</sup> The first event is mentioned by Tacitus in connection with the appearance of a comet (*sidus cometes*) and talk of Rubellius Plautus as a possible successor to Nero. Tacitus relates the second occurrence in a brief reference to a series of ominous events before he starts with his description of the consulate of C. Memmius Regulus and L. Verginius Rufus. Octavia had died and Nero had a daughter from Poppaea soon afterwards (*Ann.* 15.23). The magnificent gymnasium at the Campus Martius dedicated by Nero (Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.47) was struck by a bolt of lightning and Nero's statue in the gymnasium was melted into a lump of bronze. The association of these events mentioned by Tacitus with Typhon and his fate would be obvious and Pseudo-Seneca may be interpreted in this perspective as well. The Romans were familiar with the elimination of Typhon by the thunderbolts of Zeus/Jupiter,<sup>68</sup> and the events could easily be understood as forebodings of Nero's end.

The identification of Nero with Typhon is, in any case, explicit in lines 237–41 of the *Octavia*. After a reference to Typhon's birth because of Jupiter's neglect of Tellus<sup>69</sup> Nero is depicted as being worse than Typhon:

Not such a pest was Typhon, whom wrathful mother Earth produced in scorn of Jove; this scourge, worse than he, this enemy of gods and men, has driven the heavenly ones from their shrines, and citizens from their country. . . . (Pseudo-Seneca, *Oct.* 237–41)<sup>70</sup>

The passage includes several characteristics of Typhon that occur elsewhere: he is a savage beast, destructive (*ferus* and *pestis*, lines 237 and 239; cf. line 235 *saevus dux*), and the enemy of the gods. Lines 235–36 refer to Nero's pollution of heaven, which would fit in with Seth-Typhon's attack on heaven (*en ipse diro spiritu saevi ducis polluitur aether . . .*). The last lines of this passage (239–41) actually indicate a battle on two fronts, of the gods and of humankind. The traditional imagery connected with Seth-Typhon is expanded to the human world, which probably arises from the association of Nero with Typhon.

This is an attractive parallel to Revelation, where the combat myth is also depicted as taking place on two levels, the heavenly and the human. While Typhon

67. Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.22; 15.22. Whitman, *Octavia*, 67.

68. For example see Aeschylus, *Prom.* 362; Antoninus Liberalis 28.2–4; Ovid, *Metam.* 5.346–358; Hyginus, *Fab.* 196.

69. Pseudo-Seneca seems to connect Typhon with the giants, thus implying that his mother was Gaia/Tellus (Hesiod, *Theog.* 183–186; cf. 306). Other sources mention Typhon as Hera's son. According to *Hom. Hymn to Apollo* 305–55, Hera produced Typhon because of her wrath at Zeus giving birth to Athena and asked the Delphic dragoness to raise him. Gradually Typhon became associated with the giants (Hyginus, *Fab.* 151; cf. already Pindar, *Pyth.* 8.17–18).

70. Non tam ferum Typhona neglecto Iove  
irata Tellus edidit quondam parens:  
hic gravior illo pestis, hic hostis deum  
hominumque templis expulit superos suis  
civesque patria . . .

attacks the gods, Nero-Typhon is the enemy of gods<sup>71</sup> and humans. The expulsion of the gods from their temples can be connected with the pursuit of the gods by Seth-Typhon on the level of the heavenly world,<sup>72</sup> but easily associated with Nero's plundering of temples in Rome, Greece and Asia Minor in the human world.<sup>73</sup> Nero's frequent expulsion of citizens from Rome<sup>74</sup> can also be seen as an analogy of the pursuit of the gods by his match Seth-Typhon. No doubt *Octavia* 228–41 was grist to the mill of Nero's critics.

Dio Chrysostom's first oration may equally have served the propaganda purpose of the emperor's opponents. Domitian banished Dio Chrysostom from Italy as well as from his native Bithynia for many years. For Dio, Domitian must have been the embodiment of 'typhonic' ruler. Dio and other contemporary writers portray Domitian as the tyrant par excellence, so that they could praise Trajan, after the brief intermezzo of Nerva, to the skies.<sup>75</sup>

The second part of Dio Chrysostom's most sophisticated speech on kingship (*Or.* 1)<sup>76</sup> is based on the legend that Hermes shows the youth Heracles the right as well as the wrong type of rule by taking the boy on a walk to a huge mountain, which appears to consist of two summits (1.58–84).<sup>77</sup> Heracles wants to be a ruler (1.65)<sup>78</sup> and Hermes leads him along a secret path to the two peaks, one of which stands high above the clouds while the other is dark and misty. On the throne of each peak sits a woman. One is called Kingship (βασιλεία, 1.73) and the other Tyranny (Τυραννίς, 1.78). The first woman is further described as a child of Zeus (like Heracles himself, 1.59), considered a god by Heracles (θεὸς ἀληθῶς εἶναι, 1.83) and is linked with the personified characteristics of virtuous kingship: Justice (Δίκη), Order (Εὐνομία), Peace (Εἰρήνη), Law (Νόμος)<sup>79</sup> and Friendship (Φιλία, 1.74–75; 82). The other woman is

71. On this epithet of Seth-Typhon, see L. Koenen, "θεοῖσιν ἐχθρός: Ein einheimischer Gegenkönig in Ägypten (132/1)," *CEg* 34 (1959): 103–19.

72. For references to the pursuit of the gods by Seth-Typhon and his attack on temples and some analogies in the human world (concerning Antiochus III and IV), see Van Henten, "Antiochus," 228–35, 242 n. 81.

73. Dio Cassius 62.11.3; Suetonius, *Nero* 32; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.45; Whitman, *Octavia*, 68.

74. Dio Cassius 62.11.3–12.1.

75. *Or.* 40.12; 45.1; 50.8. See Jones, *Roman World*, 118; L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 95–115.

76. See further P. Desideri, *Dione di Prusa: Un intellettuale greco nell'impero romano* (Biblioteca di cultura contemporanea 135; Messina, Italy: D'Anna, 1978), 283–375.

77. The legend is said to be modeled on a story by the sophist Prodicus about Heracles meeting two women (Vice and Virtue). See Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.1.21–34; Cicero, *De off.* 1.118; Desideri, *Dione di Prusa*, 245 n. 6; Jones, *Roman World*, 116. See also A. Loyen, "Hercule et Typhée: A propos de Virgile, *Enéide* VIII, 298," in *Mélanges de Philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes, offerts à Alfred Ernout* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1940), 237–45.

78. On Heracles as ideal king, see R. Höistad, "Cynic Hero and Cynic King: Studies in the Cynic Conception of Man" (diss., Uppsala, 1948).

79. Also called Λόγος Ὁρθός, Σύμβουλος, and Παρέδρος, 1.75.

ugly, greedy, hated by everybody<sup>80</sup> and associated with Cruelty (Ὠμόγητος), Insolence (Υβρις),<sup>81</sup> Lawlessness (Ἄνομία), Rebellion (Στάσις) and Flattery (Κολακεία, 1.82). Right at the beginning of the description of the two peaks their names are given: “One of them bore the name Royal Peak and was sacred to Zeus the King; the other, Tyrannical Peak, was named after Typhon”.<sup>82</sup> The companions of Lady Tyranny correspond to the description of Seth-Typhon in the myths. Heracles, of course, prefers the first woman, so that Zeus entrusts him with the rule over all humankind (1.83–84).

#### IDEOLOGY OF THE IMPERIAL CULT AND MYTHOLOGY

In the previous section I tried to show that combat myths of both Python and Seth-Typhon were used to endorse the association of rulers with the divine world by linking him to gods who restore order by triumphing over Python or Seth-Typhon. The Seth-Typhon complex, moreover, seems to have been used in two ways: either by constructing the emperor as the victorious Zeus/Jupiter or Horus or, by inverting the political message of the myth, by associating the emperor with the forces of chaos, i.e. the world of Seth-Typhon. Exact information about the emperor cult is missing in Rev 13 and a close connection between ruler cult and persecutions of Christians cannot be taken for granted in the first and second centuries c.e.<sup>83</sup> Scholars may never be able to establish the precise connection between John’s visions and the practices of imperial cults in Asia Minor.<sup>84</sup> However, it seems at least possible to read some of the statements in chapter 13, with Revelation’s ancient readers, as reflections on the emperor’s claim for divine status, as articulated, among other things in the private and public bestowal of divine honors upon the emperor in Asia Minor’s cities. How does such a reading fit in with the political applications of the combat myths? Whether or

80. Or. 1.78–82; G. Mussies, *Dio Chrysostom and the New Testament: Parallels Collected* (SCHNT 2; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 250, points to the correspondence between this woman who has many sceptres, many tiaras and many diadems on her head and the diadems on the head of the dragon and the first beast (Rev 12:3; 13:1; cf. 19:12).

81. Cf. 1.76 where Dio refers to authority (or power) with folly (ἐξουσία μετὰ ἀνοίας) as the worst result of this woman’s activities.

82. 1.67: ἐκαλεῖτο δὲ αὐτῶν ἡ μὲν Βασιλεῖος ἄκρα, ἱερὰ Διὸς Βασιλέως, ἡ δὲ ἑτέρα τυραννική, Τυθῶνος ἐπώνυμος.

83. Arrested Christians were forced to venerate the gods, sometimes also the emperor, but there was no obligation to attend provincial or municipal sacrifices or to perform rites. See D. Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire* 2/1 (EPRO 108; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 530. Pliny (*Ep.* 10.96) and some martyr texts refer to the obligation for Christians to venerate the emperor or to perform acts that belonged to imperial cult (*Mart. Pol.* 8–10; *Mart. Pion.* 8; 18; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.2). For a dossier of the evidence, see F. Millar, “The Imperial Cult and the Persecutions,” in *Le culte des souverains dans l’Empire romain* (ed. W. den Boer; Entretiens sur l’antiquité classique 19; Vandoeuvres-Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1973), 143–65. See also P. Prigent, “Au temps de l’Apocalypse III: Pourquoi les persécutions?” *RHPR* 55 (1975): 341–63; Jones, “Christianity”; P. Keresztes, “The Imperial Roman Government and the Christian Church,” *ANRW* 23.1:247–315, 375–86; Price, *Rituals and Power*, 123–26, 220–22.

84. Cf. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 145–47, 201–9.

not John the prophet hints at the emperor cult itself, his ancient readers and listeners may have been alerted to the fatal consequences of the ideology connected with this cult. The vision of Rev 13 constructs a clash of two mutually exclusive ideologies.<sup>85</sup> Building on the story of the veneration of Nebuchadnezzar's statue<sup>86</sup> in Dan 3,<sup>87</sup> with the death penalty as sanction for disobedient subjects, John's vision depicts the second beast as organizing the general adoration of the first beast (13:14–15; cf. 13:8, 12; 19:20; 20:4).<sup>88</sup> Ancient readers may have been inclined to interpret this first beast as a symbol for Rome, perhaps an individual Roman emperor, or the emperors as a collective.<sup>89</sup> They may have even linked the second beast to the high priesthood of the imperial cult or—more generally—to the provincial councils who were responsible for the activities connected with the emperor cults, although the latter associations might have been less obvious.<sup>90</sup> Yet, in the context of early imperial Asia Minor, many ancient readers would have interpreted the blasphemous names of the first beast according to Rev 13:1 (cf. 17:3) as hints at the various honorific titles attributed to the emperor in connection with his supposed divine status (titles such as κύριος, σωτήρ, and θεός), which are, of course, blasphemous to the God of Jews and Christians.<sup>91</sup>

In the eastern part of the Mediterranean world the emperor's divine status was commonly acknowledged: in the provinces, in the cities and even in private life, as is apparent from provincial and local decrees and archaeological sources:<sup>92</sup> "Sacri-

85. H. S. Versnel, "Geef de keizer wat des keizers is en Gode wat Gods is: Een essay over een utopisch conflict," *Lampas* 21 (1988): 233–56.

86. Dan 3:12, 18 reads "your image" (εἶδωλον σου εἰκῶν σου).

87. Cf. Rev 13:15 with Dan 3:7, 10, 12, 14–15, 18 (LXX); 3:7, 11–12, 15, 18 (Theod.) with the verb προσκυνέω and εἰκῶν as object. Also the groups living under the authority of the first beast (Rev 13:7) with Dan 3:2, 7 (LXX): ἔθνη, φυλαὶ καὶ γλώσσαι; Dan 3:4, 7 (Theod.): λαοί, φυλαί, φλώσσαι (cf. also Dan 3:96 [LXX/Theod.]).

88. See S. Giet, *L'Apocalypse et l'histoire: Étude historique sur l'Apocalypse johannique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), 113–45; Jones, "Christianity," 1034–35; Keresztes, "Roman Government," 271–72; Price, *Rituals and Power*, 196–98. See also S. 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 (1984): 599–610. According to 13:4, the dragon is venerated, too.

89. Cf. B. Reicke, "Die jüdische Apokalyptik und die johanneische Tiervision," *RSR* 60 (1972): 173–92, esp. 175.

90. Cf. Cuss, *Imperial Cult*, 20, 96–112. On provincial councils and officials of the emperor cults, see J. Deininger, *Die Provinziallandtage der römischen Kaiserzeit von Augustus bis zum Ende des dritten Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Vestigia 6; Munich: Beck, 1965). Friesen (*Imperial Cults*, 203) offers a brief critical summary of several proposals for referents of the symbolic second beast.

91. Cf., e.g., Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 360; H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of John* (London: Macmillan, 1907), 161–62; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:347–48; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 175; Cuss, *Imperial Cult*, 50–53.

92. S. R. F. Price, "Gods and Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult," *JHS* 104 (1984): 79–95. H. Hänlein-Schäfer, *VENERATIO AUGUSTI: Eine Studie zu den Tempeln des ersten römischen Kaisers* (Archaeologica 39; Rome: Bretschneider, 1985), elaborates the differences between provincial and municipal sanctuaries for Augustus and the different practices in provincial and local imperial cults. See also Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 25–103.

fices were sometimes offered to the emperor as to a god. So too the emperor was called *theos* (god) and the main aim of the cult was to display piety (*eusebeia*) towards him.<sup>93</sup> We can assume that Jewish and early Christian authors were familiar with this practice, not only in Asia Minor, but also and even in Israel/Palestine. Herod the Great felt compelled to show his loyalty to Augustus after having supported Mark Antony. Herod built a temple for Augustus and Roma in the newly founded city of Caesarea (Josephus, *J.W.* 1.414; *Ant.* 15.339). The sacrifices, statues,<sup>94</sup> prayers, games and other forms of worship connected with the imperial cult rendered the emperor divine honors and titles which belonged, in the perspective of Revelation, only to God and Jesus Christ.

It would not have been too difficult to fill in the roles of the combat myth pattern for John's readers who were familiar with the ideologies of what, for those readers, must have been the "outside world." The association of the emperor with Apollo was prominent during the reigns of Augustus and Nero (see above), but Zeus/Jupiter was the most important god in the provincial imperial cults.<sup>95</sup> There are many attestations of emperors associated with Zeus/Jupiter.<sup>96</sup> Gaius and Domitian even arranged to present themselves as Zeus or Jupiter. Gaius' decision to erect a statue of himself as the new Zeus Epiphanes in the temple of Jerusalem<sup>97</sup> is well known.<sup>98</sup> Because of the most commonly defended date of Revelation, the sources concerning Domitian may be especially relevant.<sup>99</sup> Coins from 85–96 c.e. commemorate Domitian's victory over the Chatti and suggest that he could only establish peace after defeating the agents of chaos as Jupiter had done: Zeus/Jupiter had to defeat the Giants and Typhon before he could establish his permanent supreme rule. On these

93. Price, *Rituals and Power*, 232. Cf. 231, 233.

94. See, on the connection between the image of the first beast and statues in the imperial cult, Cuss, *Imperial Cult*, 104–12.

95. I will, therefore, concentrate on Zeus/Jupiter rather than on Apollo in the following pages. Kerkeslager, "Apollo," 119, points to a reference in Philo to an imitation of Apollo by Gaius (*Leg.* 95–96).

96. See the survey by J. R. Fears, "The Cult of Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology," *ANRW* 17.1:3–141. Fears considers the victorious Domitian as the viceregent of Jupiter a major *topos* of the panegyric literature of the period (79–80). Cf. Price, "Gods and Emperors," 86: "The most common assimilation (to give the figures for the evidence from Asia Minor) was between the emperor and Zeus (26), though twelve of the instances are for Hadrian alone. Next in frequency were assimilations with Helios (12) and Dionysos (8)." See also D. N. Schowalter, *The Emperor and the Gods: Images from the Time of Trajan* (HDR 28; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), esp. 109–11. Scherrer ("Signs and Wonders," 605) refers to representations of emperors with symbols and insignia of Jupiter Optimus Maximus.

97. This implies that Gaius would have been considered a "god having the same temple" (*synnaos theos*) as the God of the Jews (A. D. Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], 1:202–51). Second Thessalonians 2:4 has been linked to this decision of Gaius, but the connection cannot be proven.

98. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.184–203; *Ant.* 18.261–309; Philo, *Leg.* 184–388, esp. 188, 265, 346. Cf. Suetonius, *Cal.* 22; Dio Cassius 59.28; Prigent, "Culte impérial," 218–19.

99. Suetonius, *Dom.* 13, says that Domitian wanted to be called *dominus et deus noster*. Cf. Dio Cassius 67.5.7.

coins Domitian is represented as Jupiter's earthly vice-regent, and he fulfils a role like that of Hercules, who served Jupiter and the other gods. The emperor is crowned by Victory and, in his right hand, holds Jupiter's thunderbolt (*fulmen*) as the symbol of supremacy and protection. Trajan is similarly associated with Jupiter, by hurling his thunderbolt against the Dacians on the Column of Trajan in the Forum Traiani.<sup>100</sup>

Steven Friesen collected and analyzed the evidence of the emperor cult at Ephesus, which was initiated by Domitian, interrupted after his *damnatio memoriae*, and reintroduced by Hadrian.<sup>101</sup> I shall give a few examples from this material. There were 'Olympic Games' connected with the imperial cult of Domitian at Ephesus, as appears from coins from Ephesus with portrayals of Domitian and Zeus Olympios.<sup>102</sup> The association of the emperor with Zeus Olympios continued during the reign of Hadrian, who is presented as Zeus Olympios in six inscriptions from Ephesus. He was also hailed in acclamations as Zeus Olympios.<sup>103</sup> On the front of a coin with the portrait of Domitian stands *Domitianos Kaisar Sebastos Germanikos*, while the back has a picture of Zeus Olympios sitting on his throne with a sceptre in his left hand. Zeus' outstretched right hand carries the temple of the Ephesian Artemis. Friesen compares this coin with the so-called twice neokoros coins and comments: "The Zeus Olympios coin, however, made two new statements. It assimilated the emperor to Zeus, and it placed the emperor in a direct relationship to Ephesian Artemis".<sup>104</sup> Thus, the evidence for associating emperors with Zeus/Jupiter is surely not restricted to Gaius and Caligula.<sup>105</sup> In fact, in the East the propagation of the emperor as Zeus/Jupiter probably perpetuated the link between Alexander the Great's successors and Zeus.<sup>106</sup> An incentive to this association was provided also by the fact that Zeus/Jupiter as protector of oaths and treaties usually accompanied the goddess Roma, who was the principal goddess of the imperial cults.<sup>107</sup> Consequently, the emperor was often linked with Zeus/Jupiter after he joined Roma in the cults. The virtues and status of Zeus/Jupiter were thus transferred to the emperor: "Later, when the emperors were joined in cults with Roma, they often took over the characteristics of Zeus."<sup>108</sup>

100. Fears, "Cult of Jupiter," 79. See also J. R. Fears, "The Theology of Victory at Rome: Approaches and Problems," *ANRW* 17.2:736–826, esp. 816–18.

101. S. J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 116; Leiden: Brill, 1993).

102. M. Lämmer, "Olympien und Hadrianeen im antiken Ephesos" (diss., Cologne, 1967), 9 (further, 4–14); Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 114–41.

103. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 118.

104. *Ibid.*, 119. For further material concerning Domitian in this connection, see Fears, "Cult of Jupiter," 74–80.

105. According to Klauck ("Sendschreiben," 157), it is not certain that Trajan and Hadrian themselves were venerated at Pergamum as Zeus Philios and Zeus Olympios.

106. Fears, "Cult of Jupiter," 74.

107. R. Mellor, *QEA RWMH: The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Hypomnemata 42; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975); R. Mellor, "The Goddess Roma," *ANRW* 17.2:950–1030.

108. Mellor, "Goddess Roma," 972.

Reading the visions of Rev 12–13 together with the traditions of the combat myths about Python and Seth-Typhon and the claim for divine status for the emperor, who is also considered a personification of the dragon's opponent, would imply the utter deconstruction of this Roman imperial ideology. It would strongly suggest that this ideology was fake and that the emperor did not play the part of the restorer of order, the savior of the world,<sup>109</sup> or the supreme commander of humankind, as associated with Apollo, Horus and especially Zeus.<sup>110</sup> After recognizing the pattern of the combat myth and the association of the dragon and the beasts with the ideology of Rome, ancient readers may have realized that the visions imply a reversal of roles, turning the imperial ideology upside down. According to this reading, the emperor's part would be that of the dragon that causes chaos and destruction, the opposite of what the connection with Zeus/Jupiter implies according to such propagandists of the emperor as Aelius Aristides. In his eulogy on Roman government, Aristides presents the emperor as Zeus, the guarantor of order (*Or.* 26.32)<sup>111</sup> The inversion of roles in the combat myth is no scholarly construction, as is apparent from the examples of the ancient associations of the dragon with rulers or their opponents in the Ptolemaic royal ideology or the characterization of Nero as worse than Typhon in the *Octavia* discussed above. Dio Chrysostom refutes the divine status of Domitian in a comparable way with the following remark: “[T]he most powerful, most stern man, who was called by all Greeks and barbarians both master and god (δεσπότην καὶ θεόν), but who was in reality an evil demon (τὸ δ’ ἀληθὲς ὄντα δαίμονα πονηρόν, *Or.* 45.1).”<sup>112</sup> Such a reversal of roles in the context of the combat myths was probably bound up with a conflict between two opposite and mutually exclusive ideologies, as Henk Versnel suggests in connection with the pagan accusations of Christians and their reactions: “The adherents of one utopia put the propagandists of the other in the category of the *negative* alternative, the anomic image of primeval chaos.”<sup>113</sup>

109. For a fine sketch of imperial ideologies, see Versnel, *Inconsistencies*, 2:192–201. He refers (198) to an honorary decree from Halicarnassus in which Augustus is called the Zeus of our fathers (*Zeus Patroios*) and the saviour of the entire human race (*Ancient Greek Inscriptions in the British Museum* 4/1 no. 894).

110. The Zeus Olympios coin with the portrait of Domitian discussed by Friesen (above) is another example of how mythical traditions about dragons and their conquerors become fused.

111. Friesen (*Twice Neokoros*, 151) points to this passage to demonstrate that the emperor was thought to accomplish the gods' work in an unparalleled manner. For a commentary, see J. H. Oliver, *The Ruling Power: A Study of the Roman Empire in the Second Century after Christ through the Roman Oration of Aelius Aristides* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, n.s., 43; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953), esp. 941–42, 948–49.

112. Cf. the criticism of Roman imperial rule by Justin Martyr. See E. Pagels, “Christian Apologists and the ‘Fall of the Angels’: An Attack on Roman Imperial Power?” *HTR* 78 (1985): 301–25.

113. Versnel (“Geef de keizer,” 255 [trans. mine]) also mentions Revelation in this connection.

## CONCLUSION

The interpretation of Roman imperial rule as “typhonic” or “pythonic,” which is implied by the inversion of the role of the victorious god into that of his monstrous opponent in this contextualized reading of Rev 12–13 fits in with two observations concerning Revelation that have been discussed by many scholars. First, the dragon and the first beast not only function in the visions’ narrative as the opponents of God and Jesus Christ, but are also presented as their opposites. This is emphasized by the parallel vocabulary describing these four figures.<sup>114</sup> The inversion of the combat myth role models fits in well with this observation, because it supports the divine role of God and Jesus Christ, so to say, even in the propagandist terms of the non-believing outside world. Second, scholars have pointed out that Revelation incorporates Greco-Roman traditions and literary forms despite its uncompromising rejection of the outside world to which these traditions belong. This is only understandable if we assume that John the prophet radically changed these traditions and forms, honorary titles, imperial decrees, hymns, imperial court ceremonial etc, in order to make them subservient to his own proclamation.<sup>115</sup> David Aune even concludes that John the prophet was not afraid to turn the original meaning of such materials completely upside down: “John has consciously employed the form of the royal or imperial edict as part of his strategy to emphasize the fact that Christ is the true king in contrast to the Roman emperor who is both a clone and tool of Satan.”<sup>116</sup>

It goes without saying that a contextualized reading of Rev 12–13, focusing on the mythological traditions about Python and Seth-Typhon and their political applications, underscores the refutation of the claim for divine status for the emperor. Foreign rulers’ pretensions to divine status had been contradicted already in the Hebrew Bible (Ezek 28:2)<sup>117</sup> and were refuted again in post-biblical Jewish literature. The passage from the fifth book of the *Sibylline Oracles* quoted at the beginning of this contribution indicates that Nero equated himself with God (ἰσάζων θεῷ αὐτόν,

114. One striking example is the phrase ὡς ἐσφαγμένον in 5:6 concerning the Lamb, which is repeated in connection with the mortally wounded head of the first beast ὡς ἐσφαγμένην (13:3). See, among others, G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1974), 207–8; Jenks, *Antichrist*, 241; R. Bauckham, “The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 322–41, esp. 329.

115. See, e.g., Deissmann, *Licht*, and Cuss, *Imperial Cult* (see n. 2). See also D. E. Aune, “The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” *BR* 18 (1983): 5–26; idem, “The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2–3),” *NTS* 36 (1990): 182–204. P. Barnett, “Polemical Parallelism: Some Further Reflections on the Apocalypse,” *JSNT* (1989): 111–20, offers chiefly a survey of earlier research into this parallelism.

116. Aune, “Form and Function,” 204.

117. The oracle against the king of Tyre (Ezek 28:1–10) says: “Mortal, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord God: Because your heart is proud and you have said, ‘I am a god; I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,’ yet you are but a mortal, and no god, though you compare your mind with the mind of a god” (Ezek 28:2 NRSV). An echo of this passage is found in 2 Thess 2:4; cf. also Dan 11:36 and Ps. Sol. 2:25–29.

5:34; a similar phrase occurs in 12:86).<sup>118</sup> Nero's claim is immediately denied by the statement that his deeds proved he was *not* equal to God. The corresponding lines in book 12 of *Sib. Or.* (12:78–94) refute a divine status even more plainly: Nero's flight and miserable death proved that he was not divine (12:93–94; cf. Pss. Sol. 2:26–27; Acts 12:22–23). Likewise, the king of Tyre comes to a sticky end: his divine ambition is punished by God and he dies through the hand of strangers (Ezek 28:6–10). In the book of Judith a similar claim of Nebuchadnezzar (3:8) is disproved in a more subtle way in Holophernes' failure and Judith's ridiculing of Nebuchadnezzar in the ambiguous phrases of chapter 11. But, of course, one reading does not necessarily exclude others. Readers of Rev 12–13 familiar with the Roman emperor's ideology may well have associated one emperor or all of them not only with Satan but also with Python or Seth-Typhon, the chaos monsters according to the emperor's own ideological frame of reference.

118. The phrase may be a Jewish (Christian) articulation of a platonic expression (θεοῖς ἰσάζοιτ' ἄν Plato, *Tim.* 13 41c). See for the motif of Nero's pretension to be equal to God *Sib. Or.* 5:34, 138–40 ἰσόθεος φῶς; cf. 215–17). Collins, *Sibylline Oracles*, 84.

